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TRANSIT ZONE. EXIT GATE № 2020-2021

ABSTRACT:

The article is designed to analyse the preconditions for maintaining creative independence in the period 2020-2021. The research was conducted during the international art project “#365daysafter”, which aimed to collect stories and voices of artists from four local contexts, analytically study art during the pandemic in Ukraine and around the world. The growing negative impact of social restrictions has prompted the search for ways to break down the walls of isolation and create a virtual “Library of Artist's stories”. The text of the field study on the limitations of social activity during the pandemic contains stories about the experience of artists from different countries on ways to cope with obstacles, effective examples of successful overcoming the crisis. Analysis of examples of finding effective methods and ways not to lose creative activity in the face of local and international constraints on social life and communication.

INTRODUCTION

The period 2020-2021 has become a challenge for most artists, as an endless stay in the waiting area and finding themselves in new conditions of social activity. The transit zone is to some extent a place of imprisonment, the exit from which is clearly limited by a pre-established “choice”. Stiffness of this period has all the characteristics of waiting during the delay. However, it is also a distance interaction, when, finding themselves alone with difficulties, artists began to actively seek a way out of the situation, using the disadvantages as advantages, and the suppression of freedom as a factor in gaining even more independence. In the transit zone of the pandemic, artists created and destroyed borders at every stage of the struggle for their creative freedom.

There are usually many people in the waiting area, but the pandemic pause situation is somewhat different. If you find yourself in an unfamiliar

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environment, the first thing you will do is try to determine if you are alone or if there is someone near you, which in these circumstances was greatly complicated by the fact that the distance between people has increased significantly. The silence in which creative work plunged was focused on the space in which everyone existed, as if in a cocoon, from which voices were sometimes caught: “hello”, “I’m here”... – only to confirm the existence [1].



Alberto Harres “The Pandemic Archive of Voices”

Random voice messages, in which the desire for socialization is fixed at the level of the individual, become evidence of the perception of the fact that communication has passed into the transmission of messages. We create a message and send it into the space of online broadcasting, releasing like a bubble of air from the vacuum of silence in which we are. The message overcomes the distance between countries, filling another vacuum with voice, sound, and human existence.

The period of limitation of live contacts encouraged to use the available opportunities to transfer it to the virtual dimension, developing information chains between different cultural contexts. The exchange of messages is the basis of communication between people, the virtual side of which in the pandemic gave a new impetus to social networks, which have become the main meeting place, open and closed systems of messages transmission. With still insufficient readiness of virtual activity to completely replace physical one at this stage of development of public relations, one can hardly disagree with the fact that it allowed not to lose touch with society. The pandemic period has given us many “new opportunities” to experience life through the monitors of our gadgets. Despite the fact that cross-cultural interaction in a pandemic has

created bridges between different local contexts, at the same time the long-term avoidance of intimacy and contact with other people over the past two years has left a noticeable imprint on communication.



Transit zone of the art project “#365daysafter

More than 220 participants of the international art project “#365daysafter”¹ found themselves in a waiting state. As a cross-cultural interaction “#365daysafter” project is characterized by a comparison of four cultures by a common variable, namely the pandemic period 2020-2021. And at the same time as intercultural interaction – involves the interaction between artists of four cultures, which, in turn, makes it possible to form a common framework for counteracting the impact of the pandemic on the cultural sphere and artistic activity [3]. The temporarily created waiting room within the art project is a living structure, which is an example of an effective mechanism for overcoming the crisis. Based on the results of this model of behaviour, we can predict in which direction the struggle for creative independence will develop if the suppression of freedom is repeated in the future.

THE MAIN PART AND RESULTS.

In general, the transit zone is designed to wait, but even the waiting period can be productive. Two successful initiatives can be mentioned as well-directed examples of international art collectives aimed at expanding creative

¹ In a joint study of the pandemic's impact on culture and creativity, the art research project “#365daysafter” brings together Europe and Asia, focusing on the local context of four countries – Ukraine, Croatia, Portugal, and China [2].

independence.



