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LATVIAN
PAVILION

Skujā Braden

Selling
water by
the River

59TH INTERNATIONAL
ART EXHIBITION OF LA
BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

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Skujā Braden

Selling Water by the River

LATVIAN PAVILION

59TH INTERNATIONAL
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LATVIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART



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Selling Water by the River

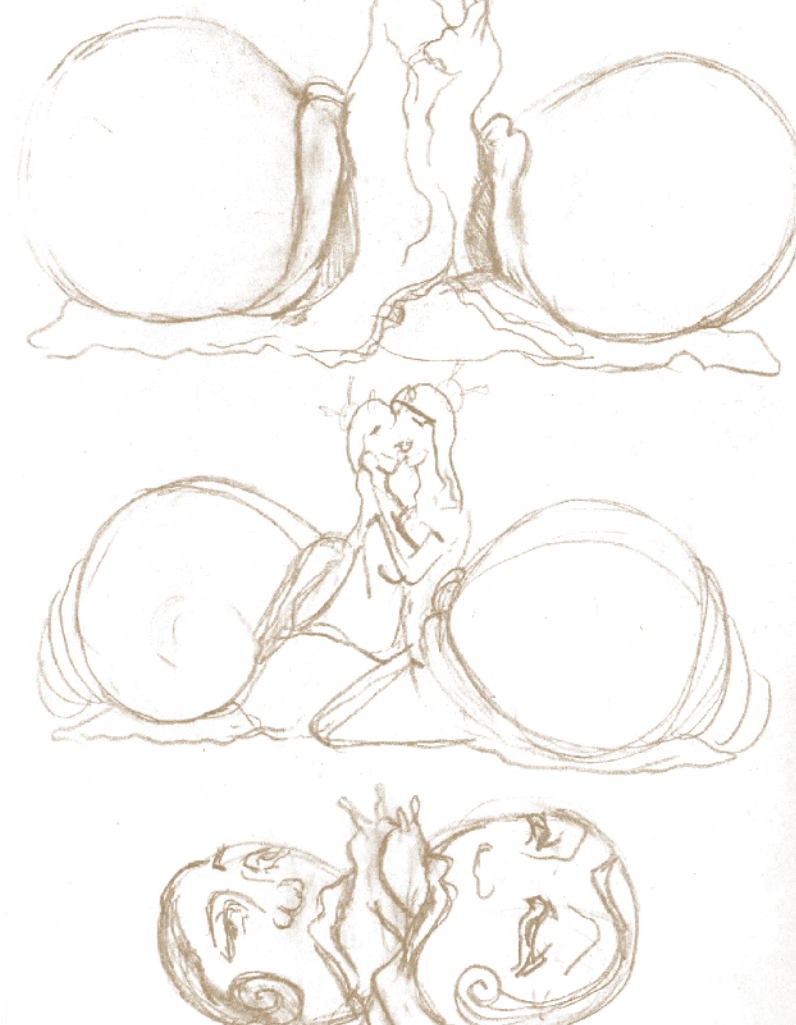
“Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition,” wrote James Baldwin in his novel 1956 *Giovanni’s Room*, as if echoing the idea, rooted in Zen Buddhism, of an enduring state of presence and enlightenment.

Elsewhere, the Japanese Zen master Daiun Sogaku Harada had once jubilantly recorded, “For forty years I’ve been selling water by the bank of a river. Ho, ho! My labors have been wholly without merit,” asking us to understand that we already have everything we need, that the river flows whether we’d like it to or not, and that if we want to become enlightened, well, that’s entirely up to us. The book *Selling Water by the River* by Hōun Jiyu Kennett, the first Western woman to become a Zen Buddhist monk, was published comparatively recently, in the early 1970s. It is a guidebook for Westerners who seek the true teachings of Zen Buddhism but want to avoid simply performing a parody of an Eastern way of life by only imitating its rituals.

Why has *Skuja Braden* – a symbiotic whole and integral being that the artists Ingūna Skuja and Melissa D. Braden have created by working and living together for more than twenty years, merging two different personalities, skill sets, sets of experiences, knowledges, historical contexts and nationalities – chosen such a framework for their exhibition at the Latvian Pavilion? Is it because the coming into being of *Skuja Braden*’s unique selfhood was influenced by the time the two artists spent together at a Zen Buddhist monastery in California? Or is it that their singular mélange of experiences and characteristics – a confidence rooted in Buddhist teachings, mixed with a Californian free-spiritedness and memories of post-socialist life – has aided

them in finding solutions to problems in both everyday situations and creative practice, as well as in coping with a society based on heteronormative ideas? Is the water different in California, where Melissa is from, or in the Daugava River, the Latvian body of water on the banks of which lies Aizkraukle, a town built under the auspices of Soviet industrialization, where Ingūna grew up and where the artist duo lived and worked for many years? And can we really say that we already have it all, and that there’s no longer any need to fight for change or for equal rights for different social groups and identities?

