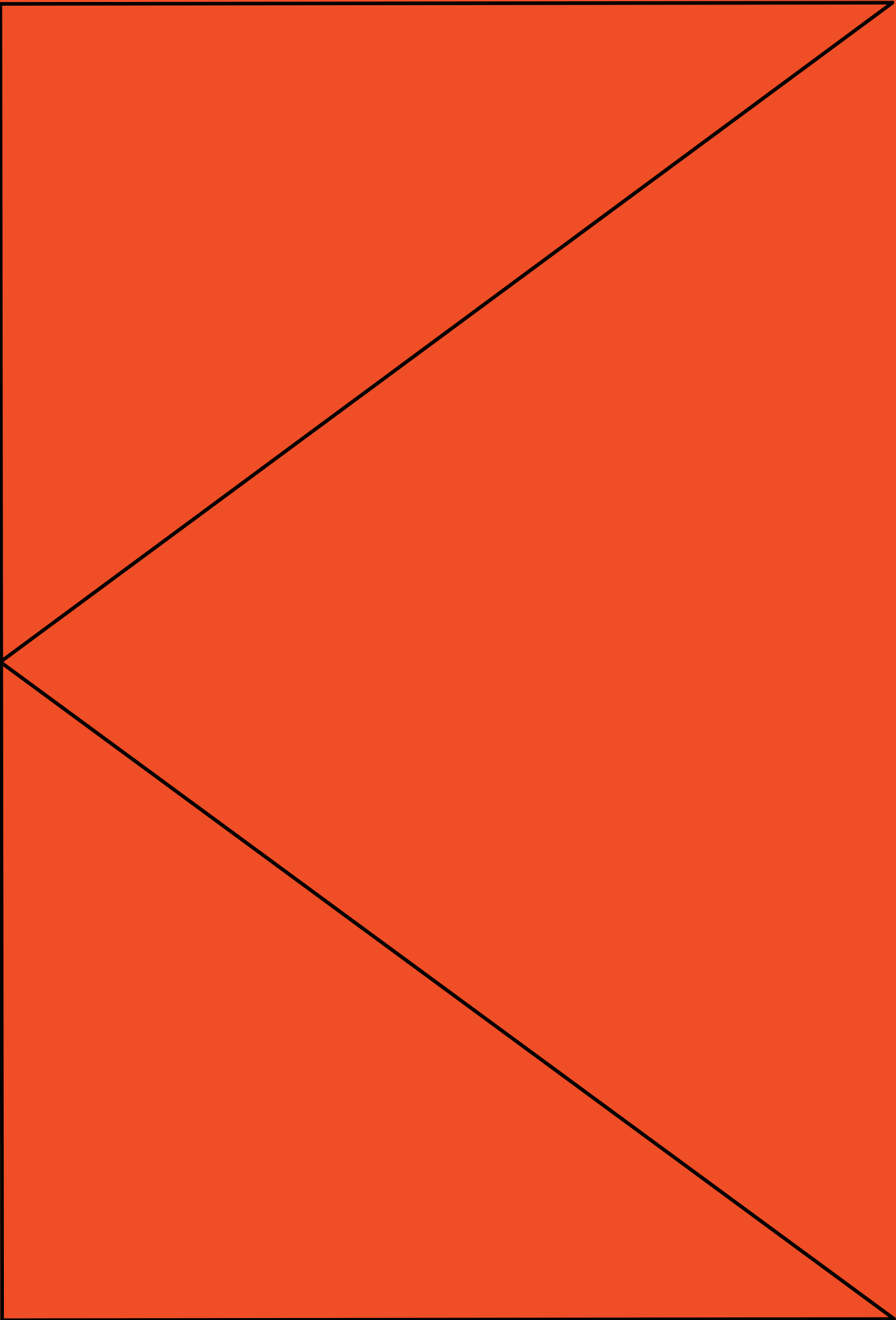


Kaunas –  
European Capital  
of Culture  
2022



# Body of Evidence

From Temporary  
to Contemporary





# Foreword

2023 is the year in which we complete and reflect upon the seven-year-long 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture' project, which has been marked by uphill challenges and ambitious cultural practices. A project that has become a forge for new skills in management, audience development, co-creation practices and mass event production, as well as regional cultural policy strategies, new partnerships, competences, cultural leaders, and – from various other professional perspectives in the cultural sector – a laboratory for new cultural practices.

By the time you open this book, the Kaunas 2022 team will have dispersed, and the institution that prepared the project will have been dissolved. The expertise accumulated through the project will undoubtedly continue to circulate throughout the Lithuanian cultural sector and has already had a spill-over effect in the form of newly established creative organisations and ongoing Kaunas 2022 event initiatives. Nevertheless, one of the last things we feel the need to do as a project team, before we close the institution's doors, is to summarise and share the experiences we have accumulated over the past seven years, which on the one hand reflect the typical daily challenges of cultural organisations, and on the other hand are specific to this occasional and monumental genre of cultural project. This knowledge – a fragment of Kaunas 2022's intangible legacy – will be made available to the general public in the form of a publication series, consisting of three methodology books, the project's impact assessment report, and this book (all publications are available from September 2023).

*Kaunas 2022: Body of Evidence* is a collection of personal reflections, memories and opinions about the Kaunas 2022 project, which consists of quotes from about 100 project creators, partners, sponsors and participants. 100 out of several thousand people who contributed to the project's realisation, which makes this narrative subjective, selective, and at times, due to its multivocal nature, contradictory and ambiguous. The events recounted in the book cover the period from the inception of Kaunas 2022 in 2012, marked by sentiments and ambitious visions, to 2022, the year that demanded the most practical project management and production skills. The book's material, assembled from personal interviews conducted in 2023, composed by the authors themselves or selected from previous publications, is fixed on the Kaunas 2022 chronological axis, but is not perfectly coherent, and can therefore be read by turning to individual parts of the book, or by following the book's hashtag index, thus allowing for readers to create their own narrative.

We classify this publication as belonging to the documentary genre, providing an opportunity for readers independently to analyse the European Capitals of Culture phenomenon and Kaunas 2022's management and creative practices, as well as to take a look at the behind-the-scenes of the project. Yes, this book is full of emotions, which the book's protagonists have not tried, and perhaps are not able, to distance themselves from, as well as being unable to step back from their creative practices. The authors' personal accounts also form one of this book's main narrative threads, linking these experiences of cultural sector actors with their own life projects.

I hope that this book will fulfil its purpose by contributing to the work of cultural organisers, researchers, creators of future Capitals of Culture, and specialists in the field of cultural policy, and I invite readers to embark on a joint reflection on the project and a discussion with the characters of this book.

ANA  
KOČEGAROVA-MAJ,  
editor of this book,  
Kaunas 2022 Head of  
Programme



# In lieu of an introduction:

As you shall see from this subjective story, consisting of *Ignition, Agitation, and Explosion*, Kaunas 2022 – European Capital of Culture was a work based on the structure of a classical drama that was created, directed, and rehearsed, before being presented to the public for review. With this active seven-year-long journey, whose objective was to transform the travellers who would, in turn, change the city, having been planned rather precisely, we have chosen a dramatic structure that has been tried-and-tested over centuries. How much comedy and how much tragedy does it include? – this we invite you, our dear participant, reader, and spectator, to decide for yourself.

The prologue to this participatory performance took place between 2012 and 2018. It was during this period that we wrote the play and the script (the proposal) for our city, ignited the rehearsals, and then, later, performed it together, each of us taking on a different role. If you are reading this book, you are one of the characters in this drama.

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2012  
–  
2018

*Igni-  
tion*

# 2012

## On Flags and Flag Bearers

*#bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #culture\_community  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement #Creative\_Europe  
#European\_Commission #leadership #working\_with\_authorities*

VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/\*

In 2012, at the annual conference organised by Creative Europe, which I was attending to share the success of a project implemented by Kaunas Biennial in 2011, one of the sessions was dedicated to the presentation of the principles, criteria and calendar of the European Capitals of Culture project. Lithuania and Luxembourg were featured in the 2022 calendar. In this session, I learnt that the competitions start seven years prior to the title-holding year, which was then three years away; and that the project is about strategy-driven urban transformation, strengthening sustainable links between culture and other areas of importance to society. From the very first minute, I could see Kaunas 2022 ending up on that calendar, and when I came back to my city, I started taking steps to make this happen.

Albinas and Gediminas, both working at the Kaunas City Municipality's Culture Department, were of the same opinion – we needed to plan, apply, and make the most of this opportunity. We shared the view that Kaunas had great potential, which called for more empowerment of the cultural sector for this potential to flourish. The European Capital of Culture seemed to us to be a bridge that we had to build in order to move the city from one state of being to another. We felt that it was the city's route to becoming powerful, vibrant! But we first had to consult our cultural colleagues. This was not least because the previous 'Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009' project had left in its wake a lingering sense of unfulfillment, as well as unsubstantiated accusations directed against culture workers for wasting public money. We met up with them in Kaunas Photography Gallery back in November 2012. All those who attended (around 40 people) expressed their support for the candidacy. We agreed to keep 2022 in mind and to forge international partnerships in the meantime.

\*  
*See the full list of witnesses and their roles in the Kaunas 2022 project on p. 304–319.*

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

After talking to the Culture Department of Kaunas City Municipality, we presented the idea of seeking the status of ECoC to Andrius Kupčinskas, the Mayor of Kaunas. The Mayor asked us who should take it up, who should be entrusted with the role of flag bearer, suggesting several cultural leaders of the city, to which Albinas and I replied that Virginija and her Biennial colleagues were the most promising thing we had in Kaunas, that the idea came from the cultural leaders, and that there was no point in getting side-tracked. The Mayor gave us the green light, we began to move forward with the bureaucratic decisions and to look for people who had experience in other capitals and could advise us on the organisation of the Kaunas programme.

## DAIVA PRICE/

At the beginning of the initiative, Virginija brought together a small circle of people, most of whom were active participants in the cultural field. We knew each other from joint projects. Virginija, Ana, Vaidas, Gediminas and I were linked by the Vytautas Magnus University's (VMU) Faculty of Arts, and our studies in History and Theory of Art.

I think this project became a kind of intellectual and creative challenge for

all of us. It was an interesting task that called for an original solution. To create a vision for a city that was so lacking in vision. For the city which seemed to have no future. At least I felt at the time that I was living in a state of stagnation. There seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel. Thus, this project became a very personal challenge – to change the environment in which we lived and worked. To break out of the trap of inertia and boredom. The fact that the project was so personal to us ensured its success.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I knew Virginija from before. Virginija and her team were making the Kaunas Biennial, and I was making the TV shows 'Pasivaikščiujimai' (Going for a Stroll) and 'Alchemija' (Alchemy). The latter was dedicated to discussing cultural phenomena. The Kaunas Biennial was one of such phenomena. This was how the 'Alchemija XXIII. The Escape from Textile' episode was created. The year was 2011. From the very first meeting with Virginija, we realised that we share similar thoughts about contemporary culture and our role in it. Later we used to meet at VMU, where we both lectured, and at other biennales. So when Virginija called and invited me to discuss the possibility of Kaunas becoming the European Capital of Culture, I was not at all surprised.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

After the first meetings with the cultural department and the community, Virginija, under whose leadership I was working at the Kaunas Biennial, invited me to join her and work on the proposal together. Her experience in successfully preparing and implementing European funding projects assured everyone that we had the competences needed to prepare the Kaunas ECoC proposal.

The fact that the project's initiative originated in the cultural field differentiated us from many Capitals of Culture, which are often managed by municipal authorities, and often by people with a background in politics. Both scenarios have their advantages and disadvantages. For our project, this meant a lower risk of politicisation, less dependence on municipal KPIs, and the opportunity to create our own vision, even though we have always sincerely sought to integrate the project with the city's and the district's strategy.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Working alongside me, Ana Kočegarova Maj, Daiva (Citvarienė) Price, Vaida Venckutė-Nagė, Rytis Zemkauskas, Vaidas Petruolis, Viltė Migonytė-Petruilienė, Gediminas Banaitis were the ideologists of this project, I would say. Someone implanted in us the belief that we were carrying out a mission for our generation, for ourselves. At the same time, we felt privileged in being able to create something from start to finish. Maybe not even from the beginning, but from the negative pole, towards strategising, piloting (both successfully and not), planning, observing the change and marvelling at the success of it. We inspired one another, encouraging one another to put our dreams on paper and believe in their feasibility.

### Alchemija XXIII. Pabėgimas nuo tekstilės

+ Pasidalinti f t+ t



Virginija Vitkienė, a still from 'Alchemija' (Alchemy). Hosted by Rytis Zemkauskas. LRT. 2011

# 2014

## Advisers

*#bidbook\_advisers #bidbook\_preparation  
#candidacy #international\_partnerships*

### INA PUKELYTĖ/

At the beginning of July 2014, I received a call from Rolandas Kvietkauskas, the Director of the Lithuanian Film Centre and former head of 'Vilnius – European Capital of Culture', asking if he could forward my contact details to the Capital of Culture adviser who was assisting with applications. Shortly afterwards, I received an email from Hanns-Dietrich Schmidt (Ruhr 2010), explaining that he was representing the consulting agency Acultus and was willing to offer his services for the preparation of our proposal. As Kristina Juraitė and I were organising a VMU conference on culture and communication in October, we invited

him to be a guest speaker. Along with Hanns-Dietrich Schmidt, Neil Peterson (Liverpool 2008) also came along. Gediminas took care of showing the guests the right places in Kaunas; the first brainstorming session took place in the tasting room at Stumbras

restaurant. Bachmetjevas was also present. In such an environment, we dived straight in. 😊

### ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

And so, three advisers, our 'godfathers' – Hanns-Dietrich Schmidt, Nadja Grizzo, and Neil Peterson – joined the team. All three of them have acquired their experience from their respective teams of the former Capitals of Culture – Liverpool 2008 and Essen/Ruhr 2010 – and from advising a number of cities that have applied for (and often won) the Capital of Culture competition. Contrary to what some people supposed, they did not write the proposal for us. They helped us in understanding the priorities set in the competition, in exploring our own city's predicaments and potential from the other side of Europe, and in preparing us for meetings with the Jury. Thanks to them, we were well-prepared at every stage of the competition, down to the smallest detail.

### HANNS-DIETRICH SCHMIDT/

How did it all begin? There are many myths. Here is the truth: I will never forget my first visit to Kaunas. After the conference organised by Ina, the long and very successful journey to acquiring the 2022 title began, including an almost perfect jury visit that I still remember to this day. A jury member remarked: 'Today I have discovered a fascinating new city in Europe!' He was right!



Lecture by Neil Petersen and Hanns-Dietrich Schmidt. Vytautas Magnus University. 2014



## NADJA GRIZZO/

By the time I first came to Kaunas, in June 2015, two women, Virginija Vitkienė and Ana Kočegarova, had been appointed to lead the bid for Kaunas 2022. Not a bad start, I thought. And over the course of time, I would silently thank whoever had made this decision a million times over. The two made an excellent team, complemented each other, and were not only well-connected in every corner and stakeholder community in the city and at the university, but also in the artistic world all over Europe and beyond. They reached the best of all worlds: academic, but not too much, artistic, but not too much, and always pragmatic.



Neil Peterson, Nadja Grizzo and Hanns-Dietrich Schmidt. Kaunas. 2015

## NEIL PETERSON/

My first encounter with Kaunas came in February 2015. I was not at my best. A heavy dose of 'man flu!' Nor was the city at its best. At that time of year, the frozen winter still rules and spring is fighting for an opening. But I was really taken with the enthusiasm of the people I met. Passionate about Kaunas, passionate about culture. Great stories about the Temporary Capital and how it could become a Contemporary Capital. Except... we visited several museums. They all seemed to employ very stern-looking women who didn't smile very much. As the candidacy developed, we decided that one of the success factors for 2022 would be to have smiling faces greeting museum visitors!

## DAIVA PRICE/

With our advisers, we once travelled to Essen to work. It was an interesting time. I remember Hanns's cosy apartment, Nadja's exotic ginger (?) soup and our first exam. After an intense brainstorming and writing session, the chief of the consultancy company arrived. He said: 'Well, I have not been to Kaunas, I don't know anything about your city. I have only heard that before the war people used to call Kaunas "Little Paris". I was intrigued by this fact. Now you have a few minutes to convince me that Kaunas deserves the title of European Capital of Culture. Why?' I remember the adrenaline rush. This was our first small exam. After that, there followed more serious ones. Really, why does Kaunas deserve to be a European Capital of Culture? We

searched for the answer to this question for years.



Virginija Vitkienė, Hanns-Dietrich Schmidt and Ana Kočegarova-Maj. Kaunas Cultural Centre. 2015

# 2015

## What Could Replace the Devils' Museum?

*#bidbook\_advisers #bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #heritage #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future*

### DAIVA PRICE/

It's the summer of 2015. A visit to Kaunas by our future application advisers is taking place. We show them our city. My colleague Gediminas remarks that the army is on high alert, modelling situations in which the Russians will probably try to attack Lithuania in September. We gasp. 'What kind of European Capital of Culture is it going to be if we are already occupied by 2022?', we joke amongst ourselves, but the bitterness of this thought lingers in our mouths for a long time.

After all, the tension of war was in the air back then. We started the project with a premonition of war, and ended it with a war underway...

What I remember most about this city tour with our future advisers was the bus tour. The one where the audio guide narrates the city's stories, and the facts or sights that catch your interest should make you want to jump off the bus and see the area up close. I remember us rolling over the Aleksotas Bridge, hearing facts, dates, some names... We drive past the most beautiful modernist buildings, and all I hear about them is silence. The only 'must see' is the Devils' Museum. When we return to the Town Hall Square, we are greeted by the owner of the travel agency. 'Well, how was it?', she asks. We smile politely. 'And how did you create the story?', we ask. 'Why is there nothing about our modernism?' The woman looks surprised because she has never heard

of it. It turns out that the travel agency and the creators of the itinerary are from Vilnius... I remember feeling a strong urge to create something completely different as I was stepping out of the bus. Something that wouldn't make the city's history boring. Something that would be our story. Two years later, we presented *Spirit's Guide to the Old City*.



*'Spirit's Guide to the Old City',  
route across Kaunas Old Town.*

## VIKTORAS BACHMETJEVAS/

I remember that at that time, when we were developing the concept for the Capital of Culture bid, we found it quite difficult to articulate why we were of interest to Europe. Modernist architecture was probably one of the most undeniable aspects and the most striking sign of Kaunas and Europe coming together. The narrative of Kaunas modernism was just beginning to emerge, and this was thanks to Vaidas Petrulis and the Architecture and Urban Research Centre that he was leading. On their website, they had already registered and described modernist buildings in Kaunas.



Exhibit. Devils' Museum



*Architecture and Urbanism  
Research Centre website.*

# A Tiny Room Full of Big Ideas

*#administration #bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #funding #working\_with\_authorities*

## SIMONAS KAIRYS/

In April 2015, I became Deputy Mayor of Kaunas City Municipality. I remember that after the election we were dividing up tasks and curating areas. I was given two projects that were not really understood by many of my colleagues (I don't think anyone else wanted to work on them), and whose evolution and success no one truly believed in at the beginning. The projects in question were 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' and the application for the inclusion of Kaunas modernist architecture on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

## ALBINAS VILČINSKAS/

We had nothing. We had to prepare a cultural strategy for the city, we had to build a team, we had to communicate with the European Capitals of Culture advisers, and we had to move forward at full speed. We agreed that two new positions would be established in the Kaunas Cultural Centre for the Capital of Culture project coordinators, Virginija and Ana. At that time, the Cultural Centre was perhaps the most flexible institution, with a director and an accountant who could at least help Virginija and Ana get to grips with budgetary matters and processes. So, they settled down on the second floor, in a small office at the end of the corridor.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

At the Kaunas Cultural Centre, one additional position has been allocated for international relations. I shared this post with Ana until we won the ECoC title and founded a new public institution, 'Kaunas 2022'. This is how we were preparing the proposal, working both for the Kaunas Biennial (full-time) and part-time at the new institution. The Cultural Centre, headed by Jolita Rudgalvienė, provided everything it could to get the process off the ground. The new institution was even later registered at the Cultural Centre, in whose office we worked one on top of the other: whoever came first sat around a semi-circular desk, while there were two standing places for whoever didn't fit at the desk, and the last person to arrive would sit in the hallway behind the door. I have always felt nostalgia for those first years of teamwork, in a

small office brimming with ideas. In total, during the period from 2015 to 2017, Kaunas City Municipality invested €140,000 in funding the proposal (making it possible to organise visits, hire experts and proposal ideators, run kick-off events, generate communication, and finance the event on the day of the competition in the Town Hall Square).



Kaunas 2022 team, Room 213. Kaunas Cultural Centre. 2017



Silainiai apartment block. 2016







Demolition of the unfinished Respublika Hotel. 2016



# 'Vilnius Didn't Succeed, Neither Will You'

*#bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #working\_with\_authorities*

## DAIVA PRICE/

As soon as we started talking publicly about our intentions to participate in the European Capital of Culture competition, it turned out that this project had left quite a trauma in Lithuania. The experience of Vilnius as the European Capital of Culture, its public image and the history of the project had left the worst memories in many people's minds. We have had to fight against this legacy for a long time. Even after winning the title, the first questions we received from suspicious journalists revolved around money and the risk of it being wasted.

The trauma of 'Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009' had left a deep imprint on the minds of this project's organisers. I remember a Facebook discussion in which my fellow Vilnius residents started telling me in a somewhat patronising tone not to take part in this competition. Their message was simple: we screwed up, so you will screw up for sure. I remember my blood boiling: let us make our own mistakes and gain our own experience.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We were always keen to get to know the people behind the Vilnius 2009 project. It was often said that they did not want to repeat that experience or that it was traumatic. Little by little, we learned how the reputation of Vilnius 2009 had been unduly undermined and what we needed to bear in mind when strategising the shape of our future institution. In particular, colleagues stressed that all funding had to come

from one body and be distributed from there to the cultural partners involved in the project. Given the administrative failures in Vilnius, the Ministry of Culture also gave us similar advice when Kaunas was drafting its statutes.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

For some time, before the Ministry announced the competition for the ECoC title, rumours had been circulating that, after the European Commission appointed our country to organise the European Capital of Culture in 2022, our government had attempted to turn the project down. And the only reason why the ministry proceeded with the competition was that the European Commission did not permit any way out. As someone who had high hopes for our chances, these rumours shook me to the core.

In public conversations, we were frequently asked how we would avoid a repeat of the Vilnius scenario. As a team, we were of the same opinion about Vilnius 2009, namely that the Vilnius project had been thwarted by circumstances. We believed that, after all the intervening years, we were better prepared for the challenge.

## TADAS ŠARŪNAS/

The year 2009 left us not only with regretful feelings, but also with understanding. It was evident that back then the sector had not been ready to seize the opportunities offered by the nomination. Besides, instead of being

just a half-baked project, it became a disappointing fiasco that soaked up everyone's disappointment. There was no question of any legacy for the project – everyone wanted to forget about it as soon as possible. All that was left were a few city festivals and a polarised 'debate' about the so-called 'pipe' that would resurface from time to time and lead nowhere. For a long time, the rain-soaked, tarnished and moss-covered 'Vilnius Culture – 2009' logo stood on the lawn by the White Bridge. I remember once pointing it out to a guest from a graphic design office in Berlin. 'Oh, I know this one,' she said straight away. 'In our circles, we call it Shrek's snout.' The comment was poignantly fitting.

By then, I was no longer sensitive to such comments. Very soon, I overcame the collective resentment of 2009's failure with a simple exercise in dissociation. It was quite clear that the year would pass and sooner or later we would forget everything. And there would be a new nomination in 2022. And Kaunas would of course be the European Capital of Culture. And then, of course, we would do everything better, much better. I allowed myself to fantasise about that capital's programme too. Down to the smallest detail. I dreamt of those moments when Kaunas would be the place to go to see cultural events of the highest quality – exactly what I had so keenly missed in the city in the 90s and why I left it. Through these imaginative journeys, I identified with my home city.

\*

*This refers to the 'Krantinės Arka' (translated as the 'Embankment Arch'), a sculpture by Vladas Urbanavičius (2009), constructed in Vilnius on the Neris riverbank.*

# We Shall Rewrite Kaunas

*#administration #bidbook\_advisers #bidbook\_preparation  
#candidacy #Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #Designing\_Happiness  
#Emerging\_Kaunas #Fluxus\_Labs #heritage #Memory\_Office  
#Modernism\_for\_the\_Future #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas  
#programme\_development #staff #We\_the\_People*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We launched consultations on the ideas and content of the proposal. During Hanns and Neil's visit, we had dinner at Medžiotojų Užeiga in a private function room, where we drank red wine. And, from our subconscious minds, we pulled out all the stereotypes about Kaunas that we wanted to get rid of. We talked about the things we didn't like, about how we didn't feel altogether at ease in our beloved city, about how young people leave Kaunas without looking back, and how within a year they become 'cool' Vilnians, bad-mouthing Kaunas. The biggest culprit seemed to be people's nostalgic fixation on the concept of the Temporary Capital, Rytis said. Citizens had not been offered the chance to become masters of their own city in the present. Everything that had once been great was no more. It had already happened. The aim of the Capital of Culture, we said, was to merge with the contemporary, to become proud of the city today. Because of our foreign guests, we spoke in English at dinner, referring to the temporary capital over and over again. Viktoras Bachmetjevas proposed naming the programme 'Contemporary Capital', which over the years has become the main slogan of the change we have been dreaming of: 'From Temporary to Contemporary'. By inserting CON (Latin for 'with', 'together'), we came up with the names for the main directions of the programme – CONfusion, CONfluence, CONsciousness (which was renamed CONtract in the Kaunas 2022 Trilogy). No matter what we were programming, we always sought to establish a conceptual foundation. In this case, we singled out the concept of change (from-to) as the main target in place for the whole process from 2015 to 2022, and we chose co-creation as our method, working alongside Kaunas District, with cultural partners from other Lithuanian institutions, with foreign partners and local communities, together with business involvement. There were more such gatherings during the preparatory years, but this one at Medžiotojų Užeiga has remained in my memory as having laid down the signposts, cemented the vision, and somehow convinced me that we might succeed.

## VIKTORAS BACHMETJEVAS/

At that time, one of the first things that the people of Kaunas would say about themselves was 'we were a temporary capital'. In my view, when you say that, you are also saying that your best days are behind you, which also implies that you live in a museum. I had a nagging sense that Kaunas needed finally to rid itself of being described as a temporary capital.



Kaunas 2022 bid-book team and advisers on research tour. 2015

I have always thought of Kaunas 2022 as a chance for Kaunas not to show what it was, but a chance to become something. During discussions, I used to try to encourage and remind people not to think about the past, but focus on the future and what would remain after the title-holding year.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I show up at Medžiotojai. The place is packed with familiar faces and strangers. Right away, Viktoras Bachmetjevas and I clash over our vision for the project, because we can both be intense and tend to lead. At the same time, I was strongly in favour of the idea that we had to break away from the 'temporary capital'. This epithet – 'temporary capital' – used on

TV and in the press at each and every opportunity to refer to the present-day Kaunas (i.e., not the historical or inter-war one) – has bothered me ever since my youth. Hey, it's 2015! Whose capital are we? Temporary in what way? Big thanks to the citizens of the temporary capital. They fulfilled their duty to the Motherland; now it was time to move on and create new epithets for the city.

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

We had a very constructive and positive conversation, which allowed our

problems to be articulated openly and highlighted our strengths. I remember leaving the restaurant with a seemingly unfounded sense of optimistic confidence that everything was going to turn out just fine.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I remember walking home from the Old Town and thinking to myself, 'Ah, another self-help circle for people of culture has formed, I doubt if anything will ever come of it... But look, they already have foreign advisers involved... so maybeeee?'

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

We had planned to devote more time to finding a slogan for the project after the meeting, but by then we couldn't get 'ConTemporary', born in Medžiotojai, out of our heads. One hundred years later, Kaunas now had the chance to become a capital again. In our communications, we played with this symbolic coincidence, suggesting that here again was an opportunity for a significant leap for the city, for a new narrative to emerge.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We have already described how we strategised the Programme's main objectives – in terms of what the city and we were lacking, what areas seemed to be too poor for a city of such potential. To heal the memory gaps, we needed the 'Memory Office' programme; to retain and even attract young people to the city, we needed the 'Emerging Kaunas' programme; to understand the value of our modernist heritage by simultaneously interpreting it, we needed the vision of 'Modernism for the Future'. We wanted friendly neighbourhoods and empowered citizens – we created the 'Fluxus Labs' programme for local communities, better known in the Kaunas District as



*'Rytis Zemkauskas: Kauno slibinas' in the podcast series 'Istorijos prie kavos' (2013) (in Lithuanian).*

the Contemporary Neighbourhoods programme. To justify the title of UNESCO City of Design, we had to create the 'Designing Happiness' programme. And to be able to fire things up and unleash change, we realised that we had to learn from those with more experience and from each other. Thus the 'Tempo Academy of Culture' was conceived, which trains community facilitators, engages young people in the generation and implementation of cultural projects, trains volunteers, and shares its experience at the international European Capital of Culture Forum. In order not to come across as boring preachers, we also aimed for playfulness, for a game, for a story. The idea of a Kaunas myth, proposed by Rytis Zemkauskas, which we were to create collectively, became the very glue holding the city and its historical and contemporary personalities together, bonding different generations, and teaching even the naysayers to believe that fantasy is an inevitable part of daily life. If we want to be more interesting to ourselves and others.

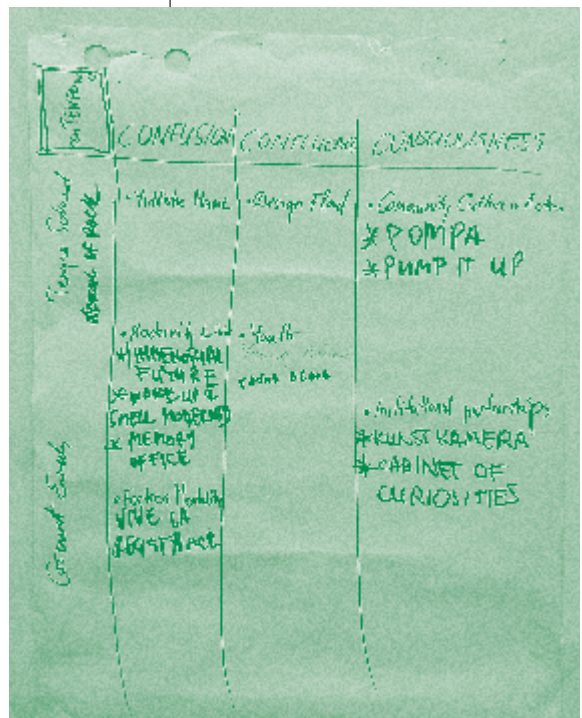
## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Virginija is on the phone. She tells me: 'We've started the application. I want you to join us, because it's coming out pretty dry.' 'OK,' I say. 'Oh, do you know my idea about the mythological creature of Kaunas?' 'Nope,' says Virginija. I send her the link. The youth of Kaunas used to do a podcast called 'Stories Over Coffee' (Istorijos prie kavos). They turned up with a voice recorder at my doorstep and asked me to tell them something about the city. And I didn't hold back: 'I am convinced that a city only becomes a real city once its guts and its underworld have been inhabited by a mythological creature...'

Virginija really likes my story about the Kaunas mythical creature, who lives in the city waters and only comes out at night or during heavy rain. We agree that the mythological creature and the creation of a new urban myth will serve as the most attractive part of the programme. And that I will be responsible for the myth and the literary form of the whole bid-book.

## NADJA GRIZZO/

The team's creativity and joyful dedication was limitless. A huge egg appeared and from it hatched the Mythical Beast of Kaunas. From the glorious times of the Temporary Capital evolved the forward-looking vision of a Contemporary Capital. Confusion was not shamefully hidden, while the Confluence was taken as a chance, and Consciousness 'woke it and shook it'. Modernism, Memory, Happiness, and Fluxus went on to 'wake up and shake up' Europeans to realise that there is more to Lithuania than just Vilnius.



Sketch of the Kaunas 2022 programme



## DAIVA PRICE/

Like the entire Kaunas 2022 programme, the 'Memory Office' emerged from reflecting on the challenges faced by the city, from desiring to rethink our relationship with history and our accounts of the past. In 2015, many topics were still taboo, and we were still in the process of discovering 'our own' history, about which we knew so little after the long Soviet era. So, it seemed important to us to re-evaluate the ways in which we tell the story of our city, to pay attention to those pages of history that have remained in the margins, to tell the story of all the inhabitants of the city and their fates. I remember, after we had won the title, I was sitting with my colleague Justina Petruilionytė-Sabonienė and the historian Arvydas Pakštalis in the Višta Puode restaurant. We were discussing ways of formulating this programme's purpose. The key word here was a 'Kaunesian' – not a Lithuanian, a Jew, a German, or a Pole living in Kaunas. But a Kaunesian. We wanted to talk about Kaunas and its inhabitants as a whole, with all its colours and all its dramatic stories. Therefore, there had to be space created for reflecting on the trauma of the Holocaust, on the Soviet occupation, on the stories of Kaunas's citizens of different nationalities. We started by collecting testimonies from Kaunas's residents, of which there are now 43 available on [atmintiesvietos.lt](http://atmintiesvietos.lt). Then we carried on knocking on the doors of members of every ethnic community in the city. In some places they responded to our knocking, and in others maybe we had been knocking too softly. But I believe that, through our efforts, we have encouraged the people of Kaunas and our partners to take a broader look at the city's history, to bring to light what has been forgotten, to recall the names of those who lived here some time ago.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The programme descriptions for the bid-book were prepared by each curator who had donated not only

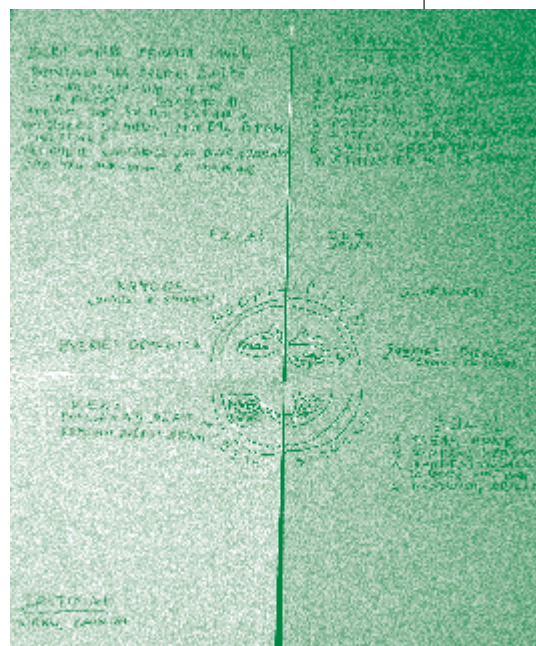


Open Archives of Kaunas  
[atmintiesvietos.lt](http://atmintiesvietos.lt)

their expertise, but probably also put their necks on the line, for the idea. Meanwhile, a large part of the bid-book, related to administration, management, financial planning and the securing of funds through votes in the Government and municipalities, was taken care of by Ana and me. When the second round of the competition required the city to approve a Cultural Strategy that would integrate the aspirations and legacy of the proposal, it was I who, with the help of the Kaunas City Municipality's Culture Department, drafted the Kaunas City Cultural Strategy (2017–2027). This required taking a month off from both my jobs, which I spent living in a residency cell at the Nida Art Colony and analysing documents from the City of Kaunas, the Republic of Lithuania, and the European Union which set out the guidelines of integrated culture.



The Mythical Beast of Kaunas holding the Confluence in his jaws



Sketch of the Mythical Beast of Kaunas programme

## DAIVA PRICE/

2015 was probably the most intense year of preparation. We read piles of proposals, reports and articles from other cities. We researched ideas, methods, looking for 'magic recipes' on how to transform our city, how to create a unique vision for it. This was a time of creativity and intense research, and for me personally, the most exciting. Each case study has helped me to better understand the principles, goals and objectives of this project, and to answer the question (principally for myself): what makes the European Capital of Culture project special?

One thing became clear: the aim of this project was to change mindsets, the way organisations work, the way they relate to their audiences, to the city and its history. But the project's ambitions need to be relevant not only to the city

in question, but also to other Europeans. I remember how long it took me to come to grips with the concept of the 'European dimension', which was difficult to grasp at first. What is it? How could Kaunas enrich other Europeans? It was a very healthy exercise in building up our confidence. It took time to come to believe that we had something we could teach others.

I think that belief is evident in the two proposal applications (pre-selection and

selection). The first is more biting and sarcastic. The second one represents a well put together methodology. And, as a team writing it, we felt much more confident, much more assertive in arguing with our advisers, believing that nobody else but us could know best what our city needed.

# Lithuania's (Non)Capital of Culture

*#candidacy #working\_with\_authorities*

## ALBINAS VILČINSKAS/

We had already received approval from the City Council that Kaunas would be preparing a bid proposal for the European Capital of Culture competition, but at the same time we would be participating in the Lithuanian Capital of Culture competition. After consulting with the team in our tiny room, we decided that their application for the Lithuanian Capital of Culture competition would be a kind of introduction to the much broader context of the ECoC 2022 programme, thus developing the idea further, expanding the audience, and revealing the city's creative and cultural potential. The result was very good: the application addressed a broad context, with a variety of content, opening up opportunities for the city, the state and Europe.

The day after the jury meeting, I paid a visit to the Ministry. The results of the competition had not yet been announced, and a colleague I met there, a former member of the Jury, confided to me: 'Albinas, your team didn't succeed. The application is very poorly prepared, it's impossible to understand what it's about, who, where... It's way out there. Whoever drafted it for you, I have never before come across such unprofessionalism...!' The first thought that popped into my head was: we're doomed. How to tell the Mayor and his team? There was no doubt that my head would roll, but what about the so-called unprofessional ones, Virginija and Ana? But maybe, just maybe, there was still some hope? I sat in the smoking room, gathered the latest news (you always get the most accurate and up-to-date information in the smoking room), and, having refocused, I went to see the ministry's employee in charge of the Lithuanian Capital of Culture project. I had one simple question: what was wrong with our application and why had Kaunas been rejected? It was common knowledge which Lithuanian cities we were competing against. The employee tells me: 'Albinas, it's looking really bad. Not convincing at all. You know, you've filled it with some things that are hard to understand: communities, audiences, contemporary arts, syntheses... After all, it's supposed to be all about culture! You could have painted the Nemunas in a beautiful light – how many times the father of our rivers has been celebrated! And yet, there is nothing here. The Jury didn't understand what you were planning to do, or why you needed it! The winner is Rokiškis. They are brilliant. A very good application! It's so beautifully conceived, mentioning the banks of the Nemunėlis...!'

I came back and told Simonas all about it. My head didn't roll. The 'non-professionals' continued their work, the tiny office started to run out of space, we were deciding on the purchase of a coffee machine because we had beans, the number of people who would congregate was growing, and our end of the hallway had become probably the most visited space in the Cultural Centre.

## SIMONAS KAIRYS/

As it happened, Kaunas did not become the Lithuanian Capital of Culture; instead, Rokiškis won. This was the first failure in the area I was overseeing, and I remember that even the opposition started to question why this had happened and whether we were capable of competing for the European cultural stage since we had not won a place in the local competition. Six years later, when I became the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, I remembered this disappointment and changed the rules of the competition for the Lithuanian Capital of Culture, introducing more of the ECoC spirit into them.

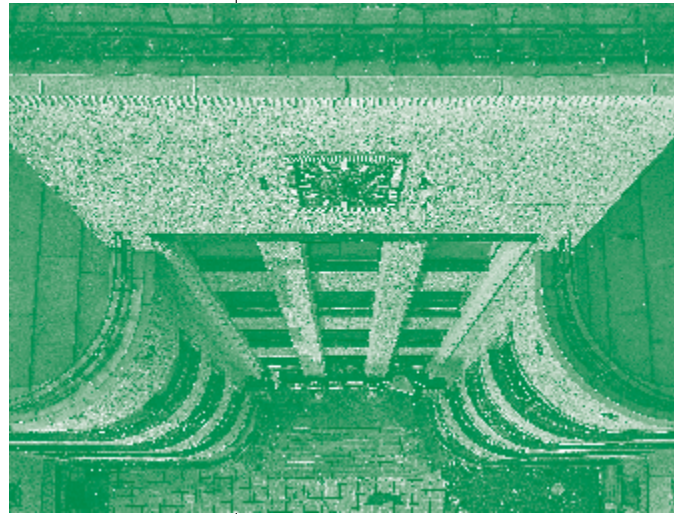
# 'Modernism for the Future'

*#architecture #candidacy #communication  
#Designing\_Happiness #heritage  
#Modernism\_for\_the\_Future*

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

On 15 April 2015, in Brussels, the European Commission awarded the European Heritage Label to Kaunas interwar modern architecture. The European Heritage Label is an EU initiative aimed at selecting heritage sites that are historically and culturally significant for Europe, European values and the building of the EU. For Kaunas, receiving this label symbolises a new phase in which Kaunas finally believes in itself, and in the fact that it can be interesting, not only to itself but also to others. This recognition was especially needed from abroad, at a suitable distance from the ongoing struggles within Lithuania between the capital and the regions, between Vilnius and Kaunas. This symbolic award represented a turning point for the city. And an opportunity. An opportunity to replicate the optimism of the interwar period and strive for a new golden age.

The successful application for the European Heritage Label, that I co-wrote with Vaidas Petrulis, Jolita Kančienė and Andrijana Filinaitė, was about the past. The application for the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, co-written with Alvyda Stepavičiūtė, after we had already emigrated to Luxembourg, during the brief hours



Kaunas Central Post Office

knitted together during our kid's lunchtime naps, was about the future. About creativity, about lessons learned from the past, about today's Kaunas within Europe and its future in the design sector. This application and the successful entry into the Creative Cities Design Network once again cemented our confidence that Kaunas not only had the potential but was also ready to act.



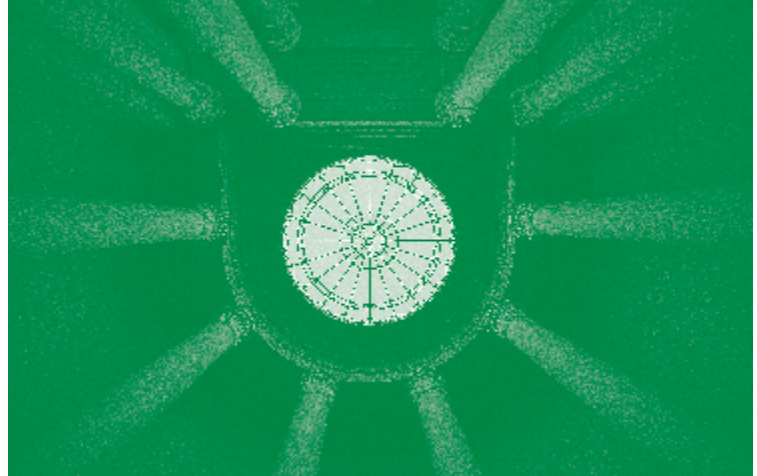
*Dance Plus City* by Lithuanian Dance Information Centre, Kaunas 2022, and AURA Dance Theatre. Kaunas State Philharmonic



Veterinary Academy of Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

## VAIDAS PETRULIS/

In the same year, the Kaunas 1918–2015 architectural guide is published. Later, this guide is translated into English, Polish and German. This provides yet another opportunity for Kaunas architecture to be talked about. Various public initiatives promoting Kaunas modernism, led by different enthusiasts, begin to emerge (e.g. 'Ekskursas', 'Gražinkime Kauną', etc.).



Kaunas State Philharmonic

## ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

In 2015, a lot of cards really stacked up in favour of Kaunas architecture. 'Ekskursas' was born out of the coming together of the volunteers of the Open House Vilnius open architecture festival. We thought that in Kaunas we should also open the doors to buildings, specifically modernist buildings, because we felt that while the title of European Heritage Label had been awarded, both the people of Kaunas and the buildings' owners had little capacity to answer the question of 'what is the value of this building after all?'. And the architectural guide that came out in the same year has, ever since then, become a great tool, often the main or the only one, for preparing the sightseeing tours. 😊

By the way, many people who joined 'Ekskursas' were later active members of, or implemented projects in, the Kaunas 2022 team, among them: Algimantas Grigas, Irutė Tumaitė, Rasa Chmieliauskaitė, Martynas Plepys, Nerijus Babrauskas.



*Ekskursas community initiative website (in Lithuanian).*

# There is Kaunas, But There is Also Kaunas District

*#bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #capacity\_building  
#culture\_community #cultural\_sector\_involvement  
#decentralisation #Kaunas\_District #legacy  
#programme\_development #regional\_dimension  
#working\_with\_authorities*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

We were aware of many examples of regional cooperation in the European Capital of Culture programme. There was some deliberation about whether we could bring together several municipalities in the county, e.g., Birštonas, Jonava, but later we abandoned the idea. However, the involvement of Kaunas District in the project seemed very natural – after all, Kaunas District is a continuation of Kaunas, and the programme would only expand geographically and involve more people, so we initiated a meeting with the representatives of Kaunas District Municipality. I am, of course, simplifying things here, but it was not until maybe a year later that I realised how wrong I was in not considering the different realities and needs of the district's neighbourhoods. The programme in Kaunas District necessitated attentive work by colleagues, an in-depth analysis of the needs of the local residents, the cultural sector and the localities of the district, until we acquired the knowledge that allowed us to develop Kaunas District's programme. I believe that the district municipality was exemplary in its ability to take a lot away from the project – at the end of the project, many of the project's physical signs remain present in the district to this day, the cultural context has been greatly enriched, and part of the project team is employed by the district municipality to continue the strategies formulated by the ECoC.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

From the first meeting with Kaunas District Municipality, above all else I remember A. Nesteckis, the Director of Kaunas District Municipality's Administration, who reacted to our enthusiastic offer to join the programme with 4 million for culture rather suspiciously. 😊 Before this project, I had seen the Mayor of Kaunas District at many cultural events, where his welcoming speeches during the openings always amazed me in a good way: he would comment fluently and accurately on facts and names relating to the history of art. I could sense that he was a culturally educated man and even at the first meeting regarding the district municipality's participation in the Kaunas 2022 project, I could see the

Mayor's positive regard toward the prospect. He warned us that we would have to persuade the council. That didn't faze us. 😊 Persuasion was our daily bread.

By the way, the issue of the title of the Kaunas 2022 project has become quite a sensitive topic in the context of the disagreements between the two municipalities, when the Mayor of Kaunas expressed his intention to join a large area of the district's territory to the city in 2019... In the district, there have even been doubts as to whether the European Capital



Meeting with Kaunas District Municipality representatives on involvement in the Kaunas 2022 project. 2015



of Culture project is not a kind of special operation to achieve precisely this goal. Thus, the team, which has been equally sincere in implementing the cultural programme in both the city and Kaunas District, faced the daunting task of managing the different expectations, political tensions and ambitions of the municipalities throughout the entire duration of the project.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ/

After the Kaunas District Municipality's Administration decided to participate in the project, we quickly began studying the status quo of cultural organisations in Kaunas District, seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics, needs and challenges of culture users and creators. The beginnings were so rudimentary... We sent out a survey to all cultural centres and leisure halls, libraries and the museum. In the survey, we asked them to name the major project with the largest budget that they had carried out in the preceding few years; to describe the available/usable infrastructure (equipment, buildings, halls, public squares, parks) in their district; to describe the type of events being organised; to provide profiles of the most frequent visitors (or visitor groups) to their institution and events; to identify the strengths of their organisation/community; and to propose a project or an idea that they would be willing to carry out or create within the framework of the Kaunas 2022 Programme. Most of the cultural institutions responded to our survey, though looking through their responses, we really had plenty to think about... I think we had imagined things differently. What do I mean by that...? For example, the largest project implemented in the Vandžiogala Cultural Centre up to that date had cost them €2,500 to organise, and the events included: celebrations of national holidays, poetry readings, Advent evenings, the lighting of the Christmas tree, town celebrations, Children's Day, Easter celebrations for kids, the celebration of the Day of the Elderly, and a few others. Vilkija proposed an international folklore festival (in a park by the Nemunas), while Garliava came up with film projects, a senior folk-dance festival, etc. From the applications we received, we knew very clearly that we would be working with energetic people who were very aware of the strengths of their region and, for the most part, knew their audience very well. However, how would the Capital of Culture manage to fit into the neighbourhoods' meticulously planned annual programme? Would they step outside of their comfort zone? Would they have the courage to innovate? The potential was great. A more constructive turn was made at the Kaunas Cultural Centre, which hosted the first Kaunas 2022 Office in their premises, and Happspace, a private co-working space and one of Kaunas 2022's first sponsors, before the idea of 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' was born.

Before developing the Kaunas 2022 project's model for Kaunas District, we initiated training sessions for the district's cultural professionals. The sessions were led by 'Creative Connections' – a collective of creators, organising training, in a variety of formats, for cultural and educational organisations. The programme's primary objectives included helping the participants to: explore the cultural identity of their place and community; rethink their role as local cultural practitioners; discover new opportunities; gain deeper understanding of their community's cultural and creative needs; develop and test ideas aimed at improving communication with target groups, attracting new audiences, fostering innovative partnerships, and facilitating active community participation in cultural activities.

The seven-day training programme was divided into separate sessions covering collaboration, exploration of the cultural identity of communities, creative problem-solving, goal-setting, and generating and developing ideas. The training was conducted by Milda Laužikaitė, Kristina Veršeliėnė, and Justas Tertelis.



Discussing the bid-book preparation with representatives of Kaunas District's cultural centres. 2016

# 2016

## A Legendary Bid-Book in the Making

*#bidbook\_advisers #bidbook\_preparation #candidacy*

### RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

It's January. I reside in Nida, in a colony of local artists. Virginija, Ana, Daiva and other colleagues are working on separate parts of the bid-book. They forward them to me. And, here and there, I am adding 'sprinkles of gold dust'; that is, I am making the text attractive, playful, but without diminishing its authoritative voice, because I'm here in this company for the sake of beauty, not for my mind. I'm not kidding. In parallel, we are all devising concepts, objectives, the titles for each of the programme's parts. Both in Lithuanian and in English, all at once. We communicate and even think in two languages. Every text is also edited by our advisers: the German Hanns, the German-Italian Nadja, and the British Neil. We have argued with them, we have learnt from them, but one thing must be said – bringing in these experts was a great decision.

While writing the introduction, the epilogue, and the part of the proposal concerned with the myth, I allowed myself complete freedom. And, to tell the truth, in my little room with the roof windows facing the sea, I knew I was writing well, however arrogant that may sound. Colleagues and advisers sometimes quoted other cities' successful proposals. I had opened one of them... and found it boring.

Nadja, who has served as literary editor for other capitals, tries to interfere in my parts, based on her own practice. But I believe blindly that her practice, and indeed the whole 'politically correct' hackneyed practice of writing 'governmental proposals', is wrong.

And I forbid changing a single letter in my texts. I still have those rather mean e-mails...

I am supported, in my audacity, by Neil, our British adviser from Liverpool, who once worked on one of the most successful Capitals of Culture in history. Thank you, brother.

January

### NADJA GRIZZO/

The first bid-book was quite the revolution in the history of bid-books – with a quirky visual language, and hilariously funny edits by Rytis Zemkauskas.

### DAIVA PRICE/

I have many files on my computer with various scenarios for writing a proposal. I've written on heritage, communities and museums. Finally, I settled on the 'European dimension' and the programmes for change within cultural organisations. In fact, we covered all the topics together, we were working on a common vision, because we had a shared goal: to create a coherent programme for change, with all the component parts functioning in unison. Rather than drawing on individual artistic fields, we focused on issues and themes that were relevant to the city and Europe.

For example, the idea of going beyond museum cooperation projects and promoting changes across the whole cultural field emerged from a discussion we had with Gintarė Masteikaitė on the bus returning from Riga.

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

This was the process of drafting the text for our first bid proposal. After organising all the necessary information, we decided to add a touch of humour and self-criticism – which had always accompanied us along the way, throughout our preparations – to an otherwise serious application. Rytis was so witty in some of its sections that, to this day, I can't help but chuckle when any of these bits springs to mind (e.g., that Kaunas would only come to Europe's attention if we kidnapped Jude Law 😊). I have been made aware that there is a rumour circulating among the bidding cities about the caricatured style of Kaunas's application, and that colleagues from other European cities seek to read not only the final (second) version of our proposal, but also the first one. With the first version of our application, we had nothing to lose, because we were sure that we'd make it to the second round anyway.

# On a Marten Who Nearly Scuppered the Capital of Culture in Wrocław

*#candidacy #ECoC\_family  
#ECoC\_opening\_ceremony  
#working\_with\_authorities*

SIMONAS KAIRYS/

I remember my first trip to Wrocław, my first ECoC. The whole minibus crew came down with the flu, and there was hardly a single crew member with a temperature below 38°C on the way back from Wrocław. We later found out that there had been a flu epidemic in Poland at the time. I was very impressed by the opening event in Wrocław in the brand-new concert hall. For the first time, I witnessed how even the professional performing arts can indeed be deeply engaging. The whole audience played different homemade instruments under the baton of a renowned Polish conductor, Agnieszka Franków-Żelazny. But there was one political moment which stuck with me even more: the Minister of Culture and Deputy Prime Minister, Piotr Gliński, was greeted by jeering crowds, and the city's mayor by a standing ovation. As fate would have it, we met again in 2021 in our capacities as the Polish and Lithuanian Ministers of Culture (my Polish colleague attended the opening ceremony of Kaunas 2022), but I could never bring myself to share my memories of Wrocław with him.

VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

In January 2016, we travelled to Wrocław's opening ceremony on a mini-bus – half of the bus was filled with the emerging Kaunas 2022 team, and the other half with our colleagues from the Kaunas City Municipality: the Deputy Mayors Simonas Kairys and Rasa Šnapštienė, and Ina Pukelytė, Albinas Vilčinskis, Sigítas Šliažas and us, travelling with a burning curiosity about what the opening ceremony of a European Capital of Culture would look like. From Wrocław's municipality, we learnt about the protocols for hospitality (given that Kaunas and Wrocław are twin cities, we used to have special meetings). Simonas and I attended the exclusive opening ceremony, which also included the opening of the Wrocław Philharmonic Hall, during which the involvement of the audience in the musical composition made a deep impression on me (not to mention the incredible concert hall, which had cost 120 million euros to build). But the opening to the general public in the Old Town Square didn't go as smoothly as had been expected: there was a power outage at the beginning of the show. Outside, it was about zero degrees, damp, cold and the flu epidemic was raging in Poland. The frost was penetrating right down to our bones. When the power came back on, the sound of the music barely cancelled out the chattering of teeth. Two days later, on the minibus ride back to Kaunas, all 11 passengers were feeling feverish, and by the time we reached Kaunas, so was the driver. By the way, the electrical short-circuit at the Wrocław opening ceremony was caused by... a marten, crawling into a power substation to warm up. We always took these kinds of incidents as lessons, as we too were preparing to organise major mass events, also early in the year. Ana says that it was in the minibus on our way back from Wrocław that we came up with



'Wrocław – European Capital of Culture 2016' opening ceremony



A marten 🦉

the idea of the Tempo Academy of Culture's programme – I don't recall this happening at all, that is how ill I was.

Wrocław's marten, among other things, made us realise that it is impossible to manage projects of this magnitude at one hundred per cent. We realised that we had to be prepared for mistakes and unexpected eventualities and to plan with a margin for re-planning. But it is also important to pass on this message to others, especially those who may have heightened expectations.

# 'Tempo Academy of Culture'. Why Ever Not?

*#audience\_development #bidbook\_preparation #capacity\_building  
#community\_involvement #Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #Emerging\_Kaunas  
#Kaunas\_Challenge #programme\_development #volunteering*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

On the way to the opening of Wrocław's European Capital of Culture year, as on most other trips, we worked with our heads down. During the trip, we discussed our vision for the programme – participatory culture, audience development, interdisciplinary collaboration, creative agents in communities, audience development mediators in cultural institutions. The vision was there, but could we hope to find so many artists, mediators, and facilitators for a programme of this scale, aimed at breathing life into all the district's neighbourhoods?

Most Lithuanian artists at the time shunned similar concepts, which were often associated with amateur groups. Community arts were not yet fully established in Lithuania in 2016, and the concepts of participatory culture or audience development in cultural institutions were more of a novelty, fancy keywords linked to European agendas. We formulated the idea of the 'Tempo Academy of Culture' in the blink of an eye; it was to comprise four faculties, each dedicated respectively to:

- volunteering: this faculty soon acquired the title of the culturists' community;
- communities and participatory culture: this one hosted training workshops for 'Fluxus Labs' agents and similar sessions;

– professionals: the highlight of this hub would be the continuous workshop programme for cultural organisations, delivered by Impact Foundation (Poland);

– and youth: this faculty was known as 'Kaunas Challenge' workshops for high school students.

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ- NAGĖ/

The idea of actively involving young people born around the year 2000 began back in 2014. We were estimating that they would be of age by 2018, which is when they would start choosing their future professions and university studies. This would happen in the same year that Lithuania celebrated its 100th anniversary of independence. Thus, the educational programme was named 'CENTURIANS'. The concept is great, but the name is not sexy at all. As I talked to young people, introducing them to the programme, they'd all say: 'it's all very good and necessary but...'. It became clear that no young person would want to be called a centurian. Therefore, we refined the idea, thinking that we would invite these young people to address the challenges faced by the city and culture, so that, with their insights, they could help the cultural community to become more responsive to the interests of younger audiences. This was how we came up with the title of 'Culture Challenge'.

But then again, we pondered whether the use of the term 'culture' might be somewhat misleading, as young people might interpret it as relating solely to 'art'. We decided then that it had to be the city challenge – whether it be a cultural, a social, or an infrastructural one. And our city is called Kaunas, so here's the 'Kaunas Challenge', which we would invite the young urban audience from the city and Kaunas District to take up. Since, from the outset, we had set ourselves the goal of one of the project's lasting legacies needing to be the educational programme, whose best practices and methods we could later pass on to other cities, it turned out that the title was easily adaptable, as it could easily be transformed into 'Esch Challenge' or 'Matera Challenge'. In other words, it was the perfect title for a future franchise.



*Webpage for 'Kaunas Challenge',  
Kaunas 2022's educational youth  
programme.*



*'Kaunas 2022: Youth Programme  
Methodology' (eds. Sandra  
Karnilavičiūtė, Vaiva Marija  
Bružaitė, Aurelija Prašmuntaitė,  
2023).*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The 'Tempo Academy of Culture' was led by the best teachers in audience research, audience development and strategic planning for institutions, and



Vaida Venckutė-Nagė, Ana Kočegarova-Maj, Virginija Vitkienė and Rytis Zemkauskas

young leaders. Many participatory culture and community arts practices were introduced and many Fluxus agents – key contributors to the Kaunas 2022 programme, whose involvement meant that the number of active participants in the programme reached 100,000 – were trained. But perhaps most importantly, the programme

transformed the city's cultural core into an active network of collaborators.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I remember Virginija and Ana trying to explain to me something about the Tempo Academy. I didn't get it – what was it and what was it for? This happened to me quite often in this project. On the other hand, however, I never really paid too much attention: I knew that my colleagues

were competent, and they knew what they were doing. There were things I never managed to fully get my head around, and there were some (such as the Tempo Academy) that eventually became clear to me, and I began to appreciate them and promote them everywhere.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

As far back as I can remember, Daiva, Ana, Rytis, Vaida and I have always felt that we had to continue learning, improving our qualifications and our knowledge, which is why we participated in the seminars we organised and read a lot of research studies. On the day we won the title, after Kaunas was declared the next Capital of Culture, we had a little chat with the members of the Jury. We approached the Jury's chair Steve Green, who we deemed the strictest, and thanked him for giving a well-structured overview of the ECoC material in one of his articles. He was taken aback: 'Have you read it?' And how could we not have read it, seeing as it was the leading analysis of the whole European Capitals of Culture scheme.



Presenting the ECoC application process. Kaunas Cultural Centre

# The First Exam

*#bidbook\_advisers #candidacy  
#ECoC\_jury*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The first bid-book has been printed out.

Now we must rehearse our presentation to the Jury. We are in Kaunas, where our team has been allocated two tiny rooms in the Kaunas Cultural Centre. We are seated around an oblong desk. Hanns explains: the Jury is strict! Time will be kept in seconds! There is a strict order for speaking, no one can interrupt, and one of us has to be the moderator. The main presentation must take half an hour exactly. It is then followed by questions. You must answer briefly and clearly and avoid elaborating on your colleagues' answers. The Jury dislikes this and that; here's the list of their preferences. What a nightmare! I remember saying to Hanns: 'well, the Greek football team became the European champions because...'

'They had a German coach!', says Hanns, proudly.

We are discussing how the team ought to be composed. I ask whether the city's Mayor shouldn't also be a member. The municipality promises to ask him, yet somehow they don't. They are afraid of him. Unexpectedly, the problem gets solved in a very peculiar way: the Mayor's heart fails, and he finds himself on the operating table at Kaunas Clinics.

We don't have many options, and so Simonas Kairys, the Deputy Mayor, will have to do for the first round, especially since he is fluent in English. We are so lucky to have Leonidas Donskis with us. The jury members also seem familiar with this authoritative figure. Rumours reach us that Klaipėda's team had also invited Leonidas, born on Klaipėdan land, to join their team, but he chose Kaunas.

The rumour-mill is turning...



Kaunas 2022 bid-book defence rehearsal. Kaunas Cultural Centre



Kaunas 2022 bid-book defence rehearsal. Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania. 2016

## DAIVA PRICE/

During the Q&A rehearsals, I felt as if I were facing my final exams in high school, like a teenager afraid to fail.

## SIMONAS KAIRYS/

The first defence of Kaunas as a future ECoC in front of an international jury was an unforgettable experience. This was my first visit to the Ministry of Culture. Kaunas had a great team, Leonidas Donskis's compelling answers to the question of what Kaunas could give to Europe still ring in my head to this day. The Kaunas 2022 team were keen to rehearse before any significant deadline or public defence. It's okay, it's a serious matter, one must come prepared, but with them a rehearsal could take place suddenly in a hotel lobby or even late in the evening, hanging out with a team in a local beer pub in Brussels. I have never liked to learn anything by heart, I have always preferred to leave some room for free flow in the moment of action, but Virginija, with her expressive face, could always draw you into rehearsing anything, down to the last detail. Anywhere.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

In addition to Kaunas (along with Kaunas District) and Klaipėda (along with Palanga and Neringa), Jonava, Anykščiai, Plungė and Rokiškis were also competing in the first round. I bet, out of the six teams, we were the only ones who had received training from advisers on how to carry out the proposal presentation (in 30 minutes precisely). It took around three half-days of training to prepare us for these 30 minutes. We had two rehearsals in Kaunas. We arrived in Vilnius on the eve of our presentation to the European Commission Jury. We had rented a conference room in the hotel, where we rehearsed our presentation in the evening and in the morning. On the decisive morning, when we saw each other leaving our rooms, we raised our eyebrows ever so slightly: by chance, we had all gone for smart casual, in blue, sky blue, and black. Shared concentration had even influenced our outfits. Hanns managed to get everyone into such a serious mindset that we had all learnt our scripts by heart and rehearsed answers to all possible questions. Even Leonidas Donskis felt anxious, lurking outside the door of the hall at the Ministry of Culture, waiting for an invitation to come in. He said he felt the same way he had done many years ago, when he took his last exam. 😊

## DAIVA PRICE/

Before the semi-final 'defence procedure' at the Ministry of Culture (where we even rehearsed our entrance to the hall and the timing of our speeches), I remember the late Leonidas Donskis saying: 'I never thought I'd have to worry so much ever again in my lifetime.' But what impressed me most was his humility and his ability to recognise that even a professor has to keep learning throughout his life. During a rehearsal at the Kaunas Cultural Centre, he said to us: 'I understand that this is an area where I have to trust the experts and learn because my rhetorical skills are not going to be of any use here.' Thus, this man rose even higher in my eyes...

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Vilnius.

The Ministry of Culture. We are about to enter the hall to take our first exam in front of the Jury. Under my jacket, I am wearing a T-shirt I made myself. On it is the Beast of Kaunas, superimposed over the two great rivers of Kaunas as if he were holding Santaka in his jaws... I always say that any idea has to be grounded, otherwise it won't be fruitful. The Beast is grounded in Kaunas's geography. I see his silhouette on the city's map. The advisers are careful to mention that the Beast is rather medieval and rather patriarchal. Masculinist, unfashionable, a bit of a... And yes, they are right. He is like that, but at the same time he makes fun of it himself. Europe, in my view, mustn't pretend not to have dangerous teeth. But it is also a civilisation of the alternative, and I am not afraid to play with the Jury, to be ironic and self-ironising.

We enter the hall. The selection panel is seated, each with a nameplate in front of them. A Finn, a Spaniard, a Pole, a Latvian, a Brit, a German, an Austrian, a Portuguese person... We begin. We are nervous, but gradually the atmosphere warms up. The Jury laughs once, then again... As a broadcaster, I know



Rytis Zemkauskas. Day of the bid-book's first defence

we are on the right track. And then Leonidas starts talking about Europe. With emotion, warmth and substance. And I see how the jury members are transformed from officials into human beings before our eyes. We have changed them.

We and Klaipėda make it through to the second round. So be it, I think to myself. We will fight until the bitter end. We are great, we know what we are doing, we are learning every day, we have not been appointed from above, we are not looking for our own benefit. We have no real interest other than to make Kaunas feel better about itself. Seriously. That's what I was thinking then and that's what I told the team. That's what I'm thinking even now, as I write these lines. And I'm damn proud of it!



The team before the bid-book presentation. Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania. 2016



## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Although we had made it through to the second round, after the meeting with the Jury, I had this strange feeling – whether because of the questions or for some other reason... We weren't jubilant. Then rumours surfaced that maybe the Jury didn't believe that we had prepared the proposal ourselves, and therefore interrogated us a bit about who we were. And if we had indeed prepared the document ourselves, then we appeared too academic. Would we be as effective doers as we were writers? ☹️ This was something that even we didn't dare to say about ourselves at that time (and until the closing of the ECoC programme)...

The Jury's uncertain reaction was one of the first hard-to-take doubts about us from the outside. We don't even know if it was real or if we made it up. Since that time, we faced doubts not only about our capabilities, but also about our sincerity, on more than one occasion and by more than one person. For me, those doubts were the hardest thing to bear in the whole project. A 'thorn in the flesh' bringing me down to earth. It was this culture of mistrust that we deliberately resisted by creating an open programme, an open way of speaking and acting. ☹️



Defence of the first bid-book. Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania



*'Kaunas is shortlisted for the title of European Capital of Culture 2022'; kaunas2022.eu, 22-06-2016.*





*Peregrino*, play by KTO Teatr (Poland). 'Kaunas Puppet 22' International Puppet Theatre Festival



Arūnas Periokas, electronic music creator.  
'Music of Modernism' project





# We Reach Out to People

*#bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #co-creation #communication  
#community\_involvement #cultural\_sector\_involvement  
#Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #Emerging\_Kaunas #Kaunas\_Challenge  
#programme\_development*

## DAIVA PRICE/

During the first year of the application process, we met with many people in Kaunas – including cultural workers, communities, educators and others. Here we faced several challenges. One of them was how to explain the objectives of the European Capital of Culture in an understandable way. It turned out to be not so easy. Some partners admitted a few years later: ‘although we talked about it so much with you, we probably didn’t fully understand what the project involved. We thought everything would simply be the same as it always was, but with more money for culture.’

Another challenge was trust. We faced a range of reactions, from indifference and disbelief in the possibility of victory, to the fear of sharing ideas. I remember how, in a meeting with teachers (which was unexpectedly used by some local politicians as a stage for their election campaign...), we tried to explain that their ideas and suggestions were important to us and that this project was being developed together with the city’s communities. Unfortunately, this proposal was taken as evidence of unprofessionalism. We were told to come back when we knew exactly what we were doing.



Vaida Venckutė-Nagė, meeting with Kaunas teachers

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

On 20 September 2016, together with my colleagues Ana and Daiva, I visit the Kaunas Teacher Qualification Centre, where we are supposed to have a meeting with representatives from every school in Kaunas. Although we are in a positive mood, there is a little bit of trepidation to contend with (probably a remnant from our school days, remembering our own relationships with teachers). The meeting is important for us because from the very beginning we thought that by partnering with schools we would be able to reach a very large number of target audiences – pupils, teachers, school administration, and parents – close to practically the whole population of the city, or at least those with children.

For the meeting, we proposed a discussion format with the topic ‘Kaunas school community involvement in the “Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022” (ECoC 2022) project programme’, with the aim of facilitating a lively discussion about the cooperation between the cultural and the education sectors, rather than merely giving a unilateral presentation. We intended to present the project and its long-term benefits for the city’s cultural and educational sectors, as well as for communities of all ages, and hoped to hear teachers’ expectations, advice and ideas for this programme’s development. We hoped to work with educators in exploring models of collaboration, finding solutions that would deepen cooperation between the city’s cultural and educational sectors and increase opportunities for students to participate in creative activities in and out of school.

The event begins; the auditorium is full of teachers. When Daiva takes the floor, 10 minutes into the meeting, a few teachers interrupt her and begin to criticise our ideas on behalf of everybody: they say that we are unprepared and have come to give them extra work, that they will have to think of extra out-of-school activities for the pupils while they are already working unpaid overtime (!). These were very different principles and approaches to the ones we used in developing the Kaunas 2022 programme.

We didn’t manage to find a smooth model for cooperation with schools at the time



but, after the meeting, we began to receive emails from schools that had attended, and had heard about, understood and supported our project. They expressed their willingness to contribute with ideas and suggestions and invited us to come and give a presentation about the project. It was then that we realised that this format would be more suitable for us and, from then on, we started paying visits to these educational institutions, talking, sharing, inviting them to participate, and creating together.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We initiated the meetings with our cultural colleagues with the thematic guidelines for the programme already in place. We made presentations at Kaunas Artists' House, and ran creative workshops at the Kaunas Cultural Centre. We also asked for people to submit their ideas in writing. The process was not easy. Not only because



Kaunas 2022 meets with the city's inhabitants to conduct a survey. 2016

of the long timespan between the 2015-2016 period and 2022, but also because I think we did not emphasise the complexity of the process to our colleagues enough. There was a lot we did not know ourselves. For example, we did not know how our partner institutions would be funded. We imagined that we would produce almost the entire programme from our office at the newly created institution. However, in Lithuania, the law does not foresee how one public body can refinance other bodies – not only public bodies but also state funded ones. Not to mention how costs differ depending on the location of the activity – in Kaunas or Kaunas District. Therefore, in the year of the application, there were not very many ideas that would have later developed into real projects.



Discussing the bid-book with the team of the National M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum



Discussing the bid-book with the representatives of Kaunas's theatre sector

## AGNĖ BUROVIENĖ/

To objectively evaluate the importance of Kaunas 2022 for cultural institutions, I recommend comparing two documents submitted by the theatre to the Capital of Culture team: the initial application from 2016 and the fourth-quarter report from 2022, which coincided with the project completion dates. The first document was sent to Kaunas city cultural organisations with the aim of gathering their dreams and aspirations, which could potentially then be incorporated into the final Kaunas 2022 bid-book for the European expert jury. Consequently, they were asked not to focus on the financial aspects of realising their ideas. On behalf of the National Kaunas Drama Theatre, we included a performance by a Polish director, a series of concerts by local actors on the theatre balcony, and added a few more productions by Lithuanian directors. To us, it was just another spreadsheet to complete by the deadline for a purpose that was still rather unclear to us at that point.

## TADAS ŠARŪNAS/

I realised that the vision for Kaunas ECoC 2022 was transitioning into the implementation phase when I learned about the bid-book team's meeting with Kaunesians living in Vilnius. Ūla Tornau informed me of this – I regularly attended the KultFlux platform events she curated. The exploration of urban themes and the DIY spirit at these events resonated with me. At the time, Vilnius lacked any socially engaged

cultural events. Institutional culture prevailed in the city. KultFlux, for me, was the best thing that could have happened to Vilnius during its year as the Capital of Culture. Ūla mentioned that the Kaunas application team was similarly inspired by participatory practices and invited me to a meeting. One unexpected consequence of the economic crisis was that cafes sprang up in Vilnius like mushrooms after rain. After all, surely everyone can afford at least a cup of coffee? We all started drinking coffee. And not just one cup, but several. We met the application team at one such cafe, then called Šviežia Kava.

The gathering felt like a secret meeting of Kaunas exiles. I knew Virginija from the Textile Biennial and could tell that the bid-book was in good hands. I saw Ana for the first time, and she discussed the programme's key ideas in her usual calm voice. We all leaned forward towards Ana to hear her speak in the noisy cafe, creating an atmosphere akin to a composition from classical painting – Ana explaining the programme to the Vilnius exiles. The social engagement that the programme promised, and which I had so missed on Vilnius's cultural scene, was music to my ears. But would such DIY formats suffice to support the entire programme? And where were the grand 'high culture' events I had already dreamt of? I took the liberty of pronouncing my wish list. For instance, I could not imagine the Kaunas ECoC programme without the Manifesta nomadic contemporary art biennial. To my astonishment, Virginija immediately shared the outcomes of preliminary negotiations with the event's curators. While the event was costly, this might not be an insurmountable barrier. The greatest challenge, however, was that the curators showed no interest in the host city or the team's ideas.

That day, I realised for the first time that the Capital of Culture is not defined by grand events. It was evident that Kaunas would have to work in the shadow of Vilnius's 2009 fiasco, with both local and state politicians exercising caution towards the initiative. No one wants to risk another failure, especially not by

promising larger budgets and attaching their name to the initiative. As we left the cafe, Virginija calmly explained that it would be a relatively modest Capital of Culture, but that in no way would diminish its importance to the city. She also cautiously asked me to express my full support for the programme's bid-book and to put my ideas down on paper, so that they could find their place within the proposal application. Is that all? Absolutely! I'd put my neck on the line for it. The exile expresses his complete support.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

In order to test the ideas coming from the cultural bubble with a wider audience, during the Autumn Fair in Kaunas in September 2016, we carried out a population survey (close to 1,000 people responded to our questions about the accessibility of culture in their neighbourhoods, their expectations should Kaunas win the ECoC title, etc.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Courtyard of the Historical Presidential Palace in Kaunas. People used to call us KEKS. Well, maybe it's logical, because in Lithuanian it stands for 'Kaunas – Europos kultūros sostinė' ('Kaunas – European Capital of Culture'). But we didn't like it. I remember the city's previous Mayor took the liberty of referring to my female colleagues as 'keksės' ... Ha, ha, ha, so funny. Right up until the close of Kaunas 2022, 'keksas' kept popping up, here and there. And we kept trying to mop it up with a broom, to get rid of it, that is. But there was that one event in the historical presidential courtyard that was truly delightful. The owner of the leti restaurant baked us cupcakes. Some real cakes. They were some of the most beautiful cakes I have ever seen in my life. We treated the city's residents, inviting them to dream of what Kaunas should be like. In the evening, I put a cupcake as the cover photo for my Facebook account. It was like a signature. For the first time, I was publicly declaring myself as a member of the European Capital of Culture project.

\*  
*'Keksas' in Lithuanian stands for 'cupcake'.*

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ- NAGĖ/

It's 2016. I'm working on the youth section of the proposal. I look at the calendar, counting down the days – the results aren't inspiring, and I realise that I will be thirty-five in 2022. A moral dilemma arises: what kind of youth programme will this be, if it's headed by someone who is no longer part of this audience group? I have always been a team player in my professional life, so I realised that even at this stage I needed young people in the team like oxygen, to help me not lose the pulse and to stay tuned to ongoing changes. I try googling for active young people in Kaunas and Lithuania. I find Dominyka Ginelevičiūtė (Kaunas Regional Chair of the Lithuanian School Pupils' Parliament), copy her e-mail address, and send out an email. Soon, we are having coffee in a cafe, and I present our visions and dreams for the project. Dominyka agrees that the idea is good, fresh and relevant, and shares a few more contact details for some culturally active young people in Kaunas, all of whom then get an email from me talking about 2022. It's only now that I realise how strange it must have been for these 15–18-year-olds to receive an email inviting them to get behind an idea that is uncertain to succeed, and if it does, will only come to fruition in six years. And all that during the crucial six years of a young person's life when the greatest transformations happen... But it worked! I formed my own advisory board, with Dominyka and Simas (Sirtautas) as its most active participants. They helped me to involve, hear and gather the voices and suggestions of young people, integrating them and thereby strengthening the content of the youth programme. Working with them also gave me the idea that I would like these young people to represent the youth programme in front of the Jury when presenting the proposal to the Ministry of Culture. I believed that this would really prove that we weren't merely bluffing and that this wasn't just another one of those youth strategies that does little more than look good on paper, but that in fact young people were involved in the project 'hands on' from the beginning.

# In Memory of Leonidas Donskis

*#leadership #team\_relationships*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

In September 2016, when we were working on the second version of the bid-book and the Kaunas City Culture Strategy, Leonidas Donskis, an outstanding European Jewish thinker and member of the project's initiative group, passed away. Although I cannot claim to have been his close friend, to this day I consider his passing not only as a loss to Lithuania and Europe, but also as a personal one. The empathy he exuded and the idea of Little Europe and Big Europe have been sorely missed, in a world where democracy is fracturing, and human freedom and dignity are being brutally attacked. The wound of this loss has not healed to this day. We have dedicated the second version of the bid-book to Leonidas.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

21 September 2016. Leonidas passes away; he slumps to the floor at the Vilnius Airport. He was only 54.

He had so many plans... 'Café du Monde', the European cultural synthesis project, was his brainchild... Leonidas was a true European. The European Union, European art and culture were Leonidas's home, his homeland, his passion. And you know what the worst part is? With his death, there is not a single influential intellectual left who has spoken positively about the European Union! Is this not, in a way, an absurdity worthy of Molière's pen?

From that moment on, I was left as the oldest member in the team...



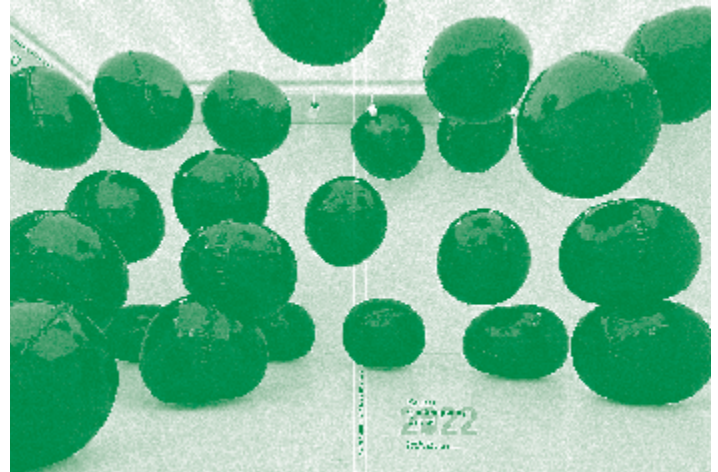
Leonidas Donskis (1962–2016)



# 2017

## Knock Knock! Kaunas Is Back!

*#bidbook\_preparation*  
*#candidacy #programme\_development*



'Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022' final bid-book. Cover design by Tadao Cern, book design by Darius Petreikis

### RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The second round is fast approaching. We are up against Klaipėda. We look at their new bid proposal and wonder: why are there so many similarities with our first round's proposal? 'Copycatting? Plagiarism?', someone remarks. The very idea makes me laugh. Ours is impossible to plagiarise. We are unsurpassable. We have already shown the Jury that we are free people. Now we will show them that we were not joking! We write our second-round bid-book in a much more reserved way. And only in a few places do I wink at the Jury: hey, it's us again, remember? Kaunas! Yes, Kaunas.

We dedicated our second-round bid-book to the fond memory of our friend and teacher Leonidas Donskis.



