

LESSONS



FOR A BRAVE WORLD

How to live, work,
and create in times of



uncertainty

None of us truly knew how we would respond when the familiar world and its rules began to fall apart – or what to do next, after that rupture.

Today, Ukrainians know this: the onset of chaos does not necessarily mean the end of everything. During the war, cultural managers and artists, educators, media professionals, and teams from NGOs and cultural institutions continue to work. Thanks to the efforts of millions of people, life goes on in cities and towns alike: bookshops, cinemas, libraries, schools, and museums remain open.

But how is this possible? What decisions are made under conditions of constant uncertainty – and which of these experiences are worth passing on?

EU-funded programme House of Europe, implemented by Goethe-Institut, and The Ukrainians Media have brought together 32 lessons for life in a new world – for those who will come after us; for those who may also one day have to defend their freedom and work amid uncertainty; and for those already on the path of decolonisation.

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT HOW
TO LIVE, WORK, CREATE,
AND REMAIN RESPONSIBLE
WHEN FAMILIAR RULES
NO LONGER APPLY. IT
REFLECTS EXPERIENCES
UKRAINIANS DID **NOT** SEEK
OUT, BUT HAVE LEARNED
TO UNDERSTAND – AND
ARE READY TO SHARE WITH
OTHERS.

**LESSONS
FOR A BRAVE WORLD**

How to live, work, and
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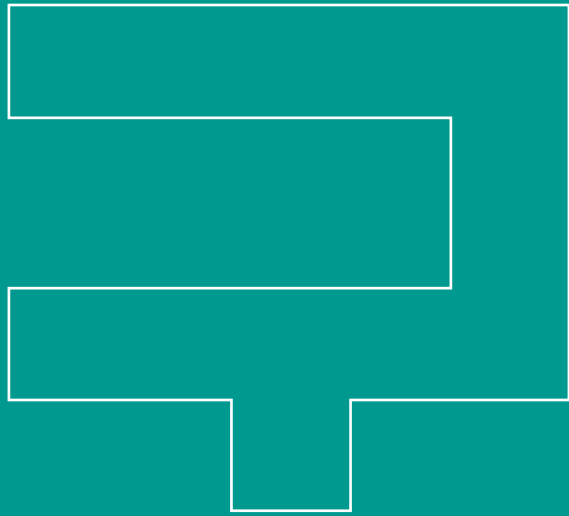
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WHO IS THE FIRST PERSON YOU WOULD MESSAGE
IF SOMETHING HAPPENED?

**Introduction → Katarína
Mathernová → EU Ambassador
to Ukraine**

This publication is about the stories of the persons who were part of the House of Europe programme activities: Ukrainian managers, creatives, researchers, teachers, and media professionals who, far from being paralysed by war, continue their work under extreme circumstances.

When freedom is under siege, culture is the first target. In Ukraine, Russian forces show their disdain for culture by burning books, demolishing libraries, bombing theatres, and looting museums. Their denial of Ukrainian identity only fuels its revival – as culture becomes a critical force in rallying the nation. The fight for the survival of culture forms integral part of the struggle for sovereignty and for the affirmation of a national identity in the face of aggression.

As this struggle goes on, the culture sector continues to suffer the effects of the full-scale invasion. While cultural assets are being destroyed and looted by the aggressor state, many artists, curators, and managers of cultural associations leave Ukraine in search of opportunities or enlist in the army. At the same time, the demand for project funding and professional profiles in the cultural and creative industries sectors grows.

That is why, the European Union's (EU) support becomes crucial in addressing these challenges and

supporting the preservation of Ukraine's rich cultural diversity as part of our common European heritage. Ukraine's fight for survival is also a struggle for our shared culture and history. Thanks to the House of Europe programme, the EU, in partnership with the Goethe-Institut, promotes people-to-people exchanges by building stronger relationships between Ukraine-based and EU-based artists and fostering co-creation.

The sub-granting schemes of this programme include international mobility, individual project, cultural heritage digitalisation, infrastructure, translation, media content, and international cooperation grants. In total, since the start of the programme in 2019, 2,629 individuals and organisation participated in House of Europe grants and financial support schemes. 4,514 participants took part in online ideathons and training programmes on the digitalisation of cultural heritage, and almost 2,000 had access to the programme's learning opportunities. Following the full-scale invasion, the programme funded hundreds of opportunities for displaced persons and focused on addressing wartime challenges.

I am proud that the EU is contributing to this remarkable effort of resilience, professionalism, and belonging.

**Foreword → Franziska Simon
→ Head of House of Europe
programme, Goethe-Institut**

We published the first book, *Changemates*, in early 2023. It was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and at the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – a period in which personal, institutional, and social certainties were simultaneously shaken. Then, as now, House of Europe pursued a central goal: to connect representatives from the cultural, educational, and creative sectors in Ukraine with partners in the EU and to support Ukraine on its path to EU membership. *Changemates* was a contribution to making these connections visible and strengthening them and to showing how cooperation remains possible even under extreme conditions.

At the same time, it has become clear how much Europe still needs to learn. Russia's colonial past – and its patterns that continue to this day – is little known in many parts of the EU or is still underestimated. House of Europe was and is able to contribute to making this more visible and better known: the diverse forms of cultural oppression in Ukraine, linguistic suppression, political dependence, and deliberate distortion of historical narratives. Likewise, the diversity of Ukrainian society. Its minorities, its multilingualism, and its different identities. All these things make it clear how naturally Ukraine belongs to Europe and why the Russian attack threatens not only Ukraine, but

the security and freedom of the entire European continent.

By the time you hold this book in your hands, Ukraine will have been defending itself against Russia for more than a decade and with it, defending a Europe based on cultural openness, democratic values, and the free exchange of ideas. The attack is directed not only against national borders, but against the values that underpin our coexistence. Amidst this ongoing destruction, Ukraine's cultural, educational, and creative scene has achieved something extraordinary: it has not come to a standstill. It has found ways to make decisions, keep institutions and organisations agile, and continue international cooperation, even under extreme conditions.

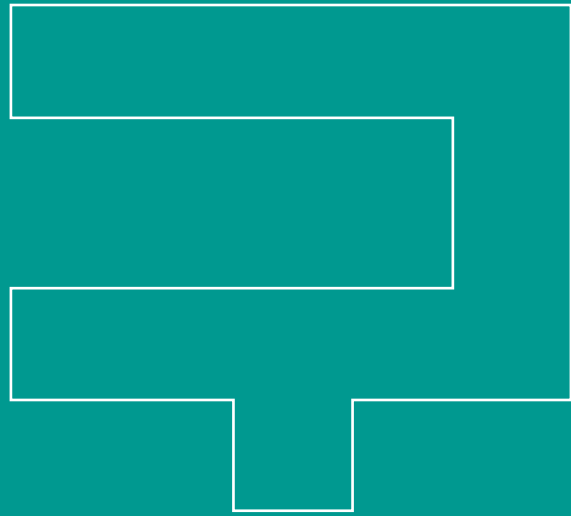
These developments are not a marginal phenomenon in a country under attack, but rather an expression of a competence that is becoming increasingly crucial for the whole of Europe. The Ukrainian experience shows how clarity, decisiveness, and creativity arise where security and reliability have been lost. It shows how culture, media, and education can fulfil their social mission even though war is trying to silence them. And it makes it clear how European values are defended in everyday actions.

House of Europe has been working for years with Ukrainian cultural and creative professionals, connecting them with partners and institutions in EU member states, whose insights, observations, and experiences are reflected in this book. Their reality

in Ukraine is shaped by political upheaval, hybrid attacks, and the fragility of public spaces and by war, which intensifies all these processes and much more. Europe is already living in the shadow of this future; whether war itself becomes part of our own experience also depends on the decisions we make today.

This book invites you to learn about these experiences, not only as an observer, but also as a reflective reader. Open a page, read a lesson from a brave world, let yourself be inspired or challenged, and question your own routines and assumptions. Each lesson is an invitation to think differently about work, international cooperation, responsibility, and Europe.

The value of these lessons lies not only in their urgency, but also in their authenticity: they were written in the midst of a war that challenges Europe to consciously protect and defend its own foundations. Ukraine shows how this can be achieved and what support is needed from us to make it happen. This book aims to give you the tools, thoughts, and insights to do so and perhaps also the impetus to rethink your own role in this joint European project.



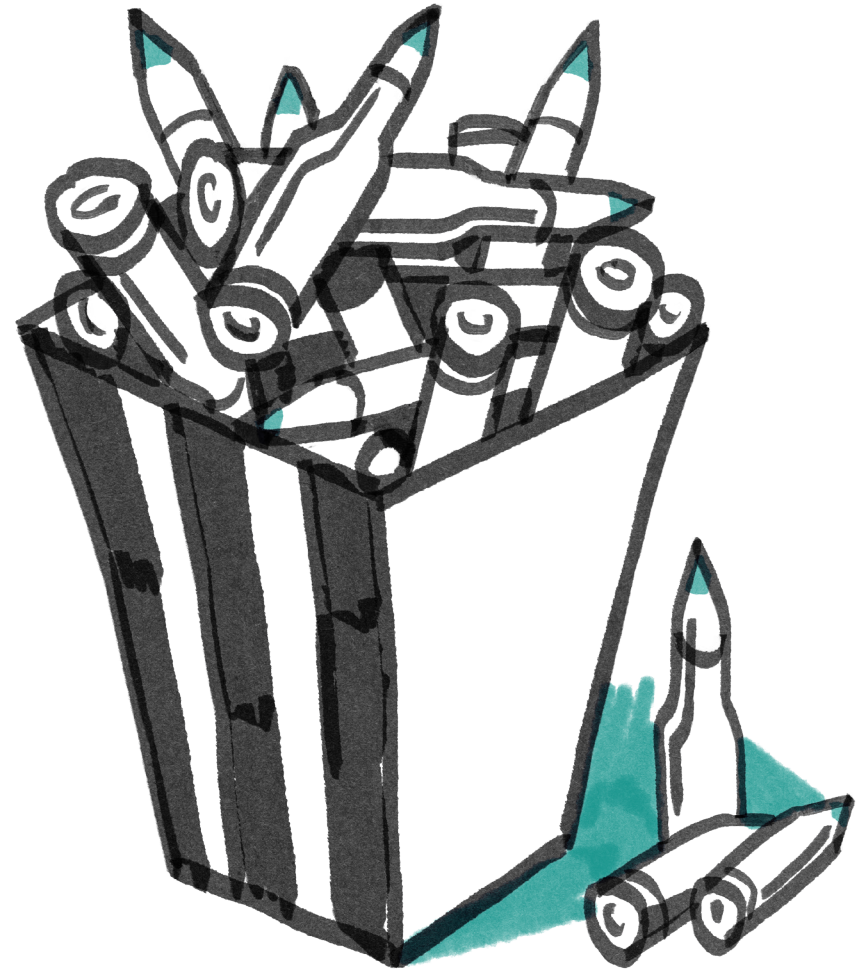
WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAD TO FORCE
THE WORLD TO NOTICE YOUR TRAGEDY?

1→

AT FIRST, YOUR TRAGEDY
WILL CAPTURE THE
AUDIENCE'S ATTENTION.
BUT THEN IT WILL BECOME
JUST ANOTHER STORY

Andrii Kotliar

Cinematographer, Producer for
the Babylon'13 collective



‘We had co-production projects before, but not as many as after the full-scale invasion. After 2022, there was a great demand from our Western colleagues to understand the context of this war because, compared to Russia, we were insufficiently represented in the European space. For instance, for our German colleagues, this war was a revelation because they did not think Russia would attack us. They wanted to understand who Ukrainians are. So, we started co-producing films, and thanks to this, we survived as an institution, because in Ukraine, all the money “from culture” went to the Defence Forces (and that was understandable and justifiable at that time).

We found ourselves in a situation where we could no longer produce cultural products independently. It was a moment of uncertainty. Babylon’13 began actively seeking co-producers, involving companies from Germany, France, and the Baltic countries. We have had great support from the governments of these countries, as well as from international film festivals.

But over time this demand from foreign colleagues has transformed. We rode that wave for a year and a half, and now we need to change. What worked in cultural diplomacy in 2022 no longer works in 2025. If in 2022 it was simple: “Let’s help Ukraine no matter

how,” now it has morphed into a desire to build equivalent relationships. And this is more complicated because for many of our foreign colleagues, the war has become more about risk.

The approach has changed, and we need to change our communication with them.

It is simply that they cannot understand what it is like to live and work under war conditions. But they do not have to understand this. That is why I tell our European partners: “I do not want you to know what it is like to live in such a situation”.’

