



Polish Pavilion
60th International Art Exhibition
La Biennale di Venezia

REPEAT AFTER ME II

Exhibitors: **OPEN GROUP** — Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga

Curator: **Marta Czyż**

Commissioner: **Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland**

Interim Director of the Zachęta — National Gallery of Art: **Justyna Szyłman**

Polish Pavilion office: **Anna Kowalska, Michał Kubiak (deputy commissioner)**

Media strategy: **Zofia Bugajna-Kasdepke**

20 April–24 November 2024

Pre-opening days: 17, 18, 19 April 2024

Opening ceremony: 18 April at 11 am

***Repeat after Me II* is a collective portrait of witnesses to the ongoing war in Ukraine, presented in the form of an audiovisual video installation. The protagonists of the film at the Polish Pavilion are civilians with refugee experience, speaking about the war through the sounds of weapons they recall, which they invite the audience to repeat. The Open Group art collective and curator Marta Czyż have thus created a military karaoke of the future, joining the public and war witnesses in dialogue.**



Repeat after Me II is an installation by the Ukrainian Open Group collective, made up of two films. These videos were created in 2022 and 2024. All the people they feature are refugees, speaking of their war experiences through the sounds of weapons they recall, then encouraging the audience to follow their lead. The artist use the karaoke format. Yet here the accompaniment is not hit songs, but shots, missiles, howling and explosions, and the lyrics are descriptions of deadly weapons. This is the soundtrack of a war.

The juxtaposition of these works from 2022 and 2024 shows the drastic continuity of memory, as well as the changes in war technology. The first video was shot in a camp near Lviv for people resettled within the country. The second work was made outside of Ukraine, in the countries of Western Europe, which are a haven for the participants. Yet even now, beyond the reach of the endless sirens, the sounds of war remain part of their trauma and symbolically spread their range.

The audience can repeat the sounds of the weapons after the witnesses, learning the language of their experiences, or step back into the safe space designed to look like a karaoke bar. Yet this is no ordinary bar, it

is a karaoke instruction site for a military future that threatens all of us.

A few weeks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Strategic Communications and Security Information Centre of the Ministry of Culture and Information Politics began distributing brochures called *In Case of Emergency or War*, explaining how to behave in a war zone. The instructions vary depending on whether the attack in question is automatic rifle fire, artillery shelling, rocket launchers, or an air raid. The ability to tell between them can save your life. *Repeat after Me II* portrays war as a collective experience — crossing age, ethnicity, professional and social status — giving the floor to witnesses and calling attention to the individual experiences of catastrophe.

The caretaker of the Polish Pavilion and organiser of the exhibition at the 60th International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia is Zacheęta — National Gallery of Art. Poland has participated in the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia with its own pavilion since 1932.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

artists:

OPEN GROUP

YURIY BILEY, PAVLO KOVACH, ANTON VARGA

Open Group was founded in August 2012 in Lviv by six Ukrainian artists: Yuriy Biley (2012–present), Pavlo Kovach (2012–present), Oleg Perkovskiy (2012–2013), Yevgen Samborskiy (2012–2014), Stanislav Turina (2012–2019) and Anton Varga (2012–present). The group's structure has changed over the years. Its present members are: Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach and Anton Varga.

The structure of Open Group is built around the idea of collective work, involving people from different fields for a period of time to work on collaborative projects. Their work is based on exploring interactions between people and contextual spaces, creating 'open situations'.

The group's members have run independent art spaces, such as Detenpyla Gallery (since 2011) or Efremova26 Gallery (2013–2014) in Lviv.

Open Group won the Special Distinction at the PinchukArtCentre Prize in 2013, and the Main Prize in 2015. Their works were featured at the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition in Venice. In 2016, Open Group curated a show called *Dependence Degree, Collective Practices of Young Ukrainian Artists 2000–2016*

at the BWA Awangarda Gallery (Wrocław, Poland). In 2017, their work was presented as part of the Future Generation Art Prize@Venice 2017 (an event to accompany the 57th Biennale). In 2019, Open Group curated the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice.

Open Group's works have been exhibited by such institutions as the 8th Yokohama Triennale; Albertinum, Dresden; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv; Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle (Netherlands); Belvedere 21 Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna; Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland); Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; PinchukArtCentre, Kyiv; Jam Factory Art Center, Lviv (Ukraine); 4th Autostrada Biennale, Prizren (Kosovo); The School of Kyiv — Kyiv Biennial 2015; Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art, Sarajevo.

The artists' works are held in the collections of the KADIST, Paris and San Francisco; Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art, Sarajevo; MOCA NGO/Ukrainian Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA), Kyiv; National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv; Museum of Contemporary Art in Kherson (Ukraine); and in private collections.

www.open-group.org.ua



Yuriy Biley was born in 1988 in Uzhhorod (Zakarpatian region, Ukraine). In 2011 he graduated from the National Academy of Arts in Lviv. Since 2015, he has lived and worked in Wrocław (Poland). Since 2022, he has been living between Berlin and Wrocław.

A visual artist and curator and a co-founder of the Open Group (since 2012), Biley has also curated and co-founded two galleries, Detenpyla in Lviv (since 2011) and New Golden in Wrocław (since 2019).

The artist's practice focuses on themes related to the experience of emigration. Most of his projects are based on personal experiences, which he constructs through borrowings and quotations. He creates post-art installations, collages and works. Beyond the theme of emigration, the works are a reflection to current social and political events. They contain images of a world oblivious to today's fundamental problems. He is interested in text and the impact of language as a cultural factor. His announcements communicate a civic attitude, constantly rooted in the artist's identity.

