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Meklējot metodes un materiālus: fotogrāfijas mantojums kultūras un mākslas vēstures pētniecībā

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Sophie Thun Interprets Zenta Dzividzinska's Negatives: A Case Study of Exploring and Re-evaluation of a Private Photo Archive

Summary

Based on a case study of the private archive and estate of Zenta Dzividzinska, a Latvian artist and photographer active locally and internationally in the 1960s, the article highlights some of the difficulties of preserving forms of cultural heritage that so far have eluded the attention of both the professional art world and official memory institutions. Curator Zane Onckule envisioned a new model of collaboration between the estate of a deceased artist, the practice of a contemporary artist, and the labor of an archivist. The unusual vision resulted in the solo show of Austrian contemporary artist Sophie Thun, “I Don’t Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ” at the Kim? Contemporary Art Center in Riga, Latvia (July 15 to September 12, 2021). Onckule invited Thun to exhibit her own work as well as to study Dzividzinska’s archive. During the exhibition, Thun discovered Dzividzinska’s negatives and printed new images from them onsite. Thun referred to her practice as interpreting Dzividzinska’s work. Archivist Līga Goldberga opened the boxes where the family had kept Dzividzinska’s archive, described their contents, and helped Thun with the selection of negatives. Departing from the concepts of kinship, collaboration, and affective labor, Onckule, Thun, and Goldberga engaged with Dzividzinska’s archive to create an evolving space for a caring conversation. By physically bringing her archive into the gallery, the exhibition attempted to reverse the history that too often had overlooked and forgotten women photographers’ work. By centering the project around darkroom work, usually the most invisible part of photographer’s labor, the exhibition challenged the cultural status of that labor and encouraged a broader re-evaluation of Dzividzinska’s oeuvre. After the exhibition, part of Dzividzinska’s archive found a permanent home at the Latvian National Library.

Keywords: private photo archives, women photographers, 1960s, Zenta Dzividzinska, Zane Onckule, Sophie Thun, Līga Goldberga, photo exhibition

Introduction

Insight into the fate of the private archive and estate of Zenta Dzividzinska (1944–2011), a Latvian artist and photographer active locally and internationally in the 1960s, aims to approach the issues of preservation of private archives of photographers, especially women photographers whose careers have taken place on the margins of the art world. Dzividzinska’s case illuminates these issues because she had been forgotten and misunderstood as an artist for most of her lifetime, yet her work begins to be appreciated today. This case study also presents a metaphorical journey of an artist’s cultural status from a quite acknowledged young talent in the 1960s to decades of oblivion and neglect to an emerging interest after her passing in 2011.

As the map for this transformative journey, this article uses the solo show of Austrian contemporary artist Sophie Thun (b. 1985), “I Don’t Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ” at the Kim? Contemporary Art Center in Riga, Latvia (July 15 to September 12, 2021). Curator Zane Onckule had envisioned a new model of collaboration between the estate of a deceased artist, the practice of a contemporary artist, and the labor of an archivist. Onckule invited Thun to exhibit her own work as well as to study Dzividzinska’s archive. During the exhibition, Thun discovered Dzividzinska’s negatives and printed new images from them onsite. Thun referred to her practice as interpreting Dzividzinska’s work. Archivist Līga Goldberga opened the boxes where the family had kept Dzividzinska’s archive, described their contents, and helped Thun with the selection of negatives.¹

The exhibition highlights the problematic aspects of photographer’s labor and preservation of the products of such labor. At the center of the exhibition, one finds a working darkroom and the process of opening and describing the archive. By emphasizing these activities, Onckule turns the spotlight onto the usually invisible parts of photography as an artistic practice. When viewers admire the works by well-known photographers in museums and art galleries, the practicalities of darkroom work (which often is the responsibility of someone else, typically an anonymous technician) remain behind the scenes. The physical presence of a photographer’s archive as they leave it at the time of their passing also usually remains unknown to the general public. We are used to seeing only the polished end-product, either nicely framed prints in an exhibition, sequence of images in a photo book, or selected documents, notes, or contact sheets reproduced in a scholarly journal or book. Here, however, the spotlight is on the raw and messy life material.

1 Onckule had met Dzividzinska briefly in 2006-7 and knew about the state of her archive from conversations with the author of this article who is also Dzividzinska’s daughter and sole supervisor of the artist’s estate. However, it needs to be clarified that my role in the project was only supportive, as the idea and its execution was entirely in the hands of Onckule and Thun. My involvement in the project encompassed granting Onckule, Thun, and Goldberga full permission to work with any materials in Dzividzinska’s archive.