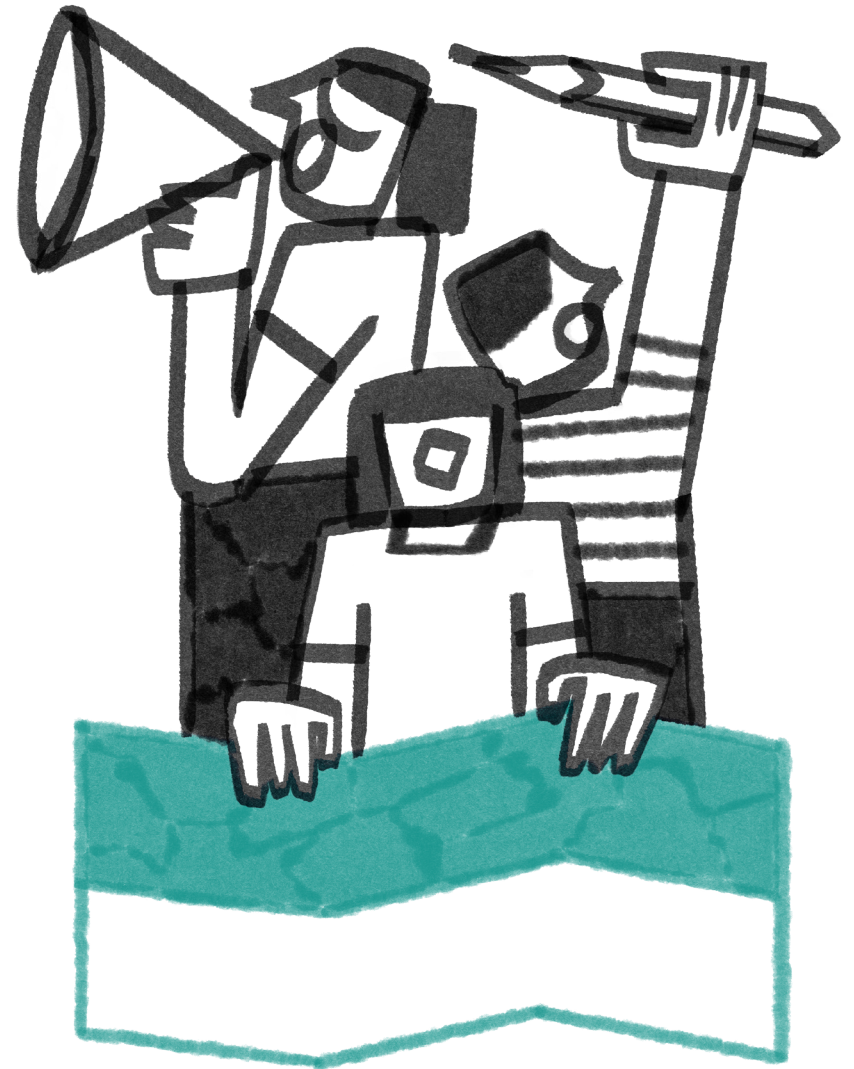


2→

SOMETIMES WE NEED ART
ITSELF TO COMPREHEND
THE EXPERIENCES OF WAR

Diana Berg

Cultural manager and activist



‘When the war began in 2014, I had the idea to open an art centre in Mariupol, twenty kilometres from the front line. It was a decision to invest in art and culture as a way to counteract and make sense of what was happening.

Art works on an emotional level. To use a metaphor, it is Eros, while war is Thanatos. Through emotion, what is difficult to convey with dry words hits home faster. The entire world has seen documentary evidence of the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022: mass graves, destroyed houses, and the brutal consequences of shelling. It has been on the front pages of every media outlet. But over time, images become blunt, they stop having the same effect, especially for an international audience.

At the same time, artistic works that address the same events work differently. The film “20 Days in Mariupol” won an Oscar, and the world did not just see, but felt and experienced what happened in Mariupol. I have my own photographs from there, but they do not work in the same way. The document and the artwork are different modes of influence.

The same can be said about the works of Zhanna Kadyrova and the Ukrainian projects at the Venice Biennale after 2022. Our artists address the theme of war through emotion, and it works.

I hope that even more works about the traumatic, the terrible, and the painful will emerge, but the kind that can be shared, understood, and felt together. After the Second World War, entire artistic movements emerged, notably Fluxus and Viennese Actionism. Radical forms are often born after radical experience. Ukrainian art will flourish. The only question is at what cost.’



IF PEOPLE SPEAK TO YOU
ABOUT THE WAR, IT DOES
NOT MEAN THEY EXPECT
PITY OR SYMPATHY
FROM YOU

Anna Kyrpa

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences,
Associate Professor of the Department
of Social and Humanitarian Education at
Dnipro Academy of Continuous Education,
and Head of the Centre for Support
of Educational Initiatives



‘In my communication with foreign partners, I see genuine sympathy, but not always a deep understanding of what it is like to live next to the front line. During one of my trips to Romania, where we were implementing a joint Erasmus project, I was asked on local television: “How are things there with you? We have not heard about attacks on Dnipro for a long time.” This was in late June 2024 and was broadcast literally the day after the city centre was bombed. This moment was very telling: even benevolent and attentive people often do not realise how much the war is still ongoing and how much it affects our daily lives.

Therefore, we need to talk about the war and our reality constantly on all international platforms, in professional and educational communities, and in the media, not for pity, but for understanding. To explain how we work, study, and create projects under air raid sirens, and how we continue to hold the education front.

But we must tell not only about pain and loss, but also about the strength, resilience, and professionalism of Ukrainians, who continue to work, teach, and create projects despite the danger. Because silence only reinforces the distance between what we are

experiencing and how it is perceived abroad. And so, this is a kind of diplomacy through human stories that helps others better understand us and our reality.’

4→

WAR DEMANDS
CONSTANT ENGAGEMENT.
BE MINDFUL OF THE
EMOTIONAL LABOUR
OF UKRAINIANS, WHICH
IS OFTEN UNPAID AND
CEASELESS

Nadiia Koval, Anastasiia
Omeliianuk, Iva Naidenko,
Yuliia Elias

Curators of the Ukrainian
Decolonial Glossary



‘When the full-scale invasion began, our non-governmental organisation, Ksi Prostir, was noticed, and people started offering collaborations. But we were not prepared to be constantly subjected to emotional work. We use our resources to explain not only general facts about the history of Ukraine and the political background, but also various nuances. For example, regarding interaction with Russian artists. We constantly have to think about how to get out of certain uncomfortable situations.

For instance, there was a case where Ukrainian curators were placed in the same space as a Russian curator, because their mentality dictates that they must “hear all voices.” But they did not consider the ethical implications of such a situation. In this way, foreign organisers of such events distance themselves from emotional labour but impose it on the Ukrainian audience.

Also, the context is becoming more nuanced. This began about a year after the full-scale invasion, when the narrative “everyone is tired” first appeared. When Ukraine is less present in the information space, it is harder to sustain audience interest in our topic. This means we also have to become more nuanced, be prepared for indifference and misunderstanding, and repeat what we have already repeated many times.

A great deal is still carried by enthusiasm. This applies not only to activism but also to academic or cultural work. But the person who complains becomes the problem. That is, the problem is not what they are saying, but them, because they are showing their emotions. The term “Killjoy,” introduced by the feminist Sara Ahmed, applies to this situation.

We need to consider how to enable psychologically healthy interaction in international projects. We want to work not reactively, but affirmatively, lovingly nurturing what is ours.’

5→

MASTER AN IMPORTANT STRATEGIC SKILL – CARING FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE (ESPECIALLY IF YOU WORK WITH PEOPLE)

IT IS OKAY TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Anna Kyrpa

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of Social and Humanitarian Education at Dnipro Academy of Continuous Education, and Head of the Centre for Support of Educational Initiatives



‘I worked on a project that developed the competencies of English language teachers through the integration of social and emotional learning. This is because, in times of war, educators particularly need not only professional but also emotional support. So, I help teachers better understand themselves and their students, creating an atmosphere of trust and safety even in difficult conditions.

Since 2022, life in our region, which is close to the front line, has fundamentally changed. Our main safety skills include quickly assessing risks, acting calmly in critical situations, and supporting others. This is an experience of resilience that would be useful to anyone: how to maintain clarity of thought and humanity under stress.

Working in wartime conditions has shown that, alongside performing professional and socially useful tasks, it is crucial to take care of oneself and one’s mental well-being. Without this, it is impossible to remain effective, support others, and make the right decisions.

Caring for one’s own resilience is not selfishness, but a strategy for survival and the preservation of professional competence.

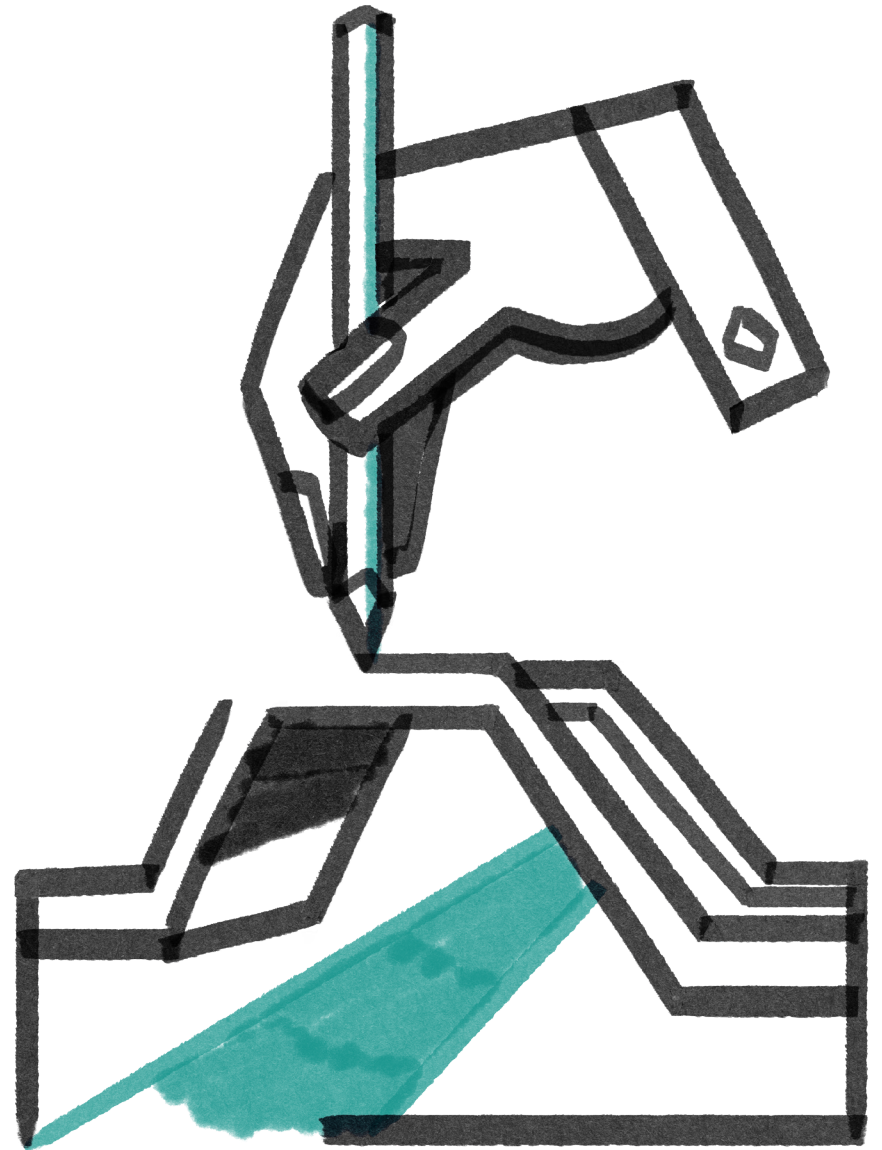
This experience is important not only for Ukrainian educators but also for colleagues in any crisis conditions, as mental balance allows one to make informed decisions and remain a resource for others.’



POETRY CAN SAY THINGS ABOUT THE WAR THAT THE NEWS CANNOT

Marco Vidal González

Founder of the publishing house
La Tortuga Búlgara

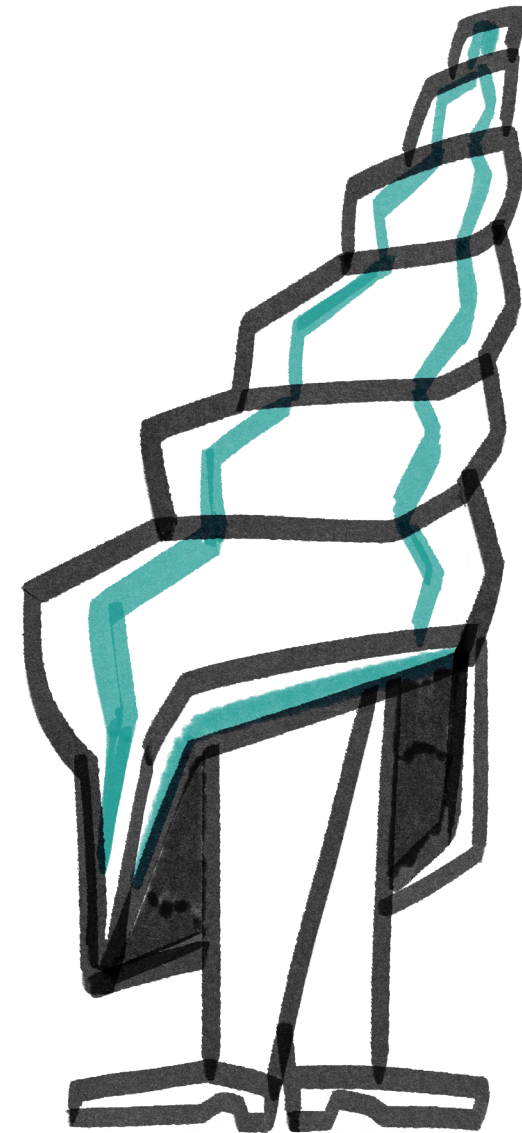


'In the news, victims are reduced to figures. Poetry, however, transports us to the voices of those who suffer, to their daily lives; to how war, or any other adverse circumstance, affects personal and everyday human life. Through the description of every detail, through feeling, fear, and hope, poetry has the power to connect someone else's suffering, which seems so distant, with a real event that, unfortunately, could touch any of us.

In response to the texts of Ukrainian poets, I can only listen and empathise. At the very least, through poetry, I can partially understand the pain of the lives of people under siege, without forcing them to constantly talk about it.'

7→

TO SPEAK ABOUT ONE'S
EXPERIENCE OF WAR, IT IS
SOMETIMES NECESSARY
TO BECOME VULNERABLE,
BUT WITHOUT INVOKING
PITY



Diana Berg

Cultural manager and activist



‘Contrary to stereotypes, acknowledging one’s own vulnerability is a sign of strength, not weakness.

How can we talk about vulnerability without inviting pity? I think about this often, because in the Ukrainian context, it is easy to slip into a tone of sorrow when speaking about one’s position or situation. And this must not be allowed to happen.

We are experiencing terrible things. It is an abnormal experience for a human being to live through what is happening around us. But there is a temptation to start lamenting to get a more emotional reaction in response. One must stop this within oneself, because the posture of a victim immediately transforms us from subjects into objects.

For example, in a conversation with someone from abroad, such a tone robs us of our agency. We take it away from ourselves. This stems from an inferiority complex that was planted over decades. But we need to feel our own strength, truth, freedom, and will. To see ourselves as strong. Not “we were attacked, we are being beaten and killed, how sorry everyone feels for us”, but “we are fighting back against an enemy that is significantly larger than us”. We are subjects who act, not just suffer.

This seems like a small shift in perspective, but it changes everything. Many are ready to help a victim: to cover them, support them, and provide resources. But is this what we want? Or do we want to speak from the position of a strong partner, a nation of strong people who are the agents of their own fate?

