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Creativity is a Constant Undercurrent Blending Enjoyment with Reflection. A conversation with Jung Hsu

December 4, 2024

Author Rosana Lukauskaitė



Jung Hsu. Photo: TAICCA

Jung Hsu is a Berlin and Taipei-based media artist whose practice integrates interdisciplinary knowledge with artistic research, crafting heterogeneous encounters that respond to contemporary social situations. Her work often employs metaphorical objects to construct speculative scenarios, offering multiple perspectives on pressing global issues. A Golden Nica winner of Ars Electronica 2022 and the Art & Science awardee of Falling Walls 2023, Jung has also been recognised by *Tagesspiegel* as one of *'Die 100 wichtigsten Köpfe der Berliner Wissenschaft'*.

Currently engaged in the SODAS 2123 residency, we had the chance to explore Jung Hsu's perspectives on combining art, science and technology, and her approach to interdisciplinary collaboration. In the interview, she delves into how metaphorical objects and speculative scenarios bridge these domains, offering unique ways to address complex social and environmental issues.



Jung Hsu receiving Golden Nica. Photo: TAICCA

Rosana Lukauskait?: Your work often combines art with science and technology. Can you tell us how you bring these different worlds together in your projects?

Jung Hsu: Art and science, in my view, aren't as distant from each other as they might seem. Both are deeply human pursuits, born from our innate desire to understand the world and to communicate our understanding. Science seeks to explain phenomena, while art offers ways to express and share those understandings, often inspired by the same sources. I approach my projects by exploring different perspectives, aiming to find connections between seemingly unrelated contexts. A single fact can manifest differently, depending on the framework in which it's viewed, and discovering these reflexive connections, where one idea resonates within another, helps me bridge the gap between art, science and technology. It's about weaving these perspectives into something coherent, yet open to interpretation.

RL: Winning awards like the Golden Nica of Ars Electronica is a huge accomplishment. How do these recognitions inspire or challenge you to keep pushing at boundaries in your art?

JH: When I first learned that 'BiOfilm.net' had won the prize, I went through an intense bout of imposter syndrome. It was surreal, especially since the project emerged from such a collaborative and deeply personal process with Natalia, who continues to inspire me in profound ways. Over time, I've come to see the award as a celebration of our shared work rather than a measure of individual merit. The recognition has given us opportunities to present the project in various contexts, sparking dialogues that reaffirm the importance of collaboration and embracing difference. It also pushes me to keep questioning and exploring, especially on themes like biopolitics, which demand ongoing, dynamic engagement.

RL: Your project 'BiOfilm.net: Resist Like Bacteria' draws inspiration from bacterial communication. How do you use biological processes as metaphors for civil resistance, and what has been the public's response to this unique approach?

JH: The feedback has been fascinatingly diverse. Many have noted the project's non-visual aesthetic, which challenges traditional expectations of art. Others have described it as functional, poetic, rhetorical, and even techno-optimistic or anarchic. Some find it thought-provoking, but acknowledge that it requires significant background knowledge to fully grasp its depth. One of the most rewarding moments was hearing from individuals seeking support for autonomous networks in their own contexts, validating the project's practical and symbolic resonance. This diversity in reactions reflects the project's intention, to provoke dialogue about non-human perspectives and alternative forms of resistance.



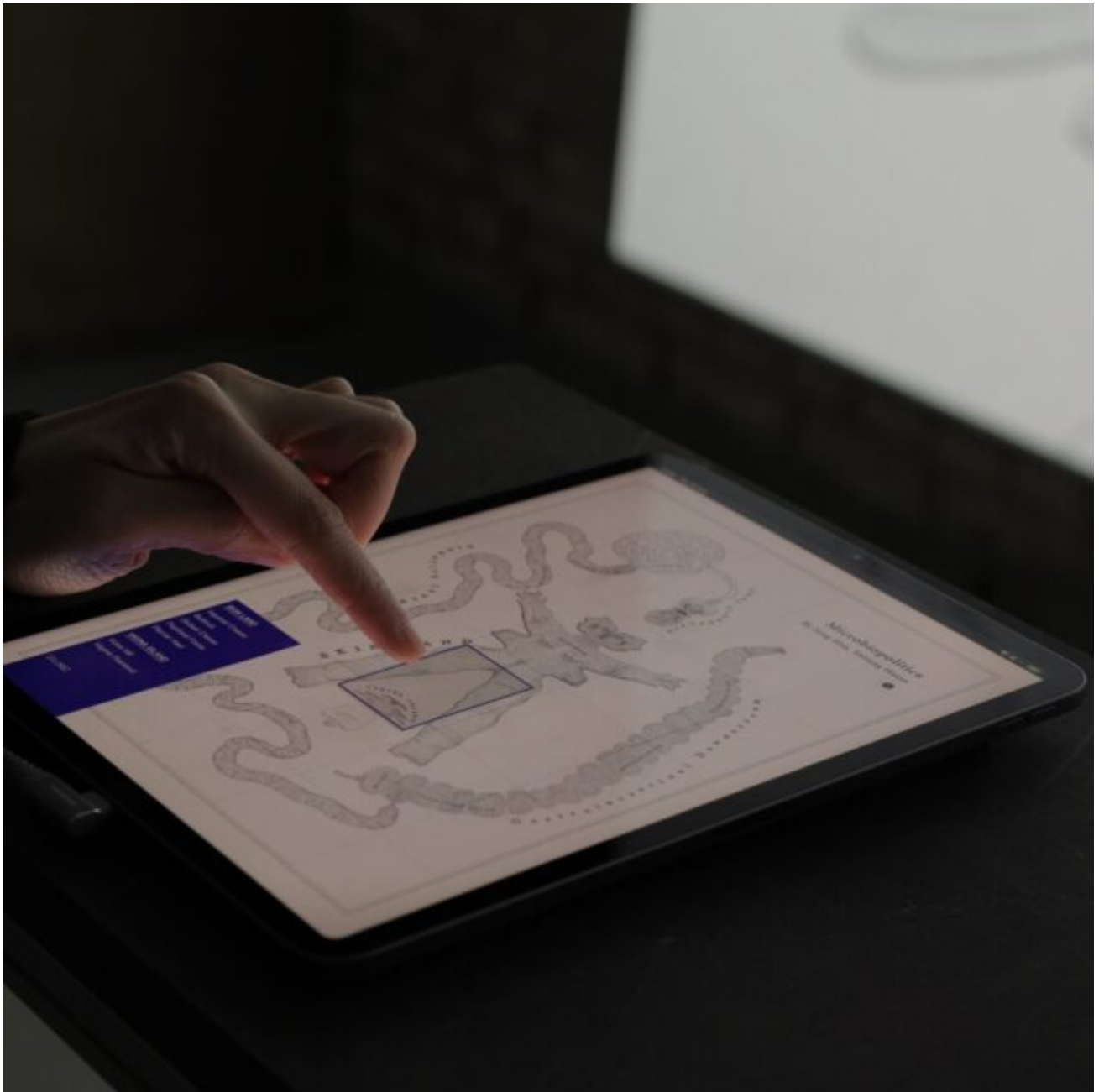
'Biofilm.net: resist like bacteria' Photo: Juan Diego Rivera

RL: You've lived and worked in different cities, like Berlin, Taipei and Shanghai. How have these different cultures influenced the way you think about and create art?

JH: Each city represents a distinct reality, shaped by its unique social, historical and cultural fabric. Experiencing these differences has expanded my perspective, helping me see how the same 'facts' can be understood in vastly different ways, depending on the context. This awareness sharpens my curiosity about the narratives that underpin our understanding of truth. It also challenges me to approach my work with greater sensitivity, and to embrace the complexities of multiple, sometimes conflicting, realities.

RL: In your project 'Microbiopolitics', you map out the human microbiome to explore the relationship between humans and microorganisms. How does this project reflect the tension between our desire to control our bodies and the complex, often unpredictable, nature of the microbial populations within us?

JH: This project stems from personal experience, as my own body's sensitivity to microbes has forced me to confront the delicate balance within the microbiome. Years of infections and overuse of antibiotics and probiotics have shown me how easily this balance can be disrupted. Society's pursuit of health and cleanliness often exacerbates this tension, creating conditions where microbial systems are thrown into chaos. Rebuilding that equilibrium is a slow, unpredictable process that underscores how little we truly understand about these interconnected systems. Our bodies aren't isolated entities, but are part of a larger, interdependent web of life. This project highlights the futility of trying to impose control over such complexity.



'Microbiopolitics'. Photo: Madoka Kitani

RL: Your project 'How to meet out of now/here?' explores the concept of Nepantla within the VR chat world. How does this hybrid virtual space help individuals navigate their complex identities, and do you believe VR can truly provide a 'borderland' for those who feel marginalised in society?

JH: The VRChat world offers a small window into the broader possibilities of online platforms for identity exploration. It creates spaces for diverse communities to express themselves in ways that physical spaces might restrict. The Internet already allows us to navigate identity in a more fluid way than before, and VR adds an extra layer of embodiment to that experience. While VR can't fully replicate the nuances of real-world 'borderlands', it provides a powerful metaphorical space for those seeking refuge or reconnection with parts of their identity. These spaces are not perfect solutions, but can be transformative tools for imagining alternative ways of being.



'How to meet out of now/here?' Photo: Maria Capello, Jung Hsu, Francesca Valeria Karmrodt, Won Park

RL: As someone who works across disciplines, do you think creativity thrives more in collaboration or in solitude? How do you balance these two dynamics in your own process?

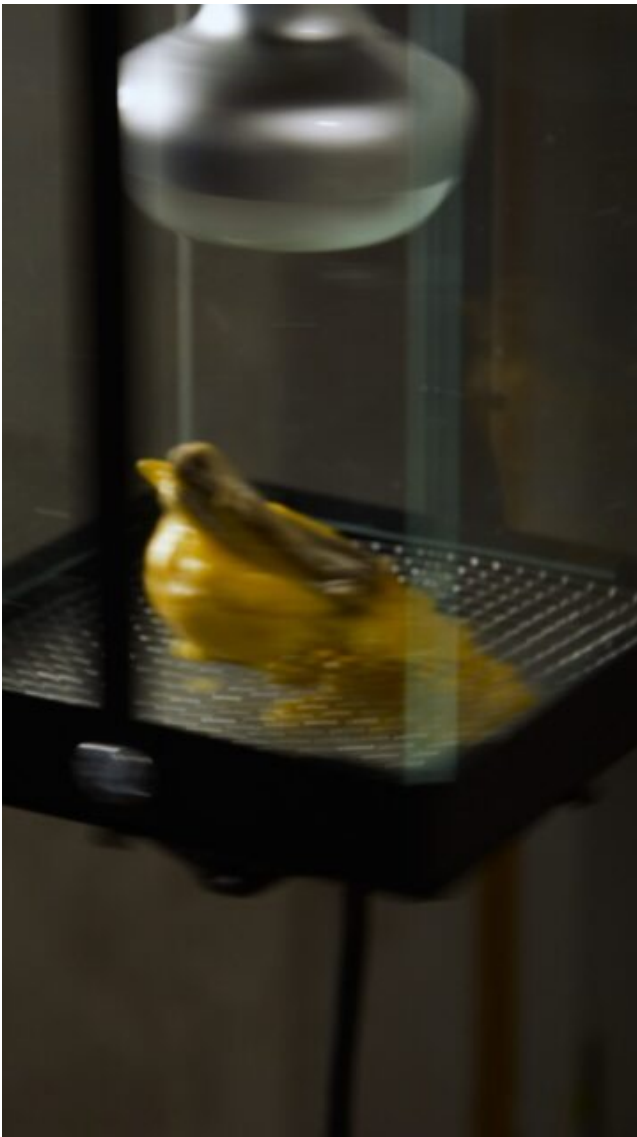
JH: Collaboration is at the core of everything I do, even when I'm working alone. Research, reading and writing often involve dialogues with the work of others, ideas I engage with, adapt and build upon. Asking for help or feedback is a natural part of the process; no one can know or do everything on their own. Even the digital tools I rely on are products of collective outcome, open-source frameworks and libraries, I'm only an individual user of all these creations. I feel like I'm just doing something reflecting 'the moment'. It's not my own will, but a reaction to being part of a collective consciousness. At the same time, I value moments of silence and introspection, which allow me to process and synthesise these influences. For me, creativity is about finding a rhythm between these two states: solitude for reflection, and collaboration for growth.



'How to meet out of now/here?' Photo: Maria Capello, Jung Hsu, Francesca Valeria Karmrodt, Won Park

RL: In your project 'Save a Dying Bird?' you explore the shift in how humans relate to nature, from viewing it as a resource to feeling guilt and attempting to preserve it. With the canary as a metaphor, do you think our current environmental efforts are genuine acts of restoration, or are they more about easing collective guilt for the damage already done?

JH: My understanding of this question continues to evolve. Are we too late, or is it never too late? Beyond this binary, I'm particularly drawn to the emotions of guilt and mourning: where they originate and how they shape our interactions with nature. The canary has long been a symbol, carrying layers of meaning through history, from its role in coal mines to its status as an ecological metaphor. In manipulating and mourning nature, we create something that is no longer 'natural' in the traditional sense. This duality fascinates me: the canary as both a victim of human actions and a projection of our societal struggles with responsibility and empathy. What does it truly mean to save something, and who or what are we really trying to save?



'Save a dying bird?' Photo: Maxim Tur

RL: In your downtime, when consuming media, are you able to fully immerse yourself for enjoyment, or do you find that your artistic and critical lens is always engaged, influencing how you process and potentially integrate what you see into your future projects?

JH: For me, the concept of 'downtime' feels almost non-existent: artists rarely truly switch off. While I can fully enjoy all kinds of entertainment, whether it's a film, a game or a piece of music, there's always a part of my mind quietly processing, analysing and connecting what I experience to my ongoing work. These moments of enjoyment often act as fertile ground for ideas, with every detail or narrative carrying the potential to inspire future projects. Even when I'm not actively thinking about my work, the experiences I consume inevitably become seeds, waiting to sprout in unexpected ways. Creativity, in this sense, is a constant undercurrent, blending enjoyment with reflection.



'Save a dying bird?' Photo: Madoka Kitani

A Conversation About Queerness in the Baltics: ‘We Felt Compelled to Tackle These Issues’

December 11, 2024

Author Sean Burns



Heinrich Sepp, 2021. Courtesy the artist. Photography: Kristina Kuzemko

Queer Histories from the Baltic Region presented innovative research on queer cultures and artistic practices, highlighting the rich history of gender and sexuality discourses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The programme – held at Auto Italia in London and the Edinburgh Art Festival in 2024 – aimed to broaden the understanding of the conditions faced by queer-identifying individuals in the region. It sought to provide a more nuanced perspective on queerness, moving beyond the dominant narratives that often focus on the US and UK. Here, curator Milda Batakytė speaks to artist and writer Sean Burns about the development of the programme, which contained exhibitions, performances and discussions. Batakytė is the Exhibition Curator of Auto Italia, London.

Sean Burns: Let's start by discussing the origins of the Queer Histories from the Baltic Region programme.

Milda Batakytė: Yes. I suppose the whole premise of the project was to present the complexity of the LGBTQ+ experience in the region and relate it to the broader world. I don't think it is healthy to approach queerness in a singular way, so I wanted to demonstrate a few examples of those complexities elsewhere.

SB: Yes. And it's obviously never going to be a total picture.

MB: Yes, exactly. It all started with Karol Radziszewski's exhibition 'Filo' (2024). I felt it was important to show Karol's work in the UK because his project Queer Archives Institute has never been presented here before. He is among the very few Polish contemporary artists who has been working around the subject and looking at the queer experience. There are fewer artists in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia openly contending with queer issues. Being in London, I've registered a lack of discourse in the Baltics because we are talking more openly about queerness here.

SB: A kind of comparison.

MB: Yes. The other impetus was emphasised by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. I recognised the influence of culture as a soft power that can enhance the recognition of a nation-state, region or cultural identity.

Coming from Lithuania, a country that was part of the Soviet Union for such a long time, experiencing the invasion of Ukraine was shocking for me. It made me think about how a curator can respond and create soft power with a small exhibition. So, it's sort of like creating several layers.

SB: Yes. What was attractive about Karol's project?

MB: Karol's research addresses so many different characters and histories, both before, during and after the Soviet occupation. I was in conversation with colleagues from the Baltics, some based in the UK. We all felt compelled to tackle the same sort of issues.

There were shared notions of needing to reckon with the trauma that the Soviets left. We observed that very few people had worked on that trauma since that period. So, since the 1990s, when Lithuania became independent, let's say, nobody had addressed that trauma, and nobody has paved a new way for us to talk about the culture in this region or queerness or anything else that exists within that.

SB: Yes. It's so recent, really.

MB: It's so recent—like 34 years—so it just felt important. It felt important to process that for myself, my friends, peers and colleagues in those countries. We organised three events, two at Auto Italia in London and one during the Edinburgh Art Festival. We decided to invite people whose work focuses on direct action, who participate in different organisational and artistic interventions, to discuss the mentality and the perception of queerness in those regions.

It was remarkable because audiences heard Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė from Lithuania, Konstantin Zhukov from Latvia, and Heinrich Sepp, otherwise called Helgi, from Estonia. All of them have such different practices, but they had the opportunity to compare their experiences.

The second event was Gregor Kulla's performance, *Recital* (2023). Gregor works specifically within the classical music genre. They are a classically trained oboist interested in revolutionising that world. Gregor presented this wild performance, which intersected with a drag performance of oboe and electronic music.

SB: It was like a kinky, cabaret oboe.

MB: I was looking at Gregor's legs, and they were shaking loads because they were wearing these huge high heels. It was terrifying.

SB: It's great that that happened here.



Recital, 2023, Gregor Kulla. Kanuti Gildi SAAL, Estonia. Courtesy the artist. Photography: Alana Proosa

MB: Yes. So, that's what happened in London. In Edinburgh, we invited Agnė Jokšė's performance *Lezbynai* (2020). Agnė is a Lithuanian performance artist who works extensively with the written word. Their research and practice are related to activism. If I'm not mistaken, Agnė was also one of the first people to talk about how the Lithuanian language is gendered. It's such an old, incredibly rigid language. So, it's interesting how Agnė addressed that. *Lezbynai* comes from the name of a district in Vilnius (Lazdynai – Ed.). This area is notable for its quintessentially Soviet architecture. It's a place which feels like a concrete panopticon.

SB: Right. So, it's residential.

MB: It's a residential area. There is nothing much around apart from these tower blocks, and they're all concrete, and they're all circulating around each other. The text that Agnė prepared and performed talks about her experience growing up there as a queer person and interacting with other queers within that context. And it's an incredibly gentle and subtle performance.

SB: In the accompanying statement, you mention how LGBTQ+ cultures and rights are still largely underdeveloped discourses within the Baltic states. Could you discuss some of the factors involved in preventing a discourse from flourishing?

MB: I think, firstly, it's cultural. During the event at Auto Italia, Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė discussed how there was a brief period of freedom for queer magazines and similar publications to flourish during the transition between the fall of the Soviet Union and the formation of Lithuania, roughly one to two years.

SB: This is early 1990s?

