

When you get to barren New York,
you will share our opinion:
We must afforest it!
And it could go like this:
A fast-growing birch on Times Square,
oaks on the fanciest avenues,
mountain ash, mountain ash in
Greenwich Village,
weeping willows in Harlem,
pine and spruce on the waterfront,
juniper around the slaughter houses,
and every place where Latvians gather,
ash, linden and maple alleys,
suburbs and side-streets –
let's sow it all over with a mixed forest.*

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES:
Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

19.11.2019—15.02.2020
James Gallery, The Graduate Center, CUNY

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

EXHIBITION

Artists:

Daina Dagnija, Yonia Fain, Yevgeniy Fiks,
Hell's Kitchen collective, Rolands Kaņeps, Boris
Lurie, Judy Blum Reddy, Karol Radziszewski,
Vladimir Svetlov & Aleksandr Zapoļ (Orbita
Group), Viktor Timofeev, Sigurds Vīdzirkste,
Artūrs Virtmanis

Curators:

Katherine Carl, Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce,
Andra Silapētere

Exhibitions Coordinator:

Whitney Evanson

Graphic design:

Kārlis Krecers

Thanks to Chris Lowery, LanningSmith,
Christian Capelli, Ryan Brennan, LFC painting

Organized by:

The James
Gallery

CUNY

THE
GRADUATE
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CITY UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK



LATVIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

CATALOGUE

Editor:

Andra Silapētere

Design:

Kārlis Krecers

Texts:

Katherine Carl, Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce, Andra
Silapētere, Yevgeniy Fiks, Karol Radziszewski,
Ksenia Nouril, Viktor Timofeev, Vladimir Svetlov
& Aleksandr Zapoļ, Artūrs Virtmanis

Language editing and proofreading:

Will Pollard

Special thanks to Voldemārs Avens, Daina
Dagnija, Izabela Gola, Ilze Jurkāne, Jānis Krēsliņš,
Ilze Pētersone, Laila Saliņa, Laris Saliņš

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Portable Landscapes: Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

Solvita Krese
Inga Lāce
Andra Silapētere

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

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This 1959 poem by Gunars Saliņš, a central figure in the exiled Latvian artists' and writers' collective Hell's Kitchen, expresses his desire to bring the Latvian forest to his new home, the urban island of Manhattan, and reveals a longing for his lost homeland. Similar atmospheres dominated the literary and visual artworks made by his comrades, through which they raised questions of belonging and tried to deal with the traumatic experiences of Second World War.

The Hell's Kitchen collective was active in New York from the 1950s through to the 1970s and combined visual art and text-based practices, bringing together – on an on-again, off-again basis – more than fifteen artists, writers, and literary scholars exiled from Latvia.

They associated themselves with the neighbourhood of Hell's Kitchen on Manhattan's West Side, where they would most often meet to organise poetry readings and performance events. For its "Heavenly Pagans," as the group's members called themselves, the collective served as a laboratory, stimulating their individual work, and as a platform for collaborations, but it also provided a context through which they were able to strengthen their positions in the local (New York) art scene and thus find ways to put their ideas forward in this new environment. Pushed to search for their own historical, social, and cultural contexts within a new country, they found the Latvian language and their sense of identity to be important tools in developing their collective history and establishing their own autonomous territory, one in which they could document and interpret their experiences.

Through telling the story of Hell's Kitchen, this exhibition reveals a parallel chapter in the history of Latvian art and culture – one produced as a result of the 1944 Soviet occupation, which drove many artists into exile. This exile situation has been little discussed, but it demands a broader contextualization within the histories of migration and of diasporic communities. Thus, taking the Hell's Kitchen collective as a starting point, this exhibition looks at and highlights a number of different personalities and artistic phenomena connected to migration – whether freely chosen or forced. It concerns itself with movements, individual artists and groups of artists that have played supporting roles in, but have also worked to diversify and challenge, overarching art historical narratives. In addition to pursuing these stories with the help of archival material, historical works of art and artefacts, the exhibition also gathers works by contemporary artists that address the theme of migration and its attendant questions.

One reason to look back at the history of exile and migration is to try to understand and analyse our current situation. In our current political discourse, and perhaps within society as a whole, there is a tendency to view the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe and the recent waves of migration to the United States as exceptional and undesirable, and to associate them with negative phenomena such as unemployment, problems with "integration", and even terrorism. But if we take a longer view of history, it is clear that the world has seen countless migrations as a result of war and political and economic change. Exile, diaspora and migration are characteristic elements of global culture, and their manifestations have not only shaped the world map but also contributed to the development of various trends in art and culture, allowing for the blending and overlapping of cultures and the birth of new ideas and movements.

The lives and works of the exhibition's protagonists invite us to contemplate the boundaries of countries and cultures. We are led to ask: Is it possible to look at history as something that exists beyond the borders of nation states and is shared between several places at the same time? An approach that acknowledges this might allow us to reflect differently upon current migrations and to realise that, if we were to take into account the viewpoints of migrant groups and of the countries from which they are fleeing, the contemporary situation would be interpreted differently.

In the life of a migrant, a forced departure from one's native land is a milestone that demands the acquisition of new strategies. These may include trying to fall in with a new group as quickly as possible in order to foster social and economic well-being, or, alternatively, trying to retain a sense of one's distinct national character by attempting to avoid blending in with the dominant culture. The questions of identity and place that spurred the poets and artists of Hell's Kitchen have been taken up by Aleksandrs Zapols and Vladimirs Svetlovs (Orbita Group). They have taken the space of New York as it was poetically transfigured by the Hell's Kitcheners – who, for example, called their favourite pub in New York *Tor akalns* (after a district in Riga) – and organized a walk through Riga, symbolically overlaying the two maps. The feeling of broken ties and of a search for new roots is expressed by Artūrs Virtmanis with his installation, which centres on a destroyed bridge. With reference to the destruction of Riga's Railroad Bridge in the Second World

War, he constructs an associative landscape within which the act of creation, represented in this case by the poetry of Gunars Saliņš, serves as a binder between what was lost in the past and our present reality. Meanwhile, Judy Blum Reddy looks back at her parents' experience of fleeing to New York and becoming citizens of the United States. She has revisited their archives, constructing a landscape that not only deals with lost memories but also questions identity within the US context by revealing the traumas that were concealed in her parents' attempts to act like "normal" Americans.

