

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

Pam Rosenblatt

Volodymyr Bilyk: An artist who dwells in the Chaos and the Ukraine

Bold and thick black-white digital images similar to film noir and characters like femme fatales or detectives are some subjects found in artwork created by Volodymyr Bilyk, an artist from the Ukraine.

After simply "searching the internet for literary journals" where he located WHLR link, Bilyk submitted artwork and "The Letter", a poem, to the Wilderness House Literary Review.

"The Letter" was published in WHLR 8/2. Now, in WHLR 8/3, we are publishing an email interview dated June 6, 2013 between Bilyk and Pam Rosenblatt, arts editor for WHLR, that focuses on his font-collage artwork, artistic development, and life in the Ukraine:



WHLR: How would you like your name to be written in the article? Simply Volodymyr Bilyk?

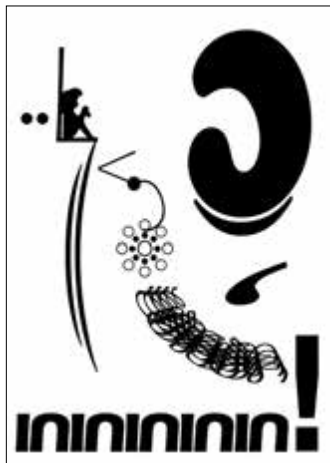
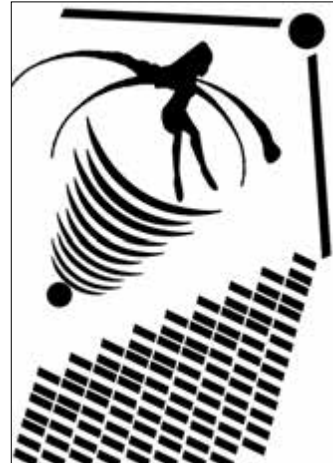
VB: Yes.

WHLR: We looked your name up online and found out that you are a visual artist, a sound producer, journalist, poet, and an author. Are we accurate? And we learned that you were born in 1991? Is this year accurate?

VB: Yes. Yes. Yes.

WHLR: Have you been a citizen of Zhytomyr, Ukraine your entire life? Have you ever visited the United States? When and where?

VB: Citizen of Ukraine, Zhytomyr is just a city. No, I haven't.



WHLR: What's life like in Zhytomyr? How is the economy doing? Does the economy affect your artwork?

VB: Life: Quite dull and almost motionless. It's almost as empty as Antonioni's film universe. If you want to catch the rhythm of post-soviet middle-of-the-road city – watch Béla Tarr's films – it's almost like that. Very depressing, very offensive. Sometimes even repressing. There some artistic activity, even few groups – but they suffer from the lack of substance and they're bound with traditional views on art and being. Also I feel isolated most of the time. I don't know how to describe it.

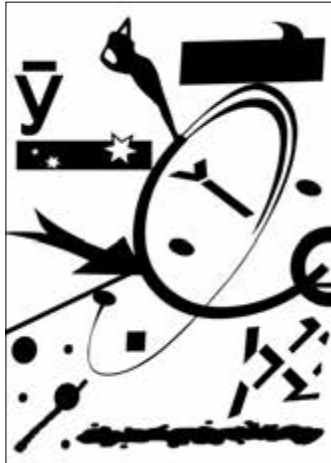
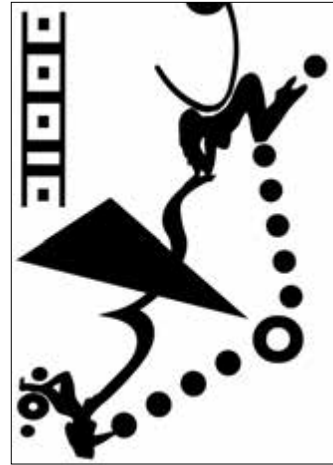
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Economy: for an artist of any quality – no chances to live without regular job. The problem is – there almost none regular jobs to do. The only thing you can get paid for is “Shut up and obey orders”. It’s all about survival – not living.

Does the economy affects my artwork? Yes, because regular jobs and search for it takes huge amount of time. Sometimes it makes me desperate. I’m making art through the never. (It sounds a little bit pathetic).

WHLR: What language do you mainly speak? How many languages do you speak?

VB: Ukrainian. But I also use Russian a lot. It’s a long story about language in Ukraine. It deserves a separate talk. If you are interested in further explanations – let me know. I also speak English, German, French and Italian.



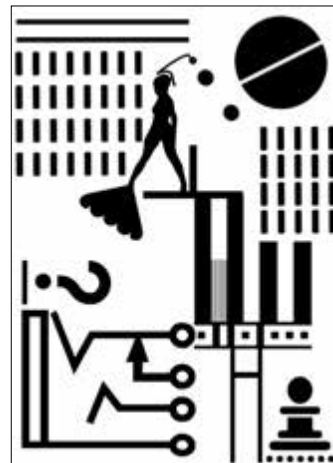
WHLR: How did you find out about Wilderness House Literary Review? Why did you submit to WHLR?

