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Walking the Path of Immigration: Creating Immersive Narrative
Through Guided Pop-Up Exhibition

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INTRODUCTION

Narratives of migration and settlement are narratives in which, almost by definition, settled and stable senses of self are unsettled and challenged.
(Baynham, M., 2006, p. 376)

2 years ago, I moved to Estonia and the biggest change that influenced my artistic journey was the process of immigration. Going through isolation, cultural shock, confusion, and depression, I learned much about myself. But what's more important – I poured it all into my art. Creating short films, paintings and video art gave me the freedom to express myself in a safe space.

Now, after so much reflection and artistic expression, I started to wonder – how can I share the experience of immigration with other people? How can I create an immersive experience that can provide a safe space for my audience and maybe even have a therapeutic effect? How can the exhibition open up a valid discussion about unspoken struggles that immigrants are going through? These are the question I tried to address in my master's thesis and implement in my practical part.

Unfortunately, last year the problem of immigration become even more relevant due to the war in Ukraine that started on the 24th of February 2022. If I relocated to Estonia by my will, many people are now forced to do so. I can only imagine how frustrating and defeating this may be.

My main challenge as a visual artist – is to create a narrated walking pop-up exhibition that immerses my audience in confusing and complicated feelings about immigration. In the article “Navigating Pop-up Geographies: Urban Space-Times of Flexibility, Interstitiality and Immersion” E. Harris (2015, p.1) mentioned defining traits of such kind of exhibition that became fundamental for my work “Specifically, I identify flexibility, interstitiality and immersion as three of pop-up's key spatiotemporal imaginaries”

As a result, I curated an exhibition “INIMMIGRATION” and collected feedback from the audience to find the answers.

1. WALKING EXHIBITION “INIMMIGRATION”

Exhibition planning started in the winter of 2023, and it formed from the idea of putting together works that I have done during 2 years of being in Estonia. I wanted to rent an off-white room and draw a timeline on the wall starting with my arrival date and ending in 2023.

But gradually I realized that the timeline can be conceptual, and I don't have to put everything in one room only. Later, I developed the idea to use city spaces – places that have a personal meaning to me. So, the thing that really ties the exhibition together is not a room – it's the experience that the audience might go through.

Moreover, the *walking* exhibition is a very interesting concept to me. I choose the walking part for my audience because of the unsettling feeling that greatly represents the experience of migrating to a new country. In this situation exhibits play the role of links to the past, it's not the main product of the idea. I wanted to make this exhibition almost like a physical diary to myself.

As Caleb A. Stockman wrote about the pop-up exhibition in his thesis *There's a Museum for That? Defining New Pop-Up Experiential Exhibition Spaces* (2019, p.49): “While one of these museums works in telling more hard facts, most of these sites aim to sell a main experience; an experience that leaves you with memories more than knowledge.”

I also divided my work into conditional stages since every work that I've done was made in a very different emotional state. Thus, I started conceptually connecting my works, places that I want to use, and stages of immigration. And after lots of drafts, I finally decided on the order.

For me as a visual artist, it is a big challenge to compile media artworks together. And this is the reason why I made an exhibition in the city, where the main product is the experience. A story that brings together the conceptual stages of migration and invites the audience into an immersive experience.

2. DOCUMENTATION OF CONCEPTUAL STAGES

The exhibition is conceptually divided into 4 stages: Derealisation, Depression, Defeat, and Self-Exploration. Each stage was reflected through one of my works, which was shown in 4 different public spaces around the city (see table 1). Here we can see that the initial timeline transformed into a defined order of exhibits and since I am guiding my audience with me – they experienced every artwork sequentially.

Table 1. *Exhibition content*

Work	Conceptual stage	Place
Music video “Is it even real?”	Derealisation	Viljandi Castle
Short film “Chuzhaya”	Depression	Raamatubaar Romaan
Painting “I Want to Die”	Defeat	Oak tree with a swing
Video-performance “Fit in G(ender)”	Self-exploration	White box

The first stage “Derealisation” is represented in the music video “Is it even real?” that was made in collaboration with artist and musician Rafael Mustafa in October 2021. The installation took place in one of the spaces of the Old Castle area with the help of a projector, portable screen, and speakers.

