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# Hair Reveals what Makes us Human. An interview with Sarah Lewis

April 4, 2024

Author Aistė Marija Stankevičiūtė



'Bouffant'. Photo from Sarah Lewis' personal archive.

Sarah Lewis is a London-based filmmaker and interdisciplinary artist with an MA in artists' film and moving image from Goldsmiths College in London. She works in the fields of the moving image, photography and installation, and her work has been presented theatrically, via broadcast, and in art galleries. She is a co-founder of the Ballpark Collective, creating opportunities for moving-image artists. Her work has recently focussed on the representation of female sexuality through trace and effect. She is committed to various long-term film projects that span decades: a process of intimacy that leads to creative outcomes. Her feature-length documentary 'Cuts – No Ifs Or Buts' was invited to Locarno Pro 2023 (Switzerland) where it won the Jannuzzi Smith and Le Film Français awards.

In this interview, we talk to Sarah about her latest exhibition and a moving image work of the same title 'Bouffant' at the InTheCloset space in Vilnius, touching on a 25-year documentary about a local Soho barbershop called Cuts, and the ability of hair' to liberate and imprison.



Photo of Sarah Lewis at 'Cuts' when filming the documentary in the late 90s.

*Aist? Marija Stankevi?i?t?: Sarah, congratulations on 'Bouffant'! On encountering the French allure of its title, I envisioned something grandiose, voluminous and graceful. But what unfolded before me was a contradiction: pictures of messy hair, sculpted by the burst of desire, shone on a screen. Could you illuminate us on the enigmatic word bouffant? How did it get entangled with the hair of your work?*

Sarah Lewis: The 'Bouffant' hairstyle is created by hair being backcombed on the top of the head to form a pile of tangled, loosely knotted hair. Unteased hair from the front of the head is then lightly combed over to give a 'smooth, sleek look'. Usually, hairspray is applied to stiffen the hairdo and '**hold it in place**'.

In this work the idea of **bouffant** is a metaphor for the attempt to control the expression of erotic energy in a patriarchal society. What is underneath, messy and untamed is essential but obscured in the service of a stylised and presentable façade. The moving image work parodies the incessant swiping in the pursuit of finding the perfect persona to fulfil one's desire, and yet this work consistently brings us back to what is underneath.

The experience of the erotic in my own life forced an impulse to record a trace. This felt urgent: a reminder of who I am, while simultaneously living in a culture that often 'equates pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual' (to quote Audre Lorde). The intimacy of each encounter was captured by the image being 'snapped' by 'the other' on an iPhone.

I've talked about the underlying ideas behind the piece, but the idea for the work came to me when I had an intense experience of the erotic with my partner at the time: this experience made me realise the extent to which my own sexuality up until that point had been informed and distorted by the culture I had grown up with. **Bouffant** seems to trigger a recognition in women who see the piece, a secret knowing that subverts the culturally imposed dictates of the male gaze ... and I love that because the idea of who is and who is not a 'fuckable woman' seems to be determined by these

imposed tropes, and results in a reductive idea of female sexuality.



'Nesting'. Photo from Sarah Lewis' personal archive.

*AMS: Hair holds inexhaustible traces of history, acting as a silent witness to the evolution of cultures and societies across time. It wields significant political power, often becoming a battleground for social norms, activism and rebellion. But it also curls with expressions of love and longing. If we look back to the Victorian era, for example, the erotic power of hair extended to the practice of exchanging locks of hair as tokens of affection, embodying intimate connections between lovers and friends through tangible traces of their being. And then there is another section of stories about mice living in tall and powdered 18th-century hairstyles, you scratch your scalp with a stick, and so on ... This visual has stayed with me since history classes when I was thirteen years old. Anyway, it would be interesting to know how your relationship with hair started. You also delve into the roots of it with other means of expression, not only visual art, is that right?*

SL: Hair has been an ongoing preoccupation for me since I was a little girl watching how my mother's identity was tied in with her 'blonde look'. Over the years, I have also defined my identity by how I chose to wear my hair. Hair is tribal, it is expressive, and it creates community. As an artist, it has also been an ongoing preoccupation. I have worked with hair sculpturally and through my film practice. Over twenty-five years ago, I began making a documentary in a local Soho barbershop called Cuts. It was meant to be a 'year in the life', and I am only now completing the film. I was embedded in the Cuts community, who have built their lives around the ritual of cutting hair. The film is ostensibly about hair, but reveals many of the concerns that make us human. My work comes from a place of not knowing, a process that uncovers hidden meanings within my own psyche.

After many years of sporting micro bangs, I recently chose to shave off my shoulder-length hair. I remember waking the night before, terrified that I would look 'abject'. This was the message that I had internalised about hair and female identity. What was really at play was my place in the world. I had defined myself by looking a certain way, and this in turn made others feel safe. What I was

scared of was the loss of connection that occurs when someone no longer recognises the person they need you to be, the person they thought you were. It was a symbolic death, but it felt like a real one. What actually transpired felt like a new lease on life, a change at a foundational level, and with it, a new way of engaging with the world. The solidarity I felt with women was far greater than I'd experienced: women smiling at me on the street as if to say 'good for you', because we all intuitively understand that hair is power but it is also a prison.



Still frame from 'Cuts- No Ifs Or Buts'

*AMS: Have you ever thought about being involved in the haircutting business yourself? And returning to the film, could you tell us more about the process? Is it made of found footage, or did you film? With twenty-five years of research, I'm sure there is a lot of material.*

No. There is a theme of hair running through my work, but hairdressing and hairstyles don't really interest me. I was drawn to making the film about Cuts because I wanted to document the community: it was evident that it was a very special cultural hub that has existed in London since the early 1980s. What was originally meant to be a year in the life became a twenty-five-year-long project. I began filming on 16mm film in a pre-digital age with no concept of what was to come. As the process has progressed, the media used has represented the different times: filming on analogue through to iPhones.

My more personal work with hair has a different focus. Hair has been a symbol to gain access to certain preoccupations in my life that are too difficult to encounter directly: the process helps me work through ideas around female sexuality, the performative nature of gender, and resulting trauma.

*AMS: Do you intend to work with the hair theme further? What else is on your horizon?*

My work is not so strategic, ideas seem to come in whispers, and I'm open to the direction it takes. I'm currently working on a piece about care 'giving' and care 'taking', concerning ideas around mothers who use their child's body to help alleviate their own guilt. I'm not committed to hair; whatever medium works for the idea, whether that be film, photography, performance or sculpture.

At the moment I'm in the final process of finishing my 'Cuts – No Ifs Or Buts' documentary! I have another film that I have been collecting footage for over a fifteen-year period based on the life of a South Sudanese child soldier David Nyuol Vincent and the French filmmaker Patrice Barrat: that is another long term project that I am looking to complete next.

# Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging Oneself

April 5, 2024

Author Laura De Jaeger



Angela Maasalu, Happy House, rüki galerii, Viljandi. Photo by rüki galerii

Towards the end of an early Zoom call with my friend Amit, I took another look at a picture she had sent me on Whatsapp. It's an image of the artist with her parents in a car. She's in the front with her father, while her mother leans forward, holding the edge of the seat in order to be included in the conversation. Amit tells me that they're discussing the contemporary format of a centuries-old religious holiday, and its potential significance in the setting of a small family. The content is new to me, but the scene is familiar. We might have grown up about ten countries apart, but the portrait immediately throws me into the back seat of our family's Volkswagen Passat. It's a place where we'd find the courage to ask something, get stuck in arguments, and run out of things to talk about. While I was walking home from the nearest tram stop a few weeks ago, through wind and rain, I longed once more for that same car to come and pick me up. I felt like a kid: tired and drained. So, so hungry. It seems as if it took me until then to fully emotionally grasp the conditions that small place had accumulated over the past decades. The bottomless availability my family would provide through it. The way the black ribbed fabric would slightly burn my thighs on a hot summer's day, the nauseating smell of Dad's cleaning products being spread by the ventilator, and the limited amount of leg space which actually kind of felt like being tucked in.



Angela Maasalu, Happy House, rüki galerii, Viljandi. Photo by rüki galerii





Angela Maasalu, Happy House, rüki galerii, Viljandi. Photo by rüki galerii

These things take time. In the Rüki Gallery, Angela Maasalu spent three weeks reflecting about a sense of place. The situation is slightly different to the one above. Whereas I recollect a former home space from abroad, the Estonian artist revisits the process of painting in her home country. To be honest, it can feel like a deep dive, a crash course, those one-month residencies with a focus on production. But when it's well set, in the context of returning home, the strict framework might come in handy. It allows you to dwell, but not marinate until the point of no return. To cast a spell, you need a certain rhythm. You follow the rhyme. It doesn't take years to summon something. The necessary distance she obtained over the past years can furthermore allow the small obsessions to fade and other details to blossom.

The exhibition invites me in with a request to take off my shoes. A few seats are ready for me, as well as a coat rack. The sun is shining, and I'm in a good mood. I don't mind the effort. (It might also be the Viljandi atmosphere.) The space is a patchwork of carpets. Each of them is the same size, and follows a similar pattern. They are the sort of carpets you can find in every other house in Estonia, and which circulate at large in second-hand shops and outlet stores. In the gallery space, they have differing colour schemes, but the identical ones are often placed consecutively, creating micro-pathways that lead somewhere, and then again nowhere, really. Some carry stains of their past use, but generally they're in quite good shape. Hence the shoe ritual.

Through the grapevine, I hear that the initial intention of Maasalu is to cover up the bright blue floor that characterizes the gallery space. At first hand, such an act makes me shiver. Why deny the space its personality? With a certain empathy towards (exhibition) spaces, I wonder if one should even consider working together if they aim to hide their partner. But this opinion of mine has been proven

wrong in the past. A few years ago, Mihkel Maripuu covered the nostalgic, funky tiled floor in the Draakoni gallery for his solo exhibition 'Fatamorgana'. The result was a hermetic non-place that sharply highlighted his oeuvre. Not because it became the ultimate white cube, but through its materiality, the gloss, and reflections.



Angela Maasalu, Happy House, rüki galerii, Viljandi. Photo by rüki galerii

Maasalu turns towards another materiality. It is not the first time the artist is using domestic 'ready-mades' as a way to dialogue with the exhibition space. Her recent solo exhibition 'A Fool with a Heart of Glass' played with the central hall of Tartu Art House by means of translucent curtains. This spatial decision of adding soft material continues at Rüki. Aside from the universal home rituals the carpets call for, they generate a significant dialogue with the other characteristics of the space, the medium, and the theme of the show. The carpet's ribbed structure connects the soles of my feet with the walls of log houses, which contain similar waves (on a different scale). It feels incredibly intimate to actively sense material under your toes while looking at the many layers of a painting. On the canvas, another process of layering takes place, although with a little more leeway. Furthermore, the act of covering is inherent to making a home. After all, with our abundance of tastes, preferences and quirks, we continuously negotiate with our environment. Covering up is one of the tactics of doing so. I have the small curtains in mind that are hung in front of open shelf systems, or frames that cover imperfections of the walls. It's a process of compromise really, which makes a *Happy House*.

People who are not yet at ease taking off their shoes can stick around the edge of the floor which remains blue. They keep their distance. I don't encounter these hesitant visitors. It is the gallerist that informs me about them. I do find their state of mind between the figures in Maasalu's paintings. A number of works depict subjects that are strongly engaged with their borders: they seem worried or preoccupied to me, as if the first chance they'd get would be used to escape the frame. A duo deals with boundaries through bending, stretching, and other acrobatics. A gigantic mouth opens up around them. Are they trying to wiggle through a system such as language? Another figure stares its way through architectural obstacles. While two people are reflecting with the help of a mirror, another one simply stares upwards.



