

## FOREWORD

The Museum of Contemporary Art of Estonia (EKKM) is very pleased that Mark Raidpere accepted our invitation to organize a solo exhibition. Despite the fact that Raidpere is one of the most internationally known Estonian artists, his last solo exhibitions in Tallinn date back to 2005 (Tallinna Linnagalerii) and 2006 (Kumu Art Museum), the last one in Estonia was at the Pärnu Kunstihall in 2008.

The year 2005 was definitely a breakthrough year for the artist: Raidpere was chosen to represent Estonia at the Venice Biennale; he started working with the Gallery Michel Rein, and in the same year, he won the Hansabank Annual Art Award, which was the largest and most important in the region at that time. The period between 2006 and 2013 was marked by solo exhibitions in Naples, Paris, Istanbul, Glasgow, Hamburg and Krakow, not to mention participation in countless group shows throughout Europe and in the United States. He also won the Loop'08 Award, Gilles Dusein Prize and the Ars Fennica Award, all in one year, in 2008, almost in passing. The more successful the artist has been internationally, the fewer opportunities the Estonian public has had to see his newer work, if we discount a few group shows here and there. One of the aims of this exhibition is to try and compensate for this omission.

The exhibition titled *Damage* focuses on Raidpere's work in the post-Venice period by assembling mostly the works created between 2007 and 2013. One new video installation *Pae St. Playlist* will also be completed for this exhibition. The emphasis is on the latter years, and especially on the photographic series and videos that were conceived in Naples during his residency at the Fondazione Morra Greco in 2012. In 2002 Raidpere made a photo series depicting Tallinn for the alternative Tallinn Guide, then kind of exceptional work in his overall oeuvre. This survey tries to capture the core of his current work, which is located conceptually between photo series that depict two cities – Tallinn and Naples.

It is probably not an exaggeration to speak about a breakthrough in Raidpere's work

after the Venice Biennale, when, the obsessive mapping of the "family trap" and identity problems, which were his central focus, were joined by considerably more social topics. (*Vekovka*, 2008) Mostly he approaches the subject using portraits of various people, the so-called outcasts and social undesirables from the outskirts of the social community: street musicians (*Majestoso Mystico*, 2007), beggars (*1:1:1*, 2008), male strippers (*Andrey/Andris*, 2006). The artist alludes in extremely poetic language to the shortcomings of the social regime, the symptoms of which the subjects of his works actually are. It is not the people who are defective – the empathy of the artist lies outside the doubt –, but the society that surrounds them.

At the same time, personal motives have not disappeared from his work. In many works displayed he continues the discursive "dissection" of his life and family dramas. (*09/12/07 – 05/04/09*, 2009; *Pae St. Playlist*, 2013) The series of self-portraits titled *Damage*, which was completed in Naples and which has given its name to this exhibition, could in some sense be a counterpart to his legendary *Io*, which was a series of post-traumatic self-portraits completed in 1997. The title of the *Damage* series refers to a film or rather to the epilogue of the film with the same name by Louis Malle. There, the main character played by Jeremy Irons tries in melancholic loneliness to cope with his life after a micro-catastrophe of his own creation has resulted in the loss of his son, wife and lover.

Just like the *Isolator* exhibition, which was curated by Hanno Soans for the Estonian Pavilion in Venice in 2005, comprised the essence of Raidpere's work over a longer period of time by including the works from 1997 to 2005, so too this survey tries to capture the core of his current work. Raidpere has never been an immensely productive artist, who completes and exhibits much – there have even been years when he hasn't completed a single work. Most of his works are born when "it can no longer be avoided." But almost always his works have been very noteworthy. His productivity, which is orientated toward quality rather than quantity, may also be a reason why a larger exhibition

project has yet to be undertaken. Now the time has come.

As on several occasions during the last few years, one of Raidpere's co-travelers in this exhibition is Eugenio Viola, curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Donnaregina in Naples. Viola has written a comprehensive essay for this catalogue, where the focus of his analysis of Raidpere's "aesthetics of frailty" is based on the works done in Naples. The author of a second essay is Judith Quentel, a French curator and critic who is also very well-informed about Raidpere's work and who concentrates to the years 2005-2008 in Raidperes oeuvre.

On three sunny days in June and July of 2013 Mark and I met on the outdoor terrace of a Tallinn café and spoke about art, life, photography and much more. The essence carefully distilled from this almost four hours worth of material, with the indispensable help of EKKM's curatorial assistant Marten Esko, completes this catalogue. All the exhibition photos used in the catalogue were made by the artist himself. The splendid design was created by Jan Tomson and the catalogue is being published in cooperation with the Lugemik Publishers.

Neither this exhibition nor the EKKM in the form that it has existed for several years now would be a reality without the support of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. The exhibition catalogue is being published with the help of two institutions that have played an extremely important role in Raidpere's life and work – the Galerie Michel Rein and the Fondazione Morra Greco.

Anders Härm  
Member of the Board,  
The Museum of Contemporary  
Art of Estonia

*When we pronounce the word life, we must understand that it does not refer to the life of external facts, but of that fragile, uneasy core so elusive from outer forms.*

A. Artaud<sup>1</sup>

According to Artaud, a thorough sufferance of his own physical and psychical weaknesses is a *mental erosion*, a disease, a painful device used to conquer the right to be born again. The existential and human story of the French intellectual becomes the paradigmatic symbol of a man who never made compromises either with life or art: an hallucinated path which is bitterly lucid as well, strongly carried on through the maze of conscience and driven to the extreme consequences...

Frailty is something connatural to the human being since it represents his most hidden and magmatic core; it comes to be imponderable whenever is meant as a sense of limit; it is a feeling revealing everyone's vulnerability, it is a state of danger, a *vulnus* to be concealed being in contrast with the anthropocentric vitalistic ideal based, not by fluke, on a dualistic, oppositional and antinomic concept which represents one of the principles of the western philosophical tradition focused on the strict separation between body and mind as sanctioned by the Cartesian *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.<sup>2</sup>

The artist, seen as a *special correspondent of reality* (Achille Bonito Oliva), revises his own emotions and experiences in order to restore them in the shape of aesthetic works. His emotional hypertrophy needs a shelter which is not to be meant as a simple protection but as a different dimension where his own imagination can be cultivated and improved. This way, frailty becomes an added value, investigated, carried out and experienced just like in Artaud.

Actually, Oskar Becker affirms that even the aesthetic experience is characterized by frailty, a feature phenomenologically remarkable which is also reflected in the real life (*Erlebnis*) with no certain repetition<sup>3</sup>: the frail and transient power of the aesthetic comes to pervade, so far, the dimension of the being.

Should I find a proper definition of Mark Raidpere's poetics, I would say that this complex artist has always pointed his search towards an "aesthetic of frailty" within the deepest meaning of the term, that is precisely taken from Artaud. Raidpere is a difficult artist, "ruthless", who copes with extraordinary sensibility and efficacy the dilemmas and worries of the human soul as well as its incoercible solitude, its tragic doom. The artist's search often starts from his family universe or takes specific social features focused on people

on the sidelines, on cases of urban violence or episodes of street life. The Estonian artist carries on a coherent and collected enquiry, private and solitary sometimes, evoking the dimension of memory or small acts which turn into a way to either tell about his own "being into the world" or to give voice to a microcosm of daily events, fading now and then.

