

# **THEN AND AGAIN**

Επαναπροσδιορίζοντας την τελετουργία στα σύγχρονα Βαλκάνια











# Traces of Lineage

**Armin Graca**

My knowledge of my grandfather, Omer, is limited. I only know that he was born in Sjenica, Serbia, and held a prominent position as a government official in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. His image exists solely in family photographs. They portray a tall, imposing figure with a dark complexion and an ever-clean-shaven face.

My father rarely discusses his own father. What is left of him are some photographs, a few documents and personal items, a testament to the enigmatic figure whom I never had the chance to meet. His life, shrouded in myth and reality, serves as the focal point of my exploration into the intricacies of familial bonds and the echoes of the past in the present.

I start my journey by talking to my father. Meeting him makes me feel like I am treading the narrow path of my past. A part of my grandfather lives in him, and through him, in me. I meet these parts when we sit down for our daily morning coffee. This is our thing: Father's many cigarettes, two coffees, and one storyline I follow.

As I sift through memories and anecdotes, I confront the transient nature of identity, moulded by loss and shaped by the passage of time. Omer's legacy, intertwined with my father's and my own, becomes a testament to the fluidity of selfhood and the enduring power of lineage.

Each photograph becomes a witness to the interplay between myth and reality, capturing the essence of a man whose presence lingers in the shadows of my consciousness. I aim to piece together the fragments of Omer's life, weaving a tapestry of remembrance that transcends the boundaries of individual experience.















# The Censorship of Flowers

**Gerta Xhaferaj**

As a child, I used to record everything.

Hours-long sequences of my family eating dinner on any given weeknight, my mother dancing, my cousin's loud wedding, a decade's worth of New Year's fireworks. Nothing was too grand or too minuscule. There was no hierarchy in place to dictate what I was documenting at the time; I would simply pick up my camera and press record when I felt like it. The video camera in question was a model acquired by my parents in North Macedonia in 1998. The device became integral to capturing family events. Looking through the archive, I notice that the footage has been overwritten by another recording. In the middle of my cousin's wedding ceremony, a pink flower suddenly appears. As the rose cuts through the chaos of the celebration, the silence of the garden is almost deafening. A couple of seconds later, we are suddenly thrust back into the chaos of the wedding.

My father loved flowers.

He had seen my trembling footage as a sort of work to treat and restore. Something that should be smoothed over. In an attempt to save his daughter's documentation of her surroundings, he taped over the most erratic and blurry parts with still portraits of roses from his garden. Was he embarrassed by my shaking hand? Did he think that someone from outside the family would ever see this footage and think, "Oh, what an unprofessional video?" Or could he not stand to see his imperfect daughter's creations? Is his fixation an escape from the hard job that he had? Being the Head of Police during the transition era in Albania, he constantly encountered violence, pain, civil war, and massacres following the dictatorship. Later, I discovered another reason he might have chosen flowers as his subject when filming. During communism in our home country, the only TV station available to the public was the state-run TVSH. Between shows, there would be a so-called interlude/intermission. To fill these gaps in their program, the station would display footage of flowers and still-life images.

Before starting this project, I hated flowers.

















# Books of Promises

**Ali Cem Doğan** (Darağaç Collective)

The small market in the neighbourhood functions as a bank. Its ledger book is full of names of people living in this small industrial neighbourhood of İzmir named Darağaç. Some names are crossed out, while others are moved to a bigger ledger book. The owner of the market, Firat, knows even the paycheck dates of people. He never insists because his old calculator never makes mistakes.

When we started to move into the neighbourhood, the locals were excited. New faces, at least someone different. They told us that the skyscrapers would come to the neighbourhood. Every building will be demolished. This was nine years ago. Throughout the years, newcomers met with the old-timers. Old-timers were car mechanics, carpenters, and repair shop owners; newcomers were artists. They invited us to their shops. We shared tools and knowledge.

Now, skyscrapers are rising around us. The ones that shadow the sunset in the west, the ones that shadow the sunrise in the east. It's their sunset and sunrise now. The greedy owner of that house in the corner is rubbing his already sweaty palms, waiting for that right moment of opportunity for more than thirty years. Will the gods of concrete hear his praying and give him those four flats instead of this old, ruined family home?

Skyscrapers grew; they rose as high as possible. To the sky, to space. We grew inside, sharing the streets, our houses, our plates, our dreams. What is more concrete than a dream?