Angela Maasalu, Happy House, rüki galerii, Viljandi. Photo by rüki galerii



Angela Maasalu, Happy House, rüki galerii, Viljandi.  
Photo by rüki galerii

Those same paper works bring me back to Tartu Art House. Maasalu's paintings were gently attached on the curtain's surface. I absolutely adored the lightness, the texture, especially with the paper works which remained unframed. It was kind to the figures, gently enlarging their space, rather than pushing them into a designated structure. That hall furthermore thrives on natural light, which contrasts with the spotlights in Viljandi. On the plaster wall in Rüki, they create cloud-like shapes above the work. The characteristic log walls play to the advantage of the works on the other side of the gallery. The light works differently there. I wonder how an unframed paper works would relate to the wood. Maybe there was no need for spotlights, but rather an in-house atmosphere?

Maasalu's paintings have a strong allegorical tendency. Whereas the carpets are an act of covering up, the artist employs fictionality and fairytale-like imagery in order to reveal things which are tucked away. The *Umwelt* contains plentiful contrasting experiences which linger. The publication *Between the Fiction and Me* divides *Umwelten* into various interrelated worlds. References to the French author George Perec arranging his desk function as an introduction to the *Wohnwelt*. Our immediate surroundings are dealt with through these arrangement-habits in all kinds of contexts really. From the carpeted gallery space, I walk to Viljandi's Jaani Kirik, where I spot houseplants carefully placed in alcoves, and even a fish tank. The latter fills the supposedly silent hall with the buzzing of what must be the water filter.

That same *Wohnwelt* can also mean a natural habitat. Maasalu's paintings rely strongly on patterns of nature. A cat-like creature finds itself in a cavity of icy walls, reflecting, dripping. They look trapped on a structure shaped by natural processes of moisture. Another figure finds themselves in a flesh-like environment, where the richness is concentrated in an object she is sitting on, formed from oyster or pearl-like material, with colours ranging to those of an exotic jellyfish. In the framework of *Umwelt*, these environments are perceived, interpreted, and reacted to. One creature appears to be hostile, a natural response to feeling trapped, while others undertake the desperate deed of opening

themselves up physically.

At times, Maasalu's environments are shaded and vague, which makes me wonder if it isn't the inner worlds (*Innerwelten*) that really interest the painter. Surroundings become a medium to turn inwards. These tactics are inscribed in the history of painting through the Impressionists. Whereas in the two large-scale paintings, the subjects look me straight in the eye, the smaller ones retract from the viewer. They turn away, towards themselves. One can try to mask oneself in order to regain control. Others hide behind the mechanisms of language, or small quotidian rituals. It seems that Maasalu manages to capture that precise moment when all around simply becomes too much. A state of despair, in which decision-making or other rational mechanisms fall short, and the body has an adrenaline response. I don't witness the consequences at large, but that intimate instantaneous moment, whether it is opening up guts or drifting off. It's mostly the raw honesty of it all, rooted in between our body and mind. That side of ourselves we only ever allow to be visible when at home.



Angela Maasalu, *Happy House*, rüki galerii, Viljandi. Photo by rüki galerii

Angela Maasalu

*Happy House*

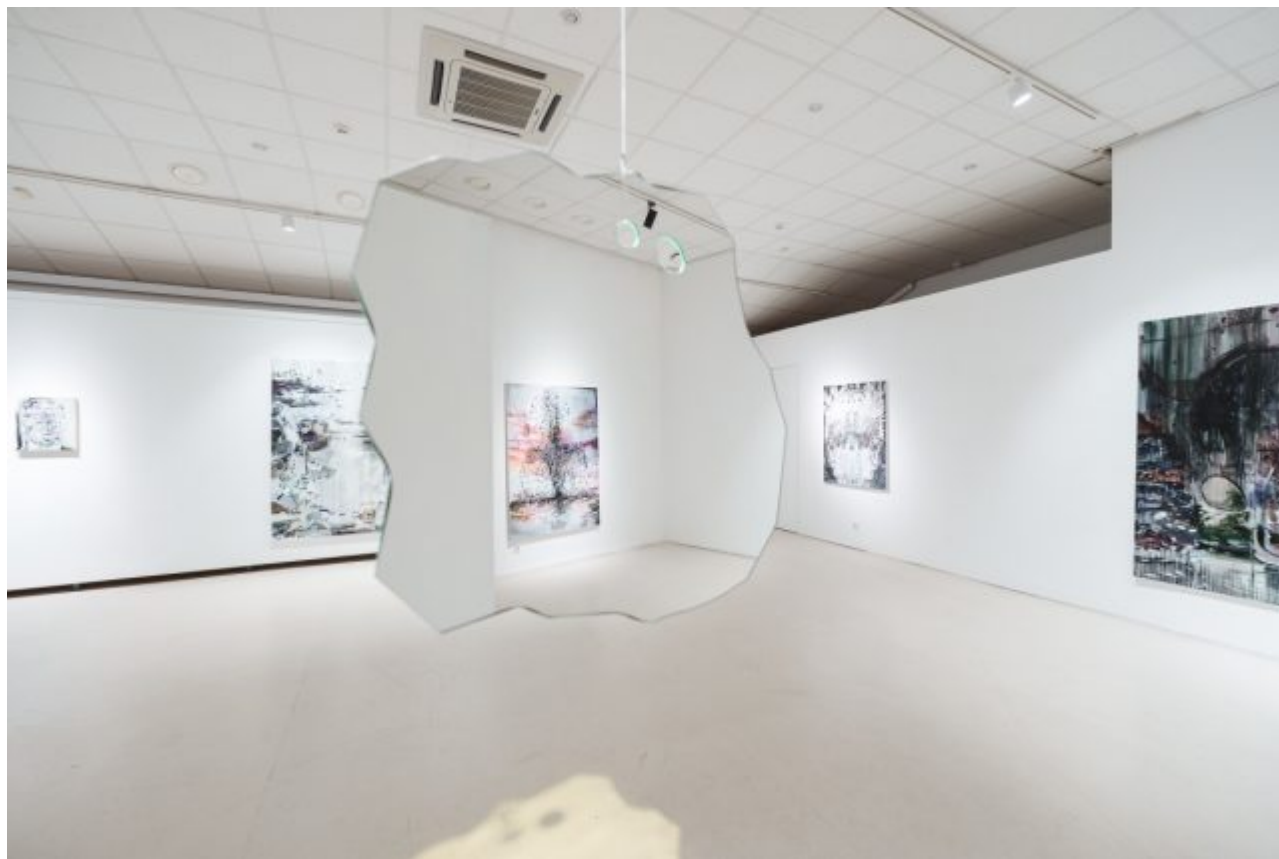
8 March to 20 April, 2024

rüki galerii, Viljandi

# Out of My Depth: Navigating a Liquid World

April 22, 2024

Author Rosana Lukauskaitė



The double-sided mirror, centrally suspended in the exhibition space, allows you to see either the faces of your fellow visitors or your own reflection. Which experience is more pleasurable? It offers opportunities for cheeky observations. For a moment, your own face seems to merge with someone else's body, helping you realise that others share the same experience. When you visit the exhibition alone, the true purpose of the mirror becomes clear: it allows you to view paintings hung opposite each other simultaneously, enabling you to fully experience the artist Kristina Ališauskaitė-Volungevičė's concept of a fluid reality. Her solo exhibition 'The Water Face' is at the KCCC Exhibition Hall until 28 April.

The mirror here also serves as a metaphorical device that bridges the realms of the tangible and the surreal, the seen and the unseen. This dichotomous mirror, with one side reflecting the conventional spectrum of light, and the other bathed in a luminous neon green, invites the viewer into a dual narrative of reality and altered perception. The traditional mirror presents a direct, unaltered view of reality, capturing moments like a fountain's flow, while the neon green mirror offers a transformative, otherworldly perspective, suggesting an alternate dimension full of vitality and continuous change.



Just as water flows, adapts to its container and changes states, painting too is a medium of transformation. The brushstrokes, whether they depict the literal flow of a fountain or the abstract essence of movement, embody this change. Paintings, like water, can be gentle or forceful, clear or opaque, encapsulating the dynamic nature of both the subject matter and the medium. Water

reflects the world around it, but also distorts, enhancing or diminishing realities based on the viewer's perspective. Similarly, paintings offer reflections of reality, sometimes direct and at other times abstract, allowing for deeper introspection. The act of painting can refract and reflect cultural, personal and universal truths, much like water reveals and conceals the depths beneath its surface.

No wonder that the mythologies of many ancient cultures viewed water as a gateway to another world. Throughout history, rivers, lakes and oceans have been revered as sacred conduits to realms beyond our own, often depicted as portals where the veil between the earthly and the divine is thinnest. This mystical attribute of water has inspired countless legends and rituals, suggesting a deep-seated belief in its power to connect us to the mysterious and the supernatural, though not always in the manner one might hope (cue the ominous nod to the occasional, unfortunate act of drowning, ahem).

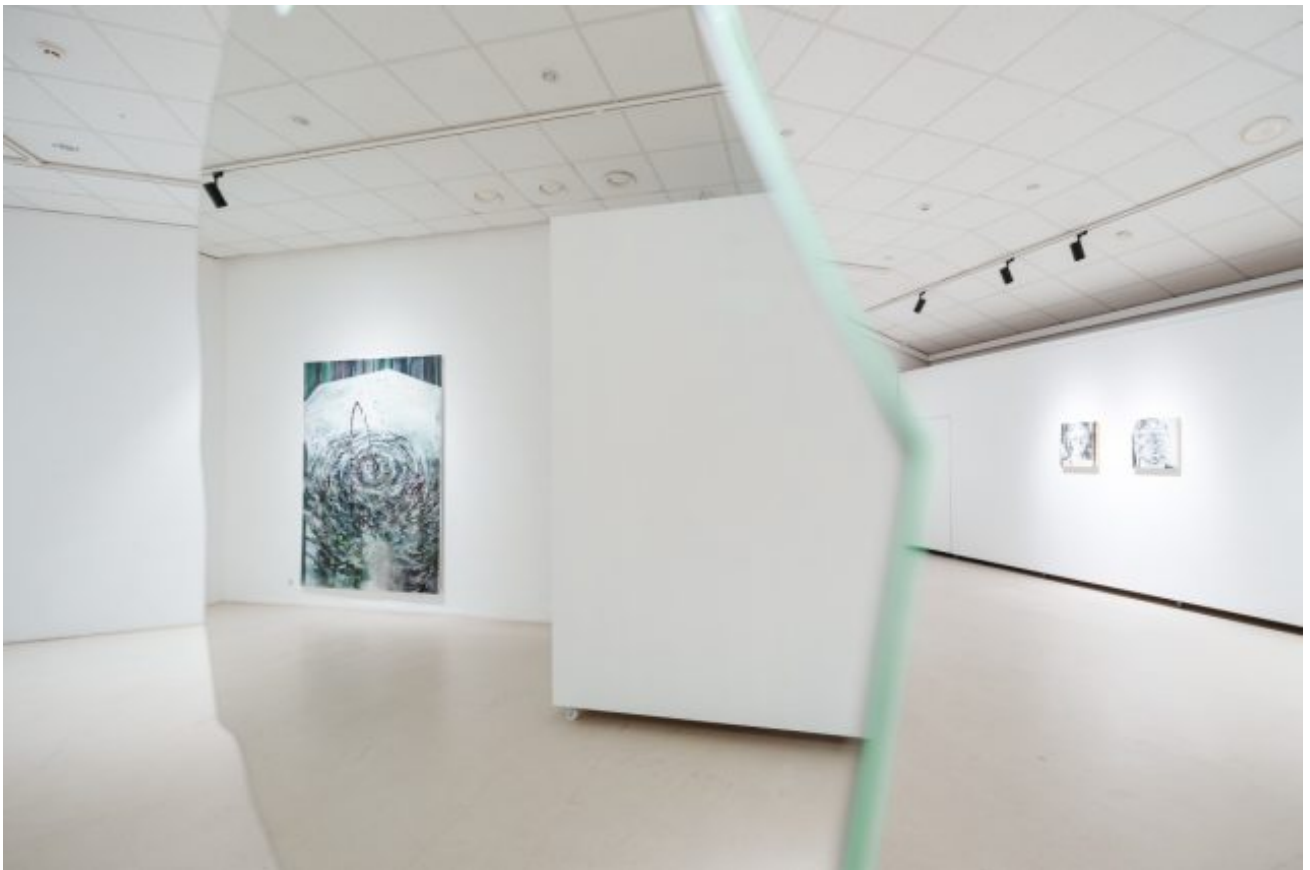
In the painting *Oil Is Water*, water is transformed into a strikingly different substance. A geyser, presumably of petroleum, bursts forth like a fountain, challenging our traditional perceptions of natural flows and the elements. This visual metaphor powerfully juxtaposes the life-giving nature of water with the environmentally hazardous qualities of oil, provoking a reflection on the impact of human activity on the natural world. Similarly distressing, PFAS chemicals, known as 'forever chemicals', persist for thousands of years and have been accumulating in the environment, contaminating soil and water. Recent studies, including those from Stockholm University, reveal that PFAS levels in rainwater exceed safe limits, with these chemicals now pervasive in global water sources, and even found in human blood. The poisons within us will outlive us.

