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Alexandra Bondarev  
homing around

*Dwelling is not primarily inhabiting but taking care of and creating that space within which something comes into its own and flourishes. - Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking'*

*It's no good without a home. - Anyone who had a TV in the 90s and watched the series 'Home and Away' dubbed in Lithuanian*

**homelessness**

*there is a little gap in this  
wind it seeps  
through the little sips I take each  
day of this glorious yes please oh  
yes, again  
I home around a city I don't know  
there is a music in my strolling, it tells  
of knowing and all the times  
I've stepped onto a new page of  
land it gapes at me with all its  
timelessness  
I like to choose not to  
be chosen  
path is home and nest and I  
am my own  
executive  
god*

Throughout many years of travelling across cityscapes and landscapes, translating words and traversing worlds, I slowly began to *home around*. Understanding ‘home’ in a broader sense – as a space (not necessarily four-walled) to which we can return and be reminded that we are still ourselves, no matter how chaotic or uncertain the times may be – I started to relate the concept of ‘feeling at home’ to the very practice of being oneself. This conclusion hitchhiked to me slowly, through my own experience as a nomad: I came to see that this practice is enabled by certain repetitive habits, often deemed rituals in contemporary popular discourse, by mental and spiritual states and, most importantly, by people. However, physical spaces, as the path has taught me, can also play a significant role.

After landing in Georgia for the pandemic, I realised I was feeling more at home than in my previous *longer-exposure* roosts. Later, a similar feeling came during my wandering in Morocco: both places surprisingly reminded me of my childhood in Vilnius around the turn of the century. This feeling of belonging and ‘being at home’ was mostly due to the people’s relationship with their environment and each other: spontaneous, immediate, uncurated, and completely free of self-consciousness. They followed the natural rhythm of their bodies as if the streets were an extension of their home, their shared spacious, cosy balcony. Yet, this is not the case everywhere.

Over this decade of travelling, I’ve been observing how the Western economic boom has been accompanied by the glorification of hyper-productivity and subsequent alienation. In the face of globalisation, people and cities are assimilating, losing their unique identities. Fortunately, there are still places where public spaces are not used solely as capitalist transit zones from A to B, but also as safe places to be oneself – to play, build relationships, express *authentic* emotions; to feel at home.

The Ancient Greek word αὐθεντικός (*authentikós*) is made up of the prefix *auto-* (‘self, oneself’) and *héntēs* (‘doer, being’): the very structure of the word implies that authenticity is the practice of the self; the kind of self that is most easily enabled at home. Over time, I’ve come to realise that this practice awakens the mirror neurons, stimulating reciprocity: the presence of naked authenticity becomes a fertile ground for the flourishing of one’s own authentic self.

*Homing around* in search of my own authenticity, as well as that of my fellow wanderweavers, coincided accidentally with an analogue camera appearing on my neck. As the concept of home became the focus of my artistic investigation, leading me to a more deliberate selection of the places I visit and naturally spending more time in Lithuania, I began capturing these authentic, homelike moments and people. The act of photography itself, fully inhabiting the life witnessed through the lens as well as writing it down not only with ‘light’ (Greek *phōtós* + *graphê*) but also with words, became one of the aforementioned home-creating rituals. The works in this exhibition are thus the result of this practice of

*homing around*. Hung across the gallery like everyday clothes plucked from a backpacker's rucksack, these photographs focus on the Human – naked, real and therefore homey, paradoxically both uniquely individual, and embodying universal values, timeless truths. There is no distinction between children, the elderly, mountaineers, and street vendors encountered on the road and the closest of friends or family. Blurring the boundary between the global and the local, individual selfhood and belonging to a community no longer negate each other but function as two sides of the same one-way ticket. This ticket, meanwhile, leads Home – to oneself in relation to the Other.

The images, based on the principles of humanistic anthropology and spontaneous documentary, are accompanied by texts: poetic fragments born out of experiences on the road-home, and stories that contextualise the shots. Analogically, a potpourri of smartphone videos is projected on one of the walls, providing atmospheric context for the featured photographs. The somewhat unusual combination of analogue pictures and seemingly disposable iPhone videos also plays a conceptual role: the combination of traditional and new-age media *highlights* the earlier mentioned timelessness, and the different aesthetics they create are not competing but complementary to each other, emphasising not only the subjectivity of our gaze, but also the fact that *contrast* and coherence can work hand in hand. Physically transforming the gallery space into a homelike environment, the yawning fireplace in the second hall becomes a kind of site-specific photo installation: the 'hearth' of this home consists of portraits of Lithuania-based friends and members of the local art community, printed in a photo album-style format. Similarly, the wall cabinet nearby holds unwritten postcards for viewers to take home.

Finally, and not coincidentally, the display is complemented by situational self-portraits: roaming among countless faces and stories, I keep coming back inside – home – to myself. The mirrors scattered throughout the space, often used in the shots to acknowledge my own agency, reiterate the humanistic equality found in such a home: here, we can look at ourselves and at the Other simultaneously. Come, look at yourselves, and *home around* a little too: without your faces and our collectively built home, whether we know each other or not, this exhibition would not exist. So make yourselves at home.

*Alexandra Bondarev is a young generation artist working in the fields of analogue photography, documentary video, textual storytelling, and poetry. After living in multiple countries and travelling around different continents for the past decade, she has been spending more time in her native Vilnius since 2023. Alexandra's practice is based on the principles of humanism and anthropological documentary, centring on the human being and unifying, unexotified, universal cultural signs. Well-known in the Lithuanian art scene as a translator and editor of cultural texts, Alexandra has been sharing her personal work more widely since 2022. In 2023, her works were first presented at the Tbilisi gallery Fotografia in a three-photographer show titled Based in Tbilisi; at the contemporary art fair-exhibition Komisas at Tech Zity in Vilnius; and the Vilnius Photography Weekend. In 2022, her poetic work was published in the Sarajevo cultural magazine Punkura and later presented at the Rupert Centre for Art and Education and the MO Museum in Vilnius as part of the interdisciplinary project Love Chrestomathy. Homing Around is the artist's first solo exhibition.*

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