Harmke Datema-Chang (China-Holland) “Laugh at your demons!”, 2020, acrylic painting on thin fabric; “Saca al monstruo, mami, let it go” and “Saca al monstruo, mami, don’t give up” (both are Installations of acrylic painting on thin fabric displaced with neon lights, 2020). Exposition of the art project “#365daysafter”

The first was founded by Chinese artist Harmke Datema-Chang from the Netherlands and concerned intercultural communication. The space and association she offers is aimed at creating joint projects, conducting international online auctions, providing support, etc., during the pandemic lack of art events. The second initiative worth mentioning is KTMN Productions, initiated by Valentino Zvonarek, an artist from Croatia. The main message is in creative collaboration at a distance, because, as the artist says, isolating people, the pandemic did not isolate creative communication (Library of Artist’s Stories¹).

Artist duos also demonstrated productive results, facilitating contact through a virtual communication resource, such as “Telefone Estragado”,

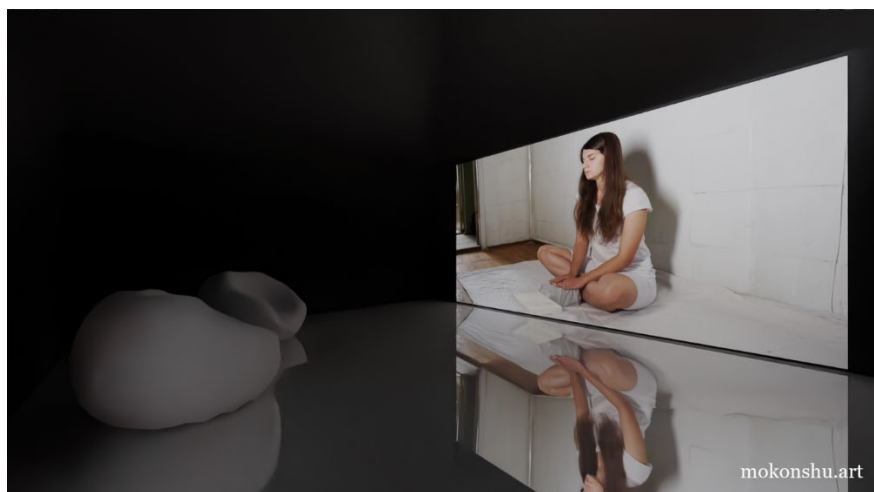
¹ Artists pandemic experiences have been included in the Library of Artist’s Stories, the full text of which can be found at mokonshu.art.

project created by Maria López (Portugal) and Josephine Gerhardt (Germany), and the Instagram bank of references by artists Francisca Patrocínio and Leonor Talefe (both from Portugal). The artificial virtual world becomes a source of social life for artists and a means of preserving the creative independence of international activity. These are example where restrictions encourage the creation of a new model of artistic creativity.

Artists in the international environment interact through a common search for independence, and the pattern of development of stages in this way helps to overcome temporary obstacles in the form of restrictions on social life and subdue them, turning the obstacle into a push. It turned out that the challenges were not as localized as they seemed first, and ways to overcome personal crises were somehow common to many countries. For example, independently and unconsciously artists worked on the theme of the memory of mobility: Oksana Okhapkina and Tetiana Ocheredko from Ukraine, Iwa Kruczkowska-Król (Ukraine-Poland), Dejan Gotić from Croatia, Maša Gavran (Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia), Maria López from Portugal with Josephine Gerhardt from Germany, Viktoria Ganhao from Portugal, and others. Thus began the formation of intercultural interaction. The discourse of the struggle to preserve creative independence in one local context reflects the same discourse in another, which has led us to effective methods of sustainable action in the face of the pandemic constraints. Recourse to memories gives artists the opportunity to turn to their adventures, the virtual dimension of which affects the subconscious as well as the real, which, in turn, saved many from burnout. Physical activity has given way to the memory of not only travel but also intimacy (Agata Ber, Nataliya Bagatskaya, Nina Mári, Oksana Okhapkina), love (Olena Shlapak, Zorana Unković), social life (Tetiana Kornieieva, Marianna London).