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**dyed blonde hair...  
still beautiful.**





# Behind Seven Hills and Seven Seas

**Teodora Ivkov**

*Behind Seven Hills and Seven Seas* delves into the intricate layers of migration, identity, and cultural constructs that shape the contemporary narrative surrounding the mythical figure of the Aunt from Germany. Drawing from my own personal experiences on Gastarbeiter in Germany, as well as the collective memories and stories passed down through generations, I start a journey to explore the complexities and nuances of this semi-fictional character.

At the centre of my exploration lies the symbolism embodied by the Aunt from Germany – “the goddess of migration”, an omnipresent family member in contemporary Balkan culture. Through discussions with my friends and random passengers on social media about gifts and objects that She used to bring from Germany, we recall together the image of Her.

As the narrative unfolds, through introspective reflections and storytelling, we start to unravel the complexities of identity formation in the context of migration and the profound impact of cultural constructs on shaping our perceptions of self and belonging.

Through the medium of video essay, I invite viewers to join me on this journey of both self and collective discovery, as we navigate the blurred lines between reality and myth, longing and belonging, in the search for Aunt from Germany – a symbol of hope, aspiration, and the perpetual pursuit of a better life.





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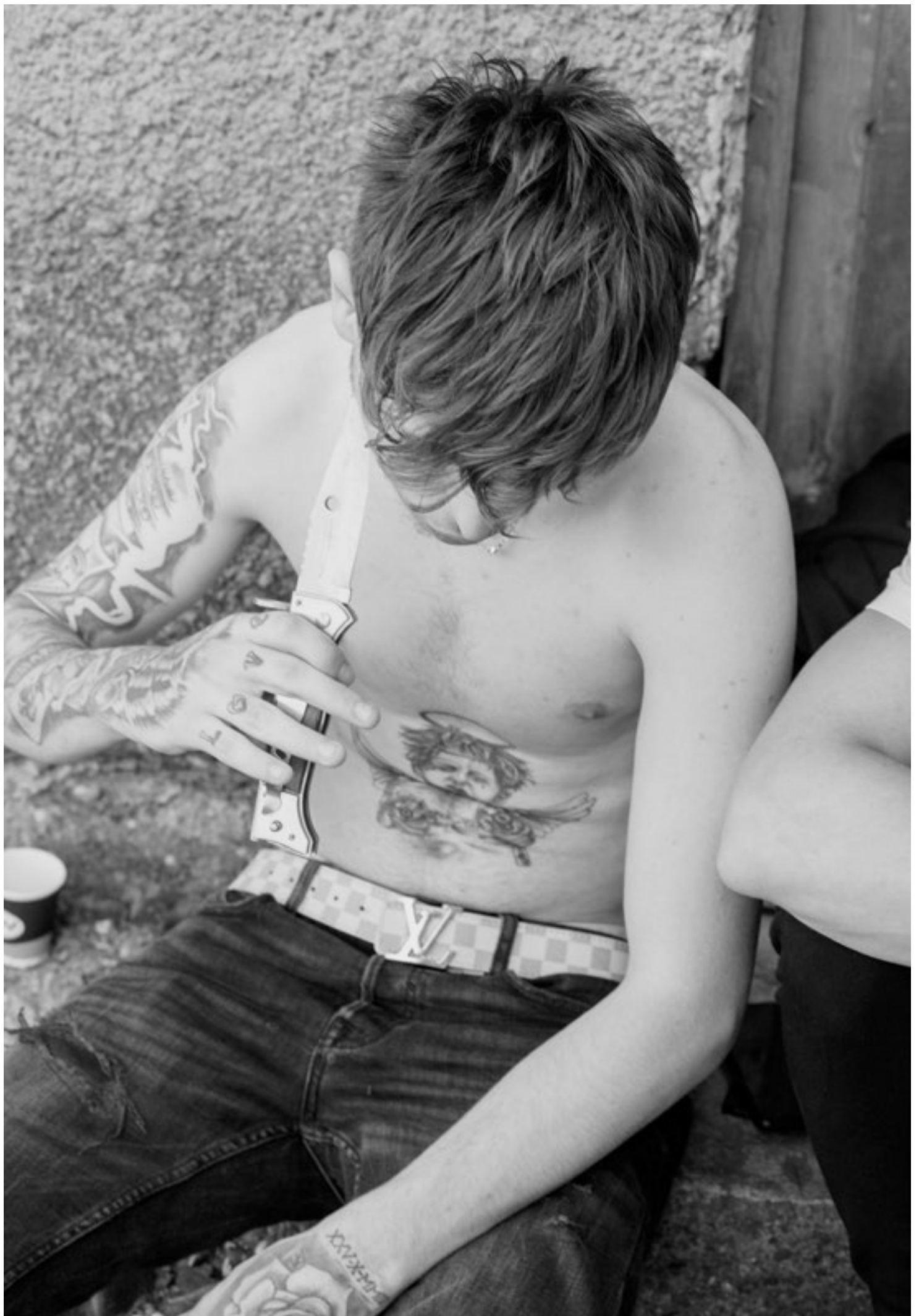


