Since long ago I really wanted to make a project about personal and intimate stories of people and their lives. Returning to Lithuania from UK without a job wasn't the most pleasant thing but later I realised the power I possess by being able to use my native language as a tool to make it happen. I saw it as a chance. Being in the final year at university meant I have to make a project to graduate so it was an opportunity to fuse these two together.

When starting on this project I wanted to rewrite personal experiences of families affected by various physical and psychological features either of themselves or their children. Finalising it into a somewhat lyrical form, but finding people for such idea wasn't easy from the very beginning. I was told by many founders of associations and community groups that not many feel safe opening up about it.

It proved itself even more when few families after joining me, decided not to go any further with it. Apparently, the bigger part of people, don't feel comfortable speaking about their state here. I wasn't sure whether it's the Lithuanian mentality or just a subject being so sensitive. I started wondering what is the reason and soon, it became obvious. It's not because they have diagnosis in some medicinal paperwork or sit in a wheelchair, but because of the pressure they get from public on their differences. Many feel better by just keeping themselves behind the curtains on purpose. "It's not easy to maintain strength and believe in yourself when the environment is going against you". It happened many years ago, in 1980, but the president of USSR on an interview gave a very swift and puzzling answer when asked if they are going to take part in Paralympic games: "There are no invalids in the USSR!"

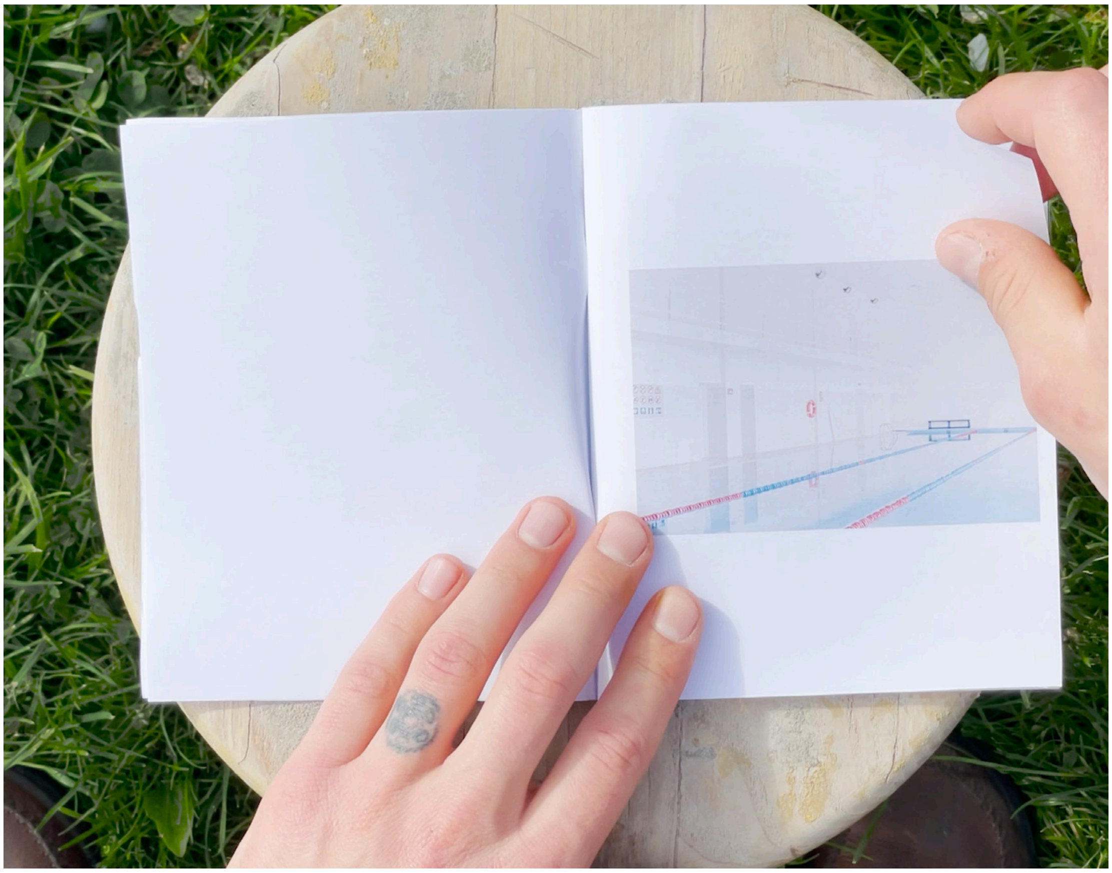
I was very happy and excited when people appeared intrigued by my interest to represent disability, but speaking to a few families made me rethink what is a life having a disability, in every aspect, it made me drop my ideas of it completely. I guess I could excuse myself saying I had no knowledge or experience about disability before that, but I knew that I can't continue with just using them as unordinary subject for my photography. After photographing some families, I noticed many of the images were strongly underlining the disability. Crooked hands. Tensed up feet. I saw that when I printed and spread them all out in front of me. All of those details seem beautiful to me, but I barely had images of their faces. I didn't want them to feel their features are the only place I focus my lens on.

