AUDIO TRANSCRIPT:
Conversation with AYLA OLYA DMYTERKO

MILDA:
For the first question and kind of like thinking about the program that we're doing... So we were thinking about Eastern Europe and what it means and can mean in Scotland: so what does it mean to be an Eastern European person here, how the region is understood, what alliances can form or have already formed between Scotland and Eastern Europe... And of course, the latter term is to be contested at this point. But when you talk about your work and practice, you usually talk about Ukrainian diasporic identity. So we're thinking is there such a thing as an Eastern European diasporic identity too? And do you think that it's a useful term or way of thinking? And does it come up in your research or like your general experience?

AYLA:
Thank you. So I think that my Eastern Europeaness is something that kind of ignites my cultural identity. However, in the same breath, I'm not sure that I can fully encapsulate that I am an Eastern European person. So I'll just kind of explain my background, which is something I share with actually 180,000 other Ukrainian Canadians. So not kind of like a monolith or anything like that.

I was born in Canada, on Treaty 4 territory, it's also known as the traditional lands of the nêhiyawak (Cree), Anihšināpēk (Saulteaux), Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda, and it's also the homeland of the Métis/Michif Nation. So my family immigrated in the early 1900s from Western Ukraine, fleeing what we call today Holodomor, which is recognized as a genocide via forced starvation during the Soviet Collectivization project. My family were deemed kulaks or tight-fisted farmers. They immigrated from the bottom of the Carpathians through the Glasgow Ports and onto the prairies. So from one politically idealized breadbasket to another. Ukrainians' agrarian knowledge and labour was obliquely utilized in the Crown's colonial project as they were simultaneously dispossessed of their lands back home. This in-betweenness guides most of my work. So it's an *intercise* — the entrapment of major imperial projects.

And when I use the term *intercise*, I may be roughly kind of quoting from Homi Bhabha a little bit.

There was recently an essay, and there have been many amazing essays during the current invasion. I think if anything, it means that the sharing of kind of what's been going on in Ukraine has become more… there was an essay called *No Milk, No Love* by Asia Bazdyrieva. It was published on e-flux online. So you can read it really accessibly. She's talking about these problematics and what the breadbasket mythos is. She describes its use as a kind of an idyllic... so it's a socio-technical imaginary that enables the making of a resource, in this case, a product of European and Soviet modernities... imagining territories that are present-day Ukraine. This breadbasket image evolves to the parallel processes of geological prospecting and territorial imagination. It envisions the infinitely fertile black soil and mineral riches of a land that could easily feed the whole world. An inexhaustible resource, unconditionally given by nature and the people who live there. This description of the imaginary of Ukraine as a breadbasket, that can kind of like constantly be harvested, rings a very similar tone to the propaganda posters that were created by the colonial project in the West to seduce the peasants to immigrate there. So kind of to seduce my family... kind of saying that it was like this vast, free, and hardy lands of the prairies and Canada. I often say from one breadbasket to another, but I'm kind of being critical about what that word actually means and who's using it.

So in a sense, the trajectory of my practice is a generational return. As I trace my ancestors' path back through Glasgow, I hope eventually I'll be closer to Ukraine. The differences for me culturally to artists my age in Ukraine practicing today… is really complex and it's a conversation. We have extremely different experiences. I have never lived in Ukraine and I cannot experientially grasp what it is like to live in a climate of war. My generational advantage extends further, as a woman who studied internationally, education was not a privilege accessible to those who came before me. So I'm the first generation to study at university. I want to further mention that as an invisible minority, I do not suffer xenophobia as many individuals in the wider diasporic community do. Most urgent to my practice is not only the preservation of cultural memory or upholding a long lineage of peasant revolt, but rather examination

of which diasporic tendencies are stabilized or destabilized amidst globalization. I'm wary of projects that utilize the past to inform ethnocentric, nationalist or insular identity formation. Instead, I'm focused on how anti-oppressive strategies can gain momentum from dialogue occurring through intercultural education.