The issue of creative independence during the pandemic was closely intertwined with many manifestations because both creative and personal freedom are hardly possible without open movement or communication. Contact is extremely important for creative work, so we saw bright examples of building new interaction networks both between artists and the audience. As a result of the approaching of the factor of (non) freedom into public life, there was a large-scale revaluation of values, changing the focus of personal needs towards emotional and physical intimacy, such as touch, hugs, meetings. Thus, the pause of social participation made it possible to see that part of everyday life which a person did not notice or pay attention to during the daily rush. Therefore, the revaluation of values is manifested in relation to the simple but most important things in life, such as nature, of which we are all part, the loved

ones, thanks to whom we exist, and ourselves, who also need care, like any other temporary resource.



Tetiana Kornieieva “love/don’t love”, performance

Usually by the word “freedom” we mean liberation from all or at least many things. At the same time, during the pandemic, the meaning of this expression shifted from the abstract to the real dimension and acquired a bright dominant connotation with branching manifestations: from gaining freedom of movement, choice, communication, and the desire to do what you want. “People have lost what they did not notice before – freedom of contact, movement and expression”, – Viktoria Sukhanova (“Library of Artist’s Stories”). Ukrainian artist Bohdan Svrydov was one of those who felt that the lockdown made people physically separated, and this painful feeling was somewhat healed by virtual joining, but as the artist asks himself, whether gadgets will be able to replace live contacts, and the answer is – unlikely. As a new tool that opens opportunities for joining, the computer is becoming an important factor on the verge of loneliness and sociality in the context of communication 2020-2021.

Under the quarantine restrictions, it was necessary to limit the offline activity without reducing constant interaction with society. In most cases, artists seek social involvement, for creative people, discussion with others remains a necessary source of professional development, the lack of which causes a lack of vitamin elements for a full life. It is in expression that the

formation of personality takes place, the achievement of which is possible both individually, and in a group or team. Gaining artistic growth in the face of restrictions was accompanied by the following steps, including forced productivity (Vedran Šilipetar, Nuno Fareleira, Ena Bajuk), work/residence replacement (Tania Belashchuk, Lucija Krizman, Valentyna Spanchak, Anna Ogulewicz, Hilde Camacho, Viktoria Adkozalova), adaptation to digital media (Nikita Khudiakov, Veronika Cherednychenko, Gaia Radić, Khrystyna Khmil, Dmitriy Zazimko, Peggy Le Poulen, Fu Qiang), online tools for promotion and development (Astian Rey, Katerina Pyatakova, Anna Pichuhina, Anastasia Khudoliy, Harmke Datema-Chang), use of recycled materials (Dmitro Krishovsky, Ivana Bajcer, Laura Sajko, Andrija Večenaj), and much more.

It was no less difficult for artists to maintain career plan in the face of limited international activity. Despite the large number of online collaborations, working remotely is not the same as working in common studio or residency. However, being in a one physical space does not help to successfully work on a joint project, as confirmed by the Instagram project “Telefone Estragado”, created by artists Maria López and Josephine Gerhardt [5]. Despite the total rigidity in which the creators found themselves, they were motivated to create living connections with their environment and harmonious relationships within the system.



