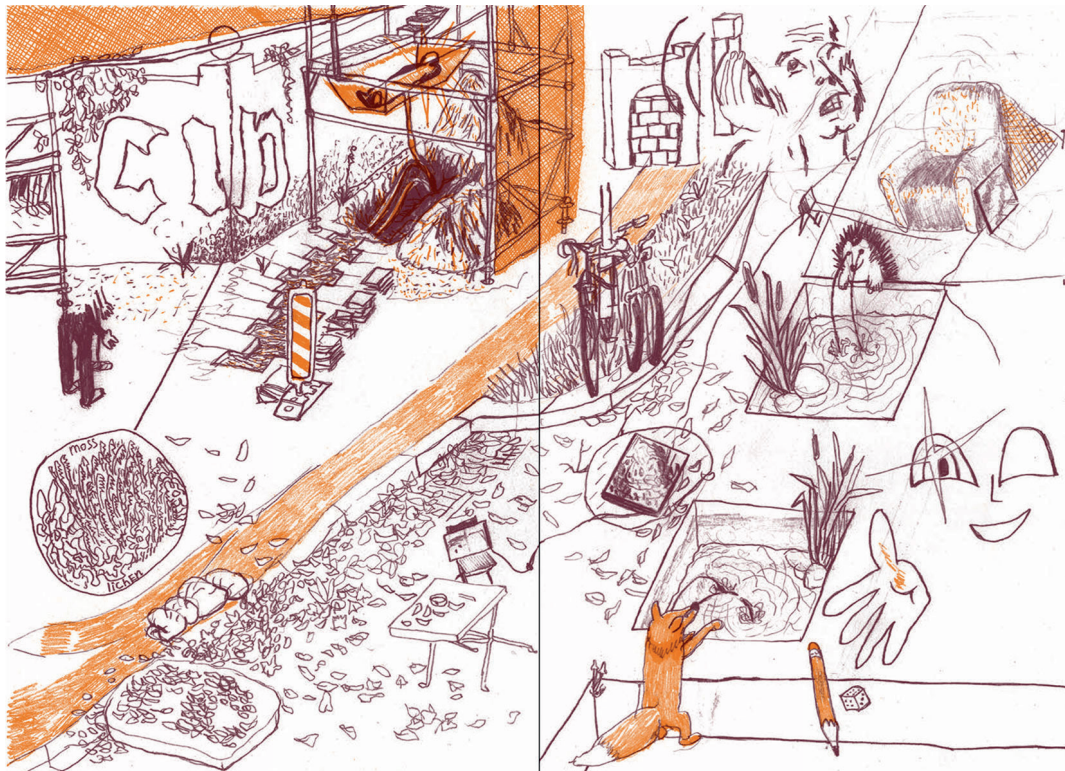


- Contemporary art and social transformation in Armenia
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Part of the series „Park Volny“ by Anna and Vitalii Cherepanovy, in „Artists in Exile“, artasfoundation, 2024

