

INVISIBLE HERITAGE OF BREST

[Alina Dzeravianka](#)

1/23/2021

In September 2020, the [Brest Fortress Development Foundation](#) announced an open call, as a result of which it invited four contemporary artists to take part in a 10-day art residency in Brest.

The art residency in Brest, where the organizers covered the costs of the artists' stay, is a way to focus on artistic practice, an opportunity to immerse yourself in the local environment and problems, and to spend a week working on a project.

The mission of the residency was, using artistic methods, to expand the existing image of the Soviet history of Brest and to present a reflective look on the Soviet heritage of the fortress and of the city.

The Foundation's team has been researching the fortress and Brest for more than seven years, working with local history through the digitalization of knowledge, events in new formats and creating new tourism products. The Foundation often involves artists in its projects: photographers Oksana Yushko and Arthur Bondar (Moscow), artist Wapke Feentsra from [myvillages.org](#) (Rotterdam), Nick Degtyarev (Moscow), Hutkasmachnaa (Minsk) and many others. In 2020, within the framework of the art residency in Brest, there came: Ilona Dergach, Aliaxey Talstou, Daria Trofimova, Maxim Sarychau.

As a result of the residency, four projects were created, which were to be exhibited in Brest in November 2020. Due to COVID-19, it was decided to hold an online exhibition. The exhibition is organized in collaboration with the [SHKLO platform for contemporary photographers](#) and is available at [invisibleheritage.shklo.org](#). On the opening day of the exhibition, a talk took place: "[How is the art environment of Brest changing and what will happen to it next?](#)" featuring Aliaxey Talstou, Mikhail Gulin, Katerina Pavlovich, Liza Mikhalchuk, Ilona Dergach, and Daria Trofimova.



Still from the video of the performance by Ilona Dergach

"In Brest, much reminds of the Soviet era, which ended almost 30 years ago. But only now are we beginning to think about how to relate to this past and the power of its influence on the present.

For many, the image of Brest is inseparably linked with the outbreak of World War II in the USSR and the creation of the Memorial Complex "Brest Hero-Fortress". The planning of a significant part of the residential areas of the city took place during the Soviet period, therefore the traditions of Soviet architecture can still be noticed in the new quarters today. The Soviet has become firmly embedded in our present and culture, and sometimes it seems that little has changed around. The Soviet way of thinking also did not disappear with the collapse of the USSR – that is why different generations have different attitudes towards the same events in history and today.

In the critical heritage studies, there is a concept of "heritagization", where "heritage" is formed and designated through the grassroots initiative, when a community or group proposes something and demands that this object / phenomenon be recognized as historically important. Much in Brest has yet to become a heritage, and artists are among those who can help to realize the significance and emphasize what should be preserved.

Therefore, during the art residency of the Brest Fortress Development Foundation, the artists were invited to immerse in the context of modern Brest, including the Brest Fortress, architecture and monuments of the Soviet period, to reveal an invisible heritage that has already become part of the usual everyday life, in which the border between the past and the present is often blurred. What value is there today? What will disappear as quickly as it appeared in our life? What is important to remember and keep?



Still from a performance by Aliaxey Talstou. Photo by Daria Trofimova

In his artistic research, photographer Maxim Sarychau, went on a trip through the Brest region in search of a Soviet-era mosaics that were created at bus stops. Daria Trofimova turned to monotonous life and stories in five-story buildings typical for the entire post-Soviet space, creating a kind of video-panel out of them. Aliaxey Talstou, in the genre of performative poetry, suggests thinking about what is better to leave in the past and without which a "bright future" is impossible. Ilona Dergach asked a question about the invisible boundaries of what is permissible in the construction of memory and its hidden aspects in the name of higher goals.

Time requires changes and creates new opportunities for comprehending the past. Our discussions and debates can help in this process of choosing an invisible heritage. – curatorial text for the exhibition 'Invisible Heritage'.¹

Project organizer: Brest Fortress

Development Foundation

Supported by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Project partners: Hermitage Hotel, Conserva Art Quarter, SHKLO Platform for Contemporary Photographers, Binkl.by, KH Space.

1. Excerpt From the curatorial text of Alina Dzeravianka, 2020 ¹