

Preface to Masterpiece

My dissertation masterpiece consists of three components. The first component is the physical exhibition, *The Lingering Presence*, which was held in the spring of 2025 at the exhibition space of *Tranzit.hu*. The second component is the essay film, also titled *The Lingering Presence*, an experimental attempt to reveal and express the hidden layers behind the exhibition's making. This will offer a different perspective on the textual explanation of the concept. For me, as the author of the project, making this film has been a meditation on the process of making and the inspirations behind the project. The third component of the masterpiece is directly connected to the dissertation text and my research about memories. This is an experimental film, *Letter from Belgrade*, an extension of *Chapter 3 (Ljiljana Blazevska & Cryptomnesia)* of my dissertation. I went to Belgrade on a research trip to learn more about the Macedonian/Serbian painter, Ljiljana Blazevska. On this trip, I also took footage with two cameras, a digital one and an old analog Super 8 camera. I was taking footage while visiting the apartments of Blazevska's family members, seeing her old paintings, and exploring the texture of the city of Belgrade, where she was based for most of her life. The triad of these three components comprises the masterpiece I am submitting for my dissertation.

The Lingering Presence, Essay Film by Erekle Chinchilakashvili

available here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xh9bW7_DAQa3nIODyfN9_8DVufu-JnDmh/view?usp=drive_link

Letter from Belgrade, experimental documentary by Erekle Chinchilakashvili

available here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xFi3bH2g75TBR5guMiGftODC-C9aS2NgJ/view?usp=drive_link

Photo documentation of the exhibition by Zsuzsi Simon.

Chapter V - The Lingering Presence (About Masterpiece)

1. Project Overview

The Lingering Presence is an exhibition that can be called the physical synthesis of my method of “perception excavation.” In this project, I approach the concept of archive as an active process of curation, a process which re-imagines history as a constructed narrative.

This project brings together the earlier threads of my dissertation: participant observation, architecture of memory, cryptomnesia, and process documentation. The central basis of this project is inherited material: my grandfather’s, Tristan Chinchilakashvili’s, book, *The Heroes of the Soviet Union*. Rediscovering this book was a trigger for this project.

The exhibition space of *The Lingering Presence* is curated as a mental landscape, as an activist’s mind, a field of fragments of memories, which somehow linger as fractures of their original states. I will discuss the specific artworks and materials, as well as the choices behind my decisions, in detail in the following chapter.

2. The inherited archive: my grandfather's book

A few months ago, before the planning of the exhibition, while considering ideas for my final project, I had a conversation with my father, where he reminded me of a significant detail from our family history that I had entirely forgotten.

This detail concerned my grandfather, who was a historian. He grew up in the period following World War II. Although he was born earlier, 1930s. His formative years occurred after World War II, during a period marked by Soviet propaganda celebrating the defeat of the Nazis. The prevailing narrative emphasized the heroism of figures such as Stalin and the Communist Party. This propaganda shaped the dominant narrative of the time, leading many in that generation strongly believe in and participate in the Communist Party.

My grandfather belonged to this generation and later became a historian with a particular interest in military history. During the 1980s, he researched in an archive in Podolsk, Russia. During his time there, he researched and documented Georgian nationals—both men and women—who died in World War II. After compiling this information, he set the project aside for several years before publishing a book based on his findings.

The book contains little information about the individuals. I assume it was not possible to find out, so Tristan included the information that he could retrieve from the archive. Typically, each page features a large photograph of an individual he identified during his research. Each picture is accompanied by a brief text in both Georgian and Russian. In some cases, the place of birth is known; in others, it is not. For some individuals, additional details such as their battalion or place of service are provided. In certain instances, it is known whether they died in the war, while for others, their fate remains unknown, since they never returned and/or their bodies were never found.



Figure 1 - My grandfather's, Tristan Chinchilakashvili's, book - *The Hymn for Heroes: Heroes of the Soviet Union from Georgia*, 1999.



3. *What an archive does?*

When my father reminded me of this fact, I realized it was something I wanted to explore further. Over the months, I began to think more about the concept of the archive itself and what an archivist does. What does an archivist make choices? Because there is an immense amount of information, sometimes reachable, sometimes not, an archivist chooses from it. The act of choosing and classifying a set of information also becomes an act of curating it. I began to reflect on how archiving can reconstruct history in a manner that borders between fiction and reality.

