Eyewitness the Russian War in Ukraine:
The Matter of Loss and Arts

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Abstract

Describing the first months of the full-scale Russian war in Ukraine, this article considers the materiality of art during the war: the destruction and appropriation of cultural heritage and infrastructure, the risk of being violent, and losing a life. Furthermore, this essay problematizes the value and symbolism of objects and art and speaks of artworks as a strategy of intellectual and historical resistance.

Keywords: War; contemporary art; materiality of art; memory; war testimonies.

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When we, as art critics and historians, talk about history, particularly art history, we often describe it through the history of ideas and things using our knowledge of its materiality. However, what if something important from artistic processes is missed? What does the absence of a thing mean?

The German philosopher Walter Benjamin (2010) believed there is no single document of humanity that would not simultaneously be evidence of barbarism. Consequently, museums' artwork collections are not accidental. They are, especially in today's wartime, formed relying not only on aesthetic principles but shaped on other factors. First of all, they survived under missiles and bombs.

According to the philosopher Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004), the "presence cultures" is formed on "things". For Gumbrecht, the history of things is comprehensive and includes knowledge, approach, meaning, nature, and politics. Gumbrecht believes that things vividly represent the "presence" and can evoke the personal and bodily understanding of historical knowledge. However, can we say there is an opposite phenomenon based on the absence of culture? What is the significance of the absence of a thing and the lack of art in public discourse, developed or produced due to war and direct physical violence?

At the beginning of his essay *Why We Need Things*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1993) reflects on the fact that the survival of human making depends on many factors, including the objects that man himself produces missiles and bombs. In describing the history of things in 1993, I have to emphasize the importance of his time. The beginning of the 1990s marked a new look at history, primarily at the history of Europe, which was then transformed but still on fire: starting in 1991, the war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia continued until 2001. There are no military conflicts in the history of the Ukrainian 1990s, but this period was filled with an economic crisis that affected the materiality of art. But most importantly, during this period, the Black Sea Fleet was redistributed between Russia and Ukraine. Furthermore, Ukraine proclaimed its non-bloc and neutral status as an independent state, renouncing nuclear weapons and declaring this rule in its Constitutional Law.

I also would like to clarify who I mean by "we are" at the beginning of this essay. American Ukrainian literary and cultural scholar and postcolonialist Vitaliy Chernetsky, in his co-authored article, *Are We Postcolonial? Post-Soviet Space* (Spivak et al., 2006), sharply asked this question. Describing the postcolonial discourse and the problematizing of the representation of the "former Soviet Union countries and its former satellites in Eastern Europe and elsewhere" in public, academic discourse, he speaks on behalf of the community of intellectuals that was invisible in academia for a long time (Spivak et al., 2006). But unfortunately, more than a decade after this was published, our voice as local scholars, art historians, critics, and anthropologists is not that loud and visible either. As a Ukrainian feminist writer and visual culture researcher focused on the relationship between art and violence, I am trying to show the hidden sides of the public discourse and problematize international art history through the question of presence, invisibility, and loss. In my essay, loss becomes not a representation of trauma, but a material factor — the critical production of loss.

In this essay, I will describe how materiality is shaped by the Russian war in Ukraine in the first five months of the full scale-war and why it's essential to document these processes for the future.

1   Destruction of Cultural Heritage

Criticizing the heroic narrative dominating various historical literature about war and tyranny, as a feminist writer, I see war and violence are primarily about risk, security, and loss. Undoubtedly, the loss of life, family, and home is one of the most pressing problems associated with violence. Among such risks are destroying cultural heritage and infrastructure such as museums, art schools, academies, studios, and manufacturers. According to the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, by July 2022, 406 architectural monuments and cultural heritage sites, including churches, libraries, and museums, were destroyed or damaged by military aggression. Social and cultural infrastructure destruction rewires the social fabric, forcing people to leave safe places. But another critical factor is the destruction of the cultural heritage that characterizes such places; for instance, it clarifies what community it belongs to, what culture existed here, what values it represented, and what relationship between society and people was here. Deputy Minister Kateryna Chuieva noted that some of the destruction is even more serious than in the Second World War. According to her, the most significant number of destroyed and damaged objects is located in the Kharkiv region. Such destruction affected 13 regions of Ukraine (Minstry of Culture of Ukraine, n.a.).

