

Three Stories of Art and War

Peter Beijer & Constance Uzwyshyn

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Constance Uzwyshyn is an expert on Ukrainian contemporary art. She founded Ukraine's first foreign-owned professional art gallery, the ARTEast Gallery, in Kyiv. Having written a masters dissertation entitled The Emergence of the Ukrainian Contemporary Art Market, she is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge researching Ukrainian contemporary art. She is also CJLPA's Executive Editor and the Ukrainian Institute of London's Creative Industries Advisor.

The following interviews have been condensed and edited for clarity.

коли гуркочуть гармати- музи замовкають

The Russian invasion catapulted the Ukrainian art world into crisis, and desperate measures were undertaken to secure staff, collections, and artists. Dreams are deferred but stubborn resilience manifests as a desire to not only protect cultural heritage, but also somehow provide opportunities for continued creativity. Three institutions from all regions of Ukraine—Central, East, and West—reflect on their current challenges, on how they are coping, and what might be in store for the future. When cannons roar, the muses will *not* fall silent.

In Conversation with **Olesya Ostrovska-Liuta**

21 April 2022

Olesya Ostrovska-Liuta is the Director General of the National Art and Cultural Museum Complex 'Mystetskyi Arsenal'.

Located in a magnificent eighteenth-century structure once devoted to the production and storage of artillery and ammunition in Kyiv's historic Pechersk district, the Mystetskyi Arsenal (Art Arsenal) is Ukraine's leading cultural institution, notable for its multidisciplinary programme in the visual and performing arts, as well as for its annual book fair.

Before her tenure at Mystetskyi Arsenal, Ms. Ostrovska-Liuta served in several leading roles in the development of Ukraine's national strategy for culture and creative industries. She has been the First Deputy Minister of Culture of Ukraine, the First Deputy of the National Committee for UNESCO, and was on the board of the International Renaissance Foundation, the Ukrainian Institute, and numerous other professional bodies. She is also a freelance curator and writes on culture and cultural policy.



Fig 1. The National Art and Cultural Museum Complex 'Mystetski Arsenal' 2012
© Barnbrook.



Fig 2. Futuromarenia Exhibition (15.10.2021–30.01.2022 Mystetskyi Arsenal)
© Oleksandr Popenko.

Olesya Ostrovska-Liuta: I am at Arsenal right now, the air sirens are blaring, and I am in a corridor sitting between two walls.

Constance Uzwyszyn: How are you able to work at the moment?

OOL: We have a very different set of challenges. Our team is scattered all across Ukraine and Europe and this is the challenge for all organisations. People are everywhere. We have to rebuild the processes and understand what the organisations are about now, what the cultural centre should do, and what is the most important task.

Yesterday, I had a meeting with a German writer from a Western European publication. It is very difficult to think about the idea of war, that this is possible, and it is very, very strange for Ukrainians to imagine as well. In 2014, we could not imagine the war. Even this summer, Constance, when you were here, you could not imagine it.

Consider Putin's text of 12 July 2021, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*.¹ It is very explicit in what he thinks and what he is going to do. It seemed like a theory, like mythology, not an action as it turned out to be.

CU: What kind of programming can you have now that there is war?

OOL: We have multidisciplinary lines of approach.

¹ Vladimir Putin, 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians' (President of Russian Federation, 12 July 2021) <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>> accessed 12 March 2022.

Apologies, I have another call from security and must answer it. When you get a call from security you want to answer it.

We are a museum which holds a collection and the most important job for all museums in Ukraine is to protect the collection. This is very difficult because we were not prepared. There are no safe and prepared places in Ukraine to receive the collection. Museums are doing a lot and it cannot be discussed publicly where these collections are being safeguarded.

Peter Beijer: There is lots of information about this in the press; some people think that collections are safer abroad in other countries.² It is a delicate question. What are your thoughts about this?

OOL: It is safer for certain objects, and it needs to be decided at the governmental level and not by separate organisations. You cannot move objects easily out of Ukraine, you need governmental decisions and permissions. Most museums cannot move their collections because there simply has been no time to prepare.

We have a very tragic and bad situation in Mariupol,³ and also in Kharkiv and Chernihiv. Many cultural institutions have been

² Hannah McGivern, 'French Museums Rally to Protect Art Collections in Ukraine with Truckload of Emergency Supplies' (*The Art Newspaper*, 25 March 2022) <<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/03/25/french-museums-ukraine-emergency-supplies>> accessed 26 March 2022.

³ Pjotr Sauer, 'Ukraine Accuses Russian Forces of Seizing 2,000 Artworks in Mariupol' *The Guardian* (London, 29 April 2022) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/ukraine-accuses-russian-forces-of-seizing-2000-artworks-in-mariupol>> accessed 29 April 2022.



Fig 3. Shah Basit. Maria Prymachenko Museum in Ivankiv, Kyiv Oblast. [Twitter post](#). 28 Feb 2022.

purposefully destroyed (fig. 3) and collections have been looted (for example, Arkhip Kuindzhi artworks were stolen) (fig. 4).⁴ However, in Chernihiv, Russian troops have retreated. Furthermore, both Lviv and Chernivtsi are under threat but there are no Russian troops on the ground (they are targeted by long-range missiles), so it makes things different. Therefore, these institutions and their requirements need to be addressed differently. In some situations, it is wise to move a limited number of objects abroad.

Then you have the teams and the issues with people moving abroad. We need our people; we are being de-staffed. At the moment, we have connections with our staff, but the longer they stay abroad, the more they get immersed. It is very important to support programmes in Ukraine and it is difficult when the staff are not in Ukraine. However, there are exceptions. For example, our digital team is located outside of Ukraine and works well. An example of this is with the international book fairs. Our design team produces the designs for all the stands.

CU: Do you think the COVID experience in some way prepared for this remote work?

OOL: Yes, it has helped us cope with the situation right now because we learned how to work remotely and how to use technology to keep on working. We also learned that communication is key, and that we cannot rely on spontaneous communication as one does in an office.

Also, Ukraine is a country with very good internet connections, and the Internet has not been down since the invasion, except for the occupied areas like Bucha, Irpin, and Mariupol. That is also why the press knows so much about what is going on in Ukraine. This also supports us!