When I spoke to those living with autism, down syndrome or physical disabilities, they told me about many issues they face in schools, accesses to places Etc. “I think our government is trying very hard to make it seem like we are a part of European culture. I’m just not sure if they see all of us here as neurotypicals or ignore us on purpose”. I was invited to an online conference about autistic behaviour and avoidance of stressful situations which was a part of ‚blue month’ awareness. A woman there said: “We don’t want to be seen as autistic people. We want to be seen as people who are able to live despite their autism”.

I never try and categorize people into groups or describe them in any other way than ‚we are all different’. However my grandfather seemed to think otherwise. I remember when I was very little, every time someone with cerebral paralysis or any other physically visible difference walked past us, he would keep me further away as if trying to keep me safe from something. I wasn’t sure why. But later I understood his view upon disability was inverted thanks to his educational system throughout school years and military services. “If a man is not able to serve the country in the army, he is no man at all” he used to say.

These meetings with families took quite some time. I didn’t want to be a photographer who takes a few photographs of them and later disappears forever. I wanted it to go slow. To have time to know each other. To make space for silence just as much as there was for words. Some days I would take 20 pictures in an hour, other times only 1 throughout the whole day. Photography became a secondary thing when we were together. It was only a tool to become a part of their life. To let them feel needed. Wanted for who they are. “While sometimes those differences define us as slightly different, most times we are taken very alienated from our ‚the normal’ majority”.

What I'm proud of is I never ever had a thought of hiding. I never wanted to escape this turn of life by hiding her away from people.



Until 5 she walked. We knew the diagnosis and condition but before we just didn't really believe she will have to sit down. Maybe with loads of work we could go around it, get her away from it. Maybe something will change, but you know, genetic diseases are stronger than we dream.

I was always fascinated by the power of truth. The natural, un-staged appearance. I was missing that a lot through my teenage years and I think it could be the reason I look for these closer connections with my subjects and try to portray them as they are. I try to show every individual in my work as natural as I can, no matter their circumstances or environment they find themselves in.

Working with analogue film makes this process much slower and rather surprising. Instead of seeing the image right away, I have to develop, print it in the darkroom or digitize it first. It's unpredictable just as the time I spend with my subjects. It eliminates certain reactions of people that I photograph as-well. These materials and tools are what makes it so fascinating. We live in a time where we want to see results of everything we do right away. To me this type of long process is a way to get further from that. To be there every second, to explore the world I live in and my interest in that world.

I think in a way it represents how the relationship with my subjects evolves. I like to spend time getting to know them before I take out my camera and point it at them. It brings us to a more intimate and honest space. Sometimes I might even forget I'm a photographer there. Photography is just an excuse for building these relationships and sharing stories.