

LATVIJAS NACIONĀLĀ BIBLIOTĒKA

ZINĀTNISKIE RAKSTI



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Feminist Perspectives: Archives and the Arts

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LATVIJAS NACIONĀLĀ BIBLIOTĒKA

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Feministiskie skatījumi arhīvos un mākslās

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Feministiskie skatījumi arhīvos un mākslās

Feminist Perspectives: Archives and the Arts

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Priekšvārds

Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas “Zinātnisko rakstu” 15. (XXXV) sējums “Feministiskie skatījumi arhīvos un mākslās” turpina izziņāt tēmas, kas tika skartas 2024. gada vasarā notikušajā starptautiskajā simpozijā un vasaras skolā “Dzimtes studijas kultūras un mākslas vēstures pētniecībā un atmiņu institūciju darbā”. Vasaras skolas programma un tajā notikušais simpozijš tika īstenoti Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas (LNB) un Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas (LMA) kopīgā sadarbībā. To mērķis bija veicināt un pētīt feminisma un dzimtes studiju atziņu un metožu iekļaušanu Latvijas atmiņu institūciju darbībā, kā arī piedāvāt daudzpusīgu, starpdisciplināru vasaras studiju kursu Latvijas augstskolu studentiem.¹

Papildus simpozija programmai vasaras skolas dalībnieki piedalījās lekcijās, praktiskajās nodarbībās un darbnīcās Paula Stradiņa Medicīnas vēstures muzejā, Latvijas Nacionālajā rakstniecības un mūzikas muzejā, Rīgas Porcelāna muzejā, kā arī LNB krājumā un LMA profesionālajā doktorantūrā studējošo mākslinieču darbnīcās. Vasaras skolas uzdevums bija gan sniegt ieskatu feminisma un dzimtes studiju teorijā un kritikā, gan arī iepazīstināt ar to, kā šīs atziņas tiek lietotas praksē krājumu speciālistu, arhivāru, kuratoru, pētnieku, mākslinieku darbā un institucionālajās praksēs. Vasaras skolas programmu sagatavoja un vadīja LNB Mākslas un mūzikas centra vadītāja un fotogrāfijas pētniece Katrīna Teivāne un LMA Laikmetīgās mākslas, dizaina un arhitektūras institūta pētniece, mākslas vēsturniece Māra Traumane. Tā tika īstenota valsts pētījumu programmas “Latvijas kultūra – resurss valsts attīstībai” projektā “Latvijas kultūras ekosistēma kā resurss valsts izturētspējai un ilgtspējai” / CERS.

Starptautiskais simpozijš, kas kalpojis par galveno impulsu šīs publikācijas tapšanai, tika organizēts ar nolūku starptautiskā kontekstā aktualizēt pēdējā desmitgadē Latvijas mākslas un kultūras pētniecībā un kuratoriālajās praksēs pieaugošo pievēršanos feminismam un dzimtes studijām. Simpozija uzmanības centrā bija dzimtes problemātika un tās atainojums, sieviešu pārstāvniecība, kā arī sieviešu un kvīru loma Latvijas kultūras, mākslas un sabiedrības vēstures interpretācijā. Pulcējot dažādu mākslas jomu pētniekus un kuratorus no Baltijas un Austrumeiropas valstīm, simpozijš aptvēra plašu, taču konceptuāli vienotu tēmu loku: kultūras kanona kritikas stratēģijas, dzimtes studiju lomu Austrumeiropas mākslas mantojuma interpretācijā, feminisma un dzimtes jautājumu klātbūtni izstāžu un kuratoriālajā praksē, kā arī šo pieeju nozīmi arhīvu un atmiņas institūciju pētniecībā. Simpozijš apvienoja

1 Vairāk informācijas par vasaras skolas un simpozija programmu, kā arī lektoriem: <https://vasarasskola.lnb.lv> [22.12.2025.].

akadēmisko pētnieku, praktiķu, kuratoru un institūciju darbinieku skatījumus uz dzimtes problemātiku mākslas procesu un vēstures pārļasišanā.

Šī ievirze atspoguļojas arī LNB “Zinātnisko rakstu” 15. (XXXV) sējumā, kas iekļauj pētnieku, kuratoru, kā arī arhīvu un kolekciju glabātāju rakstus. Tāpat kā simpozijš, šis izdevums iezīmē feminisma un dzimtes studiju metožu pielietojuma augošo aktualitāti Latvijas pētniecībā un institucionālajās praksēs, vienkopus pulcējot gan autorus, kas likuši pamatus Latvijas kultūras analīzei no dzimtes skatupunkta (Inga Pērkone, Jana Kukaine, Kārlis Vērdiņš, Jānis Ozoliņš), gan jaunākās paaudzes kuratorus un pētniekus, kuri šīs metodes aktīvi attīsta.

Simpozijā nolasītie referāti ir pamatā sešiem šī numura rakstiem. Pārējo septiņu autori tika uzrunāti ar mērķi paplašināt sējuma tematisko loku un skaidrāk izgaismot daudzveidību, kas raksturo mākslas un kultūras pētniecību Latvijā. Krājumā iekļautie raksti aplūko trīs pamattēmu lokus: mākslas un kino arhīvu un vēstures pārvērtējumu no feminisma un dzimtes studiju skatpunkta; feministisko stratēģiju ietekmi kultūras kanonu veidošanā; feminisma un dzimtes studiju tēmu reprezentāciju vizuālajā mākslā.

Sējuma struktūra iezīmē tematisku virzību no institucionālās atmiņas un mākslas vēstures rakstīšanas problemātikas, kuratoriālajām un arhīvu pārvērtēšanas praksēm uz dzimtes un feminisma tēmu klātbūtni atsevišķu mākslinieku darbos. To ievada pētījumi par sieviešu iekļaušanu un redzamību kultūras mantojuma institūcijās un kanona veidošanas mehānismiem, kas analizē arhīvu lomu sieviešu radošā snieguma dokumentēšanā un jaunu vēstures naratīvu veidošanā. Seko pētījumi par kuratoriālajām stratēģijām un institucionālajām praksēm, kas, balstoties kritisko teoriju atziņās, tiecas veicināt līdz šim mazāk pētīto personību un kopienu redzamību. Sējumu noslēdzošie raksti aplūko dzimtes un seksualitātes aspektus, sievietes balss klātbūtni un feminisma manifestācijas atsevišķu mākslinieku un mākslinieču darbībā.

Numuru ievada fotogrāfijas pētnieces Līgas Goldbergas raksts, kurā autore tematizē sieviešu fotogrāfiskā mantojuma arhivēšanas un ar to saistīto rūpju prakses problemātiku. Raksta centrā ir latviešu fotogrāfes, fotokluba “Rīga” dalībnieces Zentas Dzividzinskas arhīvs, kas glabājas LNB Mākslas krājumā. Rakstā aplūkotas arhīva statusa izmaiņas – pāreja no privāta krājuma uz publiski pieejamu kultūras mantojuma kopu – un ar tām saistītie jautājumi, kas skar darbu saglabāšanu, anotēšanu un iekļaušanu institucionālajās struktūrās. Goldberga pievērš uzmanību Dzividzinskas lomai kā savu darbu krājuma pirmajai arhivārei. Vienlaikus viņa aplūko arhīva saglabāšanas un tā redzamības veicināšanas procesus, kuros vēlāk iesaistījusies fotogrāfes meita un vairākas valsts un nevalstiskās institūcijas. Tādējādi tiek aktualizēts jautājums par arhīva auras ilgstamību un tās saglabāšanu arhīva transformācijas procesā.

Nākamajā rakstā mākslas kritiķe un kuratore Agne Narušīte (*Agnė Narušytė*) raksta par patriarhālā mākslas vēstures kanona pārskatīšanu Lietuvā, sākot ar 20. gadsimta 90. gadiem. Rakstā izcelta mākslinieču, kuratoru un mākslas vēsturnieču darbība kā ilgstošs process, kas pakāpeniski ļāvis dekonstruēt no padomju laika

mantoto tendenci pazemināt mākslinieču radošo sasniegumu profesionālo vērtējumu. Atsaucoties uz Grizeldas Pollokas (*Griselda Pollock*) kanona kritikas idejām, autore parāda, kā sievietes, darbojoties “ārpus” dominējošā kanona, ar pašorganizēšanās, kolektīvo iniciatīvu, institucionālās kritikas un kuratoriālā aktīvisma palīdzību veido jaunas reprezentācijas stratēģijas. Šīs prakses rakstā interpretētas kā kanona diferencēšanas mehānismi, kas apvērš vērtējuma hierarhijas un veido daudzveidībai atvērtas kultūras telpas.

Vizuālās kultūras pētniece un kuratore Liāna Ivete Žilde savā rakstā apskata izstāžu ciklu “Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures”, kas 2024. gadā norisinājās ISSP Galerijā. Veicot šo piemēru gadījuma izpēti, autore izvērtē, kā mākslinieciskās un kuratoriālās stratēģijas izgaismo mazzināmas fotogrāfijas vēstures un piedāvā jaunus skatpunktus uz Latvijas fotogrāfijas historiogrāfiju. Rakstā skatīti Kristīnes Krauzes-Sluckas, Agates Tūnas, Annemarijas Gulbes un Konstantīna Žukova darbi un to atsauces uz vēsturiskajiem fotoarhīviem, izceļot jautājumus par dzimti, sieviešu un kvīru vēsturi un spekulatīvām pieejām pagātnei. Žilde situē izstādes plašākā kontekstā, kurā fotogrāfija ilgstoši tikusi atstāta mākslas vēstures perifērijā, vienlaikus uzsverot pašreflektīvas prakses un dialoga nozīmi līdz šim nepamanīto balsu iekļaušanā kultūras naratīvā.

Savukārt fotogrāfijas vēsturniece Katrīna Teivāne raksta par sieviešu redzamību agrīnā 20. gadsimta Latvijas fotogrāfijā, balstoties uz līdz šim maz pētītu avotu – Latviešu fotogrāfiskās biedrības 1908. gada ceļojošo albumu. Rakstā uzmanība pievērsta Emīlijas Mergupes, Otilijas Cers, Paulīnes Ķemeris un Natālijas Riekstas albumā iekļautajiem darbiem. Autores izvēlētais fokuss izgaismo dokumentāru materiālu nozīmi fotogrāfijas pētniecībā un aktualizē jautājumu par to, kā fragmentāro sieviešu fotogrāfijas mantojumu iekļaut fotogrāfijas vēstures kopainā un kādi līdzekļi un stāstījumi ļauj to izcelt.

Vēsturnieks Mārtiņš Mintauris analizē sieviešu un dzimtes vēstures kā patstāvīgu Rietumu historiogrāfijas virzienu veidošanos un nostiprināšanos saistībā ar postmodernisma ietekmētajām pārmaiņām vēstures rakstīšanā. Autors aplūko, kā feminisma teorētiskais ietvars veicinājis jaunu tēmu, avotu un metodoloģiju ienākšanu historiogrāfijā. Mintauris identificē šo virzienu iniciētās nozīmīgās pārmaiņas vēstures jomā – rosinot pārvērtēt objektivitātes kritērijus, tie izceļ subjektivitātes un politiskās izvēles lomu vēstures rakstīšanā.

Kuratore un pētniece Sanita Duka pievēršas pirmo latviešu profesionālo teātra režisoru sieviešu darbībai un feminisma klātbūtnes jautājumam 20. gadsimta sākuma Latvijas teātra ainā. Rakstā aplūkotas politikas, teātra un dzimtes attiecības, kā arī Birutas Skujenieces, Annas Lācis un Olgas Bormanis nozīmīgākie iestudējumi un organizatoriskā darbība. Pētījuma pamatā ir līdz šim nepublicēti arhīvu materiāli, kas ļauj atklāt saikni starp šo režisoru māksliniecisko praksi un kreisajām politiskajām idejām. Raksts iezīmē diskusiju par to, vai šo novatorisko režisoru darbība uzskatāma

par pirmā viļņa feminisma izpausmi Latvijas kultūrvidē vai drīzāk par savrupiem, bet nozīmīgiem sieviešu aģences piemēriem, kas radušies vēl pirms diskursa nostiprināšanās.

Kino zinātnieces Ingas Pērkones uzmanības centrā ir filmu arhīvu materiālu izmantojuma un interpretācijas jautājumi mūsdienu kino un arhīvu teoriju kontekstā. Raksts demonstrē, kā tādas kategorijas kā autorība, anonimitāte, apropriācija, balss un skatiens kinematogrāfā veido kompleksu varas un reprezentācijas attiecību tīklu. Autore skata filmu mantojuma un kino arhīvu sociālās vēstures aspektus, kā arī, balstoties tuvlasījuma metodē, analizē vēsturisko kinomateriālu izmantojumu dokumentālajā filmā “Bals” (Augusts Sukuts, 1986) un dokumentālajā spēlfilmā “Mērijas ceļojums” (Kristīne Želve, 2018) un problematizē arhīvu materiālu fragmentos pārstāvēto sieviešu redzamību.

Kuratore un pētniece Andra Silapētere pievēršas kvīru kopienas pieredzes un tās reprezentācijas veidošanās gaitai Latvijā caur koprades arhīvu praksēm. Izstāde “Starp mums viss labi” (2024) rakstā aplūkota kā vieta, kur stāstu stāstīšana un to atspoguļojums mākslā kļūst par kopienas veidošanas un zināšanu radīšanas rīku un kuras konteksts iezīmē saikni ar plašāku Baltijas kvīru arhīvu iniciatīvu loku. Autore parāda, kā pētnieku un mākslinieku izstādei radītie darbi izaicina tradicionālo arhīva izpratni un rosina līdzdalīgas, inovatīvas pieejas kvīru vēstures saglabāšanā. Kuratore uzsver nepieciešamību pēc jūtīgas, afektīvas un interpretatīvas pieejas stāstījumiem, kas bieži veidojušies ārpus institucionālām struktūrām.

Turpinot tēmu par arhīvu kā aktīvu spēlētāju laikmetīgās mākslas procesos, kuratore Marika Agu (*Marika Agu*) aplūko Igaunijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centra arhīvu kā dinamisku un daudzfunkcionālu struktūru. Viņas pieredze, kas gūta, strādājot ar arhīvu kopš 2017. gada, ļauj parādīt, ka tā materiāli ne tikai dokumentē institucionālās un mākslinieciskās norises, bet arī rosina jaunas interpretācijas un ietekmē paša arhīva identitātes veidošanos. Rakstā aplūkoti veidi, kā veicināt auditorijas līdzdalību arhīvu apgūvē: tiek atjaunināti novecojuši mediju formāti, piemēram, analogais video, veidoti digitāli rīki un piedāvātas radošas arhīvu materiālu interpretācijas laikmetīgos mākslas darbos un izstādēs.

Literatūrzinātnieki Jānis Ozoliņš un Kārlis Vērdiņš piedāvā jaunu skatījumu uz maskulinitātes atainojumu gleznotāja Edgara Iltnera atveidotajās vīriešu grupu kompozīcijās 20. gadsimta 60.–70. gados. Atgādinot par Iltnera nozīmi “skarbā stila” aizsākumos un viņa centieniem atbrīvot sociālistisko reālismu no Staļina laika kanoņiem, autori pievēršas mākslinieka radītajam modernā un heroizētā laikabiedra tēlam. Viņa kolektīvās kompozīcijas iemieso padomju progresa un industrializācijas ideoloģiju, taču mūsdienās to idealizētā stilistika rosina jaunu recepciju un interpretācijas, kas iekļauj arī “kvīro lasījumu”. Raksts pēta seksualitātes un dzimtes tēmu klātbūtni Latvijas mākslas kanonā un sasaucas ar Latvijas Nacionālā mākslas muzeja izstādi “Iekāres vārdā” (2024). Šajā kontekstā autori pievērš uzmanību Iltnera kompozīcijām, akcentējot homosociālu attiecību un ķermeniskuma klātbūtni.

Mākslas zinātniece Laine Kristberga reflektē par Latvijas laikmetīgās mākslas norisēm un pievēršas radniecības tēmai mākslinieces Annas Maskavas radošajā praksē. Autore balstās atmiņas un rituāla studijās, kā arī posthumānisma teorijā un analizē to, kā Maskava performancēs, fotogrāfijā un stāstniecībā apvieno personisko pieredzi ar dzimtas vēstures un starpsugu attiecību pētniecību. Gan bērnības un pusaudža gadu autobiogrāfiskās ainas, gan paaudžu atmiņas pārmantojamības un starpsugu līdzaspastāvēšanas modeļi tiek skatīti caur ievainojamības un materiālās aģences prizmu. Aplūkojot Annas Maskavas mākslinieciskās stratēģijas līdzās citu mūsdienu mākslinieču praksēm Latvijā, autore akcentē rūpes, iztēli un mijiedarbību starp cilvēka un vairāk-nekā-cilvēka pasaulēm.

Mākslas kuratore un feminisma ideju pētniece Jana Kukaine kopā ar filozofu Jāni Taurenu raksta par Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumu sēriju, kas tapusi grupas izstādei “Pretrunu pilns zīmējums ar gaišredzības iezīmēm” (2023) Valmieras pilsētvidē. Autori izceļ trīs darbus, kuros visspilgtāk atklājas feministiskās mākslas manifesta iezīmes. Atskatoties uz avangarda manifestu tradīciju un tās saistību ar feministisko mākslas aktīvismu, viņi izseko tam, kā Pičukānes zīmējumi vienlaikus atsedz politisku nostāju, kritisku iejaukšanos un utopisku horizontu. Autori konceptualizē cerīgā pesimisma afektīvo toni, kas caurvij Pičukānes darbu, un vērš uzmanību arī uz diskusijām par šādu manifestu iespējamās “novēlotības” jautājumu un tajos sastopamajām dihotomijām.

Numuru noslēdz mākslas zinātnieces Ingrīdas Peldekses raksts, kurā aplūkota grafiķes Dzidras Ezerģailes 20. gadsimta 80. gadu radošā mantojuma mazāk zināmā daļa – tautasdziesmu motīvu atainojums tušās zīmējumos. Tajās vērojams mākslinieces sievišķīgais, matricentriskais pasaules skatījums, kas balstīts latviešu folklorā iekodētajās ētiskajās vērtībās. Analizējot tautasdziesmu ilustrācijas, raksts sniedz ieskatu Ezerģailes simboliskajā domāšanā un bieži izmantotajā saules tēlā kā mātišķības zīmē.

Šajā izdevumā apkopotie pētījumi būs noderīgi mākslas un kultūras pētniekiem, muzeju, bibliotēku un arhīvu profesionāļiem, izstāžu kuratoriem, kā arī humanitāro un sociālo zinātņu pasniedzējiem un studentiem, kurus interesē vizuālās kultūras, mākslas un kultūras vēstures daudzveidīgā izpēte un tās mūsdienu metodoloģijas.

Katrīna Teivāne, Māra Traumane, Pauls Daija
2026. gada 5. janvārī



Zentas Dzividzinskas arhīvs Latvijas Nacionālajā bibliotēkā. Foto: Sofija Tuna, 2024 /
Zenta Dzividzinska's archive at the National Library of Latvia. Photo by Sophie Thun, 2024

Preface

The 15th (XXXV) volume of the *Proceedings of the National Library of Latvia, Feminist Perspectives: Archives and the Arts*, continues to explore themes addressed during the international symposium and summer school *Gender Studies in Cultural and Art History Research and in the Work of Memory Institutions*, held in the summer of 2024.

The summer school program and the accompanying symposium were jointly organized by the National Library of Latvia (NLL) and the Art Academy of Latvia (AAL). Their aim was to promote and examine the integration of feminist and gender studies insights and methodologies into the work of Latvia's memory institutions, as well as to offer a multifaceted, interdisciplinary summer study course for students of Latvian higher education institutions.¹

In addition to the symposium program, the participants of the summer school took part in lectures, practical sessions, and workshops at the Pauls Stradiņš Museum of the History of Medicine, the National Museum of Literature and Music of Latvia, the Riga Porcelain Museum, as well as in the collections of the National Library of Latvia and in the studios of artists enrolled in the professional doctoral program at the Art Academy of Latvia.

The aim of the summer school was both to provide an introduction to feminist and gender studies theories and critique, and to familiarize participants with how these approaches are applied in practice in the work of collection specialists, archivists, curators, researchers, and artists, as well as in institutional practices.

The summer school program was prepared and led by Katrīna Teivāne, Head of the Art and Music Centre of the National Library of Latvia and a researcher of photography, and Māra Traumane, researcher at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture of the Art Academy of Latvia and an art historian. It was implemented within the State Research Program *Latvian Culture as a Resource for the Development of the State*, as part of the project *Latvia's Cultural Ecosystem as a Resource for National Resilience and Sustainability* (CERS).

The international symposium that served as the main impetus for the creation of this publication was organized with the aim of foregrounding, in an international context, the growing focus over the past decade in Latvian art and cultural research and curatorial practices on feminism and gender studies. The symposium focused on issues of gender and their representation, women's representation, as well as the role of women and queer subjects in the interpretation of the history of Latvian culture,

1 More information about the summer school and symposium program, as well as the lecturers, is available at: <https://vasarasskola.lnb.lv/> [22.12.2025.].

art, and society. Bringing together researchers and curators from various fields of art from the Baltic region and Eastern Europe, the symposium addressed a broad yet conceptually coherent range of topics: strategies for critiquing the cultural canon, the role of gender studies in interpreting Eastern European art heritage, the presence of feminist and gender issues in exhibition-making and curatorial practice, and the significance of these approaches in the research of archives and memory institutions. The symposium brought together the perspectives of academic researchers, practitioners, curators, and institutional professionals on gender issues in the re-reading of art processes and history.

This orientation is also reflected in the 15th (XXXV) volume of the *Proceedings of the National Library of Latvia*, which includes articles by researchers, curators, as well as archivists and collection custodians. Like the symposium, this publication marks the growing relevance of the application of feminist and gender studies methodologies in Latvian research and institutional practices, bringing together both authors who have laid the foundations for the analysis of Latvian culture from a gender perspective (Inga Pērkone, Jana Kukaine, Kārlis Vērdiņš, Jānis Ozoliņš) and a cohort of curators and researchers who are actively advancing these approaches.

The papers presented at the symposium form the basis for six of the articles in this volume. The authors of the remaining seven contributions were invited with the aim of expanding the thematic scope of the volume and more clearly highlighting the diversity that characterizes art and cultural research in Latvia. The articles included in the collection address three main thematic areas: the reassessment of art and film archives and histories from the perspective of feminism and gender studies; the impact of feminist strategies on the formation of cultural canons; and the representation of themes from feminism and gender studies in visual art.

The structure of the volume outlines a thematic progression from issues of institutional memory and the writing of art history, through curatorial and archival re-evaluation practices, to the presence of gender and feminist themes in the works of individual artists. It opens with studies on the inclusion and visibility of women in cultural heritage institutions and the mechanisms of canon formation, analyzing the role of archives in documenting women's creative contributions and in shaping new historical narratives. This is followed by research on curatorial strategies and institutional practices which, drawing on insights from critical theory, seek to enhance the visibility of previously under-researched figures and communities. The concluding articles examine aspects of gender and sexuality, the presence of women's voices, and manifestations of feminism in the work of individual artists.

The volume opens with an article by photography researcher Līga Goldberga, in which the author addresses issues related to the archiving of women's photographic heritage and the care practices associated with it. At the center of the article is the archive of Latvian photographer and member of the photo club *Rīga*,

Zenta Dzividzinska, which is held in the Art Collection of the National Library of Latvia. The article examines changes in the status of the archive – from a private collection to a publicly accessible body of cultural heritage – and the related issues of preservation, annotation, and integration into institutional structures. Goldberga draws attention to Dzividzinska's role as the first archivist of her own body of work. At the same time, she considers the processes of preserving the archive and enhancing its visibility, in which the photographer's daughter and several state and non-governmental institutions later became involved. In this way, the article foregrounds the question of the durability of an archive's aura and its preservation in the course of the archive's transformation.

In the following article, art critic and curator Agnė Narušytė writes about the revision of the patriarchal art-historical canon in Lithuania since the 1990s. The article highlights the work of women artists, curators, and art historians as a long-term process that has gradually made it possible to deconstruct the Soviet-era legacy of undervaluing the professional assessment of women artists' creative achievements. Drawing on Griselda Pollock's ideas of canon critique, the author shows how women, working outside the dominant canon, have developed new strategies of representation through self-organization, collective initiatives, institutional critique, and curatorial activism. These practices are interpreted in the article as mechanisms for differentiating the canon – overturning hierarchies of value and creating cultural spaces open to diversity.

Visual culture researcher and curator Liāna Ivete Žilde, in her article, examines the exhibition series *Contemporary Histories of Photography (Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures)*, which took place at ISSP Gallery in 2024. Through this case study, the author evaluates how artistic and curatorial strategies illuminate lesser-known photographic histories and offer new perspectives on the historiography of Latvian photography. The article discusses works by Kristīne Krauze-Slucka, Agate Tūna, Annemarija Gulbe, and Konstantin Zhukov and their references to historical photo archives, highlighting questions of gender, women's and queer histories, and speculative approaches to the past. Žilde situates the exhibitions within a broader context in which photography has long been relegated to the periphery of art history, while emphasizing the importance of self-reflective practices and dialogue in incorporating previously overlooked voices into the cultural narrative.

Photography historian Katrīna Teivāne, in turn, writes about the visibility of women in early 20th-century Latvian photography, drawing on a previously little-studied source: the 1908 travelling album of the Latvian Photographic Society. The article focuses on the photographers Emīlija Mergupe, Otilija Cers, Pauline Ķemere, and Natālija Rieksta. The author's chosen focus highlights the significance of documentary material in photographic research and foregrounds the question of how fragmentary women's photographic heritage can be integrated into the broader

narrative of photography history, and what means and forms of narration allow it to be brought to the fore.

Historian Mārtiņš Mintauris analyzes the formation and consolidation of women's and gender history as an independent direction within Western historiography in connection with postmodernism-influenced changes in the writing of history. The author examines how the theoretical framework of feminism has facilitated the introduction of new themes, sources, and methodologies into historiography. Mintauris identifies the significant transformations initiated by this approach in the field of history, as it has prompted a reassessment of criteria of objectivity and highlighted the role of subjectivity and political choice in historical writing.

Curator and researcher Sanita Duka focuses on the work of the first Latvian professional women theatre directors and the question of the presence of feminism in the Latvian theatrical landscape of the early 20th century. The article examines the relationships between politics, theatre, and gender, as well as the most significant productions and organizational activities of Biruta Skujeniece, Anna Lācis, and Olga Bormane. The study is based on previously unpublished archival materials, which make it possible to reveal the connections between these directors' artistic practices and left-wing political ideas. The article outlines a discussion on whether the work of these innovative directors can be regarded as a manifestation of first-wave feminism in the Latvian cultural environment, or rather as distinct yet significant examples of women's agency that emerged prior to the consolidation of feminist discourse.

Film scholar Inga Pērkone focuses on questions of the use and interpretation of film archival materials within the context of contemporary film and archival theory. The article demonstrates how categories such as authorship, anonymity, appropriation, voice, and gaze in cinema form a complex network of power and representational relations. The author examines socio-historical aspects of film heritage and film archives and, drawing on the method of close reading, analyzes the use of historical film material in the documentary *Bals (Voice)*, Augusts Sukuts, 1986) and the docu-fiction film *Mērijas ceļojums (Mary's Journey)*, Kristīne Želve, 2018), problematizing the visibility of women represented in fragments of archival materials.

Curator and researcher Andra Silapētere addresses the development of queer community experience and its representation in Latvia through collaborative archival practices. The exhibition *All's Good Between Us (Starp mums viss labi)*, 2024) is discussed in the article as a site where storytelling and its reflection in art become tools for community formation and knowledge production, and whose context points to connections with a broader range of Baltic queer archival initiatives. The author demonstrates how works created by researchers and artists for the exhibition challenge traditional understandings of the archive and encourage participatory, innovative approaches to preserving queer history. The curator emphasizes the need for sensitive,

affective, and interpretative approaches to narratives that have often emerged outside institutional structures.

Continuing the theme of the archive as an active participant in contemporary art processes, curator Marika Agu examines the archive of the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art as a dynamic and multifunctional structure. Her experience working with the archive since 2017 allows her to show that archival materials not only document institutional and artistic developments but also generate new interpretations and influence the formation of the archive's own identity. The article discusses ways of encouraging audience engagement with archives: updating obsolete media formats such as analogue video, developing digital tools, and offering creative interpretations of archival materials in contemporary artworks and exhibitions.

Literary scholars Jānis Ozoliņš and Kārlis Vērdiņš propose a new perspective on the representation of masculinity in Edgars Iltner's group compositions of men from the 1960s–1970s. Recalling Iltner's significance in the emergence of the harsh style and his efforts to liberate socialist realism from Stalin-era canons, the authors focus on the artist's construction of the image of the modern, heroic contemporary. His collective compositions embody the ideology of Soviet progress and industrialization; however, today their idealized stylistics invite new forms of reception and interpretation, including queer readings. The article explores the presence of themes of sexuality and gender within the Latvian art canon and resonates with the exhibition *In the Name of Desire (Iekāres vārdā)* at the Latvian National Museum of Art (2024). In this context, the authors draw attention to Iltner's compositions, emphasizing the presence of homosocial relationships and corporeality.

Art historian Laine Kristberga reflects on developments in Latvian contemporary art and focuses on the theme of kinship in the artistic practice of Anna Maskava. Drawing on memory and ritual studies as well as posthumanist theory, the author analyzes how Maskava combines personal experience with explorations of family history and interspecies relations in her performances, photography, and storytelling. Autobiographical scenes from childhood and adolescence, along with models of intergenerational memory transmission and interspecies co-existence, are examined through the lens of vulnerability and material agency. By considering Anna Maskava's artistic strategies alongside the practices of other contemporary women artists in Latvia, the author emphasizes care, imagination, and interaction between human and More-Than-Human worlds.

Art curator and feminist scholar Jana Kukaine and philosopher Jānis Taurens write about Ingrīda Pičukāne's series of drawings created for the group exhibition *Pretrunu pilns zīmējums ar gaišredzības iezīmēm (A Visionary Drawing Riddle, 2023)* in the urban environment of Valmiera. The authors highlight three works in which the characteristics of a feminist art manifesto are most clearly revealed. Reflecting on the tradition of avant-garde manifestos and its connections with feminist art

activism, they trace how Pičukāne's drawings simultaneously articulate a political stance, critical intervention, and a utopian horizon. The authors conceptualize the affective tone of hopeful pessimism that permeates Pičukāne's work and also draw attention to discussions surrounding the possible belatedness of such manifestos and the dichotomies encountered within them.

The issue concludes with an article by art historian Ingrīda Peldekse, which examines a lesser-known part of the creative legacy of graphic artist Dzidra Ezergaile from the 1980s – her ink drawings depicting motifs from Latvian folk songs. These works reveal the artist's feminine, matricentric worldview, rooted in the ethical values encoded in Latvian folklore. Through an analysis of the folk song illustrations, the article offers insight into Ezergaile's symbolic thinking and her frequent use of the sun motif as a sign of motherhood.

The studies collected in this volume will be useful to researchers of art and culture, professionals working in museums, libraries, and archives, exhibition curators, as well as teachers and students in the humanities and social sciences who are interested in the diverse study of visual culture and art and cultural history and their contemporary methodologies.

Katrīna Teivāne, Māra Traumane, Pauls Daija
5 January 2026

LĪGA GOLDBERGA

Archiving for Aura: Exploring Strategies that Activate the Labor of Care for Women's Photographic Heritage

Summary

The heritage of women photographers from the second half of the 20th century remains understudied compared to their male peers. With the archive of Latvian artist and photographer Zenta Dzividzinska, a participant in the photo club *Rīga* during the 1960s and 1970s, as a case study, this paper explores the challenges women photographers face in performing the necessary work to preserve and annotate their archives, aiming to insert themselves into art canons and photography history narratives. The article also examines the labor of care undertaken by archive heirs, memory institutions, and curators concerning the safeguarding and availability of women photographers' legacies.

Dzividzinska was the first archivist of her own work and left clues in her archive that reveal her attitude toward her achievements, sometimes with self-ironic undertones. Her daughter, art historian Alise Tīfentāle, later took on the task of archiving, ensuring that her mother's work was visible and included in the history of photography. Since 2021, the archive has been part of the National Library of Latvia's collections and is subject to the institution's policies regarding preservation and accessibility.

Keywords: library collections, archives, women photographers, reproductions, feminism, art canons.

“I see myself at the labyrinth’s gate, ready to get lost in the city and in this story. Submissive.”¹

“To understand something is to understand its topography, to know how to chart it. And know how to get lost.”²

Introduction. Thirteen Boxes

In 2021, I was invited to consult on the preservation of an archive. It comprised thirteen “banana boxes” – ordinary moving boxes of the kind used in storage rooms to keep memorabilia and objects no longer in use. The boxes were sealed with various types and colors of tape and marked with the initials “ZDZ” in black marker. ZDZ stands for Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011), a Latvian artist and photographer, and one of the few women photographers active in the Latvian photo amateur club movement during the 1960s and 1970s.

The boxes contained neatly annotated negatives in storage sleeves, deformed rolled-up films wrapped in paper napkins and plastic bags, analogue and digital prints with exhibition stamps, small prints with torn corners and traces of mold, family albums, office-printer book dummies, and even candlesticks, spools of thread, a powder box, glasses, and childcare diaries. I was asked whether I would be interested in systematizing the archive within an exhibition space and assisting an artist in creating prints from the negatives – to exhibit them and gradually fill the room with images, as a kind of performance for gallery visitors.

The exhibition *I Don’t Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ*, curated by Zane Onckule, took place at the KIM? Contemporary Art Centre (henceforth KIM?) in Riga from July 15 to September 12, 2021.³ Alise Tīfentāle, Dzividzinska’s daughter and an art historian, loaned her mother’s archive to artist Sophie Thun,⁴ who set up a darkroom in the gallery. Over the course of two months, Thun assumed the role of lab technician, developing previously unseen images from the archive.

1 Calle, Sophie (1983). *Suite Vénitienne*. Seattle: Bay Press, p. 6.

2 Sontag, Susan (2001). *Under the Sign of Saturn*. London: Vintage, p. 116.

3 Onckule’s curatorial interaction with the archive can be seen as another turning point in the archive’s circulation, one that enabled many storylines. See: Onckule, Zane (2021). *Exhibition text. Sofija Tuna: Es neko neatceros, ienākot ZDZ izvairīgajā arhīvā*. Kim?, 15.07. Available at: <https://kim.lv/lv/dont-remember-thing-entering-elusive-estate-zdz/> [23.11.2024.].

[Anon.] (2021). Photo reportage from the exhibition ‘I Don’t Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ’ at Kim?. *Echo Gone Wrong*. Available at: <https://echogonewrong.com/photo-reportage-from-the-exhibition-i-dont-remember-a-thing-entering-the-elusive-estate-of-zdz-at-kim> [23.11.2024.].

4 See Thun, Sophie (n.d.). Homepage. Available at: www.sophiethun.com [20.10.2025.].



Boxes containing Zenta Dzvidzinska's archive at KIM? Exhibition *I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ*. Photo by Liga Goldberga, 2021

Initially invited to consult and support the artist, I found myself increasingly involved in the archival process. Coming from a background in memory institutions, I was attentive to the archive's physical condition and its long-term preservation. Archiving *in situ* during the exhibition meant limited time and access to archival supplies, which made thorough work difficult. Using large sheets of acid-free paper provided by the exhibition organizers, I folded improvised folders to begin annotating and assembling a preliminary, rough systematization. However, acid-free boxes, archival negative sleeves, and envelopes were essential for proper repackaging, as many negatives and prints were wrapped in napkins and office paper – materials that can harm the longevity of photographic artefacts.

I could only learn the patterns of previous archivists and their choices in organizing what they considered valuable. As I became more familiar with the contents of the boxes and discussed them in depth with Tifentāle, Onckule, Thun, and exhibition visitors, numerous questions arose regarding the conservation and visibility of female photographers' archives. Following the exhibition, Tifentāle decided to donate her mother's archive to the National Library of Latvia (henceforth NLL), where I continue to work with it, assist other researchers in developing narratives about Dzividzinska's work, and write my own account of the archive's circulation and systematization.⁵

Learning from the spatiality and topography of an archive in order to navigate its numerous storylines is an essential part of a research archivist's work. In her book *Suite Vénitienne (Venice Diaries)*, artist Sophie Calle reflects on the act of getting lost and surrendering to agentic forces beyond her control within her practice. These include the city with its unknown streets, coincidences initiated by passers-by, and the itinerary of the man she has decided to follow as part of her artistic investigation.⁶ Similarly, writer Susan Sontag, in her reading of Walter Benjamin's childhood memories, emphasizes the process of learning and unlearning certain topographies in order to re-experience them as a *flâneur*.⁷ Here, I turn to the archive as a site of memory work whose topographies are continually reshaped by discourses, institutions, and the practices of archivists.

When an archive enters a memory institution, it first requires an attuned reading of its internal order and previous modes of circulation. Only then can it begin the slow process of disassembly – of being taken apart, reclassified, and gradually absorbed into the frameworks of the institution's collection. Finally, to tell a story about a fraction of the *archive's biography*, the archivist must surrender to its agency and become a wanderer within the archive's memoryscapes.

5 Currently, I am working on my Doctoral Thesis *Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011): Biography of an Archive* at the Art Academy of Latvia.

6 Calle, Sophie (1983). *Suite Vénitienne*. Seattle: Bay Press.

7 Sontag, Susan (2001). *Under the Sign of Saturn*. London: Vintage, pp. 109–137.

This paper is structured in three parts. I begin with a review of a selection of studies that inform my perspective on the Dzividzinska case study. The second part introduces Dzividzinska in relation to photo-club aesthetics and frames archiving as an autobiographical practice. Here, I approach the photographic archive as an ego document – one that narrates through visual and material forms. The third part focuses on the archive's circulation after Dzividzinska's passing and its current institutionalization. In this section, I consider the repository as a site of memory work and as a hearth for the archive's *aura*.

My research is practice-led, and I take on multiple roles – as both an archivist and a researcher, working directly with the material and its institutional contexts. Drawing on contemporary archival practice, the paper examines how aura, authorship, and care are negotiated within institutional archival spaces. I, therefore, ask: how the process of archiving women's photographic legacies functions as a practice of care and a means of reconstructing historical visibility? Through the case study of Latvian photographer Zenta Dzividzinska, the paper explores the accession of a private archive into a national memory institution and the evolving status of its materials – from personal documents to cultural artefacts. I argue that archiving is not merely an act of preservation but a spatial and affective process that enables the reconstruction of artistic identity and historical visibility. Employing a feminist lens, the study highlights tensions between institutional constraints and the generative potential of recontextualizing women's archives. Ultimately, it advocates for archival practices that prioritize narrative multiplicity, accessibility, and ritualized care, positioning the archive not simply as a storage site but as a living space of memory work.

Marginalities Among the Established Photographers

Women's archives have been routinely excluded from the history of Latvian photography, which still contains many gaps due to the delayed inclusion of the medium in higher art education curricula and in the work of research institutions. This remains true today, even as the photographic heritage of the second half of the 20th century is increasingly being incorporated into the art canon and reassessed through diverse research approaches in the arts and humanities. The first publication to summarize Latvian photographic heritage was art historian Pēteris Zeile's book *Latvijas fotomāksla: vēsture un mūsdienas* (*Latvian Photographic Art: History and Present*, 1985), which for a long time served as the only survey of recognized 20th-century Latvian

photographers.⁸ Its overview of post-war photography does not discuss a single woman in depth. Dzividzinska is mentioned only in the annotation of a group photograph alongside her photo club *Rīga* peers, with no further introduction to her practice. This omission highlights the marginalization of women photographers' legacies – a concern explored further in this paper.

The next major publication to complement and revise Zeile's edition was Alise Tifentāle's *Photography as Art in Latvia, 1960–1969*, published in 2011. Alongside established male photographers, it also included information about Dzividzinska and Sarmīte Kviesīte (b. 1946).⁹ Further attempts to shape and amend the art canon have been made by publishers such as *Neputns*, the poets' association *Orbīta*, and the cultural center *Kultkom*, all of which have recently released monographs mostly on the lives and work of male photographers,¹⁰ while retrospectives and monographs on women photographers remain scarce.

Nonetheless, recent years show promise, with growing academic, curatorial and artistic research devoted to this topic. The Latvian National Museum of Art has expanded its retrospective program of women artists, though primarily painters. Women photographers such as Dzividzinska, Kviesīte, and Māra Brašmane (b. 1944) have been included mainly in group exhibitions. Local engagements with feminist discourse, shifts in institutional collecting policies, and increased curatorial activity raise hopes that women photographers will be more fully integrated into the Latvian art canon.¹¹

This shift toward differentiating the canon includes the work of visual culture researcher Liāna Ivete Žilde, who is currently preparing a publication titled *The History*

8 Zeile, Pēteris (sast.) (1985). *Latvijas fotomāksla: vēsture un mūsdienas*. Rīga: Liesma.

Since the 1970s, the historian Pēteris Korsaks, as well as Vilnis Auziņš, the first director of the Latvian Museum of Photography, have made significant contributions to the history of photography. Baiba Teterē's interview with Korsaks on the Creative Museum website offers insight into the challenges of photography research in the 1970s and beyond.

See: Teterē, Baiba (2021). 30 neatkarīgas muzejniecības gadi. Baibas Teteres saruna ar Pēteri Korsaku. *Creative Museum*, 27.07. Available at: www.creativemuseum.lv/lv/raksti/dienasgramata/30-neatkarigasmuzejniecibas-gadu-baibas-teteres-saruna-ar-peteri-korsaku [23.11.2024.].

9 Tifentāle has compiled information on the history of Latvian and international photography clubs.

See, for example:

Tifentāle, Alise (2011). *Fotogrāfija kā māksla Latvijā: 1960–1969*. Rīga: Neputns.

Tifentāle, Alise (2021). Entering the Elusive Estate of Photographer Zenta Dzividzinska. *MoMA Post*, 24.03. Available at: <https://post.moma.org/entering-the-elusive-estate-of-photographer-zenta-dzividzinska> [23.11.2024.].

10 Recently, monographs have been published on photographers Jānis Gleizds (1924–2010), Gunārs Binde (b. 1933), Juris Poišs (1933–1984) and Dominiks Gedzjuns (1918–1998). Kultkom is currently working on a book on Latvian press photographer Alise Iljina (1918–1974).

11 Although there are currently no monographs on women photographers' lives and work, several photo series albums have been published, such as *Manas jaunības pilsēta* (*The City of My Youth*, 2005) and *Centrāltirgus* (*Central Market*, 2017) by Māra Brašmane; *Es neko neatceros* (*I Don't Remember a Thing*, 2005) by Zenta Dzividzinska; and the series *Amālijas iela* (*Amālijas Street*, 2008) and *Mani lauku ļaudis* (*My Country People*, 1999) by Inta Ruka.

of *Latvian Photography in Images*, a project that critically revises earlier studies. Žilde also curated the exhibitions *Histories of Contemporary Photography I and II* (2024),¹² which expanded the scope of research approaches. These exhibitions featured artistic research by four artists whose work explored themes of memory, gender, and the underrepresentation of marginalized narratives. Their projects addressed the materiality of memory and the physical (or absent) body of the archive as a generator of new knowledge, while revisiting the legacy of photography not only through content but also through methodology.

In recent years, contemporary visual artists and photographers have increasingly turned to photographic archives as both material and conceptual frameworks, using them to reconstruct forgotten histories, question authorship, and activate new forms of memory work. For example, Agate Tūna's *Kurš šeit ir ieradies?* (*Who Has Come Here?*, 2024) and Konstantin Zhukov's series *Melnā neļķe* (*Black Carnation*, 2022–2024) created fictional occultist and queer archives that reframed historical events lacking tangible evidence. Kristīne Krauze-Slucka's installation with Ina Stūre's (1958–2006) artistic and private archive, *Entuziasms asa deficīta apstākļos* (*Enthusiasm in Times of Extreme Scarcity*, 2024), and Annemarija Gulbe's *Motociklu vasara* (*Motorcycle Summer*, 2024), which interprets the legacy of photographer Uldis Brauns (1932–2017), both emphasize the archive as a material space of remembering. Similarly, the exhibition curated by Zane Onckule at KIM?, discussed in the introduction, stands as an example of artistic research with a process-led methodology, in which the contemporary artist Sophie Thun assumed the role of Dzividzinska's posthumous lab technician, working within the late photographer's archive.

The biography of Zenta Dzividzinska reflects the historical marginalization of women photographers. She studied at the Riga School of Design and Applied Arts (1961–1966), where she took a photography course led by her mentor, Gunārs Binde (b. 1933). In 1965, she joined the photography club *Rīga*, where she remained active until the mid-1970s, and was one of the few women among its members. During this period, she produced photographic projects that entered the exhibition circuit of the 1960s, such as the series *Rīga Pantomime* (1965–1967) and nudes conforming to the photo club aesthetic, including *One* (1966) and *Strawberry Field* (1968). Alongside these works, Dzividzinska created more substantively and formally experimental photographs that have only gained wider recognition in recent decades. These include many images from the long-term series *House by the River* (1965–2004), self-portraits

12 Žilde, Liāna Ivete (Curator) (2024). Exhibition *Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures I*. ISSP Galerija, 17.05.–27.06.2024. Available at: <https://issp.lv/en/gallery/musdienu-fotografijas-vestures-i> [20.10.2025].
 Žilde, Liāna Ivete (Curator) (2024). Exhibition *Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures II*. ISSP Galerija, 04.07.–16.08.2024. Available at: <https://issp.lv/en/gallery/contemporary-histories-of-photography-ii> [20.10.2025].

from 1967 – first reproduced at large scale by Sophie Thun – photomontages featuring model Velta Stīpiņa, and portraits of the painter Laima Eglīte.¹³

In the 1970s, Dzividzinska abandoned her photographic practice to make a living and turned to graphic design.¹⁴ Her photo archive remained dormant for more than twenty years, until a revival began in the mid-1990s, coinciding with a shift in the aesthetic criteria of photography exhibitions.

In scholarship, Dzividzinska continues to represent the marginalized stories of women, even though her legacy has been comparatively more studied than that of many of her contemporaries. She has been featured in comprehensive publications on post-socialist art such as *Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2009), *Beyond Memory: Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art* (2004), *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2013), and, in the local context, *Tikai neraudi! (Don't Cry!, 2023)*.¹⁵ This visibility is largely due to the labor of care by Alise Tīfentāle, as well as Dzividzinska's own active role in organizing and circulating her archive from the late 1990s until her death.¹⁶

Since then, Dzividzinska's story has been unfolding through various narratives: her photographic experiments have been interpreted by scholar Laine Kristberga as a form of hybrid practice between photography and performance art;¹⁷ as an example of para-feminism in the former Soviet bloc by Tīfentāle and art historian Jana Kukaine;¹⁸ as a fusion of the family archive and the boundaries of art by Tīfentāle herself; and

13 In the exhibition, Thun printed Dzividzinska's negatives on 40 x 50 cm photographic paper, selecting the size and paper type based on Dzividzinska's exhibition prints from the 1960s.

14 Photography clubs were amateur organizations rather than part of the professional art sphere, and their members were often professionals working in other fields.

See: Tīfentāle, Alise (2011). *Fotogrāfija kā māksla Latvijā: 1960–1969*. Rīga: Neputns.

15 Traumane, Māra (2012). Women's Art and Denial of Feminism: History of Exhibitions in Latvia 1977–2011. In: Kivimaa, Katrin (Ed.). *Working With Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*. Tallinn: TLU Press, 2012, pp. 163–189.

Pejić, Bojana (Ed.) (2009). *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*. Wien: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig; Köln: Walther König.

Svede, Mark Allen (2004). On the Verge of Snapping: Latvian Nonconformist Artists and Photography. In: Neumaier, Diane (Ed.). *Beyond Memory: Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art*. New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, pp. 229–245.

Ansone, Elita (2023). *Tikai neraudi! Feministiskie skatījumi Latvijas mākslā: 1965–2023* (exh. cat.). Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs.

16 Tīfentāle, Alise (n.d.). *Art Days Forever*. Available at: <https://www.artdays.net> [23.11.2024.].

17 Kristberga, Laine (2025). Convergence of Performance Art, Photography, and Archival Practices. *Culture Crossroads*, No 27, pp. 87–108.

18 Tīfentāle, Alise (2021). Entering the Elusive Estate of Photographer Zenta Dzividzinska. *MoMA Post*, 24.03. Available: <https://post.moma.org/entering-the-elusive-estate-of-photographer-zenta-dzividzinska> [23.11.2024.].

Kukaine, Jana (2003). Intimacy and Darkness: Feminist Sensibility in (Post)socialist Art. *Arts*, No 12 (1), pp. 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12010024>

as a case of avant-garde practice in post-socialist contexts by photography historian Maria Garth.¹⁹

Since 2021, the archive has also become a site of artistic research for artist Sophie Thun, who continues to engage Dzividzinska's imagery in her own work.²⁰ Similarly, filmmaker Emīlija Kareņņikova is currently developing a film that draws on Dzividzinska's photographic style, merging it with cinematic language and her own visual vocabulary. These projects reflect a broader wave of critical discourse gaining traction in Latvian art research, art history education, and cultural institutions.

This shift has been further supported by scholars in literary and gender studies, such as Jānis Ozoliņš and Kārlis Vērdiņš,²¹ as well as by the editorial work of photography historians Katrīna Teivāne and Tifentāle in a publication dedicated to photographic archives.²² Art historians and curators, including Agnē Narušytė, Katrin Kivimaa, Šelda Puķīte, and Indrek Grigor, have drawn significant parallels across the Baltic region. A nuanced characterization of the region – particularly the tension between official and non-conformist art – has been developed in the writings of Vērdiņš and art historian-curator Mark Allen Svede.²³

Still, despite the diverse and interdisciplinary research of the past decade, there remains a lack of discourse addressing archival research itself – particularly the materiality and agency of archives, as well as the complexities involved in systematizing and integrating archival objects within memory institutions. Although the material turn, which foregrounds the agency of things, has shaped humanities and arts research since the late 20th century, in Latvia it remains a relatively recent approach.²⁴

The case of Dzividzinska's archive encompasses tactile, practical, and conceptual dimensions. As both researcher and archivist, my work involves examining each of the thirteen boxes and repackaging every item using acid-free materials. This hands-on engagement brings with it the challenges of systematization: deciding whether

19 Garth, Maria (2022). Soviet Avant-Gardes and Socialist Realism: Women Photographers Bridging the Divide, 1930s–1960s. *Journal of Avant-Garde Studies*, No 1(2), pp.188–220. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25896377-00102002>

20 Thun, Sophie (2022). *Sophie Thun. Phileas*. Berlin: DISTANZ; Phileas.

21 Ozoliņš, Jānis; Vērdiņš, Kārlis (2023). Ievads. *Letonica*, No 48, pp. 1–5.

22 Teivāne, Katrīna; Tifentāle, Alise (2022). Preface. In: Teivāne, Katrīna; Tifentāle, Alise (Eds.). *Proceedings of the National Library of Latvia, Vol 9. (XXIX): Mapping methods and Materials: Photographic Heritage in Cultural and Art-historical Research*. Rīga: National Library of Latvia, pp. 15–21

23 Svede, Mark Allen; Vērdiņš, Kārlis (2021 [2024]). Nearly Underground in the Near-Abroad: Outliers in Soviet Baltic Culture. In: Lipovetsky, Mark; Engström, Maria et al. (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Soviet Underground Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 303–331.

24 Melgalve, Ieva (2023). Atmiņas protēzes: Kristīnes Krauzes-Sluckas un Aļņa Stakles gadījumi. *Mākslas vēsture un teorija*, No 27, pp. 62.–73.

Tetere, Baiba (2020). Fotogrāfija muzejā: Paula Stradiņa Medicīnas vēstures muzejs. *Creative Museum*, 15.10. Available at: <http://www.creativemuseum.lv/lv/raksti/dienasgramata/baiba-tetere-fotografijamuzeja-paula-stradina-medicinas-vestures-muzejs> [23.11.2024.].

Bula, Dace (2023). Flood Stories: Agency of Water and Relationality of Narrative. *Narrative Culture*, 10(1), pp. 1–25.

to preserve the archive's original rhythms or to disrupt them in order to fit the classifications of the NLL.

Acknowledging these tensions, the following chapters draw on critical theory and contemporary archival practice to explore the gendered nature of archival neglect and the delayed inclusion of women's archives in the history of photography.

A Self-Portrait. The Autobiographical Urge

A medium-format film strip of 24 frames shows Dzividzinska in a photography studio. She lights and smokes a cigarette, poses with a tripod, and performs for the camera. The angles shift – looking down on her, up at her, and directly across – each frame capturing a different layer of presence. In some shots, her gaze is unfocused, as if absorbed in thought; in others, she meets the camera head-on, laughing or momentarily blinded by the studio lights.

The film is accompanied by contact prints and two sheets of handwritten notes. One page appears to reference other photographs, instructing to “rinse” the negatives because they are “stuck together.” It mentions people and animals absent from the images – her contemporary Arnolds Plaudis (1927–2008), his parents, and horses. The second sheet reads: “Me, working as a photographer after RLMV, when I didn't get into the Academy.”²⁵ In another box, I find small prints with torn corners. On the back of her self-portraits, Dzividzinska uses the colloquial term *mans ģīmis* (“my mug,” “smiler,” or “visage”) – a playful, perhaps defiant, way of marking her own image and reclaiming authorship over how she is seen. After examining all the negatives, I am able to identify which frames the note about the “lost” negatives refers to. Similarly, the studio setup with the tripod corresponds to another photoshoot in which Dzividzinska's contemporary, Ingrīda, poses with a skull and a veil. This 19-frame sequence bears the annotation “making big art”.

A pattern of self-irony emerges in her own evaluations of creative work and self-portraits. Yet these scattered notes and comments, along with her careful annotations, reveal an autobiographical impulse and a conscious effort to preserve the materials as records of her artistic life. Dzividzinska left no autobiographical essays or diaries that would allow us to follow her thoughts at particular moments. Instead, her archive contains numerous fragments of self-documentation: interviews, notes, exhibition plans with handwritten remarks, funding proposal drafts, and the mock-up of a possible book – a stack of printed office pages, a bibliography, and an artist's CV bound together in a folder decorated with colorful jelly beans on its cover.



Zenta Dzividzinska's negatives with the artist's notes. Photo by Līga Goldberga, 2021

Tifentāle continued her mother's efforts, becoming the second archivist of Dzividzinska's oeuvre. In a publication devoted to the collaboration between Sophie Thun and Dzividzinska, Tifentāle employs the metaphor of a sentence to describe her mother's creative trajectory. The sentence begins in the 1960s, when Dzividzinska joined the photo club *Rīga*. Tifentāle narrates her mother's stylistic and conceptual distinctiveness, which ultimately led to her marginalization within the photo-club milieu. The sentence is interrupted in the 1970s, when Dzividzinska stepped away from photography to earn a living as a graphic designer at *Kombināts Māksla*. During this time, the archive lay dormant until the late 1990s, when curators Mark Allen Svede and Inga Šteinmane rediscovered her work and initiated a re-evaluation of her contribution to Latvian photography. From that point onward, Tifentāle describes her role as one of "reading the sentence" and "completing the sentence," framing the archive's recent developments – most notably, Thun's intervention mentioned above.²⁶ Through the metaphor of the sentence, Tifentāle constructs a narrative that traces both the interruptions and the continuities in her mother's artistic life, situating it within its specific cultural and historical context.

In a similar vein, I propose approaching this material through the lens of *biographies of archives*.²⁷ The stages of systematization, visibility, circulation, and shifts in status – or even the eventual disappearance of archives through neglect, destruction, or loss – make it possible to trace the inequalities, omissions, and fragmentations that shape the broader and often uneven landscape of photographic histories. Although Dzividzinska did not leave a sustained first-person narrative in chronological form, her archive nonetheless embodies an autobiographical impulse and reflects a deliberate act of self-archiving. With exhibitions such as *Black and White* (1999) and *I Don't Remember a Thing* (2005), Dzividzinska began to work with her photographs as an artist within the archive, selecting moments to narrate stories that had not necessarily been central at the time of their creation.²⁸ These intimate images – family portraits, child-rearing, funerals, weddings, and everyday scenes – were largely absent from the visual vocabulary promoted and exhibited by photo clubs during the 1960s and 1970s.

After the 1990s, the archive reveals a shift in emphasis regarding which photographs hold artistic or personal significance. As art historian Agnė Narušytė notes in her analysis of Lithuanian artist Veronika Šleivyte's (1906–1998) photographic

26 Tifentāle, Alise (2023). Completing an Unfinished Sentence: on the Collaboration Between Sophie Thun and the Archive of Zenta Dzividzinska. From: Müller, Christin (Ed.). *Trails and Tributes. Sophie Thun*. Vienna: VfmK Verlag für moderne Kunst, pp. 53–55.

27 I developed the conceptual framework in a paper on NLL's postcard collection. See: Goldberga, Līga (2022). Atmiņas averss un reverss: fotopastkartes Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Konrāda Ubāna Mākslas lasītavas atklātņu kolekcijā. No: Teivāne, Katrīna; Tifentāle, Alise (atb. red.). *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Zinātniskie raksti, 9. (XXIX) sēj.: Meklējot metodes un materiālus: fotogrāfijas mantojums kultūras un mākslas vēstures pētniecībā*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, pp. 157–172.

28 *Black and White*. Exhibition curated by Inga Šteinmane. Gallery Čiris, Rīga, Latvia, 07.-20.09.1999. *I Don't Remember a Thing*. Exhibition. Gallery of the Artists' Union of Latvia, Rīga, 20.12.2005–20.01.2006.

archive, “the medium functions, first of all, as a family ritual. Who has been with whom, what did they do, who married whom, who was born or who died – everything has to be documented.”²⁹ Similarly, Dzividzinska’s series *House by the River*, which portrays a family living in the countryside, emerged as an art project only in the early 2000s, even though it comprises images taken throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and early 2000s. Dzividzinska was neither meticulous in her archiving practices, nor strict in delineating the boundaries of events within the series. As archivists at the NLL, we now face questions about the coherence of *House by the River*: can every image made on the family property be considered part of the series? These boundaries are far from clear, particularly as the archive undergoes digitization and several negative strips remain uncertain in their attribution. Moreover, digitization enables public access. While Dzividzinska – as both author and custodian of the archive – was intimately aware of the distinctions between the public and private sections of her collection, as well as of the series’ chronological and thematic contours, once the archive enters a memory institution, the entire body of material becomes available for interpretation by researchers, curators, archivists, and artists alike.

Memory institutions have long served as sites of accumulation for objects that move fluidly between the realms of personal and collective memory. Latvian publicist and cultural critic Santa Remere reflects on this delicately in her essay on postcards housed at the NLL, where she contemplates the gendered nature of the diary form and women’s role as caretakers of the familial memorabilia hearth through postcard collections and photo albums.³⁰ Similarly, in her discussion of diaries as ambiguous forms straddling private and public dimensions, scholar Desiree Henderson addresses the “privatization” of ego documents created by individuals and communities on the margins. Drawing on literary scholar Jennifer Sinor’s term, Henderson argues that such documents are often perceived as private and apolitical, even though they perform public and social functions – especially in the case of marginalized voices.³¹ This notion of “privatized” narratives is useful for understanding the archival practices that have historically rendered certain voices invisible. Women’s archives – and with them, subjective and intimate documentary modes – were long excluded from the dominant visual language of photographic practice in Latvia. Shaped by the aesthetics of the photo club movement and gendered inequalities in the art world, these archives

29 Narušytė, Agnė (2020). Reading Dream Sediments. In: Dainovskytė, Milda; Narušytė, Agnė (Eds.). *Foto Vėros Šleivyтės*. Kupiškis: Kupiškio etnografijos muziejus, p. 287.

30 Remere, Santa (2022). My Reply is on the Back. In: Goldberga, Līga (Ed.). *Atmiņu topogrāfijas/ Topographies of Memories*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, pp. 83–89.

31 Henderson draws on the term *privatized* introduced by literary scholar Jennifer Sinor. Here, I connect it to archives that have been systematically marginalized due to neglect, as women’s archives and subjective documentary practices were long excluded from the artistic canon due to the aesthetics of the photo club movement and gender inequalities surrounding women’s art. See: Henderson, Desiree (2018). Reading Digitized Diaries: Privacy and the Digital Life-Writing Archive. *Auto/Biography Studies*, Vol. 33:1, p. 166.

were rarely acknowledged as legitimate artistic expressions. The archive of Šleivyte, for instance, remained deliberately hidden for decades because it documented queer relationships – identities and intimacies criminalized under Soviet law. Yet her collection of photographs and postcards reveals a profoundly relational and communicative narrative, grounded in affect and care.³²

In a comparable way, Zenta Dzividzinska's *House by the River* series has historically been relegated to the private sphere. Her quiet documentation of everyday life – women's labor, ageing, childhood, domestic rituals – and her intuitive, experimental portrayals of women were largely excluded from the dominant visual languages of both art photography and amateur or state-sanctioned photographic practices. In this sense, Dzividzinska's photographic archive functions much like a diary – a conversation with her shifting roles as the photographer, archivist, artist and self-observer. It is a non-linear and material ego document granting an access to memory and converting the personal into a form of public representation. Her archive not only highlights the complexities of making private lives visible within institutional frameworks but also reveals the structural exclusions embedded in the photographic canon. It thus provides a compelling case for re-evaluating art histories that have systematically overlooked the contributions of women artists and photographers.

Historian Penny Summerfield has noted that the term *ego document* is problematic within feminist theory, as it originates from nineteenth-century philosophical ideals of a self-contained, masculine subject. She instead proposes understanding storytelling as a relational, interactive, and collective act – one that is inherently shared.³³ While I support this perspective, in the context of Dzividzinska and other women photographers working in Soviet-occupied territories during the second half of the 20th century, a certain self-reliant detachment from the dominant aesthetics of photo club culture becomes vital. It is precisely this detachment that enables Dzividzinska to construct a personal narrative through her archive – a form of *ego document* that does not assert dominance, but rather renders visible the overlooked and intimate layers of lived experience.

This autobiographical impulse marks the beginning of a chain of care: one initiated by Dzividzinska herself and later sustained by her daughter, who has worked with dedication to preserve and promote her mother's legacy. The archive thus emerges

32 Likewise, archival research by Kārlis Vērđiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš allows a cross comparison in reading marginalized and private archives – their materiality, the affects they embody, and the metanarratives they represent. See: Ozoliņš, Jānis (2024). Accumulating Negative Affects: The Diary of the Soviet Latvian Film Director Gunārs Piesis. *Journal of the Institute of Latvian History*, Vol. 120 (1), pp. 81-102.

Vērđiņš, Kārlis (2024). Two Peters: Queer Domestic Space and Artist's Sensibility in Soviet Latvia. *Journal of the Institute of Latvian History*, Vol. 120 (1), pp. 103-121.

33 Summerfield, Penny (2019). Introduction. In: Summerfield, Penny (Ed.). *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge; Taylor & Francis Group, p. 5.

not only as a personal repository but also as a collaborative, intergenerational project of memory work.

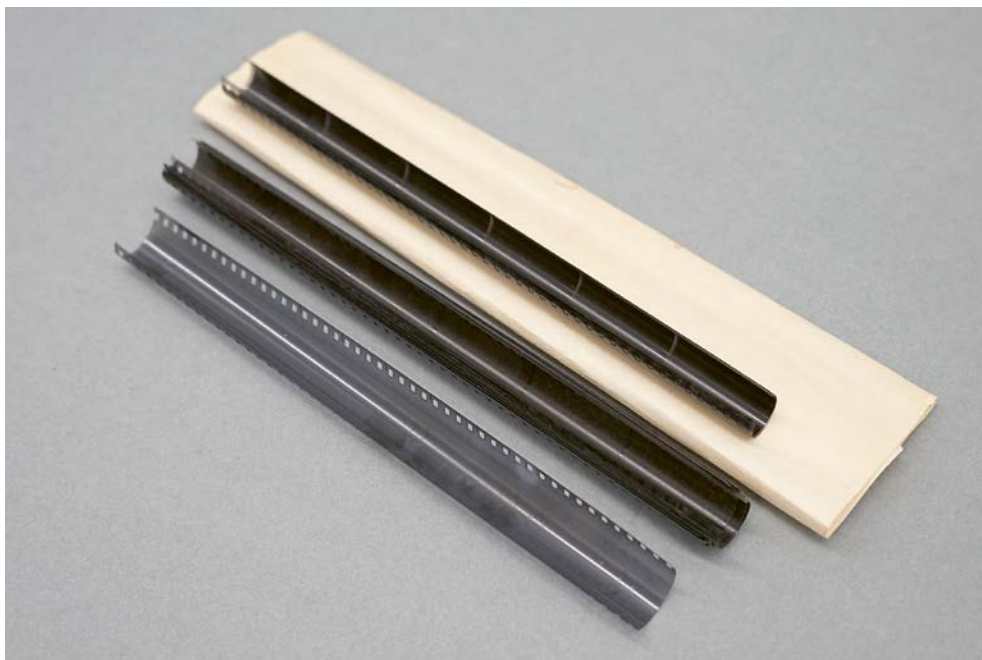
The following chapter shifts focus from Dzividzinska's personal narrative to the evolving biography of her archive – its institutionalization and integration into the collections of the NLL. This transition introduces the concept of *archiving for aura* as a framework for exploring the shifting meanings, values, and statuses of archival materials as they move from private to public, from personal memory to cultural heritage.

Cinnamon Bark. Institutionalization of the Archive

When the archive was transported to the NLL after the *finissage* of the exhibition *I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ at KIM?* in 2021, it was first placed in the library's disinfection chamber. There, each component was examined, dusted, and – where necessary – mold-affected materials were isolated and decontaminated before being transferred to the Art Department of the Special Collections. The process of reviewing the entire archive, which consisted of thirteen boxes and additional items later donated by Tifentāle, took nearly a year. In specific cases, the expertise of the NLL's conservators was required, most notably in addressing what Tifentāle metaphorically referred to as “cinnamon barks”: tightly curled 35 mm negative film strips containing five to seven frames. This epithet captures the physical deformation caused by long-term exposure to humidity, unsuitable storage temperatures, and the absence of proper pressure to keep the film flat. These strips, now almost unreadable to the naked eye, present a significant preservation challenge. At present, the only viable method proposed by the Conservation Department for recovering their content is digitization, while the physical restoration of these objects remains a subject of ongoing research.

As an autobiographical form, the archive resists linearity and, at times, becomes unreadable: some of its parts have been misplaced or dispersed through donations to other art and memory institutions or absorbed into private collections. While this dispersal benefits the broader circulation of cultural heritage, it contributes to the fragmentation of the archive as a unified body. Yet this material fragmentation is itself part of the archive's biography. Unlike textual autobiographies, which unfold in language and sequence, the archival form manifests through materiality – through the tactile presence of negatives, handwritten notes, and prints bearing traces of use. The archive becomes a site where memory is performed rather than narrated, and where selfhood is constructed through acts of preservation, annotation, and arrangement.

At the same time, the integration of Dzividzinska's archive into the collections of the NLL necessitates a re-systematization that inevitably overrides the original



Curled negatives by Zenta Dzividzinska, 1960s. Photo by Līga Goldberga, 2024

logic of arrangement shaped by Dzividzinska and her daughter. This reorganization risks erasing key markers of the archive's own biography and the chronology of its circulation. Yet institutionalization also introduces a new phase in the archive's life: one defined by both care and a subtle form of violence. Its assimilation into the NLL's preservation systems and catalogues enables greater access and reactivation in future narratives, even as it effaces the personal gestures and idiosyncrasies that once shaped its internal logic. Thus, the archive's biography continues to unfold not despite, but through these shifting frameworks of preservation, translation, and institutional control.

Walter Benjamin's concept of the *aura* is frequently invoked to examine the relationship between artworks and their reproductions, particularly within photography theory, where it helps problematize the medium's inherent tensions between negatives and prints, originals and copies.³⁴ In this context, I turn to the notion of *aura* to consider its spatial dimensions in relation to memory work. The quotations from Sophie Calle and Susan Sontag at the beginning of this paper already suggest the topographical nature of archives as sites where memory is activated. Similarly, art critic Boris Groys, in his interpretation of Benjamin, refers to such spatiality as "topologies of aura."³⁵

The position of photography within the arts has been contested since its inception. Although photography is now widely accepted within contemporary art discourse and increasingly incorporated into institutional canons, questions persist regarding its boundaries and its legitimacy as an art form. In particular: which photographers are granted inclusion in the art canon, and which segments of photographic archives are classified as personal or documentary rather than artistic?

At the NLL, photography has historically been preserved as reference material rather than as art. Only a few collections within the Rare Books and Manuscript holdings – such as the works of Roberts Johansons (1877–1959) – have been explicitly recognized as artistic. Prior to the donation of Dzividzinska's archive, the NLL's Art Collection included photographic materials primarily as documentation: negatives from the newspaper *Diena*, photographs from the news agency LETA, and collections of photographic postcards. The function of these materials was largely evidentiary, serving to illustrate historical events and to support scholarly work in the arts and humanities.

34 Benjamins, Valters (2005). *Mākslas darbs tā tehniskās reproducējamības laikmetā*. No: Benjamins, Valters. *Illuminācijas*. Rīga: Latvijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centrs, pp. 152-187.

Emerling, Jae (2012). *The Thing Itself*. In: Emerling Jae (Ed.). *Photography. History and Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 17-41.

Steyerl, Hito (2013). *In Defense of Poor Images*. In: Steyerl, Hito (Ed.). *The Wretched of the Screen*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, pp. 31-45.

35 Groiss, Boriss (2008). *Auras tipoloģija*. No: Groiss Boriss. *Mākslas vara*. Rīga: Latvijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centrs, pp. 85-91.

Dzividzinska's archive, while stored in the NLL's collection rooms, is not classified as an art object *per se* but rather as a repository of her artistic endeavor. It acquires the properties of an artwork through processes of artistic mediation within exhibition contexts, most notably, its activation by Sophie Thun at KIM? in 2021. As Boris Groys argues, archival materials and other forms of art documentation gain artistic agency through installation, with spatial arrangement serving as a crucial element in this transformation. Within this framework, Groys distinguishes between the exhibition hall as a "living space" and the museum as a "tomb" – a space of closure and preservation, emblematic of the end of an artwork's active life.³⁶ Yet this binary – between liveliness and stasis, activation and preservation – ultimately proves limiting. It reinforces a hierarchical model in which the archive is positioned as a passive object and the curator or artist as an active subject. The following discussion challenges this dichotomy, offering instead a more entangled and reciprocal understanding of agency within archival and exhibition practices.

Memory institutions often attract critical scrutiny in art and curatorial discourse. The formalization of archives as collection objects introduces restrictions that can hinder their use within artistic research. Once archived, the material tends to lose its practical function and instead assumes the status of an artefact. During the 2021 KIM? exhibition, Thun was able to work freely with Dzividzinska's negatives and prints – experimenting in the darkroom, copying, and reprinting elements of the archive – because the material was still privately owned by Dzividzinska's daughter. Following the archive's transfer to the NLL, however, such creative freedoms have become conditioned by the institution's preservation policies. This shift was particularly evident during the Summer School *Gender Studies in Cultural and Art History Research and Memory Institutions* (2024), when Thun visited Riga to participate in a public discussion and began preliminary research aimed at incorporating Dzividzinska's archive into her ongoing artistic practice. Thun encountered a number of limitations stemming from the archive's new institutional status: the inaccessibility of the storage spaces (collection rooms are restricted to staff), limited access to materials (granted only through archivists and within designated research hours), and the requirement to negotiate the use and representation of archival materials with library staff.

According to Groys, reinterpretation and creativity unfold within the "lively space" of exhibitions. The archive exists in a continuous and dynamic relationship with its audience, as well as with the artist and curator. By contrast, the repository room lacks this liveliness: once objects are admitted into institutional collections, they acquire the status of precious artefacts, to be handled only with white gloves and subject to strict conservation protocols. This tension is evident in the case at hand. While archives housed in memory institutions are protected by a framework of legal

36 Groys, pp. 85–87.



Artist Sophie Thun photographing Zenta Dzividzinska's archive at the National Library of Latvia (NLL).
Photo by Līga Goldberga, 2024

and ethical regulations – such as those outlined in the Libraries Act – collections are, in principle, meant to remain accessible.³⁷ The curators of the NLL, Anete Krūmiņa and Anda Boluža, have creatively explored this paradox of “accessible inaccessibility” by inviting artists to engage with the library’s collections. Exhibitions such as *2020: A Perspective on Eternity* (2020) and *Elephants Tormented by Idleness* (2024) have examined the deterioration of artefacts and the cryptic, often exclusionary language of library catalogues. Yet the vitality of archival material is not confined to the public sphere of exhibitions. At present, at least six researchers are engaging in in-depth work with Dzividzinska’s archive, and the NLL’s digitization policy further facilitates access to the archive’s contents, allowing broader public engagement without requiring direct contact with archivists. Institutionalization, then, is a double-edged sword. On one hand, institutional protocols may restrict artistic and curatorial freedoms. On the other hand, the process of institutionalization enables private or marginalized archives to enter broader cultural discourses, particularly those in which questions of canon formation, representation, and historical omission are actively debated. In this way, the archive’s life continues to unfold, albeit under new conditions.

In his discussion of aura, Groys poses a pivotal question: how does the aura of an artwork come into being before it can be lost through reproduction? He argues that aura emerges for the very reason it eventually dissipates – through the act of reproduction itself. At its core, the concept of aura allows us to differentiate the original from its copies, offering a way to navigate the overflow of images and the endless reiteration of artefacts.³⁸ It is precisely here that the role of the repository – or, as Groys frames it, the “tomb” – becomes significant: the aura of an artwork is inseparable from its spatial context. Revisiting Virginia Woolf’s famous assertion with an archival lens, one might say that women’s archives, too, require a room of their own – a dedicated site where memory work can be activated and where aura can be cultivated through the ritualized labor of care performed by archivists.³⁹

In the context of women’s archives, this brings forth two interrelated conclusions. First, if the archives of women artists are to be fully integrated into the art-historical canon – if Dzividzinska is to take her place as an “old master” alongside her tutor Binde and other male contemporaries – then these archives must be housed in spaces that enable sustained, attentive care. Second, if aura indeed arises through repetition and circulation, then women’s archives must remain alive and accessible. Their vitality depends on ongoing interpretation, reproduction, and storytelling – a polyphonic unfolding of meanings across time. The conclusion will consider how these archival dynamics shape the broader landscape of memory institutions, cultural

37 [Anon.]. (1998) 5. pants. Bibliotēku darbības vispārīgie principi. No: [Anon.]. Bibliotēku likums. Available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/48567-biblioteku-likums> 5 [23.11.2024.].

38 Groys, pp. 86–87.

39 Woolf, Virginia (1935). *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press, p. 6.

heritage policies, and feminist curatorial practices, drawing together the tensions and possibilities explored throughout this study.

Conclusion. Building “a Self” Through Archiving

As this paper has shown, the accession of an archive into a memory institution demands both an understanding of its prior internal structures and circulation patterns and a willingness to disassemble, reframe, and recontextualize them within institutional frameworks. This process requires more than classification – the archivist must surrender to the agency of the archive, navigating its memoryscapes with attentiveness and care.

Through the case study of Latvian photographer and artist Zenta Dzividzinska, this research has examined the institutionalization of a previously private archive, positioning it within broader conversations about archival labor, institutional care, and the circulation of women’s photographic practices in the second half of the 20th century. In doing so, it addresses the persistent exclusion of women’s archives from the historical narrative of Latvian photography and affirms the need for critical, interdisciplinary approaches as these materials are gradually integrated into the national art-historical canon.

In the humanities, ego documents are typically understood as testimonies, memoirs, or letters – written texts with a discernible narrative arc. This paper suggests expanding that understanding by turning to the materiality of the archive and its ability to carry memory through re-use and re-systematization. Although Dzividzinska did not leave behind a diary or conventional autobiography, she actively annotated her archive and assembled photographic selections that later appeared in exhibitions. She was the first archivist of her own work, leaving traces of her artistic process and the internalized ambivalence she faced as a woman photographer. As Sontag writes, “the self is a project, something to be built.”⁴⁰ Seen through this lens, Dzividzinska’s self-archiving becomes a form of self-construction, a diaristic practice of returning to her images as sites of memory, reflection, and ongoing negotiation of the self.

To care for an archive is to construct a space for remembering – and in Dzividzinska’s case, a space that had long remained private due to the absence of a research discourse attentive to women’s photographic legacies. Taking up space – both metaphorically and materially – in the repository rooms of a memory institution becomes a necessary act of revision, one that reshapes the boundaries of the art canon. In the Latvian context, where photography has historically occupied a marginal position within art history, the archives of women photographers have often been doubly peripheral, confined by both medium and gender.

40 Sontag, p. 117.

Here, Walter Benjamin's concept of *aura* offers a valuable framework for considering the relationship between artwork and space. The reproduction of Dzividzinska's photographs – in exhibitions, academic work, and digital platforms – unfolds as a tension between the emergence and erosion of aura. Repository rooms simultaneously restrict and enable the circulation of images. And yet, for women's archives, institutionalization often marks a turning point: it grants visibility, stability, and entry into public discourse. "Memory, the staging of the past, turns the flow of events into tableaux," writes Sontag.⁴¹ As an archivist working closely with academic and artistic researchers, I witness this staging firsthand – the formation of new narratives shaped by fragments of the archive. Some frame Dzividzinska's legacy within the discourse of genius and mastery; others position her in the margins, as part of the unruly undercurrents of queer, feminist, or minoritarian histories. These reiterations do not diminish the aura of her work. Rather, the ritualized labor of care – in repositories, exhibitions, and research – cultivates and extends that aura, threading it into the fabric of a reimagined canon.

As Calle writes, "I see myself at the labyrinth's gate, ready to get lost..."⁴² – a sentiment echoed by Sontag, who reminds us that to understand is also to know how to get lost. This paper has explored the spatiality of the archive as a site of care, labor, and narrative multiplicity. Like navigating unfamiliar streets or wandering through memory, the archivist must also surrender to the archive's agency, tracing its shifting topographies. Dzividzinska's case allows us to consider how institutionalization, while disassembling prior structures, can also offer new forms of visibility and meaning. In this sense, archiving becomes a spatial practice – what Groys calls a topology of aura – in which meaning is produced through the positioning, circulation, and ritualized care of archival objects. "Archiving for aura" entails cultivating an environment where artworks and their traces can remain alive in dialogue, rather than sealed in static preservation. The archive is not merely a container of the past, but a shifting landscape where aura is continually reassembled through acts of mediation. To stray within an archive is not to lose direction, but to embrace the complexity of its stories and contribute to the ongoing revision of cultural memory.

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41 Sontag, p. 116.

42 Calle, p. 6.

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LĪGA GOLDBERGA

Auras arhivēšana: stratēģijas sieviešu fotogrāfiskā mantojuma rūpju darba aktivizēšanai

Kopsavilkums

Sieviešu radītais fotogrāfiskais mantojums no 20. gadsimta otrās puses joprojām ir maz pētīts, īpaši salīdzinājumā ar viņu laikabiedriem – atzītiem fotogrāfiem vīriešiem. Veicot gadījuma izpēti par latviešu mākslinieces un fotogrāfes, fotokluba “Rīga” dalībnieces Zentas Dzividzinskas (1944–2011) arhīvu, raksta autore pievēršas izaicinājumiem, ar kuriem sastopas sievietes fotogrāfes sava mantojuma arhivēšanā, anotēšanā un iekļaušanā mākslas kanonos un fotogrāfijas vēstures stāstos. Līdztekus rakstā tiek analizēts arī rūpju darbs, ko veic arhīvu mantotāji, atmiņu institūcijas un kuratori, nodrošinot sieviešu autoru fotogrāfiskā mantojuma saglabāšanu un pieejamību.

Dzividzinska bija pirmā sava fotogrāfiskā mantojuma arhivāre, un viņas arhīvā atrodamas norādes, kas atklāj fotogrāfes attieksmi par paveikto, nereti ar pašironisku nokrāsu. Arhivēšanu vēlāk turpināja viņas meita mākslas zinātniece Alise Tīfentāle, gādājot, lai mātes darbi kļūtu redzami un tiktu iekļauti fotogrāfijas vēsturē. Kopš 2021. gada arhīvs ir Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Mākslas krājuma daļa, un uz to attiecas institūcijas noteikumi par saglabāšanu un pieejamību.

Atslēgvārdi: bibliotēku krājumi, arhīvi, sievietes fotogrāfes, reprodukcijas, feminisms, mākslas kanoni.

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AGNĖ NARUŠYTĖ

Creating a New Canon: Women Artists in Lithuania from 1990 to the 2020s

Summary

This article examines the transformation of the Lithuanian art historical canon from 1990 to the 2020s through the activities of women artists, curators, and art historians. Following the restoration of independence, the Lithuanian art scene inherited institutional and discursive structures shaped by Soviet cultural ideology, which had long marginalized women artists and devalued practices associated with femininity. The article traces how, over three decades, women intervened in these structures through self-organization, collective action, institutional critique, and curatorial activism, gradually reshaping the conditions of visibility and recognition.

Drawing on archival research, exhibition histories, critical discourse analysis, and case studies of artists' groups, exhibitions, and institutions, the study foregrounds the role of women as active agents in cultural production rather than as passive subjects awaiting inclusion. Particular attention is paid to strategies such as forming alternative collectives, introducing feminist and queer perspectives, revaluing applied arts within contemporary discourse, and challenging institutional hierarchies through performative and interventionist practices.

The article argues that these cumulative efforts contributed to the emergence of a "new canon" in Lithuanian contemporary art – one characterized by greater diversity of voices, media, and identities. By reframing canon formation as a contested and ongoing process, the study highlights how women's artistic and curatorial practices have played a decisive role in redefining national art history in the post-Soviet context.

Keywords: women artists, canon formation, feminist curating, institutional critique, Lithuanian contemporary art, post-Soviet culture.

Art history has long tended to overlook women artists, granting only a few a marginal presence within narratives of artistic movements. Although Western feminist art historians began addressing these inequities in the 1970s, Lithuania remained outside this discourse: under Soviet occupation, any form of critical or revisionist inquiry was suppressed. As a result, when independence was restored in 1990, the country's art scene continued to be dominated by men. In the decades that followed, women artists and art historians made concerted efforts to redress this imbalance. Yet meaningful change became evident only in the late 2010s, when women began to gain access to prestigious exhibition venues, major awards, and inclusion in national artistic canons.

In *Differencing the Canon* (1999), Griselda Pollock conceptualizes the canon as a “retrospective” narrative that constructs a story of origins and legitimizes “the backbone of cultural and political identity” – a structure whose ideological foundations become visible when the canon begins to shift.¹ She argues that the art-historical canon functions as:

A discursive formation which constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery and, thereby, contributes to the legitimation of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and with Culture.²

This patriarchal art history, presented as “tradition”,³ is built upon the systematic “negat[ion] [of] femininity”, a mechanism necessary to maintain “the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity”.⁴

Given this, Pollock asserts that the notion of a *feminist canon* is inherently contradictory, as it risks merely affirming the very structure it seeks to challenge. Meaningful transformation requires looking from what she calls the “elsewhere of discourse” – the institutional “blind spots”, “interstices”, and gaps within the “power-knowledge apparatuses”.⁵ Pollock therefore advocates for practices of “re-reading and reworking” the materials already situated within the “spaces of representation” in order to reveal the repressed Other.⁶ In this sense, efforts to “rework” the canon often take activist forms, exemplified by internationally recognized figures such as

- 1 Pollock, Griselda (1999). *Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. London; New York: Routledge.
- 2 Ibid, p. 9.
- 3 Ibid, p. 10.
- 4 Ibid, p. 5.
- 5 Ibid, pp. 7-8. Pollock quotes Lauretis, Theresa de (1987). The Technology of Gender. In: Lauretis, Theresa de. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. London: Macmillan, p. 25.
- 6 Pollock, Griselda (1999). *Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, p. 8.

Judy Chicago and the Guerrilla Girls, whose interventions expose and destabilize the exclusions on which canonical narratives depend.