Preparation of the bid-book

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

On 28 February, we delivered the printed bid-book to the Ministry. We kept jokes to a minimum in the second version of the proposal. We were trembling for fear of losing... Perhaps on the outside, we seemed very confident in our victory, but oh... Need I remind you what Kaunas was like in 2014, 2015 or 2016? Compared to the dunes of Neringa, pine forests of Palanga, and even the charming Klaipėda, we looked pathetic. If this were a beauty contest, Kaunas would have had no chance... And then there was the elephant in the room, lingering ever since the first meeting with the Jury... So we worked hard on the proposal, improving the planning and doing our best to confirm some of the projects. Philip Miller's *Kaunas Cantata* and Jenny Kagan's exhibition *Out of Darkness* were already included in the programme, but negotiations with William Kentridge were stalling. His studio's reply had said to come back to them once we had won the title. Which meant that we couldn't include his name in the bid-book until it was finalised.

The bid-book is a 100-page document. A small number, considering the weight of its content. The process was akin to writing a dissertation, but with more than ten people working on it, and a few hundred more being involved. It involved producing document analyses, and integrating with the Cultural Strategy, which linked the vision for Kaunas 2022 with strategic documents at the Kaunas, Lithuanian, and European levels. After submitting the proposal, in anticipation of the Jury's visit to Kaunas and the upcoming defence of the proposal, together with the city municipality's administration, we prepared the statutes of the new institution, which we were prepared to submit to the notary if our bid proposal proved successful and we won the competition.

I have written a doctoral thesis and defended it. But this process has been much more personal for me, many times greater. Dedicated not to myself, but to others, to the city, to the present generation and to future generations.



'Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022' final bid-book.

# ECoC Isn't Up and Running Yet, But 'Kaunas Challenge' Is

*#candidacy #Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #Kaunas\_Challenge  
#Kaunas\_District #programme\_development #youth\_engagement*

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ- NAGĖ/

When designing the 'Kaunas Challenge' training, we initially set out to find local partners who would take on the task of implementing this educational programme. We hoped that by working together, there would be a better chance that the programme would take root and live on beyond 2022. From the outset, we wanted to develop the youth programme as a mentoring programme, empowering young people to stay active for the full 5 years through co-creating a youth programme for 2022 and beyond. Our goals were ambitious and long-term, and we needed to start achieving them. As the students live by a different calendar, we realised that, in order to follow through with the plan, we had to start before we even knew if Kaunas would win the title. We made up our minds not to wait and to get started. Thus, in March 2017, together with the Vytautas Magnus University Centre for Business Practices, we launched the pilot season of the 'Kaunas Challenge'. The title had not yet been won, but the youth had already been activated.

After the pilot season, however, we realised that in order to achieve the programme's goals – young people working in teams, young people creating content, and the landmark event in 2022 being developed – close cooperation between the youth and the Kaunas 2022 team was extremely important and key to the programme's success. During the pilot season, we

tried and tested how challenging it was to deliver this through external partners, not least because our partners were focused on entrepreneurship education, not on developing cultural management skills. This is why we made the educational programme an integral part of Kaunas 2022 and built an in-house team dedicated specifically to this task.

## SANDRA KARNILAVIČIŪTĖ/

I'm seventeen. My head is full of dreams and fears, stereotypes and insecurities. Even so, I try to analyze myself while I'm exploring the city. At the last minute, I apply to the first edition of this educational youth programme – the 'Kaunas Challenge'. There I meet some like-minded peers, get mentorship and pick up some know-how on how to run projects. I can make any idea real? That's how I fell into this.

We meet Kaunas, the European Capital of Culture wannabe, and its team. 'We want more youth', they say. Professionals provide us with tools, connections, and most importantly trust. That quality empowered us to think bigger and try harder. Trust means both freedom and responsibility. Empowerment is a superpower.



'Kaunas Challenge' 2nd year group. 2018



'Kaunas Challenge' seminar. 2017

# It's Now Or Never. The Competition Final

*#bidbook\_advisers #candidacy #ECoC\_jury  
#working\_with\_authorities*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The final comes in two parts. First, the international nominating panel visits both cities, and a programme must be prepared for them. Kaunas will be a full working day. No souvenirs can be handed out, no off-topic conversations, protocol must be strictly observed, the time is calculated in minutes, and every mistake is penalised. This is what Hanns and Nadja explain, and we believe them. Tomorrow they will visit Klaipėda, and then Vilnius, the Ministry of Culture, where the final exam for both cities will take place.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The competition regulations stipulated a visit by part of the Jury to each of the candidate cities. Kaunas was scheduled to host the delegation on 27 March, Klaipėda on 28 March, and on 29 March we all met at the Ministry of Culture for another presentation of each bid-book, followed by the selection of the winner. We had been preparing for these meetings for several months.



Bid-book defence rehearsal. Kaunas Cultural Centre

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Rehearsals again, in Kaunas, at the Kaunas Cultural Centre. 'Where's the Mayor?', I ask, 'Hasn't he recovered yet?' 'Oh come on', his inner circle notes, 'his English is poor, he may just tell someone to bugger off and cause problems'. In short, the Mayor's inner circle is afraid of him, as though he were the Beast of Kaunas himself!

'No,' I insist. He must take part. The Mayor must take part to guarantee our victory.

And he shows up. A little lost, with the whole entourage, but he sits down at the desk and begins working. He rehearses his part along with everyone else. He listens to the advisers' instructions. Eventually, a few days later, he admits: 'I had no idea that culture, too, required hard work.' Yeah right, as if it ever didn't! To the Mayor's credit, he did absolutely everything that was asked of him. And he did it perfectly, with no posturing or complaining.

## DAIVA PRICE/

In the run-up to and during the Jury's visit, I was very pleasantly surprised by our partners: museum and university leaders, staff, community and business representatives. The visit lasts 8 hours and is tightly scripted, with everyone's role and time measured by the second. It took a lot of unanimity and discipline. And how do you tell that to a university rector or a museum director with a reputation for long speeches?

# The Jury's Visit

*#bidbook\_preparation #business\_and\_culture #candidacy  
#culture\_community #cultural\_sector\_involvement  
#ECoC\_jury #Memory\_Office*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

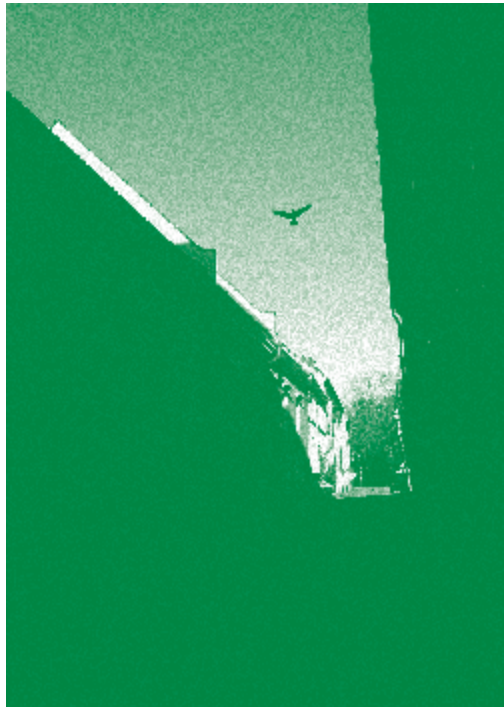
Daiva Parulskienė and Ina Kniurienė, representatives of the Ministry of Culture, Sylvain Pasqua, a representative of the European Commission in charge of the ECoC programme, and three members of the Jury – Ulrich Fuchs, Sylvia Amann and Cristina Farinha – came to Kaunas for the visit. The Jury included people, especially Ulrich Fuchs, whom we really looked upon as teachers. The day of their visit was planned by the minute, not by the hour. Everybody was committed to the plan, and we had contingency scenarios ready in case of any delays. We knew that we would not be able to compete with Klaipėda's dunes and the sea, so we did our best to showcase our city's competences and the multifaceted support being offered to the initiative from the business, education and cultural sectors.



Jury members' visit. Aleksotas viewing platform

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I am in charge of starting the Jury's tour, with a view of the city's skyline from Aleksotas. I'm tasked with explaining how we intend to transform the city. To point out these changes with my finger. To demonstrate every part of the programme. How the city's layers function. How our programme will play out. It's morning. I am walking from my home through the Old Town to Aleksotas. The sun is shining brightly. I take out my phone and take a picture of the historic day. A raven flies through the sky over T. Daugirdo Street and alights right in the middle of my frame, completing the composition perfectly. You may call me crazy, but in that moment, I believed we would win...



Morning of the Jury's visit

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Vaida Venckutė-Nagė was in charge of the schedule. The itinerary of the Jury's visit had been planned for months and, in the few days leading up to it, had been rehearsed to the minute. For the first time in my professional career, a traffic sign violation was being permitted and coordinated by the police, to allow us to turn towards the Town Hall Square coming from the Vytautas Bridge. On the cold day of 27 March, the sky was smiling down on us: the sun and the clouds were dancing on Tadao Cern's balloons, installed specially for the Jury's visit, in the Town Hall Square (don't ask me how well we slept after discovering that the balloons hadn't been given any security protection to prevent curious youngsters from poking around...). A concert and an exhibition on the rooftop of the twelve-floor Šilainiai high-rise, tea with our ambassador Bella, lunch on the Žalgiris Arena basketball court... just a few of the programme's highlights. Our message, underpinning everything, brought a tear not only to the Jury's eyes, but also to their entourage's.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

We showed them our vision of the city, the creative, partnership and infrastructural potential we had, with different points along the tour-route dedicated to presenting all parts of our programme. On that day, we were joined by the IT cluster Blaster, Vytautas Magnus University, and M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum, as well as young dancers and musicians and the artist Tadas Černiauskas (Tadao Cern). Architectural historians gave our guests a guided tour. A young man and a senior citizen from the apartment blocks of Šilainiai read poems they had written. In her house, Bella Shirin shared the story of her family and Jewish Kaunas over a cup of tea. Participants of the 'Kaunas Challenge' pilot programme welcomed the Jury to their workshop.

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

The cover of our second bid-book featured the art installation *Black Balloons* by the internationally acclaimed Lithuanian artist Tadas Černiauskas, which we later nicknamed 'the Eggs of the Beast of Kaunas' (room for interpretation). 😊 It is no coincidence that the black balloons became somewhat symbolic of the Jury's visit and the project's subsequent years. Each planned site of the Jury's visit was marked with a big black helium balloon emblazoned with our logo of the time. It appeared as if all the places were marked on Google Maps. 😊 Moreover, these black balloons, only inflated to giant dimensions, also landed in Kaunas's Town Hall Square; the jury members and our team later took a walk among them.



Christina Farinha, Virginija Vitkienė and Sylvain Pasqua in front of Tadao Cern's installation. Kaunas Town Hall Square



Jury members on Šilainiai apartment building rooftop

## DAIVA PRICE/

Every single organisation and location throughout the city was chosen not by accident; each person had a role to play and a carefully thought-out message to convey. We joked that, as history shows, if a city makes the Jury cry, it has a chance of winning. I don't know if any of the jury members cried, but Virginija and I certainly did, and more than once. The participants' authenticity and belief in their city was very moving.

I remember telling the Jury in Vieniybės Square a story about two museums that are connected by a door, the key to which they had lost. And how we were hoping that, after this project, Kaunas's museums would open their doors to one another. I don't know if this has eventually happened between the museums I had in mind at the time, but I do know that many new partnerships have been forged as a result of this project.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Everything works out well in Aleksotas. My other site is the Kaunas Central Post Office. Here, I have a few adventures planned for the Jury. First, together with young actors from Vytautas Magnus University and friends from the now defunct Kauno Miesto Mažasis Theatre we have prepared a unique 360-degrees panoramic experiential film. It tells the story of the city's post office as a symbol of hope, repression, espionage, and messaging. You put on a special virtual reality headset and get transported to another world where you can look around and experience a hundred years of history in one room amongst a great many characters.

We had worked on that video with our partners from the IT cluster Blaster in Kaunas for over three months, using the most advanced filming and video processing techniques available at the time.

Second, we go up to the first floor, and there, in the hallway, we ask the Jury to put the virtual reality headsets back on. At first, they see nothing – just the same hallway, as if without the headset. And suddenly... a creature jumps out in front of you! The Beast of Kaunas! The spectators would gasp, some even scream in shock.

'Congratulations, you've been officially scared by the Beast of Kaunas!', I would say.

Everybody loved it because there lives a child in each of us.



Jury members visiting Bella Shirin's home

## BELLA SHIRIN/

It was decided that the Jury would come to visit my house. I was incredibly excited and couldn't sleep the entire night. I began speaking and read some of Lea Goldberg's poems in English. As it turned out, one of the jury members was an admirer of her work and was thoroughly captivated. Someone from the Jury had friends in Israel. They were curious about my background and my parents. As the Jury were about to leave, I simply told them what I felt in my heart: 'To me, Kaunas is like a sleeping beauty, and I implore you to be the prince who awakens her with a kiss.' My words may have seemed naive, but that was how I felt.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The last and final stop of the Jury's visit was the National Kaunas Drama Theatre. We took a risk by giving the Jury a surprise. After a short tour of the theatre's magnificent spaces, they walked back from the main hall into an entrance hall where, without any prior warning, they were greeted with applause by a hundred representatives from Kaunas's cultural scene. There were many memorable moments during the Jury's visit, but for me personally, it is the still shot taken of this very moment that symbolises Kaunas 2022's success. Despite the fact that, at the time, the cultural sector was not yet exactly fully apprised of what to expect from the project or how

we would work together to bring it to fruition, and despite the subsequent challenges in communication and the project's cumbersome administrative side – which drove both us and our partners to despair – nevertheless, the cultural organisations of Kaunas City and Kaunas District have always given their utmost, providing a great deal of support to Kaunas 2022.



Filming a virtual reality experience at Kaunas Central Post Office

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

At the entrance to the theatre, the Jury was greeted by the athletic-minded Kaunas dance company Nuepiko. They organised an extraordinary workout involving black balance balls, in which the Jury and passers-by in Laisvės Alėja participated.

During the Jury's visit, it seemed as if the whole city was taking an exam. It felt great to see everyone, from our team members and partners to museums and universities, etc., united behind a common goal and showing what we could achieve together.

## SYLVAIN PASQUA/

It was while reading the application file for 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture', in June 2016, that I got to know the city, its recent history and its current challenges. But, above all, its dreams and its plans to use having the European Capital of Culture title to put culture and Europe at the centre of the city's development, in a process of strong citizen involvement. I was very intrigued when I read the dossier, both at the pre-selection and selection stages. The team was able to transform what often seemed to be an imposed exercise in school style into a vivid and profound reflection on the issues at stake for the city. And not without humour! Nothing was hidden about the difficulty Kaunas had in revisiting the dark areas of its past, such as the tragic fate of the Jewish community during the Second World War or the harshness of the time when the city, and Lithuania, were under Soviet rule. The city's shrinking population and the lack of public life in its (beautiful) public spaces... But

also the complexities of a city, which, by chance, became the national capital between the two world wars before being 'downgraded' into second place behind Vilnius when Lithuania restored

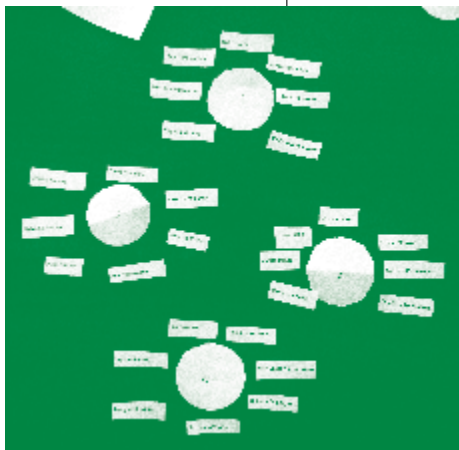
its independence in 1991. When visiting the city for the first time in March 2017, I discovered it was a hidden gem with its two beautiful rivers, the Nemunas and the Neris, and its many superb modernist buildings that date from the interwar period and have earned the city the European Heritage Label. In addition, right from the start, I got to know the Beast. This beast found himself at the centre of a new myth co-constructed, or rather eternally to be co-constructed, with all those who are eager to seize the chance and to play the game. It is also the symbol of a city's desire to renew the pact that unites it with its inhabitants and the rest of Europe.

**RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/**

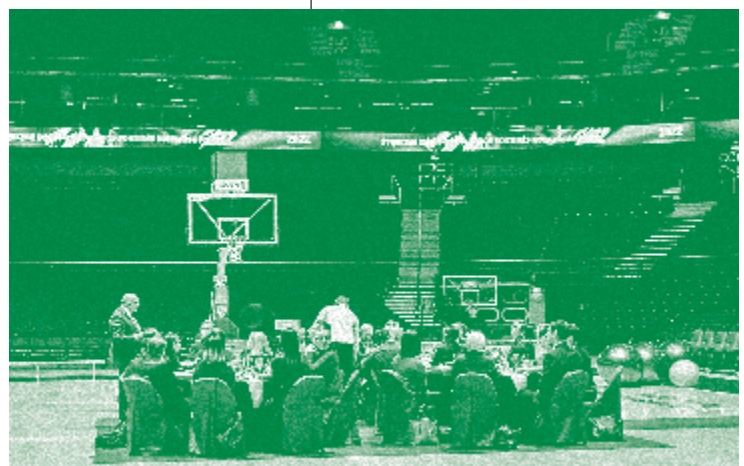
28 March 2017, Vilnius. The final is tomorrow. We've all gathered at the Reformatų Parkas hotel next to the Ministry of Culture – the team, the Mayor, the Head of Administration, the adviser. Everyone is on edge. The Mayor can't sit still – he has invited us to one of his restaurants on Vokiečių Street, but the restaurant is closed. We wander around Vilnius and return empty-handed. We try to rehearse but soon decide that we won't learn anything new. Everything is done and dusted. Let's drop it and go to bed. I don't remember how much sleep I had that night. Not much.



Virtual reality experience. Kaunas Central Post Office



Lunch seating plan at Žalgiris Arena



Lunch at Žalgiris Arena basketball court

# Defence of the Bid-Books. The Winner Is Announced

*#bidbook\_preparation #candidacy #communication  
#ECoC\_jury #public\_relations #working\_with\_authorities*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

It's morning.

Our presentation is scheduled for 10 a.m., if I remember rightly.

I ask my colleagues whether they know if the Mayor of Klaipėda is going to play the trumpet for the Jury. 'Yes', someone replies, 'he's brought a trumpet'. Great, I think to myself, let him play. Our chances of winning will only improve.

The exam is going smoothly as planned, the Jury obviously has nothing else to ask us and is just dragging its feet at the end, because protocol is protocol.

## DAIVA PRICE/

The 'defence' of the final bid-book at the Ministry of Culture took place in the morning. We went first. This time, we felt much better prepared and disciplined. We gave confident answers to the Jury's questions and followed all the unwritten rules (e.g., avoid adding anything to supplement your colleague's turn, even if you think that their answer may have been inaccurate).

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The Jury panel seated in front of us comprised ten experts appointed by different EU institutions. The Lithuanian Ministry of Culture had had the right to appoint two Lithuanian members to the panel but had chosen not to do so. We were grateful for that. There is no doubt that the presence of Lithuanian experts on the Jury would have fuelled speculations about the decision's transparency for many long days after the announcement of the results.

Whereas the members of the Jury only knew us from the first selection round, by contrast we knew them all rather well. We had carefully studied the professional profiles of each member. We had anticipated the questions that

each of them was likely to raise upon reading our bid-book and had prepared our best possible answers.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

It was such an important day for me that it is hard to describe. I remember very well how Gintarė Masteikaitė bolstered our team with her visions for the upcoming festival and breakthrough in the performing arts. Lewis Biggs, art curator, added international weight. Leonidas was missing, but we felt magically united. I know that on that day, the Mayor of Kaunas, who was present at the defence – well-rehearsed and responsibly minded – began to have faith in the creators of our bid-book. Prior to the defence, the Mayor and I knew each other very little. It took time for him to understand what the city should pay 12 million for. The Mayor said to the Jury: 'I am not a man of culture, but you have professionals of the trade before you. The municipality's obligation is to provide funds for the project, and theirs is to implement it. I have full confidence in this team.' This, by the way, is the best thing the city's representatives can say to the Jury (any claims regarding the mayors' cultural or artistic knowledge do not strike the Jury as professional or sincere). In all fairness, the municipality, although strict in terms of expenditure and administrative control, has never interfered in the content of the Kaunas 2022 programme. The content has always belonged to cultural professionals and artists. Except once, but more on this later in this book.



Final bid-book defence



## DAIVA PRICE/

Coming out of the 'defence', we felt we had won. But we still had to wait for the final verdict. The Mayor invited us to his cafe on Vokiečių Street, where we remained until the evening – discussing the Jury's questions and remarks, our own mood, and, at the same time, timidly dreaming of our future office.



Waiting for the competition's results to be announced

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The verdict will be announced in the afternoon. The Mayor invites us to his restaurant again, this time successfully. We sit down and have some wine. 'We won't win. It's Vilnius after all, the Ministry is not fond of Kaunas,' says someone. 'The Minister of Culture is herself from Klaipėda, she's definitely not vouching for us,' adds someone else. I feel both funny and stupid – everyone is aware that the Minister of Culture is a close friend of mine. Not only that, but I know for sure that she indeed does not like Kaunas very much at all. But all this means nothing! Anyone who is aware of EU procedures will tell you that neither she nor the Ministry has any say in this, even if they wanted to.

The tabloid press would, of course, have made a story out of this. Fortunately, that kind of press in Lithuania already has one foot in the asylum and the other in the grave...

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

As we were preparing for the competition's final stage, I thought it was important not only for our colleagues at the Ministry of Culture, but also for Kaunesians themselves, to have an opportunity to experience anticipating and celebrating the competition's results. Thus, the idea sprung to my mind of organising a results announcement 'party' in the Town Hall Square in Kaunas, where Tadas Černiauskas's big *Black Balloons* had been installed previously. I wanted to invite everyone to gather and witness the results being announced live. Together with the Kaunas City Municipality's communication team (with Renata who was working there at the time and later joined Kaunas 2022 as the coordinator of the Myth of Kaunas programme), we began to prepare for this event. It's no secret that the black balance ball has since come to symbolise this event too. We had to break a sweat before we could find a sufficient number of these black balls. We managed to ship them from abroad and put special white logo lettering on them. They looked stylish, indeed. 😊

We started with the event countdown, when, a week before the results were announced, we placed the black balloons in different parts of the city, such as Spurginė, Laisvės Alėja, a bus, the Church of the Resurrection, the Pažaislis Monastery, the Leonidas Donskis Library, and so on. Anticipation was felt equally across both traditional and social media. We swiftly organised a host, performances, a stage, and hundreds of black balance balls, which we gave away to students and schoolchildren on the spot before the event.



Announcement of the ECoC title winner. Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania



## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

We are in the hall, inside the Ministry. We take our seats. The Jury's Chair, Agnieszka Wlazel, and jury member Alain Hutchinson walk in. The European Capital of Culture 2022 is... Kaunas!

All this is broadcast live to Kaunas, to the Town Hall Square, which is packed with people! I will repeat it over and over again: for the first time in Kaunas's history, we gathered at the Town Hall Square not for a beer festival or basketball, but for culture. I consider this a historic achievement for our team.

Later, at the joint celebration, the jury member Ulrich Fuchs approached me and told me outright that our bid-book's literary style, our Myth Programme, and the Beast of Kaunas were perhaps the best things he had ever had the pleasure to read in a city's bid proposal.

## BELLA SHIRIN/

Filled with anticipation, we stood in the Town Hall Square. As the winner was revealed, my heart soared with delight, and we all embraced – neighbours from the courtyard gallery and nearby strangers alike. Everyone was overjoyed, and I couldn't help but dance! Without a doubt, it was one of the most memorable and beautiful days of my life.

## SIMONAS KAIRYS/

Experiencing a great victory is not a common occurrence in life. When Virginija, her team and the Mayor of Kaunas were defending the city's bid, Albinas Vilčinskis, the former Head of Culture at the Kaunas City Municipality, and I were waiting for the results at the dedicated event in Kaunas's Town Hall Square. I vividly remember that split second when the news of Kaunas's winning of the title reached us. In such moments, it's often very difficult to leave preoccupying issues and worries behind, to allow yourself to relax and rejoice. I will always remember that feeling. I uttered some congratulatory words from up on the stage to my fellow Kaunesians, and then walked back down to my colleagues.



ECoC title announcement celebration. Kaunas Town Hall Square

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

On the bus ride to Kaunas, I kept repeating to myself every five minutes, 'but how great is this – we won!' It was probably one of the happiest days of my life, surpassed only by the birth of my daughters...

When we returned to Kaunas, it was late in the evening, the crowd at the Town Hall Square had dispersed, and only about a hundred of our most loyal supporters were waiting for us at the Kultūra Café.

## DAIVA PRICE/

Winning the title brings two things to mind for me.

Firstly, I recall the reception we received at Kultūra upon returning to our hometown. It was an extraordinary feeling, knowing that, even though it was already almost night-time, our fellow cultural colleagues were eagerly awaiting us with fireworks. That was the first time a cultural victory had been celebrated with such joy, and we felt a sense of unity that we had never experienced before. Fortunately, thanks to this project, we have had the opportunity to experience this feeling many times over.

Secondly, I reflect on the wonder of seeing how the city was the next morning. The city felt completely different that day. There was something special lingering in the air. After not seeing my daughter and mother for a long time, I went out with them to celebrate. We visited several cafes, and our city's victory was the topic of discussion in all of them. What struck me the most was seeing the director Gytis Padegimas passionately sharing his impressions on a live TV broadcast. I had never felt such a great feeling in my city before.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

When I stepped into the Department of Culture at Kaunas City Municipality, the next morning, posters reading 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' were hanging on every door in the hallway. And on our office door's logo, we proudly crossed out the words 'candidate city' next to 'Kaunas 2022 – European Capital of Culture'.



ECoC title announcement celebration. Kaunas Town Hall Square

I knew about some of Kaunas's joys and challenges during the ECoC implementation. I remember asking (during the monitoring meeting in Brussels) the then Vice-Mayor of Kaunas to protect the team from political pressures, and I remember telling the team (during the Rijeka ECoC opening ceremony) to also take care of themselves. I know that ECoC implementation is always a very challenging task. So it was in Kaunas. But, despite the problems, this committed team managed to change the city's image. During the selection meetings, we kept hearing about the 'neglected second city'; yet because of ECoC, Kaunas was able to dismiss the word 'neglected' from its informal description. It is now Lithuania's intriguing second city. I loved the art and the city's atmosphere when I visited Kaunas during the ECoC's final weekend. I believe that the ECoC created the conditions needed for Kaunas to be a happier and more European city – this was the vision the ECoC team had for its city when they delivered their presentation to us, a few years ago. There is a new story to

be told about Kaunas and a new sense of community. Echoing our selection reports, I would add that this is a very good starting point for the future of Kaunas and its role in Europe.

## AGNIESZKA WLAZEL/

This is a tale from the perspective of a (critical) friend. I was privileged to observe (from different distances and perspectives) Kaunas becoming the European Capital of Culture. I was the head of the panel of independent European experts selecting (and, later, monitoring) Kaunas as the European Capital of Culture. I remember my initial curiosity about how the programme (driven, as it was, by contemporary art) would become attractive to other audiences. I still have a clear image of how the Kaunas team was during the ECoC title announcement – their apprehension, tears and happiness.



Kaunas 2022 room. Kaunas Cultural Centre



## DAIVA PARULSKIENĖ/

The European Capital of Culture title is more fitting for cities other than capitals, as non-capital cities tend to have more ambition, engagement, and stronger involvement from local authorities. The clearer regulations for European Capitals of Culture for 2020–2033, approved by the EU in 2014, encourage closer collaboration among all stakeholders. This regulation stipulates that a concept must be developed at least five years before the event and mandates the implementation of the approved concept. Kaunas's proposal excelled in many aspects, primarily because it presented several scenarios in which culture could bring about transformative change for the city and its inhabitants.

In the process of formulating cultural policies, there is often a focus on including people and giving them responsibility for cultural heritage, on minority policies, youth engagement, empowering communities, and the skill-sets of cultural workers. However, talk and action can sometimes remain unconnected. Kaunas 2022 didn't only talk about these ideas but also put them into practice. In my view, these experiences will be the most valuable legacy.



Kaunas City Municipality Culture Department



On the way home



Jury's visit. Apartment block rooftop in Šilainiai



*Black Balloons*, installation by Tadao Cern





Jury's visit. Aleksotas viewing platform



# Public Institution 'Kaunas 2022'

*#administration #capacity\_building  
#ECoC\_project\_management #working\_with\_authorities*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

On 30 March 2017, the morning after a long night, I remember walking down Gediminas Street. I was on my way to the notary's office to submit the documents for the establishment of 'Kaunas 2022' as a public institution. The statutes, all the required shareholder documents, and contracts had been prepared ahead of the final round of the competition, in order to save time and meet the municipality's budget planning deadlines.

Upon the founding of the institution, there were two shareholders (later joined by a third, Kaunas District Municipality) – Kaunas City Municipality and a recently established association called the 'Tempo Academy of Culture', whose membership list included all five organisers of Kaunas's bid proposal. I don't know of any other 'Capital of Culture' institution that had an independent representative of the cultural sector as a shareholder. We never held a majority of votes at shareholder meetings, but we always had our representative involved in the institution's decision-making.

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

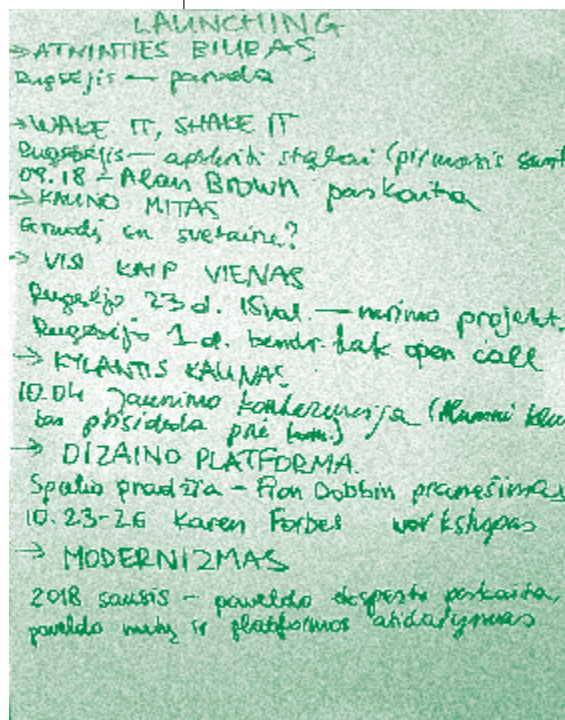
As we were gearing up for the submission of our second bid-book, we had already discussed that, if we were to win the European Capital of Culture title, a new non-profit organisation would be established to administer the programme. Our creative team, who had worked on the bid proposal, felt the need to safeguard the ideas and content that would be passed on to the new entity in case of a win. At that time, no one knew how things would play out, and previous examples of European Capitals of Culture – in terms of management and administration – were not particularly inspiring. Therefore, those of us who were actively involved in the bid proposal, including Virginija, Rytis, Ana, Daiva, and myself, decided to found an association that would serve as a platform for bringing the cultural community together and ensuring the programme's implementation. At that time, the funding model for cultural institutions in case of a win was not yet clear either, so we were creating a backup plan to deal with 'what if' scenarios. Informally, Rytis referred to this association as the Honourable Beast Society (Žvėries draugija) and formally, on 23 January 2017, the 'Tempo Academy of Culture' (Kultūros tempo akademija) association was established. The first meeting of the association's board of directors took place on 24 January 2017, during which it was decided that Kaunas City Municipality ought to be invited to jointly establish the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution. This proposal was sent to the Mayor of Kaunas City Municipality, Visvaldas Matijošaitis. And they accepted it. This was a significant achievement and a truly exceptional case within the broader history of European Capital of Culture projects, where an association that was voluntarily established by independent cultural enthusiasts who had worked on the bid-book was given a voice and representation in the management of the entity responsible for the project's implementation.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

I have been serving as the acting director of the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution ever since its inception. The first year was a challenging one, as our aim was to initiate all programmes as quickly as possible. This meant that we were able to face challenges early on and resolve them before the title-holding year, while also gradually developing the project's visibility and people's awareness of it. Our institution's mission has always been to focus on the city's narrative and societal changes that require time. I am pleased that we did not delay the programme's implementation. Many cities often kick things off with programme improvement, project development, and the preparation of investment and communications plans. By contrast, we started, learned, and adjusted the programme as the project progressed. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to identify and eliminate ineffective methodologies. However, this path was not an easy one to take. The administrative side of the operation had been lagging behind for a long time, as we were not familiar with many of the regulations and procedures.

Gathering the administrative team was way more difficult than gathering the creative one – the challenges ahead of us were atypical even for most experienced public administration professionals. Moreover, specialists were in short supply, and the proposed salary was not competitive. We knew that a single botched public procurement could condemn the whole project.



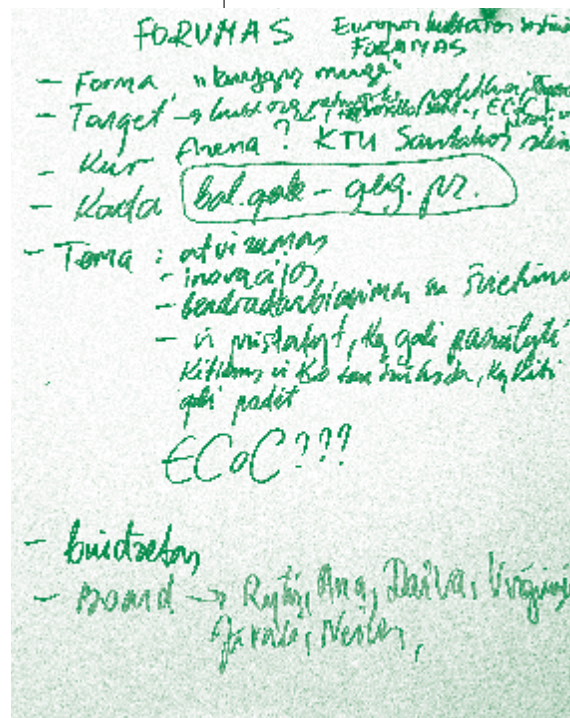


Planning the programme's launch

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

When the operations of the newly established institution began, we organised a staff development workshop with Lina Grigė and Elma Paulauskaitė from Terra Brevis about the mission, vision, and staff responsibilities of Kaunas 2022.

During the full-day meeting, we encountered a symbolic misunderstanding when, with the help of our facilitators, we came to realise that the project and the organisation were two different things. The workshop leaders asked us to set the organisation's mission, vision and objectives, and we went on talking about them exclusively in project-related categories. It was a real eye-opener for me or, rather, just the first fissure providing a glimpse of a new reality. Until that day, I hadn't given much thought to the fact that an organisation is not a project but a vehicle for driving it forward. I wasn't even the head of the institution yet, only the project's art director, as was inscribed in my professional DNA. 😊  
 In early 2018, out of a sense of duty (as no one else applied for the job vacancy) and responsibility for the stability and independence of the project's content, I submitted my documents and was appointed as the institution's director. And throughout the project, which lasts until September 2023, I have been struggling with this institutional status, feeling unnatural in this position.



Planning the programme's launch

# The European Capitals of Culture Family

*#capacity\_building #ECoC\_family #international\_partnerships #networking*

## DAIVA PRICE/

Winning the ECoC title brings about many new experiences. One of them, perhaps the most rewarding, is becoming a part of the wider family of European Capitals of Culture. Other cities' experience (gained from their own projects), and colleagues' advice, as well as their support and encouragement, are all invaluable.

For me, such meetings have always been an opportunity to satisfy my thirst for knowledge. Learning from best practices, comparing, identifying mistakes – all this provides for extremely valuable lessons. After all, we're doing what no one else has done before. We must not only help our partners grow but also grow ourselves.

From the first meeting of the Capitals of Culture that we attended in Leeuwarden in 2017, I returned with not only the lessons I had scribbled down for myself, but also the idea of taking part in the International Crochet Blanket project that became perhaps the first project realised by my colleagues together with the city's and the district's local communities. At one of the ECoC meetings, I met a woman with an interesting name: Esmeralda. She told me about her initiative and made me promise that we would implement this project in Kaunas. Upon returning home, I told my colleague Evelina Šimkutė about this. Thus, the crocheted blankets connected Kaunas with European communities in different countries for the first time.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The meetings of the Capitals of Culture family served as a fuel for us. Only representatives of cities that have been awarded the title can attend. We used to joke sometimes that this was a kind of therapy group. All countries embark on a Capital of Culture project with a sense of being on a great mission but without any practical answers to the 'how?'. There are no textbooks at hand – each project is implemented in its own unique cultural and legal context and in accordance with its own unique programme. We drew as much as we could from the story of Vilnius 2009, but Kaunas 2022 had a fundamentally different programme, and was taking place in very different times. Therefore, we searched for and found equivalents to our project's challenges among the other Capitals of Culture. We studied what was entailed in creating a celebration for the whole city during a Capital of Culture opening ceremony, how we could best present the project to potential sponsors and how to work with the programme's network of partners. We observed the other capitals' marketing and PR activities. We analyzed their teams' structures and political undercurrents. We couldn't always apply their good practices due to our strict public administration

regulations and public procurement laws, but sometimes even just sharing our concerns led to positive outcomes. These meetings eased our daily life and prompted hundreds of international collaborations. We looked for ways of involving not only our project's organisational team but also our partners in the hope that these partnerships would last beyond 2022.

## ERNI KASK/

The question 'How are you?' can be asked in several ways. I've always been wary of people who only talk about themselves. Over the years, Virginija, Ana, Daiva, Aurelija, Dovilė... every time, they asked, 'How are you doing in Tartu?' This question has resonated at the Kaunas Forums, and at the opening and closing of Kaunas 2022. It has always been asked sincerely, there has been a true desire to know, albeit with an awareness that no talk can ever be truly complete. I'm so grateful for those talks and hope that they will continue in Tartu and Southern Estonia in 2024.



European Capitals of Culture visiting Kaunas. European Capitals of Culture Forum. 2018

# First International Additional Funding

*#community\_involvement #funding  
#international\_partnerships #rivers*

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ/

After the launch of Kaunas 2022, the first international additional funding that came from the Interreg project known as 'Sustainable Tourism for Attractivity of Riverside Cities' (STAR Cities) was dedicated to sustainable river tourism. Its main focus was on sharing best practices for the sustainable development of riverside areas (in our case, this included Kaunas District, as most of its municipalities border rivers). It also addressed political decisions related to river tourism and the creation of sustainable river tourism. Our Interreg project involved partners from France, Italy, Germany, Slovenia, and Belgium. I remember the application process being very confusing, as Kaunas 2022 was not an established 'policy maker', so I had lengthy discussions with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to clarify what EU financial mechanisms were active in Kaunas District at the time. In other words, what soft and hard local infrastructure development processes were being financed by European Structural Funds. This information was crucial for justifying the concept behind the project, on our side.

Upon receiving Interreg funding, we invited local partners to initial discussions on the topic of rivers. Everyone had many questions regarding the programme's direction, especially on ways of integrating Interreg funding with their visions. This went on for a couple of years. Over time, as numerous discussions took place, the audience became more targeted, as more local community representatives became increasingly interested in activating the potential of rivers within their neighbourhoods and localities. Thus, rivers became an integral theme of the communities programme, and we eventually grasped the Interreg logic.

The project was nerve-racking, especially due to the complicated funding mechanism, which was deeply inconvenient for a public institution. 'What the hell got me into this...', I would often say. But we persevered, learned, and ultimately achieved success. In the communities programme, we utilised this opportunity to the maximum, securing additional funding for the river festival in 2022 and submitting another application with Aistė Ptašinskaitė-Paukštė and Romėna Puikytė. In 2023, Aistė, Romėna, and other river enthusiasts have already been working on the river festival programme to ensure its continuation, with new activities on the horizon. Lack of love and attention is not something that Kaunas's riverside-dwelling communities could possibly complain about, these days.

However, the issue of river accessibility in the city remains unresolved, highlighting the need for increased business participation and strategic municipal action.



*'Sustainable Tourism for Attractivity of Riverside Cities' (STAR Cities) project webpage.*

# A Play About Bella's Life

*#communication #European\_dimension  
#impacts #Litvaks #Memory\_Office  
#storytelling #theatre*

VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Bella Shirin is one of the first and most dedicated ambassadors of Kaunas 2022. We met in the spring of 2016. I had already heard about Bella from others: she was a Jewish girl born in post-war Kaunas. Her parents, having survived the Holocaust, took Bella and emigrated to Israel in her teenage years, during the Soviet era. After retiring, Bella returned to her hometown, Kaunas, seeking to invite as many Jewish people as possible to visit, reassuring them of their safety here (naively, I hadn't fully realised that Kaunas and Lithuania still signify cruelty, loss, and insecurity for Jewish people). We were having a meeting in one of our offices at the Cultural Centre when Bella entered with her friend, Asta Kavaliauskaitė. Her eyes radiated love. We instantly embraced as if we were the best of friends. She needed us, having returned to Kaunas without any family, and we needed her. Together, we made significant strides in bridging the gap between Jewish and Lithuanian people, particularly in broadening Kaunas residents' understanding of the fate of Jews in Lithuania.



Actors Rūta Kumpikaitė, Olita Dautartaitė and Rokas Lažaunykas. *Sbalom, Bellissima* premiere



Rūta Kumpikaitė, Bella Shirin, Ina Pukelytė, Olita Dautartaitė and Rokas Lažaunykas



Bella Shirin (on the left) beside the Nemunas. Photo from Bella's personal archive



Bella Shirin with her parents. Photo from Bella's personal archive



## BELLA SHIRIN/

While I was still living in Israel, I used to say that my story would either become a book that I would write myself or a play in which I would act. No one believed me; they all said I was living in a fantasy, and that nobody cared what Jews – or I, for that matter – had experienced.

During my initial visits to Lithuania, I had mixed feelings about this place and was testing the waters. It turned out that this wasn't a land of anti-Semites. I was always welcomed warmly. Eventually, I obtained citizenship and relocated here on 16 July 2016. I knew I couldn't just sit still. A friend informed me that Kaunas was submitting a bid to become the European Capital of Culture. We called, and they responded kindly – the director was on leave but would return in September and get back in touch. In September, she called me, and the next day I found myself at the Kaunas Cultural Centre, where I met Virginija and Ana. I would never have imagined such a warm and heartfelt meeting. I shared my idea, and Virginija decided straight away to speak with a director or writer to document my story.

Soon after, I met Ina Pukelytė, who wrote and directed the biographical play *Shalom, Bellissima* and we began writing my story. Was it easy? No. Initially, I found it difficult to speak. Later, preparations commenced with actress Olita Dautartaitė, who played my character in the play. We met frequently to allow her to get to know me better. Rehearsals started, which were, at first, tough for me to sit through. Somehow, I got used to it, and it became natural.

It was greatly significant to me that Lithuanians could see me and learn what the Jewish people experienced during the Holocaust. On the other hand, I felt it was essential to speak about Lithuanian rescuers, since there were many in my family's history, and this topic wasn't really discussed enough. These individuals risked their lives and their children's lives to save Jews. It was important to me that the world heard about this, and for Lithuania's image to change.

While we were still working on the play *Shalom, Bellissima*, every time I visited Israel, I would show pictures and share stories with everyone. People couldn't believe what was going on in Lithuania. I spoke to people everywhere – on buses, in shopping centres – as I am someone who feels comfortable approaching strangers. I was telling everyone I met to visit Kaunas in 2022. I spread the word about the ECoC project in Lithuania, too. That's how I understand the commitment that comes with being a Kaunas 2022 ambassador.

Over these years, my home has welcomed numerous tourists, including Jews from America, Australia, Canada, and Israel. Once, the son of a former Israeli Litvak Committee president contacted me. His father had set up several arts and crafts schools in Kaunas and had lived in the ghetto. After surviving and escaping to Israel, he wrote a harrowing book about his experiences, the war, and the collaborators. I met his son in Israel and told him about Kaunas and Lithuania. Following our conversation, he became passionate about tracing his father's footsteps and discovering his own roots. He visited Kaunas in the autumn of 2022. A friend of mine, who works as a tour guide, uncovered information in the archives about where his father had studied and the street where he had lived. When the son arrived, all this information was passed on to him. He then travelled to his father's hometown, where I had arranged for the Deputy Mayor to welcome the visitors and accompany them to the local museum. They were met with exceptional hospitality.

Many Litvaks I had spoken to about Lithuania then took the plunge and visited the country. Once they had experienced the warm welcome from locals, their perception of Lithuania changed dramatically. Over the past seven years, Lithuania's image in Israel has significantly improved. As a Kaunas 2022 ambassador, this has been an important achievement for me. Even though the project has now come to an end, I feel that my mission is far from over.



*Interview with Bella Shirin  
(YouTube video, 2016).*

# What's Up in Kaunas District?

*#capacity\_building #communication #community\_involvement #decentralisation #Kaunas\_District #regional\_dimension*

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ/

To ensure a smooth integration of the European Capital of Culture programme into Kaunas District, we started by creating a contact map for all the district's localities, gathering the contact details of cultural organisations, institutions, libraries, leisure centres, and other culturally active communities and individuals. We later used this information to individually inform them about ongoing relevant events, discussions, creative workshops, lectures, and joint meetings. One of the first such occasions involved an invitation to participate in the International Crochet Blanket project (coordinated by former communities programme curator Evelina Šimkutė). The Kaunas District community was one of the most active participants, with handmade greetings from Kaunas, Kaunas District, and other Lithuanian cities travelling to Leeuwarden, a Dutch city. This project helped strengthen our initial ties with the local community.

Cultural fieldwork conducted in Kaunas District in 2016 allowed us to gain a better understanding of which thematic programmes would be the most relevant to the district's localities. I regularly visited the Kaunas District Municipality and its cultural department, where its head Alvyra Čičinskienė provided a comprehensive overview of the state-of-affairs in the district's cultural institutions. She shared her insights on challenges, provided advice, and helped identify key figures within the local cultural field. Following my first visits, engaging in conversations over tea about the Capital of Culture's programme and primary objectives, we began organising broader community presentations. Together with our curators for the youth, modernism, design, communities, and memory programmes, we embarked on a journey, organising meetings with the local community and visiting nearly every single cultural centre, leisure hall, and library. We were sharing our ideas and plans for these programmes and (even more attentively!) listened. And there was a lot to hear, indeed.

## ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

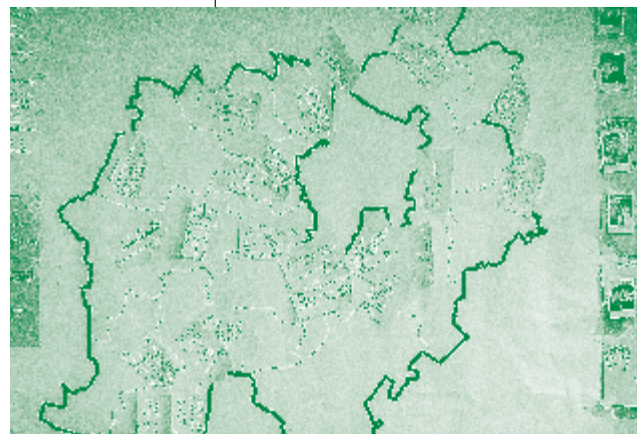
Most of our curators (and the coordinators who accompanied them) would likely have similar memories of their first trips to Kaunas District, especially in terms of people's reactions and our own attempts to explain the project. After our well-practised presentations on ideology, ideas, and projects, we often faced straightforward and specific questions from the audience, which were not always easy to answer in a simple and concise manner. Although our strategies and plans were laid out until 2023, for me and many others, the big picture only became clearer as the deadline approached.

It's only natural that some people didn't understand what the project was about or why we were asking 'what is it that you would like to do?' without handing out cash to the first idea that came to mind or to some random drawing on the wall. But there were some who understood and supported us from the very beginning. They helped

us realise that we were heading in the right direction but not everyone had to be on board with us. However, the district's residents always impressed us with their sincerity, warmth, and emotions, which we would bring back with us, with a smile on our faces, from every visit or meeting in the area.

## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

One of the early moments of the European Capital of Culture project in Kaunas District involved introducing the community to the project and the bid proposal for Kaunas and Kaunas District. At meetings, attendees would often be split into groups, comprising everything from sceptical economists (questioning the project's value-for-money and preferring to focus on more practical needs: 'give us cash, we know best what it is we need – a bench!'); tired and demotivated people, lacking faith in the project's success ('who would even come to visit this place', 'you mean more work for the same salary or, even worse, for free?'); and, my favourites, the change enthusiasts, the dreamers and doers ('why don't we organise a festival?', 'let's involve local business!'). The seeds of change were sown. We participated in many of the district's events, promoting Kaunas 2022 and asking people how they saw their involvement in the project, what kind of cultural change they needed, and who they were and sought to become.



Materials from the workshop with Kaunas District organisations. 2018

# ‘Draw Us for Us’: the Project’s Visual Identity Contest

*#administration #communication #marketing  
#open\_calls #public\_procurement*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

It was time to design the project's visual identity. We organised a competition on a survey basis, planning to sign a low-value public procurement contract with the winner. Kaunas City Municipality brought us back down to earth, marking our first lesson in public procurement. The legal way of selecting a logo was to conduct a project competition in accordance with public procurement law which, by the way, was created with the specificities of the architectural field in mind. I drafted the contest's documentation myself, not having a clue about procurements and lacking a qualified specialist on the team. Fortunately, I had an example of a similar contest conducted by the Municipality. We had to announce and suspend the contest several times due to ever-emerging claims of interested parties. Over time, we learned the lesson that claims were often used as a means of reducing competition or forcing one's way onto the suppliers' list without possessing the necessary qualifications. It was a miracle that we ultimately received not only a fantastic winning proposal that served us well, but also had multiple options to choose from, and, in addition, gathered an international jury of over a dozen members.

## VIKTORAS BACHMETJEVAS/

At the time, I was known as an ‘ad man’, having worked in several advertising agencies, so Gediminas invited me to be a member of the competition's Jury. It was the beginning of the Kaunas 2022 project, and we all strongly supported it, wanting everything to go smoothly. I had no doubt that this contest would gain importance. My only concern was whether there would be options to choose from. Out of around eight proposals, two were workable. International and local experts agreed among themselves, and the Jury solved this puzzle easily. The winning proposal was aesthetically pleasing, democratic, flexible, and well-developed, outlining several logo adaption methods that proved successful over time. Modern design often becomes outdated quickly, but even five years on from the competition, the Kaunas 2022 logo has remained just as fresh.



Announcing the competition's winner

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We are grateful to the then young, up-and-coming designers Rokas Sutkaitis and Julius Seniūnas, who courageously took part in this competition and offered a brilliantly crafted brand identity system right from the first stage. It was somewhat similar (as noted by the designers of a non-winning proposal) to the brand identity system of the Whitney Museum in New York. But on the other hand, the winning logo was very Kaunesian, reflecting the confluence of our two rivers and the letter K, radiating a sense of community, and promoting stylistic minimalism. It was the pinnacle of style and adaptability. After the results of the Kaunas 2022 logo competition, some capitals even redesigned their logos. Black and white became the majority trend. ☺



Announcing the competition's winner



*Guidelines for using the  
Kaunas 2022 logo.*



*Presentation of Kaunas 2022's visual identity  
(by Julius Seniūnas and Rokas Sutkaitis, Acid  
Studio).*



# Communication

*#communication #media  
#public\_relations #staff*

## DEIMANTĖ ZUTELIENĖ/

I joined the team just before the logo contest ended. Rytis Juodeika, who had been consulting Kaunas 2022 on matters of communication, invited me to learn more about the project since the team was looking for help in putting together a marketing and communication strategy. Having read the application in both English and Lithuanian, I realised immediately that the opportunity to join such a project only comes once in a lifetime. We met with Ana at Kultūra cafe several times to discuss the project, expectations, and the challenges ahead. We all knew that the shadow cast on 'Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009' could become an obstacle in attracting the public and sponsors, and fostering trust in the Kaunas project. It was necessary to launch marketing efforts, clarify goals, gather tools, identify necessary partners, and attract marketing and communication staff to the team. On the day I joined the team, there was only one person working on communication: Agnė. Having worked in large organisations with substantial marketing budgets, I was used to relying on agency resources, but here everything was different – we were looking for talented freelancers who, without being directly involved in the team, would be an integral part of it. People, people, people – their creativity, their faith in the programme and changes awaiting the city through culture, and their values were our trump card in assembling the team and implementing activities.

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

Although 2022 still seemed far away, we started with having clear goals in mind for what we had to (and wanted to) achieve, from strategic image-building steps and searching for promotional sponsors to establishing warm links with the media (by introducing the project and the team). A lot of coffee was consumed during this period. ☺ We launched the logo contest, which received considerable attention from the public. At the time, I was the sole member of our communications team.



Beside the Kaunas 2022 office. Laisvės Av.

# Facilitating Fluxus?

*#audience\_development #community\_involvement  
#Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #Fluxus\_Labs #We\_the\_People*



Awarding diplomas to Fluxus agents post-training

## GRETA KLIMAVIČIŪTĖ-MINKŠTIMIENĖ/

In November, the first Tempo Academy training sessions on community arts and working with communities were launched. Over a five-month period, these sessions were aimed at training future team members to address local challenges through artistic and creative activities. Initially, we named the trainees 'Fluxus agents', a term that everyone deemed suspect. A few years in, these individuals working with communities would be renamed 'community facilitators', another complex term that eventually stuck with us. Out of nearly 140 registered 'agents', only eight were selected. They went on to become the communities programme coordinators or else continued their activities in another form up until 2022, forming a truly unique generation.

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

I joined the agent training sessions unexpectedly. I had just returned from a year-long trip around Asia, and I was searching for a group or a club engaged in meaningful social projects. To be honest, I was also looking for friends since I didn't know anyone in Kaunas at the time. And then one day, I came across a photo on Facebook showing around 60 people learning about community arts. It was a photo from the first agents' meeting. I did a little research and, intrigued, joined the second meeting. There were significantly fewer people attending and, though I found the topics interesting, missing the first meeting meant that I found it difficult to grasp where the training was headed. I did attend the third meeting but decided not to continue with the training – I honestly did not get the point of it. Merely attending lectures and talking to people was not enough to keep me going; I was looking for concrete activities. Just as I was about to leave, Egidijus Bagdonas, the then 'Fluxus Labs' coordinator caught me heading through the doorway and gave me some encouragement: 'Keep attending the sessions, great things lie ahead of us!' And thus, I continued, not missing a single session, completing all the homework assignments, working with the Šilainiai community in my free time, and began to believe wholeheartedly in Kaunas and the ECoC project. I felt like I belonged.



*'Kaunas 2022: Community Programme Methodology' (eds. Greta Klimavičiūtė-Minkštienė, Aistė Ptašinskaitė-Paukštė, Milda Rutkauskaitė, 2023).*

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ-PAUKŠTĖ/

Throughout the training, we acquired a wealth of information about communities, facilitation, and co-creation. However, I believe the key to our success was the considerable time and effort invested in cultivating personal connections among the participants. This involved tea breaks, casual gatherings, and encouraging people to work in pairs when undertaking their first initiatives, among other things. Without having planned it, we put all the theoretical material to test in practice, and, over the course of the training, we became a tight-knit community. This experience instilled in us the confidence to share our newly acquired knowledge more broadly, to use our personal experiences as evidence of the importance of embracing play, simplicity, and collaborative creativity within communities, including truly listening



Fluxus agents' workshop materials

to one another, planning together, and finding joy not only in the concrete results but also in the process itself and the way relationships evolved.

## GRETA KLIMAVIČIŪTĖ-MINKŠTIMIENĖ/

After these training sessions, the first batch of communities programme coordinators quit their jobs. There were only two of us left in the team, namely Stefanija Paulauskaitė (from the first generation of agents!) and I. I remember us sitting on the ground floor of our new Tempo Space in a dimly lit corner, thinking about our uncertain future, confused and with a sense of trepidation. We sat in silence for a while and then, little by little, the programme for 2022 began to emerge.

# 2018

## How the Audience Development Training Programme (“Tempo Academy of Culture”) Began

*#audience\_development #capacity\_building #culture\_community  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement #Culture\_Tempo\_Academy  
#international\_partnerships*

### DAIVA PRICE/

For me, the European Capital of Culture project represents a continuous learning process. We carried out many things for the first time in our lives. We read, travelled, listened, and learned... In 2017, I invited Alan Brown, audience development expert from the US, to Kaunas. Alan wasn't just a 'theoretical' expert, he was conducting organisational research first-hand. In meetings with leaders from cultural organisations, however, it became apparent that the American reality differs significantly from that of Lithuania. Moreover, many audience development keywords were not yet easily understood in our context.

In 2018, at Alan's invitation, Ana and I attended the 'Young Audiences' conference in Oslo, seeking inspiration and new methods. Later in October, we visited Aarhus, the then European Capital of Culture, to find answers to one of our most pressing questions: how could we encourage cultural organisations to collaborate? We learnt about several successful collaborative projects, none of which, unfortunately, were initiated by the organisations themselves. Later, discussing organisational collaboration in Galway, someone suggested: 'When you find a recipe for success, share it with us.' We still naively believed that we could easily overcome old habits.

During this period, I was curating two programmes: 'Memory Office' and 'Wake It, Shake It!', a programme aimed at transforming cultural organisations. We sought to inspire organisations to become more visitor-friendly and open to change. 'Audience development' became the main key term for these transformations. In 2017, we encouraged several city-based organisations to participate in training workshops run by KŪRYBINĖS JUNGTYS ('Creative Connections'), and in 2018, I began searching for international partners to help develop a targeted training programme. That's when I discovered Agata Etmanowicz. I was travelling



*'Beyond Audience Development' (ed. Agata Etmanowicz, Impact Foundation, 2022).*



with students to Warsaw's Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews and arranged to meet Agata nearby afterwards. Our next meeting took place in Kaunas, where we drafted a long-term audience development programme with contributions from experts across several European countries. Since 2018, most of Kaunas's cultural institutions have participated in this programme. Thanks to Agata's workshops, regular cultural community meetings were revived, and a Kaunas cultural community group was created on Facebook. These training sessions enabled us truly to get to know one another, turning Kaunas's cultural workers into a community.

## AGATA ETMANOWICZ/

One of my earliest memories is meeting the whole team for the first time. It was a grey and cold day in early January 2018. Back then, the Kaunas 2022 office was in this big, old building not far from the park. It was a time when the whole team could fit into one room (and not a very big one at that).

We had had a few meetings before, but this was my very first time meeting everybody in-person. I understood the concept behind the Kaunas 2022 bid-book. But I was exceedingly curious about how the people who created the project (as well as people who joined the process later on) imagined success would look like, and what their hopes and dreams were. So I asked them.

And I remember the answer that was repeated most often: for Kaunas inhabitants to smile more often at each other, spend more time together, connect with their city and its history and ultimately be proud of being from/living in Kaunas. And with arts and culture (i.e., Kaunas 2022 project activities) being the incentive to do so. Everything the Kaunas 2022 team was saying was so connected to audiences, to people and there was so much honesty, care and dedication. My only thought was: I am so happy to be here and so honoured to be embarking on this journey with them.

And guess what? It actually happened! Over all these years, I have been privileged enough to have had the chance to observe and experience the process of change.

After long preparations, we started the first capacity-building programme for Kaunas 2022 with audiences at its core in 2018. The key to success was ensuring proper recruitment to the programme.

The recruitment was planned in two stages. The first was an online form. It served various purposes. The straightforward goal was, of course, to select the organisations who would be participating in the programme. But there was also a 'hidden' agenda: just the simple act of engaging in filling in the form already fired up (or at least was supposed to fire up) the conversation taking place inside the organisations about how to grow audiences.

The second stage, the interviews, involved meeting face to face. Choosing the participants was the shared responsibility of the Kaunas 2022 team and our Impact Foundation. In the final stage, interviews were conducted by Paul Bogen and me.

While selecting the participants, it was important for us to choose the most motivated organisations who were ready to put audiences at the heart of everything they did (or at least who declared a readiness to do so...).

But at the same time, it was also about having representation from various types of organisations (formal, non-formal, NGO, institutions etc.), and representation of different art forms (visual arts, performing arts, culture heritage etc.). All of this concerns the organisational level.

Yet there was also the human dimension. Each organisation was going to be represented by two people throughout the whole process. Let me explain the reasoning behind this. Based on our previous experience in conducting capacity-building programmes and long-term processes within cultural organisations, we have noticed three things. The first is that, contrary to the popular view, people do in fact change jobs rather often within the cultural sector. Our second finding is that it is hard to introduce change in an organisation when you are acting alone and, also, when you participate in a workshop it is good to have someone to talk to who knows your organisation as well as you do. The third thing is that humans are 'fragile material' and 'life happens', so it is not always possible

for an individual to participate in all activities within the programme. When there are two, the chances are that at least one will be there to follow and report back.

We were originally aiming to involve 10 organisations. That means 10 sets of 2 people. So, we had a few more factors to consider here. There was the 'social dimension': this group of people all interacting with each other, spending time together for over a year. Maximising the potential for growth meant finding people who were both willing and capable of carrying out the change (being the change!) in their respective organisations. Therefore, it was also crucial to bring together culture professionals who were not only open to gaining more knowledge and skills but also willing to share, exchange and cooperate with others. And on top of that, there was also a 'technical' consideration and limitation, concerning the comfort afforded within the available space and time in workshops, and the care and focus of mentors.

So, as you can imagine, putting this puzzle together was not an easy task. We had a lot of discussions both amongst ourselves and with the Kaunas 2022 team. If only it were possible, we would probably have welcomed all interested organisations, as they were all amazing (or at least I would have done...). But we were conscious that this was just the first edition of the programme, and there was still more to come. Therefore, we did our best to be strategic about it. If only we knew back then that Covid would come... But, let's go back to 2018 for now.

Finally, there were 12 organisations chosen for the first edition of the programme and we started the work straight away in the autumn of 2018.

The programme was divided into two parts: 'Hands-off' and 'Hands-on'.

The first was the 'HANDS OFF' phase. It was all about workshops. We were meeting once, sometimes even twice a month for two full-day, in-person workshops (mind you, back then 'in-person and on-site' was the main working method and there was no need to underline this). So it was very intensive (today I might say maybe even a bit too intensive...). We went from getting to know each other and our organisations/ institutions, with a proper introduction to audience development and audience engagement, through to strategical planning, audience mapping, segmentation and audience research (...a lot of research, as knowing your audiences and non-audiences is key!), accessibility in the cultural sector and audience development planning.

The programme was designed this way with the first part being called 'hands-off' for a reason. What usually happens is that, as soon as one gets out of the workshop room, there is this urge to test out, implement the new knowledge and skills right away in the organisation. It might bring good results but might just as easily be a recipe for failure. And we have observed that in the past. Working with audiences is a process in which all elements have to be considered and they all need to come together. Therefore, it is best if it all sinks in, to have time to reflect and plan properly. And to start acting only after obtaining a sense of the 'bigger picture'. Even when it comes to so-called 'quick fixes'.

This urge to act was also very visible within this group. We are all doers in this sector. There is a task, there is a problem, so we are there to fix it, straight away. Hence, me going over and over again, repeating: wait, don't do anything, wait a moment. I am sure that everyone became sick and tired of it.

The second phase, 'Hands-on', was all about slowly – and with the support of mentors – starting to plan how to introduce the change into the organisation. So the second part was mainly focused on the mentoring process, on-demand workshops for organisations participating in the programme (on various subjects, on an as-needed basis) and one-on-one support in specific fields (e.g., conducting audience research and making sense of collected data). We were also meeting as a group regularly to update each other on progress.

The 'grand finale' was the presentation on 'what happened and what's next', 'the outline for the audience development plan'. Most of them were in fact audience development strategies. As I was there from the first workshop to the last, I had a chance to observe not only what had already been accomplished but also how the approach had changed (and trust me, we were returning to some of the issues over and over again!). It was truly amazing to witness the final presentations being undertaken with so much reflection and understanding of what working with audiences is all about and that, while there may be some quick fixes, there are no shortcuts in this process. And what touched me, also, was that so many participants took the accessibility of culture into consideration.



Audience development training



Culture community breakfast. Kaunas Chamber Theatre



Audience development training

# 'Modernism for the Future' Launched

*#architecture #communication  
#heritage #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future*

## ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

The long-awaited launch day of the 'Modernism for the Future' programme has arrived.

I'm feeling sick, with a runny nose and, most likely, fever...

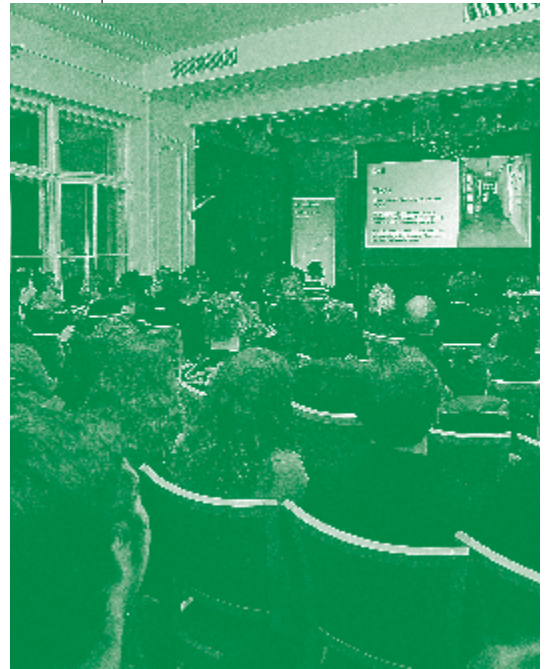
This was the first significant event that I was not only hosting but also organising, so I couldn't miss it. The event took place at one of Kaunas's main cultural institutions – the Kaunas Artists' House. The venue was packed to capacity.

We had chosen the venue not only because of its cultural importance but also on the basis that the launch of a programme dedicated to Kaunas modernism couldn't take place in a non-modernist building. This remained a rule that I followed throughout the project's lifespan, thinking first not about how comfortable or suitable the building was to accommodate an event but, on the contrary, where I would like an event to take place and which venue would be open for it. Thinking of the ways to adapt a chosen building came second.

Active participation and questions from attendees demonstrated the public's interest and expectations for the programme. I believe we fulfilled most of their expectations, but not all.

For instance, we had declared that the programme's website was intended to become a social network for modernists, akin to a second Facebook. While it ultimately has not become one, it has nevertheless achieved another success indicator – over the past two years, it has generated a consistent flow of more than 2,000 unique visitors per month. I consider this an outstanding achievement for a website of this type.

I have received positive feedback from the outside. People were somewhat surprised that one could enter a building's address in a Google search and be presented with information on over 300 architectural objects in Kaunas City and Kaunas District, complemented by historical photographs and stories. Not to mention the archimede.lt platform, dedicated to wooden architecture, and the autc.lt database – no other Lithuanian city boasts such extensive architecture-focused archives!



'Modernism for the Future' programme launch event. Kaunas Artists' House



'Modernism for the Future' programme launch event. Kaunas Artists' House



*More about 'Subjective Atlas: Kaunas Modernism' by Hugo Herreta Tobon.*



*'Modernism for the Future' architectural objects archive.*

# The Europa Building

*#communication #Creative\_Europe  
#European\_Commission #public\_relations  
#working\_with\_authorities*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Brussels. Together with the Minister of Culture and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we take the metro to the Europa building, also known as the Consilium. We are here to attend a meeting of EU culture ministers, where I am scheduled to deliver a speech. In the corridors of the European Union, one becomes accustomed to protocol. One must always be brief, concise, and to the point. Initially, I was given 10 minutes, but as the meeting overran, my time was reduced to 7, then to 5 minutes. Eventually, they asked me if I could give my speech in 3 minutes, but I said no. I will have five minutes. I condensed everything about who we are and what we do into an intense five-minute presentation, and delivered it. I even managed to amuse the audience. After my speech, ministers from at least two countries (I believe, Bulgaria and Greece) approached and thanked me for my broad perspective on culture.

My core message was that Kaunas was not waiting until 2022 to become the capital; it was already the capital and would continue to be such for the next five years. The key focus should be not on impressive but short-lived grand events but rather on continuous work with the city's people. Kaunas's improved everyday life, rather than merely a show, would become our legacy.

Here, I want to make one crucial point. All the people I met at the EU institutions throughout my time working with Kaunas 2022 were competent, attentive, and well-intentioned. I was impressed by how European 'bureaucrats' were always ready to offer help and advice. They read all the documents we sent to the Creative Europe Office from beginning to end, evaluated our efforts, and asked substantive questions. In private conversations, I felt their genuine interest in how we were doing. Most often, they were ordinary, hardworking, well-educated cultural professionals from all across the EU.

I had an equally great impression of the Lithuanian diplomatic representations in Brussels. The staff there work tirelessly and without complaints. They will always find time for you, respond, and offer assistance. My thanks go to them. 🇺🇪



Ina Kniurienė, Saulius Šimanas and Liana Ruokytė-Jonsson on their way to the Europa building



*Rytis Zemkauskas presenting the 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' project at the EU Council of Ministers of Culture (Brussels, 23 May 2018).*

# The First Day of Happiness

*#capacity\_building #communication #community\_involvement  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement #Designing\_Happiness  
#festivals #new\_longterm\_initiatives #programme\_development  
#public\_relations*

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

At the initiative of the United Nations Organisation, the 20th March is celebrated as the International Day of Happiness, as a way of encouraging member states to focus more on sustainable economies and the happiness factor within societies. It's not a coincidence that our design programme was called 'Designing Happiness', and its initiator, Jūratė Tutlytė, proposed celebrating the Day of Happiness in Kaunas. I was appointed the main organiser and, frankly, felt somewhat apprehensive due to the event's novel format and the ambitious goal of creating a city-wide festival with extensive local and cultural partner involvement.

When celebrating the Day of Happiness for the first time and creating the locations of happiness, we based everything on the ten principles of happiness: Give, Communicate, Move, Understand, Try, Plan, Don't Stop, Feel, Accept, Participate, as they are shared by the United Nations. These principles helped partners to get on track with thinking about their happiness activations. I was so enthusiastic about inviting various organisations and partners that my emails could have ended up in the spam folder due to their sheer quantity. The results were delightful: 56 different organisations participated in the Day of Happiness 2018, creating approximately 80 unique happiness points and initiatives.

One unforgettable moment from the first Day of Happiness was organising a morning workout at 6:30 AM in a very unusual space: a train station. That day, I visited dozens of different events, experiencing a wide range of emotions, from lots of laughter to tears of joy. My memorable highlights included the elderly trying on VR goggles for the first time, people's reactions to professional NŪEPIKO dancers at the airport, the elderly dancing ZUMBA in a library, a happiness parade on Laisvės Alėja, and a party near the Kaunas 2022 office (then undergoing reconstruction) featuring Baltic Balkan.

The Day of Happiness 2018 also had its first integrated communications campaign, with bright yellow Kaunas 2022 posters and advertisements displayed throughout the city.

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

This Day of Happiness was more like a grassroots movement. We gathered a diverse group of enthusiastic actors, ambassadors like Bella Shirin, and ordinary people to participate in a happy protest march from the Historical Presidential Palace to our soon-to-be office. The response from other cities, medical professionals, and the media exceeded our expectations, prompting us to plan future events with clearer objectives and more involvement from cultural organisations.



Day of Happiness. 2018

## DEIMANTĖ, ZUTELIENĖ/

The first Day of Happiness tested our team's ability to work together on large-scale projects, from initially realising that such an event was needed through to executing our concept. We worked closely with Julius Seniūnas and Rokas Sutkaitis, creators of Kaunas 2022 logo. They were our brand guards, making sure we used it in accordance with their concept. The logo, just as a canvas, a creative solution in itself, required subtlety and attentiveness in working with it.



Day of Happiness procession.  
2018



*Kaunas 2022 International Day of  
Happiness (YouTube video, 2018).*





Day of Happiness, virtual reality experience. 2018.



19:32		ATVYKIMAS – IŠVYKIMAS /	
PRAKIMAS – KATIMAS		KATIMAS	
085	PAPR	VILNIUS	KAUNAS
086	PAPR	KAUNAS	N.VILN
092	HOT.	MARIJAMPOLĖ	KAUNAS
033	PAPR	VILNIUS	KAUNAS
067	PAPR	VILNIUS	KAUNAS
088	PAPR	KAUNAS	N.VILN
094	HOT.	MARIJAMPOLĖ	KAUNAS
063	PAPR	VILNIUS	KAUNAS
028	GR.	KAUNAS	VILNIUS
		3 6 700 55111. INTER	

Silent Disco at Kaunas Railway Station. International Day of Happiness, 2019

ARRIVAL - DEPARTURE			
AVIOLINIA	AVIOLINIA	NUMERAS AVIOLINIA	AVIOLINIA NUMERAS
IS	1939		11
IA-VILNIUS	1958		11
IS	2002		2
IS	2021		1
IS	2110		12
IA-VILNIUS	2113		1
IS	2147		2
IS	2217		11
IS	2242		11
NETO SVE			





*Me Tvo / Savoј Krūvoj*, play by Low Air. 'Audra'  
Festival. 2022

# We Grow the Minds in which the City Grows

*#capacity\_building #Emerging\_Kaunas #impacts  
#Kaunas\_Challenge #motivation #staff #youth\_engagement*

## SANDRA KARNILAVIČIŪTĖ/

With our team, we are creating a cultural project named 'Youth Kaunas'. We don't actually know what we are doing, but we want to organise a one-day festival featuring youth culture, social networking, lectures and fun.

We pitch our idea, we get a place for an event – the Pienocentras, \* comprising 4 floors of modernist beauty – for a week. This inspiring event involved telling stories and exchanging experiences.

Sometimes I can't believe it truly took place – a bunch of teenage students getting a heritage building and a budget to organise an event from scratch! I'm eighteen. Even though I graduated from the 'Kaunas Challenge' programme, I am still visiting the temporary office of the European Capital of Culture. Because I have ideas to share and they have questions to ask.

\* *Complex of buildings, originally belonging to Lithuanian milk processing companies (construction completed in 1939).*



'Kaunas Challenge' seminar



'Kaunas Challenge' seminar

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

Recognising her potential and aiming to bolster our team, I considered inviting Sandra to join us and recommended this to my colleague Aurelija. I vividly recall the day we called Sandra in for a discussion at our office in Happspace. Nervous and on edge, she was in the process of finishing high-school and deciding where to study. She said, 'I plan to study in Vilnius. I want to experience a new environment, city and people.' To which we responded, 'Stay in Kaunas, study here, and we'll offer you a job.' Sandra accepted this challenge, altering her initial decision about her studies. Thus began her journey, starting as a participant in 'Kaunas Challenge', progressing to becoming a programme mentor, then to a coordinator, and ultimately to a co-founder of a public institution established by the 'Kaunas Challenge' alumni.

## SANDRA KARNILAVIČIŪTĖ/

I have just graduated from high school. In my head, I have a dilemma: which capital to choose – the current or the contemporary one. Kaunas 2022 has a proposal for me: to stay here and join the team.

I start coordinating the 'Kaunas Challenge' programme. I see youth meeting like-minded peers and creating projects in teams. They explore the city and collect experiences. They are not sure what they are doing but they are passionate. They fail and try again. It's a superpower.

By the end of 2022, I will have managed three seasons and met 105 curious doers, which equates to 15 teams with the exact same number of projects and ten times more ideas.

I believe the youth is changing this city. I see the city changing because of its youth population: organisations seeking out young people's opinions, and our youth initiatives inspiring citizens.

At 'Kaunas Challenge', we say: 'We are growing the minds in which the city grows'. And it is undoubtedly an experience of growth.

# The European Capital of Culture Forum

*#capacity\_building #culture\_community  
#Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #ECoC\_family  
#European\_dimension*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Tempo Academy's annual flagship event is the European Capital of Culture Forum. In the early years of the project, we eagerly sought successful examples of capital projects that would help us find solutions. These examples inspired us and contributed to shaping our programme. Our goal with the European Capital of Culture Forum was to inspire a wider range of partners. One of the forum's objectives was to highlight the essential role culture plays in the development of our cities and regions.

Preparing for the first Forum, we found ourselves short on team members and not yet accustomed to hiring external event service providers. I took care of nearly all aspects of the conference myself – from the programme's development and collecting presentation slides to ticketing. I learnt very well what to avoid in the future.

For the first Forum, I aimed to gather the most engaging speakers from other cultural capitals, showcasing how they functioned in various parts of Europe. This wasn't a difficult task, as we had already encountered numerous exceptional organisers. I humbly informed the family of cultural capitals about our event. To my astonishment, around 40 network representatives attended. We realised that such an event was necessary not just for us and Lithuania's cultural movers, but also, perhaps even more so, for the cultural capitals' network. One of the later forums was attended by Tartu 2024's delegation, who brought as many as 40 delegates.

After the forum, we took all foreign attendees to the Courtyard Festival, co-organised with Vytenis Jakas. A communal dinner for all citizens at a long table along Laisvės Alėja has become a new and greatly cherished Kaunas tradition.



European Capital of Culture Forum.  
Kaunas Žalgiris Arena. 2018



European Capital of Culture  
Forum. Kaunas Žalgiris Arena.  
2018



*European Capital of Culture Forum website with a media library  
of presentations given between 2018 and 2023.*

# The First Courtyard Festival Co-organised by Kaunas 2022

*#co-creation #community\_involvement  
#festivals #Fluxus\_Labs #We\_the\_People*

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

I had the pleasure of taking part in the Courtyard Festival as a participant who brought together the Šilainiai community. This experience solidified my faith in the 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture' project. The event saw people coming together, smiling, engaging in conversation, and sharing their talents and food. The city came to life, and I found myself surrounded by wonderful people. Being a Fluxus agent proved to be an incredible experience. I was joined by eight elders from Šilainiai, who, I can confidently say, found the Courtyard Festival to be the most unforgettable event of the year. They dressed up, ventured into the city, met new people, made friends (who became companions in other events), felt accepted and appreciated. I am hopeful that, in the future, a method will be invented for measuring the impact of such events on the community at large.



Courtyard Festival. 2018

# The Beast of Kaunas Makes His First Appearance

*#art\_in\_public\_spaces #artist\_engagement  
#Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas #mythology  
#rivers #storytelling #visual\_arts*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The Myth Programme captivated the seasoned European Jury. The Myth Programme helped us win the title. Word about Kaunas having a highly original Myth Programme had already done the rounds of the European Capitals of Culture circles.

Meanwhile, in Kaunas, the myth and the Beast were met with resistance. What's this? Who needs this? What sort of a fabrication is this? And why the Beast, and not Taurus? Why not Kaukas? Why him, and not her? And how about Čiurlionis, Maironis, Ušinskas, Zikaras... (insert your own favourites here)?

In short, we created the website [kaunolegenda.lt](#), featuring stories, materials gathered by historians, and a co-creation platform for citizens. We decided to present it to the public on the White Bridge (officially called Simono Daukanto Bridge) leading to Nemunas Island.

We told people that the Beast would make his first appearance. And that I would be reading tales.

I invited Linas Kutavičius, a Klaipėda-based light installation artist whose work I greatly admire, to be a part of the event. Linas and his team spent two days getting soaked in the Nemunas Canal, preparing a surprise for the audience.

Dusk fell. A crowd gathered on the bridge. I began reading tales. Suddenly, a colleague exclaimed, 'Look!'

Below, two eyes appeared glowing in the water 🐉. The river canal itself had become the body of the Mythical Beast of Kaunas.

\*  
*Kaukas is a Lithuanian mythological being, a household spirit fabled to bring wealth and prosperity.*



The Beast's first appearance. Nemunas Canal. Light installation by Linas Kutavičius



# The Modernist Summer School

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings*  
*#architecture #capacity\_building #heritage*  
*#Modernism\_for\_the\_Future #youth\_engagement*

## ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

2018 marked a significant year for the modernism team, as we successfully launched their first international summer school and held a two-day international conference.

