

**Failing
Painting
My Mother
as an
Inevitable,
Performative
Action**

Liisa Mudist

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SUMMARY

The thesis text "Failing Painting my mother as an Inevitable, performative action" is an accompanying part to the series "I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language)" including three paintings "ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with yellow", "ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with beige" and "ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with pink". In this thesis text, I reflect on the questions I had before making the paintings for Kuvan Kevät, and analysing the outcomes of the work and thinking behind them.

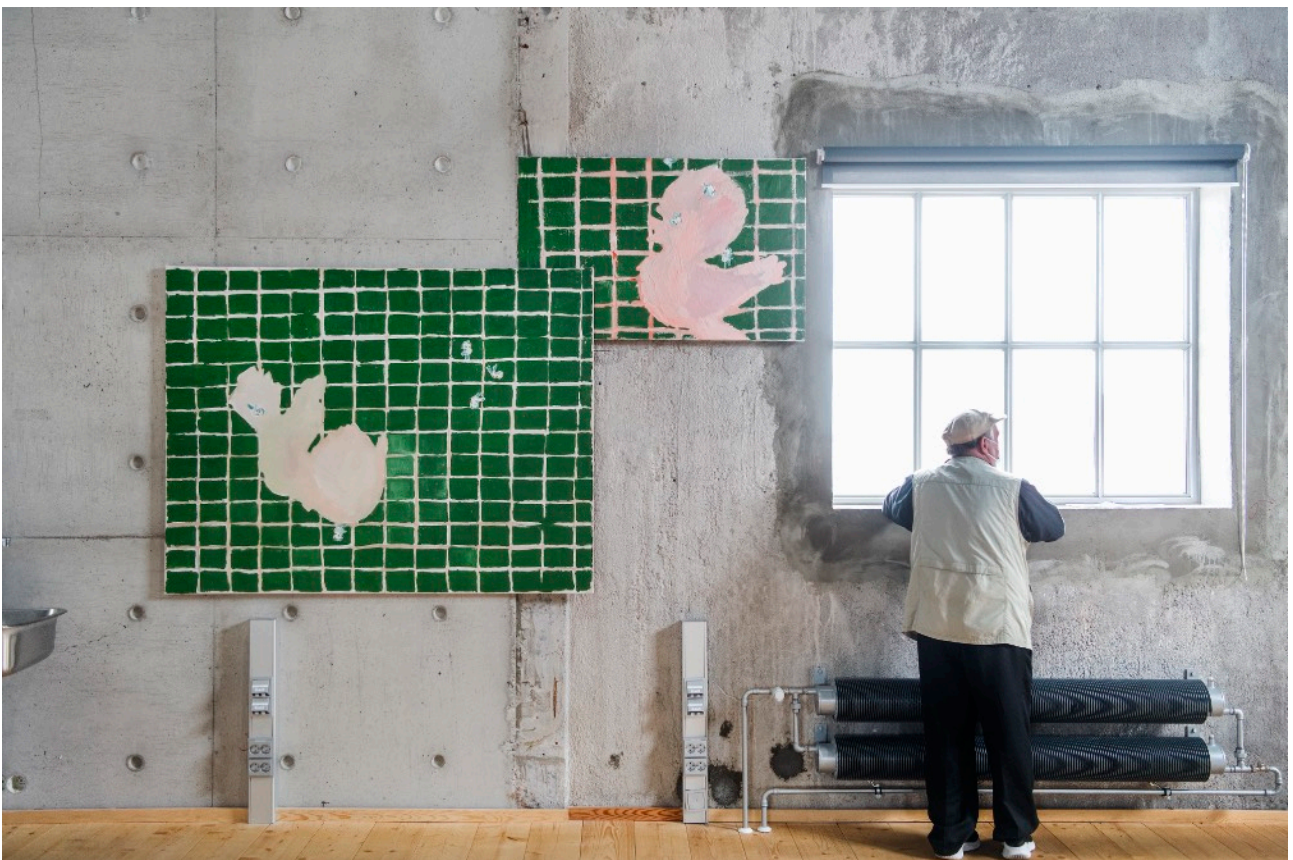
I clearly remember being fascinated by the USA I saw in the television. I uncritically believed in a sort of the American Dream. It was only in my 20s I became disillusioned with, among other things, capitalism and neoliberalism. I chose to concentrate on this image of an Eastern European, who idealises the West, because I have been there. Idealising the West and simultaneously Othering myself as an Eastern European led me to be interested in this notion of stable and Othered self. Chapters in this thesis talk about the post-Soviet identity which often concerns failure, failure to be like the imagined West to be more specific. I elaborate on that failure, but also the meaning of failure in personal and wider (perhaps political, social, or cultural) sense, and try to see sense in it.

