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Līga Spunde in conversation with **Lena Bril** As part of the exhibition **THE MIND THE HEART**

To provide you with more insight into the development of this exhibition, we're sharing a conversation between the artist and a correspondent. The correspondent was not familiar with the artist's work and, like you, has discovered through this dialogue the often invisible choices made during the creation of this project, as well as in the artist's general working process.

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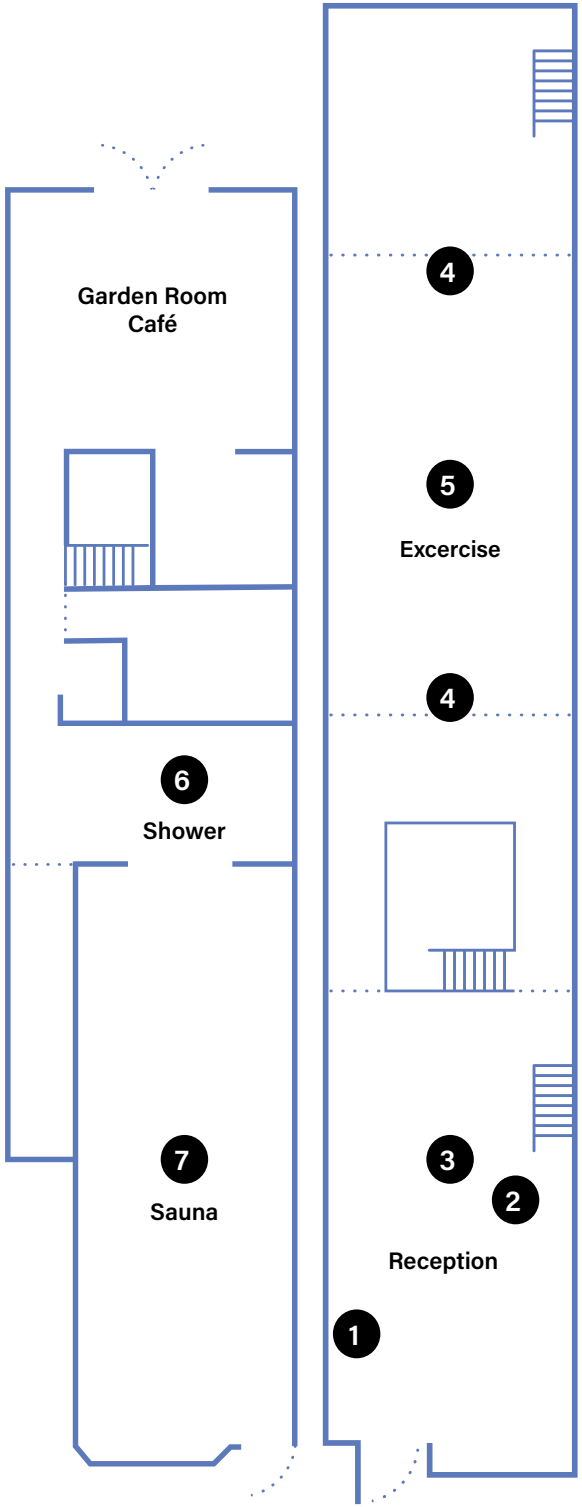
1. **The Bin**
   3D-printed resin, paint, stickers, 2026
2. **Exercise of Playing Dead**
   digital print, 2026
3. **Visitor**
   3D-printed resin, aluminium, paint, 2026
4. **Laughing Without Reason**
   Two channel video installation (with animation), 6:20, 2026
5. **Broken Smile**
   3D-printed resin, steel, paint, 2026
6. **Shower**
   3D-printed resin, aluminium, sound, shower curtains, 2026
7. **The Mind, The Heart**
   Single channel video installation (with animation), 8:20, 2026



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For more information about this and other projects, check our website or scan the QR-code:

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Līga Spunde

Līga Spunde (b. 1990, Riga) is known for her richly narrative and emotionally charged installations that fuse digital aesthetics with speculative fiction, autobiography, and psychological inquiry. A graduate of the Art Academy of Latvia (BA 2014, MA 2016) and former student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp (In Situ3, 2015). Spunde's work frequently explores the fragile boundaries between perception and reality, often rendered in digital prints, video, and sculptural environments.