Thanks to Vaidas's connections and determination, the prestigious Bartlett School of Architecture in London was invited to co-organise and lead the summer school. As a pilot project with a fee of €150, attracting participants proved to be challenging. Nevertheless, although we did not receive enough applications to necessitate a selection process, we did manage to draw students from Latvia, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Poland, Türkiye, Italy, and Spain.

We continued the tradition of hosting events at selected modernist locations in Kaunas, emphasising their importance and using them as case studies. Given that all the summer schools were implemented in collaboration with Kaunas University of Technology (KTU), for the first one we managed to secure the Pienocentras, the milk processing company headquarter building, situated in the heart of the city, as our venue.

Throughout my entire time working with the Kaunas 2022 team, I had the pleasure of handling the keys to the two largest interwar buildings on Laisvės Alėja: the Pienocentras Building and the Central Post Office – a truly great feeling! Of course, we faced challenges in activating and making these relatively neglected and rarely used buildings suitable for work. These challenges often extended beyond basic room tidying or cleaning. Sometimes, we'd take care of updating the water supply, restoring the sewage system, and other housekeeping matters. Luckily, the elevator was operational as, for our event, we had to carry around 50 chairs to and from the now defunct POST gallery.

Temporarily occupying and activating these iconic buildings was a delight for the team. I fondly recall an evening when the organiser and architect, Paulius Vaitiekūnas, and I decided to switch on the lights in most, if not all, of the Pienocentras Building's rooms. This act brought a momentary sense of life to one of the symbols of modern Kaunas for passers-by on Laisvės Alėja, so that passers-by on Laisvės Alėja would see one of the Kaunas's modernist symbols come to life, even if only for a moment.

Despite some students making minor complaints about its intensive schedule (activities starting at 9 a.m. and often ending at 8 p.m. or later), the summer school went smoothly. The welcoming atmosphere and rich cultural and extracurricular activities made up for the long days.



'Modernism for the Future' summer school workshop



'Modernism for the Future' summer school workshop



'Modernism for the Future':  
 International Summer School  
 (YouTube video, 2018).

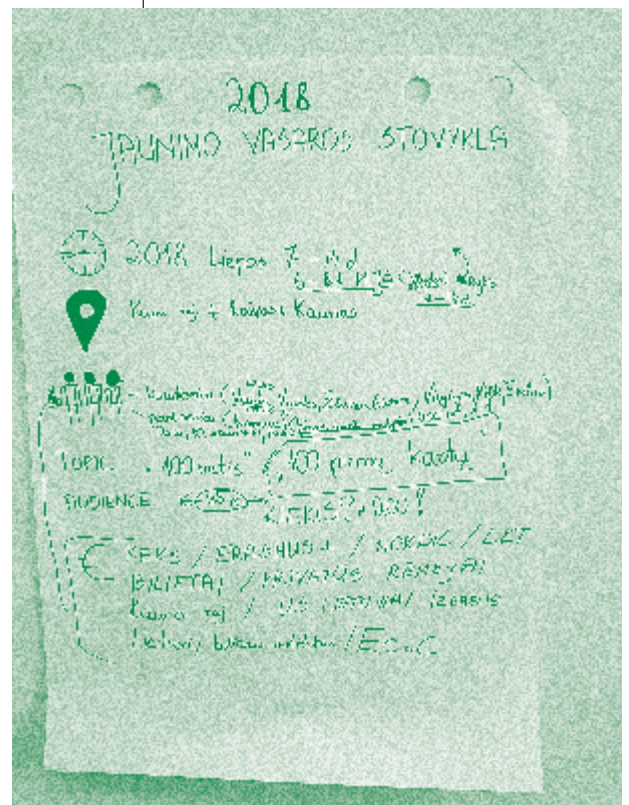
# The '100 First Times' International Youth Summer School and the First Fluxus Hill-Climb

*#audience\_development #communication #Emerging\_Kaunas  
#festivals #Fluxus\_Labs #Kaunas\_Challenge #marketing  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives #public\_relations #technical\_production  
#working\_with\_authorities #youth\_engagement*

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

From the very start we had already planned a dedicated segment of the programme to commemorate the centenary of Lithuania's independence in 2018. Following the successful launch of the educational youth programme for pupils, we began the process of incorporating university students into the youth programme. This task posed a considerable challenge, as it was one of the first major Kaunas 2022 events after securing the title. The challenge was twofold: the entire team had to unite for a collaborative production effort, and the event was dedicated to showcasing the beauty of Kaunas District neighbourhoods and celebrating local communities.

The chosen format was not without its difficulties – a week-long summer camp culminating in a weekend festival for the entire city and district community. Furthermore, the summer camp was to be international, adding another layer of complexity to the organisational and communication processes. In the summer of 2017, we began the preparatory work of strategising the summer camp's concept and content. Programme curators devised ways of presenting and highlighting their programme's focus while incorporating Kaunas District communities. As the camp's structure became apparent and various internal and organisational challenges emerged, we hit upon the fitting title of '100 First Times'. Our team experienced many first times, and the summer camp's content was developed as a series of interconnected events and projects that served as a space for new experiences, acquaintances, and discoveries for the youth.



Team planning for '100 First Times'



*'100 First Times' international youth summer camp  
(YouTube video, 2018).*



*Festival of Surprises  
(YouTube video, 2018).*

## INDRĖ ALEKSANDRA-VICIUTĖ/

'100 First Times' represented 100 young people, 100 unique personalities, and a plethora of diverse emotions, all gathered in one location. It resembled a distinct republic within the city, quickly forming its own customs, traditions, and most importantly, fostering a sense of enthusiasm and active participation among attendees as they engaged in activities prepared by local communities.

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

Vincent Bozek, Berlin-based French artist, choreographer, and producer joined the event's organisation team. The collaboration caused a stir-up within a team, as not everyone was willing or able to commit time, and not everyone agreed with Vincent's methods. We needed to clarify the responsibilities appropriate to the team and to Vincent as a producer. It was our first time working on an event with a foreign producer. The Covid-19 pandemic hadn't yet happened, and it was challenging to grasp the concept of remote work. Everyone wanted Vincent to be present and close by, fearing that the process wouldn't work otherwise. Would we have the same perspective today? Back then, it was a considerable challenge. On 1 June, a month before the summer camp's launch, I received a call from Vincent, announcing his withdrawal from the project. We faced a crisis and needed to act quickly and effectively.



Summer-school participants' workshop



Summer-school participants' workshop

## INDRĖ ALEKSANDRA-VICIUTĖ/

Organising such an event demanded intensive effort. Merely finding a location and hoping everything else would fall into place was not enough. With so many participants, each day represented a challenge, even with months to prepare before the event. Hosting 100 young representatives from Europe and around the world meant that each day would bring with it a new question raised by the participants themselves. Logistics, catering, travel needs, activities, and decorations – as the launch approached, the entire Kaunas 2022 team was drawn into the whirlwind, prepared to face this event with undoubtedly extensive preparation behind them.

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

The summer camp was a success, achieving its goal of creating an atmosphere that brought together 100 young individuals from 26 different countries to inspire Kaunas and Kaunas District with 100 fresh ideas and possibilities. In just one week, we discussed collaboration, fostering creativity, promoting new initiatives, and encouraging engagement in Kaunas 2022 projects. This multilayered, co-creative process began within

The team pooled their resources and found solutions for the camp's closing event, resulting in the spontaneously re-planned Festival of Surprises and its culmination, the Fluxus Hill-Climb.

## DEIMANTĖ ZUTELIENĖ/

We used to occupy the entire round table while brainstorming communication solutions for the Festival of Surprises. A strong core team was forming, consisting of Agnė Pinigienė (Head of Communications), Irutė Tumaitė and Danas Viluckas (Heads of Marketing), Eglė Simonavičiūtė (Designer), Laurynas Rėckus and Gytis Dovydaitis (creators of creative communication concepts). Our goal was to reflect the director's vision by inviting partners to join and create a unique, self-generating festival that fuelled collaboration. Thus, the communication campaign's 'Goodbye to the Bubble' concept was conceived, inviting participants to step out of their comfort zone and experience hundreds of unexpected twists.



our own team, cultivating a culture of collaboration and co-creation among us as curators. Time will tell if we succeeded. Moreover, this experience marked our first significant interaction with Kaunas District's communities, helping us recognise the unique individuals and groups living in the diverse and remarkable Kaunas District.

## DEIMANTĖ, ZUTELIENĖ/

During the festival, it rained, but still, dozens of city and district locations drew large crowds, and the first sponsors embraced the Kaunas 2022 idea. Many of them remained involved with the Cultural Capital all the way through to its title-holding year.

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ- NAGĖ/

Challenges in the summer camp's planning, endless Excel spreadsheets, a reduced budget, the departure of the main producer, team building through joint activities, internal (mis)communications, organisational issues (hundreds of letters from the youth around the world) and logistical ones (visa, transport, catering, accommodation, etc.) – these all made up my 100 first times. It was plenty to deal with.



Summer-school participants' workshop

## INDRĖ ALEKSANDRA- VICIŪTĖ/

'100 First Times' provided an opportunity for young people to meet one another, as they gathered for a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience in Kaunas. Participants explored every corner of the region and discovered the most vibrant locations in Kaunas and Kaunas District. All this was crowned by the inaugural hill-climb which has since become an integral part of the city's cultural identity. Years later, I still follow the activities and lives of some of our participants. It is heartening to see that several of them have now become representatives of the cultural and arts sectors, are organising events and creating art. Most importantly, some of them continue to maintain close relationships with one another – participating in these remarkable achievements has been a truly wonderful experience.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The youth summer camp presented me with two opportunities. Firstly, with the international team, I had another chance to test out the Myth. It worked excellently, everybody liked it, everybody found it clear and easy to understand. In the Kaunas cultural sector, you see, things aren't usually so simple.

Secondly, I was creating a real performance for the first time in my life. Collaborating with Eglė Kuzmickienė from the Samylų Cultural Centre, we held a performance in one of Kaunas's underpasses, commemorating the submerged villages and towns beneath the Kaunas Reservoir, and sharing stories written during the youth summer camp's creative workshops. I named this performance UNDERWATERGROUND. Using lasers, we created an immersive underwater experience for the audience.

The performance itself wasn't difficult to create. The real challenge was getting rid of the urine stink in the underpass...

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The idea of the Fluxus Hill-Climb was conceived during joint team workshops as the culminating event of '100 First Times'. I took on the responsibility of organising the first climb. This was one of the very few projects that I approached with scepticism (closing the street, disrupting traffic, expending considerable effort, and would anyone even attend?). And it was one of the most unusual ones in terms of organisation. We did everything in the final weeks. To secure participants, I called everyone I knew, from DJs to dog trainers, who joined the climbing event with their dogs. Everyone on the team was making calls. We asked the owner of the nearby Kultūra bar to pass on the invitation to their clients. We contacted Kaunas Centre of Leisure for Children and Schoolchildren, as well as numerous art collectives. I informed public transport companies about what types of vehicles would be stopped and for how long.

Working with the chief of road police at the Kaunas Central Police Station, we drew a traffic management scheme; he instructed me what traffic signs had to be put up and where. Where would I get them from? 'Go', he says, 'to the police yard; they will hand them over to you'. I returned home with a trunk full of traffic signs that my husband and I set up on the day of the event. The police provided two crews to guard the two closed passages. The security company we had hired guarded the remaining closed streets. And then we waited. As many as 700 participants gathered, donning masks, rags, carrying bathtubs, tables, dogs, wings, hospital stretchers, and more. People sang, did push-ups, and danced in lines. The event made me realise how important it is for people to sometimes let loose and have fun. I think I was the most stunned of all.

All the first times, we first and foremost experienced ourselves, going through the nuts and bolts of organising all sorts of events. That is until we settled on certain formats, gained experience, and learnt what organisational aspects could be better outsourced to external companies.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The Fluxus festival is an exemplary joint product of the Kaunas 2022 team's creativity. We debated and nurtured the idea together, and each member



First Fluxus climb up Parodos Hill

contributed something unique. My proudest contribution was the idea of climbing Parodos Hill in true Fluxus spirit – not merely climbing but climbing with a unique idea present in one's mind. I even wrote copy for posters hung alongside the street: 'Jurgis, could you have imagined that everything would turn out like this?' People embraced the concept, and now, to my delight, Kaunas has its own intellectual carnival – a rare feat for any city in the world.

I can now reveal that, during the first festival, I wore an astronaut suit from one of my TV projects. No one knew who was walking inside the suit. The suit posed a slight risk of dehydration and fainting, so I asked Gytis Vitkus, Virginija's husband, to accompany me and remove my helmet if necessary. But we reached the hilltop successfully, and the astronaut made his way into many photos, since many people wanted to take pictures with him (and not with me).

## ALBINAS VILČINSKAS/

At one of the city's public event organisation committee meetings, a member of the Kaunas 2022 team introduced the programme for the Festival of Surprises. They were going to climb up the Parodos Hill. Wearing costumes, with drums and prams... In the evening, in the middle of the week, in reverse. In whatever ways they pleased! The event would require halting traffic and redirecting public transport.

The committee was composed of representatives from various fields, departments and the police. Their expressions revealed a blend of irony and mild astonishment. Someone inquired whether the city's authority figures had already been briefed, and another asked, 'Wait, which hill did you say? Aren't there any other hills in the city? Go somewhere else and climb as much as you like in some place where the traffic wouldn't have to be stopped nor the city disrupted'.

The news didn't take long to reach the second floor: Kaunas 2022 has concocted some absurdity! I must attend the morning meeting and present the matter to the Mayor's team. While customarily waiting by the office door, I encounter initial reactions and comments from those gathering: 'Oh, you culture hustlers, did you get into trouble again?' Particularly active in this regard were two such ladies, who never missed an opportunity to stress that they were far removed from culture.

As I explained the idea of the planned event to those present, numerous questions were raised: Where would the participants climb? How, in reverse? Are they out of their minds, can't they climb as normal people do? Masks and costumes, seriously? What kind of event is this, and how much will it cost? Do they realise this is Parodos Street, a busy thoroughfare? These questions gave out a looming verdict: nobody is going to halt traffic for a few fools; they should go to Aleksoto Hill instead; a day of happiness, yeah right(!); how much cash will be thrown away for this nonsense? Bring me the estimated cost breakdown, now! Culture, huh?!

But... the initial uproar gradually settled down, the permit was approved, the event took place, the press coverage was positive, and Facebook was brimming with positive reactions such as 'wow' or 'super'. But no one on the second floor paid any attention. And it was only those 'anti-culture' ladies who began regarding every Kaunas 2022 event with even more aloofness, openly relishing a chance to grumble, cause a ruckus, spread hatred, belittle, or threaten.



First Fluxus climb up Parodos Hill

\*  
*Jurgis Mačiūnas was a Lithuanian American artist, born in Kaunas. He founded and coordinated Fluxus, an international artistic movement.*

# Fluxus Labs

*#capacity\_building #communication #community\_involvement  
#crisis\_situations #Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #decentralisation  
#dormitory\_neighbourhoods #Fluxus\_Labs #impacts  
#Kaunas\_District #motivation #networking  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives #programme\_development  
#regional\_dimension*

## GRETA KLIMAVIČIŪTĖ-MINKŠTIMIENĖ/

In July 2018, the first generation of community facilitators commenced their work. They held meetings, organised creative workshops and events, but the most significant part of their work involved engaging local organisations, artists, and residents to showcase their talents and put unconventional spaces to use.

It's very important to mention Fluxus. Having analysed the work of J. Mačiūnas and the Fluxus movement, we distinguished the key principles of Fluxus. On a sleepless night, at about 3 a.m., I sat down at my computer and outlined them:

- Fusion of different disciplines: blurring the boundaries between different arts and/or life domains;
- Randomness: when one is not afraid of activities veering off in a different direction to the planned or expected one, and attempts to be surprised, or to surprise others, with unexpected decisions;
- Adventure: endeavouring to involve community members in activities unfamiliar to them;
- DIY culture and aesthetics;
- Simplicity: when magic is created from simple and everyday means, using local resources;
- Fluctuating movement: nothing stands still, and people, activities, topics, and project goals change;
- Elimination of the border between art and life: creativity and art penetrate everyday life and become everyday companions;
- Escape from one's everyday routine.

Later, with my team, we made a few adjustments and presented it to all the facilitators. It became like a prayer for our community. This is why we have been, and remain, exceptional.

The beginning was heavily process-orientated: building relationships, getting to know one another, cosying in, conducting local research, and so on. Later, the community programme transitioned into project-based activities, with the finale typically being a communal event of any genre. It's delightful that the activities and topics first considered at the very beginning reached all the way to 2022, and became major community events.

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

The most significant event for me, as a Fluxus agent in 2018, was the Šilainiai Day, when the Šilainiai community, cultural organisations, and sports institutions were brought together in one place. The event featured basketball competitions, a marathon, numerous educational sessions, and concerts. We had no budget and a limited number of helping hands, just ordinary community members who required a lot of personal encouragement to convince them to contribute to the event. In essence, the event was substantial and impactful, but we were short-handed – I ended up as exhausted as I later would be after the Fluxus Festival 2022.

*First 'Fluxus Labs' activities:*



*'Fluxus Labs' in Eiguliai  
(YouTube video, 2018).*



*'Fluxus Labs' in Šančiai  
(YouTube video, 2018).*



*'Fluxus Labs' in Šilainiai  
(YouTube video, 2018).*



*'Fluxus Labs' in Garliava  
Vicinity (YouTube video, 2018).*



'Fluxus Labs: Courtyard' workshop. Naujasodis. 2020

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ-PAUKŠTĖ/

Nevertheless, the first steps venturing into the public domain delivered ambiguous results. Although we felt motivated by interesting people and explorations of the local area, which was an essential component of the training sessions, many of us also faced negative reactions, mistrust, being ignored and rejected. Engaging with official community centres often resulted in hostility, particularly in matters concerning money. As our project was launched with minimal funds for implementing activities, we relied heavily on our initiative securing partners and sponsors.

During the early years, our focus was on small-scale public events, such as Neighbours and Pets Day, game afternoons, and idea kiosks, with the primary objective of establishing connections and information gathering on ideas and community needs. Many people viewed these events with

scepticism, questioning their necessity. Back then, activities were considered meaningful only if they yielded tangible results, such as a new bench or repaired courtyard surfacing. The purpose of our efforts was not immediately clear yet, but in retrospect, the groundwork laid during the early years – getting to know the district, engaging in



'Fluxus Labs: Courtyard' workshop. Baltų Av., Šilainiai. 2020

informal conversations with residents, mediating between various individuals and organisations, and bringing some ideas to fruition – served as a solid foundation for the neighbourhoods festivals in 2022.

The fact that, during the training, Fluxus agents became a strong community bolstered our perseverance and belief in what we were doing. We continually motivated, comforted, and inspired one another, collaboratively seeking solutions. The communities programme curator Greta and coordinator Stefania managed to create an open and supportive environment, in which we felt at ease discussing the roots of the animosity between Kaunas 2022 and formal community centres, or what was needed for attitudes towards the notion of community to change, or which aspects of our own efforts were successful and which perhaps needed to change. All of us together made mistakes and corrected them.

## GRETA KLIMAVIČIŪTĖ-MINKŠTIMIENĖ/

In those days, there were three community facilitators working in Kaunas District (in Garliava Vicinity, Zapyškis, and Akademija) and five in Kaunas City (in Šančiai, Eiguliai, Dainava, Vilijampolė, and Šilainiai). Each facilitator received a nominal monthly remuneration based on the number of activities they implemented with local communities. Additional funds were allocated for various purposes, such as payments for artists and creative professionals, necessary supplies for creative workshops, equipment rentals, and more.

As our activities expanded into different localities, we encountered formal (or official) community organisations. Initially, they perceived us as rivals who were duplicating their efforts, but over time we found ways to get along with most of them and jointly implemented various activities.



Creative workshop, 'The Other Side of the Neris' community lab. 2020



## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

The community programme takes its first steps as Fluxus agents begin their work in Kaunas District. They set out to ignite a cultural spark and introduce a fresh perspective to existing activities. However, their efforts don't yield the desired results. The agents' initiatives are perceived as competition. Questions arise as to why these specific individuals are chosen, and why cultural institutions and official local communities aren't included. Instead of a revival, there is a sense of irritation. Despite the Fluxus agents' best efforts, they carry out activities that cater only to a small group of like-minded people. Different approaches are needed for cultural activities to thrive in the district.

## GRETA KLIMAVIČIŪTĖ- MINKŠTIMIENĖ/

Experience has shown that the community facilitator network model was not entirely suitable for Kaunas District. There were several reasons for this.

Kaunas District boasted a dense network of cultural centres and leisure halls, which, among other responsibilities, were aiming to bring communities together. Therefore, our facilitators' initiatives were seen as duplicating existing efforts.

One of Kaunas District's objectives was to enhance the competencies of local cultural centres' staff through community projects. The facilitator network model, by contrast, focused on developing local residents' (i.e., community members') cultural management skills.

While motivational measures were employed for facilitators working with communities, it was decided that individual incentives of this type could potentially demotivate other community members. As a result, neutral individuals, such as cultural institution employees, were engaged instead.



'Fluxus Labs: Community Initiatives', creative workshop with C. Bibiano. 2020



'25 Million Stitches for Kaunas and the World', creative workshop. Žaliakalnis. 2019



# Kaunas 2022 Has Launched Its Own Radio Broadcast!

*#communication #marketing  
#media #public\_relations*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

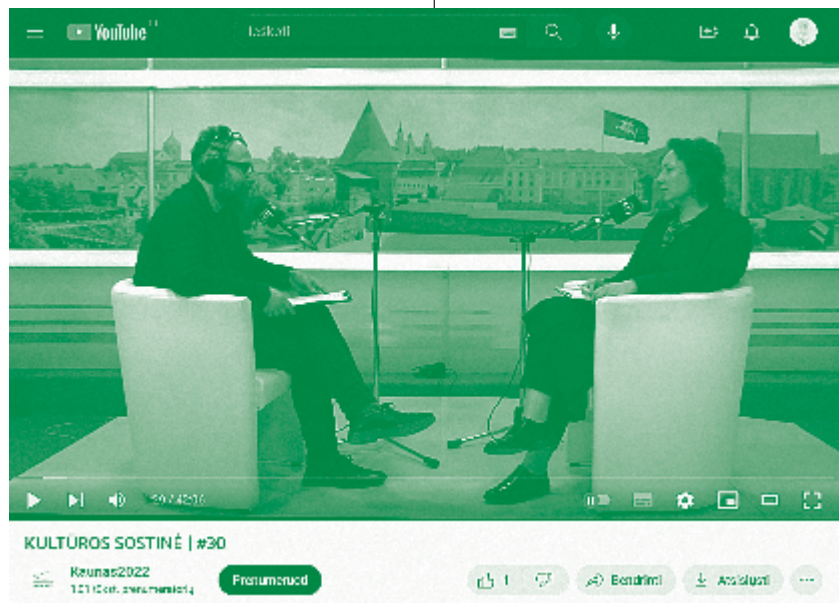
Jolanta Kryževičienė from LRT Radio calls me, explaining that they are about to launch a new series of cultural programmes called 'Homo Cultus'. She is wondering whether I would be interested in hosting one of them. Goodness me! With so much on my plate, including TV projects and teaching at Vytautas Magnus University, not to mention my involvement with the Capital of Culture, I hesitate. But wait. The Capital of Culture could use its own radio show...

Taking a deep breath, I agree, asking if I can call it 'Capital of Culture'. She agrees.

I announce the news to the office: 'we're getting our own radio show!' 'Hurray', everyone is excited. 'Get ready to present your programmes, as you will be my guests on the show, one by one...'. Everyone is a bit nervous, but I tell them that they should get used to the attention.

At the LRT Kaunas editorial office, Juras Jankevičius helps the radio to adapt a TV studio for radio, and we begin. Our first show features two heads of two capitals of culture: Vilnius 2009's Elona Bajorinienė and Kaunas 2022's Virginija Vitkienė.

Our international partners are amazed: you already have your own radio programme? Some time later, at least a couple of German university students will use our programme as the central topic for their master's theses in communication.



LRT radio programme 'Kultūros sostinė' (Capital of Culture), in conversation with Virginija Vitkienė. Host Rytis Zemkauskas

# 'Modernism for the Future' Conference

*#architecture #communication #conferences  
#heritage #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future*



'Modernism for the Future' conference.  
Kaunas Žalgiris Arena

## VAIDAS PETRULIS/

The Modernism conference was designed as a means of testing the programme's ideas within an international context. The core idea, since the programme's inception, has been that the value of architectural heritage can be conceptualised in a variety of ways. Its value is codified formally in the Register of Cultural Property, in arguments outlined by the European Heritage Label, and ultimately in the UNESCO World Heritage List. However, there also exist subjective notions of value based on emotions, intuitions, personal experiences, and memories. This relatively under-explored theme of the intimate relationship between people and buildings seemed to us an interesting and promising field. We explored how artists could contribute to these processes, which led to discussions about heritage and various interpretations of it. We wanted to test this idea on a broader scale by inviting foreign colleagues. The conference was a breeze, which was an encouraging sign.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ/

I moderated a session focused on heritage interpretations, entitled 'Artistic Interpretations of Modernism'. Inspiring presentations were delivered by Virginija Vitkienė (CEO Kaunas 2022), Aideen Barry (contemporary visual artist from Ireland), Partha Mitter (Professor at the University of Sussex), and Camilla Borghese (architectural photographer from Italy). These presentations generated numerous ideas that ultimately guided us towards developing the Modernism programme. It seemed that 20th-century architectural topics were finally getting the attention they deserved, and this was just the beginning, fuelling curiosity about this period in Kaunas's history as well as its tangible and intangible heritage. The conference was attended in great numbers, which really attested to wider society's determination (and not just that of urban residents) to learn more, get involved, and make change happen.

After the conference, I began curating two programmes simultaneously: the Kaunas District programme and the Modernism programme. As this architectural programme expanded rapidly, Augustina took over the Kaunas District programme with the help of Daiva Jeremičienė, Lukas Alsys and Gediminas Banaitis.

## ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

During the conference, just as on the day of the programme's launch, we realised once again the extent of this topic's relevance and appeal, not only for specialists but also for ordinary city residents. Over 400 people attended the two-day event, ranging from school students to cultural operatives, teachers, architects, and officials. They came to hear presentations on both Kaunas's modernist architecture and the global history of this architectural movement, as well as on contemporary issues, and a range of cultural interpretations.

This was (and still remains) very important since one of the programme's primary objectives was to foster city residents' subjective emotions, intuitions, and experiences relating to the city's rich physical architectural and cultural heritage.



*'Modernism for the Future'  
conference presentations  
(YouTube video playlist, 2018).*

# Kaunas 2022 Office

*#architecture #communication  
#infrastructure #open\_calls*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

In 2018, we already had 15 employees, and we could barely fit into a single office and meeting room at the Kaunas Cultural Centre. Meanwhile, the former Tourism Information Centre premises at Laisvės Av. 36 seemed to be awaiting a renaissance. The municipality agreed to transfer the space to the ECoC office. We invited project ambassador and architect Audra Kaušpedienė for consultation. She suggested organising a competition for ideas, with a symbolic prize, which would generate interest among designers and raise project awareness while simultaneously supplying multiple ideas with great potential. The competition was anonymous. Among several interesting projects, one stood out for its imagination, freedom, and colourfulness. The Jury unanimously chose this project, which turned out to be the brainchild of Linas Tuleikis, Kęstas Vaikšnoras and Karolis Platakis. We met with them in the unoccupied office space, still filled with interwar furniture awaiting removal, to discuss the future stages of construction work and the competition. I asked them what colours they envisioned for the office. 'Pink and blue'. I couldn't believe that the colours in the project proposal were not merely associative. Cotton candy, you see. 😊 After setting up the office, it didn't take long to get used to the colours, which evoked only the best feelings for anyone who visited.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Had it not been for Audra Kaušpedienė, we would have opted for a typical industrial DIY-style office and moved in as quickly as possible. At that time, a dozen or so people were sharing a single room at the cultural centre every day. Audra's arguments convinced us that the project office's role was too important for the city's representation not to seek a distinctive interior design solution. Besides, it would be an opportunity for young architects. We ultimately selected, anonymously, three aces of Kaunas architecture – Karolis Platakis, Tuleikis, and the Vaikšnoras trio. Setting up the office tested our patience, but after what seemed like an eternity, we moved into a 125 square metre area with 25 employees. Our (always witty) architects arrived at the grand opening in a pink convertible. The interior design soon earned a commendation from the architectural community.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

We have our own office at last. Since I didn't plan to spend much time there, I asked my colleagues for just one thing: a chair of my own. Virginija provided a folding fabric chair embroidered with my last name. However, the chair, purchased through public procurement, tore after only two sittings, causing me to fall to the floor.



Laisvės Av. 36, the future Kaunas 2022 office, pre-renovation. 2018



Kaunas 2022 office interior. Architects: Karolis Platakis, Linas Tuleikis and Kęstas Vaikšnoras

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

I fondly recall the office opening. I was very involved in acquiring furniture, accessories, and other items. The office felt like a second home at some point, where I knew where everything was. The most enjoyable part was preparing for the opening. We wanted to showcase the BLACK theme, so the party featured black desserts, black ice-cream, black drinks, and black decor elements. Everyone's tongues turned black – we were immersed in the brand theme, even down to our tongues. 😊 It was fun to invite all the partners and sponsors to our office for the first time. Everyone looked so beautiful and charming.

The following day, we organised an open day for the public to visit and learn about the Kaunas 2022 programme and projects. The event was highly successful, with numerous visitors throughout the day, even though the curators may have found it challenging after the previous night's party.

# Tempo Space

*Culture\_Tempo\_Academy #Fluxus\_Labs #infrastructure  
#Kaunas\_Challenge #We\_the\_People*



Tempo Space opening event

## VAIDA VENCKUTĖ-NAGĖ/

On 30 January 2018, I received an email from Gediminas Banaitis about a meeting scheduled for 12:00 p.m. on 1 February at Daukšos St. 34, for discussing the revitalisation of the building that had previously housed the Kauno Miesto Mažasis Theatre. The Kaunas 2022 team and the Kaunas Artists' House were invited. We attended the meeting and found that the premises were rather dilapidated. Nevertheless, we needed space for the Kaunas 2022 youth activities and other programmes, so we expressed our interest and willingness in taking on the challenge.

Evelina Šimkutė, the curator of the communities programme at the time, and I were assigned by Virginija to draft a vision of Daukšos St. 34 as a venue for youth and community activists' workshops. Within a week, we submitted a proposal for activating the premises, which we named Tempo Space. After careful deliberations, we were granted the venue.

We then transitioned from creative work to construction, engaging in intensive preparations. The first phase involved cleaning the area, removing leftover debris with trucks, and inviting architect Sigita Kondrotaitė to assist with planning the premises' layout. Although we had a vision, we lacked the necessary funds. We persuaded Virginija and our Head of Administration, Jovita, very much needed but required proper setup to function. Virginija emailed all curators: 'We have windows. I think we need another €15,000 to be cobbled together from various programmes for painting, floor polishing, electrical system setup, lighting, etc. The space has great potential – it will become a very charismatic venue.' Reading archived emails and reminiscing about the numerous tasks and projects that seemingly had nothing to do with the job of a curator on a creative team, brings a smile to my face, knowing we have overcome these challenges.



Tempo Space opening event

The preparation process for the opening became increasingly active, even though it was no longer our main focus. From obtaining the premises to preparing for the opening, the Tempo Space's mission was coming to fruition: learning (from creativity to construction), collaboration (engaging all the team's strengths – creativity, management, marketing, public procurement, administration), and community involvement (participants from youth and community programmes scrubbed, cleaned, painted, cleaned even more, and developed concepts for the opening and future of the space). The concept of this space was realised and remained in action throughout the following four years, brimming with formal and informal youth and community activities, concerts, exhibitions, and various events. It provided a home for the youth and community programmes.

Unfortunately, we didn't manage to fully realise our vision, as the space failed to become a thriving social enterprise in Kaunas, after 2022, that would offer quality learning opportunities for diverse city audiences. Returning the building's keys in December 2022 demonstrated that not all ideas are destined to survive. But even ideas that exist only temporarily can be valuable.



First Fluxus climb up Parodos Hill



ECoC project team in front of the Kaunas 2022 office, 2018



Kaunas 2022  
Contemporary  
Capital  
European Capital of Culture

Kaunas 2022  
Suolaikine  
rosinė  
10-11.00



First Fluxus climb up Parodos Hill



# Modernists' Community

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings #architecture  
#communication #community\_involvement  
#heritage #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future  
#networking*

ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

The 'Modernism for the Future' programme couldn't have been imagined without community involvement, mainly due to the fact that a lion's share of Kaunas's modernist architecture comprises residential buildings. Each of these buildings embodies unique personal stories and experiences that we desired and sought to document throughout this period. This intimate and personal aspect also presented a challenge. From the outset, I was sceptical about reaching one of the set goals – to make over 100 modernist locations open to the public by 2022. Although public buildings posed no issues, it became evident that, despite our best intentions, we would only be able to open up just a few dozen private spaces.

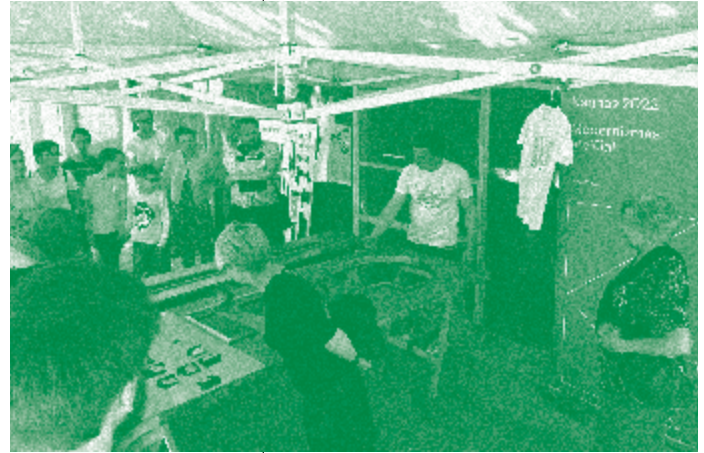
Thankfully, the activation of these locations eventually took on more tangible forms, leading to a wider spectrum of participation and engagement. Some individuals agreed to host guests overnight, offering a unique experience, while others allowed one-time interviews to be filmed in their homes, capturing private spaces and their authentic details. Yet others welcomed the modernist filming crew, participated in the creative workshops of the *Subjective Atlas of Kaunas*, or shared their stories with artists who created site-specific public art pieces in modernist locations.

Within our modernism team, we defined the heritage community in a broader sense as encompassing diverse social and urban groups connected to modernist heritage through their empathy towards it. This community was not confined to the residents of specific buildings. Consequently, we worked with or sought interaction with them in a variety of ways: through social media, the internet, volunteering and youth programmes, sending postcards to buildings' residents, organising guided exploration tours, and implementing creative projects.

As in other programmes, it took time for residents, one of our target audiences, to grasp what we were trying to achieve and how. I won't discuss success stories here, but it's worth mentioning that we had been approached with requests to fund building maintenance or renovation, restoration, or to help in motivating the municipality to allocate such resources. 🙄

What I want to convey is that this may not apply to all communities, but regarding building residents, many associated mutual cooperation with tangible benefits or concerns: broken windows, worn-out doors, insufficient funds for maintenance, or the absence of a close-knit and maintenance-orientated neighbourhood community.

Since we were unable to provide financial support, we had to find ways of helping residents with soft measures in each case through education, consultations, collaborative projects with specialists, discussions, and so on. The primary points of contact for such interactions were annual events such as heritage workshops, discussions, and guided tours.



Kaunas 2022 restoration workshop



## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

In November, a collaboration with architectural heritage preservationists Karolis Banys and Petras Gaidamavičius commenced, featuring a creative writing workshop at Vytauto Ave. 58, organised by Sandra Bernotaitė. Other activities were planned, aiming at introducing residents to the goals of the modernism programme through creative pursuits. Residents were invited to get involved in the planned light festival or in creating an online map for the website. The idea behind the festival in 2022 was to illuminate 360 buildings through the joint efforts of professional light artists and city residents. We hoped this approach would encourage the community to share their personal experiences and testimonies. However, the pandemic and a reduced budget for the programme later forced us to seek out alternative solutions and give up on the initial concept.



Karolis Banys and Petras Gaidamavičius  
in the future Art Deco Museum

## ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

We reached some buildings' residents through the internet and social media, while for others we tried a different approach. Realising the initial method wasn't relevant for everyone, we used postcards to connect with them, hand-delivering the cards door-to-door just as a postman would do. However, the best and most effective means for establishing new contacts turned out to be through word of mouth and referrals (recommendations and ambassadorship in making connections with the right people).

Although we weren't flooded with stories (which was to be expected, given that few buildings had remained in the hands of their original owners or caretakers), the departure of the original owners meant the disappearance of memories and stories. Thus, newcomers who cared about their living environment, its history, and the memory of previous generations became the programme's true driving force. It's heartening to see their numbers grow year on year, evidenced not only by the expanding archive of stories but also by the increasing number of restored façades, windows, and doors.

One particularly memorable encounter was with Povilas, son of the late Foreign Affairs Minister (Voldemaras Černeckis), who is one of the very few remaining first-hand witnesses of the Lithuania of 'those times'.



*'Modernists Community: Karolis Banys and Petras Gaidamavičius', the story behind the Amsterdam School Museum (YouTube video, 2021) (in Lithuanian).*



*Ignition:  
Closing  
Remarks*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Devising a seven-year programme, winning the ECoC competition, founding and ‘igniting’ the institution, assembling the initial team, launching all the programmes in Kaunas, communicating the then-upcoming process to the cultural sector, finding the first sponsors and ambassadors, designing the project’s logo and visual branding, setting up a fantastic office, and understanding the process as being inextricably linked to administrative structures – these were the objectives of the first, highly inspiring phase. The commencement of training workshops for the youth, community agents/facilitators, and the cultural sector, and the inauguration of the first European Capital of Culture Forum helped shape the image of the European Capital of Culture as an educational and community-oriented project, which would only be strengthened during the project’s next phase, AGITATION (2019–2020), which I would describe as a period of developing partnerships.

2019  
—  
2021

*Agitation*

# 2019

## Shaping the Vision for the Grand Events of 2022

*#directing #ECoC\_opening\_ceremony #grand\_events  
#performing\_arts #programme\_development*

RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I keep telling everyone I meet, everywhere I go: Kaunas 2022 will not be about dazzling grand shows but about the daily work. But a show is also needed. After a period of hard work, it's only natural to have a celebration. And that's what 2022 will be: a grand celebration. The question, however, is what kind of show we are going to present. We must devise a way of transforming a vast number of well-curated programmes into a singular festive experience. I set a goal for myself: it should all resemble a grand spectacle, like a play unfolding over the course of an entire year. It must encapsulate everything we are doing. All of our project's many streams should merge into three major rivers, and those rivers should flow into the metaphorical Kaunas Lagoon. Every single word and image must precisely reflect our programme. It should form a unified entity. I've been carrying this thought with me for six months and still haven't started writing.

In January 2019, I take a flight to Barcelona. As the plane departs from Vilnius, it pierces through the clouds, and the sun emerges. I pull out my tiny, old laptop and request some wine from the flight attendants. It's a four-hour flight. After a while, they begin bringing me more wine without further prompting, smiling as they pass by. I must have appeared to be someone deeply engrossed in something very important.

The modern myth of Kaunas  
is a personal journey  
from temporary  
to contemporary.  
By performing a personal journey one  
participates in the grand journey of Kaunas.  
The Beast is every travellers' avatar.  
The Beast is the city.  
The Beast is us.

Kaunas 2022 grand events vision



I landed in Barcelona having completed a full artistic vision for the three grand events of Kaunas 2022, including their titles, contents, style, communication guidelines, and the text for the Kaunas Contract. I hopped into a taxi, feeling slightly lightheaded. Probably from sheer happiness... 😊 I have never before experienced a more powerful creative impulse in my life.

I present my vision to the team. They have no major objections.

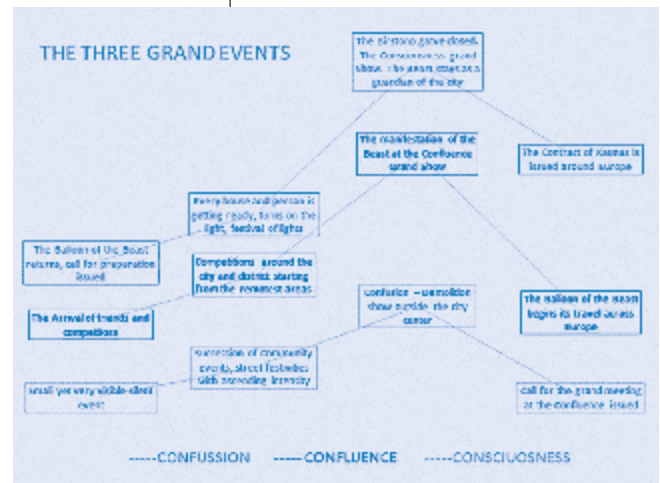
We commenced planning the grand events, starting with the opening ceremony. We decided it would be called SUKILIMAS ('uprising') in Lithuanian, although it was referred to as CONFUSION in the original English version. I had drafted the original vision document in English as it was meant to be seen by the European Commission and an international team of artists. Translating it into our native language was going to be easy. So we went ahead with the translation and made some revisions. 'Confusion' seemed less appealing in Lithuanian, so we changed it.

I begin introducing potential directors or consultants to Virginija, the project manager, and Ana, the programme manager. These candidates are my colleagues from the Lithuanian TV world, often credited in significant TV broadcasts. I sense that my colleagues view these people with a certain scepticism, perhaps thinking, 'Ah, Rytis and his TV friends... The Capital

of Culture is an event of a different calibre. We need a director with a very different professional background.'

I call Dalia Ibelhauptaitė. Her professional background is indeed very different. But Dalia is unavailable as she and her husband, Dexter, have recently set off to make their mark in Hollywood, and Kaunas is now too small for her. Dalia recommends her friend Vasily Barkhatov, who also happens to be the husband of Asmik Grigorian, Lithuanian operatic soprano. Great, two birds with one stone, we think to ourselves.

Vasily is in the middle of putting on a premiere at the National Opera and Ballet Theatre in Vilnius. I attend the performance and, afterwards, we meet up. I share my vision with him, explaining how the opening event should encompass all aspects of our programme. Coming here, I felt a bit nervous, having researched his biography and watched videos of his work... His work had been connected with the Russian authorities prior to the annexation of Crimea, but since then, he has primarily worked and lived outside of Russia. And there's also Asmik... We engage in an open and honest conversation: 'Vasily, your work is interesting, but the fact that you are Russian is a little bit of a problem...'. 'I understand,' he says, 'but I can propose



Kaunas 2022 grand events vision

an Italian set designer and a Serbian technical director to join the team.' We begin the preparatory work on the script, developing detailed script schemes, tables of the connections between various elements and systems of symbols and images rooted in Kaunas's history, European myths, and our project's values. This unique dramatical framework might be invisible to the audience, but without it, the play would fall apart. Vasily appreciates my ideas, finds the myth intriguing, and offers original solutions of his own.

During this time, Ana is appointed as the producer for the grand events. I'll be responsible for the script, while Ana handles everything else. She hires Tadas Valeika as the general technical director for all events. We meet with him and exchange our thoughts.

# Then, the First Themed Day of Happiness Happened

*#accessibility #business\_and\_culture #co-creation  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement  
#Designing\_Happiness #festivals #impacts  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives*

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

Jūratė Tutlytė, the initiator of the Day of Happiness, proposed a very sensitive theme for 2020 that I found quite daunting at first, perhaps because I thought that people might have difficulty relating to it and creating something meaningful.

Its message was 'MAKE WAY FOR HAPPINESS', with a focus on accessibility. When I was inviting people to join the project, I emphasised themes that I hoped would help people find the value-led approaches and activations that were the most relevant to them and appropriate to their existing activities. The idea was to involve diverse social groups including, to name a few, senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, pets, and non-native speakers of Lithuanian.

## DEIMANTĖ ZUTELIENĖ/

We prepared the Day of Happiness communication campaign thoroughly and responsibly.

We based it on a word play between *laimė* (Lithuanian for 'happiness') and *laimas* (Lithuanian for 'lime', a vitamin C-rich and mood-lifting fruit). A lime must move freely throughout the city, ensuring accessibility and happiness for all. 'MAKE WAY FOR HAPPINESS' – a vibrant lime-green campaign dealing with the sensitive issue of social accessibility.



Sign language lesson by Paulius Jurjonas. Day of Happiness. Kaunas 2022 office. 2019

## PAULIUS JURJONAS/

During the event, the Kaunas Deaf Youth Association plans to offer sign language lessons to the wider hearing community, introduce our culture, and showcase signed songs. I hope we will implement this idea successfully and people will show interest. We wish people would stop being afraid and understand that, to get a deaf person's attention, all you need to do is gently touch their shoulder.\*

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

This Day of Happiness was the most sensitive and heart-warming one for me. It was brimming with GENUINE moments and GENUINE emotions. We managed to organise an amazing array of activities that day: the deaf community ran sign language classes, senior citizens participated in a sports training session in the Town Hall's function room, children with disabilities visited dog shelters, and we delivered ice cream to old people's care homes, where together we enjoyed VR experiences and engaging conversations. One of the day's most

\* *Edvinas Grin. 'Nustoti Bijoti'. Kaunas pilnas kultūros, 3 (43), March 2019, p. 4-11.*

memorable events was the SILENT DISCO at the train station. It was such a joy to see the elderly dancing and swaying to the electronic music DJ Manfredas's beats. Everyone was so different, yet they had all gathered together in one space to enjoy what they loved most.

# ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Jūratė Tutlytė used to remind us that we all experience disability at some point in our lives, be it as a result of an arm injury or navigating a foreign language environment, and that good design is always inclusive. Accessibility became a focal point in the 'Designing Happiness' programme she curated as part of the Kaunas 2022 programme. Kaunas 2022 began consistently to address the accessibility and design of cultural institutions, events, public spaces, services, and information as a means of eliminating barriers. We weren't expecting to make an immediate or drastic change; challenges for visitors with mobility issues often start right at the entrance of most cultural institutions in Kaunas. Still, this programme led to long-term pilot projects aimed at adapting the Kaunas City Chamber Theatre (KCCT) and the Historical Presidential Palace for people with disabilities and non-native speakers. We also developed the Kaunas 2022 Accessibility Guide, which many European cities now explore as a reference resource for best practices.

Another important thesis of the 'Designing Happiness' programme was that a society that participates in cultural activities is happier. Thus, 'happiness' emerged in our lexicon as an alternative to the more well-established 'welfare', a more wide-spread notion in political discourse. The 'Designing Happiness' team continuously reflected on how to grasp, visualise, and spark conversations about the impact of culture on people's health, abilities, emotional balance, and other intangible aspects of life. From these aspirations, the Day of Happiness was born, as well as the unrealised 'Emotion Reflector' project. This initiative was supposed to use digital and artistic tools not only to search

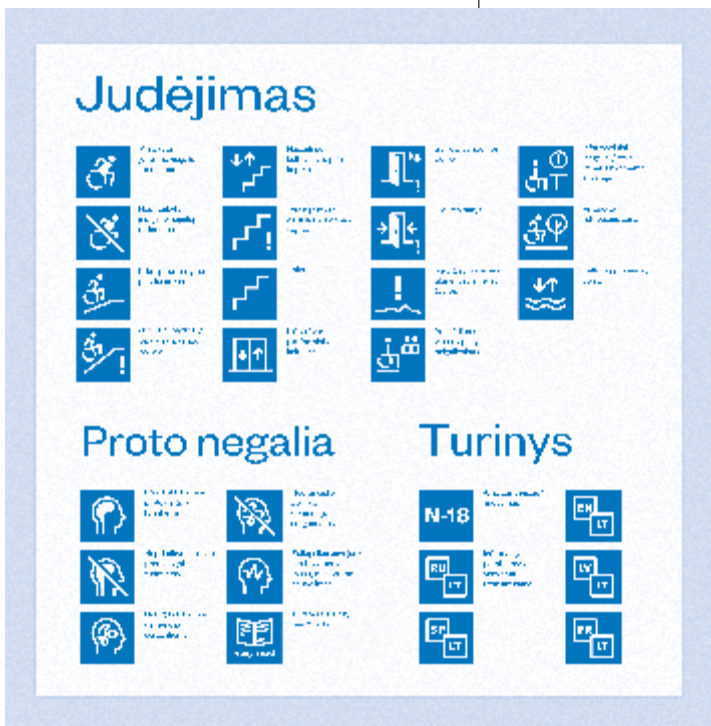


Silent Disco at Kaunas Railway Station. Day of Happiness. 2019





Silent Disco at Kaunas Railway Station. Day of Happiness. 2019

for relevant data (such as identifying visitors' emotions or collecting verbal reflections from the public), but also to visualise research results or gathered data using contemporary digital art techniques.




Fragment of Kaunas 2022 Accessibility Guide

 [International Day of Happiness, promotional trailer \(YouTube video, 2019\).](#)

 [Day of Happiness 2019 webpage.](#)

 [International Day of Happiness 2019 official aftermovie.](#)

 [Kaunas 2022 Accessibility Guide.](#)

# Sponsors. The First Ones to Believe that Kaunas Would Succeed!

*#sponsorships #business\_and\_culture*

DEIMANTĖ  
ZUTELIENĖ/

Every European Capital of Culture has its sponsors, which play a crucial role in assessing a project's success and ability to draw in audiences, engage communities, and secure support from the business sector. If memory serves, the objective for the Kaunas 2022 project was to attract €2 million in private funding. Colleagues from other European Capitals of Culture emphasise the importance of municipal government and political backing in rallying the business community. In Kaunas, however, the situation is unique: the city's major entrepreneur also serves as the Mayor. We don't even hope for any help on this front.

The project's strength lies in innovative solutions that can enhance a business's image, attract customers, and foster employee loyalty. With numerous events for diverse audiences, there are ample opportunities for integration. We engage with the largest businesses in both Kaunas and Lithuania, stressing that there will be no second chance – this is akin to a cultural Olympics. Banks, telecommunication companies, law firms, major shopping centres, and leading manufacturers have all been informed and approached.

The project is continuous which means that, before negotiating long-term collaborations, sponsors have the chance to test the waters by getting involved in various smaller projects. For example, Švyturio Brewery first trialled our partnership during the Day of Happiness before deciding that their goals were aligned with ours.

'Cultural Lighthouses', project by Kaunas 2022 and Švyturys-Utenos Alus



Kaunas 2022 and Švyturys-Utenos Alus sign the partnership agreement. 2019

Together with Virginija and Irutė, we visited the Švyturys office in Vilnius, where we met with their CEO Rolandas Viršilas and the rest of the team. We underwent a veritable exam regarding the project and its objectives, which we successfully passed, resulting in a five-year-long sponsorship agreement.

EVELINA JUŠKAITĖ/

I recall how our entire team was filled with excitement in 2019 when Švyturys-Utenos Alus and Kaunas 2022 signed a partnership agreement. We had long-standing plans to devote greater focus to Kaunas and its vibrant cultural scene. We felt we had the chance to be part of a historic event, and so we embarked on preparations for the upcoming years with our partners, full of positive enthusiasm. However, the 2020 pandemic dramatically altered those plans, bringing uncertainty and confusion. We also encountered a tremendous amount of bureaucracy,

which threatened to consume the last remnants of our patience and motivation. Nevertheless, working alongside the Kaunas 2022 team, we managed to successfully implement many great and inspiring projects such as 'Cultural Lighthouses', the 'Audra' Contemporary City

Festival (organised by Kaunas 2022's partners Lizardas) and the Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage, which was built in the Kaunas Town Hall Square, offering the city's residents and others the chance to hear quality music and enjoy a space for dancing, conversations, and gatherings.

Sponsoring cultural projects often demands considerable time and effort, particularly when businesses want more than just having their logo on a poster and seek unique, emotionally engaging integrations that generate added value. In these instances, businesses themselves must be equally involved in the process, providing continuous care and support to their partners. Only then are cultural projects created that leave a lasting impression on the city's residents and help elevate the brand's image. We are thrilled to have embarked on this adventure and extend our heartfelt gratitude to the entire Kaunas 2022 team!



*List of Kaunas 2022 sponsors.*

# What Have the 'Fluxus Labs' Concocted?

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings #capacity\_building #community\_involvement #decentralisation #dormitory\_neighbourhoods #Fluxus\_Labs #impacts #legacy #new\_longterm\_initiatives #open\_calls #rivers #We\_the\_People*

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ-PAUKŠTĖ/

In 2018–2019, inspired by our training workshops, the first wave of 'Fluxus Labs' agents (facilitators), spread across parks, marketplaces, and courtyards of Kaunas with their jars of ideas, story kiosks and other unusual invitations, for example, to throw a pillow fight in the courtyard of a residential block. To make surrendering to the Fluxus flow easier and more assuring, several workshop participants would often team up around a single idea, making it easier to involve others. Agents mainly worked with the neighbourhood communities. However, we noticed that some community-based initiatives encompassed all of Kaunas, while others, on the contrary, only involved a small residential block's community, and they both also needed support. Thus, in May and June 2019, the 'Fluxus Labs! Courtyard' and 'Fluxus Labs! Community Initiatives' calls were announced. The latter was geared towards community initiatives that brought together the entire city and the winners were selected by a public online vote. In comparison, the 'Fluxus Labs! Courtyard' call was aimed at promoting community ties within a whole residential block. We invited all courtyard communities that responded to our call to Tempo Space where each participating group would present their courtyard, its community, challenges, propose solutions, and the changes they'd like to see in their courtyard. Courtyards receiving the highest votes from other participants would be granted financial support for bringing their creative activities to life. To each winning courtyard, we offered our guidance, connected them

with necessary artists, or served as mediators.

The open invitations allowed us to find people who loved Kaunas and wanted to give it something beautiful, by sharing their talents and skills with it. It's somewhat disappointing, however, that Kaunas hasn't taken all of this on now that the title-holding year has concluded.

There are many initiatives that have very modest needs but, rather than receiving support, are often required to justify themselves and prove that they won't cause harm or damage. I very much look forward to the day when cooperation between local governments and communities will be based on direct communication: not on requiring communities to promise that they won't do anything bad, but on providing assistance and advice to them, and ensuring that everything runs smoothly.

Methodological complexity and the variety of experiments undertaken have left a rich footprint upon the landscape of Kaunas's communities. The 'Fluxus Labs! Courtyard' initiatives united residents, allowing them to get to know one another and organise together. Neighbours in the courtyards of Baltų, Masiulio, and Kuršių streets continue to engage and organise shared celebrations to this day. The 'Fluxus Labs' programme also strengthened community spaces like Parakas and K.I.N.A.S. Panemunė, serving all city residents. This five-year project helped these spaces grow their audience, name, community, and circle of volunteers, making it easier

for them to continue their activities after the project's close. Calls for community initiatives helped new cultural alternatives emerge in the city, such as 'Pelėdų kava' or 'Let's Celebrate the River'. We also worked with traditional, better-established city communities, for example in Aleksotas or Petrašiūnai. In a conversation with



'Fluxus Labs' event in Šilainiai

Ina, the latter community's leader, we noted a refreshing shift in their activities, including the choir performances being moved to Kaunas Reservoir, and the Courtyard Festival and Fluxus Festival attracting more people.



## KEŠTUTIS ŽIŽYS/

During the 'Fluxus Labs' training, one of my tasks involved searching for community-friendly spaces. I would often mention a wooden house I knew about in Panemunė, belonging to the Aukštoji Panemunė parish, as a potential hub for community gatherings. We began assembling there with the slacklining community, for four weekends in a row, cleaning up the spaces. However, I didn't anticipate that I would also take part in the building's revival. Luckily, Giedrius Bučas, a man



'Let's Celebrate the River' float-along on the Nemunas

with golden hands, joined the effort. He set up a second-hand design workshop here, while I handled the legal and formal aspects. Our goal was to rehabilitate the building to the point where the community could sustain it independently, eventually taking it over from us. And any decision on what it would be used for in the future would solely rest with those people. The key insight I learned during the 'Fluxus Labs' training was that people cherish and preserve things when they themselves have contributed to developing them.

## VIDA BLIUMKIENĖ/

Belonging to the 'Fluxus Labs' community programme, I had substantial support. I'm grateful to them for noticing Parakas and promoting it. I received their financial backing for commissioning land art pieces by Marijus Gvildys and Sergejus Zareckis, for a stand, a sound-wave-crafted ceiling mural, various workshops, and promotion. 'Fluxus Labs' really helped me to harness the chaos in Parakas and operate more effectively and purposefully.

AUSTĖJA BLIUMKYTĖ-  
PADGURSKIENĖ/

My exploration of courtyards began with my first child and a pram. At that time, the community in Žemutiniai Šančiai was gathering strength. I joined a couple of initiatives and just evolved with them, then I started doing some things myself. One of the biggest achievements was the guided tour festival – an entire weekend of strolls around a single neighbourhood.

In Dainava, I found myself caring not just for my own courtyard but also wanting to do something for others, not as an activist myself but rather to encourage others. That was the goal. The beginning was intimidating but the overwhelming turn-out at the first event, centred around a street-art piece, made me realise that I could potentially start something like this in any neighbourhood. I was convinced

\*

*Vida Bliumkienė. 'Su kuo valgomas Šančių parakas?'. Be kaukių, bost K. Lingienė, LRT, 24-11-2022.*

that I would feel confident anywhere, that I could easily approach neighbours, believing they would join in.\*\*

## ROMENA PUIKYTĖ/

The 'Let's Celebrate the River' initiative was conceived while I was travelling with other 'Fluxus Labs' agents to the community carnival in the then capital of culture Rijeka. While I was sitting with Gita and Vitalija, we realised that, even though we served as agents in different neighbourhoods, we were neighbours across the river. We felt it necessary to invite city residents to reconnect with the river and strengthen communities through creative initiatives. That's how we began organising cultural boat trips, planning city-linking water routes, involving various local communities in the process.

It was very helpful to have the opportunity to grow and learn with the Kaunas 2022 project. The first 'Let's Celebrate the River' was a rather local event: we were beginning to tame the river, collecting stories from people on the riverbanks, singing, and drawing. Over time, thanks to these activities and broader communication opportunities in Kaunas and beyond, a circle of like-minded people emerged. This led to the advent of DIY raft workshops, various community initiatives along the riverbank (e.g., riverboat send-offs with bread), and links with similar initiatives abroad: from the French, we borrowed the idea of including cycling routes, while the Finns arrived bringing on-water musical performances. Our shared goal and flow spurred others to believe in the idea behind 'Let's Celebrate the River': in 2022; the event was incorporated in the 'Confluence' grand event. It lives on, having been integrated into the Kaunas founding anniversary programme.

I see a shift in the city's inhabitants' attitudes towards the river. Many who participated in our events have confessed that they used to see the river solely as an obstacle to be crossed via a bridge. Today, I observe people newly making a habit of coming to the river to spend time here.

\*\*

*Kotryna Lingienė. 'Austėjos Šančiai, Dainava ir Pramonė'. Kaunas pilnas kultūros, 5 (81), May 2022, p. 4-11.*

# A Festival That Was Missing in Contemporary Kaunas: The First ConTempo

*#art\_in\_public\_spaces  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement  
#decentralisation #festivals  
#Kaunas\_District #legacy  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives #performing\_art  
#regional\_dimension*



## GINTARĖ MASTEIKAITĖ/

Although I contributed to the preparation and defence of the Kaunas 2022 bid, I remember that, at first, even proposing ideas felt scary – because they seemed a bit out of this world. But as meetings and discussions multiplied, so did our dreams and desire for adventure. At some point, I realised this was a unique opportunity to offer the city something exceptional, unseen, open, playful, and very ambitious. The international performing arts festival ConTempo crystallised from several ideas – we had been considering what the city lacked and which format would best suit its character. It was evident that, in 2016–2017, Kaunas's community of independent creators was very small, with many artists migrating to Vilnius due to a lack of space and opportunities. Almost nobody had experience of working with foreign partners or presenting co-productions, with the exception of the Kaunas Aura Dance Theatre. Centralised provision of cultural services, a shortage of suitable spaces, and a limited audience were glaring issues.

ConTempo emerged from the core axis of the Kaunas 2022 programme. Our vision was to create a city-wide festival instead of merely a festival within the city, not only inviting viewers to come to us, but reaching out to them in all possible and unexpected spaces, as well as posing a creative challenge both to the cultural organisations in Kaunas and to the creators themselves. In developing the festival's structure, I drew inspiration from the best and most interesting international examples and consulted with numerous foreign professionals. Notwithstanding all the examples and consultations, it was clear that our approach would be slightly different, as even the best examples cannot be simply copied and transferred directly. We needed to create a festival from scratch, tailored to Kaunas.

Each year, the festival undergoes subtle changes as we continue to explore and experiment with various ideas, which encourages not only us, but also the viewers and the creator community to grow. In the first year, we announced an open call for creative ideas for the festival's programme. The submitted proposals revealed a lack of experience in adapting existing works to other spaces and in creating performing arts pieces for public spaces in Lithuania. Consequently, we dedicated considerable time and effort to working with the creators to expand their knowledge and provide the necessary tools.

In 2019, with only four days left until the Lithuanian Council for Culture's deadline for applications, I established 'Kultūros platforma'. In June, I learned of our successful application. By then, the Kaunas 2022 team and I were already looking for a fitting name for the festival. I remember talking to Virginija about the submitted names, and within half an hour, Virginija came up with the idea 'ConTempo' (from temporary to

*Kamchatka, play by Kamchatka  
(Catalonia). Kaunas Old Town*

contemporary, a festival leading Kaunas to Europe and Europe to Kaunas). Over the course of July, we created everything: we established the first team, set up the first festival website (for €70), finalised the programme and announced it, and then we waited.

The festival's opening day in the Šančiai neighbourhood featured a free event: the conceptual contemporary dance performance Trophies (Switzerland). It was organised on a riverbank beloved by locals (dance performances in unexpected places became ConTempo's trademark). With bated breath, we awaited the arrival of the audience, unsure of its size. Minutes before the start time, people streamed in from all directions; volunteers were stopping cyclists and families. Curiosity abounded about the event. We began with around 300 people, and before the first event I invited them to follow and support us. This marked the beginning



*ConTempo Festival  
website.*



*ConTempo Festival 2019 official  
aftermovie.*



of a strong festival tradition: inviting people to support us, encouraging them to watch and engage more and feel that this festival belonged to them. Over the years, we have cultivated a loyal following that not only attends the entire festival programme but also actively shares feedback, bringing friends and acquaintances along.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Gintarė's decision to found the festival under a newly established independent organisation rather than under the root public institution, Kaunas 2022, proved very insightful. From the festival's inception in 2019, this organisation began accumulating credit and building up its curriculum. By 2022, both the festival and the Kultūros platforma organisation had gained recognition throughout Europe and secured funding from multiple sources in Lithuania. This allowed the festival to create a sustainable perspective for growth beyond the European Capital of Culture title-holding year.

This same approach was applied to initiating other events, including festivals such as the 'Kaunas Literature Week', the 'Japanese Days in Kaunas WA', and the 'Magenta Landscape Design Festival', through separate



*Trophy*, play by Rudi van der Merwe and Béatrice Graf (Switzerland). Žemieji Šančiai

We promoted this process by signing partnership agreements with newly established institutions or well-established organisations that spearheaded new, continuity-seeking events.

By the way, I vividly remember the first ConTempo performance at Šančiai Meadow... Gintarė, inviting people to become festival followers, exuded confidence and enthusiasm that made it clear that everyone would follow her lead. There was no doubt that a phenomenon was being born!



*Trophy*, play by Rudi van der Merwe and Béatrice Graf (Switzerland). Žemieji Šančiai



Gintarė Masteikaitė, initiator and art director of the ConTempo Festival





*L'ABSOLU*, play by Boris Gibé (Les Choses de Rien, France). ConTempo Festival. 2022



*Kamchatka*, play by Kamchatka (Catalonia),  
Kaunas Old Town, 2019





*Arrived*, play by Adrian Schwarzstein and Jūratė Širvytė-Rukštelė (Hungary/Lithuania).  
ConTempo Festival, Zapyškis, 2020

# The Beast of Kaunas's Creative Writing Workshops

*#co-creation #community\_involvement  
#Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas #mythology*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The myth programme and the Beast of Kaunas were initially conceived as a communication project – the fun component of Kaunas 2022. The adventures of the Beast of Kaunas, the Princess, and other characters were intended to encourage little ones and adults alike to take an interest in the European Capital of Culture programme. And not merely to take an interest, but also to help create it! I had an idea that Kaunas's myth would be created by the people of Kaunas themselves. How? I didn't know at the time. The tools were yet to be invented.

In Kaunas 2022, we often found ourselves doing things that either no one had done before, or that no one had ever done particularly well. In this sense, we were, and are, people who hit upon the right path after taking many false turns. 'We are the project that makes mistakes. Innovation is born out of trial and error,' was my mantra – a sentiment that perturbed the Mayor's office, as there was a prevalent suspicion that our efforts mattered naught and were a waste of money.

Indrė Aleksandravičiūtė was my trusted partner in all the beastly undertakings. She often took on these tasks on my behalf, because I had many other commitments. Indrė joined us from the Lithuanian World Youth Association. She was multilingual, canny like a Dane, cool-headed like an Estonian, and had a quintessentially British sense of humour.

'I'm overworked, I'm going to die,' I say to Indrė.

'OK, bye!', she says.


Indrė is very young; my approach to her is fatherlike, and I often refer to her as 'my daughter from other parents'. And I am quick to come to her defence if anyone suggests that she has done something wrong. My Indrė cannot get anything wrong, just because she can't!

So, how does one go about creating a collective myth? Indrė and I built a website for this very purpose. We uploaded numerous fairy tales, legends, and stories that had been started but intentionally left incomplete. I sacrificed and surrendered the first four chapters of my novel for public use, hoping that others would continue the story... For further reading, we included Aristotle's *Poetics*. We hired a writer and creative writing teacher Sandra Bernotaitė to lead myth-writing workshops. And so it began!



*Kaunas Myth creative writing workshop*

INDRĖ ALEKSANDRA-VIČIŪTĖ/

These workshops were among the best but also weirdest experiences I had ever had because, as we visited numerous communities, places and corners of the district, we encountered both fascinating people and some less-than-ideal situations... 

Sandra and I had found ourselves among pensioners vying to take control, and young mothers in a creative frenzy; we heard true stories about an 'erected'

goat; and listened to dozens of texts worthy of a psychologist's couch. Once, we arrived at a completely empty hall because the local organiser hadn't invited anyone but served us tea instead and generously shared his impressions of Lithuanian veteran

pop singer Katunskytė's concert.

One big issue we observed during these workshops was the detrimental impact of our schooling system on individual creativity. Nearly every participant introduced themselves with a variation of the same sentence: 'My Lithuanian language teacher said I couldn't write.' Sandra flexed the participants' writing muscles until she convinced them that they were perfectly capable of writing without following strict grammatical rules, sentence and paragraph or censorship structures. Everyone was terribly embarrassed to read their work out loud, even though we repeated hundreds of times that we had gathered precisely to write nonsense together.



*The Beast of Kaunas creative writing workshop participants' texts.*



## SANDRA BERNOTAITĖ/

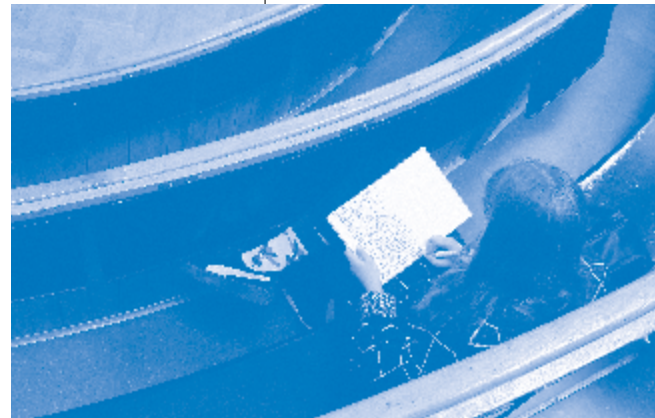
Indeed, a myth typically does not have a single author. It's a community-driven creation that seems to emerge organically, from an unknown source. We had to enchant the participants so that their conscious mind wouldn't follow what they were writing, as mythology stems from the collective unconscious. Therefore, I would talk to the participants about shamanism, distract them with tangential stories, provide them with some basic writing tools, place a sheet of paper and a pen under their noses, and then I would tell them that they would need to write in pairs, exchanging texts every few sentences. More randomness, more twisted plots, more nonsense!

## INDRĖ ALEKSANDRA-VIČIŪTĖ/

With all of this set aside, there were some very successful workshops, the material from which I would take and upload to our website. People interpreted the Beast in their own way, diving into fantasy influenced by magical realism. Having spotted their texts online, participants would often express their joy to me. They were very pleased that their thoughts had found a place, and word about these workshops spread among other communities, leading many to invite us to host sessions for them. The most successful workshops were those that took place in the more interesting locations – in the Fort, at an IT company, outdoors, in modernist buildings, and the like.



Kaunas Myth creative writing workshop



Kaunas Myth creative writing workshop

## SANDRA BERNOTAITĖ/

In this way, we generated over a hundred stories, about ten of which turned out to be magically successful. They were written by strangers, sometimes with a vast age difference between them (the elderly being paired up with teenagers, for example). I later understood that perhaps my task was not even to create the Beast's myth. We simply needed an excuse to meet, open up, laugh and

cry together. That's what I remember most vividly. The Beast would appear to us little by little: a tail sticking out from behind a bush, a snort echoing from a hole in the ground, eyes glowing beneath the water. We stirred up the collective imagination, and later I noticed elements of the Beast's myth that subsequently influenced the works of professional artists. We created material for dreams, for future memory, we draped the city in a web of emotions, and the city became more our own, more personal.

# Do You Remember the First Fluxus Festival Night in Kaunas?

*#co-creation #community\_involvement #festivals #legacy #new\_longterm\_initiatives #We\_the\_People*

ANA  
KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The first Fluxus ascent of the Parodos Hill in 2019 was a spontaneous idea, but it was unmistakably clear that a new city tradition had been born. Due to the inclusive nature of this event, its organisation was integrated in the communities programme. The event morphed into an annual festival dedicated to communities, with an additional element of the programme (involving creative manifestations and artistic performances by various neighbourhoods' communities, creative collectives, and cultural institutions) taking place at the top of Parodos Street.

SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

In 2019, the festival was organised at night (owing to the police informing us that closing a main city artery during the day would be nearly impossible, but easier at night-time). No one knew what to expect; the festival was a real experiment. Meetings were held with over 20 communities in Kaunas, brainstorming what Fluxus-like inclusive actions could be carried out at night on the Parodos Hill (which at the time seemed utopian).

On the evening of the event itself, the foot of the Parodos Hill teemed with people dressed in extraordinarily creative costumes. Climbing to the top, participants surrendered to an even more surprising flow – singing along with the old people's choir, attempting to 'scream' the loudest decibel, tasting pet food, and dancing in Ažuolynas. This was not merely an event, but a



Fluxus Festival. 2019

phenomenon, fondly dubbed by the participants as Kaunas's own miniature Burning Man Festival.

The costumes and Fluxus movement-inspired performances served to unite people – they felt more courage to approach and talk to strangers, partake in games, and celebrate life. The 2019 event was truly authentic, sincere and surprising.

There was a moment when I was standing in the middle of the closed Parodos Street, the start signal was given, and the crowd of costumed participants began running towards me. I exclaimed over a walkie-talkie to my colleagues, 'There are thousands of people!'. To this day, every time I drive past Jurgis Mačiūnas Square, I am overcome by this blend of boundless joy and anxiety.



Fluxus Festival. 2019



*Fluxus Festival 2019 official aftermovie.*

# Open Call for Partnership Projects

*#administration #architecture #cultural\_sector\_involvement #heritage #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future #open\_calls*

VIRGINIJA  
VITKIENĖ/

As Ana and the curators were crafting the terms of the call for partnership projects (around 20 pages detailing each programme and outlining the curators' expectations for proposals), I was working with the administration manager Jovita



*Entity*, play by Kaunas Aura Dance Theatre. Choreographer: Ryu Suzuki

Nalevaikienė, the Kaunas City and Kaunas District municipalities' administration offices, and the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture's finance and legal experts. We were devising a legal framework that would enable our new public institution to refinance other public and budgetary institutions. As there was no precedent for this in Lithuania, we were looking not for an existing example, but for something which would fall within the boundaries of the law. Many doubts were voiced about the feasibility of such action. Some lawyers even suggested that Kaunas 2022, as a public institution, should not be financed via the Initiatives for Kaunas programme (i.e., by submitting proposals to its annual competition) but should instead participate in public procurement, potentially succeeding (or not) and, if it did indeed succeed, offering ECoC project implementation services to the municipalities... Nevertheless, by mutual agreement of both municipalities and the Government, it was decided that cultural institutions' proposals for the ECoC programme ought to be selected through a competition. Subsequently, partnership agreements would be signed with the selected institutions, which would then be included in Kaunas 2022's three-year application (for 2020–2022) to Kaunas City Municipality and Kaunas District Municipality. Partnership agreements elevated these other cultural institutions to the status of project co-implementers, sidestepping the need for a public procurement procedure for partner proposals. But the responsibility of overseeing the results and managing the expenses of 20, 40, or even 72 institutions rested with the coordinating organisation, which had signed contracts with the main financiers. Amidst this administrative complexity, we realised that ECoC projects needed a separate law at the national level and that the coordinating institution needed to possess the status of a financing organisation. However, given that such projects occur only every 12–14 years and always in a different city, it is unrealistic to expect there to be the political will to design such legislation. We hope that the model developed in Kaunas will be applicable to other large, multi-institutional projects or future European Capital of Culture projects in Lithuania.

ANA  
KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Most of our partnerships with cultural institutions were determined through two open calls. During the ECoC application year, as we gathered colleagues' ideas for the bid proposal, we learned that developing an integral partnership and thoroughly exploring an idea required input from both partners. Therefore, we were proactive: as soon as we released an open call for partnerships, we would initiate in-person meetings with all the submitting organisations. We would hear their ideas out, give feedback, and think together about how to improve various aspects of their proposal. Once the applications were assessed, another round of such meetings would begin with the aim of discussing the budget (which was always smaller than initially anticipated by the applicants), assessing the partners' capacity to implement their project, and informing them about upcoming administrative procedures.

The application form and assessment criteria were drafted by synthesising the requirements of the competitions organised by Kaunas City Municipality and the Lithuanian Council of Culture, introducing our own ideological criteria, such as accessibility, residents' involvement, community empowerment, memory and heritage actualisation, etc. Applications were evaluated by working groups composed of our team members, and included Kaunas City Municipality and Kaunas District Municipality representatives. Virginija and I participated in each working group, barring situations influenced by private interests. Curators joined according to their thematic interests. All this took hundreds of conversations and calls.

As early as 2020, we submitted our application to the Kaunas City Municipality, collaborating with over a dozen partners. One major challenge we faced was the requirement to plan and justify planned expenses in a very detailed manner – too detailed, in my opinion. Then the pandemic struck. Over the course of the financial year, we found ourselves revising the budget plan, not only for ourselves but also for nearly all our partners, and, at times, writing explanatory statements regarding a few or a few hundred euros,



here and there, attributed to the wrong expense category. We collected every invoice, photo, and video evidence of purchases, not just from our end but from all our partners as well. As if against my will, administering public funds had inadvertently fostered a tendency towards bureaucracy in me. Our project became the alpha and omega of bureaucratic paradoxes, a mirror held up to the tarnished image of the public sector. I remained uncertain of the means, but I was sure the cultural (public) sector needed to take a very different approach to its own discipline.

## KLAUDIJA ALEKSANDRA- VICIUTE/

I joined the team in 2020, just before we issued our second call to partners. Even at that time, our joint plans seemed incredibly broad and big.

We formed a commission to evaluate a staggering 209 projects submitted by 132 organisations. This was a challenge, which, as you know, was further complicated by the pandemic.

After the first call, we had established partnerships with 64 cultural organisations, with the majority based in Kaunas. We also received project proposals from Vilnius and Klaipėda, and even had international partners. All these organisations were ready to get involved in the Kaunas 2022 programme not only in 2022 but also to contribute actively to the preparatory work from 2020 (some of them began making tangible preparations as early as 2019). It's worth noting that several partners implemented multiple projects under the auspices of the programme, with some even managing up to seven projects. Following the second call, we received proposals from 47 organisations to undertake 52 projects.

Managing 127 selected projects, offering advice, finding solutions, accepting, approving, and implementing actions, quarter by quarter, had become part of our daily life.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The first call, announced in 2019, had been orientated towards phased, continuous projects that required longer preparation. These included international exchanges, new productions, and various aspects of skills development. After the first call, we had a rich programme that was closely aligned with the project's vision and values. The second call helped to supplement the programme with what was then significantly lacking, that is renowned stars, internationally recognizable elements, and events catering to broader audiences. As a result, our programme boasted names such as Marina Abramović, Robert Wilson, and Yoko Ono, a performance by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, a collaboration between the Kaunas Symphony Orchestra and electronic music creators, a new Kaunas literature festival, the 'Audra' contemporary city festival showcasing music and youth initiatives, and a plethora of other highlights in the Kaunas 2022 event calendar.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

What an intellectual enrichment of Kaunas 2022's programme! I read partner applications dedicated to exploring, interpreting, and revealing Kaunas's interwar modernism. The diversity of proposed artistic forms and ideas demonstrated that we were on the right track and had a shared understanding about the need to seek inspiration in creating a variety of languages for speaking about architecture.

Upon confirming the final list of projects, I thought (and still do) that I could not have dreamed of having better content for the modernism strand. The partner programme, which was created for different interest and age groups, encompassed a broad audience. It included projects intended for architecture professionals and enthusiasts, such as a book about Arnas Funkas (National M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum); a tactile interactive pavilion for experiencing architecture, created with the visually impaired;

the *Architecture of Desire* exhibition, decoding a modernist city's lustful secrets; the Kaunas Architecture Festival, highlighting the most current global, contemporary themes in architecture (Architects' Association of Lithuania); the Modernism Summer School, connecting intercontinental ideas in architecture (Kaunas University of Technology); impressive exhibitions introducing personalities from the world of photography (Kaunas Photography Gallery); art objects in public urban spaces, inspired by stories about modernism (Lithuanian Artists' Association); presentations, lectures, exhibitions, and performances aimed at expanding the geographical boundaries of modernity (Kaunas Artists' House); experiential guided tours ('Ekskursas' and Kaunas Aura Dance Theatre); the Optimismo intellectual music festival held in a metal factory; and world music programmes scattered across various spaces in Kaunas and Kaunas District (GM Gyvai).

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The competence, international orientation, efficiency, and innovation of the Kaunas and the broader Lithuanian cultural sectors were among the essential premises for the success of the Kaunas 2022 project. We also had plenty of organisations equipped with experience and ideas who were responsible for various parts of the project.

Open calls at the smaller scale of separate Kaunas 2022 programmes took place frequently. The inclusion of partners became a regular tradition of the major Kaunas 2022 events: the Day of Happiness, the CityTelling Festival, the Fluxus Festival and others. I must admit, we didn't always succeed in ensuring the quality of integration, and some partners were rightfully disappointed with their limited visibility in the programme. Nevertheless, I am proud that co-creation permeated into the project's various levels and hopefully further strengthened the interconnections between cultural organisations.