In a conversation with Eugenia Moliar, a Ukrainian art historian and curator specializing in monumental and decorative Soviet Ukrainian art, she poses that digital information about artworks and institutions plays a significant role in security. For example, the self-organized initiative De Ne De that she co-organizes primarily works with local museums in different regions of Ukraine. However, in February 2022, they temporarily removed all the information from their website because of the high risk of shelling. Participants of the De Ne De initiative are sure that, in this way, the Russians would not know about unique artworks and materials in their collections, so there is a chance to protect them (Moliar, 2022).

In February-March 2022, many critical cultural and social infrastructures, like local city councils, churches, cultural sites, agricultural sites, and other essential cultural, economic, and social infrastructure, were neighbored on Google Maps with nonexistent Edemus Funeral Home. At the beginning of the full-scale war, this coincidence was presented as a possible Russian operation to use the technology to correct the fire. Having discovered this, Ukrainian Internet users began asking to remove these tags from the map, claiming they might be connected with the military operation. However, this fact has not been proven, but Google temporary closed the function to put new locations on the maps on this areas (Khomchenko, 2022). In this case, it is unclear whether these bureaus were connected with the Russian special services and were supposed to be destroyed. This episode is one of the most confusing at the beginning of the war; it shows the power of propaganda and disinformation, which reveals the fragility of a society and its infrastructure in a state of risk and threat to life.

This situation of danger and loss is fully reflected by Ukrainian artists. For example, Kyiv-born artist Katya Buchatska studied at Ukrainian and European universities focused on graphics and monumental painting. Although she works with various media today, painting remains one of her main tools. On April 3, 2022, while in Lviv, where she was hiding from the war, she went to a local shop with art tools; the artist was looking for oil. Before the war, she used to buy paint produced in St. Petersburg, but for ethical reasons, she could no longer use it. But as of April 2022, the Russian army shelled the Chernihiv and Kharkiv factories of art materials, and the only survivor was the Volyn factory. Reflecting on the materiality of the painting and the process of oil production, the artist decided to try to make oil herself but took earth as the primary material from the cities affected by the war. So, for example, she collected the soil in

Moschun town directly from the funnel left by the projectile's impact. In the city of Hostomil, the debris from the destroyed houses fell together with the land (Buchatska, 2022).

A German artist, Gerhard Richter (1995), believed that abstract paintings "make visible a reality we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can postulate" (p. 121). With the help of abstraction, Buchatska made the narrative of Russian imperialistic politics visible. Taking the tragedy of the local land as the primary material, she allows it to appear as color on the canvas — black, yellow, and red (similar to brown). Thus, on the one hand, the artist gives space for pronouncing human tragedy; on the other hand, she raises important questions related to the materiality of art. For example, what remains after the war? How does the war restructure society and culture, destroying infrastructure and influencing cultural processes, including images, words, forms, meanings, and contexts?

2   Everything You Can Take

At the time of the full-scale military invasion, Buchatska was in the village of Kryvorivnia in the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, where she was working on the design of the Paraska Plytky-Horytsvit museum and was preparing it for its opening on March 1. Realizing that the museum's opening was postponed, she moved to Lviv, where she stayed with someone who had already been displaced in a rented apartment. Not having many things with her, she had to borrow some things from others. Among such things was an old handmade tablecloth with yellow spots. "I didn't need this thing. The tablecloth evoked longing and associations with the blockade and hunger" described the artist. She remembers the evening when she found this thing a difficult one, filled with longing for home and worries for relatives who were in danger. There was a feeling of impossibility to protect those who needed it. She commented (Buchatska, 2022):

> The only thing left from my past is a backpack with things; I didn't pack it like an anxious survival pack. After a while, I put all my items on this old yellow tablecloth. So, it became a tablecloth for survival.