Lena Bril

Lena Bril (b. 1992, Amsterdam) is a journalist and writer, fascinated by the struggling human condition. Her essays have appeared in publications including de Volkskrant and De Groene Amsterdammer. In Trouw, she offers readers advice on life's problems every two weeks. The autumn of 2025 saw the publication of her non-fiction debut, *In Therapie* (In Therapy), a journalistic book exploring the question: why do so many people seek help from a therapist or coach? Through her Substack newsletter, she keeps thousands of readers updated on her search for grounding: lenabril.substack.com

28 March 2026

Dear Liga,

I love the themes you are working with. It is such a relief – and also a dissolving of my loneliness – to discover that so many other artists and writers are thinking about the same questions as I do.

Over the last few years I have been thinking a lot about the question: what are emotions? And why is it so hard to feel them authentically, in a way that they truly feel like my own? My therapist always asks me to name my feelings, and whenever I hesitantly say 'sad?' or 'frightened?', I feel like a fraud. It feels fake, far removed from what I am actually feeling. Why do you think that is?

There is always some kind of loss when you put feelings into words. This is especially true when feelings are supposed to be functional – to communicate what you need, what your personal goals are. That kind of feeling doesn't feel connected; it feels individualistic. Maybe that is why I find it so hard to really feel them. They feel instrumental, and therefore not real.

I spoke to journalist Michael Pollan last week. He wrote a book about consciousness. He wanted to find a coherent answer: what is consciousness? He concluded that there is no answer, and that not knowing is the beauty of the question. He also told me that we have underestimated feelings for so long. We thought: 'I think, therefore I am.' But consciousness is much more about feeling. 'I feel, therefore I am' is far more accurate.

AI-tools can think – perhaps even better than we can. But they cannot feel in the same way we do, because they do not experience vulnerability the way we do. They do not have a mortal body, and so their feelings are always without stakes, and therefore never real.

So why is it so hard to feel, when feeling is precisely what makes us human? Should we relearn how to feel, and if so, how? What forces in society are distracting us from our unmediated emotions?

I am trying to restore my feelings, to make them part of who I am again. But it is hard. The mind is always more comfortable, more easily accessible. How do you experience your emotions? Do you have a feeling practice? How do you use your emotions in your work, how do you switch off the mind? And what do you think makes feeling so difficult right now?

I would love to know your thoughts.

Love,
Lena

2 April 2026

Dear Lena,

It is lovely to hear from you - thank you for sharing your thoughts and kind words and asking so many important questions!

I have to say I really enjoyed reading your article *Empathy Is a Problem*. I think you capture the complexity of this subject so well. I find it really fascinating how emotions - or the inability to feel and understand them - are actively present in politics, the economy, and other structures that shape our minds and society, and how they are often twisted to serve and justify completely different positions. It really makes me wonder: how come this deeply personal human superpower - to feel, and to empathise with others - became so instrumentalised and, in many ways, misunderstood?
But I think misunderstanding is a natural part of relationships and communication. It is very interesting what you write about the authenticity of your own feelings. It makes me realise that I almost never doubt my feelings themselves – when I feel them they are sooo real! What I usually question is the reasoning behind them.

It is also very true what you are describing - it is incredibly difficult to communicate feelings, and sometimes putting them into words not only takes something away from them, but also creates these misunderstandings. It actually makes me think about voice recordings I recently did for a video work. I had a very clear sense of the expressions and emotions for almost every phrase, but I struggled to understand how to communicate them precisely. After several attempts with the voice actress, using descriptions like 'a bit happier' or 'sad and tired', we realised that these phrases did not communicate my intention accurately - because 'a bit happier' can mean a completely different thing to someone else. What worked much better was when we began referring to specific experiences rather than naming emotions. That created a shared understanding much more quickly. In the end, the entire arguing scene was recorded after my request: "do it in a Latvian way."

The questions you are asking are the same ones I find myself returning to lately. And in a way, these very questions are what led me to create this exhibition.

I have to admit that I have always been very emotional – a real drama queen. So far I never really struggled to feel emotions; if anything, my challenge was rather to control them.