⁴ Sophia Kishkovsky, 'Mariupol Museum Dedicated to 19th Century Artist Arkhip Kuindzhi Destroyed by Airstrike, According to Local Media' (*The Art Newspaper*, 23 March 2022) <<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/03/23/mariupol-museum-dedicated-to-19th-century-artist-arkhip-kuindzhi-destroyed-by-airstrike-according-to-local-media>> accessed 24 March 2022; Alex Greenberger, 'Paintings by Maria Prymachenko Burn as Ukrainian History Museum Weathers Destruction' (*ARTnews*, 28 February 2022) <<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/maria-prymachenko-paintings-ivankiv-museum-destroyed-1234620348/>> accessed 12 March 2022; Jeffrey Gettleman and Oleksandr Chubko, 'Ukraine says Russia Looted Ancient Gold Artifacts from a Museum' *The New York Times* (New York, 30 April 2022) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/30/world/europe/ukraine-scythia-gold-museum-russia.html>> accessed 1 May 2022.



Fig 4. Sunset on the Steppes (Arkhip Kuindzhi 1900, oil on canvas, 39.5 x 57.5cm).



Fig 5. May that Nuclear War be Cursed! (Maria Prymachenko 1978, gouache on paper).

CU: When war began, as the director of the Arsenal, what was the first thing you did?

OOL: On 24 February, our first action was to inform our partners abroad. I woke up at 5:30 a.m. My husband first told my daughter the war had started. When you hear these words, you don't believe it. You think this must be a mistake. It is macabre.

At 8:00 a.m. I met with my team, and we drafted an appeal to explain the situation to our partners, especially addressing book and literature circles which are a main component of our programme, in particular the *International Book Arsenal Festival*,⁵ a large literature and book festival. This was our first step. This festival was scheduled for May. Of course, we had to redirect our work to let people know, to explain what is happening in Ukraine, and to explain our point of view, especially why Ukraine does not want to be part of Russia, and why Ukrainians are not Russian (as Putin put it). Therefore, we focused on our presence at international book festivals...we started with Bologna, Tbilisi, London, and Paris.⁶

⁵ For more information on the International Book Arsenal Festival see <<https://artarsenal.in.ua/en/book-arsenal/>> accessed 16 May 2022.

⁶ 'Book Arsenal Will not Take Place in May 2022' <<https://artarsenal.in.ua/en/povidomlennya/book-arsenal-will-not-take-place-in-may-2022/>> accessed 4 May 2022.



Fig 6. International Book Arsenal Festival 2021.
© Oleksandr Popenko.

In addition to the book fairs, the team is working with contemporary art and putting together art exhibitions outside of Ukraine. At the moment, the head of exhibitions fled to Paris with her teenage son. We have put together an exhibition which is at the Ukrainian Cultural Centre in Paris and another exhibition will be in Treviso.⁷

In addition to the book fairs and art exhibitions, we are also creating an archive of artworks being produced in Ukraine during war. It is called 'Ukraine Ablaze'.⁸ This has a special meaning because it refers to [Oleksandr] Dovzhenko's film *Ukraine in Flames* (1943).⁹ We have also co-founded an art fund which deals with the consequences of the Russian invasion. It is the Ukrainian Emergency Art Fund and raises funds to purchase Ukrainian art and support curators, art writers, art research, and much more through fundraising activities.¹⁰ As I said, Mystetskyi Arsenal has several programmes, but our programme has had to drastically change because of the war. We even have a legal department to assist us.

CU: Who funds Mystetskyi Arsenal now?

OOL: We still receive basic funding but have just had severe financial cuts and we do not know how we will succeed.

CU: Due to the war, what are your thoughts on decolonisation and art and how has this been addressed by you as Director of the Mystetskyi Arsenal?

OOL: First of all, Russian imperialism is something that is not unknown to Ukrainians. But there is a blind spot by other countries. Russian politics and policies here are seen as neo-colonial. Ukrainians are very sensitive to these narratives via Russian media and culture.



Fig 7. President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky with First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska and Olesya Ostrovska-Liuta at the International Book Arsenal Festival 2021. © Oleksandr Popenko.

PB: Do you feel perhaps it is difficult to explain to Westerners, that is, to those who live in a post-modern society, decolonisation in Ukraine or Russian imperialism? They come from a different historical and cultural experience. How can you address these blind spots to western audiences?

OOL: It depends. When you look from Ukraine, especially from Kyiv, and see for example statements and declarations made from the German political arena, it is shocking. It is like there is no amount of reality that can convince a German politician.

There is a discussion in Ukraine, which I think is a good argument, but you might find this controversial. What is the reason why Western, especially European countries (it is different in America), refuse to notice the imperial nature of the Russian discourse? Also, why do they often not notice other cultures apart from Russia in these regions? Why is that?

A hypothesis arose that this has something to do with all the imperialisms in the world as well. Empires speaking to empires, important capitals speaking to other important capitals. Even at these meetings those other important capitals, for example the Russian capital, have legitimate spheres of interest.

What are legitimate spheres of interest? It means that another capital has the right to define other nations' invasion choices. Why is it possible that a Western capital or nation is even capable of accepting this idea of legitimate spheres of interests? How could people accept that Russia has the right to define Ukraine's future? One of the explanations is connected to the parallel imperialism still present in other countries.

PB: Do you think this is a hangover nostalgia (among the Left) for the USSR? Perhaps it is a modernisation project and has been affected by this view, which is present in Soviet art and transposed in current discourses?

OOL: The Soviet Union was definitely a modernisation project, which means modernisation is not always a good thing and can be a means of tolerating oppression. How do you measure good and evil? Was the Soviet Union good only because it opposed an evil side in the capitalist world? Is it enough to challenge the capitalist world to be good, no matter how many atrocities you bring with yourself? In our part of the world the answer is no. It is not enough. It can bring a greater evil. When your life is threatened, you might become melodramatic.

⁷ 'Ukraine: Short Stories. Contemporary Artists from Ukraine. Works from the Imago Mundi Collection' (Fondazione Imago Mundi) <<https://fondazioneimagomundi.org/en/progetti/exhibitions/ukraine-short-stories-2/>> accessed 9 May 2022.

⁸ 'Ukraine Ablaze; Project by the Laboratory of Contemporary Art' <<https://artarsenal.in.ua/en/povidomlennya/the-ukraine-ablaze-project-by-the-laboratory-of-contemporary-art/>> accessed 7 May 2022.

⁹ Alexander Dovzhenko and Yuliya Solntseva. 'Ukraine in Flames (1943)' (YouTube, 24 June 2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmkpOqoNZSY>> accessed 4 May 2022.