MB: Exactly. Early '90s. People were thirsty for freedom, so they talked about allowing diversity to coexist in one place. Over time, whether due to being part of an oppressive regime for an extended period or some other universal cultural element, certain rigid observations and cultural prejudices have resurfaced and been reshaped in various ways. After a very short period of talking about it, and the relative freedom and liberalism in the '90s, it slowly became essentially taboo.

SB: So, old prejudices re-emerged.

MB: Yes.



In Conversation: Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, Heinrich Sepp, Konstantin Zhukov, Queer Histories from the Baltic Region, Auto Italia, London, 2024. Photographer: Anne Tetzlaff



Queer Histories from the Baltic Region, Auto Italia, London, 2024. Photographer: Anne Tetzlaff

SB: It reminds me of Spain after Francisco Franco died. There was this scene called Movida, which is a fashion-art movement where people enjoyed their freedom. And then you still had insidious reactionary ideas beneath the surface.

MB: It almost feels like once people lose this enemy, they then start looking for something to focus on and start creating enemies among themselves.

SB: And I guess you've got this sort of religious prejudice that's baked into the culture and things like that.

MB: 100%. Religion is also a considerable influence. Karol mentioned that even today, churches in Poland, particularly in recent years, have gained considerable influence due to the far-right government that was in power between 2015–23. So much of the prejudice comes from the church as well. Lithuania and the Baltics are known to be historically pagan countries; Lithuania was one of the latest countries to turn to Christianity.

SB: Oh, really. That's interesting.

MB: But despite the paganistic prehistory, Christianity is still rooted in the culture nowadays.

SB: Yes.

MB: We are generally seeing the rise of far-right politics across Western countries. Central and Eastern Europe are the same. All the panel participants mentioned the anti-LGTBQ+ movement. If Pride is happening, it's typical for a massive far-right march to occur on the same day, which is incredibly intimidating. And other intimidation tactics are also used against people engaging in these

discourses. Kaunas Artists' House, which organised a series of events around queerness, queer histories and feminism, has received a backlash from local authorities. Or, Emma, a social club, a gathering place that Agnė also co-founded. It's often physically attacked, with windows getting smashed and things like that.

SB: So, it's both about the relationship with the funding, certain local people and the culture that they're immediately faced with. It's structural and about the reception of their activities.

MB: Yes. It really feels like a systemic cultural oppression now in that respect.

SB: And, in a way, I think that the people that spoke, who you've mentioned, were emboldened as well by that. Of course, and there's a sort of resilience that we can come on to talk to.

MB: Yes.

SB: My next provocation was whether you wanted to highlight specific people, organisations and practitioners who are doing that work. Giving people a shout-out might be good. Maybe there's a risk in doing that. I don't know.

MB: I would particularly like to mention a Latvian activist, journalist and author, Rita Ruduša, an incredible example of somebody who has actively spoken out. Also, Lithuanian author Artūras Tereškinas was a very influential figure for me personally.

Again, somebody who has written about, firstly, women's rights in Lithuania or the history that traces feminism in the country before. We can't make assumptions that the situation was terrible only under the Soviets because it's not necessarily always the case.



Heinrich Sepp, 2020. Courtesy the artist.
Photography: Kristina Kuzemko

SB: Oh, yes. Right. There isn't a clean cut, necessarily. I wanted to talk about Karol's exhibition a bit more. Specifically, I was interested in the newspaper, the archival kind of stuff. To benefit people who might not have seen the show, can you just talk a bit about *Filo* magazine (1986–89) in its early years, and its place in the exhibition?

MB: I need to step back in history to create an understanding of where *Filo* stood when it was established. In 1932, in Poland, homosexuality was decriminalised, which was an incredibly progressive move for that period across the whole Western world at least. And later, when Nazi Germany occupied Poland, they overturned it and then later the Soviets disregarded this law.

And despite overturning and ignoring it, it was the relatively relaxed social attitudes towards queer identities in Poland compared to other Eastern Bloc countries in the 1970s and '80s that allowed *Filo* to exist.

SB: Right. I see.

MB: So, Poland belonged to the Eastern Bloc. In the 1980s, they started an operation that was called Operation Hyacinth, which essentially collected information about every single queer person across all of Poland. They used that information to intimidate, blackmail and arrest people across the whole country. Ryszard Kisiel, who was an activist at the time, knew, in many ways, homosexuality had not been historically criminalised.

He understood that he held the power, essentially, if he was not scared of being intimidated or presented publicly as a queer person. So, what he did, with a group of his friends, was throw these parties where they would dress up in wonderful homemade outfits. They would do photo sessions that were incredibly flamboyant and very often perhaps reference early 20th century's French cabaret culture.

SB: Yes. It's got a kind of 1920s cabaret vibe.

MB: Yes. And the group held these parties where these photographs would also be showcased. They didn't hide these photographs, which, in many ways, would be incredibly intimidating and dangerous for many people.

SB: Yes, of course.

MB: To note, as well, in other Eastern Bloc or Soviet countries, you would literally be imprisoned if somebody caught you with these photographs.

SB: So, were they protected by the historical lack of criminalisation?

MB: Exactly. The group also decided to create *Filo* magazine to distribute information about legal rights, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and any other relevant community information. So, it was like a bulletin where you got this helpful information, and then you obviously would get some gossip, cruising and dating information.

SB: I guess there's something about the way it was queer. Because it was playing with ambiguities, right? It wasn't a gay porn magazine. And playing with notions of gender. There's something about how it was ambiguous that was also quite clever.

MB: Yes. They didn't have the same understanding of queerness as we do today. They used a different vocabulary and had their own ways of understanding and advocating for themselves and their rights. However, their behaviour was much more complex than that.

SB: I wanted to talk about the kind of relationship this material has had with the UK, your experience of touring it, people's relationship with it, and whether there have been new unities formed around it. What has been your experience showing this material?

MB: I feel there is very much DIY, face-to-face things happening across the Baltics in terms of activist organising. It's very hands-on.

SB: *Filo* really captured people's imagination. It shows that you just take something, cut it out, write something, photocopy and distribute it by post or in person. There's something matter of fact about it.

MB: There is a pragmatic element in building a close community.

SB: And responding to a need as well.

MB: And responding to a need, especially. I felt people who participated in the events were reminded, 'Oh, I just actually can do it!'

SB: Yes, I can take politics into my own hands.

MB: Yes, exactly.

SB: Even on a small scale.

MB: Yes. I think politics in this country (UK), the way I observe it, is subjective. It almost feels like you don't need to 'do' politics apart from voting. Many people don't necessarily seek to execute their rights in any other way on a smaller scale, community-focus way.

SB: How about in Edinburgh? That's a different context from London again.

MB: The feedback that I received was quite similar. Agnė Jokšė presented a context in which queerness both felt alien and relatable in many ways. It was so beautiful. A couple of people approached me and said, 'Oh, yes, I just was imagining another place somewhere in Edinburgh or Glasgow, a similar weird architectural construction, where perhaps I had my first kiss.' It felt like very transportable content.

SB: And people relate to that sense of alienation, especially queer people.

MB: I really appreciate how Agnė approached this subject. They handle queerness, language and history from that region in this very traditional writing and performance sense, and it's just incredibly powerful.

SB: Yes, totally. And I guess there's this question about the future, what happens with this material, and the kind of energy that the events have brought together. Do you have a sense of that, or are there any things planned?



Agnė Jokšė, Lezbynai, 2024. Auto Italia, London and Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland. Photographer: Jules Lacave-Fontourcy



Agnė Jokšė, Lezbynai, 2024. Auto Italia, London and Edinburgh Art Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland. Photographer: Jules Lacave-Fontourcy

MB: When we started doing the series of events, my friend, Adomas Narkevičius, a curator, with his colleagues Inga Lāce and Rebeka Põldsam, also opened an exhibition 'We Don't Do This' at MO Museum, Vilnius, about queer histories, which was wonderful.

SB: Were you aware of that?

MB: I knew Adomas was working on something but didn't know what it was. But I think these sorts of moments of conversations and exposure are important so that they ingrain into people's consciousness and memory. It enables it to become an everyday discourse. I think the next step would be just to continue doing events like those I've mentioned. We're always so focused on the UK/US understanding of queerness, it's healthy and important to consider different perspectives. I want to extend thanks to all the wonderful participants and partners, Editorial (Vilnius), Kim? (Latvia), Center for Contemporary Arts (Estonia), Edinburgh Art Festival (UK) as well as the Baltic Culture Fund and its team for their generous support.

SB: I also think specificity is important. When I read through the things you sent, I felt this impetus to not think about the region as this one nebulous thing, to say that there are conditions that affect these countries, but within these conditions, there are very specific reactions and very specific cultures.

MB: Yes, precisely.

SB: And I think acknowledging specificities is an important aspect of this as well as nurturing the kind of resilience that comes from recognising similarities.

MB: Yes, completely. Couldn't have said it better.



Rectial, 2023, Gregor Kulla. Kanuti Gildi SAAL, Estonia. Courtesy the artist. Photography: Alana Proosa

The Competition between Personal and Collective Memory. The exhibition of work by Morta Jonynaitė 'Light Rain with Big Drops' at the Drifts gallery

December 13, 2024

Author Monika Valatkaitė



Morta Jonynaitė, Pink Street Boys, 2024, Cotton, wool, textile dyes, hand weaving, wooden construction, 172 x 116 x 25 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas

A stream of thoughts reconstructing recent events glides through the brain like sharpened blades. The cuts slice through the fabric of memory, striving to ensure that, in the future, the present will heal with scars from the sutures bridging the gaps. *Never forget*, I think, as if the cuts weren't enough: blood also flows from the wound at my temple, caused by the bullet of an intensely voluntarily inflicted experience. Yet the very word *never*, implying no time and encompassing non-being, projects the inevitability of forgetting.

In this introduction addressed to readers, I weave hints of my personal experiences into the fabric of collective memory, as fine as capillaries. A similar process unfolds at the Drifts gallery, where the younger-generation artist Morta Jonynaitė presents her solo exhibition 'Light Rain with Big Drops'. Interpreted, reflected upon, or simply consumed as visual imagery by viewers, the artist's work, layering references to private life and widely recognised phenomena in the form of memories and reflections, flow into the organism of collective memory. The interweaving of personal and collective memory in a single fabric serves as the central theme of this exhibition, inspired by the book *The Years*

by the French writer Annie Ernaux.



Morta Jonynaitė, Chimeros, 2024, Diptych, Cotton, knotting, weaving, crocheting, 100 x 60 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas

The exhibition commentary, written by the curator Paulius Andriuškevičius, opens with words from this very book: 'At these moments she thinks that her life could be drawn as two intersecting lines: one horizontal, which charts everything that has happened to her, everything she's seen or heard at every instant, and the other vertical, with only a few images clinging to it, spiralling down into darkness.' It is worth noting that this quote is chosen with remarkable precision in the context of Jonynaitė's exhibition. The horizontal and vertical axes mentioned reference the artistic expression of the exhibited works, woven vertically and horizontally by interlacing threads. Simultaneously, Ernaux's words evoke the narrative structure of blending two memories into one coherent whole.

Jonynaitė quite literally weaves her personal experience into the fabric of collective memory, where they find a place in the viewer's own recollections. First and foremost, her works testify to the physically demanding labour required at the loom, where the textile objects are meticulously created. Later, on reading the accompanying text written by Jonynaitė, it becomes evident that her works encode memories of her daily life, travels, memorable moments, and similar experiences. However, no matter how many autobiographical details of the artist we might uncover, her objects are equally rich in fragments of collective memory. Jonynaitė continues the ancient weaving tradition connecting the past with the present. Her woven works incorporate decorative elements conceived by other creators, filtering pre-existing ideas through her personal lens. The titles of her pieces reference popular culture, mythology, and geographical landmarks. Furthermore, the exhibition is accompanied by a written narrative that hints at universal human experience and societal issues.

As I reflect on the fabric of two interwoven memories in Jonynaitė's works and try to discern, through the quote from Ernaux, whether the horizontal axis represents personal memory or the vertical, I find myself contemplating the interplay between personal and collective memory. The horizontal axis described by Ernaux is threaded around the pronoun *she*, which, while referring to an individual, situates *her* within the grand narrative of history: amidst everything that has happened to her, what she has seen, what she has heard, every moment. The word *everything* resonates as a densely textured fabric, woven from actual things: facts, melodies recorded in the media, and images captured within. This resonates with my thoughts on how I can often remember the plots of films, series and books better than events from my own life, which, on rereading my journals, often surprise me. I can recite entire lyrics of songs that I didn't write, but I can't recall the words I spoke in important conversations. I know the dresses Emma Stone wore while accepting her Oscars, but I can't remember what I wore on my first date. Thus, while I exist as an individual, I thrive in the persistent mire of events and phenomena surrounding me.

I identify the competition of memories not only in the dynamics of Jonynaitė's works described above, but also in specific examples. On entering the gallery, I encounter the piece *Pink Street Boys*, whose silhouette reminds me of the ceremonial mantles worn by monarchs and priests in grand processions, symbolising luxury or spirituality. However, reading Jonynaitė's narrative, I discover that the piece encodes the opposite: gritty bar and punk rock culture, along with memories of the smell of sweat and the artist's battles with personal demons. This leads me to question which side of Jonynaitė's work, the external or the internal, carries more weight. As a viewer, *Pink Street Boys* is visually intriguing to me, but the clear associations evoked by my initial impression quickly overshadow this sensation. At the same time, the silences in Jonynaitė's personal story draw me in like a thread caught in a sewing machine, provoking an urge to know more. Who is the boxer who left marks on her body?



Morta Jonynaitė, *Shed Skins*, 2024, Triptych, Linen, cotton, hand weaving, sewing, wood carving, Variable dimensions. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas

Collective memory is often shaped by societal wounds and traumas. It is no surprise, then, that Jonynaitė draws attention to social issues in this exhibition. While observing the diptych *Chimeras* (though no matter how I look at it, I see the image of the mythical Greek creature Medusa depicted from the front and the back in the lacework), I gather from the title and the roaring folklorically stylised face that this piece represents dark forces. The screaming mouth, furrowed brows and dishevelled hair symbolise an outburst of anger, an emotional response to the unjust treatment of an individual. What specific behaviour this message addresses becomes clear in Jonynaitė's narrative, which hints at the suppression of women's freedom. *Chimeras* refers to trampled women's rights: silencing, the denial of free will, degrading social status, and inflicted harm.

Another social issue reflected in the exhibition, which I discern in the piece *10 Minutes of Vilnius Silence*, is marginalisation. Observing the work created using the anamorphic principle, where one angle reveals a reclining person and another a flock of pigeons, the complementary images remind me of the marginalised individuals I've seen in the station district. A drug addict overdosing, a reeking alcoholic, a battered thief: one of them lies unconscious on Chopin Street. This person, perhaps struggling with depression, haunted by life's traumas and challenges that they were unable to overcome, probably leads a life as sombre as the sound of the *Prelude in E Minor Op. 28 No 4*. Yet few passers-by burden themselves with pondering the reasons why this individual has reached such a low point, or take action to change it.

The wounds and traumas that sow ideas uniting individuals in collective thought, eventually forming collective memory, have paved the way for movements such as feminism, social policies and protections. From this perspective, collective memory appears to have greater strength than

personal memory. However, at the same time, I reflect on the fact that no collective memory could exist without the individual stories that happened to specific people, becoming their personal memories. This brings me back to the question: which holds more weight, the external world surrounding the individual or their internal world?

In the course of this article, I have already considered how I tend to remember movie plots and song lyrics better than my own experiences and spoken words. However, the reverse relationship between these memories is also intriguing. Songs often revive suppressed memories of specific individuals, or reconstruct sensations once felt, while movie plots transport me back to similar moments I've lived in the past. Such personal memories are revived through the recognition of shared human experiences, experiences that some of us reflect upon through creative work, and others in our thoughts while engaging in everyday tasks.



Morta Jonynaitė, *Blissfully Unaware*, 2024, Linen, watercolor, hand weaving, sewing, 145x 153 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas

Jonynaitė's work *Blissfully Unaware* resonated deeply with its sense of familiarity. The abstract landscape motif in the textile resembles a watercolour painting, its forms seemingly poured from stains made by wine and ink, exuding an expression of disappointment, nostalgia or longing. This impression is amplified by a sentence filled with regret in Jonynaitė's accompanying text: 'For four years, I lived entirely in memories and perhaps spent too much energy trying to keep them vivid.' This piece reflects how the constant process of reworking thoughts unravels the fabric of reconstructed information thread by thread. As a result, wear and tear emerge, the silhouette's shape alters, patterns fade, and decorative elements fall away. Here, I return to Ernaux's words cited in the exhibition commentary about the vertical axis, where only a few images remain, plunging into the night. At least for myself, I interpret the vertical axis in the French writer's book as pointing to the

transient and constantly eroding nature of personal memory, where, over time, only individual threads hang loosely from the dismantled fabric. Yet no matter how tattered this structure may be, it remains an inseparable part of who we are.

The stream of thoughts reconstructing recent events glides through the brain like sharpened blades. The cuts slash through the fabric of memory, striving to mend the present into future scars where threads bind the ruptures. *I will always remember*, I think, as if the cuts weren't enough, blood still trickles from a wound at my temple, the result of an intense experience voluntarily shot into my mind. The very word *always*, implying an enduring span of time and embodying existence, projects a certainty of remembrance.

At this moment, I'm not even sure whether this is the introduction or the conclusion of the text. *Never forget* or *always remember*. It could go either way, as I recall words that once echoed in the past. Yet only the unknowable future will reveal the quality and longevity of this reconstructed and reprocessed material. There will always be songs, films and well-trodden paths that transport us back to the past. Thus, perhaps collective and personal memory do not compete at all, but instead form a masterful balance, preserving stories.

The exhibition of work by Morta Jonynaitė 'Light Rain with Big Drops' is on view at the Drifts gallery until 28 December 2024.



