

Kunsthalle Wien
Karlsplatz

EN

Kunsthalle Wien Preis 2025
Jonida Laçi & Luīze Nežberte
7.11.2025–25.1.2026

The *Kunsthalle Wien Preis* aims to recognise and support a new generation of artists who studied in Vienna. Organised by Kunsthalle Wien in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the University of Applied Arts Vienna, the prize is awarded annually by a jury of experts to two graduates, one from each university. This year's recipients are Jonida Laçi who studied Art and Space | Object as well as Art and Time | Media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and Luīze Nežberte who studied Sculpture and Space at the University of Applied Arts Vienna.

Jonida Laçi employs a range of media, creating works that exist between sculpture, video, photography and installation. Her work explores the conditions of production and perception specific to each medium through questions around form, the gaze, translation and parameters of standardisation, placing "the socio-economic inscriptions in familiar materials, spaces and processes", at the centre of her enquiry.

Luīze Nežberte's work considers methods of collecting, quoting and recontextualising material and forms that often refer to her Latvian heritage. She is particularly interested "in the interplay between obscured and canonical forms and understanding that reveal shared ideas, transcending geographic and cultural boundaries". Her work explores the hidden dynamics and hierarchies that operate within institutions; who is given visibility and what objects or histories pass without proper acknowledgement.

The exhibition reflects the cohesion within these two distinct artistic practices. Both artists have chosen to present renewed versions of their diploma presentations, adapting them accordingly with new site-specific works for Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz:

The exhibition opens with sculptural works by Luīze Nežberte: *Implosion: We could listen much longer, but it is late by now, and the moonlight glistens like quicksilver upon the waves of the lake before us* (2025) and *Stuck in the eternal present* (2025). Their form references early examples of Latvian architecture. Specifically, "sunpoles" from the Gaides Meeting House built in 1739. This was a space built by Latvian followers of the Moravian Brethren: a movement that fostered autonomy among Latvian serfs through the promotion of literacy and communal gathering. Nežberte explains: "I wanted to pay specific attention to vernacular architecture [...] traditional building styles that use local materials and construction techniques, and are often built by people without formal architectural training". Destroyed by a fire during Soviet occupation in 1953, only one photograph of the Gaides Meeting House is known to exist. Working with this singular remnant, Nežberte explores ideas around cultural memory and how histories persist, fade and reappear through material forms.

Clustered between these two works are a series of sculptures that take the form of columns entitled *The sky above our heads is nothing else but a roof supported by wooden pillars* (2024). They reference sketches for the bandstand of the 1926 Song Festival in Riga, which was designed by the architect Pauls Kundziņš (1888–1983). Kundziņš was a key figure in the preservation of Latvian architectural heritage, publishing several books on vernacular architecture and Latvian crafts. Nežberte's research brought her to the work of Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994): an esteemed archaeologist and anthropologist from Lithuania specialised in the symbols and rituals of prehistoric Europe, including folk cosmology of the Baltic region. More specifically, Nežberte refers to the notion that the sky is a roof supported by wooden pillars and that without these forms to separate the earth from the sky, the world as we know it would collapse. This is also reflected in *Implosion: We could*

listen much longer, but it is late by now, and the moonlight glistens like quicksilver upon the waves of the lake before us. Nežberte uses the work to "question monumentalisation both in physical form and understanding" by foregrounding a pagan belief from Eastern Europe that is at odds with a more dominant Western ideology.

Nežberte's works are made from inexpensive materials (such as MDF and tape) that are readily available. The artist playfully uses them to question the idea of monumentality. *Stuck in the eternal present* in particular evidences the temporal paradox inherent in historical reconstruction. It is installed to appear as if it was purposefully constructed for the space while referencing a fragment of a column from the Gaides Meeting House that represented the sun. Nežberte explains: "The spherical form at the sculpture's core becomes a mediation of the perpetual 'now' in which we encounter the past." It captures the sun – the universal marker of the passage of time – in stasis, confronting our inability to "neither fully access historical reality nor escape our contemporary moment of interpretation". The choice of MDF alludes to the tension between the tactile, time bound labour of carved wood and the streamlined logic of industrialisation. A ubiquitous product made from compressed wood and glue, MDF transforms the original columns into reflections on the shifting relationship between craft, materiality and value.