¹⁰ 'Ukrainian Emergency Art Fund' <<https://artarsenal.in.ua/en/povidomlennya/ukrainian-emergency-art-fund-report-on-the-month-of-work/>> accessed 27 March 2022.



Fig 8. Andriy Sahaidovsky. *Scenery. Welcome!* Exhibition (18.09.2020–24.01.2021 Mystetskyi Arsenal)
© Oleksandr Popenko.

PB: Germany has a huge role in contemporary art, with their museums, fairs, and curators, but what do you think about the French, Italians, and other Europeans?

OOL: Regarding Germany, there is a gap, luckily, between politicians and professionals. Professionals are much more supportive and there is a feeling that the understanding is deeper, and the public is much more sympathetic to Ukraine. I am not saying Germany is bad. We also have to state we are very grateful for the reception to Ukrainian refugees. We could not have imagined Ukrainians crossing borders in huge numbers without passports or COVID restrictions, and with free transportation. This is great and should not be underestimated. This is very important to point out. We should not underestimate these efforts.

Regarding the political discourse, what is most striking to Ukrainians are the Germans and the French. Consider when [French president] Macron stated that events in Bucha might not qualify as genocide and in the end Ukrainians and Russians are brotherly nations.¹¹ This sounds very alarming in Ukraine. First of all, this 'brotherly nation' is of course an imperial trope. This trope tells you that no one should interfere with those relations because they are a kind of family relations so let them decide by themselves because they are a 'brotherly' family. There is this family lexis, and this form of speaking camouflages international aggression and deprives Ukrainians of agency. If they are 'brothers', then they have no political agency to make their own political choices. Therefore, when a Ukrainian hears a French president state this, it sounds quite colonial as well.

Then the question arises, why would a French president take such a colonial position? That is really alarming in Ukraine. We heard nothing like this from the British.

I have the feeling the British and American are the most realistic. They understand what is going on. When it comes to southern Europe, there is a different history of relationships. The latest story

¹¹ Reuters, 'French President Macron says Killings in Bucha were 'very probably' War Crimes' (*Euronews*, 7 April 2022). <<https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/07/uk-ukraine-crisis-france-macron>> accessed 2 May 2022; Shweta Sharma, 'Poland hits out at Macron after Massacre in Bucha: 'Nobody Negotiated with Hitler'' (*Independent* (5 April 2022). <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poland-macron-hitler-bucha-killings-b2051006.html>> 2 May 2022.

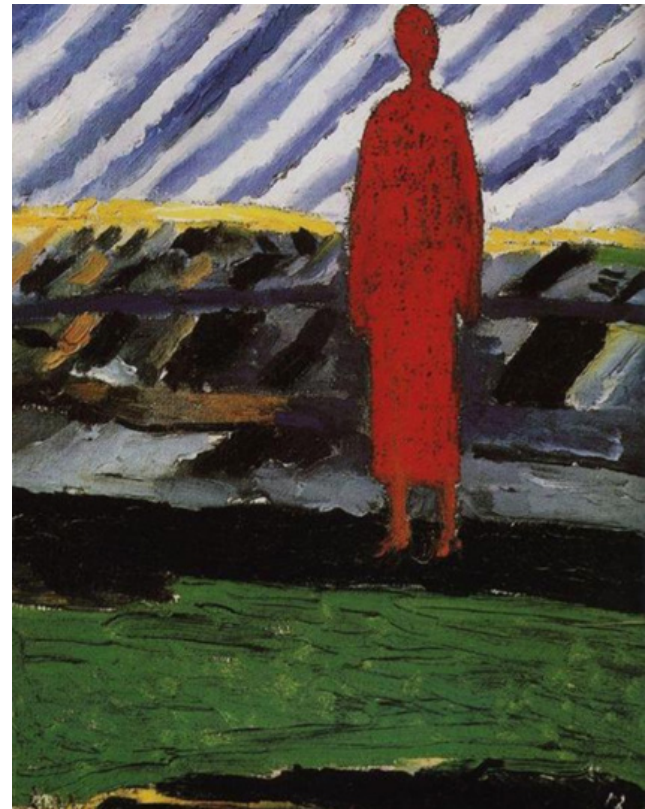


Fig 9. *Red Figure* (Kazimir Malevich 1928, oil on canvas, 30 x 23.5cm). Kazimir Malevich taught at the Kyiv Art Institute (1928–1930) when this painting was created.

with the Vatican and Rome [Pope Francis arranged a Ukrainian and Russian woman to carry the cross together during a Good Friday procession] was received very poorly.¹²

All the international steps towards reconciliation are perceived as harming the victim and inflicting more suffering on Ukrainians. The time for reconciliation between Ukrainians and Russians has not yet come. Russians have to first analyse their own political reality and their actions towards Ukrainians.

CU: Do you have any professional relations with Russian artists or Russian Institutes?

OOL: No one has reached out to us as an institution.

CU: With the war going on, the spotlight is now on Ukrainian art. Please comment on how Ukrainian art has changed during these last two months. First of all, what is Ukrainian Art?

OOL: Anything produced in Ukraine now or anything where an artist defines himself/herself as a Ukrainian artist. That would probably be my explanation of Ukrainian art.

¹² Cindy Wooden, 'A Ukrainian and a Russian were Invited to Lead the Vatican's Via Crucis. Ukraine wants Pope Francis to Reconsider' (*America* (New York, 12 April 2022) <<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2022/04/12/ukraine-russia-crucis-242811>> accessed 12 April 2022.

CU: Do we need to re-examine and critically discuss the way art history defines and establishes Ukrainian-born or artists of Ukrainian descent as Russian? Let us consider, for example, Kazimir Malevich, Ivan Aivazovsky, Ilya Repin, Volodymyr Borovykovsky, David Burliuk, Aleksandra Ekster, or even Andy Warhol (a Carpatho-Rusyn). What does this say about art history and its practice?

OOL: This is a huge question, and a complex discussion is ahead of us. How do you define a Polish or even Russian artist today? At the moment, here is my own definition today, and it might change over time: a Ukrainian artist is any artist that made an impact on the Ukrainian art scene or was either produced in Ukraine or by individuals who identify themselves as Ukrainian artists. In this way, Malevich would also be Ukrainian because he was teaching in the Kyiv Academy. He was one of the founders of the Academy and he was an important cultural figure in Kyiv life. Therefore, he is a Ukrainian artist but also belongs to other communities and societies.