So growing up, I think this kind of comes back to the film, especially this kind of part of my personal history. Growing up, I was taught to practice the more vibrant aspects of my culture, made possible through the multicultural act of Canada. So this was something that was kind of birthed in the UK by the Crown. It just means that there was a lot of funding put into things like Ukrainian dancing, attending language school... I learned how to play the fiddle. My dad played the accordion. My mom made costumes for the dance group. My brother is still a soloist. So yeah, it was kind of like a whole family ordeal. But also in the community I grew up in, I also had friends that danced for other pavilions. So there was like a Spanish pavilion and there was a Scottish one. You know, there's the Indigenous pavilion. So that was kind of what the multicultural act did... Ukrainian dance for me involved rigorous ballet training and endless repetition of combinations. Ukrainian dance also that I did was derived from a form of dance that was traditionally done in relation to the land and in congregation. And I... I think a lot about how the dance that I learned was never in relation to land. It was always in a Ukrainian dance hall... three times a week for two decades. When I first moved away from my home in Saskatchewan, I moved to Montreal to study painting. And so at that time it was even further removed because I no longer had this congregation that knew all of the dance steps. But yeah, I think when I moved to Montreal, I was 23 and I definitely still danced, it was just maybe at gigs and it wasn't Ukrainian dance and I remember being like, 'Oh, is THIS folk dance actually?' So yeah, it's like storytelling or thinking is what informs the beginnings of *Right of Return*.

One of my favorite films that playfully critiques diaspora and generational return is *Everything Is Illuminated*. So it's an adaptation of a book by Jonathan Safran Foer, and in it, Elijah Wood is kind of demystified because he goes on this generational return back to Ukraine and I think it's maybe very different from what he expected. So some of my dance instructors were from the former Soviet State and they were

former ballerinas. So during those times, they were treated like royalty. And then when communism fell, I think their lifestyle changed and a lot of them came to Canada to teach Ukrainian folk ensembles. However, I remember when they would arrive, I would be like expecting them to be Ukrainian, like old-school Ukrainian, the kind that I learned about. But they showed up wearing, you know, like trackies and got gold teeth... They were wearing chains... So yeah, this image, though, is not the only alliance between Scottish-Scottish people and their diaspora and Ukrainians-Ukrainians to their diaspora. And I remember when I first moved to Scotland, I was like, 'Oh, there are like trackies and gold chains. That's a thing here too. [laughing] I love that.'

And so having lived in Scotland now for nearly five years, I have come to see many Canadians visit on heritage journeys. So they... they show up and they want their family clan and they want to find out that exact place that their ancestors once dug peat, drank whiskey... Where did they have their ceilidh... There's a Facebook group on this, actually called *Plastic Scots*. I'm not here to make fun of them though, because I had actually been there myself. It kind of reminds me of conversations that I've had with a really good friend of mine named Olya Kovalenko. So we're the same age. However, she's from Kudlai in Ukraine. I met her in Canada and so she took me to visit her home in 2018 when it was still safe to travel to western Ukraine. And there were many moments of me being over-romantic. You know, I needed my photo in the sunflower fields... I had to go to the *Vyshyvanka* market to get my hand-stitched blouse ... I wanted to go find a fire to jump over on *Ivana Kupala* day... However, I think that through her patience, and she definitely had a lot of that, I fell kind of more in love with unexpected parts of the trip, just showering outside in the garden or keeping the bees with her dad... We had this beautiful night when we went to the discotheque...

And I'll share one more story that kind of answers your question and then I will stop talking so much... When I first arrived in Scotland, I was really obsessed with finding the exact port where my family migrated from... and I wanted to project photos there. So I had this idea that I was going to kind of like carry on a legacy through an action-based artwork, kind of like filling in archival silence site-specifically. So I found

it - Glasgow Port, this will be easy, just take the train there. And a close friend came with me and I kind of prepared him for that day, I was like 'I might get emotional and you know, I might have kind of like a moment.' And when I arrived, I just remember looking at him and bursting into laughter [laughing]... because there's nothing epic necessarily about the location at all. It has a giant Tesco behind it, the kind of port areas that have been turned into little shops. So yeah, I guess this kind of expectation and fantasy in auto-ethnography is important to be transparent about. So it's kind of this dissection that Svetlana Boym talks about in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, which is kind of restorative versus reflective.

And yeah, I guess there's... there have been other parallels between Scotland and... kind of Ukraine since I've lived there. I think that there are really similar histories in terms of indoctrination and kind of this syncretism that emerges from that. So when I say *syncretism*, I mean a kind of duality of two sets of beliefs that kind of merge into one another. Yeah, the kind of use of faith to control people is definitely present in both areas. And then also this reverence and resilience that kind of bleeds out of that. Yeah, I mean the Scottish Highlands and the Carpathian Highlands have similar dance steps in some cases. And I mean there's even things like the types of vases and ceramics that get dug up. These ones are smaller though.