4. *The locked cabinet at Feszty Ház*

While thinking about this, I was also working on artmaking in the studio and reflecting on the materials I was using. For example, the blue-grey steel cabinet which is part of the installation, *The Architecture of Memory*, comes from *Feszty Ház*, where we have the Doctoral school studios. For five years, I have been spending most of my time with this cabinet. I was also using this closed part of it, the left part, which is locked.

When I passed by this cabinet almost daily, I always had the feeling that something interesting was inside. It is really generic in its design, in the sense that it tells the story of the 20th century or the children of that epoch, because this type of industrial cabinet was used in many places, especially those influenced by the Soviet Union. It is somehow a symbol of that era.



Figure 2 - *The Architecture of Memory*, installation, size variable, 2025, materials: steel cabinet, lightboxes, found objects, dry plants, bitumen, polyurethane resin, light bulbs.



Figures 3 4 - Installation views from the exhibition, *The Lingering Presence*, at tranzit.hu, 2025.





Figure 5 - details shot of the installation, *The Architecture of Memory*.



Figures 6 7 8 - details shots of the installation showing lightboxes, the steel cabinet, and the dry plant object from *The Architecture of Memory*.







Figures 9 10 11 - details shots of the installation, *The Architecture of Memory*.





5. *Bitumen*

Simultaneously, while doing my studio work, I was thinking about and testing other materials, and how they change or transform over time.

For example, the materials we use in modernity, such as bitumen. One day, I was walking from the studio to my flat, and on the way, a group of workers was patching the asphalt, fixing the surface. It was winter time, and the air was crisp, and as I passed by, the smell of bitumen hit me very strongly. It was a strange feeling, disturbing in a way, since the smell is toxic, but on the other hand, it was pleasant, as if it were a smell of familiarity. Something that I was familiar with, that my body has been exposed to before. Bitumen is used today for numerous industrial and residential purposes. For example, it is used for sealing the roofs of residential houses, mainly because it is waterproof. Also, as we already mentioned, to make asphalt. I became interested in the material and started reading about it. I read an article *Use and Trade of Bitumen in Antiquity and Prehistory* by J. Connan, that said bitumen has been used for thousands of years, making it one of the oldest used materials in the history of humankind.³⁵

Natural bitumen mainly originates from seaweeds. Seaweeds, which would lie underwater for thousands of years, slowly transform into a black, heavy, and oily mass. Somehow, humans discovered them during ancient civilizations and removed them from the lakes. They would dry them out, then recycle them by hand.

In Egypt, for example, it was used to mummify the dead. It was also used in Mesopotamia and Elam. In Mesopotamia, they were using it to fix broken clay pots that were dripping. Interestingly, nowadays we also use it for waterproofing roofs.

Embalming the dead is also a process of archiving, since it is meant to help the body resist the changes that time brings, slowing the process of deterioration. Then I decided

to use bitumen for this project of mine, and I created black-headed sculptures. They are

³⁵ J. Connan et al., "Use and Trade of Bitumen in Antiquity and Prehistory: Molecular Archaeology Reveals Secrets of Past Civilizations [and Discussion]," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 354, no. 1379 (1999): 33–50.

sculpted from styrofoam, then they are covered with gauze and later treated with beton (concrete). After that, it is treated with various acrylic washes, and the final layer is bitumen. In the sense that they were created, I was also thinking a lot about the layering perception, becoming interested in perception and the mechanisms of memory as sedimentary layers accumulated on top of each other.

Now, to continue with the materials, what we do nowadays is metaphorically very similar to how bitumen was used for embalming in Egypt, since embalming is also a form of archiving. We can think of what we do today as similar to archiving in many ways. We create modern architecture using bitumen, concrete, and steel, all robust and durable materials that often resist the passage of time. After all, even if humans hypothetically disappeared, the architecture we have built will remain for thousands and thousands of years. So it is also an archival material, and how we use it. In these meditations on thought, the idea for this project slowly emerged: how these materials interact, materials that, for me, could symbolically represent the act of archiving.



Figures 12 - detail shot of Bitumen heads from the installation, *The Architecture of Memory*.



Figures 13 14 - detail shots of Bitumen heads from the installation, *The Architecture of Memory*.



Figures 15 - detail shot of Bitumen heads in the cabinet, from the installation, *The Architecture of Memory*.