We are discussing this because Putin and the Russians put forward this question, not only whether Ukraine is a political entity, but do Ukrainians exist? Since Putin put this question forward—by the way, Ukrainians thought this question was long resolved—he made it into a huge issue, and therefore we speak about it. Thus, his text is genocidal in nature because what he is saying is Ukrainians do not exist. There is no such thing as Ukraine. Although I exist as a physical reality, his answers are Bucha, Irpin, and Borodianka.¹³ Those people, for him, should not exist physically. This is unexpected to anyone who knows about Ukrainian culture and history.

As for the question, are Ukrainians different from Russians? There are two different issues, in my opinion. Are Ukrainians different from Russians? The answer is yes, yes, and yes. Secondly, this question in itself is disgraceful. However, if you speak about Kyivan Rus', it is a medieval period that is neither Russian nor Ukrainian. It is like equating the Holy Roman Empire to being German.

PB: What is going to happen with the Arsenal Book Fair going forward?

OOL: It will not happen in May. It all depends on the war, and it is too early to say anything. We will have to do other things. We are developing a programme to connect Ukrainians and international publishers because the international scene is very interested in connecting with Ukrainian writers. We are working with the Frankfurt Book Fair, which is the most important global book fair.

We are not able to do any cultural activities in Ukraine because this is not possible for security reasons. We cannot have a mass public event, even in Lviv. It's too dangerous. It is difficult to have a steady workflow because of sirens and you have to change your work schedule because of that. Kyiv is waking up at the moment, even hairdressers are starting to work...which is very exotic these days. The shops and markets are starting to function as well as the cafes... but there are no cultural or conference-related types of activities. We would love it, but it is just not possible.

CU: You are speaking at the Venice Biennale, can you tell us a bit about it?

13 'Bucha Massacre, Nightmares of Irpin and Hostomel' (6 April 2022) <<https://war.ukraine.ua/crimes/the-timeline-of-tragedy-bucha-massacre-nightmares-of-irpin-and-hostomel/>> accessed 7 April 2022.

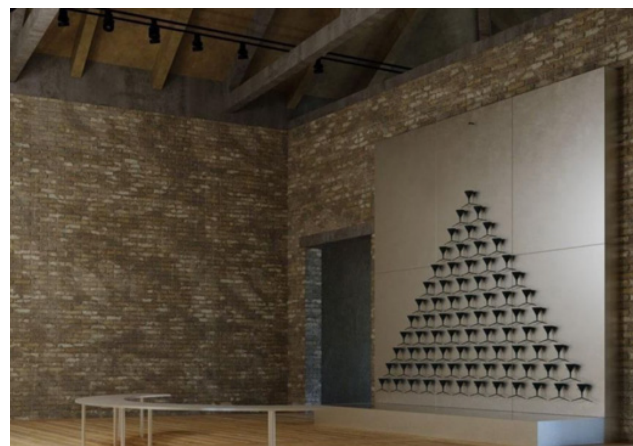


Fig 10. Fountain of Exhaustion (Pavlo Makov 2022).

Image and description courtesy of @ukrainianpavillioninvenice on Instagram.

OOL: There are two separate Ukrainian projects at the Biennale, the Ukrainian Pavilion¹⁴ and the Pinchuk project.¹⁵ It is a parallel programme, and Pinchuk's projects are always well known. The Ukrainian Pavilion is organised by three curators and the artist Pavlo Makov. Makov stayed in Kharkiv, even under the shelling. Regarding the curators, one of them is a young man (he was originally not allowed to travel due to the war but was given special permission) and one of the females just gave birth in a bomb shelter in Western Ukraine. Their work routine was extremely complicated. It will be a miracle that it is even there.

CU: Why is Ukrainian art significant to other cultures?

OOL: One thing, but it is so reactive, is because Ukrainian culture understands the nuances of Russian culture and Russian imperialism and can translate it to others. But isn't this a minor role, to be a translator? It is still part of colonialism...I feel uneasy about this.

CU: Perhaps Ukrainian artists represent values, integrity, and a morality which many in the West have lost. What do you stand for? Ukrainians are posing tough questions such as the purpose of NATO, the meaning of the United Nations, and so forth.

OOL: I agree, Ukraine is forcing people and societies to change their views. Artists such as Alevtina Kakhidze¹⁶ especially at the moment makes things uncomfortable for Westerners, with their previous views. They make people re-examine fundamentals, what people were there in Kyivan Rus' for example. In a sense Ukrainian art is a game changer, it challenges us.

Here is some small, good news. The sirens have stopped.

14 'Ukrainian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia' <<https://ukrainianpavillion.org/>> accessed 24 April 2022.

15 'This is Ukraine: Defending Freedom @Venice 2022' <<https://new.pinchukartcentre.org/thisisukraine-en>> accessed 24 April 2022.

16 See: <<http://www.alevtinakakhidze.com/>> accessed 9 May 2022.

In Conversation with Mykhailo Glubokyi

14 April 2022

Mykhailo Glubokyi, an IT specialist from Kharkiv, Ukraine, is the Communications Director for Izolyatsia/iZone and a board member of Trans Europe Halles, a Europe-based network of cultural centres at the forefront of repurposing industrial buildings for arts, culture, and activism. Izolyatsia is a non-governmental and non-profit platform for contemporary art. It was founded in 2010 in a former insulation materials factory in Donetsk and on 9 June 2014 the territory was seized by Russian Federation militants and is now used as a prison camp and torture chamber. Izolyatsia subsequently relocated to Kyiv to a shipyard warehouse where it continued its programme as both a centre for international creative industries and Ukrainian cultural activities. On 24 March 2022, Izolyatsia in Kyiv was forced to close due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



Figs 1 & 2. Pre-2014, Izolyatsia Donetsk, *Make-Up...Peace* and *Homo Bulla*
© Mykhailo Glubokyi.



Fig 3. Post-2014, Inside a Prisoner Cell at Izolyatsia Donetsk.
© Telegram/tractorist_dn.

Constance Uzwyshyn: Izolyatsia in Donetsk, what is going on with the Donetsk Izolyatsia building now?

Mykhailo Glubokyi: It is a prison.¹ Unfortunately, it remains held by Russians. Stanislav Aseyev,² who was released, has started looking furiously for people who imprisoned him. He managed to identify a couple of Russians who worked at the prison. As soon as they became public, they disappeared. It is not possible to understand who is behind this now and what happened to these people. Unfortunately, nothing has changed with this place. Now we have received reports that in newly occupied places, like Kherson, they are doing something similar there—building illegal prisons, holding people, torturing people, persecuting people. Unfortunately, this model is considered successful and is duplicated.

