

artasfoundation Rundbrief

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Photo: Iris Ganz

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Exploring the Dialogical Potential of Art

Dear Friends of the Foundation

‘What, you work with THEM?’ The indignation of a project partner from Eastern Europe about our cooperation with artists from her warring neighboring country was strong. Understandable: where people are killed daily and political propaganda floods everything, categories become fixed and sweeping: here our people and there the enemies. Them against Us. ‘Who to trust?’ becomes the big question. No wonder, the cross-border work of *artasfoundation* easily comes under criticism under such circumstances. Partnerships and even friendships built up over several years of working together are put to the test: ‘Don’t our enemies have to be your enemies too?’, it is rarely said so directly, but still, and ‘Don’t you see their atrocities?’ Yes, even if those of us who live in Switzerland are by far not as directly affected, we see them. And we are also concerned about how catastrophic this may be for our partners in the region and how much it demands of them to bear it. What can we say to them? First, perhaps, that it is important for us to also ask within our own country who is directly or indirectly supporting and benefiting from aggressors. And then we’d say, that there are probably also people among ‘THEM’, in the country of their enemies, who think like our project partners, who also stand for peaceful coexistence. If we were not ready to look more closely and to differentiate, all entry points for further coexistence that will hopefully one day be possible again, indeed inevitable, would disappear. It is certainly easier to differentiate when one lives further away and without direct danger, and in this way, it is perhaps also possible for us to contribute to preserving entry points for later reconstruction.

In order to also practice this cooperation across borders and front lines within the *artasfoundation* office itself, we are in the process of expanding our team. Now we began to involve not only members who live in Zurich in our regular office work, but also members who live in Eastern Europe. In March, five new team members started working with us on a trial basis, and a lot is going on now via Zoom meetings. By the next newsletter we hope to be able to report on the results!

Thank you for your interest in *artasfoundation* and best regards!
Dagmar Reichert, also on behalf of Theresa Ackermann, Nasta Agrba, Tamara Janashia, Olivia Jaques, Shoghakat Mlke-Galstyan, Sandra Suter, Rana Yazaji and Mara Züst

About Hosts and Guests



Common differences. A collage made by our four residency participants from various textile fragments (as part of an ongoing art-project by Natalia Peredvigina)

In 2023, *artasfoundation* has the chance to host cultural workers (artists, curators, or mediators) from Belarus and Russia who have left their homeland because of the war. Here is, how they saw their stay with us:

Curator, producer Nasta Agrba: I have received two main things from this residency – financial support for living expenses and the opportunity to work with *artasfoundation*. How to measure this? Money helps me with the basic needs. Communication with people is something else. They become the witnesses of your life; their memory becomes the horizontal space you are traversing with your life. This is what *artasfoundation* became for me this time. To disagree with one person, to work hard on an idea with another, to laugh, to think together, to bake a cake. These people have become the topography of my new life, *artasfoundation* – the map.

Curator, producer and art researcher Nika Parkhomovskaia: This residency was different from many others in which I took part, because it didn't require any project or production but a lot of communication and learning. I learned how to be in the office (a totally forgotten experience), I learned how to understand Swiss German (which I don't), I learned how to communicate with various people at the same time, I learned to work without being obliged to work, I learned how to relax and not to control things, and last not least I learned how to listen.

Artist Natalia Peredvigina: The residency at *artasfoundation* is an opportunity to continue artistic practice and build new connections in difficult circumstances. It is especially valuable that art works as a tool for self-awareness now. I can look at myself through the prism of current events, and the gaze changes the circumstances, and the circumstances change the gaze. Everything is very close, the line between personal and public is almost dissolved. In this ephemerality and zeroing lies the continuation of life.

Writer and art critic Inna Rozova: My main way of interacting with the world is through language. One of the main problems of emigration for me is the transition to another language (which, moreover, I do not know well enough to express all my thoughts freely). The residency at *artasfoundation* is an opportunity for safe and meaningful communication with other people, getting to know other cultural codes.

Teaching the Teachers



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

After seceding from Georgia in a war in the early 1990s, only Russia and a handful of countries have recognised Abkhazia¹ as a state in its own. The unresolved status makes professional further education difficult for its inhabitants, an issue from which the demand for a training in art therapy emerged. Local teachers who work with children and young people from difficult family backgrounds had requested it from us.

Just one week ago, we concluded the third part of *Art Works* – a training in inter-modal art therapy, for practicing teachers in Abkhazia. The previous parts of the project had been jointly led by a Swiss and a Russian expert, but this time, we had not been certain that entering Abkhazia would be possible for Swiss people. It finally turned out to be possible for our team members, but by then we had already decided that the art therapy expert from Russia, Varvara Sidorova, would lead the workshop together with her assistants. Now we are evaluating *Art Works* and elaborate with our partners in Abkhazia, how they would carry on independently with the impulses we could give.

¹artasfoundation would like to underline that its use of names and titles particularly in regard to conflict regions should not be understood as implying any form of recognition or non-recognition by the foundation or as having any other political connotation whatsoever.

Last Places Available in the CAS Course *Arts and International Cooperation*



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

After the summer, we will start with a new Certificate of Advanced Studies course *Arts and International Cooperation*. Within the continuing education department of the Zurich University of the Arts, *artasfoundation* is responsible for the curriculum of this course. The course enables its participants to form a critical understanding of the potential and limitations of working with art in fragile contexts and in peacebuilding. Through examples and field visits (Tunisia or Armenia), it gives them insight into actual projects in this realm.

