



Nini talking to journalists in Tbilisi. Courtesy of GeoAIR.

YARAT TALKS TO... NINI PALAVANDISHVILI

The GeoAIR director chats to us about her indirect route to residencies, why she's passionate about them, and other fascinating insights into the world of art

Nini Palavandashvili is in the YARAT office to chat to us before her talk tonight. She looks inquisitively out of the window along the S... She tells us it's only her second short trip to Baku, despite that she grew up in Tbilisi.

We are particularly interested in the story of the GeoAIR residency programme, curated and managed by Nini. Not only is it inspiring to hope to learn from her experience to develop our own relatively young YARAT Residency Programme.

Nini, let's get to the point. Tell us about your residency.

"On a basic level, GeoAIR Residency has been hosting creative people since 2010 for a minimum of around one month. They live in our re... how many secrets does Baku have?"

Sounds straight-forward. Is the timeframe important?

"Well, yes, in order to have enough time to develop some ideas or work."

So they always produce something?

"Actually, no, not always. In fact, this is a guiding principle of our residency – there is no pressure to create any work."

And what do they produce? Is there a set theme to what you ask your residents to work on?

"Again, no. But we work within the general context that it should be something locally engaging that somehow impacts or involves communities... night-at-the-museum-elizabeth-brandolini-talks-to-us-about-her)

We ask Nini to expand on this, but then agree that it would be better to keep her examples for tonight's talk. So to find out more, come along... 04 Jun 15

Her coffee arrives, and she peers out of the window again across the unfamiliar skyline of Azerbaijan's capital.

So if the residents do produce something, what do you do with it?

"We have no permanent space, so we work with our network of small galleries and public spaces in the city and find an appropriate one for... 03 Jun 15

So if there's no pressure to produce anything, what is the point of the residency?

"Residencies vary hugely, but for us it's about education. In fact that's the only element that we ask them to do. We don't even insist on this, but they really should give something back if... 02 Jun 15

Got it, so your residents give talks and lead discussions?

"Yes, they have done, but actually we've ended up emphasising workshops because we've seen more of a result. If a resident can spend several days, with a small group, they will tend to retain what they learn than over a one-hour talk. So the effect is smaller-scale but longer-lasting."

And is there a more far-reaching aim to the residencies? Perhaps on a national level?

Photo of the Week

#TM86sovetskaya
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-tm86sovetskaya>)

12 Jul 15

YARAT talks to...

TERRIBLEm86
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/yarat-talks-to-terriblem86>)

10 Jul 15

Photo of the Week

Public Art: *Taboor*
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-public-art-taboor>)

06 Jul 15

The Month Ahead

What's on in July?
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/the-month-ahead-whats-on-in-july>)

01 Jul 15

YARAT talks to...

Eltaj Zeynalov
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/yarat-talks-to-eltaj-zeynalov>)

29 Jun 15

Photo of the Week

Night at the Museum
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-night-at-the-museum>)

07 Jun 15

1 Day To Go: Night at the Museum

How many secrets does Baku have?
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/1-day-to-go-night-at-the-museum-how-many-secrets-does-baku-have>)

05 Jun 15

2 Days To Go: Night at the Museum

Elizabeth Brandolini discusses her upcoming session
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/2-days-to-go-night-at-the-museum-elizabeth-brandolini-talks-to-us-about-her>)

04 Jun 15

3 Days To Go: Night at the Museum

A chat and some tea with TV chef Farkhad A. Shatoyev
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/3-days-to-go-night-at-the-museum>)

03 Jun 15

4 Days To Go: Night at the Museum

A conversation with yoga instructor Hamid Elsevar
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/4-days-to-go-night-at-the-museum>)

02 Jun 15

"The residences are about building relationships, both locally and around the world, which is why we emphasise the human instead of the material. We want to interact with creative people from all over the world, including Georgia of course, and to make an impact on local communities."

We are again tempted to ask Nini to expand on this, but then remember that she's saving this for tonight.

Then how do you select your residents?

"Our ideas are discussed and developed in our small interdisciplinary team (which includes an anthropologist). Once the ideas reach a stage where we need someone to help us with the specific work or approach we are looking for, then we contact them, add them to the discussion, and hopefully this leads to a residency."

If you don't mind us asking, how does that work on a financial level?

"Not at all. We secure funding from various international funds and schemes which sponsor the residents' travel and other expenses, and we provide them with a place to stay – our residence. In fact, that's our only building, apart from a small office, and it was built onto the side of our founder Sophia Tabatadze's home. There you go for passion!"

It sounds very idea-driven, and quite well-developed from an early stage. Doesn't that inhibit the residents at all?

"Well not really, since they join the discussion voluntarily and only come if they really want to. Besides, our residency is for Tbilisi and Georgia. What would be the point in inviting a foreign artist for them to just continue the work they were doing before? We try to inspire them or at least encourage them to share our idea and to bring their skills to it."

Good point. The way you explain it, everything seems to run very smoothly with your residency. It can't be that easy, can it?

"It certainly isn't. It's a 24/7 job, although we give ourselves August off every year. All the time we spend developing ideas for upcoming residencies while looking after the current resident is incredibly rewarding but very intensive."

"In Georgia we also have the language problem – not that many people speak English so we spend a lot of time on translating and other organising things needed when people come to a new country and culture."

Changing the direction slightly, we can see that you are a very passionate person – perhaps that's the Georgian in you – in a position that you don't really love. We spent some time reading your biography, and it's interesting to see that your path to where you are now was rather winding. Why is that?