JULIJA:
Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, those are very interesting stories and thank you for sharing them. I kind of still want to go back to maybe Eastern Europe and ask you about languages and how do we explore the region through different languages. Yeah, my question would be that, well, from the outside, Eastern Europe is often represented as one region with its defined characteristics. But when you live there, it feels very fragmented and there are many languages which are not shared transnationally in Eastern Europe. So to communicate cross-culturally, we need to use either English or Russian, depending on the generation and also depending on the views of the speakers. This lack of direct communication severs continuities and so many shared traditions or rituals are appropriated as uniquely national. For example, you also mentioned wreath-making and jumping over fires. And we have that in Lithuania as well but it's part of the summer solstice celebrations. So yeah, we just... were

thinking about what it means to be able to speak and reflect on these continuities only through languages that bring with them the histories of imperialism with their own sets of meanings and conditions. And how can we in this context, do decolonization work and create our own stories about ourselves and our shared experience and whether the Eastern European solidarity is even necessary? And maybe I would add the question about the Eastern European folk dances, or are other rituals being done in Canada? You mentioned the multicultural program... was it just mostly Ukrainian... and Ukrainian rituals that were funded or yeah... all of that.

AYLA
So the multicultural act of Canada is like... I sometimes think of it as kind of like a facade or a stimulation. It's kind of saying like 'Okay, you can practice your traditions and your dance because it's in like a multicultural blanket,' or they call it like a melting pot, which is disgusting, but it's kind of like... if the government is funding different groups of people based on ethnicity to practice parts of their cultures, they get to decide what parts of those cultures get practised. So it's kind of like I got to celebrate these like vibrant histories, but I didn't know what Holodomor was till I was like 16 years old, even though I went to Ukrainian school. By allowing... it's almost like the government allowing us to practice our culture... but it has to... It's like a very… like you have to kind of abide by their rules.

So yeah, and also answering your question, it definitely was not only Ukrainian. Where I lived, there was lots of Ukrainian people. There was actually three Ukrainian dance groups in Regina, which kind of illustrates the way that religion divides different groups of people. Yeah, but like I said, every... so every June there was something called Mosaic where viewers would get a passport and then they would go to different pavilions and get their passports stamped, and then they can have food and watch the dance. But I was at the Ukrainian pavilion, but there was like, yeah... the Jamaican one was really like, really good. I think the Scottish one, lots of people really like to go to that one. And so no, it was like a funding for all the diverse groups of Canada. So I'm trying to... sorry, I'm just going to... I kind of made notes of some of your questions so I can make sure I kind of like hit everything.

So it's… I think I knew that in Yugoslavia there was the same practice like with the fire and jumping through it for solstice. It made me think of this time I was in Berlin and it was solstice and I was actually there with a friend from South Korea. And I feel like his work... He's also... he's also an artist and makes video work. And he's also really interested in like hybridization of the past in contemporary ways. So I was like 'Okay, we're going to go to the river... going into the river at night and we are going to make wreaths and throw them in, I know you've never done this.' and we did it. And then a friend messaged me and was like 'Hey, we're having a solstice party, you should come by.' And I showed up and there are so many wreaths in the backyard and I was just like 'Oh…' but the people that were hosting were actually from Scandinavia, so I think they were from Sweden. And it was just this beautiful moment where I was like, that's what it is. It's not like we're practicing the traditions to like uphold a singular ethnic code or something. It's like we practice them because it's important to carry it. But I think creating congregations of like-minded individuals who kind of want to do that and celebrate our differences... And by celebrating those differences, we realize that we're quite similar... cause we're kind of like carrying traditions, albeit assimilation, I guess, in most cases. So I think that is solidarity. Just even doing that or teaching and being open-minded to... to the different parts of it. Because I'm sure in Lithuania there's like minor differences in the way it's practised versus the way it is in Ukraine. And I think that's really like kind of the most interesting part of it. If it was all the same, it would be that kind of like restorative nostalgia that Svetlana Boym talks about and it's like really cringe... and like able to be commercialized upon as well.

