
The Res Artis Regional Meeting Vilnius-Nida was organised by Nida Art Colony of the Vilnius Academy of Arts, henceforth Nida Art Colony, in co-operation with Res Artis. The meeting was supported by the Vilnius Academy of Arts, the Lithuanian Council for Culture, the Swiss Arts Council, and Netherland’s Embassy in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Background

After our last Regional Meeting in Vienna 2012 and our General Meeting in Tokyo in the same year, we are very happy to have been approached by our member VAA Nida Art Colony that is located a five hour bus drive outside of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, to host our Regional Meeting 2014. The chosen focus on non-urban artist residency centers allowed us to look at the many other types of settings that can be a perfect fit for an artist residency to operate in with joy and success. Not at last, half of our membership is situated on the country site or in even more extreme remoteness.

To concentrate on the Northern Baltic, Russia and Central Asia surely challenged many participants to gain new and updated insights about the social and political reality of this part of the world. We were humbled by the presence of our member from the Ukraine who has personally experienced the latest neighbourly atrocities and consciously chose to join us to make a statement about the role of culture to overcome separation and judgement.

Remoteness is a topic that many of the Res Artis members are confronted with or choose to contextualize themselves in. While it is often connect with quietude, reflection and the positive aspects of choosing a slower pace for creative production, not being involved in the faster context of an urban surroundings or an otherwise busier environment can cause new challenges: getting support of all kinds, offering the artists and cultural workers what they need with enough flexibility or being in exchange with a vibrant scene, are just a few. How can residencies that are situated in secluded places or isolated geographies create the social and cultural capital they need to sustain themselves and to foster?

The specificity of the region chosen for the Regional Meeting 2014 is informed by the end of the Cold War in the 90ies and the many geographical, cultural and psychological shifts and re-formations that took place in its aftermath. They are reflected till this day in mobility schemes, partnerships and

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regional exchange practices in place or lacking. In this spirit, the Nida Art Colony Executive Manager, Rasa Antanavičiūtė, concluded on the first day that the content of this meeting was based on two pillars: One, to get the two regions in contact, Central Asia and Russia with Nordic and Baltic colleagues to foster exchange and collaborations, and two, to examine in greater depth what such partnerships could entail. The venues chosen for this investigation were the Vilnius Academy of Arts in Vilnius and Nida’s artist residency on the Curonian spit in the Baltic Sea.

For Res Artis, the Regional Meeting fulfilled its purpose in many aspects.

- 76 people were registered and 106 attended the meeting from 28 countries.
- Participants of the target region of post-soviet countries including Russia and Scandinavia helped us to learn about the current dynamics and needs in these countries. Nonetheless, we always strive for a more inclusive representation of our network, and are determined to improve our support in this regard.
- The presentations given from the region showcased very inspiring projects and gave a good impression over the struggles faced and solutions found that in many cases can be internationally applied.
- There was enough room for discussion and personal and professional encounter.
- The organisers managed to create a very friendly atmosphere with care for the participants.
- We had the chance to experience once more how enriching and powerful face-to-face meetings are in order to gain local and regional insights which will help us to develop our programs and projects, to create personal relationships which advance our member communication and to expand our network to include everyone affiliated with residency field worldwide.

Nida Art Colony had provided financial support for selected participants from the region of interest that is participants from Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia.

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Location 1: Vilnius Academy of Arts

DAY 1-AFTERNOON

Three hours of training and mutual learning

The ResSupport Workshop informed the first part of the meeting. Almost 30 people came together to learn from a team of experts and from each other. The main part was presented by the Res Artis Board Member Ika Sienkiewicz-Novack, whereas the smaller group exercises were guided by all Board Members present and the Res Artis staff. The key recommendation remains: “Don’t be modest with your vision but realistic with your mission.”

The Residencies Library was co-created by all attending residencies and opened on that same evening. The brochures, and other printed and digital information material brought in by the majority of participants in the meeting gave a substantial insight into the diversity of residency models active today and how they want to be perceived by their stakeholders.

What was not distributed among the participants of the meeting has now found a place in the library of VAA Nida Art Colony.

The official opening presented local initiatives like Arts Printing House, Rupert, Kaunas Photography Gallery, Contemporary Art Center, and the Nida Art Colony itself.