6. *Dry Plants*

Another sort of material that arose from the process of contemplation was more fragile materials, such as dry plants. These specific dry plants are actually planted flowers on Margit Sziget. They got my attention several years ago, in winter, January, when I was going for evening walks on Margit Sziget, which is usually very empty and deserted in winter. Somehow, this emptiness gives it a mystical feeling, which is also calming and comfortable. Moreover, on one of my walks, I noticed these plants sticking out from the soil. In my perception of imagination, they resembled antennas.

Also, in the exposition of the exhibition, we have artworks partially covered with dry moss. This is natural moss from Iceland, which dries in a way that keeps it evergreen. And then we have resin. It is a polyurethane resin used in these two artworks. I found this drawer, which comes from an ancient archive of furniture, then I put this dry plant in and poured two components of resin on it. The resin freezes, and once frozen, it also begins to act as an archival material, since it halts the deteriorative processes in the organic plant. It freezes it in time and space.

So, metaphorically, we have industrial materials that act as archival materials. On the other hand, we have these materials, such as dry plants and moss, which are organic, fragile, and vulnerable to the passage of time. I was interested in finding ways to bring these two types of materials into proximity; how would they affect each other? How would they complement or contrast each other?



Figure 16 - Installation view from the exhibition, *The Lingering Presence*, at tranzit.hu, 2025.

Figures 17 (below) - detail shot of the dry plants from the same wall.



7. Memory mechanics and method synthesis

In Chapter III, I explore the concept of cryptomnesia. As already discussed, ‘crypto’ means ‘hidden’ in Latin, and ‘mnesia’ means ‘memory’. So the word literally means hidden memories. It also introduces us to the anthropologist Levi-Bruhl and his concept of participation mystique. These two ideas made me contemplate human perception, particularly my own. Is there a possibility that we might have memories that are not ours? Memories that could be coming from a collective memory field genetically inherited from our ancestors from a different time. Could these memories resurface as our own?

Naturally, when this kind of story about my grandfather working in an archive popped up during our conversation with my father, Zurab Chinchilakashvili, I right away got excited

Of course, though, there is a big difference between what my grandfather, Tristan, was trying to do and what I am trying to achieve with this project. His motive, as a historian, was to find out and preserve the truth or what he was trying to understand and formulate as “the truth.” However, my motive is to introduce a new fictional perspective to this narrative.

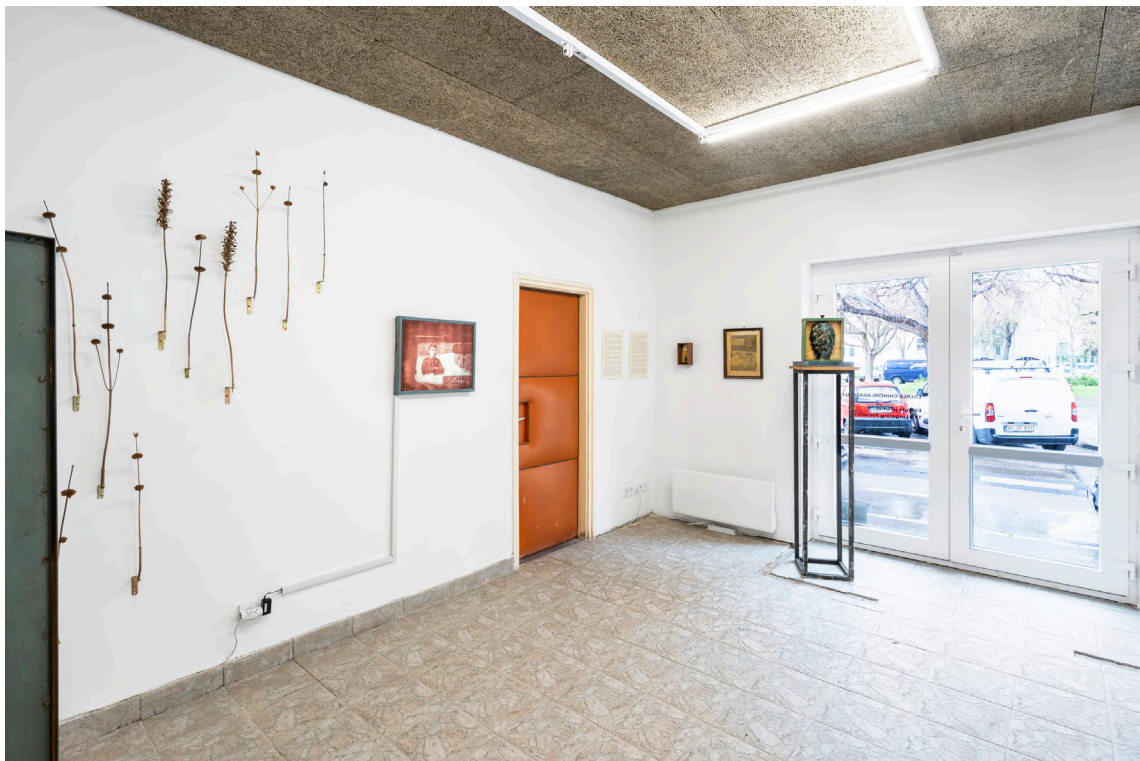
Specifically, the historical material from his archive that comes from real, legitimate sources remains, but the context in which it exists is fictionalized.