I chose the subject of the paintings to be my mother; I was interested in the relationship between myself and her. Having grown up with a parent whose youth and some formative years fell alongside to the Soviet era, I questioned our differences. The paintings and the thesis are questioning the originality of one's sense of self: what in me is truly me?

This thesis as a whole consists of a series failed attempts at writing the written part of the thesis. It is a textual collage of failed starts. The chapters flow from one to the next through the connections between one's end and the other's beginning. I have incorporated slightly more official text alongside poetical thoughts. The thesis paintings were exhibited in the Academy of Arts Mylly building, on the 6th floor space "Majakka" in May 2022. The thesis paintings were supervised by Liisa Pesonen and Heli Hiltunen. The supervisor for the written part was Siiri Haarla. The thesis will be examined by Teemu Mäki and Sanna Tirkkonen.



1. I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language):
ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЬИЙ with yellow, 220 x 165 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä



2. I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language):
ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЬИЙ with beige (left) / *ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЬИЙ with pink* (up on the right)
160 x 130 cm / 110 x 73 cm,
oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä

The Photograph



3. Photograph of Ene Luik-Mudist. 11 x 7,3 cm. 1980s, Family photobook. Photo by Peeter Mudist

Reading the Paintings

One can see on my paintings green, silhouettes of a figure and birds, same Disney birds on the uncovered cotton fabric, a sort of ghost, and squares or a grid. Some of these words have another meaning, such as a figure can be a body or it can be a “figure of speech”. Some are popular metaphors; birds are commonly representative of a sense of freedom, while a grid can be seen as something that is restrictive, either in its entirety, or inside the little square. As an Estonian singer Anne Veski — popular in the Soviet stages — sang in the 1986 song titled “Ajaproov” (‘The Trial of the Time’ in English): “*Ruudus kas rist või null / nii nagu trips-traps-trull // Kui oma ruutu tead... / õigesti samme sead...*” meaning ‘either a cross or a zero in the square / as in tic-tac-toe // if you know your square... / if you set your steps right...’ The whole song has references to the society being [restrictive] like the “grid in one’s notebook.” The sentences “if you know your square” and “if you set your steps right” are left unfinished probably because the ending is obvious: if you do the right thing within your square, you will get through life [well].



4. *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language):*
ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with yellow, 220 x 165 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä

One of the inspirations for making my paintings for Kuvan Kevät 2022 was an article titled “Zombie Socialism and the Rise of Neoliberalism in Post-Socialist Central and Eastern Europe” written by Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druță. The analysis concludes that in Eastern and Central Europe, there exists a ghost-socialism, meaning the socialist ideas are made to be ghostly, scary, through the lived and horrible experiences of the people during the Soviet Union. This trauma is weaponised in politics by the neoliberal right-wing politicians to scare people away from leftist politics and reforms. (Chelcea, Druță, 2016, 522).



5. Detail: *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language):* ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЬИЙ with yellow, 220 x 165 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä



6. Detail: *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language):* ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЬИЙ with pink, 110 x 73 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä

The little ghost on the painting is one of the elements to be read as it is: it depicts a naively painted ghost, and it is meant to be read as a "ghost". Ghost is ghostly. Ghost as someone as something from the other side. Ghost as the ghost of the Soviet Union. I like to add this sort of naive elements with a hint to a play in language to my paintings. Adding a naive depiction of ghost allowed me to add to the other depicted elements on the painting which are to be read similarly as one would analyse language of, say, a poem (in maybe high-school).

An example I have heard is that a teacher says "the blue curtains in the book represent the melancholy." I am interested in and drawn to this simplistic way of drawing parallels. There is this socially acquired naiveté to claiming banal seeming things such as "birds in my painting depict freedom", and yet, freedom is a grandiose topic; and perhaps because of it's naiveté, the referred freedom seems even more grandiose, and at the same time, simplistic and a bit un-serious.

I did not *plan* to make paintings with these elements listed in the beginning of this paragraph. They came to me in rather random and rather subconscious ways, but I think it is sometimes good to remind oneself the common ideas behind certain images. In my case, the questions about freedom vs some sort of imprisonment were very clearly in my mind while I made these paintings and while I have thought about them. The Disney birds referring to some idea(l) of the (basically mythical) West are a big part of my, let's

say, non-identity — something that I have not had so much lived experience with but about which I have learned mainly through media and other people.

