Responding to Trauma and Cultural Heritage Destruction

Artist in Residency Report - Anna Manankina
(15 May – 15 August 2025, Vienna)

As part of the project "**Responding to Trauma and Cultural Heritage Destruction**", Ukrainian artist **Anna Manankina** was invited to participate in a three-month artistic residency in Vienna. Manankina is an interdisciplinary media artist whose practice spans video, VR/AR, AI, 3D animation, and installation.

During her residency, Anna Manankina developed a **research-based digital artwork** titled *"Do Algorithms Dream of Electric Sheep?"*, which will be presented on the **dwhX platform**.
In addition, she organized **two workshops** with the support of Vienna-based artist **Sanja Lasić:**

•**Tracing an Empty Space**
Workshop on Tools for the Digitalization of Lost Cultural Heritage
Held on **Monday, 23 June 2025, 2–6 pm**

•**Armored Concrete**
Workshop on Cyber Tools of Cultural Resilience
Held on **Tuesday, 1 July 2025, 2–6 pm**

Final project presentation and artist-talk took place on August, 30, 2025, in **Apoteka, Space for Contemporary Art**, in Vodnjan, Croatia

Primary Research

Majolika ceramics, Vasylkiv 60s

Be strong like this kitchen cabinet

Kitchen cupboard with Kumanets(rooster shaped ceramic) in a bombed building in Borodyanka, Ukraine,

This ceramic rooster was crafted using the majolica technique (firing clay with a painted glaze).
Prominent ceramists Valerii and Nadiia Protoriev from Vasylkiv, a town near Kyiv, created these jugs in the 1960s. Roosters like this were common in Ukrainian homes in the 1960s–80s.
According to Ukrainian folklore, the rooster is believed to possess protective powers and bring good fortune.
The factory that made these roosters no longer exists, making each piece even more unique.

Ceramists Valerii and Nadiia Protoriev

Workshop Tracing an Empty Space

"Kumanets" 3d render , combining AI-generated
3d in Luma Labs + designed 3d objects

Workshop on Tools for the Digitalization of Lost Cultural Heritage
The first session opened with a central question: How can we preserve cultural heritage when the physical site no longer exists?
Participants explored innovative approaches to reimagining lost or destroyed heritage through digital tools and collective storytelling. Examples of possible representations included websites, AR objects, VR environments, video mapping, and 3D-printed reconstructions.
The workshop focused on personal objects and interior elements, using 3D modelling in Blender, texture collaging, and AI-generated objects. A key case study highlighted the image of a kitchen cupboard in a bombed building in Borodyanka, Ukraine, where a rooster-shaped ceramic vessel from the Vasylkiv Majolica Factory became a symbol of cultural resilience.
Prominent ceramists Valerii and Nadiia Protoriev from Vasylkiv, a town near Kyiv, created these vessels in the 1960s.
In practice, participants worked in pairs to create short video pieces from AI-generated 3D models (via Luma Labs), based on personal objects submitted as photographs. After an introduction to Blender basics, they experimented with importing, lighting, and rendering, producing final digital outputs.
The workshop concluded with a group presentation, where participants shared their digital reconstructions and artistic interpretations. The discussion that followed provided constructive feedback and opened a space for reflection on the emotional resonance of lost heritage, the significance of personal memory in cultural preservation, and the potential of digital tools to reimagine heritage in virtual space.
By the end of the session, participants had not only gained technical skills in digital object creation and visualization but also developed a deeper understanding of how personal and collective heritage can be recontextualized, remembered, and sustained in the digital realm.

Workshop Armoured Concrete

3d render , Lidar scans of the studio at
DAS WEISSE HAUS,
post-production in Blender

Workshop on Cyber Tools of Cultural Resilience
This workshop invited participants to reflect on the role of physical and architectural spaces in shaping cultural memory, and to explore how digital technologies can preserve and reimagine sites at risk of loss. Focusing on Ukrainian house-museums and UNESCO heritage sites impacted by the full-scale invasion, the session asked: How do spaces shape our memory? What happens when they are erased? Can digital tools provide new ways to remember and reconstruct them?

Participants began by scanning architectural elements using LiDAR technology with Polycam and Scaniverse, capturing detailed 3D representations of their surroundings. A basic introduction to Blender enabled them to import and optimize scans, experiment with surreal additions, and explore atmosphere through lighting, camera movement, and rendering.

In the second stage, participants integrated their rendered videos into Runway AI, extending their projects through generative video transformations. The workshop concluded with a group presentation, where each participant shared their work. Together, these digital experiments demonstrated how cyber tools can act as instruments of cultural resilience, offering alternative ways to remember, reinterpret, and sustain the memory of spaces that may otherwise be lost.

