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A series of long-form features highlighting the people, labour, and ideas behind the scenes at Rupert

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INTRODUCTION

Inside Stories is a Rupert pilot study commissioned by Re-Imagine Europe, intended to reveal more of our organisation's internal processes and unseen labour to the general public. It is composed of a long-form interview series, inviting guest writers—all alumni of our programmes—to highlight members of the Rupert team.

Inside Stories will also feature staff who do not typically have a platform to share how they support the institution, such as communications, coordinators, producers, and others.

In the first article, Alternative Education Programme curator **Goda Palekaitė** discusses her vision for new modes of learning with **Milda Dainovskytė**, a former AEP participant. The second feature has AEP alumna and writer **Ieva Gražytė** discuss with Rupert curator **JL Murtaugh** how Rupert's unique model for working with artists is shifting beyond the usual definition of residency or exhibition. Finally, Rupert's director, **Viktorija Šiaulytė**, looks back at the institution's significant metamorphosis over 2024 and 2025 with recent residency programme participant **Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė**.

These extended articles were illustrated with images from our residents, AEP, and public programmes this year, starting in March. *Inside Stories* supplements our existing communications needs and helps document this critical

↑ Cover Photo: Lecture performance by Rupert resident and Alternative Education Programme mentor Vijai Maia Patchineelam for *The Administrator and the Enthusiast*. Radvila Palace Museum of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania, July 2025. Photo: Dominyka Gurskaitė

point in our history, where Rupert departed our forest home of 13 years and relocated to a renovated facility in the city centre.

We aim to make Rupert's philosophy and processes more transparent and accessible to the public, and show how our organisation has evolved in recent years to adapt to new social, political, and economic conditions. This pilot also shows the variety and scope of Rupert's activities, including the international residency programme, alternative education programme, and our public programme.

This project was originally intended to be a running feature on Rupert's own website. However, we were lucky that all three interviews were published both there and with third-party online publishers in both English and Lithuanian.

As a result of the success of this pilot, we plan to continue the series into 2026, featuring more of the people behind Rupert, and potentially offering updated conversations with the team as our organisation continues to evolve.

‘What remains outside creativity’: an interview with Goda Palekaitė, curator of Rupert’s Alternative Education Programme

Interview by Milda Dainovskytė

For the 13th time, the Rupert centre for art, residencies and education invites artists and creative practitioners to participate in the Alternative Education Programme (AEP). Thirteen is a considerable number for an institution operating in the network of Lithuanian cultural institutions while subject to the unpredictable dynamics of cultural policy and funding. Over the past dozen-or-so years, AEP curators implemented numerous programmes, organised many seminars and meetings with curators, researchers and artists in various fields, while the programme’s participants saw a significant impact on their careers from these para-academic studies. Today, we are talking about the 13th AEP with its curator Goda Palekaitė, an artist and researcher whose work brings together different genres and practices from performance art and artistic research to literature, and who is currently exploring the mechanisms behind historical narratives, and the potential of dreams, imagination and fiction.

Milda Dainovskytė: *Goda, you are curating Rupert’s 13th Alternative Education Programme, this year titled The Secretary, the Shaman, the Scholar, the Lobbyist, the Publicist, and the Virtuoso. These roles, either separately or all together, are often familiar to the participants of the art field, and the themes of self-management and self-regulation are particularly relevant for artists striving to survive, remain active, and*



↑ Goda Palekaitė interviews artist Martyna Ratnik at the 2024 Alternative Education Programme Final Event, *Wherever we are We are what is missing*. Composers’ House, Vilnius, Lithuania, July 2024. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

navigate the art field ecosystem. What has inspired this year's programme and, in your opinion, what could help us change the way we work?

Goda Palekaitė: This year's AEP theme has been on my mind for a long time, in different forms and articulations. Back in 2015, I defended my master's thesis in anthropology at the University of Vienna and published a book titled *Conditions of Creativity*. There, I took an ethnographic look at the performative practices active in Vilnius at that time, and at the methods and conditions involved: socio-economic and historical factors, urbanism etc. I tried to define creativity from the perspective of young artists without focusing on particular works. I was interested in *how* and *why* we create what we create and know what we know, and what is left behind – uncreated and unknown. It's funny to remember now, but in one chapter of the book I was referring to Rupert in a bit sceptical way as a 'networking institute.'

Ten years ago, it still seemed that there was a distinction between artistic practice and its management. Today, however, I notice that in many instances they are intertwined, merging and inspiring each other. I'm interested in how managerial or administrative work in art can be radicalised and how these structures themselves can inform artistic decisions. For example, one of this year's guest tutors, Vijai Maia Patchineelam, a Brazilian-born artist and researcher now based in Berlin, is working on establishing a new, previously non-existent job position in art institutions. He is curious about how art and educational institutions might change if they employed at least one person as an artist with a steady salary and social security benefits.

Curators have such opportunities, but artists are the only cultural actors constantly forced to do other people's jobs. *The Secretary, the Shaman, the Scholar, the Lobbyist, the Publi-*

cist, and the Virtuoso is therefore an attempt to talk about all what remains outside 'creativity' and how it becomes part of creative practice.

MD: *How did you discover empowering tools on your path as an artist? Can you share your personal discoveries and experiences with different educational platforms?*

GP: I have a mixed background. I've been raised in a family where art and culture in general were present; I went to art schools since I was a kid. For my bachelor, I decided to study scenography and, at a very young age, started working in state theatres: as a set designer, a costume designer, and a director, but my experience in theatre was very frustrating. At least in Lithuania at that time, theatre was a rather toxic, patriarchal environment, occupied by people who had big egos but lacked clear professional and moral boundaries. To escape it, I began studying linguistics and literature – the fields that always fascinated me. Later I moved to Vienna where I stayed for many years, studying social and cultural anthropology. However, I was unable to break away from the creative practice. Over time, my ethnographic research and writings were increasingly transforming into artistic ones and vice versa, at first perhaps involuntarily. Eventually, eight years ago, I moved to Brussels and became involved in the work of the A.pass, an institute for artistic research. A.pass helped me understand the impact of intertwining creative and educational activities, and find a way to approach things that didn't fit into any box professionally, i.e. to understand that dilettantism and lack of knowledge can be an advantage if you're able to ask questions and think critically. This put me on a trajectory that I'm still following today: creating performances, installations, films, and writing, unattached to professional standards, instead following my subjects and questions, creating context that is different each time. This requires tools, skills, and trusting both your intuition

and the people you work with, because each project requires a new methodology. My dream is to see Rupert become a key career chapter for AEP participants, just as A.pass was for me.

