

COMMON GROUND



COMMON GROUND collaborative international programme
Academy of the Senses in Reykjavik, ICELAND
Association of Lithuanian Artists in Vilnius, LITHUANIA
Centre of Contemporary *Art Znaki Czasu* in Toruń, POLAND

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ICELAND

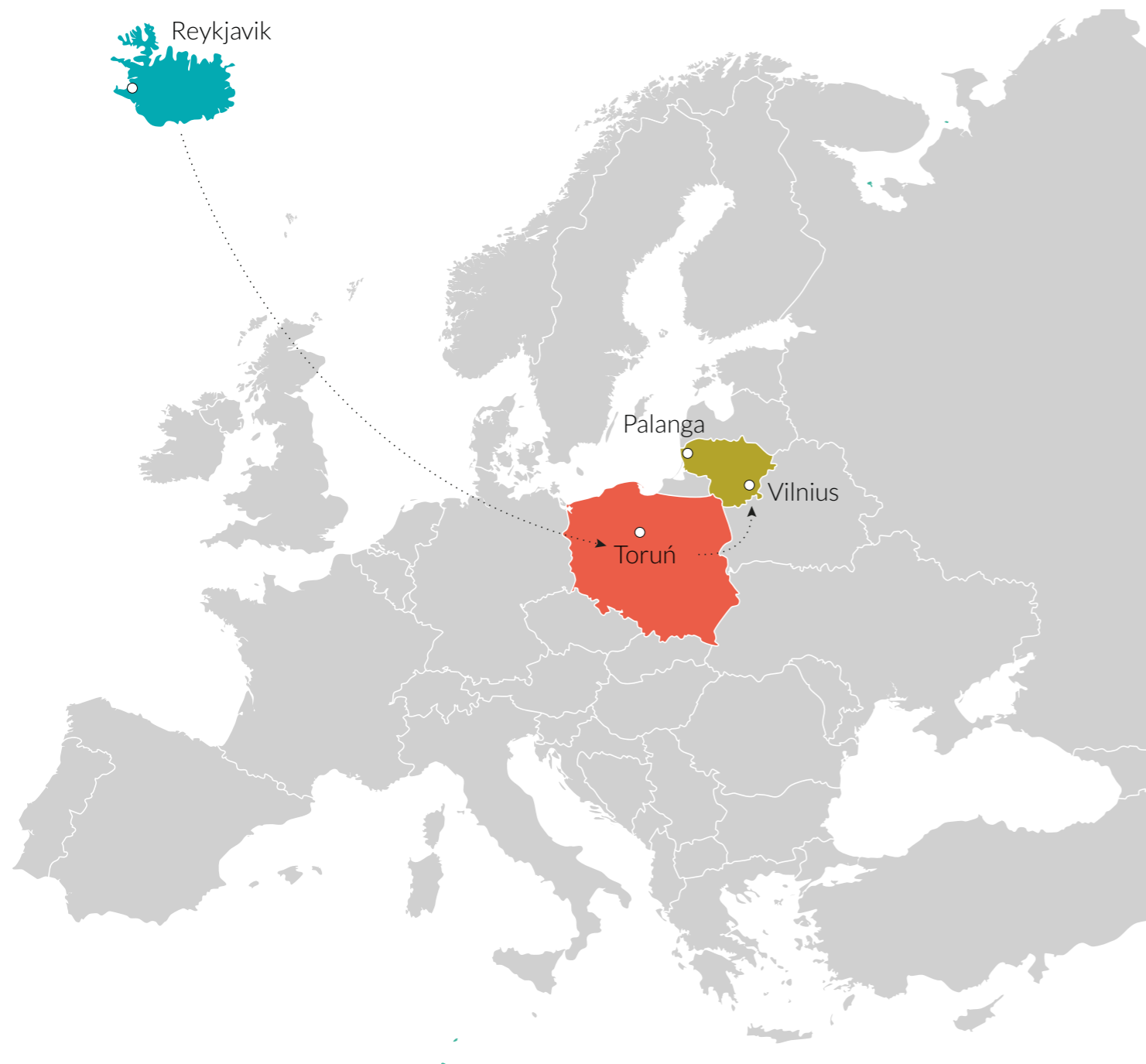
2021/2022

POLAND

2022 May

LITHUANIA

2022 September, December



ABOUT COMMON GROUND

Common Ground was an international project dedicated to the idea of home in the context of migration. It is the result of cooperation between three partners – the Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu* in Toruń, the Academy of Senses in Reykjavik and the Association of Lithuanian Artists in Vilnius. It was conceived as a platform for cooperation between institutions, artists and scientists in an aim to exchange inspiration, knowledge and experience.

Migration has become part of our everyday life – Europe is constantly responding to the challenges related with this phenomenon. The intention of the project was to strengthen intercultural dialogue, leading to the establishment of a COMMON GROUND between diverse cultures and communities, promoting understanding and interaction. Interdisciplinary activities were implemented through artistic actions, and contemporary art was used as a tool of communication and understanding.

We invited artists representing various fields of art, active in many areas: painting, drawing, graphics, sculpture, visual arts, photography and video to take part in the project. This diversity ensured the use of the full potential of contemporary art. The role of the creators was to use individual practice to start conversation – the resulting collaboration focused attention on the issues of relations between migrants and “hosts”. The means of expression with the use of interactive, contextual or site-specific media led to creation of works of art that reflect the relationship between the parties.

Experts and researchers invited to the project enriched the visual aspect proposed by the artists with an intellectual approach. The emotional aspect was expressed through the involvement of the audience, invited to share their views.

The Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu* in Toruń was the leader of this project. The invited artists (six people from each country: Iceland, Lithuania and Poland) took part in three successive residencies, whose outcome were three intercultural exhibitions (one in each country).

The project was co-funded by the Creative Europe Program of the European Union.

INTRODUCTION

Anna Eyjolfsdottir

The art project *Common Ground — Where is my home* raises questions regarding the political, cultural, ecological, anthropological, and geographical situation in our ever-shrinking, globalised world. The world is rapidly evolving to become transnational and borderless, a common ground.

Common Ground is a cooperative project between Icelandic, Lithuanian, and Polish artists and academics, lead by The Centre of Contemporary Art (CoCA) in Toruń, Poland, in partnership with The Academy of the Senses in Iceland and The Association of Lithuanian Artists in Vilnius, Lithuania. The project is divided into four main parts, the first workshop-residencies in each of the participating countries, the second an exhibition following these, the third part small seminars occurring at the same time, and, fourth, the publication of this book. The project is cross-cultural in nature; it includes individuals originating from three different countries, but also focuses on people with differences in social status, with the participation of immigrants as well as that of artists and academics.

Intercultural activity, immigration, ecology, home and identity are at the core of the project. Artists, academics, the locals, and immigrants have come together to explore the multilayered concept of a common ground, addressing the question: Where is my home? The aim of the project is to test a novel model for promoting the understanding and communication between different cultures and societies, hopefully, as well, to be able to define a common ground for future multi-cultural societies.

The project was generously co-funded by the Creative Europe program in early 2020 and it intended to start that summer. These plans were disrupted by the global pandemic and had to be postponed. The first workshop was finally held in Iceland in December 2021, with a two weeks' residency and an exhibition. The following workshops and exhibitions took place in Poland in May 2022 and in Lithuania in September and December 2022.

The aim of the workshop-residencies was to establish a relationship between 18 multidisciplinary visual artists, six from each participating country, as well as one academic from each country. During each workshop the participants lived together in close proximity, sharing workshops and preparing shared meals. Within

Photo: Artists in line for Covid test in Iceland in December 2021



this atmosphere an intercultural awareness developed through dialogue, art workshops, food, and experiential and reflective learning relating to the context of integration.

The three participating academics, an ecologist, an anthropologist, and a philosopher, served an important role in promoting dialogues focusing on the concept *Common Ground*. The artists worked with one or more of chosen subjects — nature, ecology, culture, heritage, and identity — which they presented through their individual artworks. In relation to the three art exhibitions, the artists presented information about their cooperative research, work process, and methods. This they did in seminars and events open to the general public, events where immigrants were especially welcome.

All exhibited art works were made in the workshops during the residencies and most of them were site specific. The artworks raise questions and addressed issues relating to climate change, its cause, effect, and prevention, refugees, capital inequality, land ownership and use, and the quality of life. Major recent worldwide social changes and a changing worldview is reflected in the diversity of the works. In today's world, globalization has had an infinitely comprehensive effect on the nations of the world. This is extenuated by the invasion of Ukraine, which has left its mark on the rest of the world and had an impact especially great in its neighboring countries, Poland and Lithuania.

The mottos of the project are friendship, the breaking down of walls, and laying a foundation for a common world. An important part of the project involved dining together and discussing everything between heaven and earth. We talked about the present state of the world and how things could become in the future. We had discussions on possible ways to achieve peace, our environment, migration between regions, wars and armed conflicts, and religious differences. Last, but not least, was debating how art could be instrumental in improving our being in the world.

The *Common Ground* project has been informative in many ways. Although it is not possible ascertain one simple result, the project indicates that cooperation between nations is important in order to break down barriers and eliminate prejudice and ignorance. We don't have to agree on every single detail, but we need to respect each other's opinions and have empathy with our fellow human beings.

Collaboration between the organizers, artists, and academics has been going on for more than three years. *Common Ground* is their creation.

MEETING THE OTHER, OR WHAT TO DO WITH A PHILOSOPHER'S DOG?

Paulina Kuhn

Common Ground was a three-year project (2020–2023) that spanned three countries: Iceland, Poland, and Lithuania. It involved numerous individuals from diverse backgrounds, including artists, scientists, organizers, as well as various institutions such as public entities, creative associations, and NGOs. Due to its duration and complexity, the *Common Ground* can be seen as a distinct world, a microcosm shaped dynamically by its participants and changing external circumstances.

The project faced a long and intricate journey from its inception, marked by the signing of an agreement with the European Commission in June 2020, to the final outcomes. The project's leader, the Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń, had different people involved in its conception (Kamila Neuman and former director Waław Kuczma) and subsequent implementation (Marta Pisarska, Paulina Kuhn, Lilia Kaletowska, and Aleksandra Rolnicka, under the guidance of director Krzysztof Stanisławski). Shortly after the project commenced, a global coronavirus pandemic erupted, causing widespread panic, chaos, and fear for personal safety. No one knew how or when it would all end. Airports, hotels, and restaurants closed down, and strict restrictions, including stay-at-home orders, were imposed. The entire world shifted abruptly to the digital realm. In such circumstances, how could a project centred around mutual visits, collaborative exhibitions, and cross-cultural learning proceed? As if these challenges were not enough, a war broke out in Ukraine in February 2022. Once again, uncertainty, peril, and concerns about the future arose, exacerbated by the influx of refugees onto Polish streets. The project participants faced a crucial question: Was it safe to travel to Poland, given its proximity to the war-torn region? Furthermore, did it even make sense to continue with the project while a brutal conflict unfolded nearby, with the potential to escalate?

Embarking on a project of such duration, we, the participants, underestimated the profound impact of the passage of time itself. The unpredictability of events extended beyond global occurrences like the pandemic and war. It also encompassed the circumstances of individual institutions, such as personnel changes, staff shortages, and concurrent projects. Moreover, individuals faced personal challenges on various levels, including serious illnesses, pregnancy concerns, child-related issues, divorces, work and residential changes, and more. These examples highlight the difficult situations encountered by many project participants, who also had to contend with everyday mundane problems. One particular instance involved a philosopher moderating a symposium, whose young dog couldn't be left alone. The solution emerged when symposium participants took turns walking the energetic Labrador during the event.

From these experiences, a seemingly trivial yet important conclusion arises: in the face of challenges or unexpected obstacles, giving up should not be the immediate response. Instead, one should seek optimal, sometimes unconventional solutions. New situations can lead us to derive something positive from changes and surprises, even if they differ from our initial expectations. Acting with goodwill, being open to others and their concerns, and embracing collective action for the benefit of all contribute to this process. Remarkably, these principles extend beyond the dog scenario. They address one of the key, or perhaps *the* most significant question that the *Common Ground* aimed to explore: how to establish a “common ground” when we start sharing “our” space, work, and lives with migrants from other countries.

Examining the geometric properties of planes reveals an intriguing observation: if two planes share a single point, they must have another point in common. In other words, it is impossible for two planes to touch at only one point. If one common point is found, there must be more. This principle finds perfect resonance in the evolution of the *Common Ground* project. The first common point was always the meeting with the “other”—be it an artist, scientist, individual from another country, or a participant or observer of project events. And later, with goodwill from all parties involved, additional commonalities in ideas, thoughts, experiences, and emotions were discovered or created along the way.

In December 2021, all official project participants, including artists, researchers, and organizers, gathered in Reykjavik for the first time. Originally, the project was meant to kick off in Poland seven months earlier. However, just as airline tickets and hotel bookings were being arranged, Poland was plunged into a pandemic-induced paralysis. Initially, the organizers contemplated moving the project online. However, organizing meetings for dozens of speakers who spoke different languages and were to prepare artwork for a virtual exhibition posed significant challenges. Furthermore, how could they effectively engage with migrants and truly get to know them in a virtual setting? These issues would have likely been explored in greater detail, but during an online meeting with the Icelandic team, a definitive “no” to an online project was voiced. The Icelandic side emphasized that nothing could replace the value of face-to-face meetings in real life. At that time, Iceland was relatively safe from the pandemic, with only isolated cases reported. This led to a suggestion of starting a “live” project there. Subsequently, the entire schedule was rebuilt, and after receiving approval from the European Commission, the participants were able to convene in Reykjavik.

However, the initial stay did not begin on an optimistic note. Two of the three Icelandic organizers were unable to participate in the activities on the second day due to Covid-19, and all guests had to undergo testing and several days of isolation. Despite these challenges, the guidelines permitted group isolation, allowing participants to stay together while limiting contact with outsiders. Perhaps it was during this time, when participants were compelled to stay together, that a remarkable number of artistic activities took place in the exhibition space, fostering bonds within the international group. People involved in the project were invited to co-create works alongside individual artists. These collaborations involved arranging individual patterns from black and white cubes, inscribing secrets on Ragnihildur von Weisschappel’s “palimpsest”, posing for Pétur Magnússon’s tricky photographs, or Tomas Andrijauskas’ “paraloids”. Julia Pociūtė’s work involved collecting stones and sharing stories from one’s life, while Solveiga Gutaute’s work centred around sharing hair and personal narratives. As part of his work, Sindri Leifsson chose to bake bread for everyone. Additionally, artists from Poland and Lithuania contributed pickles, while Anna Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir built a cosy house at the exhibition, inviting spectators for tea. The act of eating together, the language of art, and the

solidarity in creating the exhibition at Korpúlfsstaðir became a “common ground” for both project participants and visitors, including migrant groups from Poland and Lithuania. This initial meeting in Iceland marked the beginning of genuine friendships that have endured to this day.

The second meeting, which took place in Poland in May 2022, unfolded under different circumstances due to the ongoing war in Ukraine that had commenced two months earlier. One of the primary goals of the *Common Ground* project was to prepare institutions to engage with migrants and to open themselves up to an expected increase in migrant populations in the future. Training in this area had been planned at the Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń for the early months of 2022, precisely when the war broke out. Subsequently, waves of refugees numbering in the hundreds of thousands and later millions began arriving in Poland. It is noteworthy that the project, conceived two years prior, proved to be prophetic in its anticipation of this reality. Some of the Ukrainian newcomers even became directly involved in implementing the project. However, the project’s activities were not exclusively focused on refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Through collaboration with the Emic Foundation, which works for the benefit of migrants, contact was established with individuals from other countries such as Russia, Belarus, and Syria. Similar initiatives were carried out by partners in Iceland and Lithuania, where workshops, meetings, and other events were organized, encompassing populations beyond just Ukrainians.

The ongoing war directly influenced the works and activities of the artists themselves, particularly the group selected for the project in Poland. The recruitment process in Poland intentionally welcomed migrants, as their presence was believed to bring unique value to the project through their experiences as newcomers settling in the country. Consequently, the “Polish” group included two artists from Ukraine and Belarus. During their residency in Poland, Andrii Dostliev and Ala Savashevich created artworks that directly addressed the tragedy of the war. Wiola Ujazdowska and Maciej Kwietnicki, on the other hand, conducted a series of workshops called *Nowosiejki* (Newseeds), where they collaborated with migrants to sow native Ukrainian herbs. These actions were so impactful that they continued beyond the scope of the project. Polish artists Magda Węgrzyn and Sylwia Górak also extended invitations to individuals from Eastern Europe to participate in their multimedia projects. In Poland, a special workshop was organized for Ukrainian children by Icelandic artist Kristín Reynisdóttir.

The third residency and closing exhibition of the project took place in Lithuania in the latter half of 2022, allowing the participants to develop a deep understanding of one another. This was facilitated by meetings with scientists, artists, and visits to galleries, museums, and local landmarks, gradually exposing them to different cultures. The pursuit of commonality and universality was expressed through artworks such as Andrius Grigalaitis’ mist “portraits” and Joanna Małecka’s sign-letters.

Given the constraints of this summary, it is impossible to mention all the participants of the project, as each one contributed as an individual. The project encompassed not only artists but also scientists and organizers. When we contemplate the practical meaning of “finding common ground”, the concept of “finding a common language with someone” comes to mind. This notion has undoubtedly been realized by those who participated in the project, both within the realm of art and in their personal and professional lives. The collective overcoming of challenges, the ongoing resolution of conflicts, mutual respect, and openness to one another not only resulted in the creation of remarkable artworks and well-received exhibitions, but also led to intangible outcomes that are challenging to measure: establishing close connections, personal and professional growth, the potential for future collaborations, and, as previously mentioned, the formation of friendships among the participants.

Ultimately, it all begins with an encounter with another human being.

Fieldtrip to the Golden circle, Þingvellir, Gullfoss, and Geysir, 14.12.2021



Páll Haukur Björnsson
Sindri Leifsson
Pétur Magnússon
Kristín Reynisdóttir
Anna Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir
Ragnhildur von Weissappel

ICELAND SCHEDULE



Residency and workshop

- During 1–15 December 2021 participants came to Iceland and stayed and worked together at the SÍM residency and workshop in Reykjavík. Participants dined together every day and took a trip to the swimming pool most days. One day each was devoted to learning how to pickle vegetables, study polish, and learn about Lithuanian fashion.



