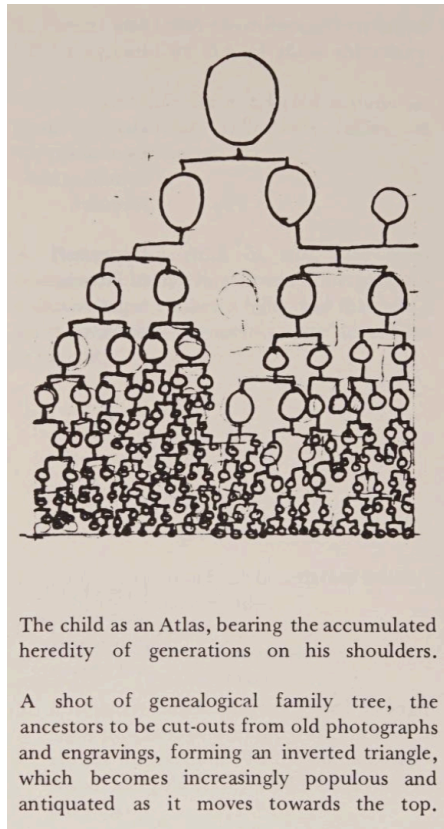


Poetics of Displacement: Maya Deren through a Ukrainian Lens



The child as an Atlas, bearing the accumulated heredity of generations on his shoulders.

A shot of genealogical family tree, the ancestors to be cut-outs from old photographs and engravings, forming an inverted triangle, which becomes increasingly populous and antiquated as it moves towards the top.

Drawing and Notes of Maya Deren

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Featured in Full Version of Publication

ABSTRACT

This research seeks to reposition Maya Deren (1917-1961), typically revered as pioneering American avant-garde cinema,¹ within the international Ukrainian avant-garde. Born in Kyiv alongside a brief chapter of Ukraine's independence, Deren's Ukrainian Jewish origins complicate and enrich our understanding of her work, particularly her use of dislocation, ritual, and psychic fragmentation.² Deren's early Slavic "blood memories"³ and her later desires to "return home"⁴ the year before her unexpected, early death bookend her biography, filmography, and theories through a Ukrainian lens. I investigate the tensions and oppressions she navigated in her cultural identities of living as a Ukrainian during Soviet Russia and as a Jewish person who was displaced to the US. Deren's 'filmic poetics' of psychological, ritual, and formal disruption are read here as embodiments of these unresolved tensions.

Deren's work is then placed in dialogue with four contemporary Ukrainian-American artists, whose insights were shared during interviews: Slinko, Daria Dorosh, Luba Drozd, and Katya Grokhovsky. All the artists are women with multidisciplinary practices. Slinko is an artist and scholar whose work uses history, social anthropology, and political satire in film and visual art installations. Daria Dorosh's digital and textile art traces the transition of analog to digital at the intersections of fashion and technology through patterns, context, and identity. Luba Drozd is an analog sound installation artist, concerned with the flux of organic materials, using piano strings, granite, steel sheets as sonic and spatial elements. Katya Grokhovsky is a mixed media artist working with gender, labor, and politics through the absurd and grotesque, rejecting beauty and creatively 'destroying' symbolic used objects to make immersive installations and performances.

From the 20th century Ukrainian avant-garde to today amidst Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, the largest war in Europe since World War II,⁵ the systems of violence at play are structured to destroy and appropriate the legacies of Ukrainian artists. Like Maya Deren, each of these artists' profound contributions combats erasure, minimization, and distortion in historical records. They elude disciplinary categorization as a means to resist colonial and artistic displacement. Here, I give overdue credence to how Deren's work is situated within the canon of Ukrainian artists. Those studying or interested in the feminist, activist, and international aspects of Deren's works benefit immensely from bringing these findings on her Ukrainianness into conversation with other scholarship on her. This research makes clear that reading Deren's works in tandem with her Ukrainian Jewish origins is necessary for a full and decolonial analysis of her work and impact. Reading Deren through her Ukrainian lens illuminates dimensions of her work that are essential to understanding their decolonial interpretations, impact, and possibilities. This research problematizes the russification of the arts historical record⁶ by shedding light on underrecognized contributions of Ukrainian-American women artists.

INTRODUCTION: THE VALUE OF MAYA DEREN'S UKRAINIAN LENS

Maya Deren's work is iconic. She originated the American avant-garde film movement, catalyzed feminist film, and was the best known name in postwar independent cinematic discourse."⁷ As one of the most well known American women in art history, she forged new paths of experimental cinema practices

¹ Cover image: *Image courtesy of The Legend of Maya Deren: a documentary biography and collected works by Clark, Vèvè A (167) Rabinovitz, Points of Resistance, Maya Deren and an American Avant-garde Cinema*, p. 50-85

² Frazier Foley, Fox, *Mosaic Pilgrim: Maya Deren's The Witch's Cradle as Filmic Poem, Dissociative Medium, and Fragmented Channel Facilitating a Pilgrimage Towards Ecstatic Awareness Through Art* 9

³ Evans, Elliot, *The White Darkness*, 144

⁴ Rita Christiani in *Mirror of Maya Deren*, dir. Kudlacek

⁵ Tesliuk, Roman, "The Demographic Sustainability of Ukraine: The Historical Retrospective and the Current Challenges." p. 36

⁶ Demchuk, Stefaniia, and Illia Levchenko. "Decolonizing Ukrainian Art History." 1-25.

⁷ Rabinovitz, 50

that have and will continue to yield many canonical artistic works. Her films has been a significant inspiration to countless experimental filmmakers like David Lynch, Stanley Kubrick, and Ingmar Bergman,⁸ as well as Ukrainian-American filmmakers Barbara Hammer⁹ and Yelena Yemchuk.¹⁰ Deren has also paved the way for crucial contemporary contributions to the art world by Ukrainian-American women multidisciplinary artists who carry her torch.

Deren's Ukrainian-American identity has long been left unaddressed by scholars, and in many ways was also a topic silenced by Deren herself, who never outright discussed her relationship to her Ukrainian Jewish origins. Thus, there is an absence of Ukrainian readings of Deren's works in academia. Save occasional mentions of her Ukrainian dress and dance from primary sources, the scholarly discussion largely ends at biographical history: 'born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1917, moved to the US at age five in 1922.'

This research reveals that Deren's idiosyncratic, highly influential 'poetics of displacement' affirms her perspective and identity as being deeply in conversation with Ukrainian avant-garde art of her time. The accepted discourse on Deren's work as proto-feminist can only come into true decolonial intersectionality by placing her Ukrainian lens as carrying equal weight. This is crucial to bringing Ukrainian decoloniality to Deren's influence in scholarly film, dance, and anthropological discourses. Her signature feminist and dreamlike film styles, theories on 'vertical poetics,' and intercultural spiritual endeavors all are better understood through this Ukrainian decolonial lens. This lens sheds crucial light on how her uniquely Ukrainian 'poetics of displacement' inform her unmatched posthumous influence and are the key to her continually evolving legacy in today's political landscapes.

Decolonizing Maya Deren's work through the lens of her Ukrainian Jewish origins and identity is profound and fundamentally necessary due to the continued Soviet colonial biases of history. Cultural appropriation and erasure of Ukrainians grows more normalized and weaponized as a crucial tenet of Russia's invasion. Decolonial academic thought too often diminishes Ukrainian, particularly Ukrainian women's, epistemological value. London-based Ukrainian academic Bohdana Kurylo writes that "Western Knowledge-making on Russia's war against Ukraine is replete with hierarchies that have caused the voices of Ukrainians to be excluded... between Europe's East and West, between the elite and the everyday, and between the objective and the subjective."¹¹ These hierarchies are at the root of Deren's own silence on her Ukrainian Jewish origins and are also responsible for the continued disregard for the value of her Ukrainian standpoint in interpretations of her work. Decades after her death, scholarship on Deren has caught up to acknowledge the feminist value of her films¹² through her 'subjective camera' and low-budget filmmaking on everyday women's consciousness.¹³ All that remains is to integrate understandings of Deren's postwar films with a Ukrainian decolonial perspective: her anti-imperialist ethos shows up most strongly when her films are viewed through the lens of her Ukrainian-American standpoint.

Though she rarely acknowledged her Ukrainian identity, she expressed it artistically and in her public persona. Her films conversed with the global decolonial geo-politics of her time. She embraces and avoids her origins in various ways that respond to the social pressures she felt, as she conformed to and resisted the limitations imposed by herself and others on her art and identity. Deren's complex

⁸ Ferrier, 2023 <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/maya-deren-avant-garde-cinema-pioneer/>

⁹ Katya Grokhovsky, Interview

¹⁰ Nast, <https://www.vogue.com/article/the-dreamlike-touch-of-yelena-yemchuk-on-show-in-new-york>

¹¹ Kurylo, 2 *The Ukrainian Subject, Hierarchies of Knowledge Production and the Everyday: An Autoethnographic Narrative*, Bohdana Kurylo, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, pp. 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00310-5>.

¹² Grokhovsky, Interview; Rabinovitz 49

¹³ Deren in Rabinovitz 55

relationship to her Ukrainian Jewish origins is full of tensions that are entangled with, and indicative of, issues faced broadly by Ukrainians around the globe during the early-mid 1900s. Many Ukrainian women artists, both during her time and after, have grappled with the very same tensions that Deren's work addressed through her distinct artistic innovations of female perspectives, altered and pluralistic states of consciousness¹⁴ and 'unrealities' in her films.¹⁵ This research outlines how Deren's artistic traditions (her content, processes, forms, and styles) are all tools she developed *specifically* to dig into her identity, conductively addressing the unique tensions she felt as a woman in the US with Ukrainian Jewish origins. This discussion is in dialogue with the abundance of scholarship on Deren's artwork and those of artists she has influenced as concerned with dreams, trances, possession, creative placemaking, social commentary, feminism, and more.

This research is guided and substantiated by in-depth interviews with four contemporary Ukrainian-American women multidisciplinary artists: Slinko, Daria Dorosh, Luba Drozd, Katya Grokhovsky. Each artist shared how they were previously familiar with Deren. Each also watched one of Deren's films to share their own interpretations, thoughts on what resonates, and how their own works are similar to and different from Deren's. Their insights address the influence of Deren in the contemporary art world and delve into Ukrainian folk symbolism, Soviet dislocation, and diasporic consciousness in Deren's cinema and contemporary Ukrainian art at large. Firsthand insights from these artists allow this research to make a critical shift toward recording marginalized Ukrainian histories not as subjects but as co-theorists whose insights and experiences each carry epistemological weight, who shape the present and future of multidisciplinary arts discourse and practice. Developments of this written research include a group panel discussion and video essay, which will be available at Borshch of Art's Discover Database.

Interviews reveal how these artists have engaged feminist and decolonial praxes at large – from Katya Grokhovsky's founding of the Immigrant Artists Biennale, to Daria Dorosh co-founding AIR Gallery, the first all-women's art gallery in the US, to Slinko's historical reckonings of Eastern Ukraine and Luba Drozd's perception-altering site-specific works. At stake is "how the boundaries of Ukrainian identity are sustained, challenged and redefined in response to what has been collectively articulated as an existential threat facing the Ukrainian nation."¹⁶ Scholarly reckoning with Eastern European identity, de-imperialization, and the situatedness of international avant-gardes within the contemporary art world is key. Those who admire Deren's work as an independent multidisciplinary filmmaker and theorist – including audiences, artists, and academics – all can shift the tides of history by fully considering how Deren's Ukrainian origins influence her life, work, and impact. Reconsidering art history through Ukrainian epistemologies opens new avenues into resisting Russia's ongoing violence that attempts to destroy Ukrainian national and cultural sovereignty. In the context of growing decolonial scholarship on Ukrainian sovereignty, revisiting Deren's heritage acquires renewed ethical and historical significance.

The analysis here finds that the work of Ukrainian-American women artists resonates with Deren's prominent contributions to the development of dreamlike imagery, feminine subjectivity, ritual, symbolic objects, and fashion, as well as formal experimentation, arts accessibility initiatives, activism, and merging material and technology in art, and resistant acts of creative placemaking. By uplifting Ukrainian epistemological self-determination in this research with interview methodologies, Deren's legacy becomes embedded within the living, transgenerational ethos of Ukrainian resilience.

Deren was and continues to be displaced in history and discourse both by Russian imperialism and by American patriarchy. These displacements were the pains in her heart that fuelled her introspective

¹⁴Frazier Foley, *The Witch's Cradle*, 5

¹⁵ Clark et al, *The Legend of Maya Deren: a documentary biography and collected works*, 110

¹⁶ Kurlyo, "The Ukrainian Subject, Hierarchies of Knowledge Production and the Everyday: An Autoethnographic Narrative," 4

films, global ethnographic works, and her theories on the social responsibilities of art. Her early experiences of strife in Kyiv, childhood immigration, grappling with anti-semitism, and adult experiences as a woman in male dominated fields, are the primary drivers of her artistic self-reflections on her displacement. Deren's internal reckonings as a displaced woman deeply informed her creations – which is what made her works so resonant to her vast circle of immigrant avant-garde artist contemporaries. Her toolbox of filmic traditions convey and grapple with her displacement. Her early films bring a dreamlike inward portrayal of her feelings of being alienated, and her later works apply a self-transcendence toward a more universalist feeling of belonging. Forming her 'poetics of displacement' onscreen, her work has forever shaped film as an art form. Her idiosyncratic style deeply resonates because it effectively visualizes the poetic weight of her realities, perspectives, and experiences as an epistemically marginalized, oppressed, and displaced person.

MAYA DEREN'S HISTORY

Deren was born in Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine in 1917, the same year Ukraine declared independence as the Ukrainian People's Republic amid the collapse of the Russian empire. Those first few years of her life, Ukraine was an independent state – her birth coincides with the birth of that chapter of Ukrainian history. At that time, Kyiv had a population of nearly 500,000,¹⁷ today having over 3 million inhabitants as the seventh largest city in Europe.¹⁸

While Ukrainian Jews like Deren's family were subjected to violent oppression throughout the early 1900s by Russian Soviet imperial forces,¹⁹ her family's temporal, spatial, and class juxtapositions granted her a relatively privileged early youth in Kyiv, the city center, which contributed to her educational excellence. Deren's father Solomon was a psychiatrist and her mother Marie studied piano and economics.²⁰ "The Derenowskys' lack of religiosity, high level of assimilation and degree of wealth led friend Miriam Arsham to describe the family as 'a particular kind of Russian Jews; they weren't small village Jews. Her father was an educated, city man. He was a doctor, which is very unusual for Jews in Russia... There is a Russian Jewish intelligentsia which both her parents were part of: the people who sat around and had ardent discussions about liberalizing forces. Smoked cigarettes and talked about Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. That was their heritage.'" ²¹

While Deren received a luminous education throughout her young years, most other Ukrainian Jewish youth of her age were forcibly removed from education and conscripted by Soviets in early adolescence. "The more common case for a Jew living in ghettoised Russia was that 'your birth was not registered. You never were permitted in a Russian school. At the age of 12, you were stolen from your village to serve in the army. And your servitude in the army was *pure* slavery.'" ²² In 1917, only 34% of men and 12% of women in the USSR were literate²³ – yet Deren was versed in Ukrainian, Russian, English, German, and French by her early teens.²⁴ While Deren praised film as a form for its capacity to say what she could never quite say with words in poetry,²⁵ Soviet Ukrainian filmmakers of her time used

¹⁷Chemakin, Anton. "Ethnic Composition of Kiev Population in Early 20th Century: A Snapshot of Actualized History," 34

¹⁸"Kiev, Ukraine Population 2024." Worldpopulationreview.com, 2024

¹⁹ Tesliuk, 38

²⁰ Brony, Richard, "How Maya Deren Became the Symbol and Champion of American Experimental Film," New Yorker.

²¹ Hoffman, "Looking Again at Maya Deren: How the 'Mother of Avant-Garde Film Was a Socially Conscious "Judaized Artist." " 31

²² Hoffman, 31

²³ Midnight Cleaner. "Smoke and Mirrors: An Alexander Dovzhenko Video Essay." www.youtube.com/watch?v=3liUfwh9Wwg.

²⁴ Berr, K.E. "Meshes of the Avant-Garde." www.respectrebelrevolt.com/post/maya-deren.