Looking back, I think it is quite helpful to analyse my paintings in a very simplistic A=B type of way here.

Here is the list of elements in my paintings with the possible meaning behind them:

- green, more specifically chromium oxide green = poverty, childhood
- squares/grid = repression, repetition
- Disney birds = idea(l)s about freedom
- a human figure = mother

Painting in Parallel to Gender

**"I wake up most mornings
to do what.
Dress my genitals for
occasion. What
choices. A
twat cravat."
— JASON KEERY
"The Choice is Real"**

One day I realised I feel about painting as I feel about my gender. I felt that there are similarities between gender and painting.

I was inspired by Judith Butler's way of using the term "performativity" (1999, xv). I think I might have misunderstood it; the way I understand performing gender is that the "performing" part is inevitable, everyone "performs" their understanding of their gender. And I understand painting as a practice to be similar in a way that to paint is to perform, and if you paint, you are performing something on the canvas. A line drawn on the canvas can't help but perform. It is inevitable.

It is this Real vs perceived non-Real dichotomy that excites me both for dressing up my genitals for the occasion, and painting.

I think painting, like performing one's *subconscious sex*¹, is an act of *performing* while being *true*. Perhaps it is obvious when stated like this, but I think there is something intriguingly odd about thinking of painting the same way as thinking about gender. Every gesture we make is a performance. Every item of clothing we wear is performing something in certain context. There is no truly neutral style of clothing, and there is no truly neutral way to paint. Every gesture on the painting on a canvas is a gesture of the un-neutral real.

It is this "performing" in the way one inevitably performs gender that I was interested in when choosing to pick the specific shade of green, chromium oxide green, to become important in my *Kuvan Kevät 2022* work. I was interested in how the chromium oxide green performs both, its shade of green, and (my personal) connections and memories it brings up.

¹ Performing gender is vaguely linked to the idea that gender as something socially constructed. I do not find it useful to think of gender (nor painting) as a social construct. Social construct is something that matters socially in a particular context — this is why it is a social construct. In a way, to some extent, it can be said, it is socially made up. Understanding gender in this way gives the power of decision of one's own gender to other people, to society, or to the unconscious of the society. I do think, that to some extent, gender is a social construct. But to analyse painting in parallel to gender through the idea of gender being solely a social construct ends up to be very much like institutional theory led by Arthur Danto and George Dickie in the second part of the previous century; it is the idea that the institutional level of the society decides, perhaps unconsciously, what constitutes as an artwork (or what constitutes as a "woman").

Being inspired by Icelandic philosopher Ásta, I could say that gender is *deeply social*, as the author puts it (2023, 311). Gender could be seen as a social construct only, but I disagree with that. Insisting on the parallelism between gender(ing) and painting, painting, for example, is not simply a social construct just because the act of painting and the painted painting bears a societal significance. Painting is something almost every person is doing or has done in their childhood. It is its certain attribute of being common that I think that helps to talk about gender.

If we can understand that painting is not simply a social construct, we can think of gender having something more to it. Keeping in mind the parallel between painting and gender, we could say, painting is not simply a signified social thing, but something that is, despite what the institutions of the art world decide it is. One's gender can be thought as a thing deep in every individual which they might or might not express in relation to the society's understanding of certain gender. A biologist Julia Serano separates in "Whipping Girl" gender identity from something she calls *subconscious sex*, which is "the gender we subconsciously feel ourselves to be." (2007, 78).

Abstraction

“Структура-ду-ду-ду-ду-дура”

SHORTPARIS — КоКоКо / Структуры не выходят на улицы

“Dear Charlotte,

Language begins in joy. Today I saw my publisher. He said to me, “All the phenomena in the world are just signs for other truths. Our job as humans is to find out what each thing represents.””

— KATHY ACKER

“My Death, My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini”

I was interested in the space between the abstraction and figuration.

But every abstraction is real, non-abstract.

I like Julie Mehretu’s works. Mehretu’s works are occupying the space of abstraction and non-abstraction. Glenn Ligon describes Julie Mehretu’s work as follows: “It’s hard to leave your body behind, especially when your body is always being thrown up in your face. But being heavy is a motherfucker. The question is: How to remove weight, to move toward lightness, as [David] Hammons has? How to do all this while still acknowledging the particular history of a body that has been used, as Stuart Hall suggests, “as if it were, and it often was, the only cultural capital we had?” These questions now occupy several young artists who walk the threshold between a dematerialized and a historicized body. Julie Mehretu (...) creates canvases full of incident: records of memories, places, historical events, time, symbols, at once exploded and collapsed on themselves, dynamic, spiraling in and out of control, nonsensical, and coherent. (...) Mehretu’s paintings are neural maps, flowcharts describing the processes by which what exterior becomes interior (and vice versa).” (Ligon, 2024, 33)