Pollock also highlights the powerful role of desire and the “psycho-symbolic investment in the canon”, which compels culture to defend its established narratives and heroic figures.⁷ This investment obstructs attempts to expand the canon by adding the excluded names of women artists or by elevating devalued “feminine” practices such as textiles or ceramics as a challenge to entrenched “hierarchies of value”. From the perspective of canonical gatekeepers, the rediscovered work of women artists often appears marginal, uninteresting,⁸ or “unrepresentative” of national artistic identity.⁹ Instead, Pollock proposes the “deconstructi[on] [of] discursive formations” to expose the canon as a gendered construct shaped by traumatized, sexualized forms of masculinity.¹⁰ She argues that feminist art historians and artists must instead cultivate collective movements and sustain the coexistence of differences – forms of practice and discourse that “cross-fertilize and challenge” one another. This approach, she suggests, expands the cultural “space for multiple occupancy” and generates new, plural meanings beyond the constraints of patriarchal tradition.¹¹

The re-formation of the patriarchal art historical canon in independent Lithuania can be understood as a gradual deconstruction of the discourse inherited from Soviet cultural ideology. The system justified the exclusion of women from prestigious study programmes, such as painting and sculpture, as well as from representation in major art institutions and from national awards.¹² Since 1990, Lithuanian art historians have challenged this legacy both by reinserting women’s names into the canon and by demonstrating that practices traditionally classified as “applied arts” can operate as conceptual and contemporary artistic expressions.

A pioneering contribution came from Margarita Jankauskaitė, whose 2002 PhD thesis *Expressions of Feminine: Identity in Contemporary Lithuanian Art* focused on the conceptualization of the body and foregrounded feminist perspectives within Lithuanian art discourse.¹³ Further momentum emerged from the nine conferences *My Territories: Migrating Space of Women’s Art* (2008–2018), initiated and organized by art historian Ramutė Rachlevičiūtė. She also edited three volumes of conference

7 Ibid, pp. 13–19.

8 Ibid, p. 8.

9 Ibid, p. 10.

10 Ibid, pp. 23–26.

11 Ibid, pp. 11; 26–27.

12 Narušytė, Agnė (2022). Menininkės okupuotoje Lietuvoje ir išėvijoje. In: Narušytė, Agnė (Ed.). *Lietuvos menininkės. Vizualiųjų menu kūrėjos nuo XX a. pradžios iki šių dienų*. Vilnius: Kitos knygos, pp. 105–116.

13 Jankauskaitė, Margarita (2002). *Moteriškojo tapatumo išraiškos šiuolaikinėje Lietuvos dailėje*. Doctoral thesis. Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania.

proceedings¹⁴ and compiled two collections of texts written by women artists themselves, published in 2021.¹⁵

International and private initiatives also contributed to this process. The Noewe Foundation¹⁶ highlighted Lithuanian women artists in its collection through an exhibition and publication in 2018.¹⁷ Around the same time, the global surge in publications dedicated to women artists¹⁸ inspired the Lithuanian publisher *Kitos knygos* to produce the dictionary entitled *Lithuanian Women Artists. Creators of Visual Arts from 1900 Until Today*.¹⁹ Emphasizing biographical narratives articulated in the artists' own voices, the project invited readers to "psycho-symbolically invest"²⁰ in an expanded and more inclusive canon. Collectively, these initiatives retell art history retrospectively to illuminate the presence – and significance of – women artists who had long been omitted, thereby reshaping the contours of the canon itself.

This paper discusses the other side of this transformation: the activities of women artists who, alongside art historians, became active subjects within cultural discourse – though not always through explicitly feminist art. Over time, their collective efforts contributed to shaping a "new canon" that foregrounds diversity and incorporates not only women but also queer identities. The retrospective narrative that follows traces how women artists self-organized to assert their presence in the cultural field by curating exhibitions and collaborative movements; engaging in institutional critique and curatorial activism; and working from the margins to dismantle entrenched hierarchies of value. Through these strategies, they effectively challenged the discourse of traditional canon, opening cultural spaces to greater heterogeneity and fostering new modes of representation.

14 Rachlevičiūtė, Ramutė (Ed.) (2011). *Moters savastis dailėje. Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Vol. 62. Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts; Eadem (2013). *Moteriškoji tapatybė ir dailė. Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Vol. 68. Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts; Eadem (2017). *Moteriškumo reprezentacijos ir dailė. Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Vol. 85. Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts.

15 Rachlevičiūtė, Ramutė (2021). *142 atvertys: Lietuvos menininkų autobiografijos*. Vilnius: Tarptautinės dailės kritikų asociacijos (AICA) Lietuvos sekcija.

16 Previously Lewben Art Foundation founded by Vilius and Rita Kavaliauskas in 2013.

17 Krikštopaitytė, Monika (Ed.) (2018). *Kiekgi galima laukti. Menininkų darbai iš "Lewben Art Foundation" kolekcijos ir jų interpretacijos / What Took You So Long. Works by Women Artists from the collection of Lewben Art Foundation and their interpretations*. Vilnius: Lewben Art Foundation.

18 In particular, Frigeri, Flavia (2019). *Women Artists (Art Essentials)*. Thames & Hudson; Eadem (2019). *Menininkės*. From series *Meno pagrindai*. Vilnius: Kitos knygos.

19 *Lietuvos menininkės. Vizualiųjų menų kūrėjos nuo XX a. pradžios iki šių dienų*. Texts were written by Agnė Narušytė, Ieva Burbaitė, Laima Kreivyte, Audronė Žukauskaitė, Karolina Rimkutė and Aira Niauronytė. The dictionary presents 59 artists.

20 This refers to Pollock's discussion of the role of desire in the "psycho-symbolic investment in the canon". See Pollock, Griselda (1999). *Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, pp. 13-19.

Self-Organizing Women Artists

The national revival began in 1987 with the first public protest meeting organized by the Lithuanian Liberty League (*Lietuvos laisvės lyga*) at the monument to the poet Adam Mickiewicz in Vilnius on 23 August, calling for the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Lithuania. At first, this moment appeared to lift long-standing restrictions; however, it soon became evident that the marginalization of women continued under the guise of “tradition.”

The State Institute of Art (now the Vilnius Academy of Arts) remained reluctant to admit women to its painting and sculpture programs. In the 1980s, only a few women held teaching positions in these departments – painters Irena Trečiokaitė-Žebenkienė (1909–1985), Sofija Veiverytė (1926–2009), Gražina Vitartaitė (b. 1942), and sculptor Daliutė Ona Matulaitė (b. 1942).²¹

After the 1988 reforms, when, following the demands of rebelling students, professors who had taught socialist realism were replaced by artists who had opposed official art under the Soviet occupation, the Painting Department became exclusively male.²² A similar imbalance persisted in the restructured Lithuanian Artists' Union. In 1990, thirteen artists – the so-called “silent modernists” – together with two art critics, formed Group 24 within the Union, becoming the most influential elite of the art scene.²³ Although the group later expanded, women were never admitted as full members and could participate only as supporters.²⁴

While the years 1987–1994 are typically described as a vibrant period of emerging artistic collectives,²⁵ this section proposes a reinterpretation of the era as the beginning of feminist activism that confronted institutional sexism in the Lithuanian art world.

Responding to their exclusion from Group 24, five women artists and an art historian – painters Dalia Kasčiūnaitė (b. 1947), Kazė Zimblytė (1933–1999), and Rūta Katiliūtė (b. 1944); graphic artists Adasa Skliutauskaitė (1931–2023) and Danutė Jonkaitytė (b. 1951); and art historian Aldona Dapkutė (b. 1953) – joined forces with six male artists to establish an alternative collective in 1992. As an act of defiance, it was named Group 1, ensuring that it would always appear first in alphabetical or numerical listings. Group 1 quickly became known as one of the most dynamic

21 Trilupaitytė, Skaidra (2017). *Lietuvos dailės gyvenimas ir institucijų kaita. Sovietmečio pabaiga – nepriklausomybės pradžia*. Vilnius: artseria, pp. 61–63.

22 Tapyba / Bakalauro studijos, *vda.lt*, https://www.vda.lt/lt/studiju_programos/bakalauro-studiju-programos/tapyba/tapyba-bakalauro-studijos-vilnius/tapybos-katedra.

23 [Anon.] (1990). Grupė 24. *Šiaurės Atėnai*, 28.02., pp. 4–5.

24 [Anon.] (1994). Grupė “24” švenčia pirmąją sukaktį. *7 meno dienos*, 24.06., p. 3.

25 Andriūšytė, Rasa (1997). Dailės grupotės – organizacinio meno gyvenimo naujovė. In: Laučkaitė, Laima; Liutkus, Viktoras; Kuizinas, Kęstutis; Jurėnaitė, Raminta; Andriuškevičius, Alfonsas; Jablonskienė, Lolita; Korsakaitė, Ingrida; Andriūšytė, Rasa; Lubytė, Elona. *Lietuvos dailės kaita 1990–1996: institucinis aspektas*. Vilnius: Tarptautinė dailės kritikų asociacija / Lietuvos sekcija, p. 55. All information about artists' groups is from this article if not indicated otherwise.

collectives of the period, dedicated to professionalism and aesthetic experimentation.²⁶ In her review of the group's 1992 exhibition, critic Erika Grigoravičienė (b. 1965) wrote:

Ladies flourish in it – the feminine elite of Lithuanian art, the noble aristocrats who have not sullied their good name with cheap tricks. Several men hide in the shadow of their glory as if among the folds of baggy crinoline – the obliging and noble assistants, always ready to pick up a handkerchief, to offer coffee or publish a catalogue.²⁷

Group 1 stands out as a rare instance of feminist activism during this period, especially considering that the vast majority of members in the 22 newly formed artists' groups were men. Only seven collectives – *Post Ars, S.E.L., Š. V., Individualists, EMC, Aqua 12, Good Evils (Geros blogybės)* – included any women at all.²⁸ The only group composed entirely of women artists was *Four (Keturios)*, founded in Kaunas in 1990 by Aušra Andziulytė (b. 1961), Aušra Barzdukaitė-Vaitkūnienė (b. 1962), Judita Budriūnaitė (b. 1955), and Elena Balsiukaitė-Brazdžiūnienė (b. 1958). Between 1990 and 1996, they organized twelve exhibitions, each centered on a collectively chosen theme and predominantly featuring neo-expressionist painting – a style that artists defined as “a phenomenon originating in depressive – lyrical, impulsive colorism.”²⁹ Despite their sustained activity, the group encountered persistent marginalization. Their work was frequently criticized and dismissed as “uninteresting,” and they were excluded from major exhibition venues in Kaunas. As Andziulytė recalls:

Our first exhibition took place in a private space: the art historian Rasa Andriušytė-Žukienė (b. 1960) offered her newly bought flat to us. Only friends would see exhibitions. And when we wrote an application for an exhibition at the Picture Gallery, we heard such a remark: “Girls have set their hearts on the gallery. What do they think?” But we did organize the exhibition. It was huge.³⁰

The group's marginalization is further evidenced by the fact that *Four* were not invited to the 1994 exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) in Vilnius, which aimed to summarize the early 1990s group movement. Of the six groups

26 Dapkutė, Uršulė (1994). Bandytas klausimais atsakyti į klausimus. *7 meno dienos*, 26.08., p. 3.

27 Grigoravičienė, Erika (1992). Ne vienos. *7 meno dienos*, 06.11., p. 6. Hereinafter the translation of quotations is mine – A. N.

28 Andriušytė, Rasa (1997).

29 Ibid, p. 58.

30 Milkova, Vaida (2009). A. Andziulytė: dailininko akys dirba visą laiką. *Kauno diena*, 13.11. Available at: <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/kultura/aandziulyte-dailininko-akys-dirba-visa-laika-182255> [15.09.2025.].

selected, only one – Group 1 – included women artists. The newly founded CAC, founded in 1992, thus reproduced the patriarchal structure of the canon, merely supplementing it with a minimal female presence rather than challenging it.

At the same time, women who self-organized into collectives like *Four* recognized the necessity of resisting institutional sexism. Their collaboration – supported by women art critics who publicly valued their work – contributed to the emergence of a more multivocal cultural landscape. Through their exhibition practices and solidarities, these artists began to carve out a more multi-vocal cultural space.

Entering the New Contemporary Art Canon

The dominance of men in newly formed artists' groups reinforced the perception that experimentation with non-traditional art forms, such as installation and performance art, was primarily a male domain. This dynamic was evident in 1991, when painter Aistė Kisarauskaitė (b. 1967) was the only woman participating in *Works*, an international exhibition of performance art held in Vilnius. Her performance – cutting her own fingers in a stark re-enactment of a folk fairy tale – stood out not only for its visceral intensity but also for the distinctively patronizing and ironic tone with which critics received it.³¹

The Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, established within the Open Lithuania Foundation in 1993, was expected to act as a transformative force, introducing ideals of open society and cultural liberalization into the post-Soviet art scene. Its annual exhibitions – made possible by unprecedented financial support – became key platforms for producing ambitious large-scale works and shaping the emerging contemporary art canon.³² Yet despite the fact that the SCCA was directed by a woman, art historian Raminta Jurėnaitė (b. 1953), the institution's programming reproduced entrenched gender hierarchies. No woman artists were included in its inaugural exhibition, *Between Sculpture and Object in Lithuania* (1993), nor in the fourth annual exhibition, *Multilingual Landscapes* (1996), a survey of Eastern European contemporary art.³³ The exclusion of women from these high-profile, well-funded exhibitions – organized by what was effectively the most influential sponsor in the impoverished Lithuanian art field – significantly reinforced gender imbalance and implicitly positioned male artists as the sole representatives of the contemporary avant-garde.

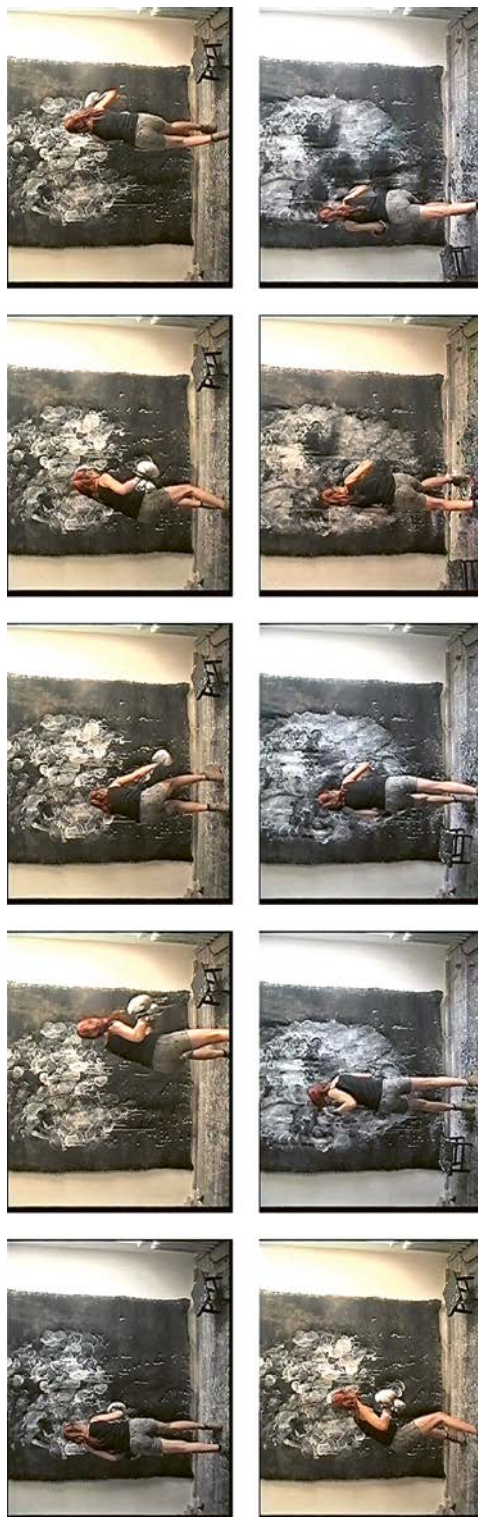
31 Andriūškevičius, Alfonsas (1991). Apie naująjį intymumą. *Šiaurės Atėnai*, 20.11., p. 3.

32 Fomina, Julija (2012). Šiuolaikinis menas ir jo publika: Soroso šiuolaikinio meno centro metinės parodos [Contemporary art and its audience: the annual exhibitions of the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art]. *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Vol. 64, *Vizualioji kultūra: problemos ir interpretacijos*. Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Publishers, pp. 153–167.

33 Jurėnaitė, Raminta (Ed.) (1996). *Daugiakalbiai peizažai*. Vilnius: Soroso šiuolaikinio meno centras.



Participants of the Lithuanian, Polish, and Hungarian exhibition of actions and performances *Darbai-Works*: Aleksas Andriuškevičius, Auris Radzevičius, Herkus Kunčius, Linas Liandzbergis, Džiugas Katinas, Aistė Kisarauskaitė, Markas Cukermanas, Česlovas Lukenskas, Gintaras Zinkevičius, Robertas Antinis. Photomontage by Gintaras Zinkevičius, 1991. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Gintaras Zinkevičius



Eglė Rakauskaitė, *For Guilty without Guilt. Trap. Expulsion from Paradise*, 1995.
 Photo by Kęstutis Stoškus. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Eglė Rakauskaitė

One or two women artists did, however, participate in other SCCA annual exhibitions. In 1994, as critic Erika Grigoravičienė observed, women's art that "somewhat engaged in feminism" was presented at the second annual exhibition, *Bread and Salt*.³⁴ In reality, among the 23 participating artists, only four were women: photographer Snieguolė Michelkevičiūtė (b. 1953) and painters Eglė Gineitytė (b. 1968), Audronė Petrašiūnaitė (b. 1954), and Jurga Barilaitė (b. 1972).³⁵ Michelkevičiūtė gained immediate recognition after receiving one of the two main prizes for her photographic series, *A Woman about Men*, which depicted male nudes – anonymous bodies partially concealed behind curtains, yet daring to expose their most intimate parts to the female photographer's gaze. According to Jurėnaitė, Michelkevičiūtė's work transgressed deeply internalized taboos traditionally embedded in women's psyche, thereby challenging gendered power relations within visual representation.³⁶

In 1995, two SCCA annual exhibitions were held. *For the Sake of Beauty* (curated by art historians Raimundas Malašauskas (b. 1973) and Sandra Skurvidaitė) included four women artists among its 24 participants. One of them, the Canadian-Lithuanian Karla Gruodis (b. 1965), had been actively discussing feminism in the cultural press,³⁷ creating openly feminist art, and editing a yet unsurpassed volume of seminal feminist texts in Lithuanian.³⁸ The other women participants were two members of the group *Good Evils*: Leila Kasputienė (now Leila Džeiran Šukiur), whose work using feminist approaches, and Ieva Martinaitytė-Mediodia (b. 1968), as well as ceramic artist Svajonė Stanikienė (b. 1961), who has worked collaboratively with her husband, Paulius Stanikas.³⁹

The exhibition *Mundane Language*, curated by sculptor Algis Lankelis in public spaces across Vilnius, featured eleven artists, only one of whom was a woman – Eglė Rakauskaitė (b. 1967). She suspended a net made of hair intertwined with ribbons above Gaon Street in the former Vilnius ghetto and presented her live sculpture-performance *For Guilty without Guilt. Trap. Expulsion from Paradise (Be kaltės kaltiems. Pinklės. Išvarymas iš rojaus)* at the CAC. Thirteen girls, dressed in white dresses with men's jackets draped over their shoulders, stood with their braids bound together into a net. This work symbolized the condition of women constrained

34 Grigoravičienė, Erika (1994). Sausi užkandžiai. *7 meno dienos*, 18.11., p. 3. To the exhibition she curated, *Action and Image [Veiksmas ir vaizdinys]*, in 1992 she invited one woman artist, Laima Drazdauskaitė, among eight participants.

35 Jurėnaitė, Raminta (Ed.) (1994). *Duona ir druska, Antroji Soroso šiuolaikinio meno centro Lietuvoje paroda*. Vilnius: Soroso šiuolaikinio meno centras, p. 54, 56, 62, 65.

36 Ibid, pp. 8-9.

37 Gruodytė, Karla (1990). Feminizmas ir Lietuva. *Šiaurės Atėnai*, 24.10., p. 1; Žilėnas, Bernardas (1990). Feminizmas be Lietuvos. *Šiaurės Atėnai*, 24.10., p. 3.

38 Gruodis, Karla (1995). *Feminizmo ekskursai: moters samprata nuo antikos iki postmodernizmo*. Vilnius: Pradai.

39 Malašauskas, Raimundas; Skurvidaitė, Sandra (1995). *Dėl grožio. Parodos katalogas / For Beauty. Exhibition catalogue*. Vilnius: Soroso šiuolaikinio meno centras.

by traditional expectations and brought Rakauskaitė recognition not only locally but also internationally. She was selected to represent Lithuania at the international Venice Biennale in 1999 together with sculptor Mindaugas Navakas. Rakauskaitė was also the only woman artist to whom the CAC offered a solo exhibition among the most prominent – i. e., “canonical” – interdisciplinary artists of her generation, as part of the *Emission* cycle in 2004.⁴⁰

This overview of the SCCA annual exhibitions demonstrates that women artists were treated as “the Other,” occasionally included as exceptions, particularly by curators whose professional practices began in the 1980s. Although the participation of women artists remained limited until 1995, the selections made by younger curators indicate a growing intention to include not only women’s art, but also explicitly feminist themes. They also drew attention to younger women artists who had initially emerged through self-organized groups. In this way, through the SCCA annual exhibitions, women artists gradually began to enter the new canon of contemporary art.

Exhibiting Women Artists and “Feminine” Arts

During the 1990s, many women artists avoided feminism as a label, perceiving it as negative. As art critic and artist Laima Kreivytė has noted, numerous women artists employed “feminist iconography, themes, [and] materials [...] creat[ing] interesting works, yet refused to call their art feminist, as if the term itself were derogatory [...].”⁴¹ For example, painter Jurga Barilaitė produced collages and video performances that critiqued the constraints of stereotypical femininity,⁴² while graphic artists Birutė Zokaitytė (b. 1968), Eglė Kuckaitė (b. 1969), Eglė Vertelkaitė (b. 1967), and Laisvydė Šalčiūtė (b. 1964) used photography, performance, and installation to address women’s bodies, desire, and sexuality.

Nevertheless, many women artists remained silent on what was perceived as the “derogatory issue” of feminism, or even articulated stereotypical views on femininity and masculinity. For instance, Irma Balakauskaitė (b. 1968) stated in an interview that painting was a “male priority” because “in the search for truth, a man penetrates the meaning of things or strives upwards. A woman does not seek truth, because the world of her visions and dreams is the only true reality for her.”⁴³

40 Dovidaitytė, Linara (Ed.) (2005). *Emisija 2004 - ŠMC*. Vilnius: Šiuolaikinio meno centras.

41 Kreivytė, Laima (2022). *KURuoTI. Kuravimas kaip meno praktika ir politika / CuReATE. Curating as Art Practice and Politics*. Art doctoral thesis. Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania, p. 43.

42 Budrecka, Emilija (1994). Sąmonės plyšiai ir laisvė. *7 meno dienos*, 10.06., p. 3.

43 Šimkus, Vilius V. (1992). Juodos ir baltos dėmės. Kas už jų?. *7 meno dienos*, 22.01., p. 6.



Jurga Barilaitė, *Self Defence*, 2001. Stills from a video performance with sound, 18 min.
Courtesy of Jurga Barilaitė



Violeta Bubelytė, *Nude, No. 48*, 1991. Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Violeta Bubelytė

Another recurring question concerned whether certain artists stood out primarily because they were women, or whether their gender functioned as an obstacle to artistic recognition. Painter Dalia Kasčiūnaitė (b. 1947) responded as follows:

It helped. In Soviet times, I was probably the only abstractionist accepted into official exhibitions. I think the fact that I was a woman also played a role in this. In addition, I was probably not completely repulsive externally to the men who had the right to decide.⁴⁴

In this context, exhibitions featuring exclusively women artists were often perceived as problematic, as they were assumed to imply lowered criteria for entry into the art scene. Reviewers of such exhibitions almost invariably pointed out that all the participating artists were women, thereby confirming that this fact itself was considered noteworthy. For example, such remarks accompanied the 1992 exhibition of female students from the Vilnius Academy of Arts – Barilaitė, Orūnė Morkūnaitė (Gibavičienė, b. 1972), Violeta Martinkėnaitė (Indriūnienė, b. 1971), Sigita Maslauskaitė (Mažylienė, b. 1970), and Jūratė Mikailionytė (b. 1971), held in Kaunas.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, exhibitions of women artists constituted a necessary strategy for articulating diverse subjectivities and voices within a predominantly patriarchal cultural field. The most prominent event to draw public attention to women as heroines and creators was the 1995 exhibition *Joan of Arc: Eight Comments (Joana Arkietė: aštuoni komentarai)* initiated and curated by CAC director Kęstutis Kuizinas. The exhibition's title referred not only to the historical figure of the woman warrior but also to Lithuania itself, which, after the bloody events of January 13, 1991, was frequently referred to as a Joan of Arc figure.⁴⁶

Seven artists participated: Zimblytė, Gruodis, Rakauskaitė, Gražina Pajarskaitė (1944–2019), Jūratė Stauskaitė (b. 1947), Violeta Bubelytė (b. 1956), and Paulina Pukytė (b. 1966). As critic Skaidra Trilupaitytė wrote in her review, “the idea of the exhibition is the search for unapologetic heroism in Lithuanian culture, a special spiritual energy spread by certain works and the women who created them.”⁴⁷

While the exhibition was predominantly received positively, two critics responded mockingly, questioning both the myth of Jeanne of Arc and the premise of an all-women exhibition, as well as feminism more broadly – even though none of the participating artists explicitly identified their work as feminist. As one critic

44 Daugirdas, Romas (1993). Pasikliauju intuicija. Su dailininke Dalia Kasčiūnaite kalbasi Romas Daugirdas. *7 meno dienos*, 20.08., p. 1.

45 Vaišnora, Dairius (1992). Kaip nutapyti metaforą? arba ką reiškia baltas kaklaryšis. *7 meno dienos*, 10.07., p. 6.

46 Mareckaitė, Gražina (1991). Lietuva – tai Žana d'Ark. *Šiaurės Atėnai*, 11.09., p. 2.

47 Trilupaitytė, Skaidra (1995). Kontroversiškas istorinės mergelės šešėlis. *7 meno dienos*, 12.05., p. 8.

remarked: “A woman today is still [trapped] in this vicious circle: first she seeks to intervene in the world of men, and then, by appearing coolly within it, she proves that she is a woman.”⁴⁸

Women artists also began to challenge the contemporary art scene by introducing so-called “feminine,” and therefore hierarchically devalued, applied arts, particularly textiles and ceramics, into conceptual artistic discourse. In 1987 and 1990, textile artists Laima Oržekauskienė (b. 1959) and Eglė Ganda Bogdanienė (b. 1962) began teaching at the Kaunas and Vilnius faculties of the Vilnius Academy of Arts, respectively. Through their pedagogical work, they educated a number of internationally recognized contemporary artists who critically reflected on their chosen medium.⁴⁹

In 1995, three young artists – ceramist Nomeda Marčėnaitė (b. 1965), textile artists Jurga Šarapova-Stulgienė (b. 1965), and Paulina Pukytė (b. 1966) – held the exhibition *Combination of Three (Trijų kombinacija)* at the Gallery of Applied Arts in Vilnius. According to critic Rita Mikučionytė, they “thus [became] the living classics of their generation.”⁵⁰ This assessment proved prescient a decade later, when Pukytė, together with yet another artist, Patricija Jurkšaitytė (b. 1968), was included in the expanded CAC *Emission* cycle in 2005–2006, thereby entering the contemporary art canon.⁵¹

In 1998, art historian Rūta Pileckaitė organized the high-profile exhibition *Liberated Things (Išlaisvinti daiktai)* at the CAC Vilnius, presenting conceptual projects by artists working in applied arts. A year earlier, textile artists had initiated the international textile biennials in Kaunas. In 2013, this event was renamed the *Kaunas Biennial*, becoming an international contemporary art exhibition in which the legacy of textile practices remains visible. Notably, art critic Virginija Vitkienė (b. 1975), who had organized the biennials since 2005, later assumed leadership of the *Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022* program and subsequently the *Season of Lithuania in France 2024*.

Through collective self-organization and sustained institutional engagement, women artists who presented their works without waiting for curatorial invitation left a lasting mark on the Lithuanian art scene. Their efforts expanded the canon toward a plurality of voices and practices, transforming traditionally “feminine” media into respected means of contemporary artistic production and even catalysts for major international events.

48 Ibid.

49 Almyra Bartkevičiūtė-Weigel (b. 1964), Vita Gelūnienė (b. 1969), Lina Jonikė (b. 1969), Inga Likšaitė (b. 1972), Monika Žaltauskaitė-Grašienė (b. 1975), Severija Inčirauskaitė-Kriaunevičienė (b. 1977), Žydrė Rūdulytė (b. 1958) and the group *Baltos kandys* (Austė Jurgelionytė-Varnė, Karolina Kunčinaitė (b. 1975), Miglė Lebednykaitė (b. 1976), Rasa Leonavičiūtė, Laura Pavilonytė-Ežerskienė (b. 1976), Julija Vosyliūtė).

50 Mikučionytė, Rita (1995). *Derinukas. 7 meno dienos*, 10.03., p. 9.

51 Dovydaitytė, Linara (Ed.) (2007). *Emisija 2005 / 2006 - ŠMC*. Vilnius: Šiuolaikinio meno centras.

Feminist Institutional Critique

At the turn of the new millennium, artists began to engage more explicitly in feminist institutional critique, drawing attention to the systematic omission of women from art institutions and, consequently, from the canon. Among the earliest and most prominent examples were two installations by the artist couple Nomedra Urbonienė (b. 1968) and Gediminas Urbonas (b. 1966), presented at the CAC Vilnius. These works offered a critical cross-section of stereotypical attitudes toward women in Lithuanian culture.

Their audiovisual and architectural installation *Transaction* (*Transakcija*, 2000) addressed gender politics inherited from the Soviet era and shaped by persistent patriarchal structures. The project was grounded in extensive research: the artists recorded interviews with artists, journalists, philosophers, lawyers, and sociologists; incorporated texts written by women; and organized educational sessions in collaboration with the Gender Studies Centre at Vilnius University. Conceived as a laboratory-like environment, the installation featured a television monitor displaying excerpts from Lithuanian films produced between 1947 and 1997 that depicted women. These film fragments were accompanied by recorded commentaries from psychiatrists, whose analyses exposed the culturally reinforced construction of women as victims. Such performative “transactional analyses” were intended to encourage viewers to “liberate themselves from the life script.”⁵² The installation *Rūta Remake* (CAC, 2002) functioned as a sequel to *Transaction*, further examining “female identities and social roles constructed through an alienated, artificial and mediated voice.”⁵³

While for the Urbonas duo the perception of women’s roles constituted one topic among many, the struggle for the recognition and visibility of women artists became a central agenda for the art critic, poet and artist Laima Kreivytė (b. 1972). In 2005, she founded the group *Cooltūristės*, explicitly inspired by the example of the Guerilla Girls. The group’s name fuses several meanings into a single neologism, combining “cool,” “culture,” “female tourist”, and “female body builders”.⁵⁴ In order to maintain anonymity, the members perform wearing white overalls and welding helmets.

The group’s early actions were based on the practices they termed *mis(s)appropriations* – “female thefts consciously estranging, turning the situation and gender roles inside out without fear of making mistakes or misleading.”⁵⁵ One such intervention,

52 Daubaraitė, Jurga; Grigoravičienė, Erika (2005). Įvaizdinta ir naikinama lytis: šiuolaikinių Lietuvos menininkų poros. In: Goštautienė, Rūta; Jablonskienė, Lolita (Eds.). *Pažymėtos teritorijos*. Vilnius: Tyto alba, p. 115.

53 Ibid, p. 116.

54 Apart from the English word “cool,” the other are Lithuanian words: *kultūra*, *turistė*, *kultūristė*.

55 Cooltūristės; Inčiūraitė, Kristina (2013–2014). *Susitikimas. Pavogta praeitis / The Meeting. Stolen Past / Vstrecha. Ukradennoe proshloe / Spotkanie. Skradzi ona przeszłość*. Klaipėda: Klaipėdos kultūrų komunikacijų centras, p. 27.

Vilnius in Your Stocking (*Vilnius tavo kojineje*), mocked the city's symbolic landmarks – its sculptures and towers – by inserting them into stockings, thereby offering a blunt gesture of resistance to what the group described as the “phallogocentric rhetoric of power”. Through this and similar actions, *Cooltūristės* symbolically disempowered patriarchal institutions and signs, transforming them into new, subversive symbols that ruptured the long-standing silence associated with feminine modesty.

In order to make the public aware of gender inequality in art institutions, *Cooltūristės* employed the method of counting. In 2005, they counted the disproportionately small number of women among the laureates of the Lithuanian national culture and art awards and presented the results in a poster titled *National Men's Awards* (*Nacionalinės vyrų premijos*). The poster initially attracted little attention; however, in 2013, when the national prize was awarded exclusively to men, it was recalled and used to spark discussion about sexism in culture – visible yet largely unnoticed.⁵⁶ Thanks to *Cooltūristės*, the issue was finally acknowledged, and women subsequently began appearing more frequently among the laureates, even surpassing the number of men in 2019.

By combining counting with interventionist strategies, *Cooltūristės* also addressed the persistent tendency to exclude women artists from prestigious exhibitions. For instance, in 2010, Kreivytė, by then without the welding helmet, conducted an intervention titled *Last Minute Tour* (*Paskutinės minutės ekskursija*) during the exhibition *Lithuanian Art 2000–2010: Ten Years* (*Lietuvos dailė 2000–2010: dešimt metų*), organized by CAC Vilnius. She glued reproductions of omitted artists, women and men alike, to the exhibition walls, thereby challenging the canon constructed by the country's most influential contemporary art institution.⁵⁷

Cooltūristės also counted the number of women representing European Union countries in national pavilions at the Venice Biennale between 1999 and 2011, marking their presence in red. Their project *Women in Red* made this imbalance visible, particularly in the Lithuanian pavilion, where women had appeared only three times and exclusively alongside male artists.⁵⁸ Gradually, this observation entered the awareness of selection juries. In 2019, three women – Lina Lapelytė (b. 1984), Vaiva Grainytė (b. 1984), and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė (b. 1983) – represented Lithuania and won the Golden Lion for their opera-performance *Sun & Sea* (*Saulė ir jūra*).

Kreivytė has created numerous other projects advocating for the political emancipation of women, questioning heteronormativity, and critically addressing the loss of

56 Paulauskas, Donatas (2013). *Kultūra ir menas - vertinga, jei tai kuria vyrai. Šiaurės Atėnai*, 18.01. Available at: www.satenai.lt/2013/01/18/kul%C2%ADtu%C2%ADra-ir-me%C2%ADnas-%E2%80%93-ver%C2%ADtin%C2%ADga-jei-tai-ku%C2%ADria-vy%C2%ADrai [26.11.2025.].

57 Vitkienė, Virginija (2013). *Moteriškieji meno istorijos perrašymai XXI a. kuratorystės praktikoje Lietuvoje. Moteriškoji tapatybė ir dailė / Female Identity and Art, Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, p. 105.

58 Cooltūristės (2012). *Women in Red. 7 meno dienos*, 16.03., p. 12.

VILNIUS TAVO KOJINĖJE



Už įvairovę menė! COOLTŪRISTĖS pakeliui@hotmail.com

Cooltūristės, *Vilnius in Your Stocking*, 2005. Digital print on canvas.
Courtesy of Laima Kreivytė

VILNIUS IN YOUR STOCKING

**Monumental power rhetoric –
into the stocking!**

**Granite Mindaugas –
into the stocking!**

**Bronze Gediminas –
into the stocking!**

**The Palace of Grand Dukes –
into the stocking!**

**Skyscrapers –
into the stocking!**

**Down with the
bronze and
granite of the wealthy!
Down with phallogocentric
monuments!**

**We have pulled stockings
onto
totalitarian logic.**

**Eternity's
tall towers
stare through holes
in the torn stockings.
The pillars of power
are at our feet –**

**V i l n i u s i n y o u r
S t o c k i n g !**

memory in public space, capitalist gentrification, and the Russian war against Ukraine.⁵⁹ She has also engaged extensively in feminist curating, following the premise articulated by curatorial activist Maura Reilly, who understands curatorial practice as a means of empowering marginalized identities. Such practice aims at “levelling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating new knowledge, and encouraging strategies of resistance – all of which offers hope and affirmation.”⁶⁰

For Kreivytė, “dialogicity, multivoicing, and openness to different experiences” constitute the core principles of feminist curating.⁶¹ In order to create what Griselda Pollock terms “spaces for multiple occupancy” and to “re-read” the canon,⁶² she employs a range of strategies, including “horizontal” co-curating in collaboration with participating artists, performativity, feminist interventions, counting, and “smuggling”⁶³ a concept by Irit Rogoff.⁶⁴ Smuggling operates as a response to dominant events or narratives through fluid, illegitimate boundary crossings, introducing obscure objects that remain unidentifiable within habitual frames of reference.⁶⁵

Kreivytė’s actions, exhibitions, and interventions have inspired other curators to experiment with feminist curatorial practices as a means of questioning the art historical canon.⁶⁶ Most recently, in 2025, the young curator Monika Kalinauskaitė adopted a similar strategy by “smuggling” works by contemporary women artists into the permanent exposition of Western art from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries at The Radvila Palace Museum of Art. The exhibition *Everything You are Not Supposed to Do (Visa tai, ko negalima daryti)* introduced women’s – and even queer – perspectives, thereby exposing the sexism and structural limitations embedded in historical artworks and their institutional presentation.⁶⁷

59 Narušytė, Agnė (2022). Cooltūristės ir Laima Kreivytė. In: Narušytė, Agnė (Ed.). *Lietuvos menininkės. Vizualiųjų menu kūrėjos nuo XX a. pradžios iki šių dienų*, pp. 358–364.

60 Kreivytė, Laima (2022). *KURuoTI. Kuravimas kaip meno praktika ir politika / CuReATE. Curating as Art Practice and Politics*, p. 146. She refers to: Reilly, Maura (2018). *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 22.

61 Ibid.

62 Pollock, Griselda (1999). *Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories*, pp. 26–27.

63 Jablonskienė, Lolita; Kreivytė, Laima (2011). Istorijos (per)rašymai: feministinės kuravimo ir kritikos strategijos. In: *Moters savastis dailėje [The Female Self in Art]*. *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Vol. 62, pp. 193–202.

64 Rogoff, Irit (2006). “Smuggling” – *An Embodied Criticality*. Available at: www.alicedittmar.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/rogoff-smuggling.pdf [18.09.2020.], p. 4.

65 Ibid.

66 I have discussed Kreivytė’s projects at greater length in: Narušytė, Agnė (2021). Women Artists in the New Permanent Display at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius: An Insider’s Account. In: Hein, Ivar-Kristjan (Ed.). *Women Artists in Baltic and Nordic Museums. Proceedings of the Art Museum of Estonia*, Vol. 11 (16). Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuseum, pp. 59–63.

67 Kalinauskaitė, Monika (2025). *Everything You Are Not Supposed to Do*. Radvila Palace Museum of Art, 13 March–28 September 2025, Indm.lt.

Conclusions

Over three decades of independence, the Lithuanian art scene has gradually disrupted the male-dominated structure of the canon by opening itself to a greater diversity of voices. Once positioned at the margins of cultural life, women artists now occupy influential roles: they participate in major exhibitions in Lithuania and abroad, represent the country in international forums, receive prestigious awards, and actively shape contemporary visual art processes. Viewed from this present position, it becomes possible to recognize the cumulative actions of women artists and art historians that have contributed to the expansion of the canon through the inclusion of previously marginalized figures. Through self-organization and collaboration, they exposed the systematic absence of women artists within the patriarchal cultural framework inherited from the Soviet occupation and asserted the legitimacy of women's artistic practices within art institutions. By engaging in dialogical and feminist curatorial approaches, they also challenged entrenched gender stereotypes embedded in the art historical canon.

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AGNE NARUŠITE

Veidojot jaunu kanonu: mākslinieces Lietuvā no 1990. gada līdz 21. gadsimta 20. gadiem

Kopsavilkums

Raksts analizē Lietuvas mākslas vēstures kanona transformāciju laikposmā no 1990. gada līdz 20. gadsimta 20. gadiem, pievēršoties mākslinieču, kuratoru un mākslas vēsturnieču darbībai. Pēc neatkarības atjaunošanas Lietuvas mākslas vidē saglabājās institucionālās un diskursīvās struktūras, kas bija veidojušās padomju kultūras ideoloģijas ietekmē un ilgstoši marginalizēja mākslinieces, kā arī devalvēja ar sievišķību asociētās mākslas prakses. Rakstā aplūkots, kā trīsdesmit gadu laikā sievietes, izmantojot pašorganizēšanos, kolektīvu rīcību, institucionālo kritiku un kuratoriālo aktīvismu, pakāpeniski mainīja redzamības un atzīšanas nosacījumus mākslas laukā.

Balstoties arhīvu pētījumos, izstāžu vēsturē, kritiskā diskursa analizē un konkrētos mākslinieču grupu, izstāžu un institūciju gadījumu pētījumos, raksts akcentē sievietes kā aktīvas kultūras procesa dalībnieces. Īpaša uzmanība pievērsta tādām stratēģijām kā alternatīvu kolektīvu veidošana, feministisku un kvīru perspektīvu ieviešana, lietišķās mākslas izvērtēšana laikmetīgās mākslas diskursā, kā arī institucionālo hierarhiju izaicināšana ar performatīvām intervences praksēm.

Raksts argumentē, ka šo darbību kopums ir veicinājis “jauna kanona” veidošanos Lietuvas laikmetīgajā mākslā – kanona, ko raksturo daudzveidīgākas balsis, mediji un identitātes. Pārskatot kanona veidošanos kā strīdīgu un nepārtrauktu procesu, pētījums izgaismo sieviešu māksliniecisko un kuratoriālo prakšu izšķirošo lomu nacionālās mākslas vēstures pārrakstīšanā postpadomju kontekstā.

Atslēgvārdi: sievietes mākslinieces, kanona veidošanās, feministiskā kuratoriālā prakse, institucionālā kritika, Lietuvas laikmetīgā māksla, postpadomju kultūra.

LIĀNA IVETE ŽILDE

Artistic and Curatorial Interventions: Reflecting on the *Contemporary Histories of Photography* Exhibition

Summary

The exhibition series *Contemporary Histories of Photography*, held at the ISSP Gallery in Riga from May to August 2024 as part of the Riga Photography Biennial, explored epistemological questions and marginalized histories through the intersection of artistic research and curatorial strategy. The first exhibition featured the work of contemporary artists Kristīne Krauze-Slucka, who engaged with the archive of Latvian photographer Ina Stūre (1958–2006), and Agate Tūna, who examined early twentieth-century spirit photography through a speculative history lens. Both artists foregrounded questions of gender and women's histories alongside other cultural and artistic concerns. Their projects – together with the works of second-cycle participants Annemarija Gulbe and Konstantin Zhukov – offered new perspectives and methodologies for approaching photographic history. Collectively, these artistic and curatorial interventions contributed to the ongoing critical reassessment of Latvian photographic historiography, challenging its established narratives and expanding its interpretative frameworks.

While photography in Latvia has long been marginalized within art historical discourse, partly due to its secondary status during the Soviet era, recent decades have witnessed a renewed scholarly and curatorial interest in photographic research. The *Contemporary Histories of Photography* exhibition was conceived within this context, acknowledging the complexity and subjectivity inherent in the writing of history. Using the exhibition as a case study, this article underscores the importance of a self-reflexive approach in curatorial and historiographical practice, emphasizing the need for sustained research and dialogue to integrate previously overlooked voices into the broader cultural narrative.

Keywords: photography historiography, exhibition, gender studies, archives, artistic research.



Kristīne Krauze-Slucka, *Enthusiasm in Times of Extreme Scarcity*. Ina Stūre, 2024.
Photo by Kristīne Krauze-Slucka from the exhibition *Contemporary Histories of Photography I*

Precariously balanced columns of cardboard boxes, reminiscent of an improvised archive, serve as frames for deep-toned images of women – both posing for artistic portraits and captured in candid everyday moments. At one end of the exhibition space, a large blown-up snapshot depicts a woman dyeing fabric in her kitchen using buckets, a common practice of resourcefulness during the scarcity of Latvia's transitional period in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Another wall features a surreal black-and-white apparition combining multiple female heads with botanical elements alongside printed, wallpaper-style images with various ghostly undertones. The sometimes-faded photographs, layered textures, and material and technological experiments reflect visual histories spanning different periods, and the shifting roles, representations, expectations, and identities of women and their bodies.

The exhibition series *Contemporary Histories of Photography* took place at the ISSP Gallery in Riga from May to August 2024 as part of the Riga Photography Biennial program. This article reflects on the curatorial process, its considerations and challenges, and focuses specifically on the artistic research undertaken by artists Kristine Krauze-Slucka and Agate Tūna, which addressed issues of gender within a broader context of epistemology and marginalized histories. Krauze-Slucka worked with the archive of photographer and artist Ina Stūre (1958–2006), dating from the late 1980s and early 1990s in Latvia, while Tūna explored the local history of spirit photography in the early 20th century. The artworks created specifically for the exhibition illuminate the processes of local photographic historiography, actively contribute to it and signpost further avenues for exploration. Subjective, situated interests served as starting points for deeply personal, micro-historical approaches to a broad and underexplored field that nonetheless carries political and social implications.

Photography has been relatively neglected in the context of Latvian art historiography, partly due to the medium's marginalization as an art form during the Soviet period. In recent decades, however, there has been a renewed interest in researching and publishing on photography. While working on an upcoming anthology on the medium's history together with colleagues, a question arose: how can we simultaneously fill the vacuum of in-depth historiography while critically re-examining existing narratives? The exhibition series was conceived as an act of critical self-reflection, highlighting the subjectivity inherent in every version of history and shedding light on various lesser-known facets of local photography. Several recent local examples demonstrate how exhibitions can also act as a fruitful form of critical reflection on history-writing processes alongside written scholarship – for instance, Ivars Grāvlejs's *Unknown Latvian Photography* (Latvian Museum of Photography, 2016), *Silver Girls. Retouched History of Photography* (Tartu Art Museum, 2020, curated by Šelda Puķīte and Indrek Grigor¹), and *I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of*

1 An adapted version, *In-Visible Authors*, was later displayed in Riga's urban spaces as part of the Riga Photography Biennial in 2020.

ZDZ (KIM?, 2021, curated by Zane Onckule).² *Contemporary Histories* was conceived as a continuation of this self-reflexive process and conversation.

The act of writing history, including art history, is never neutral but is woven into social and political contexts, shaped by both power dynamics and personal choices. The process of creating the *Contemporary Histories* exhibition series was grounded in the belief that epistemology itself should be analyzed and that the historiography of photography can be viewed as part of a broader process of writing national history and building a shared base of knowledge. Four contemporary artists – Annemarija Gulbe, Kristīne Krauze-Slucka, Agate Tūna, and Konstantin Zhukov – were invited to create new works engaging in dialogue with photographers and phenomena spanning various historical periods. By employing a framework of artistic research – “thinking in, through, and with art”³ rather than seeking formalized knowledge – their alternative historical interpretations illuminated diverse perspectives and offered a departure from potentially didactic, canonical versions of the past. This article focuses specifically on the first cycle of the exhibition, *Contemporary Histories of Photography I* – in which artists Krauze-Slucka and Tūna both addressed issues of gender, among other themes and considerations.

Situating Photography History: Curatorial Investigations

Photography has typically been a male-dominated field, and the patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks observable in Soviet-era historiography continue to reverberate. For example, the 1985 survey publication *Latvian Photographic Art. History and Today*⁴ lacks any in-depth representation of female photographers active at the time, while women feature prominently as subjects in images by male photographers. This reflects the dominant Soviet photo-club culture, which tended to “manifest [...] the desires of straight middle-aged men”,⁵ and in which women were accepted only if they conformed to, internalized, and adapted to a worldview that catered to the male gaze.

2 For a more detailed analysis of these exhibitions, see: Žilde, Liāna Ivete (2024). Reexamining the History of Latvian Photography: Exhibitions as a Form of Critical Self-Reflection. In: Hirša, Santa (Ed.). *Riga Photography Biennial 2024 Catalog*. Riga: Riga Photography Biennial.

3 Borgdorff, Henk (2011). The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research. In: Biggs, Michael; Karlsson, Henrik. (Eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (1st ed.). London: Routledge, p. 44.

4 Zeile, Pēteris (sast.) (1985). *Latvijas fotomāksla. Vēsture un mūsdienas*. Rīga: Liesma.

5 Tifentāle, Alise (2023). Women with Cameras: Providing Erotic Entertainment for the Male Audience While Working as Photographers. In: Grigor, Indrek; Murashko, Alexey (Eds.). *The Queue. An Episode in Tartu's Photo History*. Tartu: Tartu Art Museum, p. 83.

While the 21st century has seen a move towards more inclusive narratives, the existing historiographical base still echoes the wider displacement of women from narratives of cultural, historical and national identity. The issue of a gender imbalance in photography history, as part of a broader focus on marginalized narratives, was therefore one of the key considerations from the outset of preparing the exhibition.

As part of an intersectional and integrative approach, other angles of investigation included sexuality, national identity, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, as well as the inherent hierarchies within photography as a medium and its research. The notion of the canon was also taken as a critical starting point, and archives were perceived not merely as repositories of history, but as contested spaces of shifting memory, power, and omission.

With this wide-ranging focus, the exhibition series functioned as an experimental ground for various ways of looking at photography and its epistemology – a kaleidoscope of subjectively focused artistic interrogations. Some of the theoretical considerations, particularly those pertaining to gender, will be outlined in more detail before discussing the curatorial process and examining Krauze-Slucka's and Tūna's artworks in greater depth.

Alongside local considerations, the curatorial research behind the exhibition drew on key feminist theory, including Donna Haraway's still relevant concept of "situated knowledges". Haraway emphasizes that knowledge is always shaped by an individual's perspective, social context, and background. While she built a significant critique of scientific objectivity and detachment, she does not advocate total relativism; instead, she proposes a self-reflexive version of objectivity – "partial, locatable, critical knowledges"⁶ that enable connection, political solidarity, and open theoretical debate. Aligned with the exhibition's aims, this concept challenges dominant, universal narratives, offering alternative ways to understand history by valuing diverse, often marginalized perspectives.

Haraway's ideas have long influenced fields such as art history and socially engaged curating.⁷ Rejecting the myth of a neutral, objective scientific viewpoint – typically associated with the white Western male – she stresses the importance of acknowledging one's own embodied, experience-based perspective in research. In *Contemporary Histories*, the artists' subjective interests and backgrounds, discussed in collaboration with the curator, were central to the development of their work and the exhibition. For Krauze-Slucka, this meant linking the materiality and experimental nature of her photographic practice with Ina Stūre's expressive work. Tūna's exploration of spiritist photography stemmed from her family history and interest in the

6 Haraway, Donna (1998). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14(3), p. 581.

7 For example, see the articles in this thematic issue: Kolb, Ronald; Richter, Dorothee (Eds.) (2022). Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating. *On Curating*, No. 53.

paranormal. While personal fascinations and thematic affinities are often a driving force for artists, here they were explicitly foregrounded as a conceptual framework.

Critical feminist approaches to art historiography, such as those by Griselda Pollock,⁸ have long challenged not only the exclusion of women from the art canon but also the canon itself. They advocate for its deconstruction and rethinking as a hegemonic system that reproduces societal power relations and turns women into “others”. Others, like curator Simon Sheikh, argue in favor of a conceptual art history based on ideas, rather than events, individuals, or objects.⁹

While female photographers such as Inta Ruka (b. 1958) and Māra Brašmane (b. 1944) are well known in Latvian photography, they remain exceptions – highlighting the need for continued structural critique of the “othering” of women. Recent local exhibition projects have specifically addressed the need for a more inclusive art history and a reframing that acknowledges previously underappreciated female contributions. Examples include the aforementioned *Silver Girls. Retouched History of Photography* and *Wool and Silk. The New Erotic* (2018, curated by Jana Kukaine and Rasa Jansone) at the Latvian Museum of Photography, as well as several exhibitions at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga¹⁰ that encompassed a broad range of artistic media. *Contemporary Histories* continued these lines of inquiry by foregrounding the process of history writing and questioning the mechanisms through which certain narratives gain visibility over others.

Beyond feminist critique, local photography historiography raises additional issues that can only be briefly addressed here. In pursuit of a regionally specific, horizontal art history,¹¹ a decolonial perspective helps examine both the Soviet-era marginalization and ideological constraints of photography as an art medium, as well as the ongoing dominance of the Western-centric art discourse, which continues to relegate Latvian and other regional practices to the periphery. Feminist art theorist Jana Kukaine has emphasized the need for an understanding of locally specific forms and shapes of feminism, which are not rooted in unflattering comparisons with the West but grounded instead in the distinct post-socialist condition. This difference,

8 Pollock also references Linda Nochlin and the work of other influential feminist art scholars. Pollock, Griselda (1999). *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. London: Routledge.

9 Sheikh, Simon (2011). On the Standard of Standards, or Curating and Canonization. *Manifesta Journal*, 11(17), p. 17.

10 *Don't Cry! Feminist Perspectives in Latvian Art: 1965-2023* (2023, curator Elita Ansone); *In the Name of Desire* (2024, curators Lina Birzaka-Priekule, Laura Brokāne, Igors Gubenko); *I Remember, Therefore I Am. Unwritten Stories: Women Artists' Archives* (2020, curator Andra Silapētere, organized by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art).

11 The influential concept of horizontal art history was developed by Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski. See: Piotrowski, Piotr (2008). On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History. *Art / Umění*, Vol 56, Issue 5, pp. 378-383.

she argues, can serve as a source of vitality for developing feminist thought.¹² She highlights, for example, the work of photography historian Alise Tīfentāle with the archive of photographer Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011), whose practice can be seen as para-feminist or exhibiting a “feminist sensitivity” that preceded the appearance of feminist discourse in Latvia.¹³ This lens is also helpful in examining the work of late Soviet-era artists like Ina Stūre, whose practice both reflects the patriarchal culture of the time and introduces a new, subtly subversive sensitivity.

Hierarchies within photography itself also shape what is deemed historically significant – often favoring artistic over vernacular, social, and locally rooted uses, as argued by scholars such as Geoffrey Batchen.¹⁴ Elizabeth Edwards has similarly emphasized the importance of attending to the materiality and social trajectory of photographs as objects, rather than focusing solely on their (artistic) visual content.¹⁵ These overlapping concerns informed the exhibition’s curatorial approach, linking gender with broader social, political, and aesthetic contexts.

A Collaborative Process: Towards the Exhibition

The artists invited to take part in *Contemporary Histories of Photography* were selected by the curator based on their previous practice and ongoing interest in themes of memory, history, and interpretation. Each artist’s work entails a specific focus on photography, while combining it with other media such as installation and video, emphasizing photography’s position as an integral component of the contemporary art landscape. Although the artists’ gender, sexual or national identities were not among the initial criteria for collaboration, these factors ultimately played a significant role in the curatorial research process and the development of the exhibition.

While the patriarchal and heteronormative bias that marked earlier local photography historiography is no longer as dominant, it nonetheless imbues the voices of female and non-heterosexual artists with additional meaning – recalling Haraway’s notion of situated knowledges, which accentuates the need of acknowledging embodied and experience-based perspectives within research. This pursuit of self-reflexive objectivity – rather than either total subjectivity or the illusion of

12 Kukaine, Jana (2024). *Viscerālā estētika: afekti un feministiskā māksla postsociālismā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes (LU) Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts; Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, pp. 104–105.

13 Ibid., pp. 110–111.

14 Batchen, Geoffrey (2000). Vernacular Photographies. *History of Photography*, 24:3, pp. 262–271.

15 See: Edwards, Elizabeth; Hart, Janice (Eds.) (2004). *Photographs. Objects. Histories. On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge.

neutral objectivity – demands attention to identity in particular: the artists' social position in relation to the history of photography inevitably shape their perspectives, just as they shape those of the curator and author of this article.

Curator Maura Reilly has also underscored the curator's social responsibility in addressing the inequalities that persist within the art world with regard to women and minority groups. Through the inclusion of diverse voices within group exhibitions, curators can, in her words, encourage "leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating *new* knowledge, and encouraging strategies of resistance".¹⁶ Without overstating the impact of curatorial activity compared to social or political activism, the decision to collaborate with artists representing groups historically marginalized within the history of photography becomes especially relevant in this context, seeking at the very least to generate a discussion about existing inequalities and the potential for greater diversification.

From February 2023 until the opening of the exhibition series in summer 2024, each artist undertook a process of personal artistic research, being invited to choose and address themes significant to their own practice. A non-hierarchical, collaborative approach was adopted throughout. In conversations with the curator, various critical perspectives were introduced, encouraging the artists to pay close attention both to their personal and social experiences and to those of other knowledge-makers in relation to the photographic histories they focused on.

This individual research unfolded alongside group discussions and visits to the archives of memory institutions, as well as conversations with local photography historians.¹⁷ The creative team of the exhibition also included scenographer Liene Pavlovska and producer Kamilla Kūna, whose contributions were crucial to the installation of the artworks – the materialization of both artistic and curatorial research.

While each artist's approach was distinct, they shared a common understanding of artistic research as a context-sensitive, practice-based mode of knowledge production, overlapping with a curatorial research approach that integrates theory and practice. Importantly, the resulting works open up further questions and avenues for investigation, rather than offering definite answers or closed narratives. In this way, they exemplify the potential of artistic research as a form of "unfinished thinking" or "not-yet-knowing", one that "creates room for that which is unthought, that which is unexpected – the idea that all things could be different."¹⁸

16 Reilly, Maura (2018). *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 22.

17 For example, a group visit to the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, discussions with specialists Lauma Lanceniece, Katrīna Teivāne, Līga Goldberga. The curatorial concept was also informed by interviews with other researchers and historians - Alise Tifentāle, Laima Slava, Eduards Kļaviņš, Baiba Tetere.

18 Borgdorff, Henk (2011). The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research. In: Biggs, Michael; Karlsson, Henrik (Eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (1st ed.). London: Routledge, pp. 44–63.

The exhibition title, *Contemporary Histories of Photography*, refers to this ongoing process of unfinished thinking: the shifting perspectives and evolving approaches in the historiography of photography over time, and the impossibility of stepping into the shoes of a future historian. Thus, the exhibition becomes a meeting space for multiple histories, knowledges, and photographs.

Enthusiasm in Times of Extreme Scarcity

Artist Kristīne Krauza-Slucka creates images, objects, and installations, often focusing on the material and experimental aspects of the photographic process. In this case, her work *Enthusiasm in Times of Extreme Scarcity*¹⁹ centers on a single, specific archive – that of Ina Stūre. Krauze-Slucka’s selective artistic interpretation blends everyday, vernacular scenes – such as Stūre and her daughter among backyard chickens or in a summer flower field or celebrating Christmas in a not-yet-renovated house – with highly edited, pictorialist-influenced photographs of female figures adorned with elaborate props like paper crowns, flowers, and fisherman’s nets. Interspersed are intimate portraits and self-portraits of Stūre at different stages of her life, navigating her roles as artist, mother, and woman.

The story of “rediscovering”²⁰ this archive dates back to 2021, when American art historian Maria Garth curated the exhibition *Communism Through the Lens: Everyday Life Captured by Women Photographers in the Dodge Collection*²¹ at the Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, USA.²² Due to the global pandemic, the exhibition was also presented as a virtual exhibition online, where the author of this article first encountered it, while researching Latvian photography history. Stūre’s work was featured among that of better-known Latvian photographers Zenta Dzividzinska

19 Title borrowed from a newspaper clipping (*Cīņa*, 06.08. 1990) found in the archive of Ina Stūre. Original title in Latvian: “Entuziasms asa deficīta apstākļos”.

20 This is a partial “rediscovery”, since Stūre’s archive has remained known and integrated into the lives of her surviving family members, while her name and work continue to be remembered by close peers. A few of her works are also held in the collection of the Latvian Museum of Photography.

21 Virtual exhibition: *Communism Through the Lens: Everyday Life Captured by Women Photographers in the Dodge Collection*. Zimmerli Art Museum, 2021. Available at: <https://zimmerli.rutgers.edu/art/exhibition/communism-through-lens-everyday-life-captured-women-photographers-dodge-collection> [01.03.2025.].

22 The Zimmerli Art Museum houses the *Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, which features works by several Soviet-era Latvian photographers - many curated and acquired by art historian and collection consultant Mark Allen Svede - alongside artists from other republics, representing the period from Khrushchev’s “Thaw” to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

and Māra Brašmane. However, seeing only a few examples of her distinctive imagery prompted a deeper search for her work and its broader context.

While brief biographical data about Stūre appears in several publications,²³ her name has largely faded from public awareness in Latvia today. Stūre initially pursued studies in architecture, but later shifted her focus to photography under the mentorship of well-known Latvian photographer Gunārs Binde at the Photo Club *Rīga* between 1985–1986. Later, in the 1990s, she expanded her grasp of artistic mediums by studying icon painting and printmaking at the Latvian Christian Academy.

When Krauze-Slucka first heard Stūre's name during the development phase of the exhibition concept, her curiosity was piqued, leading to a personal quest to learn more about the artist. Through online research, she discovered an article on the website of the Vecmoku Library in the Tukums region, and, after a series of phone calls and correspondence, eventually succeeded in contacting Stūre's daughter, Gerda. This led to a first visit by Krauze-Slucka and myself to Stūre's home in Vecmokas, where her archive was stored, and to a meeting with her daughter and husband, Jānis. Since then, further visits and interviews with her family and former collaborators have followed. Krauze-Slucka has begun digitizing segments of Stūre's artistic and personal archive, and discussions are underway regarding the possible inclusion of part of this material in the collection of the National Library of Latvia.

The transnational connections behind the current rediscovery of the archive reveal the unexpected trajectories and shifting meanings of images over time. Both the artist and Krauze-Slucka share an experimental approach and a focus on materiality – Stūre often painted and drew over her photographs, employing collage, graphic techniques, unconventional filters, emulsions, and double exposures.

The turn of the 1980s and 1990s – *Atmoda* (the Third National Awakening period of Latvia) and the early years of renewed independence – was marked by optimism and new international opportunities for Latvian photographers. At the same time, living conditions were challenging and photographic materials scarce. To achieve the rich tones and effects in her images, Stūre used whatever materials were available, including crayons and cosmetic hair and fabric dyes.

Stūre's staged, imaginative, and symbolically charged works drew inspiration from literature, fashion, painting, and graphic art, while simultaneously resisting the prevailing paradigm of documentary and straight photography promoted by influential

23 For biographical information on Ina Stūre, see: Šteimane, Inga (2000). Stūre, Ina. No: Vanaga, Anita (atb. red.). *Māksla un arhitektūra biogrāfijās, R-V. Enciklopēdija Latvija un latvieši*. Rīga: A/S Preses nams, p. 122.



Kristine Krauze-Slucka, *Enthusiasm in Times of Extreme Scarcity. Ina Stüre*, 2024.
Photo by Kristine Krauze-Slucka from the exhibition *Contemporary Histories of Photography I*

curators in the 1990s.²⁴ This resistance to prevailing aesthetic norms is one of the reasons her work has since fallen into relative obscurity.

As far as is known, Stüre never articulated a feminist sensibility regarding her work. This is typical of the post-Soviet art environment, where feminism was often invisible or even regarded as undesirable, as analyzed in detail by art historians Māra Traumane²⁵ and Jana Kukaine.²⁶ Today, however, Stüre's oeuvre and archive can be seen as an important example of the *female gaze*, challenging the predominantly masculine Soviet and post-Soviet photography scene.

Stüre's portraits of her friends, cousins, and her daughter, as well as those of Ina taken by her husband, Jānis, embody photography as an intimate, collaborative process, in which both photographer and subject share artistic agency. At the same time, through the use of imaginative props and performative characters, her images invite reflection on women's roles in society and on the performative dimensions of identity.

Krauze-Slucka juxtaposes Stüre's artistic representations of women, abstracted from their surrounding reality, with her private family photographs that vividly document everyday life and its responsibilities: raising her daughter, dreaming of renovating their country home, dying fabric, and tending the garden. Then as now, perseverance was required to carve out a creative space of one's own.

Krauze-Slucka's decision to exhibit Stüre's artworks alongside a selection from her uncategorized personal archive of negatives and slides – including portraits, family photographs, and travel images – is significant. These everyday, domestic, and vernacular photographs offer a vital record of life during the transition from socialism to capitalism, capturing social and economic transformations through interiors, fashion, gatherings, early trips beyond the Iron Curtain, and changing urban and rural landscapes. In Stüre's case, this material often served as a source for later artworks, emphasizing the fluidity of photographic categories as family photographs became part of creative projects, exhibitions, and archives.

By presenting artworks and domestic images on an equal basis, the exhibition challenged traditional hierarchies that prioritize "art" over the vernacular. This approach also underscores the porous boundary between personal pursuits and artistic production: for Stüre, the creative process was inseparable from the fabric of everyday life. The teetering stacks of cardboard boxes used as display cases for images evoke

24 The rise of documentary photography and the role of curators such as Helēna Demakova in promoting "A grupa" and other documentary "new wave" photographers has been discussed by Tifentāle, for example, in: Tifentāle, Alise (2010). From Photographic Art to Photography in Art. In: Astahovska, Ieva (Ed.). *Nineties. Contemporary Art in Latvia*. Riga: Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, pp. 297-306.

25 Traumane, Māra (2012). Women's Art and Denial of Feminism: History of Exhibitions in Latvia 1977-2011. In: Kivimaa, Katrin (Ed.). *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, pp. 163-187.

26 Kukaine, pp. 104-105.

the dormant yet overwhelming potential of the archive. Idiosyncratic artefacts – such as film negatives wrapped in a shopping list – once again form a tactile link between the artistic and domestic spheres.

The choice to exhibit Stūre's archive and tell her story is not merely a disruption of the existing canon, but also an inquiry into the mechanisms that have contributed to her work's disappearance from public attention. Contemporary perspectives, grounded in critical epistemology and feminist perspectives, provide new interpretative frameworks through which to approach Stūre's practice today.

Stūre's archive had remained untouched for years in the attic of her country house in Vecmokas. Due to limited resources and the absence of systematic research, countless personal photographic archives in Latvia share a similar fate – risking erasure as memories fade and their custodians pass away. By shedding light on Stūre's archive, Krauze-Slucka demonstrates that the preservation of history is also an act of care, while outlining the potential for continued exploration.

The exhibition serves as an initial step in the ongoing research into Stūre's archive, highlighting multiple avenues for further analysis. These include the archives of other women photographers from the period; the unofficial Experimental Group of the Photo Club *Rīga* (led by artist Mārtiņš Krūmiņš), of which Stūre was a member; as well as several international projects and exhibitions of the early post-Soviet era.²⁷ Broader questions also emerge concerning the formation and trajectory of an archive as it transitions from private to public sphere. Additionally, it lays out the potential for combined research into the artistic and vernacular dimensions of photographic archives.

Who Has Come Here?

Agate Tūna also has a subjective and personal affinity for her chosen subject matter, although her methods differ greatly from those of Krauze-Slucka. Previously, Tūna has undertaken artistic investigations into the supernatural history of various generations of her family – which has included healers, fortune tellers, magicians and witches – linking it to broader social and photographic narratives.²⁸ Her work *Who Has Come Here?* is an investigation into historical practices of spirit and illusion photography in Latvia and their archival presence or non-presence. Framed images and large-scale hanging prints allude to paranormal phenomena like ectoplasms and

27 For example, the exhibition *Stepping out of Line* (curated by U.S. based photographer of Latvian origin Boriss Mangolds) showcased contemporary Latvian photography and toured several university galleries across the United States between 1992 and 1993.

28 For example, *The Order of Invisible Things* (2022). For more information on previous projects, see the artist's website: agatetuna.com [01.03.2025.].



Agate Tūna, *Who Has Come Here?*, 2024.

Photo by Sasha Komarova from the exhibition *Contemporary Histories of Photography I*

levitation, and the female body – that of the artist herself – takes center stage in a critical reinterpretation of disembodiment. The dense, layered, fragmented imagery evokes spectral disturbances that span both past and present; data-like visual patterns suggest disrupted or obscured knowledge systems, reinforcing the work's engagement with historical erasure and haunted memory.

Since its inception, photography has not only shown what-has-been, but also served as a medium for imagination and the suspension of belief. Ever since the mid-19th century, the new medium of photography became a natural ally not only of *memento mori* practices, but also of the trend of spiritism. Through the use of mysterious props and tricks – such as the materialization of spirits in the form of ectoplasm, table-turning, and levitation – glimpses of an unseen world were seemingly revealed. Rumors and scraps of knowledge suggested that well-known Latvian photographers of the interwar period – Voldemārs Priede (1880–1940) and Mārtiņš Buclers (1866–1944) – may have documented séances with renowned medium and photographer Eižens Finks (1885–1958).²⁹ However, the actual photographs have not yet been found. Venturing into existing archives as a starting point (including that of the Mystero Museum of Illusionism),³⁰ as well as speaking to historians and researchers – Tūna eventually adopted a strategy of speculative history, creating her own photographic versions of that which is missing from the archives. The resulting layered installation questions the historically tenuous relationship between photography and reality. Through referencing the spaces and tropes of spiritism practices, experimenting with physical trick photography, collages and analogue techniques, Tūna tests the boundaries of her own belief and that of exhibition viewers. Sections of the work also refer back to the nature of contemporary research, where visual information about historical esoteric practices circulates in the form of digital files online, often disconnected from their original sources, experiencing deformations and thus acquiring a new kind of aura.³¹

Tūna's exact field of research ranges from the seemingly paranormal and occult to staged magic, visual trickery, and “mistakes”. Spirit photography as a genre has not been researched in depth in Latvia. As such, it represents a wide array of other, overlooked uses of photography, that are ignored when examining the medium's development primarily through an art historical lens. Like Krauze-Slucka's work, which incorporates vernacular photography, Tūna also questions this hierarchy of images. The visual history of many fields remains unwritten and unexplored, with evidence waiting to be discovered within the collections of local memory

29 Tūna was given insight into these currently unverified rumors in collaboration with photography historian Katrīna Teivāne. See: Voldemārs Priede, *Timenote*. Available at: <https://timenote.info/lv/Priede-Voldemars> [01.03.2025.].

30 A private museum and collection in Riga, Latvia, owned by Enriko and Dace Pezzoli.

31 With reference to the influential and still relevant essay: Steyerl, Hito (2009). In *Defense of the Poor Image*. *E-flux*, issue 10. Available at: www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image [01.03.2025.].



Agate Tūna, *Who Has Come Here?*, 2024.

Photo by Sasha Komarova from the exhibition *Contemporary Histories of Photography I*

institutions. For example, Laine Kristberga reflects on the potential and challenges of working with photographic materials related to performance art in Latvia, often “sporadically scattered” across numerous private and institutional archives.³² Whereas, writing on photograph postcard collections, Līga Goldberga has commented on the hierarchical status of image collections, in which they are judged on authorship, aesthetic categories, and relation to art discourse. She also remarks that the work of curators and artists with archives can provide agency for hitherto marginalized image collections.³³ Curator Inga Lāce echoed this in her Purvītis Prize nomination of Tūna’s work, highlighting its global resonance and noting that it addresses “the marginal edges of the pages of history,” offering a way for Latvian photography to connect with wider international narratives.³⁴ Alongside broad notions of the ghostly, Jacques Derrida’s influential concept of hauntology³⁵ has gained currency within philosophy, popular culture, and contemporary since it was coined in 1993. More specifically, the active links between historical spirit photography and contemporary art practices of the 21st century have been commented on by various scholars, including Ben Burbridge³⁶ and Alison Ferris, who both highlight the potential of disrupting regimes of visibility and “reality” in our “contemporary, digitized, hypermediated world”³⁷ with its sophisticated, but often untrustworthy image-making technologies. Ferris concludes that representations of spirits can signpost forgotten, repressed, or buried aspects of history and culture that demand our attention and re-evaluation and this can be applied to Tūna’s work, in its focus on marginalized photographic histories, as well as the aspect of gender.³⁸

In the traditionally male-dominated field of photography, the female body has often been a source of pleasure for the male gaze. This echoes the gender imbalance of art history in general, which feminist scholars have been deconstructing for decades. Certain parallels can be drawn with the history of magic and illusion, in which the female body has often been used to demonstrate the power of the male magician – most

32 Kristberga, Laine (2025). Convergence of Performance Art, Photography, and Archival Practices. *Culture Crossroads*, No. 27, pp. 87-108.

33 Goldberga, Līga (2022). Postcards in the National Library of Latvia: Options for the Interpretation of Photographic Materials. *Letonica*, No. 46, p. 191.

34 Expert Nominations, *Purvītis Prize*, 2024. Available at: <https://purvisabalva.lv/en/ekspertu-nominacijas> [01.03.2025.].

35 In *Spectres of Marx* (1993), Derrida examined how Marxism continues to haunt Western society. This concept was later expanded and adapted to a broader cultural context, reflecting a state of historical rupture and convergence.

36 Burbridge, Ben (2013). The Ghosts of Media Past and Present: Spirit Photography and Contemporary Art. In: Mays, Sas; Matheson, Neil (Eds.). *The Machine and the Ghost: Technology and Spiritualism in Nineteenth-to Twenty-First-Century Art and Culture*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 158-179.

37 Ferris, Alison (2003). Disembodied Spirits: Spirit Photography and Rachel Whiteread’s Ghost. *Art Journal*, 62:3, p. 53.

38 Ibid.

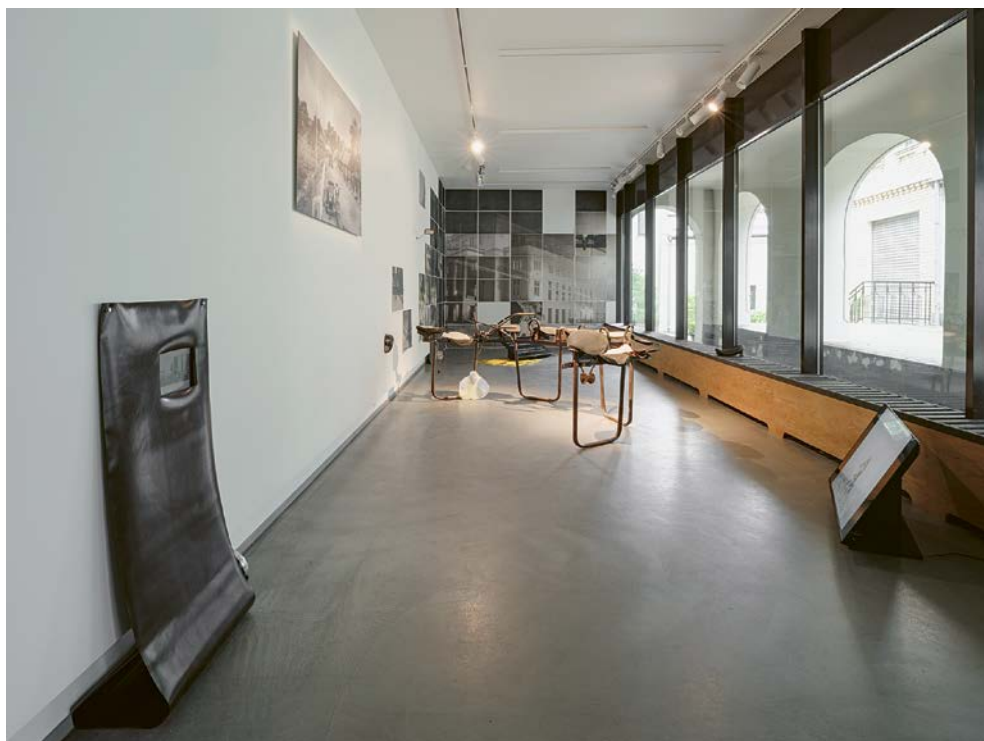
notably in the well-worn “sawing a woman in half” trick. Conversely, research into historical Western practices of spiritualism has shown the central role women have played as mediums and participants, transgressing social restrictions, stereotypes, and power imbalances of the time, although the records of this participation remain relatively obscure.³⁹ In her work, Tūna grapples with these complex, gendered histories of various fields, using her own body as a tool for personal and artistic research, in which she is at once photographer, model, and medium. *Who Has Come Here?* unfolds a double suspense – first by challenging the viewer’s belief due to the nature of the paranormal practices being investigated, and then through the strategy of speculative history, or a creative falsification. The work comments on the murky history of local esoteric and magic practices and their photographic representation, while also examining how the challenge to photographic “reality” extends into today’s technologically advanced media society. Thus, Tūna scratches a very personal itch as well as scratching the surface of a field ripe for further exploration.

Tūna and Krauze-Slucka’s exhibition was followed by the second in the cycle, featuring new work by artists Konstantin Zhukov and Annemarija Gulbe on their own personal choice of subject. Gulbe’s *As we gathered and watched, we were happy again* explored and built on the legacy of well-known director and cinematographer Uldis Brauns (1932–2017). His photographic archive is a rare and humanistically inclined documentary reflection of the post-war Latvian rural environment that remains underexplored and presents fertile ground for further research. Combining installation, video, and photography, she interrogated the intersection between documentary approaches and the poetic license of editing, and the role of images in constructing national identity. Gulbe’s geographical links to Brauns – they both hail from neighboring parishes in the Kurzeme region of Latvia – added an additional subjective angle to the material.

Meanwhile, Zhukov’s *Black Carnation: Case Study No. 1* was a continuation of his ongoing artistic research into queer histories in Latvia, this time using archival imagery from the interwar period and focusing on the Latvian National Opera as a stage, an urban locale, and a community. Historical queer and LGBT narratives remain largely omitted from mainstream cultural discourse and absent from official archives in Latvia, though in recent years scholars like Ineta Lipša, Jānis Ozoliņš, and Kārlis Vērdiņš have begun to weave them into the historical record.⁴⁰ Referencing

39 On the role of women in spiritualism movements, see, for example: Braude, Ann (2002). *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; and Owen, Alex (1990). *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

40 See, for example, recent articles: Ozoliņš, Jānis (2024). Accumulating Negative Affects: The Diary of the Soviet Latvian Film Director Gunārs Piesis. *Journal of the Institute of Latvian History*, 120(1), pp. 81–102; Vērdiņš, Kārlis (2024). Two Peters: Queer Domestic Space and Artist’s Sensibility in Soviet Latvia. *Journal of the Institute of Latvian History*, 120(1), pp. 103–121.



Exhibition *Contemporary Histories of Photography II*, 2024. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, Zhukov highlighted these unspoken and censored aspects of history – personal stories that are often invisible in family albums or official visual archives, but can rather be read between the lines.

Forming a visual and conceptual bridge between both cycles of the exhibition was the spatial design created by artist Liene Pavlovskā – furniture and textile elements printed in the historical cyanotype technique, forming another layer of interpretation for local photographic images from various periods.

Contemporary and Critical Histories: Challenges and Conclusions

Revisiting and re-evaluating the history of photography is a continuous and evolving process that is itself integral to the discipline. The *Contemporary Histories of Photography* exhibition series has actively contributed to the ongoing critical reassessment of photography's historiography, as reflected, for example, in several engaged and thoughtful long-form reviews published in local media, as well as the nomination of two of the participating artists (Tūna and Zhukov) for the biannual Purvītis Prize. However, the in-depth artistic research undertaken by the artists can nonetheless seem like a drop in the ocean of underexplored and often unseen local photographic history. Echoing other curators working with marginalized histories and disrupting canons, in the case of *Contemporary Histories*, it is rather possible to speak “not of a ‘record’ in social memory, but of an ‘imprint’ – a reminder, a mark, a vibration that makes us revisit history and can lead to new searches and discoveries, changing previous perceptions.”⁴¹ Other challenges included balancing speculative interpretations and contemporary, critical viewpoints of history with the need for a grounding in historical reality – not presenting a preferred or more seductive narrative, but rather acknowledging its complexity. The limited availability of archival materials further complicates the process (especially for artists inexperienced in archival research), as many photographs and documents are scattered, lost, or excluded from institutional archives, both due to the political shifts and turmoil of the 20th century, as well as specific practices of marginalization. Gaps and silences in historical records make reconstructing narratives a slow and overwhelming task, yet they can also spur creative solutions, as in the case of Tūna's speculative history. Finally, reconciling

41 Melgalve, Ieva; Silapētere, Andra (2022). Personisko arhīvu pārnese kultūras atmiņas laukā: izstādes "Atceros, tātad esmu" veidošanas pieredze. No: Teivāne, Katrīna; Tifentāle, Alise (atb. red.). *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Zinātniskie raksti, 9. (XXIX) sēj.: Meklējot metodes un materiālus: fotogrāfijas mantojums kultūras un mākslas vēstures pētniecībā*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, p. 251.

the subjective and situated nature of knowledge while ensuring its real applicability within a social and political context can be a balancing act.

By engaging with underexplored histories and incorporating feminist perspectives, the exhibition and its participating artists – including Krauze-Slucka and Tūna – demonstrated how artistic research, informed by curatorial strategy, can serve as a vital method for both illuminating obscure narratives and questioning the mechanisms that shape historical visibility. Their work underscores the fluidity of archives, the subjectivity inherent in versions of history, and the importance of a self-reflexive approach in historiographic practice. The exhibition project also highlights the need for sustained institutional research, continued dialogue and education to ensure that the traces of marginalized voices and histories are integrated into the broader cultural and scholarly landscape.

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LIĀNA IVETE ŽILDE

Mākslinieciskās un kuratoriālās intervences: refleksija par izstādi “Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures”

Kopsavilkums

Izstāžu cikls “Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures” no 2024. gada maija līdz augustam norisinājās ISSP Galerijā kā daļa no Rīgas Fotogrāfijas biennāles. Tas pievērsās epistemoloģijai un marginalizētām vēsturēm, pārklājoties mākslinieciskajai izpētei un kuratoriālajai stratēģijai. Pirmajā izstādē bija iekļauti divu laikmetīgo mākslinieču darbi: Kristīne Krauze-Slucka bija veikusi latviešu fotogrāfes Inas Stūres (1958–2006) arhīva izpēti, bet Agate Tūna – pievērsusies 20. gadsimta sākuma spirituālisma fotogrāfijai, izmantojot spekulatīvās vēstures stratēģiju. Abas mākslinieces līdzās citām tēmām pievērsa uzmanību dzimtes un sieviešu vēstures aspektiem. Viņu darbi, kā arī cikla otrās izstādes mākslinieku Annemarijas Gulbes un Konstantīna Žukova darbi piedāvāja jaunus skatpunktus, atziņas un pētniecības virzienus, vienlaikus veicinot kritisku Latvijas fotogrāfijas historiogrāfijas pārvērtēšanu un izaicinot ierastos naratīvus.

Var teikt, ka fotogrāfija Latvijas mākslas vēsturē bijusi atstāta novārtā daļēji tāpēc, ka padomju periodā tā kā mākslas medijs tika marginalizēta. Tomēr pēdējās desmitgadēs interese par fotogrāfijas pētniecību atdzimst, un izstāžu cikls “Mūsdienu fotogrāfijas vēstures” tika veidots kā daļa no šī procesa, apzinoties vēstures rakstīšanas sarežģītību un subjektivitāti. Rakstā, pievērsoties minēto izstāžu gadījuma izpētei, uzsvērta pašreflektīvas pieejas nozīme kuratoriālajā un historiogrāfiskajā praksē, akcentējot nepieciešamību turpināt pētniecību un dialogu, lai plašākā kultūras ainavā integrētu līdz šim nepamanītās balsis.

Atslēgvārdi: fotogrāfijas historiogrāfija, izstāde, dzimtes studijas, arhīvi, mākslinieciskā izpēte.

Raksts izstrādāts, īstenojot valsts pētījumu programmas “Letonika latviskas un eiropeiskas sabiedrības attīstībai” (2022-2024) projektu “Identitāšu ainavas: vēsture, kultūra un vide” (IDEUM) (Nr. VPP-LETONIKA-2021/1-0008).