In the paintings by Kristina Ališauskaitė-Volungevičė, faces appear as though they are negatives, reflections in water, with features obscured and pixelated as if distorted by digital noise. These portraits, resembling frozen holograms, evoke a sense of being suspended within themselves, capturing a contemporary feeling of alienation and introspection. Perhaps this is a metaphor for our own existence, where, like these images, we too are only partially visible, with much of our essence hidden beneath the surface, visible only in fragments.

The essence of the exhibition 'The Water Face' eludes being easily grasped; it slips through your fingers like a slippery water creature, leaving you thirsty for more, eager to dive deeper into its enigmatic depths. You take away from it what you've caught like a fisherman without a net, a glimpse of something elusive and captivating.

Photography: Gediminas Sass

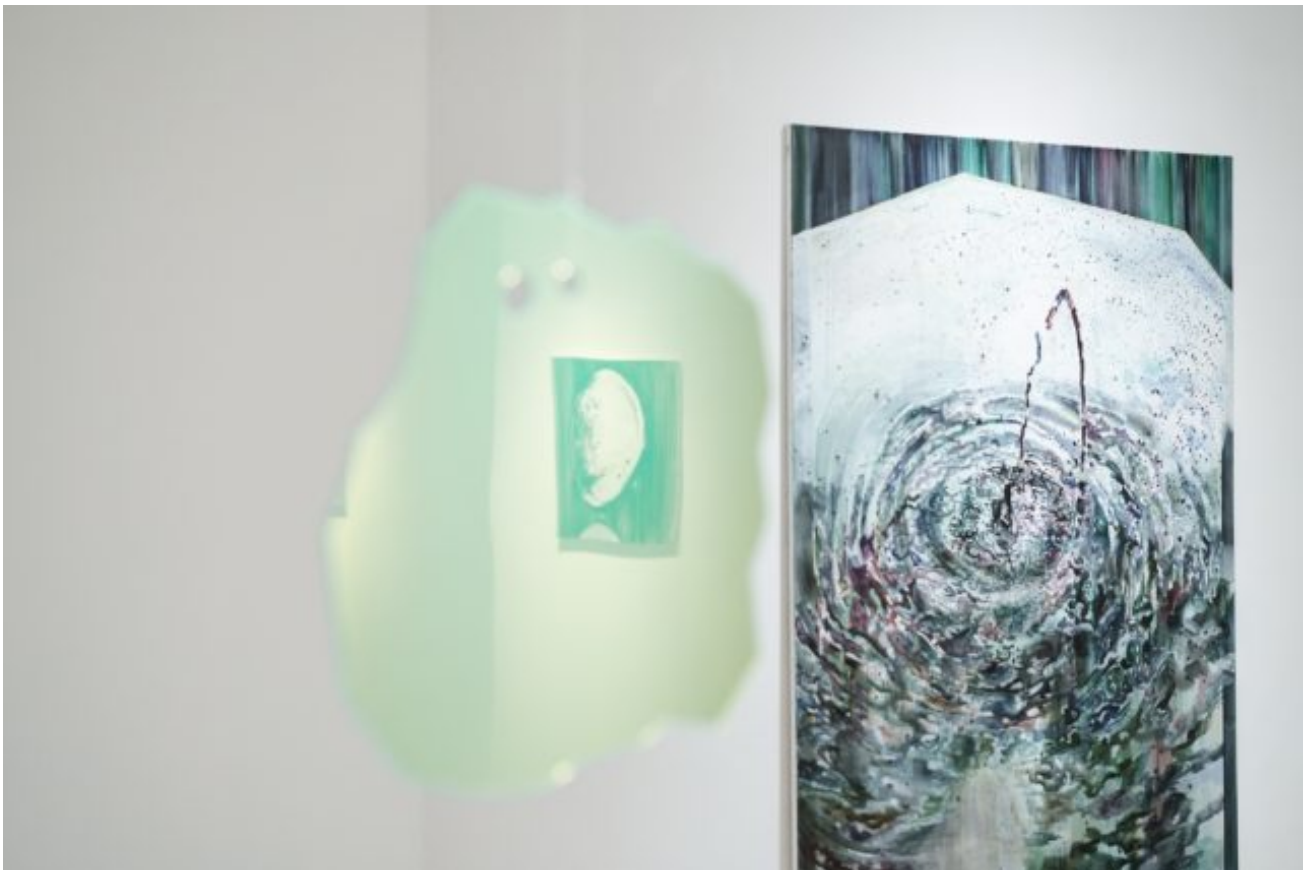
















KRISTINA ALIŠAUSKAITĖ-VOLUNGEVIČĖ

Vandens veidas / The Water Face





# The Woman Monster. A conversation with the artist Sabīne Vernere

April 29, 2024

Author Šelda Puķīte



Sabīne Vernere at her studio, 2024. Photo: Filips Smits.

The Latvian artist Sabīne Vernere is known for her expressive Indian ink paintings depicting anthropomorphic, gender-fluid beings. Opting for a limited, often monochromatic palette of colours, she diffuses her images on an abstracted plane, where they float in a constant state of flux. There is a strong presence of beauty, sensuality and emotion in her work, but also disturbance and violence, a juxtaposition that correlates with the complexities of the dynamics between humans and nature. Vernere exercises it through anthropomorphic bodies that can be perceived as sensual beings experiencing a metamorphosis. Just as in some ancient story, they transform from human bodies into stems with blossoms, the bark of a tree, and buds ready to unfold. Mixing ideas that could be attributed to ecofeminism and body identity, she explores her relationships with nature and landscape, dives deep into new readings of ancient myths, and revisits the ghosts of the Soviet past through stigmas attached to women's sexuality.

The most recognisable and most frequently encountered form in Vernere's work is the vulva, which represents the interplay between feminine power and nature, and serves as an allegory for her emotions. Sometimes these figural forms are joined by miniature landscapes living inside the ink bodies like shadowlike silhouettes or small windows. These and other elements play in her work as layers or portals, showing the complexities of one's emotional experience. Landscape is a way to investigate and contemplate the world she inhabits, a way of visualising an entangled state of existence. The works can be viewed as realistic depictions of natural forms, and simultaneously perceived as abstractions that transport the viewer's perception to a more imaginative place.

Vernere's works have a very defined plastic quality, which she has recently been exercising off the plane by using various materials and creating installations in space. She also uses discarded materials, working with leftovers from marble blocks. It is considered a valuable and popular material for creating luxurious walls and floors in bathrooms and islands in kitchens. Left-over or defective parts are discarded like road rock. The artist uses this once luxurious, now unwanted, material, and joins it with her ink bodies. Traces of life experiences are melted together in one entangled piece, embracing it with all its flaws and vulnerabilities.

Vernere is no newcomer to the Latvian art scene. However, her work of the past few years has put her on the map of Latvian art as an artist with a promising future. She is actively exhibiting her work in solo and group shows, most recently in 'Don't Cry! Feminist Perspectives in Latvian Art: 1965–2023' (2023) and 'In the Name of Desire' (2024) at the Latvian National Museum of Art. She is studying for a professional doctorate at the Art Academy of Latvia, and runs the Academy's experimental art space Pilot. Reproductions of her work have appeared in various publications. Since spring 2024, Vernere has been represented by the Kogo Gallery in Tartu.



View from group exhibition Triquetra at Kogo Gallery, Tartu, 2023. Photo: Roman-Sten To nissoo.



Sabīne Vernere. BUD. 2023. Indian ink on paper, marble. Courtesy of the artist and Kogo Gallery.

*ŠP: The past year has been an important one for you. You took part in 'Don't Cry! Feminist Perspectives in Latvian Art: 1965–2023' at the Latvian National Museum of Art (LNMA), and you also had the solo exhibition 'Angles Morts' (Blind Spots) at the Gallery of the Artists' Union of Latvia, where your work was displayed side by side with that of several important Latvian artists from the 1970s and 1980s in the Soviet era. You also participated in the Triquetra group exhibition at the Kogo Gallery in Tartu in Estonia. After the exhibition 'Angles Morts' the LNMA decided to acquire two of your works, Medusa(2022) and Tangled Legs (2023). This exhibition was also nominated for the Purv?tis Prize.*

*You have been active on the Latvian art scene for more than ten years, but it seems that the last few years have allowed you to hit the ground running and come out with several persuasive projects, at the same time as increasing your visibility on the local cultural scene. Is this the moment in your creative practice when certain ideas and ways of form making are polished, and you have the opportunity to showcase them publicly in different ways, or is it just a coincidence, and this appreciation has come naturally, like the sweet fruits of long work?*

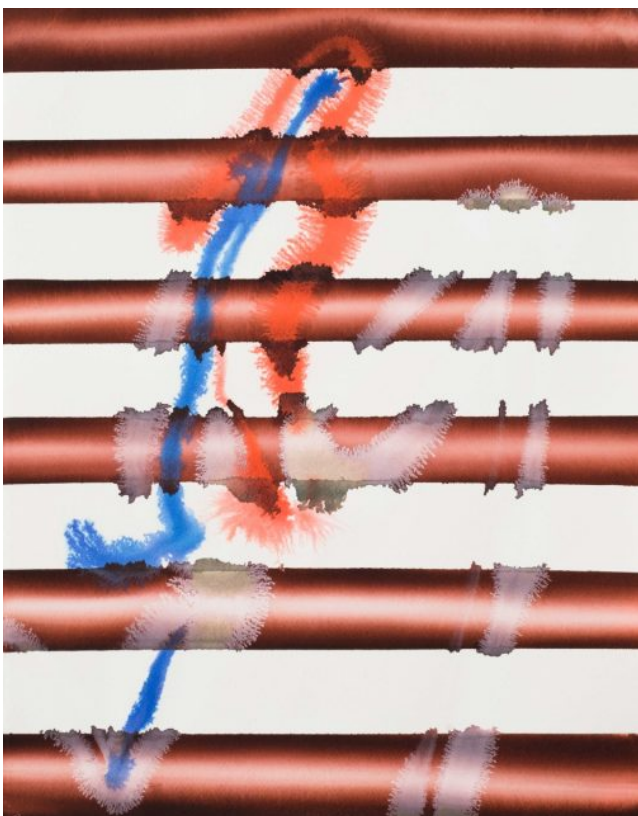
SV: Thank you for the wonderful summary. In the rhythm of everyday life, everything that has happened becomes forgotten, the struggle in front of you is all that matters. During and after my studies, like many young artists, I had to find a way to work. It took me a while to understand how to deal with the world around me in my artistic practice. I started asking different questions, and it seems that in the last few years these questions have started to resonate more with the people around me. Of course, gaining recognition also gives me strength and confidence. An example of this is getting the year-long scholarship [the Latvian State Culture Capital Foundation's Scholarship for promoting creative work].