This change begins from within. Everyone needs to realise that we are not victims, and we must not make it our goal to evoke pity.’



DO NOT WAIT FOR
AN 'INVITATION TO
THE TABLE' – CREATE
THE TABLE YOURSELF

Tetiana Storozhko

Co-founder and Head of the TENET
Centre for Social Transformations



46



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‘Even though the war has severed many ties, forced people from their homes, and stripped some organisations of their capacity, the voice of the Roma community has grown louder, both at home and abroad.

It is precisely our past experiences and the continuity of trauma passed down through generations that made us realise how vital it is to document our stories here and now. We began speaking out about the Roma’s contribution to our shared victory and their inseparable place within Ukrainian civil society.

A large number of our active youth, having found themselves abroad, have become our voices there: they are building partnerships and pursuing education, and we are supporting them every step of the way. This is a transformation from an “invisible minority” into a visible part of a political nation – one that has a right to its memory and its future.

No one can tell our story better than we can. It is essential to offer international partners more than just requests for support; we must also offer our own expertise and ready-made intellectual and cultural products (such as our digital archives or exhibitions) grounded in deep knowledge of our community. Invest in institutional sustainability and your own expertise – this is what makes us equal players in a global dialogue, rather than just recipients of aid.’



WE BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PRESERVING OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE

Vasyl Karpiv

Head of the Karp Restorer
Restoration Bureau



‘If we want to preserve our state, we must preserve our culture.

Regrettably, before 2022, few believed a big war was coming. As a result, art was held hostage. We lost a great deal because we failed to understand what to hide, how to hide it, and where to hide it.

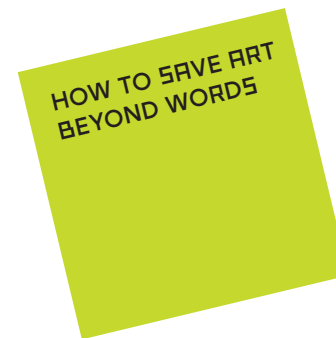
Our restoration bureau, Karp Restorer, has been engaged in research projects and the restoration of architectural monuments for 15 years. In the past three years alone, we have processed around 70 projects, including comprehensive studies of the interiors and facades of buildings in Uzhhorod, Lviv, Lutsk, and Kyiv.

This is our response to the constant talk about the need to preserve culture, develop the restoration craft, and protect restorers. Those are all just words. Real action is found in private initiatives, among volunteers, and people who themselves defend the preservation of objects that might otherwise be lost due to societal indifference.

To the best of our ability, we work to preserve and promote our country’s cultural heritage. We have come a long way over these years.

We do not only restore and conserve, but we also explain why this is necessary for us as

a society. We film documentaries and spread awareness. We do our utmost, because we are talking about the centuries-old history of Ukraine.’



10→

A MUSEUM WITH
AN EVACUATED
COLLECTION CAN ALSO
BE INTERESTING FOR
VISITORS

Oleksii Voronko

Manager of Digital Transformation
and Grant Activity at Odesa
National Art Museum



‘With the start of the full-scale invasion, the museum’s work became complicated for two reasons at once: the team sharply decreased, as many people left, and due to the lack of an exposition, which museum workers had hidden and began to evacuate. Since then, Odesa National Art Museum has found new ways to engage with visitors.

We were the first to reopen in the city in May 2022. Initially, we conducted tours of the empty museum, and by summer, we had opened the first exhibition, “PREWAR”.

The exhibition covers several issues, among which I would highlight: documenting how contemporary artists perceive and portray the current war; representing creators from the southern regions of Ukraine; and rediscovering the Odesa art scene of the 20th century, which both ordinary Odesans and local researchers know very little of, due to Soviet policy in this area.

Under different circumstances, we could dedicate more time to academic work or parallel projects. However, temporary exhibitions are what keep the museum’s audience engaged without a permanent exposition, although this requires a significant effort from the team.’

11→

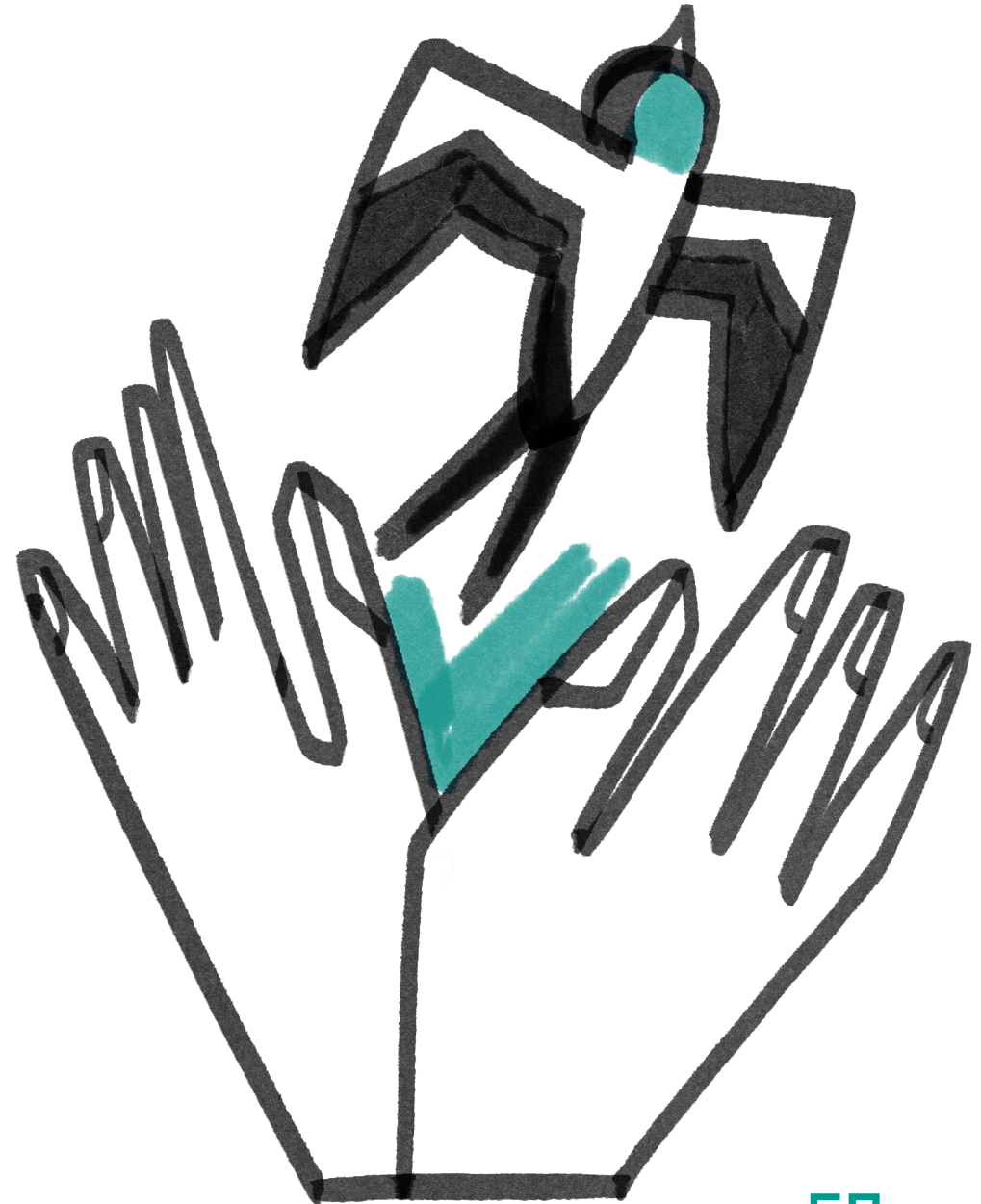
EVEN WHEN THEY TRY TO
ERASE YOU, YOU CAN
STILL PRESERVE YOUR
LEGACY

Eldar Osman

Head of the NGO QIRI'M Young



58



59

‘In the spring of 2014, I was forced to leave Crimea. It was a difficult decision. At first, I felt anger and defiance. But the occupation was advancing rapidly: I began receiving threatening phone calls, which later escalated into visits from the so-called “police”. I realised it was becoming too dangerous to stay.

It was mostly young people who left. The older generation, including my parents, mostly refused to go. They had returned to Crimea in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union [following their forced deportation in 1944 ordered by Josef Stalin – Ed.], and for them it was a matter of principle to remain on their land and live out the rest of their lives in their homeland, rather than face yet another exile.

Lviv welcomed us with open arms. There, I worked on an initiative to add the Crimean Tatar language to Google Translate. We quickly realised that training machine translation algorithms required gigabytes of text, so, in 2020, the idea of creating a Crimean Tatar language corpus was born.

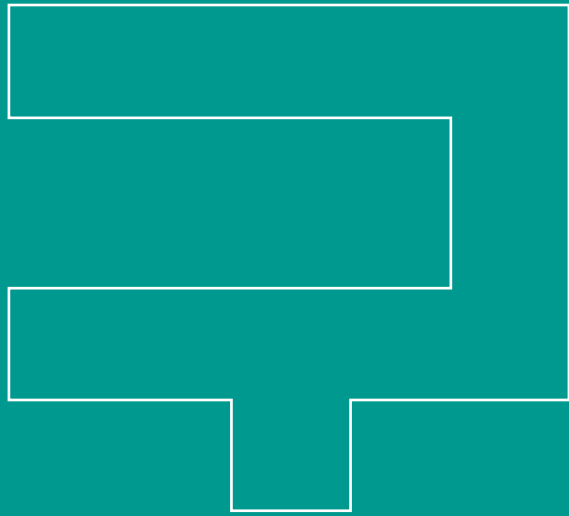
As we felt powerless in the face of losing our land, we turned to culture. That was our response: if they try to erase us physically, we will make sure our language remains immortal.

Along this process, we found like-minded partners within the government. It became a true symbiosis: we generated the ideas, and government officials, in fulfilling their duties, supported us and gave the initiative official standing. That legitimacy was enough to attract donors, who provided the necessary funding. The result of this work became visible to the world in 2024 – the Crimean Tatar language was added to Google Translate.

This year, with the support of the House of Europe and in collaboration with our Romanian colleagues, we digitised three volumes of the Dictionary of the Dobrujan Crimean Tatar Ethnolect. This marks another step toward expanding Google Translate’s functionality, paving the way for a full dictionary and voice recordings in the future.

We have proven that the enemy can occupy our land, but cannot destroy us as a people as long as we can preserve our language.’





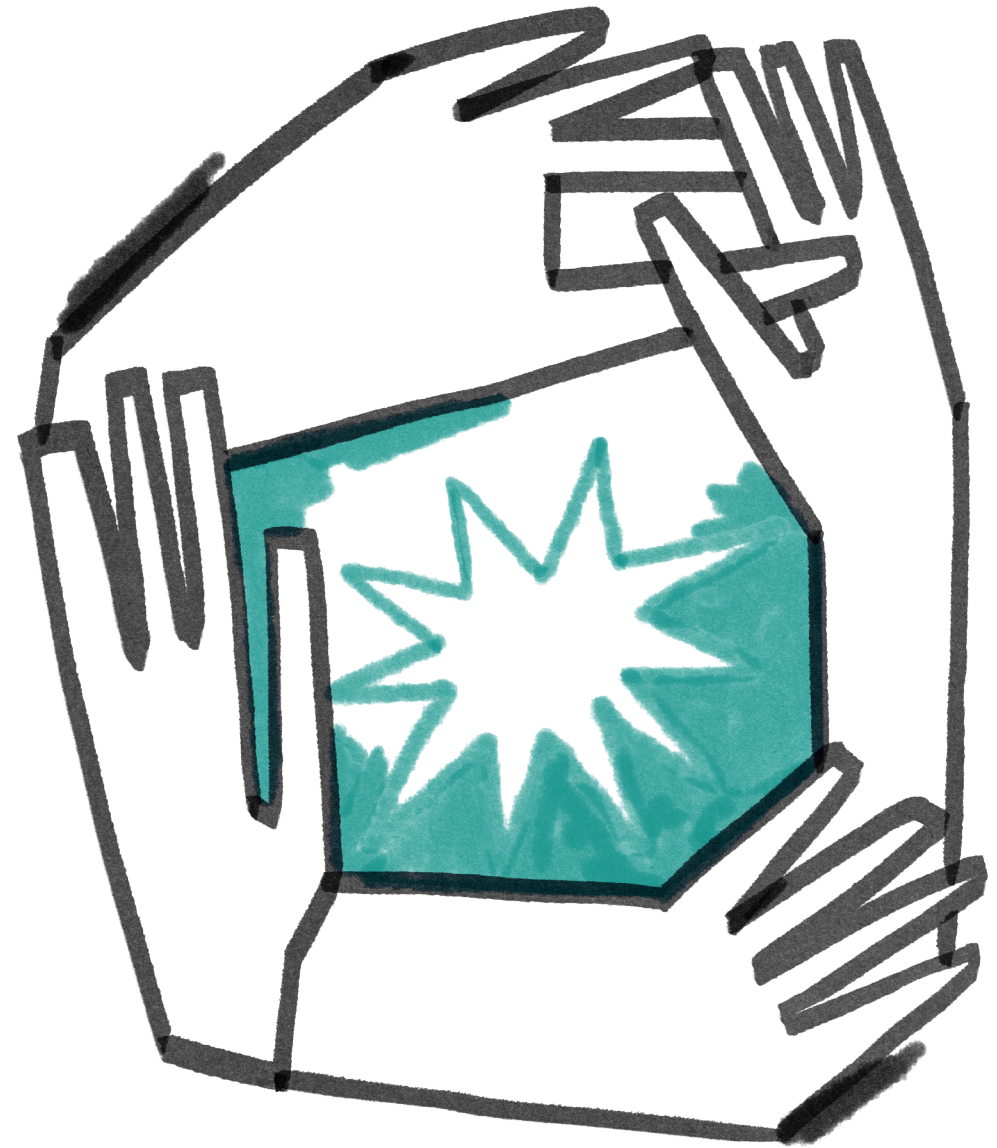
WHAT WOULD YOU SAVE IF YOU HAD
TO FLEE YOUR HOME?