The title of the exhibition, “I Don’t Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ,” is a combination of the title of Dzividzinska’s second solo exhibition “I Don’t Remember a Thing” (Artists’ Union of Latvia Gallery, Riga, 2005) and the title of an article by art historian Alise Tifentale (b. 1977), “Entering the Elusive Estate of Photographer Zenta Dzividzinska” published in *MoMA Post* (2021) introducing the artist’s work and legacy.² The abbreviation “ZDZ” is a reference to the artist’s preferred signature, which came about from her frustration at people’s inability to correctly spell or pronounce her Polish-sounding last name.³

Who is Zenta Dzividzinska?

Dzividzinska became fascinated by photography while studying in 1961–66 at the Riga School of Applied Arts. “In 1964 she took an extracurricular photography class taught by Gunārs Binde, one of the most visible champions of photographic art and a leading member of the photo club *Rīga*.”⁴ In the Soviet Union of the 1960s, the photo club circuit offered the only legitimate context for exhibiting photographs as an art form. Creative, self-commissioned photographic practice was a hobby, a form of self-realization—an activity strictly outside the professional career. As such, it provided certain freedoms that were especially important in places like the Soviet Union where the more traditional arts like painting and sculpture were under more severe control and censorship than this “amateur” art. Dzividzinska joined the photo club *Rīga* in 1965. As one of the very few women in the highly competitive and patriarchal circle of photographers in the club, she succeeded in earning the respect of fellow members while still in her twenties. The prints that brought Dzividzinska recognition fit well within the aesthetics of the photo club culture: a female nude, a pair of horses in a sunlit meadow, an image from her series *Rīga Pantomime*. However, most of her creative work in photography was leading to a different, more experimental visual language that did not fit in the photo club culture of the time.

Dzividzinska continued working for approximately a decade, likely inspired by her own excitement about the possibilities of the photographic medium to capture and at the same time defamiliarize the visible reality. But the excitement faded away when she faced the need to provide for her family and to prioritize paid work over creative experiments with photography (in 1969, she married painter Juris Tifentals

(1944–2001) and became the sole breadwinner of the family). Also lack of like-minded peers could be among reasons why Dzividzinska abandoned her creative practice.

After Dzividzinska dropped out of the regular photo club activities in the 1970s, her name was soon forgotten, and the artist herself did not revisit her photo archive for almost three decades. In the early 1970s, she put the negatives, prints, exhibition catalogues, books, equipment, photo magazines, and everything else photo-related away in the attic where they stayed untouched until the late 1990s.

Interest in Dzividzinska’s work emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Art historian Mark Allen Svede (b. 1960) selected a collection of Dzividzinska’s prints for the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art which currently is housed at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University. Curator and art historian Inga Šteimane (b. 1965) inspired her to organize what became the artist’s second solo show since 1965, an exhibition entitled *Black and White* (Riga, Čiris Gallery, 1999). The exhibition displayed nine new large-scale prints from the negatives made in the 1960s, the size chosen partly in response to the recent international trend of spectacular, musealized color photography most notably practiced by artists like Jeff Wall (b. 1946) and the Düsseldorf School of Photography. The show was based on the daring assumption that black and white images from the 1960s could be presented in what Jean-François Chevrier (b. 1954) proposed to call the “tableau form” photography and Michael Fried (b. 1939) further discussed as “theatrical.”⁵ The local art world, however, did not approve of such gestures, believing that “old” photographs can be only viewed as small vintage prints.

Interaction with Svede and Šteimane convinced Dzividzinska to revisit her archive more thoroughly. This revisiting resulted in her third solo show, *I Don’t Remember a Thing* (Riga, 2005) and an eponymous photobook (2007).⁶ The exhibition consisted of large-scale printouts on canvas as well as photographic enlargements, some from the negatives made in the 1960s, some from more recent work, as she had again taken up the camera in the 2000s. Although the exhibition and book received positive reviews in the local art press, they did not bring a notable change in the general attitude toward her work. The public as well as a large part of the art world still regarded Dzividzinska’s images as “not pretty”—that is, as unsightly, unattractive, and ridiculous.

