

Gentle Pendulum is Aija Zariņa's (1954–2025) first memorial exhibition.

Originally the exhibition was intended as the result of Aija's residency at PAiR. In the summer of 2024, Aija invited photographer Haralds Vecvagars to document her planned performance, creating signs in the sand on the Pāvilosta seashore. As I was doing the organizational work, I got to know Haralds and we decided to continue the collaboration after Aija's passing shortly before the planned residency. As Aija wrote in the exhibition project: "Kristians Fukss and Haralds Vecvagars will express themselves as creatively as they wish in the exhibition making process."

Together with Aija's daughter Tīna Zariņa, we decided to create this exhibition as a memorial. Haralds offered documentary images from 2019 and 2020, showing Aija in plein-air in Venspils, not far from Pāvilosta and in the process of painting. Together with Aija's watercolors from 2023, they form *a horizon*. At this moment, Aija has crossed it. The light line in the exhibition highlights the path of light that the artist walked and led society along.

The residence library contains several bibliographic materials about Aija Zariņa, which confirm her influence, although it is not a comprehensive collection of theoretical materials – only those that were already in the residence library and those that I brought from home.

In director Gints Grūbe's "Evening Interview" (2004), which can be seen in the next room behind the residence library, Aija is seen in 2004 at the famous, Riga Gallery, one of the first and most influential galleries in Latvia after the restoration of independence. The 33-minute interview reveals many facets of Aija's character. Aija is seen as a nonconformist, a very powerful artist. At the same time, she is a genuine, wonderful and kind person.

The interview takes place at Aija's exhibition "Conversations about Art in Riga," for which Aija interviewed the then Minister of Culture Ingūna Rībena (no longer active in political circles, left the party "Vienotība" in 2019), Edgars Vērpe, director of the State Culture Capital Foundation (still director of the SCCF), Jolanta Treile, Head of the Strategy Department at the Ministry of Culture (currently working as a text editor and literary scholar), as well as art scholars Eduards Kļaviņš and Stella Pelše, who are still active and highly regarded in the field of art science.

In her interviews, Aija interviewed them about the role of art (and culture) in the development of society and who is responsible for it. Although I did not see this exhibition myself, as I was only four years old at the time, I read Helēna Demakova's article about it: "The pictures currently on display at the Riga Gallery heavily criticize the government, but that is not what is interesting. What is most interesting is that these are very good works. The political content, which Aija Zariņa calls "analytical" cultural or cultural-political work, is of secondary importance. It is difficult to argue in a short article that this is good painting. Works of this quality are rarely found in our part of the world. Against this backdrop, future exhibitions at the Riga Gallery will seem like enlarged decorative stamps."

Demakova's statement requires no comment. The exhibition "Conversations about Art in Riga" is a turning point in the art of the free state. In the lecture by art historian Elita Ansone, which followed the exhibition opening, she noted that after her war like attitude in the interviews society turned away from her and she gained a very controversial fame in Riga. The works in the exhibition were overlooked and not even acquired by Latvian National Museum of Art. The mistake was corrected only after her passing – museum acquired thirteen large scale works. Now can we appreciate the legacy left by Aija. Not only in the form of artwork, but also in ideas; she did everything in her power to improve the cultural situation in the country; to be a responsible artist, to think and do as much as possible.

From the interview, I would like to highlight what Aija said:

If I don't figure out the essential things, then I'm basically a wreck. (...) If I have found value in an idea, then it has sustained me, I have felt it with my whole inner world, with my whole human attitude, I have felt that these are the values – we must fight for them! Everything inside us shows that they are valuable. Everything inside us moves, we begin to rejoice in them. (...) Try to understand the content, its meaning. Why do you want to limit yourself to just the concept? (...) What is important to you in life? (...) You want to be more interested in form than in ideas. Then you will not be able to understand anything if you want to express yourself in an increasingly complex and interesting form. Then you will not get to the essence. (...) I am ready to fight for the truth. (...) Society is sick, but it can be healed. If it masters the ideas that humanity has accumulated, if it begins to study them, to build a cultural state – then it can be healed. (...) Are you ready to lose this fight? – No. Lāčplēsis will never lose. This battle is not over and will never end.

The exhibition brochure, which is available in the residence's workroom, contains several photographs by Harald Vecvagars and dedications to Aija that were created during the making of the exhibition. Based on Harald's idea, Harald and I transcribed Aija's texts from the WhatsApp messages she sent us. Monika Korpa described her memories of the inspiration provided by the exhibition "Maigais svārsts" (The Gentle Pendulum) and shared a photograph from 1992 of her and Aija visiting Māra Ķimele in her house. In 1990, after seeing Aija painting freely in the exhibition hall "Latvija," Monika returned home and painted on a blanket. Margarita Zieda remembers a trip with Aija Zariņa and Jānis Deinats to West Germany in 1997 to interview Pina Bausch and see her performance. On the table is a painted postcard that Aija sent to Margarita. On the right wall are works by Aija Zariņa from the VV Foundation collection: the ink drawing *Madonna* (1980) and the painting *The Lightness of Being* (2010). On the right side of the left wall are three more photographs by Harald Vecvagars, which the author developed analogously in a photo lab.

Kristians Fukss

Exhibition soundtrack: Alekšis Luriņš

The exhibition is open until March 1, 2026

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