KATRĪNA TEIVĀNE

Rethinking Women's Visibility in Early 20th-Century Latvian Photography: Women Photographers through the Latvian Photographic Society Traveling Album

Summary

This article examines the traveling album (1908) of the Latvian Photographic Society (LPS) as a key yet understudied document for understanding women's visibility and participation in early 20th-century Latvian photography. While photographic historiography in Latvia has long centered on canonical male practitioners and pictorialist aesthetics, the album reveals a more diverse and multilayered photographic field, shaped by the coexistence of professionals and amateurs, collective practices, and social networks. By analyzing the fragmentary contributions of Emilija Mergupe, Otilija Cers, Pauline Ķemere, and Natālija Rieksta, the article highlights the forms of authorship, embodied presence, and collaboration through which women participated in photographic culture. Using an approach that combines archival investigation with interpretative and theoretical perspectives on agency and heterochronic temporality, the article argues that women were not marginal to the photographic practices of the time; rather, their marginalization emerged through later canon-forming processes and uneven material preservation. The LPS traveling album thus becomes a critical point of departure for rethinking early Latvian photography, opening pathways to a more inclusive and multi-temporal historiography.

Keywords: Latvian Photographic Society (LPS), early Latvian photography, women photographers, visual culture, photographic archives, agency, heterochrony, pictorialism, gender and photography, photographic heritage.

Introduction

Research on early 20th-century Latvian photography has so far relied primarily on art-historical approaches – thematic or chronological typologization of images and formal analysis. Such methods have shaped a historical narrative centered on prominent works and authors, most often men whose legacies were preserved more fully and whose activities were documented within photographic organizations, particularly the Latvian Photographic Society (LPS), and reflected in the press.¹

With the founding of the LPS in 1906, its initiator and leader Mārtiņš Buclers (1866–1944) established a conceptual direction that deeply influenced subsequent understandings of photographic practice. In his publication *Photography as Art*² (1906), he combined practical guidance with the theoretical principles of pictorialism, situating local photography within the boundaries of artistic ambition and shaping how early photographic heritage has since been interpreted.

If the trajectories of male photographers can often be reconstructed through press coverage, preserved collections, or continuity into the interwar period, the study of women's contributions resembles an archaeological process. Recovering their presence still requires assembling fragments: scattered names, occasional references in the press, or individual works preserved in archives. The challenge is compounded by the limited survival of photographs from before the First World War, including those by men whose professional activities are nonetheless more reliably documented within the artistic or documentary discourses of the time.³

- 1 The most extensive published studies to date on photographers of the first half of the 20th century have focused on male authors – for example, Vilis Rīdzenieks and Roberts Johansons. See for more information: Teivāne, Katrīna (2022). *Roberts Johansons. Laikmets un fotogrāfija. [Roberts Johansons. Age and Photography]*. Rīga: Neputns; Teivāne-Korpa, Katrīna (Ed.) (2018). *Vilis Rīdzenieks*. Rīga: Neputns. The legacy of these authors is substantial and relatively well preserved, and the majority of it can be viewed together within the collection of the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation. Other studies on early 20th-century photographic history largely provide a general overview of the field or examine specific directions, such as the development of art photography, photo ethnography, certain photo establishments and their archives etc. In these works, women photographers are mentioned only fragmentarily, if at all, – not due to neglect, but because of limited access to information and surviving visual material. However, recent initiatives dedicated to uncovering and integrating women authors into photographic history have brought renewed attention to previously understudied collections, such as Marta Pļaviņa's glass-plate archive at the Aizkraukle Museum of History and Art.
- 2 Buclers, Mārtiņš (1906). *Fotogrāfija kā māksla [Photography as Art]*. *Stari*, No 1, pp. 3–10.
- 3 See for more information about the Latvian Photographic Society: Zeile, Pēteris (sast.) (1985). *Latvijas fotomāksla: Vēsture un mūsdienas [Latvian Photography: History and Today]*. Rīga: Liesma; Kļaviņš, Eduards (2014). *The Origins of Art Photography*. In: Kļaviņš, Eduards (Ed.). *Art History of Latvia: Period of Neo-Romanticist Modernism. 1890–1915*. Vol. 4. Rīga: Institute of Art History of the Latvian Academy of Art; Art History Research Support Foundation, pp. 396–403; Teivāne-Korpa, Katrīna (2016). *Photographic Art*. In: Kļaviņš, Eduards (Ed.). *Art History of Latvia: Period of Classical Modernism and Traditionalism. 1915–1940*. Vol. 5. Rīga: Institute of Art History of the Latvian Academy of Art; Art History Research Support Foundation, pp. 435–469.

For this reason, women's presence is usually examined from multiple angles: (1) their work as professionals and amateurs; (2) their collaboration with or support for male family members engaged in photography; (3) their roles as archivists and custodians of visual heritage; and (4) their representation within photographs themselves. This peripheral position, however, is precisely what highlights the need to broaden research methods and to include marginal or fragmentary materials that invite a reconsideration of established historical narratives. Accordingly, the article addresses women's participation and visibility in early Latvian photography by examining the LPS's 1908 traveling album as a primary source and contextualizing it through insights drawn from the Society's Second Collective Photographic Exhibition, also held in 1908.

Methodologically, this article combines visual analysis with archival micro-history.⁴ The LPS traveling album is approached both as a curated object – shaped by institutional rules, aesthetic values, and the ambitions of its contributors – and as a historical trace that reveals social networks, patterns of participation, and the uneven visibility of certain practitioners. By interpreting the album alongside press texts, exhibition reviews, and biographical fragments, the article employs a relational method: women's presence is reconstructed not only through surviving images but also through silences, omissions, and indirect evidence. This approach situates the album within a wider ecology of sources, acknowledging the fragmentary nature of the archive while using these gaps to illuminate the structural conditions that shaped early photographic culture.

In this article, the LPS traveling album is highlighted as a documentary source that reflects the society's activities and the ideas it promoted, while simultaneously providing evidence about authors, the period, and the photographic community. Taken as a whole, it offers a broader view of the photographic environment of the early 20th century than is possible when focusing solely on artistic, salon, or documentary practices.

Most importantly, the album brings to light marginal aspects – particularly women's participation and visibility. Among the thirty-two respondents, it includes works by only two women, yet this fragmentary record prompts essential questions about women's roles in photography and how their (in)visibility was inscribed into the visual and institutional landscape of the time.

Three interrelated thematic directions thus lie at the center of the article: early 20th-century photography in Latvia, women's roles and presence within this environment, and the photographic album as a research object. To situate these

4 Levi, Giovanni (1991). On Microhistory. In: Burke, Peter (Ed.). *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 93–113; Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi; Szijártó, M. István (2013). *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

aspects within broader historical perception, it is essential to consider the theoretical perspectives through which women's contributions can become visible.

Approaching Marginal Materials

Writing about the exhibition *Silver Girls. Retouched History of Photography* (2020),⁵ curator Šelda Puķīte identifies a central challenge in Latvian photography historiography: although canons tend to dominate the field, they are continually disrupted by initiatives that foreground marginal or overlooked perspectives, such as the history of women photographers.⁶ While this may seem destabilizing, it opens the possibility for more flexible, inclusive narratives not bound to rigid methodological frameworks.

This insight is crucial for reconstructing the photographic landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is largely known through institutionally structured sources – especially the activities of LPS members. Incorporating themes such as women's participation, their historical invisibility, and the fragmentary evidence of their work challenges canon-formation and reveals photography as a socially embedded, contested field. Empirical material and theoretical concepts are inseparable here: the history of photography emerges through interpretive processes that combine documentation, meaning-making, and subjective looking.

Women's presence becomes visible through both archival fragments and later scholarly attempts to reinterpret these traces. Art historian Inta Pujāte, in her dissertation *Photography in Latvia at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Century (Fotogrāfija Latvijā 19. gadsimta beigās un 20. gadsimta sākumā)*,⁷ offers one of the first systematic surveys of women's involvement, drawing on press materials, Baltic German women photographers, and LPS membership records. According to archival membership-fee receipts, around twenty-five women were active in the LPS before the First World War – roughly one-fifth of all members.⁸ In 1913, the LPS

5 The exhibition, curated by Šelda Puķīte alongside with Indrek Grigor, was dedicated to early Latvian and Estonian women photographers. It was on view at the Tartu Art Museum from 12 June to 27 September 2020. For more information, see the exhibition catalogue: Puķīte, Šelda; Grigor, Indrek (Eds.) (2020). *Höbetüdrukud: fotograafia retušeeritud ajalugu = Sudrabmeitenes : fotogrāfijas retušētā vēsture = Silver girls: retouched history of photography*. [Rīga]: Blind Carbon Copy; [Tartu]: Tartu Kunstimuuseum.

6 Puķīte, Šelda (2022). Izstāde "Sudrabmeitenes. Fotogrāfijas retušētā vēsture" kā platforma sieviešu vēstures aktualizēšanai un fotogrāfijas identitātes pārskatīšanai [Exhibition "Silver Girls. Retouched History of Photography" as a Platform for Mobilizing Womens History and Revisiting Photography's Identity]. No: Teivāne, Katrīna; Tifentāle, Alise (atb. red.). *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Zinātniskie raksti, 9. (XXIX) sēj.: Meklējot metodes un materiālus: fotogrāfijas mantojums kultūras un mākslas vēstures pētniecībā*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, p. 228.

7 Pujāte, Inta (2023). Sievietes fotogrāfes [Women Photographers]. No: *Fotogrāfija Latvijā 19. gadsimta beigās un 20. gadsimta sākumā [Photography in Latvia at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Century]*. Promocijas darbs. Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija, pp. 52–58.

8 Ibid, p. 55.

Women Members' Committee was established with plans to organize exhibitions, although these were interrupted by the war.⁹ While the numbers are small, they clearly demonstrate that women were active participants in both amateur and professional photographic circles.

Rare examples of contemporary self-reflection further illuminate how women's photographic practice was perceived. A 1906 article titled *Woman in the Field of Painting With Light (Zhenshchina v oblasti svetopisi)*¹⁰ in the publication of the Russian Photo Club founded in Riga describes the rapid increase of women in photographic societies as evidence of photography's accessibility and its appeal across social boundaries. Significantly, the Russian language text (the publication most probably is a translation from another language, probably German) itself explicitly allows for the possibility that the author might be a woman – there is a nuance present (*ya nablyudala zhenshin*) that foregrounds female authorship as a conceivable position within the field. The text praises women's attentiveness, precision, and sensitivity – qualities seen as particularly suited to photographic work – while simultaneously reproducing familiar gender stereotypes. Yet, whether written by a woman or not, the article articulates an early notion of female agency grounded not in institutional power but in aesthetic awareness and the enjoyment of process.

These historical traces demonstrate that the history of photography emerges at the intersection of empirical evidence and interpretation, where material traces become carriers of meaning. Such an interpretative perspective can be further developed by examining how similar shifts in meaning and the active role of the image are discussed in contemporary art history theory. This is particularly important when reassessing women's presence in the photographic field. For example, ideas explored by Matthew Rampley¹¹ and Keith Moxey allow us to perceive the article *Woman in the Field of Painting With Light* as a key point that connects questions of gender and visuality with a broader theoretical debate. As Rampley emphasizes, drawing on Moxey, the artwork should be understood as an active agent in the formation of its own reception. This argument is supported by historiographical examples that address the diversity of understandings of agency and forms of interpretation in art history. In this context, Rampley's and Moxey's views are particularly productive for approaching materials that are fragmentary or historically underrepresented. They provide a way to understand how objects like the LPS traveling album continue to act within the present, generating meanings that exceed the limited archival traces

9 More about the committee and its intended activities: [Anon.] (1914). LFB Biedreņu komiteja [LPS Women Members committee]. *Stari*, No. 3–4, pp. 118–120.

10 [Anon.] (1906). Zhenshchina v oblasti svetopisi [Woman in the Field of Painting With Light]. *Fotograficheskoye Iskusstvo [Photographic Art]*, No. 1, pp. 9–13.

11 Rampley, Matthew (2021). Agency, Affect and Intention in Art History: Some Observations. *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 24, p. 1.

and canon-based narratives through which we usually know the history of Latvian photography, particularly those relating to women's participation.

The trans-historical concept is highlighted, pointing out that historical time is not unified or universal, but heterochronic – unfolding at different tempos in different places. This means that art history faces a challenging insight: the very foundation of history is not linear or homogeneous, but rather multilayered and fragmented. Rampley complements this with the conclusion that:

Societies do not change and develop at a uniform rate and in a uniform manner; in the place of a single narrative that can encompass all societies on a global scale, one has to contend with the irreducible plurality of histories at a local scale. On the other, it means that the works of art themselves are in possession of properties that enable them to transcend the temporal limits of the time of their making.¹²

An artwork, through its aesthetic impact, is not confined to the specific historical moment in which it was created. More significant than its placement within a linear historical trajectory is its capacity to become present in aesthetic experience at any time. In this sense, photography as a visual and material object also embodies an experience of multitemporality – simultaneously containing the moment of its creation, the situation of viewing, and the time of interpretation.

The experience of multitemporality can also be understood at the level of perception, where the sensation of time becomes inseparable from aesthetic interaction. Estelle Barrett's concept of the performativity of the aesthetic image is particularly useful here: unlike images that operate through established symbolic codes and serve informational aims, the aesthetic image emerges through sensory processes and introduces ambiguity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy.¹³ Through this lens, photography becomes a connector of times – a visual and material medium that continually reactivates itself in the encounter between the moment of creation, the situation of viewing, and the temporal layers of interpretation that follow.

In this light, the LPS traveling album becomes a concrete site of such temporal and interpretive convergence. Its images operate between document and memory, aesthetics and affect, visibility and erasure. Within this space, the fragmented presence of women photographers gains renewed significance, entering a multi-temporal dialogue that reshapes how early Latvian photography can be understood.

12 Ibid, p. 11.

13 Barrett, Estelle (2013). *Materiality, Affect, and the Aesthetic Image*. In: Estelle Barrett; Barbara Bolt (Eds.). *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a "New Materialism" through the Arts*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris, p. 63

The Traveling Album

Baiba Teterē, curator of the exhibition *The Photo Album – A Subjective Narrative* (*Fotoalbums – subjektīvs naratīvs*)¹⁴ discusses the specificity of the photo album as material and its marginal status in the study of photographic history:

It should be noted that art and photography history research has not been focusing attention on the photo album as an object, a medium, nor has it been integrated in the memory environment and studied as a sovereign entity. Following the changes of the photography medium and the dominance of digital technologies, only in the last decade the complex nature of a photo album has become of interest for the interdisciplinary studies.¹⁵

The LPS traveling album – also a marginal material – has likewise received only sporadic scholarly attention.¹⁶ Teterē's observation about the photo album as a little-studied medium, only recently foregrounded in interdisciplinary contexts, highlights an important perspective on this documentary material as well. It testifies to an early understanding of the album as a form of photographic circulation.

In the first issue of 1908 of the LPS's official magazine *Stari* (*Rays*),¹⁷ a notice appeared stating that the LPS planned to introduce a traveling photo album with the aim of fostering members' professional development, mutual acquaintance, and the exchange of ideas.¹⁸ Inspired by similar practices in England, the initiative envisioned members participating in the album's circulation by inserting two works each time

14 The exhibition was on view as part of the Riga Photography Biennial 2022 program from 13 May to 11 September 2022 at the Latvian Museum of Photography.

15 Exhibition *The Photo Album – a Subjective Narrative* (2022). Available at: www.rigamuz.lv/lfm/en/exhibitions/archive/the-photo-album/ [19.08.2025.].

16 The album was brought back into circulation through art historian and curator Šelda Puķīte's recent research on women's photography in Latvia, conducted for the exhibition *Silver Girls: The Retouched History of Baltic Photography*. The exhibition continued the 2020 project *Silver Girls: Retouched History of Photography* and focused on early women photographers from Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Curated by Šelda Puķīte, Agnē Narušytė, and Indrek Grigor, it was on view at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius from 18 March to 15 June 2025. Available at: www.lndm.lt/nauja-pavasario-sezono-paroda-sidabro-merginos-retusuota-baltijos-saliu-fotografijos-istorija-nacionalineje-dailes-galerijoje/?lang=en [07.11.2025.].

17 In the context of development of national school of photography, the official magazine of the LPS, *Stari*, played a significant role. In its first publication period – from 1906 to 1908 – it functioned primarily as an arts and literature magazine with a section for photography. This editorial structure served to attract a broader readership, to familiarise the public with the “new” art form, and to situate photography within the desired framework of the arts. In its second publication period – from 1912 to 1914 – *Stari* appeared as a journal devoted exclusively to the promotion of practical and artistic photography. With the first issue of this renewed series, the importance of ethnographic photography and the journal's role in fostering it were particularly emphasised.

18 *Biedrības valde* (1908). *Latviešu fotogrāfiskā biedrība ierīko ceļojošu albumu* [The Latvian Photographic Society establishes a traveling album]. *Stari*, No. 1, pp. 111–112.

the album was sent on. Each image had to be accompanied by detailed technical information: the type of glass-plate negative used, exposure time, developer composition, type of printing paper, and toning method. The captions for the photographs were to contain technical information only. Several albums were intended to be created and circulated simultaneously – depending on the number of subscribers – with each album undertaking two journeys per year. Participants had to apply in writing to the society's board to join the initiative.

The practical circulation of the album was carefully formalized, and its movement was to be overseen and regulated by the society's secretary. Shipping, insurance, and communication followed a specified procedure and were carried out at the members' expense. The album travelled among subscribers in a wooden box, accompanied by postcards for communication with the album secretary, a travel log, and the contact information of the next recipient. Upon receiving the album, the subscriber was required to notify the secretary by sending a postcard indicating when and in what condition the album had been received, as well as to report if any works not meeting the required technical standards had been added.

Describing the concept and significance of the album in the early 20th century, photography historian Pēteris Korsaks highlighted the idea – already mentioned in *Stari* – that it served as an alternative means of exhibiting photographs at a time when exhibitions were rare and visually illustrated periodicals were scarce. He also emphasized its pedagogical role, especially for amateurs living in peripheral areas:

One of the working methods practiced by the Latvian Photographic Society was traveling albums. Each author pasted in their best work and sent it on by post. Thus, once the album had visited the members of the society living across Latvia, it became a traveling photo exhibition in which the greatest beneficiary was the final viewer.¹⁹

Overall, the album presents a wide thematic and stylistic spectrum, encompassing artistic photographs aligned with the pictorialist movement, documentary images, and photographs that could be described as vernacular. The subjects are primarily landscapes and portraits, ethnographic-type scenes, as well as photographs of buildings and groups of people. The structure of the album was simple – each author placed two photographs on their page.

Eighteen photographers represented the capital city. In the first pages we find images by the head of the LPS, Mārtiņš Buclers, as well as those by Voldemārs Priede (1880–1940) and Arnolds Cālītis (1883–1972), which – judging from the available

19 Korsaks, Pēteris (1987). Par ģimenes albumiem. Un ne tikai [On family albums – and more]. *Padomju Daugava*, 10.01., p. 3.

documentation – were inserted before the album began its circulation. The album's actual journey started on 15 April 1908 with Fricis Cielavs. It then reached several Riga members, including Jānis Rieksts (1881–1970), Oskars Jankovskis (1872–?), Mārtiņš Lapiņš (1873–1954), Roberts Johansons (1877–1957), and Emīlija Mergupe (1885–1972). Also noteworthy is the name of Mārtiņš Teodors Ķemers (1877–1920), the father of painter and pastor Miervaldis Ķemers (1902–1980). Beyond Riga, the album's journey included photographers from Valka, Rūjiena, Saliēna, Aizpute, Kastrāne, Līvāni, Koknese, Kābile, and Bauska district.

Some of the most striking works in the album are those by Jānis Rieksts – expressive examples of pictorialism. In one of the images, judging from other sources, his wife Natālija Rieksta (1885–1967) may be depicted. It is a close-up portrait showing a woman next to what appears to be a bust of Socrates. The second work is a landscape from Sigulda with an intense green tint – added during the printing process – which gives it a watercolor-like appearance. Rieksts's page also provoked reactions from viewers. Respondent Kārlis Spuriņš from Saliēna added a comment to the album, noting that he drew inspiration from the works of Riga photographers, yet could not understand these two images, comparing them to “the decadent trend in fiction.”²⁰

Several other works stand out stylistically as well: Mārtiņš Bērziņš's view from a hillside with an expressive rhythm of road and trees; J. Ļubmanis's photographs featuring a mother and daughter in a cemetery and a rural landscape in which the clouds have been artificially drawn into the sky; and J. Bratiško's image from Arkādija Park showing a family by a waterfall. In Bratiško's second photograph – taken during an LPS excursion to Photographers' Hill in 1908 – a group of LPS members is depicted. The central composition features only one woman: Emīlija Mergupe.

An intimate moment of motherhood is captured in the photograph by Mārtiņš Teodors Ķemers, depicting his wife, also a photographer, Pauline Ķemere (1876–1942), feeding their newborn daughter. The following pages feature other members and their works: Mārtiņš Lapiņš's toned landscape and a portrait of the artist Ivan Tikhomirov (*Иван Тихомиров*, 1867 – 1933); Roberts Johansons's exemplary pictorialist work – a portrait of an old man executed in carbon print technique; and an ethnographically themed image of a woman watering furrows.

Emīlija Mergupe's page contains two portraits of a young woman – one taken in a garden, the other in an interior. Among the women members, only the works of the amateur photographer Otilija Cers from Ļaudona are preserved: a snapshot of a little girl in a pasture and a group photograph of schoolchildren from Ļaudona. Another woman, Berta Viģure from Līvāni, appears in the list of respondents, but it can be assumed that she did not include her photographs, likely unsure of their

20 LPS *Traveling Album* (1908). Library of the University of Latvia, Misiņš Library, [uncatalogued material].

quality. This is indirectly suggested by Buclers's remark: "Only one subscriber was so shy that, after holding on to the album for a whole month, the subscriber sent it on without adding a single photograph."²¹

At the end of the album, landscapes and everyday scenes dominate. Particularly notable are the works of Vilis Šņore – a photograph of a nurse beside a patient's bed, and a winter scene in which damage to the negative and specific toning create an experimental, almost color-photograph effect.

A review of the album's 1908 circulation indicates that its exchange among members proceeded unevenly: in Riga it circulated for roughly seven months, while in the regions it tended to be delayed, remaining with some members for as long as a year and a half.²² After its journey – which ultimately lasted two years – the album was deposited in the society's library²³ as a "particularly interesting document"²⁴ and preserved as a permanent part of the LPS collection.

In 1909, at the members' request, a second traveling album was created, yet it reached only a few Riga members: Buclers, Mergupe, Cālītis, Rieksts, and Kārlis Ezerģailis (1872–1924). After that, its circulation came to a halt. Despite this setback, the LPS repeatedly attempted to revive the initiative, calling on members to participate once more. However, the endeavor was never successfully realized.

The LPS traveling album becomes a significant research source, allowing one to quite literally *touch* the history of photography. It reveals the mechanisms of photographic circulation and the culture of visibility in the early 20th century, helps reassess the meanings of images, and highlights both women's and men's participation, as well as the institutional structures and aesthetic choices that shaped photographic practice at the time. The album's narrative is further enriched by a specific event—the LPS Second Collective Photographic Exhibition. This exhibition testifies to photography's visibility in the public sphere as a collective undertaking evaluated by a jury and its viewers, while also drawing attention to the presence of women.

21 [Anon.] (1914). Vēlreiz "ceļojošais albums" [Once again on the 'traveling album']. *Stari*, No. 10-12, pp. 314-315.

22 Ibid, p. 315.

23 The LPS began compiling publications for the library's needs shortly after the association was founded. The collection was regularly supplemented through both purchases and donations. For example, the LPS library book list published in 1910 lists 209 publications. Among them are several issues of the magazines *Photographische Rundschau*, *Photographische Mitteilungen*, and *Der Amateur-Photograph* (mostly older issues), *Die Photographische Kunst*, and other publications in German, which are mostly related to technical information. There are also some materials in Russian – textbooks and individual issues of the magazines *Fotograf Lyubitel* [*Amateur Photographer*] and *Fotograficheskoye Iskusstvo* [*Photographic Art*]. The library had catalogs of the most important exhibitions in which the LPS participated. The collection also included special sets of works by members. For example, the library also held an album of portraits of Latvian writers created by photographer Jānis Rieksts and designed by painter, writer and amateur photographer Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš in honor of Leo Tolstoy's anniversary, as well as a collection of works exhibited at the LPS exhibition in 1910. For more see: [Anon.] (1910). *Latviešu fotogrāfiskā biedrība. Bibliotēkas grāmatu saraksts* [*Latvian Photographic Society. Library book list*]. [Rīga: n. p].

24 Vēlreiz "ceļojošais albums" [Once again on the 'traveling album'], p. 315.

The Latvian Photographers' Society Exhibition in Sigulda

The LPS Second Collective Photographic Exhibition took place on 1–2 June 1908 during a members' excursion to Sigulda, held in Buclers's photographic studio near the so-called Photographers' Hill.²⁵ Judging from an image preserved in the Latvian Museum of Photography, the excursion was widely attended by professional and amateur photographers as well as other interested visitors.

For the exhibition, two thematic categories were established: *landscapes and events* and *family photography*. The board placed particular emphasis on the latter, highlighting portraiture as an expression of Latvian identity. A telling explanation of this perspective can be found, for example, in a 1914 article dedicated to family and portrait photography:

Amateurs must move from photographing streets and buildings to documenting people, for it is not streets but the human being who is the maker of history. Every person should strive to leave to their descendants the history of their ancestry and of their own development, with which they are bound by unbreakable ties. This will lead to a deeper understanding of one's own life, to respecting and loving one's homeland and place of living, and to elevating one's sense of family.²⁶

The painter Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, an LPS member and a juror of this exhibition, noted in his review that the exhibition was of a fairly good level – “certainly not lower than the level of the recent exhibition of the Russian Club²⁷ in Riga.”²⁸ He also offered a general critique of the formal execution of the works on display – including those created by women. Among the now-classic male photographers, the painter highlighted the names of Emīlija Baumane (1876–1950), Emīlija Mergupe, and Natālija Rieksta. Baumane's and Rieksta's contributions are described succinctly: “Ms. Baumane has many smaller works, all of equal value, and that value is high. The same can be said of Ms. Rieksta.”²⁹

25 [Anon.] (1908). Paziņojums Latviešu Fotogrāfiskās Biedrības biedriem [Announcement to the Members of the Latvian Photographic Society]. *Stari*, No. 3, pp. 20–21.

26 [Anon.] (1914). Ģimene un ģimietne [Family and Portraiture]. *Stari*, No. 3–4, pp. 68–69.

27 The international exhibition organised by the Russian Photo Club took place from 5 to 17 April 1908. LPS was represented there with 200 works. Although the exhibition was generally highlighted as an important event in the local photographic scene, the available commentary is largely critical due to various organisational shortcomings. For more see: [Anon.] (1908). Apskats par “Krievu Fotokluba” sarīkoto starptautisko izstādi Rīgā [Review of the international exhibition organized by the Russian Photo Club in Riga]. *Stari*, No. 4, p. 27.

28 Jaunsudrabiņš, Jānis (1908). Fotogrāfiskā izstāde Siguldā [Photographic Exhibition in Sigulda]. *Latvija*, 21.06., p. 5.

29 Ibid.



Unknown author, *The Latvian Photographic Society's excursion to 'Photographers' Hill', 1908.*
Latvian Museum of Photography, LFM 22486

His assessment of Mergupe is more detailed: “Ms. Mergupe has all outdoor shots. Portraits with various beautiful background planes which, despite their weakness, do not interfere.”³⁰ In this case, “weakness” most likely refers to softness (lack of sharpness) rather than criticism of technical execution. In any case, the evaluation criteria for both men and women primarily concerned technical execution and the aesthetic impression of composition.

Several awards were planned for the best works in the exhibition, including audience-favorite prizes. As with the album, it was decided that the awarded works would be included in the LPS library collection. Importantly, several awarded images were among those found in the traveling album. This is confirmed by the dates of photograph placement noted in the respondents’ registry. For example, the first prize went to Mārtiņš Lapiņš for the portrait of the painter Tikhomirov, which can be seen in the album; the second prize went to Johanson “for a bearded old man,” which is also likely the pictorialist portrait of an elderly man included in the album.³¹

The only prize-winning woman was Emīlija Baumanē, “for her commendable works in general,”³² although her photographs are not found in the album. For other works, it is more difficult to confirm a direct connection between the exhibition and the album, but based on Jaunsudrabiņš’s description, this may also have applied to Emīlija Mergupe’s photographs.

In the exhibition review published in *Stari*, an author – most likely Buclers – also highlights Emīlija Mergupe’s contribution in particular, writing: “Among the new directions one must also note Ms. Mergupe’s outdoor photographs, which will always leave a better impression on an aesthetically minded viewer than photographs taken against an artificially painted backdrop.”³³

In this context, it is worth mentioning that a year earlier, in his article *Portrait*,³⁴ Buclers had written extensively about photographing people in the open air. On one hand, he believed that such images gained additional value through their informational or documentary aspect, which he called their ethnographic significance and which, in the studio, is lost behind draped backdrops. Moreover, photographing outside the studio – where “all work proceeds cleanly and mechanically” – was regarded, given the technical limitations of the time, as evidence of a photographer’s higher level of skill.

The exhibition and the album together offer evidence of how women’s participation in photographic circulation formed in the early 20th century. The following case studies illuminate different aspects of this presence.

30 Ibid.

31 [Anon.] (1908). Latviešu fotogrāfiskās biedrības II savstarpējā fotogrāfiskā izstāde. Siguldā 1. un 2. jūnijā 1908. g. [The Latvian Photographic Society’s Second Mutual Photographic Exhibition. Sigulda, 1–2 June 1908]. *Stari*, No. 4, p. 24.

32 Ibid.

33 Latviešu fotogrāfiskās biedrības II savstarpējā fotogrāfiskā izstāde. Siguldā 1. un 2. jūnijā 1908. g. [The Latvian Photographic Society’s Second Mutual Photographic Exhibition. Sigulda, 1–2 June 1908], p. 24.

34 Buclers, Mārtiņš (1907). Portreja [Portraiture]. *Stari*, No. 5, p. 395.

Emīlija Mergupe (1885–1972)

The works by Emīlija Mergupe found in the LPS traveling album are attributed to 1908 and are among the few of her pieces known today. In both photographs, the same young woman appears in different settings, clearly demonstrating the author's ability to produce high-quality images both outdoors and indoors. This aspect gains particular significance in light of Buclers's previously mentioned article *Portrait*, in which he praises the skill of creating images outside the studio, as it requires dealing with lighting conditions that are more difficult to control.

In one of the photographs, the young woman sits on a tree stump in a garden or park with an open notebook in her hands, with a soft, painterly continuation of the park landscape in the background. Based on Buclers's and Jaunsudrabiņš's descriptions of Mergupe's works shown in the exhibition, this could be one of the pieces displayed in the Sigulda show. In the second photograph, the young woman appears in profile, sitting indoors, presumably near a window. Both images feature a harmonious composition and a poetic mood, enhanced by their moderate tonal range. In the outdoor image, this takes the form of a delicate balance of light and grey tones, creating a dreamy depth of space and a gentle hint of melancholy. In the second photograph, the nuanced dark tonal range evokes a sense of quiet and deep contemplation. The technical description notes that the work *Indoors* is a colored platinum print. It should be added that platinum prints were particularly favored by pictorialists for their wide tonal scale and exceptional durability.

In both the outdoor and indoor photographs, the woman is shown in a moment of contemplation. Her pose is concentrated rather than theatrical. The quiet and calm atmosphere allows these works to be viewed within the context of pictorialist aesthetics, where tonality and nuanced light serve to reveal an inner state. Yet Mergupe's approach appears personal. She does not simply employ the conventions of the period but intuitively shapes the image of a woman as self-sufficient and self-aware – someone who exists in her own world, rather than being constructed for an objectifying gaze.

A broader sense of Mergupe's perspective is offered by a 1913 photograph depicting her sister with her family. This image differs from the works included in the album through its more pronounced narrative presence and emotional tension. The woman occupies the central position in the composition, yet her distant pose and averted gaze contrast with the presence of the other family members. The husband, holding a rifle, is positioned slightly further back, while the children appear at the edge of the frame. This arrangement creates an inner tension between belonging and separation, between the woman's social role and her individual presence. The image also conveys its historical context – the looming premonitions of the First World War and the growing societal tension between tradition and modernity.



Emilija Mergupe, *In the Garden*, 1908. From: LPS Traveling Album.
Library of the University of Latvia, Misiņš Library [uncatalogued material]



Emilija Mergupe, *Indoors*, 1908. From: LPS Traveling Album.
Library of the University of Latvia, Mišņiņš Library [uncatalogued material]

The photographer's activity is a vivid example of women's participation in the photographic field of the early 20th century. It demonstrates women's professional parity with their male colleagues and marks a shift in the development of photography as a creative practice. Born in Mālpils parish, Mergupe took part in the events of the 1905 revolution in her youth, giving speeches and experiencing persecution. She found refuge in Riga, where she began working at Mārtiņš Buclers's photo factory, later becoming its manager for a time. Mergupe was also one of the first women to join the LPS. She actively participated in the society's activities, took part in international exhibitions and competitions, and received recognition for her work.³⁵

Mergupe's professional independence, public engagement, and personal lifestyle mark her as a striking *femme forte* figure in the context of Latvian modernity. This is further underscored by the fact that she appears in the traveling album among Riga's photographers, whose professionalism served as a model for amateur members in the regions. Although little is known about Mergupe's artistic intentions, her works and biography suggest the emergence of female self-determination and professional identity in the early stages of Latvian photography. Viewed in the context of her life story, the images discussed here encourage us to see Mergupe not only as an author but also as a figure symbolizing women's presence and creative agency within the processes of modernity.

Mergupe's significance was also recognized in later years. She is the only woman included in Aivars Freimanis's short film *Putniņa izlidošana* (*Watch the Birdie*, 1979), which is dedicated to the development of photography in Latvia and thus was shown in the exhibition *Silver Girls. Retouched History of Baltic Photography* (2025). At the time, the press wrote:

Jānis Rieksts, Vilis Rīdzenieks, Emīlija Mergupe, Mārtiņš Buclers – these names cannot be found in the Latvian SSR *Small Encyclopedia*. Yet they are precisely the people whose photographs have brought to the present day, often as the only possible and authentic visual material, the past of our nation and who already then, at the turn of the century, proved the artistic value of photography.³⁶

Photographer Krišjānis Vīburs, recalling his memories, mentions that after the First World War, when he returned to Latvia, Mergupe “immediately returned to her beloved work – preparing photographic plates – and a few years later also produced photographic paper, a very low-sensitivity chlorosilver paper, which, when developed,

35 See for more information on Mergupe's biography: Emīlija Mergupe. In: Puķīte, Šelda; Narušytė, Agnė; Grigor, Indrek (Eds.) (2025). *Silver Girls. Retouched History of Baltic Photography*. Vilnius: NoRoutine Books, pp. 148-157.

36 Jureviča, D. (1980). Dokumentālo filmu ekrāns [Documentary film screen]. *Padomju Druva*, 08.01., p. 4.



Emilija Mergupe, *Sister Anna with Family*, 1913. Courtesy of the private archive of Pēteris Korsaks



Otilija Cers, *At Pasture*, 1908. From: LPS Traveling Album.
Library of the University of Latvia, Misiņš Library [uncatalogued material]

yielded a very beautiful blue tone.”³⁷ Vīburs remembered her as a knowledgeable and helpful master who explained a great deal about the field of photography.

The photographer’s works have also been exhibited in *Silver Girls: The Retouched History of Photography* and *Silver Girls: The Retouched History of Baltic Photography*. These are among the most significant recent initiatives dedicated to uncovering and integrating women’s contributions into the history of photography, examining them not only within the context of Latvia but also on a Baltic scale. Likewise, Emīlija Mergupe, alongside Paulīne Ķemere, is one of the only early 20th-century photographers included in the ISSP-edited publication *A Visual History of Photography in Latvia* (in progress at the time of writing).

Although Mergupe’s legacy has survived only in fragments, it marks an essential thread in shaping the understanding of Latvia’s photographic history.

Otīlija Cers³⁸

In the LPS traveling album, works by only one other woman – the amateur photographer Otīlija Cers from Ļaudona – are found. One photograph depicts a grazing scene, the other shows a group of Ļaudona schoolchildren outdoors, settled around tree roots. The images captured by Cers outline a documentary, vernacular line of everyday life, marked by a noticeably personal vision. They are not as technically accomplished as Emīlija Mergupe’s works and can be categorized as amateur photography. However, it is worth pausing at the grazing image, which stands out both for its composition and for the way it foregrounds the dimension of prehistoricity highlighted by Rampley. Similar to Mergupe’s 1913 photograph of her sister’s family, the image here offers today’s viewer broader possibilities for interpretation than a work strictly corresponding to a specific period style or aesthetic.

The photograph shows a forest-edge scene with a herd, a girl, and herding dogs in a stand of fir trees. Soft, diffuse light creates a quiet, everyday yet poetic atmosphere. The technical note next to the aperture reads “instantaneous.” This term most likely indicates a short exposure time and characterizes the work as a snapshot rather than a long-posed image. The girl is placed at the center of the composition; she looks sideways, as if pausing in thought. This figure, on one hand, aligns with the pictorialist portrait tradition – the pose and facial expression evoke a dreamlike mood – but on the other hand surprises with its modernity. Her light hair, pinned up and slightly loose, and her dress with light-colored appliqué braids could just as well belong to the second half of the 20th century. The girl carries a small pouch on her arm, and in her hands held close to her chest she appears to hold some knitting or crochet work.

37 Pētersonē, Vita (1990). Krišjāņa Vībura fotolaiks [Krišjānis Vīburs's photo time]. *Izglītība*, 13.07., p. 8.

38 The dates of birth and death are unknown.

The grazing scene is not approached here in a classical manner – through literary sentimentality or an idealization of national character – but rather in an everyday way, with a slight mythical undertone. The image foregrounds the relationship between humans and nature, and the most active participants in the composition are the animals surrounding the girl: the dogs in the foreground look toward the camera, while the cows fanned out behind her also seem to turn their attention to the photographer's presence. Because of this spatial arrangement and the animals' active presence, the image acquires an almost fairy-tale atmosphere in which the dogs appear as guardians marking the boundary between childhood and the outside world.

Otilija Cers included this photograph in the album as one of her best works, as required by the rules for submitting photographs. It is known that she was a member of the LPS, and, although a peasant by social background, in 1912 she obtained a permit to open her own studio in Ļaudona in order to trade in picture postcards.³⁹ Images of this kind – whose agency is amplified by the album itself as a body of works representative of the photographic developments of its time – allow us to view the association's activities more broadly, not only through the lens of art or ethnography, which traditionally dominate research on the LPS. Although it is not known how Cers's photographs were perceived by her contemporaries, from today's perspective the image reveals both the presence of a feminine gaze and an aesthetic interdisciplinarity in which the creative merges with the documentary. In this way, the photograph brings a distant era closer and prompts reflection not only on what is different but also on what is shared.

Natālija Rieksta (1885–1967) and Paulīne Ķemere (1876–1942)

The examples of Natālija Rieksta and Paulīne Ķemere form another mode of women's visibility – they appear as models in their husbands' works, yet both were members of the LPS and photographed at least at an amateur level, which allows us to imagine them as active co-creators of images.

The works by Jānis Rieksts included in the LPS traveling album are pronounced examples of pictorialism. In one of them, a woman – most likely the photographer's wife Natālija – is depicted. This is suggested both by other similar images and by the photographer's note indicating that the photograph was taken in his own apartment. In the violet-toned photograph, the woman is shown next to an antique bust, possibly

39 [Anon.] (1912). *Rasporyazheniya i obyavleniya administrativnyya* [Administrative Orders and Announcements]. *Liflyandskiya Gubernskiya Vedomosti* [Lifland Provincial News], No. 101, p. 648.

of Socrates. The two figures occupy equivalent positions: their faces form a diagonal composition that simultaneously creates a sense of closeness and tension. The soft focus and side lighting seem to blur the contours, giving the image a painterly mood characteristic of pictorialist aesthetics.

The viewer's comment written in the album about "decadent literature" most likely reflects a morally critical reaction to the image's aesthetic – the woman's closeness to the bust of Socrates may have seemed overly aestheticized and psychologically charged, though nothing in the photograph is overtly provocative. Such a judgment is typical of early 20th-century modernist perception, in which symbolist-tinged, emotionally intense, and sensuous works were often labelled "decadent" because they challenged the boundaries between beauty, morality, and intellectual passion. In this context, Rieksts's image does not rehearse a classical veneration of form but reveals an inner tension between human and ideal – between the woman's sensuous presence and the symbolic authority of the philosopher's figure.

Although Natālija Rieksta's works do not appear in the traveling album, it is known that she was a member of the LPS and participated in the 1908 exhibition in Sigulda. Viewed alongside Jānis Rieksts's photographs, this fact highlights the couple's creative collaboration and the presence of women within the artistic sphere of the society. The portrait thus becomes not only a testimony to pictorialism but also an early example of how women's image and authorship emerge in the beginnings of Latvian photography.

Mārtiņš Teodors Ķemers included in the album a 1907 photograph in which Paulīne Ķemere is depicted breastfeeding their daughter Austrā. The photograph contains two mutually connected yet also distanced focal points: the little girl dressed in light clothing and the mother's figure. Both are portrayed with a discreet gaze – without idealization or sensual objectification. The woman's face, turned slightly away from the child and lit from the side, conveys not only calmness but also an impression of inner self-containment. This seeming detachment likely resulted from technical conditions – the noted exposure time is 15 seconds, which meant the woman had to maintain a pose, and it also explains the little girl's position, turned away from the camera. Yet the composition creates a certain dissonance that draws the viewer's attention and opens the image to broader interpretations, extending beyond admiration for the mother-child unity.

One could say that the photograph reveals an intertwining of creative and documentary layers – it can be viewed both as a family photograph and as part of the era's artistic photography aesthetics. At the same time, from a contemporary perspective and considering her practical involvement in LPS activities, one may imagine that Ķemere is not merely the subject of the image but consciously participates in shaping her presence and representation. As a result, the photograph may be regarded as a multi-layered record of experience – of maternal closeness, of a woman's presence



Jānis Rieksts, *In My Own Apartment*, 1908. From: LPS Traveling Album.
Library of the University of Latvia, Misiņš Library [uncatalogued material]



Mārtiņš Teodors Ķemers, *In the Apartment*, 1907. From: LPS Traveling Album. Library of the University of Latvia, Misiņš Library [uncatalogued material]

in the photographic process, and of the transformation of a personal situation into a visual metaphor for the rhythm of life. The mother and child do not appear as a single whole but reveal a complex weave of experience and relationship. In this sense, the image also resonates with Mergupe's photograph of her sister's family.

It is known that Paulīne Ķemere joined the LPS with her husband in 1906, becoming one of the first women in the organization. During the First World War, the family fled to Russia, where Mārtiņš Ķemers and their youngest son Tautgodis died during a typhus epidemic. Paulīne returned to Latvia in 1921 with her son Miervaldis and daughter Austrā. Her name appears in LPS documents again in 1924 and 1925, indicating continued involvement in the society's activities.⁴⁰ From her legacy, several photographs have been identified in the Ethnography Department of the Latvian National History Museum,⁴¹ along with a few family photographs preserved in connection with the biography of her son, the painter and pastor Miervaldis Ķemers.

Conclusion

The LPS traveling album shows that the early landscape of photography in Latvia cannot be reduced to canonical names or to pictorialist aesthetics. Instead, it reveals a multilayered field in which professional and amateur practices coexisted, individual artistic styles intersected with collective activity, and photography functioned as a tool for social experience, self-representation, and community formation.⁴² The presence of women in the album and in the exhibition is therefore not a numerical detail but a key to understanding broader questions of visibility, authorship, and social participation.

The examples of Emīlija Mergupe, Otilija Cers, Paulīne Ķemere, and Natālija Rieksta highlight diverse forms of women's participation and illuminate aspects of photographic life that have so far remained largely unexplored. Their work also

40 Paulīne Ķemere's biography has been compiled based on: Goldberga, Līga (forthcoming). Paulīne Ķemers. No: Žilde, Liāna Ivete; Goze, Evita (sast.). *Latvijas fotogrāfijas vēsture attēlos [A Visual History of Photography in Latvia]*. Rīga: ISSP. (At the time of writing this article, the publication has not yet been released and is still in preparation.)

41 [Anon.] (2022). Personību nozīme Latviešu etnogrāfiskās biedrības darbībā [The importance of personalities in the activities of the Latvian Ethnographic Society]. No: Bartkeviča, Anna; Kalna, Sanita; Ķikutis, Toms. *Kamēr vēl laiks. Fotoetnogrāfijas sākums Latvijā [While There Is Still Time: The Beginnings of Photo-Ethnography in Latvia]*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs, p. 83.

42 For more on photography as an autonomous creative contribution - albeit in a later historical context - see Laine Kristberga's chapter "Performance Art as Intermedial Appropriation in Latvia in the 1970s." Although focused on the late socialist period rather than the early history discussed here, Kristberga's analysis is nonetheless crucial for understanding continuities in Latvian photographic culture. She shows that photographers were not merely documenters but co-authors: images produced within collaborative settings often became independent artworks, reinforcing photography's role in enabling visibility beyond institutional hierarchies. This suggests that issues of marginality and invisibility in the field of photography persisted across the century. In: Kristberga, Laine (2018). *Performance Art as Intermedial Appropriation in Latvia in the 1970s*. In: Cseh-Varga, Katalin; Czirka, Adam (Eds.). *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere: Event-Based Art in Late Socialist Europe*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 138-151.

prompts us to consider those whose contributions are only partially documented or have yet to be uncovered. The absence of other active women photographers from the album – such as Natālija Rieksta or Emīlija Baumanē – exposes the uneven preservation of photographic heritage and underscores the role of chance in shaping historical narratives. This in turn highlights the need to expand research beyond institutional histories by engaging with family albums and private archives, where previously unknown women authors continue to emerge, as in the case of the Baltic German photographer Sofia Badhe.⁴³

Taken together, these materials show that women's visibility in early Latvian photography developed through the interplay of authorship, embodied presence, collaboration, and social context. Although their works are few in the surviving album, they reveal the many ways women were involved in photographic practice and help trace a broader visual-cultural dynamic in which both the visible and the invisible – center and periphery – contribute to the story of the time. Women's roles were not marginal by nature; they became marginalized only through later interpretations and uneven archival survival.

A further research avenue concerns the depiction of women in the work of male photographers, not only as models but as visual agents whose representation reflects gender dynamics, structures of looking, and social hierarchies. Although challenges of attribution, context, and preservation complicate the study of this material, these very uncertainties hold significant interpretive potential.

In this light, the LPS traveling album is not a closed document but a point of departure – a guide to restoring the missing links in Latvia's photographic history and to integrating women's experiences as an essential part of early photographic practice.

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43 Sofia Badhe's three images are reproduced in: Brasliņa, Aija; Slava, Laima (sast.) (2017). *Janis Rozentāls*. Rīga: Neputns, p. 383.

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KATRĪNA TEIVĀNE

Sieviešu redzamības pārskatīšana agrīnā 20. gadsimta Latvijas fotogrāfijā: fotogrāfes Latviešu fotogrāfiskās biedrības ceļojošajā albumā

Kopsavilkums

Raksts analizē Latviešu fotogrāfiskās biedrības (LFB) 1908. gada ceļojošo albumu kā būtisku, taču līdz šim maz pētītu dokumentu sieviešu redzamības un līdzdalības izpratnei agrīnā 20. gadsimta Latvijas fotogrāfijā. Lai gan Latvijas fotogrāfijas historiogrāfijā ilgstoši dominējis uzsvars uz kanoniskajiem fotogrāfiem vīriešiem un piktoriālisma estētiku, albums atklāj daudzveidīgāku un daudzslāņaināku fotogrāfijas vidi, ko veido profesionāļu un amatieru līdzaspastāvēšana, kolektīvas prakses un sociālie tīklojumi.

Analizējot fragmentāri saglabājušos Emīlijas Mergupes, Otīlijas Cers, Paulīnes Ķemereres un Natālijas Riekstas veikumu, raksts izgaismo autorības, ķermeniskās klātbūtnes un sadarbības formas, kas bijušas raksturīgas sieviešu līdzdalībai fotogrāfijas kultūrā. Apvienojot arhīvu izpēti ar interpretējošu un teorētisku pieeju radošās aģences un heterohronās temporalitātes izvērtējumā, raksts argumentē, ka sievietes nebūt nebija agrīnās fotogrāfijas perifērijā; perifēra viņu klātbūtne kļuva vēlākās kanona veidošanas praksēs, arī materiāla nepilnīgas saglabātības dēļ. Tādējādi LFB ceļojošais albums kļūst par nozīmīgu sākumpunktu agrīnās Latvijas fotogrāfijas kritiskam izvērtējumam, nodrošinot iespējas iekļaujošākai un daudzlaicīgākai historiogrāfijai.

Atslēgvārdi: Latviešu fotogrāfiskā biedrība (LFB), agrīnā Latvijas fotogrāfija, sievietes fotogrāfijā, vizuālā kultūra, fotogrāfijas arhīvi, aģence, heterohronija, piktoriālisms, dzimte un fotogrāfija, fotogrāfiskais mantojums.

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MĀRTIŅŠ MINTAURS

Sievišķais skatījums uz vēsturi Rietumu historiogrāfijā 20. gadsimtā

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā aplūkota sieviešu vēstures un dzimtes vēstures kā patstāvīga pētījumu virziena attīstība Rietumu pasaulē saistībā ar konceptuālajām un metodoloģiskajām pārvērtībām, kas ietekmēja vēstures rakstīšanu postmodernismā kopš 20. gadsimta 60. un 70. gadiem. Feminisma piedāvātais atšķirīgais skatījums uz vēsturi ietver gan jaunas teorētiskās nostādnes, gan jaunu vēstures avotu apzināšanu, kā arī jaunu tēmu iekļaušanu pētniecībā. Atzīstot vēsturnieka neizbēgamo subjektivitāti, iezīmējās postmodernajai vēstures izpratnei raksturīgā pieeja, kas noraidīja kādas sabiedrības grupas vai zinātnes pārstāvju pretenzijas uz viendabīgu vēstījumu par pagātņi, dodot priekšroku vēsturisko pētījumu daudz balsībai. Sieviešu vēstures nozīme Rietumu historiogrāfijā ir saistīta ar alternatīvu vēstures naratīva izveidi, kas pievērsa uzmanību līdz šim ignorēto vai politisku iemeslu dēļ marginalizēto sabiedrības grupu vēsturiskajai pieredzei. Bez sievišķā skatījuma (kā sievietes pieejas pagātnes izpētei, kas var būt atšķirīga no pētnieka vīrieša perspektīvas) vēstures attēlojums nav pilnīgs: sievišķais skatījums kā autonoma refleksija par vēsturi ir nepieciešams, jo tas atgādina par konteksta nozīmi un par tiesībām interpretēt pagātnes dzīves rekonstrukcijas, ko mēs dēvējam par vēsturi.

Atslēgvārdi: feminisms, postmodernisms, sieviešu vēsture, dzimtes vēsture, sociālā vēsture.

Ievads

Jēdziens “sieviešu vēsture” ir nostiprinājies historiogrāfijā – šī mūsdienās bieži sastopamā termina skaidrojums ir atrodamas gan vēstures zinātnes skaidrojošajās vārdnīcās,¹ gan speciālajā literatūrā par sieviešu vēstures pētniecību.² Vairums autoru sieviešu vēsturi aplūko saistībā ar dzimtes vēstures pētījumiem³ vai pieskaita kādam no sociālās vēstures virzieniem⁴. Sieviešu un dzimtes vēstures pētījumi ir saistīti ar vēsturisko socioloģiju (sievietes statuss sabiedrībā un dzimumu sociālās lomas), demogrāfiju (ģimenes struktūru vēsturi) un mentalitāšu vēsturi, kā arī sociālo un kultūras antropoloģiju, kas pēta sabiedrībā dominējošos priekšstatus par dzimti, šo priekšstatu konstruēšanu un to izmaiņas laika gaitā. Priekšnoteikumus sieviešu vēstures pētījumu attīstībai radīja 20. gadsimta 60. gadu emancipācijas kustības un ar tām saistītie politiskie nemieri Rietumu pasaulē, kas lika pārvērtēt esošās sociālās attiecības, dažādu sabiedrības grupu statusu un ar to saistītās privilēģijas vai ierobežojumus.

Kaut gan sieviešu vēsturi un dzimtes vēsturi bieži uztver kā sinonīmus, tie ir saturiski atšķirīgi pētījumu virzieni. Dzimtes vēstures pētījumi kopš 20. gadsimta 80. gadiem attīstījās Amerikas Savienotajās Valstīs un Rietumeiropā kā tolaik jau pastāvošās sieviešu vēstures atzars.⁵ Dzimtes vēstures pētījumu ietvaros izpētes fokuss tika pārcelts no faktoloģiskajiem pētījumiem par sieviešu darbību un tās nozīmi pagātnē uz jautājumiem par sievietes un vīrieša lomu sabiedrībā, par to, kādi sociālie apstākļi (valdošie priekšstati, morāles normas, tiesiskie nosacījumi, kā arī politisko un ekonomisko resursu sadalījums un varas attiecības) nosaka šo lomu saturu un līdz ar to ietekmē sievietes statusu un rīcības iespējas sabiedrībā.⁶ Pateicoties šiem apstākļiem, vēstures rakstīšanas prakse kļuva aktuāla Rietumu pasaules politiskajā diskursā, jo izrādījās, ka tās izpēte var atklāt pastāvošās sociālās kārtības cēloņus.

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- 4 Ziemann, Benjamin (2003). Sozialgeschichte, Geschlechtergeschichte, Gesellschaftsgeschichte. In: Dülmen, Richard van (Hg.). *Fischer Lexikon Geschichte*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, S. 84-108.
- 5 Jardins, Julie Des (2011). Women's and Gender History. In: Schneider, Axel; Woolf, Daniel (Eds.). *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. Volume 5: Historical Writing since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 136-139.
- 6 Dzimtes vēstures tematikas raksturojumu sk.: Meade, Teresa A.; Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. (Eds.) (2004). *A Companion to Gender History*. Oxford: Blackwells Publishing.

Sieviešu vēstures identitāte

Lai gan ir sacīts, ka “vēstures izpēte mūsdienās ietver gandrīz jebko, sākot ar Senās Mezopotāmijas atkritumu vēsturi un beidzot ar sērfošanas vēsturi Sidnejā”⁷, sieviešu vēstures kā noteikta historiogrāfijas virziena pastāvēšana apliecina vairākas lietas. Pirmkārt, tas norāda, ka runa ir par pētījumiem, kas saistīti ar sievietēm kā sabiedrības grupu, kam ir raksturīga atšķirīga vēsturiskā pieredze, kas līdzās citiem apstākļiem veidojas, arī darbojoties sociālās dzīves jomās, kurās dominē vīrieši un viņu veidotās kultūras prakses. Sieviešu vēsture pamato dzimumu kā vēsturiskās izpētes kategoriju tiklab bioloģiskajā, kā sociālajā jeb dzimtes nozīmē, tādējādi atklājot jaunas tēmas un skatījuma perspektīvas historiogrāfijā. Otrkārt, sieviešu vēstures eksistence apliecina arī to, ka pastāv ne vien konkrētas tēmas, kas saistītas ar sievietes dzīvi vēsturiskajā perspektīvā, bet arī īpašs sievietes skatījums uz pagātņi. Tas izpaužas iepriekš minētajos pētījumos par sieviešu vēsturisko pieredzi noteiktā telpā (reģionā, valstī, novadā u. tml.) un laika posmā, taču vienlaikus sievišķajam skatījumam vēstures zinātnē ir arī būtiska konceptuāla nozīme.

Šāda skatījuma izcelsme un tā politiskā ietekme ir saistīta ar sieviešu emancipāciju un feminisma kustību, kuras pirmsākumi meklējami jau 19. gadsimta nogalē.⁸ Savukārt 20. gadsimtā iestāšanās par sieviešu līdztiesību sociālajā dzīvē juridiskajā sfērā un arī ikdienas dzīves praksēs ieguva jaunu dimensiju: to papildināja prasība pēc līdztiesības arī pagātnes reprezentācijā jeb vēstures rakstīšanā.⁹ Sākotnēji tā īstenojās kā “vēstures papildināšana” ar tēmām, kas saistītas ar sieviešu vēsturisko pieredzi un nozīmi dažādos laikmetos, kuru attēlojumā līdz šim sieviešu rīcībspējai bija pievērsta maza uzmanība. Kopš 20. gadsimta 80. gadiem feminisma ietekme sieviešu vēsturē ieguva vairāk teorētisku raksturu, pārejot no sieviešu darbības apraksta pie sievišķā skatījuma uz pagātņi un ar to saistītā kritiskā vēstures pētīšanas un rakstīšanas prakses izvērtējuma. Saglabājot galveno motīvu, kas saistās ar vīriešu dominēšanas pārvarēšanu Rietumu kultūrā, jaunā pieeja vēstures rakstīšanai prasīja īstenot šo uzdevumu ne tikai faktoloģiskajā, bet arī teorētiskajā līmenī, atklājot sieviešu vēsturi kā jaunu vēstures izpratnes un interpretācijas veidu.¹⁰ Tādējādi mūsdienās par sieviešu vēsturi var runāt ne tikai kā par patstāvīgu tematisko virzienu pagātnes pētniecībā, bet arī kā par konceptuālu pieeju, kas tiecas pamatot un pārstāvēt citādu izpratni par vēstures procesu norisi, kritizējot un izaicinot līdzšinējos priekšstatus par to kā vienpusīgus, patriarhālus un līdz ar to ierobežotus.

7 Hunt, Lynn (2018). *History: Why It Matters*. Cambridge: Polity, pp. 78-79.

8 Southgate, Beverley (1996). *History: What and Why?: Ancient, Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 94-99.

9 Konceptiju par vēsturi kā pagātnes reprezentāciju pretstatā vēsturei kā pagātnes notikumu aprakstam detalizēti aplūkojis amerikāņu vēsturnieks Roberts F. Berkhofers jaunākais. Sk.: Berkhofer, Robert F., Jr. (2008). *Fashioning History: Current Practices and Principles*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 23-81.

10 Skota, Džouna Voleha (2001). Sieviešu vēsture, 206.-208., 217.-219. lpp.

Sieviešu vēstures un dzimtes vēstures pētniecība aptver plašu vēstures avotu loku, līdzās institucionālajiem dokumentiem izceļot arī literāros un privātas izcelsmes tekstus (dienasgrāmatas, vēstules, atmiņu pierakstus), kā arī mutvārdu vēstures un vizuālos vēstures avotus. Turklāt sieviešu vēsture var dot impulsu jaunai avotu interpretācijai, pievēršot uzmanību tam, kā sociālās tradīcijas, rituāli un to kodifikācijas veido, saglabā un reproducē noteiktai kultūrai un sabiedrībai raksturīgos priekšstatus par dzimuma sociālo nozīmi. Jaunu vēstures avotu iekļaušana zinātniskajā apritē un jaunu pieeju attīstīšana pakāpeniski mainīja priekšstatus par vēstures zinātni un veicināja pāreju no vēstures kā pagātnes notikumu apraksta uz vēsturi kā pagātnes reprezentāciju.¹¹ Šāds pavērsiens lika no jauna apzināties vēstures rakstīšanas politisko kontekstu nozīmi: faktu atlase, kas tiek veidota, lai iegūtu pagātnes situācijas raksturojumu, vienmēr ir politiska rīcība, tātad arī historiogrāfija nevar izvairīties no politikas klātbūtnes. Sieviešu vēstures pētījumi, pievēršot uzmanību tēmām, kas pirms tam tika uzskatītas par marginālām un nesvarīgām, atklāja, ka vēsturnieku veidotais naratīvs jeb vēstījums par pagātni vienmēr būs saistīts ar politisko izvēli par labu kādai personai vai notikumiem, kas kļūs par pētījuma objektu.

Rietumu historiogrāfijā ir sastopami dažādi, arī skeptiski vērtējumi par šo centienu sekmēm. 20. gadsimta 60. un 70. gados Rietumu historiogrāfijā iestājās sociālās vēstures popularitātes laikmets, kas ļāva vēsturniekiem iziet ārpus politisko institūciju radīto "oficiālo" vēstures avotu noteiktajiem ierobežojumiem, lai piekļūtu vienkāršo cilvēku ikdienas dzīves vēsturei. Šim virzienam jau 80. un 90. gados sekoja ne mazāk dedzīga aizraušanās ar kultūras vēstures tēmām. Sociālās vēstures pārstāvji uzskatīja politisko vēsturi par pārāk šauru nozari, kas nespēj ņemt vērā parasto cilvēku dzīves pieredzi. Kultūras vēstures virziena pārstāvji savukārt norādīja, ka sociālās vēstures pētnieki nodarbojas tikai ar noteiktām, stingri definētām sociālajām kategorijām, piemēram, ar strādniekiem un sievietēm, nepievēršot uzmanību tam, kā šīs sociālās grupas ir izveidojušās un ieguvušās savu identitāti.¹² Cilvēka piederību noteiktai grupai vai kategorijai vēsturiski vienmēr ietekmējuši pārāk daudzi mainīgi lielumi, lai to varētu atveidot uz dažiem stabiliem parametriem. Tādēļ lielāka uzmanība būtu jāpievērš dažādu sociālo grupu radītajai simboliskajai realitātei un priekšstatiem, kas veido viņu pasaules uztveri, kas tiek saglabāta un atjaunota, īstenojot noteiktas kultūras prakses.

11 Vēsture kā pagātnes apraksts tiecas rekonstruēt pagātnes notikumu secību un to savstarpējās saiknes (cēloņsakarības), savukārt vēsture kā pagātnes reprezentācija pievērš uzmanību pagātnes notikumu interpretācijām: to autoriem, interpretāciju motīviem un paņēmieniem - historiogrāfijas politiskajam un estētiskajam pamatojumam. Pagātnes apraksts tiecas būt iespējami objektīvs, izslēdzot vai ignorējot apraksta autora lomu historiogrāfijā, bet pagātnes reprezentācija uzsver autora lomu pagātnes notikumu rekonstrukcijā.

12 Hunt, Lynn (2018). *History: Why It Matters*, pp. 77-78.

Ja par feministiskās kultūras kritikas metodoloģiju ir teikts, ka tā ir “nevien- gabalaina un daudzveidīga”¹³, tad to pašu var sacīt par vēstures zinātnes kritiku 20. gadsimtā. Kultūras vēstures pētnieks Pīters Bērks (*Peter Burke*) aplūko sieviešu vēsturi kā vienu no 20. gadsimtam raksturīgajiem mēģinājumiem rakstīt “vēsturi no apakšas” (*history from below*)¹⁴, pievēršoties konkrētu cilvēku dzīves pieredzei un tās iespējami autentiskam attēlojumam, pretstatā historiogrāfijā ierastajiem vispārīgajiem un tieksmei reducēt indivīdu līdz tā piederībai kādai no sabiedrības grupām ar savām interesēm un dzīvesveidu. Šādā aspektā sieviešu vēstures pētījumi loģiski saistījās ar citu marginalizēto sabiedrības grupu (vergu, etnisko un kultūras minoritāšu, dažādu subkultūru pārstāvju u. c.) vēstures izpēti, pievēršot uzmanību to mijiedarbībai ar citiem sabiedrības pārstāvjiem. Līdz ar to sieviešu vēstures pētījumos būtiska nozīme ir jautājumam par varas attiecībām noteikta laikmeta sabiedrībā un šo attiecību ietekmi uz sievietes sociālo statusu. Iepriekš minētā “vēsture no apakšas” ir tiešs pretstats historiogrāfijā ilgstoši dominējušajai “vēsturei no augšas” (*history from above*) – tas ir stāsts par lielo vīru dižajiem darbiem pagātnē, kur sastopamas tikai dažas izcilas sievietes.¹⁵ Rietumu historiogrāfijā jau kopš 19. gadsimta vidus dominēja tieši “vēsture no augšas”, to lielā mērā noteica romantisma estētikas radītais varoņu un ģēniju kults un politiskās vēstures notikumu prioritāte pār citām cilvēka dzīves nozarēm, kas tikai pamazām ieguva pētnieku uzmanību. Šāda pieeja atstāja ārpus pētnieku uzmanības loka ne tikai sieviešu vēsturisko pieredzi, bet arī citu sabiedrības grupu nozīmi vēstures norisēs.

Citu skatījumu piedāvā amerikāņu vēsturniece Linna Hanta (*Lynn Hunt*), grāmatā par vēstures rakstīšanu globalizācijas laikmetā atzīmējot, ka sieviešu vēsture ir veidojusies kā viena no Rietumu cilvēka identitātes politikas sastāvdaļām.¹⁶ Identitātes politika līdzās marksismam, modernizācijas teorijai un tā dēvētajai Annāļu skolai historiogrāfijā¹⁷ 20. gadsimtā bija viena no četrām vēstures rakstīšanas paradigmām Rietumu historiogrāfijā, kas savstarpēji ietekmēja un papildināja cita citu. Sieviešu vēstures rakstīšanas mērķi 20. gadsimtā evolucionēja no stāsta par izcilajām sievietēm vēsturē līdz pētījumiem, kas tiecās uz sievišķības identitātes kritisku izvērtējumu. Dzimtes vēstures pētījumi kopš 20. gadsimta 80. gadiem pievērsās cilvēka ķermeniskajai pieredzei, ķermeņa vēsturei un biopolitikai.¹⁸ Līdzās feminismam būtiska loma

13 Cimdīņa, Ausma; Šroma, Natalja (sast. un zin. red.) (2017). *Kultūras feminisms: Feminisma terminu skaidrojošā vārdnīca = Cultural Feminism: A Glossary of Feminist Terms*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 72.–73.

14 Burke, Peter (2005). *History and Social Theory: Second Edition*. Cambridge: Polity, p. 52.

15 Maza, Sarah (2017). *Thinking About History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 10–13.

16 Hunt, Lynn (2014). *Writing History in the Global Era*. New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 28–29.

17 Par to sk.: Šuvajevs, Igors (1995). Cita vēsture. *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, Nr. 1/2, 37.–48. lpp. Sal. ar: Tendler, Joseph (2013). *Opponents of the Annales School*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 13–71.

18 Rose, Sonya O. (2011). *What is Gender History?* Cambridge: Polity, pp. 20–24, 105–106.

sieviešu vēstures attīstībā bija postmodernajai historiogrāfijas kritikai, taču jāatzīst, ka attieksme pret postmodernismu nekad nav bijusi viendabīga. Kaut gan liela daļa sieviešu vēstures un dzimtes vēstures pētnieču izmantoja postmodernisma pieejas, lai dekonstruētu priekšstatus par dzimumu sociālajām lomām Rietumu sabiedrībā, citi kritizēja postmodernismu gan par tā koķetēšanu ar konservatīvajām politiskajām idejām, gan par postmodernistu relativizējošo patiesības jēdziena interpretāciju.¹⁹ Tomēr arī postmodernās kultūras teorijas, neraugoties uz to popularitāti akadēmiskajā vidē, pēc Hantas domām, nepiedāvāja īstu alternatīvu aprakstošajai pieejai kultūras pētniecībā.²⁰ Kultūra kļuva par visaptverošu apzīmējumu bez noteikta satura, tādējādi zaudējot spēju izskaidrot notikumu gaitu: vēstures procesa iekšējās pretrunas kultūras teorijā aizsedza vienīgi tendence iekļaut kultūras jomā pilnīgi visu. Historiogrāfijas kritika, kuras uzdevums sākotnēji bija atsegt valdošo pieeju trūkumus, pārvērtās vispārīgā papļāpāšanā par visiem jau zināmām lietām. Līdz ar to kultūras vēsture nespēja aizstāt sociālās vēstures paradigmu Rietumu historiogrāfijā, taču kultūras vēsture ieguva jaunu dimensiju, iekļaujot sevī tēmas, kuras savulaik bija aktualizējušas sociālās vēstures koncepcijas. Tādējādi postmodernā historiogrāfijas kritika deva jaunu impulsu sieviešu vēstures attīstībai: sociālās attiecības, kas veidojas noteiktā sabiedrībā, ietekmē kultūras saturu un to, kā šīs sabiedrības pārstāvji apzinās savu vēsturisko pieredzi un veido savu sociālo identitāti. Šis process atspoguļojas ne tikai institucionalizētajās varas attiecībās un sociālā statusa iegūšanā, bet arī valodā un dažādās diskursīvajās praksēs.²¹ Kultūras teoriju ietekme vēstures rakstīšanā paplašināja izpratni par sieviešu vēstures nozīmi, piešķirot specifiski sievišķajam skatījumam uz vēsturi patstāvīgu konceptuālu vērtību.

Vērtējot feminisma ideju ietekmi historiogrāfijā, ir svarīgi apzināties, ka sieviešu vēsture nav vienkārši sociālās vēstures paplašinājums (rūpniecības uzņēmumu strādnieču, mājsaimnieču, akadēmiski izglītoto sieviešu utt. vēsture), pievienojot "sieviešu tēmu/tēmas" kādam no jau esošajiem izpētes virzieniem. Sieviešu vēstures tematika ir plašāka par jautājumu: kāda bija sieviešu sociālās marginalizācijas prakse un tās cēloņi? Marksisma pieejas ietekmē 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē Rietumu historiogrāfijā nostiprinājās viedoklis, ka dzimtes konstrukcijas jāpēta saistībā ar dominējošajām politiskajām struktūrām, ideoloģiju un ekonomiku. Dzimtes vēstures kontekstā jēdzieni "sieviete" un "vīrietis" vispirms ir saistīti ar dzimumu sociālajām lomām, kas dažādos apstākļos tiek saprastas atšķirīgi. Līdz ar to vēsturnieku uzdevums, raugoties no feminisma perspektīvas, ir izpētīt šķietami pašsaprotamos nosacījumus, kas definē sievietes un vīrieša lomu un izturēšanos konkrētajā sabiedrībā.

19 Cheng, Eileen Ka-May (2012). *Historiography: An Introductory Guide*. New York: Continuum, p. 128.

20 Hunt, Lynn (2014). *Writing History in the Global Era*, p. 39.

21 Turpat, p. 42.

Historiogrāfijas tradīciju kritika

Rietumu kultūras tradīcijai piemītošo androcentrismu²² jau 1911. gadā definēja amerikāņu rakstniece Šarlotē Pērkinsa Gilmena (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 1860–1935), un, kā jau minēts, šī pieceja līdz pat 20. gadsimta otrajai pusei būtiski ietekmēja arī vēstures rakstīšanu. Līdzšinējā vēstures izpratne, kurā dominēja vīriešu viedoklis, balstījās uz binārajā opozīcijā sakņoto hierarhisko attiecību modeli: subjekts–objekts, patiess–nepatiess, reāls–iedomāts. Tas paredz noteiktu pasaules kārtību, kuras pamatā ir hierarhiska attiecību struktūra, tā nosaka pakļauto un valdošo slāņu esamību un stingri subordinētas attiecības starp tiem. Feminisma skatījumā Rietumu pasaules izpratnes iedzimtais grēks ir domāšana binārās opozīcijas kategorijās, kas paredz nevienlīdzīgas attiecības starp tās daļām: viena puse vienmēr dominē, otra pakļaujas.

Feminisma uzdotie jautājumi par vēstures rakstīšanu sakņojās modernitātes izraisītajās sociālās dzīves pārmaiņās, kas sekoja emancipācijas kustības nevienmērīgajiem, taču arvien pieaugošajiem panākumiem Rietumu pasaulē kopš 19. gadsimta pēdējā ceturkšņa. Rezumējot minētās attīstības rezultātus, šos jautājumus var apvienot trijās tematiskajās grupās: 1) Vai historiogrāfija reproducē vīrišķo skatījumu uz sievietes dzīves pasauli? 2) Kas raksturo specifisko “sievīšķo telpu” vēsturē, kā tā tiek definēta? 3) Vai pastāv sievišķais rakstības veids? Filozofe Ella Buceniece 1994. gadā publicētajā esejā “Feminisms – jauna vēstures perspektīva?” atzīmēja šī skatījuma galvenos pieturpunktus jeb “būtiskākās modernā feminisma izpratnes poststrukturālās zīmes: sieviete vēsturē līdz šim ir bijusi margināla un veidojusi *kultūras minoritāti* [..]; sieviete grib reinterpretēt pasauli, kuru radījis *Vīrišķs*; sieviete savās pašinterpretācijās [..] rada savu īpašo diferenci, rakstības veidu [..].”²³ Pieņemot feminisma piedāvāto pieceju vēstures rakstīšanai, rodas arī jaunas izpētes tēmas, kas tiecas atrast atbildes uz minētajiem jautājumiem.

Pētījumu centrā ir jautājums par patriarhālisma ģenēzi un tā izpausmēm Rietumu vēstures gaitā, un tas prasa pārskatīt vēstures periodizācijas praksi un noskaidrot, kādi apstākļi radīja vīriešu dominējošo īpatsvaru pagātnes rekonstrukcijās, ignorējot sieviešu klātbūtnes un ietekmes nozīmi vēstures procesos.²⁴ Tādējādi sieviešu vēsturei un dzimtes vēsturei ir svarīgs salīdzinošais aspekts, lingvistiskais aspekts un psihoanalītiskais aspekts, jo runa ir par sieviešu kā noteiktas sociālās grupas pārstāvju statusu sabiedrībā, par šīs grupas pārstāvju attiecībām ar citiem un par faktoriem, kuri ietekmē šīs grupas pārstāvju identitātes veidošanos. Sieviešu vēsture pievērš uzmanību tām sociālajām attiecībām un procesiem, kas ir šķietami neredzami, jo tiek uzskatīti par pašsaprotamiem. Sieviešu vēstures tēmu marginalizācijas cēloņi

22 Sk.: Cimdiņa, Ausma; Šroma, Natalja (sast. un zin. red.) (2017). *Kultūras feminisms*, 32. lpp.

23 Buceniece, Ella (1999). *Saprāts nav ilūzija: Rietumu filozofija modernisma situācijā*. Rīga: Pētergailis, 107. lpp.

24 Burke, Peter (2005). *History and Social Theory*, p. 51.

vēsturiski ir bijuši saistīti ar viņu statusu sabiedrībā – tas ir noteicis, ka sievietes kā vēstures subjekti, būdamas iesaistītas sociālajās attiecībās un procesos, nav izteikušas vai nav drīkstējušas izteikt savu pieredzi laikmetā pastāvošo normatīvo ierobežojumu dēļ. Savukārt minēto ierobežojumu veidošanā liela nozīme ir bijusi sabiedrībā valdošajiem dzimumu stereotipiem un priekšstatiem par sievietes un vīrieša dabu, kas nav tikai 19. gadsimta mantojums, bet joprojām turpina ietekmēt attieksmi pret sievietēm kā vēstures subjektu. Ar to izpēti nodarbojas dzimtes vēsture kā sieviešu vēstures turpinājums.

Priekšstats par vīriešu dabisko racionalitāti ir vēsturiski nostiprinājies Rietumu pasaules sociālās un kultūras dzīves struktūrās, laika gaitā kļūstot par dominējošo “vispārzināmo patiesību”. Tās statusu nostiprina arī valodas lietojuma tradīcija, tādēļ šis priekšstats liekas pašsaprotams. Feminisms atgādina, ka šāda pieceja pamato vīriešu un sieviešu principiālo nevienlīdzību, nevis vienkārši neitrāli konstatē atšķirības to pasaules uztverē.²⁵ 20. gadsimta 70. gadu pirmajā pusē Rietumu lingvistikā aizsākās diskusija par to, vai valodas gramatiskā struktūra un lietojums piešķir sievietēm zemāku sociālo lomu salīdzinājumā ar vīriešiem. Piemēram, valodnieces Ennas Pauvelsas (*Anne Pauwels*) 20. gadsimta beigās veiktie salīdzinošie pētījumi par dzimtes kategoriju lietojumu dažādās savstarpēji neradniecīgās valodās apliecina kādu noteiktu tendenci.

Vīrietis (vīrieši vai vīriešu dzimums) tiek attēlots kā standarts, ar ko salīdzināmas visas pārējās dzīvās būtnes; viņš tiek uzskatīts par normu vai atskaites punktu. Sieviete (vai sievietes) savukārt ir kategorizēta, lai tiktu iekļauta jebkādā lingvistiskā atsaucē uz vīrieti. [...] Abu dzimumu lingvistiskā reprezentācija bieži ir izteikti stereotipiska. Sievietes galvenokārt attēlo kā seksuālas būtnes (piemēram, madonnas – prostitūtas polaritāte), kamēr vīriešus noteikti portretē kā “racionālas radības”.²⁶

Modernajā zinātnē pieņemtais priekšstats par objektivitāti un tās noteikšanas kritērijiem pamatos tika formulēts 17. gadsimtā izstrādātajā kartēziskajā izziņas koncepcijā, kam ir izteikti dabaszinātniska ievirze. Objektīvā, uz racionālo argumentāciju un loģiku balstītā pieceja tika pretstatīta subjektīvajai, intuitīvi empātiskajai piecejai, kas vēstures izpētes gadījumā nozīmēja mēģinājumus iejusties pagātnes cilvēku domāšanā un pasaules uztverē. Rietumu pasaulē sievietes piedalījās vēstures rakstīšanā jau kopš 19. gadsimta sākuma, taču gadsimta vidū akadēmiskās historiogrāfijas tradīcija šo devumu ignorēja.

25 Sīkāk par sieviešu un vīriešu valodas lietojuma interpretācijām sk.: Cimdiņa, Ausma; Šroma, Nataļja (sast. un zin. red.) (2017). *Kultūras feminisms*, 98.-100. lpp.

26 Džozefs, Džons Ē. (2008). *Valoda un politika*. Rīga: Zinātne, 102. lpp.

Šādu attieksmi pamatoja dažādi. Vispirms tika minēti pārmetumi par to, ka "sievišķā pieeja" vēsturei ir saistīta ar emocionālu attieksmi pret izpētes objektu un sniedz tikai iztēlē balstītas pagātnes reprezentācijas. Tādēļ šī uzskata piekritēji noraidīja vēsturnieču darbus kā kopumā diletantiskus un tematiski nenozīmīgus.²⁷ Līdz ar to par vienīgo leģitīmo dokumentālā naratīva žanru izglītoto sieviešu rakstniecībā 19. gadsimtā kļuva beletrizētās dienasgrāmatas, kuras publicēja kā (vēsturiskās) prozas paveidu un uzskatīja par sievietes dabai atbilstošu daiļrades izpausmi.²⁸ Dienasgrāmatām drīz vien pievienojās arī atmiņu krājumu izdevumi un ceļojumu aprakstu publikācijas, taču kopumā akadēmiskajās aprindās tolaik valdīja uzskats, ka sievietēm trūkst nepieciešamās pieredzes un kvalifikācijas, lai viņas spētu rakstīt vēsturi – radīt naratīvu par politiku un karu, kas ir galvenais vēstures saturs.²⁹ Sava nozīme bija arī informācijas pieejamības problēmām, jo vēstures avoti par sieviešu darbību pagātnē bieži vien sniedza tikai netiešas liecības.³⁰ 20. gadsimta starpkaru periodā tika uzsākta sistemātiska to vēstures avotu apzināšana, kas satur materiālus sieviešu vēstures izpētei, tomēr akadēmisku pētījumu statusu šie pasākumi sāka iegūt tikai tad, kad bija jau pagājuši vairāk nekā divdesmit gadi kopš Otrā pasaules kara beigām.³¹ Tādējādi, atsaucoties uz piemērotu vēstures avotu trūkumu, sākotnēji tika atrasts šķietami objektīvs iemesls, kas kavēja sieviešu līdzdalību vēstures pētniecībā.

Sievišķā skatiena nozīme vēstures izpētē

Priekšstatus par sieviešu vēstures kā zinātniskas disciplīnas neiespējamību jau 1902. gadā sarakstītajā esejā "Sievišķā kultūra" noraidīja sociologs Georgs Zimmels (*Georg Simmel*, 1858–1918), piedāvājot jaunu skatījumu ne tikai attiecībā uz sieviešu autoru lomu historiogrāfijā, bet arī uz vēstures rakstīšanas pamatprincipiem. Pateicoties minētajai esejai un citām publikācijām, kurās aplūkota sievišķās jeb sieviešu kultūras specifika, Zimmelu uzskata par autoru, kurš 20. gadsimta sākumā pirmo reizi pamatoja sieviešu kultūras jēdzienu, kas joprojām tiek diskutēts dažādās feminisma tradīcijās.³² Lai saprastu, kādēļ tieši esēja par sievišķās kultūras un pasaules uztveres savdabību sniedza jaunas atziņas vēstures filozofijā, nepieciešams šo tekstu aplūkot mazliet tuvāk. Eseja sākas ar situācijas ieskicējumu laikmetā, kad pirmā feminisma viļņa ietekmē notika sieviešu politiskā cīņa par līdztiesību ar vīriešiem sociālajā dzīvē un ar to saistītajās

27 Southgate, Beverley (2006). *What is History For?* London; New York: Routledge, pp. 80–83.

28 Delafield, Catherine (2009). *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 25–38, 59–134.

29 Cheng, Eileen Ka-May (2012). *Historiography: An Introductory Guide*, p. 55.

30 Burke, Peter (2005). *History and Social Theory*, pp. 51–52.

31 Jardins, Julie Des (2011). *Women's and Gender History*, pp. 138–139.

32 Cimdiņa, Ausma; Šroma, Nataļja (sast. un zin. red.) (2017). *Kultūras feminisms*, 194.–195. lpp.

privātās dzīves jomās. Pēc Zimmela domām, tolaik “sievietes vēlējās pāriet vīriešu dzīves un veikuma formās, viņām svarīga bija dalība jau pastāvošajos, tikai viņām līdz tam liegtajos kultūras labumos”³³. Laikmeta konteksts lika pievērst uzmanību sievietes lomai sabiedrībā, un Zimmels šajā esejā to dara, nonākdams pie pārdomām par sieviešu veidotās kultūras principiālo citādību, tās atšķirību no maskulinitātē sakņotajiem vispārējiem Rietumu kultūras standartiem. Zimmela atziņas par viņa definētās, tā dēvētās objektīvās kultūras vīrišķo raksturu tomēr nav tikai patriarhālisma attaisnojums, kā varētu šķist pirmajā brīdī. Viņš rakstīja:

[..] mūsu objektīvā kultūra, izņemot pavisam dažas jomas, ir caurcaurēm vīrišķa. Vīrieši ir radījuši mākslu un industriju, zinātni un tirdzniecību, valsti un reliģiju. Ticība tīri “cilvēciskajai” kultūrai, kas nevaicā pēc vīrieša un sievietes, rodas no [..] naivās “cilvēka” un “vīrieša” identificēšanas, kas daudzās valodās ļauj abiem jēdzieniem izmantot vienu un to pašu vārdu. [..] Savukārt tas, ka mūsu kultūras lietišķajiem saturiem īstenībā ir nevis šķietami neitrāls, bet gan vīrišķs raksturs, sakņojas daudzveidīgā vēsturisku un psiholoģisku motīvu savijumā.³⁴

20. gadsimta otrajā pusē feminismam bija cits viedoklis par to, vai vīrieša un cilvēka identificēšana valodā ir tikai naiva, vai arī tā atspoguļo noteiktas varas attiecības sabiedrībā. Zimmels to skaidroja ar analogiju par vēsturiski noteiktās morāles identificēšanu ar morāli vispār: laikabiedru pieņemtais morāles vai tiesību normu kopums, kas šķiet objektīvi pareizais un kļūst par standartu, jo tas ietekmē un nosaka mūsu dzīvi ikdienā. Rietumu kultūras vīrišķo saturu Zimmels saistīja ar vēsturisko darba dalīšanas sistēmu sabiedrībā, kur vīriešu ietekme un pieeja laika gaitā ir dominējoši nostiprinājusies. Zimmels piedāvāja, viņaprāt, radikālu atrisinājumu minētajai vīrišķā un objektīvā identifikācijas problēmai, uzsverot sieviešu specifiskās iejušanās spējas nozīmi kā medicīnā, respektīvi, diagnosticēšanas un ārstēšanas praksē, tā arī vēstures pētījumos. Te ir runa nevis par sieviešu vēsturi kā atsevišķu pētījumu jomu ar saviem mērķiem un uzdevumiem, bet gan par sieviešu īpašo pasaules uztveri, kas, pēc Zimmela domām, sniedz viņām noteiktas priekšrocības pagātnes izpētē. Taču vispirms Zimmels veltījis dažas rindas jautājumam par pagātnes izziņas iespējām kopumā.

