



audiovisual installation

UNSEEN UNHEARD

q u e e r m a p o f v i l n i u s

ENGLISH TRANSCRIPTION



ROKANTIŠKĒS CEMETERY

Rokantiškės.

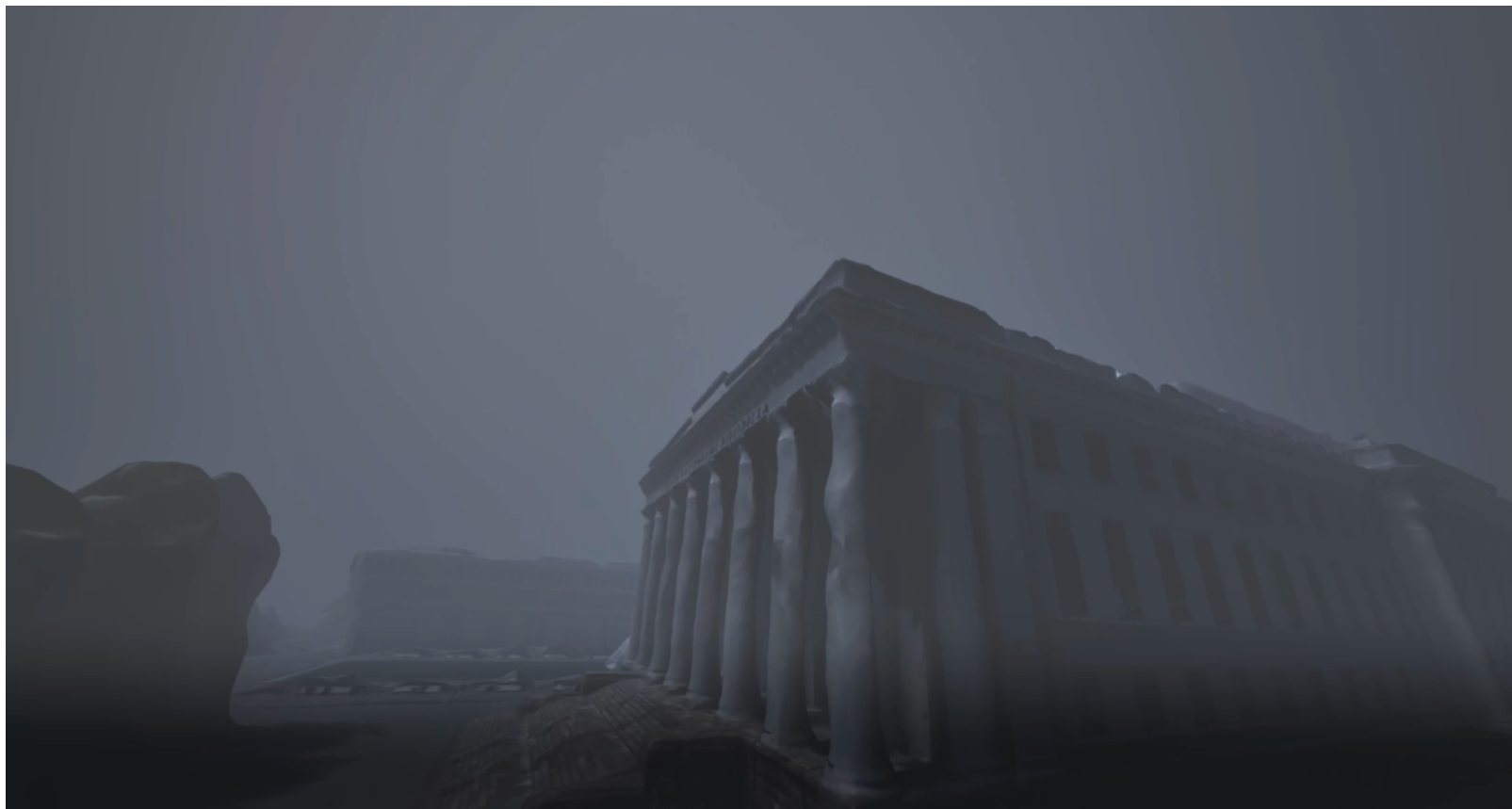
He didn't come out of the closet either. I was always separated from his family. During holidays, he would be with his family members. As long as his parents were alive, he loved his parents deeply. His father died, his mother died...

