

Exhibition title: FAMILIAR / LĪDZBŪTNE

Artist: Agate Tūna

Venue: 427, Riga

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The repository was not like the Library of Babel described by Borges. It was not an infinite structure of information containing all possible content with inaccessible meaning, but rather a limited space that could be taken in by the eye. The shelves held books on specific themes, published within a limited span of time, while the boxes and drawers contained thousands of images in various formats, including photographs. These were older and newer photo postcards, negatives—those that had become part of the unseen photographs, because they had never been developed into images — and films that had been kept in tight rolls for years and had become objects in their own right. There were photocopies that had been left out of the hierarchy of value at the time of their creation but had now gained the interest of researchers, and magenta-toned slides with reproductions of artworks. The boundaries of the repository—thematic, chronological, and material—made the archive conceptually transparent, even though the material it contained never formed a closed whole.

She had the feeling that everything important to her was present in this small archive. It held many possibilities, and each piece of material had its own voice that could be heard at any moment. This feeling coexisted with the understanding that the archive's work was based on constant contact with what already existed, on selective choices and maintaining order. In relation to the collection, she used to experience two identities — the keeper's and the interpreter's. Both existed between the observance of rituals that ensured the preservation and organization of materials and the ongoing creation of changing meanings. She imagined herself as a priestess of this space — not herself, but a presence that served order and materials, so that they could be found.

When she thought about her relationship with the archive, she tended to remember one particular image. It dated from a time when she was learning photography with an analog SLR camera and using expired black-and-white film. The picture was taken on a winter evening in the city center. In it, she had wanted to capture her friend standing in front of a timeworn building. Without an exposure meter, she had learned to skillfully capture a good shot in daylight, but not in twilight conditions. She still remembered the joy of seeing some object-like outlines appear on the paper when she printed the photograph—apart from the gray gradient that took up most of the image. The friend looked more like a ghost in the photo, while the building resembled a thick fog from which she seemed to have emerged. The lower part of the image was more detailed, as the street pavement had received

more light, while the central figures were slightly further away. Only on the photocopy could one see that at the moment the photo was taken, a cat was running across the street, blurred as it passed by the edge of the frame.

The shot was undoubtedly a technical mistake, but it echoed the feelings that accompanied her in the repository—the awareness that meaning does not have to be completely clear in order to be worth preserving.