

June 19

11:00 - 12:00

MAIN STAGE

OPEN MIC

An Open Space for Stories, Questions and Unfinished Thoughts, led by **Ninutsa Nanitashvili**

Help us turn the festival from something you attend into something you create: pick up the mic to share a story, respond to a session, ask a question, or test an idea. You have 5-15 minutes!

THE SMALL LANGUAGE PROBLEM

The Fragile Art of Being Understood

Tamta Melashvili, Tina Mamulashvili and Iva Pezuashvili in conversation with **Matthew Janney**

What does it mean to write in a language the world rarely reads? For Georgian writers, translation is not a luxury; it is the bridge to international readers, publishers and literary life beyond the country's borders. This conversation explores what gets lost, what gets carried, and who decides which books are allowed to travel.

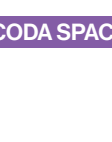


CODA SPACE

ATLAS SPACE

ART SPACE

OPEN SPACE



12:00 - 13:00

MAIN STAGE

DEEP LISTENING

A Live Experiment in Attention

With **Emily Kasriel**, hosted by **Ninutsa Nanitashvili**

Most of us know how to wait for our turn to speak. Fewer of us know how to listen in a way that changes the conversation. In this polarized moment, when disagreement so quickly turns into performance or retreat, journalist and author Emily Kasriel leads a live, interactive session on deep listening: how to stay present when a conversation gets difficult, respond in a different way, and hear more than the answer you expected.



JOURNALISM 2050: THE LIGHTS MUST STAY ON

Georgia's Independent Media and the Fight Not to Disappear

Heather Chaplin and Emily Bell with **Lika Antadze and Nino Bakradze**

A live Tow Center/Columbia Journalism Review podcast recording with two journalists from Snafle Media, the Georgian coalition of independent online outlets formed around a simple promise: the lights must stay on. As pressure on free media intensifies, this is a conversation about what it takes to keep reporting when the walls close in.

In partnership with The Tow Center

ATLAS SPACE

ARENA STAGE

ART SPACE



OPEN SPACE

WHO GETS TO EXPORT A COUNTRY'S IMAGINATION?

Books, Boycotts and the Battle for a Global Voice

Natasha Lomouri, Nato Alhazishvili and Paata Shamugia in conversation with **Patrick Walsh**

When Georgia's Writers' House was taken over by a ruling-party appointee in 2023, many writers, publishers and translators walked away. The boycott cut off the country's main official route to translation funding and international visibility. This conversation asks how Georgian literature finds its way into the world when the institutions meant to support it become part of the problem.

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TRANSLATING IRAN

What Gets Lost when a Country Has to Cross into Another Language?

Sahar Dowlatshahi and Simon Allison

Sahar Dowlatshahi translates Iranian literature into languages that can reach the world, at a moment when Iran's reality is constantly flattened, censored or misunderstood. A conversation with Patrick Cox on why the smallest choices of language can make all the difference.

THE STRINGER

What the Photograph Hides

Bao Nguyen in conversation with **Rena Effendi**

One of the most famous photographs of the twentieth century shaped how the world remembers the Vietnam War. But what if the story behind it was wrong? In *The Stringer*, filmmaker Bao Nguyen follows the contested authorship of the image known as "Napalm Girl" and the Vietnamese photographer whose work helped make history without always entering its official record. In conversation with photographer Rena Effendi, he asks what happens when an image becomes so iconic it obscures the person behind the camera.

ON FREEDOM

With Democracy Under Threat, What Does It Mean to Reimagine Liberty?

Mohamedou Ould Slahi in conversation with **Yoei Albrecht**

Mohamedou Ould Slahi was detained for 14 years without charge. He was tortured under a program personally approved by the US Secretary of Defense. From inside Guantánamo, in a language that was not his own, he wrote the diary that carried his voice into the world before he was free. He is now a Dutch citizen and an internationally acclaimed author. He is still barred from entering the United States. A conversation about survival, freedom, and the life that begins after the story everyone thinks they know.

DON'T JUST TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED

Masterclass on How to Make People Care About a Story

With **Joshi Herrmann**, facilitator **Irina Matchavariani**

Most stories fail not because they lack facts, but because nobody has been given a reason to care. Joshi Herrmann has built Mill Media around journalism people actually want to read. With Irina Matchavariani, he takes apart the difference between information and story — and offers practical lessons on beginnings, scenes, characters, tension and the details that make readers keep going.



AFTER ORBÁN

How Change Becomes Possible

Zsuzsanna Lippai in conversation with **Hans Gutbrod**

Hungary spent years as a warning: captured media, weakened institutions, demonized civil society, politics built on fear. Then something shifted. Zsuzsanna Lippai, who has worked across media, philanthropy and human rights, joins Hans Gutbrod to ask how civic life survives long periods of pressure — and how change becomes possible when a system looks immovable.

