

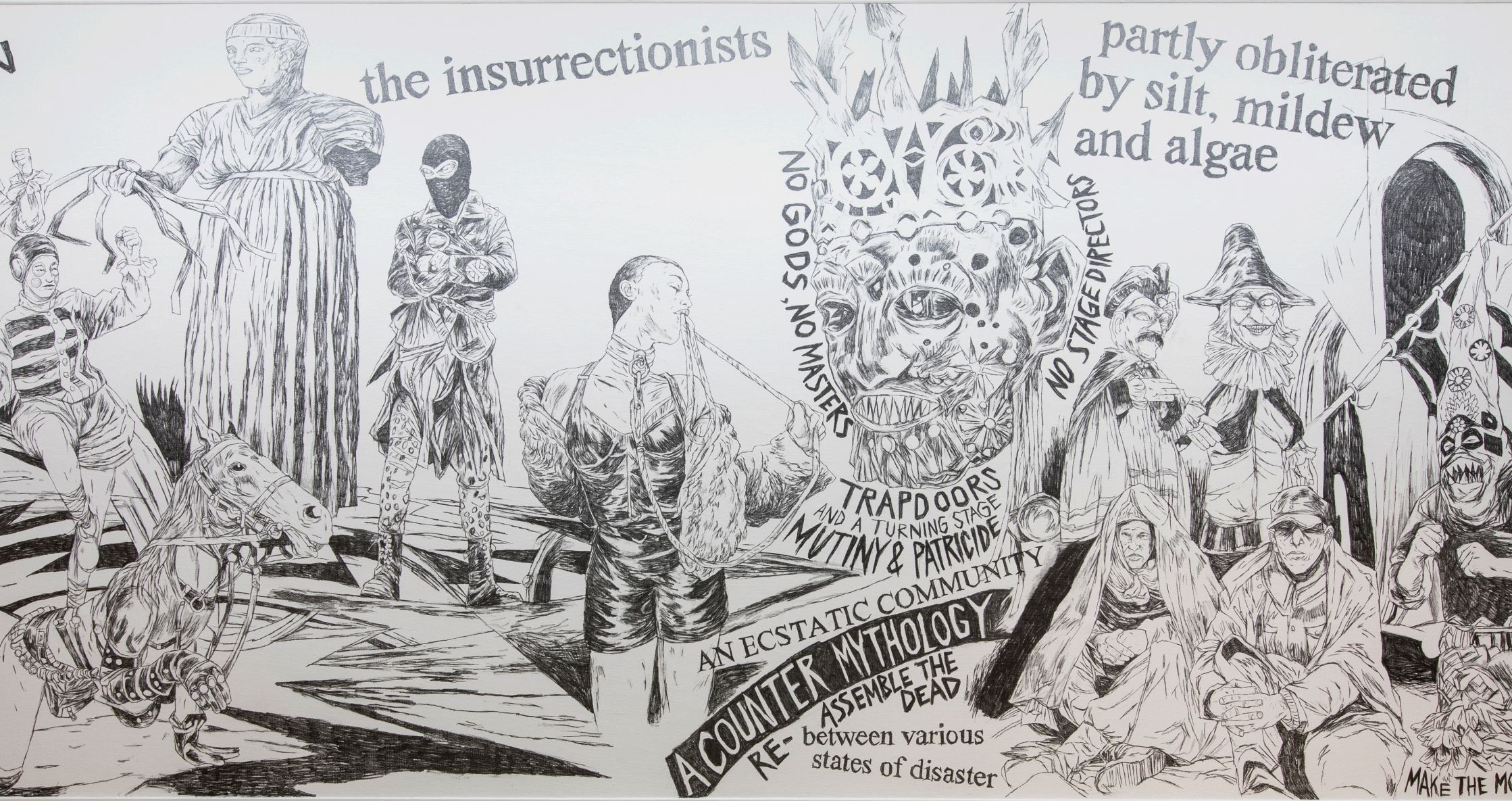
The cover features a decorative border composed of various geometric and floral motifs. At the top and bottom, there are horizontal bands of repeating star patterns. The corners are adorned with clusters of small, stylized flowers. The sides of the cover are decorated with vertical bands of stars and diamond shapes. The central text is set against a solid black background.