**While talking to my friends about Maša's spiral staircases, milk chocolates and big fake Christmas tree,**













# The Gambler

**Marius Ionut Scarlat**

*The Gambler* is a project about street craps and how it is used by a group of young people in Romania as a rite of passage to construct a new identity.

It all started while I was working on another project in the area, and every time these kids saw me with the camera, they would ask me to take their photos. I began taking their pictures with no intention of creating a project or telling anything about them. As I delved into the material, I discovered familiar stories that deeply resonated with my own experience. Many of these young people were the children of my parents' friends, and I saw myself reflected in their lives and in the traditions we shared. The presence of the game of craps in their daily routines did not go unnoticed by me, especially because my father had also been involved in this game in his youth. It is not only a form of entertainment but also a means of earning money and, more significantly, of building and affirming individual and group identity. Each roll of the dice reveals a universe of personal expression, camaraderie, and identity-seeking amidst a cultural context rooted in tradition and community. This project arises from both social and personal concerns, exploring the complex interaction between rural youth, tradition, and the risks associated with gambling. Through these images, I aim not only to document their lives but also to reflect on my own identity and connection with a place that could have been my home if circumstances had been different.

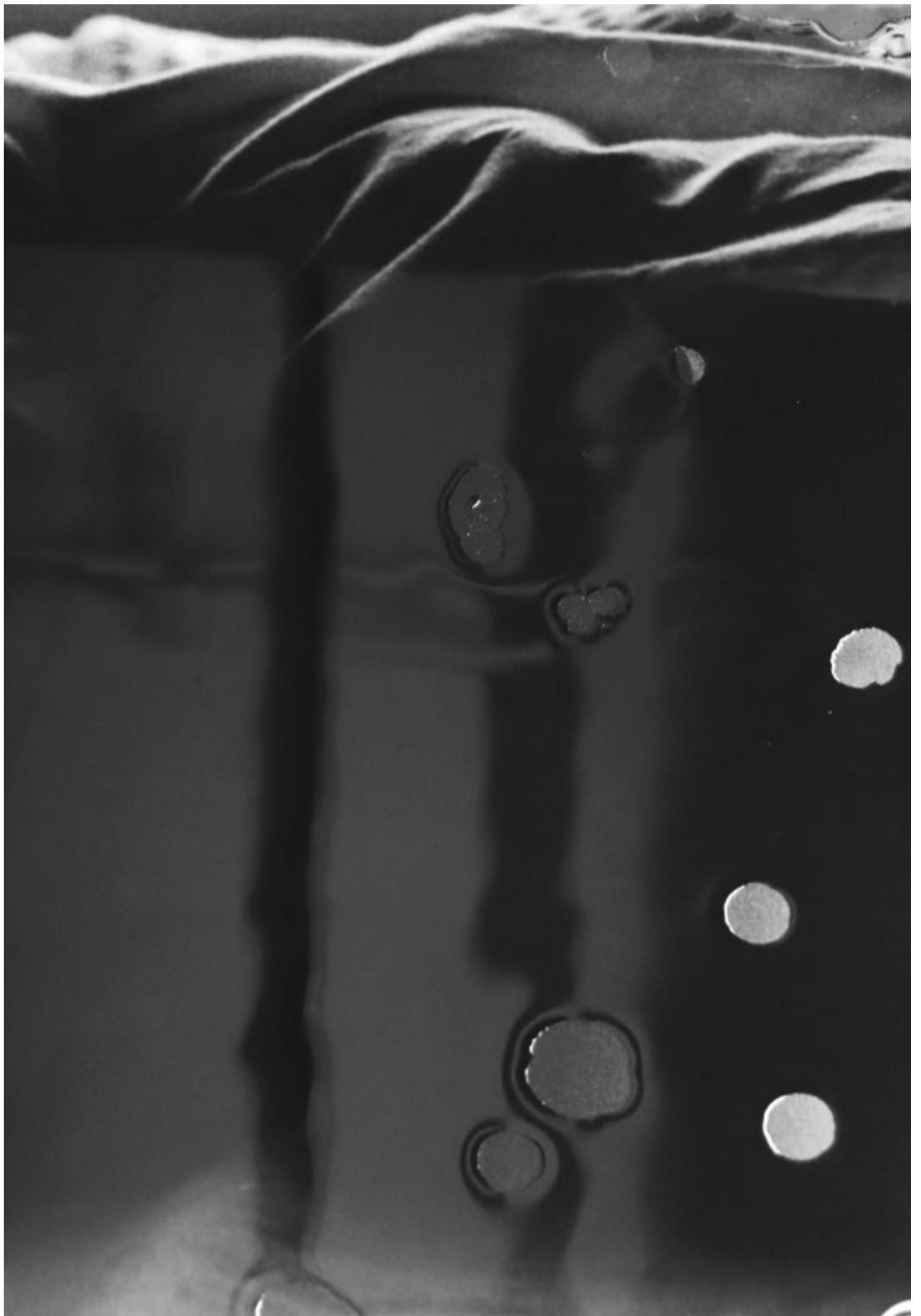














# Autoportrait

**Marietta Mavrokordatou**

Oscillating between privacy and exposure,<sup>1</sup> the series *Autoportrait* consists of five photographic prints. Shot in analogue, printed in the darkroom, and re-shot digitally, *Autoportrait* can be considered as a narration of process or a depiction of photographic time, analogue and digital, respectively. The word 'exposure' itself holds a duality: at once representing exteriority, being exposed to, and the photographic medium, the duration of exposure.

For a moment, the darkroom clock, ventilation, and pipes are reflected in the wet analogue photograph of the artist's bedroom. Discarding the vertical mode of waking life, there is a parallel sense of horizontality found in both sleep and exposure, flatness. On the matte surface of the paper, the two rooms become One. "In dark space, pictorial depth is guaranteed or twinned by the introjected interiority of the subject. This interiority can be characterised as an inconsistent system of metamorphoses – a spatial extension inwards."<sup>2</sup>

Examining the qualities of the physical and the virtual, the lasting and the fleeting, as well as embracing the potential of the private as interior and intimate, *Autoportrait* is inherently a piece on metamorphoses – "as the belief in the spatial organisation of vision is replaced or supplanted by the unknowably superb risk of experiment"<sup>3</sup> and chance.