I've always believed that Mark Raidpere's quest explores private spaces or, better to say, "psychological outlines": one of the basic features of his activity is to relate himself to the natural and social landscapes in order to transfer them into a dimension deeply individual and emotional. The artist's personal experience, his reaction to the surroundings and even to himself becomes, so far, the fertile soil nourishing an endless series of suggestions which explore themes both universal and local, social and individual. In conclusion, Raidpere opts for an intimist and mental approach to the work of art, he assumes an interior and private point of view, he finally puts on, with no mediation, other's weaknesses as well as his own ones by setting off, rather often, a drift which eliminates any wall between the art work and the artist, subject and object, art and life.

Over the years, the Estonian artist has created an unique stylistic code of his own, objectively documentary but dreamlike and visionary at the same time, deliberately introspective in his autobiographical works which make a rent on his private life. In these terms, it comes to be emblematic *09/12/07 - 05/04/09* (2009), a video truly disarming in its apparent formal simplicity: two shadows walk side by side and never meet with each other, they go along a landscape, a scenery now and then surreal, a no place aided by the white and desaturated black which refers to the evanescent dimension of memory: it reminds of the dream atmosphere of a physical journey turning into a metaphorical one, promptly contradicted by the obsessive and hypnotic music composed by Rainer Jancis which accompanies the two shadows.

Running through the video there is a series of overprint sms sent to the artist by his father at the time flatly specified by the work title: some of these sms are a clear reply to those of Raidpere which we will never get the chance to read. A long monologue in monosyllables,



Voiceover, 2005  
2 channel video installation, 5'03''



Father, 2001, music 2005  
video, 3' 40''

written out in the direct rude style belonging to the language of the derealized communication, implacably restores the chronicle of a difficult, harassed relationship, an expedient aiming at harshly visualizing the mutual

incommunicability with his parent. This is a topic theme we can also find in previous works of Raidpere such as *Dedication* (2008), focused on the relation between his father and mother, *Voiceover* (2005) or the suggestive *Father* (2001, music 2005) where the artist's parent is caught in the melanconic solitude of his own domestic privacy, or *Shifting Focus* (2005) which refers,

instead, to a forced conversation between Raidpere and his mother. In these works, the introspective and autobiographical device comes to be a true gear for a self meditation, a strong claim of his own subjectivity.

In broader terms, Raidpere peers into the fate of solitary figures by depicting events frequently suspended between violence and desire. His characters are often figures on the fringes of society as observed in Estonia and in the Baltic countries: just like in the poignant *10 Men* (2003) where 10 prisoners, interviewed by the artist in the jail of Tartu (Estonia), are the subjects of half-length portraits arranged in sequences. These men are convicted to a long-term sentence, secluded from social life for many years, deprived

of an ordinary dignity either personal and professional, trapped in a place barring their chances of identification with the surrounding society. A different connotation can be found in the thorough psychological inquiry of *Andrey/ Andris*

(2006), a video interview whose main character is a young boy dancing in a gay club in Riga who offers himself to the camera among attempts of seduction and flashes of unconscious shyness. On the contrary, *Majestoso Mystico. Stockholm-Tallinn 26.04.07* is a video installation arranged in the form of a diptych: one video refers to two Russian and Swedish musicians playing the soundtrack of the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*

along the streets of Stockholm while the other video shows images of the harsh fights occurred in Tallinn on the same day, April 26th of 2007 due to the decision of the Estonian government to remove a monument dedicated to the Red Army soldiers from the city centre to the military cemetery. The documentary nature of these works lies in their approach to the choice of characters to be examined and stories to be told since it doesn't lead to any ideological or formal overtone. Raidpere is not trying to recreate specific stylistic languages. He uses the video camera as a mere work tool which is functional for the depiction of reality, as a voracious interface of the surrounding world inhabited by occasional anti-heroes or aimed at restoring the ruins of history, the repressed content of memory as well as different moments suspended between personal recollection and collective experience.

Between presence and absence, news reportage and evocation of dreams, autobiographical experience and narrative bliss, Raidpere leaves his characters to the foolish attempt to sort out the existence, to evade it from the inscrutable events of fate trying to give a logical explanation to the facts: what emerges progressively is the desperate condition of men and beings who have not asked to live but who have found themselves, "by mistake, perhaps because man does not belong to this condition"<sup>4</sup>, to fight for survival. Life is consumed between pain and boredom, as Schopenhauer claimed, and the subject in Raidpere is shivered, it is a witness of the undecidability of its action but, as Gianni Vattimo said, "the witness is reduced to a pure symptom"<sup>5</sup>.



Shifting Focus, 2005  
video, 9' 30''



10 Men, 2003  
video, 8' 01''



Andrey/Andris, 2006  
video, 6' 14''

The modern man has won the claims of ontology with the hermeneutic of what cannot be interpreted, of the existential experience; he mediated the immediacy, but "life, meant as origin of the representation, cannot be performed"<sup>6</sup>,

and so he has barred himself the way to a real and conscious interpretation. The introspective study of all the characters examined by Raidpere ends in a futile attempt to systematize life, an attempt doing nothing but taking the characters closer to the discomfort and strangeness towards themselves and the world.<sup>7</sup>

Considering the corpus of Raidpere's production, I will mainly get focused on the last series of works produced by the artist, since I had the opportunity to closely follow its genesis and development during a residency period spent by the artist in Naples in the summer of 2012 and culminated in the exhibition, which I curated, at the Morra Greco Foundation in Naples and then set up again in February 2013, at the Gallery of Michel Rein in Paris.

In my opinion, it is possible to trace through these works all the themes of his research, recognizing emergencies as well as motifs of continuity and divergence. Taken together, they disclose, in substance, an open view on his *modus operandi*, on his multiform poetic.

First of all, the return to photography: like most of the art public, I have learned to know and appreciate the work of Mark Raidpere after the extraordinary *Isolator*, a project made to represent the Estonian pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005), where the artist showed, along with some poignant videos,<sup>8</sup> a series of self-portraits: a happy but episodic incursion into the fields of photography which is intended to thin out gradually in order to focus on the video only.

On the occasion of the Neapolitan exhibition – which takes its title, both serious and humorous, *Napoli.ok* from the folder's name on the computer on which Raidpere reposed the shots selected after his forays into what Matilde Serao defined in one of her best novels *il Ventre di Napoli* (the bowels of Naples) – Raidpere presents for the first time a series of city-scapes and self-portraits.

Like many people, I was used to those famous portraits belonging to the series *Io* (1997) exhibited in Venice, in which the artist presents his naked and tormented body in a blocked but restless posture; a work that shows discomfort, alienation and suffering, unsettling images in their frailty, in their being hopelessly *human, too human*.

The latter works however, appear singularly less dramatic and more self-mocking, starting with the title *Damage*, borrowed from the novel by Josephine Hart (1991), from which Louis Malle would have later on adapted the hit film version (1992).

In those works the black and white *chiaroscuro* gives way to a more soothing color. The artist portrays himself in his home-studio in Naples, involved with actions apparently rational but whose purposes are, instead, totally irrational, almost designed to investigate one self's checking

in intersubjective situations; works that cheeky wink to a number of historical references, ranging from Bruce Nauman to Dennis Oppenheim. In the photos of the *Damage* series, Raidpere proposes, once again, a private dimension that stimulates the voyeurism inherent the viewer: the artist's body seems to be reduced to a mere behavioral code, concentrated in a series of solitary and self-reflective acts that recall the daily exhausting banality. In *Workout in Progress* (2012), a video which completes this series, the spatial ambiguity and a sense of instability are combined with a reflection on time, deconstructed and reduced to a constant, uncontrollable present. The movements of the artist, the contact between his body and the floor almost becomes a connection with his existential dimension that carries out a conceptual process where a physical place acquires a mental feature.

