I Crave to Make the Invisible Visible

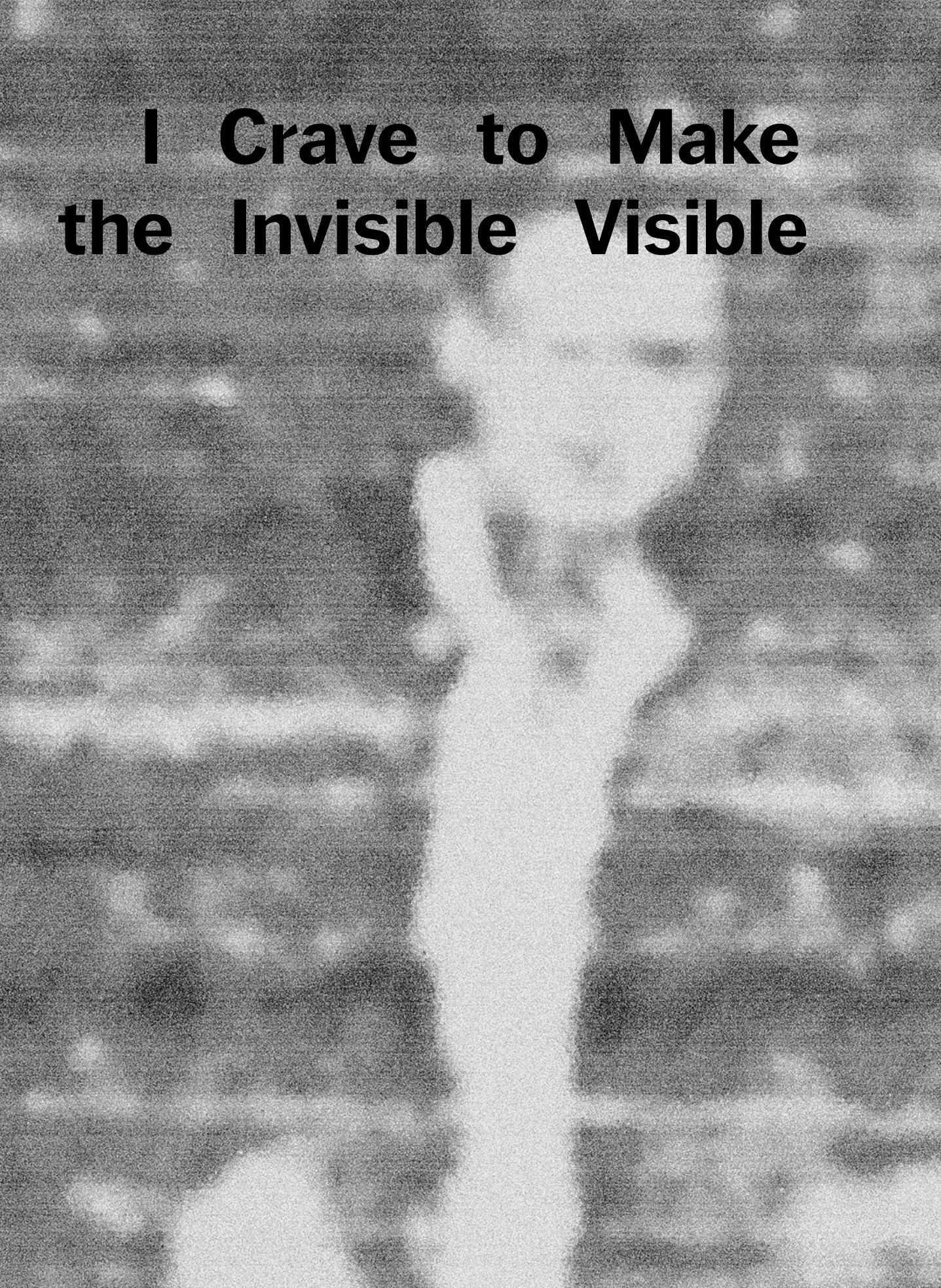


Image on this page: Velykyi Potomkin Island near Kherson, where for the last time the artist Slava Mashnytskyi was online before he disappeared.

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Even though we should have anticipated that Putin would not be satisfied with merely annexing Crimea, this full-scale war came as a shock. Across Europe, ordinary people immediately mobilized efforts to assist those forced to flee. I was living in Berlin at the time and witnessed Hauptbahnhof being filled day after day with volunteers swiftly organizing the distribution of donated blankets, tampons, diapers, and food packages, as well as coordinating offers of shelter for the refugees.

How could we, at the Artists' Association of Sweden, and the Swedish IAA committee, support our Ukrainian colleagues? With 3,500 members who are professional visual artists, crafts artists and designers, we decided that one way to raise awareness about the situation in Ukraine was to provide Ukrainian artists with a platform through our quarterly magazine, reaching 10,000 subscribers in Sweden.

One month after the invasion began, I met with Dariia Kuzmych at a café in Berlin, where she was residing at the time. We decided that she, along with her co-editor Polina Baitsym, would have the freedom to design this publication as an attachment to the magazine. It was clear that they, along with their Ukrainian colleagues, were in the best position to assess what was most important to communicate in this situation.

Shortly thereafter, Dariia traveled to Kyiv. I became accustomed to receiving messages like these from her:

"Because of the new air raids of Kyiv and other regions we have some problems. I'm in Kyiv now. We will write you more today."

"Unfortunately, new massive bombardments of Ukraine on the 10th of October interrupted our plans."

"The shelling was in the city center of Kyiv, where we all have friends and relatives."

"I woke up from explosions and then, I've spent a long time in a bomb shelter."

"The war takes energy from possible work and from the realization of projects; our resources (also human resources) are limited."

"A close person, a soldier, died on the frontline, Polina went to his funeral."

"I understand that we postponed it for a long time, and we wholeheartedly appreciate your patience and remaining interest (as a manifestation of true solidarity)."

It was evident that the situation made it impossible to focus on creating a publication amid all this. The war persisted without any sign of de-escalation.

With support from the Swedish Arts Council, we have finally been able to produce the publication you are holding in your hands. It has taken many winding paths from idea to your mailbox.

Our hearts ache as we come to terms with the fact that the war persists, and through Dariia and Polina's accounts, we grasp how it inflicts pain on those who, in Dariia's description, reside inside the vortex.

Sara Edström

Chair of the Artists' Association of Sweden and the Swedish Committee for the International Association of Art

Polina Baitsym

In Search for Radiance and Dusk

"...writerly tacitness may reside between things: in the lexical gaps, the spaces separating lines, the structural interstices of fragmented writing."[1]

"My narrative falters, as it must."[2]

Whenever I attempt to talk about images, I recognize my failure, time after time, in constructing the opening sentence as flawlessly and seamlessly as images compass our lives. In fact, my own choices of subjects to address and speak about, the themes to bring up, are the motives perennially revolting against exhaustive enunciation: death, loss, mourning, violence, memory, and history. They coalesce and culminate in war. War is a constellation of everything horrid and always *something else* beyond verbal and pictorial indications. Throughout these two years, I came to think about this elusive excursus as a burden of the inarticulacy of war.

One of the best introductions known to me, and the one that I wish I had the faculty to emulate, was written by Eduardo Cadava around the mid-1990s:

> There is no preface that is not an opening to light. Like the small window that lets in the morning light or the aperture of a camera that gives way to images, the preface allows us to experience a kind of light. This light is a condition and matter or presentation. It casts a future tense on the significance of what has already been written. Like the photographic negative that can only be developed later, it traces the imprint of what is to come. At the same time, it is written only in order to be left behind. That is why the preface takes in the interstices of the past, present, and future.[3]

I imagine this preface likewise as an opening to light. Cadava advances with placid elegance the display of the prodigious kinship between photography and writing: the "transit between light and darkness that we might also call writing."[4] For Jacques Rancière, who, akin to Cadava, revisits Walter Benjamin's thought, photography is writing with light, and "with the advent of photography all lives entered the shared light of a writing of the memorable."[5]

1 Kate McLoughlin, "War and Words," in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17.
2 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 23.
3 Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997), xvii.
4 Ibid.
5 Jacques Rancière, *Figures of History* (Polity Press, 2014), 15.

In this editorial, I attend to several photographic images of the ongoing war in Ukraine, trying to fumble for the passage between darkness and light. The pictures I discuss capture the occupation experience that redefines visibility as critical for corporeal existence. Under occupation, once the population enters the aggressor's sight, their bodies are involuntarily surrendered at the mercy of the occupants. In laying down my impressions, fragmentary yet potent, I discover a minuscule consolation — to share the thoughts on death, loss, violence, memory, and history is also to resist them for an instant. In general, our issue strives to illuminate the tenacious and enervating search for words and images to comprehend and convey the war, as it has been carrying on within Ukrainian artistic and scholarly communities. We hope that the attempts to vocalize our thoughts and yearnings, despite their plain abruptness and labored wording, aid in furnishing a "sense of political community of a complex order" on the basis of vulnerability and loss.[6]

Inga Levi, *28 June, Day 126. Children try to climb a tree, Nida, Lithuania / In the morning, russians shelled Mykolaiv, a residential building was destroyed, there are casualties, the Double Exposure* series, 2022, pencil.

6 Almost two decades ago, the idea of reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss was elaborated by Judith Butler in the essay "Violence, Mourning, Politics" in Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*, 23.

(Re)imagining the russo-Ukrainian War

Photography and war constitute an ineludible communion. Since the mid-19th century, the vestiges of violence have been reanimated through the camera's aperture.[7] Yet, the endurance of this association has been bringing forth numerous disturbances and agitating the debates among many thinkers. In my writing, I refer to these discussions as I deem them apropos in the current breath. In the russo-Ukrainian war, which was already bestowed the contentious title of the "most documented war,"[8] the degree of photographic images' proliferation is inconceivable. Its sweeping reach embraces the domains from the documentation of missiles ravaging residential buildings to the forensic investigations of russia's crimes. Photography also serves as a harbinger of the death of the beloved and a guide in mourning. In many cases, including mine, the picture for identification arrives from the frontline much earlier than the body. A single portrait representing the unfathomable complexity of one's life is selected to mark the burial place.[9]

I choose to attend briefly to photography not merely because I sense a conspicuous lack of critical engagement with the Ukrainian context, but also because I believe it encapsulates the subjects addressed in this issue. In Ukraine, artists frequently employ photography and its grammar to make the invisible visible, as enunciated in the quotation of the Kherson art scene's member, Slava Mashnytskyi, inscribed on the publication's cover. In the artworks of Inga Levi, for instance, the modernist double exposure method is reimagined in graphics to display the ruptures between the interiority of the country at war and its exterior settings. A simple and familiar gesture grants a complex insight into the unsettling anguishes experienced by the artist in war-dictated mobility.

