

## ***Slash: In Between the Normative and Fantasy***

**Participants:** Tom of Finland, Aleesa Cohene, Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst, Lucas Foletto Celinski, Atis Jākobsons, Vladislavs Nastavševs, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay, Armīns Ozoliņš, Edgars Ozoliņš, Karol Radziszewski, Wolfgang Tillmans, Vilnis Vējš.

Curated by **Kaspars Vanags**

Curator of display of Tom of Finland art works and ephemera: **Gary Everett**

**The opening of the exhibition:** June 18, 7pm – 9pm.

**Venue:** *kim?* Contemporary Art Centre

**June 19 – August 2, 2015**

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There may be a kind of bent understanding of things. We can be bent on something, like crossing the lawn in a park on the diagonal. A drawing can be criss-crossed in red pencil, and calligraphy can be drilled into children by making them to do exercises in ruled notebooks with diagonal lines. A queer instance of the diagonal is the slash. In and of itself the slash is far from the norm. In street address numeration it both combines and separates adjacent buildings. Place it between terms; it's like a break in the lexicon and points to the indefinable, to what's in-between. The slash bears witness to the union of space and time, measured in km/h. And there are texts where it appears as a confusing alternative in the *and/or* format. The slash is the arbiter of the binary world and the lost dimension in three's-a-charm.

Side streets connect parallels with a slash, horizontal crossbeams hold up unsteady constructions, and much of the muscle tissue adjoined to the skeleton is crosshatched. In Latvian, the word *šķērss* – something that is opposite to straight, holds considerable potential as an equivalent to *queer*, which in the English-speaking world was introduced in the 1980s, when describing one's own personal take on the peculiarities of one's sexuality.

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The exhibition *Slash: In Between the Normative and Fantasy* is the first time a public art institution in Latvia is turning towards “slashes” among contemporary art expression. More than 20 years had to pass since the decriminalization of homosexuality for such an exhibition, influenced by the digitalisation of personal life, to be possible - borrowing from the *open-source* mentality. The other, here, isn't juxtaposed to the norm as something locked in the solitude of an individual strangeness or an impossible taboo, but as an awareness of an essentially recognizable, reachable, and modifiable aspect of personal identity.

Stuck between the norm and fantasy, the slash questions the self-explanatory about sexual orientation. It questions the difference between identity and belonging, between belonging and decency. It does not concern only homosexuality, but a whole range of issues, which sometimes dart and zigzag through our minds. For the bent, the queer, first and foremost has to do with the right to be asexual and is unlikely to lead to pining for polyandry. The starting point here is to be found outside the context of partnership: it is the reflection of the queer on the self and an inner dialogue with the imagined possibilities aroused by the surrounding environment. Imagination is universal, therefore seductive art is meant even for the conservative. Straightness may lift one straight to heaven, but if we consider the infinite outside the Euclidian geometric framework, then

the relationship between two parallel lines turns out to be less than straightforward, a little slanted, allowing for them to meet at some point.

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The group exhibition consists of works that hold a friction between imagination and reality, with unexpected flickers of synergy in the place of routine sparks. The different fusion samples are of a variety of structures. There are fragments of personal stories, micro-history notes without any pretence to the status of an artwork, as well as art installations of a conceptual nature without narrative features. There are poetic subversions of the hetero-normative dominant in mass media, presented in a video format, and nearby – charcoal drawings, where the plaster casts of Roman busts, ubiquitous in the academic art education system, have seemingly lost their *cast in stone* identities. The stories of intimate human relations and changes brought by the changing of time are addressed by various photo series, and daily artefacts unexpectedly surfaced from the past proclaim a certain message.

Knitting together the period before the decriminalization of homosexuality in Latvia with the queer interpretations of the turn of the 21st century in contemporary art is an exercise in the tightrope walking of communication. Thus an almost atrophied form of communication, which is nevertheless crucial in any attempt to revisit the past, the letter, pops up here and there among the works included in the exhibition. Letters are placed in glass cases as documentary evidence of history, or serve as epistolary forms of *social sculpture*. At a time when you can officially stick a stamp with a Tom of Finland's homoerotic drawing on an envelope, you might think that shortly before becoming extinct even the most conservative type of communication has succeeded in integrating the outsiders. How such a letter might reach its addressee in Latvia is one of the footnote questions of the *Slash* exhibition.

The exhibition includes work from the archives of Tom of Finland and Edgars Ozoliņš, and by the following participants: Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst (USA), Lucas Foletto-Celinski (Brazil, Germany), Atis Jākobsons (Latvia), Aleesa Cohene (Canada), Vladislav Nastavševs (Latvia), Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay (Canada, Germany), Armīns Ozoliņš (Latvia), Karol Radziszewski (Poland), Wolfgang Tillmans (Germany), Vilnis Vējš (Latvia).

### Curators:

**Kaspars Vanags** is an art and culture theoretician. In the 90ties worked as a curator, together with like-minded thinkers in the fellowship *Open* organizing inter-disciplinary events, where he mixed visual art with trending rave music. Created projects in which art has a critical role of a social platform, turning against or creating an alternative to consumerism culture (*Slideplays* (2000); *Subversion in the city* (2001)). Later turned to studies of art history, obtained a degree in art history at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Lives in Berlin, where has worked as a maker of exhibitions and art critic. Curator of the Latvian exhibition in the 56th International Venice Biennale.

**Gary Everett** is the founder and current artistic director of Homotopia Liverpool. He produces an annual festival in the UK and works extensively internationally with projects in Finland, Sweden and Turkey. Recently he curated *April Ashley, Portrait of a lady* at Museum of Liverpool & extended twice due to popularity attracting record audiences of 930,000. Curated the year-long *Tom of Finland Retrospective* as part of Turku's European Capital of Culture 2011 which attracted 90,000, which then toured to Kulturhuset Stockholm in 2012. Currently curating a major new project on the life of Touko Laaksonen (Tom of Finland) which opens in Turku in 2017. In December 2014 he was judged 53rd in the 100 most influential LGBT people in Britain in the Independent on Sunday's annual Pink List.

**Minors must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian while visiting the exhibition.**

**Collaboration partners:** *Homotopia*, ISSP, *MooiMan*, *Tom of Finland Foundation*, 427, *Luis De Jesus Los Angeles*, Association of Memorial Museums.

**Supporters:** State Culture Capital Foundation, United States Embassy in Riga, Embassy of Finland in Latvia, Embassy of Canada to Latvia, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Riga, VKN, *Absolut*, BIRZĪ, *Valmiermuižas alus*, Mozaika, Rīgas Laiks, Pieci.lv, Rīga TV24.

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