Morta Jonynaitė, *Departed*, 2024, Cotton, wool, textile dyes, hand weaving, metal construction, 168 x 136 x 14 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Mirta Jonynaitė, Miglos str., 2024, Linen, cotton, textile dyes, hand weaving, sewing, wood carving, 245 x 360 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



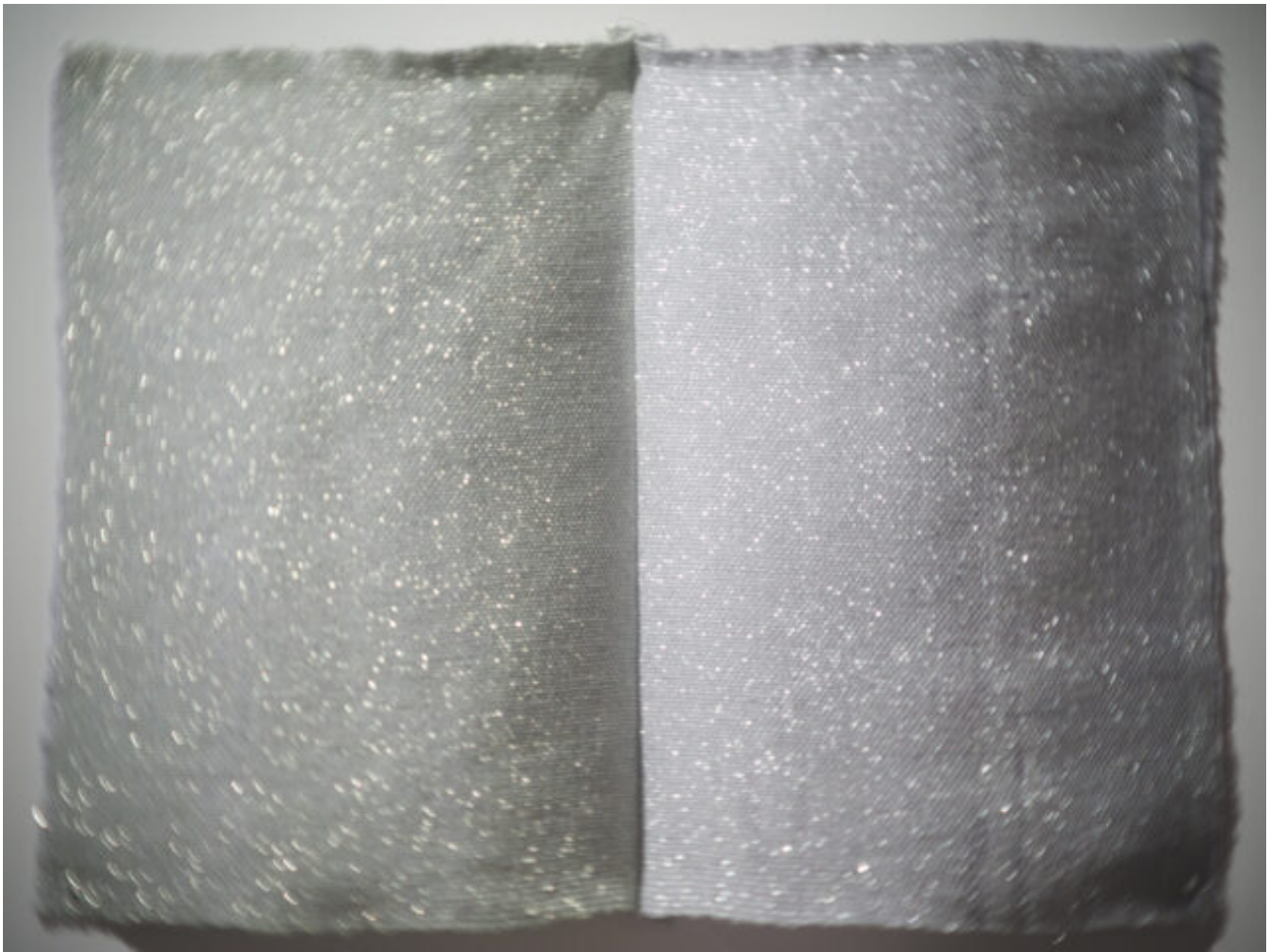
Morta Jonynaitė, Chimeros, 2024, Diptych, Cotton, knotting, weaving, crocheting, 100 x 60 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, Chimeros, 2024, Diptych, Cotton, knotting, weaving, crocheting, 100 x 60 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, Shed Skins, 2024, Triptych, detail. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, Harper's Bazaar, 2024, Linen, viscose, lurex, hand weaving, sewing, 39 x 51 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, Pink Street Boys, 2024, Cotton, wool, textile dyes, hand weaving, wooden construction, 172 x 116 x 25 cm. Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, 10 Minutes of Vilnius Silence, 2024, Linen, markers, hand weaving, sewing, 110 x 200 x 19 cm.
Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, 10 Minutes of Vilnius Silence, 2024, Linen, markers, hand weaving, sewing, 110 x 200 x 19 cm.
Photo: Martynas Norvaišas



Morta Jonynaitė, 10 Minutes of Vilnius Silence, 2024, Linen, markers, hand weaving, sewing, 110 x 200 x 19 cm.
Photo: Martynas Norvaišas

A Small Square that Becomes Boundless. An interview with the ceramic artist Onė Austėja Maldonytė

December 16, 2024

Author Agnė Sadauskaitė

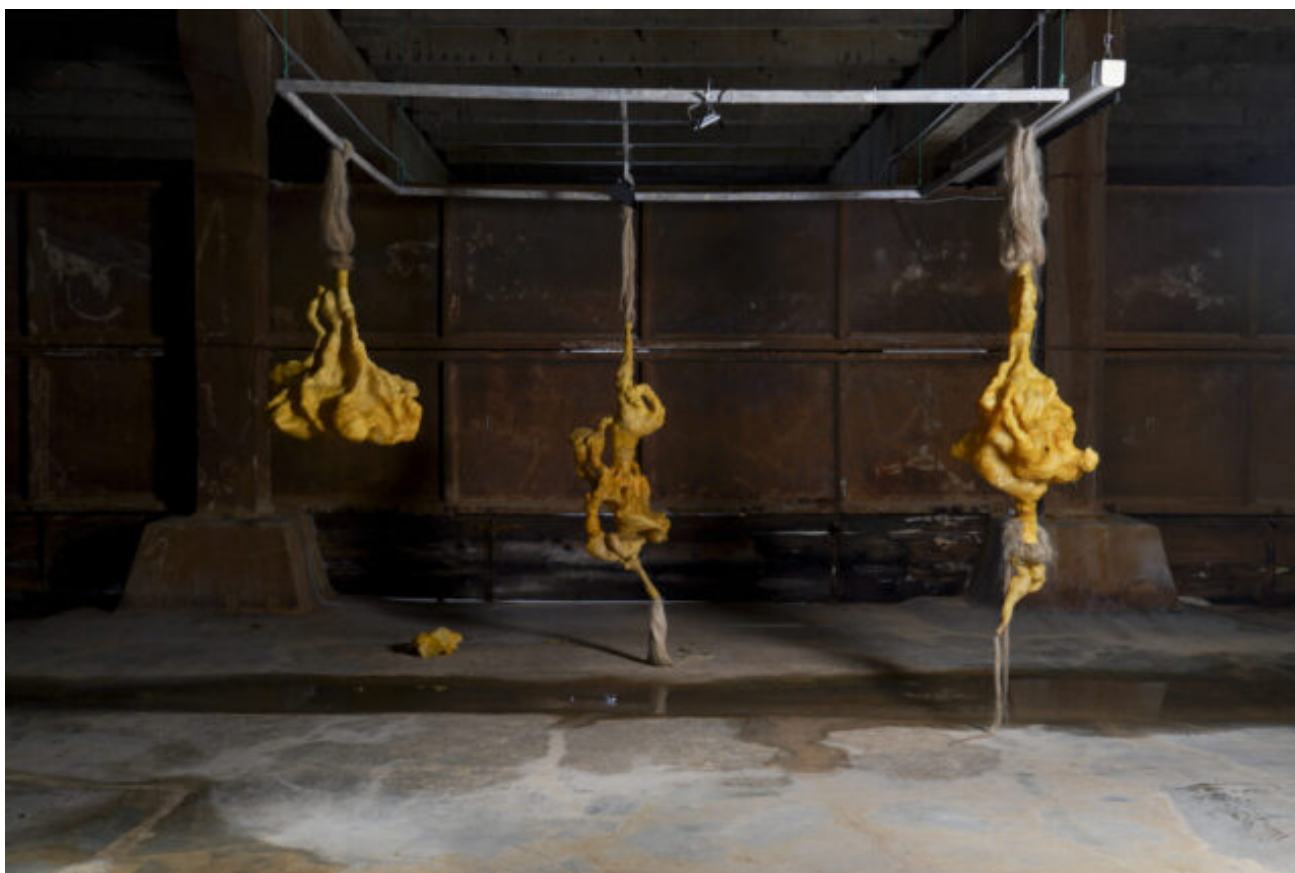


Onė Austėja Maldonytė. Photo from personal archive

On a day when the first snow was covering the rooftops in Kaunas, finding ourselves somewhere between Norway and Lithuania, I had a friendly conversation with the ceramic artist Onė Austėja Maldonytė. Over time, it became clear that Onė often exists in this in-between state, living and creating in Oslo, while frequently spending time in Lithuania. Her visits to her homeland often revolve around project work. Several boxes of her ceramic pieces, part of the underground exhibition 'Inserted' in Panevėžys, recently left for new destinations. These works represent part of her exploration of the connection of organisms with water. In our discussion, we delved into this fascinating experience and the showcased works, which exemplify her long and productive search in the field of ceramics.

A demanding material influenced by air, heat, pressure and gravity, clay requires patience and consistency to master. Onė emphasised these qualities during our conversation, noting the importance of handling unfinished ceramic pieces with care, almost like cradling a baby.

Onė Austėja Maldonytė (b. 1995) is a ceramic artist who works both in Lithuania and Norway. She experiments with various techniques and materials, pushing the boundaries of ceramic art, and questioning fragility and limits. She completed her BA degree in ceramics at Vilnius Academy of Art in 2018, and her MA studies in ceramics at Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2022. She participates actively in residencies, and group and solo exhibitions.



Exhibition 'Inserted' by Onė Austėja Maldonytė at UAB 'Aukštaitijos vandenys', 2024. Photo: Paulius Vepštas



Exhibition 'Inserted' by Onė Austėja Maldonytė at UAB 'Aukštaitijos vandenys', 2024. Photo: Paulius Vepštas

Agn? Sadauskait?: Tell us about your creative journey. When did ceramics first appear in your life, and how did it remain there?

Onė Austėja Maldonytė: I studied at Kaunas Art Gymnasium, where I graduated from the sculpture class. After finishing school, I wanted to apply to the Academy of Art, but at that time sculpture seemed tied to materials like metal, stone and steel, none of which inspired me. Back then I viewed sculpture from a material perspective, from a Classical approach. I was always fascinated by colour, painting and clay, so I decided to study ceramics at Vilnius Academy of Art, despite not having much experience.

During my BA studies we had some introductory courses in design and functional ceramics, but I wasn't interested in reproducing works or creating objects for household use. I was drawn to form, scale and variety. I'm intrigued by space, although I wouldn't say my works are strictly site-specific. Perhaps they adapt and respond to space instead, what could be called 'sensitive sight'. I've always been interested in the relationship between space and objects: how they intertwine, how much history, sound, light and overall atmosphere can be given to the works. Even the hierarchy is fascinating: gallery spaces impose certain constraints and frame the viewer, while non-gallery or specific spaces make art more grounded and more emotionally accessible to the audience.



Onė Austėja Maldonytė's artwork. Photo from personal archive

AS: *You currently live in Norway and studied at Oslo National Academy of the Arts. How did this country become part of your life?*

OAM: During my fourth year of BA studies I participated in the Erasmus exchange programme in Denmark. That's where I first heard about Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Norwegian students presented their academy, showing photos from workshops. The facilities at Oslo seemed excellent: large kilns, a wide selection of glazes, separate studios for masters students, and a focus on sculptural ceramics. In Denmark, the studies balanced design and conceptual art, but the basis was still design and technology, while I leaned more towards sculpture and installation.

I currently live, create and work in Norway, but I spend time in Lithuania as well.

AS: *I'm always curious about the differences between studying in Lithuania, in your case at Vilnius Academy of Art, and abroad. Can you share your impressions of each academy's unique traits?*

OAM: At Vilnius Academy of Art the ceramics course spans all four years, providing students with an in-depth understanding of the technical aspects, albeit at a slower pace. In Oslo, the technical part is covered quickly, and more time is devoted to experimentation, generating ideas, and creative focus. Compared to Vilnius, there's less emphasis on art history and painting and drawing classes.

The Oslo Academy places a lot of emphasis on group activities, workshops and collaborative lectures. Students can customise their schedule: there are a few compulsory lectures, but most classes are chosen freely. MA studies are highly flexible. I met with my supervisor maybe two or three times per semester. The Academy avoids hierarchical relationships, treating students and lecturers as equal artists in a dialogue.



Onė Austėja Maldonytė's artwork. Photo from personal archive

AS: *That sounds like academic therapy: reaching the core of a topic through question and answer sessions. Was it difficult to adapt to an environment where you were equal participants in discussions with lecturers?*

OAM: It felt strange during the first semester. It wasn't easy to engage, because I lacked the tools and skills for open discussion, whereas Scandinavian students seemed to be used to it. They ask questions effortlessly, their minds work in a rhythm of inquiry and listening. In Lithuania, I felt that even reviews of works in mid-semester were more like exams where you had to defend your ideas. Meanwhile, in Oslo critique was about learning from more experienced artists. I prefer this approach,

where even the exams become part of the learning process.

AS: Until mid-November, your exhibition 'Inserted' was taking place in an underground water reservoir in Panevėžys. The location is stunning: finding a ceramics exhibition in such a place was unexpected. Was this the most unusual space you've exhibited in?

OAM: It's definitely one of the strangest. Accessing and being underground, realising that the reservoir once held a massive volume of water, was astonishing. The sheer force of water, the amount of iron it corrodes, the colours it reveals, is all fascinating. The first part of this project was shown in Vilnius and curated by Monika Eidėjūtė. When discussing future plans, I mentioned that I wanted to present these works in a non-gallery space. Monika found this reservoir in Panevėžys, and we spontaneously contacted the administrators. Although not actively used, the space had hosted a few artistic events before.

AS: The longer I studied the photographic documentation, the more the works seemed perfectly placed there. Your ceramic objects appear as if they have been frozen in a moment of stillness, but after the photographs were taken they were ready to move, drip or crawl towards water. This exhibition was a continuation of 'Virtuoti' at VDA's Akademija gallery which opened in 2023. How does this exhibition continue the first? How do they differ?

OAM: Both share a focus on materiality, combining paper clay and wax. The aesthetics of paper clay often don't resemble ceramics, sometimes they are mistaken for papier-mâché. At Akademija I explored parasitism through ceramics, playing with the perception of clay as a natural, even elevated, material. Clay is technically complex, prone to breaking, cracking and crumbling. Finished objects are often presented on pedestals, untouchable, and I've always wanted to challenge this impression.

The transition to wax represented the analysis of living forms, a kind of parasite entering and exiting ceramics, connecting the exhibition's elements. Wax, as a parasite, breathes life into the work, allowing it to evolve, change, and avoid stasis.

In Panevėžys, I explored water as a unifying element of life. We are born through water, share information through it, and exist in a water-connected ecosystem. This idea of connection resonated deeply while working in the reservoir. I envisioned the sculptural elements as creatures that might have inhabited that space, and the process of entering the underground hall, leaving the real world behind, intrigued me.



Onė Austėja Maldonytė's artwork. Photo from personal archive

AS: *Your ceramic and wax combination technique is fascinating. At what stage do you incorporate wax?*

OAM: I fire the pieces once at high temperature without glazing, then pour melted wax mixed with pigment over them. I also use wax to join parts of the sculptures. Metal frameworks form the base: I do that in the studio, and I complete the assembly in the exhibition space, making it a three-part process.

AS: *Have you mostly been using this process recently?*

OAM: For the past two years, yes, mainly because this project spanned several years. I'll decide later whether to continue. My MA works, created in Oslo, were fired without glaze, but using reduction firing to enhance the drawings and the pigments. I wanted to preserve a matt impression, sometimes using a few transparent glazes. However, the wax and the paraffin gave the softness and smoothness that I was looking for, enhancing the pigments on the ceramic surface. I usually sculpt with fireclay clay, but I've recently been using paper ceramics, where paper is mixed into the clay mass. I make this clay myself.

AS: *Your works are highly distinctive: lively, dynamic, detailed yet massive, organic yet fragile and strong. How did you discover your style?*

OAM: During my MA studies, my professor Caroline Slotte asked why my objects relied on flat, stable bases. Her questions made me rethink the relationship between the sculpture and the ground, prompting experiments.

Clay behaves unpredictably during the firing, influenced by gravity and heat. While the ceramic pieces are typically formed with a consistent thickness, I intentionally 'played' with irregularities. Clay

has a personality: you can't simply bend it your way. It tilts, bends and shifts, based on its thickness and heat. Each piece emerges from the kiln slightly altered, leaning however it sees fit.

This process is especially engaging with large works. Once, I couldn't sleep all night because I forgot to cover a piece before firing it, which resulted in its collapse! But as a demanding and humbling material, clay teaches patience and adaptability. That is how a personal style forms.



Onė Austėja Maldonytė's artwork. Photo from personal archive

AS: *Did your perspective on ceramics change after finishing your studies? Do the exploration and experimentation, which are so important to you, now happen within more defined boundaries?*

OAM: I've been working mostly with drawings on ceramics and paper clay. When you find a certain 'square' that interests you and delve into it deeper, it becomes boundless. I'm still exploring that square today, seeing how long it remains intriguing. Of course, the more I work, the more colour, glaze and texture come into play: they become inseparable. Experimentation doesn't drastically change your understanding in a single day; rather, it develops naturally.

AS: *You mentioned that ceramic objects often seemed final during your studies. When exhibiting your works now, they seem to extend their life: they are often propped up with metal beams, wrapped in material, or tied to ceilings, making those elements part of the exhibition, continuing the objects' stories, and exploring new forms. In your work, questioning the boundaries of ceramics as a medium is important. Why are these themes and explorations so important to you?*

OAM: One recurring theme in my work is transformation. It's tied to thoughts about time, its passage, how we perceive continuity, and when it vanishes. Two years ago, I participated in a dance residency where we explored the boundaries of the body through physical exercise, movement and

rituals. We spent time in a cave, where the rhythmic motion, sound vibrations, sense of timelessness and darkness captivated me.

Another theme I often explore is fragility/sensitivity and their strength. In today's world, we always try to appear strong, valuing the trait so highly that it sometimes leaves no room for sensitivity. This is directly tied to materiality, because ceramics seem fragile, and yet at the same time they are enduring.

AS: Would you say you're a sensitive person? Do these considerations partly arise from thinking about how to live in the world with this particular trait?

OAM: I think so. Sensitivity and transformation in my work emerge from observing the world, where everything changes so quickly that it's become normal. Stepping back and looking at these processes from a distance helps to translate them into art.

AS: The ceramic-making process is long and complex, requiring planning, time and resources. What still surprises you about the process? Which is your favourite part?

OAM: One thing I had to learn was patience: initially I had none. I had to understand that if I rushed and skipped a step, the piece would collapse and I'd have to start all over again. Sometimes I tried to cut corners, but that always showed in the final results. Learning to work methodically with the material was essential.

Also, learning to let go. You never know at what stage things might go wrong. There have been times when a piece was finished and placed in the kiln, only to shatter into pieces just before closing the kiln door. At those moments, I wouldn't know what to do with myself.

What I enjoy most is shaping forms and arranging completed works in a space. Sketching ideas and concepts is also fun, but there are challenges when ideas don't come together and I can't find an entry point. The initial stages are often filled with frustration. Only when everything aligns and I have an initial plan do I allow myself to start working with the material: that feels like a reward.



Exhibition 'Inserted' by Onė Austėja Maldonytė at UAB 'Aukštaitijos vandenys', 2024. Photo: Paulius Vepštas

AS: *Do you often stay in that frustration phase for long?*

OAM: It depends on the project and the deadline. Usually, that phase naturally takes the longest. It's quite funny when I start working with the material, because the plan I spent so much time on often changes, due to the material itself or the final firing, forcing me to rework the plan again.

