

## In war-torn landscapes

The exhibition *and quiet that splinters the winter* has a specific message, while also raising global issues

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Denise Hawryσιο and John Wynne have been grappling with the question of how to reflect on the war in Ukraine for some time. Their disquiet led them to At Home Gallery. Slovakia seemed ideal for these Canadian/British artists, both for its proximity to Ukraine, and for personal reasons.

The silhouettes of a forest surround me. The contours of tree trunks and branches that have lost their leaves unfold in the space, and the reddish brown of fallen leaves emerges below them. An eerie sound fills the space: slowly bowed violin strings mix with a pulsation that sometimes grows stronger, sometimes fades. A bare, deserted landscape comes to life here: at first glance, this is not a specific place, the empty forest materialises as an archetypal landscape — wherever we are.

The rhythmic noises fight their way through our eardrums more and more persistently. The origin of the pulsation is hard to locate, but the sound eventually excludes everything else, as if the propeller of a helicopter is buzzing in our ears. However, the rumbling is not only



This exhibition in the former synagogue that houses the At Home Gallery has video projection on the lower level, collages on the upper level, and sound throughout.

perceived as sound, it affects the entire human body with an elemental force. It beats in our throats, as if we were breathing it in and out ourselves - it vibrates our vocal chords. The rumble gradually fades away, and the violin sound takes centre stage again. Looking back

towards the gallery upstairs, we discover a smaller video projection: a Ukrainian soldier playing the violin.

The visitor enters a special interaction with the landscape. Standing in the middle of the gallery, watching the video projected on the walls, it seems that the landscape is slipping past us. Yet it's not the same experience as looking at the passing trees through the window of a moving vehicle. The projected images have a completely different effect on the viewer: the impression is much closer, much more raw — we are not mere observers, outsiders here, we feel the experience in our bodies, on our skin, as if we ourselves were running between the bare tree trunks. The trees are pulsating — we can hear our own breathing rumbling through our bodies. So might the forest appear to hunted game during the chase. And to a soldier running from the enemy.

The collages on the upper floor, on the other hand, show the war in a more specific way. Denise Hawryσιο used two types of sources: photos that were recently taken in Ukraine, and clippings that she culled from National Geographic magazines published in the 1970s. The latter show attractive merchandise

and household items - one of them shows a refrigerator, another a luxurious sofa - but the artist places these in war-torn landscapes. However, just like in the space below, the specificity of the images opens up to more universal readings: "For those who might not know that they are specifically about this war, the collages also offer a wider possible interpretation," explains Hawryσιο. In one of the collages, for example, we see people wading through a river with a few personal possessions — the photo was taken when they were fleeing the hostilities in Ukraine. According to Hawryσιο, the displacement of communities is a global issue, as many people around the world are forced to leave their homes due to climate change. These collages were originally made for a fundraiser for Ukraine (which you can find on the Internet under the name *Someone Prays For You*). Due to her Ukrainian roots, the topic is extremely important to Hawryσιο: her relatives fled Ukraine and are currently in Slovakia.

The title of the installation, *and quiet splinters the winter*, comes from the pen of Ukrainian writer Anastazia Afanasieva. Afanasieva, like many contemporary Ukrainian authors at present, reflects on the

war with her poetry — as do Hawryσιο and Wynne with their own artistic media. Their installation focuses partly on one of the devastating effects of the war, one which is not widely recognised: the destruction of the natural environment. The war not only claims human lives — in forest-covered Ukraine, trees, biodiversity, and the natural habitats of the animal world are being destroyed. The forest itself is also the scene of human war atrocities.

The forest projected in the ground floor space of the synagogue is not projected onto a screen, but directly onto the synagogue's time-worn walls, which bear the marks of its difficult history. The video was shot by Wynne in England. "There's a kind of universality to the footage — it could be any forest, anywhere, and there's something mysterious and powerful about it," says Wynne. "The recording was made on a foggy day on top of a hill in Kent, on a trail that is part of the pilgrimage route to Canterbury Cathedral" — the theme of changing places, of being on the road appears here as well.

The unique auditory effect of the installation was achieved by Wynne with two types of sound — very low and very high frequency tones — and by taking advantage of the specific acoustics of the space. Interestingly, what we experience in the synagogue is not a homogeneous sound effect: walking around the room, we perceive that the quality and strength of the sound changes. In the past, Wynne has created a number of site-specific installations that exclusively used synthetic low and high frequency sounds: these were site-specific in the sense that he worked with sounds that could be heard on site and the acoustics of the space itself. Here, however, the high frequency sounds are provided by the violin: the inspiration came from the many videos circulating on the Internet of Ukrainian soldiers playing the violin. The effect of continuous pulsation was achieved by Wynne by combining very low-frequency sounds of slightly different pitch, creating an acoustic phenomenon known as beating. By placing two sound waves next to each other which are similar but not identical in frequency, an interesting interference is created, whereby the two sound waves sometimes become more intense together, sometimes dampen each other. This creates the pulsating effect — along with the quiet that splinters the landscape around it.

*and quiet that splinters the winter* can be seen in the At Home Gallery, Šamorín, until October 18, by appointment only. See [www.athomegallery.org](http://www.athomegallery.org)



Denise Hawryσιο and John Wynne

(Photos by Tibor Somogyi)