The second stage “Depression” is expressed in the short film “Chuzhaya” which was made in February 2022. The screening was happening in Raamatubaar Romaan with the use of their equipment and bar screen.

For the third stage “Defeat” I chose the painting “I Want to Die” which was made in September 2022, right after mobilization in Russia. The painting was exhibited on the oak tree on the corner of Pikk Street.

The last stage “Self -exploration” took place in White Box. It was a video installation on old TV screens of my video essay “Fitt in G(ender)” previously shown in Tallinna Kunstihoone.

Regarding the landscape design of the exhibit locations, my aim was to maintain their originality and authenticity. Moreover, I curated the exhibition in a way that each location was in proximity and also emphasized the context of my works. To ensure that the audience could navigate the exhibition in the right time and order, I chose to guide them personally. This choice also gave me the opportunity to make a verbal introduction to each exhibit, where I could dive deeper into details about the location, artwork, and process of its creation.

In order to maintain the group's cohesion, I gathered my audience together before proceeding to the next location. The exhibition started at Viljandi Pärimusmuusika Ait, where I met with the audience and welcomed them to the first installation.

2.1 Stage “Derealisation”

“Where am I? Who is this Other I cannot define yet recognize as myself? Will I ever get to see its face?”
(Barabas, D., 2000 p.1).

The first conceptual stage, that opens the exhibition is “Derealisation”. This stage is dedicated to the first unsettling feeling of immigration - being lost and not accepting a new reality. This psychological phenomenon is widely described in the medical context of mental illnesses, but it is rarely mentioned in the discourse of the immigration process. However, from the experience of my friends and me – it is incredibly common.

From the statistical data, mentioned in the article “The epidemiology of depersonalization and derealization” (Sierra, M., David, A. S., & Hunter, E. C. M., 2004, p.1). up to 74% of the population face the symptoms of derealization due to traumatic event. Those are very close to the symptoms of depersonalization: “Depersonalisation is an experience in which the individual feels a sense of unreality and detachment from themselves. Symptoms often include a dream-like state, loss of empathy, and a sense of disconnection with bodily parts to the extent that sufferers feel as though they are observing the world from behind glass. Depersonalization is often accompanied by the symptom of derealisation in which the external environment also appears unfamiliar..”

The work that was representing “Derealisation” is a short music video called “Is it even real?” directed and shot by me. In October 2020 I collaborated with songwriter and musician *Rafael Mustafae*, who is also a student at Viljandi Cultural Academy in the Sound and Visual Technology master’s program. He wrote a piano piece, expressing his own experience of grief and derealisation.

“Is it even real?” was shot handheld on a DSLR camera Nikon 5300 with kit lens AF-P DX NIKKOR 18-55mm. Editing was done in DaVinci Resolve and the final clip is 49 seconds long.



FIGURE 1.1. SHOT FROM THE VIDEO “IS IT EVEN REAL?”

The shooting originally happened in the Old Castle area because it perfectly aligned with the feeling of emptiness and confusion that I wanted to portray (see figure 1.1). This was one of the main reasons why I wanted to exhibit this work in one of the Old Castle’s spaces. It gives the context to the whole story but also immerses the audience in the exact same place where the shooting happened.

I contacted Viljandi Pärimusmuusika Ait and Sakala Keskus to ask permission to use the public space. Since it was a video screening installation, I also needed an electricity supply (see figure 1.2). Sakala Keskus’s team helped me with it and lent me a white portable screen. Video distribution was done with the help of a Macbook Pro 2018 and NEC P554U projector. A portable waterproof Bluetooth speaker JBL Charge 5 served as an audio output.



FIGURE 1.2 EXHIBITION INIMMIGRATION

2.2. Stage “Depression”

Every crossing by an individual of physical and language borders to survive or start afresh as a migrant and every application for citizenship or test of language proficiency are acts of self-’translation and transformation.(Evans R., 2012, p1.)