AS: *Are there any forthcoming projects or plans you'd like to share? When can we expect your next exhibition in Lithuania?*

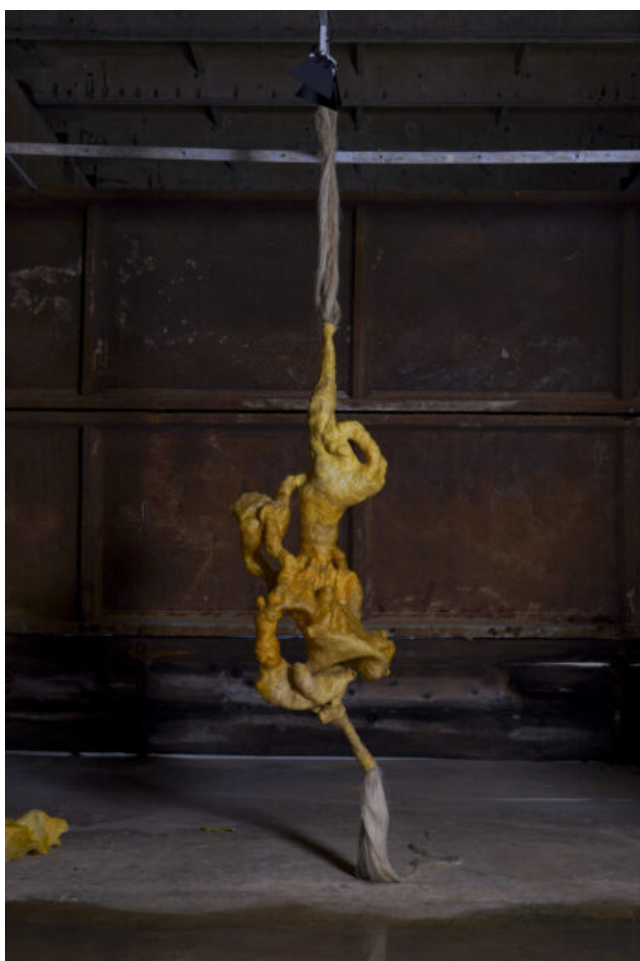
OAM: The works exhibited in Panevėžys are still making their way back to Kaunas. That exhibition was one of the largest in terms of scale: the space was massive, and transporting the works required a major effort, since some were in Lithuania and others were in Oslo. It took us over a week to install the pieces, so it was a huge undertaking.

Eventually, I'd like to present the works in another space, but Monika, the curator, and I agreed it would be best to take a break for a few months, reflect, and then look for a new venue. I don't have any specific planned projects at the moment. I'm settling into a new studio in Oslo and exploring new ideas. Right now it's a period of transition to a more studio-based, creative phase, without fixed deadlines. It's nice to have these periods when you can search and play.

AS: *Thank you for the conversation, On?.*



Exhibition 'Inserted' by Onė Austėja Maldonytė at UAB 'Aukštaitijos vandenys', 2024. Photo: Paulius Vepštas



Exhibition 'Inserted' by Onė Austėja Maldonytė at UAB 'Aukštaitijos vandenys', 2024. Photo: Paulius



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Onė Austėja Maldonytė's artwork. Photo from personal archive

It is Rewarding to Cultivate Complex Relationships. A Conversation with the curators of Kaunas Artists' House in the context of the project 'Belly-Up Dream (Dog or Fish?)'

December 19, 2024

Author Ieva Gražytė



Curators (from the left) Asta Volungė, Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, Edvinas Grinkevičius. Photo by Vytis Mantrimavičius

A conversation with Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė, Edvinas Grinkevičius and Asta Volungė, curators at Kaunas Artists' House, explores the industries of rational happiness and inevitable sadness. The discussion also delves into cultural tools designed to create safe spaces and institutions where we can experience and critically reflect on sadness.

Ieva Gražytė: You present the project 'Belly-Up Dream (Dog or Fish?)' as a contemporary context initiative, encompassing exhibitions, discursive/performative events, and an educational programme. In short, this almost year-long programme at Kaunas Artists' House consisted of eighteen events in various formats and an uncountable number of participants. What were the personal and collective motivations behind this truly extensive and complex project?

Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė: The initial idea was to work together on a cohesive annual programme. For some time, we had felt the desire to share our expertise and create a thematic programme encompassing all the fields we curate at Kaunas Artists' House. While at first the division into exhibition, educational and discursive programmes was clear, these boundaries blurred over time, with the programmes intertwining and complementing each other. I was particularly interested in developing and critiquing the theme of the happiness industry through the tools of the exhibitions

programme. Having been engaged for a while in the context of Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, I was intrigued by the possibility of crafting an alternative narrative for the sadness industry, without which such happiness cannot exist. The theme resonated even more after I read closely Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* during one of the strict lockdowns.



Liliana Zeic's exhibition at Kaunas Artists' House, 2024 July. Photo by D. Matonis

IG: The curatorial inspiration or overarching methodology of this project is drawn from Sara Ahmed's book *The Promise of Happiness*, where the primary object of critique is the archetype of the 'happy family'. It might sound amusing, but you, Agnė, Edvinas and Asta, and Kaunas Artists' House as a whole, have been, for me and I believe for others in the Lithuanian cultural field, an example of a happy family for many years. How do you manage to nurture this connection?

Asta Volungė: Whenever I hear the sentence 'We are more than a company, corporation or institution, we are a family,' I take it as a sign that the emotional climate in such a workplace may not necessarily be healthy. This rhetoric often sounds like an obligation to appear satisfied and to tolerate everything. In such a 'happy family', it often becomes difficult to criticise the internal system. As curators of Kaunas Artists' House, we all come from different families, and not everyone associates the concept of a family solely with happiness. For me, the first association with our team is not 'family'. However, if I had to use the family metaphor, we would be a dysfunctional chosen family. We are connected by a multitude of shared activities and cultural initiatives beyond the scope of Kaunas Artists' House, and these have created a bond that could easily be mistaken for the image of a family.

AB: We certainly spend more time together than with our 'real' families.

Edvinas Grinkevičius: I agree. We are not a happy family, and that's precisely why we work together quite smoothly. Our professional relationships intertwine with our other social activities outside

Kaunas Artists' House. We nurture all this effort, but not necessarily with ease. Being involved together in various personal, activist and self-organisational practices, we find ourselves in diverse situations where we work, socialise and argue together, making our relationship highly dynamic. We see each other in different contexts. I believe it would be simpler to maintain strictly collegial, professional and neutral relationships. However, it is rewarding to cultivate a complex relationship where you can allow yourself to be multifaceted. Particularly in curatorial work, this creates a space where decisions are not simulated or pre-determined. Sometimes we make less calculated, more emotional yet authentic decisions, precisely because of how safe we feel in our working environment. This also allows us to share responsibilities, not feel isolated, and resist the pressure of thinking that everything depends solely on your decisions.



Gregor Kulla's performance at Kaunas Artists' House, 2024 November. Photo by Vytis Mantrimavičius

IG: It is an excellent observation that emotional and institutional safety enables unique and uncalculated curatorial decisions. You introduced the programme with a detailed and vivid curatorial text: 'No one can explain what is happening in the world today. There's a pervasive sense of incomprehensibility, where everything seems intangible, almost dreamlike. At the same time, it feels as though it is so difficult to grasp contemporary existence; the possibilities for changing it dissolve even further, lost in a void made up of countless fragments, whose totality evokes profound sadness. Amid this whirlwind, where ephemerality and surrealism intertwine, an acute sense of incomprehension lingers. Everything appears unearthly, almost dreamlike. Yet within this surreal tapestry a persistent question remains: if the essence of contemporary existence cannot be understood, what hope is there for reshaping it? It feels as though the very fabric of change dissolves into a void composed of fractured fragments, each amplifying a deep sense of melancholy.' This sort of explains the title 'Belly-Up Dream (Dog or Fish?)'. A fish swimming belly-up suggests death, perhaps symbolising surrender to uncontrollable, possibly even supernatural, currents of modernity. But what about the dog?

AV: A dog lying on its back, belly up, is usually an expression of blind trust and boundless joy. In contrast, a fish swimming belly up shows no signs of life. So even the same reaction can signify entirely different things. With the title, we wanted to emphasise the space created when one flips over an axis, belly up. Between the dog and the fish lies a space to endure, experience emotions, and critically analyse them, emotions that are inevitable when experiencing happiness, such as sadness or anxiety.

AB: For me, the most important aspect of the title is the dream as a state, rather than the dog or fish as subjects. The dream was chosen to reflect the reality in which we exist and attempt to reshape, or simply accept and come to terms with it. Acceptance is essential as an act against violence. It's no coincidence that the exhibition programme began with the artist Zoe Williams and her interpretations of the melancholic myth of Eros. Zoe's exhibition was essentially very erotic, as is her entire artistic expression: deeply emotional, rebellious, and at the same time ephemeral. One could say that throughout the entire exhibition programme, which each show complemented, a narrative of an erotic, highly corporeal and often nightmarish dream unfolded. One segment of the exhibition, or perhaps it's more fitting to call all the exhibitions in 'Belly-Up Dream (Dog or Fish?)' parts of a single show, relocated to a completely different space, a now-closed bar called O Kodėl Ne? (And Why Not?), where the installation *Total Strangeness* by Žygimantas Kudirka was displayed, focusing on our collective obedience to media and the transfer of our bodies into virtual reality. In a sense, we too relocated a part of the exhibition's body to this little-known, veiled, and now non-existent bar space, a kind of black hole. Honestly, I find it difficult to recall this literally dark part of the exhibition. It feels like a foreign object that has become part of the body.

IG: In Ahmed's book, the concept of the happy family as the foundation of society is explored through three alternative perspectives: those of angry feminists, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants. The latter, given current geopolitical circumstances, receive the most public attention. The project also involved several international artists.



Performance by Ieva Rižė and Vaidas Bartušas during the exhibition opening of Rižė's at Kaunas Artists' House. Photo by V. Mantrimavičius



Ieva Rižė's exhibition at Kaunas Artists' House, 2024 September. Photo by D. Matonis

AB: Almost all the programme's artists were not based or doing their creative work in Lithuania. In total, there were perhaps three local artists, although it's difficult to say whether they would identify themselves as such. None of the artists lived or worked in Kaunas. However, the terms 'migrant' and 'migration' are politically charged today. I don't wish to romanticise these concepts, and I approach them cautiously, especially in the context of current policies aimed at excluding specific groups of people. I am referring to the very real and violent measures being used today to push back refugees crossing the Lithuanian-Belarusian border. We barely touched upon the theme of melancholic migrants, which is particularly relevant right now and in my opinion deserves to be explored with much greater seriousness. We only scratched the surface.

If we return to the world of angry feminists and unhappy queers, vast horizons unfold. I should mention the remarkable Polish artist Liliana Zeic, who seems to embed the stories of Polish feminists in her marquetry works, continuing the craft she learned from her parents. Here, the craft itself becomes a means of narrativising the issues surrounding queer representation, while simultaneously focusing on the contours of bodies, their connections, and intertwining. In the exhibition at Kaunas Artists' House, Liliana collaborated on the architectural set-up with Laura Kaminskaitė and Matas Šatūnas. Together, they brought Liliana's narrative to life brilliantly, introducing shades of lavender and a sculptural object that highlighted the marquetry technique used by the artist.

AV: The first event in the programme featured Sasha Wild, emigrés who reflect on their childhood in Lithuania through their creative practice, exploring the experience of being queer on the periphery during the period of the national revival. Meanwhile, Afrang Malekian, one of the contributors to the penultimate cycle, uses kitsch and pop culture to engage in a dialogue about diasporas and migrating culture. The theme of migration can be found in the work of a significant proportion of the cycle's artists: it is an unavoidable experience and state for many, not necessarily tied to economic reasons, but also creative and emotional ones. However, I agree with Agnė that in the current context it is crucial to distinguish migration as a theme or emotion from the forced, real act of migration and its associated consequences.



Exhibition space architects Matas Šatūnas ir Laura Kaminskaitė at Liliana Zeic's exhibition opening. Photo by Vytis Mantrimavičius

IG: The concept of happiness as a theory of rational choice was first explored by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, who inconsistently developed the theory of 'the happy consciousness'. Essentially, this theory argued that rational happiness obstructs progress, individuality and resistance. For a time, the archetype of such happiness in the collective consciousness was linked to another archetype, the American Dream. Today, other universal and long-commodified images of happiness have taken hold. Meanwhile, the experience of sadness remains far more unique. This unproductive emotion, one that no one actively chooses to pursue or catalyse, is now being described as a potential, and perhaps already functioning, industry. What makes you personally saddest, and what characteristics of the sadness industry do you observe?

EG: What saddens me is that we do not have equal opportunities to grieve or feel sadness. Sadness becomes a privilege that some cannot afford, whether due to a lack of money or time, or other commitments. The broader system does not support the creation of equal conditions for these complex but important states. That is why we should strive to create such opportunities within cultural spaces.

AV: There are so many reasons to feel sadness that we become desensitised, losing our sensitivity, finding comfort and a sense of security in the mundane. Unable to fully grasp or change the ongoing wars and catastrophes, we grow apolitical and succumb to the temptation of diving into discursive details. What saddens me is that even in the cultural sphere, there is a considerable degree of apoliticism, a lack of clear positions, and silence, that tacitly endorse the status quo. Therefore, I hope that in the spaces Edvinas mentioned, we can embrace uncertainty or anxiety, and by allowing ourselves this space, find a way to engage with reality without passively resigning ourselves to it.

AB: I could answer the question what brings me joy these days more easily: it would require less listing. And I wouldn't place such a big emphasis on sadness. For me, the best expression of how sadness can be experienced outside the normative, market-driven methods is through the interplay of body horror and humour. During the discursive programme, people watched films by the artist Marianna Simnett, which are filled with elements of horror. One might wonder why we need to depict horror, which is already so pervasive, in art as well. But its relationship with humour transforms it into something more bearable. There's a wonderful dynamic between horror and humour that may not be accessible to everyone, but for some, understanding the sight of crows killing their young purely as horror might actually be beneficial. It shows that a fairy tale doesn't have to be Hollywood-style cheerful.

It is no coincidence that we will conclude the exhibition (or exhibition programme) with the Finnish artist Kristoffer Ala-Ketola. While employing different forms of expression, he uses elements of drag and camp aesthetics, combined with body horror, to explore how to endure the absurdity of the here and now. I see humour both as the only way out of absolute sadness and as a means to resist the current industry of normative grieving. This resistance can only be achieved by attempting to discard our shells, something Kristoffer proposes by discarding the skeleton and embracing being a formless mass.



Johhan Rosenberg's performance Post-Summer Choir at Kaunas Artists' House, 2024 July. Photo by V. Mantrimavičius



Johhan Rosenberg's performance Post-Summer Choir at Kaunas Artists' House, 2024 July. Photo by V. Mantrimavičius

IG: We often fail to value sadness. As Sara Ahmed stated, 'Where we find happiness teaches us what we value, not just what is valuable.' However, I am more interested in the actual value of sadness, particularly for the critical and expansive cultural field. How can we learn to grieve or experience sadness in a meaningful way?

AV: Sadness is often undervalued because it is perceived as unproductive, as something that hinders us from fulfilling our social and economic functions. It is only deemed useful insofar as it accelerates the consumption of sadness-related goods and services, such as yoga, various therapies, self-help books, and courses. These products are often designed to divert sadness, rather than allow us to fully feel and reflect on it.

AB: I would like to interject that there's nothing wrong with not wanting to be sad. We chase happiness in ways we know or have been taught, whether it's temporary or not. To quote Jason Read, 'We desire not necessarily what is right or wrong but what brings joy, increases our capacity to act, and avoid what brings sadness. It is precisely such encounters that determine our relationships with objects and how we value them.' I came across this quote when I was writing about part of the exhibition by the artistic duo Liudmila, where a belief in luck, personified by the goddess Fortuna, is playfully employed. This belief, trapped in a Soviet-era lampshade or a 1990s slot machine in the exhibition, reveals a certain attachment to normative sadness, never quite reaching the American Dream. So perhaps sometimes it's not even worth being sad?

IG: Negativity also fuels the consumption of online news. The ratio of positive to negative headlines in global news streams is dramatic, which is why some broadcasters have started limiting the amount of negative news in the media to protect the emotional well-being of their audiences.

AV: The educational programme originated from a need to listen to the emotional world of the younger generation, a generation that grew up with the internet and a constant global stream of negative news. The first event in the project was co-curated by a group of young people. This generation, often portrayed on social media as 'snowflakes', incapable of working, and dreaming of unrealistic future scenarios, is far more engaged with global political issues and current events than my peers ever were. Discussions with them brought to light themes later developed by participating artists: climate anxiety, emotional self-preservation, relationships with hierarchies, and, unfortunately, the persistently painful experience of being queer.



Edvinas Grinkevičius in conversation with Sasha Kochan and Teo Ala Ruona about Paul B. Preciado film Orlando. Photo by V. Mantrimavičius

AB: This led to a beautiful collaboration with SODAS2123, thanks to Edvinas. Their residency programme focusing on the theme of celebrations was a perfect fit for us. It provided an excellent opportunity to weave and expand the project's educational programme, which included events such as a 'Name Day Party' with the artist Ollie Hermanson, and a performative presentation of climate change issues in a public urban space with the artist Kirsty Kross, among others.

EG: Yes, as I co-curate the celebrations residency programme at the SODAS2123 cultural complex with Monika Kalinauskaitė and Aušra Vismantaitė, it seemed meaningful to present the practices and activities of the residents in Kaunas. This collaboration enriched the programme, especially since many of the artists participating in the residency work with socially and politically engaged practices. For instance, during one event, a non-binary person from Jonava, visiting Kaunas Artists' House for the first time, shared how much it meant to them to be in such a safe space. Creating safer spaces for various vulnerable groups through culture is a vital part of the programmes I curate.

AV: The framework of the educational programme is quite broad, with various event formats intertwining. The events in this part of the project ranged from a participatory performance in a city

square with Kirsty Kross, to a two-and-a-half-hour listening session with Daina Pupkevičiūtė. The aim was for the different elements of the programme to complement each other not only in form but also in content, offering diverse approaches and perspectives.



Ollie Hermansson's (Sodas2123 resident) workshop Name Party at Kaunas Artists' House. Photo by V. Mantrimavičius

IG: I'd like to end the conversation with a naive question: does sadness contradict beauty, the primary function of art?

EG: At the opening event of this project, readings from Sara Ahmed's book *The Promise of Happiness*, at which we shared excerpts relevant to us and the programme, I was reminded of one of the first lesbian bestsellers, *Spring Fire*, published in 1952 by the author Marijane Agnes Meaker under the pseudonym Vin Packer. The author was required by her publishers to ensure that the love story between women in the novel would not have a happy ending as a condition for its publication. It seems that this narrative was carefully cultivated for a long time, teaching us that we and our queer experiences could exist, but only as unfulfilled and unthreatening to normative society. This lack of fulfilment continues to be conveniently depicted, not only in Hollywood films and literature, but also in broader social and political contexts.