A counterpoint to poetic reflections on memory and the nature of broken ties is contributed by the artist Boris Lurie, a Holocaust survivor who grew up in Riga, where he also lost his sister, mother, grandmother and lover. They were all killed in the Riga Ghetto during Second World War. After years spent in concentration camps in Germany, Lurie and his father moved to New York where he started to fix his experiences in a series of drawings. For Lurie, it was important not to forget what had happened. He wanted to remind others about these events – particularly when he began to witness wider society forgetting the traumas of the war amid the euphoria of new-found capitalist well-being.

The creative atmosphere of New York in the second half of the twentieth century is usually characterised with reference to movements such as Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and Conceptualism and their respective artists. Dominant art historical narratives still tend to be shaped by this approach, but when we look closer at this historical period we notice a number of parallel artistic developments that took place alongside the above trends yet have remained largely unknown, have been forgotten or have simply been ignored.

Yevgeniy Fiks, for example, has developed a work based on the unique story of another artist, that of the writer and painter Yonia Fain, whose journey, starting with his family's escape from war, political unrest, and later the Nazis, brought him from Ukraine to Warsaw, Vilnius, the Soviet Union, Japan, China and Mexico before he finally settled in New York in 1953. Based on this route, Fiks has drawn a *Map of Refugee Modernism*, emphasizing the extent to which political events shaped the lives of artists and their practices throughout the twentieth century and alluding to the idea that, next to "transnational modernism," a term already used to challenge Western-centric notions of modernism, a case could be made for the use of the potentially confronting term "refugee modernism." A fascinating example of work that might be said to be part of such a tradition is that of the painter Sigurds Vīdzirkste, one of the members of Hell's Kitchen. It reveals an artist in exile responding to a new art ecosystem by developing ideas outside of it, while nonetheless also participating in it. Vīdzirkste developed an individual and innovative artistic vocabulary, synthesizing mathematics, chemistry, and music to produce a unique style that he called "cyber-painting". His art spanned a large creative territory and brought creative production to what might have been considered a new level for the time, but he remained largely unknown to the local New York scene. Viktor Timofeev has created a work in which, drawing on his interest in both the digital world and the creation of utopian realities, he presents associative analogies of Vīdzirkste's practice. Blending ideas about the constitution of humanity and rational ways of organizing information, Timofeev reviews the cyber revolution and provides a kind of diagnosis of the trap into which we have fallen with our everyday use of social networks and computer technologies.

The second wave of feminism and the gay liberation movements of the 1970s, while disrupting the structure of the history of twentieth-century modernism, began a discourse that not only touched upon issues of identity but also directed public attention to things outside of what had been presented as the norm. Re-evaluating the developments of this era, the Polish artist Karol Radziszewski retraces the 1977 visit of the Polish artist Natalie LL to New York in his film *America Is Not Ready for This* (2012). The film confronts the narratives of both Western and Eastern art history, turning to questions of gender, feminist art and the LGBT rights movement. Feminist ideas are explored in the artistic practice of the painter Daina Dagnija – a late member of Hell's Kitchen collective – who turned her attention to the position of women in society and reacted to various social and political

developments in the US, including issues concerning migrants and refugees. Her works from the 1970s and 1980s translate these issues from the realms of deeply personal experience to an effective symbolism. The works of Rolands Kaņeps – another participant in the Hell's Kitchen group – bring queer issues to the foreground. In the 1970s, Kaņeps developed his own style, painting figurative compositions that dealt with Biblical and mythological subjects, placing these ancient messages in a contemporary context. The affected manners and gestures of his protagonists outline issues concerning sexuality and gender, perceptions and understandings of which underwent substantial transformations within the art scene as well as wider society at the time.

Through focusing on individual biographies that are nonetheless intertwined in global political processes – the wars and occupations of the twentieth century – the exhibition brings forward a web of lesser-known stories from the multicultural art scene of New York. New research connects these stories to our present-day situation and to younger generations of artists. Emphasising the importance of diversity – of acknowledging different modernisms and promoting alternative undercurrents to dominant narratives – the exhibition draws attention to the roles we play in the constant updating and reshaping of both the present and the past.

1 Saliņš, Gunārs, "Apmežosim Ņujorku. Dzintaram Sodumam pār plašu jūru", Raksti, Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 2006, p.105.

From Riga to New York and Beyond: Reflections on Migration

Ksenia Nouril

New York City is arguably one of the most diverse cities in the world. Its five boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and The Bronx are home to over 8.6 million people, who speak over 800 languages. It is a destination inextricable from the American Dream – where everyone can be on Broadway, even if not on stage. Whether by force or by choice, people have settled in New York City for centuries. These influxes have not always been warmly welcomed. This city is built on the land of the Lenape people, who originally inhabited areas of southern New York and eastern Pennsylvania as well as the entire state of New Jersey. Thus, one migration of people precipitated another migration of people, as Europeans colonised what is now known as the United States, divesting indigenous populations of their native land and resources.

The legacies of these past migrations forever mark the city and foreground the exhibition *Portable Landscapes: Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism*. Organised by a team comprising curators from the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art in Riga and the James Gallery in New York, this exhibition brings together work by over a dozen artists active in the postwar and contemporary periods. Its selection spans generations, from the legendary painters Sigurds Vīdzirkste (1928–1974), Rolands Kaņeps (1925–2011), and Daina Dagnija (b. 1937) to the emerging artists Artūrs Virtmanis (b. 1971) and Viktors Timofeev (b. 1984), who work avidly across mediums. While the majority of the artists in the exhibition have direct personal connections to Latvia – including Virtmanis and the Orbita Group (founded 1999), who address topics of migration related to the Latvian experience – others, like Yevgeniy Fiks (b. 1972), whose work is inspired by that of the late Yonia Fain (1913–2013), and Karol Radziszewski (b. 1980), represent the wider regional experience of movement. Timofeev even veers beyond lived experience, producing a multi-media installation that points to the failures of language and the inevitable untranslatability of both literal text and figurative meaning across cultures – whether Latvian and American, human or machine. While self-identification as an exile, immigrant, or refugee is critical to some – like the Hell's Kitchen Group of Latvian artists, poets, and intellectuals who settled in New York after the Second World War and actively cultivated a rich diaspora – others, like Judy Blum (b. 1938) and Boris Lurie (1924–2008), focus on the effects of collective experiences, including the Holocaust, which precipitated waves of migration to the United States, among other countries. As a whole, the artists in this exhibition actively engage with the imaginaries and the realities of the migratory experience to – and in – New York during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

