ONE WORK: Ayla Dmyterko in-conversation, August 2026

David Upton: Hello everyone!

You're all very welcome to this ONE WORK. ONE WORK is a regular online programme exploring contemporary moving image practice in Scotland and beyond. For this episode we are delighted to be joined by Ayla Dmyterko to discuss her 2025 piece 'Dance of the Fated Furies' which we will be showing on the LUX Scotland website for the month of September.

My name is David Upton, I am the Public Programme Manager at LUX Scotland. LUX Scotland is a non-profit agency dedicated to supporting, developing and promoting artists' moving image practises throughout Scotland.

Thanks for joining us, Ayla!

Ayla Dmyterko: Thanks for having me David.

David: So to begin, I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about how the making of 'Dance of the Fated Furies' came about and maybe what was its original context.

Ayla: Sure. So 'Dance of the Fated Furies' came about impulsively, with immense energy, a manipulation of reality through means I had available to me. These are also ingredients for ritual, which is what Ukrainian dance was originally – a ritual, practiced in congregation and in relation to land.

As you mentioned, 'Dance of the Fated Furies' was originally conceived of as a total installation, it was not going to be a film, however, through process, it became the centre of it.

So, "total installation" was pioneered by Ilya Kabakov, one of the most influential and visionary artists of our generation in my opinion. Born in

Ukraine, Kabakov worked as a Soviet State artist illustrating children's story books while simultaneously hosting apartment art shows in the evenings. He was one of the livewires of the non-conformist movement, fighting against state-imposed artistic limitations. This eventually motivated him to leave to the west, to escape the restrictive totalitarian regime, for artistic freedom. He was, and is forever, a "Flying Komarov". "Total Installation" came from this experience, as his gaze shifted from the 'East' to the 'West' he became interested in the different uses of public and private space. In my total installations, this is the opposite. I am a Western Artist, with an often longing diasporic gaze peering Eastward – something I both celebrate and subvert in different ways. Humour is often the best healer.

I often think of the words of Madina Tlostanova: "Decolonial thought critiques how Western epistemology has shaped global knowledge production, marginalizing other perspectives and maintaining colonial power structures. It is to be distinguished from post-colonial or anti-colonial – it is focused on shifting knowledge systems rather than merely addressing colonial histories. It resists linear expansionist visions, advocating for non-linear approaches to artistic practice."

So in this work especially, I really thought about it being non-linear and circular in terms of time. This dismantling is sometimes also referred to as post or anti colonial or soviet; however it is not terminology that concerns me most. I embody and practice as an artist.

So, Ilya Kabakov was also interested in the lineage of the "painter's task". In the Soviet Union, painters could only paint in a Socialist Realist style, it was all that was accepted – images of workers and bucolic bliss. All other art was deemed illegal. Kabakov believed that the painter's historical, true task was to depict reality, of both our inner and outer worlds – so he thought about this from different painters over history – from the fresco, to the icon, to the modern painting, to his "total installation".

This idea of outer and inner worlds is reminiscent in Ewa Majewska's conception of 'feminist cosmism' where she describes the etymology of the word cosmic. It means the entirety of our worlds, inclusive of what is outer and what is inner. Here, she differentiates from the common misconception of the word 'cosmic', stemming from the space race.

In Soviet times, Cosmism as derived from the philosophies of Sergei Federov. It was used to supplant the recent cancellation of religion. Rather than heaven, the party told its citizens they should believe in the project of colonising the planets, eventually exceeding to resuscitate all humankind. The work they would do on earth today would be congratulated in this utopian future, where they would eventually be rebirthed through technology. What a nightmare!

During his life, Ilya created, often alongside his wife Emilia Kabakov, 155 Total Installations, 'The Man Who Flew to Space from his Apartment' is his most well known. In these total installations, the painting on the wall was the mother. Everything from the entrance, to the readymade, to the debris on the floor, to the lighting, to the furniture was considered; the total installation feel like a labyrinth. For Kabakov, film and projections were used metaphorically to suggest escape and utopian longing. For the viewer, it is as if they have just walked into the after-effect of an event that has already occurred, its an after action.

With 'Dance of the Fated Furies,' I wanted to bring the viewer into the action, for the work to move and be continuously moving, so rather than an after, there is the inevitability of repetition, of eternal recurrence – so here, a recurrence of movement, and a recurrence of war. There is no utopia or future, it has been cancelled, so time becomes ouroboric.

When I first heard of Ilya Kabakov's passing in 2023, so this was two years before 'Dance of the Fated Furies'.

David: Hm.

Ayla: I wrote a letter to his wife, Emilia just because I wanted to honour him, and I also found a second hand copy of his Total Installation doctrine he wrote which is translated into English, German and also Ukrainian. And it is sort of a set of rules for Total Installation but it also just reads like a dream, which has always been his vibe. Yeah my work at the time had always involved elements of total installation, subverting icons, including handwritten notebooks, references to different theorists, and I've placed readymades placed in spaces sort of like leftovers. I sorted wanted to read his words. One of my installations that I think about often still was called 'Warped Warnings' at 5 Florence Street in Glasgow. So it was kind of in this half circle shaped room painted black and you'd walk in kind of as if you were entering backstage and it was filled with slipper dust, stoneware hollyhocks, a cross-stitched UK mail bag filled with rotting onions, a ticking metronome, regalia and fresco-like paintings sitting atop of matryoshka dolls. So this work was the first work I made following the recent invasion. I think I was thinking a lot about the waiting, because it felt like this was coming for so long because the war had started years before. I think at the time, it was the moment that the work felt like I wanted it to feel, if that makes sense.