Exposition of the art project “#365daysafter”, from left to right: Maria López (Portugal) and Josephine Gerhardt (Germany) “Telefone Estragado”; Helena Valsecchi (Portugal) art project “Synecdoche”, 2020



In search of a common solution in the struggle to preserve communication, Maria López and Josephine Gerhardt applied the concept of “telefone estragado” into their remote work. The idea was based on the popular late nineties game “Telephone”, the essence of which is to convey messages and monitor how it changes from the increase of information transfer points. Converting the transmission of the message into a visual series, the artists observed how the idea is reborn under the influence of distance and time, what was left over from the first speech and how the essence of the original idea changes. During the year, they conveyed a visual message to each other and eventually faced the need to interact with a wide audience. The solution was found on the social network Instagram, where three columns of visual format perfectly matched the artist’s idea. For this case of creative cooperation, the restriction of mobility significantly contributed to a deeper disclosure of the problem of communication and message transmission; it is unlikely that artists would have better developed the project by working side by side in one studio as planned before the pandemic. So, we see an example of how disadvantages become advantages by assisting professional development. And this is not the only one case of creative independence winning position in the period of restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The idea of “telefone estragado” is consonant with many concepts of relations within the system, including reflections on communication according to Niklas Luhmann. Interacting entities mutually recognize the legitimacy and validity of each other’s internal experience: one partner perceives the other’s experience as real, taking it as a basis for own action. In “Love as Passion. The codification of Intimacy” Nikolas Luhman sheds light on the issue of interaction between two people when “a common medium of communication” becomes a means of accepting “excessive individualism and the need for a close world” [6]. Although the idea of transmitting a message at a distance is not new, the result of this study shows that during the pandemic, online art projects have acquired the ability to combine challenges related with time and distance.

Balancing between virtual and physical communication, also worked artists from Portugal – Francisca Patrocínio and Leonor Talefe. Being separated by distance, Francisca in Porto, and Leonor in Leiria, they found a way to create a virtual studio for their own use based on existing social networks. Although the virtual world is also a zone of restriction of freedom to some extent, under the Covid limitations, Instagram has become a universal medium for information exchange, a neutral territory independent of pandemic restrictions. However, if we appeal first to the positive role of social networks during the pandemic, we



can say that Instagram has become a place of ideas sharing between open and closed systems, a conditional artists residency with free and permanent access to it. As a reference bank, the social network allows artists to create their own “account”, storing valuable information “on demand”.

A feature of closed systems on the example of the reference bank developed by Francisca Patrocínio and Leonor Talefe is that they do not have sharing environment with the audience – only within the system. Their goal is the incubation period – to create a new product from simulacra. Taking open information, artists duplicate it in a private environment, where in an individually created atmosphere it acquires new significance, although it becomes a network of simulacra of constant struggle of similar systems. Thus, we can see how the hidden rooms of the online space become a bank of ideas, an effective tool for exchanging information both inside and outside the structure. And open systems, such as “Telefone Estragado”, are designed to expand the network of the dialogue and allow not only to accommodate creative activities, but also to become a place of constant international presentation of its results.

As we can see, the transit zone of the pandemic is characterized not only by a frozen sense of delay, but also by search, because if some doors close, others open. So it was with Lucija Krizman, the pandemic does not ask about your plans, it sets the same framework for all, and the artist was forced to leave her career in England and return to her place of residence in Croatia. Not only Lucija found herself in a similar situation, which required a decision – wait, adapt to the conditions, or adapt the conditions to themselves. This situation concerns the question of choice and one’s own will. If you do not have access to studio, you can work from home, such as Valentyna Spanchak, Bohdan Sokur, Maja Kalogera and Ivan Oštarčević, for whom the apartment became a workshop, or Vladimir Tomić, whose workshop was focused on stack of paper and pencils, always carried with him. If it is not possible to buy art materials, then the material can be anything, from wrapping paper, foam, or cardboard to anything that can be found on the street (Andrija Večenaj, Laura Sajko, Dmitro Krishovsky). And in the case of Lucija Krizman, only after returning home, one of her best artworks was born, for which there was simply no time before. An unexpected stop in artistic process indicates the vulnerability of creativity, but it also strengthens it.

