



CAC

interviu

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Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain*, recently presented at the Venice Biennale, closed in on and moved a community of artists living, working or having originated from Lithuania; a community more colourful than that, which is generally seen and recognised in the exhibition or textual spaces. While working on the project numerous lists were sought and compiled: artists who had received the state grant (classified by type of work and year of stipend); artists' contact details; artists who agreed to participate in the project, and also works proposed for the project. As the 'collection' began to materialise, yet another list became evident: artists who had received the state grant but didn't appear in any of the lists. Later, the accompanying and eponymous book systemised this abundance of information in the form of indexes – four alphabetical and chronological lists of the artists and the artworks.

Therefore the idea behind this issue of *CAC Interviu* is simple. The newly discovered yet always existent diversity suggested that it would be no less

Editorial

interesting to talk to these very different artists – both those who took part in the project as well as those who chose not to. Fittingly, the following pages began as lists too – who could or wanted to converse with whom. There were those who agreed but later changed their mind, those who did not reply to the invitation as well as authors that promised texts, which were never delivered. And so, the list of *CAC Interviu* contents was constantly being rewritten and updated too.

When inviting the interviewees to talk with the artists the project *Behind the White Curtain* was suggested as a starting point, a pretext, that could be discussed or not; and that it would be interesting if each exchange would find its own theme catalysed by each artist, his work and interests. Imagining that in this way we could construct a fragment of a map of artists' thoughts and ideas.

The Venice project wasn't left behind in these conversations, however different trajectories of different artists' works, opinions and insights are laid forth in this issue.

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Reminiscences of reverberations*

AURELIJA MAKNYTĖ

AURELIJA MAKNYTĖ — ALGIMANTAS KUNČIUS

ALGIMANTAS KUNČIUS is a photographer living in Vilnius.

AURELIJA MAKNYTĖ is an artist based in Vilnius.

Aurelija Maknytė: The initial idea was very simple – I wanted to ask questions and hear answers. But then I began to think what these questions could be. The kind of questions I could not ask anyone else.

Algimantas Kunčius: Yes, and in addition, you already expect something when asking a question.

AM: Right. In this way, I would be trapped inside the genre's conventions. Recently I read a book whose author admitted in the preface that he had written the book, among other things, to jumble the librarian's mind and soul, because the librarian would have to catalogue the book and find the appropriate shelf for it. The writer attempted to break free from the format and the conventions of the genre... But is it not the case that such a premeditated, artificial liberation, confines one to a different set of conventions? Then I also thought: could there be a kind of interview that the magazine would not be able to present as an interview? And then I realised that I had fallen into a trap, because every conversation is more than just a conversation, and every interview is more than just a dialogue... (*You will find the conclusion of this thought at the end of the interview, because it was concluded after the interview text had been edited.*)

What do I expect when asking questions? To learn something?

AK: Perhaps humans are created in such a

way that they acquire information naturally in the process of living, instead of gathering it consciously. One is not isolated in a capsule; one receives information through all the senses, and the content of this information sometimes makes one want to protect one's mind from it... And you usually do. You open a newspaper, read it... We can also talk of how much it all hurts. I am tempted to ask a simple and banal question: why do we need heritage? Why do books, libraries, museums exist? What is it all for? Because you pick up a book and find a friend.

AM: Are there any books that shook you and had a strong influence on you?

AK: For me books by Vaižgantas and Knut Hamsun were special. Hamsun in particular encouraged self-confidence in being myself and having no fear. It is not necessary to possess or acquire something; it is enough to be satisfied with what you have.

AM: Inner freedom is as important as a backbone – I recall a fact that you mentioned in an earlier interview: you once skipped your duties, because they were normative.

AK: Existence that takes the form of living, expressing oneself and working here and now is a natural thing, an organic process. When you live together with others, you naturally have to affirm yourself, exist, transmit something, accept or reject things, adapt and make compromises, which are difficult, and

therefore sometimes one can not take it. But if you have common sense... And how to maintain this common sense? Immanuel Kant talks about it nicely and extensively – one must live and speak calmly, instead of being all emotional and frenzied like I am now... Calmly read into things, look deeper into them, calmly understand them. The text flows, and you too gradually begin to understand it, calmly, without hurry...

When I read a book, I don't like action. I like images – whatever I read, I need space. When I find an action space, I can read about action too. I don't need to go to Egypt. I have read the accounts of the 19th century French art critic and painter Eugène Fromentin's travels to Arabia. How skilfully he describes it all! You simply melt – it has such a strong effect!

AM: And you might become disillusioned if you actually went there...

AK: Maybe so. Someone asked me once: 'You probably travel a lot?' – 'No' I said, 'I think a lot.'

AM: Thinking is travelling.

AK: We are thinking incessantly. Thinking about the world never stops.

AM: Things that never end are mesmerising. I have always been fascinated and frightened at the same time by the fairy tales without an ending – they are like an eternal endless journey.

AK: With age you fill yourself up as much as it is possible. I am not an absolutist. As I don't proclaim any truths, I just have my own vessel and fill it up, and I don't want to fill in anything else; maybe it is full already anyway...

AM: And that vessel, if it is your own, maybe you can transform it and increase its capacity?

AK: There is no such need anymore...

AK: I think negatively of statements that say something must be done in a particular way – it is dogmatic, just like in the church. I remember how I once had a heated argument with my grandma, back when I was a youngster, a ninth or tenth grader. We argued about the priest – I said that he was preaching his sermons, teaching people how to live over and over, but some people spoke of how he was saying one thing and doing another... Then my grandma said: 'Have you seen the sign near Klovainiai that says the distance to Pakruojis is seven kilometres? The sign tells the absolute truth, but it does not go in the direction it points... It is the same with the priest.' The epitome of village wisdom. But I prefer non-coercive action. I like to be where meditation is taking place.

AM: It seems to me that creative work itself is a meditative process, and the things you do remind me of watching the clouds – it is an ever-changing everyday process... Here I see a photograph hung on the wall that illustrates this – a cloud, a juniper tree, and

its shadow (*a photograph from the Reminiscences series*).

AK: Oh, yes, it is an icon, a sign of my expression... It has all the tensions: low-high, close-distant, white-black... With *Reminiscences* I was going towards a completely individual 'the world and I' relationship. Nature, culture and inner monologue action. The things here are not pointed out for their function; they are arranged in a spontaneous way, and this junction of things gives birth to meanings, thoughts and associative links.

AM: I would like to rotate this photograph horizontally, so that the cloud and the shadow could turn into the trees. (*It would be perfect if Kunčius gave permission to publish this photograph rotated on the page – after all, in Darius Mikšys' project Behind the White Curtain one could have exhibited and looked at the work in a way that the author did not necessarily intend...*)

AK: I can openly admit that in 1969 the square helped me to discover...

AM: The square of Malevich?

AM: The square of the camera. But Malevich used the square for a reason – he simply reminded us of it. Today I believe that some kind of revelation enabled me to grasp the importance of the square. I used this format in the *Sundays* series, because the square

scheme at all, is it? I am improvising now, but I will have to remember it all... *Verstand* – when you process the material, the intellect turns on – you contemplate, arrange, mould things and try to arrive at some kind of end result. And the end result is a product of reason, because you have to understand what you are doing, what your idea is. When photographing and watching people in general, I am interested in conveying the idea of their

feeling of self-worth, rather than their actions.

*Talking to a person and writing down the words of the conversation later are such different things; they resemble *a linguistic-acoustic illusion: when you talk, the meanings arrange themselves in one way, but when the conversation lays itself down in the form of lines on a page, the meaning wanders elsewhere, like some living creature...*



ALGIMANTAS KUNČIUS
Niūronys (from the *Reminiscences* series), 1984
black and white photograph

The following text was produced from a conversation with Darius Mikšys and a few local students, artists and curators that took place in Venice, on the 6th of July 2011, in a local café.

A selection of fragments from a conversation with Darius Mikšys

Edited by MICHELANGELO CORSARO

Afterwards, the recording of this conversation was edited together as a series of fragments. For this issue of *CAC Interviu* some relevant fragments have been selected from the original text to create a new reading flow.

DARIUS MIKŠYS is an artist based in Vilnius.

MICHELANGELO CORSARO's activities focus on curating oral exchange, live encounters and verbal culture production. He is currently based in London.

MICHELANGELO CORSARO — DARIUS MIKŠYS

1.

The idea was to construct an art collection with people who received art stipends. The collection had to be represented similarly to these private gallery collections, which are usually being shelved in storage; and being professional, for instance, you could acquire any of these works to be shown. Otherwise they would remain in the storage. Only in this case any of the spectators could acquire any of the works.

2.

So the idea was very quick and it came quite early, six years ago. And very simple: people who receive this stipend go to Venice. It is the same as, for example, Marc Chagall: people are flying. So that's the idea. The work itself is not conceptual at all. People are flying; in this case, they're flying to Venice. And for six years that was enough. Later with this idea I applied to CAC, you know, to apply for Venice Biennale. I applied with Marc Chagall's flying people, with that idea, which was short and not very concrete. And then, what happened later was already the concept, which has quite moderate relations to the idea. In your case you interpreted it very interestingly and it has very little of the idea I applied with. So the work started and I came out with the idea of the nation as a person and curator who selects the artists, in this case those who received the art stipend. Some kind of a virtual show, which lasts twenty years, thus being quite invisible. The collection was the possibility to see this, to see the work of this curator and at the same time to see the work of the audience, especially those who hadn't been introduced to Lithuanian art, even though they are Lithuanian. So the collection had to work like a social mirror reflecting back to the audience something they would otherwise miss or not see at all.

3.

I remember in my art school a teacher of composition talking about art practices where the art is being produced while the art is behind the wall. The same pleasure you probably experience while you're in the lobby of a cinema: not having it yet or not even wanting to see the movie, having a coffee or a drink in a cinema lobby. When the movie starts you hear something and you get this particular state of the mind. When you're not getting the movie you are in fact getting that. You are getting the movie or something from the movie.

4.

So in Vilnius the work was installed before the Venice Biennale. People could come, produce their show, and they finally could see what goes on in Lithuania from that point of view. It had to produce a kind of social mirror or the screen, which would show you or your culture from the side. In Venice it doesn't

happen because there are few Lithuanians who come so maybe less than one hundred of them came in these two months. Maybe fifty, not more. Yes it would be fifty, not more. The international audience works in this case as a medium, which produces some kind of realisation of Lithuanian art for Lithuania. The difference is huge in this case because the Lithuanian audience is too close, they can't see that. The Venice show was the only possibility to produce such a collection in order to step aside and to see.

5.

Theoretically you can produce your show. And several shows were produced. By artists and curators, they were spontaneous although we were saying that you could even book your time and invite guests, provide some drinks and we would provide the space and the artworks. Normally it happens that there is an interaction of several visitors, those who are active. And probably even those who were not asking to show any of the works they still take part by seeing the works. So this interaction is a complete secret for me and I can only say that it happens. This interaction happens from time to time and it takes one form or another depending on the visitors and on the background of the visitor. Someone quickly asks to remove something, another starts to rearrange the exhibition, others are tolerant to anything and they don't want to remove anything.

6.

We didn't really invent anything in this case. Except for only one part, nobody really took an active part in this. This is in some cases a nobody's work because there is no person who made final decisions. I've been interested in the outcome of appropriating all the outcomes. I was playing with this idea one month ago in Finland. That was the show where I was trying to produce nobody's work, which would inquire liberal states where the people agree with something but still they're not taking a great part in it. So in this case, if you have several actors in a situation you get some results, which don't belong to anyone, fully.

7.

There's no other curator than the state. Of course, as the author of the idea I hold some responsibilities for that. That's why I'm sitting here. But this doesn't mean that I'm in charge of doing some things, which are normally accepted to be done by a curator. Curatorial decision is usually based on something a curator chooses and in this case only the state does it. The state was the curator. For the state selected the artists. I'm not saying that it projected the vision of the show but, again, the artists collaborated in this case with the state, proposing the artworks.

MICHELANGELO CORSARO — DARIUS MIKŠYS

8.

I worked there for one month, I didn't feel myself elsewhere than in Lithuania. It's like, you know, coming with those huge cruise liners: you're at home while you're in Venice. Well, I never came with a cruise liner to Venice. It's hard to tell that cruise liners are home but it depends on how much time you spend there. So one month is enough to feel at home. And the pavilion and the collection itself became a very very immanent part of me.

9.

– Which is the gap, the difference, between the art supported by the state, as you displayed it, and the one which is not – all the Lithuanian artworks which are not in the pavilion for this reason?

– This is the difference between bad and good artworks. It appears that in this case the bad and good artworks, if we can assume that we're able to produce this division, they produce some kind of a system, a structure, which cannot be brought apart, or cannot be brought apart easily. Because these artworks are linked by some kind of magnetism and bad cannot go without good or vice versa. In the other case, if you leave the system and look for art, you wouldn't get bad artworks. I'm not saying that in the collection there are bad artworks, it's very personal of course, but I do think there must be some kind of equation which could, I believe, be mathematically proven that in such a collection as this, being represented in the Lithuanian Pavilion, there should be some bad artworks. Otherwise the system would fall apart. In another case, in curated exhibitions, you can hardly get a good equilibrium, I would say, or equilibrium made on any kind of basis. We were discussing the importance of bad works in national galleries once. Because the bad artworks are not simply bad. In most cases they are better than good ones. They do emanate something the good artworks are incapable of doing.

10.

I don't know if you've ever seen this movie, *ABBA: The Movie*. There are a lot of shots of ABBA's audience. Imagine that that audience could be different; ABBA's audience is very different. They are not the best-looking people and this made me think: can this show that bad artworks are like ABBA's audience? They're opening a way... You wouldn't expect that kind of thing from good artworks. I'm just making the proposition that there are some bad artworks in the show, in the collection, while the artists represented themselves with their best artwork. So this is not about an evaluation of the artists, about what is good and what is bad. The artworks are always good, but sometimes they are bad. This equilibrium between bad and good, I think is sometimes necessary for the show but I'm not insisting on it.

11.

– It could be also an economic model, about the choice, a democratic choice that was impossible before. It could be a reflection of a capitalistic...
– In this case rather socialistic. Although it's a 'mixed medium' in this case. We could imagine two political systems matching...

12.

Freedom of choice is very important. You would feel very differently in both states: the one which restricts you to something and the one which allows you something.

13.

Ethically this work is also problematic. This is appropriation of the artworks from my side, although it doesn't really matter how I feel personally on my side.

14.

– I do have some work I would like to buy. The idea was suggested by some visitors constantly asking for the prices of some works. I was of course trying to connect the visitors to the artists.

– The catalogue and also the display mechanism somehow remind me of a shop. You could feel like a customer who sits in a shop and has things displayed in front of him.

– For me it's closer to the Pinacoteca or the library but of course in any case you don't have that kind of catalogue, which is of course maybe closer to the TV shop catalogue.

15.

I didn't have an aim. I had an idea. The concept was only a methodology to bring the idea into the form we have. So this form and the idea are the most abstract and the concept works only like technical tool for doing that. I would even say that the concept is less important or less interesting in that case. Because the work is not conceptual. The idea was not conceptual, you know, saying that these people go to Venice is only the idea, it's not the concept. In order to produce that idea you have to conceptualise it. So the concept of the social mirror came out. But the connection with the idea is very conditional because ideas never become concepts and vice versa. Concept is always smaller. As a methodology for bringing ideas to life this works well, but the idea can't be replaced by the concept.

16.

I imagine some kind of a hierarchy where the idea is always higher than the concept, accepting that the concept is only the technical tool to bring the idea, to show it, and to produce the idea. For one idea you can have limitless number of concepts. And prob-

ably one outcome... or several outcomes. So social mirror and public as a medium, they are tricky and probably they worked. I'm not saying this is bad but this is only one of the concepts. There could be more. One of the concepts is yours.

17.

I wanted you to read this short paragraph written by Clémentine Deliss which came to my mind while visiting the pavilion: 'Writing in 1915, Carl Einstein, the German theoretician of African art contemporaneous with Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg, declared that museums were the foundation for living schools. Einstein argued against the idea that works of art from the past possessed a kind of material and sentimental immortality. Instead, he wanted to nurture an intellectual lifeline between the museum and the research institute. The greatest strength of a collection, he wrote, lay in its mobility. In other words: in the intentional act of switching the position of exhibits back and forth between analysis, interpretation and public visibility. The itinerancy of objects would encourage rigor, make people look again, understand better what they saw, and take apart what they believed or assumed. Collections would reflect the extremes of intellectual explorations and exhibitions would speak of human experience and knowledge. If not he claimed, museums would become nothing more than "preserve jars", and "anesthetize and rigidify into a myth of guaranteed continuity, into the drunken slumber of the mechanical."'

