Thank you so much. Thank you, Vika. So, hello to everyone. Thanks very much again for the invitation. Thanks for the collective. I'm also grateful to Tatiana Fedorova Lefter who is here tonight who is I think our link to the collective as well. And I'm also very happy to share the mic with Francoise Verges because Francoise has been and remains an important inspiration for the work that I do in the field of creating. And I think that the research, which is a new one, which I'm going to share tonight, is also greatly inspired by our conversations that we had something like a year ago, a bit more than a year ago.

So I want to begin by saying that during this talk I will of course not offer any universal complete instruction on how to decolonize memory or the processes of remembrance that won't be impossible and also in a sense dishonest. I'm also not a specialist in every topic that i will touch upon. I think it's also important to acknowledge. So what I can do is instead share what I've learned along the way. Share some situated reflections and strategies that I've developed in the position in which I am and in which I've been working so far.

So, these reflections are rooted first in where I stand in my own story and in the story of my family. They're also shaped by conversations, by readings, by encounters that have pushed and reshaped the way I think. And finally, they also come from my practice as visual arts creator and as a co-founder of the collective "beyond the PostSoviet". I will later on say a few words about this work within the collective as well. So, my hope is that these reflections will resonate with you that they will open up new questions maybe even contradict some of your perspectives and it's also valuable.

So, my contribution will unfold in four main parts. I will start with an introduction that is titled "where is my home". So here I'll begin with where my knowledge comes from, how my family history and personal experiences shaped me and from what position I'm speaking today. I also want to reflect on individual and family responsibility towards memory. Then I'll move on to the second part. I'll share some insights into how decolonization is being approached in the field of arts and museums, especially from an Eastern European perspective. Then the third part will be devoted to a very specific case study research that I recently started looking at: the historical and cultural entanglements between a disintegrating Russian Empire and Japan at the beginning of the 20th century. So, I'm asking what questions emerge from this connection and how does it invite us to revisit narratives from the colonial and indigenous perspectives. And then the last part which is not here but it will be there which is more like a conclusion wrapping up, summarizing, wrapping up of all the questions and some ideas of how we can counter dominant narratives. I'll share some thoughts on this process which I see as part of intellectual, political and ethical engagement.

Before we dive in, I will also add just one more note about my intention. Because of colonialism and coloniality are at the heart of this talk we will touch on sensitive issues. My aim is not to condemn any community nor to erase or cancel parts of the past. On the contrary, my work and my desire to unpack and translate the complexity of these histories within the arts comes from a place of responsibility, a feeling of responsibility, a care and attachment. It comes from love for the communities I belong to and also for the communities I feel close to.

So let me move to the first part, which is where is my home. So I'd like to begin by thinking about remembrance and something deeply personal, and individual and family process, and by reflecting on where responsibility began for me in this process. So, for me thinking about remembrance always leads to the question of home. Where is my home and how is that sense of home has been constructed?

My family history stretches across Belarus, the Greek diaspora in Ukraine, Russia and Ukraine. It's marked by many forms of mobilities. Sometimes chosen or partly chosen through labor, migration or education, but also imposed through state violence, repression and war. Uncovering these memories has been an ongoing process and one which will certainly last my entire life. I can already identify those certain markers of family me memory that I have inherited. Some came directly, others came through what Marianne Hirsch calls post memories.

So, histories that were not lived firsthand yet carried through stories, images and emotions. They returned to me in memories of childhood. Long conversations at night, family photo albums, gestures and habits I couldn't fully understand at the time. For example, stalking the foot endlessly was one of these gestures and even in dreams and sometimes in nightmares. One story repeats very often and it's the story of a sudden disappearance of my ancestors as told by my grandfather. So in the late 1930s, many of my Greek relatives in the Mariupol region were taken at night, kidnapped and killed. I later learned that historians later on called this a "Greek operation of the NKVD", a campaign targeting those accused of potential political subversion. So only a few members of this part of the family survived. Other stories include hunger during the holiday, life under occupation in World War II, deportation to Nazi labor camps and mobilization into the Soviet armies. Despite all these events and ruptures, my grandparents and parents, I have to say this, also contributed voluntarily to rebuilding the postwar Soviet Union, its economy, industries, infrastructure, and many genuinely believed in this system. I myself was born in the Soviet Union at the moment of its collapse.

