# ENG

## PAVLO KOVACH

*Return of Lost Time*, 2020

painting and sculpture installation

natural pigments and paint medium, canvas, polystyrene insulation foam

Despite the 2019 renovation of the Intoursit Hotel in Khabarovsk, several floors of the southwestern wing were left in their original state, almost like an intentional glitch in the four star gloss. When asked about this decision, a hotel spokesperson replied “all hotels have memories, some are harder to get rid of than others.” In one such room (offered as “vintage experience” on the hotel’s website), Pavlo Kovach’s installation *Return of Lost Time* forgets almost nothing of an almost imagined past. In a fitting mutation of memory, the title stumbles close enough to that of Proust’s magnum opus to invite our speculation about what precisely has returned and how. Has the exhibition itself prompted the artist’s flood of involuntary memories? Or has the always evocative hollow romance of a distant hotel invited back the sensual shadows of the past?

What returns to us is expansive and flattened all at once. Kovach’s sedate and textural paintings meditate along surfaces whose vivid verticals and horizontals enfold time and memory. The palette of hand mixed natural pigments itself brushes up against the walls of Uzhhorod’s Greek Catholic cathedral, where the artist once worked as a restorer. Decades away but side by side, icy blue edges of razor-cut insulation materially and formally quote cold memories of the Arctic, where Kovach spent his military service in the early 1980s. These features are warmly woven together across a lifetime by the installation’s free associatiative playfulness. But why have these moments in particular returned, and why now? Concentrating too hard, we may never catch the shadows of our past, but absorbed in the artist’s walls on walls, clipped from another time and pasted into a room with a balcony overlooking the Amur River, we feel the flow of a parallel but distant reality. While the memories belong to the artist, perhaps they, like cookie crumbs in a spoonful of tea, contain something to which we too can return.