Thus, when reflecting on this recurring narrative of an unhappy ending in the context of the performative/discursive programme, I began to see the entire programme as a contemporary procession of lamentations. However, these lamentations are not meant to conform or surrender, but to find strength in vulnerability. These lamentations do not merely reiterate the leitmotif of the unhappy ending; they resist and reclaim it. We find strength in our unfulfilled state, choosing not to follow the normative path. This idea resonated in the performances by Sasha Wilde, Johhan Rosenberg, Gregor Kulla and Paulius Janušonis, as well as in Paul B. Preciado's film *Orlando*, which had its Lithuanian première within the framework of our programme. Through diverse aesthetic

languages and performative practices, the programme's artists employed methods of personal ethnography, using personal experiences to analyse and interpret sociocultural phenomena. They created sensitive, emotionally engaging narratives that offered alternative perspectives on the complexities of everyday life, sexuality, corporeality, and the contradictions inherent in contemporary world-views.

Happiness is often understood as something we should share and rejoice in together, but I believe it is important to attempt consciously to reverse these notions. It is sadness, in fact, that provides the opportunity to experience and understand joy. In the programme, deeply individual emotions, such as mourning and sorrow, could be experienced *collectively*. Perhaps this is how an alternative 'happy ending' takes place, through collective resistance to the prohibition of a happy ending.

AV: We live at a time when traditional social algorithms for dealing with sadness or crises are considered outdated or have been completely forgotten. Practices such as lamentation, pathways sprinkled with spruce branches leading to the home of the deceased, or rituals that give a shape to the expression of negative emotions, have been replaced by the so-called sadness industry, commercial self-improvement products aimed at individual 'feel good/better' outcomes. These products often ignore the fact that we live surrounded by tragedies, the majority of which are far from natural. Art and culture have the potential to create, if not structures, then at least tools for rethinking these situations, tools that acknowledge their structural roots and relieve the pressure to 'get better'.

AB: Reflecting on the contemporary context, avoiding sadness is possible only through an infantile denial of it. In any case, sadness manifests itself even in its denial. Both in the exhibition programme I curated and in the broader programme, the aim was to invite artists to resist normative happiness and normative perceptions of happiness. The exhibition programme reflected this particularly well, for example in the works of Iva Rižé, where nails, like hooks, become the central character. These nails cling to life and to objects that bring happiness. This metaphor resonates with everyday human existence: after all, you can't hang on by your nails for long. In that absurd hanging, you remain a strange, misunderstood in-between, so let's hang.



Zoe Williams' exhibition at Kaunas Artists' House, 2024 April. Photo by Darius Matonis

Exhibition 's a naqba i muru' by Agata Orlovska at Pamėnkalnio Gallery

December 3, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



The exhibition 's a naqba i muru' by Agata Orlovska was open until the 30th of November at Pamėnkalnio Gallery (1 Pamėnkalnio St., Vilnius).

The desire to see the invisible stems from the urge to know more than what lies on the surface of phenomena. When confronted with the overflow of the world's manifestations, it becomes increasingly difficult to grasp the totality of the world, which we constantly dissect with various tools, reducing it to the cognitive limits of our ability to comprehend, calculate, and predict it. We lose the aspiration to build a picture of the world and look only at its fragmented parts and their interactions, where we try to identify the patterns that enable us to stretch our imagination and emerge from the ocean of cognitive limits.

Sunken in the deep blue, the exhibition is a fusion of rather varied objects, material connections, contents and contexts. Each of its segments, diverse surfaces, materialities and forms, constitute a multi-faceted archipelago of meaning. The interconnected parts of this system, in some places

converging and overlapping, but at other points function antinomically, and due to their different primary sources, give the impression of a heterogeneous assemblage – each connection between the works and their parts can be illuminated in innumerable ways, with no clear possibility of unifying and summing up the whole. The architecture of the exhibition and its objects move in multiple registers, which hardly flow into a clear and coherent body. It is as if they create a void of meaning that emerges in the act of unfolding a commonality. In this lack of holistic experience, the deceptive consciousness looks only at the material or discursive surfaces, blocking our ability to see the whole landscape – and preventing us from immediately reaching the myriad of sources that emerge from beneath the layers and depths.

The exhibition's staging of experience is based on the verse from the Epic of Gilgamesh – (Eng. *He Who Saw the Deep*) – and encoded metaphor of the culminating point of the journey of knowledge, of becoming aware. The invisible, imperceptible, intangible elements engraved in the works' bodies are converted into mental images within the perceiving subjects, extending the limits of their physical manifestation. The extension of the objects into the perceiver's consciousness and the inverse loop of this consciousness into the works creates a feedback loop between direct and mental imagery – living and non-living media. At the moment of this performativity of material and invisible components, the alignment of the manifold image begins to unfold as a multidimensional but singular organism, combining different sets of meaning-making, references, historical periods and cultural contexts, technological tools and concepts, which flow into a pool of common denominators. Their discovery allows us to see the invisible and to gaze into the depths of the ocean.

Agata Orlovska is a new-generation interdisciplinary artist, who graduated in 2023 with a Master's degree in Painting and is currently working on installations and objects, conceptually combining various media, with a particular focus on the materiality of surfaces and the interactivity of works. Through her research, Orlovska attempts to discover the connections between sensory and mental modes of perception in art and the interpretive potential that emerges from this synthesis, which she explores through the concept of acousmaticity in sound aesthetics. Her work is full of dialogues between belief and knowledge, the historical and the immediate, and the relationship between the work of art and the spectator. Orlovska's works are often time-varying, actively engaging with architecture, interactive, kinetically adjusting their physical forms, and not susceptible to a single, stable meaning.

Curated by Linas Bliškevičius

Graphic design by Ringailė Demšytė

Logo by Monika Radžiūnaitė

Olfactoric object by Laimė Kiškūnė

Sound by Arturas Bumšteinas

Special thanks to Jurgis Paškevičius, Rytis Urbanskas, Dovas Vyšniauskas, Kristijonas Žungaila, Benas Lipavičius, Paulius Tumelis, Laura Matukonytė, Jonas Aničas, Tauras Kensminas, Mykolas Sauka, Vytautė Bernatavičiūtė, Layla Ismayil, Hubert and a friend, and two random customers of Elska café

Organiser – Pamėnkalnio Gallery

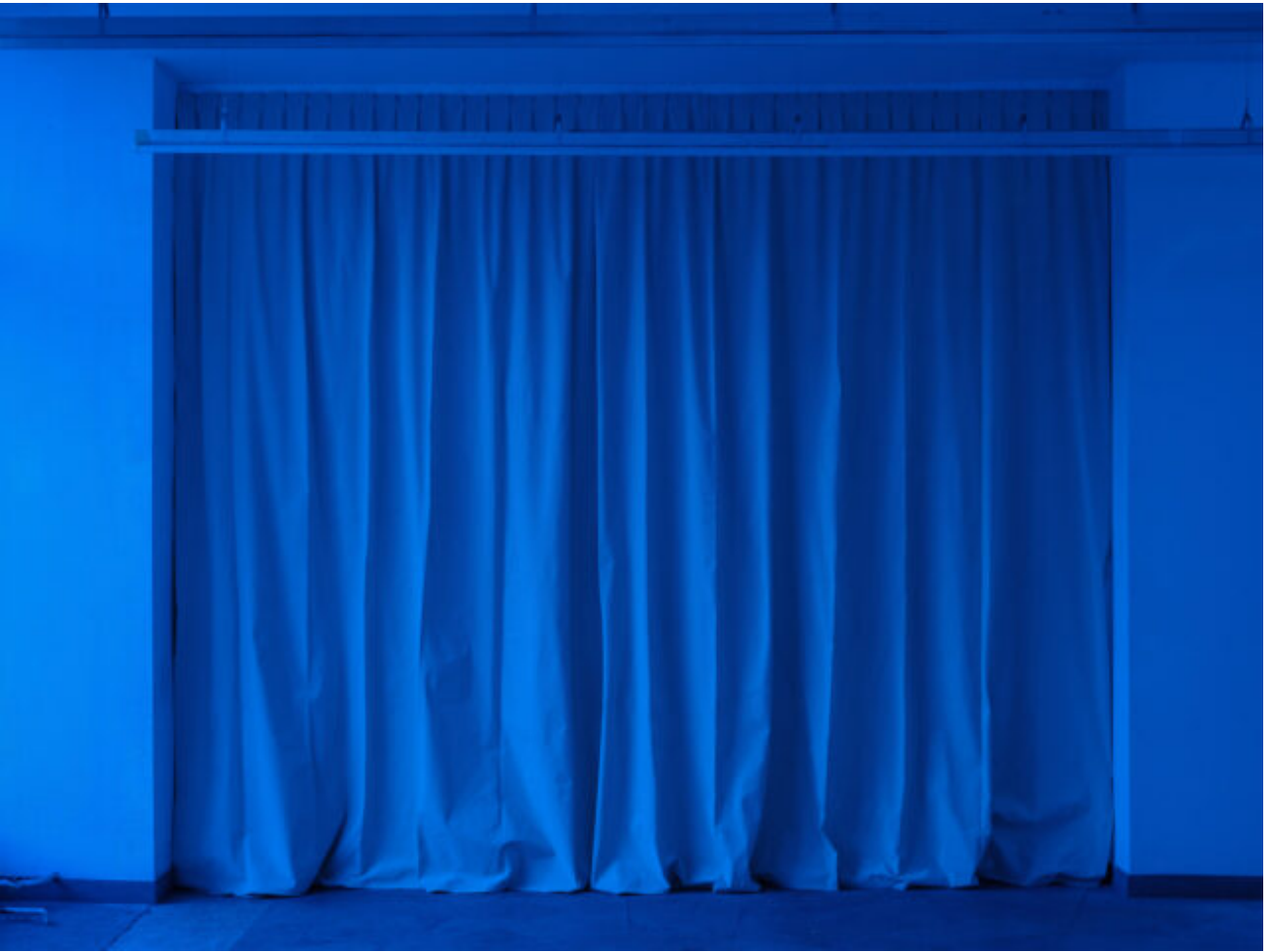
Partner – DRIFTS gallery

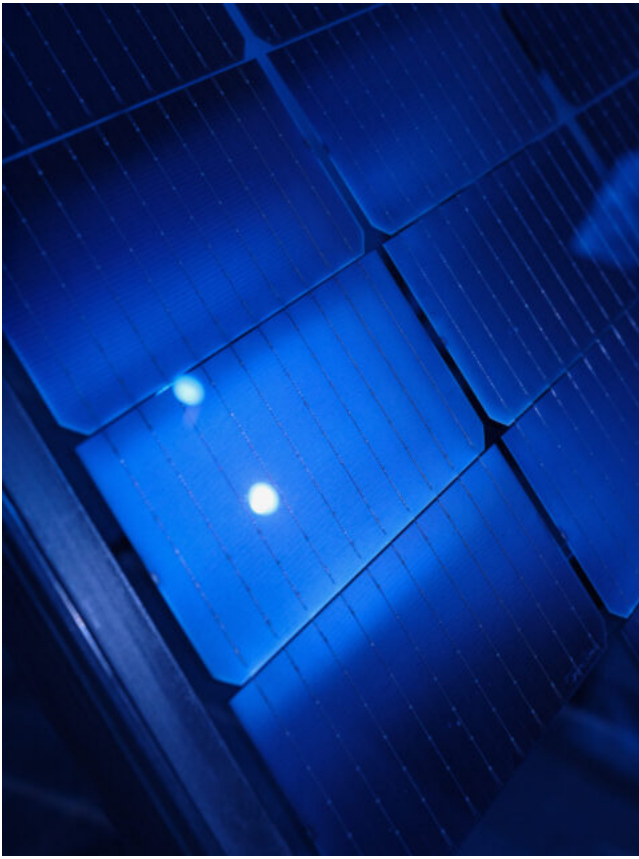
Sponsored by Lithuanian Council for Culture, Vilnius City, SoliTek, Lithuanian Artists' Association

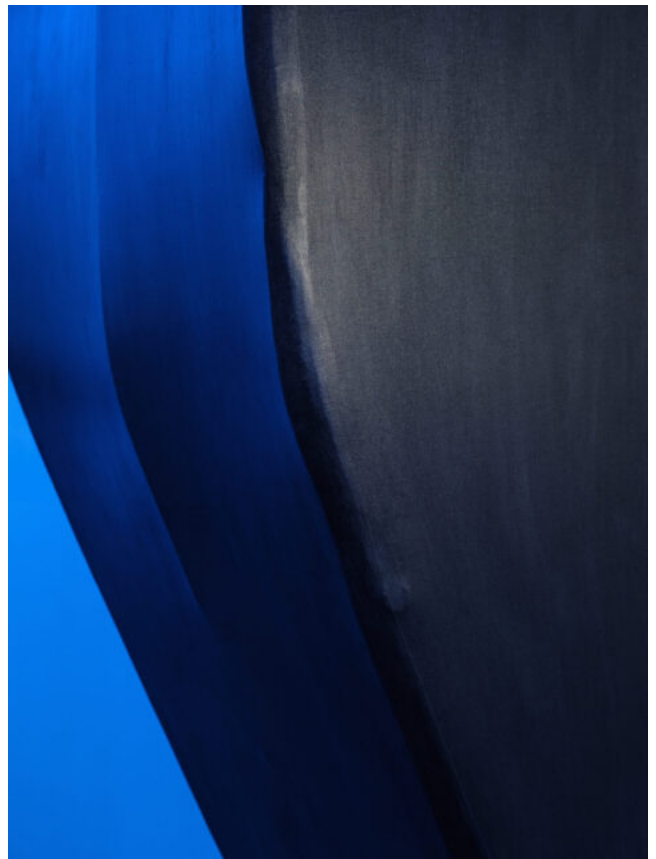
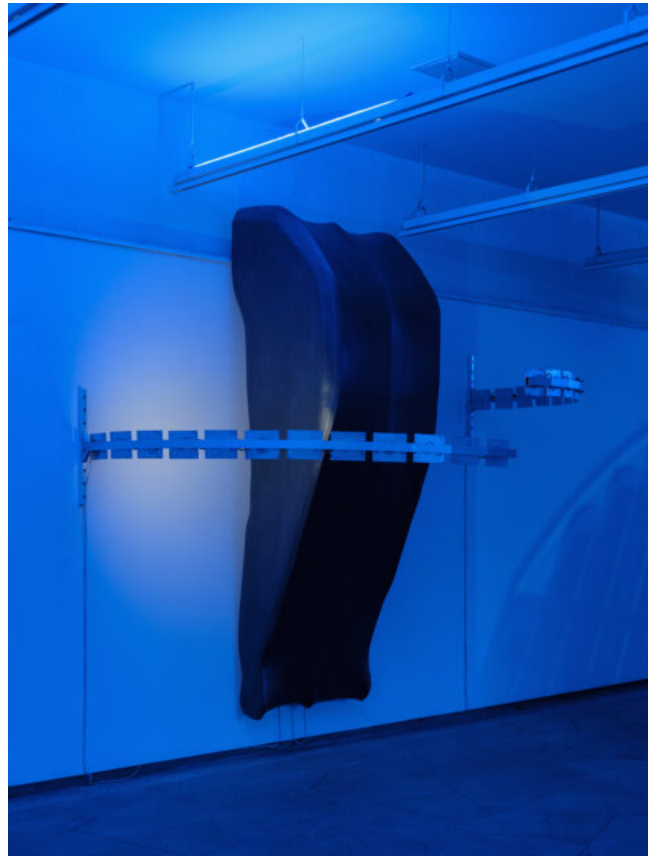
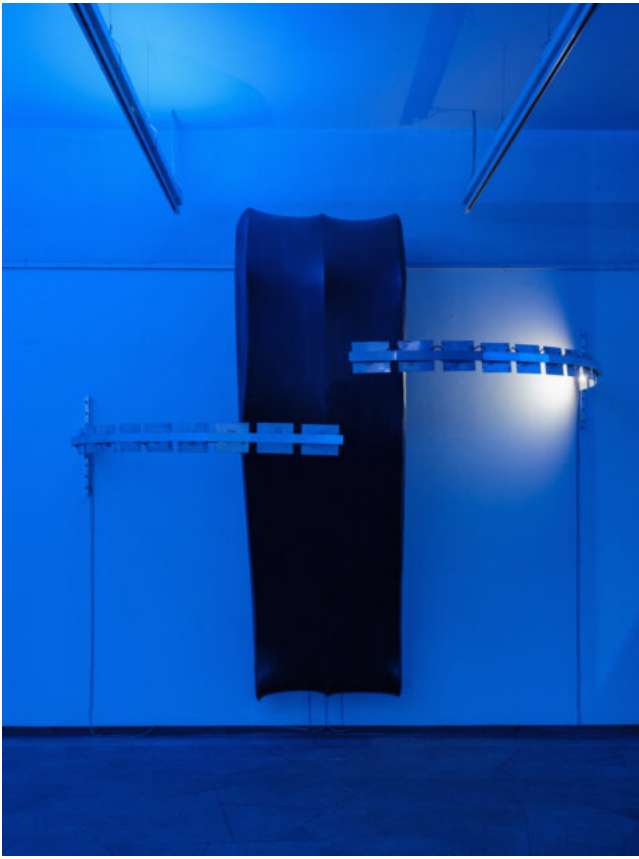
The exhibition is also part of the presentation of the work of the winner of the Young Painter Prize '24