glitches, inabilities, mistakes

on repeat; lines, squares, patterns, photographs,

lines, squares, patterns, photographs,

lines, squares, patterns, photographs

Language can be seen as abstract in some sense. Though of course language can be representational, it can also give forward an image. Not going deep into semiotics, I say words are representations of sorts; “cat” refers to a cat, and “chair” refers to a chair. Clear language has power to transfer meanings. I have been thinking about the power of language, and who can use language that offers access to power. I

became interested in sounds and little words that people use in everyday language but which are not seen as part of “proper language” and are therefore unnecessary or just mistakes. Words such as “like”, sounds like “eeeh...” and “hmm...” became repeating elements in my poems. I see “hmmm...” to be abstract because it does not refer to anything that has a body. And so, this is an example of “hmmm...” having a political and social relationship to power. An American artist Sam Gilliam gave an interesting view on the abstract-political thought saying abstract art is political precisely because its lack of representation: it forces the viewer to face something they do not understand (Gilliam, 2020). The same can be said about “hmm” — it can represent a space of in-between, a moment of formulating a thought. From the viewpoint of proper written language, “hmmm” is a mistake, it does not serve a clear purpose.

I was interested in using the political or social power of abstraction, and colour in itself is quite abstract. I used chromium oxide green, this odd green “out of global capitalism” (Benderson, 2022, 64), to refer to something I could not fully give a body to.

i chose green. all i remember is green. lots of green. chrome oxide green. this metallic green between natural and artificial. this heavy green. heavy with moisture in the air, un-renovated wooden houses in the streets of pelgulinn in tallinn heavy with danger in the streets. heavy with the shadow of grey clouds in the sky. heavy — there were so many tubes of this dmn green.

Amy Sillman wrote in her essay “On color” that she was told by someone who lived in the Soviet Union that she got many chromium oxide green tubes of paint for free during the era. Sillman describes the colour being dull. (2022, 62)

- this green is the soviet union because it is so dull

yet:

there

is

something

good

about

it

- there is this yearning... to fit into the canon of western art. and then, there is this failure.

Failure

I failed

I failed

I failed

Failure (2)

... is (?) past not staying in the past

... is (?) colour

... is a start-up

... is (?) a two way street

“Every decision always includes a choice of one thing among others; a choice which is always also of the lesser because no one thing can meet all demands of what is called desire. Or, perhaps, it is the lesser because what we call desire is but the presence of a demand to choose, to decide, to pick one and only one, and go your merry way. (...) An input, any input is always less than a thing. It is never raw material; it is never just something. Input is data, it has a form and a purpose. It is always ready to be in relation, to make a connection.”

— DENISE FERRERA DA SILVA

“Abjection means cast off, existing in or resigned to a low state dumped by yourself, as you psychotically misrecognize yourself in ideals.”

— RHONDA LIEBERMAN

- I was not happy with the paintings technically. The painting surface had several layers of paint, and it felt emotionally heavy. Päivi Takala got it right describing another one of my paintings, technically similar to my Kuvan Kevät paintings, saying it seemed like some sort of gravestone or something that does not let change happen. I agree and I think it is fair to apply this idea to my paintings presented at the Kuvan Kevät 2022 exhibition. There is something non-changing and static in emotional sense

Technique of applying glue, gesso, and paint is really important to me. I like to start the process of painting from applying glue. Usually I put one coat of glue and then I already add a bit of pigment powder to the glue to add shades or colours to the canvas before painting on it. This adds a sense of space to the paintings in the end, it feels this way the painting can “breathe”, and is, opposite to being a gravestone, with the possibility of openness to changeability.

The process of painting KK22 paintings was slightly different. I applied ready-made white gesso with

some added chromium oxide green pigment powder making the gesso light mint-green. Then I projected a picture of the picture of my mother on it, and traced the lines. I painted the face several times. It didn't seem to do what I needed, and I decided to paint the entire surface as the picture of my mother itself looks like. So instead of putting the picture in some sort of perspective, I removed the environment around the picture, and just traced the lines of the photograph on the canvas with the help of a projector. But because the canvas already had paint on, I couldn't keep the slightly airier background almost at all, and also I repainted it several times, so it ended up with several layers of thick oil paint on it. And it was physically heavy.