It is appropriate that this exhibition is held at the James Gallery, a crossroads for the academy, art, and life at The Graduate Center (GC) as well as the city as a whole. It is part of the larger City University of New York (CUNY) system of public higher education, which coalesced in 1961, merging four institutions established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, over 275,000 degree-seeking students are enrolled across its network of eleven senior colleges, seven community colleges, one undergraduate honors college, and seven post-graduate institutions in all five boroughs.¹ It is an institution of and for the people, poised to react and respond to its needs. Exhibiting the New York portion of this multi-part long-term research project, which begun in Riga in 2017 and was reconfigured for Berlin in summer 2019, here at the James Gallery, re-connects the city with its pivotal role in the history of exiled and émigré Latvian artists during the postwar period. It also expands upon that network through the inclusion of additional artists impacted by the broader effects of migration after the global turn.

For all the artists in this exhibition, migration is a force of creativity. It requires what the French philosopher Michel de Certeau describes as “making do,” a tactic in which one combines disparate things to “create for himself [sic] a space in which he [sic] can find ways of using the constraining order.”²

This resourcefulness is necessary when faced with the challenges of the unexpected when making a new, even if temporary, home. De Certeau advises that, “Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he [who ‘makes do’] establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity.”³ Historically, this strategy was attractive to artists living under communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. For those who did not have the ability to change their physical location, it was a way for them to mentally relocate in order to preserve their sense of self. “Making do” is a practical tactic. It is a slapdash approach. It is a survival mechanism, initiated under duress. It enables one to claim one’s own space and adapt without necessarily compromising one’s own morals.

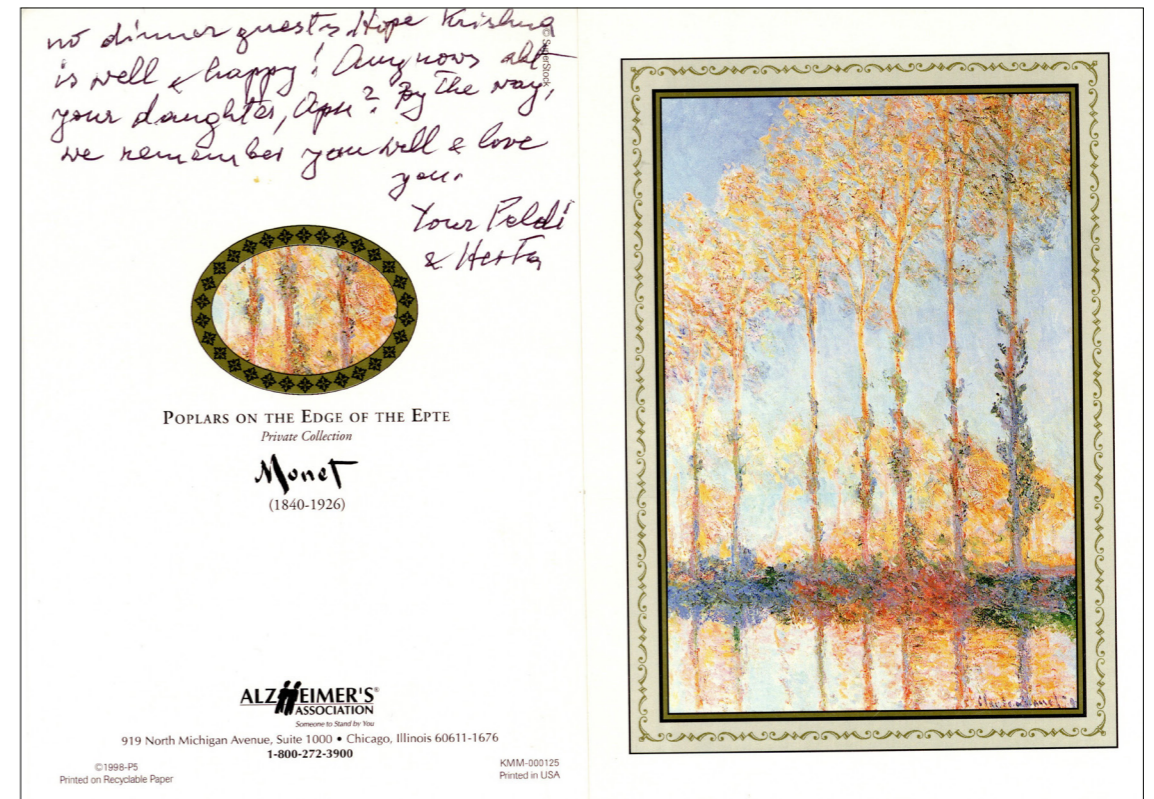
In meditating on the topic of migration today, it is difficult to avoid quoting the inimitable Edward Said, who aptly said, “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions.”⁴ The diverse range of artists in *Portable Landscapes: Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism* mediate multiple dualities concurrently in a world that is increasingly post-essential and post-geographical yet still unabashedly biased and partitioned, both literally and figuratively. Their navigation of this landscape is far from seamless, accounting for blips and bumps along the way. This is because the concept of a homogenous identity is a fallacy, despite contemporary pressures of the all-encompassing global. The factors that create and promote disparities in social, political, and economic conditions persist, steering waves of movement from the gentrification of a single city block to the mass migration of an entire ethnic group. Albeit temporary, this exhibition serves as a commemoration of past migrations, a marking of present movements, and a forecast of the future as we march forward in space and time.