So yeah, and then I think that also you were also talking about language... and language is really tricky because it's like... I spoke Ukrainian when I was young with my Baba, which is my grandmother, and that's the same person that actually did the wax pouring with me that is in *Right of Return*. But I think her Ukrainian was like small-town Canada Ukrainian. So it was like... it's really, really different from what people speak in Ukraine. And I went to a language school so I can still read and write in Ukrainian, but when I go there, it's really hard. Like I would have to basically like immerse myself for like a year probably before I could speak it again. And it is kind of this like sense of shame that I have about it. I've been kind of, yeah, working

with an artist called Natalka Husar, who is an older-generation Ukrainian Canadian artist. She's amazing... Her paintings are actually quite similar to Paula Regos' in kind of tone. But, you know, she's always like 'You need to go to Ukrainian school again. Like, where's your language?'

But then I also know that what you're kind of asking me, it's like, well, that specific kind of language, makes it hard to actually communicate with people that don't speak just Ukrainian. And that's kind of why English and Russian are more widely spoken. Just because, it like... I don't have an answer for it at all. I find it's like, honestly, like this last six months I was like 'I'm going to learn Ukrainian,' but I'm in Montreal right now, so I've been brushing up on my French. It's like I went like... I actually need to be able to... kind of yeah, with the gallerists that I'm working... they are francophone and I think it's like a sign of respect to show them that I put that effort in... So I do, I do know that like the Ukrainian language... people do see it as a sign of resilience. And I think that people from Ukraine… when I hear them talk about kind of the upholding of language, it is really important to them. So yeah...

MILDA:
Yeah, I feel like it's very similar in Lithuania in that sense. The country is very protective of its language. And I think it's like because in the past there were attempts to erase it so that kind of builds up a lot of resilience to use it as an act of resistance.

AYLA:
It's kind of similar to…Like, I feel like it reminds me of how there's like a strong focus on Gaelic in Scotland.

MILDA:
Yeah, trying to kind of like, I guess keep that language alive.

I guess I can just move on to another question, which is kind of like also thinking about collectivity and possibilities of like kind of collective organizing. When you speak about like your family's history, you speak about participating in both the

colonizing project, but also being colonized. And it seems to us that like it maybe reflects the broader position of Eastern Europe globally, where it feels like the region has always been at the crossroads between the Russian and the Western imperialisms. So on the one hand it has been affected by the Russian imperialist project through cultural imposition and the erasure of local identities and cultures, and also the physical occupation and exploitation of land. But on the other hand, it has also been like complacent in Western imperialist projects, both in terms of internalizing and disseminating the Western systems of value and also supporting its military projects. We were thinking that maybe because of these tensions, the region is often isolated or even isolates itself from finding global solidarities against colonialism. So maybe in your opinion, how can we think about solidarity beyond Eastern Europe? So like with Global South... like and I feel like your work kind of tries to do that anyway, so maybe you can tell us more how you're approaching these tensions in your work.

AYLA:
Totally. So, yeah, my work definitely does that. And I think that it started doing that... like kind of the solidarity that you're talking about with the global South and Ukraine... It started doing that because I went to this lecture at CCA actually, and it was with Boaventura de Sousa Santos and it like blew my mind! I was like, whoa, like everything that they said. And they wrote a book called *Epistemologies of the Global South*, and it's kind of about justice against epistemicide. And I love the book because it kind of does this thing where like one side of the book is written for the people that it's written about. And then the other part is written for academics because the book is very dense... like I think it's quite like a dense academic text, but there is a thought for it to… because it is… it's talking about the fact that, yeah, like what types of knowledge and kind of the hierarchies of knowledge that exist. And I think infamously he talks about a river in Brazil that was being given human qualities and the same rights that humans have. And that's kind of something that the people that have lived there have always felt like... that's not a new idea in that region.

So while I was listening to the lecture, it reminded me so much of what they're doing to Ukraine. It's just kind of this exploitation of land and the people that live there and

being kind of... like going into a land and thinking like 'Oh, this is really prosperous, we're going to take it for ourselves.' And then in the process of doing that, they haven't gone slow enough to ask the people who live there how do you actually care for that land, because there's been like thousands of years that have gone into the actual process of that care and that relationship. Ukraine is tricky, though, like I've definitely read about an in-betweenness.. like it's definitely not... It can't be called the Global South, I don't think. And I don't think at the same time it can be called the West. So it is kind of like it does kind of sit in this in-betweenness. And I think my work talks about in-betweenness with that and then also with being diasporic, because I'm kind of constantly in-between. I live in Scotland, I'm Canadian and I'm Ukrainian, and it's kind of, for me, the most interesting place to think about work... because I know there's lots of other people that feel that way. And so I think that's where we can kind of come together to think.

