

artasfoundation Circular November 2021



Photo: Regula Langemann

Dear friends of artasfoundation

We are writing from the road, on the way to Abkhazia¹ for an art project, just waiting in front of the checkpoint at the de facto border or 'administrative border' as it is called on the other side. Our papers are prepared, but will we be allowed to cross?

We can feel how 'border' is just another name for 'power'. With the corona pandemic, the power holders were given new tasks, which in turn offer them new arguments. This is true here in Ingur/I just as in the Schengen area or Switzerland. Our efforts to connect people across borders, to enable study trips and open access for cultural exchange have become more difficult. For example, despite the availability of vaccines, only 15 or 20 percent of people in Armenia or Georgia have been immunised so far. Where the population does not trust state institutions, where the wildest rumours circulate in social media about corona vaccines and the measures taken by the authorities come to nothing, the state's power of closing borders confirms the failure of the state.

September was made of ups and downs for us. On the one hand, we had to postpone two projects because of the pandemic. We had prepared them in detail but have now to start all over again! On the other hand, we were selected for the *Recognition Price for Cultural Participation* by the Canton of Zurich! The news landed just at the right time and gave us new energy. The price honours cultural workers 'who enable people to have access to cultural life'. For us, 'access' means reciprocity, a mutual exchange between ways of life, between privileged ones and those that are perhaps more precarious. In other words, it is a participation that crosses cultural or political boundaries.

After a few hours, the crossing into Abkhazia was finally possible. On the road we still are, hopefully with your support!

The artasfoundation team

- **Teachers on Trees**
- **How to Dance Wishes**
- **Resolve and Resignation**
- **Curating a Lecture Series on Socially Engaged Art**
- **Curtain up for the Foundation Board!**

Teachers on Trees



Photo: Regula Langemann

At the end of October, we were able to start an 8-month introductory training for art therapy in Abkhazia¹. It had been requested by local teachers who work with children and young people from difficult family backgrounds. Twelve of these teachers (ages 19 to 54) took part in the first workshop and tested the methods of *Intermodal Art Therapy*. Guided by two experts, Varvara Sidorova from Moscow and Annatina Strub from Basel, they explored it primarily through practical work. It is difficult to describe the power of change inherent in artistic activity without prior experience. In the beginning, the workshop participants probably would not have imagined that they would end up climbing a tree!

Next, the training will be continued through supervision talks via Zoom before the second on-site workshop takes place in January.

How to Dance Wishes



Photo: Kilian Haselbeck

For our recently concluded second workshop, the dance project *Wishing Wishes* in the Armenian region of Tavush at the border with Azerbaijan, the teenagers developed their movements and choreographies under the guidance of dancers and choreographers Meret Schlegel and Kilian Haselbeck. As starting points, they were using their wishes: Some small and some big, some for themselves, some for others, and some for society. They experimented, combined and dissolved the boundary between male and female movements, which is very strong in Armenian dance. Traditional movement patterns were expanded in intensive work with the Armenian dance teachers. Although thoroughly pleasant, connecting the different approaches to dance was also very challenging. While choreographies are usually developed collectively by all the participants in contemporary dance, in Armenian traditional dance it is common practice to teach the ensemble an already elaborate choreography. Despite the different approaches, the outcomes convinced everyone, and we are looking forward to completing and performing the choreography of the *Dancing Mountains* in the next workshop!

Resolve and Resignation



Artist presentation at Hay Art in Yerevan. Photo: Julien Fehlmann

As September came to a close, the *artasfoundation's* team took off to Armenia with the German-Finnish artists Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen to test the water in anticipation of an art project in the Armenian village of Chambarak. A stone-throw away from the disputed border with Azerbaijan, the people there showed a complex mix of resolve, resignation and need to escape from it all.

After Tellervo and Oliver presented excerpts of their past works, the discussions revealed the chasm between the luxury of the Western way of life at peace on the one hand and the uncertainties that define prospects in Armenia on the other. Yet, despite the differences, the mutual respect and willingness to understand each other was never dented during the exchanges. Back in Finland, Tellervo and Oliver have now started to draft their future project, which we very much look forward to facilitating next year.

Curating a Lecture Series on Socially Engaged Art



Drawing from Victoria Lomasko's book „Die Unsichtbaren und die Zornigen“, 2018, on protest and civil rights movements in Russia since 2010.

artasfoundation is not only doing practical work in conflict regions but is also trying to give more weight to art in peacebuilding in the educational landscape in Switzerland. Therefore, we are very much looking forward to cooperating with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. For the spring semester of 2022, we are designing a programme of lectures, working discussions, and semester presentations as part of the *Bachelor of Art & Design*. The focus is on socially engaged art and international cooperation. To this end, we invited artists and cultural workers with whom we have been working before. Moscow artist Victoria Lomasko will discuss socially engaged art through the prism of her graphic reports; Mara Züst from Zurich will give an insight into her Mini-Zine-Library; and the Georgian art historian Irine Jorjadze will present her knowledge on the Central European and Georgian Avantgarde.

Curtain up for the Foundation Board!



Iron Curtain of the Berlin Ensemble, on which Bertolt Brecht had Picasso's 'Dove of Peace' painted. Currently on display in the exhibition 'The Divided Picasso' at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne (photo from the exhibition).

Behind *artasfoundation* stands its Foundation Board, which enables and supervises all activities. For once, we would like to bring them to the fore and warmly thank them for their many years of work!

Austrian diplomat Margit Wästfelt, dramaturge and climate advocate Barbara Ellenberger, architect Isa Stürm, and former director of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Angelo Gnädinger, all offer their experience on a voluntary basis. As does the board's president, the experienced Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini. She recently reported on her mediation work in conflict regions – including regions where *artasfoundation* is active – in an interview with Deutschlandfunk Kultur that is well worth hearing.

Here is the link to the interview:

www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/diplomatin-heidi-tagliavini-teilsiege-sind-auch-siege-100.html

'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.

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