

"IT IS EASIER TO GET SUPPORT IN BERLIN THAN IN ST. PETERSBURG"

By Olga Ryabukhina

This year, CYFEST in St. Petersburg was rather short-lived - from November 5th to November 9th. In the Hermitage Youth Center in the General Staff Building, the American Ken Butler - an heir to Dada, Fluxus and New Age simultaneously - held his performances playing the instruments that were hand-made out of trash. It was also the venue for screening of documentaries about the history of electronic music and for showcasing of the sound-art archive from the CYLAND Media Lab.

Starting in 2007, CYFEST was each time held on several venues in the city, and it showcased cyberarts, performances and objects of domestic authors - from the "Blue Noses" and "Kuda Begut Sobaki" to Dmitry Kawarga and ::vtol:: - in a dialog with the classics - from Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol to Billy Klüver and Phill Niblock. This year, the St. Petersburg portion of CYFEST has been significantly reduced, but, on the plus side, the festival will open next week in Moscow and, in late November - in Tokyo. In December, the exhibition The Other Home as well as the presentation of the sound-art archive will be held in Berlin. In mid-December, there will be a presentation of the video-art program that, as promised, will be repeated at the Luda Gallery. Anna Frants, cofounder and curator of the festival, spoke why CYFEST expanded its geography, what kind of audience it has in Tokyo and about the museification of cyber art.

— **This year, CYFEST was held just for five days in St. Petersburg, but it was widely received in the rest of the world. How come it shrunk ever so much in St. Petersburg?**

— CYFEST is no smaller this time than last year - it still has performances and master classes. It is smaller than a few years ago because we decided to expand towards globalization. The festival will start here, and then it will move to Moscow, Tokyo, Berlin and New York. We will showcase something new in every city. The exhibition of artists from St. Petersburg The Other Home will be held in Berlin. There will be a video screening in New York and a performance in Tokyo. Also of importance is the fact that we receive no support - it is as if nobody is interested in us. We are on our own. Fortunately, the Hermitage has afforded us a wonderful venue, but this is the extent of it. However, Berlin and New York are really happy to receive us. It is easier to get support in Berlin than in St. Petersburg.

— **How did you manage to make arrangements with all the international venues?**

— We have a long history of friendship with Berlin. The owner of the New-York gallery Dam Stuhltrager, where I am on board, moved to Berlin, and Leah Stuhltrager, who is its curator and my friend, helped us to find the space. The city gave her a huge post-office building that has both an exhibition hall and a residential area, among other things. Being an energetic person, she plunged into such ambitious activities that the city started supporting it. New York is the place where I live most of the time. Tokyo is the result of a confluence of circumstances. The Japanese side invited us because of the days of Berlin. Their venue is very good - it is near the Mori Art Museum in the Roppongi Hills.

— **Can you picture the audience of CYFEST on the international venues?**

— In Berlin and New York - yes. This is harder to do with Tokyo due to geopolitical reasons and the difference between our cultures. The Tokyo audience is less predictable than, shall we say, the Berlin one, though the latter, in its turn, very much differs from the audience in St. Petersburg. One of the festival's organizers in Tokyo is a Japanese company that deals

with the promotion of technologies with the elements of art (at our CYFEST art come first, with them - it's the other way around). It is most likely that our audience there will be the younger generation. The Japanese, in particular, will organize a round table where they will discuss the integration of technologies into art. Strange as it may seem, they invited to participate in the round table not me, but my 16-year-old son Daniil who has been conducting master classes at CYFEST since he was 12 years old.

— **How do you participate in this Cyfest as an artist?**

— In Berlin - with the installation On the Lookout that was first showcased as part of the parallel program to Manifesta at the gallery Frants Gallery Space at my home. To Tokyo - this is their choice, not ours - I send the project with vases called Jumping Jacks, and one of such vases is in the collection of Museum of Art and Design in New York. I have many variations of this project - about 15 items. The Japanese selected three vases. The other venture that will travel to Tokyo is the project Inventions by Ivan Govorkov and my son Daniil. Ivan will be drawing while the system will be reading his movements through the software, and a 3D printer will print out sculpture. That is to say, Ivan's two-dimensional drawing will become a three-dimensional sculptural form.