12→

OUR SKILLS IN
RESEARCHING AND
RESTORING DAMAGED
MONUMENTS WILL BE
ESSENTIAL AFTER THE
WAR ENDS

Vasyl Karpiv

Head of the Karp Restorer
Restoration Bureau



‘With the start of the full-scale invasion, some of our projects halted due to funding constraints and uncertainty. Part of the team turned to volunteering. Some returned home to their native cities. Some went abroad.

Approximately two weeks into the war, we began to resume work in part. Of course, for a long time, there were serious logistical problems and delays in the delivery of restoration materials from abroad, which significantly slowed down the organisation of our work. Now, many of the men from our team are on the front line and are actively participating in the fighting.

Today, it is difficult to predict when the hostilities will end or the full extent of the damage. Yet we work on and believe we will be able to preserve our cultural gains and values. Great hope will be placed in us regarding the research and restoration of damaged objects. Therefore, we have an incentive to develop our team of professional conservators and art restorers.

In relatively safe zones, work to preserve heritage must not stop, but it should be planned immediately as work in crisis conditions: with backup power (generators, battery stations, and autonomous lighting) and the ability to continue even in the absence of heating and electricity. The war

has shown that we can work in the cold, without light, and under torches, but this should not be the norm.

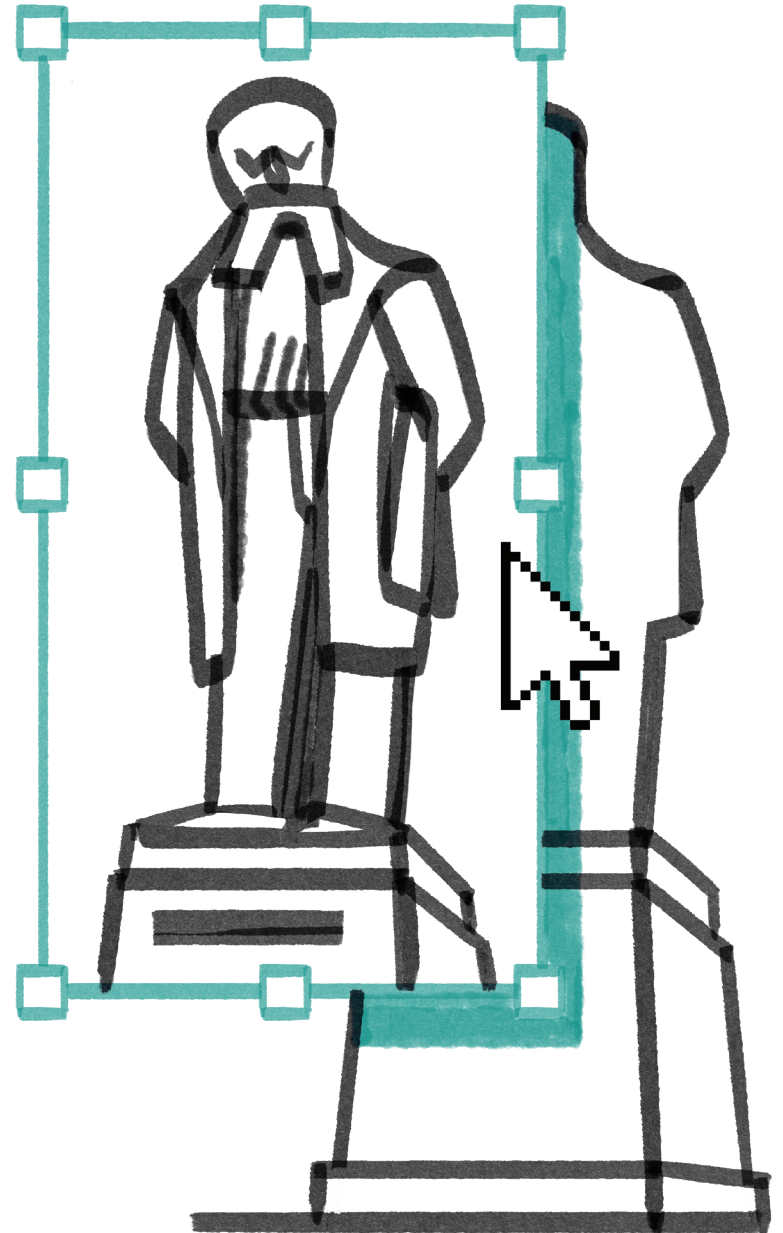
The second mandatory block is preventive measures. We must have backup storage for the most valuable objects and pre-prepared evacuation protocols. This also involves basic digital recording (photography, 3D scanning) and minimal conservation interventions that stabilise a monument until full-scale restoration can occur. This must be a systematic model of work under threat, not an improvisation after the fact.’

13→

THE RESTORATION
AND CONSERVATION OF
CULTURAL MONUMENTS
PRESERVE NOT ONLY
THE OBJECT BUT ALSO
THE CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN PEOPLE

Vasyl Karpiv

Head of the Karp Restorer
Restoration Bureau



‘Our story is built on long-term work and trust. Some organisations are surprised by what we are doing here and how we do it, at what level and on what scale.

It is very significant that during the full-scale war, foreign foundations did not cease their cooperation with us. Thanks to them, teams like ours continue to work effectively. We have not noticed a decrease in support: since 2022, we have continued doing what we were doing before.

Support from abroad mainly comes through grant programmes of various countries. We have worked with House of Europe, the Aliph Foundation (Geneva, Switzerland), the Goethe-Institut Ukraine, and the Polonika National Institute of Polish Cultural Heritage Abroad.

Among the largest projects implemented thanks to foreign support are the restoration of the Uzhhorod Cathedral and the Gothic wooden church in Oleksandrivka in the Khust district. A research trip through Europe was also very significant.

It is important to emphasise the need to invest in education. We are learning ourselves, and we try to send people on internships abroad. Recently, a restoration school opened at the Lviv National Academy of Arts, where I

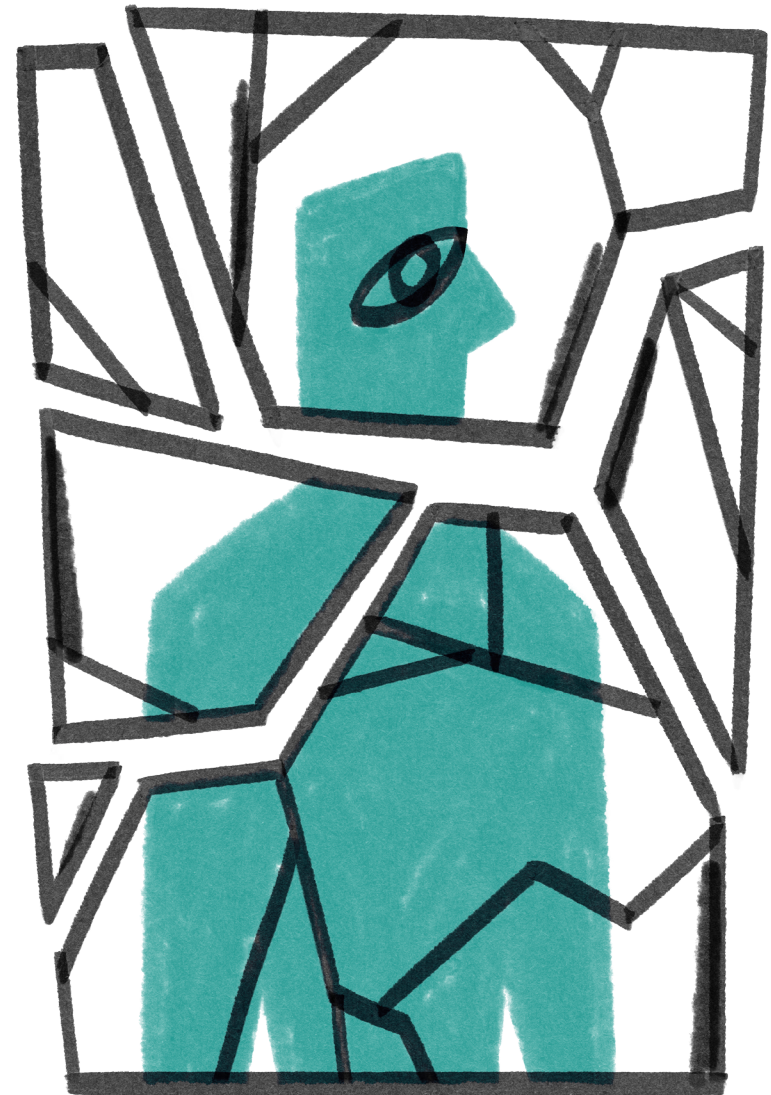
teach. This programme is implemented jointly with the Eberhard Schöck Foundation (Germany) and UNESCO. The second institution in Ukraine that trains restorers of monumental art is the Ivan Trush Lviv Professional College of Decorative and Applied Arts.

Education for restorers is developing, albeit slowly, but developing. However, such training should be available in all cities formed by historical buildings: Uzhhorod, Lutsk, Odesa, Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, and others.’

14→

PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF THE PAST FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Liudmyla Yavorska
Head of misto.media



‘It is crucial for us now to work on preserving historical heritage.

I once wondered what interwar Lutsk was like in the 20th century. It was filled with people, buildings, and hopes. You could see all kinds of people on the streets. Jews running shops and selling sweets, Czechs brewing beer and firing bricks, Armenians telling children how they built Liubart’s Castle, Germans talking about the Lutheran Kirche, Poles sitting in the official cabinets (as they were in power), Ukrainians fighting for their schools and theatres, and Karaites gathering to preserve their community. Everyone lived side-by-side, because Lutsk was a multinational city.

However, under Soviet rule, these voices were silenced: national identities were destroyed, leaving only the permissible image of the “Soviet person”. Some nations were physically exterminated, some were deported, and some left voluntarily.

While contemplating the importance of documenting contemporary significant events, we realise we have significant gaps in our historical record. The life and history of the Karaite community in Lutsk is one such gap. During the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the cities of Lutsk in the Volyn Oblast and Halych in the Ivano-Frankivsk

Oblast were the sites of the largest Karaite settlements, excluding Crimea.

This is how the idea came about: to find, document, and tell the history of the Karaites in Lutsk while it is still possible to find the lost trace, and subsequently, to record and preserve the memory of this community in one of the largest places of their settlement through contemporary formats of stories about traditions, architecture, urban life, publishing, poetry, and so on.’

15→

WITHOUT A LIVING
LANGUAGE, NATIONAL
CULTURE BECOMES
A MUSEUM EXHIBIT

Eldar Osman

Head of the NGO QIRI'M Young



‘Language is the software of our culture. Without it, all other elements – customs, clothing, and songs – become mere “hardware” that does not function, a lifeless museum exhibit. At our first meetings in Lviv, we instinctively tried to create our own microcosm so we would not melt into our new environment. To be honest, my Crimean Tatar was very basic at the time. I could understand and speak it, but I could also feel the lack of depth.

Why was the language already in decline even before the war? The honest answer is that we did not use it enough ourselves. It often remained confined to the home, limited to family settings, and even there, people frequently spoke Russian, since the public sphere was Russified. 2014 and later 2022 became moments of reassessment. With the start of the full-scale invasion, I stopped using Russian entirely – it became a matter of hygiene. At the same time, it is unfortunately difficult to switch fully to Crimean Tatar in everyday life due to the lack of a supportive language environment on the mainland.

Working on the Language Corpus together with Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University gave us a deeper understanding of the problem. We encountered a serious shortage of specialists. There are very few

professionals who can work with texts at an academic level, and most of them are elderly. We paired a young volunteer, who sat at a computer, with an elderly linguist with a book. Thanks to this tandem, we digitised our heritage.

Throughout history, our literature has been written in four different writing systems. Reducing this diversity to a single standard suitable for machine learning was a titanic task. In addition, the war scattered the language’s speakers. The last place where our community gathered and could communicate freely outside occupied Crimea was Kherson, but the occupation of the south destroyed that community as well.

All of this prompted me to pursue an academic career. By combining technical expertise with linguistics, I will be able to bring the greatest benefit to my country and my people.’

16→

IN A WORLD AT PEACE,
DIGITISATION MAKES
MUSEUMS MORE
ACCESSIBLE. IN
A WORLD AT WAR,
IT SAVES ARTWORKS
FROM DESTRUCTION

Oleksii Voronko

Manager of Digital Transformation
and Grant Activity at Odesa
National Art Museum



‘Despite the overall heavy workload for employees, everyone is aware that both the collection and the museum’s archive must be digitised. Firstly, this helps the museum comply with global standards of openness and enables it to provide equal access to the national cultural heritage. Secondly, it allows all interested parties to conduct research using our unique materials.

We presented the results of the first wave of archive digitisation in February 2023. The goal was to digitise the most interesting documents from as many funds as possible. These are the documents we posted for free access on the museum’s website. Later, in the summer of 2023, we digitised a large collection of documents relating to the restoration work in the palace building.

I have been involved in the third wave of digitising documents from the early 20th century to the present. This includes 8,100 documents from 9 funds. Among them are the funds of museum research fellows Lidiia Kalmanovska, Abram Shyster, and Oleksandr Tiuriumin; artists Petro Nilus, Hennadii Malyshev, and Feliia Falchuk; and contemporary art critics Ute Kiltner, Mykhailo Rashkovetskyi, and Semen Kantor. House of Europe supported the project.

The most important thing, in my opinion, is to make public a large amount of information about the fact that Odesa has a unique local school in practically every period of history. Furthermore, almost any document from the imperial and Soviet eras is evidence of colonial policy at different levels: from organising mandatory “agitation trains” to months-long correspondence with Moscow officials seeking approval to hold exhibitions in the museum.

Our goal is to digitise the museum’s collection and archive fully.’

17→

IN THE 21ST CENTURY,
THE MOST IMPORTANT
SKILL FOR SURVIVAL IN
WAR IS NOT TO BE AFRAID
TO CRITICALLY LOOK AT
WHAT YOU SUPPOSEDLY
KNOW ABOUT RUSSIA

Inna Pavlenko

Head of the Project Management
Department at Zaporizhzhia Regional
Universal Research Library



‘Since 2022, there have been many waves of propaganda attacks on Ukrainians by Russians, intended to cause panic among the population. There have been many attempts to destabilise society by manipulating our values. This is the most insidious weapon.