MD: *In 2019, I participated in the AEP (curated by Adomas Narkevičius) together with my creative partner Laurynas Skeisgiela. The pre-pandemic year stood out from the ones before (and after), as curators and researchers were invited to join the programme alongside artists developing their artistic practice. An important part of this year's programme is a trip to Brussels, where participants will have the opportunity to collaborate with Belgian collectives Level Five, Établissement d'en face, KASK Curatorial Studies, A.pass, and others. With several years of successful creative practice in both Brussels and Vilnius, you're able to compare the two art fields. How do we look in the context of the Belgian capital?*

GP: Brussels is great for artists because it is a city where many paths intersect and many fascinating creators, organisations, and initiatives meet. It has less of an elitist atmosphere than London or Paris, and instead offers relatively accessible creative opportunities, connections and inspiration. Also, the city's diversity of languages, cultures, styles and lifestyles keeps your mind awake. Of course, it is also a politically, bureaucratically, demographically and logistically challenging city. I certainly don't idealise it, but I am very happy to live there.

I've known the organisations you mentioned for a while. They are all different and interesting initiatives and they all tie in with this year's AEP theme. For example, our closest partner, Level Five, is the largest artist-run organisation in Belgium, taking care of artists' workplace and working conditions, contacts,

presentation etc. It almost sounds like some public service but, in fact, Level Five is mostly DIY.

Meanwhile, the current Lithuanian cultural field, from galleries and institutions to funding models, is still very much a legacy of Soviet nomenclature and bureaucracy, the policy of closed doors and minding your own business. We achieve a lot through DIY too, but I think we need to learn to be more open, caring, and collectively minded. It is also obvious to me that there is a cult of production in Lithuanian art, which should really be a thing of the past. Nowadays, art can take the form of questions, conversations, gatherings, systemic and ideological shifts, and hundreds of other forms, including filling out Excel sheets. I don't think we should be spending our cultural budget at the hardware store, buying single-use materials for yet another exhibition created by an unpaid artist.

MD: *Over the past dozen-or-so years, as the curators of the AEP changed, so did its concepts. It is interesting to note, in retrospect...*

GP: Indeed, the Rupert AEP has evolved and changed significantly over the years. First of all, because it is the only such programme of alternative art education, i.e., an interdisciplinary one, in Lithuania and even the entire region. So, there were many questions to ask and new methodologies to test. On the other hand, conceptually speaking, this programme is essentially in the hands of the curator. Of course, the whole team helps implement it, but its theme and structure are defined, and the tutors are selected, by a single person. So, it's unsurprising that with each new curator, the programme changes significantly. I myself would like to expand and grow the AEP into a conceptually radically experimental, but structurally more stable body. We shall see how it works out in these turbulent times. I believe that, especially in a world dominated by a multitude of

polarised mechanisms of knowledge and sources of information, and in a time of widespread fear and mistrust, there is nothing more important than fostering alternative, independent, critical, ethical, and creative thought.

Institutions are people. Conversation with JL Murtaugh, curator of Rupert's Residency and Public Programmes

Interview by Ieva Gražytė

Ieva Gražytė: *I remember our first meeting vividly – it took place on Zoom a little over a year ago. Lost in the ever-shifting time zones, I had simply missed it. You, fully understanding the complexity of life in this ever-moving world, promptly re-scheduled it without the slightest inconvenience. You greeted me warmly through the screen, assuring me that you truly understood what it means to be constantly on the go.*

JL Murtaugh: I remember the call well. I sensed your natural enthusiasm and appreciated you making time on the other side of the world. You couldn't have known at the time, but it was a difficult moment for us internally, our team was stretched very thin.

Conversations like that kept us going. It's a real honour that people like you have the interest and bravery to be part of what we do. If you dare to trust people, it can go far.

We must have frank conversations and compassion about our present working conditions, and strive to improve them. Our team's primary focus, after all, is helping talented individuals reach their artistic goals, whatever they might be.

Within reason, I at least consider the other side's perspective in every interaction. It's an imperfect strategy, but I find it usu-

ally leads to a better outcome. We all want a compelling result. I admit that some do not share that sense of common purpose – it doesn't always work for the best. Still, I endeavour to remain optimistic and empathetic.

Applying to any of our programmes takes courage and dedication. Rupert has a strong reputation, but applications are extremely personal and intimate. At Rupert or in my other projects, I choose to work with those who are genuinely enthusiastic and have a shared understanding of what resources and outcomes all parties contribute to the collaboration – labour, time, conversation, ideas, et cetera – and act accordingly.

I will speak with everyone at least once – I spend a lot of time on preliminary conversations. Beyond that, I have little energy for those who try to extract without any return, even just their attention. A relationship means they have to bring something to the table for it to work. My focus is always on those artists and partners who offer a mutually fruitful exchange.



↑ *Articulations 6*, Gosia Lehmann, Ceci Moss, Ren Loren Britton & Goda Klumbyte. Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, July 2024. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

IG: *Your involvement and genuine curiosity are always apparent to me. As both Liam and Syndicate, you represent a nomadic subject in contemporary art – producing exhibitions, events, and publications across the globe. I see your international presence as one of Rupert's strengths. Could you tell us more about how Rupert fosters partnerships and long-term friendships with collaborators worldwide? It's no secret that nurturing sustainable relationships in a scene dominated by short-term projects is incredibly challenging.*

JM: I appreciate the compliment, though I see these as two distinct points.