So in my practice I have continuously questioned cultural memory, the performance of heritage and its function in the present. Ukrainian dance was and is still made possible through the Multicultural Act of Canada, so funding for costumes and instructors, who were often former Soviet State ballerinas, directly supported through a mandate that trickled down from the Commonwealth Crown – I think it was bought to Canada in 1988. So, the instructors would show up wearing track suits and gold chains while I was wearing my Ukrainian blouse. It was up to these funding bodies what parts of 'culture' would be embraced, so what parts got to be put in that incubator of time and also what parts would go unsung or unlearnt.

So yeah, growing up, I knew the choreography, the vibrant symbols, the songs, the braided breads. I knew how to do the traditional holidays. I was sent to Ukrainian school – to re-learn a tongue my grandparents were

punished for speaking when they arrived in Canada. At this school and also at dance I was not taught the full history of Ukraine; I did not know about Holodomor – which is the genocide from which my family had fled, or of the Canadian Internment Operations during the Cold War period. This oppression under the guise of colonial expansion undermined the foundations of family and respect inherent to my Ukrainian family's agrarian values and ways of life. Internment resulted in family members disappearing, internalised shame, fear and indignation; something that has lingered inter-generationally.

So I'll talk about my family briefly. My family migrated from Ivano Frankivsk, so they were of the 180,000 first wave Ukrainian immigrants to the Canadian prairies. From one breadbasket to another, they would be obliquely utilised by the Crown's settler project for their agrarian knowledge and labour. In her essay, 'No Milk, No Love' which I highly recommend reading. It published by e-Flux, Asia Bazdyreeva talks about this bread basket imaginary as a utopic falsification of abundance, strategically setting up the land and the people who live there for exploitation and over-resourcification.

When first delving into the history of Ukrainian-Canadians while studying Painting & Printmaking at Concordia University in Montréal, I found information under the keywords so there was Russian Art, the Peoples of the USSR, the Peasants of SubCarpathian Russia, or Kulak – a derogatory name for Ukrainians meaning 'tight fisted farmer' – a distortion of reality. Many distinct nations within the former Soviet Union including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Moldova, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the indigenous cultures still present within the borders of Russia today are also mislabelled and universalised in history books and archives. It is not a monolithic culture, this is a cultural gap in the way that history is organised and interpreted, which reflects the biases and oversights of a cultural collective. As artists, we create culture, and I believe that it is in our power to change dominant discourses. And often this is just about speaking about them.

In school, I was not taught the histories of the land on which I was raised. So theres kind of like a parallel. These are the traditional lands of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakoda and Nakoda peoples as well as the homeland of the Métis or Michif Nation, so its also called Treat 4 Territory. I came to understand the realities of the Treaties and the Crown's colonial project on Turtle Island— of the acute, ongoing legacies of pain and trauma for Indigenous communities—through my work as an arts educator at the MacKenzie Art Gallery which is in Regina. There, I collaborated with Elders and Indigenous artists on projects that engaged inner-city youth and recent immigrants, foregrounding the enduring impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples.

So I wanted to talk about this work, even though it feels like I've gone far away from 'Dance of the Fated Furies' just because it was formative to my understanding of the term colonial within Ukrainian contexts— so this really shaped my approach to how I approach questions of possible solidarity, points of resonance, but there's of course crucial differences.

So yeah, so growing up – this is also part of 'Dance of the Fated Furies' it's not just all about Ukrainian dance, when I wasn't at Ukrainian dance I was going to gigs. When I moved to Montréal to study painting, it was only the latter because I no longer had that Ukrainian community to dance with. When I was at these gigs I would often see these circle dances and I was like "oh right", but the steps were different, I think its called maybe two-stepping and maybe skanking.

David: I'm imagining a kind of mosh-pit of some sort of 'circle of death'.

Ayla: Exactly, yeah and there's kind of chaotic, these bodies needed to move and not have choreography and these are spaces where there was no judgement, and I guess there's also no mirrors like the dancehall.

David: And there's also a sort of ‘code of conduct’ too, like when someone falls down it's like a competition of who gets to pick them up again, you know?

Ayla: Totally, yeah. And so I guess in a way that felt closer to a ritual. There's this kind of collective expulsion of energy, where movement produced a temporary congregation and a total environment. I don’t know if I would necessarily listen to that music in my studio or something but I still really like going to gigs because I like being immersed in that energy. And I think this is what Ukrainian dance tries to emulate historically. I think it's something people just have to do.

So yeah, on chaos, I wanted to share a quote because I really like it. I think I wrote it for an exhibition I was in: “To be communed with ecology is to accept and trust in chaos, a continual reordering is what is needed to keep us all alive. In my practice, I embrace this chaos through a re-ordering of hierarchies, reclaiming autonomy while preserving threads of cultural continuity.”

So I wanted my total installation to somehow encapsulate all of this – so thats kind of how I approached making ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’. I was really thinking Total Installation. And yeah, with the recent invasion – it's obviously horrifying but one positive was that there was actually a lot more information about Ukrainian culture and access to Ukrainian cinema online through streaming platforms like Takflix.

David: [Agrees]

Ayla: Takflix is completely dedicated to Ukrainian cinema. I think prior to this those films were more difficult to find.

