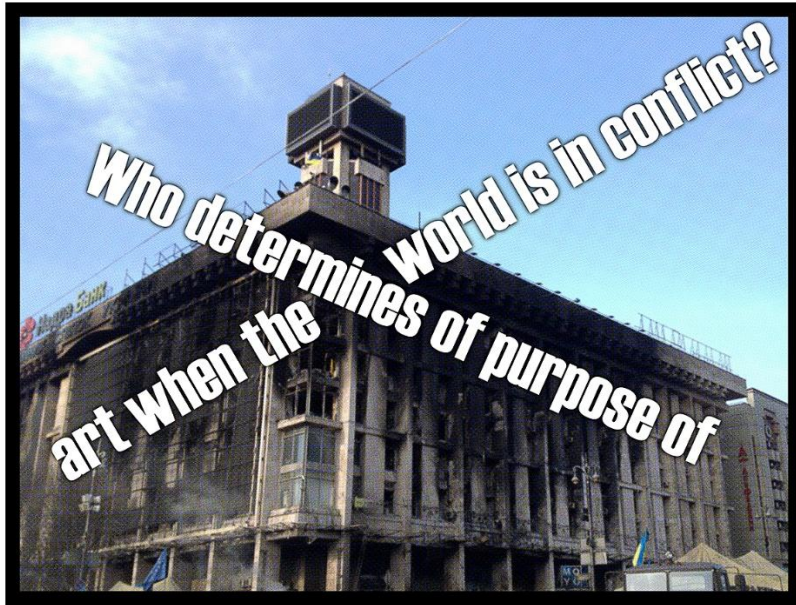
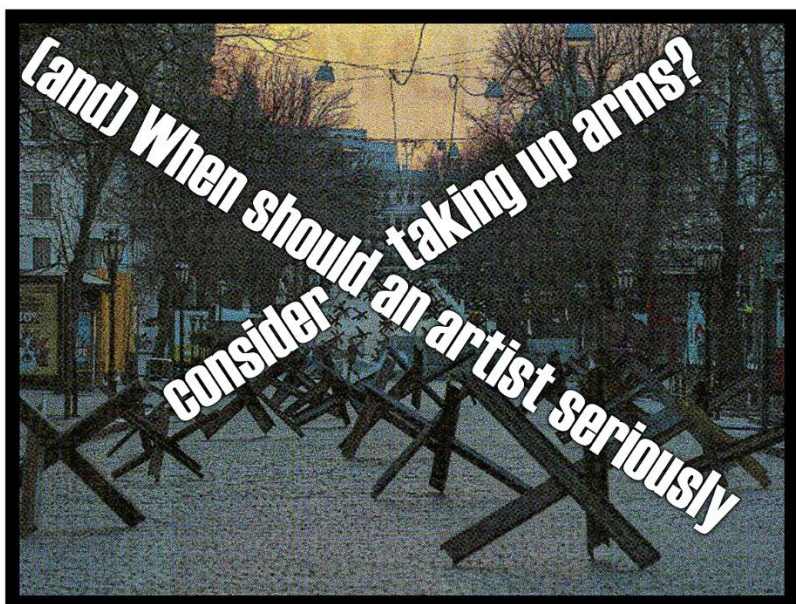