Photography: Lukas Mykolaitis

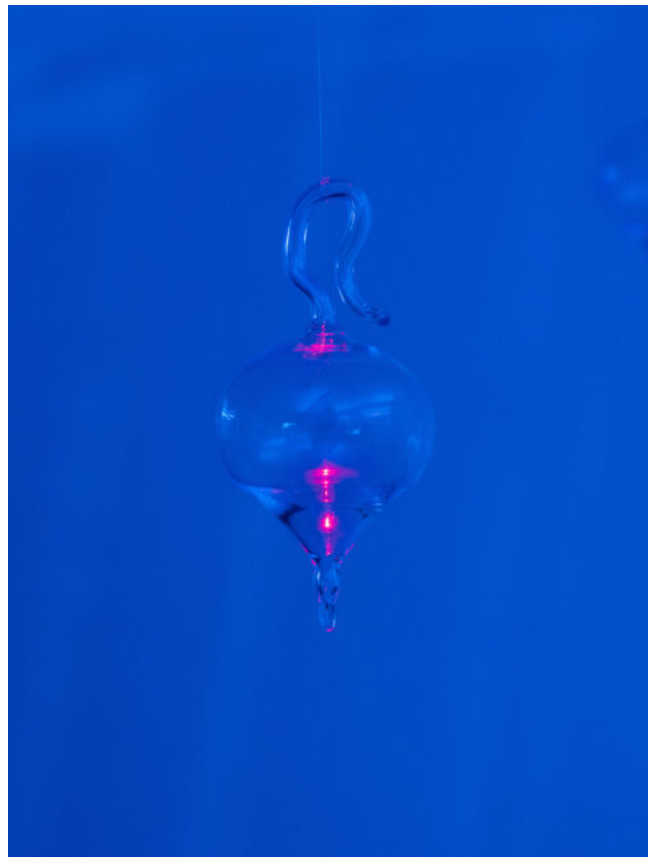


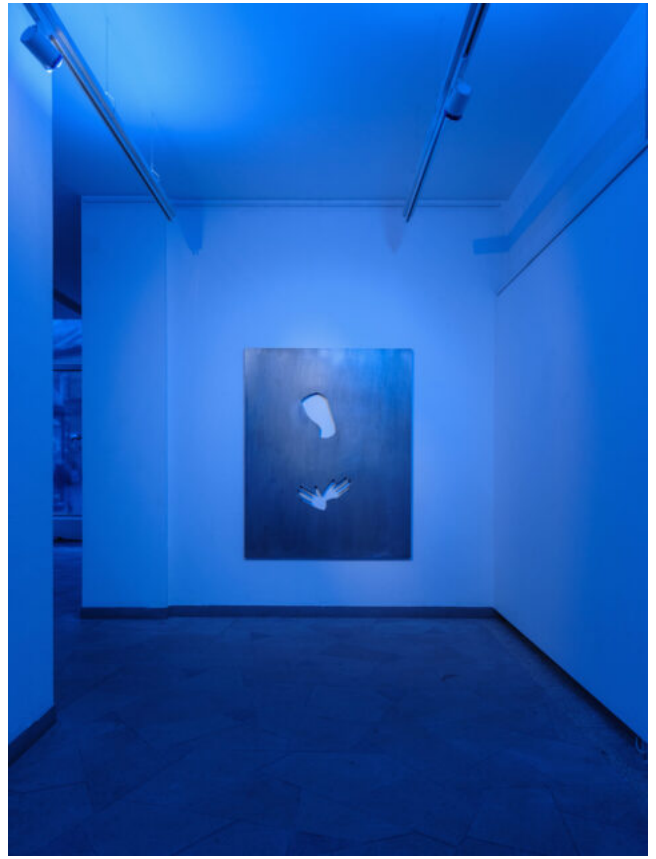


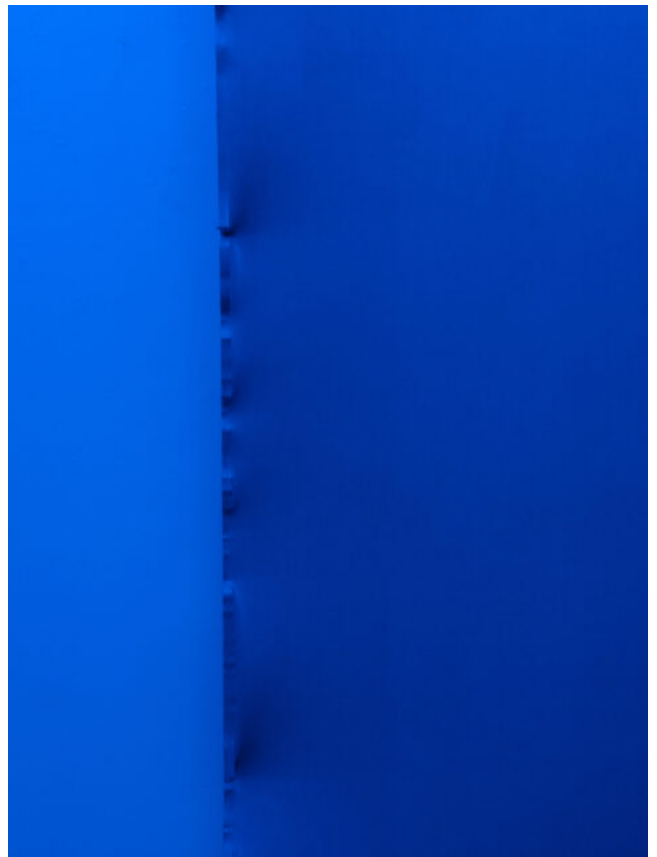












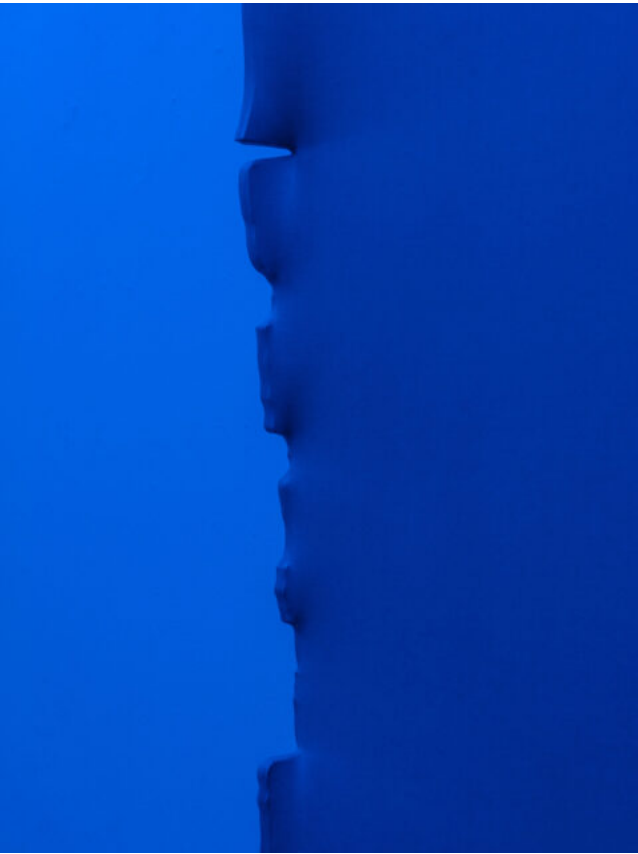




Photo reportage from the exhibition 'JCDecaux Award 2024: Fall' at the Sapieha Palace

December 16, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



'JCDecaux Award 2024: fall exhibition' view

The exhibition 'JCDecaux Award 2024: Fall' will be open until January 5, 2025, at the Northern Gallery on the first floor of the Contemporary Art Center's branch at the Sapieha Palace (L. Sapiegos St. 13, Vilnius).

"And twist about the past your thoughts

Like some parasitic vine

Which on an ancient structure's walls

Its widely-scattered arms will twine."

Adam Mickiewicz, "Forefathers' Eve", "The Living Dead"

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

Fall began with thoughts on the in-between, the horror and the bounty of an unnamed sense of the present. In five artworks, the artists invite us to enter or observe the relationship between material and human modes of being, between generations, emptiness and filler, something synthesised and homogenous.

When young writer Adam Mickiewicz began writing the poem Forefathers' Eve two hundred years ago, he experienced the destructive force of imperialism, personal losses, heartaches, and the pressures of market and success. He transferred collective and personal anxiety to the character of the spectre. The artworks are ghosts, too. Like the Living Dead in the poem, they are mediators between different times and spaces – forever the same age, trapped in an endless moment, and

drifting through the walls of the old house. fall reminds us that it's not only seasons that recur. Kotryna Markevičiūtė and Ona Juciūtė

Opening hours of the Sapieha Palace: Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri 12:00–20:00, Sat 11:00–19:00, Sun 11:00–18:00. Admission to the exhibition is free.

JCDECAUX AWARD 2024 PARTICIPANTS

ELENA LAURINAVIČIŪTĖ is an artist from Anykščiai who currently lives and works in Vilnius. In 2024, she completed her Master's at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. The artist creates experimental ceramic wind instruments. Their sharp edges cut the invisible air and thus transform it into humming and whistling sounds, from which the artist forms three-dimensional soundscapes of air vibrations. Elena explores the relationship between sound and space, actualising the sonic heritage of clay whistles and connecting past and present with ceramic tools.

KAMILĖ PIKELYTĖ is a visual artist who lives and creates in Reykjavik and Vilnius. She uses found footage and physical remains in her work. In her installations and performances, the artist examines humanity's dominance and the tendency to annihilate non-human life forms. In questioning the systematic labelling of certain things as 'dirty,' Kamilė explores the masking of inconvenient truths in such a way.

EGLĖ RUIBYTĖ is a visual artist and graphic designer who combines these fields and thus searches for meaning in particularly standardised global processes. She graduated from graphic arts studies at the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts and then studied typography and sculpture at the Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts (HFBK). Delving into industrial technologies and looking for functional-emotional metaphors, Eglė constructs seemingly mass-produced objects partly by handiwork. In this way, the author deliberately allows mistakes to occur, which speak of contradictory humanity in the industrial machine.

ONA BARBORA ŠLAPŠINSKAITĖ is an artist and educator who lives in Vilnius, where she is currently studying for an MA in Sculpture at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. The artist creates installations in which personal memories, family stories, and political contexts unfold and sometimes create conditions for different communities to meet. Recently, she has been rethinking the role of 'ghosts' in her work, both on personal and political levels. In using auto- and biographical facts and weaving them into fictional stories, Ona Barbora tries to highlight the influence of history and ideological heritage on past, present and future identities.

MANTAS VALENTUKONIS is a painter who lives and works in Kaunas. In 2023, he completed his BA in Painting at the Faculty of Kaunas of the Vilnius Academy of Arts. This year, he organised a personal exhibition, Apparitions, at the Drifts Gallery in Vilnius and also curated the group exhibition Tarpinės gliamos / Intermediate Glooms at the Klaipėda Culture Communication Centre. The artist has presented his work in group exhibitions in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda.

Photography: Alanas Gurinas



'JCDecaux Award 2024: fall' exhibition view



'JCDecaux Award 2024: fall' exhibition view



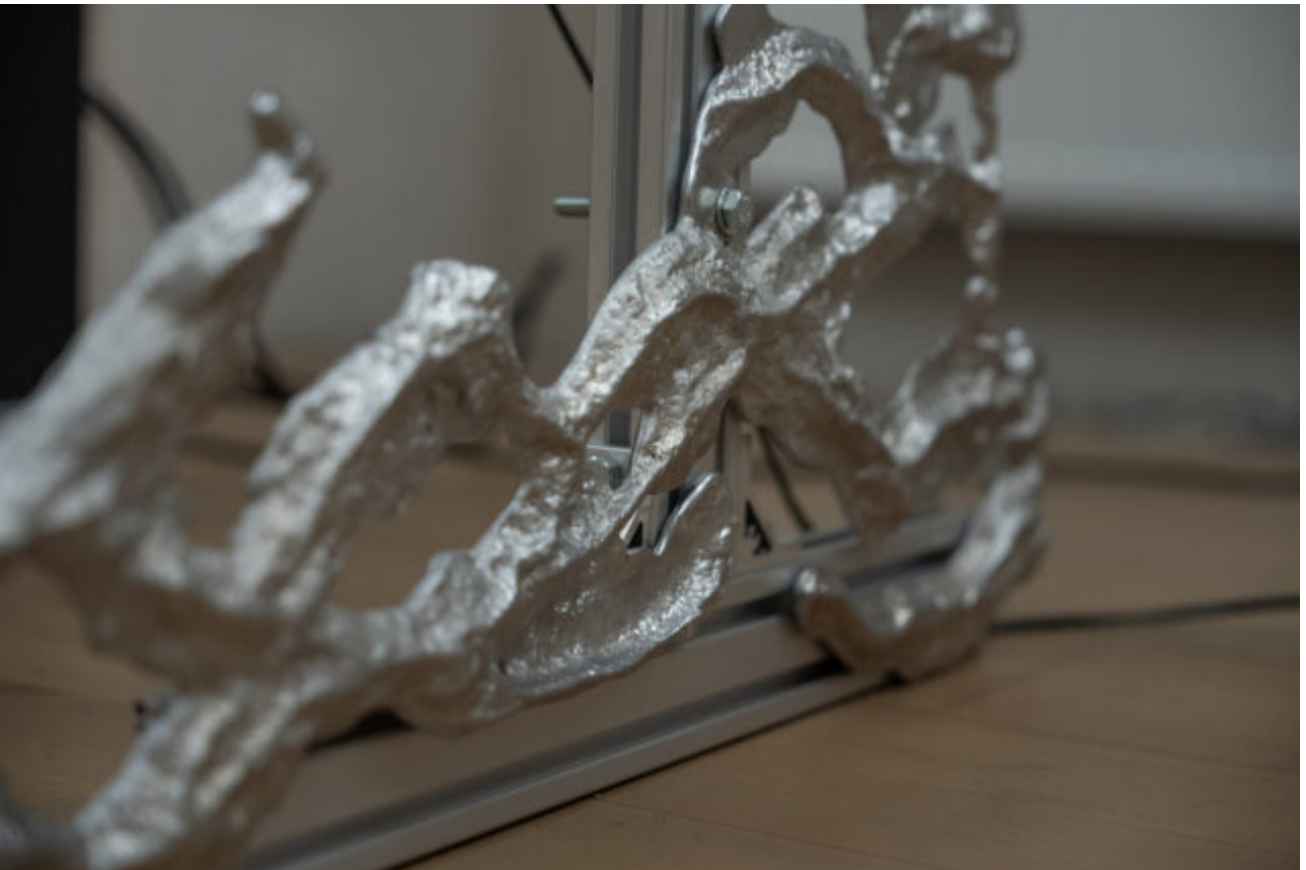
Mantas Valentukonis, 'Quagmire', 2024, VR simulation, aluminium construction



Mantas Valentukonis, 'Quagmire', 2024, VR simulation, aluminium construction



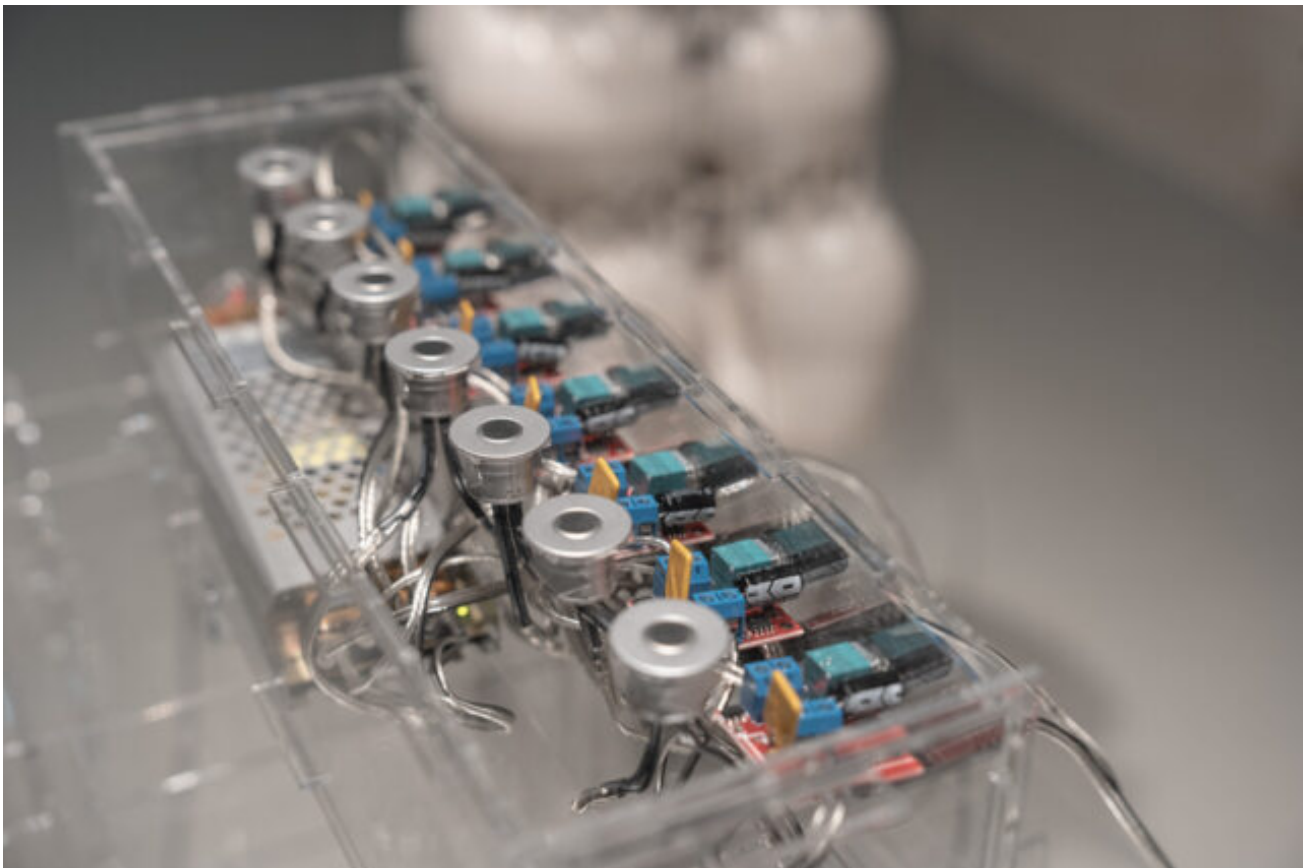
Mantas Valentukonis, 'Quagmire', 2024, VR simulation, aluminium construction



Mantas Valentukonis, 'Quagmire', 2024, VR simulation, aluminium construction



Elena Laurinavičiūtė, 'Soundscrapers', 2024, ceramic sculptures, cooling fans



Elena Laurinavičiūtė, 'Soundscrapers', 2024, ceramic sculptures, cooling fans



Elena Laurinavičiūtė, 'Soundscrapers', 2024, ceramic sculptures, cooling fans



Elena Laurinavičiūtė, 'Soundscrapers', 2024, ceramic sculptures, cooling fans



Kamilė Pikelytė, 'Vita Sintetika', 2024, found mufflers, steel, latex, collagen from rabbit skin, soap, linen fibre, snake exuvia, silicon



Kamilė Pikelytė, 'Vita Sintetika', 2024, found mufflers, steel, latex, collagen from rabbit skin, soap, linen fibre, snake exuvia, silicon



Kamilė Pikelytė, 'Vita Sintetika', 2024, found mufflers, steel, latex, collagen from rabbit skin, soap, linen

fibre, snake exuvia, silicon



Kamilė Pikelytė, 'Vita Sintetika', 2024, found mufflers, steel, latex, collagen from rabbit skin, soap, linen fibre, snake exuvia, silicon



Eglė Ruibytė, 'Middlemen', 2024, plastic film, EPS foam



Eglė Ruibytė, 'Middlemen', 2024, plastic film, EPS foam



Eglė Ruibytė, 'Middlemen', 2024, plastic film, EPS foam



Eglė Ruibytė, 'Middlemen', 2024, plastic film, EPS foam



Eglė Ruibytė, 'Middlemen', 2024, plastic film, EPS foam



Ona Barbora Šlapšinskaitė, 'Don't get me wrong, this is not a simple possession', 2024, video, 13'37 min.



Ona Barbora Šlapšinskaitė, 'Don't get me wrong, this is not a simple possession', 2024, video, 13'37 min.



Ona Barbora Šlapšinskaitė, 'Don't get me wrong, this is not a simple possession', 2024, video, 13'37 min.

Photo reportage from the exhibition 'The Big Deal' by Dzelde Mierkalne at 427

December 17, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



The Philosophy of Feasting and Emptiness

Ainārs Kamoliņš

Every day I approach a seemingly different table. These small changes that I notice every day are in a way inevitable: the color is affected by light, the distance from it by shape. That is why the “real” table is unknowable. It is not for nothing that Bertrand Russell, writing in his introduction to philosophy, points out: “What we see is constantly changing as we move through space, so that here too our senses give us the truth not about the table as such, but about its appearance.” Similarly, the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl tried to understand how we know that a table is the same table. He also observed it from different perspectives and this revealed different shades of color, shapes, and the like. He pointed out that the “real” table is transcendent and constitutes itself in our consciousness thanks to memory. Each moment of observing the table connects with the previous one, memories of the table merge with the present observation. However, the unknowability of the “real” table does not yet distinguish it from other physical objects. One can ask in a Heideggerian vein: what is the table-ness of a table? Heidegger himself liked to recall Eddington’s statement that every table has a double – his childhood table and the “scientifically understood” table. The childhood table is not just a simple surface that can be scientifically described – its material, shape, color. You can see various streaks, prints, or stains on the childhood table. Through it, you can remember the games that were played on it. In short, it can reveal the childhood lifeworld. This is an aspect of the table that cannot be scientifically described. Therefore, when entering a room, the table is not perceived simply as an object, but as something at which you can sit down and work. The table is either convenient or inconvenient for the task I have chosen.