Saskaņā ar to pašu priekšnosacījumu, ka atšķirīgai būšanai ir arī atšķirīga izziņa, sievišķā psihe ar specifiskiem veikumiem varētu kalpot arī vēstures zinātnei. Izziņas kritika ir parādījusi tā reālisma aplamību un

33 Zimmels, Georgs (2023). *Pilsēta un sieviete*. Rīga: Neputns, 74. lpp.

34 Turpat, 75., 76.-77. lpp.

virspusību, kuram zinātniskā vēsture ir iespējami fotogrāfiska norises atainošana (“kā tas tiešām bija”), nepastarpinātās realitātes iekraušana zinātniskajā apziņā. Tagad jau mēs zinām, ka [...] “vēsture” rodas tikai no to funkciju darbības, ko nosaka izzinošā gara struktūra un intences; no šīs noteiksmes īpatnības rodas rezultējošā veidojuma, vēstures, īpatnība. Tāpēc tā nepavisam neķļūst par kaut ko “subjektīvu”, nepieejamu patiesības un malda nošķiršanai [...] Ja vēstures izziņa aprobežotos ar to, kas precīzā nozīmē konstatēts un “pieredzēts”, mums būtu kaudze nesaistītu atlūzu; tikai ar nepārtrauktu interpolēšanu, papildināšanu pēc analogijas, izkārtošanu pēc attīstības jēdzieniem no tā veidojas vienotas “vēstures” rindas – kā zināms, tā notiek, pat atainojot cilvēku sadrūzmēšanos ielās pēc aculiecinieku teiktā.³⁵

Citētajos Zimmela izteikumos atrodama norāde uz vēsturnieka Leopolda fon Rankes (*Leopold von Ranke*, 1795–1886) formulēto, pozitīvisma metodoloģijā balstīto akadēmiskās historiogrāfijas pamatprincipu: vēsturnieka uzdevums, rakstot par pagātņi, ir attēlot visu tā, kā tas patiesībā noticis (*wie es eigentlich gewesen war*).³⁶ Taču jau nākamajā teikumā Zimmels šo pieeju apstrīdēja, atgādinot, ka vēsture kā stāsts par pagātņi rodas tikai pētījuma rezultātā un to nevar uzskatīt par bezkaislīgu pagātnes realitātes fotogrāfiju. Ar šo apgalvojumu viņš noraidīja tolaik akadēmiskajā vidē valdošos priekšstatus par objektivitāti vēstures zinātnē un iezīmēja 20. gadsimta otrās puses postmodernās vēstures teorijas kritisko attieksmi pret neitrāla pagātnes attēlojuma iespējamību. Tiesa, sieviešu priekšrocības vēstures izpētē Zimmels saistīja ar dabiskajiem, respektīvi, bioloģiskajiem un psiholoģiskajiem nosacījumiem.

Minētās sakarības, manuprāt, norāda, ka, ciktāl vēsture ir praktiskā psiholoģija, sievišķajā naturālībā varētu būt bāze pavisam oriģināliem veicumiem. Sievietēm kā tādām salīdzinājumā ar vīriešiem ir ne tikai [...] iespēja redzēt citu nekā vīriešiem, bet arī iespēja redzēt citādi, pateicoties savai īpašajai dvēseliskajai struktūrai. Saskaņā ar savas būtības apriori tās vispār tebušanu interpretē citādi nekā vīrieši, turklāt abas šīs interpretācijas nav pakļautas vienkāršajai alternatīvai “paties vai aplams”, tādējādi arī vēsturiskā pasaule, izmantojot viņu psiholoģiskās interpretācijas mediju, varētu piedāvāt citu daļu un veselā aspektu. Lai cik problemātiskas un eventuālas saistībā ar principiālajām sakarībām arī šķistu šādas iespējas, tomēr uzskatu, ka vēstures zinātnē varētu pastāvēt

35 Turpat, 88.–89. lpp.

36 Par Leopolda fon Rankes vēstures filozofiju un tās ietekmi historiogrāfijā sk.: Baberowski, Jörg (2005). *Der Sinn der Geschichte: Geschichtstheorien von Hegel bis Foucault*. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, S. 64–71.

specifiski sievišķas funkcijas, veikumi, kas izriet no sievišķās dvēseles uztveršanas, iejušanās un konstruēšanas orgāniem, sākot ar izpratni par neskaidrajām tautas kustībām un neatzītajām personību motivācijām un beidzot ar uzrakstu atšifrēšanu.³⁷

Georga Zimmela eseja “Sievišķā kultūra” ietvertās atziņas nebija saistītas ar feminisma kustībai aktuālo dienaskārtību, un arī viņš pats centās ieturēt formāli neitrālu nostāju, rakstot par sievišķās un vīrišķās kultūras atšķirībām, tādējādi paliekot savam laikmetam raksturīgās akadēmiskās pieejas priekšstatos. Tādēļ nav pamata uzskatīt Zimmelu par sieviešu vēstures aizsācēju, jo viņa esejai bija cits mērķis: mēģināt raksturot sievišķās pasaules uztveres jeb “kultūras” savdabību. Tomēr dažas Zimmela pamatotās tēzes iezīmēja jaunu izpratni par vēstures zinātnei, kas Rietumu historiogrāfijā strauji attīstījās tikai 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē. Daļa no šīs jaunās izpratnes radītajām pārmaiņām bija saistīta ar sieviešu vēstures un dzimtes vēstures disciplinām. Kā uzsver Linna Hanta, vēstures tematikas demokratizācija 20. gadsimtā notika ne tikai tādēļ, ka vēsturnieki paplašināja pētījumu ģeogrāfiju, bet gan tādēļ, ka mainījās pētnieku pieeja historiogrāfijai. Tādēļ saprotams, ka jaunās metodes ienāca vēstures rakstīšanā, daļēji pateicoties relatīviem nomaļniekiem, piemēram, pirmajām sieviešu vēstures izpētes aizsācējām Lielbritānijā un ASV jau 19. gadsimta beigās un 20. gadsimta sākumā, iezīmējot pāreju no politikas vēstures uz sociālās vēstures un materiālās kultūras tēmu izpēti.³⁸ Šādā kontekstā Zimmela eseja neradās “tukšā vietā”, tās tapšanai bija jau zināmi priekšnoteikumi sava laikmeta intelektuālajā vidē.

Arī vēstures pētījumu metodoloģijas jomā Zimmelam izdevās iezīmēt pieeju, kuru no jauna atklāja un attīstīja tālāk tikai 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē, kad aktualizējās jautājums par vēsturi kā pagātnes reprezentāciju, kas rodas pētījuma gaitā, taču nav atrodamā vēstures avotos tiešā, jau “gatavā” veidā.³⁹ Tāpat vēsturiskā iztēle, pateicoties postmodernisma pārstāvju attīstītajai vēstures zinātnes kritikai, 21. gadsimtā ir atgriezies kā pilntiesīga akadēmiskās historiogrāfijas sastāvdaļa,⁴⁰ un daļēji šo atgriešanos sagatavoja Georga Zimmela uzmanība pret sievišķo kultūru un sievietes priekšrocībām vēstures rakstīšanā, kas piešķīra iepriekš noraidītajai subjektivitātei jaunu vērtību. Feminisma piedāvātais atšķirīgais skatījums uz vēsturi ietver gan jaunas konceptuālās nostādnes, gan jaunu vēstures avotu apzināšanu un iekļaušanu pētniecībā. Cita pagātnes reprezentācija vēstures pētījumos ir iespējama, izmantojot vēstures kā pagātnes attēla metaforu – tā izceļ “vēsturiskās iztēles” un autora subjektivitātes jeb “sievišķā skatiena” nozīmi. Atzīstot sievietes, tāpat kā ikviena cilvēka, tiesības būt subjektīvam, iezīmējas postmodernajai vēstures izpratnei raksturīgā pieeja. Bez sievišķā

37 Zimmels, Georgs (2023). *Pilsēta un sieviete*, 91.-92. lpp.

38 Hunt, Lynn (2018). *History: Why It Matters*, pp. 75-76.

39 Berkhofer, Robert F. (2008). *Fashioning History*, pp. 25-32, 103-115.

40 Munslow, Alun (2006). *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, pp. 135-140.

skatījuma vēstures attēlojums nav pilnīgs. Sievišķais skatījums uz vēsturi nav “tikai” subjektīvs, tas atgādina par konteksta nozīmi un par tiesībām interpretēt pagātnes dzīves rekonstrukcijas, ko mēs dēvējam par vēsturi.

Nobeigums

Sieviešu vēstures rakstīšana ir tikpat politiska nodarbošanās kā vēstures rakstīšana vispār, jo aktuālo politisko jautājumu ietekme historiogrāfijā ir nenovēršama, un šajā ziņā sieviešu vēsture nav politizēta vairāk par ikvienu citu vēstures zinātnes nozari. Tomēr laikmetīgā attieksme pret vēstures zinātni kā instrumentu, kas nesniedz piekļuvi visai patiesībai par pagātņi, bet ļauj radīt ticamus un pamatotus pagātnes realitātes attēlus jeb reprezentācijas, padara sieviešu vēsturi par vienlīdz svarīgu pagātnes izpētes sastāvdaļu salīdzinājumā ar ikvienu citu historiogrāfijas virzienu. Feminisma, kreiso politisko ideju un kapitālisma kritikas ietekme sieviešu vēstures tapšanā par nozīmīgu akadēmisko pētījumu disciplīnu ir nenoliedzama. Tomēr tas nenozīmē, ka sieviešu vēstures saturs ir reducējams uz politiski aktuālo jautājumu apkalpošanu. Sieviešu vēsture nav tikai pagātnes liecībās balstīta ilustrācija vai propagandas tēls, kas vajadzīgs sekmīgai cīņai par emancipāciju mūsdienās. Tās būtiskais ieguldījums ir saistīts ar vairākiem aspektiem.

Pirmkārt, sieviešu vēsture izraisīja akadēmisko pētījumu lauka paplašināšanu, ietverot historiogrāfijā gan jaunus vēstures avotus un to grupas, gan arī jaunas tēmas, kas saistītas ar ģimenes un radniecības struktūru vēsturi, emociju vēsturi, cilvēku ikdienas dzīves praksēm pirmsindustriālajā un industriālā laikmeta sabiedrībā, dzimuma identitātes un dzimumu sociālo lomu konstruēšanu. Otrkārt, sieviešu vēstures attīstība izraisīja fundamentālas pārmaiņas arī vēstures zinātnes teorētisko koncepciju jomā. Tā lika pārvērtēt uzskatus par objektivitātes kritērijiem vēstures zinātnē, atklājot šo kritēriju atkarību no sava laikmeta intelektuālās un politiskās konjunktūras. Sieviešu vēsture apzināti izcēla subjektivitātes neizbēgamo klātbūtni un nozīmi pagātnes attēlojumā, atgādinot par to, ka vēsturnieka darba vērtību noteiks tikai tā rezultātu verifikācijas pakāpe, proti, iespēja pārbaudīt pētījuma autora izdarīto atklājumu un secinājumu pamatotību. Treškārt, 20. gadsimtā Rietumu historiogrāfijā veiktie pētījumi sieviešu vēstures un pēc tam arī dzimtes vēstures tematikā lika pārvarēt 19. gadsimta pozitīvismā un patriarhālismā balstītos priekšstatus par “objektīvo” androcentrisko vīriešu vēsturi kā historiogrāfijas standartu un galveno tās zinātniskuma mērauklu. Akceptējot sieviešu vēsturi, konceptuālajā līmenī tika pārvarēta pozitīvisma inerce vēstures zinātnē, kas savukārt deva jaunus impulsus arī metodoloģiskajā līmenī, veicinot mutvārdu vēstures iekļaušanu un pievēršot uzmanību līdz šim ignorēto un/vai marginalizēto sabiedrības grupu vēstures izpētei.

Sieviešu vēstures un dzimtes vēstures pētniecība ir starpdisciplināra un pret-runīga nozare, kas radās pārejas laikā no modernisma uz postmodernismu. Tās spēks meklējams spējā eksistēt un attīstīties ārpus pētnieku un sabiedrības komforta zonas, bet pastāv arī iespēja, ka sieviešu vēsture un dzimtes vēsture var iekļūt iepriekš raksturotajā binārās opozīcijas slazdā: kompensējot tradicionālās historiogrāfijas nevērību pret sieviešu vēstures tematiku, pēdējā riskē atkārtot marksistu shematisko pieeju vēsturei, kas visur saskatīja relatīvi vienkāršas pretrunas un konfliktus starp dažādām interešu grupām, piemēram, starp sabiedrības eliti un vienkāršo tautu, vai šajā gadījumā – starp vīriešiem un sievietēm.⁴¹ Lai to novērstu, nepieciešams vēlreiz mainīt pētījumu tematisko fokusu, pievēršot uzmanību tam, kā un kādēļ mainās attiecības starp vīriešiem un sievietēm, kā tiek noteiktas dzimtes kategorijas un kā tiek saprasti sievišķības un vīrišķības jēdzieni konkrētā sabiedrībā un laikmetā. Vēstures izpētē ir tikai viens pamatprincips – pagātnes interpretācija nedrīkst būt atkarīga no dzimumu stereotipu diktētajiem aizspriedumiem par “dabisko” vīriešu pieejas objektivitāti un sieviešu subjektivitāti. Liekot apzināties subjektīvā un objektīvā relatīvo nozīmi pagātnes izpētē, sieviešu vēsture ir sekmējusi jaunas attieksmes veidošanos pret vēstures zinātni un piedāvājusi jaunu perspektīvu cilvēka pašizziņas ceļā.

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41 Burke, Peter (2005). *History and Social Theory*, p. 52.

10. Hunt, Lynn (2018). *History: Why It Matters*. Cambridge: Polity.
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MĀRTIŅŠ MINTAURS

The Feminine Perspective on History in Western Historiography of the 20th Century

Summary

The article discusses the development of women's history and gender history as distinct research trends in Western historiography, examining their conceptual and methodological transformations influenced by postmodern theory from the 1960s and 1970s onwards. The alternate perspective on history writing proposed by feminist theories encompassed the development of new theoretical concepts, the identification of previously overlooked historical evidence, and the establishment of new research topics for historians.

Acknowledging the right to adopt a subjective approach toward representations of the past has been a defining feature of postmodern historiography, rejecting any form of "grand narrative" that could be monopolized by particular social groups or academic elites. Instead, scholars have embraced a plurality of historical approaches, uncovering new perspectives for writing both women's history and gender history.

The significance of women's history and its civic context stem from its focus on marginalized social groups and those previously silenced for political or ideological reasons. Without this perspective, portrayals of the past remain incomplete, lacking the contextual depth necessary for understanding the historical processes and lived experiences that shape what we call history today.

Keywords: feminism, postmodernism, women's history, gender history, social history.

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SANITA DUKA

Latvia's First Female Theater Directors – Biruta Skujeniece, Anna Lācis, Olga Bormane – Latvia's First Wave Feminism or *ante litteram*?

Summary

The article foregrounds the contributions of women to professional theater directing in the early decades of the 20th century, analyzing the intersections of politics, theater, and gender, and situating Latvian theatrical developments within broader European sociopolitical and cultural dynamics. The first female Latvian theater directors – Biruta Skujeniece (married Dambekalna, 1888–1931), Anna Lācis (née Liepiņa, 1891–1979), and Olga Bormane (née Groskaufmane, 1893–1968) – proved themselves as artistically independent professionals. The article focuses on introducing their most significant achievements: Skujeniece's large-scale performances such as Maurice Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* and Rainis's dramatic poem *Daugava* (1919) and her poetical Intimate Theater (*Intīmais teātris*, 1923–1925); Lācis's investment in organizing leftist drama studios at the Riga People's High School (*Rīgas Tautas augstskola*, 1920–1934) and Riga Trade Unions Central Bureau Club (*Rīgas Arodbiedrību centrālbiroja klubs*, 1924–1928); and Bormane's extensive contributions to the Riga Workers' Theater (*Rīgas Strādnieku teātris*). These cases demonstrate how leftist transnational political ideals were locally expressed through theater-making and question whether these directors' work signifies feminist agency or isolated instances of artistic leadership.

The research was initiated during the Summer School by the National Library of Latvia and the Art Academy of Latvia in 2024, within which the author offered a workshop, combining a discussion about feminism and gender studies in Latvia with an introduction to researching unpublished sources at the Latvian National Museum of Literature and Music. The study incorporates unpublished archival materials, highlighting the challenges faced by these pioneers. By reassessing their

legacy, the enduring cultural influence of these directors is brought to light. The study contributes to the discourse on women's roles in Latvian culture and society.

Keywords: gender and performance studies, Latvian theater history, leftist political theater, Intimate Theater, Riga Workers' Theater.

Introduction

Among the significant changes in the early decades of the 20th century fostered by transformations in European society, politics, and culture, the emergence of women in professional theater directing in Latvia represented a noteworthy shift in the traditionally male-dominated field of stagecraft. This article examines the contributions of the first Latvian female theater directors – Biruta Skujeniece (married Dambekalna, 1888–1931), Anna Lācis (née Liepiņa, 1891–1979), and Olga Bormane (née Groskaufmane, 1893–1968) – by situating their work within the broader sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the time. Their contributions not only challenged traditional gender norms but also reflected the influence of contemporary political ideologies, which were linked to social and democratic movements advocating for gender equality.

The relevance of addressing the pioneering Latvian women stage directors who took leading position lies in their potential manifestation of feminist agency within a broader movement, or whether these cases should instead be evaluated as individual initiatives that appeared before their time – *ante litteram*. The Latin expression *ante litteram* literally translates as “before the letter” and denotes a phenomenon that existed before the term or specific field of knowledge was established. The article questions whether these directors should be viewed as isolated pioneers operating outside a broader framework or as representative figures of the Latvian women's struggle for their rights.

The research presented in this article was initiated during the Summer School organized by the National Library of Latvia and the Art Academy of Latvia in 2024. As part of this event, participants engaged in a research game that combined discussions on feminism and gender studies with hands-on archival exploration at the Latvian National Museum of Literature and Music. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how unpublished sources can serve as evidence for the presence or absence of feminist ideas in Latvian history and theater.

The range of phenomena described by the term “feminism” is broad and heterogeneous, branching out and changing over time. The plural term “feminisms”, used to capture the diversity of views, refers to various ideological backgrounds such as liberalism, socialism, and Marxism, framing the context of evolution within existing

or emerging doctrinal traditions.¹ For relevance to global feminism and to anchor the findings within comparative feminist discourse, the critical framework of the article is based on the “waves”² metaphor of feminism, applied to outline its trajectory by subdividing it into several time frames – starting in the late 19th century with the fight for women’s suffrage and gender equality in civil rights, and extending to the plurality of movements coexisting in the present day.³

The women’s struggle for equal rights, opportunities, and freedoms, and the comprehension of emancipation, was a social, political, and cultural movement. Advocating for legal, economic, and social reforms, including access to education and labor rights, and rooted in the broader fight against oppression, the movement has historically taken various forms – from early campaigns for voting rights to contemporary activism addressing workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, and gender-based violence. In the frame of this article, feminism is defined as a theoretical framework that continues to evolve, a continuous effort to challenge restrictive norms and empower women’s presence in political, social, cultural, and philosophical fields.

The examination of women stage directors’ experiences in their creative, professional, and political roles, within broader comparative contexts refers to international works such as *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theater* (1932),⁴ *Women in Russian Theater* (2013),⁵ *Stage Women, 1900–50* (2019).⁶ Exploration of women’s participation in theater – their professional practice, careers, celebrity status or infamous reputation, and how they, as women, lived through the struggle for enfranchisement in rights – was and still is an ongoing research topic on an international scale.

Recent research questioning the place of gender in contemporary theater, for example, *International Women Stage* (2013)⁷ and *Contemporary Women Stage Directors* (2019),⁸ turns to the female agency of theater directing. The ongoing discussions in women’s studies, an academic field that draws on feminist and interdisciplinary methods, place women’s lives and experiences at the center of study, discussing systems of privilege and inequality while examining social and cultural constructs of gender

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- 1 Wilford, Rick (1994). *Feminism. Political Ideologies: An Introduction*. Routledge, pp. 252-253.
 - 2 Soken-Huberty, Emmaline [n.d.]. Types of Feminism: The Four Waves. *Humanrightscareers.com*. Available at: www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/types-of-feminism-the-four-waves [17.03.2025].
 - 3 Aikau, Hokulani K.; Erickson, Karla A.; Pierce, Jennifer L. (2007). *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*. University of Minnesota Press, pp.1-45.
 - 4 Gilder, Rosamond (1960 [1931]). *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre*. New York: Arts Book.
 - 5 Schuler, Catherine (2013). *Women in Russian Theatre: The Actress in the Silver Age*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.
 - 6 Gale, Maggie B.; Dorney, Kate (2019). *Stage Women, 1900-50: Female Theatre Workers and Professional Practice*. Manchester University Press.
 - 7 Flotsos, Anne; Vierow, Wendy (2013). *International Women Stage Directors*. University of Illinois Press.
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and the relationships between power and gender as they intersect with other identities such as race and socio-economic class.⁹

Latvian researchers have addressed local specificities in several edited volumes, such as *Sieviete Latvijas vēsturē* (*Woman in Latvian History*, 2007),¹⁰ *100 Latvijas sievietes kultūrā un politikā* (*100 Latvian Women in Culture and Politics*, 2008).¹¹ The relative invisibility of women's contributions to Latvian society is reflected in the academic journal *Letonica* special issue (No. 49, 2023) on women's agency and history, based on findings from the fundamental research project *Sieviešu pārstāvniecība Latvijas kultūrā un sabiedrībā 1870–1940* (*Female Agency in Latvian Culture and Society 1870–1940*, No. lzp-2020/1-0215) of the Latvian Council of Science. This research argues that historiography relies heavily on existing biographical and documentary sources, which mostly contain little information about women – explaining why so little is known about women writers, translators, publishers, artists, scientists, politicians, and social workers.¹²

The question of women's civil and political rights in the 19th and early 20th centuries resonated within the broader left-wing political discourse at the transnational level, as well as in Latvia. The First World War, the collapse of empires, and the subsequent formation of new nation-states created circumstances and opportunities for advancing democratic principles, including gender parity. During the democratic period, Latvian political parties, competing for the electorate, addressed a female audience with inclusive appeals. Women's political organizations, such as The Latvian Women's Relief Corps (*Latvijas Sieviešu palīdzības korpuss*, 1919), the Women's Centre of Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (*Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku partijas Sieviešu centrs*, 1918), Latvian Women's National League (*Latvju sieviešu nacionālā līga*, 1922), Council of Latvian Women's Organizations (*Latvijas Sieviešu organizāciju padome*, 1926), formed a framework for women's political engagement.¹³

In this context, the work of Skujeniece in the Rainis's Club (*Raiņa klubs*, 1919–1934), Lācis in leftist theater studios, and Bormane in the Riga Workers' Theater can be examined as manifestations of broader ideological trends. By incorporating previously unpublished archival materials, this article aims to reassess the contributions of the first professional Latvian female theater directors. Reviewing the protocols of the Riga People's High School and the Riga Workers' Theater board meetings revealed

9 Shaw, Susan M.; Lee, Janet (2014). *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, sixth ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp. 2-28.

10 Zellis, Kaspars (sast.) (2007). *Sieviete Latvijas vēsturē*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Akadēmiskais apgāds.

11 Cimdiņa, Ausma (sast.) (2008). *100 Latvijas sievietes kultūrā un politikā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte.

12 Eglāja-Kristone, Eva; Kārkla, Zita (2023). Introduction: Women's Agency. Multiplying Stories and Subjects. *Letonica*, No. 49, p. 4.

13 Lipša, Ineta (2022). *Viena. Grozāmo sarakstu slazdā: sieviešu politiskā vēsture Latvijā 1922-1934*. Rīga: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, pp. 15-57.

that both Lācis and Bormane had been voted out of their positions as drama studio directors. The article critically examines the contradictory assessments of their work.

This research employs a historical-cultural methodology, integrating archival research, discourse analysis, and the biographical method to examine the work and legacy of women theatre directors in early 20th-century Latvia. The biographical method allows for an in-depth exploration of individual life trajectories in their socio-political context, highlighting how personal experiences, choices, and constraints intersected with broader ideological and artistic movements. The study draws on feminist historiography and performance theory to situate theatre as a site of both cultural agency and political expression. This interdisciplinary and biographically grounded approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of how individual women navigated, challenged, and helped reshape the cultural and political landscapes of their time. The research contributes to the study of the history of Latvian theater, shedding light on the input of Latvian female directors. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on gender, politics, and cultural history, discussing the role of women in shaping Latvian theater and society.

Theater, Politics and Gender in Latvia

In Latvia, the field of gender studies is evolving to examine Eastern European contexts and the distinct characteristics of the post-Soviet experience. Post-socialist feminism is often viewed as a delayed adaptation of Western models, resulting in a localized hybrid theory developed through transnational influences. Feminist art researcher Jana Kukaine highlights how historical and cultural factors have contributed to uncertainty and caution in feminist narratives. Kukaine's review of feminist thought in the Baltics emphasizes the opacity of the discourse and the tendency to mark any manifestation of feminism as uncanny, which leads to tactics of concealment.¹⁴ Considering these regional specificities, this paper aims to identify traces of first-wave feminist ideas in beliefs and actions rather than categorizing specific individuals as feminists. However, a transnational perspective within broader European dynamics reveals distinct feminist ideologies and practices in Latvian society in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Progressive ideas from Western European women's movements resonated within the Latvian cultural landscape, but could not gain legal expression, as political organizations were prohibited in Tsarist Russia. The historical roots of beliefs and actions aligned with women's activism in Latvia can be traced back to women's involvement

14 Kukaine, Jana (2024). *Viscerālā estētika: afekti un feministiskā māksla postsociālismā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes (LU) Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts; Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, p. 79.

in cultural and charitable initiatives, marking an early instance of women's active participation in cultural and social initiatives.¹⁵ Furthermore, women's involvement in the first Latvian political organizations demonstrates their engagement in the nation's political and social transformations. This presence underscores the practical dimension of the struggle for women's rights in Latvia, which was not a separate phenomenon but an integral part of the nation's broader fight for political and social progress.

The demands for national emancipation, initially championed by national romanticism and later advanced by critical, democratic, and eventually social democratic movements, played a crucial role in shaping feminist thought. A key moment in this ideological shift was the emergence of the movement *Jaunā Strāva* (New Current). The name signified a new ideological direction in opposition to the old one, with *strāva* metaphorically representing a "stream" or "energy" for the liberating struggle, corresponding with the "wave" metaphor. Social democratic ideas gained traction, particularly after newspaper *Dienas Lapa* editor Jānis Pliekšāns (pen name Rainis, 1865–1929) attended the Third Congress of the Second International in Switzerland in 1893. There, he met August Bebel (1840–1913), a prominent figure in the German Social Democratic movement, and secretly smuggled socialist literature and subsequently published excerpts from various socialist works in *Dienas Lapa*, promoting these ideas among Latvian readers.¹⁶ One of the most influential texts was Bebel's *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (*Woman and Socialism*, 1879), which became a foundational work for the socialist women's movement. Before World War I, the book had been published in more than fifty editions and translated into over twenty languages, including Latvian in 1912, thereby reinforcing the connection between socialist ideology and women's activism in Latvia. The questions on women's equality became an essential part of the discourse, often framed under the generalized concept of "the women's issue." This growing engagement with feminist ideals, shaped by democratic and socialist influences, indicates that by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, discussions on gender equality in Latvia were not isolated incidents but part of a broader ideological shift towards social justice and political inclusivity.

15 Zelče, Vita (2002). *Nezināmā: Latvijas sievietes 19. gadsimta otrajā pusē*. Rīga: Latvijas Arhīvistu biedrība, pp. 111–113.

16 Buceniece, Ella (sast.) (2005). *Ideju vēsture Latvijā: Jaunā strāva - 20. gs. sākums: antoloģija*, Vol. 1. Rīga: RaKa.

Latvian Drama and Women's Rights

Latvian theater emerged as a platform for advancing new political objectives. The first Latvian theater performance in 1868 was staged under the pretext of organizing a charity event, but in reality, it served as a means to establish the first Latvian political organization, the Latvian Aid Society for Estonians in Need (*Latviska palīdzības biedrība priekš trūkumu ciedamiem igauņiem*). The Women's Committee of this organization played a key role in providing practical support, demonstrating women's active social involvement.¹⁷ The strategic use of theater for political engagement and social activism continued with the founding of the Riga Latvian Society (*Rīgas Latviešu biedrība*), which played a pivotal role in fostering national consciousness. The Riga Latvian Society Theater (*Rīgas Latviešu biedrības teātris*) became a forum for discussing and promoting national identity and political self-awareness.

This intertwining of theater and activism laid the groundwork for its role in reflecting and shaping the evolving political landscape of Latvia. Historian Vita Zelče highlights theater as a significant sphere in women's emancipation.¹⁸ From the early stages of Latvian theater, women's presence on stage not only challenged traditional gender roles but also provided a platform for advocating broader social and political change. By engaging in theater, women gained visibility, professional recognition, and the opportunity to express ideas about equality and emancipation, making it a crucial realm for empowerment and societal influence. Through plays addressing themes of national struggle, social progress, and class and gender inequality, Latvian theater provided a space for public discourse, strengthening collective identity and furthering political aspirations.

One of the major figures in Latvian drama, Aspazija (née Johanna Emīlija Lizete Rozenberga, 1865–1943), shaped public opinion, advocated for women's rights, and amplified resistance to patriarchal oppression. Her historical plays prominently featured female protagonists, including *Atriebēja* (*The Avenger*, 1893), *Vaidelote* (1893), *Ragana* (*The Witch*, 1895), and *Sidraba šķidrāts* (*The Silver Veil*, 1902). Her social dramas, *Zaudētās tiesības* (*Lost Rights*, 1893) and *Nesasniegts mērķis* (*Unreached Goal*, 1895), actively promoted feminist ideals, portraying the dependent role of women whose struggles were defined by conflicts with patriarchal laws.¹⁹

These plays garnered widespread attention, igniting intense public debate and provoking sharp disagreements in the press. Supportive arguments appeared in *Dienas Lapa*, while critical perspectives were voiced in *Baltijas Vēstnesis* and echoed in other periodicals through wide-ranging polemics, in which Aspazija herself was

17 Zelče, Vita (2002). *Nezināmā: Latvijas sievietes 19. gadsimta otrajā pusē*. Rīga: Latvijas Arhivistu biedrība, p. 121.

18 Ibid, pp. 121–129.

19 Hausmanis, Viktors (2009). Aspazija. *Latviešu drāmas sākotne*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 239–272.

also enthusiastically involved.²⁰ Aspazija's dramas and polemics positioned theater as a public forum for exposing inequalities and catalyzed political confrontation with the "Old Current", setting new ideological goals. She aligned herself with the New Current²¹ and became a significant figure in the history of Latvian literature in relation to the reception of Marxist social and cultural philosophy in Latvia.²² After Latvia gained independence, theater flourished on an unprecedented scale, becoming a dynamic space for artistic and ideological expression. Women directors began to emerge, particularly in leftist-supported theaters and drama studios, where progressive ideas about gender equality and social change were more actively promoted. These institutions provided opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in directing and theater-making, breaking traditional gender barriers in the field and driven by an unconventional leadership approach rooted in female agency. This period marked a significant shift in the visibility and influence of women in the performing arts, establishing a foundation for their continued impact on Latvian theater.

Women in the Role of Theater Director

Latvian theater researchers in recent decades have rediscovered the contribution of women stage directors, describing their developed methods as "the most striking extremes in the search for a form of modern Latvian theater".²³ Biruta Skujeniece's experiments in symbolic aesthetics pushed the boundaries of theatrical expression. Subsequently, Anna Lācis's avant-garde political theater, as the *Latvian Theater October*,²⁴ echoed Vsevolod Meyerhold's revolutionary call for transforming theater aimed at overthrowing traditional theatrical forms, engaging audiences directly in performances, and creating agitational productions to serve revolutionary ideals. In contrast, Olga Bormane pursued a more conventional directing style, focusing on the artistic delivery of the spoken word in acting, and her role was pivotal both as a director, drama studio teacher and actress at the Riga Workers' Theater.

The case studies of Skujeniece, Lācis, and Bormane highlight the outstanding personalities within Latvian theater. However, it is also crucial to recognize other female directors of the time. Prominent actresses Otilija Muceniece (1871–1951) and

20 Aspazija (1988). Raksti un runas par sieviešu emancipācijas jautājumu. *Kopoti raksti*, Vol. 5. Rīga: Liesma, pp. 455–475.

21 Aspazija (1988). Jaunā strāva. *Kopoti raksti*, Vol. 6. Rīga: Liesma, pp. 386–400.

22 Cimdiņa, Ausma (2016). Aspazijas izaicinājums zinātnei un tēvzemei. No: Ausma Cimdiņa (sast.). *Aspazija un mūsdienas: dzimums, nācija, radošie izaicinājumi*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 23–37.

23 Mamaja, Evita (2002). Modernisms latviešu teātrī (1920–1930). No: Silvija Radzobe (sast.). *20. gadsimta režija Latvijā un pasaulē*. Rīga: Jumava, p. 95. [Hereinafter the translation of quotations is mine - S.D.].

24 Paškevica, Beata (2006). *In der Stadt der Parolen. Asja Lacis, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht*. Schriften des Fritz-Hüser-Instituts für deutsche und ausländische Arbeiterliteratur. Bd. 14. Essen: Klartext Verlag, p. 101.

Tija Banga (1882–1957) transitioned into directing, while Felicita Ertner (1891–1975) played a central role at the Dailes Theater, significantly shaping its artistic direction.²⁵ Additionally, women held leadership positions in private modern dance studios, with Anna Ašmane (married Sietiņšone, 1888–1967), Anna Kerrè (also Kerē, Ķere, 1902–?) and Beatrise Vignere (1903–1990) pioneering modern dance education and performance in Latvia.²⁶ Also, there are more female theater directors whose investment has not yet been made visible. Their collective contributions underscore women's influence on the performing arts, whether through experimental symbolism, politically charged drama, or traditional dramatic interpretations, demonstrating their significant impact on the evolution of Latvian theater. By taking leadership positions in a historically male-dominated profession, female directors challenged entrenched gender biases. Their presence in positions of authority and creative control was a manifestation of early feminist demands for professional and artistic equality.

Poetical Theater by Biruta Skujeniece

Biruta Skujeniece received her primary education at the Āgenskalns Latvian Society Girls' School (*Āgenskalna Latviešu biedrības meiteņu skola*) and continued her studies at the Ķeniņi Girls' Gymnasium (*Ķeniņu meiteņu privātproģimnāzija*) in Riga. At merely 16 years old, she played major roles at the Riga New Latvian Theater (*Rīgas Jaunais latviešu teātris*) and the Apollo Theater.²⁷ She studied at the Musico-Dramatic School of the Philharmonic Society in Moscow (*Muzykalno-dramaticheskoe uchilishche pri Moskovskom filarmonicheskom obshchestve*) and Reichner's Academy of Dramatic Art in Berlin (*Reichersche Hochschule für dramatische Kunst*).²⁸ Upon returning to Riga, she organized poetry recitation evenings, staged large-scale poetry performances such as Maurice Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* and Rainis's dramatic poem *Daugava* (1919),²⁹ led the dramatic section of the Rainis's Club (1919–1923), and later founded her private Intimate Theater (1923–1925).³⁰ She suddenly left the theater, published

25 Zeltiņa, Guna (2010). Ievads. *Latviešu teātris no pirmssākumiem līdz mūsdienām*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, p. 14.

26 Vidzemniece, Valda (2024). *Modernā deja Latvijā 20. gadsimta pirmajā pusē*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 147–215.

27 Kundziņš, Kārlis (1972). *Latviešu teātra vēsture*, Vol. 2. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, pp. 38, 67, 91–92.

28 [Womage] Biruta Skujeniece, [n.d.] Available at: www.womage.lv/personas/biruta-skujeniece

29 These very important episodes were erased from *Latvian Theatre History*, mentioning Skujeniece as "shortly present" and "deviated into aestheticism". See for more information: Kundziņš, Kārlis (1972). *Latviešu teātra vēsture*, Vol. 2. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, p. 233. The *Latvian Theatre Chronicle* does not mention premieres before the establishment of the Latvian National Theatre, but notes performances on December 3, 1919, and January 6, 1920. See for more information: Sniedze, Evita (2006). *Latviešu teātra hronika 1919–1944*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 12–13.

30 Lūriņa, Rita (2023). Modernisma žests Birutas Skujenieces režijā un pedagogijā. *Latviešu modernisma teātris un žests*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 192–200.

her collection of poems *Staru spārni pār dūmainu upurtaku* (*Ray Wings Over a Smokey Sacrifice Path*, 1925), and began studying sculpture and painting at the Art Academy of Latvia.³¹

The most prominent production by Biruta Skujeniece was Rainis's dramatic poem *Daugava* at the Latvian National Theater on November 18, 1919, marking the first anniversary of the declaration of independent Latvia. Just a week earlier, on November 11, church bells had rung in Riga, heralding victory over the Bermontian army after more than a month of uncertainty about the outcome of the military operations. The poem *Daugava* had been published only a few weeks before the battles began on the banks of the River Daugava in Riga. It turned out that Rainis was a poet-prophet calling for battle. "The power of poetry did as much as a division of the army" became a catchphrase describing the inspiration it evoked. Biruta Skujeniece had thrown herself into battle with the weapons available to her, mobilized the actors of the newly formed National Theater, and staged the dramatic poem *Daugava*, which was not originally intended for the stage. The performance resembled a prayer of gratitude, a religious service, and a testament to the power of art, and the will to freedom.³² The leading actors were Alfreds Amtmanis-Briedītis (1885–1966), Paula Baltābola (married Merksone, 1891–1978), Tija Banga, Lilija Ērika (1890–1981), Berta Rūmniece (née Mihelone, 1865–1953), Mirdza Šmithene (1887–1978), and others, including Biruta Skujeniece herself.

The stage design and costumes for the expressionist dramatic poem were created by Valdemārs Tone (1892–1958), an artist from the Riga Expressionist Group, founded in the same year.³³ Before the Bermontiad, Skujeniece and Tone had collaborated on Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice*, featuring Dace Akmentiņa (Doroteja Šteinberga, 1858–1936) in the lead role, which Romans Suta (1896–1944) described in his review as "a new page in Latvian stage art".³⁴ No photographs of the performances have survived, but reviews indicate that the stagings were innovative and followed the principles of expressionism, highlighting inner human experiences rather than naturalistic representations of reality. For example, the River Daugava had to be imagined as a pale cloth in the background of the stage, while purple searchlights over the battlefield marked the chorus on site. There was no need for an illusory depiction: all that had been experienced together during the Bermontiad projected a vision of collapsed bridges, trenches, and shells. The Latvian National Theater was solemnly opened on November 30, 1919, and both productions by Skujeniece were included in its repertoire.

31 Gudriķe, Biruta (2003). Biruta Skujeniece. *Latviešu rakstniecība biogrāfijās*. Rīga: Zinātne, p. 538.

32 Kroders, Roberts (1919). Raiņa sērdieņu dziesmas "Daugava" izrāde 2. pilsētas teātrī, 18. novembrī Latvijas valsts pastāvēšanas gada dienas piemiņai. *Latvijas Sargs*, Nr. 193, 20.11., p. 3.

33 Lamberga, Dace (2010). *Valdemārs Tone*. Rīga: Neputns, pp. 64–66.

34 Suta, Romans (1919). Meterlinka "Māsa Beatrise". *Latvijas Sargs*, Nr. 146, 23.09., p. 3.

In 1919, Biruta Skujeniece became the director of the newly founded Rainis's Club Theater Studio, where actor Kārlis Hamsters, artist Romāns Suta, and choreographer Mārtiņš Kauliņš participated as teachers. During this period, Biruta Skujeniece formulated her views on theater in lectures given to students and in theoretical articles published in the two issues of the journal *Skatuves Studija* (*Stage Studio*, 1920), where she proposed a theater manifesto based on the principles of symbolism and expressionism.³⁵ She intended to become a director at the Dailes Theater, organized by the Rainis's Club, but this did not materialize.³⁶ Instead, she established the Intimate Theater where her students performed chamber-style poetic productions. Due to financial difficulties and social pressure, Skujeniece ended her theater career. Her studio members, such as Ģirts Bumbieris (1894–1973), Lonija Karlivāne (real name Emīlija Leontīne, married Alksne, 1901–1939) and Tonija Karlivāne (real name Anna Antonija, married Igals, 1902–?), Nikolajs Mūrnieks (1904–1977), Kārlis Pente (1896–?), Edgars Zīle (1908–1986), and Aleksandrs Zutis (1877–1941), later formed an independent group in collaboration with Jurijs Jurovskis.³⁷ Eventually, this studio merged with the Riga Workers' Theater.

Biruta Skujeniece's contributions to Latvian theater were groundbreaking in both artistic innovation and the mobilization of cultural expression as a form of national resilience. Her stagings of poetic performances in 1919 demonstrated how theater could serve as both a spiritual and ideological force, capturing the emotions of a war-torn nation. Drawing on symbolism and expressionism, her productions rejected naturalism in favor of deep emotional and psychological resonance, setting a new artistic direction for Latvian stagecraft. As the director of the Rainis's Club Theater Studio and later her Intimate Theater, Skujeniece sought to cultivate a new theatrical language that integrated poetry, movement, and visual abstraction. However, despite her visionary approach, financial constraints and societal pressures forced her to abandon her theatrical career. Her legacy, however, endured through her students, many of whom became leading figures in Latvian theater. Skujeniece's case exemplifies both the potential and the challenges of introducing female leadership on stage in early 20th-century Latvia.

Latvian Theater October by Anna Lācis

Anna Lācis received an artistically inspiring high school education at Anna Ķeniņa Girls' Gymnasium in Riga and began her career as a theater director and theorist

35 Rodiņa, Ieva (2020). *Eduarda Smiļģa režija un modernisms (1920–1945)*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte, p. 21.

36 Lūriņa, Rita (2023). *Latviešu modernisma teātris un žests*. Rīga: Zinātne, p. 197.

37 Eņģele, Māra (1993). *Birutēni. Teātra Vēstnesis*. 1993, Nr. 3, pp. 128–133.



Intimate Theater drama studio, 1923. Director Biruta Skujeniece - sitting in the first row, third from the right.
Photo by photo studio "Klio", Riga. Collection of the Latvian National Literature and Music Museum, RTMM 550743

by entering the St. Petersburg Bekhterev Psychoneurological Research Institute (*Sankt-Peterburgskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii Psikhonevrologičeskii institut im. V. M. Bekhtereva*), Shanyavsky Moscow City People's University (*Moskovskii gorodskoi narodnyi universitet imeni A. L. Shaniavskogo*), and Fyodor Komisarzhvsky Theater Studio and postgraduate course of A. Lunacharsky State Institute of Theater Arts (*Gosudarstvennyi institut teatral'nogo iskusstva im. A. V. Lunacharskogo*).³⁸ She received an exceptional education and immersed herself in the atmosphere of history-making discussions on the revolutionary renewal of theater, exploring its political, ideological, and educational significance.³⁹ Her work with drama studios in Orel (1918–1920) and Riga (1920–1921, 1925–1926) emphasized collective creation, improvisation, and mass open-air performances. Her special talent was to find the very center of the topical events wherever she appeared: in Berlin and Munich (1921–1924) she collaborated with Bertolt Brecht and Bernhard Reich; in Moscow (1926–1938) she worked with Sergey Eisenstein, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Dziga Vertov, among others, and together with Reich was involved in avant-garde artists' associations and organizations of revolutionary theaters. Lācis gained international recognition, her memoirs *Revolutionary by Profession* were published in German, Italian, French and Russian,⁴⁰ and her contribution remains a focus of interest among theater researchers.⁴¹

Anna Lācis's input was crucial for the emerging radical leftist drama studios in Riga: she founded the Art Studio at Riga People's High School (1920–1921),⁴² then, back from travelling Europe, worked at the Riga Trade Union Central Bureau Club (1925–1926).⁴³ Debates and polemics in the press initiated by her regarding the political purpose of theatrical practices rooted in leftist ideology ultimately led to the establishment of the Riga Workers' Theater. In essence, Lācis's vision of theater was profoundly forward-looking. The revolutionary aspirations of uniting theater with life aimed to redefine the role of art in society. Her main rehearsing method was improvisation, following the guidance learned in Komisarzhvsky's studio. She worked with group dynamics, adapting the actor's body to musical rhythms. The main principle was self-activity, which was the aim of self-education. Lācis practiced mutual

38 [Womage] Anna Lācis, [n.d.] Available at: www.womage.lv/personas/anna-lacis [17.03.2025.].

39 Lūriņa, Rita (2023). *Latviešu modernisma teātris un žests*. Rīga: Zinātne, pp. 210–211.

40 Lācis, Asja (1972, 1976). In: Hildegard Brenner (Ed.). *Revolutionär im Beruf: Berichte über proletarisches Theater, über Meyerhold, Brecht, Benjamin und Piscator*. Munich: Rogner & Bernhard; Lācis, Asja (1976). In: E. Casini Ropa (Ed.). *Professione: rivoluzionaria*, Milano: Feltrinelli; Lācis, Asja (1989). *Profession: révolutionnaire: sur le théâtre prolétarien, Meyerhold, Brecht, Benjamin, Piscator*. Presses universitaires de Grenoble; Lācis, Anna (1984). *Krasnaja gvozdika: vospominanija*. [Red Carnation: memories]. Rīga: Liesma.

41 Aquilina, Stefan (2020). The case of Asja Lācis. *Modern Theatre in Russia: Tradition Building and Transmission Processes*. London: Methuen Drama, pp. 180–189.

42 Kundziņš, Kārlis (1972). *Latviešu teātra vēsture*, Vol. 2. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, pp. 209.

43 Gudriķe, Biruta (1999). Lāce Anna. *Teātris un kino biogrāfijās*, Vol. 2, K-Ņ. Rīga: Preses nams, pp. 207–209.

assistance as a teacher, being supportive, not instructive.⁴⁴ The purpose of the drama lessons was to train participants in collective improvisation, fostering self-reliance and creative autonomy so that the group could conceive, devise, and realize every aspect of a performance collaboratively, without reliance on external direction or predetermined scripts.

Anna Lācis's name appears in the minutes of the board meeting of the Association of People's High Schools Society⁴⁵ on September 29, 1920, when the possible establishment of a theater studio in Riga People's High School was discussed. She was invited to read a report in the Attenders' Club of the Highschool on the new direction in theater art, followed by an open discussion with opponents. At the following meetings, Lācis read out her prepared theater art program, which provided 20 hours of classes per week, of which 10–12 were practical. The responsible representative of the People's High School Attenders' Club (*Tautas augstskolas klausītāju klubs*), Ludolfs Liberts (1895–1959), objected that this would not be feasible due to time planning and budget constraints. Therefore, Andrejs Kurcijs (real name Kuršinskis, 1884–1959) proposed establishing a separate art class with Lācis as the head. The art class were announced at the lecture by Lācis about the new directions in the theater on November 22, 1920, and 56 participants applied for it.

A large-scale mass production *Gadsimtu sejas* (*Faces of Centuries*, 1921) by Leons Paegle (1890–1926) was prepared under Lācis's direction for the annual Workers' Culture Festival (*Strādnieku Kultūras svētki*) held in an open-air area in Mežaparks, then called Ķeizarmežs. Revolutionary methods used by Lācis can be traced in her article *The New Directions in Theater Art* published in the Bulletin of the Culture Festival: "In a new theater, it is necessary to call upon fresh, original forces, to meet them, to involve them in self-activity and collective creation."⁴⁶ Anna Lācis referred to her activities at the People's High School in her published memoir *From the Notebook* as a spontaneous idea prompted by a chance meeting on the street with Linards Laicens (1883–1938), who invited her to lecture at the People's High School.⁴⁷ The memoir does not mention the complex decision-making process regarding her involvement in the art studio, nor the vote that removed her from the position.

Before the start of the next high school year, the full assembly of the Association of People's High Schools (*Tautas Augstskolu biedrība*) convened to discuss the future of the art class. The resolution on July 20, 1921, affirmed its continuation to foster an

44 Lācis, Anna (1984). *Krasnaja gvozdika: vospominanija*. Rīga: Liesma, p. 10.

45 *Associations of Teachers, Schools, and Parents in Latvia, 1864-1941*. People's High School Association. Minutes of Board and Council Meetings. 09.01.1921-03.09.1924. Latvian State Historical Archives (LVVA), Fund 1813, Description 1, File 388, pp. 30-35.

46 Lācis, Anna (1921). Jaunie virzieni teātra mākslā. *Kultūras Svētki* (Rīga), Nr. 1, 03.06., p. 4.

47 Lācis, Anna (1965). No piezīmju burtnīcas. *Karogs*, Nr. 10, p. 121.



Group photo of the Riga People's High School drama studio actors, participants of the outdoor mass theater performance *Gadsimtu sejas* (Faces of the Centuries) by Leons Paegle at the Culture Festival in *Saules dārzs*, 1921. In the center - director Anna Lācis, wearing Pierrette's costume. Photo by an unknown author, Riga. Collection of Latvian National Literature and Music Museum, RTMM 278526

“independent culture of labor”.⁴⁸ However, debates persisted at the Art Class assembly on August 30, 1921,⁴⁹ attended by 15 students. The student body was divided – one half opposed Lācis’s leadership, while the other supported her:

C[omrade] Zviedris – directing the art class work is undesirable for Mrs. Lāc[is], as evident from the previous year’s results; c. Fogel – worked without a specific program and was not coordinated with the other lecturers; c. Jātniek[s] – although working in a new direction, which no one knows closely; c. Leduš – the students did not come to classes properly, so they could not work seriously; c. Zviedris – some wanted to work, but were hindered by the teacher’s quick ideas, e.g. in an improvisation class, when one group had already read and rehearsed an improvisation together, but when it was finally ready, then at the discretion of Mrs. Lācis it was broken up and the groups were redivided according to her personal preferences; c. Idrisal – the reason for the confusion was some elements of the denizens.⁵⁰

During the discussions, some participants criticized the previous results, arguing that Lācis lacked a structured program and pursued a new but poorly understood artistic direction. Concerns were raised about student attendance, with some arguing that irregular participation hindered progress. As a result, two key issues were on the vote: (1) whether the art class should continue the following year, and (2) whether Mrs. Lācis should remain its leader. The first vote passed unanimously, affirming the class’s necessity. However, the decision on Lācis’s leadership was held by secret ballot, resulting in a 10 to 7 vote against her continuing as the art class leader. The art class was unanimously recognized as valuable, but opinions over Lācis’s leadership were controversial. Innovative methods appeared too radical.

The debates surrounding the leadership and direction of the art class highlight the complexities of artistic education and institutional governance. The criticism of the free approach and improvisational methods suggests that while artistic experimentation was encouraged, it needed clearer frameworks to be effective. The final vote against her leadership reflects broader concerns about pedagogical direction based on revolutionary ideas. The majority voted for stable, coherent instruction in arts education. This case exemplifies the tensions where progressive ideas often clashed with the needs for practical organization and consensus.

48 *Associations of Teachers, Schools, and Parents in Latvia, 1864-1941*. People’s High School Association. Minutes of Board and Council Meetings. 09.01.1921-03.09.1924. Latvian State Historical Archives (LVVA), Fund 1813, Description 1, File 388, p. 45.

49 *Ibid*, p. 53.

50 *Ibid*, p. 53.

Olga Bormane in Riga Workers' Theater: Acting and Directing Trainer

Olga Bormane was a Latvian actress, director, and theater pedagogue specializing in stage speech. Expelled from Saldus Progymnasium for her involvement in the Social Democratic movement, she continued her studies in Kazan, where she was arrested and returned to Latvia. She studied drama at Gustavs Gižickis Music School (*Gustava Gižicka mūzikas skola*) and began her stage career at the Torņakalns Latvian Aid Society Theater (*Torņakalna Latviešu palīdzības biedrības teātris*). She trained in Moscow at Alexander Shor's Private Conservatory (*Курсы музыки, оперы, драмы и хореографии А. Г. Шора*) and Vasilii Serezhnikov's Institute of the Living Word (*Институт живого слова В. К. Серёжникова*). During her stay in Russia, she continued her career at the Moscow Latvian Workers' Theater (*Maskavas Latviešu strādnieku teātris*) and with other Latvian theater groups.⁵¹ Returning to Latvia, she acted and directed at multiple theaters, including the Riga Workers' Theater (1929–1933), where she staged 23 performances, comprising over a third of the theater's repertoire. From 1924, she taught stage speech at various institutions, becoming an associate professor at the Latvian State Conservatory in 1949. She authored the book *Skatuves runas pamati (Fundamentals of Stage Speech, 1961)*, emphasizing speech as a tool for action, logic, and psychological depth.⁵²

At the Riga Workers' Theater, Olga Bormane faced resistance from the ensemble. The actors, upholding a democratic approach to decision-making, prepared a report to the board about Bormane's intolerant attitude toward the ensemble and some individuals. The formal protest, signed by the entire troupe and objecting to Bormane's working methods while demanding her dismissal, was submitted to the theater board through a nominated representative. The protest, adopted during a general meeting of the actors, criticized her for making offensive remarks and displaying tactless behavior toward the ensemble.

Following the submission of the complaint on February 12, 1931,⁵³ the board appointed a commission to investigate the grievances. Each actor was interviewed, and Bormane presented her side of the case. Board member and lawyer Nikolajs Valters played a key role in resolving the matter, meticulously gathering evidence and structuring the proceedings like a legal case. He compiled the actors' statements,

51 Kundziņš, Kārlis (1972). *Latviešu teātra vēsture*, Vol. 2. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, p. 172; 192.

52 Gudriķe, Biruta. *Olga Bormane. Teātris un kino biogrāfijās*, Vol. 1, A-J. Rīga: Preses nams, 1999, pp. 151-153.

53 *Latvian Art, Literature, Theater, and Musical-Dramatic Societies, 1841-1941*. Union of the Latvian Workers' Theater. Minutes of the Theater Directorate Meetings. 1930-1933. Latvian State Historical Archives (LVVA) Collection 1747, Inventory 1, File 258, pp. 40-59.

obtained Bormane's response, and ultimately framed the conflict as a personal dispute between the director and one of the lead actresses. Based on this conclusion, the board ruled that the conflict should be resolved. The theater's commitment to maintaining cooperative and comradely relations was expressed in resolution:

The causes of the conflict mentioned in the report by character are relatively minor and personal-individual. Becoming a common phenomenon, they are very undesirable and, by aggravating relations, interfere with the internal activities and harm the theater's good reputation in society.

The Workers' Theater, as an organized socialist labor institution, only [encourages comradeship relations (deleted)] a spirit of solidarity and mutual trust may prevail among the personnel and in the relations between the personnel and the theater's governing bodies.

Maintaining comradeship relations, promoting the theater's activities and protecting its good reputation in society must be recognized as the most important responsibility of every theater employee. No personal relationships may intrude on the work of the theater.⁵⁴

Despite this initial resolution, tensions persisted. The actors' representative brought the matter before the theater council again. The dispute escalated into a broader debate during a subsequent board meeting, nevertheless, further discussions did not change the board's initial decision: the collected materials did not provide sufficient grounds for Bormane's dismissal. Instead, the board advised Bormane to adjust her approach and urged the ensemble to collaborate professionally, recognizing the importance of preserving collegial relationships within the theater. On April 20, 1931,⁵⁵ a final resolution was unanimously adopted, acknowledging the ensemble's grievances while affirming that future conflicts should be avoided through better organizational measures.

The dispute unfolded in the middle of the season, during which Bormane continued directing rehearsals for *Peldētāja Zuzanna* (*Susanna the Swimmer*, 1922) by Andrejs Upīts with Olita Starka-Stendere in the leading role, who was an injured party in the conflict. Despite the controversy, she remained in her position, reinforcing her lasting presence in the Riga Workers' Theater. She staged twelve more productions the following year, including *Dzirneklis* (*The Spider*) by Upīts as the season opening

54 Ibid, File 258, p. 48.

55 Ibid, File 259, pp. 20-22.



Scene from the production *Peldētāja Zuzanna* (Susanna the Swimmer) by Andrejs Upīts at the Riga Workers' Theater, 1931. Director: Olga Bormane; scenographer: Arnolds Vilkins, choreographer: Sam-Hiors (Volfs Frīdlanders); musical consultant: Aleksandrs Melli. Persons from the right: Olita Starka-Stendere as Alise, daughter of Mr and Mrs Baumanis; Ģirts Bumbieris as Mr Baumanis; Elvīra Grasiņa as Mrs Baumanis; Hermanis Vazdiķis as Dzirnīns, accountant; Luijs Šmits as Artūrs Klēbergs, student of theology, Alise's fiancé; Nikolajs Mūrnieks as Mr Klēbergs; Malvīne Ustube as Mrs Klēbergs; Edgars Skuja as Vabiņš, cabbage gardener; Alvīne Salduma as Vabiņa, sister of Mrs Baumanis. Photo by an unknown author, Riga. Collection of the Latvian National Literature and Music Museum, RTMM 303847



Scene from the production *Dzirneklis* (The Spider) by Andrejs Upīts at the Riga Workers' Theater, 1931. Director: Jurijs Jurovskis; scenographer: Mikhail Jo (Meir Jaffe). Persons from the right: Olga Bormane as Anda Murevski; Kārlis Pente as Viktors Pīrsons. Photo by an unknown author, Riga. Collection of the Latvian National Literature and Music Museum, RTMM 302896

event, playing the main female role by herself. This case proves that a democratic decision-making process can be effective for resolving conflicts.

The conflict surrounding Olga Bormane at the Riga Workers' Theater highlights the complexities of leadership within a politically and artistically charged environment. While the actors' collective valued democratic decision-making and sought more collaborative leadership, Bormane's directorial style and interpersonal approach led to tensions, placing the dispute on balancing authority with the expectations of a self-governing artistic ensemble. Although the conflict did not result in her dismissal, it underscored the fragile dynamics within the theater, where ideological values of equality and collective participation dominated. Nevertheless, Bormane's continued tenure and subsequent productions demonstrate her resilience and the board's recognition of her artistic contributions, ultimately affirming her professionalism.

Conclusion. Latvian First Wave Feminism or *ante litteram*

There are both supporting and opposing arguments regarding the presence of feminist ideas in Latvian cultural and social life. On the one hand, the advocacy for women's rights aligned with the broader leftist political agenda has been seen across Europe. On the other hand, these instances could be viewed as isolated cases – women in leadership roles were tolerated rather than widely embraced and often faced societal resistance. Outstanding individuals were recognized as symbols of women's rights, yet they also faced hostility and frequent misinterpretation.

Applying the framework of feminism's waves to analyze the presence of these ideas in Latvia, we should ask – can we notice something corresponding with the deeds of the first wave, such as women's rights and emancipation? It becomes evident that significant public debate, like the reception of Aspazija's dramas, marks the understanding of feminism. At the time, symbolic terms such as "old" and "new" currents were commonly used to describe social transformations. These figurative designations, initially markers of societal change, have since become defining terms for the era. The New Current, as a social, literary, and cultural movement, encapsulated the core principles of First Wave Feminism – advocating for social justice within class structures and calling for gender equality in civil rights. That means there is no way to mark the cases of female stage directors as *ante litteram*.

The role of women in Latvian theater directing during the early 20th century reflects social, political, and cultural transformations towards democracy. While feminist ideas were not explicitly labeled as such, the careers of Biruta Skujeniece, Anna Lācis, and Olga Bormane, as well as those of other female directors, demonstrate

a gradual significant shift in gender roles within the performing arts. Broader ideological movements, including socialism, nationalism, and the democratization of society, shaped their work.

The Latvian theater stage processes challenged traditional gender roles by accepting women in leading positions. However, their contributions were met with both progress and resistance. While leftist cultural organizations provided some opportunities for women's professional growth, societal attitudes and institutional structures often limited their influence. By linking their artistic contributions to the wider feminist movement, it becomes evident that their efforts were more than individual achievements – they were part of a broader historical trajectory advocating for gender equality. Whether explicitly identifying with feminism or not, their impact contributed to the gradual dismantling of patriarchal constraints in theater and beyond, reinforcing the idea that cultural production is an essential battleground for feminist discourse. By examining the directorial careers of these women, it becomes clear that the presence of feminist ideas in Latvia was both a product of international currents and deeply rooted in the country's own political and cultural context. The debates surrounding their leadership, artistic vision, and public reception highlight the complexities of gender equality in theater and beyond. Ultimately, this study underscores women's involvement in Latvian theater innovations. Their contributions, whether in poetic or avant-garde experimentation, political theater, or traditional dramatic forms, demonstrate the diversity of female agency, influence and the artistic input that made their presence. Revisiting their work broadens our understanding of processes in the Latvian theater history, as well as contributes to the ongoing discussion on women's roles in cultural and political life, advocating that the presence of women in politics, social and cultural developments was not an isolated, but a part of a broader ideological shift towards social justice and political inclusivity, putting Latvia on the map for women's agency advancement.

Acknowledgments

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SANITA DUKA

Pirmās latviešu teātra režisores – Biruta Skujeniece,
Anna Lācis, Olga Bormane – Latvijas pirmā
viļņa feministes vai *ante litteram*?

Kopsavilkums

Izceļot sieviešu lomu profesionālā teātra režijā 20. gadsimta sākumā, rakstā aplūkotas politikas, teātra un dzimtes attiecības, Latvijas procesus skatot kontekstā ar kopējām norisēm Eiropā. Trīs pirmās latviešu režisores – Biruta Skujeniece (precējusies Dambekalna, 1888–1931), Anna Lācis (dzimusi Liepiņa, 1891–1979), un Olga Bormane (dzimusi Groskaufmane, 1893–1968) – sevi apliecināja profesionāli un radoši patstāvīgi. Rakstā analizēti katras režisores zīmīgākie darbi – Skujenieces iestudējumi uz Rīgas lielākajām skatuvēm Morisa Māterlinka lugai “Māsa Beatrise” un Raiņa dramatiskajai poēmai “Daugava”, kā arī viņas izveidotais poētiskais “Intīmais teātris”; Lāces ieguldījums kreiso drāmas studiju organizēšanā Rīgas Tautas augstskolā un Rīgas Arodbiedrību centrālbiroja klubā; Bormanē režijas un pedagoģiskais darbs Rīgas Strādnieku teātrī. Katrs no piemēriem parāda, kā politiskie uzskati un ideāli spoguļojas režijas metodēs un izrādēs. Piemērus apkopojot, tiek izvirzīts jautājums – vai tie skatāmi kā apliecinājumi pirmā viļņa feminisma ideju klātbūtnei Latvijas kultūrvidē vai arī kā nesaistīti atsevišķi gadījumi, *ante litteram*?

Pētījums tika aizsākts Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas un Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas organizētajā Vasaras skolā 2024. gadā, kur autore darbnīcas dalībniekiem piedāvāja pētniecisku spēli, apvienojot diskusiju par feminismu un dzimtes studijām Latvijā ar nepublicētu avotu iepazīšanu Latvijas Nacionālajā rakstniecības un mūzikas muzejā. Pētījumā iekļauti nepublicēti arhīva materiāli, izceļot izaicinājumus, ar kuriem saskārās pirmās režisores. No jauna izvērtējot viņu biogrāfijas un kultūrvēsturisko mantojumu, var izgaismot ietekmi, kādu šīs režisores radīja. Raksts turpina diskusiju par sieviešu lomu Latvijas kultūrā un sabiedrībā.

Atslēgvārdi: dzimtes un performances studijas, Latvijas teātra vēsture, kreisi politiskais teātris, Intīmais teātris, Rīgas Strādnieku teātris.

INGA PĒRKONE

Filmu arhīvi un sievietes skatiens

Kopsavilkums

Raksts iepazīstina ar dažiem mūsdienu kino teorijas konceptiem attiecībā uz arhīvu izmantojumu un interpretāciju filmās, raksturo filmu mantojuma un kino arhīvu sociālās vēstures jautājumus un ar tiem saistītos politiskās varas, koloniālisma un dzimtes aspektus. Ar Latvijas dokumentāro filmu “Balss” (Augusts Sukuts, 1986) un “Mērijas ceļojums” (Kristīne Želve, 2018) tuvlasījumu tiek raksturota tagadnes vara kino praksē – veids, kā arhīvu materiāls tiek izmantots vēlāk uzņemtajās filmās, kā arī šajā izmantojumā saskatāmais dzimtes konteksts.

Atslēgvārdi: Latvijas filmu mantojums, kino arhīvi, arhīva efekts, kino arhīvu sociālā vēsture, dzimtes studijas, feministiskā kino teorija un vēsture, feministiskā mediju vēsture.

Ievads: filmu mantojums un mūsdienu kino teorija

21. gadsimtā pasaulē vērojama pieaugoša interese par filmu arhīviem gan mantojuma, gan institūciju nozīmē, arī kino teorijā arhīvu jautājums iedvesmojis jaunu koncepciju rašanos.¹ Piemēram, kinozinātniece Džeimija Barona (*Jaimie Baron*) savās monogrāfijās izveidojusi plašu teorētisku ietvaru ar daudzveidīgu bāzi (historiogrāfija, kino fenomenoloģija, dokumentārā kino pētniecība, dzimtes studijas, digitālās humanitārās zinātnes), piedāvājot skatīties uz audiovizuālo materiālu izmantojumu

1 Vairāk sk.: Pērkone, Inga (2023). Arhīva jautājums mūsdienu kino teorijā un Latvijas filmu piemēri. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, Nr. 2, 67.-80. lpp. Pieejams: www.latvijasarhivi.lv/index.php?&198 [25.08.2025.]; *Culture Crossroads* (2025). Vol. 27, special issue: *Exploring the Past and Future of Audiovisual Media in the Baltic Sea Region: Archives, Digital Platforms, Researchers and Spectators*. Available: www.culturecrossroads.lv/index.php/cc/issue/view/35 [25.08.2025.].

Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīva (LNA LVKFFDA) vēsture un filmu mantojums nedaudz aprakstīts arī grāmatā: Pērkone, Inga (2023). *Afekti un atmiņas: Par sajūtām un Latvijas kino*. Rīga: Neputns.

kā uz apropriaciju, kas vienmēr izmaina sākotnējā filmējuma jēgu, radot jaunas, atšķirīgas vai pat tiši pretējas nozīmes.²

Balstoties uz daudzās filmās novēroto temporālo jeb laika plaisu un nodomu atšķirīgumu filmēta materiāla izmantojumā, Barona izstrādājusi *arhīva efekta* konceptu, kur “arhīva efekts [...] ir funkcija, kas izriet no attiecībām starp dažādiem viena un tā paša teksta elementiem, starp dokumentu, kas ievietots jaunā tekstuālā kontekstā, un nevis attiecībām starp tekstu un ārpus tekstuālu kontekstu”³. Par arhīva efektu, saskaņā ar Baronu, varam runāt tad, ja arhīvs filmā parādās kā tāds, respektīvi, ir nošķirts no pārējā teksta, lietots kā citāts ar atsauci. (Tomēr, kā tālāk būs redzams filmu piemēros, atsauces uz arhīviem filmās lielākoties ir atšķirīgas no zinātniskos tekstos pieņemtajām – parasti priekšplānā izvirzīts arhīvu materiāla saturs, bet artefaktu autori bieži vispār netiek minēti.)

Ar arhīva efektu Barona sasaista arī *arhīva efekta* konceptu:

Kad mēs saskaramies ar attēlos fiksēto laika ritējuma ietekmi uz cilvēku ķermeņiem un vietām, rodas ne tikai epistemoloģisks, bet arī emocionāls efekts, kura pamatā ir atklāsme par laiku atšķirīgumu. Citiem vārdiem sakot, mēs arhīvu dokumentus apveltām ne tikai ar “īstās” pagātnes autoritāti, bet arī ar zaudējuma sajūtu. [...] Laiku nošķirums liek mums apzināties, ka pagātne ir neatgriezeniska, pat ja tās nospiedumi ir redzami.⁴

Filmu arhīvu apropriacijas fenomena izpratnei būtisks ir Baronas piedāvātais *daudzslāņu skatienu* koncepts. Viņa raksta:

Vērojot aktualitāšu filmējumus, skatiens jau sastāv no vairākiem slāņiem, jo filmdara skatiens pārklājas ar skatītāja skatienu. Bieži vien mēs nepamanām šo slāņošanos, neapzināti identificējot savu skatienu ar filmas veidotāja skatienu. Tomēr, ja mūsu afektīvā reakcija uz filmas objektu šķiet pretrunā ar filmdara reakciju, mēs varam izjust atsvešinātības sajūtu: sajūtu, ka esam – vai vēlamies būt – izraidīti no filmas un tās skatienu, kas pēkšņi kļūst redzams kā figūra.⁵

2 Sk.: Baron, Jamie (2014). *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History*. London; New York: Routledge; Baron, Jaimie (2021). *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse: The Ethics of Audiovisual Appropriation in the Digital Era*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

3 Baron, Jamie (2014). *The Archive Effect*, p. 22.

Šeit un tālāk teksti no angļu valodas tulkoti, izmantojot DeepL tulkošanas rīka bezmaksas versiju.

4 Turpat, p. 21.

5 Baron, Jaimie (2021). *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse*, p. 16.

Tad, kad šīs filmētās aktualitātes jeb dokumentējošie filmējumi tiek izmantoti citās filmās, struktūra kļūst vēl komplicētāka:

[..] iepriekš ierakstīta materiāla apropriācija rada daudzslāņainu struktūru, kas balstās mūsu uztverē – par filmas subjektu, par oriģināldarba veidotāja ētisko nostāju (kas var sakņoties viņa vai viņas vēsturiskajā un sociālajā kontekstā) attiecībā pret savu materiālu, kā arī par tā autora ētisko nostāju, kurš ir apropriējis šo materiālu, rediģējot un pārveidojot tā attēlus un skaņu jaunam mērķim.⁶

Būtiski atcerēties, ka gan oriģināla filmētāju, gan arhīvu materiāla izmantotāju skatiens ir komplicēts arī pats par sevi: filmdari pārstāv noteiktu dzimumu, vecumu, tautību, kultūras pieredzi; uz filmējamajiem objektiem viņi arī var skatīties dažādi: kā iesaistītas personas, kā tūristi vai varbūt iekarotāji, utt. Tomēr vairāk nekā 100 gadu garumā aiz filmētā materiāla esošais skatiens bijis piederīgs cilvēkam, un pat tad, ja attēls bijis tehnoloģiju pārveidots, tam, kā nesenā publikācijā uzsver Džeimija Barona, piemītusi cilvēciska intence (*human intentionality*)⁷.

Te vietā atgādināt, ka viens no skatienu koncepta pamatdarbiem kino teorijā ir feminisma teorētiķes un filmu veidotājas Loras Malvijas (*Laura Mulvey*) 1975. gadā publicētā eseja “Vizuālā bauda un naratīva kino” (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*)⁸, kur, pētot Holivudas klasiskā kino filmas, autore secināja, ka sieviešu tēli parasti tiek veidoti kā objekti, kas pakļauti vīrieša skatienam (un baudai)⁹, līdz ar to arī skatītāju auditorija ir determinēta gan uz sievieti, gan uz filmu kopumā skatīties kā vīrietis, ar vīrieša skatienu (*male gaze*). Kaut arī Malvija savā esejā apskatīja ierobežotu kinomākslas segmentu, viņas skatienu koncepts ticis izmantots un attīstīts, arī kritizēts daudz plašākos kinomākslas un kultūras konceptos – tas vienmēr noder kā atgādinājums par dzimtes klātbūtni skatienu fenomenā.

Taču līdz ar mākslīgā intelekta (MI) rīku parādīšanos nākotnē varētu būt problemātiski ne tikai konstatēt tehnoloģiju radītu dokumentu un artefaktu autentiskumu, bet arī izvērtēt to izcelsmes intenci, tāpat sarežģīti būs noteikt tos slāņus, kas veido īpatno, MI rīka radīto, skatienu.¹⁰

6 Baron, Jaimie (2021). *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse*, pp. 16-17.

7 Baron, Jamie (2025). The Anachronism Machine. *Culture Crossroads*, Vol. 27, p. 67. Pieejams: www.culturecrossroads.lv/index.php/cc/article/view/552/457 [25.08.2025.].

8 Loras Malvijas raksts ir daudzkārt pārpublicēts un pieejams gan dažādās kino teorijas antoloģijās, gan kā atsevišķa publikācija. Šeit izmantots ilustrēts suvenirizdevums: Mulvey, Laura; Rachel, Rose (2016). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. London: Afterall Books: Two Works.

9 Sieviete kā (at)tēls, vīrietis kā skatienu turētājs (*woman as image, man as bearer of the look*) – tāds ir Malvijas esejas III. sadaļas nosaukums. Turpat, 15. lpp.

10 Džeimija Barona min vairākus piemērus tam, kā MI rīki pēc pasūtījuma veido šķietami vēsturiskus vizuālus dokumentus. Baron, Jamie (2025). *The Anachronism Machine*, pp. 64-69. Pieejams: www.culturecrossroads.lv/index.php/cc/article/view/552/457 [25.08.2025.].

Arhīvu sociālā vēsture, dzimte un anarhīvisms

Neraugoties uz to, ka modernās tehnoloģijas, t. sk. MI un digitalizācijas radītā arhīvu bezprecedenta atvērtība un vēsturisku dokumentu pieejamība, ir fenomeni, kas prasa jaunas teorētiskas koncepcijas un jaunus pētījumus, jāatzīst, ka arī iepriekšējās sistēmās eksistējošo arhīvu un audiovizuālā mantojuma sociālā vēsture joprojām ir maz zināma – un ne tikai Latvijā. Jo īpaši tas attiecas uz arhīvu un mantojuma dzimtes aspektiem.

Viens no mēģinājumiem situāciju labot bija Starptautiskās filmu arhīvu federācijas (*Fédération internationale des archives du film, FIAF*) 2023. gada kongresa ietvaros rīkotais simpozījs “Sievietes, kino un filmu arhīvi” (*Women, Cinema and Film Archives*), kura uzdevumi bija analizēt patriarhālo nospiedumu filmu arhīvu praksē, pētīt sieviešu ieguldījumu gan filmu veidošanā, gan kino mantojuma saglabāšanā un iestāties par dzimumu līdztiesību arhīvu darbā.¹¹ Simpozija kopsavilkuma ziņojums, kā arī ar tēmu saistīti raksti tika publicēti elektroniskajā žurnālā *Feminist Media Histories*¹², savukārt 2025. gadā ir uzsākta iniciatīva “*FIAF* Dzimtes observatorija” (*FIAF Gender Observatory*), kur brīvprātīga darba grupa apkopos un analizēs informāciju un gatavos publikācijas par dzimumu līdztiesību, nebinaritāti u. c. ar dzimti saistītiem jautājumiem pasaules filmu arhīvos.¹³

Varētu šķist, ka Latvijā, kur arhīvu sistēma ir slikti finansēta un nepietiekami nodrošināta ar atbilstošām telpām un modernām tehnoloģijām¹⁴, bet darbinieku algas sociālajos tīklos tiek apspriestas kā raksturīgas “nabagmājai”¹⁵, domāt par filmu arhīviem dzimtes pētījumu ietvaros ir lieka greznība. Tomēr, no otras puses, finansējuma nepietiekamība kopumā un zemās algas jo īpaši vedina domāt, ka varbūt te viss ir saistīts ar dzimti, respektīvi, dzimumu stereotipu radītiem aizspriedumiem. Kopš padomju okupācijas laikiem Latvijas arhīvos, tāpat kā citās kultūras un izglītības

11 Informācija pieejama simpozija mājaslapā: <https://fiarf2023.filmoteca.unam.mx/en/symposium-women-cinema-and-film-archives> [25.08.2025.].

12 *Feminist Media Histories*, 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2-3, University of California Press, <https://online.ucpress.edu/fmh/issue/10/2-3>. Diemžēl žurnāls nav brīvi pieejams lasīšanai.

13 *FIAF Bulletin Online*. 06.2025, p. 52. Available: www.calameo.com/fiarf/read/0009185405b263e8ef3ce [22.06.2025.]. Jāpiebilst, ka LNA Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs nav *FIAF* biedrs.

14 Sk., piemēram, interviju ar Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva direktores vietnieku Gati Karlsonu 2023. gadā, pēc Valsts Kontroles ziņojuma par arhīvu sistēmu (nav indikāciju, ka situācija 2025. gadā būtu radikāli uzlabojusies): Laganovskis, Guntars. Dokumentārais mantojums. Iespējas pētniecībai un riski. *LV portāls*, 19.10.2023. Pieejams: <https://lvportals.lv/viedokli/356129-dokumentarais-mantojums-iespejas-petniecibai-un-riski-2023>, skatīts 22.06.2025.

15 [Anon.] “Domāju, kas ir tas cilvēks, kurš var atļauties šodien strādāt arhīvā? Tas izceļas kā nabagmāja!” Soctīkli apspriēž algas. *LETA, LA.lv*, 19.06.2025. Pieejams: www.la.lv/domaju-kas-ir-tas-cilveks-kurs-var-atlauties-sodien-stradat-arhiva-tas-izcelas-ka-nabagmaja [22.06.2025.].

iestādēs, tradicionāli strādājušas galvenokārt sievietes¹⁶ un šīs “sieviešu profesijas” bijušas un joprojām ir slikti apmaksātas¹⁷, iespējams, balstoties arhaiskā priekšstatā, ka sievieti un ģimeni uztur vīrietis/vīrs, tāpēc sievietes amatam, konkrētai institūcijai, un attiecīgajai (“sieviešu”) nozarei vai jomai kopumā pietiks ar minimumu. Latvijai arī raksturīgi, ka kultūra un izglītība *de facto* tiek skatītas kā sekundāras, kas gan padomju okupācijas, gan Latvijas atjaunotās neatkarības periodā finansētas pēc atlikuma principa, turklāt arī citur pasaulē demokrātiskās sistēmās šīs jomas lielākoties netiek asociētas ar varas pozīcijām.¹⁸

Tomēr, kā monogrāfijā “Filipīņu kino pēcdzīve arhīvos” (*The Archival Afterlives of Philippine Cinema*) raksta filipīniešu izcelsmes Kanādas kinozinātniece Blisa Kva Lima (*Bliss Cua Lim*), arī atmiņu jautājums ir varas jautājums:

Lēmumi saglabāt, atstāt novārtā vai iznīcināt pagātnes paliekas nekad nav neitrāli; arhīvu sociālās eksistences pamatā ir vara. Arhivēšana pēc būtības ir politiska darbība, jo tā ietver vērtību un līdz ar to arī viedokļa apliecināšanu par to, cik daudz no pagātnes tiks atļauts saglabāt. Šī arhivēšanas politiskā dimensija prasa augstus ētikas standartus tiem, kam uzticēta kultūras atmiņas saglabāšana. Ņemot vērā to, ka liela daļa arhīvu darba netiek uzraudzīta un apstiprināta, pagātnes saglabāšana pastāvīgi ir pakļauta tagadnes varai.¹⁹

Tagadnes varas koncepta izpratnei svarīgi arī divi citi Limas lietoti jēdzieni – *arhīvu klusums* un *arhīvu vara*:

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- 16 Piemēram, 2024. gadā saskaņā ar Latvijas oficiālās statistikas portāla datiem profesiju grupā “Arhīvistu un muzeju vecākie speciālisti” (kods OC2621) bijis 1051 darbinieks, no tiem – 896 sievietes, tātad aptuveni 85 %. Sk.: *Oficiālās statistikas portāls. Datubāze*. Pieejams: https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__EMP__NB__NBLA/EKA110/table/tableViewLayout1 [22.06.2025.].
- 17 Latvijā ir viens no lielākajiem nošķirumiem Eiropas Savienībā starp vīriešu un sieviešu darba samaksu. Viens no iemesliem saskaņā ar oficiālo statistiku: “Sievietes ir biežāk nodarbinātas zemāk atalgotās nozarēs un profesijās, kā arī mazāk atalgotajā sabiedriskajā sektorā, taču arī vienādās nozarēs un profesijās darba samaksas plaisa pastāv.” Sk.: *Oficiālās statistikas portāls. Datubāze*. Pieejams: <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/labklajibas-un-vienlidzibas-raditaji/dzimumlidztiesiba/6300-dzimumu-lidztiesiba?themeCode=GE> [22.06.2025.].
- 18 Gan Eiropas, gan arī Latvijas statistikā sieviešu īpatsvars varas pozīcijās un lēmumu pieņemšanā tiek mērīts, analizējot dzimumu reprezentāciju parlamentā, pašvaldībās, tiesās, uzņēmumu valdēs. Kultūras un izglītības jomai vistuvākais mērījums attiecas uz zinātnisko pētniecību – te Latvijā sieviešu īpatsvars ir ļoti augsts. Sk.: <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/labklajibas-un-vienlidzibas-raditaji/dzimumlidztiesiba/6298-dzimumu-lidztiesiba?themeCode=GE>. Raksta autore uzskata, ka šī Latvijas īpatnība tomēr vairāk apliecina nevis dzimumu līdztiesību, bet zinātnes maznozīmīgumu Latvijas sociālo vērtību sistēmā.
- 19 Lim, Bliss Cua (2024). *The Archival Afterlives of Philippine Cinema*. [Durham, North Carolina]: Duke University Press, p. 76.
Citētajā tekstā Lima atsauca arī uz Reju Edmondsonu, kura pētījums par audiovizuālajiem arhīviem ir uzskatāms par vienu no šīs jomas rokasgrāmatām. Sk.: Edmondson, Ray (2016). *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles*. 3rd ed. Paris: UNESCO. Pieejams: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243973> [25.08.2025.].

Termins *arhīvu klusums* attiecas ne tikai uz “zaudētajām filmām” Filipīnu kino korpusā, bet arī uz strukturējošu iztrūkumu (*absences that are constitutive*) vēsturisko naratīvu veidošanā, sākot no pazudušajiem valdības dokumentiem līdz gandrīz neatgūstamajai institucionālajai vēsturei. *Arhīvu vara* nosaka iekļaušanas un izslēgšanas dinamiku vēsturisko naratīvu veidošanā, nevis tikai novērtēšanas praksi, kas institucionalizē nelielu daļu no esošajiem dokumentiem. Visbeidzot, aktīvisms, aizstāvība un “iztikšana” (*making do*) – radoši risinājumi, lai nodrošinātu Filipīnu kino arhīvu turpmāko pastāvēšanu – ir būtiski arhīvu varas izpausmes veidi.²⁰

Limas pētījumā par centieniem (vai to neesamību) sistematizēt un saglabāt Filipīnu Republikas kinomākslas mantojumu ir pārsteidzoši daudz līdzību ar filmu arhivēšanas vēsturi un problēmām Latvijā.²¹ Tas vedina domāt, ka daudzas mūsu arhīvu un to kolekciju izmantošanas problēmas varētu būt saistītas ar Latvijas koloniālo pieredzi gan Krievijas cariskās impērijas, gan Padomju Savienības sastāvā. Latvijas nacionālā kino attīstību, kas bija samērā aktīva 20. gadsimta 20.–30. gados, pārtrauca PSRS okupācija un kolonizācija – šo procesu rezultātā zudumā gāja ne tikai neatkarības periodā uzņemtās filmas, bet mērķtiecīgi tika nīdētas arī atmiņas par to kādreizējo esamību. Savukārt liela daļa padomju laikā Latvijā, Rīgas kinostudijā, uzņemto filmu oriģinālu (izejmateriālu) tika aizvesti uz PSRS Valsts Filmu fonda glabātavām un Latvijai nav pieejami joprojām.²²

Mainīga institucionālā piederība, valstiskas stratēģijas un atbalsta trūkums kino mantojuma saglabāšanai, audiovizuālo artefaktu pielīdzināšana juridiskiem dokumentiem un to glabāšanas nosacījumiem, atbilstošu telpu neesamība u. c. – tie ir apstākļi, kas raksturo arhīvu situāciju postkoloniālās valstīs, arī Latvijā un Filipīnās. Blīsa Lima to sauc par anarhīvu stāvokli (*anarchival condition*), ko varētu interpretēt arī kā anarhīvismu: “Anarhīvo apstākļu klāsts, ar ko neizbēgami cīnās visas atmiņas institūcijas, ietver mūžīgi klātesošo zaudējuma, sabrukuma vai iznīcināšanas iespēju,

20 Lim, Bliss Cua (2024). *The Archival Afterlives of Philippine Cinema*, p. 19.

21 Līdzīgi tam, ko Lima raksta par Filipīnām, arī Latvijā ir ļoti maz pētījumu par arhīvu darbību politiskās varas un sociālā kontekstā; arī pētījumu par dažādu arhīvu vēsturi nav daudz. Attiecībā uz kino saglabāšanu sk.: Vāvere, Ieva; Blumberga, Santa; Melderis, Māris (2023). LVKFFDA kino dokumentu, fotodokumentu un skaņas dokumentu uzkrāšanas vēsture: no analogiem dokumentiem līdz digitāliem failiem. *Latvijas Arhīvi*, Nr. 2, 5.–51. lpp. Pieejams: www.latvijasarhivi.lv/index.php?1&208&view=article&art_id=1529 [25.08.2025].

