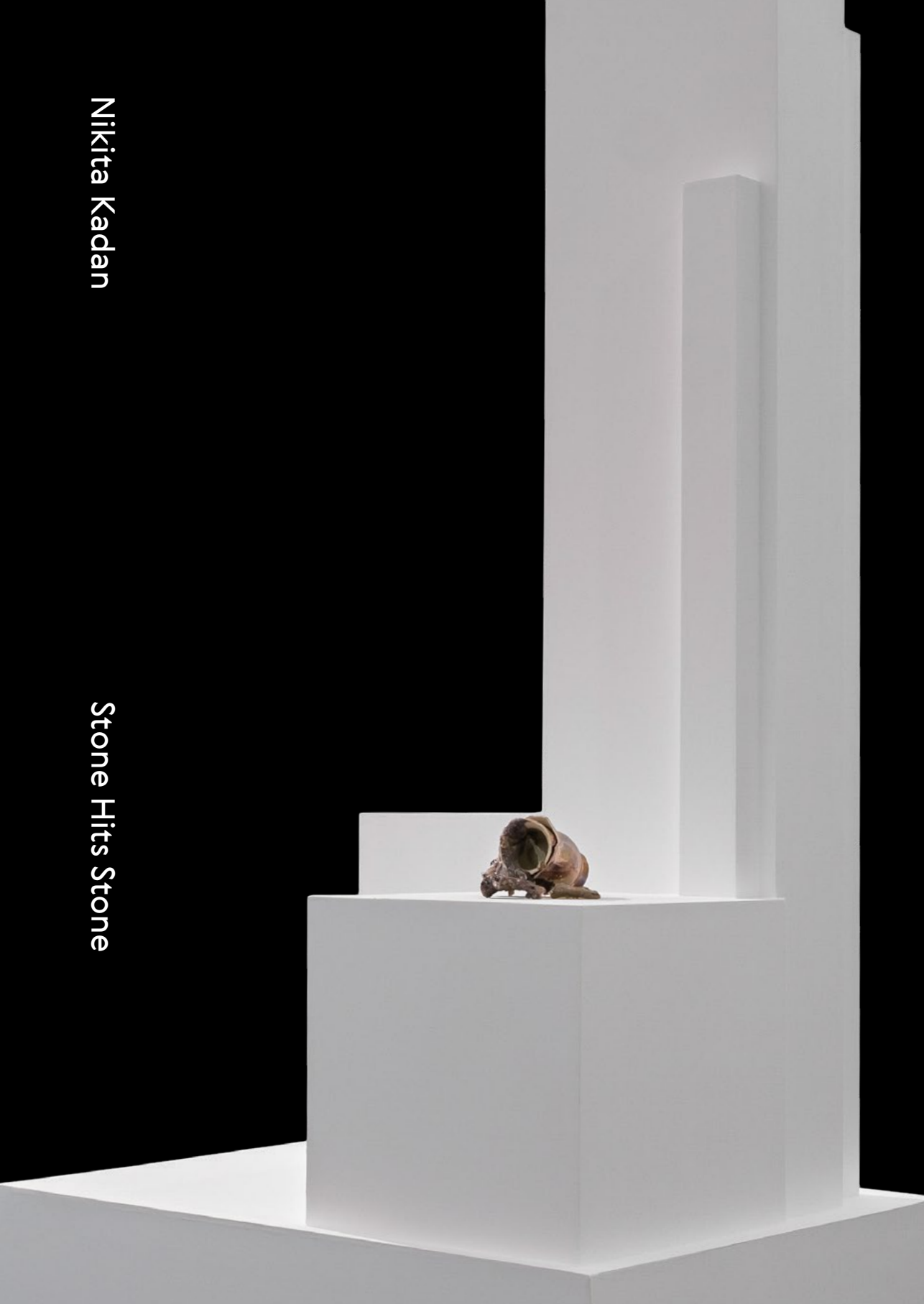


Nikita Kadan

Stone Hits Stone



The historical past, in the form of ideologies, art and acts of political violence, lies at the heart of Kadan's oeuvre. He delves deep into the (Ukrainian) avant-garde and engages with the history of last century in Ukraine. Permeating the entire exhibition are historical events, objects and designs which the artist re-interprets with regard to modern-day pressing need to resist geopolitical failures, and far-right ideologies. With an acute sense of urgency, Kadan continues to talk about history as the here and now. But the exhibition goes beyond historical facts by addressing political violence embedded in binary world views. It makes the question of memory as such the subject of artistic expression while exposing and contrasting the political injuries caused to it.

Published on the occasion of a solo exhibition by Nikita Kadan *Stone Hits Stone* and within the framework of the PinchukArtCentre Research Platform.

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PinchukArtCentre

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Stone Hits Stone, is the first major solo exhibition of Nikita Kadan in Ukraine and his largest solo exhibition to date. It is a celebration of an artist who, over the last 14 years, has created a vibrant international career while also influencing and supporting many Ukrainian artists.

For PinchukArtCentre, Nikita Kadan is only the third Ukrainian artist in 15 years to be represented with a major solo exhibition. He follows in the footsteps of two other monumental figures of Ukrainian art: Sergey Bratkov and Boris Mikhailov. This landmark exhibition is the culmination of a long collaborative journey. Since 2007, Kadan has shown twice in the PinchukArtCentre Prize (winning it in 2009), twice in the Future Generation Art Prize (once as a member of REP), taken part in the exhibition *Fear and Hope*, and contributed works to five other group exhibitions.

It is therefore not without pride that we celebrate Nikita Kadan with this publication and exhibition, marking history while dreaming of the future.

Björn Geldhof
Artistic Director PinchukArtCentre

NIKITA KADAN: STONE HITS STONE THE PAST AS AN URGENT NOW

BJÖRN GELDHOF

“To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”¹

Walter Benjamin, On the Concept of History, 1940

¹ Benjamin, Walter. (1940) *Illuminations*. Edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn. New York City, Schocken books. 1969. P. 255

- 9 The historical past, in the form of ideologies, art and acts of political violence, lies at the heart of Kadan’s oeuvre. He delves into works of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde and engages with the history of the last century in Ukraine. From this perspective, it seems fitting that his first large-scale solo-exhibition in Ukraine, *Stone hits Stone*, opens with a memory expressed as an intuitive art-historical reflection, mainly through works from those counted among the Ukrainian Avant-Garde. The works celebrate the Soviet revolution (Victor Palmov) and are testament of a Soviet ideology that merged with communist theory and practice² (Vasyl Yermilov). Others emphasize Ukraine and its cultural identity (Ivan Padalka) and the subject of political violence against those who identified as Ukrainian (Sofia Nalepynska-Boychuk) and by among others Ukrainians against minorities (Manuil Shechtman and the Marc Chagall). Kadan juxtaposes his own work, *Tiger’s leap* (2018) to this historical reflection. The sculpture displays iron replicas of improvised weapons fashioned from tools used in industrial metallurgy during the early 20th century, in what was then the Russian Empire. Such weapons were used by factory workers in a failed uprising in 1905 in Horlivka, an industrial city in the Donetsk region. The revolt was violently subdued by the military, but this act of resistance was one of many that laid the groundwork for not only the successful revolution of 1917 and the start of the Soviet empire, but also the enthusiastic belief in a Soviet utopia that would be vividly expressed by the artists of the Avant-Garde.