THE CASE FOR NOT KNOWING

On Confusion, Curiosity, and the Power of Not Settling

Geoff Dyer in conversation with **Matthew Janney**

Not everything that matters can be explained, and not everything that can be explained matters. We live in a moment that rewards clarity, certainty and expertise. But some of the most interesting ideas begin in confusion, in the instinct to follow a thought without knowing where it leads. Moving between writing, memory, obsession, and the strange logic of ideas that refuse to settle, this is a conversation about thinking as a process rather than a product, and why, in a world that demands answers, there is still power in staying with the question.

THE MELODY OF THINGS

On Reclaiming What We Leave Behind

Nadia Beard in conversation with **Razia Iqbal**

Most of us can name the moment we stopped: the instrument put down, the thing we loved before life told us to be serious. In *The Melody of Things*, Nadia Beard returns to the piano after years away — not as a professional, but as an amateur in the original sense: someone who does it for love. In conversation with Razia Iqbal, she talks about time, practice, beginning again, and whether it is ever too late to go looking for the parts of ourselves we left behind.

14:00 - 15:00 - LUNCH BREAK

15:00 - 16:00

MAIN STAGE



PHILOSOPHERS AT WAR

Thinking Under Fire

Volodymyr Yermolenko and Vakhtang Kebuladze in conversation with **Matthew Pye**

What is philosophy for when missiles are falling, friends are dying, and the future of your country is being decided by force? Ukrainian philosophers Volodymyr Yermolenko and Vakhtang Kebuladze have spent the war not retreating from the world, but moving closer to its most dangerous edges: lecturing near the front line, arguing with history, playing music, and trying to keep language alive in a time of violence. This is a conversation about thinking as an act of resistance: what war does to ideas, what ideas can still do in war, and why the life of the mind is not a luxury when everything else is under attack.

MAKING THE UNBEARABLE LEGIBLE

A workshop on data, design, and reaching the unconvinced

Inna Gadzynska, Nino Macharashvili, Lasha Kveseladze and Diana Deliuman

Some stories are too vast, too painful, or too politically contested for conventional reporting to carry. In this workshop, journalists and data visualisation specialists from Texty and ForSet present the tools and methods they used to make the stories, like that of Ukraine's abducted children, impossible to ignore, not for audiences already paying attention, but for those who weren't, or didn't want to be. A practical session on how design, data and AI tools can make complex, sensitive material travel across indifference.

Powered by Lviv Media Forum

BLINDSPOTS

Missing Half of the Story

Eliza Anyangwe in conversation with **Luba Kassova**

Women's lives are not a niche subject. They are where power shows itself first. So why does journalism still turn women into victims, symbols, exceptions or afterthoughts? Eliza Anyangwe and Luba Kassova ask what the news still fails to see — and what would change if women's lives were treated as central to the story of power.

Powered by UN Women and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

AFTER MADURO

Venezuela and What Comes Next

Leopoldo López in conversation with **Jon Lee Anderson**

For years, Leopoldo López has lived inside Venezuela's unfinished struggle: as opposition leader, political prisoner, exile and one of the country's most visible voices for democratic transition. In this conversation, New Yorker writer Jon Lee Anderson, who just returned from a reporting trip to Venezuela, interviews López about what comes after Maduro — not only the fall of a man, but the harder question of how a country rebuilds after fear, corruption, oil politics, foreign influence and years of broken trust.



THE WORLD INSIDE US

A workshop on how to make sense of ourselves in uncertain times

With **Tara McDonald**, facilitator **Irina Matchavariani**

Before we have a thought, we have a sensation. Before we tell ourselves a story, the body has already decided whether it feels safe or not. Tara McDonald works with children, parents and adults whose earliest experiences often live beyond language — in the nervous system, in the body, in reactions that can feel inexplicable until we learn how to read them. In this practical workshop, she offers a way to understand our own cues of safety and threat, and to see our responses less as failures than as forms of protection.

THE GIFT

Gratitude, Adversity, and the Edge of Astonishment

Brad Barton in conversation with **Jake Friedman**

What happens when magic stops being about deception and starts being about truth? Producer Jake Friedman and mentalist Brad Barton have both worked at the edge of what the form can carry: the opportunity within grief, the beauty inside broken things, plus the unusual relationship between a magician and their audience. A conversation about what lives on the other side of the illusion.

THE CONVERSATIONS WE CAN'T HAVE

The Middle East and the Politics of Refusal

Rachel Shabi in conversation with **Ghaith Abdul-Ahad**

Some arguments have become impossible to have. The words are familiar, the positions fixed, the outcome predetermined. Rachel Shabi has spent years writing about antisemitism, racism, Israel and Palestine inside debates designed to produce heat, not understanding. In conversation with Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, she asks what happens when societies lose the ability to think together — and whether stories can reopen doors that politics has slammed shut.

THE DUMPSTERPOOL THEORY OF CHANGE

How Strange Places Become Institutions

David Belt in conversation with **Nic Dawes**

Before NewLab, there were swimming pools made out of dumpsters, a country club in a junkyard, and the discovery that cities are hungry for places that do not quite fit anywhere else. David Belt has made a career out of seeing possibilities where other people see waste. In conversation with Nic Dawes, he explores how real innovation begins before there is permission, why cities need places that are neither school, office, museum nor startup — and how the best institutions answer a need people cannot yet name.