THE LATVIAN COLLECTION

EXHIBITION
CATALOGUE

the insurrectionists

partly obliterated
by silt, mildew
and algae



NO GODS, NO MASTERS

NO STAGED DIRECTORS

TRAPDOORS
AND A TURNING STAGE
MUTINY & PATRICIDE

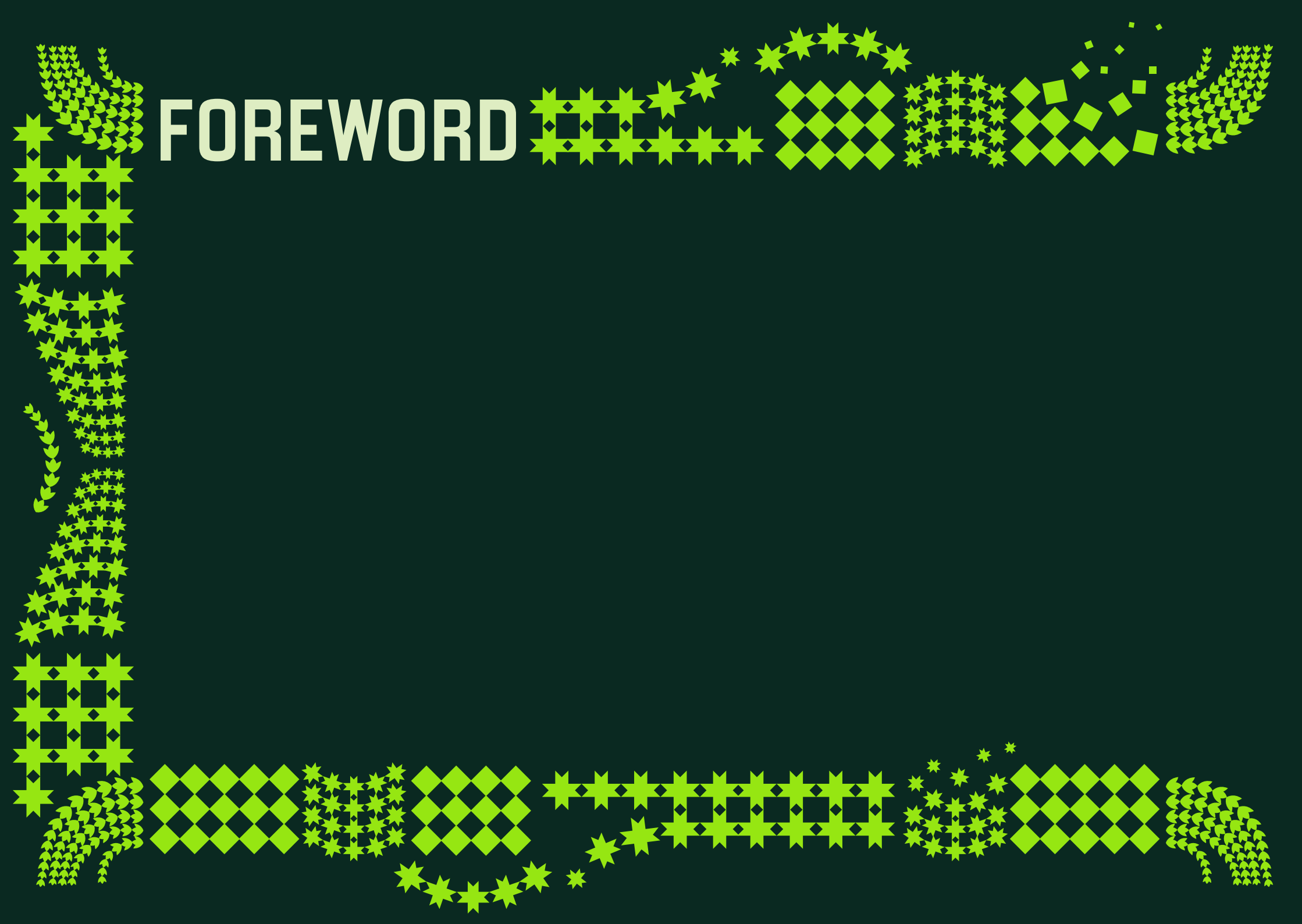
AN ECSTATIC COMMUNITY

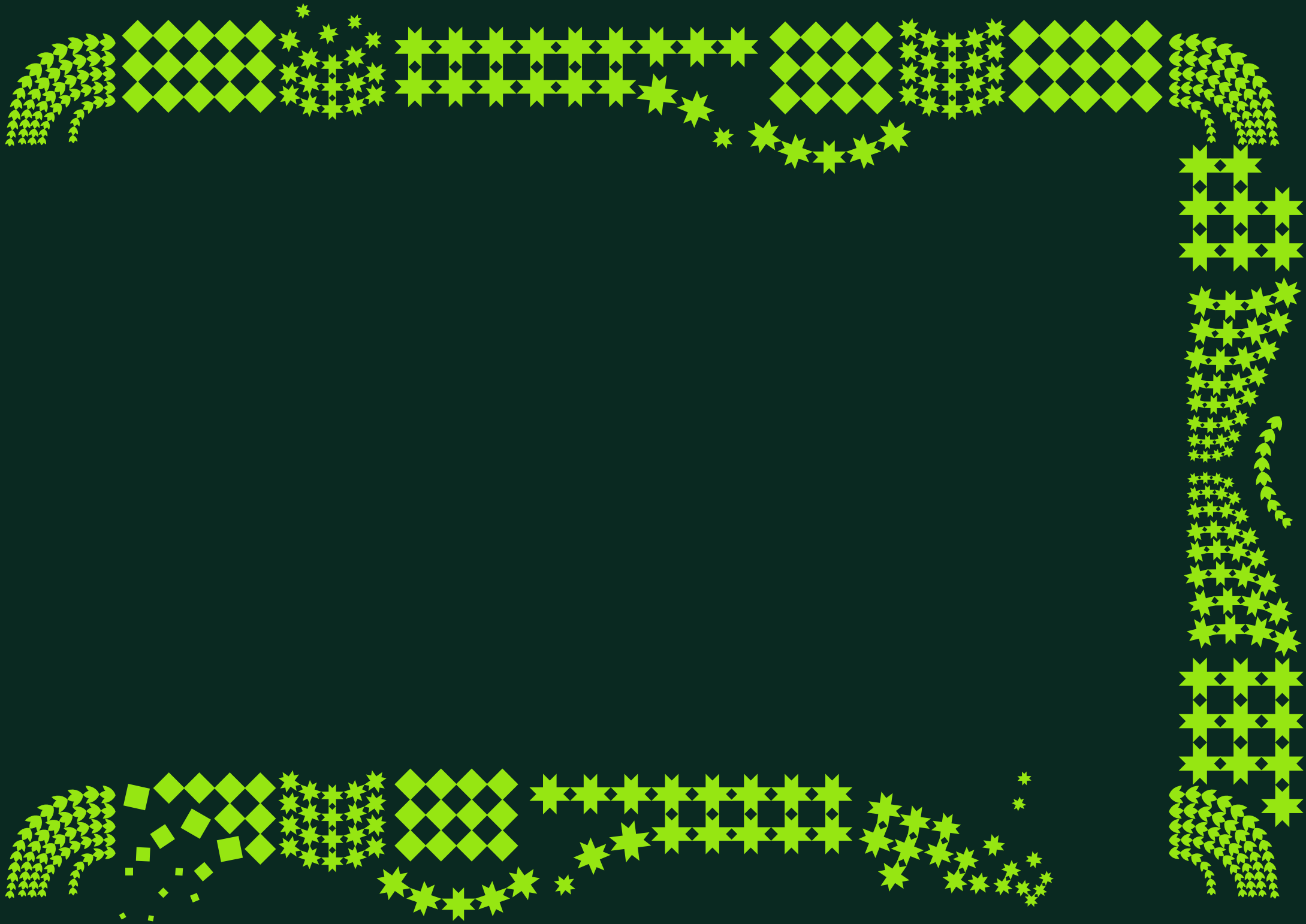
A COUNTER MYTHOLOGY
RE-ASSEMBLE THE DEAD
between various
states of disaster