Tiger’s Leap, is one of Walter Benjamin’s most well known concepts. Applied to the work of Kadan, Xin Feng & Kiera Chapman’s reading of a tiger’s leap comes to mind: “a ‘tiger’s leap’ into the past rejects the idea of time as linear and sequential in favor of a creative use of past example that breaks with the temporal continuum. The ‘tiger’s leap’ allows people to seize on the past as a source of difference and thus to draw attention to new possibilities for change in the present.”³. Kadan, throughout the exhibition, makes a series of ‘tiger’s leaps’ by appropriating historical events, objects and designs, and reinterpreting them with a contemporary urgency—an urgency to resist geo-political failures, extreme right ideologies and neo-liberal forces.

An example is *Victory (White Shelf)* (2017), a work reinterpreting Vasyl Yermilov’s (1894-1964) unrealized sculptural composition entitled *Three Russian revolutions: 1825, 1905 and 1917*. Yermilov, one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde and a predominant inspiration for Kadan, worked in constructivist tradition seeking to express ideology mainly through geometrical constructs, seen as the creative organizing principle of art. For his *Three Russian revolutions: 1825, 1905 and 1917*, he constructed a logical argument on history, embracing the consciousness of a then new society. Examining Kadan’s piece, Yevgenia Belorusets explains Yermilov’s work by saying: “... (the) several surfaces of the sculptural group united become an embodiment of history, its code. Each surface in his exceptionally concise construction comes across as a sign of a particular historical event”⁴. Kadan revives this sculptural composition but radically transforms the carefully constructed surfaces of Yermilov. Instead, he chooses to recreate the work as a pure white form. “*Three revolutions become a ‘Victory’; to align historical events in a certain significant order seems pointless. Kadan moves the absurd nature of the ‘rational’ formation of revolutions in a composition of concise forms into a chaos of meanings, in which any of the events appears in the shape of a single Victory*”⁵. Belorusets points out that Kadan refuses the rational approach to history

² Railing, Patricia. (1995) *The Idea of Construction as the Creative Principle in Russian Avant-Garde Art*. Leonardo. Vol. 28, No. 3 (1995), pg 201

³ Feng, Xin; Chapman, Keira (2020). *The tiger’s leap’: The role of history in legitimating the authority of modern Chinese planners*. In Sage journal. 2020. URL: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0042098019882913>

⁴ Belorusets, Yevgenia. *On a future without a past. What if the past is never actually happened? Can the Future take place?*. Projects of Ruins Nikita Kadan, page 51.

⁵ ibidem



11 embedded in the original work of Yermilov, recognizing it as a single form which evokes a chaos of meaning. The interpretation of Kadan becomes even more consequential when his choice of material is taken into account. The work is translated using white painted plasterboard, a mass-produced building material. For Kadan it is a symbol of what is known as “евроремонт”⁶ and is inherently generic. What is more, because the inner properties of the material do not have a relation to its outer content, its use becomes problematic in constructivist ideological terms⁷. Nevertheless, it serves the rigid conceptualization of the work, reducing the “original ideology” and making *Victory* a shell, offering, on one hand space for a (re)new(ed) utopia, and on the other hand formulating an urgent critique of Ukraine’s relationship to its own (unwanted) history. This critique is further complicated by the transformation of the sculpture into a *White Shelf* (or a *Pedestal*) which carries an object retrieved from a destroyed house in Lysychansk (a city previously in the warzone in eastern Ukraine). By including this object of ongoing war (history in the making), Kadan completes his ‘tiger’s leap’ and reorients history entirely towards the present and future. This allows *Victory* (*White Shelf*) to remember the past while being a piece of evidence of an ongoing war (the present) and an undecided monument for an uncertain future.

The transformation of Yermilov’s sculptural model into a pedestal fits a long-term interest of Kadan into the ideological meaning of the avant-garde pedestal. Over a period that lasted longer than a century, heroes and ideologies shifted continuously. Throughout this time, public monuments changed accordingly. But with all those changes, very often the pedestal itself, which in constructivist tradition was an expression of ideology, stayed untouched, carrying a new temporal hero. The first monumental work devoted to this subject is *Pedestal. Practice of Exclusion* (2009-2010), a near 6-meter large Avant-Garde inspired pedestal made of the same white-painted plasterboard material, installed into a 6-meter-high space. As a result the pedestal became the sculpture itself, refusing its role of servitude while emphasizing its original ideological narrative. With this work, Kadan urged a reconsideration of the political framework in which national memory is defined and cultural heritage becomes censored and destroyed. It criticized the ongoing war on monuments in post-Soviet Ukraine, a war that till this day is costing Ukraine essential parts of its heritage. Although Kadan continued his interest in the pedestal itself, the notion of the ‘monument’ is a more poignant departure point to understand his works. *Victory* (*White shelf*) and *Pedestal. Practice of Exclusion* are first and foremost modernist and avant-garde designs which Kadan transforms into monuments because they are a testament of the Soviet utopia. This appropriation and transformation of historical forms doesn’t suggest history might or should be repeated, but rather that history is a way to enlighten the present.⁸

This understanding is most urgently embodied in *Victory*, as well as in the newly produced *Lysa Hora Architecton* (2021). This monumental new work, installed in the same space where *Pedestal. Practice of Exclusion* was first shown in 2011 (coming full circle), draws on a series of “architectons”, drawings and later plaster block models by Kazimir Malevich exploring the notion of cosmos and “cosmic cities”. They embodied Malevich’s efforts to translate the suprematist principles of composition to three-dimensional forms and architecture.⁹ This work, made in a time and place where artists and especially architects internationally (far beyond the Soviet Union) were drawn to the belief that the socialist revolution offered the

6 This is a term widely used in CIS countries to designate a special type (often major) repairs in residential or commercial premises.

7 Railing, Patricia. (1995) *The Idea of Construction as the Creative Principle in Russian Avant-Garde Art*. Leonardo. Vol. 28, No. 3 (1995), pg 201

8 See: Snyder, Tymotheny (2021) *The American Abyss*. New York Times magazine. 9 January 2021.

9 See: Fabrizio, Mariabruna (2015). *Kazimir Malevich’s Arkhitektons in Sosck*. 2015. URL : <http://socks-studio.com/2015/07/15/kazimir-malevichs-arkhitektons/>



prospect of imminently realizing their most utopian dreams.¹⁰ This belief in an imminent utopia, inherently embedded in the architectons, is juxtaposed to “a burned house” installed instead of the original black circle of Malevich’s Architecton. In doing so, Kadan replaces the notion of cosmos and utopia with that of a violent reality. The burned house makes reference to the attack in 2018 on a Roma encampment in Kyiv by a paramilitary organization C14 (Ukrainian extreme right nationalists). They rounded up the families and led them away from their homes, which were subsequently burned. This modern-day pogrom shamed Ukraine, a reference that is made explicit by the adjoining lightbox showing an image and new paperclipping of this horrifying event. The sculpture in this sense offers a steep warning against the dangers of politically driven violence that through fascist ideology threatens to hijack nationalism. The burned house is equally a stain on the utopian dreams voiced by socialism, while the sculpture expresses an ideological clash that echoes the binary world views dividing today’s society at large, both in Ukraine and on the global stage.