So at the time, I re-watched the 1930 film ‘Zemliya’, or ‘Earth’ by another champion of art, Oleksandr Dovzhenko. There was a moment in one of the scenes, where the camera is in the centre, its Ivana Kupala day, where

dancers dance the springtime ritual. Yeah, when I saw Dovzhenko's actors performing, I had this kind of moment of affinity. And it wasn't an affinity where I felt an affinity to performing that actually ritual – because I've never been to an Ivana Kupala day in Ukraine – it was actually an affinity to the actors because they were performing the dance rituals because I had done that on stage many times before.

This all somehow relates to Baudry's writings around simulacra and simulation, where he thought from within the system, where there is an erosion of interior life into the shareable for the public. The symbol begins to point to something that has become absent, so a copy points to what is present. What happens when the copy no longer refers back to anything real at all – when it becomes its own system of meaning untethered from its origin or referent? He warned that this was not just an illusion but an obituary for the real. Quoting here... "We are surrounded by images, signs and cultural artefacts that simulate reality not by hiding it but rendering it obsolete – our reality begins to only exist through signs, the performance becomes the self – it isn't untrue, it just does not feel complete."

So here I think often we think about our lives online more with this simulation, but I think I had that moment with the Dovzhenko film. So at that time I wanted to somehow deconstruct the performance element of Ukrainian Dance to try and understand if there was any ritual left, so is there any healing propensity left? I wanted to radically welcome my audience to the affect of being in that circle, maybe this would form a new congregation. Initially, I wanted to paint a series of six dancers on six separate canvases and position these canvases in a circle – so I remember I drew diagrams of this – so I wanted my viewers to enter the circle of painted dancers. I wanted there to be theremin, and hand written letters to some of the artists of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde.

So yeah, I was like "how do I do this?". So for the paintings, I needed some reference photos. Dovzhenko's film was black and white and I needed colour. At that time I also had a residency coming up at the Banff Centre, and was

visiting home just one province over. And so the Banff Centre is in Alberta which is a province over.

I explained this all to my brother and his wife over dinner at my mother's house and they kind of stared blankly at me because I think often they don't understand what I'm trying to do as an artist but they're all very supportive. The next day, my brother's wife texted me and said "lets make this happen" and I think I was filming in like two days. So she messaged some of the other girls – that congregation has my brother's wife, her sister, one of the girls I taught dance to when she was like five, and a couple of others I danced with when I was growing up. They just showed up and they were so happy to participate without asking any questions really at all.

So yeah, when I got to the Banff Centre, I printed stills from the video and I started writing this poem to try and make sense out of my brain, which writing often does for me. I sized and grounded my linen. Then I stared at the blank boxes. And you know, after all of this, I remembered that I actually really dislike painting figures, and like I've been here before. So my kind of issue with painting figures is that figures represent the self, often not the other, and if it is someone else or the other that you are able to portray, who does this eventually leave out? Illustration portrays an outer world, but not the inner world. This was the opposite of what I wanted with the circle and I felt like really defeated on this residency.

And then I had a studio visit with one of my mentors named Lori Blondeau, who is a really epic performance artis and also comes from Saskatchewan. I remember she was just like watching the film and I was like "I really don't know how I'm going to paint these dancers" and she said "what do you mean this film is the work, its really great". Sometimes you just need someone else to see what you're doing or something. So yeah, then 'Dance of the Fated Furies' then became part of the total installation – it was actually presented alongside another moving image work. The installation was titled 'Ring Around the Sun and We Rage On' at Alma Pearl in London, curated by Celeste Baracchi. So Alma Pearl has sort of like halls around a centre room,

so it sort of provided me with this outer and inner world with its architecture so it was sort of perfect. I considered this the outer space filled with debris, of a storm. The centre room because the eye of the storm. I wanted it to feel totally immersive and calming in a way because there's like theremin and these circular meditative dancers.

So yeah I projected it in this room on a loop, with a mirror on the opposite wall so when the viewer stood in that room it really felt like they were in it, in the dance circle.

David: Wow, yeah that's something I hadn't picked up on was that the mirroring of the piece in the installation context really connects to the influence of Ilya Kabakov.

So yeah just picking up on your mention there about the theremin: the work had a haunting electronic score, I understand that this came about through a collaboration with the theremin player, Christina Masha Milinusic. For anyone unfamiliar could you please maybe briefly explain what a theremin is? And why did you choose this as the main sound, main score for the work?

Ayla: Of course! Also thank you for saying it's haunting, I'm really glad that I'm glad it came across that way. It was important for me that mood was prioritised over content. I first came across theremin at a gig in Saskatchewan, it was a band called 'Let There be Theremin!' they would place a theremin at the front centre of the stage and let the audience interact with it, to make warped sounds. So yeah, a theremin is an electronic instrument, it was invented in 1928, it was a product of soviet government sponsored research actually into proximity sensors, its inventor was named Leon Theremin he was also a cellist and played his instruments (the Theremin) in symphonies and he did have dreams of this new instrument collaborating with dancers and light waves, however he was identified by the soviet officials as having potential for their project they hired him at a secret gulag laboratory where he created an eavesdropping machine using similar technologies which was used to spy on British, French and American embassies in Moscow. He was

later awarded a Stalin prize for his work for the KGB, although it is rumored that his technology was used to spy on Stalin himself. Um, I think also, there was a rumor that he was, like, stolen from New York by the KGB, but I wasn't able to confirm that for sure. I think it was like a rumor that was printed in many newspapers, but then also some people think he just fled because he had financial difficulties, so I'm not sure. There it's like a very interesting story around the conception of the Thermin.

David: Definitely something that has a lot of this kind of ghostly, a kind of ghostliness attached to it as well.