"Everything you can take" is not a critical concept but a condition that Ukrainian artists face during the first days of full-scale war. It was limited by the size of the "anxiety" backpack or a travel suitcase that they were able to take. It is important to note that this condition was especially acute in the early days of a full-scale war because no one could predict the scale of the war and that no city would be safe. A striking example is Kateryna Lysovenko, an artist who, with her children, left Kyiv and came to Lviv to rest and calm precisely two days before February 24. When she packed her things, she did not expect that she would be unable to return home and her studio for these six months. After a while, somebody with the administration's permission entered the studio and touched her drawings. Many of these sketches seemed unimportant to these people; however, such works mattered and were valuable to the artist. Being outside of Ukraine, Lysovenko (2022) does not fully know what happened to her works, whether they are damaged, intact, or stolen, and she cannot check them by herself.

3   Artifacts of War

In 2017, the Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan created the work "Victory (White Shelf)", which is a modified reconstruction of the model of the monument to the Three Revolutions: 1825, 1905, and 1917 by Vasyl Yermilov and cups melted by artillery shelling found in one of the

buildings Lysychansk, Donetsk region. In this work, the artist showed reproduced violence and lost Utopia. In this context, the artifacts of war — melted cups from a household service — have become appropriated by the language of modern and contemporary art.

For many artists, such things have symbolism and inspiration. For example, Mykhailo Alekseenko, in his previous works, reflected a lot on Soviet everyday life, and more precisely, his grandmother's life and her tiny old apartment in a residential district in Kyiv. Like many Soviet people, his grandmother collected so-called "crystal" glass sets. Designed from fake crystals, Soviet people had the illusion of having a prosperous and joyful life. However, such glass sets often stood on the sideboard, covered with dust, and were not used. In 2021, Alekseenko made a vast installation based on grandmother glass service, symbolizing a postponed happy life (Kasianova, 2021). While in Hostomil after the shelling, he found one of such glasses in a private room. The deformed and broken glass reminded the artist of postponed life, which this time was shortly cut because of the war. In the new work, Alekseenko wants to restore and give second birth to this object.

What objects does society choose to take into the future that emphasizes willpower and social resistance? How this "selection of the process" is represented by intellectual history shaped by war?

Photographs of objects that withstood fire and destruction began appearing in the media during the full-scale invasion. These items have become symbols of resilience and the future. For example, a decorative rooster, which stood on the shelf of a destroyed house in Borodianka, became such an item. This object had a completely everyday functionality, and its value as an object of mass production was also small; however, after a vital gesture (the thing survived the war and destruction), it gained an essential value based on common ties, wisdom, resistance, and future. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1993), such objects can "stabilize our sense of who we are; they give a permanent shape to our views of ourselves that otherwise would quickly dissolve in the flux of consciousness" (p. 23). It is interesting that in this case, once an individual thing becomes a national symbol. Of course, formally, it still belongs to the person whose apartment was in the spotlight of the press. But now, it matters not only for them alone but for society.

4   Matter of Form

The Russian war occurs not only in real-time but in digital spaces. For many, digital photography has become the primary and necessary method to document social and cultural changes that occur within incredible speed. Following the updates and news from the frontline not only in real life, but mostly through social networks, I would note an essential aspect of today's meaning of documentation and art. For example, photographs of Russian soldiers found on mobile phones, footage accidentally taken by passers-by, or images by military drones, security cameras, and satellites. Today all these images can be present in both fields and taken by critics, curators, and artists. Technology shapes art's visual language and explicitly influences the aesthetic of war and symbolical representation of violance in art and culture.