22 Koloniālisma laikā tapušo filmu piederības jautājums ir aktuāls Rietumos (tradicionāli gan parasti neskarot PSRS okupētās teritorijas), un filmu mantojuma atdošana ir viens no dekolonizācijas procesa apliecinājumiem. Sk., piemēram, informāciju par Britu filmu institūta arhīva filmu kolekcijas atdošanu Trinidadas un Tobago Nacionālajam arhīvam: Pillai, Xavier Alexandre (2025). The Repatriation of Colonial Film. *Sight and Sound*, June 2025, Vol. 35, Issue 2, pp. 84–85.

saglabājušos darbu nepietiekamību, institucionālo kolekciju nestabilitāti vai īslaicīgumu un ierobežotu piekļuvi.”²³

Tālāk, izmantojot konkrētus Latvijas filmu piemērus, tiks aplūkoti daži tagadnes varas aspekti kino praksē – arhīvu materiāla apropriācijas īpatnības vēlāk uzņemtās filmās un šīs apropriācijas dzimtes konteksts.

Borisa Podnieka balss un komjauniete Velta

Režisora Augusta Sukuta (1947–2017) dokumentārā filma “Balss” (1986) ir skarba un ironiska padomju okupācijas laikmeta kino analīze, kurā galvenais pētījuma objekts ir diktora Borisa Podnieka (1924–1995) balss ideoloģisks izmantojums filmās un tā ietekme gan uz paša Podnieka likteni, gan uz Latvijas dokumentāro kino kopumā.

Apjomīgākais tekstu kopums, ko diktors ierunājis, bija saistīts ar filmu hronikām jeb, padomju perioda terminoloģijā, kinožurnāliem “Padomju Latvija” (1940–1941, 1944–1989²⁴), tāpēc tieši šo hroniku fragmenti kā analīzes materiāls dominē arī filmā “Balss”.

Viena no izvēlētajām hroniku epizodēm sākas ar tuvplānu, kurā redzam modinātājpulksteni uz kāda ar mācību grāmatām nokrauta naktsskapīša un pēc tam – šķietami aizmigušu jaunu sievieti, kuru šis pulkstenis modina četros no rīta.²⁵ “Agra?” – iejūtīgi jautā diktors Boriss Podnieks aizkadrā un tūlīt arī skaidro: “Jā, daudzi šajā laikā vēl nododas saldiem sapņiem. Bet tu taču esi uzņēmusies vienu no godpilnajiem septiņgades uzdevumiem – strādāt fermā un palīdzēt radīt lauksaimniecības produktu pārpilnību mūsu zemē!” Pēc tam redzams jauns vīrietis, kas ar lukturi rokā brien pa sniegu, un brīdi vēlāk – tā pati sieviete fermā, apkopjot govīs. No diktora teiktā uzzinām, ka viņas vārds ir Velta, un dzirdam viņai veltītu uzmundrinājumu: “Tu jau neesi viena! Kopā ar tevi strādā arī citi komjaunieši!” Tālāk režisors Augusts Sukuts piemontējis kāda cita kinožurnāla sižeta fragmentu, kā arī speciāli filmētu kinozinātnieka Jura Cīvjana komentāru par balss nozīmi (uz)ticamības radišanā. Līdz ar to Veltas stāsts paliek nepabeigts un ir tikai maza daļiņa bez autonomas nozīmes “Balss” izveidotajā vēsturisku audiovizuālu liecību mozaīkā.

23 Lim, Bliss Cua (2024). *The Archival Afterlives of Philippine Cinema*, pp. 4–5.

24 1940. gadā, tūlīt pēc padomju okupācijas, tika izveidota filmu hronika “Nedēļas apskats”. 1940. gada novembrī, sākot ar 17. numuru, tā tika pārdēvēta par “Padomju Latviju” (LNA_KFFDA_F194_1_841). Savukārt 1989. gadā tika uzņemta 21 filmu hronika “Padomju Latvija”, bet, sākot ar apvienoto 22./23./24. numuru, tā tika pārdēvēta un iznāca ar nosaukumu “Latvijas hronika” (LNA_KFFDA_F8_2_4096).

25 Aptuveni filmas sestajā minūtē. Filma “Balss” pieejama: www.filmas.lv/movie/3021 [01.06.2025.].

Vīrieša inscenēta filma, vīrieša balss, kas kadrā un aiz kadra skaidro filmētās sievietes sajūtas, – tas ir Latvijas filmām gadu desmitiem raksturīgs paņēmieni, sākot ar padomju perioda kinohronikām līdz, iespējams, populārākajai Latvijas dzimtes studiju filmai – “Sieviete, kuru gaida?” (režisors Ivars Seleckis, 1978).

Aprakstītā filmas “Balss” epizode iezīmē vairākas ar kino mantojumu saistītas problēmas. Pirmkārt, protams, ar izvēlēto fragmentu Augusts Sukuts pievērš uzmanību padomju perioda hronikāli dokumentālā kino fiktīvajai dabai – gandrīz viss šajās hronikās bija speciāli iestudēts atbilstoši oficiālās ideoloģijas noteiktajiem mērķiem un bieži vien atklāti izmantots propagandai. Piemēram, minētās hronikas epizode (ši daļa filmā “Balss” gan nav iekļauta) beidzas ar diktora uzrunu skatītājiem: “Darbs kolhoza fermās gaida arī jūs, jaunie draugi!”

Taču šī raksta kontekstā svarīgāka šķiet cita filmas iezīme, kas kinomākslai ilgstoši bijusi tipiska. Pētniece Stella Bruči (*Stella Bruzzi*) konstatējusi, ka arhīvs dokumentārajās filmās parasti ticis izmantots divējādi: ilustratīvi, kā daļa no vēstures raksturojuma, kas papildināts ar citiem elementiem, piemēram, intervijām un diktora komentāru, vai arī analītiski, kā daļa no politizēta argumenta vai diskusijas. Abos gadījumos filmējumu izcelsme un autorība vēlāko filmu veidotājiem reti šķiet svarīga.²⁶

Kaut arī “Balss” ir viena no dažām Latvijas filmām, kas veic tieši kinomākslas vēsturisku un fenomenoloģisku analīzi un runā par mākslinieka personisko atbildību laikmeta atainojumā, izmantotās hronikas un citi iekļautie filmējumi netiek atšifrēti ne citātu vietās, ne filmas sākuma vai beigu uzrakstos. Skatītājs lielākoties neuzzina, kad ir filmēti redzamie arhīva materiāli, kurš vai kura tos ir filmējuši, un dažkārt arī filmējumu saturs uztverams tikai aptuveni. Jāatzīmē, ka šāds arhīvu izmantojums jeb neautorizēta apropriācija ir globāla un ilgstoša tendence, savdabīgs tagadnes varas apliecinājums pretstatā arhīvu materiāla neaizsargātībai. (Pēdējos gados gan šī tendence sākusi mainīties, varbūt tieši arhīvu teorētiskas apjēgsmes, novērtējuma un pieejamības ietekmē.)

Tagadnes vara, izmantojot arhīvus, bieži vien ir neētiska un pat nelikumīga autorības kontekstā, tomēr filmas “Balss” tapšanas laikā kolēģi Rīgas kinostudijā saskatīja cita veida ētikas pārkāpumus – tas noveda pie lēmuma filmu “nolikt plauktā”, respektīvi, izrādīt tikai ierobežotam skatītāju lokam. Pārmetumi bija saistīti ar insulta skartā diktora Borisa Podnieka portretējumu un to, ka režisors Augusts Sukuts, kā teica Rīgas kinostudijas direktors Heinrihs Lapeško (1931–2014), “visus grēkus, gribot vai negribot, [...] uzvēlis Borisam. Var būt apsūdzība laikmetam. Bet Borisu nedrīkst vairs aiztikt. Ja izņemtu Borisu ārā un tā vietā kādu citu veselu cilvēku, kurš strādā (nevis diktoru), es piekristu filmai ar abām rokām.”²⁷ Ari Borisa Podnieka dēls, režisors

26 Bruzzi, Stella (2006). *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. London; New York: Routledge, p. 26.

27 Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts arhīvs (LVA), 416 f., 4 apr., 411. l., 86. lp.

Juris Podnieks (1950–1992) uzskatīja, ka tēva atainojums filmā ir nepieņemams, un Mākslas padomes sēdē teica:

Katram laikam ir savi patiesības griesti. Es domāju, ka Sukuts taisīs citu kino. Sukuts arī melo šodien. Tāpat. Vēl vairāk, kā toreiz meloja. Tevi interesē tas, kas ietilpst tavā koncepcijā. Tev nesāp tas, kas bijis, bet tu to izmanto. Tīri ētiski tēvs varbūt to norīs. Kaut gan vienīgais, kas tēvu tur pie dzīvības, ir doma, ka viņš savā dzīvē, ar savu balsi ir kaut ko paveicis. Sukuta filma šo dziedziņu pārgriež.²⁸

Mūsdienās daudzi pasaules filmu arhīvi no rūpīgi sargātām bundžu un citu artefaktu nesēju krātuvēm pamazām ir pārvērtušies par atvērtām institūcijām, kuru kolekcijas ir digitalizētas un bieži pieejamas pat personu privātajās ierīcēs – tas attiecas arī Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvu (LNA LVKFFDA) un tā digitālo krātuvī “Redzi, dzirdi Latviju!”²⁹. Arī filma “Balsis” ir brīvi pieejama ikvienam interesentam, dodot iespēju katram skatītājam pašam spriest par Sukuta piedāvāto Borisa Podnieka portretējumu un kino vēstures interpretāciju.

Tomēr aplūkotās filmas un līdzīgu materiālu pieejamība arhīvos daudzos gadījumos vēl nenozīmē pieeju jēgpilnai informācijai: ja izmantotā avota (šajā gadījumā – filmu hronikas) dati nav norādīti, to identificēt ir sarežģīti. Piemēram, lai atrastu Augusta Sukuta filmā izmantoto hroniku ar agrā rītā uzmodināto komjau-nieti Veltu, ir dotas tikai dažas aptuvenas norādes. Noderīgs fakts ir filmā minētā septiņgade – tāda padomju okupācijas laikā bija tikai viena (1959–1965), viss pārējais periods tika rēķināts piecgadēs.

Kino pētniekiem palīdz zināšanas par filmu stilistiku – personu vietniekvārdi un tiešas uzrunas dokumentāro filmu un hroniku tekstos parādījās 50./60. gadu mijā un vēlāk tika definētas kā poētiskajam dokumentārajam kino atbilstošas.³⁰ Viens no pirmajiem Latvijā, kas personiski adresētas uzrunas sāka lietot hronikās un dokumentārajās filmās, bija režisors Aloizs Brenčs (1929–1998). Un tiešām – šādi meklējot, raksta autorei izdevās atrast “Balsi” izmantoto sižetu – tas ietilpa Brenča veidotajā hronikā “Padomju Latvija”, un ir pat zināms, ka sižeta filmētājs bijis operators Laimonis Gaigals (1922–1990).³¹ Tālāk, noskatoties sižetu pilnībā, iespējams uzzināt, ka filmēts Dobeles rajona kolhozā “Staļina ceļš” un tajā ir redzams kolhoza komjaunatnes sekretārs Jānis Feirābends – viņš ir tas vīrietis, kas sniegputenī

28 LVA, 416 f., 4 apr., 411. l., 86. lp.

29 Pieejams: www.redzidzirdlatviju.lv/lv.

30 Vairāk sk.: Pērkone, Inga (2013). *Tu, lielā vakara saule! Esejas par modernismu Latvijas filmās*. Rīga: Neputns, 19.–33. lpp.

31 *Padomju Latvija*, 1960, Nr. 5, Rīgas kinostudija, režisors Aloizs Brenčs, sižeta operators Laimonis Gaigals, LNA_KFFDA_F8_2_1736.

sauc, kā no hronikas uzzinām, savu māsu. Un tikai tā, ņemot palīgā arī padomju laika periodiku³², var noskaidrot, ka uz ekrāna redzamā Velta ir kolhoza slaucēja, pirmrindniece Velta Feirābende...

Filmējumi bez identifikācijas, personas bez identitātes un (lielākoties) bez balss (Velta sižetā neko nerunā, viņas vietā visu pasaka diktors) – tie ir tikai daži piemēri tam, kā izpaužas varas pozīcija, veidojot, izmantojot un ietekmējot arhīvus un atmiņas.³³

“Mērijas ceļojums” un sievietes skatpunkts

Režisores Kristīnes Želvas filmā “Mērijas ceļojums” (2018) dažādu politisku periodu filmu hronikas sasaistītas, izmantojot Mērijas Grīnbergas vecākās (1881–1973) dienasgrāmatas. Pateicoties meistarīgai arhīvu audiovizuālā materiāla un dienasgrāmatu teksta montāžai, kā arī sievietes (aktrise Marina Janaus) balsij, agrāku laiku filmējumi iegūst personisku skatpunktu. Režisore rūpīgi izraudzījusies tekstus un attēlus tā, lai tie papildinātu cits citu un veidotu it kā jau iepriekš saskaņotu stāstījumu. Savukārt notikumos, par kuriem audiovizuālu arhīvu nav, Želve izmantojusi inscenējumu – iesaistīti aktieri, veidoti laikmetam atbilstoši interjeri un tērpi.

Arhīvu un inscenēta materiāla sakausējums, bieži – izmantojot arī animāciju, kļūst par raksturīgu mūsdienu kino iezīmi. Pēc filmas “Mērijas ceļojums” iznākšanas Mērijas Grīnbergas dienasgrāmatas tika publicētas.³⁴ Savukārt filmā izstāstīto stāstu par muzeoloģi Mēriju Grīnbergu jaunāko (1909–1975) un viņas māti – etnogrāfi Mēriju Grīnbergu – Želve paplašinājusi līdz dzimtas stāstam romānā “Grosvaldi”.³⁵

1945. gada 8. maijā (šķiet, ieraksts turpināts 9. maijā), Mērija Grīnberga raksta:

Šorīt mani apsveic: “Miers!” Pa skaļruni izsludināta liela svētku diena. [...] Sākas neskaitāmi gājieni. Starp pavasara zaļumiem plandās sarkanie karogi, saulītē cilvēki stiepj šņapsta pudeles, spēlē jauka mūzika, priedīgi pāriši militārās drēbēs iet zem rokas. [...] Viens privātais piedzēries, ar otru tā saķērušies, ka knapi tiek uz priekšu, sāk bučoties.³⁶

32 Sk., piemēram: [Anon.] (1958). Kolhozu labākās slaucējas. *Brīvais Darbs* (Dobeles), 10.06.

33 Arī jaunlaiku filmā, kas daļēji uzņemta Latvijas kopienā ārvalstīs, diemžēl ir konstatējama līdzīga pieeja. Kritiķe Dita Jonīte par filmu “Vairāk kā dejas” (Pauls Dombrovskis, 2025) raksta: “Apmēram pirmajās desmit filmas minūtēs rodas jautājumi – kas ir šie cilvēki kadrā, kurā pasaules vietā tas notiek, vai stāsts būs par Latviju vai latviešiem, par deju vai deju svētkiem?”. Sk.: Jonīte, Dita (2025). *Vairāk kā dejas*. Mēs uzkāpām kalniņā... *Kino Raksti*, 19.06. Pieejams: www.kinoraksti.lv/domas/recenzija/vairak-ka-deja-mes-uzkapam-kalni-na-1374 [25.08.2025.].

34 Grīnberga, Mērija (2021). *Mana pasaku zeme: Mērijas Grīnbergas atmiņas un dienasgrāmatas*. Rīga: Latvijas Mediji.

35 Želve, Kristīne (2021). *Grosvaldi*. Rīga: Neputns.

36 Grīnberga, Mērija (2021). *Mana pasaku zeme: Mērijas Grīnbergas atmiņas un dienasgrāmatas*, 477. lpp.

Šeit Mērijas Grīnbergas teksts citēts ieskatam, oriģinālā tas ir garāks un bagāts ar vizuālām detaļām, kas cita citu papildina, veidojot daudzpusīgu, gara acīm ieraugāmu notikumu, – tāpēc to var dēvēt par filmisku pēc dabas, un nav brīnums, ka Želve šo tekstu izmantojusi filmā un vēlāk – reducētā veidā – arī romānā³⁷. Režisorei izdevies atrast atbilstošus hronikas filmējumus pat specifiskām Mērijas Grīnbergas dienasgrāmatā minētām detaļām – piemēram, tuvplānā fiksēts, kā divi vīrieši, atbilstoši sava laika ierašām, kaismīgi bučojas.

Tomēr arī filmā “Mērijas ceļojums” nav atšifrēti izmantotie filmējumi un to autori (beigu titros gan norādītas arhīvu institūcijas un digitālās kolekcijas³⁸). Taču, salīdzinot ar filmas “Balss” slaucēju Veltu, tādu notikumu kā Uzvaras diena, kurā tiek svinētas Otrā pasaules kara, padomju izpratnē – Lielā Tēvijas kara – beigas, arhīvā atrast, protams, ir vienkāršāk. Kristīne Želve kā ilustrāciju Grīnbergas dienasgrāmatas ierakstam apkopojusi materiālu no divām 1945. gada kinohronikām “Padomju Latvija” – Nr. 2³⁹ un Nr. 3⁴⁰. Abiem žurnāliem ir vairāki operatori: Jakovs Marčenko (1908–1969), Konstantīns Stankevičs un Irina Kasatkina, vēlāk Rīgas kinostudijā pazīstama kā Irina Masa (arī Mass, 1917–1991).

Tā nu izrādās, ka filmējumiem, kam Kristīne Želve ar vēsturisku tekstu palīdzību piešķīrusi sievietes skatpunktu, tāds vismaz daļēji – abās minētajās hronikās nav precīzi norādīts, kurš no operatoriem ko ir filmējis, – ir piemēris jau sākotnēji! Tomēr vienlaikus te veidojas arī zīmīgs nošķīrums un skatienu daudzslāņainība: Mērijas Grīnbergas skatiens bija ne tikai sievietes, bet arī okupētas valsts pilsones skatiens – padomju vara viņai bija atņēmusi gan dzīvokli, gan tautastērpu veikaliņu, būtībā izpostījusi ģimeni, savukārt Irina Kasatkina ieradās līdz ar Sarkano armiju, un uzsāka veiksmīgu filmdares karjeru okupētā un kolonizētā teritorijā.

Vēlāk intervijā Irina Masa atcerējās: “Es sāku strādāt Rīgas kinostudijā 1945. gada martā. 9. maija rītā man izdevās uzfilmēt ļoti emocionālu kadru: pa ielu iet muzikanti, viens sit bungas, otrs pūš tauri. Sejas priecīgas.”⁴¹ Minētais kadrs (atmiņa gan bija Masu pievilusi: bundzinieka partnerim ir nevis taure, bet gan vijole; blakus ir arī cilvēks ar akordeonu) ir ietverts gan hronikā par Uzvaras dienu, gan arī izmantots Želves filmā “Mērijas ceļojums”⁴².

37 Želve, Kristīne (2021). *Grosvaldi*, 371. lpp.

38 Latvijas Valsts Kinofotofonodokumentu arhīvs, *Agentur Karl Höffkes, Footage Farm, Ciné-Archives (Fonds audiovisuel du PCF)*.

39 *Padomju Latvija*, 1945, Nr. 2, Rīgas kino-kronikas studija, režisors Nikolajs Karmazinskis, LNA LVKFFDA, F8-2-149. Žurnāla tēma: Pirmais maijs Rīgā.

40 *Padomju Latvija*, 1945, Nr. 3, Rīgas kino-kronikas studija, režisors Nikolajs Karmazinskis, LNA LVKFFDA, F8-2-150. Žurnāla tēma: Uzvaras svētki.

41 Litvinova, Irina. (1979). Mera pravdy - pravda. *Sovetskaja molodež'*, 09.05.

42 Aptuveni filmas 15. minūtē.

Irina Kasatkina (Masa) bijusi operatore apmēram 600 kinožurnālu sižetiem⁴³, tomēr viņas skatiens jeb autorība audiovizuālo arhīvu kontekstā joprojām uzskatāms drīzāk par anonīmu. Ne velti kādā intervijā, runājot par filmu hronikām, Irina Masa saka: “Gribētos, lai operatori vārda vislabākajā nozīmē kļūtu par savu darbu autoriem.”⁴⁴

Vēl viena no retajām Rīgas kinostudijas operatorēm sievietēm – Rūta (arī Ruta) Urbaste (1933–2018) – teikusi līdzīgi: “Par svarīgāko tiek uzskatīts tas, ka es esmu vienīgā kinooperatore republikā. Bet tas taču nebūt nav galvenais. [...] Kinofilma – tā ir mana piezīmju grāmatiņa, mani uzskati, manas domas. Par operatoru būtu jāraksta tieši tas, kā viņš filmē, kāds ir viņa “acs raksts””⁴⁵

Nobeigums

Raksts ieskicē dažus no pētnieciskiem jautājumiem, kas saistīti ar filmu mantojuma un kino arhīvu sociālo vēsturi un tās dzimtes aspektiem. Jāatzīst, ka šī ir ārkārtīgi plaša, Latvijas kino teorijā un vēsturē gandrīz neskarta tēma, kuras tālākai izpētei nepieciešams gan faktu apkopojums, gan statistikas dati, gan arī filmu saturiska un estētiska analīze. Tomēr no pieejamā un rakstā apskatītā materiāla var secināt, ka Latvijas filmu mantojumā atrodams ārkārtīgi bagāts audiovizuāls materiāls, kuru veido visdažādākie skatpunkti un to vēlākas apropiācijas un interpretācijas.

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INGA PĒRKONE

Film Archives and the Female Gaze

Summary

The article *Film Archives and the Female Gaze* introduces key contemporary film theory concepts related to the use and interpretation of film archives and found footage. It addresses issues concerning film heritage and the social history of film archives, while also discussing aspects of political power, colonialism, and gender. A close reading of the Latvian documentary films *Bals (The Voice)*, dir. Augusts Sukuts, 1986) and *Mērijas ceļojums (Mary's Journey)*, dir. Kristīne Želve, 2018) explores the archival or present-day power in film practice – specifically, how archival material is appropriated in later works and what gender perspectives emerge through this process.

Keywords: Latvian film heritage, film archives, archival effect, social history of film archives, gender studies, feminist film theory and history, feminist media history.

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ANDRA SILAPĒTERE

Co-Creating the Archive: A Case of the Exhibition *All's Good Between Us* (2024)

Summary

The article focuses on different forms of the archive presented in the exhibition *All's Good Between Us* (2024), which aimed to highlight the discourse of queerness and gender in art and cultural environment in Latvia. The focus was on storytelling as a strategy for memory and community building, using the exhibition format both as a platform and as a method for new knowledge creation. In this article, I examine several artistic and cultural queer archive initiatives in the Baltic region, highlighting their role in documenting and narrating LGBTQIA+ history and contemporary experiences. The article also reflects on the potential of the archive as a starting point for history writing in the context of queer history, which often exists outside institutional frameworks. In light of this, the article expands on the works produced for the exhibition *All's Good Between Us* and their strategies for addressing, redefining, and reinventing the archive in interaction with the exhibition's visitors. The new works by ten artists and researchers, created for the exhibition, challenged traditional notions of the archive and highlighted the need for innovative, collaborative, and participatory approaches to archive-making, emphasizing engagement and co-creation in shaping historical narratives.

The analysis of the exhibition is framed from the curator's standpoint, maintaining a balance between empirical evidence and subjective interpretation. This approach was deliberately chosen, considering that queer archives and experiences often involve complex narratives that challenge traditional historical frameworks. By combining empirical rigor with interpretive reflection, the analysis in the article aims to foster a nuanced and respectful understanding of these layered stories.

Keywords: exhibition, archive, storytelling, co-creation, queer histories, contemporary experiences.

In 2024 as part of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA) program, the exhibition *All's Good Between Us*¹ took place in an off-space in a rented flat on Dzirnavu Street 21a in Riga, Latvia. The exhibition's primary aim was to stimulate and engage with queer and gender discourse within the local art and cultural landscape.² In doing so, it emphasized observational and interaction-based strategies over theoretical perspectives, grounding the conversation in empirical evidence and experiences relevant to current discussions. Within the framework of the exhibition, queerness was viewed not only in terms of gender and sexuality but also as a means to challenge power relations in social and cultural contexts. The goal was straightforward: to rethink the engagement of the past with the present from a queer perspective and to focus on storytelling as a strategy for remembering and community building. The exhibition functioned both as a method and a platform for knowledge creation, rather than merely reflecting reality.

In the article, I examine several queer archive initiatives across the Baltic region and neighboring countries, focusing on artistic and cultural strategies. I question whether the archive can function not simply as a repository of historical sources but as a generative condition for rewriting histories that have been fragmented, suppressed, or erased. My approach combines methods from curatorial studies, visual culture analysis, and queer historiography. I position curatorial practice as a situated form of knowledge production and emphasize how selection, contextualization, and speculative storytelling can transform archives into active sites of meaning-making and critique. Within this context, I discuss the artists' contributions to the exhibition *All's Good Between Us*. Their work represent both creative and speculative attempts to understand how memory can be and is constructed, and how archives when presented in exhibition form can engage the audience. The exhibition approached archives outside institutional frameworks, exploring their different forms and potentials while narrating queer histories and contemporary experiences. It viewed the archive through three artistic lenses: what exists, what can be imagined, and how we might document the present.

1 *All's Good Between Us*, 14.02.-31.03.2024., Dzirnavu iela 21a, Riga, Latvia, curated by the author of the article herein.

2 Additionally, exhibition included voices from outside the Latvian cultural environment in its public program with discussions, presentations and film screenings. Full program available at: <https://lcca.lv/en/exhibitions/all-is-good-between-us-/#izstade> [02.10.2025.].

Exhibition *All's Good Between Us*

For the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA), the archive has been an important not only as a tool and as a resource but also as a mindset that enables institutional critique and encourages rethinking the past and its connections to current processes. This approach is linked to the LCCA's institutional structure, function, and its inherited archive, which was developed in the 1990s by the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts-Riga.³ Over the past decade, the focus has been on contextualizing the archive to explore themes such as gender, minorities, individual and cultural memory, and environmental issues.

One effective way to reinterpret the past has been through contemporary art strategies and collaboration with scholars from the Baltic region and former Socialist Bloc countries. More recently, there has been a growing emphasis on documenting current processes to recognize the diverse experiences of various social groups and identities through art and culture.

The outcome of this approach was the exhibition *All's Good Between Us*, which brought together reflections by ten artists and researchers on how LGBTQIA+ histories are narrated and documented in the local context. The exhibition explored not only how political and economic factors affect the visibility and existence of the archive but also how social and individual consciousness can influence, challenge, and stimulate processes of memory and representation.

The title of the exhibition *All's Good Between Us* was derived from the play⁴ of the same name by Polish writer Dorota Masłowska (b. 1983). The play tells the story of three generations of women – an elderly grandmother who survived World War II, a mother raised under communism, and a daughter growing up in a capitalist world. They all live together in a small apartment in Warsaw, where their daily lives reveal the impact of twentieth-century Polish history on social and national identity and contemporary culture.

The reference to the play become significant due to its portrayal of a social environment that mirrors everyday life in Latvia, where the past continues to shape perceptions of various social norms. Notably, the title *All's Good Between Us* takes a provocative stance by asking: How can everything be good when we know it's complicated?

3 When the Soros Center for Contemporary Art-Riga began its work in 1993, one of its main tasks was to collect and disseminate information about contemporary art in Latvia. Guidelines on how to structure dissemination were provided by the Open Society Foundation and implemented by local art specialists, who collected information on art processes in the form of artists' portfolios, exhibitions, work descriptions, and documentation. Even after the SCC-Riga ceased its work in 1999 and its functions were taken over by the LCCA, the information in the archive continued to be added to, revisited, and expanded. Today, the archive contains audio-visual and textual materials about local and international contemporary art events dating back to the 1960s.

4 The play *All's Good Between Us* (*Między nami wszystko dobrze*) was first published in 2008, with a Latvian translation released in 2016.



Mētra Saberova, *Šļipkas (Slippers)*, 2024. Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*.
Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

The play's narrative uses exaggerations, escalations, and satirical comparison to depict the landscape of a post-socialist country from a stereotypical perspective on the one hand, and to highlight cultural, economic, and political conflicts between different identities and their social statuses on the other. Beyond the satire and stereotypes, the generational context was particularly important – the relationships between generations and their historical and political experiences, how they interpret processes, why some things are understood while others are denied, and how rereading history can help to destigmatize certain positions.

During the preparation of the exhibition, conversations with artists and researchers also revealed that generational divides significantly contribute to the lack of sustainable knowledge and understanding of LGBTQIA+ histories, both in broader society and within the LGBTQIA+ community. This context led to the choice of the archive concept as the exhibition's conceptual foundation – whether the archive is lost, found, or yet to be created.

The exhibition refrained from adopting queer and gender theoretical frameworks, instead choosing to focus on artistic *sensibility* in its approach. This strategy was chosen as a curatorial tactic to emphasize the initiatives and methods of the participating artists. By doing so, the exhibition explored how memory can be constructed and restored through social awareness and empathy, incorporating interactive strategies to engage the audience.

The featured works highlighted the significance of creativity and the freedom to interact with the archive. Participants engaged with the archive in diverse ways – through invention, creation, performance, and reimagining – thereby fostering a dynamic and multifaceted experience. The exhibition and its public program brought together artists based in Latvia and the Baltics, creating a space for the local community and a broader audience to explore, share, and discuss. The exhibition's reflective and audience-involving gestures exceeded expectations: they allowed younger generations to connect with the past and gave older generations a renewed sense of purpose in their ongoing struggles for LGBTQIA+ visibility.⁵

Within the exhibition artist Konstantin Zhukov (b. 1990) brought to light the unwritten histories of the LGBTQIA+ community, illuminating the invisible narratives embedded in everyday spaces that need to be uncovered and shared. To address the

5 The exhibition attracted a total of 2,467 visitors, predominantly from the younger generation, while also capturing the interest of older audiences. A notable example was the visit from AGIHAS, a support group for individuals living with HIV/AIDS, who spent considerable time engaging with the exhibition, discussing their experiences, and sharing their testimonies. Intergenerational collaboration and involvement in the exhibition were further strengthened by the participation of the LCCA mediator team and its Youth Club. Seniors from the Art Mediator program and participants from the Youth Program collaborated to mediate and discuss the exhibition's narratives surrounding the LGBTQ+ community in Latvia. Every day, the exhibition was managed by a pair: one from the Art Mediator program and one from the Youth program. Together, they explored the exhibition's themes and helped visitors connect with the artworks and stories. This collaborative setup fostered meaningful dialogue among LCCA participants and revealed diverse ways of sharing the rich narratives of the LGBTQ+ community, offering valuable insights from different generations.



Konstantin Zhukov, *Black Carnation. Part Three*, 2024. Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*. Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

knowledge gap created by the layering of eras and their prevailing perspectives, designer Rūta Jumīte (b. 1993) and education program curator Ieva Laube, in collaboration with critic Vents Vīnbergs (b. 1979), created *The Living Room of Stories*, opening up possibilities for documenting LGBTQIA+ histories in Latvia and demonstrating how this can be done by engaging a broader audience.

Krišjānis Elviks (b. 1992) explored the potential of documenting stories through social engagement, addressing fear within the queer community and its resonance with wider social processes. Mētra Saberova (b. 1991) used her textile archive, comprising materials from drag performance costumes she created, and “archived” them in specially sewn slippers, which visitors were invited to wear during their visit to the exhibition.

Artist Ingrīda Pičukāne (b. 1978), together with Monta Cimdiņa (b. 1987), addressed the question of rewriting history through the life and creative legacy of artist Felicita Pauļuka (1925–2014), uncovering silent episodes in official narratives and challenging stereotypical assumptions of time and gender.

The exhibition also showcased works by photographer Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011) from her yet-to-be-researched archive, now preserved in the Art Collection of the Latvian National Library. Her creative explorations resonated with Felicita Pauļuka’s artistic inquiries, both aiming to transcend imposed norms and reshape conventional narratives within the context of their respective eras.

By emphasizing diverse and multi-layered identities and their conflicts with social norms and assumptions, Annemarija Gulbe’s (b. 1997) work explored the possibilities of interpreting identity in a society where reality intertwines with fiction and the layers of social expectations. In response, Atis Jākobsons (b. 1985) created an installation designed to activate the viewer’s senses, encouraging a perception that liberates one from the everyday and challenges the boundaries of fixed and singular identity in public space.

Do Archives Create the Starting Conditions for History? Reimagining the Archive

The archive is a powerful concept and institution. As demonstrated in Estonian artist Jaanus Samma’s (b. 1982) exhibition and research project *NSFW: A Chairman’s Tale*,⁶ the archive can serve as a space where the past is actively reconstructed, silences are confronted, and marginalized voices erased by dominant narratives can be reclaimed.⁷

6 *Jaanus Samma. Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman’s Tale*. The Estonian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale 9.05.–22.11.2015, curated by Eugenio Viola.

7 Viola, Eugenio; Poldsam, Rebeka (Eds.) (2015). *Jaanus Samma. Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman’s Tale*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, p.125

But what happens when such an archive does not exist? How does one build it, and can it truly become a point of origin for history? Scholar Ann Cvetkovich argues that lesbian and gay history require a “radical archive of emotion” – one capable of capturing “intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism”, all of which resist documentation through the conventional materials of traditional archives.⁸

Because of homophobia and the lack of acceptance of the Other, queer histories exist mostly outside state institutions such as archives or libraries. The situation of queer archives in Latvia – and even in broader global contexts – is layered with multiple social, political, and cultural dimensions shaped by time and individual histories. One of the recent and important studies on queer histories in Latvia, the collective monograph *In Silence: Queers, the Soviet Power and Society in Latvia, 1954–1991*, sheds light on the complicated process of historiography, in which not only the lack of material denies access to knowledge, but also the people who hold that knowledge may withhold it for various reasons.⁹

To date, the acknowledgment of queer culture and its manifestations in the cultural space of Latvia has culminated in several important studies and publications.¹⁰ However, the exploration of these questions in art has remained rather marginal and somewhat silenced. Although queer narratives have been a constant presence in contemporary art exhibitions, it is rare for an exhibition to be dedicated solely to this topic.¹¹

Nevertheless, we are currently experiencing a moment in which various projects, exhibitions, and research initiatives are being carried out that highlight unknown, marginalized, and oppressed narratives, while seeking to redefine conventional assumptions about the body, identity, sexuality and equality.¹² Focusing specifically on archival strategies in relation to culture and art, one of the most significant initiatives in

8 Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003. Available at: <https://www.are.na/block/10659431> [13.10.2024.].

9 Lipša, Ineta; Vērđiņš, Kārlis; Zellis, Kaspars (sast.) (2024). Ievads. Ierakstīt vēsturē. *Klusumā. Kvīri, padomju vara un sabiedrība Latvijā, 1954–1991: zinātniska monogrāfija*. Rīga: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, pp. 7–24.

10 Among the key researchers in this field, it is essential to acknowledge Ineta Lipše, Kārlis Vērđiņš, and Jānis Ozoliņš, who have published numerous articles on topics related to homosexuality in academic journals and books. A significant contribution to revealing the histories of homosexuals in Latvia, as well as in other Soviet countries, not only to the public in Latvia but also to an international audience, has been Ineta Lipše's discovery of the diary of Aleksandrs Irbe (1906–1996). This diary was published in the first volume titled *Slēptā dzīve. Homoseksuāļa dienasgrāmata 1927–1949* (2021).

11 One of the groundbreaking exhibitions in Latvia dedicated to queer themes was *Slash: In Between the Normative and the Fantasy* (2015), curated by Kaspars Vanags at the Contemporary Art Center KIM?. An important gesture in the same direction was the exhibition *Balsis (Voices)* held at Gallery Low (2022) and curated by Mētra Saberova. Another significant contribution expanding the queer context in the Latvian art scene was the exhibition by the artist duo Skuja Braden at the Latvian Pavilion of the 59th Venice Art Biennale in 2022, curated by Solvita Krese and the author of the article herein.

12 To mention just a few among many others: *In the Name of Desire*, Latvian National Museum of Art (2024), *We Don't Do This. Intimacy, Norms, and Fantasies in Baltic Art*, MO Museum, Vilnius (2024); and *Elisarion. Elisàr von Kupffer and Jaanus Samma*, KUMU, Tallin (2024).

the region was established in 2015 by Polish queer artist Karol Radziszewski (b. 1980). His *Queer Archives Institute* (QAI) is dedicated to researching, collecting, digitizing, presenting, exhibiting, analyzing, and artistically interpreting queer archives, with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe.¹³ In recent years, the archive has also incorporated voices from other continents, such as South America, emphasizing the need to decenter queer narratives that have largely been shaped by Western perspectives.

Radziszewski collects objects and information for the archive primarily through direct contact with the subjects and eyewitnesses of the events. Recording and documenting living memory is his priority, but an important starting point of the archive is Radziszewski's friendship with Ryszard Kisiel (b. 1948), one of the first gay activists in postwar Poland and the creator of the gay zine *Filo*.¹⁴ Through this friendship, Kisiel's collection of magazines, documents, and photographs documenting the social life of homo, bi-, trans-, and queer people in Soviet-era Poland serves as a foundation of the archive, which has also been the subject of various exhibitions and academic lectures by Radziszewski.

The QAI has become internationally well known, and through its narratives it aims to foster the self-awareness of queer communities before and after 1989. This is particularly important when viewed in the context of the political climate in Poland in recent years – especially during the governance of the Law and Justice (PiS) party between 2015 and 2023, a period marked by systematic suppression that sought to erase these histories. In this case, the archive serves not only as a foundation for history but also as a form of resistance and resilience.

Another project following a similar approach is *Išgristi* – a space for queer social and cultural action based in Vilnius, Lithuania. It is one of the few examples and initiatives in the Baltics that, as an institution, actively collects and reflects on queer histories. As the founders¹⁵ define it, *Išgristi*'s activities encompass queer culture, archiving, and psychosocial welfare.¹⁶ In addition to the *Kreivės* festival and running a queer gallery, library, and information and support center, one of their key objectives has been building of the Lithuanian Queer Archive. The archive was launched in 2020 with the goal of consolidating and systematically collecting historical materials.

13 *Queer Archives Institute*. Available at: <http://queerarchivesinstitute.org/> [13.11.2024.]; Radziszewski, Karol (2016). In *Search for Queer Ancestors. L'Internationale Online*. Available at: https://archive-2014-2024.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/55_in_search_for_queer_ancestors [13.11.2024.].

14 The magazine *Filo* was founded in 1986 as a small underground zine. *Filo* evolved into a monthly magazine after the collapse of socialism in 1989, when it began regular distribution and was published until 2001 (as a zine until 1990).

15 The organization is led by Augustas Čičelis, and the team consists of seven people in total, including Viktorija Kolbešnikova and Anton Karyuk, who are responsible for managing the archive.

16 *Išgristi. Lietuvos Queer Archyvas*. Available at: <https://isgristi.lt/archyvas/kaip-isgristi-tyla-lietuvos-queer-archyvas/> [13.11.2024.].

Among the many questions the archive seeks to illuminate, one stands out: “How do we find and preserve what is outside the state narrative?”¹⁷ In addressing this question, it is crucial to recognize how *Išgirsti*'s work embodies both social awareness and action – not only preserving queer stories but also making them widely accessible, allowing anyone who connects with them to engage meaningfully. For instance, in addition to its extensive digital archive and library, the archive hosts a collection of experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital recording project *Queer COVID Archive* provides a platform to listen to the stories of LGBTQIA+ community members, sharing what they felt, did, and overcame during this time.

Among the various archive-making initiatives, it is crucial to highlight another project that responds to constantly changing social and political environments by recognizing the importance and role of regional histories in relation to queer narratives. This initiative, titled *Pink Submarine*, has been implemented by Finnish artist Kalle Hamm (b. 1969) and sociologist Antti Järvi (b. 1977). The project involves collecting oral histories about LGBTQIA+ migration in the Baltic Sea region from the 1960s to the present day, focusing on Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Tallinn, Riga, and St. Petersburg. Since the project began in 2021, testimonies have been collected by a seven-person working group each respective country, and based on this material, a cultural-historical exhibition, *M/S Baltic Queers – Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Migration*, was presented at the Helsinki City Museum at the end of 2024.¹⁸

The project examined the impact of movement on the daily lives of sexual minorities – when and how people decided to leave their countries, why they left, how they felt about settling in their new homelands, how information was exchanged between countries, and how rainbow communities have communicated with one other.

The work of *Išgirsti*, *QIA*, and *Pink Submarine* emphasizes the importance of innovative archival practices in securing diverse narratives of LGBTQIA+ histories. By reimagining archival processes through artistic and creative perspectives, they have opened up possibilities in the region not only to document existing narratives but also to create new frameworks for understanding contemporary experiences. These efforts underscore the need for continuous, collaborative, and participatory approaches to archive creation, emphasizing engagement and the co-creation of historical records.

Similarly, *All's Good Between Us* aimed to challenge traditional notions of the archive, inviting a reconsideration of the boundaries of fixed knowledge within the context of evolving identities and histories. In the following sections, I will explore the artworks and artistic approaches to the archive developed within the exhibition

17 *Išgirsti. Lietuvos Queer Archyvas*. Available at: <https://isgirsti.lt/archyvas/kaip-isgirsti-tyla-lietuvos-queer-archyvas/> [13.11.2024.].

18 Helsinki City Museum. *M/S Baltic Queers – Experiences of LGBTQIA+ Migration*. Available at: www.helsinginkaupunginmuseo.fi/en/exhibitions/m-s-baltic-queers-experiences-of-lgbtqai-migration [16.01.2025.].

project, examining how they disrupted traditional narratives, reclaimed overlooked histories, and redefined the role of memory in contemporary art practice.

Existing Archive: Challenging Traditional Notions of the Archive

To explore how existing archival practices can challenge traditional notions of authority and historical truth, the exhibition highlighted the distinctive narratives of photographer Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011) and painter Felicita Pauļuka (1925–2014). Their work brought to the fore the diverse experiences of creators whose archives have been historically overlooked, misrepresented, or interpreted according to dominating patriarchal and heteronormative social structures. Dzividzinska's once-marginalized work is now receiving overdue recognition, while a newly published collection of letters to Pauļuka¹⁹ is reshaping our understanding of her life and artistic journey. Together, their stories expose the persistent tension between entrenched historical hierarchies and the evolving reinterpretation of artistic legacies – especially through the lens of women artists' experiences.

The majority of Zenta Dzividzinska's and Felicita Pauļuka's works were created during the Soviet era, where their artistic expressions directly confronted the rigid social and ethical norms of the time – particularly those surrounding gender and sexuality. It is essential to recognize that Soviet ideology, through its enforcement of Socialist Realism as the dominant artistic doctrine, systematically suppressed individuality and sensuality. This framework promoted collective, ideologically sanitized imagery, framing the body as a symbol of labor, productivity, and ideological conformity. Art was expected to portray idealized, heroic figures, muscular, masculine, and heteronormative, reinforcing the state's narrative of progress and collective unity. Yet, it was these constraints that compelled artists to push boundaries. The creative exploration of nudity and eroticism in Baltic art of this period has been interpreted by Estonian art historian Katrin Kivimaa (b. 1969) as both a “continuation of national modernist art culture of the independent interwar period and an act resistance to official Soviet modernity”.²⁰

However, this has largely contributed to the consolidation of a certain view of the body based on a patriarchal and masculine interpretation dominating in the

19 Burāne, Ingrida; Beināre, Dina (2021). *Mīlu Tevi: gleznotāja Jāņa Pauļuka vēstules māksliniecei Felicitai Pauļukai*. Rīga: Zinātne, p. 221.

20 Kivimaa, Katrin (2009). Private Bodies or Politicized Gestures? Female Nude Imagery in Soviet Art. Pejić, Bojana and Museum Modern Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (Eds.). *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*. Vienna: Mumok, p. 114



Zenta Dzividzinska, *Nudes*, 1967. The National Library of Latvia Art Collection.
Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*. Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

art system (e.g., artist Andris Grinbergs (b. 1946) or photographers Gunārs Binde (b. 1933) and Jānis Kreicbergs (1939–2011)).²¹ In this context, the work of Pauļuka and Dzividzinska emerges as a vital counterpoint, expending perspectives and interpretive possibilities for understanding the body, identity, and sexuality in their time. Their art challenges the dominant patriarchal gaze, presenting alternative visions of female body as well as subjectivity. The exhibition's design played a pivotal role in reinterpreting their artistic legacies. Through architectural and curatorial strategies, it uncovered historical layers and revealed the narratives of their lives and work – liberated from dogmatic constraints. By engaging with the material, its contexts, and the interpretive potential of the physical space – including doorways, corridors, and existing wall paintings,²² as well as the other participating artists' works exhibited in the space – the exhibition itself became an active participant in reshaping understanding of these artists' legacies.²³

For example, Dzividzinska's photographic archive reveals her determined efforts to break the objectification of the female body in photography. A broader look at her creative experiments was possible thanks to the Art Collections expert at the National Library of Latvia Līga Goldberga. With her guidance, we chose to exhibit some photographs from 1967 of her model Velta Stīpiņa, and a photo montage created between 1968 and 1970, when Dzividzinska travelled to Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, and documented the sculptures known as the "Stone Women," dating from the 9th to the 13th century. Later in her artistic explorations, she combined these photographs with studies of nudes using the photomontage technique. The resulting image, with erased hair and breasts, opens up the possibility of thinking about identity in shifting categories – and whether the artist did it intentionally. As written by Līga Goldberga:

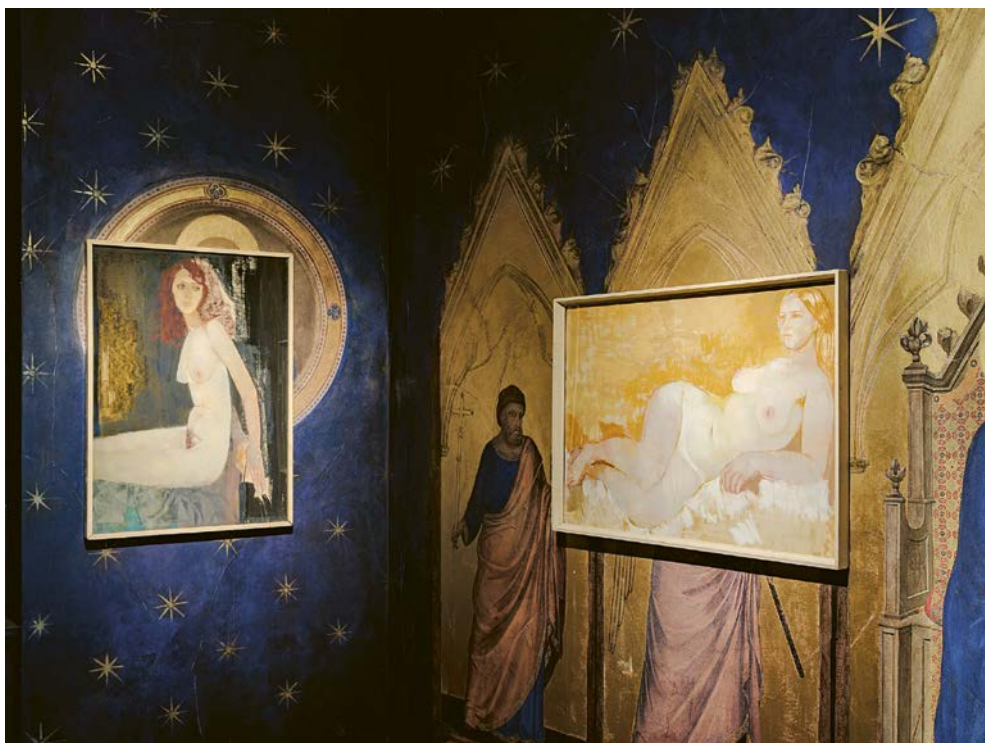
The androgynous creature has not been exhibited in the context of photography clubs, most probably as not belonging to the fetishized aesthetics of female body representation, nor in the second wave of archival circulation, which in the late 20th and early 21st century demanded subjective documentality and a departure from the technical experiments practiced in photography clubs.²⁴

21 Kristberga, Laine (2025). Convergence of Performance Art, Photography and Archival Practises. *Culture Crossroads*, Vol. 27, pp. 89-108.

22 Before the exhibition took place in the flat at Dzirnau 60a, the space hosted a theater play by director Laura Groza *Mājoklis. Komentāri*. (*Home. Comments*, 2022). Felicita Pauļuka's works were exhibited in a room featuring wall paintings by Sintija Jakobsone, which referenced the works of Giotto (1266/67-1337).

23 The exhibition's design and architecture was created in collaboration with the architect and designer Līva Kreislere.

24 Goldberga, Līga (2024). Vienas fotogrāfijas stāsts: Zenta Dzividzinska. *Foto kvartāls*, 11.03. Available at: <https://fotokvartals.lv/2024/03/11/vienas-fotografijas-stasts-zenta-dzividzinska> [30.01.2025.].



Felicita Paujuka, *Nude on Yellow Background*, 1970; Žanna, 1973. The Latvian Artists' Union Museum. Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*. Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

Dzividzinska's experimental works were enlarged beyond their original archive dimensions and strategically displayed. Studies of the nude female body (model Velta Stipiņa, 1967) were positioned in a narrow, secluded space behind a half-open door, evoking the artist's marginalized status in the Latvia's art history. Meanwhile, in the adjacent room, a series of photomontages confronted visitors with black-and-white images of a monumental figure – its form shifting across each image, raising questions about its very essence and identity.

In the same room as Dzividzinska's works, two pastel paintings by Felicita Pauļuka were exhibited, depicting female nudes: *Nude on Yellow Background* (1970) and *Žanna* (1973).²⁵ These pieces highlight a key theme in Pauļuka's art – the female body – which she portrays in a way that diverges from the prevailing “male gaze” of her era, instead emphasizing a different kind of sensitivity. The monumental research and exhibition *Gender Check* (2009) interprets Pauļuka's nudes as part of the lesbian narrative of the time.²⁶ The exhibition also sought to address this aspect, though conversations with her contemporaries ultimately did not bring us closer to understanding this narrative of her life and art.²⁷

However, a significant opportunity to reread her biography differently from the already published accounts²⁸ and testimonies of her contemporaries is offered by the book *Mīlu Tevi* (*Love You*, 2021).²⁹ This collection of letters, written by her former husband, the renowned Latvian painter Jānis Pauļuks (1906–1984), spans the years 1941 to 1956. Letters reveal a deeply troubling chapter in Felicita Pauļuka's life – the physical abuse she endured within her marriage. For instance, in one of the letters her husband Pauļuks writes: “I am, after all, the greatest painter in this part of the world – I know that – but why don't I see myself surpassing the others? Maybe it doesn't need to be done. But I won't hit you anymore! Don't cry! Yours, Jānis. 6 November 1944.”³⁰

Despite the raw and unsettling revelations contained in these letters the publication largely passed without public discussion upon its release. In response to this silence, artist Ingrīda Pičukāne created a site-specific installation *The Lives of Felicita (Pauļuka)* for the exhibition. Pičukāne occupied a separate room of the apartment

25 Both works were loaned for the exhibition from the collection of the Latvian Artists' Union.

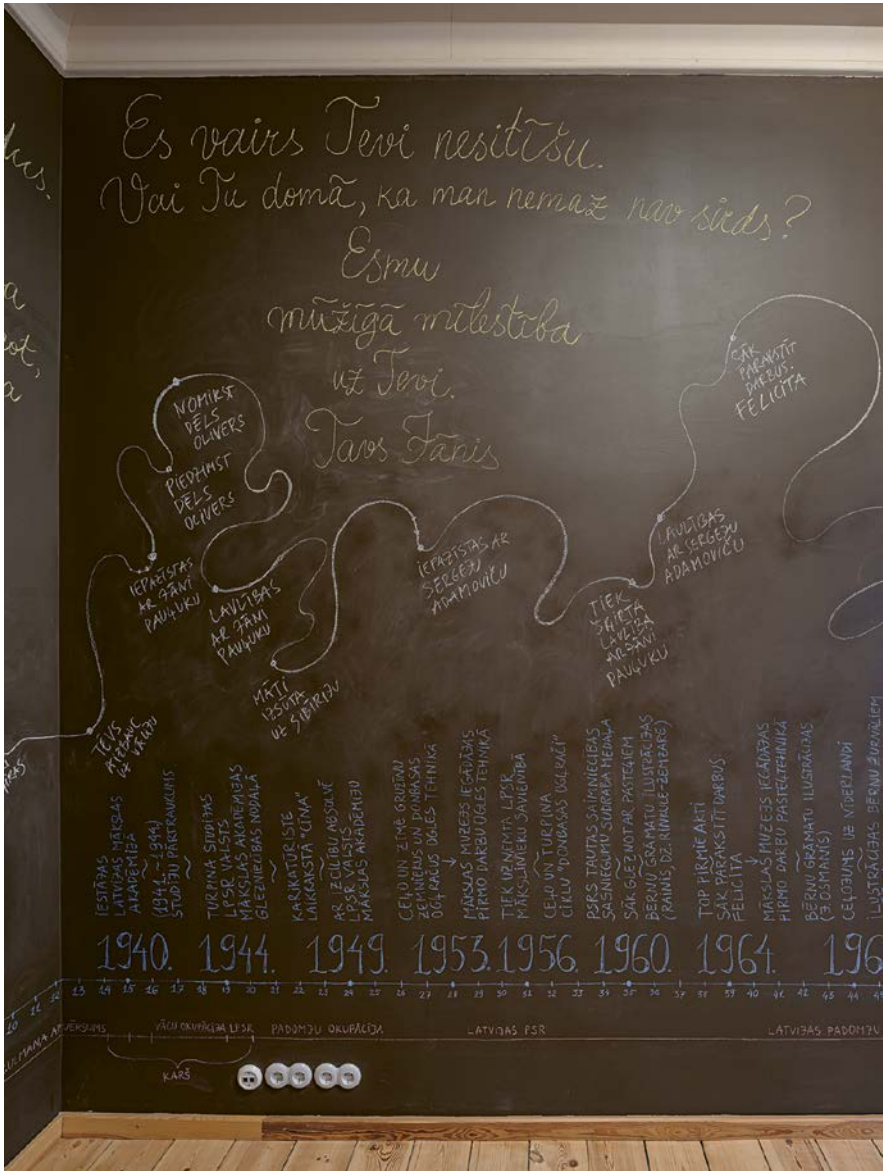
26 Pejic, Bojana (Ed.) (2009). *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*. Vienna: Mumok.

27 During the preparation of the exhibition, we spoke with her contemporaries, artist Baiba Vegere (b. 1948) and art historian Ingrīda Burāne (b. 1949), but neither of them wished to confirm Pauļuka's lesbian identity or its manifestation in her art.

28 To mention some publications: Šmagre, Rita (sast.) (1966). *Felicita Pauļuka: reprodukciju albums*. Rīga: Liesma; Circene, Baiba (sast.) (1999). *Felicita. Felicitas Pauļukas darbu kolekciju katalogs*. Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas muzeju apvienības izdevniecība Doma; Konstants, Zigurds (2006). *Jānis Pauļuks*. Rīga: self-published; Slava, Laima (2006). *Jāņa Pauļuka divas saules*. *Studija*, No. 4, pp. 10–15.

29 Burāne, Ingrīda; Beināre, Dina (sast.) (2021). *Mīlu Tevi: gleznotāja Jāņa Pauļuka vēstules māksliniecei Felicitai Pauļukai*. Rīga: Zinātne, p. 221.

30 Ibid, p. 47.



Ingrīda Pičukāne, *The Lives of Felicita (Pauļuka)*, 2024. Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*. Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

and, in collaboration with Monta Cimdiņa, curator of the Graphic Art Collections at the Latvian National Museum of Art, created a timeline drawing of Pauļuka's life based on research. This timeline explored both recognized and lesser-known aspects of her biography, offering insights into themes such as domestic violence and queer identity. It illuminated contexts that not only revealed the diverse directions of Felicita's creative practice but also reflected on her ongoing exploration of identity and selfhood.

Imagined Archive

Artist Konstantin Zhukov, in his artistic practice, responds to the passage of time that has partly erased evidence and knowledge by engaging in the process of uncovering and narrating queer stories. His ongoing project *Black Carnation*³¹ (initiated in 2021) reflects on lost, hidden and yet-to-be-documented queer histories. The project envisions a hypothetical collection of documents, artifacts, and records that do not physically exist but are instead imagined or created through artistic gestures.

For the exhibition, Zhukov created a site-specific installation, *Black Carnation. Part Three* (2024), which served as a metaphorical and poetic embodiment of these lost and undocumented histories. Installed in the kitchen area of the apartment, it utilized elements of the domestic environment – such as windows, kitchen counters, and drawers – to stage a space that simultaneously concealed and revealed evidence: historical testimonies that have been self-censored, deliberately forgotten, or denied.

The installation incorporated photo material depicting Zhukov queer contemporaries, whether in his studio or, for instance, in cruising spaces. The photos were printed on receipt paper – some framed, others attached to the kitchen furniture panels with magnets. The delicate and fragile nature of the prints underscored the ephemeral quality of the stories they conveyed. While the work emphasized the absence of an archive, Zhukov's intention was to illuminate his contemporaries and their experiences, ensuring they are documented, recorded, or at least acknowledged so that they are not lost.

Documentation of contemporaries and processes in the Baltic drag scene, particularly within the Drag King collective, was at the center of Mētra Saberova's work *Šlīpkas* (Slippers, 2024). Saberova has been an active member of the Baltic Drag Collective for the past six years, performing drag and creating costumes that embody

31 The project's title refers to a term used in Latvia before World War II to describe homosexual men and to a widely reported criminal case from that period in which several men were prosecuted for their homosexuality. From: Zhukov, Konstantin. *Portfolio*. Available at: www.konstantinzhukov.com/_files/ugd/8c5933_1b93f65be03c4578babf469607923813.pdf[13.11.2024.].

images and characters exploring issues of gender, sexuality, and equality. During this period, she has designed countless costumes for her alter ego, Timmy, as well as for other drag kings in Latvia and the Baltics.

For the exhibition, the fabrics from her collection were used as means of writing history – stitched into eleven pairs of “šļipatas,” or slippers. Visitors were invited to wear these slippers and walk through the apartment, engaging with the documented history through this interactive experience. One pair, for example, consisted of:

././ a nautical outfit for one of the Estonian kings; a faux leather jacket for one of the Latvian kings; a shirt for the only Lithuanian king; a jabot for a British king; something green for a sister; a sample of the first jacket that transforms into trousers with a historic cut; the first stretch fabric; a 20-meter block of lining; the all-too-uncompositional rainbow fabric; face masks before the fabric was deemed ineffective; a new outfit to welcome the Mayor of Riga; [..]; a Valentine’s Day outfit that transforms into a proud #wearealsoLatvia (#mēsariēsamLatvija).³²

Saberova’s work was installed at the entrance of the space, using the apartment’s original furniture to display the shoes. The colorful slippers contrasted sharply with the monolithic, heavy historical furniture, offering a parallel narrative to our shared understanding of society. In a way, the artist’s responsive gesture in the exhibition not only employed an unconventional form of archiving the Drag King Collective’s experiences but also confronted the audience with the principle of cross-dressing – literally inviting everyone to step into someone else’s shoes.

Documenting Queer Culture: Capturing Contemporary Experiences

In exploring how queer culture is documented in the present, the exhibition featured two interactive installations: Krišjānis Elviks’s *Queer Fear* (2024) and Rūta Jumīte and Ieva Laube’s *The Living Room of Stories* (2024). These projects reimagined the archive as a dynamic, participatory space – one that captures the complexities of contemporary queer experiences while empowering queer communities to shape their own narratives that foreground fear and resilience, collective memory, and agency.

32 Saberova, Mētra. *Šļipkas or Slippers*. In *All’s Good Between Us*. Riga: Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2024, p. 11.



Rūta Jumīte, leva Laube, *The Living Room of Stories*, 2024.
Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*. Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art.
Photo by Ingus Bajārs

The strategy of providing a platform for storytelling and collecting was implemented in the exhibition by Krišjānis Elviks. He created a site-specific interactive installation titled *Queer Fear* (2024), which addressed the fear experienced by queer individuals in today's public spaces. The work invited members of the LGBTQIA+ community to share their stories of fear, highlighting the social and political contexts that can limit access to services such as healthcare and restrict freedom of movement. Additionally, the artist encouraged participants to share stories that explored ways to overcome this fear.

Using a bureaucratic aesthetic and simple white furniture to set the mood, the artist divided the space into three sections. In the first, visitors could write down their stories of fear or overcoming fear on a prepared form and place them in an envelope. The second featured two voting booth-like boxes where these envelopes could be deposited. The third area contained two folders in which all the stories were archived daily and made available for public reading by exhibition visitors. The installation also included a table designed to measure the general mood of visitors: everyone was invited to place a small cube on a square that best represented their current feelings, such as love, joy, sadness, or loneliness.

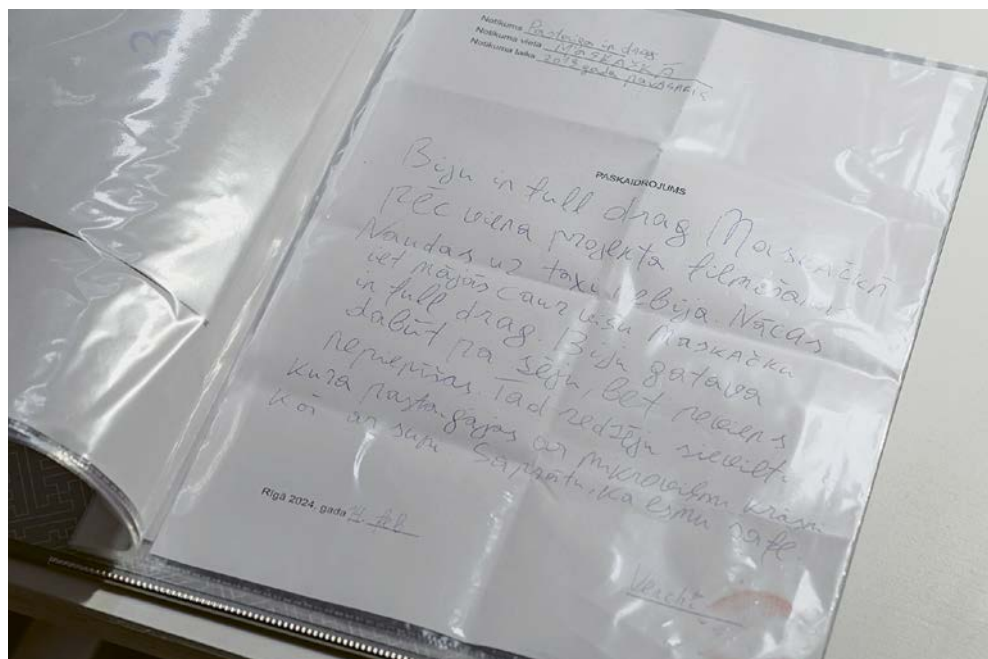
The initiative yielded extraordinary results. The testimonies collected not only highlighted the diverse challenges faced by the community and its members – ranging from homophobia to intolerance – but also demonstrated courage in standing up for one's rights despite political decisions, hate speech, and right-wing populism. The project revealed the pressing need for a space where such experiences could be shared, not only within the community but also with broader society, to document events as they unfold and empower individuals to make their stories visible. Notably, several testimonies came from individuals who do not necessarily identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. These contributions were not mere diversifications of the artwork but complemented the process inclusively, reflecting everyday realities to which visitors could relate with empathy and understanding.

Expanding and diversifying the possibilities for documenting LGBTQIA+ history and its ongoing processes was the installation and social platform *The Living Room of Stories* (2024) by Rūta Jumīte and Ieva Laube. This project explored new modes of knowledge creation through public participation and engagement, asking how it might be possible to collectively fill the knowledge gaps in understanding our recent history.

The installation was located in the central room of the flat and consisted of multiple pieces of custom-made furniture: chairs and tables painted in bright blue, yellow, and orange. A special atmosphere was created through lighting, which invited visitors into a comfortable, home-like environment where they could share their experiences. *The Living Room of Stories* was specifically designed for “recording



Krišjānis Elviks, *Queer Fear*, 2024. Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*.
Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs



Krišjānis Elviks, *Queer Fear*, 2024. Installation view of *All's Good Between Us*.
Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by Ingus Bajārs

histories,” providing tools for sharing testimonies and encouraging reflection on how queer culture can be documented in both the present and the future.

The room was divided into two areas: *The Living Questions Wall*, which mapped personal, social, and political questions, and *Seating Stations*, which comprised furniture inviting people to pause and share their experiences – either by writing them down or by speaking, inspired by the questions and stories displayed on the wall. Before the exhibition, Jumīte and Laube collaborated with Vents Vīnbergs to develop the questions in a workshop. Participants from the LGBTQIA+ community identified key topics essential for documenting histories during a three-hour session. These were later grouped under the themes of courage, identity, the closet, taboo, acceptance, memories, sympathies, place, and dating.

Both Krišjānis Elviks’s and Rūta Jumīte and Ieva Laube’s works demonstrated the power of interactive archive-making, where a collaborative and participatory approach to creating and maintaining archives is crucial. This method of collecting information emphasizes engagement, accessibility, and the co-creation of historical records, actively involving the public or specific communities in the process. Despite initial concerns that people might not respond to these invitations, both initiatives showed significant participation and enthusiasm from visitors, indicating a clear willingness to share.³³

Conclusions

Over recent decades, the Baltic States have experienced significant transformative developments in archival practices concerning queer histories. Archives, once primarily spaces of state-controlled and sanctioned narratives, are increasingly being redefined as sites of resistance, reclamation, and community empowerment. Artists and activists like Jaanus Samma in Estonia and initiatives such as *Išgristi* in Lithuania and broader regional projects like *Queer Archives Institute* (QAI) and *Pink Submarine* demonstrate how archives can challenge dominant narratives and preserve marginalized voices. Taking inspiration from these practices the exhibition *All’s Good Between Us* aimed to rethink the archive through a participatory, speculative, and interactive curatorial methodology, transforming it from a static repository into a dynamic space of dialogue and co-creation. By positioning the exhibition as both a research method and a platform for knowledge production, the exhibition’s curator and artists invited visitors to actively engage with history and contemporary environment, dissolving the

33 For instance, over the course of the exhibition, Krišjānis Elviks collected eighty-seven stories of fear and resilience. Meanwhile, Rūta Jumīte and Ieva Laube’s *The Living Room of Stories* gathered approximately one hundred and fifty testimonies. While these collected stories have been digitized by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, they are currently held in the artists’ private archives.

traditional boundaries between artist, audience, and archivist. This approach allowed not only to democratize the archival process but also challenged institutional authority, demonstrating how queer and feminist perspectives can reshape our understanding of the past and today's processes in the society.

At its core, *All's Good Between Us* was a collaborative and participatory endeavor, prioritizing engagement, accessibility, and the co-creation of historical records. By involving the public in re-examining and rethinking historical and contemporary narratives, the exhibition established a living, dynamic archive that reflected the diverse experiences of the queer community. In doing so, it challenged the dominant male gaze and its shaped aesthetics in both art historical discourse and contemporary culture, fostering a liberating and empowering environment.

Ultimately, the exhibition emerged as an experiment, reimagining the archive as a collaborative, living entity that transcends traditional institutional boundaries. By centering storytelling, participation, and co-creation, it transformed archiving into an active process of reclaiming histories that have been marginalized, erased, or deliberately silenced. This approach illuminated the persistent tensions between institutional erasure and the reinterpretation of artistic legacies, particularly those of queer artists and marginalized women artist.

While the exhibition initially focused on queer perspectives, its broader significance lies in its intersectional approach, revealing the layered oppressions faced by women artists under Soviet and post-Soviet patriarchal structures. Dzividzinska's photomontages and Pauļuka's intimate pastel nudes challenged the dominant male gaze, offering alternative visions of female subjectivity that defied the ideological constraints of their time. Their works expose the systemic biases embedded in art historical narratives and underscore the urgency of rewriting history from the margins.

While *All's Good Between Us* succeeded in breaking the silence around queer histories and contemporary experiences, it also revealed the limits of visibility as a tool for social change. The collected testimonies and the exhibition visitor's engagement raised a critical question: How can visibility be meaningfully enacted in the telling and retelling of stories? Though the exhibition challenged systemic erasure, it acknowledged that recognition alone is insufficient to dismantle the entrenched barriers of homophobia and prejudice.

The testimonies highlighted that ending the silence of the archive does not inherently resolve the systemic and cultural issues that perpetuate discrimination. While visibility is essential for recognition and empowerment, it remains insufficient to dismantle the deeply rooted structures that uphold inequality. Addressing these challenges demands sustained efforts to confront societal norms, advocate for inclusivity, and cultivate understanding within broader social contexts.

Ultimately, *All's Good Between Us* underscored the potential of art as a catalyst for social transformation, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic landscape.

By centering marginalized voices and reimagining archival practices, the exhibition empowered communities to shape their own narratives, ensuring that queer histories are not only preserved but also amplified and passed on.

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ANDRA SILAPĒTERE

Koprades arhīvs: izstādes “Starp mums viss labi” (2024) gadījums

Kopsavilkums

Raksts pievēršas arhīvam un tā atšķirīgajiem veidiem izstādē “Starp mums viss labi” (2024), kuras mērķis bija aktualizēt kvīriskā un dzimtes diskursu lokālajā mākslas un kultūras vidē. Uzsvars tika likts uz stāstu stāstīšanu kā atmiņas un kopienas veidošanas stratēģiju, izstādes formātu izmantojot gan kā platformu, gan kā metodi jaunu zināšanu radīšanai. Rakstā aplūkotas atsevišķas kvīru arhīvu iniciatīvas Baltijas reģionā, uzsverot to lomu LGBTQIA+ vēstures un mūsdienu pieredzes dokumentēšanā un stāstīšanā. Raksts arī pārdomā arhīva kā vēstures rakstīšanas sākumpunkta potenciālu kvīru vēstures kontekstā, kas bieži vien pastāv ārpus institucionālajiem ietvariem. Ņemot vērā minēto, raksts izvērsis izstādei radītos darbus un to stratēģijas, kas pievērsās arhīvam, tā pārdefinēšanai un jaunradīšanai mijiedarbībā ar izstādes apmeklētājiem. Izstādei jaunradītie desmit mākslinieku un pētnieku darbi izaicināja tradicionālos priekšstatus par arhīvu un uzsvēra nepieciešamību pēc inovatīvām pieejām sadarbībai un līdzdalībai arhīvu un vēsturisko naratīvu veidošanā.

Izstādes analīze veikta no kuratora skatupunkta, ievērojot līdzsvaru starp empīriskā ceļā gūtiem pierādījumiem un subjektīvu interpretāciju. Pieeja tika apzināti izvēlēta, ņemot vērā, ka kvīru arhīvi un pieredzes bieži ietver sarežģītus naratīvus, kas apstrīd tradicionālās vēstures stāstījumu formas. Apvienojot empīrisko un interpretatīvu refleksiju, analīze cenšas veicināt niansētu un cieņpilnu izpratni par sarežģītajiem stāstiem.

Atslēgvārdi: izstāde, arhīvs, stāstīšana, kopradīšana, kvīru vēstures un šodienas pieredzes.

MARIKA AGU

Archive of the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art as a Multimodal Agent

Summary

This article examines the archive of the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art as a multimodal agent by tracing the Centre's organizational principles and analyzing their impact on the archive's formalization and subsequent activities. Drawing on empirical examples from the author's work at the archive since 2017, the paper explores how archival materials can serve as catalysts for new ideas to arise, contributing to ongoing cultural discourse and the archive's evolving institutional identity. In particular, the examples discussed highlight how the archived materials reveal the interplay between institutional agendas and artistic practices, offering insight into the dynamics of the Estonian contemporary art field.

Keywords: 1990s, new media, video art, printed matter, Eastern Europe, generative archivist practice.

Introduction

After more than 30 years since the establishment of the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), it is timely to reconsider the status of its archive and to develop a more discursive approach to its contents. This article seeks to acknowledge its genealogy by outlining the organizational principles of the Centre and tracing their continuing influence in the present. In this context, the practices of Estonian artists such as Mare Tralla (b. 1967), Raivo Kelomees (b. 1960), Ene-Liis Semper (b. 1969), and Jaan Toomik (b. 1961) – who were among the first to engage with new media art – correlate closely with the Centre's program and, in doing so, provide a framework for understanding the processes shaping Estonian art history in the 1990s.

CCA was founded in 1992 as the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts, Estonia, with the aim of strengthening the international visibility of Estonian art by supporting curatorial and art-historical knowledge production on East European art and shaping the local canon. Another key objective of the Soros Centres was to facilitate the adaptation of contemporary artistic practices – a goal that, in the Estonian context, made new media art particularly prominent.

When the activities of the Soros Foundation were restructured in 1999 and its funding withdrawn, the CCA began to operate as an independent non-profit foundation pursuing similar aims. Today, the CCA is primarily funded by the Estonian Ministry of Culture, and since 1999, it has served as the organizing institution for the Estonian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

As a result of its long-standing activities and its role as a cultural mediator between international and local stakeholders, the Centre has accumulated a considerable amount of archival material – both physical and digital. Although the CCA is not a memory institution per se, its representative function has led to the formation of a significant collection of art-historical materials that merit preservation, research, and mediation.

Some research has already been conducted on the activities and projects initiated by the CCA. For example, in 2012, Estonian art historian Ragne published a master's thesis titled *Interstanding Festivals in Local and International Contexts*, which provides an overview of Estonian media art and maps the international landscape of media art festivals in Europe. The thesis analyzes the themes and discussions of the *Interstanding* conferences organized by the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, Estonia (SCCAE), held in 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001. Likewise, art historian Brigita Reinert's 2018 master's thesis, *The Estonian National Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale*, a discourse analysis on the biennale project, examines it as a carrier of symbolic meaning and representation of the local cultural identity between 1997 and 2017.

More broadly, art historian Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus has published several studies on the Soros' network of contemporary art centres,¹² while historical anthropologist and sociologist Kristóf Nagy has provided insights into the impact of the Soros Foundation within the Hungarian context.³

1 Łabowicz-Dymanus, Karolina (2025). Transition and Visual Arts in Estonia 1988–1995: Cultural Policy, Financing, Legislation, and Social Changes. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Volume 56, Issue 2, pp. 289–307.

2 Łabowicz-Dymanus, Karolina (2019). The Corporate and Market Strategies for Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. *Proceedings of The Art Museum of Estonia*, pp. 76–96.

3 Nagy, Kristóf (2018). From Fringe Interest to Hegemony: The Emergence of the Soros Network in Eastern Europe. In: Beáta Hock, Anu Allas (Eds.). *Globalizing East European Art Histories*. Routledge, pp. 53–63.



Raivo Kelomees, *Dry Video Art*, 1992. Exhibition view. Courtesy of the artist



Raivo Kelomees, *Dry Video Art*, 1992. Exhibition view. Courtesy of the artist



Festival catalogues from the CCA archive, 2025. Courtesy of the author

Centralized Structure and Programmes of the Network

The impulse to establish a network of contemporary art centres originated in the 1980s in Hungary, when George Soros (b. 1940) founded the Hungarian Centre for Contemporary Art in Budapest in collaboration with the Budapest Art Hall and the Soros Foundation in 1985. At that time, the Soros Foundation focused on supporting and financing young Hungarian artists whose work was marginalized by the state apparatus, thus fostering countercultural tendencies. In 1991, Soros's name was added to the title of the Budapest Art Centre, and in the same year, the model was expanded across the post-socialist region, including Estonia. The network of art centres aimed to integrate local art scenes into the international art world, catalyze artistic dialogue between East and West, facilitate the exchange of information on contemporary art, and promote international collaboration.⁴

All of the centres operated according to similar principles and were organized within a centralized system, though each retained a degree of autonomy to define goals based on its local context. Sirje Helme, the founding director of the Estonian centre (1992–2005), outlined its main activities in the 1992 statute: documenting modern and contemporary visual art, distributing grants to artists, institutions, and organizations, organizing annual exhibitions to inspire new ideas and energy, and initiating projects that addressed societal conditions in Estonia.

Despite conspiracy theories suggesting that the network imposed cultural homogenization across Eastern Europe, it is more accurate to view the centres as accelerators of developments that would likely have occurred independently. In the Estonian case, the centre's funding significantly exceeded national cultural budgets, creating a noticeable contrast; however, assumptions about externally imposed homogenization are largely unfounded.⁵

Video as the Most Sought-After Medium

The zeitgeist of the early 1990s in Estonia was characterized by an eagerness to integrate new technological advancements into everyday life. Despite limited resources, two of the most active artists of that period – Mare Tralla and Ene-Liis Semper – began experimenting with video art. At the time, there were only three video projectors

4 Nagy, pp. 53–63.

5 Ojavee, Sten (2025). Eastern European Spectacle in a Distorting Mirror. *A Shade Colder*, Issue 9. Available at: www.ashadecolder.com/eastern-european-spectacle-in-a-distorting-mirror [22.09.2025.].



Mare Tralla, *eyeBlimp*, 1999. Video still. Courtesy of the artist

available for the entire cultural field, and video editing could be done solely with access to the Estonian Public Broadcasting facilities.⁶

The scarcity of technical means is exemplified by the story of artist Raivo Kelomees, who in 1992 presented his work *Dry Video Art* at an exhibition *S & K 2 – Artmix* held at the Estonian Fair Centre in Tallinn. The piece is considered one of the first conceptual video artworks produced in Estonia. Its title, *Dry*, derived from a pragmatic condition – there were neither resources for production nor equipment for screening. Consequently, the artist decided to present the project in printed form, displaying video stills on paper alongside photographs of his four-year-old son accompanied by quotes from Carl Gustav Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*.

Despite technological limitations, video became one of the most sought-after mediums in Eastern Europe during the 1990s. This growing interest was reinforced by festivals such as the *French-Baltic-Nordic Video & Electronic Art Festival* (1992–2000) – an annual international electronic arts event held in the Baltics – and *Ostranenie* (1993, 1995, 1997), an international forum hosted by the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation in Dessau. Both platforms placed a particular focus on video art from Eastern Europe.

One of the central aims of the Soros Centres for Contemporary Art was to integrate local art scenes into the international art world by facilitating information exchange. This explains the abundance of cassette-shaped catalogues from the *Ostranenie* festivals, as well as publications from the *ISEA International Symposium on Electronic Art, Ars Electronica*, and the *International Short Film Festival Oberhausen* found in the CCA archive. These publications on media and video art document the institutional efforts to support new media art and to provide access to information and critical discourse surrounding it.

One of the most active artists in Estonia at that time, Mare Tralla, has noted that the younger generation did not feel entirely comfortable with the growing emphasis on new technologies, which were rapidly institutionalized, leaving little room for development from a grassroots level.⁷ As a counter-reaction, many Estonia artists began creating new media artworks in a deliberately nonchalant manner – avoiding sleek design and polished aesthetics – as a form of resistance against the commercialized visual language of emerging technologies. Responding to the institutional preference for video as the dominant medium, artists increasingly distanced themselves from it, turning instead to digital technologies, the internet, and the possibilities of interactive art.⁸

6 Semper, Ene-Liis (2024), *Kadunud ajas nagu pisarad vihmas. Sümpoosion postmodernist üleminekuajal ja nüüd*. Tartu Elekriteater, Research Group of Contemporary Estonian Culture. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/1036960715> [09.01.2025.].

7 Interview with Mare Tralla (29.10.2024.). Tallinn, author's personal audio recording.

8 Nukk, Ragne (2012). *Interstading Festivals in Local and International Contexts*. Master's Thesis. Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Art, p. 15.

This tendency is clearly traceable in the practice of Mare Tralla, an Estonian queer feminist artist and activist, who since the 1990s, has focused on feminist critique and questions of identity through performance, video, installation, and digital media. In her video *eyeBlimp* (1999), Tralla reveals the behind-the-scenes process of creating an interactive artwork of the same title from her home – sewing foam, pouring silicone, connecting wires, and programming. Through this, she introduces the notion of craft in media art, juxtaposing so-called “low” and “high” forms of production. *eyeBlimp* was first presented in Tallinn and later in Liverpool in 1999. As Tralla recalls, it was conceived as an ironic commentary on the contemporary belief that technology would have a decisive influence on human sexuality.⁹

Tralla’s *eyeBlimp* was later featured on *CCA Weekly* – a digital newsletter¹⁰ published between 2014 and 2022 that provided overviews of regional art events and reflected on current topics through themed sections. Among them, *Arhiivikuller* (*Archive Courier*) temporarily made selected video works from the archive publicly available, while *Meenutaja* (*Recaller*) used in-house archival material to offer historical context and reflection.

Archive by Chance

By the late 1990s, the conditions for promoting the use of new technologies in art – such as video, interactive art, net art, photography, installation, and others – had significantly improved. During this period, the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts (SCCA) began collecting VHS cassettes containing video works by Estonian artists and acquired a Sony Video8 camcorder, which was occasionally used by artists such as Jaan Toomik, Mare Tralla, and others. The VHS format was particularly convenient for sending materials overseas. Taking advantage of the Western art institutions’ growing curiosity toward the previously little-accessible Eastern European region, the SCCA accumulated hundreds of cassettes documenting Estonian artists’ works. Later, these were transferred to DVDs, gradually filling the office shelves as copies of the original tapes.

Something that began from simple practical needs, gradually gained significance through its scope and scale – the videos started to form a collection of information and knowledge. The current status of the CCA video archive can be compared to Ubuweb, founded by artist and writer Kenneth Goldsmith – an online shadow library consisting of hundreds of thousands of freely downloadable avant-garde artefacts.¹¹

9 Agu, Marika (2021). Arhiivikuller. Mare Tralla „eyeBlimp”. *CCA online magazine*. Available at: <https://cca.ee/ajakiri/arhiivikuller-mare-tralla-eyeblimp-1999> [09.01.2025.].

10 Homepage of KKEKI ajakiri. Available at: <https://cca.ee/ajakiri/> [16.09.2025.].

11 Homepage of Ubuweb. Available at: www.ubu.com [09.07.2025.].



Tõnis Jürgens, *Plastic Cloud Documentary*, 2022. Video still. Assemblage based on video documentation by Kaarel Kurismaa et al. of *Metabor*. Duration 17 min. Courtesy of the artist



Mare Tralla, *95-04 = 2022*, 2022. Video still. Video based on personal archive. Duration 17 min 25 s.
Courtesy of the artist

Yet, unlike Ubuweb, where all works are publicly accessible, the CCA mediates its archived materials upon request.

After more than thirty years of operation, the Centre has become a backup repository for artists and, in some cases, holds the only existing copy of certain works. As the video archive has now reached over 1000 items, questions regarding the public accessibility, preservation, and conservation of the material have become increasingly urgent. Despite allocating in-house resources to organize, maintaining and mediating the video works, the centre does not hold publishing rights; therefore any public screening depends on approval from the respective authors.