Ayla: Yeah, for anyone who's not seen one before, I recommend watching a video of someone playing one on YouTube because it's really fascinating to watch the kind of shapes that the hands make. A theremin is an electric instrument. It looks like a metal box, and it has an antenna that pokes straight up. And there's another kind of metal loop on the side, and it's played without touching these two things. It's more interacting with them. Your hands alter the air frequency surrounding the metal pieces. It's kind of like making sound out of thin air. I love the sounds they make, but I also was obsessed with the thermin, for this work because it also reminds me of how painting works, and I wanted it to be like an abstraction. And when you're painting in an abstract way, it is kind of like painting out of thin air. I was thinking a lot about the limits of representation and abstraction with this work. And the theremin just really made sense.

For example, I've been trying to, like right now, I'm trying to make paintings in response to this cartoon that was recently banned in the UK called Masha and the Bear. I don't know if you saw there was like a Guardian article. It's seen as a Soviet soft power invasion to children. Rather than painting Masha and her bear, I've painted in a more abstract way where there's images of grids of Ukrainian patterns with nets slung over top of them. So sort of like this is Masha's net. And so in the work, there's also this dizzying effect with the repetition of patterning and they feel sort of like how I feel hearing about this cartoon. Which is like, just completely dizzied.

Yeah, so with ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’, I wanted it to feel like the horror of watching history repeat itself. So to feel this anxiety of diaspora, complacency, dancing in circles on top of a stage across the ocean while Ukraine is under a siege.

In my previous films, I experimented with editing techniques, including Sergei Parajanov’s painterly tableaux, as well as the Kuleshov Effect by Lev Kuleshov, where two seemingly unrelated shots edited together create a new meaning in contrast to a long sequential take. And both of these editing techniques rely on the image. And to make meaning, they use images to illustrate. I started to wonder if I could use these techniques in unison with the formal elements of film. So formal being also the sound and somehow this all related to formalist painting for me. I didn't want my film to present an illustration or scene of a memento moriritual. I wanted it to feel like a memento mori or ritual. And the addition of the theremin, somehow like took it there.

David: Yeah, and I guess, I mean, it sounds like it was quite a long-term project, how did that collaboration come about? How did you meet and work with Christina?

Ayla: So Christina came to me out of thin air too. I was at the, it was when I was at the Banff Center for this residency, thinking about the installation at the breakfast are communal. So artists, musicians and writers from all of the programs dine buffet style in the same hall overlooking the mountains. It's really beautiful. And that week there was a sound workshop going on. So there's like a lot of musicians around and I mentioned my obsession with the theremin. How it reminded me of rituals and how these rituals are something that we make tangible from seemingly nothing and it's this energy that matters. This process and this transformation and that's what theremin reminds me of. And the next day, one of the musicians walked up to me and was like, I found you a theremin player. I was like, no way. And so they gave me her email. We emailed, she came up from Calgary. Which is where she's

based and there was an open studio as part of the residency. When Christina and I met, we were finishing each other's sentences. It was just perfect. And so, when I when I met with her originally, because I thought the work was an installation, I wanted to put a theremin, sort of like that band actually, like in the center of the installation so that the viewers could walk around the theremin and make sounds with their bodies and Christina said, that's actually not how it works. You have to, you're supposed to tune a theremin to the kind molecular makeup of your own, the player's body. And so it really wouldn't be possible. And eventually the work became a film. As we say it today, and I asked her about a score, and then she said, I would really like this to feel super collaborative, so we actually worked over the course of one year, and I would be in my studio at David Dale in Glasgow, and kind of strapped my phone, like my phone was like up here, and so I would draw like on the desk, so she could watch me drawing, and I listened to her making sounds with her theremin through headphones. I don't even know how to explain who started it because we would just go. And so the audio for this film is sort of a collage of that long-term collaboration.

David: Wow. Yeah, that's amazing, though how your movement across the Atlantic, the fact that this, the audio. I wanted to ask about the composition too in the work and how you situate yourself and the tripod and the camera, within the circle of dancers and at times you're also being bisected by the mirrors in the space, which kind of feels like it's, in one sense, a privileged, insider's position, but also creates this sort of partial invisibility, which could maybe imply an erasure or an absence. So why did you compose the shot in this way?

Ayla: Yeah, so, in her 1960 essay, 'Cinematography: the Creative Use of Reality', Ukrainian American filmmaker, Maya Derren, argued that film is a distinct art form because it starts with actual physical reality, rather than creating an illusion from scratch, like painting or theater. She describes the use of the controlled accident. So she described this as uncontrolled spontaneous elements, which are the property of actuality itself. So to be completely honest, when I filmed the dancers, I was not thinking about the

mirror, like at all. Having rehearsed in that room so many times before, I was just part of the room and just felt natural to be standing there. Originally I was documenting the dancers for references for paintings. So I wasn't really being super precious and when I watched the footage back, I saw this bisection that you're talking about of my body between the mirrors. And I began to think about psychoanalysis and the mirror mask, and this is often something that gets talked about with Maya Deren's work, ‘Meshes of the Afternoon’ (1943). And so there's like, in psychoanalysis, a psychic matrix, in which the real and the fantasy are equally as disturbing, and so the mirror, there's like this mirroring of self reflected in others and how that becomes a distortion. And so I also thought about the "Hans mirror stage", the fragmentation and subsequent armoring via the ego. And about the psychodynamics of my remove and estrangement from this former community. So there's like myself and then the other and how I used to be very much part of that community, but now because I've moved away, I've become almost othered. And then also, yeah, like mirrors are placed in memento mori paintings, and they symbolize the fleeting nature of earthly life, also mirrors in Ukrainian culture. When someone passes away, they often get covered blankets, because there's this thought that the recently passed on needs a week to kind of pass on to the next life and they might re-enter the house and then they'd be stuck in limbo. I thought about all of these things with mirrors. However, this is really, truly like an analysis of my own work. So, you know, I watched the footage and I was like, this is like a perfect accident.