If you are interested in reflecting on projects like those of *artasfoundation*, you are particularly invited! The registration period runs until 21 May 2023. You can contact Dagmar Reichert for last remaining places: dagmar.reichert@artasfoundation.ch

More information: www.zhdk.ch/weiterbildung/vermittlung-525/cas-arts-and-international-cooperation

Doubt and Preciousness



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

Does it make sense to engage for a study visit – and a very short one at that – for ten art students from Abkhazia¹ at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK)? The effort is very high for everyone involved. The visa is very difficult to organise, everything is unpredictable, the journey, especially now, is extremely long and exhausting. What about the CO2? Is it worth it for young people living in an unrecognised state and limited in their travel options? Is it worth trying to counter the dominant propaganda in the Russian-dominated media space with an opportunity for personal experience? What if it is simply our defiance: surely it is unacceptable that the borders to countries or regions in the Russian sphere of influence are becoming insurmountable. There must be opportunities for encounters!

A few days ago, the ten artists, our guests from Abkhazia, arrived at Zurich airport. Although tired, they were very happy! We notice how important the study visit to Switzerland is to them and how curious and eager to learn they are. All the doubts from before now carry less weight.

The project takes place at the ZHdK and was enabled by it. Through our network we were able to facilitate and accompany the project organisationally.

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The Colour-Coordinated Washing-Lines



Photo: Rana Yazaji

artasfoundation is collaborating with researchers from the Zurich University of the Arts in the research project *Contemporary Art, Popular Culture and Peacebuilding in Eastern Europe*. Rana Yazaji, who is a member of the research team, reports on her first research trip in Armenia:

In January 2023, I arrived in Yerevan. Besides meeting as many artists and cultural practitioners as the intense days allowed for, my plan was to experience the vulnerability and uncertainty of being a stranger in a city, of being lost, overwhelmed by all the landscapes and everyday corners.

Noticing the all-black washing line in the photo you see above, I remembered cultural anthropologist and writer Lusine Kharatyan's recall of her life in Yerevan: 'I miss the washline, where the laundry hanging in the sun and wind confirms the continuity of life. A transient piece of eternity. When, on the roads of a hastily lived life, you meet a colour-coordinated washing line of laundry and suddenly realise that the laundry is yours'.

It was not such colourful washing lines that attracted me when walking into a random building block in Yerevan on 17 January. Instead, there was an all-black one. It was relieving to see the pieces of cloths could fit for theatre, or gymnastic training. I was happy to eliminate the possibility that these clothes would belong to a widow. When you are engaging with a region in conflict, death, as the result of violence, is always to be expected.

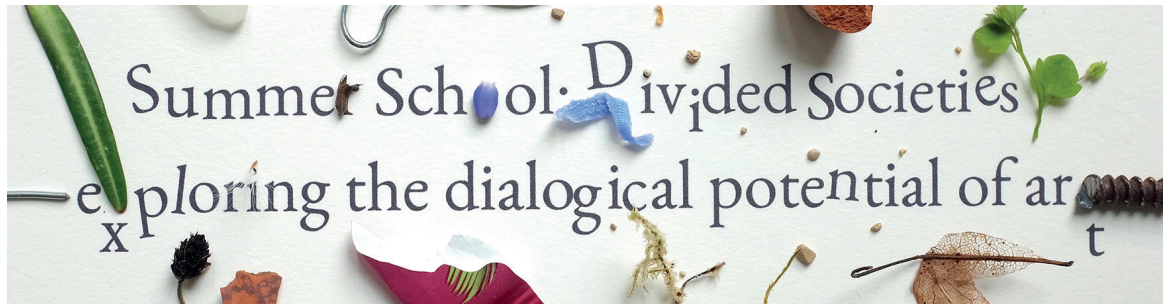
Art Education Back and Forth



Photo: Céline Brunko

Last autumn we were able to organise an intense programme for a group of future art teachers from Switzerland in Tbilisi. It included visits to schools and cooperation with colleagues there. Past January, we received the Georgian art teachers for a return visit. The Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, BA programme in Art and Education, was the host. For twenty students, plus lecturers from both countries, it opened its workshop spaces and studios and organised visits to public schools and museums in Lucerne. Active involvement with trial lessons, expert discussions about respective approaches to art teaching and talks about museum education completed the program. Many things were equally new for the Swiss participants as for the Georgians. Finally, we were all impressed by the hospitality of the Lucerne students, who did not miss the opportunity to introduce the non-Swiss colleagues to their cuisine with home-made dinners.

OPEN CALL Summer School: Divided Societies Exploring the Dialogical Potential of Art



Artwork Natalia Peredvigina: *microterritory.land*

In late August 2023, we will invite artists, activists and cultural practitioners working within the field of socially engaged arts to explore the chances and limitations of artistic interventions in contexts of deep differences in world-view. Taking diverging views within Eastern European societies and within different social groups in Switzerland as starting points, we dive into a week full of inputs, exchange of experience, shared learning, inspiration, and networking.

The 7-day summer school (28.8.–3.9.) brings together artists located in Zurich and artists from Eastern Europe and beyond, who, despite their respective social and cultural contexts, share similar basic concerns. The programme itself will be partly developed jointly with the participants. The summer school will be held in English.

More Infos: www.artasfoundation.ch/de/aktuell