

Hey, I'm Yulian, I'm 22 And that is usually as far as my ability of talking about myself goes. But as soon as I climb over that first wall of being unreasonably private, I'm able to open up this book of mine slightly. My story involves millions of decisions, some with pleasant outcomes, some with painful ones, some conscious, some externally influenced, some trivial, some as matters of survival. Despite how I decide to label them, I'm where I'm supposed to be, for which I feel grateful every day. I'm grateful to be in such a vibrant environment that explodes with different colours and flavours, and I'm honoured to add a couple of drops of colours of mine to this melting pot as well. I love cultures, travelling has been encouraged in my family my whole life, as it is one of the biggest forces of awareness development... and that got me to decide to pursue "International Relations and Information" as my Bachelor, cultural diplomacy being a key component in it. Though in my second year of studying I decided that it wasn't enough for me, as my love for design would grow stronger and stronger. So I enrolled for a local Graphic Design academy and started juggling these two fields. And I'm glad I did so, as this chemical reaction of two broadened my circle of awareness and made me wiser. After graduating from the academy I wanted to dedicate all of myself to Graphic Design, and I promised myself to leave my cocoon once again for that purpose and to go abroad. And that was my plan until I woke up to bombs and missiles flying over my house. I set my life aside for some time and did everything I could to prevent my culture from being exterminated. But at a certain point I had to force myself to start to live my life again, so I revised my plan, but with little corrections to it: this year of resistance and uncertainty of tomorrow helped me to realise what is really important and strengthened my sense of purpose, through which I would channel my work. Florence and IED accepted me with warmth and kindness, to the point that this safety was very contrasting to my reality just some time ago. Still, I was grateful, more than ever. I managed to establish a balanced lifestyle by updating myself with what was going back home and staying present in this Florence context, full of opportunities to learn and explore. One day on my way home I thought "If I had a chance to tell my grandfather that now I have a chance to be involved in a conversation with persons from Brazil, Nigeria, Italy, Norway and Hawaii and all of us would be able to tell their stories and each one of us would understand one another, he wouldn't have believed me". Yet this is real, and if you look carefully enough, you might notice culture in every aspect of being a person. Every moment is an opportunity to learn and with every breath of ours we share a bit of our cultural affiliation. We, international students, share by simply being together, and that is the beauty and value of being a part of an international group, in this multicultural city of Florence. When you move to a new place, you get to face

the unfamiliar, the unknown, which might be intimidating and overwhelming... though it's nothing but natural. It's natural in a way that any type of growth requires somewhat of a crisis. Kids are screaming in pain when their teeth are growing, just like you, who might be anxious to find yourselves in a totally different country with people of shapes and colours you never shared the same space with before. But trust me, in no time this anxiety will swap places with curiosity and new worlds will open up their doors for you to explore and appreciate them. Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko said: "Learn from others and don't shun your own". And it's in that order for a good reason. With more external awareness you develop sensibility to your inner world, you learn to love and appreciate everyone for who they are unconditionally, despite all the differences and peculiarities. To study abroad is to grow, so pack your stuff and get out there. Concerning the cover, I managed to trace a precise route of this symbol from my subconscious to my sketchbook. Interestingly enough, this is a significant cultural projection. When I thought of "melting pot/exchange/mutualism", which were reference words in the brief, a strong image popped up in my mind - "my grandmother pickling fruits and vegetables for winter". And it feels as something essential, something you cannot spend winter without. The jar full of different fruits and vegetables on the cover represents our context as students from different parts of the world, with different textures and flavours to our characters, who individually ripened under influences of our cultures. Despite our differences we coexist, exchange juices and create something new, never seen before, still preserving our integrity. That's why I called it "cultural marination". Still, a lot of people decide to stay conservative and sometimes even xenophobic towards people who they feel are different from them. For individuals like that, the process of cultural exchange and celebration is fearful. "You don't mix this and that" they say. We say: "watch us". Some oppose cultural marination as if when one culture meets another, there's a threat of extinction and expansion. But there is such a threat only if you're unaware of your cultural identity and heritage. And that comes from a person whose culture has been facing attempts of extermination for generations. Yet we're still here, Vopen to speak, listen and exchange. I feel nothing but compassion to those who are terrified, as they're simply unaware, and that's exactly why we are here, to share our story of cultural marination within the canvas of IED Florence. What are my expectations for the future? Well, I'm at that point where I'm at peace with whatever comes my way, I'll just try my best to focus on what is within my range of influence.

Though what I desire the most is peace in Ukraine, and everything else will come along.

Thank you so much Artribune and IED Florence for the opportunity to speak, I'm truly honoured.

Yulian

Zabarylo.