Rupert made its name, from very early on, as a borderless organisation. I followed it closely from afar, and its distinguishing characteristic was a focus on groundbreaking ideas and artistic quality, rather than the artist's origin. Admittedly, it still tended to favour those who resided or were educated in the major European or North American hub cities – London, Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles, et cetera – but the type of artists attracted to us set an important tone. I have always viewed Rupert as a transnational institution, albeit firmly rooted in Vilnius.

With initiatives like *Mutual Empathies*, *Alterlife*, and *Ulysses*, I hope to expand our frame of reference, to challenge the preference for those hubs. Since joining Rupert, I've individually reconsidered each of our partnerships, evaluating their curatorial conditions and outcomes. I'm attempting to provide similar resources for our artists, regardless of birthplace. Truthfully, there are often bureaucratic barriers, closed-mindedness, and fear, but it's important to stretch the perimeters of what's accepted as possible.



↑ Installation view, Alina Schmuch: *Underpasses. Mass Moving*, Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, June 2025. Part of the collaborative residency Alterlife (with Sonic Acts, Amsterdam) and New Perspectives for Action, a project by Re-Imagine Europe, co-funded by the European Union and the Lithuanian Culture Institute. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

IG: *Could you tell more about the initiatives you just mentioned? And how do global openness and interculturality reflect on them?*

JM: The first edition of *Mutual Empathies*, a multinational artist residency project, confirms the validity of this concept. It was co-created with the Goethe-Institut Lithuania director Anna-Maria Strauss, to demonstrate how everyone benefits from intercultural dialogue, and how Rupert is uniquely positioned to lead such a programme. The pilot edition took place in Vilnius and Cologne, matching a German-based artist (Vanja Smiljanic) with a non-European one (Saroot Supsuthevich of Bangkok, Thailand). It was incredible to see how quickly the bonds formed between them, and how it influenced what they created during that time.

Our newest European project, *Ulysses*, places us in a pan-European network of largely music and sound institutions, led by Ircam in Paris. We are its first predominantly visual and interdisciplinary arts member. What attracted me to this was its commitment to extended relationships with artists working with sonic media. Our first two residencies in this framework allow us to both revisit an artist duo we've collaborated with before in support of an ambitious new project—Yen Chun Lin and Gediminas Žygus; and initiate a new collaboration with an artist I've followed for some time now, Nazanin Noori, introducing her layered theatrical direction, hardcore compositions, and politically charged practice to Lithuania.



↑ Artist talk with PRICE. Medūza, Vilnius, Lithuania, August 2024. Photo: Dominyka Gurskaitė

Alterlife is a cooperation with Sonic Acts in Amsterdam, part of our Reimagine Europe network. It provides a special opportunity to invite an artist to Rupert for a residency and mentorship, with an invitation for a new work commission to be exhibited in Vilnius, and at the biennial in Amsterdam. It had a huge re-

sponse, with over 500 applications for a single spot. I have worked closely with the first artist in this programme, Alina Schmuch, who spent several months in Vilnius last year conducting interviews, research, filming, and refining her concept, then a second residency at W139 in Amsterdam where I visited her to extend the project further. We will show the first chapter of her new film installation in June at Rupert, in a very special environment, and the second with Sonic Acts in late 2025.

Last year, we hosted a residency and production initiative as part of *The Sustainable Institution*, where we cooperated with E-Werk in Lückenwalde, Germany, and LUMA in Arles. The artist we worked with in this programme was bones tan jones, who spent six weeks at Rupert working with me, Viktorija, bones' project manager Eglė Kliučinskaitė, and numerous technicians and performers to first compose, then rehearse a new opera performance that we showed as part of *Earth Bonds II* last year, then the filmed version for a screening I organised as part of Meno Avilys' *Deep Rivers Run Silent*. I've worked in many distinct contexts with artists to guide and facilitate new work, and without question, Rupert offers something special that other institutions cannot. We are always prepared for the unexpected.

In each case, these projects are a means to an end: residencies have to be about more than the time one is physically present. It should only be the start of a relationship. While the story differs from person to person, ideally, anyone who joins Rupert continues that conversation and benefits from our support for years to come. I have devoted considerable time to evaluating how our artist relationships can improve, facilitate return visits to Vilnius, or offer production resources, continued advice, and curatorial support.

I would like Rupert to grow to the point where we offer more than just space and curatorial support to every single artist in the residency programme. We're moving that way already by inviting residents to be AEP tutors, holding paid public events like screenings or performances, plus those production opportunities I mentioned. It will take time, but our institutional partners, private donors, and of course, the Lithuanian Cultural Council will all be essential to making it happen.

I've been very fortunate to count so many supremely talented, brilliant, and motivated people as colleagues. I've had the freedom to move between contexts (public and private, commercial or institutional) and locations in a way many others cannot. So, while I certainly bring my own experiences to the team, the real reason I am at Rupert – why I'm in Lithuania – is because it's always had faith in people like me. A lot is possible when you work hard, be kind, and listen closely.



↑ *Mutual Empathies 2024-2025*. From left: Monika Kerkmann, ADKDW; Anna Maria Strauß, Goethe-Institut Lithuania; Saroot Supasuthivech, artist; JL Murtaugh, Rupert; Vanja Smiljanić, artist; Trace Polly Müller, ADKDW. Akademie der Künste der Welt, Cologne, Germany, February 2025. Photo: Sophie Dettmar

IG: *In the age of the neoliberal gig economy, when artists often move from one residency to another, some institutions begin to feel like home. Rupert is likely the most well-known contemporary art residency in Lithuania, bringing together artists from diverse cultural backgrounds. One of the greatest strengths of the residency, in my view, is the opportunity it provides for residents to collaborate with participants and mentors from the Alternative Education and Public Programmes. I personally made friends and professional connections at Rupert, and I'm now happy to visit these people elsewhere. How does Rupert cultivate this sense of community and lasting connection among its residents?*

JM: I said this before moving to Vilnius or being directly affiliated with Rupert, so it comes without personal bravado: it is the most distinguished residency programme in the Baltics, and I'd even include all the Nordic countries too. I don't believe that's a controversial claim. I'm not sure even the Lithuanian art community fully appreciates that fact. That's a testament to the artists who came to Rupert, its past curatorial and management teams, the welcoming environment in this country, and the high calibre of Lithuanian contemporary artists and curators establishing that ground.