So I grew up surrounded by strong traumatic memories as you might have understood of a past that I could not fully grasp. And at that time uh also by a sense of emptiness, a kind of vacuum of belonging. Perhaps this is why questions of identity, memory and remembrance sorry became so central in my life and work. They were not abstract for me. They were essential to understanding my place in the world. I realized progressively that I carry responsibility for what I remember and what I don't, for how I address gaps in memory, whether through recollection, imagination or other forms of remembering. I also wanted to ask given the privileges that I have, what can I do with that responsibility?

So since the mid 2010s after Russian's invasion of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, question of power dynamics in post-ocial spaces become urgent in both my personal and professional life. Living in Western Europe, I also confronted my own ignorance about parts of these histories and the present. Conversations with artists like the Ukrainian Nikita Kadan and the Chechen Aslan Goisum played an important role in that process. That ignorance I have to say it was uncomfortable even shameful sometimes but I've come to see it as a generative place to begin, as a generative condition.

In 2021 I co-founded the collective "Beyond the PostSoviet", which is fully operative today as well. So it's a non-hierarchical group where we could share stories, exchange knowledge, and collectively work through difficult histories and difficult memories. It began as a small self-organized initiative and it grew into an organization that now shares knowledges on post socialist context, produces public programs, conversations and other ways of sharing knowledge, and which also looks at the intersections between post-socialist histories and other imperial and colonial histories.

On a more personal level, in 2022, I made a gesture that was also political for me. I changed my surname to Baydal honoring my maternal family of Greek origin. Their first through state violence was then reinforced by patriarchal norms as my mother (as many other women at that time) took my father's surname. And it was something I've been thinking about since I was a child. I was simply not understanding why this happened and I wanted also to think how I can change it. And so renaming myself also became later on a form of resistance against erasure, not only by the state but also through the everyday normalization of patriarchy, which was beginning inside my own home.

The philosopher Sarah Ahmed has been also a guide in this process. So she reminds us in her writings that for those who move home is not a neutral origin but rather an orientation, a way of finding ourselves. Migration, according to her, splits the idea of home. Memory attaches itself to multiple sides. So no single place can fully carry the past into the present. Home becomes both impossible and necessary. Not a return, but a horizon, a process of becoming.

I recently read Anne-Marie Fortier, who is writing from queer and diasporic perspectives, and she also frames home in a similar way, a bit different, but very interesting as well. So she speaks of leaving the heterosexual home as a defining rupture in queer lives, opening the way for new forms of kinship and belonging. And this resonates with my own story as well. As a queer teenager, leaving home was both a gesture of emancipation from a heterosexual household shaped by post-soviet structures, and it was also an act of existential survival in a place which was quite oppressive and violent. So that rupture and that movement I think helped me feel in my own body that that home is something that we make and remake continuously.

Today I think of my position as a kind of a diasporic third place. So my roots are in Eastern Europe. My relatives are spread across the Czech Republic, France, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. I've lived more than 15 years in Western Europe, and now my life moves between Marseille, Istanbul, and Tiohtià:ke/Montreal and also soon Kyoto. This constellation might sound surprising, but it is also somehow logical because it reflects both my personal story and professional interests and the connections I try to uncover in my work. Of course, this mobility is also a privilege. So, it provides safety and relative stability, while many (including members of my family) remain displaced under violent conditions. That's why I want to express my deep respect for those who live and work in such contexts, and for cultural workers who pursue their practice in conflict zones. So, I tried on my level in many ways to support them. I'll stop here for now. I know this has been quite a detailed introduction but I believe it was a necessary entry point both to reflect on responsibility in family and

individual memory and to show how my personal trajectory shapes the broader question of history, power, memory and identity that guide my work and that I'm going to share.