2 Tifentale, A. Entering the Elusive Estate of Photographer Zenta Dzividzinska [online]. *MoMA Post* (24 March 2021). Accessible at: <https://post.moma.org/entering-the-elusive-estate-of-photographer-zenta-dzividzinska/> [viewed 6 January 2022].

3 Onckule, Z. I Don’t Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ [online]. *Kim.lv* (undated). Accessible at: <https://kim.lv/en/dont-remember-thing-entering-elusive-estate-zdz/> [viewed 6 January 2022].

4 Tifentale, A. Entering the Elusive Estate of Photographer Zenta Dzividzinska [online].

5 Fried, M. *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008; Maimon, V. Michael Fried’s Modernist Theory of Photography. *History of Photography*, 2010, 34 (4), P. 387–395; Lugon, O. Before the Tableau Form. *Études photographiques*, 25 May 2010. Accessible at: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques/3440> [viewed 6 January 2022]. See also: Lugon, O. Photography and Scale: Projection, Exhibition, Collection. *Art History*, 2015, 38 (2), P. 386–403.

6 Dzividzinska, Z. *I Don’t Remember a Thing. Photographs 1964–2005*. Riga: Artists’ Union of Latvia, 2007.

In sum, part of Dzividzinska's archive had remained in a state of neglect since the early 1970s when she ceased practicing photography and participating in photo exhibitions. At the time of her passing in 2011 the exact content of her estate was unknown because no systematic research and archiving ever had taken place. Boxes full of unsorted papers, prints of various sizes, negatives, books, notes, documents, and miscellanea with no obvious monetary value and uncertain cultural value were kept in the family's storage space (Figure 1).

Opening the archive

The article loosely follows the spatial plan of the exhibition, laid out in four rooms of the Kim? Contemporary Art Center. For the purposes of this article, I propose a sequence of visiting these rooms that help outlining the underlying issues that I aim to highlight here. For clarity's sake, I have entitled each room according to the role it plays in my description. In the gallery, from Room A one can either continue to Room B or Room A1 which then leads to Room C. We shall proceed from A and A1 to B and then C. These titles were not part of the original installation and may not correspond to the curator's and the artist's intentions, but here they work as signposts in my verbal navigation of the exhibition space which I use as a map for the broader theoretical and historiographic issues the exhibition raises.⁷

Rooms A and A1 – Presentation

The exhibition's first two rooms present selected work by both artists in the way that we are used to seeing photographs in art galleries and museums. Small selection of framed vintage prints by Dzividzinska from the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art is on view next to similarly framed works by Thun. The most symbolic part of the presentation is the pairing of these two works in the Room A right across the entrance: a self-portrait by Dzividzinska, *Self-portrait with Moskvitch* (1965) showing the photographer's distorted reflection in a car's hubcap, and Thun's work *Contact (release)* (2018, 77,5 x 62 cm), an analogue color photograph that features a photogram of the artist's profile. This pairing is an almost idyllic introduction to a recurring theme in both artist's work, namely a mediated (re)presentation of the female body that oftentimes (in Dzividzinska's case) or always (in Thun's case) is



Figure 1. The state of Zenta Dzividzinska's archive at the time of her passing in 2011. Detail. Photo: Alise Tifentale

⁷ The exhibition's wall text, labels, press release, and installation shots are archived and freely available on the Contemporary Art Library website: <https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/sophie-thun-and-the-estate-of-zenta-dzividzinska-at-kim-contemporary-art-centre-19974> [viewed 6 January 2022].

also a self-(re)presentation. All that follows, meanwhile, attempts to deconstruct and complicate this idealized introduction of two women artists.

Room B – Labor (Archive)

At the center of this exhibition is the concept of affective labor. According to Michael Hardt (b. 1960), the concept of affective labor highlights “the production of affects in our labor and our social practices” and helps us better understand the “processes whereby our laboring practices produce collective subjectivities, produce sociality, and ultimately produce society itself.”⁸ Furthermore, Hardt points out that feminist theorists “have grasped affective labor with terms such as *kin work* and *caring labor*” (emphasis in original), and these are the very aspects that this project brings to the foreground.⁹ Most notably, the affective labor takes place in the space of the next gallery room that has become a darkroom and an archival research office. Because the exhibition is a work in progress that evolves and changes every day, this article can only offer a snapshot-like description of the next room as it could have looked like sometime during the run of the exhibition.