That complete limitation from the social environment was apparently also not for the better. You cannot publicly express your feelings. That constant self-control, maybe it leads to all kinds of depressions, neuroses, you know.

- But eight... how many did you say?
- We stayed together for about seven years.
- And in the end it broke up because of that, you say, well, because of that closet.
- I think it's the closet effect.

That interaction of ours is strange. For example, he looks after my (relatives') graves. Try to find such cases among divorced couples, where a person, without being asked, would go and take care of your (relatives') graves.

Everything passed so quickly.



MARTYNAS MAŽVYDAS NATIONAL LIBRARY

"Stalinist baroque" buildings, which are around here, are actually different from the tsarist ones. Tsarist for me is much more gay. There's more queerness, more joy in those buildings...

And here are these endless columns that state: they are a sign of strength. And a sign of straightness, so anti-queer right away. The windows are always smaller than in tsarist buildings in general.

And the very idea that we have pomposity, but the content inside is suppressed. That actually reflects how I... ..used to feel very often before. Constantly making myself smaller like those rooms of "soviet baroque", where they're tiny, tiny, but the facade is giant.



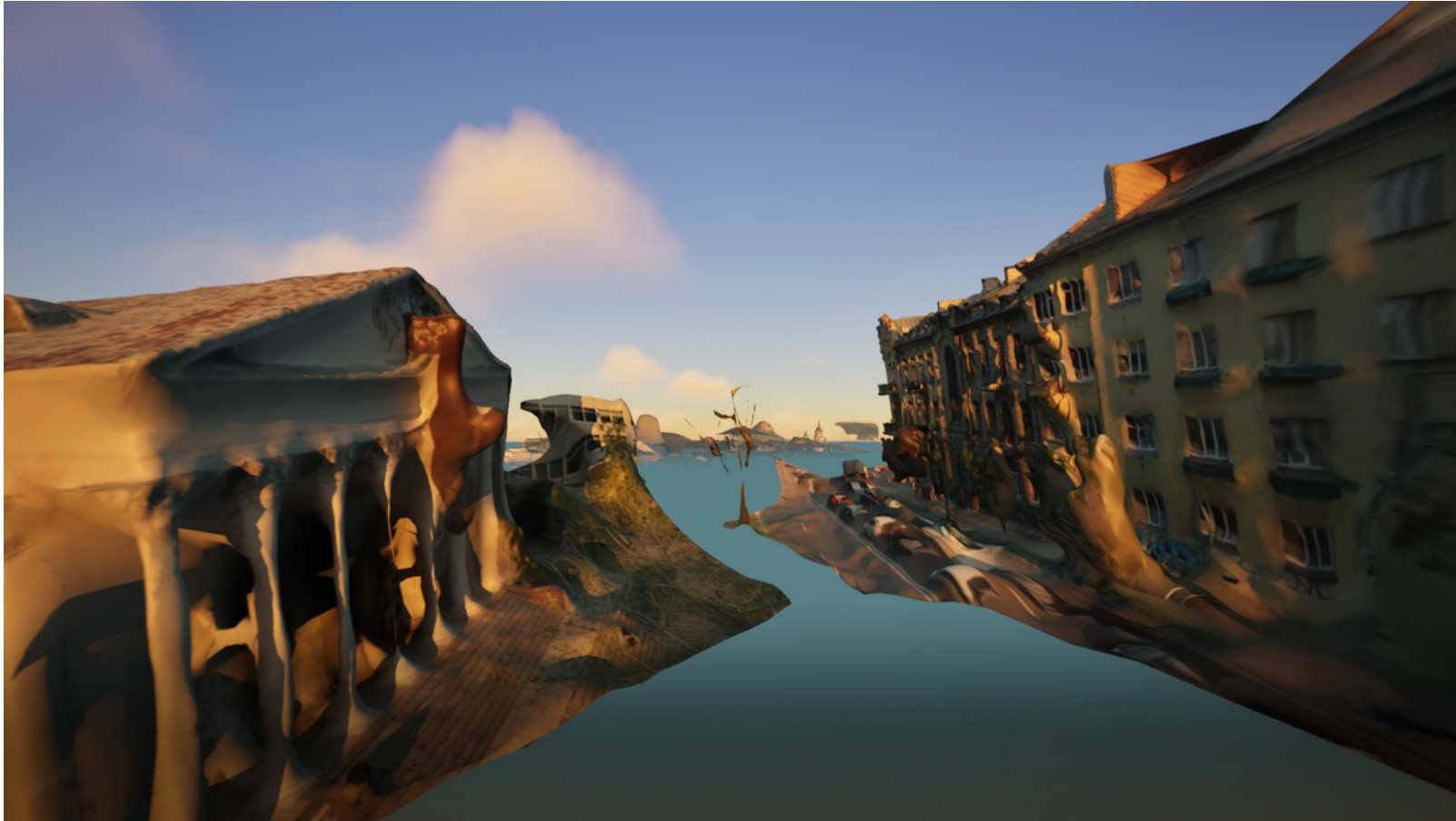
KABLYS (THE HOOK)