Stanislav is in Kyiv now and has joined the Territorial Defence and he is fighting and protecting Ukraine. He has written a book on the prison. It is now available in English, translated by the Canadian Embassy. It has also been translated into German, French, Latvian, and more languages.

The title of the book is amusing because the title in Ukrainian is *Svitliy Shlakh* (The Bright Path) and this is the street where Izolyatsia is located. So, it is a Soviet name...the 'Bright Path to Communism' and of course it became ironic because it is not so bright, and not so positive. The book title is *The Torture Camp on Paradise Street*. The funny thing is, when Western publishing houses were translating the text into French and German, we were told we could not use the description 'concentration camp' because it is a term that only refers to the Second World War and has another context.

1 'Izolyatsia Must Speak' (Izolyatsia) <<https://izolyatsia.ui.org.ua/en/>> accessed 5 March 2022.

2 'Dispatches from Ukraine; Speakers: Stanislav Aseyev, Nataliya Gumenyuk, Isobel Koshiw' (YouTube, Ukrainian Institute London, 3 April 2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-Pgy1SpR_8> accessed 4 April 2022; Yuri Zoria, 'Multimedia Project Izolyatsia: Must Speak Sheds Light on Infamous Donetsk Concentration Camp' (18 Dec 2021) Euromaidan Press <<https://euromaidanpress.com/2021/12/18/multimedia-project-izolyatsia-must-speak-sheds-light-on-infamous-donetsk-concentration-camp/>> accessed 4 April 2022.

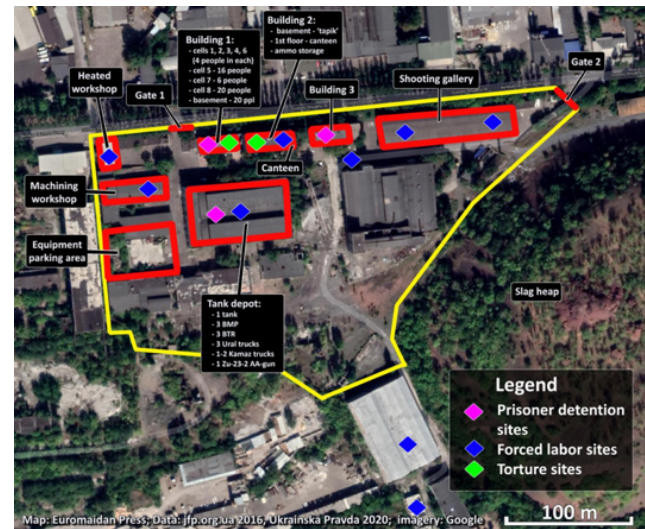


Fig 4. Plan of the Prison in 'Izolyatsia' in Donetsk. Euromaidan Press;
Data: jfp.org.ua 2016, Ukrainska Pravda 2021; Imagery: Google.

'This is a prison operating in present-day Ukraine, where horrific torture techniques are being utilised. This prison is, in reality, a concentration camp, beyond whose fencing no laws reach. Life there is lived in humiliation, fear and uncertainty. Wounds and burns marks cover bodies that are filled with pain from broken bones and often too, broken wills... a secret prison in the Russian-controlled part of Donbas...hundreds of people have passed through...most of them have survived torture by electric shock, rape, humiliation, and heavy forced labour. Several inmates are known to have been murdered. No human rights or humanitarian organisations have access to the prisoners. It continues to operate. It is overseen by the Federal Security Bureau of the Russian Federation (FSB).'³

One important thing to remember is there are a lot of testimonies by witnesses in the UN Human Rights High Commissioners Report. This can be referenced and can be considered impartial and is proof of torture.⁴

CU: What is happening with the Izolyatsia that had to be relocated in Kyiv?

MG: I am not able to disclose anything about the Kyiv building.

Peter Beijer: What about the current programming and future programming?

MG: There are several things we are doing now.

The first concerns humanitarian efforts—at the beginning of the war we called our donors to request that funds allocated for cultural purposes be used for humanitarian programmes and we received support from the European Commission, the Danish Institute, and several other organisations. We purchase equipment and organise shelters in Western Ukraine for internally displaced Ukrainians. Our focus now is humanitarian aid.

3 Stanislav Aseyev, *The Torture Camp on Paradise Street*, (The Old Lion Publishing House 2021) 2-3.

4 'Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 16 November 2019 to 15 February 2020' (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/29thReportUkraine_EN.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3P4AAb58AFNAPF0zzt4NfTZ_XbHPepOJlZ9XDCxdjPix3eihYU_UkWM> accessed 9 May 2022.



Fig 5. Entrance to Izolyatsia (Factory in the Background) in Kyiv.
2021 © Constance Uzwyshyn.



Fig 6. Inside Izolyatsia—IT Zone in Kyiv.
2021 © Constance Uzwyshyn.

Secondly, we are a cultural organisation, and we have no funding now so we focus on events we can manage. For example, we organise small events in cultural communities in Europe to talk about what is going on in Ukraine. Most of them are centred around Ukrainian films and include a fundraising component, e.g., ticket sales, and funds are then transferred to volunteer organisations in Ukraine.

One of the most prominent events was our participation in the *London Stands with Ukraine March* (26 March).⁵ We produced a video, with different people expressing their solidarity with Ukraine. There are 15 clips—most of them are artists who are fighting in the war now. We worked with Circa⁶ and they are going to publish the full videos on our social media.

We also work with Trans Europe Halles and organised a couple of solidarity events within the network and have created a number of residencies and support networks for Ukrainian artists. Our relationship with both the Institut Français and the Goethe Institute is strong, and we have been in partnership for the last four years. We have been implementing 'iOpportunis Programme'—a mobility programme for artists and cultural professionals and funded by *Creative Europe*. It is called *Re-Imagine Europe*⁷ and is very successful.

Regarding Mariupol, our team would like to continue from what we created in 2015. This was a residency programme with ten international artists which we presented at Venice Biennale. We hoped to continue this experience. However, it is now complicated because of the war. It is really crazy now. What is going on in Mariupol is really important to discuss and we would like to repeat this residency, but this time have more Ukrainian artists involved.



Fig 7. On Vacation—Venice Biennale
2015 © C. Rudeshko.⁸

Since the first residency, almost half of the foreign artists have remained in Ukraine. This says a lot about their commitment to Ukraine.