It would serve us well to recall that the other is always simultaneously as far removed from our self as the primordial sea but also closer than the skin that we’re in, since traces from our shared oceanic beginnings still circulate within us (Neimanis, 2012). In *Skuja Braden*’s exhibition at the Latvian Pavilion, a home, a river and a body become metaphors and signifiers of states of consciousness as well as changeable and living organisms. They are embodied in a large-scale porcelain installation that prompts the viewer to examine the borders between the private and the public and poses questions about the possibility of living and being together in a world that has been shaken by shifts on a seismic scale – a world where we have seen rapid growth in aversion to all that is different, where social groups can be bound together, as if by a manifesto, in aggression towards “guests”, and hospitality is considered a neoliberal consumer good.



Aiming to expand the concept of home, *Skuja Braden's* exhibition comprises an entire anatomy of the common spaces in which we live together: the bedroom, the kitchen, the studio, the guest room, and those areas where our everyday activities assume a ritual meaning, where memory is kept alive and the dimensions of our spiritual and physical bodies are cared for.

The past and present meet here, along with illusions, religions and convictions, making space for not only critically reviewing different ways of reading the history of our region, but also testing the public's capacity to weather the challenges of the present, including the increasing polarization of opinion.

The places we live in reflect what we want to be and how we want others to see us. It's here that we can most directly see where public and private territories start to overlap. Our homes and everyday lives may reflect social norms, to the extent that they can embody or reinforce physical and moral restrictions, but they can also be used to express the ideas of freedom, solidarity and emancipation. Often, home is tied to the notion of a woman's world, revealing her relationship to her society and the stereotypes prevalent therein. At the same time, homes have been important as shelters and alternative spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community, forming part of its survival strategies. From a historical perspective, one can see that the home, in its changing use and design, has often served as a barometer of social, economic, and political change and as a space for the realization of both utopian and dystopian ideas.

In 1971, the artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, in collaboration with local artists and students of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, turned an abandoned Los Angeles villa into a space for exhibition and performances. They named it *Womanhouse*. This project was to become a landmark event within the context of second-wave feminism, its emancipatory discourse harmonizing with wider changes taking place in society at the time.

These changes were driven by various groups and movements, from those giving voice to human rights defenders and those representing the LGBT community, to organizations of pacifists and environmental activists. The participants of *Womanhouse* deconstructed the matrices of patriarchal society and developed practices focused on the female experience, reconsidering history and the social roles found within it.

A different emancipatory aspect of female experience inside the home was developed by Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, one of the few female architects in mid-1930s Germany. She responded to demand for a convenient and functional kitchen that could fit in a very small space by designing the Frankfurt kitchen. The design was ergonomically functional and made household chores easier for women. Not only did it reduce the amount of time that one might need to spend inside a kitchen, it also indicated a change in women's status. Later this type of kitchen was also introduced in the Soviet Union, where women played the role of the equal sex on the hypocritical stage of Soviet ideology. Such kitchens were also likely to be found in Aizkraukle, which echoed a vision of Futurist socialism. The town was built in 1967 to house the workers taking part in the construction of the *Plaviņas* Hydroelectric Power Station.

As in many locations across the Soviet Union, when the construction of Aizkraukle began, private properties were destroyed. In the process, an urban and social reality was created within which the borders between private and public life-spaces were dismantled. This shaped the foundations of a "new" form of society where commonly owned properties would be shared and collectively managed. Nevertheless, attempts were made to balance out the construction of monotonous Soviet concrete apartment blocks with the creation of summer houses, the majority of which have now been turned into dwellings for year-round use. It was in one such house that *Skuja Braden* for a long time lived and worked, blending Californian creativity with lingering impressions of the Soviet era.



In 1982, Audre Lorde's classic novel *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* was published, and the writer referred to its narrative form as an example of a "biomythography", combining elements of history, biography and mythology.

Lorde uses the novel to relate her individual experience and depict lesbian life in the New York during the 1950s through the 1970s. She not only details examples of homophobia, racism and discrimination but also develops her notion of a space where one can take refuge, a room of one's own. Here at the Latvian Pavilion in Venice, *Skuja Braden's* living space is reanimated through their porcelain installations. Porcelain is a material that *Skuja Braden* has mastered superbly, allowing it to take on the most surprising shapes. This environment is an archive of feeling and memory, telling the story of *Skuja Braden's* shared and individual biographies. Its system of images and myths not only opens a queer perspective on the home but also invites the visitor to consider themes such as anger, trust, sexuality, eroticism, care and self-empowerment.

