

THE RED SOFA

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Link to view the video of the book:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BWU-t_RjWb2xezNrqO4iyWb0fVvB98Ok/view?usp=sharing

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Critical Rationale

The origin of “The Red Sofa” was an essay that I have written*, that reminisces of my childhood home and its surroundings. Within that piece of writing, I talk about how the physicality of that place is imbedded in my memory and how going back there feels like a journey through time. The essay also talks about one of my clearest memories, which was seeing my younger brother for the first time, wrapped up in a blanket, sleeping on a red sofa that we had in our living room. The vividness of that moment, its physicality and emotional weight are still with me and acts as a true example of how ambiguously memory is able to establish itself in the present.

*This essay is featured at the start of the book and is available to read at the end of this presentation.

Having began as a depiction of a specific memory, during the development of this project “The Red Sofa” started to encompass more than that – it became a space, where I was able to analyse memory as a phenomenon that is not only limited to its description, but rather present through the experience of it.

And so, I began trying to understand what it means to experience memory and in what ways do we encounter it. It seemed apparent to me, that memory is constructed of three dimensions: time, space, and intimacy. Researching Gaston Bachelard’s and Svetlana Boym’s works helped me develop this idea and apply it to my personal experiences of encountering memory. I asked myself – what is memory to me?

As someone who has moved to a different country, away from my homeland, I tend to associate memory with specific places. Longing for home often means longing for spaces, people, and moments, as it brings a sense of comfort and belonging. This longing for physical familiarity led me onto a journey of visiting specific places in Lithuania where I have spent a lot of time during my childhood and teenage years.

As a way to understand how places nurture our memories not just from a subjective standpoint, but also through a transgenerational perspective, I began to visit and document different sites that are not only significant to me, but also to my family members.



Some of the spaces that my grandparents and I have visited during these trips haven't changed a lot over the years, but others were gone, swallowed by time. A hill in my grandfather's hometown, a field where he used to work during the 1980s, a garden, in which my great-grandmother picked cherries - the same garden, where I spent every summer in my adolescent years - as these places remain present, the memories they bear fade away. Through documenting them, I try to fit myself into the past, a time that is foreign and unknown to me, in hopes to understand these places, memories and people better than I do now.

To document these spaces, I decided to use my first film camera, which is the same camera that my grandfather used to take all the archival images that are featured in "The Red Sofa"; this full circle moment felt like an appropriate way to approach this story, it became a way to pay homage to the past.



As a way of trying to understand my family history, I started to look through my grandparents' photographic archives. Most of them were taken in Lithuania during 1970s'-90s', others were older – images of my grandmother in the arms of her father and mother, a portrait of my great-grandfather when he was in the army, pictures of Soviet parties in my grandparents' flat and other images of people, whose names my grandparents can't remember anymore. All those photographs evoke longing in me, but I am not completely sure why – after all, I wasn't there to experience those moments.







That nostalgia lead me to combining my own images with my family archives as a way for me to understand these places and memories better and get a glimpse into my family's past. Through this biographical fictioning, I created a non-linear story of collective memories. Some of them are a continuation of each other, and some - imagined narratives, that I invented through the fusion of old and new archive. Encountering memory through this collective perspective reflects how the past and present are interconnected, how they both have each other within themselves.

The landscapes that are featured in “The Red Sofa” are a thread that binds the book together. When I am away from home, the nature of Lithuania is one of the things I miss the most; that absence echoes the bond that I feel between my memories and land. These changing landscapes act as a metaphor of time being experienced as a place and reflect how memory is of similar origin as nature – it builds itself from within, starting with individual and reaching collective being.

