

artasfoundation newsletter

November 2019



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

Dear friends of *artasfoundation*

What an autumn! In the Caucasus region, *artasfoundation* has been realising four projects simultaneously, two new project managers have joined us, while there is another turnover of staff in the office. Božena Čivić, who has taken care of our administration over the past two years with prudence and a keen sense of cultural differences, is handing her tasks over to Sandra Suter. Thanks to her previous work, running the office of the dramaturgy department at the Schauspielhaus Zurich, Sandra is perfectly suited for a dynamic cultural institution. We look forward to working with her. We thank Božena Čivić for her great commitment!

I also joined the *artasfoundation* team myself at the beginning of September. My first trip took me to Tsklatubo, where I accompanied the director Ron Rosenberg as a dramaturge. Back in Zurich, I want to focus on fundraising, which seems to be a terrible burden for many artists, but for me it is actually a passion. The people I talk to are smart, cosmopolitan and responsible. Through skill, ability and luck, they have more than enough and to spare. With their wealth they

want to do something meaningful and support others who are less fortunate and who have fewer opportunities. I have inspiring conversations with them about the challenges of today's world, which can only be mastered through joint commitment. For me, fundraising is not a laborious „begging tour“ but a work of a cultural, political, philosophical and humanitarian persuasion. Every Swiss Franc invested in a cultural project by *artasfoundation* is a meaningful investment. It is the thriving of the central values of culture, such as solidarity, empathy, tolerance and beauty, which decides whether the world will be worth living in for future generations.

Barbara Ellenberger and the *artasfoundation* team,
Dagmar Reichert, Božena Čivić, Anna Fatyanova, Sandra Frimmel, Olivia Jaques, Evan Ruetsch, Sandra Suter

- **Conference: Art at Risk – Creative Work in Challenging Contexts**
- **Tskaltubo Art Festival: 7th edition**
- **SKLAD Summer School for Art 2019**
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Conference: Art at Risk – Creative Work in Challenging Contexts



Photo: Fenja Läser

At the moment we are in the midst of the preparations for the international conference „Art at Risk. Creative Work in Challenging Contexts“! It will take place 27. till 29. February 2020 in Zurich. The conference is public, but space is limited, so it's strongly recommended to register as soon as possible. Experienced practitioners and exciting personalities from the fields of art, international cooperation and peace building from around 20 different countries will take part in the conference. Personal risks artists from the Global North and Global South are exposed to due to their work, and various forms of censorship or instrumentalisation will be discussed as well as the potential of artistic work to contribute to finding new answers to contemporary global risks.

artasfoundation is carrying the responsibility for the concept and programme. The conference is conducted in collaboration with Swiss Development Cooperation and the Zurich University of the Arts.

[Programme and Registration](#)

Tskaltubo Art Festival: 7th edition for which Ron Rosenberg got involved in a theatre project



Photo: Ron Rosenberg

For almost five weeks Ron Rosenberg was out and about in the small town, on foot, with a theatre concept and asking people he met about their big dreams. And asked if they would like to talk about it on stage. From the third week on, I (B. E.) accompanied the project as a dramaturge.

I asked Ron: How would you describe the effect of your project?

RR: The effect of the project reveals itself in an interlacing of contrasting positions in the village. Pupils and teachers, young and old, individuals and groups, the more privileged ones as well as the ones in need joined forces and overcame prejudices.

BE: Can you say something about the working process?

RR: Yes, isn't it crazy that we arrive with a concept and set something in motion that actually becomes independent from the very first moment on? The original concept floats in a vacuum until the moment it meets people and circumstances on site. It triggers a process; and in this case one that I could not have dreamed of.

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SKLAD Summer School for Art 2019



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

In 1915, Kasimir Malevich exhibited the *Black Square* and Alexander Rodtschenko painted compositions with ruler and circle. How come today most art schools in Eastern Europe concentrate on figurative painting and follow an „academic“ curriculum? This was a question three lecturers from Abkhazia* asked the 26 art students from Sukhum/i, Chisinau and Zurich at the recent *Summer School* that took place at the SKLAD art space.

Not long ago SKLAD moved from its former location – an empty theatre storage – to the vast third floor of what had been a factory for ball-pen-balls in Soviet times: a unique experiment of self-organisation of youth from Sukhum/i that opens up new possibilities from exhibitions, discussions, start-ups to parties and concerts. The opening of the space takes place with the activities of the participants of the *Summer School*. Earlier on, during the first of the two weeks of the project, the students got to know each other and became friends while staying and working on joint projects in a small village in the foothills of the Caucasus. The project has been organised by the Zurich University of the Arts on the basis of *artasfoundation*’s network in Abkhazia.

And what about the legacy of Malevich? When the Soviet Union transformed the agricultural state into an industrial state with all its might after 1922, art was commissioned to support this development. Regarding this example of the interdependency between specific conceptions of „what art is“ and their respective socio-political contexts, all participants received a question to take home: what about this interdependency in their own societies?