Ksenia Nouril is the Jensen Bryan Curator at The Print Center in Philadelphia. She holds a BA, MA, and PhD in Art History and is a co-editor of *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology* (The Museum of Modern Art, 2018).

1 “CUNY Freshman Enrollment Reaches Record High,” October 3, 2019, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2019/10/03/cuny-freshman-enrollment-reaches-record-high/>
 2 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 30. Italics are in the original.
 3 Ibid., 30.
 4 Edward W. Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 186.

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism



Dear Judy: Thank you for phoning to let us know the sad news. Thschoelein called alos and Said that poor Fritzi suffered much. So we must look at it with relief for her, having been freed from her travails.

We had a great circle of friends in Vienna, about 10 couples, but hopefully they all escaped in time and had a chance at normal lives. Poldi got his papers before we were married and he said: "I'll wait for you." No such thing said I, you go! Actually, the day he arrived in New York he started to work in my behalf and also on Bruno and Fritzi's cause. He went to see Bruno's uncle right away and the man said he wouldn't include Fritzi in th affidavit because she had been married once before. But it seems he thought she was divorced, while actually her first husband, a famous ~~skier~~ skier of olympic quality, had been killed in a ski accident. Religious Jews are encouraged (if they are free) to marry a brother's widow, it is a mitzvah. So Poldi changed the name: S MIND AND WHEN I came to their house on one of my daily visits, they greetd me: "Your Poldi is a demi-god!" There were just 5 of us still left in our hometown which had suddenly become a hostile foreign country: The Blums, the Lowenbrons and I, and we were very close. On Kristallnacht Fritzi came to my sister's house where I was and spent the night with us, because Bruno had been taken away. He was in Dachau, but somehow convinced his Jailers that he was going to leave the country ~~so~~ shortly; and he was unshaven and incredibly dirty but we embraced him regardless, so happy to have him back. Then I afit to join my Poldi, but the day came soon when I, all by my self, walked an endless street to get to the harbor in New York where I was just in Time/saw my two beloved friends come down ~~the~~ the gangplank. We spent a few wonderful days together, happy like kids and then we had to leave for California. We had them come to visit us a few times and they once sent you to us we sent Joyce to you, and had hilarious times together with the Stiefels wh had joined us for good, and whenever we went to Europe we stopped in NEW YORK TO SEE THEM AND IN 1964 Poldi drove your father's car all over the historic sites back East with the 3 of us and we all 4 had a wonderful time. I cherish all he memories, but now Tschoelein and we are all that's left and I can't travel because Poldi has great difficulty walking and I, eating, and we never leave Napa anymore, not even go anywhere in t evening...not to the Napa symphony, etc, but we are otherwise okay and spend great evenings listening to operas and other good music, etc. Glad to be together. We have lost many friends but we have some good one's left & our children and grand-children, I still work 5 course dinner for Poldi, but

Letter from Herta Stoer to Judy Blum Reddy, 2003. Private archive of Judy Blum Reddy



The group of writers standing in the town square, from left: Teodors Zaltiņš, Irma Liepsala, A. Bļodnieks, Zenta Liepa, Jānis Klāvsons, Linards Tauns, Mudīte Austrīņa, Gunars Saliņš. Writers' evening in New Haven, Connecticut, USA. 1951-1955. Photo: unknown photographer. Collection of the Literature and Music Museum



Linards Tauns and Fridrihs Milts at the artist's studio discussing the cover drawing for the first edition of Linards Tauns' book "Mūžīgais mākonis" [Eternal Cloud], New York. 1957-1958. Photo: Bruno Rozītis. Collection of the Literature and Music Museum

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism



Illustration for the magazine "Kākslis" by Sigurds Kalniņš. 1948. Private collection of Ojārs J. Rozītis



The preparation of the book "Dzejas un sejas" [Poetry and Faces]. From left: Vitauts Kalve, Gunārs Saliņš, Ēriks Raisters, Linards Tauns, Teodors Zaltiņš holding the manuscript's pages. 1962. Photo: Bruno Rozītis. Collection of the Literature and Music Museum



In the Studio of Daina Dagnija with her painting "Immigrants". New York. 1969. Photographer: unknown. Private archive of Daina Dagnija



One of the first gatherings of the Hell's Kitchen collective on March 24, 1951. Photographer unknown. Private collection.

HELL'S KITCHEN

Hell's Kitchen was an informal group of exiled Latvian writers and artists active in New York from the 1950s through to the 1970s. They associated themselves with the Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan's West Side, where most of their gatherings took place. These included meetings at the 41st Street apartment of the poet Linards Tauns and the 42nd Street basement studio of the painter Fridrihs Milts.

Information about the formation of the Hell's Kitchen collective is limited, leaving much room for speculation, but the origins of the collective are linked to Tübingen, a university town in southern Germany where, around 1946, a group of Latvians began their studies after becoming political refugees. Nevertheless, New York City was to become their gathering point. The nucleus of Hell's Kitchen was formed by the publicist Mudīte Austrīņa (1924–1991); the poets Gunars Saliņš (1924–2010), Linards Tauns (1922–1963), Jānis Krēsliņš (b. 1924), Teodors Zeltiņš (1914–1991), Roberts Mūks (1923–2006), Aina Kraujiete (1923–2007), Rita Gāle (b. 1925), and Baiba Bičole (b. 1931); the artists Fridrihs Milts (1906–1993), Sigurds Vīdzirkste (1928–1974), Ronalds Kaņeps (1925–2011), Vilis Krūmiņš (1989–1959), Imārs Rumpēters (1929–2018), and Voldemārs Avens (b. 1924); the photographer Bruno Rozītis (1914–1986); the literary scholar Jautrīte Saliņa (1924–2011); the writer and para-psychologist Kārlis Osītis (1917–1997); and the critic Vitauts Kalve (1913–1989). The creativity of the group also served as a magnet for other exiled Latvian authors and artists, who participated in its gatherings when visiting New York City.

