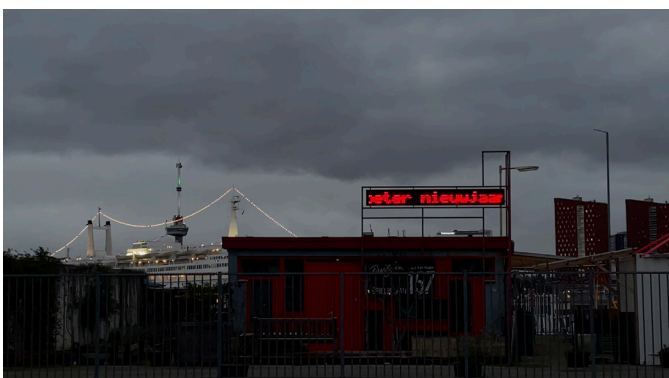


Poetic documentary is this hybrid genre that connects classic, experimental and essayistic styles of documentary film making; often lacking explicit narrative – these are the elements that I often find myself combining in my practice of moving image making. Poetic way of documentary film making was an important creative tool in Lithuania during the time of the Soviet occupation – it was a way for Lithuanian artists to secretly express their thoughts and feelings without openly disobeying the restrictions of the totalitarian regime. Even though I was born in an independent Lithuania – Lithuanian history is important to me as past and present is strongly entangled. Focusing on the poetic documentary mode of filmmaking in my practice is a way for me to stay connected to my roots. This way of filmmaking allows the personal experiences and emotions to unfold by using creative techniques, which are supposed to make the viewers to feel a part of the makers life. The themes of my most recent work mostly comes from my personal worries and experiences – in a way it is a sort of therapeutic and liberating process. As my practice is research based, while researching by using various methods such as reading/writing, interviewing, visual and theoretical research I am learning about myself and about the world around me.

While visualizing my ideas I often tend to work with found footage – footage that I find on my hard drives, old phone or computer archives, or I use footage filmed by my grandfather as he is a filmmaker himself and gladly shares his material with me. This year I challenged myself to collect more material on a daily basis so I carry a handy cam everywhere with me and I document moments which later could be used for my films.



I Think They Are Buildings

Lithuanian identity is often a part of my work. Now that I moved to Rotterdam, I feel like I have two homes - two places in the world, where I feel myself, I feel happy and feel at home. On the flip side – when you have two homes – something is inevitably, ultimately lost. You can't have it all and be in the two places at the same time. During the Cihad's seminar we read a part of the PHD thesis by Turkish author Nermin Saybasili : Borders and Ghosts: Migratory Hauntings in Visual Culture. After reading the piece it struck me - I am like a ghost – stuck in between two worlds, belonging yet not fully belonging in the both of them. That being said, my most recent work – 4min. video, I Think They Are Buildings – began from this big, perhaps even an abstract word - solitude. To me solitude is like a metamorphosis of loneliness that is often shared between the people who have experienced emigration, in one way or another. While trying to unfold this topic to a more personal level I tried to relive the time when I felt the loneliest after coming to live in the new country and re-discover where did I find relief. I used to walk around the city a lot so I took the same, now already well-known, routes around Rotterdam that were unfamiliar 6 years ago. And it struck me – I always found comfort in buildings of Rotterdam – big, large structures, weird shaped and colored, I wasn't sure why but I always felt calmer and, on a good day even happy to see the landscape of the city of Rotterdam. Apparently, the study of neuroscientist Colin Ellard proves, that the complexity of buildings facades affects people in a positive way. I was interested to research more about the way how architecture affect people's well-being and I came across a book Poetics of Space by a French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. Labeled as a book about architecture, author examines the domestic space of our homes through poetry. The book got me question the notion of home. I asked myself, what and/or where is home to me? What makes me feel at home? Do I need to have couch to sit comfortably to feel at home? What if I had to leave my home because of war and not because of privilege, where is home then? These all questions got to me during the freewriting (which I found particularly helpful) exercise which revealed the essence of this project. By the influence of the book and the questions I asked myself, I realized, that all the houses/homes that I have ever lived at, all the memories of home that I 'store' within me – makes me home myself. I started to realize this piece as a transformation of a person rather than a nostalgia for home. Transformation of a person, who, because of the experience of displacement becomes home for him/her self.