The desire to build a comfort space, in the case of deprivation of the usual conditions of creative activity, is based on an algorithm in which the existence of even a small choice in a situation of it lack creates a sense of privilege. With limited space, artists began to design an individual area of power, even though

for the most of them it was limited to the area of apartment. Anyway, it is a zone of personal space, where you can also find inspiration and new impressions despite isolation. Because in the daily rhythm of social activity a person limits the ability to observe, which eventually leads to the fact that artist stops noticing the amount of visual information that is lost in a hurry.

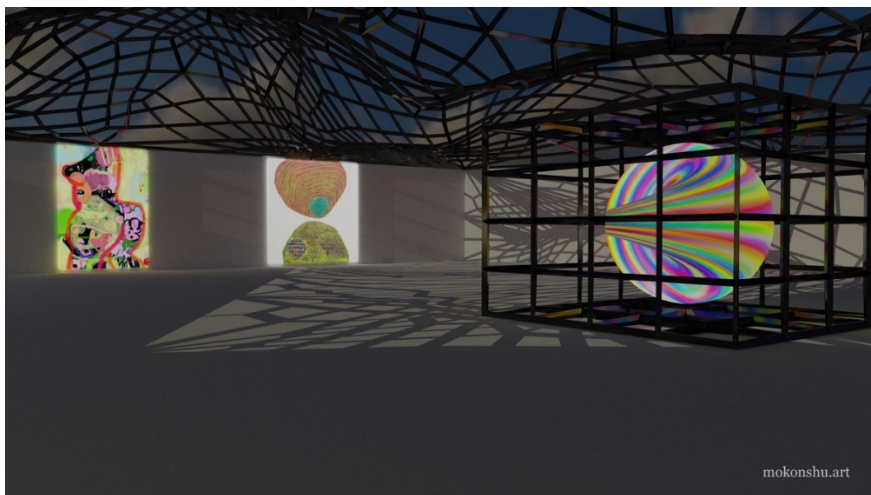


From left to right: Sofiia Korotkevych Installation “Mode “ON”, 2021, mixed technique; Andrija Večenaj (Croatia) series “Preplet 01”, “Kefa 03” i “Kefa 04”, 2020, sculpture, sorghum, and gypsum

The search for a space of freedom has led many artists to nature as a source of inspiration. In both cases, being in the city and being isolated in your own apartment, you can also find a way to get closer to the outside world, such as Vera Mukhina. During the quarantine, the artist saw in the sky outside the window “infinite space of freedom”, from which she drew strength for life and work. The loss of external sources of insight due to restrictions on mobility, communication and touch has led to the fact that the source of inspiration was the “small world” of our rooms. Once frozen in a small world, artists gained the ability to study it and transfer themselves as an insight to objects that filled the basic everyday reality, such as flowers on the windowsill (Anna Mironova), plant sprouts (Viktorii Cherniakhivska), the sky outside the window (Katerina Pyatakova), the yard (Vera Mukhina), an ordinary kitchen sponge, which at some point acquired artistic value (Nora Bolanca), coffee on the stove (Daria Prokhorchuk), own breath (Tatiana Zubchenko), the world of your dog (Tetiana

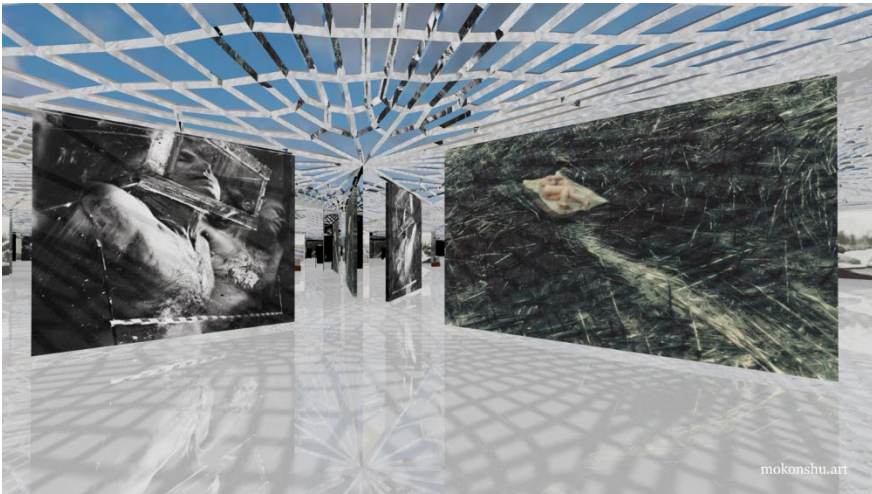
Kornieieva) and more. However, each of these feelings is a vision that was constantly lost day after day, and the pandemic simply gave everyone time and source to see, despite the restrictions on movement.