AIDS CENTER IN FRONT OF THE HOOK

I saw all those columns for so many years. From below, from an artistic angle... As is proper for gays, I worked in a basement. I reigned there quite well. Kauno street 6, opposite “The Hook”.

I would go out to smoke, look at what kind of people were walking. They were curious what this basement was, because there was no office, no nothing. I sort of felt like in some kind of underground. And boys would come, because I had gathered some volunteers. So boys, boys, boys...



SAFE FLAT IN FRONT OF THE HOOK

Our place was opposite "The Hook". Even though it was quite high up, we used to call it a basement, because we could hide in it and be ourselves.

It was definitely not a basement; it was one of the top floors. That apartment, being so high up, was not hiding. It makes you feel dignified; you'd go there, and you'd feel so special, aristocratic. It was just "wow."

Together with my friend, a gay young man, we came to Vilnius to see his friends. It was a private party and it left a huge impression on me. It was so bohemian, so artistic, in an old apartment, with someone playing piano. It was filled with smoke, someone's taking photos, someone's playing, drinking wine, laughing, philosophizing. It was a complete queer bohemia. For me, it was "wow." I'd never seen anything like it.

Wooden floor and high heels. The neighbor would call the police and ask: "what kind of tanks are driving around at your place?"

Drag shows would take place. On the fourth floor we had a space of 130 square meters. And we were really safe there. Because if you went out into the street, you might have gotten hit in the head just because you look somewhat wrong.