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Art Matters: a multi-layered learning space



Photo: Bastian Riesen

The pilot project *Art Matters*, which has come to an end after two years of exchange of Swiss students of Art Education with first Abkhazian* then Armenian colleagues, sees itself as a multi-layered learning space. It is multi-layered because of its concept to learn together through (art) teaching, through the interlacing of theory and practice, but also because language differences sets limits to communication with one another, which must be overcome constantly. Language becomes a stumbling block, but while we fall on our faces we catch a glimpse of another horizon of thought. In the exchange with the Armenian participants in Zurich we relied on up to four languages (Armenian, German, English, Russian). We observed different approaches to art and art mediation, but often even the familiar words are not sufficient to name the differences and certainly not to explain them. At the exact point where language ends, the differences become perceptible: It's there, where we find frictions, where we are given the opportunity to wonder about ourselves with patience, where we observe and rethink ourselves within the collaboration, where we perhaps learn more about our own understanding of art but, above all, where we learn to put it in perspective. In a world in which differences are depicted as threats, *Art Matters* teaches us to encounter differences with curiosity and courage.

We hope the new generation of art teachers will continue to challenge their students with art lessons in which art can also sketch alternatives to their existing societies.

We wish our Armenian colleague and dear friend Shoghakat Mike-Galstyan and her newly born daughter Tsovinar all the best!

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off/line: Zemo Nikozi



art object by Michel Eisele, photo: Anna Fatyanova

This year is a turning point for the project: After five years of exchange we asked self-critically, to what extent could art contribute to positive changes in Zemo Nikozi, in this Georgian village close to the line of demarcation with South Ossetia? Should the project be continued? The annual visit of around 30 artists has established itself in the village, and we were able to resolve the tensions that arose last year about the selection of host families. The villagers appreciated the exchange with the artists and now also address their own design wishes to them, the young people on the street greet us in English. Our project brings variety and new perspectives into the village, it has created new connections among its inhabitants and beyond. Nevertheless, the people in Nikozi suffer from the unresolved conflict and the everyday noise of the shooting exercises on the other side of the „fence“ will probably never become a normality for them.

Anna Fatyanova reports from her first trip to the region: „It was the first time that I took part in a project of *artasfoundation* in the Caucasus region. Before, my fear was that I would not be welcome in Zemo Nikozi due to my Russian origin. All of the participants were warmly welcomed and accommodated at the local families. Not only did we share a household for two weeks, but we almost became part of the family. In such a situation, one gets to know oneself better. You realise you are stuck in your own patterns of thinking. Is it even possible for me as an outsider to contribute anything to the admirable way in which the local people manage their hard life? In addition, there is the uncomfortable feeling of being right next to a military zone, a feeling of powerlessness. But such critical self-reflection is part of the creative process. Some distance helps to realise the potential and importance of art especially in such fragile contexts.“

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International Choir



Photo: Fenja Läser

One month ago, the three-year project *International Choir* came to a touching end with a joint concert tour by the Armenian choir *We Are One* and the Abkhazian* *Rainbow Singers* through Abkhazia*.

Of course, each of the three concerts was an eagerly anticipated highlight of the trip. What kind of audience is going to come? What will the atmosphere be like? Before our last concert at the boarding school in Ochamchira, the only local singer was not sure how many guests were to be expected, because concerts are taking place every two days, she said. We asked mischievously whether the people there could sing so well also. No, she replied laughing, but they would do it anyway! But the guests came, and the concert hall was bursting at the seams. The local Armenian community had arrived and was visibly touched by the Armenian songs in the programme. They were obviously aware of the efforts it takes to bring together the two choirs, across borders and demarcation lines. So many people had come, the noise was tremendous – enjoying music obviously doesn't work in devout silence here ... But it turned out that the high volume of the boarding school students shouldn't be confused with inattentiveness: during the „Cup Song“ at the latest everyone wanted to know how it works and dared to get close to the singers.

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Jour Fixe – An invitation to the monthly discussion event in Zurich

Every month *artasfoundation* hosts a Jour Fixe, a public event where we present current projects, discuss open questions related to our work and exchange knowledge on relevant political developments.

If you are interested in learning more about the Jour Fixe, you are welcome to subscribe to our mailing list [here](#).

Thank you for your support!

The projects of *artasfoundation* can only be realized thanks to the great support of friends, donors and patrons of the foundation. Apart from the contributions of institutions and foundations, 60% of the budget comes from private hands. Thank you for your help and thanks to everybody who has supported us already in 2019. All contributions are welcome both large and small donations are valuable and helpful!

Bank details for individual donations:

Artas Foundation, Raiffeisen Bank, 8001 Zurich, IBAN: CH56 8148 7000 0412 5940 4

If you would like to become a friend or donor of the foundation or a project sponsor write us an [e-mail](#).

As you have probably noticed, we have a new webpage!

After weeks of work and collective exhaustion, today we have finally crossed the finish line happily and proud: we are going online!

[Click here to visit us on our new webpage](#). Click through the menus, find new texts and pictures about the current projects and familiar ones in a new dress. Browse, drift, scroll through the pages „Ressourcen“, „Tätigkeiten“ or visit our page „Aktuell“ to find our upcoming Jour Fixe with Eva-Maria Bertschy, to which you are cordially invited!

Have fun on the new *artasfoundation* website and enjoy the exciting discoveries!

(We have put the new webpage through its paces. Nevertheless, mistakes creep in inevitably. If you find any, please point them out to us. Thank you! [e-mail](#))

**artasfoundation would like to underline that its use of names and titles particularly with regard to the conflict regions should not be construed as implying any form of recognition or non-recognition by the foundation or as having any other political connotation whatsoever.*