MAKE THE MO

TABLE OF CONTENT

FOREWORD





NO COLLECTION

INGA LACE & LOTTE LØVHOLM



IMAGE SOURCE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME

WILL RESTORE YOU

**THE LATVIAN COLLECTION IS A JOURNEY
INTO THE PASTS, ALTERNATE PRESENTS AND
FUTURES THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF A
NATION IN THE SEMI-PERIPHERY OF EUROPE.**

The exhibition presents the collection in its entirety for the first time since the late 1950's alongside eight new commissions by artists we invited to visit the collection with us delving into different themes embedded in it.

Our common journey into this archive started in 2019. Lotte had been researching the collection with her publication *Museum of Care* (2019) for Konstfacks CuratorLab as part of *Migration: Traces in an Art Collection* curated by Cecilia Widenheim and Maria Lind. She was invited to create her own project within their exhibition uncovering the mystery of how this collection ended up in Malmö while following her maternal grandmother's footsteps fleeing Latvia during World War II thus focusing on artworks in the collection related to war and migration. Inga and her colleagues at the Latvian Centre of Contemporary art were working with the series *Portable Landscapes* (2017-2019) focusing on Latvian artists in exile with exhibitions in Riga, Paris, New York, Gotland and Berlin. The series presented new research on stories of exiled and emigré Latvian artists, locating them within the broader context of 20th-century art history, and wider processes of migration.

Going into the archive together we had hopes. We thought that this collection would give us some answers about current political climates. And on a more personal note that it could even present some healing from suppressed collective traumas of war, occupations and exiles.

UNCOVERING THE MYSTERY

How did the artworks end up in Sweden? It is quite unique for a museum outside Latvia to have a Latvian collection. And in the case with many museum collections the acquisition comes down to individual interest. As the Second World War broke out, the former Malmö Museum received a donation of 10,000 Swedish kronor from private donor Oscar Elmquist with the specific purpose of establishing a Latvian contemporary art collection at the museum. The amount, equivalent to 330.000 Swedish kronor today, equated to what a worker would earn in little under a year. Elmquist was a customs inspector and private collector who had lived in Riga and befriended artists there. The museum accepted Elmquist's donation, continuing the legacy of a donation the year prior by Svensk-Lettiska föreningen of a Ludolfs Liberts painting, as well as the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914. A committee consisting of artist Ludolfs Liberts and art historian Francis Balodis was appointed to make a selection of works. The collection was inaugurated in Riga before going to Malmö where it was on permanent display in the museum. After the war, in 1947, more works were added to the collection and the exhibition. In 1958, during the Cold War, the entire collection was taken down from permanent display and kept in storage till parts of the collection were on display in 2019 for the exhibition Migration: Traces in an Art Collection.

A NATION IN THE SEMI-PERIPHERY

Over the centuries, the Baltic territories have been a target of conquest and a battleground between Sweden, Russia, Germany, and Poland. Before gaining independence in 1918, Latvia was part of the German Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire. This part of the empire was mainly Protestant, industrially advanced, and had a German cultural influence with Baltic German and German-speaking elites. Influences from both Russia and Germany are apparent in the works of artists in this region; from realism inspired by the Russian artist group Peredvizhniki (The Wanderers) to German Jugendstil. Many Latvian artists however experimented with different styles, sometimes in connection with political and national movements, concerned with inventing a Latvian identity.

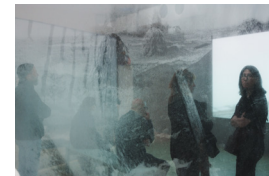


IMAGE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME

In the early 19th century, other European art scenes would celebrate historical painting and folklore in the period that has later been termed Neoclassicism, connected to ideological currents in Europe through the influence of philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder's celebration of folklore on nation state building in the late 18th century. This tradition arrived later in Latvia, with artists starting to take their inspiration from Latvian folk songs and tales throughout the self-definition process in the late 19th century and the fight for independence.