²⁵ Deren in *Mirror*

film to communicate with illiterate populus – where artists like Alexander Dovzhenko work within the confines of censorship and propagandization to document history, preserve heritage, and inspire hope.²⁶

Artist and historian Slinko notes that “If you really look into her the date or the time of Deren leaving Ukraine and getting to the US, that’s a very tumultuous time specifically for Kyiv, because the forces occupying or holding power over Kyiv were changing almost every other month. Between the Germans and World War I to the White Army, which was a pro-Czarist Army, to the Bolsheviks.” Amid constant shifts in control over Kyiv, violence and antisemitic persecution surged. Maya and her mother suffered severe illness and poverty at home. During the Russian Revolution of 1917, in the fall of Czarist Russia, the fight for an independent Ukraine, and the early formations of the USSR, Deren’s father was conscripted into battle with Bolshevik forces – who formed the Communist Party and Soviet Union under Lenin, and who enacted famine and mass displacement across former imperial territories, including Ukraine.²⁷ Her father’s conscription placed them within a deeply divided national conflict. To escape the political instability and antisemitic violence in Ukraine, the family snuck out of Ukraine in the early 1920’s, emigrating via Poland and France to Syracuse, New York.²⁸

Deren later attended international school in Geneva, Switzerland, where she advanced as a poet and photographer, studying in English and French.²⁹ She enrolled at Syracuse University in New York at age 16, in 1932, studying journalism and political science.³⁰ Her activist work at this time followed the anti-Tsarist and Soviet high-culture stances of her parents; she briefly married a Trotskyist fellow student, and finished school at New York University studying literature. She wrote “prose, poetry, and political essays, and was passionate about dance and photography.”³¹ By age 21, Deren received a Master’s in English Literature from Smith College,³² with her thesis on the influence of the French Symbolist tradition on Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.³³

There are many primary sources of Deren’s friends discussing their perception of her, collected in works such as the extensive book series *The Legend of Maya Deren* and documentary *In the Mirror of Maya Deren*. She had a profound personage, and is accounted as exorbitantly outspoken, confident, and a strong leader. These reputations remain consistent, yet she was controversial and subjected to specific positive and negative framing of those characteristics. Her authenticity was at odds against misogynistic standards for women, especially those breaking boundaries in artistic endeavors. “Maya was always on fire.... always wanted to dance at social parties.... everyone felt it as a religious and sexual act at once”³⁴

Deren’s Ukrainian identity was expressed, and unexpressed, by her in many ways. While Deren scarcely, if ever, referred to herself as Ukrainian – she did “talk of her “blood memories” of her roots in Ukraine, of embodied memories of folk songs, and described “racial traits of Slavic temperament, inherent within me... such a part of me that it cannot be a memory.”³⁵ She also pronounced Ukrainian identity through many factors of her public perception. She was notorious for meticulously curating according to her self-concept of how an artist should conduct oneself. With fashion as one of her main modes of personal expression, she always took great care to sew her own clothes, embodying her concept

²⁶ Oleksandr Petrovych Dovzhenko. *The Poet as Filmmaker*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973. xxxi

²⁷ Brody

²⁸ Hoffman, 11; Arsham in *Mirror*

²⁹ Clark, *Legend of Maya Deren*, 408

³⁰ Doneson, *Maya Deren – Jewish Women’s Archive*

³¹ Martinez, *Overlapping dances. Chantal Akerman and Maya Deren around Toute une Nuit*,

³² Brody

³³ *Legend*, 57; Doneson, Judith, *Maya Deren, Jewish Women’s Archive* <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/deren-maya>

³⁴ Dunham in *Mirror*

³⁵ Evans, 5



(Fig. 1) Maya Deren in flowy, off-the-shoulder white shirt.³⁸ Deren's hand-sewn clothes here evidence how she cultivates her 'artist self-concept.'



(Fig. 2) Maya Deren sitting with a woman in Haiti, both wearing dresses of similar styles,³⁹ patterned fabric with short sleeves and knee length skirts, shows Deren's resonance with Haitian fashion.

of 'the artist's way of self-sufficiency.'³⁶ Her dress of choice was flowy white embroidered shirts with long sleeves, and she would expose her shoulders by extending the sleeves downward³⁷ (Fig. 1). Longskirts were also an essential part of her wardrobe, evoking the styles of Ukrainian, and Haitian, dress (Fig. 2).

Like many avant-garde artists of her time, generating a buzz around their works meant cultivating a personality that garnered public interests. "Deren's own eccentricities – her unconventional dress, her love for ethnic music and dance – all singled her out as something of a curiosity among the continental crowd."⁴⁰ She blends embracing and denying her Ukrainianness and Jewishness, with her female, artist, and immigrant identities – and aspects of her life experiences such as her early youth in both liberated and soviet Ukraine, international education, American living in Los Angeles (1940-43) and NYC's Greenwich Village (1943-61),⁴¹ and her time in Haiti thanks to a Guggenheim Fellowship (1947-55).⁴² All of Deren's artistic choices were informed by her negotiations "as a white, US citizen but also as a Ukrainian refugee, a diasporic Jew who does not feel herself to be American,"⁴³ crucially informed her key identity as a "person of the world."⁴⁴ Her early artistic stances against Hollywood and patriarchal hegemony informed her

exploration of feminine consciousness in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, *At Land*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, and later works that incorporated global spiritual embodied philosophies: *Meditation on Violence*, *Divine Horsemen*, and *The Very Eye of Night*.

Her Ukrainianness is tied by her friends to her free-spiritedness and non-conformity, as a way of carrying herself that manifested in everything from Deren's innovative film style and proto-feminist

³⁶ Dunham in *Mirror*

³⁷ Legend, 128; *Mirror*; Durant, Mark Alice. *Maya Deren, Choreographed for Camera*. Saint Lucy Books.

³⁸ (Fig. 1) source: Fragments from *In the Mirror* of Maya Deren

³⁹ (Fig. 2) source: "Maya Deren's Haitian Footage – SFCinematheque"

⁴⁰ Clark, Legend 124

⁴¹ Brody, *How Maya Deren Became the Symbol and Champion of American Experimental Film*, 2022

⁴² *Mirror*

⁴³ Evans, *The White Darkness*, 144

⁴⁴ Heyman in *Legend* 202



(Fig. 3) Maya Deren, still from *Mesches of the Afternoon*, 1943, courtesy of The Filmmakers' Cooperative. The glass window softens her features in this iconic image, the symbol of US avant-garde film.

artistic traditions.⁴⁵ The specific meanings and influences of her artwork and style – such as her woman's subjectivity in filmic poetics – are lost due to Deren's elusion of categorization, combined with the delimiting nature of the society she worked within. The 'othered' aspects of her are especially remembered, such as her promiscuity and bold choices, while her anti-patriarchal and decolonial contributions are erased. This undermining and ignoring of Deren shows up directly in academia on her: Grokhovsky notes that "People forget about her when they teach film. I definitely see that in schools here in the US, especially when it's not avant-garde, it's not like no one's going to talk about her, but only in a particular, very narrow way."

Maya Deren is problematically exoticized by her colleagues: "Maya the Ukrainian gypsy, with the wild, frizzy hair like a halo around her face. Sasha Hammid placed her face behind glass and in that softened image she appeared like a Botticelli" ⁴⁶ (Fig. 3). Her friends use the term 'gypsy' to connote her free-spirited, nomadic and nonconformist nature – as well as to define her as non-Western 'Other,' with her contemporaries discussing Deren's 'peasant-like features,' such as her 'wild hair, full lips, South-Sea islander nose.'⁴⁷ The term 'gypsy,' historically used by some of Deren's circle to describe her, appears here in quotation to expose the exoticizing and racializing gaze imposed upon Eastern European women; it was not used as a self-description and is recognized as a problematic term.

Deren's physical appearance directly contributed to her perception as Ukrainian. The 'face behind the glass' here is the landmark, most widely referenced still from all of her films – her features are softened to meet the 'Italian Renaissance' style Western gaze.⁴⁸ The still is from a moment when she looks out the window in *Mesches in the Afternoon*. Ironically, that moment was improvised by Hammid,⁴⁹ and filmically represents Deren's removal from, and inability to control, her own image through the male hegemonic gaze. Her image here has garnered icon status, representative of the advent of independent cinema itself. She masterfully infused her portrait, and legacy, with feminist meaning by playing the protagonist in her own films. This feminist infusion is not without Ukrainian infusion – from her facial features, to her unique fashion, to her activist and artist values enacted in her artistic traditions.

Deren's multidisciplinary challenges, rather than upholds, hegemony – as a multi-talented woman whose work directly explored the pluralistic intelligences of feminine consciousness, such as "women's time" in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, and "women's internal and external space" in *Mesches of the Afternoon*.⁵⁰ Generations of feminist artistic responses to her work, such as Barbara Hammer's 2011 material-archive documentary *Maya Deren's Sink* (Fig. 4), suggests that Deren's Ukrainian contributions should be read alongside the remaining ideological and material influences of Deren's work, alive in the sculptures, films, and organizations built by contemporary Ukrainian-American women artists. Such an

⁴⁵ Marcia Vogel in *Mirror*

⁴⁶ Anais Nin in *Legend*, 123

⁴⁷ Anais Nin in *Legend* 123; Rabinovitz *Points of Resistance* 50

⁴⁸ Sasha Hammid, *Mirror*

⁴⁹ Sasha Hammid, *Mirror*

⁵⁰ Deren, *Mirror*



(Fig. 4) Image from *Maya Deren's Sink* by Barbara Hammer, 2011.⁵¹ Film of Deren is projected onto her sink, which is covered in leaves, merging artifacts and storytelling.



(Fig. 5) *Fantasyland* by Katya Grokhovsky, 2021. Multimedia installation investigating the American dream through an immigrant lens.⁵² Grokhovsky's key motifs like the giant beach ball, bright colors, figure-like sculptures, and digital elements (lower right corner) appear here.

approach to Deren's Ukrainian identity honors, follows, and expands upon the anti-patriarchal research methods responsible for Deren's successful integration into the canon of feminist cinema, by bringing a Ukrainian decolonial lens that flows with her elusions, embracings, and resistances of both socio-political and artistic categorization

ART AS PLACE: DEREN'S ARTIST-ORGANIZER IDENTITY AND LEGACY

Artist Katya Grokhovsky, founder of the Immigrant Artist Biennial, says that: "Migration challenges you, it forces you to leave behind sometimes what shaped you in the beginning. The language that shaped your first thoughts, cultural codes that shaped your identity, and you have to start again. Migration strips you naked of your outer layer, and you learn to rebuild new skin cells in yet a new place. Art is my country, where infinite new rules, new laws, are established. I had to create this space to feel safe in, a space which now acts as a zone of protection for me. Art is now my country, my home" (Fig. 5). Grokhovsky draws from imagination and rejection of beauty in absurd and grotesque styles to navigate the intersections of being an immigrant and a woman, saying that the challenges of adaptation of belonging can be particularly painful for women – who are made to 'speak the language of oppression when placed under strict gender limitations' – a struggle that renders immigrant artists and immigrant women invisible: "their labor undervalued, underrecognized, contributions erased."⁵³

One of the most important self-defined aspects of Deren's identity was an understanding of the self at the center of organizational networks. Deren founded the Creative Film Foundation around 1954, which she ran until her death in 1961, to help others

⁵¹ (Fig. 4) source: <https://barbarahammer.com/films/maya-derens-sink/>

⁵² (Fig. 5) source: <https://www.katyagrokhovsky.net/fantasyland>

⁵³ Katya Grokhovsky. "Beyond Borders: Art, Gender, and the Immigrant Experience | Katya Grokhovsky | TEDxSVA Women." YouTube, TEDx Talks, www.youtube.com/watch?v=32xY5buoPSU.

get publications and money for independent artistic films.⁵⁴ Her tireless efforts have had profound long standing impacts, for example we have Deren to thank for the teaching of independent cinema in higher education.⁵⁵ Her early involvements have shaped current film organizations such as The Filmmakers' Cooperative, founded in 1961 after Deren's early death by her colleagues Jonas Mekas and Shirley Clarke alongside other filmmakers – inspired to honor Deren's legacy by continuing her effort to support and distribute experimental films.⁵⁶

The artist organizer identity rings true in unique ways for each woman multidisciplinary artist of Ukrainian descent – as each extends their creative practice into activism, many also paving the way for other artists through their labor. From Grokhovsky's *The Immigrant Biennial*, to Dorosh's confounding of the first all women's art gallery in the US *AIR Gallery*, to Drozd's presentations on Ukrainian artists, to Dashkina Maddux's Wake Forest Dance Festival – the legacy of Ukrainian-American women artists is clear to be one of supporting the artistic community. More specifically, alongside the driving forces of social justice and artistic equity – these artists rise up to the additional challenges that comes with creating multidisciplinary work that evades categorization, are thus both more likely to take on “artist-organizer” tasks by virtue of their innovation of artistic forms, and are more likely to be under-recognized for said organizer efforts.

At the intersections of struggles faced by immigrant artists and immigrant women outlined, Deren's films and texts lay the earlier groundwork for not only the filmic poetics on women's consciousness she is highly recognized for, but also for why it is crucial to understand the ‘artist identity’ in the geopolitical contexts of the artist in her analogy of the ‘artist-native’ that foregrounds her Haitian Vodou ethnography *Divine Horsemen*. Deren defines her identity here through an understanding of the artist as an oppressed demographic in “modern industrial culture” in line with her continual effort to curate her self-concept of an ‘artist identity.’ She articulates the ‘artist-native’ as analogous to an ‘othered Indigenous’ oppressed by the West's individualization and appropriation as methods of displacement and erasure of cultural lifeways.⁵⁷

Deren writes: “...in a modern industrial culture, the artists constitute, in fact, an “ethnic group,” subject to the full “native” treatment. We too are exhibited as touristic curiosities on Monday, extolled as culture on Tuesday, denounced as immoral and unsanitary on Wednesday, reinstated for scientific study Thursday, feasted for some obscurely stylish reason Friday, forgotten Saturday, revisited as picturesque Sunday. We too are misrepresented by professional appreciators and subjected to spiritual imperialism, our most sacred efforts are plagiarized for yard goods, our histories are traced, our psyches analyzed, and when everyone has taken his pleasure of us in his own fashion, we are driven from our native haunts, our modest dwellings are condemned and replaced by a chromium skyscraper.”⁵⁸

Deren's ‘artist-native’ is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's ‘colonized intellectual,’ who battles individualization, and Westernization. He defines colonized intellectuals as educated members of colonized societies who first imitate or assimilate the colonizer's culture, then reclaims Indigenous culture (often superficially at first), and ultimately merge with the masses in their struggle for liberation.⁵⁹ Through ethnography in Haiti, Deren reckons with her oppression as an artist in the US, overcomes her initial modernist-primitivist proposal to create her own film creating different meanings from Haitian dance aesthetics, and instead focusing her work on the cultural complexity of Haitian Vodoun, to combat

⁵⁴ Mirror

⁵⁵ Rabinovitz, 72-73

⁵⁶ Rabinovitz, 84

⁵⁷ Deren, *Divine Horsemen: Living Gods of Haiti*, 6-7

⁵⁸ Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 7-8

⁵⁹ Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, 210-211



(Fig. 6) *AIR Gallery Co-founders*, photo courtesy of Daria Dorosh (seen bottom row 2nd from the left), 1973. Founders of the first women's art gallery in the US.

Western misperceptions, and join Haitians in 'ritual kinship' stemming from her roots as an oppressed American, woman, artist, and Ukrainian Jewish person.⁶⁰ Within Grokhovsky's "art is now my country, my home," Deren's 'artist-native' analogy can be read alongside contemporary decolonial understandings of *displacement* through territorialism as a primary weapon of settler colonialism. Colonial territorialism historically disrupts community lifeways such as arts and meaningful ceremonies – for example, the restriction, censorship, and appropriation of communal dance among Indigenous and Black people by the US, and the banning of Ukrainian film and destruction of Ukrainian museums by Russia. The mixture of violent erasure simultaneous to appropriation of artistic cultural heritage is a method of oppressive agendas globally, with nuances to the intersections of gender and material politics. Hegemonic arts spaces (such as galleries) are exclusionary racist and sexist. Male dominated fields like film, photography, and visual arts, especially during Deren's time, are wrought with "glass ceiling" invisible upper limits for women, while female dominated forms like dance and fashion,

and even things like gymnastics and nursing, are wrought with "glass escalators" for men.⁶¹ Further, the abundance, space, time, and flow required for artistic creation – especially collaborative and technological arts like film, and embodied arts like dance, fashion, and sculpture – are racistly and misogynistically withheld from artists of marginalized identities through this 'artistic displacement,' necessitating the need for resistant practices of 'creative placemaking.' For Ukrainian-American women artists, creative placemaking both copes with and resists displacement. Deren and her artistic lineage are continually displaced – as immigrants, as women, and as artists – from countries, to industries, and even the historical record itself.