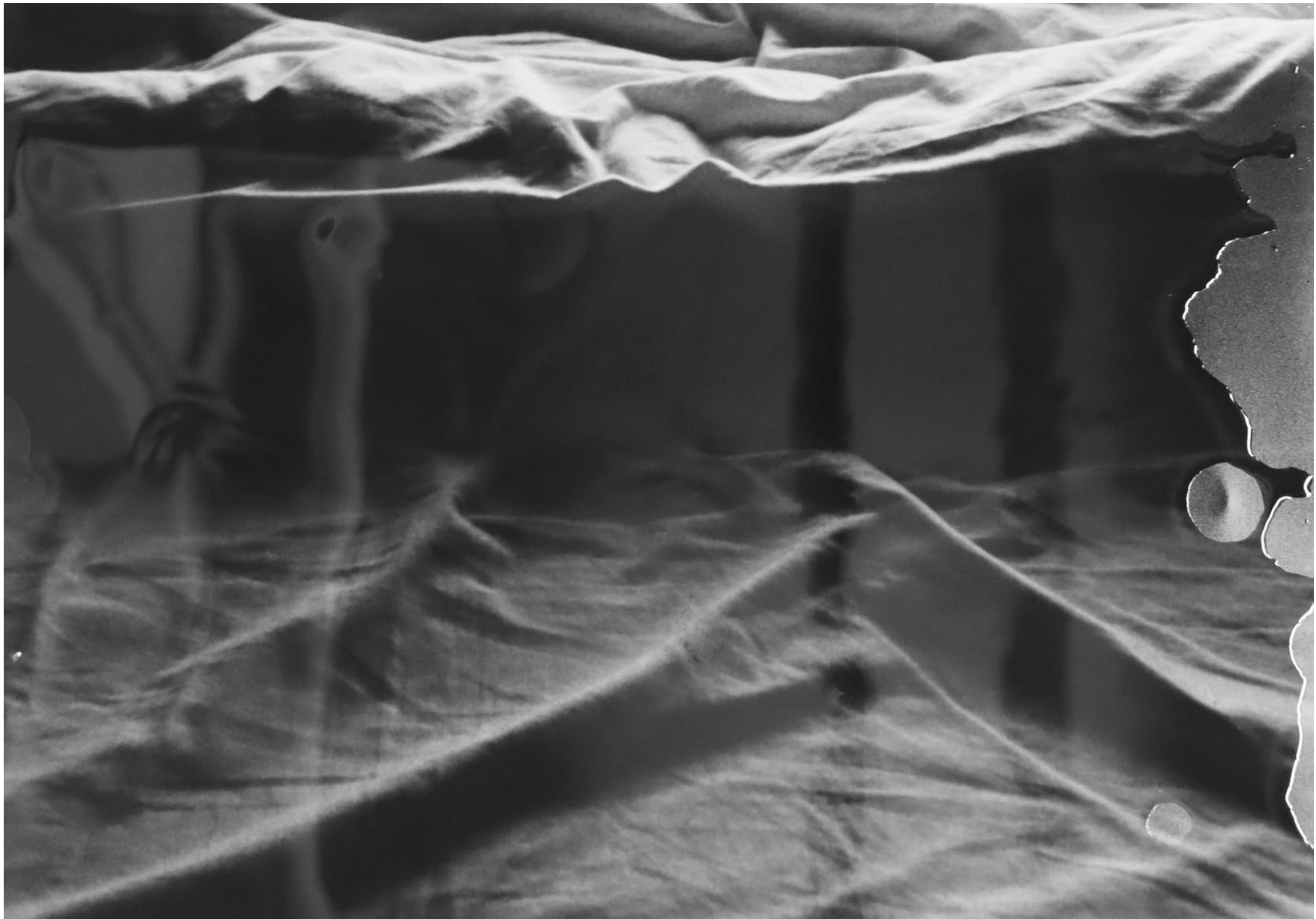
<sup>1</sup> Kirsty Bell, *The Artist's House: From Workplace to Artwork*, London: Sternberg Press, 2013, 260.

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Robertson, *Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, The Codex, Melancholy, Lucretiun, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias*, Toronto: Book\*hug Press, 2012, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



















# Touch

Luka Pešun

This series combines archival family photographs with new images I created, collaborating with actors and dancers to interpret the meaning of touch.

Touch is a fundamental part of human existence. We, as humans, depend on it.

It's often used to express and amplify a sense of connection and closeness. Studies have shown that affectionate contact is essential for brain development from the moment we're born. We need it regularly, and its benefits reach far beyond childhood.

Throughout humankind's history, touch has been one of the main forms of relating to each other. Many social interactions include this contact, but the meaning always depends on the context. The 'how', 'where', 'when', and 'between whom' the contact is transmitted determines whether it is deemed acceptable and proper or not. It falls within the construct of social norms and is also personal.

We can define touch as any form of bodies coming in contact with each other or themselves. Touch can extend to a kiss. We can use it to self-soothe. It is a bridge between us and the rest of the world; with it, we can cross the barrier of apparent separateness.

We use it to express both joy and grief, anger, lust, passion, and love. It can be casual, practical, personal, or ceremonial, but more than anything, it is primordial.















# Cutout Study: A Personal Study (Chapter 2)

**Martin Atanasov**



*Cutout Study* is a long-term visual research project that deals with the queer body within the context of Bulgaria. Separated into two chapters, the first explores the archive as a perspective, and the second investigates a personal study and the experiences of the author. The cutout acts as a metaphor and a desire to create a space for a personal and collective queer narrative. In the cutouts, the body is researched and defined as a territory in which one could code homosexuality, missing narratives, and identity, and it is a visual gesture that helps to reimagine the body. The text within the work is drawn from a collective questionnaire conducted with gay men living in Bulgaria born after the 1990s.