So, I will be moving to the second part. So, today I wanted to talk about a specific case from my work as a curator and researcher in the visual arts. A case that reveals not only how the past is remembered and narrated, but also the deeper, often invisible dynamics at play beneath the surface. But before that, I think that the context could be important when it comes to the question of decolonization and Eastern Europe.

So, the issue, the question of decolonization especially viewed from Eastern Europe, the Baltics, Central Asia and the Caucasus has already been taken up by several scholars including App Anulds, Svitlana Biedarieva, Madina Tlostanova. Their works look at both the internal dynamics within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and post socialist countries, and also at how the legacies of the past continue to influence the present.

My own interest in these questions came from two directions. First, I wanted to understand how imperial and colonial strategies, whether under the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union or contemporary Russia, played out differently across regions and shifted over time.
Some communities were treated as colonized, conquered in need of civilizing. While others were absorbed more seamlessly under the ideology of brotherly nations, which often erased or blurred local differences. So, this was the first direction, the first perspective. And the second one was tied to me being also in Western Europe, living in France. I became interested in how imperial entanglements, past and present, between Western Europe and Western European empires and Russian Empire and USSR operated, and how they also shape the way these regions, various regions (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Baltic countries) how they are represented in European cultural institutions today.

So, in late 2021 I developed a project, a research project, that was titled "Two-faced Janus", which borrows its name from Madina Tlostanova reflection on imperial legacies from post-soviet societies. My focus in this work was one of France's National Art Collections, the collection of the National Center of Visual Arts, whose origins date back to the late 20th century. And over the course of two years, I analyzed roughly 600 artworks from the collection which were spanning the 20th and the 21st century, all connected in one way or another to the regions I just mentioned.

So, what I discovered was quite striking and in some ways unexpected. Let me briefly share four key points that came out of this research. So, the first one is unequal representation. The collection was deeply impacted by a lens inherited from the imperial centers of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Centers were consistently privileged over the peripheries and predominantly white context over those with racialized or mixed populations. To give just an example, as you can see here, at the time of my research, there were no artworks connected to Central Asia, for example, not historical, modern or contemporary. That absence was not just noticeable, it was quite shocking. It revealed how entire regions, histories and artistic voices could be structurally overlooked.

So, the second point is the erasure of national differences and hybrid identities. This show up both in knowledge gaps and in sort of a bureaucratic cataloging, collecting information about the works and the artists. Artists were often classified according to the so-called principle of nationalities, which is basically citizenship, but by their state of birth. This was deeply inadequate, because as a result, for example, Ukrainian, Lithuanian or Georgian artists born during Soviet Union were then cataloged as Soviet or sometimes even Russian, erasing the complexity of their lived realities and self identifications. A counting for other groups, for example, Roma added other important challenges. So the ratio was not just institutional, it was also epistemic, shaping how these works could be studied and valued.

My third point is about unequal distribution of knowledge. Artists who were already visible in Western Europe or in cultural centers were well documented, while others, sometimes very important locally, remained marginalized or invisible. And this disparity was also reinforced by geography. So, the collection is based in France and creators often lack regional expertise or mobility. And the result is a sort of a hierarchy of knowledge, where visibility aligns with power, with institutional support and proximity to western, but also to Soviet and Russian centers.

And so, this fourth point is here. I hope you can see it. It's the question of language transliteration and alphabets, names and places. I think it's a recurrent problem and up till today. So, names and places were overwhelmingly recorded through Russian transliteration, often inaccurately, even with mistakes, which reinforced this kind of hierarchy of knowledge. And Ukrainian names and cities, for example, were almost always listed in the Russian forms. Only the Latin alphabet was systematically used in catalogues and it created real obstacles actually for identifying and researching certain artists.