During World War I, many Latvian artists became part of the Latvian Riflemen, some as artists at war. The Latvian Riflemen unit fought for the Russian Empire, defending the Baltic territory against Germany. Fearing defeat and an ensuing refugee crisis, the tsarist autocracy accepted the formation of The Latvian Refugee Association and the Latvian Riflemen, which later became important in Latvia's fight for independence from the Russian Empire following the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Both the Latvian Refugee Association and the Latvian Riflemen became important subjects for artist Jāzeps Grosvalds (1891–1920) who is represented in the collection with the painting From the series Latvian Riflemen, undated (c. 1916) from his known series portraying World War I as an artist at war. He is considered to be Latvia's first Modernist painter together with artist Jēkabs Kazaks. Grosvalds fought in the same unit as artist Niklāvs Strunke who is also present in the collection and they documented their immediate impressions of warfare from their bunkers in paintings and drawings. This period of transition for Latvia contributed to a military focus within art, as it did in many places in Europe. Where German Expressionists in the 1930s would focus on the suffering of soldiers, highlighting the state's exploitation of young men sent to fight in trenches, there is a duality in Grosvalds' and Kazaks' works; The Latvian Riflemen represented a fight for freedom – a national minority within the empire, fighting for independence.

IMAGE SOURCE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME



MAKING SENSE OF THE COLLECTION

The Latvian Collection was meant to be representative of contemporary art in Latvia at the time. With Latvia getting its independence in 1918 following the Russian Revolution and fighting during World War I with the Latvian Riflemen Unit, the collection of 42 artworks encapsulates a general zeitgeist toward thinking and developing ideas about what Latvia is through art. Marked by the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis who came to power after a coup in 1934 and its subsequent cultural policy, the collection represents an inward gaze as well as national romanticist ideas. There are landscape paintings, portraits, urban life, mythology, folklore, still life and images of war from the 1930's as well as works from earlier periods. The Latvian avant-garde has been left out as well as the more culturally diverse parts of the art scene at the time. The collection is as incomplete and subjective as the people working on the selection – artist Ludolf Liberts, himself part of the collection and art historian Francis Balodis.

Latvian identity displayed through idyllic rural scenes, closeness to the land, and nature, was characteristic at the turn of the century, coinciding with the era of National Romanticism in art. The Latvian imaginary landscape especially drew on the repertoire of Latvian traditional songs, known as dainas. The visual language of the artists' works complemented the oral nature of this heritage. In contrast with the concerns of artists at the turn of the century, the 1930s involved more official demands towards creating a national art and state imagery that would convey strong and simple messages. Portrayals of rural life and landscape acquired a political dimension, and there was a transition from a more spontaneous production of art in support of the “national idea” at the turn of the century, towards a mobilisation of art and artists to serve the State during Ulmanis' and authoritarian rule. The shift in aesthetic produc-

tion towards nationalist mythology and folklore in the 1930s is connected to a general political zeitgeist within Latvia and Europe, supporting ethno-nationalist ideas. Modernism came under attack. Liberts who made the selection for the Latvian collection is famously known for his portraits of ancient Latvian tribe leaders in the 1930s whereas his oeuvre in the 1920s is colourful and cubo-futurist.

State control of the economy grew after Ulmanis' coup in 1934. The years of the Great Depression were past, and large state-supported infrastructure and agriculture projects made the 1930s feel like a period of prosperous economic growth. Praise of rural life coincides with this upsurge and to this day in Latvia, the 1930s are often portrayed as a prosperous time despite authoritarian leadership. This mental image can also be explained by what followed – the war and the Soviet occupation were much worse. In 1934, the Kārlis Ulmanis authoritarian regime's new cultural policy not only encouraged strengthening ideas of Latvianness through representation of rural life in art, but also prioritised distribution and support of art in the countryside and small towns. The aim was to advance feelings of patriotism by keeping the land and honouring labour across the whole country. During the years of authoritarian rule, different spheres such as agriculture, economics and culture were taken care of by semi-independent bodies known as 'Kameras'. An interesting initiative mentioned in the press was a collaboration between the 'Writing and Arts Kamera' and the 'Agriculture Kamera' where artists were invited to stay at farms in the rural countryside:

“Living in the countryside, the artists will have closer contact with the rhythm of life in the countryside and the tools used in farm life, the depiction of which sometimes does not coincide with reality in their work”. (Talsu Vārds, 1939).

**I HAVE DECIDED TO GO TO WAR IN THE NEWSPAPERS AGAINST
MADERNIEKS BECAUSE IT'S NONSENSE TO SUGGEST YOU CAN MODERNISE
YOUR NATIONAL DRESS. THEN IT'S NOT A NATIONAL DRESS ANYMORE.
AND WHEN HAVE YOU HEARD OF ANY NATION WHO HAS DONE THAT?**

There is no information about direct outcomes of those residencies, but the example is an indicator of the political standpoint of the time. Under this system, the artists were indirectly being told that their ideas were subordinate to the goals of the state. In 1938, upon establishing the new 'Writing and Art Kamera' Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis said: “There can be just one culture in Latvia – Latvian culture”, emphasising the importance of Latvian identity in art and distancing culture even more from Modernist tendencies.

Like Prime Minister Ulmanis, artist Rihards Zariņš in the collection also insisted on a “pure Latvian culture”. His views regarding ethnographic ornaments and subjects caused a public argument with fellow artist Jūlijs Madernieks: “I have decided to go to war in the newspapers against Madernieks because it's nonsense to suggest you can modernise your national dress. Then it's not a national dress anymore. And when have you heard of any nation who has done that?”