In his *Napoli 2012* (2012) Raidpere proposes a series of *tranche de vie*, sometimes within the bounds of folklore, where the portrayed characters are never chosen at random: each of them not only represents himself but also an individuality especially significant in his



photo from the series *Io*, 1997  
b/w photo, 68 x 102 cm

environment and time, with a deep human sharing of the artist, perceptible in many details.

In my opinion, this is the reason why also the Neapolitan city-scapes have to do with the self-portrait. The artist works on his characters in their obvious realistic characterization, without any formal exasperation, preferring to focus attention on the secret burdens of humanity.

The faces that he shows to us seem familiar not because we've become accustomed to their appearance thanks to the print media or television: instead, they are strangers who assume a different familiarity that comes out not from counterfeiting but from a focalization and a very personal psychological introspection which is



view of the exhibition Napoli, ok, 2012  
Fondazione Morra Greco, Naples, Italy  
photo: Danilo Donzelli

the peculiarity of Raidpere's photographic eye. Abolished any superfluous ornament, the eyes, as well as the gaze, point out the fate: in them we read the present lived by its anti-heroes.

Raidpere's strategy is to reveal rather than to describe: he takes part into an excavation work, not cruelly traumatic but intense, referring to an act of reflection combined with an emotion.

This is what the artist wanted to do in these portraits, so real, so clear, so personal, so apparently accidental and yet so unexceptionable in the formal outline. It is this strong sense of belonging that enables the encounter of the artist with a reality so far away from him as the Neapolitan one, defined by him, with an admirable sense of synthesis, *pleasantly unpleasant*. The situations, that Raidpere refers to, do not require any obligated interpretative key, they speak for themselves, through the simple instrument of seeing. And all we see, even what appears irrelevant or superfluous, acquires a different meaning if we pay it the attention of a second closer look. Raidpere's lens captures revealing and unexpected moments, it gets lost in the maze of narrow streets of the historic center of Naples, it records impressions and nuances that restore a microcosm of improbable events, ironic at a first glance but which give way, through a mechanism of progressive revelation, to mixed feelings suspended between decay and solitude, beauty and suffering, vulnerability and isolation, marginalization and decay, separation and detachment, all topic themes of Raidpere's poetic.

Raffaele La Capria, a Neapolitan writer, in one of his book, *Harmony Lost*,<sup>9</sup> writes that there is nothing more to say about Naples, because everything has already been told. Being Neapolitan, I must admit that many artists and intellectuals end up taking a picture (in a literal or metaphorical way) of Naples or of a part of it: they start from the available data and do not go beyond it, no matter if it's about the Vesuvius or the unemployed people, the garbage or the Camorra's nomenclature.

In Raidpere, the image, which is filled with an enormous tension, is expected to coincide with existence in order to extract its essence and save it from oblivion. Beyond any simple stereotype and menacing failure to an oleograph already hackneyed, Raidpere's lens captures an aspect of the city which I like to define, by quoting Walter Benjamin, porous:<sup>10</sup> Naples is porous in its architecture, in its form, in its social relations, in

the character of its inhabitants, it is riotous towards any simplistic definition.

Like Benjamin, Raidpere captures a snapshot of the city which entraps the ephemeral in the eternity of the image, a living image, whose aura is the seduction of both the sensible and the present, but whose houses, streets, faces of its pedestrians have cracks that, although disguised, announce, like the wrinkles on a face, life and history crumbling away. It is as if the deformation of intimacy that characterizes the end of Western modernity, requires the fall of privacy, of private life, the advent of a new collective existence that recovers, within a renewed and free social dimension, the archaic ensemble of the origins.

Benjamin believes to find this new intimacy in the "porous" Naples visited in 1925 with Asja Lacis, where people come out of their houses, instead of coming in, and they set together their social life on the stairs or in the alley. This porosity, this multi-faceted soul, its *Kunstwollen* (its will to have a form), its intelligence – which comes out of desperation and enables it to survive – come back with intensity in the conscious gaze of Raidpere, beyond any interpretation dear to stereotype that would frame his Neapolitan incursion into the cliché of the artist arrived from the cold north and collided with the Mediterranean culture to revive the glory of a *Grand Tour* no longer in style. Raidpere shows us a jagged universe, a "sentimental journey" within the city and at the same time in its poetry, which is considered as a model of investigation, a model that the artist has applied to the microcosm of Naples at first and then in Paris and which is presently becoming more universal in Tallinn, his hometown, in order to underline, in an impartial but always merciless way, the miseries, the discomforts, and the contradictions so typical of our uncertain time, besides the contingency these photos were taken for.

1. A. Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double (The theater and its double)*, Italian edition, preface by J. Derrida, introduction by G. Neri, Einaudi Editor, Turin 1968, p. 11
2. For the problem related to the paradigm of incompleteness see at least R. Marchesini, *Post Human. Towards new models of existence*, Branded Hogarth, Turin 2002, pp. 9–42
3. Cf. O. Becker, *Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers (About the Fatality of Beauty and the Adventurous Nature of the Artist)*, It. Edition curated by V. Pinto, Guida Editor, Naples, 1998
4. I. Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno (Zeno's conscience)*, in *Works*, curated by B. Maier, Dall'Oglio Edition, Milan, p.867.
5. G. Vattimo, *Le avventure della differenza (The Adventures of the Difference)*, Garzanti, Milan 1988, p. 54
6. J. Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence (The Writing and the Difference)*, It. Edition by G. Pozzi, Einaudi, Turin 1990, p. 301
7. About the relationship between Italo Svevo and the aesthetics of the crisis, at least refer to N. Donati, *I Svevo: crisi del soggetto ed estetica della crisi*, Università degli Studi di Perugia, 1999-2000, [ctr www.ousia.it](http://www.ousia.it)
8. Among the videos presented in the project *Isolator: 10 men (2003)*, *Father (2001)* and *Voicover (2004)* evoke the intimacy of his father, felt as a field of defeat, where the precarious security of isolation is achieved through mental insanity, and *Shifting Focus (2004)*.
9. Cf. R. La Capria, *L'Armonia Perduta: una fantasia sulla storia di Napoli (Harmony Lost: A Fantasy About the History of Naples)*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1999
10. Cf. W. Benjamin, *(Images of Cities) It.ed.* curated by E. Ganni with a preface by C. Magris, Giulio Einaudi Editor, Turin, 2007

## I'LL BE YOUR MIRROR

Judith Quentel

Since the early 2000s, Mark Raidpere has been questioning the notions of identity and physical representation, the status of artists while addressing the socio-political issues of our times. Using aestheticized bodies, group or single portraits, snapshots or images related to documentary practice; he explores the different mechanisms in representation and media. Some of his works specifically refer to Estonia, to the post-Soviet era and more generally to our world in a state of decay, while other more intimate works only offer a glimpse. Mark Raidpere's portraits and images taken while travelling are the incarnated echo of a tormented humanity.