Both workshops were facilitated and supported by artist Sanja Lasić, whose contribution was integral to their success. She played a key role in shaping the initial workshop methodology, assisting with organizational matters, and providing technical guidance throughout the sessions. Her presence helped establish an attentive and focused atmosphere, while her support during feedback discussions fostered a constructive and reflective environment for participants.
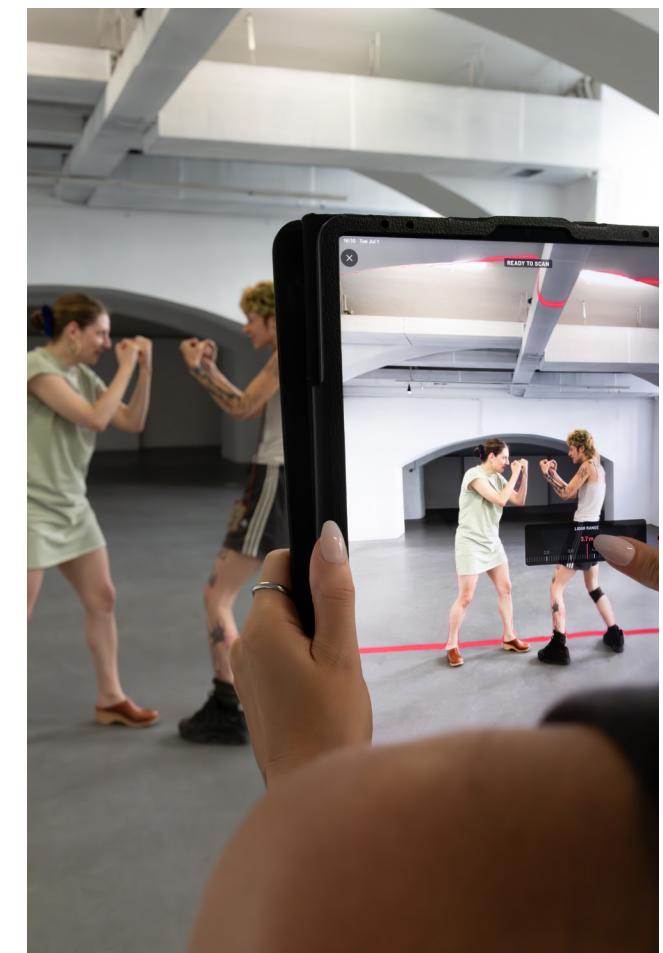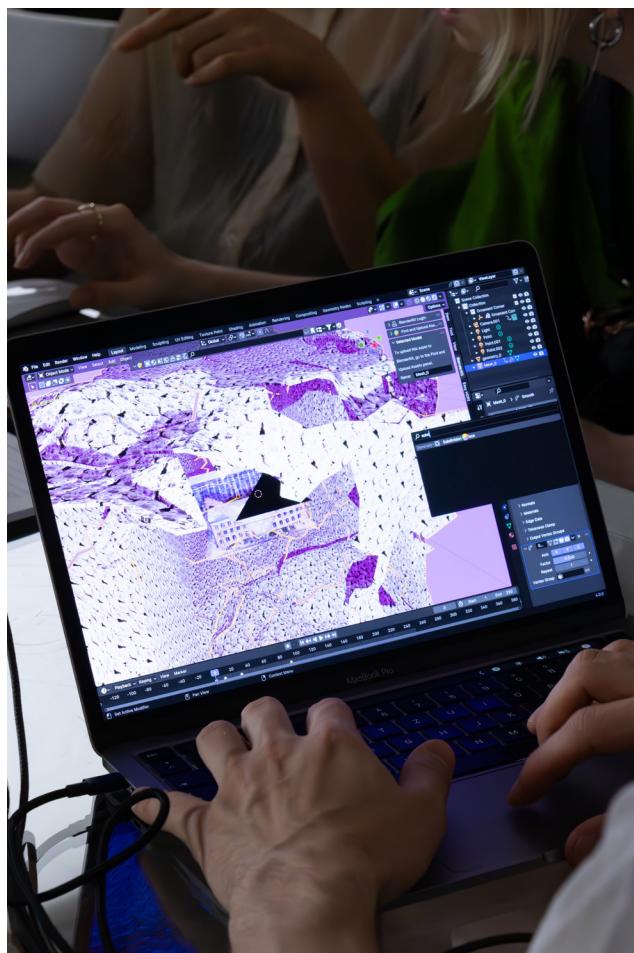
Final project presentation and artist-talk with Anna Manankina and Sanja Lasić,
Apoteka, Space for Contemporary Art
Vodnjan, Croatia

On August 30, 2025 **Apoteka - Space for Contemporary Art** hosted **Anna Manankina** for an **artist talk** to present Anna's work and experience in the scope of the project. Moderated by artist **Sanja Lasić**, the artist talk involved the local audience in Vodnjan, Croatia, to reflect on how art can serve as a response — and resistance — to violence, erasure, and the destruction of heritage. Anna and Sanja were welcomed by Apoteka's director and visual artist **Matija Debeljuh**.