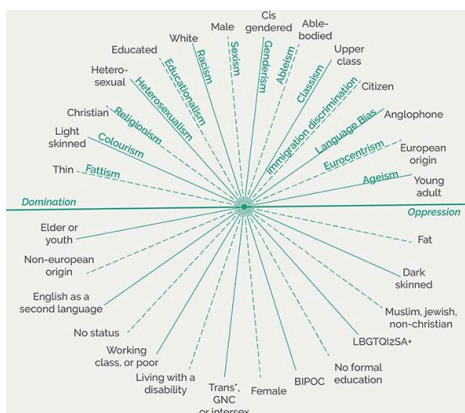
Daria Dorosh's work navigates establishing "art as place" through the transition from analog to digital eras, noting those whose work eludes categorization between materials and informatics is particularly subject to 'artistic displacement.' Daria offers potent methods of 'creative placemaking' – such as for women artists to "be the museum," merging studio, archive, and legacy in ways that resist colonial and patriarchal erasure of women and immigrant artists. In 1972, Dorosh co-founded the first all women art gallery in the US with twenty other artists, AIR Gallery in Brooklyn, NYC, in response to the art market as the sole definer of artistic success, which was and remains nearly entirely exclusionary of women, especially women of color.⁶² Pictured is the iconic AIR Gallery crew, renovating their loft, including the iconic ladder that represents unprecedented upward mobility for women artists (Fig. 6).

Beyond Dorosh, Deren, and Grokhovsky's artist organizer feats, the acknowledgement and creation of 'Art as Place' is ample in the works of artists like Slinko and Yelena Yemchuk, who were born in Ukraine during the Soviet era and have since returned to their homeland to create art following the

⁶⁰ Evans, *The White Darkness*, 155

⁶¹ Wingfield, Adia Harvey. "Racializing the Glass Escalator," 15

⁶² Daria Dorosh, Interview



(Fig. 7) *Matrix of Domination* by Patricia Hill Collins, 1990

	The Nature of Forms	The Forms of Art	The Art of Film
The State of Nature and The Character of Man	1A Page 38	1B Page 55	1C Page 74
The Mechanics of Nature and The Methods of Man	2A Page 44	2B Page 60	2C Page 85
The Instrument of Discovery and The Instrument of Invention	3A Page 49	3B Page 68	3C Page 96

(Fig. 8) *Table of Contents, An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film* by Maya Deren, 1946

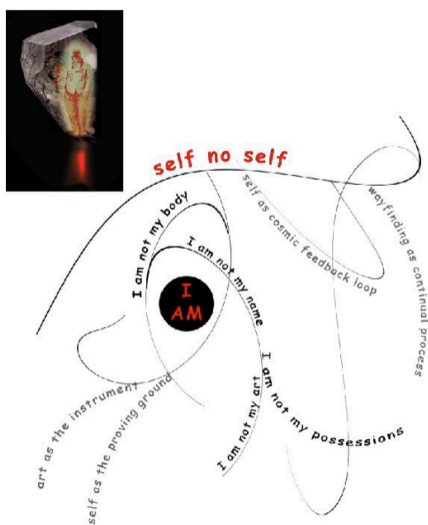
autobiographical, ethnographic, and nostalgic dreamlike aspects of Deren's works. Their art is deeply personal and introspective, drawing locations and moods from their own early childhood memories, as a basis to discuss the complexities of their displacement in ways that problematize Russian cultural colonization and support anti-imperial effort. Their auto-ethnographic and poetic documentary resists Russian censorship, erasure, and appropriation of Ukrainian art, culture, and history. Yemchuk and Slinko show us that Deren's filmic traditions in *Meshes* and *At Land*, typically revered as distinctly feminist anti-Hollywood, are the very same filmic traditions employed by contemporary Ukrainian women.

ANAGRAMS OF IDENTITY: RENAMING AND VERTICAL POETICS

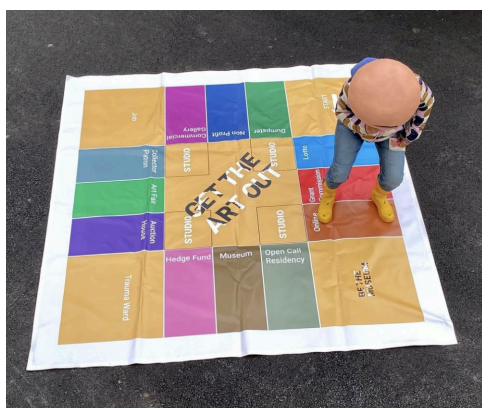
In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Gender theorist Patricia Hill Collins offers an intersectional visual-linguistic mapping of oppression, titled *The Matrix of Domination* (Fig. 7). The key aspects of Collins's approach to intersectional oppression is that a person can be oppressed in one realm of their identity while being privileged in another, and that the individual facets of identity like race, class, gender, age, ability, nation of origin, and so on, are all deeply interconnected and not understandable in isolation.⁶³ Deren would have understood *The Matrix of Domination* as 'an anagram of oppression,' akin to Deren's theoretical text *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, on the 'moral form' of art and the responsibility of 'the artist' to improve and progress society. Deren's table of contents is structured to reveal the distinct yet cohesive fluid interconnected grid, where all parts are independent yet crucially inform the whole (Fig. 8). Applying the Matrix of Domination to Deren's standpoint reveals not only her multiple axes of marginality, but how these vectors position and shape her experimental rejection of film's conventions, such as temporality and narrative.

Daria Dorosh, who traces the patterns of informatics from analog to digital, notes that grids are a distinctly analog way of organizing information, as compared to the digital pixel. Here, two of Dorosh's own anagrams – namely the *Damage As A Springboard for Self Discovery*, and the second an embodied game called "Get the Art Out." Together, through the form of visual anagram – Deren, Dorosh, and Collins give credence to the nuances and intersectionalities of oppression, self, and artistic forms – helpfully considered throughout this research to trace the tensions at play in Deren's, and other artists' creative reckoning with their identities.

⁶³ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.



(Fig. 9) *Damage as a springboard for self discovery*, by Daria Dorosh, 2020



(Fig. 10) *Get the Art Out*, game by Daria Dorosh, 2016

Bringing an artistic anagram of self to this intersectional read of Deren's silence on her Jewish and Ukrainian heritages, outlining how Deren affirmed tenets of Dorosh's *Damage As A Springboard for Self Discovery* manifesto are a helpful lens for deciphering Deren's artistic relationship to her Ukrainian Jewish origins, while also affirming Deren's historically localized identity is connected to her contemporary impact (Fig. 9). Coinciding with Dorosh's "I am not my body," Deren's overarching emphasis on possession, collaboration, film, and personage points to an interpersonal, collaborative, and disembodied understanding of identity.

Deren's creative iconizing of her own image and meticulously mysterious public persona is more deeply understood with Dorosh's "I am not my art." Deren's works are creatively autobiographical and introspective, yet still only alluding to the multitudes of her identity through her indirect and elusive artistic self-portrayals. Deren says that "I intended it almost as a mythological statement in the sense that folk tales are mythological, archetypal statements. The girl in the film is not a personal person, she's a personage."⁶⁴ Dorosh's "art as the instrument / self as the proving ground" points to an understanding of self as the place of these personages – which matches Deren's highly internal artistic inquiries, that pertain to the connective sinews between personal histories and artistic forms. Additionally, Dorosh's *Get the Art Out* ties these introspections to the art-organization and production through a map-like game, played by a faceless personage (Fig. 10).

In line with the *Matrix of Domination*, this analysis recognizes that although Deren's silence on her cultural origins and identity was ubiquitous, there were nuances between her reactions to the Ukrainian aspects of her identity in comparison to the Jewish ones. Both Deren's reactions to

her Ukrainianness and Jewishness, and the geopolitical effects of each, are more than the sum of their parts through Hill's intersectional matrix. Hoffman writes that examining the nuances of Deren's internal Jewish tensions in her work allows a link to be made between "Deren's oeuvre and her life experiences, in the context of the social and cultural tensions surrounding Jews at the time, thus explaining the broader issues around her feelings of alienation and constant search for inclusion. It explains her political involvement and defines the basis of her moral outlook and social conscience." Read together, renaming and vertical poetics articulate the formal strategies through which Deren restructures memory and public persona.

⁶⁴ Deren in *Mirror*

RENAMING

Maya Deren's evolutionary refuting of her birth name is better understood alongside Dorosh's "I am not my name," where renaming expresses response to external pressures, and internal creative agencies, rather than intrinsically defining a person. Deren reflected this in her use of renaming herself and others as a political and artistic tool, anagrammatically restructuring names to reflect a mutable avant-garde mystere. Just as an anagram reorders letters to produce a new word, Deren's renaming of herself and others reflects a reordering of identity, for both the inner psyche and to attempt to control public perception. The following analysis on Deren's relationship to names reveals how her rise to fame in the US as an avant-garde artist was affected by her internal Ukrainian Jewish tensions.

In her youth, Deren's family's surname was shortened from Derenkowsky upon US naturalization in 1922 – with her paternal uncle Louis having already shortened their name upon his earlier arrival.⁶⁵ In Kyiv, Deren's family already had been raising her, an only child, with little regard to Jewish customs and traditions, a survival tactic amidst anti-semitic pogroms that would result in the family's US immigration. The family last name assimilation is echoed in Deren's 1933 first-name change from Eleanora to Maya, upon the death of her father and publication of her first completed film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Fig. 11). The family surname's change away from Ukrainian Jewish identity is a product of US assimilation. Similarly, Maya's first-name change is a distinct move to publicly identify with the the primitivist 'non-western other' rather than modernist US hegemonic norms – with the name Maya having affiliations with water, the Buddha mother, the Hindu goddess whose veil of illusion prevents one from seeing the spiritual reality behind it," as well as reference to the Mayan Indigenous peoples.⁶⁶ She told her friends this represented her decision to work in film – with its magical properties as a visionary medium to capture the essence of altered states of consciousness like hypnosis, dreams, and possessions.⁶⁷ Renaming to Maya was a move to alter her public perception as an artist, mystic, and person "of the world"⁶⁸ – yet at the same time it was a shift away from her birth name, given to her by her mother Marie, after the famous dancer and actress Eleanora Duse.⁶⁹

Deren's last name, and new first name, both were influenced by anti-semitism in the US.⁷⁰ Her strong desire to avoid anti-semitism contributed to her insistence on changing others' names. She gave her second husband Oleksandr 'Sasha' Hackenschmied a new last name, Hammid, around the same time he came up with her first name of Maya (Legend, Mirror). Another is Hella Heyman, who Deren kept pushing to change her name. Deren even changed Heyman's overtly Jewish last name on credit rolls; in one her name appears as "Hamon." Heyman, who took the last name Hammid after marrying Sasha (effectively having her married name also changed by Deren), says that "Hamon makes cringe every time I think of it... She had such difficulty accepting her Jewishness. You know, I didn't make a big deal of it, but there wasn't anything *wrong* with being Jewish...She actively *denied* being a Jew. I mean, she just didn't want to own up to it. She just wanted to be a citizen of the world, not identified with a group."⁷¹ Another friend of Deren echoes Heyman: "Miriam Arsham explains that Deren 'was very, very embarrassed about being Jewish. It was anti-semitic, let's just say it straight out ... she hated it, it seemed

⁶⁵ Soussloff *Maya Deren Herself*, 120

⁶⁶ Sasha Hammid, *Mirror*

⁶⁷ *Legend*, 2

⁶⁸ Heyman in *Legend*, 201

⁶⁹ Soussloff, 120

⁷⁰ Hoffman, 65

⁷¹ Heyman in *Legend*, 200-202

very vulgar to her.”⁷² These comments from her contemporaries should be understood as contested personal accounts that were likely points of tension within Deren’s circles.

Hoffman notes that adds that Jewish identity was coded differently depending on class, region, and immigration wave, arguing these lenses are necessary to understand Deren’s complex subjectivity. As a Russian Jew arriving in the 1920’s, Deren faced more anti-semitism in the US than earlier generations of German Jewish immigrants. Hoffman discusses these histories, and how they inform Deren’s cosmopolitan identity, writing that “In America the embodiment of the *universal* or *cosmopolitan* man reflected the attributes of ‘the Jew,’” while on the flipside, “poverty and immigrants were also pinned onto ‘the Jew’... the tradition of the Jews being ‘wanderers’ or a ‘homeless nation’ also created an immediate association with ‘the Jew’ as the epitome of ‘the immigrant.’”⁷³ Artist Daria Dorosh adds that Deren’s immigrant artist circles were “Very cosmopolitan... that’s very good in a way. Then she doesn’t have to be Ukrainian or Jewish, she’s just floating among 600 other nationalities.”⁷⁴ During Deren’s time, “You could grow old in the ways of Europe without setting foot off Manhattan Island.”⁷⁵ Deren navigated oppression as a “Russian Jewess”⁷⁶ through a cosmopolitan identity amidst her artistic community of European-American immigrants. Hoffman writes that “In the artistic milieu of Greenwich Village, her attitude had become more outwardly focused as she had started to create a collective culture in which artists, Jews, and other outsiders could find belonging.”⁷⁷ This is a significant point in Deren’s life and work: no longer was she trying to find acceptance in wider patterns to displace her Jewish identity. Instead, now living as the cultivated artist among other artists, she sought to satisfy her own needs as well as the needs of those who were similarly outsiders, alienated or displaced.”⁷⁸

Deren internalized her fears that negative reception of her Jewish background would jeopardize her artistic credibility, and she reacted by pronouncing other identifiers, like being an ‘artist’ or ‘person of the world,’⁷⁹ as being in opposition to identifiers such as Ukrainian, Jewish, and/or American. Resultantly, her criticality of the US is well understood as feminist, rather than diasporic. Renaming helped Deren creatively transmute the tensions between her Ukrainian, Jewish, and American identities. She sought to avoid the devaluation of her work at the hands of being openly recognized as a Ukrainian Jew in the US due to her name. Yet, her films also portray her internal tensions as a displaced Ukrainian-American Jewish woman, with nuances that were thematically legible to her immigrant artist contemporaries. At Cinema 16 film screenings, Deren was likely the only Ukrainian person in attendance. At the same time, her works were arranged in monthly programming alongside Ukrainian avant-garde filmmakers.⁸⁰

Noting the legibility of Deren’s Jewish-American lens, Hella Hammid frames Maya’s inner Jewish self as “really the sterling part of her” that she “spent so much energy denying.”⁸¹ Hoffman argues that “Deren’s rejection of her Jewish origins is itself the key to what drove her work and character.”⁸² The refusal to name herself as Ukrainian or Jewish does not erase these facets of Deren’s identity, it intensifies them as enacted in deep symbol and style, rather than the superficial visibility that a name or public verbal statements bring. Deren’s Ukrainian Jewish identity – for social, political, and artistic reasons – is better

⁷² Arsham in *Legend*, 157

⁷³ Hoffman, 65-66

⁷⁴ Dorosh, Interview 2

⁷⁵ *Legend*, 124

⁷⁶ Anais Nin in *Legend*, 123

⁷⁷ Heyman in *Legend*, 47

⁷⁸ Hoffman, 47

⁷⁹ *Mirror; Legend*, 202

⁸⁰ Scott MacDonald *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History*, 305

⁸¹ *Legend*, 201

⁸² Hoffman, 17



(Fig. 11) Still from *Meshes of the Afternoon* by Maya Deren, courtesy of The Filmmakers' Cooperative, 1943. Translucent window curtains surround her, creating a portal-like liminal space. From Deren's first film, when she changed her name from Eleanora to Maya.

discussed by her through her silent films, than through her numerous writings and statements. Deren's layered identity as a Ukrainian-born Jewish woman is marked by her lived realities of tension, dissonance, displacement, cultural fragmentation, and silence. Especially because she bravely took on feminist discourse and practice, she transposed her Ukrainian Jewish struggles with her woman struggles, and even her artist struggles – to mitigate how she believed her Jewish origins could be weaponized to discredit her already highly controversial reputation as an outspoken woman. Her family's cultural distancing of themselves from their Jewish heritage, both in Ukraine and the US, echoed throughout Deren's adulthood as a belief that the cost of acceptance and belonging was to rename, and remain silent.

