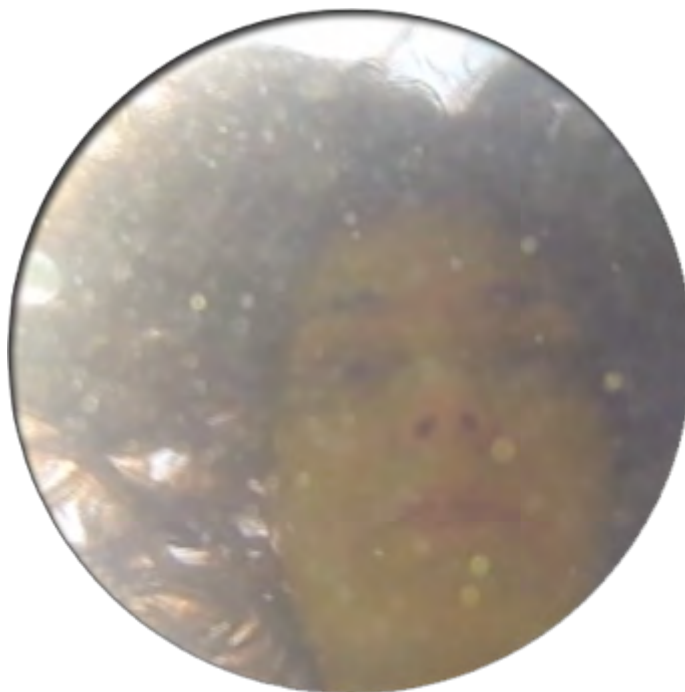


STAGING THE MOMENT: PLAY AND FICTIONAL REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The first decade of the twenty-first century world affairs can easily turn one into an activist or induce the state of a mild but perpetual madness. Globalization of commerce and technology, economical collapses, global claustrophobia bred by instantaneous travel in both physical and cyber space, reevaluation of the previous century ambiguous human achievements, and the fact that my son is a grown up man brought on longing for contemplation, and reflective exploratory work within the subject matter of *individual* and primary experience. In 2008 I took a long dive into the world of academic research and practice in the field of art and humanities.

Given my personal and professional background, art was a place to wrap into one body of work all my life's inspiration, and thoughts on the formative and generative function of live experiences for - and of - art practice. The journey lasted for eight years, commencing with the Master Thesis at Harvard University on cultural perception of comedy, and culminating with the Professional Doctorate at the University of East London.

Inspired by Mikhail Bahktin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, I focus on art as *act*, in my case the act of playing, and *play* as a means of engaging with the momentary existence. Establishing the rules, and contextualizing my practice led me to experimentations with a variety of media, and studying the work of other artists.

Yayoi Kusama, Elmgreen and Dragset, Marina Abramovic, Elizabeth Price, Bill Viola, Douglas Gordon, and Akira Kurosawa are but a few whose work and life inspired me in the last three years. Analyzing my own methods and staging the viewers' experience, I find it is important to keep observing my own, as well as my viewers' behavior. Exploratory travels and international art residencies provided just those necessary research opportunities.

Just as, according to Umberto Eco, one should see the difference between story and discourse (Eco, 2004, p. 36), my aim is to understand the difference between the moment of experience (story) and the moment of perception (discourse). The desire to further explore these topics in the future led me to enumerate and summarize all the thousands of the last three years' moments that yielded the story entitled *Staging the Moment: Play and Fictional Reality*.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

As I am using some terms and concepts that have different meanings in different fields of knowledge, I would like to clarify what meanings I find appropriate for my discourse. The reason this terms are important for me is that they helped me to define the boundaries of my theoretical inquiry into what is the place of art in the dichotomy of human knowledge, and how it is relevant to my practice. I will be speaking about it in more details in the Creative Practice and Theory section of this paper.

Apperception.

The term Apperception differs in psychology, philosophy, epistemology and psychoanalysis; e.g. in psychology it means “the process by which new experience is assimilated to and transformed by the residuum of past experience of an individual to form a new whole” (Dictionary of Philosophy, 1972); in epistemology it is “introspective or reflective apprehension by the mind of its own inner states” (Dictionary of Philosophy, 1972); in psychoanalysis (Winnicott, 1971) it means subjective creative experience of an infant, before perception is even formed. I use the term in the Winnicottian way, but in a broader sense of applying it to everybody not just to infants – as I believe that ability to have *apperceptive* experiences is a necessary condition for making and consuming art.

Cognitive closure.

Cognitive closure – is a philosophical proposition that human minds are constitutionally limited in their rational faculty. While examining the tendencies in philosophical discourse on perennial philosophical questions of “consciousness and the mind-body problem, the nature and identity of the self, the foundations of meaning, the possibility of free will, the availability of a priori and empirical knowledge,” one of the proponents Colin McGinn McGinn suggests that:

The distinction between science and philosophy is, [...] at root a reflection of the cognitive powers we happen to possess or lack,

and is therefore creature-relative: it does not correspond to any interesting real division within objective reality...(1994)

I believe the concept of cognitive closure is an important link between understanding the limitations of the rational and the possibility of generating new knowledge outside of the rational, of which both *play* and *art making* are often good examples.

The concept of *cognitive closure* that recognizes the limitations of the human conceptual mind (McGinn, Negel) provided firm grounding for my looking deeper into my motivations of making art. I believe art practice compensates the deficiencies of intellectual cognition by providing immediate experiences by the means of which new knowledge is generated, and contributes to acquisition of knowledge in a specific way, which is yet to be researched and understood. Per Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'the arguments both for and against the notion that we can learn from art are being simultaneously developed. The debate is not any less complicated than it was historically, nor is it any closer to being resolved' (Sarah Worth, *Art and Epistemology*, 2005).

Fictionality.

In my research, I use the idea of *fictionality* similarly to the way it was explored and developed by Kendall Walton in his work *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990), where he argues that all works of representational art are essentially props in fictional worlds.

According to Walton: "To call a proposition fictional amounts to saying only that it is 'true in some fictional world or other'" (Walton, 35). He also suggests "Not all fiction is linguistic [sic]. Any adequate theory of fiction must accommodate pictorial fiction, as well as the literary ones" (Walton, 75). While I feel a close affinity to Walton's ideas, I believe that this approach can be expanded from representational art to all art in general, as every single work is a prop for a

specific reality or a *Weltanschauung*¹ that can be true to some, but fictional to the others.

This concept is especially important in my research and my practice that aims to create experiences based on my own specific ones, in a hope they can resonate with my viewer in some unexpected way.

Play.

Although we live in the 21st century, and experienced thousands of years of playing, there is still not a single exhaustive definition of play or play act. For example, Encyclopedia Britannica resorts to zoology and behaviour of animals, Meriam Webster dictionary refers to play as a recreational activity especially 'spontaneous activity of children'. Oxford dictionary has it as 'activity engaged in for enjoyment and recreation, especially by children'. Not until Johan Huizinga wrote his *Homo Ludens* in 1944, play was looked at as an essential element of human culture and human behavior:

Summing up the formal characteristic of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings that tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress the difference from the common world by disguise or other means (Huizinga, p. 13).

In his seminal text Huizinga traces the formation of culture to generative attributes of play and playing. He discusses civilizing functions of play and its manifestation in language, law, war, philosophy, religion, and art. Specifically, he

¹ *Weltanschauung* is a German word that often is translated as "worldview" or "world outlook" but just as frequently is treated as a calque or left un-translated. A *Weltanschauung* is a comprehensive conception or theory of the world and the place of humanity within it. It is an intellectual construct that provides both a unified method of analysis for and a set of solutions to the problems of existence. The concept of a *Weltanschauung* has played an important role in the development of psychoanalysis, critical theory, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century hermeneutics (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Thomson Gale, 2008).

talks about music, and poetry. However, he denies to the plastic art the ability to be 'absolutely free play' (Huizinga, p. 166) for the reason of being 'bound to matter and to the limitation inherent in it' (Huizinga, p. 166). I was interested in exploring play's generative features in my art practice. I will discuss my findings in Creative Practice and Theory section of this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the people who encouraged and helped me in my work, provided support and guidance during the transitional period of adapting to life in a new country while developing my practice.

Dr Mark Sowden for his creative and academic insights as well as his unwavering dignity; My supervisors Lee Maelzer and Dr John Smith for their advice and tutelage; Dr Eric Great-Rex and Cherry Smith for their invaluable suggestions on my writing, as well as my friend Richard Benton, for detecting my occasional non-English phrasing. Dr Firuza Melville for inspiring lofty thoughts as well as facilitating creative and professional collaboration with the Shahnameh Centre at Pembroke College; my fellow students Dr Nerys Mathias, Dr Magdalena Papanikolopoulou, Dimitrios Oikonomou, Chen Shih Lu, Ali Darke, Natalia Jezova, Gloria Shiziko Li and many others whose work and dedication was always a joy to behold.

I would like to acknowledge my dear academic advisor Jeremy Geidt who left this world just as I started the Doctorate, and whose positive and inspiring guidance I craved, but could only imagine.

In remembrance of my mother, Zinaida F. Shimanovskaya, my grandmother, Zinaida P. Shimanovskaya, and my great grandmother Zinaida A. von Voight, three women whose lives were dedicated to love of knowledge and inspiration, without whom I wouldn't even be present at this moment on this planet, I have been working these last three years to get to where I am today.

INTRODUCTION

Every man is the sum total of his reactions to experience. As your experiences differ and multiply, you become a different man, and hence your perspective changes. This goes on and on. Every reaction is a learning process; every significant experience alters your perspective

Hunter S. Thompson, Letter to Hume Logan, 1958

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible...

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890

It seems facile for me to simply put my practice in the context of my Soviet Russian upbringing, or my naturalized American sensitivities, my gender, my professional or charitable affiliations, and examine national or international identities that perhaps can be traced in my art. It is, however, the reality that I find myself on this earth, and the well-known fact that “there is no cure for that” (Beckett, *Endgame*), that drives my action. So, following Beckett’s advice, I will “use [my] head” (Beckett, *Endgame*).

Fortunately, introspection is a part of my daily routine, so I thought it would be appropriate to aim my Doctoral research at the UEL at examining, contextualizing, and developing my practice that spans over three decades, through three different disciplines: design, drama, and fine art in three very different countries: Russia, the USA and the United Kingdom. The fact that the social and geographical circumstances varied widely was instrumental for defining my own voice. The last three years on the Doctorate helped me to better understand what drives my practice and how it can be developed further.

While reflecting on the main topic of my interest, I realized that it is the **moment** of pure experience of the visible world before its transition into individual and subjectively perceived reality. **Playing** as a means of staying in that moment is a main strategy of my practice. As we can perceive very little of

the true workings of the world by a momentary experience, the only impression we can gauge from it will add to the **fictional** nature of our understanding of it. “‘Reality’ is the word that belongs in quotation marks” (Nabokov, 1995).

My goal is to trace this process from the very first moment of actual sensory experience, and the resonance it creates in the mind and body, to the second when it becomes a driving force of art production and manifests itself in the art form. It is a very slim sliver of time and space in which this transformation actually happens. The work I create aims to capture my own experience and create experiences for my audience. The means by which I create and convey this experience is *play*. The complexity of analyzing this triad – *moment-play-fiction* – through practice brought me to the necessity of analyzing my methods of production as well as the necessity of contextualizing my practice in a broader philosophical and critical discourse. I will speak of this in depth in the Creative Practice and Theory section of this paper.

In my attempt to better understand the morphology and structure of my creative process, I looked into the conditions, which facilitate the emergence of my work.

I seek and value experiences that are existential and wondrous in nature, the ones that remind us of the phenomenon of human existence, of delights and perils of Being and Communing. Visceral and transformative, they represent to me the very nature of art. While living and re-living those experiences and analyzing all their components the best I could, I was also exploring ways of sharing them with my audience, which I hope would pose and/or answer their own questions in turn.

For the sake of simplicity, I am presenting my research in a chronological manner, with some minor detours, to account for all the intricacies of the development of my practice and research in the course of the doctorate in some systematic way.

I am indebted to all the artists in whose work I have found similar interests. It inspired and resonated with my own quest in the last three years, and helped me to keep going when the going got tough. Yayoi Kusama with “visions and hallucinations” (Kusama, 2011, p. 66) fueling her art; Bill Viola with his ongoing work of reconciling spiritual practices with being a contemporary artist; Douglas Gordon, whose idea of art is ‘to be as free as possible’ (Interview with Philip Oltermann, *Douglas Gordon: I retain the right to do whatever I want*, 2014), but whose main concern seems to be orchestrating experience of empathy by means of creating the ‘fantastic situations’ (Oltermann, 2014). The work of Marina Abramovic gave a new perspective to my thinking on relationship between performance in drama: where ‘the play in the thing’ (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p.24) and the performative aspect of art in general; and all others of whom I will be mentioning later in the Creative Practice and Theory section of this paper.

My medium of choice is immersive installation, as I believe that the relationship of objects in space rather than objects by themselves creates the specificity of the environment I am looking to make. By its nature, immersive installation is often bound to be multimedia or, perhaps, to borrow Fluxus term *intermedia*. In my case, it is the correlation between painting, video, and made objects. I will write in depth about the reasons I selected this approach in the Creative Practice and Theory section.

PERSONAL AND CREATIVE CONTEXT

Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?

Edgar Allan Poe. *A Dream Within a Dream*.

Simplicity is the highest goal, achievable when you have overcome all difficulties. After one has played a vast quantity of notes and more notes, it is simplicity that emerges as the crowning reward of art.

Frédéric Chopin.

From my teenage years on, I felt that one's own life experiences shape and inform one's art practice just as much as they shape and change life practice. Initially influenced by Lau Zu, and then much later by Joseph Beuys with their holistic approach, I am convinced that, essentially, life is art. This is the main concept of my work and this is the message I am interested to conveying to my audience. From the diary entry to the life's transformative experience I am communicating the value of every moment of existence.

Growing up in Soviet Union allowed me to experience first-hand the influence and the impact of ideology on culture in general, and on art in particular. Driven by Marx's interpretation of art as a part of *superstructure*, his emphasis on art's place in society as support of the class struggle of the *basis* i.e. the working classes, social realism of the day was mostly devoid of the artist's personal world and was often functioning as social propaganda tool. Subjectivity of any kind was deemed bourgeois; personal experience was not considered a worthy subject, unless it dealt with critique of capitalist society. A compulsory course of history of philosophy at the university was structured in the way that positioned Marxist theory as a pinnacle of the absolute knowledge, and Marcuse's rebuttal of Marxists' esthetics was considered an aberration.

There, modern art belonged to the museums, while contemporary art was barely heard of. Just as I started my university course, conceptual artists such as

Kabakov, Komar and Melamid left the country because of the sheer impossibility of surviving creatively and exhibiting their work.

I was born in 1961 in Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg, now St. Petersburg). My mother was a researcher in urban planning and development of the Far East region; my father was an aeronautical engineer and a playwright. Both inspired my love of art, philosophy, and literature.

My first participatory experience of an exhibition happened in 1966, when I was five years old, and my gouache painting got the delicious first prize, in the form of an embroidery kit, at the organisation where my mother worked. Or, maybe, it was all the parents deciding to create this experience for their children to encourage their creativity. I will never know: there is no one to ask anymore. My mother was my first art teacher. It was, however, Pablo Picasso's paintings at the Hermitage exhibition in 1976 that taught me what it meant to be free. His absolute mastery of handling reality the way he saw fit to get to the absolute essence of the subject matter the way he felt it resonated deeply with the my rebellious teenage apprehensions.

From the age of thirteen, I attended an art school that employed classical methods of training: painting, drawing, composition, sculpture and art history, and had three-hour classes three times a week for three years complemented by a drawing preparatory course in the Academy of Art in the last year of high school.

Not until I passed the enrollment exams of the University of Architecture and Civil Engineering did I realize the main topic of interest of my life: the conditions under which people change their routines and enter an active and creative state of true engagement with the moment.

The reason that interest came about in the first place was that I aspired to design architectural spaces that would interact with people in the sense of enhancing the experience of their presence in the space, and be assistive in the

action of a person or a group, be it working, resting or entertaining. I became interested in perception patterns, and in human behavior in general.

Cognition and perception of the experience and negotiation of space were necessary and instrumental considerations in my architectural studies. That necessity drove my interests in works and theories, which deal with cultural criticism, behavior, and anthropology. I was interested what necessary and sufficient conditions can be created to assist particular behavior or state of mind.

PREVIOUS EDUCATION AND CREATIVE PRACTICE

2012-13 University of East London, MA Fine Art

2009-12 Harvard University, ALM (MA) in Extension Studies in Humanities

1980-86 St. Petersburg State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering.

BA+MA in Architecture

1978-80 Academy of Art, Painting, Drawing (preparatory course)

1975-77 Leningrad Art School, Painting/Drawing/Sculpture/Art history

I have degrees in three fields: Architecture, Dramatic Arts, and Fine Art, from three different universities in three different countries. One from State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering where the BA and MA programmes were integrated into one 5½-year full time course, another one from Harvard University, and the third one from the University of East London.

BA and MA Architecture – Russia: St. Petersburg State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering.

My work was related to the two major topics of interest:

Space/Time and their functions in conception and perception of architectural space as live experience. Play as *modus operandi*.

From the very beginning of my creative and academic career, I was keenly aware of the existence of imagined and subjective reality that informed my aesthetic decisions. Back then I wasn't preoccupied of the experience of the moment, but rather the interaction between different realities: the one of the creator (be it a designer or an artist), and that of the receiver or a consumer.

The major task of my research was to find the ways and methods by which the subjectivity of the creator shapes multiple strands of data, that come from social and utilitarian functions and contribute to architectural harmony. From Vitruvius to Corbusier and Alexander, the architects themselves were concerned with posing and answering the questions of optimisation of architectural and urban environment, and enriching human experience. Studying relationship between parts of space and objects from the basic rules of composition, and Gestalt principles to more complex and challenging environment, and how they become inductive of new experiences was instrumental to the development of my practice. My own experience in finding a balance between utilitarian, aesthetic and semantic functions in architecture materialized in two projects that were most important for me.

One was my diploma project and thesis: 'Multifunctional Cultural Centre in Petrozavodsk' (included theatre, singing field, and multiple feature spaces for communal activities and interactions) and another, a countryside hotel in Kaliningrad. In both of these works, principles of continuity of architectural space and its relationship with the environment as well as specific public participation were instrumental in my decisions. The research that went into these projects was beneficial to my much later work related to dramatic and art performance, as well as for developing the installations. The main benefit for this application was understanding that every space has a certain capacity to accommodate objects, and human activities, and this capacity can be reached or exceeded to achieve particular results. For example, space *under-saturated*, or non-filled with object or people/audience, is invocative of some unknown presence – think of cathedrals, theatres, caves, marginal spaces, etc. – while crowded and overfilled rooms create the sense of insecurity and/or confusion.

The theoretical and philosophical works in which I found most support to my practice were Charles Le Corbusier's *Le Modulor*, in which he analyses architectural proportions – golden proportion based on human measurements and its application to the work of art and architecture to then translate it into his contemporary architectural practice, Christopher Alexander's *Pattern Language* (1977), with his attempt to remedy the artifice of rationality and mass

production of the time by reminding of the organic development of the environments which follow the numerous but finite set of patterns. Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1955) where he explores the play element of human culture was instrumental ever since, as it illuminates the action-patterns of human behavior, particularly in relationship to the one of the most fulfilling and enjoyable human activity – *play*. I will expand on the importance of Huzinga's ideas for my practice in the Creative Practice and Theory section.

By 1989 I was working on the PhD proposal on the topic of *Play in the Social Space of Multi-functional Cultural Centre*. The deterioration of the state impeded my desire to proceed with pursuing academic career in Russia.

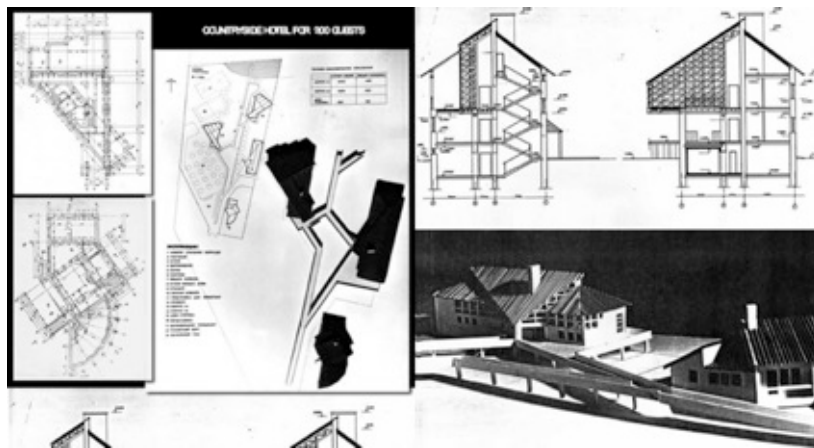


Figure 1. *Small Gulf shore resort*, Kaliningrad, 1989, Ink, card.

Meanwhile, my art practice was concerned with painting. I was sympathetic to Western minimalism as well as its oriental origins (see appendix). In the environment of prevailing realism, Russian Suprematism (Kandinsky, Malevich), as well as Picasso, and Dadaists like Picaba and Tzara were the liberators. I have exhibited my work locally in Leningrad and was teaching art classes for children of 7-12 age group. My main concern at the time was to introduce children the to experience of creative freedom of expression in the social context of conservative schooling and state censorship. For personal and political reasons, I have moved out of Soviet Union in 1991.

Between 1991 and 1997, my art production moved to the background of my adapting to the life in San-Francisco Bat Area, while performing motherhood duties and working full-time as an architect and a designer. Life in San Francisco Bay Area brought about new personal and professional experience, and I have

started and developed a career in digital media. It was an exciting time, in the 90-s, digital media was at its infancy, and by proximity of being in the heart of its development, Silicon Valley, and then later in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I was evolving together with the industry.

In 1993 my mother came for visit and a few months later was diagnosed with cancer that took her away in 1995 before she could return to her favorite St. Petersburg. During that trying time, I have been only working on illustrations for a digital game that was being designed specifically for girls “Secret Paths in the Forest” by the company called Convivial Design, and making some diary-like small paintings, as life’s vicissitudes left no time for anything else.



Figure 2. Drawing and paintings. Acrylic, watercolour.1993-1995

In 1996, I made my first sound piece called *Nick Girolamini: extension 345*. It was a multi-track sound recording of the outgoing corporate messages superimposed with Bjork’s song “Enjoy”. The messages were recordings of the company directory phone extensions in the original people’s voices. The piece was 9 minutes long, and called to question human condition when the person becomes just a number with a robotic voice. It was real voices, however, working with the music track that betrayed suppressed and canned emotions.



Figure 3. *Music*, 1996.

Oil, canvas. 12x36 in

It was the moment when I realized that I have to show my work again. In the summer of 1995 I moved to Massachusetts. In 1997, I took part in the Gallery One “Music in Painting” show in Toronto, and 1998 I showed two paintings in a group exhibition in Boston.

MA in Humanities – USA: Harvard University

My design and multimedia career evolved in a new specialization User Experience design that deals with the human experience in the digital world. After a 20-year-long career in digital design and multimedia, working as an art director in various industries from education to media, I returned to academic research and started my MA in Humanities in the field of Dramatic Arts. My work was concerned with cultural perceptions and understanding the work of playwright in the context of different cultural traditions and sensibilities. The dissertation was entitled: *One Hundred Years of Habitude: Russian Comedy on the British and American Stage*. As the abstract stated, the study investigated the causes and effects of the ways in which Russian comedy has been understood by British and American scholars and theatre practitioners from the time it was introduced in the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. The research that proved to be important for my creative practice resulted in an arduous dive into the realm of perception, translation, transmission, and interpretation of the literary artifacts, and causes and effects within and outside of them. This illuminated my understanding of art performance, and its relationship with theatre performance as one of the specific forms of Performing Arts.

Anna Wierzbicka's *Emotional Universals* (1999), Andre Helbo's *Theory of Performing Arts* (1987), Cornicke's *Stanislavsky in Focus* (1987), Zarilli's *Psychophysical Acting* (2009), Pascal Bouyer's *Religion Explained* (2001) were but a few critical and theoretical works that helped in the development of my hypothesis and investigation. All of them, one way or another, were unraveling the accepted wisdom of their respective fields and focusing on the patterned formation of systems of behaviors and perceptions.

While I was occupied with writing my dissertation, my art practice stayed in the field of painting and installation, with a special attention paid to the ritual of painting in my practice. Although figurative, the materials' preparation, gestures, and the rhythm of painting were generative part of work. At that point, I became interested in the artistic means of the construction of different realities. Since I was painting from imagination, the important part of the

process was to meditate on the image that was developing in my inner vision to then transfer the impression of it onto the canvas. It was a process opposite to the one I was following later during my Doctorate years.

Between 2008 and 2011, I was teaching the evening classes at the Brookline Art Centre, where I was an art instructor and taught painting and live drawing to the students of age groups ranging from 12 to 72. I was invited to have a solo show by a Dr Hae-Sook, at the All Saints Church Gallery in Brookline, MA.

I called the exhibition *Places* and showed 16 of my paintings. It was a retrospective of a number of pieces that were made during my seclusion in the motherhood and daughterhood, as well as the new ones that were made between 1998 and 2010.



Figure 4 *That tree* 24x28 in.
Oil on canvas, 2009



Figure 5. *Sea behind*, 24x30 in. Oil on canvas. 2003

In 2012, I created an installation called *Labyrinths* – a public art piece shown during Cambridge Art Week. Inspired by the childhood experience of a countryside yard, wandering into a clothesline full of drying sheets and perceiving the wide open space turning into a magical maze of separate smaller spaces created by the hanging coloured fabric. It was my first immersive installation that gives direct experience to the viewer.



Figure 6. *Labyrinths*, rope, fabric, var. sizes. ~15X15 meters. Dana Park, Cambridge, MA, 2012

Light shines through and forms unusual shadows of the nearby trees and people. Blowing wind and sussuring of foliage created a perfect sound effects. Just as labyrinth is a symbol and a metaphor of the life-changing experience, the composition of intersecting clothesline-like installation invoked a reflective or playful mood in a spectator wandering and suddenly transported into an unexpected environment in an unexpected space. This work was one of my experiments of large-scale installation.

MA Fine Art – UK: University of East London

During my MA at UEL, I focused on three areas continuous with my past interests: participatory environments, historical and geographical referencing and the way they inform and guide the work, and experiments with new materials and new forms. Although I am still interested in these subjects, during my doctorate I was looking to concentrate more on the immediate and subjective, and use immersive environment more as a formal device for installation.



Figure 7. *Touch and Tag Surveillance*. Fragment. Furniture, mirror, paper stickers, TV set, surveillance camera, 2013.

An example of a participatory work I created for the MA final show is entitled *Touch and Tag Surveillance*. It is an installation of the imaginary institution waiting, or sitting room environment with a surveillance camera installed to project the view of the spectator/participant into a wide screen TV. All the objects in the room are covered with the red round stickers, to emphasize the homogeneity of the environment. Two chairs opposite each other as well as a mirror imply an interrogation or self interrogation, and the different colour sticker sheets placed at the entrance entice the viewer to enter the game and spend some time in the room engaged in the activities similar to the artist's touching and tagging the walls and the object and him/herself.



Figure 8. *Touch and Tag Surveillance*. Exhibition shot. Fragment. Furniture, mirror, paper stickers, TV set, surveillance camera, 2013.

During my MA course, I was exploring some connection to my own historical and geographical references, stemming from interests to what in literature is called *intertextuality*, the term that defines the story re-told and re-thought using different means in different cultural contexts. I grew up reading ancient Greek myths and listening to my grandmother quoting Nizami and Ferdowsi, as she spent her childhood and youth in Central Asia. My further study of history and literature only deepened my interest in poetry and legends, and in the course of my MA I developed a series of works, exploring visual intertextuality in the context of contemporary art. *One Flew Over The Silkworm Cocoon*, *Golden Fleece of Birmaya*, *Hermes Trismegistus and Phycyche*, *Hamartia*, *Perepetiea*, *Catharsis* are examples of my work inspired by this interest, which resonated with my life at that moment.

One of these was a geographical separation with my son, who moved East to St. Petersburg from London, another was my own moving East to London from the USA. There was also reconnection with my childhood friend Firusa Abdullayeva, with whom we were attending the same Art school in St. Petersburg when we were little girls. She is now Dr in Iranian Philology, Art and Islamic Studies. My contemplations on these matters, and a one particular event sponsored by British Uzbek Society exhibition and a lecture: Silk Through the Ages – Traditional Textiles Today (31st October, 2012), generated an image that I saw in my dream.

A giant soft and fluffy cocoon, lit by a beam of light was absolutely beautiful, but in the same time inherently fragile and dramatic, as I knew that the silkworms are boiled out of their soft shells before the silk thread is collected, and they never turn into butterflies. It took me a while to figure out what materials to use. At first, I was thinking of felting technique, but I realized that felting something as large as I was envisioning – the size of perambulator, which is at least two feet long and almost as wide – would take too much time and material.

I decided to sand-cast the two halves of my cocoon and envelop it in layers of roving – the unwoven wool. For the husk of the silkworm I used 10-15 mm still rods that I made into coils and metal hose base, fashioned in a free-assembled form.



Figure 9. *One Flew Over The Silkworm Cocoon.*
Fragment. 2012.

I used a few meters of uzbek *ikat* – a traditional silk and cotton fabric. The installation consisted of two, almost identical pieces, the difference being that one was completely devoid of colour. The purpose of this is twofold: to invoke the image of a both life, and death – *white* being the colour of death in the Orient, and the colour of innocence in the West; to help to “fill the void” by stirring imagination toward rich colours of silks produced from the silkworm cocoons.

I called the work *One Flew Over The Silkworm Cocoon*, the title referencing a famous Milos Forman film *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, which invokes the theme of what it is to be humane in the modern society of humans. During the Private View at the Bermondsey Project show, I have received comments and questions from the public from: "Do you have a child?" to "It looks like post-industrial nightmare".

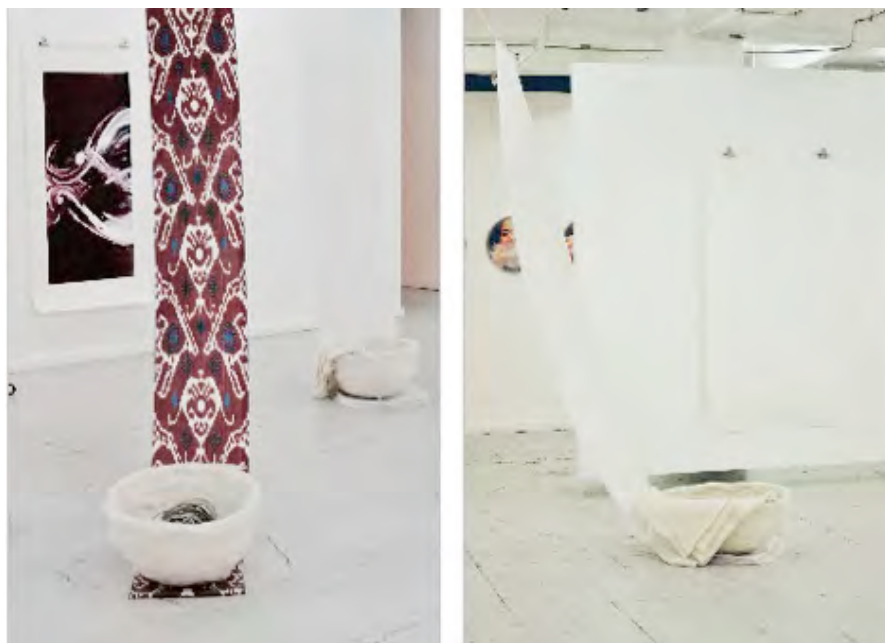


Figure 10. *One Flew Over The Silkworm Cocoon*. Ikat, plaster shells, roving, fabric, steel rods sculpture, mono-prints, various sizes. 2012.

Golden Fleece of Birmaya is another example of my way of working with visual intertextuality. Here the interest was in creating a sculpture referencing different cultural traditions of the West and the East. *Golden fleece* is an iconic story of Jason from ancient Greek mythology. In a way, it is representative of Western culture, as Western philosophy all the way to the age of Enlightenment and further is rooted in Greek tradition. It also has a connotation of the innocent victim of presumably evil force. Birmaya, is a name of a cow from the ancient Iranian tradition captured in the longest poem ever written – *Shahnameh*. The rainbow-coloured cow's milk helped to nourish a future hero, but she was brutally slain by a tyrannical king.

Both the title and the interpretation of the visual superimposition of these symbols suggest of the continuity of human history. I believe the value of

understanding this continuity of time and space shared by many, as the stories we make today will stay with our children tomorrow.

To support the seemingly eclectic subject matter, the materials I used are also not easily or conventionally combined. There were: white fabric, stretched in the manner of the spread skin of the animal, dry fish, suspended from the ceiling on a piece of rope, and a projection of the digital animation. The projection of slowly cycling through different primary colours I produced using a combination of Adobe CS programmes: Adobe Flash and Adobe Premier.

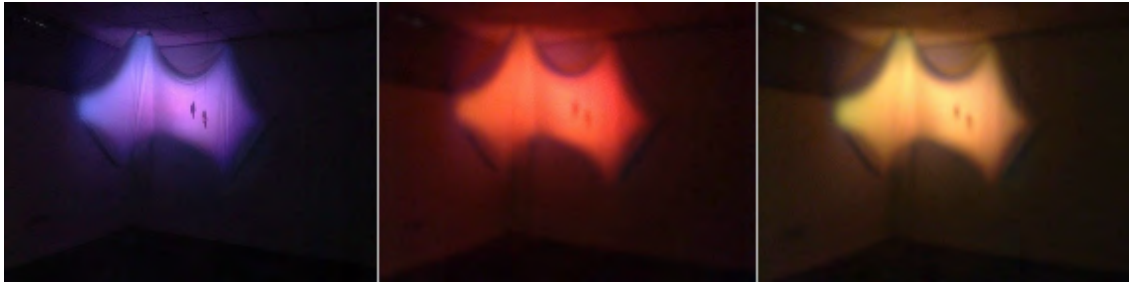


Figure 11. *Golden Fleece of Birmaya*, fabric, projection, found object. 300x150 cm

The installation of *Golden Fleece of Birmaya* was a quite a stressful experience as could only get the access to the room a day before the show. The piece was planned for the final MA show, and not until the very last minute I knew what would come out. The animation was done well in advance but the installation of all the components took experimenting with position and masking of the projection light, because of the shape of the projection required special custom mask to be made on the spot. This experience reemphasized the necessity of allocating as much time for installation work as possible.

Hamartia, Peripeteia, Catharsis explores the setting up of the imaginary by creating an environment of objects as well as historically referenced titles. In this piece I also added audio, which I found semantically relevant to the subject matter – Aristotelian terminology for tragedy and its relevance to the human condition. The piece consists of three parts, one of which is imaginary, in other words, it doesn't exist as a material piece, but the environment implies it, as the absence of the one of the elements announced in the title “Catharsis” leaves it to imagining what it might have been. The other two “Hamartia” and “Peripeteia” are clearly portrayed according to their imbedded meaning:

Hamartia, according to Aristotle, is a fatal flaw of the hero in Greek tragedy that eventually leads to his unraveling. In my triptych it is the size of a newborn baby

sculpture made of roving yarn² and displayed on a plinth. It carries the meaning of human qualities with which we are born, and the fact that we are born makes us vulnerable immediately after. This is the irony that I aimed to convey. Arte Povera's approach to materials informed some of my own choices. The concept of vulnerability and gullibility of a flaw that is not a fault, but an inborn quality suggested the material used.

Peripeteia is a term that describes a reversal of fortune of the tragic hero, the series of events that lead to his or her fall, but in the process of which he or she acquires a crucial understanding of the true nature of events and their meaning.

My sculptural installation of *Peripeteia* was made of aluminium wire spirals and projected light animation with sound. The linear whirlpool-like digital line drawing was animated as strokes of light using Adobe Flash software. The image was essentially monochrome, but because of the colour space used RGB, and because of the angled position of the wires, tiny specks of the RGB colours flickered on the wire while the animation played, which wasn't a planned effect, but it added to the visual richness. The soundtrack is a musical phrase cut out of Debussy's famous piece *Jeux* (Games) composed for Diaghilev in 1913. I selected this piece of music for the title, and the certain musical phrase in it that, when looped, added to the idea of perpetual motion. It was the last orchestral Debussy's work, and the story behind the piece that just perfectly illustrates concept of *peripeteia*. *The Catharsis* is nowhere to be seen, it can be only imagined, but the title and the rotating gallery wall left slightly ajar implies it. Even viewers unfamiliar with the terminology and ideas used in this piece were intrigued by the absence of the third element seemingly promised by the title. That absence did trigger questions. I know this because the visitors of the exhibition did ask me.

² Roving – is a long bundle of yarn produced in the process of spinning yarn from the wool fleece.

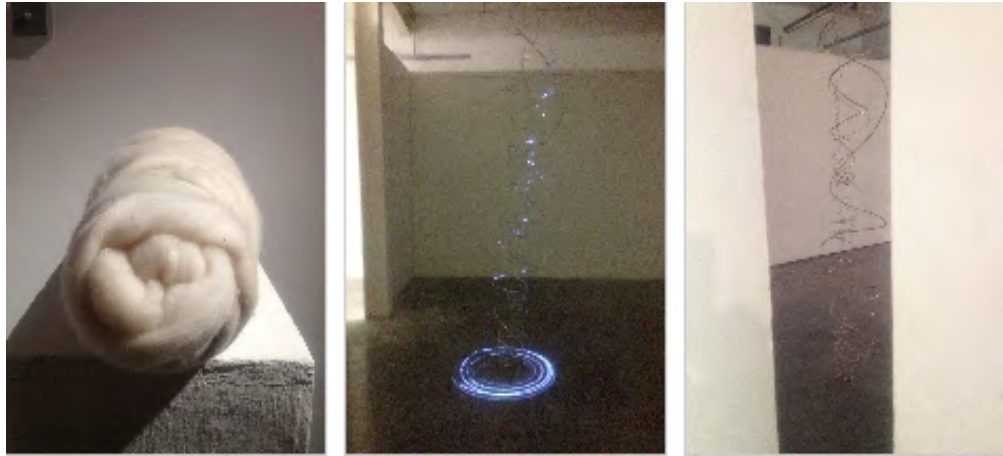


Figure 12. *Hamartia, Peripeteia, Catharsis*. 2013. Roving, cement block, aluminium wire, animation projection, sound.

Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), Umberto Eco's 'Semiotics of Theatre' (1980), Irit Rogoff's *Terra Infirma* (2000), Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make Believe*, were most helpful additions to my previous reading and development of my own ideas about the subjectivity of the creative process and the mechanics of visual communication in art. Particularly instrumental was Walton's work as it provided a necessary framework for my critical thinking on nonverbal communication during the Doctorate. The concept of artifacts as props in the game of make-believe was just the starting point for my theoretical research that I needed.

I believe that art is uniquely positioned in human culture to have a very specific function: that of creating *intuitive empathy* through *metaphors*. Comparing with the other forms of communications, it is most efficient at it. I am staying aware of the specific properties when they manifest themselves in the artwork, as they are responsible for producing organic response in the viewer. Gravity, scale, contrast, rhythm, mutability are the fundamentals of our tactile relationship with the world which either vicariously or by design help to transcend the materiality of the object at hand. I found somewhat resonant thought in Joseph Beuys's discussion of sculpture, particularly the sculpture of his 'teacher' Wilhelm Lehmbruck when he said: "His sculptures are not to be grasped visually, they has to be only grasped through an intuition that opens up completely different origins of perception, above all, hearing—hearing, thinking, willing. [...] Beuys expressed his conviction that Lehmbruck's sculpture stands

for the extension of space to include the concept of time and warmth (Stachelhaus, 1987, p.14).

My *Hamartia, Perepeteia, Catharsis* piece was developed based on premise that the objects' properties that are both were derivative of the nature of the object (rovin to express vulnerability, and metal, illuminated by the light animation, spiral to express ruthlessness of transformation), and their relationship to each other will resonate with the viewer in some visceral way.

The works of Albert Irvin, Rosemarie Trockel, and Richard Wentworth were inspirational during my MA year.

For instance, Wentworth's piece at the Lisson Gallery (*A Room Full of Lovers*, 2012) provided an interesting example of an artist working with gravity and rhythm. The way Wenworth used heavy metal chains, attached by industrial clamps to metal tubes anchored along the top of the gallery walls, was highly effective to invoke the sense of direct relationship with the piece, and initiate further contemplation on its meaning and references. The Gaudi reversed arches, the arriving and moored boats' anchors, the implication of attachment/detachment, bonding/releasing, all of this and more could ensure the viewer's involvement with the piece.

I did questioned the particular relationship between the distance of the support tubes and the length of the chain segment that seemed arbitrary, but perhaps it was the intention of the artist to convey the arbitrariness of it all. To see if my interpretation had any connection with the artist's idea at all, I went to Richard Wentworth talk at the time of this show.

He did mention Gaudi's arches indeed, but he was also talking about getting excited with the connection big and index fingers forming a link, as a starting point of the piece, of linking, as preserving or forming a source of energy, and

that that “hot spot of energy is actually in your head,” and people expressing their connectedness in linking arms. (Artist’s Talk, Lisson Gallery, 2012).³



Figure 13. Richard Wentworth, *A Room Full of Lovers*, Lisson Gallery, 2013.

In the same year, I have also got acquainted with the Ying Mei Duan’s work in performance, that moved, me as she her work was an embodiment of my thoughts about visual *intertextuality*, that I mentioned before, as well as playing and staging that was used in her piece *Happy Ying Mei* (2012) of which I will be talking in the Creative Practice and Theory section of this paper.

Together with my professional activities and exhibitions, of which I will be talking in the Professional Practice section of this report, the MA at the UEL helped me to consolidate and develop my work and prepared me for the Professional Doctorate research.

³ The thoughts Wentworth expressed during the talk were repeated at the interview with the Gallery. The interview can be accessed at the Vitamin Magazine channel <https://vimeo.com/59721383>

CREATIVE PRACTICE AND THEORY DURING THE DOCTORATE

CONTEXT

The principal aim of my doctoral research is to bring key components of my creative and theoretical inquiries together into a single body of work. While determining my position in contemporary cultural and discourse, I am working from a very narrow focus in practice – one that is concerned with *playing* as an experience of mapping one's reality, and *staging* as means to share my work with my audience – to the broader philosophical issues related to the same subject matter. In the process of development of my work and research, the working title *Culture, Play and Fictional Reality* yielded its essence and became *Staging the Moment: Play and Fictional Reality*.

As I mentioned in the Previous Education and Creative Practice section, one of the most important theoretical works, that guided my research, was Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1955). Not only he discussed the role of *play* element in all the components of human culture from poetry to religion and politics, but he also defined the morphology of play itself: "The more we try to mark off the form we call 'play' from other forms apparently related to it, the more the absolute independence of the play concept stands out" (Huizinga, 1995, p.6). The main features of the play concept the way Huizinga sees them were instrumental in my attempts to recognize, refine and develop my process:

First and foremost, play is a voluntary activity. [...] The main characteristic of play: that it is free; is in fact freedom. The second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life. [...] The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid. [...] Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration. This is the third characteristic of play: it secluded-ness, its limitedness. It is "played out" within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning. [...] Immediately connected with its limitation as to time there is a further curious feature of play: it at once assumes fixed for as a cultural phenomenon. Once played, it endures as a newfound creation of

the mind, a treasure to be retained by the memory. [...] It can be repeated at any time, be it a child's play or a game of chess, or at fixed intervals [...]. In this faculty of repetition lies one of the most essential qualities of play. It holds good not only of play as a whole, but also of its inner structure (p. 7-10).

Being aware of these and others features of play helped me to plan my work during the art residencies explorations, each of them was a play with a set of rules I established and tested as I went. I found a lot in common between Huzinga's understanding of play and Mikhail Bakhtin's research on the Greek romance as a literary form, of which I will be talking further. The interconnectedness of the ideas of play and its features and *art form* and its features helped me to find the lens through which I looked at my own methods of productions.

During the course of the programme I had an opportunity to make a good amount of exploratory work. The specificity of my work is related to the fact that I rarely use ready-mades, and I combine media in my work. For example: plaster and wool fiber (2012), metal sculpture and animated light projection (2013), fruit and oil paint (2014) video and painting (2015). I make most of the pieces, which I then use to create my installations. I have made paintings, objects, animations, and videos. Some of them became part of my installation, others, have been shown on their own.

I have a special relationship with *objects*. It may be due to my exposure to almost diametrically opposed views on material cultures that I had opportunity to observe: coming from the Soviet Union, with a lot of its material heritage destroyed, living most of my adult life in the USA, where material culture is a disposable fetish, and coming to the UK, where every object has an unmatched specificity, I prefer making my own objects, to avoid any preconceived visual reading by my viewers. The relationship between objects and objects in the space is more important than the objects themselves. For example, *Caught in the Mundane* (2013-14, Fig. 92): the position of the cast resin fish, and the natural sisal rope was more important than the size and the shape or even material of the fish or the rope; it could have been easily made of plaster, or be a real fish (if

organic matter were permitted in the gallery), and a synthetic rope, if necessary. The main point was the discoverability of the object in the space by the viewer and the pun of the title.

In this section I will briefly enumerate the thoughts, and the artists with whom I have found affinity, and whose work vicariously contributes to my decision making process. Further, I will present the development of my practice that lead to the final set of works.

From ideas of Thomas Nagel and Martin Heidegger through phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and cultural criticism of Umberto Eco and Nikolai Bakhtin to the experiments and thoughts by other artists I cast my net, only to happily confirm that I am not alone in my preoccupation with the subjective experience of the moment.

Because my media varies widely, I research painters, video-, performance-, and installation artists in almost an equal measure. I have felt especially lucky, when I have been able to locate artists who use more than one medium in the same work.

A good example of this is Yayoi Kusama. In particular, her *Obliteration Room* (2012) that simultaneously explores installation, participatory performance, and mark-making action, while employing essentially the painting technique of accumulating marks on the surface.

In case of *Obliteration Room* the effect is achieved by installing the living room set of white furniture in a white cube gallery setting, which is transformed to a completely different state of reality by the viewing public who are invited to plaster all of the environment with circular coloured stickers. The transformation that takes place is facilitated by the participatory action of the public. However, this fact is almost irrelevant, as they can only observe their own and others' action in the limited period of time of their physical presence in the room. Therefore, the final result of the transformation is unknown to them.

It is a state of experience, of participation that makes it worthwhile for the viewer, not the outcome.



Figure 14. The Obliteration Room, Yayoi Kusama, 2012

More often than not my reflection on other artists' work has a retrospective character, as I consider my own *apperceptive* processes the starting point for my work. As per Winnicottian definition of *apperception* (see Terms and Concepts,

p. ix), the instantaneous life experiences leading to formation of the image inform my creative impulses triggered by certain conditions, which I will discuss further in this section. I found deeper connection to Kusama's work, than I initially thought possible.

It all started with a dot: the dot of one of my childhood impressions that was strong enough to become one of the formal elements of my piece in 2013, the dot that became a clue for discovering an artist whose worldview bears some similarity to mine. Just as I am attempting to share my subjective experiences with the world to indicate my position in it, Kusama wanted "to measure the infinity of unbound universe from [her] position in it" (Kusama, 2011, p.23). For her "from the point of view of the one who creates, everything is a gamble, a leap into the unknown" (Kusama, 2011, p.37), and "the devil can live only in the midst of freedom. He soon flees anything settled or predetermined" (Kusama, 2011, p.81).

In 1974, I was pouring tea into a white cup decorated with pound-coin-size orange polka dots. The companion saucer was just white with a simple orange border, but it was standing on a white tablecloth decorated with orange polka dots of the same colour and size. I removed the saucer. The effect was magical. The first visual experience of a metaphoric visual continuity, of the unity of space and object and me, being a part of this world, was breath taking.

"By covering my entire body with polka dots, and then covering the background with polka dots as well, I find self-obliteration" (Kusama, 2011, p. 47). Unlike Kusama, I didn't have a need for self-obliteration, but the rather a communion, and the resonance with the pattern was that communion. That experience stayed with me for the rest of my life, kept me interested in significance of patterns in human existence and cognition and re-emerged when I was working on my *Touch and Tag Surveillance* piece in 2013.

First formal, and then conceptual interest in Kusama's work led me to reading her biography. Remarkably, I found some circumstantial similarities in her formative years and mine, but most importantly, we share an acute visual

awareness, and near-hallucinatory visions: “I communed and conversed with the souls of the violets and many other things. In doing so, I tumbled from the realm of reality into scintillating illusion” (Kusama, p.69). I have also found that her work was not only an outpouring of her inner impressions and phobias, but was also related to creation of certain scenarios for her viewers. In reference to her *Peep Show* (1966) she writes for the show brochure: “I prefer the title *Kusama’s Peep Show* for this exhibition, because it allows you to see things that you can not touch” (Kusama, 2011, p.51). The fact that Kusama, a Japanese girl born in Japan, for seven years had endured and then overcame her mother’s resistance to her moving abroad to New York, and finally succeeded at the age of 28, formally resembled my own – Russian – story, almost to the year. Here, the circumstantial similarity ends, but perhaps they were instrumental to the understanding of development of Kusama’s art forms which transcended the borders both literally and figuratively, and spilled from painting, sculpture and installation into film and literature.

When I was making singular pieces, I wasn’t particularly drawn to Kusama’s polka-dotted surfaces and endless repetitions, from her earlier work in the 60s to her *Obliteration Room* of 2012. However, my *Far afield* (2013) emerged as a one-element-repetition installation. The further I drifted off to installation, the more I found myself considering multiples. The main shift in my practice that happened in the course of the doctorate is the fact that I became more interested in communicating with my viewer, in telling the story in such a way that it conveyed directly through the body—involving the body by its relationship to the space. I found the medium of installation with all its possibilities most appropriate. Kusama’s installations are the epitome of visceral experience. By allowing the public into her private subjective world she creates a possibility of empathy to this world and thus empathy in general.

Repetitive patterns of her early *Infinity Nets* (1960) paintings, near-cloning objects of her *phalli* sculptures, polka-dotting environments of her installations and happenings (branching off to performance and theatre) – all spoke of her desire to be free of something. Kusama herself talked of her polka-dots, with which she was painting the rooms, the objects, her body and the bodies of

others, as of her way to obliterate herself, to merge with the environment, and of her *phalli* sculptures and furniture as her way to overcome her aversions (Kusama, 2011, p.47)



Figure 15. Yayoi Kusama preparing for happening. New York, 1965.

Kenjiro Okamoto wrote: “Her work has no connection to the doctrines of cubism or surrealism, but seems to operate directly through the senses, linking technique to physiology” (Kusama, 2011, p.80).

Referring to Kusama’s work *Endless Love Show* (Fig. 13 below) Claire Bishop, in her critical history of installation art, asserts that it is ‘typical of a 1960s’ psychedelic sensibility in appealing to the fantasy of a shared social body whose intersubjective immanence would obliterate the individual difference: ‘all you need is love’ to fight individualistic capitalism’ (Bishop, 2005, p. 91).



Figure 16. *Endless Love Show*, Yayoi Kusama 1966.

I see Kusama's work as a much more complex reflection of her development as a person and an artist, who came from a different philosophical understanding of the world and society and her presumably repressive family circumstances, from which she longed to escape, than just a product of the Western European socio-philosophical tradition of the time⁴. In her own words printed in the exhibition brochure, she wrote: "Endless Love Show 1966 is about Mechanization, Repetition, Obsession, Impulse, Vertigo, and Unrealized Infinite Love" (Kusama, 2011, p.51). In her autobiography Kusama recalls: that the 60s' generation demands for a restoration of humanity had much in common with the themes of her work (Kusama, 2011). It was her intimate and personal experiences though that brought in the space of similar perception.

My own interest in cross-cultural considerations in the field of human communication in general and visual art in particular, as well as the similarities I can observe between Kusama's approach to form and action and mine, makes the analysis of her work relevant to my own research. Kusama's own definition of her position as "someone who aspires to the world that lies midway between mystery and symbol" (Kusama, 2011, p. 80) resonate with my own reality, as well as probably with other's who love her work. At times I find her work process identical to mine: "...I would spread a sheet of velum paper on top of the red carpet, line up my brushes, and then sit in Zen meditation. [...] I would confront the spirit of the pumpkin, forgetting everything else and concentrating my mind on the form before me" (Kusama, 2011, p.76). The difference is the subject matter: I am aiming to confronting my own spirit by attuning to my own reactions to the outside stimuli, and that is a driver of the form.

For example, different from the physicality of Kusama's pumpkins paintings her *Phalli* sculptures and installation, my work *Capturing the Moment* (2014) aims to capture my precognitive impression of a concept or an intangible moment. I "sit in Zen meditation" focusing my mind on the sensations and vibrations of the world or environment around me, and let it guide my form creations. I used wire mesh as my material for its cold, neutral, and non-organic qualities in my

⁴ Specifically, a simplistic Marxist argument on art as an extension of social struggle, one that was successfully criticised in the field of aesthetics more than ones. Herbert Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension* is a one good example.

attempt to minimize the inherent features of the material to determine the feeling emanating from the final work. Unlike clay, or fabric, the mesh doesn't have the warmth, or the softness that comes through any objects that made out of them. Shaping it into form felt more like transferring my own warmth through the mesh. Perhaps akin to the shapeless sand being formed by the wind into the shapes of dunes. My working of the wire mesh into form driven by my meditation of the moment resulted in the series of objects and their shadows representing, perhaps, my meditation in the material form.

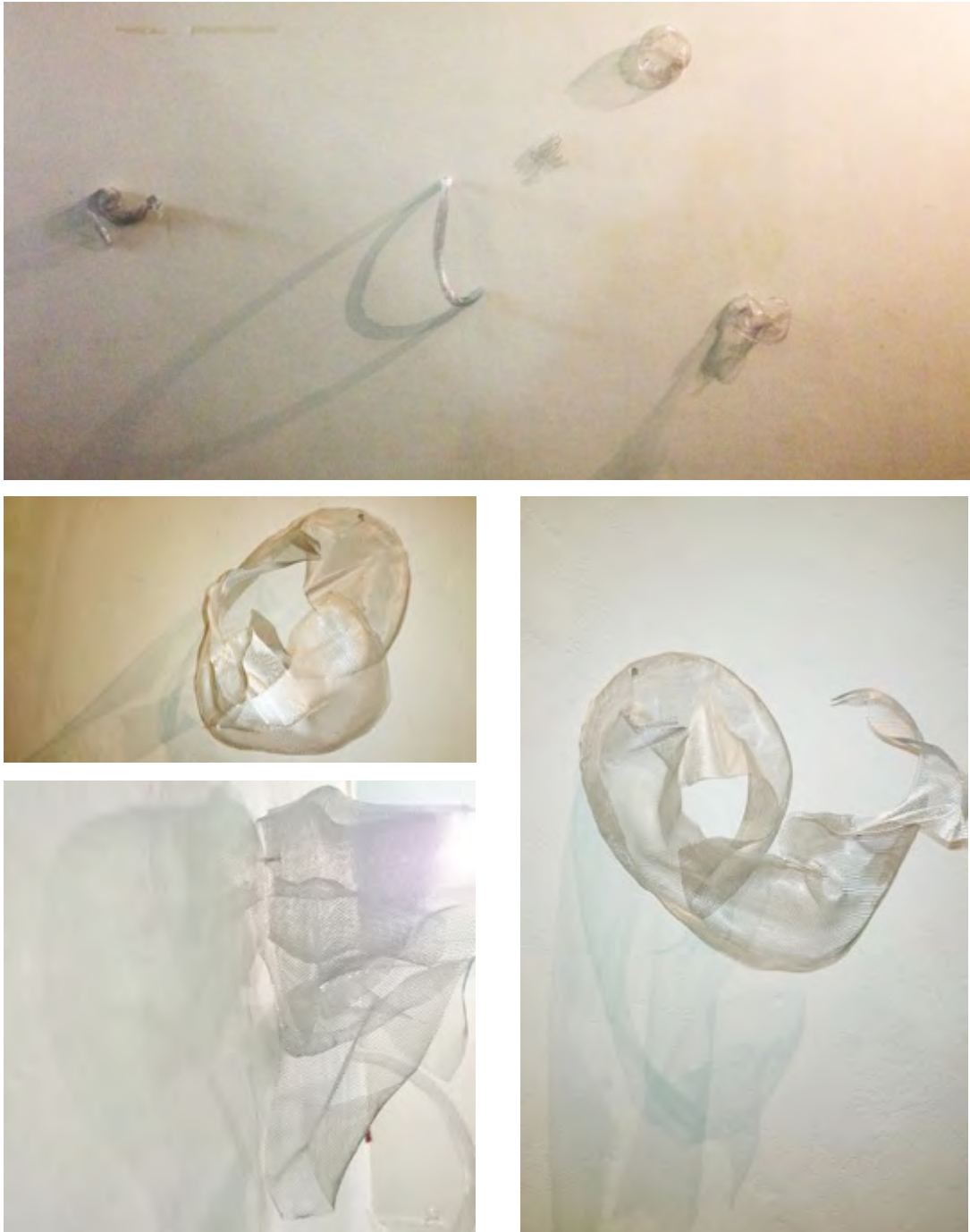


Figure 17. *Capturing the Moment*, wire mesh, 2014.

The relationship of the ephemerality of the moment and my own warmth was the inspiration that drove my work.

In relation to ephemerality of the object in the process of form creation it is worth mentioning Alison Wilding's work, in particular, *Terrestrial* (2003), as probably diametrically opposed in the attitude to mine in the sense that she uses recognizable visual reference. In this case, computer generated image. Looking more like an engineered model it does have an effect of a symbol of the 'unknown'. It also opens up a conversation about *otherness* that is so tempting in the contemporary critical discourse. The title itself implies some outsider's 'extraterrestrial' point of view, thus questioning the relationship between humans and their habitat, and automatically opening ecological and the socio-political conversation. It is, however, the opposite of otherness that drives my interest to 'mystery and symbol', as I am looking for it within and not without.

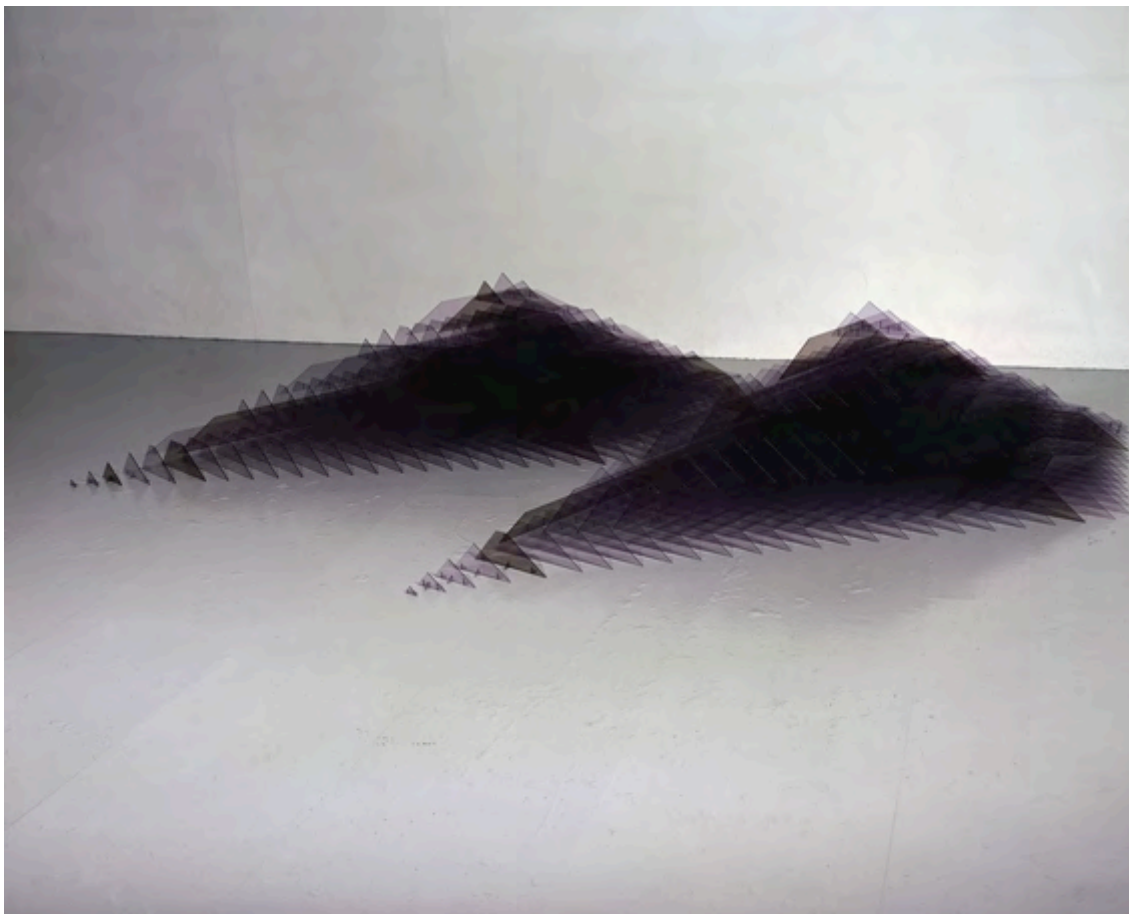


Figure 18. *Terrestrial*, Alison Wilding⁵, PVC and acrylic. 67x300 cm

⁵ Photo: Peter White, accessed at <http://www.nua.ac.uk/thegallery/extraterrestrial/> 20.01.2016

Symbols, if not mystery, seem to be of importance to other artists whose work I consider applicable to the present discourse. For instance, Elmgreen and Dragset's *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101* is symbolic on many levels. Although *play* itself used as a symbol not as a process of production, it is one of them. "Appearing golden in the sunlight, the boy is a symbol of youth, innocence and modern masculinity next to his neighbouring statues of kings and military men" (Domus, 03.09.2012).⁶

My interest in their work is related to my merging into the field of installation. Elmgreen and Dragset are well known for their tongue-in-cheek social critique sculptures and environments. They produce their work as a mixture of urban and interior installation in which the stories of human lives and cultural clichés are embodied and exposed. It attracts me that this often self-referential tapestry that can be traced and decoded.

In the *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101*, the artists thought that 'maybe [they] should celebrate some generations to come and hope that there will be a future where we won't have to have so many war monuments' (Elmgreen and Dragset, 2012).

The setting of the Fourth Plinth Project, on Trafalgar Square, for which Elmgreen and Dragset's work was commissioned, was masterfully employed by the artists to pose many questions. The bronze sculpture of a young boy on a rocking horse placed on the plinth, where a traditional equestrian statue of a war hero is expected, commands the whole square. It is a metaphor of fictional reality, or, to borrow from Walton's concept, "a prop" of cultural myths in which innocent child is a hero, *play* is a heroic act, and the whole cultural cliché of war and peace is questioned. The traditional vision of the relationships between history and its interpretation (fiction of history), adulthood and childhood, masculinity organic and imposed, the heroic and the mundane are being challenged by this work by the means of creating historical visual references and the use of materials appropriate for the task. This compact and witty

⁶ <http://www.domusweb.it/en/interviews/2012/03/09/fourth-plinth-commission--em-powerless-structures-fig-101-em-.html>

commentary, a habitual symbol of a happy boyhood embodied in the form of a realistic bronze sculpture and placed on the plinth in the context of the Trafalgar Square completely reshapes the experience of the onlooker.

Although opposite of appeceptive experience, the work of Elmgreen and Dragset seems to refer to the memories of such experiences by superimposition of clichés of the accepted wisdom and acuteness of emotional responses imbedded in their work: “The boy is at an age before going to war and fighting whatever enemy to get medals. Trafalgar Square is celebrating winning a battle and winning over the enemy, but the worst enemy we have is our own fear” (Michael Elmgreen, interview to Domus 2012).



Figure 19. Elmgreen and Dragset, *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101*, 2012

Their *Death of Collector* installation at 2009's Venice biennale, consisting of the realistic effigy of a man floating face down in the pool of presumably his own home, is as ironic as it is contextual. It not only it invokes Roland Barthes' essay *The Death of the Author* which in 1968 opened up new ways of looking at literary texts, but by implication calls for reflecting on the role of the collector in the modern art world.



Figure 20. Death of a Collector. Elmgreen & Dragset., 2009 (Telegraph online, 2012)

In their exhibition at Victoria and Albert Museum *Tomorrow* (2013), Elmgreen and Dragset used build-in new interiors in the museum rooms, as well as made objects, like a boy on the rocking horse figurine – the recurring image in their work.



Figure 21. *Tomorrow*, Elmgreen and Dragset, 2013

They represented a house of a bankrupt old architect, who is about to be evicted. *Tomorrow* should be the day. Of this and of many other details the viewer may learn from the 'film script' the stacks of which are sitting on the

floor of the architect's working studio. Here Elmgreen and Dragset added yet another dimension to their work: time. Their use of a planted artefact – a printed film script that visitors could take home as they would an exhibition catalogue, and read it afterwards as they would read a book – to extend the time of the viewers' interaction with their work. The fact that Michael and Ingar came from poetry and theatre studies respectively makes their sense of time and timing especially effective. The reason I find their work relevant for my practice is their desire and ability to create fictional reality of their own using cultural and historical references while using all available media. They haven't yet branched off to actual film making or video, but the subject matter of their work is related to cultural and historical perception and memory (as in the *Harvest* exhibition of 2012 at Victoria Miro Gallery) for which video is also an appropriate medium. As I consider my work tightly related to these topics, and the task at hand dictates the media, I also grew more interested in the work of a 2012 Turner Prize winner – Elizabeth Price.

I have begun to research Elizabeth Price's work, as I was interested in the ways she constructs her visual narrative.

Unlike Kusama and Elmgreen and Dragset, Elizabeth Price is an English-born and -based artist whose video work in 2012 won her Turner Prize. A former member of Talulah Gosh and The Carousel music bands and a graduate of the University of Leeds Professional Doctorate Programme (1999), Price describes her oeuvre as "something that looks like a PowerPoint lecture [moving] to something that looks like an infomercial to something that looks like a cinematic melodrama" (No Author, Tate, 2012).

All these attributes are characteristic of a form known as Music Video (which is also very interesting to decode). They are generally short impressionistic narrative illustrating the content of the song for which they were created. The difference between music videos and Price's work is that she doesn't weave her creation around a particular musical piece. Music is just another – equally substantial – element of her video sampling fantasy. The multimedia environment she creates in 2D projection employs a typical tool of

postmodernism – sampling. Hers are visual and music DJ-like compositions based on the theme of her fancy. For example, her Turner Prize winning piece is particularly concerned with British imagery: church architecture, Woolworth furniture department fire of 1979, and pop-music performances. All of this is edited into a piece of video that creates an impressionistic view of the period of late 1980s England.



Figure 22. *The Woolworth's Choir of 1979*. Elizabeth Price. Still from video 2012.

The piece reads as being consistent with the peripheral view of a thirteen-year-old who may have had a traumatic event reaching her via TV news amongst other bits of media: pop performances and historical documentaries. Born in 1966, she would have been thirteen at the time of the fire. An impressionistic sampling so characteristic of post-modern art seems, in the case of Price's work, an effective way of delivering a play of imagination based on a memory-based experience.

Another piece representative of Elizabeth Price's style is the one screened and exhibited at The Stanley Picker Gallery and entitled *At the House of Mr X*. According to the gallery curatorial description:

At the House of Mr X by Elizabeth Price takes as its subject the home of an anonymous art collector, designed and built in the late 1960s. [...] A slow, visual tour begins, proceeding from the

entrance through open-plan areas, into every room. [...] The tour is directed by a silent narrator, present as an on-screen script, punctuated with percussion and close-harmony vocal arrangements. (Stanley Picker Gallery, 2007).

As can be gleaned from the curatorial description of *At the House of Mr X*, Price's approach to her subject is shaped by her own memory-based experiences and reflections as well as her professional craftsmanship and research skills.

Price's current exhibition *Sunlight* at the Focal Point Gallery in Southend-on-Sea is a composition combining scientific, pop-culture and musical imagery.



Figure 23. *Sunlight*. Elizabeth Price. Video installation, 2013.

Consisting of two-screen video projections, choreographed and orchestrated into a performance of their own, *Sunlight* combines historical photographs of the sun, loop-animated in such way as to convey a continuity of time, as the photographs were taken every day for a year, fashion stills, syncopating or lingering on the screens just enough to stage awkward tensions, resolved by a rhythmical snap of fingers, that became Price's signature image/sound. Masterfully timed, minimal, and captivating in terms of rhythm and colour,

Sunlight is anchored in the visual pop-culture, but succeeds in referencing deeper matters, such as superimposition of the eternal, personal and social:

In *SUNLIGHT* Price occupies a feverish ontological universe; using the torrid slashing surface of the sun as a backdrop or springboard, from which she deploys several items. The links between the items on screen and the work's genesis seem sordidly ostentatious: a pot of yellow nail polish, a rotating 'K'-Zildjian cymbal, and finally several images of hosiery models shielding themselves from the apparent rays of the sun, which is cast as the film's ultimate protagonist. All of these stories act as a way to suggest that our thoughts and judgments are bound up in our experiences - we are ultimately at the mercy of our own individualistic impressions and interpretations (Sophie Risner, 2013, no page number).

Although, the subject matter is different, moment rather than memory driven, my own practice is also concerned with visual impression, and the imprint it creates on one's imagination, I find it enriching to research Price's methods in the field of video art. In her interview to *The Guardian* (2013) she says:

Usually, I have an autobiographical attachment to the subjects I explore. I use pop music – with its cathartic, libidinal pleasures – to draw on my formative experiences as a shy teenager growing up in Luton, listening to post-punk on the radio. Its alienated fury and arch, satiric wit offered me an ambivalent optimism. Adult life was going to be hard, hazardous and probably sorrowful, I deduced. But still, there were all these bold, witty people out there in the world, finding inventive ways to express themselves.

She seems to be drawing from her memory of the events captured on or by media and putting them into a montage triggering relevant memories in her viewers.

It is interesting to compare another approach to creating experiences in and by the means of video art, which is either subconscious or empathetic, and certainly more sensual.

In my last year of the Doctorate the works of Bill Viola and Douglas Gordon helped me pursuing the difference between the primal and intellectual response to a piece of art, and placing my own practice within the former category. It is sensual and emotional responses to the work either my own or someone else's that inform my judgment, and no amount of intellectual analysis or reasoning can justify the change.

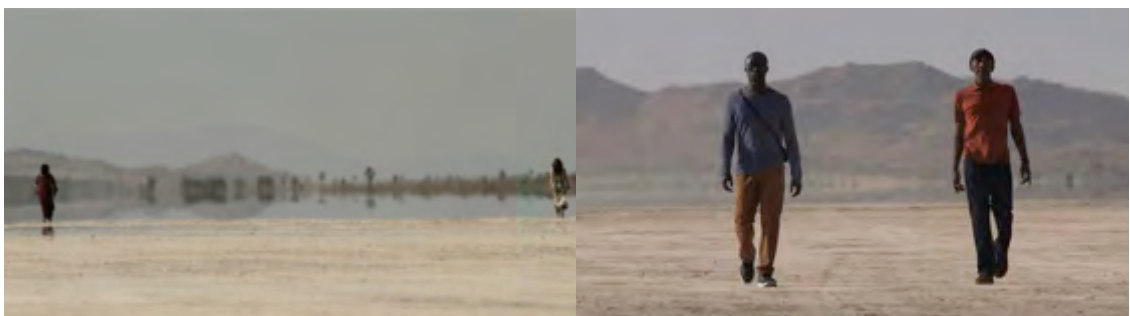


Figure 24. *The encounter*, Bill Viola, 2011

The theme of life and death as phenomena of human existence irrelevant of social factors is a characteristic of Bill Viola's art. His topic is *ineffable* lived and sensed through the simplicity of the simple and recognizable imagery. Such is his *The encounters*, *The dreamers*, as well as his mother's death tape, and the rest of his art. Focusing on simple and forgotten, he reminds his viewers of the irreconcilable mysteries of being (Viola, 2012).

In 2014, the views and thoughts of the artists whose practice is concerned with colour and the perception of colour attracted my attention. I have attended Helio Oiticica's retrospective in Dublin. His installation series *Nuclei*, with its painterly approach to colour that "have its own power" (Oiticica, 1960, quoted in *Propositions* booklet, 2014), creates environment for participatory and sensory discovery for the audience.

Observing Oiticica's work was important for my work with installation and painting, as it is related to the exploration of pure color "as a cultural coding and

embodied knowledge”⁷. Thus making his experimentations almost completely formal study of perception and communication with/by color. Oiticica’s approach resonates with the McGinn’s “creature-related” concept:

I believe that color [sic] has already achieved the sublime or is at its doors, within me, however, the necessary development it is only at its beginning. The experience of the *Nuclei*, of which I created some small models, opened all the doors to the liberty of color to me and to perfect structural integration in space and time (Oiticica, 1960, quoted in *Propositions* booklet, 2014).

Oiticica created an immersive space for the viewers to experience colour in the synthetic space of a gallery, where the audience presumably arrives open-minded, or at least curious. “Not only they [they] leave the wall, the cluster together to surround ‘the participant’ (Oiticica’s word) emphatically in engaging her physically (Craig, 2013, p. 20).

It is interesting to note that at the IMMA exhibition in 2014 Dublin the curatorial choice of supporting documents presentation was projection, which was almost completely devoid of colour. It was an important observation for me, because I was planning combining painting with video projection for my installation piece. It helped me to consider the relationship of brightness and colours of video and the intensity of colours and in situ lighting in painting.

⁷ Helio Oiticica. *Propositions*. Exhibition booklet, IMMA Dublin July 2014.



Figure 25. Helio Oiticica. *Propositions*. Installation view, 2014 DMMA

Another artist whose work in the field of painting developed in the three-dimensional space is Anselm Kiefer. He claims that he had found in art what he couldn't find in the church (Kiefer, 2010). However vicarious that comparison may be, it reflects the spiritual essence of creativity, and art making, which is "the only thing that makes life worth living" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 65).

In 2014 I attended Kiefer's exhibition at the RA. His paintings with the incorporated objects create almost phantasmagorical corpo-reality that by its grander is evocative of idealistic German philosophy and the music of Wagner. The themes of German culture and history are famously referred in such Kiefer's work as *Parsifal*, *Heroic Symbols of the Past* and many others. The power and energy transmitted by his work requires the large halls of the Academy as a negative space of counterbalance. It was an important experience for me to measure the amount of space necessary for the exhibition of work of such a scope and a scale of inquiry.



Figure 26. Anselm Keifer, *Fates of the Nations*, mixed media.

The perennial topics of life and death, the human and elemental power balance and imbalance, and the role of art in acquiring empirical knowledge on these subjects brought me to the philosophical concept of *cognitive closure* (as referred to in *Terms and Concepts*, p. vi).

My research, at this point, doesn't include anthropological references, I hope, eventually, to be able to look further through this lens. The holistic approach to art taken by anthropology seems to be aligning well with my point of view. Several anthropologists have noted that the Western categories of 'painting', 'sculpture', or 'literature', conceived as independent artistic activities, do not exist, or exist in a significantly different form, in most non-Western contexts (Robert Layton, 1981). Thus, there is no consensus on a single, cross-cultural definition of 'art' in anthropology.

The reason I find this liberating for the artist as a maker is that while historically art was divided onto genre by the material means of production, the essence of art making as act was muddled.

My brain recorded my first transcendental experience before I could walk or talk. Bundled up for a frosty Russian winter day out, I was ridden down the streets of St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) in my perambulator; face up, by some

animated creature. Was it my mother, my father, or my grandmother, I have no recollection, but the sense of timeless communion with the visible world was so strong, that it remained a compass for the rest of my life. The sense of connectedness, of communion with the snow and fog around me, with the tops of the buildings syncopated by the recessed walls and columns visible from my fixed motion, with the sound of trams and human voices, of being in the moment now and then, of being one with the world, was akin to the later experienced immersive and uncompromising sense of creation.

During my doctorate I returned to my long-term interest in *apperceptive*, subjective experience as a method of cognition, and *playing art* as a manifestation of such an experience. In practice I made it my task to explore the generative conditions of my practice, and consciously reproduce them for the purpose of tracing the act of creation. I reached the results that helped me to understand how to reproduce the experience of apperception as an adult. I will be sharing my findings not only in the form of my works, but also in the form the rules that are instrumental in my art practice.

My theoretical framework benefitted greatly from the fact that I was able to look at the subject of my interest through the variety of lenses and concepts.

The Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method that explores the intricacies of experience and points of view delineated by rules as a phenomenon echoes Kendal Walton's constructions of the importance of acknowledgement of rules of the game while discussing fictional realities in representational art.

While exploring mechanism of generating fictional or worlds Walton states:

The role of props in generating fictional truths is enormously important. They give fictional worlds and their contents a kind of objectivity, an independence from excitement of our adventures with them. This objectivity constitutes another affinity between functionality, insofar as it derives from props, and truth (Walton 1999, p.44).

echoes Merleau-Ponty's thought that:

If we set ourselves to see as things the intervals between them, the appearance of the world would be just as strikingly altered, as is that of the puzzle at the moment when I pick out 'the rabbit or the hunter'. There would be not simply the same elements differently related, [...] but in truth another world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.16)

Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* critical studies position *play* at the centre of human experience (as referred to in *Terms and Concepts* p. vii). Heidegger, Eco and Bakhtin, all spoke of experiential processing in the context of their respective fields. By the end of my second year looking into Winnicott's *Playing and Reality*, provided yet another – psychoanalytical – lens through which the subjective experience of playing could be analyzed and understood.

The fact that a variety of recognized thinkers and theoreticians placed the activity that I always valued the most under such a vigorous scrutiny and considered it fundamentally important and defining activity of our species helped me to better contextualize my practice.

Being a synthetic multimedia or inter-media artist, I find it crucial to use multiple means to convey and explore one and only idea, that is the idea of, to borrow from Winnicott, *creative apperception – the moment* of precognitive creative experience that manifests itself first and foremost in play. In his *Playing and Reality* Winnicott asserts that “creative apperception ‘more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living’” (Winnicott, 87). In order to explore this complex phenomenon in practice, I had to align my thoughts and creative findings with a broader cultural discourse, to question and examine my motives and methods.

It was my aim to create certain experiences for myself as an artist, and then to share my work with the audience. I used my art practice as an exploratory device to better understand the means of my art production as well as the

impact it makes on my audience. There is a myriad of factors that contribute to both their creation and consumptions of which I will be talking in this section.

As I am exploring the intangibles, I generally follow two activities: I play, and then analyze play's outcome in the hope to find something new in the manifestation of this experience. As my subject matter is playing, one would assume that performance might have been a medium of choice. However, playing for me has broader implications. It stretches to the way of life, and everything becomes playing. Playing is a main means of production of my art, be it staging a journey, glazing a painting, or slashing a raw clay. The specificity of playing for me is, first and foremost, the state in which all my interaction with objects, myself, and/or the environment of the moment becomes an imaginary or fictional (in the sense of 'true in [my] fictional world' (Walton, p.35)) interaction with the essence ('a spirit' as Kusama puts it (p.76)) of the object or the environment. In the meditative state, everything becomes animated, the energy is flowing in a way that all actions seem predetermined by the flow of the previous action. The most important point is a consciously setting up the start of the game, suspending fear and judgment and going with a flow in a state of being alert. I will further speak of the ways by which I set up my exploratory games, the simple rules I follow, and what I consider a satisfactory outcome.

INVITATION TO PLAY

The 'association of ideas which brings past experience into play can restore only extrinsic connection, and can be no more than one itself, because the original experience involves no other.

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1962

If I am ever in any other and better world, I hope that I shall have enough time to play with nothing but toy theatres; and I hope that I shall have enough divine and superhuman energy to act at least one play in them without a hitch.

G.K. Chesterton, *The Toy Theatre*, 1923

Not many artists refer to their art as *play*. It is, however, often a word of choice for activity of defining and refining one's decision: "playing with the idea", "playing with the material", ... with a rhythm, color, metre – the possibilities are endless. Although we live in the 21st century, and despite all the tenets of human history and culture, the importance of *play* is played down in a 'serious' society. It is enough to look at the major dictionaries' definition of the concept of play (as referred to on p. vii of this paper) to observe this tendency.

The concept of *play* as a human activity in childhood is well developed by Jean Piaget (1962). Johan Huizinga (1957), considered *play* a fundamental element of culture, and a driver of human behavior in all its activities from love to politics and religion. Umberto Eco talked about the role of play in fiction as discussing language and literature:

To read fiction means to play a game by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world. By reading narrative, we escape the anxiety that attacks us when we try to say something true about the world. This is the consoling function of narrative – the reason people tell stories, and have told stories from the beginning of time (Eco, 1977).

In application to visual art the centrality of play is well argued by Kendall Walton. *Play, interplay, settings, timing, staging* – all these terms which used to belong to the world of theatre, long ago spilled out into contemporary art. Arthur Danto argues that aesthetics is actually the means of art, rather than a criterion of its evaluation. I would argue that *play* is its absolute *modus operandi*.

The topic of play was well researched in relation to psychoanalysis by D.W. Winnicott in his *Playing and Reality* (1971), who considers *play* to be the only state where creative action is possible, and connects lack of ability to play with a psychological imbalance or illness. Winnicott calls it *creative apperception* and considers it “more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living” (*Creativity and its Origins*, 1971, p. 65). He refers to “the infinite subtleties that are to be found in play by those who seek” (Winnicott, p.53).

As the main focus of my research and practice is the moment of pure inundated experience before or during its accumulation into the existing individual framework of perception, play is also instrumental. Perhaps it is only possible tool for modeling of apperceptive experience. According to Winnicott: “It is in playing and only in playing the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self” (p.73). According to Piaget: “Children’s play constitutes the extreme pole of assimilation of reality to the ego, while in the same time it has something of the creative imagination which will be the motor of all future thought even of reason” (1951, p.163). In my adult condition, I consciously set up/create my reality, and suspend my judgment until the game is over. For example, when filming on location, I may determine the place and time I am going to spend there, thus “assimilating reality to the ego”, and then staying alert to the unfolding circumstances. It becomes the game of chance. This is the way I filmed my *Fish* video (Fig. 70) in Tashkent, or the *Circle* video (Fig. 69) in Samarkand, of which I will be writing further, and painted my circular paintings (Fig. 82).

I see Marina Abramovic’s *The Artist is Present* (2010) as a good example of artistic inquiry into the realm of *apperception*. It seemingly aims to create a unique

experience for the members of the audience by giving them an opportunity to sit opposite to the artist for the unlimited amount of time, and consume, literally, the artist's presence. Whether or not it steers people into the new thoughts and feelings we can only gauge from the MoMA's visitor's interviews, but the intension of creating this new experience for herself and her audience is quite clear.

The lifetime of experience of being a performance artist and a powerful human being, made Abramovic's ambitious project possible. It was her unique presence and energy that created a subjective reality for each and every participant of the action; it is their genuine curiosity that aided the interaction between the artist and her audience.



Figure 27. Marina Abramovic *The Artist Is Present*, (Observer online, July 2011)

While contemplating Marina's performance, the nature of performance art, and its relationship to drama and play, I uncovered my own means of art production, of necessary and sufficient conditions of its emergence. I see Marina's performances being based on the art of acting when she uses techniques similar to the ones used in acting exercises, particularly Sanford Meizner, which is based external responses vs. Stanislavsky's *method* acting that draws from the internal: memory and emotional recall. I am not the only one who noticed this similarity. Kent Turner, in his article for Film Forward magazine writes:

Abramovic calls herself an artist, rather than an actor, yet her work shares basic performing skills. The main goal for her and a voluntary participant, who sits about five feet across from her before a roomful of spectators, is to shed one's ego and become vulnerable. It's also one of the desired outcomes for acting guru Sanford Meisner's famous repetition exercise: two actors, also directly facing each other, repeat a stated observation back and forth. The point is to shift one's focus onto the scene partner, allowing the reactions to become spontaneous, as opposed to behaving based on preconceived ideas. In other words, learning to be, uh, present (13 June, 2012).

In, perhaps, a similar to Meisner's exercises manner, I am seeking to free myself for the apprehensive experiences by facing and reacting to the unknown or unusual circumstances, or any unexpected events that trigger this kind of experiences. My environment becomes my acting or playing partner, and work then emerges in relation to this partnership. For example, while in residency in Slovakia, I stepped on a snail. I tried to save the creature by placing it aside on the grass, but the intense sense of discomfort and shame of causing harm haunted me until I did a performance. I enacted being a stillborn. Somehow, playing dead had a therapeutic effect for my psyche. It was a play: I was being born from the hammock, like from the pouch of a marsupial, and then stayed still on the ground. I made a video recording of this performance (Fig. 52), which I then edited in post-production.

The diary of this kind of micro events constitutes my art-practice. It is my life's subjective experience I am sharing with my audience, just as a haiku poet shares his feelings of the moment. These moments resonate with subjective realities of my audience and become theirs however different they may be. In this sense, to borrow from Kendall Walton, I am creating a reality, which is fictional for the members of my audience.

Recorded performance is one of the media of choice, and staging is relevant to for my methods of production, therefore studying performance artists' work such as

Marina Abramovic or Yingmei Duan, of whom I'll be talking further is always of interest.

The body of work I made during my Doctorate consists of paintings, video, and made/found objects, arranged in an immersive multimedia installation. Here I can elaborate on my media choices, but before, I would like to refer back again to the Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, and again emphasize the importance of the concept that all the representational art by nature functions "as a prop to this fictional reality or that" (Walton, 38). The notion has been instrumental in contemplating my practice as well as in discussing my work.

That being said, I consider multimedia installation a prop that most effectively reflect my imaginary or fictional world, which I create and share with my viewers. The complexity of *apperceptive* experience suggests use of materials and media that would convey this. I consider *polyphony* or what Mikhail Bakhtin called *heteroglossia* (1921) necessary condition when selecting the media, as it allows multiple takes on the same theme and allows multiple voices to be heard (seen) simultaneously. It is not always easy for the viewer, but with my aim of conveying the message of complexity of life, it is my choice.

Painting is another medium that I work in. For my doctorate study of searching for the ways of having and transmitting immediacy of experience, I find action of mark making in painting very important, because the energy of the moment in which that mark creation took place is transmitted by the final image. "Within art discourse, reformulation of painting as act of performance in the 1950s and 1960s explicitly cite Pollock as the model for the new way of conceptualizing the work of art and the artistic subject" (Amelia Jones in Craig Staff, p. 17). I look at Pollock's paintings as records of his interaction with paint, for me they are indicative of the moments of artist Jackson Pollock transmitting his energy into the splashes of color.

Painting captures the energy of the moment. It helps to establish immediate connection to the world. Colour choice is associated with a particular moment or situation. Working, merging together, paint gives the immediate feedback. I relate

to my painting process, just as I relate to my exploratory journeys—as a opening up the possibility of serendipitous event, and unusual discovery, an apprehensive experience.

Akin to automatic writing of Dada my videos and my paintings demand complete trust to the process, to all my pre-conscious and subconscious. Not having a preset scenario, apart from just recording the moments of being, I analyze my videos in postproduction stage. Curatorial choices often require some site-specific touchup. For example, what works as an individual piece, may require editing if shown as a component of an installation.

FIRST YEAR WORK / DEPARTURE

My first year work was transitional from my MA course to the Doctorate. I had to define the main direction of my research and my practice, and decide on what media to focus. I set to begin with the experimentation in communication through fictionalized objects. Before I come to talking about actual pieces, I would need to explain what I mean by this.

I would like to mention Jean-Francois Lyotard position when, in 1979, he had famously argued the disintegration of and the mistrust toward metanarratives in postmodern era. As valid as it may have been, the metanarratives Lyotard was interested in were mostly concerned with society rather than with human nature, inspiration and imagination. The main metanarratives of life and death are still intact and are to stay, and will always be a major source of reflection and struggle for human kind. It is a common sense, a consensus, a given wisdom of experience of history and culture upon which all the variations of other kinds of consensus are being built. All cultural groups are held together by a certain consensus, a set of shared values, a habit or a form. By exploring a possibility of creating new forms or new connections within the forms, I was hoping to question the accepted wisdom, and suggest that different reading is possible.

While talking about common sense in it is impossible not to mention a French culture philosopher Jacque Ranci re, who calls it “a community of sensible data, a certain way of being together, relying on certain meaning of things and words (2008). He also introduces the concept of *dissensus* as opposite to *consensus*. It is a construct describing the idea of art that is not challenging existing consensus or common sense but builds over it. “It means oversetting of time and space, over communities of words and things [...] Art and politics I think begins when the monopoly of common reality is questioned. [...] Creating forms of dissensus is a work of fiction” (Ranci re, 2008).

Quoting Jacque Ranci re further: “Fiction doesn’t mean telling stories, it means constructing another sense of reality” (2008). This thought lines up with my understanding of where my content lies: it is a play in the realm of fictional reality that I am creating while living and reflecting on life micro and macro events. In the

course of my doctorate years, I was consciously focusing on the processes and conditions of conceiving, making, developing, and presenting my work. I will be talking of the particular pieces further in this report.

That being said, as my content is communication between different realities and fictional truths, questioning and integration within the fictional, I have also observed the influence of ancient poetry and iconography on my practice. Greek mythology, Iranian *Shahnameh*, Old English *Beowulf*, Russian *Tale of Igor's Campaign* are timeless sources of the tales of birth, love, and death, and all possible patterns of life, some parts of which spring to mind in seemingly random circumstances.



Figure 28. Icon with the Nativity, Central Rus', 16th Century, tempera and gold on wood, 23 ¼ by 18 ½ in.

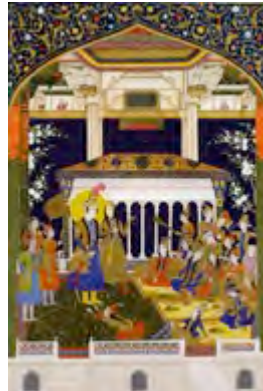


Figure 29. Shahnameh: Sudaba and Siyavush Illustration 16 c.



Figure 30. Battle between Novgorodians and Suzdalians. Novgorod Icon 15 c.



For example, my piece *Hermes Trismegistus and Psyche* (Fig. 32) derived from a found object – pair of sole-less shoes with three buckles. When I saw them at the Shortditch Sunday market, just like in the word association game⁸, the thought of Hermes Trismegistus, and the idea of impossibility as such came to me simultaneously. I am not sure how the idea of impossibility came about. Perhaps, the absence of the shoe soles suggested it. In my own game of association, I looked for some image that would counterbalance Hermes' traits. Psyche, another character from Greek mythology *materialized* in the form of butterflies.

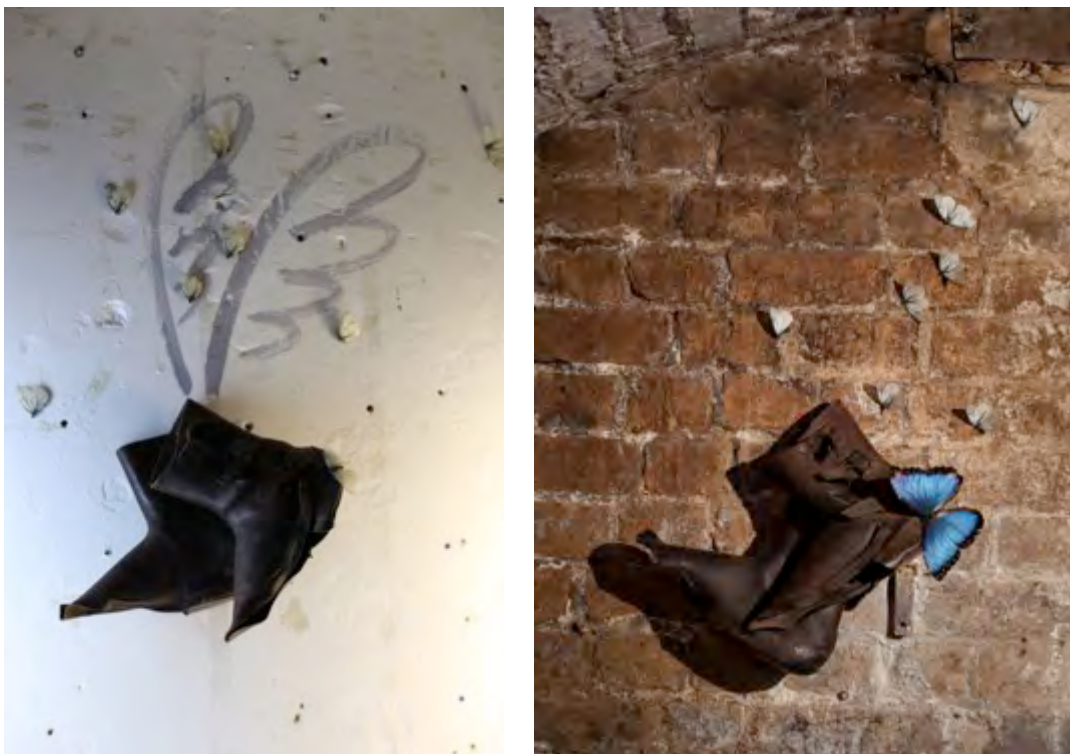


Figure 32. *Hermes Trismegistus and Psyche*, found object, butterflies, 2013.

Hermes is the trickster, the god of transitions and boundaries, protector of traders, travelers and thieves. Psyche is seemingly his opposite in nature, a beauty so pure that butterflies take her for a flower and accompany her everywhere she goes. In my fiction I connected the characters that have never met, aided by the object I've found on my travels: the old shoes from Brick Lane Sunday market and the butterflies that died in my friend's greenhouse near St. Petersburg.

⁸ Word association game is the game when a player attempts to guess a word conceived by other players by the images these players think are associated with the word (V.S)

The meaning that in my intuitive processing was suggested by the things I found, I then transferred to the title of the piece, in the hope to help the viewer see a glimpse of my reality. Just as Walton suggests: "A picture generates the fictional truths of the picture world, and it combines with activities and experiences of the observer to generate the fictional truths of his game" (Walton, p.336).

It the process of reflecting on the accepted wisdom of the previous century and beyond, the critical thought of our time connects art as well as interpretation of the works of art to the world of fiction. For example in 29-30 October 2010, a conference was held by the Clark Art Institute entitled 'Fictions of Art History,' where art historians, artists and critics 'set out to explore the extent to which the discipline of art history, the writing of fiction, and the making and viewing of art might be commingled' (Ledbury, 2013). Walton (2003) discusses the whole edifice of fictional worlds and the way they operate in the human mind, imagination, and art. While Walton is occupied with the world of play and fiction, Dave Davis' (2013) approach is focused on the art's 'performative' aspect (Davies, 2003). The ideas of Total Art as thought and theorized by Dadaists are seemingly spreading globally after a century of experimentations. As Francis Picabia who saw his mission of merging life and art claimed "after us life will become art.'

My long-standing interest in performance and installation as platform for communicating imagined or fictional realities led me to the critical writing of Claire Bishop, an art historian and a professor of Contemporary Art at The City University of New York. Bishop's analysis of installation and performance art as well as relational aesthetics critique provided a valuable perspective on the socio-political and psychological elements of art production. It was important reading for me, as it helped to define my own position in relation to appropriating of art as a vehicle for social and political agenda. I had to understand what, if any, social and/or political agenda I am promoting by my own practice.

On another side of the spectrum Stephen M. Leuthold's compilation *Cross-cultural Issues in Art* (2013) which provides a framework for comparative aesthetic analysis rooted in more organic, anthropological considerations: sense of space and geography, culture, ethnicity, gender are the lenses through which the means

and the output of art production are being discussed. Although Bishop's arguments do illuminate general historical circumstances, I believe the Leuthhold approach does allow more rigorous analysis of the particular artist's moves and motives, their worldviews, and the visual narratives through which they reconstruct their realities. That is the space where I locate my own work.

My first year on the Doctorate was an intense experience of making and showing work. I took part in multiple art residencies. It was a natural conclusion and a departure point from my recent MA work. I finished the *Transformation* series (Fig. 33) that I had started in the previous year. This work was concerned with the process of emergence of the opposites, with the suggestion of eternal cycle. The work consists of 15 prints of a traced circular movement of the increased intensity, placed in a 4x4 grid with the place of the 16th left empty.

Working with one plate, I produced a series of etchings, which transformed prints with only one mark into a blackened surface. The colour spots then were painted randomly on top of the etching as if in attempt to break the inevitable entropy. This work sets to explore the restrictive rules of the game of observation of repetitive actions over the period of time, which is also limited by the longevity of the zinc printing plate. That very simple, almost illustrative experience, of the moment of emergence and capturing the essence of time the way I feel it. The work was a process and a result of the "faculty of repetition" which Huizinga considers one of the most essential qualities of play, "it holds not only of play as a whole, but also of its inner structure. In nearly all higher forms of play, the elements of repetition and alteration are like the warp and woof of a fabric" (p.10).

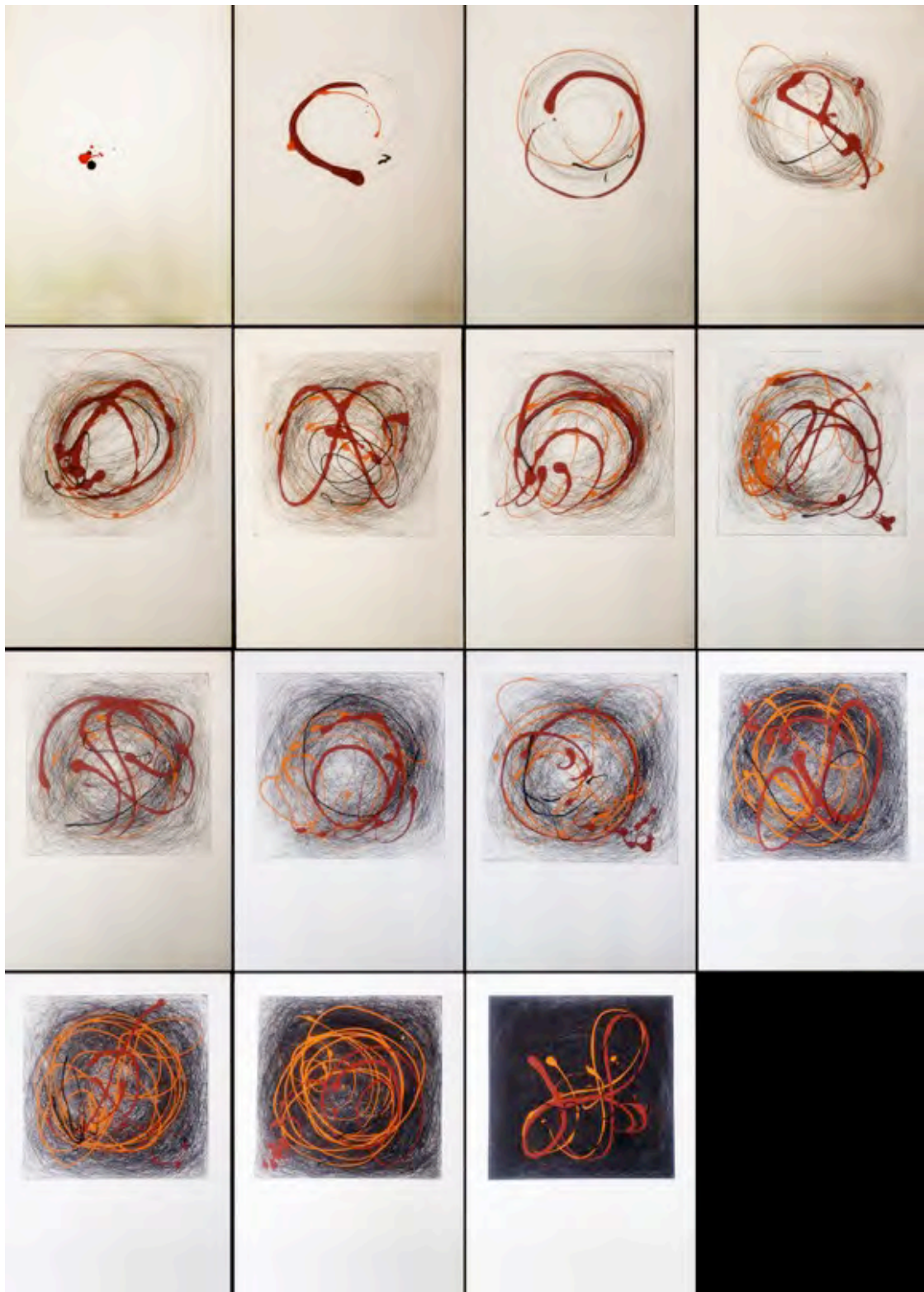


Figure 33. *Transformation* series. Etching, acrylic paint. 2013

As an extension of the *Transformation* series, I made a video piece that was directly related to my reflection on time and how differently it is traced in the material world. *Spinning Top* (Fig. 34) is a three takes recording of my childhood toy put together into a continuous loop. Together with the *Transformation* prints it also became a part of my first year Annual Showcase installation.



Figure 34. *Spinning Top*, video. 2014

Combination of etchings and video was next piece where I explored the potential of multimedia installation. As both pieces were dedicated to the same topic—transformation—using different media, I wanted to see how they might work together in one show. I was curious to see whether they would interfere or amplify each other. The installation revealed an interesting visual dialogue between two pieces, although I felt that I could have positioned them closer together, perhaps on the opposite rather than on adjacent walls. It was an example of an environment I was aiming to make, but it also brought to my attention the

necessity to consider lighting very carefully, as video projection calls for a dark space, while prints required natural light.

The same year I have embarked on a journey that was triggered by reading my late grandmother's memoirs, as well as my own memory of my grandmother and the stories she told when she was alive. She had a formative influence on my character; at least as a first bearer of realities so distinctly different from my own that I could only consider them as fictional. That first experience of mapping my reality *near* hers and establishing my own identity was an important experience of my life. Words, images and visions that were heard, viewed and imagined came into play and kindled my passion for action, motion and creation.

This is where I made the first exploratory incision of my doctorate research. I have begun by attempting to superimpose sensory, visual, aural memories with the awareness of the present moment and observing the ways the manifest themselves in objects and their interplay.

My idiosyncratic approach to *object* that I mentioned above (p. 30) carries a suggestive rather than prescriptive character; it serves to invoke associations in the viewer, while revealing my own experience of making by observing easily traceable method of production. One of the good representations of this process is my installation *Far Afield* (2013, Fig. 35) that was a part of my second year work. It was an illustration or, according to Walton, a prop for the tracing of my grandmother's story, the story of her coming of age in Central Asia during the time of Russian revolution of 1917 that was happening far away in St. Petersburg, the flowering early spring steppe, and the philosophical debates with her friends about Nietzsche and Marx. I used impoverished materials: plywood pieces, nails and paper to create an image of multiple connotations—a flower, a bayonet, mass production of the industrial revolution, and the irony of the grandeur of ideas against the backdrop of the dilapidated state of economy of the time. The image as a symbol came to me in a daydream.



Figure 35. *Far Afield*. Objects, installation. Plywood, paper, nails. 2013

I have created over a hundred similar objects consisting of a piece of red-coloured paper pierced by a steel nail held vertically in place by a broken piece of plywood through which it was driven. I painted the large sheet of plywood black using acrylic paint. The rough edges of the plywood body underneath the paint looked quite vulnerable in its interaction with the sharp steel.

The installation was shown in three different locations: Trinity Buoy Wharf Gallery and Old Truman Brewery Gallery, AVA gallery at the UEL. None of the locations was optimal for the installation, as it required more space than was available, to be most effective. The pieces were too crowded on location at the Old Truman Brewery Gallery. In the Trinity Buoy Wharf show, it was put behind the barrier for the health and safety reason by security, and thus lost its poignancy for the viewers. However, the image created by the interaction of materials and the repetitive pattern of display successfully suggested the intended meaning. It received a good response from the audience at all three locations. People were inquiring about my intended meaning, noting the sense of danger emanating from the pieces, sharing their impression of drifting into the unknown that was invoked by the piece.

In further development of the installation I made a video, with an intended 'walk-through' effect, that added the sense of immersion into the installation almost in *Alice in Wonderland* sense of the scale change. In its new iteration with a

companion video, I have shown it at the final second year exhibition at the UEL in 2014.



Figure 36. *Far Afield*, made objects, video. In situ. UEL annual show. 2014.

With this piece I investigated disappearing memories and associations, while exploring the way they interact with the moment of here and now. The immediacy of danger of the sharp objects and their mellowing down in the form of 'harmless' projection I attempted to form a perspective and scale changing experience for the viewer. This playing with artificial objects as well as their projection opened interesting way of creating new experience in the material environment. Once again I was exploring visual associative play and storytelling. Interplay of objects, found and made, real and imagined, their shadows and anticipations, subliminal historical referencing, are the features of the visual language that I employ in my creative practice.

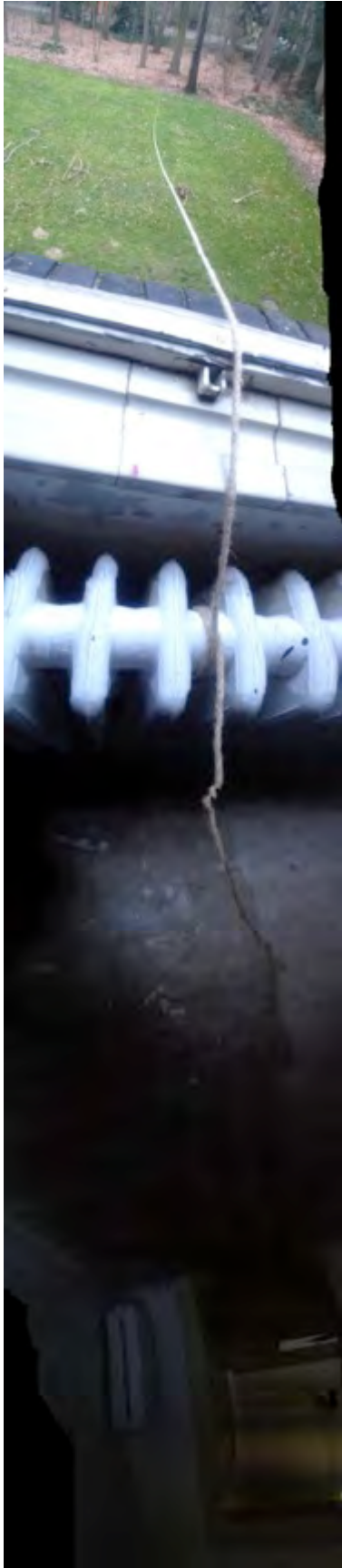
Artoll Residency Work

ArToll 2014 was my first experience of the Directional Forces residency. The residency is located near Kleve, the birthplace of the artist Josef Beyus, on the territory of a former psychiatric asylum. The SS headquarters were located there during the World War II. Nowadays, a women's prison is situated on the premises. The place is so loaded with the past and present history, that it is almost bound to predetermine the train of thought.

However, I neither wanted to construct a rigid plan for my work, nor was I ready to completely ignore it. So, I set on contemplating what sort of personal connection may exist for me there. Part of my ancestry is German and I always wanted to study the language. I haven't yet, but what I did study was an Anglo-Saxon (Old English), a Germanic language that seems closer to modern German than it is to modern English. I felt that being immersed in the experience of a new environment for the purpose of learning is similar to learning a new language. It is often related to observing the new, and not knowing its meaning. Not knowing, and not being able to apply previous understanding seems to be a good way to set an apprehensive experience in motion.

While contemplating the matter, I have recalled an old Anglo-Saxon poem, which I loved, that is titled by the scholars *The Husband's Message* (970 AD). It is ~ 1050 year old, consists of 53 lines of Old English and ends with five runes. The Anglo-Saxon part contains a message, recounted by a wooden stick, of a man to his wife. The message is for her to join him as he is now settled in safety and prosperity after some feud ended. The speaker refers to his origin as a sapling that would never have dreamt of having a power of speech until the message was carved on it. There is a journey by ship, another country is involved, and a lord sent the speaker to seek his true love. The meaning of the five runes at the end of the poem is impenetrable to the scholars of today.

I thought the story of the poem was a perfect starting point and set to collect 53 pieces of wood from the grove surrounding the residency. I have begun to work on my piece in the garden, and I wanted it to be viewed from the second floor space, that was allocated to me.



The themes of lost and found connection, the uncertainty and, in the same time, certainty of communication brought to mind another experience of my life, when for a split second a rainbow rays came through my car's wind shield. The magical sensation of connection with heavens by a multicolored beam of light is one of my favorite experiences. I thought it might come useful for the work I've been making.

The space that I was allocated turned out to be a challenging one. It consisted of 4 rooms: one large one and 3 adjacent former cells. The openness of the enfilade floor plan created a feeling of a syncopated movement both aural and visual. Presence of some people working in their spaces, others passing through with or without an acknowledging glance, suggestive space of former psychiatric institution and its unfortunate patients, constant thought of both fragility and violence of people brought in a first persistent image of shadows of eyes. Especially important for my further development was installation *The Husband's Message* in the surrounding lawn of the residency, and the installation entitled *Borders* in the building to which it was connected by the 50 meters rope. *The Husband's Message* was set as a play. It was both mapping the unknown territory and sharing the message with the viewer. Pieces of wood were forming a word-like piece of the scale that only observed from the first floor window it felt like a phase that should be deciphered.



Figure 37 *Signs*. Wood, acorns, rope. In situ



Figure 38. *Signs*. Wood, acorns, rope.



Figure 39. *Borders*. Fragment. Rope.

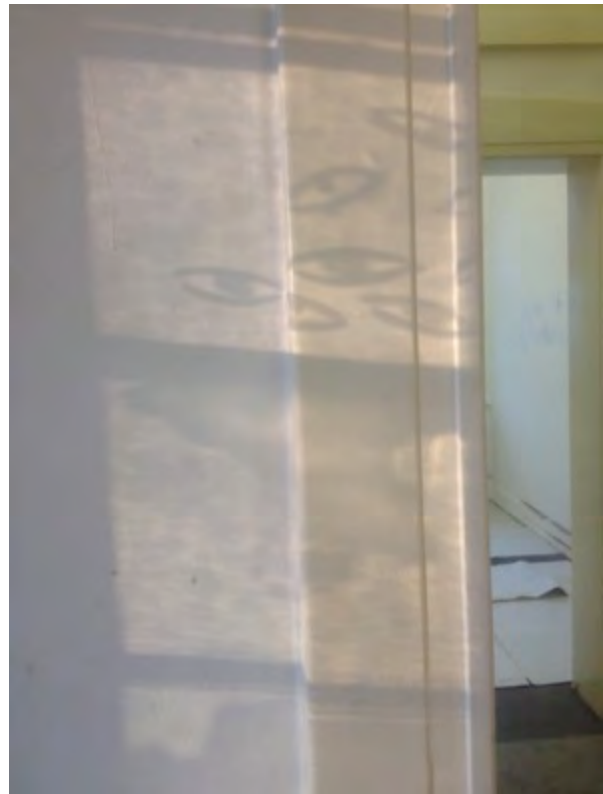


Figure 40. *Watching*. Fragment. Acrylic on glass.

The confined and oppressive environment of the historical psychiatric ward inspired other pieces made in ArToll. *Watching* (Fig. 40, above) was one of them. *How to build you own prison* (Fig. 41), *Cell*, and *Eye* were the other two.



Figure 41. *DIY: How to Build Your Own Prison*. Clay, wire, nails. 2014.

I find it effective to use the physical features of materials to transmit a thought or a feeling. For example in my piece *DIY: How To Build Your Own Prison*, I used clay to create a mock model of iron bars of a prison cell. They were purposely held together with nails, gratuitously inefficient for such a fragile material as clay. The use of material helped me to convey the idea of the assumption of unbreakable barrier of the prison bars. They were held together steadfastly in place, but the use of materials questioned this assumption by the apparent inadequacy of clay bars and the nails. It reminded me of the ancient idea of Clay Colossus, which only looks huge and horrifying, but can be easily conquered because of the nature of the material it was made of.



Figure 42. *Point of view*, wire mesh, tape.

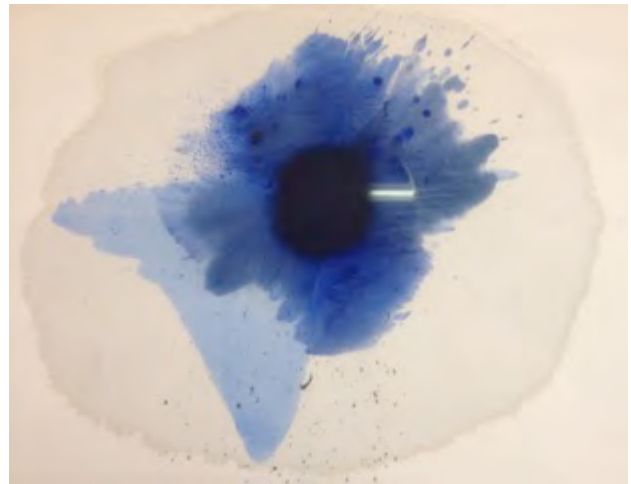


Figure 43. *Eye*, oil on canvas.



Figure 44. Tomás Saraceno - *In orbit*, installation view K21 Ständehaus, 2013

While at ArToll, I was able to visit exhibition of Tomas Saraceno in Dusseldorf at K21. It was a major work made of massive mesh-ways installed at the roof of a four-story building of the museum. Visitors were invited to step in the surreal landscape that reverberated at every move of every participant. Unlike a sea or a cloud irresponsive to individual interference, *In orbit* installation seemed a quintessential representation of primary responses to the feelings of flight, fear, exhilaration, and so much more. Powerful and esthetically appealing, it did however have features of a theme park rollercoaster, and once again brought to mind the thought of dissolving boundaries between art and life, especially in the

context of Dusseldorf where Joseph Beyus worked and thought: “another concept of art, one that relates to everyone [...] that can be proclaimed in a purely anthropological sense (Stachelhaus, 1987, p.69). In the Reflection on the Residencies section of this paper, I will be talking of the lessons learned from my experiences.

There are the traces of the self that are contained in the objects that are around us.

Bill Viola, *Video Art, Sense Perception and Human Experience*.

In my 3-year plan, my second year was supposed to be dedicated to exploring my means of production and finishing all the experimentations before the end of the academic year. An intense travel schedule included Russia, Turkey, Greece, Slovakia, and Uzbekistan. I allowed my travelling schedule to be as full as it came, as I was in the information accumulation mode. I haven't restricted either input or output: video sketches and notes, paintings, sculptures and drawings were accompanied with the reading of Eco's *Baudolino*, Calvino's *Le città invisibili*, (Invisible cities), both of these books explore the notion of truth versus fiction, and the way they merge together in the literary form of a novel. My reading informed my contemplation on the means creating visual fiction.

I set to explore the visual *fictuality* and transformation of everyday objects and events into, to borrow from Walton, props of fictional reality.

Work began with the Kronfest residency in St. Petersburg, where the International Ecological Annual Festival invited me together with other artists from the Baltic region. The aim of the festival which takes place on the island of Kronshtadt, off of the St. Petersburg' Gulf of Finland shore is to raise awareness of ecological problems in the region. Initially conceived as participatory public works, it turned into an installation, due to the programme constraints. Gathering debris on the shores of the Gulf and placing it into a trawler-net like structure aimed to convey a gradual build up of pollution that starts from a few little pieces. It was placed in the fountain on the City Hall Square for the duration of the festival. I used soil before in my painting, but *The Net* was one of the first pieces where I used water as a part of the installation.



Figure 45. *The Net*, Kronfest Residency, St. Petersburg, Russia – June 8-15th, 2014

While participating in this socially engaged project, I was also exploring the reality of fictionalization: when the first impression of the grown-ups was a ‘hoop-net’, children referred to the piece as a ‘magic tower’, something that ‘is from a fairy story’. It may speak of the geographical specificity of course, but the difference in perception was quite telling.

While in Turkey and Greece, I took photographs (Appendix), which upon later reflection proved to be instrumental to further development of my thoughts. The integration of those moments creates that fragmented and fictionalized reality that becomes my work. I came to the realization that I am interested in that place in human experience that lies between the first encounter with the event and the beginning of classifying the event based on the previous experiences. That particular instance constitutes the life of innocence, the pure moment. That instantaneous split-second while the sense of wonder is not yet transformed by the formulaic patterns of the mind. Thus I am interested in subjectivity that can be nothing but fragmented, as it is self-referential in its purely fictional form. Just as Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggested: “The ‘association of ideas’ which brings past experience into play can restore only extrinsic connection, and can be no more than one itself, because the original experience involves no other” (Merleau-Ponty, p.14).

While in Greece, I attended Christos Kapralos museum, and was taken by his famous frieze *Battle of Pindus*, the battle that took place during the Second World War.



Figure 46. *Battle at Pindos*, Christos Kapralos, 1952-56 (fragment)

The theme resonated with me on every level. Every single family I know in Russia was affected by violence. Sons, daughters, mothers and fathers perished or disappeared during either the First or the Second World War, not to count the victim of Stalinism. I have been contemplating human suffering and traces and spots that this suffering leaves on human faces, on human condition in general, and the image of a mask reminiscent of an Ancient Greek theatre came to me. The natural materials abundant in the region and traditions of Ancient Greek theatre moved me to creating 58 terracotta clay masks, which I then painted with acrylic paint. Looking at representational figurative sculpture of Karpalos was an experience that inspired my stylized frieze of Masks. The simplicity of their geometry and paint application was used to express emotional pain, and grief, which is a common and recognizable human condition. It took a few weeks of making, firing and painting these masks. I was planning them to be used in one of my shows as a part of larger installation (Fig. 46, 47).



Figure 47. *Masks*, terracotta, acrylic paint. 2014

They also became a component of my installation for the second year annual show, of which I will be talking later in this section. *Memento mori* is the main reflection behind this piece. I was moved to the state of painful empathy by Karpalos work. The fact that I used masks, however, implies the freedom of interpretation and the mystery of human experiences and their effects. “The masks have different uses, but regardless of their shape or size, they all help to focus attention on the

essential. They make it impossible to rely on habits of the ordinary life” (Jeaque Lecoq, quoted in *Fictions of Art History*, p. 107).

This particular work was also an observation of accumulation of marks, and the way they create specificity. As the paint was dripping off of the masks, it became a metaphor of the traces that contraction of emotions and experiences leave on human faces overtime.

As soon as I began to work with multiples, I started paying more attention to the artists employing similar techniques.

For example, Ryan Gander, has inspired me after seeing his work at Lisson gallery in 2014, each piece evocative of a scenario and an action. His pieces often have a play element and a precision in installation, which are interesting to observe from the production standpoint. In both examples shown below, identical arrow shape installed in different angle, as well as the variety of colored rectangles in *Your Present Time Orientation*, a cinematographic quality of his “stop-frame” installations create a dynamic effect evocative of underlying movement, and almost a frozen moment in time.

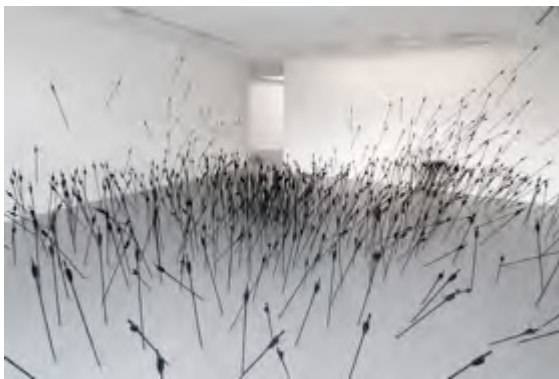


Figure 48. *Ftt, Ft, Ftt, Ftt, Fttt, Ftt, arrows*, 2010



Figure 49. *Your Present Time Orientation*, Ryan Gander. 2011

For the week in Slovakian Hontianske Trst'any, I set myself a task to explore that moment as well as formal material fictionalization, based on the unforeseeable experiences “in the field”. This resulted in a few pieces: two sculptural paintings (*Apple* and *Skinned*) and two videos, which require further editing (*Anything Can Happened Behind The Closed Doors* and *Commemoration of Snail*).

Skinned was a documentation of turning painting canvases into a sculptural 3-D painting object. The reason I used these canvases as my initial material was my intention to explore the process and the outcome of the venturing into a 3-D sculptural space from a 2-D pictorial plan. I used the rope from which I created a 3-D pattern, and painted the rope to emphasize its corporeality.



Figure 50. *Skinned*. Canvas, rope, oil paint. 2014

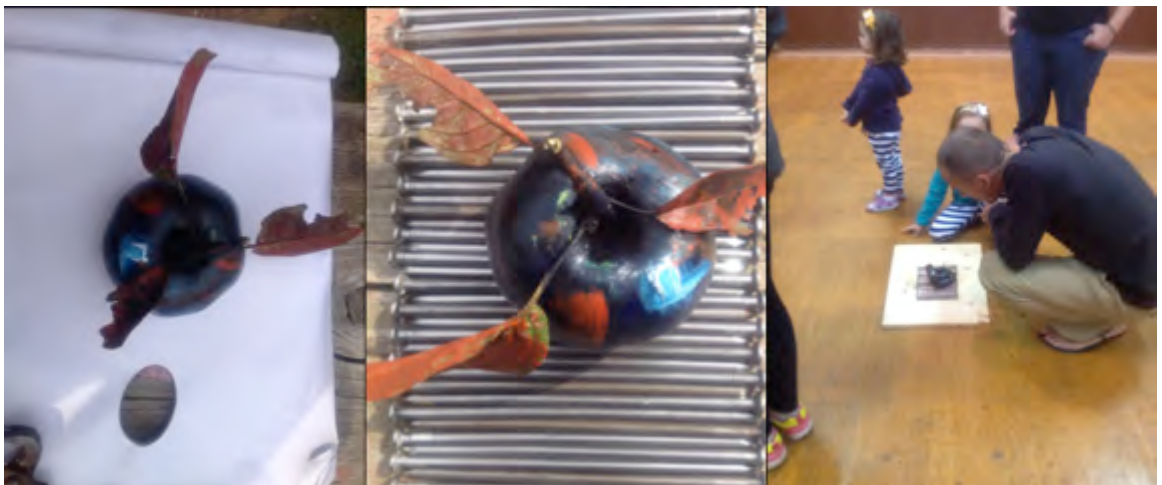


Figure 51. *Apple*. Apple, oil paint, stainless still nails. 2014

While working on these two pieces, I was exploring how familiar and recognizable turns into the fictional and surreal.



Figure 52. *Anything can happen behind the closed doors*. Installation. 2014.

The video is can be accessed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIR_pFDRMAg&list=UUEm7IBQ1REa30tuuh_mknig&index=1

In *Anything can happen...* the uncharacteristic game with the ping pong balls in the uncharacteristic settings was a mode of action. The footage consists of a hand, functioning as *deus ex machina*⁹, setting up a purposely-faulty balanced installation of the balls, and finally resolving the seemingly perpetual failure to the balanced state.

The story transformed into performance sometimes forms my practice. Although usually triggered by a personal experience it often refers to the universal themes of birth, life and death, transformation, emergence, etc. Such was the

⁹ *Deus ex machina* – is a dramatic device that allows the seemingly impossible conflict to be resolved by the higher powers.

Commemoration of Snail video performance. It was brought to life as a reconciliatory re-action to the stepping on a snail in the yard.

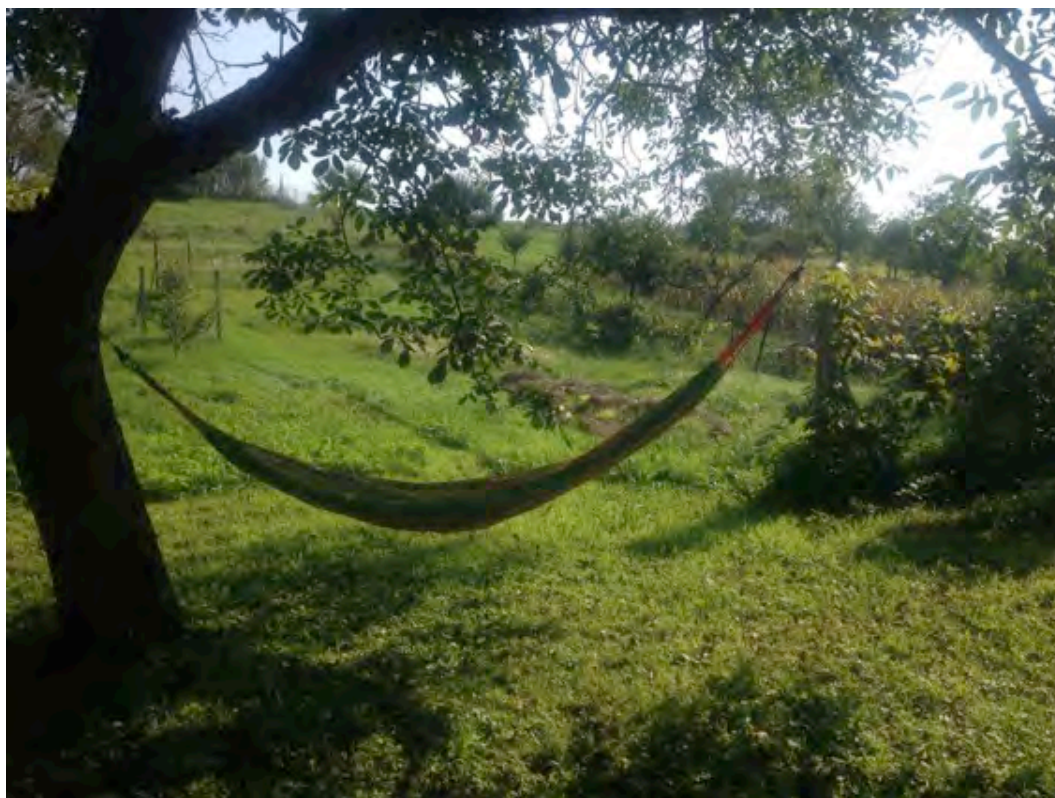


Figure 53. *Commemoration of snail, take 2*. 2015.

The video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjSGpAstgEQ>.

The week in Slovakia moved my work and my thinking to new questions, those of the inseparability of the form, the content and the fictional truths, the way the fictional truth is perceived in literature: true to the reality of a finite story.

Upon my return to London, I felt it was time for me to return to painting—the process that has started with the mixed media masks. I made a quick succession of small (30x30 cm and 40x40 cm) oil paintings.



Figure 54. *Untitled 1*. Oil, canvas. 40x40, 2014



Figure 55. *Untitled 9*. Oil, canvas. 40x40, 2014



Figure 56. *Untitled 7*. Oil, canvas. 30x30, 2014



Figure 57. *Untitled 9*. Oil, canvas. 30x30, 2014

In December, I have noticed the pace of life became much slower, and if I used to make paintings in one session, I now felt that I need more time and a different technique. I tuned to glazing and washes. That sweet feeling of the time passing, required to achieve necessary depth of *sfumatura* I remembered from the late 80s when I was copying 18th century Dutch masters.



Figure 58. My copy of an old Dutch painting (after Jacob van Ruisdael, XVII c.)

I have switched to a larger (100x100 cm) format. I began using semi-translucent glazes, allowing for drying time on each stage, utilizing my past training in classical methods.

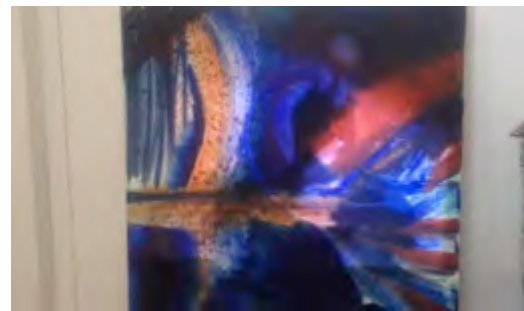
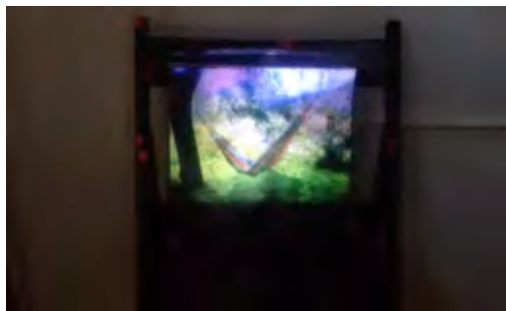


Figure 59. *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 100x100 cm, 2014-15



Figure 60. It's a true story, installation study in the studio. 2014

I was also exploring the option of using video projection as a glaze in a motion picture and a source of light in a multimedia installation. Below are the stills of the experimental video projections in my studio.



SECOND YEAR / DEFINING RULES

The proposed title of my Doctoral research last year was indicated as *Culture, Play and Fictional Reality*. Further development, however, lead me to focus more on the structure of the process of my own work and its content, and if the question of *Culture* hadn't completely lost its relevance, it became secondary or perhaps even a separate topic for another research. This helped me to better focus on the main themes of my research: *Play and Fictional Reality*.

In preparation for my final year, I wanted to bring the process to a very clear path and set firm rules based on the analysis of my working process to better organize the making of work. I will be talking further of the theories that helped me to define these rules in application to my practice. I also kept looking for other artist's work. Kusama, Laura Provost, return to Kurosawa's *Dreams*, which is always an inspiration, Bill Viola, and a few others, whom I will mention below.

As I further analyzed the means of my practice, and guided by Walton's idea that "adequate theory of fiction must accommodate pictorial fiction, as well as the literary ones" (Walton, p.35), I have found it necessity to turn to the literary fiction, particularly to picaresque and romantic novel. The reason that I found the genre of picaresque novel relevant for my research is that the early "picaresque novel is autobiographical and episodic in nature, as the *pícaro* recounts his adventures in the service of one master after another. These novels rarely came to a conclusive end, and were sometimes continued in later volumes" (Chandler, Richard E & Kessel Schwartz, *A New History of Spanish Literature*, p.120).

The character of the picaresque novel is generally a solitary figure leaving and acting a series of circumstance that are either unbeknown, beyond his/her control, or set up by his/her imagination. The best examples of the genre being Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Tool's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Voltair's *Candid*, Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, etc.

I find the formal structure of the picaresque adventure as a series of loosely connected or completely disconnected events is similar to the structure of my practice: as in the condition of setting up, living through being open to serendipity,

and analyzing my subjective experiences, I produce work. It is important for me to step out of my ordinary daily routine, and create the element of *unknown* in the form of location or a journey of which I will be talking further.

In 2015, I have been reading Eco's *Baudolino* and Italo Calvino's *Le Città Invisibili*. Both oeuvres are dealing with perception, fictional truths, illusion, and imagination in the literary form. Both are employing journey, time, conditional or imaginary geography for opening up imagination and empathy to the characters. Both are serving a good illustration of Bakhtin's discussion of the novel, and its elements. Mikhail Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* and Umberto Eco's *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* helped me to understand how location, space and time determine the development of work.

Bakhtin's analysis of romantic Greek novel, in which Journey, Time and Chance are the main literary devices is highly relevant to my practice, where journey is a necessary element of conception and development of work and where the morphology of the emergence of work is as important as the work itself.

While exploring the morphology of the Romantic Greek novel Bakhtin discusses the "adventuristic 'chance time' [as] the specific time during which irrational forces intervene in human life (Tyche), gods, demons, sorcerers [...] we have a veritable downpour of 'suddenlys' and 'just at that moments'" Bakhtin, p. 93).

My method is to start with creating a simple scenario in the form of a journey, where I can expose myself to the new experiences in the effort of preserving freshness and innocence of the moment, and letting the form suggest itself. My work on refining the piece(s) comes as a reflection and contemplation on what actually happened in the immediate. While analyzing this method, I have found its mechanics akin to writing fiction, and thought that literary discussion on fiction was relevant to my research. Samuel Becket was once quoted as saying that *Waiting for Godot's* characters Vladimir and Estragon suggested themselves by their persistent murmur before his falling asleep.

Just as these chance moments set in motion by a chance journey constitute the basis of my practice, where the material production and editing then become the next stage.

To summarize, the rules that I was looking to set for my production are:

1. Step out of the daily routine into the unknown environment
2. Keep the sense of awareness to environment and serendipitous happenings
3. Make work in response to the events that occur

During my second year I was experimenting with media: sculpture, objects, painting, and video, exploring my own methods and processes, and looking into the ways of presenting work. While attending exhibitions, I paid particular attention to curatorial choices, and the ways artists themselves perceive their own process. I kept following Yayoi Kusama's work. I attended an exhibition at Victoria Miro's gallery entitled "Pumpkins". She was exhibiting large bronze sculptures and paintings. The larger-than-life pumpkin sculptures made the viewers look like diminutive elves. The change of scale for the purpose of conveying different reality is a well-known device in the theatre set design. I also used it in my *Far afield* video (Fig. 36).



Figure 61. *Bronze Pumpkins*, Yayoi Kusama, Victoria Miro Gardens 2014.

I periodically refer to Kusama's work, as I am inspired by her uncompromising dedication to her own world, and her own vision. I have also begun to analyze the differences in her approach to a circular mark and mine. I see Kusama's circles as an instrument of mapping the environment, while for me, as my work with the circular shapes developed, it became a container of the image, a portal into a different world. I will elaborate further in talking about my last year work.



Figure 62. *The Artist*. Laure Prouvost, Multimedia installation, Hayward gallery, 2014

Laure Prouvost's *The Artist* (2014) at Hayward gallery was an example of this type of different world, or different reality. Her immersive installation felt like an old abandoned back stage room or a house. The 'artist studio' is invocative of associations "belonging seemingly to a heritage of Kabakov, or Boltanski, [...] a glimpse, part voyeuristic, part mirror, into the materially swamped modes of operating within contemporary artistic practice, and by measure of the degree to which art reflects society, of contemporary society itself" (MIRRORCITY: *London artists on fiction and reality*, 2015, exhibition materials, no page number) provided a good example an inspirational 'creature-related' (McGinn) experience.



Figure 63. Akira Kurosawa. *Dreams*. Film still. 1990

I was also looking into Annette Messenger's work, and I appreciate her choices of media, as well as the interplay of 2-D and 3-D spaces in her ways she creates volume with line and color with the text, resonated with my research.



Figure 64. Annette Messenger. *Chance*. 2011



Figure 65. *Spikes*, Annette Messenger. Steel, fabric, pencils, paper, cardboard, glass, dolls 1992

The feedback from my peers and supervisors helped to deepen my research this year. A suggestion to get acquainted with Jessica Stockholder's work was helpful as it deals with "challenge boundaries, blurring the distinction among painting, sculpture and environment, and even breaching gallery walls by extending beyond windows and doors" (Juno, 2009). The "free assembly" of Jessica Stockholder's approach was interesting to observe. Although she often uses ready-mades, she treats them more like brush strokes with paint or a piece of clay from which she composes her installations.



Figure 66 Jessica Stockholder. Copper flashing, hardware, yarn, oil paint, red plastic balls, wire and hinge 16 X 1in. 2012

My interest in Elizabeth Price's work yielded some interesting results, as her practice-based PhD of 2000 *sidekick* is a meticulous exposition of her building a boulder out of the packing tape in the course of three years, while questioning authenticity of both the action and the perception. This experiential approach to her work with the writing akin to Kafka's *Cockroach* seems purely ludic with all the main characteristics of *play* (as per Huizinga, see p. 22-23) present:

Wind packing tape from the roll upon which it is commercially distributed, and then rewind it again, but this time only upon itself. I wind the entire roll in this way without interruption. At the conclusion of one roll I continue with another, and so on, adding each to the same mass. Gradually the mass grows larger. I maintain this process without any fundamental changes [...] Did I make it in the way that I claim? Was it made in the way it appears to have been made? Certainly only one material and method is disclosed, but this does not preclude the possibility of others. And clearly the tape lends itself generously to these doubts in as much as it functions as a kind of skin, which conceals and encapsulates other materials. There is certainly nothing evident that would disprove the possibility of deception. Even if the weight were consistent with a solid mass of tape, it would not prove that this was the nature of the mass; it might simply suggest a more sophisticated hoax (E. Price, quoted in Katy Macleod, "Writing/Art", 2007 p.2).



Figure 67. *The boulder*, Elizabeth Price, 1996-1999.

This particular Elizabeth Price's piece of work was also an important discovery for me. It seemed an embodiment and amalgamation of almost all the ideas, which I am trying to reconcile: the concept of *cognitive closure* (the limits of inquiry), *apperception* (as in having a unique experience of building the boulder keeps one in the unknown territory), and *play* (as a voluntary, limited in time and space ritualized activity). The only component that is missing is staging, as I believe that no amount of time spent on visual analysis of this object can help to decipher all the possibly intended meanings without the aid of the artist.

A JOURNEY INTO THE JOURNEY / ORIENT

Knowing that real physical transition in space engages my imagination and resonance, in February of 2015 I set off to another trip. That trip to Uzbekistan, where my grandmother grew up and became a young adult, was planned last year in my attempt to explore the fiction-generating feature of memory triggered by my re-reading of my grandmother's memoir.

I don't have many things left from my grandmother, or grandfather who I never met, but stories and imaginings that appeared in my mind prompted by the stories told, and then the same stories read. In the first year, while working on my proposal, I was hoping to explore these layers of memory and the game of make-believe as a driving force for making work.

That resulted in a few pieces that I made and showed in 2014: *Far afield* (Fig. 35), *Transformations* (Fig. 33) and *Signs* (Fig. 40). While these pieces were triggered by memories, it is not the objects or environments from the past with which I interact, paying attention to the era and memories it imbued, but the residue of memories themselves and their interaction with a present moment. These pieces were transitional for me in the sense that they helped me to abstract my memories from the being in the moment. All of them were hybrids, as, although based on my own experience with the memory, it was the memory that suggested imagery.

This work helped me to deepen my inquiry into the world of fiction, as I was aiming to lessen the influence of previous experience on my work, and focus instead on the present.

For example, the fact that my grandmother grew up in central Asia, lead my decision to travel there, and not to Japan or France, but I used it as merely a trigger, as a cast stone in a game of chance, to define my direction.

From my Uzbekistan trip, I have brought new videos, photographs and a first hitchhiking experience.¹⁰

¹⁰ Finnish photographer Emma Vepsa was hitchhiking from Moscow to Mazari Sharif (Afganistan), facilitating the unaided human communication not obscured by language (she didn't speak Russian or any local tongues).

The Circle (Fig.68) is a continuous panoramic shot of the old city square in Samarkand. When I came to the square, on a cool winter day in February 2015, it was completely devoid of any action. There was nobody on the square, nobody on the visibly parts of the nearby streets. Only the babbling water of the canal and some random birds' cries. And here was I, in the middle of it. I set for a panoramic recording, deciding to start from the waters of the canal, direct my camera movement in a circular motion adjusting the pace of it reacting to any possible changes in my view. I had no way of knowing whether anyone would appear on the square or if anything would happen at all. I imagined myself an eye, press 'record' button, and began my slow movement. It was just the experience I was looking for.

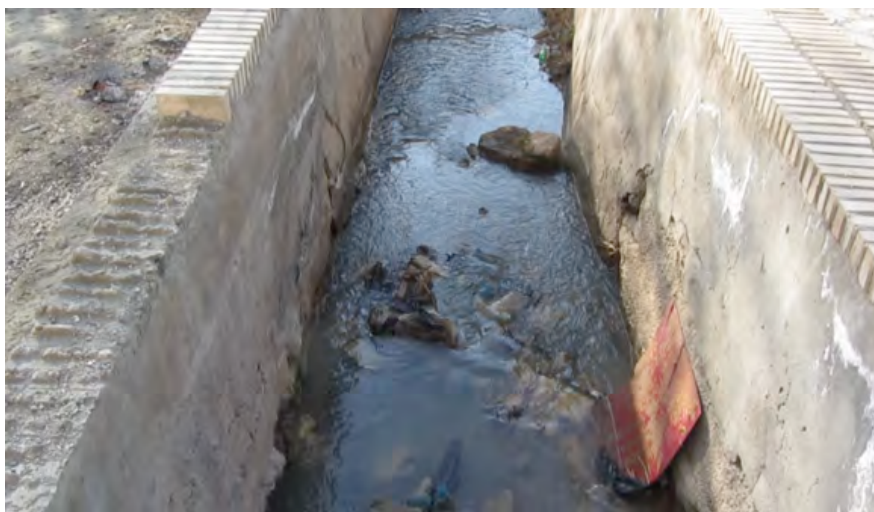


Figure 68. *Circle*, video still. 2015

Few seconds in, as in scripted action a man appeared on the far end of the opposite street. The camera kept its circular movement. Two women entered from another corner of the square, then a bicyclist crossed, a bird with its shadow, then another man. By the time the camera returned to the initial position the square was empty again. All of this happened by a serendipitous coincidence, as if my presence triggered these events. The experience was transporting and fun in the same time. When I was editing the video upon my return to London, I couldn't help but feeling a puppeteer, and I was playing with motion in the frame to make this impression even more prominent.



Figure 69. *Fish*, digital photograph. 2015

I find it especially revealing when the un-staged or documentary photograph bears the surreal¹¹ or fictional—in a sense of a being a prop for a fictional world—quality. The example of this is on the left. It was taken in the city park in Tashkent. No amount of further effort helped me to repeat the effects of this still image. Unexpectedly, the resulting video footage captured the unforeseen event of a fish coming up for air and creating a ripple effect, looking like a perpetually shimmering brush stroke (Fig. 75).

IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Formally, immersive environment is similar to stage design. The difference is that all the elements of the installation are acting like props on stage where the audience is placed. Therefore all the conventions of dramatic performance are inverted, thus by definition the element of absurd is present in any immersive installation. It may be looked at as a voyeuristic look into the mind of the artist. Sometimes, it is a stage performance by the audience, as, for example, in Yungmen Duan work (Fig. 70). As I aim to show my work in the form of immersive installation, I was studying how other artists work in this area.

Nam June Paik installation *TV garden* (1977) is a perfect example of the immersive visual fiction. The 120 monitors displaying video *Global Groove* that consisted of 21 dance movements from different cultures and time are placed in the environment of 600 palm trees and other vegetation. The mixture of seemingly unmixable strategically plants contemplation on the mutability and fluidity of our world.

¹¹ Surrealism - Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (André Breton, *Surrealism Manifesto*, 1924)

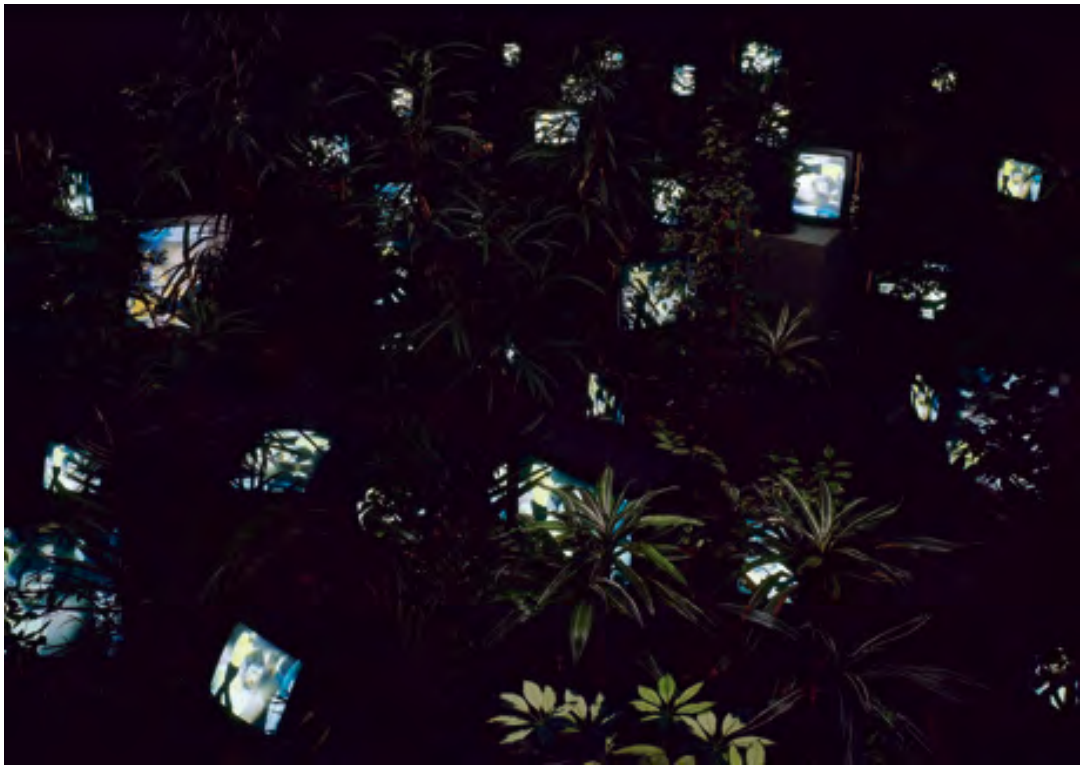


Figure 70. TV Garden, Nam June Paik. Kunstsammlung NRW, Photo: Achim Kukulies

A contemplative immersion is also characteristic of Yingmei Duan work (2013), which is, a mixture of performance, immersive installation and visual storytelling. She studied in Germany with Marina Abramovic. Her work, however, is representative of a completely different attitude towards performance.

For example, *Happy Prince*, that was on show at Hayward in 2013. ‘The story loosely based on Oscar Wilde’s sets up a social content for the performance one is about to see, and when the viewer comes into the room it’s not immediately obvious in what capacity s/he is there: he swallow, the prince, the adoring public or all of the above. In the twilight environment with the twigs projected onto the wall where the spectators find themselves upon entering, their shadows are mixed with the shadows of the branches, amongst which, on a rock, someone is singing a wordless tune” (Shimanovskaya, 5).

It is a game? Most definitely. A fictional reality in action? Absolutely.



Figure 71. *Happy Prince*, Yingmen Duan, 2013.

Another artist whose work I found inspirational and in resonance with the idea of personal and subjective experience is Tris Vonna-Michell with his piece *Finding Chopin in Essex* nominated to 2014 Turner price.



Figure 72. Tris Vonna-Michell *Finding Chopin in Essex*. 2014.

The piece revisits Vonna-Michell's research on French concrete and sound poet Henri Chopin (1922–2008). Between the 1950s and 1970s Chopin created a large body of pioneering recordings using early tape recorders, studio technologies and the sounds of the

manipulated human voice. Chopin lived in Vonna-Michell's hometown of Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, England between 1968 and 1986. Vonna-Michell's interest in Chopin began after asking his father how he came to be born in Leigh-on-Sea. His father suggested he find and ask Henri Chopin. "All you need to know is that he loves quail eggs, lives in Paris and is 82 years old," Vonna-Michell's father relayed. Vonna-Michell then set out to meet Chopin. His ongoing performances and installations titled, "Finding Chopin" have continued since 2005. Originally shot on 16mm film, "Finding Chopin: Dans l'Essex" begins and ends with scenes of the begins and ends with scenes of the estuary and marshland of Essex filmed on a single day from dawn to dusk (Overdun&Co Gallery press release, Los Angeles, 2015)

The reason I found this work engaging as it interweaves multiple narratives into immersive contemplative experience.

I have tested all the experiments conducted in the course of my second year in the final year show. I have created an immersive environment consisting of four video produced during my travels and residencies, projected on the walls and the floor, a mask series places in the water-filled plastic bags lit by small LCD lights resulted in a rich and surreal environment. The unexpected connections between the installation components bred questions and both positive and negative responses from the viewing public.

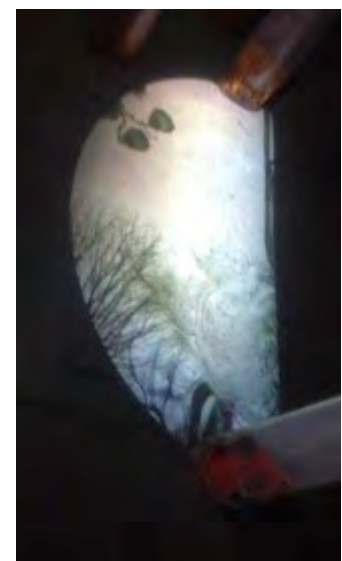




Figure 73. *Anything can happen behind the closed doors*, 2015. Annual show UEL.

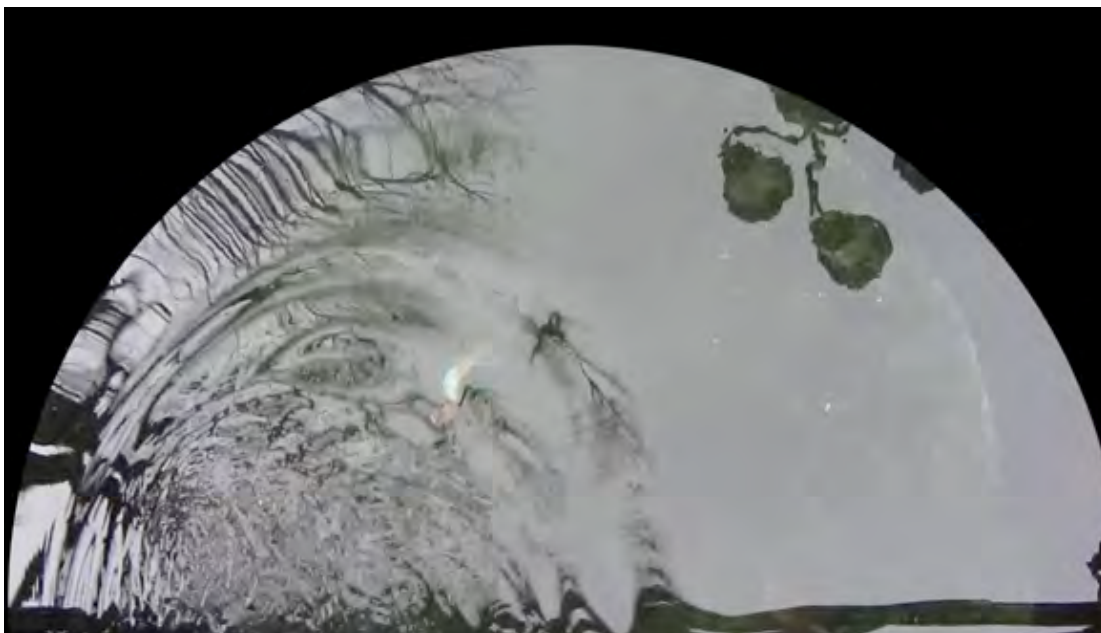


Figure 74. *Fish*, video projection still. From *Anything can happen...*, 2015.

Romantic conceptualism is a tendency in contemporary conceptual art that replaces the rational with the affective and the calculated with the coincidental.

Jorg Heiser, 2010

DADA - this is a word that throws up ideas so that they can be shot down; every bourgeois is a little playwright, who invents different subjects and who, instead of situating suitable characters on the level of his own intelligence, like chrysalises on chairs, tries to find causes or objects (according to whichever psychoanalytic method he practices) to give weight to his plot, a talking and self-defining story.

Tristan Tzara, Dada Manifesto, 23th March 1918

As an echo to Tristan Tzara's sentiment, I am presenting a true story of my Greek residency in August of 2015, the experience that provided the necessary perspective in preparation to my final show of the doctorate. It became a starting point for the development of my new body of work, and a bridge from the previous works done up to that point.

As I mentioned before, in the beginning of my second year I have turned to video, and in the middle of my second year I returned to painting. Color and light in my work have begun to work together. Slowing down the pace, keeping the distance from the source of observation were the techniques that I had to develop in the course of my last year.

Visiting beautiful Greece always invokes stories of antiquity full of magic and transformation. Connecting present moments with the past, or the past experience with the present moment is often a part of my work. That is why I found the settings of the Old Can Factory in beautiful Prespes so inspiring.

Immediately upon entering the abandoned factory with floors littered by a thick layer of animal droppings, the fifth labour of Hercules came to mind. The almost

monochromous environment of death and decay seemed to be calling for purification and the colour of life.

Coincidentally, my current video work, which I was hoping to film in the waters of Prespes's lakes, was related to the concept of purification and revival. This serendipitous coincidence brought forward the work that I called *Hercules's Fifth Labour or Purification by Colour*. The work consists of two large paintings on the surfaces of abandoned production line machinery of the Can Factory, and the metaphoric river of colour, placed in the old conveyor valley reminiscent of the river that Hercules used to help him to clean up King Augeas' stables in a single day.



Figure 75. Panels before painting. Old can factory, Psarades, Greece. 2015



Figure 76. Panels and shut used for installation and painting. Old can factory, Prarades, Greece.
2015



While working on these pieces, I realized that I am removing my body and tools more and more from the production process. It is more facilitation of the elements to manifest themselves rather than the act of will or design. In a way it is similar to Dadaist automatic writing because I relied on my pre-conscious (as in apprehensive) and my intuitive rather than on the intellectual choices.

There is something to be said about painting that broke free from the 2-D space to fill the 3-D space. I believe that there are no boundaries between 2-D and 3-D space, it's all fluid and continuous. The boundaries are in conditioned perception. The function of my practice is to keep erasing the boundaries not in the disruptive, but in unifying way.

For example the *Purification by colour* work might have been very well produced by a coloured rain or hail. Perhaps, the hail, that I have experienced one of the days in Psarades, contributed to my inspiration. The video *Hail* (2015-16) later became a title piece for my final show. To shoot Prespes videos, I was using an underwater camera, and I was shooting slow motion at 120 frames per second.

The video piece of Douglas Gordon *Making Eyes*, which he produced as a visual for Rufus Wainwright music tour, shot in super slow motion, was an interesting point of reference when I was working with video in Psarades and then a multimedia installation in London. A complex musical narrative referencing Shakespeare, Widekind's Lulu and Alfred Hitchcock, was just the level of complexity that makes one relax to submission without asking questions of how it is all related.

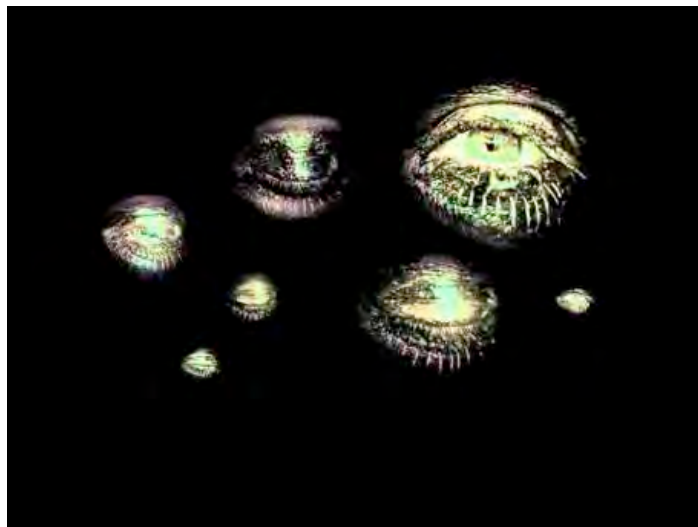


Figure 77. *Making eyes*, Douglas Gordon, 2010

Working on my *Purification* and *Emergence* series, I recalled Bill Viola, who uses water in his videos, and who is known to say that art exists to detox life (Viola interview 2011). I particularly found his piece *The Dreamers* closely related to the image I made.



Figure 78 *The dreamers*, Bill Viola, 2013

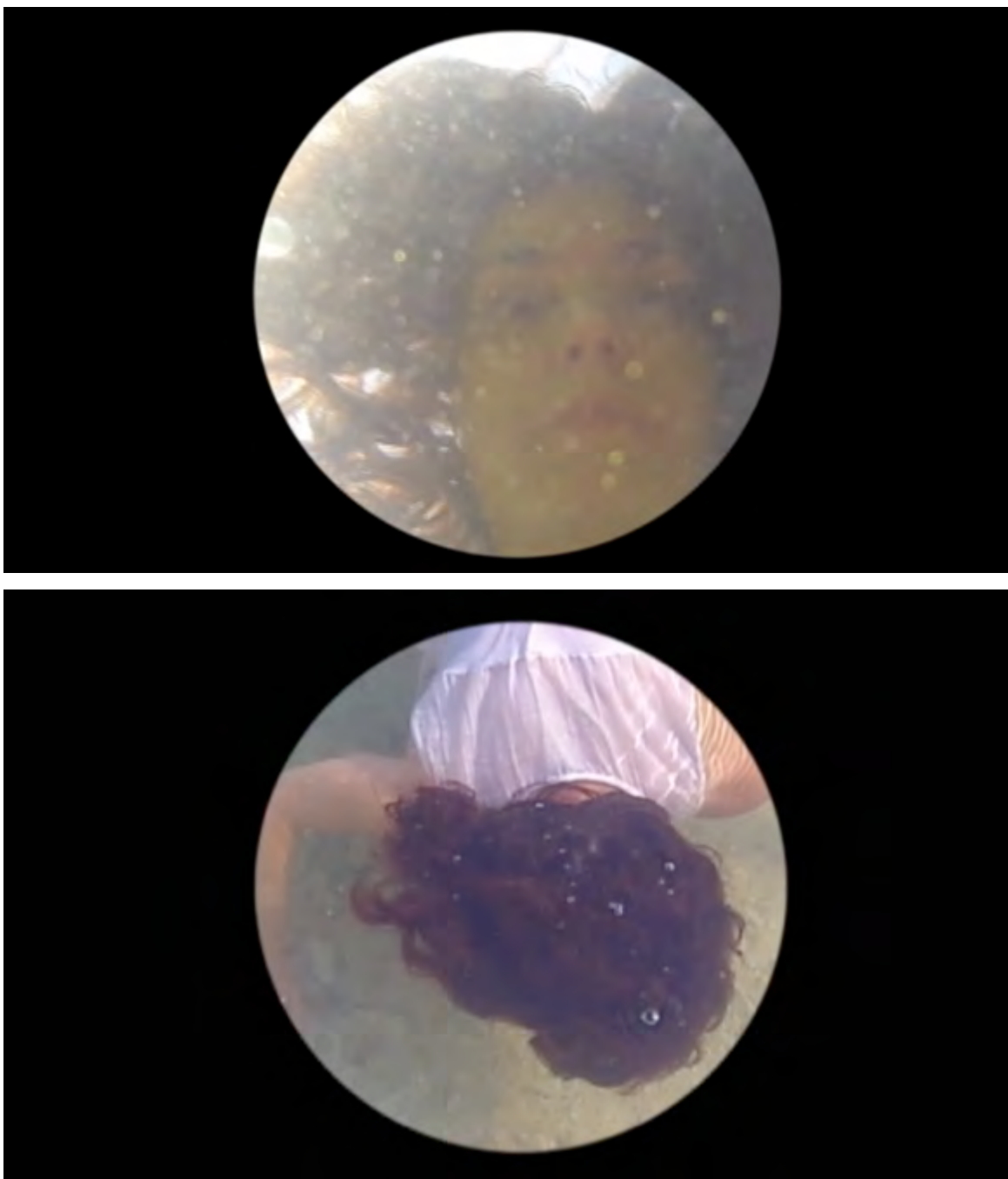


Figure 79. *Purification Series*, video still. 2015

I have found some resonance with Christina Mackei's work with colour filters that I have recently seen at Tate Britain.



Figure 80. *The filters*, Christine Mackie, 2015

I showed my Prespes work at the UEL in the Container space. The two videos were projected on the floor and on the ceiling of the Container space with my circular paintings displayed on the floor installed as stepping-stones in the Japanese water garden. The colour-cycling animation was projected onto one of the blank canvases. The composition had an eerie and surreal character, as paintings are generally treated with reverence and are placed on the walls, so are projections of the video. The face of a seemingly drowning person projected on the ceiling automatically 'placed' the viewer under water, but a floor projection created the opposite effect. The scale of the projected image was twice the life size, thus increasing the effect of non-reality or a fictional reality.

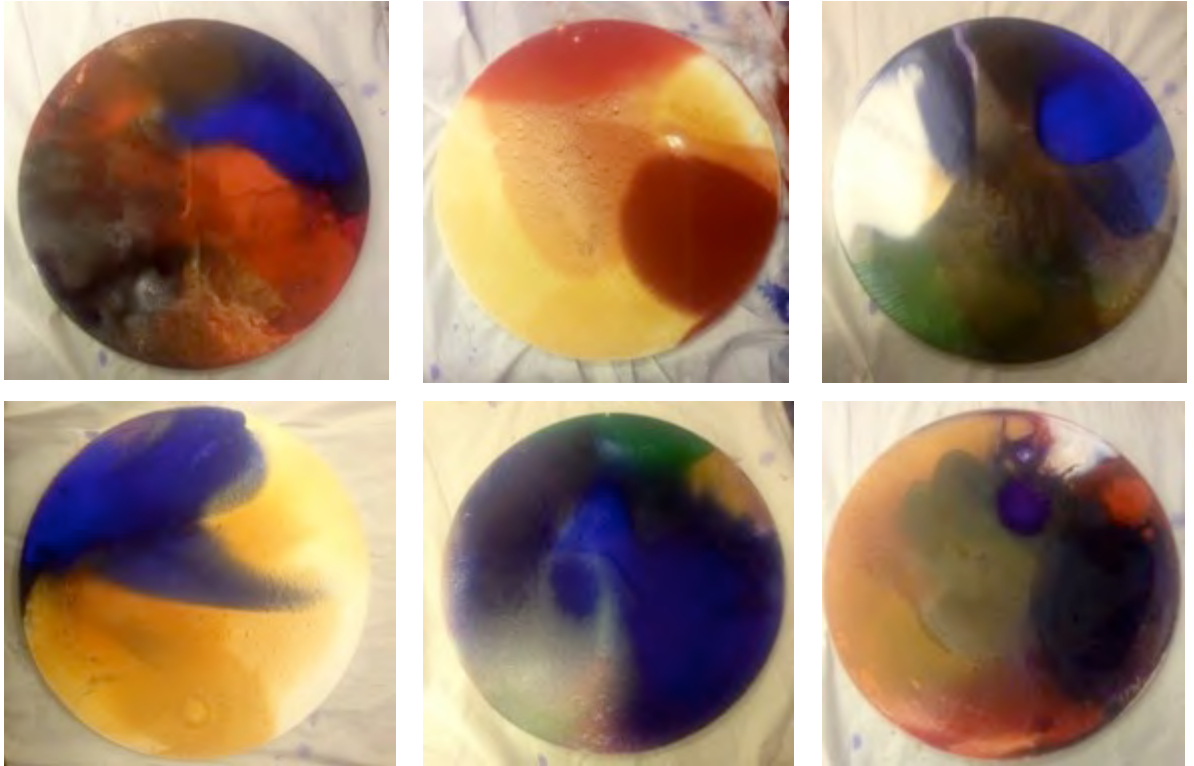


Figure 81. *Emergence & Purification*. Oil on canvas, 6 60x60cm, 2015



Figure 82. *Emergence & Purification*. 294x200cm. Installation view 2014

On my return to London I have worked intensely on my paintings. I again was using layering of glazes. It resulted in the *Emergence* (Fig. 83) series, which I had on show in November at the Old Truman Brewery in Shoreditch.



