

Plans for the Future*

"Do you want to learn how to understand contemporary art? Do you want to create your own works in the style of contemporary art? Do you want to communicate with like-minded people and find your own style? Then you are invited to our theoretical and practical course of immersion in contemporary art! 10 lessons - 10 ultra-modern styles! Hurry up! Limited number of seats."

Found on the Internet, 2016

LN's¹ "school of contemporary art" was the CCA at NaUKMA². It was there that she became acquainted with the universal rules of contemporary art. She was taught how to prepare an exhibition and how to present it: the principles of exhibiting, of organizing the accompanying processes and materials. Exhibition practice must fill one's CV, as documentation of the artist's activities, line by line. Exhibition upon exhibition - the years are counted and structured by shows, by public appearances.

Art is realized in public space, understood as open to view. While an artist's exhibition activity is driven by the professional need to display, in Ukraine it seems to have an additional function. An invisible demand for constant presence in public space resounds time and again - "When is your next show?" - prompting even the laziest to plan ahead. As if producing exhibitions and regular public appearances are the only things that keep an artist in the art field and provide absolute proof of his existence. Time and again, fragments of the artist's life displayed at an exhibition allow the viewer to detect and witness his presence. The exhibition is a sort of report, a testimony that the project "LN, the artist" exists, that LN is not loitering but continuously and steadily creating an artistic product (allegedly, one of extraordinary value).

The role of collector and archivist is usually played by the artist himself. The collection of exhibitions and projects in the often long CV list serves as documentation of the individual who claims to be involved in contemporary art. Consequently, this list becomes part of the documentation of the project called "Ukrainian contemporary art," creating and enlarging its fictitious archive.

Artworks, exhibitions, projects - as documentation of the state of society, of current attitudes - pile up in the "auto-archives," awaiting future archaeologists. It is possible to secure them a place in public memory by, for instance, positioning a project as tangential to some bigger one, capable of becoming its unique extension. Consequently, they claim their place in the history of contemporary art as an institution, not just in an archive of some random artist-made things.

The history of contemporary art, which we read in translation or in the original, entices us with its meaningful complexity and structuring. The system of contemporary art gladly shares its practices and discourses, claiming their universality. All that remains is to learn them and put them to use. To proclaim "Ukraine is Europe," to find shelter in the warmth of the grand narrative (and may all our darker sides die off with our bodies). Imitation is a safe bet: the project of Europe's Great History has a long tradition of respect (from which, they say, Ukrainian contemporary art "temporarily

dropped out").

"Project" has become a familiar concept in the culture of contemporary art in Ukraine. When exactly it became normalized is unknown – perhaps simultaneously with the term "contemporary art." Project implies a complex statement. An exhibition project is a public invitation to share a certain view, a certain attitude or idea. There are projects that address urgent problems, projects that react to the present moment, «thematic» projects (i.e., "about displaced persons"), projects that aim to create attractive images, project-meetings of frustrated participants, projects that show the other what he cannot discern in himself (and thus assert one's own superiority), escape-from-reality projects that ignore the here and now, utopias of self-delusion.

Project thinking is future-oriented. However, the artist's existence as a project-maker, unfolding through a continuous sequence of production and presentation, roots him deeply in the meaningless present. Exhibiting becomes a ritual.

A successful articulation, supported by a group of fans, calls for repetition. Repetition leads to popularity, while losing meaning. A single project is pushed aside, forgotten, and replaced by another one – sometimes they do not overlap. With no perpetuation in discussion, they contribute nothing to the creation of discourse in Ukraine. We can state that there are project-oriented activities without a project. (They say art helps imagine the impossible.)

Thus the present is affirmed in the future. It involves the repetition of a program of calculated actions to prevent risk and guarantee success. It is all one project – impossible to escape – for it feels like a comfortable house, where anything disturbing is removed from view, where you know which corner hides the things that are best not to touch. (But art cannot happen without risk.)

An exhibition is a deed. So what if we consider the artist's archive of projects not as a demonstration of a "life-in-the-project," but as a history of deeds? Where every project is an argument about what is a person as such.

The army of cultural activists – "artists"³ – in pursuit of "the contemporary" has been growing ever since Maidan, multiplying its symbolic capital. Heroes realize projects, performing the role of a useful, good person – an artist who expands the public imagination, offers utopias and other perspectives, new ways of seeing the world. The artist exercises control over his archives: through periodic public appearances he deliberately constructs his image (confirming his place in contemporary culture, in this or that social group, or identifying himself as a champion of certain values or ideas). Documentation must preserve the image and history of a good person for the future.

The author of the project of the future refuses to see himself in it.

A view is not a passive observation. If its function is not to penetrate, then it is to project, to create a semblance that obscures the material body with all its imperfections. An insurmountable gap opens between the body and the semantic field constructed within the project. The "Eurorenovation" project is an idea that encourages the building of false walls and facades, planes

available for utopian pictures of any kind.

Unwillingness to see oneself and disgust towards one's own materiality do not permit contact with the dark side of human nature, causing a manic desire to escape into imaginary worlds and virtual realities. Artists are guilty of creating a sense of obviousness around the natural – human nature as perfect, beautiful. This classicist idea (with its social and educational functions) of creating an imaginary ideal model as typical was continued in socialist realism and preserved in independent Ukraine, the successor to the Ukrainian SSR.

The future can arrive if the artist is willing to take risks. But now he mostly follows normative behavior patterns or – as a manager – proposes actions to others. Or shapes existing projects (political, social) from the past, as a way to secure his place in the future. This future will not differ from the present.

Young initiates of this most incomprehensible profession need education – this demand leads to the regular appearance of new private contemporary art schools in Ukraine. So the desire to become an artist becomes a desire to join the workforce of the project of the contemporary, which fortifies itself through the unreflected repetition of the typical, which harbors ideas for the future. Thus, only dreams about the future have a chance to be carried on.

2016

Translation: Larissa Babij

* In this text I resort to gross generalizations, based on my observations of Ukrainian culture, which has no future.

1. LN - Lada Nakonechna

2. Soros Center for Contemporary Art at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (established in 1994).

3. The term "artivism" is used by O.Esanu to denote a "safe" artistic event that happens far away in some Western kunstverein or contemporary art center. ("On" artivism "// Korydor, an online journal. - April 9, 2012)