Apoteka is a leading institution for contemporary art in the region of Istria in Croatia. Situated on the premises of an abandoned pharmacy in the old town Vodnjan, it is a place for artistic and curatorial research and discussion. Joined by artists and the local publici n Vodnjan, Anna Manankina talked about her experience during the artistic residency in Vienna and the workshops organized in the scope of the project. Blending contexts of war trauma related to both Ukraine and Croatia, the artist talk presented a platform for common reflection on the role of artists in processing and interpreting the destruction of cultural heritage during war. Both Anna and Sanja describe the event in Vodnjan as an opportunity to build a fruitful and meaningful interaction with the local public through Anna´s work and connect it to topics of trauma and cultural heritage placing it in geo-contemporary context.

Final project presentation and artist-talk with Sanja Lasić,
Apoteka, Space for Contemporary Art
Vodnjan, Croatia

Do Algorithms Dream
of Electric Sheep
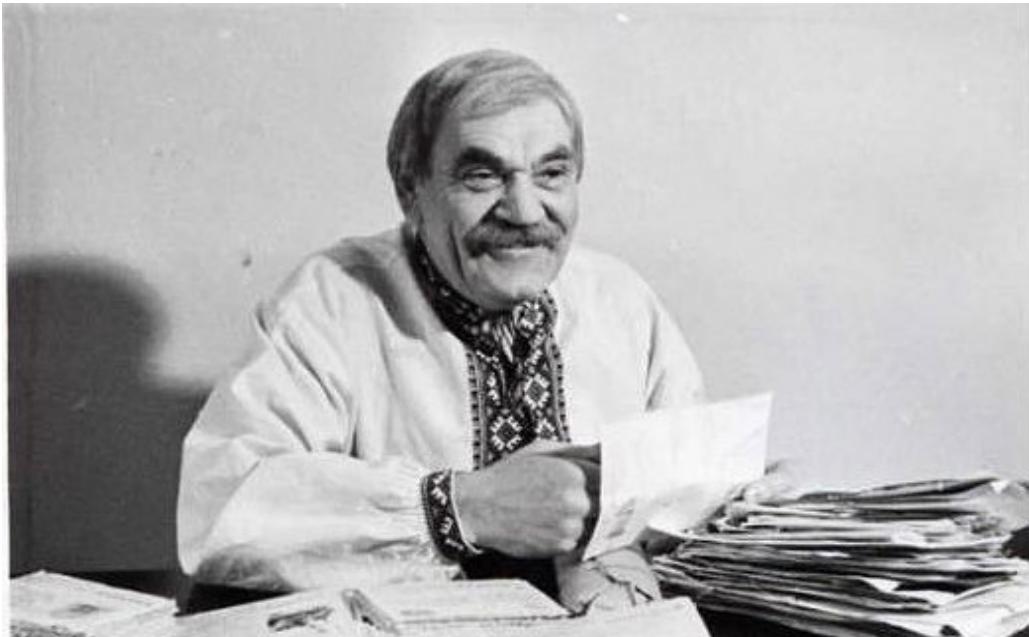
Do Algorithms Dream of Electric Sheep?

Final project development during the residency 'Responding to Trauma and Cultural Heritage Destruction', initiated by BLOCKFREI in collaboration with STUDIO DAS WEISSE HAUS and co-funded by the European Union.