It is not worth waiting until the war is close; it is important to take preemptive action now. Before Russian tanks enter any country, the Russian church, culture, media, and science will enter first, and Russian narratives will be promoted in the information field. First and foremost, one should start with a total revision of one’s own views. Do not be afraid to subject even fundamental knowledge to doubt.

Foreigners have many imposed stereotypes and misconceptions about the past and present, about Russia and Russians, which impede objective assessment, critical analysis, and substantiated forecasting. This is what poses the greatest danger, limiting their ability to defend themselves. This threat is, of course, most pressing for Europe.

It is important that the citizens of other countries thoroughly understand the trends in current processes and recognise the threats to themselves. Playing diplomatic games with

an aggressive, militaristic country resulted in Europeans seeing Russian drones and fighter jets above their heads. We have a shared threat, and it is now obvious that the only condition for Europe’s safety is the military defeat of the Russian Federation.’

18 →

IT IS TIME TO
ACKNOWLEDGE:
RUSSIA IS A COLONISER,
EVEN IF IT TRIES TO
PROVE OTHERWISE

Nadiia Koval, Anastasiia
Omelianiuk, Iva Naidenko,
Yuliia Elias

Curators of the Ukrainian
Decolonial Glossary



‘The challenge we face is that Russia always presents itself as the leader of the anti-colonisation movement. As the legal successor to the USSR, it is attempting to return to the Cold War era and demonstrate that it is an alternative to Western capitalism and even imperialism. This is the narrative of their propaganda, and it works, specifically, to gain sympathy in the countries we refer to as the Global South. The narrative is that Russia is not a colonial state, it is not an empire.

Russians are instrumentalising the decolonial discourse. And there is an opinion among Europeans that “Russia has a different role, they are not colonisers.” However, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and Belarusians are shouting the opposite. If we look at Russia’s policy during the years when it was called an empire or during the years of the Soviet Union, we will see processes that intersect with the colonial policies European countries carried out in various parts of the world.

In its narrative, Russia is trying to appropriate not only Ukrainian but also European things in order to strengthen the propaganda narratives that it is the carrier of culture and education. This further underscores it as an empire and a coloniser.

We must explain the basics: this process did not begin in 2014 or 2022. It has a very long

history. Accepting Russia as a coloniser and Ukrainians as a victim of this policy is not an easy step for everyone. For many Ukrainians, it is difficult to admit that they were colonised, and that their ancestors were colonised, and then to fundamentally rethink a part of their consciousness.’

19→

USING ITS OWN HISTORY
AS AN EXAMPLE, UKRAINE
SHOWS: IT IS NEVER TOO
LATE TO BEGIN REFUTING
THE RUSSIAN-SOVIET
STEREOTYPES

Serhii Bozhko

Senior Research Fellow at
the National Reserve Sophia of Kyiv



'In the National Reserve Sophia of Kyiv, we conduct tours of our branches. These are St. Sophia Cathedral, St. Andrew's Church, St. Cyril's Church, and the Golden Gate. De jure, the Reserve also includes the Sudak Fortress, which is located in the temporarily occupied territory.

We look at which country the person is travelling from, and how best to present the information to them. This practice existed before, but now the demand for such tours has grown. This is cultural diplomacy.

The programme for the visit of foreign guests is compiled by the Protocol Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Primarily, everyone is interested in St. Sophia Cathedral. There, we first draw the guests' attention to the sarcophagus of Yaroslav the Wise and tell them that the prince's remains, according to the latest information, are in New York, at the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity. The icon of St. Nicholas the Wet has already been discovered there, a 12th-century work that was taken out of St. Sophia of Kyiv by Ukrainian priests during the Second World War. It is likely that the remains of Yaroslav the Wise were removed at the same time.

Ukrainian scholars are convinced that the remains in the sarcophagus in Kyiv belong to

Yaroslav's wife, the Swedish princess Ingegerd. To prove this, we plan to conduct a comparative DNA analysis. The Russian version, which originated in Soviet times, claims that she is buried in Novgorod, hence one of the princess's known names, Anna of Novgorod. This stereotype, that she is a Russian saint, is unfortunately widespread in Sweden. In the 1990s, a popular science book about Ingegerd was published there, which described this Russian version. The book was translated into English and is available online. We, however, refute this Soviet stereotype and assert that it is incorrect. Princess Ingegerd, the mother of six princes and four queens, is buried specifically in Kyiv.'

20→

DECOLONIAL STUDIES ARE
NOT ONLY A NECESSITY
BUT ALSO A FOUNDATION
FOR FINDING COMMON
GROUND WITH THE
WORLD

Nadiia Koval, Anastasiia
Omelianiuk, Iva Naidenko,
Yuliia Elias

Curators of the Ukrainian
Decolonial Glossary



‘Decolonial studies are shared theories that help various countries (Ireland, Syria, France, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine) work with the past, and build the future. This provides an opportunity to speak together, think together, and learn from one another.

Decolonisation has been discussed in Ukraine for a long time. For example, Ivan Dziuba. Then, Oksana Zabuzhko, Tamara Hundorova, Vira Aheieva, and Vitalii Chernetskyi. We have a tradition. But before, it was not large-scale and was not included in Western studies.

Ukrainian Decolonial Glossary that we created is a working tool that includes the findings of various specialists. It aims to help Ukrainians, for example, those working in the field of culture, communicate with foreign partners on these topics, as well as foreign researchers who lack the necessary knowledge base, since their education is Russia-centric.

We often explain our work as a translation that works both ways: we translate foreign authors into Ukrainian, and back, the Ukrainian experience into the context in which we currently find ourselves abroad. We are building little bridges between different contexts.

The whole world is built on colonisation. There is no person who has not been touched by

colonisation. If we accept this and enter decolonisation studies with our strong perspectives, history, and opinions, it will be very valuable for both us and decolonisation studies.

We have the opportunity to explore ways to foster dialogue and establish a common vocabulary with Europeans. But what is more important, with other republics colonised by Russia.

The Ukrainian experience is useful for the general discourse because it returns the acuity to this discussion. Often, there is a large gap in time between the processes of colonisation and the present day. We, Ukrainians, are currently living in a post-colonial context and are in an acute phase of war.’

21→

WE CANNOT ALWAYS
ERASE IMPERIAL
HERITAGE, BUT
WE CAN CHANGE
OUR PERSPECTIVE.
DECOLONISATION
STARTS WITH THE MIND

Serhii Bozhko

Senior Research Fellow
at the National Reserve Sophia of Kyiv



‘One of Kyiv’s landmarks, St. Andrew’s Church was built by order of Elizabeth (Elizaveta Petrovna), the daughter of the Russian Emperor Peter I. In the summer of 1744, she and her favourite, Alexei Razumovsky, came to Kyiv, and one of them initiated the construction of a brick church on this hill in place of the wooden one that had collapsed.

Mariinsky Palace, which today is the official ceremonial residence of the President of Ukraine, was also commissioned by Elizabeth. There are still cartouches with her monogram, EP, on the façades, although they are difficult to discern.

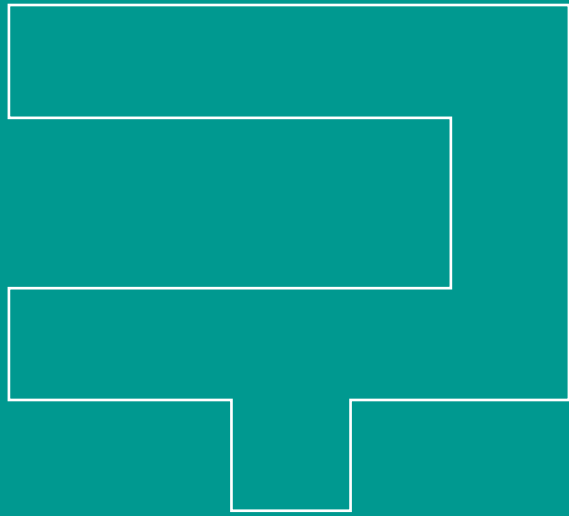
We told this story about the connection between the Russian princess and Kyiv until 2014. After the war with Russia began, it became clear that such a presentation of this history would only irritate Ukrainian listeners. So now, we talk more about the creators, not the patrons: for example, the architect Rastrelli, whose drawings were also used to build the Pokrovskyi Cathedral in Okhtryka and Rundāle Palace in Latvia.

In addition to Rastrelli, who drew the project, a whole international team worked on St. Andrew’s Church, including the German master joiner Johann Grot, and the gilding work was performed by the French master

François Leprince. Local Ukrainian craftsmen, carvers, and artists were also involved.

We must present the information in a balanced way: not hide the past, but at the same time, not reduce it solely to the empire.’





HOW MANY 'UNCOMFORTABLE' HISTORICAL
MONUMENTS ARE THERE IN YOUR CITY?

22→

THE MUSEUM IS LIKE
A LIGHTHOUSE IN THE
MIDDLE OF A STORM.
WHILE THE CITY IS IN
SEARCH OF ITS OWN
IDENTITY, THE MUSEUM
COLLECTS FACTS

Oleksii Voronko

Manager of Digital Transformation
and Grant Activity at Odesa
National Art Museum



'If I were to make an educated guess, I would say that society is currently noticeably polarised. There are still enough supporters of the previous "Odesa myth", which includes Catherine II, Potemkin, Pryvoz market, Duke de Richelieu, and so on. On the other hand, research and discussion of alternative narratives have clearly become active, and, most importantly, at least part of the population is interested in them.

We are talking about settlement in this territory that emerged during the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the subsequent Ottoman period. Recently, in July 2025, historian and archaeologist Andrii Krasnozhan finally found a fragment of the wall of the Ottoman fortress, which is now material confirmation of Odesa's non-founding by the Russian Empire.

Researchers are rediscovering the 1920s in Odesa, which are on par with those in Kharkiv. There is great interest in Odesan Modernism of the second half of the 20th century and in the dissidents. Ukrainian-language texts about Odesa, such as "Master of the Ship" by Yurii Yanovskyi or "Above the Black Sea" by Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi, are finally becoming part of popular Ukrainian culture. And the museum, as a place where archives are collected, can offer answers to these inquiries.'



23 →

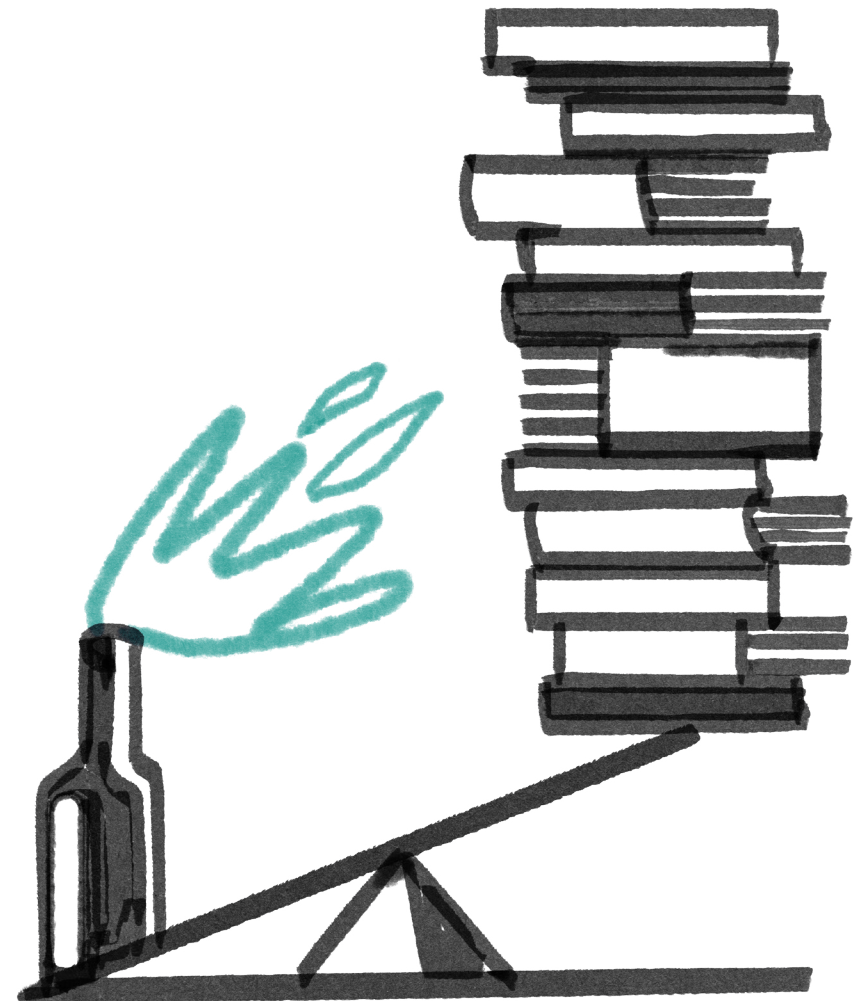
UKRAINE IS NOT
JUST TALKING ABOUT
DECOLONISATION,
IT IS LIBERATING ITS
TERRITORY

Nadiia Koval, Anastasiia
Omelianiuk, Iva Naidenko,
Yuliia Elias

Curators of the Ukrainian
Decolonial Glossary



110



111

‘In European academic studies, decolonial theories have become so popular that they have become blurred, and decolonisation is perceived somewhat as a fashionable accessory. Some people accuse Ukrainians: “You also want to be fashionable and use the term decolonisation.”

However, decolonisation is not a metaphor, as Eve Tuck wrote. It is a movement, meaning we, Ukrainians, are actually decolonising the land: in the Ukrainian context, there is specifically occupied land where the aggressor is committing terrible crimes. Only then do we speak about language and memory, this cultural and psychological space.

The trap is that one can create an exhibition or other projects about decolonisation, but leave the situation unchanged. This exhibition will make one feel like they are a good person, but systematic, strategic changes will not follow. And we, Ukrainian researchers, constantly emphasise this: real actions must accompany the theories.’