DAY 2-MORNING

Voices from the region and reports

The entire meeting was set around a focus on workshop co-production and mutual learning.

In the same logic, the morning of the second day was dedicated to different voices from the region to provide a report on the residency field where they are situated, and around.

Res Artis presented its Mapping project, which is put on hold for capacity reasons. The project wants to not just collect dots on a map but to document the collaborations and interactions among different agents in the residency field. This includes funders, public bodies and other stakeholders apart from artist residencies. It is difficult to access certain areas, Mark Vennegoor said. It is also not easy to get enough response when Res Artist is seeking active local partnerships for mapping remote areas, why is that? Res Artis suggests a quick mapping exercise in the room to get an overview, something that seems impossible from out of the office.

We then heard about the Caucasus region from Geo Air, Georgia, the Central Asian situation through Dushanbe Art Ground in Tajikistan, and the twenty years of bilateral exchange between the U.S., Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus were summed up by CEC Arts link, the U.S. and Russia.

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Two commonalities became obvious: All these initiatives depend on international funding and for most of them it accounts that they need to work under the radar of governmental bodies and cannot publicly register as non-profits or cultural centers.

**CEC Arts link** recently included the MENA region in its programs, from where each year about 16 artists go to the U.S., as part of a reciprocal exchange. Susan Katz, representing the organization, said, “with offices in New York and Saint Petersburg we have been running residency programs for a long time but I never thought of ourselves as a residency center.” Residencies bridge the problems that go on around the world, she continued, making it clear that a practice can be very effective without being legitimized as an institution by an outer reality. CEC Art link’s Global Art Lab, funded in 1998, is focusing on Russia, the U.S., Central Asia and Caucasus and includes non-English speaking residents. Western Europe is part of the exchange now as well.

**Dushanbe Art Ground** is situated in Tajikistan, a country that consists of 93 percent mountain area and has hardly any resources and no arts community. Stefan Rusu, the center’s director, tells us about Central Asia. Soros foundation was involved in the region for a while, up to 2004. Prins Claus, Arts Collaboratory, HIVOS and others were funders, too, with HIVOS sponsoring the Central Asian Pavilion in Venice. Kazakhstan is growing and is economically and politically interesting to invest in, in other Central Asian Countries that is not the case. Turkmenistan is rich but the cultural field is completely missing. The balance that exists between some countries can change at any given moment, and sustainability is a huge challenge.

GeoAir gave us their impression about the residency field in the Caucasus region between Europe and Russia and the Caspian and the Black Sea. The North is autonomous since the UDSSR collapsed. The wars that took place shape the reality of the residencies, says Nini Palavandishvili. Her research resulted in finding two residencies in Azerbaijan, three organizations in Armenia holding ten places for residents, and two artist residencies in Georgia.

**DAY 2-AFTERNOON**

Group workshops to explore the role of residencies in remote areas and their many roles

The entire audience split up in five thematic workshops for most of the day to work on the following topics:

1. Flexibility and adaptability in remote residency models: shifting context;
2. Reputation and influence of residencies;
3. Residences as incubators and social partners for local communities;
4. Residences as education and research centers;
5. Host-residences ethics, hospitality, and artistic production and evaluation of residencies’ results.

This is a list of conclusions drawn during the common evaluation of all groups:

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LOCAL IMPACT AND EMBEDMENT

- Many residencies are very busy with situating themselves locally in the strongest manner possible.

- The need for local support and the social impact residencies have today, seems to range very high in the participants’ awareness. This asks for long term investment and some of the participants went from door to door to introduce themselves and to be exposed to critical questions and initial mistrust. After all, residencies can be known in the world but be unknown within their own local community.

- Another important item on the list is to create long-term perspective for yourself, your staff, funding bodies and all stakeholders. Know your story.

- Create other networks not just project partners, but advisors, experts in various areas that you meet within your profession. Influence your situation through all sorts of relationships, local national and supranational funding, private funding, sponsorship, and donations.

- Crowd funding is a tool to reach out to a wider audiences. Critical voices say that it only reaches a closed group of people who are open for crowd funding. In the U.S., it is actively used. In Europe it is often critically discussed.

ADVOCACY

- Promote your residency towards the public level: Create media relations, use public occasions to promote your residency even if it is not absolutely clear if it is the right place.

