From Complicated Past Towards Shared Futures (Riga, 18-19 May 23)

Riga, Latvia, May 18–19, 2023
Registration deadline: May 18, 2023

Krista Priedīte

Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA) announces the final event of the collaborative project From Complicated Past Towards Shared Futures (2020–2023), which has been focusing on the relationship between the complex and difficult past of the twentieth century and today in our region, considering how to think and talk about these issues in a wider society, with a particular focus on the role of art mediation. The international symposium will take place on May 18 and May 19 in Riga, Latvia.

The international symposium brings together artists, curators, researchers and educators from the Baltic States and other European countries, and it aims to focus on perspectives on and approaches to the ways that art can raise public awareness of the tangled relations between the past and the present, and it takes an active stance regarding the current realities that have particularly been shaken by the war in Ukraine. The participants include cultural historian and curator David Crowley, researchers Katarzyna Bojarska and Margaret Tali, as well as philosopher and organizer of the Kyiv Biennial, Vasyl Cherepanyn, among others.

The program of the symposium consists of six thematic sessions on issues related to the transformations and current realities of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet region. On the first day participants will focus on themes such as art mediation, inclusive cultural environments and new approaches to audience engagement; the legacy of 20th century avant-garde art in Eastern Europe during the socialist period and today; and the “unprocessed” past and its impact in the present. On the second day thematic sessions will focus on narratives of nationalism and internationalism in the former Eastern Bloc countries and how to engage with them through museum collections and archives; an analysis of Russian colonialism and the importance of decolonisation in our region; and issues of ecology and environmental solidarity in our everyday life, culture and art.

Discussing the Russian colonial war in Ukraine and how its catastrophic reality affects our region, the symposium will focus on the role of memory politics and culture of commemoration, avant-garde art through the lenses of the current wartime, and ecosystems destroyed by war and efforts to restore them. Symposium participants will also analyse the legacies of Russian imperialism and colonialism from the perspective of decolonisation, the context of identity politics and communication and infrastructures both on the Russian side as it continues its colonial violence, and how these affect strategies of solidarity on the Ukrainian side.

The event will be conducted entirely in English.

Please note that the symposium will be held at the Art Academy of Latvia, with sessions taking place at two different venues! On Thursday, May 18 – at Kronvalda Boulevard 4 (423 auditorium). On Friday, May 19 – at Kalpaka Boulevard 13 (building K2).

The symposium is organised by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art in collaboration with the Art Academy of Latvia and its international partners – the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, OFF - Biennale Budapest, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź and the Malmö Art Museum.

The event is supported by the Creative Europe programme Culture, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, the State Culture Capital Foundation (Latvia), Riga City Council, the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Program “Culture”.

Detailed programme of the symposium
DAY 1: THURSDAY, 18 MAY 2023
Venue: Art Academy of Latvia, Auditorium No 423
Kronvalda bulvāris 4

9.30–10.00
Registration
10.00–10.15
Welcome and introduction to the Symposium by Solvita Krese and Ieva Astahovska, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art
10.15–11.45
Session 1

How Can Art Mediation Engage Vulnerable Audiences and Help to Communicate Difficult Pasts?

Participants: Eglė Nedzinskaitė, Santa Remere, Hanna-Liis Kont
Moderated by Māra Žeikare, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

In this panel, the participants will share their experiences on how art mediation and new ways of engaging with audiences can not only strengthen inclusive environments, but also engage in reflection on relevant and pressing societal issues. How can contemporary art and culture engage in building a more inclusive society by listening to the needs and interests of diverse audiences? How can we share, learn, or acquire new practices from and with them? How can we engage in dialogue through the arts with people from vulnerable or marginalized communities? How can alternative approaches to art mediation help in exploring the difficult past and in critical memory work?

Eglė Nedzinskaitė
When Art Helps to Communicate: Seniors and Contemporary Artists

In 2022 to 2023, the National Gallery of Art (NGA) in Vilnius hosted the project When Art Helps to Communicate: Creative Meetings by Elderly and Contemporary Artists. The project’s aim was to create a safe and welcoming space for seniors and young contemporary artists to meet one another, talk, and exchange knowledge and experiences, as well as to build bridges between generations and approaches to contemporary art practices. During twenty-six events (studio visits, workshops, guided tours, visits to contemporary art spaces and exhibitions, video screenings),

both sides were encouraged to raise questions, voice their opinions, and exchange more traditional culture practices and contemporary art practices. The project was curated by Tomas Daukša, Marta Frėjutė, Eglė Nedzinskaitė, and Irena Ūsaitė.

