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KHARKIV ARTISTS FROM AZERBAIJAN IN ARTISTIC RESISTANCE OF THE HERO CITY TO THE RUSSIAN INVASION

From the first minutes of the full-scale Russian aggression on February 24, 2022, the one and a half million city of Kharkiv became a direct target and object of the aggressor's capture. In just a few days, Ukraine's second most populous industrial, scientific, cultural, commercial, and student city nearly emptied: by mid-March, no more than seven hundred thousand residents remained, as in the first days, most of its districts suffered devastating missile, artillery, mortar, and bomb attacks from the enemy not only on military targets but also on civilian infrastructure, educational and children's institutions, hospitals, libraries, religious buildings, shopping centers, residential buildings, etc. In the first week of this villainous attack, combat actions took place almost in the center of Kharkiv. Thanks to the self-organization of the city's population and the heroic efforts of the military and civilian defenders of the city, who urgently united into self-defense units, despite numerous casualties among the military and civilian population, it was possible to hold the city, but the enemy was forced to retreat to the Russian-Ukrainian border in the north of the Kharkiv region under pressure from the Armed Forces of Ukraine only in September 2022.

Alongside heroic military resistance, a small creative community that remained in the city, barely recovering from the initial experienced horrors and losses, began to exert increasingly powerful artistic resistance from March of last year. It manifested itself in the almost spontaneous organization of various artistic acts in safe places (metro stations, relatively protected basement premises of cafes, etc.): small improvised concerts, theatrical performances, exhibitions of children's drawings created in shelters, heartbreaking photographs of buildings destroyed by the enemy and deceased civilians, examples of the first enemy equipment hit, faces of Ukrainian soldiers and Kharkiv volunteers, etc. In this artistic resistance, representatives of numerous national communities of the city, united by love for Ukraine, native Kharkiv, and faith in the inevitable — despite tragic circumstances — final Victory of Ukraine, which heroically defended and continues to defend against a strong and insidious enemy, took an active part.

Numerous representatives of Kharkiv's creative intelligentsia, who were forced to leave the city and become refugees, also tried to adapt as quickly as possible to life under new conditions in safer regions of Ukraine and abroad, and join the artistic resistance. This happens because the vast majority of creative actions that have been taking place for already eighteen months in Kharkiv and involving Kharkiv artists anywhere outside the native city have a clearly defined volunteer orientation: musicians, artists, writers, painters, photographers, sculptors, and others are constantly directing part of the earned money to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine, wounded soldiers, refugees, etc.

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In this important process, bright pages are also associated with the activities of the creative community representatives, whose homeland is Azerbaijan.

Victoria Gigolayeva-Yurchenko, a candidate of art, senior lecturer of the Department of Choral Conducting and Academic Singing at Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, soloist of Kharkiv Regional Philharmonic, laureate of international and national competitions, and academic singer (soprano) was born in the ancient Azerbaijani city of Lankaran, spent her childhood in Azerbaijan, and received her higher musical education as a soloist-vocalist at Ivan Kotlyarevsky Kharkiv State (now — National) University of Arts.

For active concert-volunteer activity in Kharkiv during the full-scale Russian aggression, Victoria received the Honorary Diploma from Kharkiv City Veterans' Organization of Ukraine, several "Thank You" notes from church and volunteer organizations, including those from the volunteer Public Organization "Defense for Victory", with which she constantly cooperates. Often, Oleksandr Sklyarov, Honored Artist of Ukraine, Professor, Head of the Piano Department at Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, and leading concertmaster of Kharkiv Regional Philharmonic becomes Victoria Gigolayeva-Yurchenko's partner in her volunteer performances. In particular, this duet has prepared a large program of songs and romances by Ukrainian composers and examples of Ukrainian song folklore, which has been many times performed by this duet, beloved by Kharkiv citizens, in volunteer concerts and is constantly being updated with new bright masterpieces.

Recently, during the celebration of Ukraine's Independence Day, involving representatives of the Kharkiv Regional Society of Azerbaijani-Ukrainian Friendship "Dostlug", Victoria performed the song "Azerbaijan" (music by M. Magomayev, words by N. Khazri) soulfully and sincerely along with Ukrainian songs.

The singer herself speaks about her dedication to Azerbaijani and Ukrainian land as follows: "Azerbaijan is my father for me, Ukraine is my mother. It happened that I have two Homelands, which I love equally with all my heart! Azerbaijan is my first Homeland, where I was born and took my first steps in life! Ukraine is my second Homeland, where I grew up and became who I am! Today, on the Independence Day of our Ukraine, I am fortunate to pay tribute to both of them! When I sing a song about Azerbaijan, it seems that I am returning to my childhood, I smell the scent of the sea air, see the beautiful mountains, and, of course, the Caspian sea, which is impossible to forget!"