24→

PEOPLE WHO NEED HELP
CAN ALSO OFFER IT – IN
WHATEVER WAY THEY
CAN

Liudmyla Petrova

Project Manager for
the Good Bread platform



‘Adults with mental disabilities are often invisible in our society. There are many centres for children with autism, Down syndrome, and other conditions, but once they grow up, we barely see them. At best, they remain isolated at home, cared for by their parents. When the state assumes responsibility for them, they are placed in psychoneurological residential institutions. That is why we are here – to give them the opportunity to leave such facilities, to see the world, and to feel a sense of belonging.

This involvement and sense of purpose bring real joy to people with mental disabilities. You should see how happy they are to prepare and deliver food to those in need.

We want to drive change in society. We want employers to notice people they may have previously overlooked. In the end, this will benefit society as a whole.

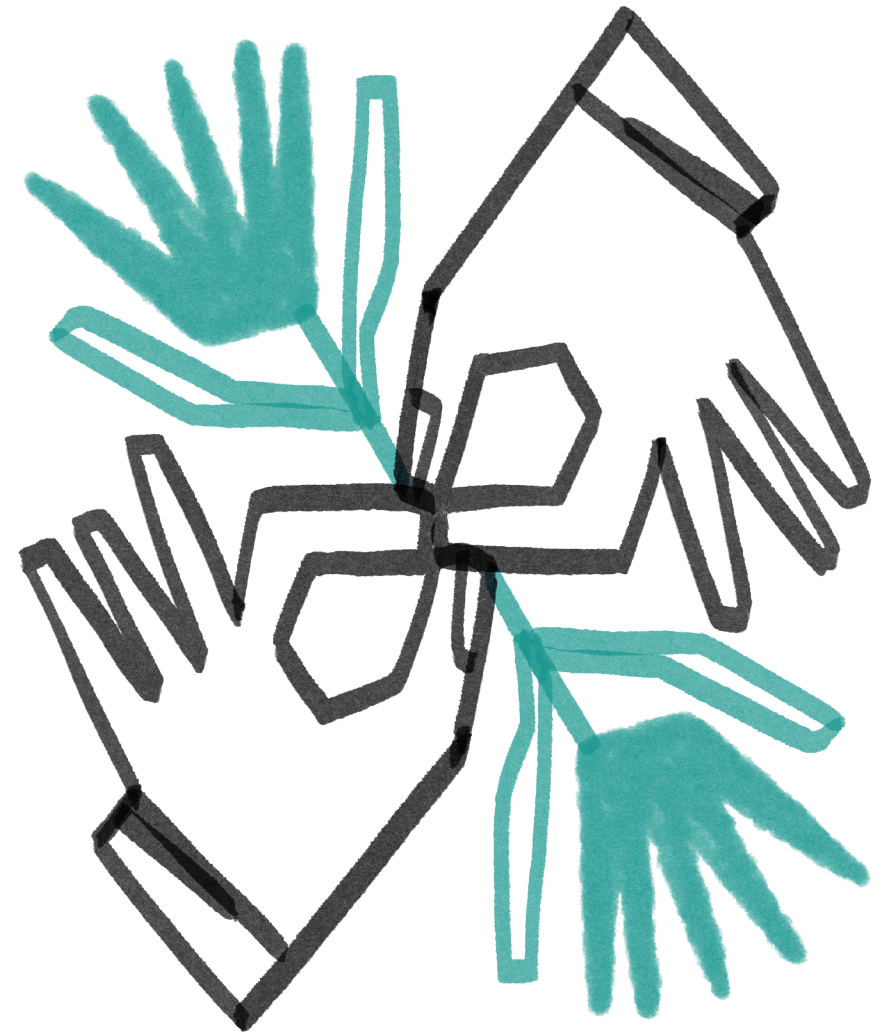
There was a period of time when our bakery was closed. One of our employees, Vitia, called every day to ask if he could come in to work. The founders of the bakery have the option to pursue other paths if they so choose, but for the people who work there, the bakery is currently the only place where they can truly realise themselves.’

25 →

ALL RESOURCES ARE
FINITE, AND THE MOST
FINITE OF THEM ALL
IS TIME

Olesia Zakharova,
Snizhana Nikolaienko,
Yelyzaveta Prasolova

Nafta Theatre
Collective



‘You have to keep asking yourself, “Is what I am doing right now actually necessary? Is it truly effective?”

The circumstances of war make everything feel incredibly vital; that is why we must be honest with ourselves and only do what truly fulfils us and carries meaning.

Theatre offers a moment in time when we can shift our focus to collective movement, collective action, and shared thoughts – creating a common context. This space that opens up between the audience and the performers allows us to be with what is happening right here, right now. In these times, it is what gives us strength.

This connects the theatre to the garden. The garden as a concept, a place, an activity, a shared endeavour. It is another dimension that gives us the strength to keep doing what we do, on the land where we do it, and for that land’s sake. For those who will come after us, because a garden is something that permeates time. A garden transforms and embraces change. It exists alongside us, and it will continue to exist long after we are gone.’

26→

DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE
LIBRARIES: NOT ONLY DO
THEY PROVIDE BOOKS,
BUT THEY ALSO HELP
OVERCOME FEARS

Inna Pavlenko

Head of the Project Management
Department at Zaporizhzhia
Regional Universal Research
Library



'Isolation leads to emotional withdrawal among children and young people. Therefore, we are making efforts to help them feel more comfortable and confident, get to know their peers better, and make new friends.

Thanks to donor support, we were able to purchase a powerful generator and mobile charging stations. Thus, library visitors gained the opportunity to charge their gadgets and stay in touch with relatives, study, and work when they have no electricity at home.

We sought to create a comfortable and attractive safe space where people could stay during air raid alerts. That is how the creative shelter space, "The Mysterious Dungeon," came into being.

Based on observations and research, we found that the most stressful moment of staying in a shelter is transition into the basement itself, when a person goes from light and warmth into darkness, cold, dampness, and stuffiness. This applies to everyone, but children reacted most acutely. So, we installed bright lighting, a heater, a ventilation system, purchased equipment and comfortable mobile furniture, set up Wi-Fi, and the entrance to our shelter is now decorated with artistic murals. We tell the children that we are going through a magical forest to a mysterious dungeon where a hobbit's house is located.

Thus, with the help of a mix of art and storytelling, we overcome children's greatest fears and combat stress.'



27→

RESILIENCE GROWS
FROM CONSTANT
COMMUNICATION AND
INTERACTION WITH
PARTNERS

Liudmyla Petrova

Project Manager for
the Good Bread platform



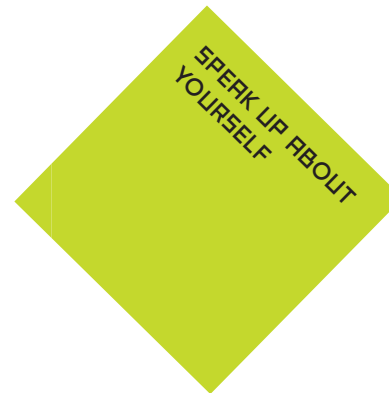
‘Shortly after the full-scale invasion began, foreign foundations started to learn about us. To support our work, they either donated equipment or provided funding, which we used to purchase what we needed. We assist not only people with mental disabilities, but also internally displaced persons and low-income individuals.

Now, we and other community initiatives across Ukraine are facing a decline in foreign aid: attention is fading, and “war fatigue” is setting in.

That is why communication is so important. Even if you are doing the best possible work and truly helping people, if you do not speak up about it, no one will know. And without visibility, you lose the ability to help anyone.

We have proven ourselves to be reliable partners, and the donors who supported us in 2022 continue to stand with us in 2025. They also recommend us to other foundations, which allows us to expand and strengthen our work. For example, House of Europe supported our space where people with mental disabilities can learn to live independently in comfortable conditions. Organisations from the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the embassies of Canada and Ireland, continue to provide their support.

Communication creates mutual support – and multiplies it. That is how synergy emerges. You share what you have done; others help you continue; a fourth party hears about it; a fifth supports you in ways you never expected. So you keep doing what you can, where you can, with the resources you have.’



28 →

THOSE WHO TRULY
WANT TO FIND
A COMMON LANGUAGE
WILL FIND IT AND
WILL DISCOVER A NEW
WORLD THROUGH
CREATIVITY



Marco Vidal González

Founder of the publishing house
La Tortuga Búlgara



‘War does not suppress creativity. On the contrary, it intensifies it, giving a voice to those who continue to strive for freedom. For Spanish-speaking readers anthology of Ukrainian poetry is of great importance, offering a profound and poignant vision of modern Ukraine. These poems create a cultural bridge that fosters compassion and understanding, making Ukraine’s struggle visible and celebrating life that continues despite everything.

Working on the anthology of Ukrainian poetry, we discovered a great deal. And it was not difficult, since previously we knew almost nothing about Ukrainian literature. Generally, in Spain, knowledge of the “East” is limited, and everything is often reduced to generalisations.

Personally, I have professional ties with Bulgaria and know that country and its language well, but there are many other Slavic countries with which I have not had the opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted. The more I learn about Ukrainian literature, the more I like it. Following the anthology, we published three more books: “My Women” by Yuliya Iliukha, “Valse Mélancolique” by Olha Kobyljanska, and several short stories by Mykola Khvylovy. Very soon, the poetry of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych will also be released.

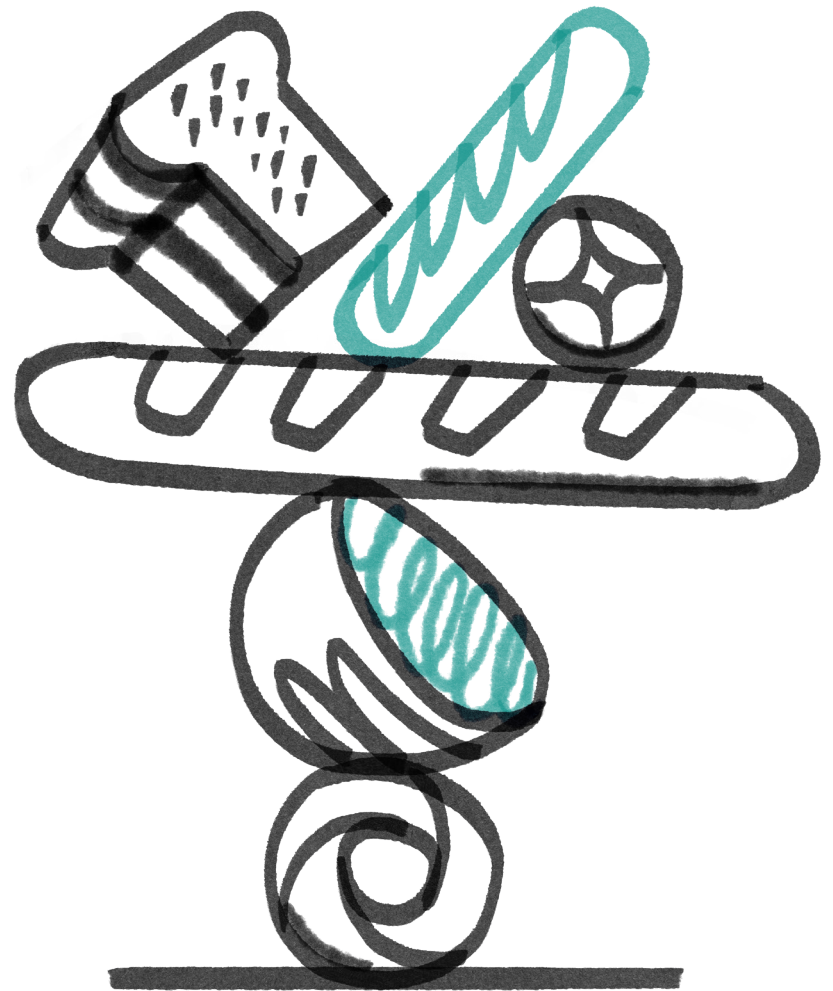
This anthology opened a door to a dimension I had not previously known, and which, unfortunately, is insufficiently explored in Spain: Ukrainian literature. This discovery has been the best gift.’

29→

BREAD IS A SYMBOL OF CARE AND UNITY

Liudmyla Petrova

Project Manager
for the Good Bread platform



‘Good Bread for Good People was closed for two weeks after the invasion began: the people in our care either sheltered in their homes or were evacuated to villages or to the west of the country. But on 9 March, we resumed baking bread.

The founder of the bakery, Vladyslav Malashchenko, wrote a post on Facebook announcing that we would bake bread and provide it free of charge to territorial defence fighters. Many people volunteered to help – journalists, actors, and those who had found themselves in difficult circumstances, having lost their jobs and feeling disoriented. A lot of young people came as well. Sometimes, 10 to 15 people we had never met before would show up to work a shift. That is how we went from baking 200 loaves a day to 2,000.

Ours was the first bread people saw in Irpin and Bucha. Before bomb disposal teams had even arrived to clear the mines, volunteers delivered loaves by bicycle and in old, rickety cars.

Our bread was also among the first to reach the deoccupied territories. It was brought to shelters for internally displaced persons and to people with disabilities in Dnipro and Kharkiv. And now it is being delivered to our military by drones. This is a great honour for our bread.

Our bread is a symbol of care. It is our message to those on the front lines and in frontline communities that we remember them and will not abandon them. Despite missile strikes and blackouts, we continue to bake.’

EO→

WHEN YOU ARE FAR
FROM HOME, FOOD
CAN RESTORE A SENSE
OF SECURITY AND
BELONGING

Eldar Osman

Head of the NGO QIRI'M Young



‘We were able to teach machines to translate the Crimean Tatar language. But national cuisine cannot be digitised. You cannot upload the aroma of coffee or the taste of freshly baked köbete to the cloud.

In Crimea, cuisine was a true ecosystem, where everything was available – from street food to refined confectionery. The restaurants there offered a high level of gastronomy and service, but above all, they were a natural linguistic environment. You could walk in, say “Selâm aleyküm”, and know that you will be understood – not as a gimmick of the establishment, but as part of everyday life. When we found ourselves in Lviv, our culinary evenings became a kind of time machine. We would gather, make manti, and cook pilaf. We even tried to speak only Crimean Tatar at those gatherings.

Food has the power to transport you back to your homeland and into your childhood home. For us, it created the psychological comfort we so desperately needed.