Since 2009, Eglė Nedzinskaitė has been the curator of educational programs at the NGA in Vilnius. From 2020 to 2023, she was the curator and mentor of the educational project That Strange Art that aimed to give young people a full, hands-on experience of what it is like to be an exhibition curator, architect, designer, and manager, with the resultant exhibition, That Strange Art, wholly prepared by teenagers. From 2019, she has been a creative agent in work with schools, children from difficult social backgrounds, and communities around Lithuania in projects by Asociacija "Kūrybinės jungtys". She has been also the coordinator of the Erasmus+ project AMUSING (Adapting Museums for educational Inclusive Goals), which aims to share experiences on how to make schools and museums more accessible for visually impaired children and adults. At the NGA, she has co-curated exhibitions for the blind and visually impaired titled BLIND DATE, worked as the co-author of the educational workshops Pictures of Senses, and curates the educational program Let's Meet at The Museum for people with dementia and Alzheimer's.

Santa Remere
Understanding a Place through Listening: Co-creating with the City in Contemporary Theatre

I will share some insights from my experience as producer and city dramaturg while working for the international theatre festival Homo Novus in Riga. I will specifically talk about adaptations of international works that have previously taken place in the context of other cities. How does the method and unbiased eye of foreign artists bring out unprecedented testimonies and offer new local voices to commonly known narratives? How does discovering "other" memories of Riga help us gain a critical perspective on our society and history? I will present practical examples of several festival works, such as the sound-site project Witness Stands by conceptual artists Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey, who invite local composers to make sound works for specific, historically contested sites, creating unexpected opportunities for listening and intervening with specific places. I will also talk about the Heterotopias project by Japanese company Port B, and current cooperation with UK artists Andy Field and Beckie Darlington on the Book of Riga, a city guide made by its youngest inhabitants.

Santa Remere has a background in visual communication and art anthropology. She works as a publicist and art critic for Latvian and Baltic magazines, mostly with a focus on cultures of young audiences, contemporary theatre, and feminist topics. She has authored a book of feminist tales for children entitled Our Sisters (2020). Since 2015, Santa has regularly worked as a dramaturg, researcher, and producer for the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre Homo Novus, which often focuses on the inclusion of different communities. She has collaborated with international theatre companies and artists, such as Mette Edvardsen, Andy Field, Japanese theatre unit Port B, and the Canadian art-atelier Mammalian diving reflex, including assisting with the translations of language and local context and realizations of international performances in remote conditions. In 2021, she worked on the expansive sound project Witness Stands by Australian artists Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey in Riga dedicated to deep listening to the contested places and their histories.

Hanna-Liis Kont

How Can Art Mediation Foster Social Wellbeing? Contemporary Art for and with Children

This presentation introduces an art project titled Creative Connections, which is part of the European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024 program. The project aims to create new research-based educational activities and contemporary artworks that help develop children's and families' social skills, and to raise awareness of art's potential to contribute to a healthier social environment. The project focuses on children between the ages of six and ten and their families. The research conducted during the project so far shows that children in this age group have numerous barriers to experiencing professional art – the lack of teachers' and parents' awareness of art and its benefits as well as limited access to art venues. Nevertheless, teachers state that developing children's social skills is one of their most important tasks during the first school years and that going to museums can help with that. When the art museum offered them opportunities to participate in museum programs, their motivation to engage students with an art project increased. I am therefore arguing for creating resources that connect art mediation with the development of social skills as well as for the need to raise awareness of relevant art-based materials and activities that already exist.
Hanna-Liis Kont is a freelance curator and researcher based in South Estonia. She is a PhD student and guest lecturer at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Institute of Art History and Visual Culture. As a researcher, her main interest lies in current and recent curatorial practices' contribution to communities and their members' social wellbeing in art museums in the Baltics. Kont has curated exhibitions of Estonian and international twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, often employing collaborative approaches and polyvocality to bring together different viewpoints and voices.
Māra Žeikare is a curator of education and art mediation programs at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. Since 2020, she has also been the accessibility manager for people with disabilities in LCCA exhibitions. Her most current projects include: Artist is Present: Contemporary Art Residencies in Schools (2022–24), Agents of Change: Art Mediation as Conversation (2020–22), and ART vs DEMENTIA: Art Therapy as an Empathic Tool to Strengthen and Maintain the Cognitive, Physical and Relational Skills of People with Dementia. In 2022, she worked on the exhibition Diary Diaries by artist Anna Priedola, which was dedicated to seniors in Latvia suffering from dementia. In collaboration with Colorize and other consultants, she is working to ensure that contemporary art can be experienced by everyone, including people who find it difficult to attend cultural events due to disability, lack of access to the environment, or social exclusion.

14.00–15.30
Session 2

Late Avant-garde

Participants: David Crowley, Nikita Kadan, Zsuzsa László
Moderated by Daniel Muzyczuk, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

The panel will focus on the legacy of the interwar avant-garde in the Eastern Bloc. The starting point for this discussion is the exhibition Henryk Stażewski: Late Style, which looks at the work and influence of one of the key members of the Polish constructivist movement. It will introduce

more examples of artistic practices that were suppressed during socialism but still managed to become an important point of reference. The reception of the work of the avant-garde generation was delayed by Stalinism and socialist realism. The interest in the exploration of the genealogy of the neo-avant-garde was also connected with regroupings in the social and political landscape of the countries of the Eastern Bloc after 1968. The new generation of artists found inspiration in the political aspirations and collective practices of the pioneers of radical art.