*Open Call for partnerships with 'Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022'; kaunas2022.eu, 06-09-2019.*

# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'

*#artist\_engagement #co-creation #community\_involvement  
#Contemporary\_Neighbourhoods #decentralisation  
#Kaunas\_District #new\_longterm\_initiatives #open\_calls  
#regional\_dimension*

## DAIVA PRICE/

It soon became apparent that the principles of cultural activity, the network of cultural institutions, and even the concept of community differed significantly in the city and the small townships across Kaunas District. Furthermore, the history, social problems, community needs, and other factors in many of these townships also varied. Some of them were established during the Soviet era, others were trying to rediscover a history that had been erased during that same period. In some, most residents were newcomers who had spent most of their lives in the city and did not participate in local community life, showing little concern for its well-being. This led to the creation of a separate programme for Kaunas District, the purpose of which was to search for and strengthen its local identity.

Each curator was tasked with adopting one of the townships and creating a programme that would help the local community identify its challenges, expectations, and ultimately, its artistic vision. However, none of us had any previous experience in facilitating such a project. Therefore, we initially tried to create a set of rules, a plan for curators, outlining the steps that should be taken in local communities.

Particularly interested in community art practices, we wanted to do everything right, ensuring the process would be inclusive and open. Still, this experience also brought the realisation that life is much more complicated than textbook examples might suggest; it's not always possible to overcome, in just a few years, the long-standing tensions, disagreements, and old habits associated with organising cultural projects. We understood that changes were possible only with active support from local organisations, communities, and especially people working in local cultural centres. We didn't manage to find such allies in all the townships. Therefore, unfortunately, not everywhere will the legacy of Kaunas 2022 continue, despite many projects organised within the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme having brought fresh winds, broken down numerous stereotypes, and included people in culture who never thought it had a place for them.



*'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
project webpage.*



*Official aftermovie of the  
'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
project in 2019.*



*'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
2022: official aftermovie.*

## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

The description of the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme was long and beautiful. However, for those who were most involved in working on it, it was a programme encompassing a large area of Kaunas District, which transformed spectators into participants, passive cultural consumers into committed audiences, shaped neighbourhoods' self-image, and involved artists, communities, businesses – Kaunas District's entire cultural sector. We dreamed of new continuous activities, traditions spiced up with a modern twist, cultural workers feeling inspired with improved competencies, and residents proud of the place in which they lived. Did we achieve this goal? I believe we did.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

After the training sessions for cultural operatives in Kaunas District, led by Milda Laužikaitė's team, we were preparing the terms and conditions of the calls for proposals from the District's localities. Several observations arose. Firstly, it was crucial to introduce a healthy competitive dimension among the localities, i.e., to issue an open call to all 25 of them. The applications would be divided into two types: a) participants with already existing events, b) participants with an idea for an event. The people responsible for filling out project applications would be cultural

centre and leisure hall staff. The call for proposals would need to specify clearly the criteria for the projects, partnerships (Fluxus, other local and international partners), and communication (how events developed as part of the project would be communicated, etc.).

The applications, of course, needed to be evaluated by our team. We assembled working groups of two to three curators who organised round-table workshops with the winning neighbourhoods, helping them to develop or create their flagship event. The following year, the call for proposals would be repeated for those who hadn't participated in the first round, while we continued working with the rest consistently up to 2021.

I hoped that, in this way, we would conserve human resources, because at that time many of Kaunas District's communities lacked motivation, and we did not want to disadvantage those wishing to work together. We would equally avoid mechanically assigning neighbourhoods to curators, providing everyone with the opportunity to work in groups, share their skills and experience and learn together. However, after the call for proposals, we decided to split the groups up... This decision was motivated by the fact that the applications fell, more or less, into separate thematic categories, making it easier to consult and work individually.

## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

In the first year of the project, 18 out of 25 localities submitted applications. I asked the remaining ones why they hadn't applied. 'We'll see how the first ones get on,' they said, with caution and suspicion.



Weekly meeting of 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' curators on a Tuesday

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

The applications submitted for 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' might not have revealed this, but it was clear that most of the neighbourhoods were actively searching, albeit not always successfully, for their place on the contemporary culture map. They were unsure about how to attract either the local residents, who would only return home to the neighbourhood to sleep, or transient city dwellers, not to mention their uncertainty about how to work on larger long-term projects, or indeed, how to work internationally. However, the applications, while demanding participants to provide a great deal of information, were very useful – they helped us identify potential resources and see local areas and stereotypes through the participants' eyes.

## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

Choosing is hard. The Jury is large, the discussions long. Seven applications get selected. An official announcement comes, followed by the communities' joy, as if they've won the biggest competition. There's a live LRT broadcast from Karmėlava airport, because one of the selected applicants is Karmėlava. And what comes next?

We, the curators, are sitting at the round table at Laisvės Av. 36, dividing up the 'territories' between us. I had already planned which neighbourhood would go to each of the curators, but I thought maybe they wouldn't want to work with one or another place or community. I definitely knew that Karmėlava would go to Gediminas (due to Gediminas's expertise in music, perfect for the traditional rock festival of Ramučiai), and Linksmakalnis would go to Daiva (on account of Daiva's research in memory studies, suiting her well to the unique historical aspect of Linksmakalnis). The neighbourhoods in question, situated further away from the city, were complex. I saw the curators' anxiety that the already enormous workload would increase even more unbearably, and it did.

As the process got underway, in choosing the thematic directions for their assigned neighbourhoods' programmes, the curators relied on the communities' local uniqueness and talents, but the curators' own preferences and specialisations also played a significant role. For example, in Linksmakalnis, where the project was curated by the 'Memory Office' team, the memory programme flourished, while in Rokai the communities programme came into greater focus, and in Vilkija they tried adopting the 'Designing Happiness' programme (albeit not very successfully).

## VILTĖ MIGOŃYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

The first year of 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' proved difficult for everyone involved. Following community meetings, our team would engage in discussion, seeking consultation and advice from one another on how to boost motivation, resolve emotional disagreements within the participants' inner circles, or identify which creators would be best suited to facilitating each project... And, of course, in the Kaunas District Municipality's joint meetings with cultural operators, we had to explain more than once why some localities hadn't been selected.



## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

There were many gaps in our knowledge, at first. Everyone was learning along the way. Lesson No. 1: an excellent application doesn't necessarily mean that the community is motivated and ready to create and come together. Lesson No. 2: within every neighbourhood there is a critic, and we need to find ways of working with them. Lesson No. 3: not every idea conceived by the community takes root, but this isn't a failure. Lesson No. 4: the curators, who are assigned specific neighbourhoods to work with, need to be motivated more than anybody else. There were many such lessons.

We worked within clear project frameworks and adhered to certain values, whilst allowing room for each neighbourhood to adapt. We also had expectations. The phrase 'managing expectations' became very popular among us. Every Tuesday at 11 a.m., we would convene to discuss our little victories: attracting 30 new faces to a meeting; garnering 500 responses to a local survey; successfully devising an activities grid; securing an international artist (!); securing business involvement; or recruiting volunteers. We also took time to share the challenges: it's difficult to maintain momentum without the curators' initiative; people are tired of endless discussions, reflections and questionnaires, and everyone prefers benches instead (i.e., practical, tangible outputs); cultural workers are feeling tired and treat the project as an unpaid, additional duty.

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

One of the most interesting, yet sometimes unpleasant experiences of working in the Kaunas District team was that not everyone in the Kaunas 2022 team had understood and internalised, from beginning to end, just how important it was for the residents of Kaunas District not to be subsumed under the umbrella term 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture'. They needed to have their own name: 'Kaunas District'. Our work was plagued by people's unwillingness to listen and a constant need to remind them that wherever there was Kaunas City, there was also Kaunas District.

## AUGUSTINA KALESNIKIENĖ/

Conveying to the District's cultural operators the change and scale of activities we expected from them was not an easy task. It seemed they genuinely thought of our plans as flights of fancy. And then we took a representative from each locality to some former European Capitals of Culture: Matera, Aarhus, and Leeuwarden. A massive shift happened. In the aftermath of these trips, I sensed a newfound advocacy for the project emerging and a strong inspiration being instilled amongst community leaders. Three standout quotes come to mind: 1) 'We do many things in Kaunas District that are of a higher quality than you get abroad, but we don't know how to showcase it widely'; 2) 'It turns out that even simple things can prove interesting, so many ideas have now sprung up'; and 3) 'So this is what you expect from us, and how you see it all coming together!'

As we neared the launch of our inaugural events, the nervous anticipation of our curators and local project implementers was palpable. (Would people show up? Would anyone even find it interesting to travel here, all the way from Kaunas, for an exhibition?). Throughout this time, we consistently emphasised the significance of the process rather than the destination, impressing upon everyone that the end product was just one minor component – a celebration marking a meaningful journey. Yet, the Kaunas District Municipality measured success in terms of events and audience size. This triggered my apprehension that our project could be labelled a failure, which would nullify all our collective efforts. However, after the concluding events in 2019 at Linksmakalnis, Garliava Vicinity, and Rokai, I realised that everything would be alright. This assurance didn't stem from the sizeable audience turnout, but rather from the noticeable change in the local residents – a sudden click, a spark of understanding in their eyes, and pride

felt for the place where they lived which were all very evident. These events were also attended by other localities' representatives, and by the following year, all of the remaining localities had participated in the call for proposals.

Localities that were not selected to participate in the project during the first two rounds of selection were presented with a medley of alternative activities which did not necessitate any dedicated community commitment, such as the 'ConTempo' performances, various activities within the CityTelling Festival or other programmes. 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' stood as a testament to the strenuous efforts of applicants, partners, curators, and artists. The project managed to navigate political landscapes, community crises, a pandemic (imagine facilitating community activities aimed at empowering the locality remotely!), tonnes of administrative work, and the twists and turns of public procurement processes.



First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' representatives after the announcement of selection winners. 2019

# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' Raudondvaris

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

As a curator in Raudondvaris, I grew deeply fond of the local people and communities, so much so that I would now like to live here one day. I've never encountered another place where various communities and individuals work so harmoniously together towards a common goal. I think I'll certainly find my way back to Raudondvaris, as I now feel like a true member of the Raudondvaris family.



Dance-based guided tour with Kaunas dance company Nuepiko and the Raudondvaris community. Raudondvaris. 2020

## ALGIMANTAS GRIGAS/

Over the years, I've attended numerous openings for my projects, but this one undoubtedly tops the list. Not just because Raudondvaris is my childhood home; I lived here until I was in the eighth grade. On this occasion, I enlisted the help of my former ceramics teacher, Ričardas Gaška, who continues to reside and create in this neighbourhood. The early stages of discussion saw keen participation from local high-school students in their final year. However, as we commenced the physical workshops themselves, the students had moved on, having graduated from school. Their places were taken up by younger students, who would be the ones ultimately using this space. We designed two terraces



Architecture workshop with Algimantas Grigas. Raudondvaris. 2021



Dance-based guided tour with Kaunas dance company Nuepiko and the Raudondvaris community. Raudondvaris. 2020

linked by wooden poles, and children proposed painting the poles red and white – a fitting tribute to Raudondvaris, which means 'red manor'. Overall, I'm of the belief that the main purpose of 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' lies in continuous engagement with the local community – not merely giving them a fish, but rather teaching them how to fish.\*

\*

*'Pakaunėje kylančius meno objektus vietos gyventojai ir įkvėpia, ir palaiko'.  
kaunas2022.eu, 19-07-2021.*



*'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
in Raudondvaris (2020).*



# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' Ežerėlis



## AURELIJA PRAŠMUNTAITĖ/

When I began my work and was getting to know the Ežerėlis community, I found myself pondering how we might unearth this locality's true identity. During one meeting, staff from the cultural centre casually disclosed a fascinating fact – it was here, in the Ežerėlis peat bog, that renowned photographer Antanas Sutkus earned the money he needed for his first camera. And to my surprise, they pulled out about twenty of his original photos from a storage room. He had gifted them to the school, and the school subsequently passed them onto the cultural centre. All this time, these photographs had been languishing in storage... tucked away among educational posters. I couldn't help but remark 'what a treasure you've got lying here among these geography posters...'. After three years of concerted efforts, these photographs were brought into the limelight, professionally finished and framed, in the final event. This was all accomplished through the cultural centre's initiative.

I had the opportunity to invite Žygimantas Kudirka, a notable writer, musician, and futurist, to partake in an artistic residency in Ežerėlis. In this small town, devoid of guest houses or standard accommodation, Kudirka stayed with a hospitable local woman. She had adapted her outdoor kitchen to provide a comfortable room with a shower, and wasn't averse to hosting weekend gatherings for the community in her yard. The residency resulted in the creation of an immersive alternative reality audio story that encapsulated Ežerėlis's essence, guiding listeners through a journey across the whole town. By the way, at that time, only Vokiečių St. in Vilnius and Ežerėlis in Kaunas District had such audio guide stories created for them. Kudirka later remarked that the weekend in Ežerėlis had been a very memorable experience for him.

Working with the talented photographer Vaida Virbickaitė, we started forging connections with the local population, on a quest for compelling material for photo narratives encapsulating the local identity. In doing so, we crossed paths with Giedrius, a farmer who had not only reared muskoxen, protagonists of one of our photo stories, but also held a large collection of vintage machinery. Thus, an outdoor automotive technology exhibition appeared in Ežerėlis, as did a mural on the farmer's house, created by Tadas Vincaitis-Plūgas, depicting the narrow-gauge railway over Ežerėlis peat bog.

Launch of Ežerėlis's alternative reality audio guide. 2020



*'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
in Ežerėlis (2020).*

# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' Kulautuva

JUSTINA PETRULIONYTĖ/

Getting to know the Kulautuva community has been one of the highlights of my Kaunas 2022 experience.

'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' invited small towns within the Kaunas District to come together and create collectively. Although the people of Kulautuva didn't need an invitation to come together (in fact, they could probably teach us all a thing or two about coming together), they joined the project with the goal of rediscovering and presenting afresh their own Kulautuva. This resort town often attracts researchers from various fields such as history, architecture, and memory studies, yet their research rarely focuses on its contemporary narrative and its inhabitants.

Over the course of three years, we tried out a multitude of activity formats.

We photographed the town and organised an exhibition, designed a tour and developed an interactive game. Assisted by artists, we created several public art pieces: the street art mural *Home* ('Namai', by Laura Slavinskaitė), the sculptural space *Leap in the Harbour* ('Uoste šuolis', by Džiugas Karalius), and the *Community Space* (by Gaila Akelienė), to name a few. The street art mural depicts a smiling girl, Rosian Bagransky, who was sheltered in hiding by the Fugalevičius family, the manor owners in Kulautuva, during the Second World War.



*Home*, street art mural by Laura Slavinskaitė. Kulautuva

And when I discovered that this small town was home to at least two choirs, it became clear to me that we had to dip our toes into the performing arts. Thus, we dedicated the project's final year to the musical performance *Will You Rise Again as a New Note?* ('Ar atgimsi tu nauja nata?'), which was conceptualised, created and performed by members of the Kulautuva community under the guidance of director Eimutis



*Will You Rise Again as a New Note?*, community play (director Eimutis Kvosščiauskas). Kulautuva. 2022

Kvoščiauskas. Community members crafted the script, text, music, costumes, set design, and props. They sang, acted, and danced. The performance was inspired by a Kulautuva legend, yet it told a contemporary version of the town's history. It's truly remarkable how Eimutis, who was born in neighbouring Vilkija, was able to inspire the people!

DŽIUGAS KARALIUS/

I'm grateful to my family for taking me to visit various Lithuanian locations when I was young, including the surroundings of Kaunas, and Kulautuva. Arriving here, as a creator, I found an incredibly strong and creative local community, comprising long-standing residents, newcomers, and young people who cherished their region. The people of Kulautuva closely observed my creative process, which always went ahead regardless of the weather conditions, generously offering advice and listening attentively to my stories about what art could be and how it could be created.\*

\* *'Pakaunėje kylančius meno objektus vietos gyventojai ir įkvėpia, ir palaiko.'*  
*kaunas2022.eu, 19-07-2021.*



'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
in Kulautuva (2020).



# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' Domeikava

ŽILVINAS RINKŠELIS/

Without detailing the aspects of the project that were common across all localities (whether in terms of structure, phases, or progression), I can only add that Domeikava exhibited characteristics and associated issues typical of localities surrounding the city. With the project's help, we attempted to address these creatively by introducing change. The locality's proximity to the city means that its inhabitants can easily fulfil their needs for cultural services and events, or address any lack thereof, in the nearby city. Another factor is the rapid urbanisation and a large influx of newcomers. The local identity is continually evolving and never remains static. Participatory culture is noticeably lacking, as are any incentives promoting the exploration of local heritage and identity.

To foster community engagement, we decided to develop live-action, role-playing, and orienteering games. Our goal was to establish a gamified platform permitting a live exploration and understanding of the neighbourhood. We believed that play was among the most universally accepted and liberal ways of fostering engagement. Regrettably, this approach didn't produce the results we had anticipated: people's engagement remained rather low. Many found grasping the novel and unheard-of gaming principles – based on LARP (live action role play) – to be challenging or time-consuming. However, the gaming initiative did yield valuable resources, producing ample visual content and creative narratives that could be used to present and bring the community's cultural heritage and local symbols to life.



'Tracing Domeikis's Footsteps',  
interactive role-playing game. 2020



*'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'  
in Domeikava (2020).*



# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' Radio Angels in Linksmakalnis

ANA  
KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Having conducted a mentorship seminar at a festival in Vilnius in 2019, on the recommendation of Gintarė Masteikaitė, Roberto Magro (a circus director, dramaturge, and educator) came for a visit to meet us.

ROBERTO MAGRO/

I distinctly remember that, when I was sitting in the Kaunas 2022 office and looking through the 25 districts of Kaunas, one in particular caught my attention. And when I found out that Linksmakalnis meant 'Funny Mountain', I thought 'this is mine!'



*Radio Angels*, play by Roberto Magro.  
2019



Official aftermovie of the  
'Radio Angels' play in  
Linksmakalnis in 2019.



*Radio Angels*, play by Roberto Magro.  
2019

ANA  
KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

We're on our way to Linksmakalnis, a secluded place that was once the location of a radio surveillance base, needing isolation. There is a dog shelter, a small sports hall, a forest, a row of apartment blocks, and the abandoned buildings of the former

radio surveillance base, where we notice a local figure quietly observing us. There's also a school, and towards the far reaches of the town lies an addiction recovery centre. Adjacent to it, we discover a verdant Soviet sculptural composition with a torn-out portrait, cleverly used to

obscure some trash containers. Nearby, children are playing at the stadium near the school. And a museum, the like of which no other town has... The Museum of Angels.

ROBERTO MAGRO/

Once I got there, I found out that there was no mountain... And the funniest corner was the little Museum of Angels and from there began the story that, over the course of four years, led the Angels of Linksmakalnis to transform themselves into people and, together with some circus performers, to create unique community shows that transformed this village bringing with them the scent of Magical Realism. 😊

DAIVA PRICE/

Whenever I talk to people about the impact of the European Capital of Culture, I always remember Linksmakalnis, a community I had the privilege of working with for several years. In 2018, artist Roberto Magro ventured into this strange, once secret and secluded Soviet town, still shrouded in legends. He conceived a tale about angels lured by Soviet radio antennas, who decided to make this town their home, performing benevolent deeds invisibly. This is how *Radio Angels*, a community-based contemporary circus project, came about.



This was how things began. What followed was an intense period of work and circus training. Not everyone found they were prepared to face this challenge. Nonetheless, the town's children placed their trust in the artist. These were children whose dreams often fell on the adults' deaf ears. Roberto fuelled their belief that there was more to the world than just Linksmakalnis. I will never forget the valuable life lessons Roberto imparted to the children about self-improvement, the significance of reading, visiting exhibitions and watching films. It was then that I said to myself: even if this project doesn't change the entire community but still has the power to alter even a single child's destiny, it will be a success. These young girls, once



*Radio Angels*, play by Roberto Magro. 2019

disheartened seeing their parents not attend their performance because they didn't care, now harbour dreams of becoming actresses, contemporary circus artists, or even military officers. This is the ultimate reward that this work could possibly bestow.

## VACLOVAS ŽVIRBLIS/

We were learning many new things, for example, how to shift the body's centre of gravity or how to properly maintain balance in different positions. Many children, and adults too, participated in these workshops. If people stayed, that means they enjoyed the experience. These sessions were more a matter of social engagement, fostering community bonding. They were also about sport, movement, and health.

## LUKAS ALSYS/

What Roberto and his team created in Linksmakalnis, I believe, has long stuck in the town's inhabitants' hearts and minds – the local youth dream of becoming circus artists, and the town is no longer associated with the grim and dark history of the Soviet era, but is now identified with angels, who walk among us every day and protect Linksmakalnis.

The play was remade in 2022. In the newly fashioned performance, actors and circus artists tell the story of how the angels, who we first saw in Linksmakalnis during the play's first edition, are preparing to leave. As the ceremony unfolds, it's revealed that as these angels leave, others will take their place – those who over the past four years have become Roberto's new friends – local youth and children, and not just them. In fact, all of Linksmakalnis's inhabitants are angels, infusing the town's daily life with a multitude of new experiences and encounters. That's why I deem this project a great success story. I believe that Linksmakalnis has been eternally transformed into a town of angels, where nothing will ever be the same again.

\*

*Jurgita Lieponė. 'Menininkų iš Italijos sudomino buvęs slaptas karinis miestelis: istoriją pasakos savaip'. 15min.lt, 16-03-2019.*



*'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' in Linksmakalnis (2019–2020).*

# First 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' Lapès

MILDA  
RUTKAUSKAITĖ/

I often remember the Lapès neighbourhood being one of the greatest success stories. Over the span of just a few years, Lapès underwent a significant transformation. This shift can be illustrated with a simple example: during the first sustainability festival in Lapès, volunteers were primarily from Kaunas 2022, but two years later nearly all 20 volunteers were locals. The discovery of a sustainable identity and the commitment to elevating public consciousness about this matter encouraged the Lapès community to host an annual festival, consistently expanding in size and scope. This led to the engagement of local vendors, the upgrading of local infrastructure, and the inclusion of other establishments and organisations based in Lapès. The greatest achievement is that community life and the search for creative solutions there continues to evolve, with an increasing number of enthusiastic people joining the cause.



Lapès Sustainability Festival. 2020



Lapès Sustainability Festival. 2020

# How *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas* Came About

*#communication #literature #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The time came for the book. I proposed writing one in which the entire Kaunas 2022 programme would be depicted in the form of tales. I wrote these stories over the course of a year, in Kaunas, Nida, Vilnius... I would select a part of our programme, read it, then call the colleagues curating it to ask: What are the most important elements in your programme? What are you aiming for? What are its keywords? What values do you wish to convey? And I would try to convey all of this through the adventures of the Beast, the Princess, and other characters. Eventually, on a balmy evening in Catalonia by the Balearic Sea, the book was completed.

Right from the word go, we knew that the book had to be translated into English. And from the start, I knew that the translation had to be impeccable. So, I reached out to someone I trusted completely: University of Oxford graduate Skaistė Aleksandravičiūtė. Skaistė is a linguist, meticulously thorough to the point of madness. She brought on board her colleague, Andrzej Stuart-Thompson, a Brit, and they began their work.

## SKAISTĖ ALEKSANDRA- VICIŪTĖ/

Working with text is quite a solitary endeavour. I wanted it to be different. After all, the Beast is for everyone, about everyone, and the tales are about attentiveness to one another and learning to co-exist. We aimed not only to deliver an enjoyable read for the audience but also for the process to bring joy to us too. The behind-the-scenes of every translated tale include a multitude of conversations, both in person and inscribed in the margins, on how the Beast needed to sound as though he had stepped out of the legends of European cities, fairy tales for children and teens, while being contemporary and relatable. Mythical, mysterious, somewhat elusive, yet with his own humanly beastly fears and weaknesses. Close to a Kaunesian, but understandable to a foreigner. All of this dictated our choices of language, style, and vocabulary at every step.

## ANDRZEJ STUART- THOMPSON/

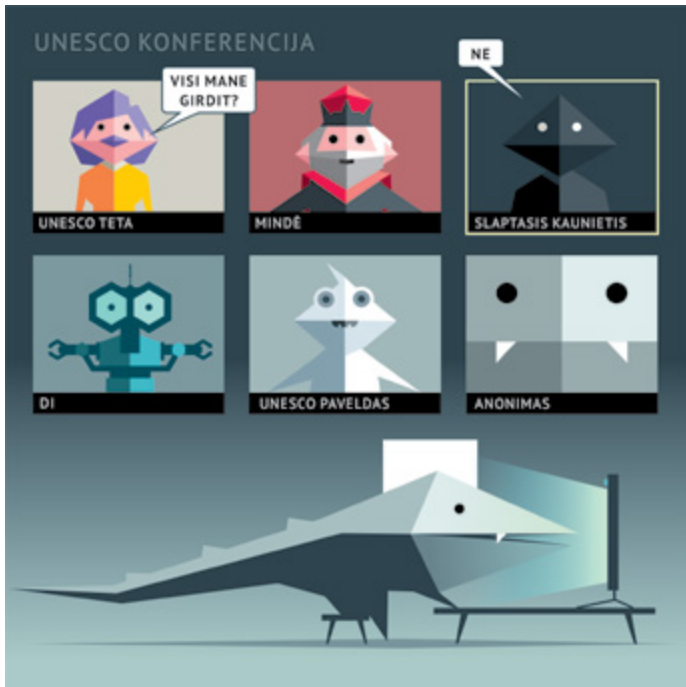
Working on this book offered a wonderful opportunity for Skaistė and me to meet up for translation sessions in a cafe, and the Beast soon became a charming reason to come together. We used to work at the Organic Deli Cafe in Oxford. Perhaps a commemorative plaque should be displayed there... We enjoyed the text's wittiness and playful ironies. For me, it was an immersive experience in Lithuanian humour and culture – a kind of baptism into Lithuanian folklore, or rather myth. I loved the Beast's community-spirit and his bemusement with contemporary reality. And I think we quite enjoyed the sassy princess, too.



*Radio Angels*, play by Roberto Magro. 2019







METAS PAKILTI



PIRMYN | ATEITJ



# International Competition to Design the Beast's Image

*#artist\_engagement #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas #mythology #open\_calls*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

*Tales of the Beast of Kaunas* has been written. Translation into English is underway. Now the book needs illustrations. And for illustrations, the Beast needs a shape. What does the Beast look like?

We launch an international competition and convene a jury, filled with trepidation: will there be any good proposals? Will it attract enough participants? After all, an international competition is a serious business, fraught with formalities and bureaucracy.

We receive a sufficient number of proposals.

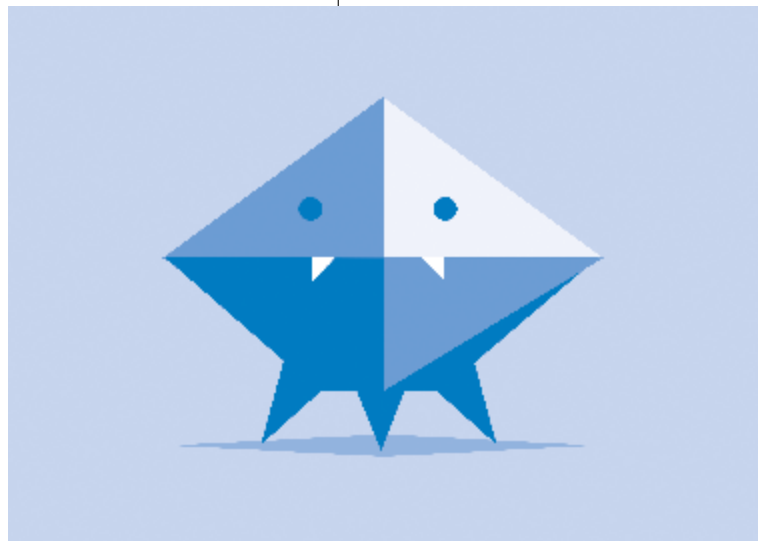
Flipping through the sketches, we suddenly see a perfect Beast of Kaunas in front of us. Unlike anything else. Or, rather, it looks similar to modernist buildings, a NATO fighter jet, a shark, a tadpole, a knight, a dragon, the hills of Kaunas... Half-animal, half-machine, swift, flexible, funny, intellectual, contemporary.

We have a winner: the artist and designer Darius Petreikis. He doesn't just create the Beast, he creates a whole new visual fairy tale style. No, more than just a style. Darius masterfully crafts the entire landscape of the Underworld Kaunas and the Sunny Kaunas, complete with character archetypes. Our team members and politicians even seemed to recognise themselves in some sketches...

Darius gets so engrossed that he even draws a ghost named Leonidas. I visit Jolanta, Leonidas Donskis's widow, to ask if that's okay. She says: 'Totally, Leonidas would have loved the joke.'

## SKAISTĖ ALEKSANDRA- VICIUTĖ/

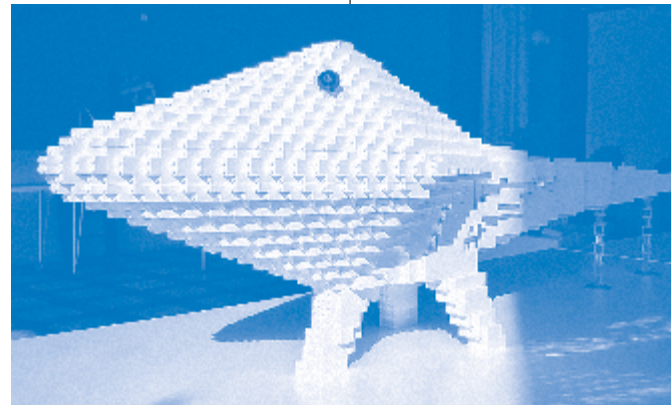
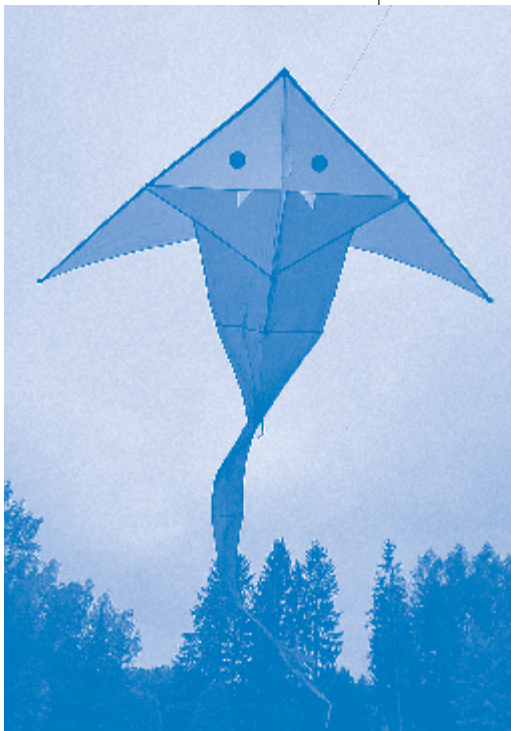
A delightful twist of fate transpired with the illustrations. There's a tale entitled *Kodėl Žvėris taip mėgsta Santaką* in Lithuanian, the literal translation of which would go something like 'why the Beast enjoys Santaka so much'. When the time came to translate the tale into English, Andrzej struck upon the title *Why the Beast Has a Whale of a Time in Santaka*. Translating the tales, we only had the bare text in front of us, without illustrations. Meanwhile, Darius, the book's designer, had only Lithuanian texts at hand. When we



Beast of Kaunas. Drawing by Darius Petreikis

received and opened the draft layout, to our astonishment, Darius had depicted the Beast looking exactly like a whale lounging leisurely next to this tale! Completely unintentionally, by a stroke of luck, or perhaps the Beast's making, the picture perfectly echoed the funny wordplay we had come up with for the tale's English title.

# How Kaunesians Befriended the Beast



Mythical Beast of Kaunas souvenirs and design interpretations

# The First-Ever CityTelling Festival

*#community\_involvement #festivals #history #Memory\_Office  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives #storytelling*

## DAIVA PRICE/

In 2019, we organised the inaugural CityTelling Festival. The festival spanned eight days, and we produced many of its events ourselves, making it a considerable organisational challenge, particularly with such a small core team comprised of only Justina Petrulionytė-Sabonienė and myself... It was a historic project where culture became the pretext for a gathering of the spiritual leaders of four religious denominations!

I believe the festival successfully opened up the theme of Kaunas's multi-ethnicity. Ramybės Park (the old city cemetery of Kaunas) epitomised this narrative beautifully: having once served as a shared burial ground for four different religious denominations and being home to German, Polish, and Russian schools, the park is a poignant reminder of the city's past. The park also recalls the times of Soviet occupation and Lithuanian resistance.

The memories and experiences of organising the festival are among our most profound and vivid. Our pride remained undimmed when we staged the cantata *Peace, Peace...* in Ramybės Park. This performance emerged from stories collected over several days in the park itself and later immortalised on a vinyl record. These stories also served as inspiration for the pieces of street art that remain in the park to this day.

Another major project was *The Last Concert*, a concert-cum-performance that served as a poignant tribute to the Kaunas Ghetto Orchestra, commemorating its history, its musical repertoire, and performers. A proud moment came with a performance of *Fantasy in Yellow*, a piece conceived in the ghetto by Percy Haid, a musician and composer who resided in Kaunas before the outbreak of World War II. This event marked the first-ever performance of this work in post-independence Lithuania.

This project also led me to one of the most emotionally touching encounters of my life. As soon as we announced this concert, I received an email which read: 'Hello, I am Joseph Haid, the son of the composer Percy Haid who wrote *Fantasy in Yellow* in the Kaunas Ghetto. I live in the USA. And I am coming to Kaunas.'

It was only later that Joseph, along with his wife Julie, admitted they hadn't known what to expect when coming to Kaunas. Both of his parents had survived the Holocaust, and a visit here was something Joseph had never planned. It was far too painful.

After our first few days of being acquainted, Joseph and Julie were already planning to return to Kaunas. At the 2022 Litvak Culture Forum, they were a party of four. Joseph's son Sebastian saw his grandfather's city for the first time.

Such experiences are the most rewarding aspect of my work. The opportunity to help someone find their way home, in every sense of the word, is a profound privilege and a gift of life.



Daiva Price, Joseph Haid, Justina Petrulionytė-Sabonienė and Julie Burkhart-Haid. 2019

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The cantata *Peace, Peace...*, dedicated to Ramybės Park, composed by Vidmantas Bartulis and performed by the 'Jaunystė' choir under the direction of Danguolė Beinarytė, epitomised the power of the 'Memory Office' programme. The involvement of members from two religions, Christians and Muslims, including three Christian denominations, executing the piece and participating in the event, was not just a promise but a solid demonstration of Kaunas becoming more open. The participants felt compelled to remain silent, just wanting to be present and to experience the story that was being told by the old city cemetery. The second marvel of the inaugural CityTelling Festival was the poignant visit by Joseph, the son of Percy Haid, and his wife, to *The Last Concert* of the Kaunas Ghetto, revived from the old scores. Here, *Fantasy in Yellow* was performed – a piece that had not been heard anywhere since the days of the Viliampolė Ghetto Orchestra in 1943. The story of this family's return to Kaunas vindicated all our efforts, sleepless nights, and temporary failures, and the doubts we had had to overcome.



*CityTelling Festival 2019  
webpage.*



*CityTelling Festival 2019 official  
aftermovie.*



*Peace, Peace...*, musical cantata. Libretto by Daiva Čepauskaitė, music by Vidmantas Bartulis, conducted by Danguolė Beinarytė, performed by Jaunystė Choir. 2019

stories? We have no stories, there's nothing to tell here...'. And yet, eventually, they started telling the most unexpected stories: about how the motorway was constructed using gravel from their area, and the extraordinary night, during the Soviet era, when they used horses to relocate an entire church. Many visits, similar to this one, followed, which helped us believe that our work was meaningful and sorely needed.

In the run-up to the first-ever CityTelling Festival in 2019, I participated in prayers at the Kaunas Mosque (we needed the sound recording for Jenny Kagan's project *Pavėjui*, set in the old Kaunas cemetery). It was like being teleported into an entirely different realm within Kaunas. I felt very nervous later as I interviewed Nelli, a representative from the mosque's community. We discussed Ramadan traditions on a hot day in May, and only at the conversation's close did I realise that we were in the midst of Ramadan, and Nelli had been fasting all day. And yet, she was radiant with energy and open to my naive inquiries.

We are proud that the mosque organised an open-door day for Kaunesians during the festival. I recall a humorous incident when an interested visitor phoned me to ask if they needed to bring their own slippers for the mosque tour. This incident, while amusing, highlighted the festival's success – the city's inhabitants were genuinely keen to learn more about Kaunas.

## KOTRYNA LINGIENĖ/

For many years I didn't enjoy Ramybės Park at all; I felt ill at ease there. The CityTelling Festival, however, breathed new life into traditions and shed light on aspects previously forgotten or unknown. Events such as the cantata *Peace, Peace...* gifted this place back to me. In March of 2023, I had a wonderfully uplifting experience. As dusk approached, I found myself

inadvertently following three young men heading towards the mosque. Checking the time, I realised sunset was near and remembered it was the Ramadan period. Seeing more people converging towards the mosque from the surrounding streets, I felt more at peace in Ramybės Park than ever before.

## FRUMA VITKINAITĖ- KUČINSKIENĖ/

Interactions with Daiva and Justina, which began in 2017, have enriched my life. They've always shown curiosity, sensitivity, and empathy towards me. The very first event of the CityTelling Festival in Ramybės Park already stirred deep emotions within me, as it engendered an extraordinary sense of unity when representatives from various faiths joined hands in communal prayer. I am filled with joy having been invited to converse with the younger generation, to share my experiences with them. It made me realise what an amazing generation has now come of age.

## IEVA ČERNEVIČIŪTĖ/

We are grateful to the teams at the European Capital of Culture and the 'Memory Office' for their immense dedication towards shedding light on the fates of Lithuania's Jewish citizens, the history and culture of the Litvaks, and the stories not only about the tragedy of the Jewish community in Lithuania but also about the lives of these people. We appreciate the efforts (sadly, met with some hostile reactions) in bringing to the forefront subjects that are seemingly perpetually discussed, yet remain alien to some. We also appreciate the impetus we were given to rethink our own experiences and those of our loved ones. Our sincere thanks go out to these programmes for having conversations with, and immortalising, Holocaust survivors within our community who, sadly, have since departed from this world. Thank you for providing an opportunity for the younger generation to meet and interact with these extraordinary individuals.

## AGNĖ DILYTĖ/

There's a difference between formally knowing the facts of war and genocide, perhaps gleaned from movies, books, or schooled lessons, and truly immersing oneself in the atmosphere of these historical events. Harnessing the power of the imagination, an artist's most potent tool, one can empathise deeply with the chilling aura, the fear, the smells, and live these events through the personal experiences of particular individuals. [...] What moved me profoundly was how, in those circumstances, people found the inner strength to assemble an orchestra, to perform or to come and listen to a concert. After all, each person involved was acutely aware that this could potentially be their final day, their final concert – a performance on the precipice of death.\*

## JUSTINA PETRULIONYTĖ- SABONIENĖ/

Throughout 2017 and 2018, we used to hold meetings with local communities in Kaunas and its surroundings. Winning their trust and persuading them that their stories were valuable proved challenging. In Bubiai, people said: 'What

\* Julija Račiūnaitė. 'Paskutinio koncerto aidas'. *Kaunas pilnas kultūros, 10 (50), October 2019, p. 10–15.*

# 2020

## The Galway Grand Opening that Didn't Happen

*#grand\_events #ECoC\_family #ECoC\_opening\_ceremony*

RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I'm on a plane off to Galway to attend the opening of the European Capital of Culture 2022. Truth be told, I've not been particularly enthusiastic about attending the ceremonies of other capitals of culture. Why? Because I've found all the opening events I've watched on TV until now to be quite underwhelming. Galway is a charming small coastal town. The Irish are a wonderful people whose way of thinking resonates with me. Regrettably, this time they did not think things through, scheduling the opening ceremony during the storm season – and right on the seafront. So, it was pretty clear from the night before that things would go badly, and by morning, they had gone very badly indeed. The storm Ciara roared in and blew the whole opening ceremony away. They had to call it off.

I remember the Mayor of Kaunas swearing, after visiting such an opening ceremony: why on earth do they hold these openings in January, when it's cold and windy? I couldn't agree more. If I had my way, I'd make the openings of the Capitals of Culture happen in March.

And so, with the opening cancelled, we set off to return home but managed to get as far as London. Ciara had wreaked such havoc that it caused extensive flooding across a thousand-kilometre radius and grounded all flights. I'm stranded, wandering around London, considerably disgruntled as the storm has disrupted my life. To add to the irony, the hotel I was staying in was named... 'Corona'. I'm not even joking.

Then a month will pass by, and another such 'Corona' will arrive, making the storms and chills of the capitals of culture's opening ceremonies seem merely like a gentle breeze on our backsides.

# Tales of the Beast of Kaunas Launch at Vilnius Book Fair

#communication #literature #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

We had to rush to publish the book by the time the fair came along. The stand was ordered, the presentation to the public planned, and yet, we were falling behind with public procurement! I thought I would have a heart attack! Eglė Petreikienė is editing the layout, discovering new errors every day... How many more will there be, I wonder... Virginija calls: 'Have you taken out the ISBN code for the books?' 'ISBN... what?! Curators often had to master things they had never done before in their lives. So you know how to write a book? That was the easy part of your job. Now try publishing it! Luckily, Eglė had extensive experience in publishing, and Indrė was tirelessly calling and emailing everyone...



Rytis Zemkauskas and Renata Bartusevičiūtė with *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas*

## EGLĖ PETREIKIENĖ/

My aspiration was for this publication to be of extremely high quality in every aspect. I was privileged to witness the talented duo, writer Rytis and illustrator Darius, in their creative laboratory, as they breathed life into fantastically beautiful tales. They motivated and complemented each other so well, even in the minutest details. Their sense of humour is strikingly similar too. I remember Darius drawing a fisherman's boat and casually pondering, 'Would Virginija mind if I named this boat after her?'

## DARIUS PETREIKIS/

I got really annoyed upon learning that I only had a month to produce the illustrations, and the printer was going to take two full months for the production of the book itself, because 'you know, we're dealing with hardcovers here'. I grabbed the calculator and quickly did the maths: I was expected to churn out 2.93 illustrations a day. Without taking a day off. I found myself drawing everywhere, even on a plane en route to a Christmas celebration in Norway. Flight attendants would occasionally stop by to peek at my screen. I was in the middle of drawing a curly-haired bicycle thief... 🖋️

## INDRĖ ALEKSANDRAVIČIŪTĖ/

Dealing with the printing house was a daily headache: the shifting deadlines, fluctuating costs, and at one point, our contact in the printing house simply vanished. We had to chase them up concerning the paper, the cover, the format, the colours, languages, translations... Our entire team's hair went grey and regained colour at least a few times. When the books were finally delivered – or rather, dumped on our doorstep – we mustered our collective effort and hauled the boxes in. It was only then that we seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. 😊



Darius Petreikis and Rytis Zemkauskas in the LRT 'Labas Rytas' morning programme studio

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

We had made it. The morning before the book launch at the Book Fair, Darius and I were sitting live on an LRT morning show. I don't remember what we were asked. All I know is that I was happy that LRT was our project partner because getting that kind of airtime for our book during the fair... most publishers would kill for that.

## DARIUS PETREIKIS/

Public speaking, whether on TV or to large crowds, is an absolute nightmare for me. 🙌 My mind goes blank, as if there's no room for any rational thought.

## EGLĖ PETREIKIENĖ/

That morning was truly memorable. I observed them both from the studio's backstage area. Rytis, a seasoned TV wolf, seemed completely at ease. Meanwhile, Darius, who finds expressing himself through drawings easier than through words, was visibly nervous, fearing he would be at a loss for words. But in the end, they both spoke non-stop, as if spinning like whirligigs!



*Tales of the Beast of Kaunas* launch at Litexpo Conference Hall

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

From the TV studio, we're making a mad dash straight to the book launch, and I'm thinking to myself: we've booked Conference Hall 5.1... will we manage to fill it? What if people don't show up? And then there's my ego squeaking away:

you've done three shows to a full house in this hall, and now you're about to flop... We start in a half-empty room. Kotryna Lingienė is steering the conversation, and I've also persuaded Daiva Čepauskaitė, as a good writer, to come along and give us some praise... slowly but surely, people start trickling in. Darius is showing slides from the book, telling some stories.

The crowd is swelling. I receive a picture on my phone: the President of the Lithuanian Republic himself is at our stand, leafing through the book. We discuss the Kaunas 2022 programme and how the book is our tool for showcasing it. The room fills up. We've succeeded. It's done. We hasten to our stand to sign autographs. 'Did the President buy the book?' I ask. He just flickered through it and put it back, Virginija tells me.



Lithuanian President visits Kaunas 2022 stand at Vilnius Book Fair

# 'Culturists'

*#community\_involvement  
#ECoC\_family #volunteering*

## MARIJA PULOKAITĖ/

When I agreed to curate the volunteer programme in 2019, all I had was a spreadsheet with 50 volunteers' email addresses. I knew that in three years' time, a grand opening ceremony was on the horizon, followed by a myriad of events, and all the major festivals were starting at that time. All the events slated for 2022 were still on the ideas level, so my questions about how many volunteers we might roughly need were met with amused smiles from my colleagues. I needed a starting point, so I began studying previous European Capitals of Culture. From all the pieces of information I came across, I derived an average number which gave me a sense of direction. That's when the development of the volunteer programme began.

On 5 March 2020, 'Culturists' (the volunteer programme) officially kicked off, inviting people to don a volunteer shirt and a bright orange jacket, to become hospitality experts, volunteer coordinators, good friends, true team members and simply good citizens, contributing to change within the city. We coined the term 'Culturists' for the volunteers because, with their exuberant energy and cultural 'muscles', they lifted the project and the city's cultural landscape to a whole new level. On 15 March, quarantine began in Lithuania.



'Kaunas Culture Workout'. Seminar for the Kaunas culturists community. 2020

## AGNĖ MEDĖKŠAITĖ/

When I joined the volunteer programme team, my main role was to maintain fluid communication and keep the community's spirit high. I couldn't have foreseen the number of spreadsheets, graphs, and colourful lists this role would encompass. I started working during quarantine, which meant that, for the first few months, all interactions with my colleagues and the volunteers were limited to email, social media, and telephone calls. We established a volunteer database and administration system to simplify the process whereby volunteers could find and sign up for positions during the title-holding year, when there would be a massive number of events taking place. This allowed us to see clearly who wanted to participate and then to automatically track their involvement. Gradually, I got to know the volunteers, communication became more streamlined, and I quickly began addressing the most active volunteers by name. I won't deny that, while setting up volunteer opportunities, I often felt the desire to register and swap my job for volunteering. Our culturists undertook a variety of tasks, from participating in film shoots or preparing for a performance in the forest to interacting with foreign artists or assisting backstage at summer concerts. However, the biggest challenge awaited us during the title-holding year's opening event.

## VITALIJA LYSKA/

I took on the role of volunteer programme coordinator for the Kaunas 2022 project during the pandemic, overseeing volunteer education and motivation. Frankly, it was a challenging start. I'm deeply committed to the idea that volunteering should be a well-managed experience, in which the volunteers are treated well, and this made me pay special attention to how the organisation treated its volunteers and their responsibilities. Moreover, the culture sector was an entirely new field for me! But I accepted this challenge, thinking: 'Well, that's precisely why I'm here, to ensure the volunteers' well-being.' And I'm happy to admit that I'm grateful to myself for making this decision.

The first team-building session with the volunteers was a slightly nerve-wracking experience. They didn't know me, and I didn't know them. Yet, I arrived with the invitation of opening a dialogue, sharing thoughts, and addressing challenges together. I was concerned about whether I would remember all the volunteers' names – there were so many of them! But after a while, I began joking that I could recall their names, and even their surnames, even if woken up in the middle of a night.

As the cultural sector began to return to normalcy, so did our volunteering activities. In the Kaunas 2022 project, these were as diverse as the project itself. Our volunteers assisted renowned and up-and-coming artists, helping them bring their creative visions to life. They engaged residents in a wide array of workshops and activities, took on roles in a film, showed our guests around the city, built international relationships with other European Capitals of Culture, and did so much more.



*'Kaunas 2022: Volunteering Programme Methodology'*  
(ed. Marija Pulokaitė, 2023).



*'Join the Culturists - Kaunas 2022 Volunteers', culturists sharing their volunteering experiences*  
(YouTube video, 2021).



# Pandemic. A Premonition of the World's End

#community\_involvement #crisis\_situations  
#pandemic #quarantine

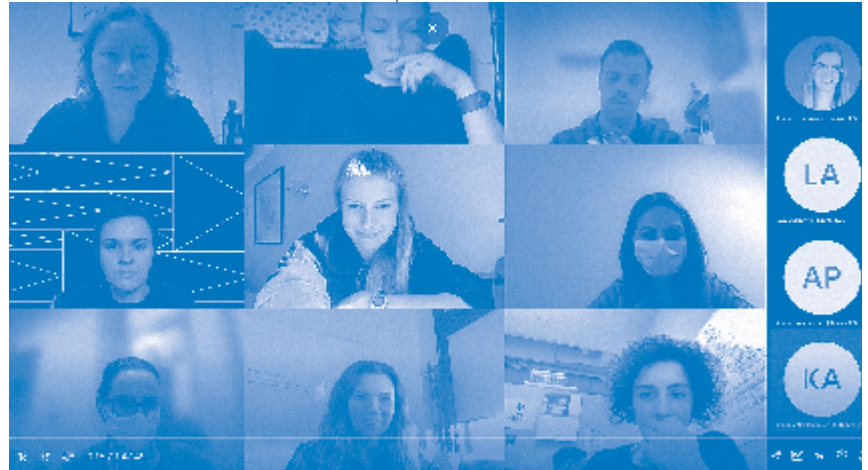
## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Quarantine is announced. I'm staying with my younger daughter in Šventoji. There comes a day when we're not even allowed to travel to Palanga – there's a police post blocking the road. Kaunas grows distant. The Capital of Culture is now condensed into my computer screen, where remote meetings take place. We fear the loss of our funding, as no one seems to care about culture right now. Everyone is talking about the death toll. 😞

I remember the uphill battle Virginija fought to secure our salaries from the municipality. I thanked her for this, on behalf of the entire team. Yet, there were so many instances when we didn't express our gratitude to Virginija for the numerous things this determined woman quietly accomplished for the team and her colleagues...

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

I still recall when the first rumours started to spread of Covid-19 infected individuals returning to Lithuania. With every passing day, the situation only grew more serious. Gradually, a number of events began to be cancelled. Exactly one week before the scheduled Day of Happiness, official quarantine was declared. The shockwave was twofold: not only did we have to cancel the Day of Happiness, but we were also grappling with understanding the magnitude of the situation, what the quarantine was, and its potential duration. We were immensely disappointed, as the image



Kaunas 2022 team meeting

campaign was already in full swing, featured on television and outdoor advertising, and the entire programme was mapped out, but we were forced to abandon it all. It was very, very sad.

Of course, it was great to see some of our partners adapting their activities to a virtual format, but we regretted that we weren't able to create another celebration for the city.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Throughout the lockdown, as the city's budget balance was still unclear, our computers were ablaze with additional spreadsheets. We must have revised and recalculated the annual budget and individual project budgets dozens of times. We were uncertain about how things would pan out, whether the project was even set to happen, or if the municipality, amidst the crisis, would be able to pay for the project. As circumstances improved, we gradually resumed our normal operations. The

pandemic tested the entire sector's ability to mobilise, yet many new excellent projects emerged that gained recognition all over Europe.

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ- PAUKŠTĖ/

Local communities responded by suggesting their own initiatives: they distributed, among the inhabitants of different neighbourhoods, plant seedlings that were sown and cultivated for the cancelled Day of Happiness; they decorated windows with cheerful smiles; they recorded creative videos, etc. When we came across photographer Gabija Vainiūtė's initiative to document people through their home windows, we invited her to capture the same spirit in Kaunas, with residents registering through an open call. This sparked the *Windows of Quarantine* exhibition, which further inspired Faro, a candidate city for the ECoC, to kick off the project 'Europe at Home'.

# ‘Culture to the Courtyards’, or How Kaunas 2022 Outsmarted the Pandemic

*#business\_and\_culture #community\_involvement  
#crisis\_situations #new\_longterm\_initiatives #pandemic  
#sponsorship #quarantine*

## GRETA KLIMAVIČIŪTĖ-MINKŠTIMIENĖ/

As the lockdown struck, our community programme was on a growth trajectory with activities expanding, the number of agents increasing, and the communities programme team growing larger. Amidst these testing times, we held daily team calls. It was during one such conversation that the concept of ‘Culture to the Courtyards’ (also repeated in 2022) was conceived. We faced many varied challenges.

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

Following the unfortunate cancellation of the Day of Happiness, we had to channel our energies and thoughts towards developing new projects. There was much talk that our funding could be suspended, so we focused on finding ways of sustaining our activities. The first initiative, as an alternative to the Day of Happiness, was ‘Culture at Home’ and involved sharing an assortment of film and book recommendations from a diverse array of individuals and partners via our social networks. That was all we could do in those times to keep our followers engaged and provide cultural content for people forced to stay at home.

Our collaboration with one of our main sponsors, Švyturys, was also put to the test. In return for their support, we committed to offering them marketing integrations. With quarantine restrictions in place, we thought of the projects we could propose to the sponsor that would ensure their brand remained prominent. The conversation with Laurynas Rėčkus sparked the idea of suggesting to Švyturys that they become our primary partner in organising musical performances in courtyards. Thus, the project ‘Culture to the Courtyards’ was born. We agreed with Švyturys that they would fund the performers’ fees, a delicate and important matter given that many performers had been deprived of their usual venues for some time.



‘Culture to the Courtyards’ concert. Šilainiai. 2020



Erica Jennings and Jurgis Didžiulis. ‘Culture to the Courtyards’ concert. 2020



*Official aftermovie of the  
‘Culture to the Courtyards’  
events in 2020.*

Once we had our list of performers finalised, I started calling them. Those conversations were amongst the most heartfelt and touching experiences I've had. The performers, pleasantly surprised by the invitation to perform in an apartment block courtyard, said they would be doing it for the first time and that they certainly couldn't refuse such an offer. I felt a huge contrast between how people communicated before the lockdown, when performers used to receive numerous offers and there was a lot of competition to secure someone, and during it.

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ-PAUKŠTĖ/

There was a great deal of uncertainty, and we often found ourselves walking the tightrope of quarantine regulations. However, we felt that solidarity and support were more meaningful than ever. Organising the first 'Culture to the Courtyards' performances, we felt like 'outlaws'. For example, only family members were allowed to travel together in a car, but there we were, Simona and I, on our way to prepare a concert in Neveronys, both of us wearing masks and medical gloves, and our hearts were racing with the fear of being stopped by the police. In the courtyards, we had to remind one another not to gather in groups and promptly sent home any local residents who happened to step outside. Information about these performances was discreetly shared only with the residents of the surrounding apartment buildings, with personal invitations being left by their doors detailing the event and requesting people to enjoy the show from the safety of their homes.

In organising the first 'Culture to the Courtyards' performances, we aimed to involve as few people as possible, in order to minimise contact. This meant we did virtually everything ourselves: from preparing the performance space to delivering invitations, ensuring safety measures and that people didn't gather in groups of more than 2 people. However, we received assistance from the locals in almost every courtyard. Some would bring a bucket and broom to clean our makeshift carpet-stage,



Marius Pinigis. 'Culture to the Courtyards' event. 2020

others took on the task of distributing invitations, organising electricity provision, and so on. We felt a lot of support in every courtyard we visited.

## INGA, AKADEMIJA RESIDENT/

We were in lockdown, so any kind of entertainment was an absolute delight. I recall we were asked to prepare flags. Some people painted their faces, others drew flags on windows; some hoisted a large flag, others waved smaller ones. My daughter and I waved flags from our window on the fifth floor. Our courtyard was recognised as the best decorated. Before the concert, I wasn't familiar with 'Girių Dvasios', the electronic music project, but I googled them and listened to their music in advance. It sounded interesting! From what I could tell from speaking with others, the neighbours enjoyed it too. People of all ages liked it. This performance lifted our spirits. One must learn to adapt to changing circumstances, and Kaunas 2022 did just that.

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ-PAUKŠTĖ/

The lockdown period was filled with challenges, yet it provided countless lessons and pushed the community programme forward by leaps and bounds. It became a stimulus for artists and performers to venture out into public spaces (such as apartment courtyards and parks) and explore new formats. The desire to perform for an audience outweighed perhaps the not-so-perfect technical execution, surface, or weather conditions compared to being on a stage. Culture moved from city centres out towards all neighbourhoods, reaching people who had previously not been, or didn't have the opportunity to be, consumers of culture. This period saw many informal encounters take place between local residents and artists, encouraging a mutual re-evaluation of preconceptions about one another, and about culture in general.

# Everyone in Lockdown, and Yet, It's Kaunas's Birthday!

*#artist\_engagement #community\_involvement #crisis\_situations  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement #pandemic #quarantine*

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

Inspired by the 'Culture to the Courtyards' project, the Kaunas City Municipality contacted us asking for help in organising the quarantine version of Kaunas's birthday in a similar format that would involve local partners and cultural organisations in creating performances in the courtyards of Kaunas's neighbourhoods.

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ- PAUKŠTĖ/

Throughout the day, in various parts of Kaunas – mostly in courtyards – around forty events are taking place: concerts, plays, dance performances, exhibitions, film screenings, and a festive dinner in the city centre and Old Town initiated by businesses.

Lockdown is still in effect in Lithuania, although restrictions have been relaxed. At this time, maintaining the continuity of the Courtyard Festival, dedicated to fostering community and neighbourhood spirit, seems especially important. On the other hand, people's health and lives remain our priority. We've had numerous discussions on how to navigate these priorities, and eventually decide to invite cafe owners from Laisvės Alėja and Vilniaus Street to set up the longest dining table, encouraging people to order food or drinks from the menu, reducing direct contacts and communal food sharing. We are fully aware that this set-up somewhat deviates from the original



*Kaunas Founding Anniversary  
2020 aftermovie by 'Kas vyksta  
Kaune' (in Lithuanian).*

idea of the Courtyard Festival (a topic widely discussed on social media). Still, the transformed Courtyard Festival under quarantine became an impetus for continuing collaboration with cafe owners, uniting Kaunas residents, communities, and businesses in a single celebration so that by 2022, the communal dining table, stretching down Laisvės Alėja, would be the longest and most colourful ever.

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

It was a monumental challenge, as we decided to organise over forty courtyard concerts amidst the quarantine. I remember the enormous planning schedules for Kaunas's birthday programme that wouldn't fit on my desk at home, so I had to roll them out like a carpet. Once it was over, I felt that I had accomplished a grand feat. The project was particularly challenging due to the need for coordination with the municipality, working remotely, obtaining permissions, the project's large scale, and the looming fear of the pandemic.

## IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

I can still vividly recall my emotional state. It felt like we'd been released from a cage. Everyone was bopping to the Baltic Balkans performance in the Šilainiai courtyard, as if they were trying to shake off and dance off the months spent in quarantine. It seemed as though Covid-19 would never return. After a long time, the city was teeming with people once again; it was vibrant and alive. We felt the urge to hug and greet everyone. What a buzzing party in the city it was.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

That was the most beautiful birthday celebration for Kaunas since the tradition began. Due to quarantine restrictions prohibiting communal food sharing, we transformed the tables set up on Laisvės Alėja, where we would typically share treats, into small stage platforms where communities and small groups of artists could perform. These formats, born over several months of quarantine and applied outdoors, in courtyards, and the city centre, later became traditional practices in Kaunas: in 2022, 'Culture to the Courtyards' organised over 70 concerts in Kaunas's courtyards, and both in 2021 and 2022, rows of dining tables draped in white tablecloths on Laisvės Alėja were combined with stage islands for community performances. Our wonderful team adapted to the pandemic restrictions within the space of two months, even while working remotely, and created event models that would come to be emulated across Europe. Galway 2020 and Rijeka 2020 laid off staff during the pandemic. Kaunas 2022 did not lay off any of its 47 employees. Not a single one.

Administratively, we were all working longer hours. Not only did we retain our staff, but also persuaded the city council to unfreeze a portion of the budget, as we had successfully implemented all planned events: The European Capital of Culture Forum was carried out remotely, so too was the Kaunas Design Event. Later, we held the CityTelling Festival, finding a format that mitigated pandemic risks, involving talking about memory through murals, a book publication, and a record release.

# Audience Development During Lockdown

*#accessibility #audience\_development #capacity\_building  
#culture\_community #pandemic #quarantine*

AGATA ETMANOWICZ/

We finished the first capacity-building programme in the autumn of 2019 on a high note with ambitious plans for the following year. The idea was not only to do another full-scale programme but also to work in parallel with those alumni from the first programme who were willing to do so in a 'training for trainers' capacity. But when 2020 came we all know what happened... Everything stopped.

To this day, I regret that we were not more persuasive and that we did not start the programme in an online format straight away.

We waited and waited and finally agreed to resign from the original plan. We decided to do an online edition focused on accessibility and online attendance open to any interested organisations from all over Lithuania. There was also a specific reason for doing this: the cultural offering online appeared to be even less accessible to audiences with disabilities than a 'regular' one.

On the one hand, a programme in this format was great as it gave us a chance to open up and communicate a message about working inclusively in an online (and offline) mode with audiences. On the other hand, I still feel that at the beginning of the pandemic, with all the uncertainty, it was more important than ever to bring people together and start the regular programme (just in an online version). To give people a chance to meet, to talk, to look for new tools, to understand the importance of strategising (especially in the face of what was happening).

All in all, we went from introducing the concept of A<sup>2</sup> (combining audience development and accessibility) to using various access tools for making online processes accessible to audiences with various disabilities (e.g., how to write Alternative Texts, create closed captioning, introduce sign language interpretation and audio description, communicate in plain language and make Easy Reads). A separate workshop module was dedicated to accessible websites and another one to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), since 'befriending Google' is directly connected with accessibility.

# The Monitoring Meeting

*#crisis\_situations #ECoC\_jury  
#European\_Commission #monitoring*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

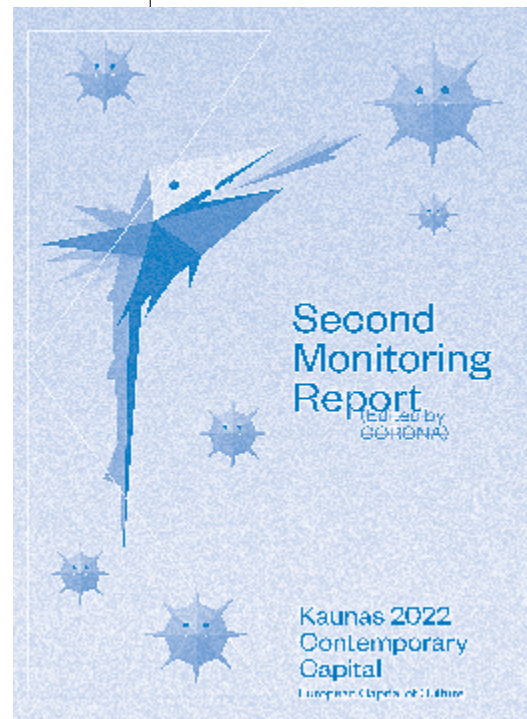
In May 2020, we had an interim monitoring meeting with the Jury of the European Capital of Culture programme. Every one and a half years after being awarded the title, the Jury evaluates the city's progress in executing its planned programme. The Jury's assessment determines whether the city will be awarded the EU prize of €1.5 million for the title-holding year. We were two months deep into the lockdown, which had begun in mid-March. After a long period of not seeing one another, we gathered in our office for a remote meeting with the Jury. During the two months of quarantine, conducting a self-reflexive analysis of our year-and-a-half of activities was a luxury we did not have. We worked tirelessly, day and night, to replan (with around 30 partners) our 2020 budget, cutting all expenses associated with international visits, residencies, and indoor events. The municipalities were still wary of any newly proposed events due to the uncertainty and fear of instigating fresh outbreaks of the virus.

We heard that Galway 2020 and Rijeka 2020, having just made an impressive start to their ECoC year, had put their operations on hold, their teams were suspended, and dismissal notices had been handed out to employees. I was overcome with frustration, verging on anger, about their chosen solution. In Kaunas, within the first two months of the pandemic and with just under two years remaining before our own title-holding year, we had already remade our annual plan, devised online modes of operation, and sparked up a completely new initiative entitled 'Culture to the Courtyards'.

We inform the Jury that we have already replanned our budget; that funding bodies have suspended some of the funds, but only temporarily (we are stressing as much as we can, with the municipalities' representatives present, that the partial suspension of funds is only temporary); and that we have created new operating models through digital services and non-contact events in the city's public spaces. We present an interim report, showcasing the incredible results achieved before the pandemic, and our updated plans for 2022 with an integrated crisis management plan in case of a pandemic. We explain that we do not intend to postpone the ECoC year, although all 2021 capitals – Novi Sad, Timișoara, and Elefsina – have asked for their dates to be reconsidered to move their title-holding years to 2022. The only issue we can mention as a short-term failure is the halted negotiations with potential private project sponsors. But even here, we reassure the Jury that our programme's success does not depend on securing private funds. We can implement one hundred percent of it without private sponsorship. The jury members could not believe our optimism and asked us three times how the pandemic would affect us. Well, it certainly wasn't the first time that we've seemed like hardwired fanatics to outsiders. 🤖



After presenting the interim report to the international Jury



'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' interim report. Cover design by Darius Petreikis



*Kaunas 2022 Second Monitoring Report to the European Commission.*

# Broad-Reach Communication Begins

*#communication #marketing #public\_relations*



Kaunas 2022 logo integration in CityTelling Festival. 2019

## MINDAUGAS REINIKIS/

I joined the Kaunas 2022 team in July 2020. I was forwarded the job advert by about ten of my acquaintances, all insistent that I should apply. At the time, I wasn't entirely sure what it was all about. Like many others, I identified Kaunas 2022 with the city's municipality team. This was only natural, considering that the broad-reach communications campaign hadn't been launched yet, and the team was primarily focused on engaging partners and cultural communities who were already in the know.

I joined my first weekly curators' meeting where everyone debriefed me about their activities. I then had the opportunity to sit down individually with each team member. The majority of these conversations had a recurring theme: 'I need an advertisement on LRT from Monday to Friday, from 9:00 in the morning till evening.' Of course, each project is equally important, in a certain sense. A

high-profile artist's exhibition is an excellent vehicle for promotion, but a project that involves a community in an active creative process, in places like Lapės, a courtyard in Šilainiai, or Linksmakalnis, arguably has a much greater impact, in terms of change, to that circle of a few hundred people who are involved. However, we had to become the 'bad guys', grappling with and conveying an uncomfortable reality to our other team members: not all events can be given equal publicity. Our decision was to let the major events drive the narrative, assigning them a higher priority. Understandably, this idea took a while to take root within the team. Everyone's project is like their baby, and hence holds utmost importance to them.

We promoted the aspects that were the easiest to sell, such as the tradition of hill climbing during the Fluxus Festival, while leveraging stories about community building during the festival for our public relations efforts, which helped us build up the project's broader narrative. Not aggressive campaigns, but rather consistent, long-term reminders, for example about the activities of the 'Memory Office' programme, generated so much interest that, in 2022, the programme's exhibition (*Out of Darkness*) was teeming with visitors – even in the absence of intensive advertising. This was the result of sustained communication output on the theme of memory.

We kept reminding the team that publicity measures needed to be adequate. For instance, the Fluxus Festival is targeted at a wide audience, and to attract even a small portion of Kaunas residents – about 5,000 visitors – a wide-reaching campaign is necessary. In comparison, for the International Forum of Design Networks, the 250 listeners that were sitting in Žalgiris Arena's amphitheatre probably made up this event's entire audience, which we reached using direct communication measures. Afterwards, the general public only needed to know that an important event had taken place and many interesting people had attended.

Our communication campaigns employed not only our own original content but also independent initiatives. For example, the museum, being created by Petras Gaidamavičius and Karolis Banys, and other modernism initiatives, greatly aided in communicating the narrative of the 'Modernism for the Future' programme.

# The Beast in Kaunas Castle

*#artist\_engagement #cultural\_sector\_involvement #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

On 25 July 2020, the Beast of Kaunas's snoring echoes from beneath Kaunas Castle's western tower for the first time.

You can approach it and listen. There are signs, which read:

'Here sleeps the Beast of Kaunas

Come closer to the hole in the wall and hear his snoring

If there is no sound, he may be gone somewhere – come again later

Be quiet...'

The soundtrack of the Beast's snoring was created by Paulius Kilbauskas.

## PAULIUS KILBAUSKAS/

There were no guest actors or sound effects. I simply sat in my studio for a few hours making snoring noises. Given my upbeat nature, I find it quite easy to delve into such characters – much easier than inviting someone else and having to explain things.

\*  
*Gunars Bakšjevs. 'Kas ten knarkia po Kauno pilimi?'. Kaunas pilnas kultūros, 9 (61), September 2020, p. 40–43.*



Beside the Beast of Kaunas sound installation in Kaunas Castle Tower

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

From a cost-benefit perspective, I consider this installation one of the most effective projects of Kaunas 2022. Coming up with the idea was a breeze. Let's make it so that children and adults alike, as they approach a hole in a rarely used derelict tower, will hear a snoring sound. That's it. Creating the soundtrack was also a breeze. This snoring only cost about 100 euros to make! And over the following three years, thousands have visited the spot and learnt about the Beast of Kaunas.

How exactly was the installation set up deep inside the tower? I won't tell you. All I can say is that the good-hearted little Beast of Kaunas does indeed have a den set up in there.

## JONAS VAIČENONIS/

I'm delighted that the Beast of Kaunas has found his home in the Kaunas City Museum, in the dungeons of Kaunas Castle. Thousands of people visit annually to listen to the Beast's peaceful sleep and snoring, often returning over and over again. We've had our fair share of amusing incidents as well. One day, when the museum was closed, the alarm went off. When the security officers arrived to check if everything was alright, one officer suddenly said: 'Hey, listen there's someone in there, snoring, how did they get in!?' We had to reassure the somewhat startled officer, explaining that it was the Beast of Kaunas residing there and peacefully snoring away in his sleep. It seems it had been quite some time since the security officer had last visited Kaunas Castle...

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Admittedly, the cost of the installation did go up slightly with time. The Old Town's local jobs had a knack for slipping through the bars to get inside the tower's pit, and stealing the snore. What they could possibly want to do with the snore was beyond me, especially given its aforementioned cost... Yet, they persisted, like little martens, until – with help from the Kaunas City Museum – we had to install additional bars. The signs directing people to the pit, too, had to be replaced several times for they'd either be torn down by stormy winds or else by stormy Kaunesians. In a nutshell, the cost did tick up a bit, but even so, it remained a trifling sum for such a popular tourist attraction.

## INDRĖ ALEKSANDRA-VICIUTĖ/

There was a time when Rytis himself ventured down into the depths of the tower, scouting out the ideal spot for the Beast's abode. Amid the stones, rubbish, and time-worn walls, a small podium was discovered, seemingly awaiting something special.

It was quite an interesting experience purchasing a 30-metre-long electric wire, and commissioning a mobile scaffold service, not to mention all heritage-related matters and permissions, for which it was not easy to articulate in bureaucratic terms what exactly we wanted to make...

Alongside the installation, the first events were taking place: presentations and readings, accompanied by all sorts of promotional initiatives. Kaunas's locals did not attend these readings enthusiastically, perhaps due to the sweltering heat of high summer, but those who came and read the tales found the experience enjoyable. Young people, culture sector workers, Kaunas City Museum staff, and passers-by – all of them took turns reading.





*The Last Concert*, director Agnė Dilytė. CityTelling Festival. Kaunas Cultural Centre. 2019



Blessing bestowed on the city and its citizens. CityTelling Festival. Ramybės Park. 2019





Concert by Future Cello. 'Culture to the Courtyards'. Raudondvaris, 2020

# Monitoring

#ECoC\_project\_management #monitoring

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Every European Capital of Culture declares clear project objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) already in its application, and later carries out the monitoring assessment of its impact on the intended spheres and its success in achieving its declared objectives. The methodology and timeline of this monitoring are also outlined in the application form.

The changes we sought to implement through the Kaunas 2022 project were primarily associated with the efforts to enrich residents' sense of identity, collective memory, and narrative, and to foster openness and participation in civil society, empower young people and communities, and enhance competencies within the cultural sector. Besides, like every ECoC organiser, we were interested in data that could demonstrate economic and social return on public investments in the project through the lens of tourism, the city's image and recognition, property value, etc. Thus, to be able to draw conclusions about how successful we were in implementing our vision, we had to select a partner capable of conducting a comprehensive and multifaceted impact assessment. We undertook this task in 2020.

## TADAS ŠARŪNAS/

An email lands in my inbox with an invitation to participate in the open call for public procurement of Kaunas 2022's cultural, social, and economic impact assessment services. It's forwarded to me by a former colleague, with whom I had previously worked at what was arguably Lithuania's strongest political analysis firm. Her note reads, 'This one's for you!' In keeping with consultants' etiquette, I ask her, 'Aren't you going to try? Shall we join forces?' She retorts, 'No way, I'm not suicidal.' Reading through the terms and conditions, I understand what she means. The subject matter is very complex, something I've had a taste of, having experienced the challenges first-hand. The primary focus is on data collection, which will consume four fifths of the budget. As a data analysis specialist, I'm aware that it's through this process that one can uncover genuinely valuable and non-obvious insights. I would have to compete against data collection agencies vying to offer the lowest prices for this project. Shutting my laptop, I say to myself, 'No thank you, maybe next time.'

But I spend the entire night wide awake, realising there won't be a 'next time'. When will another chance come along to research a cultural capital? It presents an opportunity to work on entrenched norms of cultural behaviour research. The survey conducted by the Lithuanian Council for Culture is important, undoubtedly, but its interest is overly bureaucratic, focusing on institutional results rather than people's lives. It's an opportunity to rethink what cultural interventions can and cannot achieve, and to attempt to quantify the invaluable. In my head, I run through all the scenarios of competition with potential opponents, none promising anything good. I know for certain that none of these opponents will advance our understanding of monitoring and analysis of cultural behaviour, let alone its impact. Opportunities like this for the cultural sector are few and far between. I wake up the following morning with a very clear understanding that I simply cannot afford to miss it. My hometown is calling again.

Whether an assessment survey has even the slightest chance of success, or whether it's doomed to total disgrace, usually becomes apparent during the first meeting with the client. In our meeting with the Kaunas 2022 team, I was very honest about my concerns. I shared my intuitions, all of which eventually proved to be accurate. The task seemed overly technical, and the question at hand overly philosophical. In such cases, there are

hundreds of ways to execute it, from a simple cash-grab 'by the letter of the contract', common in consulting, to trying to measure everything, ultimately finding out nothing. I had to find the golden middle where my professional reputation wouldn't suffer. I took on all the risks with enthusiasm. My instinct was telling me that this was a chance to accomplish something professionally that no one else had managed before. If not in terms of content, then at least in terms of form. We began looking for this appealing form from the very first day.

This pursuit was motivated by previously experienced failures. Initial attempts to measure the state of Kaunas's cultural sector, along with its residents' behaviours and attitudes, were interesting and offered a necessary understanding to the Kaunas 2022 office that helped them to plan their activities. However, the data gathered from these first trials didn't provide a statistically reliable basis for further assessment. Therefore, certain aspects had to be reworked. One such aspect was methodology. Previous inspirations of delving into the data-driven search for Kaunas's residents' happiness turned out to be overly ambitious. It was evident that in a country the size of a city, there wasn't enough know-how for realising these ideas. Neither would the research budget have withstood any attempts to realise them. This was also evident from the fact that the very authors of these ideas then wished to compete for their implementation. Hence, we focused on what was sensible and achievable. We aspired to conduct our research at a standard that was several notches above that which was being conducted in Klaipėda. The sociologist Liutauras Kraniuskas kindly contributed his ideas to our cause. During the preparatory years, no one has managed to surpass his research in this field. It doesn't matter. We still have time.



*'Kaunas 2022: Investigation Report', project impact assessment report (led by Tadas Šarūnas, 2023).*

# The Great Myth of Kaunas Trilogy. Worries and Fears

*#directing #ECoC\_opening\_ceremony #grand\_events  
#team\_relationships*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The pandemic was underway and, in the meantime, Kaunas was undergoing intensive roadworks. The city centre is being renovated, and we learn that soon the entire paving of the Old Town will be torn up for a complete rebuild. But will they manage to complete these renovations by 2022, the year when we're planning to host tens of thousands of tourists and official foreign delegations? No, we're told, they won't. 'Never mind about your Capital of Culture', 'Don't ask too many questions'. 'And anyway, with the pandemic ongoing, is there even any talk of tourists?' On top of that, construction work is set to kick off on Nemunas Island, adjacent to Žalgiris Arena. But that's where we are planning the grand opening! 'Well, you can plan all you want...'

As I mentioned previously, we have planned three grand events for 2022, the title-holding year, which together form the Trilogy. The first event is set to take place inside Žalgiris Arena at 20:22 on 22 January 2022. We're working on it with Vasily and already have preliminary visualisations. The second event is meant to take place on the water at Kaunas Santaka on 22 May. The final event – yet to have a confirmed location – is scheduled for around 22 November, leaving a month of peace and quiet before Christmas.

Collectively, these events are entitled 'The Great Myth of Kaunas Trilogy'. Act One: 'The Confusion' – the Beast of Kaunas awakens; Act Two: 'The Confluence' – the Beast of Kaunas appears; Act Three: 'The Contract' – the Beast of Kaunas stays to protect the city. The Beast of Kaunas symbolises the city's energy and vigour. We are that beast; we are that energy. The city as an animal, as a living organism.

First of all, a threat to the grand opening event arises. Under pandemic conditions, any indoor event is out of the question. People are even afraid of their own shadow, let alone gathering inside Žalgiris Arena. I tell Vasily that we need to move the event outdoors. Ana and Tadas agree. Tadas doesn't even like the concept proposed by Vasily, nor his visualisation or vision. Tadas holds very strong opinions about everything. So do I. We tolerate each other, but with little sympathy. I tell Vasily that we must revisit our entire approach in the team. I'm in Šventoji. Vasily, in London. Ana and Virginija, in Kaunas. Tadas is in Vilnius. Our bonds are weakening, especially given that a contract with Vasily hasn't yet been signed.

It's becoming clear that the opening ceremony will most likely have to take place outdoors near the Žalgiris Arena. And we must economise. Virginija once mentioned a certain amount of funding, but now she no longer talks about that amount. Vasily's ideas would involve great expense and, because of the pandemic, it's entirely unclear what budget we will have. I'm somewhat at a loss, as the situation is evolving rapidly. I can't shake the feeling that I'm not fully informed.

Eventually, Ana tells me they've hired a new director. He's very experienced. Who is he? A Brit named Chris Baldwin; he directed the opening of the Capital of Culture in Wrocław, and comes highly recommended. She says he's very good at working with communities. Tadas has already spoken with Chris, and he liked him. What can I say? I write to Vasily saying: I'm sorry, but we won't be working with you anymore. I feel that

half a year's worth of my work (as well as that of Vasily and his colleagues) has gone to waste.

Chris and I meet for the first time remotely in an online call. Ensnored comfortably in my large, white armchair, I sit with my laptop perched on my lap. Chris is polite, but seems not too pleased with my laid-back posture, even though I'm articulating our vision, which he will have to bring to life, in a friendly and patient manner. I mention the key elements, talk about the myth, the Beast of Kaunas, and tell him that I will forward all the necessary materials to him, such as schemas, tables and more. Chris suggests that it may be too much and asks for some time to think and formulate his own proposals. He doesn't respond to my mention of the myth or the Beast of Kaunas. Well, I muse to myself, we shall see. I forward everything to him anyway.

I feel it's important to acknowledge something here: my arrogant demeanour has irked my colleagues more than once. It's a flaw that I continuously attempt to curb, but it occurs unconsciously. From where, I wonder? I don't know. It's some infantile, childish part of me. I don't take pride in it, and I probably owe my colleagues several apologies on this account. However, there are times when I consciously turn to my arrogance, because in creative work, it's not always about politeness. If you always remain polite, soft and fluffy, the fruits of your creative labour could end up in a regrettable mess.