*ŠP: When did this turning point in your career take place?*

SV: Actually, I can pinpoint it quite precisely. After graduating from the Academy, I had a period of exploration. There was a moment when I thought that maybe I shouldn't do art at all. I never won any prizes or open competitions, there was no evidence I could succeed. I have been given various opportunities, such as residencies and support grants, for which I worked hard and am very grateful. The first turning point happened when I decided that I was going to do this for myself, because it brings me joy. This way I took the pressure off what I was doing. For a very long time, I didn't mix work, where I earned money, with my creative practice. Maybe it was a kind of self-defence mechanism in case it didn't work out, a kind of self-deception. And then there was a second breaking point, in January a year ago, when I made the decision, okay, I want to do this and only this, so that all my energy and focus and mind and my entire being is in it. Shortly afterwards I got the 'big scholarship'. I decided to do a solo show at the Artists' Union of Latvia. I had been thinking about it for a long time, but I was kind of afraid. Obviously, nothing happens if you don't work very hard. When I felt I couldn't do it any more, I pushed myself harder. I persuaded myself to go to the studio the day after the party. I have seen many times in my life that hard work pays off.

*ŠP: That's interesting. You allowed yourself to reboot after your studies at the Art Academy of Latvia to overcome this moment of crisis.*

SV: I always knew things would be difficult after I graduated. Everyone knows that's the case. After the Academy, I applied for an Erasmus internship in Antwerp, where I spent about nine months. I made this pact with myself that I wouldn't push myself to do art, I would allow myself to do nothing during that time; a very luxurious situation, actually. I wanted to see what I come up with when I do nothing. Completely, without any expectations.



Sabine Vernere. 1306 II from series New Works.  
2021. Ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Kogo  
Gallery.

*ŠP: It was, of course, no accident that your works were included in the exhibition at the museum. Your art is appreciated locally due to your direct feminist perspective. At the same time, your work retains a certain level of abstraction and symbolism that allows for a wide variety of readings. They seem deeply personal, emotional, feminine and sensitive, in a new, empowering and very sexy way, where the female voice is unabashedly present. It's all somehow natural and fluid, like your*

*ink paintings, and it has also brought you into the Latvian feminist art circle. Artists on the Latvian art scene don't always wear the labels 'feminine art' or 'feminist art' with particular enthusiasm, seeing them as overly confining, political or even deprecating. What do you think about these views that are directed towards your art? Do you have a desire to position yourself in this way?*

SV: At the beginning, I felt a resistance to the feminist label. But now I can say, with my chest puffed out, yes, I belong to this discourse. I need to celebrate women's power. For me, feminism is a celebration of fragile strength and beauty, a celebration of differences. Of course, without ignoring all the problems that are present. It's all there. In interrogating the world through my artistic practice, I always keep the power of feminine energy as my core. The way your inner power can change the world.

*ŠP: You say you felt some resistance at first. Why?*

SV: Yes, it took some time to truly understand feminism. This included exposure to many artists who interpret feminist ideas in different ways. When you study, you only learn about the most prominent, blatant examples. These didn't fit in with the way I felt. We needed time to understand each other.

*ŠP: Your work is associated with sexuality and the corporeal, but you have repeatedly emphasised that what interests you is nature and landscape. Looking at your work for a longer time, the corporeal outlines seem to transform into flower stems or tree branches, buds and roots, and the fuzzy parts even start to resemble mycelia. At some point, you started incorporating natural landscapes into your work, also in the form of small rectilinear formats, reminiscent of mise-en-scenes within a larger narrative, or windows through which to peer into another, less turbulent, world. Can you tell us more about your relationship with nature and its presence in your work?*

SV: Yes, they have always gone hand in hand. I'm interested in nature and sexuality, and sexuality in nature and in people. I think it's all very interconnected. Sexuality comes naturally from nature, it's not culture. When a person thinks about sex, and thus indirectly, subconsciously, about reproduction, the region in the brain that is responsible for thoughts about death and mortality is activated. When a person thinks about sex, they are subconsciously aware that they are mortal, that they are not part of the infinite cycles of nature. Culture, on the other hand, is something constructed by human beings. It offers the possibility of participating in processes that go beyond the human lifespan, and, to a certain extent, makes one feel part of something 'immortal'. For me personally, nature is very important. It is a way of restarting myself, of putting my thoughts in order. And then there are landscapes that have some sort of power that you can go back to. There are specific locations that I inlay in my ink-drawn bodies, using them as empowering symbols.



Sabine Vernere. *Body Intuition*. 2023. Ink on paper.  
Courtesy of the artist and Kogo Gallery.

*ŠP: The corporeal and the landscape in your work are constantly undergoing new metamorphoses, and are suggestive of ancient Greek mythology, which is currently of great interest to you. You seem to be drawn to the representation and analysis of the role of women in Greek mythology, to women's stories. This is a topic that you are further elaborating on as a part of your professional doctoral studies at the Art Academy of Latvia. Can you tell us more about this interest? What sparked it, and where has it led you up to now?*

SV: I've loved making summaries and lists ever since I was a child. I still do it to a certain extent in my creative practice. As a child, I had a notebook where I would write down the colour of the cars that were passing by outside the window, and what commercials were on television. I was an only child, and spent a lot of time at my grandmother's, where I started reading *The Golden Fleece*, a book of Greek myths. I cracked it, and realised that it was all very complicated. There are gods, titans and demigods who are related to each other. As a child, I realised that making a summary of it was out of the question for me.

Greek mythology is also a kind of international language for Western culture, in which it is possible to have a conversation just by outlining the basic context. For example, if someone talks about a certain myth, it's clear what human emotions and human relationships are involved, and as an artist you can then go one step further in your work, because the foundation has already been laid for you. And that's what has always interested me. Later on, it kind of unravelled in this amusing way. I wanted to read *Ulysses*, but I found out that *Ulysses* is based on *The Odyssey*. I discovered that *The Odyssey* was the second part of *The Iliad*. Then I read both books, got hooked, and didn't get round to reading *Ulysses*, of course. That is where my interest in ancient Greek myths came from. I started researching them more, reading and listening to podcasts and lectures.

Then, at some point, I started to feel this sense of injustice, because the stories didn't resonate with me as a woman. I felt a kind of bodily resistance to the content of the stories. I started thinking how fundamental these myths are to the world we live in, and that for thousands of years women and

female sexuality have been represented in a certain way, and this has definitely left its mark. I typically examine sexuality in my practice, and I reached a point where I started to interrogate the representation of female sexuality. Greek mythology clicked with me as a tool that shows very clearly the very roots of the world today. And I learned, much to my delight, that I was not the only one, and that for the last 40 years or so, women classicists have been addressing this segment seriously with a feminist outlook. Ancient Greek myths are being translated and rewritten by women. If knowledge is passed down through the millennia in stories that men tell to other men, all sorts of glitches can arise. Women classicists reinterpreted the myths, translated them, and gave them their own voice. Myths are still alive today because they are universal. They can be adapted to all sorts of situations in life, to one's own inner processes, and they help us understand things.

You see, I am fully immersed in this world, reading different theories and interpretations and new translations, learning about the ways these myths have shaped social attitudes, ideas about the good woman, the bad woman, the woman monster. All women who have been disobedient are punished or made into monsters in Greek mythology. This immediately provides a wonderful framework for a whole host of problems. This history is now being written anew, and I am observing the process with great pleasure and enthusiasm. At the same time, I seek to connect it with the world around me; like, to what extent do these woman monsters, strong, independent, sexual women, live inside me, inside my head? Who is the Perseus, the symbol of patriarchy, that comes to behead the Medusa, the symbol of power, in my mind, in my friends' minds, in society around me?



Sabīne Vernere. From the series Sirens, Medusa and the Isle of Lotus-Eaters. 2022. Ink on paper. From the collection of Latvian National Museum of Art.



Sabīne Vernere. From the series Sirens, Medusa and the Isle of Lotus-Eaters. 2022. Ink on paper. From the collection of Latvian National Museum of Art.

**ŠP:** *Apart from Medusa, have other stories from Ancient Greek mythology caught your attention?*

**SV:** Many have. I am currently interested in the story of the Sirens, the temptresses. In the context of these myths, I am interested in exploring sexuality as an instrument, and asking who owns this instrument of sexuality, does it belong to women themselves? To put it briefly, the Sirens live on an island in the sea, where they sing an irresistible song. The most famous in this context is the story of Odysseus, in which he and his men sail past the island. They sing a song, and the men jump overboard because the song contains a promise. Nobody knows what the promise was about. At

some point in the history of art, these Siren women become sexualised as evil temptresses. I, on the other hand, am interested in the question why they sing. Perhaps they are singing to themselves rather than to the men. Why are they considered monsters? They are not killing anyone, the men jumped overboard themselves. That is something that interests me at the moment.

Another story I'm focusing on is that of Pandora. *Kalon kakon*, the beautiful-evil thing. Prometheus gives fire to people, and Zeus punishes humanity by creating woman. He gives men one bad thing (woman) for one good thing (fire). Before her, there were only men living on the Earth. And he makes all the gods give something to the woman. Aphrodite gives her seductive abilities, beautiful clothes, a beautiful body, and body language. He wants to give men something that they cannot live with and cannot live without: both ways there is suffering. These images, Pandora, the guilty one, the punishment of the gods, Medusa and the fear of sexuality, and the Sirens, the temptresses, these are the images I am interested in exploring through Greek mythology. By the way, Pandora did not have a box, she had a vase, an amphora. It's a mistranslation. Another interesting topic is the Amazons. They were women who lived as equals to men, and for that reason they seemed very sexy to Greek men. In order to be allowed to marry, an Amazon had to have killed a man in combat. I read about this recently, I think it's an amazing tidbit.



Sabīne Vernere solo exhibition *Angles Morts* at Artist Union Gallery, Riga, 2023. Photo: Ansis Starks.





Sabine Vernere solo exhibition *Angles Morts* at Artist Union Gallery, Riga, 2023. Photo: Ansis Starks.



Sabine Vernere solo exhibition *Angles Morts* at Artist Union Gallery, Riga, 2023. Photo: Ansis Starks.

*ŠP: The exhibition 'Angles Morts' at the Artists' Union of Latvia, as well as your other projects, make me think about your relationship with the past, and the way you choose to talk about it. Why*

*are you interested in highlighting and interpreting this material, and is your interest focused on a particular topic, or on the blind spot itself, its ignorance, its lack of understanding?*

SV: I've been thinking about this a lot, and as I'm a year and a half into my PhD, I have to look at my practice as a researcher as well. Whereas before I was simply working and had only a vague idea of what my artistic methodologies were, I am now looking at it much more scrupulously, and I've come up with some answers.

What I got from 'Angles Morts' was an idea of the way I do my work. Looking at myself, looking at the world around me, I have always asked questions about nature, sexuality and human relationships, and over time these questions have become more and more complex. In the case of the exhibition, the big question I came to was: what is my place on the Latvian art scene, what are the foundations on which I stand? What is my context? The Soviet regime, the 1990s, the artists whose work I grew up looking at, all of this has influenced and shaped the way I am. I really want the environment I'm in now to become better. The question is, what do I do, where do I go? Should I go into education, into politics? Where should I pitch in to improve the world around me? I made the decision a long time ago that I wanted to live in Latvia, and I consider it my duty to do everything I can to make things better. Somehow, it all came together in the following point: in order to find answers to these many questions, we need to have a conversation with this exact place and this exact collection. So I chose the Latvian Artists' Union, with all its politically and geographically complicated history, as the larger framework. And then, as I delved into the details, I decided to have a direct conversation with the place, with the collection. There's a lot to this building and its collection. And then, intuitively, reading and gathering information about it all, I chose certain works for the exhibition. Some at the very beginning, some of them later, and some even at the very last minute, as tends to happen when you have exhibitions.

In the process, I started forming questions about the role of the female artist. I began approaching the material in a more intimate way: the way I feel, the way this role has been influenced by time, and the way it has changed today. So somehow I slowly got a context for all the size, the infrastructures, the institutions, the artists, and the recent art history that I'm standing in the middle of. To an extent, it was probably self-therapy and clearing things up for myself. But I also had a great respect and reverence for what the thing I was working with actually was. I really think the collection of the Artists' Union is a miracle, as are the lives of its artists. There is a generation that has grown up without knowing anything about the Artists' Union and what in fact happened there. We don't have studies and art history books about it.