David Crowley
Stażewski's Autofictions

In this short talk David Crowley will reflect on the themes of his current exhibition at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland, on the life and art of the Polish constructivist artist Henryk Stażewski. A pioneering figure in the European avant-garde of the 1920s, Stażewski lived until 1988. Although he experienced the future he had once imagined, the People's Republic Poland was hardly the socialist utopia that had once been augured by his generation of avant-garde architects and artists. Crowley will consider the way that Stażewski reflected on Stalinist and Post-Stalinist rule—in his 70s and 80s—by seeming to espouse anarchism and creating what might be called "autofictions."

David Crowley teaches at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. He is a cultural historian and curator with an interest in Eastern Europe under communist rule. He has curated various exhibitions including Cold War Modern at the Victoria and Albert Museum (2008–9, co-curated with Jane Pavitt); Sounding the Body Electric: Experimental Art and Music in Eastern Europe at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź (2012), and Calvert 22, London (2013); and Notes from the Underground: Music and Alternative Art in Eastern Europe, 1968–1994 at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź (2017), and Akademie Der Künste in Berlin (2018, both co-curated with Daniel Muzyczuk). His exhibition Henryk Stażewski: Late Style opened at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź in April 2023.

Zsuzsa László
Futurologogy of the Avant-garde and Neo-avant-garde

In connection with the theme of the late avant-garde, I'll present a brief proposition suggesting that future orientation and utopian thinking are a link between the interwar and postwar avant--gardes. On the basis of the early 1970s theoretical writings of the Slovak art historian Tomáš Štraus and his younger, Hungarian colleague, László Beke, I'll discuss interferences between the socialist design of society and the arts and late avant-gardism. The presentation will also look at actual neo-avant-garde and conceptualist artistic practices, such as that of Dóra Maurer, among others, who sought both local and regional contact with surviving constructivists, such as Lajos Kassák and Henryk Stażewski, and revived their "future-design" through Fluxus and didactic impulses democratizing avant-gardes.

Zsuzsa László is a researcher and curator at the Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI), Budapest. She is a member of the editorial team of ARTMargins Online, tranzit/hu's board, and the Hungarian section of AICA. Her forthcoming dissertation discusses the emergence and critique of the concept of East European Art through exhibitions. Recent projects and publications she has co-curated, co-authored, and co-edited explore transnational exhibition histories, artist archives, progressive pedagogies, cultural transfers, and decentralized understanding of conceptualism and neo-avant-gardes in Cold War Eastern Europe, including

Resonances: Regional and Transregional Cultural Transfer in the Art of the 1970s (2021–23), What Will Be Already Exists: Temporalities of Cold War Archives in East-Central Europe and Beyond (2021), 1971: Parallel Nonsynchronism (2018/22), Creativity Exercises (2014/15/16/20), Sitting Together (2016), and Parallel Chronologies (2009–23).
Nikita Kadan
“The Project with Postponed Implementation”

My contribution is based on the four artworks I made in 2017 to 2022 that interpret the legacy of Vasyl Yermilov (1894–1968), a Ukrainian artist from Kharkiv, whose work combined elements of constructivism, cubo-futurism, and neoprimitivism. I am especially interested in Yermilov’s way of bringing the intentions of the 1920s avant-garde to the 1960s, such that they temporarily conspire in a Stalinist time. I also research the ways we can look at the Ukrainian avant-garde through the lenses of the current war.

Nikita Kadan is a Ukrainian artist working and living in Kyiv. He works with various media, including installation, sculpture, painting, and collage. Kadan graduated from the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture in 2007 in the department of monumental painting. He is active as a member of the creative group R.E.P. (Revolutionary Experimental Space), which arose during the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in Kyiv in 2004. Since 2008, he has been a member of the “Hudrada” curatorial group, and since 2016, a member of the editorial team of Prostory, an online publication of artistic and social criticism. Kadan represented Ukraine at the Venice Biennale in 2015. In 2019, he was the curator of the Gestures of Attitude exhibition series at the Kyiv Art Museum. He has also been awarded several prizes, receiving the First Prize of the PinchukArtCentre in 2011, the Special Future Generation Art Prize in 2014, and the Kazimir Malevich Prize in 2016. Finally, he was also a laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine in 2022.

Daniel Muzyczuk is head of the Modern Art Department at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź and curator of the exhibitions Sounding the Body Electric: Experiments in Art and Music in Eastern Europe 1957–1984 (with David Crowley), Notes from the Underground: Art and Alternative Music in Eastern Europe 1968–1994 (with David Crowley), The Museum of Rhythm (with Natasha Ginwala), and Through the Soundproof Curtain: The Polish Radio Experimental Studio (with Michał Mendyk). He was co-curator of the Polish Pavilion of the 55th Venice Biennale (with Agnieszka Pindera) and was the winner (together with Agnieszka Pindera) of the Igor Zabel Competition in 2011. He is a member of Grupa Budapeszt.