Kadan’s monuments to failures of society and political violence emphasize (national) memory as a tool of societal definition. It makes ‘politics of memory’ an essential battle ground within the political arena, by definition the subject of manipulation, and never about “the way history really was”. This makes Kadan’s practice a form of resistance, voicing memory as a part of a public debate not ‘managed’ by the political class. An example of this is seen in the work *Pogrom* (2016-2017). A series of large-scale drawings that are based on photographic evidence of the pogrom that took place in Lviv early July 1941, in the days following the occupation by the German forces. Over a period of 4 weeks, over 4000 Jews were murdered. Although initiated and encouraged by the occupiers, the pogrom was carried out by (among others) Ukrainians who were part of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The participation of Ukrainian nationalists was long disputed but has become apparent through research and testimonies, particularly in the work of professor John-Paul Himka¹¹, who not only names the OUN but includes the urban crowd, composed of both Poles and Ukrainians, with those who took part in robberies, sexual assault, beatings and murders. The photographic evidence was captured by the German occupiers, and each drawing stays true to the composition of its source photograph. Kadan only permitted himself to make slight crops, maintaining the gaze of the photographers, who were in this case German officer or military journalist. The viewer is thus following the gaze of the perpetrator. This position forces the viewer into the uncomfortable position of looking at the crime as if witnessing the event itself. This unapologetic repetition of the perpetrator’s gaze, combined with Kadan’s aggressive and dynamic drawing technique and the large scale of each work, makes the images difficult to forget (resisting removal from history). At the same time, through the act of interpreting and naming documentary evidence of cruelty, he again exposes risks embedded in nationalism and its connection to fascist ideology.

The subject of political violence, embedded in binary world views, moves us through the exhibition, both in direct and indirect ways. A key work for this is *The Inhabitants of Colosseum* (2018). The work appears first as a sound piece at the start of the exhibition but is not named or explained until the very end of the exhibition where it returns in a different form. As a sound piece, one hears the sound of 400 pairs of wooden clogs walking together over a stone bridge (the work at the start of the exhibition has no caption nor any textual reference). The sound itself is a remnant of a 2018 performance in Regensburg, which took the form of



¹⁰ Wolfe, Ross Laurence, *The Graveyard of Utopia: Soviet Urbanism and the Fate of the International Avant-Garde*, in CHARNEL-HOUSE magazine. URL : <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2011/11/22/the-graveyard-of-utopia-soviet-urbanism-and-the-fate-of-the-international-avant-garde/>
¹¹ Himka, John-Paul (2011). *The Lviv Pogrom of 1941: The Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd*, in Canadian Slavonic Papers, Vol. 53, 2011 - Issue 2-4: Special section: Twenty Years On: Slavic Studies Since the Collapse of the Soviet Union.





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19 a call to public action by Nikita Kadan in remembrance of over 400 prisoners, who were stationed at the Colosseum boarding house, a satellite of the Flossenburg concentration camp between March 19 and April 24th, 1945. During their internment, the prisoners were forced to repair damaged railway connections, marching daily from the camp over the stone bridge in Regensburg to the railway worksite, wearing wooden clogs. Over a period of 5 weeks, a tenth of the prisoners died. The choice to leave this sound work unnamed and unexplained at the start of the exhibition allows for the installation to move beyond its original intent, becoming duplicitous. The deliberate manipulation invites an initial reading of the work within the context of the first spaces and works the viewer encounters, with suggestions of Marxist ideals, revolutions and farmers' resistance. The fascist narrative, inherent to the work's original meaning, is only revealed at the very end of the exhibition, complicating the encounters that followed the first display of *The Inhabitants of Colosseum*. This confusion obliges the viewer to revisit the preceding works and rethink the implications of fascist history and ideology, in relation to both Ukrainian historical narratives and contemporary challenges within Ukraine and in a global context.

The Inhabitants of Colosseum, is both the false beginning and the end of the exhibition. In the last room, it takes the form of documentation and stands in conversation with *Anonymous, Tarred* (2021), yet another monument, and a new large scale charcoal drawing inspired by Yermilov remembering the Internationale. The sculptural form of *Anonymous, Tarred* is informed by sculptural exercises, or "volumes", developed by students of the avant-garde at the VKHUTEMAS workshops in Moscow in 1920, under the guidance of Anton Lavinsky. These volumes represent the legacy of Soviet ideology, a legacy Kadan dramatically comments on by covering the monumental form with black tar, while placing it on a traditional white marble plinth. This blackened volume is the counterpoint to the white *Victory*. White was as much a shell as it was a utopian expression of ideals, while the gesture of covering the sculpture with black tar, on the other hand, is an act of desecration symbolic to how the politics of memory engages with history and heritage in Ukraine, which simultaneously declares the death of the Soviet utopia. However, through the act of placing it respectfully on a white marble plinth, the importance of that utopia is preserved as a memory in the face of an implied dystopian future. *Anonymous, Tarred*, a blackened Soviet legacy, and *The Inhabitants of Colosseum*, a fascist history, represent two ideologies that defined the 20th century. While the struggle between those two ideologies might have been paused (or came to an end), it emphasizes the binary logic and violence, rather than ideology, that survived and continues to divide the globe in the 21st century.

With an acute sense of urgency, Kadan continues to revive throughout this exhibition moments, images or artworks from the past century as 'an urgent now'. And yet, all the works move beyond historical facts, making the question of memory itself the issue, while exposing and opposing the political injuries done to it. *Stone hits Stone* is never about "history as it really was". It is a motive that flashes up in a moment of danger. It enlightens our present and orients us towards the future.



HEAD TO THE WIND— NIKITA KADAN'S ARTISTIC IMAGES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR REMEMBRANCE

KATERYNA IAKOVLENKO

Today, the fresh wind from the pastures
Has made its way to stuffy streets.
It knew no how—go back or visit—
And so it calmed.
I left the house into daylight,
With head to wind I stepped outside.
The wind has touched me, it has hugged me
So soft, so light.

David Hofstein¹

¹ A fragment of David Hofstein's poem. Translated into English from a Hebrew-Ukrainian translation by Pavlo Tychyna.