Video

- Production: Andrius Grigalaitis
- Camera: Tomas Andrijauskas
- Music: *Tundra* - instrumental version by Tomas Novoa / Artist.



3D scan

- 14 December: 3D scan of the exhibition *Common Ground* by Martynas Petreikis in The Art Center Hlaðan, Korpúlfsstaðir, Reykjavík.



Advertisements and presentation

- Outdoor advertisements on digital screens in bus-shelters around Reykjavík city, design Margrét Weissappel.
- Advertisement in the newspaper *Fréttablaðið*, design Margrét Weissappel.
- Advertisement in social media, design Margrét Weissappel.
- Interview in the newspaper *Fréttablaðið*.



Exhibition opening

- 12 December: Opening of the exhibition *Common Ground* at the art center Hlaðan in Korpúlfsstaðir, Reykjavík.



Artist talk

- 12 December 2021: Artists talk at the exhibition at the art center Hlaðan.
- 13 December 2021: Artist talk at the exhibition at the art center Hlaðan.



Field trips

- 7 December 2021: Day trip to Geldingadalir to see the new lava from the newly erupted Fagradalsfjall. Walk at the seashore in Grindavík and Dinner at Anna's house.
- 9 December 2021. Day trip to Reykjadalur valley, nature observation. The valley is characterised by hot springs, mud pools, and a warm river to bath in.
- 14 December 2021: Day trip, nature observation trip to the Golden circle, Þingvellir, Gullfoss, and Geysir. Dining at Friðheimar, a restaurant and greenhouse where tomatos are grown and everything on the menu is made from tomatos.
- 3 December 2021: Gallery walk in Reykjavík, Kópavogur and Hafnarfjörður. The Reykjavík Art Museum, The National Museum, and the National Art Museum were visited.



Symposium

- 13 December: *Common Ground* Symposium—Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Diversity. Speakers: Jón Proppe, art historian, Anna Wojtyńska, anthropologist, Justas Kažys, climate ecologist, Paulina Kuhn, representative of Centre of Contemporary Art, Toruń, Poland, Anna Eyjólf's art director of *Common Ground*. Artists of *Common Ground* were present. The symposium was open to the public. About 35 people in all attended the symposium.



Participatory projects

- May 2022: Dinner party for immigrants at Anna's house in Grindavík. 12 people attended; many more were invited but had to cancel because of Covid 19.
- 15 April and 19 September 2022: Art workshop for immigrant children in Grindavík at Kvikán culture house. Instructors: Seweryn and Natalie Chwala. The theme of the workshop was devoted to the idea of home.
- 18 April 2023: Dinner party. The Academy of the Senses and media company Vísir invited people of foreign origin to a common dinner in the dining hall of Vísir. The idea was to cook together, eat together, have fun, and learn about each other's food traditions. Food is important to us all. It connects us. 40 people participated and made the night unforgettable. The tablecloth became an art piece and was afterwards on display in Kvikán culture house Grindavík. The menu was fish soup, fresh homemade bread, salad, ceviche, hummus, butter, cheese, cake, and fig-dessert.
- May 2023: Tablecloth exhibited in Kvikán.
- 2021–2023: Gathering of dishes from immigrants in Grindavík and Grundarfjörður. The idea is to have participants make their favorite dish, write up the recipe, and take a photo of the dish. This was connected to them writing their memories or ideas connected to the food. They were also asked to describe in writing or in a drawing how the food is made, what tools are used, and how the food is to be served and eaten.

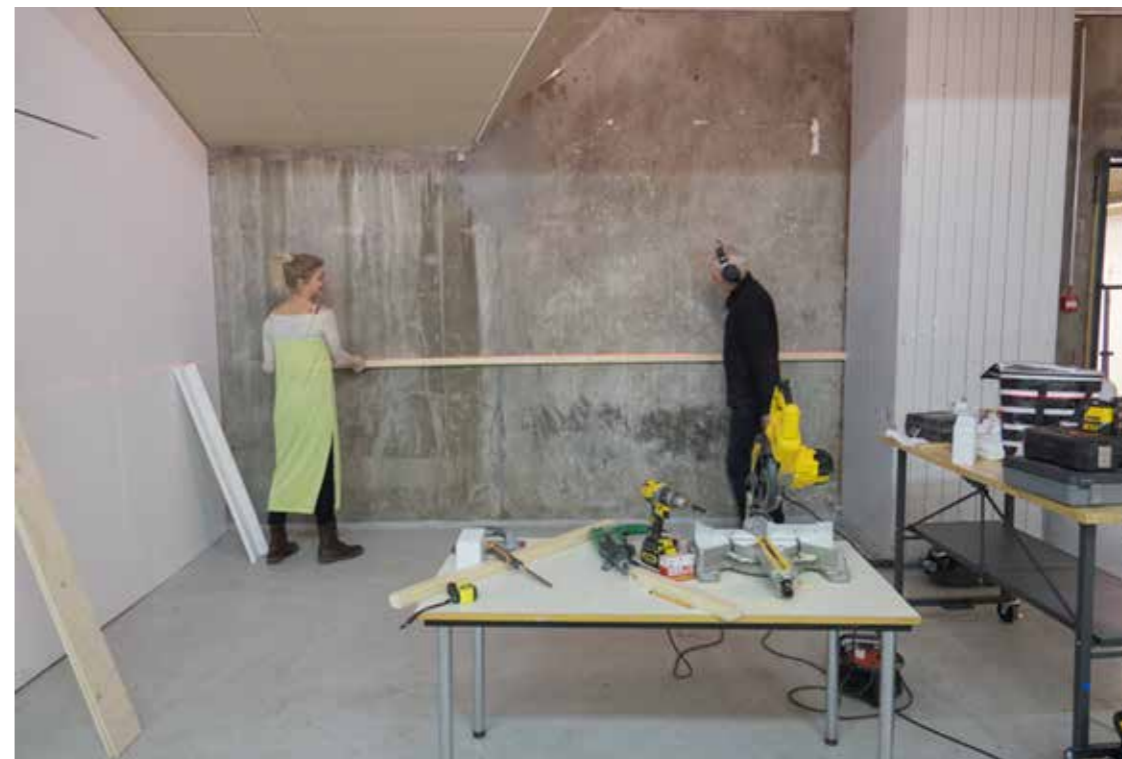


Residency in Iceland. Preparations for the exhibition *Common Ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, December 2021





Residency in Iceland, December 2021, Reykjavik, December, 2021



Residency in Iceland. Preparations for the exhibition *Common Ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, December 2021



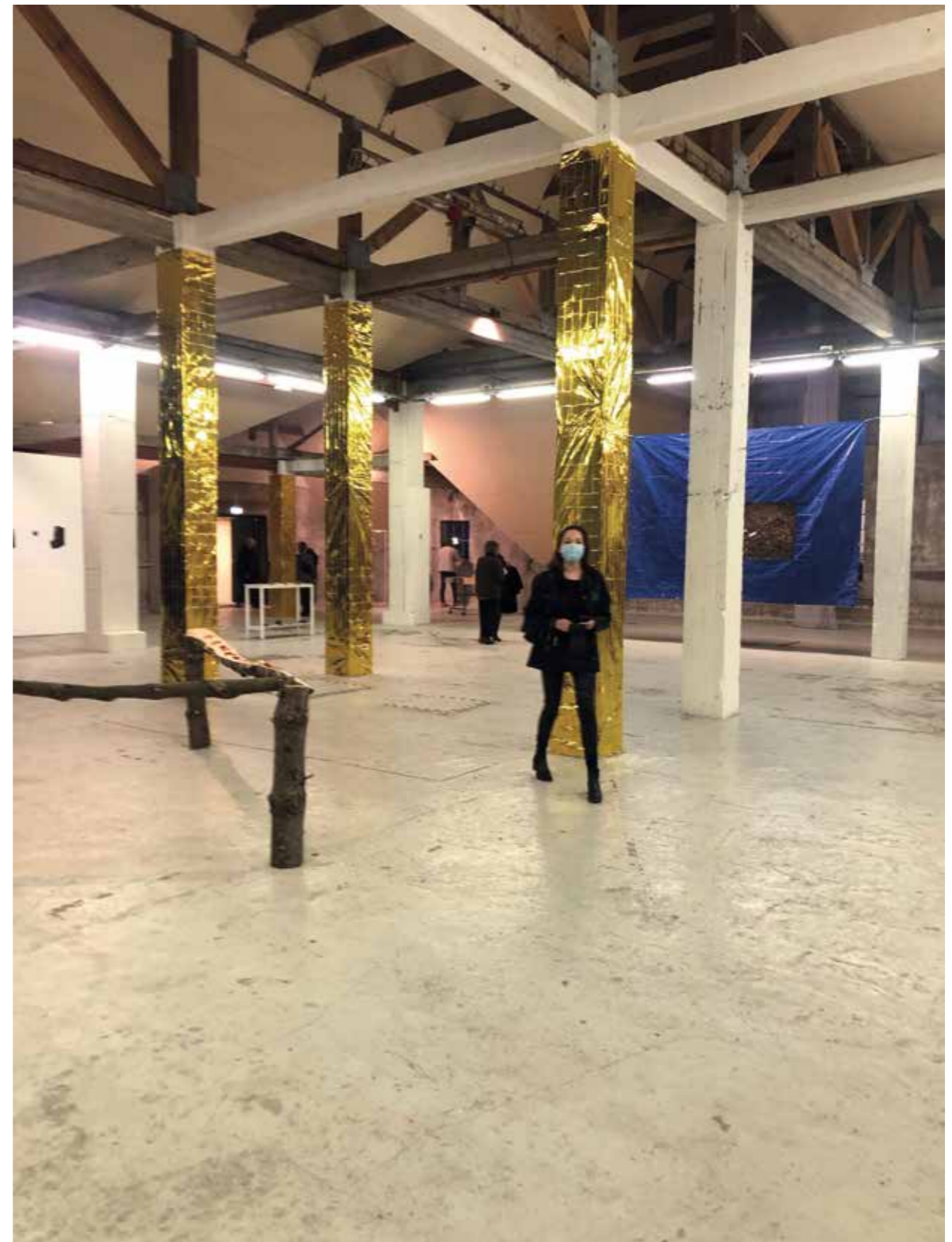
Pickled vegetables by the artists in residency, Reykjavik, December 2021, photo: Sólveig M. Jónsdóttir



Residency in Iceland, December 2021, Reykjavik, December, 2021



Promotion of the exhibition *Common Ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, December 2021



Residency in Iceland. Preparations for the exhibition *Common Ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, December 2021





Opening of the exhibition *Common ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, 12.12.2021, photo: Sólveig M Jónsdóttir





Opening of the exhibition *Common ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, 12.12.2021, photo: Sólveig M Jónsdóttir





Opening of the exhibition *Common ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, 12.12.2021, photo: Sólveig M Jónsdóttir



View from in front of the art center Hlaðan in Korpúlfsstaðir, Reykjavík, December 2021, photo: Maciej Kwietnicki



SÍM Residency in Korpúlfsstaðir, Reykjavík, December 2021, photo: Maciej Kwietnicki



View of the exhibition *Common ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavík, 12.12.2021-16.01.2022, photo: Maciej Kwietnicki











Gallery walk, Reykjavík, 03.12.2021





Dinner party for immigrants at Anna's house in Grindavík, May 2022

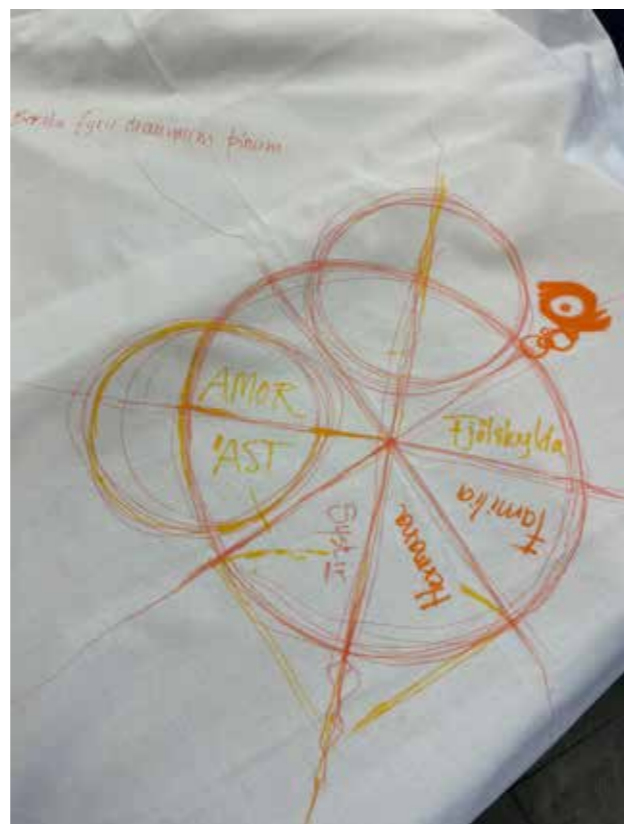
Art workshop for immigrant children in Grindavík at Kvikon culture house. Instructors: Seweryn and Natalie Chwala, Reykjavik, 15.04.2022, photo: Seweryn and Natalie Chwala





Dinner party in the dining hall at media company Visir, Reykjavik, 18.04.2023, photo: Sólný Pálsdóttir





PLACE AS THE ENACTMENT OF MULTICULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Anna Wojtyńska, anthropologist

Common Ground – the name and the focus of this project – can bring various associations and provoke different thoughts. Obviously, the Earth literally embodies a common ground for all living humans. At the same time, globalization, technological advancements, that contribute to so-called ‘time-space compression’, make us quite aware of the existing interconnectedness and growing interdependencies – economic, cultural, and environmental.

A common ground can also be a metaphor for reciprocal entanglements of people, animals, and plants; for the ongoing interaction between many kinds of beings; for our immersion onto and reliance on nature, as well as for our power to interfere with it, often with damaging results.

Since migration has been the main focus of research, place, mobility, and belonging were my first associations in relation to common ground. I therefore understand common ground as a possibility, locally negotiated and enacted within the context of diversity.

A typical association with place [in opposition to abstract space] is localisation and fixity. We often use the idea of place to anchor our identity. We often think about places as instrumental factors that mould who we are, our subjectivity. Place denotes placement, grounding, and being at home. It carries with it a notion of familiarity and safety which constitutes a backbone for communities, for a sense of affinity and relatedness. Therefore, places tend to be perceived as static and immune to time. Or at least we sometimes wish places would stay the same, to fit in with our memories of them. Following this logic, any change to places can be framed as a threat to identity and a source of anxiety, thus mobilizing resistance.

Places are, however, always in the making, being shaped and transformed by the people inhabiting them. These people, increasingly, come from different parts of the world, even from regions that are quite far apart. They do not speak the same language, do not have the same habits, or practice different religions. In times characterised by mobility, fewer and fewer people actually live in places where they were born. Fewer people live in a single place throughout their lives. Not only does the flow of people transform places, but also the flows of ideas, commodities, and capital. Places do increasingly become nodes of global connections and transnational practices, simultaneously undergoing a processes of homogenization and diversification. Many migrants maintain socially embedded in the countries they came from, by staying in touch with relatives and friends via the internet, following news or adhering to the traditions of the countries they come from. So, sharing geographical space does not have to imply mental proximity.



This leads to a quite important question, how can we imagine a common ground and a common sense of community in places that are increasingly becoming socially fragmented? How do we build a common ground in the context of growing diversity?

It is important to remember that, to a large degree, contemporary migrants are not so much mobilized by a desire to live somewhere else, but by global inequalities. These global inequalities, furthermore, tend to be reproduced in the ethnically segmented labour markets and persistent social boundaries. To use Iceland as example, immigrants account there for 18% of the total population. In some towns, however, they comprise a fourth or even half the local population. Nearly one in five of the all workers in Iceland is of foreign origin. In some industries, such as fish processing and the hospitality sector, immigrants represent up to half of all employees. In construction, one fourth of the workers are of foreign origin. It must be noted, however, that official numbers may not reflect the actual situation at the labour market, because many are employed through subcontracting companies or temporary staffing agencies. Even though some immigrants arrive in Iceland in order to do work requiring specialized training, migration to Iceland is mostly driven by low-wage and low-skill occupations, such as cleaning, manufacturing or tourism. More than half of the members of Efling – the union for low-skilled service workers – are of foreign origin. In some cleaning companies, migrants comprise up to 90% of the workers. This indicates that migrants tend to be spatially and socially confined – assigned to certain occupations with lower social status, involving limited interaction with the, so-called, local populace.

How can we then encourage places favourable to intercultural encounters that would allow to negotiate common grounds?

Seweryn Chwała, one of the Polish artists living in Iceland who took part in the *Common Ground* participatory project, displayed his work, titled *The Icelandic Dream*, at the opening exhibition at Korpúlfsstaðir. It was a self-portrait displaying him in clothes typical for a fish factory worker (he was employed in fish processing at that time). He was also wearing a face mask, as was obligatory during the pandemic. Being completely covered by his outfit he could represent any worker of the plant. Anyone and no one. His face was not visible, there was nothing that would allow one to recognize him as a unique individual – his age, gender, and skin colour were undistinguishable. Nothing but a small palette he was holding in his right hand served to tentatively disclose his inconspicuous identity as an artist. To me, this painting represents a figure of a migrant – an anonymous, disposable, temporary worker defined or reduced to his position in the labour market – deprived of his personality. A figure that typically creates a mismatch between an individual and his sense of self.

How can we set up grounds for mutual recognition, in order to move beyond a stereotypical preconception of each other?

According to the recently published results from a survey among Poles living in Iceland, about 70% of participants reported experiencing instances of discrimination, while almost 20% had suffered some form of violence. The title of the report quoted one of the participants, who was apparently told, “No one wants you, go back to your country”. This shows that sharing geographical space and casual encounters do not simply result in reducing prejudice.

Which leads to the question: can we imagine a common ground, beyond nationalist logic?