This is a double-edged sword, of course. Our current team benefits immensely from the strong reputation built by our predecessors. We must also continue to take educated risks to stay relevant and at the leading edge of creativity.

Rupert was built on the value of alternative education. The residencies were a way to bring more established and innovative voices to the contemporary art conversation in Lithuania. It only makes sense, as we grow and our network enters its third generation, that we merge these two main pillars of activity.

You are right, for artists and curators – myself included! – other residencies are often a mark of approval, a line on the CV that denotes legitimacy, affiliation, and aspiration. There are so many residency programmes now, and it's easy to rest on its most basic definition; someone who merely hands studio keys to the artist, wishes them well, and picks up the keys at the end. Some even charge artists considerable rent, which in my mind makes those institutions indistinguishable from a hotel.

Rupert must continue to stand for more. Its established success in identifying artists makes it neither an education nor a residency institution now. Those are only our main tools for engagement. We are an ecosystem, a mutual benefit society. No matter where I travel, people know Rupert by reputation and word of mouth. It's an incredible responsibility to be a steward of Lithuania's major conduit between the local and international contemporary art domains.

So, maintaining that visibility and presence, keeping these conversations active and the pots boiling, requires a deep commitment from everyone on the team – Viktorija, Goda, Monika, Aistė, Aistė Marija. We all play a big role in making Rupert what it is today, and what we aim for it to become. It's critical to give meaningful time and attention to every individual we work with.

IG: *Indeed, institutions are made up of people, and I am so very happy to meet you all, Rupert.*



Articulations 8, Imani Mason Jordan and Candice Nembhard.
Medūza, Vilnius, Lithuania, March 2025. Photo: Dominyka Gurskaitė

The Ethics of Not Knowing, the Politics of Doubt, and a New Face: A Conversation with Rupert Director Viktorija Šiaulytė

Interview by Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė

Rupert is more than an organisation. It's a living, constantly evolving organism whose rhythm is shaped not only by programmes and structures, but also by people, encounters, disruptions, fatigue, and various tensions. In a conversation with Viktorija Šiaulytė, Director of Rupert, we explore the organisation's current state: how an institution shifts when it becomes a site of everyday responsibilities and decision-making, what relocating to the city centre has brought about, and the emotional and conceptual point at which it finds itself today.

Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė: *My first question is about your perspective on Rupert as an institution you have been part of for the past two years. How would you describe your personal relationship with it? How did you imagine Rupert before you started working here? Rupert is often described as a living, evolving organism, something more than an institution. How does that description resonate with your own experience? Does Rupert have moods of its own, emotional rhythms, shifts in energy? And where would you say Rupert finds itself emotionally today, after the move to the city centre?*

Viktorija Šiaulytė: Before starting work at Rupert, I had lived outside Lithuania for many years. What drew me to Rupert was its international character: not so much the networking itself as the possibility for different perspectives to intersect within



↑ Rupert Director Viktorija Šiaulytė at the opening event of Rupert's new location *ARITHMOPHILIA* and the *TECHNOLOGIES of DELUSION and RESONANCE*. Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, October 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

its programmes. In this sense alone, Rupert is an organisation that never stands still. I grew professionally in Berlin and know very well what it means to live and work in a place where you are considered an outsider, where you may even sense a reluctance on the part of local institutions to recognise the value of immigrant perspectives. I told myself that after many years I would return to Vilnius if I had the opportunity to work in an equally multicultural environment and to help expand it further. Rupert is an organisation for artists, and of all aspects of working in the cultural sector, what drives me most is the possibility of engaging directly with artistic processes and getting to know artists and their work, rather than encountering them only through theoretical texts (though that is as important), social media, or other channels.

This also answers the second part of your question about what kind of organism Rupert is.

Artistic processes and practices quite literally live within the institution, and personal involvement inevitably intertwines with professional responsibility. All of this demands a high level of skill in working with many unknowns and taking risks. In my current role, I try not to anthropomorphise Rupert too much, but I do think of it as both a personal and a professional organism, one that at times operates under significant uncertainty. Having recently settled in the city centre, a relocation that was an exceptional project in itself, we feel tired, but at the same time energised by a surge of ideas. We can now think about programmes, accessibility, and reach through an entirely different set of categories.



↑ Alternative Education Programme final event *The Secretary, the Shaman, the Scholar, the Lobbyist, the Publicist, and the Virtuoso*. Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, November 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

AB: *Rupert often speaks about community, but we know it's never a given. How is it actually built? How would you describe the kind of community that needs to be actively nurtured for relationships between its members to last? How do you think this has worked at Rupert so far? And has this approach always been fully conscious?*

VŠ: That's an interesting observation. When shaping Rupert's internal structures and planning processes, we do not explicitly name "community"; we are careful not to dilute the term through our communication. Over the past few years, our focus has been on long-term relationships with artists, so that together with residents, participants in our educational programmes, and invited guests, we can follow a longer creative path. I would rather describe this as an ecosystem. Also, for some time now, we have been thinking about processes in the long term. With a number of artists, this has worked very well:

we have built residencies lasting more than a year; we are planning future productions that grew out of long-term collaboration; and when organising events and exhibitions, we actively involve programme alumni.

AB: *At first glance, Rupert often appears open and free. Yet anyone familiar with how institutions work knows that this freedom comes with responsibility: towards partners, funders, and residents alike. How does this tension between freedom and responsibility play out in everyday practice? And how do you manage to hold these two together?*

VŠ: Freedom and openness at Rupert take the form of an organisation oriented towards programme participants and their practices. Each year, the content of our programmes responds directly to the participants' own creative processes. Over time, this approach has been valued differently by funders and audiences, and right now it feels like a moment when this principle has to be actively defended. Now that we are settled in our new space, my thoughts increasingly turn to future possibilities. For instance, how Rupert might continue to raise critical questions without being forced into rigid curatorial or institutional frameworks.