Skuja Braden bravely invites the audience into their private space to investigate their bedroom and become acquainted with its behind-the-scenes intimacy, the traces of feeling that have been left there, and markers of their personal memories. At the same time, the topics represented in the display on the large guestroom table are those that are bubbling in the waters of public discourse – political discussions, ecological problems, matters of identity and manifestos of feminism. Within the exhibition, inside space is blended with outside space. A garden is crawling between the furniture, some of which rests in a mass of scattered apples and some of which is hiding in a strawberry patch. A scarcely intuited river wave has washed through the space and left puddles on the floor. The domestic environment is echoed by images in porcelain, the ceramic coming to life in the form of luxuriously painted dishes, vases and everyday objects that assume the contours of different bodies. Some of these works preserve traces of nature, while others spurt water like a fountain or coil menacingly. At the head of the assembly is a spacious porcelain bed. All the themes of *Skuja Braden's* art and life meet in this frantic act of cosmogony.



We often use the term “body of knowledge” to refer to the notions, actions and values acquired in collective practices and experiences. We also know that it’s important to develop existing understandings and create new definitions that expand the field of our ideas. How can we prioritize an outlook that works against entrenched social hierarchies with empathy for, and in solidarity with, those who have been disadvantaged by these structures? What would it mean to consider a “body of knowledge” an “archive” of the different experiences of our intellectual and physical bodies in their multiplicity and cultural diversity?

In 1999, two independent artists, Ingūna Skuja and Melissa D. Braden, decided to relinquish their individual egos and create a shared “body”, *Skuja Braden*, by mutually appropriating and expounding on their emotional experiences, social skills and practical knacks, and blending various dimensions of Latvian and North American culture. This body is changing, interacting, and flowing; it is impulsive, subjective, explosive and critical and does not flinch from breaking socially accepted norms. There’s a lot of loving and caring inside this body. It sympathizes and professes gratitude. It’s neither egotistic nor isolated. The body of *Skuja Braden* is a collaboration seeking ways of alleviating, and developing forms of, human existence and of overcoming the loneliness and alienation that are so often experienced due to cultural, social, and economic factors. The signature on their co-created porcelain works – a single mark combining their separate names that was developed gradually, through play and the interchange of

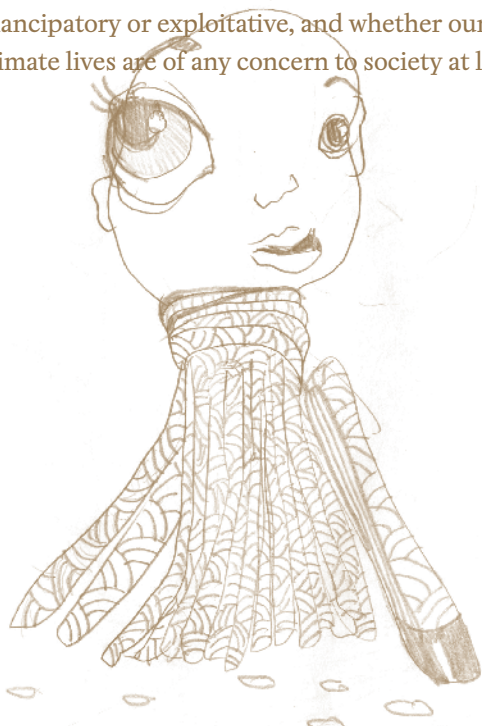
different signs and symbols – serves as a material proof of *Skuja Braden’s* collaboration. But what does it mean to live with a body like this, the existence of which is doubted by and called into question within a heteronormative world? Is it possible to consider such a symbiosis to be a fully-fledged form of existence, one that can not only cultivate new knowledge but also transform existing social structures? And in what ways, within this context, might local and regional histories and social processes be related to the development of feminist ideas and the wider trajectories of global development?

Feminist movements and the LGBTQIA+ community in Latvia and the Baltics have long histories, and thus the notion, often expressed publicly in region, that the values these groups embody are Western things, alien to the local context, is something of a paradox. It may be considered a continuation of the sorts of suppressions and denials that were characteristic of the general sociopolitical climate of the Soviet Union, of which Latvia was part for many years. Soviet ideological rhetoric has left indelible marks on present-day notions of gender equality and sexuality, fueling peculiar reactions against feminism and the other movements that feminism has helped to bring to the fore. But it is important to consider that, after independence was reinstated, it was nationalist and conservative-leaning movements that went on to shape the social narratives that are now dominant, ostensibly fighting the traumatic past while at the same time striking the prospect of a truly inclusive and open society off the agenda. Latvia is among the few countries that continue to refuse to sign the Istanbul Convention, thus making room for violence against women to be justified within families and in public space. Many politicians also continue to see no need to shy away from rhetoric that incites hatred against people of different races and sexualities. For these reasons, among many others, it is extremely important to think about how new narratives can be shaped amid such a constellation of circumstances – narratives that can counter the discrimination sanctioned by a patriarchal society and perpetuated in its traditions.