18.

This is my part in it, I think. Because the work involves a lot of collaboration and competence, as I mentioned earlier. One thing is that while you skip your references of course you evolve other possibilities.

19.

There are statistics. We keep statistics of the acquired works and it says nothing because you never know why that artwork was chosen for display.

20.

Sometimes the exhibition tends to fall apart very quickly, sometimes not, but sometimes it falls apart immediately. And visitors are not sensitive to that kind of thing. Entropy works within minutes and it goes into nowhere. You get bits of something you were seeing as good and in half of an hour it becomes absolutely messy for a long time. Because following the principles you still can't fix it in a particular way. So it is changing all the time and it's not always really good.

21.

– There's an entropy audience-produced

– Yes, audience-produced
– Artificially produced
– Naturally maybe

22.

I meant for some time, for a short time, to remove my name from the catalogue. I was already in colloquy so there was no need to write 'a project by Darius Mikšys' in the title. And in my opinion the book would represent a more universal source of information in the future by being less personalised. But I agree that in the case of a show it is better when someone's in charge.

23.

It's also good for me, this type of experience, being responsible. Once I was visiting, just after the academy, I was visiting an employment office and they were giving me a test that had plenty of those kind of questions like 'do you like responsibility?' The psychologist was telling me not to think before answering but I couldn't, so I answered 'no'. Because normally who would write otherwise? Well that was not true. My answer was totally obsolete and I didn't get any job. Which was probably good because I wouldn't be an artist. By default people like responsibility a lot. At least I didn't meet a lot of people who didn't. For instance in this production team, in CAC, there are a lot of people who like responsibility more than me. Partly because of this the work was quite successful.

24.

There is a contradiction between the idea of nobody and responsibilities. In this case responsibility lies in producing this nobody.

The text has been minimally edited – after an endless struggle between the editorial staff and the author (read: the Royal Navy and Jolly Roger) – to preserve a good souvenir of the conversation during which it was produced.



‘Yes, I paint – here, a still wet, unfinished piece (he points with his finger at a painting hung nearby which depicts a flying rolling green cube against a blue background). This is just the beginning, the cube will become a square.’

ALGIMANTAS JONAS KURAS talks to
GEDIMINAS G. AKSTINAS and GERDA PALIUŠYTĖ

ALGIMANTAS JONAS KURAS
is a painter living in Vilnius.

GEDIMINAS G. AKSTINAS is a
sculptor based in Vilnius.

GERDA PALIUŠYTĖ is a curator
from Vilnius.

GEDIMINAS G. AKSTINAS and GERDA PALIUŠYTĖ ——— ALGIMANTAS JONAS KURAS

A visit to Algimantas Jonas Kuras' home. A wet painting is hanging and Darius Mikšys' letter inviting artists to participate in the project *Behind the White Curtain* is placed on a table; it has notes by A.J.Kuras' written on it.

Gediminas G. Akstinas: Let's imagine the curtain from a room's perspective when both its sides are visible simultaneously – it is the situation of multidimensional observation familiar to a cinema goer. In this case the individual sight of the curtain matters more; when a thought carries us from the catalogue of the *Behind the White Curtain* to a meeting with you.

Gerda Palušytė: I think Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain* is not just an exhibition presented at the Venice Biennale but also a situation like the one we are in. We are drinking wine and talking because your participation in the project became a pretext for our conversation. Though at this very moment, when looking at your works, I feel like talking about painting.

Algimantas Jonas Kuras: Let's start our conversation with Darius Mikšys' project and later we can talk about painting too. Darius' letter to the artists states that the project *Behind the White Curtain* is a possibility to create ourselves in the way we want to be seen; and that the collection will become a 'nation mirror' – the latter statement makes grand claims. Paintings created for a stipend are not necessarily the best ones; in Soviet times commissioned paintings were also much poorer than those created through free will. True art is a wild plant and the curated one: an indoor flower. Allotted allowances are considered to be a programming of a cultural product, but who can programme how the cucumbers will grow?

GGA: What do you make of the drawing by Darius Mikšys that accompanied the letter sent to the artists, and illustrated the intended look of the exposition? It seems to me, that following the formal address of the letter it goes back to the traditional subjective presentation of an idea – he sat and drew and thought and drew.

AJK: When you read his letter it is not very clear how everything is supposed to look; the curtain, the works carried in some way... And here he sat and drew it and everything became very clear. Of course, it could

have been depicted in a completely different way... He couldn't schematise so drew in a child's manner. Perhaps, that was simpler for him or maybe that's how he plays? In some way, this also reflects the project.

I liked the boldness of the project – the fact that it succeeded in gathering the artists, in convincing them to give their works and that the waves were generated in our calm waters. And that is already good – the waves have rolled away and rocked a bit... However, the situation of Lithuanian art was certainly not reflected, the proposed artworks became merely a material for a vinaigrette. Darius' piece didn't become a 'nation mirror', rather a splinter. I took part in this project because I received this state stipend and felt indebted in a way (to not participate would have simply been disrespectful), nevertheless I do not recognise exhibitions with slogans. When high ideas are declared it does not leave any place for art. Once my colleague Marius Š. organised an exhibition in Klaipėda with the title *Wishing You to Get Well* and asked me for a painting. So I asked Marius: 'What do you mean? Give an artwork that everybody would like or what?' I would participate in an exhibition *Wishing You to Fall Ill* meaning an aspiration to get ill, to get contaminated with art.

GP: I liked the video interview in which you talk to art critic and curator Raminta Jurėnaitė about the plane of the painting as a window. When she asked whether it was a window to an imagination or a reality you started to laugh and answered: 'To an imaginary reality'.

AJK: You can improvise as you wish – through an imaginary window to an imaginary reality...

GP: A window in a painting – a window in a window... Works as glass, each time distorting the world image in its own way.

AJK: Maybe so. My thought in this case would travel in parallel. I remember when I was preparing the painter Jonas Švažas' posthumous exhibition in which for a long time, for three days, I installed his works and I adopted his thinking to such an extent that I was later seeing the landscape the way he paints, the way he generalises the trees – big contrasts of colour and chiaroscuro. I later worked on the painter Viktoras Vizgirda's exhibition after which I saw winding trees and sandy lanes... When you see Vizgirda's works you want to paint like he does. Art is very contagious; art is 'wishing you to fall ill'.

GP: It often happens that you start seeing with someone else's ideas. You can later get confused between your own and someone else's eyes...

GEDIMINAS G. AKSTINAS and GERDA PALIUŠYTĖ ——— ALGIMANTAS JONAS KURAS

AJK: Yes, and that is why you need to have a spine. After graduating from the Vilnius Institute of Art I kept picking up something from one artist or another. I worked in the exhibition palace – the present day CAC – for twenty years and so I encountered many characters. Just as people do, artworks also speak in many different manners – one is stuttering, another is very melodious – this in itself is very interesting. I'm not even mentioning the philosophy which is employed, even by artists who do not philosophise; one is witty, the second is reserved; one likes to laugh out loud and another – just to smile. After a ride with different sledges you later choose your own path by way of rejection until you find your own niche.

GP: In my opinion, rejection is a very beneficial process. However, I do think, that bad works are also windows.

AJK: What kind of window is an unsuccessful work – it is still an unclear position.

GP: As a matter of fact I wanted to ask you about unsuccessful works...

AJK: The work can simply be unprofessional. It is similar to grammatical mistakes or when the beginning of a sentence contradicts its ending, and vice versa. The work becomes a window when a person has thought through what he is doing. A professional has to have a position; he has to have his mind made up. It has to be clear what he wants to say with his work; and random works – what kind of windows are they? In this case any tin can can be a window for you through which you see nothing.

GGA: With a forming position there comes consistency, not only in artworks, but also in a relationship with the environment.

GP: When one follows the evolution of your creative thought one can see how the form has transformed from the painting into an assemblage; you then later climbed out from the plane until you finally stepped off it completely and 'relaxed on a firm ground'¹.

AJK: Well said. There are photographs of my small scale assemblages gathered in the book² that you've brought with you; it is very amusing to make them. When you work on the big ones you have to hammer them together, to paint them, and here you can use whatever you find in a drawer. You can make assemblages from anything and photograph them unmounted; like an installation – after one stays for a while, you make another.

GP: Today I had a thought that I don't understand paintings as self-sufficient works anymore.

AJK: When you look at the paintings of other artists you shouldn't force your own view on them but instead should try to understand the rules of their game. If you have a strong preconceived opinion you won't be able to delve into the painting, especially if its form is not traditional. You have to understand why it was made. Why? For example, I get asked: 'Why do you paint in this way, maybe you can't draw; is this why you smear with broad strokes because you can't do it evenly?' I can do it evenly and I can paint in a very material way, but this doesn't interest me and that is why I do it in a different way. I have my inner goal, which is not visible to the outsider. The painter Antanas Gudaitis used to say: 'Maybe someone will get it...' It is said that one cannot paint five great paintings in two years, it is a difficult and hard work; and a viewer after gazing at a work for one minute moves to another one, he doesn't go deeper into it. Gudaitis didn't paint for a viewer like this... 'Maybe someone will get it...' Perhaps, not even a painter but someone who has looked at the painting for a longer period of time and has compared it to the works of other artists. Understanding is a subjective thing of course; not measured by kilograms.

GGA: Speaking of the relationship with the artworks and their readability – what discussions used to take place in your studio when you talked about the works and their creation?

AJK: Colleagues, artists, students, writers, composers and simply people would come. Sometimes there would be visits from philosopher-aesthetes: Antanas Poška, Antanas Katalynas, Krescencijus Stoškus. They would come and discuss how to distinguish a good artwork from a bad one. They would talk very intelligently, and it would create the impression that everything was fine, but when faced with a particular painting they wouldn't feel if it was good, they couldn't separate good art from bad art. When debating at my place they wanted to know how to learn this kind of discrimination. The art critic Alfonsas Andriuskevičius would also interrogate me; he would come and say that he already knew what a good painting is and how to recognise it. 'No' I would say, 'Following your logic this one would also be good.' – 'Oh, again...' But he later had a breakthrough. Katalynas had a circle in which he would teach grown-ups aesthetic theory, discussions would take place there, he would, for example, bring me in and would exercise a cross questioning. I, of course, have my own opinion, my logic, which is influenced by a sort of reading and acquired practical knowledge.

GP: When encountered with an opinion that an artwork has to speak for itself you initially reject it as a very primitive thought; but if you think deeper – what is this 'speaking for oneself'?

AJK: If we talk about one new painting among many others, it would hardly defend itself, but if there are three paintings you can already see the position.

GGA: I really like the way you have laid out your works in your book. Now, having opened the book, I am faced with two works; one is called *Akimirka* [The Moment] and next to it is *Durys* [The Door]. They compliment each other interestingly.

AJK: In 1970 I made the sketch for *Akimirka* that I later painted in 2002. I have many such old sketches but have realised very little.

GGA: After thirty-two years *Akimirka* has returned. It is interesting, that recorded thoughts do not disappear; they can return and play a part in a new game perfectly.

GP: It is very interesting to look at the process itself when we are among the artworks and you compliment them with texts, drawing, and we then venture among sketches, thoughts, among... Why are you interested in eyes?

AJK: I was thinking to paint, but perhaps it won't be eyes, perhaps it will be a lake.

GP: In 2000 you had a show at the CAC, which was called *Drawings, Things, Half-art*. What do you classify as 'half-art'?

AJK: Half-art is the idea in progress; it is the very beginning of thinking.

GP: How interesting, I haven't seen the documentation of this exhibition...

AJK: It wasn't very well documented; there was no catalogue. In one of the artworks in the exhibition I was throwing darts and in order for them not to pierce the wall, I pinned the target onto a failed artwork that was painted on corrugated cardboard. The darts chopped it up so well that its centre fell out and I noticed that the painting had improved a lot. And that was the way I exhibited it. That was the idea of my exposition – things on their way to becoming art.

GP: If they weren't on their way to becoming art they wouldn't be worth exhibiting?

AJK: Half-art was art to me, but as no one would have believed that that was enough for art, I named it half-art. I did doubt myself whether it was art too. This boundary rubs off. By the way, I liked some of my half-art better than my finished drawings. The idea is most charming while it is not spoiled. Once you start thinking about composition and completion the naturalness escapes. Here, for example, this thing³. It might not be interesting at all, but then you invert it and it becomes part of my theme – my fields and horizon and forms are like that. So is this art? Or is this my art? Maybe it is my art? Now it is my future painting, I'm planning to paint it, and even though I already like it, it is still not sufficient for me as it is. This is just an idea, but the idea in itself can be art as well.

GP: So this is a photograph of your painting?

AJK: Yes, I put it aside so I could return to it. Even though it is a photograph of an existing painting we can also perceive it as a sketch and further develop what has already taken place in it.

GGA: Although it had already become an artwork it returns again to a half-art situation...

GP: Why? As you have said at the beginning of our conversation – why?

AJK: I don't know how you learnt about art, what mattered to you most. Maybe – how to understand the painting? All the time: how? how was it made? what is this?.. What is this? In order to understand me you have to ask why I was doing it. It is a primary question for me. Why did I leave such traces?

1. Algimantas Jonas Kuras, *Atsipalaidavimas ant kieto pagrindo* [Relaxation on a Firm Ground], 2002, assemblage, 45 x 92 cm

2. Algimantas Jonas Kuras, *Tapyba, piešiniai, gyvenimo užrašai, asambliažai* [Painting, Drawings, Life Notes, Assemblages], Vilnius: VDA leidykla, 2009

3. Clipping from an advert in a magazine:



The format of *CAC Intervju* is undoubtedly based on conversations, dialogues and the exchange of sounds, images, project drafts, and so on that takes place.

On cooties and artists

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ — DARIUS ŽIŪRA

This time, the conversation can also be understood as an inspiration or a (pre)text: we communicate — therefore, everything is possible.

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ

DARIUS ŽIŪRA is an artist based in Vilnius.

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ is part of 6CHAIRS BOOKS.

Darius Žiūra

Having received Darius' letter detailing the concept of the Venice project, I felt slightly confused — it was the second letter he had sent in a short period of time that contained the salutation 'Dear colleague'. Like *Artists' Parents Meeting*, the concept of the Lithuanian pavilion sounded like a utopian idea, born in the mind of an abstract-thinking artist and tailored for an ideal society. When ideas are transferred to physical reality, they create tensions and often look different to their imaginary versions.

The concept of his parents meeting presents an ideal family situation, which perhaps does not exist in our society. If one reads the text verbatim, it sounds ironic. It could appear that Darius invites others to reflect on situations that could be uncomfortable for their participants. It is interesting that what he says with his text does not correlate with what he has in mind.

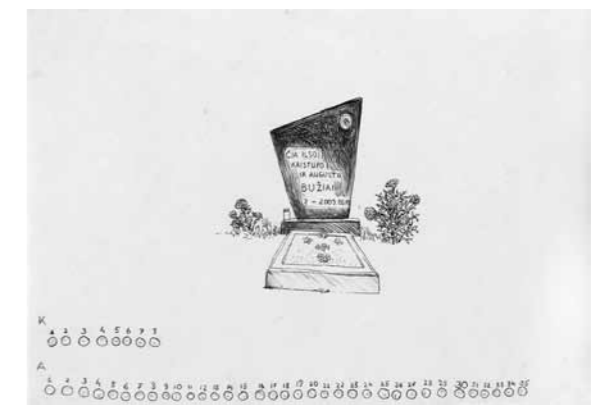
The idea of the Venice project is also difficult to grasp fully if one takes it literally. It is evident that totalitarian or utopian states can curate art processes. Examples of totalitarian art are well known. Culture curated by a utopian state can be embodied in fictional formats. Is there such a relationship between the state and culture where the former curates the latter? The state can stimulate cultural processes by providing them with competent attention and adequate funding. Unfortunately, very little money is spent on culture, especially on contemporary art, in Lithuania, while the giant Christmas decorations that hang under Vilnius' bridges all the year round never cease to amaze one with the culture functionaries' lack of competence.

