

ЭСТИМА КОДУМА

Darja Popolitova

Video installation, 2022 [2021]

HD video, 8 min, sound, necklace
[3D-printed silver, burned velvet], laser-
engraved oil shale, hand-engraved velvet,
LED lighting, soil-covered clay, soil

VFX: Erik Merisalu
Sound: Andres Nõlvak
3D animation & rendering: Karmo Järv



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Though the title “ЭСТИМА КОДУМА” is written in Cyrillic, the correct way of writing it is “EESTIMAA KODUMAA,” which in Estonian means “HOMELAND ESTONIA.” The installation speculates about so-called “veneesti” (RusEstonian) linguistic “weirding” in Estonia.

A series of objects such as a charm necklace, sculptured hands, soil, and a poem are shown together in a vlogger-style video. This video features a lithotherapist, Seraphita, performing a ritual intended to foresee what the Russian-Estonian region of Estonia will sound like in the future.

There are about five-hundred words the Estonian language borrows from Russian.¹ This overlap occurred because of the historical, political, economic, and cultural frictions between Russian territories and Estonian ones; among the most notable of these frictions were several occupations of Estonian territories by Russia. At present, these words are not perceived as “coming-from-outside,” although their origins go back to shared Slavic roots.

Very few words came to Russian from Estonian, but those did belong to more recent times. Today, the third generation of people whose native language is Russian is growing in Estonia, and those who are more integrated into Estonian society bring various hybrid words into use. Such words are not necessarily grammatically correct, and are used in informal speech.

In my video installation, I reflect on this phenomenon using the techniques of contrasting accents, linguistic intercrossing, and distortion. For example, in some parts of the video, I use words that came from Russian to Estonian, but

which have become ‘Estoniased’. For example: *parseldama* [барыжничать = barter]; *kostitama* [гостить = to guest]; *raatsima* [рачить = nurture]; and *tirima* [теребить = fumble].

Other parts of the video engage words that came from Estonian to Russian. They have a very specific contextual character and are usually not understandable to Russian speakers outside of Estonia. For example: *топсик* [tops = small drinking vessel]; *максовать* [maksma = pay]; *кеоскус* [poekeskus = shopping mall]; *кандидировать* [kandideerima = apply for a position]; *сулараха* [sularaha = cash].

In the third part of the video, the words become hardly recognizable. I made them up such that a part of the Estonian word is mixed with the Russian one and vice versa. For example: “*kupsin kohu-творор*” = “I bou (Russian) ght (Estonian) some cottage (Russian) cheese (Estonian).”

This linguistic “weirding,” as I call it, is spiced with influences from the internet including the pseudo-magical vlog genre from YouTube, as well as ASMR videos. I invite visitors to reflect on the performativity of language and perceive the intermediate and fuzzy territory of Estonian idioms, here understood not as a form of polluting language but as a creative tool for responding to social and cultural changes.

WHAT DO I EXPECT FROM THE VIEWERS? — NOT UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF THE WORDS, BUT EXPERIENCING THE SURFACE (SOUNDING) OF THIS SPECULATIVE LANGUAGE.

1. M. Musta, Mari, 2000. *Vene laensõnad eesti murretes* = Russian loanwords in Estonian dialects. p. 586. Tartu: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.