In the story of my immigration, the next breaking point happened in December 2021, when I started to experience depressive episodes. At that point in time, I was completely unmotivated and lost, everything seemed gloomy, and even my memories of those times were obscure. The representation of my emotional turmoil during the second semester in Estonia is expressed in my conceptual stage named “Depression”.

The artistic product of such an emotional state became my first short film “CHUZHAYA” and it became a crucial part of the exhibition (see figure 2.1). The film narrates the story of a vibrant and extravagant character who struggles to adjust to a new place. The name of the film "Chuzhaya," meaning foreign or alien from Russian, captures the essence of the film and the conceptual stage it represents.



FIGURE 2.1 SHOT FROM THE FILM “CHUZHAYA”

The film was directed and shot in February 2022. *Astrie Sofie Heen*, who was an exchange student from Norway at Viljandi Culture Academy performed as an actress in film. All scenes were shot handheld on Panasonic Lumix DH-GH5 and the sound was recorded on Rode VideoMic Pro+.

Visual elements of the film I curated very precisely to emphasize the contrast between the character and her surroundings. Firstly, I paid great attention to styling, so the character was shaped with the help of eclectic colorful clothing. This technique added dissonance between the actress and the background of the winter landscapes of Viljandi. Ugala Theatre and Viljandi Culture Academy lent me some parts of the costume.

What added an extra layer of complexity to the storytelling is the use of a not translated or subtitled foreign language in the film. *Astri* performed in her native Norwegian language, which was intentionally left untranslatable to the audience. This whole idea displayed the experience of the foreigner living in a place, where no one understands their language. The film ends abruptly, without a happy ending, which was a conscious artistic choice.



FIGURE 2.2 EXHIBITION INIMMIGRATION

The first screening of "CHUZHAYA" was held at a popular youth hangout spot in Viljandi - Raamatubaar Romaan (see figure 2.2). The intention behind it was to show a very personal work about excruciating pain in a public space that is associated with parties and loud crowds. As it was cleverly noticed in Stockman's work (2019, p.40) : "All sites

referenced the ability and intentionality of their spaces to expand visitors' views on the themes they cover and the experiences one can have with those topics." Moreover, Romaan, where I spent a lot of my time, played a significant role in my immigration story.

In addition to the creative decisions, there were also important technical choices. For video output, we relied on a MacBook Pro 2015, while for sound output, we used an audio system in Romaan. We also used an in-bar projector and screen. This setup allowed us to show the film with minimal technical setup and in a high-quality manner, which created an immersive and engaging experience for viewers.

2.3. Stage “Defeat”

Political events in the autumn of 2022 triggered new challenges and the stage of Defeat followed the Depression stage. The most articulate work that I created during that period is the acrylic painting “I Want to Die”, measuring 49,5*34,5 cm (see figure 3.1.).

The painting “I Want to Die” was made right after the mobilization in Russia on 21 September 2022. For the most part, emotionally this work expressed feelings of despair and shock. This point of my immigration process was the most challenging because I knew that there was no return to my former life. The state of not belonging to my country anymore but also not belonging to a new one yet was the hardest for me. Since I couldn’t stop thinking and analysing the situation at one point this heaviness of the unknown led me to first-time suicidal desires.