AB: *We could say that Rupert often operates according to principles of openness and horizontality, and yet that power still persists even there, embedded in language, decision-making, invitations, and even in silence. How do you and your team reflect on these subtle forms of power? And is it possible to create situations in which visibility is not a privilege, but something shared as an act of care?*

VŠ: I have said more than once to the team that we are not a

grassroots organisation. Rupert does not try to pretend otherwise. It has a clear history and a clear hierarchy. The idea of care has been used and overused by many institutions; it is one thing to curate exhibitions around it, and quite another to actually change organisational culture. These questions were already being discussed before I joined Rupert, and at the time they exposed real limitations of the institution. Looking back, however, that experience turned out to be an important lesson. Today, the team talks a lot about transparency at different levels. When we select participants for our programmes, rethink selection processes, or try out new methods, questions of bias come up again and again. For key selections, we always invite people from outside, reconsider how panels are formed, pay attention to which patterns keep emerging and why, and try to push ourselves out of our own blind spots. I am not sure if this fully answers your question.



↑ Performance by Oscar Mathieu le Bussy. Final event of the Alternative Education Programme *The Secretary, the Shaman, the Scholar, the Lobbyist, the Publicist, and the Virtuoso*. Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, November 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

AB: *In Milda Dainovskytė's interview with Goda Palekaitė, curator of Rupert's Alternative Education Programme, it was suggested that the core of alternative education lies not in the transmission of knowledge, but in creating a space for not knowing; a space of being in process, without an emphasis on outcomes or control. This idea stands in clear tension with more conventional models of institutional governance, which tend to demand clarity, structure, and decisions.*

As director of Rupert, how do you understand this tension between not knowing and responsibility? Is it possible to lead an institution while consciously holding on to doubt as a method, as a kind of ethics of not knowing? How much room is there in Rupert's everyday life for uncertainty, hesitation, and slow processes? And for you personally, is this state of not knowing, searching, and getting lost a threat, or rather a creative resource?

VŠ: I think an ethics of not knowing, as you put it so precisely, is simply part of any creative process. It is something I would really encourage people in the cultural sector, and especially policymakers, to protect.

At the same time, it's only one part of the picture. Other things need clarity, structure, and decisions. If you look at the film industry, which is much better funded, there are usually three stages of development: research, production, and post-production. At Rupert, we try to work with a similar split. On the one hand, we hold space for an open, unfinished, experimental phase of searching. On the other, we deal with very concrete production matters: structures, schedules, budgets, and the actual production of events and exhibitions.

When I became responsible for Rupert, it was important to rethink how the institution builds relationships. Rupert had long

functioned as an intense meeting point, with artists, curators, and researchers coming for residencies and making connections. Yet those connections were often fleeting. People would arrive, spend some time here, and then move on into the orbit of other institutions, with Rupert no longer part of that trajectory.

What interests me now is being part of a longer process. Before Rupert, I worked closely with artists on various projects, and what motivates me is not networking as such, but how encounters spark possibilities and set things in motion. I often think about Rupert as more than a place where connections happen, but as part of a longer journey: somewhere people can return to with ideas, pick up work they have already started, and where we can invite them back and support that process.

Of course, this kind of practice doesn't take shape overnight. It requires time, resources, and consistency. Gradually, though, projects, residencies, and open calls are emerging that are conceived from the outset as part of a longer relationship. Not everyone can return, of course. Each year, more than forty residents and participants in our educational programmes come through Rupert, and we are a relatively small institution. Still, with everyone who comes here, we try to build relationships that can last.

Coming back to the ethics of not knowing, in the team we have been quite clear that our work tends to unfold in two phases. The first is an open, research-based residency, often lasting a month, where artists are free to explore intuitively and associatively: the city, the context, their ideas. For some time now, Rupert's residency programme has not been oriented towards a final outcome or presentation. What matters more is the idea, the method, the question, rather than whether a project is real-

ised at the end of the month. It is entirely normal for an artist's thinking to shift over the course of a year. That's not a problem, because an application is not a contract for a finished result.

The second phase is an invitation to return. After some time has passed, we can begin to talk about production: what it might look like, what resources it requires, and how we can support the organisation of an exhibition, an event, or another project. At this stage, clearer structures emerge, along with planning and a shared sense of responsibility.

It is very important to me to protect artists' right not to know, to remain in process. At the same time, I find it risky when, at the production stage, not knowing turns into a form of manipulation. Sometimes uncertainty means that someone does not know until the very last minute what is supposed to happen, and then someone else has to step in and rescue the situation, dropping their own work to fill the gaps. In such moments, not knowing is no longer a form of creative freedom, but an unethical practice.

When leading an institution, the most important thing is to constantly sense this boundary: where not knowing is a necessary condition for creation, and where it begins to slide into an avoidance of responsibility.

AB: *I think that even at the selection stage we are already making choices, indirectly assessing artists based on what they have done so far and how their practice has developed. From previous work, you can often sense an ability to hold a process, even when that process is open and uncertain. This is probably a matter of both skill and experience, on the part of the artist as well as the institution. Over time, you learn to trust that a result will eventually emerge. Could you give a concrete example of how, during your time leading Rupert, a deeper and more sustained collaboration has developed?*



↑ Performance by Nazanin Noori at the music and art space Draugų vardai, for *Articulations* – a cycle of public events presenting Rupert's international residents. Vilnius, Lithuania, August 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

VŠ: This year, I stepped back quite significantly from curatorial processes. I had to deal with a lot of institutional, practical, even survival issues. The curators could speak about this in more detail. Still, there are a few examples that come to mind. In the spring of 2023, while we were still working with the earlier open residency model, two residents came to Rupert: Marissa Lee Benedict and David Reuter. It was the same open call through which you were also selected as a resident. At the time, we made very few promises on purpose. We simply created the conditions for research.

