

A GUIDEBOOK TO LIFE ELSEWHERE



C.A.T. CONTENT

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35 MM

CULTURAL CENTRE

ALIENS

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Marina Rebhandl



It was in 2005 when Tatiana Bielousova, actress and stage director from Rivne, came to Nyzhnje Selyshche to join the Longo Maï community. The cultural centre, which is located on the main road and next to the music school of the village, was not being used at that time. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the huge building had been empty. There was no financing for cultural programmes nor to maintain the building. There were holes in the roof and water was in the building. But on some nights young people from the village would gather, bring their music and dance in the ruins.

Later some active citizens got together with the people from Longo Maï and repaired the roof and made new windows. Then Tatiana was invited to come to Nyzhnje Selyshche to do a one-week theatre workshop with children in the cultural centre. During that workshop she realised that there are many active young people who wished for more cultural activities in the village. It was the beginning of her ambitious work in Nyzhnje Selyshche. She stayed and eventually made the cultural centre her 'first home', as she likes to call it. Tatiana started giving classes on a regular basis, and in 2007 she organised the first theatre festival, where theatre groups from different countries would meet and develop projects together. Since then it's been an ongoing festival, happening in the summer. In order for the festival to be open to all children, regardless of their financial

background, Tatiana managed to acquire funding for that programme. But also during the year, when there are specific interests in learning something, like juggling or other circus elements, she tries to invite teachers to come to the village to give a workshop to her students. In particular, the group who works with circus elements have the possibility of getting paid for their performances at weddings and festivals in Transcarpathia. Meanwhile the cultural centre hosts not only the local theatre group but also one clown band, a group who practises dancing with fire, two other music projects by young people and one adult band.

When we arrived in Nyzhnje Selyshche in July 2017, the cultural centre soon became a central location for us too. We enjoyed the programme, the concerts, film screenings and joyful parties, where all generations of the village would meet and celebrate their holidays. It's strange to imagine this place was asleep for about 15 years and on its way to decay. Tatiana showed us the inside architecture of the building. As it used to be the cultural centre of a former wealthy kolkhoz within a wider territory, the house is quite big. On the ground level you find the bar with a small stage and a billiard table. Up on the first floor are many small rooms, which are now used for rehearsals during the festival; there is a huge attic and one big theatre room, which could probably host a few hundred people. Cinema screenings and other cultural events happened there during the Soviet Union times. Since I work with analogue film I was curious about the



Irina working at the cultural centre, 2017

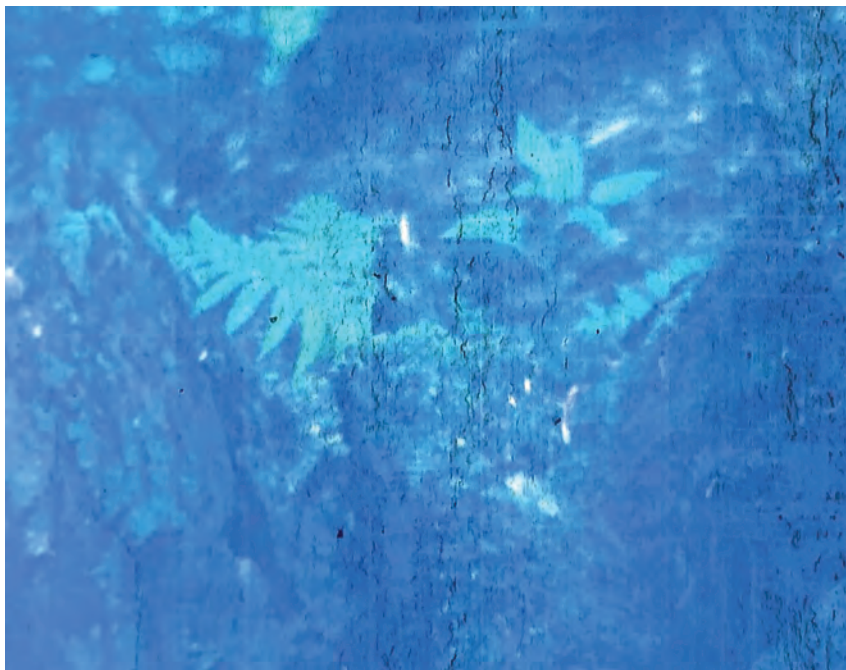


cinema leftovers, and Tatiana gave me the keys to see the projectionist's room, where I discovered two 35 mm projectors. Those old projectors usually have a long lifespan, and with a little technical knowledge we could probably bring them back to life. Today it seems that the room is used as a dressing room for the children's theatre group. The colourful dresses and masks are stored there and the projectors serve as hatracks. I was glad I went up there as I could feel the presence of the two very different lives of this place. The once grand events that happened there had now been replaced by small theatre plays and concerts, organised by ambitious people in the community who make the most of the resources available.

One can sense that this is a communal place that developed not from predetermined planning, but evolved through cooperative effort within the village. Its programme is alive and constantly reinvented with the people who realise their projects there. And we – a group of 'aliens' from Vienna – felt welcomed by the people working there. Some joined the centre's activities: Andrea gave a dance class, Fredi did a drawing workshop with kids and Marko recorded a song with the local band Waterfly. And on some holidays we became part of unexpected parties that occurred when people from the village brought their instruments. We won't forget those enchanted nights.







cooperation among aliens (2017–2018), super 8 film stills, Marina Rebhandl

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