Here, on the mainland, we are still in the process of recreating that feeling. The situation varies from city to city, from one establishment to another. Some places offer better flavours; others feel less authentic. Personally, I miss not so much the dishes themselves as the atmosphere of a Crimean

Tatar establishment – that feeling when the space itself breathes culture.

Cuisine is probably the most enjoyable way for Ukrainians to experience our culture. But unlike language, which we are successfully preserving in digital repositories, gastronomic tradition exists only in the real world – in conversations around the dinner table.

We try to preserve our traditions even when we are scattered across the world. Religious holidays, especially Qurban Bayram, are an important time of unity for us. This is when we gather in the greatest numbers – hundreds of families. Traditionally, we slaughter a lamb and share it. But people do not come just for the meat. They come for a sense of community that cannot be conveyed in any other way. In moments like these, we feel whole again.’

→E1

A CULTURAL
MANAGER NEEDS
TO KNOW HOW
TO SHOOT

Andrii Kotliar

Cinematographer, Producer
for the Babylon'13 collective



'I think that if you are a Ukrainian artist, you have to be with the Ukrainian people in all their hardships.

We must tell our Western colleagues that the war will come to them. Although, we do not need to explain this to our friends in the Baltic countries: they are preparing because they understand they will be next.

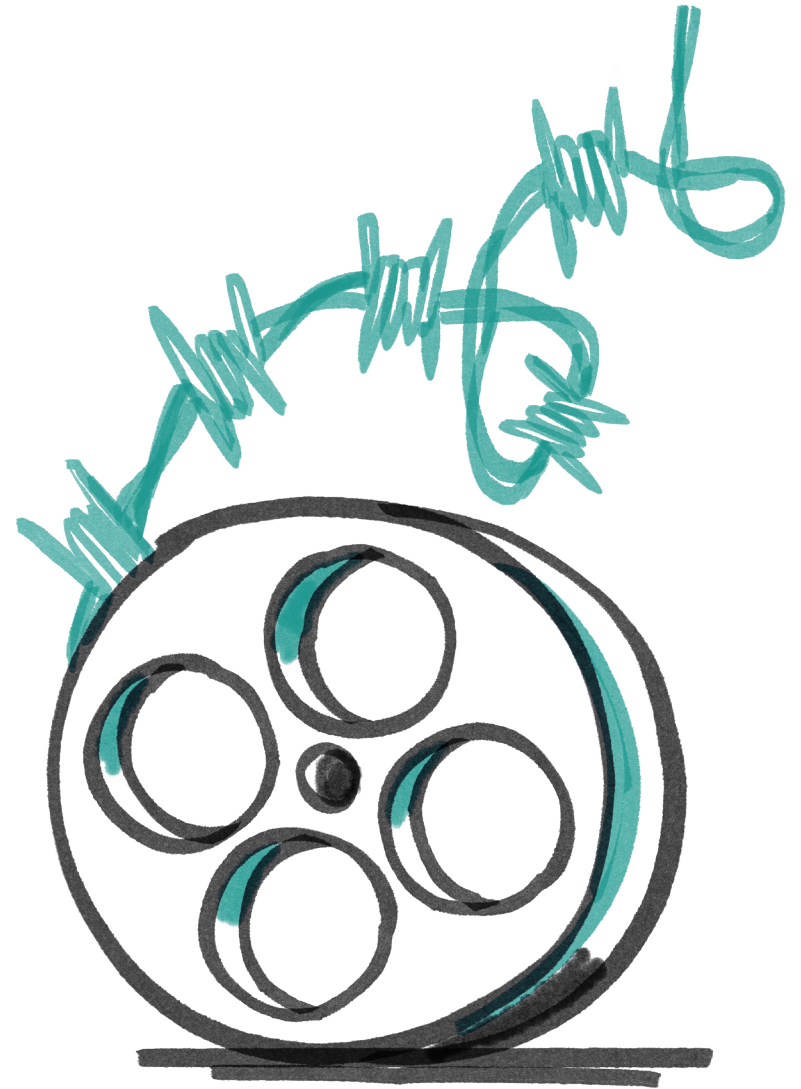
I advise all my colleagues to master certain skills and understand how to act under stress, take a good course in tactical medicine, and have a basic understanding of how to save a person's life. It is worth learning about backup power devices and how to make your life more comfortable in the event of an electricity outage. If you are ready to take up arms, you can go to a firing range; you do not need to fire a thousand rounds, just become familiar with the weapon. Do not be afraid of it. I never knew how to shoot, and now I do. Yes, a cultural manager also needs to know how to shoot: I am currently on duty, so I need this to survive.'

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WITH THE WAR
STILL ONGOING, THE
CHALLENGE IS HELPING
SOLDIERS TRANSITION
BACK TO CIVILIAN LIFE
AND CAREERS

Andrii Kotliar

Cinematographer, Producer
for the Babylon'13 collective



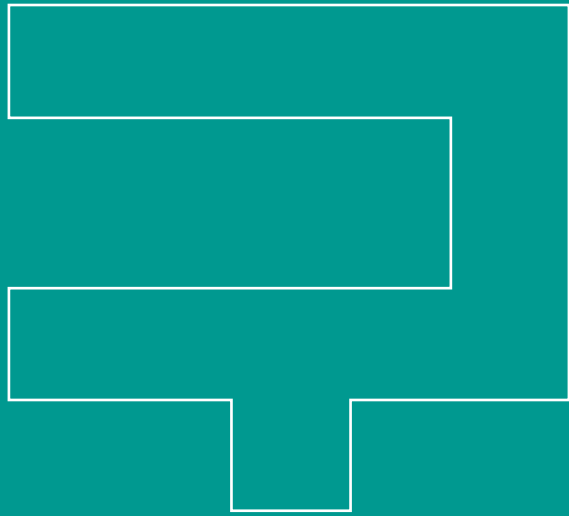
‘The war is taking many professionals from the film industry. This sets the industry back years. We are losing great specialists in the war, and not only those killed or wounded. Some people simply will never return to this work because their lives have fundamentally changed. A friend of mine, a very good cinematographer, has been in the army since 2022, and he will never return to the cinema. For him, it no longer matters; he is interested in military technologies.

On the other hand, I have another friend, a lighting designer. We worked together before the full-scale invasion. Now, he is in the military in a combat role, and he is afraid that he has lost his professional skills. He has not been on a film set for four years and has health problems. Meanwhile, his other colleagues continue to work and improve their professional skills.

We need to think about how to reintegrate people. We will be dealing with this internally within our organisation because we have mobilised specialists. We are pondering how to “bring them up to speed,” what projects and space we can offer.

Also, one of the priorities for the next six months is to seek grants to support the mental health of our collective as a whole.

Today, the war is a marathon, during which we must take care of the people around us and try to figure out how to help and support them.’



WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN THE WAR ENDS?
AND WHAT IF IT DOES NOT?

**Volodymyr Yermolenko →
Rules for living in a world where
rules no longer exist**

Culture is the translation of experiences. Yet experience itself is untranslatable. You cannot truly understand ‘what it is like’ to be under fire unless you have been under fire yourself. You cannot understand ‘what it is like’: to lose those closest to you unless you have lost them yourself.

But culture is a desperate attempt to translate the untranslatable.

It will not let you feel, in full measure, the ‘what it is like’. But it will bring you closer to that feeling. It will lead you as close as possible to the border of a country you have never been to.

Culture allows us to learn. From the experience of others. From the pain of others. From the joys of others.

It is a school of human interaction. And in this school, we Ukrainians have something to tell you.

These are my rules for living. They are rules for a world where rules no longer exist. They are rules for a world where life ends quickly. These are my rules as a Ukrainian, though it is not a given that other Ukrainians will agree with them.

Whether they are useful to you or not is for you to decide.

Rules are like fish: more often than not, they slip through your fingers.

But if you should find you need them after all, pass them on to your friends and your enemies. And along with them, pass on greetings from a land where people live despite death, love despite hate, and find joy despite sorrow.

Live despite

Ukrainians live not because of, but despite. Our concept of ‘воля’ (volia, translated as both will and freedom) means ‘freedom despite’. It is a freedom that requires an act of will. It is freedom against the current.

We swim away from the sea, not towards it.

Great things are achieved only when you have overcome something. The matter of the world is inert, and often hostile. You can do what others deem impossible. Freedom is a muscle that must be trained. In comfortable conditions, it atrophies.

To live despite, to live in spite of, means to seek rare flowers. It means saving a life where it is thought to have died.

It means giving love where it is thought to have no chance.

Strive for the impossible

The impossible is often just a boundary established by previous experience. Sometimes the impossible is a cage created for us by someone else.

When you fly out, it remains a cage, the same as before, but without you.

The essence of human effort lies in pushing these boundaries.

Some things are truly impossible, while others only seem so. Courage is testing which is which. Wisdom is the ability to distinguish the possible from the impossible. Therefore, wisdom is inextricably linked to courage.

‘The brave always have good fortune,’ wrote the Ukrainian classic Ivan Bahrianyi (trans. George S. N. Luckyj, 1954).

Connect with others

‘Hell is other people,’ Sartre said; ‘hell is the absence of other people,’ we say.

Never before in human history have we been so dependent on one another and so helpless alone, and never before have we poisoned ourselves with the illusion of individualism so much.

On our own, we cannot feed ourselves, clothe ourselves, warm ourselves, or be happy... Yet we are

constantly focused on ourselves, our image, our pleasure, and our reputation.

But the truth is simple: we live thanks to others, and others live thanks to us. We are dependent on others every second of our existence. These others may hold worldviews we loathe, listen to music we find repulsive, or live in a country we want to know nothing about. And yet, we are dependent on others like an infant on its parents.

The Ukrainian experience shows: communities matter; connections between people can be lifesaving; you can only achieve something by connecting and bonding yourself to others.

Connect with as many people as possible, and then something important might happen.

Have faith

We have never seen the most important things in the world.

Love, justice, virtue, eternity, beauty... We only suspect they exist. We are always deceived by someone or something.

And yet, we search for them constantly because we believe they are there.

Without faith, we are deprived of eyes. Without faith, we are prey for hunters.

We have chased 'critical thinking' so desperately that we have forgotten about faith.

Faith without critical thinking is fanatical, but critical thinking without faith is powerless.

Ukrainians believe in victory, even though empirical reality provides no grounds for it. Our ancestors believed Ukraine would become independent, even though empirical reality denied the possibility of such a development.

Through faith in small things, we are able to live through today. Through faith in great things, we can change the world.

Do not mistake critical thinking for a lack of faith. Do not mistake the reason for despair.

Know how to defend yourself

Evil will not vanish from human nature. It will not wither away under the kind sun of a 'pocket' ideology. Evil will always be within us. It is our disease. We were born sick. We are children of original sin. The Christians are right, even when they are atheists.

But besides 'original sin,' there is also 'original good' within us. Good and evil struggle inside us every day. And no victory for either is ever final. The next moment, a new war begins.

Know how to defend yourself against evil. Not just to avoid it, but to defend against it. Not just to plead with it, to enter into trusting relationships with it (to supposedly disarm it), or to draw its attention to international law and the UN Charter, but to defend against it.

Sometimes dialogue is needed, and sometimes a fight is needed.

Because the fear of provoking evil provokes evil. Because evil goes where it meets no resistance.

Because evil feeds on impunity.

Value life, for it is fragile

Life is a miracle authorised by physics, chemistry, and biology. It is a miracle translated into the language of matter.

Pascal said: 'Man is a thinking reed.' He is a reed, and easily broken. But he thinks, and through him, the universe introduces itself to itself.

The universe can only know itself through man. Only through the thinking reed. Only through the brain, which is the mirror of the universe, but which is as fragile as a real mirror.

Life is fragile, it can end at any moment. There are forces in this world that want it to end right now.

You have just seen dark spots on a page, translated them into sounds, sounds into words, words into meanings, and reflected on them. This is already a miracle. In this moment, you have taken several breaths. Your body is working by itself. This is a miracle.

‘Man is a living being endowed with rational speech,’ said Aristotle. But we say: ‘Man is a living being who becomes aware of life at the moment it might disappear.’

Value it while it lasts. For soon it will be gone.

Love, for it is useful

The modern world warns us against love. It brings us back to the idea that love is a trap. That it is a danger.

That love is too idealistic. That it is too infantile.

To love is to give of oneself. But we are taught to live in energy-saving mode. We are taught to accumulate. We are taught to have a private space with a fence and a guard dog.

And so we become lonely. Behind the fence, behind the guard dog.

But it is never too late to love. War teaches love. People defend themselves not out of hate, but out of love.

Because hate teaches nothing and protects no one.

The more vulnerable life is, the stronger the love. The shorter the moment, the sharper the arrow of enchantment.

Love, for it is the best way to connect. Give when you can, for it is the best way to gain.

Those who love are those who cannot do without others. Those who love are those whom others cannot do without.

**Natalie Nougayrède →
Thinking about Europe from
Ukraine: the big war, culture,
and our self-understanding**

At a public discussion in a Lviv bookstore, in the Autumn of 2025, a young Ukrainian woman in the audience raised her hand to ask a writer a question. He had just presented his book. He was a combat medic, with years of experience on the front since 2014. The woman asked what his message would be to ‘foreigners’: what would be the main thing he would tell them? She was preparing to travel to Brussels and then Lisbon, she wanted to raise awareness about the war and rally support for Ukraine. The writer paused and said: ‘We must say that our fight is about values, democracy, the right to freely speak our own minds, to live as we like; we will never go back to what we were subjected to for seventy years.’

After the public discussion, I went up to the woman to thank her for her question. ‘He’s right,’ she said, ‘it is important to tell people outside Ukraine that this is not just about territory.’ The intensity with which she had asked her question had struck me. It reflected a widespread frustration and sense of urgency among Ukrainians about having to constantly make their case to people abroad, not least in Europe. It also reflected a deeper questioning: do other Europeans really understand us? Can they feel what we are going through? Can they fully discern the stakes? Ukrainians deploy great energy to explain their cause

and themselves to other Europeans. Writers, artists, activists, and academics, take the long train rides to cross into EU territory. They speak at conferences and festivals about identity, culture, memory, and resistance against empire and military aggression. Each one of these efforts is like a symbolic act of combat, a contribution to the fight against Russia’s attempt to subdue, break, erase Ukraine.