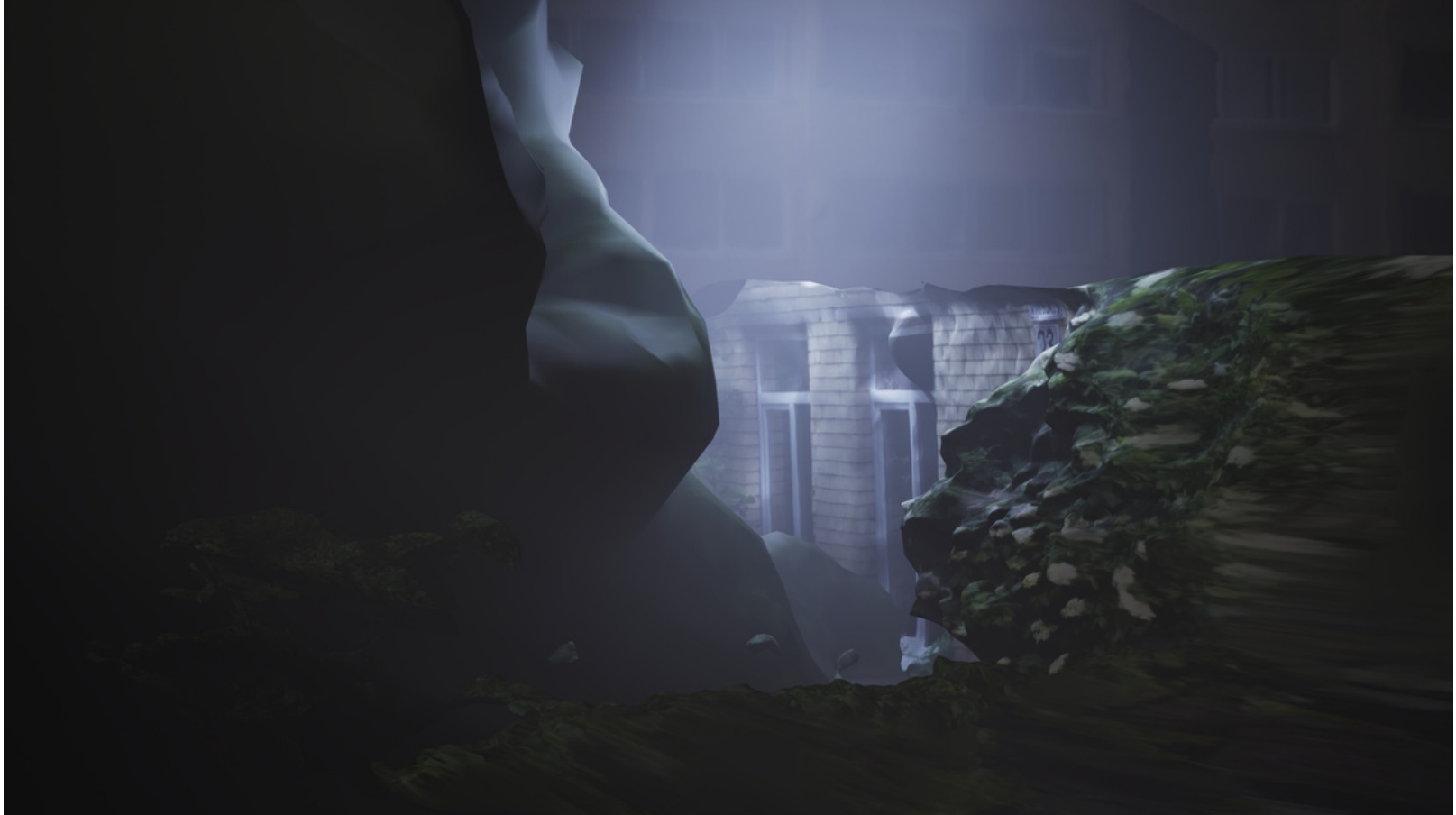


SAFE FLAT IN FRONT OF THE HOOK

I think the architectural layout is extremely important. Because most of those basements hide identities, not allowing the daylight... I think that especially affects self-esteem. You're underground. You're already invisible, but then you push yourself even further down. While it might seem safer to some, it actually has a brutal effect. Psychologically, it's like a life of subconsciousness. We hide it in daily life, but sometimes we go to the basement to let it out. It provided safety, but also hindered progress in coming out and visibility, because everything was suppressed.

We were the quiet ones. We lived quietly. It happened on one of my birthdays; friends decided to arrive there to congratulate me in a taxi wearing all kinds of dresses...

Well, to run wild, but those are one-time cases. One-time.



SODAS2123

Drag King performances in Sodas were wow, really. It really touches; there's buffoonery in it and there's protest.

And this is my gallery, and my photo studio, and my therapy, and a queer place where I can always meet friends and feel safe.

Everyone left. We went into the hall to collect our things.

We played some music through the phone a bit.