As we enter Room B, on the right side we see a pile of unassuming cardboard boxes, regular ones that one gets from a hardware store for moving and storing one’s belongings. This is Dzividzinska’s archive, kept in the state it was at the time of her passing and brought into the gallery from the family’s storage space. Some boxes are open, some have notes on them. There is also a desk where the contents of one box are laid out, such as strips of 35mm and 6x6 negatives wrapped in paper, hand-written notes, contact prints, some small-size prints. This desk is Goldberga’s workplace where she works on a regular basis, listing and describing the contents of the boxes as well as helping Thun select negatives to print new images from.

At the far end of the room is a life-size (ca. 300 x 200 cm) color print depicting an open storage room, its metal gates raised to give a glimpse into its inside, full of cardboard boxes, wrapped paintings, furniture, and other items. Thun’s work *Alise’s storage in Riga for ZDZ on April 21, 2021, red* (2021, C-Print, photogram), depicts one of the actual storage rooms that housed Dzividzinska’s archive before the exhibition. Thun produced this work specifically for the exhibition while she was on a research visit in Riga. “I came in April for four days,” says Thun, “I wanted to see the space because I almost always work site-specifically. I also wanted to see the archive; we went to the storage facility. I brought my large format camera and took

some negatives (. . .). I wanted to incorporate the different places of production along with the different stages of production. (. . .) I thought it was important to show the place where these boxes were brought from.”¹⁰ (Figure 2.)

“Those are the hierarchies of visibility,” notes Onckule about the dichotomy of the few framed works versus the multitude of negatives in the boxes.¹¹ The darkroom and archival research “office” mobilize two contradictory yet complementary notions of photography. The framed, completely musealized and legitimized prints-as-artworks in the first room stand in stark contrast to the pile of cardboard boxes containing strips of negatives, contact prints, and various test prints alongside random miscellanea of life.

“Negatives don’t really have this immediate exhibition value as a painting or a print does,” says Goldberga, “There are only so many prints that Zenta made (. . .). But [a negative] doesn’t have this accustomed exhibition value; how would visitors approach this little object? In this case, the body of the archive allows us to view it as a part of a whole—as an installation. It is important that these boxes are here and that all these otherwise unseen processes, like printing and archiving, are revealed.”¹² Reflecting on her work as an archivist, Goldberga admits that “two months to work with such a huge archive is not enough time to systematize it. I can only start to understand what is in there, what was Zenta’s thought process organizing her work and what will be my next strategies. It is important to be respectful towards her system.”¹³

The relatively sad state of Dzividzinska’s archive stems from the fact that neither her life nor her work had been considered particularly valuable. First, at the time of its making and until the late 1990s, Dzividzinska’s work was not considered “art” at all because the Soviet professional establishment did not accept photography as an art medium, and the art world agreed. All creative pursuits in photography retained the lowly status of hobby and amateurism. Thus, in the eyes of the society, Dzividzinska was not even a “real” artist, and her work and her legacy did not have any cultural value until recently. In addition to her studies at the Riga School of Applied Arts, Dzividzinska completed the preparatory course offered by the State Art Academy of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1965–67. After that, however, she did not pursue the Art Academy degree that would have potentially opened the door to a more established art career. At the time, only graduates of the Art Academy could rely on state commissions and museum acquisitions, along with access to studios, better housing, and numerous other privileges. The benefits, however, came with

8 Hardt, M. Affective Labor. *Boundary 2*, 1999, 26 (2), P.90.

9 Hardt, Affective Labor.

10 Ruka, E. Giving Thanks to the Past. Interview with Zane Onckule and Sophie Thun [online]. *FK Magazine* (27 July 2021). Accessible at: <https://fkmagazine.lv/2021/07/27/giving-thanks-to-the-past-interview-with-zane-onckule-and-sophie-thun/> [viewed 6 January 2022].

11 Ibid.

12 Raudsepa, I. We Can See Her Being Seen [online]. *Arterritory* (26 August 2021). Accessible at: https://artterritory.com/en/visual_arts/interviews/25733-we_can_see_her_being_seen/ [viewed 6 January 2022].

13 Ibid.

certain limitations and demands that the Soviet system imposed on professional artists. Moreover, photography was not among the mediums one could study at the academy. Eventually Dzividzinska chose a less public and more mundane, but also a more secure, career at the margins of the art world—that of a graphic designer at the state-owned company Māksla (Art), where she worked from 1967 until the company’s dissolution in 1993.