His early works were driven by a desire of reflexivity that contributed in the making of a space that articulates intimacy and alterity. They



Dedication  
(2008, video, 9' 10'')

reflect, with strength and simplicity, his relationship with the subjects he photographs or films. In the works *Father* (2001-2005), *Dedication* (2008), *Voiceover* (2005) and *Shifting Focus* (2005), he invites his parents to participate in the making

of his artwork while simultaneously pointing out the distance that separates them from it. The dramatic tension that arises in these portraits lies in the delicate balance between the staging, quite bare in appearance yet studied, and the authentic torment that haunts the artist and his family's dialogues or confessions.

*Dedication* is emblematic in the way the work condenses many of the issues Mark Raidpere addresses in his formal works and considering that it reveals the scenario of its own production. The artist's parents pose facing the camera in a confined and outdated decor. In this double portrait filmed as a close-up, they are invited to sit side-by-side. They are then asked to listen to a contemporary music piece and to guess its composer. Like any television gameshow there is a protocol to follow, except here the rules are provided by the artist and the contestants are his parents. His father seems to play along. Concentrated, he regularly looks up for inspiration, probing at his own memories. Meanwhile, his mother doesn't try to hide her slight annoyance, yet she also seems amused. This intimate face-to-face, revealed by the artist's reflection in the mirror, is part of a complex staging despite its extreme simplicity. The viewer witnesses a sweet torture session, indicative of the intimate ties between each protagonist. The dialogues that

follow the listening session speak for themselves. The father who believes he has gotten the answer right, hurriedly removes his costume, while the mother complains that she is tired after her long day of work; thus only distancing her even more from her son's artistic concerns.

Mark Raidpere's earliest video *Shifting Focus* isn't unlike an intimate confession, reminding us of the unavoidable and excessive amount of voyeuristic talk shows in reality TV. As if to better observe his face-to-face with his mother, Mark Raidpere films the prior installing of the set, removing a table cloth, adjusting the camera, moving a few objects. The scene is set; it is now time to lay the cards on the table, a table that happens to be physically there. After a moment of silence, he bursts into tears, revealing his anxiety and fear at the idea of representing his country at the Venice Biennale. His mother is destabilized, acts with what seems to be something in-between



Father, 2001, music 2005  
video, 3' 40''



Voiceover, 2005  
2 channel video installation, 5' 03''

complicity and indifference while emotions are at their peak. The viewer, that had been expecting the artist to reveal his *coming-out*, is instead faced with the profoundly moving expression of his dismay at the pressure generated by his participation in this international event. As always, the staging and the narrative technique are simple and accurate, yet open to multi-directional interpretations as this confession is clearly staged. The dramatic tension consequently becomes the subject of the work.

Not only reflecting his difficulties to communicate and his relationship with others, *Shifting Focus* is also a cynical performance about Art in general. A performance during which, unlike regular TV shows, all the anecdotes have been removed. Identity, loneliness, the artist's difficulties, materialize in the medium itself – the transition from colour to black and white, the 16:9



Shifting Focus, 2005  
video, 9'30''

format – before finally leading us towards fiction's limits. These interferences that are here to disrupt the usual patterns in storytelling, can also be found in his earlier works: *Io* (1997), *10 Men* (2003) or *Andrey / Andris* (2006) and in

the recent self-portraits edited together in *Damage* (2012).

In 2005, Mark Raidpere was chosen to represent Estonia at the Venice Biennale. His videos chosen for that occasion – *10 Men* and *Shifting Focus* – were immediately noticed and acclaimed by critics. In *10 Men*, prisoners from the Tartu prison in Estonia present an image of themselves full of humanity. The filmed portraits follow one after another. Some inmates appear to be uncomfortable, and others show off manliness and tattoos in what becomes a strange game of seduction. Their back and forth close proximity and moving back from the camera is confusing and unsettling. The viewer can only wonder whether the attitudes are authentic or scripted, and what role the artist has in the *indications* given to his models. The film, which follows a series of photographs on the same subject, shows the rich expressivity in certain physical traits the prisoners have, the emptiness or the depth in their eyes... We can't help but to think about Jean Genêt here, his descriptions on how the human condition is dependant on the body and on passions, like



10 Men, 2003  
video, 8'01''

the multitude of images a *secret wound* would have. The humanity or the underlying eroticism in some of these portraits, are like glimpses into the inmate's personal nature that is defined here regardless any body image alienation. It is however, a commissioned series for which the artist asked his models to show their personality while he plays with the conventional codes in fashion photography. Overexposing and flashes, on top of background music coming from what



photo from the series *Io*, 1997  
b/w photo, 68 x 102 cm

sounds like a music box, enhances the viewer's emotion and emphasizes on the empathy at work. There is a kind of monumentality in these intimate portraits taken in the empty spaces of these cells, a framing that appears neutral and falsely decontextualizing yet revealing the weight and isolation of imprisonment.

In the videos *Andrey / Andris* and *5 Guards*, both made in 2006, the portrait modalities are based on another form of empathy, as the filming here is closer to documentary practice and due to the questions the artist asks the participants. While the young waiter in Riga (*Andrey*) is questioned on "what he expects of life" and the museum staff answer everyday questions about their work, it is still the same issues that are addressed, identity and representation.

*Andrey* and the museum staff, just like the inmates, aren't professional actors. Each time, the artist takes on a specific point of view revealing the relationship each model has with the camera and how they interact with him. Even if the flashes of a second camera, the slow motion and the artist's silence impose a form of distance with inmates in *10 Men*, the proximity the artist develops with them, like in *Andrey / Andris*, is in how he created the contours of a space that is entirely devoted to highlighting their true personality, their beauty. As if he had been invited to an amateur casting, *Andrey* is asked to perform in a nightclub, outside opening hours, wearing an ordinary white T-shirt and everyday trousers. Mark Raidpere informs the viewer on the context of this video with a text scrolling on the screen before the scene takes place: he saw the young man dancing in a gay bar a few days earlier and asked him to re-enact the scene for him. The performance that takes place under flashing red and blue lights, with *New York, New York* by Frank Sinatra as a soundtrack, is mesmerising and suggestive. The choreography is

controlled and unambiguous but also ingenuous, and naïve, as if it were the dance of a teenager who had practiced alone in his bedroom for hours and was performing here for the first time. The strength of the scene lies in Mark Raidpere's ability to unveil the subject's true identity, whether in a negotiated or acted situation. The few questions he asks the adolescent in a documentary style – yet in an unsettling seductive close-up with the camera – reinforce the gap between reality and fantasy.

In the video *5 Guards*, members of the museum staff are questioned by the artist about their work, their function, their relationship to the artworks and contemporary creation. We learn that the women are torn between the satisfaction of working in a museum and their daily difficulties due to their low wages. Each story is personal and retraces how they came to take on this position. The usual clichés about contemporary art come up but we can also observe quite a fine perception of the on-going situation by the protagonists, conscious to be participating in the making of an artwork. Curiously, the more elderly, fifty years old more or less, who lived through the socialist period, are the most opened minded. After living lost in the anonymity and collectivism that took place under the Eastern Europe regime ideology, they show a real curiosity for the new generation, seen as a symbol of the democratic age. Instead, the youngest of them all (Gundega, 34) has difficulties knowing what to think of art. She is quite retrograde and conformist in her opinion on the Arts today, not understanding anything and unwilling to even try. As a matter of fact, when the artist insists on her giving him an example of her repeated assertion "As I already said, I like art", she chooses a painting featuring workers playing cards: a painting in the purest socialist realism tradition.