During the residency, they began developing a work that became deeply rooted in the Lithuanian context. They were particularly drawn to the Lithuanian Metrica, an archival body of material that makes it possible to trace long-term processes of territory, statehood, and the formation of power. What interested them was not only the post-Soviet context, which

often becomes a default point of reference for those coming to Lithuania or Vilnius for the first time, but also much older historical layers. At the same time, they were thinking about artificial intelligence, archives, and data storage, and how historical material could be interpreted and rewritten today.

In 2023, they presented a still relatively small version of the work at Rupert. After the residency, they moved on to other residencies, continuing to develop the project. Some time later, they got back in touch with us themselves. This year, we were able to secure funding from the Lithuanian Council for Culture, and in September they returned to Vilnius for the filming stage. The work was carried out here, in Lithuania, and we hope to present the final outcome in May next year.

The process unfolded in a largely organic way. You cannot plan everything; you have to let things happen. Not every residency leads to this kind of continuity, and that is entirely normal. Not every connection turns into a long-term collaboration.

At the same time, we are also trying to build more structured models. One example is our joint residencies with Sonic Acts, which operate as a deliberately developed co-production model. In autumn 2023, the artist Alina Schmuch had a residency at Rupert. She continued with a residency in Amsterdam, then returned here to present the work. Experiences like this show how a two-year timeframe can allow a practice to unfold.

The start of a residency then becomes something like a getting-to-know-each-other phase, for the institution as much as for the artist. It is a moment when you begin to sense whether you are actually moving in the same direction. At this stage, it is not only the portfolio that matters, but also attitudes, working

methods, communication, and trust. At the moment, we are trying to reflect on these processes and to structure them as a kind of model.

That may sound a bit bureaucratic, but there is also a very practical side to it. The funding structures that support culture in Lithuania are simply not designed for two-year residencies or long-term projects. The system is built around short timeframes, half a year at most.



↑ Performance by Gediminas Žygus and Yen Chun Lin at the music and art space Draugų vardai, for *Articulations* – a cycle of public events presenting Rupert’s international residents. Vilnius, Lithuania, August 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

AB: *I would also like to talk about the local cultural field, and more broadly about responsibility and uncertainty. We are living in an extremely unstable and unpredictable world, and this is felt very clearly both in relation to funding and to working at a national level. Institutions and organisations are often expected to “carry on” as usual, as if nothing around them were changing, even though the context itself is clearly under strain.*

I am interested in Rupert’s position here, as well as your own perspective on this responsibility. How much, and in what ways, should an institution respond to what is happening not only locally, but also globally? There is pressure to survive, to keep operating, to maintain a certain status quo, while at the same time new audiences and new expectations emerge. For example, there has been strong activist criticism that cultural institutions and other organisations in Lithuania are not responding sufficiently to what is happening in Gaza. In your view, how should institutions act in situations like this?

VŠ: To be honest, I don’t have clear answers. I keep asking myself what our work actually means today. At times, these questions become very fundamental: whether what we do – residencies, international exchanges, projects – still feels meaningful in the current global context.

I think many of us who finished our studies at a certain moment now feel that the theoretical reference points, values, and ways of thinking we once relied on are, in a sense, suspended. I am not saying they no longer apply, but I often feel a lack of tools, both theoretical and practical, to adequately grasp and reflect on the present situation. To my mind, we need to look for new, long-term ways of understanding the context we are in and of acting within it.

The question of positioning feels especially difficult today. The logic of social media is clear: any opinion is very quickly appropriated, simplified, and assigned to one side or another. What I would like to see is the art field holding on to openness to complexity, contradiction, and discussion. The question is how to sustain that complexity when public discourse constantly pushes us towards binary positions: either “for” or “against”.

I think each institution has to respond in a highly differentiated way, based on its own structure, mandate, and responsi-

bilities. We expect one thing from a ministry, something else from an academy, and something different again from small, independent initiatives or private organisations. That’s why I am interested in your experience as well; perhaps this is where our dialogue could begin.



↑ Performance by Imani Mason Jordan at Medūza, for *Articulations* – a cycle of public events presenting Rupert’s international residents. Vilnius, Lithuania, March 2025. Photo: Dominyka Gurskaitė

AB: *I often think back to the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. At that moment, things in the cultural field felt very clear. Institutions spoke out openly and in unison, support was explicit, and positions were transparent and unambiguous. Now, reactions to different situations seem far more ambivalent, even hypocritical at times. Take the question of refugees, for instance. There is a constant weighing of where “our competence” ends and where something is deemed “outside our role”.*

And yet, responding feels unavoidable. Artists express their views, residents ask questions, people arrive from very different contexts and want to understand why we act in one way rather than another. We are also confronted with very concrete local events: protests, political crises, and clear lines being drawn around what should and should not be acceptable in government or in the cultural field.

What interests me is how we rank these issues: what is considered “too close”, what is “too far”, what matters, and what no longer does. I understand that what is closer tends to hurt more, but institutionally, it is still important to observe how these decisions take shape. This is especially true when we talk about so-called independence. How much of it do public institutions actually have? Are they really freer? At the moment, the discourse in Lithuania feels shaped in a fairly homogeneous way.

VŠ: As I said before, Rupert is not a grassroots organisation. While it is important for us to be artist-led, to follow artists’ practices and give them priority, institutionally Rupert is a fairly clearly structured organisation. I feel a responsibility to align decisions with the board and the founding body. Rupert has also consciously avoided direct political affiliations throughout its existence, which can be seen both as a strength and as a limitation. In my power I try to create space through our programmes and the practices we choose to support, for artists’ positions to unfold.

I place great importance on the fair distribution of opportunities and resources, and on being attentive to power relations. At the same time, taking a very explicit public political position on certain issues, as the rather reductive public sphere often demands, is difficult for me personally, and perhaps even unacceptable. Probably because I feel a responsibility to have suffi-

cient competence in such cases, or to understand the situation in all its complexity. This may be a limitation of my leadership, but it is my honest position today.

That is why I would like to see more collective discussion, without fixed positions or quick judgements. I’m also curious how you yourself see these processes, for instance through your experience with SODAS 2123, Kaunas Artists’ House, or other contexts.