JULIJA:
Yeah, it's probably such a big project to find new ways of producing knowledge so that it wouldn't be affected just by just like how everything is categorized in the Western academia, but how to acknowledge the Indigenous knowledges... And yeah... it's just a big project.

AYLA:
Yeah, it's weird. It's... it's kind of this like... There was COP26 in Glasgow and there was like a lady that I kind of ran into and she seemed really lost. So I was like 'Oh, I'm going to help her like figure out how to use the bus.' She's a bit older and I just, you know... anyway, we were walking and she's like ‘Where are you from? Are you from Canada? Like dadada… And then she was like 'Are you indigenous?' cause I don't know, sometimes people think I look indigenous. And I was like 'No, I'm not. I'm actually Ukrainian.' And she was like 'Do you know any indigenous people? Can you connect me with them? Because I really want to know more about the way that they practice their traditions in their land.' And I was just like 'Oh my gosh,' like I wanted to throw up. What? I do think that there is like, yeah, there's definitely like a wave of people that want want to grab that knowledge now because it's like being seen as kind of the way that we can fix climate change. And I think that... that's kind of like...

sadly, unless it's done carefully... obviously, there are some people who have good ethics, but it is kind of a form of ethnography still. So it's kind of the shadow of that, I think.

JULIJA:
Yeah no, for sure. But yeah, it ties so well into the next question. You mentioned ethnography and we wanted to move to like the methods that you use in your work and your thinking... and yeah, I just wanted to ask you about the method of ethnography because I was thinking that it's understood differently in different regions as well. And yeah, on the one hand, and the West, it's a method of anthropology, participant observation as the main methodology, but it also has its colonial histories... and on the other hand, it has to do, and particularly in the Eastern European context with folklore, traditional dances and songs that are for the stage. So there's the aspect of such national rituals... I have an example of song festivals in the Baltic States, and you mentioned many examples before... so that such national rituals were also bolstered during the Soviet times. And the *for-stage* aspect kind of shallows the culture in a way and shows how national identities become reified and work in tandem with what Svetlana Boym calls restorative nostalgia. And so you use auto-ethnography in your work and also reference Ukrainian folklore traditions... and my question would be, how do you, again, navigate these tensions of power dynamics inherent in methods?

AYLA:
And yeah, so I definitely agree the term ethnography is tricky, complex, it's really slippery and I think it also has changed over time. And when I think of ethnography, I think of a practice done by a dominating person to a group of other people that are often deemed as *others* or they are *othered*... sadly, it's also often done in a way that they are documented as if they are in rapid decline. And this rapid decline occurs through their later assimilation. So I guess I kind of... apologies, I sometimes feel that I've been triggered by the word even, I think... But it's just kind of something that I feel quite passionate about and I think just with my history...

So yeah, when I first came across auto-ethnography, I was studying for my MFA at GSA and, at first, I was like 'Oh, wait okay, if, if *auto* was in front of it, maybe that is actually what I'm doing in my practice.' But I was writing the 'E' word and it still tasted metallic. I don't know… So aligned with feminist and decolonial discourse through time, I've just decided to actively kind of avoid the term altogether. I read a text called *Auto Theory as Feminist Practice*, which was written by Dr Lauren Fournier. And I realized that kind of the term that they use, *auto-theory*, made a lot more sense for my practice. I was honoured to have her write about *Rite of Return*, actually, for its premiere at Lunchtime Gallery in Glasgow.

So talking about my work in parallel to her research and knowledge, I had come to kind of adopt this term. I think... I think it's important though… like and through conversation with Lauren also, I kind of realized that the word theory is not as traditional when I use it, kind of this traditional canon of like theory, like capital T theory, white male... So I kind of think of theory instead as anti-hierarchical. It's a weaving of diverse sets of knowledge. When I say this, I mean that although auto-theory implies that I'm working through theoretical currents, in quotations *academia*, I also consider a theory to be oral storytelling, embodied knowledge... What is tacit, vernacular, pre-patriarchal, fictional, folkloric, anachronistic, and most ambitiously, what has been silenced.