Second, Dzividzinska’s work did not have much value as photography or “photographic art” either. The cultural and social status of a photographer in the past was frequently measured by the cultural and social status of their subjects, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) has observed.¹⁴ Photographer’s association with acknowledged artists and other notable peers are known to have helped building successful careers, as art historian Nadya Bair has demonstrated with her case study on the influence of Henri Cartier-Bresson’s (1908-2004) social and professional network on his artistic reputation.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Dzividzinska did not aim for professional success as a photographer. She chose her mother, her sister and nieces, and her art school friends as her protagonists, as opposed to well-known artists, actors, and other public figures of her time. For that reason, she did not rank as a notable or respectable photographer to her peers.

Third, most of her work remained unknown and unseen by anyone, partly because there was no audience for her work then and there, partly because of practical reasons as making prints required a notable investment of time, labor, and money all of which were in short supply. From today’s perspective, most of the images Dzividzinska produced during the 1960s can be defined as an artistic gestures or statements with zero likely spectators: spontaneous snapshots, female subjects that defy the mainstream understanding of “prettiness,” blurred or unfocused images, seemingly random and oblique angles, dangerously slanted horizons, fragmented or distorted reflections, incorrectly exposed and/or processed images, and in general quite a careless attitude toward the craft part of the photographic practice. “Photographic art,” as it was understood in the patriarchal and conservative photographic culture of Soviet Latvia of the 1960s, was not supposed to look like this. There was no institutional framework or intellectual context in which a young woman from Riga could exhibit such images and expect to be understood at the time. For this reason, most of her work remained in the latent form of negative, never printed and thus never really seen as an image by anyone including herself.



Figure 2. Sophie Thun at work in Zenta Dzividzinska’s archive in the artist’s family temporary storage facility, Riga, April 2021. Photo: Alise Tifentale

14 See Bourdieu, P. et al. *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

15 Bair, N. The Decisive Network: Producing Henri Cartier-Bresson at Mid-Century. *History of Photography*, 2016, 40 (2), P. 146-166.

Considering all that, it is especially fitting that the exhibition brought Dzividzinska's archive into the light and created the circumstances for Thun to make new prints from some of the negatives that had never been printed before.

Room B – Labor (Darkroom)

At the center of the Room B, we see an imposing installation of darkroom equipment with an enlarger, chemical and paper supplies, baths, and other accessories (Figure 3). This is Thun's darkroom where she works several days a week throughout the run of the exhibition. Why is the darkroom work so important? Onckule explains: "Analogue photography is a medium with a high production cost, but with a much lower market value compared to other media. Moreover, works by women in the medium of analogue photography typically sell for less, have less gallery exposure, and possess a slimmer chance of being included in museums and private collections. In order to support and finance the creation of their uncompromising art, both Dzividzinska and Thun have had to find additional avenues for sustaining their practice. Dzividzinska worked as a graphic designer at the state-owned company Māksla from the early 1970s to the early 1990s, while Thun continues to work as an exhibition photographer, mentoring aspiring photographers and developing film for established artists. Both Dzividzinska and Thun make art largely "on the side," during their so-called "free time," be it in a family kitchen (Dzividzinska) or in the "erotic fantasies" (M. Vukovič, 2019) which denotes the hotel rooms Thun frequents."¹⁶

In the 1960s, when Dzividzinska produced most of her work, from the economic perspective, photography as an artistic practice existed completely outside any market—a leisure activity that required only expenses and never did promise any material reward. The photo club culture in the Soviet Union as well as elsewhere was based on completely volunteer, self-financed, and self-commissioned activities, and the prints that circulated in the photo club exhibitions did not have any notable material value—no money exchanged hands. Dzividzinska developed most of her film and printed most of her images in a makeshift darkroom in the kitchen, on a time borrowed from school and work. Until the early 1970s, she continued to take photographs and develop film on a regular basis, and most of the time even make contact prints, but less time as well as less means to purchase the supplies led to the situation where she printed less and less images. Only a few works exist as proper "exhibition-size" prints (ca. 30x40 cm), most images are printed as small test prints (10x15 cm), and hundreds of frames had not been printed at all.