Though Latvia gained independence thirty years ago, only recently have we seen a pronounced increase in emancipatory discussions, with voices speaking more loudly about taboo topics, and new histories and stories being written that turn against entrenched conservative notions of the body and identity. One such taboo is eroticism, which has always been a sensitive subject of discussion. Women have long been “taught” to censor expressions of their sexual impetus or desire.

“If ‘the phallus’ symbolizes active desire and women perform as women so that men could affirm this phallus, with woman thereby expressed only in opposition to man, in that case, then, the concept of a lesbian is theoretically a step outside of it all. But in practice, if I think about it, I still don’t have an organ I can use actively. I cannot stick my clitoris inside or impose it on somebody else, as it is too small and has been ‘sewed on’ askew. I can only touch it or let somebody else touch it, be it a man, woman or cat.” (Anna Auziņa, 2021)

Thus writes Anna Auziņa in her recent novel, which follows Terēze, a heroine of her creation, as she figures out her relationship to sexuality against the backdrop of Latvia in the 1990s. She puts forth her views on sex, religion, family, and friends with an uncharacteristic forthrightness, breaking stereotypes in the process. Similarly, in the works of *Skuja Braden*, desire, sex and the erotic are employed in a focused way. In reaction against the suppressive strategies of the public at large, they are used to tickle the audience’s fancy, reexamine the boundaries of propriety, and openly articulate *Skuja Braden’s* lesbian identity. Since the beginning of the duo’s collaboration, the objects they have made have always been underscored by an understanding of eroticism that’s steeped in clichés. The goal has been to play with irony upon our bodies and the notions we cultivate about them at the societal level. The large chandelier hanging in the dining room is made up of innumerable crooked erect phalluses; there’s a prickly vagina on the table; the bathroom is lined with rows of small bottles in the most diverse shapes of the female breast, as if assembled for some Walpurgis Night ritual. By *Skuja Braden’s* bed, the artists themselves are revealed in passionate scenes and portrayed as sex symbols: Marilyn Monroe meets a geisha. All these objects are autobiographical, serving to document or reflect aspects of *Skuja Braden’s* life. Audiences are invited to experience each of them as a small performance and to consider for themselves whether pornography and nakedness are emancipatory or exploitative, and whether our private, intimate lives are of any concern to society at large?



Made using a technique that ranks among the most ancient within the plastic arts, and having seen periods of both advent and decline, ceramics have quite the history to tell – one that involves both hidden and long-ignored narratives.

Twentieth-century art movements including the constructivists and suprematists, the futurists and the Bauhaus school all sought to recapture the possibilities of ceramics and formulate a new language of art by breaking the routine hierarchical boundaries between different media. However, alongside the stories of the avant-gardes it is important to remember the factories and workshops that were making porcelain and other ceramic objects for both everyday and decorative use in the industrial era and earlier. The study of such objects not only provides information about their historical context but also reveals the experience of their making, which involved the work of collectives comprising sketch artists as well as those who gave shape to the objects and those who painted them. The master craftspeople involved were often women, but seeing as the process was multi-layered, they have often remained unknown.

The American art historian Jenni Sorkin emphasizes that ceramics has played a particular role in modern and contemporary art, one oriented towards understanding and inquiring into history and in which great importance has been placed on pedagogy as a method for the passing down of knowledge (Sorkin, 2016). It’s not just that the different forms made possible by ceramics have expanded the arsenal of artistic expression; part of the significance of ceramics, and what is important to talk about, is the work and perspective of its teachers, who are mostly (!) women. Through their work, these women have made some of the most direct contributions to the development and understanding of socially inclusive art over the course of the twentieth century. Sorkin calls attention to the fact that ceramics and the interdisciplinary communities that have formed around it have laid the groundwork for collective and inclusive creative practices such as the aforementioned *Womanhouse* in California, which helped to usher in globally significant discussions around feminism and equality.

The history of ceramic art as a practice is also important in *Skuja Braden's* porcelain, seeing as it both follows and challenges tradition. *Skuja Braden* not only use porcelain as an instrument for telling their stories but are also interested in how the practicalities of working with and collaborating on this material take on an added importance when viewed from a feminist perspective. Each operational segment of *Skuja Braden's* creative practice – from the making of sketches in a shared notebook to the endowing of raw material with form and the processes of painting and glazing – not only requires a shared sense of space and time but also provides an opportunity for different readings of femininity and masculinity. The question *Skuja Braden* hope to keep asking is how we might produce more inclusive narratives that continue to take different histories into account, remembering and acknowledging those who may have previously been erased.