So, taken together these findings and these conclusions revealed some structural inequalities in the representation of these regions. These inequalities became even more urgent to confront after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. And so, at the end of my fellowship, I drafted a set of practical proposals to counter this flattening of histories, adding layers of complexity to artists' identities, inviting regional specialists, and finding strategies to avoid perpetuating historical inaccuracies or mistakes.

I also began weaving these findings and these methods in my practice into the exhibitions and programs I was developing. Where, of course it's connected with other initiatives. And one of them is a guide, a publication that is titled "Supporting the colonization in museums, focus on Ukraine" that was published recently in 2025 on the initiative of the Ukrainian institute. So it's an online publication. I think you can consult it or if you can't find it, I think drop me a message and I will share the link. So it gathers some essays and practical guidelines on how to address Russian colonialism specifically in museums. It also proposes this framing of decolonization. So, it frames decolonization as protecting, restoring and advocating for Ukrainian culture and identity by campaigning against their erasure. So, this is the quote. And it offers theoretical reflections and concrete case studies for working with Ukrainian heritage in museum context.

So, with all this in mind I want to turn now to my current research that is called "twirling memories". So, this work combines the earlier concerns that I shared and it also questions the framework of decolonization in the arts, which is now forming from the Eastern European perspective. And also I'm trying to enrich these approaches. My work operates on two levels here. On one hand, I revisit the legacy of a group of artists, a group of artists from the Russian Empire at the time, and specifically David Burliuk that you probably know, asking how their work and memory are remembered and also are being reinterpreted today. On the other hand, it also traces their journeys from the Russian Empire to Japan, which I find is a very fascinating entanglement that lets me explore how national narratives intersect with global imperial histories, with colonial practices, patriarchal structures, and erasure of indigenous voices and presences.

So, the goal here is not only to reexamine a set of artistic legacies, but to broaden our understanding of what decolonization might mean when it comes to art history, and the ways we tell and re-tell these stories today.

So, now let me tell you the story. We find ourselves at the dawn of the 20th century. As you know, following the October revolution of 1917, the Russian Empire began to fall apart. And the civil wars spread across its former territories. This upheaval triggered a significant exodus of various communities, particularly those who had supported the monarchy, what historians called the white immigration. Alongside this political flight, there was also cultural and intellectual exodus and political exodus, including writers, artists and thinkers fleeing the violence of civil war and the looming rise of the Bolsheviks. Within this context, I encountered a particularly interesting case, four Avant-Garde artists, fleeing to Japan.

So, paradoxically, this collapse of the Russian Empire produced unique intercultural encounters far beyond the usual sphere of the imperial influence, and it created unexpected spaces for artistic dialogue. In 1920s after traversing vast stretches of the former empire, including Siberia, and giving lectures on modern art movements, such as futurism, which David Burliuk famously claimed to have founded, the first group of artists reached Vladivostok, a port city in the far east. But the artists were preparing to leave. Among them were the three artists that are in the list: David Burluk, Vaclav Fiala and Viktor Palmov. So, David Burluk born in 1882 in Kharkiv, a key center of early modernist experimentation in Ukraine. Vaclav Fiala born in 1896 in Prague. And Victor Palmov born in 1893 in Kharkiv as well. The group embarked on the ship, while also carrying roughly 300 artworks including pieces by prominent Avantgarde painters and works by less known or amateur artists they had encountered along their journey, particularly in Siberia.

They arrived in Yokohama, Japan and from that moment began to engage actively with the Japanese artistic community. exchanging ideas and exhibiting their work. They remained in Japan for about two years. In 1922, another artist, Varvara Bubnova, born in 1886 in St. Petersburg, arrived in Japan and eventually settled there for several decades. Meanwhile, Burluk eventually moved to the United States, presenting himself as, I quote, the founder, the father of Russian futurism, despite his Ukrainian heritage. While Fiala and Palmov, sometimes described as his assistants, and Bubnova remained less visible in mainstream art historical narratives.