The group adopted exile and displacement as their main focal points, both as a collective and in their work as individuals. Activating their historical and cultural knowledge, and in this way distancing themselves from their new environment and its art scene, they constructed new meanings and alternative forms of expression. A statement of their philosophy, their "Heavenly Pagan Cohabitation Manifesto" (1956) contains thirteen points that, written with a great deal of absurdity and humour, demonstrate the group's creative approaches to the realities they were facing as young artists in exile, which included the complexity of getting their work published in the United States and the need for support from colleagues. In this context, their Latvian language and national identity were important points of reference in their creative production – despite their willingness to be integrated into the local art world and culture. Most of their writings and organized events were in Latvian, which could be interpreted as a rejection of their new context and an expression of obstinacy born from the need to prove their existence as a distinct community within the multicultural environment of New York City. But, in the context of their displacement, their decision to work in their native language could also be seen as part of

a hybrid form of self-historicization – a way of engaging with the international art system of which they were part. The material archival evidence gathered for this exhibition allows us to follow individuals and their collaborations, registering their everyday lives, the atmosphere of their gatherings, and their creative approaches to the reality they faced as a result of forced immigration.

DAINA DAGNIJA
Born in 1937, Riga (LV);
lives and works in Riga (LV)

Target Queen
1980
Oil on canvas, 75.59”

Refugees from Vietnam
1976–1977
Oil on canvas, 66 × 84”

Courtesy of the artist

After escaping occupying Soviet forces in 1944, Daina Dagnija’s family was one of many that spent years in refugee camps in Germany before moving, as soon as it was possible, to the United States. This experience has become an important point of departure for the artist, who reflects upon it in her paintings, transforming the personal into the symbolic and seeing parallels between her story and those of refugees from other parts of the world who have had to escape their homelands, whether because of war or for other reasons.

In New York, Daina Dagnija attended the Art Students League. An important point of reference in her development as an artist was a trip to the Japanese island of Okinawa, where she spent a year (1961–1962). The landscape she saw and people she met changed her painting style from abstract to more figurative.

In 1976 and 1977, Daina Dagnija painted *Vietnamese Refugees*, depicting the migration of people seeking refuge from the Vietnam War. She likened these events to those in her own past, saying, “That little girl in the cart could be me.”

Human beings have been an important point of departure in her works. Observing local society in the United States, she has made various paintings depicting social norms and paradigms. In her work colour plays an important role in emphasizing emotions, struggles and hopes. Some of the strong themes in her works relate to women, and in this way they address notions of feminism; however, issues of women’s equality are not interpreted in an aggressive or radical way in her work. The artist simply analyses developments in society and in the ways women’s roles are projected. One of the examples of this critical approach is *Target Queen*, painted in 1980.

YEVGENIY FIKS
Born in 1972, Moscow (RU);
has lived and worked in New York (USA) since 1994

The Yonia Fain Map of Refugee Modernism
2019
Giclee print on paper, 21 × 48”

Courtesy of the artist

The Yonia Fain Map of Refugee Modernism is Fiks’ reflection on the legacy of the twentieth-century modernist painter and Yiddish poet Yonia Fain (1914–2013). The work traces the history of Fain’s escapes and migrations during the twentieth century, which took him from Ukraine to Poland, Lithuania, the Soviet Union, Japan, China, Mexico, and then finally the US. *The Yonia Fain Map of Refugee Modernism* contributes to the mapping of displacements and relocations within last century’s Eastern European Jewish history as well as the lost-and-found trajectories and geographies of twentieth-century artistic modernisms, which were often created by the refugees, the stateless, and artists on the run.

Yevgeniy Fiks has produced many projects on the subject of the Post-Soviet dialogue in the West. Fiks’ work has been shown internationally, including in exhibitions in the United States at Winkleman and Postmasters galleries (both in New York), Mass MoCA, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Moscow Museum of Modern Art and Marat Guelman Gallery in Moscow; Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros in Mexico City; and the Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon. His work has also been included in the Biennale of Sydney (2008), the Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2011), and the Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2015).

YONIA FAIN
Born in 1914, Kamianets-Podilskyi (UA);
died in 2013, New York (USA)

Witness to History, a suite of 8 drawings
circa 2000s

Pastel and markers on paper, each 2 × 3”

Courtesy of the Congress for Jewish Culture

These drawings are part of the last body of work produced by Yonia Fain in the mid-2000s, at the end of his life. In this series of semi-abstract pastels and markers on paper, Fain returns to the themes and motives drawn from twentieth-century history that he explored in his earlier works, including the connections between the landscape, the city, human suffering, desperation, and uprising.

The writer and painter Yonia Fain (1914–2013) was born in Kamianets-Podilskyi, Ukraine. He left Ukraine in 1924 at the age of 10 when his father, a Menshevik, took the family first to Warsaw and then to Vilnius to escape war and political unrest. During the war, Fain sought refuge in Kobe, Japan and then in Shanghai, China for six years. There he painted and wrote poetry. His first volume, *A tlje unter di shtern* (“A gallows under the stars”), came out shortly after he emigrated to Mexico in 1947. In Mexico he taught Yiddish literature and attracted the attention of the artist Diego Rivera, who arranged an exhibition of his paintings at the prestigious Palacio de Bellas Artes. Fain’s mural dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust still hangs in the Pantheon Israelita in Mexico City. In 1953, Fain moved to New York and became a professor of art at Hofstra University, where he stayed until his retirement in 1983.

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

ROLANDS KAŅEPS
Born in 1925, Riga (LV);
died in 2011, New Rochelle (USA)

Rolands Kaņeps’s archive and works

Courtesy of the Latvian National Museum of Art and Ilze Pētersone

As of 1949, Rolands Kaņeps lived in New York, where he perfected his creative expression, studying the paintings of Duccio, Simoni Martini, Piero della Francesca, Sandro Boticelli and many others. He was also a devoted collector of antiques and artwork; it is said that Kaņeps turned his small studio apartment on 76th Street into a sophisticated antique shop.

Up until the 1970s, Kaņeps drew inspiration from modernist painting, but later his style acquired an affectation that he then preserved for the rest of his career. He painted realist figurative compositions with references to religious and mythological subjects, transforming them into allegorical and symbolic messages and providing them with a contemporary backdrop. Saturated blue, green, pink, and red tones predominated in his palette, and he did not avoid bold juxtapositions of colour.