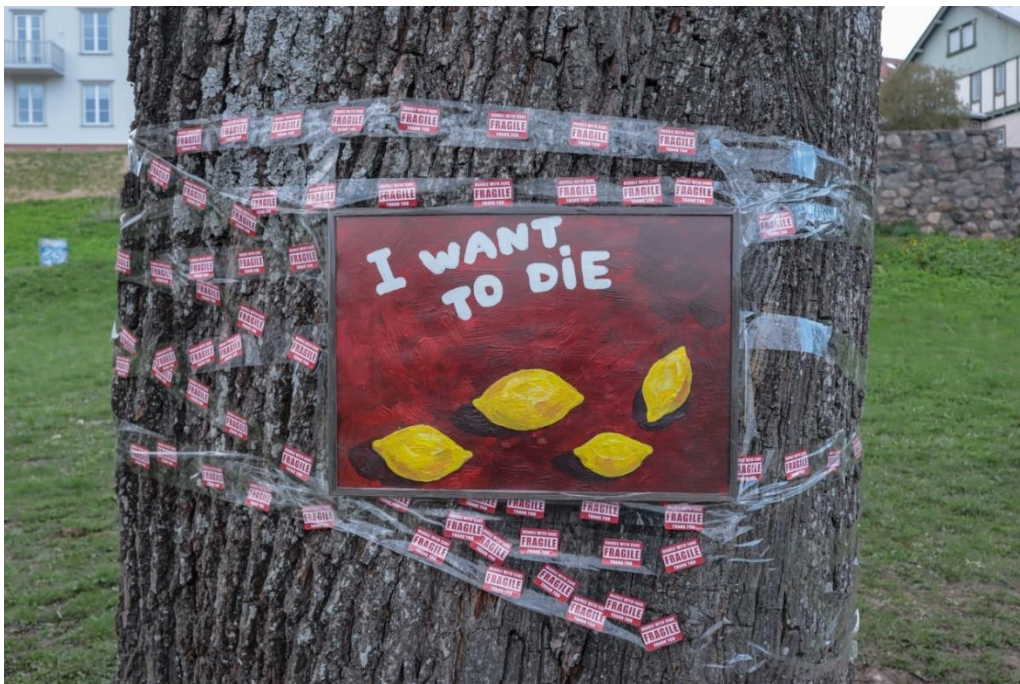


FIGURE 3.1 PAINTING “I WANT TO DIE”

The installation of the exhibit was made in a rich landscape, where a steep hill overlooks Viljandi Lake. The painting was installed on the oak tree with a swing, that is located on the corner of Pikk street. The artistic aim of this choice can be explained through a desire to contradict heavy and dramatic pieces with a timeless view (see figure 3.2). I wanted to highlight the irrelevance of the former.



FIGURE 3.2. EXHIBITION INIMMIGRATION

Since pop-up exhibitions have been of grant interest to contemporary artists, I paid close attention to Caleb Stockman's (2019, p.30) statement: "The findings in this study suggest that the visitor experience at new, pop-up, experiential exhibition spaces emphasize three key things, including engagement, active exploration, and immersion. The spaces that comprise these exhibits are crafted to maximize immersion, visual impact, and emotional effect. All of these exhibits empower their visitors to explore every inch of their space and promote a freeform path to allow the exhibit to be self-guided and visitor-centered."

To fasten the painting, I used adhesive tape so that the tree would not be damaged. On the tape, we added printed patterns of stickers, which are usually used for fragile parcels (see figure 3.3). It says, "Handle with care FRAGILE thank you".



FIGURE 3.3. TAPE PATTERN

2.4. Stage “Self-exploration”

Self-encapsulation-the body or psyche as its own surround is everywhere to be found in the corpus of video art.(Kraus R., 1976 p.53)

On November 19, 2022, my video art “Fitt in G(ender)” was exhibited in Art Hall in Tallinn, Lasnamäe, as part of the project showcase “I’m Home”. Suddenly, I was recognized as a visual artist by another Estonian art institution, besides my university. That triggered the self-development process and I focused more on my future and art. In other words, I found myself in a new place and it formed the last conceptual stage of my exhibition named “Self-Exploration”.

Previously, I participated in a workshop “Mina. Kodus” under the supervision of an Estonian visual artist Maria Kapajeva. During the workshop participants were reflecting on the topics of gender identity and working on video art pieces, expressing their concerns. As a result, young audio-visual artists created 4 video works. I personally collaborated with another Estonian interdisciplinary artist Nadya Tjuska, who works mainly in Tallinn. All the shots were made on a wide-angle camcorder Canon LEGRIA HF G25 and edited in DaVinci Resolve.