In addition, the interaction between green and Naples' yellow-like colour did not bring the idea behind or reasoning of Chromium Oxide Green forward. The idea behind paintings was about how one learns *things in life* — not through words or stories but through surroundings and general non-verbal approaches towards varying things: in my thoughts, it was the green colour I had come across during my life; how we had this green sofa from the Soviet time and the fact I was so embarrassed about it that my mother did not replace it with a newer sofa.

I was especially interested in this poverty relation because I read from Svetlana Alexievich's "Secondhand Time" how several Russian people felt that after the fall of the Soviet Union (and the entrance of capitalism into Russian economy), being poor became shameful. (2016, pp..., ...)My mother was born in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1959. Estonia became independent from the USSR in 1991 when my mother was 32 years old, and I was born three years later in 1994. I have grown up in an independent capitalist and neoliberal country. This explained so much of our different feelings towards our financial situation: whereas I felt a great discomfort about that, as I constantly compared our situation to the wealth of my classmates' family, my mother did not really mind it; she told me once how she never dreamt of being rich, and I could not relate to it.

- Iranian mystic A.P Nasafi wrote: "Poverty is a great blessing, wealth a great pain. But the ignorant ignores this, escaping poverty and sticking to wealth. Our prophet (...) chose poverty, for he knew it and its effects as he knew wealth and its effects." (Rahnema, 1991, 8). Another example could be Dostoevsky: according to Estonian semiotic and literary critic Mihhail Lotman, Dostoevsky believed that Russia is a country chosen by the God, and that God doesn't show itself in wealth, but in poverty. (Lotman, 2017)

- According to Majid Rahnema, contemporary understanding of poverty resembles 'pauperism'. During the Victorian era, a moralistic stance was taken in relation to poverty: a pauper was a person who needed to rely on outside institutional assistance for their basic needs (Rahnema, 1991, 11). In 1949 Harry Truman said that poverty in "Second" and "Third" Worlds was a disability that the wealthy nations could remedy. (*Ibid.*, 24) During this time, World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund were established that started to measure the wealth of countries around the world in relation to the new universal minimum. (*Ibid.*) According to that, poverty is a material deprivation. An Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen suggests that poverty isn't innate lack of money but it is a social phenomena that depends on the environment and the ability to cover the basic necessities of life within the social conditions of that environment. According to Sen, poverty is deprivation of capabilities (Sen, 2000, 86).²

For my mother, the basic capabilities were met during the Soviet era: she had a roof over her head, she did not pay rent, she had food. In terms of food availability, Estonia during the late Soviet time was in a relatively good place; according to my mother, there were never empty shelves in the shop, and one could afford food. Fashion industry was essentially very different to the contemporary one. Fashion cycles were slower, and people often sew their own clothes from materials available to them; my mother remembers how her friend sew pants out of her parents' flower-patterned curtains.

Some people aim to fail; Fred Moten writes: "The essays in "Black and Blur" attempt a particular kind of failure, trying hard to not succeed in some final and complete determination either of themselves or their aim, blackness, which is, but so serially and variously, that is given nowhere as emphatically as in rituals of renomination, when the given is all but immediately taken away" (2017, vii). ~~I think failure consists of something vital.~~ Jack Halberstam writes in his book "The Queer Art of Failure" that "We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique." (2011, 88) I failed in the face of my desires. And my desires are a combination of learned elements of current power, but also unlearned internalised expectations to a person in capitalistic neoliberal Estonia. It's both. I am interested in analysing what could be liberating in failing my desires. Thus, it is relevant to list the desires I had when I was working on paintings for Kuvan Kevät:

² It could be questioned whether the latter argument is more truthful, as Amartya Sen's thought has been used to say that poverty in the wealthier countries is as acute as in the so-called Global South: although the wages are higher in the so-called West, the social conditions have higher expectations. For example, trends in fashion change more quickly than ever, and people have the expectation to follow the trends in order to meet the necessities of the western life. People online tend to claim that criticising buying fast fashion is classist because people with less financial capabilities also deserve to keep up with the fashion. But this way of thinking is inherently prioritising the comfort of the people in wealthier nations over the extreme poverty of the Global South (caused by the Global North).

- to say something about the identity of post Soviet Estonian
- to say something about my relationship with my mother that would have a larger bearing in society
- to say something learning things through silence, perhaps learning things visually
- to be successful at the Kuvan Kevät show

Failing the last one has taught me how to position myself when making a project, so that the aims I make would not be dependent on the success in the commercial sense, but in the idea I have, no matter how personal or un-relatable.

Identity

"Protect me from what I want"

— JENNY HOLZER

"Papa, Ich muss dir etwas sagen..."