16.00–18.00
Session 3

The Legacy of the Difficult Past Today
Participants: Katarzyna Bojarska, Margaret Tali, Antonina Stebur, Anna Engelhardt
Moderated by Egla Mikalajūnė, National Gallery of Art in Vilnius

The past, and even more so its ghostly return in today's political catastrophes, forces us to rethink the shared difficult experiences of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet world – violent conflicts, traumatic losses and their imprints linked to nationalist and communist regimes, recent and cur-

rent hostilities and the history of colonialism – through the prism of identity, solidarity and decolonisation. How can art today engage with this often repressed and unresolved past? How can it reveal the social and infrastructural power relations of the past and the present, including the interconnections between the military industry and the IT sector? What new perspectives does it open up for the role of artists in working with social solidarity?

Katarzyna Bojarska
Modes of Return: How Past is Becoming Present

In my presentation I would like to discuss the possible ways of dealing with a difficult and traumatic past, taking a closer look at how it recurs, including in what forms and mediated by what processes. I will be looking at forms of re-collection, re-construction, re-connection, re-enactment (and working through), re-vision, etc., in relation to the present-day situation both in social and political life and in the arts.

Katarzyna Bojarska is an assistant professor in the department of Cultural Studies at SWPS University in Warsaw and president of the NGO View, Foundation for Visual Culture, where she co-founded and is currently the editor of View: Theories and Practices of Visual Culture, an international, open access, online academic journal (www.pismowidok.org). She has received numerous grants and awards including Fulbright and Horizon2020 (www.repast.eu/), as well as individual and group grants from the National Centre for Science. Her research interests include cultural memory, gender and memory, trauma, and visual culture studies, as well as contemporary arts. She is an active art critic and member of the AICA.

Margaret Tali
The Present Pasts of Identity Politics

Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine has brought along many questions about the politics of identity and the roles that identifying carries in the post-soviet region. Furthermore, it has seen a new wave of changed or changing identifications among the groups who had previously identified themselves as Russian. This presentation will reflect on the power-struggles that identification in the region carries and on this new wave of identity politics by zooming in on selected artists projects.

Margaret Tali is a Postdoc Researcher at Estonian Academy of Arts. Her research expertise combines 20th century art history, memory studies, museum studies, cultural diversity and migration in the Baltic context. She is the author of Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums (2018). Together with Ieva Astahovska she leads the transdisciplinary project Communicating Difficult Pasts (2019–2024) that examines critically erasures, silences and blind spots in the 20th century Baltic and Eastern European cultural histories. As a part of this project, they have collaborated intensely with artists, commissioning altogether 8 new artworks that were exhibited in Difficult Pasts. Connected Worlds at the Latvian National Art Museum and National Gallery in Vilnius.

Antonina Stebur
Interdependence and Infrastructures of Care as Tools for Resistance and Solidarity

The presentation explores the concept of interdependence as a crucial link between social communities, promoting feminist strategies of solidarity. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine serves as a powerful reminder of how we are all connected through various infrastructures, such as the internet, logistics, food supplies, and labor. Ukrainian researcher Svitlana Matviyenko highlights the importance of different types of communication, including “inter-imperial,” “imperial--colonial,” and “inter-colonial.” Matviyenko argues that building lines of communication and alliances between marginalized, oppressed, and endangered communities is critical.

Antonina Stebur is a curator, art historian, and art critic. She works as a guest lecturer at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) where she teaches an art activism course. She is a co-founder of the #damaudobnayavbytu project on gender discrimination in post-Soviet countries and the research platform Spaika.Media. She was co-curator of the exhibitions Every Day. Art. Solidarity. Resistance (Ukraine, 2021), Names (Belarus, 2017), I Was Approaching the City I Had Not Known Yet (Ukraine, 2021), and If Disrupted It Becomes Tangible (Lithuania, 2023), among others. She is a co-founder and curator of antiwarcoalition.art, the International Coalition of Cultural Workers in Solidarity with Ukraine. Her research interests include feminism, post-Soviet studies, political art, tactics of resistance and solidarity, and developing infrastructure.

Anna Engelhardt
Hardwired Obsolescence of Russian Colonialism

Although the Russian military claims to use high-tech weaponry that ushers in a future of remotely controlled digital battles, these weapons often malfunction in the material world. Tanks get stuck in the mud, military phones have no reception, and “precision” weapons are guided by pen and paper. These weapons are obsolete as soon as they are deployed—yet Russian colonial violence persists. These intergenerational wars subject their targets to repeated cycles of fear and violence. As the dead of one war haunt the dead of another, Engelhardt considers how to further the hardwired obsolescence of the Russian war machine.

Anna Engelhardt is an alias of a research-based media artist and writer. Her practice examines war as a technology, looking into the hardware and software behind Russian invasions. Interested in topics from military cybernetics to cyber warfare, she conducts investigations that take on multiple forms of media, including videos, software, and hardware interfaces. In tandem, she pursues writing, lecturing, and publishing to situate digital conflicts within a broader colonial matrix. Her works and activities have been featured at transmediale festival, Venice Biennale Architettura, Ars Electronica, Kyiv Biennial, and in Digital War journal and Funambulist magazine.