"I think we have this self-sufficiency and in-betweenness in common that is not so much about proper photography but more about working with a medium," observes Thun, "So for me, the darkroom work is the most important aspect, and Zenta had a lot of experiments with solarization, and photograms. It was less about doing technically perfect images, just about what the medium itself is. I think we both try to dissect the medium."¹⁷ For Dzividzinska, photography was never about the cameras, lenses, filters, films, or techniques, contrary to most of the photo club members who were concerned with the sharpness, graininess, and other mechanical or chemical qualities of the photographic negative and print. For her, photography was just a tool to make images that were interesting (for a lack of better word) to herself. The images did not need to be pleasing or "pretty." Her fascination with the various optical effects, fish-eye lenses, or distorting reflections instead of perfecting the skills to make "good photography" indeed point toward what Thun calls "dissecting the medium."¹⁸ Such dissecting continues in Thun's darkroom at the center of Room B.

The involvement of Thun as artist-technician becomes a crucial symbol of affective labor, kinship, and collaboration. Her work during the exhibition can be seen as a generous gift of time, effort, and care that Dzividzinska never had during her own lifetime. It is a delicate process in which another artist from a different generation and cultural background studies Dzividzinska's legacy and weaves it into her own practice. (Figure 4.) Thun's involvement also brings up questions about authenticity and authorship, some of which are tentatively answered in the Room C.

Room C – Interpretation

To pass from Room A1 into Room C, one must literally walk through a photographic image. This is a large-scale, life-size color print, a trompe-l'oeil depiction of the very gallery space it partially covers—Thun's *Zenta's Box, Passage Kim?* (2021, C-Print, photogram, ca. 400 x 350 cm). The Room C in this image is empty apart from a cardboard box on the floor with initials "ZDZ" on it, one of the boxes containing Dzividzinska's archive that the artist herself had packed and marked while moving from one house to another. "That is an enlargement one-to-one size and hung in the place where I shot it. It's the type of work I first started doing photography with, where I would simultaneously show and cover reality, which I feel photography very often does," comments Thun.¹⁹

17 Ruka, E. Giving Thanks to the Past.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

16 Onckule, Z. I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ [online].



Figure 3. Sophie Thun's darkroom in the exhibition "I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ," "Kim?" Contemporary Art Center, Riga, July 15 - September 12, 2021. Photo: Ansis Starks. Courtesy of "Kim?"



Figure 4. Sophie Thun at work in her darkroom that was part of the exhibition "I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ." Photo: Ansis Starks. Courtesy of "Kim?"

The exhibition makes visible the photographer's labor as well as gradually reveals the products of this labor as they materialize over time. Two large metallic panels dominate the opposite walls of the gallery's largest space, Room C. On the day of the opening, they were empty (Figure 5). With each day passing, Thun gradually began to cover the panels by fresh prints, attaching them to the metallic surface with her signature system of minuscule magnets (Figure 6). The first images that Thun chose to print were all frames from a roll of film that contained Dzividzinska's attempts to take a serious self-portrait in a studio setting while she held a temporary job at a photo lab. Dzividzinska herself had printed only a few select shots, but Thun printed all frames, including all "failures" or "unsuccessful" shots along the way, thus providing an insight into the artist's creative process and her sense of humor in relation to both the photographic medium and her self-image (Figure 7).

Thun's contribution here, however, is more than just printing—she rather interprets Dzividzinska's work. "I took the term from music, because there is a work and then it gets interpreted," says Thun.²⁰ Treating the negative as a musical score that gets interpreted by each musician who performs it, Thun opens a whole new avenue for thinking about photography in terms of authenticity and authorship. No less significant is the way Thun interprets these images by making the viewers more aware of the photographic process. In each new print, the image is surrounded by black, i.e., fully light-exposed area with a photogram of Thun's hands "holding" the image. This approach is similar to Thun's own photographic practice, where "she exposes the photographic process by exposing the entire negative as a contact print and exposing the parts where it has been cut. Around it, the outlines of her hands – characteristic white spaces that appear when Thun holds the negative on photo-sensitive paper and shines light on it – clearly indicate the artist's authorship."²¹

While the works on the two metal panels are Thun's, they also are Dzividzinska's, because without her negatives these prints would not exist. Discussing her work with Dzividzinska's negatives, Thun reflects: "Some of the negatives have stains, some have marks of the storage. The passing of time from the moment she took the images to now will also be visible, which is also interesting, for me. (. . .) In this work, if I inscribe myself into the prints, it's at the same time a piece, which was made in 1960 and in 2021."²² Thun's hands "holding" the other artist's images that now have become part of Thun's images, evoke touch, care, tenderness, and kinship. Regarding the latter, art critic and curator Adam Szymczyk (b. 1970) writes: "In the blinding spectral