I went through my drawings and paintings stored in the collection of the art academy. It was interesting to see them after a long time. Initially I wanted to propose one of my academic 'stagings' for inclusion in the Venice project. But then I stumbled upon *The Cooties of Kristupas and Augustas* — a drawing from a folder, which I call 'the children's notebook'. The folder belongs to Kristupas and Augustas. It contains drawings that I made over the course of several years as entertainment for the children and for my own imagination. They are soiled, crumpled little drawings with curious characters and situations. *The Cooties* date back to the time when an incredible lice epidemic broke out in Vilnius. For quite a while it seemed impossible to exterminate them by any means. They crawled through the collars of coats in school cloakrooms and tried to get on kids' heads in every possible way, and the lice poison that was available in the drugstores did not seem to help. It went on for a long time, just like the daily magic ritual of removing the lice with a dense comb and crushing them. In order to make the process more fun and give it meaning, we began to further ritualise it and

contextualise the lice: squash them on a white sheet of paper, count them, name them, and draw headstones with rose bushes, epitaphs and death dates for them.

One evening, as I was looking through the contents of the folder, I saw this drawing and discovered that I had found a personal connection with Darius' project — in creating a context in the strangest way possible (who said that one could not contextualise lice or artists in this way?). The context of *The Cooties of Kristupas and Augustas* and the Lithuanian pavilion in Venice appear only at a distance to be very different — when presented in this way, both lice and artists lose individuality. If the artist, just like the curator, is comfortable with reflecting on different points of view, everything is fine. If the artist's attitude is less flexible, such a situation may be uncomfortable. I believe that this is precisely the reason behind the fact that almost half of the grant recipients refused to participate in the project.

When one leafs through the pages of the catalogue of the Lithuanian pavilion in Venice, the artists and their works become decorative colourful blots in a large book that commemorates an important event. At first sight the blots look a little miserable and boring, and do not really motivate one to go deeper. I am curious what future awaits the Lithuanian artists who took part in the project. Will Darius' project be a ray that revives a ghost for an instant, for merely as long as the exhibition is on show? Or will the artists involved in his projects, as well as their parents, become a conscious community?



DARIUS ŽIŪRA
Cooties of Kristupas and Augustas
(drawing from children's notebook) 2009,
blue pen, lice, writing paper, 20.7 x 29.6 cm

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ — DARIUS ŽIŪRA

A Lithuanian Garden

Art critic JOLITA LIŠKEVIČIENĖ talks to artist
DAINIUS LIŠKEVIČIUS about Darius Mikšys' project
Behind the White Curtain.

JOLITA LIŠKEVIČIENĖ — DAINIUS LIŠKEVIČIUS

DAINIUS LIŠKEVIČIUS is an
artist based in Vilnius.

JOLITA LIŠKEVIČIENĖ is an art
historian. She teaches at Vilnius
Academy of Arts and Vilnius
University and is a researcher at
the Institute of Art History at the
Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Jolita Liškevičienė: How do you see the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale of International Art, where Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain* was presented now?

Dainius Liškevičius: Thinking about Venice, I remember a dream I had. In this dream I regain consciousness, firmly clinging to the photographer Arturas Valiauga with one hand and to an unfamiliar elderly lady in a white beret with another. I see a chain of people holding hands stretching to both sides, and the Lithuanian pavilion behind my back. My fingers are stiff and I feel cold sweat pouring off me. I wake up. It is only now that I can associate this dream with the Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer's darkly satirical political allegory *The Garden* (1968), which was screened at the Danish Pavilion.

JL: Sounds like a curious, surreal, and at the same time, symbolical dream. Were the people who formed this human chain (in Švankmajer's film it was a human fence that surrounded a farmstead) those same artists whose works were presented behind the white curtain?

DL: That is probably how one could understand it. I wouldn't want to go through that 'experience' again. The very idea of Mikšys' Venice project is powerful.

JL: As one of the artists who gave a work, does it prevent you from being critical of the project?

DL: It is hard for me to evaluate it objectively, as I am not only a viewer, but also a 'participant' – one of the project's constituent parts. I saw the work – i.e. the installation itself – in Vilnius during the rehearsal at the Contemporary Art Centre, and then in Venice during the opening of the Lithuanian Pavilion – I must say that in the international context the project looked innovative. However, during the opening, the project *Behind the White Curtain* became just... behind the white curtain. For instance, I remember a moment during the opening when a reporter from daily newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas*, having requested Linas Cicėnas' painting *Father's Portrait*, which depicts an elderly man with an issue of *Lietuvos Rytas* in his hand (this work is the property of Gedvydas Vainauskas, the editor-in-chief and the chairman of the governing board of *Lietuvos Rytas*), interviewed the Lithuanian Minister of Culture Arūnas Gelūnas, who had officially opened the pavilion, in front of the work. The opening itself created huge turmoil, everyone was pulling out the works of their favourite artists or acquaintances so that they would be 'used', and that small space became similar to the Italian Pavilion, which resembled chaos – a veritable artistic mess. I realised that Scandinavian minimalism was turning into a Lithuanian market.

JL: Paradoxically, what is hidden behind a curtain excites curiosity, while an abundance of art, a visually overloaded exposition (I am hinting at the Italian Pavilion you mentioned), has an effect of estrangement. One could see very different ways of exhibiting works at the Venice Biennale – from hidden to explicitly thrust methodologies. Would you agree that the building itself played a part in contributing to the acclaim of Mikšys' work?

DL: From the pavilions I had a chance to see, the Lithuanian one stood out with its concept and form, comprised from individual elements, that is, the different artists' works, which formed a certain narrative of Lithuanian art. Plus, it 'fit' really well into the space itself, and resonated with the building, which is the house of a community of believers – it was precisely this space that gave birth to an additional context.

JL: It seems to me that at this year's Biennale most expositions emphasised the space itself. Maybe it is not the quality of art as such but the idea behind the exposition and presentation that are important in respect to its perception? In this case, Darius Mikšys ceases to be a physical artist; his art is the idea itself. Did he offer a menu of Lithuanian art, while the viewer not only gets acquainted with the latter, but also chooses what to see *de visu*? Did he present to the audience a new form of consuming and viewing art?

DL: Yes, it is attractive and interactive. For instance, if you visited another country's pavilion, you might also choose something after looking through the catalogue of exhibited works. It is not a large-scale project, because the size and the weight of the works were limited in the process of selection. If, for instance, a Chinese artist came up with a similar idea, maybe they would bring a huge hangar with a wider variety of artworks, and, for example, one could order a five-metre-high statue of Mao for visual inspection. In our case, it was a modest work in respect to all of the country's artists. It was more of an attraction for the viewer.

JL: Are you saying, then, that it is the individual reaction and one's personal choice and relationship to the work that is more important in this project? Maybe one could compare it to a Muslim woman who covers all but her eyes?

DL: But she does not carry a catalogue listing all of her body parts with her. And this project features a catalogue.

JL: Does that which is veiled catch the eye more quickly?

JOLITA LIŠKEVIČIENĖ — DAINIUS LIŠKEVIČIUS

DL: But nothing is veiled here. It is only stored. The veil is purely symbolic, the white curtain only embodies the cultural policy of the state: it distributes grants and supports art, but not everyone can make it to the Venice Biennale, and this is why Darius Mikšys did not remain anonymous in his project...

JL: For me it was essentially enough to see the white curtain when I came to the Lithuanian Pavilion, and I did not care at all what was behind it.

DL: For you, as someone who knew the context, it was only the packaging itself up to the white curtain that was interesting, while I, as an artist who had agreed to contribute work, was concerned with the context from the start. The idea to present the state grant recipients had already been widely discussed in the press. In this project, I represented a citizen of Lithuania: I had received the grant, produced the work, and contributed to the project, rejecting any personal feelings.

JL: Why, in your opinion, did the jury of the Venice Biennale give the Lithuanian exposition a special mention?

DL: It meant that the plan worked, that the attractiveness was justified, that the white curtain worked, and that something unexpected emerged; in addition, there is a greater probability of miracles happening in a church...

JL: What did you like at the Biennale? I, for one, liked the installation *The Sleeping City* by the Czech artist Dominik Lang. It felt very close to me. It seemed to me that the artist succeeded in bringing together life, the past, creative work, everyday reality, and other things that constantly surround us – for instance, the installation involved a knitting woman (as a mother/grandmother figure), sculptures created by the artist's father and items of furniture. He created a cosy intermediate space between public creative work and personal life. The artist uses his father's works to actuate the past and display his own creative present through them, revealing a broader portrait of the collective memory of that epoch – the Czechoslovakian Socialist Republic. Everything had a place and meaning there. I think that that situation is very close to Lithuania and its present state. What do you think?

DL: I agree. Even without reading anything in advance, I immediately felt a positive emotion in that exposition – various domestic objects with an artistic touch, furniture, sculptures. Perhaps it is something close to me and my own work; it attracted me with the simplicity of form, lack of special effects

and impressive technological stunts. I would also like to mention the Russian Pavilion (even though I'm a Russophobe), which did not demonstrate 'oil and natural gas' this time.

JL: And the British Pavilion was a giant installation that restructured the entire building it occupied, turning it into an abandoned illegal factory space; it seemed as if someone had been working hard there just recently, while all that's left are balls of yarn and dust and some kind of ineffable dismal mood.

DL: Yes, a lot of effort and, surely, funds went into it. I am saying it in order to relate it to the current issues – for example, the monthly salary of the consultant employed by the Lithuanian commercial bank Snoras almost equals the budget of Lithuania's presentation at the Venice Biennale. I just want to draw attention to certain financial (dis)proportions in Lithuania.

JL: The fact that Lithuania presented a wide spectrum of artists at the Biennale is not particularly extraordinary. For example, the Danish Pavilion presented an internationally curated exhibition of eighteen artists, which featured works of different generations and genres: from photography, painting and installation to animation.

DL: In any case, I am happy that the Lithuanian Pavilion, and, by extension, Darius Mikšys, was met with acclaim. Still, I would like to say that the Lithuanian Pavilion presented a wide range of Lithuanian art, but not artists; it presented only one artist. It is not a Scandinavian version, it is a Lithuanian garden...

JL: Coming back to *Behind the White Curtain*, which work did you give?

DL: *Blot/Restart*.



Projection of Jan Švankmajer's 16 mm film *The Garden* (1968) in the Danish Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale. Image: Dainius Liškevičius.

JOLITA LIŠKEVIČIENĖ — DAINIUS LIŠKEVIČIUS

Interview with Algis Griškevičius

RENATA DUBINSKAITĖ

RENATA DUBINSKAITĖ — ALGIS GRIŠKEVIČIUS

ALGIS GRIŠKEVIČIUS is an artist based in Vilnius.

RENATA DUBINSKAITĖ is an art critic and holds a PhD in art criticism. Her main research interests include cinema, video and photography as well as themes of reality representation.

Before I have a chance to ask a question, I hear Algis Griškevičius say:

Algis Griškevičius: We are like tubes of paint for a painting in Darius' project.

Renata Dubinskaitė: Do you see an exploitative relationship in it then?

AG: Not really exploitative but rather a playful one. I must admit that initially I, perhaps like everyone else, had some strong doubts. First of all because the Contemporary Art Centre engaged in a project with 'uncontemporary' artists; I feared that this project would be just disguised mockery. If such a collection was displayed as an integral exhibition, it would indeed be nothing but mockery – I believe that the white curtain saved this project.

RD: And what do you make of the collaborative idea in this project?

AG: Collaboration with whom? Does the fact that the artists brought their works together amount to collaboration? There are many similar 'potluck' exhibitions.

RD: So you think that it is only the principle of display that makes this exhibition different from a 'potluck' one? What about the project's idea itself? After all, the entirety of the exhibition does not disappear, it can be seen in the catalogue. The majority of the Lithuanian pavilion's visitors at the Venice Biennale really did skim through the catalogue and become acquainted with the whole collection. Yet, since they looked at it through the prism of the project's concept, they saw it as different from a 'potluck' exhibition, in which one can only evaluate the artistic quality of individual works. This project allowed visitors to not only get acquainted with particular works, but also trace the guidelines of the national cultural policy in their totality.

AG: Yes, I understand, and I think that this project can be viewed as a critique of the national art management paradigm. Nevertheless, I was a bit surprised, because I expected that the project would place a greater emphasis on institutional critique and critique around cultural policy, but it almost did not focus on these aspects in the end... I tried to ask Darius about it before the exhibition, but he left me with no answer.

RD: Such collaborative practices, when an artist invited for a solo project proposes a group exhibition together with other artists, are increasingly frequent.

In a sense, the more you loosen the notions of authorship or a work of art, the more animated the work becomes. In this project, the question of authorship remains open. Perhaps it is good that some aspects are left open to interpretation. Of course, there is also the danger of absolute relativism, when you cannot state anything with certainty – you can say 'yes' and 'no' about everything.

AG: But Darius' project balances precisely on this slippery line. I can't say I like it. Maybe Darius' position was the very absence of a position? It seems to me that he consciously avoided answering certain questions. Sometimes you couldn't tell whether everything was clear to him himself, or if perhaps everything made perfect sense, but he was unwilling to put it into words. If we had been presented with more concrete points of departure, it would have been easier to evaluate the project whether that was positively or negatively.

RD: I understand that you yourself contributed a work to the collection created with the grant money?

AG: Yes, it was a work that had been created with the grant money. I thought that paintings would account for the majority of the submitted works anyway, so I proposed a photograph. Yet it must be acknowledged that a particular artist's participation or non-participation in the project does not make any difference. Whether it is you or someone else, whether it is this or that work does not have any influence on the project as a whole... Besides, I don't think anybody asked for my photograph to be brought from behind the white curtain.

RD: Is that really what you believe?! You can't even imagine how far from the truth that is. At least when I was working at the pavilion in Venice, this was one of the most popular works. Visitors ordered around fifty new works to be brought for display per day, so the turnover was quite high.

AG: Well, that is a lot indeed!

RD: In addition, I was happy to discover that the interactivity really worked – people looked at a work they had chosen themselves in a totally different way. Believe me, they found a completely personal relationship to it. It was not only the Biennale crowd who visited the pavilion, but also the random passers-by. On one occasion, a person who looked like a stereotypically obese American tourist caricature stopped by. Introduced to the project's idea, he chose a work and was carefully examining it for half an

hour! Then he said: 'Thank you, that was one of the most intense experiences in Venice, something I hadn't anticipated – a true gift.' This means that a real encounter with a work of art had happened.

AG: In fact, you have just reminded me of an Austrian journalist who wanted to buy my work in the pavilion, he later found me here, in Vilnius. So it turns out I was wrong when I said that nobody selected or saw my work.

RD: Yes, many people wanted to buy the works. There were also some who came back to the exhibition after a while and asked for the same work again. Others said they would come back with their friends. Some provocateurs did not want to choose a work themselves and instead asked us, who were working at the exposition, to reveal our preferences.

AG: The project was really successful. I wonder, though, if it would work if repeated.

RD: Some concepts and artistic gestures can be significant and expressive only once. Unless Darius manages to somehow develop his idea further. After all, in the beginning he had an idea that the collection could be sold as a single unit; let's not forget that he had managed to translate some art projects into real entities – for instance, the cricket club that had indeed been established in Vilnius. By the way, did you ever meet Darius before the project?

AG: We met each other once a very long time ago. When Darius was still a student at the Academy of Arts, I was spending an evening with the painter Vyngantas Paukštė at the CAC Café, and Darius called us many names then... (*laughs*). He said it all – among other things, that painting was total crap and had no future.

RD: Has this project enabled you to see Darius in a different light?

AG: Yes, definitely. But I was still afraid to submit a painting for the collection (*laughs again*).

RD: It is well known that in collaborative projects it is not only the final result that is important, but also the connections that emerge through the course of the project. Is it likely that this project will have changed something in the sphere of connections and interaction among artists?

AG: To tell the truth, it is not so easy to communicate with Darius. I'm not sure if this project will have an effect on the people who participated in the

project. I think it can have an effect on every one of them individually. Even I have noticed that the number of visitors to my website has obviously increased.

It seems to me that creative work still requires a certain privacy and individuality. No matter if you are a painter or a photographer, you essentially work alone, and communication takes place afterwards. In Darius' case, communication itself is his creative work. I don't know, maybe Darius will decide to establish a 'Desperate Artists' Club' or something in the future.

RD: The working process you employ in your photography resembles film production rather than classical studio-based art: it involves set design, working with actors, the shooting process, which requires assistants, etc. Is it true that by switching to photography you have made a radical leap towards entirely different – team-based – creative principles?

AG: Yes, this is true. If you have no assistant, you might not notice that a model has forgotten to take off their wristwatch; assistants are also necessary when you are working with lifting cranes, etc. – it all really heavily relies on teamwork. It's much like a film set – the machinery is rented, time is running, you have to be in your best shape and work fast.

RD: Do you travel a lot? It seems to be taken for granted today that an artist must participate and be seen everywhere, because he has to maintain the connections. I am curious how an artist who spends most of his time in the studio develops his connections.