DAY 2: FRIDAY, 19 MAY 2023
Venue: Art Academy of Latvia, Building K2
Kalpaka bulvāris 13

10.00–11.30
Session 4

From Coast to Country: Narratives of Nationalism and Internationalism in Eastern Europe

Participants: Lotte Løvholm, Santiago Mostyn, Bojana Piškur
Moderated by Inga Lāce, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

The transformation of Eastern European countries from nationally oriented post-socialist societies to transnationally oriented capitalist societies has largely determined their social and political course as well as their cultural contexts. But the relationship between nationalism and internationalism in our region remains complex. For the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, nationalism is often characterized as the heir of a socialist past that rejects both the communist experience and the current liberal democracy, globalization, and Western neoliberal models, and justifies the search for a "third way." Needless to say, ethnic nationalism and various nationalist tensions and complexities are characteristic to both formerly Soviet occupied Eastern European countries, as well as the former Yugoslavia.

Collections and archives play an important role as material evidence reflecting these processes. Critical examination of collections can activate the narratives of pasts and presents that span beyond the current, exclusive nation-building stories, opening up darker sides, or, on the contrary, those collections can function as emancipatory sites of transnationalism. Spanning time and geographies from the Baltic coast to the island of Tobago, and the non-aligned Yugoslavia and its allies, this panel will look at different curatorial and artistic strategies that challenge and open the tensions between narratives of nationalism and internationalism.

Lotte Løvholm
Working with "The Latvian Collection"

In which ways are museums and artists vehicles for nation state building? How does collection-building intertwine with cultural diplomacy and a country's politics?
In this presentation, Løvholm will discuss her research into the exhibition The Latvian Collection (December 2022–April 2023), co-curated with Inga Lāce. The collection was given to Malmö Konstmuseum as a donation in 1939, remaining on permanent display until 1958, and was meant to be representative of contemporary art in Latvia at the time. With Latvia gaining independence in 1918, the collection of fifty artworks encapsulates a general zeitgeist toward thinking and developing ideas about what Latvia is through art. Marked by the authoritarian regime of president Kārlis Ulmanis, who came to power after a coup in 1934, and its subsequent cultural policy, the collection represents an inward gaze as well as national romanticist ideas praising Latvian soil and culture. The recent exhibition presents the collection in its entirety for the first time since the 1950s, showing the works alongside eight new commissions by artists who have researched the collection. The exhibition highlights overlooked narratives within the collection and looks at new ways of accessing it as a moment in time.

Lotte Løvholm is an independent curator and editor based in Copenhagen and runs art space Collega. With a background in critical theory, she relates art to contemporary culture and cultural history. She often collaborates with other curators and artists as a way of acknowledging blind spots and valuing colleagues in her freelance life. Lotte's practice is situated between intense digging in archives and more extrovert activities. Together with Inga Lāce she is the curator of The Latvian Collection at Malmö Konstmuseum and with Awa Konaté is the curator of Jeannette Ehlers' solo exhibition Archives in the Tongue: A Litany of Freedoms at Kunsthal Charlottenborg. Lotte is the

editor of Algorithm (2023) with Anne Kølbæk Iversen, Museum of Care (2019), and Say It Loud (2016). She is part of Nikolaj Kunsthal's selection committee for PLATFORM (2022–24) and runs conversation series Living Archives at Bastard Performance Art Journal.

Santiago Mostyn
Every Boundary Line is a Myth

Santiago Mostyn will discuss two film works that grew from research into the role that Latvia has played in both the colonial era and the Second World War. The Warming Plateau (2018) reveals the site of a Curonian colony on the island of Tobago, while Umdrehen (2023), made in collaboration with Susanna Jablonski, digs into the history of a series of massacres on the Latvian coastline in 1941. In both cases, the works slip away from established narratives around national identity to reveal the complex, uneasy histories that make up our shared present.

Santiago Mostyn is an artist whose practice foregrounds narrative entanglements in pursuit of new understandings of place, both in a cultural and psychic sense. Mostyn has long been interested in the interplay of music, narrative, and the embodied self, with works manifesting as films, exhibitions, and curatorial projects.

Bojana Piškur
Southern Constellations

In the presentation I will be talking about some ideas but also dilemmas related to my decade--long research on the non-aligned movement—especially its cultural politics. I will discuss the Southern Constellations: Poetics of the Non-Aligned exhibition that was a result of this endeavor. The exhibition was shown in Moderna galerija, Ljubljana in 2019 and its iterations later presented in Gwangju, Rijeka, Ramallah, Podgorica, Eindhoven, Skopje, and London.
With Southern Constellations, a humble idea has developed—that of an exhibition and a collection as a constellation, a fair way to do something together so that everyone gains something from being involved in these endeavors. The constellations would, ideally, instead of producing new exhibitions alone, bring together peripheric "institutions" that share common political and social aims and are similar in their conditions of art production. These constellations would be some sort of "desiring machines" then, not in the sense of desiring objects (i.e., works of art), but in the sense of producing new realities, different modes of cultural production and relations, new constituent dimensions, and emphasizing situated or local knowledge, while at the same time re-examining their role in society.