↑ A lecture and discussion with Rupert residents Eva Herrmann and Linnéa Bake, curators of the Berlin art space “soft power”. Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, November 2025. Photo: Dominyka Gurskaitė

AB: *The case of Nida Art Colony has stayed with me in particular. It made a censorial regime very visible, with clear boundaries around what is allowed and what is not. A major institution was involved as well, Vilnius Academy of Arts, and there was palpable pressure from the community, from embassies, and even from policing structures.*

At times – often through rumours or semi-public accounts – it feels as though large state institutions tend to censor uncomfortable positions. The state’s stance on Gaza was clearly communicated through LRT (Lithuanian National Radio and Television), while the silence within the cultural field itself was rarely questioned. What interests me is how smaller institutions, such as Rupert or SODAS 2123, navigate these larger narratives: how they support them, or perhaps try to sidestep or reprogramme them. One can, of course, articulate a position through the practices one chooses to support, the artists involved, and the methods employed; this is also a strategy. At the same time, in private conversations people’s positions are often quite clear, yet when it comes to articulating them publicly, many nuances emerge that would really benefit from more open and public discussion.

However, let us return to Rupert’s new space. You have already mentioned it briefly, but I would like to hear more about the expectations you set for the organisation when moving into a location right in the city centre. Can you already see what has changed, and what impact this shift is having on the institution itself? You also mentioned the gallery aspect and the street-facing window. Do you feel this has opened Rupert up more to what is happening around?

VŠ: We moved into the new space in mid-October. The programme for that period had already been planned in advance, and the move itself happened quite quickly, so we essentially finished the year in the old Rupert rhythm, organising events and programmes in the way we were already used to.

Now, I think everyone needs some rest and a pause, while the real transformation is only just beginning. We have changed

the infrastructure and the location, but an organisation's way of working and its programme habits do not shift overnight. To my mind, 2026 will be a year of change. Rupert will continue to function as a learning organisation, and that kind of process always unfolds gradually.

One thing that feels especially important is that the new space opens us up again to the local creative scene. In the future, we are planning local residencies for artists. We now have a studio dedicated to this, and it will be interesting to build stronger connections with the local artists.

Another aspect I am really looking forward to is the layered nature of the public programme. The new premises offer a great deal of potential, and the street-facing window and façade are particularly inspiring. I think of it as a kind of 24-hour exhibition space, allowing the work to remain visible even during the off-hours of the institution. The architects, Ona Lozuraitytė and Petras Išora, designed a number of really inventive infrastructural solutions that are well suited to such presentation of artworks.

For the first time, we really have full autonomy over the space. There is the main gallery, and then there is the basement, both I find especially exciting. It works well for experiments, workshops, and temporary production situations, and this year it has already proved its value as a production space.

Very practical things change as well. Logistics become simpler. Sometimes it's enough just to set up a few chairs and something can already happen. It's easier to organise a dinner, a meeting, or simply open the doors. At the same time, a new task emerges. We need to be clear about how, and for whom, this space can be opened up, who we want to prioritise, and which initiatives we want to give room to. Before, if we wanted

to do something in the city, we often had to be guests in other people's spaces. Now that situation has reversed. We can truly become a host.

Another discovery, still very much unfolding, is the neighbourhood itself, Naujamiestis. It is an extremely diverse area: former industrial blocks, lofts, cafés, start-ups, all kinds of organisations. There are schools, kindergartens, and universities nearby. I have started looking into the history of the district, which turns out to be layered, complex, and far from uniform. I hope that, over time, this will open up possibilities for more situated projects: working with the neighbourhood, with the city, with local histories.



↑ Performance by George Finlay Ramsay at the event *Mass Moving*, the closing event at Rupert's former premises in Valakampiai. Vilnius, Lithuania, June 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

The move itself, together with the end of the year, was intense. I am really looking forward to a moment when everyone has had some rest, and when, learning from what has already hap-

pened, the programme can become more generative. Being in the city also means being easier to reach: dropping in for a coffee, stopping by briefly, inviting people more easily, building connections more naturally. It opens up new possibilities, both infrastructurally and socially.



↑ Performance by Rūta Junevičiūtė, with Barbora Groblytė, at *Mass Moving*, the closing event at Rupert's former premises in Valakampiai. Vilnius, Lithuania, June 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko

AB: *Rupert has long been focused on international partners and artists. Now you are operating within a very dense local context. How do these two directions come together, in your view?*

VŠ: Last year, when a number of funding challenges emerged, we had to reassess many things quite radically. We considered different scenarios. While we were still based in Valakampiai, we were genuinely thinking through several directions, including

the possibility of taking on greater responsibility for the building itself. That, however, would have been a major challenge. In the end, circumstances led to a much more radical decision, particularly in terms of accessibility and openness.

In any case, it was important for me to preserve what is essential to Rupert: residencies, space for process, and exchange between local and international programme participants. One of Rupert's strengths has always been the close relationship between the team and the residents. In the new premises, although the context is very different, the architects have also thoughtfully designed residency spaces, and we have already hosted four residents here. I think it will now be easier to create encounters between local and international practices. Until now, this aspect posed certain challenges: there was often a sense that Rupert was physically and symbolically quite removed from the city.

AB: *I would probably like to end on this optimistic note. I will just ask one last, perhaps slightly silly question: what would you like me to wish for you, and for Rupert?*

VŠ: Probably a backbone. The situation around public funding is deteriorating. We are looking for different ways to sustain and expand our circle of support, locally and abroad – partners, sponsors, alumni, and others.

What matters to me is to sustain a clear core. We choose carefully what we show, what we bring into our programmes, and we work hard to support the people we decide to work with. I would like that to continue to grow stronger: for Rupert to open up, without losing itself in the process.

AB: *That is exactly what I wish for you. Thank you so much.*

VŠ: Thank you as well.