Skuja Braden's home is rich in allusions, from the private to the political, the trivial to the tragic, and the direct to the obscure. All of these are tied together and enveloped by water, which dissolves the boundaries between not only private and public but also nature and home. Water flows through and past any difference, and in so doing offers us one of richest images of what it could mean to be together. The water enveloping the house here is charged with new knowledges and, in the spirit of hydrofeminism, signals the idea of a radical collectivism, asserting that we are all connected to our planet through the flow and continuity of different liquids.

“We are all bodies of water,” writes the feminist and environmental researcher Astrīda Neimanis. “To rethink embodiment as watery stirs up considerable trouble for dominant Western and humanist understandings of embodiment, where bodies are figured as discrete and coherent individual subjects, and as fundamentally autonomous. [...] Our wet matters are in constant process of intake, transformation, and exchange – drinking, peeing, sweating, sponging, weeping. Discrete individualism is a rather dry, if convenient, myth.” (Neimanis, 2017) The symbiotic body of *Skuja Braden* is also part of this circulation, and likewise represents a challenge to habitual categories of thought. Inside the body, experiences merge and commingle, and its creative expressions are suggestive of the fluidity of water – its perpetual motion and ability to assume any shape.

SELLING WATER BY THE RIVER

Moving incessantly from one state to another, water is eternally changeable yet abiding. It ties together past and present, having borne witness to all manner of global events since the prehistory of the Earth. Just as the Zen master's koan uses an abundance of water to teach us to recognize that we already have everything that we need, and that we must only learn to see this, *Skuja Braden's* home asks us to immerse and dissolve ourselves in the global circulation of water, connecting and including instead of creating and consuming in excess.

ANDRA SILAPĒTERE, SOLVITA KRESE
CURATORS

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*Skuja Braden: We all have
the student in us that seeks
the teacher, but the teacher
is there already, too.*

Telling Water by the River

INTERVIEW WITH SKUJA
BRADEN BY ILIANA VEINBERGA

EDITING BY IEVA MELGALVE

Of course, this is a love story. But more than that, it is a work of love. Not the kind of love where two people bond because of their similarities, but the kind of work that involves deep attentiveness and appreciation. It is about extreme attention to texture and form, to contrasts and differences. It is a story about understanding the material and exploring it, a story of taking risks while being constantly aware that what you've dreamed of may crumble and break when you put it in a kiln to be fired. So "Selling Water by the River" is not just a finished product from Skuja Braden, it is also a part of an ongoing conversation: one that we are invited to listen to, but also one that has no beginning or end. In this way, the conversation between Ingūna Skuja and Melissa D. Braden is an ongoing process, a river that continues flowing whether we buy its water or not. We are here just to listen for a while.

SKUJA. It seems that we have always had the image of women. Both me and Melissa. It's funny, when she saw my first works in California, she immediately noticed that. And then she said that I was exploiting women, their images, which I had never imagined. But later she accepted that, indeed, it is not exploitation. Why would it be OK for men to paint nude women but not OK for women to do so?

BRADEN. When I first saw Ingūna's pieces I was shocked by them. I was really enmeshed in academic feminism and studying all the different feminisms at the time. I loved her work immediately, but then I felt like – *Wait for a second! She's putting nude women as decorative pieces all over this vase!* And then I thought – *So what? Maybe it's an incredibly subversive moment! Maybe she's doing something incredibly genius, and I've just been trained to not accept it.* And because I was confused, I was captivated. I began to really think about it and research it. And then I realized that this is unique, and incredible. The easiest thing to do is to dismiss it because you don't understand it. But the most important thing is to understand it, and to do so, you must go deeper. And that's when I realized – she's a genius!

SKUJA. My first workshop was at Melluži, where I lived at the time. I built it from scratch. I had the heated floor – there I could dry the porcelain slabs nicely.

BRADEN. When I came to live with you for a while there, we were actually taking pieces and quick-drying them on the heated floor, pulling them off of the floor and manipulating them. So, we could speed things up or slow them down depending on how we used the floor. One thing I thought was really wild when I came was that Ingūna had this great, amazing space, but she wasn't using it. She had a tiny little room next to her bedroom. It was tiny, like a closet.

SKUJA. It was basically two by three meters; I had it arranged so that all the tables were around the perimeter, the shelves around in a circle, and the chair in the middle – I didn't even have to get up. That's why I could make so much in this single room.

BRADEN. But after we started working together, I said – *I don't want to work in this tiny closet.* So, we took the second room over, a giant workspace. And that's when we started working big. Everything came out wrong, but still that was the first time Ingūna had used space like that.