So, today Burliuk's place in art history is relatively secure. He's often mentioned alongside Kazimir Malevich and other prominent artists of the Avant-Garde, but the narratives surrounding his legacy remain contested. They are constantly shifting. To unpack this, I propose to analyze his story in three main narratives. And each of them will propose a lens to approach his legacy critically, this complex figure critically and also to look at how art history constructs emphasises, holding his particular legacies.

These are the images of the three other artists. This is a fragment from Burliuk's paintings, realized on top of his arrival in Japan. This is a work by Varvara Bubnova, realized in Japan. Viktor Palmov and Vaclav Fiala's works also connected to Japan.

So, the first narrative I wanted to focus on is the narrative of the Russian Avant-Garde. So much attention has been paid to his (David Burliuk's) artistic output and his cultural background. He was extremely active, constantly drawing public attention, experimenting across multiple styles: cubo-futurism, neo- primitivitivism, neo-impressionism. And for a long time Burliuk has been subsumed internationally under the broad label of the Russian Avantgarde, a categorization that I believe needs to be nuanced. In Ukrainian scholarship this continuous and important discussion appears clearly in an article by Oleh Ilnytzkyj, Professor Emeritus of the University of Alberta. It's titled "An "imperial" or a "Russian" Avant-Garde?" and it was published in "Supporting decolonization in museums, focus on Ukraine" that I previously shared with you.

So Ilnytzkyj examined seven Garde movements that emerged across different regions of the Russian Empire in the early 20th century and he highlights a persistent tendency to erase national differences. This issue goes beyond any single artist. It affects entire movements. He argues that labeling all these currents and simply "the Russian Avant-Garde" is reductive. It obscures the richness of local context and the diversity of artistic identities. Cities like Kiev and Kharkiv were themselves important centers of Avant-Garde activity producing internationally significant work. Yet their contributions were historically made invisible in favor of a homogenized Russian narrative. So, artists like Malevich and Burliuk are often automatically classified as Russian, effectively erasing their cultural positioning and identities. Ilnytzkyj also discusses how these representations continue in institutions today and suggests way to challenge it.

Another phrase frequently associated with Burliuk is "Father of Russian futurism". This has been widely debated and revised and sometimes reframed as in a more recent description "Ukrainian father of Japanese futurism". So, for example, the online portal namu.ua, produced by the NGO Museum of Contemporary Arts with support of the Ukrainian Institute opens an article about Burliuk with this line. David Burliuk is often called the "Father of Russian futurism", which means that Russian futurism had the Ukrainian father. It's an interesting formulation and interesting twist. On one hand, it acknowledges an undeniable fact: Burliuk was shaped by and helped shape the artistic media of early 20th century in Ukraine. While at the same time while presenting himself abroad he often called himself the Father of the Russian Avant-Garde or the Russian futurism. Strategically, this was a way to gain recognition and visibility in this globalizing art world. Explicitly identifying as Ukrainian might have been less advantageous at that moment, given the structures of

attention, authority and influence in the arts. So, there is a kind of a paradox as well. The self-representation combined with a broader narratives of the so-called Russian Avant-Garde, which contributed to the systematic erasure of his Ukrainian heritage.

However, there is another crucial point that I want to raise. The narrative of a founding father. So, I will put it very simply. In art history, do we really need yet another founding father? Given what I said at the beginning about my own positionality, I'm personally very skeptical about such a framing. I don't have a specific theoretical framework for this. It's more intuitive, but it comes from observing how art histories have been constructed. Visibility tends to privilege male figures often portrayed as extravagant geniuses, just like Burliuk, framing them as pioneers while other contributors are relegated to secondary roles. This focus naturally eclipses the many other actors involved, as I will develop in this presentation. So, my work is seeking to rebalance this perspective, giving more attention to figures like Vaclav Fiala, Viktor Palmov and Varvara Bubnova, who also traveled to Japan and who are active within these networks. I'm also interested in the history of the roughly 300 artworks that accompanied them. These objects help us understand how ideas and forms develop through human relations and exchange of ideas rather than in isolation, and how they develop within broader artistic communities. So, through this approach I would like to challenge this conventional trope of the solitary male genius, as artistic creation is always embedded within and shaped by social and cultural environments.

