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Tymofii Maksymenko about voices of cities, psychogeography and participation in Burning Man

If you attended the Brave! Factory Festival this year, then you saw and even used the booths from where you could communicate with a stranger who was at the other end of the Metrobud plant. This was the Mutro art project group, and Tymofii Maksymenko is one of the founders of this group.

Tymofii is a young Ukrainian artist producing audio, video, installation and performance works. He researches into a city as a living organism. Tymofii Maksymenko studied at Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow, University of Wolverhampton, Great Britain, and Polytechnic University, Valencia.

Besides his native Kyiv, he presented his projects in London, Krakow, Valencia and Berlin, participated in London Art Night 2018 and Burning Man 2019, and also was included on a short list of nominees for PinchukArtCentre 2020 award.

Olya Artemenko met with Tymofii in Kyiv and had a talk about voices of cities, Ukrainian art

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community and how to observe life in the other hemisphere without Internet.



Why did you choose the concept of the city as an element of interaction? And in what way exactly do you interact with it?

Since my childhood, I have been fascinated by cities and their structures. I was drawing their landscape in profile with underground tunnels and skyscrapers. I even coined the term “landscrapers” meaning the houses going deep under the ground.

In my works I often use the word combination “city as an organism”. It means that the city like people is permanently changing and is never the same.

I like to reproduce the situations where the work becomes some kind of a “connector” between a human and a city, gives opportunity to see and hear the city from a different angle, establishes special contact with the environment.

You say you like to put in a foreground the things that have stayed unnoticed. What things do you mean?

Acting by our everyday life schedule, we actually do not see the city as something individual and use its space only for our conveniences, transportation and living in general. We assign negative meaning to the city and never slow down to really pay attention to it. And when weekend comes, we rush out to the countryside to get some rest.

Have you ever tried to stop in the middle of the street and to listen to the city's breath? People are more focused on issues of nature, and in their view the city, on the contrary, acquires the features of evil. I actually do not relate my practice with environment issues, I am just trying to show that behind unevenness and non-aestheticism there is something beautiful and intriguing. In my opinion, this is how the urban life is manifested.

In you work Howls you decode the city's voice. In your opinion, what does it tell us? And what difference is there between the voices of London and Kyiv?

The city tells everyone something special, and it is exactly how the personal relations with the city are built. It might be some melody or vibration, for example, a sound of the sewage system, ventilation system or power transformer vault. One should just listen closely and try to decode the message.

All the cities have their own voices: some of them sound clearer; some of them are thoroughly disguised. In this regard the cities resemble people: some of them try to mask their wrinkles under make-up foundation cream, while the others prefer their natural look. When I studied in Spain, I noticed that cities over there are more open and a bit neglectful of their appearance as well as the Spanish themselves. You can see the wires sticking out everywhere, lots of buzzing and leakages.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Wyn01JjBtY>

In London, for example, all municipal utility communication lines are more arranged and concealed, so that they could be kept out of the public eye, but not ear. London citizens are quite reserved, but at the same time they are quite loud, so the city is always noisy and you can feel specific electricity dispersed in the air. And in this city you can see clear delineation between private and public spaces. The rampant and sometimes vulgar elements, which you can find on the streets of Barcelona, could be hardly found in London, as they are meticulously hidden.

In my opinion, Kyiv is a super open and accessible city. Each courtyard has power transformer vaults and conditioners, which produce water dropping on your head. Kyiv as well as its population is variable, chaotic, lacking integrity. From one hand, it is deformed by newly built blocks, which being a native of this city I find really disturbing. While at the same time, it is really intriguing as the city as a living organism is naturally evolving although not necessarily in the best way.

Can your works help make people more aware of what their city is? Can your works be practically applied?

Yes, of course. In London, for example, exists an application Shadow Memory of walks around the city with artists. This application was presented within the framework of the largest art-event in London - London Art Night 2018. I was the author of one of the routes titled The Urban Howl. It consists of ten stations along the River Thames. Each station represents working electrical control units and ventilation producing noise. When a

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participant of the route approaches this point, he/she hears a part of the soundtrack. With every station visited, such person “builds up” more sounds layer by layer, and at the end of the trip he/she can download in the application the composition he/she has composed. To produce the soundtrack for this route, I collaborated with the Ukrainian musician Andrey Kiritchenko. So, if you visit London, you can try The Urban Howl yourself.

Among your interests there is a certain school of psychology - psychogeography. What is it? And how do you apply it in your art?

The term “psychogeography” was introduced by Guy Debord in 60-ies of the last century. He defined the psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of geographical environment on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”. In other words, this is the science studying psychological effect of the urban environment.

In my work, I try to feel the city, achieve resonance with its central and back streets. I am interested in studying the atmosphere of various venues, their sounds and vibrations. Psychogeography also envisages work with urban senses map.

Last year within the framework of the Krakow Audio Art 2018 festival I presented the work titled The Sound Labyrinth. It was a map of sounds recorded in various places of Krakow.