Dear friends of *artasfoundation*

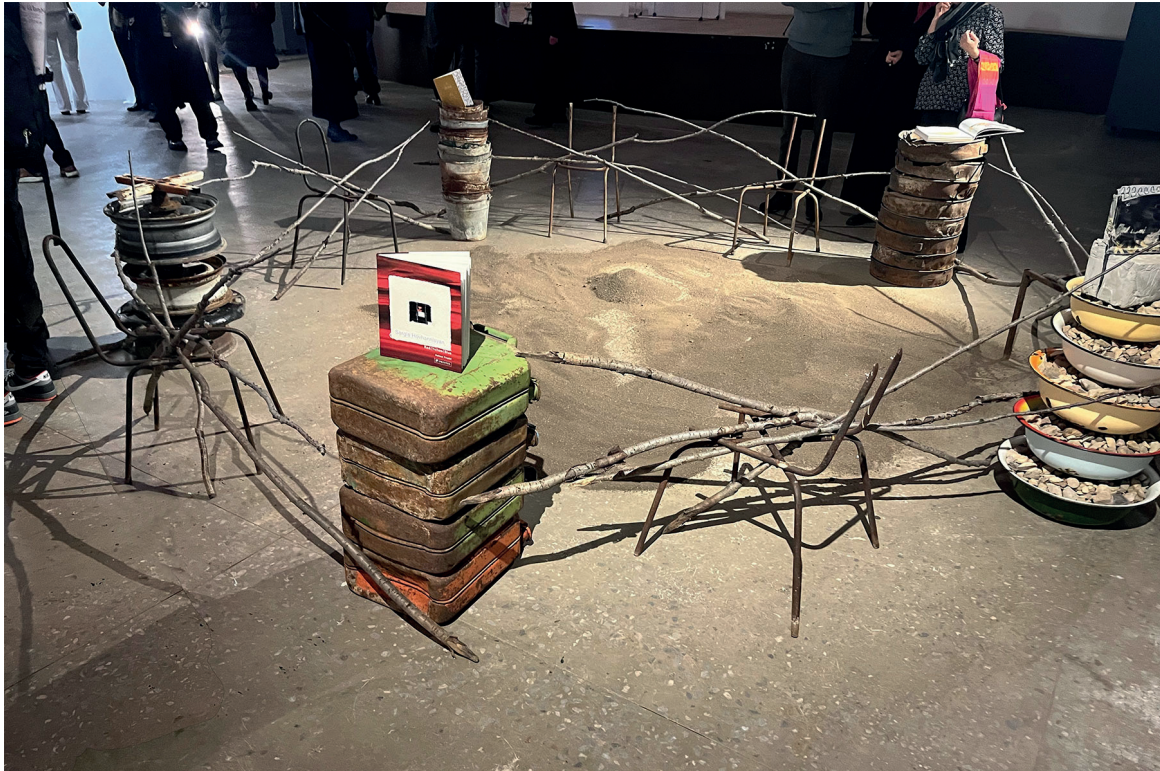
Many parts of the world are experiencing intense political, social and humanitarian upheaval, fuelled by authoritarian regimes, wars, conflicts and economic inequality. These conditions are forcing millions of people, including artists, to migrate and seek refuge in more secure regions, where they must face the harsh reality of being refugees and become artists in exile. They are required to redefine their artistic practice in unfamiliar cultural contexts while processing the experiences they often bring with them into their new realities.

In 2023, we invited six artists in exile to an exchange and collaboration program in Zurich for three months each. This year we launched the *Tbilisi Crossroads* art residency. The project brings together 12 local and international artists living in Georgia from different, perhaps conflicting regions, who otherwise live in separate communities alongside the local cultural scene and interact only briefly with each other.

Art in exile is an area that deserves special attention and awareness - both academically and in practice. This raises many questions: What relationships do artists maintain with their countries of origin and what role do displaced artists take on in their new environment? Do they speak the same language? Does the new environment allow them to continue their artistic practice or does the change lead to an inner crisis and block their artistic expression? Does their art speak the aesthetic language that the public is used to in the new context? Do they have access to funding or are they excluded from the cultural and art system? These are questions that we at *artasfoundation* continue to explore topically with various projects.

Rana Yazaji, on behalf of the whole *artasfoundation* team
Theresa Ackermann, Shoghakat Mlke-Galstyan, Tamar Janashia,
Olivia Jaques, Dagmar Reichert, Sandra Suter, Mara Züst

Contemporary art and social transformation in Armenia



Art installation by Aleksey Manukyan in the exhibition „Beyond Data“ in Yerevan. Photo: Rana Yazaji

The starting point for cooperative art projects cannot simply be an elaborate written concept or a successful funding application. Ideas for meaningful projects emerge when they are imagined together with regional artists and discussed in meetings and during exhibition openings – amidst the city noise and influenced by the artistic works experienced in museums, theaters and on the streets.

During a week-long research trip, we continued to experience Yerevan as a place with a keen sensibility for political change and a constant fear of further violent escalations. The *Living Room* project is now in the starting blocks. It has been consulted with contemporary artists, art institutions and other activists. A physical space will now become the center of ongoing conversations and the site of various contemporary art practices and social transformation. At the moment, the *Living Room* is being set up to bring together displaced families, young people, Armenian and international artists, with the aim of encouraging those who have lost their homes to reconnect with their own strengths and resist long-term self-identification as victims.

Art residency *Tbilisi Crossroads*



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

Totalitarian violence or social injustice prompted many artists to leave their home countries and come to Georgia, a country that finds itself in a difficult political situation as well. Although Georgia has a long tradition as a meeting point of different cultures, those who have arrived in recent years tend to stay in their own communities, with little overlap. Many of them are from Belarus and Russia, some also from Ukraine, Azerbaijan or Iran.