Figure 5. One of the two empty panels at the opening of the exhibition "I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ," July 15, 2021. Photo: Alise Tifentale

20 Raudsepa, I. We Can See Her Being Seen [online].

21 From press text by Magdalena Vuković for Thun's solo exhibition *After Hours* at Sophie Tappeiner gallery, 2018. Quoted on the exhibition label. *Contemporary Art Library* [online]. Accessible at: <https://www.contemporaryartlibrary.org/project/sophie-thun-and-the-estate-of-zenta-dzividzinska-at-kim-contemporary-art-centre-19974>. [viewed 6 January 2022].

22 Ruka, E. Giving Thanks to the Past.

white outline of the photographer's hands pressed against the black backdrop of her photogram, a contour of rings can be made out on one finger like a sign of kinship that remains in place as generations pass and individual images perish, change in time, and are perpetuated."²³ He refers to Thun's interaction with a photo-portrait of late Austrian artist Elisabeth Wild (1922–2020). Writing about Thun's involvement with Dzividzinska's archive, Onckule notes that it "is both exhibition and performative act—sign of a kinship that exposes the hidden, the unknown and the unconscious. Focused on the work of Dzividzinska, a fearless, marginalized, and system-defying artist whose work, in the course of her lifetime, was written off as not particularly valuable, the exhibition uncovers her neglected oeuvre. Simultaneously, the exhibition is contemporary artist Thun's tribute to the preceding generation of women artist(s) that affirms their legacy and shows continuity in their efforts to create, exhibit and be respected within changing, but still constraining, hierarchies."²⁴

On the last day of the exhibition, September 12, which also would have been Dzividzinska's 77th birthday, both panels in Room C were completely covered by the new prints. The selection of self-portraits, snapshots, staged setups with nude female models alongside test prints leave an impression of work in progress, although Thun's work here is finished and tomorrow the gallery will begin deinstalling the exhibition. This feeling partly characterizes also Dzividzinska's career in photography which she abandoned at such an early stage without a proper chance to fully develop her own practice.

Closing the archive and moving forward

Departing from the concepts of kinship, collaboration, and affective labor, Onckule, Thun, and Goldberga engaged with Dzividzinska's archive to create an evolving space for a caring conversation. By physically bringing her archive into the gallery, the exhibition attempted to reverse the history that too often had overlooked and forgotten women photographers' work. By centering the project around darkroom work, usually the most invisible part of photographer's labor, the exhibition challenged the cultural status of that labor and encouraged a broader re-evaluation of Dzividzinska's oeuvre. After the exhibition, part of Dzividzinska's archive found a permanent home at the Latvian National Library that will preserve it and make available to future researchers. Meanwhile, Thun continues to use Dzividzinska's images for her subsequent projects thus raising awareness of her work internationally. For example, Thun included works based on Dzividzinska's images in her subsequent solo exhibitions "Merge Layers" at the Sophie Tappeiner Gallery, Vienna, Austria



Figure 6. One of the two panels, partly covered by prints that Thun made using Dzividzinska's negatives. August 22, 2021. Photo: Alise Tifentale

²³ Szymczyk, A. Hands. *Camera Austria*, 2020, 150/151, P. 8/10.

²⁴ Onckule, Z. I Don't Remember a Thing: Entering the Elusive Estate of ZDZ [online].



Figure 7. Detail—closeup of the panel with prints that Thun made using Dzividzinska's negatives. Photo: Alise Tifentale

(January 14 to February 26, 2022) and “Trails and Tributes” at the Kunstverein Hildesheim, Germany (May 8 to July 17, 2022).

But just making Dzividzinska's legacy visible was one of the main goals of the exhibition project. Most museum curators or collectors typically are interested in “great” artworks—they look for large-size, excellent quality, well-preserved vintage prints ready for framing and exhibiting. But art forms such as photography cannot always meet such expectations. For example, Dzividzinska did not even make that many exhibition-size prints during the 1960s. Besides, her most radical work at the time was not even thought of as exhibitable, so it existed in small test prints or only in the form of negative. The exhibition provided a basis to begin a conversation about these issues.