EXILES

In 1947, the Latvian collection was expanded with acquisitions and donations by artists following the museum's Exhibition of Latvian Art (1947). Most of the artists in the exhibition were living in exile in Sweden following World War II. A work from that exhibition, Eduards Dzenis' Refugees (1947), deals directly with exile and depicts a procession of people fleeing by foot beside a horse drawn carriage.

During World War II, the Latvian army was divided between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and mass deportations were carried out. An estimated 200,000 Latvians fled, 4,500 came to Sweden by boat over the Baltic Sea. By the time the Baltic countries regained their independence in 1990-1991, their populations had become displaced peoples. The island of Gotland was the point of entrance for numerous boat refugees from Latvia. Among the artists of the Latvian collection, these included Marija Induse-Muce-niece, Niklāvs Strunke, Eduards Dzenis and Milda Liepiņa. For some artists, the exile ended their careers.

In 1970, Latvian art historian and poet Ojārs Jēgens wrote the article “The Fate of Our Artworks” about the Latvian collection for the Latvian magazine Tilts (Bridge), which was published in exile in the US from 1949-1976. As a young Latvian writer living in exile in Denmark, Jēgens was part of a Nordic Latvian art community and was friends with artist Niklāvs Strunke who was living in diaspora in Sweden. In his article, Jēgens explains how the exhibition with Latvian art at Malmö Konstmuseum was taken down from permanent display in 1958 due to a lack of space. Some of the works were displayed in public institutions, but management of the museum told people who enquired about the Latvian collection that it was “doubtful” that the works would be shown again. In his footnotes, Jēgens connects the museum’s attitude with an unwillingness to support the still-occupied Latvian nation. The point of departure for collecting the works – as a tribute to Latvia and its art scene – had been forgotten. For Jēgens, an intellectual in exile, this gesture is similar to the erasure of Latvian history by the Soviet Union.

THE COLLECTION AND THE AFTERMATH

Similarly to Ojārs Jēgens we find ourselves searching for clues about the story of the collection. As Jēgens was projecting his current situation and geopolitical time onto the collection we are in a similar way using the collection as our witnesses. The book *No Archive Will Restore You* by Juliette Singh presents the longing for archives in an academic context. The archive presents “an elusive hope of our individual salvation”. Singh describes how as a student finding the right archive held the promise of “tenure track work”:

“IF WE COULD FIND THE RIGHT ARCHIVE, THE RIGHT STASH OF MATERIALS THAT WAS SEXY ENOUGH TO SELL OURSELVES, WE COULD BE SPARED THE DEPRESSION, THE ANXIETY ATTACKS, THE PRE-MID-LIFE CRISES THAT WOULD COME WHEN, ONE BY ONE, WE REALIZED WE WERE NOT GOING TO BE CHOSEN (...) THE ARCHIVE WAS AN OPAQUE HOPE, YET IT KEPT SLIPPING AWAY AS THOUGH IT DIDN’T WANT TO BE FOUND, PLUNDERED, EXCAVATED.” (SINGH 2018: 22)

An equal obsession with the collection as a site for potential could be transferred to the art scene. But as Singh suggests each time we have had a clear idea about the collection we find contradictions within it. The Latvian collection is slipping away all the time. It is sticky, slippery and messy. It is not the kind of archive your colleagues will “gosh over”. We understand why it has been overlooked: the quality of the works vary and aesthetically few works are pleasing. Instead of creating relief and a wholesome experience, it has opened up new questions, doubts and dreams.

COMMISSIONING AS CURATORIAL METHOD

The collection gave us inspiration to look at ways of thinking beyond the nation state as a counterpoise and addition to the collection. But in the middle of our research came the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 by Russia. And how do you question a fundamental structure that you now need to protect? The blindspots within the exhibition are apparent; the entangled relationship between the Baltic nation state building and Russia is left for another time. Instead of directing the attention at the ethnic diversity and communities that have been cohabiting Latvia which include Jewish, Polish, German, Russian, Roma, Scandinavian influence, the exhibition brings a multiplicity of perspectives stemming from the collection and presenting modest alternatives for exclusions and inequalities in relation to nation state building. We are widening what a Latvian collection can be, stretching it in time to now and going beyond the borders of the Latvian nation state.

With Malmö Konstmuseum we commissioned 9 artists to create works that would become part of the Latvian collection. They have been digging, becoming confused, upset, curious, uninspired, and intrigued with us. The artists have become our conversation partners in the archive and the rest of this publication we leave to their research and ideas. Through visits with us to the Latvian collection they have delved into different themes:

Inspired by the culturally diplomatic role of artist and scenographer Ludolfs Liberts who was part of the selection committee for the collection, artist Ieva Epnere is producing a new video installation. Anastasia Sosunova is looking at post-Soviet nation state building in her home country Lithuania where cute white angel statues have been popping up in public space in recent years becoming a symbol for neoliberal

politics. Makda Embaie is highlighting community building as an alternative to nation state building with inspiration from Jānis Tīdemāns' vibrant painting *Carnival* (undated, possibly from the second half of 1930's). Embaie is looking at the carnival as a potential for joy and collectiveness. Susanna Jablonski and Santiago Mostyn present the darker sides of nation state building with a video commemorating the holocaust in the city of Liepāja, Latvia during the Second World War. Lada Nakonechna's installation explores the concept of national collections and the impossibility of such highlighting how the Latvian Collection could be representative of other nation states. Ieva Kraule's work tells the story of a mother and a small child building the world on the ruins of an old civilization after an unnamed event that destroyed everything. The work deals with myth making from a female perspective. Asbjørn Skou's wall drawings represent fictional timelines of an alternate past of the post-soviet regions, researching an anarchist theatre that was about to happen but never did. Jaanus Samma is showing a woolen rug in the shape of a brooch inspired by the painting *Teatre decoration* (undated) by Janis Kuga. The figures on the rug represents "Kalevipoeg" (Kalev's Son), Estonian national epic.