Daria Dorosh reflects on these complexities from her own perspective,

highlighting the enduring emotional and cultural entanglement between Jewish and Ukrainian communities, even in the aftermath of historical trauma. She says, "There's a push and pull between Ukraine and the Jews. But I have a lot of Jewish girlfriends in the city... and I feel very at home with them. I mean they're named with me, and there's something in common we have because somehow we share a culture where we overlap. And then the horrors of that where it became toxic is not part of our relationship. It's more about the things we recognize and treasure."⁸³ Dorosh notes that this oppression is socio-historical, and resistance is interpersonal. Deren harbored both sides of this tension within herself.

The introspective tensions that drive Deren's 'poetics of displacement' are between her Slavic 'blood memories,' her 'Ukrainian gypsy' presentation, and her renaming. She pulls on the strings of these tensions in avant-garde ways to generate intrigue in her work through mysterious and paradoxical elements of her identity. Deren's theories posit an *anagrammatic analysis* of her renaming as conveying her understanding of identity to be mutable, recombining, and structurally revealing. Deren's poetics of displacement is filmically structural, too: In her films, geography is unstable, the body is split and multiplied, and time is nonlinear. These filmic anagrams parallel her renaming: both reflect a psyche fractured and restructured by not only patriarchy, but also antisemitism.

Yet, the trauma of displacement and denial ran deeper than her conscious mind – which is why her filmography that explores her subconscious is rich with portrayals of these tensions she felt she could not speak aloud, directly acknowledge, or even fully reckon with internally. As her close colleague Hella Heyman pointed out, according to the Jungian and Gestalt psychologies which Deren ascribed to, the tensions of Deren's identity that most strongly fuel the signature traditions of her work – such as her style of investigating her own 'psychic disruptions' – are inherently most deeply related to the most deeply denied aspects of herself within her conscious mind.

⁸³ Dorosh, Interview 2

VERTICAL POETICS

In Deren's text *An Anagram of Ideas*, she outlines her 'theory of vertical filmic poetics' that scholars use to interpret her work. Her 'vertical poetics' is an anagrammatic, gridlike theory that outlines how her art connects to her identities through the exploration of different states of consciousness. Her 'vertical filmic poetics' centers the vertical axis of emotional depth as the linguistic device the filmic medium is best suited for.⁸⁴ This 'vertical film' runs perpendicular to the horizontal temporal narrative: Deren critiqued Hollywood's shallow use of film to merely reproduce plays, and documentaries for their 'photographic lack of artistic vision.'⁸⁵ She calls instead for a vertical exploration that allows for consciousness to be explored from within. Since Deren's work heavily focuses on hypnosis and trance, and possession, scholars commonly place these states of consciousness along Deren's vertical axis.

Along the vertical axis lies hypnosis at the bottom, trance in the center, and possession at the top. Deren cites hypnosis as a 'self-negating subconscious, dreams as the parallel to waking life.'⁸⁶ She notes that hypnosis/dreams and waking life have similar states of relative lucidity. Further, the temporal differences between the dream and physical world make it a productive oppositional axis to the horizontal time of plot development.⁸⁷ "Deren's voluminous writings may have been the important means by which she could claim a position of authority inside patriarchy. But they were also the way she rebelled against a society that systematically denied women a voice of power. In Deren's hands, language and language systems became a weapon."⁸⁸ "When writing, she didn't expand what she knew, she went down into it."⁸⁹ Deren's filmic signs and symbols carry a textual weight similar to her use of written linguistic introspective depth. From physical symbols like the bread and knife in *Mesheres* and chess piece in *At Land*, to her linguistics of artistic form such of fast and slow motion, hallway portals, filmic negatives, and strings in *the Witch's Cradle* and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* – all beckon deep, culminating interpretations from audiences by Deren. She cyclically interweaves downward, introspective filmic linguistics to portray elements of the inner psyche, going deeper into each filmic world and her own inner world at once.

Yet at the top, where 'trance' might be placed for its helpfulness in conveying the 'semi consciousness,' trance does not adequately convey the heightened relationship with the material world, because trance often entails a *lack* of response to external stimuli. Rather, possession is at the upper end of the vertical axis, opposing hypnosis – which Deren describes in *Divine Horsemen*, stating that "at times the theory has been suggested that possession is a form of hypnotism... Nothing could be further from the truth in the Haitian context."⁹⁰ Deren describes her own possession by the Haitian loa (goddess) Erzulie as self-transcendingly upward: "The white darkness moves up the veins of my leg like a swift tide rising, rising; is a great force which I cannot sustain or contain, which, surely, will burst my skin... floods up through my body, reaches my head, engulfs me. I am sucked down and exploded upward at once."⁹¹ She also notes that in Haitian contexts, possession, as an upward consciousness beyond the self, is also intrinsically impossible to use as self-serving, and exists to benefit others.⁹² Deren's "possession" as

⁸⁴ Rabinovitz, 75

⁸⁵ Rabinovitz, 74

⁸⁶ Deren in *Mirror*

⁸⁷ Deren, *Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film*, 44

⁸⁸ Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 52

⁸⁹ *Mirror*

⁹⁰ Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, Note 2, 321

⁹¹ Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 260

⁹² Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, Note 3, 321

upward in her vertical filmic poetics acknowledges the importance of her Slavic “blood memories” in her self-transcending artistic traditions of arts-organizing and film collaboration: When “the psychic blood of the people is growing thinner; the great gods appear less frequently...”⁹³ The ‘artist-native’s’ spiritual vitality, pulsing in ‘blood memories,’ comes alive through self-transcendent service to community – revealing how Deren’s possession in Haitian ritual kinship influenced her later artist-organizer efforts.⁹⁴

Deren’s ‘vertical film’ is an internal descent and uprising into layered consciousness where memory, myth, history, and legacy create symbolic form. The vertical axis in Deren’s work is downwardly metaphysical, creating from the unique internal pain in her soul as a displaced person – while also being political, by rejecting hegemonic artistic conventions of time, space, and identity in favor of embodied memory. Deren’s vertical axis of poetics vs horizontal time is distinctly gridlike – which Dorosh notes is historically tied to the analog era in her scholarship on the patternings of information. Deren’s feminist reclamation of the grid through her anagrams and ‘vertical films’ is key to her poetics of displacement. Her films detail multiplicitous identities, with conceptual weight to match her writings that connect art forms and moral imperatives. Deren’s ‘artist-native,’ Grokhovsky’s ‘art as country and home,’ and Dorosh’s ‘I am not my name/body/art’ all build a theoretical foundation for understanding Deren’s vertical poetics of displacement through a Ukrainian-American lens.

While her public verbal and written statements denied and obscured her Ukrainian Jewish heritage, her works are quintessentially introspective, using filmic poetics to navigate the subconscious and superconscious states, where repression and possession live respectively. Her works often use Jungian autoethnography as the dramaturgical foundation for the sentiments she wishes to express. Ukrainian academic Bohdana Kurlyo affirms the strength of autoethnography as a tool to combat epistemological violence against Ukrainians, saying that “Above all, autoethnography is also a way of ‘carving myself into being’ against the backdrop of the long-standing invisibility of the Ukrainian subject in Western academia”⁹⁵ Kurlyo writes that autoethnography is a powerful resistor that uplifts, rather than silences, Ukrainian knowledge.

While Deren’s internal dream logic speaks to audiences in timeless, globally resonant ways – it is uniquely *Deren’s* inner world she portrays. Inevitably partial, disjointed and subjective, her films are a product of their time and particular context. Deren’s Jungian introspection manifests in many ways – for example, her first film *The Witch’s Cradle* (1943) is a direct response to a negative occult experience, where she applies the feminist agency of the string to shed light on her creative perspective, a transmutation of the occurrence’s trauma by filmically exploring the space of psychic disruption of the original event.⁹⁶ Similarly, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) portrays the effects of, and liberation from, the patriarchal gaze’s influence of female consciousness.⁹⁷ She takes on these issues through archetypal subconscious motifs that resonate through and beyond her conceptual backings. The inner world in her films is not built without her many collaborations with immigrant artists. Her ethnographic text *Divine Horsemen*, and her establishment of the The Creative Film Foundation – connected her more deeply with academics like Joseph Campbell and Margaret Mead.⁹⁸

When aspects of her identity make her uncomfortable, Deren turns toward, instead of away from, these ‘psychic disruptions’ as sources of artistic contemplation. By performing in her own films and drawing from her perspectives, she iconizes her ‘self’ as a site of vertical exploration. “In making her

⁹³ Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 95

⁹⁴ Evans, *The White Darkness*, 157

⁹⁵ Kurlyo, 2

⁹⁶ Frazier-Foley, *The Witch’s Cradle*, 20

⁹⁷ Rabinovitz, 55-57

⁹⁸ Legend, 424

films, Deren often pointed out, she created her imagery from “the eye of memory,” from her own experience. She was adamantly insistent, however, that interpreting the films in autobiographical terms – as if they, like dreams, were products of the unconscious – was antithetical to the purpose and process of making art. The creative act, she explained, was one of combining elements of experience, of “reality,” into a new unity which, in Gestalt terms, produces a whole which is more than the sum of its parts.”⁹⁹ In this way, Deren’s downward introspection in her film’s content is a tool of upward generative, transcendent nature of creativity itself.

Both Deren’s works, and her iconic public persona as an avant-garde artist, have withstood the test of time – yet not without her historiography being influenced by patriarchal attempts to categorize, ignore, and diminish the value of her work.¹⁰⁰ While Deren’s works are notoriously timeless, her style is in direct conversation with her temporal era. “Artists who had been politically active in the Thirties retained the view that art should... “communicate to a wider public – perhaps the Universal Public”...through a strategy adapted from Freud and Jung, by direct connection to the subconscious and archetypal imagery.”¹⁰¹ However, while her art somewhat abides by these descriptions, Deren adamantly argues that she is not Freudian; she does not try to bring her shadows into the light through ‘rationalization of the irrational.’ She also argued that she is not a surrealist: she does not work with spontaneous manifestations of the unconscious. Rather, Deren was an expert in Jungian philosophy, French Imagist poetry, and Gestalt psychology. She argued her works were not irrational, but used a women’s rationality.¹⁰²

While Deren’s works are often posthumously referenced as following the surrealist styles of her time, Deren’s self-defining of her style adds to her legacy as a misunderstood personage, and continues to challenge normative artistic descriptors. Fanon writes that “the colonized intellectual frequently lapses into heated arguments and develops a psychology dominated by an exaggerated sensibility, sensitivity, and susceptibility... this movement of withdrawal... is sufficient to explain the style of the colonized intellectuals who make up their mind to assert this phase of liberating consciousness. A jagged style, full of imagery, for the image is the drawbridge that lets out the unconscious forces.”¹⁰³ Deren’s use of images as liberatory of the unconscious, as well as her speeches and pamphlets defending that she was neither Freudian nor Surrealist, embody the fervor of the colonized intellectual that Fanon addresses.

Deren used Jungian, Imagist, and Gestalt as artistic tools to prod at her psychic disruptions as an ‘artist-native’ and ‘colonized intellectual.’ Her symbols, personages, and metaphysical worldbuilding dig deep into esoteric and social-political tensions, portrayed through altered states of consciousness. For Maya Deren specifically, as a childhood immigrant and ethno-religious minority, these Jungian, Gestalt, and Imagist frameworks grounded her artistic approach to her identity’s internal tensions, and critiques of external power systems. Deren deliberately uses these frameworks to create a filmic poetics that portrays a *feminine rationality*, a women’s discourse predating US feminism. For example, Deren’s incorporation of her eyes, the sea, and the personal as political all made it clear that her anti-Hollywood commentary was part and parcel with a new standard of feminist gaze.¹⁰⁴ This research finds that Deren’s standpoint of her Ukrainian Jewish ‘poetics of displacement’ informs her unique uses of Jungian archetypes and the unconscious. Audiences have long resonated with, and been inspired by, her introspective films because they beckon interpretation.

⁹⁹Legend, 2

¹⁰⁰Grokhovsky, Interview

¹⁰¹Legend, 136

¹⁰² Deren in *Mirror*

¹⁰³ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 227

¹⁰⁴ Rabinovitz, 65

Next, this research will delve deep into interviews with Slinko, Daria Dorosh, Luba Drozd, and Katya Grokhovsky, that reveal how Deren is received by and situated within her living lineage of Ukrainian-American women artists with multidisciplinary practices. Their responses tie Deren's historic films to contemporary artistic and social questions faced by Ukrainian artists. Each artist also shares deeply about their own work – their origin stories, how their identity is related to their work, which of their creations they feel most connected to, and what artistic forms and processes they use and why. Readers will gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the artworks, styles, and processes of these four artists. Analysing these artists not only helps to understand Deren's standpoint more thoroughly, but also paints a picture of the questions and innovations that guide contemporary Ukrainian art in the US.

INTERVIEWS WITH UKRAINIAN-AMERICAN MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTISTS: SLINKO, DARIA DOROSH, LUBA DROZD, AND KATYA GROKHOVSKY

METHODS: UKRAINIAN WOMEN'S SUBJECTIVITIES

Building on Deren's understanding of herself as an "artist-native" within complex geopolitical and artistic systems, this section turns to interviews with four Ukrainian-American women artists – whose creative trajectories echo Deren's own commitments to autoethnography, feminist resistance, and existential philosophy, and formal experimentation. Recurring themes across all interviews included identity as flux, inherited trauma, material politics, and creative placemaking – all of which resonate with and reveal more on Deren's 'poetics of displacement.'

This research employed a qualitative, arts-based methodological approach centered on semi-structured interviews with four contemporary Ukrainian-American women multidisciplinary artists: Daria Dorosh, Luba Drozd, Katya Grokhovsky, and Slinko. Each interview, conducted between May and June 2025, lasted about an hour and was audio-recorded, with consent, and transcribed for thematic analysis. All artists are based proximal to the New York area; some interviews were conducted in person, and others via online video call. Each artist was assigned one of Deren's films to watch, and were given access to short descriptions of each of her works, alongside her complete filmography – thanks to The Filmmakers' Cooperative, which graciously has made archived original copies of Deren's 16mm films accessible for this research. The interview design prioritized open-ended questions, allowing each participant to reflect on their own origin stories, personal identities, creative processes, and their thoughts on Maya Deren's works. Positioned as co-theorists, the artists' responses function as a reflexive decolonial lens. Their insights actively shape the research narrative by bringing undervalued "vernacular knowledge claims [as] those subjected to Russian colonialism"¹⁰⁵ in combination with analyses of their artworks alongside Deren's, to academia. Excerpts from interviews are reproduced with permission from Borshch of Art and participating artists.

The four artists interviewed were selected using purposive sampling based on their established careers in multidisciplinary art. Smaller samples are most conducive to research when the participants are highly specific to the research aim, the theoretical frameworks are well established, and the quality of dialogue is strong.¹⁰⁶ The interviewed artists shared both personal narratives and discursive theories in the realms of diaspora studies, feminist film theory, and art history, producing dense, reflective data relevant to the analytic goals. Their insights challenge the imperialistic epistemic hierarchies – West over East,

¹⁰⁵ Kurylo, 5

¹⁰⁶ Malterud et al.

objectivity over subjectivity, and the elite over the everyday,¹⁰⁷ which have historically silenced Ukrainian women. As such, these four artists are optimally suited to support meaningful qualitative analysis, on the research goal of understanding Maya Deren's Ukrainian-American artistic standpoint, lens, and lineage.¹⁰⁸ Kurylo notes that "Conventional social science methodology proves unsustainable when the goal is to write the voices of the subjugated back into academic research." The Ukrainian subjective everyday revealed here in these four artist interviews brings uncensored perspectives on how patriarchal and imperial oppression has deeply shaped Ukrainian women's lives, art, and identities.