And I actually very recently read about... kind of what you're talking about, the bolstering of traditional satellite cultures during Soviet times. So because my family didn't go through the Soviet era, I only know about this through reading about it. I was reading more about the film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* by Sergei Parajanov. It's in a text *Ukrainian Cinema: Belonging and Identity during the Soviet Thaw*. So, Parajanov's poetic cinema, or *cinefreskii*, put The Dostoyevsky Studio kind of back on the map, however, at the same time, the film exploited the traditions of the Bukovina people as if these were those of all regions of Ukraine. The Carpathians were seen as being entrenched in this kind of mystery and secrecy and that made it really special cause they were remote... kind of place of... the last primal place for Ukrainian culture. And during the world premiere of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, there was much emphasis put on the main actor, Ivan Mykolaichuk, they

were kind of saying that his upbringing was there, so it made the film more authentic... And Parajanov was criticized, however though, because the main actress in the film, Tatyana Bestayeva, was very Russian and also his wife. So admittedly, I like love that film. It's sort of one of my favourite films of all time. I kind of love its unabashed kind of displays of this frenzy and harshness of dance movements... like instead of it being for stage, it kind of tries to take it back to its original point. But obviously, it's not perfect. So navigating these tensions of power dynamics is core to the work.

I think it is also core to the work that I make, to answer your question more directly. *Rite of Spring* was the riot-inducing ballet originally performed by the Ballet Russes in Paris in 1913. The initial narrative circles around a sacrificial virgin that dances herself to death. It's appropriated esthetically and thematically from Slavic folklore. So actually from similar regions as *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. So in my version, the Soloist awakens in a world that we live in, and she's fraught with anxieties that surround ecological decline and lack of community... she looks back to the original reasons for folk dance, relying on her body and sometimes wax to do the work of healing. So the framework is meant to critique ways that culture can be taken back from its propagation onto the stage. So kind of just visually exploring what this can look like. I kind of often go into my filmmaking creating that framework, and then I just allow for like the movement or the action-based part of the work to... do what it needs to. So yeah...

MILDA:
Yeah. I mean, I feel like even just exposing the kind of tensions is an important work in itself because it like complicates the picture, which... you know... sometimes discourses try to oversimplify things and like sometimes there is no one answer.

JULIJA:
Yeah. So the last question is that, in your work, you combine folkloric knowledges and rituals with contemporary mindfulness techniques, and we think, in our opinion, that your works have therapeutic qualities probably both to you and for the viewer. And in this way, it also ties into activism, and it becomes a way to resist slow forms

of violence that relate to imperialism: from colonization of the body and the land to that of the mind. And how are you thinking about art and healing? And you're also an arts educator? How does this practice inform your artistic choices and then the other way around?

AYLA:
So I started putting *Right of Return* after watching the 1987 re-articulation by the Joffrey Ballet... so that the original score for the ballet was actually lost for like... I can't... I'm not very good with quick maths but like over 50 years... I actually met the lady… where they think they found it in her grandmother's closet. She works at the V&A for the ballet archive and she's like wow... but anyways, I mean, I was watching... I was watching that on YouTube during the lockdown, and I honestly didn't think I would ever get to see a ballet in person again. And I was really anxious as everyone was… like locally. So I think coming from that I wanted the work to offer therapeutic qualities because that's what I truly thought as an artist that I should be offering the world at that time.

And also during lockdown. I kind of... you know, networking with other artists, sharing resources and things to read and like some videos… A friend of mine sent me a dissertation called *The Word & Wax* by Rena Jeanne Hanchuk, so it explores *Strakty Vlaty*, or pouring forth the fear. The body of research explores the magic or religious and oral incantation or genre of folk medicine. And when I read it, I had this really distant memory. It just kind of like slipped into my consciousness. So it was like something that I had... and like, I feel like it wasn't there until I read this text. And I recalled my baba, or my grandmother, doing this to me as a young girl. I always had these nightmares and I would come down really upset and she would place a glass bowl on my head and then on her stove she would heat the wax and then she would pour it into the bowl while kind of mumbling these incantations in her Ukrainian.

