

CYFEST-2014 IN ST. PETERSBURG

By Lizaveta Matveeva

From November 5 to 9, the educational program of international media-art festival CYFEST was carried out at the State Hermitage Youth Education Center. Also, there was a screening of the video-art works at Luda Gallery. The festival, which was founded eight years ago in St. Petersburg by the lab Cyland, has expanded its geography in the recent years, and now its participants include Berlin, Tokyo, New York and Moscow. The theme for 2014 is "The Other Home". This event united international venues that have become "other homes" for each other. All the festival's visitors, regardless of the place where it was held, were invited with the help of contemporary technologies and means of communication to plunge into the art life in other cities and countries.



*Mauricio Sanhueza (Peru). Calico. 2012 (3:38).
Video Screening "Universe in Your Pocket". Luda Gallery.
Photo: Anton Khlabov*

The program's headliner was the American artist and musician Ken Butler. He creates strange hybrid musical instruments that look simultaneously like sculptures and installations. These objects are assembled out of the things found in the garbage and household items that are capable of producing various sounds that Ken turns into music. The American artist brought about 30 musical instruments to the Youth Center and did the performance "Voices of Anxious Objects", during which he made music on a hockey stick, a tennis racket, a shovel, an umbrella and even the zipper of his own pants. In the course of this untraditional phonation, familiar things appeared in a new capacity and filled the space with the sounds that appeared simultaneously like ethnic music, jazz, blues and noises of a big city.

The Hermitage also showcased the film program consisting of 20 documentaries on the history of electronic music from the 1940s on. During five days, visitors could view in a non-stop mode

rare film and video recordings, interviews with the artists, documentations of the performances, for instance, a clip from John Cage's film *Paying Attention*, an interview with Bebe Barron, *Music of Dust* by Paul Lansky, *Bye Bye Butterfly* by Pauline Oliveros, a documentary about Robert Moog and many other things. In addition to this, on one of the festival's days, Sergey Teterin, curator of the archive, delivered a lecture about famous performers of the electronic music.

Among CYFEST's guests, there was Al Doyle, American professor and specialist in the field of information technologies, who conducted a workshop "An Introduction to Game Design Tools: From Simple to Complex". The seminar's focus was on active users of computer games without any experience in design or computer programming, and it turned out that there are quite a few of those. The participants were introduced to the contemporary means for creating video games for iPads, and they also played various arcade games and solved puzzles.

As part of the educational program, visitors also had an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the CYLAND archive of sound art and audio that is curated by Sergey Komarov and Vladislav Dobrovolsky. This year, the archive, stored on custom-made transparent "square plates", was demonstrated with the help of special equipment. Since 2012, Sergey and Vladislav have been experimenting in search of possible means of showcasing the sound art. The plates were selected as a classic method of storage and playback of sound art. They, much like the player, are made of solid and durable material - polycarbonate. Now the archive contains works of 20 participants from different countries, but the curators intend to expand its collection to include works not only of contemporary sound artists, but also by the genre's pioneers.

One of the festival's events at the Hermitage was the workshop "Invention of Sounds" of Ken Butler who told its participants about the possibilities of sound-creating and demonstrated how to make an instrument out of materials at hand and how to derive music out of it.

The program's final event was the one-day screening of video art "Universe in Your Pocket" at Luda Gallery, and it will travel to New York as part of the festival. Works selected for the project correspond to the concept *The Other Home*. Victoria Ilyushkina, curator of the video-art program, gathered works, in which the authors examine the transformation of the notion of "home" as a border between the private and the public. Among the participants, there were artists from Europe, Russia, Japan, Chile, Philippines and Indonesia.

Anna Frants is a multimedia artist, curator, art collector, founder of the nonprofit cultural foundation St. Petersburg Arts Project and CYLAND media art lab, director of Frants Gallery Space (US/ Russia). CEO of CYFEST.

Lizaveta Matveeva: How did the concept of the eighth CYFEST "The Other Home" come about?

Anna Frants: The concept "The Other Home" was being formed as the exhibition activities of CYLAND were unfolding. We are becoming more and more international, and the other home is, in fact, the home that is not yours. It is difficult to understand the other home, so we suggested that the artists interpret this theme.

Lizaveta Matveeva: When you decided to hold the festival in 2007, what expectations you had and have they been realized? Or has the festival transformed into an unexpected form over the years?

Anna Frants: We had a role model - the group E.A.T. (the lab Experiments in Art and Technology. - *L.M.*) that was created in the United States in the 1970s by the Swedish engineer Billy Klüver. He understood that the time came when artists would need the technologies and organized a lab where thirty engineers from Bell Labs helped artists to bring technological ideas into being. Our festival is a way to tell people around us about that culture. At the first CYFEST, I was fortunate to be introduced to Julie Martin, Billy Klüver's widow. She brought over the materials and delivered a lecture. After some time, it became clear that the cyber art is inseparable from the traditional art. We started mixing the genres. One cannot say that the cyber art is singular - it is exactly the same as all the other arts - it's just that different materials are used.

Lizaveta Matveeva: As time goes by, the cyber art and, accordingly, the festival's content gets transformed?

Anna Frants: It gets modified following the new materials and technologies. But it's not technologies that are ultimate - it is art that is ultimate. We do not have fanciful things. If technology is needed to translate the idea that an artist introduces - we use it; if it's not - then we don't use it.

Lizaveta Matveeva: How does the Russian media cyber art differ from the similar art from different countries?

Anna Frants: There isn't that much cyber art in Russia, and there are not that many people who use technologies. It is more widespread in the West, and an attitude towards it is different. However, conceptually - no, there is no difference.

Lizaveta Matveeva: The festival has expanded its geography: St. Petersburg, Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo and New York. What kind of public come to CYFEST, does it differ in these cities?

Anna Frants: The public differs everywhere, in any country, even in Germany and France that are neighbors. The public in Germany and New York differs absolutely. It goes without saying that the festival is more of a draw for young people who are attracted by the very word "cyber".

Lizaveta Matveeva: What determined the program's territorial division: the educational part is in St. Petersburg, the exhibition is in Moscow, and the performance is in Japan?

Anna Frants: They can swap places, but there are practical considerations at work here: you have the river, and St. Petersburg is situated on both of its banks. Berlin has a really good space for the exhibition. The Youth Center also has a good space, but they don't seem to have enough rooms for us, so we decided to place the educational program at the Hermitage.

Lizaveta Matveeva: How do you see CYFEST in the future?

Anna Frants: I only see qualitative changes: new projects, new artists. As for the subsequent festival's growth, I think that we have now reached the maximum or we are near that because it is physically hard to do projects at so many venues.

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