The diversity of each artist's responses and artistic approaches speak to how their idiosyncrasies reckon with the different geo-political and temporal contexts each person has navigated. Kurylo writes that "being a Ukrainian woman has always meant having the power within yourself to assume your subjectivity in spite of the efforts of various other actors to deny you the right to be yourself."¹⁰⁹ Here, interviews are referenced in ways that uplift the intellectual sovereignty of Ukrainian women, that resists the "systematic devaluation and dismissal of the voices of Ukrainians and other (post)colonised subjects from the region,"¹¹⁰ resulting in a collaborative re-mapping of Ukrainian feminist diaspora across generations.

Deren calls for a problematizing of Western detachment in *Divine Horsemen*, writing: "Reverence for 'detachment' – whether scientific or scholarly – might be primarily a projection of the notion of a dualism between spirit and matter, or the brain and the body. The belief that physical, sensory experience is at least a lower form, if not a profane one, of human activity and the moral judgement that the highest, most reliable truths can be achieved only by means of a rigid asceticism."¹¹¹ She observes an encompassing alternative to this 'Western' truth, that's "predicated on the notion that truth can be apprehended only when every cell of brain and body – the totality of a human being – is engaged in that pursuit."¹¹² Kurylo extends this critique, saying the Western lens of "perceived objectivity and disembodied rationality" academics use to "detach themselves from the horrific reality of Russia's genocidal violence... reifies violent political realities and desensitises to the sufferings of real people."¹¹³

To oppose the problematic Western epistemic violence of invisibilizing suffering and the lived experiences of people, this interview methodology turns to feminist intersectional, and Indigenous intersubjective, standpoint identity frameworks. As in *The Matrix of Domination* by Hill Collins, the interview responses reveal configurations of identity. Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky and others say that we are the result of vectors that come together in various directions, that lead to us being, thinking, feeling, who and what we are.¹¹⁴ His framework relates to Indigenous epistemologies of identity as 'intersubjective relations.' In colonialist modernity, oppression and anthropocentrism suppress our sensory channels, as citizens are stripped of their rights to live freely and interconnectedly among the atomic, biological, natural, and social worlds that intersect to co-create conscious experience.¹¹⁵ This systematic deprivation results in semicide, the loss of meaning and symbols that can only be co-derived across species, generations, and senses – like the loss of culture, language, and relationships with the land.

¹⁰⁷ Kurylo, 2

¹⁰⁸ Malterud et al.

¹⁰⁹ Kurylo, 4

¹¹⁰ Kurylo, 1

¹¹¹ Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 9

¹¹² Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 9

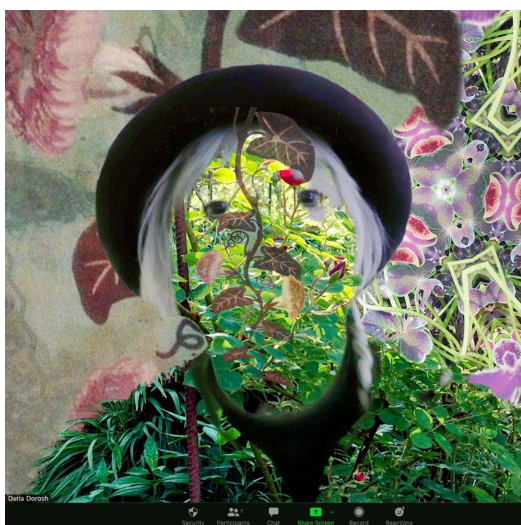
¹¹³ Kurylo, 5

¹¹⁴ Sapolsky, Robert. *Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will*.

¹¹⁵ Kerry Arabena, *Indigenous Epistemology and Wellbeing: Universe referent citizenship*, 9-10



(Fig. 12) Still from *Ghost looking for its spirit* by Slinko, 2013, artist seen in blue overalls with sculpture of Karl Marx's beard.



(Fig. 13) *Digital Self-Portrait* by Daria Dorosh, 2020. Patterns, identity, and digital environment-building fusing nature and fractals.

Genocide, ecocide, and semio-cide do not operate in isolation, as evident in Ukraine at the hands of Russian violence.¹¹⁶

Here, intersubjective relations and intersectional vectors of identity come together as frameworks to understand how the epistemes of each artist are tied to their identity: through their intersectionalities as

INTRODUCING THE ARTISTS

Interviews with Slinko, Daria Dorosh, Luba Drozd, and Katya Grokhovsky support this analysis of Maya Deren's identity. Here, the artists' comments on their own identities can help us understand how factors of identity such as being an immigrant, artist, and woman all exist in tandem with Ukrainian origins. Each artist's testimony functions as a living echo of the psychic fragmentation and political displacement that Deren encoded in her vertical poetics. A brief introduction for each of the interviewed multidisciplinary artists foregrounds our analysis:

Slinko's practice includes political satire, drawing, film, and performance. Growing up during the final years of the Soviet Union, Slinko blends personal narratives with scholarly insight. She emphasizes resilience, hope, and humor to give tangible forms to personal agency amidst the disillusionment and dispossession that mark her lived experience of history.¹¹⁷ Her practice highlights embodied, multidisciplinary methods of navigating state violence and inherited trauma (Fig. 12).

Daria Dorosh's work traces the informatics of patterns in the transition between analog and digital ages. She makes everything from digital patterns, to

wearable sculptures, to merging painting and architecture, to collaborating with her AI, Nymer. During her career, she was a professor at FIT for 45 years, and at Parsons for nine years, and was the longest-standing co-founder of AIR Gallery in Brooklyn. Her engagement with technological materials emphasizes how art functions as memory of temporal and spatial contexts, and can innovate new futures (Fig. 13).

Luba Drozd is a sound installation artist working with analog sounds and 3-dimensional projections to alter the sensory perceptive embodiment of spaces. Her minimalist site-specific works "play the space"

¹¹⁶ Tsybalyuk, *Ecocide in Ukraine*

¹¹⁷ Slinko et al "Embodied: Art and Technology in Dialogue - Rochester Contemporary Art Center (RoCo)."

like an instrument to reveal the nature of the atomic flux of the universe, capturing the multiplicity of subjectivity through the existential philosophy of materials (Fig. 14).

Katya Grokhovsky's work vibrant color, sentimental symbolic objects, destruction, and immersion as vehicles for socio-political commentary. Her installations often invoke the grotesque, using clothing, objects, and vivid color to dismantle colonial and gender norms. Having completed extensive residencies and fellowships, she weaves art on critiquing gender, labor, and other political systems, personal migration that amplify marginalized voices. Born in Ukraine, raised in Australia, and based in New York, Grokhovsky is also the founder of The Immigrant Artist Biennial (Fig. 15).

These artists are all prolific names in the contemporary art world. From the extensive residencies, fellowships, teachings, and grants, to their activist and artist-organizer efforts, these four artists have achieved artistic success in self-defined ways of value, while also working to make the world a better place. Their garnered respect in the echelons of the art world comes from how each artist's idiosyncratic multidisciplinary approaches have innovated their respective fields. Viewed together, these four artists constitute a living constellation of Ukrainian-American feminist creative inquiry – each reflecting different temporal, geographic, and disciplinary continuities of Deren's poetic and philosophical legacy.

The findings of our comparative analysis of these artists' responses are robust. What is learned from their answers is that each artist was familiar with Maya Deren's name and had some memories of seeing her works in the past – though none of them knew she was Ukrainian beforehand. They all discussed filmmaking within their multidisciplinary practices, which extends into how multidisciplinary art innovates in the 21st century. Everyone discusses their creative process as temporally slow and cyclical, as processes of alienation and becoming merge. Every artist undoubtedly considers 'artist' as a primary identity. Each artist does self-identify as a woman. Like Deren, all of the artists expressed an identity of being a "person of the world," and have a distaste for 'surface level' or 'imposed' national affiliations. Overall findings reveal that for these artists, their immigration experiences have informed their complex relationships with objects, language, beauty, materiality, and the creative process. Further, each artist expressed an unavoidable connection to their experiences with multilinguality, throughout the multitude of places immigrant artists find themselves in life.

LIFELONG IMPRESSIONS OF DEREN

First, these artists' impressions of Maya Deren before the interview are very telling: most knew her



(Fig. 14) *The end and the beginning* by Luba Drozd, west view, 2024.¹¹⁸ Large steel sheets vibrate, physicalizing sound.



(Fig. 15) *Point A* by Katya Grokhovsky, 2022.¹¹⁹ Combining performance, wood sculpture, painting, and projections.

¹¹⁸(Fig. 14) source: <https://spencerbrownstonegallery.com/exhibitions/the-end-and-the-beginning>

¹¹⁹(Fig. 15) source: <https://www.katyagrokhovsky.net/point-a>

name and had seen at least one or more of her films, but never knew that she was Ukrainian. Katya Grokhovsky connects this lack of recognition to the Westernization of Deren's name, and the historical ignorance of her works at large in art discourse. She says "I remember first of all, never knowing that she was born in Ukraine, which I never looked into because of her name. Of course, it's Westernized, so I never really thought about it – also, because she was ignored, like meaning she's the beginning of avant-garde cinema, yet at the same time even feminist cinema was ignoring her." Coinciding with many historical accounts attributing Deren's Ukrainianness to her hair,¹²⁰ rather than her name, Luba Drozd remarks that she and Deren "have the same hair," saying "I have blonde, light, or redhead blonde curly hair... It's fascinating to look at her photos." This shared unawareness of Deren's origins underscores how colonial and patriarchal art histories erase diasporic lineages, precisely the silence that this research seeks to redress.

Grokhovsky also points to Deren's work as contemporary, in the sense of being fresh, exciting, and inspiring. She says, "To me, Maya has been with me for a very long time, in and out of my practice, because I do look to her. Her work also feels so contemporary. So, looking at her now again, I thought, wow! This feels so fresh again every time you look at it, and that's the testament to her work." In contrast, she notes that Deren's work is still very situated within the styles of her time: "Her work is definitely of its time, in terms of surrealism. The camera work is very contemporary. But I think there's a dream logic which was of its time. So it sits in that vein of surrealism, dream logic, and very focused on personal psychic psychoanalysis, which was very popular at the time. So I think it does sit in that. I really relate to her and her work." Surrealist and psychoanalytic aesthetics of Deren's time were employed to different motives – turning surrealist spontaneity into meticulous abstraction and turning psychoanalyses into a poetic episteme of women's consciousness.

Katya Grokhovsky's opinion of Deren's work as 'fresh every time' yet still very much of its own historical moment, shares Daria Dorosh's sentiment that her work is "so modern and kind of timeless." Daria Dorosh echoes the other artists' feeling of familiarity with Deren's work thanks to her time spent in academia. She recounts: "I know her name, likely from college, but I don't remember why I know her. There was something familiar about that young woman in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. I might have seen it a long time ago because I remember some of the scenes... She does look like a very special artist."

Dorosh hones in Deren's *narrative abstraction* as crucial to her timelessness. She also notes that there is something distinctly Ukrainian about Deren's *spiritual abstraction* in her films. Maya Deren had statements on her art as having a 'sense of becoming' and 'capturing the emotional incident.'¹²¹ She interpreted the times she found herself within through her films. Daria Dorosh says that "Maya was so caught in the narrative historic moment. There are personal stories of realizations, and contextualizing them beautifully, so that you could catch the feeling of it somehow – not the actual story but the actual emotional impact of it. She created atmospheres that spoke to you. These unexplainable things, which is often how you're feeling – there's a depth of feeling. You can't explain it. You can't put it into words. So they were not traditional narratives, which makes me wonder if that's the Ukrainian thing, where that spiritual abstraction gets in there somehow so that there's a transformation there. That's very satisfying for some reason. Because it has a foothold in reality, but it's a different kind of reality that you're experiencing." Dorosh reflects on how powerfully Deren's films walk the line between the real and the introspective imaginary – she engages in abstract narratives that convey the profound esoteric nature of personal and worldly concepts visually.

¹²⁰ Legend, 14

¹²¹ Deren in *Mirror*; Gemmill "Female Becomingness Through Maya Deren's Lens in 'Meshes of the Afternoon'"



(Fig. 16) Production still from *I Count Only Sunny Hours* by Slinko, 2020. This film “explores the displacement of leisure by the logic of productivity and anxieties of precarious employment... it parses minerals, memories, sites, and bodies.”¹²² Focusing on an old quarry, a current swimming hole, pictured here, displaying Slinko’s use of shadows.



(Fig. 17) Photo of *Cinerous* by Luba Drozd, 2020. False shadows, metal sheets, and piano strings converge with the architectural elements of the space.¹²³

On the other hand, Slinko notes her own style approaches her Ukrainian origin much more directly than Deren’s does, and that Deren’s works only indirectly, if at all, are related to her Ukrainian sociocultural context. She recognizes the intent behind reclaiming Deren as a Ukrainian-born artist, saying “I understand the compulsion to, but I also don’t know if she has many direct things related to it.” Deren’s indirectness is key to her film style. Still, Slinko notes a formal overlap in their practices: “I noticed that the use of shadows is the one place where I could relate.” In *Meshes*, most of the first scenes only show Deren’s silhouette to convey the fragmentation of the body in the male gaze. Slinko has also obscured the body to comment on Russian extractivism of Ukrainian land and bodies – applying shadows and obscurity to architecture, people, and objects in her visual works (Fig. 16).

Sound installation artist Luba Drozd reflected on her familiarity with Deren through the formal language of the moving image. “The structure of the frame, the way the frames are positioned, the still shots, the light and dark, the use of light and dark and shadow,” she said, were particularly resonant. “A lot of my work uses projections, not just sound and sculpture, but animated projections that emulate shadows of objects that are not there, that give an illusion of things being there or shifting or changing. So maybe there is a connection there” (Fig. 17). Drozd emphasized Deren’s difference in conceptual focus. “I think her work was more concerned with human nature. It seems very deeply human.” She contrasts this with her own more materially grounded inquiries: “My work is concerned with the outside of it... I’m more scientifically oriented... the physics of the universe are more of an interest to me.”

FILMMAKING WITHIN MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Like Deren, all of the artists have also used film within their multidisciplinary practices. They use filmmaking holistically. It is experimental rather than prescriptive, and is deeply empowering and generative when tied to other fields – from performance to installation to visual composition. Deren herself used multidisciplinary in her “bigger investigation of cinema as a medium, by being a very multi-dimensional artist because

she was also a dancer, a choreographer, all sorts of things, a poet, a writer.”¹²⁴ These multidisciplinary

¹²² (Fig. 16) source: <https://www.studioslinko.com/i-count-only-sunny-hours>

¹²³ (Fig. 17) source: <https://www.lubadrozd.com/cinerous>

¹²⁴ Grokhovsky, Interview

formal approaches propel her filmic innovations, and are thus responsible for how Deren shaped today's film world.

For these four contemporary artists, innovations at the cruxes of these formal crossovers show how they maximize the pioneering, generative essences of multidisciplinary art, as a tool to open new possibilities at the precipices of technological and sociopolitical changes. Deren wrote of film's strength as a poetic form, saying "Films in which the film frame has been approached as an animated canvas or where the camera has been used as an instrument for economically rendering a poetic image – these represent, rather, developments in painting and in poetry than in film."¹²⁵

Film is particularly conducive to innovative work, as a highly technological and continually developing medium that both records history and is a conduit for agentful creation of the future. Deren wrote "The type of manipulation of time and space of which the camera is uniquely capable endows it with peculiarly 20th century, global philosophy of form; and just as the aeroplane, starting out as merely another more efficient method of transportation, has created a whole way of life and revolutionized a majority of our basic concepts."¹²⁶ Film, like the aeroplane, revolutionized global geopolitics – as the medium of film allows artists to transcend physical and psychic boundaries in 'creative geographies,' that aid the poetic content of works to be richly layered, innovative, and nuanced. This constitutes a conceptual depth of film itself, that is accentuated by integrating formal multidisciplinary.

