

DIANA BERG

Ukraine

- *CCP Fellow 2021 at the Center for Political Beauty*
- *Head of the cultural centre Platforma Tju in Mariupol*
- *artistic and political activist*



»Protests are an important instrument for dialogue and change. I go to demonstrations today to win back what was not achieved in Donetsk in 2014: justice, tolerance and equality.«

Diana, you studied graphic design but have been working as an activist for several years. How did that come about?

When the coup in my hometown Donetsk started in March 2014, my friend and I decided to organise a protest march for the unity of Ukraine. Thousands of people responded to our call, and that is the moment I realised everyone is capable of making a difference. Although we were attacked in the streets and friends died, we continued to demonstrate. Thanks to our movement, Donetsk will be remembered as a city that fought back.

What motivated you to found the cultural platform "Tju" in Mariupol, which you have been running for five years now?

Platforma Tju is my attempt to create a utopia – a place of safety and respect where contemporary art, critical thinking and activism meet. When I arrived in Mariupol at the end of 2014, activists were taking care of the displaced, doing volunteer work on the front lines and carrying out pro-Ukrainian actions. My friends and I felt it was important to develop a long-term perspective and to build cultural and civic awareness. We countered the Soviet-influenced idea that art should simply be uplifting by organising disturbing performances and punk concerts, giving us the reputation of being provocateurs.

What questions are at the centre of your work?

The idea of freedom drives me. For me, freedom means equal opportunities for oppressed and marginalised groups. The greater the tolerance for LGBTQ* people, for example, the more opportunities open up to women, creating a greater degree of freedom in society as a whole. Lately, we have been thinking a lot about the

youth of Mariupol and realise they have few chances to figure out themselves or try out their ideas. That is why we have opened an art cluster especially for them. Tju has thus become a second home for many teenagers – a space free of fear where they can be themselves.

What are your impressions of the CrossCulture Programme?

The CCP is a super network. I have made friends with artists from Germany, Cuba and Tajikistan. We are planning a joint project on the legacy of the Soviet Union; it is called Red Lines and deals with the subject of private and public spheres. I also hope to find partners to cooperate internationally with Tju. My goal is to make Mariupol an important spot on the cultural map of Europe.

* LGBTQ = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer

The CrossCulture Programme is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. For more information on the CrossCulture Programme: