

**Alyona Movko-Mägi**

**2023**

**PORTFOLIO**

## **“Beyond the river”**

**2023**

**Tallin Art Hall**

*Found textile, projection, machine learning model, directional sound, ceramic and various glazes, copper, raw wool*

Installation “Beyond the River,” presented at the "Immerse!" exhibition, examines the complexities of computational immersion. This international showcase, curated by Corina Apostol and Livia Nolasco-Rózsás, raises critical questions about the evolving nature of knowledge production and spatial relationships in the face of emerging immersive and virtual interactions, which serve as mediators of space and presence. The dialogue centers on maintaining a critical distance amidst the blurred lines of reality and virtuality, tangible and computer-generated entities that continuously challenge our perception.

The installation combines diverse elements - clay sculptures of Sami warriors, a beloved textile object replicating a deer family tapestry, and a video projection of an animation created through a machine learning model trained on Finno-Ugric symbols and early age art. The textile piece, being a clichéd plush merchandise object, echoes a traditional gobelin. This serves as a metaphor for the perpetual copying and dissemination of ideas and images in the digital age, much like the spread of internet memes and rumors.

Through this amalgamation, I invite viewers to reflect on the dynamic intersections and reciprocal influences between digital and physical worlds. The tapestry and clay sculptures symbolize the natural world and traditional cultural practices, while the AI-rendered interpretation of traditional Finno-Ugric symbols illustrates how the digital realm informs our understanding of these elements. The fusion of these components prompts thoughts on the escalating overlap of digital and physical domains and the evolution of indigenous cultural practices in the digital era.

This artwork explores themes surrounding the fusion of the human and the digital, and the blurring boundaries between reality and virtuality. Leveraging the concept of a 'river of blood' from Sami mythology, which symbolizes the separation of different worlds or realms, the piece proposes a metaphor for the digital and physical dichotomy. This 'river of blood' symbolizes not just the delineating technologies and systems, but also the disparities between cultural and political spheres.

Drawing parallels to the myth of Myandash, a figure in Sami mythology known for his ability to transform between human and deer forms and attributed with teaching humans the art of hunting, the installation invites introspection. Just as Myandash, who resides in a lavvu made of deer bones and skins, we too inhabit a world where the boundary between physical and digital progressively fades. I aim to provoke reflection on the ways technology shapes our experiences and perceptions, and how it transforms traditional cultural practices in the digital age.











## **“Phases of Reflection I. Glass, Light, and Film”**

**2022**

*Silver Halide Black and White Film Photography, Traditional Darkroom Development, Hand Sculpted Clay, Plaster Molding, Hand-blown Glass Sculpture, Photogram*

In my series, "Phases of Reflection," I seek to explore the interplay between traditional and modern mediums, self-perception and reflection, the physical and metaphysical. I use an amalgam of techniques, from photogrammetry to hand-blown glass sculpture, to unearth layers of self, manifested in a fascinating choreography of shadow, light, and form.

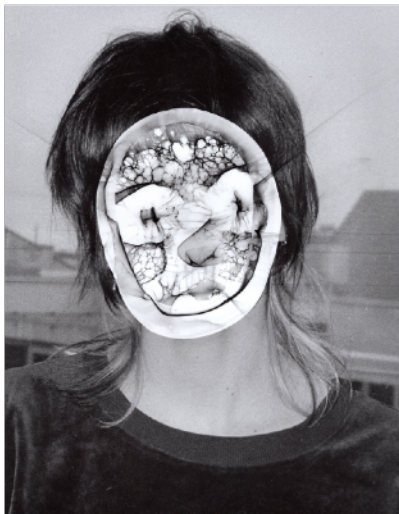
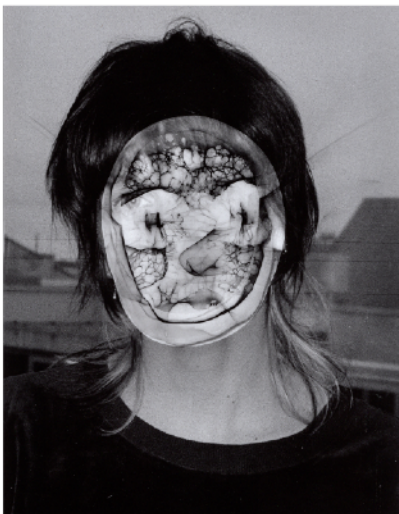
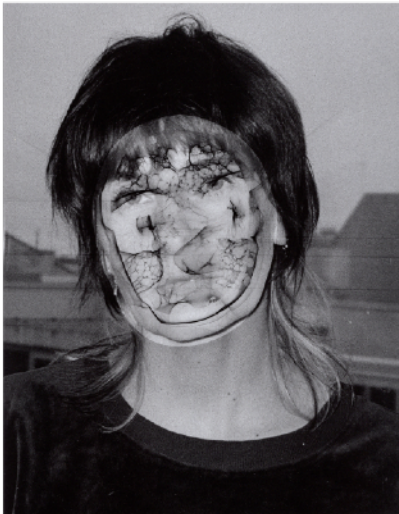
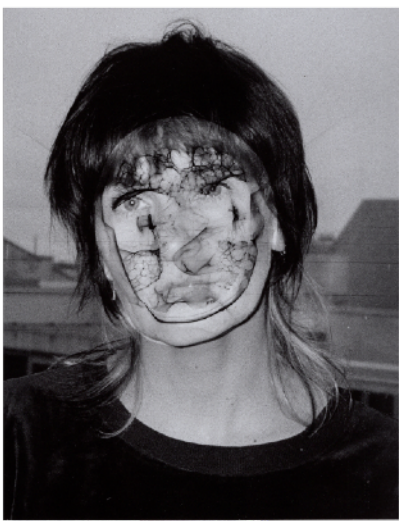
At the core of my work is a black and white self-portrait, captured on analog film and developed via traditional techniques. This not only emphasizes the importance of self-exploration and authenticity, but also pays homage to the raw and unaltered origins of photography. The portrait serves as a canvas, a grounded reality onto which I project a series of glass-face sculptures, each meticulously crafted to mirror my own facial features.

The process of creating these glass sculptures started with me hand sculpting a clay model of my face, from which I then produced a plaster mold. Into this mold, I blew the molten glass, a process that inherently distorts and transforms the original form. The juxtaposition of the tangible solidity of the photograph and the ethereal quality of the glass represents the contrast between our tangible self and the mutable, often distorted self-perception we carry within us.

The series is comprised of 14 pieces, each capturing a different stage of the glass face's presence over the photograph. As the glass gradually obscures the face, it simultaneously casts shadows and distorts light. This embodies the multiplicity of our identities, constantly shifting and changing, yet each iteration formed from the same core self.

In my work, I invite viewers to delve into the intricate dance between light, glass, and film, and reflect on the ever-changing perception of the self. "Phases of Reflection" is a journey into our inner world, a dialogue with our alter egos, and an exploration of the prismatic nature of identity. I hope that as viewers navigate through the series, they can not only appreciate the technicalities of the work but also introspect their own journeys, mirroring their ever-evolving identities.











**“Phases of Reflection II. Form, Material, Perception”  
2022**

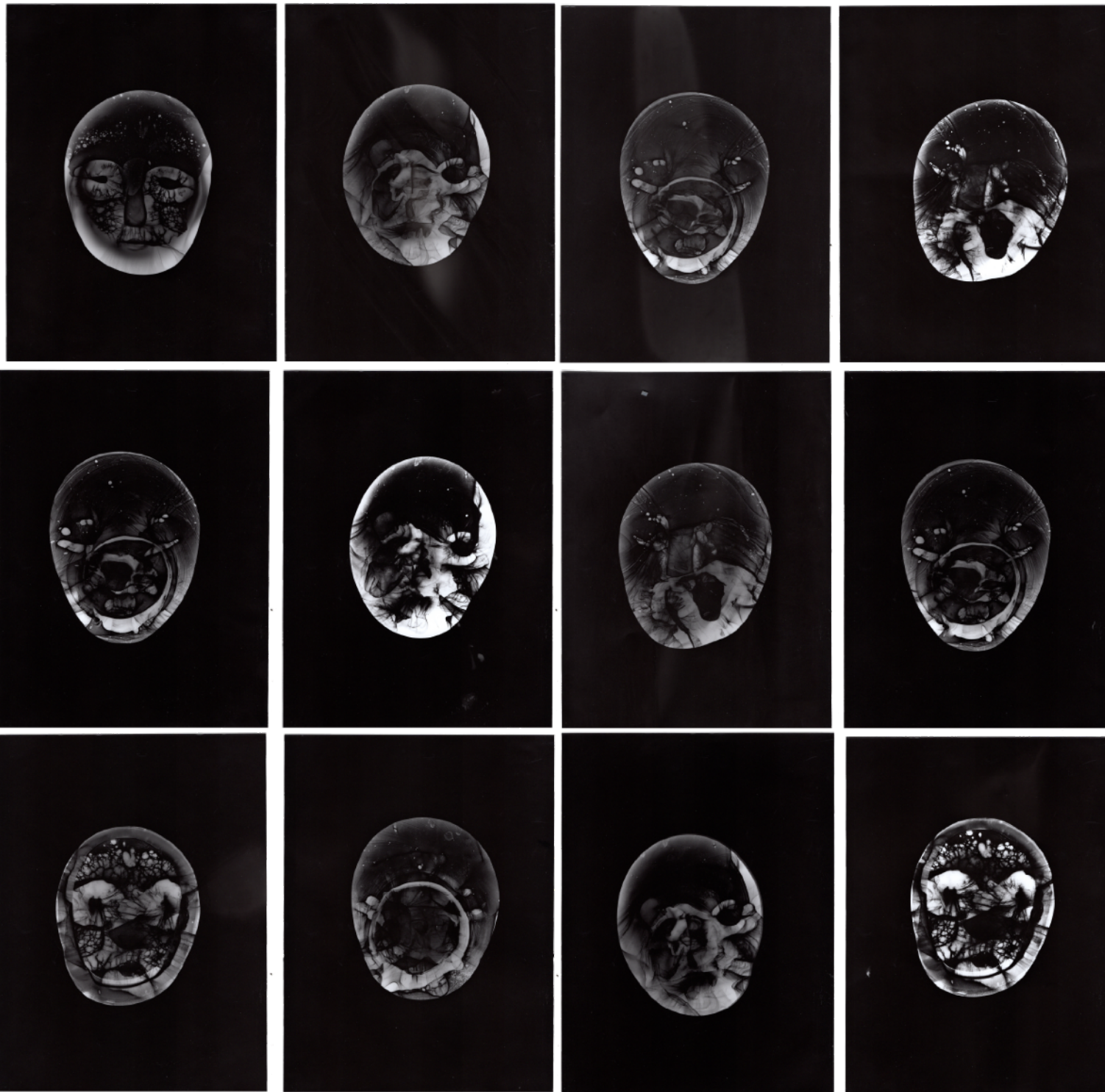
*Hand Sculpted Clay, Plaster Molding, Hand-blown Glass Sculpture, Photogram*

This work is a rigorous exploration of materiality, technique, and the representation of human identity. This series features hand-blown glass face sculptures, embodying the fragility and variability of human expression.

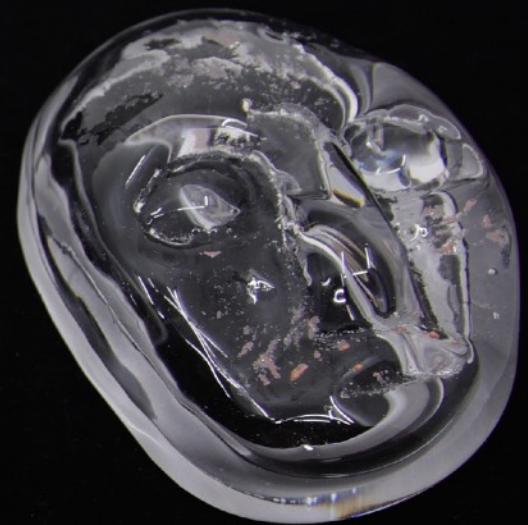
These sculptures, born from a single clay model and plaster mold, showcase the transformative potential of glassblowing, where minor alterations in technique yield diverse outcomes. This echoes the inherent complexity and variability of human identity.

The physical sculptures are converted into photograms, camera-less images created through direct exposure of objects onto photosensitive paper. By adjusting the F-stop on the enlarger, the series explores light, shadow, and form, underlining the fluctuating perceptions of self.

"Form, Material, Perception" prompts scholarly introspection on self-perception, transformation, and the balance between intention and outcome. It highlights the beauty and complexity found within our shared yet individually experienced human condition.







## **“Decoding Decolonization”**

**2022**

*Unglazed Ceramic, Photogrammetry, Digital Game Design, 3D Modeling*

This body of work represents a comprehensive exploration of national identity, historical burden, and resilience amidst conflict. It centers around two unglazed ceramic sculptures: a young Slavic boy and an older man with Mongoloid features, each embodying aspects of these themes. The closed eyes of both figures offer a visual metaphor for societal blindness towards the harsh realities of conflict and the collective desire to evade its unpalatable truths.

The youthful figure, with his slender neck and lowered head, embodies the heavy burdens that war imposes on the younger generation. His fragmented form acts as a visual representation of the divisions and fragmentations engendered by conflict. In contrast, the older man is adorned with fur-like textures, a nod to the primal instincts that surface during times of strife. The empty sockets intended for antlers serve as a symbol of the enduring strength and complexity of the region's historical influences and the resilience necessary for the process of decolonization.

Molded from unglazed ceramic, these figures present an unfiltered representation of the individuals shaped by the lands they represent, their bodies bearing the scars of conflict. The unfinished state of this material underscores the ongoing nature of decolonization and the formation of new, independent identities.

The work extends into the digital realm with the incorporation of these sculptures into a computer game. The game's avatar represents the artist's mixed-nationality identity, embarking on an endless journey in a vast desert amongst these monumental figures. The desert landscape serves as a metaphorical stage for the exploration of personal and collective histories, depicting a continuous journey of self-discovery within the context of historical and cultural identity.

As the avatar navigates this boundless desert, the complexities of identity shaped by mixed cultural backgrounds and a region steeped in conflict come to the fore. The work stands as a critical commentary on the intersection of personal and political spheres, emphasizing the enduring power of art in shaping and challenging societal understanding of these complex themes. It invites a reflection on individual identities, the histories that have shaped them, and the collective journey that society is undertaking





Screen captures from game





**“SEEN: it’s bitter so bitter, that it becomes sweet”**

**with Madara Gruntmane**

**2022**

**Tallin Art Hall**

*Four-channel video, double-side projection, surround sound*

*725”*

"Seen" is an art project embodying a socially poetic message, highlighting the often overlooked factions of society that are frequently labeled as 'marginal'. These are individuals living beyond the societal norms, unheard and unnoticed - the homeless, those struggling with addiction, and people with a criminal past. Many in society find interacting with these groups disconcerting, puzzling, or even perilous.

The objective of this art piece is to unambiguously illustrate that these individuals, too, harbor feelings and unique life experiences. Their social standing, coupled with their experiences, offer them a unique vantage point for understanding the essence of poetry. By breaking down the barriers of existing stereotypes and paying heed to these individuals' narratives through their lens, we may come to realize that their interpretation of poetry can be profoundly different, potentially more genuine.

The project aims to promote active listening, understanding, recognizing the often-concealed humanity in these groups, and breaking down the walls of societal prejudice.

The screens involved in the project create a polyphonic visual interplay. During a live poetry reading, the main actor is accompanied by an avatar positioned behind them, acting as a guardian angel, reinforcing the message that they are not alone. As the poem concludes, the avatar aligns with the actor.

Meanwhile, on other screens, avatars of additional actors attentively "listen" to the poem. Subsequently, the live version of the actor joins an avatar on a different screen, while avatars on other screens continue to 'listen' to the poem, maintaining the interplay's polyphony.

Screen captures from simulation







**Sutures.**  
**2021**  
**EKA Gallery**

**Sutures duo.**  
**2022**  
**ULM**

*Two-channel video, stereo sound, loops out of sync*

In "Sutures", I explore the compelling intersection of biopower, identity, and history, portraying their nuanced influence on our bodies and behaviors. Through the medium of CGI, I generate a layered narrative with the visualization of a naked body shedding its skin and executing a ritual dance beneath a translucent layer. This poignant choreography signifies the relentless societal norms and regulations shaping our everyday existence.

Integral to the narrative is a captivating video of a CGI woman dressed in an Estonian traditional costume, performing the Brazilian martial art, capoeira. This unexpected fusion of cultural elements underlines the intricate interplay of global influences that characterize our identities and symbolizes the struggle for individuality within a globalized, yet still divided world.

"Sutures" confronts an array of bodily-related debates mirroring the evolving political landscape and the shifting norms around the 'acceptable' body within it. I weave in references to the Soviet era, a critical historical layer that intertwines with our present discourses, manifesting a hybrid narrative of past and present, tradition and innovation.

The artwork critically examines the notion of biopolitical conservatism, as exemplified by Putin's domestic policies. Through the evolving scars of national symbols marked onto the face of a woman, I portray its impact on individual identities and the societal inscription of political narratives onto our bodies, often reinforcing notions of 'otherness.'

"Sutures" aims to provoke critical thought about the pervasive nature of biopower, the intersection of socio-political ideologies with our bodily selves, and our continual negotiation within these spheres. My artwork seeks to foster an understanding of our bodies within the larger societal and political structures, revealing the overlooked but profound intersections between personal and national identities.



Photos: Noora Lahtivuori







## **BIOPOEESIA / BIPOETICS**

**2021**

*video projection, water screen, pump, sound composition*

0.9 grams per litre is the level of salinity in human blood, equal to the salinity of the primordial sea at the time the entire planet Earth was covered with water.

Rivers as the circulatory system of the planet. Rivers that cleanse and give life a second chance. Life was born in water and water has a memory.

Ice crystals have a perfectly symmetrical hexagonal structure and meltwater remembers that.

What does the water of the river Emajõgi remember? Time flows. Our world is always busy, busy with living, busy with being. But time flows regardless. Just like Emajõgi. Emajõgi – ema is mother and jõgi is river in Estonian. Why does time move slower in Tartu? The river with its calm, yet powerful

flow seems to slow the city down, giving people the opportunity to just be in the urban environment.

Biopoetics is an optical water play, exploring life and being.

Biopoetics is also a play on words: biopoesis is a term in biology describing the formation of life on the cellular level.

Artwork is created in collaboration with composer Markus Robam.

Photo: Taevakaamera



Photos: Annika Haas





# CHARTER X

**2021**

**ULM**

*video projection, motor, light, sound, viewer*

In September 2021, the first spacecraft launched into outer orbit, its crew composed entirely of civilians. This ship, a vessel for space tourists, made headlines across broadcasting channels, which even hosted a tag-fundraising event. Tags, emblems of strength and power, akin to logos. Who among us didn't dream of space travel as a child? Thanks to the big egos of powerful men, this dream is now within reach. The spaceship has become the new limo, the new private jet. This transition necessitates new fashion, new trinkets, and all the other accompanying paraphernalia. However, we won't desire these until they're shown to us, ideally on screens. Consider an expensive electric car launched into space, its logo proudly displayed. We are passengers on a Ferris wheel of desires, and commodity fetishism, an old concept, still holds sway, with the Universe as its ultimate limit.



Photos: Mihkel Ilus

