



04 July 2020 Opening of Art Space Connect
Digital talk with Sophia Tabatadze (GeoAIR, moderation), Tina Gurgenidze (Tbilisi Architecture Biennial) and Marika Kuźmicz (Arton Foundation Warsaw)

Notes from Q & A

Art Space Connect 2020 - Strengthening international exchange with independent art initiatives and artist-run spaces in Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus

Art Space Connect is a 2020 collaboration of Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste (IGBK), [GeoAIR \(Tbilisi\)](#) and [Centrala Berlin](#).

As cooperation partners, we want to strengthen the exchange with and amongst independent art initiatives and artist-run spaces in Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, asking:

- What is the specific profile of independent art initiatives and artist-run spaces and how do they develop and reach their audience?
- What is the status quo of international exchange amongst those initiatives? Which structures are relevant and how does international cooperation help?
- What are the regional perspectives and political frameworks to consider?
- What will mobility come down to in the aftermath of the COVID19-crisis, which new ways of digital and regional audience development will remain?
- How do we find creative and alternative ways to support and finance independent art initiatives and artist run spaces in these countries and the international exchange amongst them? What are the new tools and solutions for support?

Speakers:

Marika Kuźmicz from [Arton Foundation](#) in Warsaw is an art historian, curator and researcher and established the Arton Foundation in 2010. The focus of the foundation is on researching and developing private archives of artists and on making them accessible digitally via the Arton Foundation database. This approach started out with mainly Polish artists, but since 2016 the Arton Foundation database also presents artists a.o. from Estonia, Croatia and Latvia. Currently, Arton Foundation initiated an international project "[Not Yet Written Stories. Women Artists' Archives Online \(2020–2021\)](#)", supported by Creative Europe and the Polish Ministry of Culture with partners from Latvia, Slovenia and Croatia.

Tina Gurgenidze, co-founder of the [Tbilisi Architecture Biennial](#), is based in Berlin and Tbilisi. The Architecture Biennial was founded in 2017. The first event took place in 2018. Now, the 2nd Biennial for 2020 is in planning. The Biennial is funded by Creative Europe. It is planned as an interdisciplinary festival, not only focussing on architecture but also integrating artistic presentations to the program.

Moderator: Sophia Tabatadze from [GeoAIR](#) and [Centrala Berlin](#).

Here is a selection of questions and answers from the talk, freely summarized in our own words...

Q: Independent and small art initiatives: how do they cope with the restrictions that came with COVID-19? And, if many projects go online now, how can one involve the audience?

A: Arton Foundation seems to have been already nicely prepared for the situation in a way, with a focus strictly on digital projects since the beginning, working mainly on databases and digital



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accessibility of artistic works... But for the Tbilisi Architecture Biennial, the shift came very suddenly, just as for most. Of course, an architecture festival is very physical, and there has been a very strong local bond with specific venues in Tbilisi since the very beginning. But then, this early summer (facing COVID-19-restrictions), the decision was made, not to postpone the 2020 Biennial, but to reinvent the concept. How to organize a biennial in such a challenging situation and how to assemble everybody?

Most of the parts of the 2020 Biennial will be presented online now. A virtual tower was constructed on the biennial's website, a bare frame, an empty unfinished tower, as one can see on many construction sites all throughout Eastern Europe. In this virtual building, each floor will become a space for the participating institutions and groups. The participants are joining without coming to Tbilisi. The works are done locally, potentially everywhere in the world, but are then presented in the online tower of the biennial. The main content of the project and the website will be created by the participants themselves. Accompanying to that, there will also be live events in Tbilisi, in Berlin and Skopje. Even if the event is digital now, the construction of the event, the locality of it, remains. This digital version will reach more people than the Biennial before. One can already see that in numbers, the information is already spreading online a long time before the event itself.

Q: Both projects we are talking to here are funded by the EU Creative Europe program. If you want to apply for programs like Creative Europe, you need a lead partner and cooperation partners. But in some cases, and countries, you can generally not be the lead partner for a Creative Europe project yourself. You need to find lead partners in other countries. Then again, in many regions which we are talking about here with Art Space Connect, the governments do not fund small organizations at all. So, international cooperation is the only way to go about things. How does this help and what is the danger of it? How do you select your partners?

A: The 1st Creative Europe project that Arton Foundation participated in for instance was in 2016, and they received the maximum budget within the so-called small projects scale. The partners for this project next to Arton Foundation came for instance from Croatia, Belgium and Estonia. The Croatian partner was a small NGO, the Belgian partner a public Art School, but the Estonian partner, on the other hand, was the biggest art museum in the country, with a stable financial situation. This set up, with different models of institutions, was very helpful! By the way, since the beginning, much of the whole communication was made in long and intense online meetings... So, you get to have lots of practice in this technique! Marika's strong advice: Work with people and partners that you have already had experience with, build up long-term relationships! Avoid working with people who are not really involved in the project. You need the true support of everybody involved. Work with people that you know!

Q: When you do receive funding by the European Union, how do you deal with the high administrative requirements, especially as a small organization with little administrative resources?

A: First of all, never forget: Creative Europe funding is co-funding. So, the biggest challenge is always to allocate the remaining percentage of the budget on your own, especially for small organizations.



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Many can report quite Kafkaesque situations from negotiations with the banks, asking Creative Europe funding beneficiaries for private securities - such as houses, inheritances, ... - to help confirm the necessary financial capacities that beneficiaries need to provide. And let's be realistic: Especially for small organizations with not much staff, it is quite likely to spend months and years into bureaucracy, even up to 80% of your time, just for administrative issues related to the funding!

Q: The situation has become even more difficult lately, so we heard. With a new matrix for the financial capacity of EU funding applicants in 2018, it became much harder especially for small organizations from the cultural sector to access such funding. And it is still not clear today, what the new Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU, officially starting 2021, will bring in that regard. Regulations could become even stricter for small-scale organizations, meaning, even higher standards for financial capacities could be applied?

A: Yes, it seems absurd to apply such new regulations specifically to small organizations and NGOs, for whom one would think it is in the nature of things not to be able to fulfil such requirements. Sounds very much like "Poor people becoming poorer and richer people becoming richer...". So, there has been a protest letter signed by different smaller and bigger organizations in Eastern European countries lately, asking to revise such an approach of stricter financial controls applying to small-scale organizations. We will see how this issue will be resolved next year!



Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste (IGBK)
Taubenstraße 1

D – 10117 Berlin
Tel.: +49 (0)30 23 45 76 66
E-Mail: art@igbk.de
www.igbk.de

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