But lately - and by lately I mean over many years - I have realised that I don't feel as much anymore, despite being exposed to so much emotionally charged content on a daily basis. And it seems that many people can relate to this.

When thinking about what makes feeling so difficult nowadays, I wonder if it might be exactly what I just mentioned: this constant oversaturation we experience every day. What do you think?

Warm greetings from Riga!
Līga

13 April 2026

Dear Līga,

Thank you for your letter. What you wrote about voice coding and voice recording stayed with me: the idea that you can engineer something to sound 'happier' or 'less happy', and how that ultimately fails because happiness means something different to everyone. There is something almost tragicomic about it: the attempt to standardize an emotion that is, by nature, resistant to standardization.

It reminded me of a conversation I once had with cultural psychologist Batja Mesquita. Her research challenges one of the deepest assumptions in Western emotion science: that emotions are universal, biologically fixed states that get triggered from within and then expressed outward. As if there is some essential core, some true anger or true sadness, waiting to be activated. What Mesquita argues instead, is that emotions are constructed. Culturally, relationally, situationally. How you narrate the experience of happiness is not the same as how someone in Japan would narrate it – and those differences between cultures tend to be far greater than the differences within them.

What struck me most in her thinking is the distinction between emotions as something that happens inside a person versus something that happens between people. In more collectivist cultures (like Japan), emotions are inherently relational. They do not precede the encounter, they emerge from it. I find that framing far more honest, and closer to how I actually experience my emotions.

What you wrote about the difficulty of capturing emotions in language – and how that gap inevitably produces miscommunication – resonates with me as a structural condition of any real intimacy. It is also, I think, proof of the more relational view on emotions.

I had to smile at your description of the 'drama queen.' I was called that too, when I was younger. In my family it functioned as a kind of verdict – something my parents reached for when I was too much, too present, taking up too much emotional space. I have been thinking about how strange that dynamic is: the way people, who feel intensely, are so readily pathologized as excessive. As if a strong feeling is automatically a performance, a demand. Whereas I now find something genuinely interesting, admirable, in people who allow themselves to feel without immediately trying to manage, rationalize, or contain what arises.

For me, access to my own emotions was not a given. It took years, and a great deal of therapy. And now I feel more than I ever did. At the same time, I recognize what you describe – that relentless flood of images and affect, the way contemporary media produces a kind of emotional saturation that paradoxically leaves you feeling less.

I have noticed that since I started spending less time on my phone and almost stopped watching series or films, something in my emotional register has become sharper. When I read now, I feel the inner lives of characters with far more precision. As if there is space again. I wonder whether what we call emotional overload is less a psychological condition than an ecological one – a question of what we allow into our attention, and what we protect.

I am very curious about your working process. How do you allow feeling and intuition to function within it – do you try to grasp them, understand them? Or do they just guide you, without analyzing them? And how do you handle negative emotions during the process? When I am writing a book, anxiety and frustration can colonize an entire day. Always eager to learn how other creators are handling this.

I also keep thinking about the position of the artist in this particular media moment. Emotions seem to be everywhere, it has become some kind of currency. Where does your work locate itself within that? What do you understand as your role as an artist, and what do you think art can actually do, in the midst of all that noise?

And one more thing – given everything we have been circling around: what makes you happy right now? And how would you describe happiness as it is understood in Riga, what does it mean to live a happy life in your culture? Where are you supposed to find happiness and what does 'the good life' look like? And does that 'good life' feel genuine to you, or is it something capitalistic systems impose on you?

Sometimes in the Netherlands it can feel like that: happiness as enjoying yourself and/ or something you can buy. But then, on more optimistic days I see that we all know, deep inside, that what really makes us happy (or, at least, gives meaning) is caring.

I look forward to your answer (and please, don't feel obliged to answer all my questions! If you feel like sharing something completely different: I would love to be surprised by your creative mind).

With love,
Lena

16 April 2026

Dear Lena,

Oh yes, this struggle to communicate the exact amount of an emotion is indeed tragicomic. It is so true what you are saying about how we assume we know what 'true' emotions feel like, as if they are just waiting to be named or activated. It's funny just to imagine it.

It's interesting to look back at the situation with the voice recording now, after learning about Batja Mesquita's ideas - that emotions might be something that happens between people rather than within them. I completely agree, it explains this struggle so well.