Kaņeps’ figurative paintings – in which Biblical and mythical heroes were often depicted naked or half-naked, and highly eroticized – caused some raised eyebrows among the exile community of the time. Kaņeps was gay, and this fact has allowed his works to be interpreted in a queer context. Such an interpretation was not possible during his lifetime, as there was no rush to embrace queer communities within the society of the time, and the community of Latvian exiles, where he was mostly known for his work, was rather conservative. It is interesting to note, however, that several of Kaņeps’ closer friends in the Hell’s Kitchen group defended his mode of expression, inviting viewers to delve into his multi-layered compositions without prejudice.

BORIS LURIE
Born in 1924, Leningrad (USSR);
died in 2008, New York (USA)

Untitled (37 Ludzas Street), c. late 1940s
Oil paint on board
20 × 15”

Untitled, c. late 1940s
pen, ink and charcoal on paper
8 × 11”

Untitled, c. 1946
Ink, Conte crayon and estompe on paper
10 × 8”

Untitled, c. 1946
Ink on paper
4 × 4.5”

Untitled, c. 1946
Pencil, colour crayon, Conte crayon and
watercolour paint on paper
8.75 × 8.25”

Boris Lurie was born in Leningrad in 1924 and spent his childhood in Riga, Latvia. This period of his life was marked by tragedy. During the Nazi occupation of Latvia (1941–1944), all the Jews were put in ghettos; Lurie, along with his family, was deported to a concentration camp in Riga, before being moved to Salaspils and Stutthof and then finally to Buchenwald-Magdeburg. His mother, sister and grandmother were all killed in Riga, but Boris and his father survived and were able to build their new lives in New York after moving there in 1946. In New York Boris started his artist career by first studying for a short time at the Art Students League, where he attended classes with Georg Grosz. During his lifetime he produced thousands of drawings, etchings, paintings, collages, assemblages, and objects – often with pornographic or Holocaust-related imagery. Lurie wrote a novel, *House of Anita* (first published in 2016), and a large memoir entitled *In Riga* (published for the first time in 2019) as well as scores of poems that were collected in the volume *Geschriebigtes - Gedichtigtes: NO!art in Buchenwald* (2003).

Boris Lurie’s artistic praxis is strongly linked with his founding of the NO!Art movement, which called for and manifested socially and politically involved art that would resist and combat the forces of the market. In 1960, with Sam Goodman and Stanley Fisher, Lurie took over the leadership of the March Gallery (95 East 10th Street, New York, NY) from Elaine de Kooning, and the gallery became a significant platform for their ideas.

Untitled, c. 1946
Ink and wash on cardboard
9 × 7”

Untitled, c. 1946
Pencil on paper
8 × 10”

Untitled (12 Hours Central European Time), c. 1946
Pencil on paper
11 × 8”

Untitled, c. 1946
Pencil and colour pencil on paper
10 × 8”

Courtesy of Boris Lurie Foundation

Lurie’s early works already showed the necessity of depicting war time memories. They emphasise the dehumanization that took place during the Second World War, which was to become a central theme in his later career. Lurie started to draw his experiences just after the war in spite of the dominant opinion that this part of history should be forgotten and that he should concentrate on his new American identity. He depicted everything he saw in camps: administrative scenes, bands of *Sonderkommandos*, executions, moments of fear and episodes of sudden kindness. This exhibition proposes to unfold the importance of these memories and of remembering as a process of healing and a search for meaning.

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

KAROL RADZISZEWSKI
Born in 1980, Bialystok (PL);
lives and works in Warsaw (PL)

America Is Not Ready for This
2012
HD film
67’

Courtesy of the artist and *BWA Warszawa*

The inspiration and starting point for this film was the Polish artist Natalia LL’s stay in New York in 1977. Thirty-four years later, Karol Radziszewski decided to embark on a journey to America to meet with the artists and gallery owners that Natalia LL had met with during her stay in the United States.

With only a few black-and-white photographs and some names scribbled in a small notebook, Radziszewski began his artistic investigation. He talked with the artists Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconci, AA Bronson and Carolee Schneemann; the gallerist Antonio Homem; the critic Douglas Crimp; and one of the stars of Andy Warhol’s movies, Mario Montez. The protagonists of the film recall the atmosphere of New York in the 1970s, providing a picture of what Natalia LL would have been confronted with at that time. They also analyse what America was “ready” for.

Radziszewski revives Natalia LL’s memories, confronting both Polish and Western narratives of art history and raising a series of questions on issues such as gender, feminist art, conceptual art and queer art as well as East-West relations and their impact on the art world in the context of the period of the Iron Curtain. The film is both a search for parallels between the artistic experiences of Natalia LL and Karol Radziszewski, as well as an attempt to examine the rules governing the positioning of artists in the art world, both in the 1970s and today.

Karol Radziszewski works with film, photography and installations and creates interdisciplinary projects. His archive-based methodology draws on multiple cultural, historical, religious, social and gender references. Since 2005, he has been the publisher and editor-in-chief of *DIK Fagazjine*. He was the founder of the Queer Archives Institute. His work has been presented in institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; TOP Museum, Tokyo; Whitechapel Gallery, London; the New Museum, New York; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; VideoBrasil, Sao Paulo; Cobra Museum, Amsterdam; and Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz. He has participated in PERFORMA 13, New York; the 7th Göteborg Biennial; and the 4th Prague Biennial.

The participation of Karol Radziszewski is supported by Polish Culture Institute in New York.

VIKTOR TIMOFEEV
Born in 1984, Riga (LV);
lives and works in New York (USA)

Node
2017–2019
Custom software, infinite duration, drawing on the wall

Courtesy of the artist

This two-channel generative video scrambles the standard Latin alphabet and uses the resulting characters to display a short text. This text and the new alphabet in which it is written are displayed on separate walls, inviting the audience to walk back and forth between the screens in order to decrypt the writing. However, the pace at which the alphabet degenerates is faster than that of the human capacity to engage in the text’s decryption, rendering the process futile. The alphabet is scrambled by dissecting each of its letters into four quadrants that are then systematically rotated and flipped as well as swapped out for quadrants from other letters at random. The whole installation is flanked by a large pastel wall mural along with a few chairs, evoking a waiting room in an unspecified bureaucratic setting.