AG: I used to travel a lot: exhibition organisers will usually ask you to at least be present for the opening, especially if it is a solo exhibition – this year I will have my fifty-fifth solo exhibition. Currently I try to minimise my travelling as much as possible, because trips take away energy that you could spend on creative work, and claim a considerable amount of time. In the last ten years or so I have been maintaining my connections mostly via email. I will come back home now and will find some twenty or thirty letters with requests and offers. Most people find me through my website, as well as through several of the galleries that represent me. Usually I plan my schedule several years ahead. This has been the dynamic of my work in the last ten or fifteen years, and I have been able to support myself through creative work for about twenty years now.

RD: And how did this self-sustaining system start?

AG: It did not develop instantly. In the beginning I was working as a set designer at the Youth Theatre, because I needed money for paint, so I could work

on my paintings only in my spare time. When I decided to quit my job at the theatre and devote all of my time to art, I tore my official employment-record book to pieces to prevent myself from having second thoughts.

RD: Oh, simply 'burned bridges'!

AG: Yes. It took courage. Because not everybody manages to support themselves through creative work. And it doesn't always depend on whether you are a good artist or not. It's very sad that not a single art manager has surfaced in Lithuania over so many years. It even angers me a bit that the studies of art management in our universities only teach students to work with state money – that is, to write project proposals, and nobody even tries to learn to work privately and take risks.

RD: I wonder if the education system is really to blame for that. For example, I know that I have no entrepreneurial vein. Maybe it has historically been so that it is the people who have a bent for the humanities, rather than those who see a possibility to make money in this sphere, that study art criticism or art management. Maybe art management should be taught at, say, a school of economics, rather than at the Academy of Arts?

AG: Perhaps. In addition, there is another reason why many artists' careers are unsuccessful. Just imagine: some twenty years ago only three students were admitted to study stage set design, and only every other year. The calculations showed that this corresponded to the actual demand. Today, thirteen students are admitted every year. It is clear in advance that the majority of them are doomed to unemployment in the future. There should be immense competition, while now students are accepted only because of the money the state spends on them and the teachers' salaries. When the recent reform of the Lithuanian education system was still in progress, the dean of the academy and others had to do a sit-in in front of the office of the chairman of the Parliament's education committee, refusing to move from their place until they convinced the committee that art education required special conditions. Because it doesn't make too big of a difference if you lecture to twenty or fifty people at a university, but if there are twenty people instead of three in the studio, the difference is critical.

For instance, in a Dutch academy where my daughter is studying at the moment, twenty five people from all over the world are admitted each year, but after each review show, every semester, three to four people are expelled (some are even said to have

been taken away in an ambulance after the review show). Only three students reach the final year. And even though the weaker students are expelled, the best ones later take part in the city's exhibitions, serve on admission committees together with their teachers, and are given employment after graduation – in this way, the continuity is ensured. In Lithuania, where there is no real selection in the system, you come to the students' defence, and sometimes you feel ashamed and sorry for them. At the moment I also serve on the state art grant commission...

RD: Oh, this is directly related to Darius' project! I have always been curious if it was possible to decide something objectively based on an application. Isn't it a lottery of sorts?

AG: Of course, it is a lottery to some extent. The most important thing is to make sure that the state grant does not become a mere welfare payment, that it motivates professionals and encourages professionalism.

RD: Yet sometimes it is difficult to measure professionalism, the criteria are not that clear anymore. For instance, how does one evaluate skill if it has ceased to be obligatory in contemporary art?

AG: Skill and handicraft have a certain value; it definitely differs, say, from working on a computer. In my photographs, the sets and the objects I photograph are not manufactured in an easy way. An amateur might not tell the difference, but a trained eye can always tell if it is a Photoshop job or not. For example, when I served in the army, I once had to dig a pit just to fill it again later – this was used as a way to break the human psyche. But after some time has passed, you remember digging and filling that pit, and this work doesn't seem meaningless to you anymore. You are thinking while you are working. Irony is born while you are digging that pit. You get something out of that physical experience. And when the work has been done with the help of a computer, even if it is faultless, you still see the results of the computer's work. Something is still artificial, and that feeling of artificiality is somehow off-putting. I create very phantasmagorical stories, and if I want to convince the viewer of their realness, I must make sure that there is as much realness in them as possible.

RD: Has your work with photography changed your painting in any way?

AG: Yes, photography has changed my painting. Because I create plots and storylines in my photography, my painting has become completely pure.

There was too much literature in my painting at some point, and photography has helped me to get rid of it. I never created the kind of plots that you see in my photographs in my painting, but I was heading towards it. Yet it has a much greater effect in photography, because such narratives are not inherent to this medium. In general, photography appeared in my life because at one point painting started to become a mere craft for me, executed with inertia, while painting requires a direct charge of energy, which is sometimes lacking – without it, painting loses its depth. Now, however, everything is in a perfect arrangement – all summer long I work only with photography, but as autumn draws close, I feel that I begin to miss painting. In the end, it is not so important what means of expression you choose, as long as you have something to say.



ALGIS GRIŠKEVIČIUS
Eclipse, 2009
toned photograph, 56 x 100 cm

On the DJ and long exposure

EGLĖ JUOCEVIČIŪTĖ talks to
AGNĖ JONKUTĖ

EGLĖ JUOCEVIČIŪTĖ — AGNĖ JONKUTĖ

AGNĖ JONKUTĖ is an artist
based in Kaunas.

EGLĖ JUOCEVIČIŪTĖ is an art
historian, critic and curator based
in Vilnius.

Eglė Juocevičiūtė: When I was asked to interview you, I became aware that your view of Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain* was positive.

Agnė Jonkutė: I did not know all the stories around it; I simply read about the project and liked the idea a lot. It's a cunning idea: it incorporates the whole silly outdated war between the old and the young generation, between the Contemporary Art Centre and the Lithuanian Artists' Union. It's just superb – one person represents the whole state cultural support policy. It was only later that I found out that there was so much criticism around the project. I find it wrong that they criticised not only the project itself, but also Darius Mikšys as a person. The project's only shortcoming is that the applied arts were rejected, because this dividing line has long ceased to exist, but on the other hand it is understandable, because the amount of people and works were already too big, so there was a need for some limitations. Again, the artist inventively used the scholarship allocation rules that the Ministry of Culture still follow – that is, the way in which scholarship candidates and recipients are grouped. I really liked how Darius appropriated the cultural policy rules of the Republic of Lithuania and played around with them like a DJ.

EJ: This is precisely one of the reasons for criticism – if everyone understood that the rules are flawed, why did Mikšys adopt them exactly as they were? It would seem that art should make wrongs right. Therefore, many hoped for serious research that would collect information about all of the projects that had been funded through scholarships and make conclusions.

AJ: I, on the contrary, somehow understand Mikšys' chosen method of faithfully adopting the system. It made it absolutely obvious that this division into 'sections' was completely inaccurate and pointless (which everybody suspected before). I recently read the theatre director Cezaris Graužinis' idea that art that claims something is propaganda. So, there are other, indirect as well as non-linguistic ways of speaking.

The visual presentation of the project was Darius' personal business, and don't forget that the jury awarded the pavilion a prize for its elegance. An unthinkable achievement for Lithuania, which does not have long-standing traditions in this field. The only thing I was unsure of in the exposition was the furniture. In my opinion, in such a project it should have been less prominent, almost non-existent – in other words, it should have been elegantly invisible, raising no doubts, just like the accompanying white book.

After the project had received the award, all discussions about the 'crappy' project ended; those

who had been criticising it did not write anything again, the public debate collapsed. Maybe it shows that we do not really know how to rejoice, especially at others' success?

EJ: The main argument of the critics following the project's success was that the Biennale's jury has very little time to get acquainted with the problems addressed by the pavilions, and simply awards the expositions with the best design.

AJ: Why not? After all, beauty always was a very important factor in art, therefore I think that it is absolutely understandable. I know that there were people who refused to participate because they did not want to be mere cogs in the project. I didn't think about whether my work would be unpacked or not, but I have photos that show it was taken out from behind the white curtain – personally, I'm glad about that.

I remember how we were on our way to the final exhibition of the Düsseldorf Academy with my group from the Vilnius Academy of Arts and stopped at a museum in Cologne, I think, where archives were stored in a glass cube inside a larger cube-shaped building. It is interesting, Darius probably never saw it, and his intention was different, but for me these two things are somehow strongly interrelated – it was more intriguing to look behind the curtain, because that was where the things that were invisible and hidden were.

This project is also interesting because of the fact that one artist represented Lithuania, but he acted as the commander of an army. If I were the head of the Artists' Union, I would employ Darius Mikšys as its project curator right away. Because he really united people from two camps – the CAC and the Lithuanian Artists' Union, so we ended up with a real result instead of name-calling.

EJ: Did he really unite them? When did you notice that, during the farewell party?

AJ: The farewell party was a real celebration, it attracted people who had never been to the CAC before, and this means that they will probably come again. I believe that this project has the potential to unfold further, because a lot of work was put into it and a lot of contacts were established. I don't think fault-finding is exclusive to Lithuanians. Just before the Biennale artist Žilvinas Landzbergas and I participated in an exhibition in Croatia, and the Croatian and Ukrainian artists that took part in it also told us similar stories about their countries' candidates for participation in the Biennale.

By the way, my work was once featured in an exhibition rolled in a transportation tube. It was in

EGLĖ JUOCEVIČIŪTĖ — AGNĖ JONKUTĖ

Africa, during the Francophone Culture and Sports Games. Me and one of the other artists in the exhibition travelled there without a guide, just the two of us. Everything was progressing very slowly there, I failed to hang my work in time, so during the opening it stood in the corner rolled into a tube. And I really liked that – it was and wasn't there at the same time.

EJ: You mentioned that in your opinion *Behind the White Curtain* could go on. Before the project was taken to Venice, its most important part was the discussion, which nevertheless was not constructive. Do you see value even in this kind of discussion?

AJ: Yes, it rocked the boat, although it could have been less personal. The main accusation was that Mikšys was actively promoted by the CAC. It seems to me that if the CAC represented 'everybody's interests', it would not have the name that it has made for itself, and not only in the Baltics. I believe that the curator and the art institution have to be very selective; only then will they have an identity of some kind.

EJ: While studying for my BA degree, I wrote a work on Lithuania's participation in the Venice Biennale, and I made the conclusion that, unlike at the Eurovision Song Contest, they mastered the rules of the game better and better each time, and brought to the Biennale exactly what needed to be distinguished. I wrote that after the success of the Urbonas' marketing campaign, but the attention *Behind the White Curtain* has attracted fits the same trend.

AJ: Yes, they seem to continually hit the spot... I saw the Mekas and the Stanikas expositions with my own eyes. The Stanikas had created a wonderful space, a total experience. Those who visited this year's exposition also said that the lighting, architecture, and all the other components turned into an emotional field.

EJ: We have finally touched upon architecture. When did you become concerned with the architectural space?

AJ: I believe that everything started with my great-grandfather's camera. He assembled it himself, having bought the lens with money made from selling a cow. I began to use this camera as a student; it captures light perfectly. I started taking pictures of empty spaces, I was mostly interested in that extremely long exposure, the whole lengthy process. I like to work slowly, repeating the same action for a long time.

EJ: Do you consider this work as a form of meditation?

AJ: Yes, all religions have their own techniques, such as the mantra, rosary, or mala, which enable one to submerge themselves into a certain state. I paint in the same way, always about the same thing, in long series – I'm sorry if someone finds that boring.

EJ: Why do you paint? After all, it's more convenient to talk about space through an intervention with one's body, a projection, or an installation; there was even a point in your work when you projected the shadow of a feather or a wire onto a wall, which had been fixed to a slide frame and fluttered from the breeze coming from the projector's fan...

AJ: There is a line in a song by Laurie Anderson, where she is asked: 'So, what's so good about new?', and she answers: 'Because it is interesting, it is like being awake'. I went through a period that was full of the joy of amazement: when I drew on thermal paper, did light installations, but... Perhaps I am addicted to the smell of oil paint and thinners.

There is a story behind those images of emptiness. I have both Christian and Buddhist friends; they show me a lot of things. For instance, once I went to the Trinitarian monastery in the district of Antakalnis with a friend, and they were holding a week of silence there. I received a cell and could remain in that silence for as long as I wanted. I 'switched off' completely. Of course, the monastery walls were very helpful – there was nothing else in the ascetic cell. You begin to observe the environment, to follow the movement of shadow or light, and it has a strong effect on you. I drew, took some photographs, and after some time began to paint.

EJ: I read in one article that the photographs you use for your painting have to lie in a drawer for a while.

AJ: Yes, while I am finishing works started earlier, they rest in the drawer. Some of those images come back to my mind; they haunt me. I need a long process. A photograph cannot be completely transferred to the canvas, but it serves as a base. Another important part of the process is to take the works to another space, because in the studio I cannot see if that 'child' can begin its independent life or not.

EJ: What was the story with your exhibition at the Old Town Artists' Gallery? According to the critic Kęstutis Šapoka you chose a space that was completely unsuitable for your paintings, why was that?

AJ: I really liked Šapoka's text, because what he had written was true. They welcomed me very warmly. I had visited during Eglė Karpavičiūtė's exhibition, and liked the space. Yes, it is dark, the window

niches are dominant, but I am still happy that I ventured into a different place, I wanted to see my works elsewhere. For a long time I did not do any solo exhibitions in Lithuania, and only took part in a few group ones. I am most happy when my works take me somewhere. You keep doing what you like and receive something that you could not have afforded otherwise – as in the case of that event in Africa, thanks to which I saw Niger.

EJ: That's almost a Mikšian strategy – like learning to play cricket during a residency in London.

AJ: Yes, but for that you need to tune in to an artist's way of thinking, which might begin with the strategy 'why not?'

EJ: In the press release of your recent exhibition you mentioned the spaces of the Stedelijk museum, so I had this thought that perhaps while travelling to galleries and museums around the world and observing their architecture you were instinctively choosing unimaginable and impossible, yet the most intriguing places for your works.

AJ: There is a gallery in Amsterdam that I often think about. The CAC would suit me just as well – the space is beautiful and light. I have become much more relaxed about where and how my works hang, because I know what the reality is. It is more important to show and see for myself than to wait for that ideal space. It is like an abscess: when it bursts, you relax and it becomes so easy to move on...

While staying in the Netherlands, I wanted so much to travel to Vermeer's city, Delft. I went to his museum there, hoping to find at least one original. Of course, that was in vain – all they had were high-quality printed copies on canvas... Feeling resentful, I discovered the superbly lit corridors. Later, in Berlin, I found several of Vermeer's paintings in the National Gallery, and this sounds absurd, of course, but I literally felt how the structure of my cells was changing while I was looking at his works. I think that the works by Ryoji Ikeda and Žilvinas Kempinas, which I saw at Berlin's Transmediale, speak about the same, albeit in a different way. Of course, I am a modern person who is accustomed to the fact that light is used everywhere, that everything is very fast, but I am concerned with taking my time, with taking a closer look at something when you are left alone with that thing. Maybe that is why I paint? I am intrigued by the fact that these spaces were built by people and for people, and by what happens when they are empty.

EJ: This summer I travelled along the architectural routes in Finland; this was my first specialised archi-

tectural trip, and thus I had many new experiences. For instance, perhaps because it was summer and I mostly visited modernist public buildings, they were all empty, with the exception of a few tourists like myself – I kept meeting couples from Japan and Italy. I had a strange feeling that those spaces, scrupulously designed for people's convenience to the last millimetre of the door knob, stood unused, only visited for observation, and all belonged to me at that moment.

I read your thought somewhere that in your paintings the human being was just there and will appear again soon. Meanwhile, after that Finnish experience it seemed to me that there had never been any people in those spaces of yours, and should be none.

AJ: There is a Soviet cartoon, a fairy tale from my childhood called *The Magician*. In this cartoon, a person from the South is stuck alone in a Soviet institute and cannot find the exit. He is wandering through the gloomy hallways that all look alike, shouting 'People... people!...'.

EJ: Do very colourful spaces leave an impression on you and become paintings later?

AJ: As a matter of fact, yes. Last year I saw one in Amsterdam and took a photograph of it, thinking that I would definitely have to paint it later. It was Diana Thater's amazing installation *White is the Colour* at the Stedelijk museum, which altered the architecture with the help of light. An old building, a row of connecting rooms, and each room is illuminated by a blue light of a different shade. Nothing else, just the light and the architectural space, unchanged. And this does not require any text; this Gadamerian – let's call it that – revelation, which probably is not very popular these days, is enough. Another part of her installation was a projection of floating clouds in the corner of the hall. Due to the blue illumination, the edges of the projection disappeared – this looked very impressive as well, because it completely changed the perception of space.