In 2023, the CCA entered a co-operative project with the Film Archive of the National Archives of Estonia to improve the storage conditions of both video tapes and digital copies. Recognizing that accessibility and discoverability are crucial to the use of archival materials, the Film Archive subsequently published the inventory of the CCA video archive in its online database *Meediateek*, which serves as a shared platform for several public databases.¹²

Contextualizing the Findings

The exhibition *Impression on Paper. Publications from the CCA's Archive*, which took place at Café Hulda and Lagemik Bookshop in Tallinn in 2020, showcased rare and lesser-known printed materials from the CCA archive alongside merchandise from the bookshop. The exhibition highlighted printed matter that the Centre has been collecting since the early 1990s – documents that serve not only as records of past events but also as artefacts reflecting the visual and intellectual climate of their time. Comprising nearly 4,000 items, the collection encapsulates a wide range of artistic tendencies and design practices that have yet to be fully historicized.

Each exhibited publication was accompanied by a short curatorial text drawing attention to its distinctive features – its design, conceptual framework, technical execution, and broader art-historical context. Among the items displayed were festival catalogues, exhibition booklets, artist books, examples of graphic design, and self-published materials, including the 1995 catalogue for *Est.Fem* – the first exhibition in Estonia to explicitly address feminist ideas. Curated by Mare Tralla, Reet Varblane, and Eha Komissarov,¹³ *Est.Fem* marked a turning point in Estonian cultural discourse. Wrapped in soft fleece, the catalogue itself symbolically conveyed care and tactility, standing out as a notable publication in Estonian art history.

12 Homepage of *Meediateek*. Available at: www.meediateek.ee/en/site/index [09.07.2025.].

13 Mare Tralla (1995). *Est.fem*. Tallinn: Vaal Galerii.

Supported by several institutions, including the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art, *Est.Fem* represented a critical moment when feminist ideas were particularly articulated in Estonia for the first time. The exhibition allowed participating artists to reflect on their identities and the broader trajectory of Estonian art history, while simultaneously inviting society to confront gendered structures of power. At *Est. Fem*, Tralla presented her video installation *This Is How We Gave Birth to Estonian Feminism* (1995), which brought together key themes that permeate her 1990s work: the position of Eastern European women in transitional societies, the expectations placed on women in newly independent Estonia, and the lingering influence of the Soviet era – an influence that was perhaps deeper than many were willing to acknowledge.

Archive as Generative Space

The screening event *Audiovisual Compost* (2022) at Von Krahl Theatre emerged from a growing awareness of the need to safeguard and activate existing yet unpublished footage of art-historical value. The project's concept – to commission new works based on archival material – sought to bridge decades, exploring how artistic ideas have endured over time and whether revisiting them might offer a deeper understanding of their history of sound and media art in Estonia.

One of the newly commissioned works drew from the footage documenting the activities of the Metabor art group and their series of events from 2001–2002, originally filmed by group member and pioneer of Estonian kinetic art, Kaarel Kurismaa (b. 1939). The archival material captures artists such as Aivar Tõnso, Andres Lõo, Hanno Soans, Kiwa, Martiini, Kärt Ojavee, DJ Masin (Anti Mäss) and p0rt (Jevgeni Berežovski) at a time marked by the restless energy of the post-transition era – repurposing abandoned buildings in Tallinn and experimenting with the fusion of industrial sound and urban environment.

Videographer and artist Tõnis Jürgens (b. 1989) reinterpreted this material in his semi-fictional video *Plastic Cloud Documentary* (2022), blending archival and contemporary footage. Some shots of the Tallinn skyline were newly recorded in September 2022 using a mini-DV camera, intentionally evoking the blurred line between fact and fiction. As the original locations of the Metabor events no longer exist, Jürgens's work becomes both a meditation on urban transformation and a reflection on evolving aesthetic strategies in sound and performance art.

Just like Tõnis Jürgens's video, Mare Tralla's work *95-04=2022* was also commissioned and presented to the public on the occasion of the event *Audiovisual Compost*. In Tralla's case, the process of creating the video involved accessing her personal digital archive, which required her to film the screen of her early 2000s computer, as contemporary devices could no longer support the outdated video formats.



Scaled Views: Details from the CCA Archive by Andrew Hill, 2025. Exhibition view. Photo by Paul Kuimet

The resulting documentation includes footage from the *Interstanding* exhibitions and conferences organized by the SCCA, Estonia, in 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001. In the same work, Tralla integrates self-recorded archival materials from the time when she co-organized the 12th International Symposium on Electronic Arts (ISEA) in 2004. The festival, held across Tallinn, Helsinki, and Stockholm, had an extensive scope – spanning electronic music, body and cyborg art, digital media theory, and explorations of new modes of coexistence in virtual space.

Another example of how the existing materials accumulated at the archive are being renewed and mediated to a wider public is the Artists' Database digital project. Reflecting one of the initial aims of the CCA – to document artists' work and create portfolios to introduce them to the international field – an online Artists' Database was launched on the CCA website in 2019. Eighty bilingual biographies follow a standardized format, providing a chronological overview of notable projects, followed by a CV and photographic documentation of various exhibitions.

The Artists' Database continues the legacy of the original SCCA network program, during which art historians were commissioned to compile physical artists' portfolios that included biographies, bibliographies, selected works with reproductions, and supplementary printed materials such as invitations and exhibition flyers. Many of these portfolios, containing unique documentation and ephemera that would be impossible to reassemble retrospectively, are still preserved at the CCA. Each functions as a kind of time capsule, reflecting the materials accessible at the moment of its creation – in this case, around 1998. In contrast, the Artists' Database project, due to its digital format, evolves dynamically according to newly added materials and artists' input. It is publicly accessible online, whereas the physical portfolios can only be consulted onsite at the archive.

In 2025, an exhibition by artist and graphic designer Andrew Hill (b. 1997), titled *Scaled Views. Details from CCA Archive*, showcased findings from the archive of the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art at the library of the Estonian Academy of Arts. Hill approached the CCA archive as a material deposit, shaping his discoveries into various A4-format compositions. Juxtaposed with original archival elements – such as the physical portfolio of artist Eve Kask compiled during the SCCA Estonia era, office photo chronicles, and publications – the act of scanning became central to the exhibition's concept. Rather than reconstructing past events, the showcase emphasized the rendering of scale, the indefinite potential of archival material, and its multiple possible interpretations. The exhibition's focal point lay in the infrastructure of the exhibits – the everyday information carriers that transform archival matter into a *bureau-aesthetic exposition*.

Ending Note

Taking into consideration that the CCA provisionally functions as a memory institution, it continuously enables actions that visualize and verbalize the history of processes in contemporary art in Estonia. With recent examples of how to interpret and intervene in existing archival material, and how to renew its format, I hope to contribute to a more defined understanding of preceding times and to build bridges between the past and the present. By organizing video screenings and exhibiting printed matter, and by recontextualizing archival materials, these activities add to ongoing discussions and the identity-building of the CCA archive – where existing materials guide us toward a deeper understanding of both the past and potential futures.

Relying on its history, the archive of the CCA operates as a dynamic, generative space that not only preserves the history of Estonian contemporary art but also contributes to ongoing conversations about identity, technology, and the role of art in society. Through its combination of inward reflection and outward engagement – through continuous acts of recontextualization – the Centre's archive has evolved into a valuable resource for both artists and researchers.

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MARIKA AGU

Igaunijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centra arhīvs kā multimodāls aģents

Kopsavilkums

Raksts piedāvā praksē balstītu skatījumu uz Igaunijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centra arhīvu kā multimodālu aģentu, izsekojot centra organizatoriskajiem principiem un skaidrojot to ietekmi uz arhīva formalizācijas procesiem un turpmāko darbību. Balstoties uz empīriskiem piemēriem, kas gūti, autorei kopš 2017. gada strādājot arhīvā, tiek analizēts, kā arhīva materiāli var kļūt par avotu jaunu ideju rašanās procesā, vienlaikus sekmējot aktuālās kultūras diskusijas un arhīva identitātes veidošanos. Īpaša uzmanība pievērsta arhivēto materiālu nozīmei, lai izprastu, kā institucionālās prakses atspoguļojas mākslinieciskajā darbībā un iezīmē attīstības virzienus Igaunijas laikmetīgajā mākslā.

Atslēgvārdi: 20. gadsimta 90. gadi, jaunie mediji, videomāksla, drukātie materiāli, Austrumeiropa, ģeneratīvā arhīva prakse.

JĀNIS OZOLIŅŠ, KĀRLIS VĒRDIŅŠ

Performing Working-Class Masculinity in Soviet Latvian Painting: The Case of Edgars Iltners

Summary

The article examines the construction of masculinity in Edgars Iltners's (1925–1983) group portraits of working-class men from the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1950s, Iltners was recognized as one of the pioneers of the so-called Severe Style in Soviet art, which sought to liberate socialist realist painting from the rigid restrictions of the Stalin era and to create a modern, typified, and heroic image of the contemporary Soviet citizen. During the 1960s and 1970s, Iltners frequently depicted working-class men – factory workers, farmers, fishermen, and soldiers – whose collective portrayals conveyed positive affects aligned with Soviet narratives of progress and industrialization. Today, when such idealized representations of Soviet citizens appear false or implausible, new questions arise regarding the interpretation of these figurative compositions. Following the question raised by the 2024 Latvian National Museum of Art exhibition *In the Name of Desire* concerning representations of sexuality in Latvian art history, this article analyzes Iltners's multi-figure compositions in the context of gender studies, problematizing their expressions of homosociality and corporeality, while also emphasizing the significant role of technology in his later works.

Keywords: Latvian art, Soviet Latvian culture, masculinity, homosociality, Edgars Iltners.

Introduction

Nowadays, the artistic and literary heritage of the Soviet era is undergoing critical reassessment. This was a period when art was created under conditions of increased ideological pressure; therefore, the legacy left by artists cannot be viewed solely as

the product of their free creative expression but also as a response to the political and institutional demands of their time. The art of this period also reflects contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality – topics that were largely excluded from public discourse. Our research was motivated by the need to critically examine representations of masculinity in Latvian art of the Soviet era. Addressing this issue requires both respect for the artistic language and intentions of the period's authors and an awareness of the historical context in which their works emerged. At the same time, it is essential to problematize the relevance and reception of this heritage today, in an era when audiences are accustomed to different visual codes and cultural frameworks.

Our research focuses on Edgars Iltners (1925–1983), one of the most prominent Latvian painters of the Soviet era, whose creative biography serves as a key testimony to the development of Latvian art from the late 1950s to the early 1980s.¹ We concentrate particularly on his group portraits of working-class men, which once held great ideological significance as visual embodiments of the Soviet worker engaged in the construction of communism. Today, however, as the narrative of Soviet progress has long become a legacy of the past, Iltners's group portraits, like many other works of art from that time, invite new readings and interpretations, including queering that aspires to dismantle the canonized narratives of the artworks and looks for new interpretations of their politics of sex and gender.² Their corporeality, expressive affects, gender performance and compositional intensity call attention to the embodied presence of male figures. This raises a key question: can the contemporary viewer abandon the interpretative frameworks imposed by Soviet ideology and instead approach these works through a subjective lens? Before turning to Iltners's painting in detail, it is useful to consider a recent exhibition held in 2024, whose curators re-examined representations of masculinity in earlier Latvian art, introducing significant shifts in interpretation.

1 Edgars Iltners's work during the Soviet occupation period is well documented, yet following Latvia's restoration of independence, publications devoted to him have become noticeably fewer. Rasma Lāce wrote a full-length monograph on Iltners, while Džemma Skulme, Aleksis Osmanis, Aleksandrs Stankevičs, Aija Brasliņa, Andris Teikmanis, and others, including Soviet Russian critics, have written shorter essays and exhibition reviews. See also: Ņefedova (1988).

2 As Jānis Ozoliņš has pointed out, "A person perceives the world and communicates with it through narratives, using a system of cognitive processes and the regularities corresponding to them." Ozoliņš, Jānis (2020). Stāstījuma jēdziens un tā adepti latviešu literatūrzinātnē. *Letonica*, No. 42, p. 9.

Contemporary Interpretations Beyond Normativity

The exhibition *In the Name of Desire* took place at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga from 27 April to 28 July 2024. As stated in the curators' press release, the exhibition sought to expand and problematize the representation of sexuality in Latvian art:

For the first time in Latvia, Baltic queer art is surveyed at such breadth, demonstrating inclusive thinking and openness towards questions of self-identity regarding awareness of one's sexuality. [...] The exhibition will celebrate sexual diversity at a time when authoritarian regimes right next to us as well as in other parts of the world violently oppress and persecute people who identify and desire differently.³

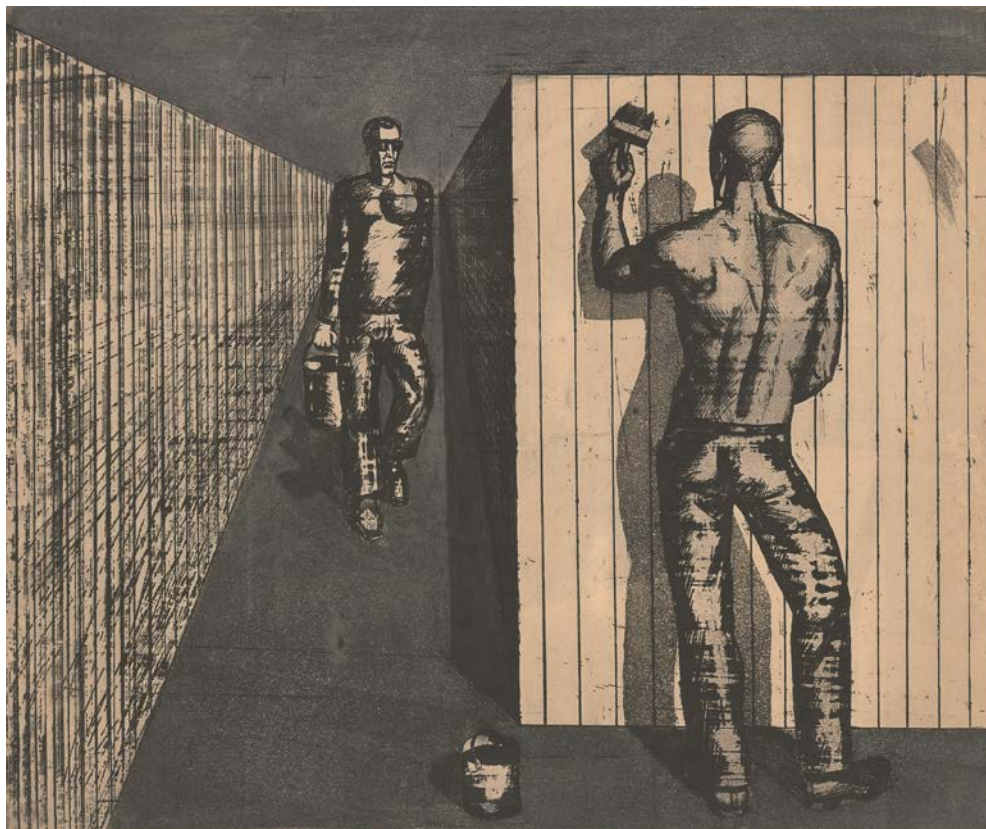
According to this concept, the exhibition juxtaposed newly commissioned artworks on queer themes with selected historical works that, according to the curatorial framework, could be reinterpreted as manifestations of queer desire.

The thematic section titled *Queer Desire* included, among others, two black-and-white graphic works from the Soviet period by artists Rūsiņš Rozīte (1943–1978) and Iosif Elgurt (1924–2007), both depicting working-class men in seemingly “innocent” situations. Elgurt's screen print *Break (Pārtraukumā, 1975)* portrays a group of workers, some of them half-naked, spending their break gathered around a chess table. Nearby, Rozīte's etching *Fence Painters (Sētas krāsotāji, 1966)* shows two men at work: one, bare-chested, seen from behind as he paints a fence; the other approaches with a bucket in hand, wearing sunglasses. Both works provoked discussion about whether such imagery might be reinterpreted as homoerotic⁴ and therefore included within an emerging canon of queer representations in Latvian art. This curatorial gesture invites a broader reconsideration of the entire archive of Soviet Latvian art from the perspective of a twenty-first-century viewer, whose gaze is no longer bound by the ideals of innocence and puritanism characteristic of the socialist period.

Even before the *In the Name of Desire* exhibition, Rozīte's artwork had already been subjected to queer reading by art critic Vilnis Vējš. In 2023, he published a short essay dedicated to *Fence Painters*, in which he outlined several principles of reinterpreting seemingly “innocent” works of Soviet-era art by acknowledging their thematic and formal features that may evoke queer desire. As Vējš observed:

3 The Latvian National Museum of Art (2024). The exhibition *In the Name of Desire* in the Great Hall of the main building of the Latvian National Museum of Art. *Ministry of Culture, Republic of Latvia*, 23.04. Available at: www.km.gov.lv/en/article/exhibition-name-desire-great-hall-main-building-latvian-national-museum-art [accessed 23.11.2024.].

4 Homoeroticism is sexual attraction between members of the same sex.



Rūsiņš Rozīte, *Fence Painters*, 1966. Paper, etching, 43x51 cm. LNMM, VMM AO-3189

Oh my, how these two men look! Just like Greek gods: [...] slender, long-legged, elongated waist, broad shoulders, massive neck. The first is half-naked in the sunlight, only in tight work trousers; the other, who is carrying a bucket, has also put on a sweater and elegant sunglasses and patent leather shoes. Nowadays, these gentlemen could certainly be models. [...] Who were they when the drawing was made? [...] Rather, they are the fruits of the author's fantasy, idealized bodies, which are characteristic of the time of the Severe Style, when human figures became more stylized. [...] The first similarity that comes to mind is Edgars Iltner's *Masters of the Land*, and this is no coincidence, because Iltner, as the exhibition annotation says, was Rozīte's teacher. The second similarity is Ojārs Ābols, who also often depicted idealized male figures at the beginning of his career. Perhaps all three were inspired by Aleksandr Deineka, an unparalleled Soviet Russian painter of male bodies, whose reproductions now circulate on homoerotic websites.⁵

Several vital points in this passage need closer attention. First, Vējš practically equalizes *idealization* and *typification*, as though the unified features in the representations of working-class male bodies were the reason for their appeal to contemporary viewers. While this might be the case in some instances, typification can also function as a source of anonymity – erasing individual identity rather than enhancing it. Thys dynamic is clearly evident in a number of Iltner's group portraits of working-class men and Latvian riflemen, including his celebrated *Masters of the Land*. Critics have long questioned whether the erasure of individuality in Iltner's typified portrayals of workers and peasants served to strengthen or, on the contrary, to weaken their expressive power.⁶

Secondly, the reference to Aleksandr Deineka is especially significant, particularly in light of Christina Kiaer's recent monograph, which focuses on the representations of the *collective body* in Deineka's painting.⁷ As Kiaer argues, Deineka's – and indeed much of Soviet art's – imagery can also be read through the framework of the *capitalist commodity form*, promising voyeuristic pleasure through the display of idealized,

5 Vējš, Vilnis (2023). Ideālie virieši. *Rīgas Laiks*, No. 9, septembris, p. 75. [Hereinafter, the translation of quotations is ours – K.V. and J.O.].

6 Such questions can be found in reviews in Iltner's lifetime and the more recent writings: Lāce, Rasma (1992). *Edgars Iltner*. Rīga: Liesma; Brasliņa, Aija (2007). "...because I can't imagine anything more beautiful...". In: Brasliņa, Aija (Ed.). *Edgars Iltner: Gleznas / Paintings*. Rīga: Latvian National Museum of Art / Neputns, pp. 27–41.

7 Kiaer, Christina (2024). *Collective Body: Aleksandr Deineka at the Limit of Socialist Realism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.



Aleksandr Deineka, *Lunchbreak in the Donbas*, 1935. Canvas, oil, 150x249.
LNMM, ĀMM GL-1361

athletic bodies.⁸ In paintings such as *Lunchbreak in the Donbas* (1935), Deineka presents the well-built worker as both a role model and an object of desire: a figure meant to provoke aspiration in the viewer, to inspire imitation through labor, discipline, and participation in collective physical culture.⁹

However, contemporary audiences operate within entirely different visual and ideological codes than Soviet-era viewers. It is therefore reasonable to ask why present-day interpretations should confine themselves to readings permissible within Soviet public discourse. As the biographies of Soviet Latvian artists reveal, politically suspect themes and stylistic modernisms – dismissed under the pejorative label of *abstractionism* in the early 1960s – were actively suppressed, as were explicit or implicit representations of sexuality, especially homoeroticism.¹⁰ Only with *perestroika* in the late 1980s did Latvian art begin to adopt more provocative strategies, embracing political subtext, thematic diversity, and a broader spectrum of corporeality, including depictions of disability.¹¹

None of the artists mentioned in Vējš's essay identified as queer, nor is there any evidence to suggest that they maintained romantic or sexual relationships with men. Nevertheless, as Brian James Baer argues in *Queer(ing) Russian Art*, certain works can “produce queer imagery, that is, images that go against the grain of dominant or official representations of gender and sexuality”.¹² In this sense, the artworks of Rozīte, Elgurts, Iltnerš, and other artists of the Soviet period can be seen by the audiences of the 21st century as questioning the notions of masculinity and men's homosocial bonds in visual representation.

As this article argues, contemporary interpretations of such works should not be regarded as deviations from the “authentic” principles of art appreciation established in Soviet times. Rather, they represent an attempt to re-examine the visual culture of a bygone era through a new affective lens – one, in which the influence of modernism need not to be concealed, the primacy of the social over the individual is no longer a requirement, and themes of corporeality, sensuality, and sexuality are freed from

8 On representations of masculinity in Latvian art in the 21st-century capitalism, see: Ozoliņš, Jānis; Vērđiņš, Kārlis (2023). Urbānie mūki: portretu konteksti Ata Jākobsona personalizstādē Padures muižā. *Letonica*, Nr. 48, pp. 164–181.

9 On collectivist representations as occupying the central place in both socialism and nationalism, see: Vērđiņš, Kārlis (2021). History, Trauma and Narrative Perspective in “A Woman in Amber” by Agate Nesaule. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2021, 52:2, pp. 179–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2020.1850486>

10 On the non-conformist art of the Soviet Baltics, see: Svede, Mark Allen; Vērđiņš, Kārlis (2024). Nearly Underground in the Near-Abroad: Outliers in Soviet Baltic Culture. In: Lipovetsky, Mark; Kukuļ, Ilja; Glanc, Tomáš; Engström, Maria; Smola, Klavdia (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Soviet Underground Culture*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 303–331.

11 Zviedre, Agnese (2023). Social Critique of the Soviet Regime in Ivars Poikāns' Works from 1987 till 1990: A Disability Aesthetics Perspective. *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi*, Vol. 32, No. 1/2, pp. 152–168.

12 Baer, Brian James; Fiks, Yevgeniy (Eds.) (2023). *Queer(ing) Russian Art: Realism, Revolution, Performance*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, p. 24.

taboo.¹³ Within this framework, the analysis turns to the case of Iltner, whose representations of male figures offer an especially revealing example of how gender performance operated in Soviet art. This article focuses on the question of gender performance in Iltner's representations of male figures, exploring an additional layer of meaning beyond anatomical sex and gender identity that the viewer can discern in his paintings.¹⁴ In this context, the concept is understood as a set of deliberate artistic choices through which Iltner constructs images of working-class men that conform to the norms of the Soviet art scene and are intended to evoke positive affect in viewers by depicting the attractive bodies of the builders of communism.

Working-Class Men of Edgars Iltner

The remainder of the article focuses on Edgars Iltner (1925–1983), one of the most prominent painters of Soviet Latvia, whose oeuvre contains numerous representations of working-class men. Although his work was not included in the exhibition *In the Name of Desire*, the representation of masculinity in his art offers a fascinating case study of the period.

Iltner's biography was not the most convenient for a Soviet Latvian artist. He was born on March 3, 1925, in a wealthy farming family in the Aizpute district in western Latvia. After the Second World War, his family voluntarily handed over their property to the Soviet authorities to merge it with a nearby collective farm, thereby avoiding the Stalinist repressions that targeted wealthier farmers during the mass deportations to Siberia in 1949. As a young man, Iltner came of age during the Nazi occupation of Latvia. In October 1944, to avoid conscription into the German army, he went into hiding in the forests and, as he later emphasized, maintained contact with the Red partisans. In 1945, between March and May, he was imprisoned in Liepāja for living without official documents. After the war, Iltner moved to Riga and, in 1949, graduated with honors from the Rozentāls Riga Secondary School of

13 On the emancipation of homoeroticism in Latvian post-soviet literature, see: Vērdiņš, Kārlis; Ozoliņš, Jānis (2019). *Queer Narratives in Contemporary Latvian Short Fiction*. In: Anna Pilinska; Harmony Sigantoria (Eds.). *All Equally Real: Femininities and Masculinities Today*. 2nd edition. Leiden: Brill, pp. 79–87; Vērdiņš, Kārlis; Ozoliņš, Jānis (2025). *Melancholic Sons and Dying Mothers: Queerness in (Post)Soviet Baltic Fiction*. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 385–400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2024.2424257>.

On the life stories of Soviet Latvian queer men, see: Ozoliņš, Jānis (2024). *Accumulating Negative Affects: The Diary of the Soviet Latvian Film Director Gunārs Piesis*. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, No. 120, pp. 81–102. doi.org/10.22364/lviz.120.05; Vērdiņš, Kārlis (2024). *Two Peters: Queer Domestic Space and Artist's Sensibility in Soviet Latvia*. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, No. 120, pp. 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.22364/lviz.120.06>.

14 As Judith Butler points out, “we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.” Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York; London: Routledge, p. 187.

Art. Due to his family background and ambiguous wartime position, some of his contemporaries regarded him with suspicion during the Stalin era, which made his position within Riga's artistic circles precarious.

On January 7, 1950, he married Ērika Kunstberga; they had three daughters, all of whom later became artists. In 1956, Iltnerš graduated with distinction from the Art Academy of Latvia, and shortly afterward, his figural composition *The Men Are Coming* attracted attention of Soviet cultural authorities as an early example of the so-called Severe Style – a movement that emerged during the Thaw and sought to renew socialist realism through austere and monumental depictions of everyday life. Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, Iltnerš produced several large-scale figural paintings depicting groups of factory workers, fishermen, and farmers that followed the principles of the Severe Style: rough, monumental human images portrayed in their working environments – fields, factories, or along the seaside. In 1959, Iltnerš received the USSR Artists' Union Prize; in 1960, he became a professor at the Art Academy of Latvia; and in 1968, he was appointed chairman of the Artists' Union of Soviet Latvia. Awards, positions, and participation in exhibitions both in the USSR and abroad continued until Iltnerš's untimely death on February 9, 1983.¹⁵

Iltnerš's breakthrough in art was secured by his timely adoption of the features later labeled as the Severe Style. This style can be characterized as an acceptable compromise between socialist realism and modernism, allowing artists a degree of formal experimentation while maintaining content aligned with Soviet culture and history, the lives of workers and peasants, and the vision of building a communist future. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it became a significant trend in Soviet art, linking contemporary subjects with the legacy of early Soviet Russian artists such as Aleksandr Deineka and Yuri Pimenov. In Soviet Latvian art, Iltnerš's contemporaries – including Indulis Zariņš, Gunārs Mitrevics, Valdis Dišlers, Džemma Skulme, and Ojārs Ābols – created large-scale paintings depicting robust figures of construction workers, farmers, fishermen, or soldiers.¹⁶ In those monumental paintings, people were often represented at work, on their way to work, or during moments of rest after work, emphasizing collective identity and dedication to hard work. Within this circle, Iltnerš occupies a distinct place through his carefully balanced compositions and his ambition to convey meaningful messages to Soviet audiences.

As his publications and archival materials reveal, Iltnerš's ambition was to create multi-layered compositions that functioned simultaneously as realistic portrayals of his working-class models, as typological group portraits capturing the Soviet ideal

15 Biographical information is based on: Lāce, Rasma (1992). *Edgars Iltnerš*. Riga: Liesma, pp. 7-91.

16 For a recent overview of the Severe Style in Latvian painting, see: Valda Knāviņa (2019). The Severe Style. Manifestations of Socialist Modernism in Latvian Painting during the 1950s-60s. In: Elita Ansons (Ed.). *Ten Episodes in Art of the Second Half of the 20th Century in Latvia*. Riga: Latvian National Museum of Art, 2019, pp. 51-89.

of laboring men deeply rooted in their environment, and as symbolical depictions of class consciousness and devotion to collective labor for the multinational state. His painting *Masters of the Land* (1960) stands as a paradigmatic example of this approach. Widely reproduced in Soviet periodicals, art catalogues, and postcards, and frequently exhibited, it epitomized the visual rhetoric of its time.¹⁷

As was characteristic of the period, the representation of masculinity in such works was never publicly problematized. Iltner's robust, monumental male figures adhered to contemporary standards, and the themes of his paintings conveyed clear, ideologically approved messages – often reinforced by explanatory articles in newspapers and magazines documenting his working process and contextualizing each new work. Contemporary Latvian artists and art historians tend to view these paintings with skepticism, interpreting them primarily as compliant responses to official Soviet cultural directives.¹⁸

Our interest, however, lies in the paradoxical tension between the ideological dimension of these paintings and the physical manifestations of the men depicted. In what follows, we focus on two of Iltner's large-scale portrayals of working-class men, conceived and received in their time as statements on how the Soviet man should look, behave, and think.¹⁹

Soon after completing the canonical *Masters of the Land*, Iltner began work on another large-scale figurative painting depicting working-class men. *Hard Hands* (1962) was based on his observations of workers in the open-hearth furnace workshop of the *Sarkanais metalurģs* factory in Liepāja, from which he ultimately selected four men as models. Readers of Latvian newspapers and magazines could follow the painting's development for almost two years: several publications described the painting

17 Detailed exhibition and reproduction history of the painting can be found in: Brasliņa, Aija (Ed.) (2007). *Edgars Iltner: Gleznas / Paintings*. Riga: Latvian National Museum of Art / Neputns, pp. 147–148.

On *The Men Are Coming* and *Masters of the Land* in the context of the Severe Style, see: Reid, Susan E. (1999). 'Masters of the Earth': Gender and Destalinisation in Soviet Reformist Painting of the Khrushchev Thaw. *Gender & History*, Vol. 11, No. 2, July, pp. 276–312.

For the context of Soviet Baltic art, see: Talvoja, Kādi (2018). The official art of the Khrushchev Thaw: The Severe Style as an ambassador of the Estonian national school at Baltic art exhibitions in Moscow. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 333–350.

On the taxonomy of postcards as memory objects, see: Goldberga, Līga (2022). Postcards in the National Library of Latvia: Options for the Interpretation of Photographic Materials. *Letonica*, No. 46, pp. 186–208.

18 Brasliņa, Aija. "...because I can't imagine anything more beautiful..." Brasliņa, Aija (Ed.) (2007). *Edgars Iltner: Gleznas / Paintings*. Riga: Latvian National Museum of Art / Neputns, pp. 27–41.

19 Cf. the argument of Claire McCallum: "Because the heroes of Iltner's canvas are all discrete characters, differently dressed with differently directed gazes, their diverse appearances allowed them to act as a universal standard for all Soviet workers – or at least all the male ones – as no one occupation was privileged over another. Yet, all this individuality was just on the surface, as the workers' synchronized striding and forward momentum unified the group, giving their progress a common objective – they are a collective." McCallum, Claire (2018). *The Fate of the New Man: Representing & Reconstructing Masculinity in Soviet Visual Culture, 1945–1965*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, p. 55.



Edgars Iltners, *Hard Hands*, 1962. Canvas, oil, 184x174.
LNMM, VMM AG-2877. Photo: Normunds Brasliņš

process, composition, and the ideas it sought to convey.²⁰ Subsequent reports covered the completion and exhibition of the painting, as well as its first critical reviews. The concept behind *Hard Hands* was outlined by artist Aleksandrs Stankevičs in a 1961 newspaper article, where he explained what Iltner himself regarded as the central message of the work in progress:

A group of workers reflects on the newspaper article they had just read about humanity's first journey into space. At the center of the composition are the figures of four workers, imaginatively illuminated by two sources of light – the red glow of the open-hearth furnace and the blue of the starry night sky visible through the workshop's huge window. A pictorial expression of thought has been achieved here – a part of these strong, simple people can be found there, in space. Their hard hands accomplish the work without which the genius of Soviet science could not have reached such miraculous distances.²¹

Now, more than sixty years after this artwork was painted, contemporary audiences are unlikely to share the sense of joy once felt by the depicted workers. This and other similar paintings have recently been interpreted as collaborative efforts by artists from the occupied Baltic States to navigate between their personal artistic aspirations and the need to conform to Soviet ideological demands.²² Iltner tried to convince viewers that workers, reading a Soviet newspaper and overwhelmed with admiration for the first man in space, could appear both “real” and “symbolic.” It was only after Iltner's death that Džemma Skulme (1925–2019), another prominent artist of his generation, offered a different interpretation, grounded in the physicality of the male body: “In the painting *Hard Hands*, the play of the workers' back muscles is significant. He equates it with the play of firepower, with the twisting of pipes in modern industry; he connects it with the play of stars. In general, it is a poem about men and fire.”²³

20 *Komunisti*, 1961, 05.02., p. 5; *Literatūra un Māksla*, 1961, 12.08.; *Literatūra un Māksla*, 1962, 02.06. Color and black-and-white reproductions of the painting appeared in *Literatūra un Māksla* and the magazines *Māksla*, *Karogs*, and *Bērnība*.

21 Stankevičs, Aleksandrs (1961). “Cietās rokas” sūta zvaigžņu kuģus [“Hard Hands” Send Spaceships]. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 12.08. A similar interpretation was offered by Romis Bēms in his introduction to the catalogue of Iltner's work: Bēms, Romis (sast.) (1964). *Edgars Iltners: reprodukciju albums* [Album of Reproductions]. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, p. 6.

22 Teikmanis, Andris (2003). Edgara Iltnera gleznas “Pavasaris (V. I. Ļeņins)” (1973) retoriskās uzbūves analīze. No: Kristiāna Ābele (sast.). *Latvijas māksla tuvplānos*. Rīga: Neputns, pp. 136–143.
Brasliņa, Aija (2007). “...because I can't imagine anything more beautiful...” In: Brasliņa, Aija (Ed.). *Edgars Iltners: Gleznas / Paintings*. Rīga: Latvian National Museum of Art / Neputns, pp. 27–41.

23 Skulme, Džemma (1985). Noslēpums, ko viņa māksla glabā [The Secret His Art Hides]. *Māksla*, No. 3, p. 10.

As more years have passed, the physicality of the male body in this painting has become increasingly open to reinterpretation through contemporary visual codes. If we deliberately ignore Iltnerš's projection of the communist agenda onto working-class men, the painting emerges as a manifestation of close homosociality²⁴ among factory workers spending their breaks together in intimate proximity. The workers' personalities are practically erased, as the typicality Iltnerš sought has transformed into anonymity. Their partially clothed, muscular bodies are fused tonally into the glowing red of the furnace hall, unified by the heat and light. The blaze becomes a metaphor for their shared labor and collective fervor. However, if we can no longer accept that their excitement stems solely from reading about the first man in space, the painting invites us to consider alternative sources of that excitement.

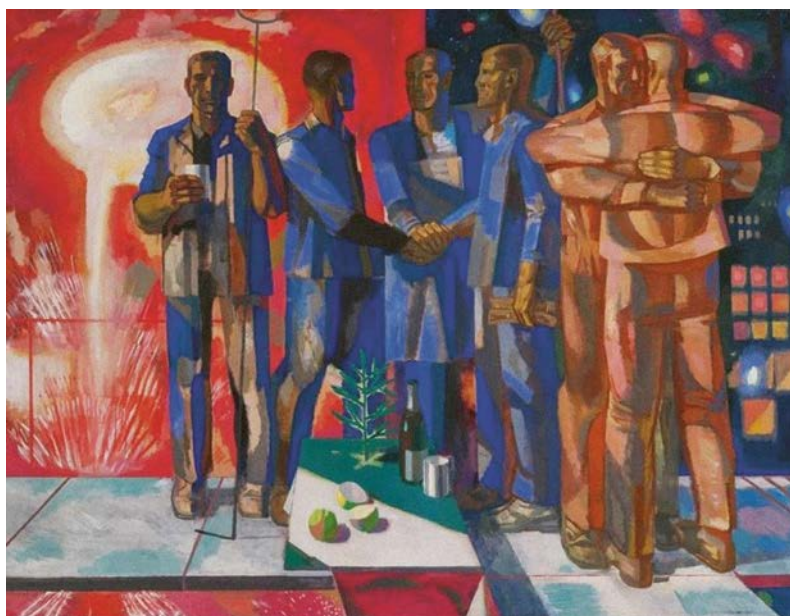
Five years later, Iltnerš completed another large-scale painting inspired by the same group of factory workers. *New Year's Eve* (1967) depicts even closer emotional ties among six men spending the celebration in their workplace. They mark the arrival of the new year with food and drink, holding hands and embracing with visible affection.²⁵ The figures are arranged in three color-coded groups: four blue-toned men on the left and two beige figures locked in a tight embrace on the right. The source of excitement in this painting is no longer the celebration of Soviet achievements in space exploration but rather the shared joy of an all-male gathering – an intimate, alcohol-fueled moment in which physical closeness and camaraderie blur the boundaries between friendship, sensuality, and desire.

In the following years, Iltnerš drastically changed his approach to depicting groups of working-class men. The robust, geometric figures of middle-aged workers disappeared, replaced by much younger and more slender male bodies. His large-scale painting *Latvian Countryside*, exhibited at the annual *Autumn '75* exhibition, surprised viewers with its departure from previous models. It showed thirteen young men – repair workers and mechanics – whose appearance seemed entirely incompatible with the realities of rural labor, gathered around vividly painted agricultural machinery. Art historian Rasma Lāce, in her biography of Iltnerš, described this scene as “a challenge to the patriarchal rural poetics in art.”²⁶ Most critics at the time highlighted the “advent of technology” in Iltnerš's painting. Yet it is not only the machinery that seems unprecedented and confusing, but the depiction of the

24 Homosociality is a term popularized by American scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, referring to same-sex relationships that are not romantic or sexual in nature, such as friendship and mentorship. Homosociality is interpreted as a form of male bonding that sustains men's social dominance and often carries a homophobic dimension. See: Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1985). *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 1–5.

25 As a newspaper article explained in 1967, “*New Year's Eve* will not feature a lavish still life with champagne glasses and toasts. It will see the turn of the year in a steel mill; the workshops and workers of *Sarkanais Metalurģs* served as models. [Anon.] (1967). *Edgara Iltnerša darbnīcā. Dzimtenes Balss*, Nr. 12 (marts), p. 3.

26 Lāce, Rasma (1992). *Edgars Iltneršs*. Rīga: Liesma, p. 63.



Edgars Iltners, *New Year's Eve*, 1967. Canvas, oil, 150x195. State Russian Museum



Edgars Iltners, *Latvian Countryside*, 1975. Canvas, oil, 175x275.
LNMM, VMM AG-935. Photo: Normunds Brasliņš

young men themselves: slender figures dressed in modern, tight-fitting clothes, their bodies revealing the musculature of their arms and legs. The poses – many of them captured from behind – render these figures subtly erotic, even if the artist's original intention may have differed. Sketches from the period show that Iltners meticulously planned the composition, including precise studies of the agricultural machinery. As his daughter, painter Ieva Iltnerē, later acknowledged, he often asked his daughters to pose for him, even for the portrayals of young farmers²⁷ – perhaps explaining the androgynous grace and mannered appearance of the figures. Furthermore, in the mid-1970s, younger Latvian artists increasingly adopted hyperrealist aesthetics, which also began to influence Iltners's own style. His travels to Western countries, including North America, allowed him to acquaint himself with contemporary Western art trends, further informing this stylistic transformation.²⁸

The tight trousers, knee-high boots (seen already in Iltners's Severe Style paintings), fashionable shirts, and vests led critics to speculate that the artist was increasingly interested in youth – a theme he could observe both as a father and as a professor at the Art Academy. The style and the model of masculinity introduced in *Latvian Countryside* mark a turning point in Iltners's oeuvre, continued in works such as *Homeward* (1975), *Montage* (1977), and *Plowmen* (1977). The young men painted in *Plowmen* are shown in close-up, dressed in tight jeans, disco trousers, and fashionable, colorful shirts, with one wearing a wide-brimmed hat. The youthful mechanics of *Latvian Countryside* and the plowmen beside the machinery appear more like urbanites than rugged rural laborers. Their clothing gestures toward broader social changes of the time, such as the migration of youth from the countryside to the city and, more importantly, the growing influence of Western consumer culture. Even within the Soviet republics, Western goods were in high demand, fueling an active black market. These paintings were produced during the period of the so-called “stagnation”, when the aging of population and labor shortages became increasingly evident.

Iltners's portrayal of young men undeniably unsettled and confused the viewers, especially given the broader Soviet concern with the “masculinization” of women, which, paradoxically, was believed to render men effeminate.²⁹ Most likely, the painter sought contemporary modes of expression by depicting the youth of his time. Yet, the result is far more powerful, highlighting a range of issues that can be labeled as

27 Iltnerē, Ieva (2025). Interview with the artist by Jānis Ozoliņš and Kārlis Vērdiņš. Audio recording in authors' archive, 09.01.

28 As Rasma Lāce points out, from the late 1960s to mid-1970s, Iltners visited Norway, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, West Germany, the Netherlands, France, Canada among other countries. See: Lāce, Rasma (1992). *Edgars Iltners*, pp. 53–54.

29 On representations of masculinity in Soviet Latvian art, see: Buholcs, Jānis (2005). *Vīrieša dzimtes konstrukcija žurnālā “Padomju Latvijas Sieviete” (1952–1968)*. *Latvijas Universitātes Raksti. Vol. 683: Komunikācija*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, pp. 97–126; Krilova, M. (2005). *Maskulinitātes un feminitātes diskurss Rīgas kinostudijas kara tematikas filmās*. *Latvijas Universitātes Raksti. Vol. 683: Komunikācija*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, pp. 173–191.

part of an ongoing “crisis of masculinity.” As one of the pioneers of the Severe Style, who had earlier painted peasants, fishermen, and factory workers, Iltneris now offered a markedly different perspective – a queer reimagining of masculinity embodied by the figure of the *stilyaga*, standing as an antithesis to Soviet greyness, austerity, and the archetype of the war veteran or socialist labor hero.

During this period, public discussions on Soviet masculinity and gender relations intensified. In 1970, a widely debated article by Soviet demographer Boris Uralnis, published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, offered a new perspective on Soviet masculinity, contributing directly to the emerging narrative of male victimization. Men were portrayed as an “endangered species”, their social and emotional struggles attributed either to their “biological nature” or to “structural-cultural circumstances.”³⁰ While Iltneris’s group portraits of men may not appear overtly socially charged, such contextualization becomes essential when examining the depiction of working-class masculinity. The young men in his paintings – ephebes, dandies, “jeansters” – signal the artist’s search for new modes of expression, distancing himself from the Severe Style that had once enabled a degree of separation from socialist realism.

Conclusion

The evolution of Edgars Iltneris’s large-scale figural compositions of working-class men traces his development trajectories from the monumental Severe Style paintings to more casual, even flamboyant, depictions of contemporary youth. Whereas the mature male figures in his Severe Style period were meant to radiate noble heroism, the stylish *ephebes* of his later works projected far more ambiguous ideological messages. Soviet audiences were once instructed in the “correct” readings of such paintings – seeing groups of men united by collective labor, pride in Soviet industrial progress, or admiration for the USSR’s space triumphs. Today, when the social function of art no longer dominates over the personal, these narratives have become increasingly open to reinterpretation.

The groups of workers and peasants in Iltneris’s paintings, typified through visual unification, celebrate life and belonging within all-male work collectives, expressing affective bonds that, as Iltneris himself emphasized, extended beyond the workplace – into breaks, leisure time, and festivities. The hypermasculinity (or, in Vējš’s terms, idealization) evident in Iltneris’s Severe Style period, as well as in the works of other Soviet Latvian artists, now appears closely aligned with Western twentieth-century traditions of erotic representation – including the homoerotic aesthetics of Tom of

30 Zdravomyslova, Elena; Temkina, Anna (2012). The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse. *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, pp. 16-17.

Finland, Paul Cadmus, and others. As we suggest, what once signified true or artificial enthusiasm for Soviet progress can now be read as an ambiguous portrayal of homosociality, whose affinities with Western Cold War-era art also open space for a queering. Soviet art also produced portraits of idealized groups of men united by close homosocial bonds, in which traces of desire can sometimes be discerned – paralleling developments in queer art in the West. While Soviet art criticism neither could nor wished to acknowledge the eroticism in these images, the modern viewer has reason to reintroduce this missing dimension into the history of twentieth-century art.

From 1975 onward, Iltner's group portraits increasingly incorporated machines, mechanisms, and technological systems that, through the industrialization of Soviet agriculture and industry, reduced the need for physical strength. This mechanization subtly “feminized” the male figure, presenting him as a desirable subject defined as much as by intellect as by physicality. A queer reading from the vantage point of the twenty-first century makes it possible to unpack the latent homoeroticism of these works and to reframe the visual codes embedded in Iltner's archive. The question thus emerges: might Iltner's oeuvre merit inclusion in future retrospectives of queer-related Latvian art?

Acknowledgments

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JĀNIS OZOLIŅŠ, KĀRLIS VĒRDIŅŠ

Strādnieku šķiras vīrišķības performatīvie aspekti padomju Latvijas glezniecībā: Edgara Iltnera piemērs

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā aplūkotas maskulinitātes konstrukcijas Edgara Iltnera (1925–1983) strādnieku šķiras vīriešu grupu portretos 20. gadsimta 60.–70. gados. Iltners 20. gadsimta 50. gadu beigās tika atzīts par vienu no tā saucamā “skarbā stila” aizsācējiem Padomju Savienības mākslā, kas sekmeja sociālistiskā reālisma mākslas atbrīvošanu no Staļina laika stingrajiem ierobežojumiem, radīdams modernu, tipizētu un heroizētu sava laikabiedra tēlu. 20. gadsimta 60.–70. gados Iltners vīriešu grupu portretos parasti attēloja strādnieku šķiras pārstāvjus (rūpnīcu strādniekus, zemniekus, zvejniekus, arī karavīrus), kuri emocionāli apliecina padomju progresa un industrializācijas stāstījumu nozīmību. Mūsdienās, kad šāda izskaistināta padomju pilsoņu reprezentācija šķiet melīga un neticama, izvirzās jautājums par šo figurālo kompozīciju interpretācijām. Sekojot 2024. gadā Latvijas Nacionālā mākslas muzeja sarīkotās izstādes “Iekāres vārdā” izvirzītajam jautājumam par seksualitātes reprezentācijām latviešu mākslas vēsturē, rakstā Iltnera daudzfigūru kompozīcijas analizētas dzimtes studiju kontekstā, problematizējot to homosocialitātes izpausmes, ķermeniskumu, kā arī akcentējot tehnoloģiju nozīmīgo lomu Iltnera vēlinā perioda darbos.

Atslēgvārdi: Latvijas māksla, padomju Latvijas kultūra, vīrišķība, homosocialitāte, Edgars Iltners.

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LAINE KRISTBERGA

Rituals of Kinship: Ancestors, Memory, and More-Than-Human Relations in Anna Maskava's Work

Summary

This article examines the artistic practice of Latvian artist Anna Maskava (b. 1990), integrating autobiographical, genealogical, and interspecies dimensions of kinship. Drawing on studies of autobiography, memory, and ritual, as well as posthumanist theory, the article explores how Maskava transforms personal experience, generational inheritance, and relationships into performative rituals of kinship. Through analyses of works such as *1997, Milk and Vodka*, *Expelled from the Kin*, *Ancestral Body*, *Animacy*, *Bare Life*, and *Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past*, the author demonstrates how the concept of kinship emerges as a dynamic, relational network of memory. In Maskava's autobiographical works, memories of childhood and adolescence come to the fore; in works engaging with family history, generational memory is activated through the method of fabulation; meanwhile, her interspecies performances are grounded in modes of co-existence characterized by vulnerability, attentiveness, and material agency. Situating Maskava's practice within the broader context of contemporary art in Latvia and acknowledging the author's curatorial and pedagogical engagement in the artist's professional development, the article argues that Maskava's works reconceptualize kinship as an embodied, material, and more-than-human relational practice, revealing a close affinity with posthumanist ideas.

Keywords: autobiographical performance, kinship, interspecies relations, posthumanism, fabulation, intermediality, Latvian contemporary art, feminist aesthetics.

Introduction

Among contemporary women artists in Latvia, ritual, ancestral narratives, and ecological entanglements have become key points of departure for critically revisiting questions of identity and belonging. This broader cultural orientation toward ritual, kinship, and embodied memory becomes especially visible when examining the work of a constellation of contemporary women artists such as Katrīna Ģelze (b. 1991), Vika Eksta (b. 1987), Ance Vilnīte (b. 1995), Iveta Gabaliņa (b. 1979), Ieva Epnere (b. 1977) and Katrīna Neiburga (b. 1978). Though varied in medium, these artists have engaged questions of domestic memory, lineage, and intergenerational transmission through painting, photography, video, and installation. Such practices mark a broader cultural shift in which the family archive, articulated through material, affective, and mythic dimensions, becomes a key locus for reimagining relationality across human, ancestral, and more-than-human domains.

It is within this expanding field that the work of Anna Maskava (b. 1990)¹ has gained resonance. Spanning performance, photography, video, and ritual-based installation, Maskava's practice probes the porous boundaries between autobiography, matrilineal memory, and ecological embodiment. Her works *Ancestral Body* (2024–2025), *Animacy* (2022), *Ancestor II: 65 kg of the Past* (2022), *Expelled from the Kin* (2023), *1997* (2023), *Milk and Vodka* (2025), and *Bare Life* (2025), reconfigure the artist's personal history into a series of embodied rituals that expand kinship beyond biological lineage to include animals, plants, fungi, and geological matter. These works perform the ancestral memory through the body, through shared substances like soil, milk, and honey, and through intimate encounters with more-than-human organisms. In doing so, Maskava proposes an alternative ethics of relation grounded in vulnerability, care, and interdependence, in contrast to anthropocentric, instrumental, and hierarchical models that position the human subject as autonomous and dominant. This article, ultimately, argues that kinship in Maskava's work functions as an ecology of memory, enacted through ritualized autobiographical, genealogical, and interspecies practices.

To develop this argument, the article situates Maskava's oeuvre within a conceptual triad of ritual, autobiography, and ecological kinship, which functions as the article's analytical framework. The study is guided by three interrelated research questions: (1) How does Maskava construct embodied rituals of kinship through autobiography and oral history? (2) How do these rituals extend kinship beyond the human by linking ancestral, material, and interspecies relations? (3) How does posthuman ecological thought help theorize memory as a distributed, relational process in her work?

1 Anna Maskava's website: www.annamaskava.com/works [17.11.2025.].

In terms of methodology, the article draws on qualitative, practice-based approaches grounded in performance studies, cultural-memory theory, and feminist posthumanism.² Alongside visual and performative analysis, it incorporates interviews with the artist as well as texts authored and read aloud by Maskava within her performances, treating these as integral components of her ritual language. Attention is also given to the intermedial³ character of her work, particularly the role of photography and video in extending performance into a performative archive that circulates memory across bodies, media, and environments.

Context: Contemporary Latvian Women Artists and the Turn Toward Autobiographical and Ancestral Aesthetics

While Maskava's practice forms the focal point of this study, her engagement with autobiography, kinship, and embodied memory resonates with a wider tendency among contemporary Latvian women artists who draw on familial histories and intimate geographies as critical frameworks. Over the past decade, a growing number of artists have revisited personal archives, ancestral landscapes, and domestic material cultures to address the shifting conditions of identity, care, and belonging in post-Soviet Latvia. Their work functions as a mode of cultural inquiry through which private experience becomes entangled with collective memory and social transformation. Situating Maskava within this artistic constellation clarifies the cultural impulses that shape her engagements with ritual, ancestry, and more-than-human relations.

Across the Latvian contemporary art scene, autobiographical material and intergenerational memory have become central methods of inquiry for many women artists working today. Although their practices span different media – painting, photography, installation, video – they share a conceptual orientation toward the lived body, the family archive, and the affective labor of remembering. Three interconnected tendencies structure this wider cultural field and form the backdrop against which Maskava's work takes shape: (1) autobiographical rupture, (2) matrilineal return and disappearing places, and (3) the reconstruction of domestic archives.

2 Feminist posthumanism is understood here as a theoretical orientation that extends feminist concerns with embodiment, care, reproduction, and relationality into more-than-human contexts. It emphasizes distributed agency, material entanglements, and interspecies ethics, while remaining attentive to gendered histories of vulnerability, labor, and care (see, for example, Rosi Braidotti; Donna Haraway; Karen Barad).

3 The intermedial character of Maskava's work refers to the way live performance, photography, video, and textual narration function together as mutually constitutive elements, rather than as separate media or as documentation secondary to the live event.

A first tendency concerns the use of autobiographical rupture – moments of crisis, trauma, and bodily extremity – as catalysts for artistic form. These works foreground the body as a site of knowledge and expose the fragile textures of intimate relationships. Katrīna Ģelze's 2024 exhibition *Ātrs un bez žēlastības* (*Fast and Furious*)⁴ translated the emotional shock of her father's⁵ severe car accident into artwork, revealing how trauma reverberates across family structures and psychic space. Vika Eksta's *The Encounter* (2022)⁶ documents the birth of her first child through self-directed video and photography, reclaiming childbirth as an act of authorship and corporeal endurance. Similarly, in *Dievs Tēvs Debesīs* (*God the Father in Heaven*, 2021–2022), Ance Vīlnīte⁷ interweaves documentary family photographs, found objects, and painting to confront her father's struggle with alcoholism, transforming private pain into a shared social narrative about intergenerational wounds in post-Soviet Latvia.⁸ In each of these practices, vulnerability becomes a critical method: an aesthetic strategy that renders visible the tensions between love and damage, intimacy and exposure, rupture and resilience.

A second tendency involves a return to maternal lineage and the landscapes of ancestry – geographies marked by disappearance, migration, and fragmentary remembering. These works reconstruct inherited stories from partial archives, sensory impressions, and embodied encounters with place. In *Somewhere on a Disappearing Path* (2012),⁹ Iveta Gabaliņa retraces the village of her grandmother Antoņina, meeting elderly residents whose recollections evoke echoes of her own family's past. The resulting images capture a rural world on the brink of vanishing, turning the act of looking back into an attentive and affective method. Likewise, Ieva Epnere's *I Was Almost There* (2012)¹⁰ stages an initiatory journey toward her Russian great-grandmother's origins. Working with incomplete information, Epnere travels to uncertain locations – unsure whether she inhabits the exact spaces her ancestor once traversed – yet experiencing a powerful sense of proximity. In both projects, ancestry emerges as a spatial and emotional search rather than a fixed genealogy: a movement toward the past that recognizes loss but also refuses erasure.

4 Katrīna Ģelze on her exhibition *Ātrs un bez žēlastības* (*Fast and Furious*). Available at: www.makslaxogalerija.lv/news/614/53/19-12-2024-25-01-2025-KATRINA-gELZE-atrs-un-bez-zelastibas [17.11.2025.].

5 Artist Kristaps Ģelzis (b. 1962).

6 Vika Eksta's website: www.vikaeksta.com/encounter [17.11.2025.].

7 Married name Ance Eikena.

8 Līna Birzaka-Priekule on the nominations of the Purvitis Award: www.km.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/2021-gada-ceturtaja-ceturksni-purvisa-balvai-2023-nominetas-ance-vilnite-sabine-vernere-un-ieva-kraule-kuna [17.11.2025.].

9 Iveta Gabaliņa's website: <https://ivetagabalina.com/earlier-works> [17.11.2025.]; also see Kristberga Laine (2015). *Ainava kā (paš)portrets Ivetas Vaivodes fotoesejā "Klēpis"* (2011–2014). No: *Alnis Stakle* (sast.). *Latvijas ainava*. Jelgavas tipogrāfija, pp. 113–117.

10 Ieva Epnere's website: <https://ievaepnere.com/works> [17.11.2025.].

A third tendency concerns the rediscovery of domestic objects and everyday artefacts as carriers of intergenerational memory. Here, artists treat the home as a repository of affective histories embedded in material things. Katrīna Neiburga's exhibition *The Memory of Things* (2012) at Kim? Contemporary Art Centre¹¹ exemplifies this turn toward the domestic archive. Integrating inherited belongings, furniture fragments, tools, and recorded narratives into multisensory installations, she reveals how intimate objects mediate between personal recollection and broader cultural histories. Similar impulses run through Vīlnīte's and Gabaliņa's practices, where household items – milk pails, family photographs, clothing, mundane remnants – become mnemonic interfaces that activate forgotten stories and emotional traces. These engagements highlight the material dimension of memory: objects as active participants in the ongoing processes of remembering, grieving, and reconstructing kinship.

As a result, these tendencies articulate a broader cultural shift in contemporary Latvian art: a turn toward autobiographical inquiry, embodied memory, and the relational dynamics of family, place, and material inheritance. In this sense, these works resonate strongly with what Michael Renov¹² has termed “domestic ethnography”¹³ – a mode of creative practice in which artists turn the analytical gaze toward their own familial environments and “family members, or less literally, people with whom the maker has maintained long-standing everyday relations and has thus achieved a level of casual intimacy”.¹⁴ According to Renov:

Domestic ethnography is more than simply another variant of autobiographical discourse, given its explicitly outward gaze; nominally, at least, this mode of documentation takes as its object the father, mother, grandparent, child, or sibling who is genetically linked to the authorial subject. [...] Domestic ethnographies tend to be highly charged investigations brimming with a curious brand of epistophilia, a brew of affection, resentment, even self-loathing. The point to stress is that for this mode of ethnography, the desire for the other is, at every moment,

11 About Katrīna Neiburga's exhibition *The Memory of Things* (2012): <https://kim.lv/en/katrina-neiburgas-exhibition-memory-things> [17.11.2025.]; also see Kristberga, Laine (2018). *Feminā estētika Katrīnas Neiburgas videogrāfijā un kinematogrāfijā*. No: Jānis Ozoliņš (sast.). *Andra Neiburga: valoda, dzimte, stāstījums, attēls*. Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, pp. 172–182.

12 While Michael Renov's concept of “domestic ethnography” provides a useful analytical lens for understanding artistic engagements with family, intimacy, and everyday life, it is important to situate this approach within a longer feminist tradition. Since the 1960s, feminist theory and art history have foregrounded domesticity as a politically charged site shaped by gendered labor, reproductive work, and affective economies.

13 Renov, Michael (2004). *Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the Self*. In: Michael Renov *The Subject of Documentary*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 216–229.

14 Renov, 2004, p. 218

embroiled with the question of self-knowledge; it is the all too familiar rather than the exotic that holds sway.¹⁵

This conceptual lens illuminates how Latvian women artists use bodily testimony, ancestral geography, and domestic objects to negotiate wider cultural histories and collective emotions.

Their practices show that autobiography can be treated as a methodological pathway for rethinking identity and belonging in contemporary Latvia. Consequently, the body becomes testimony, the landscape becomes mnemonic terrain, and everyday objects become active participants in the work of remembering.

This constellation of concerns forms the cultural environment within which Maskava's practice emerges, echoing these tendencies while extending them into ecological and posthuman dimensions. Understanding this broader context allows us to see Maskava as a central participant in a significant shift within Latvian contemporary art – from autobiography to relational ecology, from domestic archive to embodied ritual.

Theoretical Framework

This article approaches Anna Maskava's work through a triadic conceptual framework that brings together ritual, autobiographical and postmemorial performance, as well as posthuman theory. These three strands are proposed as mutually reinforcing perspectives that illuminate how Maskava constructs kinship through embodied action, storytelling, and interspecies encounter.

Ritual serves as the first conceptual anchor. Following Victor Turner, ritual is understood as a liminal process, a threshold condition in which relationships, identities, and cosmological orientations are reconfigured.¹⁶ Turner's emphasis on liminality as "betwixt and between"¹⁷ frames Maskava's use of ritual gestures – pouring milk, brewing chaga tea,¹⁸ sharing space with snails – as transformative techniques for

15 Renov, 2004, p. 218

16 Turner, Victor (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969, p. 94.

17 Renov, 2004, p. 218

18 Chaga tea refers to black birch chaga (*Inonotus obliquus*). In her Master's thesis Maskava explains: "My intention is to create a performance space in which all the senses are activated, and in this case, the preparation of the tea made from this fungus - chaga - produces a warm, steamy atmosphere, generating a kind of sensorial environment that feels like being 'in a mother's womb.' At the same time, as the black birch chaga boils, it releases a distinct, pleasant, sweet aroma that stimulates the sense of smell. The tea is also consumed, thus activating the sense of taste. In this performance, black birch chaga is used as a 'medium' to facilitate interaction and collaboration among the spectators while also engaging their sense of taste." Maskava, 2025, p. 28.

reimagining the self in relation to ancestors, audiences, and nonhuman beings. Richard Schechner's notion of *restored behavior* also provides a useful lens for understanding how inherited gestures, domestic tasks, and healing motifs reappear in her work as recomposed and reactivated practices:

Restored behavior is used in all kinds of performances from shamanism and exorcism to trance, from ritual to aesthetic dance and theater, from initiation rites to social dramas, from psychoanalysis to psychodrama and transactional analysis. [...] Because the behavior is separate from those who are behaving, the behavior can be stored, transmitted, manipulated, transformed.¹⁹

Furthermore, Catherine Bell's emphasis on ritualization as strategic, embodied differentiation is especially relevant here. As Bell writes, ritualization is "a strategic way of acting [that] differentiates itself from other practices, [producing] particular social effects [through] the interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures".²⁰ This understanding is crucial for interpreting Maskava's performances, especially in terms of how Maskava ritualizes everyday gestures as forms of embodied knowledge²¹ that reorganize relations among humans, ancestors, and nonhuman agents.

The second analytical strand concerns autobiography and postmemory. Analyzing autobiographical performance, Deirdre Heddon emphasizes the complex and palimpsestic relationship between individual experience and its public articulation. For her, autobiographical performance merges personal and collective dimensions, refusing any simple or transparent correspondence with "real life." Autobiography is therefore not a straightforward reflection of subjective experience but a crafted construction shaped by multiple creative strategies – strategies that draw not only on the performer's perspective but also on external conditions, cultural narratives, and interactions with others.²²

Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory²³ – the transmission of ancestral experience across generational distance – provides another key framework for examining how Maskava's work mediates between her own biography and matrilineal histories,

19 Schechner, Richard (1985). *Between Theater and Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press. Retrieved October 4, 2025, pp. 35–36. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhjzs [17.11.2025.].

20 Bell, Catherine (1992). *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford University Press, pp. 6–7.

21 As Dwight Conquergood argues, performance generates "embodied knowledge," a mode of understanding that emerges through corporeal action and relational engagement, transforming how participants negotiate and reorganize relations with others. In: Conquergood, Dwight (2002). *Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research*. *The Drama Review*, 46(2), pp. 145–156.

22 Heddon, Deirdre (2008). *Autobiography and Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 9

23 Hirsch, Marianne (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.

such as the story of her healer great-great-grandmother or her childhood memories of rural Latvia.²⁴ Maskava's interweaving of family stories, oral histories, and bodily testimony exemplifies this dynamic, particularly in works like *1997* (2023) and *Expelled from the Kin* (2023), where remembrance unfolds through ritualized performance.

Diana Taylor's distinction between the archive and the repertoire further enriches this frame. Taylor emphasizes that the enactment of embodied memory, comprising "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dancing, singing"²⁵ constitute a repertoire through which cultural memory is enacted rather than stored. Maskava's performances, documented but also lived in and through the body, operate at this interface: her photographic images extend and transform the repertoires enacted in performance.

The third strand introduces posthumanist and ecological thought, which provides essential tools for interpreting how Maskava expands kinship beyond human lineage. Donna Haraway's call to "make kin, not babies"²⁶ situates kinship as a practice of care, cohabitation, and multispecies world order,²⁷ rather than a biological or heteronormative category. In works like *Animacy* (2022) and *Bare Life* (2025), Maskava enacts this principle literally, sharing intimate physical space with snails, soil, fungi, and other living materials.

Rosi Braidotti's posthuman theory (2019)²⁸ similarly foregrounds relationality, vulnerability, and affirmative ethics as core modalities of subjectivity:

For Braidotti (2019) the posthumanities compose a new posthuman subject, immanently and materially grounded in a position of relationship amid the convergence of *zoe-bio-technos* to reveal a distributed consciousness and a radical equality between all entities. posthumanism therefore exposes the hierarchies of power that have traditionally sexualized, racialized and naturalized others, composing a new collective subject, a 'We' 'who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together'.²⁹

24 This approach also aligns with the previously mentioned Michael Renov's theory of domestic ethnography, which identifies a mode of creative practice in which artists turn ethnographic attention toward their own familial environments.

25 Taylor, Diane (2003). *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 20.

26 Haraway, Donna (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.

27 Latvian terminology for many concepts used in environmental humanities and posthumanist theory has been significantly advanced by Dace Bula, who has systematically localised terms such as "aģence," "tapšana," "koptapšana," "tiklojums," "dabkultūra," "citbūtnes," and others in her recent work on literary naturecultures (Bula 2024). Her contributions offer a consistent, contextually grounded vocabulary that enables the translation and application of multispecies and more-than-human concepts within Latvian scholarship. See for more information: Bula, Dace (2024). *Literārās dabkultūras: Regīnas Ezeras zooproza ekokritiskā lasījumā*. LU LFMI.

28 Braidotti, Rosi (2019). *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge and Oxford: Polity.

29 Cull O Maoilearca, Laura; Fitzgerald-Allsopp, Florence (2024). An Introduction to Interspecies Performance. In: Laura Cull O Maoilearca, Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp (Eds.). *Interspecies Performance*. Wales: Performance Research books, p. 21

Maskava's exposure of the body to nonhuman agents – its permeability, risk, and receptivity – echoes Braidotti's insistence that the human subject is always situated within a web of “trans-species interdependence”.³⁰ In this context, objects and substances such as milk, soil, stone, and glass can be understood as agential participants in the performance. Maskava's use of such materials, for example, dragging a 65-kg stone, lying naked inside a glass container, pouring milk over the body, foregrounds the agency of matter and its capacity to shape relations.³¹

Consequently, in Maskava's performances, interspecies contact (snails, ants, hornets, fungi, etc.) becomes a form of interspecies ritual, challenging anthropocentric hierarchies and situating the human body within broader ecological networks. This resonates with the concept of more-than-human geography. As Lorimer and Hodgetts note, more-than-human materialisms insist that humans are “entangled parts of the world,” embedded within a “meshwork of beings in constant processes of becoming otherwise”.³² Moreover, more-than-human thinking widens the category of agency beyond intentional human action. Agency becomes “distributed across humans and nonhumans,”³³ expressed through the varied capacities of organisms, materials, and ecologies to affect situations. Her rituals thus operate as situated experiments in what Lorimer and Hodgetts call “multinatural worlds,”³⁴ where multiple organisms enact different versions of what a place, body, or relation can be. Within this framework, Maskava's interactions with nonhuman beings and substances are situational encounters that reconfigure the boundaries of subjecthood and relationality.³⁵

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, practice-led methodology grounded in performance studies,³⁶ feminist research ethics, and posthumanist approaches to embodied knowledge. Because Maskava's works unfold across live performance, photography, video, and text, the methodology is designed to account for their intermedial and

30 Braidotti, Rosi (2013). *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 92

31 Likewise, Maskava's work with photography, particularly her use of self-photography, positions the camera as a nonhuman agent that participates in the performative process. Alongside the artist's body, natural environments, and organic materials, the camera contributes to a distributed field of agency in which memory is produced through human-nonhuman collaboration.

32 Lorimer, Jamie; Hodgetts, Timothy (2024). *More-Than-Human*. New York: Routledge, p. 3.

33 Lorimer; Hodgetts, 2024, p. 9.

34 *Ibid*, p. 13.

35 As Karen Barad argues in her theory of agential realism, subjectivity does not pre-exist relations but emerges through “intra-actions” – the dynamic entanglements of beings, materials, and environments that constitute both matter and meaning. In: Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

36 Kershaw, Baz & Nicholson, H. (Eds.) (2011). *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*. Edinburgh University Press.

multisensory character, as well as the relational dynamics that emerge between performer, materials, and audience.

The primary sources include live performances,³⁷ photographic and video documentation, artist interviews, and texts authored and read aloud by Maskava as part of her performance practice. Following Philip Auslander,³⁸ Rebecca Schneider,³⁹ and Laine Kristberga,⁴⁰ performance documentation is understood as a performative extension of the work: images and videos are treated as sites where gesture, affect, and material agency persist and acquire new meanings. This is particularly important for Maskava, whose still images often function as autonomous artworks.

The research adopts a triangulated analytical process. First, each performance is approached through close visual and textual analysis, attending to gesture, spatial composition, material interactions, and sensory modalities. Second, interviews with the artist provide insights into the conceptual motivations behind specific works, the significance of inherited family narratives, and her evolving relationship with ritual and more-than-human ecology. These interviews illuminate how the artist frames and reframes her own practice. Third, textual analysis is carried out. Maskava's written and spoken texts delivered during performances or presented alongside exhibitions are treated as integral components of her aesthetic language. These texts operate as ritual utterances, autobiographical fabulations, and postmemorial linkages that guide spectators through the performance's emotional and narrative terrain. They are analyzed in relation to the gestures and materials of each work, as well as in light of critical fabulation and speculative storytelling.

Case studies are selected according to three modalities central to Maskava's practice: (1) autobiographical rituals (*1997* (2023), *Milk and Vodka* (2025)); (2) genealogical and ancestral rituals (*Expelled from the Kin* (2023), *Ancestral Body* (2024–2025)), and (3) ecological and posthuman rituals (*Animacy* (2022), *Bare Life* (2025), *Ancestor III/65 kg of the Past* (2022)). This thematic clustering reflects the triadic conceptual framework developed earlier – ritual, autobiography/postmemory, and posthuman ecology – and enables a structured comparison across works.

The methodology is grounded in feminist and posthuman ethics that foreground vulnerability, embodiment, and relationality.⁴¹ This involves recognizing nonhuman beings, as such as snails, insects, fungi, soil, stone, as active participants in

37 All seen by the author of the article, except *Bare Life* (2025).

38 Auslander, Philip (2006). The Performativity of Performance Documentation. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28(3), pp. 1–10.

39 Schneider, Rebecca (2011). *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London: Routledge.

40 Kristberga, Laine (2025). Convergence of Performance Art, Photography, and Archival Practices. *Culture Crossroads*, No. 20, pp. 87–108.

41 Jana Kukaine's work on viscerality and affect in feminist art offers a parallel perspective on how embodied states – sensory, affective, and material – shape artistic meaning and relationality (Kukaine 2024).



Anna Maskava, *1997, 2023*. Performance presented at the Riga Performance Festival *Starptelpa*.
Photo by Beatrise Anna Ozoliņa

the performance situation and attending to the precarious conditions under which such encounters occur. It also demands reflexive awareness of the researcher's own position when interpreting affective, intimate, or exposed bodily states. Ultimately, this approach keeps the analysis attuned to the embodied, intermedial, and interspecies dimensions of Maskava's practice, mirroring the performances themselves, where knowledge emerges through ritualised gesture, narrative reactivation, and entangled human–nonhuman relations.⁴²

Autobiographical Rituals: *1997* (2023) and *Milk and Vodka* (2025)

Maskava engages with autobiography through a ritualized method to re-enter, rework, and redistribute personal memory. In line with Deirdre Heddon's argument that autobiographical performance constitutes a relational, multi-layered process rather than a transparent account of lived experience,⁴³ Maskava often uses childhood memory as material for embodied inquiry. Unfolding through gesture, repetition, humor, and the sensory textures of everyday life, in both *1997* and *Milk and Vodka*, autobiography becomes a technique for unsettling the boundaries between private memory and public ritual, individual experience and shared cultural history.

1997: Re-enacting the Textures of Childhood Memory

In *1997*⁴⁴ Maskava returns to the sensory, emotional, and social textures of her childhood in post-Soviet Latvia. Her narration opens with a vivid evocation of a family gathering in a cramped Khrushchev-era apartment: "Despite the small size of the apartment, there was always a place for everyone. There was also a table with the party food and a corner for dancing. My grandmother loved celebrations."⁴⁵ This setting functions as a ritual microcosm, where domestic gestures – singing, dancing,

42 It must be also mentioned that the author has had a long-term professional relationship with Anna Maskava, having supervised her Bachelor's and Master's theses and collaborated with her as curator and mentor in several artistic projects, for example, www.performanceartlatvia.org/projects/fresh-start-nordicbaltic-development-programme-for-emerging-performance-artists [19.11.2025.]. This proximity has provided in-depth insight into the development of the artist's practice and working processes. At the same time, it requires ongoing critical self-awareness regarding the author's positionality in relation to the material discussed.

43 Heddon, 2008.

44 www.annamaskava.com/works/1997 [17.11.2025.].

45 Here and further all quotes are provided from Maskava's texts used in her performances. Available at Anna Maskava's request. Stored at the digital archive of the author.

eating, telling stories – become repertoires in Diana Taylor's sense: embodied practices that transmit cultural memory.⁴⁶

The performance situates childhood within a liminal environment: a moment suspended between the Soviet past and the newly restored Latvian state. Maskava says: "I was born in a space between, on a borderline between two countries – in a country that existed and didn't exist at the same time." This in-betweenness is not only historical but corporeal, shaping the child-body as both witness and emblem of a transitioning nation.

Crucially, *1997* does not unfold as nostalgic recollection. The narrative introduces elements of disruption and dissonance. The figure of Gunārs – the quiet relative who suddenly explodes into song, then mimics shooting a gun – embodies the unspoken trauma of war: "When he drinks too much, he starts singing some soldier songs [...] He was in Afghanistan." Here autobiographical memory intersects with Hirsch's postmemory,⁴⁷ revealing how unarticulated histories of violence permeate domestic ritual and the development of the child's worldview.

Moments of humor and absurdity – the sausage with the nail inside, the grandmother washing and returning it to the table – transform the everyday into a ritual of resilience. Maskava recalls: "It was truly a miraculous sausage [...] Grandma picked up the sausage from the floor, washed it, and put it back on the table." These micro-stories form what Michael Renov terms "domestic ethnography": intimate accounts that reveal the social, political, and emotional textures of family life.⁴⁸

1997 thus mobilizes autobiography as a sensory and relational practice. Embodied gestures, narrative fragments, and material textures (food, textiles, the smell of alcohol, the sound of singing) are woven together to construct a performative ethnography of post-Soviet family life.

The performance becomes a time capsule made present – a ritual of remembering that blurs private and communal memory, past and present, childhood perception and adult re-activation.

Milk and Vodka: Shame, Desire, and the Socialization of the Adolescent Body

If *1997* explores childhood through humor and social ritual, *Milk and Vodka*⁴⁹ turns to adolescence as a site of embodied contradiction – fear, desire, shame, curiosity, and transgression. The work belongs unmistakably to the coming-of-age genre, though

46 Taylor, 2003.

47 Hirsch, Marianne (2008). The Generation of Postmemory. *Poetics Today* 29, No. 1, pp. 103-128.

48 Renov, 2004, p. 218

49 www.annamaskava.com/works/milk-and-vodka [17.11.2025.].



Anna Maskava, *Milk and Vodka*, 2025. Performance presented at the New Turku Biennale, Finland.
Photo by Jussi Virkkumaa

reimagined through a feminist and performative lens. The performance opens with an encounter that is both shocking and clinically observed: “A huge erect penis is forced into a woman’s mouth [...] Her eyes have been gouged out [...] tears are visible in them.” This confrontation with graphic imagery in a porn magazine that Maskava found as a child is a catalyst for adolescent confusion and fascination – an initiation into the adult world that arrives prematurely and violently.

The autobiographical voice, however, remains analytical, even humorous: “We simply called them the sex magazines.” The performance contrasts Maskava’s childhood friend Ramona’s Catholic guilt, repeated time after time “Jesus, Jesus... this is a sin”, with Maskava’s pragmatic curiosity: “This is their sin, not ours. We are just... looking at their sin.” This dynamic establishes the adolescent self as a shifting and unstable subject, oscillating between moral tension and exploratory agency.

As Heddon suggests, autobiographical performance produces an “I” that is often exaggerated, destabilized, or multiplied.⁵⁰ Maskava’s adolescent self is performed in this instability – a subject caught between fear, desire, humor, and defiance. Her account of being pushed into the bushes by an older boy becomes a moment of embodied revelation: “It [the boy’s penis] was reddish, pulsing... like something that didn’t belong to his body. [...] It reminded of featherless baby birds – transparent, small... their veins visible”.

The performance also situates sexuality within the socio-economic context of 1990s Latvia. Illegal trades, moonshine distilleries, and informal economies form the backdrop against which the girls – Maskava and her friend Ramona – decide to sell the “sex magazines”: “Most people were selling something illegally [...] It was quite normal.” Here, sexuality, morality, and capitalism become intertwined: the magazines circulate as commodities in a precarious post-Soviet economy, revealing how adolescence is shaped by social structures far beyond the individual body.

The title *Milk and Vodka* itself foregrounds the contradictions that structure the coming-of-age experience: purity and corruption, childhood and adulthood, nourishment and intoxication. Vodka appears not only as an emblem of the adult world but also in a childhood memory in which Maskava’s grandmother treats a dog bite by rubbing vodka into the wound and over the child’s head. Remembered as her first encounter with alcohol, this moment sits alongside other formative “first times” – the discovery of the pornographic magazines and the older boy’s unsolicited display of nudity – marking points at which innocence is punctured by abrupt initiations into adult knowledge.

The performance culminates in a small yet potent ritual of defiance: eating chocolates one after another, a gesture of excess and reclaiming bodily agency: “I was already opening the box of chocolates and stuffing those candies into my

50 Heddon, pp. 8-10.

mouth. One after another. One after another...” This act – indulgent, mischievous, defiant – becomes a small but potent ritual of reclaiming agency within a childhood world saturated by moral tension, secrecy, and contradiction.

Genealogical and Ancestral Rituals: *Expelled from the Kin* (2023) and *Ancestral Body* (2024–2025)

Maskava’s genealogical works deepen her autobiographical method by shifting from childhood memory to the long *durée* of matrilineal inheritance. If *1997* and *Milk and Vodka* examine the early formation of subjectivity, then *Expelled from the Kin* and *Ancestral Body*⁵¹ turn to the entangled histories of mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers whose lives were shaped by precarity, gendered labor, vernacular healing, and embodied resilience. These works activate what Hirsch calls postmemory, a mode of affiliation that emerges through affective and imaginative re-engagement with inherited stories.⁵²

Expelled from the Kin: Rupture, Lineage, and the Aesthetics of Survival

*Expelled from the Kin*⁵³ offers a stark, poetic meditation on the story of Maskava’s great-great-grandmother – a rural healer whose life was marked by poverty, social exclusion, reproductive violence, and embodied resilience. The performance text opens with an image of matrilineal simultaneity – women across generations moving, murmuring, invoking:

“*Kamēr vecā* // While the old woman
Sēžot pie ugunskura murmināja senus buramvārdus // Sitting by the fire
murmured ancient incantations
Viņas meita leca // Her daughter jumped

51 Visual and dramaturgical qualities are examined in: Kristberga, Laine (2025). Folklore in Contemporary Performance: Intertextual and Intermedial Negotiations in the Baltic-Nordic Context. *Letonica*, No. 58, pp. 118-144, <https://doi.org/10.35539/LTNC.2025.0058.06>

52 Hirsch defines postmemory as: “The relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they *remember only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors* among which they grew up.” In: Hirsch, Marianne (2008). The Generation of Postmemory. *Poetics Today* 29, No. 1, p. 106.

53 www.annamaskava.com/works/expelled-from-the-kin [17.11.2025.].

Pacēlusi // Lifting
Puķainos svārkus gaisā // Her flowered skirt into the air.”⁵⁴

This scene, where the ancestor murmurs incantations while her daughter attempts to abort by leaping from the hayloft, stages ritual, desperation, and embodied agency in a single compressed tableau. As Bell argues, ritualization is a *strategic way of acting* that differentiates certain gestures from ordinary behavior;⁵⁵ here, the daughter's leap becomes both an act of refusal and a form of embodied insurgency. The daughter “*leca no kūtsaugšas uz vēdera [...] lai viņas auglis izputētu*” (leapt from the loft so that the fetus might scatter) – a visceral counter-ritual against forced maternity. Yet, as the poem repeats with inexorable force:

“Bet // But
Viņa piedzima // She was born
Un tad viņai piedzima // And then she gave birth
Un tad tu piedzimi // And then you were born
Un izdzimi // And were born out.”

This refrain collapses generations into a single line of embodied survival. The unborn child survives the attempted abortion; another daughter is born; and finally the performer herself “was born out” – a pun on *izdzimt* (to be born strangely, anomalously) and *izdzīvot* (to survive). Lineage becomes not a triumphant genealogical continuity but a series of ruptures, accidental survivals, and counter-forces that nonetheless produce a chain of female descendants.⁵⁶

The text functions as what Schechner calls *restored behavior* – a cultural fragment transmitted, altered, and reactivated in a new setting.⁵⁷ Maskava does not reenact the ancestor's gesture; she ritualizes its energy, giving form to a transgenerational wound that still shapes embodied life. The work's interpretive power lies in this articulation

54 Translation provided by the author of the article.

55 Bell, 1992, pp. 6–7.

56 Maskava's own writing expands this genealogy and gives voice to the ancestral wound that the performance reanimates. On her website she describes how an old woman once told her: “*Tas tev iz dzimtas. Tu esi izdzimtā.*” (“That comes to you from the lineage. You are the outborn one.”)

The encounter prompted a deeper investigation into her family line, leading to the discovery that her great-great-great-grandmother had been a healer – a “white witch” who treated both people and animals with incantations. As Maskava writes, this ancestor's fate “had, in a strange way, been born out in me and woven into my dreams”. Her history inspired the artist to explore what the figure of the woman-witch truly contains, and *Expelled from the Kin* became a performance that examines the witch archetype through the personal experiences and stories of the women in her lineage. Available in: www.annamaskava.com/works/expelled-from-the-kin [19.11.2025.].

57 Schechner, 1985, pp. 35–36.



Anna Maskava, *Expelled from the Kin*, 2023. Performance presented at the opening of the exhibition *Tikai neraudi! Feministiskie skatījumi Latvijas mākslā: 1965–2023*, Latvian National Museum of Art. Photo by Elīna Lieltiruma

of postmemorial affect: the daughter's pain becomes part of the performer's sensorium, not as trauma inherited intact but as a resonant field of gesture, breath, and voice.

At the same time, *Expelled from the Kin* signals Maskava's broader inquiry into the status of women who sit at the margins of kinship – healers, outcasts, women whose reproductive choices were constrained by violence and historical catastrophe. This figure's ostracism anticipates the social position of many Baltic rural women whose knowledge systems (healing, herbalism, ritual labor) were simultaneously needed and stigmatized. Maskava reframes this exclusion as a site of generative reconfiguration: a space from which alternative forms of knowledge and resilience emerge. Through poetic condensation and ritualization, the performance reclaims the ancestor's story as part of a living, embodied inheritance.

Ancestral Body: Matrilineal Knowledge, Interspecies Intimacy, and the Ecology of Memory

If *Expelled from the Kin* is marked by rupture, *Ancestral Body* foregrounds continuity, care, and ecological entanglement within the maternal line. The central figure – Maskava's great-grandmother Anna Ieviņa, known in the village as *Medņū Māte* (Mother of the Black Grouse) – appears as a nexus of human and more-than-human worlds. The opening image of the text is fabulatory: “Sometimes I truly imagine that at night all of us, her descendants, turn into dark black-grouse chicks, and she spreads her black wings over us.”

This metaphor of turning into black grouse chicks situates the matrilineal relation within a interspecies ontology, aligning directly with Haraway's call to “make kin”⁵⁸ across species lines. Kinship here is not only biological but atmospheric, gestural, nocturnal. The grandmother's sheltering wings evoke a lineage of care that exceeds the human domain.