Even now, when I sit down at the table, it temporarily forms my lifeworld. Gamblers, on the other hand, probably don't see anything at all outside of what's happening on the roulette or card table at that moment. Of course, the table also has a shady side. Namely, cheating, dirty dealings take place under the table. There you can sometimes find those who have fallen under the table – those who can no longer participate in the table conversations and celebrations.

The table in the world creates certain lines of demarcation. Not everyone is invited to the table. The invitation separates friends from those who are not. However, the table itself creates an even more significant ontological boundary. The human lifeworld is realized at the table, while the animal world is realized in the pen. Of course, the table can also become a pen at any time. Therefore, the boundaries between the table and the pen are not stable and can easily change depending on the situation.

The table also creates a distinction between Western rationalism and Soviet or post-Soviet hopelessness. It is formed by the attitude towards an empty table. Ilya Kabakov points to the Western attitude: "Empty is a table on which nothing has yet been placed, but on which something could be placed; land that has not yet been cultivated, but which could be cultivated." Emptiness for Western rationalists is an opportunity, a potential for creation and change. For Kabakov, on the other hand, the Soviet emptiness on the table transforms active being into active non-being. Sitting at the table causes Kabakov special stress, powerlessness, apathy and causeless horror. Even if he had set the table, the emptiness would still be present and nothing could fill it. It is not for nothing that tableiness appears in language when we ask about life: how are things? This question, as one might guess, does not always refer to whether the table is actually set.

Sources:

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Dzelde Mierkalne (1997) is a multidisciplinary artist with a background in printmaking. Based in Riga, Latvia, she has finished studies in the MA program POST at the Art Academy of Latvia. With great reverence for technique and process, Dzelde aims to overthrow technique-related artistic standards to create something new and find its place in today's context. While reflecting on the existential fears of "world destruction", mortality salience, and death anxiety through the lens of today's post-irony and humour, she likes to play around with the syntheses of drawing and form.

The Big Deal

Dzelde Mierkalne

22/11 – 21/12/2024

427, Riga

Support: VKKF, Rīgas dome

Photography: Līga Spunde













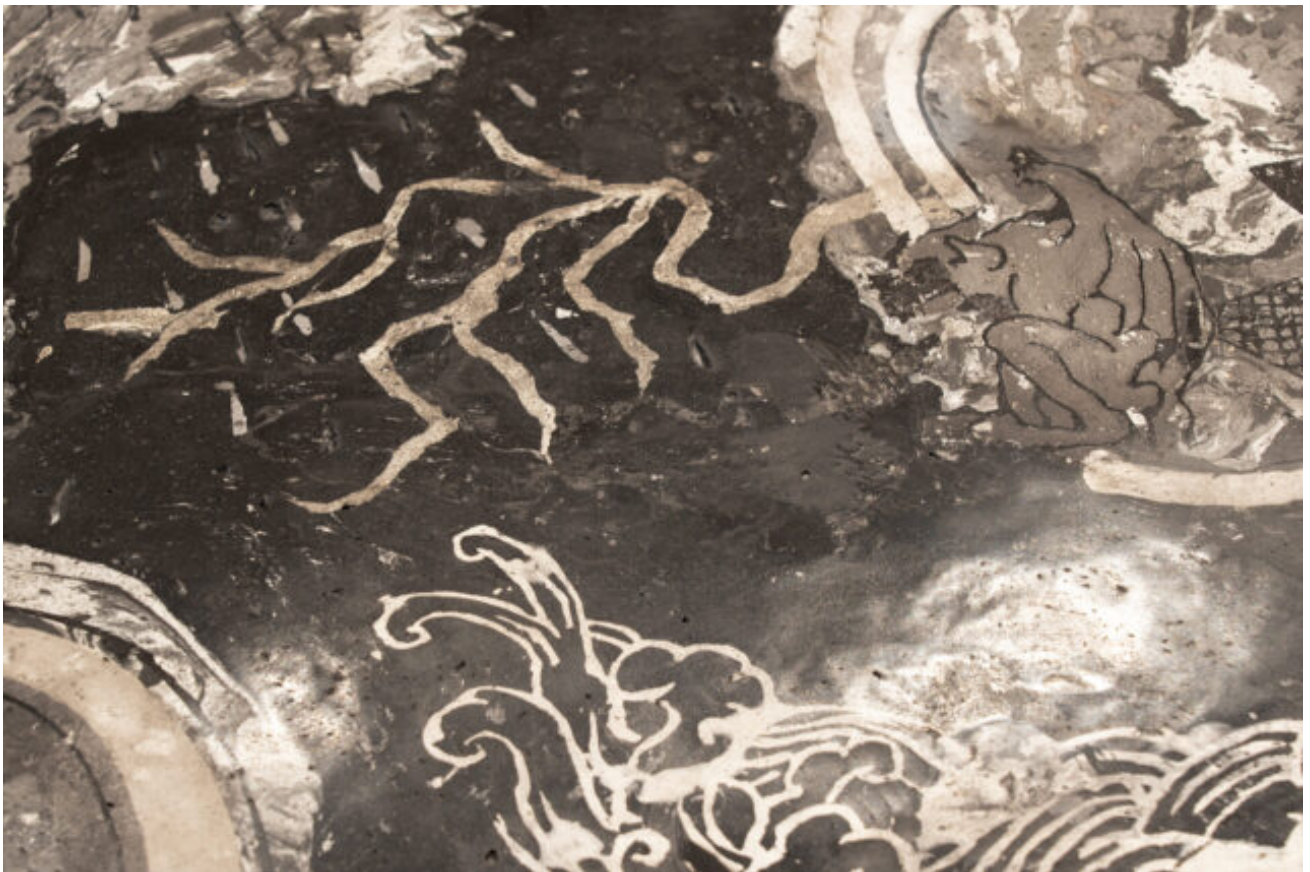








Photo reportage from the exhibition 'In Spe. Saint Victor and Four Dragons' by Krista Leesi at Draakon gallery

December 19, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



Krista Leesi's exhibition 'In Spe. Saint Victor and Four Dragons' is open until January 4, 2025 at Draakon gallery.

The exhibition draws inspiration from the martyrdom of Saint Victor, as portrayed on the main altar of St. Nicholas Church in Tallinn. The altar, crafted in the workshop of Lübeck master Hermen Rode, was brought to Tallinn 543 years ago.

"The times are tense, even frightening.

Such that every means and possibility must be put into service.

Why not even mythical creatures and medieval patron saints.

Tallinn's patron saint was Saint Victor.

He is often depicted on altars alongside Saint George, the dragon slayer.

But Saint Victor did not slay dragons.

Perhaps dragons might protect the knightly saint and us instead?"

Krista Leesi is an artist and designer with a distinctive textile art practice and extensive teaching experience at the Estonian Academy of Arts. She stands out in the field of textile art with her conceptual approach, often exploring the multi-layered meanings of language (as the author of tekkSTIILikunsti SÕNArAamat). Leesi graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts in 1993 and has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Estonia and abroad since 1992. Her first solo exhibition was in 1999. Leesi's work encompasses both distinctive unique creations and practical

small productions. Her works are part of the collection of the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design. Her works can be encountered in several museum collections around the world: in Tartu Art Museum, the China National Silk Museum (Hangzhou, China), the Contextile Contemporary Textile Art Biennial (Guimarães, Portugal), and World Textile Art (Miami, Florida, USA).

In 2019, Leesi was awarded the annual award by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia for her work. In 2020, she won the main prize at Contextile, one of the world's most prestigious contemporary textile art biennials. In 2021, her site-specific exhibition Verbarium, which conceptually connected language and visuals, was shown at Tartu Art Museum. Leesi has been named Textile Artist of the Year four times and is a member of the Estonian Textile Artists' Association and the Estonian Artists' Association.

www.kristaleesi.ee

The artists gratitude goes to: Heino Prunsveld, Kadi Kibbermann, Äli-Ann Klooren, Leelo Leesi, Mari-Leen Leesi, Aivi Valliste.

The exhibition is supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia.

Exhibitions at Draakon gallery are supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, the Estonian Ministry of Culture, and Liviko AS.

Photography: Anna Mari Liivrand







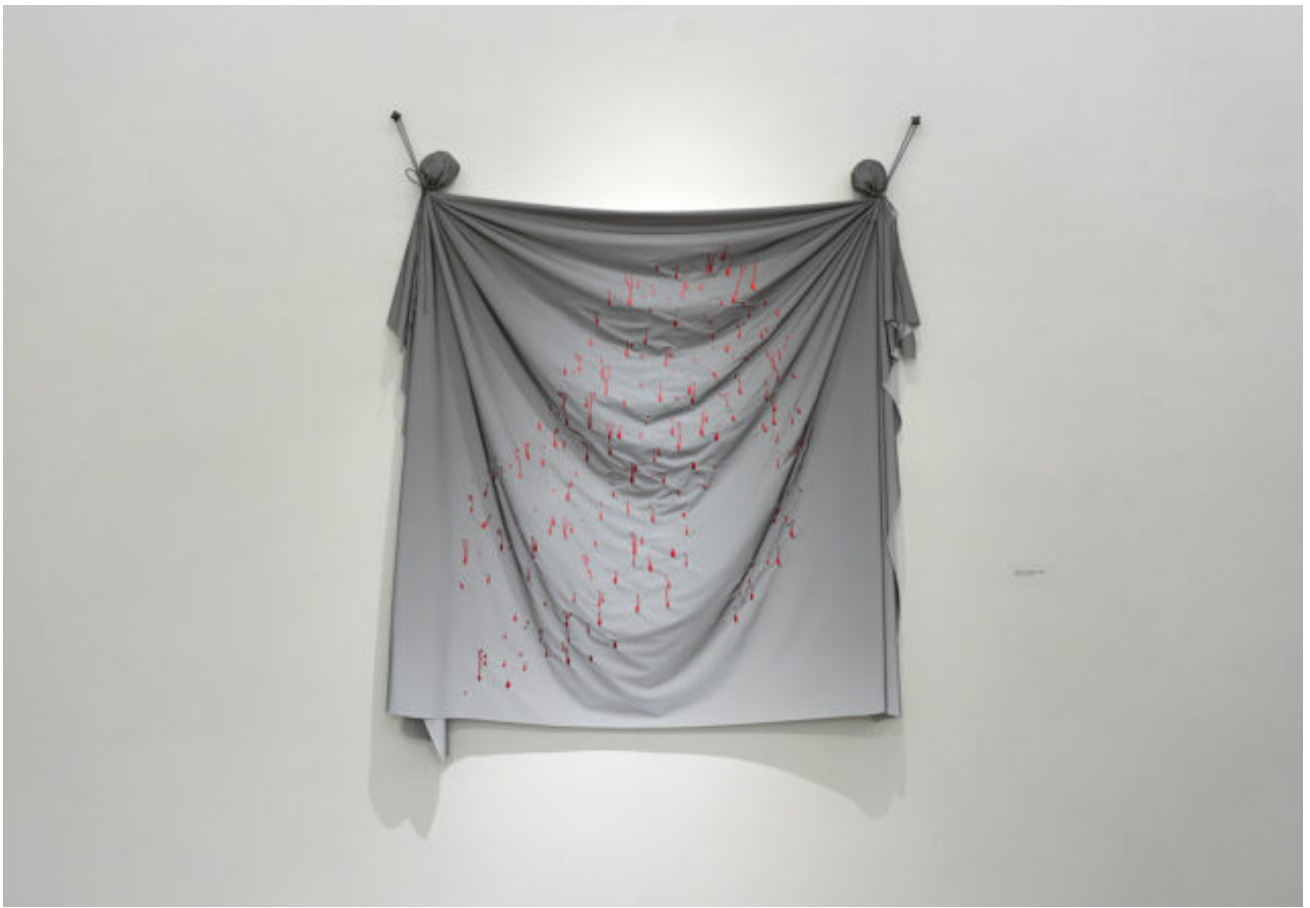










Photo reportage from the exhibition 'The Sound of Music' by Angela Maasalu at Tütar Gallery

December 20, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



The exhibition 'The Sound of Music' by Angela Maasalu runs at Tütar Gallery (Tallinn, Estonia) to 26 January 2025.

The curtain falls. I fall onto a stage. The stage falls. I don't fall with it. I remain on stage—that is, in the place where the stage used to be before it fell away. The curtain keeps falling. The sound of music is constant. The noise never ceases. A constant distraction. Or an attraction? I try to turn around to face the music. I keep turning. It never faces me. And these faces I see, every time I turn, never embrace me.

I used to feel as if we were getting away with it, slipping through unnoticed. Now, I feel that we try hard not to worry, even though we are well aware that we are going the wrong way and aren't carrying any supplies. We take pride in our aims, which come with sleepless nights, and crave sleep for the remainder of time.

While trying to make sense of this sound, the house had moved. Everything was now in a different place, myself included. There was no front yard, no cobbled pathway through which I had entered earlier. Instead, I found the sea. The endless waves were crashing against the walls, and I had no time for swimming lessons. Was I asleep? Did I already mention it was night? It was night, and it was cold. It was 3:55 AM, and I felt wide awake, the icy kick of the sea only serving to confuse me further. I was hoping there might still be a way out, even though I couldn't see one. As long as you are in a dream, there is always a way out—at least, that's what they say. But was I dreaming? I hoped I was. Still, who were these two other clowns in bed with me?

- More confusing news?
- Yes and no. Though I have a feeling we have to continue.
- So, how does it work?
- It doesn't. It's not supposed to be this way.
- Then how is it supposed to be?
- I don't know. That's why I'm here. We can just turn a blind eye while everything keeps unraveling. We just have to stay where we are, absorbed by this endless noise.
- It feels like we're getting cornered.
- That's natural, almost essential. But have you ever felt cornered to the point of bursting out laughing in the face of it?
- Not really, no... But funny you should say that. I think we're getting close.

“How's the weather in your head right now?” is a phrase used to ask someone about their mental state in a genuine way. How does it sound? The weather, I mean... Have you, by any chance, been ignoring these sounds, this music, these evil tongues? Or have you been listening to them a bit too keenly? You and I could still make some beautiful music together.

About the artist

Angela Maasalu (1990) is an Estonian painter based in London. Maasalu focuses her work on personal and intimate themes, exploring the contradictions of human experience – happiness and misfortune, the drama and comedy of life. She weaves autobiographical fragments with symbolic and poetic imagery, transforming personal experience into something universal. Maasalu's works are characterized by rich metaphors, a fairy-tale quality, and hidden narratives.

Angela Maasalu studied painting and art history at University of Tartu (BA 2012), and painting at Estonian Academy of Arts (MA 2015), as well as at UAL Central Saint Martins in UK (2013–2014). In 2017 and 2019 Maasalu was nominated for the AkzoNobel Art Prize.

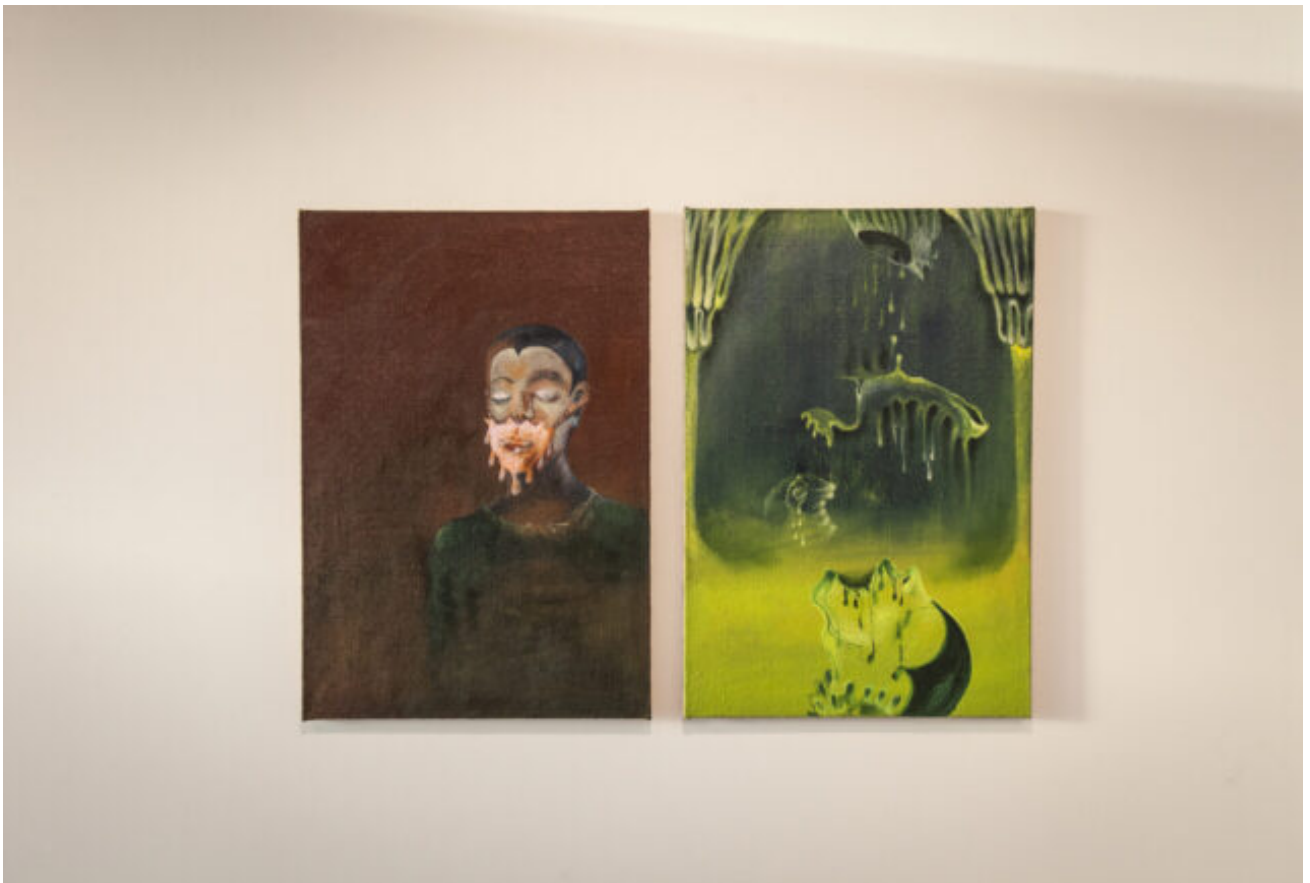
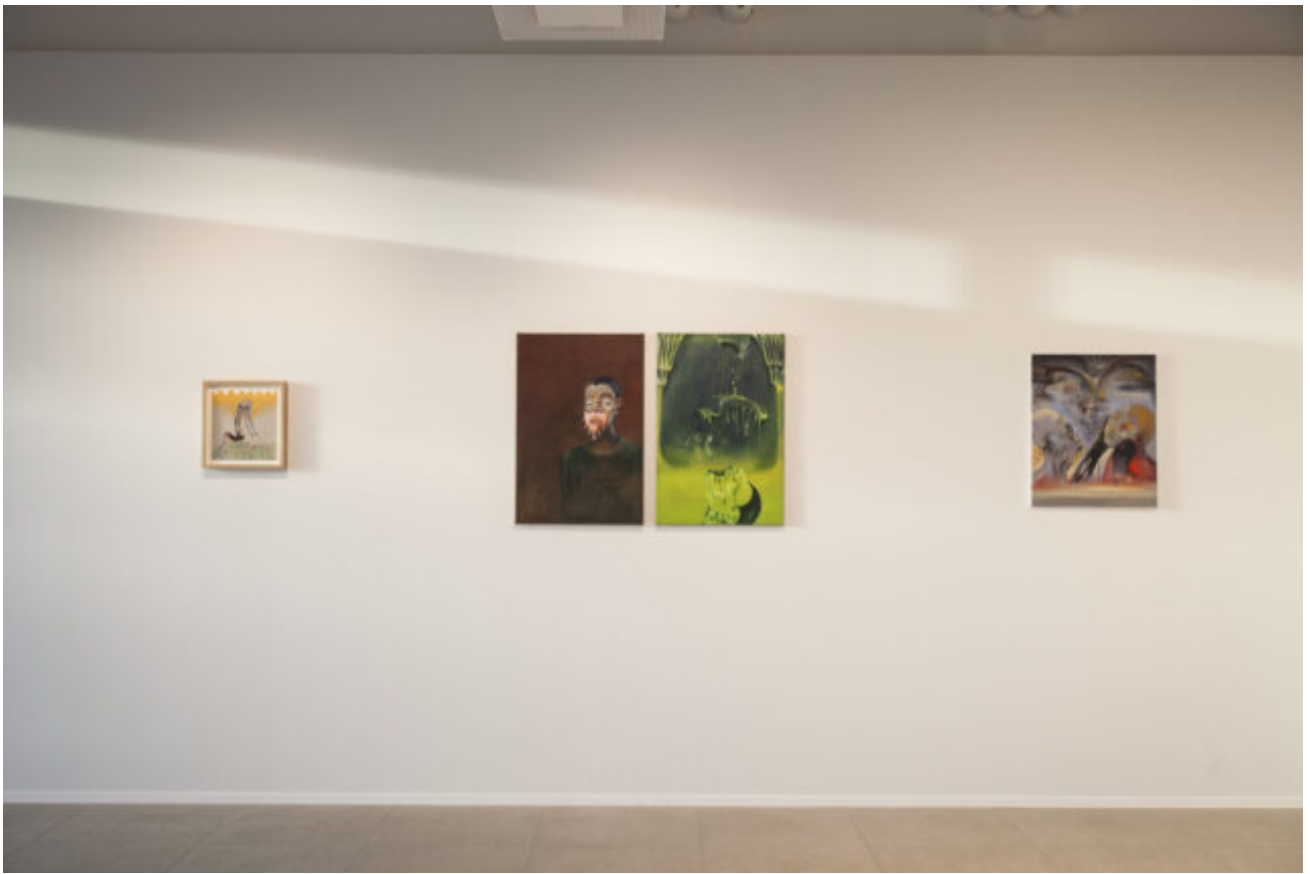
Accompanying text: Marten Esko
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The exhibition is supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia.