It seems that despite the forces of globalization (or maybe because of them) we are increasingly confronted, divided, detached, and antagonized on different levels. Expansion of the market economy and neoliberal governance has polarized societies, destabilized economies, and brought us to the edge of an ecological catastrophe. An increasing number of people feel that the current system does not work.

So, can we enact solidarity across ethnic identities, in order to fight for social justice and a prosperous future for all?

Seweryn Chwała, *Self portrait*, 2020, oil on canvas,
120 x 80 cm, Photographer: Sólveig M. Jónsdóttir



Could art and its methods – in a quite broad sense – play a role in creating a sense of increased proximity? It is generally assumed that art has a potential to encourage sensitivity and empathy. Hence art methods could, presumably, be a suitable way to initiate communication beyond languages and differences, and to lay foundations for a common ground and mutual understanding. In a similar way, sharing food has for a long time been an established form of practicing community. While representing one of the basic human needs, dining is a profoundly social urge. Thus, feasting with neighbours can become a symbolic and powerful way of communicating solidarity and performing hospitality, a means to engage with others, an avenue to establish rapport and intercultural connections; as were the intentions behind the participatory workshops and festive dining in the *Common Ground* activities in Grindavík.



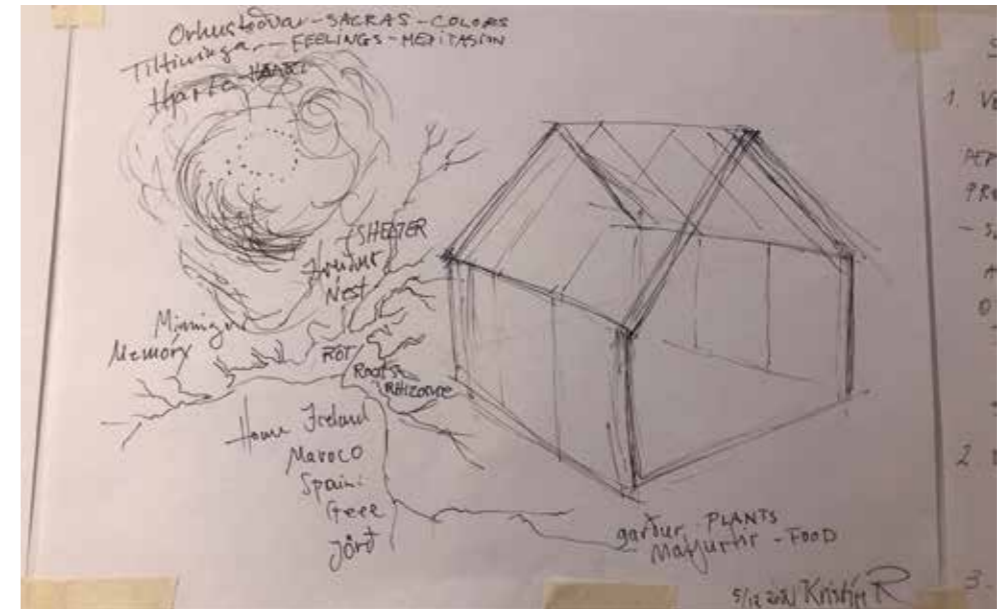
Residency in Iceland, Reykjavik, December, 2021

REACHING COMMON GROUND

Jón Proppe

In December 2021, 18 artists from Lithuania, Poland, and Iceland gathered in Reykjavík to mount an exhibition to explore the theme of common ground. It was a pressing issue, as refugees from Belarus were massing on the Polish border, resulting in yet another refugee crisis caused, as most often, by political strife and economic inequality. This was an addition to the refugee crisis in Africa and the Mediterranean, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, refugees massing at the southern border of the United States, and the often-contentious migrations within Europe itself. Common ground can be understood both literally, as a shared place, and figuratively, as something we can all agree on. Both senses seemed to apply in the current international climate.

The venue was an unusual, large building on the outskirts of the city, Korpúfsstaðir, built a century ago as a dairy farm. It is now managed by the Association of Icelandic Visual Artists, providing studios for artists as well as a large exhibition hall and communal facilities. While the 18 artists each brought their own concerns and approaches to the project, the works and exhibition were developed in an atmosphere of intimate discussions and cooperation. While some focused on the wider, political context, others strove to create more intimate spaces, based on the premise that common ground can only be reached through a frank and open discussion between people. Despite the works being to a large extent varied, they demonstrated a shared feeling of urgency, a need to reach out and work towards a solution, towards a common ground.



Sketches by the artists in residency, Reykjavik, 2021

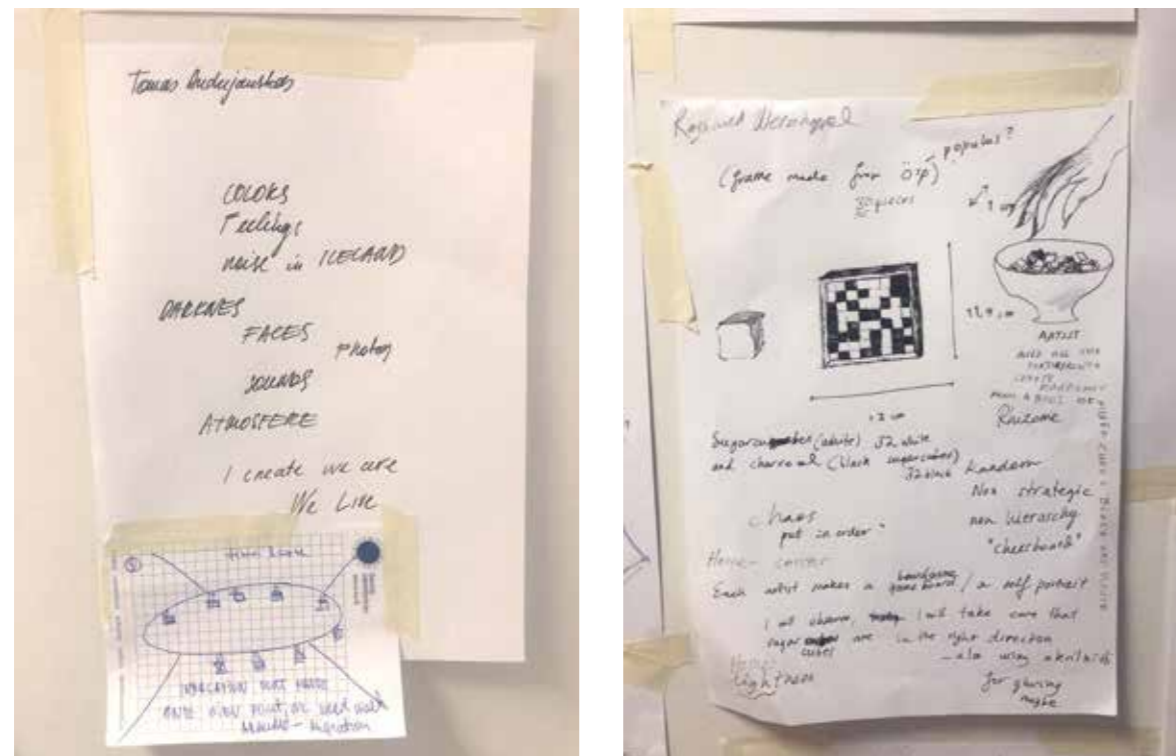


As part of the project the artists gathered, along with guests, in the communal hall of Korpúlfstaðir to discuss the project and the issues it sought to address. It was easy to find common ground among the group itself, despite our different cultural backgrounds; we discussed how this could be extended to address the wider crisis facing us. One theme that emerged, again and again, was the importance of sharing stories, of merely trying to find ways to understand each other, to understand the plight of the refugees and the different opinions, fears, and feelings that make it so difficult to find a solution. An important factor in this was to try to erase some of the boundaries that divide us, national, political, or economic. We agreed that the most difficult boundary of all lies in the inequality that separates us, not just between nations or continents, but within every society, however small or large.

While art projects such as *Common Ground* cannot hope to have a decisive impact on the larger, geopolitical stage, they can at least serve as some sort of model for cooperation and open dialogue. Someone mentioned that it could be like planting a seed that would hopefully grow into something bigger; that seemed to sum up the feeling in the discussion. At least we will have taken a step towards the journey.



View of the exhibition *Common ground - Where is my home?*, Reykjavik, 12.12.2021-16.01.2022, photo: Maciej Kwietnicki



Sketches by the artists in residency, Iceland, 2021, photos: Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir



2

POLAND

Symposium in practice - workshop by the Vistula River, 22.05.2022, photo: Alicja Kochanowicz



Andrii Dostliev

Sylwia Górak

Maciej Kwietnicki

Ala Savashevich

Wiola Ujazdowska

Magda Węgrzyn / Joanna Małecka

POLAND SCHEDULE



Workshops

- **Newseeds** – workshop, 27.03.2022 / Maciej Kwietnicki and Wiola Ujazdowska
Held in cooperation with the Urban Greenery Department of the City of Toruń, a workshop for migrants from Ukraine, familiarising them with alternative and creative ways of spending time and nonstandard forms of artistic expression on gardening and vegetation as a process – an artistic process as well. The main themes of the workshop were herbal medicine, backyard gardens and cultural, social and anthropological aspects of nursing, providing care, the history and significance of herbs in Ukrainian culture.
- **Newseeds** – workshop, 06.05.2022 / Maciej Kwietnicki and Wiola Ujazdowska
A workshop on sowing that took the form of a picnic. Ukrainian migrants and local people joined with the artists who ran the workshop in planting native Ukrainian plants in a city square.
- **Ambiguity in Culture** – online event, 14.05.2022 / Magda Węgrzyn
- **Meet the Dragon of Toruń** – art workshop for children, 17.05.2022 / Ala Savashevich
- **Workshop for children of Ukrainian immigrants** run by CoCA's Department of Education
- **Eco workshop**, 25.05.2022 / Justas Kažys
- **Workshop for children of Ukrainian immigrants** run by Kristín Reynisdóttir – 26.05.2022
- **Vocal workshop** (two groups) – vocal emission and diaphragmatic breathing / Sylwia Górak, 29.05.2022



Symposium

- **Symposium. Theoretical Part at CoCA, 21.05.2022** / Justas Kažys (ecologist, Lithuania), Tomasz Markiewka (philosopher, Poland), Anna Wojtyńska (anthropologist, Iceland), and Krystyna Szmek as a guest.
- **Symposium. Practical, 22.05.2022**
A morning trip by timber rafts to W788 Foundation, a place of artistic residence run by Ela Jabłońska in the village of Kozielec, preceded by collecting weeds under Filip Malinowski's supervision (Chwast Prast bistro), collective cooking and chatting around the table.



Exhibition and conference

- **Exhibition *No Man's Land*** – press conference and opening reception, 27.05.2022
- Guided tours of the exhibition (27.05–28.08.2022):
 - by the coordinator of the exhibition
 - for foreigners in Ukrainian
 - for foreigners in English
 - in Polish

- **Plant Migrations**, a workshop accompanying the exhibition /
Conducted by Sara Orzechowska:
 - part one – a workshop for adults, 06.08.2022
An encounter with native herbs including species vital for Slavic culture (and health). The workshop involved making herbal infusions and discovering the secrets and potential of the green heroes of wayside thickets.
 - part two – a workshop for families, 17.08.2022
A meeting for families with children where they will be able to listen to stories about plants, learn about herbs and how they can be used, and finally make plant ink by themselves.



Closing of the exhibition *No Man's Land / Ziemia Niczyja*, 25.08–28.08.2022:

- *Stone from a Journey* – a family workshop inspired by the exhibition, 25.08.2022 /
Conducted by Joanna Kalenik
- The workshop shows that expensive souvenirs brought from trips can be impractical, while it is memories and experiences that matter most.
- A souvenir can be free – a tiny piece of the place we have visited, a stone perhaps. The workshop involved producing packaging, or display cases for memories, for small items from the places participants have been to.
- Picnic, 26.08.2022
- Final guided tour of the exhibition, 26.08.2022
- Special screenings at Kino Centrum, 27–28.08.2022:
 - Screening of *Seal Story*, directed by Bartłomiej Błaszczyszki and a meeting with Jakub Adamiak – the protagonist and co-creator of the film;
 - Screening of films devoted to migration: *Frost* and *Notturmo*.



Closing seminar – 03–05.08.2023

- 03.08.2023
 - meeting of the project team: summing-up of the project, conclusions, presentation of the publication,
 - lecture on boundaries in art by Mateusz Kozieradzki
- 04.08.2023
 - workshop + lecture on boundaries in the social world by Michał Bomastyk
 - open discussion in the project team concerning boundaries in art, conducted by Radosław Osiński
 - meeting with Dionisios Stiuris, the author of numerous reportages on migration, devoted to the problem of migration and conducted by Anna Zekin-Kompanowska
 - screenings of thematic films at Kino Centrum
- 05.08.2023 – day of migrant initiatives organised in cooperation with the Emic Foundation
 - concert, meetings
 - world cousine (tasting)
 - screenings of thematic films at Kino Centrum.









Symposium in practice - workshop by the Vistula River, 22.05.2022, photo: Alicja Kochanowicz









Symposium in practice - workshop by the Vistula River. In W788 Foundation run by Elżbieta Jabłońska,
22.05.2022, Kozielec, photo: Alicja Kochanowicz





View of the exhibition *No Man's Land* in CoCA *Znaki Czasu*, 27.05.2022–28.08.2022, Toruń, photo: Adam Antoniuk





Guided tour of the No Man's Land exhibition for foreigners in Ukrainian, CoCA Znaki Czasu, 30.07.2022, photo: Weronika Lasota



Closing of the exhibition *No Man's Land*, 26.08.2022, photo: Tatsiana Safonava



Plant migrations - a workshop for families, 17.08.2022, fot. Weronika Lasota





View of the exhibition *No Man's Land* in CoCA *Znaki Czasu*, 27.05.2022–28.08.2022, Toruń, photo: Adam Antoniuk



View of the exhibition *No Man's Land* in CoCA *Znaki Czasu*, 27.05.2022–28.08.2022, Toruń, photo: Adam Antoniuk

NO MAN'S LAND – OUR SHARED HOME

Natalia Cieślak

The *No Man's Land* exhibition, showcased during the summer of 2022 at the Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu*, forms a part of the international *Common Ground* project, which revolves around the theme of migration. During their artistic residency in Toruń, artists from Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Iceland deeply contemplated this phenomenon within the broader context of external space. They explored it as both a physically perceptible environment and a mental realm influenced by cultural, social, political, economic, and other factors. The outcome of their reflections materialized into an exhibition that resembled a rhizome in its structure, characterized by features such as openness to diverse contexts, a multi-threaded approach, the absence of a dominant narrative, and a lack of hierarchy between threads. The threads interacted with one another at different points and levels¹. The chosen perspective placed various subjects, objects, phenomena, and experiences in a position of mutual interest, not in isolation but as interconnected entities.

Within the exhibition, a symbolic representation of a migrant emerged, the yellow rubber duck, serving as the focal point of Pétur Magnússon's artwork. Even before entering the gallery, visitors could encounter the duck as it playfully floated in a water-filled boat, resembling a bathtub, situated in the square adjacent to the Centre of Contemporary Art building. Is it anchored here permanently? Has it found a safe haven? Or is it merely a temporary visitor to Toruń, with plans to travel to another "port"? The subsequent scenario likely depends on the predominant motivation of the passenger: the desire to find refuge or the yearning for freedom and independence experienced during the journey.

This dilemma, relatable to many individuals who change their place of residence, is intricately linked to the ambivalence that characterizes our existence in the so-called 'socialized world'. As Zygmunt Bauman noted, our behaviour is influenced not only by the drive for autonomy and self-determination but also by the simultaneous "longing to settle securely within a group or collective", "the dream of belonging", and "the need for social support"². This imperative was reflected within the exhibition framework, exemplified by Maciej Kwietnicki's installation, *Internal Connections*, consisting of ropes stretched from the gallery ceiling. In metaphorical terms, the artwork symbolically portrayed

¹ Cf.: G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Tysiąc Plateau*, Warsaw 2015.

² Z. Bauman, *Kultura w płynnej nowoczesności*, Warsaw 2011, p. 37.

integration among individuals, particularly those with similar experiences. Within the context of exile, it can be interpreted as a representation, as the artist himself pointed out, of the safety net that unfolds beneath them when they receive support from their fellow migrants.

The encounters and relationships formed with others leave a lasting impact on individuals, influencing them in various ways. Solveiga Gutautė's work, titled *Impact*, reflects this notion. From the people she encountered on her journey, the artist not only drew inspiration but also received a tangible part of them: a lock of their hair. This hair became a meaningful memento, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's concept of a "complementation of experience", serving as both a trace of an experience and a relic – which is but a remnant from the past³. Gutautė wove these locks of hair together into a dreadlock that she wore continuously for a period of time.

Sylwia Górak and Julija Pociūtė presented different perspectives on the theme of building relationships. In her sound installation *Songs from my little homeland*, Górak demonstrated that singing, rooted in folk traditions, can serve as a space for the exchange of emotions and experiences among representatives of different cultures. On the other hand, Pociūtė's work *Monuments of Momentary Connection* adopted a non-anthropocentric approach, placing empowered elements of the landscape at the centre of attention. The seemingly cold and impersonal stones were transformed into living organisms, carrying energy and evoking emotional states when in contact with humans.

Pociūtė's work explored the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Fragments of rocks, collected and donated to the artist by co-participants of the residency in Iceland, as well as poetic works by Tomas Andrijauskas (*untitled*) and Andrius Grigalaitis (*The Mist. Trace of Toruń*), served as reflections on the role of landscape and the places that impact us in the present moment. Inspired by such a "connection" and acting on the spur of the moment, Sindri Leiffson made a felled poplar tree trunk from the Vistula waterfront in Toruń "migrate": to the gallery, which became an integral part of his artwork *Here you go*. Resting on this improvised "table", a lemon and physalis were served, immigrant fruits originally from China and Central America that have firmly established themselves on our menus. Accompanying them was a shell, the former abode of a snail, presumably transported to its new location along with the poplar tree.

Nature was often regarded as an equal co-creator of the presented artworks. This notion was particularly evident in Sylwia Górak's *Lunar Calendar*, a painting that attributed co-authorship to the aurora borealis. By personifying the *aurora borealis*, which shares a name with the Roman goddess of dawn, the artwork emphasized female agency and creativity. The selenological motif, an ever-changing moon in the sky mirroring its various phases on the canvas, also highlighted the feminine aspect of fertility, as it is intricately connected with the menstrual cycle.