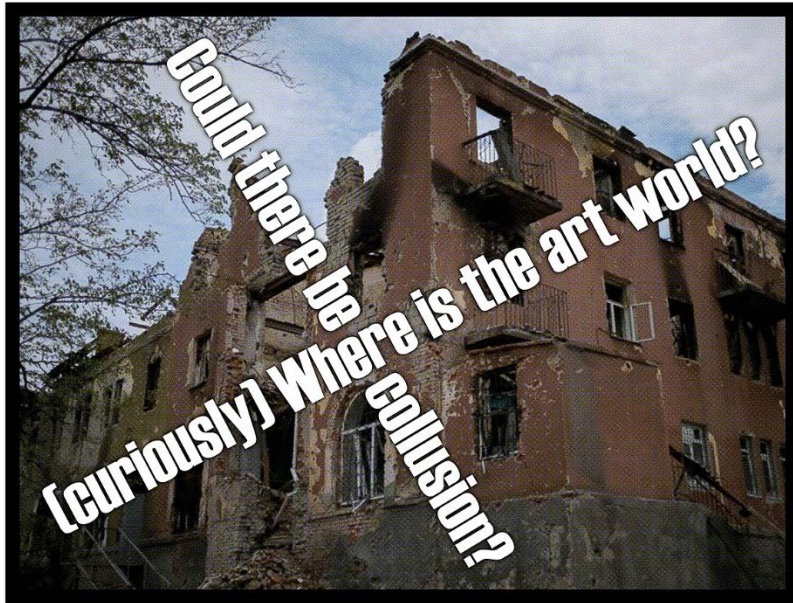


“FIVE EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS (DURING WARTIME)” (2022): Patti Smith really pissed me off on February 27 when she sang the Ukrainian National Anthem on the war-torn streets of lower Manhattan at the Bowery Ballroom (which is not actually on the Bowery – it’s on Delancey Street and hasn’t seen a genuine “Bowery Bum” for well over a quarter century). How brave! How heroic! How completely narcissistic! I realize she was in the position of mortal danger (of not finding a cab) but was this po-faced act of selfless devotion accompanied by a big fat cheque to pay for a few thousand rounds of ammuni-

tion? I doubt it. This is not grandstanding on my part. I am part of a world of huge egos and filthy money (however tenuously) but have the impertinence to ask, “Who determines the purpose of art when the world is in conflict?” “What has the art world ever done during a humanitarian crisis?” (and) “When should an artist seriously consider taking up arms?” (but curiously) “Where is the art world? Could there be collusion? (and in the end) “Why do artists remain so passive? So aloof?” These questions are the essence of “Work # 1058: Five Existential Ques-



tions (During Wartime)” (2022) – a series of five 76.2 x 101.6 cm (30” x 40”) text/image juxtapositions. Those five somewhat unanswerable questions are splayed Constructivist-like across the devastation inflicted by this season’s aggressor where the scenes of the crime echo the interior design of each image and are distanced through the interventions of photographer, photo editor, art director, page designer, printer, and your eyes. The location is rather irrelevant – after all one destroyed building pretty much looks like any other. This was of course the successful strategy leading to Warhol’s most dramatic works



from the early 1960s – clipping photos from the front pages of *The Daily News* and transferring enlargements to silkscreens; (were he still with us today he'd be surfing the net for source material. This work is a combination of both.) ¶ The aim is to critique the deafening silence emanating from the collective art world (an unregulated industry) and its individual heavyweights. I'm the first to acknowledge that I cannot rise to the task of answering my own questions in an *honest* way. The only thing I know for certain is that I doubt I'd have the cojones to follow through on question # 3 without shitting my pants. Work # 1058 is willfully didactic, both looking

back to the earliest performance works I made from the mid-1970s, but more crucially operating to counter the risk-free, enervating, claptrap currently dominating the conversations around contemporary art. ¶ While most of us mortals give what we can to reputable charities like Doctors Without Borders and the Canadian Red Cross without tooting our own horns about it, one has to wonder where the Ais, Christies, Gagosian's, Glimcher's, Gormley's, Hirst's, Hockney's, Johns', Kapoor's, Koons's, Murakami's, Philips's, Richter's, Sotheby's', and Zwirner's of the world are with all of their countless millions; or is the upper end of the market so corrupt and awash in dirty Oligarch stolen riches that any attempts at being Christ-like (accompanied by a press release) render them callow hypocrites too compromised to ever be part of the equation? The cumulative *known* assets of the ten wealthiest living visual artists is estimated to be \$2,565,000,000.00; how much is known to have been donated to reputable charities? \$0,000,000,000.00 . . . given that their every fart is considered newsworthy, this estimate is probably not off the mark. Being unregulated, the net worth of the most financially successful art businesses is unknown . . . ¶ But wait! Two months into the humanitarian crisis de jour Christies finally jumps on the bandwagon with a benefit auction seemingly geared only to the diaspora de jour. It seems a little condescending, to say the least; certainly tone-deaf. Will the auction commissions be waived (or donated)? I doubt it. Is there no one else in the art world interested in the humanitarian crisis de jour except for those directly affected? I'm sure Christies Oligarch buddies don't give a shit, but the rest? ¶ Not to be outshone, a couple of days later arch-rival Sotheby's offered restoration supplies to save the embattled country's art treasures . . . which seems a bit pointless given there are no longer hardly any walls left to hang the works on. It's both the vainglorious posturing from Patti Smith (*et al*) to the ominous silence from everyone else that makes me feel simultaneously bored and nauseous. Bruce Eves May 2, 2022