Biley's works are held in the collections of the Stadtmuseum, Berlin; Labirynt Gallery, Lublin (Poland); Museum of Contemporary Art, Kherson (Ukraine); and in private collections.

www.yuriy-biley.com

Anton Varga was born in 1989 in Uzhhorod (Zakarpatian region, Ukraine). He studied at the Zakarpattia Art Institute (BFA, 2010), Kharkiv State Academy of Art & Design (2012) and Rutgers University (MFA, 2024). He is a co-founding member of Open Group (since 2012). He is also a co-founder of the *Sorry No Rooms Available* art residency in his hometown, Uzhhorod (running since 2016). Since 2015 he has lived and worked in New York and Poznań (Poland).

Anton Varga's practice deals with temporary, archival, scrolling, pictorial, video and celluloid film images. His recent interests hover around war consumption, the politics of light, the light in parking lots, institutional light, the light in Youtube videos, Ultimate Master, immortality, collaboration, labour, the Kojévian End of History, pain, painting, landscapes, Socialist Realism, narrative, nostalgia, dialogues and hope.

www.antonvarga.com

Pavlo Kovach was born in 1987 in Uzhhorod (Zakarpatian region, Ukraine). He studied at the A. Erdeli Uzhhorod Art College and at the National Academy of Arts in Lviv (Ukraine), where he received his BA and MA. He lives and works in Lviv.

He is a co-founder of the Detenpyla Gallery and Efremova26 Gallery artist-run spaces, and since 2022 he has been the curator of the Lviv Municipal Art Centre; Kovach is also a co-founder and participant of the Open Group arts collective.

In his artistic practice, Pavlo Kovach is interested in creating the mythological image of a real person. The concept of his work is held in the statement that a person's image is based in the real-life story which the artist develops. Pavlo Kovach fills a fictional character's life with stories, artifacts and artworks, which (might) have been produced by the character themselves.

www.pavlokovach.weebly.com

exhibition curator:

Marta Czyż art historian, independent curator and critic, Marta Czyż lives and works in Warsaw.

Her practice draws on archives and recent developments in art history to influence culture and social movements. She explores the history of exhibitions in Poland and the curatorial profession.

She has prepared exhibitions in Poland at the CCA Ujazdowski Castle and Zachęta — National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, BWA Zielona Góra; MOS Gorzów; the National Museum in Szczecin; and elsewhere. In 2020, she curated the 10th Contexts Festival of Ephemeral Arts in Sokołowsko and the 9th Youth Triennale at the Centre for Polish Sculpture in Orońsko. In 2022, she joined Yuriy Biley in putting together the *Society of Discouragement* exhibition at the History Meeting House in Warsaw. She regularly publishes in the art-related press (*Dwutygodnik*, *Vogue Polska*, *Polityka*, *miejmiejsce*, *Wysokie Obcasy*, *Camera Austria*, *follow.art*). In 2015, she and Julia Wielgus released a Polish-language book called *In the Frame of the Exhibition — Conversations with Curators*. She has been granted a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland. She is a member of the Board of the Polish Section of the AICA.



ORGANISER

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art (pronunciation: [za' xɛŋta])

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art is an institution whose mission is to popularise art in all its current manifestations as a vital part of culture and society.

The gallery organises temporary exhibitions, presenting the most interesting developments in twentieth and twenty-first century art, with both solo exhibitions and widely-discussed thematic exhibitions. It also promotes the work of young artists, who are displayed, in part, at the Zachęta Project Room, a laboratory space for art experiments.

One of the foremost tasks in Zachęta's social mission is to promote contemporary art, and thus provide contact with it for viewers from all walks of life. Pictures of works from the Zachęta collection, documentary and

educational materials, and most of the publications are made available on Creative Commons licences on the gallery web site. This is part of the Open Zachęta project, ongoing since 2011, within which the gallery conducts its openness policy.

Zachęta runs educational activities geared toward children, young people, and adult viewers as well. It also organizes series of accessible events, taking into account viewers' diverse needs. It releases publications on contemporary art and gathers information on the present-day Polish art scene.

Zachęta holds a collection of nearly 3,700 works of painting, sculpture, installations, video, graphic art, and performance.

The gallery is also tasked with overseeing the content and organisation of the exhibition for the Polish Pavilion in Venice at Biennale Arte and Biennale Architettura.

THE POLISH PAVILION

Poland has been participating at the International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia since 1932, and at the International Architecture Exhibition since 1991. The construction of the Polish Pavilion in Venice was financed in the 1930s by the Polish government, whose property it remains to this day. Zachęta — National Gallery of Art is the caretaker of the Polish Pavilion and the organiser of exhibitions at the Biennale Arte and Biennale Architettura of La Biennale di Venezia.

POLISH PAVILION AT THE 60TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION — LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

Organiser: Zachęta — National Gallery of Art
Sponsor: ORLEN
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Sponsor of the opening reception: Cisowianka Perlage

Poland's participation in the 60th International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia is financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

LINKS:

Polish Pavilion:
<https://labiennale.art.pl/>

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art:
<https://zacheta.art.pl/en/>

Open Group:
<http://open-group.org.ua/en/about-us>

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Hashtags: #PolishPavilionVenice #PolishPavilion #RepeatAfterMe

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THE 60TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION — LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

20 April–24 November 2024
more about the Biennale: biennale.org

preview days in Venice: 17–19 April 2024