# MoFu 360/365. Alternative Narrative of Modernism

#architecture #audience\_development  
#Central\_Post\_Office #community\_involvement  
#Creative\_Europe #exhibitions #interdisciplinarity  
#international\_partnerships  
#Modernism\_for\_the\_Future

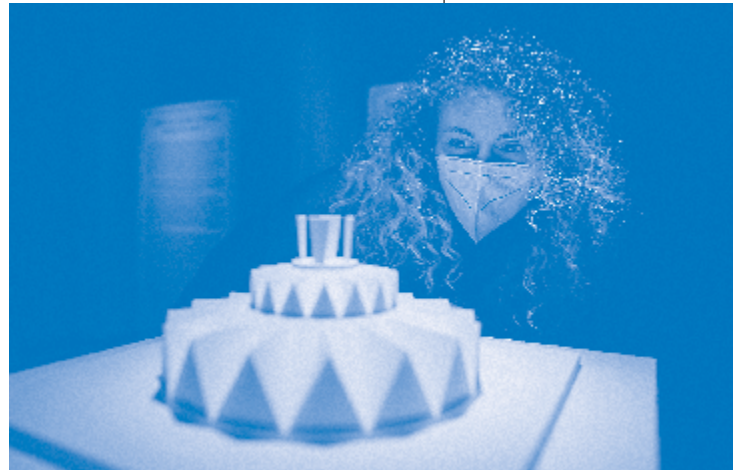
VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-  
PETRULIENĖ/

At the beginning of 2020, just before the pandemic erupts, we find out that we have won Creative Europe funding for our project 'Modernism for the Future' 360/365', which has become one of the highlights of the overarching 'Modernism for the Future' programme and the Kaunas 2022 programme as a whole. When talking about modernism as a phenomenon of the 20th century, examples from Germany, the Czech Republic and other cities, where the architectural ideas of this period were expressed in their purest form, are usually mentioned. However, small countries such as Lithuania – where modernism manifested itself in a very distinctive way, often intertwined with ideas of nationhood – also participated in this global phenomenon. So, in this project, we have brought together the cities of Kaunas, Kortrijk, Brno and Lviv, seeking to contribute to the narrative of modernism.

One of the project's important aspects was interdisciplinarity. Through an open competition, all project partners invited local artists from a wide range of disciplines to propose artistic ideas linked to specific modernist buildings and to give the local modernist narrative an appealing, dynamic and creative visual form. The result was dozens of artworks, in genres ranging from contemporary dance, architecture, design, visual art, sound and beyond, which reflected the often-uncomfortable stories of European modernism. These works were then presented in the buildings themselves.



Fragment from the *MoFu 360/365* exhibition. Curated by Viltė Migonytė-Petrulienė. 2022



Fragment from the *MoFu 360/365* exhibition. Curated by Viltė Migonytė-Petrulienė. 2022

The artists in the project worked in their own countries as well as in partnering ones. This aspect of the exchange was a challenge, because as soon as we had selected the artists, the first wave of Covid-19 began. Each of the 18 projects had to be reconsidered separately.

We have put a lot of emphasis on community involvement. For this, we had workshops and consultations with audience development expert Agata Etmanowicz. She organised meetings with each artist in the project, analysed the stages of their artistic project with them, and helped them to achieve interesting results: many artists reconsidered their project's concept, holding dozens of meetings with local residents, children, senior citizens and partner organisations, and collecting

various artefacts, which were then creatively incorporated in their projects. The projects' inclusivity has provided a significant and even very tangible value. For example, in Brno, the Kortrijk-delegated artist Erich Weiss worked on the administrative building of the Municipal Committee of the Communist Party in Brno, known as the 'white house'. In discussions with the local cultural community, the artist realised that a new cultural function could be invented or developed for this site. During his residency, he carried out a series of discussions and workshops with local cultural operators, which contributed to the fact that, after a few months, the building was permanently activated as a new cultural venue.

# Life Interrupted: CityTelling Festival II

*#Memory\_Office #pandemic #problem\_solving #quarantine*

## DAIVA PRICE/

In 2020, like the rest of the world, we were paralysed by shock. We encountered unexpected global challenges and experienced what we had only ever read about in history textbooks: an enormous uncertainty, fear for the future, and an insecurity that was gripping almost all of humanity.

I remember the onset of the pandemic as one of the most emotionally challenging periods of my life – upon returning from Israel, I was haunted by a fever for six weeks, ambulances wailed outside, the global media kept a grim tally of the growing death toll, Italy declared nationwide mourning, businesses went bankrupt, lives were put on hold... It was against this backdrop that the theme of the second CityTelling Festival emerged: 'Life Interrupted'. We invited reflections on what happens when our lives are abruptly interrupted by unforeseen disasters, such as wars, occupations, and pandemics.

The pandemic brought significant changes to our programme. Life had to continue... Even if it had to be with masks, disinfectants, strict registration protocols, and other regulations. We had to rethink our event formats, which gave birth to an array of street art projects and accompanying sound-art pieces. The pandemic compelled us to bring the faces and names of those in Kaunas and the towns of Kaunas District whose lives were prematurely cut short back onto the streets, through the medium of mural art. Thus Rosian Bagriansky returned with her mother Gerta, as did renowned Israeli and Lithuanian poet Lea Goldberg, along with the celebrated teacher, inventor, and Kaunas Ghetto photographer George Kadish (Hirsh Kadushin), Kaunas Ghetto policeman and child rescuer Yehuda Zupovich, and their friends. We wanted to honour those from whom we had inherited this city. We wanted to create a physical testimony that they had once been here, they had created, they had lived... Interestingly, thanks to the then-Israeli Ambassador Yossi Levy, photographs and videos of Lea Goldberg's work spread like wildfire throughout Jewish media worldwide. It was a great success for the project, validating our efforts as both significant and meaningful.



Street art mural dedicated to Lea Goldberg by Linas Kaziulionis

## JUSTINA PETRULIONYTĖ- SABONIENĖ/

Organising the festival during the pandemic-stricken year of 2020 presented us with a set of complex circumstances. For a long time, we remained uncertain whether it would take place at all, but we needed a plan in line with the safety protocols of that period. Our commitment to storytelling compelled us to continue this tradition; and good stories, as well as telling them, invariably require direct contact! Unexpectedly, while in conversation with one of the festival's participating artists, actor Paulius Tamola, we devised a novel way of adapting his and his colleagues' musical storytelling rendition of 'The Snow Queen' for a pandemic-affected world. We housed the actors in the Kaunas 2022 office behind its glass window, carried sound equipment out to Laisvės Alėja, and lined up chairs alongside the windows. How delightfully Paulius's laughter echoed down Laisvės Alėja, leaving many passers-by bemused as to its origin! We filmed and live-streamed the performance, creating a multi-layered event that could be enjoyed by those at home as well as by the curious bystanders gathered on the street. In my view, it served as an even deeper metaphor for the latter: they could see and hear the performance, but they couldn't touch it or get closer, separated by glass... How challenging it must have been for the actors to perform for two different audiences simultaneously, I can only imagine.

When we organised a similar event in 2021 (the musical storytelling performances *Cherry of Slabotké* with Dominykas Vaitiekūnas and *Quarantine Diary* with Eimutis Kvoščiauskas), we could finally accommodate the audience indoors, although masks remained a necessity. The turnout was so overwhelming that I was forced to keep the door shut – we couldn't fit any more people inside... That's how much we had all missed one another.



*CityTelling Festival 2020  
official aftermovie.*



# Meanwhile, in the Administration Office

*#administration #ECoC\_project\_management #staff*

## ŽIVILĖ STANKEVIČIENĖ/

I joined the team in November 2020, when the second lockdown had already been declared. The timing was less than ideal for being plunged into the whirlwind of administrative tasks, requiring familiarity with the team and the nature of each administrative employee's tasks and workload, let alone other aspects of work 'awaiting attention', such as policies, instructions, funding agreements, written and unwritten rules, and the team's ingrained traditions. 😊

I met Rytis on my first day. We greeted each other and he remarked with a cheeky grin: 'We have good people here, but they can be quite chaotic. Very chaotic, indeed.' 😊 You couldn't have put it more aptly.

From day one, I dived headfirst into the vortex of work: it was the last day for convening the general meeting of shareholders; changes in the institution's board were afoot; a colleague from the partnership programme was knocking on my door, seeking clarification on draft contracts and procedures for open calls; colleagues from administration were in a rush to obtain advice on initiating urgent public procurements; and there was a pile of contracts pending final decisions – a never-ending story indeed... 😊

During my first Tuesday's team meeting (held remotely), Virginija presented me to the team and gave me the floor. I introduced myself very formally, as if I were at a stakeholder meeting. The team seemed quite insular, almost as if they were living in their own bubble... My first impression was mixed. I realised that the road ahead would not be an easy one.

I was greeted by a small administrative team: the finance manager, Miglė, who also juggled personnel matters whenever she could; the office administrator, also called Miglė, who ensured a warm office atmosphere, handled visitors, and provided employees with necessary supplies; the administrator, Kristina, trusted with all critical matters and tasks; the manager, Irmantas, not only tasked with the institution's property maintenance (two substantial buildings) but also helping out during events (mounting,

gluing, dismantling, delivering, and collecting); and Rūta who looked after our office's cleanliness and order. Povilas and Lina were jointly responsible for monitoring project activities. Alongside monitoring, Lina worked on EU projects implemented by the institution. And, of course, the public procurement department with Kęstutis, the Head, and colleagues Egidija and Ignas. Together with our CEO, this team of twelve individuals were responsible for preparing and administratively managing the approaching 'Olympics' of culture.

That was the state of affairs at the end of 2020. By 2022, the highest number of staff employed at one time had reached 93, and the overall count reached 108 in 2022. Of these, 20 employees worked in the administrative team (ranging from cleaners to the CEO). The team had expanded slightly, but often it still seemed like we were understaffed.



Kaunas 2022 office

# 'LOKALI: Made in Akademija': The Akademija Community Shop Opens Its Doors

*#business\_and\_culture #community\_business  
#community\_involvement  
#Contemporary\_Neighbourhoods  
#Kaunas\_District #legacy  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives #regional\_dimension*

VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ/

We were in the second year of developing the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' projects across Kaunas District. Akademija's team had clearly identified two of their community's fundamental strengths: the diversity of locally manufactured products and the wealth of natural resources.

The 'Taste of Akademija' project, launched in 2019, inspired not only the creation of new products, but also rallied local producers in search of an integrated, sustainable, and inclusive business model. The aim of Akademija's project in 2020 echoed the primary objective of the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme: to build community, foster its creativity, and create a lasting impact. When I first heard about the Akademija community's ambition to establish a sustainable shop (!) driven by local producers, not merely a stall in some shopping centre, I confess I was startled and taken aback. Premises, interior design, furniture, a contract with local producers, cash registers, money, sales, taxes, advertising... Seriously?! My hair stood on end at the thought. The project appeared incredibly ambitious, in every sense of the word. Countless meetings, hunting for sponsors... Yet, against all odds, Kristina Šiožinienė, Daiva Gavrilčikė and Skirmantas Nominaitis performed titanic work, both in finding shared solutions for this project's vision within the community and in realising the result that, by the way, had been in the making for over a year. After long discussions with local residents, our team proposed a name for the shop, 'LOKALI: Made in Akademija', and designed its visual identity. It caught on instantly. I believe the support and endorsement given by the Mayor of Kaunas District was one of the critical factors in its success. Not long after, the pandemic bit hard, but the community stood firm (!). In November 2020, the shop opened its doors. I can only imagine the sleepless nights and the amount of excitement. The project is so fresh, the shop so beautifully designed, and its concept so right that I believe these people will overcome any challenge that lies ahead and continue to fulfil other cosmic dreams.



'LOKALI: Made in Akademija',  
community store in Akademija



*'LOKALI: Made in Akademija'  
sustainable community store  
(YouTube video, 2020).*

# How *Folds* Unfolded

*#administration #architecture #artist\_engagement  
#co-creation #community\_involvement #film #heritage  
#international\_partnerships #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future  
#open\_calls #pandemic #public\_procurement #quarantine*



## VILTĖ MIGOŃYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

It was an astounding experience, considering both the end result and the immense effort that it took for such a project to appear in our programme.

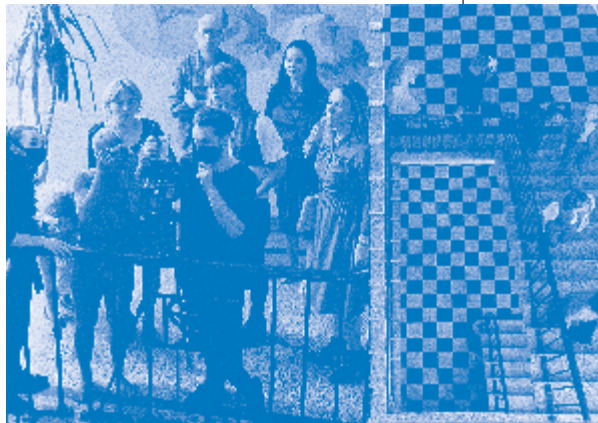
The original idea, as described in the bid-book, was to produce a documentary film (as a means of disseminating knowledge) about Kaunas modernism, which would showcase various interpretations of modernism on a global level. By aligning the Kaunas phenomenon with the experience of other modern cities, we aimed to introduce Europe to the uniqueness of our architecture. However, this format had to be changed.

Over six months, we, alongside Kęstas Kazulis, who was the head of public procurement at the time, and Virginija, crafted the public procurement documentation. We found ourselves in uncharted territory without any precedent for how to articulate or establish artistic criteria or formulate the stages of the project. Jovita Nalevaikienė, the then-administrative director, lent us her support, and we sought advice from Rolandas Kvietkauskas, the director of the Lithuanian Film Centre, and invited



*'Klostės/Folds' film website.*

1.



2.

experienced directors such as Andrius Stonys to contribute their insights. We announced the call for proposals which were then evaluated by an external jury, who arrived at the conclusion that none of the submitted ideas met the criteria or expectations. The proposed product's quality and its cost were worlds apart. We were saddened, wracking our brains.



3.

1-3. Filming *Folds/Klostės*. Directed by Aideen Barry

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We opened the submitted bid proposals when I was en route to Johannesburg. During a layover at Istanbul airport, I quickly skimmed through six or seven proposals in about half an hour. All of them were essentially for documentary series. It was disappointing, considering the time invested in preparing procedures and technical specifications. Why should we be bound by public procurement restrictions in commissioning an artistic product? After all, artists have certain exemptions in the procurement law. It was only after seeing the open call's results that I realised we needed to look for an artist. With a budget of €100,000 for this project, it might have been challenging to produce anything more ambitious than a straightforward documentary, devoid of any artistic challenge or creative drive, whereas, for an artist, such a sum represents a rare, perhaps even a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to push their boundaries. The first artist I approached with this idea was

none other than William Kentridge, the very person I was flying to Johannesburg to meet. As soon as we started discussing his new upcoming pieces and the concept of his exhibition in Kaunas, I proposed that he create a moving-pictures film dedicated to Kaunas modernism. He politely declined, explaining that creating new pieces for



his 'Drawings for Projection' required nine months of dedicated work (as many months as there are minutes), a commitment he was unable to make due to his demanding schedule of exhibitions and opera productions.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

I was really keen on finding a place for the talented Aideen Barry, an Irish artist who had previously participated in our events, to showcase her work here as well. I rang Virginija and proposed the idea of commissioning Aideen to create the film with us producing it. An ambitious endeavour, as we had never done anything like this before, the budget was tight, there was plenty of work and potentially mistakes ahead – it was a risky undertaking. After coming to a mutual agreement, we invited Aideen, who in turn refined the idea to incorporate a pivotal role for the local community. This marked the beginning of a two-year creative journey (in the middle of the pandemic!) which proved to be highly complex and remarkably interesting and whose goal was as important as the process itself: co-creation and learning together. The video project, a 67-minute, black-and-white stop-motion animation, took the effort of over 500 local residents and 60 professional actors to make, and was filmed in sixteen modernist buildings. The film, entitled *Folds*, first made its debut on the international stage, being featured at film festivals in France, Italy, Canada, the US and elsewhere. It was screened in Kaunas in September 2022 during the symbolic closing event of our modernism programme. We were eagerly awaiting the reopening of the Romuva, Kaunas's only non-commercial cinema. We initially scheduled the screenings for a modest three-day period (not anticipating that the film would garner so much attention), but following a complete sell-out, we ended up organising several more screenings. I believe this has proven one of the most successful ventures our team has embarked on to create new content for interpretations of modernism.

## AIDEEN BARRY/

My experience of my time in Kaunas and my time working on this project can kind of be summarised as a type of plait. One strand was the aspiration to make a moving-image love poem to the city, the second was to really tap into the history and heritage and to really be true to the subject of 'interwar modernism' and its legacy, and the third strand was to get the citizens of Kaunas onboard with the idea and to have them co-create this weave together.

I think the final strand was the most important part of this whole project for, without it, the project, the film and its legacy would not have manifested themselves. Without the commitment of nearly a thousand people who wrote, acted, played parts, gave their homes and permissions to use the buildings, made props, experimented with me through the moving image and costume workshops, composed the score, filmed, edited, designed the sound and performed the foley effects, we would never have had this beautiful work *Klostės/Folds*, and we would never have been able to fold together all the complex stories that needed to be told.

I will be forever grateful for this experience, as I am sure the world is too. For this plait has grown long from the crown of Kaunas. This weave has spread out across the world and has been seen by people in nearly all the continents of the world at film festivals, contemporary art centres, modern art museums, experimental lens-based media centres and academic institutions. I could never have imagined any of this and I am eternally humbled by the gift that was each and every person's contribution. I would sincerely like to thank the Kaunas 2022 team, in particular, who were the invisible ingredient that made it all run so smoothly. It's not easy to manage the logistics of so many people who wanted to be involved and to make sure that each of those people felt valued and appreciated. I think that was largely down to the skills of the curatorial and administrative team that helped to manifest this complex tapestry.

I will never forget that first week in Kaunas in March 2020, when the pandemic hit and I had to abruptly change every single plan to consider how I was going to make this film happen, the logistical nightmare that had been presented by Covid. I remember

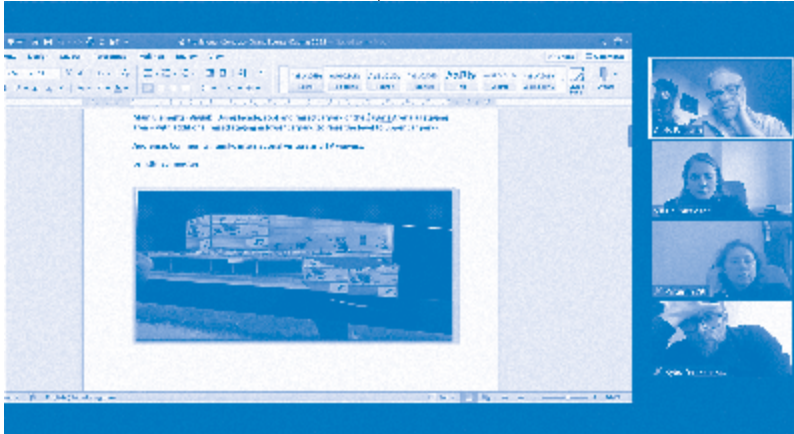
thinking, 'Can I direct this film from my home in rural Ireland?', I really wavered about the daunting challenge. However, as we started to move the workshops online via Zoom, the numbers engaged in the project rapidly increased. Perhaps it was that we had a captive audience? Perhaps it was that everyone had come to the end of the content on Netflix and was bored? Who knows for sure, but I could never have imagined that within those workshops with children, young people, story tellers, cake builders, and costume makers that the kernel of ideas was growing just like a strand of hair and that these ideas would become the threads of this great mane that ultimately became our project. Along every strand of this journey were the team who kept me going and were the optimism that the project needed. They are the optimism for the future that the project was built upon, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart for their guidance and support all the way through this project.



Filming *Folds/Klostės*. Directed by Aideen Barry

# The Great Myth of Kaunas Trilogy. The Script

*#ECoC\_opening\_ceremony #grand\_events #team\_relationships*



Discussing the Kaunas 2022 grand events

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The planning of the Trilogy's events continues apace. I am concerned. Chris methodically refuses to begin working with me on the opening event's script. He insists he needs the music first. Why? Because that's how he works. He has made several visits to Kaunas and keeps in touch with Tadas and Ana. They are planning something, technical preparations are in full swing, their team is expanding, they are analysing both sites, Žalgiris Arena and Santaka, since Chris will be directing both events. Both? Is it

actually OK that he will be directing both events, I ask my colleagues. It's more efficient this way, he already knows everything, there's less bureaucratic hassle... Why are you fretting?

Chris dislikes and avoids the theme of the Beast of Kaunas. He tells me directly: 'The Beast is fearsome.' I object, suggesting that, on the contrary, the Beast is friendly, open to various interpretations, and does not have to play a significant role in the opening show. He merely awakens at this stage; a mere few seconds about him would be enough: read this, look here... Chris turns a deaf ear.

I don't understand what's going on. From our conversations with him, I sense that Chris doesn't think I'm professional enough. Perhaps it's my arrogance... or the fact that I'm younger... I keep trying to tell him that although I've never produced a massive open-air event, I've spent years writing scripts for the highest-rated shows on LNK (one of the major TV channels in Lithuania), including those that took place outdoors. I teach narrative construction at a university... in English... Moreover, even the script for the Žalgiris Arena's very own inaugural ceremony was mine... He seems unmoved. I don't know what to do next. I feel that Ana, Virginija, Tadas, and Chris are working without me, that they don't really need me. 'Am I still a scriptwriter?' I ask Virginija. 'Of course, this whole concept was your brainchild'. But Chris doesn't want a script from me! Can he manage the show? Will he articulate our values? Is he professional enough? 'Well, he did a good job in Wrocław...'

No, I think to myself. I must at least build the dramatic structure. Otherwise, he might come up with something else, who knows what. And nobody will understand a thing.

I tell this to Chris. Just the basics, no frills, grumbles Chris. In his day-to-day interactions, Chris is a very pleasant person. Everyone likes him; he never gets angry or raises his voice...

I sit down and draft a dramatic structure following all the tenets of Aristotle and Shakespeare. My scheme is textbook-worthy. I send it to him.

Chris falls silent. 'Fine, fine', he says. 'I'll take this as a guide'.

# 2021

Everything You Wanted to Know About Administration But Didn't Dare to Ask

## Planning and Accountability

*#administration #ECoC\_project\_management  
#financial\_control #funding #working\_with\_authorities*

KRISTINA LASKAUSKAITĖ/

Our institution conducted operations and administered funds in line with our strategic plan. Each year, we signed budget agreements with our financial backers, which were updated every quarter. In the 2020 budget, the funding was broken down according to programmes and funding quarters.

A significant change transpired in the 2021 budget. With the funding nearly tripling (for comparison: in the 2020 budget, the planned funding from Kaunas City Municipality and government funds was €1,387,733, whereas in 2021 this increased to €3,970,590), our financiers demanded all planned expenditure to be broken down into smaller categories. Thus, the budget was segmented into programmes, then into measures and projects, detailing specific categories of expenses and the precise amount projected to be spent on each (for instance, licensing fees would be €100, press €500 and so on, adding up to a total of €3,970,590). In 2022, we continued this detailed approach, meticulously planning the allocation of around 14 million euros. The planning and breaking down of funds into smaller expense categories was consistently undertaken by approximately 15 curators, coordinators, and department heads, responsible for implementing the activities of Kaunas 2022.

All detailed budgets were signed and approved by our financial backers, and we were obliged to adhere strictly to them. It is noteworthy that when these financial plans were drawn up, the majority of the public procurement procedures, following which the exact service prices would become known, were still pending. And it was only after signing these budgets that we would (or wouldn't) receive permissions to carry



Kaunas 2022 office

out various activities or events, artistic concepts would become crystallised, and the resources needed to implement them would be identified. Therefore, executing a cultural project of this scale, which involved implementing over 3000 activities and events in 2022 alone, meant that adhering rigidly to the financial plan laid out in the budget was incredibly challenging, if not entirely impossible. Even the slightest deviation from the budget (for example, spending €630 instead of the planned €650 on photography services, or allocating €310 instead of the planned €300 for event equipment hire) had to be justified by naming specific circumstances that may have prompted it. Our colleagues and programme partners – professionals in the cultural field – gradually turned into administrative specialists.

# ŽIVILĖ STANKEVIČIENĖ/

In my view, due to our project's core idea, objectives, funding model, and the diversity, nature, and intensity of its activities, Kaunas 2022 cannot easily be compared with other public cultural sector institutions, which tend to be more specialised and operate within specific fields. Well-established institutions within the cultural sector have the advantage of assessing their accumulated experience, refining internal control processes, dedicating more time to adapt new procedures to institutional needs, and setting longer timeframes for team formation and strategic planning.

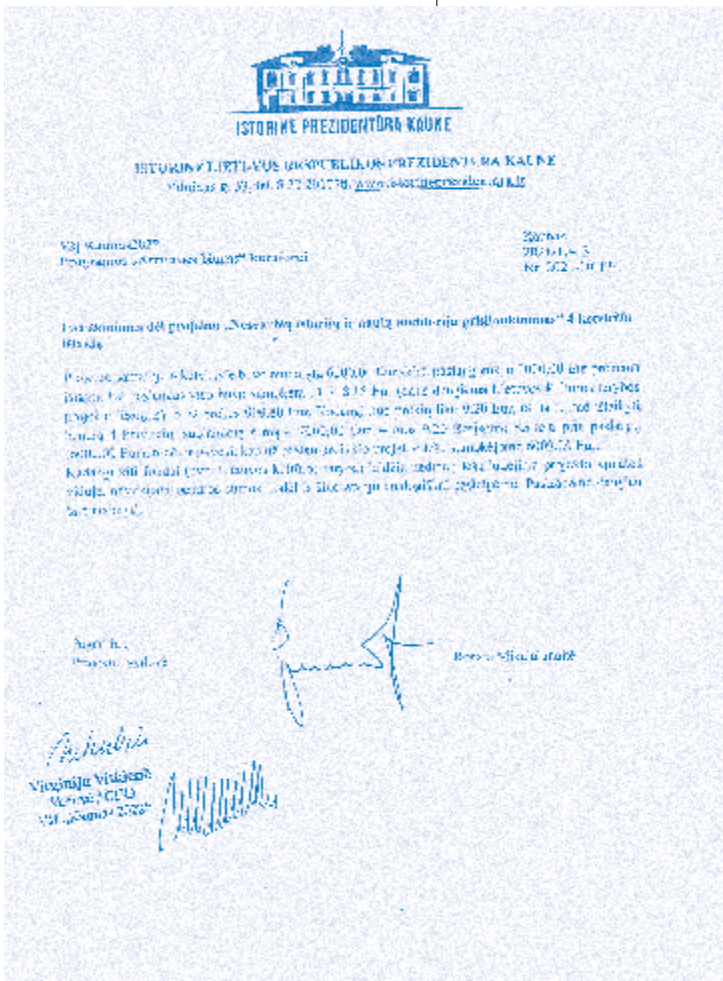
Often, our curators and project partners were left frustrated by excessive bureaucracy and the need to provide detailed justification and clarification regarding unused or reallocated funds. On my end, I would wonder, sulkily, why it was so hard to plan everything

in advance, in greater detail, and why in certain cases justifications had to be requested several times over. From my standpoint, the need to provide a detailed account concerning the received funding seemed to be self-evident. However, the creative team frequently perceived this as a burden imposed on them. Understandably, the programme curators and coordinators were fully absorbed in their events, activities, and projects. Despite our differences, we tried our best to understand and help one another. Our administrative team served as an intermediary link between our financiers, the city's Control and Audit Office, Public Procurement Office, and our creative team.

# KRISTINA LASKAUSKAITĖ/

Administrative paperwork, spreadsheets, and the requirement that documents be countersigned naturally evoked resistance, even a certain sense of trepidation, among colleagues. Therefore, my personal aim while working in the administration, albeit within my narrow sphere of responsibility, was to present the increasing burden of control over processes within the institution to the curators in the most straightforward and comprehensible way possible, as well as to be available and always ready, collaboratively, to review their curated activities' budget execution and seek the most effective solutions. In other words, I tried to portray the growing administrative accountability measures and increasing number of obligatory Excel spreadsheets, all being mounted on top of the numerous organised activities that curators were in charge of, as a non-threatening and collectively surmountable challenge.

Always remaining strict and following rules to the letter would have not allowed us, in the administrative office, to collaborate with the creative staff and achieve our shared goals. Even so, our existing administrative procedures called for precisely such strict relationships and order.



Official letter regarding the use of project funds, written by Renata Mikalajūnaitė, Director of Historical Presidential Palace

# Everything You Wanted to Know About Administration But Didn't Dare to Ask

## Staff

*#administration #quarantine  
#team\_relationships #pandemic  
#staff  
#ECoC\_project\_management*

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Over a seven-year period, the Kaunas 2022 team grew and evolved. Shortly after the institution was founded in 2017, we employed about ten people: a CEO, an accountant, a public procurement officer, programme curators and a communications officer. By the autumn of 2018, a year and a half later, when we were moving into our new office in Laisvės Alėja, there were 27 of us; we had outgrown our office even before its renovation was completed. By the time the pandemic struck in March 2020, we had become a team of 47: we didn't lay off a single employee or reduce any salaries because our operations (including remote work, replanning, cancellations and the introduction of new initiatives) were more intense in terms of effort required than before the pandemic. We entered the title-holding year with 86 staff members and, during the peak of our activities in September 2022, the number of staff across our three offices reached 93 employees. At the beginning of 2023, there were just over 40 of us, but by April we were left with fewer than 20 employees (administrative and communications staff who were mainly working on archiving), and in July this number dropped to 10 employees (solely administrative staff). And in September, the last of our offices will close and we will return the keys.

Thus, the dynamic of hiring and firing is akin to a tidal ebb and flow. The growth and decline of the workforce was a natural part of this project's processes. However, in such intense and complex projects, not all staff



Kaunas 2022 team with the 'Kaunas 2022 babies'

departures come about naturally. Although some colleagues, upon leaving the project, would often say they had done everything they could, and that things would carry on without them, this was often a painful untruth. Premature departures always created tension for the remaining team members, who had to take on additional work, as it became impossible – at the height of the project – to fill some positions with people from outside the institution. It would typically take about six months for any new person to understand how the organisation functioned, and about a year to feel fully conversant with everything. Therefore, team formation and motivation are crucial conditions for project success and sustainability.

One of the most positive elements related to team turnover has been the Kaunas 2022 babies!!! Between 2018 and 2023, 17 babies were born to our team's families (try and beat us if you dare!!!). 15 of them were born to the women of our team, which in Lithuania means stepping back from events for at least 1.5–2.5 years, and in the project's final year this meant for good. Project managers, prepare yourselves for this joyous stress – you will have to find solutions to it too! 😊

### ŽIVILĖ STANKEVIČIENĖ/

One of the greatest challenges in implementing such a project is posed by its temporal nature. Given the increased

staff turnover with only a year remaining until the project's conclusion, finding and attracting professionals in relevant fields proved very difficult. This was true whether we were seeking administrative

staff, or public procurement specialists, or a head of finances. Furthermore, the project's intensity drastically shortened the onboarding process. What one might normally grasp within three to six months in a standard organisation, here, had to be grasped within one to three months – time was simply not on our side.

### ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

While many in our team would say otherwise, I'll always maintain that open dialogue (albeit against the backdrop of rigorous financial control) and horizontal organisational structure characterised our institution. Much of our work experience came from the NGO sector, and this was felt in our approach both to operations and to relationships within the team. As the Head of International Relations, I was personally responsible for laying out the strategic objectives, actions, and budget for international cooperation. Later, as the Head of the Programme Department, I would occasionally carry out planning on behalf of the curators. Curators independently managed the initiatives and budget of their respective sections of the programme – just like small NGOs within the larger structure of the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution. Inter-programme collaboration was quite common, with almost every festival organised by our institution featuring integrations from various programmes. We held curator meetings every week, and once a month we had meetings for the entire, ever-expanding team to discuss the activities within each part of our institution, programme updates, challenges, and key decisions made within our institution and stakeholders' offices. This communication routine, I believe, was the linchpin that determined our organisation's internal health and served as a conflict prevention measure.



# Everything You Wanted to Know About Administration But Didn't Dare to Ask

## Monitoring, aka 'What Have You Accomplished, Folks?'

*#administration #data #ECoC\_project\_management  
#impact\_research #monitoring*

### MIGLĖ MORKŪNAITĖ-VERVEČKIENĖ/

In the spring of 2021, right after I joined the team, I was paid a visit by a student who wanted to learn more about the specifics of our project's monitoring processes. As a novice, I explained enthusiastically how smoothly and confidently everything was being run (programme activities weren't yet in full swing, plus there was the pandemic situation). However, as our calendar started filling up with events and activities, I would often chuckle thinking back to that interview. I realised that I'd been a bit too quick off the mark, and only now am I able to draw more informed conclusions. The reality is that the smooth and reliable functioning of the monitoring department requires a significant amount of effort, and even then perfection is never guaranteed.

In Kaunas 2022, monitoring functions in the following way: every month, curators and coordinators report on their activities and provide plans for the following month via a dedicated online platform. Representatives of our programme's partners submit their quarterly reports by filling out special report forms. The monitoring specialist then gathers and submits the provided data to the municipality, with written reports submitted monthly, supplemented by quantitative data once every quarter. At the end of each year, comprehensive annual reports are prepared, presenting a summary of year's activities, consolidated data from different programme strands, and an assessment of achieved outcomes. Outcomes are assessed based on the objectives set at the beginning of each year. They include specific key performance indicators and assessment criteria.

A key challenge for the monitoring specialist is to ensure that the information is submitted correctly and on time. Subsequently, all this information is collated, processed, and presented by filling out specific report forms. This workflow necessitates continuous communication with other team members in charge of organising events and activities.

It took us around two years within the Kaunas 2022 team to develop our own monitoring system which gradually enabled us to simplify and streamline the process of data collection. Admittedly, there is always room for improvement, for making processes run faster and more smoothly. However, we have come to believe that this system is effective and necessary as it can provide the foundations for any external project impact studies, performance analysis and evaluation, and can prove instrumental in future projects.

# Everything You Wanted to Know About Administration But Didn't Dare to Ask

## Public Procurement

*#administration #crisis\_situations #ECoC\_project\_management #financial\_control #public\_procurement #transparency*

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The whole public sector in Lithuania (and beyond), must adhere to the Public Procurement Law when organising its activities. A peculiarity of Lithuania is that procedures, such as procurement initiation, preparation of technical specifications, conducting provider surveys, creation of price comparison certificates, etc., are mandatory for absolutely every procurement of goods or services. As the programme creators and coordinators manage their activities independently, composing an annual procurement plan aimed at consolidating procurements of similar groups and services often proved challenging and frequently required adjustment. When activities began in 2018, including procurement of artistic, expert, or even technical services, against the backdrop of growing administrative needs, we found ourselves facing a deadlock in terms of competencies and human resources. A breakthrough occurred with the arrival of Kęstutis Kazulis and the implementation of a digital public procurement system. The majority of the team was subsequently trained to plan in advance, to initiate and correctly draft technical specifications, and to oversee the administration of signed contracts, ensuring that services met specifications and costs set out in respective procurement agreements.

### ARTIOM VALUJEV/

During my job interview, Živilė and Virginija outlined the institution's public procurement situation, which certainly didn't appear inadequate. In fact, Kaunas 2022's use of a digital public procurement system was a major advantage. This system allowed for a smooth procurement process and traceability of completed procedures. The then-upcoming 'Confusion' event allowed me to get to know the majority of the team in a very short time and also revealed the primary challenges of public procurement procedures:

- Some purchases are inherently difficult to plan in advance for objective reasons;
- Specification of goods or services (including those already purchased) often need modification due to the nature of services procured;
- Defining and describing the subject of procurement often proves complicated;
- A high volume of procurements necessitated by large-scale events;
- Contract administration.

All this underscores the importance of planning, even if this can prove challenging at times, and of course, communication and discussion. 😊

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

During 2021–2022, when major purchases, including the international ones, were in progress, with procedures lasting from a month to half a year, our procurement department consisted of five staff members. Around 40 employees, representing half of our entire staff, were initiating and overseeing procurement procedures, which amounted to over fifty percent of their total workload. We attempted to calculate the cost of procedural transparency, considered excessive in cases of low-value procurements or procurements of artistic or expert services. Salaries alone would have amounted to around €800,000 throughout the entire period, not to mention most services' corresponding to higher-than-average market rates. Particularly after the pandemic, the quotes offered by competing event technical support companies were startling, given that there was in fact so little competition in the local market due to immensely increased demand. We made efforts to ensure that our calls for tender were also appealing to foreign providers.

Throughout the project, we implemented around 5,000 procurement procedures. In recognition of our efforts, we received an award in 2021 for being the most progressive digital procurement organisation in Lithuania!



Kaunas 2022 office

# The Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy. Music

#grand\_events #music #shows

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Chris informs me that the composer Antanas Jasenka is joining the Trilogy team. I'm thrilled. Antanas is an old acquaintance, also very talented.

## ANTANAS JASENKA/

The invitation to compose music for the grand events was quite unexpected. But it was a pleasant surprise. It is a considerable yet enjoyable responsibility to be part of an historic event. I welcomed the news that Kaunas had been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture with joy. But what fascinated me most of all was the consolidation of all forces – both political and social – within this project. I realised that our country had mature and thoughtful creators, propelling our nation forward through our culture and history. Realising such grand ambitions is no small feat; it demands thorough preparation, attentiveness, and teamwork. All of the positive aspects, visible only with hindsight, will surface. The accomplishments of Kaunas 2022 are monumental, ranging from world-class exhibitions and renowned guests to the organisation of concerts, the fostering of community cohesion and the concept of a communal table being introduced on Kaunas Laisvės Alėja.



Antanas Jasenka. Recording the *Šaipėrantas* symphony. Lithuanian National Philharmonic. 2021

Inspired by the creative process of my fellow composer Zita Bružaitė, who created music for Kaunas 2022 closing event, I too began writing two major works for 'The Confusion' and 'The Confluence'. After reviewing the script, I decided to use a symphony orchestra, vocals, and the rock band ROYCE.



Recording the *Šaipėrantas* symphony for Kaunas 2022's grand opening. Composed by Antanas Jasenka, directed by Modestas Pitrenas, sound editing by Vilius Keras. Lithuanian National Philharmonic. 2021

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

We connect online and have a chat. Once again, I go through our project's core ideas, much like reciting a well-memorised poem, a routine I follow with every newcomer. I explain the activities of each of our programmes, emphasising that our project is educational and community-based, that the myth is meant to empower people to create, that the Beast of Kaunas is a symbol of creativity, a versatile tool, not to be interpreted straightforwardly but rather as a metaphor, that he only needs to appear for a mere few seconds.

## ANTANAS JASENKA/

During the early stages of my creative journey, I was keenly interested in noise music, futurism, electronic music, and modernism. Somehow, I settled on consonance in my creative practice. Working in theatre in Lithuania and

Europe with directors such as the late Eimuntas Nekrošius, and Oskaras Koršunovas, Yana Ross, and others taught me to seek balance in musical decisions and appropriate creative codes through text, action, and visual arts, and to search for elements in various art forms that correlate with music. Choosing direction, harmony, rhythm, melody, colour, and structure is arguably the most crucial part of the creative process and the greatest responsibility. This makes the conceptual script essential in organising

concerts of such scale; it becomes the foundation for everything that will be presented on stage. The message to the audience, to the listener, is the primary code in events.



My message in music and painting is often about posing a question to myself. I have developed and unlocked the following model of thinking: Shakespeare, in his play 'Hamlet' asks, 'Who am I?'; in Ibsen's play 'Peer Gynt', the main character responds with 'I am myself'; now in the 21st century, I ask, 'What does it mean to be oneself?' Here I find fodder for creative thoughts, inspiring me to search for an answer through music and painting. So, in both 'The Confusion' and 'The Confluence', I did not shy away from this formula of thinking. I think that entertainment culture is a good thing, but the audience is educated and prepared, desiring a non-toxic product. Therefore, while creating music for these performances, I chose to put forward my position in the form of a question: who are we, what do we aim for, what have we learned, and where are we heading? The ancient Greek saying 'bad music destroys states' is very accurate. Therefore, in my profession and creative practice, I remain a representative of existence and quality in sound and visual art.

The scripts of 'The Confusion' and 'The Confluence', penned by Rytis Zemkauskas, speak directly to issues of identity – our personal identity, national identity, our country's identity, and who we are when we exist. This is how I found an ideological friend. We are a generation of existentialists.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Antanas gets to work. He says we need a choir. Why a choir? Well, how could we not have one? Chris wants a choir too. But we don't have a detailed scenario yet! That's fine, you see, we first need to write the music, and the choir is a significant part of that. Besides, the choir is already booked.

But how can one compose music in the absence of a detailed script? This isn't an opera production; this is the opening of the European Capital of Culture. Look, we have a dramatic schema, a story we want to show at the grand opening: about the city, our values, our history, myth, creativity, Europe...

Yes, yes. We'll write the music and then... But right now, we need a choir. Don't worry though, the choir won't be that audible, words are not that important.

What do you mean, 'words are not that important'???

Let me put it bluntly, these matters remained a mystery to me. It seemed to me back then (and now I'm convinced of it) that the house was being built from the roof down. I would experience this later once again, when producing the 'Confluence' show, but there at least I managed to tame the chaos.

Alright. If you insist on having words that aren't important, I propose using Pranas Morkūnas's Dadaist poetry. Morkūnas, an interwar modernist (and communist) from Kaunas, was known for his irony, eroticism, and chaotic style, and, I think to myself, absolutely no one will be able to understand his texts. At least they won't get in the way. Antanas reads Morkūnas's texts and gets fascinated. 'Superb,' he says. He even names the whole piece after Pranas Morkūnas's poem, 'Šaipėrantas'.



*'Šaipėrantas' symphony by  
Antanas Jasenka (2021).*



Nejau galvoji, kad užmarščiau.  
Kas užmiršta, tikrai nuplove.  
Laiga atgyja vaizdas vėl iš pelenų.  
Tikrai tikrovė, ryški tikrovė.  
iš būsimu, dieni.

*Life Interrupted*, street art mural by Tadas Vincaitis-Plūgas.  
CityTelling Festival. 2020





Filming *Folds/Klostés*. Directed by Aideen Barry





The Beast of Kaunas sculpture





# The Saga of the Beast Sculpture

*#art\_in\_public\_spaces #artist\_engagement  
#legacy #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas #mythology  
#public\_space #sculpture #technical\_production*

RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

There is a crucial element in the Myth programme that has been troubling me for two years. I'm not even entirely certain what to call it: the Beast object, image, balloon, kite? All these 'formats' have been considered at various points. The original idea, as outlined in my vision, entailed the Beast appearing during the second Trilogy event. His 'emergence' takes place. How? In what form? Where?

Perhaps he should arrive by air?

Even before the conception of beasts, myths and Kaunas 2022, Virginija had been captivated by the most peculiar hot-air balloon in the world, created by the Australian artist Patricia Piccinini. I was rather fond of it myself. I made Patricia's acquaintance. We try persuading her: create a mythical hot-air balloon shaped like the Beast! She promises to give it some thought. She gives it some thought, and then some more, and finally says: no, I don't want to.

I then come up with the idea of having a massive kite (the world's largest, of course). I dedicate several months to it and find a man named Linas Ambraziūnas, an aviation engineer by day and a kite maker in his spare time. We draw all sorts of blueprints, estimating the costs. Our plans get gobbled up by the pandemic and public procurement procedures.

Could the Beast perhaps swim instead?

With the talented artist Martynas Gaubas at our side, we roam the banks of the Nemunas and the Neris, pondering whether we could make a floating island. It would be as though the Beast were slightly submerged, making his appearance at the culmination of the celebration. Martynas sends over several visualisations... We deliberate on this with the grand events team. It would be very challenging technically to make this happen. Very challenging. This was a refrain I would hear many times thereafter.

Could the Beast become Kaunas's little mermaid? Just like in Copenhagen? A tourist attraction?

Let's suppose the following: he won't make his appearance at the location of the event itself, but we can still use this occasion to unveil his sculpture elsewhere! What if we arranged for it to emerge and then be submerged alternately, anchored to the Nemunas riverbed, only coming into view when the water level is reduced by the Kaunas Hydroelectric Power Station. We could even market this idea to tourists, with forecasts on whether the sculpture will be visible or not.

I head to the Inland Waterways Authority to learn about flood and ebb tides, trying to figure out where in the Nemunas a semi-submerged sculpture could be installed. They give me some valuable advice. I consult sculptors, engineers and rivermen on what such a project would entail. How should it be anchored? Won't it be carried away by ice? Might a ship collide with it? Won't it become overgrown with algae? Who will clean it? I learn a lot of stuff about the Nemunas's and the Neris's fauna and flora, geology and hydrology.

It becomes clear that such a project would be very expensive. And no one will understand why. And it will become Kaunas's very own version of Vilnius's divisive 'Pipe' sculpture, eagerly awaited by our critics and dreaded by our friends.



Scouting out a location for the Beast sculpture. Visualisation by Darius Petreikis



Scouting out a location for the Beast sculpture. Visualisation by Darius Petreikis

No, no, no. Bad idea, bad idea.

The clock keeps ticking. The Beast takes shape, designed by Darius Petreikis, and a book gets published. I'm sulking about, not knowing what to do. I complain to Virginija that we're doomed, that the Beast will not make his appearance to people, and we promised that he would. And then I suddenly remember that, in the bid proposal for the competition for designing the Beast of Kaunas's image, Darius had included the idea of making a mirror sculpture of the Beast. I say to Virginija, 'Should we perhaps make that mirror sculpture?' She says, 'But of course, I've long thought that's the way to go.' 'Why didn't you say so?' 'I didn't want to interrupt your worrying...', she replies.



Renata Bartusevičiūtė, Darius and Eglė Petreikis, and I are sitting in one of the cafes across from our office. It's a sunny day. We're pondering where the sculpture should stand. The initial idea is to install it by Soboras, just as Darius has drawn in his visualisation. 'It should be standing somewhere in the way... so that it bothers everyone... as a symbol', he argues. Darius always has bold and subversive ideas, just give him a chance... I don't want it to be by Soboras. I don't want it to bother anyone. Kaunas is already cluttered with all sorts of nonsense in public places; it's uncultured.

Perhaps in the meadow near Santaka?



Scouting out a location for the Beast sculpture. Visualisation by Darius Petreikis

## RENATA BARTUSEVIČIŪTĖ/

The spot seems fitting, as this is precisely where the Beast emerges, revealing himself to the townsfolk. As soon as we've had a chat, Rytis and I immediately head to Santaka. We need a reference point. I'm looking around in the middle of the meadow between the Nemunas and the Neris. Rytis is filming, taking pictures. Later, Darius digitally positions the mirror Beast, slightly longer than 12 metres, right next to me. We all reconvene once again. Something's off. The sculpture blends into the horizon: the river, the street, the Nemunas's concrete riverside. It simply dissolves. We need to look for a new location.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Let's install it near the Žalgiris Arena, on the steel pier, I suggest. It would fit in beautifully there, without looking ostentatious. Darius agrees. He promises to prepare a visualisation.

## DARIUS PETREIKIS/

Frankly, I couldn't understand why Rytis and Gaubas were scouring the banks of the Nemunas, trying to create a new kind of object, an island-beast. After all, I'd already proposed the idea of a mirrored sculpture for the Beast's visual image design competition.

While its proposed location may have provoked some doubts, I was absolutely confident about its form and materiality. At some point, Renata called, passing on a request from Kaunas City Municipality to design a Beast souvenir for giving as a gift. Together with my son Rokas, we designed a 3D model and ordered a handful of 3D miniature sculpture

prototypes to be printed. I took them to the sculptor Aloyzas, who was commissioned to produce several dozen chrome-plated miniature beasts. Quite unexpectedly, Aloyzas praised the design highly as a particularly contemporary sculptural object, and expressed his surprise as to why such a Beast sculpture did not appear in the city, in all its glory and scale. I relayed Aloyzas's compliments to Renata, and then to Rytis. Without much further thought, he said, 'Let's do it!' All that remained to do was to find the right location. The island's pier seemed most fitting for the purpose. I photographed the island's surroundings and created a visualisation in which the Beast appears as though he had always been there! As if he had just emerged from the Nemunas to bathe his back in the sun. A few tweaks and he inclined forward slightly, as though observing something in the water. However, before submitting the sculpture project to the municipality for approval, Renata asked me to 'clean up' the bird droppings from the pier in the visualisation. I protested, 'What a futile effort!' The reality is that birds will not only shit all over the pier, but also

over the Beast himself. Renata was adamant, 'Clean it up, please, because the municipality will definitely not approve it and, God forbid, they may even name it the shitty beast.'

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

It transpires that the approach to Žalgiris Arena and the pier are a copyrighted artwork. We arrange a meeting with the sculptor Alfonsas Vaira and the architect Aurimas Ramanauskas. Much to my delight, both Alfonsas and Aurimas are taken with our idea. 'It will look good,' Alfonsas says. I was and still am overjoyed to have received such an endorsement: not only because the authors welcomed us into their creation but also because, as seasoned professionals, they confirmed our proposed design's good taste.

## RENATA BARTUSEVIČIŪTĖ/

We launch a competition to commission the manufacturing of the sculpture. The sculptor Stasys Beišys is declared the winner. We meet. The project is complex, full of nuances, unlike anything he's ever crafted before. But his enthusiasm is inspiring. We'll make this happen! How long will it take, I ask. Around four months. But it must be ready by mid-May. Alright, then mid-May it is! And then the war broke out in Ukraine. Everything came to a standstill, including the supply of stainless steel from which the sculpture was to be made. January, February, mid-March... Then, in the final days of March, a phone call. Stasys sounds happy: we have it, we're set to begin production. But, instead of the four months, we now have just a month and a half. 'Don't worry, Renata', Stasys says, 'we'll put other projects on the back burner, forego our days off, but we'll make it by the deadline.' And indeed, they did.

# What Does Kaunas Smell Like? The Fragrance of the Mythical Beast of Kaunas

*#artist\_engagement #communication  
#Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas #mythology*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The saga of the Beast sculpture is over, decisions have been made, and I'm roaming the city ablaze with a new idea. I'm keen on creating a Beast of Kaunas fragrance! Unique. Unheard of. What should the scent of the Beast of Kaunas be like? To me, it's crystal clear: it must be a mixture of city smells, pleasant and unpleasant alike.

The smell of asphalt, diesel, flowers, bakeries, cat and dog piss, freshly cut grass in parks, garbage bins, blooming linden trees in Laisvės Alėja, beer, and cigarettes... How to blend all this together? I search for a perfumer who could rise to this task. I visit one fragrance creator after another, explaining the idea. They all listen attentively, agree that the idea is good, but are afraid to undertake it, whether in Kaunas or in Vilnius. I order all sorts of scent concentrates... I still have a vial of civet (one such vicious African puss) in my storeroom – if Russian invaders were to storm my home, I would douse them with it...

Finally, a friend of mine, the photographer and cameraman Evaldas Virketis, recommends Eglė Jonaitytė. He says she's interested in Kaunas's art deco, makes excellent perfumes, and has a good sense of Kaunas's spirit. Eglė's studio is located on V. Putvinskio Street, in a former foreign consulate building. It's not far from our office, so Renata and I get there on foot.

## EGLĖ JONAITYTĖ/

Creating the scent for the Beast of Kaunas was an interesting experience. As a creator who enjoys crafting unconventional fragrances and olfactory experiments, often not meant to be worn, this animalistic and somewhat shocking scent became a playful and fun creative task. A friend called me to say that Rytis Zemkauskas wanted to speak with me. I couldn't help but smile as he is the voice of my favourite TV series, *The Mentalist*. I was eager to receive Rytis's call, and his proposal made me even happier.



The Mythical Beast of Kaunas perfume

## RENATA BARTUSEVIČIŪTĖ/

As we open the tall double wooden doors, we are greeted by Eglė; she has already prepared a few initial trials. They are rather mild, evoking linden blossoms and the smell of freshly rain-washed asphalt. Then comes the second attempt. The scents are somewhat sharper, taking us to dusty libraries, cellars, or diesel-soaked garages. Yet, none of them hits the mark. We need something more potent. We sit down with Eglė amongst her small black vials, sniffing, sorting, experimenting. She has already put together the key notes; only one, the most crucial, is missing. At long last, we find it! The smell of burnt butter. Unbelievable, it concludes the composition fittingly: pleasantly unpleasant, distinct, unexpected – the scent of the city's Beast, captured in a small black bottle.

# The Thunder Before the Storm. Interdisciplinary City Festival Premieres in Kaunas

*#capacity\_building #co-creation #crisis\_situations #cultural\_sector\_involvement #ECoC\_project\_management #Emerging\_Kaunas #festivals #interdisciplinarity #Kaunas\_Challenge #leadership #music #new\_longterm\_initiatives #problem\_solving #public\_relations #public\_space #working\_with\_authorities #youth\_engagement*

ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The year 2022 was set for hosting our youth programme's culminating event, showcasing the initiatives of the 'Kaunas Challenge', a satellite of Kaunas 2022 targeted at young people. With two years to go, we sought to find a partner (by way of a competition) to organise this event. They had to be experienced music festival producers who would organise the festival's international music component, attracting to Kaunas the best contemporary musicians available. Seven producers, offering to bring famous and very famous performers, presented their partnership proposals, and I must admit, their proposals' scale and simplicity were very tempting. Ultimately, however, we chose 'Lizdas' club as our partner. They didn't offer the largest event in terms of audience numbers, but what they did offer was something much more important: a long-term festival format and complete openness to collaborating with the young members of our 'Kaunas Challenge' team. Everyone got introduced and a decision was made to trial the festival's format in 2021, setting the stage for two festivals: 'Per\_kūnija' in 2021 and 'Audra' in 2022. \* ☁

VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

'Per\_kūnija' is a festival organised by the young people who took part in the 'Kaunas Challenge' in July 2021, a prelude to the major youth event, 'Audra', in 2022. It served as a dress rehearsal, showcasing the youth programme's values and goals:

\* *The Lithuanian word 'perkūnija' translates into English as 'thunderstorm', and 'audra' as 'storm'.*

empowered youth, creating and realising cultural events in the city that are relevant to them and their generation. Events such as fashion shows, poetry readings, exhibitions, concerts, virtual culture, street dance and street art, and discussions spread throughout the city, taking place in indoor and public spaces, music clubs, and squares.

AURELIJA PRAŠMUNTAITĖ/

The 'Per\_kūnija' and 'Audra' festivals were key highpoints of the five-year-long educational programme, 'Kaunas Challenge'. The city's youth spent six months developing cultural projects in teams, and we provided mentorship, symbolic financial support, and assistance in the development stages. As a result, a wealth of youth-curated content saw the light of day, from public



Workshop for young curators of the 'Per\_kūnija' Festival. Kaunas 2022 office. 2020

poetry readings (by the way, these young poets were even given the honour of reading their poetry about Kaunas from the grand stage at the opening ceremony of the Capital of Culture title-holding year), to projects merging fashion with modernism or promoting up-and-coming trap music creators, to photography projects, etc. This experience with the educational

programme showed how many creative young people there are in the city, who really need a platform to be heard, noticed, and – most importantly – given confidence and space to express themselves. 'Kaunas Challenge' became a launchpad for these young people to explore their creativity, meet like-minded individuals, or simply be part of a community. These young people who matured alongside the 'Kaunas Challenge' later became a significant part of the entire Kaunas 2022 programme and team. They could be found working as volunteers in our community programme, and as exhibition guides at the Kaunas Central Post Office. And we, as a team, gained programme heralds with ever-critical minds, well-versed in the latest trends and spread across the whole city.

In 2021 and 2022, we integrated the initiatives generated by the participants of the 'Kaunas Challenge' into the programmes of the 'Per\_kūnija' and 'Audra' festivals. This, of course, required curators, who we decided to train ourselves from among the ranks of the young project participants. During the quarantine period, together with our partners from Hungary, we had a virtual training programme which helped us select the festival's future curators based on their creativity, teamwork skills, ideas and, of course, their sense of responsibility to work together and not abandon the team. It's no secret that a lack of responsibility sometimes gets in the way of working with young people and entrusting them with tasks. A meeting that gets slept through, a spontaneous trip with friends to the other side of the globe, or a mere setback in a personal relationship can wipe out all the progress in an instant. Maintaining young people's motivation merely with promises ('wait a minute, we'll create a festival, there will be more to come...') was a great challenge.

## AUSTĖJA JOCIŪTĖ/

The festival's curators were a non-professional but curious group of people (some still in school), so we really wanted to test our strengths before the year of 2022. The team comprised ten individuals for whom this project wasn't their primary pursuit, yet we managed to organise almost 50 different events. At that time, as an intern for Kaunas 2022, I was able to dedicate significantly more time to the project, so I was given a huge bundle of responsibilities: integrating the young 'Kaunas Challenge' projects into the festival's programme, communicating with partners, collecting information for external communications, creating and revising internal team information, drafting applications for the municipality, and so on.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Since some of the 50 events in our programme are scheduled to take place in the city's public spaces, they need to be coordinated with Kaunas City Municipality's administrative authorities. Meanwhile, the Municipality is in a legal dispute with the LGBT

community due to its refusal to grant permission for the 'Kaunas Pride' event. One of the eight public discussions in the 'Per\_kūnija' programme, set to take place in Vieniybės Square, centres on the topic of 'Can We Create an LGBT+ friendly culture?' The municipality refuses to grant permission for the entire festival, with a multitude of public events planned, just because of a single four-letter abbreviation in the title of one of the public discussions... Time is pressing for decisions to be made. I recommend that the discussion be held in a setting that doesn't require the municipality's approval, to ensure that we can obtain the permit for our festival on time. After all, it's time not only to put the posters up, but also to start setting up the stages. On learning this, the LGBT community interpreted this as censorship on our organisation's part and initiated a public outrage campaign on social media.

## AURELIJA PRAŠMUNTAITĖ/

The festival is about identity, the interplay between the city and the individual, offering a wealth of educational and other engaging content.

Yet, the spotlight inevitably falls on how the public discussion about the LGBT community's self-expression in the city is getting banned just before the festival's weekend. The internet is awash with reactions, everyone is sharing links and discussing how antiquated Kaunas is on this matter. In other words, all hell breaks loose. Our festival's content is pushed to the sidelines as the city's inability to have an open debate captures everyone's attention.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

During that week, I was on vacation abroad, with my only contact with the team's crisis management group being via a Facebook message chain. I received a slew of chaotic suggestions on how to proceed and what sort of message to put out to the public. A mere few hours into the crisis, I began receiving forwarded emails from members of the LGBT community. In these, they appealed to our programme's participating artists, urging them to sabotage Kaunas 2022 on the grounds that we were censoring LGBT participation in the programme.



'Per\_kūnija' Festival in the media



## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I was holidaying by the sea, a day so scorching hot that a beer bottle exploded in the shade. Virginija is calling. It turns out, something much bigger has exploded. In my life, I've always worked within systems where persistent tension is the norm, so I'm not overly fearful of crises. In such situations, several factors are very important: knowing the real situation, not yielding to the pressure exerted by people or time, controlling one's emotions, and not losing sight of the main objectives. I know that we are in the right, that we've done nothing wrong, and that our main goal is to safeguard the project's future (for the sake of those same minorities, not excluding any others). I know that there are homophobes working in our municipality who have been trying to force us not to allow our youth to organise the LGBT debate. I know that we advised our youth to pause until we found a solution. Naturally, young people are quick-tempered and don't want to wait. Naturally, activism is steaming out of their ears. While we seek a resolution, activism turns into a witch-hunt. And it's we who must bear the brunt! A handful of Vilnius 'activists' manage to lodge a complaint against us (not against the Kaunas Municipality!) to the Creative Europe office. Within the space of half a day! Two of our project's ambassadors, Arūnas Matelis and Giedrius Širka, publicly disavow us...

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

That evening, I wrote two private letters. One addressed to the Kaunas City Municipality's Administration, and the other one to our project's ambassadors, whom we'd always informed first about serious situations, given that journalists would approach them seeking their opinion on scandals. In the letter, I mentioned that we were still going to hold the public discussion at Vieniybės Square, and if the permit was denied, I would resign. One of the ambassadors (I still don't know who it was) leaked my letter to the media. Overnight, my statement became the talk of the day in Lithuania. From the very first minute of the crisis, I knew that this would be my move *va banque*. My own personal move. Other team members experienced shock or confusion, voicing

or expressing their natural indignation at the slow or inadequate reaction from the institution's leadership team. And for me, it took a good eight hours (just the length of time it takes to drive from Wrocław to Kaunas) to decide that I could not make any compromises on the project's values, even if that meant that this would be the last stop of my personal journey in the European Capital of Culture. I experienced the actual grief of bidding farewell to the project.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The issue was resolved. The most time-consuming part, by the way, was getting a clear understanding and accurate assessment of the real situation. The discussion took place, and Virginija took full responsibility. Our new head of communications, Mindaugas Reinikis, took part in the discussion personally. I was among the attendees. There were just a handful of us. Activists seemed less inclined to participate in a peaceful dialogue where conflicts had already been resolved. Screaming and fist-waving is always easier. By the way, neither Arūnas Matelis nor Giedrius Širka resumed their ambassadorial roles. Admitting to having made a mistake and coming back is a different feat altogether to mere fist-waving.

## MINDAUGAS REINIKIS/

The public discussion in Vieniybės Square eventually took place, with fewer attendees than security personnel. I did take part in it too.

In my view, this minor scandal drew a clear line between Kaunas 2022 and Kaunas City Municipality, but also highlighted the internal differences within our team.

Soon after, the conflict between Kaunas City Municipality and the LGBT community over the 'Kaunas Pride' parade shifted the focus away from the name of Kaunas 2022 and the topic of our discussion.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The discussion was peaceful, much like the other seven public discussions that took place at Vieniybės Square. It was a hot summer's day, with few people attending. The municipality's representatives formally explained to the media that they issued permits based not on event content, but rather on compliance with safety regulations. Both parties knew this was the calm (or rather, the thunder) before the storm.

## AURELIJA PRAŠMUNTAITĖ/

After a lot of work and compromise, the public discussion takes place, runs smoothly, and turns out to have been more interesting online than in reality. During the 'Per\_kūnija' weekend, we learnt a lot together with the young curators' team: that is what it means to take full responsibility for curating an assigned area, how important it is to think through logistical, security, and various unexpected scenarios in advance, how not to burn out, and how to communicate with a team. The weekend flies by, the team is tired but happy. During our reflection session, we all unanimously decide: that's it, we're ready for the Capital of Culture year and the other, bigger festival.

Uh, if only we had known then how big a storm we'd be unleashing in the city the next year. Maybe some of our youth would have made their escape there and then. 😊

# Audit

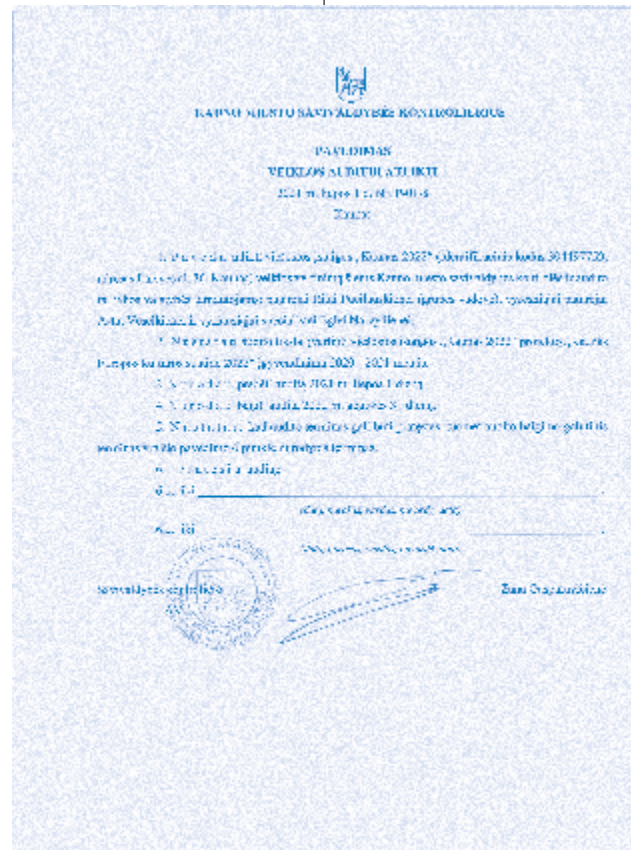
*#administration #audit  
#financial\_control #monitoring  
#transparency  
#working\_with\_authorities*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The day after 'Per\_kūnija', while I was still on vacation, at 8 a.m., employees of the Kaunas City Municipality Control and Audit Service were already standing at the door of the Kaunas 2022 office, which opens only at 9 a.m. They came to hand over an order for the institution's activity audit. The audit of the activities carried out during 2020–2021 took place from the beginning of July 2021 until May 2022. That's right, up until the middle of the European Capital of Culture year...

## ROKAS NAUDŽIUS/

Having joined the project team in the autumn of 2021, I felt the tension from the very first moment. The intimidating word 'audit'. The institution was being inspected by auditors; every day we were hearing feedback, comments and various kinds of remarks concerning administrative procedures.



Letter from Kaunas City Municipality to 'Kaunas 2022' public institution

## ŽIVILĖ STANKEVIČIENĖ/

With less than half a year remaining until the anticipated opening ceremony in 2022, an unexpected and somewhat rushed audit of the institution's activity was begun in July 2021. They were inspecting everything: staff documents, public procurement documentation, partnership contracts with project partners, evidence of our activities, budget planning documents, accounting documents...

I won't even count how many hours it took us to provide all the additional explanations and to discuss internal control and project management issues, because the hours are not what matter most. However, when after meetings and discussions of urgent matters, you would receive an email with an order to provide information or clarification by 12 or 2 p.m. on the same day, despair would set in. I physically couldn't bring

myself to do it... And what can you think when you send an email at 1:59 p.m., only for them to respond saying that you were late, since the email arrived at 2:01 p.m... 🙄

All you can do is take a deep breath in, a deep breath out, and continue working. Administrative resilience lies in having a sound and cold mind, and showing unflinching diplomacy. 😊

# The Great Myth of Kaunas Trilogy and Its Protagonists

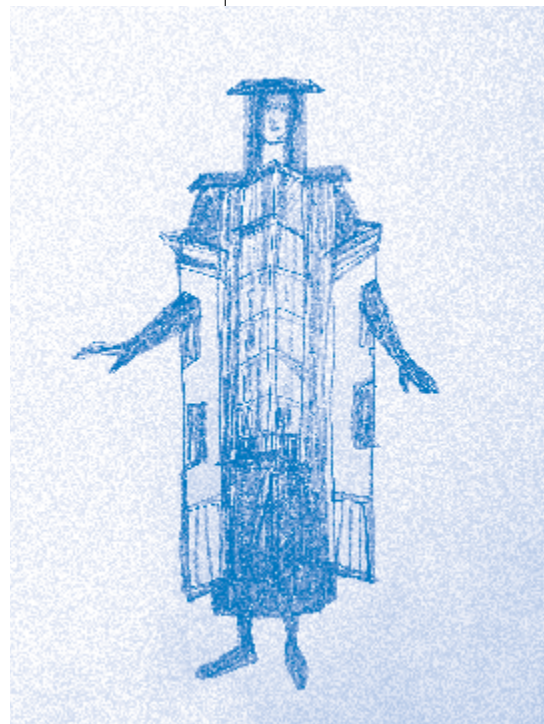
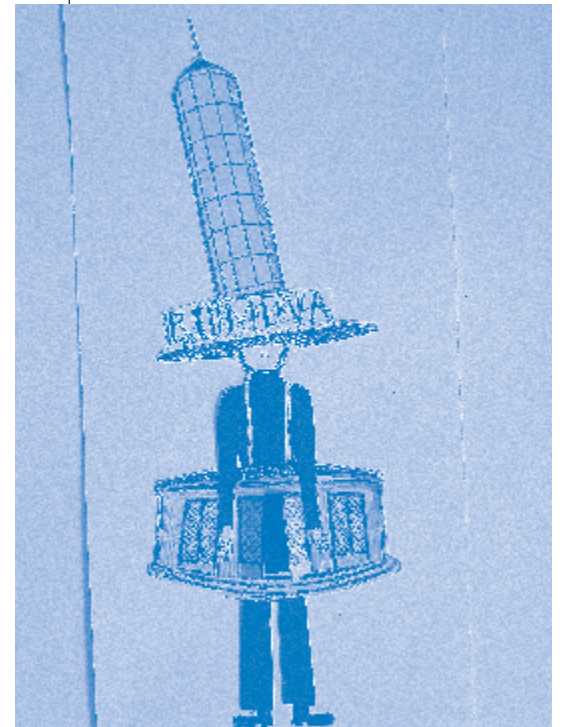
*#grand\_events #problem\_solving #shows  
#staff #technical\_production*

ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

August saw the final touches being put on the opening programme. Chris Baldwin, as the event director, was focusing on the show's direction. I oversaw its production, put together the programme for the weekend, and expedited the works, engaging curators, the Kaunas District team, partners and other creative support. Tadas Valeika was addressing the event's technical puzzles. More and more producers joined the project, each responsible for individual elements of the opening ceremony. Directors of lighting, sound, and broadcasting, and a coordinator responsible for logistics, traffic, crowd movement and security, all pitched in. In the creative department, the team of artists and performers already numbered in the hundreds, and following tense public procurement procedures, the creative team was joined by 'Orka', the video content creators. The entire work of the creative flank was supervised by Marija Tarasova and Renata Krapikaitė. Dozens more people were involved in preparing a post-show programme in the city. And the volunteer programme team was already gathering a brigade of a thousand volunteers who would be dismantling the cardboard building created by French sculptor Olivier Grossetête, coordinating the crowd logistics, and supervising the locations involved in the city game.

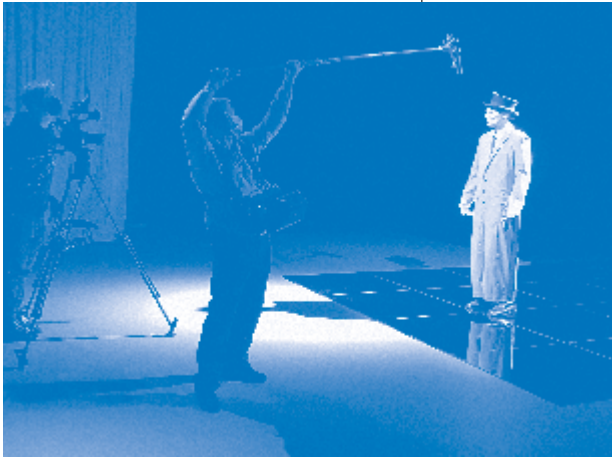
As far as the event's creators are concerned, I can share with you that integration was our weak spot. Various circumstances dictated by public procurement procedures and performers' capabilities resulted in our work's fragmented, phased nature (for example, music had to be created first and was already recorded in April 2021). The technical team in Vilnius were not part of our daily office team, and the director was based abroad. Most of the conversations took place online, involving the creators of each part separately. We lacked an occasion when the whole creative team could come together around the table at the start of the project, and we lacked the ability to work with the technical team daily and face-to-face. Working conditions were far from ideal, but amid the pandemic and bureaucratic circumstances, and dealing with public and stakeholder expectations, we still pushed towards the anticipated explosion with great excitement.

Gradually, the city municipality's involvement and the attention it paid to the event grew, from general roundtable discussions with municipal leaders about the event's main components, logistics and overall organisational tasks, through to meticulous planning of the VIP list, the location, the programmes for visiting delegations, traffic conditions and other details. In a political context, the opening ceremony was thoroughly exploited as an opportunity for international diplomacy.

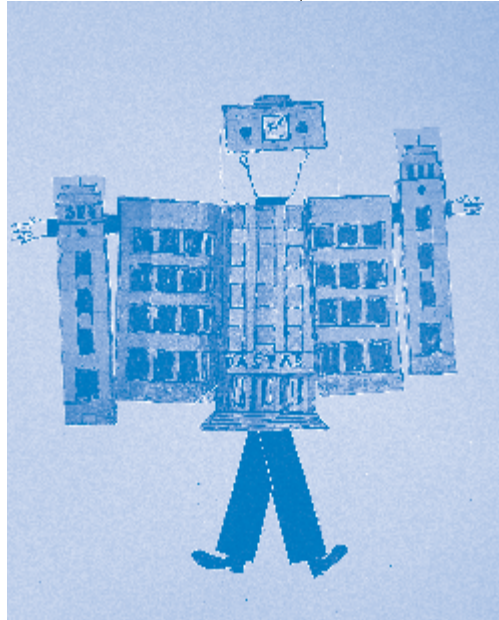


Costumes and costume sketches for the grand opening show by Aleksandra Jacovskytė and Julija Skuratova

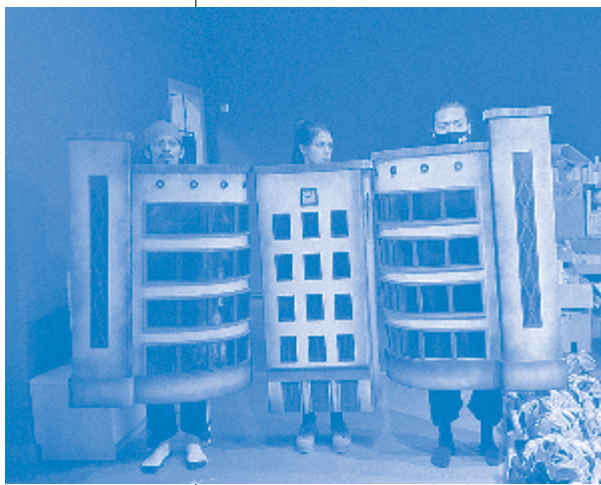




Filming young poets for the visualisations for the grand opening. LRT studio



Costumes and costume sketches for the grand opening show by Aleksandra Jacovskytė and Julija Skuratova



Filming young poets for the visualisations for the grand opening. LRT studio



Discussing the grand opening show. 2021

Having tackled the most pressing issues of the opening ceremony weekend, I kept coming back to the 'Confluence' event, reminding those responsible for it of their deadlines. To no avail, everyone's efforts are focused on the opening. And yet, all three grand events of the Trilogy were only a few months apart, and each presented new challenges.

The main show of 'The Confluence' was even more dependent on the natural and technical 'infrastructure' than the opening ceremony. According to our original idea, the event was to take place at the confluence of the Nemunas and the Neris. After Tadas's extensive consultations with the wonderfully cooperative Inland Waterways Authority (IWA), the safest and most accessible section of the Nemunas near the confluence was chosen, where, after the IWA's infrastructure projects had been temporarily put on hold, all of the IWA's existing water vehicles and barges were repositioned to serve as the stage for the event. The Kaunas Hydroelectric Power Plant made us a very important promise to ensure that the water levels would remain constant from the rehearsals through to the end of the event (since inconstant water levels had once seriously undermined the Kaunas International Hanseatic Days). A children's sailing school also joined in, ready to sail several dozens of training sailboards along the Nemunas during the show. We also reached out to the hot air balloon club, who were supposed to fly balloons lit with projections up

in the air during the show's climax (we had to abandon this idea, however, due to bad weather). The often-unpredictable May weather dictates the conditions for everything – rainfall or wind can, and will, significantly alter an event's scenario. Among the programme's unfulfilled parts, we could also mention the long-planned special premiere by theatre director Oskaras Koršunovas. Long negotiations and quite far advanced planning were terminated on our initiative with less than half a year left until the event: our work schedule, ever-shrinking time, public procurement issues and our limited internal resources, as well as the scale of this production, did not allow us to adjust to the director's rhythm.

Alongside the grand event of 'The Confluence', we are once again putting together a rich programme for a cultural weekend, the highlights of which are the opening of the Summer Stage in the Town Hall Square and shows by European performers, the main afterparty stage at the Santakos Park, the Cie Basinga tightrope walking show, the interactive puzzle maze created by our Spanish partners, and other activities. While designing the programme, I am striving to create an alternative to the Kaunas founding anniversary format, overshadowed by the fair. The 'Confluence' event, just like the opening and closing weekends, will



Grand opening show technical rehearsal. 2021



Kaunas 2022 countdown clock

also be celebrated in Kaunas District. For the first time, against the backdrop of the traditional but significantly internationalised Zapyškis kite festival, a new public cultural object will be presented to wider society: Nemuno7, a floating dredger boat transformed into a garden.

The closing event, entitled 'The Contract', is based on an idea for a ballet-oratorio proposed by Zita Bružaitė, which she submitted along with the 'Kauno Santaka' concert institution in an open call for partnerships. Upon confirming the essential production term and conditions, Zita assembles a top-class creative team and together with director Gediminas Šeduikis independently develops its creative part until the first two parts of the Trilogy have been accomplished.



Grand opening show technical rehearsal. 2021

# The Beast in the Grand Opening

*#art\_in\_public\_spaces #artist\_engagement  
#grand\_events #music #public\_space #shows*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

It's summer. We're creating 'The Beast's Installation'. After 'The Contract', the show's audience will be invited to the city where numerous concerts, performances and exhibitions will be held. There will be the Game of the Beast's Secrets, where players will have to travel around the city following specific signs and experiencing the spirit of the European Capital of Culture. Together with Darius Petreikis, we come up with an idea that the Beast will settle on the stairs in V. Putvinskio Street and next to the funicular also situated in the same street. We need someone to create the visuals and sound. It is Ana, I think, who suggests a team from Latvia, specialising in laser, light and water installations. It is led by Janis Petersons. We reach out to him. Janis understands what we need straight away. We come up with a simple and clear dramaturgy of light. Darius spends some more time ironing out the details with Janis.

## DARIUS PETREIKIS/

Ana asked me to design a visualisation for the installation, showcasing exactly what needed to be lit and how, and send it to Janis. I imagined that at the bottom of the 'Šilelis' stairs there could be the Beast's giant gaping jaw, through which curious visitors could enter into the Beast's long and angular skeleton – made from gigantic luminous LED bars. Janis and I agreed that it shouldn't be difficult to install and light such a stylised Beast's body. Janis needed detailed measurements, distances and the exact number of the Beast's 'ribs'. I remember how the two of us, Ana (who was pregnant at the time) and I, walked up and down those stairs, back and forth, measuring, counting and photographing.

Certainly not in vain. What we managed to create together with our Latvian partners was the most vivid, the most selfie-worthy highlight of the entire celebration, which people continued visiting for an entire week following the 'Confusion' show.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Now it's time for the music. I come up with the idea that the Beast needs a voice. What does his voice sound like? It must be made from the sounds of

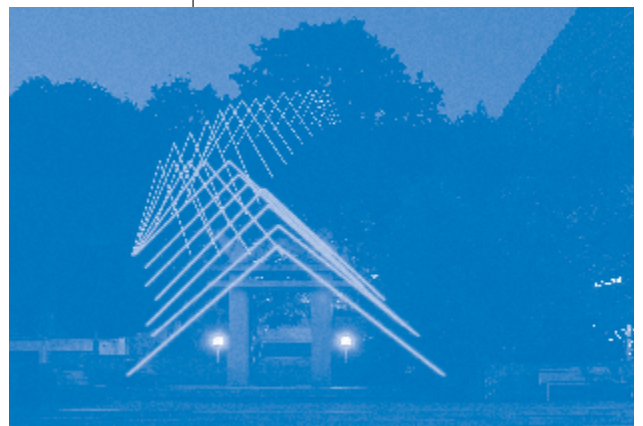
And Antanas sends me back the perfect music and a perfect Beast's voice modulator precisely by the agreed time.