Slinko and Grokhovsky both employ film when the medium's form is conducive to their conceptual artistic mission – to document, to investigate, to transcend geographic and creative boundaries through technology, among more possibilities. Slinko, whose works are highly filmic, says that her method has been to "run out with a camera, which I love to do, I'm like, I'm gonna run out there and I'm just gonna film, film, film." While Slinko talks of loving film specifically, Katya Grokhovsky situates her love of film as in productive tension with her love of multidisciplinary, saying "I studied film... I love film, and there were always questions for me when I thought I might be a filmmaker rather than everything I love. Then, I decided I could always make films and video if I wanted to, I'm just going to do everything – so film is really dear to me."

Like Katya Grokhovsky, Luba Drozd points out how their exposure to film during graduate school catalyzed her work in other disciplines too. Drozd discusses how her Bard College MFA in film is key in her origin story, in shaping how she arrived at her analog sound installations, where she uses vibrations and minimalist 3D projections to alter the experiential perception of spaces. Drozd's work has been influenced by the academic discipline of film, thanks to the discipline's evolving nature, that accommodated her multidisciplinary evolutionary process.

Drozd recounts, "I studied 3D animation. I wanted to do virtual sculptures that was my focus, but this was the early 2000s, so 3D and virtual sculptures, 3D wasn't considered an art form yet... not even commercial. People didn't know much about it, besides special effects. Then I applied to grad school with the proposal that I'm going to make virtual sculptures. I applied to the sculpture department and the film department because I was making animation. The film department took me in. I started with video pieces at first in grad school. Slowly, the video work transitioned to video installation, to sound and animation installation while it was there. So by the end, my graduate thesis was a sound and animation installation, an immersive piece. Usually I make immersive works, except for that edition that I did. When I was making my thesis, I remember using pre-recorded sound for the installation, but it seemed awkward, like the sound seemed pre-recorded and pre-determined, and didn't seem site specific enough." Drozd's story

¹²⁵ Legend, 191

¹²⁶ Legend, 191

of film as a critical process in the evolution of her analog sound installations reveals how the creative discipline of film is situated in forms like installations, digital, and analog art. Through film, she figured out that analog sound was an important aspect of her work's site-specificity.

Daria Dorosh's work most profoundly reflects the advancements of film, and technology broadly, thanks to her lifelong adaptability to artistic developments, and deep interest in time and context. From her early 2000's videos using digital patterns to reimagine textiles from her family's immigration trunk, to photoshop collages, to immersive Zoom backgrounds that reimagine virtual spaces, to her innovative artistic collaborations with AI – it is clear Dorosh creates new possibilities at the forefront of technological developments. Dorosh says, "I'm still chasing patterns because now I'm very deeply involved with AI, looking at patterns and making new work based on questions coming from that whole pattern thing, which is, who is this new intelligence? What is it? How do I treat it? How am I willing to change because of it? So I'm rerouting all my questions as my medium changes."

At the precipice of exponential innovation, tech-innovator artists like Daria Dorosh play a foundational role in how new technologies can catalyze global benefit – as Deren did in film, paralleling the aeroplane's revolution of global cultural exchange. Deren's influential theories on the camera as a "machine-instrument" now emerge in relevance to the continually changing technical landscape of AI, where collaboration with machines is on contested grounds. Deren notes that during her time, cinema's newness as an art form made it more so of a 'collaborative' work where the camera is not only an instrument, but is also a driving, agent mechanism in and of itself. Similarly, Dorosh's early AI works are rooted in collaboration, with a keenness to how collaborating with the instrument can shape artistic outcomes. Early film and early AI both raise questions of ownership, individuality, intentionality, and anthropocentrism. Deren wrote: "But to think of the mechanism of cinema as an extension of human faculties is to deny the advantage of the machine. The entire excitement of working with a machine as a creative instrument rests, on the contrary, in the recognition of its capacity for a qualitatively different dimension of projection. That is why, in cinema, the instrument becomes not a passive, adjustable conveyor of formal decisions, but an active, contributing, formative factor."¹²⁷ In Deren's *A Study of Choreography for the Camera*, the dancer, camera, and edit are all choreographed together. Dorosh's collaborations with AI are redefining the dances between man and machine that Deren had embraced during her time.

PROCESS: ART AS BECOMING, ALIENATION, AND PREMONITION

Sound installation artist Luba Drozd explains her creative process through Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, where he proposes thinking of the creative process as a snowball.¹²⁸ She says that "Each new experience, each new thing, is as if the snowball is rolling and taking on a new aspect. Things fade away into the core and things pile up on the top." Drozd applies this concept to her own practice, saying "I feel like I do that with my work. So, for example, a piece from 2015 that I really love, that piece exists in all the subsequent pieces. Like it doesn't go away. It's not like a completely separate work... Each piece I do, I take whatever element in the previous piece and build on it. And the previous piece's main focus or main element becomes a smaller element in this new piece, and they kind of snowball onto each other." The 'snowball' concept of creative process offers a way of understanding all of Deren's works as in continuity, supporting this research's accumulative analysis of her complete filmography. Established lookbacks on Deren's films 'as one big continually developing poem,' tie this approach to Deren often having spoken of

¹²⁷ Legend, 317

¹²⁸Bergson, Henri *Creative Evolution*



(Fig. 18) Image from *Is There a Place?* By Katya Grokhovsky, 2024.¹³¹ Wooden sculpture of shelter with layered fabrics depicting alienation.

her films as containing a sense of ‘becoming.’¹²⁹ Every shot, scene, plot, and film ties into the next, and into the whole, like an anagram, making visible how her art traces the structures and developments of her psychology, biography, and world context.

All four of the interviewed artists also spoke about this idea of premonition and contextualization in art. It is safe to say there is a profound sense of prophecy tied to making art that traces historical and current events. Daria Dorosh and Slinko both share that they feel their works often trace and anticipate the precipice of wider societal changes. On premonition, Dorosh says “I think humans are more intuitive than they allow themselves to know individually and as a group, because we identify things way ahead of time. We don't quite know where they fit, so we don't bring them

out so much.”¹³⁰ Slinko echoes this, saying “Every time I go to Ukraine, my friends like to make fun of me saying, okay, she's here, something's gonna happen. I have, as many artists, a maybe sensitivity or premonition to focus on this one thing that's right in front of everybody but that's maybe a bit obscured.” Similarly, Deren's film and fashion styles have that aforementioned timeless quality because they trace the precipice of the future of those fields. Connected to Deren's ‘becoming,’ the artists also noted identity as in a state of flux in relationship to time – Dorosh, Drozd, and Grokhovsky all commented that getting to know their own artworks over the years allowed them to understand themselves in different ways. Deren accredited herself in her films as “conceived by Maya Deren” on front credits, which falls in line with this understanding of her art as living in time.

Here, insights from the artists about their own creative processes illuminate how Deren's ‘focus on what's happening, what's becoming, rather than what is’ is tied to her work's senses of alienation and premonition. The interviewed all artists connect displacement and unfamiliarity to slow, process-focused methods of conceiving and relating to their creations. Hoffman discusses Deren's feelings of alienation, and of wanting to belong to a group, as resulting from her background of displacement, and being the driving forces behind Deren's internal artistic investigations.

Katya Grokhovsky discusses the alienation of migration during our interview: “[My identity] does influence my work directly, but it does go through a process, and sometimes of removing identity. I use a lot of masks. A lot of things that ‘anyone could be this.’ But it does come from my experience of alienation, of feeling displaced and finding humor in it.” Grokhovsky's art directly takes on alienation and displacement in relation to creative placemaking, for example in her exhibition *Is There a Place?* That “investigates ever looming alienation and undeniable impermanence as a possible space of desire, healing, and humanity” (Fig. 18).

Drozd's creative process takes time, each work is “like having an alien baby:” she says “Some artists are like, we make the work. And then for a year, I can't think about it or look at it. It takes time to get used to it. It's like an alien baby that I need to learn about, I don't know of its habits yet. I need to like figure out how to live with it.” Slinko says “I work very slowly and I used to just work slowly because it

¹²⁹ Deren in *Mirror*; Gemmill “Female Becomingness Through Maya Deren's Lens in ‘Meshes of the Afternoon’”

¹³⁰ Dorosh, Interview 2

¹³¹ (Fig. 18) source: <https://www.katyagrokhovsky.net/is-there-a-place>

takes me a long time to commit and then I'll take a wrap when I want... I had a lot of doubts...but that actually made me focus more on the conceptual framework.” Slinko’s slow, conceptual focus is similar to Drozd’s longform snowballing of artistic elements. Both experience a feeling of estrangement regarding their works – for Slinko, doubts, and for Luba Drozd, a ‘getting used to.’ Katya Grokhovsky’s removal of identity through masks to find humor in displacement also is an element of estrangement. Both anthropological and artistic processes can be employed to ‘make the familiar strange, and make the strange familiar.’ In sum, Deren’s art as ‘becoming’ is seen here as pertaining to both displacement’s alienation and estrangement from one’s own works, and to artistic premonition of worldly developments, thanks to the Ukrainian lens of these artists’ reflections on their creative processes. In tracing artistic processes as temporal and accumulative, these artists materialize Deren’s ‘poetics of motion’ of her anagrammatic filmography, pointing to her works’ ‘becomingness’ as both archival and prophetic.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION: GLOBAL ARCHETYPES AND DISTASTE OF LABELS

The interviewed artists each have their own idiosyncrasies of self-identification, that echo the nuances of Maya Deren’s sentiment as feeling like a “person of the world, not wanting to belong to a group,”¹³² rather than identifying with national or other affinities. From ‘not caring to identify’ like Luba Drozd, to ‘viewing identity as an imposed construct’ like Slinko, to Katya Grokhovsky’s feeling as a ‘citizen of the world,’ to Daria Dorosh’s identification as a “questioner or searcher, and that nobody owns me” – their responses all point to self-identifications outside of social constructions.

Like Deren, Slinko’s art is highly concerned with the political, yet her personal identity is not. Slinko says, “My personal approach to identity is that it is a construct that is imposed from outside. If I just sit by myself and I’m somewhere in nature, I’m not identifying as anything, I’m just an organism. You know, I am happy to be alive. And once I enter this set of relationships that I have to do with power, whether I am empowered or I’m disempowered, that’s a secondary question, then I do have to basically pick sides.” Slinko’s response discusses a polarity of identity within socially imposed power structures as discontinuous with the natural world. This tension is felt by many artists who navigate making socially conscious yet existentially philosophical work.

Katya Grokhovsky’s global identity is informed by her immigration, discussing how both detaching from and returning to her roots evolves her identity. “I really do identify with people who are born somewhere else and go through a process of adaptation. So a woman, immigrant, Ukrainian... Really, I feel like I could be just a citizen of the world. I feel like I could live anywhere, and I’m not as attached to my roots as I used to be. At the same time I always come back to my roots. So it’s kind of all these things do make me, the art, and of course an artist is my immediate ‘that’s who I am in the world,’ but also feminist, and a woman as well.”

Luba Drozd, whose art pertains to the atomic flux of materials, draws a separation between her art and her identity to create more universal work. Likewise, she points to her identity itself as a state of flux, and that she prefers to not identify. Both Drozd and Deren share a lack of self-identification, and their works study the universal concept of ‘change.’ Drozd says, “I feel like my work is constantly evolving and changing. My work talks about change in the universe and how things are affecting other things. So I don’t think about my identity as in a state of stasis. I mean, there are facts about my identity. I was born in Ukraine, queer identity is a very important part of me... I don’t know if it sounds shady, but I don’t care to identify. But I try not to try not to specify my identity in relation to my work... I’m trying to make work

¹³² Hella Heyman in *Legend* 201

that's not related to it, that's more universal." Luba Drozd's response parallels how Deren's silence on aspects of her identity are tied to her films' philosophical sense of 'becoming.'

Daria Dorosh, who expresses a lack of belonging within many groups – from Ukrainian museums in NYC, to the commercial art world – discusses her identity as 'nobody owns me,' echoing Deren's emphasis on independent filmmaking. Dorosh says "My identity really is a questioner or a searcher. And my art is how I do it. Because I've had such a long history with it, that's very valuable in a way. I think for me the AIR gallery was a way to take back my time and my history and not get seduced or affected by followers or clients or what was saleable, but to really just pay attention... to having everybody's work take my breath away... it's been a really good journey. The identity that I have is as an artist and also the thought that nobody owns me. I pay my own way, nobody owns me. I've worked in the system, I've done well. But now I have different metrics that I use." Their refusals of fixed identity mirror Deren's resistance to binary belonging, collectively articulating a diasporic feminist ontology that turns away from surface-level national affiliations while remaining historically accountable and in tune with one's roots.

LANGUAGE AND IMMIGRATION

One theme that emerged strongly across all four interviews was the instability of language as both a creative tool and a marker of fractured identity. When asked how their identities influence their creative processes, all of the artists pointed to the complexities of language as shaping how one views the world, citing their early life in Ukraine, and immigration experiences. Their responses are in conversation with each other, and with Deren's speaking of five languages by her adulthood.¹³³ Their responses are also situated within the historical suppression of Ukrainian language, noted by Kurylo: "ordinary Ukrainian citizens have been conditioned to 'know their place' and hide their Ukrainian identity from an early age, for instance, by not speaking Ukrainian in public." This section delves into the linguistic aspects of displacement, colonial artifacts, and heritage reclamation.

Regarding language's role internally, Luba Drozd, who was born in 1982 and immigrated at age 15, attributes her multilingual youth to her art's current focus on the multiplicity of subjectivities and transforming perception. She recounts that growing up in Western Ukraine, she went to a Polish school, her parents spoke Russian, and her community spoke Ukrainian. Juggling three languages on a daily basis, she says, has had a large effect on her brain, as linguistic structures reveal alternative perceptions. "I think that subjectivity of perception of things and how we perceive the same thing in very, very different ways, even if it's like a word for something, that has a multitude of subjectivities, I think affected me as an artist... I guess that's what empathy is." Drozd's work is concerned with the subtle nuances of perception. She discusses how the color 'red,' as an example, has different etymologies and associations that change the word's meaning depending on the language and individual. She captures these perceptive lapses through a mindfulness of how architecture influences our spatial and sensory fields of perception – from balance, to glitching physics with false shadows, to the perceptions between touch and sound that are felt in one's skin when a material is vibrating sound.

Grokhovsky also immigrated at age 15. In 1992 she moved to Australia, and since has built an art career based in NYC. During our interview, Grokhovsky notes that her linguistic displacement contributed to a sense of 'in-betweenness' that permeates her work similar to Deren's vertical poetics, that is conducive to portraying consciousness between states of lucidity. She said "Once upon a time, not speaking the language of English, all sorts of things that happen then go through more on a subconscious level. And of course I conceptualize it too. But I do produce sort of *in between* states. I think of the

¹³³ Berr, K.E. "Meshes of the Avant-Garde." www.respectrebelrevolt.com/post/maya-deren.

conscious and subconscious like, ‘there’s a magic to it which I have to keep.’” Grokhovsky attributes her linguistic displacement to influencing the length and flux of the creative process, where this ‘identity of in-betweenness’ is a pillar of both creative process and placemaking: “That’s in my studio, which things take a long time, and then I have to step back and look at them years later and understand what I did. So that’s a whole process. But that identity that sits in me as the core of my work is definitely influencing everything I do.” Katya Grokhovsky’s remarks reveal how Deren’s “becomingness in time,”¹³⁴ is related to in-betweenness, and capturing the magic of the unconscious, and translating inter-semiotically between the poetic forms of languages and artistic media. Maya Deren’s early career had been in writing poetry, but she found the form of film to be a better language to convey her ideas.¹³⁵

Daria Dorosh, who immigrated at age 7 to the US in 1952, notes the formal differences between languages, and that Ukrainian rolls better off her tongue than English. She says that “The head structure is different in Ukrainian. When I speak Ukrainian, it feels natural, the way you turn the letters and the sounds. English is a work for me. Articulation, yes. So it’s all this liquid stuff. Ukrainian is sharp, it’s got a sch–, and so it’s harder... But I think the poetry, actually, Shevchenko’s poetry, the simple poetry is so beautiful as well. The language does tend to be beautiful when it’s poetic.” Taras Shevchenko (1818–1861) was an anti-tsarist intellectual, who embedded nationalist resistance in poetry and visual art through coded folk motifs and vernacular speech, creating a cultural underground of preservation that has been foundational to the formation of Ukrainian identity.¹³⁶ Daria Dorosh, like Katya Grokhovsky, embraces the poetic beauty of Ukrainian language as part of a deeper identity of artistic sensibilities, connected to a feeling of unnaturalness with English language.