Sabīne Vernere. Vulva. 2020. Indian ink on paper.  
Courtesy of the artist and Kogo Gallery.



Sabīne Vernere. From series Sirens, Medusa and the Isle of Lotus-Eaters. 2022. Ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Kogo Gallery.

**ŠP:** *A book was published about it a long time ago, but we definitely need a new monograph.*

**SV:** I often think that artists lack a common voice, a sense of community, including political decisions. A united voice that stands up for their rights. Everybody is doing good work, great work, but somehow they're all doing it one by one, or in these little clusters. Working on this project, it seemed that there was a lack of being together, so it was important for me to do it all there.

Then, while working on this project, the theory of the gaze was important to me, which was brought to me by [the poet and translator] Lauris Veips, who also did research on my work *Medusa*. His MA thesis discussed the theory of the gaze that appears on the wings of a butterfly, which paralyzes its attackers in self-defence. And this is consistent with my own work *Medusa*. I see that the collection of the Artists' Union also paralyzes us. Dobičins [Igor Dobičins, the head of the Artists' Union] laughed when I went to his office several times to talk about the exhibition: 'Well, I realise now, you simply want to be friends.' And in a way I do, I want to be friends with the recent past. The primary impulse for this exhibition was the will to make things better, and I also asked myself a lot of questions.

**ŠP:** Can you give us a little insight into how you selected the works from the collection of the Artists' Union of Latvia?

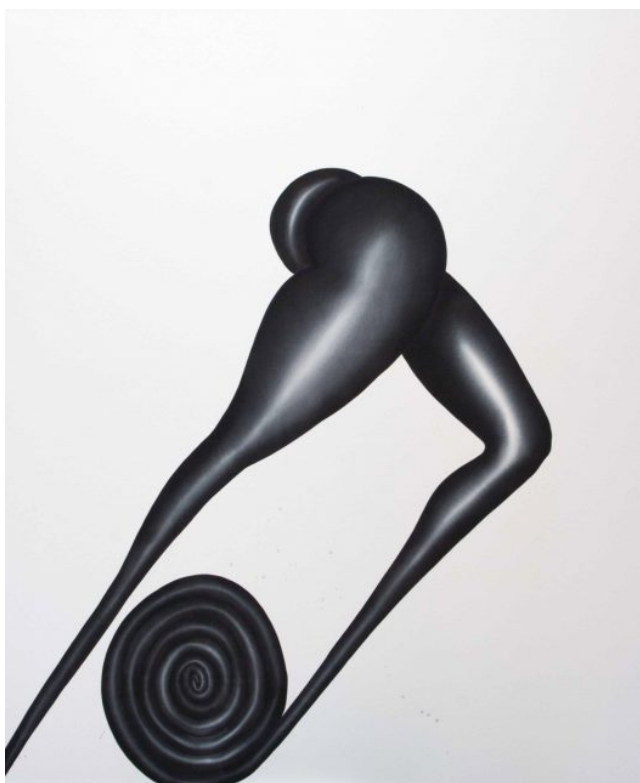
**SV:** When I started working a year before the exhibition opened, I realised that I would not be able to do scientific research. The task would require a team of artists and art historians working on it. But I went there, sat in front of the collection, and tried to understand what was happening to me on a bodily level. In my practice, it is often the case that there is a bodily impulse from the beginning. Of course, it is the women artists that resonate with me most, such as Maija Tabaka's work, Līga Purmale's empty room, and Lidija Auza, a wonderful little-known artist. They all have their own aspects that interest me. This choice was, of course, influenced by the various stories about what it means to be a woman artist. In one of the first painting lessons I ever had, my first teacher Aija Jurjāne sat us in a line, and said: 'It's difficult to be a woman artist.' She was preparing us mentally.

*ŠP: Your art education can be perceived as very traditional in the Latvian context. You studied at the Janis Rozentāls Riga Art School, and then at the Art Academy of Latvia, where you obtained your BA and MA degrees in painting. At the same time, early on in your career, ink and paper became an important means of expression. Can you tell us about your choice to study art and painting, and how you decided to focus on ink and watercolour techniques, instead of oils or digital painting, for example? What is it that drives you to go outside the boundaries of certain art forms and techniques?*

SV: When I was about two and a half years old, an art school opened in Kuldīga [the artist's hometown], and I was enrolled in its preparatory group. I hadn't even learned to speak properly yet. Ever since then, I consistently attended the children's art school, and then the Rozentāls Art School. I don't even know what it's like not to do so. I have no memories of a time when I didn't. We went to Roži [translator's note: the nickname for the Rozentāls Art School] from Kuldīga Children's Art School on an excursion. As I went into the building, I realised this was where I was going to study. I didn't analyse that path much, to be honest, and for a very long time I just did it without thinking.

As for the medium ... I turned to paper and ink for very rational reasons. I was on an Erasmus exchange in Croatia, and I realised that I wouldn't be able to take any canvases or oils with me anywhere. So I started working with paper and watercolour. I also understood that I'm quite impatient when it comes to making art. I started with oils, and then moved on to large formats and acrylic, and then to watercolour, so I could cover the bigger areas faster. I eventually gave up watercolour and stuck to black ink. I like how direct and simple the material is. There is nothing superfluous, everything happens bodily and intuitively. Antoni Tàpies has a cool quote, that when you're working with materials that are fast, that spread and dry quickly, your mind is unable to keep up. The hand wields the flowing ink so quickly that the mind can't be there. It's like a format that was made for me. It's a quick, intuitive, bodily way of creating forms.

I had an interesting turning point with the exhibition 'O' (2021) in the Tu Jau Zini Kur art space, which was the first time I worked directly with space. Up to that point, I had been working with the image. With 'O' I wanted to 'throw' the body, which I usually represent on paper, into reality as well. The viewer can feel their body as their shadow slides across the paper, clearly aware of their own corporeality. It was the first time I worked with space, and I realised I was very interested and liked it.



Sabīne Vernere. Impossible Runner from series Angles Morts. 2023. Ink on paper – stretched on wooden frame. Courtesy of the artist and Kogo Gallery.



Sabīne Vernere solo exhibition Brivibas St. 40, Riga, 2020. Photo: Peteris Viksna.

*ŠP: You have said more than once that there's a plastic quality to your work. Recently, in a private conversation, you also suggested that perhaps it was time to turn to sculpture, a turn that has by now become evident in your marble frameworks, as well as in your installation ink paintings. Can*

*you tell us a bit more about this aspect of your art, and maybe some of your ideas for the future?*

SV: When I create images in ink, I see them as three-dimensional objects. I don't think my work is just limited to the plane. I don't think of it as flat. I already see it in movement. I sense it from all sides, and in that sense my work is already very sculptural. Actually, the creative process, especially if I'm working on a large scale, has a profound bodily side. Applying a large area of water and then adding ink pigment to it is by itself a method of creating form on paper. Of course, I have fantasies of what it would look like in physical reality, in three dimensions. Francis Bacon had this text about how it was enough for him just to think about sculpture as he was painting. I mean, the fact that I think about it in itself changes my practice, and helps me.

*ŠP: Apart from your direct creative work, you also run the Pilot exhibition space at the Art Academy of Latvia. You have also had the opportunity to work as an intern in commercial galleries in Belgium. Considering that nowadays an artist has to be able to be a good manager and entrepreneur, these seem like very useful experiences. What do you think about your own experience of working in galleries and art spaces? In the case of Pilot, isn't it also the case that you have a natural desire to collaborate, to support other artists, as in your last solo show?*

SV: The internship was a very deliberate decision. Latvia has developed an unusual, unique model, where commercial art institutions work in a hybrid format. This doesn't give a full understanding of how work relationships are formed, what the gallery expects from the artist, or the way it functions. It was a very interesting experience. At the beginning, it was difficult for me to understand how it could be that a gallery is a shop. It was a wonderful learning experience. I got a lot out of it, and came to understand many things that I think are missing from our education system.

When I came back, the Art Academy of Latvia offered me the opportunity to run Pilot, an experimental student space. I was hesitant at first, because it's a difficult job. But I accepted, because I wanted to pass on my new knowledge to as many young students as possible. It's an exhibition space for learning, and every two months I meet someone who has never done an exhibition, and then we can go through the process together and talk about what it is and what it means. I think it's very important to have this practical learning space here.

*ŠP: In past interviews you have said that you try not to plan too far ahead into the future. Is that still the case now, or has something changed?*

SV: *(Laughs)* Just recently I was talking with friends about how unusual it is to know what you're going to do in a year and a half. Is that a sign of being an adult? Because for me it's something new. But yes, I know what I'm going to do, and I plan for the future. I'm making a lot of plans. I'm currently looking forward to another year of professional doctoral studies. I'm going to the Cité residency in Paris. I'm also planning a solo show in Madona in the summer at the Maboca [art festival] gallery Visuma Centrs 2, which I await with great enthusiasm and joy. The main thing I will be doing is immersing myself in the research necessary for my PhD studies. I'm preparing myself, because I have to conclude my PhD with an exhibition. I also have a wonderful plan with the Savvaļa [open-air art space] team. We will carry out an initiative of mine, creating an exhibition of contemporary art for children in different regions of Latvia.



Sabine Vernere. CLIMB. 2023. Indian ink on paper, marble. Courtesy of the artist and Kogo Gallery.



Sabine Vernere solo show O! at TUR gallery, Riga, 2021. Photo: Aleksejs Bejeckis.

# Photo reportage from the exhibition 'Sounds like a Silver Teaspoon' by Eglė Petrošiūtė and Liudvika Sonia Koort at Medūza

April 2, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



That morning I woke up as a sentient being. A beautiful garden appeared before my eyes. Full of lush greenery and passing sounds. I noticed the source of some of these sounds in the distance – surrounded by curved branches – the backs of two figures murmured. I could not hear their voices. Yet the bodies seemed vibrant, sitting on a little bench discussing something forever, showering in the sublime.

They left me with a map, made up of words, which fell into a poem. Not only did it help to navigate surroundings, it also gave directions for building a home. It read:  
to build a house you should start by listening to the materials, their form is not accidental it is what reminisce from the time long before us – metal, glass, wood, and threads. The ever-changing nature of these materials makes you look closer, maybe even too close. Will you be able to avert your gaze? If not, you will need to use your other senses to get the full picture. And maybe, just maybe you will



start to feel not only the space but what the space lacks and create accordingly. Only then you will notice the natural rhythm of breathing of walls. With each breath, the microcosmos changes just a little bit, and a way back is lost. This house is alive, by placing objects in it part of the unconscious trapped its frame, giving even more directions, but never steering the way.

Before my eyes surrounded by a lush garden appeared two figures. Sitting on a bench I could hear their voices getting quieter with every footstep I took their direction. As much as I would have loved to overhear this conversation It would have been quite useless, as words can be deceiving if one does not share the experiences. Yet these figures taught me to listen to the in-between, to silence, to the materials and their silent whispers.

The sun beams caress you with the sound of silver reflections. The new generations won't know my lessons, yet they'll feel the gentle touch of the objects we left behind. These abstractions, these objects are the closest things left to us by our predecessors who just like us created things, yet left no instructions, the air they breathed has changed and so have the times. However, it would be naïve to think they do not guide our hands. The figures listened and told me what they heard in the way of a poem.

Turns out the figures themselves have their separate journeys, but they know every intersection is a place to share their discoveries and celebrate uncovered wisdom.

Eglė A. Benkunskytė

Artists:

Eglė Petrošiūtė (b. 1991) is an artist living and working in Vilnius, who graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts with a Master's degree in painting in 2016. Her artistic practice is interdisciplinary: through video art, installation and sound, she speaks through the connections between materials. Her creative strategy is based on the problem of the notion of corporeality, identity and intimacy.

Liudvika Sonia Koort (b. 1994) is also an artist living and working in Vilnius, currently studying at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, where she is pursuing a Master's degree in Sculpture. L. S. Koort began her artistic career as a theatre set designer, then switched to an individual artistic practice. Her work explores the corporeal, the experience of intuitive knowing, and the magic of everyday life. Today, she prefers the mediums of drawing, object creation, poetry and the universal language of symbols, forms and metaphors.