FIGURE 4.1. SHOT FROM VIDEO ESSAY “FITT IN G(ENDER)”

The film “Fitt in G(ender)” (see figure 4.1) reveals the process of gender search through the relations between humans and space. The movement of a living body in a rough

geometric environment metaphorically expresses attempts to fit in, feel comfortable and find a place. All shots were made in the late-Soviet district of Tallinn - Lasnamäe. Its urbanism made a big visual contribution to the film, inspiring with its harshness, aloofness, and sense of vacuum. As Rosalind Krauss mentions in her article “The Aesthetics of Narcissism” (1976, p. 52) a valid point about video art is “Because most of the work produced over the very short span of video art's existence has used the human body as its central instrument. In the case of work on tape, this has most often been the body of the artist-practitioner”

For the “Self-Exploration” stage, I have chosen the most neutral space that would provide valid technical support and space for the audience (see figure 4.2). The installation included 4 CRT television sets, 2 MacBook Pro 2020, and a computer for the video output Lenovo IdeaPad.



FIGURE 4.2. EXHIBITION “INIMMIGRATION”

My computer was connected to Panasonic TC-14S10A, which produced sound and video, with the help of HDMI to composite video converter. Silelis 32TC-401D produced visual noises and glitches. Samsung CK – 3339ZR and Sharp 54DM-12SC were not in working condition but were used as part of the installation regardless. 2 MacBook Pros also produced the film without a sound output. For the overall image, it created this delayed video effect.

3. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Promotion

For marketing purposes, I used two main social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram. Having previous working experience as Social Media Manager I used several marketing strategies to reach the potential audience and raise interest in the exhibition.

Firstly, I started by creating a Facebook event, which provided the necessary information and engaged the audience. With the help of the event, I managed to communicate key information about the exhibition, including locations, time, and concept. The image that I designed specifically for the exhibition was featured as a Facebook event cover, as well as a booklet with the schedule (see figure 5.2). By the open report of the Facebook event, we can see 47 people were marked as interested in the event and that 11 chose the going option.

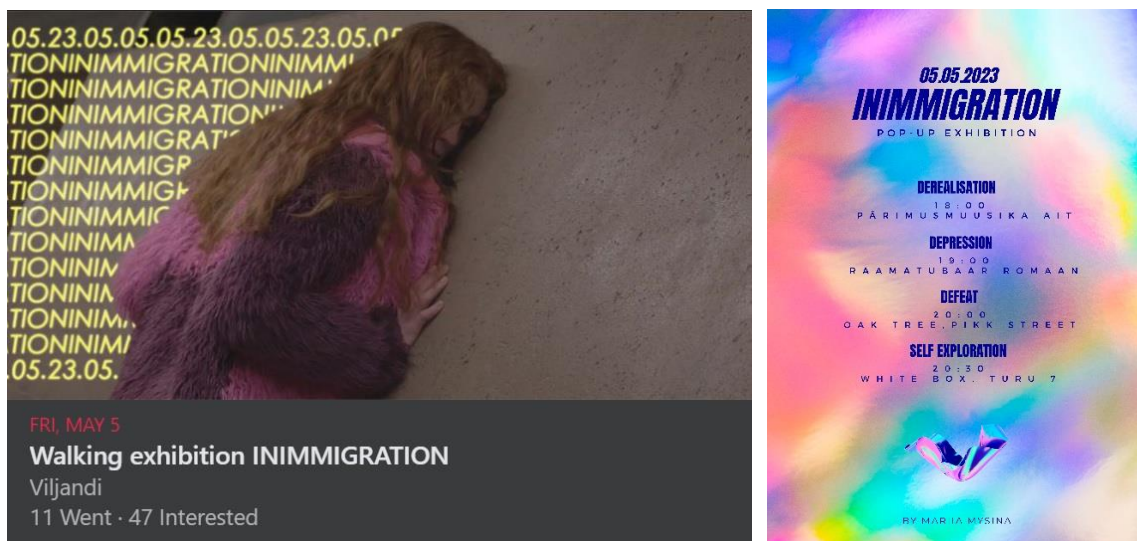


FIGURE 5.2. PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

In addition to this, I also used Instagram stories to promote the exhibition. thus, I managed to share more visual content, including behind-the-scenes photos and images of my artwork. Therefore, I was able to reach a wider audience and connect with people who may not use Facebook. The number of people who showed up on the day of the event varied from stage to stage, however, there were at least 15 people present. I can rate this level of engagement as quite high, which proved that my promotional skills helped reach a broad audience.