EJ: When you mentioned your great-grandfather's camera, I had this thought that one could call your painting 'long exposure painting', literally. Is it true that you like oil paint and glazing because they physically prevent one from working fast?

AJ: Oh, that is a very beautiful description. Yes, I like the long process, a certain exposure, maturation – if you hurry, everything will wash away... Those layers develop on the canvas like the patina of time.

Taking photographs was indeed a very special

process: two to four hours of exposure, wooden boxes for film, waiting for the film to develop...

EJ: Do you still have those photographs?

AJ: I do, and I think that the time has come to take the camera out of the drawer again, but it takes time. As well as chemicals, and making sure that nobody switches the light on in the bathroom... It takes solitary time and space. The camera itself is a very special and beautiful thing, it is about 150 years old already, but it is fully functional.

EJ: It too has been maturing. I would like to see it someday. Thank you for the conversation, and good luck in taking your time!



AGNĖ JONKUTĖ
Windows, 2011

installation in St. Donat church in Zadar (Croatia) created in the framework of the project *Coming to Heritage 2011. Tertium organum*

EGLĖ JUOCEVIČIŪTĖ — AGNĖ JONKUTĖ

A conversation with Algis Lankelis about the everyday, politics, and art worth supporting

AURIDAS GAJAUSKAS

AURIDAS GAJAUSKAS — ALGIS LANKELIS

ALGIS LANKELIS is an artist and principal of the Vilnius Justinas Vienožinskis Art School.

AURIDAS GAJAUSKAS currently works in the CAC Reading Room and teaches philosophy at the Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Auridas Gajauskas: Earlier we were speaking about one's own place where one can share his knowledge – competencies, memory, or background – with others. 'Finding one's own place' sounds like a measured and long-term project. There are many such projects like this. For instance, this year Deimantas Narkevičius came to teach at the Vilnius Academy of Arts for a period. While, I would associate Artūras Raila's project-lectures at the academy with the creation of 'a place within a place' or 'a time within a time', when, for example he invites the engineer and bioenergetics specialist Vytautas Kapačiauskas or the high priest of the pagan Romuva community Jonas Trinkūnas, who work outside of the academic context, to give lectures within this very context. In this way it becomes clear that 'finding one's place' may mean finding the 'place' of non-standard cultural truths as the 'place' of the whole of the academy and the education system. How do you share your role and knowledge with other people?

Algis Lankelis: In my case it is not just sharing. Rather I use my competence for creating a whole environment. For instance, when the computerisation of the Justinas Vienožinskis Art School was underway and the installation course was being developed, Arūnas Gudaitis, Audrius Navickas and Džiugas Katinas contributed a lot; I mobilise and invite people. Whereas Raila and Narkevičius, for instance, spend more time communicating with the students directly; they utilise their knowledge in this way.

AG: How does art participate in the everyday when there is no artistic practice left in it?

AL: Essentially I think that sometimes one may create a precedent while not creating anything. Even when driving a car. I don't ride a bike myself, but those who do say that ten years ago riding a bike in the city was much scarier, and now it is a great deal safer. Perhaps the car owners have seen that things are done differently in other countries, and have begun to drive more carefully: you pass, drive around and by doing so you are already creating a precedent, an example that suggests one can behave in a different way, and someone near you sees that and gets a sort of inspiration from you; a challenge to change his behaviour. It is the same with other everyday things. These social changes are small, but we can provoke a certain reaction with our own behaviour. Even very small gestures can change a lot. The newspapers won't write about you, you won't be shown in the evening news on TV, you won't become a part of written history. But who creates the history anyway? The people who are the least talked about. They create it with their behaviour, with a certain example.

AG: This year, first in Vilnius and later in Venice, at the Lithuanian Pavilion, Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain* was presented to the public. From what I heard many people's attitude toward it was split: they usually said that the project was incredibly self-centred, but it was good in the sense that it caused much debate. What do you think about it?

AL: To tell the truth, I didn't participate myself, although I am a recipient of the state grant. I read the invitation addressed to the artists somewhere – it said something like: here, you too will have a chance to go Venice and take part in the exhibition. I thought then that it was quite a funny thing – after all, if you can't be a soloist, you'd rather not go there as a part of a choir. It's like those misleading fake brands – Phillipz instead of Philips, for instance; an invitation to the artists who are unworthy of being invited to participate in the Biennale: here, you can go too.

AG: What disadvantages did you see in this project?

AL: In my view, it lacked objectivity. Different kinds of artists receive the grant, while the project's selection criteria were favourable only to the ones who create objects. And if one creates, say, performances instead of objects, what can he submit?

AG: Documentation?

AL: Yeah... I understood this work as an artistic research project. Research is successful if its findings disclose something new. But why would one conduct research in a sphere where everything was clear in advance? This project revealed the chaotic image of state art policy – i.e., a complete absence of it. I know that already, so why does one need an exhibition with such investments? I know in advance that there is no policy whatsoever; there is only a system where everyone gets 'a little bit'. This reminds me of the debate about the Modern Art Centre and the National Gallery of Art. I heard opinions that the NGA collection (I have in mind the Soviet period collection) had been put together 'bit by bit' historically, because the exhibits had been selected for acquisition by various commissions at that time, as well as that it was more historically objective. Meanwhile, the MAC was criticised for allowing a few individuals create a historical picture. That is supposed to mean that one collection is subjective and the other one is objective. I think, however, that this subjectivity can have much more objectivity about it because, regardless of whether the creator's name will be included in the name of the collection or not, people will know it – it will be that individ-

ual's personal responsibility. And how was the NGA collection being put together prior to 1990? What if the acquisitions were made based on personal connections? We don't know anything for certain. Nobody bears responsibility, because everything is anonymous. I believe that subjective selection can be much more objective. What does objective selection mean anyway? To buy a little bit of everything like one would at a market?

AG: How objective and subjective is Darius Mikšys' project?

AL: If one were to bring together all the artists who had received the grant, maybe one would end up with a particular objective picture.

AG: But does the title *Behind the White Curtain*, which sounds like both a revision and a betrayal, not disclose the secret?

AL: Well, yes, but I don't even concern myself with the question of what the policy of the Ministry of Culture was – it was nonexistent. It was populist, a little bit to everyone, so that everyone would shut up.

AG: I would like to give an example from British sociology. Between the 1930s and 1940s, Thomas Humphrey Marshall studied how the bureaucratic institutions directly responsible for Britain's social welfare were functioning. At that time, when applying for welfare payments, a single mother was required to provide information about her husband in the application: whether they were divorced, whether he was alive, died at a factory because of an accident, or died at war as a war hero. The size of the payments depended on the information provided. This, of course, was populist, but was it objective with regard to each single mother? After all, it was only thirty or forty years later, when a new generation had matured, that the results, which had nothing in common with the populism characteristic of the past, became obvious. Suddenly the views, questions and debates on who had to receive how much money, which had shaped the policy, became unimportant, because it was more important at this point who and why has received it, and what kind of evolution this had determined. In other words, what kind of people these children grew up to be.

AL: Yes, because a child of a hooligan can be a genius.

AG: Likewise, I would suggest taking a closer look at state art policy in the context of Darius Mikšys' project. Most of the works submitted had been exhibited earlier, the participating artists had given

interviews before, and critics had written texts about their work. Yet this is already history. Just like the political conditions, the so-called populist reasons behind the funding of each work. If we manage to get rid of this history (let's say, we bracket it), we can lift up another 'curtain', behind which we will see fully politically conditioned works of art. In this way we will learn that it was not only the state as a government that took part in the work's emergence, but also the state as a republic, or a civil and everyday society. The smallest changes in the whole of Mikšys' project, which we see by observing the shifting names, contrasting colour palettes of the objects, the allusions and dialogues between paintings and video works, all those 'micro-overlaps' and their differences, reveal something more than could be demonstrated under the local conditions of the artists' solo exhibitions or concepts.

AL: Essentially one can see the whole spectrum of the most diverse artists ever supported by the state here. Frankly, I never went deep into these politics. Well, I had served on the Ministry's grant commission for five years. I applied for a grant myself and received it. As a former member of the commission, I can say that everybody was always dissatisfied with the end result. When we saw the compromised list, everybody was unwilling to sign it. On the other hand, should the state support only a few artists and leave out all the others? Guarantee a good life for some and give nothing to the others?

AG: What is your position on today's Lithuanian art and cultural policy?

AL: Frankly speaking, in recent years I have digressed from art policy and art itself. I keep an eye on it, but I don't really watch it closely, and I can admit that there are many things now that I don't know. For this reason, it would be difficult for me to judge or to voice an opinion on these matters.

AG: What about education?

AL: It is difficult for me to speak with confidence even about my own field. There are changes taking place in this sphere, geared towards transparency and openness, which is good. But there are no final results yet. The new informal education funding system will begin to work only in September next year. There are numerous nuances; as it is often said, the devil is in the details. I think it would be bad if nothing were being done, and if something is being done, maybe it will do some good? But if it is done in a bad way, things will be bad or worse. In and of themselves, reforms do not guarantee quality; only

good reforms guarantee it. The system of 'student baskets' (state allocations for students receiving free education) will stimulate competition in this sphere and will facilitate the emergence of initiatives. I am talking about the informal education of children, which will create the conditions for artists to open their own schools. This is the current direction.

AG: Why do you think we are moving in that direction?

AL: Because if there is a 'basket', it means that the money comes with the child. To date, the state has been subsidising only state institutions, which means that private initiatives in this sphere have been virtually impossible because of the high tuition fees in private schools and studios. When the funding system changes, if an artist decides to open a class and the children come to it, the state money will come after them. This idea is great, but there are also inherent obstacles – one will be required to have various licenses. For an ordinary artist, who is creative and is concerned with art more than with papers, this will be too difficult. Because of this, everything will depend on how this reform will be implemented.

Speaking of state policy, I think that there is a need for a set of priorities that would determine who should receive the money. When we were distributing the state grants, we were faced with a paradox – grant recipients were divided into separate sections: painters, graphic artists, ceramicists, interdisciplinary artists... The latter became a separate genre, much like ceramics or glass art. But interdisciplinary art is contemporary art, the *whole* of contemporary art – one cannot squeeze it into a single group or genre... Or take photographers, for instance – they used to receive separate grants. Now, should an artist like, say, Dainius Liškevičius, who uses photography among other media in his work, apply for a grant in the photographers' section? There has been a lot of confusion, how does one impose order on this mess? I think that we should invest into a particular individual who has potential, rather than into a particular genre or form of art. Then, genres will no longer have any significance; we will be left with art worth supporting and art that is worth supporting more.

AURIDAS GAJAUŠKAS — ALGIS LANKELIS

Conversation with Kęstutis Lupeikis about the black cube

JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS

JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS — KĘSTUTIS LUPEIKIS

KĘSTUTIS LUPEIKIS is an architect and artist based in Vilnius.

JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS is an architect and researcher in architecture. He recently graduated in architecture from London Metropolitan University and is currently undergoing an internship at the architectural company MVRDV in Rotterdam.

Jonas Žukauskas: We are speaking on the occasion of your participation in Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain*, that presented Lithuanian art at the Venice Biennale. The project sought to introduce art as a complex phenomenon that has varying appearances in singular white cube space. How did you receive Darius' idea and did your opinion change after participating in the project?

Kestutis Lupeikis: Essentially, not much has changed since the beginning. Overall, I found it a very unexpected idea, a sort of provocation, but it was interesting – it was a non-standard approach. Of course, there were many opinions; some artists were not happy to see their work deposited behind white curtain, but I didn't have those thoughts. I valued the project as a neologism, after all, it was positive – it provided the possibility to show and to see a wider spectrum of artistry and not just one artist as is normally the case. During one of the initial meetings my colleagues and I were making jokes – what would happen if we presented a performance piece for example. We would travel there, sit in the storage and wait to be called. It was fun for us, maybe for the older generation it could have seemed strange.

JŽ: Darius' white space in front of and behind the white curtain became a projection of various discussions in artistic circles and the wider society, as well as of each individual visitor choosing the contents of each display from a catalogue. Was this important to you?

KL: I think that this projection is in line with a broad spectrum of views – in fact there was everything. Darius imposed criteria – to invite artists who had received a state stipend. Apparently, those who received it were among the best at the time. And there were all kinds of opinions and discussions – for instance my colleague the artist Redas Diržys made very sceptical remarks during one of the meetings. I didn't think that I would be somehow discredited if my work was exhibited in such a way.

JŽ: You are an architect and member of the artist group *Angis*. An essential characteristic of your paintings are expressive accidents that materialise through the process of making them. And in architecture, which is like a second fraction of your thought output, the form is just rational and functional?

KL: Not necessarily. In the same black cube, the prosecution office building, you can find accidental elements – occasionally on the facade there are no windows and this was not intentional. I allow the unforeseen variations to appear in my architecture

and this building is not the only instance. Here you see a photograph of an entry proposal for a Dutch competition; there is a certain random element to the layout of the spikes on the sphere. And there you see projects for individual houses where, like in painting, the arrangement of colours is emotionally grounded – there is also no system.

And in painting I went through various periods. It all started with the artists M.K. Čiurlionis and later Antanas Gudaitis (I studied the work of both of them), following a period of hyper-realist painting, when I was working with photographic precision. I enjoyed renaissance profile portraits and consider my later work to be figurative with greater expression; and the succeeding works are defined by a minimal calmness.

I wrote my PhD dissertation and monograph on minimalism. Minimalism is characterised by a wide spectrum of values and it is exactly those values that distinguish it from functionalism. The comfortable and practical is beautiful for the functionalist, but minimal empty space is clearly not functional. Minimalists care about other values – in a large space they would have a single chair or bench. For example, the British architect John Pawson, during one of his exhibitions in London, exhibited a twenty-metre-long impractical bench but, as I mentioned before, the range of expression can still be extensive. In minimalism the form might be diverse and not of central importance but instead aesthetical values of clarity, purity, essentiality.

JŽ: Maybe minimalism relates to elitism?

KL: Of course, the minimalist can be a boutique, haute couture house interiors – the same John Pawson designed a shop with a single shop shelf displaying a single pair of crocodile boots – that is a luxury.

JŽ: Is the image of the prosecutor's office as a black cube a literal projection of the meaning and function of the prosecution office?

KL: Regarding the prosecution office, when I heard about the subject of the competition I found it to be provoking, extraordinary and possessing a certain inner content and charge. Almost instantly I had the vision that it should be a strong and clear form and the most determined one is the cube. Black, because it is the colour of justice – prosecutors, judges, and lawyers wear black robes; it is the colour of their uniform. The oblique windows were intended to give dynamism throughout the appearance of the building. Although the cube is a very stable form, it is not a monument but rather an active and functioning institution. The windows received a varying reception

from people; one remark was that the employees would walk diagonally. In answer to that question I argued that while doing his job one should probably be working instead of staring through the window, then everything will be straight.

JŽ: Did the new image always suit the prosecutors?

KL: They were on the jury of the competition. They chose it themselves, therefore we should assume that they liked it. The plan of the building changed during the process – new units were established so we consulted with the prosecutors in written form. Speaking about the image I would not relate the black cube to all of the legal system. The justice, the courts, may be white, but black suited our case the most. After all, black is the colour of prestige and the prosecutor's office should be prestigious. I just felt that this image, the decision was intuitive, later of course I analysed it but it was not thought of logically, therefore it is difficult to explain in words. When I had to present this idea, one of the prosecutors asked why the building was black. Then, besides other explanations, I asked what the colour of president's car was? The prosecutor replied with a smile: indeed, the good Mercedes is black.

JŽ: Does the architecture of the black cube rectify the dominating image of justice?

KL: Of course, I created this image, I proposed it, it got adopted and gradually became part of the institution's image – what else can you do? Each prosecutor or his deputy sees things in a different way but how do you suit everyone? It is different in painting and sculpture – you don't have to look if you dislike it, whereas it is more complicated in architecture's case, you cannot make it only for yourself, there is the requirement of objectivity.

JŽ: The contrasts between function and representation are characteristic of this building. Inside, the atrium space is clad with translucent glass that exposes the construction of the building, the utilitarian concrete frame becomes representational. One can feel this contrast while entering; way up above he unexpectedly sees a bright space and simultaneously a kind of theatrical element appears – the volume of the conference hall hangs in this well of light as a depressing boulder dimming the vestibule. Therefore, when entering in daylight one cannot see much until he lets his eyes readjust to the shadow. Was this decision a response to some kind of functional requirement?