In Baltic countries, the aesthetics and the structural form of documentary have strongly influenced contemporary art since the late nineties. The artists had the desire to reinvest history and make a clear cut with the image of the Soviet era. They have contributed to distancing the past, which they didn't take much part in, and yet constantly continue to refer to it.<sup>1</sup> In *1:1:1* (2008), *Vekovka* (2007), *Majestoso Mystico* (2007) we witness the observation of contemporary geopolitical changes and short stories converging with History. The recurring issues of identity – subjective or social – are still a constant in these works. The films and photographs are like testimonies of *geographical* events that the artist shares with us after his trip to Greece, Russia, Sweden, Estonia of course, and more recently Naples.

*1:1:1* are the recollections – in a jumbled stream of words – of an old man of Turkish origin, who remained alone, living in the remains



5 Guards, 2006  
video, 40'00"

NATO left his family home in at the end of the territorial conflicts. In this video, he tells us how there today, cats and pigeons live together peacefully... The viewer understands the old man has lost the habit of speaking to people and his mental health is quite precarious. His flood of



words is difficult to grasp, giving the interpreter a hard time in rendering the entire speech. Mark Raidpere, who organised this meeting pretexting he wanted to offer the old man a drink for his birthday, can be seen in the footage as there is also a cameraman present. He listens but never breaks the flow in the old man's story. His discretion contributes in giving Lazaros' words an unprecedented weight, as the short testimonies he gives us refer back to how universal the condition the forgotten from conflicts, the exiles, still is.

From the windows of a train stopped in the Russian station of Vekovka, Mark Raidpere films the people selling trinkets' constant back and forth, an everyday parade pointing out the object trafficking and street peddling near by. Meanwhile, the conversation of the two men sitting in the train beside him is also being recorded. One is Russian and the other Estonian; they both talk about life in their home country with clarity and sometimes melancholy. They discuss globalization, immigration, their native language and the need to master it in both countries. There is poetic in this dialogue that the viewer is invited to confront to the insignificance of what is happening out the window. This friendly dialogue between a Russian and an Estonian gives a strong feeling of optimism in regards to the fratricidal conflicts between Estonians and Russians that the artist reports in *Majestoso Mystico. Stockholm-Tallinn 26.04.2007*.

While Mark Raidpere was in a residency in Stockholm, violent riots between the two communities took place in Tallinn. On the 26th of April, he asked some street musicians to play the tracks from a horror film (*The Silence of the Lambs*) as an attempt to contrast with the tranquillity the Swedish capital inspires him. The original artistic project features as distinctive right from the start, when the artist chooses the subject based on the presence of one of the musicians, a renowned Russian specialist in classical music reduced to performing on the street. The fact that simultaneously riots are bursting out in Tallinn, about the moving of a pro-Russian monument, reinforces the tragic situation: each small story continues to intersect with History. Both events are presented on the screen side-by-side, with on one hand the tranquillity and the alleged stability seen through the flutists playing in the silence of Stockholm, and on the other hand, images of the violence and chaos taken from the Estonian television. The events have been reconstructed by the artist and the installation – visual juxtaposition or alternating images – to disrupt the viewers interpretation mechanism of reality. Once again, the subtlety in Mark Raidpere's work lies in his ability to observe the social and historical reality from a psychological point of view rather than from its critical aspect. The story, split into two, highlights reality and its temporality while

changing the conventional codes of representation and media. The artist manipulates the reporters' images taken in the field of action, and chooses to give the musicians a space of the same importance, therefore, a true *visibility*.

The photographic series of cityscapes he took during his stay in Naples and the several self-portraits in *Damage* (2012) follow on from his earlier works. In a poetic or even humorous manner, the artist depicts emotional states and feelings that he connects more or less allusively to the Neapolitan social background. Presented in 2013 at the Michel Rein Gallery and in Naples by Eugenio Viola, they occupy a central place in this exhibition in Tallinn, and are extensively



view of the exhibition "I'll Come Back Later", 2012, Galerie Michel Rein, Paris, France, photo: Florian Kleinfehn

discussed in this catalogue. They reveal with an extraordinary acuity, anxieties and individual human situations in the context of capitalist globalization, using street scenes, damaged or degraded landscapes, portraits of marginalized individuals ...

In the photos and videos which are based on performances or rituals, and whatever the technique chosen – static shot, hand-held camera, using media aesthetics, fashion photography, documentary practice ... – even in his most recent self-portraits, which could be seen as burlesque, Mark Raidpere raises identities like he would the result of many *trajectories* and not as predefined realities.<sup>2</sup> Despite their irony or their poetry, the *objective* moments captured during his travels, just like the more intimate *mise-en-scenes*, depict a moment in life. In the background or at the centre in his works, the artist reveals the real relationship he has with his own image and with the faces of those he meets. He shows in a subtle manner that our contemporary identity has become a narrative<sup>3</sup> in an environment in constant evolution.

1. Specifically, the works of Deimantas Narkevicius, early videos of Anri Sala or Renata Poljak.

2. The terminology used by Judith Quentel in the French version of this text has been borrowed from Michel Foucault, in Michel Foucault, "Pour une morale de l'inconfort", *Dits et écrits*, vol. III, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 786. (Translated in English under "For an Ethic of Discomfort" p. 443, in *Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. III, New York: New Press)

3. *Ibid.*

## I WOULD PREFER TO BE INVISIBLE

Interview with Mark Raidpere  
Anders Härm

**I think we could start the conversation from the point where the exhibition and catalogue start conceptually – the situation following your participation in the Venice Biennale. This provided the impetus for your international career and, at the same time, you therefore receded to the background in the local art scene. Or am I mistaken? What happened in Venice and how do you assess the process now – the entire experience and the period that followed in your life?**

I don't agree with the statement that I was very visible in the Estonian art scene before Venice. Naturally, there was *Io*, which took everyone by the storm and there was *10 Men*. But what other strong stuff did I have to offer at that time? I completed *Io* in 1997, *10 Men* in 2003 and participated in Venice in 2005. After *10 Men* I had done almost nothing as an artist for a year and a half. I have always admitted that I am relatively unproductive. However, the Venice project started quite by accident. Everything started from a phone call from Andres Kurg. I lived in a building next to his at the time and imagined how Andres was looking at me through his window, because our windows faced each other. "Listen Mark, I'm reading something about Andy Warhol, something about prisoners, and listen, did you know that now's the time for presenting Venice projects..." At that moment there was only a week and a half or two weeks left until the competition ended. Kurg said that he remembered my *10 Men* and I could take that to Venice, what did I think? I said, well, I might think about it...

**You hadn't thought about before at all, about participating?**

No, no for God's sake... To be honest, I didn't think I was in that league. It was a question of self-assessment and ambition. No... not even a question of self-assessment, but rather whether I even wanted to position myself as professional artist at all.

**At that time, you were studying at the film school, weren't you?**

Not anymore in 2004. I entered the school in 2000 and officially dropped out around 2003. At that time, I did a lot of fashion photography and other series of glossy press photos and I was extremely busy. I thought that appearing publicly in an art context was more of a sideline for my main activity – fashion photography. But I was careless and went along with Andres Kurg's suggestion, although Andres didn't have the time to write the project and suggested Hanno Soans as the curator. Actually I never believed that our project might be taken into consideration. And initially I thought of the meetings with Hanno and the writing of the exhibition project as a needed summary for my artist's practice to date, and the analysis of it in dialogue with the curator as a small achievement in itself. However, the subsequent events are already history. Estonia had never sent a solo exhibition to Venice; they had all been either tandems or trios: Raoul Kurvitz, Jaan Toomik and Siim-Tanel Annus; Marco Laimre and Ene-Liis Semper; Peeter Pere, Jüri Ojaver and Ando Keskküla; Kaido Ole and Marko

Mäetamm. I was the first “solitary one.”