Actually, this relationship - between the rational and the emotional - is another theme I am touching on in the exhibition. Somehow, in our society, being rational is still valued far more than being emotional. Of course, this is closely connected to capitalist ideas of productivity and measurable results, but I keep wondering: was it always like this?

I think this becomes especially interesting in the context of creative work. You mentioned that emotions have become a kind of currency, and yet artists, writers, musicians: we are still expected to be productive, effective, disciplined, and on time. We are also expected to be sensitive and emotional, and while it is of course possible to manage both, balancing these two demands can be quite challenging. I am wondering how that aligns with the freedom of creativity, spontaneity and being wild at heart? I would love to hear your thoughts.

In my creative process, I am always searching for something - a story, a situation - anything that resonates with me emotionally and is strong enough to give me the feeling that I have something to say about it.
From that point, I often start to analyse it. I actually enjoy trying to find the right characters or situations to express certain feelings. It is almost like searching for the right words to name an emotion but using visual references instead.

What I find interesting is that very often my interpretation - using a specific character to describe a situation - actually helps people relate to the work more easily. I think this connects to what you mentioned earlier: that our emotions are shaped by culture and experience. It also makes me think about something: how sometimes simply sharing ready-made GIFs with friends can communicate emotions, or even thoughts, much more precisely than words.

If I could, I would share some cat pictures with you now as an answer to your question about what makes me happy in Riga :) They really make everything much nicer! But thinking about Latvians in general, I would say that being in nature is what makes us happy - being outside the city, in a forest, or a garden.

And actually, I can relate to that very well - whenever I have a free moment, no deadlines, no stress, I prefer to just jump in my car and go for a walk by the seaside. That also makes me happy, it helps me unwind a bit.

What makes you feel a bit happier?

Warm greetings from warm Riga!
L.

18 April 2026

Dear Līga,

I have been thinking a lot about your question of why, since the Enlightenment, we have come to value rationality so much more than emotions. What you write about capitalism and productivity really resonates with me, but it also seems to contain a strange paradox. On the one hand, we are expected to be rational, controlled, and efficient. On the other hand, that same system seems to constantly appeal to – and perhaps even stimulate – our emotions in order to make us consume.

I recently read a book by a sociologist, Eva Illouz, who describes how feelings like dissatisfaction, jealousy, or disappointment are made economically productive. These emotions create a sense of lack, and we then try to fill that lack by buying something. For example, if you are afraid of losing status, you might buy something like artisanal sourdough bread; or if you feel a kind of resentment or envy toward an older generation who were able to buy homes, that disappointment can be redirected into small luxuries – like an expensive hand soap – as a way of compensating for something much larger that feels out of reach. It's as if you can purchase a sense of control or fulfillment – even if only temporarily.

That makes the hierarchy between rationality and emotion feel somewhat hollow: we pretend rationality is leading, while in reality we are constantly being guided through our feelings.

It makes me wonder whether it is even meaningful to value rationality more highly. In that sense, I find myself agreeing with philosopher David Hume, who wrote: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." Perhaps everything really begins with a feeling, and thinking only comes afterwards. I notice in myself that I often need to be emotionally moved by something before I can write or think about it.

I found what you wrote about your creative process really interesting – that you begin with something that resonates emotionally and then move into analysis and form. I was wondering: does that analytical process ever change your original feeling? Do you sometimes end up somewhere different from where you started?

And how does this relate to external factors for you? To what extent does your motivation come from within, and to what extent is it shaped by deadlines, money, or expectations from outside? I find it difficult to clearly distinguish between the two. Working without a deadline feels almost impossible to me. Everything becomes too large, too open, too undefined. At the same time, I long for the kind of freedom you describe: space to wander, to reflect, without immediate pressure. But I am not sure how one actually creates that space.

What you said about images and situations as a way of communicating emotions also stayed with me. It seems like a kind of freedom – not being limited to language alone. Sometimes writing feels restrictive, because words can so quickly fix or flatten something. Do you feel that images come closer to a 'pure' emotion, or is that also a construction?

