

## RESISTANCE: Stories from Ukraine

### Episode 5: "Arts, Crafts and War"

(Published: May 19, 2022)

Transcript

(0:00)

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

*Interpreter: Before the war started she made underwear.*

*Laurel: Oh, like sexy underwear?*

*Interpreter: Yes, yes [laughter]*

*Laurel: So you went from a lingerie maker to a military outfitter?*

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

**V/O:** This is Resistance: Stories from Ukraine. I'm Laurel Chor, a photojournalist from Hong Kong. In this series, I'm sharing personal stories of resistance that have emerged everywhere in Ukraine since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of the country in February. Today, we meet people turning their creativity to wartime production, sewing bulletproof vests, welding anti-tank obstacles, and even using online targeted ads to break through Russian propaganda.

(1:05)

**V/O:** Some work alone, in their kitchens or home studios. Others are more organized, building production lines in community halls and co-working spaces. All over the country, people are contributing whatever skills they have to offer.

### PART ONE: THE SEAMSTRESS

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

*Interpreter: This is for the pilots.*

*Laurel: For the pilots?*

*Interpreter: Yes, for the pilots of helicopters.*

# Project Brazen.

**V/O:** In a matter of weeks, Lilia has transformed her home sewing studio into a wartime production shop. We're in Lisnyky, a sleepy village south of Kyiv. Lilia is 36, and dressed in a cozy, copper-colored, sweatsuit she made herself. The silk and lace she used for making lingerie are packed away now, replaced with tough camo-patterned fabric and rolls of velcro. The back wall is covered with spools of colorful thread. In the corner there are women's mannequins. And on a cutting table there's a pile of freshly made bulletproof vests.

(2:10)

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

*Interpreter: She is growing in the times when she can switch from the lingerie to the body armour, she realised that it's only good for her and for her skills.*

**V/O:** The bullet proof vests look just as good as ones made in a factory. Lilia has perfected her designs over time.

*Laurel: How did you learn to make this?*

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

*Interpreter: The main thing how she learned how to do the body armour is communicate with the soldiers. She gave her product to the soldiers - soldiers wear it, soldiers try it and they give it back and she try to something modify.*

(3:00)

**V/O:** One of these soldiers is her husband. In peacetime, he's a construction worker. But now, he's serving in Ukraine's territorial defense. Lilia shows me the pieces that go into the vests, like small fabric triangles and metal clasps – those will be sewn into pockets for carrying grenades.

All day, she works alone in this small studio. I ask her how long it takes to put one of these vests together.

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

*Interpreter: In the first days, one vest she made for one and a half day ... but now she can do two of them for one day.*

(3:50)

**VO:** Once complete, armour plates slip into the vests. Plates are expensive and hard to come by these days, so neighbors in the village are welding together scrap metal to make their own. I'm blown away that all these regular people have transitioned to war manufacturing so quickly. But Lilia tells me this isn't their first time.

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

*Interpreter: She was a volunteer, she repaired military clothes and made body armour, from 2014 when there was conflict in the Donbas. So from that time, she has experience how to make this body armour.*

**V/O:** I ask Lilia if she'd ever imagined that she'd one day be using her skills to churn out military kit.

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

**V/O:** She tells me never. At least until eight years ago, when fighting first broke out with pro-Russian separatists in the east.

*Lilia: [speaking Ukrainian]*

**V/O:** But after that, she says, she realised that Ukrainian women can do *anything*.

(5:00)

## PART TWO: THE TOUR

**V/O:** I drive from Kyiv's rural outskirts to the center of the city, and arrive at Kosmos Tabir, which means Space Camp in Ukrainian. It's a creative co-working space in an old shipyard.

