



# Blinks

## Projected Visions - Latvia

The current selection of the video-works by Latvian artists is reflecting some of the recent creative practices, quests and developments in the area of art and moving image in Latvia. The selection includes works created between 2001 and 2005, it comprises thirteen films by nine authors. Selection is organised in three parts that provide loose, thematic and interpretative guidance through the works. Part I is including artists' interpretations of the course of history, concepts of statehood and attributes of national and local belonging – it could be generally regarded as a reaction to the “operational” historic surroundings. Part II reveals personal and intimate approach, narrativity, stories and moods enveloping individual existence. It oscillates between essays, observations and anthropological

Plankton & Aquarell (Peteris Kimelis)  
*The Focal Point*, 2002

investigations. Part III includes works fusing different genres and experimenting with the image and textual or sonic properties of the video. Conceived in the interchange with the fields of writing and sound these pieces reveal abstract language of image, sound and word that appeals to the process of perception, duration and sensory effects. This part is indicative of the collaborations of artists from different fields in a shared search for the new media of expression.

As a rather time-conditioned collection and overview the selection mostly includes short works suited for a single projection/screen viewing; it had to refrain from the time demanding pieces and multi-screen installation videos.

Examining history of video in Latvian art one should go back to the mid-80's when the first video cameras owned individually or by the small semi-professional collectives were allowed in the strictly controlled technological consumer environment of the USSR. The break that splits the first video-documentations of performances and explorations of the analogue video effects from widespread contemporary recording and broadcasting media manifested itself primarily in technology – in the shift towards the digital solutions. Artists featured in "Blinks" are coming from the generation whose creative advent coincided with the advancements of digital video and computer editing. Universal and accessible flow of the data serves as a technological base for all of videos in the selection.

Traditionally "moving image" is one of the most democratic genres on the visual art scene in Latvia – it was always linking the artworld and "do-it-yourself" practices, providing unified grounds for experiments to the creative people from different domains. This feature was characteristic of the pre-video era of the amateur-film movement that from 1960's was stretching throughout the Soviet Union, it was marking first festivals of "classic" – analogue video-art that united people from the film, theatre and fine arts background in the early 90's, the time when important contribution towards the promotion of video as artists medium was made by the French-Baltic Video festivals (1990-1992). In the following decade numerous self-organised, "open call", informal and therefore far-reaching video-festivals like "Kristapa tapa" (1998-2000), "2 Annas" (from 1996) "Water pieces" (from 2000) succeeded in encouragement of the community video scene, youth experiments, subculture driven expression mingling these with works by artists and art students. Film

*Eurowatching* is a good example of how this approach is developed today by the independent cultural centres like K@2, youth studio Annas 2, and Noass video gallery.

The egalitarianism of the above events is coinciding and sometimes overlapping with another extreme pole of the creative field in Latvia – the professionalisation of work within the advertising industry. Flowering from the mid-90's and nowadays affluently presenting itself to public in nearly seasonal competitions of regional and international night screenings of the commercials, this business is absorbing the creative minds, still giving them a secure financial refuge, and sometimes serving as an off-time laboratory for the technical perfection. Talking about both specialised – “business” and democratic wings of the video-world, what comes to mind is the proliferation of the moving image in the visual culture of the last years, since now we talk not just about the screening or TV broadcast formats, but about the video in stage designs, internet broadcasts, community video, VJ performances, mobile phone animations, etc. Even if not all of these branches yet serve the creative “do-it-yourself” production purposes they are released “on air” as a dormant eventualities.

Selection of “Blinks” is approaching video from a slightly different, more focused perspective – looking what is the role of the video, and the ways of its use in the artists practice. Despite the short film formats and space limits of selection, it marks the main tendencies in the video art of the last years. Therefore it is important to mention the sets of recent influences on Latvian video-art. These areas of influence are not distinctly separated and, as we'll see, the authors tend to cross the borders of the “affiliation”. Still these fields allow to explore some similarities and common grounds in the Latvian creative environment.

Important and striking aspect of the Latvian scene is the link between video and other disciplines – involvement with moving image aligned with the interest in electronic soundscape, interferences of light and sound patterns within the work. It arises on the one hand from the impact of Riga club and party scene that in the late nineties cultivated local VJ culture and influenced the style, rhythm, duration and repetitive structures of the video images. Good example of this kind of work is the *Independence Day 18* video that was first produced by Martins



Arnis Balcus  
*Xionel*, 2004

Ratniks as a long sequence of looped VJ material. On the other hand, lately the influence of sonic space appeared in more hermetic and experimental use of sound and collaborations with sound artists tracing the correspondences between sonic and visual sequences – as can be seen in Martins Ratniks' work with dark ambient/technoise group Clausthome in *Spectrosphere* – a piece exploring the sound and visual traces of electromagnetic spectrum. It is also apparent in the atmospheric, metaphysically tuned works by Peteris Kimelis that are often meant to be presented as parts of the live-art events or environments.