Ideally, if there were no time restrictions this film would have 3 chapters that would each illustrate 3 different stages of the transformation:

1. Home as a house. First house that made me feel at home is a base of understanding about a primary feeling of home. My first home is just a place, I did not know any better nor worse.
2. Home as a feeling. All the houses and homes I used to live in taught me and introduced me to different feelings and made me understand what it means to feel at home and what it means to long for home. Home became a feeling, not a place.
3. I carry all the memories of my previous houses, moods, people, I know what it means and what I need to feel at home. I house it all within me. Withing me I carry all the homes of the past, I bring them everywhere with me. I became a house myself because of all the previous memories and experiences. I feel good in an unfamiliar place because I have it all within me.

Because of a time restriction I needed to compress these stages into the video piece of 4 minutes so I decided to write a poem that would illustrate the transition between the 3 transformational stages. I wrote the poem by using the cut-out writing method. I never wrote poetry myself but since I have discovered this method earlier this year, I found it a useful creative tool to use in my practice - collage of words and sentences, results in rather surrealistic text with intriguing phrases.

Eventually, the poem became the most relevant element of this project, and it was a challenge to accept it - 'I am visual maker, not a writer, I can't just write stuff on screen and call it a film!'. It took me a while to accept that writing sentences on screen is also a way of image making.

In the making process, it was difficult to balance it out – I wanted visuals and sound not to overpower the written text. Therefore, I minimized the visual and audible material to a very minimum which resulted in this very elegant and quiet video.



"To read poetry is to daydream" (Bachelard 38) - inspired by the book, my attempt was for this video to unfold as if you were reading poetry, as if it was a mind space, therefore I chose the main visual to be an abstract, very zoomed in and slowed down image of a snow falling in the background of trees, as if it is your mind space – snowy landscape might bring people back in time – in many places in the world it doesn't snow as much anymore as it did 20 years ago. The image of the snow (the mind space) gets interrupted by short glitches, as it happens daily, when random memories just enter your mind. The glitches are represented by the actual archival images from my childhood and the youth of my parents. I wanted this video to evoke a mixture of feelings of nostalgia, displacement, longing, but also comfort – wanted it to feel like it's really cold but you are warm 'inside' (both literally and metaphorically). I tried to achieve it with a soundscape, but because I minimized it all – it ended up being just a sound of a fireplace on one part and a sound of the city in the other. Now that I look back on it – I could have developed a soundscape better, make it more layered and more textural. In general, visual and sensory elements could have been developed further to trigger the feelings of nostalgia, displacement and comfort to more people.

WHATS NEXT

As I am stuck in between two worlds – I am also stuck in between two languages. My Lithuanian identity and language is important to me – my work has always been in Lithuanian. Because of the academic circumstances and my 2nd home abroad– every film that I make and that includes language is translated to English. In my most recent projects translated text became a part of the visual instead of being just a functional subtitle. I would like to research it further – to work with texts on the screen as a way to connect two worlds. Experiment with graphic design on the moving image or with moving text on still image. Work with typography and write more, translate texts into images.

To continue developing my visual practice I am planning to research the essayistic film form of Jean-Luc Godard and other French New Wave movement creators and research the tools used to break through from the classical Hollywood cinema and the shift toward more experimental, personal, and self-reflexive forms of filmmaking.

My way of working mostly is process/research based – without actually having a concrete final goal, I am collecting and adding new material in the process until it reaches a certain point. It is a very comfortable way of working, but during the projects with sensitive deadlines - projects might fail to reach their full potential. Therefore, I am interested to engage more into script writing and hoping to gain more power over my workflow. In the near future, I would like to challenge myself to make a fiction film, perhaps it would be a fiction/documentary hybrid. I want to research Lithuanian paganism and mythology to broaden my interest of cultural identity and perhaps it would turn out to be a film about Lithuanian Goddess of Love Milda but nowadays.

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