*Laurel: Hi. Hello. Cool space... Oh my gosh, so many people*

*Yehor: This is the front door of Kosmos Tabir*

*Laurel: So, how many, how many people live here?*

*Yehor: About 20 to 25...*

**VO:** This place is a kind of hipster haven for artists. In the parking lot out front, there's an all-white, stretch limo with serious 90s vibes. As I step inside, I can see art

# Project Brazen.

everywhere. The stairwell is lined with drawings made in the first days of the invasion, a sort of visual diary of the war. There's one of Vitaliy Klitschko, the famous boxer turned mayor of Kyiv, holding a javelin, the anti-tank weapon that's proved so essential for the country's defence.

(6:00)

*Yehor: Let me do a quick guide.*

*Laurel: Oh yes, please.*

*Yehor: So basically, we have a couple of sections here. Here we have a workshop...*

**V/O:** My tour guide into this world is Yehor. He's 27, and works in advertising. He's got a beard and sleek hair that goes down to his chin. Before the Russian invasion, Yehor tells me, Kosmos Tabir was a place where designers, artists and musicians, worked side by side and shared ideas. But now that air raid sirens blare across the country, it's become... a shelter. The working spaces are below ground, so they feel safer sleeping here, and they figured they'd rather be with other people.

*Laurel: Can I just pop my head in the kitchen? You've got everything you need.*

*Yeah, it really feels like a dorm in here.*

*Yehor: Yeah, we have a fridge here and also backup kitchen below in case we get bombed...*

(7:00)

**V/O:** It's organized chaos down here. In the main communal area, there's a woodshop in the corner, where someone is doing pull ups from a bar hanging from the ceiling. On the walls there is a big neon crucifix, fairy lights, Ukrainian flags, and large paintings – there's one of a woman holding a gun, and wearing nothing but a balaclava

*Laurel: Oh my there's a hair salon over here. Yeah, so much going on.*

**V/O:** In a cramped hallway, Anton, the de facto resident barber with an exquisitely manicured handlebar mustache, is giving people haircuts. They're much needed, most businesses are shut. Every room now doubles as sleeping quarters, with makeshift cots squeezed behind desks, or as storage for emergency supplies

# Project Brazen.

*Laurel: Every door is a new surprise. Yeah. Like we're in a magical Wonderland. So what are they doing in? What are they doing in there?*

(8:00)

**V/O:** Behind one door, there's a guy using a drill press to make quick and dirty smoke grenades out of plywood. Behind another, a designer is hunched underneath a loft bed he had just built. He's using a 3D printer to make a sort of grappling hook that's meant to help soldiers detonate mines. The Russians have left mines all over Ukraine, so de-mining has become an urgent priority.

*Artist: So 3d prints, it's like my hobby.*

*Laurel: So what does this do?*

*Artist: This thing when you discharge mines, you grab on like this and under this the mine goes boom and you save your legs.*

**V/O:** Yehor tells me, this is actually a pretty quiet day at Kosmos Tabir.

*Yehor: We can have a bit of a day off today because we run out of materials to produce bullet proof vests.*

*Laurel: Oh, that's what you're doing normally? Oh, so you guys are making bulletproof vests.*

*Yehor: And also hedgehogs...*

(9:00)

**V/O:** You can see these 'Czech Hedgehogs', as they're known.. on streets all over Ukraine. They're there to block invading tanks and are made out of metal beams soldered together, sticking out like the spikes of a hedgehog. Four days into the invasion, Yehor tells me they realized they could make these hedgehogs out of a nearby artists' workshop. They spread the word on social media that they needed scrap metal, and contacted local scrap yards as well. Since then, they've managed to make 300 hedgehogs for Ukraine's Territorial Defence Force. That old school limo parked out front? Turns out, they've used it to transport the metal beams.

*Yehor: One takes about, like hour or maybe something like that. Day one we produced like maybe five or seven, day two we produce like 20 and it was like a run of maybe a week and a half maybe two weeks.*

*Laurel: Wow, it's like a resistance factory, a creative resistance factory.*

(10:00)

## PART THREE: HANDS AND MINDS

**V/O:** Not everyone is making things with their hands. Yehor shows me into yet another room. Unlike all the others, this one is actually quiet. The walls are soundproofed. This is where they make their own podcast.