5 Andrew Anthony, 'March in Support of Ukraine in London: Everything was Turning Blue and Yellow' *Guardian* (London, 27 March 2022) <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/27/march-in-support-of-ukraine-in-london-everything-was-turning-blue-and-yellow>> accessed 1 May 2022.

6 See *CIRCA* <<https://circa.art/>> accessed 1 May 2022.

7 See *Re-Imagine Europe* <https://www.paradiso.nl/nl/landing/re-imagine-europe/24828/re-imagine-europe/24831/?gclid=CjwKCAjw9qiTBhBbEiwAp-GE0ZA8h5CHLjRNL--BVsxM0JfgkqPPhecw0dC85d-a8YsPX34bVaKBoCJwgQAvD_BwE> accessed 9 May 2022.

8 'In 2014, the New York artist and curator Clemens Poole was invited to Izolyatsia and just as he arrived, it was occupied. In 2015 he returned and created a project called *Zahoplennyya* which dealt with the subject of the occupation of public spaces. The timing was unique. Izolyatsia had been taken over by the Russians. We wanted to participate in the Venice Biennale, but Pinchuk dominated the scene. So Poole created uniforms, like an army, and on the back, they had a big sign reading, 'on vacation'. We all toured the Biennale and invited visitors to take selfies in the pavilions of countries they consider to be occupying powers. A huge number of people went to different pavilions. Some went to the former 'Yugoslav' pavilion which now belongs to Serbia. Some went to the Israeli pavilion, and some to the Russian pavilion. A lot of Americans went to the US pavilion to protest American foreign policy. We created a website of photos taken by visitors (<https://on-vacation.info>). There was a contest on the website to win a trip to Crimea. It was all very political, and a huge number of people were supportive'. Taken from an interview by Constance Uzwyshyn with Mykhailo Glubokyi in 2021.



Fig 8. Soledar.
2021 © Mykhailo Glubokyi.

PB: Izolyatsia today has been displaced once already, and now twice. Going forward, what are your views on the role of Ukrainian contemporary art and what purpose does Izolyatsia have during this time of war?

MG: The role of art and culture is very significant now; we can see that there is a spotlight on Ukraine. The country is in Western media, and it is important to say something meaningful. One of the main roles is cultural diplomacy...to explain what is going on here, what people feel in Ukraine, and how they see the situation. There is a very big need to take down this imperial Russian narrative. The Western world needs to understand Russian imperialism, and what it means...they don't see it as something bad, something disturbing, something that brings more trouble.

CU: When I met you in the Summer (2021) you spoke about a new art and cultural project called *Soledar* in a salt mine.⁹ What is happening with this project now?

MG: Up to the last moment, the role has been providing humanitarian and medical aid, but now the entire region is not accessible. It is now estimated that over 60 percent of the people have fled, because it is on the contact line and there is a huge chance it will be destroyed. It is a really bad situation now. Some of our team members have fled and are staying in different places, yet there are many who have refused to leave.

I am very proud of how we have inspired *Soledar* to become active from previous projects. They are self-organised volunteer groups and are preparing bomb shelters, supporting internally displaced people. They are much more active than the city authority and government and they do this from their own initiative. This is great because before 2014 they were sitting and waiting for someone to come to do everything for them and now, they take initiative and are proactive. We see this change in our society in Ukraine.

⁹ Soledar is a city in Donetsk Oblast (Province) of Ukraine. The name means 'gift of salt' and the art project was to take place in one of Soledar's spectacular salt mines.



Fig 9. Soledar, Salt Mine.
2021 © Mykhailo Glubokyi.

CU: This war has shown the strength and self-determination of Ukrainians.

MG: Yes, we are determined to fight for the preservation of our identity, our nation, and our sovereignty. The word nationality is very different in Ukrainian than in Russian and how it is used in Russian and Russian propaganda.

CU: Where are you now?

MG: I have one son who is five, he is the reason we moved outside of Kyiv (to an undisclosed location) because it is better he doesn't see what is happening or hear explosions and sirens. However, my mother is in Donetsk. At the beginning we thought it might be safer for her in Donetsk rather than in Kyiv. However, no one is safe anywhere in Ukraine and it is really frightening.

CU: After the war is over, what are your plans? Would you return to Donetsk?

MG: This is a difficult question. There is obviously a need to do something in Donetsk. The city is subjected to propaganda, without any access to international or independent media, independent culture, or discussion. We have to organise some programmes, to speak to people. It is even more important because we come from Donetsk. This means people are more receptive to us, more open to building and developing, there is a code of comradery amongst us—the people of Donetsk.

However, at this moment and time in war, it is hard to imagine how this is possible. It is all crazy, I was talking to a journalist from England and at the same time he was also communicating with people from Donetsk on Instagram. I was trying to tell the journalist it is impossible for these people to say anything except how they love Donetsk and the 'so called government'. Either they like their government because of this propaganda or otherwise they are afraid and will get into trouble. They are not free to discuss. Even the journalist cannot understand the fact he is not [getting uncensored material].

It is very important for us to do something in Donetsk, but we do not know what this will look like. We have this plan we started to develop a couple of years ago. We want to demolish the entire complex of Izolyatsia and turn it into a memorial garden. It is impossible to work in a place which has been used to torture so many people and has such bad energy. This memorial garden will talk about Izolyatsia, and it will be the best thing to do.

The British architect Rick Rowbotham, who designed the Donetsk Izolyatsia, has already created plans for this Memorial Garden. We need to liberate Donetsk so we can do this.