Within the margins of the aforementioned painting, there was a portrayal of a house and car of the future, a representation of infrastructure designed to address the environmental degradation caused by human activities. Through low thermal energy requirements and the elimination of harmful exhaust emissions, this envisioned infrastructure aimed to combat the adverse impacts of human presence on the ecosystem. The imperative to mitigate humanity's detrimental effects on nature was also explored in Ragnhildur von Weisshappel's work *Wind*, a multimedia composition blending video and poetry. It narrated the tale of a 'wizard' capable of repairing what is broken and reviving what has perished with a mere touch of his hand. Symbolizing the unstoppable force of nature, *Wind* exemplified self-regulating processes capable of mending the damage inflicted upon

3 W. Benjamin, *Park centralny* [in:] W. Benjamin, *Twórca jako wytwórca*, selection by H. Orłowski, Poznań 1975, p. 251.

it, as long as it remains undisturbed. The significance of horizontal air movements lies in their role in carrying fertilizing pollen across long distances, enabling the growth of new plants in different locations. However, this process relies on fertile soil, which unfortunately is being depleted, largely due to industrial-scale agriculture. Addressing the issue of the Earth's deteriorating life-sustaining matter, essential for the well-being of plants and numerous animal species, Anna Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir created the installation *All come from dust, and to dust all return*. The artist skilfully arranged a mosaic using seeds, grains, and soil, among other materials, in a concentric form imbued with solar symbolism, evoking themes of vitality, rebirth, and fertility. In her commentary on the artwork, the artist emphasized the significance of edible seeds, recognizing their growing value in the face of the climate crisis. Today, seeds are preventively stored at the Global Seed Vault on Spitzbergen.

The exhibition's narrative threads reached into various realms of the contemporary global landscape, including political and social events unfolding on the international stage. The eruption of full-scale hostilities in Russian-occupied Ukraine, resulting in massive migratory movements, reverberated within the displayed works. The situation on Poland's eastern border served as the inspiration for Wiola Ujazdowska's work, among others. In the work titled *Banner of Support* she expressed gratitude towards volunteers who dedicated themselves to assisting Ukrainian refugees by crafting it from their vests. The artwork symbolized their selfless dedication during those challenging times. In contrast, *Wicek the Border Guard II* utilized the form of a vase, reminiscent of the faience factory in Włocławek, and applied a layered paint technique to convey society's ambivalence towards newcomers. The decorative table, symbolizing the proverbial Polish hospitality, visually resembles an open gate welcoming Ukrainian refugees. However, lurking in the background are stories of individuals from other parts of the world, attempting to cross the Polish-Belarusian border, tens or hundreds of kilometres to the north, for similar reasons, only to face barbed wire and bleak prospects.

At the crossroads of these two worlds, in the 'in-between' space, lies the village of Uściług, situated on the Ukrainian-Polish border. This place, suspended in the 'buffer zone' between the theatre of war and a safe haven, became the focal point of Ali Savashevich's work. Drawing inspiration from her friend Lera's experiences of being forced by conflict to seek refuge in the relatively secure western regions of the country, the artist employed embroidery on a photograph to convey this poignant narrative. Using intricate stitches with blue thread, she delicately covered the areas of the photograph where dark smoke clouds from the bomb blast marred the horizon. This stitching technique serves as a poignant reminder that reality can never revert to what it once was – traces of trauma will forever remain. Magda Węgrzyn's work, titled *Because it is not true that all the wounds are healed by time*, conveys a similar message. Through the ephemeral and emotionally-charged medium of contemporary dance, the artist combines a diverse range of inspirations, spanning from avant-garde theatre classics, poetic themes and Swedish cinematography to the biography of Putin's mistress. These elements intertwine, drawing attention to the fact that war often arises from the actions of seemingly "good people".

Such destructive acts always leave scars and frequently result in divisions. Andrii Dostliev's work takes as its starting point the consequences of the systematic erasure of Ukrainian culture, extending beyond the current war. In *Yellow Portraits #1 and #2 (Gallery of Unknown Ukrainian Cultural Actors)*, the artist consciously repeats an act of symbolic vandalism, using spray paint to blot out images of Ukrainian writers and female writers. Through this act, Dostliev signifies the painful absence of those who have been excluded and erased from collective consciousness due to imperial propaganda. The propagandists knew that cultural tradition plays a crucial role in building and integrating national identity.

NO MAN'S LAND – A LAND FOR ALL

War vividly demonstrates the consequences of conflicts arising from a lack of respect for diversity and otherness. The opposite of such an attitude is pluriversalism, which promotes the equal recognition of different visions of reality. The artist Marija Griniuk directly addresses this concept in her installation, *Toward the Pluriversal Common Ground*. In her self-commentary on the work, she advocates the coexistence of multiple 'worlds' while championing unity in diversity and peaceful coexistence, which can triumph over the politics of antagonism and division.

The *No Man's Land* exhibition revealed the expansive nature of the term "migration", encompassing not only the movement of people to new locations driven by diverse factors but also, in a non-anthropocentric context, the movement and shifting distribution of various species of living organisms.⁴ This comprehensive exploration of the subject shed light on various aspects of human interaction with other individuals, communities, and the non-human realm. We coexist socially as representatives of diverse cultures, while biologically, we also function as symbionts for other organisms and entities. The complexity of these interconnected systems was conveyed through enigmatic and conceptual works, such as Živilė Minkutė's *Hang in There*, Kristín Reynisdóttir's *Balance 2*, and Páll Haukur Björnsson's *A Whole and Its Things*. These pieces juxtaposed organic and synthetic elements, constructing images composed of smaller structures. They embodied a desire to maintain integrity despite the intricate nature of the entire system and the precarious balance it entails. Amidst the dynamic changes of modern times, the exhibition emphasized the need to redefine relationships on various levels: between individuals, societies, humans and the ecosystem. A crucial first step on this journey is to reconsider the perception of the Earth as someone else's (implicitly human) property. The notion of "no man's land", originally associated with military contexts, has been brought into the realm of contemplation on our shared home – the planet.

⁴ Cf.: <https://sjp.pl/migracja> [accessed on: 06.05.2023].

Tomasz S. Markiewka

Is there any political ground that is common for the whole globe, something that unites such different countries as Poland, Japan, New Zealand or South Africa? This criterion is satisfied by only one thing: the system we tend to call capitalism.

Among capitalism's many features, ownership is one that is especially cherished. Though "cherished" might be too weak a word, there are moments when "obsession" would seem more appropriate. In an advanced version of capitalism nearly everything must be "owned" by someone – every product, every inch of ground, every part of natural wealth. Some countries have even made attempts to privatise access to water.

It is a legacy bequeathed capitalism by old colonial powers – Spain, France or Great Britain, the places from which it sprung. On reaching the New World, they set out on a mission to claim ownership of the land there. That practice was unknown to indigenous people. Every tribe naturally had a territory of their own – that was where they lived or hunted – but vast areas of land belonged to no-one, so in a way they belonged to all. It was European colonialists that built the whole legal and military apparatus to precisely divide whole continents into fragments that were always in "somebody's possession".

Several centuries have passed and we who live in capitalist states take the boundaries between "mine" and "not mine" for granted. We are only left with patches of what we consider "common".

In discussions on migration, we tend to pre-assume a default capitalist background. Someone migrates from a place of "their own" to "somebody else's" place. For our ancestors, hunters and gatherers, migration was a regular way of life until the first agrarian communities emerged some ten thousand years ago. It was conceivably an experience very unlike what it is to us as they did not migrate from "their" land to "somebody else's" land – the whole Earth, the whole planet was both "no-man's land" and "a land for all". For plants and animals, too.

The environmental crisis, not synonymous with the climate crisis as it embraces soil and water contamination by chemicals as well, has partly reminded us of things that passed into oblivion or were marginalised in the capitalist world. This includes the notion that a simple division between what is "ours" and what belongs "somebody else" is not easily made. People living in developed countries where aeroplanes and cars are in common use, meat is consumed on a massive scale and

all kinds of goods are purchased in large quantities exert much greater impact on global temperatures than people living in the poorest states, mostly in Africa. However, “our” consumption that takes place in “our” part of the world affects the climate which does not belong to “us”, it is something all people “share”. Additionally, it is African people who experience the most adverse effects of global warming at “their” place. Some are forced to leave “their” homes to live in “somebody else’s” home.

Economists have a name for this: “externalities”. For instance, two parties enter into contract, a passenger and an airline, in this way causing harm to a third party that is not involved in the transaction and has never been consulted.

Environmental problems and a growing environmental awareness reveal to us one more thing: we, people, can make different divisions and treat fragments of the world as ‘ours’, but they have never been exclusively ‘ours’ as we have never been the only inhabitants of the planet. Animals and plants are also part of this world. And they suffer the consequences of our actions. Global warming leads not only to human migration, non-humans relocate too. Many animal and plant species have become incapable of inhabiting the regions in which they have lived so far.

To stick to the jargons of economics – all non-human nature falls into the vast category of externalities. When we carried out more and more transactions, when we expanded our economic activity on an unprecedented scale, we never invited birds, trees or coral reefs to negotiate.

This poses one obvious question: how about their rights? How to account for the fact that the Earth belongs to them as much as it belongs to us?

Some economists suggest that specific elements of nature should be viewed as financial assets – in other words, they should come with a price tag. If the Amazon rainforest is not evaluated, it becomes invisible to our economic activity – so they claim – but if we decide that it is worth a certain amount of dollars, then we will have to consider it in our calculations.

This solution is only halfway satisfactory. Yes, we render elements of nature visible, but we treat them as ordinary goods – extremely valuable perhaps, but nothing more than goods.

Is there another way out – something that would enable us to show more respect to non-human inhabitants of the Earth?

As soon as the 1970s, Christopher Stone, a law professor at the University of Southern California, came up with another solution which to many sounded absolutely incredible: “I am quite seriously proposing that we give legal rights to forests, oceans, rivers and other so-called «natural objects» in the environment – indeed, to the natural environment as a whole – he wrote in his article *Should Trees Have Standing?—Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects* (1972).

Stone was aware that his proposition was revolutionary and would be perceived as preposterous. However, he pointed out that suggestions to grant any rights to slaves, children or women had met with similar reactions. “The fact is, that each time there is a movement to confer rights onto some new «entity,» the proposal is bound to sound odd or frightening or laughable” – Stone wrote. “This is partly because until the rightless thing receives its rights, we cannot see it as anything but a *thing* for the use of «us» – those who are holding rights at the time.”

Fifty years after Stone’s article, what once appeared to be a fantasy is becoming real in some regions of the world. In 2017, the Whanganui River in New Zealand was given a legal identity. Gerard Albert, one of the campaigners, explained: “We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 year of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management.”

From the philosophical perspective, what is at stake in such enterprises is whether we will treat the environment as a thing that can be freely manipulated and used by humans, or as an integral part of our world that deserves respect. We should stop talking about societies made up of humans, we should start talking about communities made up of humans and non-humans, as the French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour demands.

We need a shift in our thinking, in the workings of our imagination, while our old habits that introduce a clear-cut dualistic division between humans and non-humans must be given up. Artists take the lead here, as it is often the case. Years ago, philosopher Andrew Pickering wrote it is art that provides inspiration for a different approach in the relations between humans and non-humans. In one of his texts, he discusses the work of the Dutch painter Willem de Kooning, whose “smeary canvases”, full of “vortices of colour,” lacking precise boundaries between particular elements and the author’s control, reveal “a dense, embodied, material *engagement* with the world” – actually, “a de Kooning painting is somehow irrevocably *a joint product of the human and the nonhuman* (...) a de-centred production of which de Kooning was, one might say, at once the author and the discoverer, both active and passive in turn.”

If we are to switch our thinking from the capitalist mode that sees everything as “owned” by someone (presumably a human being), to ecological mode that proclaims the Earth as “no man’s land” (it belongs to all), we need such artistic inspirations – we need interventions that would help us get out of a rut, and catch us by surprise forcing us to rethink our attitudes. They will remind us that we have to keep negotiating the form of our communities.

Anthropologist David Graeber once advanced the thesis that there was a deep kinship between revolutionists struggling to make the world a better place to live, and artists. Both have the same motto:

All power to the imagination!

3

LITHUANIA

Residency in Lithuania, 05-16.09.2022, Palanga, photo: Andrius Grigalaitis



Tomas Andrijauskas
Andrius Grigalaitis
Marija Griniuk
Solveiga Gutaute
Živilė Minkutė
Julija Pociūtė

LITHUANIA SCHEDULE



1 residency

- **Palanga Artists' House (PAH)**, Palanga, Lithuania, 05–16.09.2022
- 18 artworks created during the residency, 18 artworks (paintings, installation, site-specific installations, objects, video art, objects, photography series) represented at PAH studio and international group exhibition in Vilnius, Gallery Arka.
- **18 artists participating in residency:** Andrii Dostliev, Sylwia Górak, Maciej Kwietnicki, Ala Savashevich, Wiola Ujazdowska, Joanna Małecka, Páll Haukur Björnsson, Sindri Leifsson, Pétur Magnússon, Anna Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir, Ragnhildur von Weisshappel, Kristín Reynisdóttir, Tomas Andrijauskas, Andrius Grigalaitis, Marija Griniuk, Solveiga Gutautė, Živilė Minkutė, Julija Pociūtė (18).
- **3 scholars participating in residency:** climate ecologist Justas Kažys, anthropologist Anna Wojtyńska, biologist Giedrius Vaidilavičius.



1 exhibition / 3 locations:

- 1) **group exhibition [up]rooting**, Gallery Arka, Vilnius, 16.12.2022–18.01.2023,
- 2) **project documentary exhibition Common Ground** at Lithuanian Artists' Association project space "Venus gallery", Vilnius, 16–31.12.2022,
- 3) **project artistic research video exhibition** at PAH studio, Palanga, 2022





Seminar

- 1 seminar: **PAH studio seminar / artistic talks and discussions / 11.09.2022**
- LT – seminar on intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity: **Interdisciplinary seminar on intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity *Common Ground. Common Roots***. Moderator: dr. Skaidra Trilupaitytė, space “in Vino”, Vilnius, Lithuania, 16.12.2022.
- **All partners had presented the project (Egle Ganda Bogdaniene, Paulina Kuhn, Anna Eyjólfssdóttir), 1 speaker (Stsiapan Stureika) and 1 scholar (dr. Tadas Šarūnas) were invited participate to share the view on migration issues in Europe from the academic field perspective.**
- 1 external speaker: **art sociologist dr. Skaidra Trilupaitytė**
- 50 people participating in the seminar.



10 accompanying events (i.e. touring, workshops, meetings):

1. Special excursions with curators at art museums of Palanga – Antano Mončio museum, museum of Resort „Anapilis” / 07.09.2022
2. Educational programme with sculptor and local amateur Linas Zulkus and local communities in Palanga with educational sauna experience / 07.09.2022
3. Exploring tour to Nida at Curonian split, Lithuania. Visiting Nida Art Colony (NMC), meeting artists, community. Group walking (artists trekking) – Parnidzio Dune – city centre – T. Manas House – the seaside. Visiting exhibition at NMC. / 08.09.2022
4. Participatory walking tour with climatologist Justas Kažys and his auidial perception workshop in Palanga surroundings / 09.09.2022
5. Excursion to Šiauliai – visiting Hill of Crosses, degustation of heritage of local gastronomy, visiting Šiauliai municipality gallery and participating at exhibition opening events, guided tour at Šiauliai photography gallery / 10.09.2022
6. Environmental walking with biologist Giedrius Vaidilavičius / 12.09.2022
7. Workshops and artistic meetings in PAH with European Humanity University (EHU) students on project themes and migrations and integration issues / 20–26.09.2021
8. Discussion on project issues and presentation of EHU students workshop results / 20.10.2021
9. Lithuanian artists’ community and project artists’ meeting in Vilnius / 2022 12 15
10. Meeting at Lithuanian Artists’ Association Gallery „Klaipėdos galerija”, visiting exhibition / 08.09.2022



View of the exhibition *[up]rooting*, Gallery Arka, Vilnius, 16.12.2022–18.01.2023, photo: Lukas Mykolaitis