KL: The entire volume of the building floats slightly

above the ground and seems as if it will crush you at any moment – the low entrance on the ground floor unconsciously asks you to bend down. By employing the black cube and floating volumes of inner spaces I was seeking the experience of respectful awe.

JŽ: The prosecutor's office stands out in the environment of the Žirmūnai area – the black cube is dominant among the other grey block buildings. Can we say that it is a stranger there?

KL: My response to the criticism around this is: dear ones, do we have to revert to the typical soviet panel housing? Where would this take us? Architecturally this is a poor context, it is not valuable – my position towards this is sceptical. In Post-Soviet space context is valued too highly and this demonstrates a certain creative inability. Elsewhere in the world this does not cause many problems, in the West no one thinks about the context but rather the artistic value of the object itself – the idea. For instance in New York volume is not a problem – you have money and you build a larger building, therefore the overall result is effective.

JŽ: Perhaps you don't trust planning?

KL: I have an edgy relationship with urbanists. In my Longman English dictionary there is no such term at all. Within our Architecture Faculty we have the Department of Urbanism; I do not understand – students get an architecture degree, they are taught by architects so why is there this delirium around urbanism? In my opinion, planning institutions are not at all useful, it is the desire of bureaucrats to control and regulate.

JŽ: In the competition you proposed a cube that is a few stories higher than in the master plan and it also challenged the competition brief. How did the local community receive such alterations, were they consulted?

KL: Although the brief stated the volume should not exceed five stories, I proposed nine with the ground floor so it became a cube. After winning the competition, the master plan of the area had to be changed and this procedure involved consultations with the local community. They came to the meeting and as always it began with noise – not because of the volume, not because of the cube, none of that. Their discontent was because of the square where children are usually playing. But when I was taking pictures there it was not even possible to step on the grass for all the dog poo. In any construction proposal you get a few old age pensioners appear who reject any kind

of construction, especially nearby. I can hardly imagine a scenario where the crowd gathers and starts to design. In my understanding this would be total nonsense, it would be the same as a crowd who would start painting a picture together. Should the artist stop practicing if society rejects him? If you are an artist, it is in your interests not to do it in a bad way.

JŽ: Do you think our reception of the black cube will change with time?

KL: The function of the building may change but if the form remains it will be hard to take away its suggestibility – only in the case of reconstruction. Some curse it, some like it – this is the everyday. With time passing the locals will get used to it, as with everything else. In the meantime I am happy that at least there is no indifference towards it, so my goal as an artist was achieved.



Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Lithuania building in Vilnius designed by KĘSTUTIS LUPEIKIS.
Photos: Jonas Žukauskas.

JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS — KĘSTUTIS LUPEIKIS

Cubes and corrections

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ talks to
ROBERTAS ANTINIS

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ — ROBERTAS ANTINIS

ROBERTAS ANTINIS is an artist based in Kaunas.

JUSTINA ZUBAITĖ is part of 6CHAIRSBOOKS.

JZ: When I mentioned the white cube, you said that the square-cube is a good topic to talk about in general.

RA: It began a hundred years ago: there was Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*, then I came up with the idea of the black cube, and now you're saying that it can be white.

cubes

JZ: I always associate the white cube with an imaginary ideal exhibition space (Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube*, 1976).

RA: I think about it differently.

JZ: When we think about a museum or a gallery today, we usually imagine works exhibited in a white cube space. Darius Mikšys and the Contemporary Art Centre, through their text, which presented the Lithuanian pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, introduced the motif of the white curtain, thus making a reference to the purportedly ideal exhibition space, purified from the various other contexts and tamed. Still, let us try to imagine, recall, or mentally simulate the situation when a viewer comes to the space with a white curtain, chooses a work (or a number of works) from the catalogue, and has the work (or works, one by one) brought to him in some way from behind the curtain for visual inspection. It is precisely at this moment that context-generating combinations or links emerge in an apparently neutral environment.

RA: This means that there is a shortcoming – *something* works its way out of this cube. Which means that one must come up with a way to prevent it from getting out. Still, you must understand that I am speaking about the cube as an artist now and not as an analyst of a particular and past event. Let us suppose that there exists some higher level, where the cube still conceals the works – what matters is how to make the intrusion worthy of these works. Everybody knows that an unspoken word is much more interesting and significant than a spoken one, and I keep trying to figure out how to attain this effect – which would be an altogether different work. Unspoken, unrealised, unseen, unshown – I am already recounting old truths about the state of being unspoken. So I think that I will have to develop this cube further in my next exhibition, and I still haven't quite come up with a way, but it's on the tip of my tongue, and I feel the desire to do it.

JZ: Maybe we could speculate on the possibility of realising the first Lithuanian art exhibition* today, then?

RA: The smartest way would be to take the original

1907 exhibition to Venice. But how would one squeeze it into the format of Venice? It would surely end up being another recontextualisation. I have no doubts regarding the viability of such an option. Manipulation of times is in the hands of the artists. Maybe time would become a curiosity? To use a different time, not an imaginary one, but the present, existing one. I am just thinking out loud. Or maybe 'reinscribing' the past in the present can help one feel the latter more acutely? As we speak now, I suddenly feel a desire to contemporise these past hundred years as an artist. It is possible to realise that exhibition just as well too. Maybe even better.

JZ: By the way, what work of yours did you propose for the exhibition at this year's Venice Biennale?

RA: That question comes with two implications: I) why did I do it?; and II) what could the viewer see? It would be better to ask what the viewer could not see.

JZ: Ok, let's invert the question: what could the viewer not see?

RA: I think that we should go back to the beginning of our conversation and begin to consider how one could make that cube even more closed and, at the same time, more open. Sometimes there is vacillation between closure and openness. Often that which is closed reveals more, while the chatter of that which is open may not mean anything. This is what we are talking about. We are vacillating between these two opposites.

Relating all of this to the exhibition, it would follow that everyone is so sick and tired of volubility that they start to look for peace and quiet, hidden ground, silence, and similar things. And it is always those who take (at least) a little pause – both in life and in Venice – who experience happiness. One also has to keep silent differently; this is why I am trying to figure out how to keep silent in a different way. How to not say something in a different way.

I believe we are approaching the conclusion that one part of the cube should be hidden and depend on the viewer/perceiver himself. The latter is a perceiving cube of sorts. We can start imagining, asking ourselves, who that white cube viewer is.

JZ: It is only possible to imagine a white cube viewer if one can imagine a viewer without personal preferences and cultural experience. Are we still talking about the cube?

RA: The cube can take us to many places; the cube can fall into the water. And that cube, as we already know, is the perceiver himself. We can also ponder over the material from which the cube is made. Can there be a white cube made of water? Did the cube always exist?

JZ: Yes, the cube existed at all times...

Both: ... it's just that nobody had named it.

JZ: In this case, the question would be: when did the concept of a cube emerge?

and corrections

JZ: As our reflection on the cube's guises, possibilities, transformation, etc., is well underway, I believe this is the point in time and space where some speculations should emerge that attempt to link: a) Darius Mikšys and the cube; b) Venice and the cube; c) this year's Lithuanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and the cube.

RA: We can keep on fantasising about what else could happen. For instance, there could be a cube that will give birth to many small cubes. Just an impression.

JZ: Can this impression trace a connection with the aforementioned components?

RA: Fantasy itself makes possible a connection with anything – that is, fantasy is a means of connecting the elements, for instance, the ones you've mentioned. Let's imagine what happens if we try and create *Mikšys' Project II, Mikšys' Project III, Mikšys' Project IV*, and so on...

JZ: Is this another parallel with a cube and many smaller cubes?

RA: Or we could ask a slightly different question – what would happen if a) there was just a curtain and nothing more; b) there were just the titles of works; c) the works themselves created the cube's form?

JZ: And what if the artists themselves came (or were brought) instead of the works? We would call it an 'artists' meeting' and would definitely remember the meetings of the artists' parents that already took place.

RA: We are just fantasising, inspired by Darius Mikšys' project *Behind the White Curtain*, created for the 54th Venice Biennale... The artists are sitting there, behind that white curtain...

JZ: And their verbalised works, or perhaps not the works anymore, but rather their transformations into a (retold) narrative?

RA: If some of the artists were unable to attend the pavilion personally, and if not all of them went to Venice, what could compensate for their absence or mediate their presence? Maybe there would be a sub-

stitute in their place: a) a mannequin; b) a sonic sign; c) something else. Maybe someone would object: 'No, I don't want to lend my work, I will only give you the materials employed in my work, from which you could do an even better version.' Another option would be to show that these real objects, these works do not actually exist, because they have changed in some way while they were travelling to Venice. It would be a demonstration of disappearance of some sort. Maybe these works would even become better if they disappeared?

JZ: We should also keep in mind the difference between change and modification.

RA: Change can obviously take place due to various reasons: I) the ones that the artist controls and II) the ones that he doesn't. It is precisely uncontrollable change that can surprise even the artist himself and compel that artist to become a subject in relation to his work, rather than being its creator or perceiving it as an object. And maybe the perceivers should even be allowed to cause or influence this change?

JZ: I, on the other hand, would like to focus on the aspect of modification – the artificial, deliberate, distortion of the work's original image. I would even like to speculatively imagine the artists who view this departure to Venice as a simulated feast that everyone has suddenly become obsessed with, which displays obvious (since they are highlighted) carnivalesque elements, as well as ones of pathos. In this way, the modification of a work would be associated with improvement, with preparation for presentation, with a euphoric intoxication of public appearance, perceived with irony.

RA: What you are talking about is also one of the possible options. Continuing the play on the theme of travel, there is also the option of presenting the project intended for exhibition in Venice, here, in Lithuania, and inviting all the Venetians and guest visitors to come to our country, and maybe even discard the exposition as such, instead treating the process of their travel and the stories and reminiscences associated with it as works of art, linking them to the Lithuanian Pavilion at the Biennale.

and, in conclusion:

– So where are the works?
– Can't you see? You yourselves are the works.

* The first Lithuanian art exhibition was organised by the Lithuanian Art Society in 1907 and included over 200 works by 23 professional artists and 68 artisans. It was held at the home of the Lithuanian publisher and editor Petras Vileišis.

Everydayness

JURGA DAUBARAITĖ and JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS — GEDIMINAS AKSTINAS

GEDIMINAS AKSTINAS is an artist and lecturer at The National M.K.Čiurlionis School of Art.

JURGA DAUBARAITĖ is an art theorist and architecture researcher.

JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS is an architect and researcher in architecture. He recently graduated in architecture from London Metropolitan University and is currently undergoing an internship at the architectural company MVRDV in Rotterdam.

Gediminas Akstinas: you used a good word earlier – ‘everydayness’. You said that during an interview everydayness is erased. Therefore let’s return to this term because it works well with the white curtain project. What is that everydayness? The most interesting and rewarding part of Darius’ project was the everydayness of each artist and submission of one’s produce for the general context. Another important principle was to set it up like a commercial gallery that does not engage in selling – money is ‘withdrawn’ from the exhibition space and where the action is taking place. In this way completely different criteria are met: easiness, carrying, placing... Each artist-participant is faced with his own choice – to propose his work or not. I’m also interested in this relationship – the responsibility that an artist holds when accounting for his own objects, and how some artists immediately distanced themselves from the project, while others hesitated. Then I remembered a question someone asked me when I was younger: ‘Is this it for you, after you sell the work?’ As if throwing a hyperbole at you: ‘You know, it is like letting your child start his own life – maybe he’ll find his place...’ Then I thought about how irresponsibly that was said, and remembered the term ‘love is blind’, which is completely indescribable in words, but which some attempt.

During one of the meetings Darius expressed the opinion, that in spite of everything, however unpleasant it might be for some, we had *already* won, therefore it made clear what was most important to him. You could submit work, or not. But you are not even in contact with Darius. All of this has no relation to social groups or stipend receivers, because if he had started working on gathering the collection himself he would’ve become buried in it and it would’ve been a completely different project. And as it turned out it was a pleasure to observe how the project operated in the given space. It was a pure action project, which worked according to commercial gallery principals in that artworks were brought in and out, without any liability and being insured for possible mistakes. Thus we have a business here not with results, but action.

Jurga Daubaraitė: So in this case did the viewers see a work or works?

GA: In this project it is important how you generate your presence – and in such conditions I would agree that many saw a work. I think the realisation of the concept in the space was very important – how it functioned here and there. I find this change of space interesting. Those who carefully select where and how they participate obviously refused to be included. It was clear to me that you could loan your work

in the knowledge that it will travel safely and return. So a conclusion could be made here that many saw *their* work in that space.

Jonas Žukauskas: And how was it for you with the box for your ‘pupil’s’ shelf and image of Kennedy? Did it become a condition of your participation for a shelf to be included?

GA: I see this image as a union of people and a very beautiful photograph, where marriage is documented. But it appeared completely randomly when the box was already prepared for the trip. I just wanted to add a beautiful photo. There may have been another image but it would point towards different interpretations. Interpretations need to appear before the work, and not follow its creation. Interpretations need to be especially active in the learning process, because if you are overloaded with interpretations during the presentation of the work you are shocked – and it happens not while learning but during submission. Then strange ruptures appear. I think interpretations should happen during the process, as it was in Darius’ project. And process, rather than presentation, is often more relevant for artists. Presentation is a visual part of the project, as you say – that box. There is a movement in a flow. For me, generating a thought is more spacious. If it disappears you see only production, which simply confuses it all.

JŽ: Could learning be a shelf to support a mental activity?

GA: Precisely – all things return to warehouses. For me the point of making a shelf is to fill it. There is always a space within a space and it is being structured, interpreted. And if you put up a shelf it will get filled. If there is a vertical or horizontal plane an object will appear on it. And it will participate in time and space alongside the participating pupil’s experience.

JD: Do you find the link between object and context important – as with the bridge you drew on the wall of Artcore gallery?

GA: A link such as a bridge does indeed interest me, because leaving, returning and disappearance are all related to the bridge. Of course it is sentimentally symbolic, but that path which crosses a completely different medium, where you cannot or do not wish to be, then leads to a safe plane – it is a very important point. For example, in villages there used to be the name of a deceased kinsman written on a makeshift bridge. Thus crossing the creek was like crossing

JURGA DAUBARAITĖ and JONAS ŽUKAUSKAS — GEDIMINAS AKSTINAS

that person's territory – remembering him, and not just going somewhere.

JD: How did you end up studying art?

GA: Alfonsas Andriuškevičius once wrote that I joined M.K.Čiurlionis art school in exchange for a bicycle. I was such a street kid in my neighbourhood of Antakalnis that my grandmother and mother promised to buy me a bicycle if I went to the art school. When I was accepted I was staggered – it was such a different environment, another world, where you can tell people about your dreams and everyone listens. In my street you would have immediately been called a loser for it. It was such a shock for me – to experience that something else exists, aside from the mundane power relations on the street.

JD: Has your current creative practice become teaching? How do you teach?

GA: My teaching is based on dialogue and discussion – I aim to break out from the reticence, while simultaneously developing an important quality; self-confidence. Through this approach you can avoid backbiting, which is a dismal part of teaching process. Backbiting is silently thinking one thing yet saying another. Doors must always, as much as is possible, be open.

My aim is to free kids of the fear of risking, losing, and to counter so called 'art education'. I despise accounting for results, which would affect others. I don't think it should be like this in education. It is a process. And again we return to the idea, that process is more important.

JŽ: Talking about this process – how important is teaching to enable one to read ideas?

GA: During the learning process free interpretation is the most important thing. And whatever we might say about the art field that surrounds us we need to participate, go, see, discuss, in order to not only name and see the current situation but also to question it and 'switch on' ones consciousness. I disagree when someone expects that a kid should know one thing or another. Importance lies not in quantity of knowledge but perception of physical gauge sensations. Then you gather knowledge not only using logic, but also by using those receptors through which you would like to learn more.

We receive information through images. There are such terms as 'viewers', who watch and then consciously analyse, discuss. But there is also a category of observers, who make up the majority of our society. They are observers and transmitters – that's all.

JD: What role do you think an artist could play in such a process?

GA: Here the bar should be raised high. Maybe this sounds a bit obscure – but when you start living consciously you are thrown into destruction, in order for you to be able to exit clean into a different level of death, which nobody can name. Therefore I think that cleanliness, an ability to survive in different levels, your relation with others – I don't have any Roman Catholicism in mind – is very important. Everything being done has to be as plain as rye bread, that way things have value, and responsibility can appear. Occasionally it appears as if someone is boring, but it is a habit, and habits structure core elements.

JŽ: Could artists dust off the everydayness?