Urbanisierung .

Privatisierung.

Modernisierung.

Föderalisierung.

Globalisierung.

Legalisierung.

Devalorisierung.

Standardisierung.

Popularisierung.

Of! Fuck off!"

— NICOLETA ESINENCU

One of the aims of my Master's thesis was to discover the relationship between painting and my so-called Eastern European identity through abstraction. I thought I found it in chromium oxide green. It is a green pigment, and also it is something I remember from the 90s. I remember wooden little boxes of oil paint, and several tubes of this odd green. Not quite natural, not quite artificial looking. Dull but safe. It felt familiar. Heavy as the air in a newly independent Estonia, full of crime, poverty, and the newly rich.

I remember how in the 2000s everybody seemed to be doing "*euromont*" ('European Renovation' in English) which meant replacing their old soviet furniture and wallpapers with cheap but new furniture and wallpapers. My mother didn't go along with it. Specifically, I remember this soviet sofa, green, similar to this chromium oxide green, just existing heavily and permanently in our home atelier. I was embarrassed every time when my friends came over. I wished we would have gotten rid of it. Replace it with something, anything else. This green became to represent shame of poverty. Became to represent post-Soviet Estonia to me. My memories of and thoughts on it. Partly fiction, partly facts.

In 2004, the Romanian artist Ciprian Mureşan took a photo titled "*Leap into the Void, after Three Seconds*". It is a photograph inspired by Yves Klein's photomontage "*Saut Dans le Vide*" ('Leap into the Void') where

the artist jumps out of the window on October 19 on Rue Gentil-Bernard in Fontenay-aux-Roses, France. Instead of falling, the artist stays in the air, face directed towards the sky. The street is almost empty besides a cyclist who heads towards their direction, not paying attention to the body in the air. Klein explains: "Today the painter of space must, in fact, go into space to paint, but he must go there without trickery or deception, and not in an airplane, nor by parachute or in a rocket: he must go there on his own strength, using an autonomous individual force; in a short, he must be capable of levitation." (Palumbo, 2020)

As it was with the Klein's piece, Ciprian Mureşan's photo was about the condition of a contemporary artist. But whereas Klein's photomontage is seemingly full of optimism, Mureşan wanted to express a sense of failure in the Post-Soviet condition (Nathan, 2011) Now, the photo has almost become a symbol for the Post-Soviet countries' failure (Tichindeleanu, 2013). Tanel Rander describes the life in Eastern-Europe as being full of fear and uncertainty that is normalised by the neoliberal ideology that teaches the skill of survival and finding strengthening challenges in drastic changes, seeing oneself as a start-up in an unstable market (Rander, 2017, 8)

This vision of the effect of neoliberalism on people's selves is not stranger to the so called Western world either. Byung-Chul Han writes in his book "Psychopolitics" that "today, we do not deem ourselves subjugated *subjects*, but rather *projects*: always refashioning and reinventing ourselves." (2017,). While Han is talking about the seeming sense of freedom that comes with seeing oneself as a project, Rander's example of the start-up in an unstable market is rather evoking fear of not succeeding; there is this sense of failure indeed.

But going back to the beginning, what do my Kuvan Kevät 22 paintings say about the identity of an Estonian born into specific post-Soviet condition? Were the paintings meant to be the metaphor for failure of the post-Soviet countries? Yes. As analysed in the chapter "Reading the Painting", there are elements of sense of failure there. An empty silhouette against a grid suggesting there could be more but you end up with nothing. But I would like to take the idea to another direction, and ask simply: what can painting say about an identity?

In the straight-forward way, paintings can include for example elements that are important or rather meaningful to certain groups. But taking painting as an idea(l), I would say that painting, unlike writing, can not (usually) give forward one answer; painting, and language often as well, is up for the viewer to decide what does it mean, and different people see different things. Thus, had I taken the quest to understand my identity through the act of painting more straightforwardly, I would have probably understood earlier what I

think now. Which is, that identity is in flux, and it is very complex having many layers of conditions effect it. Identity is not a fixed thing, in a way that paintings don't have a fixed meanings; they might have the original thought or meaning to the artist or certain identity-holder, and both a certain painting and certain identity can be conveyed visually as well as other ways, but it is a combination of meanings that are individual which are sometimes difficult to convey, and meanings that are cultural, social, that depend on the groups one belongs to etc, that are readable in certain contexts by certain other people.