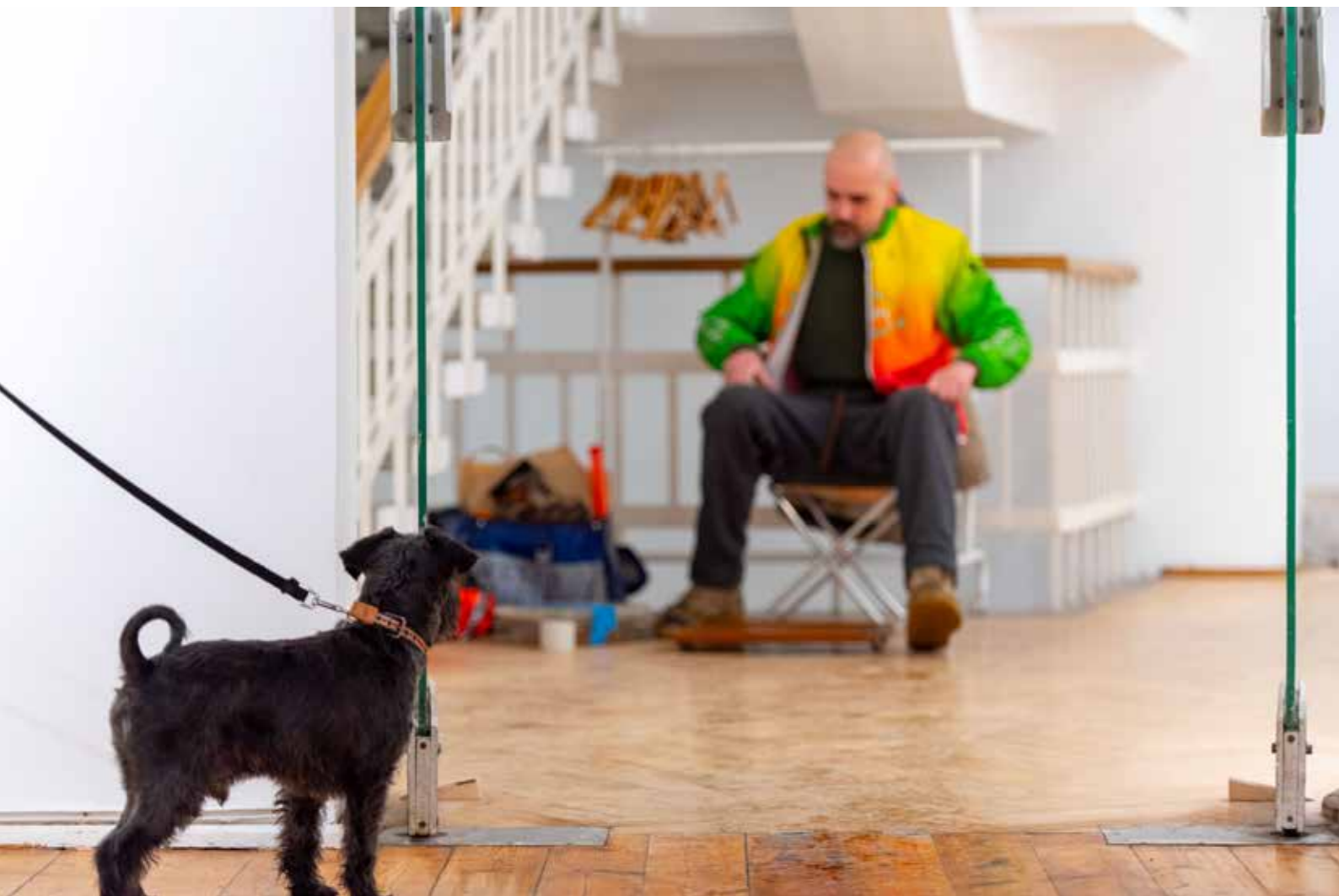
View of the exhibition *[up]rooting*, gallery Arka, Vilnius, 16.12.2022–18.01.2023, photo: Lukas Mykolaitis





View of the exhibition *[up]rooting*, gallery Arka, Vilnius, 2022.12.16–2023.01.18, photo: Lukas Mykolaitis







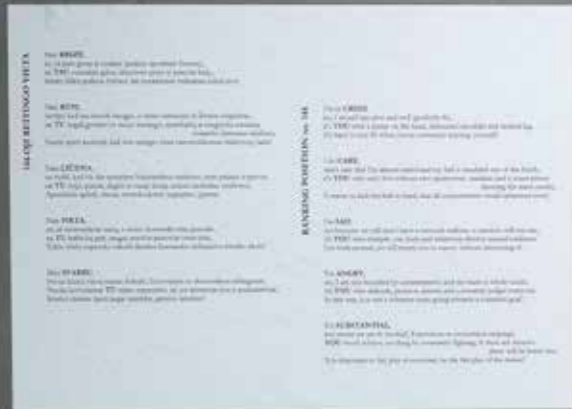




Interdisciplinary seminar on intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity *Common Ground*. *Common Roots*, 16.12.2022, Vilnius, photo: Tomas Terekas



RANKING POSITION NO. 144



Justas Kažys

I'm in **CRISIS**,
no, I myself am alive and well (perfectly fit),
it's **YOU** with a bump on the head, dislocated shoulder and bruised leg,
It's hard to stay fit when you're constantly injuring yourself!

I do **CARE**,
don't care that I'm almost naked and my ball is moulded out of the Earth,
it's **YOU** who can't live without new sportswear, sneakers and a smart phone
showing the latest results,
It wants to kick the ball so hard, that all consumerism would splattered away!

I'm **SAD**,
not because we still don't have a national stadium, a meadow will suit me,
it's **YOU** who trample, cut, burn and otherwise destroy natural stadiums,
Just look around, art will return you to nature without destroying it!

I'm **ANGRY**,
no, I am not bounded by commitments, and my team is whole world,
it's **YOU** who defends, protects, attacks and constantly judges everyone,
In this way, it is not a cohesive team going towards a common goal!

It's **SUBSTANTIAL**,
not where we are in football, Eurovision or economical rankings,
YOU won't achieve anything by constantly fighting, if there are winners
there will be losers too,
It is important to fair play to everyone, by the fair play of the nature!

Justas Kažys *Ranking Position No. 144* (2021)

[poem inspired by artwork *Rūpintojėlis* (Pensive Christ), Leopoldas Surgailis, 1970]

About football. The game could be fun I think it was invented for this particular purpose. However, football has changed, like all other parts of our consumer-based society. Now football has become a manifestation of politics, power, and dominance. FIFA organization is an example of why the game (the world) is no longer fun. The title of the poem refers to the position of the Lithuanian national football team in FIFA rankings (last time it was 146 position, 6 April 2023). The poem speaks in the words (thoughts, maybe) of the painting's protagonist. The position is not important: "...if there are winners there will be losers too..."

"There are more important things in life than winning or losing a game." – Lionel Messi

About nature. When I saw this tribal-looking "crucifix" I thought he represents the whole of nature. There was no separation between humans and others. He does not bother to be naked, he is not afraid to be dirty, he invites everyone to be a part of it. On the other hand, he looks angry and a little bit aggressive that humans overexploited the whole planet and pushed nature to the very limits. For those that we usually name as progressive, intellectual homo sapience he could look like the primal one. However, for me, he represents nature as it is: pure and sacred. I can read from him: why do we keep "destroying natural stadiums"?

"Everything I know about morality and the obligations of men, I owe it to football." – Albert Camus

About both. Is nature playing football? Yes, I think, it is the most Fair Play that we can imagine. And this poem is not about desperation, even though it gives negative thoughts about our attitude towards the world, it is about finding a way to connectivity between everyone and everything and about becoming "a team going towards a common goal" (ground). This is an open question for everyone: are you ready "to kick the ball so hard, that all the consumerism will be splattered up"? Because nature is always ready to play together with us.

"You can't score a goal if you don't take a shot." – Johan Crujiff

ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF HUMAN COMFORT, CONNECTIVITY TO NATURE AND CLIMATE CRISIS

Justas Kažys

According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, *physiological* and *safety* needs are the basics for every human being. Physiological needs include air, heat, clothes, hygiene, light, water, urination, food, excretion, shelter, and sleep. Only then they are reached, and we can seek others (related to our project ideas), including artistic inclusivity and creativity, connectivity to nature and environment, social actualization and communication, etc.

On average, Europeans spend 90% of their time indoors (Kakoulli et al. 2022). From the perspective of human physiological comfort of the body the indoor environment should secure *thermal*, *visual*, *acoustic*, and *respiratory* comforts (Song et al. 2019). All these criteria together are called *Indoor Environmental quality* (IEQ). Human comfort perception is a complex matter which depends on both environmental factors and the personal characteristics of the individual occupant (Song et al. 2019). The relationship between IEQs and the wellbeing of occupants and the relationship of IEQs amongst themselves is quite complex (Al horr et al. 2016). IEQ has an effect not only on comfort but also on well-being, health, and productivity (Kakoulli et al. 2022). Even though optimum comfort is subjective, and the criteria for achieving it varies from person to person and culture to culture, these criteria are all interlinked and share basic environmental factors (Fantozzi & Rocca 2020).



The relation of IEQ criteria to human comfort (based on Fantozzi & Rocca 2020)

The recent studies include the fifth component – *biophilic* comfort. Biophilia refers to our innate tendency to connect with the nature around us and is related more to mental health. Psychologists Rachel & Stephen Kaplan (1989) suggested the theory that nature can provide a restorative effect on attention after mental fatigue. Known as the biophilia hypothesis, Kaplan’s theory suggests that the tendency of humans to focus on and affiliate with nature is genetic. However, green building designs don’t automatically guarantee that the building designed will be comfortable and ensure occupant well-being (Al horr et al. 2016).

Increasing global temperature will affect billions of people around the world and humans will be pushed out from their thermal comfort zones (Xu et al. 2020). In regions with temperate climates, the thermal insulation of buildings is increased to reduce the need for heating (in cold periods). It might significantly reduce human thermal comfort in the summer period (Ferdyn-Grygierek et al. 2021). Therefore, climate change demands for increasingly high-performance buildings have led to the research of new strategies to mitigate energy consumption and environmental impact. The comfort simulation methods based on easily accessible numerical simulation tools of the built environment are becoming more popular (Fantozzi & Rocca 2020). Moreover, biophilic designs are strongly related to climate change mitigation and adaptation in urban environments (Africa et al. 2019).

The Main Idea and Method of Research

My hypothesis was that people who experience suitable IEQ conditions and feel comfortable and secure at their living and working places have a higher ability to take care of themselves and are more connected to nature, to develop higher compassion to environmental problems. It is based on Maslow’s theory (1943) that first people need to support their fundamental needs and later could have a possibility and inspiration for self-expression, creation, compassion, etc.

Therefore, I decided to take a few interviews with participants of the *Common Ground* (CG) project. I was asking questions about the importance of individual (physiological) comfort and IEQ in daily life the personal relation and connectivity to nature and the importance of environmental crisis and climate change from personal to other perspectives (e.g. as an artist).

The very first interviews were taken in Palanga (coastal part of Lithuania) in September 2021 during CG pre-project workshop activity with students of EHU (European Humanities University) which is situated in Vilnius (Lithuania). It was a great opportunity to meet, share and talk about the ideas with Byelorussian and Russian students. The rest of the interviews were taken in Reykjavik (Iceland) in December 2021 during the first residency of our project. It was a great opportunity to talk personally with the members of our team and to know them better. In general, I collected 23 interviews from all the participating countries and even more. All the interviews were recorded using the *HDD Everio* camera (model GZ-MG155E, JVC). I tried to record the majority of the interviews by filming (12), however, for some of the interviews only voice was recorded (11).

A Small Experiment in Torun

During CG residency at the Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu*, Toruń, Poland in May 2022, we have *ClimateFresk* workshop with the artists. *ClimateFresk* is a powerful tool for providing quality climate education. It proposes a collaborative serious game based on 42 cards and putting them in the right sequence to understand the climate change process (Fiore, 2022). Within the workshop, I was measuring environmental parameters: air and global (operative) temperate, and air humidity. I was using a *Heat Stress meter* (model HT30, Extech instruments). It was quite warm inside our room with a slight discomfort condition for the activities. Other IEQ parameters such as noise, illumination, and air quality was okay.



Common Ground members in *ClimateFresk* workshop, Torun, May 2022 (photos by: Kristín Reynisdóttir & Paulina Kuhn)

In the very process, I asked a few participants to share about perceived temperature and thermal comfort during the activity. The perception of the temperature among participants was very accurate. The range of answers was between 22 to 24 °C. They said that it was warm, but they were okay with the temperature. Only one participant said that it is 28 °C because it felt very hot. Usually, engagement in some activities weakens the demand on physiological comfort, even though it was too warm, the attention was focused on the creative process. According to McGilchrist (2012), attention’s ontological status precedes cognitive functions.

Time of the measurement (AM)	Air temperature, °C	Global temperature, °C	Air humidity, %
9:05 (the beginning)	24.4	24.7	42
9:30	23.2	22.9	44
9:45	23.5	22.9	45
10:00	23.6	23.4	46
10:30 (the end)	23.7	23.5	46

Personal (Physical) Comfort

“Of course it is important” was the main answer to the question about personal (physical) comfort, because we exist in the physical world, and sensing it makes us humans. However, most of the time we take it as a natural, pre-existing state and not paying attention to the thermal, air quality, acoustic, and visual environments then it is within its comfort zone. Contrary, then the limits of comfort are crossed; it starts to disturb you more and more intensively. I liked the idea/suggestion of one of us that we could focus and understand more about comfort and it could make us more connected to the environment. Even Aristotle studied the common aspects of the physiological processes at the basis of attention (Fieconi 2021).

“Physical well-being is like an addiction.” – Alexandra R.

Another important aspect that emerged from the interviews was that comfort is not only about you, it is about how others could feel comfortable too – people, nature, and even non-living objects (sofa on which you are sitting). In general, the importance of comfort could be understood very individually and it is very difficult to change when we are used to a certain level of it. At the moment we are really too much into comfort and should we become less?



The snapshots of the interviews in Palanga, September 2021 and Reykjavík, December 2021 (camera by: Justas Kazys)

“I could live without comfort, but without nature - no.” – Nadezhda

Not surprisingly, nature was one of the biggest stimuli responsible for personal comfort. People really needed nature to relax, to come down, to refill their energy resources. The ability of nature to be a source of psychological and emotional comfort and, at the same time, to secure physical comfort is overwhelming. And it seems that with age the importance of it only grows.

“It is okay to be in your comfort zone, but it is most important to make it bigger and bigger.” – Ragga

I found that the state of comfort could be a good position to start acting, because the basic needs are satisfied and you can include creativity, compassion, etc. However, some answers gave another opinion: only then you are outside your comfort zone (by personal choice or because of circumstances) you are forced to act. I think the real thing lies in between these extremes. Most important – not to be stagnating or overacting, but slowly explore and expand the limits of your physical comfort.

Connectivity to Nature

Nature comforts us, as we have found in the previous section. But what about individual connectivity to and perception of nature? Again, it seems very individual. Are we connected or just thinking that we are? On one hand, it is obvious that connectivity exists everywhere and with everything. The cities with trash, noise, and polluted air are no longer attractive. Therefore, we are seeking shelter and relaxation in nature. On the other hand, only some things are connecting us, but not a lot. We are picking ‘the best suited’ nature pieces for us, but the bigger picture stays undercover. I like the idea of Wamsler et al. (2017) that mindfulness could be a way for reaching connectivity to nature on both scales: individual and global.

“Everything is connected to each over. We are one living form.” – Maciek

Not so rarely the connectivity was reached with a reflection of the past, and perceived via memories of childhood, parents’ house, garden, woods, and local landscapes. It seems that the roots of this connectivity were strongly related to cozy and safe places. Nature becomes very localized and is seen from a narrow point of view. However, it still could be fairly enough during the rest of life to perceive nature with increasing interest and connectivity.

“Even simple feeling about the park with a concrete path instead of having ground on it. And all these kinds of small things are already making a distance.” – Julija

It seems that nature is only what is beautiful and comfortable. While interviewing and communicating with CG artists from Iceland I felt that their perception of and respect for nature has a different, wider point of view. However, for some of the persons, the perception of nature was shifted during our visit to Iceland (previous visits to other countries). It opened new ways to see and understand nature. (We discussed with Maria that it could be bigger research on it, but so far it didn’t happen.) And the shift could be very big, for example, what I have learned from chatting with Wiola. She told that her connectivity to nature was strong from childhood, but mostly related to living nature such as animals, and plants. She always had a feeling of controlling it. Iceland opened another part – non-living nature (rocks, volcanos, weather) which now was not possible to control.

“Nature has an effect more on my way of thinking. I am not working on nature; nature is working on me.” – Pétur

What are we lacking for higher connectivity to nature? I have collected different thoughts. Sometimes you just need to ask, because people are kind and they do not refuse to help. Also, people should want and reach for it, without that, it wouldn’t work. And this willingness could be reached by developing the ability to know and to learn more about the importance of relation and nature in general. Not surprisingly, some see art as a possibility to get closer to nature through artworks, which is not imperatively related to nature but, awaken sensual perception of environments. I appreciate this attitude a lot.

Climate Crisis and Common Ground

I like it as continuous thought – it is essential to understand that we are not alone on this planet and some species were living in the same locations much longer than we do. It reminded me of one small step (illustrating humankind’s history) compared to 4.6 kilometers distance walk (which represented the whole history of Earth). We had this experience with our CG group using the *Deep Time Walk* app during Palanga (Coastal part of Lithuania) residency in September 2022.



Common Ground members in Deep Time Walk activity, Palanga, September 2022 (photos by: Paulina Kuhn)

“This is very unfair. We have been here for a very short time compared to the animals who have been living here for hundreds of years.” – Anna Sigga

As I learned from the interviews humans get used too much for comfortability and technological progress during the last two hundred years. Nature should be closer to us and the way to reach it is by developing self-consciousness. Otherwise, within 50 years, we could lose the human climate niche (Xu et al. 2020). Environmentally friendly technologies could be a good tool, but firstly we need to listen to people – they could show us the right way to act.

“The landscape changed completely. I would like to make people conscious about the problem.” – Sylwia

I heard from the interviews, is that the current environmental situation in the world makes us sad, worried, and, even ashamed of it. It became very dangerous and it scares us a lot, it is paradoxical, but this danger comes mostly from humans. The ideas which entered were that some push-on is needed for humans and it could be reached step by step showing how much nature and green spaces could be beneficial for us. Referring to Wiola’s words: we need people who are *fighters with empathy*.

“This makes me sad. We could be living in a different kind of world if not for our ego.” – Živilė

It was surprising, by myself and from the interviews, to find that even in such a small community of CG we are not *common grounded* at all. It looked like more fluid (not stable and always changing) ground. It is how we felt during our residencies and meetings. We were just a small reflection of the world situation, where everything is based on political decisions, not on human needs. On the one hand, we could choose to protect the environment. On the other hand, we could use and consume nature as much as we want. However, I felt huge climate crisis awareness among our team which became (will become) actions and it was a magnificent achievement of *Common Ground*.

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UPROOTING ON COMMON GROUND. A FEW OBSERVATIONS WHILE WANDERING IN AN EVER-FASTER WORLD

Evelina Januškaitė

In recent decades, Europe has faced the biggest migration challenges since the Second World War. These have been exacerbated by the ongoing refugee crises and the fierce war in Ukraine, which have sown anxiety, insecurity, and the fragility of the home as a physical place. Human rights issues are also sensitive in the Lithuanian discourse: the Lithuanian society, which is becoming richer in races, nationalities, and origins, is still in the process of developing a sustainable socium. In the face of humanity’s contingencies, community ties are breaking down, leading to social and cultural problems. Therefore, the international cooperation project *Common Ground*” which started a few years ago, has very aptly predicted these ripe social sores and has allowed for the actualization and artistic consideration of their issues.

