

Anastasiia

Christian van der Kooy

She folds her memories
like a parachute





Given the distance between our homes,
given our love, which is flourishing
across this distance,
taking pictures, working on an idea
of oneself as seen by the other

Given the history of modern Ukraine,
beginning in 1991, its fluidity,
being subject
to open-ended questioning,
challenging different generations
to continuously look
for a vocabulary and coordinates

Given our dialogue emerging
out of photographs and words,
revealing memories
of almost forgotten paths
running through the landscape,
where knowledge grows into affection

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She immediately spots me at the crowded metro station Zoloti Vorota. It is the first time we meet. She beckons me. I look into her eyes and give in to a strong electric shock traveling through my body, until I realize I need to breathe again. I think my hearing and vision are clear, but I am dazzled. I am not quite aware of where I am, because I don't smell the metro anymore. She states my name and greets me with such power. I nod. She asks me something else, but the noise of the departing trains makes it impossible to understand. I follow her dancing curls.



Tuesday 19:35
Usually I don't smile at all. It's not normal for me. It doesn't fit me. My friends don't like me anymore. They say I'm spoiled now.

Wednesday 22:31
I used to be a girl with an ordinary appearance, sometimes – good looking, but nothing else. I hope you understand me. I don't mean I don't want you to use this word. No! I'm saying that it is very touching, very strong for me!

22:46
I didn't like you at first. While sitting near the table you were looking at me and making me nervous. I don't know people very well. Maybe it is because I don't look into their eyes.



Saturday 11:55
I was just thinking of you while laying in my bath, I went under the water and stayed there for minutes. I was trying to remember your eyes. I need them.

From around the corner, a man shambles towards the bench where I'm drinking my coffee. Even though there are no riots going on, his splinted left leg, homemade helmet and kneepads make it look like he just came back from one. The only thing missing is soot on his clothes and face from burning tyres. He sits down without a word. As if he is ignoring a direct order to collect cobblestones for the catapults and return to the front line.

He presses a grubby piece of paper into my hands. It's a folded page, that is almost illegible. It is hard to recognize him by the portrait photo on his university diploma; a then 27-year-old Lucian, with a sweet gaze in his eyes. His major in Energy gave him a steady position for many years at the Thermal Power Station on the city's outskirts. He seems tired, and he doesn't look at me, but stares at the ground while choosing his words carefully and sensibly. Several times a week he collapses unexpectedly, because he suffers from seizures. He mentions it as if it is no longer important. Next to him on the bench he carefully positions two toilet rolls to dry in the sun. His shoes are filled with wet newspaper pages. I cannot remember it raining these past few days.

Saturday 13:31
It's not a pause either, I got used or
I do really enjoy this silence – I finally have
time to think about all I feel with you.

00:25
Sweet did you survive that crash?

Sunday 09:03
From morning's beginning, I hope I meet
you too. I felt wonderful when around six
I walked down the empty streets under
the arches of plane trees with the early
sun on my face. Sometimes you can hear
the sound of water in the trees, they say.
I cannot really hear the difference.

20:56
By the way, I'm not home yet. They
switched off the power again in my house.
The silence is so great that you can almost
hear the cold stones in the soil. I want
you to be strong, because I'm not.





No evidence of the recent past is visible to me or any of the others who stroll along the river. Our destination is Obolon, the sleeping district that has managed to overcome its grey past, and where people exchange glances as they pass one another, wondering about what keeps them awake at night.

It only took a decade for the tall shiny houses to shield the older buildings from the main promenade, blocking the daylight and the view of the water. When Ukraine became independent and the era of official atheism came to an end, a young priest knew he had no time to lose. As he collected signatures street by street to begin the construction of the pompous St. Pokrovsky Cathedral, he declared solemnly: "God is building, and not me." There is nothing subtle about God's ambition though: the temple is too tall, too broad and too colourfully ornamented with mosaics, gold and Venetian plaster. "Sunday's liturgy will include prayers and reflections on the theme of poverty." Rumour has it that seventeen of the icons were recently donated from the storage of confiscated goods by the customs service.

Despite the fact that the church is heavily guarded and almost always closed when I pass, it serves the purpose of diverting the community's funding into a symbol of faith and obedience to the patriarchy. The shrill sound of the electronic bell diminishes the greatness of sacrifice a little, but the gesture still makes an impression: passers-by bless themselves, before eating the ritually revolving flesh of a kebab down the beach.