KIT CULTURE

Football Kits, Fashion and What's Lost in Between

Jorg Skorobogatov and Mari Sukhishvili

From the scandalous Eintracht Braunschweig 1973 shirt, to the iconic kits of the 1990s, football jerseys used to belong to fans as symbols of loyalty — now they are everywhere. What happens when clothing brands borrow credibility from football and what does football receive in exchange? [This session includes an opportunity to take pictures in your favorite team's kit, styled by a professional art director.]

Powered by betsson.sport

FIND YOUR VOICE

A Workshop on Speaking Clearly, with Laurence Lee

Some people are taught early how to sound confident. Others are taught to stay quiet. Former foreign correspondent Laurence Lee has spent his career telling stories under pressure, and now works with young people learning how to make themselves heard. A practical workshop on voice, presence, confidence and the small techniques that help people speak clearly when the room, the camera or the stakes feel too big.

AFTER DANGER

What the Body Learns When Safety Disappears

Arwa Damon in conversation with **Simon Schellevis**

A threat can pass long before the body believes it is over. Arwa Damon has spent her life close to war, first as a journalist and then as a humanitarian working with children. Simon Schellevis works with the body as a place where memory, fear and protection are stored. Together they explore what people carry after danger — and what it takes to teach the body that the threat has passed.

FILM SCREENING: LOVE+WAR

149 photojournalists. 29 countries. One war that the world mustn't look away from. FotoEvidence — the publishing house dedicated to documentary photography focused on human rights and social justice — has spent a decade building an archive of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This short documentary draws on that archive, weaving together the images and first-hand testimonies of the photographers who risked everything to bear witness: to the destruction, but also to the strength and humanity that survives inside it. A film about what photojournalism is for, and why the people who do it keep going back.

BREAKING THE NDA

Harvey Weinstein, Silence, and the Law That Followed

Zelda Perkins in conversation with **Nadia Beard**

Harvey Weinstein's former assistant signed a non-disclosure agreement in 1998. Breaking it cost her everything — her career, her relationships, years of her life. What she built from the wreckage changed the law in three countries. Nadia Beard sits down with the woman who exposed the system that enables those in power to buy impunity.

Powered by UN Women and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

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NO MORE MUSES

The Right to Be Difficult

Nana Darkoa Sekyimah, Tamriko Kordzaia, Rosmery De la Cruz Suazo, Rachel Corp in conversation with **Matthew Pye**

Culture loves women as inspiration, image, witness, victim, beauty, memory. It is less comfortable with women as authors of the story, makers of the room, owners of the room. A conversation about women who refuse the decorative role and what happens when they stop being material for someone else's genius.

Powered by UN Women and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

THE POLITICS OF CARE

What Public Health Reveals About Power

Allison Ekberg Dvaladze and Alexander Kvitashvili in conversation with **Shelley Thakral**

Every country tells a story through the health of its people: who is protected, who is ignored, who profits, who waits, who leaves, who dies early. Allison Ekberg Dvaladze has spent much of her career working on the systems that shape everyday survival. Alexander Kvitashvili has tried to reform health care from inside the government in Georgia, Ukraine and now Albania. Together with Shelley Thakral, they ask what it takes to make a country healthier — and why health is never only about medicine.

MAKING MEMORY PHYSICAL

Design, Heritage, and the Stories Buildings Carry

Agata Kurzela in conversation with **Kirsten Dawes**

Every space tells people how to behave, what to notice, what to remember and what to forget. Agata Kurzela works between architecture, interiors, craft and cultural memory: designing places where heritage is not simply displayed but translated into material, movement and atmosphere. Drawing on her recent work at the Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi, she explores what it takes to turn history into a lived experience — and why the smallest details of a room can carry the largest stories.

WRITING BEYOND THE GAME

A Workshop with **Marcela Mora y Araujo** on how to use sport to tell bigger stories, led by **Irina Matchavariani**

Sport is never just sport. A match can reveal class, power, gender, money, nationalism, grief, migration, beauty, corruption, faith — almost anything, if you know how to lose. Marcela Mora y Araujo has spent her career writing about football as a way into politics, culture and human drama. In this workshop, she and Irina Matchavariani explore how to take a subject that seems narrow, niche or "soft" and use it to tell a much larger story.

18:00 - 20:00

MAIN STAGE

ZEG OPENING NIGHT: WHAT'S THE STORY?

Coda Live at ZEG 2026

With **Leopoldo Lopez, Aida Delpuech, Irma Dimitradze, Martin G. Reynolds, Rosmery De la Cruz Suazo, and Shahmir Sanani**.

Music by **Nino Jvania, Misha Mdinaradze and Oliver Poole**.

ZEG 2026 begins with a question: what's the story? The answer unfolds through an immersive evening of live storytelling and music, with six stories of long-lost family, opera sung across a divided city, desire discovered later in life, corruption exposed from the inside, survival after solitary confinement, and the search for light as darkness closes in.