Deconstruction and self-reflection also play a central role in Jonida Laçi's practice. Three projectors, mounted on tripods in the centre of the exhibition space, present edited video footage that the artist received during an exchange of messages. *work* (2022/2025), *Planes* (2022/2025) and *The Fiction of a Doorframe* (2022/2025) are new iterations of works first presented in her diploma exhibition. The original video, filmed with a mobile phone from the roof of a house, has been cut into three landscape segments, which are projected side by side onto the wall. Each projector is set at a slightly different angle, to create a deliberate spatial dissonance within the installation. Rather than serving purely as a technical device, the apparatus functions as a sculptural element in its own right. Its intentional positioning distorts the projected images: the urban landscape appears in skewed trapezoid forms, challenging conventional forms of presentation and reception in exhibition spaces. By destabilising the image, Laçi foregrounds the role of framing, orientation and perspective in both analogue and mediated image production. As viewers negotiate through the installation, their shifting physical position and point of view merge spatial and cinematic perspectives:

"What connects the fields of sculpture and film is that both can really only ever be viewed in fragments. I have to walk around a sculpture, to see it completely and when I see it from one side then the other is missing. That means I have to gradually assemble my image of it, just as I do when I look at a film, where I'm really only ever seeing one sequence at a time. To be able to fully grasp it, I have to watch it in its entirety."

Lači's formal investigation of media and its condition of reception foregrounds its condition of reception. This is reinforced by the decision not to use her own footage. Lači refers to herself as a "second-hand observer", reversing the conventional producer-recipient relationship of artistic production and reflecting on her own authorship:

"Working around the reproduction of images, I have always been confronted with questions of representation, the critique of it and its impossibility. I mean, how it's connected to values such as visibility or absence, for example. By rather working with material that already exists, appropriating or deforming it, I aim to reflect on my own position of power in this constellation. Yet, I do not only see the producers of images as inhabiting this very position. Considering the act of looking as an active practice, I want to understand the role of the viewer as ambivalent too, certainly complicit in the fixation and production of meaning, but also capable of its deviation."

Daylight is minimised by a film applied to the windows of the exhibition space to darken the room. While this intervention improves the visibility of the projected image, it subtly complicates the perception of other works creating a situation that draws attention to the opposing needs of Lači's chosen media: light versus darkness, white cube versus black box. A "strategy of compromise", as she explains, "I am interested in exploring strategies of not-showing – the possibility of withdrawing something from view – as an act of agency".

New works by Nežberte also presuppose a change of perspective and anticipate the movement of visitors through the exhibition. *Speech and Eulogy* (2025) consists of two drywall partitions that divide the space and are initially viewed from the back with the painted surface on the far side. Nežberte cites amateur marble replicas of two fireplaces in the house of the Kaudzīte brothers, and thus refers to *Mērnīeku laiki* [*The Times of the Land-Surveyors*] (1879), the first novel written in Latvian. To Nežberte, the "brothers represent a crucial example of the Moravian Brethren movement's impact on Latvian culture". The Kaudzīte brothers led dual lives as teachers during the school year and travellers in the summer months. They travelled to Russia, Finland and eventually Western Europe, and were inspired after one journey to recreate a trompe-l'oeil marble painting on their stoves at home. A copy of a copy, Nežberte's paintings reflect her interest in how translation results in the inevitable transformation of the original source material.

On the other side of the drywall, *Receptacle* (2025) references waste bins that are commonplace throughout Latvia since the 1980s. The original bins were installed during a period of Soviet oppression and painted to mimic Greek columns, turning a functional object into an illusory device and presenting a façade that hides their utility behind symbolism. Nežberte plays with tensions between form and function, the monumental and the prosaic.