Curator: Eglė A. Benkunskytė

Architect: Dovydas Alčauskis

Graphic design: Vytautas Volbekas

Communication: Deimantė Bulbenkaitė

Words of Gratitude

The artists and the organisers would like express their sincere gratitude to the people who have immensely helped to makes this exhibition come alive: Valentinas Varnas, Aurelijus Blažinauskis, Ramutė Toliušytė, Vytautas Viržbickas, Izabelė Šuikaitė and Alexandra Bondarev.

This exhibition is partly funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture and is part of the creative programme of Lithuanian Artists' Union.

Eglė Petrošiūtė and Liudvika Sonia Koort  
Sounds like a Silver Teaspoon  
2024.03.08–2024.04.06

Photography: Laurynas Skeisgiela











at night  
 night sounds  
 sounds like a silver teaspoon  
 sounds tense  
 sounds full

how quickly a body accumulates in space  
 fingertips melt and eyes heat up to  
 recognize the new born-mark

stretching through eternity  
 lies rooted the child of Proteus  
 a language he understands  
 has not yet been created in the mind of any man  
 it was visible  
 in the mythical pupils of his eyes

he looked straight at you  
 then shot right through you

just to see  
 how lust and creation  
 noisily turns into a single breath

I really enjoy being part of that chaos  
 it has no intention of being anything good or better

the circle of the moon  
 unprepared for the night shift  
 sent a Chimera instead  
 with wood-scented nipples  
 to nest above my head















# Photo reportage from Dainius Liškevičius' exhibition 'Obsessions' at the Radvila Palace Museum

April 10, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



On 21 March the Radvila Palace Museum of the LNMA opened Dainius Liškevičius's solo exhibition *Obsessions*. The artist employs different media to revisit and rethink the function of a museum as an institution and its role in society, questioning at the same time the objectivity of the stories, which museums maintain and their significance. The exhibition is open for public until 2 June.

“It is not the first time that the Lithuanian National Museum of Art invites the community of its visitors to discuss the museum as a concept. Two years ago, also at the Radvila Palace Museum, together with the Italian artist Aldo Giannotti, we challenged the public to experience the museum differently from the usual. Last year's National Gallery of Art event, curated by Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, offered to explore the beginnings of the LNMA Collection and to contemplate the museum from a historical perspective. The current exhibition by the outstanding artist Dainius Liškevičius will urge the public to penetrate even deeper and to reflect on the very idea of a museum as such. I hope that the exhibition will be received as a provocation by all the visitors and will stimulate them to reflect on these questions”, Dr Arūnas Gelūnas, director general of the LNMA, expresses his expectations.

“Dainius Liškevičius's exhibition proposes a conceptual take on the collections of the Radvila Palace Museum, on its spaces and processes, and invites to reflect on the role of a museum as an institution acting as a keeper and maker of stories and to call into doubt the objectivity of these narratives. The exhibition is important also as an opportunity of self-reflection for the museum, as it suggests to revisit the proportion of the museum as an accumulation of artwork and artefacts on the one hand and a place for the emergence of new significant narratives on the other, it also invites to

share private and collective experience,” Justina Augustytė, director of the Radvila Palace Museum, notes.

The exhibition *Obsessions* to show something stranger than art

The exhibition *Obsessions* by Dainius Liškevičius, an artist recognized by the Lithuanian National Prize for Culture and Arts, raises questions about museums as institutions safeguarding material and spiritual treasures, and speculates what happens when on display at the museum is brought very museum. Is it possible to deconstruct the physical, cultural and legal structures which serve to highlight the continuously changing history narrative?

The issues and problems of history construction, of sustainability of the collections, and the nature of a museum as an institution which inform the exhibition *Obsessions*, are also the artist’s recurrent themes. Their first manifestation was the project Museum, which represented Lithuania at the 56th Venice Biennial in 2015.

This time the artist entangles the visitor into multiple obsessions by him, which are different interlacing routes of voyages into the world of things and resources. According to the creative team of the exhibitions, visitors, when setting on these voyages, risk to see something stranger than art, perhaps even their own expectations in an empty frame.

One of the key parts of the exhibition are historical picture frames from the LNMA Collection. Other relics of the museum’s activity, the collection of photographs by the artist and a film created specifically for this exhibition invite the public to think about the margins and paradoxes of history and the sustainability of culture within the world of real challenges and threats.

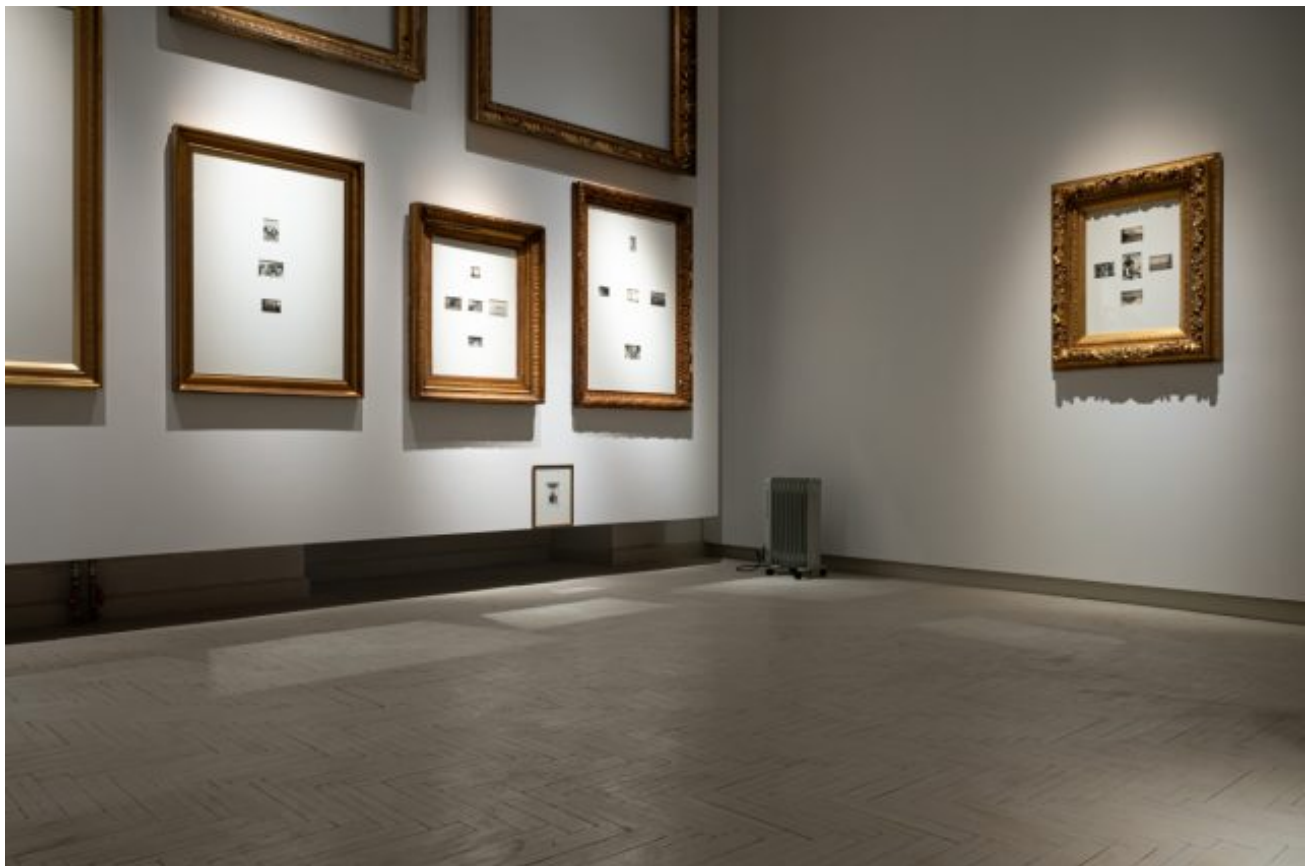
“In the collection of photographs, I have designed a multilayered narrative connected by complex logical threads. The exhibition broadcasts personal and universal memory voyage across the stories of the Radvila Palace, across political systems, biopolitics, ecology and disasters eventual approaching the antiutopian future constructed by the subconsciousness of our times”, Dainius Liškevičius elaborates on his ideas.

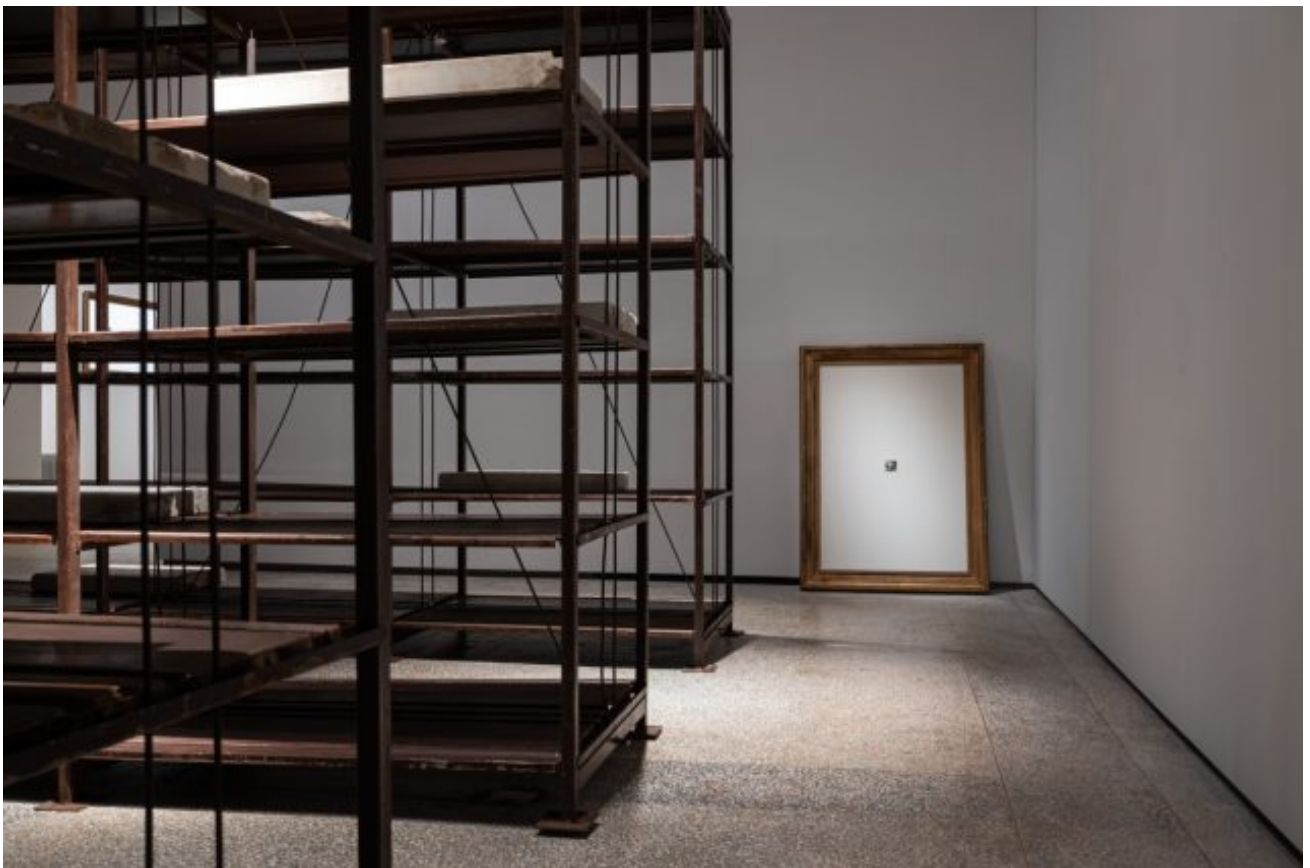
The artist tests the boundaries of the genres, and employs installation, photography, performance and other media to create his art. He uses these means to explore different types of human behaviour and experience, identity and cultural values, the encounters of public and private spaces, of collective and individual memory.