The visitors entered a totally darkened room, at the centre of which there was a controller, using this controller one could travel on the sound map in various directions. The person did not move. He/she was travelling with the help of amplifiers placed along the perimeter of the room producing various sounds. The visitors experienced something similar to what visually impaired people experience. Staying in total darkness of the room and listening to the sounds of the railway station, a person could reproduce in his or her memory an urban landscape and realize how he/she could get, let’s say, to the central market.

I know you are a member of the Mutro group. I have seen your booths at Brave! Factory. It was great. What else do you do?

Thank you! Yes, our booths were a success and were used during the entire festival! Somebody was always occupying them for communication (and not only for communication).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOIHX34qmGw&t=77s>

Together with Vano Say we founded the Mutro art-group in 2014. At Brave! we started working with Olexandr Tsymovskiy and Sofiya Bondar as an extended team. As the Mutro we develop various projects which hardly can be traced linearly as all of them originate from a joint impulse, the impulse, which as a rule is generated unexpectedly.

One of our most recent works with Vano Say - Aophone performance - was a presentation of a keyboard of live people. Its first version was presented in 2017 in Valencia. We had seven participants, each of whom was singing one note. The spectators could pull the rope following which the mask opened the mouth of a participant who produced his/her sound. This was how the melody was improvised. Later Kyiv, London, Berlin, Krakow, and Szczecin also saw this performance.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8XJOzTQ8jY&t=1s>

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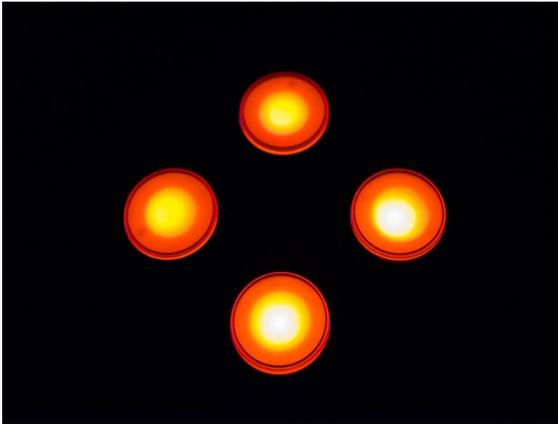
In the later versions, each participant instead of notes had specifically selected sound to make.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnFULTY1nH60&t=2s>

Not so long ago, the Burning Man festival was held, where your work was presented. Tell us about it.

It was a video we had produced together with Vano Say. During several years we were shooting videos of trains passing by in various countries. At the beginning, we had no idea how this material could be used, so we just collected the material in our joint stock. But in July we got an offer to take part in Burning Man under the Digital Culture project. They were going to bring to the festival a 30-meter pyramid with projections of Ukrainian media-art. We immediately imagined that our trains would look impressive in the middle of Nevada desert. As a result, we made a 3-minute video of trains passing by with the images laid over one another, thus, creating some kind of a dynamic pattern.



You work in many different genres. Which of them is more interesting for you at this moment?

Currently, I am in the process of producing several new works. I call them portals and have not even decided what genre they would belong to. One of them will present two concrete pipes located in different parts of the world. With the help of integrated camera and monitor, the pipes will be connected through the earth, thus, creating some kind of a through-hole. It means that people at one end of the earth will be able to see what is going on at the opposite end, and vice versa.

The angle between the pipes will be measured by a special formula creating the effect of an absolutely direct hole between two points – like shooting-through. If different hemispheres are involved, there will be also a day-night magic. Just imagine: you walk around Kyiv in the night and all of a sudden you come across the pipe and look inside to find the sun shining in Singapore.

I am planning to create one more work in this field, but this time it will be sound-based. It will deal with intercommunication devices mounted on the walls of houses like entry phone systems, which will combine functionality both of an amplifier and a microphone. The devices can be installed within one city, as well as in different parts of the world. The pedestrians will hear the sound of the busy traffic way at the other side and by speaking to the devices will draw attention of the pedestrians at the other side and initiate communication.

In your opinion, what are the skills a young artist should have to become visible?

I believe one should follow impulses and trust oneself. This way it is easier to make other people interested in your work, to get them “infected” with this interest. It is also important to set the specific goal and to not be distracted by the things not bringing you closer to your goal.

In Ukraine, the art-community is quite specific. To enter it, you need to find the entrance point, like, for example, PinchukArtCentre or the right contacts. The situation outside Ukraine is similar, but in this country it is more vivid.

Many people are not even interested to hear what you are doing; they start aggressively imposing their own ideas. Lack of any dialogue deprives you of an opportunity to implement your interesting collaboration ideas and initiatives. It brings up to some kind of stagnation in arts. But we have mega cool potential, the most important is not to stay idle, but work hard. You have got an idea – then implement it, and reason less why and who needs it. In this country, the beginner artist is often flooded with questions like: Why do you do it? What is the concept? I believe that it is not mandatory to think over all the details and give many grounds as experimenting is much more fascinating.