

Sashko Protyah & Vasyl Lyah: ми/We

Audiovisual composition (leftfield-monoopera), 6'53", 2021

Arborglyphs (graffiti on tree bark, mostly on poplars) are one of the most common types of memory in eastern Ukrainian cities. We collected an archive of about 1,000 images of arborglyphs, and used about 50 of them to create two compositions. The idea was to decipher the socio-cultural portrait of a person who practices graffiti on trees. Arborglyph writers remain invisible in society, because their messages often indicate their marginalisation and criminalisation. The practice itself is not seen as a noteworthy medium, although there are examples around the world of arborglyphs forming important evidence of social and cultural background (arborglyphs that Basque immigrants left on elms in northern California in the 1930s). On the poplars in Eastern Ukraine, the vast majority of messages are very simplified fixations, which often contain only the name of the city, date, a name or several names. Sometimes there is an indication of how to understand the relationship between names, or the author's attitude to the name. The simplicity of the messages does not help with interpretations, on the contrary, it makes the context even more ambiguous and opaque. Swearing and controversial political allusions point to danger and frustration. That is, arborglyphs function as patterns of aggression and self-aggression, scraped on the bark of a tree with a pocket knife or a more serious melee weapon.

The song "We" is based on a list of arborglyphs, which tell about the social ties of vandals. We are talking primarily about romantic gravity, sometimes with elements of humiliation and audacity, hanging out with alcohol on the beach, thoughts of food. The world of vandals is described in "We" as concisely as possible, in words that are more like impulsive gestures or muscle tension. When arborglyphs turn into chaos and graphic clutter on poplar bark, words give way to beatboxing. The young beatboxer Dake helped to make the socio-cultural portrait of the vandal more expressive.