SKUJA. When I studied in America, I didn't know how to work with porcelain clay. And you, Melissa, made those tiny little thingies.

BRADEN. I had no fear of the material.

SKUJA. At the Art Academy of Latvia, I was always good at porcelain, because there were molds, and I liked making molds, I felt like – *This is so cool!* And the slip casting. And well, in America I learned the stoneware. I had sketches of what I would like to make but I did not know how to do it. Then I was shown the extruder.

BRADEN. She was coil-building.

SKUJA. I started really putting together sculptures, I had like eight of them, and the teachers told me to stop making them, that maybe it's time to glaze. And then I was drawing on them. They said they had never seen anything like this, that there is one figure, and another one drawn on top of it.

BRADEN. Technically we really developed in America, because we had access to different materials, and that was imperative for our development. We had a ton of porcelain sitting right there in our studio. And when we were in Latvia, it was like – *Hey, we only have three bags left, we need to dole it out carefully!*

SKUJA. I didn't throw out even the tiniest crumb. I taught kids at the school, too, that when we brush the table after work, we throw it all in a bucket, and pour water on it, that will be our casting slip. Material is like gold.

SKUJA. That is the best thing – to work together! I like it because it is so easy. Because Melissa is all the time next to me. Two people doing something together. When muggers are working, they are two people, and when the police are working, they are also two people. A doctor also is never alone.



BRADEN. If you don't know what to do, she'll just take it. *See how I did it? – Yeah, I love how you did that!* You can fly through that way. Also, it makes it so that it's not mine. The work is not mine; it doesn't belong to me. I feel it as something outside of me. It's a separate thing that lives between the two of us. It's a product of our relationship.

SKUJA. If something needs to be done, I always look at nature. Of course, the result is never as beautiful as nature, but that reflects your ability. Melissa once said it perfectly, I really like it – *Our mistakes make our artistic style*. This is how the style develops – from the mistakes we make when imitating nature. If I need to imagine something, I always look at nature; it is only women that I draw from my mind.

BRADEN. Because the work is so much a part of our everyday lives, our everyday issues end up in our work. The work for me has always been a way to transform the suffering. It's the way I can explore what is happening in order to come to terms with something painful or something awful. You can use this material – take it, use it, and turn it into something transformed. Work through it and let it go. That's the cathartic aspect of the work. But there is also an aspect of catexis – there is an aspect where you go so deep into a specific object of desire or love that you come out on the other side of it. *Om mani padme hum* – this chant literally means *the jewel in the lotus*. This lotus actually comes out of the muckiest mud. All the shit and grime and muck is the fertilizer that causes this amazing lotus to grow. It's the same thing, you know. We muck through the muck and mud of our existence and all the shit and grime sticks on you, but if you can grow something beautiful out of it that speaks to people, that maybe can help people, then you are doing a good service for humanity.

SKUJA. It is interesting that the symbolic language shows up only later. Sometime after fifty, one starts to realize what one is doing, what one burns for. Before that, you just do. The head of the Ceramics Department at the Riga School of Design and Art, Sarmīte Ozoliņa, told me that a ceramic artist should always have all kind of weird objects gathered in their workshop, as they help to create form. This is why artist workshops are so much like flea markets. It is really hard to manage all this chaos, which is why the space is essential. Maybe you'll use that form once in a year, once in ten years, but you need it at the exact time when you have the idea for it.

What we have learned from our training is to keep working. When you feel bad or stressed or weary, what can you do?

BRADEN. Meditate.

SKUJA. A working meditation.

BRADEN. There are three kinds of meditation in Zen Buddhism. There is a form of meditation where you sit and meditate. Then there is working meditation and walking meditation. If something is irritating you, that's the source of suffering which is a source of release. What are you attached to? What are you pushing away? Take a look at why you are pushing it away. Why do I not accept this? And *Selling Water by the River* is a Buddhist phrase. At first, I said – *Let's make the show and call it Cunts!* But they said – *No, you can't do that.*

SKUJA. The Latvian government is not going to approve that.

BRADEN. Well, too bad, OK? Then I said – *Let's make it me two, like there are two of us but we both are me?* But the team said no, just straight off the bat, and I'm glad they did. Everything we put out there, they dismissed. Finally, I threw the *Selling Water by the River* out there, and they were intrigued. It has several meanings. In English, you could absolutely understand it as a snake oil salesman selling you something that you don't need. But coming from an Ancient Japanese saying, it is about a master telling a student about something that they already have within them. We all have the student in us that seeks the teacher, but the teacher is there already, too. In a sense we all have already experienced and understand enlightenment, it's all already happened. Something that is unborn and undying is the great eternal which does not die and is not born. The eternal essence that activates all. We are literally a form of emptiness perfectly held together and activated by the eternal. So, we don't have to be afraid of dying, we have to be afraid of hurting each other and we have to be afraid of what our intentions are and what our minds are doing, because our mind is actually creating the existence in which we are living in.