Before thinking of the state of flux of identity, I thought a lot of Estonia and other post-Soviet countries as the Other. CAC Conrad's poem in their book "The Book of Frank" goes like this: "Pig says to Frank "This fence keeps you in your world!"," and Frank replies to pig: "This fence keeps you in your world!", pig replies "This fence keeps you in your world!" (CAC Conrad, 2009, 124). I agree with the pig. The fence, was created by the human to keep humans separated from, say, pigs. I could change CAC Conrad's poem a bit, and rephrase:

Frank says to pig "Eastern Europe keeps you in your world"

Pig says to frank: "Eastern Europe keeps you in your world"

Eastern Europe is what fence is for a pig and Frank. It keeps us in our world, and them in their world. In other words, Eastern European is the Other to the Europeans. Making the Other of the eastern Europe is not my original idea. Jacob Mikanowski suggests in his book "Goodbye Eastern Europe" that "the phrase Eastern Europe is an outsider's convenience, a catchall used to conceal a nest of stereotypes." (2023, xv) A similar view is echoed in "Orientalism" (1978) by Edward W. Said who wrote that neither the West nor the Orient has any ontological stability, and it is made up "partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other" (1978, xii).

"Goodbye Eastern Europe: An Intimate History of a Divided Land" identifies the Eastern Europe through giving a view of its history. The book begins with giving an overview of the pagans and christians in the AD 170 and ends with a chapter about the 20th century. It is dubious whether these Eastern European countries can be talked about in such unity, or whether Eastern Europe even has history beyond the Soviet era (Rander, 2023, 155). Tanel Rander argues that without the Soviet Union, we wouldn't be talking about Eastern Europe, (*ibid.*) and suggests that Eastern European people do not have an Eastern European identity because Eastern Europe is a product of geopolitics, and that the unified identity of an eastern European is forced upon the people in that area of the Europe (Rander, 2017, 8).

In terms of belonging to the European Union, the Moldovan playwright and director Nicoleta Esinencu writes in her monologue "Fuck You, Eu.ro.Pa!" that European future propagates nothing but urbanisation, privatisation, modernisation, federalisation, globalisation, legalisation, devalorisation, standardisation, popularisation" (2005, 16-17). Another voice says: "Europe, I've given you all and now I'm nothing (...) Europe, when will you end the human war? Go fuck yourself with your Christ complex" — thus writes Athena Farrokhzad in her 2,700 word poem "A Letter to Europe" (2018). Jennifer Hayashida says the poem is drawn from Allen Ginsberg's 1965 work "America" which criticises the "nation-state along axes of domestic disenfranchisement and military imperialism" (Hayashida, 2022). Through echoing Ginsberg, Farrokhzad interrogates the "ongoing European crisis around racist nationalism(s) and refugee displacement (*ibid.*).

According to Žižek, for the Western Europe Eastern Europe is fascinating to itself because of the idea of the *reinvention of democracy*. (1993, 226) The Eastern Europe functions as the Ego-Ideal, "the point from which West sees itself in a likable, idealized form, as worthy of love." (*Ibid.*). Of course, Žižek wrote that in the early times of the liberation from the Soviet Union in 1993, and in this day when also the Eastern Europe sees a certain fall of democracy, it is questionable whether the West needs the Eastern Europe as the Other any more.

Or maybe — it needs it more than ever. Harney Stefano and Fred Moten refer to Tsenay Serequeberhan that the pre-text to the "metaphysical belief that European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life" is the idea that modernity is to the globalisation of Europe. (2021, 27) According to Moten and Stefano, exception is granted by "oneself imagining it has been granted by an Other" (*Ibid.*, 28). Farrokhzad writes: "Everyone seems to understand the consequences of colonialism, except you [Europe], the cause." (Farrokhzad, 2018). Not seeming to understand, though, could be seen the disguise, a certain belief in its exceptionalism — and for that Europe still might need the Other. And perhaps, in order to help the disassembling of the idea(l) of European exceptionalism, the Other needs to not Other itself, and suggest a non-universal unstable identity.

My Mother

"art has no meaning beyond a religious one"

— ANDREI BELY

You show me understanding.

Patience and pleasure.

Time and attention.

Love without measure.

— ADRIANNE LENKER in "Free Treasure"

Painting is a selfish act. Painting is a selfless act. Painting is looking back. Entering a discussion you weren't invited to. Nobody asked me to make paintings I have made.

Painting helps me to see my ideas in another form. Helps me see my desires. Desire to be seen.

Painting is a visual but also tactile phenomena.

Painting is a way to see myself. My dreams and hopes. It teaches me to succeed and fail. It shows me the extent of internalised capitalism. The size of this little capitalist reflecting back to me when I wash my hands from oil paint in the toilet. The businessman in me wanting to add a bit of bright blue to the paintings to make them lighter, easier for the soul. A bit of yellow mixed with white to make paintings seem sunnier and happier.