Odessa

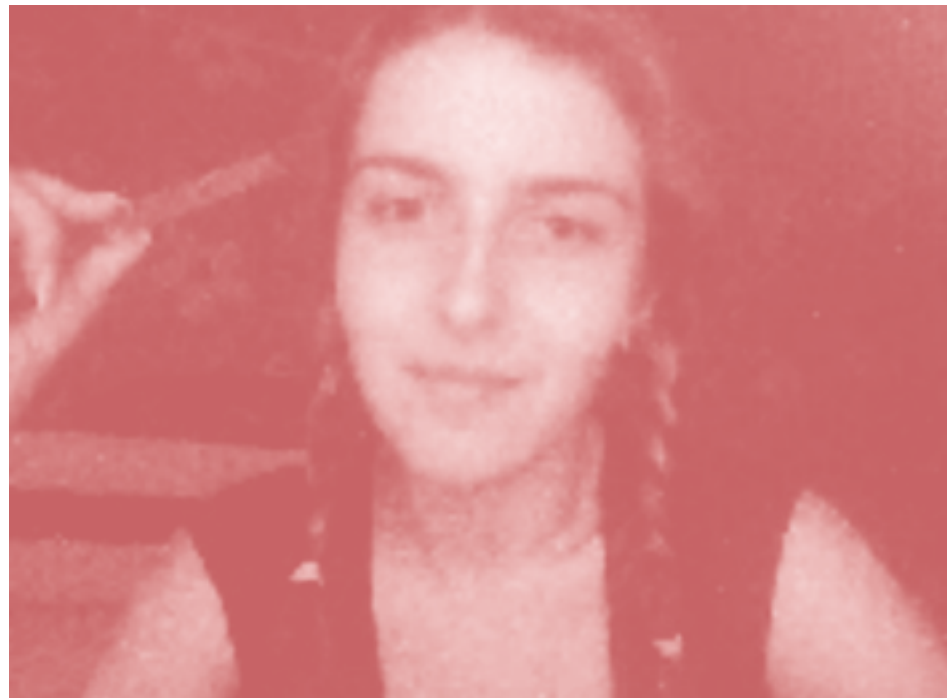


Saturday 19:42

We drove to the dacha. A young moon is shining in the night sky. Sounds are crispy clear, I can hear every little rustle. Hedgehogs make so much noise! We've spoken a lot about you, about your work and plans. I'm feeling very happy and very lonely, simultaneously.

Sunday 15:29

Time with me is fantastic, no doubt. Time with you is fantastic, actually.



Monday 10:41
Easter is circled; birds landing next to you in the grass. My papa is extremely active today. He decided to clean the whole flat, so he woke me up. I'm responsible for the kitchen; the dirtiest one!

Friday 08:49
Feel terrible. My rich imagination drew horrible pictures, I suffered in every dream – fear and tears till morning. I guess it's also because of feeling your mood.

13:38
I don't have my black pen with me, and I can't write with blue colour. I hate it. We were forced to write with blue colour only at school! It's from the shop at Kontraktova. I've bought them all, as I have a discount there now :)
This cat – it's so content, so quiet, with a serene smile on her lips, I'm sure it's a lady! That's just how I feel now. Thanks to you. I trust you more and more every day!

Sunday 22:16
I found a t-shirt smelling like you in my bag, I'm wearing it in bed. Be jealous, I'm sleeping in a sweet cloud of your smell. I wonder if they write about happiness aroma in the book of smell. Wish you to dream about it.





Friday 10:36

I had some happy dreams about us! We made love outside to the great delight of mosquitoes. We showered under cold water. On our way back, we booked the entire wagon with all 4 beds. We ate boiled eggs, cucumbers, holodetz and drank cognac.

14:18

That was in the middle of summer, in the car with the windows down – a sweaty back. The first smell of abroad that I remember: I was waiting for several hours to pass the border into Poland. I smelled a sweet, thick, strangely appealing acidic scent – comforting and fresh. A bare-chested man was painting the white road markings manually, while his colleague was stirring in a big pot of paint that was kept warm above a wood fire.



Saturday 23:27

Two bodies that do their best to become one. When we are together, I am yours, entirely yours. I can't wait for your beard to become more grey.