3.2 Team

Nadya Tjuska - co-curator and assistant to the exhibition "INIMMIGRATION". Nadya is an interdisciplinary artist who works with audio-visual mediums in the discipline of performance and installations. Their main focus is to confront patriarchal practices in our everyday forms through queer, feminist, and ecological discourse. Nadya works in Tallinn Art Hall to integrate contemporary art public programs into Lasnamäe district.

Gen-Horret Rand – photographer of the event with previous experience in producing big photoshoots. For example, for the audition to Baltic-Film Media School he created a series of 8 photos, inspired by "The Seventh Seal" film by Ingmar Bergman.

Taras Shkoliarenko – is the sound and technical manager of the first stage of the exhibition. His role is to arrange and install sound equipment in the Old Castle area. Taras is studying Sound and Visual technologies and taking a major in Sound in Viljandi Culture Academy.

Sinan Kaya – is the assistant and sound technical manager for installation in the bar Romaan. He is also a student in Viljandi Culture Academy, taking a major in Sound on Sound and Visual Technologies master program.

3.3 Venue

Ruins of the Viljandi Order Castle– a public city space on Tasuja puiestee 6 in Sakala Keskus management. Used for the first stage installation "Derealisation".

Raamatubaar Romaan – a public venue for the second stage installation "Depression" at Carl Robert Jakobsoni 18.

Oak Tree and the Swing – a city spot used for the installation of my painting "I Want to Die". This place represents the third stage of the exhibition "Defeat" at the corner of Pikk Street.

White Box in Viljandi Culture Academy – Viljandi Culture Academy off-white space located on Turu 7. Used for the video installation of 4th stage "Self-reflection".

4. AUDIENCE SURVEY

4.1 List of participants

Toma Ovchinnikova – in 2021 immigrated to Estonia from Russia.

Igor Shurygin – in 2015 immigrated to Israel from Ukraine.

Sinan Kaya – in 2022 immigrated to Estonia from Turkey.

Amina Alieva -in 2019 immigrated to Estonia from Azerbaijan.

Nadya Tjuska – in 2010 immigrated to Great Britain from Estonia.

Oleksii Popovych – in 2021 immigrated to Estonia from Ukraine.

Jason Greenberg – in 2021 immigrated to Estonia from the United States.

Gen Horrاند – didn't experience immigration.

Arty Tamme – didn't experience immigration.

4.2 Feedback

1. Does your experience of immigration correlate with artistic expression in the exhibition INNIMIGRATION?

Toma: Yes, I could relate to every stage of the exhibition in different degrees. The relatability of the first three stages was the strongest, whereas the experience of Self-exploration was very different for me.

Igor: I felt connected to some of the stages of the exhibition, but each person's experience is unique.

Sinan: Yes

Amina: Yes, my experience of immigration correlates in some way with the artistic expression in INNIMIGRATION exhibition.

Nadya: Yes

Oleksii: It does, to an extent

Jason: Immigration is a heavy topic that was brought to life in the INNIMIGRATION exhibit through art. It really hit home for me and made me realize the power of artistic expression to convey complex emotions.

2. What conceptual stage was the most relevant and close to your experience? (Derealisation, Depression, Defeat, Self-Exploration)?

Toma: Because of the ongoing war in Ukraine driven by my home country, the stage “Defeat” was the closest and the most relevant. The feeling expressed by the painting touched me deeply since I went through a similar experience and could highly relate to it.

Igor: Most of all I felt the connection with the second stage of the exhibition “Depression”. I really liked the film, very emotionally rich and involving, I also liked the place where the screening took place.

Sinan: I didn’t see all of them but within the ones, I’d say “Defeat” with a painting “I Want to Die”

Gen: The most relevant conceptual stage for me was depression. Because I've been suffering from depression long time and I saw myself in this stage.

Amina: I found the “Depression” stage to be the most relatable to my experience.

Nadya: For me, the most actual was depression and self-exploration. In general, all works were very well-paced to match the internal emotional struggles in the process of immigration

Olekseii: Defeat

Jason: The self-exploration stage of the exhibit really spoke to me. It was like looking at a past mirror and seeing my ancestor’s struggles and triumphs as immigrants.