The 20th-century scholarship elicits quintessentially the photography's conjunction with death and its perplexing bond with time. "The power of photography consists in creating sudden death."[10] For Benjamin and Cadava, the act of taking a photo is an act of mortification, an act of recognizing our mortality (especially in our portraits where we appear to ourselves as "thingified" and "memorialized.") A photograph contains our experience as already lived, perished, captured posthumously. It announces the absence and simultaneously secures the survival of what is lost in the form of image-apparitions or, in the 20th-century vocabulary, ghosts.[11]

Consider this quotation from Susan Sontag, especially favored by Judith Butler in her vast commentary on Sontag's

7 J. M. Winter, *War beyond Words: Languages of Memory from the Great War to the Present* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 35. And Geoffrey Batchen et al., *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis* (Reaktion Books, 2012).

8 This collocation was coined by the National Public Radio correspondent Greg Myre in his piece "From drone videos to selfies at the front, Ukraine is the most documented war ever," NPR, August 2, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/08/02/1191557426/

9 There are brilliant sentences that I could introduce to extend these thoughts. For the sake of conciseness, I provide only two quotations, especially dear to me: "Photographs turn the past into an object of tender regard, scrambling moral distinctions and disarming historical judgement by the generalized pathos of looking at time past," Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 2001), 71, and "Photography is a mode of bereavement," Cadava, *Words of Light*, 11.

10 Pierre Mac Orlan, "Preface to *Atget photographe de Paris* (1930)," *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings*, 1913-1940, ed. Chistopher Phillips, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture), 43. Quoted in Cadava, *Words of Light*, 7.

11 Ibid, 7-10.

late-years engagement with war photography:[12]

> Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives, heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people.[13]

War photography, which emerged as a meditation on death, offers the most powerful meditation on life simultaneously. In this dimension, it enters an intriguing interplay of temporalities, decisive for our sense of history and memory that are often at odds. Photography refers both to the past and the present: the past that is recorded within it and the present when the reading of the image is unfolding. They amalgamate in a certain reciprocal recalcitrance, which is especially evident when we consider the distinctions that the russo-Ukrainian war photography enacts. The past is so recent that it unceasingly transmutes into the present that, even in a globalized and interconnected world, is inevitably experienced as a sequence of delays. Every photographic act introduces the arrest of time, and every reading of the image, while being an interruption of time itself, distends the pictorial into the future.[14] Documentation — most attained through writing and photography — is essentially a futuristic activity, as it projects the future when the extraordinary (soliciting for documenting) reaches its finitude and can be processed, mitigated, and reflected upon.

In the text featured in this issue, Dariia Kuzmych speaks about the arrest, pause, caesura, *freezing* preceding an upcoming shock wave. This *becoming motionless and muted* is both critical for survival in wartime and names the distortion of cognitive capacities the war induces. In Dariia's writing, freezing also conjures the intellectual exertion continuously put into understanding and explaining violence while simultaneously being its target.

One of the most unintelligible and (thus radically exclusive) experiences terror begets is a sense of shattered and dispersed temporalities. War is the categorical disruption in the experience of time for those who are present within its reach. These fractures have been widely acknowledged among Ukraine's residents, but we are still struggling to convey them to the world beyond. When an individual lives through the loss and mourning, they nurture a torturous obsession with dates to comprehend and alleviate the disaster. The insistence on the periodization, originating inward Ukraine — 2014 as the start of the war, and 2022 as the start of the full-scale invasion — prescribed by the search for genuine compassion and attentiveness to the sensibilities of survivors.

War defeats linearity, and, as widely stressed, war defeats language.[15]

12 Judith Butler, "Photography, War, Outrage," PMLA 120, no. 3 (2005): 822–27, and Judith Butler, "Torture and the Ethics of Photography (2007)," *in The Lives of Images, Vol. 2: Analogy, Attunement, and Attention*, by Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa (Aperture Foundation, 2021), 95–129. The Butler-Sontag discussion is, of course, salient in the context of Ukrainian war photography but requires a separate publication.

13 Sontag, *On Photography*, 70.

14 For a more sophisticated exploration of photography temporalities in Benjamin's thought, see Eduardo Cadava, *Paper Gravyards* (MIT Press, 2021). On "the present experienced as a sequence of delays," see particularly impactful for me David Campany and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa, *Indeterminacy: Thoughts on Time, the Image, and Race(Ism)* (Mack, 2022), 78-79.

15 The latter wording refers to the noteworthy article of Kate McLoughlin, "War and Words."

The conundrum we ruminate upon in this publication lies in how to search for support and solidarity in the circumstances that limit our ability to identify and communicate *what is transpiring* to us. This matter is heavily convoluted with the demand to represent unrepresentable, imposed while entering the context of transnational art exhibiting that type of "solidarity" that exclusively promotes the image of particular institutions; and meditation on drawbacks of "visibility" granted in exchange of complying with extraneously evolved narratives about the war. In her text, Dariia speaks about the remedial relief of organizing exhibitions in Ukraine, about the comforting process of co-living through the war together, vis-à-vis her frequently vexing experiences of exhibiting artworks abroad, hindered by organizers' reluctance to ponder the war. The writing of Jakub (Kuba) Gawkowski, available in the expanded digital version of this publication, is itself a manifestation of genuine collegiality and develops these subjects further into the analytical discussion of Ukrainian art potency for Polish art scenes. Kuba's concise inspection exposes and dissects hypocritical responses to the calls for solidarity and visibility. Drawing upon his keen reading of Ukrainian art, he attentively designates professional reciprocity trajectories, salutary for Ukrainian and Polish art workers.

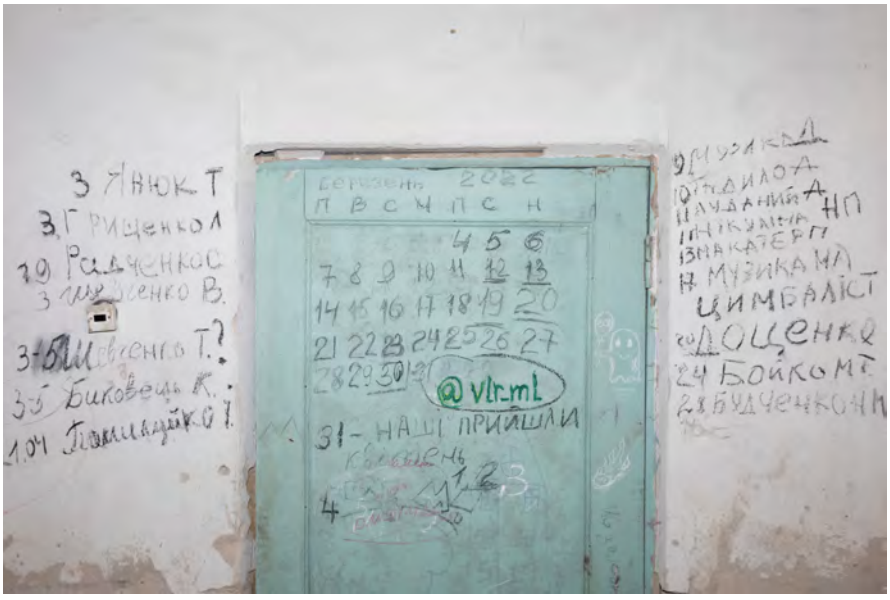
The word that I would like to filch from Kuba's writing to contemplate separately is *fatigue*. He mentions that it is "endemic to the logic of the art world," and I would go further, stating that it is endemic to our perception in these times, altered by the onset of digital sociality that aggravates the attention economy. While the distant observer, scrolling through the newsfeeds, may gloss over *another* war image, the residents of Ukraine utilize image-making in many underrecognized ways.

The most enchanting and troubling intrinsic feature of images, and photographs in particular, is their *indeterminacy*.[16] Images are incessantly ambiguous, and the attentive reading or listening to them has to be expanded into the attention to their frames that are in perpetual movement, always at the risk of breakage.[17] This capacity for infinite transformations impels us to structure this publication in proximity to a specific war frame through which Ukrainian citizens observe and live through the war. Naturally, within the country at war, the vision is not homogenous and attuned to the subjects' proclivities, sensibilities, and traumas. In this issue, we are referring to the artistic and scholarly communities of Ukraine that were also transformed by the immediate lethal threat of russia's aggression. Dariia's text, Katya Libkind's curatorial statement, and Evheny (Zhenia) Osievsky's re-reading of Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen* highlight the metamorphosis. All of the authors suspended their occupations during the full-scale invasion to allocate their resources to the resistance. Dariia contributed to the volunteering effort in the Kherson region, Katya took care of the state psychiatric hospital patients, and Zhenia volunteered in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. These trajectories are not exceptional; on the contrary, they are common in this war.

16 In this text, I prefer the term titling the correspondence between David Campany and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa. See Campany and Wolukau-Wanambwa, *Indeterminacy: Thoughts on Time, the Image, and Race(Ism).*

17 See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso Books, 2016).

It is well-known that violence transmutes artists and scholars into avant-garde soldiers *in primis*, yet, in the case of russo-Ukrainian war, it is the fact that is preferentially overlooked. The convenience of Western thinking, imagining an army as an estranged social group of callous mercenaries (some sort of perverse phantasy of violence and peace's purity and isolation) dispels in the war-razed spaces.



Mykhaylo Palinchak, Doors in the basement of a primary school in the Yahidne village which was occupied by russian troops. Yahidne village, Chernihiv region, April 20, 2022.

The reconstitution of the war frame in this publication is itself a creative act that encapsulates all the tensions images perennially entail. Recognizing their indeterminacy does not imply our incapacity to engage meaningfully with images. As Georges Didi-Huberman provocatively suggests, we may attempt not to *immobilize* them while we have to freeze, not to "isolate them from their own capacity to make a certain instant, duration, memory, or desire felt or sensible."[18] We suggest that the images did not lose their potential to participate meaningfully in the fight against oppression. They aid in tracing and processing the inscriptions of violence in the spaces of Ukraine. Some of the images, as, for instance, Mykhaylo Palinchak's work, evince attempts of Ukrainian civilians to replenish their sense of time for the sake of survival. The door of the primary school's basement in the village of Yahidne was transformed into a calendar, accounting for the days of imprisonment of more than 300 locals in a space without electricity, water, heating, and fresh air. This picture registers the petrifying transformation of administrative notes into epitaphs: from the left side of the doors, the names of those murdered by russian soldiers are inscribed, and from the right side — those who died in the basement. The doors are ornamented by children's scribbles. The calendar of March 2022 states near the number "31" — *"Ours have come."*

18 Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History: When Images Take Positions* (MIT Press, 2018), xvi.

A similar category of images focused on writing in spaces tries to get closer to the perpetrators and examine them. Those pictures are inherently driven by the tormenting search for answers to "Why?" and catch a glimpse into the aggressor's intentions. The project *Wall Evidence*, an archive of the inscriptions left by russians in the marauded spaces (mostly residential houses), catalogs their variety engraved as signs of the ferocious feast of plunder.[19]

Roman Pashkovskyi. Yagidne village, Chernihiv region, 2022.