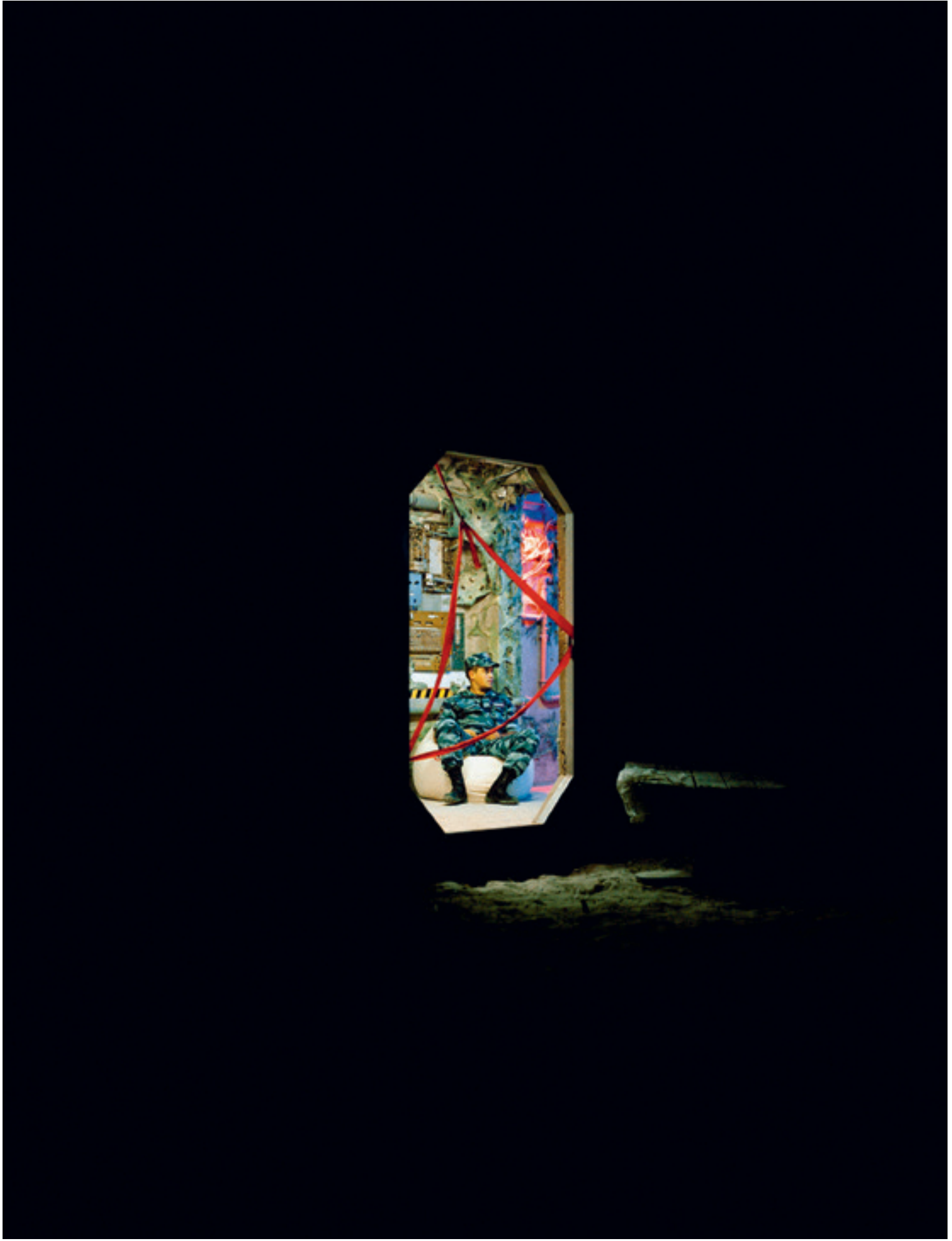








Friday 14:46
Hello, my dear! I hope you will not be shocked by this my 'art'. I know, it looks very childish. Probably, I should send a copy of my ID to prove that I'm an adult. For me these snowflakes are much more important than the New Year's tree or champagne. It's a symbol of that silly, but pure happiness which the first snow always brings to me. I just want to share.



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Christian van der Kooy

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A declaration of love, from a Kyivan student
to her foreign lover and her native land, Ukraine.
An exploration, of her everyday life.
A reconstruction, of a dialogue that lasted
two years, while Ukraine faced major changes.
And a reflection, on intimacy in times of
annexation and information warfare.

Monday 16:23
I'm calm as an elephant! My ghetto is covered
in snow. Throw! Throw you in a cloud of snow.
Or sugar powder as a plan B.
My phone thinks he knows best what I mean.