David: A happy accident, bringing in again, those kind of cultural references which really touch on how cultural memory is represented through bodies, specifically diasporic bodies seem central to ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’. Could you say a little bit about this? Is there a particular name for the dance that's being performed and an origin to that? But also, the symbol of the tornado, the spiraling as a force of destruction, but also like relocation or dislocation seems really present. The circular nature of the dance seems to suggest the cyclical nature of history and maybe possibly also violence. It reminded me of, um, Walter Benjamin's angel of history reference, um,

inspired by Paul Clay's 1920 watercolor, Angelus Novus, where Benjamin describes an angel, looking backwards at a single unending catastrophe, piling wreckage at its piece, but being blown helplessly with its wings unfolded into the future, by a storm, from paradise, which we call progress. Yeah, those are just some initial thoughts that it reminded me of.

Ayla: Yeah, thank you. Those are really, like, great reference points for the work. Yeah, so I'll talk about Ukrainian dance first. Ukrainian dance has been performed since the 3rd millennium before Christ and they think this because of the curvature marks on Trypillian pottery, so it looks like spirals and they think that might be circle dances and it's assumed that it served a ritual function. So it was practiced in congregation and relation to land. And eventually the dance became syncritic, so it was adopted during the indoctrination period which was in 988 and quite a long time ago, and this is when dance was kind of accepted for social purposes and for storytelling. And Ukrainian dance for performance. So like the, when it became like a performance thing, was actually at the turn of the 18th century. So originally it was performed by peasants and serfs living in their homelands for foreign rulers. And then this is when it became sort of an occupation. Staged Ukrainian dance began with a recording of traditional village dances, which forms the base of many of the steps that are still used today. And Ukrainian dance thrived outside of Ukraine and its diaspora, almost even more than in Ukraine itself. The first diasporic choreographer was Vasyl Avramenko. Which was a name that I heard a lot growing up and he began writing choreography while he was in an internment camp in Poland. And he later went on to share his work across North America. So he danced in New York and Hollywood. He even taught Ukrainian dance to one of my favorite painters, which is William Kurelek. And it's from this lineage that these dance dancers form their steps in ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’. So the dance that is being performed in this film is not from a single region. And so in Ukrainian dance, there are approximately fifteen different traditional dress and dance regions. Throughout the film, the dancers warm up at the beginning with balletic steps, actually, so they're walking on their toes and they're skipping and shuffling. And they go on to perform choreographed steps from several

dances that feature circle formations. And the traditional Ukrainian circle dance, which is still active at Ukrainian Canadian weddings today, is called the Kolomyika. And this is where guests gather in a circle and clap, while soloists enter the center and they show off their moves, and it's usually done like later in the evening. So it's all very fast and lively and upbeat. And yeah, so the wreaths that are featured in ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’ come from the hapoc, which is the finale dance, and this finale dance tries to emulate this Kolomyika dance from the weddings.
Yeah, so tornadoes, so I grew up at the top of Tornado Alley. And so I was always secretly fascinated by storm chasers and these aesthetics of risk involved. Like sometimes I think if I wasn't an artist, I would have studied to be a meteorologist, I use this symbol of the tornado in this total installation and ‘Dance Fated Furies’. Thinking about the reality of North American life. So I had been looking at these, kind of like colonist era propaganda posters from the early 1900s. They have pictures of beautiful women with really long wheat fields and this like bucolic bus and like this free land, land of plenty, and it's really that propaganda that urged the settlers to come, especially those from Ukraine. And so the tornado for me, it was almost like a rewriting of those posters. So there was actually a painting in the show with like a, like a Ukrainian spy girl hanging off land with like tornadoes in the middle distance. And so it was this kind of, Trying to, trying to show a reality, rather than a fantasy. And so, yeah, that's the tornado. I mean, it is also kind of this, there's something about it destroying everything in its path, and I guess that war is, of course, always there present in the work. Like thinking about what is left in the wake.

And so yeah, this Angelis Novas. I am so happy you brought it up because for me it's, I've thought about that, that work a lot. It's like a diasporic bind, it reminds me of in the Bible where Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt and so Angelus Novus, our New Angel, this, yeah, it's Paul Kley and I always think it's really interesting actually, because it was really seen as like a really important artwork. It was safe kept by George Battaille during World War 2 and then Walter Benjamin's infamous responsive text. Thesis on the Philosophy of History was preserved and transmitted by Hannah Arent. So,