Here, the multitude of russian's signature "Z" and "V" ricochets over the surfaces of wrecked households, occasionally changed with celebratory "glory to the great russia." In some cases, the perpetrators stated their presence, entitling themselves to the livelihood seizure — a "russian soldier was here," "your home is our home"; in others, they left threats and insults, addressing Ukrainians in derogatory language. The picture of a photographer, Roman Pashkovskyi, falls under the same category, though it is not part of the archive yet. This wall was spotted in the same village as Pashkovskyi's door — Yahidne, but, in a certain sense, from another side of it. The photo foregrounds a deep scratch on the wall that says, "Let's make a genocide <3," with the last symbol, a heart, borrowed from the digital messaging parlance, suggesting a sort of flirtatious intonations.

Listening to the War Victims

I am finishing this editorial on the 618th day of the full-scale invasion, and its end is not even looming on the horizon. Inside Ukraine, almost two years of protracted terror brought an awareness of lives' vulnerability and admiration of connections emerging in the face of death. Love and tenderness constitute two overarching subjects, contoured specifically in Dariia and Katya's writing. For a curatorial text, Katya adopts the most intimate literary genre, drawing on correspondence between Ukrainian writers Lesia Ukrainka and Olha Kobylianska (also mentioned in Kuba's article). She explores her sensibilities arousing around the exhibition *Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko*, held at the Khanenko Museum in Kyiv from March 11 till April 30, 2023. The museum itself is a space continuously razed by the wars and russian entitlement.

19 The *Wall Evidence* website: https://wallevidence.mizhvukhamy.com/

In the 1920s-30s, its collection was part of the Soviet "treasures into tractors" campaign, and thus, for instance, well-known paintings of Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Adam* and *Eve*, were dispatched from Ukraine to the USA. During the Nazi occupation of Kyiv, in 1941-1942, Germans took out of the Khanenko museum collection at least 78 Dutch, Flemish, and Italian paintings of the 17-18th centuries (including a landscape by Courbet) and 65 pieces of antique furniture.[20] On October 10, 2022, the blast from the russian missile piercing the children's playground in front of the museum's building was so strong that it shattered the museum's windows. The vortex in the children's space is a haunting image that Dariia invokes in her text. While we were finishing our publication, on November 6, 2023, russia heavily bombarded Odesa, the city of temporary residence of our designer and performance artist Nana Biakova, devastating the Odesa Fine Arts Museum building for the fourth time during the invasion.

Zhenia, my primary interlocutor who embodies for me an intertwinement of fortitude and tenderness, once attested to the haunting effects of the image in our conversation, speaking of photographs of the Bucha Massacre taken by Reuters correspondent Zohra Bensemra.[21] In March 2023, once he was evacuated from the occupation in Vorzel, a town proximate to Bucha, we reviewed the reports from what he called "his geography."[22] Then, the picture of a female hand with a red manicure in the mud (I sometimes think how only a woman photographer could take this shot) became a symbol of russia's incomprehensible violence against Ukrainian civilians. A less known fact is that the victim — Iryna Filkina — was identified by this picture by her cosmetologist. After the onset of the full-scale invasion, Iryna refused to evacuate from her hometown and cooked for the local unit of volunteers organized to protect the Bucha residents. She was crossing the street on a bicycle on March 5, 2022, when a russian soldier saw the woman and decided to murder her on-site. Saf Homin reanimates the cyclist's figure in an enigmatic shot, taken in autumn 2022, almost half a year after Bucha's liberation when the danger of crossing the aggressor's sight has been lifted. The photograph underpins the restored mobility yet divulges the space as irrevocably transformed by the massacre. The cyclist is moving through different Bucha, devastated and shattered.

We are moving through a different Ukraine in search of words. Beyond Ukraine, the support that seemed so overwhelming in the first months is attenuated by fatigue and misunderstanding.

Diagnosing once art scenes' inertia, Rosalyn Deutsche mentioned that "melancholic antiwar criticism tries to divide the subjective and the material, the public and the private, and the social and the psychic as though war has nothing to do with

20 Patricia Grimsted, "Art and Icons Lost in East Prussia: The Fate of German Seizures from Kyiv Museums," *Jahrbücher Für Gechichte Osteuropas* 61 (January 1, 2013): 48, 56, https://doi.org/10.25162/jgo-2013-0003.

21 "In Ukrainian Street, a Corpse with Hands Bound and a Bullet Wound to the Head," *Reuters*, https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/in-ukrainian-street-a-corpse-with-hands-bound-and-a-bullet-wound-to-the-head.

22 Zhenia wrote an article about his experience in occupation and called it "not a diary but rather marginalia." See Evheny Osievsky, "Six Cats, Thirty People, Four Mortar Shells. Two Weeks in the Occupied Kyiv Suburbs," e-flux Notes, March 25, 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/457983/six-cats-thirty-people-four-mortar-shells-two-weeks-in-the-occupied-kyiv-suburbs.

mental life, as though there is no work of the psyche in the waging of war."[23] I recognize similar tendencies in the conditions coming with opportunities to "give us a voice" or "grant the war visibility." The effects of long-lasting violence and bombardments are outwardly ignored: the Ukrainians art communities cannot keep the deadlines in the "business per usual" framework and cannot take part in the projects jointly with russians. The latter issue stems from the objection against equalizing the experiences of Ukrainians with russians who fled the country voluntarily and have not even seen a bomb shelter in their lives or heard a flying missile over their heads. This protest is essentially a request for independent consideration. Our lives are defined mainly by the resistance to aggression and that our beloved are shielding us from it with their bodies. Dariia's father and brother volunteered in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Zhenia was murdered on May 22, 2023, by a russian landmine when arriving at his trench. Before enrolling in the military, he dedicated his efforts to writing on nuclear energy, responding to the anxieties of Ukraine's residents, stirred by russia's nuclear bomb threats, occupation, and mining of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.[24]

What is impossible to suppress in photography — indeterminacy, the ambiguity of meanings — is an inverted plate of solidarity that incepts not merely from taking an articulate stance but also from giving a profound intellectual embrace. The contemporary decolonization movement habitually draws upon the vocabulary of vocalizing. It clashes with the survivors of genocidal violence, as the principal reaction to it is silence and *alexithymia* — the inability to identify, symbolize, and express feelings.[25] Providing a space for the voices of the oppressed to reverberate is important, but it is ineffective if it does not enact reciprocity. In somewhat paradoxical wording, visibility cannot be granted on particular terms and is not actual without listening. Solidarity requires effort, attention, and an embarkment for the creation of community on the basis vulnerability and loss. In Ukraine, we continuously search for light and shadows, radiance and dusk, and knowledge that comes with flashes. Simultaneously, we are in search of those who have gone missing, like Slava Mashnytskyi — more than 28 thousand people across the country. To them and to those who search for them desperately and insanely, we dedicate this issue.

23 Rosalyn Deutsche, *Hiroshima After Iraq: Three Studies in Art and War* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.

24 See, for instance, his interview with Hugh Gusterson, a British-American anthropologist who studies American atomic scientists. Evheny Osievsky, "Military Insubordination Has Saved the World from Nuclear War Several Times. An Interview with Hugh Gusterson," *Commons*, July 6, 2022, https://commons.com.ua/en/nuclear-weapons-interview-hugh-gusterson/

25 Mentioned as a traumatic response of the Holocaust survivors in association with war that "defeats language" in McLoughlin, "War and Words," 17.

Saf Homin, October 2022, Feb-5b, Ilford HP5.

Dariia Kuzmych

Simultaneously, the Vortex Speeds up and Becomes a Routine

w o r d s d i s p e r s e.

How do you speak from the inside of the vortex? We are assembled in the image of a certain we because if we are attacked, *we* must respond. We have to join together as a single side and fight back. This is how resistance works. The separate, disparate we become the image of *we*. We have to become this *we* to remain ourselves.

The words disperse and are rejoined by warm ties.
S e p a r a t e l y
Side by side
we become *we*.

Searching for missing people and ties, because it is the search that reveals the loss. We look around — who is here? To search is also to look at what is beyond the limits of visibility. These limits are determined by our distance: how close we are to the war.

Closeness to war is unevenly distributed in Ukraine. Besides the loss of lives, closeness to the contact line imprints visible injuries on bodies, the absence of limbs and the presence of prosthetics. Those are the indications of survival. The survivors who fought for our right to exist are refilling public spaces. Prostheses are products of war that bridge war and peace.[1] Karin Harrasser refers to the First World War as an impulse for processes of accelerated militarization, leading to both high-speed destruction and reconstruction. For some reason, I am returning again and again in my thoughts to the First World War. I am trying to extract answers from the context of the war of trenches.[2]

The noticeable disfigurement of the face or exposed parts of the body and amputation are established images of pain. People transmute into carriers, representatives of an uneven reality. In a crowd of the damaged, invisible wounds fall out of sight, turning into noise. A mutilated body without amputation is lost from the field of focus.

Invisible injuries are commonly referred to as concussions or shell shock, but this category can include any injury concealed by clothing or the ostensible integrity of the body. The disoriented state as a corollary of a shock wave, multiple concussions; after short breaks, and often without them, defenders must return to their positions.

1 Karin Harrasser, 2016, *Prothesen. Figuren einer lädierten Moderne*, (Berlin:Vorwerk 8), 115.
2 https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/11/01/ukraines-commander-in-chief-on-the-breakthrough-he-needs-to-beat-russia

The shock wave *(re)knocks* the established structures and connections down; the dust settles, and you can't recognize faces. We look around, groping our way through the shattered constructions and plans. Every day, these shock waves and their echoes pierce spaces and hearts, cutting us apart and fixing our gaze on the places of rupture.

Survival requires freezing.
Freezing ahead of the next shock wave.
The act from the inside of (partial) freezing
is resistance within borders, real borders.
Co-existence-co-resistance.
Freezing in particular vectors of development
to withstand and reclaim the right to be.

In this text, I want to go through the various manifestations of what I will call the shock wave — in the community, in the inter- and intrapersonal processes — and reveal what doesn't enter the attention of the world beyond. How do they want to see those who live through erasure? Which processes within communities become visible, and which hesitate to form a more focused image? Loss is undeveloped and undone images.

From a distance, the mutilated bodies transfigure into outlines without details. The image has not formed but remains a shock wave. It has passed through everyone and lingers in a compressed and hidden state of gradual fading and decelerating, disorientation and disappearance from sight; disorientation, amorphousness, and dispersal are some of the symptoms of shell shock.

The image reveals itself in its absence or invisibility. The absence indicates something that was once contained. What was contained discloses what is under erasure. What was contained is material, the filling of the substance of time, the continuity of time is enacted through people. Time ruptures through people's lives ruptures. A new erasure — the seizure of the right for the future. Freezing on the site where the fascia of time is ruptured. The occupied territories are out of sight; they are beyond the margins of rupture where the events are hidden. After long-awaited liberation, gaps in time of the visible are revealed: mass graves, signs of torture, and children abducted and taken away to be reeducated for the new russian army.

Traversing the borders of the imageless, the actual borders. Beyond the borders: silent gazing in search of a martyr-like expression.

The tension is increasing and decreasing; alert from the absence of air-raid alerts (translated as one word in Ukrainian / *Alert* — alert mode — air alert) is terror to the point of exhaustion. Forced insomnia as a form of torture. The size of the country allows you to stay alert and to sometimes dive into oblivion — into delight and what looks like peace. The word "war" loses its meaning.