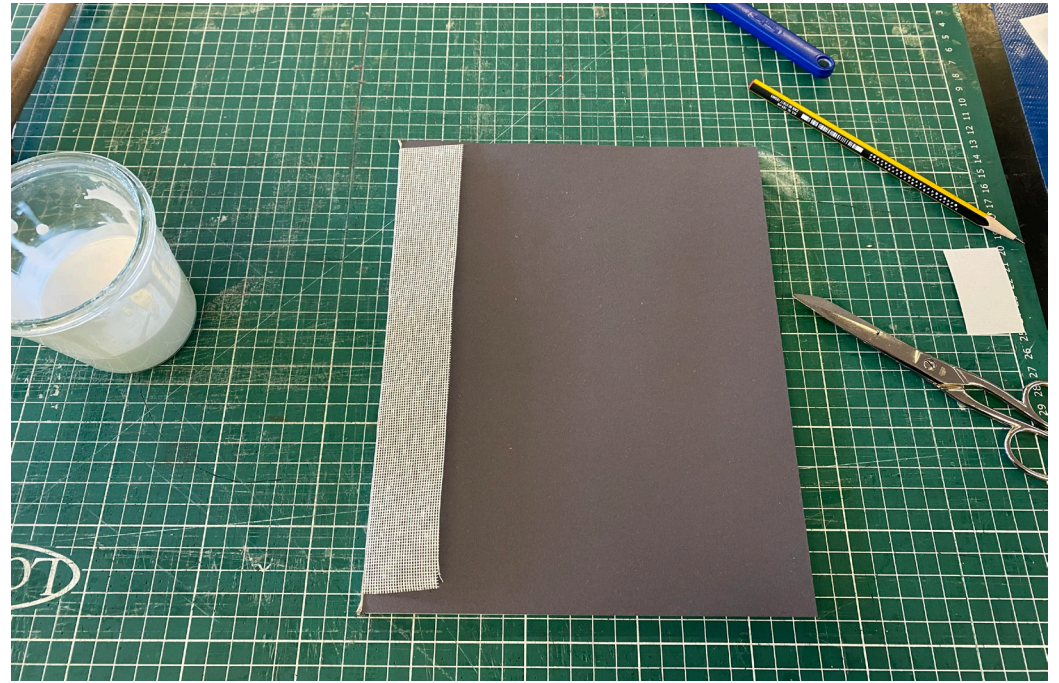


Through these images of land and glimpses of moments that have passed, the viewer is invited to travel through different times and spaces and enter a journey of memory. A journey of different realities and moments in time, of different people, of loss and change that lays between them and bounds them together.

“The Red Sofa” exists as a personal testimony of memory and the way that we encounter it - family, places, childhood homes, nostalgia and longing for home. An anchor, that encourages to remember and honour the past and nurture the present.



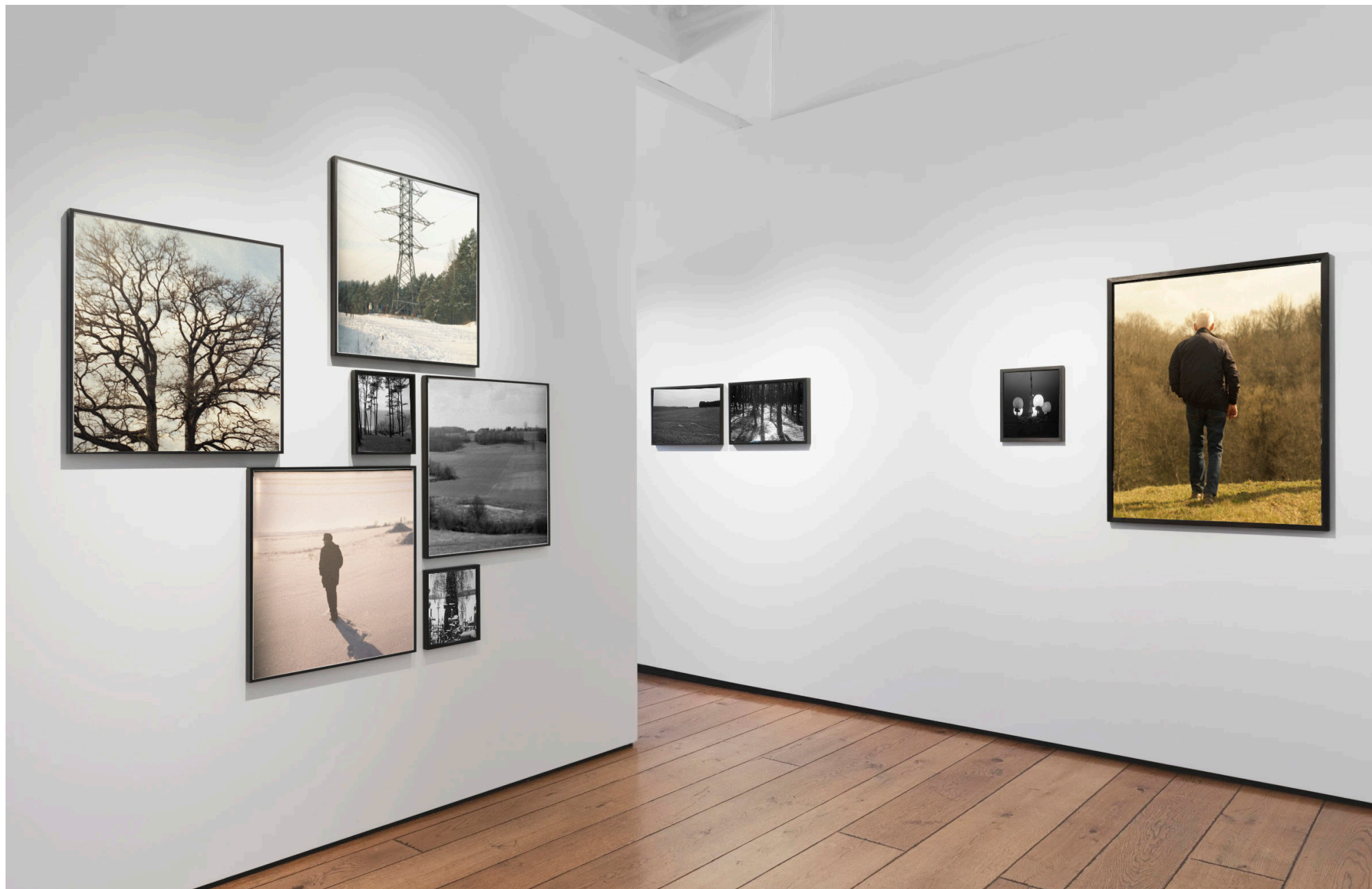
I decided to make the book myself, because that felt like the right way to complete this artefact of memory. By sewing the book with my own hands, I connected pieces of history together and gave them a space to coexist together.