- Advocate for your organization and the field, intersect with other sectors, and disciplines.

- Speak the language of the public level, translate cultural data or know-how into maps or graphs, and interact target group sensitive without losing control over what you have to say.

- The role of being the international incubator to develop the region can be challenging, for instance, if you work with tourist sector quantity is sometimes valued over quality.

EXTREME REMOTENESS

- Remote residences have sometimes the problem that the applicants do not believe in how little communication and exposition opportunity exists (no phone, no internet, and no exhibition hall). Use testimonials of previous artists to confirm your description of the place.

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When residents are frustrated with a remote place, let the resident solve the problem, let them push their refresh button. It can be part of the inner growth process of an artist that she or he will appreciate and actually choose for, consciously or unconsciously.

One way to get around matching issues is to invite artists instead of using an open call, especially in the start-up phase of a residency.

Limited communication tools are experienced as positive. The internet keeps people stuck in the meta-level of no-space and no-locality.

Should managers be friends of the artists? This is a personal choice of the residency manager. “It can help to learn about things that you would otherwise not know about, such a close engagement can also eat up your private life,” it was said.

EDUCATION

Residencies that focus on local research and education can create great local exchange with regards to social issues. The research done can help the local constituency, the artists and the residency organization.

Residences promoting Self-study can instigate productive exchange with local universities or other research centers on specific issues Professional exchange on a chosen topic.

Role of residencies when partnering up with an educational system can be tricky, as academies and schools too work results driven.

Many residencies present developed or are in the process of developing alternatives to local arts educations that they don’t deem satisfying and need to be modernized through international influence (their residents), some become partners for international MA studies or doctoral study institutions.

EVALUATION

The great challenge in the field remains finding your perfect artist: Use Skype interviews to get a sense of the resident’s motivation and personality.

Let residing artists write testimonials or problem solving diaries for the next resident to study and learn from.

Residency evaluation is still not very highly developed in the field.

Some follow the artistic output of a resident as a measurement of a successful residency, instead of the time spent at the residency. Residency manager can observe growth in the

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artist and her-his work by tracking her-his work and work recipients. Some create an anniversary project to check whether their former residents are still working in the arts and how/where. ACME, a residency organization in London, finds that 9 out of 10 of their artists remain practicing artists, which proves their investment in the artists is a success.

— To structure residencies in order to ensure measurable results is not deemed acceptable or wise. We must not choose the economic value system of competition and profit over our cultural value system of inclusion and cooperation, as this translation is not accurate.

DAY 3-MORNING

On friendship, reciprocity and residencies

“What Resides in Your Trauma?” asked Viktor Misiano, Moscow Art Magazine, in his key speech.

Misiano has studied the categorization of friendship for many years. He has been in residency once, in 1992-1993 where he met Nicolas Bourillaud and Hiroshima Fukuma. He also fell in love with a French woman while in residency who could not decide between him and an older lover, this is where his trauma resides. Spoken in psychoanalytical terms: Someone else held his pleasure.

Misiano claims that in contemporary liberal times relations became democratic in the same way that a bunch of carrots costs the same for all. Modern political structures also want to define all activities of the citizen. Individualization came out of this as a form of resistance, Misiano concluded. Friendship as political friendship became a choice as a result.

Viktor Misiano went on telling us about Soviet Russia where a system of alternative relationships was built up, as the public level was not providing any goods. People started to create an exchange society. You give me this, I give you that. “We cannot call these systems economical because they are not based on broader social interest but personal desires, needs and networks.” Debts were held until the moment came to ask something back in return. This system of relations assumes that reciprocity can and necessarily must be suspended.

How does trauma then play into social relations?

Viktor Misiano suggest that we must accept trauma as a narrative, as a story. Trauma has happened. We have to remember our trauma and we have to fully embrace it in order to heal, in order to become ourselves. This means we have to embrace the other who holds that trauma for us as well in order to rebuild our own subjectivity.

Can residencies be places where we encounter the other as someone who holds our pleasure, who creates trauma in us and overcome that trauma because here in this state of (positive) displacement we can embrace it more easily?