Your description of happiness – being in nature, outside, by the sea – also really spoke to me. It feels quite different from how happiness is often framed in the Netherlands. Here, it seems closely tied to success: a good education, a house, an interesting career, a nuclear family. And also 'gezelligheid', which almost always means something social, cozy, shared with others. But that image of a good life can also feel quite constraining.

When I think about what makes me happy, I arrive at two levels. On a very basic level: sitting in the sun with a book that truly engages me. That's probably when I feel most like myself. On a more abstract level, happiness lies in the idea of living a life I have chosen for myself. But even that makes me question things. It sounds like life is contrellable and that I am responsible for my own success. How much of that story of the 'happy life' is truly my own, and how much is shaped by expectations around me?

And finally: I completely agree with you about cats. Please send me a cat GIF :) I have one myself, and I notice that those simple images can sometimes pull me out of my head immediately. Maybe that's a kind of language too.

I'm very curious to hear your thoughts, and also whether your working process ever changes your emotions about a subject.

Warmly,
Lena

P.S. This is my cat, very happy in the sun:

26 April 2026

Dear Lena,

You are bringing up so many interesting subjects that it's hard to choose where to start :)

I completely agree with you that the relationship between the rational and the emotional is full of paradoxes. The way capitalism has learned to mobilize our emotions - to stimulate consumption, to promise fulfillment, or a sense of control, as you describe - is both fascinating and very unsettling.

Paradoxes are actually something I am very drawn to in my own practice as well. In my creative process, research and analysis often open up new layers - I really enjoy discovering unexpected connections that can introduce a playful twist within a project. At the same time, it can be quite challenging to bring all these elements together without drifting too far from the initial idea and feeling. In moments of doubt or confusion, I try to return to that first impulse, the original emotional core - asking myself whether the newly discovered details truly strengthen it, or simply distracts. I am sure you are familiar with the concept of 'kill your darlings' - it is a big part of my process too. I have to admit that minimalism and modesty is not my strength when it comes to my art - I often want to do too many things, but when I have to choose I always try to focus on what serves the work best and what stays true to the original feeling behind it.

Haha, I also long for that kind of freedom - to wander, to reflect, without immediate pressure. But in reality, it rarely happens. I remember that when I graduated from secondary school, my piano teacher once told me: "You are the least talented among your sisters, but with your work you have achieved the most." Maybe it stayed with me more than I realized - but I do think I can relate it to my practice as well. For me, making art has often felt like a process grounded in persistence and effort, rather than something that simply comes from inspiration or luck. Although, to be honest, that's not entirely true - I tend to experiment so much that a certain amount of good luck usually becomes crucial for the work to succeed.

But thinking about how images today function as a kind of language - especially on social media - I do feel that they can sometimes come closer to a 'pure' emotion than words. At the same time, I think it also really depends on the kind of language we use. Perhaps if we all communicated only through poetry, it might bring us even closer to the emotional source.

Oh, so lovely to see your cat enjoying the sun, that's a perfect way to spend a day. We should do the same, it's SUNday! Greetings from my cats, Auseklis and Justs - they look quite happy in this image as well.

Sunny greetings from Riga,
L.

1 May 2026

Dear Līga,

Your fascination with paradoxes has stayed with me. There is something unsettling in them - a sense that something doesn't quite add up, and that this tension reveals something about how we think, work, and perhaps even live.

What you describe about linking associations feels very familiar. While writing, ideas keep presenting themselves, attaching almost automatically, as the original line of thought slowly drifts out of view. That friction between control and deviation seems unavoidable, and possibly essential.

I'm curious how this has taken shape in your exhibition. Not only in conceptual terms, but as an experience: what it evokes, what emotional core emerges, and what kinds of thoughts it sets in motion for the viewer.

Our exchanges have given me a lot: on emotion, on making, on the ongoing tension between freedom and deadlines. And, not least, on your cats.

I look forward to seeing your work.

Warmly,
Lena

2 May 2026

Dear Lena,

Thank you so much for your kind words, and for sharing your thoughts and reflections - I have really enjoyed our exchange. It has opened up so many directions, and I feel like there are still many more conversations waiting to unfold.

I really hope that through my work I will manage to bring more awareness to our emotions - their complexity and importance - especially in these strange and turbulent times we are living through. Let's see :)

Greetings from the sunny Riga,
Līga