A pixelated address to nowhere, recorded on a phone's front camera: "I crave to make the invisible visible," the artist Slava Mashnytskyi told someone in the first weeks of the occupation. Kherson was occupied in the very first days. For another month, the residents protested with Ukrainian flags, but it was becoming more and more dangerous. People vanished into torture chambers and to unknown destinations. Communication with the Ukrainian side disappeared, and informational isolation began. Becoming a gray mouse and moving around the city quickly, dwindling. This was the survival strategy.

In March 2023, exactly one year after the beginning of the occupation of Kherson and part of the region, an exhibition of Mashnytskyi's work entitled *Missing* opens in Lviv.[3]

I'm traveling with my friend by night train to the vernissage at the Detenpyla gallery. A few years ago, the founders of this artist-run space, the Open Group collective, wrote to me with a request to donate a museum-worthy work to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kherson. The museum-studio has a collection of contemporary Ukrainian art, gathered by Slava Mashnytskyi. In 2002, he returned from moscow and soon afterwards founded a museum based on his studio, which he inherited from his father through the Artists' Union in the Soviet period. "Because the city deserves to have a museum [of contemporary art] here," Slava said in an interview. The museum's collection includes works by classics such as Oleh Holosiy and Oleksandr Hnylytskyi.

The Open Group's work entailed a special drive with about 50 artists and collectives donating their art to the museum. The works, still packaged, formed the exhibition *Just Don't Tell Slava Yet*. The Deed of Gift, printed on A4 paper, specified the content of the artworks, concealed by layers of cardboard and plastic wrap. My video art *Acceptance* (2014), originally exhibited as my first solo show at the Detenpyla gallery, was among them. This is my remote acquaintance with the Museum created by Mashnytskyi. It is known that, precisely because of that collection, he did not leave the city, holding out hope for de-occupation.

Missing gathers people in a small space where the questions are reverberating: are there any signs and indications of the body or at least of new information? Was he tortured? No, let's not speculate. It's an exhibition of artworks from different years through which the search manifested itself for Slava: the search for a place and belonging. He disappeared two weeks before the de-occupation, near his summer house.

The title of the exhibition refers to his 1995 mail art *Missing* [*Rozshuk*, Ukr.], in which the artist used his own photo with a description: a man of 30-35 years old, of this height, with a mole on his neck. In the mid-1990s, the city was flooded with this type of announcement because of the increased attention to migrants from the Middle East. Multiple photocopying renders the portrait no longer recognizable; the noise of the image carrier erases all possible features.

3 Organized by Pavlo Kovach (Open Group), Rina Khramtsova, Semen Khramtsov.

Losses are transfigured into noise. The number of casualties is given with descriptions: the body of a 31-year-old woman, the body of a man in his fifties, 10 dead, including 2 children of such and such age. When they write about the military, numbers are all that remain. People become numbers for statistics and are not even worthy of a general overview. For us — yes, the portraits of the dead are circulating in the news every day — a friend, a brother, a wife who volunteered in the forces, all of them are concrete people.

A map of the outskirts of Kherson, where the Dnipro flows into the Black Sea, and a logbook comprise *In Search of Strangers*, a work of art by Mashnytskyi and Ihor Platonov from the early 2000s. The search for a hero is a rafting trip through the bays and the curved landscape of the land sliced by the tributaries of the Dnipro. An inflatable boat, food, watercolors, paper, a camera, a fishing rod, and a logbook accompany the search for something that cannot be found. The red cross on the map of this itinerary, inscribed on the gallery wall, marks the place where, 20 years later, Slava was within reach for the last time.

The area on the map is already familiar to me. I had just returned from Kherson a week before the vernissage. For several months, since February, I had been taking part in a volunteer effort in the de-occupied territories to help locals, mostly the elderly and chronically ill. My old friend Olena Samoilenko started going to Kherson immediately after the de-occupation. She gets to know the residents, collects lists of their needs, and looks for opportunities for systemic support, organizing long-term care after the evacuation. One of the effects of closeness to the frontline and the experience of occupation is that vulnerable groups of people become even more vulnerable. They fade into the periphery of attention. Then Vitya Hlushchenko, Andriy Bozhok, and I joined. I went through two trips, the procurement and sorting of medicines between trips. I went through several artillery shellings nearby and that experience of the erratic peril where you must navigate your path through the rainfall of the missiles and their remnants. Later, Katya Libkind went, and perhaps she gone through enough, too.

After Mykolaiv, the nearest large city before Kherson, the locomotive's movement slows down rapidly. The crossing of the line of past battles and the ever-fluctuating border of occupation unfolds like a film roll through the window; rewinding the film or spinning in time, we are already moving backward. The landscape is increasingly encrusted with shells and other remnants of ammunition. In the gardens and fields, they stick out somewhat awkwardly, incongruously, and, thus, eerily. Incongruously and eerily, like the drunken ramblings of a russian alcoholic in a Berlin park, stimulated by an eavesdropped conversation in Ukrainian to blurt out his confession: the whole world should be blown up, and this should start with Ukraine. It's uncanny that his ramblings coincide with the official policy of the russian federation.

The village of Myrne [*"peaceful"* in Ukrainian] is outside the window, with not a single house intact; along the tracks, there are abandoned russian army positions, ordnance leftovers, packages of food, field toilets, trenches, trenches, and mountains of garbage. Decelerating before diving into the abyss. The space freezes in anticipation of the swiftness of random missile landings.

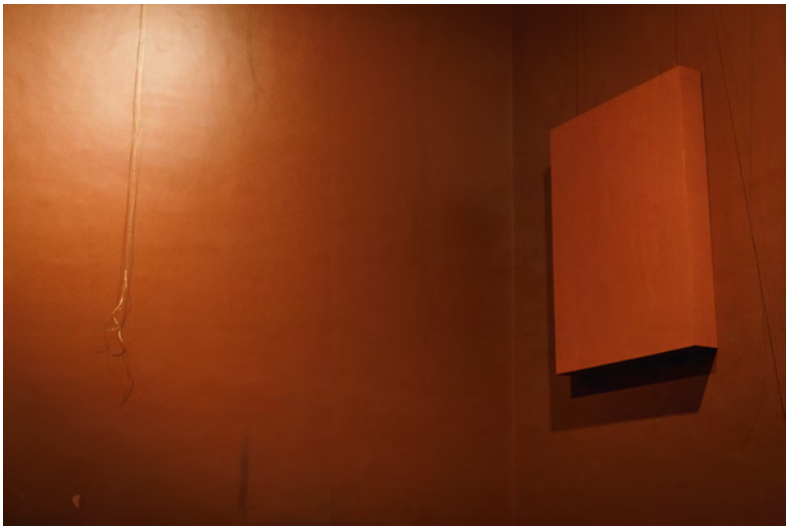
We rent a car near the train station, and the owner instructs us to park it to the north of the house to protect it from shelling as if he is talking about rain or shade to protect the car from the direct sunlight. There are remnants of russian advertisements all around the city: *"Russia is here forever," / "For free medicine,"* etc. In some places, the billboards have already been covered with Ukrainian symbols, but that, evidently, is not a pressing issue. Yellow and blue in any combination — spray paint, ribbons, words — remain on the margins on fences, poles, and inconspicuous surfaces: *"Glory to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Kherson is Ukraine."* These inscriptions are about survival, something like "I want to live and breathe." On November 11, the Ukrainian army liberated Kherson, and it felt like a holiday for the whole country. Today is November 11, a year later, and I am making the last edits to this text.

On June 6, the russian army blew up a dam in Nova Kakhovka in the vicinity of Kherson. It had been mined since October last year, as well as part of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Velykyi Potomkin Island, where Mashnytskyi's summer house was located, was washed away. Mashnytskyi said in an interview that Kherson is a place where everything is blown away like a tumbleweed. In the inflatable boat journey logbook, he laid down his work's objective: "In search of what cannot be found." After the dam was blown up, many rescue groups used similar boats to evacuate people and search for bodies in Kherson and its area. The shelling from the russian side was covering them like a rainstorm.

Meanwhile, in between my trips to the Kherson region, an exhibition opens in my native Kyiv — *Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko*. Several months before, two rockets landed near the museum. The playground in front of the museum and the intersection near the main building of the Taras Shevchenko University were the first targets of a new spate of attacks. The shock wave blew out all the windows and some structures of the museum, residential buildings, the university, and the teachers' house. Precisely during these days, I returned to Kyiv from Berlin.

Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko opened in March 2023 as a community response to the museum's efforts to save the collection in the first days of the invasion. Artists and museum workers joined forces to pack Chinese vases, medieval paintings, and other objects and organize their transportation to safer regions. Soon, the museum's deserted halls and courtyard were opened to this self-organized group, who met throughout the first spring of the great war to discuss how to rethink the museum's space. The community helped the collection to survive — they were the first to express their need for the museum. This group included museum staff, artist Katya Libkind, and nine male artists.

The urgency of the evacuation of art was not foreseen by the state system for the protection of art. This is the ramification of disbelief and lack of awareness of the reality of the great war, that of both the state and of most of the population. The gaps in the system were filled by grassroots initiatives and civil society that have formed since the Revolution of Dignity. Since 2014, the threat of a major war has become an indistinct noise for many.



Taras Kovach, *When Emptiness Becomes Void*, 2023. Photo: Yuri Stefanyak.

Meanwhile, this process resulted in an act of gratitude from the museum to the community. This is how the exhibition curated by Katya Libkind was shaped. Some treasures are hidden. Under the soft rays, the values of coexistence in the fragile present are revealed.

In the darkened rooms, a space for hiding emerges. It divulges the confusion and the search for connections in this new coexistence amidst scattered structures. The words of the prayer are dispersed and melted throughout the space (Bohdan Bunchak). *When Emptiness Becomes Void*: simple geometric shapes on the walls where the works of that size hung (those evacuated last according to certain criteria); next to it, engraved with a pencil on a plasterboard slab, a long list of the museums that have already been destroyed or looted (Taras Kovach). Significant and insignificant items that Stas Turina does not throw away: darned socks, a sewn-up backpack, temporary sculptures, random gifts, a mask from the COVID era with a smile drawn on it with a pen. They fill the emptied vitrines. A woven rug made from Stas's grandfather's clothes; this is where I liked to lie down during my five visits to the exhibition.

The Red Living Room with four friezes from the time of the museum's creation depicts ancient world cultures. Here, composer Alexey Shmurak recombines fragments of classical symphonic works between the period of the museum's creation and its looting by the Soviet authorities. The opulent-sounding fragments, when separated and layered, lose their initial meanings, akin to a universalized gaze at Other cultures. A guide to creating works of art that can be easily evacuated, integrated into clothes, rolls, wheels, or digitally (Maks Poberezhskyi); keys to the city left by friends to look after their deserted homes are found under the display glass, along with objects that poignantly remind us of the absence of these friends (Dima Kazakov). The heavy, inquisitive gaze does not press, but the question arises between us from time to time and more and more often: What did you do during the war? (Ihor Makedon). Nothing is manifested here; everything is just present.