I remember thinking: the opening show may end up being incomprehensible, but people will surely comprehend this installation. And this is precisely what happened. They understood it and photographed it more than anything else.



Light installation in the grand opening's post-show programme. Implemented by Janis Petersons

Kaunas. We propose this idea to one sound artist, then another... Nobody takes it on. So I take my professional recording device and begin recording the sounds of Kaunas: in a café, on the streets, on Laisvės Alėja, in shops. I forward everything to Antanas Jasenka, saying to him: can you weave the Beast's voice out of all this? How much time do you give? One day. Okay! And can you create music for this installation? I can. How much time do you give? Three days. Alright!



Visualisation for light installation by Darius Petreikis. 2021

# ‘The Largest Event in Kaunas Will Not Go Ahead’: A Call for Volunteers

*#capacity\_building #grand\_events #motivation #pandemic  
#problem\_solving #public\_relations #quarantine #volunteering*

## MARIJA PULOKAITĖ/

Four months prior to the opening ceremony, we learn that that, due to strict quarantine requirements, we will need a thousand volunteers – twice as many as we had planned for, recruited, and trained since the start of the volunteer programme. We see clearly that we won't get such a significant number of Kaunesians off their couches with only moderately toned messages, so we choose a shocking new campaign message: 'The largest event in Kaunas will not go ahead... unless you join our volunteers for the opening weekend of the European Capital of Culture.' Banners appear all over the city and I sleep very restlessly for a few nights. Volunteer application forms start pouring in and I begin to feel a sense of calm. The city's inhabitants do care.

## AGNĖ MEDĖKŠAITĖ/

In the months leading up to the opening, I saw not only the lists and questions of a thousand volunteers in my sleep, but also a huge Excel spreadsheet, which we used to allocate volunteers into positions. I don't know if anyone has ever used as many colours in their spreadsheets, but I think we used every possible shade to mark the positions to make it clear at a glance where each volunteer had been assigned.

People were actively registering to volunteer for the opening weekend. I believe that active communication and the desire to be part of a historic event was contributing to that, but we knew from experience that registration meant little until we saw them in person. We anxiously awaited the first in-person briefing, and I was imagining the worst-case scenario where, instead of several hundred expected attendees, only a hundred people would show up. On the day of the briefing, a huge queue stretched at the entrance to the great hall of Vytautas Magnus University. We did not expect such a crowd, so some people had to wait outside for an hour or more. When I got on stage, looked up and saw how many people had actually showed up, I knew that we would succeed.



Kaunas 2022 advertising campaign for volunteers

## VITALIJA LYSKA/

Volunteers' inner motivation to participate in the project surprised us: most of them wanted to be part of a significant event for the city, to be part of a unique phenomenon and contribute to change, to meet other enthusiastic people. I was once again convinced that external incentives can be fun and pleasant, but they are not essential when it comes to choosing one or another volunteering position. It's important to help maintain the inner impulse to volunteer, which one already has within themselves.

For the most active volunteers, we offered three types of special training, which were crucial to our project:

- Training for Kaunas Experts and Culture Hosts (presenting the city to guests and welcoming them). We were confident that a local who loved their city would present it best to the visitors, so we prepared theoretical training, which would enable the volunteers to lead guided tours in Kaunas and Kaunas District. Kaunas Experts would welcome the city's visitors in groups, and Culture Hosts would meet them individually and tell them about the city.

- Leadership training

(accompanying volunteer teams during the grand events). These sessions were the most popular, with over a hundred volunteers participating. The responsibility of the volunteer team leaders was to take care of the volunteer group assigned to them: convey information, contact them if necessary, delegate tasks, remind them to take a break, ensure that the volunteers were in the right places at the right time, well-fed, and in good spirits. At events where a hundred or more volunteers were operating in different parts of the

city, three volunteer programme coordinators would not have been enough to do it all by themselves.

- Accessibility training (assisting people with disabilities during events). One of the aims and guiding principles of the Kaunas 2022 project was to increase accessibility so that everyone could fully participate in social and cultural life. We, as the volunteer programme team, along with our partners, took the initiative to educate volunteers on how to recognise various disabilities and assist people during events. After the training, volunteers were much more confident in approaching people and offering help.

## JOVITA RUDNICKAITĖ/

I have completed several training programmes: for Kaunas Experts and for acquiring leadership skills. My debut was in the Fluxus Festival in 2021, not just as a volunteer but also as a team leader. Before joining the volunteering effort, I had seen photos from this festival on social media and was really keen to participate but I couldn't find likeminded people in my friendship circle who wanted to design costumes together. I was very worried about whether I would be able to cope with the role of team leader, to coordinate volunteers - what would I do if something unexpected happened? I had all sorts of thoughts before the event, but the coordinators of the volunteer programme, Marija, Vitalija and Agnė, were very supportive and reassured me that everything would be just fine. And it was.

In the European Capital of Culture title-holding year, I was already contributing to the creation of the festival's programme. I prepared my costume and led Fluxus-spirited guided tours in Ažuolynas, during which we would reach Kaunas's highest point. This time I climbed the hill not alone but with a handful of volunteers who came to the foot of the hill to join everyone else, having also prepared their costumes. At that point I thought to myself: once it was just a wish/dream, and now I'm climbing the hill with my new friends. The circle of people who came together to volunteer for Kaunas 2022 was exactly what I had been missing in my life.



Kaunas 2022 induction for volunteers



Kaunas 2022 induction for volunteers

# Press Launch of the 2022 Programme

*#communication #conferences #ECoC\_family  
#European\_dimension #history #international\_partnerships  
#leadership #marketing #media #Memory\_Office  
#Modernism\_for\_the\_Future #pandemic  
#public\_relations #quarantine*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

At last. In September 2021, we had the entire Kaunas 2022 programme book in our hands – a year-long calendar, including all the long-discussed projects, years of work compressed into one beautiful publication weighing nearly a kilogram, which we introduced at a press conference.

## EGIDIJUS STANCIKAS/

When I first saw that heavy black book, containing almost the entire Kaunas 2022 programme, the first thought that came to my mind was: the Bible. Turning the pages of the calendar, this Culture Bible was not only read but also implemented. It was an exhilarating experience.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The programme press launch takes place in the context of the European Capital of Culture Forum and the meeting of the European Capital of Culture Network. We wanted our partners to have the opportunity of getting comprehensive information about the project in one go, and were keen for the media to get a sense of the project's international scope. Since the pandemic was still disrupting the organisation of international events, and we were sharing the ECoC 2022 title with Novi Sad and Esch-sur-Alzette, we suggested that they might join us in co-organising the Capitals of Culture Network events and programme press launches. These combined efforts significantly increased the ranks of foreign media present in Kaunas at the time. We proposed dedicating that year's European Capital of Culture Forum to an in-depth reflection on our programme – each programme's component got its own 'airtime'; curators could decide how and in what form they wanted to present their programmes. We tried our best to reveal our partners' contribution to the project, as well as the already ongoing changes and newly formed traditions that Kaunas 2022 had helped to spark.

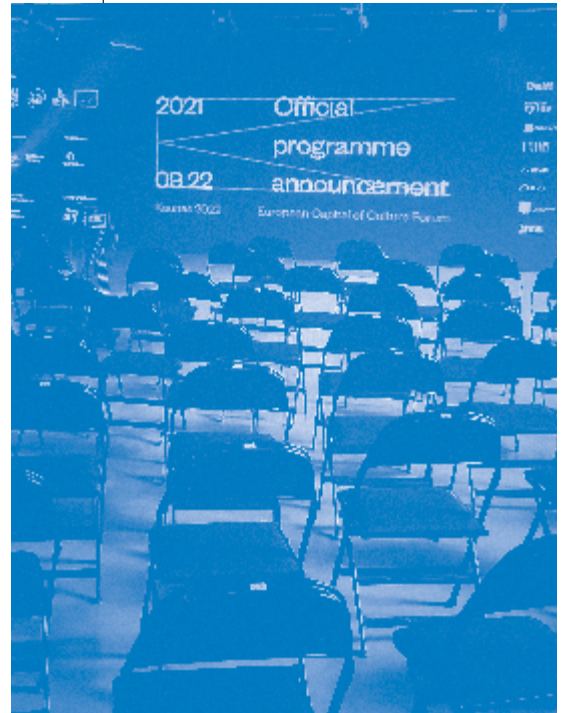
The programme press launch conference included speeches from the minister, the Mayor, and the leaders of Esch-sur-Alzette and Novi Sad, but when Virginija took the floor, the hall erupted in an applause that lasted for a good few minutes. It seemed to me that everyone present, including local operators and the media, were genuinely happy, and identified themselves with the project, that Virginija was the face of, and most importantly – they



*'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' programme guide (ed. Justina Petrušionytė-Sabonienė, 2022).*



*Official aftermovie of the press launch of the Kaunas, Novi Sad and Esch-sur-Alzette ECoC programmes (YouTube video, 2021).*



Press conference during Kaunas 2022 programme launch. 2021

wholeheartedly supported her. The same applause erupted at the closing project event in November 2022, which only confirms my suspicion that Virginija and her unique set of qualities (even more so than her competencies) were essential for the project's success and stability, the team's longevity and motivation, and the overcoming of crises and other complicated situations. Amid various circumstances that posed challenges to the project, Virginija's total dedication guided everyone forward and prevented matters from getting seriously out of hand. The fact that the project managed to avoid requiring a change of leader is an absolute rarity in the history of European Capitals of Culture, consisting of politicised and demanding projects. We have seen time and again how, after a leader's sacking, burnout or a political ousting, the Capital of Culture projects and their teams have had to reset and start everything from scratch. Thanks to Virginija's tenacity, we were able to avoid this.

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

The first press conference announcing the 2022 programme was attended by national and international media, ECoC Network members, Capital of Culture representatives and other prominent guests. I began preparing for this conference at the end of summer. We enlisted the help of a director and a producer to help us come up with the concept for the event. The event was hosted by Edmundas Jakilaitis, one of Kaunas 2022's ambassadors. We wanted the event to be tasteful and purposeful. Everything looked and went splendidly, and the Kaunas 2022 programme garnered a lot of interest from the public and the media.

## DAIVA PRICE/

I had been interacting with foreign journalists since the beginning of the project. It was interesting to observe what interested the foreign media the most, how they perceived our city, and how they saw our programme. I probably wouldn't be mistaken in saying that the 'Memory Office' programme was the focal point for many of them. I believe this was for several reasons. Firstly, the systematic exploration of serious historical and memory-related themes was a completely new phenomenon in European Capitals of Culture practice. At the same time, it's a field that is relevant to all Europeans, especially those interested in history and global affairs. Secondly, most of the journalists were from Germany and Austria, countries where history and memory are closely associated with the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Thus, it was not at all surprising that in September 2021, during the presentation of the 'Memory Office' programme to foreign media, German journalists inundated me with questions. I felt like I was taking an exam of national importance, about which I had received no prior warning. This showed the immense interest that the German media gave to this programme and to our grappling with complex historical issues. On the other hand, as on many other occasions, I was faced with questions that, as an 'Eastern European', made me resent the gaps in historical knowledge shown by Europeans from other parts of the continent. Journalist: 'You claim that you only began to discuss your country's history more in

depth after regaining independence. But how is that possible?... After all, history was taught in universities before...' Me: 'You mean in universities during the Soviet era?' Journalist: 'Well, yes.' Me: 'You do realise that during the Soviet era, history was not a scholarly discipline but a propaganda tool? That we couldn't speak about Lithuanian history during the Soviet era?' Journalist: confused.

Meetings with foreign journalists often turned into history lessons, accompanied by the following summary: 'It's a pity we didn't know any of this, nobody had told us about it...'

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I have to present the myth programme to an international audience – to the media and colleagues from other Capitals of Culture. I come up with the idea that it will be a solo performance. On the riverbank. At dusk. I will show how a myth is born, and from a myth, a city. I buy some black clothes. Our event producer Aistis Lansbergas designs the lighting. Actress Aldona Vilutytė helps with the staging. Street artist and musician Tadas Šimkus prepares to improvise on percussion.

It's raining, and raining, and raining. It won't work. It's cold, and guests won't show up. 'Shall we cancel it?', I say to Renata. 'Stick to the plan and stop fussing', she replies.

I am waiting for the audience, hiding in the distance. They arrive. All of them. I appear too, speaking from a distance, a silhouette against the river. I approach the audience, circle round them, binding them symbolically into one community. I show them how our consciousness creates depth and height, how we inhabit the space and create our worldview through storytelling. How everything that we know is born out of narrative. How a human is born as a creature of narrative. I finish and... I step into the river with all my clothes on. I disappear into the dark water. The audience is stunned. Someone rushes to rescue me. A photograph from this performance becomes one of the most memorable photographs of our project. Later, colleagues in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland would remind me of this little performance.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

We presented the modernism programme for 2022 at the M. K. Čiurlionis Museum alongside our partners. It seemed particularly important for Europe to hear our invitation from their lips – from those who were creating alongside us.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

This conference, which presented the upcoming Kaunas 2022 programme to Lithuania and Europe in the form of a 400-page book and a slideshow featuring our programme's 'beacons', was a clear breakthrough in our relationship with national media (ever since then, the door has been wide open for negotiating airtime or time slots in forums) as well as with the Kaunas City Municipality and the Kaunas District Municipality, who had the most at stake in this project – the success or failure of the project was equal to the success or failure of both mayors. Another important factor was dictated by the Covid-19 pandemic which had not only slowed down the previous Capitals of Culture (Rijeka 2020 and Galway 2020 experienced significant interruptions in their programmes; Elevsina, Timisoara, and Novi Sad postponed their programmes from 2021 to later years) but also changed the nature of programme press launches conducted for international media. For the first time in the ECoC's history, all three future European Capitals of Culture 2022 (Kaunas, Esch-sur-Alzette, and Novi Sad) presented their programmes in a joint press conference and organised a single summit of the European Capitals of Culture family, whereas before the pandemic, the common practice had been to tour all future capitals before their respective grand openings.

# Kaunas 2022 and the Business Community. Once Again about the Sponsors

*#business\_and\_culture #funding #marketing #public\_procurement #sponsorship*

## MINDAUGAS REINIKIS/

Once the programme's calendar had been announced in September, negotiations with potential sponsors became easier. Up to that point, the principal and very simple challenge in seeking sponsors had been low awareness about the project. The Capital of Culture title was often confused with Lithuania and local cultural capitals, from which businesses were also constantly receiving sponsorship invitations. The second challenge was that we had nothing to show. We could only tell potential sponsors what the programme looked like in other European cities, but that was of little help. We had nothing that could provide a basis for sponsors putting their confidence in us. Therefore, it was important to have familiar names on our team, such as Rytis Zemkauskas or Virginija Vitkienė. It became easier when more events started taking place; Kaunas 2022 was gaining an ever-greater number of mentions in the media, even during the pandemic, which proved that the ECoC programme would indeed go ahead and go well.

After numerous negotiations, I can now distinguish between several types of companies. There are those where the owner makes all the decisions. A good example is Visvaldas Matijošaitis. He will even draw the logo himself or decide about sponsorship, while the marketing manager will only carry out the technical work. The second type includes companies operating under the principles of corporate governance. In such companies, there are several levels of management, but decisions are still made by the executive director. An example of such a company would be the SBA group. The third type includes companies with a more independently functioning marketing department which has its own annual budget and the freedom to decide what to do with it. For instance, Akropolis. There are also smaller companies, with which you usually negotiate barter exchanges. In terms of our efforts, negotiations with all types of companies are quite similar: we have to prepare a presentation, a value proposal, and a proposal for creative advertising integrations for all of them. Only some companies can make a decision in a single day, while negotiations with others may break down completely simply because there are too many management levels, and a final decision is never obtained. Summing up our experience, it was more effective negotiating with smaller companies for direct services.

The key success factor in finding sponsors is individual relationships. First and foremost, acquaintances who help establish contact with the company. However, it must be understood that most companies regularly receive numerous 'partnership proposals' (a fashionable term nowadays) in the company's general e-mail inbox. Therefore, it is very important to find a unique project relationship with the sponsor's brand and its integration into events; we used to put a lot of effort into this.



Kaunas 2022 and Kaunas Akropolis sign their partnership agreement. 2019

Two of our major project sponsors included Verifo and JCDecaux, with whom we carried out a co-branding campaign abroad. Verifo's main market was abroad. For us, it was relevant to enter the Latvian, Estonian, and Polish markets, but we didn't have the money for that. So, we agreed with JCDecaux on a partnership and a big discount for advertising on their stands abroad. Verifo paid for the advertising in exchange for the opportunity to position their logo next to ours on these stands. This model also helped us in public procurements which had been adding another challenging parameter to the negotiations around in-kind exchanges or sponsorships by providing discounts.





*Dorian*, directed by Robert Wilson. Production by the National Kaunas Drama Theatre and D'haus (Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus)





'Audra' Festival. Kaunas Taxi Park. 2022



*Origami*, play by Satchie Noro. New Baltic Dance Festival. Zapyškis. 2019





Rasutė Žukienė: Kartais (2017-1982)  
 80 x 80 cm, akras, medis, stiklas  
 Pirmas parodymas

Fragment from the 1972: *Breaking Through the Wall* exhibition. Principal curator: Rasutė Žukienė.  
 Kaunas Central Post Office. 2022

Algimantas Jonas Rėkas (1940)  
 SĄJŪDIS IR AKRABIS, 1976  
 100 x 100 cm, akras, medis, stiklas  
 Pirmas parodymas

Algimantas Jonas Rėkas (1940)  
 ŽEMĖS PĖKIMAS IR ŽEMĖS PĖKIMAS, 1972  
 100 x 100 cm, akras, medis, stiklas  
 Pirmas parodymas

Algimantas Jonas Rėkas (1940)  
 ŽEMĖS PĖKIMAS IR ŽEMĖS PĖKIMAS, 1972  
 100 x 100 cm, akras, medis, stiklas  
 Pirmas parodymas

IN  
GO GO GO GO

OUT

IN

GO IN

IN IN IN

OUT IN OUT




Press conference at the Kaunas 2022 programme launch. 2021



# Final Months Before the Grand Opening

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings #administration #audit #Central\_Post\_Office #financial\_control #monitoring #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future #public\_space*

## ŽIVILĖ STANKEVIČIENĖ/

Preparations for the 2022 grand opening were very intense.

At the end of 2022, one of our stakeholders, the Kaunas City Municipality, established a new position in our list of duties: the CEO's Adviser on Administrative Matters. Along with this new position, a new colleague joined our team. Initially, this role, much like centralised accounting, was regarded with apprehension, but later it was valued for providing useful assistance in administering the project.

Reporting to the project's financiers became increasingly comprehensive and detailed. The 2020 financial reports had been quite laconic, including a list of acquired goods and services and documents justifying expenses. However, in 2022, every expense was detailed with specific descriptions. Team members often had to return to suppliers with a request to rewrite an invoice or a goods and services delivery-acceptance act. More and more specificity was required. When submitting a catering invoice, every bite had to be accounted for and justified by orders, contracts, and planning documents.

By the end of 2021, the administrative team was working with greater human resources: instead of two administrators, there were now three, while a team of five colleagues were working on public procurement; we not only had a finance manager but also an accountant. However, the scale of operations, and the pace and range of issues is difficult to describe.

In January 2022, our first exhibition, *Modernism for the Future 360/365*, was due to open its doors in the Kaunas Central Post Office. In December 2021, we were still negotiating the details of the building's loan for use: we were discussing contract provisions and proposed penalties for us, trying to justify the need, and listening to all the instructions relating to the building's extremely poor condition. And then there also was the coordination of the planned works with the Department of Cultural Heritage, insurance issues, organising heating for the premises (which is to say, simply, that we only needed to install at least minimal heating equipment, given that only the basement and the ground floor had been heated, however poorly), equipping the building with essential cleaning and hygiene supplies, ensuring cleanliness and security, and so forth.

And then there were urgently needed public procurements, event and property insurance, collaboration agreements, and other types of contracts. And everything was needed yesterday. Let's not forget the activity audit, which ran until mid-2022...

## VILTĖ MIGOŲYTĖ-PETRULIENĖ/

The opening of the first *MoFu 360/365* exhibition at the Kaunas Central Post Office was a few months away. All public procurements had been completed (half a year of intense work, piles of documents), equipment had been found and was on the way on a second

attempt, despite tremendous pandemic obstacles; constructions were being manufactured, and art pieces were also on the way from Ukraine, Kortrijk, Brno, and Tel Aviv. We were all on tenterhooks waiting for the green light to start the works, of which there were so many that those two months seemed so little... I braced myself for the worst. The administration team carried on under immense pressure, doing everything so that we could finally enter the building, where everything had to be set up from scratch. Committees, negotiations, letters, more letters, and then letters again, delays. One of our final visits was from the bailiff. My colleague Antanas Mockus and I spent four and a half hours documenting all the Post Office's worn-away corners, floors, windows, and walls. This was required in case we further damaged the building, but was that even possible?...

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

Yet another meeting was taking place at the Kaunas City Municipality to discuss traffic restrictions on Karaliaus Mindaugo Avenue during 'The Confusion'. Marijus, my colleague from Vilnius, and I represented our entire team. The previous meeting had played out according to a predictable scenario: the municipality representatives said that everything was very complicated, it was the main artery of the city, we had never done this before, how was public transport going to be redirected...? Since their arguments were not the most sophisticated, for the second meeting we had prepared just a few adjustments and additional plans. It seemed we had done everything as requested, but we got stuck again: a misplaced sign here and there, an error in the schedules. Towards the end of the meeting, the atmosphere softens, and we move from serious discussions to lighter pleasantries; Vilnius is mentioned in the conversation, and one of the participants at the meeting asks: 'Why don't you hold this event in Vilnius?' A pause. We parted in fairly good spirits, having received some homework and having witnessed a farcical picture of what awaited us in the coming years.

*Agitation:  
Closing  
Remarks*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

In the project's initial phase, we successfully laid the foundation for our programme, testing the relevance of our ideas in the first set of events, launching the programmes in all project strands, testing our competencies and modes of teamwork. The second phase, entitled 'Agitation', revealed the full outline of the Kaunas 2022 project: our main regular festivals, organised by us and our partners, took shape; dozens of partner organisations joined us, enriching our programme; 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods', a programme designed for Kaunas District, was formulated, launched and trialled for the first time; and the project's administrative apparatus ran ever more smoothly. Lockdown circumstances, while representing a challenge for the team, ended up having an effect contrary to what we might have anticipated, provoking the creation of new programme segments, enhancing our 2022 event schedule and, paradoxically, facilitating stronger links with local communities and artists. The public relations crisis in 2021 served as an opportunity to test our relationship with the project's donors and the general public, and emerge stronger out of it. But the audit that soon followed and a series of administrative complications looming in 2022 made us worry whether the grand events, of a greater scale than Lithuania was then accustomed to, would be derailed by banal bureaucracy.

2022

*Ex  
plo  
sion*

# 2022

Contemporary Myth of Kaunas  
Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion'

## A Director's Perspective

*#artist\_engagement #directing #grand\_events  
#public\_space #shows*

CHRIS BALDWIN/

Being a theatre director is akin to being a midwife. It's not as much to do with the 'grand vision' as you may at first presume. A midwife. That's what it feels like, the analogy which comes to mind, as I sit here thinking back over my work with Kaunas 2022, Lithuania's European Capital of Culture.

A midwife is responsible for delivering a baby safely into the arms of its loving and expectant parents. But she is not the parent. She is not the mother. She is not the other parent. But the midwife holds significant responsibility in her hands. She must start preparing the process of delivering the baby months before the due date and enter into a professional and empathetic conversation with the parents. What kind of pregnancy is taking place? What kind of birth is envisioned? Do the parents want to have a 'high tech' birth or keep things as natural as possible? Who needs to be consulted and heard as birth-plans are progressed? Do the parents understand the role of the midwife? Do they understand her professional responsibilities and duties? Is there a senior medical voice around who has the right to intervene and instruct the midwife to stand back and allow him to take control? It may sound like a rather perverse analogy, theatre director and midwife, but I don't think it is as strange as it may first seem – especially in the context of a European Capital of Culture.



Chris Baldwin at the technical rehearsal for the Kaunas 2022 grand opening, 2021

Although we are accustomed to the notion that a theatre director has artistic autonomy and artistic freedom (and indeed I was guaranteed this by Kaunas 2022) with such an agreement comes enormous responsibility and trust. And rather like for a midwife, the responsibility for delivering a healthy and robust result is an undeniable expectation! And yet, a large-scale cultural event, like the opening of Kaunas 2022,

is not the responsibility of one person. There are hundreds of highly skilled, passionate, committed people who all have a legitimate voice and a stake in what will happen. In other words, there is always more than one midwife involved in the birth. And this immediately raises a further series of questions which will lead to interesting answers. It is the answers to these questions which lead to the unique outcome, the unforgettable event, for which we are all working. So now let's allow our midwife analogy to rest for a while.

I must admit to a slight tendency for seeing these grand events, 'The Confusion' was no exception, as an occasion for a mighty and wide-reaching public conversation about what it means to be a city in our Europe of today. So much connects us as Europeans. Indeed everything is connected – and you only need to look for a moment to see that the climate emergency and the recent Covid pandemic serve as proof of our interconnectedness. With the climate emergency all of us will experience huge migrations of people in the upcoming decades. But this is nothing new to us. During the 20th century we Europeans have continually faced crisis, trauma, hope and rebuilding. So these big cultural projects, of which Kaunas 2022 is a perfect example, are by definition creative carriers of public debate. Teatro de Creación, and more recently Citizen-Centred Dramaturgy, are a series of techniques and method which I have developed to be practical tools for contributing to such work. How can we use cultural practice to structure a public conversation? How can our large public arenas be used for forms of entertainment and coming together which are not void of content but occasions where we can touch upon interesting and relevant social issues? Ever more questions needing to be answered in a concrete way as we developed the structure of the opening weekend. And as is now obvious to us all, this was a job for more than one midwife!

I saw my role in Kaunas as making a key contribution to the development of a useful, fascinating and even helpful myth. I kept in mind the work of Joseph Campbell and his books *The Power of Myth* and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. For Campbell myths are the creation of the human collective imagination. They serve various functions (Metaphysical, Cosmological, Sociological and Pedagogical/Psychological) and tell us something about phases or forms of societal development. But they are also deeply political in a contemporary sense which we can see in the way politicians turn to myth as a political tool. We had to choose carefully how to deploy our very particular myth in Kaunas – the Myth of the Beast of Kaunas. Were we to use the myth to say, 'it's all been decided, there's nothing to change', or could we use the myth to create a common, shared space or moment in which something radical, some kind of symbolic rupture, could occur?

There are always similarities in one's initial approach to a cultural project such as a large-scale city event which is to be broadcast around the world. In Wrocław (Poland, 2016) the question was how to reassert Wrocław as a European city. Yes, it 'belongs' to Poland now. But surely an open and welcoming, multicultural city which recognises and celebrates the legacy of German and Jewish cultures is going to be a city more open and at psychic calm with itself. A city where generations of its own citizens came from elsewhere, and thousands were deported yet again after the war, has something important to share with other Europeans. In Kaunas the conversation the city was planning had to do with hope after a long period of trauma and wartime secrets, its colonisation by the USSR, and its demand to be a city where people can now live in a free and independent European state free from domineering neighbours. The Russian attack against Ukraine occurred days after 'The Confusion' in Kaunas. And looking back the show touched upon many of the themes which were about to dominate our lives all over again. Lithuanians are generally very conscious of what is at stake at present with the war. All these themes and preoccupations are present in the Kaunas opening event and went on to play a central role throughout the year 2022.

Returning to the central questions again: How can we use large-scale events as moments for structuring an important public conversation? How can large public arenas be used for forms of entertainment which are not void of content but where we can touch upon interesting and relevant social issues? Each city has a different question to pose to a European and local audience. But of course, each city answers the question based upon its own history and experience, its own understanding of 'what is at stake'. The central visual motif in 'The Confusion', a Soviet period building being pulled down by a crowd of youngsters who were perhaps a little unsure of what to replace this grotesque monolith with, but nevertheless still sure of the need for it to go, turned out to be very prescient indeed.



# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion'

## Final Preparations

*#architecture #Central\_Post\_Office #crisis\_situations  
#grand\_events #heritage #Modernism\_for\_the\_Future #pandemic  
#problem\_solving #quarantine #shows #technical\_production*

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The official opening weekend of the European Capital of Culture, entitled 'The Confusion', comprised about 50 different public events, which began with the 'Circles of Light' events in Kaunas District, culminating in the city centre near the Žalgiris Arena and in Naujamiestis. Rytis Zemkauskas drafted the Trilogy's conceptual framework and logical scheme back in 2019, yet due to the pandemic, the grand opening's format was reshaped three times. Several directors and scenographers had been approached, processes had been started with some of them, but eventually they had to be halted because, for instance,

we were no longer allowed to organise events in enclosed spaces. In the spring of 2020, we decided to stop being distracted and focus our efforts on hosting the opening solely outdoors (temperatures in a Lithuanian January often drop well below zero...), and invited a British director, Chris Baldwin, who had gained his experience in community engagement and managing performing collectives during four of Wrocław 2016's events, to join the directing team. Although in September 2021, during the programme's media launch, it seemed that the pandemic had almost been contained, new forms of the virus began to spread soon after. In January 2022, when the grand opening took place, the super-contagious Omicron variant had peaked, with international flights to Lithuania being kept to a minimum. We organised creative and technical group crisis meetings. With two weeks left until the opening, we gave the green light to assembling the event's technical equipment. We decided that if it turned out that we could not host the opening ceremony with a live audience, we would go ahead with a television-only format, but still we refused to give up. We tracked the daily hospital admissions statistics, because the increase in these numbers would determine whether another lockdown would be declared. We coordinated the pandemic management plan with the Ministry of Health and the National Centre for Public Health, jointly estimating the maximum permissible number of attendees outdoors (!). In front of the Žalgiris Arena, which was to become the main show stage, we calculated a limit of 40,000 people (two per square metre), even though under normal circumstances we could have accommodated twice as many spectators. To manage the process, we launched online registration and distributed all 40,000 tickets within a few days. We keenly felt, as if burning on our skin, the heated expectations of our fellow Kaunesians and our foreign visitors...



Drawing of the site for the Kaunas 2022 grand opening, 2021



## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

The day before the opening, a snowstorm engulfs Kaunas. Covered in snow, I rush to rehearse our *Beast of Kaunas* installations at the stairs on V. Putvinskio Street and by the funicular. I wonder how Janis Petersons is coping: is everything working, has he prepared everything? Janis is sitting snuggly in a minibus parked by the stairs. He has prepared everything. And everything works. The rehearsal is completed in half an hour. We converse in Russian, as Janis doesn't speak English very well. How do you want it, Rytis? Like this? Or maybe like this? I want it like this. Alright, Rytis. Here you are. We rehearse at the next location by the funicular in about ten minutes. I rarely meet people who are so easy to work with. Happy, I leave Janis behind and walk through the snowstorm to the Žalgiris Arena. There Chris is rehearsing the lights. In large-scale events, often only individual elements are rehearsed. Often, it's not even possible to rehearse everything. For instance, expensive fire effects. Well, they are possible to rehearse, but first, put several tens of thousands of euros on the table and we'll show you how everything is going to look... Virginija and I must walk onto the open stage at the very end of the show. We had our rehearsal yesterday.

Well, it didn't quite happen. So, I can only roughly imagine what I will have to do. I go to where the stage will be, but I can only locate it by the hanging spotlights. There are snowdrifts there now. Horrific. The wind, carrying the snow with it, is knocking me off my feet. No, indeed, opening ceremonies should be held in March...



1.

assembling new office furniture with Lukas and Milda. And not to mention all 26 projects' artists from different countries, around 15 partners, the team assembling the exhibition, technicians, and others. A beehive, indeed. Someone isn't happy with the furniture, someone else needs a cloth, and someone else... At the same time, an international meeting with the project's partners was taking place, and we had to welcome all of them. The cherry on top: we noticed the day before that there was a missing letter in the 'Architecture Centre' sign above the entrance to the Post Office. No chance anyone would agree to make a new one, it's the weekend. But here Simonas Šidlauskas and his team solved everything in a very calm and creative manner: they just cut the letter 'A' in half and elegantly attached one of the halves in place of the missing letter. Moments like these were as sweet as honey. Oh! We still don't have a permit to hang the sign. If we don't receive it on the day of the exhibition, we'll act like partisans. The next morning, we received it, and no crime was recorded.

I believe that with this exhibition, we truly demonstrated that interwar architecture, characterised by its unique functional zoning, is convenient. We also showed that the Post Office building itself can be an exhibit and can be exhibited alongside works of art. This was largely thanks to 'Office De Architectura'. The architects of the exhibition dealt with the building, its history, and its value in a supremely sensitive, aesthetic, tasteful, and intellectual manner.



2.

VILTĖ  
MIGONYTĖ-  
PETRULIENĖ/

The final days leading up to the opening of the *MoFu 360/365* exhibition at the Central Post Office were the most challenging. By the time I had walked from the office on the ground floor to the first floor, I had already been bombarded with at least twenty questions from no fewer than ten people. Bam! The toilet got clogged too! Žilvinas rushes in with a plunger, no time to call for a plumber, because we would need to run a public procurement procedure for that too, and with his other hand he's



3.

# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion' 'Circles of Light' Grand Opening in Kaunas District

*#community\_involvement #choirs #ECoC\_opening\_ceremony  
#grand\_events #Kaunas\_District #music #regional\_dimension  
#shows*

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

The opening weekend in Kaunas District greatly bolstered the Kaunas District team's self-confidence. Having waited a long time for suggestions and strategic guidelines from the event's director on how to work with the opening programme in Kaunas District, and how to integrate it into the city's plans, we realised that it wasn't worth waiting for guidance from others. We had to propose everything and ultimately decide for ourselves. So, we proposed the concept of a 'circle of light': events gradually draw closer each day from the most remote small towns and villages of Kaunas District towards Kaunas, eventually exploding with full force in the city centre by the Žalgiris Arena. We also put together all the key elements: percussive music to get the winter event attendees moving, choirs to involve local people, ample lighting and elements of contemporary music to create a festive atmosphere, and a fire show for added impact. With the help of the burning symbols of the Beast, we also established a link to the city game. We envisaged that this concept of 'circles' would also be suitable later for the closing ceremony – the circles of events could drift away from Kaunas.

Kaunas District's team, together with the colleagues from the community programme, successfully put together the format, gathered performers, and prepared the programme and technical solutions. The opening weekend began

with modest but lively events, which then transitioned into the inner-city neighbourhoods, concluding with a grand opening. The District provided residents with a good energy, a plethora of images for the media, and a fantastic start to the grand opening. As for us, we became confident that we could do everything ourselves.

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

Nine events were organised in total: six in Kaunas District and three in Kaunas City. I visited each location several times; music rehearsals with local choirs took place in the communities. Meeting with local people, you could feel their pride in being part of the Kaunas 2022 opening programme.

In almost all of the events, it was snowing, and the wind was blowing hard, so it felt like being in a survival camp.



Event within 'Circles of Light', the inaugural Kaunas 2022 event series

Drums and podiums were covered in snow; we were sweeping and cleaning restlessly. In some places, the wind was so strong that volunteers had to hold down the tents throughout the entire event. At that time, Covid-19 was increasingly spreading, and as a result, two choirs dropped out just a few days before the events and were replaced by neighbouring communities. However, this didn't affect the morale of the musicians or choir members: during the events, there was a sense of the city's awakening, which heralded that something big awaited us all.

## MILDA RUTKAUSKAITĖ/

The most memorable thing for me from the inaugural opening events in Kaunas District was a conversation with an employee of the Čekiškės leisure hall



Map of 'Circles of Light', the inaugural Kaunas 2022 event series

after the event had ended. I asked her opinion on how everything had gone and whether she liked it. I heard words

spoken with tears of joy in her eyes: 'Our people have only ever seen such things on television before.' It was very heartening to see such sincere reactions from people, especially in the furthest neighbourhoods of Kaunas District: it reminded us that what we do has enormous value, even if it is sometimes unquantifiable and hard to measure.

# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion'

## The Morning Before

*#cultural\_diplomacy #ECoC\_opening\_ceremony  
#exhibitions #grand\_events #media  
#public\_relations #shows #technical\_production  
#volunteering*



Kaunas 2022 countdown clock in the Akropolis shopping centre

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

On the morning of the grand opening, the already-assembled stages were heavily laden with snow. There was no way we could have purchased snow removal services through public procurement in time, so the project's technical manager, Tadas Valeika, covered the expenses himself (this is not an uncommon occurrence in such circumstances, although the scale of the expenses sometimes ranges significantly). Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, whose protocol team had checked on the eve of the events, all passages and microphones through which she (what an honour!) was to deliver her live greeting to the people of Kaunas and Lithuania, cancelled her flight because of the contact she had had with a Covid-19 infected individual the night before. At that time, mandatory isolation rules were still in force – what a grim reality of Covid-19!

### AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

We've been toiling since the morning, we need to clear the snow, there's a press conference, and after the evening event at the arena, all post-show city locations and the city game will kick off. The rehearsals of the previous night went rather smoothly; we seem to be quite well-prepared. There is a fair amount of stress because there's a lot going on, but it is very pleasing to see people in the city with the maps (containing the city game rules and a programme of the weekend's events) well before the opening event. The city game proposed for the public goes to plan, and it works very well. All weekend, and even afterwards, people wandered around the city, peeking under the balconies and in the city's narrow alleyways, looking for traces of the Beast. I knew it would work, but I certainly hadn't expected it to be such a success.

### RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

Having woken up at the earliest time possible, I'm already sitting at a press conference. LRT, TVP, DELFI, LNK, BBC, 15min, TV3, Deutsche Welle. I'm telling them about everything we have dreamed of, what my colleagues have created, about our programmes. About the volunteers. About the people without whom we wouldn't have achieved anything... Then I go to the opening of the William Kentridge exhibition and share a strange moment with Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General...

She is examining Vincas Svirskis's cross, exhibited in the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art... I tell her: this cross is a copy of the one that stood next to my great-grandmother's house. Svirskis made it for my family, stayed on their homestead...

### MARIJA PULOKAITĖ/

800 volunteers, 40 team leaders, two volunteer centres. The morning of the grand opening has dawned. Wearing my jacket with the 'CREW' label and armed with a walkie-talkie, I walk the empty streets, that are closed to traffic, towards Žalgiris Arena. I am thinking: 'The whole mechanism is too big to create anything new or change anything today. What's done is done.' The crowd of volunteers dressed in bright orange starts pouring into the volunteer centre. Everyone is focused, listening to the team leaders' final instructions in the arena stands. Agnė and I address the volunteers with a word of encouragement, and there's an outburst of cheering and a stadium wave ripple across the stands. Like clockwork, everyone stands up and heads to their positions. I will probably cherish this moment for the rest of my life.



## AGNĖ MEDĖKŠAITĖ/

Assembling hundreds of volunteers is one thing, but making sure that all 800 understand what they need to do and when – that’s another thing entirely. The clear structure was not only facilitated by the volunteer team leaders but also by the walkie-talkies, which allowed for quick and effective problem-solving during the event. At the opening ceremony, we had over 20 walkie-talkies for the volunteers alone. If you saw in the city a serious-looking but smiling person in a white jacket, talking responsibly into a walkie-talkie, it was probably one of our team leaders reporting on how things were going or solving a problem that had arisen. After this challenge, no event was scary for us anymore.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

All day on 22 January, I accompanied various delegations of the highest political level and ensured that William Kentridge had a well-calibrated programme. Together with Kentridge and museum director Daina Kamarauskienė, we presented his exhibition to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, UNESCO Secretary-General Audrey Azoulay, Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, and Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė. Each of them, with their accompanying delegations and appropriate security, visited the museum at different times. Our international relations team was managing the logistics. On the same day, exhibition openings took place in the Old Town galleries, featuring artists representing our partners, Esch 2022 and Novi Sad 2022. Together with all our curators, we followed the hospitality schedule and protocol strictly and to the minute.

My husband helped me get from place to place, but I was still late for the Mayor’s reception at the Žalgiris Arena and didn’t have time to change, even though there was some formal attire waiting for me backstage. I just smiled as I greeted the attendees and thanked them for their wonderful energy and support throughout the years leading up to this moment. And it was a special moment. An even more special one was awaiting me in the arena’s surroundings.



Prime Minister of Lithuania Ingrida Šimonytė and artist William Kentridge



Virginija Vitkienė, President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and artist William Kentridge

## Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion'

# The Grand Opening and Diplomatic Protocol

*#cultural\_diplomacy*  
*#ECoC\_opening\_ceremony*  
*#grand\_events #shows*



### DOVILĖ BUTNORIŪTĖ/

At the opening ceremony, despite Omicron forecasts and dozens of cancelled flights to Lithuania (right up to the last minute, a question was constantly being raised about whether it was even possible to get here by plane?!), all the most important institutions mobilised their efforts, recognising that not only could we be proud of ourselves, but we could also showcase how good we were to others. So the grand opening served as an opportunity for politicians who had been postponing their visits to Lithuania to meet here, and we gladly provided them with a stage for this. The occasion brought together prominent figures from the European Commission and the European Parliament, the culture ministers of six countries, representatives of dozens of cities, partners from European Capitals of Culture, ambassadors, sponsors, a delegation of foreign media, and the most prominent figures elected by our nation.

### SIMONAS KAIRYS/

It was during the Kaunas 2022 grand opening, over the official lunch at the Pažaislis Monastery, that the idea was conceived of signing a cooperation agreement within the Lublin Triangle (between Lithuania, Ukraine, and Poland) in the fields of culture and cultural heritage. On 25 February 2022, I was supposed to fly to Kyiv to sign the cooperation agreement, but the war broke out.

### DOVILĖ BUTNORIŪTĖ/

This joyous occasion also brought challenges: everyone wanted to be treated in a special way and given the floor to speak, to feel like the most honoured guests, but the main events and several exhibitions were taking place in a rather small area and within a limited time frame, and the doors were not open everywhere yet. We had to create a large logistics map and schedule, which also included previously unplanned exhibition openings, where guests who were unable to be in a single room together at the same time, due to their rank, could be given the floor to say a few words. It was crucial that they didn't run into each other, but that everyone felt equally VIP. In short, a little protocol nightmare. The public didn't witness a large part of these events with 'endless speeches', but it seems all guests were happy, and the Prime Minister, who had not initially planned to stay at the main show but just pay a few hours visit, changed her mind and thus forced us to rearrange the already set VIP seating plan with just a few

Behind-the-scenes of the grand opening event. Kaunas Žalgiris Arena

hours remaining until the main event. And I got a truly unexpected opportunity to have a ride through the streets of my hometown with the flashing lights and a motorcade speeding through red lights, just before the opening show. All the delegations had their arrival times for the main opening events. Some just needed the green light. It felt surreal: everyone get out of the way – something grand is happening in the city tonight!



# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion'

## The Grand Show

*#ECoC\_opening\_ceremony #grand\_events #shows  
#technical\_production*

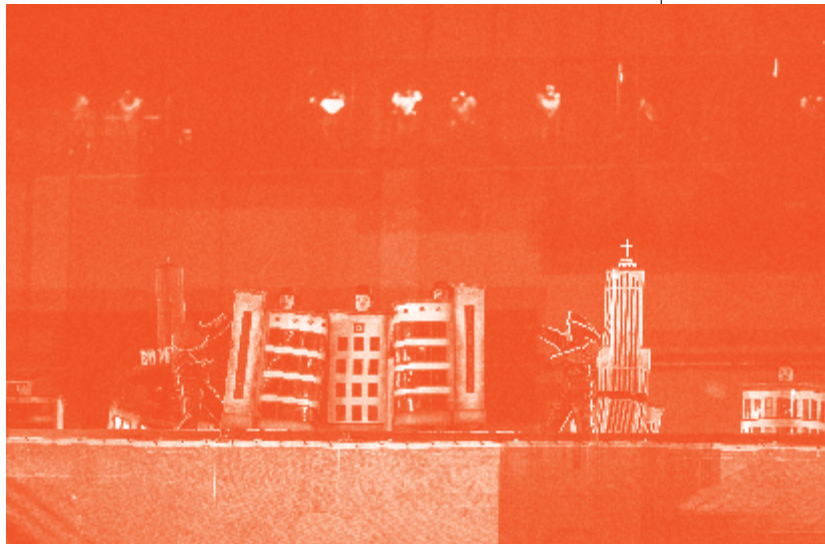
### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The Žalgiris Arena façade became the largest projection screen in the Baltic states to date. Three gigantic stages were mounted on the roof of the arena and in front of it. The action took place both on these stages and inside the arena, behind the windows, where an orchestra and a large choir were stationed. Visual projections on the arena's façade recounted the story of Kaunas city and Lithuanian history – an inevitably complex one, determined by 'being in-between', at the crossroads between Eastern and Western civilisations, being part of Western civilisation and often having to defend itself and European values. The opening performance did not shy away from our history's traumatic moments, when we failed to preserve the values of democracy and protect our citizens and neighbours – the Jews of Kaunas and Lithuania – from genocide, when we kept the history of the Holocaust out of the public discourse for too long. The opening performance was propelled forward by the wonderful music composed by Antanas Jasenka. To me, the show left an indelible sense of pride in all who had created it and participated in it. The performance was not banal. Rather, it created a sense of meaningful celebration, and its content substantially combined the narratives of Kaunas and Europe.

### AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

The main show's two riskiest elements were a helicopter designated for filming the broadcast from the air, and a cardboard building created by French artist Olivier Grossetête, designed to mimic the Britanika Hotel and supposed to be demolished during the show. Both failed us: the helicopter didn't respond well to weather conditions; ☹️ the mechanics did not manage to get it going on time. As for the cardboard building, nobody could say how the demolition would take place, it's not something that can be rehearsed, and there was only so much time allocated for this in the script. Everything was planned to the second. The building

collapsed several minutes later than we had anticipated, and the focus of the cameras and the stage lighting had already shifted to another area of the performance.



Kaunas 2022 grand opening, directed by  
Chris Baldwin



*Programme for the Kaunas 2022 grand  
opening, 'The Confusion'.*

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/



Cardboard replica of the demolished Britanika Hotel by Olivier Grossetête

Almost 60 journalists attended the opening (even under pandemic conditions). On the eve of the event, journalists had two options to choose from for observing it – either next to the arena or else in the Akropolis shopping mall's car park. The latter was supposed to be fenced off and reserved only for the media and people with disabilities. I was giving instructions to the operators and photographers near the arena. Vaida Morkūnaitė was doing the same at the Akropolis car park. Crowds started gathering from all directions at once. It turned out that security was not placed in all the required positions, so not all entrances were blocked. Vaida called me, terrified that people were pouring in and climbing up the stairs into the car park. The crowd was large, impossible to control and couldn't be asked to leave; parents were perching their kids on the railings – it was becoming unsafe. The media were cornered, people with disabilities could no longer properly enjoy the performance. We thought the car park would soon collapse.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

It's cold and damp. After quarantine, people are craving events. Enormous crowds gather. The event is free, but you must register – such are the requirements.



Spectators arriving at the grand opening



Spectators of the grand opening show in the Akropolis shopping centre car park



*Kaunas 2022 grand opening event, 'The Confusion': official aftermovie (2022).*



It all begins. They screen a documentary. Good. Then – welcome speeches. People find them annoying, I know. On the other hand, so far, no Capital of Culture has had this many welcome speeches from EU officials. The head of the European Commission, the president of the European Council, the head of UNESCO. Did this happen on its own? Well... no. Virginija and I have sent piles of letters over recent months...

The show begins. At first, I sit quietly. Then I see that the first crucial element is missing, although it should have been there. A helicopter with a huge spotlight was supposed to fly in and illuminate the Soviet building, which was supposed to collapse. The collapsing building was conceived when we were still competing for the title. I said: culture is also a destructive, not just a constructive, act. We will explode everything that gets in the way of our living! The Jury was impressed. The cardboard building was created by French artist Olivier Grossetête with help from volunteers. He is here, he participated in our press conference. He created a model of one of Kaunas's dreadful unfinished hotels... Now it must collapse spectacularly, the audience must be amazed... Nothing happens... why isn't there a plan B? Why isn't the backup spotlight illuminating from above? The rest spins around like a monotonous kaleidoscope: lots of music, lots of choir... As the end approaches, Virginija and I receive a sign to go out on stage to invite everyone to head to the city and celebrate the Capital of Culture...

As I walk to the stage, at that moment I know for sure that our appearance will be the culmination of the entire show, because there is no other culmination. So we gather all our energy and address the crowd of forty thousand people.

## ANTANAS JASENKA/

Having worked in theatre for many years, in the art of visual production, I understand the scale of such events and how challenging it is to realise them. For instance, how to light the event properly, how to amplify the music performed by musicians stationed on a stage half a kilometre wide, how to compose music that would not be cumbersome to perform but would still be vertical in terms of meaning. In our country, we have almost no practice and no experience in organising concerts and events accompanied by visuals on this scale. I believe that our opening show lacked a better understanding of how to use technology more effectively. Experience comes with practice.

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

After the show ended, a strange atmosphere lingered in the air. It seemed that everything had worked out quite well, yet something was missing. Despite this, the audience was in good spirits, people were curiously looking to visit all the programme's spots, flocking even to more remote event locations and wanting to see everything. The post-show part, intended to add extra entertainment for that evening, became a climactic highlight that rectified the impression of the opening show.

## EGIDIJUS STANCIKAS/

The most miraculous moment of all was when, following the conclusion of the opening event, crowds in their thousands burst from Žalgiris Arena into the streets of Kaunas in search of the Mythical Beast and cultural events! I drifted with the crowd from street to street, feeling at my happiest: what was so important and precious to me was also important to the majority. I have never seen Kaunas so bright and hopeful...

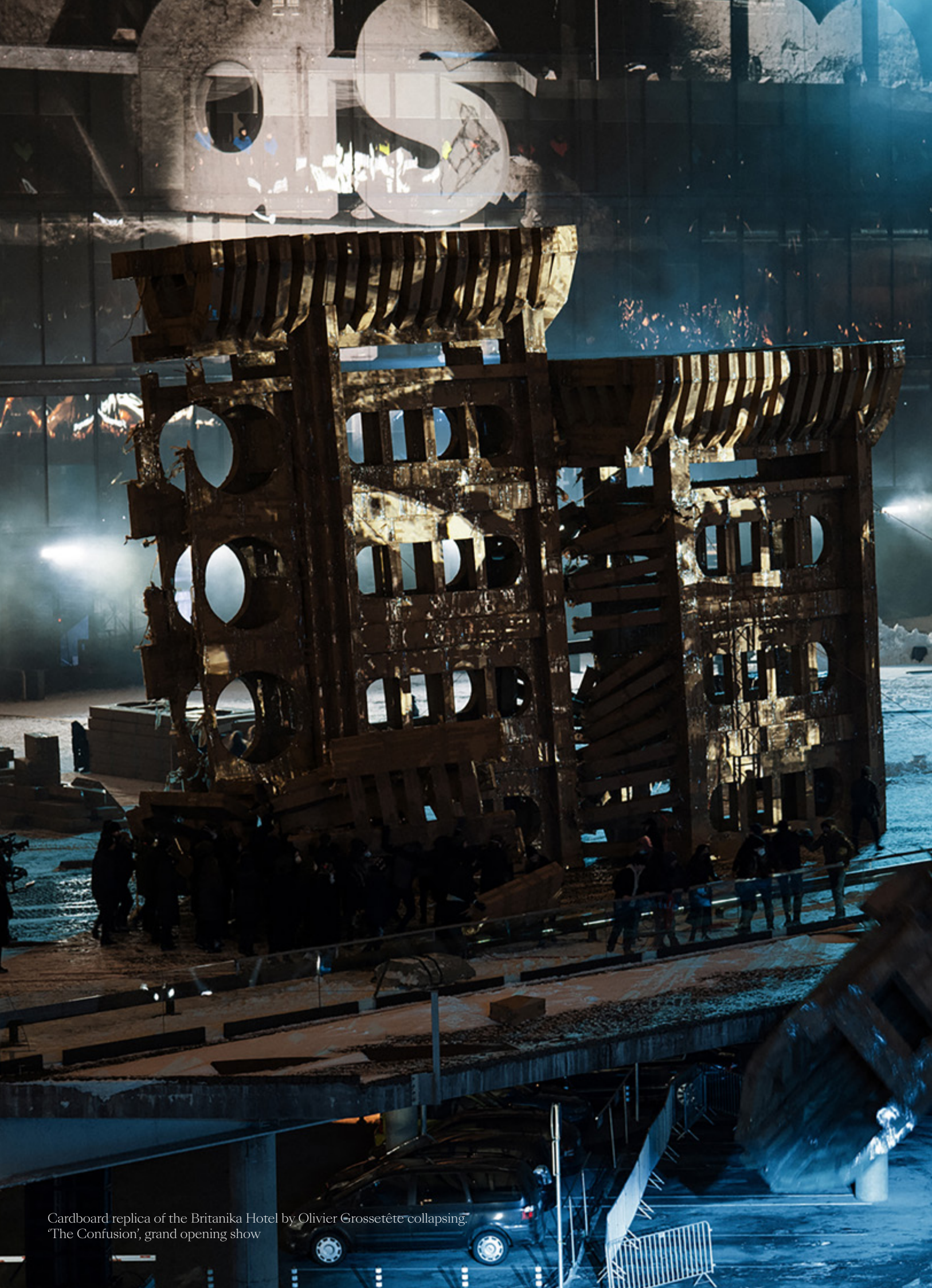


Post-show programme. Laisvės Av.

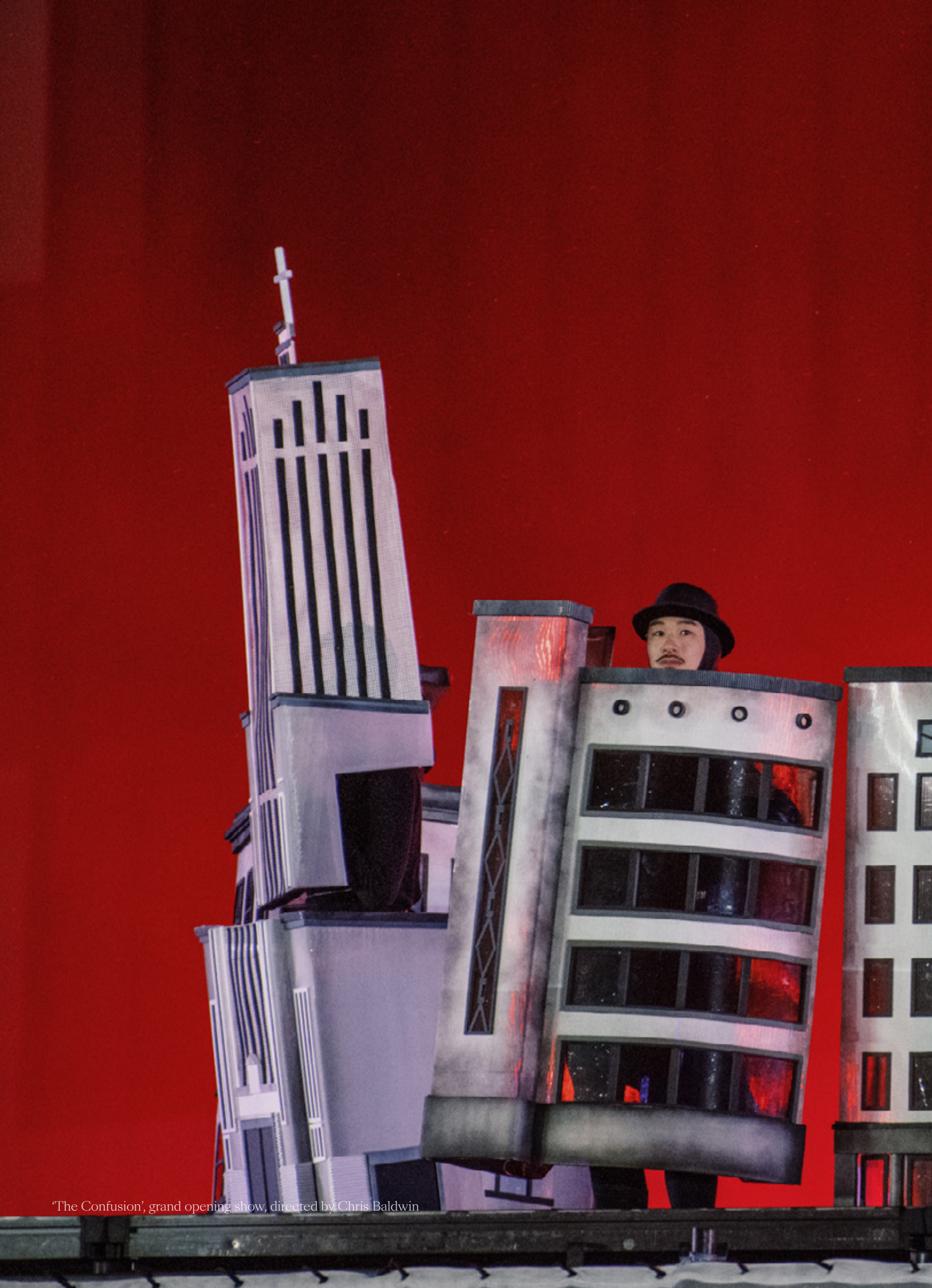


*Kaunas 2022 grand opening event,  
'The Confusion': behind the scenes  
(2022).*





Cardboard replica of the Britannia Hotel by Olivier Grossetête collapsing.  
'The Confusion', grand opening show



'The Confusion', grand opening show, directed by Chris Baldwin





'The Confusion', grand opening show, directed by Chris Baldwin

2 2 WILKOMMEN! 2 2 ZAPRASZAMY! 2 2

# INOSIOS





Fragment from Yoko Ono exhibition, *The Learning Garden of Freedom*. Curated by Jon Hendricks, organised by Contemporary Art Centre and Serralves Museum. Kaunas Picture Gallery. 2022



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Fragment of *Ex It*, installation by Yoko Ono. Curated by Jon Hendricks, organised by Contemporary Art Centre and Serralves Museum. Lietuvos Bankas. 2022



# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act One: 'The Confusion'

## The Day After

*#ECoC\_opening\_ceremony #grand\_events  
#shows #technical\_production*

### AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

After the opening events, our team entered a strange phase. On the one hand, the event seemed to have been a success, the general mood among the city's inhabitants was upbeat. But in the office... Bitterness, resentment, tension. We were questioning the director's work, video production – everything! All the work related to the upcoming the 'Confluence' event was put on hold. 'The Confusion' was subjected to mistake analysis, without seeking out what had gone right. In the grand events team, we spent a few weeks in a low starting position, waiting for a signal from our managers about how we were going to proceed with preparations for 'The Confluence'.

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

We didn't manage to avoid some moments that we would later list in our self-assessment (as we do after all major projects) as mistakes to be corrected in other events of the Trilogy. Luckily, we had planned three major interrelated events of equal importance for this year. After all, the grand opening of the European Capital of Culture is one of the rare genres where the event is a one-off, with no chance of doing better the second time around. There's no second time. Therefore, the organisers cringe with terror pondering whether the opening events will be well-received by the public. From what we know from the Vilnius 2009 grand opening, the reception of the opening events often determines the general public's opinion about the project for the whole of the coming year.

So what controllable and (importantly!) uncontrollable factors, in our opinion, stood in the way of audiences fully enjoying the event?

- Due to quarantine restrictions, we had to distribute the spectators into their assigned outdoor standing sectors. It took several hours until all 40,000 were accommodated. In the biting sub-zero cold, spectators were gnashing their teeth before the event had even begun.
- The event was live streamed by the national broadcaster and had a very limited duration of exactly one hour. Although the outdoor event, adapted for winter conditions, lasted 35

minutes, we had to use the remaining time for official speeches and a brief video about the project. This greatly enriched the TV viewers' experience but forced the audience standing outside to freeze in the cold.

- The screen net onto which visualisations were projected was too sparse for us to be able to display English and Lithuanian subtitles, making it difficult for foreign guests to engage with the text. But honestly, they didn't miss much, as even Lithuanians had difficulty understanding the modernist avant-garde poetry sung in operatic style.

- A frozen engine prevented our helicopter, which had an important role to play, from taking off (even though it had flown perfectly well during the dress rehearsal), meaning that it didn't illuminate the moment when the 15-metre-high cardboard building, built by Kaunesians and symbolising the old Kaunas, fell. Sadly, we didn't have a Plan B for illuminating this spectacle.

- The show lacked a clear climax. At the end, the lights and music faded out. People headed towards the city centre in silence, without background music, contemplating the event's rather complex content. Some quietly pondered: perhaps it's only because this was the Trilogy's first act, and the climax will come in the final event, 'The Contract'? How great that we had nurtured such a conceptual audience during the preparatory years.



– It was obvious that, against the backdrop of the pandemic, working with a foreign director, whose task was to involve local communities, is an unnecessary complication, not necessarily leading to the best possible outcome. I sincerely recommend to members of the European Capitals of Culture family to entrust such tasks to the best local professionals.

But in the city centre, miracles were happening. When I got there, people were already playing the Beast's (city) game, which later became the staple of other Trilogy weekends, too. Everyone was searching for event and installation locations, collecting points for which they received souvenirs. After a few years of the great Covid-19 depression, the city finally bloomed with people's smiles!!! Several years' worth of the programme's projects presented their teasers on the city's walls and squares: excerpts from *Kaunas Cantata* resounded in the restaurants of Laisvės Alėja, the Beast of Kaunas greeted Kaunians on the stairs on V. Putvinskio Street, images from Aideen Barry's film *Folds* were displayed on the façade of the amazing modernist Pienocentro Building, young people occupied Nepriklausomybės Square with installations and dances, communities gathered people in the courtyards of the city centre, a concert of famous pop musicians took place in Vienybės Square. The city was swarming with happy people.

The grand opening had happened. 'The Confusion' lived up to its name. The myth began to unfold.

P.S. In recent years, it's not uncommon for a European Capital of Culture to outsource the organisation (as well as concept and content preparation) of its

opening events to external production companies. We produced all the Kaunas 2022 grand events ourselves: we developed the concept, hired professionals, controlled the content and technical support – everything was Kaunas 2022's responsibility. We organised mass events on an unprecedented scale (half a million viewers attended the Trilogy alone) and we were doing all of this for the first time. Therefore, I tend to be more forgiving towards myself and team members. The most important thing is that all three Trilogy events became part of the personal histories of Kaunas's residents and visitors. These events were so rich and full of diverse cultural offerings that it was simply impossible not to stumble upon one's own personal miracle.

## TADAS VALEIKA/

In my opinion, most of the team, including myself, were like tightly coiled springs ready to be released. Self-taught amateurs, in the broadest sense of the term, not yet having had experience in a project of this size and scope, always complaining about the lack of time, funds or something else to fully implement our ideas. And then, thanks to Virginija and Ana, we were given the chance to try. To try and make events as they are truly supposed to be made. Did we succeed? It's hard to tell and I'm a biased judge, but what surprised me most was that Kaunas 2022, which was supposed to be a test intended to show us what we were capable of, became the biggest lesson. I was also very surprised that whenever I approached townspeople, companies, or city services, and introduced myself as being from Kaunas 2022, all doors would immediately open. I have been working in the events industry since 1998, and I have never encountered such warmth and a genuine willingness on the part of those around me to contribute or help. Apparently, Kaunas, as a city, and Kaunians themselves, just like our creative team, were prepared and ready to 'spring forth'. As I mentioned, any judgement would be biased, but I really want to believe that we managed to achieve all this due to everyone's sincere efforts and unity.

## MINDAUGAS REINIKIS/

In public relations, we consciously maintained a positive attitude of 'everything is fine'. If there was ever a hiccup in the organisation, what would have been the point of saying, 'Dear everyone, please be aware, we have made a mistake'? Most people never find out about the mistakes.

During 'The Confusion', not everything went well: politicians' long speeches, the freezing cold, and not everyone was able to understand everything. But a few months later, the crowd that turned up after a huge downpour at the 'Confluence' event showed us that people were really looking forward to it, even though most of them had attended the first event in January, endured the cold and had to put up with an obstructed view at times. We resisted both external and internal team self-flagellation along the lines that 'it could have been better'. Yes, it could have been, but so what?

# William Kentridge Solo Exhibition

#ECoC\_opening\_ceremony #exhibitions #grand\_events #history  
#Litvaks #museums #visual\_arts #William\_Kentridge

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

It just so happened that a single weekend in January 2022 saw two of the greatest culminations of my professional life: the grand opening of the European Capital of Culture and the presentation of the William Kentridge exhibition (*That Which We Do Not Remember*), curated by me, to Kaunas, Lithuania, and Europe, and – over the course of 2022 – to the world. I am writing this text a week after the grand opening and a few days after William's departure from Lithuania, a country he was returning to, even though he had never been here and had had no intention of visiting... I started



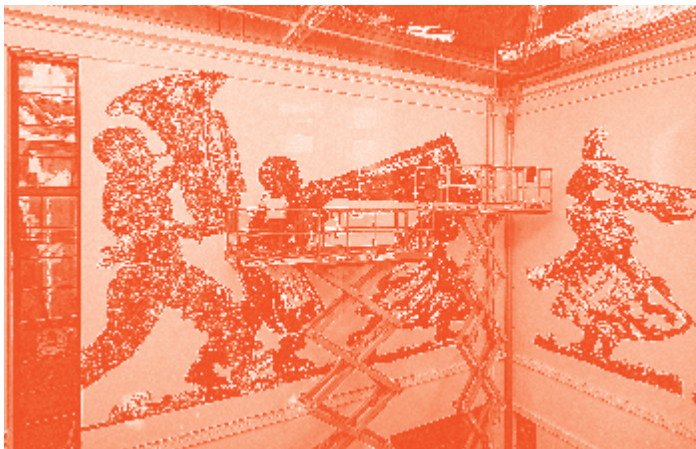
Virginija Vitkienė and William Kentridge

writing my first letters to William Kentridge, one of the greatest contemporary artists, back in 2016, when we were preparing our Kaunas 2022 bid-book. From his long-time creative partner, composer Philip Miller, who participated in several Kaunas Biennials, I knew that William was one of those South African Litvaks whose relationship with Lithuania was complicated. Both of W. Kentridge's grandparents, originating from Panevėžys and Utena, fled from the Kovno province at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries due to pogroms. All the relatives who had remained in Lithuania did not survive the Holocaust. And William had no reason to return to this country (even though he was invited on several occasions), especially since Lithuania had never been talked about in his family. Moreover, the Lithuanians' prolonged silence about the tragedy of the Holocaust and the lack of self-reflection, even after the restoration of independence, seemed to the artist to have gone on too long. In 2016, William replied that it was too early to talk about 2022: first win the title, then we shall return to the matter. But he did not, to my understanding, close the door. As soon as Kaunas won the title (29 March 2017), I 'knocked on his door' again in April, emphasising the aim of the Kaunas 2022 programme: healing from amnesia and actualising Kaunas's heritage, most of which lies in local Jewish culture. That same year, I requested a meeting in London, where the curator of that year's Kaunas Biennial, Paulina Eglė Pukytė, and I saw William Kentridge's exhibition and one of his musical works. But when I had already arrived in London, William cancelled the meeting. However, from the exhibition held at the Whitechapel Gallery (still the best contemporary art exhibition I have ever experienced), I devised a provisional structure for the Kaunas exhibition, because I simply wasn't going to stop here. In 2017, Paulina Pukytė curated one of the existentially most profound Kaunas Biennials entitled *There And Not There: (Im)possibility of a Monument*, whose catalogue, together with additional memory artwork material, was sent to William as soon as it was published. In 2019, I went to Switzerland, to the already second-agreed meeting with William at the Art Basel fair, which (after three years of effort) turned into an agreement that Kentridge's retrospective exhibition should be organised at the Mykolas Žilinskas Art Gallery. According to its renovation plans, the gallery was supposed to have undergone a major overhaul by 2022. My first list of artworks was worth occupying all three floors of the gallery (only guesstimating how much human and financial resources this might require). William explicitly did not promise to create any new pieces, although in the exhibition's collection that I was building in my letters, a 'new commission' was never crossed out. The next time we met in Johannesburg, I even suggested that



William could create an animated film about Kaunas modernism, but he declined due to lack of time. When I returned from Johannesburg, where we had been putting the collection together, and had an online meeting with William, the exhibition venue booking had already been cancelled, we were looking for a new one, and of course, the exhibition collection depended on it too. The spaces available at the Čiurlionis Gallery within the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, which were kindly offered to us by director Daina Kamarauskienė, posed a set of challenges due to their unconventional widths, heights, existing permanent exhibitions, and the building's being under heritage protection. However, my single sentence, concerning the proposed spaces, transformed this story from knocking on the artist's door to running together or even after him. Referring to the museum's auditorium, which is designed for speaking from behind the rostrum, I invited the artist to make his statement with an original art piece ('make your statement, please'). This invitation turned the process around so that Kentridge created two new pieces for Kaunas 2022: a mural *When I Am Dead and Need Tenderness* for the permanent display in the museum's inner courtyard, and – miracle of miracles – an audiovisual installation *You Who Never Arrived* (composer Philip Miller) in the museum's auditorium. The compilation of other chrestomathic works by Kentridge (such as *The Refusal of Time*, *Drawings for Projection*, *Drawing Lessons*), installed under the guidance of William Kentridge's long-time scenographer and designer Sabine Theunissen, left no one doubting the artist's genius. However, his outpouring in the piece *You Who Never Arrived*, which blends the images of the South African landscape and Lithuanian old Jewish cemeteries amidst the sound of voices singing in a cappella, brought the artist back to the land from which his relatives, who remained here, had never managed to leave. And the audience was transported to a metaphysical space, somewhere beyond the mundane and the banal.

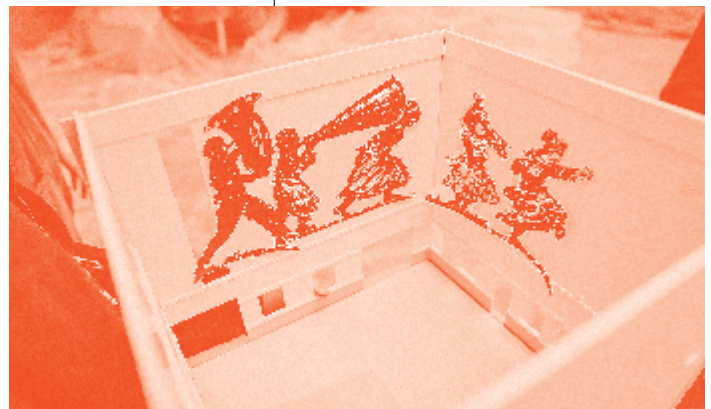
One must read Kentridge's fantastic interview published in the catalogue (the interview and the catalogue were put together by Sandra Bernotaitė, and its unique design was created by Gytis Skudžinskas), as well as his



Installing William Kentridge's painting *When I Am Dead and Need Tenderness*. M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art



Installing William Kentridge's painting *When I Am Dead and Need Tenderness*. M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art



Installing William Kentridge's painting *When I Am Dead and Need Tenderness*. M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art

daughter Alice Kentridge's essay about her second return to Kaunas, after 2009, when she participated in the Kaunas Biennial's project 'Where is Kovno?' At that time, she found no signs of Jewish culture or their existence in Kaunas...

Kaunas has changed since 2009, when Alice Kentridge found no signs of memory here, and, beginning in 2017, it has been changing even more. This exhibition became a huge part of our confrontation with amnesia, inviting us to return to... humanity.

The William Kentridge exhibition was visited by 89,000 visitors in 2022. And while preparing this book, with William Kentridge's permission, visitors to the Čiurlionis Museum still have a chance to see both of the artist's large-format pieces created especially for Kaunas...



*Behind-the-scenes at the William Kentridge exhibition (Facebook video, 2021).*

## SANDRA BERNOTAITĖ/



Press conference at the opening of the William Kentridge exhibition



Visitors to William Kentridge exhibition

In jest or in earnest, the year 2022 became my own *Refusal of Time* year (the title of one of the exhibition installations). The exhibition was opened in January. The author himself arrived and the intensity was such that I lost my sense of time; it seemed that half a year must have passed. Then, at least once a month, and sometimes more often, I took people around the exhibition and every time I kept discovering new things for myself. Kentridge seemed inexhaustible. Visitors also shared their emotions and interpretations, so there were plenty of shared experiences. I felt it would be strange to live without the exhibition once it was over. Alone, I came to bid farewell to the exhibition before it was closed at the end of the year and, once again, discovered what

I wasn't looking for: I quietly watched the video clips from the making of *The Refusal of Time* installation, the filming of *Procession*. I saw the lively faces of people who only appear as shadows in the installation. It was hot on the filming set; there was lots of laughter; music was playing; Kentridge directed, conducted, and jumped on the platform to try out a pose or a gait for himself. Once again, I understood why Kentridge has felt so close to me from the beginning: he invites everyone to create and play together, and this is my method of creation. He invites curators, designers, lighting technicians, museum staff, viewers, me, as the compiler of the exhibition's catalogue. The two of us played his interview. We all played the exhibition's narrative. We played the visits to the exhibition. Another similarity: both Kentridge and I have training in acting, so when I was

taking people around the exhibition, I quickly got into the role of a guide – not so much guiding as playing a character along the exhibition's trajectory. It was live theatre. This exhibition did not call for interpretations or external 'translators'. You just had to open your eyes and your heart. I sincerely thank the exhibition curator, Virginija Vitkienė, for her trust in me and cooperation. I am also delighted to have had the opportunity to work together with the catalogue designer, Gytis Skudžinskas. This exhibition was the most important event of Kaunas 2022 for me.



*William Kentridge exhibition, 'That Which We Do Not Remember' (Facebook video, 2022).*



*'Return to Never Before', documentary about William Kentridge (by Rytis Zemkauskas, LRT, 2022).*

# Kaunas 2022 News Factory

*#communication #community\_involvement #marketing #media #public\_relations*

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

With the launch of the 2022 programme, we became a total communication factory. On average, each month we would publish around 40–50 articles and hold four or five integrated communication and advertising campaigns at A-class events, not to mention an additional 15–20 smaller events. From clay workshops to Marina Abramović. You call the television or radio stations and arrange all the reports for the week ahead. We got so good at the mechanics of all this that we would plan topics at least two to three months in advance. I was very happy with our marketing and communications team, which coped with such a vast workload and a significant number of stressful situations. 2022 flew by like a roller coaster: with a lot of euphoria and satisfaction, but also with plenty of moments of burnout and rejection. The organisers of all Kaunas 2022 projects and events wanted to be equally visible in the media; everyone felt equally important and exceptional.

## JUSTINA ČEBATAVIČIŪTĖ/

I joined the Kaunas 2022 team after spending seven years in Brazil. It took me about half a year to understand the project's values. Coming here, I thought that Kaunas 2022 was about grand events, meant for showing off, for showing that we can! After all, the bigger your event, the more news coverage it will generate and the higher the value of the project will be. But in fact, the project's real essence lay in small community projects, which, in my opinion, will ultimately have a greater impact in the future. In a small country like Lithuania, small projects and newly created interpersonal relationships are very important. In this sense, Kaunas 2022 changed my beliefs and I find it very beautiful that these values have been discussed so much.



Journalists attending press conference at the opening of Marina Abramović exhibition

# A Fresh Start. Preparation for the Second Grand Event: 'The Confluence'

*#grand\_events #public\_space #shows #team\_relationships  
#technical\_production*

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I hear and see that 'The Confusion' left a significant part of the audience disappointed. Critics' reviews come out, accurately echoing what I've always tried to tell the show's director. It's only fortunate that, when the vision was written, it was foreseen that the first event of the Trilogy would be a kind of awakening. A kind of confusion. Which is exactly what came to pass, except that there were more confusions than anticipated. Nothing is lost, the city's inhabitants deserve a celebration, and they will get one during the 'Confluence' event.

I drive over to Tadas Valeika. He tells me that after a show like this, he doesn't want to work with us anymore, because the show was a mess both in terms of content and production. Yes, I say, I am of the same opinion. We cannot afford to lose Tadas, as he already knows the riverbeds of the Nemunas and the Neris by heart and is no stranger to the taste of water. The technical side of the 'Confluence' show – a water show, incredibly complex in terms of technical execution and never-before-made in Lithuania – is so important that we won't be able to find another person. I ask Tadas directly: 'if Virginija and I take over the production, will you stay? I promise I will manage it well.'

Okay, says Tadas.

Virginija and I take over producing the show.

A couple of weeks later, Chris, realising that his spells have worn off, quits.

Now, alongside Tadas's team, we must create a show that the people of Kaunas will be proud of.

What lies ahead are some of the toughest months of my life. I will have to face numerous roads and roadblocks, a lot of mistrust. Tadas, fully aware of how much we need him, will take full advantage of that without any scruples. I will be a foreign body in an army, where he feels like the general. We will find ourselves on the edge of the abyss more than once. Jolita Vitkauskaitė, who is used to working in the TV3 meat grinder, will come to the rescue and help resolve the issues between me and Tadas.

Jolita, as the executive director, is the mind behind more than a single great idea used in 'The Confluence'.

All the respect I will earn will be based on utmost patience and diplomacy. All the contempt I will earn will be based on my mistakes and my hesitancy to insist on things being done the way I think is right. Everything I have insisted on has worked out. Being fifty years old and having created many successful and unsuccessful projects, I started everything with a blank slate that spring. I do not regret a single second. To all those I have offended along the way, I apologise. If I were to do it again, I would go even more radical. Because now I know what a great Capital of Culture show should look like.

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

It's all very chaotic, part of the team has been replaced, the director has changed, the concept is clear, but we need a definitive plan of what we're going for. We have put everything around the main show, the weekend promises to be even more ambitious with several big events taking place: the European Capital of Culture Forum, the Courtyard Festival, 'Let's Celebrate the River', also the Summer Stage kicking off in the Town Hall Square, not to mention the entire weekend programme for 'The Confluence'! A very intense time begins as we try to merge everything into one piece. To be honest, this event was perhaps the most complex in every aspect, the event's sheer size (both geographically and in terms of content) made it difficult to arrange everything where it belonged.

## ANTANAS JASENKA/

The script for 'The Confluence' was handed to me late, but I worked with what I had, and had already composed almost the entire musical score (I rushed the musical creative processes in order to leave all the more time for preparing the other phases). I don't know why, but the client suddenly changed their mind, as if some people had fallen out with one another and could not find the right balance. They took the easy way out, without even considering the music I had proposed.

Once Chris's services were declined, the director and choreographer Vesta Grapšaitė was brought in to salvage the situation. Having proposed a number of directorial solutions, she was soon ejected from the process, but her ideas ended up being used. The resulting event was easy to implement, perhaps not very exceptional but not bad either and, according to Rytis Zemkauskas, it would please everyone. In my opinion, we couldn't afford to please everyone. I wouldn't have so radically changed the event's original idea; I wouldn't have invited the TV3 show producer to manage the situation. Today's audience is educated and sophisticated. The evening of 'The Confluence' was permeated with elements of pop culture, even though our budget would have allowed us to delve deeper.

But the client is the client, he steers the ship the way he needs to.

# Slava Ukraini! Cancelled Events, 'CulturEUkraine', Triennial of Contemporary Ukrainian Art and Other Projects in Support of Ukraine

*#business\_and\_culture #European\_dimension  
#international\_partnerships #media #solidarity #Ukraine*

## MINDAUGAS REINIKIS/

On 24 February, two fundamental questions arose: what are we going to do with our programme – should we change it, not change it, cancel it, go ahead with it, revise it, leave it as it is? And what are we going to do with the Day of Happiness? Its publicity campaign had already started. In the span of a single day and a half, we killed the Day of Happiness campaign and came out with the message that there was no happiness now...

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

It wasn't the first time that the Day of Happiness had to be transformed. In the face of war, 'happiness' is a terribly important concept, but the reality was far removed from the idea of celebration.