SKUJA. I remember the Zoom meeting when Melissa threw this title out and that was like a gulp of water for everybody. The truth has always that moment of relaxation, that yes. So, we integrated water in various forms. The central piece – the bed – transformed, too. At the beginning there was

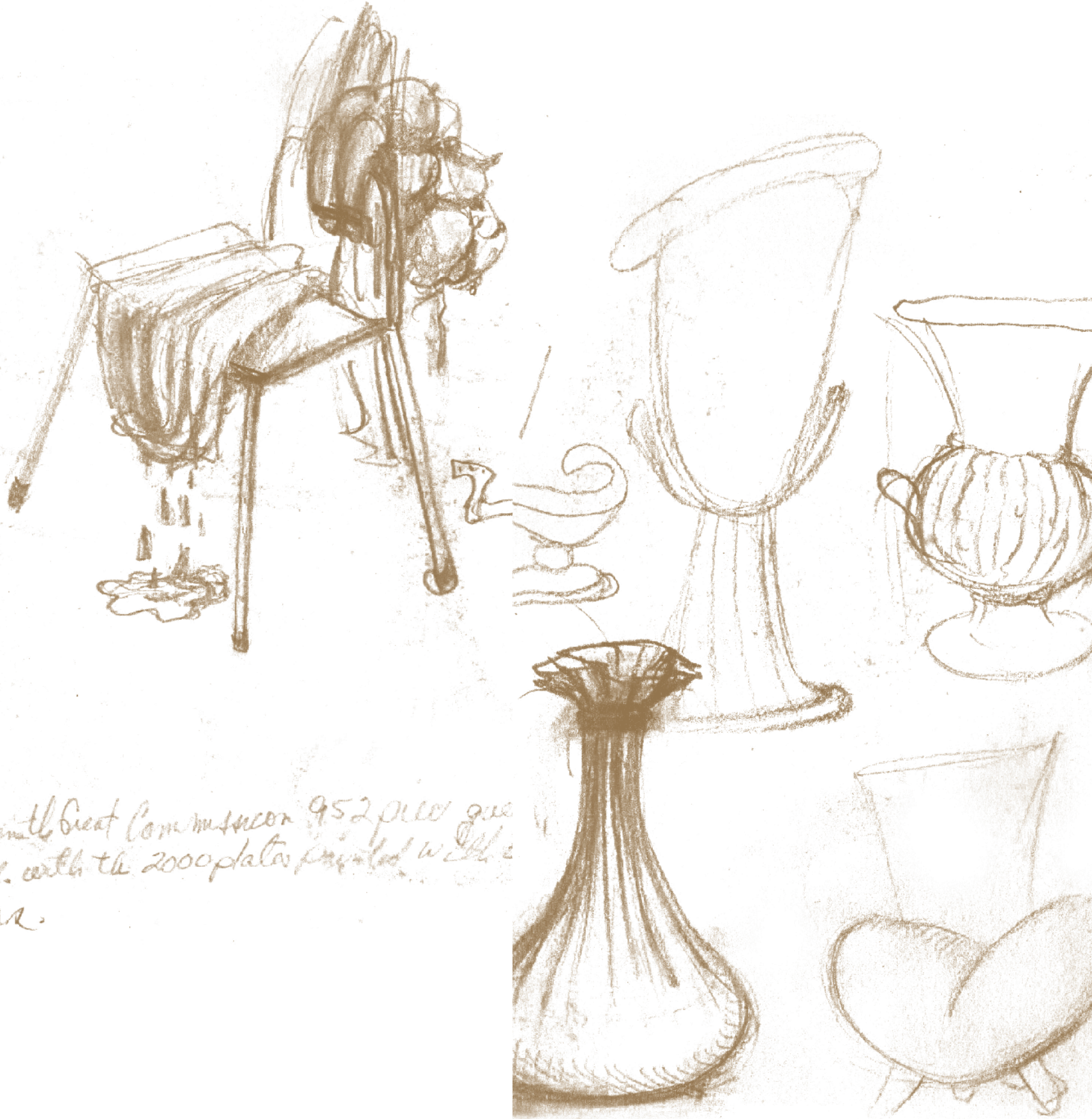
no water, it was simply a bed. Because, it's such a weird and interesting thing that when you enter somebody's home, the bed is always made, but it is usually not like that? But when we decided upon the title, the bed transformed. It was like thrown in the water, or brought out of the water, and everything is happening there, it is chaos. You cannot predict water; you cannot know what will happen. It is really dangerous, isn't it?