22

23 The further we enter the age of digital reproduction, the greater the risk of forgetting our own past, especially when that past is unacceptable, inconvenient and suffocating. And when this past emerges, flying through the paned window on a strong, cold wind, it makes us shiver. We become embarrassed and frightened by our own history, which is filled with tragedy and violence against each other. Such a wind is a frequent guest in the most recent years. However, the nature of the wind is ambivalent; it can both fan the flames, destroying all it touches, and extinguish them. Artists whose creative practice was formed after the independence of Ukraine have acquired a sharp and critical voice. The distance of time, allows artists to ask themselves critical questions about the past. They themselves become natural elements, in opposition to the wind. The art of Nikita Kadan and his cohort becomes such a biting and intermittent wind. It blows into the ideological space, alters the perception of historical tragedies, and opposes oblivion.

Nikita Kadan's work is characterized by several lines, which the author develops consistently. One of them is the connection with unrealized utopian models from the past. Another is the topic of violence and mass casualties caused by political struggles and battles of remembrance in future. Engaging artistically with the topic of the death of innocent people, the author asks over the centuries: what did this violence cost us, and are we able to take responsibility for guilt and the crimes committed? He himself gives the answer by combining the themes of the artistic avant-garde, Ukrainian and Soviet cultural heritage and stories of past victims with today's tragedies: the war in Donbas, xenophobia, and persecution of national minorities. Kadan exposes these unlearned lessons, pointing to the need to reconsider our own involvement in this blood-stained history.

In this case, the feeling of involvement in tragedy is important. During his lecture at the Center for Urban History, Professor John-Paul Himka² spoke about the identification of murderers and victims during World War II. Analyzing the experience of understanding and remembering World War II, the Canadian researcher noted the risks of what he referred to as *memory separation*, a situation in which violence is not equated with, but rather separated from history, as if people are saying that because their families and relatives were not involved in the tragedies, they themselves are not involved.

With this in mind, it is interesting to look at the works of Nikita Kadan, which break this perspective. When studying mass killings, historians, anthropologists and sociologists pay close attention to every detail in all documents because it is these details that help to reveal the truth or show fabricated information. Looking at photos, they look at the surrounding landscape, clothes, shoes, faces—anything that can give an understanding of who this person was, what views and social status he or she had. In the artist's works, the context is similarly formed by such details: for example, by cups of a kitchen set, deformed by the fire after the artillery shelling in Donbas, or Soviet window grilles in the form of a sun. These "trifles" that make up our daily routine were never noticeable until the artist brought them to the gallery and focused on them.

Looking at these things, the author illustrates the fine line between our everyday life and cruelty, while the universality and simplicity of the images allow him to expand the issue, revealing our own involvement in history. The artist places testimonies of past horrors, tragedies, and their reflection in art alongside the horrors of today—objects related to the

² Himka, John-Paul. *Who is who? Problems in identifying murderers and victims in Ukraine before and during World War II*, a speech during the program of public lectures and discussions within the exhibition "(un)marked" at the Center for Urban History on 19 October 2017.



war in Donbas, attacks on Roma, and others. He emphasizes that our present is born of the past. Jewish families from the works of Manuil Shechtman, David Hofstein, and Marc Chagall are not so distant from the Roma families affected by the 2018 attack (the work *Lysa Hora Architecton*, created in collaboration with Dana Kosmina) or with migrants from Donbas who were forced to flee the war in search of a safe place to live (the work *Victory, Broken Flag Pole* series). Looking for shelter, they took a difficult path: under their feet, the ground was mixed with sand, broken window glass, and traces of blood, tears, and pity.

In conversation with the avant-garde artists of the past, the artist concludes that both the dead and the executioners always walked the same path. Our entire landscape is shaped by tragedy, grief, despair, the search for justice, and hope for the future. There is not a single person who has not wandered this path. As such, the artistic field itself is at this crossroad. Biographies of Mykhailo Boychuk, Vasyl Yermolov, Borys Kosariiev, Sofiya Nalepinska-Boychuk, Ivan Padalka, Manuil Shekhtman, and many other authors of the early twentieth century show this gap between artistic ideas and ideology. The artistic aspirations of the authors who created avant-garde works were aimed at a belief in the power of art, however, these ideas could not be realized. The artists saw the revolution as a fresh wind that would bring significant changes, such as internationalism, equality, social rights and benefits, space exploration, and more. Instead, they faced a real storm that destroyed their aspirations and destinies. This anxiety and struggle are conveyed in the poetry of David Hofstein:

*A group of breezes
from the hills
is prowling slick
into the dark abyss...*³

In the end, art which could have influenced political power was subdued by political pressure: the ideas that the artists believed in became unacceptable and the artists themselves, unnecessary. *And there is a small space, not everyone found a place in the grove, and the game began: to fight off a ready-made twig, a leaf from the other... And I stand, silent. My mind is filled with one thing only—that troubled silence.*⁴

The history of the twentieth century is a time when violence permeated literally everything, from the physical pain of torture to words that cut like a knife. In fact, the poetry of those times, including poems by Pavlo Fylypovych and Oleksa Slisarenko, inspired Nikita Kadan to name the exhibition, *Stone hits Stone*. This seemingly absurd phrase speaks of the impossibility of peaceful dialogue and proclaims a struggle with adversaries, in which nature has endowed the opponents with all its might. Memory, like stone, is shaped by time, and subject to wind, rain, and the various conditions in which they both exist. It is noteworthy that Kadan refers to poetry, because according to Paul Connerton, *the rhythms of oral poetry become a privileged form of “remembrance”, because with the help of rhythm a series of motor reflexes of the body torment and combine to work memory and memorization*⁵. Like the futurist poets, Kadan also builds rhythm and creates dramaturgy, transforming artistic expression into a coherent narrative.

26

27 Kadan collects fragments of the twentieth century to show another side of the avant-garde era: while avant-garde artists abandoned the past in favor of the future, Kadan says that we have only the past, and our society lives in a situation without future and oblivion, because the unrealized future may still happen⁶. Only liberation from identity and nationalist framework returns us to a conversation about the value of freedom through the rejection of traditions, prejudices, and social restrictions in favor of the truths of universalism. Following the author’s opinion, this will create conditions for the development of a society that produces not xenophobia and exclusion, but renewal and creative experimentation, and this is how new forms of totalitarianism. The artist speaks of the polyphony, complexity, and ambiguity of the whole period. The past itself turns into a ghost that roams the present until its unfinished issues are resolved. Yet, referring to the unrealized or lost works of the avant-garde period, the artist seeks to correct the mistakes of the past and give it a new chance.

Fond of the romance of the sea, avant-garde poets turned to Kherson slang. In particular, in his *Ballad of Smuggling*, Oleksa Vlyzko seems to be shouting into the wind. Almost a century later, Kadan says, ‘What is being done now in the circle of authors close to me is something that is based [...] on standing with dignity against the wind of history.’

³ _____ A fragment of David Hofstein's poem. Translated into English from a Hebrew-Ukrainian translation by Pavlo Tychyna

⁴ _____ Ibid.