And after a few minutes, we started hearing something breaking. I thought that the lamp was falling. But after the third bang, I started screaming, because I thought it was robbers. Adrenaline rose. We didn't even want to go outside. Afterwards, we peeked out, but yeah, I was scared, that they're waiting behind the corner to attack us.



TRAIN STATION

The places that are important to me are those where I haven't even been. But I was told about them. In those places, mostly gay men gathered, looking for acquaintances... but during the times when everything happened behind the curtain. So one is the train station.

There were a million kiosks with beer at that time. You'd sip that beer there, you'd go to the toilet. If you were straight in front of the station "palace", on the left were the toilets. With like five stalls. There were partitions, and for some reason there were holes in them for the joy of men. So these are, you know, erotic games.

I was in the 12th grade, and there was an excursion. And it was always convenient to park the bus near McDonald's. While we were waiting for the bus, with a classmate, we went to the toilet. A woman who was working here asked us what we were going to do there. What else can you do there?

There was a free toilet there. I would tell the police, because the police also used to come there and check. They probably knew. Of course they knew. So I would say that I was from the AIDS center, and I'm distributing protection there.



MY BAR

Where the MO Museum is, on the corner with Basanavičius Street, there is a bar that has a basement. Yeah, there was "My Bar". There, too, was a dance pole on the lower floor. Also an unsuccessful place, also looks similar: black, darky-shady, some mirrors...

When I thought about those important places in Vilnius, I thought this was one of the essential ones, because for me it was a breakthrough in realizing that the community exists and is happy! I remember, I even dressed up: white shirt, a vest... Totally stud!

I was wearing this white wedding dress. I wore this dress a lot and went to Pride wearing it... I put it on for a party in My Bar...

I saw one person there in a wedding dress; I won't say who, but it made a very, very strong impression on me, and yeah, actually that person made a big impact on my life afterwards. That being in a wedding dress, I think, was also essential, because it was such a Björk moment, I think. Well, overall some people somehow dressed up. So that's very cool.



VOKIEČIŲ STREET

I put on a wedding dress there and walked home to Vokiečių Street. I remember, while walking home, some women, those stuck-up Vilnius women, congratulated me on the way, saying: "Where's your husband?" I say: "he's dead."

Now that you're interviewing, it's the Holly Week. I was listening to a Johannes Passion recording by Ensemble Pygmalion, and there's a big part about the denial of Peter. And to tell you the truth, until now, remembering that event on Vokiečių street, I feel a bit regretful that I denied it.

I was walking down Vokiečių street with one of my exes. It was our first date! And we were walking; it was dark, and two guys approached us. They didn't look like thugs, but... But they approached us and said: "Excuse me, are you gays?" And it was our first date; I mean, having met for I don't know, fifteen minutes. And the reaction of both of us was to deny it. We just froze. We walked further, but inside we were frozen.



GEDIMINAS AVENUE
(main street of Vilnius Pride)

Since I'm a late bloomer, of course it was terrifyingly scary. The first one was maybe in 2017 or so... We were walking and talking: "What if they throw something at us? What will we do?"

No one has spat on me or done anything to me, but the inner conviction comes from how the word “faggot” was pronounced. Or how people reacted in whispers to that same 2008 Pride, there on the other side of the river.



UPĖS STREET
(location of the first Vilnius Pride in 2010)

I remember when there was a report on the news and how my parents were leaning toward each other, whispering. I don't know about what, but it was obvious it was about something not meant to be spoken aloud.

The very first one was the scariest, because of that feeling of insecurity... ..and the wait to be put on the buses. An old man waving a cross was standing by the road... A creepy sight. It seemed comical in a way... But it just shouldn't be like that. Maybe not comical, but absurd. Yet it was very frightening. Especially when there was a high concentration of those people filled with hate. I remember that creepy sight: we were watching a video from that Pride... and I saw my skinhead neighbor tearing the fence from the other side. It was like, 'oh,' this is all so close, so nearby. Being brought here by bus doesn't mean you're safe in your daily life. The feeling of the kind of people you live among was very unpleasant.