Meanwhile, the installation of one of the most important retrospective exhibition since the invasion, *How Are You?*, took place in the last days of May during the months of the most intense attacks with any possible missiles and drones. One night, there were loud explosions, landings, and missiles being shot down. This was the final day to install my work. The chief art handler, Taras, exhausted after a sleepless night, climbed to the apex of the scaffolding. The textile elements of my installation, *full-bodied, velvety, stabbing, throbbing*, were stretched over several floors and formed the structure of time's gaps and ruptures, perceived in pleasure and pain. I noticed his haste and slight irritation with the complexity of the installation. He wanted to finish it quickly because he didn't sleep all night, he was working. "Do you really work at night, too?" I was worried about his safety. "Yes, I'm a paramedic and I have to go where the missile lands." The paramedic pulled up the sails of the torn fascia of time, and my admiration was limitless.

Meanwhile, Pavlo Kovach, an artist from the Open Group, was drafted; meanwhile, Bohdan Bunchak joined the army as a volunteer and was already wounded by shrapnel; meanwhile, my brother Illia flies drones over the enemy; meanwhile, my father trains new soldiers and reservists. Meanwhile, would I be useful in the army, I ask myself and my friends from the military. Meanwhile, everything is happening too fast, along with freezing. The vortex speeds up and becomes a routine at the same time. Meanwhile, yesterday, a rocket landed in front of the Odesa Fine Arts Museum, leaving a hole about the same size as the one in front of the Khanenko's house a year ago. Meanwhile, I could add a new sentence like this every day.

In the instances before the wave of destruction and erasure targeting your physical existence, language, and history, each and every one of you individually, you look around in communality and find different faces, united by the times and a set of subjectivity factors. Everyone is different, but they reveal themselves as a community in front of a vortex that pulls you into non-existence.

When abroad: the extent to which we are not left eye to eye with the act of annihilation depends on the effectiveness of my roar — images, projects, actions, and interviews. Can we broadcast balanced, analytical and subtle statements from inside the swallowing vortex? Am I shouting loud and clear enough for my country to be given weapons?

For this picture, I have to exhibit suffering and active resistance, or better, just suffering. The image of a victim who, however, should not speak too loudly about pressing needs. You can talk about a difficult journey to another country to save yourself and your family, and you can show different gradations of pain of loss and mutilated bodies, ruins of your environment. But if you want to talk about the responsibility of others and the need to reconsider cooperation with russian cultural figures who directly or indirectly support the actions of their state, you become unwelcome. You don't suffer as much, you look too belligerent and content in your heels and silk dress, you don't match our image of a person from the country that has been attacked.

The spotlight directed at you in the process of resistance and survival blinds you and keeps you from seeing the directors of the beam. As if you are being interrogated.

The burden of representation is tiring and exhausting, but in different ways than the fatigue of destruction. It is a looting of time: the risk of a missile hit and the inconveniences caused by recurrent sirens, attacks, abrupt shutdowns of heating and water, and the Internet after another hit on an infrastructure facility. Somewhere nearby?

Meanwhile, one of the losses is, and this is my personal loss, the ability to see subtly, to focus directly into the future while your consciousness is busy holding on to life, processing grief, finding ways to endure and support in resistance, in pain. Among ourselves, we represent ourselves as we are — in fragility, irritation, warmth, despair, strength, love, hate. This is a return to the unlit space, a shelter from representing pain and enduring it in the shadows. It is a permission to be our different selves in it. There are no images produced here, but coexistence is lived. The routine of coexistence, in the shared awareness of the reality under threat, allows us to work through this reality with its unknown components. The questions in this coexistence are still being formed. Without the requirement to prove anything, in strength or weakness, confusion, and exhaustion. In consolidation of actions to save lives and simultaneously in loss of previous meanings. The shared space-shelter, a hiding place from the prying eyes of the outside world, discloses unlit nooks to preserve strength, to contemplate and comprehend the dispersed structures of the past.

Those who lead the action for a long time and take the brunt of the shock wave with their bodies are exhausted. Someone breaks down a little, someone goes into the shadows, someone, at the threshold of themselves, traverses their own limits and turns inside out, oversensitized. Then, in their hearts, the sky is sliced with rockets, then their own concentrated sensitivity is indivisible from the sky cut open by the rocket blare. The sky will never be just a sky again. Or will it recuperate in memories and allow a new shell-skin of perception to form again? One lies on the bare cold ground to embrace death; one has trespassed the limits; she has passed through the wave and has been torn apart a little; at least she has gone into the shadows and silence, here the image is not yet developed.

The words are dispersed, but they have to be collected to testify and define the points where we are now. The layering and interweaving of these points in the structure of time — here we are in the process, separately and side by side, together and alone. By keeping our attention on what we are losing, we simultaneously expand the space for a playful gaze projecting into the future.

Dariia Kuzmych, *full-bodied, velvety, stabbing, throbbing*
Installation, silkscreen printing on textile, 2022
Exhibition view in a group show *How are you?* June 2023, Ukrainian House in Kyiv.

Katya Libkind

A Letter to the Audience

Curatorial text for the exhibition
Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko

Dear someone,

Today is already the beginning of March, and I finally feel like I can write you this letter. I hope it finds you in good spirits.

I'm glad I don't have to write one of those overly curatorial texts, since I am an artist posing as curator. Thus, a letter. Words come to me more calmly when I address them to you personally, rather than generally. I hope you too will find it easier to receive my thoughts and feelings as they are, in the form of a letter.

I must tell you that this exhibition was hard for me. Doubt kept me company throughout the entire process of its creation. Right now, doubt is instilled by any action that doesn't seem useful, or better still, doesn't save lives. Thoughts about useless things lead me to doubt, and sometimes, to love. With luck, they knock doubt and love into one another. This is a beautiful and painful mixture. Now, I'm slowly remembering that this is just what art wants from me.

Sorry, it seems my obsession with the useful and all that it makes and destroys will drag on a little, but I have to finish my thought. I hope I won't bore you before I switch gears.

Most Ukrainian art exhibitions at home and abroad attempt to be useful, and I don't see how this can be otherwise. At present, art must.

Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko began with a most useful task: the conservation and protection of the building and its collection. Even though art is not useful, care for it with rolls of bubble wrap is.

Then, Maksym Poberezhskyi joked that it would be nice to make a sculpture out of those bubbles. Together with Olena Zhyvkova, they laughed at this joke and invited others to laugh with them—and so began the residency.

So, once the building and the collection were secured, the hardest part began and continues. None of us really understood what to do with art, outside of saving it from shelling.

Maks invited all his artist friends who were in Kyiv at the time. As you might guess, in April 2022, the only artists left in the city were male. By the way, regarding gender representation, I had no doubts. While the war carries on, I think it is necessary to pay attention to the art of men in Ukraine specifically, before they're all drafted. Male Ukrainian art is in a vulnerable state.

Now, as I write you, I still want to find a reason for this exhibition, but I can't. There is no excuse for it. *Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko* propagates its own self. I am a bit proud of this, as you may have noticed.

So, there were nine of Maks' friends-artists-men: Andriy Boyko, Sasha Dolgyi, Andriy Sydorkin, Oleksiy Romanenko, Bohdan Bunchak, Roman Mykhailov, Ihor Makedon, Dobrynia Ivanov, and Taras Kovach.

Then, I, for some reason, agreed to curate this exhibition and invited five of my own friends-artists-men: Dima Kazakov, Stanislav Turina, Alexey Shmurak, Viktor Borovyk, and Valentyn Radchenko.

You may have sensed that this letter was inspired by those Lesia wrote to her "someone," Kobylianska. One January evening, during one of those four hours without electricity, someone ate her last mushroom, and the energy in those letters flipped something in someone on. That is when someone understood that the exhibition's central theme must be love, and laughed with pleasure at its simplicity. Also because she'd never have dared to pursue the topic in peacetime. But actually, making an exhibition about anything else right now is strange. Does anyone think otherwise?

The authors suddenly felt a similar satisfaction. We began to stir within, as though we had finally found a language.

To perceive the museum as an act of love between Varvara and Bohdan is in fact rather pleasant. Our attention becomes an act of care for this love, makes it greater. Literally, this exhibition is now part of their progeny. The Khanenko House is a very personal space, as is anybody's home. In a sense, what we did was throw a "house show" here.

Would you like to know what the Khanenko personal collection looked like before works they didn't select began to be added to it? Which pieces were chosen by Varvara, and which by Bohdan? How would they split them up if they separated? I would.

During our meetings in the Khanenkos' courtyard, many of us were drawn to the criteria for how the collection is formed and preserved. It is interesting to understand the author of these objective decisions.

We spoke with Olya Nosko, Olya Novikova, Darya Sukhostavets, Olena Kramareva, Yuliya Vaganova, Olena Zhyvkova, and Olena Shostak about the first and the last thing they'd save from the collection. Both sides understood that the answer to this half-joking question was only meant to help us get to know one another. And I never did formulate what it is one can latch onto within this topic, besides the experience and an admiration for the museum and these incredible women.

A universal solution?

We all unanimously decided to schedule the opening for the 69th day of the year.

I lost my train of thought a bit, sorry.

By the way, you can find and listen to audio recordings of the authors' thoughts about their own projects.

Now I'm just going to share my personal impressions of each work in the exhibition.

Visions of Geography

With his collection, Stas Turina binds the world together, and joins it himself, through things that remind him of other places, times, and cultures. When Stas' objects found themselves inside the museum's display cases, it felt like their places, times, and cultures recognized themselves in their objects. Clearly, there is no better place for such a collection.

Valentyn's account of the human skull cup and the Fearsome Deity Yamantaka

Valentyn understands stories and touches them through appropriation. During a personalized tour for me, he deciphers Buddhist paintings as if they are experiences lived by him and his family. He says, "The bull is guilt, now war this bull is not Stas Turina, but before that it was our Stas." One feels the universality of such a view.

Prayer Dictionary

Bohdan's works leave one with a somewhat operatic feeling, orgasmic and incomprehensible. This is wrapping paper that groans, gets nervous, slips, and reveals something to whatever might be packed inside it. Or to the person who is doing the packing.

Home (Keys to the City)

Dima became the custodian of a collection of keys to his friends' homes when their owners fled or went to war. At various stages, Dima's work unfolded around one valuable thing left over from his apartment and family: the ashes of his cat Ulysses. That's what I would have saved first. It's a long-standing dream of mine to make a museum of my friends. For now, we have a showcase of friends at a friends' exhibition.

Hyperacusis/Phantom

Andriy Sydorkin allows me the opportunity to turn aside from history and the search for coincidences towards myself and my sound in the Khanenkos' room.

An Important Event

Oleksiy told us about a very personal experience after a trip to Bucha as a volunteer. He found an image there that captured the joy of a birthday party amidst war. A blow-up balloon, a siren, a blow-up.

When Emptiness Becomes Void

Taras created monuments to works and sculptures deemed third-order of importance for rescue. But this is also a monument to the works that disappeared or were destroyed in museums on the frontline.

