

apexart

2016-17 Franchise Proposal

Illegal Kosmonavtika

submitted by: Magda Guruli and Mariam Natroshvili

Franchise location: Tbilisi, Georgia

The Soviet-led space programs that began in the 1930s ended almost simultaneously with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Over its sixty-year history, it justifiably claimed many significant achievements mostly within the cosmos-related military. It was also used as an ideological tool for maintaining the image of international prowess. In this political framework the cosmonaut, standing at the pinnacle of propaganda, was elevated to the role of a sacred figure who possessed exceptional personal and scientific skills. Since 1991, the cosmonaut and his/her glorified self-image almost completely disappeared - under the daily socio-economic struggle for survival.

In Georgia, the generation born in the late 1980s to early 1990s, knows the cosmonaut only from Soviet films, old magazines, Socialist Realism paintings and propaganda posters. It is the generation that now finds itself stuck between leftist ideas (both Stalinist and Western) and modern critiques of capitalism. A new phase of quasi-political religious 'marketing', combined with a creeping anti-western propaganda, only further serves to confuse the generation now preparing to lead the country into its future.

"Illegal Kosmonavtika" (Russian, standing for "Cosmonautics") is a quiet protest being made by young artists living and working in Georgia. Their outward target is the various state and corporate entities who currently own the exclusive rights to space research. The Kosmonavtika concept re-appropriates discarded imagery of the Soviet cosmos with its socially relevant ideals of human purpose in order to pose a very legitimate modern question: what kinds of 'skills' should be cultivated in order to survive if the current systems should collapse as well?

"Illegal Kosmonavtika" addresses this question through two components. The first is a series of six artist-led workshops that aim to cultivate an "Illegal Kosmonavt": an individual with rudimentary skills for 'survival'. These workshops will take place in the abandoned Tbilisi Geophysical Observatory, where Stalin is said to have once worked as an operator-supervisor in his youth. At the workshops, volunteers gathered through an open call in Facebook, Georgian media and online magazine outlets, will be taught various techniques of guerilla gardening, how to assemble a pirate radio station and how to perform a modernized version of former Soviet techniques of civil defense, often referred to as "GrOb" (the Russian for 'coffin.'). We will then print low-cost manuals titled "How to Become an Illegal Kosmonavt," containing images/information generated from the workshops, to be displayed and distributed at the "Illegal Kosmonavtika" exhibition, the second component of the project.

The exhibition will last one month and will feature works by 5 to 7 local artists who will be invited to respond in unique ways to the curatorial theme. Their site-specific works, along with the documentation and outcomes of the workshops, will be featured within the Institute of Space Structures, a decommissioned building located 19 miles from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. This fascinating building once belonged to the Georgian Space Agency. In a thematic gesture, the participating artists will also create logos, outfits, and other visual symbols related to "Illegal Kosmonavtika."

291 Church Street
New York, NY 10013
212.431.5270

info@apexart.org; www.apexart.org