As the philosopher Paul Henri Holbach points out, man's dependence on a society ruled by norms, principles, and laws as a sphere of necessity cannot make him completely free, although freedom is his primary right. It turns out that people can be unfree only in society, that is, to become truly free, a person must acquire freedom in a society that restricts this right. Everyone can afford to be unchain, it is only necessary to change the circumstances, for example, Tania Belashchuk, who, having moved out of the city, felt unborder as never before. You can also become happy in your studio like Kateryna Kobylianska, get rid of social responsibilities like Manuela Pauk, change the lack of autonomy in office work to disengagement of art studio like Bohdan Svyrydov, and find safe shelter in your workshop like Zorana Unković. But there is another side to benefits of working alone in the studio, and despite many artists claiming that their daily life is like being in a lockdown, as Martinho Dias, an artist living in Portugal, points out, there is a big difference between these concepts. "In fact, I have always been in lockdown at studio. But there was a difference – being in lockdown by your own will is not the same as being in lockdown by obligation" (Library of Artist's Stories).



From left to right: Anastasiya Khudoliy "Transparent essence", 2020, digital;
Peggy Le Poulen "Graphic Elements 5", 2020, acrylic on canvas; Tatiana
Zubchenko "Breath", 2021, video

This raises the question of one's own will, namely the right to choose, because, as the artist notes, the same fact of being in isolation can become a state of both privilege and dependence, it is determined by who is behind the choice. An artist who consciously isolates himself from society in favour of creative work becomes consciously free, but forced isolation, even if creative activity is possible, turns the "art studio" into a zone of imprisonment. Being alone, artists began to ask themselves: how could it be that we found ourselves in such a situation as we allowed it, or maybe somewhere deep inside we wanted such closing? Speaking of the state in general and considering similar variables, we should not forget about the exceptions, because they are the key to the answer. A striking example of such an exception is the story of Ena Bajuk, for whom the closed space of self-isolation became a place of power and a stimulus to creativity, or Zorana Unković, for whom continuous pandemic imprisonment was the impetus for gaining personal independence [4].



From left to right: Stepan Kucheriavyy "Private metaphysics-2", 2021, digital art; Olia Koval "Only lovers left alive", 2020, digital photo

Without ease of movement, communication and life experience, creative independence loses its open character, becoming limited both physically to the space in which the artist is literally closed, and emotionally, in the memories of life experience. The sudden loss of the main manifestations of freedom in everyday life made everyone think about their own scale of values. During the

period of quarantine restrictions, nature was at the top of needs and became an additional element of open breathing in contrast to the isolation of the city. “Becoming canned in our own buildings during the pandemic, we feel the need for fresh air, light, nature as relevant as ever” – Olga Polianska. With a wide range of influences on social communication, restrictions have transformed “emotional loneliness into physical” (Agata Ber), forming conditions for materializing the philosophical expression of life, which is given to create memories that we will enjoy in retirement, and lockdown due to the limited activity, closing us at home, in fact, became its testing.