Another prominent and bright artist who considers himself a representative of both Azerbaijani and Ukrainian cultures is the well-known Kharkiv artist Anar (Ashot Balay Oglu) Aliyev. The artist was born in 1957 in Baku and graduated from Baku Art and Industrial College №84 in 1981, specializing as an advertising artist. He then continued his education at Baku State Pedagogical Institute at the "Art and Graphics" Department (1982–1983), and completed it at Kharkiv Art and Industrial Institute (now called Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts) at the "Interior and Equipment" Department (1984–1986).

According to Anar, his formation as an artist and individual occurred specifically in Kharkiv, where he moved at the age of 26 and completed his artistic education. However, memories of childhood and youth about his native land constantly find echoes in the plots and elements of ornament in many canvases created over the next forty years.

Since 1993, Anar Aliyev has been a member of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine (Kharkiv Organization), and since 1988 — a recurrent participant of exhibitions in Kharkiv, throughout Ukraine, and abroad. His works are also preserved in private collections in Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Israel, and Italy. The artist has been collaborating with Kharkiv Art Museum for many years, has the "Patron of the Museum" certificate, and numerous diplomas and letters of appreciation from Kharkiv Art Museum, Kharkiv City Gallery, Kharkiv Municipality, Consulate of Azerbaijan, and public organizations. According to the characterization by the author of the article about this personality in V. Putyatin Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine, given to A. Aliyev in 2001, the artist's creations intersect traditions of

the Azerbaijani school of painting, medieval miniatures, and influences of modern artistic directions. Thematically, Eastern motifs predominate. Static compositions, combined with wide areas of pure color are filled with internal agitation and mysterious symbolism due to the intense rhythm. However, the longer the artist lives and works in Ukraine, the more prominently his creativity is filled with specifically Ukrainian themes.

In the autumn-winter of 2013/14, Anar Aliyev supported the Revolution of Dignity that took place in Ukraine. He was an active participant in Euromaidan in Kharkiv and took part in many subsequent civic and political actions that occurred in the frontier city of Kharkiv. After all, the distance from Kharkiv to the Ukrainian-Russian border is only 30 kilometers.

Before the onset of the full-scale Russian aggression in 2022, the artist worked in his own art studio in Kharkiv. However, in the first days of the war, his apartment in a multi-storey building in Northern Saltivka — the area of Kharkiv, closest to the northern part of the ring road, where heavy battles took place for several months, like this entire vast area, was significantly marred (many buildings were simply destroyed) by endless Russian missiles, cannons, mortar attacks and bombings. Therefore, Anar and his wife Olena were forced to evacuate from the city in early spring 2022. Since April 2022, the couple has been living in Kaunas, Lithuania.

At his new location, the forced refugee began collaborating with the “Meno parkas” Gallery and “Culture Ukraine” (a creative space dedicated to Ukrainian creators and artists). He received a studio for work and has already presented to the Lithuanian public his new art project consisting of a series of paintings, made over a relatively short period (a little less than a year) of his family's forced life (Anar and Olena's adult daughter remained in Kharkiv in a relatively safer area). This exhibition was dedicated by its author to the first anniversary of the start of the massive enemy invasion into Ukraine and had the symbolic title “The Road to Victory”. On the poster for the opening of this project, on a white background, 365 holes from enemy bullets were depicted in several long rows, but since the struggle did not end either then or now, the bottom row has not been finished... The main painting of this project depicts the stern face of a Ukrainian woman, her dark red, almost red hair is depicted in the form of a large bunch of viburnum – one of the brightest symbols of Ukraine.

According to the artist's wife, Lithuania has provided her husband with the opportunity to work creatively during the war. This is invaluable. Undoubtedly, the couple harbors a dream to return to Kharkiv, but the question of finding funds to repair the damaged dwelling remains highly relevant.

The example of powerful artistic activity during the full-scale Russian aggression by these two Kharkiv personalities, who are blood-related to Azerbaijan and with whom the author of this publication has long been personally acquainted, convincingly demonstrates multinational character of the cultural and artistic resistance to the northern aggressor by the creative individuals of the hero city Kharkiv.

The cited facts of powerful artistic activity in Kharkiv and abroad by only two representatives of the city's Azerbaijani community far from exhaust either the names of Azerbaijani artists—participants in the artistic resistance, or the significance of this national community (as well as many others!) in the contemporary tragic and, at the same time, heroic history of our city. Instead, they serve as examples of the sincere love of people of Azerbaijani origin for Ukraine and their belief in its ultimate Victory. If necessary, below you may find a few illustrations to the theses:

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Viktoria Hiholaieva – Oleksandr Sklyarov. Concert at KhSAC (August, 2023)
One of the numerous Honorary Diplomas awarded to Viktoriia Hiholaieva-Yurchenko during the full-scale Russian aggression.



Residential and commercial structures in Pivnichna Saltivka, where Anar Aliyev lived with his wife, ruined by Russian shelling.



Anar Aliyev near his triptych in black and white tones “Ukraine. Unreal Reality” at the opening of his own exhibition in Kaunas (March 2023).
“With faith in the victory of bright tones” — A. Aliyev.



Anar Aliyev in his Lithuanian workshop near the main painting of his personal exhibition “Ukraine Will Win” in Kaunas (March 2023).