I recorded an interview with the artist, Danylo Nemirovsky, by Zoom: at that time, I was in Vienna, located in my office at the Institute for Human Sciences, and he was sitting on a bench in the city of Zaporizhzhia, from where he was waiting for the train to Kyiv. A week before, he escaped from the city of Mariupol, where he spent about a month in a bomb shelter during the Russian full-scale military invasion. This bomb shelter is located on the Ilyich plant's territory, not far from the residential district. At that time, Nemirovsky could take several drawings he

had made earlier, as well as paper and a pen. Waiting out the war, he painted the citizens of Mariupol, the inhabitants of the bomb shelter. However, during his escape, he could take only three drawings (Iakovlenko, 2022).

> Being at home, I found white tiles and markers — my work tools and images started coming to my head. Finally, I came to terms with the fact that I am not the kind of person who will save someone, but rather the one who will be saved. I accepted it and decided to do at least what I knew how to do,

artist Julia Danylevska said. She returned to her occupied by Russian troops city of Kherson and started doing art with simple accidental materials. The first artworks created by Kherson's self-taught artist Julia Danylevska during the city's occupation were immediately "booked" by an art dealer; however, he could not get these works because of the logistic difficulties and impossible delivery (Gryschenko, 2022b)

Living under occupation, the artists is at risk even though she did not recognize this. Danylevska argued,

> Yes, people are kidnapped in Kherson, and not all are returned /[...] To fall out of favor with the occupiers, one must either be a representative of a public organization, hold some government position, or have a relationship with the military. It's just that I'm unlikely to be caught on the street. But just in case, I leave my phone at home because on my Instagram; for example, there is an image with a severed hand holding a Russian flag (Gryschenko, 2022b).

Drawings and diaries give a significant lease of life in times of war for several reasons. First, it can be compact, affordable, and easy to create. Secondly, it allows you to quickly and efficiently react to events. Finally, the drawings are political and intimate at the same time. They are also expressive and symbolic. Such an example is the "Lviv Diary" drawings series by Vlada Ralko, which includes a diary format, both text and visual. In her works, the artist reflects on the daily military violence and the colonial policy of Moscow.

The diary format allows one to record news, routine, and emotional states that change from day to day. In this regard, although a more subjective genre, the diary is truthful. However, this form of documenting and reflecting cruelty and transgressive reality has become for many eyewitnesses. Experiencing tragedy, ordinary people find it necessary to describe their experiences. I dare to assume that such a desire arises with naming things, not forgetting, trying to analyze, and subsequently finding ways to deal with such dreadful reality. However, this form of documenting and reflecting cruelty and transgressive reality has become for many eyewitnesses. Experiencing tragedy, ordinary people find it necessary to describe their experiences. I dare to assume that such a desire arises with naming things, not forgetting, trying to analyze, and subsequently finding ways to deal with such dreadful reality. The peculiarities of such diaries are fragmentation, the combination of text, drawings, thoughts, phrases, selective personal experience, other testimonies, official information, news, and rumors. A striking example is the diary of the boy from Mariupol, who was in the shelter of the Azovstal plant during the shelling and kept a diary. His records are essential documents of the war. Reading his notebook, which is titled "The War", the words and drawings remind me of a graphic poem:

> 3 вс: Я хорошо поспал, проснулся, улыбнулся, встал и почитал до 25 ст. Ищо у меня умер дедушка 26:(

У меня рана на спине выдрана кожа у сестры рассечение головы у мамы выдрано мясо на руке и дырка в ноге.

3 sun: I slept well, woke up, smiled, got up, and read until the 25th century. Also, my grandfather died on 26 :(

I have a wound on my back, my sister's skin is ripped off, my mother's head is cut open, the flesh is ripped out of her arm, and a hole in her leg.

Perhaps one of many, this diary has become iconic because it talks about a different perspective, a child's perspective. Being together with this kid in Azovstil shalter, local photographer Eugen Sosnovskyi documented every page and published it on Ukrainian social media.