*Yehor: We have a small podcast called War Kyiv, war podcast. It's on SoundCloud. We interview people from Kosmos Tabir about like events and how they, feel what they think about.*

*Laurel: So you started making it about a week after the war started?*

*Yehor: Yeah.*

*Laurel: I mean, for me, it's so remarkable or surprising that a war breaks out and one of your first reactions is to create a podcast.*

*Yehor: If you just sit in this shelter and have all the capacity to do something, it's like it became something natural because someone has an idea. Or maybe we can do a podcast because you just just sitting and waiting, it's no good use of time.*

(11:05)

**V/O:** So instead, Yehor explains, they're using the studio and mics they already have to create something as a community – an outlet where they can process their experiences and trauma together.

*Laurel: Who listens to it?*

*Yehor: Most, most from Ukraine and some portion from Russia and Europe.*

*Laurel: Why do you think people from Russia are listening to it?*

*Yehor: Probably people who were at our events when we didn't have like a war with Russia. And secondly, I think there is still a demand for some people for the information that is not from the state media.*

**V/O:** Yehor's been using his own skills to try to reach Russians, too. He works at an advertising agency pumping out digital marketing campaigns. When Russia invaded, the agency started a new campaign - this time targeting Russian civilians

with information about the war. They began with movie pirating sites popular with Russians.

(12:10)

*Yehor: It turned out that a lot of like owners of such websites support Ukraine. And they contacted us somehow to offer free advertisement space on their websites.*

**V/O:** So now, along with creating ad campaigns for Ukrainian craft beer, Yehor and his colleagues are trying to wake Russians up to the reality of the war. At first, they tried to shock Russians with graphic imagery.

*Yehor: it was like more of violence-based, it was a lot of like dead soldiers and so on and more sending a message of don't come here because you will die.*

**V/O:** But then, Yehor says, they looked at the analytics and realized it wasn't working. They found that Russians were reluctant to engage with outright criticism of their country. So, they changed their strategy.

(12:55)

*Yehor: we realise that seeing the information that we get on clicks, that people are more interested in information about their livelihood, so we basically stopped to produce anything that was like violence based, and started to just communicate information of what's happening here, and how you can avoid being brought to Russian Army, how you can save up, do some something in terms of like, adjusting to the new realities of economics and so on.*

**V/O:** Branded content for Russians - sponsored by Ukrainians.

**Laurel:** You're teaching Russians how to deal with sanctions?

*Yehor: Yeah, but it's, it's smarter than that. Because by doing so, we increase the awareness of the problems that is happening because a lot of people are in denial.*

**Laurel:** for me, that shows such an extraordinary level of empathy and compassion for regular Russians when so much of the narrative right now in Ukraine is about hating Russia.

*Yehor: Of course, we hate what they're doing right now, and we hate the situations that people allowed themselves to be placed in when they believe in all this*

*nonsense that's transmitted on the media. But I saw a lot of Russians justifying this by thinking that there is no harm for the people.*

(14:15)

**V/O:** Yehor wants Russians to know the *real* truth about what's happening in Ukraine. He thinks that over time, they might just change their minds.

**Laurel:** *When the world thinks of the war, they think about tanks and guns and soldiers, but actually, Ukraine's creative community is playing a huge role in this war.*

**Yehor:** *I think it's more of an information wars in like tanks and so on, you can you can get the territory, you can bomb something, but Ukrainians are very sure that we don't want any Russian influence here. You can even take cities, but you can never control the population.*

**V/O:** We'll be right back

(15:00)

## **PART FOUR: THE FLORIST**

**V/O:** Back in the village outside of Kyiv, I've left Lilia the seamstress, and driven a few streets over to meet with Lyudmila, a florist and gardener in her late 40s. Since the war started, she's moved in with her elderly mother. She's preparing her own home to host Ukrainians fleeing the war from other parts of the country. Crocuses, pansies and snowdrops are just starting to peek out of the dirt in the small garden outside their home.