The photo series *Recursion 1–4* (2025), produced by Jonida Lači for the exhibition, equally examines architectural forms of representation by reversing conventional perspectives. Taken from the inside of a staircase of a prestigious 19th-century shopping arcade, the artist's photographic gaze is directed through the windows of the building towards the backs of the statues that decorate the historical revivalist façade. Viewed from behind, the illusionistic nature of the figures is revealed: hollowed out from the inside, they appear as empty shells. Exposing this device, Lači calls to attention the strategies present in the design of this commercial space. Physical movement and pictorial perspective overlap through the gradually shifting viewpoints of the series of images. The artist explains that "the title *Recursion 1–4* stands for a self-reflexive process that reveals

itself, modifies itself or questions itself, thereby articulating the instability of an original".

Finally, sculpture by Nežberte takes the shape of deconstructed columns that form a ruinous heap at the end of the space. *Beings stability: an illusory sequence of fixations in space (while turning away from the ruinous present, disintegrating and entropic reality)* (2025) reflects an uncanny sense of déjà vu within the exhibition, its form mimicking *Implosion: We could listen much longer, but it is late by now, and the moonlight glistens like quicksilver upon the waves of the lake before us*. In addition, these works embody themes of construction and decay that are central to Nežberte's practice. Most of her works engage with references that have been marginalised within dominant Western narratives. Nežberte does not attempt to reconstruct their original purposes or replicate their contexts, but to open a space where they can resonate differently.

Presented within this constellation is *Bulletin* (2025, graphic design by Stefans Pavlovskis), a new edition of the single sheet publication that accompanied Nežberte's diploma. It combines her own reflections on the work with excerpts from writers including Julie Ault, Jean Genet and Raimundas Malašauskas. *Bulletin* engages with the dissipation of authorship through creative appropriation and collaborative practices. It is about bringing texts by marginalised authors in relation to canonised forms of knowledge. Many of the texts are translated from Latvian for the first time to produce a publication that reflects the artist's belief that "understanding is perhaps also the acceptance of not knowing". It may be taken away free of charge, a gesture offering "something to the viewer that can have a life outside of the exhibition".

Kunsthalle Wien Preis 2025: Jonida Laçi & Luīze Nežberte is curated by Anna Marckwald and Hannah Marynissen.

The Prize Jury

The Jury of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
For the Academy: Johan F. Hartle (Rector), Judith Huemer (Associate Professor Art and Intervention | Environment), Christian Schwarzwald (Professor Art and Image | Graphics)
For Kunsthalle Wien: Michelle Cotton (Artistic Director), Sarah Crowe (Assistant Curator), Maximilian Lehner (Press/PR), Gina Merz (Assistant Curator)
External Juror: Carolina Nöbauer (Programme Curator, Tanzquartier Wien)
Organisation: Christine Rogi

The Jury of the University of Applied Arts Vienna
For the University: Peter Kozek (Artistic Director, Angewandte Performance Lab), Cornelia Offergeld (Artistic Director, KÖR Kunst im Öffentlichen Raum Wien), Lisa Truttmann (Visual Artist and Filmmaker)
For Kunsthalle Wien: Michelle Cotton (Artistic Director), Maximilian Lehner (Press/PR), Gina Merz (Assistant Curator), Astrid Peterle (Head of Curatorial and Programming)
External Juror: Carolina Nöbauer (Programme Curator, Tanzquartier Wien)
Organisation: Jasmin Vogl

Exhibition Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication with essays by Mirela Baciak, director of the Salzburger Kunstverein, and Chris Clarke, freelance curator.

Public Programme

- 10.12. 18:00 Artists' Talk: Jonida Laçi and Luīze Nežberte in conversation with Anna Marckwald and Hannah Marynissen (DE/EN)
22.1. 18:00 Curator's Tour (DE/EN)

Guided tours are offered in English, German, Einfache Sprache [Plain German] and Austrian Sign Language.

More information on the programme:



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We are interested in your opinion! Take part in our visitor survey and pick up a goodie at the ticket desk.



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DERSTANDARD



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