**Subsequently, this became more of a tradition. Now, it seems that a decision has been made in favor of this model. However, for Venice didn't you fundamentally created a whole new exhibition or combination?**

Everything started when the decision was finally made. I rather experienced a growing fear and had hoped somewhat that Jaan Toomik's curator project, which also made it to the final round, would win. When the decision was made, the stress increased. Based on this stress, I also produced *Shifting Focus* and *Voiceover*. This inner quiver produced those works, without the biennale they would not have existed.

**Let's recall what there was...**

There was *Io, 10 Men, Father, Voiceover, Shifting Focus, Raidpere* (a portrait of my mother) and the series of my passport pictures through time (initially published as a page in the magazine *Stiil*, under the heading *10 Important Photos*). And then, there was a painting of my father, which accompanied the *Father* video. That was Hanno's idea. Preparing for the biennale with Hanno Soans provided me with an important education – how to compile a catalogue; how to interpret the works; how to bring them into harmony with the impact of the space. This entire range of topics had to be learned quickly in four months. Afterward, I think I already knew how to make these aspects function. Hanno didn't do anything based on the principle of “the curator's decision is final.” He considered my opinion regarding every detail. But in Venice, it became clear to me that this direction, which focused on my problems and my familial relationships, was exhausted for awhile. Certain tensions had been expressed and it was natural that something else was required. I made a totally conscious decision to find other paths. I started searching for other motifs.

**After Venice you also found your own gallery?**

Michel Rein contacted me, perhaps in September. In Paris, he told me that he had visited my exhibition with a larger group of people; the rest of them had dispersed after ten minutes, but he had sat for two hours or maybe even longer and looked at everything again and again. Therefore, Michel's interest was very definite and, of all the business cards and contact searches and offers that came with the Venice Biennale, this was the only concrete contact and currently functioning work relationship, thanks to which I have been able to have three solo exhibitions in Paris. Our first meeting didn't take place until after the biennale, in January 2006, when he took *10 Men* to a group show and placed it in a central location in the exhibition in his gallery. My first solo in Galerie Michel Rein followed the same spring. So, to date, we've been collaborating for eight years already.

**What did the gallery and your friends think about the social change in your work? I think that this was a surprise for many people, that, in some sense, you decided to turn the focus totally elsewhere. The Venice exhibition was extremely intimate. It's probably difficult to be any more intimate in art, letting the viewer get so close, and now, such a shift.**

My second exhibition in Paris (*International*, 2008) was really totally different from the first. There was *Majestoso Mystico*, *1:1:1*, *Dedication* and *Vekovka*. In Paris, that same summer after the exhibition, I won the Prix Gilles Dusein 2008.

**What were the impulses that motivated you to create these works in the “post-Venice” period? Which was the first?**

The first was *Work in Progress*. This was followed by *Andrey/Andris*. Both are works that observe life, or they are kind of “observation exercises”. *Work in Progress* focuses on a person that I started to see constantly from my window at home – in the panelized building that I moved to after returning from Venice. *Andrey/Andris* was born due to an accidental meeting with the main character of my video in a totally empty gay club in Riga, when I was there organizing my Hansabank Art Award exhibition. *Majestoso Mystico* also got its final form as an installation as the result of a coincidence, through blind chance. I had been in Stockholm for an IASPIS residency for four months and I shot it four days before returning, mostly because, well, I had to do something. At the moment that I was filming on the streets of Stockholm, I had no idea that the tensions in Tallinn were escalating and ended that same night with the Bronze Night riots. Apparently, I’m someone that is motivated by pressure. Be it time or something else.

**A last-minute type?**

I could also call myself lazy, but then I want to immediately recant that confession and protest. The fear of an empty sheet of paper and dread of starting a work are very typical of me. On the other hand, I am very conscientious and the concept of “guilt” has always accompanied me, and in its more acute phases, forcing me time and again to be a “better” Mark. Until finishing secondary school, I remember working constantly, and from then on, having to pay a heavy price for the periods of idleness that became more typical later on. In the best case by dealing with traumatic works of art. Basically, all my works of art have been initiated by some momentary impulse. For me, the worst questions have always been “What are you working on at the moment?” or “What’s your next project?” Because I never know...

**All these new works, that you started doing in 2006 and 2007 were in some sense portrait-like. If we think about it, *Andrey/Andris* is a portrait. *Work in Progress* is a kind of portrait. *Majestoso Mystico* is a double portrait; *1:1:1* is a triple portrait...**

I’ve always moved from the individual to the general. Of course, I start with a center and grow the work out of that.

**What activated you in the case of the man behind your window or the old man in Greece? Some oddity? Aren’t your subjects in some sense outcasts, social undesirables?**

In this sense, Andrey, for example, is extremely conventional in his dreams and visions, which will never be fulfilled. There was a certain melancholy or sadness in this, which are important to me – the failure encoded in these dreams.

**Of the works with a portrait-like structure, the one titled 1:1:1 is quite strange. You have a subject, and your assistant and translator; he's also a personality, and through him the entire mechanism in the film actually operates making him a part of the portrait. And then, there are you, like the title says – a 1:1:1 situation... In the video, this yawn, this communications gap is somehow portrayed very clearly. You seem to be together, but are still totally apart.**

This work was made in Thessaloniki, Greece, while I was on a short ArtBox residency. The three subjects are totally unsuited. In this sense, the inclusion of the translator-assistant was very important to me. My birthday was the excuse for approaching the person I was interested in. The entire situation had its share of contrasts, comicality and grotesqueness... Thalea Stefanidou, the curator of the residency and the final exhibition, said that the mentality of a person like my video hero is "like a painting – where one thing overlaps another." I really like this short comment – it was lovely, humane and even ennobling.

**Doesn't the camera scare people off? Recently, you've used lots of this reportage-like style, especially in the Naples series. Has the camera been an obstacle?**

To be totally honest, the camera activates me, boosts my adrenalin. Indeed, in Naples I look at life through this little window... It helps me have a more focused presence – I guess I'm somewhat fuzzy-headed and hectic. On the other hand, it is also the reason that I don't carry a camera when I'm travelling – I use a camera only for commissioned works or if am systematically working on a project – because once I take one or two shots, I'm already in my working mode and can't get out. I never take pictures when I'm with friends. Taking pictures puts me into a different mode of being. In Naples, it's very interesting and also very difficult to walk around with a camera. It's generally hard to work there. During the summer months of my stay, there was the heat that even astonished the locals, and which I couldn't stand. And there's also the agitation associated with a strange place, etc... Of course, this is one of the crime capitals of Europe. Moving around with a camera for more than three to four hours was also tiring because it was important to constantly check how the presence of the camera affected the surrounding mentality. One had to intuitively understand which scene or person is in the frame and sense from afar where the camera captivates or deters or angers. Although I would prefer to be invisible, and when working with such material, would prefer not to have any contact with the subjects and to let the events unfold without ruining the spontaneity, the moments when one has to get approvals are inevitable, and therefore, getting involved in reality was unavoidable. Of course, there were also moments, when you understood that you shouldn't even try. But, at the same time, I was surprised at how many situations developed where people were very vain and camera-friendly.