The text continues with rich ethnographic detail: dialect words, vernacular healing practices, the modest wooden house, the outdoor *pirts* (sauna), and the sensorial environment of boiled potatoes, smoke, and bark. This is the “ecological archive” through which Maskava inherits her matrilineal identity. The grandmother's body, habits, and rituals transmit cultural knowledge as vividly as any document. One passage stands out for its revelation of bodily lineage: “And then I noticed that she had the same birthmark on her back, in exactly the same place as I do. In that moment, I felt how my own body was revealed to me through hers.” This moment

58 Haraway articulates *becoming-with* as an ethical and ontological practice of cohabitation, grounded in multispecies relationality, particularly in Chapter 1 (*Playing String Figures with Companion Species*, pp. 9-29) and Chapter 2 (*Tentacular Thinking*, pp. 30-57). In: Haraway, Donna J. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.



Anna Maskava, *Ancestral Body II*, 2025. Performance presented at the Riga Performance Festival *Starptelpa*.
Photo by Dace Kundrāte

epitomizes Maskava's understanding of the body as a site of ancestral inscription – a place where memory is not symbolic but physiological. The body becomes a site of memory, in Hirsch's sense, "a generational structure of transmission".⁵⁹

Medņu Māte's vernacular cosmology also blurs species boundaries. She calls cattle, pigs, and chickens *kukaiņi* (insects): "*Medņu Māte* called all the livestock as *kukaiņi* (insects). 'Time to feed the *kukaiņi*!' she would say." Her language reflects a worldview in which human–animal distinctions emerge from everyday relations of labour, care, and proximity rather than formal taxonomy. This linguistic detail resonates with Lorimer and Hodgetts' notion that more-than-human worlds emerge through practical entanglement, not abstract theory.⁶⁰

The grandmother's self-made coffin, stored in the attic for twenty-six years and periodically loaned out to neighbors – returned always with planks from her own forest – stands as a ritual object that encapsulates autonomy, resilience, and communal reciprocity. It also prefigures Maskava's own use of found materials, wood, bones, and feathers in *Ancestral Body II*, which she describes in her Master's thesis as a system of "objects-as-relational-agents"⁶¹ (e.g., chaga, smoke, feathers, skulls), mediating contact between performer, audience, and ancestral presences.

Crucially, Maskava writes that the performance is built around storytelling as ritual practice, where the audience also becomes coauthors of the event.⁶² This aligns with the communal dimension of *Medņu Māte's* life, where care, healing, and labor were inherently distributed across human and nonhuman actors.⁶³

59 Hirsch emphasizes that the past is inherited as embodied, affective traces: "Postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission deeply embedded in such forms of mediation" (p. 114). In: Hirsch, Marianne (2008). *The Generation of Postmemory*. *Poetics Today* 29, No. 1, pp. 103-128.

60 Lorimer; Hodgetts (2024), p. 3; 8; 13.

61 Maskava, Anna (2025). Master's thesis *Performance 'Ancestral Body II'*, pp. 26-29. Supervised by Laine Kristberga. Defended at the Art Academy of Latvia in May 2025. Stored digitally at the author's archive.

62 Maskava, 2025, pp. 22-23.

63 At the opening of the exhibition *Ancestral Body* at the ISSP Gallery, Maskava said: "This work is also a kind of dedication to the women in my lineage, who never had the opportunity to engage in art because they always had to do something else. Without a doubt, it is also a privilege to photograph myself - and to photograph myself naked - because there are so many places in the world where this is impossible, where such an exhibition could never take place. These places are not far away; one does not have to look for them - they are right here. Just as the forest is not merely a symbol, these places too are not allegories but real and concrete. As real as war. As real as stories of lived experience." See for more: <https://issp.lv/en/gallery/anna-maskava-ancestral-body-sencu-kermenis-1> [17.11.2025.].

Ecological and Posthuman Rituals: *Animacy* (2022), *Bare Life* (2025), and *Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past* (2022)

While Maskava's autobiographical and genealogical works investigate memory and kinship across human generations, several performances in her oeuvre broaden these relations to include nonhuman beings, materials, and environments. In *Animacy* (2022),⁶⁴ *Bare Life* (2025),⁶⁵ and *Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past* (2022),⁶⁶ she builds ritual structures that position the human body in symbiotic, vulnerable, and sometimes precarious proximity to other species and materialities. These works reveal kinship as an interspecies field of encounter, aligning closely with posthumanist theories that reject anthropocentric subjecthood and instead emphasize distributed agency, interspecies ethics, and ecological co-presence.

Snail Intimacies: Interspecies Touch and Cohabitation in *Animacy* and *Bare Life*

Across *Animacy* (2022) and *Bare Life* (2025), snails emerge as central interspecies collaborators through which Maskava develops an ethics of vulnerability, contact, and ecological entanglement. Both works pursue the question she asks:

What if there is no 'it' in nature surrounding us? What if everything around us is alive and pulsating? What if personhood is extended beyond all who breathe? How would you communicate with the surrounding world and the seemingly 'other'?⁶⁷

Snails – slow, moist, sensitive to micro-atmospheres – become the primary agents through which these questions are enacted, not symbolically but through direct tactile exchange. Both performances exist as a durational ecology in which the artist's body becomes a habitat: a warm, breathing surface on which snail movements form the core (eco)dramaturgy. Refusing mastery or control, the works enact Haraway's call to become-with⁶⁸ – kin-making through shared spatial, tactile, and temporal conditions.

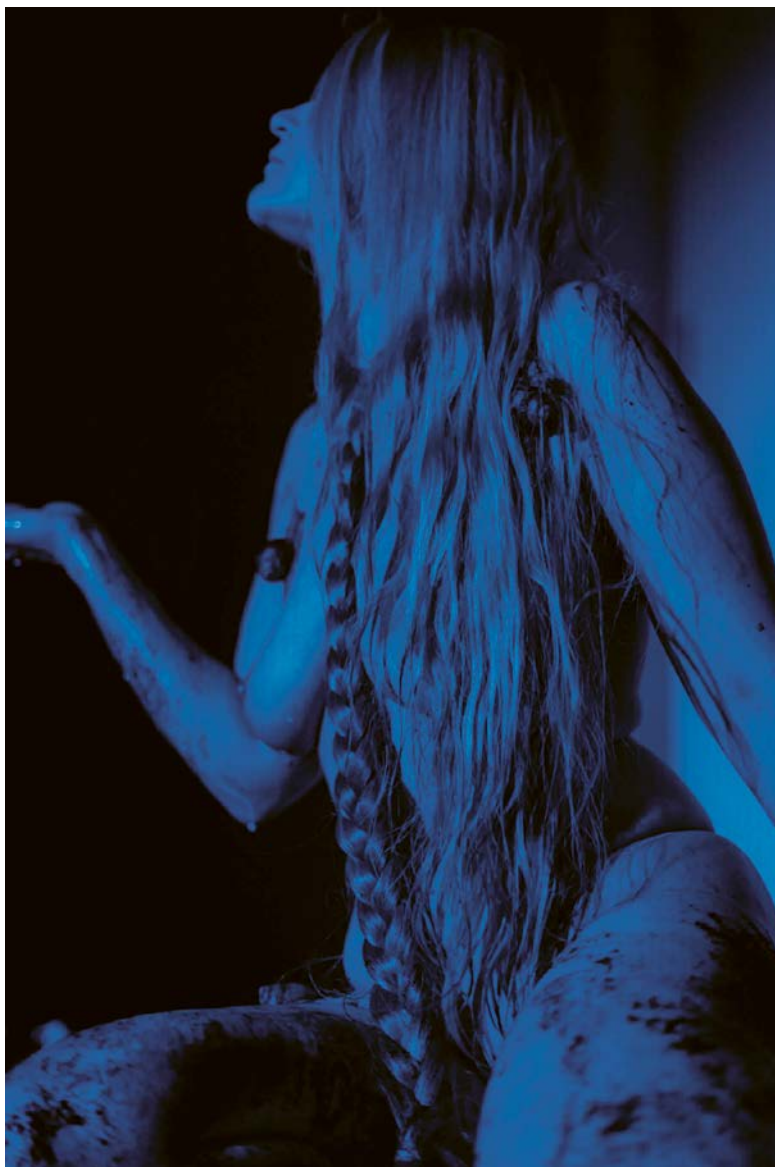
64 www.annamaskava.com/works/animacy [19.11.2025].

65 www.annamaskava.com/works/bare-life [19.11.2021].

66 www.annamaskava.com/works/ancestor-2 [19.11.2025].

67 www.annamaskava.com/works/animacy [19.11.2025].

68 Haraway, 2016.



Anna Maskava, *Animacy*, 2022. Performance presented at the Riga Performance Festival *Starptelpa*. Photo by Rīčards Zaiņmežs

In *Animacy*, Maskava describes how she interacted with spectators one by one, inviting them into intimate encounters involving gaze, touch, and direct contact with nonhuman beings. Speaking in an invented language, she guided each participant through sensory acts such as holding the snails, touching soil, and washing hands in milk. Her aim, as she explains, was to explore “intimacy, personal connection, and sexuality as fundamental aspects of communication and life force,”⁶⁹ destabilizing the conventional performance–audience divide and transforming viewers into co-authors of the event.

The slow, unhurried movement of the snails introduces what Anna Tsing terms “contaminated diversity”:

We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others. As contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds – and new directions – may emerge. Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option. [...] Staying alive – for every species – requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die.⁷⁰

Their tactile presence and moist trajectories draw attention to the subtle agencies of nonhuman beings, resonating with Jane Bennett’s notion of vibrant matter,⁷¹ in which organisms and substances possess affective capacities that shape events as powerfully as human intention:

By ‘vitality’ I mean the capacity of things edibles, commodities, storms, metals-not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.⁷²

Bare Life (2025)⁷³ extends and intensifies these concerns, staging the body in a more exposed and precarious configuration. The performance unfolded within

69 www.annamaskava.com/works/animacy [19.11.2025.].

70 Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt (2015). *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 27

71 Bennet writes: “In a world of vibrant matter, it is thus not enough to say that we are ‘embodied.’ We are, rather, an array of bodies, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes” (pp. 112–113). In: Bennett, Jane (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

72 Bennet, 2010, p. viii

73 The title *Bare Life* (Latvian: *Kailā dzīvība*) is shared with the larger exhibition of the same name, presented at the Cēsis Art Festival in 2025. Curators: Igors Gubenko and *Mākslas birojs*.



Anna Maskava, *Bare Life*, 2025. Performance presented at the Cēsis Art Festival. Photo by Jānis Poriētis

a human-sized glass aquarium. Inside this transparent enclosure, Maskava's naked body, covered in snails, became an object for the viewer's gaze, yet simultaneously retained its vital reality – affirmed by the subtle rise and fall of her breath and by the snails' continuous movements. This living exhibit, created in interspecies communion, ambivalently embodied Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life (*nuda vita*)⁷⁴ while exposing the impossibility of observing such “bare” existence without the mediation of social conventions, cultural expectations, and the viewer's own embodied presence.

Here the environment, too, becomes a volatile partner. Snails traverse both skin and glass, making perceptible what Lorimer and Hodgetts describe as humans' embeddedness in “meshwork of beings in constant processes of becoming otherwise.”⁷⁵ The container amplifies rather than resolves this entanglement: the humidity, temperature, and density of breath create a microclimate in which species cohabit under precarious conditions. Maskava's body becomes a membrane between worlds, vulnerable not to domination but to interspecies proximity.

Across both *Animacy* and *Bare Life*, endurance is reframed as attunement to the rhythms of other beings. Vulnerability becomes a method – an opening through which the possibility of meaningful encounter with the “other/stranger” emerges. Maskava's guiding question – “What if everything around us is alive and pulsating?” – is answered through the slow, moist, rhythmic agency of snails. In both these works Maskava presents a radical rethinking of intimacy, communication, and kinship grounded in slowness, receptivity, and the delicate negotiations of interspecies coexistence.

Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past: Weight, Geopolitics, and Transhistorical Kinship

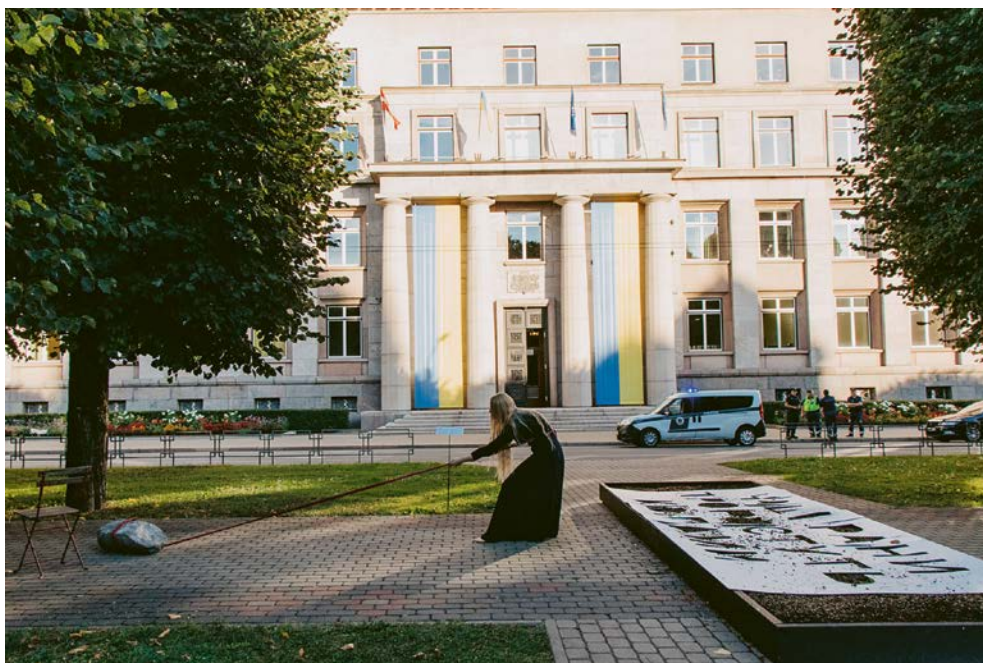
Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past shifts from biological organisms to geological matter. Performed on Freedom Boulevard in Riga in August 2022, the work involves Maskava dragging a 65-kilogram concrete block – symbolically loaded with Soviet and post-Soviet histories – from the former Lenin Monument site toward the Freedom Monument. This durational act transforms stone into a geopolitical ancestor, a material witness whose weight embodies the sedimented traumas of occupation, violence, and resistance.

The stone's density and friction choreograph the performance: the pace slows, the body strains, breath and muscle adapt. As Maskava notes, this act “echoed Russia's ongoing aggression and warfare in Ukraine.”⁷⁶ The red rope tying her to the block

74 Agamben, Giorgio (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

75 Lorimer; Hodgetts, 2024, p. 3.

76 www.annamaskava.com/works/ancestor-2 [19.11.2025.].



Anna Maskava, *Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past*, 2022. Performance presented at the public art exhibition *Tavu roku siltums man nesāp* (2022). Photo by Beatrise Anda Ozoliņa

becomes a visual umbilicus linking personal endurance, historical burden, and the geopolitics of Eastern Europe. The temporality of stone is inseparable from the lived histories of occupation, resistance, and remembrance.

Dragging the stone across public ground becomes a ritual of acknowledging both deep time and historical violence. The friction between the concrete and asphalt, the pull of the red rope, and the strain on the artist's body enact a choreography of endurance shaped by more-than-human forces. The terrain with its textures, irregularities, and public visibility functions as a co-choreographer, determining pace and posture.

In posthuman terms, the work aligns with Braidotti's *zoe-geo-techno* convergence:⁷⁷ the posthuman subject is shaped through interrelations with living organisms (the spectators whose gazes and presences form an affective environment), geological bodies (the concrete block), and technological apparatuses (the cameras documenting the action). Maskava's own body becomes a transmitting device for deep time and collective trauma, carrying the "past" not metaphorically but as literal weight that alters breath, stance, and endurance.

The red rope further activates the symbolic register: visually evoking umbilical connection, lifeline, and political tethering, it binds artist and object in a relation of mutual dependence. Through their reciprocal abrasion – her skin and muscles bearing the strain, the stone carving a temporary path across the pavement – Maskava stages a form of geological kinship. The stone, like an ancestor or like history itself, leaves marks on the body; and the body leaves marks on the stone's trajectory.

This intermaterial labor reframes ancestry as a network of human and nonhuman temporalities, geopolitical legacies, and material witnesses. In pulling the stone across a symbolic urban axis – from Lenin to Freedom – Maskava synthesizes personal, geological, and political kinship into a single ritual of remembrance. The performance insists that histories of violence remain embedded in bodies, infrastructures, and landscapes, and that to acknowledge them requires sustained, embodied labor.

77 Braidotti discusses the convergence of *zoe* (life), *geo* (earth), and *techno* (technology) as the foundation of posthuman subjectivity and relational ontology. In: Braidotti, Rosi (2019). *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press (esp. Chapter 1 and pp. 33-39). Also see: Susen, Simon (2022). Reflections on the (Post-) Human Condition: Towards New Forms of Engagement with the World? *Social Epistemology* 36, No. 1, pp. 63-94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2021.1893859>

Performative Autobiography and Fabulation: The Synergy Between Text and Performance

A defining feature of Maskava's practice is the interweaving of written text and live performance, a dialogue that not only supports the narrative content of her works but actively structures their relational and affective dynamics. Her texts inhabit a space between autobiography and fiction – a zone Heddon describes as the constructed selfhood, where the self emerges through exaggeration, distortion, and imaginative elaboration.⁷⁸ Part memoir, part poetic fabulation, the texts function as ritual scripts, affective triggers, and performative agents that co-produce the aesthetic and emotional field of the work. The synergy between text and embodiment forms a crucial methodological and conceptual through-line across *1997*, *Milk and Vodka*, *Expelled from the Kin*, and *Ancestral Body*.

Central to this textual dimension is Maskava's use of fabulation. While rooted in personal and ancestral memory, her texts do not remain bound to empirical accuracy. Instead, they move into the realm of creative reimagining. This approach is illuminated by Saidiya Hartman's notion of *critical fabulation* (2008)⁷⁹, which challenges the authority of archival evidence by proposing storytelling as a method for reconstructing erased histories. For Hartman, fabulation becomes a method for ethically reanimating erased or partial histories; in Maskava's case, fabulation allows her to activate ancestral memory that can only be accessed through affective and imaginative re-engagement.

Simultaneously, Maskava's writing echoes Donna Haraway's concept of *speculative fabulation* (2016),⁸⁰ which proposes storytelling as a means of "making-with" others – creating interspecies and transgenerational kinships through imaginative narrative experimentation. When Maskava speaks of descendants transforming into black-grouse chicks under the grandmother's wings, channels ancestral voices in rhythmic refrains, or adorns herself with a necklace of bird feathers, she expands autobiography into an interspecies cosmology. Her imagery does not simply illustrate

78 Heddon, 2008, pp. 8-10.

79 Hartman defines "critical fabulation" as a narrative strategy: "The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration. The method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation" (p. 11). In: Hartman, Saidiya (2008). *Venus in Two Acts*. *Small Axe* 12, No. 2, pp. 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>

80 Donna Haraway develops the notion of "speculative fabulation" across several works, most explicitly in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), where she frames it as a world-making practice that unsettles fixed narratives of identity, species, and history. Elements of speculative fabulation also appear in earlier texts, including *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and *When Species Meet* (2008), where she explores relational storytelling and cross-species kinship as critical methods.



Anna Maskava, *Ancestral Body I*, 2025. Performance presented at Anna Maskava's exhibition *Ancestral Body* at the ISSP Gallery. Photo by Dace Kundraite

the text, nor do the texts fictionalize the past. Instead, Maskava opens the genealogical frame to other-than-human forms of relation, protection, and memory, thereby broadening its ontological horizon.

The synergy between text and performance also operates through audience co-authorship.⁸¹ Maskava frequently constructs performances in which spectators become implicated in the narrative, addressed as descendants, witnesses, or participants. Her texts guide them into states of listening, remembering, or sensing; the audience does not consume the narrative but becomes folded into it. According to Maskava, storytelling creates a trance-like relational space in which performer and audience co-produce meaning.⁸² Because her texts are delivered in the first person but oscillate across generations, the boundaries of subjecthood become porous. The “I” shades into the “we,” and audience members find themselves addressed as potential descendants, witnesses, or kin.⁸³ The performance-text thus becomes a ritual of collective witnessing, dissolving distinctions between autobiographer, ancestor, and listener.

Finally, the textual component of Maskava's practice persists beyond the live moment. Once printed, displayed, or recorded, the texts continue to function as independent performatives – traces that invite renewed engagement. In this sense, they share the status of her photographs: not documentation of performance, but continuations or extensions of it. They carry memory forward, allowing ancestral and autobiographical gestures to circulate across time, medium, and environment.

Through the interplay of spoken word, poetic fabulation, and embodied action, Maskava constructs a performative ecology of memory.⁸⁴ Her texts create the conceptual and emotional scaffolding through which autobiographical, ancestral, and interspecies relations are enacted. Fabulation becomes not only a narrative device but a ritual technology, ultimately reconfiguring kinship as a field of imaginative, affective, and ecological possibility.

81 Also see: Kristberga, Laine (2023). Participatory Arts: Cases of Collaborative Authorship in Latvian Art and the Culture Environment of the 1970s–80s. *Letonica*, No. 48, pp. 116–141.

82 The author's interview with Anna Maskava on 10.05.2024.

83 For example, during *Ancestral Body*, Maskava approached audience members individually and invited them to introduce themselves by naming their mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and other matrilineal ancestors. This intimate gesture positioned spectators within an expanded kinship network and reinforced the relational blurring between performer and audience.

84 The phrase “performative ecology of memory” draws on Astrid Erll's conception of cultural memory as a dynamic “media ecology”, in which narratives, images, embodied practices, and material forms interact across time and space to generate and sustain remembrance. In: Erll, Astrid (2011). *Memory in Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Synthesis and Conclusion: Three Modalities of Kinship-Making

Across the works examined in this study, Anna Maskava develops a distinctive artistic grammar in which kinship emerges as an embodied, relational, and interspecies practice. By bringing together autobiography, matrilineal memory, and ecological attunement, her performances articulate what may be called a *three-modal ecology of kinship* – a framework that challenges human-centered narratives and reimagines belonging as an ongoing process of ritual, imagination, and interdependence. This concluding section synthesizes these modalities, showing how they collectively reconfigure the boundaries of subjecthood, inheritance, and ecological relation.

Maskava's autobiographical works – *1997* and *Milk and Vodka* – demonstrate how childhood and adolescence can be revisited as ritualized spaces of embodied reconstruction. These performances show autobiography functioning as a dynamic process shaped by humor, shame, vulnerability, and social conditions. Following Heddon, Maskava's "constructed I" emerges not through confession but through sensory reactivation, atmospheric storytelling, and audience participation. Private memory becomes a shared affective field, revealing how subjectivity is shaped through relational forces – family, culture, and environment. Autobiography thus becomes a modality of kinship that binds the performer and spectators through collective remembering and embodied empathy.

The genealogical works – *Expelled from the Kin* and *Ancestral Body* – extend the autobiographical into ancestral and intergenerational registers. Drawing on Hirsch's postmemory, Maskava activates inherited stories through ritual gesture, poetic text, and sensory invocation rather than archival reconstruction. Here lineage is not a linear genealogy but a set of affective, embodied, and ecological relations transmitted across generations. Fabulation becomes a crucial method: through Hartman's critical fabulation and Haraway's speculative fabulation, Maskava reimagines matrilineal histories marked by silence, trauma, or fragmentarity. These works frame the ancestral body as a relational node where humans, animals, substances, and landscapes converge within a fluid, interspecies cosmology.

The works *Animacy*, *Bare Life*, and *Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past* push kinship beyond the human altogether. Snails, chaga, soil, stones, humidity, and atmospheric conditions become co-performers whose agencies shape the rhythm and ontology of the work. Maskava stages vulnerability as a method of ecological attunement: the slow trajectories of snails across skin, the warmth and scent of boiling chaga, or the bodily drag of a 65-kilogram concrete block enact forms of relation grounded in care, cohabitation, friction, and endurance. Through Haraway's "becoming-with," Braidotti's *zoe-geo-techno* convergence, and more-than-human geography, Maskava

redefines kinship as a multinatural ecology, distributed across organisms, materials, and temporalities. These works demonstrate that memory and meaning circulate across fungi, animals, substances, and landscapes, extending far beyond the human body.

When viewed together, these three modalities reveal a broader conceptual project: Maskava reimagine kinship as a ritual ecology of relation, where autobiography, ancestry, and interspecies entanglement are interwoven. Her art demonstrates that kinship is not something defined by biological inheritance but performed, not given but made and remade through sensory experience, narrative reactivation, and ecological co-presence.

This framework offers significant contributions to contemporary Latvian art and to feminist and posthumanist aesthetics more broadly. Maskava's works resonate with the autobiographical and intergenerational tendencies prominent among Latvian women artists, yet they extend these concerns into ecological and posthuman territories. Her art challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal genealogies, proposing instead a model of belonging grounded in vulnerability, relational creativity, and interspecies ethics. Maskava's practice demonstrates that feminist concerns – sexuality, reproductive autonomy, marginalization, and female genealogies – actively generate more-than-human ethics. Her posthuman kinship emerges from feminist memory work.

In an era marked by ecological crisis, social fragmentation, and persistent historical trauma, Maskava's rituals of kinship propose a powerful alternative: a vision of continuity shaped through ritualized care, creative co-presence, and interspecies world-building, extending beyond biological descent and inherited stories. Her practice suggests that to live, remember, and relate differently requires expanding the horizons of kinship itself – beyond the human, beyond the family archive, and into the wider ecologies we inhabit and co-create.

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LAINE KRISTBERGA

Radniecības rituāli: senči, atmiņa un vairāk-nekā-cilvēka attiecības Annas Maskavas mākslas darbos

Kopsavilkums

Raksts analizē Latvijas mākslinieces Annas Maskavas (dz. 1990) radošo darbību, integrējot autobiogrāfiskos, ģenealoģiskos un starpsugu radniecības aspektus. Balstoties autobiogrāfijas, atmiņas un rituāla studijās, kā arī posthumānisma teorijā, pētījums aplūko, kā Maskava transformē personisko pieredzi, paaudžu mantojumu un attiecības performatīvos radniecības rituālos. Analizējot tādus darbus kā *1997*, *Milk and Vodka*, *Expelled from the Kin*, *Ancestral Body*, *Animacy*, *Bare Life* un *Ancestor II / 65 kg of the Past*, autore atklāj, kā radniecības jēdziens izgaismojas kā dinamisks, attiecībās balstīts atmiņas tīklojums. Maskavas autobiogrāfiskajos darbos figurē atmiņas par bērnību un pusaudža gadiem, dzimtas vēstures darbos paaudžu atmiņa tiek aktivizēta, izmantojot fabulācijas metodi, savukārt starpsugu performances ir balstītas līdzāspastāvēšanas modeļos, ko raksturo ievainojamība, vērīgums un materiālā aģence. Aplūkojot Maskavas radošo darbību plašākā laikmetīgās mākslas kontekstā Latvijā un apzinoties raksta autores kuratorisko un pedagoģisko iesaisti mākslinieces profesionālajā izaugsmē, raksts argumentē, ka Maskavas darbi pārrada radniecību kā iemiesotu, materiālu un vairāk-nekā-cilvēka attiecību praksi, atklājot ciešu saikni ar posthumānisma idejām.

Atslēgvārdi: autobiogrāfiskā performance, radniecība, starpsugu attiecības, posthumānisms, fabulācija, starpmedialitāte, Latvijas laikmetīgā māksla, feminisma estētika.

JANA KUKAINE, JĀNIS TAURENS

Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumi: feministiskās mākslas manifesti Latvijā

Kopsavilkums

Pēdējā desmitgadē Latvijas vizuālajā mākslā vērojams feministiskās intereses kāpinājums. Rakstā pievēršamies mākslinieces Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumu sērijai no grupas izstādes “Pretrunu pilns zīmējums ar gaišredzības iezīmēm”, kas 2023. gadā norisinājās Valmieras pilsētvidē. Īpaši izceļam trīs Pičukānes zīmējumus, kuros saskatām feministiskās mākslas manifesta iezīmes. Rakstā pamatojam savu viedokli, vispirms sniedzot īsu ieskatu manifestu tradīcijā avangarda kultūras kontekstā, tad aplūkojot feministiskās mākslas manifestus kā līdzīgu, tomēr atšķirīgu kultūras parādību. Raksta otrajā daļā izceļam Pičukānes zīmējumu feministiskās intervences, mākslas aktīvisma, definētās politiskās programmas un utopiskās ievirzes aspektus, kas veido to manifestējošo raksturu. Pievēršamies arī iespējamajiem iebildumiem par šāda manifesta “novēlotību” un tajā iekļauto bināro dihotomiju, kā arī cerīgajam pesimismam kā šo darbu afektīvajam horizontam.

Atslēgvārdi: manifesti, laikmetīgā māksla, feministiskā intervence, mākslas vēsture, cerīgais pesimisms.

Ievads

Mākslas manifesti to klasiskajā nozīmē vēsturiski saistīti ar modernitāti un inovatīvām kultūras formām, kas definē avangardu. 2021. gadā Latvijā izdevniecības “Neputns” paspārnē iznākusi apjomīga antoloģija “Manifests. No futūrisma līdz mūsdienām”, kas apkopo 20. un 21. gadsimta spilgtākos manifestus, savukārt grāmatas ievadā tās sastādītājs Artis Ostups iezīmē arī pretrunas, kas mūsdienās nosaka manifestu uztveri. No vienas puses, pastāv uzskats, ka manifesti ir novecojis medijs, “kura agresīvajai

retorikai ir maz kopīga ar šodienas skumjām un šaubām¹, no otras puses, manifesta formas potenciāls vēl nav izsmelts.

Divas būtiskas manifestu iezīmes ir pārlicība, ka māksla spēj pārveidot pasauli, kā arī ilgas pēc mākslas saplūšanas ar dzīvi.² Šīs idejas ir īpaši nozīmīgas feministiskajā mākslā, kas ļauj apgalvot, ka šī māksla ir manifestējoša pēc savas būtības. Tā arī atradusi veidu, kā manifestiem raksturīgo utopisko ievirzi organiski sintezēt ar skumjām un šaubām, agresīvās retorikas vietā izmantojot atšķirīgus izteiksmes līdzekļus. Tie saistās ar feminisma kustībai piemītošo vispārējo kritisko attieksmi pret 20. gadsimta avangarda virzieniem. Feminisms bieži vien noraida to izmantotos paņēmienus, kritizējot gan politiskās pretošanās organizēšanas veidus, gan izmantotos tēlveides principus.³ Tātad feministiskā māksla, lai arī daļēji pārklājas ar avangarda manifestu kultūru, tomēr veido tai spēcīgu opozīciju jeb pretstraumi. Tas nozīmē, ka feministiskie manifesti gan ierakstās avangarda mākslā jeb ir līdzīgi tai, gan pārsniedz avangarda mākslu jeb atšķiras no tās un ar to saistīto diskursu iezīmētās laika līnijas, vērtību skalas un ģeogrāfijas.

Šajā “līdzīgs, bet atšķirīgs” nojēgumā paveras iespēja pievērsties arī feministiskajai mākslai Latvijā. Lai arī pēdējo desmit gadu laikā Latvijas kultūrā vērojams feministiskās intereses kāpinājums, kas izpaužas arī vizuālajā mākslā, šajā rakstā vēlamies izcelt Ingrīdas Pičukānes darbus kā īpaši nozīmīgus šīs mākslas politiskās programmas un utopiskās ievirzes definēšanā. Raksta sākumā sniegsim īsu ieskatu manifestu tradīcijā, tad pievērsīsimies feministiskās mākslas manifestiem un to attiecībām ar avangarda kustībām. Raksta otrajā daļā aplūkosim Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumu sēriju, kas tapusi 2024. gadā, un pamatosim, kā tajā izpaužas feministiskās mākslas manifesta iezīmes. Šāda noteiktu vizuālās mākslas darbu kā manifestu interpretācija ļauj uzsvērt Pičukānes darbu politiski programmatisko lomu un precīzāk iezīmēt to vietu Latvijas feministiskās mākslas kopainā.

Rakstā izmantosim primāro un sekundāro avotu analīzi, kā arī sekosim feministiskās estētikas un filozofijas teorētiskajām vadlīnijām. Analizējot manifestus kā sazarotu kultūras parādību, izmantosim arī ir Ludviga Vitgenšteina (*Ludwig Wittgenstein*) ģimenes līdzību jēdzienu, kas plašāk pazīstams no viņa piezīmju pēcnāves publikācijas grāmatā “Filosofiskie pētījumi” (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 1953). 20. un 21. gadsimtā humanitārajās un sociālajās zinātnēs šis domāšanas instruments tiek izmantots, lai interpretētu parādības, kas nepakļaujas tradicionāliem klasifikācijas mehānismiem. Ģimenes līdzību jēdziens ir piemērots manifestiem, jo ļauj konstatēt, ka nav vienas īpašības, kas piemistu tiem visiem. Arī pats nosaukums “manifests” vai tā

1 Ostups, Artis (2021). Ievads. Nepacietīgā poētika. No: Ostups, Artis (sast.). *Manifests. No futūrisma līdz mūsdienām*. Rīga: Neputns, 8. lpp.

2 Turpat, 9.-10. lpp.

3 Deepwell, Katy (2022). Negotiations: Feminist Art Manifestos. In: Deepwell, Katy (Ed.). *50 Feminist Art Manifestos*. London: KT Press, p. iv.

autoru iecere var nebūt noteicoša, kā to rāda antoloģijas, kurās pēc sastādītāju izvēles iekļauti visdažādākie darbi. Pārfrāzējot Vitgenšteina sniegto valodas raksturojumu un vārdu “valoda” nomainot ar “manifests”, varam apgalvot:

Tā vietā, lai uzrādītu to, kas kopīgs visam, ko saucam par manifestu, mēs sakām [Vitgenšteinam ir pirmās personas vietniekvārds – *J. K.* un *J. T.*], ka nav tādas vienas lietas, kas būtu kopīga šīm parādībām, kuras dēļ tām piemērojams viens vārds, – bet gan ka tās ir savā starpā radniecīgas daudzos dažādos veidos. Un šīs radniecības vai šo radniecību dēļ mēs tās visas saucam par “manifestu”.⁴

Līdz ar to šajā rakstā citētie apgalvojumi par manifestu īpašībām, kā arī mūsu teiktais par feminisma manifestiem vispār un Ingrīdas Pičukānes mākslu konkrēti jāsaprot kā ģimenes līdzību apstiprinājums. Mūsu motivāciju rakstīt par Pičukānes darbiem uzsver vēl viens Vitgenšteina ģimenes līdzību raksturojums: “Un mēs paplašinām savu jēdzienu par manifestu [“skaitli” Vitgenšteinam – *J. K.* un *J. T.*] gluži tāpat kā, vērpjot pavedienu, savijam šķiedru ar šķiedru. Un pavediena stiprums nav atkarīgs no tā, ka viena šķiedra stieptos visā tā garumā, bet gan no tā, ka daudzas šķiedras cita ar citu pārklājas.”⁵ Savijuma un šķiedru metafora ilustrē manifestu dažādību, bet arī norāda uz feministiskās mākslas iezīmēm un kontinuitāti, piesakot tādus feminisma filozofijā un mākslas teorijā svarīgu aspektus kā solidaritāte, daudz balsība un kopiena.

Mākslas manifesti: rēcošs automobilis un Samotrākes Nīke

Kultūras un tikumu vēsturē nav daudz notikumu, kuriem ir precīzs datējums. Tā 1494. gadā Francijas karalis Šarls VIII Itālijā ierodas ar lielgabaliem, kas uzlikti uz spēcīgu zirgu vilktām lafetēm un šauj čuguna lodes, spējīgas sagraut jebkuras pilsētas mūrus. Kā raksta vēsturnieks Fernāns Brodēls (*Fernand Braudel*), tad trīs gadu desmitus nocietinātu pilsētu mūri bruka kā teātra dekorācijas.⁶ Ar līdzīgu precizitāti mākslas manifestu plejādī iesāk – vismaz vairākās manifestiem veltītās antoloģijās – Filipo Tommāzo Marineti (*Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*) “Futūrisma manifests”, kas itaļu

4 Pirmās daļas 65. paragrāfs. No: Vitgenšteins, Ludvigs (1997). *Filosofiskie pētījumi*. Rīga: Minerva, 38.–39. lpp.

5 I daļa, 67. §§. No: Vitgenšteins, Ludvigs (1997). *Filosofiskie pētījumi*, 39. lpp.

6 Braudel, Fernand (1985). *Civilization and the Capitalism: 15th–18th Century*. Vol. I. *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*. Translation from the French. Revised by Siân Reynolds. London: William Collins Sons & Co., p. 388.

valodā atklātībā nāk 1909. gadā, bet slavu iegūst no publikācijas franču avīzē *Le Figaro* tajā pašā gadā.⁷ Nelielais Marineti teksts ar politiskas cīņas kaismi – ne velti kā modernisma manifestu paraugs, pat pirmforma (*ur-manifesto*) tiek minēts Kārļa Marksa (*Karl Marx*) un Frīdriha Engelsa (*Friedrich Engels*) “Komunistiskās partijas manifests” (1948)⁸ – izvirzīja vecās kultūras noliegumu, sajūsmu par tehnisko civilizāciju un kara glorifikāciju: “[..] rēcošs automobilis, kurš skrien pa priekšu ložmetēja kārtai, ir skaistāks par Samotrākes Niki.”⁹

Mākslas manifestiem var uzrādīt visdažādākās īpašības: “apzināta sabiedrības viedokļa manipulācija”, “tas ir savdabīgs un dūsmīgs, dīvains vai pilnīgi traks”, “tas pozicionē kādus *mēs*, pretstatot tos kādiem citiem *viņiem*”, “tas sevi un savu parodiju uztver nopietni”, “tā forma un funkcija bieži balstās uz kādu centrālu tēlu, kas – līdzīgi vulkānam – satur kopā pārējo”, “tas neprasa citu tekstu kā vien pats sevi”.¹⁰ Tomēr manifesta paradigmu, par kādu var uzskatīt Marineti publikāciju, vispirms jau raksturo teatrālisms un apsēstība ar progresu, un katram no jēdzieniem ir arī savs turpinājums 20. un 21. gadsimta mākslas vēsturē.

Teatrālisms, kas lielā mērā piemita jau futūristu vakariem jeb *serata*, kļuva par amerikāņu formālisma uzbrukumu mērķi, it īpaši Maikla Frīda (*Michael Fried*) rakstā “Māksla un priekšmetiskums” (1967), kas vērsās pret jauno 60. gadu mākslu. Bet 21. gadsimtā Klēras Bišopas (*Claire Bishop*) darbā “Mākslīgās elles” (2012) tas jau ir pamats atšķirīgai laikmetīgās mākslas ģenealoģijai, kas balstīta nevis Marsela Dišāna (*Marcel Duchamp*) redīmeidos, bet ar teatrāliem eksperimentiem saistītās norisēs.¹¹ Savukārt progresa jēdziens izvērties formas attīstības izcelšanā, saturu un izteiksmi padarot par nenozīmīgiem “īstai mākslai” jeb, kā to 80. gadu feminisma

7 Teksta pilns nosaukums ir “Futūrisma dibināšana un manifests”, sk. Danchev, Alex (Ed.) (2011). *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*. London: Penguin Books; Ostups, Artis (sast.) (2021).

Manifests. No futūrisma līdz mūsdienām. Lai arī Mērija Anna Kosa savu manifestu antoloģiju sāk ar simbolistu tekstiem (sastādītāji svarīgi ir “ismi”), proti, Džeimsa Ebota Maknīla Vistlera (*James Abbott McNeill Whistler*) “Pulksten desmitos”, tomēr arī viņa Marineti publikāciju dēvē par “sākotnējo gadījumu” (*ur-case*). Caws, Mary Ann (2001). *The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness*. In: Caws, Mary Ann (Ed.). *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, pp. xxv.

8 Danchev, Alex (2011a). Introduction: Manifesto, Manifestoed, Manifestoing. In: Danchev, Alex (Ed.). *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, pp. xx.

9 Marineti, Filippo Tommāzo (2021). Futūrisma dibināšana un manifests. No: Ostups, Artis (sast.). *Manifests. No futūrisma līdz mūsdienām*, 22. lpp.

10 Caws, Mary Ann (2001). *The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness*, pp. xix-xxv. Šeit un turpmāk, ja nav norādīts citādi, citātu tulkojums mūsu – J. K. un J. T.

11 Taurens, Jānis (2020). No objekta uz notikumu un darbību: politiskā teātra piemērs. *Acta Academiae Artium III*. Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija, 227. lpp. Klēra Bišopa raksta: “[..] mākslinieks netiek uztverts kā atsevišķu priekšmetu individuāls radītājs, bet kā sadarbības un situāciju radītājs; mākslas darbs iepriekš definēts kā galīgs, pārvietojams, pārdodams produkts tiek pārdefinēts par ilgtermiņa vai beztermiņa projektu ar nekonkretizētu sākumu un beigām; savukārt auditorija, kas iepriekš tika definēta kā “skatītāji” tagad ir pārpozicionēti kā līdzradītāji vai dalībnieki.” Bišopa, Klēra. *Mākslīgās elles. Līdzdalības māksla un skatītāju pieredzes politika*. Ievads. No: *Garamantas.lv. Latviešu folkloras krātuves digitālais arhīvs*. Pieejams: <https://garamantas.lv/lv/work/1888514/Maksligas-elles-Lidzdalibas-maksla-un-skatitaju-pieredzes-politika-ievads> [28.01.2025.]. Tulkojumā nav saglabāts oriģināla terminu slīpraksts, sk. Bishop, Claire (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London; New York: Verso, p. 2.

mākslas kontekstā trāpīgi raksturojusi mākslas vēsturniece Grizelda Polloka (*Griselda Pollock*): “[...] topošie feminisma darbi bieži vien tika vienkāršoti nostādīti satura un izteiksmības pusē; šķiet, ka tiem nebija nekādu pienācīgu formālu iezīmju, tāpēc tos varēja viegli izslēgt no “mākslas” un, protams, arī no modernisma izpratnes par savu vēsturi.”¹² Šāds progressa jēdziens savienojas ar nelabojamu optimismu,¹³ kas gan 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē kļūst par “pašironisku žestu”, nespējot nopietni atkārtot modernisma utopiskos mērķus.¹⁴ Optimisms var būt arī nežēlīgs – kā apgalvo afektu teorētiķe Lorena Berlanta (*Lauren Berlant*), tas bieži vien balstās nosacījumā “saglabāt pieķeršanos kādam būtiski problemātiskam objektam”¹⁵. Šodienas situācijā, skatot optimisma un pesimisma jēdzienus kā orientētus uz nākotni, piemērotāks ir “cerīgā pesimisma” jēdziens. Teorētiķe Mara van der Lugta (*Mara van der Lugt*) to skaidro kā politisku un morālu pozīciju, kas pārvar nošķirumu starp aktīvismu un bēdām, cerību un izmisumu. Tās pamatā ir gan drosme un ilgas pēc labākas nākotnes, gan arī skaidrs un skaudrs situācijas vērtējums, kas palīdz sakopot spēkus tālākai rīcībai.¹⁶ Vai cerīgais pesimisms ir savienojams ar manifesta žanru, vai arī manifests ir sevi izsmēlis un palicis vien par apzīmējumu, ko lietot vēsturisku tekstu antoloģijās vai post-postmodernās spēlēs intertekstuālu atsauču tīklojumā? Un vai pats apzīmējums “manifests”, kurā skaidri nolasāms latīņu vārds *manus* (‘roka’), kas līdz ar visu ķermeni ir svarīgs un neatsvešināms mākslinieciskās prakses nosacījums, būtu attiecināms tikai uz tekstiem?

Feministiskās mākslas manifesti: “baudkāre ir to puķe”

Mākslas teorētiķe Ketija Dīpvēla (*Katy Deepwell*) ievadu feminisma manifestu antoloģijai iesāk ar jautājumu: “Kas ir manifests?” Un atbild: “Politiska programma, deklarācija, pārliecības pilnīgs apliecinājums. [...] manifesti vispirms jau deklarē, par un pret ko iestājas to autori, un aicina cilvēkus, kuri tos lasa, tiem pievienoties, tos saprast un dalīties ar tajos paustajām idejām.”¹⁷ Kā atzīst Dīpvēla, feminisma mākslas manifestiem, pētot sieviešu mākslinieču darbu kultūras sfērā, piemīt visas minētās iezīmes.¹⁸ Un tomēr manifestu antoloģijās, kuras ietver simt un vairāk tekstu, autoru

12 Pollock, Griselda (2013). *After-affects / After-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, p. 98.

13 Danchev, Alex (2011a). Introduction: Manifesto, Manifestoed, Manifestoing, p. xviii.

14 Ostups, Artis. (2021). Ievads. Nepacietīgā poētika, 15. lpp.

15 Berlant, Lauren (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 24.

16 Lugt, Mara van der (2025). *Hopeful Pessimism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 10–11.

17 Deepwell, Katy (2022). Negotiations: Feminist Art Manifestos, p. i.

18 Turpat.

sieviešu ir maz – tikai aptuveni desmitā daļa no kopējā skaita. Tas nav skaidrojams ar materiāla trūkumu – Dīpvelas sastādītajā krājumā iekļauti piecdesmit manifesti un minēti vēl trīsdesmit divi, kas tajā nav iekļuvuši. Uz spriedzi, kas veidojas starp feminismu un mākslas avangarda kustībām, norāda Marineti agresīvie, karu slavinošie un pret “augsto” kultūru vērstie saukļi, kas ietver arī “nicinājumu pret sievietēm” un vēlmi “cīnīties pret [...] feminismu un visām oportunistu un utilitāristu glēvulībām”.¹⁹ Tomēr futūrisma daudzo manifestu klāstā ir arī franču mākslinieces un rakstnieces Valentīnas de Senpuānas (*Valentine de Saint-Point*) “Sievietes futūristes manifests” (*Manifeste de la femme futuriste*, 1912) un “Futūrisma baudkāres manifests” (*Manifeste futuriste de la luxure*, 1913). Šī šķietamā pretruna prasa tuvāku aplūkojumu.

Līdzīgi kā Marineti teksts lielā mērā nosaka nākamo manifestu ievirzi un stilistiskās īpatnības, tā abi minētie Senpuānas darbi var būt pamats feminisma manifestu raksturojumam. Jāpiekrīt, ka viņa raksta, iebilstot Marineti un vērstoties pret dalījumu sievietēs un vīriešos (netieši arī pret no tā izrietošo sievietes nicinājumu), taču reizē vārdos noliedz feminismu un, turpinot futūrisma bellicistiskās pasāžas, pieprasa sievietēm vīrišķību, nežēlību un cildeno netaisnību.²⁰ Otrajā manifestā Senpuāna futūrisma mākslas un kara vīrišķo pasauli papildina ar baudu: “Māksla un karš ir juteklības lielās manifestācijas; baudkāre ir to puķe.”²¹ Šīs pretrunas var uzlūkot arī citādi – kā lineāras virzības uz arvien lielāku progresu noliegumu. Ja sievietēm arī piedien vīrišķie atribūti – karš, nežēlība vai netaisnība –, tas nozīmē, ka tiek apvērsta ierastā (patriarhālā) kārtība.²² Lai to paveiktu, jāizmanto šķietami vienkārša feminisma stratēģija – jāmaina vietām dzimuma lomas, ko Senpuānas apgalvojumi īsteno netiešā veidā.

Lai arī daudzi feminisma manifesti uzrāda kopīgas iezīmes jeb ģimenes līdzības – skaidri izteiktu “*status quo*, to, kā domājam par patriarhātu/kapitālismu/koloniālismu, un šobrīd sabiedrībā noteikto vīrieša un sievietes lomu kritiku”²³ –, tomēr reizē katrs manifests ir īpašs, arī tā rašanās laika, pieejas, satura poētikas vai ideju izteiksmes nozīmē²⁴. Tas var būt radies arī kā mākslas notikuma rezultāts – un šeit Senpuāna atkal iezīmē noteiktas genealoģijas sākumu, jo viscerāls uzsvars uz juteklību un baudu tekstā ir tieši saistīts ar viņas gaistošajām multimediālajām dejas performancēm, kas, piemēram, 1913. gada 20. decembra izrādē Parīzes Elizejas lauku

19 Marineti, Filipo Tommāzo (2021). Futūrisma dibināšana un manifests, 22. lpp.

20 Senpuāna, Valentīna de (2021a). Sievietes-futūristes manifests. No: Ostups, Artis (sast.). *Manifests. No futūrisma līdz mūsdienām*, 43.–44. lpp.

21 Senpuāna, Valentīna de (2021b). Futūrisma baudkāres manifests. No: Ostups, Artis (sast.). *Manifests. No futūrisma līdz mūsdienām*, 59. lpp.

22 Tas var paskaidrot, kāpēc, neskatoties uz atklāti paziņoto feminisma noliegumu, Ketija Dīpvela iekļauj šos Senpuānas tekstus pašas sastādītās antoloģijas feminisma mākslas manifestu sarakstā, kas “nav ietverti šajā grāmatā”. Deepwell, Katy (2022). *Negotiations. Feminist Art Manifestos*, p. xi.

23 Turpat, p. iii.

24 Turpat, pp. ii, iii.

teātrī ietvēra Senpuānas dzeju – mīlas, kara un atmosfēras poēmas –, ko pavadīja Erika Satī (*Erik Satie*) un Kloda Debisī (*Claude Debussy*) mūzika, smaržas un gaismas projekcijas.²⁵ Reizē manifests pats arī var būt mākslas darbs, vispirms jau tā grafiskajā izteiksmē, ko apliecina ievērojamā grafisko simbolu, šriftu, to izmēru un salikumu dažādība, kuru sniedz Dīpvelas sastādītā antoloģija. Kā liecina 20. gadsimta 60. un 70. gadu konceptuālās mākslas vēsture, atšķirība starp tekstu un vizuālās mākslas darbu ir plūstoša, grūti nosakāma un var būt pat pretēja mākslinieka nodomam vai paša teksta paziņojumam.²⁶ Līdz ar to par vēl vienu feminisma mākslas manifesta īpašību var uzskatīt tā māksliniecisko raksturu, kas būtu plašāks jēdziens par radošu pieeju teksta veidošanai.

Vēl viena manifestu iezīme ir mākslinieciskās izteiksmes deklaratīvā, bieži pat saukļiem tuvā forma. Jau pirmais darbs, ko feminisma mākslas manifestu antoloģijā ievieto Ketija Dīpvela, – Ivonnas Reineres (*Yvonne Rainer*) “Nē manifest” (1965) – sastāv tikai no divdesmit trim noliegumiem: “nē izrādei, nē virtuozitātei, [..]”.²⁷ Lai arī Reineres noliegumi izkārtoti stabiņā bez pieturzīmēm un visi rakstīti ar mazajiem burtiem, tajos skaidri saklausāma pavēles forma un tai piedienīgā izsaukuma zīme. Taču (verbālā) valoda nav tikai noteikta lingvistiska forma, bet arī darbība²⁸, līdzīgi kā vizuālajai mākslai nav tikai reprezentējošā funkcija – tai piemīt arī sociāls un politisks spēks jeb ietekme. No šāda viedokļa raugoties, teksts, zīmējums un teksts, vai tikai zīmējums bez skaidri (lingvistiski) izteikta deklarācijas, lozunga vai politiska saukļa rakstura veic to pašu sabiedrības kritiski transformējošo darbu.

Ingrīda Pičukāne: “Māksliniece, modelis un olīva”

Ingrīda Pičukāne ir viena no redzamākajām māksliniecēm Latvijā, kuras darbus iezīmē feministiska intonācija un ievirze. Kā feministiskās mākslas manifestu esam izvēlējušies viņas 2024. gadā tapušos zīmējumus. Darbu radīšanas gads var radīt priekšstatu par asinhronitāti: mākslas manifesti ierasti piesaka jaunu domāšanas veidu – ko uz

25 Goldberg, RoseLee (1999). *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. Revised and enlarged edition. London: Thames and Hudson, pp. 17-18; Danchev, Alex (2011). [Introduction to] M7. Valentine de Saint-Point. In: Danchev, Alex (Ed.) (2011). *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, p. 29.

26 Neskatoties uz Sola Levita (*Sol LeWitt*) “Teikumu par konceptuālo mākslu” noslēdzošo, 35. apgalvojumu: “Šie teikumi ir komentāri par mākslu, bet tie nav māksla”, Pīters Osborns (*Peter Osborne*) tomēr argumentē, ka “šie teikumi ir komentāri par mākslu, un ir arī māksla [oriģināla izcēlums – J. K. un J. T.]”. Levits, Sols (2010). Teikumi par konceptuālo mākslu. No: *Paragrāfi par konceptuālo mākslu. Teikumi par konceptuālo mākslu*. Rīga: kim?, 12. lpp.; Osborne, Peter (2013). *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London; New York: Verso, p. 69.

27 Rainer, Yvonne (2022). No Manifesto (1965). In: Deepwell, Katy (Ed.). *50 Feminist Art Manifestos*, p. 1.

28 Tā ir vēl viena atziņa, ko sniedz ikdienas valodfilozofija, it īpaši Džona Langšova Ostina (*John Langshaw Austin*) lekciju pēcnāves publikācija 1962. gadā – sk.: Ostins, Džons Langšovs (2011). *Kā ar vārdiem darīt lietas*. Rīga: Liepnieks un Rītups. Ostina runas darbību teorija bijusi nozīmīga vizuālās mākslas, īpaši performanču, attīstības vēsturē un mēģinājumos konceptualizēt mākslas sociālo un politisko iedarbību.

feminismu Latvijas mākslā attiecināt nevar. Feministiskās mākslas pavedieni pēdējo desmit gadu laikā Latvijā kļuvuši arvien pamanāmāki un izvērstāki. Tie ieteicas arī pagātnē, aptverot pirmās atjaunotās neatkarības desmitgades, retrospektīvi apliecinot feministiskās intereses klātbūtni un feministisku lasījumu iespējas dažādu periodu mākslas praksēs.²⁹

Tomēr tieši Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumi pilda klasisko mākslas manifesta funkciju, sintezējot vairākas manifestu iezīmes. Pirmkārt, tajos saskatāma skaidra vīzija – māksliniece deklarē, par un pret ko viņa iestājas. Otrkārt, šie darbi dažādu apstākļu sakritības dēļ ieguva lielu publisku redzamību, kas tiem piešķīra sabiedrību satricinošo un konfrontējošo funkciju, kura ir manifestu neatņemama daļa. Visbeidzot, feministiskajā mākslā – it īpaši, ja raugāties no Centrālās un Austrumeiropas perspektīvas, – ierasts noraidīt ideju par temporāli lineāru virzību uz arvien lielāku progresu. Pēdējās desmitgadēs tiek pamatots, kāpēc feministiskās mākslas historiogrāfijā nepieciešama brīvāka pieeja, kas vienvirziena kustības un mērķtiecīgas attīstības vietā paredz klaiņošanu, izplūšanu, riņķošanu, ciklisku atkārtošanos, pārrāvumus u. tml. Šādas ievirzes pamatā ir tās atvērtība daudzveidīgiem feminismiem, kas rodas dažādās pasaules malās un bieži vien ir tikai attāli saistīti ar lielajiem feminisma centriem.³⁰ Tātad atkāpšanās no lineāras laika izpratnes feminisma mākslā novērš bažas par Pičukānes manifesta iespējamo novēlotību – tā vietā tiek uzsverts, ka viņas māksla rodas īstajā vietā un laikā, jutīgi reaģējot uz apkārt notiekošo, tātad ir organiski ieausta laikmeta plūdumā un ir saistīta ar sociālām aktualitātēm.

Šeit izceltie Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumi ir daļa no plašākas sērijas, kas 2023. gada rudenī bija skatāma izstādē “Pretrunu pilns zīmējums ar gaišredzības iezīmēm” Valmieras pilsētvidē.³¹ Izstāde bija iecerēta kā astoņu mākslinieku dialogs ar Latvijas karikatūras klasiķi Māri Bišofu. Mākslinieka rokrakstu iezīmē lakonisms, precizitāte, ironija un paradoksi, viņam veltītas vairākas publikācijas, tostarp 2021. gadā izdevniecības “Valters Dakša” paspārnē iznācis apjomīgākais viņa darbu apkopojums “444 Māra Bišofa ideju ilustrācijas”, kura ievadā mākslas kritiķe Ieva Lejasmeijere izceļ Bišofa zīmējumu stāstniecisko aspektu un aicina tos uztvert kā dzeju.³² Pateicoties starptautiskai redzamībai un ilgstošajam darbam Latvijas medijos, Bišofa vārds ir ierakstīts Latvijas ilustrācijas un karikatūras vēsturē, tomēr līdz šim viņa daiļrade lielākoties aplūkota bez kritiskas iztaujāšanas.

29 Feministisko skatījumu fiksēšana dažādās desmitgadēs, piemēram: Puķīte, Šelda; Grigors, Indreks (sast.) (2020). *Sudrabmeitenes. Fotografijas retušētā vēsture*: [katalogs]. Tartu, Rīga: Tartu Kunstimuseum, Blind Carbon Copy; Jansone, Rasa (2024). *Starp Jaunavu Mariju un Mēdeju. Mātbūšanas reprezentācija Latvijas laikmetīgajā mākslā*. Profesionālās doktora studiju programmas Mākslās teorētiskais pētījums; Rīga: LMA; Kukaine, Jana (2024). *Viscerālā estētika: afekti un feministiskā māksla postsociālismā*. Rīga: LU LFMI, RSU.

30 Kukaine, Jana (2023a). Intimacy and Darkness: Feminist Sensibility in (Post)socialist Art. *Arts*, 12 (1). Available: <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12010024> [15.04.2025.].

31 Izstādi organizēja Latvijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centrs, kuratores: Solvita Krese un Māra Žeikare.

32 Lejasmeijere, Ieva (2021). [Ievadteksts]. No: Bišofs, Māris. *444 Māra Bišofa ideju ilustrācijas*. Saldus: Valters Dakša, [b. p.].

Izstādē “Pretrunu pilns zīmējums ar gaišredzības iezīmēm” Pičukāne bija viena no uzaicinātajām māksliniecēm, kura savu ieguldījumu veidoja sadarbībā ar Valmieras Dizaina un mākslas vidusskolas audzēkņiem. Viņu kopdarbs “Māksliniece, modelis un olīva” bija skatāms mākslas galerijā “Ledus pagrabs”. Sadarbības pamatā bija pievēršanās ačgārnības principam – feministiskajā mākslā izplatītai stratēģijai, kas dekonstruē ikoniskus attēlus un situācijas, apvēršot vietām dzimumu lomas. Šo metodi māksliniece kopā ar skolas audzēkņiem izmantoja, lai izgaismotu seksisma loģiku un dzimtes stereotipus, kas ir daudzu Bišofa karikatūru pamatā. Līdz ar to Pičukānes dalībai izstādē piemīt arī pedagoģisks aspekts – viņas izmantotie darba instrumenti veicina kritisku attieksmi pret mākslu un izceļ dzimtes aspektu.

“Ledus pagrabā” un standos Valmieras pilsētvidē – sērijā “Dižgares, meistas un ģēnijas” – bija izstādīti vairāki Pičukānes zīmējumi, tomēr šajā rakstā kā nozīmīgākos izceļam trīs. Iesaistoties dialogā ar konkrētiem Māra Bišofa zīmējumiem, tie veido viņas feministiskā manifesta idejisko rāmi. Šie trīs zīmējumi ir “Šangrilā”, “Dižgares” un “Laba māksliniece”, kas visi tapuši 2023. gadā (1.–3. att.). To konceptuālie pāriņieki ir Bišofa *Shangrillā*, “Dižgari”³³ un “Labs mākslinieks” (2023). Diemžēl šos zīmējumus rakstā iekļaut nevaram, jo mākslinieks nav devis atļauju tos publicēt.³⁴ Līdzīgu atteikumu saņēma arī Pičukāne – sākotnēji bija plānots “Ledus pagrabā” izstādīt abu autoru darbus kopā, taču pēdējā brīdī Bišofs no šīs ieceres atteicās, un viņa zīmējumi izstādē bija pieejami tikai kā QR kodi.³⁵ Atteikšanās sadarbības, kopīgo plānu atcelšana pēdējā brīdī un atkāpšanās no iepriekšējām norunām ir ne tikai feministiskajai, bet arī mākslinieku profesionālajai solidaritātei pretējas darbības – tās, atsaucoties uz Vitgenšteina metaforu, nevis stiprina, bet ārdā kopīgo pavedienu jeb, kā varam novērot šajā gadījumā, tiecas atšķelt noteiktas šķiedras.

Lai arī laikmetīgās mākslas darbi nereti top kā reakcija vai komentārs par kādu notikumu, repliku vai personību, šis ir pirmais mums zināmais gadījums Latvijā, kad saikne tiek iezīmēta tik tiešā un skaidrā veidā, turklāt vienas izstādes ietvaros, kas paredz teju viscerālu konfrontāciju, kas vēlāk turpinājās gan ziņu sižetos, gan sociālajos tīklos.³⁶ Uz ziņu sižetā paustajiem mākslinieces komentāriem par saviem darbiem un to tapšanas motīviem tika saņemta nesamērīga komentāru lavīna, kas pielīdzināma naida runai. Spriežot pēc ierakstiem Bišofa privātajā feisbuka lapā, autors bija neapmierināts ar savu darbu interpretāciju, kā arī izteica negatīvus vērtējumus

33 Kā lielākā daļa Bišofa darbu viņa zīmējumu grāmatās arī šie divi ir bez datējuma.

34 Janas Kukaines e-pasta sarakste ar Māri Bišofu 2025. gada 14. februārī. *Shangrillā* un “Labs mākslinieks” attēlus var aplūkot recenzijā par Valmieras izstādi: Kukaine, Jana (2023b). Brokastis zaļumos ar odziņu. *Arterritory*, 24.10. Pieejams: https://arterritory.com/lv/vizuala_maksla/recenzijas/26930-brokastis_zalumos_ar_odzinu [16.02.2025.].

35 No Janas Kukaines privātas sarunas ar Māru Žeikari izstādes atklāšanā.

36 Spriežot pēc ierakstiem Bišofa privātajā feisbuka lapā, autors bija neapmierināts ar savu darbu interpretāciju, tostarp izteica vērtējumu par Pičukānes profesionalitāti. Tomēr šajā rakstā atturēsimies komentēt Bišofa reakcijas ētiskus un koleģiālos aspektus.



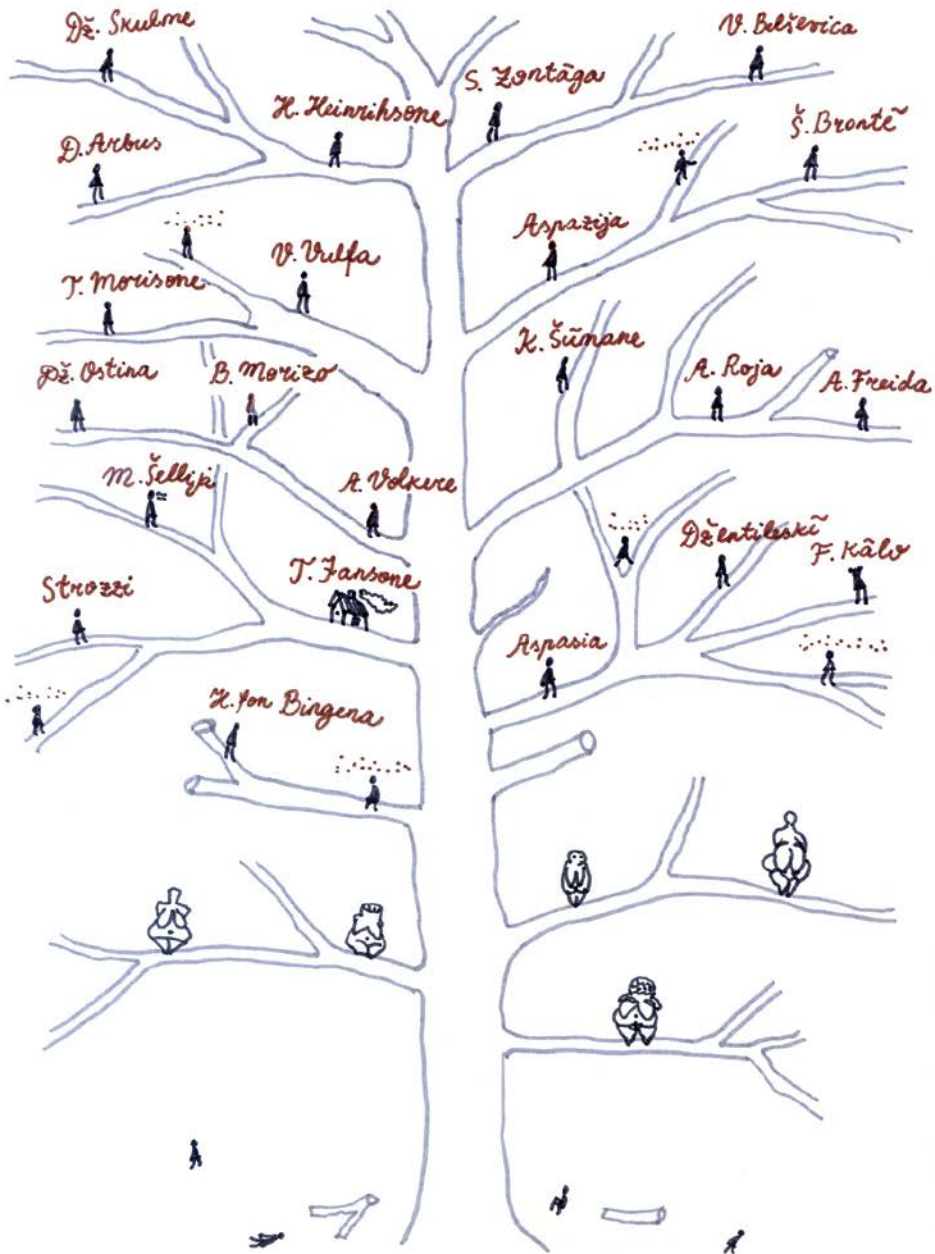
par Pičukānes profesionalitāti vispār, tādējādi uzbrūkot arī viņas personai. Lai arī atturēsimies iedziļināties māksliniecei raidīto apvainojumu straumē, jāatzīst, ka Bišofa reakcijas ētiskie un koleģiālie aspekti raisa pārdomas. Šis negatīvās publicitātes dēļ Pičukānes zīmējumi piesaistīja plašu sabiedrības uzmanību, tostarp polarizējošā veidā, rosinot dažādas atbildes reakcijas. Notikušais Pičukānes mākslas praksei piešķīra papildu vizuālā aktīvisma aspektu³⁷ – zīmējumi uzskatāmi pieteica pārrāvumu ierastajā domāšanas veidā, piedāvājot Latvijas sabiedrībai jaunu, lai arī Rietumu domas kontekstā jau apbētu pavērsienu.

Feministiskās manifestācijas

Zīmējumā “Šangrilā” (2024) Ingrīda Pičukāne ieskicē sievišķās subjektivitātes perspektīvu, to pretstatot Māra Bišofa zīmējumā iekodētajam maksulīnajam standartam. Abi zīmējumi ataino radošo procesu, uzsverot mākslas radīšanas psiholoģisko, pat psihoanalītisko dimensiju – mākslinieki mākslas darbā parāda pasauli, tajā ietverot savas intereses, vēlmju un baudas objektus, kā arī atsaucis uz ikdienas dzīvi, dzīvoto pieredzi. Ja Bišofa zīmējumā mākslinieks uzzīmē vīrieša portretu, tad Pičukānes darbā māksliniecei pretī veras sievietē. Saikni starp radītāju un radīto pastiprina acu kontakta līnija. Atšķirība tiek pieteikta arī zīmējuma krāsu paletē – Pičukānes zīmējumi ir krāsaināki, ar dominējošiem rozā un oranžiem toņiem, kas piešķir darbiem siltumu. Jāpiebilst, ka sievietē ar oranžiem matiem ir tēls, kas mākslinieces darbos parādās vairākkārt un ko var uzskatīt par viņas *alter ego*.

Līdzās portretam ierakstīti vairāki vārdi, kas konceptuāli uzskāņo zīmējuma intelektuālo ainavu. Blakus Bišofa zīmētajam vīrieša portretam lasāmi tādi vārdi kā *Ford, Coca, Pepsi, Goodyear, kli'to:ris, Shangrillā*. Bišofa iezīmētā utopija – uz to norāda angļu romānista Džeimsa Hiltona (*James Hilton*) izgudrotās mītiskās vietas *Shangri-La* nosaukums – ietver atsaucis uz automobiļiem, gāzētajiem dzērieniem un riepu ražotāju, kas ir saistītas ar amerikāņu patēriņcības kultūru, savukārt “*klitoris*” nolasāms kā heteroseksuālas intereses apliecinājums. Pičukānes versijā lasāmi vārdi *Mercedes, “Paketes”, “Ziedi”, “Klitors”, “Šangrilā*”. Uzskaitījumā vērojama gan ironija, gan plašāka interpretācija par sievietes mākslinieces dzīvi. Lai arī *Mercedes* veido analogijā balstītu atsauci uz mašīnu ražotāja zīmolu, tas reizē ir arī sieviešu vārds, kura izcelsme saistāma ar Dievmāti katoļu baznīcas tradīcijā. Paketes ir ierasts sieviešu ikdienas dzīves atribūts, bet, lai arī menstruāciju cikls ir sievietes veselības normāla sastāvdaļa, to arvien apņēm dažādi aizspriedumi un kauns. Latvijas mākslā atsaucis

37 Par vizuālo aktīvismu mūsdienās kā ideoloģisku konstrukciju drupināšanu sk.: Kukaine, Jana (2025). *My First Year Too: Obstetric Violence and Maternal Subjectivity*. In: Sliwinska, Basia (Ed.). *Transnational Visual Activism for Women's Reproductive Rights: My Body, My Choice*. New York; London: Routledge, pp. 49-62.



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uz mēnešreizēm ir ļoti retas, un to piesaukšana arvien, šķiet, liekas neērta. Ziedi ir klasisks sievišķības simbols, arī feministiskajā mākslā to forma bieži izmantota, lai veidotu asociācijas ar sievietes dzimumorgāniem. Līdz ar to klitora pieminēšana mākslas darbā lasāma kā atsauce uz sievišķo seksualitāti un baudu – tēmu, kas Rietumu kultūrā kopumā nav pietiekami redzama, jo priekšplānā tradicionāli izvirzīta fallocentriskā erotikas izpratne. Arī šajā ziņā Pičukānes agrākos gados tapušie darbi nodrošina tēmas kontinuitāti, piemēram, 2017. gadā Tartu mākslinieku mājā bija skatāms performatīvais sienas gleznojums “Jūtīga pļava”, kas attēlo masturbējošu sievieti.³⁸

Zīmējumā “Dižgares” redzam Rietumu kultūras koku, ko parasti izmanto arī ģimenes līdzību fiksēšanai un pēctecības uzrādīšanai. Ja Bišofa versijā redzam zināmus vīriešu vārdus – *Goethe, Picasso, Freud, Bach, Plato, Balzac* u. tml., tad Pičukāne piedāvā versiju, kurā Rietumu kultūras vēsturi varam izstāstīt tikai ar sieviešu rakstnieču, mūziķu un mākslinieču, tostarp latviešu, vārdiem, piemēram, – “H. fon Bingena”, “T. Jansone”, “F. Kālo”, “A. Freida”, “Dž. Skulme”, “V. Belševica”. Darba provokatīvais vēstījums ir skaidra norāde, ka vadošajā kultūras paradīgmā tiek izlaists ievērojams kultūras segments, priekšroku dodot viena dzimuma pārstāvjiem. Dzimumdiference tiek ienesta arī vizuālās izteiksmes līdzekļos – daži Bišofa kultūras koka zari ir apcirsti: tie vairāk līdzinās caurulītēm – grafiskajam elementam, kas Bišofa zīmējumos ir bieži sastopams. Pagarinātajos izvirzījumos ir viegli saskatīt arī vizuālu līdzību ar vīriešu dzimumlocekļiem, līdz ar to Rietumu kultūra Bišofa vizualizācijā ir nolasāma kā pīmpju savijums. Savukārt Pičukānes veidotā struktūra vairāk atgādina botānisku koku – mazās figūriņas uz tiem ir kā putni vai lapas. Dažas pirmatnējās skulptūras atgādinošas figūriņas ir bez vārdiem, kāda ir nokritusi, norādot uz kultūru veidojošo sieviešu likteņiem – aizmirstību un izslēgšanu no kultūras kanona.

Zīmējums saista uzmanību arī ar savu lingvistisko formu, pieskaroties vienai no feministiskās mākslas teorijas pamatatziņām: sieviešu izstumšana no mākslas kanona izpaužas arī lingvistiski. Latviešu valodā to redzam īpaši skaidri, jo vārdi izcilu panākumu apzīmēšanai – “vecmeistars”, “ģēnijs”, “dižgars” – sastopami tikai vīriešu dzimtes gramatiskajās formās. Mākslas vēsturnieces Grizelda Polloka un Rozsika Pārkere (*Rozsika Parker*) klasiskajā darbā “Vecās mīļākās” (1981) apspēlē vārda *master* un *mistress* atšķirīgās nozīmes, kas signalizē par sieviešu un vīriešu atšķirīgo novietojumu mākslas pasaulē un ar to saistītajos diskursos, kur sievietes ir drīzāk mūzas, modeles un “vecas mīļākās”, nevis radītājas, autores, jaunatklājējas.³⁹ Mums nešķiet, ka mēģinājumi atšķetināt šādas situācijas rašanās iemeslus ir primāri svarīgi. Protams, varam apgalvot, ka valodas seksisms atspoguļo arī faktu, ka vēsturiski sievietēm bija jāsaskaras ar ierobežojumiem, kas vīriešiem māksliniekiem nepastāvēja, tāpēc mākslas

38 Gleznojums tapa grupas izstādes *Godess Ex-Machina* ietvaros, izstādes kuratores bija Jana Kukaine un Šelda Puķīte.

39 Parker, Rozsik; Pollock, Griselda (1981). *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. London; Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

vēsturē sieviešu vārdu ir mazāk. Tomēr arī pašu ierobežojumu pastāvēšana, kas sievietes kavēja vai atturēja no mākslas radīšanas, ir daļa no seksistiskas sabiedrības uzbūves. No mūsdienu skatpunkta raugoties, ir svarīgi jautāt, ko mēs varam ar to visu iesākt tagad. Ingrīda Pičukāne piedāvā vairākus risinājumus. Pirmkārt, viņa aicina pamanīt un problematizēt ar dzimtes stereotipiem saistīto nevienlīdzību – tam labi kalpo jau minētā apvēršanas stratēģija. Otrkārt, māksliniece norāda uz pietiekami plašo sieviešu klātbūtni mākslā – lai iepazītos ar viņu veikumu, nav nepieciešama pārdabiska piepūle: lai arī klasiskajās mākslas vēstures grāmatās un augstskolu lekcijuursos bieži vien turpina dominēt uz vīriešiem centrēta pieeja, tomēr kopš 60. gadiem, kad sāka veidoties feministiskā mākslas vēsture, sieviešu ieguldījums ir gana labi dokumentēts. Treškārt, ierakstot sieviešu vārdus mākslas vēsturē, tiek manīti arī daudzi šīs vēstures rakstīšanas principi. Nereti tie prasa atjautību, radošumu un elastību, jo var būt nepieciešams darināt jaunu vārdnīcu, kurā ietverts arī jēdziens “dižgare”. Pičukānes zīmējumi iekļaujas feministiskajos centienos pārrakstīt, papildināt un dažādot Rietumu mākslas vēsturi, kā arī kultivēt vērīgumu pret dzimtes klātbūtni vadošajos mākslas naratīvos.

Klasiskajai manifesta formai tuvākais ir pēdējais šeit aplūkojamais darbs “Laba māksliniece”. Tas veidots kā teksts, kas uzrakstīts uzskaitījuma veidā, stabiņā uz leju. Spoguļojot Māra Bišofa apgalvojumus par labu mākslinieku vīrieti, Ingrīda Pičukāne tekstā izmaina tikai vienu niansi: vārda “mākslinieks” vietā viņa lieto “māksliniece”, atbilstoši korigējot arī pārējo teikumu daļu gramatiku. Savukārt otrās rindkopas sākumā Pičukāne atkārtoti aizvietošanas stratēģiju, vīriešu mākslinieku vārdu vietā ierakstot sieviešu mākslinieču vārdus, turklāt viens no tiem ir cieši saistīts ar Latvijas kultūras vēsturi: “Džoto, Velaskēzs, Breigels. Maļēvičs, Pikasso un Džaspers Džons” vietā lasāms “Džentileski, Kaufmane, Sirani. Muhina, O’Kīfa un Niki de Senfala”. Abos uzskaitījumos aptverts plašs mākslas vēstures posms – no renesanses līdz mūsdienām.

Mākslas radīšanas salīdzinājums ar biškopību, ādu apstrādi un kurpju darināšanu uzsver tās saikni ar amatniecību, proti, noteiktu iegūtu un izkoptu prasmju kopumu, ko var pilnveidot nepārtrauktā praksē. Šāda interpretācija lielā mērā atspēko ierasto skatījumu uz mākslas radīšanu kā ģēnija izpausmi vai dabas dāvanu, kas vienkārši kādam piemīt. Tomēr šis aspekts daudz skaidrāk parādās tad, kad tekstu lasām sieviešu gramatiskajā dzimtē un sadzirdam, cik neierasti ausij skan šo profesiju uzskaitījums.

Vērojot Pičukānes un Bišofa polemiku, var rasties iespaids, ka mākslinieces stratēģijas pamatā ir bināro opozīciju iedzīvināšana. Sievišķais tiek pretstatīts vīrišķajam, taisnas līnijas – izliektajām, mašīnas – ziediem, tos ieslēdzot tradicionālā dihotomijā. Mūsdienu feminisma teorijas pārskata šādus krasus pretnostatījumus, piedāvājot dažādībā balstītu izpratni par vīrišķo, sievišķo un nebināro. Tomēr pārmest mākslinieces darbiem tīšu turēšanos pie dzimtes stereotipiem būtu nevietā. Pičukānes zīmējumos binārisms ir stratēģisks – tas ir ačģārnības principa lietojuma pamatā, kas ļauj apvērst attēlojuma vai domāšanas veidu. Ja māksliniece būtu pievērsusies

Laba māksliniece

Laba māksliniece negadās
būžī, jo viņa ir:

kā laba kurpniece,
kā laba galdniece,
kā laba ģērmane,
kā laba sveču lēdētāja.

Džentileski, Kaufmane, Sicani.
Muhina, J'Kifa un
Niki de Senfala ~ tās visas
ir:

kā labas biškopes,
kā labas mednieces,
kā labas strēlnieces,
kā labas sportistes -
pasauls
čempiones.

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sievietēm un vīriešiem interseksionālā aspektā, proti, uzsverot dažādus faktorus, kas līdz ar dzimti veido cilvēka identitāti, tas būtu cits mākslas darbs. Līdz ar to palikšana divu dzimšu robežās ir zīmējumiem piemītoša nosacītība, kas izriet no to mākslinieciskā uzdevuma.

Secinājumi

Izstādē ietvertie Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumi ir trāpīgi komentāri, kas iezīmē plašāku problēmu loku, pievēršoties sievietes un vīrieša tradicionālajām lomām, kuras no ikdienas dzīves tiek pārnestas un iekapsulētas mākslas vēsturē un kanonā. Māksliniece izceļ dzimumu stereotipu un strukturālas nevienlīdzības caurausto mākslas vēsturi, kur sievietes tradicionāli tiek reducētas uz mūzu, modeli vai iekāres objektu, nevis uzrunātas par dižgarēm, meistarēm un ģēnijām. Mūsdienu pasaulē situācija ir uzlabojusies, tomēr nevienlīdzība starp sievietēm un vīriešiem mākslā pastāv. Tāpat ierobežojoša ir valoda, ko lietojam, lai runātu par mākslu, kā arī patriarhāli principi sastopami mākslas vēstures mācīšanas un rakstīšanas metodēs, lai arī Rietumu feminisma vēsturē par šiem jautājumiem diskutē jau kopš 20. gadsimta otrās puses. Cerība un ilgas pēc pārmaiņām iet roku rokā ar skumjām un šaubām, vai iespējamas visaptverošas strukturālas pārmaiņas, vai arī tikai nelielas feministiskās intereses salas kultūras pamatstrāvē.

Ingrīdas Pičukānes zīmējumiem piemīt vairākas feministiskās mākslas manifestu iezīmes. To iedarbības spēks pielīdzināms mākslas aktīvisma veidam – mākslas darbi izraisīja plašu rezonansi medijos un sabiedrībā, satricinot ierastās hierarhijas. Mākslinieces īstenotā iejaukšanās mākslas vēstures rakstīšanas stāstos un mākslinieka identitātes konstruēšanas principos ir feministiskās intervences piemērs. Zīmējumiem piemīt gan komiskas, gan ironiskas iezīmes – mākslinieces rotaļīgā intonācija krasi atšķiras, piemēram, no Senpuānas “mākslas un kara”. Pičukānes manifestu afektīvais horizonts drīzāk ir cerīgais pesimisms – izgāšanās, pārpratumi un izskanējušās apsūdzības neprofesionalitātē, tāpat kā Latvijas sabiedrības un mākslas vides polarizējošā reakcija uz feminisma idejām pastiprina skumju un šaubu klātbūtni. Tomēr zīmējumi sniedz arī skaudru situācijas šķērsgrīzumu, manifestējot ilgas pēc nākotnes, kurā sievietes būs pilntiesīgas kultūras veidotājas.

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JANA KUKAINE, JĀNIS TAURENS

Ingrīda Pičukāne's Drawings: A Manifesto of Feminist Art in Latvia

Summary

In the past decade, feminist perspectives have gained increasing prominence within Latvian visual art. This article examines Ingrīda Pičukāne's drawing series from the group exhibition *A Visionary Drawing Riddle*, held in Valmiera in 2023. We focus on three of Pičukāne's drawings that, in our view, may be regarded as a manifesto of feminist art. Our argument begins with a brief overview of the manifesto tradition in the context of avant-garde culture, followed by an exploration of feminist art manifestos as a related yet distinct phenomenon. The second part of the article emphasizes the manifesting nature of Pičukāne's drawings through feminist intervention, artistic activism, articulated political programs, and utopian tendencies. Finally, we address potential objections concerning the "belatedness" of such a manifesto and the binary structures it implies, proposing instead the concept of *hopeful pessimism* as the affective framework of these works.

Keywords: manifestos, contemporary art, feminist intervention, art history, hopeful pessimism.

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INGRĪDA PELDEKSE

Tautasdziesmu vizuālā interpretācija grafīķes Dzidras Ezergailes tušas zīmējumos: femīns skatpunkts

Kopsavilkums

Šī pētījuma uzmanības centrā ir 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē strādājušās grafīķes Dzidras Ezergailes (1926–2013) tautasdziesmu vizuāla interpretācija tušas zīmējuma tehnikā, un tā mērķis ir izziņāt šīs mākslinieces līdz šim maz zināmo 80. gadu radošā mantojuma šķautni. Šajos tušas zīmējumos pausts sievietes mākslinieces pasaules skatījums, kas sakņojas latviešu tautasdziesmās uzkrātajās ētiskajās vērtībās. Savukārt tautasdziesmās iekodētais femīnais pasaules tvērums šajā pētījumā ieskicēts, ciktāl tas radis izpausmi Ezergailes tušas zīmējumos, bet ārpus šī konteksta uzskatāms par atsevišķa pētījuma tēmu.

Pētījuma uzdevums ir ne vien ar konkrētu piemēru izlasi atklāt grafīķes Ezergailes izvēlēto četrdesmit tautasdziesmu vizuālajās interpretācijās iekodētās vērtības, bet arī sniegt ieskatu mākslinieces matricentriskajā pasaules uztverē, kas izpaužas lielā daļā viņas veidoto grafikas darbu ar sauli kā mātišķības simbolu centrā. Ezergailes tušas zīmējuma tehnikā interpretēto tautasdziesmu krājumu pieejamība Latvijas Nacionālajā bibliotēkā, kā arī privātā kolekcijā glabātās vienības ļauj izpētīt šo grafīķes daiļrades šķautni, tādējādi papildinot viņas radošā mantojuma kopainu.