Landscape

When Roma heard about the theme of love, he decided on painting, because of his somewhat romanticized relationship with it. He said he wanted to capture imagery from the museum's paintings, but the work is still in progress. Right now, Roma is working on the paintings in the very room where he will exhibit them. So, while I don't know whether the subject will be related to the Khanenko House, Roma has already used the museum as a studio. I think this kind of connection is even stronger.

Viewing and Manual

Maksym Poberezhskyi stopped to view the museum's lighting to the musical tracks of Oleh Shpudeiko. Maks was also the only one who dared make a frank joke about convenient art and evacuation guides and followed through.

The Island

I don't even know what to say about Dobrynia's movie. I couldn't believe it when I saw it. It's a miracle. It records a collective hallucination, which feels like the morning of February 24th, only as if it were the happiest of mornings. Here, lovers move the Earth. This hallucination also reminds me of the island that was stolen from us.

The Golden Living Room

Alexey Shmurak journeyed from the Khanenkos' cosmopolitanism, symmetry, and idealization of the artwork, towards compensation for the gold evacuated from the Red Living Room by making it out of sound.

For the Future

Ihor asks what I did during the war. At first, it seemed like he was asking if I'd done anything useful. I was outraged by such impudence, but almost immediately realized that this work is also Ihor's answer to his own question. Now I can't unthink this thought.

Unboxing

Andriy was looking at his previous projects and found something that was looking back at him. It seems this gaze knows about what is happening now. Perhaps you will recognize the artist Antigona—a keeper of modern Ukrainian porno-horror and of the Living Room of the Middle Ages.

Khanenko XXI

Sasha Dolgyi found a brilliant solution to express care for the heritage we received from the Khanenko family. In his film, a resident of one of the streets named after the Khanenkos calls a taxi to Shevchenko-and-Khanenko Park, and someone else takes the subway from Khanenko Square station.

The Kama Sutra

Viktor Borovyk is a former squadron commander. He has understood himself to be an artist since he came to Pavlivska Hospital with Afghanistan Syndrome. That's where we met him. Art literally saved him and quickly ceased to be therapy. He found a way to engage with his powerful love of love, women, and life. It is clear that Viktor is a very brave man; nothing holds him back in art, neither in plot nor materials. I found the Kama Sutra at the back of his studio, welded to the table with paint. Which involved it in an orgy with everything that found its way onto that table.

Perhaps this is the best way to conclude my thoughts about the 69th day of the year.

P.S. While I was writing this letter to you, one of my friends-artists-men was drafted, and another passed a medical exam and was found unfit for service.

P.P.S. Olena Samoilenko did a *Twin Peaks* Tarot spread for my letter. I remember it showed that the letter gives into doubts, but has in fact already understood itself. It just wants to tremble a little, because maybe that will make it more tender for you. It's dead and happy, and it is solving something it doesn't contain.

With love,
Katya Libkind

Ihor Makedon, *What Were You Doing during the War?*
2023, money, acrylic, canvas
Photo: Vlad Ivanenko.

Evheny Osievsky

The Fallout of Dreams, the Demonstration of Shadows: *Watchmen* and the Atomic Zeitgeist of the '80s

In the world of Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, a number of objects and occurrences are famously conspicuous by their absence. The most easily noticeable absentee is the national trauma of the Vietnam War, which, in the universe of the story, was a sweeping victory for the United States, almost single-handedly and quite effortlessly secured by Dr. Manhattan. Superhero comic books are also absent: readers probably consider the topic too political, publishers too "grown-up" to appeal to the target audience of 13-year-olds, not to mention that "[t]he American public has never really gone in for super-heroes in a big way" as Ozymandias puts it in the text section of issue #10, in his trim handwriting. The comic shops are dominated by pirate stories and war stories instead. There seems to be no antinuclear movement in the *Watchmen* timeline as well. But there certainly was one in the timeline of our mid-'80s.

In June 1982, one million people marched against the arms race in the streets of New York in the largest demonstration in America's history.[1] Around the same time, 750,000 rallied for the same cause in London. In the first half of the decade, during the highest peak of US-USSR tensions since the Cuban Missile Crisis, warheads, fallouts, and explosion simulations were not just on the protest signs and in the nightly news. They infiltrated people's dreams, turning them into radicals forced to leave their former normal lives behind. They guided intensely personal choices, such as not having kids in a world destined – it sometimes appeared – for imminent nuclear slaughter. A friend of mine, a person who in the '80s was in his twenties, serving in the Soviet army, once told me he participated in a grandiose military exercises around 1984, the ones modeling a full-scale war. What war, I asked. "The World War," he retorted, "which else?"

This was the air Moore and Gibbons breathed in 1986. It is not immediately obvious how much of it got soaked into the pages of *Watchmen*. Let me show.

1 At the time. As of now, the 1982 march occupies an honorary ninth place, according to the Wikipedia entry. The ranking appears to be somewhat unfair, as far as it includes both prolonged multi-site nationwide initiatives such as George Floyd protests and localized one-off events under the same heading.
See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_protests_and_demonstrations_in_the_United_States_by_size

The Details of Mutually Assured Destruction

If the tone of this text will occasionally appear laudatory, it is a fair assessment. To a significant extent, what follows is an appreciation of the depth of research and the ingenuity of metatextual acumen that went into the making of *Watchmen*. This, of course, is a genre of its own, as the present author is well aware. However, in the case of the '80s nuclear zeitgeist, the allusions Moore implanted into the narrative were so deeply anchored in that particular moment in time, so subtle, and, therefore, so fleeting, that one has to know exactly what to look for in order to spot their flashes in the panels.

Take the authors' handle on the matters of the U.S. atomic doctrine. When at the end of issue #3 an emergency meeting is assembled in the war room in the aftermath of Dr. Manhattan's abrupt departure from Earth, with (President) Nixon and Henry Kissinger in attendance, they discuss whether a "first strike" on the Soviet Union that just invaded Afghanistan should be launched.[2] Throughout my initial readings I considered the scene a caustic comment on U.S. militarism a la *Dr. Strangelove* or, perhaps, on the character of the Nixon administration: a Nixon administration on steroids, supercharged by five terms in office. I was wrong. In fact, the entire conversation occurs within the strict limits of the official military doctrine of the United States.

Here is the calculus. The conventional forces of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact in Europe were more numerous than NATO's throughout the entirety of the Cold War. Therefore, the American policy called for nuclear retaliation against a Soviet nonnuclear attack on Western Europe as a deterrent against further escalation, the so-called first use strategy.[3] On page 26 of that issue, Nixon is informed that, according to "[t]he latest analysis," "if the Soviets continue into Pakistan, it's 60% certain they'll try taking Western Europe also."[4] The leader of the free world then acts in a completely reasonable and strategically justified manner, given the circumstances. A useful comparison: Al Haig, the Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan, made headlines in 1982 with a suggestion to fire a "nuclear warning shot" over Europe to prevent Soviet expansion. Moore's Nixon is a dove of sorts, not a hawk.

This is not the only instance of Moore zeroing in on headlines and famous quotes. I am all but sure that the following episode presents a genuine call-and-response between the real world and its alternative *Watchmen* outbranching. We are seven issues deeper into the international crisis now, at the beginning of issue #10. On the third page, Nixon walks into the secret underground base, surrounded by his retinue, receiving the latest updates. In response to the phrase "no profit in employing mad bomber tactics," the President nearly loses it: "Don't... Don't you start that 'mad bomber' shit. That whole image, it was your suggestion." What image?

In one of Nixon's most famous (though unconfirmed) statements, reportedly made in 1974, shortly before his resignation, he bluntly told his advisors: "I can

2 The events of *Watchmen* occur in the 1985 of the book's timeline. In our timeline, this happened six years earlier, in 1979.

3 My source for this, as well as the bulk of facts regarding nuclear weapons and nuclear protocols in this essay, is Hugh Gusterson's *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War* and the interview Prof. Gusterson kindly granted me for an unrelated project.

4 The same page contains a curious coloring mistake, probably not readily noticeable to American or western readers. Both the Black and Caspian Seas in the second panel are marked as parts of the terra firma, as if two buffer states existed between present-day Ukraine and Turkey on the one hand, and present day Kazakhstan and Iran on the other.

go into my office and pick up the telephone, and in 25 minutes 70 million people will be dead."[5] The President was, also reportedly, drinking heavily at the time. It is rumored that after the exchange took place, James Schlesinger, the Secretary of Defense, issued an unofficial and, strictly speaking, unconstitutional order to clear all the presidential decisions related to nuclear weapons with him before execution. An alternative theory, which Moore is clearly riffing off, is that Nixon used his madman persona to achieve political goals. All similarities with other Republican presidents, living or dead, are, of course, purely coincidental.

Hiroshima lovers in Livermore

Nuclear paranoia itself is both present in *Watchmen* and important to the book's aesthetics, with the Doomsday Clock as its principal and recurrent visual stand-in. It's just that the organized, society-wide movement of people against the nuclear proliferation that was a staple of the first half of the 1980s is not there. Presumably, the existence of Dr. Manhattan made average Americans so sure of their strategic dominance and geopolitical superiority that the prospect of atomic holocaust does not even enter their minds.

A correction: does not enter their minds *consciously*. In fact, the first reference to nuclear war in the comic occurs quite early, on page five of issue #1.[6] In the upper left panel - a cityscape with a non-descript grid of concrete high rises and offices, slightly dignified by a fat pale moon and a lonely airship. On the wall of the nearest building - a print ad for this world's Skittles knock-off, the "mmeltdowns!" The print shows only a stylized nuclear mushroom, propelling allegedly delicious dragees in all directions. In issue #7, the readers will get to hear a TV spot for the same confectionery: "With fruity fallout and a delicious molten center. They'll blow you all the way to China..." A different, even larger mmeltdowns! ad is hanging in the background of the last panel on page 26 of the penultimate *Watchmen* issue, seconds before the octopus explosion.

Suppressed images and scenarios do not only return through the junk visuals of the advertisement industry. They also use the royal road of the unconscious, the dreams. The same seventh chapter escorts the reader to Nite Owl's nuclear nightmare, the one where he and the Twilight Lady-turned-Silk Spectre get carbonized – that is the scientifically correct term, not vaporized – by a nuclear detonation.

Indeed, there was an epidemic (or possibly a pandemic) of nuclear nightmares in the '80s. Anthropologist Hugh Gusterson recounts that whenever he was invited to give a public speech on the topic he would ask his audience how many of those present had bad dreams of this sort. In the audiences of peace groups members, about 2/3 would usually raise their hands. Throughout his two-year period of fieldwork at (or, technically speaking, around) Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, one of the two[7] research centers tasked with developing and testing American nuclear weapons, Gusterson encountered only one atomic scientist who had his sleep thusly disturbed.

5 Olivia B. Waxman, "An Anonymous Trump Official Claims Insiders Are 'Thwarting' Him. That May Have Happened to Nixon Too," *Times*, September 6, 2018, https://time.com/5388648/watergate-nixon-anonymous-op-ed/

6 In contrast, the eschatological catastrophe Rorschach is talking about from the book's first page is a moral and political one, not atomic. Not at this point at least.