⁵ _____ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*

⁶ _____ The idea of a postponed future was first used by Nikita Kadan for the exhibition *Postponed Futures* at the Grad Gallery (London, UK) <https://www.grad-london.com/whatson/postponed-futures/>

TO WAKE UP BEFORE YESTERDAY COMES

KATERYNA MISHCHENKO

28

29 These works have been touched by black bile. The literal meaning of the word “melancholy”, visually comprehensible in Nikita Kadan’s works of the last few years, declares its dominance quite clearly. We are speaking about the left-wing melancholy, originating from the decline of the socialist utopia and the moment we bid farewell to the chance of the historical future. The historian Enzo Traverso, author of the book *Left-Wing Melancholia*, sees potential for the rediscovery of hope in this feeling, by reflecting on the failures of major liberation projects, from the Paris Commune to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

That being said, the melancholy in Kadan’s works is also equidistant from the thoughts of Walter Benjamin, who described this feeling as a kind of a genre that exhausts an author’s left agenda before it even touches the essence of things. Contemporary art often risks being trapped by a genre of this kind, only kept from falling into this trap by its own self-undermining tendencies. This is the direction towards which Nikita Kadan looks, continuing the dialogue with Benjamin, and moving towards the politicization of the aesthetics, which, according to the philosopher, is the recipe for any leftist, and particularly anti-fascist, resistance.

Implementing this recipe in a post-Soviet country—one troubled by war and social instability, in the ruins of big art breakthroughs, and with an atmosphere inhospitable to critical positions—is not easy. The traumas of the past century and of the first decades of the current one similarly grow into collective melancholy, thickening the color black to its darkest possible shade. The artist accepts the challenge. He contemplates the modern, the contemporary, and the avant-garde, trying to formulate an aesthetic dimension of a clearer today.

The principle of a new vision, fundamental for avant-garde art, is re-politicized in Nikita Kadan’s works. Apart from the things we can see, there are also things for which we must acquire the vision. The latter, of course, take place outside the exhibition space — they are the work of memory in post-Maidan Ukraine, the struggle for time and for oneself in the conditions of actual survival. This is the moving picture in which we live.

Milan Kundera, in his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, describes the future as a dull void, while the past, for him, is tempting and exciting, with people fighting for access to labs to retouch photos and re-write biographies. Nikita Kadan makes his own mark on our cultural and political calendar, catching a moment of sinister laboratory bustle that produces, before our very eyes, a sterile, exclusive past featuring zero complexity, and an air of fear reserved for those daring to doubt it.

This lab construct becomes a bearer of the new aforementioned vision, a kind of a machine blinding the eyes and showing slides incessantly. Its optics define the parameters of being, raising the bodies to exterminate everything different, everything other, and ultimately one another. The war has several roles in this process: in Nikita Kadan’s aesthetic reflection of memory and history, one can see a complex bond between the war and struggles for the past. The war produces appalling images. And, if we look more carefully, it is now actively claiming the role of the shaper of today, expressing bitter irony about the utopianism of the avant-garde builders of a better world.

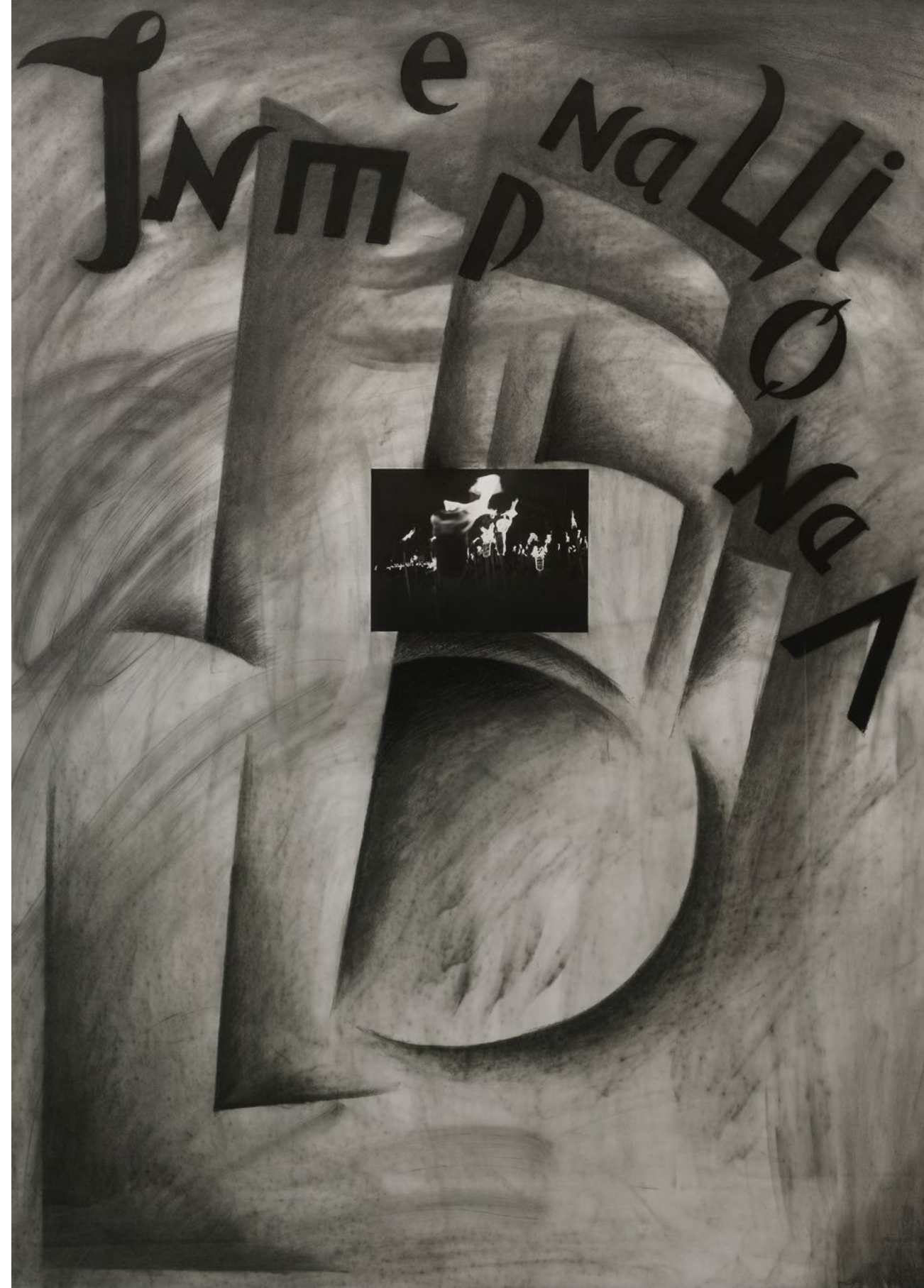
Along with the redesign of the time, the artist intervenes with a change in the concept of collectivity. The double black “masks” on the faces featured in the *Spectators* series seem to transmit darkness both inside and outside. By refusing to wander in one’s own private darkness, an individual gains a chance at collective numbness in the face of the the darkness that gazes back at us.

