

Academic Year 2023/2024

## **Diploma Project – Supervisor’s Review**

**Student’s Name and Surname:** Bc. Anna Medvetska

**Diploma Project Title:** Once Upon a Time

Anna Medvetska is continuing her studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts, after graduating at architecture department at the Odesa State Academy of Civil Engineering and Architecture, where she received her Bachelor's degree thanks to online form in Prague in the spring of 2022. It is said that during wartime, artists' work is more or less stifled, that they can only work later with distance, because the situation itself kills basic creativity. Yet we see how, with little interruption, work is still going on unwaveringly at the art universities in Kyiv or Lviv, sometimes without electricity or heat. A month ago, a Russian attack destroyed parts of the Boichuk Art Academy in Kyiv, along with many cultural monuments. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine's spiritual and cultural assets have been systematically attacked and destroyed on a widespread basis. Yet Ukrainian artists continue to work because the values they fight for are shaped by culture, and artistic practice serves as another form of struggle for their own identity. Thanks to Ukrainian artists and their extreme situation, we have the opportunity to observe and remember with humility the real potential of art, the impact of artistic experience on the immediate environment, the possibilities of its political or economic power, and last but not least, we can appreciate anew the healing and transformative potential of artistic expression. This last variant also applies to the work of Anna Medvetska entitled Once Upon a Time. Anna clearly wanted to thematize war in her project from the beginning, and it was exciting to see how the work itself took shape under its own influence to the author.

The move to the Czech Republic brought Anna quite a few challenges. Living without her parents for the first time, changing her field of study, learning a new language, all of these were something Anna had to willingly plunge into without having the time to think about it and prepare as she would have under different circumstances. During her study asylum at the UMPRUM in Prague, Anna became interested in freer fields in architecture and systematically developed her own fine art work.

For her diploma project, Anna drew on her previous artistic output, where her work was mostly directed towards illustration and graphic design. The basic idea was to create a picture book in collaboration with child refugees living in her immediate surroundings. Gradually, the work began to open up and become complicated under the practical and ethical questions that Anna responsibly asked herself. She carefully considered and thought through each step, while managing to be open enough to be guided by the situations she herself experienced. I must say that I observed Anna's discipline and independence with admiration. I know from my own experience, and from the experience of a therapist, that in the first phase of shock a pragmatic attitude comes in and emotional experience manifests later as a defence against an immediate fall into chaos. So I watched with equal admiration and silent cheering as Anna abandoned her original plans and let herself be carried away by the artistic expression itself and its healing aspects.

In the first phase of the project, Anna designed a meeting in the form of a workshop with Ukrainian children living in Brno. From the initial solicitation of stories from the children, avoiding topics with a strong emotional charge, the work with collage came to the forefront of the project, not only as a technique through which Anna communicated with the children, but also as a tool for networking in the Brno Ukrainian community and becoming aware of her own identity as a war refugee living in Brno. Digging through materials together – such as promotional printed materials for exhibitions and cultural events in Brno that Anna had not been to, the archive of FaVU printed materials, and the personal archive of her teachers, which dated back to the time of the common Czech-Ukrainian past –, created a warm feeling of togetherness and care as they moved together towards an unknown future. The principle of collage is used in art therapies, for example, when working with trauma; it allows us to experience the decomposition and subsequent composition into completely new forms, the layering of multiple realities and perspectives, the overlapping of something we don't like, etc. Trauma itself could also be simply described as the splitting off of that part of consciousness that is so painful that it is forcibly kept out of reach by personality structures in the unconscious, where it sinks into its own chaos - for this reason, memory failure is associated with traumatic experiences. The basic idea of Peter A. Levine, a psychotherapist working with child trauma is, that it is important for integrating of the child trauma, when it is processed by the adult whose trauma itself was integrated already. As far as the therapeutic aspect of the work is concerned, it is Anna herself who works most significantly in this way. She puts together pieces of stories of the past and the future, combining her experiences with those of other children, stitching together her own wounds and connecting new relationships... putting herself back together. The result of the whole effort is a coherent series of collages on small canvases, where Anna draws on the children's collages for her own imagery of her inner experience and experiences. The pieces of materials are placed on the canvas in large layers and glued tightly together, creating a strong tenacious crust that just won't break. Also, the individual parts of the painting are tied tightly together to support each other and form a solid whole. The motif of stitching also appears in the accompanying print/zine, in which Anna included most of the partial outputs and the research part of the project.

The title, *Once upon a time*, refers not only to the world of children, the potential of stories and narratives and its sharing, but also accentuates the setting of the whole work and its reading in a specific time and context, the work becomes a personal testimony. Currently Anna has strengthened her identity as an artist working with the theme of war, through her project she has discovered what she can currently offer to her own community from her position as an artist. I wish her the best of luck and look forward to more projects in other (hopefully better soon) times.

**Questions for discussion:**

Where has this project taken you in terms of your own work?

Are you already thinking about another project with the theme of war, or will you continue to develop this project?

How do you specifically see the role of art and artists facing the reality of war or crisis in general?

**Assessment:**

I recommend the work for defense.

**Proposed grade:**

A

**Reviewed by:**

MgA. Veronika Vlková

**Date:** 2.5. 2024