The themes of social discourse – the challenges of migration, the interactions between different cultures, and the integration of national minorities and local communities – highlighted the need for mutual harmony and the creation of a microclimate that is favorable to all. In the face of ecological, economic, environmental, and forced displacement crises, the “common ground” was eager to be revised to reflect the turbulent situation in this ever-changing, ever-accelerating, and unstable world.

Project *Common Ground*’s first exhibition in Reykjavík – *Where Is My Home?* raised the fundamental question of the need for a place where we feel at home, bringing to the fore the common human aspect of identification with the living environment, where the concept of home has expanded thanks to the free and intensive movement around the world. In response to the large number of foreigners living in their country (in Iceland, by the way, the largest immigrant population is of Polish nationality, with Lithuanians in third place), the authors and initiators of this project are questioning the state of being “suspended” between being *native* and being a *stranger*.

The exhibition *No Man’s Land* that the project presented in Toruń (Poland) updated the concepts of “mine” and “not mine”, which are so entrenched in today’s world, to reconsider what “common” means today. Referring to the migration-induced shift from one’s own place to another, the Polish philosopher Tomasz S. Markiewka noted that this division is due to the capitalist

phenomenon of “ownership”, while the nomadic nature of the land from time immemorial has allowed it to be perceived as nobody’s land and everybody’s land at once, living in harmony not only with humans but also with other species.

Following on from the recent discussions, the final group exhibition of the project participants’ *[up]rooting*, held at the Arka Gallery in Vilnius (Lithuania), spoke about relocation as a processual action. About location that is not necessarily defined by fixed area coordinates but rather functions as a site of a present state of being and experience. What one’s location refers to is one’s own autonomous and individual experience, which can be relocated each time and still not lose that sense of “self”. The term *uprooting* can refer to both an indigenization (“putting down roots”), an un-indigenization (“moving elsewhere”), and even a displacement (“forced eviction”), and thus to the repetition of these sensations in any place in the world.

The Lithuanian part of the project was divided into two parts – a residency in the town of Palanga (the Western part of the country), held in September, and a final exhibition and accompanying program in Vilnius, held from December to January. This format differed from the structure of the project in the other partner countries, where exhibitions were held immediately after the residency and in the same locations. In Lithuania, the research part and its visual presentation were separated by a considerable time distance, which allowed to mature the ideas of the artistic explorations to turn into a solid and large-scale exhibition. This spontaneous temporal distance made the outlines of the project take on a sharper shape, while at the same time, it was an opportunity for the project participants to come together once again from different corners of Europe.

The exhibition was accompanied by an open discussion seminar *Common Ground. Common Roots*, as well as an exhibition of documentation and experimental process recordings of the project. Here, the opening even included two performances by the artists: a vocal performance by Sylwia Górak (PL) and a performance by Marija Griniuk (LT/DK) entitled *A Reflective Dance with the Earth*, with the participation of artists Kaspar Aus and Lilija Gotautaitė-Smalinskė.

The exposition invited us to think about the search for a place to establish oneself and about the fact that the notion of “land” includes a physical place that one occupies and the relationship to the land that is important to Lithuanian consciousness, i.e. soil where something is sown, something is sprouting and growing (ground) – and also, the earth as a planet for humans, which reminds us that each unique medium of life is at the same time a global entity and a co-dependent organism (the word *Plantae*, which is the Latin name of the plant kingdom, is an anagram of the Lithuanian and Polish word *planeta* for the planet!).

The exhibition *[up]rooting* featured works by all the participants in the project, almost all of them newly created for this particular exhibition space, developing the artistic research that has been ongoing throughout the project, sometimes integrating elements of previous exhibitions as symbols of this continuity and repetition, thus highlighting the artists’ nomadic and constantly searching mode of being. Architect Darius Baliukevičius, who shaped the architecture of the exhibition, has dispersed the exhibits over 7 separate, yet spatially and conceptually connected spaces of the Arka Gallery. The concept of connections was highlighted by a red cord symbolizing dialogue, which, like an artery, transmitted communication and scattered it between the works of different authors. The inspiration for the idea came from one of the artists, Živilė Minkutė’s artwork titled *A Friend*, which, as a functional electricity “divider”, connected and enabled the works of other artists that required electricity. Such “sharing” of energy, both physically and conceptually, summed up the main findings of the “Common Ground” project – the connections between people,

creativity, and the world. The artworks in the exhibition were not divided by country but rather functioned as empowered hunches, communicative subjects connected to each other by invisible links, embedded in specific zones, installed in different materials, but speaking the same artistic language that charges reality.

Briefly recalling the Lithuanian section of the project and his roots in the exhibition, Andrius Grigalaitis presented a collection of photographs capturing the early morning, when the ground is shrouded in fog or mist when the land is just waking up and is at its most mysterious. It is not for nothing that in mythology and folklore this time of day marks a liminal state, the unknown, a transformation, when magical events take place, heralding a transformation. Exploring these feelings in different locations in Lithuania, Poland, and Iceland, Grigalaitis has created a mystified visual space, using photographs to capture such ephemeral feelings of change that arise from the autonomous and unique experience of a particular site.

Marija Griniuk’s paintings, video works, and performances reflect on the reasons why we tend to wander and thus turn the places that we visit on our travels into our temporary homes. Thanks to our attachment to these temporary places, we develop multiple and changing notions of home, which is subjective for everyone and depends on overlapping experiences of reality.

Solveiga Gutautė presented provocative installations about human relationships and communication. Referring to the lack of human communication and tactility during the quarantine period, the author started artistic research about sharing oneself at the very beginning of the project. This is not only in a conceptual sense – to share ideas, memories, or thoughts – but also in a physical form: to share a strand of one’s real hair. Dedicating her work to the inspiration that comes from the relationship with other people, Gutautė collected not only the recordings of her colleagues’ lived stories, but also the body parts that grew out of them and were seemingly separated (cut off), and wove them into her real hair. The artist wore this braid for almost half a year until it naturally slipped off – this storehouse of relational experiences was automatically detached from the author of the idea as if reminding us that each individual in our lives is only a fellow traveler.

Julija Pociūtė was also interested in collaboration as a creative experience. Her installation *Monuments of Momentary Connection* explored the relationship with the places she explored and experienced and her own relationship with them. Creating a fragile and often intuitive distance between the real and the artificial, between humans and nature, and between nature and culture, she emphasized the harmony between the social and the natural worlds, with the challenges of sustainability constantly revisited as an everyday reality influenced by processes. In another space, her video work on a tree that she accidentally spotted in Kaunas’ Oak Park, in whose hollow she found a magical teeming microcosm. It became in her artwork a meditative, self-sustainable, and processual structure of life, full of dusty or pollen-strewn networks, testifying to the harmony of nature and to the power of humans to influence its natural cycles.

Tomas Andrijauskas revisited the concept of a common ground through the metaphor of a continuous journey. His video work shows a rapidly changing landscape that dissects the viewer’s gaze and does not allow one to concretize where this place is. It asks the question of where and when we are traveling – are we returning home, are we going along unknown roads, are we leaving something behind or are we going to someone who is waiting for us? What is the direction of this journey? Looking through a window representing endless movement as a symbol of a screen overflowing with images, we cannot answer when this visual present is, or when the journey begins and ends, and it starts to appear that our whole life is one continuous rush along the roads that connect *here and now* with *there and then*.

Živilė Minkutė assembles her artwork from stones collected in the places she visits, which are like scrolls and cracks in time, the convergence of the past into the future through the present, the interaction of the living and the inanimate, the organic and the artificial. Each stone is a splinter of a past reality, accumulating the (in)continuity of time. In Živilė's installation, it creates an impression of lightness, where the objects take on aspects of balance and surprise in their interaction with each other and with their environment. The rotating objects in this installation cast a shadow over another work by Živilė, which she made in Iceland, and which has traveled through all the exhibitions, becoming, from different angles, an integral part of the exhibition space, a small disturbance that absorbed the subjective experiences of the different locations and the variations of their modes of performance.

The sustained dialogue between artists from the three countries, which was raised as one of the project's objectives in the first place, ultimately showed that the main goal and the result achieved are connections: between people, nature, environment, and ideas. It is a communication that creates coexistence, an opportunity to communicate, travel, discuss, know, to experience space and time. It is a place not only around us but also in our consciousness, to preserve and cultivate these connections. It is as if you were constantly transplanting – in other words, rooting – the plants that have “grown” within the boundaries of your space. It is not a project about a location but about the relational formation of a place on our own, based on connections.

ARTISTS ABOUT THEIR WORKS

Sylwia Górak

Of the works I have produced for the *Common Ground* project, the combination of an oil painting and a sound installation matters most to me. In my art, I tend to refer to synesthesia, making colours and sounds into a logical and essential whole. I am well acquainted with the concept of “hearing colours”.

Painting ~ *LUNAR CALENDAR* ~, creators: SYLWIA GÓRAK / AURORA BOREALIS

(oil on canvas, 2022) is an outcome of my encounter with Aurora Borealis when I was a resident artist in Iceland. Through it I comment on the relative and interactive nature of visibility, and it is for this reason that I made Aurora its co-creator. The lunar calendar indicates the position of the Moon each night in a lunar month, and implies the feminine character of the process of measuring time in relation to fertility cycles. The passive house and the Tesla vehicle are ultra-eco versions of inhabiting the future.

Audio work ~ *SONGS FROM MY LITTLE HOMELAND* ~

I invited an artist from Lithuania and one from Ukraine to sing folk songs from the Vilnius and Kharkiv regions. The recording opens with my rendering of a traditional Kurpie song arranged by Karol Szymanowski and another song from the borderlands between Poland and Ukraine. Traditional folk singing is a form of international exchange of emotions, vibrations and melodies.

As a whole, the work is an expression of my reflections on the ways in which we inhabit the Earth in terms of ecology and the mixing of cultures so typical of our times.



Sylwia Górak's works from exhibition *No Man's Land: Lunar Calendar*, oil on canvas, 2022 and *Songs from my little Homeland*, audio work, 2022; photo: Adam Antoniuk

Magda Węgrzyn

Common Ground. Where Is My Home? is an international project devoted to the idea of home in the context of migration.

The work titled *A Thousand Journeys* is one of the works created in this context, and it is also part of NAR, or Nienaszów Artists Residency, a project I have initiated; it contains the pieces I have created in connection with the village of Nienaszów (where I grew up and would like to start an artists residency in future). *A Thousand Journeys* relates the story of my mother's personal history of travelling (from the 1990s till now). Again and again, she would travel from Poland to Germany where she worked to maintain her family, improve the living conditions of her adolescent children and to build "a house of her dreams" which, despite all her efforts, was never finished. The title of my work was inspired by the book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. In the broad sense, the work aims to cast light on the phenomenon of migrating abroad in search of a better future.

She mostly travelled by bus, equipped (as many other Polish women were) with a large checkered black-and-white-and-red plastic bags full of goods bought abroad. In them mother brought home things which Germans discarded or sold for next to nothing.

From conversations with my Ukrainian friends I know that Ukrainian women who came to work in Poland also used such bags. Then, after the outbreak of the war, migrants that came here in great numbers carried whatever they still had in similar bags.

The work displayed at the exhibition in Iceland is a large-format printout in which the check similar to the pattern on the bag was superimposed on the design of my mother's house that was never built (where an outbuilding was to be). The installation which looks like a sheet dropped by the wind falls down freely to the floor, succumbing to gravity. The fabric hangs loosely, taking a tent-like form. This composition is a visual metaphor of my mother's dream which was never fulfilled, while the design of the house mixed with the check of the bag is a petrification of two apparently distant signs.

Sylvia Urbańska writes: "The structural foundation that made women leave their homes tends to be forgotten. But economic problems and deprivation are only one position on the long blacklist of reasons for departures. It is scarcely pointed out that many women had to travel because they received no protection from the state against domestic violence and no help in securing maintenance from their ex-husbands. The cost of transformation was paid first of all by women working in industry and agriculture, from the countryside, small towns and peripheral regions of Poland, young and old, mothers – chiefly single mothers of many children, but also women taking care of older or sick family members. Going abroad was, and still is, a strategy of survival for these women, the survival of their families. Quite a few of them went abroad for the first time at the beginning of the transformation as it affects women in a unique way, causing feminisation of poverty."

Now that many years have past I still find myself wondering whether my mother's decision to emigrate was the right one to take.



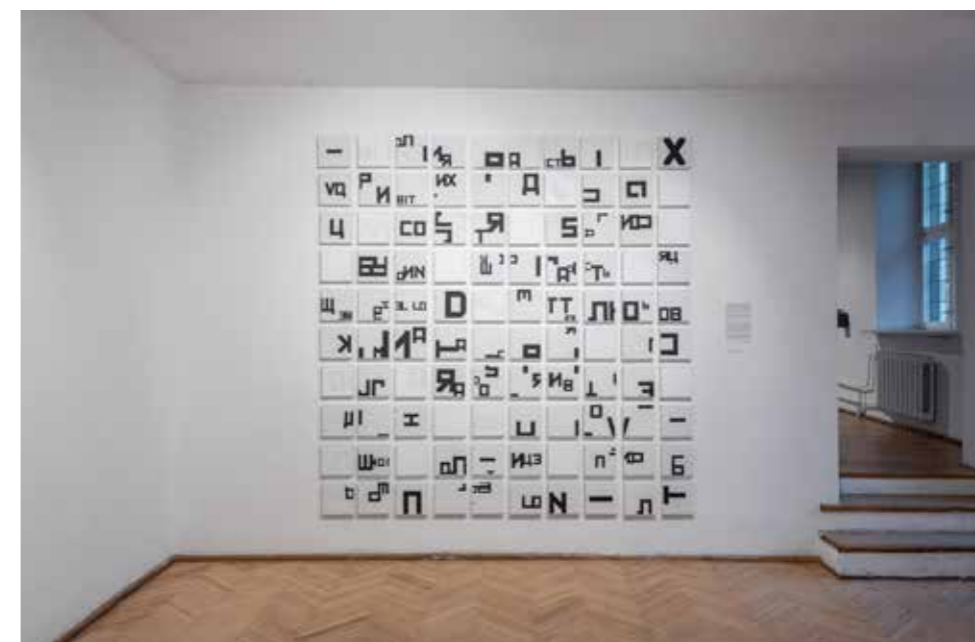
Magda Węgrzyn, *A Thousand Journeys*, 2021, mixed media, photo: Maciej Kwietnicki

Joanna Małecka

Joanna Małecka, Magda Węgrzyn

Title: *Noise of Common Ground/NoCG*

The piece NOCG speaks of intercultural communication in contemporary societies in the aftermath of Russian invasion of Ukraine. Following the outbreak of war, 5.7 million refugees arrived in Poland, and now the Polish and Ukrainian nations share the space they live in. This proximity in interpersonal relations has made it possible to learn each other's cultural codes. Common ground means that diversity and otherness, but also similarities and ties, have become evident, teaching us a valuable lesson about sensitivity and ways of establishing successful communication. Cultural differences are now part of our daily lives also at the linguistic level. Each nation speaks a different language, each uses a different alphabet. Cyrillic is used to write in the Ukrainian language, while Polish uses the Latin alphabet. This is the context of the work which depicts the communication barrier in the form of distorted letters seen in various public spaces, placed against a contrasting background. They constitute, in a way, a symbol of cultural adaptation which provides a platform for dialogue based on tolerance and respect, understanding, acceptance and coexistence. Using letters from different alphabets, the work is a symbolic representation of multicultural common ground; influencing one another, the letters create an exceptional area of abstract multi-ethnic noise. Blending cultures through social contact enables encounter and exchange, leading to dialogue. The relationships between Poland and Ukraine have had their ups and downs and included friendly exchange and cooperation as well as troublesome historical events marked by hurt and prejudice. In the work, painful occurrences, bias and misunderstanding in the communication between both social groups are represented by white empty canvases devoid of abstract graphic signs of which letters are made. All sorts of disturbances in the communication between the ethnic groups gave rise to the work *Noise of Common Ground*, showing the present joint effort to establish intercultural space as a valuable social phenomenon.



Joanna Małecka and Magda Węgrzyn, *Noise of Common Ground/NoCG*, 2022, mixed media, photo: Lukas Mykolaitis



Andrii Dostliev

When the topic of the exhibition in Toruń – *No Man's Land* – was announced it suddenly hit me right in the spot which was not at all intended by the curators. It was the spring of 2022 and the war in my homeland was raging on at a totally new level of intensity. The Russian vision of Ukraine as no man's land was exactly what both the Ukrainian army was fighting against on a very physical level at battlefields and Ukrainian intellectuals were struggling to dismantle within the established discourses in Western societies. This conceptual perception of Ukraine as a territory without agency, as a pure landmass that just lay there waiting for the first one to claim it, had many deeply grown roots. Unchallenged Western gaze onto Eastern Europe did a lot to nurture them but the primary reasons for such perception were the centuries-long colonial erasure of Ukrainian culture by the Russian state, regardless of the title it used to go under.

I started out with a seemingly not-that-important episode of the ongoing Russian invasion. Before the Russian army retreated from Novyi Bykiv, a village some 100 kilometres east of Kyiv, their soldiers who were stationed in a local school had covered the portraits of Ukrainian writers with yellow spray paint. This minor act of vandalism was nothing in comparison with all the atrocities they were (and still are) committing all over the occupied Ukrainian territories – and yet this symbolic gesture fit perfectly into the pattern of the centuries-long Russian attempts to destroy Ukrainian culture.

In my still ongoing series of works, I appropriate their hostile gesture and use it to create a gallery of portraits of women and men who could have become prominent cultural actors but instead became victims of imperialistic violence and could not make it into the Ukrainian culture's "hall of fame". It is too late to undo that damage but at least in this way I can outline the void created by the empire and use it to undermine the vision of Ukraine as a no man's land.

Wiola Ujazdowska

In my opinion, two works, *Wicek the Border Guard II* and *Banner of Support*, are of relevance to the *Common Ground* project as they combine quite a few different subjects, such as my background and the context in which I grew up, with some current migration-related issues.