yeah, I discovered these facts while I was researching around my exhibition, liberate the angel of history. So that was in 2023. And at that time, I was thinking about this new angel as a figure transfixed in the static nature of the image. So they're trapped with, like you said, this long gaze to the past, while their wings attempt to propel them forward. Also reminds me a little bit of Icarus, I think. I mean, Icarus is also an angel, but it's kind of this like inadequacy of the wings. So in with Icarus, his wings are bound together with earthly substance by oil and wax and then it melts and he falls to earth. Yeah, in my record, I think there's like always been this kind of attempt to coax the angel of history to liberate itself from this medial state. And so to like, actually come into presence, which is what I wanted to ask of the faded furies to do is like walking into that interior room is like, you're like really there. You're like in it. I guess I've always thought about how in psychology, depression is linked to rumination on the past and anxiety is stemming from an overanalysis of the future. And so if I want to heal these two things you need to counter these conditions by insisting on presence. And so yeah, there's kind of also, I guess, sort of like a quiet resistance to the attention economy, I guess. Kind of like thinking about recalibrating or like active listening. Like, and like these are all, it's not to be seen as being complacent. It's rather just like taking time to like rearticulate per considered action. Yeah, and so I think the idea of presence, in the work, like where that really stemmed from for me, with like my research interests, which often are like, I guess, philosophical or like even interested in theology is kind of this idea of what imminentism is. And I first came across this idea in an essay called ‘Elements of Immanentism’. I can't think of the author of Nikolay Smirnov. That was his name. And it's published in e-flux and I reread that essay almost every year, it just, it's like really, it really talks about this idea of like animism that has just been so present in Eastern Europe since forever and it's like it's been held synchronically also forever and. So yeah, it's like this idea of like this double faith of the region. And so, it's always been this belief that the natural world is sacred and the essence, spirit or mind is one with the material world and, I do see this kind of repeated in, in other texts. So there's like Donna Harroway's notion of staying with the trouble. And Ewa Majewska’s feminist cosmism, which I mentioned earlier, and then there's

also like Deleuze and Guattari, imminent plane. I think I started really thinking about this because of a recently translated book called Iconastasis. So the doctrine, which was originally published only in Russian in 1922 by icon painter and theologian Pavel Florensky. And so, I guess, imminentism is, maybe in opposition to some of the things he was saying. So in it, he articulates a rigid schism between heaven, which is a realm of spiritual mystery, and earth, understood as a site of burden. So this division is mirrored in hierarchical ordering of the church where icon painters occupy a sanctified, almost angelic position. So this all kind of bled into my interest in like what, what the task of the artist is, which is like, yeah, that kind of Ilya Kabakov's interest as well. So it's like kind of like, what is my job? Like, what am I supposed to be? Like, what is the task? So yeah, the painter, according to Pavel Florensky, was in charge of meditating on divine knowledge for the congregation. And so the iconastasis itself enforces this separation or this divide of the nave from the sanctuary. So often, yeah, it's also like kind of dividing the holy people from the non-holy people. And Florensky's doctrine casts this faithful as bound to the earthly realm. So they're also reliant on the elite holy to guide them upward through image and instruction. So in my mind, I was like, oh, so that's why we remain in bondage to the earth. And also, like, just leave me in my earthly harness!

David: There's something interesting about the icon painter positioning icon painters as being angelic. But, that also brings up this really interesting depiction of time. I mean, in icons how do you depict the time? It's kind of wild. But in your work too, it feels like there's many layers of time existing at once in the room. There's also a moment where the quality or the texture of the footage changes from HD to maybe like VHS which feels like a glitch or something that's maybe unintentional or something which has the effect of dislocating the footage in time. Could you tell us a bit about how you think about representing time in the piece?

Ayla: Yeah, of course. So in my wider practice, I've kind of, in a long-term way, engaged with the idea of the off modern. So this was proposed by artist and theorist Svetlana Boym. And so she was based in New York. She was a

writer, but she also made work. And she proposed different ethics and ways to look at the past. So rather than an accelerated progress or linear continuation of art history. It follows detours into the unexplored potentials of the modern project. In recovering these modes of creation, unforeseen possibilities of aesthetic knowledge can continue to re-emerge in contemporary contexts. So, in her writing, she also kind of made a division between reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia. And so, I think about that a lot just in terms of the way that I approach time and approach history. Reflective nostalgia is sort of like parallel recovery of the margins of time, rather than the restorative mode, which is like a terrifying attempt to emulate the past and I think it's really important to be conscious of that. And so yeah, over the past year, I have been trying to practically apply this mode of working through an off-modern lens. So as I do this, I have been also delving into the archives at the National Galleries of Scotland. So this is in Edinburgh. And originally I was invited to visit the Gabrielle Keeler and Roland Penrose Archive. And this focuses on surrealist and dataist art books, monographs, and paraphernalia, which I found incredibly inspiring and fascinating. However, while I was at the archive, I just kept returning to these three boxes and the exhibition files for a 1993 exhibition titled Russian Painting of the Avant-Garde. So 1993 is an important year as well because it's the year after Ukraine gained its independence. So, I think I've always been, yeah, just obsessed with these boxes and what this exhibition was, the survey included paintings by artists from across the Soviet Union, continuing to categorize these distinct cultures under a singular, singular monoliths. So there's, you know, it's called Russian painting and, you know, there's documentation letters, descriptions of artists from not just Russia and all of their artworks and there's drafts of the exhibition essay. I immediately recognized in that, these boxes that there was artists from the Ukrainian avant-garde, and I really got into Ukraine at a, it was like a 3 day symposium at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and it was alongside the exhibition in the eye of the storm, which was held at the RA, and it was curated by Konstantin Akinsha and Katya Denisova. It was just incredible because that exhibition really moved Ukrainian art, like important Ukrainian art out of the country while it was under siege. Yeah, and so because I had gone to this symposium,