The Project *Tbilisi Crossroads* began with a series of interviews with artists living in exile in Georgia. In the next step, artists will be invited to apply for a residency in summer 2024 via an open call. This will take place in the Racha region of Georgia and offer 12 local and exiled artists the space to explore possible forms of collaboration, share their artistic and personal experiences, research artists' initiatives and discuss relevant social and artistic issues. Their different perspectives may lead to a jointly produced exhibition in a later phase of the project. The project is deliberately process-oriented; at crossroads we take one step at a time.

Learning from Tunisian artists



Photo: Dagmar Reichert

The theater hall is perhaps 40 square meters in size. Our group of 14 already fills a third of it. We are in Tunis, on the *CAS Arts and International Cooperation* study trip, visiting the cultural organization Mass'ART. The group led by Saleh Hamuda and Najla Jnidi has been working in El Omrane, a rather poor part of the city, since 2010 and invites its residents to attend artistically sophisticated theater, concerts or literary readings. They usually take place at the crossroads in front of the theater. Her work has changed the atmosphere in the neighborhood, says Najla. It is long-term development work: those who took part in the first workshops as children are now building the grandstand for the upcoming festival as trained craftspeople. Mass'ART has long been involved in music and theater activities for young school dropouts, and some of them remain connected to the organisation. There are still many experiences to share, but Mass'ART is just one of the many art initiatives we are visiting on this study trip.

We return home inspired by the dynamics of Tunisian society and by what committed artists are creating here with limited financial resources. All the students on our CAS course are now completing their theses. At the end on June 29, we are inviting the graduates of all four courses held since 2017 to a big alumni reunion!

Intensive first round of the event series *Jour Fixe – Art in Conflict*



Photo: Theresa Ackermann

Since October 2023, we have been getting to know new approaches to artistic peacebuilding and deepening familiar ones in our monthly public event series *Jour Fixe – Art in Conflict*. We have listened, asked questions and formulated uncertainties. We thought out loud, took notes and didn't forget to laugh. We learned in the best sense of the word – about the challenges of building a trusting network in fragile areas, about trauma-sensitive work in the artistic field and about the possibilities of art as an open space for interaction. All this as part of the monthly event series *Jour Fixe – Art in Conflict*.

In lectures at the Zurich University of Arts (ZHdK) or in reading groups in the *artasfoundation* office – both on site and online – these topics were discussed and debated lively with the authors of the respective texts and, of course, with you and us as the audience. The *Jour Fixe – Art in Conflict* is organized by the Center for Art and Peacebuilding (ZKF) – a joint initiative of *artasfoundation* and the ZHdK. From fall 2024, we will cooperate with the performance location Gessnerallee for the event series. Our guests are practitioners who are active in the field of art and peacebuilding as researchers, designers, artists, etc.

To receive invitations to the events, please contact info@artasfoundation.ch

Ressources as a challenge and inspiration



Photo: Iris Ganz

Many aspiring art educators in Armenia often do not consider working within the educational system. Due to a poor reputation and low salaries, they do not find working in this field very appealing. In Switzerland, on the other hand, for some students the decision to teach art in schools seems to be driven primarily by financial considerations of the artists.

In two 14-day workshops in Basel and Yerevan, 18 art education students from Armenia met with future Swiss art teachers in the third round of the project *Kulturelle Bildung – inter-kulturell*. This final part of the three-year project series took place in cooperation with the Basel School of Art and Design and the Armenian State Pedagogical University. While visiting public schools, preparing and delivering lessons and reflecting on intercultural collaboration, the participants experienced a significant change of perspective on teaching art. They experienced first-hand the profound impact and transformative power of art and discussed together the possibility of promoting intercultural understanding through art education. In addition, they learned that the availability or scarcity of resources can be both a source of inspiration and a challenge.

artasfoundation community



Artas-Community-Event im November 2023. Foto: Theresa Ackermann

As a reader of this newsletter, you are part of the *artasfoundation* community. The more connected our community is, the stronger the sense of belonging, cohesion and relevance. Let's meet, exchange ideas and learn from each other, be it at the monthly, hybrid *Jour Fixe – Art in Conflict* including reading group, which is accessible from anywhere in the world, or at the annual community event in the fall on site. If you want, bring interested friends, colleagues and acquaintances or inform them about the possibility of participating or actively contributing topics. We look forward to seeing you!

Support *artasfoundation*

The work of *artasfoundation* is only possible thanks to the generous support of donors and friends. We ask for your help and would like to thank you for your donation to our projects.

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