The event was full of tension and excitement. At the same time, I felt we were doing something important and necessary. There was a sense of threat, but... but knowing that forces of such size are concentrated, you feel much safer.



CATHEDRAL, ST. CASIMIR'S CHAPEL

I remember that I used to go to the Cathedral when I was still with a girl, to pray that God would distance that attraction to men from me. The Cathedral was... St. Casimir's Chapel! Because Casimir is... This is a very important thing because St. Casimir... He refused to have sex with women, in order to heal, right? And for a very long time he was shown to the youth, especially in the 18th century, as a symbol of chastity, determination, and strength. Well, what more could you need? So many tears I had left there.

— Confession, presumably?

— Oh yes! It used to be such an emotional orgasm when... when you are absolved... You go up! So light, and then you fall so far down.



CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS

For the first time in two years, I stepped into a Catholic church. I didn't feel well during that rehearsal because I was already free by then. And that place didn't suit me. It reminded me of the whole dogma of guilt, not just guilt, but of sin, which I strongly believed in. I entered it as a totally unknown space. Even though I've been there so many times: I prayed there, attended the mass there... I entered it and realized - this is not my territory. And I don't even want to be here.

That's why I'm different... Maybe not "different", but "not screaming", maybe... I don't claim that everything belongs to me. Some spaces are not mine as a gay person. And I don't want them. I give them back.



VINGIS PARK

It wasn't very safe there... There are a lot of inadequate people, drunks, and some semi-criminal ones, trying to racketeer money, maybe. Where the stage is, a couple of toilets were there... And there was a forest area; gays used to roam there.

People from 20 y.o. maybe up to 70 y.o. used to come. Well, such places stir the imagination, maybe, inflame the brain, not that something very special is happening there.

Unless you meet the same person a third, fifth, tenth time. Well, maybe you talk... He tells you a detail or two; he tells you something, a detail or two... because there are a lot of bisexual people.



SAFE FLAT IN KAROLINIŠKĚS

My long-term partner never frequented such places. He was a scientist... And still is a scientist. But I thought now that maybe the main communication took place through certain groups of friends in apartments.

I spent quite a lot of time in Karoliniškės can't remember which floor, maybe the 7th; you could see the TV tower from there. During those meetups, there was also a certain, well, mission of mutual aid or psychotherapy. You blather something there, share memories, maybe chat, maybe flirt...

Over 20 people would manage to fit there on occasion! Yes!



UŽUPIS HIGH SCHOOL

In Užupis High School, I would say, the basketball hall of Užupis High School.

In the evenings, lesbian women just gather and play basketball. At Užupis High School, there was our place—an oasis to gather and play. The guards would look at us strangely, wondering what these "girls" were doing. But we were like, "whatever."

Sometimes they expressed it through passive aggression: they wouldn't give us the key, or they'd grumble, or not let us in. For example, if you came 10 minutes early for practice, they wouldn't let you in.

But generally, we felt safe and good because there were many people. For example, someone comes to study in Vilnius from a small town or village and doesn't have that space here. So this is a great opportunity to meet people, expand your circle of friends, and have that safe space.

I started my path into the community by coming from Kaunas to play basketball, even though I didn't even know that I was a queer woman. Simply, no one asked you who you are; we were just playing basketball. Gender Wrongs, an amateur basketball team, was born there, and I went there; it was great fun. Then we'd go to drink beer, so we'd go down by Užupis Angel, to one of those bars for a pint of Guinness...



GENDER WRONGS
(queer roaming parties)

What we thought up was to queer-ify Vilnius with Gender Wrongs. That was the series of parties that travels from bar to bar.

In some places, the owners' eyes were opened because we didn't always say exactly what would be here. You hang out the flags, and the owners suddenly realize that it's only girls here, and here some Sodom and Gomorrah has started.