**Did this change your working mode compared to your earlier one, when all the personal intimate things were done in a studio? Did you had to invent a different kind of artist's position, when you're working on the street?**

Yes, this was totally surprising for me. I did not plan this in any way. I've felt an inner urge to return to photography in the artistic context, in addition to the

commercial jobs for magazines, for some time. In the most general sense, maybe this was a desire for the medium. During ten years, I realized myself primarily by making videos, and I guess I'd had enough. Probably my photographing needs were satisfied earlier by the regular commercial work that I did constantly, but the volume of work had decreased. Yet, when I went to Naples I wouldn't have assumed for a minute that I would start to take such location-specific photos or make reportages of the city. The style is somewhat similar to the *Tallinn 2002* photo series, although this was done initially on commission for the *User's Guide to Tallinn*, an alternative guidebook, which later developed into an exhibition. It's similar, but ten years have past and I haven't done anything like it since. At that time, my fields of activity were assigned to me and I filled them to the hilt. In Naples, I took my camera with me on one of the first days that I was there. I planned to photograph only one specific object. However, when I was halfway there, I took a few shots, and from that moment, I couldn't put the camera down, because the city was so rich at every level. Everything exists there: mise en scenes, characters, scenery, especially in Naples' Centro Storico where I lived. I developed a hunter's lust and urge to capture the entire city and its life with my camera, which was, of course, impossible.

**Do you perceive this as a dramatic change? Actually, you worked in journalism – you've shot many reportage photos for the newspaper *KesKus* and you've also photographed innumerable series of fashion photos.**

No I don't. The art public sees this one line and the art historian immediately starts to analyze from the middle of this one line, but I have several lines. What I mean is that throughout my artist's career I've continued to photograph on commission, also for commercial publications. I've never considered myself to be a studio-based photographer. For God's sake, I've never even had a studio. At the same time, fashion photography was my first love, which attracted me to photography in a more serious way. The world of fashion photography captivated me with its extreme perfection, especially at that time – in the early 90s, when I was finishing secondary school – which the first year of the republic, when the Soviet grayness still existed in everyday life. Fashion photography attracted me with the perfection of its images, and I carefully studied the styles of photographers like Paolo Rovers and Nick Knight. The perfect image was a goal unto itself.

**But how do you view the relationship between fashion photography and gallery art?**

My position is that fashion photos work on the pages of magazines, in that context. Time and again I've seen how the charm disappears once the picture is torn out of the glossy magazine and put on the wall. In my case, I love to tell the following joke: When I first became a photographer, I was sure that one day I would be photographing for *Vogue*. There was no doubt about it. But then I developed "bad friends" and things went differently, and I accidentally fell in to the art world. Therefore, I never achieved perfection in fashion photography and the urge stopped there. Let's be honest, there was little originality in my fashion photos. I did have a more or less identifiable style or handwriting, but so what... And with the years, the clearly discernible Raidpere style of my fashion photos

has soften, I think. I am happy to do some magazine work once in awhile. They are like pausing to take a breath, and it allows me to get out of the reality into another play world. I'm not at home in the fashion field, and I'm not at home in these circles... For the last five years, I've earned my principal income from my art and the awards that I've received.

**The environment in Naples activated you in a very intriguing way. I would dare say that it marks the start of kind of new period in your work.**

The Fondazione Morra Greco had invited me to participate in a residency maybe three times. Every year started with this invitation. In 2008 Sven Johné and I had an exhibition there and afterwards, they were interested in having me participate in a residency. The first year, I couldn't imagine what works I could create in Naples that would interest me and I felt that I couldn't go there thinking I could just participate in a slapdash way. The second year, they invited me again and then the obstacle was my involvement in the production of a documentary and its unpredictable filming schedule. Since the work on the film finally came to naught, I contacted Naples myself at the end of 2011, which resulted in a residency in June-July 2012. I was also greatly motivated by the feeling that I simply MUST do something; that if I don't start something new right away, I will never do anything again... It was this gut feeling that I have to go and reinvent myself as an artist using any formula. But I didn't go with any definite general plan, if we disregard the fact that I wanted to photograph again.

**Now let's talk about *Damage*, the title series, which was also photographed in Naples. The title of this work is borrowed from Louis Malle's film of the same name and you've said that this series is borne by a mood that is more or less similar to the film's epilogue. The film's main character is a man, who, due to his blind passion, has lost everything and who has somehow been aware of this all along – someone who has created this situation himself. And in the film's epilogue he is absolutely alone somewhere in a sunny small town in Italy and there is a sad, melancholy and very meaningful scene when he says something like "I saw the woman once more and she was totally ordinary."**

The man looks at a wall-sized photographic portrait of his one-time lover, accompanied by a text that I can quote from memory: "I saw her only once. At the airport. She was with Peter. She was carrying a child. She looked like anyone else"

**A very powerful scene. As you said when you mentioned this initially, the epilogue isn't very compatible with the rest of the plot, but in some sense the whole story has been told only to arrive at the mood in the epilogue, to show the man in this situation.**

If we look at the completed series and compare the pictures to the film's epilogue, there isn't a recognizable connection, but this was my own state of mind when I was on my way to the residency. This film came to me for no understandable reason one afternoon while I was at home and I checked YouTube to see if I remembered this scene correctly. I'd seen the film maybe a dozen years ago. I was sitting in Tallinn in my apartment and thinking about going to Naples

for the residency and I felt like the Jeremy Irons character in the epilogue to *Damage*. The environment in the film also connected with my own Naples memories, especially when I saw the street paving, when he walks to the house and up the stairs. It seemed to be a memory from my last trip to Naples. It was also significant that this was a man who had been forsaken by the world or had disassociated himself from the world. These were my feeling as I traveled to Naples and then the city itself started doing something to me... let's be honest, I hadn't done anything new for several years and I didn't know whether I would activate again. What could and should I come out with? What did I have to say? Such a feeling of emptiness... I hoped that Naples would provide me with a commitment.

### **But isn't that exactly what happened?**

Upon cursory examination, it seems strange, since the urban environment there is so different from everything that I'm used to or have considered "my own". Upon my return, I was very surprised to realize that this dark, full-bodied, decadent, sinful and theatrical place was actually totally perfect for Raidpere. It seemed to be the ideal place where I could work and which could be my topic. The Neapolitans also explicitly expressed their amazement at how well I was able to capture the essence of the city with these images. Working there was very good physically and mentally, despite the fact that it put both – my body and my mind – to a harsh test. It wasn't easy, but in some sense it was very pleasant.

### **How did you work? You apparently shot a huge quantity of photos everyday and did so very systematically and methodically...**

I really did work regularly, but I wasn't able to do so every day. Actually, I had to force myself to go out every time. In one way, it was useful to play a tourist who was rambling absentmindedly with a camera. On the other hand, there were moments, when you need to leave the impression that you are actually a professional. But try to decide which is better at the moment. I felt that the city residents were sympathetic and I respected them, although, for my work, I sometimes had to manipulate and generally exploit them. In other words, I hope that this is not exploitation, but a small respectful declaration of my regard. And that people will sense this. This is a kind of attitude that also reaches those whom with you are communicating with through the camera. I think that this was one reason why I was able to cope with these situations... There were also moments when I was physically attacked, but these were only two or three exceptions.