I grew up in Włocławek, a city 50 kilometres away from Toruń, famous for its dam, the transformation of an old market square, once full of flower beds, into a square paved with concrete slabs, and faience. The faience factory reached its heyday in the Polish People's Republic, employing several hundred people. The plant then collapsed in the aftermath of the systemic transformation, only to be reborn as a small private company. Since 2020, I have been working on a project called *Women from the Faience Factory*, relating stories of women working in the plant and of the disappearing city. Sometimes I paint at the factory, in the room where faience is decorated, usually transferring these stories onto plates as well as the vases popularly known as *wicki*. *Wicki* were originally designed for the Włocławek plant in the Polish People's Republic, and they are still given as awards, retirement gifts, or at other special occasions. The form itself is fairly useless – a *wicek* does not make a good container and is strongly reminiscent of an urn for a dead person's ashes. Its elongated shape references a post and, in the light of the current state of geopolitical affairs and public narratives, the word 'post' immediately brings the word 'border' to mind.

And so, *Wicek the Border Guard* is a post – a fragile representative symbol. Pottery is brittle, therefore the positioning of the vase by the door creates tension, just like the tension at the border.

Wicek the Border Guard II shows the remarkable degree of hypocrisy about the situation at Poland's eastern border – part of it is protected by a fence with barbed wire on top, and part is open, but only for some. I painted barbed wire on the vase with the help of a faience painter named Joasia; there is a border crossing on one side of it which looks like a table. The crossing is narrow and, just as we invite to our table only those who are like us, only those who meet the criteria established by the officials and the system are allowed through.

Banner of Support has been sewn together from vests worn by volunteers at the Polish-Ukrainian border. This is my acknowledgement of their efforts and homage to all the people who remind us of how important our solidarity with the Ukrainian nation is today.



Wiola Ujazdowska, *Banner of Support*, 2022, fabric made of vests of volunteers from the Polish-Ukrainian border, photo: Adam Antoniuk

Wiola Ujazdowska, *Wicek the Border Guard II*, 2022, ceramics, photo: Adam Antoniuk

Maciek Kwietnicki, *Internal Connections*, 2022, site specific installation



Maciek Kwietnicki

I see the *Common Ground* project as a huge scope of statements made by artists from all over Europe, addressing the problem of migration and its various aspects from the perspective of human and non-human beings. It's given me the opportunity to hear stories of a great many people, their journeys, efforts to assimilate, and the will to succeed in a new environment. Works produced in particular countries, although autonomous, form a coherent account of different groups of issues people who were forced to leave their homeland or did so of their own free will have to tackle.

Homesick references the situation on the border between Poland and Belarus which hasn't changed since 2021. Thousands of migrants risk their lives as they escape from war and violence to find a place to call home. Their chances of getting a legal resident status in any of the European Union countries are virtually nil, therefore they decide to venture across the swamplands and forests that stretch along the border which, for many of them, prove a death trap. The aim of the work was to present the problem to the Icelandic audience and to suggest possible ways of support to organisations saving the lives of migrants.

Displayed at CoCA Toruń, *Internal Connections* constitute a metaphor for the situation of immigrants who meet new people with similar experiences and begin to develop connections. As times goes by and connections grow in numbers, a self-help network may emerge, like a safety net. But there are no rules here – some networks of internal connections are dense and truly effective, others give the illusion of safety.

Produced in Vilnius, *Ceiling* closes the triptych made as part of the *Common Ground* project. It addresses the so-called glass ceiling migrants and refugees hit. Glass ceiling is a metaphor for an invisible barrier, unjustified by any legal rules or rational reasons, a cultural impediment stopping members of minorities from professional growth. This phenomenon is well known in relation to women earning less than men in the same positions, but it also greatly affects immigrants and refugees.

Maciej Kwietnicki, *Homesick*, 2021, photo art installation



Maciej Kwietnicki, *Ceiling*, 2022, installation



Ala Savashevich, *Ustyluh*, 2022, printing, mesh, mouline, photo: Adam Antoniuk



Ala Savashevich

I showed my work called *Ustyluh* at the *No Man's Land* exhibition, staged by CoCA Toruń within the framework of the *Common Ground* project, in 2022, a year that brought us global changes. For some it was a time of sadness – they were forced to leave home in search of somewhere safe to live.

The title of the project resounded with force as it restated the question of what *Common Ground* actually meant to us – a common platform / space? Are all truly united by this concept? In a globalised world, we wish to appropriate and assimilate it at the expense of human effort and life, even if the war doesn't affect us directly, even if we find it hard to believe in this war.

When the war broke out in Ukraine, I wasn't the only one in shock, the only one paralysed by what was happening today. I use the word "today" because the war is still waged. I keep asking my close ones: "How are you doing, is everybody fine?" And I keep hearing their replies: "It was terrifying today, we stayed in hiding. I was in shock. How about you?" The last question always brings me back to reality, to the life here and the life that is not that far away – there."

My work *Ustyluh* is about embroidering – it takes time, patience, and strength. I embroider the colour of the sky to restore it, to make it look natural again, to sew together what is disturbing the balance of perception.

I only wonder how much time this is going to take, how much sorrow and death does it take to stop this?

Ala Savashevich

Ustyluh"

2022

print, mesh, thread

"It's fine. I've got used to the fact that I can't go home. How about you?" These words were spoken by a friend of mine, Lera, depicted in the photograph. She is staying in a village near the Ukrainian-Polish border. In my work, I try to restore the original colour of the sky, to make it look natural again, to sew together what is disturbing the balance of perception. The embroidery process takes time, patience and strength, and so do the processes we observe today.

Photograph courtesy of Lera Brumina.

Solveiga Gutaute

All the people that are around you, inspire you. Do you agree? During quarantine, I didn't feel any human presence for a long time and it made me sad. I understood the importance of sharing your ideas with others. A short conversation can inspire you to change something in your life. Most of the time inspiration comes from strangers rather than your friends. I call it collaboration. Another part of my project is hair. In mythology, history and in Lithuanian mythology hair represents power, energy. I've asked people around me to share their hair strands with me. They gave me them. I am very grateful for it. I'm very inspired that they were so open to me. It was a very delicate and intimate act to share a part of their body with me. I had been wearing it for a half year till the moment the dread fell off. Without a special goodbye.



Solveiga Gutaute, *Impact*, 2021–2022, human, hair, feelings, photo: Adam Antoniuk

Julija Pociūtė

The series of artwork *Monuments of momental connection* created during the *Common Ground* project is based on my interest in various ways of experienced and inexperienced connection with nature and the inner self. A way to connect with nature and feel the layers of human and non-human reality, rethinking its relationships. In the Iceland during volcano walk there was personally collected organic objects where was established an intuitive relationship between human and non-human material. This short interconnection part as the very sensitive and short moment reveals to me the possibility to get closer to the understanding of how we can perceive the environment and ourselves in a more harmonious way at the moment. The objects and the action of their collection become the background for discussion about an experienced and inexperienced connection with nature and inner self. During the project, there were issues with the coronavirus and started the war in Ukraine, so the overall theme of the project took on a more sensitive content in response to these events. As a result, the installation unfolded by artworks *Prayer Flags* and *Map*, questioning today's situation in transformation from ongoing ecological challenges that face humanity today to the topic of the war. This war situation caused the increasing national security budgets of countries globally and at the same time ecological problems were set on pause. The increased security budgets lessened possibilities to collaborate for the global solving of ecology problems. The project, in my mind, is relevant because of the currently important interconnectedness, and the opportunity to connect and reflect on the common ground we share today.

Julija Pociūtė, *Monuments of Momental Connection*, 2021, archival pigment print on Hahnemuhle paper, frame, photo: Adam Antoniuk
Julija Pociūtė, *Prayer Flags*, 2022, rope, textile, wood, photo: Adam Antoniuk
Julija Pociūtė, *Map*, 2022, vintage chart paper, pencil, photo: Adam Antoniuk



Tomas Andrijauskas

Between Moments

2021

Foto/video/audio

The audiovisual installation *Between Moments* is about the fact that we don't notice small things in pursuit of big goals. That spontaneity and simple life action is a real art scene. It is an interpretation of longing for the home and the present.

I value experimentation and coincidence, therefore I prefer old-school photo and video equipment. Recently, I've started working by scattering chemicals on photo paper, using specially prepared mixtures to physically damage it, creating abstract graphic images in the process, that are then turned into video loops. I want to immerse myself in subconscious states / moods / flows with the help of abstractions, where the sound becomes the most important part of the piece.

In my opinion, the main value of *Common Ground* is a simple, human conversation between creative people, where the art field becomes a space for discussion.

Andrius Grigalaitis

"By collecting the places where mist is born and capturing its essence, I create spatial installations that encourage the discovery of common threads that unite us, regardless of origin or personal experience. The presence of mist, with its ethereal and ever-changing nature, allows us to transcend the boundaries of language and emotionally experience the transformative power of nature.

As we walk through the mist, we encounter entirely different landmarks, silhouettes that emerge and unfamiliar objects. Mist brings back the sense of the unknown to us. The unknown becomes recognition or acquaintance."



Marija Griniuk

Reflexive painting captures the essence of being in the present moment, where colors are touched and images are created as immediate feedback from thoughts in real-time. It is a form of expression that, akin to words, communicates thoughts and experiences through paint. As I revisit my video, *The Opposites*, I approach it with a profound love for every human life and a reflection-in-action mindset.

As I engage in the act of painting, I carry with me the experiences accumulated over the past twelve years—a journey through art education, encounters with the diverse cultures of the Nordic and Baltic countries, and interactions with people of different languages and backgrounds. These collective experiences shape my artistic expression. Within these worlds, I firmly believe that coexistence is possible, free from the emergence of opposites. I envision a future where heres and theres, multiplicities of perspectives, can harmoniously coexist without the need for opposition.

Over the past year, my understanding of *Common Ground* has evolved into *Pluriversal Common Ground* – a concept that embraces the idea of multiple worlds coexisting. It is a vision rooted in hope, seeking a world where opposites dissolve and the notion of an “OTHER” becomes obsolete. The Pluriverse represents a reality where many worlds can coexist harmoniously, where we exist not as beings who leave, arrive, or migrate, but as beings who continuously evolve and embrace our shared existence.

In this realm of interconnectedness, I aspire to contribute to the unfolding of a *Pluriversal Common Ground* through my reflexive paintings. By embracing the present moment, the colors I touch, and the images I create, I aim to evoke a sense of unity and interconnectedness among individuals, transcending borders, boundaries, and differences.

Together, let us embark on this journey of becoming, where the Pluriverse thrives, and the interconnectedness of our shared humanity prevails.



Kristín Reynisdóttir

Balance III, installation, 2022

In Arka Gallery in Vilnius, Lithuania

It was inspiring to spend time in each country with the participants of *Common Ground* and consider the meaning and understanding of how the theme reflects the perception of “home” from different perspectives.

I made three different installations for the three different exhibitions in the three different countries.

Balance I was exhibited in Iceland. It is a house, an indication of a greenhouse with each corner tilted on a ball. Like sitting on four global earths or balloons – floating on the ocean. The Global warming has changed borders and affected human living and habitat. Many have lost their homes, their shelters and have been forced to break their roots. With the access of the internet it is easy to know what is happening all around the globe. It is easy as well to not be present when at home.

Balance II was made for the exhibition in Poland. The starting point was from chaos to a rule, an inspiration from the geometrical forms of plants and flowers, the affect that pattern has on our minds as opposed to the destruction and cruelty of war.

The installation *Balance III* referred to instability. An orange neon coloured cloth was hanging from the ceiling and flowed down onto the floor. At eye level I cut out the form of an arrow in the cloth, a form that can also be perceived as a house. The colour and the material of the cloth is the same as in life jackets. The arrow falls down and the opening shows a world of circle-shaped mirrors, the eternal form, and roots of different plants and trees. The roots were shadow casted and reflected on the floor and the walls.

Páll Haukur Björnsson

#1

The object as a subject of death has been a recurring theme within visual art history. From the Renaissance period onwards, artists have used objects to represent death and mortality, or to commemorate those who have passed away. Objects such as skulls, flowers, candles, and even simple everyday items can be used to signify death in visual art.

#2

The object is an interesting subject of entropy and change. As an object is changed, it goes through various stages. These stages can be seen in many different ways, such as the physical, chemical, and biological changes that occur over time, but also through the shift or complications of meaning. On a physical level, objects often become worn out or broken down over time but as objects of meaning they are constantly shifting between the physical, the apparent and the meaningful. Questioning what objecthood really is.

#3

The American Physicist Karen Barad addresses some of these concerns. In their theory, agential realism, they state that matter and meaning are mutually constitutive, rather than separate entities. Rather than viewing matter as an inert object that can be manipulated by humans, Barad's agential realism proposes that matter is an active agent that is constitutive of meaning. All material phenomena can be understood as part of an ongoing process of intra-action between different agential components. They argue that knowledge production should be seen as an ongoing process between different agents and that knowledge should be understood as something emergent from these interactions rather than as something pre-existing or predetermined.

#4

The Swedish philosopher Martin Hagglund believes that death gives life its ultimate meaning, and that it should be accepted, embraced, and integrated into life. He argues that death is an integral part of life, and that it is essential for understanding the meaning of objects, events, and experiences. Hagglund believes that death creates a kind of meaningfulness in life as it is a necessary part of the process of life. He argues that death gives us a sense of freedom and a chance to make choices that would otherwise not be possible. In addition, he believes that death provides us with an opportunity to understand life in a more meaningful way, as it allows us to reflect upon our lives and our actions. Hagglund argues that death gives us an understanding of objects and events in a more complex way. He believes that without death, our relationships with objects and events would be shallow and superficial.

Páll Haukur, *A whole and its things*, 2022, mixed media, water, granite, plastic, brick, vinyl, acrylic, plaster, wood, cigarette, photo: Adam Antoniuk



Pétur Magnússon

My experience of the project.

Taking part in the *Common Ground* project reminded me once again of the fact that we Icelanders are a very privileged people having no direct borders to other countries. And therefore, no arguments with neighbours about where these borders should be. It is rather unusual in the world today to grow up in a country that has not really experienced war for 800 years.

Looking at art and exhibiting with colleagues from Eastern Europe always shows me how much more pain there is in their approach. Pain that, if it's not firsthand, seems to have been passed on from one generation to the next.

I can only hope that the more light-hearted approach that comes naturally to me will lighten some of that pain.

Pétur Magnússon, *Rubber duck*, 2020/2022, mixed media

In 1992, a cargo ship travelling from China to Seattle was caught in a storm in the Pacific and 12 containers were lost overboard. These containers were full of rubber ducks and other bath toys. The cargo has now travelled across the world's seas. Some rubber ducks have taken the Northwest Passage, became trapped in the ice over winter and were found on the shores of the Atlantic, in Ireland, the US and elsewhere. It may be assumed that several washed ashore in Iceland though this has not been confirmed. When and where they were found has influenced oceanologists' understanding of sea currents.

That same year, 1992, I met the author Steinar Sigurjónsson. It was a short and pleasant acquaintance. His appearance in Amsterdam, where I was living at the time, caught everyone by surprise. Our mutual friends were away and it fell to me to find Steinar a place for the night. Because of some big event taking place in the city, it proved difficult to find an available hotel room. Finally, we found one and said goodbye.

Steinar had worked on ships and many of his books dealt with fishermen and sailing. When I came to meet him the next morning to direct him to the train to Maastricht, he had drowned in his hotel bath tub.





Ragnhildur von Weisshappel

Flower film n°07
2022
video, 7 min loop

Flower film n°07 was made during residency stay in Toruń, may 2022. Flowers are my medicine. I walked around the blooming medieval city. I observed and admired the flowers; man made installation and arrangement as well as the wild spreading vegetation all over the city. The video shows my hands wearing gardening gloves observing and repairing branches and flowers.

I'm intrigued by the wind and it has affected most of my recent works. The same gust of wind has been blowing since beginning of everything. The wind keeps everything in motion and in balance in a closed system. Flowers and other vegetation are not excluded from my fascination of wind. I made a sort of a poem about the wind spreading and connecting the grains of pollen, and selected sentences from it for the video in English and Polish.



Sindri Leifsson

Here You Go
Cut down trunk of a Poplar tree from the shore of Vistula river
under the *Józef Piłsudski* bridge, lemon, rhubarb, cape gooseberries, snail shell
2022



Anna Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir

My experience of the project.

What I found most interesting about this project was working with and getting to know all the people who participated in it or were involved in another way. Staying and working in these three countries, experiencing culture and nature, was also an invaluable experience. It was precious to feel the friendship and inner connections occurring and to experience being made welcome in the places we stayed in and visited. With time passing and thinking back, the feeling remains that I still feel a little bit at home in these places.

The Tea House, 2021, installation at Korpúfsstaðir in Reykjavík.

In my mind, the tea house is a place that can be almost anywhere in the world. There, visitors can experience the feeling of being at home, regardless of the location and culture. There they are able to connect with one another in a universal and peaceful environment. In a place like this, where people come together, certain connections are made and creative flows occur. The connections can be diverse, some related to the Internet, others to some inexhaustible creative omnipotence, and through that people connect to each other. All these connections are in fact one and the same.



ARTISTS, SCIENTISTS AND AUTHORS OF TEXTS



Tomas Andrijauskas

With a video or photo camera, I'm constantly capturing my immediate environment, in order to convey the accelerating pace of life, the change of feelings, the interaction between outer and inner states. I follow the same path not only in art but also in life, where my everyday actions become a part of my artistic practice.

I value experimentation and coincidence, therefore I prefer old-school photo and video equipment. Recently, I've started working by scattering chemicals on photo paper, using specially prepared mixtures to physically damage it, creating abstract graphic images in the process, that are then turned into video loops.



Natalia Cieślak

Natalia Cieślak – an art historian, educated at the Nicolaus Copernicus University. Since 2016, she has worked as content and promotion specialist in the Galeria Sztuki Wozownia in Toruń. Before that, she was employed at the Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu*. She has curated a dozen or so individual and group exhibition, and won the 6th curating competition staged by the Galeria Sztuki im. Jana Tarasina in Kalisz (2022). Also active as an art critic, she has published several dozen articles in exhibition catalogues, art books and magazines (including *Szum*, *Zeszyty Artystyczne UAP*, *Artluk*, *Kwartalnik Rzeźby OROŃSKO*, and others). In 2017, she has received a prize from the authorities of the Kuyavian–Pomeranian Voivodeship for her outstanding achievements in creating and popularising culture.