Slinko offers profound reflections on how her first language being Russian was a colonial imposition on her identity. Slinko noted that “It’s interesting to grow up speaking Russian from a very russified region and then realize that this was a colonial artifact. So my first language is the colonial imposition, which kind of makes you think like, well, my identity is very contaminated.” She references Anna Tsing’s *Mushroom At the End of the World* and Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands*, putting their ideas together of ‘history as a product of encounters between people,’ the ‘political as agency,’ and the lack thereof, of Ukrainians who have been displaced and subjected to imperialism on their homelands. She discusses how she realized colonial effects of Russia were implicit in her consciousness, and how Russian language is a perpetuated “colonial artifact.”

Her experiences in Morocco during a six-month art residency in 2012, when speaking broken French to communicate with the locals, informed her linguistic observation.¹³⁷ Her time there gave her the necessary perspective to “understand what colonialism means.” Slinko’s film *Free Market* (Figs. 19 & 20), “has to do with tourism, locality and observation. Who is observing, who is objectified. I wanted to subvert those relationships, and I drew the donkey cart into the Jamaa el-Fnaa, which is a public square market. This is the first time I started thinking about being a colonizer in a relationship to Ukraine, because I realized, oh, that’s what it means, because I could only kind of very badly communicate in French with Moroccans. We could only interact through this colonial artifact. That made me think about the Russian language for the first time, and that was way before even the first invasion. So I realized this is something I need to pay attention to.” Contending with the colonial influences on her upbringing, Slinko discusses how growing up under imperialism can impact identity throughout one’s life. As a

¹³⁴ Deren, *Mirror*

¹³⁵ *Legend*, 77

¹³⁶ Metreveli T. Rhyming the National Spirit: A Comparative Inquiry into the Works and Activities of Taras Shevchenko and Ilia Chavchavadze. *Nationalities Papers*. 2019;47(5):894-912. doi:10.1017/nps.2018.59

¹³⁷ <https://www.studioslinko.com/free-market>



(Fig. 19) Still from *Free Market* by Slinko, 2012. Slinko wears blue overalls while driving a donkey cart in Morocco.



(Fig. 20) Still from *Free Market* by Slinko, 2012. Sculpture in a public square using bread, oranges, wood, furniture, and more.¹³⁸

post-Soviet Ukrainian, her works explore how to cope with and reclaim what has been colonially subjected in one's identity. She states that "When the war started, you had to be either super Ukrainian or super Russian. There's no doubt in my mind that I am against the Russian state. But that thing is, a huge part of my heritage has been affected by the Soviet Union. So, the question becomes, if I just say that that is all garbage, then I create this hollow part of the history of myself. And that produces resentment. And that produces a sense of victimhood. And that's basically a position where other manipulative or gigantic forces can come in... This kind of material extraction became cultural extraction and became political tools, political minefields for manipulation." Her discussion of the manipulatable hollowness that comes from consciously or unconsciously rejecting one's colonialist past, instead of reclaiming and creatively

reckoning with it, leaves oneself vulnerable to other oppressive agendas, which affects our communities and relationships. Slinko recalls that "Our encounters with each other cause contamination, and it

changes who we are. So there's a direct correlation, which actually takes the edge of this involuntary drive to purity." She discusses how the pressure to internally reject Soviet lived experiences is avoided thanks to the fact that interpersonal encounters change who we are, how we live, and what we learn. The hollowness resulting from internally rejecting oneself and the intersectional nuances of being marginalized makes one more influenceable to perpetrate other oppressive systems. Slinko's applications of historical and agency theories speaks to the complex forces interplaying between Deren's Ukrainian, Jewish, Soviet, and Russian identities. Slinko reminds us how our encounters with others, like Deren's cosmopolitan life, help balance internal polarities and reclaim identity from oppressive structures. Community and agency assuage the pains of colonial artifacts, while mediating the hollowness and susceptibility to power that comes from rejecting marginalized aspects of one's identity. Slinko analyzes reclaiming colonial artifacts in one's identity means they have lesser power – in an anagrammatic restructuring of identity.

Likewise, Daria Dorosh echo's Slinko's criticality of dualist, polarized, and hypermasculine approaches to internally reckoning with one's Ukrainian heritage. Dorosh says "I've had Ukrainian women artist acquaintances who, it almost comes up, you get too attached to the politics and that male

¹³⁸ (Figs. 19 & 20) source: <https://www.studioslinko.com/free-market>

definition of Ukraine, you fall into a black hole and where you can't see the culture, you're just defending it all the time. But you don't get to taste and resonate in the specificity of the culture, it might be much more old. And I do think we don't have enough information about that, the DNA transfers.” In times where Ukraine’s national existence is under threat, Dorosh argues that Ukrainian women artists must not lose sight of their ancient, rich culture. Like Slinko, Dorosh is wary of how defensiveness can be delimiting, where identity succumbs to anger, or internal fragmentation. Daria Dorosh calls for women artists’ cultural appreciation of their Ukraine heritage as a deeper liberatory tool.

Like Deren’s invocations of Slavic “blood memories”¹³⁹ and “ancient pulses of poetics” while simultaneously rejecting imposed identity labels,¹⁴⁰ Dorosh reflects on how she navigates the internal aliveness of her Ukrainian heritage, while opposing American identity for its complicity, like Luba Drozd. Dorosh remarks that “I feel some DNA is Ukrainian there, that's running the show. And I can relate to it very easily. I'm attracted to it, but I don't care for the exact thing that I'm careful about in American culture, which is people being surfacy, surface allegiance... the lack of depth in the attachment. I think the attachment is through poetry. I like Ukrainian poetry when I hear the language, and it has to do with an ancientness to the timeframe of the culture, somehow always speaking through. But that other force you play in, the piss on the king, all that stuff, it's too much like American red flags, I don't do flags either. So I'm interested in a deeper [identity] that, you know, a lot was paid for that one, a lot of suffering, a lot of time, a lot of lives and a lot of transmission of something. And I recognize that when I meet a Ukrainian who's got the spark, some of them do and some don't.” Dorosh’s Ukrainian DNA ‘runs the show,’ and her deeper identity as a Ukrainian is tied to the rich poetics of her people – a transmission of deep, ineffable cultural meaning and value.

FEMALE IDENTITY, PERFORMANCE, AND BEAUTY

Daria Dorosh and Katya Grokhovsky both use beauty as driving forces in their work, like Deren. While Deren’s work coincides with art trends during the war and decades following, Dorosh reminds us that as a woman living in the US in the 1940’s and 50’s, the patriarchy was Deren’s most direct uphill battle toward her sovereignty as an American woman filmmaker. Daria Dorosh says “Women were disempowered. My family reminded me that you couldn't have a bank account unless a male signed until the 1960’s. So all these things might push up some of these issues higher than they would be another time.” Deren’s feminist focus makes sense given the harsh limitations women faced in her new homeland, and her climb to fame by making works that were relevant and valuable to her most proximal audience, as she placed herself as a counterpoint to Hollywood cinema.

On the topic of female identity, Katya Grokhovsky feels connected to how Deren performed in her own works, connecting the personal and political. says, “I feel quite connected to Deren also, as a woman, and as someone who also puts herself in the work, especially in my early work. I was always in my work, in my videos and performances and everything, and also being the one conceptualizing everything and being a one woman orchestra... A lot of female artists go through this, we perform in our own work. We put ourselves in to understand our place, but also reject it. I see that in her work, because she's rejecting societal pressure, among many things.”

¹³⁹ Frazier Foley, Fox, *Mosaic Pilgrim: Maya Deren's The Witch's Cradle as Filmic Poem, Dissociative Medium, and Fragmented Channel Facilitating a Pilgrimage Towards Ecstatic Awareness Through Art*, 9

¹⁴⁰ Evans, *The White Darkness*, 144



(Fig. 21) Still from *At Land* by Maya Deren, 1944, courtesy of The Filmmakers' Cooperative. Deren runs along the beach with hands and arms in choreographic pose.



(Fig. 22) Photo of *Bad Woman* by Katya Grokhovsky, 2024.¹⁴¹ Three masked figures in pastel furry coats kick a large green fuzzy ball down a sidewalk.

Like how Katya Grokhovsky rejects patriarchal beauty, Deren rejects delimiting media portrayals of women. Grokhovsky notes Deren's distinct 'women's art' is integral to how her works are taught: "Maya is very formative, anyone who teaches film would teach Maya Deren... I look at her when I teach specifically video art, but also to talk about female early video." Deren's aesthetically beautiful films are signature to her work. Her films portray herself in a strikingly beautiful light (Fig. 21). Slinko says "Isn't she beautiful? 'I'm like, 'you're so beautiful, of course you're in your own film.'" Yet, while Deren captured audiences with aesthetic appeal, Deren's films incorporate beauty to reject, rather than perpetuate, Hollywood's patriarchal gaze. Dorosh says "I believe in beauty, I still do. It's what I like about Maya Deren's films. They're beautiful, but not in this kind of beauty that's a conduit to something, like trying to sell yourself or insecurity."¹⁴² Rather, she sees Deren's beauty as "the counterpoint to the war, through the horrendous time. It was a horrible, horrible traumatic time. ... So wars do strange things to people. I think they leave a big mark."¹⁴³ Positioning Deren's fashion as coping with war, Dorosh adds that beauty is suppressed by the harshness of the world, reflecting that "We're living in a very harsh time, I think, in terms of beauty. I saw it coming, from the period where anger showed up in fashion, and then showed up in music and showed up in art." Daria Dorosh traces this notion of anger as an artistic tool of punk and other anti-industrial artistic traditions.

Katya Grokhovsky's work is in the world of the absurd and grotesque, alongside punk. Grokhovsky discusses the main difference between her and Deren's works as "Deren's is more of a psychological space. Mine is probably more activist or personal absurdist." Yet, at the root of both of their approaches is rejecting the male gaze – only Grokhovsky does so by rejecting beauty, while Deren redefines beauty through her own lens. Grokhovsky references her work *Bad Woman*,¹⁴⁴ a project "which explores a concept of an alter ego and a shadow-persona, based on ideas of defiance and expression of intergenerational rage and protest against ongoing war on women and bodily autonomy... *Bad Woman* discredits the ever encroaching oppressive patriarchal construct of society through humor, absurdist actions, activations and interventions in different locations" (Figs. 22 & 23).

¹⁴¹ (Fig. 22) source: <https://www.katyagrokhovsky.net/bad-woman>

¹⁴² Dorosh, Interview 1

¹⁴³ Dorosh, Interview 2

¹⁴⁴ First image: *Bad Woman* 2024, second *Bad Woman* 2017

Grokhovsky comments that this work resonates with her identity most deeply of all, with her artistic ethos here “...to be as ugly as possible. and I think that's that rejection in my work to pile on, cake on, paint on canvas, to make things badly on purpose. That's a rejection of beauty in a way, whereas I think Deren's rejection is different: hers is of its time where her films are very beautiful, whereas I try to reject beauty. So that's the difference between us, but the body is the same. It's the same concern even for me, trying to reject beauty – meaning rejecting the gaze, male gaze specifically, is the same thing that she's doing.” Grokhovsky and Deren both reject the male gaze in different ways, reclaiming and rejecting beauty.



(Fig. 23) *Bad Woman* by Katya Grokhovsky, 2017. Paper mache clown mask with caked layers of yellow and blue paint, a curly blonde wig, and clown nose.

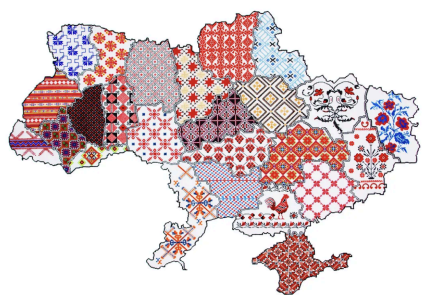
While Daria Dorosh notes that Deren's use of beauty opposes the horrors of her war-stricken times, she also observes that for many artists, beauty often takes a backseat to other drivers like anger or curiosity. Regard and sensitivity for aesthetics, as Dorosh and Grokhovsky embrace in unique ways, is important to a depth of artistic introspection, due to beauty's intrinsic relation to self worth and the body in the world. Re-claiming the character and value of beauty in one's art like Dorosh, comes part and parcel with Grokhovsky's critical examinations of what has been defined as aesthetic. Pervasive hegemonic beauty standards must be questioned by investigating their effects as both conscious and implicit – Deren's Jungian archetypal subconscious works are filmic embodiments of these introspections.

These artists reveal that a Ukrainian lens also regards beauty's place as a counterpoint to the horrors of violence, and as a criticality of Russian appropriation of Ukraine's beautiful art and cultural heritage. Dorosh's series of handmade *psankys* are a potent example of this reclaiming a personal relationship to beauty through Ukrainian heritage. Powerful critique and rejection of what has been problematically defined beauty, and reclaiming aesthetics from the appropriative gaze of oppressors, is not only artistically fundamental – it is also key to healing intimate psychological spaces that one lives within, creates from, and relates to the world through.

Fashion Professor Daria Dorosh brings this feminist conversation of aesthetics to the body next, where embodied material epistemologies come alive through fashion. Due to the patriarchal oppression of fashion, she says that the power of beauty as a creative force is largely neglected in contemporaneity: “I don't know a lot of artists who would admit to beauty being a driving force in their work. A lot of people are driven by anger, or curiosity. But the beauty part will take you into clothing, into what's on the body.” Ukrainian-American women artists are powerful agents in the world of fashion – Daria Dorosh and Katya Grokhovsky in particular – which sheds new light on the profound value and influence of Deren's Ukrainian style.

FASHION: FEMINIST BODY AND MATERIAL POLITICS

The topic of cloth as material politic in Maya Deren's, Daria Dorosh's, Katya Grokhovsky's works concludes this section of comparative analyses. The rest of this work will delve into a chronological and complete series of case studies on Deren's individual filmic works – to better



Embroidered map of Ukraine with the patterns representing different regions of Ukraine. The map was created by Luhansk craftswomen. (Wikimedia)

(Fig. 24) Embroidered map of Ukraine with the patterns representing different regions of Ukraine. The map was created by Luhansk craftswomen¹⁴⁵

science, that was disregarded.” Fashion, as an art form intimately tied to the body, becomes a potent vehicle for articulating identity – especially for immigrant women artists carrying inherited traditions amid modern displacements. Many Ukrainian women artists have deeply resonated with fashion as a politically imbued art form. Cloth is an art medium that is especially conducive to merging the personal and political. Textiles have material politics that are shaped by fashion’s proximity to the body, global industries, sewing as traditionally women’s craft, and fashion’s ability to embrace, reject, and redefine beauty. Fashion signals identity, exercises autonomy, and is a directly embodied approach to creative placemaking.

For immigrant women artists, with cultural and generational ties to textile arts like Ukrainian embroidery (Fig. 24), fashion is a powerful way to bring Grokhovsky’s “art as home” to directly shelter one’s displaced body. Maya Deren notoriously wore self-sewn clothes, using her distinct fashion to express her internal subjectivities: the Ukrainian and Haitian influences of her hand-sewn long skirts and embroidered shirts, coupled with her bare feet and “wild hair,” were not only reflective of her identity, but also in conversation with the visual language of postwar bohemian fashion, and the emerging modern dance scene.¹⁴⁶

Further, Deren’s fashion, particularly her sewing, was in line with her profession as a filmmaker, particularly as a video editor (Fig. 25). Women used to own the majority of independent film production companies in the US by the early 1920s. However, women were pushed from every role besides editing by the 1930s by Hollywood’s oppressive agendas. Video editing remained a profession dominated by women during Deren’s time, but they went unrecognized and underpaid.¹⁴⁷ The lengthy process of hand-cranking, cutting, and gluing tens of thousands of feet of film matches the meticulous hand-sewing

understand how each is informed by, and situated within, her Ukrainian origins and contemporary artistic lineage. Each case study investigates how Deren’s films are connected to the Ukrainian avant-garde of her time, and how each film’s Ukrainian ‘poetics of displacement’ can be better understood thanks to the perspectives and artworks of the four interviewed artists. Fashion is discussed as a medium that is powerfully in proximity to the body. Daria Dorosh notes

“Clothing became a record of the dissolution that we now inherited” and that “Clothing is definitely a language that was not seen as seriously as soft



(Fig. 25) Photo of Maya Deren editing film, courtesy of The Filmmakers’ Cooperative.