I was like quite fresh on the different artists that were being mentioned and I could see their names in these exhibition files and, you know, they're obviously a mislabeled show in a way. I guess my intention here, though, it's like, it's not necessarily to compare Ukrainian and Russian avant-garde art because it's important to also understand that there's a lot of complexity of interconnections. A lot of Ukrainian artists, that were born in Ukraine, studied in Russia, or they got teaching positions in Russia, or the opposite, where there's, you know, Russian born artists that moved into Ukraine, and many of them sought refuge in Paris. It's kind of like a polyphony, so I would return there again and again, and I began to understand. I think what was important was that I began to understand that the artists, what their vision was, like what were they attempting to do? And so in a world that was not working for them, they were dislocating images and ideas to form new realities. It was kind of this great idea of a liberation from what came before, so for example, to be more specific. There's something called "allocist" painting that I came across, which is an extension of song poetry. Which is poetry of the absurd. And so this allocist painting was coined by Malevich. An allocist painting presents illogical compositions, the rejection of logic, and transrational text. So there's often a kind of text through the paintings and Cyrillic. And this kind of, it's like an ignorance of standard grammar. And this precursors suprematism. So talking about allocist painting, this informed my decision to include these glitches in the film. So I, and also, and also to work with the theremin. I wanted something to be unexpected or otherworldly, so sort of almost absurd, like an absurdness. So yeah, this all came from peering into the lens of the off modern. I wanted to attend to forgotten or unfinished experiments and these roads not taken. Looking to the Ukrainian avant-garde tactics of dislocation. I sort of, I guess in a way, pick up where they were not able to continue. And I think this all really makes sense today with, you know, it's now 2026 and yet again, war threatens Ukraine artists.

Yeah, so I wanted to, I wanted to echo the words here, just quickly of painter Agnes Martin, who's somebody that I looked at often and so she is actually from the province that I'm from. And she talked a lot about perfection and how perfection is only ever the memory of perfection, once it's gone through the sieve of time. So thinking about time and yeah, Ukrainian dance is not

perfect. It's kind of this memory of perfection and it's an estrangement from reality. And also in this Ukrainian avant-garde file, there was this word and it's called ostranenie. So this is an artistic technique that was pioneered by Victor Shlavsky in 1917. It's a process of defamiliarization used to make the common or everyday strange, an estrangement. This process informed many of these avant-garde guard artists, and I wanted to inform my work also. I think that the work also thinking about the history of Ukrainian dance, stemming from ritual, I also started thinking about how rituals also foster this. They're like a purposeful estrangement from reality. A kind of like form this congregation to do something that's not, not in your everyday, and it's to mark the transition of time. And yeah, today, I mean, we live in a world filled with estrangement of time and history where we're like kind of constantly berated and. Yeah, I guess I often also think about how some of us are privileged with this awareness of making our own history. Like online and, you know, others are forced to live it, and when you are diasporic and experience war from an ancestral homeland from afar. It is like time and location have the same measure. Yeah, I think, I think often about this Etel Adnan poem, which is ‘To live in a time of war’. It's from her collection. ‘In the heart of the heart of another country’. And in it, she describes a waking internal and screen-based nightmare of the invasion of Iraq, while her exterior world in the west is a scenic, safe and peaceful place. And I also see similar resonance in Ilya Kaminski's, ‘We Lived Happily During the War’. There's this word, excursus, which is the burden of the inarticulacy of war, an archaic digression. There's no moving forward in this constellation of death, loss, morning, violence, memory, and history. Survivors of generational traumas and genocidal violence, often shared in something called elixithmia, which is a silence, an inability to identify, symbolize and express feelings or memories. So yeah, for me, there's a certain shame in feeling affected, knowing the long-term effects of generational trauma in myself and my family. Wanting desperately for this to stop, knowing definitely that it will last in long term ways, obsessively checking the news, feeling like I have no one to talk to about it. Everyone is tired of my anguish. My loved ones wish that I would focus on the good things in my life, which there are many of. Wishing I had more money to donate, wishing I was brave enough to

volunteer to defend a desperate want to understand how to honor those living through it. In saying this, I wanted to share a quote by Asia Bazdyrieva, who is a Ukrainian researcher and writer who I find unnervingly poignant. And this, so this quote is from her series of writing titled ‘Oscillations’.’The relationship between language and more is a tender matter. The underlying function of language is to structure the world. While the logic of war is the complete disruption of any given order. It is a total rupture of reality as we know it. A sudden estrangement of names and meanings from their objects.’

David: You've, they already answered my question, in the piece, I mean, we, we, have this insider's view during the intimacy of rehearsal, the costumes begin quite simple, before an element of color and national costume is added. The film's also visually quite simple and contained within one room. But the space gives the sense of the architecture of a community hall. In exploring these elements of, national costume and community, it also implicates land and seems to question if any of these 3 lands, culture, community, can survive without the other. As an artist, how do you step into these quite sensitive questions?
Ayla: Yes, this is a dance hall, you're correct. So this is the Ukrainian cultural center in Regina, Saskatchewan. And so like in this area, like down the street is the German club, and then also down the street, the other way is the Serb club, so there's many of these sort of like cultural centers or clubs dotted throughout Canada. To answer your question, okay. When I was 13, I traveled to Ukraine for my first time as a Ukrainian dancer. And so there's this like, such an oxymoron to be walking down the street in Yalta Crimea, which is now annexed. And there's these visual hangovers of Perestroika everywhere. So, you know, the giant McDonald's signs, Levi's denim suiting, women wearing 80s glam outfits in the middle of the afternoon. And there I was dressed from head to toe in a Ukrainian costume. And I was, I just felt so overwhelmed by it. And, like, I was actually so physically overwhelmed that I did a series of spins right off of the stage, like into the orchestra pit later that day. So I guess what that what that feeling was, it's like this weird existential anxiety of, it reminds me, there's, I don't know if you've heard of it, David, but, there's a, I, there's a page called Plastic Scots, and so it kind of reminds me of

that. It's like there's on it, there's photos of, of North American people that have Scottish ancestry coming over to the Glasgow Airport and they're like all kilted out and they're really excited to find where they're tartan.