After a photographer's passing, especially if it is a lesser-known photographer, their archive can be easily discarded and thrown out as useless papers. Photography, especially if it is a product of some idiosyncratic creative pursuit, still is not perceived as valuable, apart from the work of a few well-known names. Unlike paintings or sculptures, for example, which have the unmistakable “art” aura, photography does not have any material, monetary value. In my previous research of Latvian postwar photography, I have encountered the names of numerous photographers, men and women alike, who had been active at some point during the Soviet era, but then later appear to have been completely forgotten. Until very recently, there had been no museums or other institutions to ever preserve or collect their work in any systematic way. I have experienced cases where I have not been able to trace the heirs of deceased photographers and it is likely that their estates are lost.

Such a problem per se is not unique, only more severe in Latvia because there is no history of fine art photography market and connoisseurship at all. In the US, for example, the American Photography Archives Group offers support and advice for individuals who own or manage a privately held photography archive. Since 2000 it has succeeded in uniting more than “150 archives, photographers, archivists, foundations and institutions who come together to share resources.”²⁵ Lacking any institutional framework, private photo archives in Latvia remain precariously dependent on families' and descendants' decisions.

25 American Photography Archives Group [online]. Accessible at: <https://www.apag.us/>. [viewed 6 January 2022].

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Sofija Tuna interpretē Zentas Dzividzinskas negatīvus: privāta fotoarhīva izpētes un pārvērtēšanas piemērs

Kopsavilkums

Balstoties uz 20. gadsimta 60. gados vietējā un starptautiskā mērogā aktīvās latviešu mākslinieces un fotogrāfes Zentas Dzividzinskas privātā arhīva un mantojuma izpētes piemēru, raksts ceļ gaismā dažus būtiskus faktoros, kas apgrūtināta tādu kultūras mantojuma formu saglabāšanu, kuras līdz šim ir atradušas ārpus profesionālās mākslas pasaules un nav bijušas oficiālu atmiņas institūciju interešu lokā. Kuratore Zane Onckule iecerēja jauna veida sadarbības modeli, kurā iesaistīts miruša mākslinieka radošais mantojums, kāda laikmetīgā mākslinieka prakse un arhivista darbs. Šis neparastais sadarbības modelis rezultējās austriešu laikmetīgās mākslinieces Sofijas Tunas personalizstādē ar nosaukumu "Es neko neatceros: Ienākot ZDZ izvairīgajā arhīvā" Laikmetīgās mākslas centrā "Kim?" Rīgā (no 2021. gada 15. jūlija līdz 12. septembrim). Zane Onckule uzaicināja Sofiju Tunu izstādīt savus darbus un pētīt Dzividzinskas arhīvu. Izstādes laikā Tuna iepazīna Dzividzinskas negatīvus un izgatavoja jaunas fotogrāfijas no tiem, raksturojot šo praksi kā Dzividzinskas attēlu interpretēšanu. Arhiviste Līga Goldberga atvēra kastes, kurās Dzividzinskas ģimene bija glābjuši viņas arhīvu, un aprakstīja to saturu, kā arī asistēja Tunai negatīvu izvēlē. Balstoties uz tādiem konceptiem kā radniecība, sadarbība un afektīvais darbs, Onckule, Tuna un Goldberga iesaistījās kopīgā darbā ar Dzividzinskas arhīvu, lai veidotu attīstībā esošu, sirsnīgu sarunu. Fiziski izvietojot mākslinieces arhīvu galerijas telpās, izstāde mēģināja apvērst to vēsturi, kura pārāk bieži ir neievērojusi vai aizmirsusi sieviešu fotogrāfu veikumu. Izstādes projekta centrā liekot fotolaboratoriju, kurā notiek parasti visneredzamākā fotogrāfa darba daļa, autore pievērsa uzmanību fotogrāfa darba kultūras statusam. Projekts kopumā rosināja plašāku Zentas Dzividzinskas radošā mantojuma pārvērtēšanu. Pēc izstādes noslēguma daļa Dzividzinskas arhīva atrada pastāvīgu mājvietu Latvijas Nacionālajā bibliotēkā.

Atslēgvārdi: privāti fotoarhīvi, sievietes fotogrāfes, 20. gadsimta 60. gadi, Zenta Dzividzinska, Zane Onckule, Sofija Tuna, Līga Goldberga, fotoizstāde