Viktor Timofeev works across generative video, games, painting, installation and sound, frequently combining the mediums to recreate semi-fictional environments. He received his MFA at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam and his BFA at Hunter College in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include *God Room* at Alyssa Davis Gallery, New York (2018); *Stairway to Melon* at kim? Contemporary Art Center, Riga (2017); and *S.T.A.T.E.* at Drawing Room, London (2016). Recent group exhibitions include *Cosmic Existence* at Den Frie Center For Contemporary Art, Copenhagen (2019); *Digital Gothic* at Synagogue de Delme, Delme (2019); *A Barbarian In Paris* at Fondation Ricard, Paris (2018); and *Somewhere In Between* at Bozar, Brussels (2018).

JUDY BLUM REDDY
Born in 1943, New York (USA);
lives and works in New York (USA)

Jewish Refugees: at the beach; at a birthday party; in sailor hats; going fishing; with dog and cats; riding horses; wearing glasses; sailing on boats; dressing as Santa Claus; celebrating Christmas; having picnics; having parties
2017
restored 16 mm film, HD video, letters
130'

Courtesy of the artist

Home videos shot by Blum Reddy's father are cut and selected according to the artist's memories of her early childhood. These films range from her youth to the time of her departure from the United States for Paris. The films show the Jewish diaspora who arrived in the United States after the Second World War. Organised by topic rather than by chronology, these films double the process of remembering carried out by the people who were present at the events that were recorded and serve to link historical traumas across generations. The holocaust eliminated diversity from cities like Riga, Warsaw and Vienna and changed significantly the social fabric of many countries, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe. Next to the video, a series of letters is displayed showing correspondence between the American side of the family and those who remained in Austria. The latter share their experiences of living through the events of the holocaust. The film catalogues intimacy between individuals despite geographic distance. It contests the ramifications of nation-building and the formation of identity groups based on language, race, and religion.

Revisiting The... 2019
Mixed media on canvas
71 × 78"

Courtesy of the artist

Through layers of notes, drawings and imprints of bureaucratic paperwork, Blum Reddy revisits her time in Paris, the city where she used to live with her husband, the renowned Indian print-maker, sculptor and teacher Krishna Reddy. As an Indian artist, he faced much harsher immigration procedures in France than Blum Reddy, who was an American citizen. It was a similar experience when they moved to New York in 1974. This visual account, involving fragments from visa application questionnaires and other similar documentation, reflects an experience lived by whole communities of the diaspora. These communities often faced intimidating official procedures, which were "justified" with notions like "order" and "safety". The work also emphasizes the still pertinent issues of migration and privilege, and the hierarchies within which different passports exist.

Judy Blum Reddy was born to parents who escaped the holocaust by emigrating from Vienna to New York. The artist has always made lists – lists of daily actions and artist actions, and innately amusing lists that spell out patriarchy and forms of discrimination. She has recently shown at the contemporary art festival Survival Kit 10, organized by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga (2019); The Armory Show, NY (2019); The Showroom, London (2018); Villa Vassilieff, Paris (2017); and the Dak'Art Biennial (2016). She has also taken part in many exhibitions, including the seminal *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at P.S.1/MOMA and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007), among others.

VLADIMIR SVETLOV
ALEXANDER ZAPOL
Born in 1973, Ogre (LV); lives and work in Riga (LV)
Born in 1970, Riga (LV); lives and work in Riga (LV)

Hell's Kitchen: Excursion in Paradise
2018
Video, 12'

Courtesy of the artists

The video documents a projective guided tour to the Hell's Kitchen area of New York, home to the group of artists and poets known as *Elles ķēķis* ("Hell's Kitchen"). The building in which the poet Linards Tauns lived; Central Park, where Gunars Saliņš used to take walks; bars where the members of Hell's Kitchen used to gather; a drugstore; and the hospital emergency room that Tauns visited on his last day of life: all of these places become material for the visit, which takes place in the reconstructed imagination of the protagonists. In dreams and in texts their thoughts return to the lost paradises of Torņakalns, Āgenskalns and the Moscow Vorstadt.

Vladimir Svetlov is a poet and a photographer. In his projects, including those created in collaboration with the poets collective Orbita (Arthur Punte, Sergej Timofejev, Alexander Zapol), he works with the environment and the object, exploring the boundaries and perspectives of (poetic) utterance, perception and organization. His poetry has been translated into many European languages. As a photographer, Vladimir is engaged in both staged and documentary photography. Recent projects include: *Rīgas līcis*, photography installation at Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1) Riga (2018); *The Room with a View*, a poetic object as part of Orbita's exhibition *Where do the poems come from*, NOASS Floating Art Gallery, Riga (2018); *Actual Spacescape*, an installation in collaboration with Orbita at the Cēsis Art Festival (2016); *Two sonnets from Laputa*, a poetic installation in collaboration with Orbita at *Ornamentalism. Purvītis Prize. Latvian Contemporary Art*, 56th Venice Biennale (2015); *The Twinkling Crystal Of Revelation*, installation in collaboration with Orbita at Art Station Dubulti (2015); and *Phantoms of Revelations*, a documentary musical video at the contemporary art festival Survival K(n)it, Riga (2015).