Atslēgvārdi: latviešu grafika, 20. gadsimta 70. un 80. gadi, latviešu tautasdziesmas, tušas zīmējums.

Ievads

Pētījuma uzdevums ir identificēt vienu no būtiskākajiem 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē strādājušās grafīķes Dzidras Ezergailes (1926–2013) daiļrades aspektiem, proti, matricentrisko pasaules uztveri, kas caurauž viņas māksliniecisko mantojumu. Šis skatpunkts

radis spilgtu izpausmi tieši mākslinieces veidotajās latviešu tautasdziesmu jeb dainu vizualizācijās. Par šīs viņas daiļrades šķautnes izpētes impulsu kļuva Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas grafikas darbu kolekcijā nonākušie tautasdziesmu vizuālās interpretācijas krājumi, kas sastāv no sešu līdz astoņu tautasdziesmu izlasēm pašas autore oriģinālā noformējumā un izpildīti tušas zīmējuma tehnikā. Lai iegūtu pēc iespējas pilnīgāku kopainu, tika izmantotas arī divas privātā īpašumā glabātas tautasdziesmu izlases.

Latviešu tautasdziesmas ir bijis neizsīkstošs pētniecības un vizuālās interpretācijas avots gan akadēmiskajā vidē, gan mākslinieciskajā jaunradē. Nenovērtējams pienesums latviešu tautasdziesmu izpētē ir dainu pētnieces Vairas Viķes-Freibergas monogrāfija “Saules dainas”, kurā skatīta gan Saule kā Visuma iedalītāja (ši saule, viņa saule, pasaule), gan fiziskā jeb konkrētā saule, gan saule kā personifikācija un dabas metafora.¹ Tāpat īpašas uzmanības vērts ir teologa un vēsturnieka Haralda Biezā (1909–1995) apcerējums “Seno latviešu debesu dievu ģimene” ar dainās izdziedāto Saules kultu² un Mēness divējādās dzimtes evolūcijas analīzi³. Savukārt no grafiķiem – tautasdziesmu interpretiem izceļami Ezergailes laikabiedri Dainis Rožkalns (1928–2018) un Zigurds Zuze (1929–2003), kas pārstāv 20. gadsimta otrās puses latviešu grāmatu grafiku. Daiņa Rožkalna mākslinieciski noformēto grāmatu skaitā ir akadēmiskais izdevums “Latviešu tautasdziesmas”, kura 13 sējumos aptverts viss cilvēka dzīves cikls.⁴ Savukārt Zigurds Zuze ir veidojis 50 patstāvīgas grafikas lapas latviešu tautasdziesmu virknei par darba tēmu⁵ – tā ir bijusi viņa velte Krišjāņa Barona (1835–1923) 150. jubilejas atcerei.⁶

Šī pētījuma uzmanības centrā ir grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes izvēlētas un sakārtotas tautasdziesmas ar vizuālu ietēru tušas zīmējuma tehnikā autore oriģinālnoformējumā. Tieši pateicoties folkloras lielajai daudzveidībai, mākslinieces daiļradei ir raksturīga etnogrāfisko atsauču sapludināšana ar abstraktu izteiksmi.⁷ Apliecinājums tam ir arī viņas neatslābstošā interese par ornamentu, vizuāli ietverot tajā laika dimensiju, proti, ilustrējot paejošo laiku – skatu šobrīd un skatu nākotnē pēc šī brīža.⁸ Fokusā paturot sievietes mākslinieces skatījumu uz tautasdziesmām, pētījuma mērķis ir nevis identificēt to kā feministisku parādību mākslā, jo par to feminisma teoriju pētnieces *Ph.D.* Janas Kukaines ieskatā mūsdienā Latvijā ir jēga runāt tikai atsevišķos gadījumos⁹, bet gan, aizņemoties minētās pētnieces formulējumu, savā

1 Viķe-Freiberga, Vaira; Freibergs, Imants (1988). *Saules dainas*. 2. izd. Rīga: Grāmata, 13. lpp.

2 Biezais, Haralds (1998). *Seno latviešu debesu dievu ģimene*. Rīga: Minerva, 187. lpp.

3 Turpat, 37. lpp.

4 *Latviešu tautasdziesmas* [1979–2024]. Mākslinieks Dainis Rožkalns. Literatūras, Folkloras un mākslas institūts, latviešu folkloras krātuve. Rīga: Zinātne.

5 Šaitere, Tekla (1985). Zigurda Zuzes personālizstāde. *Skolotāju Avīze*, Nr. 35, 28.08., 8. lpp.

6 Bankovskis, Pēteris (1985). Bīdis mākslas izstādē. *Padomju Jaunatne*, Nr. 163, 23.08., 4. lpp.

7 Ķencis, Toms (2024). Ethno-Graphics: Folklore and Baltic Printmaking in the Period of Late Socialism. *Folklore* (Estonia), Vol 93, p. 216. Available: www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol93/kencis.pdf [26.09.2025.].

8 Peldekse, Ingrida (2023). *Grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes ekslibri*. Rīga: LNB, 186.–187. lpp.

9 Kukaine, Jana (2016). *Daiļās mātes. Sieviete, ķermenis, subjektivitāte*. Rīga: Neputns, 64. lpp.

ziņā kartografēt šo skatpunktu kā feministiskas intereses salu jeb impulsu¹⁰. Par tādu intereses salu jeb impulsu uztverama Ezergailes izvēle pakļaut vizuālai interpretācijai tieši tās tautasdziesmas, kurās izpaužas sievietes pasaules uztvere.

Savukārt terminu “femīns”, “sievšķīgs”, “sieviešu” lietojums šajā pētījumā atbilst līdzšinējai tendencei lietot politiski mazāk uzlādētus jēdzienus¹¹, jo Ezergaili primāri piesaistījusi latviešu tautasdziesmās ietvertā dzīvesziņa, kuras kodolā ir matricentrisks, proti, uz māti jeb sauli vērstas pasaules skatījums. Savukārt pirmmātes termina lietojums izceļ sieviešu ģenealogiju un uzsver sieviešu radīšanas spēka nozīmi.¹²

Ezergailes tautasdziesmu izvēle liecina, ka no augšminētā atvasināmais termins “mātišķība” uztverams ne tikai bioloģiskās funkcijas līmenī, kā sievietes auglības funkcijas godāšana tā sauktajās primitīvajās, agrārajās kultūrās¹³, bet gan paplašināms līdz sarežģītai un daudzslāņainai kultūras praksei¹⁴ un drīzāk attiecināms uz filozofisku refleksiju.¹⁵ Par to, ka mākslinieces dzīvesziņa sakņojas latviešu tautasdziesmās, liecina to citēšana gan vēstulēs laikabiedriem, gan apercerē par dainās ietvertajām vērtībām¹⁶.

Visi četri līdz šim apzinātie un pētījumā iekļautie Ezergailes veidotie krājumi tapuši laikposmā no 1983. gada līdz 1989. gadam. Tiem raksturīga liela saturiskā dažādība no tautasdziesmu izvēles viedokļa, taču tos vieno kopsaucējs – tās visas savulaik ir sievietes sacerētas un izdziedātas pirmajā personā.

Pētījums strukturāli iedalīts trīs daļās: pirmā ir veltīta latviešu tautasdziesmu femīnā aspekta ieskicēšanai un 20. gadsimta 70.–80. gados vērojamā folklorisma uzplaukuma raksturojumam; otrajā daļā uzmanības centrā ir ieskats sievietes mākslinieces Dzidras Ezergailes savpatībā Latvijas mākslas kopainā, izceļot viņas radošajam rokrakstam raksturīgo saules tēmu; trešajā daļā ir iekļauti seši latviešu tautasdziesmu vizuālās interpretācijas piemēri Ezergailes izpildījumā.

Savpatības meklējumi latviešu tautasdziesmās

Piesakot grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes tušas zīmējuma tehnikā darinātās tautasdziesmu jeb dainu vizuālās interpretācijas, priekšplānā izvirzās jautājums, kāpēc šodien būtu jāaktualizē to saturiskās vērtības un pasaules skatījums no matricentriskā skatpunkta.

10 Kukaine, Jana (2024). *Viscerālā estētika: afekti un feministiskā māksla postsociālismā*. Rīga: LU Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, 210. lpp.

11 Turpat.

12 Kukaine, Jana (2024). *Viscerālā estētika: afekti un feministiskā māksla postsociālismā*, 32. lpp.

13 Kukaine, Jana (2016). *Daiļās mātes. Sieviete, ķermenis, subjektivitāte*, 28. lpp.

14 Turpat, 25. lpp.

15 Turpat, 28. lpp.

16 Peldekse, Ingrīda (2023). Poētiskās pasaules atspulgi mākslinieces Dzidras Ezergailes grafikā. No: Dreimane, Jana; Mintauris, Mārtiņš (atb. red.). *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Zinātniskie raksti, 11. (XXXI) sēj.: Latviešu kultūra rokrakstos un laikrakstos*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, 346.–347. lpp.

Konstatējot “**tagadnisma dominanci**¹⁷ mūsdienu kultūrā”¹⁸, folkloras pētniece Janīna Kursīte secinājusi, ka mūsdienās pastāv tendence ilglaicīgās un īslaicīgās vērtības sapludināt vienā kopējā laukā.¹⁹ Ilglaicīgo vērtību meklējumos tieši mūsdienas, 21. gadsimta otrā desmitgade, ir piemērots laiks 20. gadsimta 70.–80. gadu mākslas strāvojumu apzināšanai, jo pusgadsimts ļauj kontekstualizēt atsevišķas pagājušo laiku norises un tendences plašāku mākslas procesu ainavā.

Latviešiem tautasdziesmas aktualizējas vērtību pārskatīšanas brīžos; nesēnā vēsturē tā tas notika 20. gadsimta 60. gados, kuriem bija raksturīgs 50. gadu otrajā pusē uzsāktais liberalizācijas kurss, kas Padomju Sociālistisko Republiku Savienības (PSRS) vadītāja Ņikitas Hruščova (amatā 1953–1964) laikā dēvēts par atkusni. Tas bija laiks, kuru mākslas kritiķis Jānis Borgs raksturojis kā spriedzes zonu, pretrunu un estētiskā konflikta uzkrājumu, kas 60. gados deva enerģiju relatīvam kultūras apvērsumam.²⁰ Savas identitātes apzināšanās un stiprināšana notika, pievēršoties folklorai, jo, Borga ieskatā, latviešu etnogrāfijas tēlainība pauž attīstītu intelektuālo potenciālu, kas parādās racionālās, abstrahētās un universālās formās.²¹ Tas bija arī laiks, kas lika aizdomāties, kādēļ folklorā tieši 60.–80. gados milzīgā pārsvarā tika apdziedāta un cildināta māte (pretstatā tēvam) un bija spēcīgi iesakņojies Mātes kults²², kā to akcentējusi folkloriste Maija Ligere.

20. gadsimta 80. gadu otrajā pusē PSRS vadītāja Mihaila Gorbačova (amatā 1985–1991) sāktais “atklātības un pārbūves laiks” rezultējās ar PSRS iziršanu 1991. gadā, un Latvija atguva neatkarību. Radikāli mijoties vēsturiskās attīstības posmiem, no jauna uzplaukusi interese par folkloru kārtējo reizi apliecināja tās aktualitāti. Šis pētījums, kura uzmanības centrā ir grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes piedāvātais tautasdziesmu vizuālais ietērps, savā ziņā paver iespēju pārbaudīt, vai mūsdienu globalizētajā pasaulē ir vērojama novirzīšanās no nacionālās savpatības vektora. Turklāt mākslinieces pievēršanās tautasdziesmu interpretācijai 20. gadsimta 80. gados atsedz līdz šim maz zināmu viņas radošās darbības šķautni.

17 Šeit un turpmāk raksta autore izcēlums, ja nav norādīts citādi.

18 Kursīte Janīna (2024). Sakralitātes jeb svētuma uztvere mūsdienās. No: Kursīte, Janīna. *Kamolkok. Apcere par ceļiem uz latviskumu*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 24. lpp.

19 Turpat, 25. lpp.

20 Borgs, Jānis (2016). Lūzuma anatomija. No: Krastiņa, Sandra (sast.). *Uz lielās dzīves trases: 20. gadsimta 60. gadu grafiskā valoda Latvijā*. [Rīga]: Raktuve, 20. lpp.

21 Borgs, Jānis (1988). Pretspēku spriegumā dziedēta māksla. Ieskats avangardisma attīstībā Latvijā. No: *Rīga: Lettische Avantgarde = Latviešu avangards: [katalogs]*. Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (Hrsg.); Indulis Bilzens, Maruta Schmidt, Barbara Straka (red.). Berlin: Elefant Press, 76. lpp.

22 Ligere, Maija (1983). Ceļa Gājējs divu poētisko sistēmu saskarsmes zonā. No: Čaklā, Inta (sast.). *Promatnākt, šurpaiziet. Raksti par Imantu Ziedoni*. Rīga: Liesma, 90. lpp.

Folklorisma uzplaukums un femīnais skatpunkts tautasdziesmās

Tautasdziesmu interpretācija piesaistījusi daudzu mākslas veidu pārstāvjus; it īpaši tas attiecināms uz 20. gadsimta 70.–80. gadiem. Šo laika nogriezni nereti dēvē par folklorisma uzplaukuma periodu. Padomju varas gados 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē tieši pievēršanās folklorai nostiprināja saikni ar savu valodu un kultūru; šādu redzējumu apstiprina arī indiešu izcelsmes folkloras pētnieces Sādnas Naitani (*Sadhana Naithani*) vērojumi. Pētot Baltijas valstu folkloru, viņa nonākusi pie atziņas, ka folklorā tolaik kļuva par zemūdens straumi, kas virspusē plūda rāmi un diendienā tika uzturēta, neizaicinot un nekritizējot pastāvošo varu.²³ Tautasdziesmās ietverta pasaules uztveri pauda Latvijas vidējās paaudzes mākslinieki, kas pieteica sevi mākslas ainavā 50. gadu otrajā pusē, bieži izmantojot mākslas tēla vispārinājumu un tādējādi panākot tēmas alegorisku un simbolisku skanējumu. Viena no viņiem bija Dzidra Ezergaile.

Folkloras pētnieces Janīnas Kursītes uz latviešu literatūru attiecinātais iedalījums periodos zināmā mērā atspoguļo arī procesus vizuālajā mākslā: 1) 19. gadsimta vidus un otrās puses tautiskais romantisms; 2) 20. gadsimta sākums ar tam raksturīgajām neomītisma tendencēm; 3) 20. gadsimta 20. un it īpaši 30. gadi ar nacionālās mītikas uzplūdu vilni; 4) 20. gadsimta 70.–80. gadu folklorisms.²⁴

Femīnā skatpunkta meklējumos tautasdziesmās izceļamas trīs komponentes: dainu sacerētājas un dziedātājas galvenokārt bija sievietes; matricentrisms tautasdziesmās manifestējās saules tēlā; latviešu valodas aspekts – metaforiskais izteiksmes veids un dalījums dzimtēs.

Plašie pētījumi par dainām liek secināt, ka to **sacerētājas un dziedātājas** galvenokārt bijušas sievietes, tāpēc tautasdziesmas ir noderīgs avots femīnās pasaules uztveres meklējumos. Tulkotājas Silvijas Brices pētījumā²⁵ pieminēti vācu mācītāja no Igaunijas Augusta Vilhelma Hupela (*August Wilhelm Hupel, 1737–1819*) novērojumi, kurš savā zināmākajā darbā “Topogrāfiskas ziņas par Vidzemi un Igauniju”²⁶ 1777. gadā par Vidzemi un Igauniju rakstīja: “Krietnu daļu savas liksmes viņi ieliek dziesmās un mūzikā. Dziedāšana gan ir sieviešu nodarbošanās [...]”²⁷ No minētā Brices pētījuma rezumējams, ka kopš 18. gadsimta otrās puses folkloras pētnieki, kas interesējušies par latviešu tautasdziesmām, ir secinājuši, ka tās pauž tautas domāšanas veidu, tautas patieso valodu.

23 Naithani, Sadhana (2019). *Folklore in Baltic History: Resistance and Resurgence*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, p. 41.

24 Kursīte, Janīna (1999). *Mītiskais folklorā, literatūrā, mākslā*. Rīga: Zinātne, 72. lpp.

25 Brice, Silvija (1985). “Dziesma plūst tiem no mutes kā ciruļiem...”. No: *Varavīksne. 1985: Literārā mantojuma gadagrāmata*. Rīga: Liesma, 23.–56. lpp.

26 Hupel, August Wilhelm (1774–1782). *Topographische Nachrichten von Lief- und Ehstland [Liv- und Estland]*. 3 Bände. Rīga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch.

27 Brice, Silvija (1985). “Dziesma plūst tiem no mutes kā ciruļiem...”, 29. lpp.

Savukārt **Saules kults**, kas izteikti saglabājies tautasdziesmās, ir saistīts ar Latvijas ģeogrāfisko novietojumu. Kursīte ir akcentējusi, ka bronzas laikmetā Saules kults, jo sevišķi Ziemeļeiropā, tai skaitā Latvijas teritorijā, kur saules fiziskajam siltumam ir liela nozīme, kļuva vēl izteiktāks.²⁸ Matricentrisko pasaules uzskatu apstiprina piemērs ar sauli: lielā vairumā pasaules tautu mitoloģiju Saule ir pirmtēvs, bet Mēness – pirmmāte²⁹ jeb pārstāv femīno iedabu, kas ietver gan gaismu, gan tumsu, kā to akcentējusi lietuviešu izcelsmes amerikāņu arheoloģe, etnogrāfe un antropoloģe Marija Gimbutiene (*Marija Gimbutienė, Marija Gimbutas*, 1921–1994).³⁰ Šī saules femīnā aspekta nozīme latviešu tautasdziesmās Kursītes skaidrojumā skan šādi: “Patricentriskajā sabiedrībā, iekarojot jaunas teritorijas, indoeiropiešiem radās nepieciešamība aktīvo dievišķo sākotni – Sauli – saistīt ar vīrišķo, kareivīgo, kā dēļ virknei tautu Saule arī kļuva par vīriešu kārtas dievību. Latviešiem Saule palika un joprojām tiek saukta par Saules māti, vēl biežāk deminutīvā formā “Saulīt, mana māmuliņa”.”³¹

Latviešu valodas **metaforiskais izteiksmes veids** manifestējas mājienu poētikā, kā tas izskan literatūrzinātnieces Andas Kubuliņas vērojumā.³² Tā kā metafora ir viens no izplatītākajiem nozīmes pārmaiņu tipiem³³, secināms, ka cilvēka domāšana pamatos ir metaforiska.³⁴ Ezergailes tautasdziesmu izlasēs galvenā vieta ierādīta saulei, akai un nereti arī ābelei. Līdzās saules metaforai, kas ir viens no centrālajiem tēliem mākslinieces tautasdziesmu vizualizāciju kompozīcijās, nolasāma arī konceptuāla metafora “labais – augšup” ar ābeli kalna galā; šo kognitīvās lingvistikas³⁵ konceptuālās metaforas ideju dainu pētniecībā ir izmantojusi, piemēram, Laila Vācere³⁶.

Ja metaforiskā domāšana raksturīga mūsdienām, tad vēl viens tautasdziesmu tēlu sistēmu ietekmējošs faktors, kas pakārtots latviešu valodai, ir tālas senatnes liecība, proti, priekšmetu dalījums sieviešu un vīriešu dzimtē. No leksiski semantiskā viedokļa tas attiecināms uz tālu pagātņi, kad lietu nosaukumi klasificēti atbilstoši citiem, no mūsdienām atšķirīgiem priekšstatiem par apkārtējo pasauli un dzimtes formās atspoguļojās seno cilvēku domāšana un pasaules uztvere.³⁷ Tādējādi daudzas **lietas un parādības tika personificētas**, un dainas liecina, ka tām tika piedēvētas dzīvu būtņu

28 Kursīte, Janīna (2018). *Dainu kodekss*. Rīga: Rundas, 444. lpp.

29 Turpat.

30 Gimbutas, Marija (1996). *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 152. lpp.

31 Kursīte, Janīna (2018). *Dainu kodekss*, 445. lpp.

32 Kubuliņa, Anda (1990). Astrīde Ivaska. *Grāmata*, Nr. 11, 67. lpp.

33 Trumpa, Anta (2010). *Adjektīvu semantiskā diferenciacija latviešu un lietuviešu valodā*. Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 236. lpp.

34 Turpat.

35 Stockwell, Peter (2002). *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. London; New York: Routledge, p. 109.

36 Vācere, Laila (2012). *Kognitīvā poētika latviešu dainās par ābeli: no formulas uz zīmi*. Promocijas darbs. Zin. vad. Sigma Ankrava. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte.

37 *Latviešu valodas gramatika* (2013). Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 328. lpp.

īpašības.³⁸ Viens no raksturīgiem piemēriem ir koku dalījums dzimtēs. Attiecībā uz latviešu tautasdziesmās pieminētajiem kokiem – kopskaitā apmēram 30 – valodniece Velta Rūķe-Draviņa (1917–2003) secinājusi, ka latviešu, tāpat kā lietuviešu, dzejas iztēli raksturo ciešā saskaņa starp koka vārda gramatisko dzimti un atbilstošo vīriešu vai sieviešu dzimumu.³⁹ Latviešu tautasdziesmās pieminētā “ieva” ir jauna meitene, bet “ābele” ir mātes tēls. Nereti ābele baltos ziedos uzskatāma par sirmas māmuļas personifikāciju.⁴⁰ Velta Rūķe-Draviņa ir akcentējusi, ka pie latviešu tautasdziesmu īpatnībām pieder uztvere, ka ābele ir Mātes koks, – uz to norāda tās asociēšana ar māti, auglību un dzimtu, ko simbolizē ziediem vai āboliem pilnie zari.⁴¹ Laila Vācere ir akcentējusi, ka ābeles-sievietes tēls ir emocionāli tik spēcīgs, ka sieviete var pat nebūt pieminēta – ziedoša ābele simboliski aizstāj viņas tēlu.⁴²

Grafiķe Dzidra Ezergaile starp aizmiršanu un atcerēšanos

Otrs no tēmas pieteikuma izrietošs jautājums ir saistīts ar Ezergailes radošo darbību. 20. gadsimta 70. gadu mākslas procesu izpēte ļauj identificēt iespaidu, kādu tautasdziesmas atstājušas uz grafiķes daiļradi kopumā un konkrēti uz viņas tušas zīmējumiem. Līdz ar pievēršanos dainu vizualizācijai tieši no sievietes skatpunkta māksliniece savā radošajā izpausmē iebilst konservatīvajam uzskatam, ka labai mākslai “nav dzimuma” un sievišķā lomas akcentēšana vai atsaukšanās uz dzimumu būtu zemāk vērtējama, traucējoša vai nevēlama.⁴³ Mākslinieces femīnais pasaules redzējums, kas manifestējas tautasdziesmu atlasē, saaužas arī ar viņas tēmu izvēlēm grafikā.

Ezergailes radošais pacēlums saistās tieši ar 70. un 80. gadiem, kad bija izveidojies viņas grafiskais rokraksts. Tomēr viņa, tāpat kā daudzi citi tā laika mākslinieki, intervijās un publikācijās nereti palikusi nepieminēta⁴⁴, rodot vietu ietilpīgajā vārdu salikumā “un citi”...⁴⁵

Ezergailei veltītajās publikācijās fiksētais korelē ar izstādēs aizvien aktualizēto un labi saskan ar Kursītes pieminēto sakāmvārdu, ka akmens, daudz ritināts, lēti (=viegli)

38 *Latviešu valodas gramatika* (2013). Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts, 328. lpp.

39 Rūķe-Draviņa, Velta (1986). *Cilvēks un daba latviešu tautasdziesmās*. Stokholma: Artilett, 125. lpp.

40 Turpat.

41 Turpat, 137. lpp.

42 Vācere, Laila (2012). *Kognitīvā poētika latviešu dainās par ābeli: no formulas uz zīmi*, 101. lpp.

43 Kukaine, Jana (2016). *Daiļās mātes. Sieviete, ķermenis, subjektivitāte*, 48. lpp.

44 Bute, Harijs (1969). Krāsu un dailes avotam – 50. *Ciņa*, Nr. 104, 06.05., 4. lpp.

45 Reihmane, Laima (1982). Reālistiska tradīciju dzīvotspējas apliecinājums. *Literatūra un Māksla*, Nr. 1, 01.01., 10. lpp.

neapsūnos, jo “iemieso nepārtraukto ceļu starp **aizmiršanu un atcerēšanos**”⁴⁶. No mākslinieces stādarbiem stadiju starp aizmiršanu un atcerēšanos spilgti raksturo par viņas radošās darbības virsotni uzskatāmā t. s. aku sērija desmit variācijās ar nosaukumu “Folkloras motīvs. Akas” (1970–1971, cinkogrāfija, 650 x 500 mm), kas pirmo reizi eksponēta izstādē 1971. gadā.⁴⁷

Par atcerēšanos liecina Ezergailes darbu izstādišana 2007. gadā un 2019. gadā. Viens no minētās aku sērijas darbiem – “Folkloras motīvs. [Akas]” – bija iekļauts Tallinas 14. grafikas triennāles izstādē ar nosaukumu “Politiskais/poētiskais”⁴⁸. Triennāles mērķis bija noskaidrot, vai mākslas poētiskais un politiskais aspekts ir savstarpēji izslēdzoši jēdzieni. Baltijas dalībnieku kuratoru, zviedru mākslas zinātnieku Andersu Krēgeru (*Anders Kreuger*) bija piesaistījusi šī Ezergailes poētiskā pašizpaušme 70. gados. Izstādes katalogā, aplūkojot vienu no mākslinieces darbiem, secināts, ka “folkloras” stils Baltijas grafikā kopš 19. gadsimta ir balstīts ģeometriskā vienkāršošanā, galvenokārt sastopams kokdzelumus un “spilgtām redzes ilūzijām bagātāko un konsekventāko interpretāciju (*most delirious and consistent interpretation*) tas radis Ezergailes plašajā un nepieradinātajā daiļradē”.⁴⁹ Kopš 1970. gada saules simtkārtīgā staru tīklojumā ieskaustās akas motīvs ir kļuvis par savdabīgu mākslinieces grafiskā rokraksta atpazīšanas zīmi.

Pēc vairāk nekā desmit gadiem viens no aku sērijas darbiem nonāca arī Latvijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centra (LLMC) redzeslokā un 2019./2020. gada mijā tika eksponēts izstādē “Nenorunātās tikšanās” Latvijas Nacionālā mākslas muzeja izstāžu zālē “Arsenāls”. Tajā bija iekļauti trīs Ezergailes darbi, viens no tiem – “Folkloras motīvs. [Akas]”⁵⁰, kas atrodas Latvijas Mākslinieku savienības kolekcijā. Iezīmējot “vēstures sastrēgumpunktu”⁵¹, izstādes kataloga ievadtekstā skatītājs tiek vedināts “doties zonā, kurā pagātnes nospiedumi saskaras ar mūsdienām, gan atsedzot virkni līdzību un likumsakarību, gan iezīmējot atšķirīgus diskursus un sistēmas, kuru ietvaros funkcionē mūsu sabiedrība, un veidus, kā tajā tiek iztēlotas iespējamās nākotnes,”⁵² tādējādi aktualizējot Ezergailes skatījumu uz folkloru.

Mākslinieces darbi ir pārstāvēti vairākās Latvijas publiskās atmiņas institūcijās – gan Latvijas Nacionālajā mākslas muzejā, gan Latvijas Mākslinieku savienības

46 Kursīte, Janīna (2024). Vilhelms Purvītis un hernhūtieši. No: Kursīte, Janīna. *Kamolkokas. Apcere par ceļiem uz latviskumu*, 283. lpp.

47 *Dzidras Ezergailes grafika, Artūra Kiršfelda plakāti*: darbu izstāde Rīgā 1971. g.: [katalogs] (1971). Zigurda Zuzes ievads. Rīga: [Mākslas darbinieku nams], 2. lpp.

48 *Tallinna XIV Graafikatriennaal Poliitiline/Poeetiline = 14th Tallinn Print Triennial Political/Poetical*. [Toim. Eva Nāripea] [2007]. Tallinn: Tallinna Graafikatriennaal.

49 Turpat, 168. lpp.

50 *Nenorunātās tikšanās = Unexpected Encounters*: izstādes katalogs [2019]. Kuratores un tekstu autore: Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce, Andra Silapētere; sast. Evelīna Andžāne. [Rīga]: Latvijas Laikmetīgās mākslas centrs, 50. lpp.

51 Turpat, 4. vāks.

52 Turpat, 5. lpp.

kolekcijā, gan arī Alūksnes novada muzejā. Ezergaile darījusi visu iespējamo, lai netiktu aizmirsta, – laikā, kad mākslas zinātnieks Māris Brancis strādāja Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts arhīvā, pati māksliniece nodeva glabāšanā lielu daļu sava radošā mantojuma (daļēji fotokopētā veidā) viņai īpaši izveidotajā fondā Nr. 2697, kādā no vēstulēm kodolīgi izsakot savu vēlmi domubiedrei grafiķei Ainaī Karlsonai (1935–2012): “Gribas aiz sevis atstāt padarītā darba vāgu.”⁵³ Nenosakāmi liela daļa Ezergailes darbu atrodas privātos arhīvos, savukārt daļa nonākusi bibliotēku krājumos; piemēram, jau pieminētais desmit grafikas lapu komplekts “Folkloras motīvs. Akas”, ko māksliniece kā cieņas apliecinājumu bija dāvinājusi savam ilggadējam vēstulju draugam Dr. Jānim Liepiņam (1930–2022), atrodas Latvijas Universitātes bibliotēkas Misiņa bibliotēkā Jāņa Liepiņa fondā.⁵⁴

Savukārt šī pētījuma uzmanības centrā esošie Ezergailes tušas zīmējumi – tautasdziesmu grafiskās interpretācijas – atrodas Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Mākslas krājumā un Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Reto grāmatu un rokrakstu krājuma Valda Villeruša fondā. Šajā pētījumā iekļauti arī divi mākslinieces daiļrades izpētei būtiski Ezergailes darināti tautasdziesmu krājumi, kas atrodas grafiķa un kolekcionāra Andreja Māra Eizāna privātajā arhīvā.

Tautasdziesmas Dzidras Ezergailes interpretācijā

Folkloras tēma grafiķi ir piesaistījusi visas radošās darbības laikā, un jau norādīts, ka šī interese visspilgtāko izpausmi radusi pieminētajā aku sērijā. Arī vēlāk ir tapuši vairāki stādarbi ar vispārīgu nosaukumu “Folkloras motīvs”. Atgriešanos pie šīs māksliniecei īpaši mīļās tēmas viņa pati pamatojusi ar dabas noskaņu variācijām: “[.] tāpat man no viena mirkļa motīva izaug variantu varianti.”⁵⁵ Savukārt tautasdziesmu un vizuālās mākslas pētnieks Toms Ķencis secinājis, ka, māksliniekiem interpretējot un pārnesot tradicionālās folkloras elementus savos darbos, folkloras materiāls paver īpašas iespējas identitātes veidošanai un radītais iegūst īpašu kultūras un garīgo nozīmi.⁵⁶

Iespējams, ka Ezergailes pievēršanās latviešu tautasdziesmu vizualizēšanai 20. gadsimta 80. gados saistāma ar vienu no viņas gruzdošajiem mūža sapņiem – grāmatu ilustrēšanu.⁵⁷ Kādā no esejām māksliniece atceras: “Šīs [grāmatu ilustrēšanas – *I. P.*] prieks žigli aiztecēja garām. [..] Man bija nolemts plakāta ceļš.”⁵⁸ Tik tiešām,

53 Ezergaile, Dzidra (2007). Vēstule Ainaī [Karlsonai] 18. decembrī. Raksta autores privātais arhīvs.

54 Ezergaile, Dzidra [1971]. *Folkloras motīvs. Akas*. LU AB MR J. Liepiņa f., 271, 1.

55 *Dzidras Ezergailes grafika, Artūra Kiršfelda plakāti* (1970), 2. lpp.

56 Ķencis, Toms (2024). *Ethno-Graphics: Folklore and Baltic Printmaking in the Period of Late Socialism*, 214. lpp. Available: www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol93/kencis.pdf [26.09.2025.].

57 Kaprāne, Dace (2008). *Grafiķe Dzidra Ezergaile*. Maģistra darbs. Zin. vad. Laima Reihmane. Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija, 155. lpp.

58 Ezergaile, Dzidra (1991). *Grāmatzīme manā dzīves gājumā*. Eseja. Rokraksts. Sniedzēs, 15. aprīlī. Andra Māra Eizāna personīgais arhīvs.

studijas Valsts Mākslas akadēmijas Grafikas nodaļā tika pabeigtas plakāta specialitātē, 1956. gadā aizstāvot pasniedzēja Pāveta Ļubomudrova (1916–1984) vadīto diplomdarbu. Vizuālās valodas koncentrētā izteiksme vedināja visa mūža garumā uzticīgi nodoties arī ekslibru jeb grāmatzīmju darināšanai vairākos tūkstošos vienību. Tie savā ziņā uzskatāmi par rokas un prāta vingrinājumiem, par Ezergailes idejiskās pasaules un simboliskās valodas izpausmi grafiskā formā, ar grafiskiem līdzekļiem⁵⁹, jo plakātu un ekslibru darināšanā nepieciešamas tieši **lakoniskas izteiksmes prasmes**⁶⁰. Tas pats attiecināms uz tautasdziesmām – to lakonisms izpaužas valodas lietojumā. Minēto ir uzsvērusi valodniece Velta Rūķe-Draviņa: “[...] četrās īsās rindiņās jāsaspiež vesels situācijas un darbības apraksts. Tādēļ nereti tur trūkst pat verba, kas precizētu attiecīgo kustību [...]”⁶¹ No visa bagātīgā folkloras klāsta – tostarp pasakām, sakāmvārdiem, mīklām – Ezergaile izvēlējās tieši tautasdziesmas. To muzikalitāte un ritms vistiešāk atbilst viņas izkoptajam vizuālās izteiksmes veidam; ne velti mākslas zinātnieks Jānis Kaksis (1926–2002) šo grafiķi nodēvējis par ritmu meistari.⁶² Tieši tautasdziesmu četrriņdes paredz noteiktu ritmu, kas iet kopsolī ar Ezergailes grafiskā rokraksta stingro vizuālo izteiksmi.

Tautasdziesmas Dzidras Ezergailes grafiskajā devumā

Pētījumā iekļautie un līdz šim zināmie krājumi tapuši laikposmā no 1983. līdz 1989. gadam. Tie ir savstarpēji atšķirīgi, jo pārstāv dažādas tematiskās grupas: 1983. gadā darinātais krājums “Astoņas latviešu tautasdziesmas Dzidras Ezergailes grafiskā devumā” un 1985. gadā tapusi astoņu tušas zīmējumu kopa “Kr[īšjāņa] Barona 100-gades atcerei”⁶³ veltīti gan darba tikuma, gan laika plūduma tēmai, arī sievietes mūža kontekstā. 1986. gadā fotoalbumā noformētais 18 tautasdziesmu krājums “Tautas dziesmas Dzidras Ezergailes grafiskā devumā” tematiski piedāvā lielāku daudzveidību, tajā apdziedāti tautumeitas, arī bārenītes tikumi. Savukārt 1989. gadā tapušais krājums “Veltījums Zigurdam Zuzem” ar sešiem tušas zīmējumiem pārstāv saules un mēness tēmu ar aku, dzīvības avotu, centrā. Pētījumā iekļauta arī ārpus šiem krājumiem atrasta tautasdziesmas vizualizācija, kas ir atšķirīga no citām, – šī četrriņde ir integrēta stājdarbā “Dzīļu noslēpums”, kura datējums nav zināms; jauktā tehnikā izpildītais darbs noformēts kā apsveikums vārda dienā. Detalizētākai analīzei pakļauto sešu tautasdziesmu piemēri pārstāv katru no minētajiem krājumiem. No saturiskā

59 Peldekse, Ingrida (2023). *Grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes ekslibri*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, 213. lpp.

60 Gurtiņš, Indulis (1983). Kas ir ekslibris? *Padomju Druva* (Cēsis), Nr. 129, 20.10., 3. lpp.

61 Rūķe-Draviņa, Velta (1986). *Cilvēks un daba latviešu tautasdziesmās*, 80. lpp.

62 Kaksis, J[ānis] (1969). Ritmu meistare. *Literatūra un Māksla*, Nr. 8, 22.02., 4. lpp.

63 Māksliniece zīmējumu kopas nosaukumā kļūdījies: 1985. gadā tika atzīmēta Krīšjāņa Barona 150. jubilejas atcere.

viedokļa visās izvēlētajās tautasdziesmu interpretācijās uzmanības centrā ir sievietes mūža apcere.

Visi aplūkotie krājumi, izņemot vienu, kurā iekļauto grafikas darbu tehnika nav nosakāma, jo tie pieejami tikai fotokopiju veidā, ir darināti tušas zīmējuma tehnikā. Prasmes tajā Ezergaile attīstījusi visa sava ilgā radošā mūža laikā, ne velti grafiķe zem sava portretfoto savulaik parakstījusies: “Dzidra Ezergaile; kurai patika zīmēt ar tušu.”⁶⁴ Šo interesi rosināja mācības Rīgas Valsts komercskolā,⁶⁵ kur izglītības programmā bija iekļauta arī glītrakstīšana, kaligrāfija un stenogrāfija.

Par Ezergailes ciešo saikni ar tautasdziesmu liecina arī mākslinieces 90 gadu jubilejas atcerei veltītā izstāde Daugavpils Marka Rotko centrā 2015./2016. gada mijā ar nosaukumu “Sauls dziesma”. Šīs izstādes recenzijas virsrakstā mākslas zinātniece Eva Rotčenkova likusi tautasdziesmas pirmo rindu “Saulīt tecēj’ tecēdama...”.⁶⁶ Minētajā atskatā uz Ezergailes radošo mūžu ir izcelta viņas mīlestība pret folkloru. Rotčenkova uzsvērusi, ka etniskie motīvi grafiķes kompozīcijās ritmiski un stabili kārtojas kā tautasdziesmu četrriņdes.⁶⁷ Dominējošais Ezergailes vizuālās izteiksmes tēls ir saule kā Māte, kā Visuma centrs – visu dabas ritmu noteicēja, un tas jo spilgti izpaužas arī viņas tautasdziesmu interpretācijās.⁶⁸

Latviešu tautasdziesmu vizuālās interpretācijas piemēri Dzidras Ezergailes darbos

[Astoņas latviešu tautasdziesmas Dzidras Ezergailes grafiskā devumā]. Rīga: [Autores izdevums], 1983. 17 lpp. LNB RXA 408, 573 [Dzidra Ezergaile: “Līdzīgs variants [krājums – I. P.] tika zīmēts kursa biedram Vasīlijam Šelkovam [1923–2013] 60 gadu jubilejā 1983. g.”]

*Kas to teica, kas redzēja, / Ka saulīte meita bija? /
Mēnestiņš, tas redzēja, / Tas noņēma vainadziņu. (1. att.)*

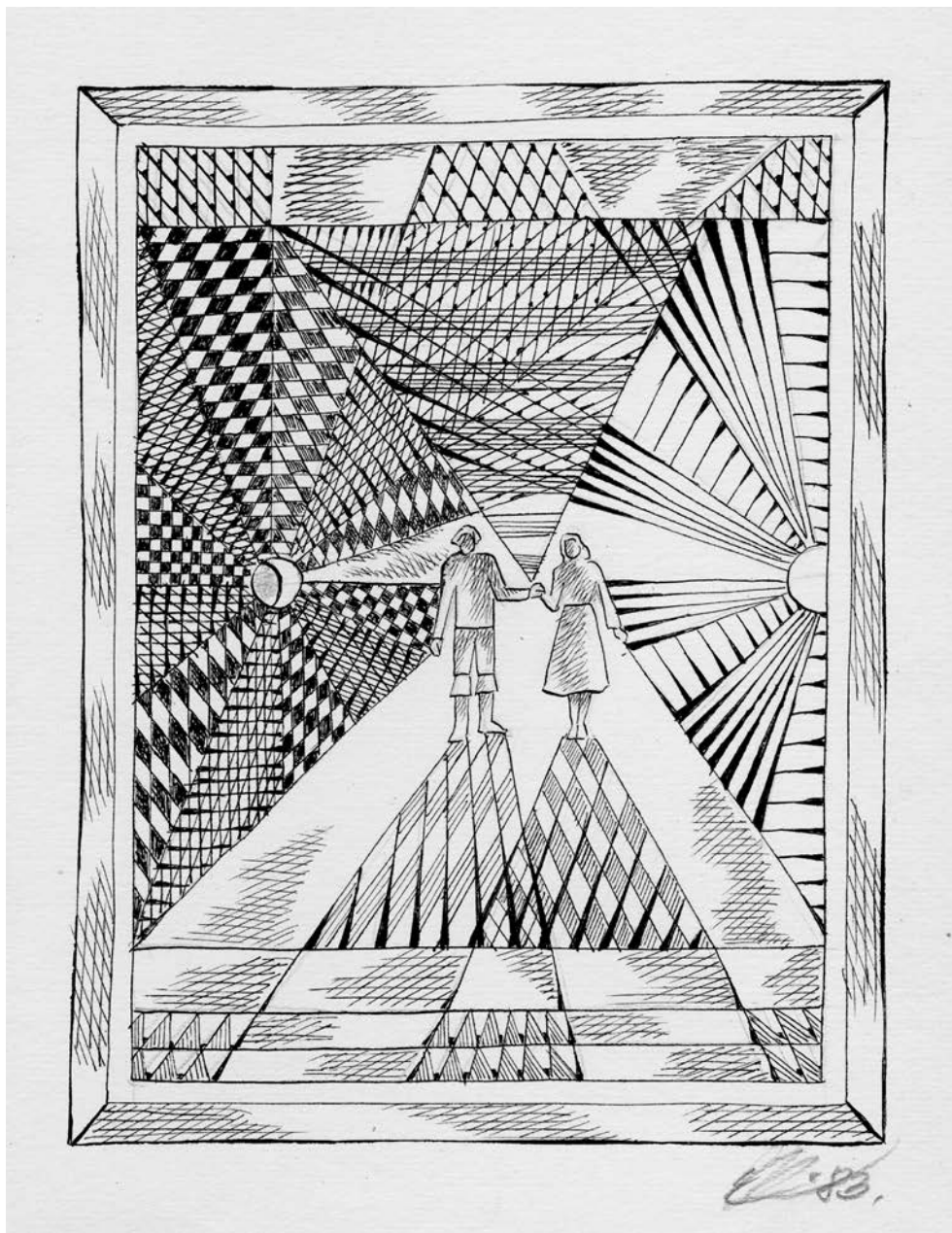
64 Ezergaile, Dzidra. Portretfoto ar parakstu. Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts arhīvs (LVA), 1839. f., 1.v apr., 249. l., 21. lp.

65 Ezergaile, Dzidra (1975). *Autobiogrāfija*. 4. janv. LVA, 1839. f., 1.v apr., 412. l., 16. lp.

66 Rotčenkova, Eva (2016). “Saulīt tecēj’ tecēdama...”. *Studija*, Nr. 106, 49.–50. lpp.

67 Turpat, 50. lpp.

68 Saule kā Visuma centrs, kas Dzidras Ezergailes grafikā ieņem īpašu simbolisku lomu, tika izcelta arī viņai veltītajā izstādē “Dzidra Ezergaile. Kosmos un ekslibri”. Izstāde īstenota valsts pētījumu programmas projektā “Latvijas kultūras ekosistēma kā resurss valsts izturēspējai un ilgtspējai” / CERS un atklāta Latvijas Nacionālajā bibliotēkā 2025. gada 30. oktobrī. Pieejams: <https://lnb.gov.lv/izstade-dzidra-ezergaile-kosmos-un-ekslibri/> [02.12.2025].



1. attēls. Dzidra Ezergaile. "Kas to teica, kas redzēja...". 1983.
Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. 155 x 120 mm. LNB RXA 408, 573

Vizuāliem līdzekļiem interpretējot šo tautasdziesmu, Ezergaile balstījies izpratnē par mītisko pasauli, kurā dominē divu sākotņu – vīrišķās un sievišķās – līdzāspastāvēšana, kas akcentēta arī dzejnieces Māras Zālītes pētījumā par tautasdziesmām.⁶⁹ Savukārt Janīna Kursīte secinājusi, ka latviešu folklorā, atšķirībā no daudzām citām, “Mēness iemieso ne sievišķo, bet gan vīrišķo spēku, kas varētu būt relikts no matricentriska laikiem”⁷⁰. Mēness tautasdziesmās darbojas ne tikai triādē ar Māru, bet arī divsavienībā ar Sauli, abiem secīgi mijoties⁷¹, tādējādi Saule un Mēness veido debesu pāri⁷².

Ezergailes skatījumā šo tautasdziesmu vizizteiksmīgāk izpauž figurāla kompozīcija ar sievieti un vīrieti, kas, rokās sadevušies, katrs pārstāv savu Visuma spēku: sieviete – Sauli, vīrietis – Mēnesi. Tāpat kā savijas saules un mēness stari, arī sievietes un vīrieša ēnas saplūst, aizņemot kompozīcijas priekšplānu. Šis tušas zīmējums, atšķirībā no citām kompozīcijām, ir tīrs no liekas detalizācijas, tajā visa uzmanība vērsta uz debess spīdekļu gaismu, kurā cilvēkbūtnes kā starpnieki ēnu laukumos kāpina to starojumu.

Ezergaile, Dzidra. Kr[išjāņa] Barona 100-gades atcerei. “Sniedzēs”, 1985. 8 lpp. Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. Andreja Māra Eizāna privātais arhīvs

Šī astoņu latviešu tautasdziesmu izlase veltīta Krišjāņa Barona 150 gadu jubilejas (autore nosaukumā kļūdaini norādījusi simtgadi) atcerei un tapusi mājās ar nosaukumu “Sniedzēs” Alūksnes rajona Alsviķu pagastā, kur grafiķe kopš 1976. gada vadījusi vasaras.⁷³ Visos šī krājuma tušas zīmējumos dominē statiskas figurālas kompozīcijas ar tautumeitas tēlu, kurās vēstīts par tās tikumiem – daiļumu un čaklumu.

*Rīta rasa prot saulīti, / Spīd kā zelta gabaliņš, /
Tā spīdēja tavs darbiņš / Mūsu Laimes viducī. (2. att.)*

Tautasdziesmas vizuālai interpretācijai izmantota figurāla kompozīcija, kuras centrā ir saules apspīdēta aka ar spaini un meitu tautastērpā, radot pārļaicīgu noskaņu. Šajā tušas zīmējumā izmantots viens no grafiķes iemīļotākajiem kompozīcijas telpiskā risinājuma veidiem, kuram ir daudz piemēru ekslibros.⁷⁴ Priekšplānā ir detaļām

69 Zālīte, Māra (1985). Pilna Māra istabiņa jeb tautasdziesmu Māras meklējumos. No: *Varavīksne. 1985: Literārā mantojuma gadagrāmata*. Rīga: Liesma, 125. lpp.

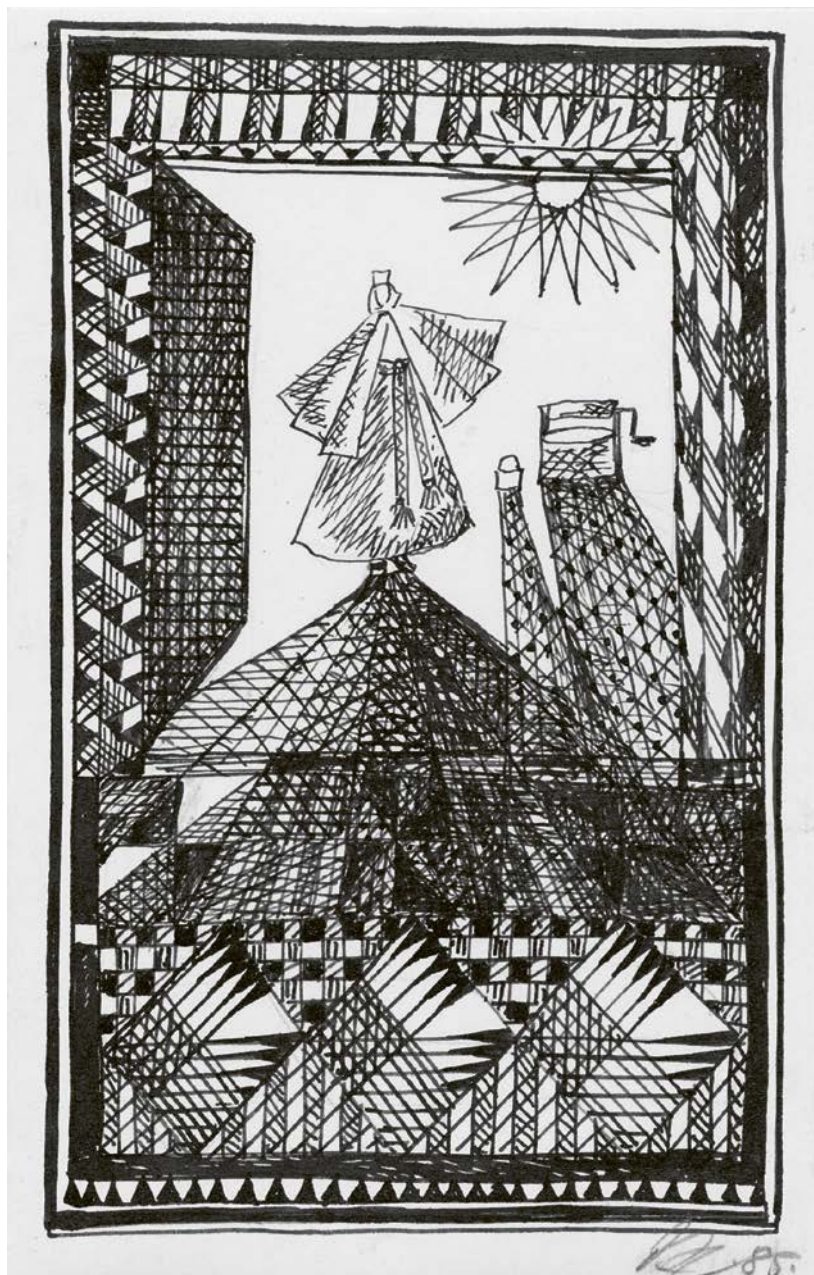
70 Kursīte, Janīna (2018). *Dainu kodekss*, 321. lpp.

71 Turpat, 323. lpp.

72 Turpat.

73 Dzene, Mārīte (2004). Rosinām piešķirt grafiķei mūža stipendiju. *Alūksnes Ziņas*. Nr. 3, 08.01., 1., 4. lpp.

74 Peldekse, Ingrīda (2023). *Grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes ekslibri*, 161. lpp.



2. attēls. Dzidra Ezergaile. "Rīta rāsa prot saulīti...". 1985.

Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. 133 x 80 mm. Andreja Māra Eizāna privātais arhivs

pārpilna plakne; ar ritmiskām līnijām tā simboliski norāda uz ikdienas dzīves detaļām, bet svarīgāko grafiķe vedina aplūkot telpas dziļumā, kas ir baltās gaismas jeb baltās matērijas ieskauds. Šajā tušas zīmējumā saule un ūdens, tāpat kā tautumeita, simbolizē dzīvības avotu. Dzejniece Māra Zālīte pētījumā par latviešu dainām nonākusi pie secinājuma, ka zemes un ūdens kopīgās “sievšķās” īpašības dažādu tautu mitoloģijās ļauj abus elementus personificēt vienā tēlā. Konkrētajā gadījumā – ūdens, tāpat kā zeme, ir Māras elements.⁷⁵

Tautas dziesmas Dzidras Ezergailes grafiskā devumā. Rīga, 1986.

Fotokopijas [18 latviešu tautasdziesmas], lappuses nav numurētas.

Andreja Māra Eizāna privātais arhīvs

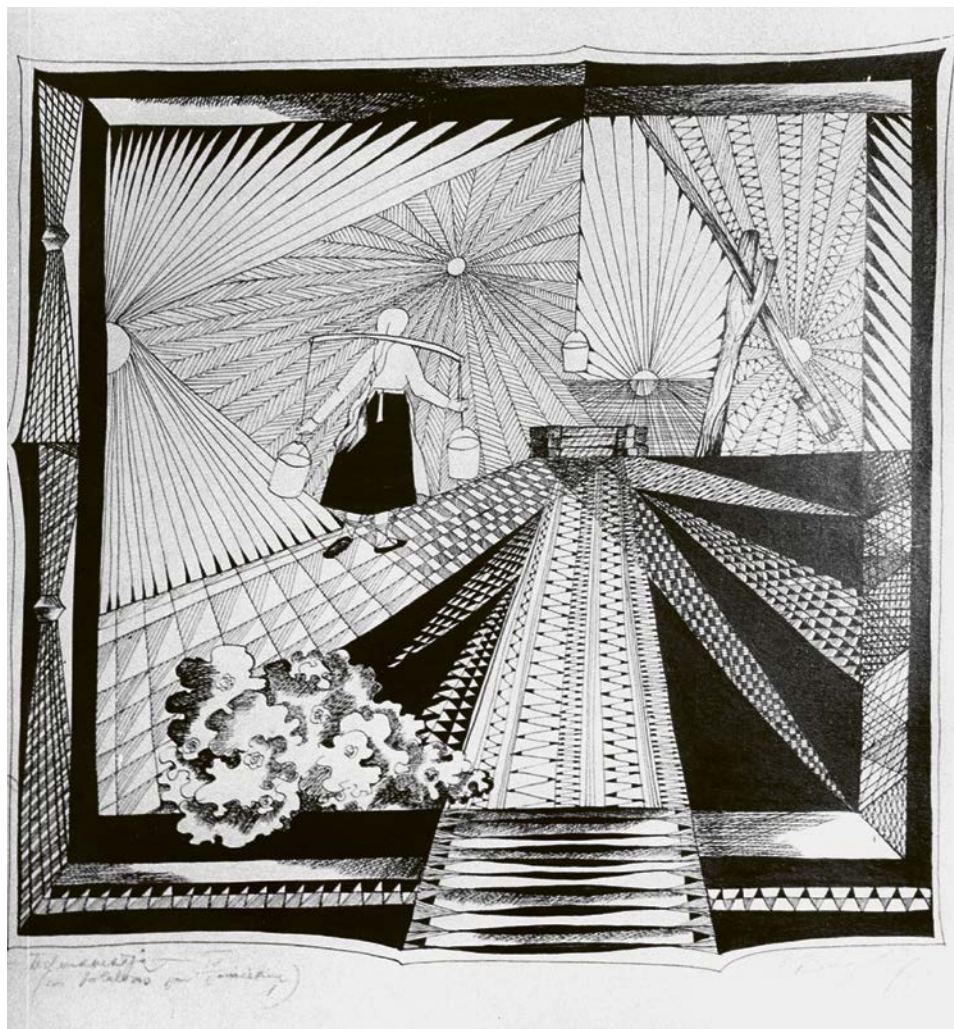
Šajā tautasdziesmu krājumā ir iekļauti vairāki stājdarbi ar atsevišķiem nosaukumiem un attiecīgi pieskaņotu tautasdziesmu, kā arī tušas zīmējumi ar tautasdziesmu. Krājumu raksturo gan satura, gan formas ziņā zināma nosacītība. Nav izsecināms, vai tautasdziesma kalpojusi par iedvesmas avotu stājdarbam vai otrādi. Tas pats attiecināms uz formas nosacītību, jo fotogrāfijas neļauj noteikt nedz stājdarbu izmēru, nedz tehniku.

*Divas rokas, divas kājas, / Tie bij' mani godātāji; /
Kad tie abi piekusis, / Neviens mani negodās. (3. att.)*

Vienā no tušas zīmējumiem ar nosaukumu “Ūdensnesēja” atspoguļojas svarīgs darbs lauku sētā. Šim stājdarbam Ezergaile izvēlējusies tēmai veltītu tautasdziesmu ar spilgti izteiktu personifikāciju: rokas un kājas godā pašu tautumeitu par paveiktiem darbiem. Šīs tautasdziesmas vizualizācijā sievietes mātišķā loma iecelta filozofiskā kategorijā, jo par otru kompozicionālo centru ir uzskatāma aka, kas ar veldzi gādā par dzīvības uzturēšanu. Uz kompozīcijas centru vērtais līniju ritms akcentē aku kalniņā, kura, tāpat kā ābele tautasdziesmās, mēdz būt telpiski novietota augstāk, tādējādi iegūstot sava veida sakrālu nozīmi.⁷⁶ Akas grodi pakalnā ir ieskaudi vairāku saulu ielokā – tos apspīd gan austoša, gan zenītā esoša, gan rietoša saule. Daudzas takas un taciņas, iespējams, arī grīdceliņš, no priekšplāna saplūst vienā punktā pie akas. Telpiskuma efektu rada arī iekomponētā tautumeitas figūra, kas ar nēšiem pār plecu un pret skatītāju pavērstu muguru sper soli akas – šīs kompozīcijas centrālā punkta – virzienā. Akcentējot kustības dinamiku, grafiķe ir izmantojusi diagonāles daudzkārtējā kārtojumā. Iepretī mūsdienu sabiedrībai, kurā sievietes darbi, uzdevumi un pienākumi tiek uztverti kā mazāk prestiži, iekārojami vai nozīmīgi

75 Zālīte, Māra (1985). Pilna Māra istabiņa jeb tautasdziesmu Māras meklējumos, 136. lpp.

76 Vācere, Laila (2012). *Kognitīvā poētika latviešu dainās par ābeli: no formulas uz zīmi*, 101. lpp.



3. attēls. Dzidra Ezergaile. "Ūdensnesēja". 1986.
Fotokopija. Andreja Māra Eizāna privātais arhīvs

salīdzinājumā ar vīriešu analogiem⁷⁷, Ezergailes skatījumā divu centrālo akcentu – tautumeitas un akas – izcēlumā jaušas ne tikai vispārīga darba tikuma godāšana, bet pašas darītājas – sievietes – novērtēšana, kas bija raksturīga tautasdziesmu rašanās laikam agrārajā kultūrā, un, lai gan šo sabiedrības formu nav pamata uzskatīt par “matriarhātu”⁷⁸, tomēr, kā to šajā piemērā apliecina Ezergailes centrālo tēlu izvēle, par matricentrisku gan.

Lai darbs veiktos, nēšiem jābūt līdzsvarā – par to liecina mākslinieces secinātais kādā no vēstulēm: “**Līdzsvarā** pretestības nav.”⁷⁹ No fizikas likumiem smeltā atziņa ir nostiprinājusies Ezergailes pirmās augstākās izglītības apguves laikā – četros studiju gados Latvijas Valsts universitātes (LVU) Arhitektūras fakultātē (1947–1951).⁸⁰ Pēc fakultātes reorganizācijas Ezergaile studijas LVU pameta, lai tās turpinātu Latvijas Valsts Mākslas akadēmijā. Arhitektūras studiju laiks atstājis ietekmi uz grafiķes mākslinieciskajām izpausmēm – kā spilgtākā minama viņas izteiktā telpas izjūta, kas kompozīcijās manifestējas tiklab stādarbos, kā arī ekslibros.⁸¹

Janīna Kursīte 1999. gadā izdotajā grāmatā “Mītiskais folklorā, literatūrā, mākslā” arī atsaukusies uz līdzsvaru – vai drīzāk tā trūkumu. Autore norāda, ka vīrišķā un sievišķā, tēva un mātes līdzsvars ilgos patricentrisma gados ir bijis izjaukts.⁸² “Feminisma kustība, kas nāca kā pretreakcija uz šo bīstamo savvērtību, pārcēla smaguma punktu no labās uz kreiso pusi. No tā līdzsvars neradās. Taču feminisms vienlaikus signalizēja par pārmaiņu nepieciešamību,” secina Kursīte, vienlaikus akcentējot, ka pārmaiņu vidū jābūt arī matricentriskā skatpunkta atgūšanai.⁸³

*Neviens mani neredzēja, / Kad es gauži noraudāju: /
Piedurknīte, tā redzēja, / Tai slaucīju asariņu. (4. att.)*

Šajā tušas zīmējumā figurāla kompozīcija ietver ābeli, kuras zaros rotājas saule. Kompozīcijas centrā attēlota bēdu pārņemta sērdienīte, kas nolikusi grozu un piestājusi pie ābeles izraudāties. Šajā tautasdziesmā arī izmantota spilgta personifikācija – piedurknīte ir asaru lieciniece. Cita sērdienītes bēdu uzklaušītāja – ābele – kompozīcijā telpiski ir novietota augstāk, tādējādi apliecinot tās sakrālo nozīmi.⁸⁴ Šajā kompozīcijā Ezergaile vizuāliem līdzekļiem īstenojusi konceptuālu metaforu “labais – augšup”,

77 Kukaine, Jana (2016). *Dailās mātes. Sieviete, ķermenis, subjektivitāte*, 29. lpp.

78 Turpat.

79 Ezergaile, Dzidra (2006). Vēstule Guntim Višņevskim 13. decembrī. Raksta autores privātais arhīvs.

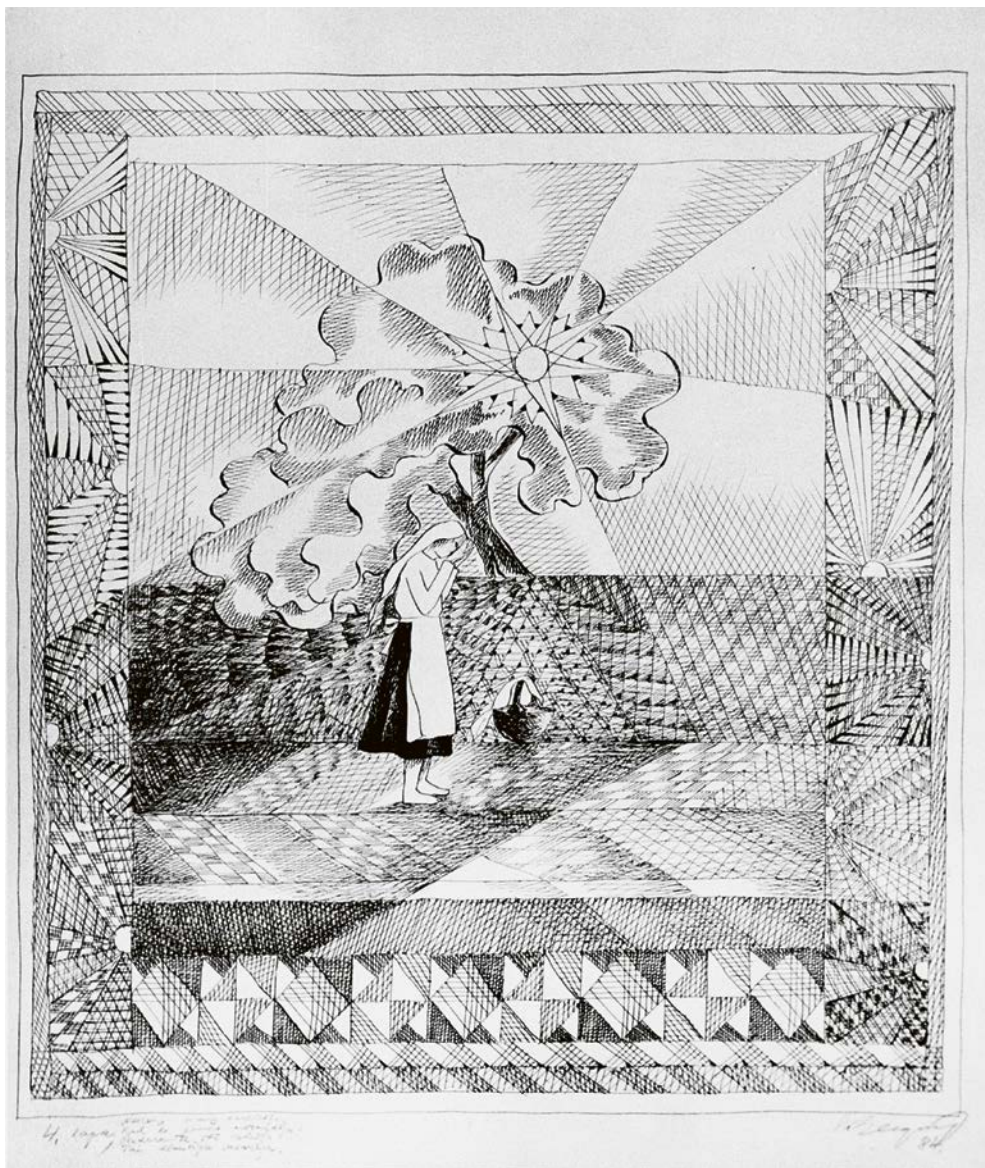
80 Ezergaile, Dzidra (2005). Mazas atmiņu šķembas. No: Šņore, Skaidrīte (sast.). *Rīgas 2. vidusskola. 1940–1990*. Rīga: [Rīgas 2. vidusskola], 335. lpp.

81 Peldekse, Ingrida (2023). *Grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes ekslibri*, 161.–172. lpp.

82 Kursīte, Janīna (1999). *Mītiskais folklorā, literatūrā, mākslā*, 79. lpp.

83 Turpat, 79.–80. lpp.

84 Vācere, Laila (2012). *Kognitīvā poētika latviešu dainās par ābeli: no formulas uz zīmi*, 101. lpp.



4. attēls. Dzidra Ezergaile. "Neviens mani neredzēja...". 1986.
Fotokopija. Andreja Māra Eizāna privātais arhīvs

uz kuru atsaucas kognitīvās poētikas pētniece Laila Vācere⁸⁵. Valodnieces Veltas Rūķes-Draviņas rezumējumā: “Kopā ņemot, par latvisku uztveri [...] varētu uzlūkot to, ka ābele ir *mātes* koks. Tieši tādēļ tai nedrīkst ne zarus lauzt, ne ziedus vainagā pīt.”⁸⁶ Šajā nozīmē ābele simbolizē māmuļu, pie kuras patveras bārenīte, bet, poētiski savietota ar sievietes tēlu, tā aptver visu sievietes dzīves gājumu.⁸⁷ Iespējams, ka tieši saules cauraustie ābeles zari liecina par šī koka saistību ar sieviešu dievībām; ābeles galotnē nereti sēd Saule, pazarēs – Saules meitas.⁸⁸ Kā secinājusi Kursīte, latviešiem koku kults bija saistīts galvenokārt ar Lielās pirmmātes godināšanu.⁸⁹ Turklāt mātes-gari mītiskajā apziņā saglabājušies ilgāk latviešu, igauņu, lībiešu, ķeltu tradīcijā, kur patricentriska ideoloģijās balstīti valstiski veidojumi radās tikai salīdzinoši jaunākos laikos vai neizveidojās nemaz.⁹⁰

Ezergaile, Dzidra. Veltījums Zigurdam Zuzem: 6 tušas zīmējumi no Dzidras Ezergailes 1989. gada aug[ustā]. [17] lpp. Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. 428 x 304 mm. LNB IZ-L/Ezergaile-11. Alberta Linarta dāvinājums

Akas kā ūdens simbola tēma Ezergailei bijusi aktuāla visā radošajā darbībā; šis tautasdziesmu krājums, kurā dominē saule un aka, ir uztverams kā parafrāze par 70. gadu sākumā tapušo aku sēriju. Grafīķis Zigurds Zuze šo darbu izstādes kataloga ievadā minējis: “Lirisko un tautisko motīvu rada bagātās tonālās gradācijas, kas rodas līniju krustojumos. [...] Dominējošs kļūst enerģiskais un aktīvais ritmu pretnostatījums. [...] paliek vairs tikai divi mūžības un dzīvības simboli: saule un aka.”⁹¹

*Noriet saule vakarā, / Spīdēdama, mirdzēdama: /
Noiet zeltu sijādama, / Sudrabiņu kaisīdama.* (5. att.)

Abstraktā ainavā iekomponētā aka ir Visuma spīdekļu izgaismota. Kompozīcijā dominē divi dabas spēki – saule, pirmmātes iemiesojums, un turpat līdzās – vīrišķais Visuma spēks mēness. Šajā tušas zīmējumā saules staru savijuma interpretācijā Ezergaile ir atkāpusies no tradicionālās dažādu staru kūļu saspēles. Lai vizuāliem līdzekļiem izteiktu darbības vārdus “spīdēdama”, “mirdzēdama”, “sijādama” un “kaisīdama”,

85 Turpat, 101. lpp.

86 Rūķe-Draviņa, Velta (1986). *Cilvēks un daba latviešu tautasdziesmās*, 54. lpp. Grāmatas autore izcēlums slīprakstā.

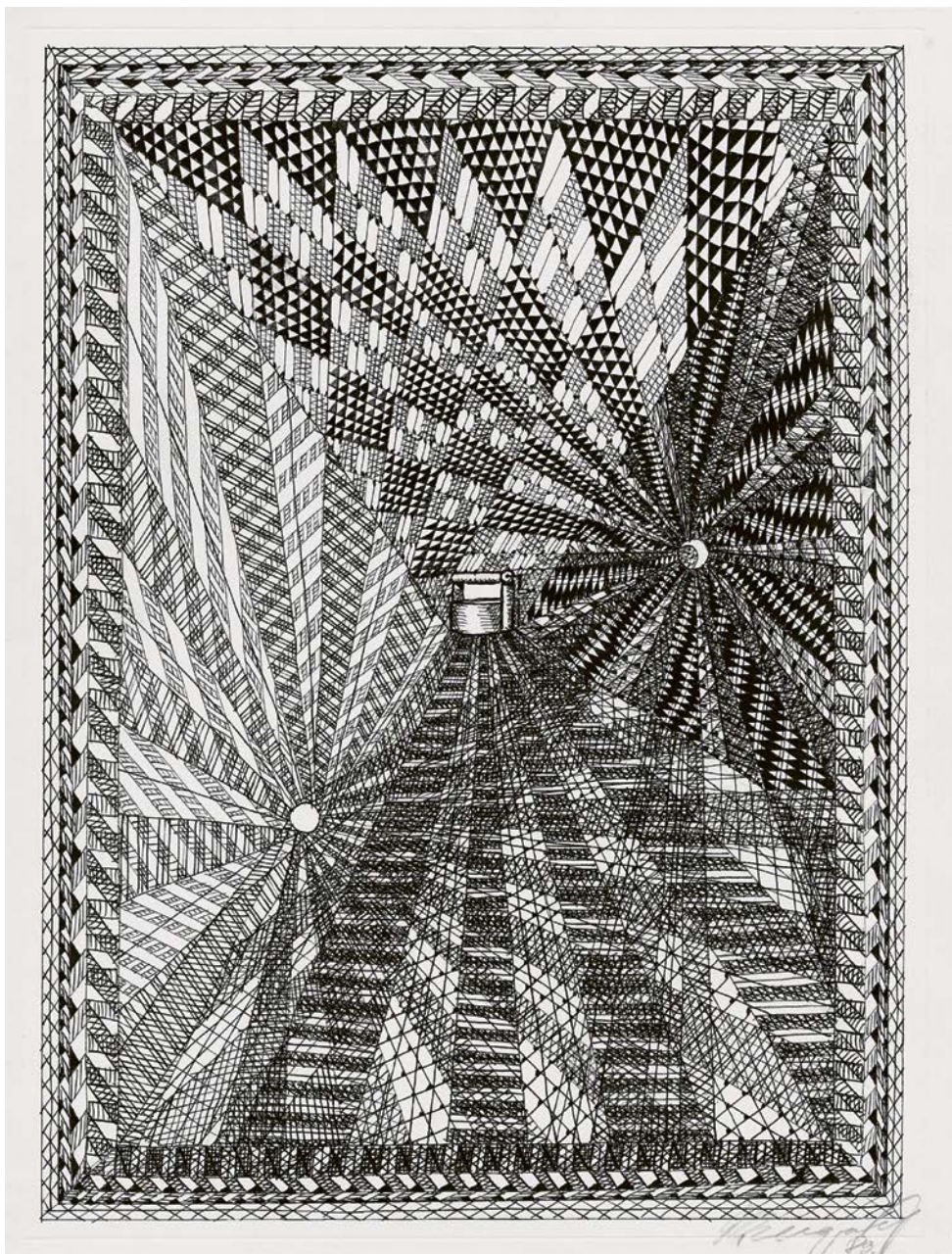
87 Vācere, Laila (2012). *Kognitīvā poētika latviešu dainās par ābeli: no formulas uz zīmi*, 13. lpp.

88 Kursīte, Janīna (1999). *Mītiskais, folklorā, literatūrā, mākslā*, 190. lpp.

89 Turpat, 511. lpp.

90 Turpat, 514. lpp.

91 *Dzidras Ezergailes grafika, Artūra Kiršfelda plakāti* (1970), 2. lpp.



5. attēls. Dzidra Ezergaile. "Noriet saule vakarā...". 1989.

Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. 428 x 304 mm. LNB IZ-L/Ezergaile-11. Alberta Linarta dāvinājums

grafīķe ir izšķīrusies par pārrāvumiem staru šautrās, akcentējot baltos laukumus, kas dominē saules un mēness staru krustpunktos.

Tautasdziesma ārpus krājumiem – apsveikums

[Apsveikums Andrejam vārda dienā 2010. gada 30. novembrī.]

Bez datējuma. Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. 225 x 490 mm. LNB Mākslas krājums. Andreja Māra Eizāna dāvinājums

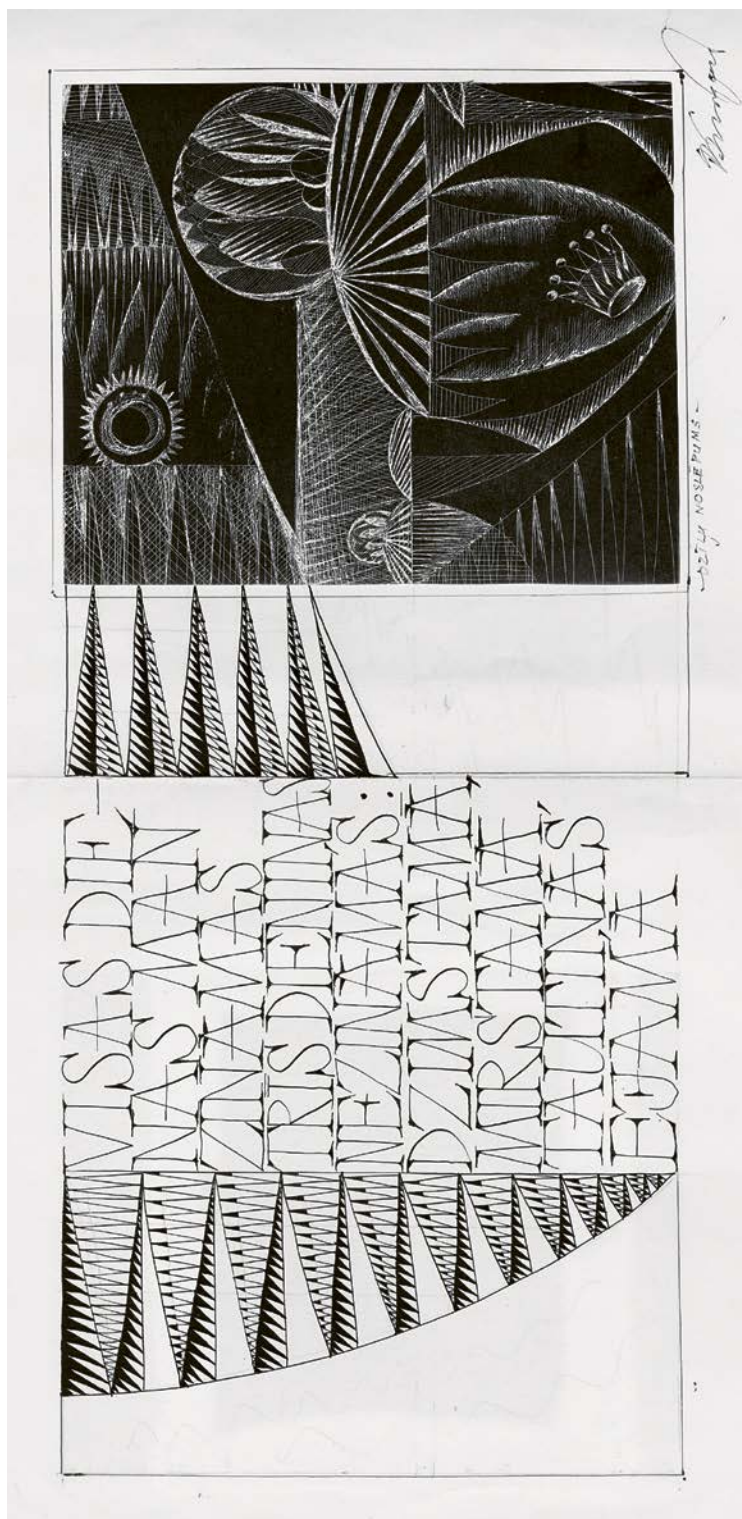
*Visas dienas man zināmas, / Trīs dieniņas nezināmas: /
Dzimstamā, mirstamā, / Tautiņās ejamā. (6. att.)*

Tautasdziesmu vizuālo interpretāciju vidū izceļams īpašs piemērs, kas savā ziņā uzskatāms par kaligrāfijas paraugu un atšķiras no pārējām ar tušu rakstītājam tautasdziesmu četrindēm. Izvēlētais burtu noformējums ar pusapli iezīmētām melnbaltām šautrām kompozicionāli ietiecas Ezergailes stājdarba “Dziļu noslēpums” struktūrā. Šis jautā tehnikā darinātais darbs patiesībā ir vērtējams kā divi patstāvīgi grafikas darbi, kuru simbiozē atsedzas trīs izšķirīgi sievišķās identitātes brīži: līdzās piedzimšanai un nāvei līdzvērtīgi nozīmīgs lūzuma punkts sievietes dzīvē ir precības – ieiešana citā dzimtā, proti, identitātes nomaiņa. To liecina tautasdziesmas vārdi; kosmiskais ritms caurvij sievietes dzīvi – tā ir jaunība, briedums, atjaunošanās un novecošana, un vēstītais skan pirmajā personā. Tautasdziesmas vizualizācijā iekļautajā grafikas darbā “Dziļu noslēpums” saules apspīdētā lauku ainavā ar birzīm un tīrumiem dzīlēs ir kritis tautumeitas vainags – jaunavības simbols. Šajā tautasdziesmas vizuālajā apdarē Ezergailes izvēlēta stājdarba nosaukums korelē ar tautasdziesmās iekodēto atziņu, ka tā sauktajās primitīvajās, agrārajās kultūrās sievietes auglības funkcija tika godāta lielākā mērā nekā modernajā kultūrā.⁹² Janīna Kursīte norāda, ka, lai gan latviešiem nav laulības dievietes, viņiem ir dieviete, kas gādā par vainaga (nevainības) noņemšanu, un tā ir Laima.⁹³

Minētās tautasdziesmu izlases apliecina grafīķes Dzidras Ezergailes uzticību latviešu tautasdziesmās paustajām ētiskajām vērtībām. Krājumus caurvij femīns pasaules vērojums, kas raksturīgs matricentriskajām latviešu tautasdziesmām. Ņemot vērā to, ka tušas zīmējuma tehnika bija iemīļota izpaušmes forma grafīķes mākslinieciskajā jaunradē un minētie tautasdziesmu krājumi galvenokārt ir veltīti konkrētiem cilvēkiem un tapuši autores oriģināliesējumā, var pieņemt, ka izvēlēto

92 Kukaine, Jana (2016). *Daiļās mātes. Sieviete, ķermenis, subjektivitāte*, 28. lpp.

93 Kursīte, Janīna (1999). *Mītiskais folklorā, literatūrā, mākslā*, 264.-265. lpp.



6. attēls. Dzidra Ezergaile. "Visas dienas man zināmas...". B. d. Papīrs, tuša. Oriģināls. 225 x 490 mm.
LNB Mākslas krājums. Andreja Māra Eizāna dāvinājums

tautasdziesmu vizuālā apcere savā ziņā ir uzskatāma par Ezergailes pasaules skatījuma apliecinājumu koncentrētā formā.

Nobeigums

Pētot grafiķes Dzidras Ezergailes veidotās tautasdziesmu izlases, kuras māksliniece interpretējusi tušas zīmējuma tehnikā, atklājas ētiskās vērtības, kas radušas atbalsi visā viņas mākslinieciskajā mantojumā kopumā. Šie tautasdziesmu krājumi palīdz arī izsekot Ezergailes radošā rokraksta veidošanās gaitai 20. gadsimta 60. un 70. gados, kad Latvijā plašos tautas slāņos dzima folklorisma kustība.

Šajā pētījumā iekļauti vienīgie četri līdz šim zināmie Dzidras Ezergailes sastādītie un lielākoties tušas zīmējuma tehnikā interpretētie latviešu tautasdziesmu krājumi ar kopskaitā četrdesmit dainām, kā arī viena apsveikuma kartīte. Krājumi tapuši laikposmā no 1983. līdz 1989. gadam. Divas no šīm tautasdziesmu izlasēm atrodas Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas mākslas kolekcijā, bet divi krājumi – privātā īpašumā.

Tuvākai izpētei piedāvātajos tušas zīmējumos dominē femīns skatījums, jo latviešu tautasdziesmām raksturīgs matricentriskais pasaules uzskats. Tautasdziesmās ietvertās atziņas saistītas ar cikliskajiem ritmiem dabā un cilvēka dzīvē. Femīnā komponente izpaužas kosmisko spēku personifikācijā – tā ir Saule, kas pārstāv sievišķo spēku mijiedarbībā ar Mēnesi kā vīrišķo spēku. Līdzās simboliskajai mātišķības nozīmei Saule, būdama gaismas un siltuma avots, ir arī dzīvības priekšnoteikums, īpaši novērtēts Latvijas platuma grādos.

Mākslinieces apgūtās prasmes kaligrāfijas un plakāta jomās, kodolīgais un koncentrētais izteiksmes veids atspoguļojas arī visa radošā mūža garumā darinātajos ekslibros. Likumsakarīgi viņa pievērsās arī latviešu tautasdziesmu interpretācijai, jo tautasdziesmām raksturīga iezīme ir koncentrēts vēstījums, kas ietverts četrās rindās. Ezergailes izvēlēto latviešu tautasdziesmu vizuālās interpretācijas ļauj pilnīgāk izprast viņas pasaules uztveri un ētiskās vērtības, kas iekodētas viņas mākslinieciskajā mantojumā kopumā.

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INGRĪDA PELDEKSE

Visual Interpretation of Latvian Folk Songs in Graphic Artist Dzidra Ezergaile's Ink Drawings: The Feminine Dimension

Summary

This article focuses on the visual interpretation of Latvian folk songs, or *dainas*, through the ink drawings of Latvian graphic artist Dzidra Ezergaile (1926–2013), active during the second half of the 20th century. This aspect of her artistic work represents an essential part of her creative legacy from the 1980s. Ezergaile's visual interpretation of Latvian folk songs reveals a worldview shaped by the perspective of a woman artist, deeply rooted in the ethical values encoded in the *dainas*.

Ezergaile's collection of forty visually interpreted *dainas*, grouped into four series created between 1983 and 1989, not only illuminates these ethical values but also unfolds the artist's matricentric perception of the world – an outlook characteristic of Latvian folk song tradition. The matricentric worldview is explicitly present throughout her broader oeuvre, with the Sun as a central symbol of motherhood.

Ezergaile's mastery of ink drawing originated from her studies at the Riga Commerce School, where the curriculum included calligraphy, later complemented by her academic education at the Art Academy of Latvia. She graduated from the Department of Graphic Art, Poster Subdivision, in 1956. Her training in poster design and bookplate creation cultivated precision and conciseness – qualities that also shaped her visual interpretations of folk songs, where meaning is similarly condensed into quatrain form.

The preservation of Ezergaile's visually interpreted *dainas* in public memory institutions such as the Latvian National Library, as well as in private collections, provides insight into a previously little-known aspect of her creative practice. These interpretations significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of Dzidra Ezergaile's artistic legacy.

Keywords: Latvian graphic art, 1970s, 1980s, Latvian folk songs, ink drawings.

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