

GALERIJA ALMA

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Vika Eksta SATIKŠANĀS

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Tērbatas iela 64, Rīga



When Vika was going to give birth to her first child, daughter Alma, she took her camera and tripod to the hospital. The self-portraits and videos she took became the source material for the exhibition «The Encounter», as this work is the artist's attempt to understand and remember the process of childbirth. Sequences of video footage cover ALMA's glass windows, capturing in thousands of frames one of the most life-changing experiences of a woman's life. Large framed photographs will be on display in the empty space of gallery.

It happened at the end of the summer of 2022. In preparation, I went to Lamaze classes, read a bunch of articles, joined several pregnancy chat groups, and, of course, tried to live as healthily as possible. I mentally prepared myself for a natural hospital birth without anesthesia. In the last weeks of pregnancy, I became slow and heavy, eagerly awaiting for the whole thing to finally begin. On the night before the expected due date, I was in serious pain, and when I arrived for the check-up in the morning, the doctor insisted that I go to the hospital as soon as possible. There, it all lasted only three hours – amniotomy followed by very painful contractions, then the urge to push and the stumbling to the delivery room. Next, I heard the midwife's voice, saying that the baby wasn't feeling well and instructing me to breathe correctly, while all I wanted to do was cry out; it was already too late to take the anesthesia... Then, an incision, a little pressure on the abdomen, and my baby girl was out before I even realized it. Then followed the delivery of the placenta and the stitching. The midwife said that I had lost quite a significant amount of blood, so it was best not to go to the shower alone. Finally, an hour of contact with the little miracle... So, I've managed to list the key moments that shaped this event. But how did I feel in all of this? What did my body do? Do I struggle to remember the details because a whole year has passed? Actually, I don't recall having any vivid memories even just the next day – for some reason, my brain was refusing to convert this intense experience into easily accessible files. It's a good thing I had brought a camera with a tripod to the maternity ward. I set it up in the room shortly after the breaking of the water. At the very beginning, I managed to take a few self-portraits. Soon, the intensity and frequency of the pain increased. A few times, I pressed the remote trigger and then switched to video mode to ensure nothing would disturb me while focusing on overcoming the pain. When I was moved to the operating room, the father of the baby remembered to grab the camera, but it only got turned on after the baby was already born. The next morning, I woke up with severe pain in my back and chest – during labour, my intercostal nerve got compressed, and the stitches were also terribly painful. It was difficult to move, but the baby needed feeding, and I had to try to get up somehow. That's how my determination to record the first days in the hospital faded away. In mid-

December, I finally mustered the courage to take a first look at the recorded material, and gradually I began to study it closer in the hope of gaining a better understanding of what I had experienced.

– Vika Eksta

ALMA has so far presented two exhibitions by Vika Ekst: P (2019) and Zvaigznīte (2021), both in collaboration with Riga Photography Biennial. The artist also participated in the exhibition GALERIJA ALMA @ Padures Manor, where in one of the exhibition rooms, together with works by Andris Breže and Krista and Reinis Dzudzilo, was exhibited Eksta's project Zvaigznīte / Star – —a contemplative mid shot portrait of Zvagnīte in a 3/4 turn, almost reminiscent of a unicorn, played out in 28 versions. Combined in one large-scale work, standing figures are placed close to each other in white frames, holding three-to-five versions of this single shot. From pitch purple to almost faded away—each individual photo is a small leap into a different register of tonality, although the difference between neighbouring images is deliberately minimal, almost elusive. At the heart of Vika's practice is the analysis of a specific theme, place or subject/object through a focused and photography-based view.

VIKA EKSTA (1987) is a Latvian artist. She works with photography, moving images, performance, audio and visual archives, and combines documentary and fictional narratives. She studied photography with Andrejs Grants and at EFTI Photography School (Madrid), she has a master's degree in visual communication from the Latvian Academy of Arts. Vika is the winner of Young Guns 14, FK Portfolio and Riga Photography Biennial awards for Baltic photographers, and has been nominated for the Purvītis Prize. Vika's works are included in the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art, and the Latvian Museum of Photography, as well as in private collections in Europe and the USA.

ALMA was founded in 2005. From autumn 2017, has a new location at 64 Tērbatas Street, Riga in a glass-enclosed space, in a small, elegantly transformed modernist building, whose architectural form is in line with the program of the art exhibited in the gallery. Because of the glass walls facing the street, the view of the exhibitions is open to the life of the city at all times of the day.

List of works

1. Contractions. Digital photograph printed on archival paper, 116 x 80 cm. 2023, Print edition 2 + 1
2. Together. Digital photograph printed on archival paper, 116 x 80 cm. 2023. Edition 2 + 1
3. Hold me. Still frame composition printed on paper, 91.4 x 280 cm. 2023
4. Breath during childbirth. Still frame composition printed on paper, 155 x 280 cm. 2023
5. Hold me 2. Still frame composition printed on paper, 155 x 280 cm. 2023
6. Getting up right after. Still frame composition printed on paper, 91.4 x 280 cm. 2023
7. Placenta. Still frame composition printed on paper, 91.4 x 280 cm. 2023