Conceptual Sketch of Memorial Forest

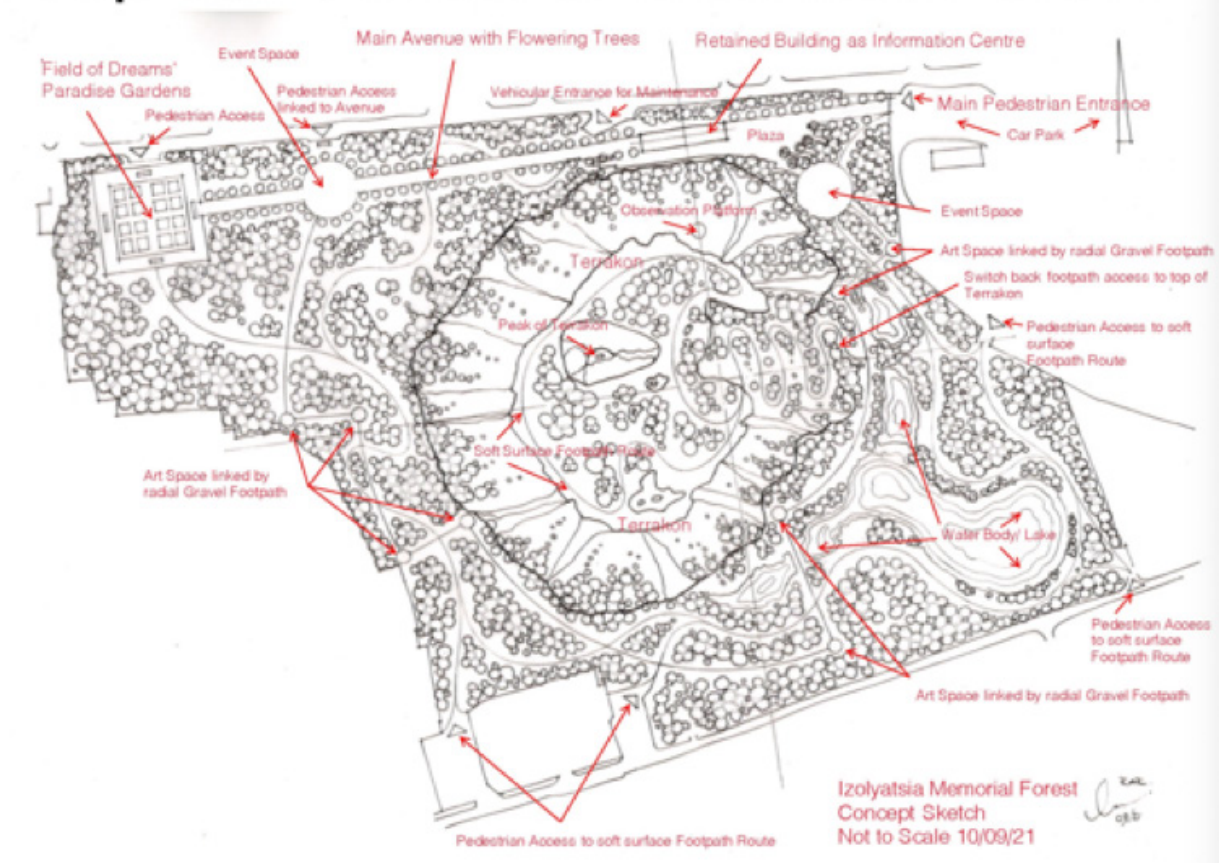


Fig 10. Izolyatsia Memorial Forest Donetsk
© Rick Rowbotham

In Conversation with **Bozhena Pelenska**

16 April 2022

The Jam Factory was on the verge of its debut as an interdisciplinary contemporary art centre in a repurposed industrial space in the Western Ukrainian city of Lviv when the Russian invasion started.

Jam Factory General Director Bozhena Pelenska has a background in art and culture management, with a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, an overseas scholarship year of study at the University of Ottawa, as well as a master's degree in cultural studies from Lviv National University through a programme affiliated with the Central European University. She fled temporarily to Poland at the onset of hostilities to place her young daughter in a safer environment and has been returning to Lviv to continue preparations for the opening in now radically changed circumstances.



Fig 1. An architectural rendering of the future Jam Factory Art Centre, Lviv.
© The Jam Factory.



*Fig 2. A current view of the Jam Factory.
© The Jam Factory.*

Peter Bejger: Please describe the Jam Factory.

Bozhena Pelenska: The Jam Factory is a complex of several buildings in the Pidzamche industrial district of Lviv. The main part, when you arrive at the site, is a beautiful old building which looks like a castle. It was built in a neo-Gothic style, with a tower, and the building was originally used to produce alcoholic beverages in the Austrian period, and jam during the Soviet era. This was a heritage building and had to be adapted and restored correctly. Our approach was to preserve as much as possible and to be true to ourselves. By May everything should have been finished. We had our timeline and date. The international press conference was planned for 4 April. We had our final timeline where the curators had to present the programme. The opening date actually was set for 26 August. That was in our calendar. This is where the war caught us.

PB: Has everything been frozen now? Or is work continuing?

BP: The first week (of the war) was a shock for everyone. My colleagues and I couldn't do anything the first week. We wanted to volunteer, to do something crucial, and for me this was important. When the air raids began, we were afraid and all of us in the neighbourhood used the basement of the building as a shelter. Lviv was being hit by rockets.

Our first question was: what can we do? We gave our offices to internally displaced people as a refuge. Also, regarding the renovations, many of the workers were from Central or Eastern Ukraine. In the early morning of the day the war started, they immediately returned to their families, to Kharkiv, or they became soldiers and joined the military to defend their cities. After a week

and a half of the war, we had a meeting with the construction company to see if they could complete the renovation. Would they be able to get workers, material, and finish the Jam Factory? We are awaiting their response.

PB: Who is the owner of Jam Factory?

BP: He is a private investor, Dr Harald Binder, who is a Swiss academic with a special interest in East Central Europe and a cultural entrepreneur who lives in Vienna and London. He is the owner of the buildings, and he is the investor, or philanthropist, who invests all the costs in renovation.

Constance Uzwyszyn: So, he bought the building?

BP: Yes. It was purchased by Dr Binder and it is part of his Foundation. He also established in Lviv in 2004 the Centre for Urban History¹ which is different from the Jam Factory and concentrates on academic research with an extensive public programme of lectures, exhibits, and events.

CU: I would like to talk about how your programme works, as well as the concept and the vision.

BP: The vision for the Jam Factory was to create an international art centre. I wanted to have a curatorial approach that would be rigorous, and we would create exhibitions of Ukrainian artists from Ukraine, Ukrainian artists that are abroad, and also international

¹ See <<https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/>> accessed 9 May 2022.

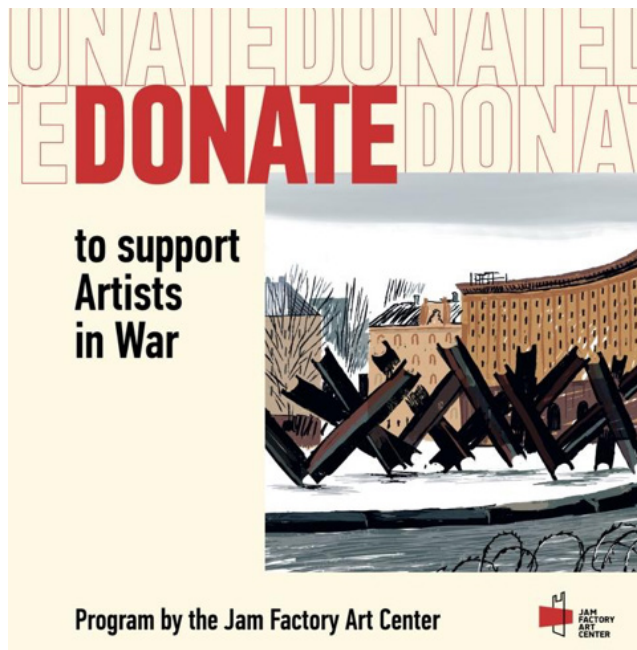


Fig 3. An appeal for the 'Artists in War' programme.
© The Jam Factory.

artists. This centre for contemporary art is important, in order to show Ukrainian art as an integral part of Europe and involved in world discourses.