So this was something that extended from her own mother. And many Ukrainian Canadians carried this tradition with them across the ocean. And I have found documentaries about it occurring in Ukraine as well. However, it became more prevalent in the prairies, and that's because it was to heal anxiety in relation to land.

And Ukrainian people suffered acute anxieties in their new eco-cultural terrain. So when they moved to Canada, they realized that it was a bit of a false promise and that they were also living on stolen indigenous lands. Pouring forth the fear provided a sense of security and objectifying the fears, so the anxiety was literally this kind of like knot of wax. And I would... my baba would give it to me and tell me to go bury it under a tree in the backyard. Like I actually truly thought my anxiety was like now this wax. So yeah, when I read that... when I read this text, it did have the incantations published in it. But I think going back to talking about the 'E' word, I did not want to repeat those kind of fallacies by exposing something that was meant to be kept kind of secret or really personal. So when I began working with the ritual for *Rite of Return*, I thought it was really important that I basically write my own incantations... and yeah, that they relate to kind of what was occurring at that time.

So yeah, I feel really privileged because in my studio and my thoughts every day as an artist, I feel like I'm constantly healing. Sometimes it feels even selfish that I get to do this... like go and explore myself deeply. So it's something that I definitely want to be able to share with others.

My first degree was in visual art and dance education. Not that this was by choice. My family actually, were like 'You have to go to university, we saved money for you to do that.' And I was like 'Cool, I'm going to take a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.' And my mom was like 'No, you were not.' [laughs] And so I remember going to a counsellor actually, and being like 'Okay, like, how can I take a degree that basically will let me have painting classes? But it's not called a fine art degree.' So it was art education. But in hindsight, it was... that degree was five years and it really has informed everything that preceded it. I always taught outside of my practice in different galleries, community centres, in universities. So yeah, I did teach for the Glasgow School of Art briefly, which was lovely. However, I have kind of returned back. I think that for me, just offering art to groups of people that kind of think that art isn't for them is most rewarding. I feel like there's like a passing of confidence... because I had to kind of find or carve that space for my own self. And so I want to share that with others. Yeah, I feel like it's kind of a lifelong journey, this kind of idea

of healing... like I feel like it's kind of always changing. I think there's different methods that are used for different parts of healing, basically.

And so, yeah, right now I'm teaching, I mean, I'm not teaching at the moment because I'm in Montreal for my residency, but I just finished teaching, for the last two years, a group of women that live in Greenock and the program was set up to kind of bridge groups where it's women who have been isolated. So it could have been because of lockdown, in some cases there were women coming that had never... like had not left their houses during lockdown and also groups of women that are new to Scotland, so new Scots women. And I love the class so much! We are making a book at the moment. Kind of like an illuminated manuscript. And not that I showed up to the class and was like 'We're going to do healing now.' But I do think that this process of writing para-fiction together, kind of this fusion of the true and untrue to offer new meaning, has been quite healing for them. There is recurring themes of female-identifying relation to land. There's kind of a lot of anthropomorphism that's happening in a lot of the stories. And so yeah, it's going to be hosted in the Women's Library when it is complete. The class is really like in my heart... [laughs] very much.

MILDA:
Yeah, that sounds really lovely. I think like what we're trying to do with this program as well with the idea of *fictioning* is that it doesn't... it doesn't need to give you an answer, but just like opening a new way of thinking about things is like an answer in itself, just like expanding the mind.

JULIJA:
And also just respecting the stories. Like there are no answers but yeah...

AYLA:
Exactly! I remember when I had some electives to fill when I went to Concordia for painting and I was like 'Ooh, what can I do?' And I like, I remember taking like a fourth-year philosophy class and it was so hard. It was like existential philosophy. But I didn't... I don't remember anything about what I read, but one thing I remember is

that I realized that there is... philosophy is like there's no answers... like being in class and being kind of like, yeah, but then like...

MILDA:
But there is always that other side of the story.

AYLA:
Exactly. And it's just kind of about having a chat with your class. It's like, yeah, that expansion of mind that you said. I think it's like... I think once you realize that it's just about that, then you're like… you are set, basically.

MILDA:
You set yourself free [all laughs].

Yeah, well, I guess we can wrap up the conversation at this point. Thank you so much for having a chat with us and for sharing about your art and also, yeah, for making your art... Yeah and creating this space for a healing conversation.