Dainius Liškevičius belongs to the generation of artists who marked the turning point in Lithuanian art by reinventing the artistic expression following the restoration of Lithuanian independence.

Organizer Radvila Palace Museum of the LNMA  
Coordinators: Monika Kalinauskaitė, Lina Jonkuvienė  
Architect Vladas Suncovas  
Coordinating architect Aleksandras Kavaliauskas  
Designer Marek Volda  
Lightning designer Milvydas Kezys

Photography: Gintarė Grigėnaitė











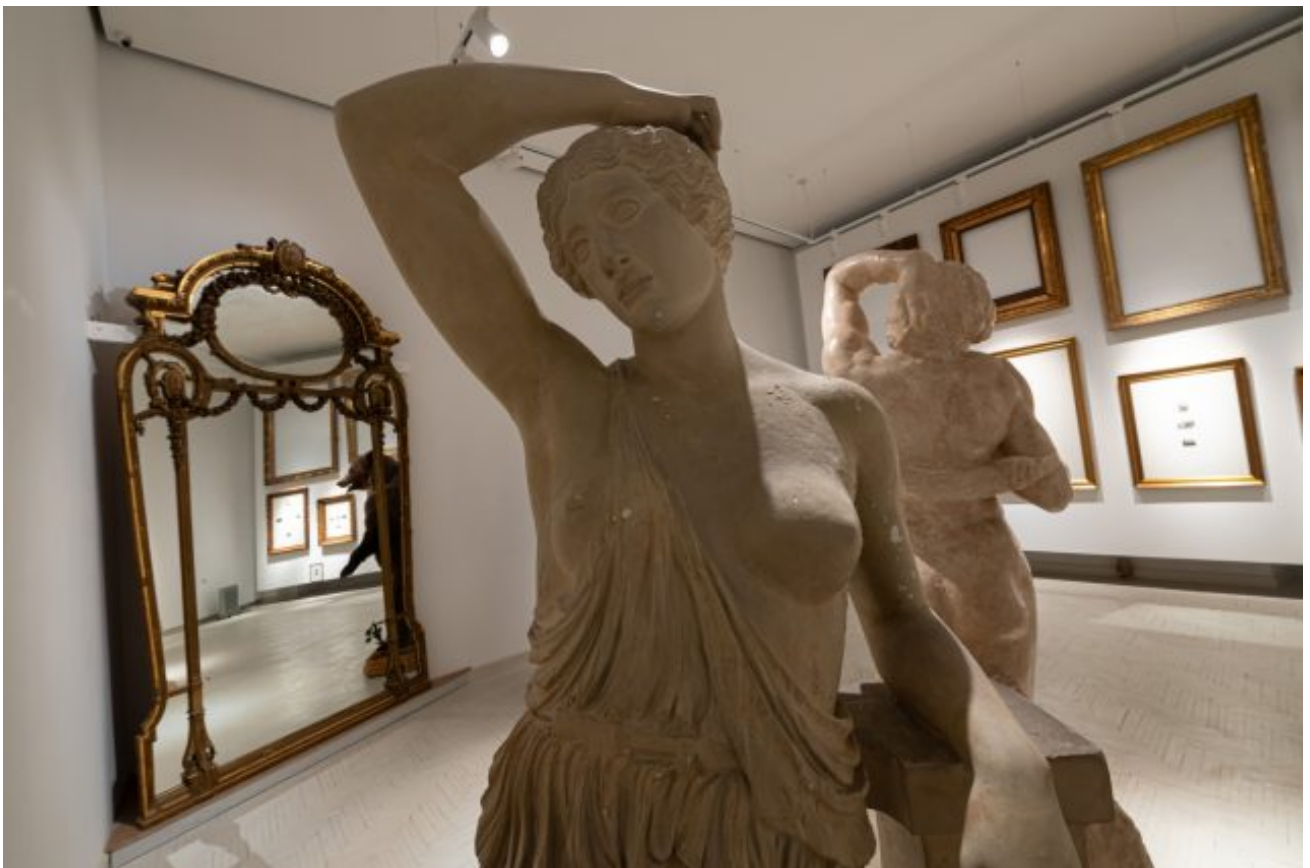
























# Photo reportage from the exhibition 'Doom Doom Delight' by Dzelde Mierkalne at TUR\_telpa

April 11, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



They say the grass is always greener on the other side... but what happens when there is no other side, or when the grass is only greener because it's artificial? There's a new generation that is fully aware of the conditions on the other side and they are not deceived by the fairytale that it's all going to be alright. Generation Z is painfully realistic. Difficult facts, dodged by previous generations, are being confronted, accepted and simply embraced as reality.

Dzelde Mierkalne and her artistic practice are quintessentially Generation Z. She has never avoided difficult questions, choosing instead to confront and embrace them. In the past, her work has explored topics around death and how we, as a society, deal with its inevitability. For "Doom Doom Delight" she goes further. She adds to her artistic language, using it to enquire into an even more fundamental ending: that of the human species. Growing up with a dying planet implies the inescapability of a doomed future and inevitably leads to the quest of finding modes on how to play a game that has been lost. In the shadow of a global pandemic, failed democracies, a new wave of wars, and the progressing climate crisis, promises of a rosy future are being unveiled as empty words marking the path into the inevitable. The world moves fast, faster than ever and with that world at their literal fingertips, Generation Z has begun to draw conclusions about the future of humanity. The resulting faineance derives from an emotional and psychic numbness in face of a never ending streak of bad news. A world of indifference and dissatisfaction calls for thrilling stimuli of relish in order to still enjoy the ride. This fun as salvation approach shouldn't be misunderstood as merely escapism, pessimism or even cynicism but rather a handling of an endless survival mode. In an imaginary landscape of fake grass, fake marble and fake candles fiction and reality merge into an

alienated, parallel world. While in amusement parks as Disneyland bleakness bursts through the cracks of a shiny plastic superficiality, Mierkalne draws a world that doesn't negate our harsh realities, but instead emphasizes the fragility and transience of life. Through a hyperrealistic language inspired by rituals of death as well as enjoyment the artist depicts the approach of a young generation that understands their own insignificance. Yes, the grass might be greener tomorrow, but even the bright shade of fake grass fades when exposed to sunlight.

Dzelde Mierkalne (1997) is a multidisciplinary artist with a background in printmaking. Last year she was part of the first graduating class of the Masters program POST at the Art Academy of Latvia. She has great reverence for technique and process with which she aims to overthrow technique-related artistic standards to create something new and find its place in today's context. She likes to play around with the syntheses of drawing and form while reflecting on the existential fears of world destruction, mortality's salience, and death anxiety through the lens of her generation's post-irony and humor.

TUR\_telpa's ambition is to complement Riga's contemporary art scene by working closely with their selected artists to create high quality, curated art exhibitions. Collaborating with the distinctive characteristic of the space – which refers to both the traditional white cube and the building's industrial past – artists are invited to create new work and encouraged to experiment beyond what might be their conventional practice.

The exhibition runs from 04.04. to 04.05.2024.

For the latest news and events, please follow TUR\_telpa's Instagram ([tur\\_telpa](#)) and/or Facebook page ([TUR](#)).

Curator: Edd Schouten

Production: Kristīne Ercika, Andris Freibergs and Viktoria Weber

Light Design and Technical Support: Maksimilians Kotovičs

Graphic design: Andris Kaļiņins

Supported by: State Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia, Rigas Dome, Angārs, and Rilak Paints

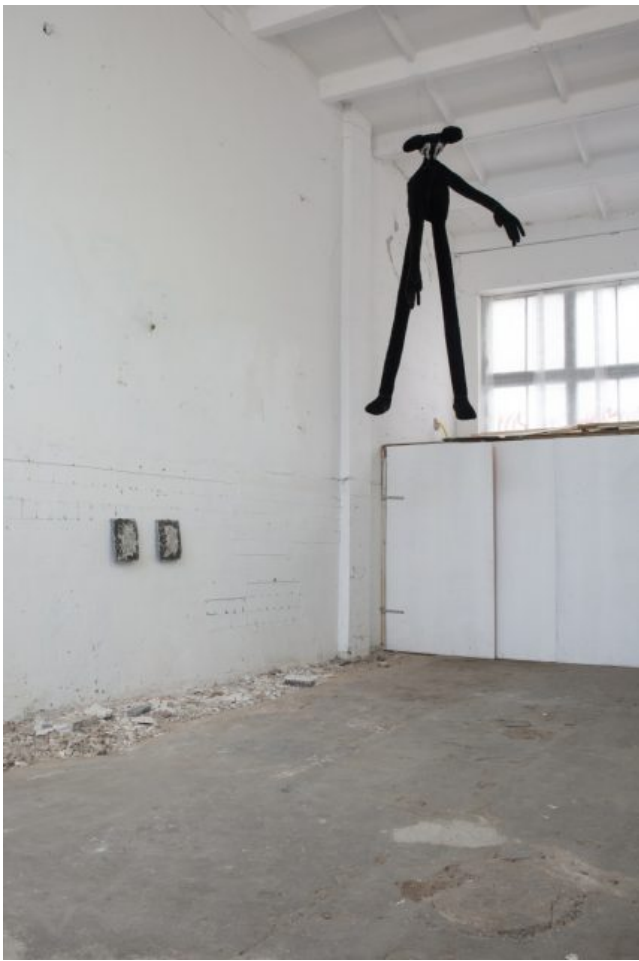
Photography: Kristīne Madjare

























# Photo reportage from the exhibition 'Behavioral Sink' by Miķelis Mūrnieks at Kim?

April 23, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



Since the start of the century, our attention has been directed to the need to be more fluid — it is preached that in times of dynamic change, it will become a valuable tool for managing everyday life. With the capitalist work rhythm dictating the tempo of everyday life, a hypnotic state can be reached that is as though gazing at the ceaseless flow of water. The sculpting of this formless substance is the main material common denominator for the works created for the exhibition. Drawn in a whirlpool of the mass of various rules, consumer illusions, and systems, the viewer is invited to explore the environment in which the artist untangles deeply personal yet, at the same time, socially descriptive experiences that are hidden behind a dreamy yet fragile shroud.

The threads of contradiction and incomprehension are reflected not only in the world of ideas but also in the manifestly visible — surprising variety of states of water. Fictional events and uncomfortable truths will serve as an invitation to catch the waves of self- and other reflections. In the socially critical spirit characteristic of Mūrnieks' work, this series will also investigate and reconsider the shortcuts of perception automated by consciousness.

In 2023, Miķelis Mūrnieks earned a master's degree at the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam with the work *Fountain*. This work will serve as the nucleus of the exhibition, which will be elaborated upon with a new series of sculptural novels and extensive scenography.

Curator: Elīza Elizabete Ramza

Flowers: Evija Krištopane

3D print: Matīss Balodis, Armands Freibergs

Mechanical solutions: Māris Mūrnieks  
Graphic design: Valters Kalsers  
Lighting designer: Romāns Medvedevs  
Translations: Valts Miķelsons  
Project assistant: Katrīna Jaugiete  
Communication: Austra Stupele

Mikēlis Mūrnieks (1995) lives and works in Amsterdam. Since 2017, he has participated in group exhibitions and has held two personal exhibitions in Riga at LOOK! Gallery and culture space Tur. His recent exhibitions include Sculpture Quadrennial *Miracles of Democracy* with the work *Aurora*; group exhibition *Synthesis. Study of the Truth Through Movement, Progress and Divergence*; MABOCA festival; duo exhibition *Security Patterns* at LOW gallery. In his work, the young artist refers to the ready-made, creating objects and installations from familiar materials and forms. A social criticism fitting to contemporary culture has become one of Mūrnieks' primary means of expression, imbued with an ironic and socio-analytical character.

Supported by:

Ministry of Culture, State Culture Capital Foundation, LODE, Wood Point, Akvedukts, Absolut, Valmiermuižas alus.

Acknowledgments:

BMT Workshop, Café Kase, Imants Pankars.