When Ukrainian culture-makers speak in front of audiences, they often start by paying homage to the soldiers ‘who allow us to live and continue to do what we do.’ Each word uttered by Ukraine’s cultural emissaries on a stage or studio in Paris, Bucharest, Berlin, or Rome, is single-mindedly focused on breaking down mental barriers, reaching across, convincing, calling to action.

By spreading the word about Ukrainian poetry, novels, essays, films, and music, they weave a fabric of knowledge and emotions that has the power to burst into the consciousness of others. They help grasp something essential about decency, connecting with others, coming together, and the irreplaceable value of each human being. They tell about the many artists and writers who have paid the highest price in this war.

They help us see Ukraine as not just a space on the continent’s map where drones and missiles fly and people huddle in metro stations at night, but as a living, breathing society of culture. A land where literature and heritage, in all their contrasts,

complexities, and beauty, offer a scaffolding on which people build a powerful sense of self. They also remind us, or rather teach us: together, we have a common destiny as Europeans.

I have spent time with Ukrainians from the world of culture and academia, watching their many travels to and fro, sharing in events with them inside Ukraine and outside. They trace a web of connections from Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Poltava, including small localities near the frontline, and then onwards to western Europe, to our rather blind and cocooned cities and capitals. It has made me think about not just the obvious need for more European action to ensure Russia is defeated rather than appeased.

It has made me ponder a question: what do we really know about each other across Europe?

What does this war reveal about our self-understanding, as Europeans, of our own space and peoples? And how are Ukrainians transforming that self-understanding? Is it possible that, by their constant crisscrossing of the continent, and having to find ways to engage with a myriad of different national or local audiences, Ukrainian artists, poets, and thinkers, are willy-nilly creating a wider European reckoning of togetherness?

George Steiner once listed what he believed defined 'the idea of Europe.' He saw it as a simultaneous combination of several elements. Europe, he suggested, is a space that can be physically

walked (no desert or mountain range, no Sahara nor Himalaya, impedes travel on foot); a space with cafés (the culture of cafés), a space where layers and layers of history are found everywhere around us or under our feet; a place where the highest levels of culture and sophistication can exist alongside the worse atrocities (Steiner mentions that the Buchenwald camp was located near Goethe's oak tree); a place where thinkers have long been obsessed with a fear that our 'civilisation' could one day disappear altogether.

Ukrainians 'walk' the European continent in the sense that George Steiner envisaged. Ukraine's culture emissaries travel by necessity in and out of their country by land, which highlights that connection to the ground. They are roamers of Europe, they are envoys, perhaps envoys from our future. As they mingle with other Europeans in conferences, film festivals, art exhibition, and book fairs, they are bearers of a crucial message about Ukraine's rootedness in Europe's cultural and historical tapestry, and about the need to protect and nurture that ancient connection.

They also bring us, western Europeans, the reminder that cultural legacy and refinement offer no protection, in of themselves, against the onslaught of violence and atrocity.

They bear witness to the fact that 'normal' life, life as we know it, can be annihilated in one fell swoop when the aggressor sets his sights on you, and that

resistance against annihilation calls for immense effort.

As they reach out to us, us the other Europeans, I think Ukrainians experience a sense of loneliness. Despite all the statements or gestures of support, despite all the diplomatic choreography, Ukrainians fight essentially alone. Let us face it: no other nation has sent troops to fight alongside them. Much has been said about the reasons for this. You have heard it all: Europeans have many problems already, they are not ready, war is terrifying, a long war is exhausting even to watch, people stick their heads in the sand like ostriches.

Can other Europeans truly know and feel the Ukrainian experience? Ukrainians produce numerous outstanding books, essays, podcasts, documentary films, art, and music, that all attempt to translate, for themselves and for others, what this war does and what it is about. Still, they often feel they hit a wall of incomprehension, or of passivity. Yet, step by step, they chip away at our mental barriers, our long held collective ignorance. Their efforts are not in vain. I have come to think of Ukraine's culture makers and thinkers who deploy their message across Europe as the weavers of a common continental consciousness. They are like custodians of a collective imagination we need to build on, before it is too late. Yes, they are the artisans of a new European mindset.

You see, there is a rarely mentioned fact: Europeans still do not know each other all that much. They tend not to pay much attention to their neighbours'

collective memories or cultural legacy. An average French or Italian person knows almost nothing about how Norway or Finland became independent.

An average Greek or a German person knows little, if anything, about the Irish struggle for emancipation and how poetry played a significant role in it. Not to mention the epistemic gap between, on one side, what Central and Eastern Europeans know about western Europe, and what western Europeans know about the eastern part of the continent, it is rich cultural fabric and its expectations. Milan Kundera described some of this in his 1983 essay 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', originally published under the title 'The Kidnapped West.'

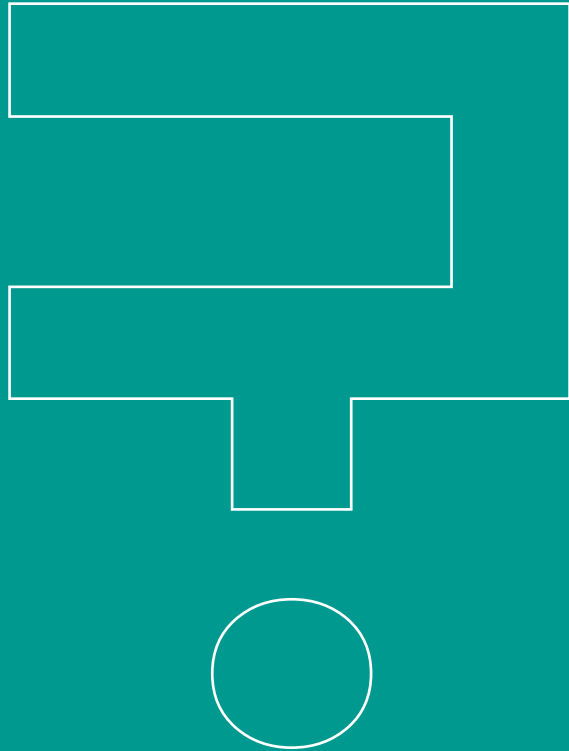
Ukrainian culture makers wander across the rest of Europe breaking down walls of ignorance and opening minds. They do it for themselves as a nation, for their country's defence. But perhaps without realising it, they also offer up a mirror to the rest of us.

I cannot think of a moment in my lifetime that has led to such an outpouring of cultural works being fervently shared across borders to create a sense of connectedness among peoples.

Jean Monnet is sometimes quoted as having said: 'If I were to do it again, I would start with culture.' Whether the phrase is exact or imagined, it points to what is often missing in all the talk about European security, architecture, and sovereignty. Europe's self-understanding cannot happen without culture. By this, I certainly do not mean culture as a catchword for White Christianity. I mean, culture as something

cognitive and inclusive: the awareness of each other's history, art, literature, and music – as sanctuaries where the uniqueness of a people, and the uniqueness of each and every individual human being, are respected and embraced. Ukrainians, on top of everything else they are doing in their struggle, are showing us the way in this too.

The woman in the Lviv bookstore getting ready to travel to Brussels and Lisbon, just like the combat medic writer who gave her advice, hold important lessons for all of us in Europe.



WHAT IS THE ONE LESSON YOU WOULD
WANT TO SHARE?

HEROES AND HEROINES OF A BRAVE WORLD

ANDRII KOTLIAR, BABYLON'13

P. 18, 142, 146

Cinematographer and producer, member of the Babylon'13 collective. The team has been documenting the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2014 and works with themes of war, memory, culture, and justice. Babylon'13 took part in the House of Europe's Creative Business Boost programme to catalyse the development of their business. As of August 2025, 14 men from the Babylon'13 film community have mobilised. One woman serves as a combat medic with the Hospitallers volunteer battalion. Andrii himself joined the Defence Forces in 2025.

DIANA BERG, PLATFORM TU

P. 22, 42

An activist and artist from Donetsk, founder of the protest movement 'Donetsk Is Ukraine'. In 2014, she moved to Mariupol, where she founded the independent art organisation Platform TU. She survived the siege of the city and relocated to Kyiv in early 2022. An active participant in Ukrainian and international cultural events. Works with themes of social change and human rights through culture and art. A trainer at the Cultural Transformation

Lab. In collaboration with the CineMova e.V. Ukrainian film community and with support from the House of Europe International Cooperation Grant, she spearheaded a project dedicated to Ukrainian women aged 60+ who have been affected by war and forced displacement.

ANNA KYRPA, CENTRE FOR SUPPORT OF EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

P. 26, 34

Teacher of English and French from Kamianske, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. As of October 2025, it was separated from the front line by 150 kilometres. At that time, Kamianske was first attacked by Russian aerial bombs. Works with teachers, particularly in rural schools, helping them adapt teaching to the conditions of war. As part of a House of Europe Individual Project Grant, she held an international online conference that brought together over 100 educators from three continents.

NADIIA KOVAL, ANASTASIIA OMELIANIUK, IVA NAIDENKO, YULIIA ELIAS, UKRAINIAN DECOLONIAL GLOSSARY

P. 30, 88, 96, 110

Curators of the Ukrainian Decolonial Glossary –

a publication that explains key concepts of decolonial and postcolonial theory in the Ukrainian context. As they describe it, the glossary is a set of tools for understanding history and Ukraine's position in the world, as well as for finding a shared language to work with the past and the present. The project was implemented in partnership with the Opora Foundation, supported by the House of Europe International Cooperation Grant.

**MARCO VIDAL GONZÁLEZ,
LA TORTUGA BÚLGARA
P. 38, 130**

Co-founder of the Spanish publishing house La Tortuga Búlgara, which works with authors from Central and Eastern Europe. Co-editor and translator of an anthology of contemporary Ukrainian poetry in Spanish, introducing readers to eleven Ukrainian poets. The book was translated from Ukrainian into Spanish with the support of House of Europe Translation Grant.

**TETIANA STOROZHKO, TENET
P. 46**

A historian and researcher, co-founder and head of the TENET Centre for Social Transformations. For over 15 years, she has worked to

preserve the memory of the Roma genocide, document oral histories, and develop educational initiatives for young people. Together with the ternType International Roma Youth Network, TENET reinterprets the history of the Roma community through artistic projects and documentary film, supported by a House of Europe International Cooperation Grant.

**VASYL KARPIV, KARP RESTORER
P. 50, 64, 68**

A conservator of artworks and founder of the Karp Restorer workshop. Works with the research, conservation, and restoration of monumental and easel art. His projects include the murals of a cathedral in Uzhhorod, 16-17th century townhouses in Lviv, the Drohobych Choral Synagogue, and frescoes in the Garrison Church. Vasyl participated in Digital Labs: restorers of historical and cultural reserves.

**OLEKSII VORONKO, ODESA
NATIONAL ARTS MUSEUM
P. 54, 80, 106**

Manager for digital transformation and grant activities. In recent years, the museum has become a true centre of cultural life in Odesa. Supported

by the Cultural Heritage Digitalisation Grant from the House of Europe, works with museum archives and those of Odesa's cultural figures, digitising previously unpublished materials – personal documents of artists, photographic materials, and records of artistic life from the early 20th century. In November 2023, a Russian missile hit near the museum courtyard, causing significant damage. Thanks to donor support, stabilisation work was carried out quickly.

**ELDAR OSMAN, QIRI'M YOUNG
P. 58, 76, 138**

An activist and coordinator of the National Corpus of the Crimean Tatar language. Works to make the language accessible in online dictionaries and translation tools. Created an interactive digital Crimean Tatar-Ukrainian dictionary for children. Winner of Hatathon 5.0: Heritage. Resilience. Innovation – an annual program held by House of Europe, the Goethe-Institut in Ukraine, and Digitizing.Space with the support of the European Union.

**LIUDMYLA YAVORSKA MISTO.MEDIA
P. 14**

Head of the local media outlet misto.media in Lutsk, which

produces independent, 'craft' content for active residents. Works with stories of the city and its community. One of the projects explores the history of the Lutsk Karaim community through personal memories and research by scholars and local historians. The project was supported by a House of Europe Media Content Grant.

**INNA PAVLENKO, ZAPORIZHZHIA
REGIONAL UNIVERSAL RESEARCH
LIBRARY
P. 84, 122**

Has been developing the library for many years as an open urban space. Initiated and established in Zaporizhzhia the creative shelter-space 'The Mysterious Dungeon,' where cultural and artistic events take place even during air raid alerts. The space came to being with the support of House of Europe's Small Infrastructure Grant.

**SERHII BOZHKO, NATIONAL
RESERVE SOPHIA OF KYIV
P. 92, 100**

A researcher and research fellow at St Sophia's Cathedral. Leads tours for foreign delegations, introducing them to Ukrainian history. Studies the cathedral's heritage, in particular the figure of the Swedish princess Ingegerd-Irene, the wife of

Yaroslav the Wise. With an International Mobility Grant, he presented his research findings at a scientific conference in Sweden.

**LIUDMYLA PETROVA,
GOOD BREAD**

P. 114, 126, 134

Project manager at the Good Bread platform, which grew out of the inclusive bakery Good Bread from Good People. Since 2017, people with intellectual disabilities have been working there. Good Bread empowers them through employment and provides hot meals to those in need, while also developing a supported living space with the backing of House of Europe.

**OLESIA ZAKHAROVA, SNIZHANA
NIKOLAENKO, YELYZAVETA
PRASOLOVA, NAFTA THEATRE**

P. 118

A team of the independent Kharkiv-based NAFTA Theatre (an open cultural platform without a fixed ensemble), who worked on the performance 'There will be a garden,' based on texts by Olivia Laing. The performance, which incorporates sign language, explores the need to cultivate one's own space and take root within it, in contrast to the challenges of life in a frontline city. The

production was made possible through the House of Europe's Creative Business Boost programme.

VOLODYMYR YERMOLENKO

P. 152

Philosopher, writer, and journalist. President of Ukrainian PEN. Doctor of Political Studies (France), Candidate of Philosophical Sciences (Ukraine). Associate Professor at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

NATALIE NOLIGAYRÈDE

P. 160

French journalist, former editor-in-chief of Le Monde and a member of the editorial board of The Guardian from 2015 to 2020.

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