Andrii Dostliev

Artist, curator, and photography researcher from Ukraine, based in Poland. His primary areas of interest are memory, trauma, identity – both personal and collective, decolonial practices in Eastern Europe, and the limits of photography as a medium.



Anna Eyjólfsdóttir

Artistic director of the *Common Ground* project, responsible for the curatorial concept of the exhibition in Reykjavík. Board member of the Academy of Senses since 2007. President of the Board of the Reykjavík Sculptors Association 1995–2002. Initiator of the exhibition project *The Shore Line* (1998, 2001) in cooperation with Reykjavík Arts Festival and Reykjavík European Culture City 2000. She is the president of The Association of Icelandic Artists since 2018.



Andrius Grigalaitis

Andrius Grigalaitis is an artist who lives, works and creates in Vilnius. In 2010 he graduated from Šiauliai University with Bachelor's degree in Audiovisual Arts study program and in 2014 he completed a Master's degree in Creative Industries study program at Vytautas Magnus University. Creative activity of Andrius Grigalaitis combines the fields of communication, photography and video art. In his works, he analyzes the aspects of isolation, ignorance and loneliness.

Since 2007 he has been participating in various group exhibitions and has held several solo exhibitions. In 2011 Andrius Grigalaitis was awarded the Šiauliai City Municipality Young Artist Scholarship, in 2012 awarded the Prize of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania for the best prepared and implemented cultural education projects for children and youth, in 2020 the series of photographs *The Mist. Other Worlds* was among the finalists (Shortlist) of the Sony World Photography Awards competition in the Landscape category.



Marija Griniuk

Marija Griniuk has a background in visual arts, performance art, and performance pedagogy. She is a Lithuanian artist, during the last decade actively working as an artist-researcher in the Nordic and Baltic region. Currently she is a PhD candidate at the University of Lapland in Finland.

Series of paintings *Reflexive painting as documentation of Common Ground* is layering of the experiences/actions by me, as the participant of the project, resulting in the reflexive painting as the visual narrative of the temporary experience of placeness and surrounding from the perspective of an artist-in-movement.

The images immerse as I start to paint and simultaneously remember/layer moments of the *Common Ground* event, thus the paintings are strongly connected to the daily experiences. The images are reflecting the immersive interhuman interconnectedness and my body impacted by the humans and non-humans in the new/unfamiliar space.



Sylwia Górak

Born in 1979 in Nowa Sarzyna. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, obtaining her diploma in painting, drawing and performance from Prof. Jarosław Kozłowski's studio. She has received grants from Prohealvetia in Switzerland, CECArtsLink in New York, and the Landeshauptstadt Kulturamt in Düsseldorf, amongst others, and took part in the Biennale of Young Art RYBIE OKO 5.

A painter, performance artist and singer, she has performed, for instance, at Carnegie Hall in New York. In Düsseldorf, she has made the world's Biggest Sundial (urban-art). The artist cooperates with the states of former Yugoslavia, and has participated in eight exhibitions staged by national museums and art galleries there.

She is currently active in acoustic (she has a four-octave vocal range) and conceptual performance, appearing at numerous festivals across Poland, Austria and Switzerland. She lives and works in Leżajsk. In 2020, she received a grant from the Muzeum Susch run by the Grażyna Kulczyk Foundation.



Solveiga Gutautė

I am Solveiga Gutautė, an artist from Lithuania. I graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts in 2010 with an MA in Ceramics. During my studies, I focused on creating artwork based on social issues. I was interested in the surrounding world, social contexts, and the new generation; topics which culminated in the final project of my MA studies – a collection of porcelain bibs named *Consumer Generation*. This project was the embodiment of a recent trend where parents purchase expensive baby items to impress their neighbours and feel better about themselves, rather than for the benefit of their babies. Frequently, my sculptures, collages, and performances have been responses to global current affairs. For example, I have explored my role as a woman through the medium of collage. Meanwhile, my *(Un) Washed Laundry* performance in 2013 was a comment on the idea of the human body as an advertising space – I suggested that, to better reflect their state of mind, people should write a personal verse or two on themselves instead of wearing famous brands. My last solo exhibition before the coronavirus lockdown was called *Laboratory of Fears*, in which I explored human fears through forty (a number selected as it is close to my age) infantile bunnies made of stoneware in various positions that conveyed a number of anxieties. This piece drew a parallel between how we care for vulnerable bunnies and the way in which we nurture our fears and refuse to let them go. Ultimately, my creativity is based on contemporary social issues, focused on the events in and around me.



Evelina Januškaitė

Evelina Januškaitė (b. 1988) – art critic, curator, researcher, PhD candidate in art history and theory at Vilnius Academy of Arts, director of LAA's Gallery Arka (since 2018) in Vilnius, LAA's projects' curator (since 2015). Professional activity consists of various texts (annotations, reviews, articles, surveys, etc.) and researches of contemporary art field, preparation and implementation of cultural projects, administration of art gallery, communication, curation and coordination of exhibitions, art critique, implementation of long-term strategic work of art association. Since 2018 at Gallery Arka had organized 43 solo exhibitions and presentations, 24 group curated exhibitions, since 2012 – about 35 various expositions in different locations, more than 50 publications in art-based scientific journals, periodical art media, art albums and catalogues, reviews of final works of bachelor and master degree students from Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Since 2015 – 26 large-scale local and international projects coordinated, from which more significant: Creative Europe 2014–2020 culture project *Common Ground*, in collaboration with Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu* in Toruń and Academy of Senses from Reykjavík, annual project *Implementation of art creators organizations strategic programs*, preparation of representing the Lithuanian pavilion at The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space in 2023, media and sound art project *Stereoscopus*, digital innovation open source platform *Interactive exchange of art samples*, 4th contemporary Lithuanian art quadrennial *Memorabilia*, educational project for youth *Creatively through Lithuania*, interdisciplinary project (*Non*) *locality principle* (in collaboration with Vilnius Tech University, Florence University, public institution „Lab of art and science“), Inter-format symposium *Cosmo(art)ology*. Main curated exhibitions: international Užutrakis Visual Art Festival (*re*)*create the former reality*, international XVIIth Vilnius painting triennial *[un]determined*, joint exhibition of Lithuanian artists' at Biennale Européenne des Blancs Manteaux in Paris, group exhibition *Imaginarium. Perceptions, Embodied Memory* at Klaipėda Culture Communication Centre, *[non]fixative medium, Emptiness of time passed* at Vilnius town hall, contemporary art exhibition *Imaginarium. Beyond the visible*, etc.



Justas Kažys

Justas Kažys was born in Vilnius, where he lives. After completing a PhD in Vilnius University in 2006 he became an associate professor at the Institute of Geosciences (Vilnius University) where he still works. During his scientific career he has focused on applied meteorology and practical implementation possibilities of climate research in different sectors. As a consequence, climate crisis (especially our adaptation to it) has become one of his most important research interests. He is actively involved in various research projects, scientific and educational activities promoting climate science. Recently he is focusing on interdisciplinary interactions between natural, social, communication and political aspects of climate change.

Everyone wants to have warm and cosy and comfort place to stay and live. However, Climate crisis have already crossed boundaries as natural science study subject and have reached every “local” community of our planet raising a lot of ethical, social, ecological and economical questions. For full perception of processes, you should jump of regular thinking basis and the collaboration between the countries (Iceland, Poland and Lithuania) and different elements such as art and science could be the key solution.



Páll Haukur

With his art Páll tries to break away from and interrogate any given notions of meaning by asking what constitutes an object. His works aim at complicating the relations that defines them, representing change or flux, either through its relationship to the body in space or through the material condition of the work itself – often using biological substances as parts of his sculptural practice. The result is an aesthetic experience that constantly asks the viewer to situate and re-situate herself in relation to object and space as Páll Haukur aims to compromise the semiological boundaries between a person and an object, between a thing and thing.

Páll Haukur studied at the Icelandic Academy of the Arts and the California Institute of the Arts where he graduated with a MFA in 2013. With a focus on drawing, sculpture and performance, his installations have been shown in Iceland, Europe and the US since 2008. He lives and works in Reykjavík.



Paulina Kuhn

Paulina Kuhn is an experienced project manager with a demonstrated history of working in the fine art industry, graduated from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and WSB Schools of Banking in Poland. She had been working as a coordinator and curator of exhibition projects at the Centre of Contemporary Art *Znaki Czasu* in Toruń since 2010. Since March 2023 she works in The Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko. She organizes group and solo exhibitions of Polish and international artists creating in a variety of media (paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, objects, installations, video works), as well as accompanying events (conferences, residencies, lectures, guided tours). Working on international collaboration, project management, budgets, planning, designing and production of the exhibitions are her everyday bread. She has worked on more than 50 exhibitions and other projects, such as retrospective of Sean Scully (*Malarstwo i Rzeźba / Painting and Sculpture*, 2022), Marina Abramović (*Do Czysta / The Cleaner*, 2019), Gustav Metzger (*Działaj albo gin!* / *Act or Perish!*, 2015), Jarosław Kozłowski (*Doznania rzeczywistości i praktyki konceptualne / Sensations of reality and conceptual practices 1965-1980*, 2015), and Jerzy Brzuskiwicz (*BOXer*, 2019); Turkish (*Czyste wody / This yearning is ours!*, 2016), Polish and German (*Układ Otwarty / Unfolding Constellations*, 2016), Romanian (*Komu bije DADA?*, 2016), Belarussian (*Bialo-czerwono-biali. Współczesna sztuka białoruska*, 2017), Chilean and Argentinian (*6,7 GB. Wystawa z pigułki / An Encapsulated Exhibition*, 2018) group exhibitions. Author of texts for catalogues, previously worked in the media.



Maciej Jerzy Kwietnicki

Conceptual/visual artist. Activist and co-creator of many artistic and educational initiatives, including Grupa nad Wisłą and Niemiejsce. Collaborated in several dozens of exhibitions, open-air and art festivals. He deals with relational art, creates installations and objects. He is a PhD student at the Academia Artium Humaniorum – doctoral school at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. In his PhD thesis, he focuses on consolidating research rooted in humanistic thought and environmental discourses with new post-artistic practices. The aim of the work is to produce transdisciplinary artistic and research methods to increase understanding of the changes caused by climate catastrophe.



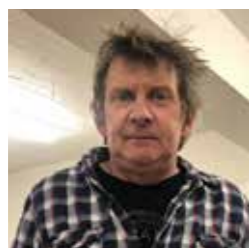
Sindri Leifsson

Sindri was born in Reykjavík, Iceland. He completed an MFA degree from the Malmö Art Academy in Sweden in 2013 and a BA degree from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2011. Simple symbols and transformation of the material are repeated steps in Sindri's work, but the environment and society are often involved. The materials are often allowed to stand autonomously and raw mixed with processed worked and polished surfaces. He has exhibited actively in recent years; solo exhibition *Næmi, næmi, næmi in Ásmundarsalur, Is the spirit aware of the matter?* in The Living Art Museum, *Sculpture / Sculpture* in Gerðarsafn, *Munur* in Skafffell, *Circulation* in BERG Contemporary and *#KOMASVO* in ASÍ Art Museum. Sindri's works can be found in the collections of the National Gallery of Iceland, ASÍ Art Museum and The Living Art Museum, as well as private collections.



Joanna Małecka

At the beginning of the century she was one of the few artists who created the visual-graphic side of the electropunk music scene in Poland, through designs and unique prints of posters, leaflets and stickers by silkscreen printing technique. Currently, she is an artist working on many levels from drawing, painting, graphics through intermedia installations with light. It is the multifaceted nature and a wide spectrum of activities that are her hallmarks. She graduated with a PhD degree at the Faculty of Fine Arts (D.F.A) at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland and earned her M.A. from the Faculty of Graphic Design and Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz, Poland. Runs the original shlagart.com project in which she carries out design orders. Fascinated by the power of lines, in her works she allows us to find their innumerable diversities, creating dynamic, multidimensional surfaces. On the basis of many realizations she has constructed her own vision of linear perception of reality which seems to be inexhaustible. The artist through her art determines that the line is perfect and fully sufficient in its structure and when it goes beyond the plane it cannot be stopped. The visual language of the artist is characterized by a conscious limitation of the color palette to simple, monochrome, expressive geometric forms. She clashes the minimalism of expressive means with a sophisticated, refined to the smallest detail composition. Sterile coldness – the effect of a restricted color palette – contrasts with the expressive construction of the space within the images. She paints the shadows of the imperfect world. Her monochromatic murals are full of fantastic swarms composed of the elements of the industrial landscape flattened and stretched on the wall. To recognize the shadows of cranes, machines and former factory buildings in their outlines, a person must come up close and contemplate them. A scholarship holder from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and a scholarship holder from the A. Mickiewicz Institute in the Promotion – 'Polish Culture in the World' program. She has participated in dozens of individual and collective exhibitions in Poland and abroad – in USA, Germany and Italy among others. Her works are at the National Museum in Cracow collections and in many private collections in Poland and abroad.



Pétur Magnússon

Pétur was born in Reykjavík. He attended the Icelandic School of Arts and Crafts (forerunner of the Iceland University of the Arts), then continued his studies at Accademia delle belle Arti in Bologna, Italy, and finally at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunste in Amsterdam, Netherlands. After graduation in 1986, he lived in Amsterdam until 2003 when he returned to Iceland. In the Netherlands, he was one of the founders of the Boekie Woekie art bookshop, which is also a gallery and a publisher. Pétur studied painting in Italy and printmaking in the Netherlands, and this is evident in his earlier works. Over time he has moved into photography and sculpture.

His art seeks to challenge the senses while offering new potential for perception of the environment. Often, his works are site-specific. Material and perspective often play a major part in distorting the environment in a philosophical and humorous manner.



Tomasz Markiewka

Tomasz Markiewka philosopher, works at the Nicolaus Copernicus University. He is interested in contemporary capitalism, especially with regard to ecological issues and social inequalities. Author of the books: *Anger* (2020), *Change the world again* (2021) and *Nothing happened* (2022).



Živilė Minkutė

Artist finalized her BA and MA studies in the Vilnius Academy of arts, Printmaking department. During these studies, spent one year in France, at the School of Fine Arts in Metz. Since then, actively worked in the visual art field as an artist, art director, and designer. A variety of occupations broadened her will to experiment and brought various technical solutions into an artistic practice.

Živilė is interested in presenting sensible and unseeable topics. Živilė is talking through subtle, often nature-based forms, as admiration for its majestic and monumental state of it. Besides that, the artist seeks to bring the traditional narrative of printmaking into a contemporary language and conceptual context.



Julija Pociūtė

Julija Pociūtė is a contemporary Lithuanian artist known for her mixed media installations based on interaction between video art, sculpture, design elements and photography. Combining different materials, artist alter the viewer's perception through experience which causes rethink the fundamental principles of nature: reality and illusion. Throughout her practice, Pociute focuses on the illusion, reflection, memory and dual and temporary nature of man and his environment raising the question of the influence of memory on the present state. Interested in historical memory explores the personal relationship through decoding symbols of the past. Julija Pociūtė studied at Vilnius Academy of Arts where she received her MFA in 2007. Since then, she has been actively involved in art practice, constantly participating in group exhibitions and art festivals, has organized many personal exhibitions in Lithuania and abroad (Finland, Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Italy). Her artworks are in the museum collections in Denmark and Spain.



Kristín Reynisdóttir

Kristín is visual artist. Her works are often installations in spaces, which both address the specific site and consider collective human factors with reference to experiences and emotions. Kristín selects the materials for her works by reference to their capacity to convey meaning.



Ala Savashevich

Born in 1989 in Stolin (Belarus). The artist graduated from the Belarusian State Academy of Arts (Minsk, 2010–2014), and the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Arts (Wrocław, 2014–2017). In 2021, Ala took a postgraduate course at the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. The artist works with installation, photography, video, and performance art and has taken part in exhibitions in Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, and Austria. Currently she lives and works in Wrocław, Poland.



Anna Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir

Anna was born in Iceland. She studied art in Iceland and Holland. She have worked as an artist for last 30 years, making sculptures, installation and performances

**Ragnhildur von Weisshappel**

Ragnhildur graduated from Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2013. Art for her is like chameleon's skin which allows her to adapt to any situation. She works in mixed media, mostly sculpture, video and drawing, but always conceptually.

**Wiola Ujazdowska**

Wiola Ujazdowska is an art worker and performer. She holds an M.A in Art Theory from Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland where she also studied Painting and Sainted Glass at the Department of Fine Arts in Lech Wolski master studio and Andrzej Kałucki glass workshop. 2012-2013 she studied in CICS, Cologne, Germany. Since 2014 she lives in Reykjavík. Her works have been shown in the USA, Portugal, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Iceland. Ujazdowska's practice is balancing between socially engaged art, happenings and video works in which she talks about experiences of excluded groups to show global phenomenons in a local context. She is mostly focusing on the group that she is most familiar with - working class migrants from East Europe. Methodology that she uses in her projects is inspired by anthropology and literature studies focused on linguistic processes of othering, post-humanistic perspectives on the other and philosophical concepts of identity. Her practice is a form of rejection of traditional way of making artworks in favor of a collective creation and recycling of already existing objects and materials to avoid overproduction of art. She is also a member of an international collectives: Beyond The Post-Soviet and AIVAG.

**Dr Magda Węgrzyn**

Dr Magda Węgrzyn is a polish born visual artist, curator and teacher with international academic experience and doctoral degree in the field of arts. She was working as assistant professor of art at the American University of the Middle East in Kuwait, previously obtaining her doctoral degree at the fine arts department at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland, where she has gained also her master degree of arts in 2011. In 2013-2014 Magda was a visiting dfa researcher at the finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki thanks to the support of the Cimo grant. Her work addresses connections between visual perception, technology and communication - calling upon a tangible contact during processes of interaction.

**Anna Wojtyńska**

Anna Wojtyńska holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Iceland and MA from the University of Warsaw. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher in project: *Integration in rural areas in Iceland*.

In the past years, she was studying various aspect related to Polish migration to Iceland. Her specific interest includes labour market and transnational practices.

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Maciej Kwietnicki

Ala Savashevich

Wiola Ujazdowska

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Tomas Andrijauskas

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Marija Griniuk

Solveiga Gutautė

Živilė Minkutė

Julija Pociūtė

Iceland

Páll Haukur Björnsson

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