One another example is a project titled *Behind blue eyes*, created by Kyivan activists shows the kid's perspective on the war. Giving kids from liberated areas film cameras, the activists asked to document everything necessary for them. Specifically using film cameras instead of digital, the curators and kids speak about being present in the historical time, giving value to each experience. Such an inclusive idea decolonize the traditional understanding of art.

5   Virtual Space and New Materiality of the Text

In the first days of the full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine, many Ukrainians started to draw over street signs and numbers, so they were empty. This happened because people wanted to disorient the Russian soldiers. A Ukrainian book designer and artist Aliona Solomadina said such an artistic expression, like this one, changes the visual representation of war a lot. All the cruelty, horrific and terrifying images from the front line and occupied cities shifted the perception of war and, in the future, will also influence the visual language. For example, as a book designer whose works are significantly related to the context of the place, she pays a lot of attention to street visual language and typography. In particular, on her Instagram, she collects photos of signboards affected by the war. War and resistance itself, in fact, design visual culture.

Solomadina noticed that the war saved her from excess and changed her attitude towards temporality. The artist believes that today, more than ever, the word "pain", printed on white paper in black letters, can convey peoples pain more than ever. Similar feelings on the matter and power of words and images led artist Stas Turina to create two ongoing graphic series, *Genocide* and *Diakuiu* ("Thank you"). He writes these specific words in Ukrainian on different pieces of paper. And if the first one is dedicated to the invader's actions, the second covers ordinary Ukrainians' daily experiences. Writing "thank you" and sharing them of one's own accord, Turina creates a gesture of solidarity.

In turn, for some artists and writers, words lost their meaning in the first weeks of the war; they could not create works and were searching for a new language. For example, Dnipro-based artist Lusia Ivanova described this period with the following:

I started drawing again only two weeks after the beginning of the invasion, although it seemed several years had passed. I forgot that I have a body and am an artist at this time. As if the whole background and understanding of myself were erased, it was the end of everything; I did not think about what was ahead. However, when I realized we were not hired in a few days and had an army, there was a future, and I could work again (Gryschenko, 2022a).

Later, Ivanova told me in an interview that her work's main problem was showing a transgressive war daily, which is very difficult to name, capture and describe. The answer came in correspondence with a friend and current soldier from the armed forces of Ukraine who sees dreams in the color of a thermal imager. Interpreting his experience, Ivanova started her new series of paintings based on this concept. Images passed as if through a thermal imager show what can be warm and alive. According to her interpretation, it can be not only a person but also a field and a forest. So the most real now is the coherence of technology and life.

On the contrary, Kharkiv-based artist Olia Fedorova has been working with text for many years. Since the beginning of the war, she created a series of textile works on which she wrote the reader with a marker.

Sometimes, it resembles poetry or prayer but is more radical and emotional. These prayers do not call for love but struggle, protection, and justice. However, the most interesting in this context is her work "Remember who you are": the artist got a tattoo on her arm with this inscription in Ukrainian. In this way, her very body became a work of art about identity and pain for her freedom. She did this work in the Austrian city of Graz at a residence for migrant artists. In this sense, materiality is symbolic; what could the artist take with her from her native city of Kharkiv, which has been under constant shelling since February 24? What material objects, and even more so materials for artistic expressions, could she have, except for her own body?

So what is the new materiality of text-based art during the war? It gained new force and meaning, opening the intimate and private space of the diary to the general public. Such social networks as Instagram, for example, have transformed the diary format where each post is a valuable testimony of the war. However, it is not only about the principle of posts as diary chapters but also about an attempt to label individual posts into one series. For example, art theorist and artist Asia Bazdyrieva created Instagram testimonies first in Kyiv and then in Kremenchuk. No images were attached; the picture was based on white text on a black background. Her Instagram diary with the following audio recordings became a part of the exhibition *The Making of Earth's Geocinema* at Kahan Art Space, Vienna.