Bojana Piškur works as a curator in Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. Her professional focus is on political issues as they relate to or are manifested in the field of art, with special emphasis on the region of post-Yugoslavia and the global South. She has curated/co-curated a series of exhibitions entitled Southern Constellations: The Poetics of the Non-Aligned that were shown in Ljubljana, Gwangju, Rijeka, Podgorica, Skopje, Ramallah, and London. Her latest projects include Art at Work: At the Crossroads between Utopianism and (In)Dependence (curated by B. Piškur, A. Mizerit, I. Španjol, Z. Badovinac) and Exercises in a Collection, both Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.
Inga Lāce is C-MAP Central and Eastern Europe fellow at MoMA, New York. She is researching modern and contemporary art in Soviet and post-Soviet Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Cen-

tral Asia, as well as its diaspora. She focuses on migration and transnational connections across regions, legacies of politics of friendship, and international solidarity. She has been curator at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art since 2012 and was curator of the Latvian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2019 with the artist Daiga Grantina (co-curated with Valentinas Klimašauskas). She has also been co-curator of the Allied – Kyiv Biennial 2021 (as part of the East Europe Biennial Alliance) and co-curator of the 7th to10th editions of the contemporary art festival SURVIVAL KIT. She has curated exhibitions at the Malmö Konstmuseum; Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź; Framer Framed, Amsterdam; James Gallery at CUNY, New York; Villa Vassilieff, Paris; and is currently co-curator of New Visions Triennial for Photography and New Media at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo.

12.00–13.30
Session 5

The Many Easts and Posts: How Can We Discuss the Many Regions Once Called Post-Soviet and Post-Socialist?
Participants: Vasyl Cherepanyn, Linda Kaljundi, Aigerim Kapar
Moderated by Eszter Szakács, OFF-Biennale

The panel discussion brings together thinkers and practitioners in and from the many regions broadly understood as post-Soviet and postsocialist. Looking at a reworked understanding of what is happening in these regions is especially paramount in light of the ongoing, full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine. Another aspect of the panel aims to diversify the use and practices of decolonization in the historical and contemporary contexts of both the Russian colonial project—foremost in the post/Soviet regions—and EU-centrism, especially in the post/socialist regions. The panel would like to open up “dialoging the Easts” and “dialoging the posts” in the micro scale of the many, multilayered regions that were part, to a varying degree, of the former Soviet Union.

Vasyl Cherepanyn
The Occupation of Memory: Russia’s War on Ukraine and the Perversions of Remembrance

The idea of a free Europe, which came into being on the basis of anti-Nazism, is now existentially threatened by Russian state fascism. Vasyl Cherepanyn, the director of the award-winning Visual Culture Research Center from Kyiv, puts this new catastrophic reality into the perspective of Europe at large. What role did memory politics and the culture of commemoration play in setting ideological conditions enabling the reactivation of genocidal fantasies and practices today?

Vasyl Cherepanyn is head of the Visual Culture Research Center (VCRC), an institution he co-founded in Kyiv in 2008 as a platform for collaboration among academic, artistic, and activist communities. VCRC is the organizer of the Kyiv Biennial and a founding member of the East Europe Biennial Alliance. Cherepanyn holds a PhD in philosophy and has lectured at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), University of Helsinki, Free University of Berlin and elsewhere. He has coedited Guidebook of the Kyiv International (Medusa Books, 2018) and ’68 NOW (Archive Books, 2019), and curated The European International (Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam, 2018), Hybrid Peace (Stroom, The

Hague, 2019), and Armed Democracy (2nd edition of Biennale Warszawa, 2022), among other texts.

Linda Kaljundi
Learning Slowly: Working with the Heritages of Russian Imperialism and Colonialism in Estonian Collections

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has made questions regarding the history and heritage of Russian imperialism and colonialism acute on a totally new level. Especially in comparison to the multi-layered and rich research tradition on Western colonialism, Russian colonial history and its legacies have been studied relatively little and, moreover, have also become nearly invisible in cultural memory. Now, along with new discussions around decolonization, is a good moment to examine this colonial history and heritage not from the perspective of Russian centers, but from the perspective of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In this talk, I will focus on the potential of Estonian collections for studying Russian colonialism. Building on concrete case studies, I will argue that Estonian cultural memory itself has played a significant role in internalizing the silence around Russian colonial history, first and foremost with regards to the involvement of Baltic German nobility in the imperial expansion. In order to work with and overcome the invisibility of colonial heritages, it is important to research and recognize the ways in which the roles of both colonized and colonizers are present in Baltic history and cultural memory.

Linda Kaljundi is a professor of cultural history at the Estonian Academy of Arts, and a research fellow in environmental history at Tallinn University. Her research focuses on Baltic and Nordic history, cultural memory, the environment, and colonialism. She has also curated exhibitions, including Art in the Age of the Anthropocene (2023), Art or Science (2022–23), and The Conqueror's Eye (2019), all created with larger transdisciplinary curatorial teams at Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, and all also dealing with colonial heritage.