IMAGE SOURCE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME





INTERVIEWS OF PARTICIPATING ARTISTS



SUSANNA JABLONSKI

UMDREHEN 2022

SINGLE-CHANNEL 4K VIDEO PROJECTION WITH SOUND, 15 MIN,
PRINTED VOILE FABRIC, CERAMIC STONEWARE CLAY, CINE
KODAK EIGHT, MODEL 60 FILM CAMERA

SANTIAGO MOSTYN

Through film, hanging textiles and skeletal ceramic sculptures, Susanna Jablonski and Santiago Mostyn's new installation examines the role of image making in relation to history, looking closely at how images of historical violence, and their appropriation, might shape our understanding of the present day.

Their new film, Umdrehen, juxtaposes audio from the 1981 testimony of a German naval sergeant, Reinhard Wiener – who partially filmed the mass murder of Jewish residents of Liepaja, Latvia in the summer of 1941 – with images recorded by Jablonski and Mostyn at the site of the massacre in 2021. The artists' camera moves through the landscape in response to Wiener's description of what he saw that day, taking the viewer into the same forested, coastal landscape and finally to the trench where the atrocities took place.

Characterised as a wartime trophy, Wiener's archival footage later circulated as evidence in the Holocaust trials and as material for documentary and feature films but remains deliberately not shown here. The artists' installation questions the function and agency of the camera in describing history, asking how historical events leave traces in landscapes, and how one can approach, retell, or represent a horrific event without reproducing its depiction of violence.

Through their visual and sculptural contributions, Jablonski and Mostyn complicate the largely affirmative story of nation state building so characteristic of Latvian art of the 1930s, adding a different chapter, and building a bridge to the images of war in the Latvian collection.

CAMERA: SANTIAGO MOSTYN
SOUND RECORDING: SUSANNA JABLONSKI
EDITING: SUSANNA JABLONSKI AND
SANTIAGO MOSTYN
SOUND DESIGN: JOEN SZMIDT

COLOUR: NANNA DALUNDE
NARRATIVE TEXT:
TOBIAS EBBRECHT-HARTMANN
TESTIMONY: REINHARD WIENER
VOICE: HANNI KAMALY

IMAGE SOURCE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME



WHAT IS OUR STYLE? VISUAL LANGUAGE OF THE NATION STATE

IN THIS CONVERSATION WITH JAANUS SAMMA WE TALKED ABOUT HIS INTEREST IN VISUAL LANGUAGE OF NATION STATES, FROM NATIONAL COSTUMES TO PAINTINGS, ARTISTS' POSITIONING TOWARDS POWER, AS WELL AS STORIES THAT NATIONS TELL ZOOMING IN ON ESTONIAN NATIONAL EPIC KALEVIPOEG.

INGA:

Could you start by telling what your process was from seeing the Latvian collection in the storage of the Malmö Konstmuseum to coming up with the idea of doing a weaving?

JAANUS:

I was very excited to see the collection since I'm working with similar topics and timeframe in Estonia and both contexts are very much alike. Lately I have been interested in how these relatively young nations were looking for their visual identity. There were the same discussions in Germany when they were creating their country – is our style Gothic, or is it something else?

In Estonia these discussions took place in the early 20th century. And the power always supports artists to work with those topics. So, when looking at the paintings in the storage of the Latvian collection, I saw this oversized brooch in the scenography sketch by Jānis Kuga, it struck me that this is exactly how one would romanticize looking for one's roots and emphasize belonging to a nation, showing your heritage in this oversized manner.

LOTTE:

When we invited you to see the collection, we already had an idea you would probably navigate towards works like this scenography by Jānis Kuga's Sketch for

stage design of *Pūt Vējiņi!* (Blow, Wind!). The artist is using traditional Latvian symbols both for the costumes, but also the actual set, including this brooch, which is used in the local national costumes. Kuga puts these national symbols on stage and you added your own narrative to it?

JAANUS:

Yes, I'm not only interested in objects or patterns that belong to national identity but also what the narratives are. Usually there are different national epics. In Estonia it is *Kalevipoeg* (Kalev's Son), equivalent in Latvia is *Lāčplēsis* (The Bear-Slayer). It also bears similarities to neighboring countries like *Kalevala* in Finland. I decided to focus on *Kalevipoeg* of whom I knew many representations existed in the visual art. Surprisingly there's less of *Lāčplēsis*'s depictions in visual art in Latvia. *Kalevipoeg* is one of the main texts created in the 19th century Estonia and even though it is based on Estonian folklore, it is also a complete construction. Nowadays it is part of the popular culture and found in the school curriculum. From a contemporary point of view, he's a problematic figure, since he goes around raping women and killing Finnish people. These women he rapes eventually kill themselves because they are so depressed.

INGA:

Lāčplēsis was also written in the 19th century, by Latvian writer Andrejs Pumpurs. It's set during the Livonian Crusades telling the story of the mythical hero Lāčplēsis who helps Latvians fight the Christian crusaders. His strength is in his ears and once it gets to the Germans, they manage to cut them off and Lāčplēsis loses his power. So in his last fight against a Dark Knight he cannot win, and they both fall in the Daugava River where they are still fighting. Latvia's independence is dependent upon him winning. Do you know if this epic has a relationship to Kalevipoeg?