Display Mock-ups

The ideal space I want this project to exist in the world would be a gallery such as is the Photographer's Gallery in London. Given the fact that I want this project to be realised in a book form as well as a wall installation, the Photographer's gallery would be a very appropriate space for the viewer to experience "The Red Sofa". I would have the hand prints framed in wooden frames and hung up in the exhibition space of the gallery and the book would be displayed and sold in the bookshop.

I would also like my book to be available at the library/reading room collection in Nida Art Colony, Lithuania. That way "The Red Sofa" would physically be positioned within the context it was created in and hopefully, would also be a source of inspiration for the library users, as well as contribute to the current archive of modern Lithuanian photography.





*The essay

The house I lived the longest in was a nine-story brutalist building built in the mid 1980s'. Its skeleton was made of cold, grey cement and the exterior walls were covered in brownish gravel and small stones. There were three separate entrances, each of them had the same number of flats on every floor. The foundation of the building was upheld by a huge basement that felt like a maze when I used to go there as a child; it was constantly so dark in there, the yellow lights would start to dimly exhaust what felt like their last breath of life only when someone would walk past them. A pesky smell of wet mold would linger there at all times and the green doors that hid each cellar would follow your steps with a wrathful gaze. You could hear your own breath tingling at the end of your nose and the blood pulsating in your ears, - it was so quiet there that it almost felt like all sound was sucked into a hollow pit of silence and the only thing that pierced it were the heavy squeaking metal doors. We used to keep potatoes there during the winter and miscellaneous objects that didn't inhabit our everyday lives.

Behind the building there was a kindergarden, you could hear the echoes of the children's screams and laughter if you stood in our balcony that faced north. Our kitchen's window faced the south. Same as my bedroom. The view was not one that evoked much excitement, as three more buildings that looked exactly like ours stared directly into the eyes of the cement auditorium. The one in front was where my grandparents lived and still do. They moved into that flat in 1985 on September 13, when our building was still under construction.

If you headed southwest, you would find my primary school, and east from there was a big forest that you had to reach through a grey bridge with orange detailing. The forest had many streams, where my friends and I would go during the summer; in spring we picked violets from the slopes and hills of the land, autumn's soil would bear peeking mushrooms through the fallen leaves and winter's stagnant cold would freeze the creeks, making the ice look like veins of the earth. There was a small hill at the edge of the forest too, where we used to go snow skating when the ground was white.

Our flat was on the second floor. After entering through a heavy steel brown door, you would have to go up three flights of grey stairs that were surrounded by brownish red railing. Once you were in the flat, you would find yourself in a narrow dark corridor that had an old wardrobe where we kept our winter coats. To the left was the kitchen. I always was slightly uncomfortable in there and I am still uncertain of the reason - it felt as if all the energy of the house was unveiled in the kitchen through an overbearing sense of heavy presence, that surpassed the physicality of the place and felt more like a separate entity.

My bedroom was at the end of a long corridor. When my family and I moved into the flat, the carpet in my room was bright blue and the wallpaper orange - I hated those colours, after a few years we painted the walls white, and changed the carpet too. In the centre of the flat was the living room. It was connected to a balcony and had a red sofa and an armchair. Later on, we replaced it with a huge beige corner sofa with brown leather details. Although I moved out of the flat while the latter was in it, the red sofa holds more memories, perhaps because most of them happened when I was a child.

I was five when my brother was born. It was July and I was visiting my grandparents as I did most summers up until high school. We drove back home from the seaside to meet him for the first time. When I entered the living room, I remember being confused about where he is. The red sofa had a small blanket with pastel pink, blue and green drawings, the fabric that it was made of looked comforting and was soft to touch. I was about to sit next to the blanket, but my parents quickly stopped me and started laughing - when I took a closer look at the cluster of pastel colours, I realised that my brother was laying there sleeping,

warmly wrapped up in the blanket, oblivious to any worry.

Now the flat is not ours anymore, it belongs to a different family. My primary school is still where it was, it just looks different than it did. The forest, the creeks, the winter hill are there, but it feels like they belong to someone else now, someone else's memory.

That day in July when I saw my brother for the first time is one of the clearest memories I hold. A short intangible echo of a moment bound by a space, by a red sofa and a small room. Although that moment has gone, it still remains alive and with me, I still see it through the dimensions that memory re-appears to me – spaces, time and intimacy.

And as other moments pass, their shadows still remain in glimpses of time. They bloom and grow through reminiscences of red sofas, cold cellars and windows of past homes. They softly echo and whisper in snowy streets and apple tree gardens, in the fields of someone's hometown and in old photographs, that were once forgotten and found again.