BRADEN. The arrangement was a team effort. The idea was to put everything together as if it were in our own home and to make it an intimate space. Also, because we would like to show that what is on the inside is coming from the outside and what's on the outside is all pulled into the inside, and then it affects the outside.

Every single thing is connected.
No one is separate from anything.
This bed we are making – that is
the bed we all are making.



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at the Great Commission 952 pieces given
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Artists

SKUJA BRADEN
(INGŪNA SKUJA AND
MELISSA D. BRADEN)

Aija Bley. Ingūna un Melissa. Photo from
the project *Workshop of Portraits*. 2013.

Skuja Braden is an artistic collaboration, born in 1999, between Ingūna Skuja from Latvia and Melissa D. Braden from California, USA. Their work is a fusion of decorative styles, touching on literary and art historical themes, grounded in the politics of now, and interpreted entirely through the experience of their shared existence.

Their solo exhibitions have been held at the Decorative Art and Design Museum in Riga, the Contemporary Craft Museum in Oregon, and the John Natsoulas Gallery in California. The duo has participated in numerous group exhibitions, the latest being held at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga and the Whitechapel Gallery in London as well as art fairs, including *SOFA-Chicago*; *Ceramic Annual of America*, San Francisco; *Start Art Fair*, London; and *SCOPE Art Show*, Basel. *Skuja Braden's* works have been published in *Contemporary Studio Porcelain*, *A Human Impulse*, and the *Lark Books 500* series on Ceramics. They have also been featured in *Ceramic Monthly*, *New Ceramics*, and *Curve Magazine*. Their works appear in public and private collections including the *White Memorial Medical Center* in L.A., the *Kellogg Art Collection* in Maryland, the Museum of Contemporary Ceramics in the Dominican Republic, Latvian National Museum of Art, Musée Ariana in Switzerland, *World Ceramic Center* in South Korea, *Changchun Ceramic Center* in China, ASU Art Museum in Arizona, Westerwald Keramike Museum in Germany, and *Zuzeum* in Latvia.



Ingūna and Melissa. Photo from private archive. 2006.

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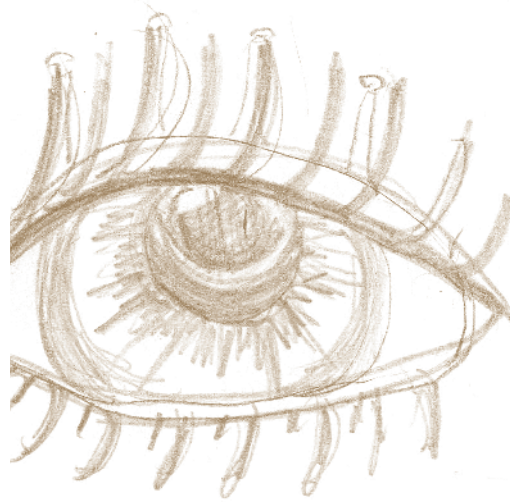
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Andra Silapētere, Solvita Krese:
*The past and present meet here,
along with illusions, religions and
convictions, making space for not
only critically reviewing different
ways of reading the history of our
region, but also testing the public's
capacity to weather the challenges of
the present, including the increasing
polarization of opinion.*

Exhibition team

Artists: *SKUJA BRADEN*
(INGŪNA SKUJA and MELISSA D.
BRADEN)

Curators: ANDRA SILAPĒTERE
and SOLVITA KRESE (*LCCA*)

Commissioner: SOLVITA KRESE

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Graphic designer: RŪTA JUMĪTE

Audiovisual solutions:
ALISE ZARIŅA

Art handlers: ALEKSEJS
BEĻECKIS and PAULS JĒGERS

Lightning designer:
ROMĀNS MEDVEDEVŠ

Art transportation:
ART SERVICES

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Project manager: IEVA KRŪMIŅA
(*MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF LATVIA*)

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ČEVERE-VEINBERGA (*LCCA*)

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Republic of Latvia

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About the Latvian Centre for Contem- porary Art

Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA) is an NGO which propels contemporary art events in Latvia since 1993, via critically and creatively approaching the processes in society.

LCCA organizes art events and exhibitions, as well as carrying out research and education projects, and creating publications addressing the most up-to-date processes in art and society and examining the histories thereof. The center's chief areas of focus are the cultural and political contexts of Latvia, the Baltics, Eastern Europe and the wider post-socialist region, with matters concerning genders and minorities, the layers of individual and cultural memory, and perspectives on the environment and ecology at the fore. *LCCA* finds cooperation with local and international artists and institutions to be of particular importance, and this is reflected in the nomadic scope of the center's activities – exhibitions, education programs and other events are held variously in museums, schools, libraries, abandoned buildings and urban spaces. One such event is the international contemporary art festival *Survival Kit*.

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