The pandemic cage isolated people from each other, instead allowing them to become closer to nature, and thanks to its energy, artists began to seek the depth of their vision. Having become creatively “paralyzed” by the pandemic, many of them could not work at all for some time, such as Helena Valsecchi. Is it possible to product the same art when the world has changed so much, the artist asks herself a rhetorical question – what can I give to the world with my art? The depth of artistry was found with the help of nature, its silence, peace, stability, and meditation in which Helena immersed herself. All this contributed to the development of immunity of creative activity to external factors.

Finding the answers to the question, what can my art give to the new world, which has changed, occupied the thoughts of everyone, regardless the level of practice, education, country of residence, age, gender etc. Everyone, including Helena Valsecchi (painting), an experienced Portuguese artist, and young Ukrainian artists Anna Bitaieva (fluid art) and Dmitriy Zazimko (sculpture), looked in the new media for ways to enhance their work to meet the social needs of the post-pandemic world, and everyone found it in their own way. Helena – in a fragmentary study of the puzzles of her work, Anna – in digital illustration, creating a virtual environment, Dmitriy – in AR technologies, which he uses to deliver a secret message to the audience.

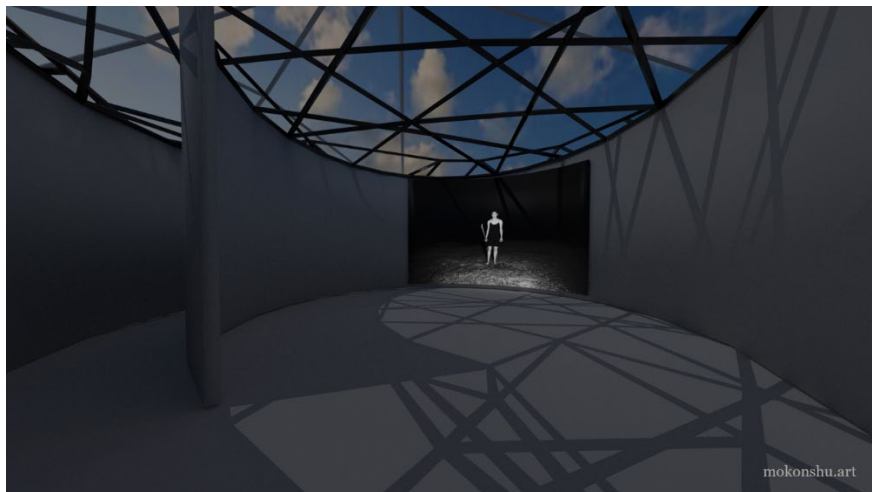
Nature, while remaining a source of inspiration for imaginative individuals, has also proved to be an indispensable medicine in the fight against emotional burnout, psychological overload, and pressure from society. It is possible to become independent only after harmony with oneself is found, which, in turn, is impossible without friendship with environment and the surrounding reality. Along with cooperation with the universe comes a sense of gratitude, man begins to appreciate what he/she/it has, and, taming own demons, forms a resource for the struggle for the self-standing in society. “The surroundings became the deepest source from which I drew”, says Tania Balashchuk. It turns out that nature is the key to reloading and accumulating strength to fight for rights in society, and, as the artist Anastasia Khudoliy says, it is the living world

that gives hope for a better future: “If our bodies are able to develop immunity to disease, then our mind is also able to develop immunity to the situation” (Library of Artist’s Stories).