7 With Los Alamos National Laboratory being the second.

In short, dreams are political. Or, at least, some of them are. The anthropologist also relates a number of conversion narratives of anti-nuclear activists that were triggered by the invasion of plutonium nightmares. Here, for instance, is the story of Karen Hogan, a daughter of two Livermore employees, who, despite some nightmares as a teenager, was generally not interested in or disturbed by the matters of nuclear arms race until a certain point:

> Karen's fears went away until the early 1980s when, in her thirties and now living an hour away from Livermore, she had two vivid nightmares about nuclear war. In one of them, everything everywhere was on fire. In the other, she was being ordered to press the button to launch the nuclear missiles that would end everything and was panic-stricken to find no way out. The nightmares came at a time when many other people were having similar nightmares and, in the context of a burgeoning antinuclear movement, were discussing them with one another. Karen, who was now a writer, joined the movement and also began volunteering at a hospice to make herself confront the issue of death. Now she began to tell her friends and family that she felt the laboratory should not be working on nuclear weapons.[8]

Nite Owl's dreams, therefore, present a point of exchange between the reality of 1986 – the year of Chornobyl's disaster – and its reflection in the pages of *Watchmen*. In one of his interviews on the topic of Steve Ditko, Alan Moore confides that after he saw the design of Ditko's the Question (which, of course, provided a departure point for Gibbons' design of Rorschach) he started wondering if Ditko was taking inspiration from his dreams. I cannot help but ask whether Moore's own nightmares contributed to the *Watchmen* edifice. It is quite probable he used to have those since at least 1985, when he was intensely researching nuclear energy and nuclear weapons for "The Nukeface Papers" storyline in *Swamp Thing* #35 and #36. Perhaps earlier, in that the world of *V for Vendetta*, which began serialization in 1982, was centered around the aftermath of a "limited nuclear war" as well.

Another such point of exchange – or dialogue, if you will – is the image of "Hiroshima lovers," the graffiti of silhouetted shadows of a man and a woman that makes its first appearance on page eleven of "Fearful Symmetry," the series' fifth chapter. As the following issue #6 explicitly acknowledges, this is a reference to "people disintegrated at Hiroshima, leaving only their indelible shadows." The image will subsequently reappear in a variety of alterations, modifications and re-glossings, up until and including the blown-up shadows of Nite Owl and Silk Spectre merging in a kiss on the walls of Ozymandias's Anubis Hall on page twenty-two of issue #12. A consummation of contours in an antipodean Antarctic Netherworld.

Those "indelible shadows" played a significant role in the history of nuclear extermination. American scientists who arrived at Hiroshima after the explosion carefully measured them in order to calculate, using elementary school-level trigonometry, the height at which the detonation of a Little Boy occurred.[9] These shadows also had their afterlife in the world of fine arts.

8 Gusterson, Hugh. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War* (1st paperback edition, University of California Press, 1998), 166-167.

9 A pet name for the enriched uranium gun-type fission bomb dropped on Hiroshima, given by Manhattan Project scientists.

Yves Klein, an influential post-war French artist, reportedly given the impression from observing the silhouette of a man imprinted onto a rock by the atomic flash at Hiroshima, created a series of fire paintings, *Peintures de feu*, in the months preceding his death. Klein used a flamethrower as his brush.

In 1985, on the 40th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, a group of activists made sure those shadows would return to haunt the United States itself: members of the antinuclear movement painted disembodied silhouettes on the sidewalks of Livermore and all over the San Francisco Bay Area in August. I think Moore saw them, at least in the papers. I wonder if their outlines were still visible on Livermore pavements when the first issue of *Watchmen* arrived at newsstands.

On reading *Watchmen*, in Kyiv, in 2022. A misplaced postcript.

I contacted *TCJ* with an offer to write an essay that I am, apparently, now finishing, on February 21st, 2022. The send data of the e-mail reads 21:28, Kyiv time. While I was composing it, I missed an hour-long televised address of Vladimir Putin, broadcasted by the state media of neighboring Russia. Perhaps because I never did see it in full, I did not really understand what it was, and believed it to be just another bizarre fit of Russian propaganda; possibly a shade more expressionistic than its regular produce. My more perceptive friends realized that very evening that Mr. Putin was laying down the case for why my country, Ukraine, does not and, more importantly, should not exist. He started a full-scale invasion three days later.

I spent the night it began far from home, in Kyiv, and heard distant explosions at 5 AM, as they happened; I would then read about the Russian bombings of Ukrainian cities in the newsfeeds. As I arrived at my apartment that morning, I saw a cautiously affirmative response from *TCJ*'s Joe McCulloch and wrote back, as politely as I could, that "the process of editing the text might prove a bit arduous" in view of the latest events. Many years have passed in the months following that exchange. I spent two weeks under Russian occupation, as the Kyiv suburb where I resided was captured by the invading forces in the early days of March. The town next door, once unknown to almost anyone except its residents, is called Bucha. Throughout the next six weeks, I changed five apartments. Due to the kindness of my friends and relatives, I did not feel as a refugee in anything but name.

In the month preceding the start of the full-scale war, and about a month after its beginning, when I finally regained the ability to interact with fiction, I was re-reading *Watchmen*. An uneasy grin at the sight of panels reading "Russia merely claims to be securing her borders," and "tanks mass in Eastern Europe as conflict escalates," and "nuclear war is quite possible within the next ten days," goes without saying. Notably, I found myself returning, time and again, to the previously inconsequential pirate comics sub-plot sentence: "Truly, whoever we are, wherever we reside, we exist upon the whim of murderers." Truly indeed.

In *Considering Watchmen*, Andrew Hoberek remarks that Moore's and Gibbons' comic contains several iconic images of impotence in supposedly almighty beings. There is Dr. Manhattan levitating above the surface of Mars, sculpting the majestic glass cathedral out of sand, seemingly shaping the world with the touch of his mind - but, as he sees it, just following a script he cannot change.

Then there is Richard Nixon, the leader of the free world entrusted with the U.S. nuclear codes, procrastinating in a bomb shelter, chained to his suitcase, incapable to do anything but "wait" and follow the protocol. The case of Dr. Manhattan is, however, unique. In a sense, he is the *least* powerful creature of the *Watchmen* universe. Certainly the most cowardly one.

When he appears to "collect" Laurie "in readiness" in the middle of issue #8, the only motivation he gives is that they "have a conversation scheduled," an hour

in his future because Silk Spectre "want[s] to talk" to him. Here's an interesting thing, though: Dr. Manhattan cannot read other people's thoughts. *Nothing* in the comic book suggests otherwise.[10] The force that "urges" him to teleport himself into Dan Dreiberg's living room, the force he cannot or, a funny thought, is *afraid* to name, is his own wish. His jealousy. His need for human contact. His compulsion to make a scene. Who makes the world? The answer is very simple, Jon. Each and every one of us, each second of our life. Even those who do not believe they possess free will anymore.

As I re-read *Watchmen*, I was struck by the numerous instances of kindness and bravery emanating from "little people" – of them chiseling the universe with unkempt and awkward charm. Not only poor old Seymour on the last page of the comic, standing above the crank file, holding the future of the world in his ketchup-stained hands. There is a pair of policemen, and Rorschach's psychologist, rushing to help two female lovers who are "hurting each other" in the last minutes before the catastrophe. The newspaper vendor and a street boy embracing, trying to protect one another from the terrible nothingness of white light. Rorschach, taking his mask off, becoming human again, refusing to be "reasonable" even in the face of the Apocalypse. *Watchmen* presented itself as a story of modest acts of kindness, spontaneous cooperation, the heroism of the supposedly "unremarkable" people in the face of all the scheming masterminds – with or without quotation marks – of the world, standing knee-deep in the blood of the innocents. As a Ukrainian, I have a very good guess about why that might be the case.

This text was originally published on the digital platform *The Comics Journal* on May 18, 2022, and reprinted with the permission of the editor, Joe McCulloch. He kindly shared with us his recollection:

Evheny Osievsky contacted myself and my fellow editors at *The Comics Journal* on February 21, 2022, about writing a piece on nuclear paranoia in *Watchmen*. Our editorial coordinator found the pitch charming, though I waited a few days to think it over. There is no shortage of writing on *Watchmen* in this world. When the invasion began on February 24, I wondered, truly, if such things were still important to Evheny. But he persisted in completing the piece, which I think you will find to be a unique perspective on this most fertile of landmark superhero comics.

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10 On page 22 of issue #4, Dr. Manhattan orders a large crowd of protestors to "return to [their] homes." Two panels later they are all teleported from the site. The caption in the next panel reads "The next day, I am reading in the paper of two people who suffered heart attacks upon suddenly finding themselves indoors." First: "indoors," not "home." Doc might have spoken figuratively. Second, it is highly unlikely that all those enraged individuals in front of the White House were *thinking* of their homes at the moment. Whatever mechanism was involved, it was not telepathy.

The House of Khanenko after shelling on the 10th of October 2022. Photo: Andriy Boyko.

Jakub Gawkowski

This Show Is Not About the War: Ukrainian Artists in Poland and the Burden of Representation

The text was originally published in *e-flux notes* on August 1, 2023.

This essay was motivated by a conversation I had at an exhibition of work by a Warsaw-based Ukrainian artist, curated by a gray-haired Polish philosopher. "But this exhibition, it is not about the war!" the philosopher declared proudly, after giving me a brief tour of the show, noting how this makes the collaboration between the Polish curator and the Ukrainian artist unique, since today everything that concerns Ukrainian art has to do with war and war alone. "Those exhibitions that fill up galleries and museums all over Poland," he continued, "are usually mildly interesting and represent nothing apart from being part of the current Ukrainian trend." He then spoke of memory and archival fever, quoting Derrida, Foucault, and Freud. "The most important function of memory, as Freud wrote, is to forget." "Trend"— a word to forget, as it was spoken on the day of yet another bombing that murdered civilians, and a little more than a week after the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam. But "*Ukrainian trend*" are words difficult to forget, precisely because of the circumstances they were spoken in, as they touch on the relation between the atrocity of war, the urgent desire for voice and visibility, the usual logic of artistic fashions, and, above all, the painful incompatibility of these realms.

As a Polish person and exhibition-goer, I have observed a growing interest in Ukrainian art in Poland over recent years, and in particular since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion. Before going any further, it's important to ask how Ukrainians are currently represented in the Polish art scene. The answer is contradictory: while they are abundantly present, their work is barely discussed outside the notion of presence alone. The exhibitions, of which a number have been staged as the war continues (I mention just a few recent examples below), are exempt from the judgement of art criticism by popular consensus, and understandably so, as their point is first and foremost about solidarity and visibility. But what is lost in the process is any critical discussion of identity, representation, and importantly, tokenism. It is not just the art scene that could benefit from such discussions, but also Poland's multinational society. And if by now these exhibitions are accompanied by a certain fatigue, endemic to the logic of the art world — ever hungry for the next big thing — it is not because they are *uninteresting* outside the categories of visibility and solidarity, but because no critical or interpretative effort is being made to consider them from a more nuanced perspective.