## MINDAUGAS REINIKIS/

A massive support rally, entitled 'Freedom Shines', was organised right away in Vilnius. We decided to keep up with the momentum and hold a support rally in Kaunas too. The first thing we did was to create a Facebook event. We were expecting maybe a few dozen people to register, we would stand quietly with a few flags and disperse soon after. After an hour, over three thousand participants registered, so we needed more infrastructure, management, logistics, and content. And permits as well. We contacted the student unions in Kaunas. The Vytautas Magnus University student union were the most active to respond and carried out a lot of invisible tasks. On 25 February at 1 a.m., I messaged Algirdas Stonys asking for financial support to set up the stage, and at 4:30 a.m. I received an 'OK' from him. Within half a day, we gathered up a dozen performers who performed their songs and music in the evening. Speakers

ranged from academics to politicians. Kaunas's Ukrainian community joined in. On that day, Irutė and I were driving back from Vilnius after a meeting with potential sponsors. We stopped on the way to buy some buns for the performers and student volunteers and arrived just a few minutes after the scheduled start time, in time for me to climb onto the stage straight from my car to host the event.





Support rally for Ukraine. Vieniybės Square. 25 Feb 2022

### IRUTĖ TUMAITĖ/

I still find it hard to believe that in just one day, a team of eight to ten people, using their connections, created an event that filled a whole square with people. That night, standing on the square, I was close to tears seeing people having come together to a support rally organised within a day. No campaigns, no advertisements, no other common marketing tools were needed to make this happen.



Support rally for Ukraine. Vieniybės Square. 25 Feb 2022

### VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Over three weeks, Ukrainian families flooded into Kaunas: women and children. They stayed with local families, but they had no place to meet up in or socialise. In the Kaunas Central Post Office building, which we had been granted on a loan for use in 2022, the second floor was empty and unused. It didn't take us long to come up with the idea of creating a place for Ukrainians to gather in, meet one another and the locals, enjoy good internet access and an environment in which to keep their children occupied. Despite the enormous workload associated with the main programme, the majority of our core team got involved in this new project. Vaida Venokutė-Nagė, Irutė Tumaitė, Monika Inčerytė, and our newly employed Ukrainian team member, Kseniia Nezhyva, carried out the idea and its implementation throughout the entire year. Private individuals and companies contributed with equipment and other things. The initiative, entitled 'CulturEUkraine' at the suggestion of Mindaugas Reinikis, lived up to its name: besides smaller exhibitions held in the centre, we concluded the European Capital of Culture programme at the Post Office with a triennial of Ukrainian contemporary art, *Ukraine! Unmuted*, co-organised with the Lviv Cultural Strategy Institute. The project – which was only added to the programme in March 2022, had no planned budget, and ended up costing about 100,000 euros – happened because the Kaunas 2022 team has always been about meaning, about what the city's inhabitants and the war-torn Ukrainians need today, about what Europe needs to learn from today's Lithuania, resistant to Russian propaganda and empathetic towards our invaded neighbour.



## MONIKA INČERYTĖ/

Among the Ukrainians coming to Kaunas because of the war in their country, I saw many cultural professionals who possessed a lot of strength and a keen desire to continue their activities here, in Kaunas. They would enthusiastically talk about their activities and work in Ukraine and almost always ended with a question: where do I go, who do I turn to in order to continue my activities? I CAN sing, write, teach...

One Ukrainian woman's words really stuck with me, when she brought a lot of coloured paper, pencils and other materials to the centre. Irina said: 'we will create a new home. Here, now. Even though we left our home there, but now we are here and we have to create a new home for ourselves.'

Diana came to Kaunas in August, via Russia, Estonia and Latvia. It was the only escape from the Russian-occupied eastern part of Ukraine. She was nineteen. She was studying Graphic Design and worked as a freelance designer. From the very beginning of the war, Diana had been keeping a diary, writing and drawing, as it helped her survive the madness she had experienced. Having spent a few weeks in Kaunas, during which she came to work at the 'CulturEUkraine' centre's co-working space daily, she left in September to pursue a degree in Klaipėda. She returned later in November with an exhibition of her artworks. Short texts and poignant illustrations gave a glimpse of what she had gone through. And maybe it helped to ease her heartache ever so slightly.



*About the 'CulturEUkraine' centre  
(YouTube video, 2022).*



*'UKRAINE! UNMUTED' public  
discussions programme  
(YouTube video playlist, 2022).*

Presenting the 'CulturEUkraine' centre to Kaunas's foreign visitors unexpectedly became part of my job, which was especially meaningful because I met various delegations visiting Kaunas, including politicians, artists, journalists, and students. I told them about the Ukrainians coming to Kaunas and starting their lives anew here, about the help the centre was providing to them. These meetings made my work even more meaningful, because by presenting the centre's activities I also had the opportunity to talk about the Russian war in Ukraine.



Event at 'CulturEUkraine' centre

## EGLĖ RYTMETYTĖ/

At the end of February, as some of the strictest pandemic restrictions were lifted and after a long wait and months of correspondence, several journalists from Belarus were eagerly awaiting a positive response from us regarding their visit to some of the Kaunas 2022 events, and began actively preparing for their visit. On learning about the Russian invasion and the role Belarus was playing in it, I once again carefully inspected who these journalists were representing and, lo and behold, found that they were working for propaganda channels. After consulting with Mindaugas, I sent these journalists a decision which they were not expecting from us: due to the support Belarus was providing Russia, we were not going to welcome any of them.

The dissatisfied journalists, unhappy with our 'unfair and undemocratic' decision, argued in every way possible that we should reconsider it: from the classic 'culture and sport are unrelated to politics and should instead unite people' and 'we

can't dictate to our government how they should behave' to 'we are your closest neighbours; Belarusians, unlike Ukrainians, are friendly, hardworking, and fighting for their freedom'. The journalists even proposed their own solutions, for instance, they would reach out to Kaunas 2022 again, this time as media representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, i.e., 'countries that are not involved in the war' (we would even be allowed to choose the country ourselves!). When the arguments in English failed, the Belarusians resorted to Russian arguments. However, our position remained firm.

# Marina Abramović Exhibition and Public Lecture

*#crisis\_situations #cultural\_sector\_involvement #exhibition\_spaces  
#exhibitions #funding #galleries #infrastructure  
#Marina\_Abramović #media #museums #visual\_arts*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

One of the most ambitious projects of our programme partners was the exhibition initiated by Arvydas Žalpys and the Meno Parkas Gallery, featuring Marina Abramović's exhibition and her meeting with the public, which immediately became one of Kaunas 2022's flagship projects. I cautiously asked the artist's assistant what the largest audience was that we could invite to the meeting. Give us a stadium, he replied, adding that meetings with the younger generation are now of primary importance to Marina. Later it would transpire that an audience of 6,000 spectators would become a newly conquered challenge for Marina. And the biggest challenge for the exhibition's organisers would be posed by the exhibition space.



Marina Abramović dining with the exhibition's organisers

## ARVYDAS ŽALPYS/

In 2019, Marina Abramović's retrospective exhibition, *The Cleaner*, was held at the Znaki Czasu Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń. Online videos will never replace the impression you get from seeing art in real life. It makes you rethink a lot of things: life in general, ideas, meaning. Not just art. It affected me, I still can't forget that feeling, even though the experience was relatively brief. I attended a press conference in Toruń. I asked a question or two, but I can't remember now what I was interested in. I must say that she is definitely not the person her critics, and I don't mean art critics, seek to portray her as. I returned to Kaunas from Poland feeling hopeful, having realised that I would like to invite her to Lithuania.

Our gallery's team, with considerable international experience, successfully carried out the preparatory work in constant communication with the artist herself, as well as the Marina Abramović



*Marina Abramović exhibition, 'Memory of Being'  
(Facebook video, 2022).*



Institute (MAI), foreign curators and institutions. Unplanned challenges, which later turned into invaluable lessons and experiences, lay ahead of us. I would like to highlight two of them. The first one involved the Lithuanian Council for Culture (LCC) making an unexpected decision in 2020. Our project required additional funding during the preparatory period, as Kaunas 2022 was providing funding only for the project implementation stage. We prepared and submitted our application to the LCC. The experts rated it positively and recommended giving partial funding, but the LCC decided otherwise. This came as a huge shock to us and felt like a blow below the belt. Attempts were made to talk the matter over and obtain some well-motivated answers during online conversations with the LCC leadership of that time. Unfortunately, these attempts failed. With great effort, and thanks to our sponsors and the Meno Parkas team, we overcame this challenge. The question, however, remains: who can deny that were this exhibition to have taken place in Vilnius, the LCC's decision would have been different?

The second challenge awaited us in September 2021, with the arrival of the MAI director, Giuliano Argenziano, in Kaunas. After long business negotiations, it was time to inspect the allocated exhibition spaces. Three years previously, when we began negotiations, we declared that this exhibition would take place in the Kaunas Picture Gallery of the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art. I won't even begin to describe the expression on the MAI director's face when he saw the building of the Kaunas Picture Gallery from the outside. The situation, after a short walk inside the gallery, can be vividly illustrated by his question: 'Do you really imagine hosting an exhibition by Marina Abramović here?' To this day, I still find it difficult to work out why he came to trust us, but I assured him that everything would be renovated, replaced, and updated. This challenge was greater than the previously experienced blow below the belt. I am glad that there were businesses who understood the nature of the problem. Exhibition organisers shouldn't be concerned with renovations of existing spaces. Why are buildings of national cultural importance in such a lamentable state? I remember last year's discussion in the LRT studio during ArtVilnius. The Minister of Culture spoke glowingly about new cultural institutions and their development on a national level, illustrating his words with impressive figures. I made a remark to him: 'And what are we going to do with the existing buildings? Are we going to shut them down and continue building new ones? Because that shows progress?' I am convinced that all of us – including artists, curators, and visitors – must demand solutions to these problems.

There is an ongoing discussion today about what will remain and what will happen after Kaunas 2022. We have built up a huge audience; we have proven that we can be an equal with our international counterparts in organising major exhibitions of renowned artists. We are capable of disseminating culture of great importance. Will we be able to offer such projects to Kaunas and Lithuanian society in the future? I don't think so. There is no willingness to face such challenges again, which arise because we still lack a long-term cultural policy, a long-term vision. No decisions are being taken by those who are obliged to take them.\*

\* *Arvydas Žalypys. „Meno parkas“. „Kaunas 2022“ Iššūkiai, pamokos ir perspektyvos. Dailė 1 (91), 2003, p. 35–42.*



Fragment from Marina Abramović exhibition.  
Kaunas Picture Gallery



*Rytis Zemkauskas's interview with  
Marina Abramović (YouTube video,  
2022).*

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

It's the eve of Marina Abramović's meeting with the public. She arrives to inspect the Žalgiris Arena, where the event will take place. I am tremendously anxious, knowing who I will be meeting, yet her excitement upon seeing the arena exceeds mine. She steps onto the stage, she is thrilled, and I hear for the first time that this will be her largest live audience ever. The rehearsal goes well, the sound is good, the screen is large, everyone is pleased, we let Marina take a rest.

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

Marina's visit to Kaunas was one of the most memorable events. We curated and managed the entire communication campaign, coordinating it with Arvydas Žalpyš and colleagues from Meno Parkas. Over 80 journalists from Lithuania and abroad showed up for Marina's press conference: TV, radio, fashion and art critics, bloggers, and so on. The hall was just about packed.

Marina's lecture drew an audience of 6,000 visitors. Due to major traffic jams in Kaunas and Vilnius, many people were late, so 30 minutes prior to the event, about 5,000 people flocked to the arena's surroundings, causing large queues at the checkpoints.

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

With five minutes left until the start, I see how an ambulance crew rushes into Marina's lounge and a half-an-hour-long drama begins. We are about to start, but Marina's blood pressure is high; she is very nervous. Fortunately for us, people are also running late, queues are long. We are 10, then 20 minutes late. Mindaugas apologises to everyone over the microphone for the delay, says something about people still pouring into the arena (later, on social media, we were scolded for having



*Public lecture by Marina Abramović: official video (LRT, 2022) (in Lithuanian).*



*Public lecture by Marina Abramović: official aftermovie (2022).*

been disrespectful to the audience). Meanwhile, backstage is bubbling with life: Marina's manager is having quite a heated discussion with Arvydas; such heated conversations are heard several times over, every few minutes. They both walk in and out of Marina's lounge, multiple times. The tension is rising, I considered other scenarios that might play out, how we might have to tell everyone that 'we apologise... but for this and that reason... the event has been cancelled'. People are still waiting. There is some commotion in the hall. We are still waiting...

## AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

We are now 30 minutes... 40 minutes late... the event still hasn't started. The doctors haven't left Marina's room yet, there's a possibility that the event may not take place at all. The crowd begins clapping, demanding for the event to begin. We cannot divulge the real reason for the delay. Over the microphone, we apologise for the lateness of the event and its attendees. Eventually, after over an hour of stressing out, we are informed that Marina will go on to the stage and the lecture will take place. Holding onto Aistis, Marina appears in front of everyone.



Rytis Zemkauskas interviews Marina Abramović. Kaunas Picture Gallery

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

Half an hour after the scheduled start, SHE walks onto the stage. Somewhat pale, but her only destination is the stage. As we agreed, I hand her the microphone and clicker remote, and escort her onto the stage. The lecture lasts longer than planned, over two hours; Marina responds to live audience questions, there are more of them than had previously been agreed; at the end, everyone stands up, holding hands and sending energy to war-torn Ukraine, which suffers inhumane actions. Everyone applauds, a certain euphoria is lingering in the air. I rush to the stage to escort Marina back, I collect everything I had handed to her, and she is just glowing, unrecognisable as the person who had climbed onto the stage more than two hours ago. This on-stage transformation is probably one of my most memorable moments from the whole year of 2022.

# Neighbourhood Festivals. Decentralisation of Culture

*#audience\_development #co-creation  
#community\_involvement #decentralisation  
#dormitory\_neighbourhoods #festivals #Fluxus\_Labs  
#impacts #motivation #We\_the\_People*

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ-PAUKŠTĖ/

The 'Fluxus Labs' co-creativity outcomes and the different faces of city's neighbourhoods were showcased in 2022 during eleven unique festivals held in a variety of the city's neighbourhoods from April until the end of summer. We began planning for these in the spring of 2021. In each neighbourhood, we held meetings, turning to all our available contacts: 'Fluxus Labs' agents, museums and cultural institutions operating within the neighbourhoods, proactive locals. We invited them to join us around a table to discuss where in the Kaunas 2022 programme they would like to see their neighbourhood be included. We strove to entrust the organisation of these festivals to the local communities, providing our material support and necessary assistance where needed. In short, the summer of 2022 – with Kaunas neighbourhood festivals and the simultaneously ongoing 'Culture to the Courtyards' project (which began during lockdown and returned once more in 2022, bringing a diverse host of performers to the courtyards of dormitory neighbourhoods) in full swing – enlivened cultural life beyond the city centre and provided countless people with their first-time experiences of participating in contemporary cultural events. A few conversations stuck with me, especially those I had with courtyard residents who had initially worried that they would not be able to grasp contemporary dance or that we were bringing them not the performance they wanted, but who, after the event, confessed they had shed a tear or changed their view on things.

By the way, in the project's final year, we began noticing the signs of burnout. We were doing things for the sake of doing them, in order to meet the project's projected quantitative expectations and indicators. We noticed the same in the communities, who, as the title-holding year approached, were struggling to find something special they could show or come up with. We had to keep motivating ourselves and those around us, reminding everyone that it needed to be fun, and that process was the most important thing in our work, so it didn't matter even if fewer than 2,000 people got to see the outcome. We returned to our regular rhythm in time and re-evaluated our priorities once more.



'Culture to the Courtyards'. 2022



'Culture to the Courtyards'. 2022



'Culture to the Courtyards' 2022:  
official aftermovie.

# The 1972: Breaking Through the Wall Exhibition

#activating\_neglected\_buildings #Central\_Post\_Office  
#exhibition\_spaces #exhibitions #film #heritage #history  
#Memory\_Office #music #photography #theatre #visual\_arts  
#volunteering



1972: *Breaking Through the Wall* exhibition opening. Concert by Bazaras Brothers. Kaunas Central Post Office

## DAIVA PRICE/

The idea of presenting an exhibition about the year 1972 was conceived while reflecting on Kaunas's history and its identity. The year 1972 is a part of Kaunesian identity, ingraining a spirit of rebellion and resistance, a refusal to acquiesce to an oppressive system and attempts at levelling and dehumanising... We saw the events of 1972 as one of the cornerstone elements of the city's DNA, as well as a historical period through which we could not only introduce the city's history, but also the history of the part of Europe which had suffered Soviet occupation, a history which, unfortunately, is still so little known to Westerners.

In 2019, in Galway, the upcoming European Capital of Culture at the time, I met a local curator. I told her about our city's history, about Romas Kalanta's public self-immolation, the hippies, the jeans, and how my father used to make tape-recordings of Western

music played on Radio Luxembourg. And she says to me: 'Hippies?! In 1972?! There were no hippies in Ireland at that time, this was unimaginable...! I was astonished. After all, we were the ones living behind the Iron Curtain, and you were living in the free world and didn't have hippies?... It seemed very meaningful and important not only to tell the story of what happened in this part of Europe after the Second World War, but also to explore what 1972 meant in different corners of Europe.'

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Professor Rasutė Žukienė, who curated *1972: Breaking Through the Wall*, devoted several years of work to this exhibition. She assembled experts from various cultural fields, oversaw the selection of artworks, and took part in creating the exhibition's architectural design. This was an internal (i.e., not partnership-based) Kaunas 2022

project. Even though we lacked human resources for productions of this scale, Justina Petruilionytė-Sabonienė, and later Milda Rutkauskaitė, tied all the project's loose threads together into a single knot. The exhibition book, compiled by Kristina Budrytė-Genevičė and rich with informative articles, remains a valuable text summarising the exhibition's research and shedding light on the structure of the cultural sector in late Soviet Lithuania and the resistance sentiment felt among the artists (and not only them). In the context of the ongoing Russian war of aggression, the relevance of this exhibition became even more apparent. The exhibition allowed us to communicate more clearly to foreign visitors the connections between the crimes of the Soviet regime and Russia's new imperialist ambitions.

## RASA ŽUKIENĖ/

The fiftieth anniversary of Romas Kalanta's self-immolation was approaching. It's a very significant date in modern times, which gave a signal to Lithuania's fight for freedom. Kalanta's self-immolation, accompanied by the slogan 'Freedom for Lithuania!', shocked everyone. As a child, I recorded this event, as did most of the Lithuanian population, fully aware of its meaning, even though in the Soviet Union everything was suppressed. This suppression and prohibition to act, think, and create freely had echoed loudly in culture and in works of art. As an art historian, I have encountered many artworks in which – often symbolically, in allegorical form – artists were attempting to talk about this. This exhibition was a unique opportunity to accumulate works reflecting what was happening in the life of an unfree country. Especially as the works of the '70s and '80s had never been reviewed as a document, as an historical, not just an aesthetic, value.



The exhibition was one of the ECoC's main events, so we had to create a narrative that would be accessible to a very diverse audience, including visitors from other countries. I believe we succeeded, as the exhibition had several layers of meaning. For some, the rock music hall left the most significant impression, for others it was the painting or the photography. Younger visitors appreciated the exhibition's sociopolitical side more than the artistic one. They seemed very impressed by the fact that Kalanta's act caused such resistance, demonstrating the tough and tenacious character of their grandparents' generation.

What struck me the most was that almost every person over fifty, when asked about Kaunas in 1972, remembers something. And they get excited, their eyes light up, eager to tell their story. Imagine, so many years have passed and yet so many things still remain to be told or written down. I heard many stories about how they got hit by truncheons on Laisvės Alėja on 18 May 1972, how radio jammers made squeaking sounds in their parents' transistors (as they were listening to Western radio), how they sneaked over the fence into a furniture factory to steal a wooden plank to make a guitar, how inmates were making clogs in Pravieniškės Prison. There was an abundance of such stories.



Fragment from the 1972: *Breaking Through the Wall* exhibition

## MILDA RUTKAUSKAITĖ/

Exhibition works were proceeding quite smoothly until 2022, but the new year brought new challenges. Perhaps the biggest headache was the rapidly fluctuating costs of building materials and labour. It didn't take us long to realise that for the exhibition to take place, we needed to alter either the exhibition's architecture or the budget. Furthermore, the exhibition was held in the former Kaunas Central Post Office building, meaning any actions such as drilling, hammering, and the like, that could alter the building's original infrastructure or cause it harm... were prohibited. This meant that in order to hang the exhibits, we had first to construct a building within a building.

It took a long time to come up with all the necessary solutions, so the tender for the exhibition installation contractors had to be announced with the utmost urgency. I dare say that anyone who has dealt with public procurement knows all too well that it is not the quickest of procedures. And then there's also the anxiety that the tender might not attract any bidders at all... In the end, everything worked out, and worked out well, but it took time. The actual installation works commenced in early May. In other words, we had two weeks to install the exhibition. Yes, you read that correctly: two weeks. To be honest, I recall the period from the start of the installation works as if it were shrouded in fog. There was so much going on and everything was happening so quickly, and I heard

my name mentioned probably more times than I had in my whole life. Our workdays used to begin at 8 a.m. and end long past midnight.

One morning, a young girl named Laura arrived with a truckload of MDF boards we had ordered. When she was done, she approached me and asked: 'Could I help out with something after my shift?' I saw her for the first time in my life that day; she knew nobody in our team. I said timidly: 'If you're willing, an extra pair of hands are always welcome here.' Laura came after work. And not just once. She assembled a wooden structure for the projector screen with her own hands: she sawed, drilled, measured and attached a 3–4 metre diagonal screen to the built structure. As if that weren't enough, she even took on painting works and on the morning of the exhibition's opening, she helped lay and secure fabrics in two exhibition halls. I've said it before, and I'll repeat it a thousand times: her arrival made me believe that guardian angels really do exist.

Due to our immense collective focus and efficiency, the exhibition opened its doors on 14 May, as planned. I believe that the exhibition was very significant in terms of its content, inviting reflection on important and sometimes uncomfortable topics. I had to give a tour for the Spanish media representatives. One journalist, while listening to the stories about Romas Kalanta and the events after 14 May 1972, burst into tears. Moments like these prove that our team's huge efforts had an immeasurable value which cannot be quantified.



More on the '1972: *Breaking Through the Wall*' exhibition (YouTube video, 2022).

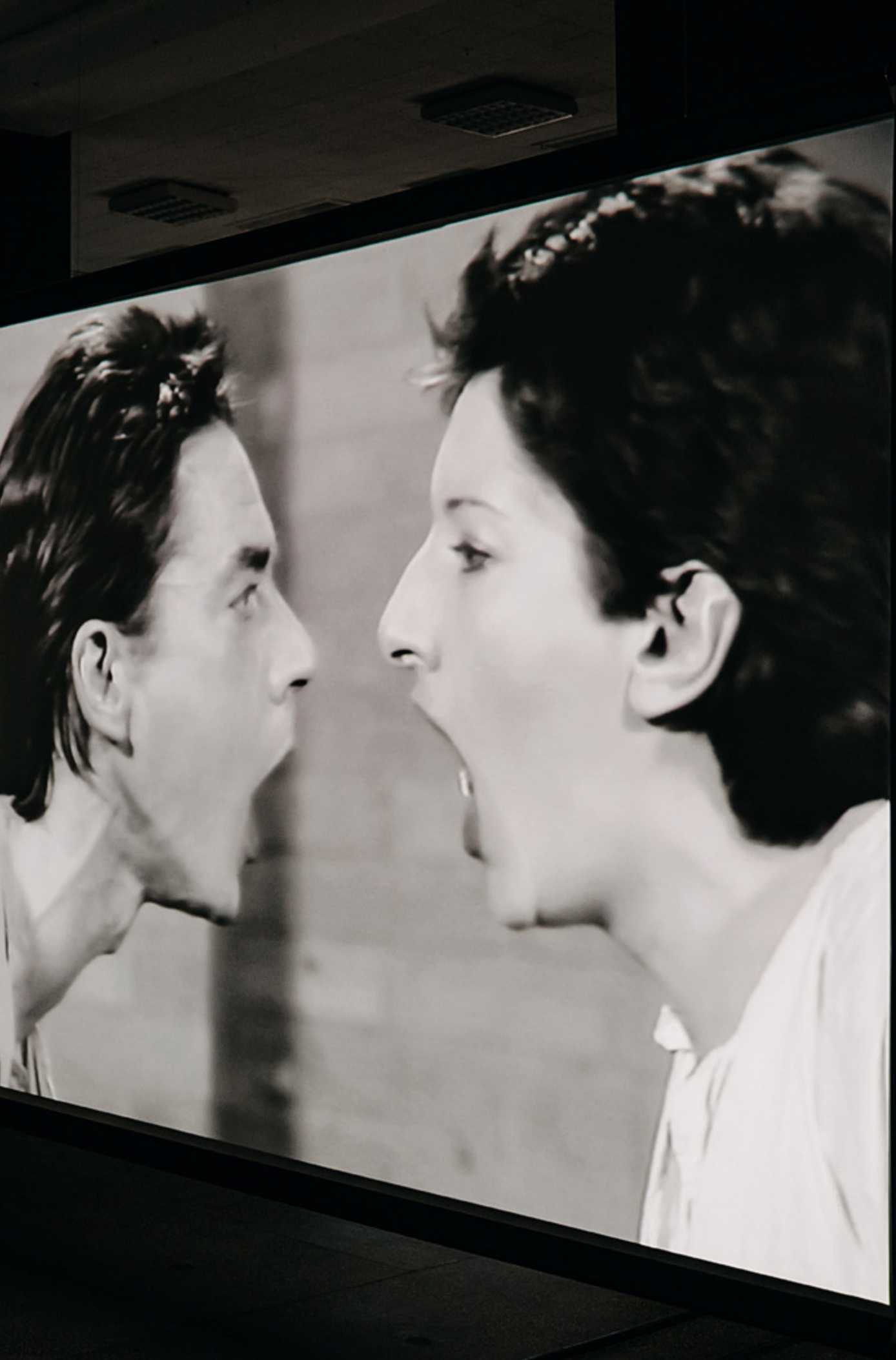




Kaunas Central Post Office during the 'CulturEUkraine' centre opening event



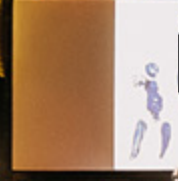
Fragment from Marina Abramović exhibition. Curated by Arvydas Žalpys, Waclaw Kuczma, Dorota Kuczma. Kaunas Picture Gallery





S - viena didelė Europos scena

Kaunas - viena didelė Europos scena



Public lecture by Marina Abramović. Kaunas Žalgiris Arena



Kaunas - viena d

Kaunas - viena didelė Europos scena

Kaunas - viena didelė Europos scena





*When I Am Dead and Need Tenderness*, painting by William Kentridge. Exhibition curated by Virginija Vitkienė. M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art





Fragment from William Kentridge exhibition. Curated by Virginija Vitkienė.  
M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art



# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act Two: 'The Confluence'

## When the City's Plans Clash... with the City's Plans

*#crisis\_situations #grand\_events  
#infrastructure #public\_space #rivers  
#shows*



'Confluence' event infrastructure. Nemunas riverbank

### AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

'The Confluence' is still a few weeks away, and I've terribly mishandled my workload – I can't keep up with everything at once. Even though the event is only in the second half of the month, preparation should start at least ten days in advance. I accidentally find out that, a week before the 'Confluence' event, Kaunas City Municipality is planning the opening event at Santakos Park. This is where the fun part begins: our preparations coincide with their event, we have to halt the works, we can't proceed at the planned pace, we'll have to force some things forward. Since the works are already underway, we must ensure safety in the work zones. And until then, I am running very late in submitting an application to the municipality's events committee. We are submitting two applications: one for the main show and its preparations, given how long everything is going to take (our stage spans almost 700 metres, so there's a lot of work), and the second one for the weekend programme for 'The Confluence'.

Post-renovation, Santakos Park is like porcelain. You can't drive everywhere inside it, or to be more precise, you can but entry is highly restricted. Installing the securing points for the event's infrastructure is a separate puzzle: an irrigation system here (nobody can tell exactly where it is laid out), a heritage-protected meadow over there. All these observations are made on the go, so we constantly have to replan different details, types of marquees, and locations. Deliveries and unloading: how, what, where? We were developing systems on the spot, seeing how we could work without disturbing each other.

Question: why aren't there descriptions of what is allowed or not allowed and where? Perhaps it is because no one wants to draft documents that contain far more prohibitions than permissions.



'Confluence' grand event



# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act Two: ‘The Confluence’

## The Show

*#grand\_events #public\_space  
#rivers #shows #Ukraine*

VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The opening event's biggest enemy had been the freezing cold, so we had high hopes that the May event would allow us to replicate the usual feeling of Kaunas's founding anniversary celebration. We spared no effort and resolved to create something about which no one could have even dreamed before – a massive music show on the Nemunas River, whose water levels are regulated by the Kaunas Hydroelectric Power Station. We used all the boats and watercraft owned by the Inland Waterways Authority and an impressive team of three hundred professionals to put on the show. I'm very proud that a significant part of the show's content was dedicated to supporting Ukraine, and one of the main performers was Jamala, who gave a deeply emotional rendition of her song. It rained all day during the day of the event, but, as if by magic, the rain stopped just ten minutes before the show began.



Tower at the confluence of the Nemunas and the Neris

RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

I'm standing atop the observation tower I proposed to build so that citizens would have a unique opportunity to see the magical confluence of the Nemunas and the Neris from above. I give an interview to the Labas Rytas morning show. It has been raining for three days. ☁️ The forecast: rain. Rain. Oh God, I think. People won't come...

On the eve of the show, I'm sitting in my car by the river, and the rain is pattering on the windows of my dented blue SAAB.

I know that we've already had to cancel one important climactic moment – the hot air balloon lift-off. The climax, an important directorial point, has been weakened. I know that Jolita has proposed having pillars of fire to intensify the effect. I know that some will mistake them for fireworks and we'll be lynched, since fireworks are now deemed unacceptable. Someone concocted a story about Ukrainians being afraid of fireworks. 'You must be joking,' singer Jamala tells me the night before, 'our people are afraid of nothing!'

Jamala will sing first tonight.

It's growing dark, the rain is letting up, people are arriving.

Growing dark, letting up, arriving.  
Growing dark, letting up, arriving.

Silence. A boat makes a sound, the water splashes, Dainius Svobonas begins to read the narrator's text.

Let others write about the CONFLUENCE. I have written enough.



*Kaunas 2022 show,  
‘The Confluence’  
(YouTube video, 2022).*

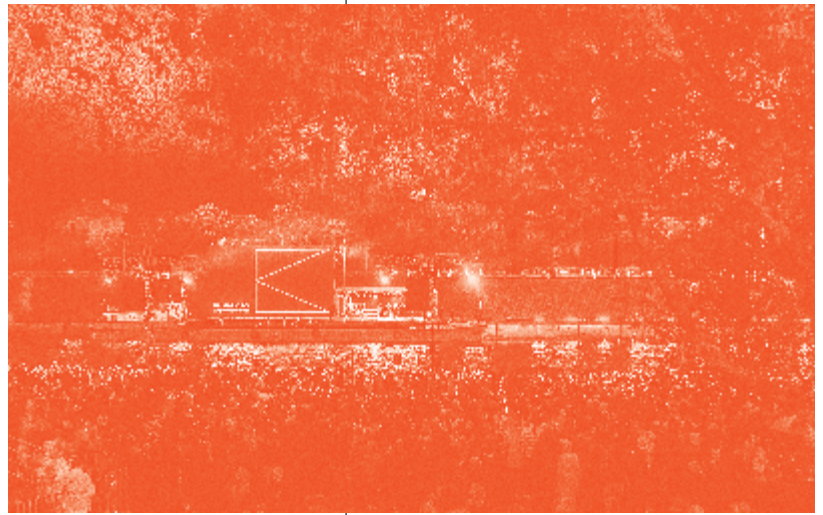
## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

Although there were all sorts of problems, the weekend turned out better than we could have expected. Perhaps it was because, after the opening event, there were far fewer expectations. We were caught up in the whirlpool of work and didn't really have time to harbour any expectations. I'd like to dedicate all the praise and laurels for this event to the team: Greta Klimavičiūtė-Minkštimienė, Linas Kazlauskas, Renata Krapikaitė, Tadas Valeika, Jolita Vitkauskaitė, Marius Vanagas, and Dominykas Dirsė. This event showed what a powerful force these people can be. Problems were solved in minutes, rather than days or weeks, right there and then, by listening to several different opinions and applying them in practice. The team spirit we had been fostering for a year and a half since our first meetings with these people became palpable. After putting in so much effort, even nature brought us a ray of light. The whole of Saturday was so rainy that you could hardly trust the hydrometeorological data's ten-year average: after all, it had rained only once during these days of the month in the whole decade, so it's obvious that the second time in the decade had to be this year! The two main highlights of this day were the 'Cie Basinga' performance, carried out while balancing on a nearly 100-meter-long tightrope, and the main evening show on the Nemunas River. It didn't rain during the two most crucial hours of the day, and as a result, everything happened, even the drones took off, although it was difficult to predict this at the start of the main show (the decision was made during the event, 15 minutes before take-off).

After the main show, the crowd dispersed: some went to listen to Jovani's hits, others to dance to Balkan rhythms in the Town Hall Square. The crowd dissipated. Everything proceeded in a calm and civilised manner (there were no major incidents), maybe only at the fair, a group of youngsters lingered too long in front of a home-brew vendor who was still working for some reason with music by Džordana Butkutė blasting too loudly on a Bluetooth speaker.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

After the grand event of 'The Confluence', on the water, there was a feeling that we had connected with the city and its residents. The encounter took place not only in our dreams; we received confirmation that we had done everything right. Because people took in what we gave to them. They played, romped, cried out of beauty, thanked, marvelled, regretted their decision to stay at home because of the rain. Everyone was united by the Confluence.



'Confluence' grand event



'Confluence' grand event



## Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act Two: 'The Confluence'

# The Mythical Beast of Kaunas Enters the Stage

*#art\_in\_public\_spaces #artist\_engagement #grand\_events  
#Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas #mythology #sculpture #shows*

### RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

After the 'Confluence' show, the sculpture of the Beast of Kaunas is unveiled at 12 a.m. precisely.

The sculpture has been standing since the day before yesterday. It was built by Stasys Beišys and his company, the winners of the tender. Darius accompanied the sculpture all the way from the workshop across the city. The Beast of Kaunas arrived, now it's secured, standing there glistening. Handsome. Cultured. 'And also very solidly made,' Stasys opines. 'We used technology that will make it stand for a thousand years,' he adds.

Indeed. And it would certainly go on to outlast Stasys... As I write these words, Stasys is no longer with us. The Beast of Kaunas sculpture has become a kind of monument to its maker, a great and very creative Kaunesian. Stasys was the kind of person who knew how to harness the wind...

We decided to unveil the sculpture exactly at midnight, as part of the city-wide programme after the grand show of 'The Confluence'. Especially given that this was meant to be the long-promised appearance of the Beast of Kaunas. We didn't plan much for the unveiling. We stated clearly: it will be the shortest unveiling in the world, lasting exactly one minute!

After all, we had neither the energy nor the money for doing anything more. All the money and energy had gone into 'The Confluence'. But still, I quietly invited the good Latvian Janis to help us out, and he created a small dance of coloured fountains around the Beast. Crowds of people gathered. They looked upon the fountains, listened to a few minutes of music and... were disappointed. Is that all? But here I couldn't help but laugh to myself: what more do you want, a repeat of the 'Confluence' show? Well, let's not get too greedy...



Transporting the Mythical Beast of  
Kaunas sculpture

## Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act Two: 'The Confluence'

# The Mythical Beast of Kaunas's... Tooth is Unearthed

*#art\_in\_public\_spaces #artist\_engagement  
#grand\_events #Mythical\_Beast\_of\_Kaunas  
#mythology #sculpture #shows*

### RENATA BARTUSEVIČIŪTĖ/

I had no doubt about the need of having the Beast of Kaunas's sculpture made, but I couldn't shake off the idea that we needed to leave a few more of the Beast's artefacts the city: something very minimalist, yet impactful. The Beast's snoring, Rytis's brainchild sound installation, was already operating in the Kaunas Castle Tower. Just pressing one's ear against the wall fires up the imagination of children and adults alike. Simple, but a stroke of genius. I wanted to add at least one more visual proof of the Beast's true existence. At that very time, the reconstruction of Vilnius Street was underway. The excavated pavement and exposed sewer trenches were an eye-opener: surely there must be a skeleton lying down there. I said to Darius that we needed to convince Rytis that the Beast's fossil had been found in that rubble: maybe a bone, a tooth, a scale. We began to look for specimens together. A tooth, it has to be a tooth, we decided unanimously. Darius immediately suggested ceramist Remigijus Sederevičius. He will definitely make it happen; he's a real master.

### REMIGIJUS SEDEREVIČIUS/

The starting point was the teeth of fossilised animals, dating back several million years, such as the megalodon, the great sea predator, which matched our design in terms of their triangular shape, but even they were too small for our imagined mythical creature of indeterminate size. Based on the scale of our 'reconstructed' tooth, our mythical Beast would have to be almost half the size of Laisvės Alėja. Anyone who has been to a dentist probably knows that metal or porcelain ceramic is normally used for dental prosthetics, as these materials are very similar to natural tooth enamel. The tooth sculpture's base is made from stone mass, corresponding to bone tooth material, and covered in bone porcelain. Rather than settling for ordinary porcelain, we chose bone porcelain. I aimed to achieve a layer of tooth's enamel – with all the textures and cracks characteristic of teeth. It's as if all the chosen materials were pure, as in nature, with no synthetics.

\*  
*Kotryna Lingienė. 'Surastas „Mitinio Kauno Žvėries dantis“ atgims didžiausia danties skulptūra Lietuvoje'. lrt.lt, 09-05-2022.*



*Unveiling of the Tooth of the Mythical  
Beast of Kaunas sculpture*

### AGNĖ PINIGIENĖ/

We came up with the idea of spreading a canard in the media about the ceramist who, while wandering around the streets of the Old Town (which were being renovated at the time, with excavated holes gaping everywhere), discovered a tooth that, as it turned out, belonged to the Beast of Kaunas. We released the story, and the tooth indeed received a lot of attention. 😊

### RENATA BARTUSEVIČIŪTĖ/

On the day of the tooth's unveiling during the 'Confluence' weekend, I overheard some men inspecting it, discussing among themselves: 'I read in the newspaper, they found it somewhere in the ruins.' 'Come on, it can't be real.' 'No, look at it, it's real.' 'Hm, maybe...' I smiled to myself; our plan had worked.

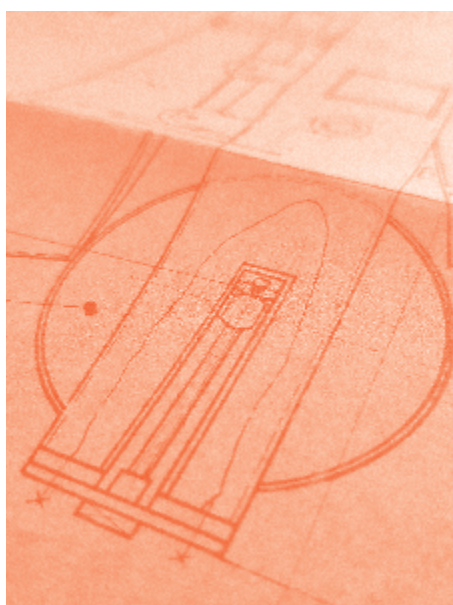
# Nemuno7 Or How Scrap Metal Became a Garden on the Water

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings #culture\_and\_nature  
#decentralisation #Designing\_Happiness #exhibition\_spaces  
#impacts #infrastructure #Kaunas\_District  
#new\_longterm\_initiatives #public\_space #regional\_dimension  
#rivers*

GEDIMINAS  
BANAITIS/

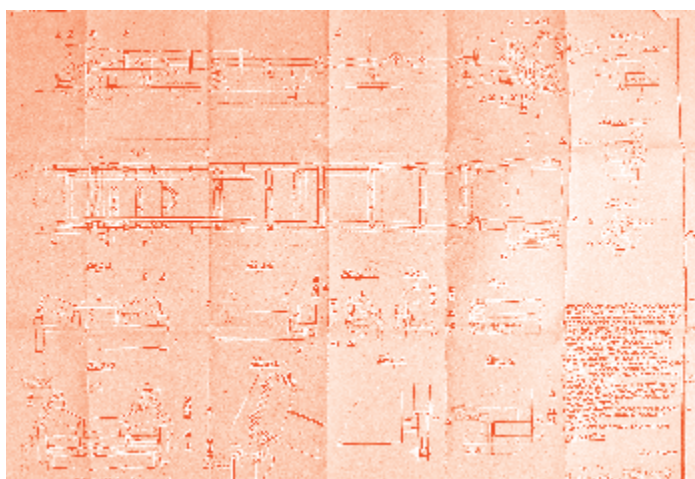
One of the project's goals was to create a long-term landscape design object in Kaunas District. We had a considerable budget, plenty of room for creativity, and a great desire to get onto the world's landscape design map. Our ambitions were high. We wanted to have a competition, we wanted more ideas, openness, and a public conversation. I was fantasising about all this wild potential at Sitkūnai Radio Station or Karmėlava's former missile base. However, quite unexpectedly, I was 'boxed' into a halved budget (the municipality retained the remaining part for its needs and area maintenance services) and a specific location – Zapyškis. I tried negotiating to have at least three resort areas, including Kulautuva and Kačerginė, but the location remained the same: the object had to be intended for Zapyškis.

Well, Zapyškis it would be then. A wonderful place: the Nemunas river, flood-meadows, slopes towards Dievogala and Kluoniškiai, and the beautiful Zapyškis Old Church. They also have an old cemetery, a myth about a sacred creek, a small harbour, a modernist water tower on a hill which undoubtedly must have served as an observation tower, the Viada Russian petrol station, and a local 'highway' cutting through the town. In meetings with the Zapyškis project development team and architect Gintaras Prikockis, I once heard the idea that for a town to breathe and movement to occur, it much have more than just a single point of attraction; the church alone is not enough. More and more widely distributed points of attraction are needed. We tried proposing a bridge

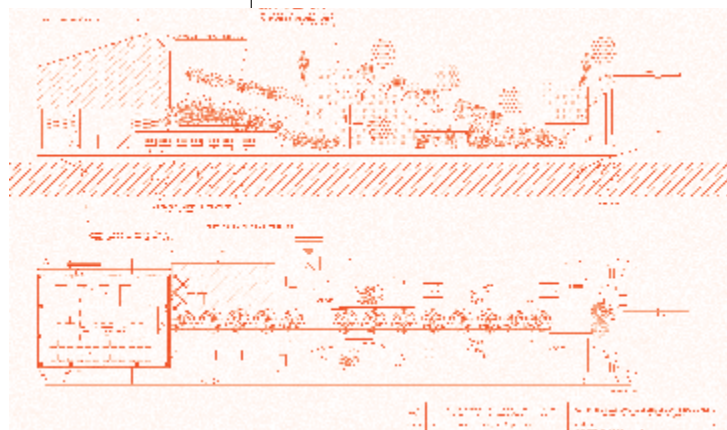


## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

I consider Nemuno7 to be one of the programme's most joyful achievements and the most unique physical sign of Kaunas 2022 remaining after the project's close. As was planned in our main events' schedule, this dredger boat, which would later go on to gain local and international recognition among architects, was unveiled to the public during the 'Confluence' weekend as a symbol of a newly found balance between nature and man, a symbol of their interaction.



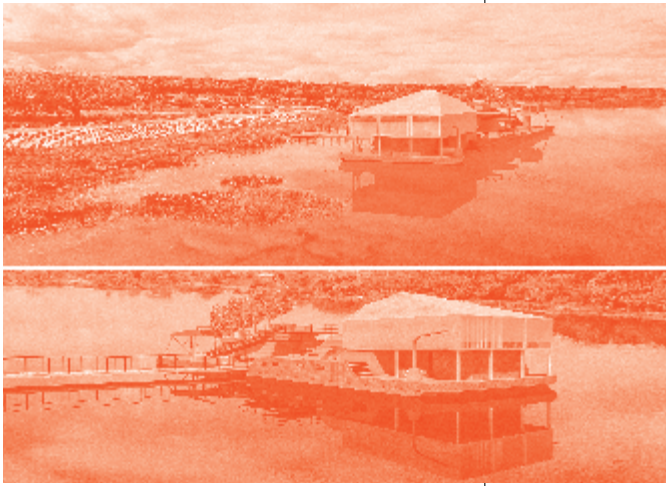
Drawings of the Nemuno7 dredger. From the archives of the Inland Waterways Authority



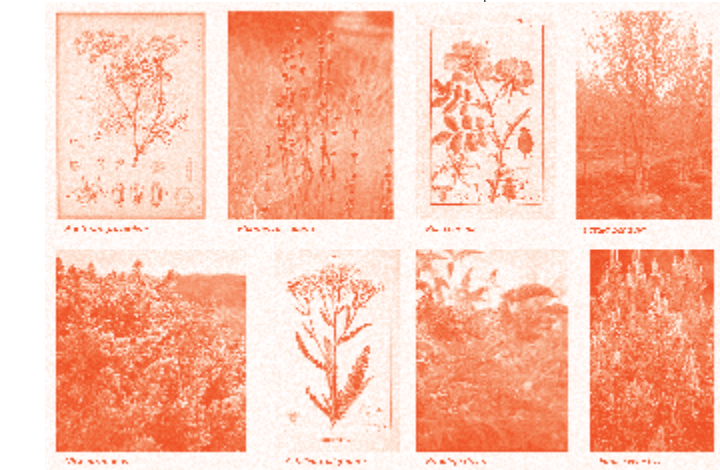
Drawing of the Nemuno7 dredger revitalization project.  
By Sigita Kundrotaitė



More on Nemuno7  
(YouTube video, 2022).



Nemuno7 project visualisation.  
Architect: Sigita Kundrotaitė



Garden flora on Nemuno7 dredger. Nemuno7 project visualisation.  
Architect: Sigita Kundrotaitė

with a viewing platform, an illuminated bicycle path, various landscape and design-based activations by the river, but all these ideas were dropped, and circumstances eventually led us to the Nemunas River and Nemuno7 dredger, which was otherwise destined to become scrap metal.

## VILTĖ MIGONYTĖ- PETRULIENĖ/

What a variety of visits we've made to the Inland Waterways Authority since the beginning of 2018... Both for Nemuno7, and for Vandenys, and various events held in the IWA territory... With Gediminas Kasparavičius, Rasa Chmieliauskaitė, Justinas Kalinauskas, Justina Petrulionytė-Sabonienė, and others, we have frequented the IWA's hallways for many years (and were always warmly received!), we snooped around the whole of their territory, followed news of boat auctions, and drafted all sorts of documents. We neither had a budget nor legal rights to acquire such property, but everyone's creativity only grew wild upon seeing this old piece of infrastructure and knowing its predetermined fate: to fall into the hands of scrap metal traders. Eventually, the idea of activating Nemuno7 was backed by the Kaunas District Municipality; the Mayor, Valerijus Makūnas, truly grasped this opportunity. My colleagues will recount

the tough path they had to tread... This project, it seems, needed time to mature and find the right caretakers. I am incredibly glad that our efforts paid off.

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

As a fan of industrial heritage and alternative spaces, my eyes gleamed with excitement about all the possibilities. I assembled a creative team, the abundant ranks of Kaunas 2022 got involved in consultations and administrative matters, and soon, after presenting the project to the Mayor of Kaunas District and his team, we received permission to go ahead with the idea. The green light was given for a pioneer plant species park on water, a music stage and an art space aboard the ship, including guided tours and education initiatives concerning the significance of water in our lives. The process moved forward. Over nearly two years of implementing the project, we encountered difficulties with the public procurement procedures, a shortage of funds, the district authorities' doubts about the concept regarding plants, delayed area maintenance works on the riverbank by the dredger. Until then, no one had created or managed such an object, so we had to learn from our mistakes, and naturally, it was too difficult for the invited institution, Ars Futuri, to exploit all of the dredger's potential. Plus-minus 60 percent of the object's potential was not enough to satisfy the shipowners, but we derived optimism from the project's continuity, its positive reception in architecture competitions, the public's interest in the unique idea, and our firm position regarding both the selection of plants and the creative approach to sustainability. So the story was not over yet, and the outstanding unrealised percentages remain to be realised over the coming years.



Gediminas Banaitis aboard Nemuno7

# Summer Stage

*#artist\_engagement #audience\_development #business\_and\_culture #co-creation #crisis\_situations #European\_dimension #festivals #infrastructure #international\_partnerships #music #pandemic #public\_procurement #public\_space #quarantine #sponsorships #technical\_production*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

As we were finalising the programme for 2022, having organised several major open calls for partnership projects, I was left with the feeling that we lacked a universal project targeting the general public. I proposed including the Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage in the programme, which would open new opportunities for local musicians and international partners who were still knocking at our doors. Dovilė Butnoriūtė, perhaps the only manager among us well-versed in the behind-the-scenes of the music industry, started putting together the Summer Stage schedule grid and planning invitations. Before long, Eglė Aleksandravičiūtė also joined the team. She would take the project and its content grid under her wing and over the finish line. The project was expected to continue throughout the warm season, starting with the 'Confluence' weekend.

## DOVILĖ BUTNORIŪTĖ/

For the country's largest cultural festival, we needed a crucial musical hub that would sustain the programme's pulse every summer weekend when music reverberates at its loudest. This role was fulfilled by the Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage project, which lasted until 17 September, spanning an impressive 20 weekends! This equates to nearly 100 performances over 80 days, accommodating not only special programmes of famous musicians but also classical music concerts, theatre and dance performances. The Summer Stage hosted numerous interactive workshops, activities for little ones, as well as experimental and edgier rock music performances not only from Lithuania and Europe but also from more distant continents. Musicians from Alaska, Chile, New York, Cyprus, and Taiwan were featured in the programme.



Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage.  
Kaunas Town Hall Square

Coping with the challenges of the pandemic, the music side of things was probably the most distressing, as the pandemic was threatening the industry's very survival globally and, in particular, our efforts towards attracting international names. When making our programme's first promises, we had practically nothing to reveal to the public. We were still at the stage of dreaming, planning and waiting for the pandemic to end. It is symbolic that after a long search, the Summer Stage has found its home in the Town Hall Square, as if illustrating the Kaunas 2022 slogan: 'From temporary to contemporary.' A young, topical and interesting sound awaited visitors in perhaps the most traditional venue in Kaunas, and all this was happening before

the square's planned renovation. The season kicked off with the big event, 'The Confluence'. Unfortunately, the location put a spanner in the works, as the Old Town was under reconstruction for most of the season and hardly became a centre of attraction. We had to put a lot of effort into attracting the audience to the death zone of the central part of the city, so the season's first half, 'peppered' by cold and inclement weather, progressed rather slowly.

In crafting the programme, we abandoned the prospect of either allocating the lion's share of our budget to celebrities passing through our country or of hosting events in already well-promoted, existing concert tours and instead sought to avoid duplicating performances hosted in the usual summer festivals. We searched for solutions by responding to the wants of the city, which had truly been craving the return of music, and by taking advantage of the contacts we had made from all over Europe. The resulting programme was exceptionally unusual, relevant, and international. In total, 27 foreign music projects from Europe and other continents participated in the programme. The Summer Stage became an important vehicle for partnerships. After the opening events, Kaunas 2022 had been constantly receiving belated invitations to collaborate, so for international partners or various countries' foreign representations in Lithuania that hadn't managed to propose their ideas in time to be included in the ECoC programme by 2022, the Summer Stage became an important additional opportunity for collaboration – music opened up the borders. We knew that local Lithuanian bands dominated Kaunas's musical repertoire, so listeners were not very familiar with music from other countries, and foreign musicians did not enjoy many opportunities to perform in Kaunas due to a lack of music venues. Therefore, we aimed to invite bands that would become discoveries for the people of Kaunas. We incorporated performances of world music across a plethora of genres, even orchestral and choir performances, paying particular attention to Ukrainian music. By organising concerts by foreign musicians, we wanted to highlight the fact that the Summer Stage is the stage of the European Capital of





Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage. Kaunas Town Hall Square

Culture itself, and to showcase a variety of cultures and music. The majority of foreign performers were performing in our country for the first time. It was great to witness their reactions to our city and our local audience.

It was important for us to have bold and bright women represented on stage, so we invited the 'Graži ir ta galinga' band from the Klaipėda Youth Theatre, the Ukrainian strongwomen 'Tonka' and 'Fo Sho', the 'Umme Block' duo from Munich, and many other interesting and delightfully surprising young women.

The Summer Stage reflected, in one way or another, the European Capital of Culture's main programme. The Town Hall Square became the venue for performances of the 'Audra' Festival and the destination into which the cultural rivers of the 'Confluence' grand weekend flowed. The Fluxus Festival, a community event, also contributed to the orchestra of activities with its fantastical ideas.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

The Summer Stage, having lived up to the audience's and the sponsors' expectations, was not without its challenges. Everything was hanging by a thread, even before the first concert, because of complications with the public procurement of event technical support services (yes, sadly, that old chestnut again).



*Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage  
official aftermovie (2022).*

## ARTIOM VALUJEV/

Preparations for the public procurement procedure to acquire the means of putting on the Summer Stage began in February 2022, after the 'Confusion' grand opening event. A lot of time was spent preparing the technical specifications to ensure the project's smooth implementation.

On 3 May, we received proposals from two companies. One of them offered a price of €181,500.00 (including VAT), and the other one a slightly higher price of €191,520.01 (including VAT). So, on 4 May, the company that offered the lower price was declared the winner of the procurement.

However, on 6 May, we received a complaint from the runner-up company regarding the procurement results. The main reason cited was the alleged influence exerted by a Kaunas 2022 employee over the procurement procedures. They alleged that this person had urged the company that ultimately ended up losing the bid to withdraw their proposal. Given that the circumstances mentioned in the complaint, if confirmed, could have had a significant impact on the procurement process, it was decided that an internal investigation should be carried out and a written explanation was requested from the aforementioned employee regarding the allegations made in the complaint. And since the allegations seemed declarative and unsubstantiated, it

was additionally decided that the complainant would be requested to provide all available data concerning the alleged influence exerted by the Kaunas 2022 employee over the procurement procedures.

We received explanations from our employee, whereas the complainant, as expected, failed to provide any data substantiating the allegations, so we dismissed the complaint and proceeded with the signing of a contract with the procurement winner. However, soon after we had sent out our response regarding the complaint, additional circumstances emerged that threatened the future of the entire Summer Stage project. The losing company's director exerted pressure on the procurement winner and our other partnering suppliers in an attempt to dissuade them from engaging in joint projects with Kaunas 2022 and, allegedly, threatened them with law enforcement authorities.

Following these actions, we received news that the procurement winner was considering refusing to sign the procurement contract, unwilling to get involved in disputes with the losing company. Considering all the circumstances, on 17 June, we made a decision to terminate the procurement procedure. However, the Summer Stage project was realised nonetheless, albeit delayed and with a revised concept, by making use of another event servicing and support contract.

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

The failed procurement led to a cascade of problems. The programme was superb, and Švyturys, Kaunas 2022's main sponsor, was delighted with the partnership, but we faced the constant challenge of working with a different service supplier each week. As we were unable to sign a contract for sound and lighting services for the entire season, we had to shop around for a different supplier for every single weekend of the project.

# Visions in the Forests of Kaunas District

*#art\_in\_public\_space #community\_involvement  
#culture\_and\_nature #decentralisation  
#international\_partnerships #Kaunas\_District  
#performing\_arts #public\_procurement  
#public\_space #regional\_dimension*

## LUKAS ALSYS/

In 2020, the director Roberto Magro and I had an ambitious plan: to create a play during which spectators would cycle from Kaunas Castle to Zapyškis. The main character was to ride a white horse, and along the way we were meant to encounter numerous strange historical figures and witness moments from their lives. Auditions were held, an international cast was chosen, and costumes began to be made. And then the pandemic struck. Everything came to a halt. The story of the hero on the white horse lost its relevance. The team lost their motivation and all hope that such a play could be made at all...

As the quarantine days went by, I decided to revisit *Visions* by Lithuanian poet Vytautas Mačernis. After reading it, I thought Roberto would appreciate these texts, so when I found the first, albeit terrible, translation, I sent it to him. A good week later, I received a call from Roberto, from which I understood it was time to prepare for a new show. Roberto said he didn't know much yet, only that we had to produce a play entitled *Visions*.



Motiejus Bazaras. Scene from the play *Visions*

So, with the spring of 2021 approaching, we had already completed a considerable amount of work: actors had been selected, costumes had been purchased, the set had been designed, and three forests had been selected in which the play would be performed each week. All that remained was to set up the technical equipment, install the set, and create the play itself. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but taking care of the performers, rehearsing, clearing up the forest, and creating the land art scenography was in fact a pleasant challenge. Most of our problems stemmed from the fact that Roberto and I had a very ambitious goal: to show the play in three different locations over three weeks, incorporating local communities. Thus, in 2021, the play was staged in the forests of Alšėnai, Neveronys, and Batniava localities. From Monday to Friday, we rehearsed, cleared up the forest and assembled the set, and on Saturdays, we ran as many as three performances. Almost every performance was accompanied by rain. There were moments when the rain would flood the play sets just before the start of a performance, and our entire team would be scooping up the water with buckets and carrying it deeper into the forest. Three hellishly interesting weeks.

In June 2022, we returned to the vicinity of Kaunas with the same play, but this time we sought quality, so *Visions* ended up settling in the Batniava locality for a whole month. We staged the play 15 times in total. Tickets were sold out in one day, and the waiting list grew longer each day. Why is remembering the entire process so much fun and sometimes even hilarious? That's because it brought with it a myriad of invaluable experiences: I was learning to translate Vytautas Mačernis's *Visions* in order to be able to recount all of its subtle meanings; Roberto and I were learning to approach *Visions* in a way no one in Lithuania had ever done before; I was learning how to drive a timber lorry, how to clear up a forest properly, and how to manually carry marine plywood boards, used for forming a 500-meter long path; and I was equally learning about public procurement procedures. We realised that it's often easier to get direct support and sponsorship than to conduct public procurements.



Viešia folklore ensemble.  
Scene from the play *Visions*

But the most important part was the people who journeyed with *Visions*, who believed in this madness, and all the locals who came to see or take part in the play – these are the best lessons from this play. I discovered so many wonderful people and talents. And most importantly, Roberto and I continue to be good friends to date, still contemplating the possibility of making a play in which the main character would gallop away from us on a white horse...

*Visions* is a dream project, and you have to dream carefully, because everything comes true.

## ŠARŪNAS PIKELIS/

It's not every day you get to hear Čiurlionis played in the middle of the forest, on a piano, amidst flashes of lightning, with acrobats whizzing around you.\*

\*  
*From a documentary film made about Kaunas 2022, entitled 'From Temporary to Contemporary'. Directed by Rūta Vėde-rytė-Macijauskienė, LRT, 2023.*



*'Visions': the play's official aftermovie (2021).*



Scene from the play *Visions*

## GITANA JANČARIENĖ/

I know everyone in the community had a great time, and we are really looking forward to something like this happening again. We'd love to do it again.\*\*

\*\*  
*Ibid.*

## ROBERTO MAGRO/

The last image is the one you always carry in your heart, and this still lives on in my mind as if it were last night:

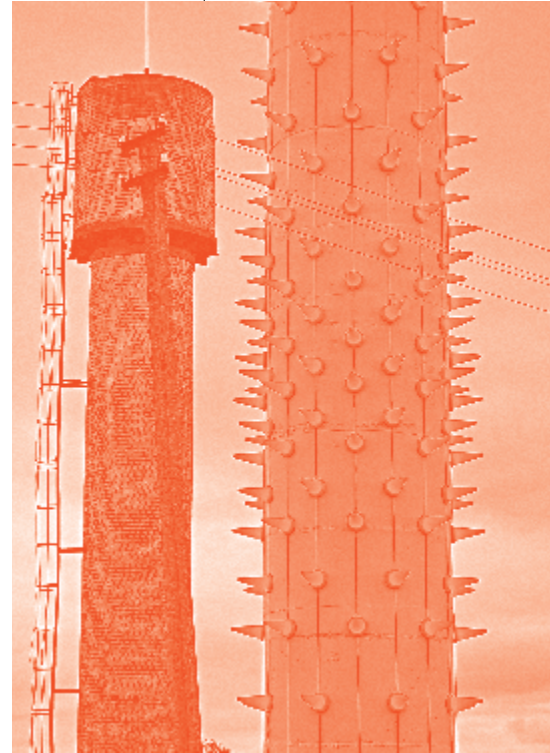
The last night in the forest of Bubiai when, at the end of the last performance, I asked for all the lights and music to be left on, just so that I could hear and see intimately for myself, one last time, the whole forest, without spectators or artists. It's the most beautiful moment, that of the secret, syncretic meeting, the 'conciliation' of art and nature, poetry and mystery, all combining in a single creative act.

# 'The Road of Emeralds'

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings #art\_in\_public\_space  
#community\_involvement #impacts #Kaunas\_District  
#legacy #public\_procurement #public\_space  
#regional\_dimension*

## GEDIMINAS BANAITIS/

In June, we launched 'The Road of Emeralds', a route touring public art objects in Kaunas District. The route included nearly 90 artworks created in Kaunas District over three years. Street art, installations, virtual products, routes, sculptures, land art, benches, signs, symbols, and much more. From self-taught street artists to globally renowned professional creators. From recycled materials to images created by artificial intelligence. 'The Road of Emeralds' acquired its title during a process in which a general term was needed for linking the outcomes of different programmes. Most of the works originated from the active involvement of 15 participating localities in the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme, but we had to fill in the gaps that appeared on the Kaunas District map due to the non-involvement of the remaining ten localities. Preparations were carried out in advance. Artists had been working for half a year prior the launch, but they still faced some unexpected difficulties: the dimensions of a sculpture had not been estimated accurately, meaning it no longer fitted in the rented truck; inappropriate hoists were delivered and got stuck in the ground; a puncture appeared in the water tower onto which a LED screen was to be mounted; the LED screen delivered from China right before the opening turned out to be faulty; information wasn't flowing properly between managers and subordinates, and so on and so forth. All that within the span of just a few days. Of course, everything got resolved in the end; all objects ended up where they were supposed to be. The only setback was the public procurement procedure. Due to its complexity and a lack of flexibility, this procedure is inconvenient for the culture sector and the so-called 'soft' means of operation. Especially when quick decisions are needed here and now. No matter how far in advance you plan or how much you operate according to the procedure set by the law, life has a way of happening and you simply cannot create separate procedures for each and every case.



*Fragment of Gathering, light installation by Kotryna Čalkaitė and Vėjas Aliukas. Daugėliškių village. Vilkija locality*



*Flying Zeppelin, sculpture by Serge Ecker and Algimantas Šlapikas. Karmėlava*



*The Birth of Venus, sculpture by Donatas Jankauskas-Duonis. Piliuona. Taurakiemis locality*

# International Relations

*#cultural\_diplomacy #diplomatic\_protocol  
#EU\_Japan\_Fest #European\_dimension  
#international\_partnerships*



King Philippe and Queen Mathilde of Belgium visiting the 5x5 exhibition organised by Designregio Kontrijk and Kaunas 2022

## DOVILĖ BUTNORIŪTĖ/

The success of our international relations lies in the trust we've gained from institutions and our ability to articulate our project's essence within a limited timeframe and pass it on by word-of-mouth (no mean feat for any Capital of Culture). A must-have highlight comes from ensuring that we can host top-level exhibitions, the showcasing of which is an honour not only for us but for others too, and that we can cater to the needs of the most prominent visitors. Our project was not dictated to us from the top; from the first day to the last, it was created and led by people. You can't fake that. Throughout the year, we kept our promises and became a popular destination for kings, presidents, ministers, prime ministers, and experts of all kinds, as well as a point of attraction for all visitors to Kaunas.

For the entire team, our most memorable visitors were the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education mission to Kaunas in July 2022. I understand that this might sound hyper-boring to the reader, but for us it was a bit of a test: after a lot of coordination, a group of fairly high-ranking politicians arrived in Kaunas and showed a great interest in our themes, objectives, and our progress in realising them. The delegation then held a press conference, sharing their insights. In short, there were plenty of reasons for us to feel on edge. However, these educated and culturally minded PEOPLE turned out to be the best audience, and it was an unexpected pleasure for us to share and discuss topics that had become part of our daily life. It felt as if we were interacting with close colleagues, without any ceremony, hierarchy, or formal outlook. During the visit, we were smiling, nature was smiling along with us, the Nemunas and Zapyškis bestowed on us the most beautiful sunsets in the

world, and relationships between people were forming even without the aid of alcoholic beverages, which are often resorted to as a means of warming up the atmosphere. The parliamentarians, without needing too much encouragement, burst into singing in Lithuanian and opened their hearts to the Beast of Kaunas, our sincerity and the city's tales and secrets, and each one of them promised to return with their families.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

I can sincerely say that we planned our programmes, communication strategies, and administrative challenges well in advance (by three, four, or even five years), but we hadn't anticipated that the project would receive such a high level of political and diplomatic support, nor were we prepared for the ensuing need to organise so many official visits. This is where our international relations team saved the day: Dovilė Butnoriūtė, Head of International Relations, along with her colleagues Daiva Jeremičienė and Monika Inčerytė, organised about 100 visits of delegations of various ranks (including members of European city councils and mayors, the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, prime ministers, ministers, parliament presidents, presidents, and even royal delegations). These visits and programmes gave us positive feedback, evidence that what we were doing was important for Lithuania as a whole, that it induced pride in those funding the Kaunas 2022 project and overseeing its execution, and that culture was at the spearhead of state diplomacy. Since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, we have directed all available resources towards a new programme: the founding of the 'CulturEUkraine' centre and the promotion of Ukraine's visibility in Europe. This centre, along with the *Ukraine! Unmuted* exhibition, became one of the venues for diplomatic meetings visited by politicians and presidents from various countries.

A truly historical phenomenon is EU-Japan Fest's participation in the European Capitals of Culture. EU-Japan Fest is a private foundation funded by private Japanese businesses that has been ceaselessly supporting Japanese artists' participation in European Capitals of Culture since 1993. Without imposing its opinion on who the good artists are, it allows the ECoC curators themselves to select and invite those who, in their view, would enrich their programmes the most. In Kaunas, thanks to EU-Japan Fest, the presence of Japanese artists was very noticeable: over 50 events took place in 2022 as part of the Kaunas 2022 programme, the WA Festival dedicated to Japanese culture was bolstered, and long-term connections were established in the fields of architecture, contemporary dance, and other areas. The head of the foundation, Shuji Kogi, is a legend to me – a witness to the ECoC project, having seen these projects' biggest failures and victories, always having something to share with and enrich the teams of current Capitals of Culture, a paragon of direct cooperation and friendliness.

# Bringing Memory Back. Jenny Kagan's *Out of Darkness* Exhibition

*#activating\_neglected\_buildings #artist\_engagement #European\_dimension #exhibition\_spaces #exhibitions #history #Litvaks #Memory\_Office #sponsorships #storytelling #visual\_arts*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

Jenny Kagan's exhibition (or rather interactive narrative), entitled *Out of Darkness*, embodies the entire 'Memory Office' programme. Jenny's incredible family history, shaped by murderers and rescuers alike, but with not a single living soul in Kaunas to remember it, told in gripping ways, invites us to delve into the depths of a long-forgotten historical building, neglected like a wound shrouded in dust. The exhibition tells the story of her parents and her grandmother, who escaped from the ghetto and were sheltered by a Lithuanian man in a hideout in Vilijampolė. Jenny's exhibition has returned the memory of Kaunas's Jews to the city, condensing the dark narrative of the Holocaust into a single-family-sized portrait, and reconstructing at least a fragment of the vast and as-yet-unarranged mosaic of histories of vanished Kaunesian families. And, according to the many visitors I met, that provided for an enriching experience.



The first visit to the *Out of Darkness* exhibition location. 2021

## DAIVA PRICE/

I collaborated with Jenny Kagan on several projects, including her personal exhibition, entitled *Out of Darkness*, and *Kaunas Cantata*. Our work involved discussions, consultations, researching historical sources, translations, and so on.

A no less significant part of this work was technical, for which none of our doctoral studies prepared us.

There was (and still is) an acute shortage of spaces suitable for art in Kaunas. Therefore, trying to find an appropriate space for each project, whether it be an exhibition, concert, or performance, would sometimes prove very difficult and take a long time. For instance, for this exhibition, we had spent several years searching for a venue, reaching a compromise just a few months prior to the exhibition's opening. Both we and the projects' authors found this continually very stressful.

Jenny's exhibition called for a large, untypical space that would be suitable for re-creating the atmosphere of a hideout where her parents had taken refuge during the war. The space needed to be somewhat neglected, situated near the city centre, spacious, and



The first visit to the *Out of Darkness* exhibition location. 2021

## JENNY KAGAN/

Installing the *Out of Darkness* exhibition

easily adaptable to the exhibition's needs. We searched for it for several years, and for various reasons had to reject several buildings. Sometimes not by our own will, but instructed from above... We had to navigate between business interests, our budget, and nuances of the location itself... The building that was eventually kindly offered to us by Edvinas Mamedovas was ideal in every aspect. Of course, refurbishing it, installing the exhibition, and maintenance constituted a whole new story, which fell to my irreplaceable colleague Justina to create.

Installing the *Out of Darkness* exhibition

When I created the first version of *Out of Darkness* in 2016, in the UK, the possibility of bringing the work to Kaunas never crossed my mind. Even when the idea was first mooted in 2017 it seemed such a remote possibility as to be in the realms of fantasy. At that time Kaunas had not even been awarded the title of ECOC, so,

although the project was included in the bid-book, I didn't allow myself to make any plans or even imagine what making the work in Kaunas would mean. It was only when the announcement was made in 2017 that Kaunas had been chosen that the idea of bringing the story home to Kaunas became a tangible possibility and I began to dream and to scheme. Yet even then there were years of hurdles and uncertainty when it was all still very much a dream. A venue was identified, ideas formulated, scenarios imagined, drawings made, only for the deal with the venue to fall through. This happened not once but twice and each time the window left to make the work got smaller and it seemed that, even if we were to find a space, I'd certainly have to significantly temper my ambitions.

## August

And then of course Covid-19 struck – and leaving the house was not allowed, let alone travelling to Kaunas.

And then, just as the world started to open up again, a rumour emerged that there was a building on Gimnazijos St. right next to the Historical Presidential Palace within spitting distance of almost all of the very places where my parents' stories took place. It seemed too good to be true. However, not only did the building exist but the building's owner, Edvinas Mamedovas, was sufficiently enthused by the project to offer it to us at a price we could afford – free-of-charge – and the daydream shifted suddenly to a pressing reality.

JUSTINA  
PETRULIONYTĖ-  
SABONIENĖ/

Finding a home for the exhibition was a relief.

However, when the construction workers cleared out, a certain trepidation set in. After all, this was not a museum space, but technically, a construction site in the midst of bustling works. And the building wasn't just any old house, it was a heritage site. We rolled up our sleeves.

## JENNY KAGAN/

Fragment from the *Out of Darkness* exhibition

It was only once we had the building that I could start to imagine the audience's journey. The building made suggestions and I 'listened'. Key elements in the original version of the show had to be abandoned and whole new ideas emerged. The multiple layers of the building opened up not only practical challenges and solutions but suggested modes of storytelling. The double height spaces allowed me to layer key elements of the story. So the dream of the cinema that my grandfather opened immediately before the chaos of occupation and war took hold hung tantalisingly above the hose pipe that



More on the '*Out of Darkness*' exhibition  
(YouTube video, 2022).



signified the horrible fate that ended his life. The unlikely romance that my parents embarked upon in the ghetto floated precariously in the darkness above an abyss, and the final moment of beauty and redemption in the form of the barbed wire stars found its home soaring above the heads of the audience in the final stairwell. The central room demanded a space where the audience could spend time and gave me an opportunity to give them time and space and a context to contemplate the key tenet of the story: how close and arbitrary the line is between life and death, salvation and degradation. Some pieces of the puzzle already existed: the suitcases that told the kernels of each part of the story, the double iteration of the hiding-place that spoke of the vagaries of memory, the mirrors that placed the viewer themselves in the heart of the story. But other pieces grew out of the space and out of the journey. And through it all I had to imagine how this story would play out to an audience from Kaunas, whose understanding of the history was so far removed from mine. I wanted to offer multiple routes into the tale – for those who were prepared to read, for those who preferred to listen, for those who felt free to interact and for those who preferred to simply spectate.

## JUSTINA PETRULIONYTĖ- SABONIENĖ/

Once we approved the exhibition's model and explored the building more thoroughly, the scale of the upcoming challenges and work needed gradually began to emerge: there was no convenient entrance to the grounds; the main entrance door was situated two metres above ground; the building comprised two spaces which required additional linking structures; the space contained many thresholds and narrow passages, unsuitable for pushchairs or those with difficulty walking; the walls offered no soundproofing against the noise coming from the busy Birštono Street; the roof was leaking; there was no toilet; there was no running water except for in the basement; birds were nesting in the second floor; the building would get very cold in spring and autumn, and hot in summer.

Not to mention the very delicate means needed to create the *Out of Darkness* world: an exhibition in a format never before seen in Kaunas, at least not on this scale. This exhibition contained a great number of theatrical elements, specific lighting, sound, and other electronic solutions. It was like a theatre without actors, or perhaps a theatre where visitors were occasionally made to feel like the actors.

Much of this exhibition's implementation was accomplished by the artist herself. Still, the project would not have succeeded without the contribution of many other people: scaffolders, electricians, construction workers, antique dealers, set designers, historians, translators... And not only them: our team members, their spouses, friends, volunteers, neighbours from the Historical Presidential Palace... This extraordinary exhibition drew in everyone who came in contact with it.

I will never forget how, with the help of my friends from Poland and Sweden, we carried one of the exhibits, a neon sign that said 'fairy tale' in Lithuanian, from the bus station to the exhibition's venue, all the way across Kaunas. The only company in Lithuania that made real neon signs was based in Vilnius, production and delivery had been delayed, and when we collected the sign, it turned out to be too big to fit in our car... Nor will I forget how the coordinators of the then-upcoming exhibition spent two days weaving 'stars' (plastic pieces on a fishing line, imitating barbed wire, and attached to a wooden board), which we hung on the second floor of the building. The next morning, we found part of the installation damaged: we suspected that a bird must have gotten tangled in the fishing line. We had to start over...

## JENNY KAGAN/

There's a challenge with making work that depends on the audience's interaction in that you never really understand how it works until the audience arrives. I was thrilled to discover just how interested the Kaunas audience was. I had anticipated anything from disinterest to resistance and even hostility – and yet, if that was the reaction of any of the audience, they didn't share it with me. The feedback

was universally warm and appreciative. I was particularly thrilled that people felt they wanted to bring their children to see the show. I'd consciously introduced the game element so that there was something to appeal to a younger audience and to speak to them in a familiar language, but they were more sophisticated than I gave them credit for and seemed willing to enter into the world from the outset. This was a particular thrill for me. I always felt that the biggest challenge in showing the work in Kaunas would be to invite curiosity and empathy and an appreciation of the horrors but not generate fear and shame. I think and hope I was able to do that – but a lot of credit for that goes to the Kaunas audience and their generosity of spirit.

## JUSTINA PETRULIONYTĖ- SABONIENĖ/

I believe that *Out of Darkness* would not have existed without pure openness.

Primarily, of course, I refer to the openness of artist Jenny Kagan, who not only brought her parents' story back to the city where it had unfolded but also uncovered many dark pages of our history and opened visitors' hearts. I say this recalling a difficult but deep conversation with Ilona, a Ukrainian currently living in Lithuania. Who would have thought that an exhibition portraying the history of the Second World War would resonate so poignantly in the present...

Perhaps we didn't manage everything in time or couldn't make all the passages accessible to everyone, perhaps some things got lost in translation... Yet, I remember everything with deep excitement and gratitude.

It was a story we had to tell, and the visitors needed to hear and reckon with it.

When I remember the thousand-strong (!) crowd on the final weekend of the exhibition, I think to myself, we did it!





Fragment from the *Out of Darkness* exhibition by Jenny Kagan



Fragment from the *Out of Darkness* exhibition by Jenny Kagan





'Confluence' grand event stage on the water



'Confluence' show. Directed by Rytis Zemkauskas



'Confluence' show. Directed by Rytis Zemkauskas





*Kaunas Cantata*. Created by Philip Miller (composer), Jenny Kagan (artist), and Chris Baldwin (director). Kaunas Žalgiris Arena



# The Great Return. The Litvak Culture Forum

*#conferences #European\_dimension #international\_partnerships  
#Litvaks #Memory\_Office*

## DAIVA PRICE/

The Litvak Culture Forum was a great celebration for me personally. It summed up everything we had accomplished with the 'Memory Office' programme in the field of Jewish memory over five years and crowned the entire long-term 'Memory Office' programme dedicated to the city's Jewish memory and the Holocaust. In 2021, we published the book, entitled *The Jews of Kaunas*, in Lithuanian and English, paying homage to the Jews of Kaunas who had lived in this city for centuries. Since 2017, we have collected several dozens of testimonies of Holocaust survivors (we have published them on the [atmintiesvietos.lt](http://atmintiesvietos.lt) website), produced and initiated about 40 art projects dedicated to the city's Jewish memory, including exhibitions, plays, and concerts... A number of Litvak artists – Jenny Kagan, Philip Miller, Bruce Clarke, Marilia Destot, William Kentridge, and others – and their works returned to the city of their parents and grandparents. At the Litvak Culture Forum, we were able to meet once again with the artists who had helped to create our programme, and members of the Jewish community who had become our friends. The Forum also gave us a chance to invite to Kaunas some of the world's most renowned academics, including Prof. Peter Salovey, current president of Yale University and the descendant of the Soloveitchik rabbinic family; Tsvia Walden, Professor of Hebrew and daughter of Shimon Peres, a Litvak and former President and Prime Minister of Israel; the brilliant scholars Prof. Antony Polonsky, Prof. James E. Young, and others. We provided a stage for Lithuanian artists who cared about our country's history and the history of our fellow citizens, which had long existed only in the margins. This represented a very meaningful culmination to this programme, summarising our accomplishments, and led to new professional and personal relationships, and I believe, became the birthplace of many new ideas and joint projects.

The Litvak Culture Forum was planned with the help of an advisory board set up by us. We invited distinguished professionals in their respective fields and representatives of diasporas from different continents and countries to become board members. I couldn't believe that no one refused to join our initiative, but instead took time for online meetings, discussions, and finally, for a trip to the not-yet-post-pandemic Kaunas.



Daiva Price. Litvak Culture Forum



*Litvak Culture Forum presentations and public discussions (YouTube playlist, 2022).*



## TSVIA WALDEN/

We woke up, had breakfast and were wondering what our day would look like.  
How can we stand without Dovilė showing us the preferred place and position?  
How are we going to speak with people without an excellent simultaneous translation?

I was looking around to see where I might get a set of headsets: 'Sandra, where are you?'

No presentations – all of which were interesting and stimulating... no lunch in good company, let alone dinner. No Daiva, floating in a long dress, always there for everybody – her imprints felt everywhere.

And what shall we do without any concert? We've got used to such creative, powerful music productions bringing the richness of the prewar community back to life. We have attended courageous, inventive, and invested shows – 300 performers! Moving texts and witnesses.

We set off to complete our tour. From Mezuzah to Mezuzah, from museum to museum. From talking characters painted on the walls that represent people who are under the stones and people who are gone without a tomb. In one yard it looked as if some of the characters were stepping down and inviting the tourists to enjoy a light snack with them. If we decorate walls and respect their testimony, maybe they will do the same for us. After all we are witnessing the same complex reality.