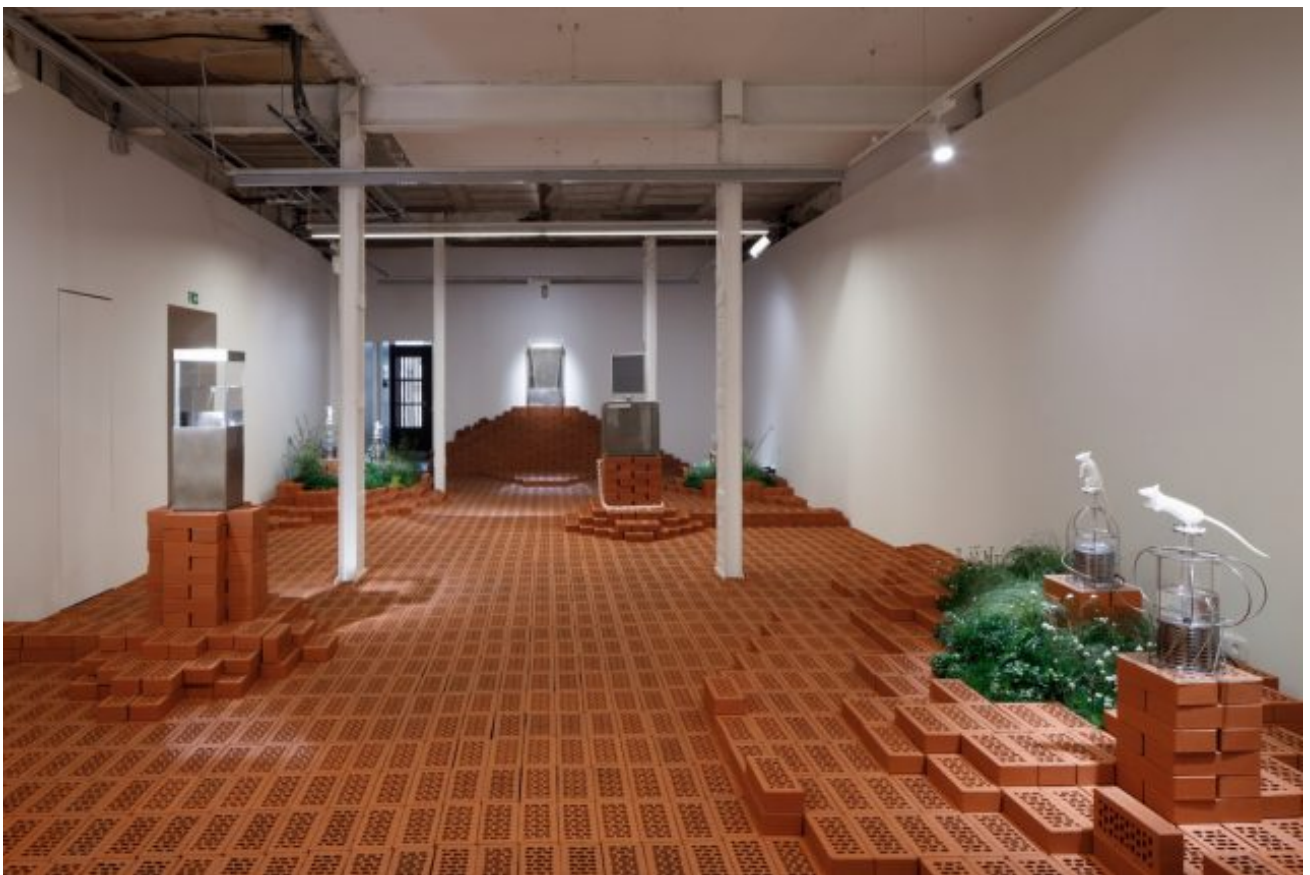
Photography: Ansis Starks

























# Photo reportage from the exhibition 'Speculative Lands' by Gisèle Gonon at the Uus Rada gallery

April 23, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



Between historical research, personal narrative and critical reflection on commons, Gisèle Gonon presents a new large-scale textile- and sound installation in Uus Rada. *Speculative Lands* explores the appropriation and exploitation of land under influence of powerful economic players.

By this time of the year, my calendar moves on from the *buienmaand*, also referred to as the *lentemaand*, to the *grasmaand*. The old Germanic terminology of months is bound to the seasons. Each name softly fluctuates between its character and its consequences. March is when spring hits off (*lente*) which includes the necessary showers (*buien*). The outcome of those first rays of sun and the never-ending rainfall is that in April, the grass starts sprouting. The month of February however, carries the name of a human activity as a response to the present climate. Gleaning (*sprokkelen*) means to harvest what has been left on the fields.

The central material in the exhibition employs the practice of gleaning. For a year, Gise le Gonon gathered a large number of used fabrics from European rural areas, above all Estonia and France. The pieces blend together as well as they carry distinctive traces of their past use. In a conceptually consistent manner, the artist sutures them together with material that is intrinsically connected to farming processes. Guided by cadastral maps of her mother's farmland in the French rural region of Monts du Lyonnais, she opens up questions about tenure, appropriation, and exploitation of space.

*Speculative Lands* uses labour as a peculiar yet successful tool to resonate on a personal as well as collective level. I find a similar approach in the writing of Annie Ernaux, painting a sensitive portrait of her father in *A Man's Place*. It is through describing his relation to work that we can truly see him as a person. As can I see my own father, a mechanic, through her narrative. In *The Gleaners and I*, Agnes Varda interviewed practitioners throughout rural and urban France. Her insistence on the personal narratives of each group managed to coin the notion of gleaning at large. The filmmaker's starting point was an oil painting from 1857 by Jean-Francois Millet named *Des glaneuses*. Unlike Ernaux' example, the movie's original French title (*Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse*), as well as the painting's subject are women. In Uus Rada, Gonon consciously focuses on the female lineage of her family in the framework of labour as well as ownership.

Millet's painting caused controversy with its unconventional portrayal of the working class, glorifying the practice on farmlands at an immense scale. Gisele Gonon creates her own leeway in the hard matter of data by elevating flat matter to a cave-like structure and inviting the visitor in. When land becomes a shelter, it can provide an escape route for ownership not to fall into traps of economically-driven power structures such as land grabbing. Instead, it becomes a setting and designated space for a multitude of narratives. Invitation replaces appropriation. We can see this in the use of material, combining fabrics from diverse contexts. But the patched land also houses distinct whispers, each relating to fields, land, as well as the forest-like environment of the gallery space by means of their own mother tongue.

The exhibition takes place at the edge of the city. It's rather symbolic to address farming, labour, and production at its original place – on the fringe, slightly outside. Yet this is a building for sculptural practices. Most of the public monuments in Tallinn were produced at Raja street and later transported to the central areas. During Soviet times, artists were often assigned the highest floor in the buildings in Lasnamae, providing an incredible view, like the one a farmer has of their fields. Still, both are kept at distance while in continuous dialog and exchange with their surroundings. Gonon pinpoints a resemblance between artistic practice and farming labour – not only through the practice of gleaning but also a conscious investigative position towards time, repetition, and material. Whereas the building is equipped with a monumental studio for stone or plaster, and wood-, welding-, and plastic rooms, the artist invites soft, flexible material in the gallery space, as a fluctuating proposal that opens up space for rethinking commons and exchange.

Laura De Jaeger, March 2024

Gisèle Gonon [she/her] is a visual artist based between Berlin and Tallinn. Her research focuses on labour, especially models of agricultural production from which she draws analogies to artistic production. Her practice is a polymorphous corpus, ranging from installation and drawing to sound and video. Land is central to her work as a tool of production, but also as a symbolic and emotional space to be surveyed, mapped, and probed. Growing up on a peasant farm, she combines autobiographical elements from a working class, queer perspective with social sciences and empirical experience. Her installations have been exhibited (amongst others) at the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia, Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei, Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, Galerie de l'IESA Paris, gr\_und Berlin and she participated in residencies at Nida Art Colony (Lithuania), Factory (Lyon) and at Kunstihoone (Tallinn).

Fabrics formerly used in and collected from farms and rural areas across Europe, threads, webbing, metal eyelets, agricultural blue twine, ring insulators.

Audio: Soundscape in different languages and durations.

Co-producer: Laura De Jaeger  
Graphic Design: Typokompanii (Andree Paat, Aimur Takk)  
Photography: Joosep Kivimäe

The artist warmly thanks Denise Gonon, Mara Kirchberg, Laura De Jaeger, Cathy Douvre, Marion Orfila, Ats Kruusing, Sandra Ernits, Solveig Lill, Sarah Noonan, everyone who took part in the fabric harvesting, the Estonian Academy of Arts, EKKM and Uus Rada.

The exhibition is supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and the Stiftung Kunstfond.

Uus Rada is a community artist-run space located in a building designated to sculpture in Raja street, Tallinn, Estonia

Title: Speculative Lands  
Open: 10.04.-20.04.2024  
Uus Rada gallery, Raja 11a, Tallinn.  
Tuesday – Sunday 14:00 – 18:00 or by appointment

[www.giselegonon.net](http://www.giselegonon.net)



















# Photo reportage from the exhibition 'To Observe the Clouds' by Denisa Štefanigova at the Tütar gallery

April 30, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



Denisa Štefanigova (born 1995) is a Czech painter, currently living and working in Brno, who has ties to the Estonian art community established during her MA-studies at the Estonian Academy of Art. In the past, she has showcased her works in two solo exhibitions in Prague and at the Art Academy gallery in Tallinn, as well as participated in numerous group shows. The current exhibition, *To Observe the Clouds*, is displaying her recent paintings, which depict hybrid creatures and fantasy animals in an expressive-dynamic painting style. The viewer is presented with an imaginative, unconscious or dreamlike world where these creatures, having taken shape within an intuitive and dynamic creative process, emerge as the artist's imaginary companions.

The influence of surrealism and its creative methods of working with unconscious and dream states is quite evident in Štefanigova's art. This influence also evokes culturally specific historical roots: after all, Prague and Czech art have a special place in the history of international surrealist art since the 1930s when Prague became the second most important center of the surrealist movement after Paris. As a timely coincidence, the ongoing exhibition of historical Czech and Estonian surrealist artists at the Estonian National Museum in Tartu provides an interesting art historical context for the show at the Tütar Gallery. The principle of hybridity, often seen in the works of historical surrealists, takes a central place in Štefanigova's art. It does not appear only in imaginative fantasy imagery but also in formal or technical solutions of her paintings: at times she may cut up her earlier paintings and sew pieces of old canvas into a collage or abandon the traditional painting format, a "window to nature".

The wider meaning of her works, however, is closely related to the problems of our world today. Upcycling the old canvases into new works of art; eliminating the boundaries between craft and so-called high art; the merging of humans and other living beings – all these elements speak of the author's ecological sensitivity and social nerve. That is why critics have associated Štefanigova with current discourses of ecofeminism and posthumanism. The artist herself does not necessarily consider these traditions of thought to be the starting point of her creative process, but their principles and ideas are not alien to her. She, too, wishes to overcome existing hierarchies and fixed boundaries between different species, sexualities or social identities. The hybrid imagery of her artworks and the painting technique, emphasizing fluidity over clear-cut borderlines, symbolize a mode of seeing and interpreting the world, where the principles of autonomous self and the dominance of the human over the non-human (other living beings, nature) gives way to the ethics of coexistence and interdependence.

“In my view, posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple ‘others’ in a vital web of complex interrelations. This ethical principle breaks up the fantasy of unity, totality and oneness...What I want to emphasize instead, in a more affirmative vein, is the priority of the relation and the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of.” (Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 2013)

#### TO OBSERVE THE CLOUDS

Denisa Štefanigova

18.04.24–02.06.2024

[www.tutar.ee](http://www.tutar.ee)

Accompanying text: Katrin Kivimaa

Exhibition design: Johannes Luik

Graphic design: Kert Viirt

Installation: Johannes Luik, Tanel Asmer, Erkki Kadarik

Photography: Joosep Kivimäe

The exhibition is supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, DSV Estonia and Embassy of The Czech Republic

Photography: Joosep Kivimäe