But, suddenly, there's a flickering light: a torchlight procession is approaching. The ultra-right mob acquires the status of a fire tamer (do they also tame the fire of time that once belonged to the Suprematists?). Their fire is not purifying, it is purging, it clears peaceful territories, erases the line between war and non-war, makes direct violence a part of politics. Meanwhile, the sun is lying on the ground, defeated.

An individual balances their own existence between a home and a tomb. Being alone, one can still hear, however remote, a revolutionary call for the collective building of a new home — a better, freer society. But the time slips away, it's as fragile and untenable as its own subjectness. A subject has to develop; a home has to be built; a plan drawing has to be hidden somewhere, waiting to be brought to life. But coal dust revives old images of assault. Here, the ashes of a burnt-down Roma house are barely distinguishable from treasures of a blown-up Donbas coal mine. Repressed experiences get hardwired into the common present; the pain of this process becomes a promise of nonviolence, but one has to wait to see this promise kept.

The atmosphere of this moment of collective numbness resembles that of Andrei Platonov's 1930 novella called *The Foundation Pit*. Its characters, like the ghosts of Communism that has never happened, are involved in the grand construction of an apartment house for proletarians. However, the emptiness of the foundation pit proves much too big for any person and their supreme efforts; the foundation pit lives a life of its own and satisfies its appetite while the builders stay hungry.

To overcome the freeze is to comprehend reality, however resistant it is, with all its intensity and menace. The way to comprehension is outside, and Nikita Kadan, for his part, urges us to walk a hypnotic corridor where a certain spirit resides, talking to us in riddle words from *The Foundation Pit*: "A village clock hung on the wooden wall, moving patiently on because of the momentum of its dead weights; a pink flower was depicted on the face of the mechanism, in order to console whoever saw time."¹



¹ _____ Quote from translation of *The Foundation Pit* by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler and Olga Meerson.

READING THE RUINS OF THE FUTURE

UILLEAM BLACKER

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33 Every society lives among its own ruins to a greater or lesser extent. These ruins are not merely physical, but also political and cultural. Physical ruins are the counterpart of discredited, semi-forgotten myths and ideas. Just as the monuments and buildings that were built on the back of empires, ideologies or economic greatness decay and lose their ability to communicate with us, so do the ideas and the histories they represent fade from our understanding. Ruination disrupts the signifying link between our surroundings and our pasts. It demands a great effort of will on our part to recover meanings from ruins—we must interrogate them, read and interpret them. Often, the effort is too much, and we live in a state of ignorance of what our surroundings mean and how they define us.

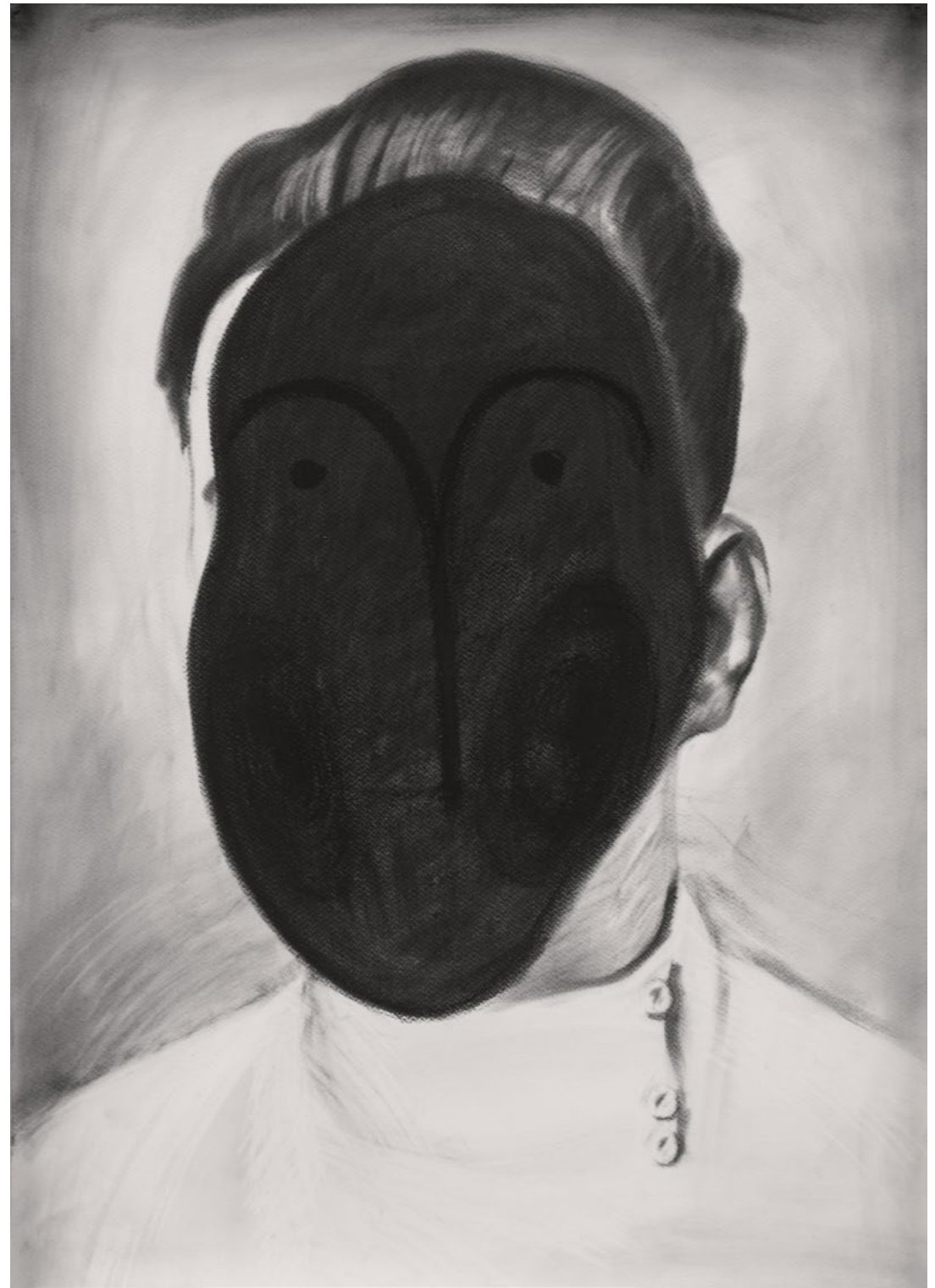
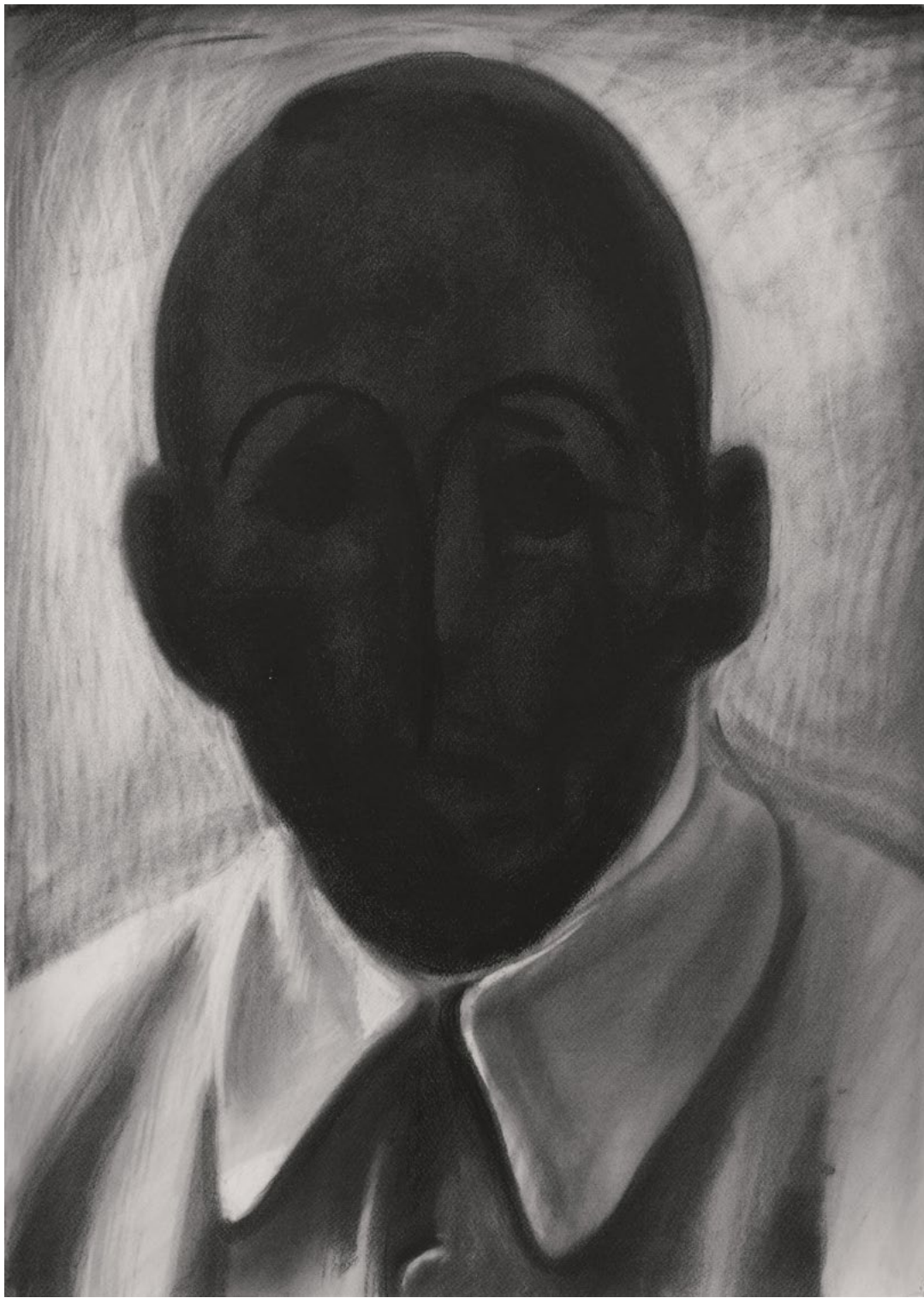
Ukrainian society lives among many layers of ruins: the Russian Imperial and the Soviet, the Habsburg and Polish, but also the ruins of aspirations for national sovereignty and the inspiring and disturbing forms these can take. It is a challenging landscape that demands a keen interpretative eye if it is to mean anything.