GA: Quite the opposite, I know many artists who create so much dust that one cannot understand anymore – everything gets covered. Now when I teach I use the term 'everydayness' and kids agree. One needs to live so that it becomes everydayness, it has to be fun. And not just in spurts – I will do it so that everyone gasps. My grandma used to say: 'Good idea, Gediminas, now just do it', so I would do it.

You see now, even more than in soviet times, it matters that an artist's child is also an artist. And at least he would develop his own form, but even the shape is not changing; plastic language hardly breaks away. I think it is a consequence of social possibilities. In a new field you would disappear, and here you already have some cultivation. Someone sits in the same chair for twenty years, some even thirty. And everywhere is the same, but when the environment is so tight the lack of change is rather visible. Then we approach each other: you call me 'Gedutis', I call you – 'Jonelis' – and when looking from a distance one wonders, why do they call each other so? Being in such close proximity to each other we do not see how everything 'shuts down'.

JŽ: Like in the Middle Ages when only the sons of wine makers knew how to produce wine? I mean it not in the craft sense but in relation to reality. Reality becomes a cave where no one can alter anything?

GA: It is not an issue with craft really but rather who has the toolbox. It is about the relationship with the reality which is retouched, erased. When a social environment is unyielding to any changes everything 'shuts down'. It is as if it is open for something new, but is received differently.

Here is a story: A father and his son go to see a play, which has been running for fifteen years

already. The story was created for the younger generation, for kids. After the play the child concludes that everything was great, but wonders why the Pinocchio was so old. But for the father he remained the same.

Period mentality is important here. There is still a reluctance to give up upon a so called military structure which is so rooted in Post-Soviet mentality – everything only gets rendered to democratic numbers, like ten points. A child gets seven points and cries, doesn't get food at home.

You know, I speak very negatively, but overall everything is ok.



GEDIMINAS AKSTINAS
Pupils, grade 5 and 6, 2005
wood, soot, 12 x 8.5 x 39 cm

Conversation with Deimantas Narkevičius about the modernist conflict between the individual and the environment and his new film *Restricted Sensation*

VALENTINAS KLIMAŠAUSKAS

VALENTINAS KLIMAŠAUSKAS — DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS

DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS
is an artist based in Vilnius.

VALENTINAS KLIMAŠAUSKAS
is a curator at the CAC and a
co-founding editor of the *Baltic
Notebooks of Anthony Blunt*
(www.blunt.cc).

Valentinas Klimašauskas: I am interested in the origin and the conception of the idea, in this case, of your new film *Restricted Sensation*. Artists or viewers often ask me as a curator about the concept of a particular exhibition or individual works comprising it, and the conversation about the ideas and concepts of an exhibition or a work often becomes extremely complicated because of the different definitions of these notions. As one of the most important traditions in contemporary art is conceptual art, which has as its point of departure a clearly formulated concept, artists inevitably face the need to explain the idea and the concept. How would you define the notion of concept in regard to your own works?

Deimantas Narkevičius: Speaking of the notion of the concept, it must be said that there are many artists who would like their work to be associated with the tradition of conceptual art. Some are more successful at it than others. This has become an aspiration, and thus the forms of young post-conceptual art are fairly predictable; usually they are based on a simple, clearly spelled-out idea that is expressed in one sentence. I don't agree with this kind of simplification of conceptual art at all – this is repetition. The form that involves an idea laid out in one sentence has been overexploited. Therefore, the simplification of the concept to a single gesture is an evisceration of conceptualism, a trend that has become unproductive and exhausted, and is of no interest to me personally.

Restricted Sensation is a relatively extended, long narrative. The film has a beginning and an end, is quite complex both visually and formally, while its most important structural principle is contradiction, dramaturgical absurdity. Finally, the work is aesthetic. One could view the film as foreign to the conceptual tradition, but the project also has a clear method of realisation, a particular principle of execution, which involves the obligatory components of feature film. I don't think that having more constituent parts makes the project less conceptual; it's just that its concept is not expressed in a single gesture.

VK: Are you concerned with the distinction between the concept and the idea? Does this manifest itself in your works in some way?

DN: The idea is more of a philological, literary category, which refers to the artist's intention to create one work or another. The concept is the unity of the idea and the realisation principle. Yet if one employs several different – even contradictory – components in one work, the method of the latter will not necessarily be excessively obvious.

VK: Could you describe the genre of the film *Restricted Sensation*?

DN: This is the first such film in my artistic biography. It complies with the requirements of feature films – there is a script, the actors speak in dialogues and impersonate characters. Although the film also has a number of different elements, feature films obey strict rules – the linearity of the plot or the change of scenes is a tribute to this genre. In other words, if I had edited this film as an abstract visual construct, as I had done earlier, for instance in *Revisiting Solaris*, it would have been even less communicative and incomprehensible to the viewer. Feature film cannot be very hermetic, it longs for a viewer. This genre is a particular tradition, perhaps even an institution, a system of power, which is reckoned with.

VK: Speaking of the gaze, can it be said that this film is intended for the gaze of the aforementioned feature film viewer? Usually, your films were made for the art gallery audience.

DN: That is the case with this film as well, but this time I also wanted to move beyond the gallery space. However, I do not think that this film is different or oriented to a wide audience of cinemagoers. The things that are exhibited in galleries, museums, visual art spaces in general are usually presented in a much more hermetic way, are communicated much more intimately, and require a more intellectual viewer, and thus are accessible to a narrower circle of people. Meanwhile, what is shown in cinemas is automatically more popular and more accessible to a mass audience. I disagree with this stereotype that has become firmly entrenched in Lithuania. This film premiered at the exhibition *You Are Not Alone* at the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona. Although the exhibition was on display for just two and a half months, more than 150 thousand people who bought a ticket saw the film. Later the exhibition travelled to the Museum of Modern Art in Vigo, where about 40 thousand more people saw it – together this makes almost 200 thousand viewers while taking part in one exhibition alone. I think this is a viewership record for contemporary Lithuanian cinema, or very close to it.

VK: Could one say that this film is about a disenchanted, perhaps even rebellious, young artist faced with the hostility of the Soviet system?

DN: I think that the film is a certain anachronistic dichotomy. I am talking about the modernist conflict of the individual and the environment – either the system defeats the artist or vice versa. Yet I do

VALENTINAS KLIMAŠAUSKAS — DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS

not think that we should emphasise the Soviet period, because all systems are oppressive. The film is not about something that once was; I just found the chosen period (the 1970s) particularly suitable because of its expressive aesthetic.

The film's protagonist is accused of homosexuality, and even today, while decriminalised, this sexual orientation is unacceptable in Lithuanian society. Homosexuality is viewed as obscene, even dangerous, and often erroneously identified with paedophilia. Has society become essentially more tolerant?

VK: Your film to me is akin to an interpretation of Michel Foucault's ideas of the panopticon, disciplining institutions, and archaeology of power and sexuality. If you were to agree with that, what would your own take on your film in the context of Foucault's ideas be? For instance, Jean Genet's 1950 film *Un chant d'amour*, although made before Foucault wrote his texts, is a work that, in my view, comments and expands on the ideas formulated by Foucault, rather than being their predecessor – it illustrates them, because it not only demonstrates how the system of power and the panopticon etc. work, but also presents examples of successfully acting within the framework of such a system.

DN: The subject of my film is as old as the world itself – it is the theme of the artist's personal as well as creative freedom. Unfortunately, as the years go by, I become increasingly convinced that creative freedom is unimaginable without personal freedom. And this is not just a legal definition. The artist sparks the spirit of freedom inside him and fosters it so that it does not falter – this is a state of being that requires a lot of effort when one lives within the reach of systems of power. And the most important thing that the artist strives to preserve is his feelings, psychological comfort, and his beliefs. Compromise is the basis for communication, but power structures demand it increasingly often. Yet there are always outsiders who prize the enjoyment of authentic experiences more than external, 'objective' acclaim and approval by the system. And this is when a conflict emerges, which, while potentially devastating and exhausting for the artist, leaves impressive artefacts of this struggle – art objects.

VK: Feminist film critique holds that cinema is created for a certain gaze. Laura Mulvey, in her famous essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), argues that most films are made for the heterosexual male gaze. The protagonist of your film is suspected of homosexuality, the KGB investigator openly shows signs of affection toward him, yet during the

conversation with the audience that took place after the screening you said that none of the film crew members were homosexual.

DN: That is a bit unfortunate, because homosexual members of the crew could have endowed the film with other nuances; maybe the characters would have acquired more 'texture'. Yet the heterosexual actors did very well, I am satisfied with the characters they have created.

VK: Have you received any response from non-heterosexual viewers so far? I am curious how they see this film.

DN: I'm not acquainted with this community very well, but during the screening in Kaunas I realised that there were people in the audience who remembered those times while watching the film. Yet I had the impression that the homosexual community – perhaps because of the dominant stereotypes – is aggressively defensive. After the screening I had a conversation with a person who said: 'Well, if you had undertaken this topic, you should have exposed it fully.' 'To submerge into the shit all the way', to use the words of that person. Yet this would have been the kind of cinema that I am least interested in. I couldn't discern the priorities of the heterosexual or the homosexual viewer in cinema.

VK: Louis Althusser spoke of the moment of interpellation, which defines the relationship between a system of power and individuals – systems of power always find a way to turn any individual into their pre-ideological subject. We always project the gaze of power representatives onto ourselves as soon as this gaze focuses on us. For instance, when we hear a police officer shout 'Stop!' in the street, we impulsively think whether this 'interpellation' is addressed to us or not. When, in the final scene of the film, set in a church, the investigator thrusts a set of photographs of a violent sex crime upon the protagonist, the action becomes a charge, to which the protagonist must respond and in this way become a subordinate subject of the system – he must disclose his sexual identity.

DN: The final scene portrays a form of blackmailing often employed by repressive systems, when the persecuted individual is allowed to choose from two evils, yet in either case a bad or an even worse fate awaits him. The Soviet system implemented a total civil security mechanism, which became an instrument for citizen's terrorisation and the full restriction of their civil rights. Other means of disciplining and ensuring the 'normalcy' of society exist today,

but this is not the subject of our conversation.

VK: This film, like all of your films, contains many references to your previous film works. Have you ever thought of making a film-exhibition?

DN: I like the single-channel, single screen format, and I consistently stick to it. I try to broaden the spectrum of expression in a different way. This film could be easily split into fragments that would be exhibited autonomously. This way the project would be diffused in the exhibition space, and the viewer could move from one projection to another. In this case I am more interested in how the protagonist journeys through the different scenes of the film – he travels from a road movie to, say, a model of the theatre, then to a crime drama, then to a documentary-like interview, and finally ends up in a romantic scene in a church. The character remains the same, he doesn't change from good to bad or from bad to good; he just travels through different cinematic constructs. I am convinced that the film does not fall apart because of this. The story had a defined ending, yet does not provide an answer. The absurd has no end, it continues, and one also needs perceptiveness and lively imagination so as to be able to recognise some of the cultural codes of the past to realise this.

VK: What is the origin of this absurdity? Is it related to the Soviet system?

DN: Absurdity and absurd situations are inevitably encoded in the relationship of the system and the individual. The Soviet system had reached particular heights in this sphere – anecdotes are still being told. The main topic of Soviet anecdotes is the powerless individual's relationship with the system or the power structures. This used to cause extremely absurd situations. Meanwhile, it is not fun to talk about the current juridical environment. We have all gained more civil rights, yet perhaps we haven't learned to use them yet – but this isn't funny.

VK: I wonder why. Maybe because of the present excess of the scandalous media, which suppresses the motivation of the 'folk storytellers'?

DN: Media has sublimated this genre. The former anecdote heroes have become the respectable personae of lifestyle magazines or regulars of TV crime shows, which portray their new existence as something to aspire to or at least as a glamorous bravado. All of this is presented to the audience in an accessible and popular style. What else can you say – read and marvel, respect, envy. Perhaps, one day you will

recognise yourself in these images, just as millions of Soviet citizens used to recognise their experiences in the anecdotes.

Much like radio pushed singing out of everyday life, the press and the television today do not leave a space for oral creation. In any case, the political dimension has vanished from anecdotes completely.



DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS
Restricted Sensation, 2011
HD video, 45'

Conversation with Arvydas Žalpys

ASTA STASIONYTĖ

ASTA STASIONYTĖ ——— ARVYDAS ŽALPYS

ARVYDAS ŽALPYS is an artist and director of Meno parkas gallery in Kaunas.

ASTA STASIONYTĖ is a student of the MA Art History and Criticism course at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas.

Asta Stasionytė: You are an artist, curator, and one of the key figures of the Kaunas art scene. Since 1997 you have been the head of Meno parkas, the Artists' Association's gallery. You initiated the interdisciplinary art festival *Kaunas mene* [Kaunas in Art] and the international art exchange project *Meno linija* [Art Line]. First of all, I would like to ask you how *Kaunas mene* has changed over the four years it has been running.

Arvydas Žalpys: There have been no significant changes in one particular aspect, but the festival is somewhat different each year. The idea of the festival is that each edition has to have its own concept, which determines the specifics of the event. While there was a large international group of guest curators one year, the next year we purposefully did without that external input – the gallery itself curated everything; in the third year we sought yet another option and gave priority to cultural institutions – so major changes happen in this way. Meanwhile, the basic selection criteria remain the same – the presentation of today's trends and contemporary arts. However, due to numerous circumstances, we are planning some changes – we will organise the festival biannually. This will probably lead to a change in both scale and, most importantly, quality. This change has been suggested through our analysis of the previous four festivals – one year is not enough time to develop and realise a truly good idea. The beginning is always pioneering – it is most important to secure a position and act quick, while now the focus is on quality: what you show, who participates, and, finally, where you show it. There is a shortage of exhibition spaces in Kaunas, because of this, next year's festival will be smaller. In addition, if we organise the festival every two years, we will be able to coordinate our events with other institutions and ask for better spaces only every other year.

AS: Do you know already what the concept of the gallery's activity will be in 2012? After all, it will be the fifth anniversary of the *Kaunas mene* festival and the fifteenth anniversary of the Meno parkas gallery.

AŽ: The programme for the next *Kaunas mene* has already been finalised. The festival continues to follow its own course, we seek to remain consistent and accomplish the tasks we had determined earlier; therefore, we will not attempt to organise exclusive projects or events that would emphasise the gallery's 15th anniversary during the festival. After all, fifteen years is not really an impressive anniversary, but several events of a different nature will still commemorate it. This year we concentrated on several projects that took place outside the gallery, invited several artists to work on special projects, and our main focus in 2012 will be an international conference that will address major issues

and trends related to the context of Kaunas – those of creative potential, as well as physical and economical conditions. We will invite participants from the city's major institutions; a considerable number of our international colleagues and curators will likely take part as well. We hope that the outcomes of this conference will set certain positive changes in Kaunas in motion.

AS: Let us turn to your artistic activity. Do the position and the activities of the gallery's director and curator have an influence on your creative practice? Do you have enough time for both the gallery-related matters and your individual work?

AŽ: My work in the gallery does not affect my creative practice itself – rather, it determines how much time I can dedicate to my duties and myself. When I began working at Meno parkas, the workload was not nearly as big as it is now, however for almost a decade the gallery has enjoyed a certain status, so I have to cope with the eternal routine-conflict between my work in the gallery and my creative practice. Regrettably, I have so little free time. The lack of time has also forced me to change my very creative credo and has made me switch to objects, abandoning painting altogether, because I can work with, say, paper or other kinds of objects at night or early in the morning because they do not require special lighting and other conditions. The most difficult thing was probably to get used to the idea – and I'm still not sure I have managed to do it – that I can only take part in one or two exhibitions a year and will not have time for any other offers. I am trying to come to terms with this situation, because you can't be in two places at once. I perceive my work at the gallery as a serious commitment and see it as a certain creative process. Whether I create something or not in my studio, it is my personal problem, while here I have an obligation to a fairly wide circle: the artists, the institution, and the public. I seek to carry out this obligation wholeheartedly, and it may be true that the work and the projects of my colleagues have become more important to me than my own.

AS: In recent years you organised two exhibitions united by the colour green – *Green (A Letter to My Colleague Andreas Pytlik)* (2010) and *Green 2 (2nd Letter to My Colleague Andreas Pytlik)* (2011). In these exhibitions, you engaged your audience in a discussion on the topic of 'green', asking what this colour meant to them: a lifestyle, like that of your colleague Andreas Pytlik, just a colour, or perhaps nothing at all... Do you plan on 'writing' more 'green letters' to your colleague and continuing this discussion?