All the faces the viewer encounters in this exhibition, in the lightboxes and paintings, are from grandfather’s book. The photo materials we encounter are no longer historical artifacts; instead, they become elements in a dialogue with one another, with the space, and with the viewer. The idea, which is also interesting and which I did not realize during the work, but only after, is that there is a significant parallel between the work of an artist and an archivist. The parallel is that none of them are completely neutral; both of them make choices based on their intuitive feelings.

The archivist, even if they try to be neutral, they can not totally be, because of the decisions they make, they are subjective human decisions after all, of what to include, what to omit. The outcome cannot entirely be neutral. The artist, in this case me, in this project becomes the archivist, because my choices while making these artworks are not neutral. I use some pre-existing material – for example, photographs of these people - but I digest it in my own way. I create something new out of it, a new context.

The idea was to create a space where we are in the mind of an archivist, and therefore, hopefully, the viewer also comes in as an actor who is not neutral. Even though there is a story here. Still, viewer does not get any specific answers about the narrative.

Artworks resemble fragmented artifacts of memories, for the viewer to reconstruct, re-imagine, or recreate. We engage with the fractions of memories. These fractions and bits of memories, which I hope the viewer can continue in their imagination.



Figures 18 - Installation view from the exhibition, *The Lingering Presence*, at tranzit.hu, 2025.

8. *Exhibition encounter: space, scale, Ingold, and slow observation*

The exhibition space of *Tranzit.hu* was a deliberate choice for this exhibition, which I also perceive as one-room installation. It is a small room, which makes it an intimate space where one is surrounded by four walls, encircled by the exhibition's artifacts. I wanted the exhibition to be oriented toward the details, not necessarily toward spaciousness. How can these artworks, which are mostly reconstructed from found materials, interact with each other in this tight space? Another reason I liked this room is two details about the interior: the brick wall and the old sienna-colored leather doors. The brick wall, somehow industrial-looking, resonated with me as a fitting background for the installation – *The Architecture of Memory*. The grey bricks' cold texture evoked a 20th-century institutional interior, reminiscent of Soviet-era interiors. As for the doors, I thought the artworks I planned to make would enter into a dialogue with these retro, leather doors, which also evoke uneasiness, since they are reminiscent of doors used in psychiatric hospitals.

As for the artworks and their alignment in the space, the main point was that most of these artifacts, especially the object-based ones, are constructed from found materials. Furthermore, we also have the stories of the materials themselves. As Tim Ingold mentions, materials are never neutral. They are also active agents of memory, since they have been grown through people's ownership; people have touched them. Human dust has accumulated on them over the years, charging the object with specific energies.

When you look at the material, for example, these drawers are coming from furniture that was used in archives. This was symbolic for me because they would also be used as part of a fictional space - the archivist's mind. Therefore their current use as artworks is still in touch with the original role, or intentions of use, when they were "ordinary" objects of life. If we perceive that the objects are active agents of memory, carrying past lives as experiences within them, we also have to think about how they interact with one another

in the same space. How do these stories and energies affect each other? For example, dry plants have their own story, which comes from the field, and they are now in a totally different context. How does their meaning change with the change of context? How does their energy change with changes in context? These are open questions that can be interpreted in various ways by various individuals.



Figure 19 - Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, 35x21x20 cm, 2025, materials: found drawer, styrofoam, plaster, chalk paint, dry moss.



Figure 20 - Artwork on the left described on previous page.

Artwork on the right: Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, 36x15x12 cm, 2025, materials: found drawer, dry plant, polyester resin.



Figure 21 - detail shot of *Untitled*.