Culture can also become ruined. In the physical sense, artworks can be destroyed, broken and lost, but the stories of artistic movements can also disintegrate. The Ukrainian avant-garde, physically and discursively devastated by Stalinism, presents just such a fragmented cultural landscape. Although the broader Soviet avant-garde legacy has been recovered, restored and re-interpreted since 1991, the Ukrainian story has become covered in new layers of obscurity: in Russia and the West, the Soviet avant-garde is nationalised and reduced to its Russian component, and non-Russian artists and artistic centres disappear from view. The academies, schools and milieux of Kyiv or Kharkiv, where Malevich, Exter, Burliuk, Arkhipenko, Boychuk, Yermilov, Shekhtman and others worked and taught are often mere footnotes, even though the Ukrainian context clearly represented a distinctive territory on the map of European modernism. The Ukrainian avant-garde, a rich and complex phenomenon, needs interrogation on many fronts.

The rediscovery of Ukraine's avant-garde past cannot merely be about recovering names and works for the sake of national pride. It must also involve a recovery of complexity and ambiguity. For one thing, the avant-garde, whether we like it or not, is part of the broader Soviet story (which it helped write, and which destroyed it), and part of the broader drama (not to say tragedy) of the European 20th century. Dusting down the ruins of the avant-garde means confronting the movement's genius and its blindness. It means being honest about what we find as we piece together the ideas, identities and aesthetics of these long-forgotten artists.

Nikita Kadan's works, their engagement and juxtaposition with the Ukrainian avant-garde, represent a commitment to such honesty. They also demonstrate another important feature of ruins: in their fragmentariness and suggestiveness, in the gaps and empty spaces that they provide, they represent ideal conditions for creative appropriation, interpretation and engagement. Among the fragments, there is room for manoeuvre, there is space to add, accentuate, extend and challenge. Kadan's works do all these things.

In Nikita Kadan's hands, Vasyl' Yermilov's monument to three revolutions is neutralised, sterilised, becoming a theatre for an autopsy. What is left after the death of the utopianism, universality and liberatory ethos of the Soviet project? Amputated fragments of the lives of ordinary people in the Donbas, whose destroyed homes constituted the newest layer of modernity's ruins. This layer also demands our interrogation, lest it become so much meaningless rubble. Kadan's take on the 1913 Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*, which



both abandoned conventional language and embraced ideological over-significance, is similarly cutting. The utopian flamboyance that melted into ideological complicity is here reduced to a broken shard of everyday Soviet life, itself filtered through late-Soviet artists' ironic re-representations. It lies stretched out and defenceless at the viewer's feet, its layers of meaning and memory bared.

One of the most famous lines in literature about memory is Milan Kundera's maxim that 'the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'. The irony of this statement is often missed: it is made by a man who prefers to manipulate his own biography in order to present himself as a dissident hero rather than confront his own ideological and personal shortcomings. Neither recovering memory erased by totalitarianism nor erasing the symbols of totalitarianism are necessarily heroic. Recoveries of heroism become erasures of cowardice. Erasure of old lies leaves space for new ones. Kadan's *Spectators*, by highlighting the historical and ideological situatedness of avant-garde cultural production, shows not heroic memory against power, but covert forgetting as a personal survival tactic. Kadan's *Architecton Lysa Hora* gestures towards the recovery of heritage obscured by power, but it also shows that such restoration is insufficient: here, we find a ruin in the shadow of suprematist hubris, the home of a Roma family destroyed in an ultranationalist pogrom in Ukraine's capital in 2018. The avant-garde is recalled, but its premises are challenged, and its ultimate irony, as an artistic paradigm that signified universal hope and progress but sank into terror and violent regression, is revealed. Moving beyond the avant-garde era to the Second World War, *Pogrom*, with its reflection on the endless remediation and distortion of testimony and visual evidence, shows how remembering atrocity can serve manipulative ideological aims. Like the photographs of the L'viv pogrom of 1941 that provide the material for this work, Manuil Shekhtman's *Jewish Pogrom* appears in this context not only as a work of art, but as a piece of evidence, an image whose meaning we must protect from distortion. All art, it seems, has the potential to bear witness.