David: Piping Live was just on in Glasgow a week or so ago. So yes!

Ayla: Yeah, in saying all this, it's, yeah, I guess I just, as an artist, I wanted to do this all really honestly, like honesty is really important. I've never really been a fan of labels, which is also probably why I'm an interdisciplinary artist. You know, as everyone is, I'm an infinity of ciphers and experiences and I live in a globalized age and, you know, I change my mind and I learn my perspective shift, my congregation shifts, my location where I live shifts and yeah, I would hope culture does also do this. And, Yeah, there's, I say this, but then at the same time, I do think that there's a certain importance and like responsibility for Ukrainian artists or Ukrianian culture to be held onto at this time when its culture is kind of being violated and like taken away in this more, it's like it's become a means to carry out genocide. It's complicated. Making art for me, it's like a rising yeast dough. And so through this process of sort of questioning it and needing it. It grows until it becomes unrecognizable. So it's sort of like kind of like how I think they talk about the word like hybridity. It's kind of this bulbous thing that shapes and grows and you can say the same thing about cultural memory and identity formation. It's hyphenated and hybridized in our contemporary era of accelerated images, information, and world events. And I do think that with ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’, that I have a certain subjective privilege to be in the center of that circle. So there's definitely a trust involved in viewing this community this intimately. As an artist, I don't think of my life and my art as disconnected when I realize that there's this point of contention through the making of an artwork. I try to actively tend to it. So it's sort of like a garden and that spot is usually where the next work grows from. So, yeah, like with, so for example, with ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’, I realized that there was this dislocation from land and congregation. And Since making it, I've started to make a more conscious effort to come home and be with my mother in the summers. So I'm still based in Glasgow, but in the summertime, she's out at her farm and she

has her apiary and she's working with bees. This is where she was raised. And, in doing this over this past summer. I have learned so much from her in tacit ways, you know, she just drops some knowledge in the middle of a sentence that I was not expecting to hear that day. And, you know, there's also this psycho-geography of being rural. These are things that I can't learn in books. And yeah, like, It's not like I'm, I've like realized this disconnection of folk dance and now I'm folk dancing with my mom at her farm. It's just, I'm trying to reconnect in the, in a natural, in a way that feels honest, I guess. And, yeah, so in Ukrainian, there's a word that is Tuteishi, and it's a type of identity that translates to from here. It emphasizes place-based belonging beyond ethnic or national labels. So it reflects a commitment to the land and community, aligning with ecological movements. It advocates for localism, sustainability, and resistance to the commodification of land and resources. It is an identity rooted in stewardship for land, cultural resilience, and ecological awareness.

David: Wow, that's a good word. Could you say it again?

Ayla: Toot-Ti-yi-she.

David: Tuteishi.

Ayla: There you go!

David: Nice! So one last question, the title ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’, seems to bring in a classical sense of inevitability, what are the furies that the piece is alluding to?

Ayla: Yeah, so, the title for the work was originally the title of the poem that I wrote when I was at the Banff Center, and also prior to arriving, I was reading the book ‘Dance of the Happy Shapes’ by Alice Monro. It's a book of short stories that narrates early hardship of immigration to Canada. A lot of stories are that kind of circle around isolation and boredom. Not mentioned in the entire book are the kind of like other settlers from agrarian backgrounds, so

those that were working and not bored. This includes those from Eastern Europe, who were, you know, used as tools of labor to break the land. I think I read it because I wanted, I was like, oh, this will identify with this because my work thinks through that period sometimes and then I did not recognize, um, I didn't recognize it at all really. And, So in the title of her book, ‘Dance of the Happy Shades’. The shades are characters from the Opera, ‘Orpheus and Eurydice’. And so these are Spirits of the Dead in the Underworld. In the opera, Furies also appear. So if you read the transcript for the opera, and these are also goddesses, but their goddesses of vengeance that guard the underworld, and they're moved by Orpheus's music. And so, I thought I could take this time to read my poem.

David: Yeah, please, go ahead.

Ayla: Yeah. Okay. So, ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’

Curtains rise, ribbons fly
umbilical cords to the earth

Bright lights & an apocalypse sky
Discs of confusion & scattered soot

Mesmerizing orbs melt wing wax
Staining your velvet infinity

Sacred sun, sick sun
Rising sound and the fury orbit

Black earth belt, black earth graveyard
Stained breadbasket filled with slag & debris

Dance like everyone is watching
Cave Cave Deus Videt

Clinically rich case

Self-imposed surveillance fantasy
Outer edges disintegrate, peripheral blur

Subterfuge defence to the panoptic glaze
Unbearable lightness heaviest of burdens

Historic hysteric in syncretic slip

Rupture, rapture, oblivion, halation
Obliterate to regenerate

Decimated history, erased memory
Burning house horizon

Cut the cord to the vortex of verbosity

Gazing inwards, familiar faces
Cosmic commons, eye of the storm

David: Thank you so much, Ayla. That was beautiful. It's about time to wrap up. You can watch ‘Dance of the Fated Furies’ on LUX Scotland website on the end of September. It'll be accompanied by a new text by film writer and art programmer Caitlin Merrett King. I'd like to thank our funders, Creative Scotland, and Valerie Tough for capturing the film. Thank you again, Ayla. Thank you for listening, and when work will be back in November.

Ayla: Thank you, David.