¹⁴⁵ (Fig. 24) source: Wikimedia

¹⁴⁶ Rabinovitz, 70

¹⁴⁷ Stokes, 2022



(Fig. 27) Ukrainian president Vladimir Zelensky and First Lady Olena Zelenska. Zelensky's green vyshyvanka depicts symbols of Ukrainian resistance.¹⁴⁸

cloth, how it is preserved, and the social meanings of patterns and materials. Daria expands on sewing as a quintessential women's art, finding new ways to answer questions of defining and building success and belonging to truly address the wants and needs of women artists. Dorosh imagines new ways of artistic and economic exchange – such as through FLiP, a fashion exhibit of works made exclusively from thrifted materials – and her recent *the Art of Place* (Fig. 26), where cellophane wall sculptures demand the use of the audience's phone flashlight to reveal the art, colorful lighting patterns on walls. Dorosh's works intentionally dissect the continual evolution of humans from “citizens, to consumers, to users” through a feminist lens to critically engage the nuances of identities pertaining to place, material, and belonging. Her feminist assertions ground her artistic work as ‘texts’ – textual discourse, textile, and technology – that instrumentally outline the role of place-based identity, such as nationalist narratives and immigrant backgrounds, within the transition from material to technological consumerism in the attention economy.

Like Daria Dorosh's decades of works that anticipate and advance the future contexts of fashion's politics and aesthetics as fashion principles develop alongside technology, Deren too anticipated future trends through her distinctly Ukrainian textiles. Katherine Dunham notes Deren wore “this European style of embroidered blouse, that could be worn off the shoulder, and it was like folksy clothes with a long dirndl skirt... so ala the 60s with the flower children and stuff, in other words, she really looked like a flower child, but this wasn't the sixties, it was the forties,”¹⁴⁹ showing Deren's trendsetting premonitions are connected to her handcrafted Ukrainian peasant fashion aesthetic. Vyshyvanka embroidery and Ukrainian folkwear have functioned as both heritage, and as coded garments of

of Deren's clothes. Her films on women's consciousness advocate for the fields of fashion and video editing to be taken no less seriously due to the predominance of women in those industries. In doing so, Deren's visual beauty becomes a strategy that transforms aesthetic pleasure into a language of survival amid patriarchy. Yet, when more women enter an industry, the pay and status of the field significantly decreases – a problem that remains to this day.¹⁴⁹ Facing contemporary issues, Daria Dorosh emphasizes fashion as apt for grappling with the global, bodily, and material politics of our time, “which works very well in this century for the cell phone users that we are.” Dorosh's medium of fashion lends itself to her work's deep look into how viscosity and feminism operate together in different temporal contexts – the touch of



(Fig. 26) *The Art of Place: The torch, the flashlight, the earth, the body* by Daria Dorosh, 2024 – Image from AIR Gallery.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ (Fig. 27) source: Kravchuk, 2024, Oboz.ua

¹⁴⁹ Claire Cain Miller. “As Women Take over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops.” The New York Times, 2016

¹⁵¹ Marcia Vogel, *Mirror*

political resistance – a symbolic armor used to assert cultural survival under centuries of Russification and colonial erasure.¹⁵²

While Soviet propaganda framed the Ukrainian peasant as the ideal collectivized subject – submissive, productive, and stateless – Ukrainian art reclaims peasant and folk figures as bearers of tradition, political resistance, spiritual intimacy with land, and national identity. Deren embraced her Ukrainian style to signal nonconformity and cultural heritage – akin to Ukrainian President Zelensky’s olive green, tank-embroidered Vyshyvanka seen here (Fig. 27).¹⁵³

CUTTING FABRIC: ABSENCE AND REPRESENTATION

The most specific and poignant cumulation of the comparative responses on beauty, fashion, and identity are the role of fashion within these artists’ ‘poetics of displacement’ through absence, destruction, and the sentimentality of objects and their histories. Katya Grokhovsky says “Since I was very young, I’ve been obsessed with fabric clothing material. I have a fashion background, and have been sewing for a very long time, so I have that with me. I love material. It’s malleable. I love fabric. So everywhere I go I collect fabrics, toys, soft toys, vintage toys.... so I’m a bit of a collector in that way, but not a collector that’s obsessed with the objects themselves. It’s material, and it’s this sadness of the objects. I love things that have been pre-owned. I think it’s because of being detached once upon a time from everything I owned, because we had to move from Ukraine to Australia with not much. I move around a lot, but I have difficulty detaching from objects.” This inner tension between preservation and destruction, between memory and detachment, informs Grokhovsky’s material practice.

Katya Grokhovsky’s work often employs cutting fabrics, even cutting clothes directly from her body, in performances. “I have a lot of fabric clothing that I cut up. So those things are really what I’m just attracted to as a person. I’m very tactile. I need to touch things. But also there’s something in me that really wants these things in my life... There’s a lot of psychological pull and push there, but I also use it as a very aesthetic thing... I will destroy these objects, I will absolutely cut. I will be brutal to everything I collect.” Aligned with Grokhovsky, Daria Dorosh also comments “I love ripping fabric. During, COVID, that made me want to rip fabric. It was so frustrating. And then to put it back again, to braid it.” Similarly, Luba Drozd also turned to material politics to cope with the pandemic, when she 3D printed frontline medical gear for US healthcare workers.¹⁵⁴

Here Grokhovsky cuts red strings in a cathartic piece for Ukraine, a section of *Point A* (Fig. 28). Further, in *Bad Woman*, Grokhovsky cuts clothes off of herself to discuss bodily autonomy and how patriarchal gaze attacks women’s art. She “rejects beauty” through material destruction proximal to the body.

Daria Dorosh’s immigration chest informed her PhD on the informatics of patterns, in the transition from analog to digital. Here, Dorosh’s nostalgic relationship to an object from immigrating when she was five helps us better understand Deren’s relationship with beauty and adolescent memory, who also emigrated as a young child. In particular, Deren’s adoration on maintaining her distinctly Ukrainian hairstyle,¹⁵⁵ is similar to Daria Dorosh’s artistic nostalgia for a curly blonde wig from her childhood (Fig. 29).

¹⁵⁰ (Fig. 26) source: <https://www.airgallery.org/exhibitions/the-art-of-place>

¹⁵² Image: <https://kyivindependent.com/vyshyvanka-ukrainian-tradition-preserved-through-centuries/>

¹⁵³ Areta, 2023 <https://forgottengalicia.com/from-countryside-to-city-the-evolution-of-ukrainian-urban-folk-fashion-in-galicia/>

¹⁵⁴ Bard Public Relations

¹⁵⁵ Dunham in *Mirror*

Daria Dorosh, who immigrated to the US in the 1940s, says “The trunk I still have upstairs in my bedroom. I keep my fabrics in them. But I had been in these plays in Germany. All the mothers had kids, you know, five-six years old. And she, they'd be so happy if they would make us costumes. And we have these pictures of us in costumes. I think one of the last plays, I had to wear a bright yellow wig that my father got somewhere. It was like curly and big. I asked my mother, ‘could you please bring that in the trunk?’ She said, yes, yes, I'll bring it here. Of course, when we got here, we opened up the trunk. There's nothing but like feather blankets.

My wig wasn't in there. I'm so broken. I didn't get it. I don't even know why that wig was so important, but it was like something beautiful. Right. And the memory of that beauty.” The material memory of Dorosh's wig, a lifelong nostalgia for an item she thought would be with her throughout her displacement in early childhood, speaks to the profound connection between beauty, the body, objects, and identity, and memory in the ‘poetics of displacement.’ Daria Dorosh's longing for this wig was visually curated alongside other objects and histories from Dorosh's immigration experiences in her digital art in her 2007 thesis video *Journey* (Fig. 29).

Fashion's proximity to the body is especially expressive when paired with the embodied art form of dance, as Deren does in her films. Dancer and choreographer Mariya ‘Masha’ Dashkina Maddux's dance portrait is perhaps the most striking contemporary image at the intersections of dance and fashion. She was born in Kiev, where she studied Vaganova ballet techniques. She's also a masterful modern dancer, a former principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company. Dashkina Maddux is featured on several magazine and book covers as a dance and fashion model: including covers of *Dior Magazine* issue #26 and *The Art of Movement*, a book by the founders of NYC Dance Project, alongside past works on *Vogue* and *Dance Magazine* – wearing



(Fig. 28) Still from *Point A* by Katya Grokhovsky, 2022.¹⁵⁶ Grokhovsky holds red thread and cuts her clothing with photographs projected in the background.



(Fig. 29) Still from *Journey* by Daria Dorosh, 2007. Curly blonde wig digital art.



(Fig. 30) Portrait of Masha Dashkina Maddux's dance photo from the cover of *The Art of Movement*, painted by David Mannstein and Maria Veill in Germany, 2023, showing dance, visual media, and creative placemaking.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ (Fig. 28) source: <https://www.katyagrokhovsky.net/point-a>

¹⁵⁷ (Fig. 30) source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CtMlnEsodBB/?img_index=1

chic flowy fabrics in champagnes and deep reds. Her poses are strong and elegant – leg extended side and torso gracefully bent, with expressive, unique arm positions, and a side-turned face. Her skirts are long and flowy like Deren’s – her poses exude beauty, freedom, and empowerment (Fig. 30).¹⁵⁸ Dashkina Maddux also upholds Deren’s ethos: as an artist-organizer, she is the founder of Wake Forest Dance Festival, which she began in 2017. She brings the highest tier of professional dance from around the world to North Carolina for an annual series of free events, embodying the importance of accessibility.¹⁵⁹

A focus on materiality connects fashion to the analog era and to the embodied labor of artmaking. From Daria Dorosh’s lost wig to Masha Dashkina Maddux’s flowing skirts, adornment becomes an archive of both absence and assertion in Ukrainian women’s poetics of displacement. Katya Grokhovsky’s cutting of fabrics and Maya Deren’s Ukrainian hair and hand-sewn clothes – mirroring the tactile precision of her film editing – signal the vitality of fashion within a broader multidisciplinary ethos. Fashion here is more than ornament; it is a language of making that binds body, medium, and history, grounded in an understanding of how these artists collectively uphold and innovate material practice as knowledge.

SUMMARY

The methodological framing and artists’ biographies trace how Deren’s ‘artist-native’ position reappears as a refusal of detached observation in favor of immersive, sensory ways of knowing. These artists share multidisciplinary vocabularies that unsettle Western hierarchies of objectivity. Analyses of beauty, performance, and textiles reveal embodied and material art as political and philosophical ground. Reflections on process and temporality show how these artists, like Deren, conceive art as transformation – linking change and motion to historical becoming – while their engagements with identity and language demonstrate how displacement generates epistemic depth and guides translation across mediums.

Dorosh’s fashion epistemology, Grokhovsky’s grotesque performance, Drozd’s sensory installation, and Slinko’s satire together articulate a politics of form, where art functions as inquiry and redefinition. Their practices confront imperial and gendered erasures, showing how aesthetic innovation arises from Ukrainian diasporic feminist creativity. These findings invite a reexamination of modern and contemporary art histories through a Ukrainian feminist lens. Maya Deren’s influence persists through a continuum of Ukrainian-American women whose multidisciplinary, embodied methods reclaim autonomy and use interplaying forms to poetically reckon with displacement.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A UKRAINIAN FEMINIST DECOLONIAL LENS

Deren’s historiography is both emboldened and plagued by her mysterious elusion of categorization. The decades of underrecognition of Deren’s feminist artistic contributions reflects her anti-patriarchal contributions, in the same way that Deren’s underrecognized Ukrainian Jewish artistic contributions reflects her unique resistances against imperialism and anti-semitism. Now, thanks to the continual artistic evolutions of Ukrainian American women artists who bear the torch of Deren’s legacy, her iconic representation in the worlds of feminist and independent cinema can be understood as inextricable from the influences of her Ukrainian Jewish origins. The historical under-recognition of these artists, as their multidisciplinary works resist the confines of art worlds’ hegemonic structures, result in under-recognition of Ukrainian-American multidisciplinary women artists’ contributions in art and art-organizing, feminism, and Ukrainian discourse, and liberatory activism. These Ukrainian women

¹⁵⁸ Masha Dashkina Maddux. “Raleigh Rotary Meeting May 13, 2024.” YouTube, 15 July 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AikzqBellQ.

¹⁵⁹ “Wake Forest Dance Festival.” Wake Forest Dance Festival, 2023, www.wakeforestdancefestival.org/.

artists whose works elude disciplinary categorization continually pioneer the frontiers of innovation, by offering new ways to contend with time and context.

Kurylo writes that “witnessing ordinary Ukrainians doing extraordinary things has been my source of energy. The collective innervation of Ukrainians gives me hope that each one of us will find the inner strength to keep going even when everything feels hopeless, even when our right to be ourselves is being denied to us.”¹⁶⁰ To engage Maya Deren’s work through her Ukrainian Jewish origins is not to provincialize her, it is to restore the geographies of trauma and brilliance from which her artistry was forged. It is to pay homage to the Ukrainian avant-garde she has been displaced from, and to understand how Ukrainian women artists’ diverse relationships to their origins emanate through their works and ethos. Merit is warranted to the women, immigrant, and multidisciplinary artists who navigate the extra challenges of resisting hegemony – building a collective ‘poetics of displacement’ through resistant acts of creative placemaking and intellectually rich, sensorily redefining, socially conscious artmaking. Analyses of Deren’s works through a Ukrainian lens have been made possible thanks to the interviewed artists – from Slinko’s numerous returns to Ukraine to make art, to Daria Dorosh’s analog and digital art on societal contexts, to Luba Drozd’s perception-altering sound installations, and Katya Grokhovsky’s absurd and grotesque political critiques of gender and labor,

Some of the main limitations facing this research are the stark lack of documentation surrounding historic Ukrainian and Ukrainian-American women’s artistic pursuits. As Dorosh puts it, “I don’t know how many other female artists you found on ‘Front Generation’ Ukrainians that were actually able to do their work – and they weren’t just the woman married to or living with a famous male artist or hanging out with them.” Women artists create both within and outside the structures of community, industry, and categorization. Innumerable names and influences of women artists throughout history and the present are purposefully erased by oppressive structures in the art world. Grokhovsky points out that the lineage of female filmmakers is shockingly sparse in the historical and academic record of Deren’s time, saying that “There was a lot of ignorance about the films very early when you study, you don’t begin with her, which was really surprising. I was really introduced to her by other people here in New York, especially Barbara Hammer.”¹⁶¹ Deren’s own legacy has faced academic erasure, and her legacy withstands in no small part thanks to Ukrainian-American women filmmakers who directly create works in her legacy, namely Yelena Yemchuk and Barbara Hammer.

Each of the interviewed artists – Slinko, Daria Dorosh, Luba Drozd, and Katya Grokhovsky – extend the artistic roots that Deren had begun in their own unique ways, that shape Ukrainian and American art histories and future trajectories. Tracing Maya Deren’s aesthetics, forms, and activism through her contemporary artistic lineage has revealed the far-reaching influence of not only Deren’s work, but also contributions of Ukrainian women artists to pillars of modern American and international arts cultures – such as the intersections of art, fashion, technology, and organization building – but also such as in feminist film, multidisciplinary forms, and sociopolitical work.

While Deren could not name herself as Ukrainian in life, the symbolic logics of her films continue to echo in contemporary artworks that center memory, fragmentation, and embodied resistance. Her artistic traditions have been shown to be a product of her Ukrainian feminist decolonial lens. These case studies collectively argue that Deren’s influence persists, not in aesthetic imitation, but in a shared, idiosyncratically evoked, political and multidisciplinary formal grammar that emerges wherever Ukrainian women artists resist erasure.

¹⁶⁰ Kurylo, 10

¹⁶¹ Grokhovsky, Interview

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