So we'd send someone to talk with the owners. They sit, drink wine, socialize, like this and that... Sometimes the eyes were opened for some of those owners, and you understand that they say, "Gosh, how cool, how good! I understand!" And you realise that the next day, when that magic pumpkin will explode, like in "Cinderella," they won't even have a way to tell their circle because the person has come from a completely different environment.

Many of those parties, like "Gender Wrongs" or "We Are Propaganda", helped raise a generation of queer DJs, especially women who are now incredible and play at professional clubs and stages, both internationally and in Lithuania. Back then, it was just the beginning for them.



SOHO

I've been collaborating with Soho club for almost a decade and I love it very much and really feel loved in that club. But I think that I am partly a spice there, a feminine one, because you need that feminine spice so that the understanding of what a woman, a lesbian, is is slightly different. While we protest on March 8th that we don't want tulips, we want rights, in Soho club on March 8th you'll get a flower when you arrive.

Well, very shitty music. On New Year's Eve there were six songs that I liked very much. Very bad... But I danced there; I discovered that I can dance, and I can pick up a guy while dancing. Not heavy music, recognizable music, how you'll mix it, that's the difference. I for example, completely can't stand top hits, and it's completely uninteresting to me.

Soho is an environment where you can find very many interesting people. For example during New Year's I met my former classmate there and another person from the Jesuit high school where I studied. He turns out to be gay too. I didn't know. There were wonderful conversations, we talked about everything! We gave arguments to each other about it around two o'clock in the morning on New Year's Eve.



ŠVITRIGAILOS STREET

People came out of the club and were standing in the middle of the street, looking at the sky. The only place where you can see more of the sky is precisely in the middle of the street. And of course, when striking twelve, there are practically no cars, because everyone stops. Some people had brought their own fireworks, letting them off nearby.

The snow was melting, so it was very wet. I knelt, and my husband just turned to me and said: "What are you doing here?"

And I proposed. He realised where this was going and said: "Stand up, stand up quick!". He saw that it was all wet around, so this was that moment, and that's why that place is so special.

But special because we weren't hiding anywhere; we were in a completely open place. We were surrounded by friends, but also strangers. Then you feel this great freedom, not only in terms of space, but in being surrounded by very diverse people. That's why it was unique.

Visibility is the key to all solutions, and because of that, I want to be visible, because I want to encourage others to be brave and to be visible. And the more people are seen and heard, the stronger we will be. Because the goal essentially is that you don't have to prove anything anymore. Everything is so natural and so clear that nobody raises any questions.

Maybe I am an open secret to my family. Everyone knows, but nobody talks about it. Because I have released quite a few interviews on these queer music topics, so it was public, and I can understand from conversations - there's no question, "When are you going to get married?" So what apparently is more understood than I sometimes maybe think. You see that you smoke... Well, you don't smoke in front of mom, but you smoke. So it's similar... Because, well, we are adults and independent people. So out of respect, I don't blow smoke in the face, and that's all.

- I haven't come out of the closet to this day. And I doubt if I ever will.
- But why?
- Fear probably, fear of losing that shitty job. Well, yes, what are your possible choices after that? It's easy for independent artists or those having a good financial foundation. Finances untie certain possibilities, if they don't imprison further. And here I am, cheap labor. Well, it's school, you see. In school, one must be an asexual person altogether. I don't interact with the children.

- Good day.
- Good day. There's nothing, there's nothing.
- You found something useful. How to write it down? Spray paint. Spray paint, good. Spray paint.

- And when you retire, you won't come out?
- What's the point? I risk less. I drink less champagne...

This project was created thanks to 9 queer volunteers who shared their stories.

Thank you for the chance to see and hear queer Vilnius.

Concept and directing

Kristijonas Dirsė

Sound spatialisation and music

Alexandre Menexiadis

Advisors

Viktorija Kolbešnikova, Augustas Čičelis, Artūras Tereškinas,
Rimantas Ribačiauskas, Karolina Klimavičiūtė, Andrius Šiurys.

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