This video project draws on Ukrainian folklore and traditional children's fairytales, reimagined through Majolika figurines - the Rooster, the Deer, and the Sheep. Within the video, the Majolika figurines traverse between auto-generated dark forest of the surface web and the shadowy, sub-surface web - the soft underbelly of reality. The story unfolds in a post-apocalyptic future, where an AI voice - trained to mimic the beloved 1980s Ukrainian television storyteller Grandpa Panas - narrates a fairytale. In this imagined world, no living Ukrainian artists or writers remain; the nation's physical cultural heritage has been destroyed, leaving only faint digital remnants. Over time, all human-generated content has been replaced by artificial creations, endlessly recycled within the echo chambers of a "dead" internet.
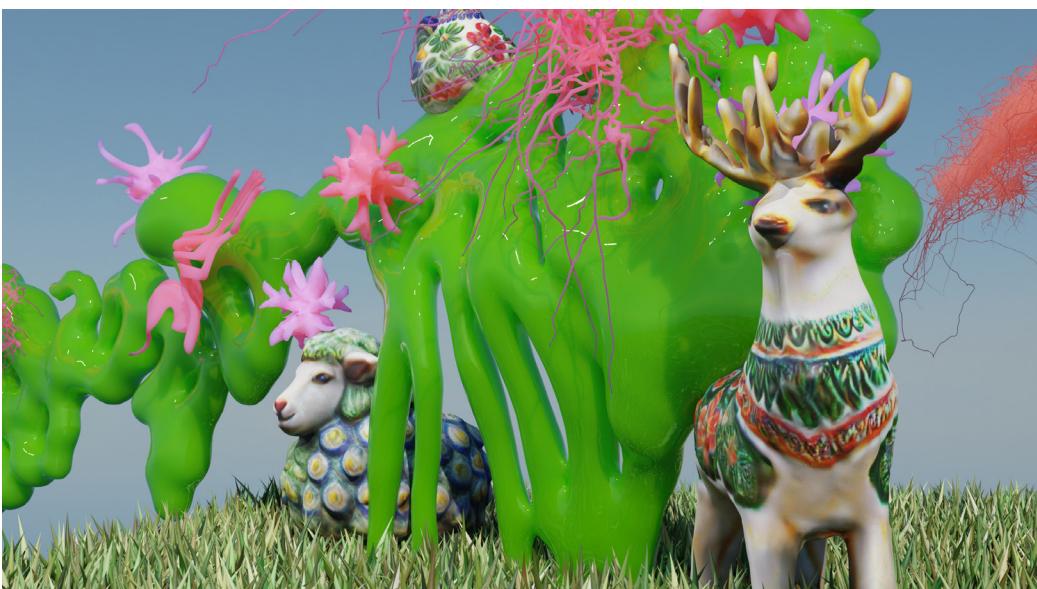
The project's research engages with the Dead Internet Theory, which suggests that most online activity - from articles to social media posts - is now generated and perpetuated by artificial intelligence. Even the accounts interacting with such content are often AI-driven, creating a closed loop of synthetic engagement that operates without human presence.

Click on the image opens a video

DARK FOREST
OF THE CLEAR WEB

INHABITED BY DATA SCAVENGERS, ADTECH MARKETERS, & TROLLS. ENTER WITH CAUTION.

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS & RSS FEEDS

DIGITAL GARDENS

UNPOLISHED, LOOSELY ORGANISED NOTES PUBLISHED ON PERSONAL WIKIS. TENDED OVER TIME AS AN EVOLVING KNOWLEDGE BASE

COZY WEB

GATEKEEPER-PROTECTED ENCLAVE COMMUNITIES COMPRISED OF LIKE-MINDED FOLKS AROUND NICHE INTERESTS. RUN THROUGH CHAT STREAMS LIKE WHATSAPP, SLACK, DISCORD, SNAPCHAT, ETC.

ONION ROUTERS

THE ONLY WAY INTO 8CHAN

DARK WEB

INTERNET UNDERGROWTH & DECOMPOSING MORALS

Anna Manankina (Kharkiv, Ukraine, *1995)
Liquid Modernity, 3D render, 2024

Liquid Modernity is a snapshot capturing a human condition in a state of rapid transformation. To be Ukrainian today is to embody adaptability, like a river flowing over sharp rocks. Liquids can travel easily; they pass around some obstacles and soak their way through others. But how does it feel to be subjected to constant change?

The conceptual foundation of this project draws from the idea of «liquid modernity», coined by Zygmunt Bauman, a metaphor to describe the constant mobility and change — in relationships, identities and global economics within contemporary society. Fluids resist fixed forms — they slip past structure, made containment. It is not the space they occupy that matters most but the passage of time. All of this raises the question of how technology can help us shape a hopeful future when the present is uncertain.

Anna Manankina

Was born in 1995 (Kharkiv, Ukraine)
Interdisciplinary media artist, working in the field of digital technol-
ogies with 3D animation, VR and AR, weaving together personal nar-
ratives, feminist practise, art historical references, and reflections on
the digital documentation of war and displacement.

Artist-in-residence at ZKM Center for Art and Media in 2022. Partici-
pated in the exhibition at Manifesta 14, Prishtina curated by Second-
ary Archive.
Finalist of the cultural exchange program Exter, supported by the
Ukrainian Institute. Fellow of the Gaude Polonia program 2021 from
the Polish National Cultural Center. Participated in 19th Media Art
Biennale WRO 2021 in Wroclaw, Poland. Worked on a collaborative
project with <rotor> Association for Contemporary Art, Graz, Austria.
Graduated from Kharkiv Academy of Design and Arts in 2020
Worked on personal project during KAIR residence in Sopa gallery
, Kosice. Finalist of Non-stop media biennale for young artists. Her
works were exhibited in Germany, France, China, Slovakia, Austria,
Ukraine, Latvia, Poland, and Lithuania.
Living and working in Karlsruhe, Germany.

BLOCK FREI

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Co-funded by the European Union