**Lyudmila:** *[Speaking Russian]*

**V/O:** The flowers and their beauty, Lyudmila tells me, give her hope... and that they were there for her even during the explosions. Right next to the garden there's an entrance to the cellar, where Lyudmila and her family spent the first three nights of the war under heavy shelling.

(16:05)

**Laurel:** *Is there light down there?*

**Interpreter:** *Some candles*



# Project Brazen.

*Laurel: So there's no electricity down there. I mean, there's just like these these dark steps that lead underground and it's dark and scary and I can't believe they spent three days down there.*

*V/O: Since the Russian invasion began, Lyudmila has swapped flowers for camouflage as her contribution to the war effort. We head inside, where together with her mother, Lyudmila has been making ghillie suits, which soldiers wear to hide from the enemy. She shows me one she's working on.*

*Lyudmila: [Speaking Russian]*

*Interpreter: This is for the sniper.*

*Laurel: Oh, for the sniper, so to camouflage the snipers.*

*Lyudmila: Da...*

(16:50)

*V/O: Her mother is sitting at the kitchen table, tying different shades of brown and green string to netting. Two small dogs lounge at her feet next to the TV. Her mother's thick glasses are on the tip of her nose, her brow furrowed in concentration. The whole time I'm standing in the kitchen her hands never stop working.*

*Laurel: How did you learn to make this?*

*Lyudmila: [speaking Russian]*

*V/O: Lyudmila says they found the designs for the suits on the internet. Then, they gathered the materials, unthreading old burlap sacks they'd used for food storage, and collecting scraps of denim from a local garment factory. Yesterday, a soldier stopped by and said the suits were good, but needed a bit more green, so Lyudmila tells me she added in a few extra strips of fabric overnight, improving on her design. Lyudmila is proud of their work. But her voice cracks. Next to her, her mother weeps without making a sound. Lyudmila says she never thought they'd be in this situation.*

(18:00)

*Lyudmila: [speaking Russian]*

*Interpreter: She was a florist and she can't even imagine that she'll do it.*

*Lyudmila: [speaking Russian]*

V/O: She says that every morning, they wake up not knowing if this will be their last day in their home, or if they'll even make it to tomorrow.

*Lyudmila: [speaking Russian]*

V/O: But they're confident Ukraine can win she says, and they are doing what they can to bring victory closer.

*Lyudmila: [speaking Russian]*

V/O: She tells me that as Ukrainians, they have the right to live on their land, and to enjoy their lives. No one, she says, has the right to take either away from them.

(19:15)

V/O: That's it for today. Next, we travel east to the city of Kharkiv, where we hear stories from those living under constant shelling, and those trying to escape.

*Sergei: It's like my apartment. I bought it. It's my place. I can't leave it. If I will die, I will die, but I will stay in my apartment.*

## CREDITS

V/O: Resistance: Stories from Ukraine is a production of Project Brazen in partnership with PRX.

It's hosted by me, Laurel Chor. I've been reporting from the field with Arman Dzidzovic and Andrii Kalashnikov. Bradley Hope, Tom Wright and Nicholas Brennan are executive producers. Rowan Slaney, Megan Dean, Clair Urbahn, and Soobin Kim produced this episode, with associate producing from Giulia Franchi and Francesca Gilardi Quadrio Curzio. Susie Armitage is our Story Editor. Cover Design by Ryan Ho. For PRX, Jason Saldanha and Julie Shapiro.

Special thanks to Denis Tsutsayev, Alex Guzenko, Anna-Maria Valchuk, Jody Bragger, Michelle Sanders, Hanna Fedorishyna, Neha Wadekar, Siddhartha Mahanta, and Lucy Woods.

You can find episodes of Kosmos Tabir's podcast on their soundcloud... That's Kosmos, with a K.. Tabir... T A B I R...

For more of our reporting, and a transcript of this episode, visit [projectbrazen.com/resistance](http://projectbrazen.com/resistance)

(20:57)

***-END OF EPISODE-***