VB: I’ve been surfing internet in search of literary journals. Not to submit but to read. Key words were “Literary Review” so WHLR was on the first page. Then I saw “submissions”. Thought a bit and then decided to submit a work. I’ve done because of interest.

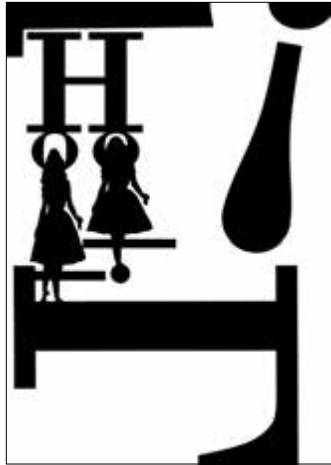
WHLR: Online it is also mentioned that you are a member of the Ukrainian Extreme Literature.

What is “Extreme Literature”? And how does it affect your artistic style?

VB: It’s not a group – so I can’t be a member. Just a term to indicate some marginal authors. Because of some long-running historical consequences Ukrainian literature got some troubles with evolving itself into the new forms. In 1930’s almost entire generation of authors were repressed – literally killed – just because artistic qualities of some works made reds suspicious. Some of those who survive had surrendered (Pavlo Tychyna) and constructed a substitute of literature (socialistic realism) – the other forms were repressed and left unpublished until the Independence. There were some underground movements (Kyiv School of poets – Vasyl Holoborodko for example) all the way through the soviet occupation and lots of thing happened in immigration (I might heard of Yuriy Tarnawskiy or Emma Andiewska) but still it’s [difficult] to find their works even online, not to mention following their works and creating something



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really new. Another long-term problem is that Ukraine and Ukrainians for the last two centuries [have been] very on the edge of destruction – there were even bans for using Ukrainian language in print at some point. So there was always a struggle to survive and to preserve the culture the way it deserves. And also struggle with the new. I don't why it is so but it affected a lot. It all stuck at some point and can't move further – fella needs new engine.

Extreme literature is something that can be described by Ezra Pound's phrase "Make it new". I believe in that.

WHLR: How long have you been an artist? Did you begin your artistic career as a child?

VB: I'm not sure from where to start the count. I've been making some things since 2005 – Orange Revolution was the influence – I was interested in the results. Years passed and I've met Andriy Antonovskiy and his Extreme Writing Community. It was in 2012. Since that year I started to take it seriously.

WHLR: Did you begin your artistic career as a child?

VB: No. As a child I was frequently asked "Are you nuts?" – because of other interests. Years later it resulted in what I am today.

WHLR: What genre of art is popular in Zhytomyr, and in the Ukraine in general? What is your favorite artistic genre? Medium? And artist(s)? Why?

VB: Socialistic realistic and all sorts of campy kitsch over the top and mostly plagiarized things for narrow minds. Lots of works are just poorly made. Everything else (anything experimental) - neglected. Ukrainian culture is dependent on grants and money-bags. They dictate what can be done and what can't be. Every artist who disagrees with them – can feel himself in kinda sole concentration camp of real life. Internet is almost the only way to evolve and show the works.

I studied book-design in university so I have lots warm feelings towards Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian and Bauhaus and concretism and formalism – on the one hand. But it's Sheeva – so it would be long. On the other hand – abstract guys like Twombly. On the other other – dada, futurism, surrealism, objectivism, vorticism, lettrism and so on. On the other other other – pop-art and conceptual art – especially Fluxus. On the other other other other hand – petroglyphs, calligraphy and asemic writing. For me, medium is like King Crimson for Robert Fripp – way of doing things. Digitality gives a new breath for all things I've mentioned earlier.

WHLR: We noticed that your artwork is in



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black and white, like film noir. Why are the brush, or are they ink, strokes so very bold and thick? What do you call your artwork? How did it develop? Why are several of the artworks scary? Why didn't you create them to appear happy, content, and/or peaceful?

VB: I can't imagine it being colorful – it is the way I feel it. Those that I've sent to you – are digital – actually nothing was drawn – it was composed with font – it can be called font-collage. I think it's far more interesting way to express archetype-based imagery. Scary? I think it's just a way you feel them. There was no intention to make it scary or funny but I'm aware of every element placed there.

WHLR: What is the artistic process that you go through?

VB: Encounter with chaos that leads to a mystic experience.

WHLR: What are the common themes throughout your artwork? The detective and the femme fatale? Please discuss why?

VB: Chaos. Something out of control. Unconscious mind movement. Private eye and femme fatale theme was only for the certain series.

WHLR: Who has influenced your artistic career the most? Do you have any mentors?

VB: I think my greatest influence was not a human being. Orange revolution was the greatest impulse I ever received. After that I started to look for something else. Also meeting with Andriy Antonosvkiy encouraged me to go further and further.

WHLR: Do you have any suggestions for visual artists starting out in the field?

VB: Let's quote few folks (I'm not sure about adequacy of the translation):

Socrates said "To live is to act"

Sartre said "To act is to live"

And Alan Moore said "Art is verb"

And the Ezra Pound wrote "Make it new"

And Kurosava said "To create is to Remember"

But in the end Sinatra sang "Do be do de do" – and that's how the things go.