Figure 22 - Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Re-arrangement of His-story*, 25x15x2 cm, 2025, materials: found book, dry plant, polyurethane resin, concrete.



Figure 23 - 1. Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, 15x10x10 cm, 2025, materials: found drawer, found photo, glycerin soap.

2. Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, 44x34 cm, 2025, materials: pencil on found paper in found frame.



Figure 24 - detail shot of *Untitled*.



Figure 25 - Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, 45x55x10 cm, 2025, lightbox.

9. Thoughts about the three paintings from the exhibition...

I created a small triptych for this exhibition, each panel measuring only 25x20 cm. The frontal portrait format is a distant reference to images widely used in bureaucratic documents of the era of modernity. These paintings emerged from my ongoing engagement with my grandfather's book, yet unlike other works, I did not rely on direct replication of the photographic source material. Instead, I absorbed the images, set them aside, and worked from memory. This act of detachment allowed the portraits to transform. They came into existence within the space of recollection rather than documentation. These paintings are not reproductions of the faces but disturbed, dissonance presences formed in the liminal space of memory.

I began by treating the wooden panels with gesso and perlite, creating a rough, sandy texture that disrupts the surface and refuses smoothness. It was about the physicality of the object, of its weight, even though its size itself is small. This wax-like, distorted surface acts as another filter between past and present, between tangible history and the fragmented past. This is another contrast between the paintings and the photographs, where the rough, uneasy texture is almost the opposite of the glossy, clear, and clean texture of the paper on which the image is printed.

Since I found out that bitumen was also used in Egypt to embalm the dead, I started watching a lot of Egyptian portraits from the Fayum basin. These small-scale funerary portraits, which were painted in encaustic, have been an influence for using the format, the wooden panel, and the waxy, dominant texture. These portraits were created to be attached to the wrapped mummified humans to document their faces. With this parallel to bitumen, which was also used in embalming the dead in Egypt, I wanted to create another hidden parallel in the space. Then I started to paint them. I painted not their initial pose but the mirror reflections of them. The portraits are painted in dark, muted tones, existing in a dreamy, atmospheric state because they are visions, not realities. They are visions in the archivists' minds, visions of faces haunting him.

The whole installation is not an archive, but it is the mind of the archivist. The space does not follow the logic or expectations that we, as viewers, might have regarding the concept of an archive. Instead, we are in the archivist's mind, where his distorted memories (which I call half-memories) exist in unfinished, fragmentary episodes. These artifacts in the space are showing just pieces of this fragmented episode of his dreamy memory.

There is an intentional weight to these images, a deliberate uneasiness. The eyes, in particular, bear a frozen opacity, a frosty layer that makes direct contact impossible. Another intentional gesture I used is the deformation of facial anatomies. I did this deliberately but intuitively, not with calculation. The paintings do not adhere to the logic of realism. Their dissonance is absolutely intentional. Instead, they fracture and dissolve, creating new, ambiguous topographies on the landscape of the human face.

The color palette that I used resonates with the existing artifacts of the installation. Blue shade resonates with the cabinet and the sculpture with the drawer and half head. The red-dish tone resonates with the drawer with resin and plant that is located in the cabinet on the second shelf, and the orange resonates with the shade of the light bulbs in the cabinet and also with the color of old found paper drawings and the rotting resin used on different artworks in the space.

These paintings refuse conventional aesthetic points of view, the traditional notions of 'beauty' and 'pleasure.' Instead, they try to grasp and convey the feeling of a disturbed dream where forms are not entirely definable. They allow themselves to exist beyond these conditions, highlighting feelings rather than rational visuality. I intended that these faces remain in the viewer's mind even after leaving the space, not because of grace and aesthetic niceness but because of their tension, heaviness, and gravity.

In this way, these paintings extend the more significant concerns of my installation. They do not seek to comfort or please the viewer but rather to disrupt and act as a controversy to reality. They are echoes of a past that is impossible to grasp. They are also about my struggle to connect with the images of the archive and my struggle to empathize with these

faces. My subjectivity attempts to transform and re-curate their existence, which comes from the pages of the book. They exist in the atmospheric realm of inherited memory and unspoken histories, and their distortion opens a space for something beyond sight—a space of tension.

On the other hand, their presence within the exhibition introduces a layer of physicality that cannot be observed in other art mediums. That is why I didn't paint paintings that would directly resonate with lightbox images. I wanted to use different mediums to explore various angles of the narrative.