The ghost painted on the right side of the figures head is simply a sign, a metaphor, a point where my painting meets text: the ghost is the Soviet Union. It is as simple as it sounds. But the reason for it being so simple and the reason for it to be presented naively in the painting is ...it is a comment towards the simplistic way thought sometimes develops.

Maybe the simplicity of the ghost refers to the flattened understanding of things.

Where the nuances get lost.

"Mother stands for comfort," sings Kate Bush. Mother is a common theme in art. Maybe it is a common symbol because it is so odd we used to be physically connected to our mothers... I picked my mother as a subject for the thesis paintings because I felt like my relationship with her is largely based on silent

elements. I have learned from her reactions, her sadness and happiness, I have learned from her paintings, her way of decorating home. I have learned from her way of spending money. I thought there is something similar in our relationship to elements of a painting: looking, observation, silence.

When I found the black-and-white picture of my mother, I thought that despite (or because) of its blurriness, I can see her more clearly. In the tilted head looking straight at the camera, assertive yet soft. Wearing probably my father's coat.

I wanted to replicate that so badly, paint it photo-realistically, but nothing was good enough. Nothing compared to the original photo.

I think I did one good piece which I was happy about but I didn't show it. It was a clay flat rectangle the size of the photograph, and I accidentally pushed my fingerprint on it. And that was that. The original photograph also has a green fingerprint on it. It was almost as if the photograph is so much about coincidence, a lucky coincidence of ending up with a beautiful photo — although your hands are shaking and you haven't used a professional camera before.

My father took the photo, his illness had started to show.

It all ended up looking effortless. I wanted to replicate that notion. That accidental-ness. But every painting I made was too obviously.... made? It is hard to replicate this notion of accident in painting, as it is a slower process than photographing. Luck is still included, and sometimes something turns out so perfectly on painting, and you don't know how you did it. But I didn't end up there. I ended up replicating myself.

My previous thoughts.

The safe thoughts I had.

I tried to express this gap between my mother and I.

The mis-understanding between us.

Our differences.

the silence between us

and in painting.

CONCLUSION

In my written part of the thesis I have mainly analysed the thoughts that led me to concentrate on the topic of Post-Soviet identity. In the thesis text, I talk about post-Soviet identity, or rather my aims of trying to figure out what it means, and also the sense of failure connected to both of these ideas. In addition, throughout the text, I talk about the colour green, more specifically chromium oxide green, that informed a lot of decisions in the paintings I exhibited in the graduate show in 2022.

Failure informs many elements in my thesis text. There is the sense of failure of an Eastern European: the failure to be as good as the West seemed to be; the failure of finding a fixed identity, and the failure of Europe, but also, failing myself. Failure could bring out the pain-points of myself, but also the current culture and politics in Europe, as discussed in the chapter "Identity" and "Failure".

The "inevitable" and "performative" part in the title of the thesis refers to the chapter discussing the possible similarities between painting and gender. It is the shortest chapter, yet it is one where I suggest a beginning of a theory of how I see painting, and how to talk about it through a certain sense of self. This is arrived at through simply making connections between phenomenas, as unrelated or related as they are. The thesis begins with a chapter "Reading the Paintings" which suggests a plain $A=B$ way of interpreting the Kuvan Kevät 2022 paintings in this thesis context. I express that perhaps it is helpful to read the paintings through interpreting the elements such as grid and birds through common connections, such as birds are often seen as a metaphor for freedom.

The subject matter of my Kuvan Kevät 2022 paintings, my mother, comes through ever so slightly, but I did not want to talk about her or mothers or mother as a subject in a direct way, which is why the last chapter, "My Mother", is more poetic, concerning our relationship that encompasses poverty, painting, and simply sense of self.

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IMAGES

1. *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language): ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with yellow, 220 x 165 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä*
2. *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language): ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with beige, 160 x 130, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä*
3. Photograph of Ene Luik-Mudist, 7,3 x 11 cm, 1980s, Family photobook. Photo by Peeter Mudist.
4. *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language): ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with yellow, 220 x 165 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä*
5. Detail: *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language): ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with yellow, 220 x 165 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä*
6. Detail: *I remember we had these boxes of paint tubes at home (with labels in foreign language): ОКСИД ХРОМА ЗЕЛЕНЫЙ with pink, 110 x 73 cm, oil on canvas, 2022. Photo by Julius Töyrylä*