Recent videos by Katrina Neiburga – another artist coming from the grounds of audiovisual experimentation – are indicating, one more current trend of the “extended-video” – the alignment of the video-sequences and a literary works, where the semantics of the text – written or spoken word – and movement of video-stills are mutually complementing. Video *Kroxā* is an example for this doubling of the visual essay and poetry. Similar example to this approach are two films from the multimedia project – literary karaoke *Stum Stum* (works by Katrina Neiburga and Peteris Kimelis) – a collaboration involving live performance – readings led and backed by the video and sound scenes

and subsequent DVD publication inspired and responding to the motives in the book *Stum Stum* by Andra Neiburga. Very often such audio and video works are made as results of collaborative practices, as continuations of live events, performances and broadcasts that at some point are captured and sometimes released in the limited numbers of the video-publications.

The theme of the extended moving image and search towards fusing visual and sonic in a united ambient effect alongside with music is largely inspired by the new media scene active in Riga since the mid-90's. Engagement of Martins Ratniks, Katrina Neiburga, Peteris Kimelis in acoustic and visual dimensions and Kristine Briedes work with the community culture vs politics are influenced by the ideas behind the new media wave – the awareness of the new informal creative workspace – online and in real-time – and possibilities of reaching the audience and experimenting by the new means – netcasting, live mixing, use of electronic formats discovered both in recent and out-dated technology. These advances were connected to the new means of recording and distribution that formed the euphoric awareness of the self-organisation, informal practice and distribution and exchange networks still present in the local scene.

Another important course in Latvian video is led by the “school” in a more institutionalised form – the Department of Visual Communication (VKN) at the Latvian Academy of Art, that is chaired by the charismatic artist Ojars Petersons. Graduates from VKN within “Blinks” are – Kriss Salmanis, Martins Ratniks, Reinis Petersons, Katrina Neiburga and Ieva Jerohina. Seeking for technical competence the department has lately emerged as promoting the more classical “fine arts” approach towards the moving image. Its students are investing in complex compositions on a large and multiple projection screens, disclosing invented or sometimes documentary narratives and conceptual riddles. Video *Zenta* by Ieva Jerohina originally exhibited as a three screens installation is a characteristic example. Particularities of the setups and duration of some of these both inventive and ambitious works left them out of the video selection. Being by far the most innovative department of the academy VKN is now responsible for bringing the new generation of inventive, original and devoted artists to the Latvian art scene, generation that feels comfortable both in the traditional exhibition



Ieva Jerohina  
*Zenta*, 2004

format or embarking on the experimental communicative and often performative practices. Noticeable feature is that students of the department develop very distinct and individual handwritings and spectres of interests like the aesthetic pursuits of Martins Ratniks, self-explorations of Katrina Neiburga, honest humour of Kriss Salmanis, as well as of the artists outside this selection – Miks Mitrevics, Kristine Kursisa, Kaspars Podnieks, and Evelina Deicmane.

Photography is the third area of influence that can be traced in “Blinks”. Arnis Balcus and Elina Lihaceva have made their creative debuts in the medium of photography. For them and Ieva Jerohina it continues to be the basic genre. One could speculate that the realism, sometimes documentalism in the form of stills, in most of their videos has its roots in photographic captions of the reality. Either fictional or true the narrative line developed by these artists contributes to the diversity of video language and develops into emotional (Elina Lihaceva, Ieva Jerohina) and sensual (Arnis Balcus) and sometimes sentimental and romantic impulses within conceptualised art frame. With the exception of Ieva, photography has been the main field of study of these authors, that probably fostered flexibility of the form in which the story or mood are conveyed in their films and animations –

black and white frames, borrowed imagery, animation or storyline told by the voiceover, duration of the single screen. Indicative that works by Arnis Balcus and Ieva Jerohina within "Blinks" can be described as portraits – a portrait of "an Asian girl turning out to be a boy" and a portrait of the solitary life of Zenta. This possibility of naming the genre contrasts with the difficulties to attribute works by artists engaged in multimedia. *Sandbox* by Elina Lihaceva – a repetitive abstract recount of a short verse, the balance between the spoken poetry and effects of the image distortion brings us back to the argument at the beginning of this article – the attempts of the moving image to transgress the limits of the separate creative genres and make a leap into the daily emotional experience.

"Blinks" are mapping out and thematically side-noting tendencies, topics and individual characters within the young video-and-art scene in Latvia. Some of the authors are represented by two or three art pieces in order to highlight the scope of experimentation and to draw an additional attention to continuous practices. "Blinks" attempt to mark some of the vectors for the insight into Latvian art and video scene; still more information on this rich and diverse phenomena, as well as on the "white spots" outside the selection can be found by visiting some of the following online addresses.

### **Mara Traumane**

For further reference please visit: video gallery Noass [www.noass.lv](http://www.noass.lv) holding a collection of the videoart in Latvia; the website of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art [www.lcca.lv](http://www.lcca.lv) and its database on Latvian artists [www.camp.lv](http://www.camp.lv); the portal of electronic music [www.andrews.lv](http://www.andrews.lv); a video-collection on a portal run by the poets group Orbita [www.orbita.lv](http://www.orbita.lv); the website of the New Media Culture Centre RIXC <http://rixc.lv>; the portal of industrial sound culture Semema [www.semema-industrial.net](http://www.semema-industrial.net) and the website of the cultural centre K@2 [www.karosta.lv](http://www.karosta.lv)



Elina Lihaceva  
*Sandbox*, 2002