3. What interactive methods of the exhibition were the most immersive for you and why?

Toma: The guidance and walking aspects of the exhibition. It was really nice to have an introduction by the author and an opportunity to discuss some things on the spot. As to the walking aspect, it created an atmosphere of a journey. That reminded me of movies with an open ending, where you go through the story, which leads you to the final, which is up for you to discover and interpret.

Igor: I really liked the idea of exhibiting in public places, such as painting on a tree and watching a movie in the ruins.

Sinan: Walking and different venues

Gen: The most interactive method for me was seeing artwork in public because even if people didn't walk with you to the next artwork, then random people can see too that there's some artwork and they can look at these.

Arty: The short film in Romaan was the most impactful because it was in a darker setting which helped to bring out the mood of this film. The personal comments following each stage felt the most emotionally touching.

Amina: I think all of them were extremely interesting but the most immersive ones, I would say, were:

1. Walking to different spots as visitors of this exhibition were given the opportunity to experience many pieces of art or feel them in their own way by moving through various regions of an exhibition.

2. Seeing artworks in public environments as it created a special experience or a special feeling, by letting visitors engage with the art in unexpected ways.

Nadya: I enjoyed the speeches and walking together. It was very interactive and enough time at each spot to not wait too long or start too soon. The pace for interaction was very good. Seeing different environments was very refreshing and was interesting to see how each environment affects the artwork differently.

Oleksii: I think the presence of artist was perhaps the most important, and also collective participation (for example, discussing how we related to your work in-between stages). To me, the importance of space was most visible in the Defeat stage.

Jason: The interactive methods of the exhibit were a total trip, man. Walking to different spots and seeing the artworks in different environments really made me feel like I was part of the experience.

4. Have this event opened up a new discussion or reflection for you about immigration? (If yes - what in particular?)

Toma: Not really, since the topic has accompanied me for quite a while now. But the event has definitely provided some new perspectives on the topic of immigration. For example, the fact that event was relevant to only to immigrants but also to people who have never lived in another country but experienced local immigration. That brings up the thoughts about whether the feelings of derealisation, depression, defeat and self-exploration are universal in any kind of changes in our lives.

Igor: This exhibition helped me feel empathy for people going through the immigration process.

Sinan: It gave me the comfort of feeling empathy for and from different people who experience the same.

Gen: No.

Arty: It made me more empathetic towards immigrants. This topic has been quite distant for me until now.

Amina: It motivated me to consider my own attitudes, prejudices, and perspectives on immigration and to work toward a greater understanding of this important social issue.

Nadya: Yes, I and my friend exchanged similar experiences in immigration.

Oleksii: We were talking about our experiences of connections with friends in our home countries that kind of fizzle out over time, and how difficult it is to sustain them at a distance.

Jason: The exhibit definitely opened up new discussions for me about immigration. It brought to light the challenges of immigration.

5. Did you feel safe to express your own emotions and thoughts?

Toma: Yes, I did.

Igor: Yes, I felt safe.

Sinan: Yes.

Gen: Yes, I did feel safe when I wanted to express my own emotions and thoughts. People were really nice, and I saw that they can relate to the artworks.

Arty: Yes, the whole process felt like hanging out with friends.

Amina: Yes, I felt completely comfortable and safe about expressing myself, my emotions, my thoughts, and my feelings.

Nadya: Yes

Oleksii: Yes

Jason: The atmosphere at the exhibit was really open and welcoming. I felt totally safe to express my own emotions and thoughts.

6. What was the most valuable experience for you in this event?

Toma: The experience of the depression stage. Notwithstanding the gravity of emotions expressed by the film and the stage itself, I didn't feel frustrated or lost. I felt like I wasn't alone and there were people who could understand and support me.

Igor: The most valuable thing for me was to learn the experiences and emotions of a person going through different stages of his life.

Sinan: To see other people's experiences.

Gen: The most valuable experience was to see one of my really good friend's artworks in a real exhibition and lots of people saw these too and it felt really great. I was happy for her.

Arty: Just being there to listen and help.