Photography: Stanislav Stepaško (reproductions) & Alana Proosa (exhibition views)











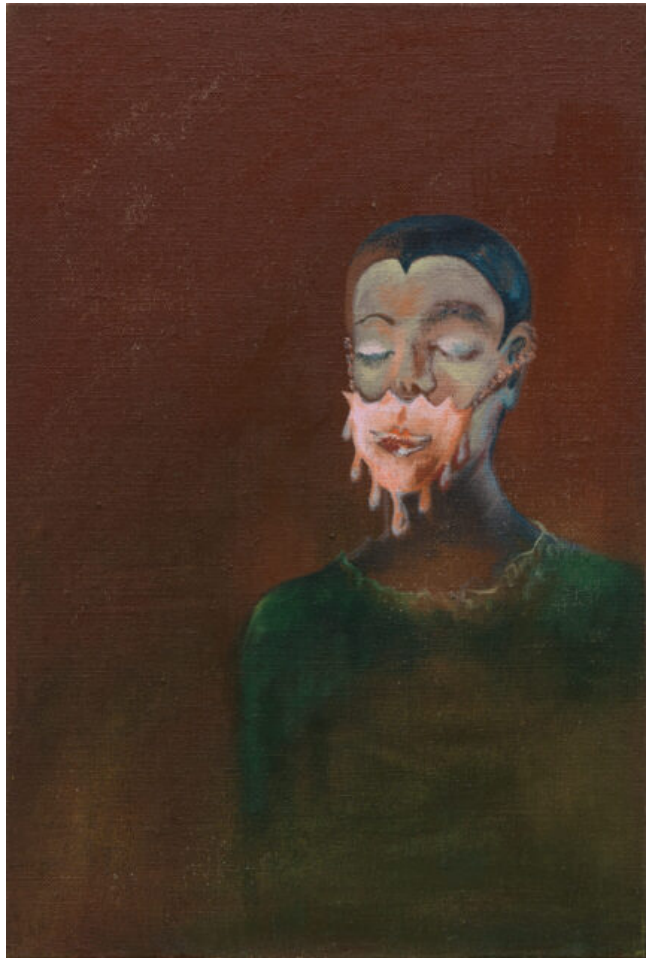




Photo reportage from the exhibition 'White Dwarfs and All Those Beautiful Nebulas' at Kim?

December 20, 2024

Author Echo Gone Wrong



View from the exhibition White Dwarfs and All Those Beautiful Nebulas at Kim_ Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, Latvia, 2024. Photo by Ansis Starks

A group exhibition White Dwarfs and All Those Beautiful Nebulas by three Estonian artists – Eike Eplik, Kristi Kongi and Anna Mari Liivrand – is open at Kim? Contemporary Art Centre in Riga, Latvia until 26 January 2025. The exhibition is curated by Šelda Puķīte and co-organised by Kogo Gallery in Tartu, Estonia as part of an exchange between the two art institutions.

A white dwarf is a former star that has collapsed into an energy-dense, Earth-size stellar object. From its outer layers, it creates a planetary nebula that erupts into colourful gas clouds, becoming a new star-forming incubator. In other words, it uses the leftovers of the old world to create a new one. The triangle dance of white dwarfs, nebulas and newly formed substances, from which life emerges, can be viewed as cosmopoetry for the cycle of life. The exhibition explores this process of rebirth, where entropy and change are part of a new beginning, where nothing is truly lost, and nothing is truly still or in control.

The practices of Eike Eplik, Kristi Kongi and Anna Mari Liivrand do not focus on studies of cosmology, yet their observations of the world and contemplations about it mirror the processes taking place in the universe. The worlds they create constantly expand and transform, not letting themselves be identified as a single form or message. Each using their own set of skills, media and forms of artistic expression, they present visions of the world as a liquid entity in constant metamorphosis. In the exhibition, they take up a certain role play by mimicking the processes

happening with white dwarfs, and by closely collaborating, they build narratives that echo each other.

The exhibition *White Dwarfs and All Those Beautiful Nebulas* is open from 28 November until 26 January at Kim? Contemporary Art Centre at Sporta 2 in Riga, Latvia. Kim? is open for visits from Tuesday to Sunday 12–18, the exhibition will be on view until 26 January 2025.

The show is part of an exhibition exchange between the two art institutions: in spring, Kogo Gallery hosted a solo exhibition *all the possibilities that existed* (28 March – 4 May 2024) by Latvian artist Krista Dzudzilo, the show being co-organised by Kim?.

The exhibition is supported by the Ministry of Culture of Latvia and the Ministry of Culture of Estonia from the fund *Estonian Culture Abroad*; State Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia; Riga City Council and Tartu City, KRASO, Caparol Eesti, Absolut and Valmiermuiža.

Photography: Ansis Starks



View from the exhibition *White Dwarfs and All Those Beautiful Nebulas* at Kim_ Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, Latvia, 2024. Photo by Ansis Starks



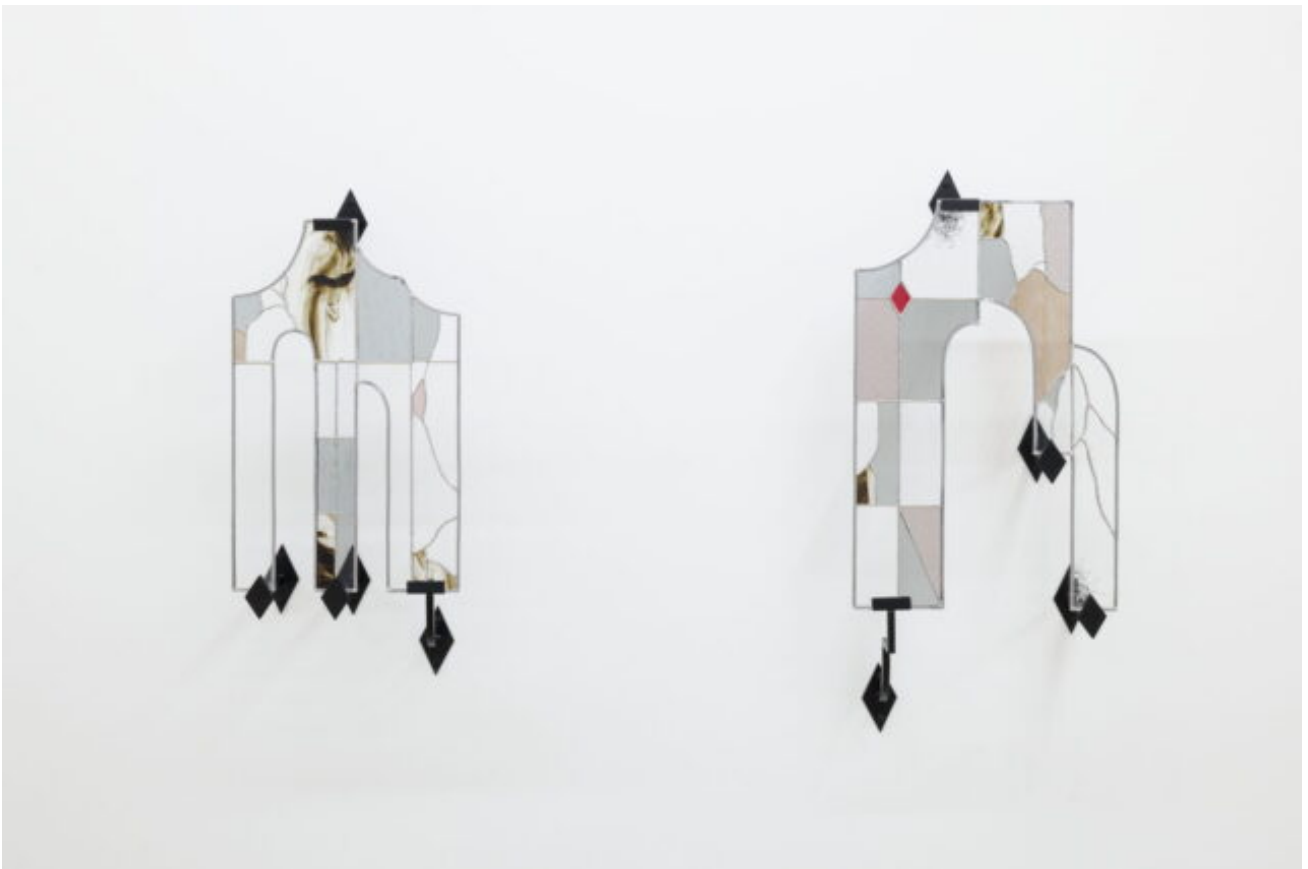
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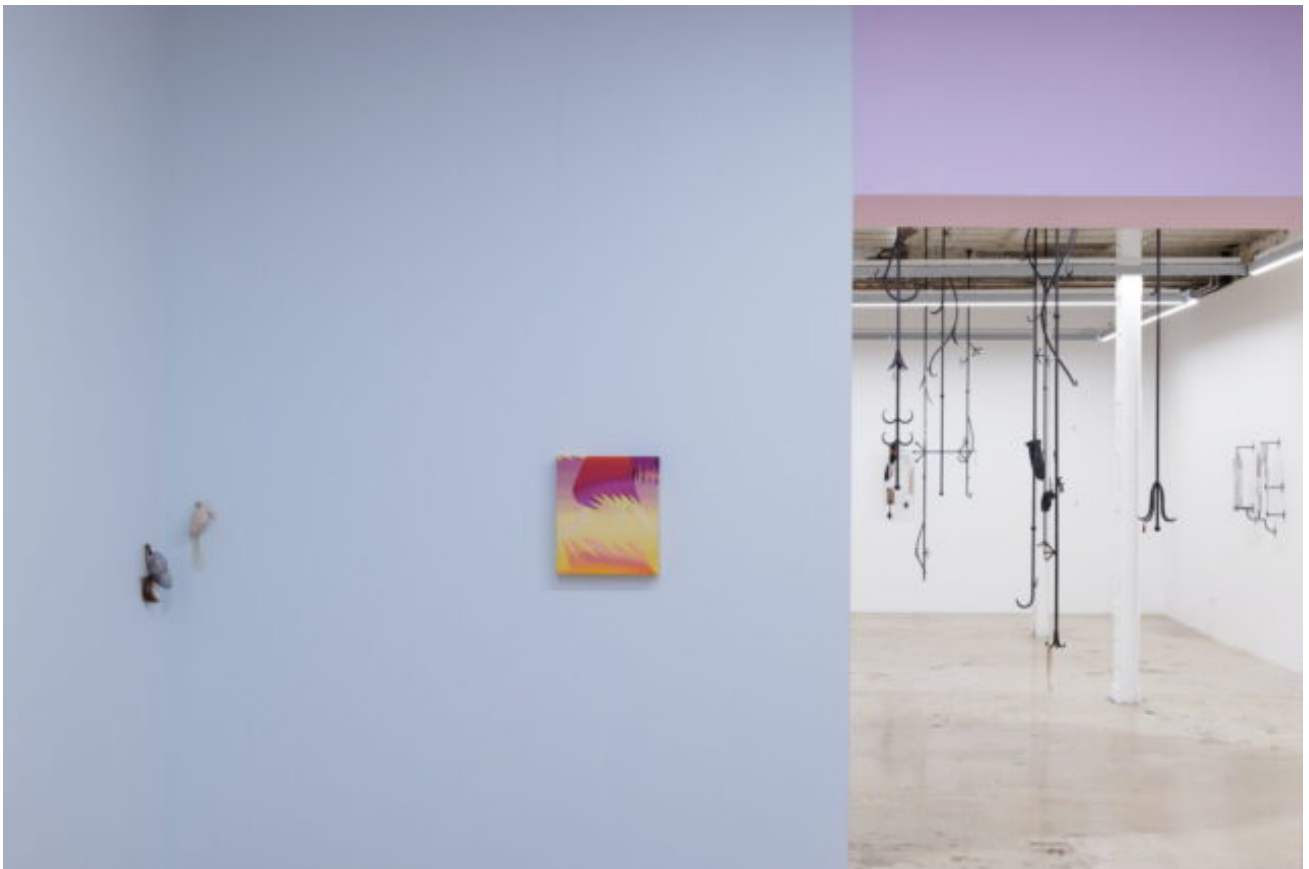
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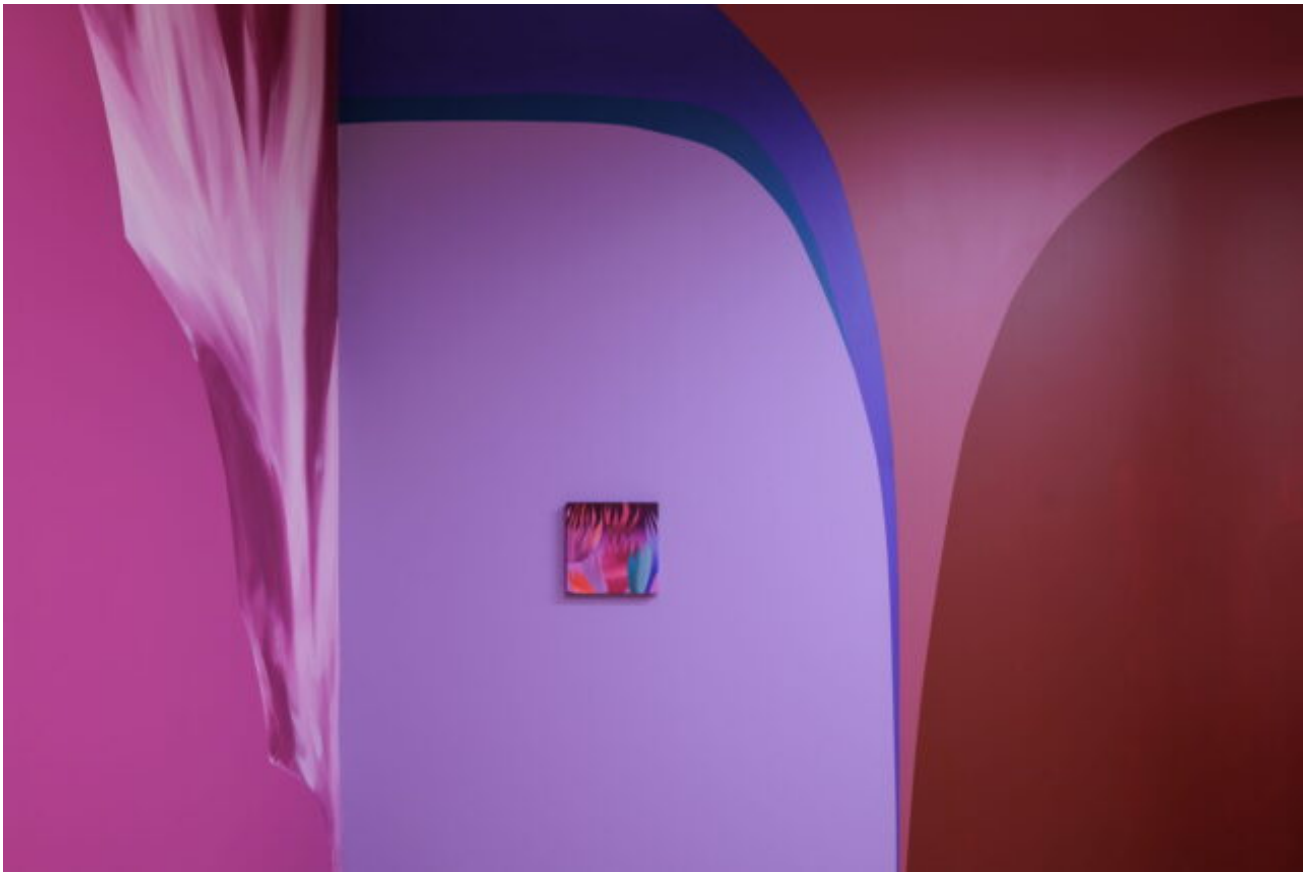




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