JAANUS:

Yes, Kalevipoeg is mentioned in the Lāčplēsis. A war was provoked between Latvians and Estonians, and Lāčplēsis went on to fight the giant Estonian hero Kalevipoeg. They fought to a draw and then made peace and decided to join forces to fight their common enemy - the German crusaders.

INGA:

Could you talk about the different Kalevipoeg-inspired figures of men at the center of your weaving?

JAANUS:

For me it was interesting how different artists have been working with the image of Kalevipoeg and I used the silhouettes from existing paintings. I didn't want to create anything new because I think he's already been represented enough. The works I used range from the early 20th century to the 1940s by Christian Raud and [which ones as well?]

LOTTE:

Knowing how you often work with the

representation of masculinity; what drew your attention to this epic tale?

JAANUS:

Kalevipoeg is all about masculinity. In the recent exhibition that I did in the design museum [Still Lifes on National Motifs at Museum of Applied Art and Design] I focused on design and national identity from the 1930s through the 1950s. One of the themes I chose is Kalevipoeg showing how he has been represented throughout crafts and visual art. To me it's interesting how the representation of the male body has changed over time. There have sometimes been more muscles, sometimes less and sometimes he's depicted very soft, almost feminine.

INGA:

Has he been represented in a weaving before?

JAANUS:

In the 1930s there was a book of ready-made patterns to work on your own tapestries at home. Between folk motives there is also one with Kalevipoeg going to Finland to make a sword with whom he later killed Finnish people. So, essentially this violent image serves as an invitation to people to use their own national motives and narratives to make one's home cozier. I'm also interested in how this kind of daily propaganda works.

LOTTE:

Let's talk about your choice of working with weaving as an art form that hasn't received much appreciation historically.

JAANUS:

I'm interested in the relationship between craft, design and art and the idea of high and low that those are associated with. I have always worked with different

craftsmanship techniques and for me it is important that the work is done using the traditional technique because nowadays there are so many options to do textile much cheaper and get much bigger works. It's also interesting who still possesses the skills and knowledge. For example, in the Norwegian folk costumes everything is hand embroidered and since there is a lack of people who know the techniques, Norwegian folk customs are done in Estonia. But when I was talking to the people at the factory in Estonia, they said that even in Estonia we have less and less people, so we have to send work to be done in Vietnam.



IMAGE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME

LOTTE:

The folk costume is a quite rare thing to own in Denmark whereas in Norway most people own a full costume. Probably because it is a younger nation and the independence is widely celebrated.

JAANUS:

It's interesting to see how Norway constructed their folk costumes almost like fantasy costumes, often based on nothing historic. In Estonia, like Latvia, people would have the costume and participate in the singing and dancing collectives, espe-

cially outside of the capital. The Song and Dance festival traditions to which people wear the costumes are still huge both in Estonia and in Latvia.

INGA:

While preparing the exhibition we have been thinking a lot about how in the 1930s many artists would willingly take part in the nation-building project in Latvia since it was still a new country. Contemporary artists today are more revisionist, however, the recent Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine brought nationalism back full scale with the fear of being invaded, at least in Latvia. How do you see the situation unfolding in Estonia?

JAANUS:

I guess similar. In Latvia you dismantled the Soviet built monument of Victory recently, in Estonia they are introducing the so called decommunization law [can we call it like this?] If there is Communist symbols somewhere on a building, you must remove it, destroy it. I find it absurd. It's only dealing with the symbols but not of what they mean. But how can we talk about history if we don't have anything of that to show to our children? You also cannot delete 50 years of your past. And probably there are other things that are Soviet that we should get rid of.

LOTTE:

As an outsider it seems like there is a lot of trauma to be dealt with. While working on this exhibition, it was important for me to understand the complexity when it comes to the relationship between the Baltic countries and Russia. Since the invasion in Ukraine it's been especially difficult looking at what is happening in the respective countries politically, and how people feel and react.

JAANUS:

In Estonia people didn't think about it as a trauma before this recent escalation of war. But now, I even had to rethink for example, showing an image of Stalin next to Estonian flag, in the design exhibition that I mentioned earlier. In some countries, it's perceived like showing a picture of Hitler.

INGA:

In the exhibition you mention, you deal with the continuity of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, which is rarely seen together. Those decades rarely appear in exhibitions since they are considered too realist, ideological, socialist realist. Mostly it's the 1920s, and then the 1960s that are considered emancipatory, resisting and thus more presentable.

JAANUS:

In Estonia, Latvia and many other post-soviet countries, the culture has been seen as episodes - First Republic, then one occupation and then another one. Of course, a lot changed during the war, but there is also a lot of continuity because it's often the same people who continue to work throughout these periods and that must be looked at. For example, in Estonia, there is this fascinating artist [?..] who did State commissions in the 1930s and then when the new regime came, he did the Soviet Estonian flag, and since he lived for almost 100 years, he again managed to do state commissions for the newly independent state in the 1990s. Aesthetically nothing much changes. It is just different symbols, colors.

IMAGE SOURCE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME







THE INTERVIEW TITLE

INTERVIEW WITH KRISTIANA ABELE



IMAGE SOURCE: MALMÖ KONSTHALL
ARTIST NAME AND SURNAME

INGA:

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In Estonia these discussions took place in the early 20th century. And the power always supports artists to work with those topics. So, when looking at the paintings in the storage of the Latvian collection, I saw this oversized brooch in the scenography sketch by Jānis Kuga, it struck me that this is exactly how one would romanticize looking for one's roots and emphasize belonging to a nation, showing your heritage in this oversized manner.