Finally, there is also another twist today to this story. So, another narrative that is put forward by some historical and journalistic accounts, who portray Burliuk as the founding father of Japanese modernism. Sorry, Japanese futurism. In my view, this is again an explicitly paternalist framing, suggesting that he supposedly brought enlightenment and some knowledge to a distant land. Yet, the reality is much more complex in my view. Japanese artists and critics were already familiar with futurist ideas before his arrival. By the way, the writings do not necessarily present Eastern European futurism in a positive light. However, the interactions which happened later were mutually transformative. Burliuk's charisma and activity in Japan were undeniably influential. But the European narrative often reduces the Japanese artistic environment to a passive backdrop, ignoring the ways in which these encounters shaped both sides.

So, my goal is to bring these complexities to light, reflecting the flows and exchange of ideas and artistic forms, which were characterizing these encounters. Moving to the most crucial part I think the core of many questions and issues around these legacies which I titled as "Fascination by the other". I refer myself to Burliuk's fascination with Japan and also other artists of the group who were fascinated by a distant land. So, when the artists arrived in Japan, they brought with themselves a very particular cultural baggage. When it comes to Burliuk, this included his futurist leanings. As a futurist, he was initially deeply invested in ideas of modernity and progress, and in translating those aspirations into visual art. Yet, once in Japan, although his early works still reflected traces of futurist experimentation, as we can see here, on this painting from 1920, "a Japanese planting rice", he gradually shifted toward painting nature, villages and everyday life of peasants and islanders in a style that was described as neo-impressionism.

So, this raises interesting questions. How was that, that his future ambitions so aligned with modernity, were partly set aside in Japan, a country itself undergoing profound modernization during the Taisho period 1920-1926 with industrial expansion, urban growth and the emergence of new artistic movements. Maybe one of the answers to that is the fact that one of Burliuk's acknowledged influences was the French painter Paul Gauguin 1848-1904.

So, Gauguin famously went to Tahiti in 1891 and 1895 and later moved to Marquesas islands, particularly the island of Hiva Oa in modern day French Polynesia, what is called French Polynesia. So, he was seeking isolation but also what he imagined as untouched civilizations and authentic culture. So, his paintings brought formal innovations, but they've also been heavily critiqued for their colonial gaze for treating indigenous peoples and landscapes as picturesque objects without any agency.

Burliuk's path in Japan has clear parallels. He too tried immersion. He spent three months on the Ogasawara Islands painting island life. You can see one of these paintings on the right side. But as with Gauguin, what we see is reflected through his own lens and artistic styles, shaped by fascination and interpretation. And where the indigenous and the land he depicts are given no voice. Now Gauguin was not his only reference though. Burliuk was also a part of a broader intellectual and artistic environment in the Russian Empire. One shaped by fascination with and imagination around the so-called Orient, which echoed similar tendencies of Western Europe, which were framed later by Edward Said as Orientalism.

Orientalist studies thrived in the 19th century. Colonial expeditions brought back ethnographic objects, displayed in museums, often stripped of their living context. In the Russian Empire this intersected with the empire's own scale, colonial history and power dynamics. The so-called neo-primitivist artists like Michail Larionov or Natalia Goncharova, to whom Burliuk was close, looked at village lives, artifacts, folk traditions and indigenous arts from Siberia as sources of renewal of their artistic language.