Internet and social media create new materiality that provokes discussion about the capitalist system and new forms and types of art (New Historical Materialism, 2015). However, this challenge is even more extreme in the case of war. For example, among the list of items people need when escaping from their home, mobile phone and full charger were included as prioritized. Being elsewhere, people can check the news and contact their relatives in an emergency. In describing the experience in notes on the mobile phone and/or social media, it is not the notebook or text that becomes material but the experience itself. Of course, today's capitalism can appropriate any experience and monetize even invisible and imperceptible things. But in this case, it also enhances the influence of personal experience and gives it significance and value. From a historical perspective, such things in the struggle for archiving and survival will have more opportunities to remain visible and assert themselves.

6   Instead of Conclusions: Artworks That Have Not Been Done

Analyzing the conditions of art during the war, it seems to me that it is worth introducing another category — "artistic works that have not been made". As a result of danger, lack of time, lack of materials, simply the inability of a person to find an artistic language in time and manage to say something about the war. Or to be in places where it is impossible to engage in creative practices. War changes not only the materiality of art but, most importantly, directly affects the

mental and physical condition of artists, from whom the art capitalist system constantly needs production, preferably the production of material objects that can be sold. A vivid example is Yaroslav Futymsky, an 35-years-old anarchist artist from the small village of Poninka in the Khmelnytsky Oblast. Futymsky's practice was always based on left-wing ideas; he defended the rights of the working class and spoke of the need to give voice to the peripheries and and oppressed communities and individuals. Since the beginning of the war, Futymsky did not look for words and images, but he decided to rebuild roofs and houses in the Chernihiv region. Such civil associations of activists and communities who restore housing with their own hands are not isolated. But Futymsky's group has no name, no Instagram page or other social media promotions, and doesn't need fame. Every week for 10-12 hours per day, he and his colleagues work at a construction site. For Futymsky, as an anti-militarist, such a way of consolidation and involvement in Ukrainian resistance movement is the most acceptable.

When I met Yaroslav Futymsky in Kyiv after many months of construction work, he said that the most challenging thing for him is his empathy; it brings more pain because every time, you have to face the tragedy eye to eye. For example, he cited a dialogue with an elderly man from the Chernihiv Oblast.

> "Imagine, on the spot, this heap of ashes that used to be my house", an old man bursts into laughter.

> "Yes", Futymsky said.

> "Imagine, on the spot, this heap of ashes that used to be my house", an old man bursts into laughter.

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> "Imagine, on the spot, this heap of ashes that used to be my house", an old man bursts into laughter.

> "These ashes are your home", Futymsky laughs heartily and hysterically in response.

> So they laugh together.

One of the media Futymsky works with is text and performance. During this time, he "did not produce" a single work that could be called artistic and possibly be sold. But in my opinion, the reconstruction of people's houses during the war and the still existing threat of shelling is a clear example of how "assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment" (Butler, 2011). Butler argued:

> I think the conception of the living body is key. After all, the life that is worth preserving, even when considered exclusively human, is connected to non-human life in essential ways; this follows from the idea of the human animal. Thus, if we are thinking well, and our thinking commits us to the preservation of life in some form, then the life to be preserved takes a bodily form. In turn, this means that the life of the body — its hunger, its need for shelter and protection from violence — would all become major issues of politics".

Futymsky's crucial tool becomes not only canvas, cameras, or found objects, but their lived body; the presence and actions in the restoration processes as volunteers reveal the other bodies and protect local communities. There is how they take a power and influence of the realpolitic. Thus, with the help of brutal physical strength, sweating, and rebuilding miraculous comfort, Futymsky creates perhaps one of his best and most influential works; he makes a home for an Other.

At the beginning of August 2022, Kharkiv-born curator Borys Filonenko invited Futymsky to participate in an exhibition dedicated to abstraction and war. Futymsky wrote phrases on the gallery walls with a thin black pencil; they were thoughts and fragments of conversations. These tiny little poems are written with care for space and curatorial use to not damage other artworks with "more powerful" narratives. But instead, these small texts become powerful gestures as well.