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Location 2: Vilnius Academy of Arts & Nida Art Colony

DAY 3-AFTERNOON

Parallel information nodes and travel to Nida

An artist and former resident at Nida Art Colony, Hendrik Hendinge invited the participants to discuss the questions “why do artists go into residencies” as a framework to celebrate his 20th artist residency anniversary. He visited in the last 10 years an impressive list of 20 artist residencies and had developed a memory game, which was presented by a fictional figure named “Residency Junky”.

Parallel to this, Egle Deltuvaite from Creative Europe Desk Lithuania offered interested participants an insight in the funding opportunities of the European Union.

Most of the participants were however joining the self-presentations of participating residencies, among others; Dushanbe Art Ground (Tajikistan), Izolyatsia (Ukraine), Art East (Kyrgyzstan), Nordic Artist Centre Dale (Norway), Yarat Contemprory Art Organisation (Azerbaijan), Art Commune Air Program (Armenia) and last but not least Kiosk Air/Oberlicht from Moldova. These presentations offered the audience some familiarity with the sites of the residencies and the programs they run. The presenter gave an extensive overview over the dynamics and challenges they are facing and the solutions they find.

The activities planned for the bus ride to Nida were cancelled, as most of the participants fell asleep exhausted from the intense program or were preparing for the evening and night expeditions. This included a dancing night guided by Transoriental Music presented by DJ Jurij Dobriakov, and an outdoors excursion by Estonian artist, former Nida Art Colony resident, Taavi Suusalu who led us on feet and by bike to explore the beauty of the Curonian Spit at night and to experience the power of the darkness.

DAY 4-MORNING

Presentations from neighbouring organisations and projects taking place at Nida

After a typical Lithuanian Nida breakfast including pancakes, the program started with a presentation by Elena Tsvetaeva and Yulia Bardoun from the Centre for Contempory Arts in Kaliningrad. They are the artist residency located closest to the Nida residency. Their artist residency is part of a network of Contemprory Arts Centres in a number of Russian cities. Situated in Kaliningrad they are part of a stimulating geographical site being surrounded by EU countries, which helps them to connect artists nationally and internationally. In lack of other contemporary art venues and educational opportunities, their program provides the arts scene and local community with artist talks, workshops, exhibitions and arts projects. The main operational challenges are language, visa issues,
finding funding and difficulties with long term planning. What helps them to go on in a meaningful way, are strong and varied partnerships.

They shared their podium with Anastasia Patsey from Art Centre Pushinskaya–10 who gave an overview over the artist residency field in Russia. This was a spontaneous contribution driven by the need to connect Russian initiatives better with national international audiences and to increase the information flow from the region to the world.

Two artists that are currently in residency at Nida Art Colony showed us their bird “watching” project. After a short introduction about their magazine and research they took the audience on an adventurous bird watching excursion to the highest point of the Curonian spit.

Livia Palidi from the Baltic Art Center in Sweden talked about the reprogramming of an art center after it was closed down. The main challenge was to stay internationally relevant and still work in the local context. The last 3 years were dedicated to an experiment providing residency space for production and research for artists and curators.

In a very vivid presentation Signe Pucena introduced Serde to us. Serde is an interdisciplinary Latvian art group that seeks to develop regional and international collaborations. Their residency is located in the historical centre of Aizpute inhabited by 5’500 people. When the community wanted to abandon a ruined old building, which was protected by the heritage law, they stepped in. Bit by bit, Signe and her colleagues renovated the building complex, which is a unique example of wood and red brick architecture in Latvia built in the 18th century. They can now offer attractive facilities to artists and organize events with the local community. The locals show their crafts and traditions, and the residents exhibit their artwork, shaping a dynamic mixture of contemporary arts, crafts and culture.

Day 4-AFTERNOON

Wrap up

After an evaluation of Karol Frühauf, Res Artis Board member, together with Rasa Antanavičiūtė, the Executive Director of VAA Nida Art Colony, the participants were invited to visit the studios of the Nida residencies.

An internal analysis was undertaken by Res Artis staff and Board present. In how far this meeting could satisfy our members and other participants was evaluated with a form that was handed out by VAA Nida Art Colony.

The Res Support Workshop was analysed with an evaluation form produced by Res Artis. The results will affect the further development of the workshop.

For any further questions regarding this report, please contact: office@resartis.org.

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