There are deep historical precances here as well. For example, Peter the First founded the Kunstkamera in 1714, one of Europe's first ethnographic museums, devoted to collecting curiosities from across the Empire and beyond. In 1893, the Winter Palace displayed objects Nicholas the Second had brought back from his world tour, world expedition. And closer to Burliuk's time, Voldemars Matvejs, a researcher and photographer born in Riga, and also husband of the artist Varvara Bubnova I previously mentioned, systematically studied in indigenous arts. For example, he produced this photographic series, studies of Nanai sculptures, so, nanai indigenous people from Siberia, encouraging artist to draw from what was framed as primitive cultures. Between 1912 and 1914, Voldemars Matvejs also compiled one of the earliest scholarly surveys of African sculpture, based largely on western ethnographic collections. And he showed how these forms were already shaping European modernism. Bubnova, the artist who went later to Japan, even wrote a preface to this work.

I don't have evidence that Burliuk himself consulted these materials, but his position within these artistic circles and his interest in what were then called pre-modern or primitive cultures, clearly

placed him within a paradigm of selective appropriation and ethnographic fascination. This was not unique, of course, to the Russian Empire. Across Europe in the late 19th and 20th century, colonialist looting, orientalist imagination, and cultural appropriation all shaped how artists approached the other. What often began as aesthetic admiration or cultural appreciation were a part of a broader processes of extraction and appropriation. When it comes to Japan specifically, Burliuk admitted that much of what he knew about the country came through European sources. Europe by that point had already developed a long tradition of Japanism, a fascination with Japanese art, design and aesthetics, that profoundly influenced the impressionists, post-impressionists and the Avant-Garde, but also, for example, the design and/or the textiles. And Burliuk's encounter with Japan cannot be separated then from this European intermediaries, or from the western gaze that filtered them.

In other words, the Russian Empire and the artists, who grew out of it, were not shielded from the orientalist frameworks and dynamics of appropriation that shaped modernism in Europe. So, while Burliuk is undeniably representative of the Ukrainian Avant-Garde, he and his peers were also profoundly shaped by a broader network of imperial connections, knowledge relations and mindsets that were inherited. His attention to what he perceived as "different" in Japan (traditional culture, islanders, indigenous peoples) cannot really be separated from that context, in my view. His stay in Japan and aesthetic choices he made there, working in a neo-impressionist style, rooted in European traditions that were themselves influenced by Japanism, are, I think, quite telling. His ongoing interest in what he and his circle called pre-modern communities or primitive forms of culture, places him firmly within a larger European movement of modernism. And like other modernists he was looking to new artistic forms and artistic language to what was then considered as cultural appreciation, but which we can now see as a form of cultural appropriation.

So, this is not unique to Burliuk, as I said, it mirrored broader tendencies in European modernism in late 19th and 20th centuries. Many artists of the time felt aesthetic or even spiritual affinities with indigenous arts from Africa, Oceania or the Americas. But these affinities were almost always filtered through colonial hierarchies. There is a recent exhibition that highlighted this, while talking about surrealism, for example, and it demonstrated how even artists with anti-colonial aspirations could not entirely escape the colonial gaze. So, even non-European art did not necessarily mean avoiding appropriation or misrepresentation.

Burliuk's diaries from his stay on the Ogasawara islands reveal this tension very clearly. They show both fascination and a troubling framing. At one point he even writes that it was in Japan that he truly realized he was European. In other words, his gaze was inseparable from the epistlic framework of Europe, shaped by its assumptions about modernity, civilization, and the other. This is why I think these cultural forms and positionings need to be revisited today through the lens of cultural appropriation, understood as a systematic mechanism of domination, exercised by European elites over the rest of the world, and deeply rooted in capitalism and imperialism. It is part of what we now call coloniality, which while being rooted in domination, represents a mindset, a set of practices, perceptions and assumptions, that shape how we see and categorize the world.

