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MacEwan University announces Lianna Makuch as the next Gene Zwozdesky Artist in Residence for upcoming academic year

Inaugural artist in residence Slinko worked closely with students and leaves a legacy of research and artistic vision

Edmonton – MacEwan University is pleased to announce that Ukrainian-Canadian theatre artist [Lianna Makuch](#) will be the next Gene Zwozdesky Artist in Residence for the 2024/25 academic year.

This program was established in the fall of 2022 and is a collaboration between the [Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre](#) (URDC) and the [Faculty of Fine Arts and Communications](#) (FFAC). The program is funded by a donation from the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education (UFCE).

Makuch is a third-generation Ukrainian-Canadian theatre artist in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton) on Treaty Six Territory. She is a playwright, director, performer and co-artistic director of Pyretic Productions. She has travelled several times to Ukraine to research and develop her plays *Barvinok* and *Alina*, which have garnered awards and recognition including the Shevchenko Foundation's REACH Award, an Edmonton Artist Trust Fund Award, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes award nominations, Gina Wilkinson Prize and was shortlisted for the Alberta Playwriting Award.

"I believe that by exploring themes and topics deeply connected to my identity and expressing my own personal truth, the art I create will find a universal connection and impact," says Makuch. "The arts are a powerful medium to enlighten and influence, while authentically advocating on behalf of community. I look forward to continuing to do this work while holding this position at MacEwan and would like to thank all those involved for this opportunity."

In addition to working with numerous theatre companies, Makuch is currently working with a colleague to adapt and develop the book *Kohkum's Babushka: A Magical Métis/Ukrainian Tale* into a Theatre for Family Audiences production which began development at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Her directorial debut, *First Métis Man of Odesa*, received a Dora Award for Outstanding Direction and has been seen on stages nationwide.

Makuch will be directing *A Christmas Carol* at the Citadel Theatre in the 2024/25 season.

She has also been a key advocate for raising awareness about Russia's invasion of Ukraine through her work as well as various fundraising initiatives and advocacy efforts. Makuch was named one of 50 Canadian Fellows of Ukraine by the UDonation International NGO, her story was published in Alberta Views Magazine and her theatre work has been referenced in the House of Commons.



Slinko, a Ukrainian-born artist living in the United States, spent the Winter 2024 term as MacEwan's first Gene Zwozdesky Artist in Residence.

During her residency in the Department of Studio Arts, she worked on a project titled "Motherless Nation," contributed to a MacEwan [research project entitled "Mothering in Exile."](#) led workshops, hosted lectures and public events and did several studio visits with fourth-year students.

As Slinko was creating her own new work, the university's first class of Bachelor of Fine Art, Studio Arts students were inching toward their final exhibition in the Mitchell Art Gallery. "It was so exciting for me to see how their projects developed and came to full realization. I have to say I was really impressed with their work ethic, their consistency in developing ideas, and their vision of themselves as emerging artists."

Maintaining the connections they've built as a community of learners, says Slinko, is incredibly important.

"Working alongside so many fellow artists who teach as well as continue their own artistic practices has been a remarkable opportunity for appreciating how much goes into culture-making," she says. "From studio visits to lectures to the daily challenges of making work, it really is a collective process. We often need each other to flesh out what can be just an inkling into a coherent idea or brainstorm different ways of making things. In conversations, ideas get articulated, and paths forward emerge."

The Gene Zwozdesky Artist in Residence program is named for the former Edmonton MLA and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, who was also a community organizer, musician and champion for the arts in

Alberta. Zwozdesky was also involved heavily with MacEwan, supporting program development between faculty and students in MacEwan's business, nursing, sociology and music programs and Ukrainian universities. While in office, he also hosted MacEwan's international visitors from Ukraine at the Alberta Legislature and arranged for the establishment of the province's Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations, including the URDC's director as a member.

For more information, please contact archerj24@macewan.ca

Founded in 1971, MacEwan University inspires its students with a powerful combination of academic excellence and personal learning experiences. Offering more than 90 programs including undergraduate degrees, applied degrees, diplomas, certificates, continuing education and corporate training, the university provides a transformative education in a creative, collaborative and supportive learning environment where creativity and innovation thrive. Located in Edmonton, Alberta Canada, MacEwan University offers a unique student experience that opens up diverse pathways for achievement and growth.