With this in mind, I went to the Centre for Polish Sculpture in Orońsko for the tenth edition of the Young Triennial, which, like many other exhibitions of late, consists of a joint presentation of Polish and Ukrainian art practices.[1] The show, addressing the invasion yet trying to transgress the category of traumatic experience, includes works by, among others, Inga Levi, Weronika Zalewska, and Dmytro Krasnyi — works that engage with issues of the commons, migration, and imperialism. But one work in particular, a video performance by Iryna Loskot, caught my attention as reflecting on its own position vis-à-vis questions of nationality and representation. The artist, dressed as a cheerleader with blue and yellow pom-poms made of trash bags, dances and sings against a background of archival footage of a Ukrainian national celebration, referring to her school memories of being forced to sing patriotic songs. The artist decided to reenact this uncomfortable childhood experience, thereby drawing a parallel between performing nationalism at school in her youth and performing it at Ukraine-themed exhibitions now.

In his seminal essay "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," Kobena Mercer commented on how Black British artists in the 1990s, positioned at the margins of the institutional spaces, were burdened with the impossible role of "representatives" accountable to, and speaking on behalf of, the communities they came from. Those deprived of a voice who finally do get to speak, Mercer writes, are expected not only to be representatives but are also pressured to say everything all at once: "If there is only one opportunity to make your voice heard, is it not the case that there will be an intolerable imperative to try and say everything there is to be said, all in one mouthful?"[2] In today's Poland, many Ukrainian artists (and to some extent also Belarusian artists, but that is a separate story) face related challenges. What often comes with getting the space to speak is the expectation of being representatives of their nation in times of national urgency, according to the fixed categories of victim and refugee. It's these categories that artists find ways to subvert, despite the most unimaginable circumstances — the ongoing genocide.

I was reminded of Mercer's text as I walked through the rooms of HOS Gallery in Warsaw, looking at "Blakytna Trojanda," a group show displaying art and activism by queer Ukrainian artists.[3] Along with textile sculptures by Jan Bačynsjkyj, which recalled both religious iconography and misfit bodies, and a call to "Arm Ukrainian Queers" spray-painted on the wall, the show included a collection of white envelopes with a touch of blue that concealed intimate letters written by Olexii Kuchanskyi. The transition between what has collapsed since

1 Curated by Lia Dostlieva, Andrii Dostliev, and Stanisław Małecki. June 24 to September 3, 2023.
2 Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," *Third Text* 4, no. 10 (1990): 62.

February 24, 2022, Kuchanskyi writes, and "the inevitably emerging environment of life seems to be repressed by the limitations of binary divisions of the militarized imaginary." In this imaginary, the individual has to be "either a soldier or a woman, a victim or an enemy, a Ukrainian-speaker or a pro-Russian, a hero or a saved, a civilized or a savage, 'us' or the other." But the horizon here is the future: a world yet to come — which may be provoked by this brutal war, as Kuchanskyi's letter imagines — is a chance to include the diverse subjectivities of the queer community, as well as "Indigenous peoples from the occupier-country, [and] internally displaced eastern Ukrainians, who lost almost everything except their (subverted Russian) language." There are many binaries to break here; gender normativity is one of them, and its relation to the national question is another. The show borrowed its title — which translates to "Blue Rose"— from a play by writer, translator, and activist Lesia Ukrainka, whose Ukrainian-language poetry and prose at the turn of the twentieth century was a voice for her country's freedom and independence against the czarist regime. The connection between the history of Ukrainian emancipation and queerness, which the title of the show hints at, was elaborated in a recent text by Maksym Eristavi, where he writes that the nation's resistance to colonial invasion is fundamentally queer: it opposes violent russification and authoritarian monoculture, in which state-sanctioned homophobia plays an essential role.[4] For Poland, the most homophobic country in the EU,[5] supporting Ukraine and the widespread objection to Russian violence might — sooner or later — mean confronting its own discrimination and oppression against the LGBTQ community and deciding on which side of the human rights frontier it stands.

The need to queer the national narrative can be seen in two other recent shows in different parts of Poland: "Queerstories_UA_PL" at Galeria Labirynt in Lublin,[6] where several commissioned video works speak of non-heteronormative experience and queer cultural history in Poland and Ukraine, and Anton Shebetko's "Brief Queer History of Ukraine" at BWA Studio in Wroclaw.[7] In each case, the expectation to be the representative of the queer community or the nation "as a whole" is turned upside down, precisely because the whole does not exist. Rather, these projects focus on emphasizing a multiplicity and diversity of voices and experiences that transgress the fixed categories of identity politics.

3 Curated by Vlad(a) and Taras Gembik. June 15 to July 15, 2023.
4 Maksym Eristavi, "Ukrainian Queerness," in *Queer Ukraine: An Anthology of LGBTQI+ Ukrainian Voices During Wartime*, ed. DViJkA Collective (2023), 13.
5 In ILGA-Europe's 2023 ranking of LGBTQI+ equality in European countries, Poland was ranked last in the European Union for a fourth year in a row.
6 Curated by Kateryna Filyuk, Alina Kleytman, Karol Radziszewski, and Waldemar Tatarczuk. July 7 to September 30, 2023.
7 June 2 to June 30, 2023.

The emancipatory potential of the underrepresented group lies in its ability to transform whole societies and the categories that organize them, in a world where, to recall Mercer's word, "simplistic dichotomies of margin and centre, black and white, left and right, reactionary and progressive are no longer adequate as a means of 'making sense' of the complex predicament we find ourselves in."[8]

For Marta Romankiv, whose show at the Museum of Warsaw just closed, home and national identity have been a matter of questions rather than statements.[9] Originally from Lviv but based in Poland since 2015, Romankiv is well-known here for her participatory work with migrants and care workers, but she rarely exhibits in Ukraine and is virtually absent from the art scene in her native country. For her show at the Museum of Warsaw, entitled "Euroworkshop," she asked non-EU migrants about their views on the future of Europe, giving voice to those excluded from public debate. During the last round of elections, she organized a performative action in six cities in which immigrants, legally deprived of the right to vote, were given a symbolic say in choosing the president of Poland. Today, her practice of redistributing attention feels especially relevant considering other major but underrepresented migrant communities. Her post-national attitude is well illustrated by another work, *Faded Flags*, a collection of flags of European countries that she handsewed and then bleached. When the work had its first iteration, in 2019, Romankiv bleached the Polish and the Ukrainian flags, an act she has not repeated since the full-scale invasion.

The individual and the collective blend together in the expressive paintings of Kyiv-based Sana Shahmuradova Tanska, exhibited at the elegant space of Gunia Nowik Gallery.[10] Soft, shape-shifting bodies flow and at times merge into one; they are fragile but also resilient amidst a flood of water and fire, one indistinguishable from the other. The figures crowded on Tanska's timelessly oneiric canvases inspired by Ukrainian history and folklore are distorted as if ripples spread across their surfaces, symbolically appealing to the circular movement of time. History goes in circles and traumas of the past and present are tangled together in Tanska's work, but also on the streets of the Polish capital. Today, those who fled the war in Ukraine may encounter Polish far-right propaganda posters recalling the eightieth anniversary of the Volhynia tragedy, ethnic pogroms carried out by Ukrainian nationalists against Poles during WWII.[11]

8 Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," 63.
9 Curated by Zofia Rojek. March 9 to July 30, 2023.
10 July 1 to September 9, 2023.
11 Andrew Higgins, "A Tangled Past Complicates Poland's Welcome to Ukrainian Refugees," *New York Times*, July 10, 2023.

The memories of the violence, despite the bond that has emerged between the two nations in recent years, still haunt Polish-Ukrainian relations — a past that has yet to be worked through jointly, in order to not let intergenerational trauma be used as a tool of hatred and xenophobia. In 2018, when the Visual Culture Research Center, the collective behind the Kyiv Biennial, curated the festival "Warsaw Under Construction," its members rejected national labels. As they told me in an interview back then, they were not interested in doing a "Ukrainian exhibition in Poland," nor another "Polish-Ukrainian project." Instead, they wanted to do a supranational leftist project where class was more important than nationality.[12] But that has changed since February 24, 2022, when the national question became a matter of survival. Last year at Dom Utopii in Krakow, Jan Bačynsjkyj presented "Self-Censorship," a show consisting of his older works critically reflecting on different aspects of Ukrainian culture. After the war broke out, these required lengthy explanations in order to be understood in the new reality, which is organized by what Kuchanskyi calls "the divisions of the militarized imaginary." "Every artist involved in critical art has works that they cannot show. This is not a matter of external censorship, but of a dramatic change in context," read the artist's statement. While for now the discussion about nationalism and its dangers seems to be suspended or at least simplified, for obvious reasons, the question remains of how these issues will be taken up again someday, in Ukraine and Poland and as a matter of their relationship.

The art of the Ukrainian diaspora in Poland can do more than speak of war and act as a perpetual reminder of the urgency of the situation. Besides providing a lesson about resilience amidst a sea of grief, this art can override fixed and binary categories of identity, and this is precisely why it's crucial to consider it beyond the keywords of "visibility" and "solidarity," regardless of how relevant and important these categories are. For a nation as confused and conflicted as Poland (call it post-socialist, Eastern European, Central European, or European), where the notion of patriotism has been largely appropriated by the right, it is vital to critically question and transform nationhood, culture, and tradition. This is how we break down the closed structures that organize our ability to think and act around questions of community and belonging. This is how we work for both individual emancipation and a society that can be our common home.

My thanks to Polina Baitsym, Ivana Mihaela Žimbrek, Marta Romankiv, Taras Gembik, and Magdalena Komornicka for conversations and valuable insights.

12 Oksana Briukovetska, Ruslana Koziienko, and Oleksyi Radynski, "Tam, gdzie kończy się polityka, azylu udziela sztuka" (Where politics ends, art provides asylum), interview by Jakub Gawkowski, *Krytyka polityczna*, October 25, 2018.

Blakytna Trojanda at HOS Gallery, Warsaw.
Photo: Adam Gut.

I Crave to Make the Invisible Visible

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Polina Baitsym (editor)
Dariia Kuzmych (editor)
Katya Libkind
Jakub Gawkowski (digital edition)
Evheny Osievsky
Nana Biakova

Cover: *Slava Mashnytskyi*, fragment of *Missing*, 1995, edited by Nana Biakova.

Exhibitions

Missing [*Rozshuk*, Ukr.], 25 March — 2 April 2023, Detenpyla Gallery, Lviv, Ukraine. Curated by Rina Khramtsova, Semen Khramtsov, and Pavlo Kovach. The artworks by Slava Mashnytskyi.

Meanwhile, in the House of Khanenko [*Tym Chasom v Domi Khanenkiv*, Ukr.], 11 March — 30 April 2023, the Khanenko Museum, Kyiv, Ukraine. Curated by Katya Libkind.

How are you? [*Ty Yak?*, Ukr.], 1 – 25 June 2023, Ukrainian House in Kyiv, organized by Ukrainian Museum of Contemporary Art.

Blakytna Trojanda [*Blue Rose*, Ukr.], 15 June – 15 July 2023, HOS Gallery, Warsaw, Poland. Curated by Vlad(a), Taras Gembik.

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