Remembering is, of course, always about the present, not the past. Benjaminian tiger's leaps are made into the past to provide the energy or the ammunition for contemporary action and contemporary struggles. There is no telling who will lift which stone from the rubble of memory and where they will throw it. Nikita Kadan's tale is, thus, a cautionary one. It warns against false optimism, uncritical celebration of the past and blindness to the present. As we salvage cultural ruins from ideological obscurity, we must learn from the failure of the utopianism that both produced and destroyed art. This is a story not only of the retrieval of lost masterpieces from the ruins, nor of reinterpreting and paying tribute to them: it is also a warning that failure to interrogate the past only leads to the generation of new ruins.













STONE HITS STONE
KAMHb 5'S KAMHb

NIKITA KADAN
NIKITA KADAN





THE SCULPTURE, 1968
BY JEFFREY J. SHAW
THE SCULPTURE, 1968
BY JEFFREY J. SHAW













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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

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71 Nikita (Mykyta) Kadan was born in Kyiv in 1982. He has been a member of the artist group R.E.P. (Revolutionary Experimental Space) since 2004, and a co-founder and member of the curatorial group HUDRADA and participant in its activities since 2008. A graduate of the National Academy of Fine Arts in Kyiv, where he studied monumental painting, he now works with installation, graphics, painting, wall drawings and collage, often in interdisciplinary collaboration with architects, human rights activists or historians.

In 2019 he had a major solo show at the MUMOK (Vienna, AT), and the M HKA of Antwerp devoted a monographic exhibition to his work in 2017. He has participated in numerous biennials, notably in Venice in 2015 and 2017, Istanbul, Kyiv, Busan etc.

He won the Pinchuk Art Centre Prize in 2011 and the Special Prize of the Future Generation Art Prize in 2014.

Several of Nikita Kadan's artworks have been acquired by museum collections around the world: Pinakothek der Moderne de Munich (Allemagne), MUMOK Museum Contemporary Art in Vienna (Austria), MuHKA Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (Belgium), Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (Poland), Military History Museum in Dresden (Germany), National Art Museum of Ukraine (Ukraine), Kontakt. The Art Collection of ERSTE Foundation (Vienna), Collection Telekom (Bonn, Germany) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kingdom of Belgium.

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The Victor Pinchuk Foundation is an international, private and non-partisan philanthropic foundation based in Ukraine. The Foundation was established in 2006 by the businessman and philanthropist Victor Pinchuk. The Foundation's goal is to empower future generations to become the change makers of tomorrow. It has been developing projects and networks in Ukraine and abroad towards this goal for more than 10 years. Since 2006, it has invested more than 142 million USD into transformative projects.

The projects of the Victor Pinchuk Foundation include the Cradles of Hope neonatal centers, the largest Ukrainian private national scholarship program Zavtra.UA, the WorldWideStudies scholarship program that supports Ukrainian students receiving an education abroad, and the PinchukArtCentre, the most dynamic art centre in Ukraine and the region, which gives free-of-charge access to contemporary art to inspire new thinking. The Foundation supports the international network Yalta European Strategy (YES), a leading forum for discussing Ukraine's European future and global context.

The Foundation supports a crowdfunding platform to foster giving in Ukrainian society, the Ukrainian Philanthropic Marketplace. The Foundation is a member of the European Foundation Center and the Ukrainian Grantmakers Forum; it cooperates with the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, the Council on Foreign Relations, Amicus Europae Foundation and other nongovernmental organizations.

PINCHUK ART CENTRE

is the largest and most dynamic private contemporary art center in Central and Eastern Europe. It was launched in September 2006 by the Ukrainian businessman and philanthropist Victor Pinchuk. Since 2006 it has had more than 3 million visitors, mostly young Ukrainians. Since its founding, the PinchukArtCentre has introduced Ukrainians to over 150 artists from all over the world, offering free access to new ideas, views, and experiences.

An integral project of the Viktor Pinchuk Foundation, the PinchukArtCentre supports talented young people, civil society, freedom, democracy, individualism, and critical thinking.

For more than 10 years, the PinchukArtCentre had been the only space in Ukraine with a consistent program of large solo shows, thematic exhibitions of new works of leading global artists, and long-term projects intended to enliven and support the new Ukrainian art scene.

Its exhibitions and a dynamic public outreach program have made the PinchukArtCentre an intellectual and artistic hub that promotes the development of a new generation able to think and act outside the box, thereby empowering it to modernize and transform society.

The PinchukArtCentre's projects deal with national identity and meet international challenges. The PinchukArtCentre seeks to introduce the leading world artists to the broadest audience. The PinchukArtCentre invests in the young generation. In 2009, it founded the PinchukArtCentre Prize for contemporary young Ukrainian artists under 35 years of age, and the Future Generation Art Prize—the first global art prize for young artists from all over the world. These biannual prizes have made the PinchukArtCentre the leading hub for the brightest young artists in Ukraine and globally.

The PinchukArtCentre represented Ukraine at the Venice Biennale in 2007, 2009, and 2015, and organized events for the parallel Biennale program in 2011, 2013, and 2017.

In 2016, the PinchukArtCentre launched the Research Platform as an open site for intellectual exploration, research, and dialogue, with the purpose of creating an archive of Ukrainian art from the early 1980s through the present. Openly accessible, the Research Platform is a cutting-edge project designed to preserve, catalogue, and rethink historical information of crucial importance to a critical reflection on Ukrainian identity today and tomorrow.

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PINCHUK ART CENTRE RESEARCH PLATFORM

Research Platform is an open platform for thinking, research and discourse launched by the PinchukArtCentre in February 2016. Research Platform is focused on Ukrainian contemporary art and conjoins research, exhibition making and education.

With a growing body of materials that is collected through institutional collaborations and with individual support, in the form of the donation of personal archives and providing access to rare information, the Research Platform is a centre of knowledge on Ukrainian contemporary art.

The mission of Research Platform of the PinchukArtCentre is to preserve, catalogue and reconsider gained information. At its core stands an academic project that aims to generate a living archive of Ukrainian Contemporary Art from the 1980ties till present with the help of Research platform team. The Research Platform attempts to engage with a broad understanding of artistic practices in Ukraine, including institutions and personal histories. Its approach enhances consequent research into generational shifts and practices.

It provokes interrogation potential to generate new interpretations and readings of the contemporary history of Ukrainian art. The Research Platform is a fundamentally open platform to build out partnerships both in and outside Ukraine sharing knowledge and expertise on archiving and Ukrainian art.

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