Amina: Learning to feel the artworks of artists while comparing their experiences with my own and trying to understand their feelings during the preparation process of their art pieces. Basically, learning to understand what they feel and what they are trying to express in their artworks.

Nadya: Experiencing artists intended artwork, in the way that she curated and introduced it Made it very intimate and engaging. I also really like the format.

Oleksii: I think watching the movie on the second stage.

Jason: The most valuable experience for me was seeing how the different artists expressed themselves through their work.

7. How would you rate exhibition INIMMIGRATION from 1 to 10, where 1 is a poor experience and 10 - is fulfilled and completed

Toma: I would rate it 9. It was an amazing experience, but I felt like the timing probably could have been slightly different. Maybe a little less time for the first and third stages and a little bit more for the second.

Igor: 10

Sinan: 8/10 (because there is always room to improve)

Gen: I would rate this exhibition 10.

Arty: The concept of pop-up exhibitions in different locations around Viljandi was interesting and the exhibition made me think about how immigrants might feel in a foreign environment. However, I felt that there could have been a more detailed explanation of each stage. The short films felt ambiguous to me because the interpretation was left to the audience.

Amina: I would give it a solid 9.

Nadya: 10

Oleksii: 9

Jason: I'd give the exhibit a steady 9. There's always room to grow, but it was a great show!

8. Would you participate again in an immersive guided pop-up exhibition again?

Toma: Yes, definitely.

Igor: I love this experimental idea of walking to different stages and interacting with the artist, it feels like a unique experience.

Sinan: Yes.

Gen: Yes, I would love to participate again in this kind of guided pop-up exhibition.

Arty: Maybe

Amina: Yes, definitely!

Nadya: Yes

Oleksii: Yes

Jason: Yes, I am very open to the idea after experiencing this here for the first time.

4.3. Results

Based on the results received from the audience survey, it is evident that the structure of the exhibition was relevant for both groups of participants. First is the one that went through the immigration process themselves and second included those who did not, but in the process, they felt empathy and for safe space for the expression of personal experiences.

According to the responses to the first question all participants who went through immigration themselves admitted the correlation between their immigration experience and their artistic expression of it in the exhibition “INIMMIGRATION”.

The second question indicated that respondents related the most to the “Depression” and “Defeat” stages. In the third question, they also defined the main methods that helped to immerse into the experience. Among them walking from one destination to another, the presence and speech of the artist, seeing artworks in public spaces, and collective participation of the group.

Almost half of the respondents acknowledged that the event helped them to feel more empathy, especially on the topic of immigration. Additionally, all respondents expressed feeling safe to express their emotions and thoughts. From the answers to the sixth question, the majority of respondents mentioned that the most valuable experience in this event was observing and noticing other people’s experiences.

The average rating for the exhibition on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented a poor experience and 10 represented a fulfilled and completed experience, was 9.5. Based on the last question, most participants expressed interest in taking part in a similar event in the future.

CONCLUSION

The process of curating and executing the immersive exhibition INIMMIGRATION helped me to find answers to the research questions I had posed at the beginning of the project. All the methods, like exhibiting in public spaces, walking from one installation to another, and personal guidance from the artist, were implemented which led to the desired immersive effect.

However, as a young foreign visual artist, I faced a multitude of challenges in this way. Through the process of curating the guided pop-up exhibition, I developed skills in communication, team building, and project management as well as my technical skills. Besides that, I also gained experience in public speaking and stage performance.

Even despite the emotional intensity and honesty of the exhibition INIMMIGRATION, my audience still sensed vulnerability and safety. And what is more important, the audience itself played an active role in this process. This suggests that such events may also have a therapeutic effect on participants.

Open and vulnerable guidance encouraged the audience to open to the same feelings. Even individuals who were not directly affected by the topic of immigration began to feel empathy. Thus, the exhibition INIMMIGRATION opened discussions on various topics surrounding immigration.

In an era of immense political change and globalization, I believe that visual artists can make a significant impact on society. The concept of guided pop-up exhibitions can be an effective tool for creating safe spaces and initiating open and uncomfortable dialogues, yet crucial, topics such as immigration. The experience of the final event demonstrated that the immigrant experience can be shared through art exhibitions.

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