Aigerim Kapar
The Secrets of Lake Balkhash: Community Narratives, Memories, and Landscapes of Past and Futures

The Secrets of Lake Balkhash focuses on the study of local values of Lake Balkhash in Kazakhstan and how these values impact the everyday lives of local communities. The research project aims to rethink the history of the region through a decolonial lens and study the future of the region reimagined by local communities. Lake Balkhash is one of the biggest endorheic water bodies in the world and has a millennia-long history of sociocultural life, ecological traditions, and semi-nomadic management methods. The region also represents the position of the Kazakh Steppe, where the interests of China and Russia intersect. Today, the industrialization and militarization of the colonial Soviet period continue to prevail and frame the basin as a zone of ecological and social crisis. Lake Balkhash may disappear in twenty years and faces a similar situation to the drainage of the Aral Sea by the Soviet government in the 1950s for the purposes of agricultural production. The research project is part of Artcom Platform's Care for Balkhash initiative, and As you go… the roads under your feet, towards the new future inquiry initiated by Biljana Ćirić.

Aigerim Kapar is an interdependent curator, interdisciplinary researcher, and a decolonial activist based in Almaty and Astana. Kapar founded Artcom Platform, a Central Asian community-based contemporary art and public engagement organization in 2015. She has also been organizing Art

Collider, a school where art meets science that has been bringing communities together since 2017. Kapar curates a hybrid reality project, Steppe Space, an important space for contemporary art and culture of Central Asia, and initiated projects of care for lake ecosystems SOS Taldykol and Balqashqa Qamqor in 2020. Her key previous works include Re-membering: Dialogues of Memories (2019), an international intergenerational project in memory of survivors and victims of twentieth-century political repressions in Kazakhstan, and Time & Astana: After Future (2017–18), an urban art research and engagement project.
Eszter Szakács is a curator, researcher, and PhD candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) at the University of Amsterdam, where she is taking part in the project IMAGINART—Imagining Institutions Otherwise: Art, Politics, and State Transformation. Eszter is on the curatorial team of the grassroots art initiative OFF-Biennale Budapest, with whom they were lumbung members at documenta fifteen. She was a team member of the East Europe Biennial Alliance—co-founded by OFF-Biennale Budapest—that collectively curated the Kyiv Biennial in 2021. Together with Naeem Mohaiemen, Eszter coedited the anthology Solidarity Must Be Defended (tranzit.hu, 2023), and she worked as curator and editor at tranzit.hu in Budapest between 2011 and 2020.

14.30–16.00
Session 6

Environmental Solidarity and / as Art Practice

Participants: Darya Tsymbalyuk, Francisco Martínez, Quinsy Gario
Moderated by Ieva Astahovska, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

Posthumanist ideas, ecological, community, participatory and sustainability issues are fundamental to our everyday lives and to today's culture and art. They come to the fore in the search for solutions to today's political and ecological crises and for alternatives to natural resource extractivism on a global scale. But they also draw attention to the processes of colonial exploitation and destruction of ecosystems in our region, the most catastrophic of which is the Russian colonial war in Ukraine. In this session, participants will discuss what decolonial approaches to human-environment relations can change our present and future? What perspectives, ethics and responsibilities can guide new relationships not only between people, but also between living and non-living, human and non-human nature, between nature and culture, between society and the environment? How can creative alternative ecologies develop new approaches to the shared ecosystem of people and nature? What are the possibilities of working with ecological solidarity as an artistic practice? How to position oneself between ecological activism and art? How can advocacy for the equality of nature be combined with political demands for system change?

Darya Tsymbalyuk
Living in a Shattered World: People, Environments, and Russia’s War on Ukraine

Russia’s war on Ukraine not only kills people and erases cities, it also destroys whole ecosystems. Ukraine today is one of the most mined places on Earth, where mines kill not only human beings, but also other animals and plants. Moreover, mines, like other munitions, contaminate land and

water, releasing deadly toxins. In this brief presentation, I discuss the environmental impacts of Russia's war on land, water, air, and bodies in Ukraine. Staying attuned to the trap of apocalyptic narratives, I discuss how the war-torn land is imagined and represented and ask what it means for human and nonhuman inhabitants to "re-exist," to borrow and adopt Adolfo Albán Achinte's term, in the conditions of livelihoods destroyed by the imperial invasion. For people, many of whom have been living in the space of war for nine long years, everyday resistance and survival are anchored in the hope for a post-war future and the justice it will bring. What decolonial imaginaries of post-war Ukraine are being crafted, what is their relation to environmental justice, and in which ways do they shape the reconstruction that is already underway, even while the war is ongoing?
Darya Tsymbalyuk is a researcher and artist from Ukraine. Her work lies at the intersection of environmental humanities and artistic research and engages with feminist and decolonial methodologies. She is currently a Max Hayward Visiting Fellow at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. Darya obtained her PhD in 2021 from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, with the PhD dissertation "Multispecies Ruptures: Stories of Displacement and Human-Plant Relations from Donbas, Ukraine," where she foregrounded more-than-human aspects of migration by focusing on human-plant relations in oral histories of internally displaced persons.
Francisco Martínez
The Art of Sedimentation: Exploring Non-authoritative Ways of Making Knowledge about Our Surroundings