After the exhibition, these texts will be washed away and disappear, just as some thoughts and words replace others, often radically opposite. Therefore, in searching for the necessary images and meanings, it is essential to be careful with statements and manifestations. The war has become a time when everything needs to be re-named, even common and well known processes and things — among other freedom, equality, democracy, culture, art, abstraction, body, existence, peace.

The Russian war in Ukraine shaped the relationship between materiality and arts and reconsidered the importance of text and images, media, human experience, and memory. The war transforms the understanding of surplus: it simply does not exist; on the contrary, there is a lack of things. The materiality of art is formed by "chance"; works are created from what may be at hand. Not only because the artist does not have the resources to buy these materials but because the materials, like art itself, are at risk and are ripped apart by war. If many artists recorded and documented their reality during the first months of the war. Today, being safe, they have an opportunity to make more analytical reflections and more technically complicated works.

In addition, the war has a different effect on its materiality, and it reimagines the relationship with the body: when one finds oneself in a bomb shelter, in an occupied city, or as a forced migrant, one's attitude to the body and art changes. Materiality lends itself to choice: what is valuable — and what is not, what is valid — and what is not. Today's "new materiality" is tested by violence. Constant destruction, and violence, including the robbery of the houses of ordinary residents — all this is revising the symbolic relationship of things.

The experience of war for artists and art itself is becoming something much bigger and beneficial: to fight in the war, to live through it, to deeply feel it with one's own body, to defend oneself with one's body, to feel politics with as a body and its relationship to the things, art and war.

That is why memoirs and artistic testimonies became extremely valuable. Today, diaries can exist in physical form and be an object, but also just be told by somebody through virtual space. Archiving various experiences means creating inclusive historical knowledge and preventing the possible future restoration of imperialism in the future.

Until 2022, when my apartment in Irpin city was shelled, I thought of the items found in the war as artifacts. However, today, having the traumatic experience of living with the loss of my home, I think about the materiality of the ruin. Daily life and encounters with the bureaucracy of rebuilding the house have shown that the ruin is not universal. It has specific dimensions and circumstances. The tragedy is material; moreover, it can be measured in terms of currency. Of course, this aspect does not reduce the understanding of trauma and does not

level this concept, but in my opinion, it determines something else — the responsibility for the ruin. Who is responsible for creating the ruin? Who is responsible for the reconstruction of the ruins? What role do art and culture play in its recovery? Will it be initiated by state and official institutions or influenced by local and grassroots initiatives? In the first months of the war and until today, thanks to grassroots initiatives, non-governmental organizations and individuals created fast reaction support and solidarity to save, archive, and protect the culture. However, this division of responsibility should not end with volunteering but should develop into a new institutionalization formed on the principles of division, empathy, and equality.

I want to finish my essay with a question: what fills the space, art history, and history instead of the absence of something? What specific art, country, and artists are represented at this place? I dare to suggest that, suppressing the voices of Others, weapons still create a space for someone with more power and representation to promote their usurping ideas with the help of images and things. But today, we have to change such tendencies and provide them with the opportunity to highlight their interests and presence in the world discourse, primarily through preserving cultural heritage, law, and material history. This is our responsibility to see things, to create a space for an epistemological transition of knowledge and to re-interpret our history that creates real-time and influences our body, memory and presence in the future.

Thinking about what possible contemporary museum exposition could be like for a country whose art and culture were systematically destroyed by the empire and undermined by censorship and violence, deported and appropriated, I thought about the possibility of presenting empty walls. But this absence represents lost works and experiences, unspoken stories, and deported artworks that must be repatriated. Unfinished artworks and literary texts were in the storage of history as unusable and incomplete. But our entire history is the history of unfinished and unrealized utopias. So why not consider such experiences as valuable and equal to "the great works that have survived"?

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