AŽ: Not really, I think it was quite a spontaneous attempt. Presently, I am interested in object-based insta-

ASTA STASIONYTĖ ——— ARVYDAS ŽALPYS

llations, photography and video. Meanwhile, *Green* was just a period when Pytlik and I were in close contact, and took part in a number of exhibitions and international projects together – I noticed that he always developed the same theme, and that appealed to me. In general, I enjoy taking part (or trying to take part) in projects that have a formulated concept – you confront it like a challenge, like a test; then you see for yourself if you are capable of mastering and realising something. As for the ‘green’ theme – it is like the fact that blue and yellow produce green through colour and light; in this way such details can re-emerge in numerous projects, I initiated it, but I really don’t think that I will return to this theme in the same form.

AS: Do you have any new ideas for installations and objects? Are you planning a new exhibition?

AŽ: I can only say this much: there are three new ideas, but I would like to refrain from talking about them at this point. They are related to the installation genre, although one of them features elements of painting. I don’t want to go into details while the ideas are still in development – it often happens that everything changes in the course of the creative process. There are different visions; they should take the form of three exhibitions – one looks quite formulated already. I don’t set a deadline for myself, because I don’t think that they will become dated after a year or beyond. I’m just doing what I’m really into at the moment, and I can take my time doing that. I have also received invitations to participate in some group exhibitions – I’m not sure about anything yet, but I might try to take part in them if I have some ideas.

AS: Do you still paint for your own pleasure sometimes, after all?

AŽ: Well, I do, because I miss this process, but at that moment, while laying the paint on the canvas and experimenting, I am thinking about the future work – in order to make it somehow related to something that is *mine*. I don’t just come along and start to make an abstract or landscape painting out of the blue, I don’t have such an objective. I still think about ideas that involve elements of painting, and then I paint when developing these – if you may call it that – concepts, but not just for the sake of painting alone. Yes, maybe I understand those who say: ‘I sit down and have such a good time painting,’ but I simply don’t have the time for that, my painting is very conditional – I don’t know if it is still painting or not... I am also searching for myself in photography, without pretending to be an art photographer, of course – photography simply serves as one of the means to express an idea. Sometimes I prefer photography to painting or certain objects in my installations and exhibitions.

AS: One more question related to painting. Painters accounted for the largest percentage (about 35%) of recipients of the state art grant who took part in Darius Mikšys’ project *Behind the White Curtain*; at the same time, the public interest in young painters grows, as demonstrated, for instance, by the Young Painter Prize. Why does the genre of painting seemingly remain dominant, in your opinion?

AŽ: I think that, because painting developed as a genre very early, it will always remain one of the principal means of expression. Some think that painting had left the stage and lost ground to new media, and now seems to be coming back in fashion again, but I do not believe that it was ever absent; perhaps there just was a time when painters themselves did not know what to do. I can say the same now: when I look at group painting exhibitions, it seems to me that most painters simply paint, but do not search for something in art – no revolution or provocation whatsoever. Earlier, everybody experimented with new media – video and installation, but it is probably not so easy and simple. On the other hand, we do not have a school in these genres, while painting has a strong school and long-standing traditions, and if it continues to evolve after a pause, I support it; besides, painting holds a prominent position in today’s global context as well.

AS: The final question: today, 11 November 2011, is when the demonstrations *Occupy Streets, Occupy the World*, inspired by the Wall Street protest, which began on 17 September and expanded to more than 100 cities in the United States and more than 1500 cities in other countries, take place all over the world. Wall Street activists fight against corruption and banks. What do you think of such actions? Do they lead to change, or is this just a meaningless act of ‘taking to the streets’ that does not mean or say anything and has no clear idea?

AŽ: I recently returned from Chicago – protesters there have been gathering in front of one hotel every day for eight years, because that hotel abolished the trade union, so volunteers who have some free time go in turns with banners day after day. This has had no influence whatsoever, even the tourists have ceased to film them and their actions seem to be totally irrelevant, but I think that if it is important and relevant to this group of people – and I believe they know perfectly well that it will have no influence and won’t change anything, then let them do it. I cannot comment on the protests you’ve mentioned, because I don’t know much about their concept and message; I can only say that I have a very liberal attitude – if they take place, if somebody needs them, let them take place. I never oppose anything, unless it has a negative effect on social or human process, on development and on everyday life.

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Project for a conversation space

MONIKA LIPŠIČ — LINAS KATINAS

LINAS KATINAS is an artist living in Vilnius and Labanoras.

MONIKA LIPŠIČ is a contemporary art curator based in Vilnius.

Linus Katinas after entering the CAC reading room: This is a notable place for me – in 1997 the performance festival ‘Dimension 0’ took place in here, I didn’t see the window and went straight through it with the full force of my body; it was such a mess and it was dark. I felt the warmth and saw the blood dripping; and my performance was called *Crucifixion of Nothing*. I carried some nails with me and had a cross made; I handed out the nail with my blood dripping and everyone was actually shaking and I couldn’t see a thing and only heard someone say behind my back: ‘What an amazing actor...’ Well, it was very beautiful indeed. And just before that happened I was ascending the stairs and met a bride, who stopped me in English, cut off a piece of her veil and wrote ‘You are a very lucky man’, I asked ‘Why?’ – ‘You will see.’ Later my friend took me to hospital, so I was sewn up...

Hereinafter the conversation is taking place in the exposition hall that hosts no exhibition just two interlocutors – Linus Katinas and Monika Lipšic.

LK: Someone might bother us in the café, lets talk here.

ML: Many acquaintances in town?

LK: Well, I’m an old Vilnius dweller. In general I’m quite closed, I don’t like the public. Now I spend half of the year in the country, in Labanoras, I do everything there, I read... I came here a few weeks ago and am still afraid of everything.

ML: And what are you reading now?

LK: Andriušis [Alfonas Andriūškevičius] gave me the last one – Mark Strand, an American poet. I always try to read the original. And I’m annoyed by television at the moment – by crying grannies and singing gaffers! I’m very specific when it comes to watching television, for example, Mezzo or BBC at night. I know that there will always be a grand ballet on a weekend evening. I’m not even mentioning jazz... And when nothing is on and we have those old ladies crying, BBC World Service delivers information. I don’t watch CNN that much but the BBC are very responsible, they’re never late.

ML: When the art critic and poet Alfonso Andriūškevičius was translating Gabriel García Lorca I did indeed realise that you don’t have to know a language well in order to translate poetry. You were recounting Venice over the phone very beautifully.

LK: You know, that city seemed such a big mess to

me; its architecture, people, streets – everything, so I decided without a doubt I had to take part in this project. I strolled the city then carrying my *avoska** with three bottles of wine in it; I went and rattled behind a few female art critics and they were so nervous, they wanted to be foreigners so much... God, how they ran away from me these art critics! I never went back to Venice again. In Soviet times there was so much control over travel and I was travelling to Buriatia, to lamas. So they followed me like some woman! Later I had to leave the Youth Theatre. ‘Comrade Katinas, you travel to Siberia a lot...’ – ‘I do and I will.’ – ‘Oh, comrade Katinas, for a senior artist...’ So I wrote a statement and left.

ML: Please, tell about Buriatia and lamas – what was happening there?

LK: I was interested in Buddhism for a long time, I would get English books from the West – I read a tonne of them – and the more I read the more scarier it was – I realised I didn’t understand a thing. I learned that there was a live active tradition in Buriatia and to me it was like a pancake fell from the sky. I started travelling there. ‘What do you need?’ they would ask. ‘I need a consecration, an oral tradition. And the texts.’ And there was a teacher in Ulan-Ude. And if it was not for the Buriats, I’d be done – I was becoming dumb from the books. It was a moral and an exotic... You know, Siberia, minus forty degrees, the sun is shining and you can walk without gloves. Just beware that your nose doesn’t fall off. Rituals, that are being filmed today.

ML: Is the live tradition always secret?

LK: It was always so. If it wasn’t for you asking I wouldn’t be talking about it because it’s very personal. And it was very stupid when my friends in St Petersburg started making a business from it. You know, the balance between secrecy and the internet is hell. The truth is it was always this way throughout the history of Buddhism – there was always an emperor who was nagging his priest, or vice versa. These are classical stories. By the way, I have something to brag about – I saw the Dalai Lama. A friend and I were drinking wine (I don’t drink vodka but I have drank a considerable amount of wine in my life – you could swim through it)...

ML: Great, I’m a good swimmer.

LK: Really? I’ve scored. I will still have to drink a lot... So he and I having received the same consecration hear on the radio that Dalai Lama is coming. I say: ‘What the hell, lets go to him!’ And he was sup-

posed to be staying at a guest house. We stole a scarf from someone’s wardrobe, invited a couple more people, sobered up and saw the Dalai Lama was coming with his court. We jumped up at him and his eyes gleamed. The Dalai Lama is like the Pope, gee! We hugged. He hugged my children, took the scarf and invited us to his place. His court stood speechless... But you have touched upon a very thin thing here – the sanctity and the publicity.

ML: The sanctity and the sacredness, the symbolism of the moment?

LK: Lets say, of a second. I wasn’t allowed to go to Ulan-Ude, they wanted to jail me. But I went, without addresses. And from that moment door after door was opening for me – like when drinking wine.

ML: Yesterday I saw one of your paintings *This rectangle is merely a shadow of a square*.

LK: Where did you see it?

ML: On the internet.

LK: Ah, facebook? You know, it hasn’t been shown yet! I want to show it in the exhibition at the Titanic exposition hall around Christmas.

ML: I’ve noted that work and now you have mentioned opening doors. Is that canvas of two dimensions or more?

LK: More. Of infinite dimensions. Therefore double-sided works have appeared. You come and see artists’ works then leave with a cloud-myth forming in your head. Even if you’ve seen only thirty works of, lets say, Matisse. When I started painting those two-sided pieces someone would say to me: ‘I see one thing on one side, another on its second side and the third thing in my head.’ And later I thought there was a partial truth to that – I don’t like monopoly. As a matter of fact, that piece is in my studio, but I haven’t seen it for half a year now. I come back, reverse it – something *it* but also – nothing in common.

ML: What’s on its other side?

LK: A very bright one... but what could I tell you here?

ML: You’re right, a stupid question. And what piece of yours went to Venice?

LK: *Blue Coffin*. *Blue Coffin* is on one side and on the other side – *C Sharp*; a key with a black dash. How did it get there... With these coffins I wondered

myself – how do they come up? Someone said: ‘Well, you’re done.’ But I grew up near the cemetery in Radviliškis; everyday I would see processions, I would sit on the fence and sing *Dominus Vobiscum*. The collaborators’ cemetery was nearby. Their coffins were red, I drew a couple – so it appears to be from life! I even wrote a musical piece for it later. I knew exactly how much of what to squeeze in – black, white and that D mayor key. I pestered one musician and he submissively obeyed me and said that it was a nut-house. Music was vanishing sounds.

ML: Do you often collaborate with other artists?

LK: Well, cinema, theatre. It is very interesting to work with actors, it is the most enchanting profession to me, because it is – nothing is there! They have nothing of their own, all they have is a play and a stupid director who is often six times sillier than the actor; and an audience who is a howling crowd. And they manage to hypnotise everyone! A true actor – that is something.

ML: As a matter of fact, I’ve recently been speaking to the artist Artūras Raila about the actor as a hollow form. Isn’t it the highest...

LK: ...the hollow form, that fills itself with hell knows what. Even an actor himself doesn’t understand it – I know stacks of them. How to fill the volume that isn’t there – it is a mystery. From nothing appears something, like a ghost, which you believe in totally; and an actor is laughing at you.

ML: Is it the actor or the role laughing?

LK: Everyone. I have seen real actors, oioioi! It is a poison, a drug, from which no cure exists.

ML: Have you ever tried to imagine yourself as a volume, a form?

LK: It is better not to even begin thinking about what a form is. Volume, form – Buddhist terms – therefore fascinate me. I had smart friends, not the Komsomol ones, and we would talk about whether the plot was even necessary. The plot is very clear in *thangkas*, like in a play – how many acts, how many intervals; and then – a completely impalpable space.

ML: Do you feel the space in painting?

LK: Oh... this is a question from hell. I once attempted to write about the space of colour, I think it exists. But what is it? Every colour has its space, undoubtedly.

ML: Once, when writing about the experience of space, I encountered a few theories and thoughts that an idea, in fact every abstract idea, such as love, faith and others is experienced as space. Is art more connected to a physical experience of space or that of thought? The canvas that you look at – a triangular. A capacious sculpture...

LK: Buddhism has an infinite number of spaces. With the poet Sigitas Geda, a close friend, may he rest in peace, we would ramble similarly about the space of the poem – it is a normal thing to do. You see, a line, a piece of writing, everything lays itself in space, even when there's just a blank sheet in front of you. And what is happening in here (*he points to his head*)?

ML: It probably doesn't matter what will 'open' that space, whether I will have a sheet or a sculpture.

LK: Yes, you see or read a play, for example, and a sign, a space – these are Buddhist terms – forms in your head. And then emptiness follows – the nothing. But it's not only Buddhism; take the Holy Scripture. Why did I break that window, why did I do the *Crucifixion of Nothing*? In the Holy Scriptures, every tenth page you have *nothing*; he was hanging on nothing, he was *nothing*. This is Christ. He was *Nothing*, nothing. All of this is in the space too.

ML: Nothing in the space?

LK: This is a corner, a border angle. But what's next? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

ML: Abstract is the real.

LK: I would torture Sigitas Geda thus – one letter is already a poem? This would drive him mad. Space is the basic element in Buddhist reasoning. All painting, everything is moving in there, in the space. And *dub-tab* is written like a culinary book. There is zero reality in it.

ML: Have you heard about synesthetes? They turn one quality into another. I'm thinking, if a colour can be identified as a space, how could one show it?

LK: It is always dangerous to talk about your own works, but that *Square* you mentioned is in the Moon. That inscription is a reference to an invisible space. My father took me to Moscow when I was sixteen; I hadn't seen anything until then and I saw Matisse – it was like getting hit over the head with a plank of wood. A completely and dumbly flat artist. Playing blind and deaf! But his painting is divine. Zero painting but the space is enormous. Matisse hangs

on one wall, and Van Gogh, Lautrec and something else – behind me; like in Mars. At that time we had dreadful social realism with all of its clericalism here. Again – a sterile environment, which doesn't leave the chance for bacteria to emerge. But once you've got caught, you are contaminated like with plague – this is also unreal.

Ah, I remembered at last. There is a piece of mine that Geda and I were discussing with a Frenchman in the 60s in a basement; it is called *Project for a space where a red colour turns white when falling*. 'Project' was still an unknown word then. For an unknown space which hosts some kind of act. Practically no arrangements, just an idea; and this Monsieur Tusen – a marvellous person – spoke only in French, and there was a female interpreter, and Geda at my place...1968, the Stone Age, you know. I showed him that work and he got very excited and started talking through the interpreter, and she was holding her head: 'You're delirious!' I say something to him, he says something, translation, Sigitas steps in. And we went off track so much... It is very clear – a project for a space which itself conditions some kind of action. I then asked the Frenchman what I should read so I could understand at least something. He laughed and said in clean English 'Syntactic Structures'. My eyes popped out. 'Here', he said, 'you have not only to read but to think a lot.' Geda held his head too and we left. For wine. Yes, that was a hundred years ago. In Tibet they have tens of names for intermediary spaces like this.

ML: I'm trying to imagine the space where your conversation took place and it appears here, in this hall. We spoke about sacred and public, about measure and ruler. You say that everything is in Buddhist terms, but I think, that the ideas that we've touched here, the common truths, everything, can all be found in other structures in the guise of other terms.

LK: That depends on your experience and on that which you put in it. That summarises the knot.

ML: It is clear that we are not hollow forms in this conversation anymore.

LK: Term, term, term. After all, in Buddhist *dub-tabs* – you could call them instructions – how to fill the space is described very precisely. And this scheme can be handed over to someone else later. The third person listening to our conversation would understand nothing. Here, we're handing over the background to what we have talked about. We can already sell it to CAC director Kęstutis Kuizinas – so many clouds have been herded around.

Conversation on the phone:

LK: I recalled what we talked about yesterday and just wanted to add that reincarnation is the same changing of forms as in *Project for a space...*, therefore one can become a colour too. Children, Buddhist children, after the consecration do this all the time.

ML: Aha.

LK: And you know, I was trying to understand what we talked about yesterday but there was a complete emptiness in my head.

* The avoska is a string shopping bag widespread in the former Soviet Union



LINAS KATINAS
This rectangle is merely a shadow of a square, 2011,
acrylic and oil on cardboard, 115 x 150 cm