In my talk, I reflect on the tension between cartographic, political, and ecological realities based on my recent field research in eastern Estonia. Modern relationships between humans and the natural world are largely extractionist, but there are other ways of knowing with the landscape, as for instance the gesture of sedimentation. This term has a double dimension: ecological and cultural. In the age of the Anthropocene (a new geological era characterized by human influence on the planetary scale), sedimentation might be a better way of linking landscapes to politics and human history.

Sediments are permanently unfinished coalitions, hybrids, and other forms of border-transgressing materialities. Besides accounting for the materiality of sediments within the assemblages that constitute our landscapes, there is a need to bring depositing into politics. In For Opacity, Édoard Glissant criticizes the importance of the verb "to grasp" within Western epistemology. When grasping, the movement of the hands reproduce a gesture of extracting and holding, one of enclosure and appropriation. In contrast, Glissant invites us "to let our understanding prefer the gesture of giving-on-and with." In short, I propose to deposit instead of extract. This gesture is not just part of the work of nature, but also an ethos for the present.
Francisco Martínez is an anthropologist dealing with contemporary issues of material culture through ethnographic experiments. In 2018, he was awarded the Early Career Prize of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. He has worked at the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, and the University of Leicester, and currently convenes the Collaboratory for Ethnographic Experimentation (EASA) Network. Francisco has published several books, including Ethnographic Experiments with Artists, Designers and Boundary Objects (UCL Press, 2021), Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia (UCL Press, 2018), and Repair, Brokenness, Breakthrough (Berghahn, 2019). He has also led different art projects, including Objects of Attention (Estonian Museum of Applied Art & Design, 2019), Greetings from Another Time and Space (Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia,

2019), and Life in Decline (Estonian Mining Museum, 2021).

Quinsy Gario
Family Connection's Marronage and Interrupting Dutch Colonial Extraction

When speaking of resource extraction in the contemporary context of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, knowledge production needs to be part of the conversation. The understanding of the islands it once colonised, their population, and their environment have varied throughout the centuries, from the first contact with St. Maarten in 1630 up until today. These ideas have ranged from simply a place of salt extraction to a marketplace for crimes against humanity through the selling and buying of enslaved Africans to a place for the storing and processing of hazardous materials like oil. In the case of Curaçao, Aruba, and St. Eustatius, going from being inutil or without use (as the Spanish typified the Leeward islands, or the Golden Rock), as a trading post and capital meeting point, to the present-day condition has been a violent endeavor that has also involved the extraction of life and knowledge. In this presentation the group installation Marronage will be used as an entry point to further talk about the islands in the Caribbean that share continued Dutch occupation and colonization. The various works reflect contemporary questions looking at environmental destruction and the colonial legacies that these destructions are a part of.

Quinsy Gario is a performance poet and artist from Curaçao and St. Maarten. His artistic work centers on decolonial remembering and instituting otherwise. He is a member of the collective Family Connection, established in 2005 by his mother Glenda Martinus and her sister. With the collective, Gario has researched and presented work on resistance, recovery, and refusal as practiced through history by the racially oppressed on the Caribbean islands that share continued Dutch colonization. The presentations centered on fugitivity through various means. Gario's most well-known work is Zwarte Piet Is Racisme (2011–12), which fundamentally altered a racist Dutch tradition. His work has been shown at Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven), MACBA (Barcelona), Latvian National Museum of Art (Riga), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), MHKA (Antwerp), TENT (Rotterdam), and Göteborgs Konsthall (Gothenburg). In 2021, Gario also ran for a seat in Dutch parliament. He is currently doing doctoral research at the VU Amsterdam on ethnographic collections and contemporary art engagements.

Ieva Astahovska is an art scholar, critic, and curator. She works at the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, where she leads research projects related to art and culture in the socialist and postsocialist periods, and entanglements between postsocialist, postcolonial, and decolonial perspectives in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. Ieva has (co-)curated a number of exhibitions, the most recent of which are Decolonial Ecologies: Understanding Postcolonial after Socialism at the Riga Art Space (2022/2023) and Difficult Pasts. Connected Worlds at the National Gallery of Art, Vilnius (2022) and the Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga (2020). She has edited a number of research-based publications, including Valdis Āboliņš: The Avant-garde, Mailart, the New Left and Cultural Relations during the Cold War (LCCA, 2019), and Revisiting Footnotes: Footprints of the Recent Past in the Post-Socialist Region (LCCA, 2015).

Reference:

CONF: From Complicated Past Towards Shared Futures (Riga, 18-19 May 23). In: ArtHist.net, May 13, 2023 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/39275>.