Figure 83. *Emergence* series. 2015



Figure 84. *Purification* series, fragment. Oil on canvas. 300x200 cm, 2015

While reflecting on the formal aspect of my latest work and the way it evolved through the course of the doctorate I have observed the usage of the circular form in my paintings and moving image. As I mentioned above, comparing this with Kuasama's relationship to the circular form, I have realized that my relation to the circle is different, as it is used as a pip-hole or a portal rather than environment and objects mapping device. I have been observing the usage of circle in the renaissance *tondo* painting, where they seem to have a similar function. Whether framing a religious scene or a country pastoral image, they convey the idea of a removed, 'outside of ordinary' (Huzinga, p.13) life.



Figure 85. Madonna Adoring the Child with John Baptist, 15th c. Florence



Figure 86. Peter Brueghel the Younger, 17th c.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DURING THE DOCTORATE

EXHIBITIONS AND RESIDENCIES

Solo exhibitions

2014 (Jan.–Feb.) Center of Contemporary Art St. Petersburg, Russia
Contexts, Dver and Parnik Galleries Pushkinskaya10. Accompanied by artist's talk on the opening day. *Caught in the Mundane* and *Hermes and Psyche* installations.

Group exhibitions and residencies

2015

15-21 October, Art Masters, Old Truman Brewery, London
Emergence, series of paintings

1-14 August. Directional Forces Residency and Exhibition, Prespes, Greece.
Purification by Colour or Fifth Labour of Hercules, painting, installation in Open Museum. Work on *Purification* series video.

January, 2015. Research trip to Uzbekistan. *Bukhara Puppetry*, *Fish*, video. Field notes.

18-24 June. Second year Annual show,
(*Professional Doctorate in Fine Arts*) AVA gallery, UEL, London
Immersive installation entitled *anything can happen behind the closed doors* (consisted of four video projections and made objects with spot lighting)

April 16 – May 14. Gallery 263 Show, Cambridge USA (*Humming-top*, video)

2014

November 25-27. Control Room, Bristol, UK
(Fabric sculpture installation on the bridge control room)

September 6-12. *Entwined*, figurative portrait show, Camden Image Room, London
(Painting, oil pastel)

September 7-14. Residency and exhibition, Hotniansky Trstany, Slovakia.
Penance, *Anything can happen behind the closed doors* videos, *Skinned*, and *Fictional Apple*, painting and installations.

June 8-15, *Kronfest* 2014 – Ecological festival Residency and exhibition,
Krondshtadt, Russia (Public art: *Filter-net* sculptural installation)

April, July. No Barking aRt Biennale [I and II] – Old Truman Brewery, Espacio Gallery, London UK (I - *Peripeteia*, multimedia installation, II - *Far afield* installations)

May. First year Annual show

(*Professional Doctorate in Fine Arts show*) AVA Gallery UEL, London. *Far afield* installation, video "Tabletop", *Artificial reality*, ceramic; *Transformation* series etchings. Painting.

May 24, 'Shahnama 002: Time Forward', Cambridge UK (Painting, mixed media)

May 6-15, Gallery 263 Annual Show, Cambridge USA

10-23 April, 'Pravac Sila', O3ON Gallery, Belgrade Serbia (*How to build your own prison*, sculpture, ceramics, still wire)

1-14 March, Directional Forces Residency and exhibition, Artoll, Germany (*The Husband's Message/Cryptic Messages*, outdoor installation; *Borders*, installation; *Watching*, installation; *Solitary confinement*, installation; *How to build your own prison*, sculpture; *Last day*, painting)

13 February, *Synthesis*, Trinity Buoy Wharf, London UK
(Painting, sculpture, installation)

2013

December, *Encrypt*, Crypt Gallery, London UK (sculpture, installation)

CURATORIAL AND CONFERENCES

2015 22 April. UEL Postgraduate Conference participant.

2013 26 October. *Festival of ideas: Persian Book of Kings in Modern [sic] Art*. Artist talk. Cambridge University, Cambridge.

2013-14 I have begun collaboration with Shahnama Project in Pembroke College at Cambridge University in 2013. I conceived *Shahnameh Forever* Art Series for Shahnameh Centre, and co-curated first two exhibitions. As a designer of all conference materials, I participated in the Cambridge conference on Orientalism, 'Orientality: Cultural Orientalism and Mentality'. The term 'orientality'¹² which I coined for my own research was adopted for the title of the conference in 2014, as

¹² Orientality vs. Orientalism is a milder term reflective of our time tendency to be inclined rather than strongly convinced. This term that helps to account for and cover the interest in the Oriental art and Cultural Orientalism in our time; while Orientalism in cultural studies and art history is strongly associated with the imitation of aspects of Middle Eastern and Asian in the 19th century. The conference web site can be accessed here: <http://www.pem.cam.ac.uk/the-college/news/2013/05/orientality/>

well as for the second one in the series held in the National Portrait Gallery in 2015 – *Orientality: Beyond Foreign Affaires* (See Appendix, Fig. XX)

REFLECTION ON EXHIBITIONS

In the first year of the doctorate I was frequently participating in the group exhibitions, as it was essential for me to see my work in the context of different cultural and geographical environments. It was important to observe and interact with the public. Interviewing the members of the audience, I found it especially rewarding when the subliminal messages (as on the value of serendipity and unpredictability, like in *Caught in the Mundane* (2013-14), or the poetry of the impossible, like in *Hermes Trismegestus and Psyche* (2013-14. Fig.11) that I was hoping to convey were perceived and creatively interpreted by my audience.

It was important for me to observe my fellow artist and curators in preparing for the shows, sharing ideas and opinion in the working collaborative conditions, engaged in the critical discourse.

I was also interested in experimenting with the exhibition environments, as I was searching for the optimal or at least effective conditions to show my work. By observing my own reaction to the spaces, I realized that, due to the nature of my work, I much prefer ambiance that encourages participatory discovery rather than pristine white space gallery's almost clinical presentation. I had an opportunity to show my work in subterranean crypt, in the fountain on the town square, in a former psychiatric ward, in the city open-air courtyard, and in a traditional white cube gallery. I very much enjoyed the trend that has emerged in the last couple of years to paint the walls of the exhibition space. It happened during the 2015 Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy, as well as at the *World goes Pop* 2015 exhibition at Tate Modern. I find this way of integrating the space of the gallery into viewers' experience enhances the participatory element and the perception of scale of the art show.

As I have been exhibiting internationally, I have also benefited from observing audiences from different parts of the world, and their different reaction to the same piece of work.

There was also an unfortunate experience of failed participation in the exhibition in Moscow. It was dedicated to Iranian culture, and was sponsored by Iranian Embassy in Moscow. Although my piece *Bezhan and Manizhe* (2012) was selected for the show through a juried selection process, I couldn't take part in the exhibition due to the sanction imposed on Russia at the time of Ukrainian conflict.

REFLECTION ON RESIDENCIES

Just as exhibiting internationally, international art residencies provided unique and fertile background for work. I took part in three residencies in 2014, and one in 2015: Directional Forces in Germany and Greece, Kronfest in Russia, and one in Hotniansky Trstany in Slovakia. All four were instrumental for the development of my practice in general and my doctorate work in particular. The following is a quick overview of each of them. I will be talking on the development of my work there in the Creative Practice and Theory section.

ArToll, Germany. March 2014.

In Artoll I observed morphology of my art production process, while exploring the themes invoked by the local environment and geography: old psychiatric asylum in Artoll near Krefeld, the birthplace of Joseph Beuys (See pp. 62-67) The themes of secret and subliminal messages, and invisible presence helped me to create a few pieces of work, which lead to further development of my method of which I was talking above in in the chapter dedicated to my first year work. The nature of the environment was helpful for exploring the process of emergence of communication and communion.

Kronfest, Russia. June 2014.

Kronfest is an international ecological festival of which art residency is a part. Unlike in Germany, or later in Slovakia, the initial proposal was required that was considered by the Organizational Committee. It was gratifying to receive the invitation to participate in the residency.

Hotniansky Trstany, Slovakia. September 2014

Unlike for Germany, for Slovakian residency I had decided to follow the initial plan of what I would actually attempt. I was interested in exploring the process of converting a natural object into a fictional state. The terminology I borrowed from Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-believe*. I will be talking of the theoretical grounding of my interest in the Creative Practice and Theory section. Apart from making objects, I have worked on a few video pieces.

Psarades, Prespes, Greece. August 2015

As my practice is driven by my personal experiences, it is important for me to relate my life and my art. By the time I arrived to Prespes, both my personal and my professional life were in a state of flux. I felt the need to reconsider, reset, and purify my life. I was emotionally drained, and on the second day, while working on my large paintings I had a white spirit poisoning, which lasted for the rest of the residency. The events preceding and coinciding with the residency yielded a body of work that although organically developed from my previous research shifted my choice of media and helped me to set specific goal for the last year work, namely, to explore the way of relating painting and videos in a multimedia installation. Collaboration with a Greek fellow artist Sofia Simaki, who offered her assistance with filming in the lake, was as instrumental as it was heart warming.

CONCLUSION

My doctoral studies at the UEL were important for integrating my theoretical research and my practice. The major task was to contextualize my practice in a broad philosophical and critical discourse, and refine my methods.

As the subject matter of my inquiry is an *appreciative* experience that manifests itself in play action, my work is experimental by nature.

The theoretical research led me to the works of Merleau-Ponti, Heidigger, and McGinn—all giving experience primary function in generating knowledge, which is 'creature-relative' (McGinn, 1994). While observing the generative condition of my practice, I have found Bakhtin's exploration of Greek romance revelatory: where the conditional time, location, and chance encounters used as literary devices are akin to my methods of setting up my work environment: in random locations, outside of a routine daily time flow, and open to serendipity as in the game of chance.

The words *experiment* and *experience* are interchangeable in the Russian language: *opyt* means both. The proposition is that in order to acquire experience, experimentation is necessary.

In the process of experimenting and analyzing my methods, I enquired into the relationship between *play* as defined by Huizinga: as free, outside of the ordinary life, secluded, limited in time and space, and defined by rules activity; and generation of visual fiction as a prop in fictional worlds as argued by Walton.

The selection process for viva exhibition was an arduous one, as I was aiming to produce a multimedia installation consisting of videos, paintings and perhaps objects, where videos capture the immediacy of experience, and paintings serve almost as a stop-frame. The show is situated on two levels of the AVI building: the ground floor level is used for the title video *Hail*, and the large (298x200cm) oil painting of the same name. On the upper level a mixed media installation is displayed. *Tondo* is a compositional device that is used videos and paintings to suggest the idea of a portal, or a porthole into some fictional worlds. Two-story

display is connected by the round stickers' path. They are placed on the floor like a breadcrumb trail (this was changed during the final installation).

Every movement, and every gesture, every drop of paint, and every flicker of light were processed in the acute sense of awareness, that after Winnicott I call *apperception*, and I hope that this will bring a response in my viewer: experience of the roundness of the ping pong balls pyramid perpetually collapsing, (*Anything Can Happen Behind The Close Doors*, 2014) that reveals a mutability of balance; the fish coming for a breath of air (*Fish*, 2015) tells a story of serendipity in life; *Transformations* (2014), and *Emergence* (2015) are tales of the encounter with circumstances that are beyond one's control. All this work, probably, would not have happened outside of the UEL Professional Doctorate.

I am certain, that the invaluable time of collaboration and communication with all the artists, supervisors, and my fellow students, the exposure to the work of philosophers and cultural critics, will provide a fertile ground for reflection and ideas for years to come.

AMENDMENTS

This amendment aims to provide a summary and reflection on the outcomes of my professional doctorate installation, as well as more detailed technical and methodological analysis of my decision-making process related to the final exhibition, as well as a reflection on its experience and outcomes. Preparation and installation of Viva Exhibition went according to the plan outlined in the Conclusion Section of my Doctorate report (pp. 107-8).

The exhibition starts on the ground floor with the *Hail* (298x200 cm, oil on canvas) painting, just as it was presented in the report (p. 107), and continues in the lecture theatre with the *Hail* video. Exiting the lecture theatre the viewer sees two small paintings *Sotto Voce* placed on the wall opposite the doors. They indicate the entrance to the staircase and balance the intensity of *Hail* video piece. Initially, I was planning to place *Emergence 1* on this wall, but in situ I thought the *Sotto Voce* diptych worked better as a transitional piece and a pivot for the viewer's movement.

Since submitting my Doctorate Report, I have been working on video and sound editing to refine all the video pieces for installation in the particular environment of the ADI building, and preparing them for the installation. I also had to select my paintings to work with video pieces in the context of the exhibition. A very important part of my show was supposed to be served by the idea of *heteroglossia* – the Bakhtin's term for multiple voices telling the same story. In my case a story, told through images, intended to evoke memories and associations, rather than an intellectual reflection on the content. That is why the multiple ways of presenting the idea of the *experience of the moment* was critical for the concept of the show.

As my work is spread over two levels of the ADI building, consists of videos and paintings, and occupies a few very different spaces, (entry hall, lecture theatre, corridors, and photo studio) with technology playing one of the major roles in the multimedia work, I was treating my space as a sculpture in action. For example, until the projectors and the circular canvas/screens with fleeting, ephemeral

videos were installed and tested on the first floor, I couldn't select particular *tondo* paintings for the black corridor in the transitional entry space.

Altogether I had ten video films: *Hail, Anything Can Happen Behind the Closed Doors/Balls, Spinning Top, Fish, Wave, Commemoration of Snail, Purification 1, Purification 2, Purification 3, Paint.*

Separating the immersive *Hail* video and a large immersive *Hail* painting from more subtle and small pieces was a choice made to emphasise the differences in experiences and the way they may be encountered. *Hail* video is eight minutes long; it was a edited



Figure 87. *Hail*, video stills

from twenty minutes of footage shot in Greece last year (2015). All the choices I had to make in post-production were related to the main idea of creating an immersive experience for the viewer. The imperfections of the raw footage and jerky movement of the camera were reflecting my experience in the field, but would take away the clarity or immediacy of the experience for the viewer. So I made a choice to cut the footage down to the absolute essentials of the hailstorm: drenching water, its interaction with the environment (rather than the person who holds the camera) and the deafening sound emanating from it. Alternating the pace with slow motion and deepening and multiplying the sound was intended to accentuate the musical quality of the event. The power and the violence of the

hailstorm, and a car that serendipitously appeared on the lonely mountain road was one of the 'props' (Walton's concept) of my fictional world, where experiences, big and small, form our relationship to *the moment*, which is our life.



Figure 88. *Hail*. Oil on canvas. In situ. AVA Gallery

The three paintings from the *Emergence* series for the first-floor corridor, and three *tondos* I selected for the transitional black corridor at the entrance were placed in order to aid the entry and exit from video installation in the photo studio room, thus becoming a part of installation rather than the self-contained pieces. All these paintings were made by the method of pouring the thinly diluted oil paint layer by layer, and letting the paint itself work while transforming and drying. Just as my short videos pieces were created without preconception, without judgment, in the innocence of the *apperceptive, child-like* (Winnicott) state of being, trusting the energy of the moment.

The videos are under three minutes each. The *heteroglossia* and serendipity were also the narrative devices used to construct this display. There were two ways in which I used both devices to create the experience for my viewer. Six videos were assembled in into three loops in the different order with the different length 'no-image' gaps with the soundtrack of the varying amplitude between them, while images were fading in and out. This way of editing was aiming to create the infinite variety of synchronicity, from complete darkness with only some ambient

sounds audible to the randomly appearing moving image combinations.



Figure 89. *It's a True Story*. Multimedia installation. In situ. UEL Photo Studio Gallery.

Other three pieces (*Purification 1*, *Purification 2*, and *Wave*) were playing as separate loops. All projections but one (*Wave*) were *tondos*, projected at the different angles on different surfaces: round canvases, and the floor, thus creating a voyeuristic environment of glancing at or looking through some portals leading to different realms or different realities. The *Wave* video piece, with the longest gap/pause was projected on the wall using the short-throw projector, to help to enhance the metronome backdrop effect in the whole orchestration of the environment. It was produced in such way that the syncopated appearance of the image combination couldn't be anticipated or predicted, unless meticulously timed (which is rarely the case with spectators of the art show).

The main transformation of the captured or recorded experience into work often happens in post-production and the installation of the show, when the outside observation of the viewer is being considered. While working on the components, and installing *It's a True Story*, I had to consider the viewer's movement through the room as through the labyrinth, where all the discoveries are made in situ. I

didn't want to script anything, but I also didn't plan it to be overwhelming. I have prepared the leaflet for the show with the introductory text referring to the installation as a collection of the visual haiku – the observation and the impressions of a transporting moment – that is characteristic of this Japanese ancient poetic form. I included a few of my own Haiku poems that I found relevant to the theme in the exhibition leaflet.

hail	seashore pebbles
pouring down	being washed by the waves
hail	in slow motion
a feather cloud	lake waves
traces the border between	are rather
the sky and the lake	fidgety
birds traverse	stumbled on
my window view	a misinterpreted shadow
up to the sky	

all the wires coiling on the floor of one room

While reflecting on the visual language that has emerged in the last three years, I observed that my main preoccupation is to look for the relationship between nurturing, cocooning and containing circular form, and the disruptive and unruly elemental shapelessness of the free movement, of freedom. A tension that seemingly can never be resolved but perhaps doesn't require resolution, is often a driving force behind my work.

The experience of installing the show has also influenced my thought on the connection between the cognitive closure concept, which I found instrumental in my research and mentioned more than once in my report, and the ideas of the philosophy of the Absurd. With the same conclusion: the impossibility of reconciling the perpetual search for meaning and the inherent impossibility of finding it.



Figure 4. *It's a True Story*. Multimedia installation fragments. In situ. UEL Photo Studio Gallery.

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APPENDICES

Partial list of exhibitions attended

2014 Malevich, Tate Modern

2014 Hélio Oiticica: *Propositions*, IMMA, Dublin

2014 Late Turner, Tate Britain

2014 Zigmar Polke, Tate Modern

2014 *Pumpkins*, Yayoi Kusama, Victoria Miro Gallery

2014 Mirrorcity, London Artists, Hayward Gallery

2014 Tracy Emin, *The Last Great Adventure is You*, White Cube Gallery

The most interesting aspect of the exhibition was the curatorial work with different media. The show consisted of line drawings, prints, neon signs and small sculptures. All the pieces were placed in the vast space with a good distance from each other, which created the sense of uninterrupted and fluid environment with Emin's works as the pooling anchors.

2015 NAKEDS, The Drawing Room

2015 Marlene Dumas, *The Image as Burden*, Tate Modern

Revisiting powerful brushwork of Marlene Dumas was a good reminder of the importance of good craftsmanship. The brushwork was content in itself.

2015 Alexandre Farto aka Vhils, *Dissonance*. Lazarides Gallery

2015 Lee Ufan, Lisson Gallery

The pristine and elegant reduction of Lee Ufan's paintings feels almost as the moments turned into a petal or of paint on canvas making an abstract visual haiku.

2015 Kristie MacLeod, *Punctured Perspective*, Rook and Raven Gallery

A textile artist, MacLeod explores the conceptual possibilities within the art of embroidery. Her fabric-based sculptural panting work was an inspiration

Selected field research images



Figure 90. *A girl and a donkey*. Digital photograph, 2014



Figure 91. The Acropolis, Krondshadt, Southern Turkish village, 2014



Figure 92. Slovakian landscape. 2014



Figure 93. UEL, digital photograph, 2015



Figure 94. ArToll Residency article in *Rheinische Post*, 22 March 2014. Paper clipping



Figure 95. Kronfest, festival and exhibition pamphlet, 2014

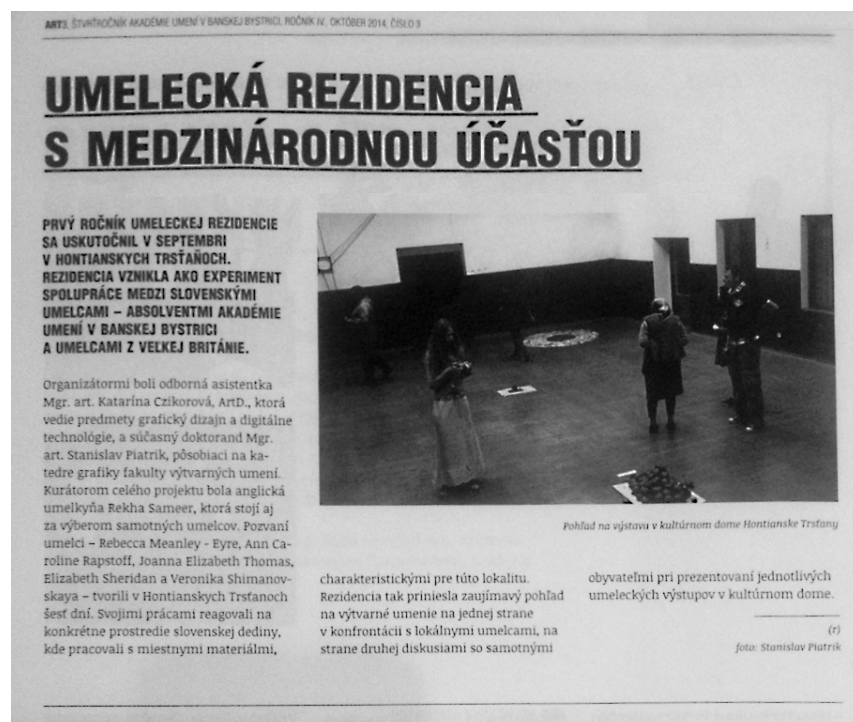


Figure 96. ART3 Magazine, Bratislava. Hontianske Trst'any /art residency. Press clipping. 2015



Figure 97. Pravac Sila/Directional Forces Exhibition pamphlet. Belgrade. 2014



Figure 98. Art Masters Exhibition poster



Figure 99. Pravac Sila/Directional Forces Exhibition pamphlet. Belgrade. 2014.

In Situ Shots



Figure 100. *Caught in the mundane*. Fragment. Resin, rope. 2013-14

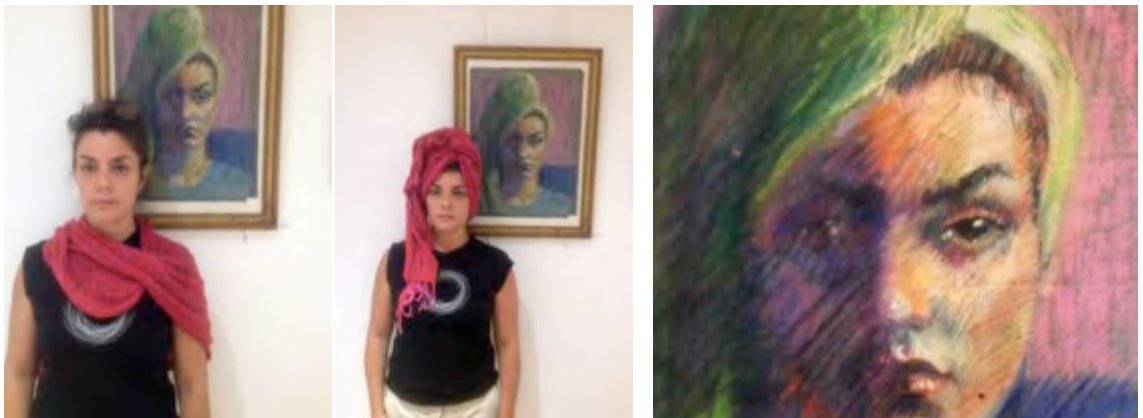


Figure 101. *Time capture*, Pastel portrait (1985) installed on old frame, digital photograph, 2014. In situ.



Figure 102. *Emergence* series, 2015. Oil on canvas. Art Masters, Old Truman Brewery. In situ.