Alexander Zapol held a one-man show, *M for Method*, at the gallery Carousel in 2011. He has authored multimedia works as part of the Orbita group as well as individually and together with Līva Rutmane and Vladimir Svetlov. His installations, performances and interactive objects include: *Vienas sejas teātris* ("Single Face Theater"), *Stūri top par centriem* ("Corners Become Centers"), *(Telpa uz laiku, jeb Laiku topoloģija 1)* ("Space for a Time or the Topology of Times 1"), *Izlaistas detaļas* ("Omitted Details"), *Rīga Underground Subway, 3dddzeja, Rīgas stūru karte* ("A Map of Riga Corners"), *(Space for a Time or the Topology of Times 2)*, *Dz-ej* ("Poetry-to-go"), *Mikrorajonu kastu dzeja* ("Poetry of Apartment Block Boxes"), *Zemūdens pilsēta* ("Underwater City"), *Rimčikā* ("At Rimchik"), etc. His short films include: *Sekošana* ("Following"), *Cinephobia*, and *Ruda meitene Vecrīgā* ("A Red-Haired Girl in the Old Town"). He has participated in festivals and exhibitions including: *Ornamentalism* (Venice); *Buket* (Moscow); *Survival Kit, RIBOCA* (Riga); Cēsis Art Festival, *Phoetry/Poetography* (The Museum of Futures, UK); Čības ("Slippers") (Istaba, Riga); *Komentāri* ("Comments") (KIM?, Riga); *Dzejas kartogrāfija* ("Cartography of Poetry"); *Word in Motion*, (Kemerov); *Poetry&Performance* (Shedhalle, Zurich); and *Print Triennale* (Tallinn), among others. Zapol curated the exhibition *Peldus (Afloat)* at the Istaba Gallery in Riga in 2014. He is a recipient of the Sergei Kuryokhin award and has been nominated for the Purvītis Award (for the Orbita exhibition *No kā rodas dzeja*, "What Gives Rise to Poetry," at Noass Gallery and the Latvian National Museum of Art).

ARTŪRS VIRTMANIS

Born in 1971, Riga (LV);
lives and works in New York (USA) and Riga (LV)

On the Bridges of No Return

2019

Installation: paper, charcoal, wood, cardboard,
plexiglass, found objects, photographic prints, steel
pins, rubber powder
106" × 72"

Courtesy of the artist

This installation is an attempt to dwell in the work of the Latvian exile poet Gunars Salins, a search light trying to illuminate the conditions of a poet in exile in a different language. It is also a meditation on memory, the irreversibility of time, the mission of the artist (in the context of the existential conditions that arise from geopolitical realities), and the inner forms of resistance available to an individual.

A poetic scale model – literally, a portable landscape – this work consists of excerpts from Salins's texts, written in charcoal which together forms a "river" and a replica of the bridge over the river Daugava in Riga, Latvia, that was destroyed during the Second World War.

Artūrs Virtmanis works as an installation artist, set designer and art director and has an educational background in sculpture, graphic arts and design. His artworks – visually and metaphorically dense provisional drawing environments that combine relics of sentimental imagery from past eras with cryptic texts, small-scale models and found objects – have been exhibited at The Drawing Center (NY), the Whitney Museum of American Art (NY), the Venice Biennale of Architecture (Venice, Italy), Exit Art (NY), PS122 (NY), the Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum (San Antonio, Texas), the Xin Dong Center for Contemporary Art (Beijing, China), the Morris Museum (NJ), the Jersey City Museum (NJ), the State Museum of Art (Riga, Latvia), Museum Arsenal (Riga, Latvia), Riga Art Space (Riga, Latvia), and Den Frie Center for Contemporary Art (Copenhagen, Denmark), among others.

SIGURDS VĪDZIRKSTE

Born in 1928, Daugavpils (LV);
died in 1974, New York (USA)

Untitled, 1960s

Mixed media on canvas, 30 × 30"

Untitled, 1960s

Mixed media on canvas, 20 × 20"

Untitled, 1970s

mixed media on canvas, 76 × 66"

Saliņš family collection

In 1950, Sigurds Vīdzirkste emigrated with his family to the United States, and a few years later he started studying at the Art Students' League. Soon after finishing his studies, he served in the US Navy on an aircraft carrier, ending up in Mallorca, which became an important source of inspiration for his early art. Originally, Vīdzirkste was interested in Abstract Expressionism, but eventually his search for his own unique style led him to practice what he called "cybernetic painting," combining his knowledge of chemistry, mathematics, music and philosophy. He first exhibited his work in 1964, in a solo show in his studio at 148 Liberty Street, where, next to abstract compositions of circles and stripes, he displayed canvases with dot-like reliefs and metallic powder compressions organized according to different rhythms. This show was followed in 1968 by a solo show entitled *Cybernetic Canvases*, which was held at the Kips Bay Gallery at 613 Second Avenue. This was the first time Vīdzirkste publicly used the term "cybernetics" in relation to his work. All of the exhibited canvases were composed of relief dots on monochromatic, ochre or grey backgrounds, and they were untitled and unsigned; only a number was assigned to each work. Vīdzirkste experimented with various pigments and substances on a grand scale, and such experiments were most likely stimulated by his chemistry studies at the Riga State Secondary School before his emigration in 1944. Vīdzirkste's cybernetic painting refers to cybernetics as a science that examines machines and living organisms in order to find out how they receive and preserve certain kinds of information before transmitting it and transforming it into signals that make them act in particular way. Unfortunately, it is hard to discern a definite theory behind his dot paintings as he did not expand on his ideas in writing. Nevertheless, each work can be interpreted as an information system similar to that of the punch cards used in early digital computers. With each new painting, he organized dots in different rhythms and sizes and, as Voldemārs Avens, another member of the Hell's Kitchen group, remembers, he used precise calculations to create each system.

PORTABLE LANDSCAPES

Memories and Imaginaries of Refugee Modernism

The Amie and Tony James Gallery's mission is to bring artists and scholars into public dialogue on topics of mutual concern through exhibitions as a form of advanced research. As a window into the research work of The Graduate Center and a hub of international discussion, The James Gallery is central to The Graduate Center's and the City University of New York's contribution to the cultural life of New York City. Located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, the gallery creates and presents artwork to the public in a variety of formats. While some exhibitions remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, and screenings have a short duration. The gallery works with scholars, students, artists and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary boundaries. All exhibitions and programming are free and open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis.

www.centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery

The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA) is the largest institution for contemporary art in Latvia, curating and producing contemporary art events on a national and international scale. Since 1993, it has researched and curated contemporary art processes both in Latvia and abroad, aiming to provoke critical reflection on issues relevant to contemporary society. The LCCA is widely recognized for its annual international contemporary art festival "SURVIVAL KIT" and its regular exhibitions at the Latvian National Museum of Art, as well as for representing Latvia at the Venice Biennale, Manifesta, São Paulo Art Biennial, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Rauma Biennale of Contemporary Art, and others.

www.lcca.lv