"Well, that's a tricky one. I think my route is a common one for people who are searching for their way in life, whether actively or more subconsciously. Although I studied Art History in Tbilisi, it was more of a traditional course in the Soviet tradition and taught me little about contemporary art. I'm sure I didn't even know what a curator was until I left Georgia! Today, of course, things have really changed, and it looks like that too in Baku."

Yes, we can confirm that! So where did the real change happen?

"Another good question. I always had the art streak running through my family, so on some level I knew I would end up doing something creative. I went to work at the Faculty of Social and Economic Communications, which now helps me a lot with my role."

"But I suppose what helped on deeper level was living in Berlin, being in contact with the art community, exposed to different approaches, not to art – a world away from the very prescriptive socialist tradition."

"Though even back in Tbilisi, it took me several years to end up in GeoAIR, via some work in advertising and then graphic design, mostly in advertising and publishing for art establishments."

Talking of socialism, this is an area where Azerbaijan and Georgia have a shared history. What are the prospects for working together over the coming years?

"Well, as you know, it's only my second trip to Baku. But we have already worked with Azerbaijani artists in Tbilisi – Chingiz Babayev and Ali Hasanov. I have also worked with Sabina Shikhinskaya in her capacity as a curator and in terms of YARAT artists I am familiar with the work of Orkhan Huseynov."

"But considering our proximity, we would love to develop our relationship with YARAT and Azerbaijan further. Regarding the post-socialist aspect in particular, we can certainly learn from each other."

This is not directly linked to your talk, so can we have an example?

"Something general I have picked up on – especially because I was out of Georgia for a decade – is that attitudes have changed. When, once, contemporary art was met with confusion and even anger, people have started to get used to it. In the very least, they are no longer shocked, which must be a good thing."

Absolutely, that's something we can relate to, and that's been a main part of YARAT's mission, to educate locals about what contemporary art is.

Our chat with you has gone on a bit longer than usual and even looks like our longest interview to date. We can see that ideas are the key element for you, whether developing them yourself in your team or with residents. You've also told us about learning about contemporary approaches during your education and through your artistic upbringing. So for us the obvious question to finish on is... why did you not become an artist?

"Ah, and I thought I'd had all the difficult ones! That is a bit tricky, but somehow what's happened to me always felt natural. I suppose it's because today, especially in the kind of art that interests me, the boundaries between artist and curator have almost completely disappeared."

"Our team even goes on research residencies ourselves where there is only a very small difference with what we do and the final artistic product is always shared. I would love to see you in the future and the opportunity for YARAT and GeoAIR to work closer together."

We wish you luck tonight and look forward to listening to all those examples. We hope that you can make some time for a longer trip to Baku in the future and the opportunity for YARAT and GeoAIR to work closer together.

Nini Palavandishvili, 'GeoAIR Residency', as part of YARAT's series 'CIS Arts Circuit'.

Location: YARAT Centre, Baku

Date/Time: 1st May 2015, 19:00

The Month Ahead
What's on in June?
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/the-month-ahead-whats-on-in-june>)

01 Jun 15

Photo of the Week
Talk by artist Benedict Drew
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-talk-by-artist-benedict-drew>)

11 May 15

Event Preview
What's the *Sludge Manifesto*?
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/event-preview-whats-the-sludge-manifesto>)

20 May 15

On This Day in 2012
Merging Bridges
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/on-this-day-in-2012merging-bridges>)

15 May 15

Weekly Work
Untitled Series, Nazrin Mammadova
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/weekly-work-untitled-series-nazrin-mammadova>)

12 May 15

Photo of the Week
Preparation for *The Union of Fire & Water*
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-preparation-for-the-union-of-fire-water>)

10 May 15

On This Day in 2014
From the Individual to the Collective / Salam Youstry
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/on-this-day-in-2014-from-the-individual-to-the-collective-salam-youstry>)

06 May 15

Weekly Work
Vivid Reflection, Vusal Rahim
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/weekly-work-vivid-reflection-vusal-rahim>)

04 May 15

Photo of the Week
'QUICK 2015' workshop
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-bbreimquick-2015-em-workshop>)

04 May 15

The Month Ahead
What's on in May?
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/whats-on-in-may>)

01 Jun 15

YARAT talks to
Nini Palavandishvili
(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/yarat-talks-to-nini-palavandishvili>)

01 May 15



On This Day in 2013...

VIP Underpass

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/on-this-day-in-2013-vip-underpass>)

30 Apr 15

YARAT talks to...

Fakhriyya Mammadova

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/yarat-talks-to-fakhriyya-mammadova>)

27 Apr 15

Photo of the Week

*Dua*s* opens

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week-duas-opens>)

26 Apr 15

YARAT talks to...

Maria Slavnova

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/aria-slavnova-too-much-focus-on-city-centres>)

23 Apr 15

Weekly Work

Abstinence, Ramal Kazim

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/weekly-work-abstinence-ramal-kazim>)

20 Apr 15

Photo of the Week

Rashad in Venice

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/photo-of-the-week>)

19 Apr 15

Inside YARAT

Preparing for *Dua*s*

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/inside-yarat-preparing-for-duas>)

18 Apr 15

On This Day in 2013...

Good Dog

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/on-this-day-in-2013>)

17 Apr 15

Weekly Work

Summer Heat, Farhad Farzaliyev

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/weekly-work-summer-heat-farhad-farzaliyev>)

16 Apr 15

Project Review

Into the Isolation Room

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/into-the-isolation-room>)

15 Apr 15

YARAT talks to...

Contemporary?

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/contemporary-more-than-just-dance>)

14 Apr 15

YARAT & YOU

Our Blog begins

(<http://www.yarat.az/en/blog/yarat-and-you-our-blog-begins>)

13 Apr 15

YARAT CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

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