LOTTE:

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KRISTIANA:

Yes, I'm not only interested in objects or patterns that belong to national identity but also what the narratives are. Usually there are different national epics. In Estonia it is Kalevipoeg (Kalev's Son), equivalent in Latvia is Lāčplēsis (The Bear-Slayer). It also bears similarities to neighboring countries like Kalevala in Finland. I decided to focus on Kalevipoeg of whom I knew many representations existed in the

visual art. Surprisingly there's less of Lāčplēsis's depictions in visual art in Latvia. Kalevipoeg is one of the main texts created in the 19th century Estonia and even though it is based on Estonian folklore, it is also a complete construction. Nowadays it is part of the popular culture and found in the school curriculum. From a contemporary point of view, he's a problematic figure, since he goes around raping women and killing Finnish people. These women he rapes eventually kill themselves because they are so depressed.

INGA:

Could you start by telling what your process was from seeing the Latvian collection in the storage of the Malmo Konstmuseum to coming up with the idea of doing a weaving?

KRISTIANA:

I was very excited to see the collection since I'm working with similar topics and timeframe in Estonia and both contexts are very much alike. Lately I have been interested in how these relatively young nations were looking for their visual identity. There were the same discussions in Germany when they were creating their country – is our style Gothic, or is it something else?

In Estonia these discussions took place in the early 20th century. And the power always supports artists to work with those topics. So, when looking at the paintings in the storage of the Latvian collection, I saw this oversized brooch in the scenography sketch by Jānis Kuga, it struck me that this is exactly how one would romanticize looking for one's roots and emphasize belonging to a nation, showing your heritage in this oversized manner.

LOTTE:

When we invited you to see the collection, we already had an idea you would probably navigate towards works like this scenography by Jānis Kuga's Sketch for stage design of Pūt Vējiņi! (Blow, Wind!). The artist is using traditional Latvian symbols both for the costumes, but also the actual set, including this brooch, which is used in the local national cos-

tumes. Kuga puts these national symbols on stage and you added your own narrative to it?

KRISTIANA:

Yes, I'm not only interested in objects or patterns that belong to national identity but also what the narratives are. Usually there are different national epics. In Estonia it is Kalevipoeg (Kalev's Son), equivalent in Latvia is Lāčplēsis (The Bear-Slayer). It also bears similarities to neighboring countries like Kalevala in Finland. I decided to focus on Kalevipoeg of whom I knew many representations existed in the visual art. Surprisingly there's less of Lāčplēsis's depictions in visual art in Latvia. Kalevipoeg is one of the main texts created in the 19th century Estonia and even though it is based on Estonian folklore, it is also a complete construction. Nowadays it is part of the popular culture and found in the school curriculum. From a contemporary point of view, he's a problematic figure, since he goes around raping women and killing Finnish people. These women he rapes eventually kill themselves because they are so depressed.

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JANIS AIZENS IN THE CORNFIELD, 1938

(1899, SĒLPILS - 1941, RIGA)

During Kārlis Ulmanis' rule (1934-40), representations of agriculture became part of a national identity project. However, Jānis Aizēns' coloured drawing In the Cornfield might have had different connotations, as Aizēns was associated with the Communist underground movement in Latvia in the 1930s. The Communist ideology stands in sharp contrast to Ulmanis' regime, which sent political opponents, primarily Social Democrats, to concentration camps in Liepāja during the first years of its rule.

Before entering the Art Academy of Latvia in 1924, Aizēns studied with painter Ludolfs Liberts. During the Nazi occupation of Latvia in 1941, Aizēns was arrested and executed in the Biķernieki forest. This forest area was the primary mass murder site during the Holocaust in Latvia, and Biķernieki has a memorial monument commemorating the approximately 20,000 victims buried there, most of them Jewish people but some of political prisoners like Aizēns.

BLACK INK AND WATER COLOUR ON PAPER, 49.5 X 35 CM,
GIFT 1989



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The catalogue has been published on the occasion of the exhibition

THE LATVIAN COLLECTION

MALMÖ KONSTMUSEUM

2 DECEMBER 2022 – 16 APRIL 2023

Curators: Inga Lāce & Lotte Løvholm

Exhibition architecture: Līva Kreislere

Research: Marcus Pompeius, Mimmi Sjö, Arthur Gorzny

Education programme: Mimmi Sjö, Ellen Arvidsson

Commissions: Marcus Pompeius, Kirse Junge-Stevnsborg, Anna Johansson

Project management: Ditte Nielsen, Jan Hansen, Björn Jumme

Exhibition production: Anders Lindsjö, Robert Kapos, Max Emland, Mattias Almlund, Niklas Antonsson, Andrés Camacho, Shekib Momand, Per Pålsson, Morgan Schagerberg, Anna Hillbom, Emil Sandström

Conservation: Karin Hermerén, Egil Ahlgren, Matilda Thorlund-Brönmark, Hanna Eriksson, Amanda Nyagake Mwita

Communication: Disa Torbjörnsdottir, Julia Stenberg

Exhibition hosts/mediators: Gabriel Bohm Calles, Åsa Hector, Soad Aziz, Aline Rosas, Anna Hillbom, Emil Sandström, Patricio Aros, Yasmin Yacob, Emma Juel Justesen, Clara Gustafsson, Henric Wollmér-Persson

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