In the piece *The End of the Language*, the artist explores his body through one of the exercises from *Nutricula* (a performance solo language created by Yassen Vasilev and Philip Kwame Boafo), which examines the body through a series of instructions that aim to test and reimagine its limits and functions and to deconstruct (un)conscious habits of movement. In this piece, the viewer is introduced to a full body image. In the video piece *Video Note*, the author plays with the idea of the cutout in a moving image context – a close-up of his body is repetitively present and in a breathing movement, a form of a gesture of calming down and grounding the body.

*Cutout Study* grows through the idea of healing and the desire to reimagine a different personal and collective narrative.







**THERE IS  
SOMETHING IN  
THE SHADOW**







# Patent(a)

## Inmates of Chios Penitentiary\* and Stratis Vogiatzis

\*Marco, Taxiarchis, Christos, Fotiev, Emiliano, Hassan, Naim, Beria, Ambroz, Beny, Angelos, Mehdi, Mohamed, Motaz, Nikolaos, Theocharis, Christos, Giorgos, Giorgi, Sofiane, Fasil, Pouassi, Walid, Jafary

The project *Patent(a)* regards inventions, DIY constructions, or designs the inmates created in order to cope with the harsh reality of confinement, inventing solutions both practical and symbolic using various forms of media (photographs, texts, drawings, sketches, collages, and constructions). The anthropologist and visual artist Stratis Vogiatzis organised co-creative workshops in painting, creative writing, sculpture, and photography from June 2022 until September 2023 in Chios prison, in which he collaborated with twenty-four prisoners from seventeen nationalities upon the concept of *patent(a)* and their meaning-making within the place of confinement.

The project *Patent(a)* suggests a counter-mapping of the prison landscape, illuminating those unseen geographies. Each *patenta* is a cryptogram of the experience of incarceration. As a whole, they convey an embodied condition of mutual fragility, a porous condition of relationality in an environment where the body is inextricably linked to repression, confinement, and demarcation methods. We see the inmates' works as alchemical constructions, as complex social patterns that carry their hopes, longings, anxieties, and fears. While most of the *patentas* concern practices of reappropriation of cheap materials, they constitute daily ceremonies and performative acts of transition and transformation. Each *patenta* as an improvised juxtaposition encloses a marginal spatiality and constitutes a kind of counter-order, undermining the entrenched narratives of a hierarchical public culture and, why not, constituting a new language for conceiving the real. Through these assemblages, anti-capitalist narratives are formed. From prisons and slum ghettos to refugee camps, people are inventing solutions out of nothing, creating *patentas* as a means of asserting their deprived dignity. Inmates' *patentas* encourage us to invent our own patents in response to the challenges of our time.

The project by the Inmates of Chios Penitentiary and Stratis Vogiatzis was supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Public Humanities Initiative (SNFPHI) at Columbia University.











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ΜΠΕΛΑ





## Then and Again. Τότε και Ξανά.

Επαναπροσδιορίζοντας την τελετουργία στα σύγχρονα Βαλκάνια

24.5–6.7.2024

ΜΙΕΤ–Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης  
Παράρτημα Θεσσαλονίκης  
Βίλα Καπαντζή  
Βασιλίσσης Όλγας 108, Θεσσαλονίκη

### Έκθεση

#### Καλλιτέχνες/Καλλιτέχνιδες

Κρατούμενοι Σωφρονιστικού Καταστήματος Χίου  
και Στρατής Βογιατζής  
Μαριέττα Μαυροκορδάτου  
Martin Atanasov  
Ali Cem Doğan (Darağaz Collective)  
Armin Graca  
Teodora Ivkon  
Luka Pešun  
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Gerta Xhaferaj

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#### Οπτική ταυτότητα

YOOOP Studio

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και οι καλλιτέχνες/καλλιτέχνιδες

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οι καλλιτέχνες/καλλιτέχνιδες

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Ronald Düker (γερμανικά)

#### Εκδότης

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Η έκδοση αυτή έγινε με την ευκαιρία της έκθεσης *Then and Again. Τότε και Ξανά. Επαναπροσδιορίζοντας την τελετουργία στα σύγχρονα Βαλκάνια*. Ένα πρότζεκτ του Goethe-Institut, σε συνεργασία με το ΜΙΕΤ–Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης και με την υποστήριξη του ΜΟΜus–Μουσείου Φωτογραφίας Θεσσαλονίκης.

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