The point of applying the lens is not to cancel artists, not at all, nor entire movements, and certainly not to pass moral judgment on them, some of them, rather is to recognize how these knowledges were formed and to trace their sources, namely how they were part of a much larger European project of extraction from exploitation of the colonized and the indigenous. And here I mean extraction in very concrete terms: land dispossession, economic exploitation, cultural erasure and physical violence. All of these lie at the heart of the colonial project. So, my argument is that this lens can help us de-center our gaze, opening up space for another contexts, other voices and histories.

So, I'm concluding this part. What I want to stress is how coloniality often operates under subtle guises, and how it can be hard to detect and dismantle it. The myth of innocence is strong in Eastern European narratives. Countries or communities that suffered under Empires sometimes imagine themselves an exempt from colonial complicities, but not having been a colonizer or even having been colonized, does not automatically shield one from coloniality, orientalism, colonial gaze, or cultural appropriation. These dynamics were and remain embedded in the broader European circulation of knowledge as a result of centuries long system of unquestioned domination. And finally I would say that displacement and entangled histories like this one make the colonial mindset more visible. And this is why I believe that these intersections of histories offer us a particular space for critical analysis.

So, my very last part. It's important to also propose ways of countering this dominant narrative and rethinking them. So throughout this case we see certain patterns repeating, some narratives still center imperial perspectives, reducing complex identities to simplified frames. Others continue to elevate paternalistic figures, the so-called founding fathers, and the issue of coloniality, embodied in ways of thinking and artistic imaginations, often remains in question. These are not just historical problems. They still shape how we understand, present, remember or circulate art and memory today. To counter these tendencies, I believe that we need to constantly question the knowledges that circulate around us or within us.

Secondly, we need to address the acts of cultural erasure and appropriation, and this can be realized in a number of ways, I think. In my case during my stay in Japan.. so, it will be next year in the frame of residency program Villa Kujoyama, organized by French institute, I plan to work closely with indigenous and Japanese artist researchers, and with community and memorial organizations. My aim is to learn from their perspectives on legacies of the Russian empire and its connections with Eastern Europe broadly. One central focus will be the first deportation of the Ainu people, the indigenous people of the Kuril Islands together with other Japanese residents between 1945 and 1949. This was carried out by the Soviet Union as part of the postwar territorial arrangements and indirectly supported by the United States. It is a tragic episode that shows how colonial and imperial logics intersected across borders, following the Second World War, and how they continue to shape memory and heritage today.

I also believe that we need to continuously question labels like "founding father" and challenge paternalistic dynamics in patriarchal dynamics in art history, while also rebalancing attention toward those who were marginalized in these narratives, lesser known cultural figures,

female artists, queer artists, collaborators and local communities. So, the goal here is not simply to correct the record. It is to find ways to tell stories differently, to allow for complexity, for different voices, for contradictions, and for multiplicity of past and present perspectives.

More broadly, I believe decolonization in the arts must be, needs to be poly vocal and multi-directional. Decolonial traditions, postcolonial thinking are long-standing phenomena, and we need to keep learning from those who have been engaged in these struggles before us. Discussions must remain, in my view, open and collective with space for different voices, histories and experiences. And we also need to remember that the core of coloniality lies in the idea of superiority of one group over another, often framed through racialized imaginaries. Crucially, a people or a nation does not need to have held colonies to be shaped by coloniality of thought. Even those who have themselves suffer depression can reproduce colonial framework. This for me is both a methodological, but also a political and ethical framework.

It's, of course, not a universal solution, but a work in progress. And I try across my projects, my proposals, my research to remain committed to these principles. So, I'll wrap up my input on that.

I would have loved to share another example from Canada, where questions of colonialism emerge not through artistic exchange, but through very concrete settler colonial actions by populations from Eastern Europe, and how these stories are remembered today. But I think we don't have time maybe this question will appear in the discussion. But I stop here, and I look forward to conversation and to the questions and I thank you for listening.