One of the biggest problems is that many people are not familiar with Ukrainian contemporary artists, or the Ukrainian avant-garde. We are connected to Europe, despite the borders separating us for many years. We have wonderful, brilliant artists who use different contemporary approaches in either the visual arts, painting, installation, or media arts. One of the artists we wanted to exhibit was Olena Turyanska.

We want to be inclusive. For example, we had one artist who is transgender. The curator selected the artist because of the interesting work. We want to be inclusive as much as possible, but we also want to have this frank approach where we choose what we believe is good and important and that can really talk about the subject.

Our first exhibition was to be 'Organic Community' and it was to involve theatre, music, and the visual arts. It was to include issues of colonialism and appropriation, ecology and human relationships, and modernisation. Colonialism is a very important topic today in Ukraine, with the war. We wanted to show that Ukrainian artists are engaged in global issues and showcase them to the world. And all this is created in Lviv!

CU: Now we are in a war, and you are living in Poland with your child, right? What's next? Can you even make plans for the future?

BP: Well, I will be frank with you. Actually, it was a very hard decision for me to leave. I actually felt very guilty leaving Lviv because I felt I had to stay in Ukraine and do everything I need to do and do whatever is necessary. But on the first day there were all these sirens, and it was such a shock. I was so frightened, especially for my daughter. This was so stressful for her, and I simply didn't know what was going to happen. I had a friend in Warsaw and she



Fig 4. A damaged building in Kharkiv, 23 May 2022.
© Dimitar Diloff/AFP via Getty images.

said, 'Come, I have a room. My son will move out of his room and I will put a mattress on the floor and you can sleep there'. I didn't know, I didn't know...And there was someone with a car and they had two places and they said they were leaving in ten minutes. I took my backpack and my daughter's backpack and our laptops and fled. This was one of the hardest decisions in my life.

PB: How old is your daughter now?

BP: She's twelve now. It was very hard travelling, and it took 30 hours to get to the border.² But this was the moment when my responsibility for my daughter and the unknown future prevailed and I decided I must leave. Yes, there were a lot of difficulties, but I returned to Lviv last week. It is still very stressful for children, and adults for that matter. If you can imagine all these sirens. I have recorded some of them. There is martial law and a curfew and you have to return home very quickly. There is a shortage of different products. Of course, this is also a very exciting time for creating now and more people are in Lviv. And now after 50 days of war a lot of people are starting to write that they are ready to do something. It is so strange, there are few children in Lviv.

I recently spoke with Harald about how we will renew activities. However, it is hard to plan. There are many battles and then it is so psychologically difficult. I want to finish the renovations and we may open the Jam Factory, but now in totally different conditions. We don't know many things.

PB: I understand now you are actively engaging with artists to help them through this crisis?

BP: Quite a lot of artists have said that they are blocked, and unable to create. Many are participating in humanitarian aid or doing military service. There are so many different stories. We created a program in response to the war. It's called 'Artists at War' and a lot

² Lviv is located about 70 kilometres (43 miles) from the Polish border.



Fig 5. A rendering of the future Jam Factory with performance space.
© The Jam Factory.

of artists can apply to this programme. We do not demand them to create, but we ask them in the next six months to create something in their work relating to the war. And we want these works to help us to collect funds, to help other artists. And I think we might also produce an exhibition later.

CU: So, you give them money to do this, is that the idea?

BP: We have collected some money for them already, and we are asking people to donate for that programme. We are selecting, we are looking at who the artist is...we are looking at their portfolios, and if they fit our criteria, we give them money for their needs and we ask them to create. The conditions are quite easy as we understand it's already very hard to create, but I think this would encourage them and it's important to give them a voice in these conditions.

PB: What is the mood like in Lviv now when you returned? What is it like psychologically?

BP: Oh well, I met quite a lot of people. They are exhausted and cannot sleep. They are very motivated to do as much as possible. A lot of volunteer work is being done. However, with some people there is a new feeling. They feel so vulnerable. There are so many people from the East or the northern part of the Kyiv region who have lost so much. They are in shelters and this situation tires them so much. I feel I can't rest because they are not resting and I am conflicted about why I care so much about me when they have nothing? This is psychologically difficult. But many people are still very motivated to help.

PB: You might want to think about this question. How might the influx of people into Lviv have changed the art scene there?

BP: You know, it has changed a lot. And it is changing now.

PB: What's going to happen with the Ukrainian art scene now, as it's dispersed?

BP: It is changing now. For example, in theatre. We are also working in theatre. As you know Kharkiv is totally destroyed.³

Kharkiv was quite strong in theatre, in experimental theatre groups. They had a very good and very strong theatrical school, and people there. And most of them are now in Lviv. They very quickly created a new group and they started to perform. I think they will stay. One of the leaders, his last name is Utsyk, Anton Utsyk, said that most probably they will stay in Lviv and in Kharkiv after the war is over. So they created this group, and I'm sure it is already an influence, and I was thinking how I as a Jam Factory director can engage with them. We can give them space, maybe to one of the groups. And this will already change Lviv. And one of the designers, he is also in Lviv. He is from Kyiv. I'm sure he is going to change things quite a lot. It's hard to envision exactly how, but I really hope for much better in the future for all of us who have been brought together quite unexpectedly.

CU: I know, it's tough. Eight years you worked on this, right? So close. But you know what? It will happen. I just know the world will come into Lviv and it will be very exciting. Just hold on.

³ Taylor Dafoe, 'Kharkiv's Palace of Culture was Destroyed by a Russian Missile Attack, Leaving Eight Injured' (*Artnews*, 24 May 2022) <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/a-ukrainian-palace-of-culture-in-kharkiv-destroyed-2120574>> accessed 25 May 2022.