↕ Musical performance by Marta Finkelštein at the 2025 Alternative Education Programme Final Event, *The Secretary, the Shaman, the Scholar, the Lobbyist, the Publicist, and the Virtuoso*. Rupert, Vilnius, Lithuania, November 2025. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko



CONTEXT

This text is one of the pilot studies of *Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action*. In these contributions we explore and reflect on artistic practices and experimental approaches in the cultural field that can engage and activate audiences and communities to address ecological, social, and political challenges. The pilot studies provide an overview of practices of cultural organisations that can serve as models, recipes, or tools for transformation for current and future generations of cultural workers and artists.

Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action (2023–2027) is a four-year transnational co-creation and circulation project of fourteen interdisciplinary art organisations across Europe. The project aims to equip and empower young Europeans through artistic practices to better withstand societal challenges triggered by rapid climate change.

The Re-Imagine Europe partnership is a collaboration of:

Paradiso^(NL), Sonic Acts^(NL), Elevate Festival^(AT), INA grm^(FR), A4^(SK), Borealis^(NO), KONTEJNER^(HR), BEK^(NO), RUPERT^(LT), Disruption Network Lab^(DE), Semibreve^(PT), Parco Arte Vivente^(IT), Kontrapunkt^(MK) and Radio Web MACBA^(ES).

BIOGRAPHIES

Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė is an artist, curator, and researcher whose practice weaves together people's histories, feminist and queer ethnography, and critical theory. Her artistic work engages with the textures of post-industrial life, tracing the invisible and embodied residues of labor. She has focused in particular on women's labour culture during the Soviet era and Lithuania's turbulent 1990s—uncovering intimate narratives within broader processes of social and political transition, through writing, installation, and performance. In addition to her role as the International Residency Curator at SODAS2123 in Vilnius, Agnė was a 2025 Rupert resident and a tutor for the 2025 Alternative Education Programme.

Milda Dainovskytė is a curator and artist who graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts with bachelor's and master's degrees in graphic art. Dainovskytė has curated dozens of art exhibitions and is a co-founder of the Lokomotif meeting space. She usually chooses the periphery for her curatorial projects; spaces that are not designed for an artistic purpose, or those that are personally important to her. Dainovskytė focuses on the history of parks in the second half of the 19th century and research into photographic archives from Lithuania's

interwar period. She creates scent-smelling tools, installations, and perfumes. Milda was also a participant in Rupert's 2019 Alternative Education Programme.

Ieva Gražytė is a Lithuanian writer and art critic whose poetic approach to the relationship between art and the market is distinguished by careful analysis of the symbolic and exchange value in a world where market forces increasingly influence cultural expressions. She delves into how digital finance influences and transforms art's intrinsic value, providing critical, philosophical insights into the dynamics of global markets.

In 2024, Gražytė received the Lithuanian Visual Art Criticism Award. Through her writing, she questions how market structures shape cultural experiences, pushing the boundaries of what art critique can be in the current age. Ieva was a co-editor of the Rupert publication *Arithmophilia, and the Technologies of Delusion* in 2025, and a participant in the 2024 Alternative Education Programme.

JL Murtaugh (Liam) is the curator of residencies and public programmes at Rupert since 2023. He is an artist, curator, writer, and consultant. Originally from Chicago, he currently lives in Vilnius and London. Since 2014, Liam has organized projects under the alias of Syndicate,

a liquid, nomadic contemporary art platform producing exhibitions, events, and publications with long-term artist and institutional partners. Liam was formerly artistic director of Autarkia, Vilnius (2020–2023), and the director of Tenderpixel, London (2012–2014). Liam studied at Goldsmiths College, London (MFA Fine Art); Kunstakademie Düsseldorf; and Columbia College, Chicago (BFA Fine Art and Art History), following earlier education in architecture and design.

Goda Palekaitė was the curator of the Alternative Education Programme at Rupert from 2024 to 2025. She is an artist, researcher, and curator working in the intersection of contemporary art, performance, artistic research, literature, and anthropology. Her practice evolves around projects and programmes exploring the politics of historical narratives, the agency of dreams and fiction, and the alternative discourses of knowledge.

Among many other venues, Goda has presented at Beursschouwburg, BOZAR, and Kanal-Centre Pompidou in Brussels; Whitechapel Gallery in London; Kunsthal Gent; Contemporary Art Centre, Editorial, and Vartai Gallery in Vilnius; Tranzit in Bratislava and Bucharest; and the Lithuanian Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennial. She is an author of three books (“Schismatics”, “Conditions of Creativity”, and “Ode to Teachers”), along

with many essays and experimental texts. She holds a BFA in fine arts (Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts), an MA in social and cultural anthropology (University of Vienna), a Post-Master's in artistic research (A.pass, Brussels), and a Ph.D. from Hasselt University.

Viktorija Šiaulytė is the director of Rupert since 2023. She has worked as an independent curator and producer for more than 10 years in the fields of contemporary art, architecture, and film. Šiaulytė holds an MFA in Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice from Konstfack and a BA in Art History from the Vilnius Academy of Arts. She currently holds the post of research affiliate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Program in Art, Culture and Technology and has been a fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude (2020–2021).

Šiaulytė presented personal and collaborative projects at Architektūros fondas, the transmediale festival for art and digital culture, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, among others. Her documentary film, co-directed and produced together with Marta Dauliūtė, premiered at the Gothenburg International Film Festival, Sweden, and Hot Docs, Canada, in 2022. Since 2020, she has been a co-founder and co-curator of *Videograms*, a festival for artists' film and moving image in Vilnius, Lithuania.

↳ re-imagine-europe.eu

Authors	Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė Milda Dainovskytė Ieva Gražytė JL Murtaugh Goda Palekaitė Viktorija Šiaulytė
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- ↳ *[‘What remains outside creativity’: an interview with Goda Palekaitė, curator of Rupert’s Alternative Education Programme](#)*
- ↳ *[Institutions are people. Conversation with JL Murtaugh, curator of Rupert’s Residency and Public Programmes](#)*
- ↳ *[The Ethics of Not Knowing, the Politics of Doubt, and a New Face: A Conversation with Rupert Director Viktorija Šiaulytė](#)*