Society needs constant movement, exploration, and interaction, under which being in a dynamic environment is somehow exhausting. There is still no consensus on whether this was a positive or a negative period, but in any case, it was a period of opportunity. The branching out of the ways of seeking independence in the conditions of quarantine restrictions allowed artists, losing their freedom, not to lose it by means of a temporary but complete exclusion from public relations. From the Library of Artist’s Stories, we see that the state of autonomy outside society cannot be considered a state of absolute power or happiness, in fact, it is an exile who has distanced himself from reality and from the society of which he is a product. Indeed, under such conditions, even a short period when the artist was able to feel release has a positive effect, but at the same time there are increasing difficulties in returning to previous “normal” life and the social environment that was left. Leaving society, which interrupted the usual rhythm of life, can have two manifestations. The first is characterized by internal silent protest, as in the case of Viktoriya Sukhanova, Elena Khomiakova and Ivan Oštarčević, the second – an open protest, as for Vedran Šilipetar, Harmke Datema-Chang, Manuela Pauk, Iwa Kruczkowska-Król and Nicol Načinović. The change from an active social environment to solitude is usually aimed at protecting oneself and loved ones (Clara Maciulis, Dmitro Krishovsky), or as a forced action when low social activity leads to financial losses that make it impossible to live in big cities. However, there are effective examples of complete immersion in loneliness, by creating conditions for the continuous self-isolation and testing the emotional state for strength. Such experiments may be aimed at a creative study, the example of which is the experience of Anna Ogulewicz, a Polish artist living in Portugal, who spent four months alone in absolute isolation from people, with her dog at the edge of the forest.

Mostly, the result of these changes is a positive rapprochement with outdoors because less public activity allows the emotional and cognitive system to relax, giving a feeling not only of physical freedom, but also mental. Staying out of town also had an impact on the development of artistic activities, when creators began to work with raw materials and the theme of environment art. Nature, which helped in the self-healing of the imaginative personality, encouraged artists to work on preserving the environment (Viktoriya Adkozalova, Sofiia Korotkevych, Oleksandr Stamer, Julia Lazumirska, Ariana Herceg, Yevheniia Danylova, Helena Valsecchi).





Anna Ogulewicz (Poland-Portugal) “Vasa Vasorum Venus”, 2021, video performance

The dynamics of life do not allow to take the necessary pause to recover, and in this case, we can talk about lockdown as an expected phenomenon for active members of society, whose daily communication tasks did not give a chance to work to their full potential. A creative person needs time for himself and conversation in solitude to hear thoughts that were muffled by the general noise of a stormy social environment. “And even noise can be a signal”, we find the answer in Umberto Eco. However, the problem of transmitting such a message becomes a problem of giving sense to empty sounds, which means that the noise must be brought to a minimum of order to give it its own “personality”, a “minimum of spectral form”, – Umberto Eco [7]. For noise to become a sign, it is necessary to organize chaotic structures in a certain way, rejecting random elements and highlighting what unites. In our case, such a linking element will be finding the answer to the question of how to become free in a fundamentally unfree society.

CONCLUSIONS.

Everyone chooses their own path in the fight against social restrictions, some become more active, calling it forced productivity, intensively generating art products in closed context, based on experience already gained. There can be many reasons, from a burst of energy due to extended social inaction, inertial movement along the already started route, to the opening of gateways



after a long accumulation of experience and information. On the one hand, forced productivity gave a positive impetus to visionary practice and allowed to increase the mass of the art product due to the already gained experience, contributing to professional independence. On the other hand, forced productivity required more energy and passion, while exhausting it, which negatively affected artistic activity.

The speed with which running to nowhere increased, the pace of life with the constant desire to press the “emergency” button, the daily routine that causes concern – all this gave rise to a secret desire to stop, and we stopped. The most difficult and valuable thing in creative independence, as in any other, is the choice between forced and considered. For instance, to run when you want to walk, to change the way, even if the route is already paved, to stop your own marathon, despite the fact that most of the path has already been overcome, to quit the game, even if you win, the choice between who you are and who you should be. Conscious loss of choice leads to the fact that in the pursuit of the “best” you are constantly in a state of search for freedom.

The transit zone of a pandemic can generally be described as a time of unexpected loneliness while waiting to return or departure. Thus, waiting for the moment when everything will be as before, or using the pause as a push to enter new opportunities – is everyone’s personal path. And every decision should not be judged as right or wrong; maybe we just need to spend some time in the transit zone to understand where we are going.

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