Figure 26 - Installation view from the exhibition, *The Lingering Presence*, at tranzit.hu, 2025.



Figure 27 - Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled (triptych)*, 25x20 cm each, 2025, oil and perlite on wood in artists's frame, dry plant.

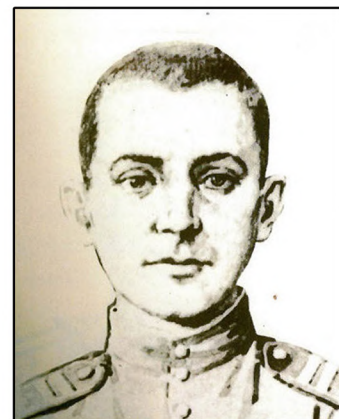


Figure 28 - Paintings from the triptych next to their original sources coming from Tristan Chinchilakashvili's book.

10. Memory as fiction, transmission, lingering presences

So we come back to the concept of archiving and the construction of history. Here, I had a question that arose from contemplating the construction of a historical narrative. What if memory is also constructed by our psyche? Then what is the difference between a memory and an imagination? This is also one of the crucial points I had to think about. For me, as an individual, one specific memory is never the same. As I transform over time, get older, change habits, and chemical reactions in my body continue various changes are taking place. The same goes for my memories, which are part of me.

They are no longer what they initially were. This means the moment I had remembered also changed in my perception, and since it has transformed, it now also has a degree of imagination - part of it is fictional.



Figure 29 - Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, size variable, sculpture: found drawer, styrofoam, polyurethane resin, dry moss, wood, 2025.



Figures 30 31 - Installation view from the exhibition, *The Lingering Presence*, at tranzit.hu, 2025.



Figure 32 - Erekle Chinchilakashvili, *Untitled*, size variable, sculpture: found drawer, styrofoam, polyurethane resin, dry moss, wood, 2025.

11. Artistic text on the exhibition

While working on this exhibition, I also wrote a text in parallel with making physical artworks. This is not a concept, but rather a poetic text on a person, a fictional archivist, going through a specific experience. This was a vision that originated in my imagination.

“This road didn’t seem long, yet somehow he was always losing himself in what was to be observed from the van’s scratched windows. The road stretched on, spilling over the outskirts of the city, leading toward a smaller town, crossing through the steppe-like fields of flatness and rigid horizons. The sky felt dry, stretched thin, carrying a silence that settled on the landscape like dust.

They passed the bitumen factories. Dark clouds climbed, slow and determined, out of the round, cracked brick chimneys, dissolving into the dry, cold air. He watched them rise until they lost their shape. And then the smell—dense, sharp, seeping through the thin steel window frame of the van, wrapping itself around him like a second skin.

He remembered an article he had read. He remembered the smell of that newspaper, the trace of tobacco on his moustache. Bitumen, he recalled, was ancient. Mesopotamia, Elam—places that existed more in words than in time. There it was used to build castles. In the Neolithic era, it was used to seal water inside clay. The Egyptians used it to embalm their dead, wrapped bodies in layers of linen and darkness.

And now this scent was here with him, squeezing through the nickel-rimmed window frame, filling the van with something thick and stubborn. The air, trapped inside the window’s steel, whistled as the van rolled on.

He looked at the field, at the dry steppe, at the far horizon where clouds hung, motionless. The land extended out endlessly. He saw the plants—thin and sharp, sticking out of the ground like antennas, almost as if transmitting

something of a message to somewhere... To the ghosts of old fields.

Then, he saw the face. The face he knew too well. He knew all of them. He kept seeing them. This was where he was going. To the temple of dust. To the archive where the lost did not vanish, but lingered. Where they had been placed on shelves, side by side, close to each other, where they continued to live on the ledges of the gods.

How had they felt when those photographs were taken? Probably you know, when it's your time. Or maybe not. The bitumen's thick scent made his thoughts sharper, drawing them into focus. He felt the weight in his eyes—the tiredness of the observer. Yes, he was an observer of the past.

The van stopped in front of the concrete building, which was a huge beton block, grey to its core, a building which was cold from the outside, but was hiding something special in the inside, hiding memories of the ones who were not amongst the ranks of the living anymore. He thought about their faces again. He stepped out of the van and started walking, cutting through the dry winter air, his thoughts were trying to catch up with the speed of smoke and dust and the lives lived in the century of modernity, of progress, of chimneys and rubber wheels rolling on dried bitumen. He was an archivist.”