### **In the *Damage* series, you have a photo where your hands...**

This was simply a picture from the first day – sunburn. I took the picture right away, as one of the first, I liked the visual effect. In that series, it was rather the photo with the broken eyeglasses that was related to a situation where my glasses were broken in the course of a small attack. Although I didn't find the lens on the paving until the next day, I thought that it simply connects these things together autobiographically.

### **Did the Naples experience finally place you face-to-face with yourself? Did you rediscover yourself as an artist?**



How sure have I ever been about myself as an artist? I can say that the things that I've done have been relatively good. Although I haven't done very much, I've also done few insignificant things. Actually this fear of the blank sheet never disappears... An important realization that I formulated when I did the interview with Raoul Kurvitz for *KesKus* (*Kultuuri KesKus* 03/2013) was that being an artist is actually very traumatizing for me. What I mean is that some artists never have any doubts about their quality. They aren't afraid that they could break.

With these Naples pictures, I'm concerned about how they will find their place here on the Estonian art scene. How will they speak to the Tallinn public? Do they have a universal force field? Can they be grasped by the people here? When I showed the Naples series in spring in Paris at the Galerie Michel Rein, I hoped to get some feedback, but I didn't get much beyond what I heard during the chatter at the opening. People can say that it's extremely strong and impressive, but that's not saying much. You also say that it is a strong work, but that doesn't count...

### **You need confirmation from someone else?**

I need awards!! OK, that's a joke. I guess we all need constantly repeated affirmations. The Naples photos are really very *flâneur*-like. I walk around the city, walk and shoot – after all, they are based on specific images. A very eclectic total package actually. When I started shooting these city pictures, I decided to ignore all conceptual considerations.

**As a whole, this work can be seen as a kind of anti-touristic portrait of Naples. The same Naples, a city that has a romanticized image for tourists, but your view of the city is something totally different. The series undoubtedly takes a critical stance toward a certain pictorial and presentation mode and an alternative approach to the location is revealed. Attempts have been made to make similar series about Tallinn, but none of them has really succeeded. And it's possible that Tallinn is also more complicated in this regard...**

One day, I was thinking about the same thing – that it would be great to be a Naples photographer who is invited to Tallinn for a residency. A few days ago I was walking around the Herne St. area with a friend, and as we were coming back from Uus-Tatari, and saw a family who had climbed on the roof. The sun was shining and they were sunbathing. And then I felt that, if I were in Naples, I would probably attack this situation. Apparently, the inhibiting factor is the infinite familiarity of Tallinn – the fact of being here, the intensity of one's gaze. Yet, at one time the Tallinn series was made, although as a commission, but structurally there isn't a great deal of difference between the two series. Maybe the difference is the fact that I live here. But, at the same time, the work took me into neighborhoods where I, as a Tallinn resident, had never been. The curious eye operates more or less similarly in any situation where you've ended up in a totally strange environment.

### **During the residency did you feel any pressure to produce an exhibition?**

Yes, but not from the outside, I pressured myself. I consider it to be simply natural or logical that if you're invited and paid, then you have to do something.

But actually, we didn't start talking about a concrete exhibition until the last day of the residency.

**What kinds of persons arouse your interest? OK, mother and father are unavoidable, but...**

Not for everyone... far from it... On a domestic level I've often been reproached about why I worry, for example, about my father's health so much. Some well-meaning people have said, "OK you love them", and others have been amazed about what is going on with this. But actually, no one has ever asked "why did you create the works with your parents"; they only ask what my parents think about being portrayed. And there have been many reactions that like, "Oh, this also made me think about my family, the lives of my mother and father and their world." People also ask, "How could you be so daring?" I've never asked myself this questions; it is so self-evident for me. The works that I've done involving my parents are simply so unavoidable and I haven't really spent much time pondering whether this is ethical, for example. And maybe I'm totally irresponsible in this regard! Once the work is completed, I've partly rid myself of the stress that motivated it. Then, a moment before it's to be introduced to the public, I've thought, how can I bring such a thing before the public, how will it affect my family, and I'm not totally free of the stress until I'm in the exhibition hall. They've never actually vetoed anything. For example, I showed my father the *Father* video from 2001, which was the first in series, on the TV at home. He wanted to watch it several times in a row and his only commentary was: "Simply horrible!" I don't know what I would've done if he'd said that, under no circumstances was I to exhibit it anywhere. I'm not sure I would have listened. However, later when, a night before the premiere, I showed my father the video *09/12/07 – 05/04/09*, which was based on the text messages I exchanged with him, I had his acceptance, and I would've also been ready to disappoint everyone (the work was completed for the Video Music Session of the 2009 Estonian Music Days) and to cancel the work if this had been necessary. As far as *Shifting Focus*, made with my mother, then the shoot itself not the video was the most traumatic for her. And what finally compensates my parents for the experiences related to my activities is the public acceptance, critical reception or success that I have received.

**What was your aim when you created the works with your parents? Was this an attempt to establish a contact with them that can't be achieved without the help of a camera? Is direct communication more complicated than employing the help of an intermediary medium – a camera?**

Yes, that's true. One reason is certainly that it helps me communicate with them. At the same time, I'm not convinced that this is main reason, but it's definitely part of it.

**The parent motif seems to come in waves with you. *Raidpere* (mother's portrait) was in 1998; *Father* in 2001; and *Shifting Focus* and *Voiceover* in 2005. Now you've returned to this motif again after some time and you have a few new works that deal with this topic. Is the moment when you return to these motifs somehow connected to you or is it connected**

**to them or is it connected to some general situation in the family's relations?**

Our everyday relations are not of sufficient quality, and let's say that at some point I try to pull myself together and celebrate this parent-child relationship. The other reason is a certain kind of self-therapy, that can't be denied. The fact that I started to poke at this topic of the family in the early 2000s could be motivated by a certain insecurity and diffidence about tackling "larger and more distant" social and other problems. I think it was Ene-Liis Semper, who directed attention to this – although not in connection with my works. But I immediately connected this to myself and this didn't seem wrong. This was a problematic sphere and needed to be dissected for many reasons, but also a sphere that I knew the best. Since I unavoidably had both an external and internal pressure to realize myself creatively, being young and inexperienced, I chose this territory, which was safer in some sense. Maybe there was also a certain cunning reason as well. I made the later texting-video at the moment – how to say this – when my breathing in this world changed, very turbulently and very rapidly. My father announced that he has cancer. And overnight I felt how the last carefreeness and lightheadedness of my youth had left me. And that it would never be regained.

**You became aware of your own mortality?**

Yes... Now I could never again create those earlier works in the form I did then. Now, I see my parents and also myself in this trio differently.

**In this exhibition set, you also have a self-portrayal video with a Lasnamäe motif, which I think is also edgewise associated with the family motif and childhood memories...**

Since this video is still in the production phase, I don't want to talk about it. When I returned from my residency in Naples, I had rented out my apartment and I was forced to stay for a few weeks in Lasnamäe in my mother's apartment, where I had lived for 20 years. And I visited my father, who also lives in Lasnamäe, and roamed around there. And the proximity of the places from bygone days induced memories and prompted the idea...

**Actually, there is one more problem left – how to end the interview...**

**It would be logical to ask: what is your next project?**

End it that way.

**And there won't be any answer?**

There won't be any answer.