— **What the first CYFESTs were about and how they differ from the current festival?**

— CYFEST is this satellite of CYLAND Media Lab, which is one of its kind in Russia. We work with engineers and computer programmers. Media Art Lab in Moscow works in a similar fashion, but their format is somewhat different. When the media lab came into being, it became clear that there was a need for a certain event that would reflect this subject matter. CYLAND itself was created in the image of "E.A.T". In the 1970's, there was this engineer named Billy Klüver. He realized that the time came for technologies to play part in the arts and organized the lab "Experiments in Art and Technology". A book on this subject in Russian is available on our site. Klüver had thirty engineers at his disposal. We do not have thirty bodies, but, nevertheless, our idea is the same: for artists freely to use technologies as their material. I was fortunate to be introduced Klüver's widow who remembers all that. We invited her to St. Petersburg, and we showed a historic retrospective at the Peter and Paul Fortress - this is how CYFEST started. Gradually, the interest in it grew and local artists started to get involved.

— **The main difference seems to lie in that, this year, the ST. Petersburg leg of the festival totally lacks local authors.**

— Their projects are still showcased, as they are being developed, at various exhibitions. For instance, Gubanova and Govorkov had a project Gagarin and Gravity presented at the parallel program to Manifesta at the Library of Book Graphics, and their project Danae was showcased at the Hermitage and in Moscow. It is more interesting to bring these works abroad - to the places where nobody has seen them before. For one, CYLAND will yet again bring artists from St. Petersburg to the Venice Biennale in the spring of 2015. It is also interesting to bring artists from abroad. I really liked Butler's performance. We did have the practice of producing musical instruments, but they never played. For example, the group Mitki has this Kuzyarushka who has done musical compilations and collages, but they were static, and Butler plays them all.

— **Last year, Yuri Landman came to SKIF. Yuri is a Dutch musician who gave a master class on making experimental guitars at that festival.**

— It is possible that Butler is not the only one who does it, but he was one of the pioneers, and now he is in his late 60s.

— **You spend a lot of time abroad and, as it were, you are half-integrated into the local art community, so you can look at it from outside. What changes have you noticed during the last few years?**

— Some moments escape my attention because half of the time I live in New York. The main change is a certain revitalization. It is a really good thing that Manifesta took place. It stirred and revitalized the space. Due to the fact that the art market collapsed, Moscow took interest in artists from St. Petersburg. The distance between Moscow and St. Petersburg is currently a great deal shorter than, shall we say, three years ago. I attribute this to the death of commercial market. This is good for the art of St. Petersburg.

— **It is for the first time that CYFEST will go to Moscow, which, as you mentioned, houses Media Art Lab or, for instance, Plums Festival that exists at the intersection of technologies, arts and electronic music. That is to say, there is a certain competition field in Moscow. Doesn't it seem to you that the festival would simply get lost over there?**

— No, it doesn't seem so at all. Art is the primary element for us, and technologies are used as a tool. Furthermore, we use the traditional art as well at our exhibitions of cyber objects. And we don't see the difference between the traditional and nontraditional art. So, these projects are not so much competitors as welcome partners. Lexus Hybrid Art is also in Moscow. However, they are all a little bit different - they are more about cyber art than we are.

— **The New Stage of Alexandrinsky Theater launched a media center: they now have the Floating Sound Gallery, and Yury Didevich put up a show Neurointegrum, in which sensors read the performer's emotional state and, based on this information, generate the image and sounds...**

— This is quite a popular subject in the field of performance in the world. I think that all the flowers should flourish - the more projects there are, the more interesting things will come to life. I met Didevich, though we have never collaborated. The New Stage of Alexandrinsky Theater might have a great future.

— **Why haven't you collaborated with the New Stage.**

— We have tried to reach them, but they didn't get back to us. They have their own business over there, whereas we are quite self-sufficient and we work with the Western programmers that are open to collaboration. It is rather hard to build communications with the local scene. There is always a hidden agenda that one doesn't really want to figure out, to tell you the truth.

— **You take our artists abroad, in particular, to the Venice Biennale. How does this affect the pricing and the evolvement of the art market in St. Petersburg?**

— In no way whatsoever because the St. Petersburg market is really sluggish. And, besides museums, who would buy cyber artworks? The Russian Museum wanted to buy Luda Belova's music tower made out of the insides of a piano. I think there is an installation of Andrey Bartenev in the Museum of Moscow. However, there is a problem with the museums as well: cyber artworks need maintenance, and there is a whole list of requirements. For

instance, the Museum of Art and Design in New York bought my vases. They come with projectors. And what should be done if the projectors break down and their line is discontinued? Now there is a serious problem with the works by Nam June Paik because he didn't leave a will, in which he would indicate that he didn't mind the use of new technologies for the restoration of his works. This is a really unusual issue that the museums need to address. A totally new category of museification is coming into being.

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