We went to see William Kentridge's enormous installation, inspiring and thought-provoking. Walking from one stop to the other surprised us again and again – and yet everything was in black and white. What a symbolic way to describe the nakedness of evil acts. The paradox between the beauty of the forests and the music became overwhelming at the last station of this *via dolorosa*. The variety of technologies and techniques Kentridge used is brought to the visitor's attention by some documentation of the 'becoming of'.

We continued to Jenny Kagan's box, house, or was it a home? Her choice to use ludic interactive tools is extremely evocative – the chess made from barbed wire is another way of illustrating the power of the human imagination. And as one goes by, the horror unfolds. On the one hand, learning slowly about her family's destiny. On the other, walking through a corridor paved with instructions that strip you of every single possession you could possibly have. The walls are covered with posters using

a wicked machinery of formal language humiliating practically every step or breath. Jenny shared with the visitors the kind of bedtime stories her mother used to tell her, and here again created out of the tension her family experienced, trying to get water without anybody noticing them, a game in which the visitors must overcome the risk of getting electrocuted while fetching water.

If it were up to me, I would encourage the authorities to keep this installation as a museum – the *Out of Darkness* experience.

We would not leave Kaunas without visiting the Ninth Fort. Even its gigantic monument does not measure up to the cruelty of the massacre, yet it gives a voice and a presence to those buried and shut away.

Enriched and thankful, we flew back home. \*



Guests of the Litvak Culture Forum

\*  
*Excerpt from Tsvia Walden's diary.  
T. Walden is the daughter of Shimon Peres.*

# The *Kaunas Cantata*

*#artist\_engagement #European\_dimension #history #interdisciplinarity #international\_partnerships #Litvaks #Memory\_Office #music #performing\_arts*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

I first met composer Philip Miller in 2009 at the Kaunas Biennial, where, alongside a couple of female artists from the Republic of South Africa (one of them was Alice Kentridge, the daughter of William Kentridge), he presented a participatory project, entitled 'Where is Kovno?'. The project sought to locate and map the sites in Kaunas associated with Jewish culture. Unfortunately, at that time, signs of the formerly rich Jewish culture were absent in Kaunas. And this search was initiated not by us, present-day Kaunas residents, but by the descendants, based in distant Africa, of Jewish citizens of Kaunas who had met a tragic fate. After the Biennial, I kept in close contact with Philip; we corresponded. He sent me several short clips from his *Rewind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape and Testimony*, which was created based on the testimonies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (after apartheid in South Africa, so many sound recordings were collected, with victims' and oppressors' testimonies, that it would take 15 years to listen to them all). Even a short excerpt of this composition simply captivated me. As soon as I started thinking about the Kaunas 2022 programme, I invited Philip to create the *Kaunas Cantata*, a reconciliation piece, bearing in mind the untold histories and unhealed wounds of Lithuanians and Jews. We began developing the content of this project in 2017, since Philip was participating in the Kaunas Biennial dedicated to the creation of signs of remembrance. Here, Philip met Jenny Kagan, another Litvak artist participating in the Biennial, whom he invited to collaborate with him in creating both the cantata's narrative and its visual form. The project's concept evolved into the idea of showcasing the multiculturalism of Kaunas by focusing on the suffering victims of various repressions and genocide – those who had been left unheard, forgotten, exiled, who never returned, survived but fell silent.

## INA PUKELYTĖ/

I joined the team when they had already started thinking about what performers could be suitable for the cantata in Lithuania. We learnt from the composer how he envisaged the performance, and began to communicate with potential performers.

In the summer of 2021, the composer Philip Miller and Jenny Kagan visited a creative workshop in Kaunas, where they heard the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra, the 'Kaunas Wind Orchestra Ažuolynas', the 'Ainiai' music ensemble, amateur choirs, the choir of the Kaunas School of Sacred Music, the soloist Rafailas Karpis, the arranger Jievaras Jasinskis, and others. The workshop resulted in the first version of the cantata, with Chris Baldwin joining as a director. It took a while to select suitable texts



*Kaunas Cantata* rehearsal.  
Garliava Sports Center

for the cantata because our intention was to show the multicultural side of Kaunas, to reveal our attitudes towards one another. The texts were sought in various archives and museums. The composer used them skilfully in different cantata compositions. In January 2022, during the opening weekend of the Capital of Culture, the cantata's first motifs sounded from the windows of cafes on Laisvės Alėja. The first joint rehearsals of the composition with all groups of performers also took place, after which the composer continued to refine the score.



'Kaunas Cantata' official video  
(LRT, 2023).



In June, over a hundred performers gathered for rehearsals held at the Garliava Sports Centre. The cantata ensemble was also joined by the Klezmer Orchestra of the Sejny Theatre (Poland), the performer Tshegofatso Moeng (Republic of South Africa), and the tenor Steponas Zaunys. As the cantata was conceived as a whole set of compositions performed simultaneously on different areas of the stage, it was necessary to test sound design solutions and adjust the parts of the cantata accordingly.

A week before the premiere, when everyone gathered again at the Kaunas Sports Hall, the cantata's conductor, Karolis Variakojis, 'tuned' all performers and we all moved to Kaunas's Žalgiris Arena for the final rehearsals with all the sound equipment and visual projections installed. The cantata's special feature was that all the performers stood on different platforms constructed in the middle of the arena. The audience could walk around them, walk between them, and would hear different groups of performers each time, depending on their position. In addition, this represented a rare opportunity to see the soloists Rafailas Karpis and Agnė Stančikaitė, and the readers Bella Shirin and Violeta Rakauskaitė-Shtromas, from up close. Screens for video projections were set up on opposite sides of the arena, and various Kaunas adult and children's choirs stood on the arena's opposite end where the audience is usually seated.

At first, the performers found it difficult to understand what the cantata was about and what message it was intended to convey. When the cantata's separate parts and words sounded together in joint rehearsals for the first time, everything turned into one powerful whole: the *Kaunas Cantata* was about us, about the choices we make in critical situations either to help or to betray one another. It was a completely different way of performing music to what we had been used to here in Lithuania.

## JENNY KAGAN/

The *Kaunas Cantata* felt like an opportunity to place the personal family story within the wider context of Kaunas in the 20th century. I'd also been working with testimony extensively in other areas of my work so the opportunity to delve into this whole range of stories and imagine new ways of re-interpreting it was an intriguing invitation.

Philip and I set about this project without fiercely defined roles – which in itself was both challenging and exciting. The project shifted continually in focus and scale over the years from the first discussions to the final execution. Some of those shifts came about because of practical considerations to do with the space, time and resources available, but we were also massively impacted by Covid in the making of the work. Our initial intention had been to make in a much more collaborative way and to really actively engage the people of Kaunas in the making of the project. But right at the key development period we found ourselves confined to our separate countries and our computers, and so the process ended up being more reflective and personal in a way. We had hoped that the arc towards the performance would involve more participation and integration. I still wonder if we would have arrived somewhere very different if we had gone down that route, or if we would have arrived at a similar destination. The enforced confinement certainly allowed for more time to delve into the material and research – but only online. I felt my research was severely limited by language. Not for the first time I berated my mother for not having been more forceful in her efforts to encourage me to learn Lithuanian and Russian when I was young. She tried, but I resisted as the young so often do – and she was too kind and I was too stubborn. In the end we read as much as we could. I used Google Translate mercilessly and read hours of badly translated testimony trying to reach the kernels of meaning. We were interested in the distillation of the experience into tiny fragments – but behind each tiny fragment that appeared in the finished piece was many hours of reading and listening. Having found our kernels, we discussed the arc of the evening many times and worked and re-worked the material as Philip composed and re-composed.

There were times when it seemed we would never be able to wrangle this unholy heap of disparate experiences into a coherent whole. The challenge to tell both the story of the Holocaust experience alongside that of the Soviet occupations continually presented us with moral and political questions and dilemmas. I hope that in the end we did what we set out to achieve which was to focus always on the nature of the human encounter, which we took as the key to our mapping of this tremendously complex territory.

What we knew from the very outset – from the very first conversation – was that the multiplicity of the story did not lend itself to a central performance or a linear narrative. The idea of multiple stages came early on and remained the driving force for both of us throughout the process. It guided everything, from the story gathering to the nature of the musical composition. Inevitably in a complex process like this there is never enough time or enough resources. I know that both Philip and I both feel that the version of the cantata that was performed in Kaunas was the tip of an exciting iceberg that, given time and resources, we could shape much more finely. I certainly would have loved to have had more time to develop the relationships between the projected visuals, the text and the performance. But the nature of the creative process is that we only learn in the doing – and it was over in a heartbeat. That said, while I will always long for more space and time to refine the detail I was thrilled with the essence of the event and the realisation of the idea. The movement of the audience, the range and scale of the performance and especially Philip's extraordinarily moving score.

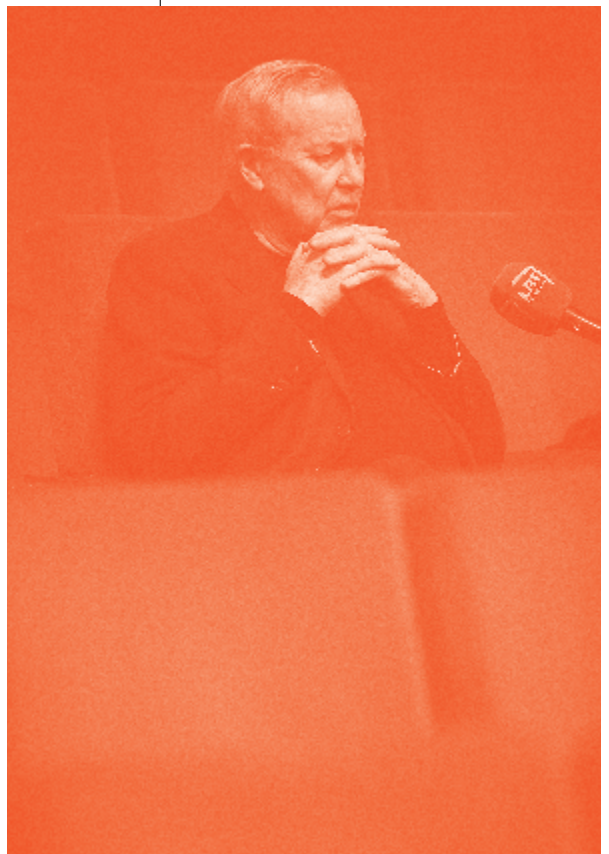
We were ambitious – probably overly so given the time and resources available – but I do believe that had we not reached for the stars we would not have made it even to the horizon. And we were blessed by the most extraordinary team who made magic happen – both musically and on the production side. Having worked internationally in theatre environments I wasn't expecting to encounter the level of professionalism, skill and commitment that I met in the technical team in Kaunas – and it was down to them that the event came together despite all the challenges we threw in their way.

# *Dorian* by Robert Wilson at the National Kaunas Drama Theatre

*#cultural\_sector\_involvement #directing #legacy #performing\_arts #Robert\_Wilson #theatre*

## EGIDIJUS STANCIKAS/

Every theatre manager dreams of an opportunity arising (and indeed actively seeks to provoke such an opportunity), during their term in the role, to invite at least one world-renowned theatre director to the theatre. If we were to count, there really aren't that many directors of this calibre. But Robert Wilson's name tops all lists. As luck would have it, I got introduced to Robert Wilson by Gintautas Kėvišas, and having gained the director's trust, I was already planning the prospects of our creative friendship. When the opportunity of obtaining funding from the Kaunas 2022 programme presented itself, one of my main proposals was to invite Robert Wilson to Kaunas. At that moment, it was not even that important which play he would choose to stage. Robert Wilson proposed staging a Lithuanian version of *Dorian* (based on *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*). Given Oscar Wilde's novel and Wilson's aesthetics, there was no room for doubt about the quality of the production. And when the director chose to work with two actors instead of one (in contrast to how he staged the play in Germany), Kaunas got a chance to host a truly original play by Robert Wilson. And that is what happened. Yes, the risk was enormous. But risk always attracts us because it helps us grow. This was what made the process so special: the demands and workload were only increasing, but so was our focus, professionalism, mutual trust, and respect. The appreciation of Creativity itself, as a unique and inclusive process, also grew, as did our sacred relationship with the act of creation. Today, we can confidently say that this was our Atlantic Ocean that we crossed. Out of boundless faith and trust in one another.



Robert Wilson. National Kaunas Drama Theatre



*Dorian* creative team with director Robert Wilson



*Interview with the director Robert Wilson (YouTube video, 2021).*



## AGNĖ BUROVIENĖ/

On 1 October 2022, the National Kaunas Drama Theatre (NKDT) hosted the premiere of legendary director Robert Wilson's play *Dorian*, which put our theatre on the map of the greatest theatres in Europe and the world.

The search for a five-star hotel in Kaunas; our Facebook friends were mobilised to help find and deliver to the director the latest issue of his favourite newspaper, *The New York Times*; four Covid-19 cases; and the director starting his work in Kaunas with just sixteen days before the premiere; the portal of the main stage painted over in deep black, newly sewn stage costumes; the newly introduced roles of stage manager and director's assistant for the rehearsal period... We joked that, for a single show, we would have to rebuild our entire theatre. In this project, the impossible became possible in every sense: from the moment that the legendary director Roberto Wilson's show appeared within NKDT's creative plans to the unification of different theatre department employees into a single team and the grasping of fundamentally different principles of work. It's often said that challenges either break us or make us stronger. Before the very first rehearsal, the director wanted to meet everyone involved in the play. Although Robert Wilson had received a detailed list of all the employees working on the play in advance, he wanted to get to know personally not only everyone working on stage but also all the service providers. Personally, I had never experienced anything like this during my over ten-year-long career in theatre. During our first meeting, Robert introduced me to the two main principles of his work: 1) all participants are equally important in the process, so the result depends on teamwork, regardless of whether it is backstage or on stage; 2) don't forget to enjoy the process (let's have fun!), because this is the essence of our work in theatre.

These are universal lessons, but also the greatest ones, because this play demanded immense concentration and collaboration at every level. And when the process lost all of its gaiety, we would find great support in our colleagues also facing great challenges in their respective areas. Thus, a special

*Dorian* team was created, involving the whole theatre, which seemed to renew itself and pause to listen before each staging of the play.

## KRISTINA KARLONĖ/

The National Kaunas Drama Theatre. Not a single living soul in the stalls. We choose our seats and make ourselves comfortable. We wait. The world-renowned director Robert Wilson appears for the agreed interview precisely on time. At first glance, he looks very much the director – dressed in black, with a scarf around his neck. During our interview, he shares stories about the roles he offered to Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep. I think to myself how lucky those who are waiting quietly backstage for their auditions for Robert Wilson's production of *Dorian* in Kaunas must feel. None of the actors appear during the interview;



Dainius Svobonas and Mantas Zemleckas, playing the role of Dorian, in rehearsals

confidentiality is confidentiality. Only Dainius Svobonas peeks his head around the edge of the curtain. I guessed, and correctly so, that he would become Kaunas's Dorian Gray.

## DAINIUS SVOBONAS/

The director Robert Wilson introduced order, silence, and concentration to the rehearsals. He tamed the pre-premiere chaos, as everyone knew what they needed to do. Before other premieres, much of the work often happens on the last day (costumes, make-up). In this case, by contrast, once Robert Wilson

arrived for rehearsals, nearly everything had already been prepared, with only adjustments and refinements remaining. Therefore, on the day of the premiere, there were no technical distractions; I only needed to focus on the execution of my role.

Every rehearsal took place with makeup and costumes, music, and lighting. Personnel of

all involved levels and departments attended and observed all rehearsals, which enabled them to promptly execute the director's notes. My task was to fulfil Wilson's creative vision; it took a great deal of effort to make the text understandable. The director's demand for precision in movement, lighting, accuracy in language and thought, gave me an opportunity to experiment with voice, tone, situation, and thought. The principle of creating a role: see with your feet, hear with your eyes, and walk with your hands. This is where the jazz of creating a role begins, underscored by Robert Wilson's words: 'I've put you in a cage; now be free.' 🎭

# 71 Organisations, 134 Projects. Cultural Operators in the Kaunas 2022 Programme

*#administration #audience\_development  
#capacity\_building #co-creation  
#cultural\_sector\_involvement  
#culture\_community  
#Culture\_Tempo\_Academy  
#ECoC\_project\_management #impacts  
#legacy #networking #transparency*



## ROKAS NAUDŽIUS/

During the title year, Virginija's desk, overflowing with project partners' planning documents and reports, resembled a conveyor belt where everything had to revolve quickly and precisely. The dictated pace was leading to burnout... But as the events gathered momentum, we got a second wind. What had been so hard to squeeze into document forms, when part of our working hours had to be spent searching for a particular 'Excel' function, making corrections or arguing within the team and with cultural operators, became flesh! Seeing the plays produced by the National Kaunas Drama Theatre, the Yoko Ono installation hosted by the Contemporary Art Centre, the fully packed Žalgiris Arena with Marina Abramović in the spotlight, other partner initiatives, festivals, concerts, exhibitions... it all helps you to see that you haven't been working in vain.

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

As the years went by, we observed new relationships developing between institutions, and partners taking on increasing leadership in the Kaunas 2022 project. A significant push was given by the audience development programme implemented with Impact Foundation as well as the European Capital of Culture Forum, our proposed meetings, and our networking trips to other Capitals of Culture. All of this helped us to give our partners a better glimpse of the context of the project's mission and core values, in which we were inviting partners to find their place. Some dived into the theme of accessibility (Kaunas City Chamber Theatre, Historical Presidential Palace, Kaunas Biennial) or launched institutional network-building initiatives for cultural organisations in their respective fields (ConTempo, Kaunas Literature Week), while others took on the role of international ambassadors of Kaunas 2022 and carried out international productions (NKDT, Meno Parkas), or else became the guardians of Kaunas 2022's legacy (Kaunas Artists' House). Regular visits to colleagues from partnering organisations helped us to discover new venues and what we could share with each other, what practical interests we had in common. New activities soon emerged out of this informal communication.

*The Wreckage of My Flesh, performance by  
Tebby W. T. Ramasike. The Ninth Fort*

In parallel, of course, there was no shortage of issues causing division between our partners and us: disagreements over the priorities of the partners' projects, expenses, inadequate resources, integration in the calendar, the city's venues, report documentation, adherence to schedules, our inability to address emerging challenges quickly, formalities, partners' visibility in our communication, our project's visibility in partners' communication, and a great many other issues. Nevertheless, the Kaunas 2022 project has been brought to its completion despite all these difficulties; our objectives have been achieved. For me, this is proof that the Kaunas cultural sector is, among other things, a community that has passionately rooted for the project's success.



## AGNĖ BUROVIENĖ/

As the expert-led Jury declared Kaunas the winner of the 2022 European Capital of Culture title, we experienced mixed emotions while watching the live celebration remotely. On the one hand, we were thrilled that Kaunas had triumphed with its incredible, energetic, and experienced team, and we were hopeful that they would be able to successfully execute the programme they had developed. We would be supporting them, and were prepared to offer help in difficult situations, albeit only minimally, as we were preoccupied with our own projects: staging productions by Lithuania's most distinguished directors across four theatrical stages, touring various Lithuanian regions, and conducting educational activities. We had little interest in delving into the essence of the title or taking on extra tasks with uncertain goals. In 2017, the NKDT introduced four premieres to audiences (by G. Varnas, E. Kižaitė, V. Bareikis, and V. Martinaitis), embarked on an international tour to Sakartvelo, and presented numerous plays throughout Lithuanian regions. The repertoire featured one premiere by a foreign director (V. Silis, Latvia) created in 2015, as well as a joint production with the Utopia theatre in Vilnius which featured performances with English subtitles and were tailored to be accessible for the hearing-impaired.

In 2022, the title-year of the European Capital of Culture, the NKDT staged eight premieres, including four co-productions with theatres from Latvia, Canada, Germany, and Luxembourg. Creatives from Latvia, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Iceland, the USA, Germany, Italy, France, Ukraine, and, of course, Lithuania, worked in our theatre. Thirty-nine performances were adapted for English speakers, one for French speakers, and two for Ukrainians. Three plays were shown with subtitles for the hearing-impaired, and 12 different educational activities were adapted for people with various disabilities during the 'Dive into Theatre' festival. NKDT was one of the largest partners of the Kaunas 2022 programme.

What drove this change? Understanding the purpose of the Capital of Culture, its priorities, and the importance of collaboration (both locally and internationally) did not come about spontaneously. It was a year of endless individual meetings, discussions, and refining of ideas, during which the implementation of the ECoC programme gradually became OUR project. Formality was replaced by an appreciation of the OPPORTUNITIES: the chance to participate in audience development programmes and thereby enhance our competencies, the chance to extend the geographical scope of activities beyond Lithuania and to adopt the best practices and operating models from foreign theatres, and finally, the chance to work with one of the world's best directors, Robert Wilson.

## MONIKA STRAUPYTĖ/

Our library's connections with most of Kaunas's cultural institutions grew stronger. The audience development training and Kaunas cultural community meetings contributed the most to this, allowing us to get to know our colleagues in the cultural field more closely and appreciate which specific individuals were linked to each institution. As a result, when necessary, you immediately knew whom to contact, rather than just using the institution's generic e-mail addresses.

## AGATA ETMANOWICZ/

I think that one of the most important results of this programme is not only the fact there is more strategic planning regarding working with audiences, more thinking about how to make cultural offerings accessible to all audiences, but also, most of

\*  
*Klaudija Aleksandravičiūtė. Europos kultūros sostinės projekto įtaka vietos kultūros organizacijų vystymuisi. 2023. Vilnius University, master's thesis.*

all, that culture professionals came together. They continue to cooperate and support each other long after the programme has finished.

The programme has also been a learning process for me. I've gained a lot from the practice of participants, picked up some things from experts running workshops, trained my Excel skills and my patience.

Would I do capacity-building for Kaunas 2022 all over again? Yes! Would I do it differently? Some parts of it for sure. Every experience brings new knowledge.

## NERINGA KULIK/

The greatest outcome of the audience development training programme is the close links that have been established between the different cultural organisations operating in Kaunas. How to achieve this? It is simple! Just dedicate two days every month throughout the year to joint activities, such as audience development training. I can now confidently say that I am well-acquainted with at least a dozen cultural organisations in Kaunas city and the professionals working within them. We had some very beautiful and meaningful collaborations at the Kaunas Biennial, which had resulted from the connections made during these training sessions. Following the 12th Kaunas Biennial exhibition held in 2019, the artwork *Lost Baggage* by Ukrainian artist Mykola Ridnyi was transferred to the Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum, where it complemented the museum's exhibition on the Holocaust. In 2020, we collaborated with Ignas Andriūškevičius from the Kaunas 2022 team in implementing the 'Magic Carpets' residency in Kaunas for Serbian artist Konstantin Djuričković. In 2021, we screened the 13th Kaunas Biennial film programme at the Kaunas State Puppet Theatre. I believe that, in the future, we will carry out many more joint projects with all twelve Kaunas cultural organisations that participated in this programme.



## MARIUS PEČIULIS/

I participated in the Kaunas 2022 audience development training and simultaneously prepared my application for the position of director at the Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum. The training served as a great opportunity to check whether my vision for the museum, outlined in my proposed programme, aligned with the trends of the time; to see what challenges other institutions were faced with, and to learn from their best practices. The training offered a comprehensive programme on how to orientate the organisation towards the public and how to address society's needs better. I was keen for the concept of the museum as such to be transformed at the Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum – from a stereotypical museum space with hanging exhibition displays and captions, visited once every twenty years, to a complex space where creators from various fields could find their own medium.

Kaunas 2022 gave me the opportunity to test out these ideas in practice. The Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum team spent the year of 2022 scooping up handfuls of new experiences and implementing several projects: in July, in collaboration with the Kaunas State Musical Theatre, G. Verdi's opera *Nabucco* was presented to the Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum's visitors; in September, we presented the art installation *ECCE HOMO: Those Who Stayed* by artist Bruce Clarke, specially created for the museum's spaces, and the contemporary choreography performance *The Wreckage Of My Flesh* by South African choreographer Tebby



Workshop for representatives of Kaunas's cultural sector

W. T. Ramasike, based on the butoh genre. We had to find the courage within ourselves to implement some of these projects and trust that they could indeed be realised in our institution.

In my personal opinion, the most important project proposed by Kaunas 2022, and in which the Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum actively participated, was institutional networking. A shared vision, newly found common denominators, continuity even after the end of the Capital of Culture title-holding year – these are some of Kaunas 2022's major outcomes and gifts to all cultural organisations.

## EGIDIJUS STANCIKAS/

Cultural institutions turned to each other not to compete, but to forge partnerships. We gained a lot of wonderful experience from our partners and from the Kaunas 2022 programme leaders and employees. One long but short flash of joint creativity... But it changed us all. This was reaffirmed at the end of December 2022, when we all gathered again at the National Kaunas Drama Theatre to thank one another. On nearly every face, I saw there shone the unique professional experience gained and a determination to continue all of this...

## MONIKA LOZINSKIENĖ/

I believe that the ECoC gave us inspiration to create, and our main goal now is to make these projects sustainable and hand over a larger part of organisation into trusted hands. As art directors, this will free us up for real creative and performance work on stage.

\* *Klaudija Aleksandravičiūtė. Europos kultūros sostinės projekto įtaka vietos kultūros organizacijų vystymuisi. 2023. Vilnius University, master's thesis.*

## KLAUDIJA ALEKSANDRA-VIČIUTĖ/

In conclusion, if anyone were to ask for the recipe for successfully engaging Capital of Culture partners:

- Initiative, meetings with partners. We can only begin to act when we know the shared goal which we are heading towards and the values that unite us. We spent over a year preparing for and investing our time in the 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture' project and introducing our programme to others. We sought and encouraged future partners to participate and propose their ideas and projects. We were constantly providing consultations, searching, and encouraging.

- Planning, sharing responsibility. When we plan together rather than unilaterally, a clear division of responsibilities forms between partners, which later helps with resolving unanswered questions or emerging incompatibilities in a timely manner. With all our partners, we signed contracts and agreements, outlining at what pace we would work together and the commitments and expectations we would have of each other. We used these contracts proactively in implementing project activities, rather than leaving them to collect dust in the drawer.

- Delivering activities together, support. Let's go back to the second point. When we work together, support one another. It's important to declare support, inquire about each other's needs, what stage we have reached in our project activities, and, of course, offer our assistance. We ask each other how we are getting along.

- Continuous monitoring. We are both mums and dads when it comes to project administration. We proactively assess one another: all the different parties working on a project. We assess not in anticipation of finding mistakes, but in order to avoid them. We record our achievements on at least several levels.

- Results. Time to celebrate our accomplishments. Let's not wait only until the end of the project to celebrate that. Let's acknowledge small achievements made in the process. Note the steps that failed, assess them. Take time to discuss them and encourage one another.

# ‘The Idea of Europe’: International Symposium

*#conferences #cultural\_diplomacy  
#European\_dimension #philosophy  
#solidarity*



## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

In this project, there were people, intellectuals, who could have, but did not pass by indifferently. I am immensely grateful to them. One such individual was the philosopher Viktoras Bachmetjevas. You may remember that in 2015, over a glass of red wine at Medžiotojų Užeiga, Viktoras proposed naming our programme ‘Contemporary Capital’.

A few years later, when we announced a call for ideas for the 2022 programme, Viktoras came to the office and said casually, as he often does: ‘I have an idea – an international symposium, entitled “The Idea of Europe”. We need to invite Europe’s greatest thinkers. Kaunas must contribute to actualising the idea of Europe.’

Viktoras envisaged the symposium in the first half of the year, but sensing this event’s gravity and relevance, I suggested for it to be the culminating event of the European Capital of Culture title-holding year, taking place on the closing weekend as part of ‘The Contract’.

Covid-19 muddled up all the planning. Not to mention the war. Both have only confirmed the relevance of the ‘Idea of Europe’. Not all invited speakers were able to come, but Viktoras assembled a very diverse and interesting group of international speakers.

## VIKTORAS BACHMETJEVAS/

As someone who has to deal with concepts in my work, I am very sensitive to words and their meanings. Europe is one of those concepts that are very slippery, which is not a good thing. We all use this word, but we each put our own meanings into it, which means that the likelihood of understanding each other greatly decreases – people say the same word but mean different things. It felt relevant for me to discuss what we mean when we use the concept of ‘Europe’. If we are using it in the geographical sense, how can Ukraine become Europe, and the British cease to be Europeans? If we are talking about human rights as a European value, does that mean they don’t apply in Asia, or are they in fact universal for all humanity? Both in a philosophical and a cultural sense, there are many different tensions inherent to the concept of Europe and everything is not so simple if you consider it not merely as a political slogan. Therefore, I wanted to invite people who think about these themes, and organise a day of discussions.

It was a great intellectual pleasure for me to listen to the symposium’s participants. There is a lot of automatism in our thinking, but the lecturers on stage not only had mastered their subject but also demonstrated how one could be open to different possibilities, to speak clearly and sharply, but without being provocative.



*‘The Idea of Europe’ International Symposium:  
official video (2022).*

From left to right: Minister of Culture of Lithuania; Kaunas 2022 CEO; Presidents of Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Alongside the leadership of Viktoras Bachmetjevas and the partnership of the Vytautas Magnus University, the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda, took the event under his patronage. At the President’s invitation, Ursula von der Leyen and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, delivered welcoming speeches remotely. And the Presidents of Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and Romania participated in a live presidential panel discussion. An incredible success, a full house, a live broadcast to several countries, a press conference on the current issues of European politics accompanying the symposium. The European Capital of Culture became the epicentre of a diplomatic event, supporting Ukraine in a difficult war. At our invitation, the aforementioned Presidents stayed in Kaunas after lunch to visit the triennial of contemporary Ukrainian art entitled *Ukraine! Unmuted*. We felt it was our duty to present this exhibition to the Presidents as a symbol of solidarity with our colleagues, the exhibition’s organisers in Ukraine – the Institute of Cultural Strategy in Lviv. Long live, Europe! Long live, Ukraine!

# Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy, Act Three: 'The Contract'

*#artist\_engagement #grand\_events #shows*

## ANA KOČEGAROVA-MAJ/

It's the end of November, the final weekend of Kaunas 2022, or Act Three of the Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy: 'The Contract'. The Capital of Culture title-holding year reaches its conclusion in Kaunas 2022's third major production, created by Lithuanian performing arts professionals. The play is performed to a packed arena. The weekend programme includes dozens of other events. The attention that the programme has garnered doesn't wane until the last day, even though our annual programme has long since passed the threshold of a thousand events. After the Trilogy's first two parts, with what else could we surprise the audience?

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

The third act of the Trilogy for me was like a spiritual recollection. A conversation with my inner self, tranquillity. Tranquillity like that of Čiurlionis's painting or the stunning set design by Sigita Šimkūnaitė. Like the contemplation of seven uninterrupted years of work, sougning like Čiurlionis's *Forest* and *The Sea*, the motifs of which were used by Zita Bružaitė, the composer and concept-author of this piece. A primal force, a beast, was rumbling inside me, vocalised by the libretto author Daiva Čepauskaitė, interpreted by the director Gediminas Šeduikis, and embodied by the dancer Petras Lisauskas. The mystical movement of dancers and choir members on the surface of the water, choreographed by Agnija Šeiko, was a testament to all that had happened during the year of the European Capital of Culture, to the supernatural. I experienced a feeling of completeness and profound identification with my city. I was proud of the whole team both on stage and behind the scenes.

Each act of the Trilogy ('The Confusion', 'The Confluence', 'The Contract') symbolised movement, change, aspiration, desire. Its purpose was to bring citizens and participants together in a shared unifying experience. Watching this magnificent performance, I dreamed that twenty or even more years later, recalling this incredible experience, a profound sense of unity would resonate even within the hearts of strangers.



Scene from the 'Contract' event.  
Composer and artistic director: Zita Bružaitė. Director: Gediminas Šeduikis



*Kaunas 2022 closing event, 'The Contract':  
official video (LRT, 2022).*



Since mid-2022, we saw that things were going quite well, but failures of various previous Capitals of Culture, which really occurred due to minor mistakes, adverse circumstances or the media turning them into big scandals, didn't allow us to rejoice loudly or speak about an extremely successful edition of the ECoC scheme. So I remember the closing event not only for the stunning beauty of the performance, but also because after it, I wanted to shout at the top of my lungs that we had succeeded, and it no longer felt scary to do so.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

'The Contract' was an event where I consciously chose not to interfere with its creative process. It was made by Lithuanian artists, as we had planned from the very beginning.

Some of these people I have known and respected highly, for a long time.

Yes, in the beginning, I presented the whole traditional package of our values, programmes, myth, and ideas to Zita Bružaitė, Daiva Čepauskaitė, and later to Gediminas Šeduikis. Yes, I read the initial version of Daiva Čepauskaitė's libretto. Yes, I took part, as a somewhat well-known face, wherever I could promote 'The Contract', because this show did not come free of charge! People had become spoiled, and we were afraid we wouldn't fill the Žalgiris Arena.

Yet we did fill the Žalgiris Arena.

Yes, I am the author of the text of the Kaunas Contract, which framed the closing events. I am pleased with this text, I believe that a hundred years will pass and it will still resurface in Kaunesians' memory. And it will do its good work.

I shall add that, even though I'm recounting my personal memories here, the aim of the entire Kaunas myth programme – with all its elements, from the very beginning – was intended to become folklore. Yes, our events, texts, stories, and ideas have specific authors, but after a hundred years, no one should remember those authors. The Myth must remain. In exactly the form that Kaunesians of the future will want to tell it to themselves and others.

## ZITA BRUŽAITĖ/

Both 'The Confusion' and 'The Confluence' were strong works in their own right, but this is a Trilogy after all, so in 'The Contract' we would incorporate some of the already-unveiled elements: the Beast of Kaunas, various geographical references, allusions to the past and present, the creation of the city and life within it; all this served as a thread tying all three performances together.

In this project, not only did different cities and music collectives come together, but also professionals, students, and school pupils, which meant it was important to correctly assess everyone's pace and capabilities. These are very important lessons, especially when preparing such a mega project. Another important lesson concerns people. Their diversity and involvement then and now still seem like a miracle to me. \*\*

\*  
*Kotryna Lingienė. „Kaunas 2022“ organizatoriai atskleidžia „Sutarties“ programą: paskutinė galimybė sudalyvauti Europos kultūros sostinės renginiuose! kaunas2022.eu, 12-11-2022.*

\*\*  
*Kotryna Lingienė. 'Su „Kaunas 2022“ kūrė menininkai: stipresni ir atviresni kaip kūrėjai, didesni kaip žmonės'. kaunas2022.eu, 16-12-2022.*

## GEDIMINAS ŠEDUIKIS/

The three of us, that is, me together with Daiva Čepauskaitė and Zita Bružaitė, were trying to get to the core of what 'The Beast' meant to us. Of course, each of us put our own piece of the answer into our creation, but in general, in 'The Contract', we talk about our inner beast: sometimes we fight it, sometimes we coexist with it. The Beast is a force of nature, creativity, strength and energy, but at the same time, he also embodies peace. Therefore, the painting *Tranquility* by M. K. Čiurlionis, depicting a mysterious creature resembling a mountain, seemed to us a very appropriate motif for the scenography, and M. K. Čiurlionis, as a personality, artist, and musician, became the play's most important pillar, our guiding star. Scenographic elements, such as the mountain, trees, and the show's entire aesthetics, including the lights, costumes and colour combinations, were inspired by his work. The music, composed for 'The Contract' by Zita, also incorporates motifs of Čiurlionis's work – each part of the work is linked together using his prelude melody.

For the play, we chose a dualistic portrayal of the Beast: one part of his role was played and sung by Jeronimas Milius, while the other, a non-verbal part, was performed by dancer Petras Lisauskas. The ballet-oratorio's third main character, performed by Monika Pleškytė, was the Beast's antipode: she was a woman, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a caring figure, and represented everything that femininity embodies. Still, at the end of the ballet-oratorio, these opposing forces did come together.

'The Contract' is also about the city, about Kaunas, and about the person who creates that city. After all, all cities are a manifestation of human creativity. However, in the play's dramaturgy, we very much avoided historical motifs or the depiction of specific events,

which are characteristic of similar types of productions. We wanted to grasp the city's emotion, its DNA, its transformation, relying on generalised, symbolic plots. The play did not have one single narrative vector, and if you really wanted to, you could start it from the end. The play provides no conclusions, something remains unanswered for the future, for someone to pick up where we left off and perhaps continue it.

## KRISTINA KARLONĖ/

It is morning at the Žalgiris arena. The scene is like stepping into a fairy tale. The tallest pine-trees, a hill of 2,022 sandbags, and a stage flooded with water. The question is, how do I showcase this beauty without getting my feet or the camera tripod wet? There is only one answer to the problem: we roll up our sleeves and start rearranging the sandbags. Some here, others there, and we have a film set ready for a conversation about events, culture, and Kaunas, which is forever.



Scene from the 'Contract' event. Composer and artistic director: Zita Bružaitė. Director: Gediminas Šeduikis

P.S. On top of that, Rytis Zemkauskas even managed have a passionate discussion about the ongoing football championship, off-camera. Culture or no culture, you can't escape current affairs.

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

Everything is much easier than in the previous grand event. Several aspects are at play: the weekend programme is



Scene from the 'Contract' event. Composer and artistic director: Zita Bružaitė. Director: Gediminas Šeduikis

much smaller than the Trilogy's previous acts. Plus, the main show, the ballet-oratorio, is taking place in the Žalgiris Arena, with which it was very easy to agree on all issues, so the process wasn't overly complicated.

Kaunas City Municipality didn't even invite us to the Events Committee's meeting. Maybe there were no more issues left to be addressed.

Simona Savickaitė and Augustina Kalesnikienė did a tremendous job: they fitted everything within the administrative framework that we were asked to adhere to. We were happy working with director Gediminas and his team. They are excellent specialists who know very well how to work together as a team; it was a great pleasure to work with them, and the result somewhat 'deflated' the sceptics. Along the way, we had to put up with hearing comments about how our work was not a very sellable product, but in the end everything worked out better than anyone could have expected: the arena was sold out, and on the day of the event additional limited visibility seats were released. The public's interest was enormous.

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

Working with true professionals is an absolute joy. The event that took place

in the Žalgiris Arena was run by exerts in their respective fields, which made the work of our team much easier. A hanging forest, a choir with dancers. A Lithuanian swamp with light reflections. I said to someone: it's going to be beautiful. Together with Aistis and Augustina, we organised the closing weekend's programme in Kaunas, 101 events took place in total. 8,000 people erupted in a standing ovation in the Žalgiris Arena – the ultimate accolade for all of us, for our entire Kaunas 2022 team.

Truth be told, it was difficult, there was a lot of work, but we had grown accustomed to the workload over the years, so we simply got on with it and did it.

After the event, I was overcome by mixed feelings: the project was over, but it didn't feel like 'a full stop', as the entire phase of project's administrative closure was still looming ahead of us. We were exhausted, we cried (with joy and happiness), we felt proud and were overwhelmed with emotion. Perhaps we even identified a little too much with what we were doing.

## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

About a month before the premiere of 'The Contract', we had some concerns regarding religious fanatics. Someone started a rumour that the Beast of Kaunas was the devil. And that 'The Contract' was a pact with the devil. I don't know what kind of incense these people smoke, but there were articles, and even prominent priests were lecturing from pulpits that the 'Contract' event needed to be banned and everyone should pray, pray, pray that it would not take place. They had not, of course, read the *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas* beforehand. They didn't want to take a closer look into it but were quick to pass judgement.

Even the Archbishop of Kaunas asked me privately not to make the Beast of Kaunas... a hero of the Revelation to John. I promised I wouldn't.

Why did I make that promise? My internal argument was this: even if I think it's utter nonsense, it's not a big deal for me to tweak the concept for the sake of some concerned Kaunesians, because 'The Contract' was always meant to carry a message of good, being meant not for its authors, or for Kaunas 2022, but for ALL Kaunesians.

Last but not least, I'll repeat a simple truth: the Beast of Kaunas is a good and friendly city myth. The Beast of Kaunas travels between Underworld Kaunas and Sunny Kaunas so that our lives can be better and more interesting and so that we aren't afraid to fantasise. He's not just any old beast, he's the Mythical Beast of Kaunas. That's his full name. He loves people, his city, and he protects it. He has renounced all evil.

And... he's secretly in love with the Princess of Kaunas.

## AISTIS LANSBERGAS/

The closing party at the Daina movie theatre. What struck me the most was the sight of all the guests, including the Minister of Culture, joyfully celebrating the success of the title-holding year and all that they had seen that day, against the backdrop of paint crumbling from the ceiling, all to the accompaniment of low-frequency bass that was making the entire building tremble.

It ends.



Danguolė Beinarytė and Simona Savickaitė after the 'Contract' event

# Legacy

*#capacity\_building #community\_involvement  
#Contemporary\_Neighbourhoods #Emerging\_Kaunas #festivals  
#Fluxus\_Labs #impacts #Kaunas\_Challenge #Kaunas\_District  
#legacy #new\_longterm\_initiatives #regional\_dimension  
#volunteering #youth\_engagement #We\_the\_People*

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

Kaunas has chosen not to continue organising cultural activities through an organisation established for the implementation of the European Capital of Culture project, because there already were over 60 active cultural organisations and festivals operating in Kaunas and Kaunas District, so there is no need to add yet another event institution to the list. Separate organisations had been established in advance to oversee the newly launched festivals and initiatives; some festivals and initiatives were handed over to our cultural partners: the CityTelling Festival went to Kaunas City Museum; 'Fluxus Labs', the Courtyard Festival and the Fluxus Festival went to Kaunas Artists' House; the 'CulturEUkraine' centre went to Kaunas Biennial; the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme was shared between Kaunas Districts' cultural centres; the Nemuno7, a dredger turned into a garden of culture, went to Kaunas District Tourism and Business Information Centre, etc. However, when the European Capitals of Culture project is carried out by smaller cities that don't have many cultural institutions and infrastructure, it is necessary to plan for the establishment of an institution that will remain after the project's close, ensuring the project's legacy and providing the lacking cultural services.

## JOVITA RUDNICKAITĖ/

In the middle of 2022, when the question 'What's next?' was raised among the leaders of the volunteer team, we realised that we didn't want it all to end, we wanted to continue meeting, going to events. An informal group was formed, in which we would discuss which event we would like to go to or what we would like to do together and so forth.

The desire not to part ways, but on the contrary, to continue participating in cultural life together, which had become our habit, prompted us, 12 volunteers, to establish the Kultūritai volunteer association and encourage others to try out volunteering. The Kaunas 2022 volunteer programme has raised the bar of the volunteering experience both for volunteers and the organisations who agree to get involved – we want to maintain this bar high in the future too.

## KLAUDIJA ALEKSANDRA- VICIUTĖ/

We are a united, large cultural community in Kaunas city, open to the city's visitors, partners from all Lithuanian cities and towns, and, of course, foreign colleagues. We are confident that the partnerships established in our project will influence Kaunas's cultural map for the next decade.

Our partners are already continuing a number of our projects, including Kaunas Piano Fest, Kaunas Literature Week, the 'Audra' Festival, the ConTempo Performing Arts Festival, the Arterija open-air creative space, Japan Days in Kaunas, the Beast of Kaunas's Fortress, the Kalniečiai Park reading room, the kultura.kaunas.lt virtual Kaunas cultural activities calendar and monitoring tool. The repertoires of Kaunas theatres feature audience's favourite works of performing arts, plays, and operas (*Dorian*, *Tower of Babel*, *The Assembly Kaunas*, *Kaunas Spring'72*, *Visage*, the opera *Nabucco*, the rock opera *1972*, the puppet theatre plays *Kaunas Beast* and *Me – the Beast*).



*Kaunas 2022 Legacy Map.*

## GINTARĖ MASTEIKAITĖ/

The ConTempo festival certainly remains as one of the legacies of Kaunas 2022. We clearly feel that it will undergo change, seeking different forms and themes. We already know that we want to create two ConTempo strands: one in the city and one in Kaunas District, to make it as diverse and unique as possible, without mixing different programmes. We want to expand collaboration with communities and encourage wider involvement from creators. I believe that the festival has a huge potential to grow, to expand its audience, and raise the bar for cultural services in central Lithuania.

## NERINGA KULIK/

When someone asks me what remains after the 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' project, I always say that there is not something you can easily pinpoint and say 'here it is, this is what remains'. The legacy of the year of 2022 is invisible, but strongly felt within the community of cultural organisations, which are increasingly opening their doors to various audiences, and in their unity.

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ- PAUKŠTĖ/

In December 2020, we began to consider: so what's next? We identified directions that were interesting to all of us in relation to working with communities and decided to establish a public institution. Thus, on 12 January 2021, after long discussions with the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language, which had some quibbles with our proposed name, the public institution 'Bendruomenių laboratorijos' (Community Labs) was founded.



*'Journey from Temporary to Contemporary':  
Kaunas 2022 project (2017–2022)  
official aftermovie.*



*'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022'  
key facts and figures (YouTube video, 2022).*



*'From Temporary to Contemporary', documentary  
(directed by Rūta Vederytė-Macijauskienė, LRT,  
2023).*

## SIMONA SAVICKAITĖ/

Aistė, Greta, Goda and I began to think about the fate of the Kaunas 2022 community programme and decided to establish a public institution without having set ambitious preliminary plans or goals. The strangest thing was that as soon as the organisation was established, we began to receive various proposals, e.g., to give lectures or guided tours. Since none of us had much extra time, things started off slowly at first, but this step was particularly beneficial as it made us think more about what would happen after 2022.

## AISTĖ PTAŠINSKAITĖ- PAUKŠTĖ/

In December 2022, facilitators of all the programme's generations secretly organised a thanksgiving party for the 'Fluxus Labs' team with a truly Fluxus-inspired programme, surprises, a community feast, a co-creation workshop, and annual reports... in a community space initiated by Kęstutis, one of the facilitators! It was the most beautiful proof and summary of what had been born with 'Fluxus Labs'

## AUSTĖJA JOCIŪTĖ/

Ever since the launch of 'Kaunas Challenge' in 2017, I've been internalising how I have the right tools and strength to create change in my environment (and if I don't, I know how to look for them!). Currently, I am not only finishing my studies in the Netherlands and organising the 2023 edition of the

contemporary city festival, 'Audra', with my team, but I am also a mentor for 'Kaunas Challenge' alumni. I hope I provide as much space to create, make mistakes and learn from them as the Kaunas 2022 team did when teaching me!

That's why I'm thrilled that, together with other alumni of 'Kaunas Challenge', we've established 'Kylantis Kaunas' (Emerging Kaunas), the legacy organisation of the Kaunas 2022 youth programme, one of the goals of which is to have the 'Kaunas Challenge' cultural training programme and its graduates continue to encourage young people not only to be interested in culture, but also to become active creators of it: to create change among their friends, their community, and their city.

## MILDA RUTKAUSKAITĖ/

The Kaunas District Municipality made a very responsible decision to continue the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' project. I believe this can be considered an inspiring step and a sign of sustainable cultural preservation. It is a courageous act and a sign of a mature cultural policy choosing not to turn away and forget but, instead, to nurture everything that has been achieved and to appreciate that community projects create important changes that take time to emerge. All that remains is to wish everyone who is contributing to the project's further implementation all the motivation and self-belief they need, as well as an ever-stronger recognition that everything they have done, are still doing and continue to do, is damn necessary for creating an environment which feels good to live in, in every sense.





Scene from the 'Contract' event. Composer and artistic director: Zita Bružaitė. Director: Gediminas Šeduikis



Scene from the 'Contract' event. Composer and artistic director: Zita Bružaitė.  
Director: Gediminas Šeduikis





Scene from the 'Contract' event. Composer and artistic director: Zita Bružaitė.  
Director: Gediminas Šeduikis



*Explosion:  
Closing  
Remarks*

## SIMONAS KAIRYS/

'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' was not merely a project. Of course, I am being very subjective, but I believe all this can be called a phenomenon. It's important to understand that such a phenomenon cannot be born in bureaucratic offices, it cannot simply be planned. Success is only possible when everything happens from the bottom up. It's also incredibly important that fate brings all the necessary people together in one place at the same time – this too can neither be planned nor rationally explained. Finally, the time simply has to ripen for beautiful and compelling things. Appreciating these factors, you must not interfere but instead seek to protect the whole process as much as possible. 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture' has slipped away from municipalities, in the institutional sense. 'Kaunas 2022' has instead become a project of Kaunians and begun to flow its own way, on its own trajectory. And my joy is doubly greater. First, after I changed jobs, almost nothing changed during the first half of my ministerial term. In the international context, 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture' remained one of the most important national projects, not to mention in the field of culture. In other words, I didn't have to make adjustments in my new position as the Minister of Culture; from the first day, I was able to continue the work I had started. Second, my team of political confidants (deputy ministers and advisers) includes people from Kaunas previously involved in overseeing culture and Kaunas 2022 activities or who have themselves worked in the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution, as well as leaders of 'Vilnius – European Capital of Culture', or just fans of Kaunas and its modernism. In other words, the ECoC process, principles and rules contain something that makes people who participated in it understand each other and do many beautiful things.

## DAIVA PARULSKIENĖ/

The title of European Capital of Culture is more suitable for cities that are not capitals. Because the non-capitals tend to be more ambitious, engaged, and enjoy greater involvement from their local government bodies. Closer cooperation between all interested parties has also been encouraged by the clearer regulation of European Capitals of Culture 2020–2033, as approved EU-wide in 2014. It requires the project's concept to be formulated at least five years before the main event and stipulates the mandatory implementation of the approved concept. Kaunas's proposal was outstanding in many respects, but primarily because it presented a scenario of how culture can change the city and its people. In the process of forming cultural policies, we often talk about people's involvement and their responsibility for cultural heritage, about having a policy for ethnic minorities, and about youth inclusion, empowered communities or cultural workers and their competences. Often, talking and doing remain unconnected vessels. The Kaunas 2022 team not only talked the talk but also walked the walk. These experiences, in my opinion, will be the most important legacy that remains.

## ALBINAS VILČINSKAS/

In retrospect, from that first day in the autumn of 2012, when we sat down in the Kaunas Photography Gallery to talk about the dream of becoming the Capital of Culture, until my departure from the municipality in the autumn of 2019, the greatest value was not the experiences, no matter how delightful or bitter they were. The greatest value was our unconditional trust and faith in those who wrote this project, glued it together, and helped it mature. Trust in Virginija and her ever-growing team was a prerequisite for not doing harm from within. After all, when you think about it, the people who not only participated but also volunteered, worked, created and assembled those who were only eight or fourteen years old at the time. We grew experiences, and alongside us, a new generation grew: the culture generation, the Capital of Culture generation. The free, creative, brave, bright people of a different city.



## AUSTĖJA JOCIŪTĖ/

The 'Kaunas Challenge' youth programme is one of the best things that has happened to me. Not only because the people I met during the programme are now my closest friends (thank you, thank you, thank you for bringing us together!), not only because I chose to continue to associate my life with culture, but also because ever since this programme's very beginning, I have been growing and improving every year, I felt trusted, I felt safe to experiment, make mistakes and learn together with the team. The Kaunas 2022 team's trust in me that I too could take responsibility, and our realisation that the success of the project would be equal to the effort we collectively put into it, helped me understand that I can create change in my environment.

## TADAS ŠARŪNAS/

Participating in public consultations on Lithuanian cultural strategy, I saw for the first time how much the cultural sector distrusted local government. Representatives of the sector divulged numerous stories, which year after year justifiably deepened their distrust in the local government. In such an environment, Kaunas 2022's newly started efforts to activate communities shone like beacons of hope. They were hailed as examples of what can be achieved by high-quality 'localised' cultural initiatives. It was clear that, despite the pains of the past, ways needed to be sought to move Lithuania's accumulated cultural capital from the imagined centres to the supposed and real peripheries. Kaunas 2022 became a kind of metaphor for such socially engaged cultural policy. There I saw one of the most beautiful things that can be witnessed in the life of a country – how life itself and successful examples inspire political imagination.

## FRUMA VITKINAITĖ-KUČINSKIENĖ/

After 2022, Kaunas has become a different kind of city; artworks and various publications have remained. People's sense of appreciation has increased, as well as their ability to be accepting of the other and the different. Events diminishing the alienation between people taught us how to communicate with our neighbours, to extend a supportive hand to those near us. I experience this myself, feeling it almost every day, now that I live alone. All the experiences of Kaunas 2022 encouraged us to rethink the past, and for me, it also made me appreciate what makes my parents and brothers so special. It has empowered me to continue to live, appreciate life, and remain strong.

## BRIGITA SABALIAUSKAITĖ/

I was not disappointed. It's gratifying that in Kaunas we had the opportunity to see up close the world's most renowned creators, which greatly enriched our city's cultural life, broadening its citizens' horizons and self-awareness. I wish that this new impulse would inspire Kaunesians to create a brighter, not just cultural, but also everyday life, one with less brutality, primitiveness, and more internal appreciation of the principles of democracy.



### JOVITA NALEVAIKIENĖ/

During a few years spent with the Kaunas 2022 team, I learnt how to recognise in a flash, better than ever, and with greater clarity, who my friends, like-minded people, and fellow travellers are, as well as how to distinguish truth from manipulation, what can be achieved using arguments, where a smile is a saving grace, and when it is better to bite your tongue. I admire the project team's ability to reach for a goal, rejoice in success and go even higher without resting on their laurels. It's a pity that during the project's implementation period, the city was not only faced with a complicated political situation, but also with a pandemic that disrupted many plans around the world, and a war that painfully and acutely affected most of us. Sometimes I wonder to myself what would have happened if the Kaunas 2022 team had worked in an environment without such challenges? And I immediately come up with my own answer: perhaps it was precisely the challenging pinnacles, and not the quiet coves of favourable days, that contributed most to the project's and the team's success... The greatest value is the contract you make with yourself. Because that is all that remains – both when the Beast falls asleep, and when he awakes.

### SYLVAIN PASQUA/

Over the years, I have had the immense pleasure and privilege of seeing the Kaunas 2022 team grow professionally and in their ambitions, and gain in confidence, establishing extremely interesting and daring cultural partnerships with stakeholders and artists from all over the world. And I have also seen them showing immense generosity in sharing their knowledge with the whole of the city's cultural community and with delivery teams from other European Capitals of Culture, encapsulating in this way the essence of the European Union's project, which is solidarity between its peoples. Then opening their hearts and the doors of their buildings to Ukrainian refugees fleeing a war of aggression unilaterally triggered by Russia in February 2022. 'Hats off' to the Kaunastic team of Kaunas 2022, for your ambitions, your unabated work and your willingness to try things out and to share. My dream is now that all team members, and the city's cultural community, will be given the means to act and capitalise on the tremendous success of your year as European Capital of Culture.



## RYTIS ZEMKAUSKAS/

We've accumulated a wealth of experience. I am convinced that Kaunas 2022, as an especially successful project with an excellent local and international reputation, can demonstrate leadership in enhancing the prestige of European Capitals of Culture within the EU context. I believe that each member of our project has something to tell and to share both in Lithuania and in the European Union, which I love, consider a miracle and whose values I continue to learn.

In short, should you need anything, call Kaunas.

## VIRGINIJA VITKIENĖ/

A miracle happened to all of us. A miracle of meeting each other. A miracle of encountering the history of one's city or area. A miracle of getting to know one's neighbour. Of sharing knowledge, resources and time with a colleague and partner. Of creating a joint festival together with other cultural institutions. Of seeing how a young generation of cultural managers matures and overtakes us. We are privileged in being able to have created what we had dreamt about for many years. Being part of this story means creating history; may it remain not in textbooks, but in the tomes of the city's myths. We needed each other in everything, from the most miniscule task to the most significant protocol event. We couldn't have done it as individuals. We were united by shared experiences. We were united by the CONTRACT.

# *KAUNAS CONTRACT*

1. EVERY CITY IS BEAUTIFUL.
2. EVERY CITY IS A CITY OF LOVE.
3. EVERY CITY IS LIKE KAUNAS AND KAUNAS IS LIKE EVERY CITY.
4. EVERY CITY HAS SUFFERED IN THE PAST.
5. EVERY CITY WANTS TO BE HAPPY IN THE FUTURE.
6. PEOPLE WE KNOW ARE GOOD PEOPLE.
7. PEOPLE WE DON'T KNOW ARE GOOD PEOPLE.
8. PEOPLE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND ARE GOOD PEOPLE.
9. MY FREEDOM DEPENDS ON THE FREEDOM OF OTHERS.
10. KAUNAS IS FOREVER.

# Witnesses



Indrė  
Aleksandravičiūtė

Coordinator (2019–2020) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'The Mythical Beast of Kaunas'.



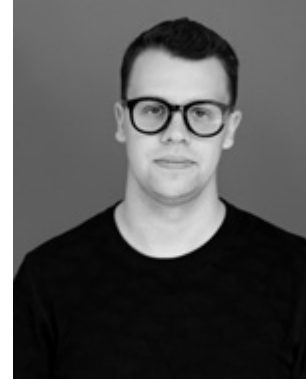
Klaudija  
Aleksandravičiūtė

Curator (2020 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Cultural Partnerships', which brought together projects initiated by the programme's partners.



Skaistė  
Aleksandravičiūtė

Translator and editor who has worked on *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas*, as well as the texts of this book and other Kaunas 2022 project publications.



Lukas Alsys

Coordinator (2019–2021) of Kaunas 2022 regional partnerships; curator (2021–2022); later, Deputy Head of the Department of Culture, Education and Sports of Kaunas District Municipality.



Viktoras  
Bachmetjevas

Philosopher who initiated 'The Idea of Europe', an international symposium (organised as part of the Kaunas 2022 closing programme), as well as events dedicated to the philosophy of E. Levinas.



Chris Baldwin  
(GB/BG)

Director of the Kaunas 2022 opening show 'The Confusion', and *Kaunas Cantata*.



Gediminas  
Banaitis

During the preparatory years of the Kaunas 2022 application, he was the Senior Specialist of the Kaunas City Municipality Culture Department, coordinating the preparation of the Kaunas 2022 project application as well as applications for the European Heritage Label and the UNESCO City of Design; since 2019, he has been the coordinator of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Designing Happiness' and regional partnerships, and has worked on the Nemuno7, 'The Road of Emeralds' and other projects.



Aideen Barry (IE)

Concept author, director, and creator of the Kaunas 2022 film *Folds*, dedicated to the heritage of modernist architecture.



Renata  
Bartusevičiūtė

Coordinator (from 2020) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'The Mythical Beast of Kaunas'.



Sandra Bernotaitė

Writer who led 'The Mythical Beast of Kaunas' creative writing workshops organised by Kaunas 2022; compiled the catalogue of William Kentridge's exhibition *That Which We Do Not Remember*.



## Vida Bliumkienė

Facilitator of the 'Fluxus Labs' programme; initiator of the Parakas space.



## Austėja Bliumkytė-Padgurskienė

Facilitator of the 'Fluxus Labs' community programme; initiator of the 'Dainava Courtyard' and 'Šančiai Kiosk' projects, amongst others.



## Zita Bružaitė

Composer and artistic director of the 'Contract' play, one of the grand events of the Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy.



## Agnė Burovienė

Deputy Director for Marketing at the National Kaunas Drama Theatre; curator (2019–2020) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Culture Partnerships', which brought together projects initiated by project partners.



## Dovilė Butnoriūtė

Curator (2020 onwards) of Kaunas 2022 international partnerships and programmes; co-producer of Kaunas 2022 Summer Stage.



Justina  
Čebatavičiūtė

Coordinator (2022) of Kaunas 2022 marketing projects.

Ieva Černevičiūtė

Vice-Chairman of the Kaunas Jewish Community.

Agnė Dilytė

Director of the Kaunas 2022 CityTelling Festival event 'The Last Concert' (2019).

Hanns-Dietrich  
Schmidt (DE)

Adviser to European Capital of Culture candidate and nominated cities.



Agata  
Etmanowicz (PL)

Creator, facilitator and mentor of the Kaunas 2022 audience development training programme and other one-off workshops and seminars.



Algimantas Grigas

Architect and facilitator of 'Fluxus Labs' small architecture workshops in courtyards; Kaunas 2022 ambassador.



Nadja Grizzo (DE)

Adviser to European Capital of Culture candidate and nominated cities.

Inga

Resident of Akademija.



Monika Inčerytė

Curator (2021–2022) of Kaunas 2022 international relations and programmes; coordinator (2022) of the 'CulturEUkraine' centre.

Gitana Jančarienė

Resident of Batniava.



Antanas Jasenka

Composer and author of musical pieces for the Kaunas 2022 grand events: 'The Confusion' and 'The Confluence'.



Austėja Jociūtė

Participant in the 'Kaunas Challenge' training for young people; later joined the Kaunas 2022 organising team as coordinator (2021 onwards) of the 'Per\_kūnija' and 'Audra' festivals and exhibitions hosted in Kaunas Central Office. In 2021, alongside the project's other young participants, she co-founded the 'Kylantis Kaunas' public institution which continues the activities launched by the Kaunas 2022 youth programme.

Eglė Jonaitytė

Perfumer and creator of the Beast of Kaunas perfume.

Evelina Juškaitė

Head of the Trade Marketing Department of Švyturys-Utenos Alus, the main sponsor of the Kaunas 2022 project.



Jenny Kagan (GB)

Visual artist and daughter of Joseph Kagan and Margaret Shtrom. The story of her parents, who survived the Holocaust in the Kaunas ghetto, inspired her to create the *Out of Darkness* exhibition, which has become an important highlight of the Kaunas 2022 programme. Jenny also worked with composer Philip Miller on another significant Kaunas 2022 project, the musical piece entitled *Kaunas Cantata*.



Erni Kask (EE)

Head of International Relations at 'Tartu – European Capital of Culture 2024'.





## Augustina Kalesnikienė

Coordinator (2017–2020) of Kaunas 2022 regional partnerships; subsequently led the development and implementation of Kaunas District's 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme as a curator, as well as other Kaunas 2022 projects in Kaunas and Kaunas District.



## Simonas Kairys

Deputy Mayor of Kaunas City Municipality (2015–2019), whose responsibilities included overseeing the European Capital of Culture project; Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (2020 onwards).

## Džiugas Karalius

Author of the *Leap in the Harbour* sculpture in Kulautuva.

## Kristina Karlonė

Journalist.



## Sandra Karnilavičiūtė

Participant in the 'Kaunas Challenge' training for young people, joining the Kaunas 2022 organising team in 2019 as this programme's coordinator and mentor; coordinator at the department of marketing and communication (2021 onwards); in 2021, alongside the project's other young participants, she co-founded the 'Kylantis Kaunas' public institution which continues the activities launched by the Kaunas 2022 youth programme.

## Paulius Kilbauskas

Artist, composer, and Kaunas 2022 ambassador; created soundtracks for numerous Kaunas 2022 brand advertisements, and sound compositions for the Beast's installations in Kaunas Castle and V. Putvinskio St. during the 'Confusion' grand opening.



## Greta Klimavičiūtė-Minkštimienė

Coordinator (2018) of 'Fluxus Labs' ('We, the People'), the Kaunas 2022 communities programme; later, Head of the Kaunas 2022 grand events programme. In 2021, together with other creators of the communities programme, co-founded the 'Bendruomenių laboratorijos' public institution which continues the activities launched by the Kaunas 2022 communities programme.



Ana  
Kočegarova-Maj

Co-creator of Kaunas's bid-book for the European Capital of Culture title; after winning the title, served as interim Director of the public institution which was implementing the project; Head of Programme, responsible for international relations (2018–2021, 2023).



Neringa Kulik

Director of Kaunas Biennial. The Biennial team actively participated in audience development training and institutional partner networking and supplemented the Kaunas 2022 programme with the artistic activities of the 'Magic Carpets', a platform funded by Creative Europe, which brings together 14 European organisations and is led by Kaunas Biennial.



Aistis Lansbergas

Producer (2021 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 grand events and other projects.



Kristina  
Laskauskaitė

Administrator (2019 onwards) of the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Kotryna Lingienė

Journalist, chief editor of the *Kaunas pilnas kultūros* monthly magazine, and author of radio reports on culture; created the greatest number of news reports and reviews on topics related to Kaunas 2022 and actively participated in many of the project's events from its inception in 2015 onwards.



## Vitalija Lyska

Coordinator (2021–2022) of the Kaunas 2022 volunteering programme.

## Monika Lozinskienė

Pianist and artistic director and founder of the Kaunas Piano Fest which supplemented the Kaunas 2022 programme.



## Roberto Magro (IT)

New circus playwright, educator, and director; contributed to the Kaunas 2022 project 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods'.



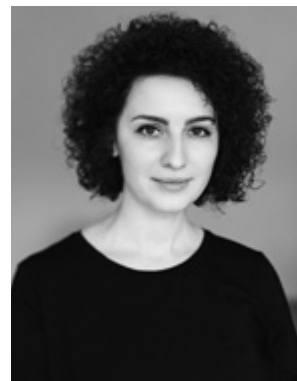
## Gintarė Masteikaitė

Performing arts and festival producer; from the Kaunas 2022 project's very inception, advised the project team on matters of institutional networking for performing arts programmes; participated in the drafting and presentation of Kaunas's bid-book for the European Capital of Culture title; initiated the ConTempo Festival (running since 2019) which became not only one of the most popular events of Kaunas 2022 but also an important platform for building networks among performing art institutions and for giving Lithuanian and European performers a place to debut.



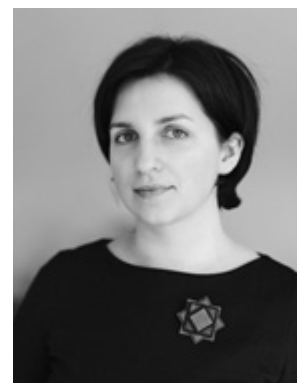
## Agnė Medėkšaitė

Coordinator (2021 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 volunteer programme.



## Viltė Migonytė-Petrulienė

Curator (2017–2020) of the Kaunas 2022 regional partnerships programme; curator (2018 onwards) of the 'Modernism for the Future' programme.



## Miglė Morkūnaitė-Vervečkienė

Monitoring specialist (2021 onwards) of the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Jovita  
Nalevaikienė

Head of administration (2018–2020)  
of the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Rokas Naudžius

Coordinator (2021 onwards) of the  
Kaunas 2022 cultural partnerships  
programme.

Daiva Parulskienė

Senior Adviser to the Professional  
Creativity and Internationalisation  
Group of the Ministry of Culture of  
the Republic of Lithuania; supervised  
the implementation of the European  
Commission-led European Capital of  
Culture 2022 competition in Lithua-  
nia; later coordinated the implemen-  
tation of the Kaunas 2022 project in  
the Ministry of Culture of the Republic  
of Lithuania, and participated on the  
'Kaunas 2022' advisory board.



Sylvain Pasqua  
(FR/BE)

Senior expert in the European  
Commission's Directorate-General  
for Education, Youth, Sport and  
Culture, responsible for coordinating  
the selection, monitoring and  
evaluation of European Capitals of  
Culture.



Marius Pečiulis

Director of Kaunas Ninth Fort  
Museum; Director of the Lithuanian  
Museums Association. Under Marius's  
leadership, the Kaunas Ninth Fort  
Museum has become an active  
participant in the Kaunas 2022  
Audience Development Training  
Programme, getting involved in the  
networking of cultural organisations,  
and being one of the most active  
partners of the Kaunas 2022 project.



Neil Peterson (GB)

Adviser to European Capital of Cultu-  
re candidate and nominated cities.



Eglė Petreikienė

Writer and editor; edited the texts  
of *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas* and  
assisted Darius Petreikis, who created  
the illustrations of the Mythical Beast  
of Kaunas and other visual solutions  
for the Beast's design.



## Darius Petreikis

Graphic designer who created the design of the mythical Beast of Kaunas, illustrations for *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas*, the board game design, and the city games for Kaunas 2022 events, as well as designing the sculpture of the Beast on the island of Nemunas.



## Justina Petrulionytė-Sabonienė

Coordinator (2018 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Memory Office'; produced the Jenny Kagan exhibition *Out of Darkness*; coordinator (2018–2019) of the audience development programme for cultural organisations; curated the development and implementation of the 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' programme in Kulautuva.



## Vaidas Petrulis

Architecture historian, researcher and promoter of modernist architecture; participated in the preparation of the Kaunas European Capital of Culture application; initiated the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Modernism for the Future', in the project's initial phase, and shaped its vision.

## Šarūnas Pikelis

Batniava locality leader.



## Agnė Pinigienė

Head of communications at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution, responsible for the project's publicity from the beginning of the application process; in 2022, together with Kaunas 2022 colleagues, co-founded 'Salto', a production agency for creative and marketing projects.



## Aurelija Prašmuntaitė

Coordinator (2018–2021) of the Kaunas 2022 youth programme, 'Emerging Kaunas'; later, curator responsible for organising the 'Kaunas Challenge' training programme and supporting and implementing the alumni club, which provides mentoring to cultural youth initiatives established during the training.



## Daiva Price

Initiator and curator (2017 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Memory Office'; co-creator of the Kaunas European of Culture bid-book; in 2017–2018, curated the Kaunas 2022 cultural partnerships programme and audience development training for cultural professionals.



## Aistė Ptašinskaitė-Paukštė

Coordinator (2019–2021) of the Kaunas 2022 community programme 'Fluxus Labs' ('We, the People'), later becoming the programme's curator; in 2021, together with other creators of the communities programme, co-founded the 'Bendruomenių laboratorijos' public institution which continues the activities launched by the Kaunas 2022 communities programme.



## Romena Puikytė

Facilitator of 'Fluxus Labs: Senamiestis'; together with like-minded colleagues, initiated the annual event 'Let's Celebrate the River'.



## Ina Pukelytė

Coordinator (2020–2022) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Memory Office'; *Kaunas Cantata* producer; during the preparation of the Kaunas European Capital of Culture bid-book, as a member of Kaunas City Council, mobilised political support for the idea of seeking the European Capital of Culture title.



## Marija Pulokaitė

Curator (2019 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 volunteering and hospitality programme.



## Mindaugas Reinikis

Head of Communication and Management (2020 onwards) at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Žilvinas Rinkšelis

Member of Ekskursas, the tour guides and architecture enthusiasts' initiative; coordinator (2017–2022) of the Kaunas 2022 programme 'Modernism for the Future'.



Eglė Rytmetytė

Manager (2019 onwards) of public and international communication at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Jovita Rudnickaitė

Kaunas 2022 volunteer; president of 'Kultūristai', a volunteer association established in 2023.



Milda Rutkauskaitė

Coordinator (2021 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 regional partnerships programme; coordinator of the *1972: Breaking Through the Wall* exhibition; since 2023, has been working in the Department of Culture, Education and Sports of Kaunas District Municipality, where she continues the activities launched by Kaunas 2022.

Brigita Sabaliauskaitė

Journalist.



Simona Savickaitė

Facilitator of 'Fluxus Labs: Šilainiai'; coordinator (2019 onwards) of the Kaunas 2022 community programme 'Fluxus Labs' ('We, the People'), responsible for organising the programme's projects and the grand community events (Courtyards Festival and Fluxus Festival); managed the implementation of the Kaunas 2022 closing event, 'The Contract'; Head (October 2022 onwards) of Kaunas Artists' House', the city's budgetary institution, which continues initiatives launched by Kaunas 2022 such as 'Culture to the Courtyards' and Fluxus Festival, and conducts monitoring and analysis of cultural activities.

## Remigijus Sederevičius

Ceramist and author of the *Tooth of the Beast of Kaunas* sculpture.



## Bella Shirin

Litvak, descendant of Holocaust survivors from Kaunas; in 1963, emigrated with her family to Israel, where she spent most of her life, but eventually returned to Kaunas; Kaunas 2022 ambassador who has dedicated her efforts to fostering dialogue and reconciliation between Lithuania, Israel and the Jewish people, promoting Litvak history and memory as well as Kaunas 2022 and Lithuania abroad.



## Egidijus Stancikas

Director of the National Kaunas Drama Theatre (2008 onwards); Kaunas 2022 ambassador.



## Živilė Stankevičienė

Head of Administration (2020 onwards) at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



## Monika Straupytė

Interim Head of the culture management department of the Kaunas Vincas Kudirka Public Library.





## Andrzej Stuart-Thompson (GB)

English language editor who has worked on *Tales of the Beast of Kaunas*, as well as the texts of this book and other Kaunas 2022 project publications.



## Dainius Svobonas

Actor at the National Kaunas Drama Theatre; performed the main character role in *Dorian*, a play directed by Robert Wilson, which was included in the Kaunas 2022 programme.



## Tadas Šarūnas

Doctor of Sociology, artist and lecturer; conducted the impact assessment of the Kaunas 2022 project and prepared its report.

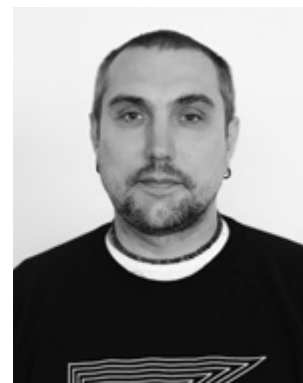


## Irutė Tumaitė

Organiser of the Kaunas 2022 Day of Happiness; coordinator (2017–2018) of the 'Designing Happiness' programme; later, curator of marketing; was in charge of attracting sponsors and ensuring their integration within the Kaunas 2022 cultural programme and its communications; worked on the branding for Kaunas 2022 and its events; in 2022, together with colleagues from Kaunas 2022, co-founded 'Salto', a production agency for creative and marketing projects.

## Jonas Vaičenonis

Historian and employee at the Kaunas City Museum.



## Tadas Valeika

Head of technical production (2020–2022) for the Kaunas 2022 grand events: 'The Confusion' and 'The Confluence'.



Artiom Valujev

Head of public procurement (2021 onwards) at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Vaida Venckutė-Nagė

One of the creators of Kaunas's application for the European Capital of Culture title; in 2015–2020, created and curated the Kaunas 2022 youth programme, 'Emerging Kaunas'; initiated the training and mentorship programme, 'Kaunas Challenge', and managed the programme's implementation during its initial years; Head of human resources (2021 onwards) at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution.



Albinas Vilčinskas

Head of Kaunas City Municipality's Culture Department (2012–2019), organising Kaunas City Municipality's functions in preparing the Kaunas European Capital of Culture bid-book, and in the project's management and financing; Deputy Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (2020 onwards).



Virginija Vitkienė

Initiator of the Kaunas 2022 project; led the preparation of Kaunas's bid-book for the European Capital of Culture title; CEO of the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution (2018 onwards) which implemented the ECoC project.



Fruma Vitkinaitė-Kučinskienė

Member of the Kaunas Jewish Community.



Rytis Zemkauskas

One of the creators of Kaunas's bid-book for the European Capital of Culture title; author of the Mythical Beast of Kaunas idea and this programme's curator; scriptwriter of the events of the Contemporary Myth of Kaunas Trilogy; producer of the Trilogy event 'The Confluence'.



Deimantė  
Zutelienė

Head of management and communication (2017–2019) at the 'Kaunas 2022' public institution; advisor to the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (2021 onwards).



Arvydas Žalpys

Initiator of the Marina Abramović exhibition and other exhibitions that have complemented the Kaunas 2022 programme; director of the Meno Parkas gallery.



Kęstutis Žižys

Facilitator of 'Fluxus Labs: Panemunė'; co-initiator of the 'Pojūčių Šilas' festival and 'K.I.N.A.S. Panemunė' creative house.



Rasa Žukienė

Art historian and exhibition curator; curated the *1972: Breaking Through the Wall* exhibition.



Vaclovas Žvirblis

Linksmakalnis locality leader.



Agnieszka Wlazeł  
(PL)

Member of the European Capitals of Culture selection jury (2015–2021).



Tsvia Walden (IL)

Psycholinguist and speaker at the Kaunas 2022 Litvak Culture Forum.

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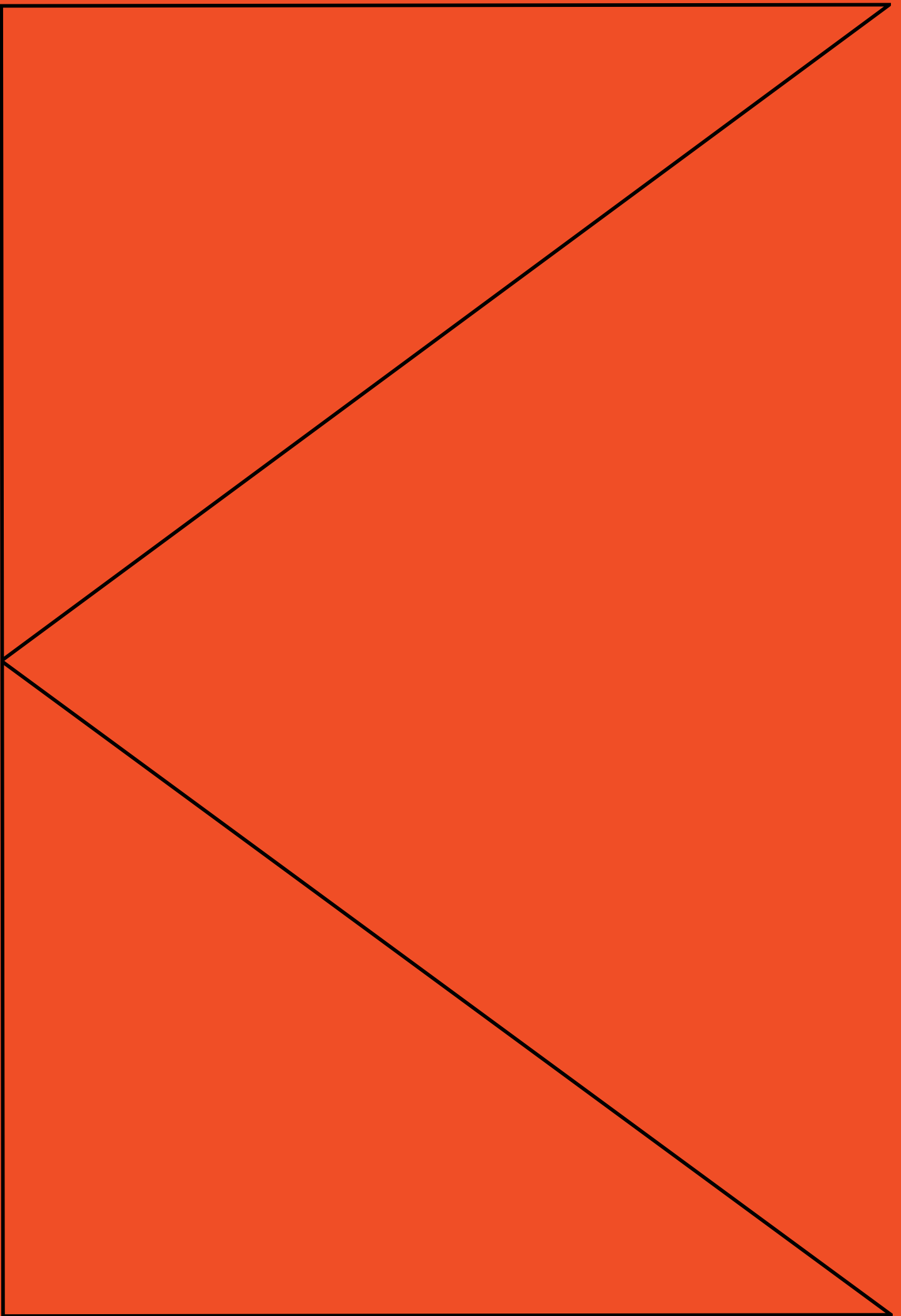
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Kaunas 2023





From  
Contemporary to..

# Kaunas 2022: Body of Evidence

is part of the collected 'Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022' reports. It is a compilation of personal reflections, memories and opinions about the Kaunas 2022 project, consisting of quotes from more than 100 project creators, partners, sponsors and participants. The book covers the period from Kaunas 2022's beginnings in 2012, marked by sentiments and ambitious visions, to 2022, the year that demanded the most practical skills. This publication, together with three methodology books presenting practices in community engagement, youth empowerment and volunteering, forms part of a report series and complements the data-based summary of research and survey results *Kaunas 2022: Investigation Report*.