



Masters Project – Visual Journal

The Art of Storytelling Rooted in Folklore, History and Family Narratives

Unit Code: VIC708

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Introduction

This journal outlines my journey in creating a project to preserve my great-grandfather's story. This project has transformed into a profoundly personal exploration of identity, memory, and artistic expression from its initial idea. Although the primary focus is still on developing a visual narrative for a book, the process has unveiled complexities beyond the original concept.

Reflecting on the project's progress, I reevaluated my objectives and refined my strategy to harmonise creative aspirations with practical constraints. Motivated by received feedback, I limited the project's scope to concentrate on story development, enabling me to delve deeper into visual storytelling. This choice eased concerns about the project's scale and facilitated a more intimate connection with its central themes.

The gaps in my family's oral history prompted me to undertake thorough research, combining personal memories with historical, cultural, and artistic inquiry. The outcome is a narrative that aims to link the past with the present, weaving my great-grandfather's experiences with broader themes of migration, resilience, and belonging. Through this journal, I record the challenges, insights, and creative processes that have transformed this project into a tribute to my heritage.

Collaborative/ Collective Narrative Inquiry

In June, I visited my homeland and family for the summer holidays to uncover more details about my great-grandfather and his life story. I continued communicating verbally with relatives and hearing their sides. I have been recording these conversations to gather audio evidence, which has helped me return to them for more details and reflection when necessary.



Audio recordings from my family speech accounts, 2024.

Exchanging tales about relatives and reflecting on memories is a valued element of traditional Lithuanian folklore. Although this custom is well-known, it has become increasingly rare practice as younger generations show less interest. Consequently, encouraging my family to participate in this tradition was challenging. Still, I was eager to speak with my oldest brother since I knew he had spent much of his childhood with our grandfather. I wanted to discover if he had found any intriguing details about our great-grandfather and his life. Our grandfather Antanas often reminisced about his father, who also bore the name Antanas. Saulius Packauskas (2024) said these discussions occurred during his youth while they travelled long distances by horse to work in the fields. Packauskas (2024) is confident that our great-grandfather was employed as a coal miner and cared for horses in the United States. Furthermore, his passion for horses was evident in his later life in Lithuania.

My brother's perspective clarified some aspects of our great-grandfather's job in the United States and his feelings about living overseas. I analysed my mother Packauskiene's (2024) account alongside my brother Packauskas's (2024) and emphasised the most notable points. Although these narratives included many noteworthy events, specific actions, and results, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of Antanas's earlier years and illustrate the broader context in which he was involved.

So, what can I tell you?
 There was my grandfather, an American.
 He lived in America for 40 years, returned, got married, and both lands. When he was ~~23~~ ⁶⁶, he had a son, my father—the only child as far as I know. He left for America to work and flourish. He was a young, hard-working farmer. He loved farming.
 How? I don't remember who said it, but someone told me he was limping with one leg. He must have injured himself while living in America.
 When he returned, he bought land to continue farming. He bought seven or 8 acres of land and 10 acres of forest.
 Do you know what people used to say in the villages?
 They said an American had returned and a rich man. As far as I know, he took the rest of the money and hid it in the barn, and then he was robbed by some locals. ← incident / misis
 Your great-grandmother, Ona. Although he was known as a well-off American, she was poor and young when she married.
 I don't know how they lived. I know that my grandmother did not die peacefully as she killed herself. She had another man, not a boy, and she was with someone else who was also a married man. ← lobastvete
 Though, your great-grandfather forgave her. She was very young when she married my grandfather, and she married against her will. You know how, in those days, she married an older man. He used to say that she was young and needed to if she wanted to. And then she, babbling like she used to, drank the soapstone.
 Love → I think it was some stone from which soap was made. That's how she died. [My grandfather died of old age, and she died the same year after him.] What else can I tell you? The grandfather told everyone that he was Polish. These were the old days, but it was a colourful world.
 Your great-grandfather went to the army when he was young. I think he was an uneducated peasant. But he was driven and wanted to travel and work. He emigrated young, probably in his twenties, and stayed in America for 40 years.

Recorded transcript of Ona Packauskiene's speech account, 2024.

Our grandfather was the only child, although truth be told there was another child who did not survive childbirth. He did not remember much but spoke about his father often on our early and long journeys to fields.
 Our great-grandfather Antanas was the most simple and hardworking person. ← character personality
 I was told that in America he worked as a coalminer.
 Our grandfather said he worked with horses, and even back here he had several, named Bernius, Sleive and others 2. One of the horses was a huge, black and powerful Yorkshire horse. He had a hard time living there and fitting in. That is probably why he came back.
 However, he left to work and earn money so he could buy his land. That to me is a picture of a great man, as he sacrificed 40 years of his life to make this dream come true. His main passion was to farm, I remember as our grandfather recalled hard lessons he was taught especially plowing.
 not fitting in? ↑ main occupation in US

Recorded transcript of Saulius Packauskas speech account, 2024.

Photo Elicitation in Genealogical Research

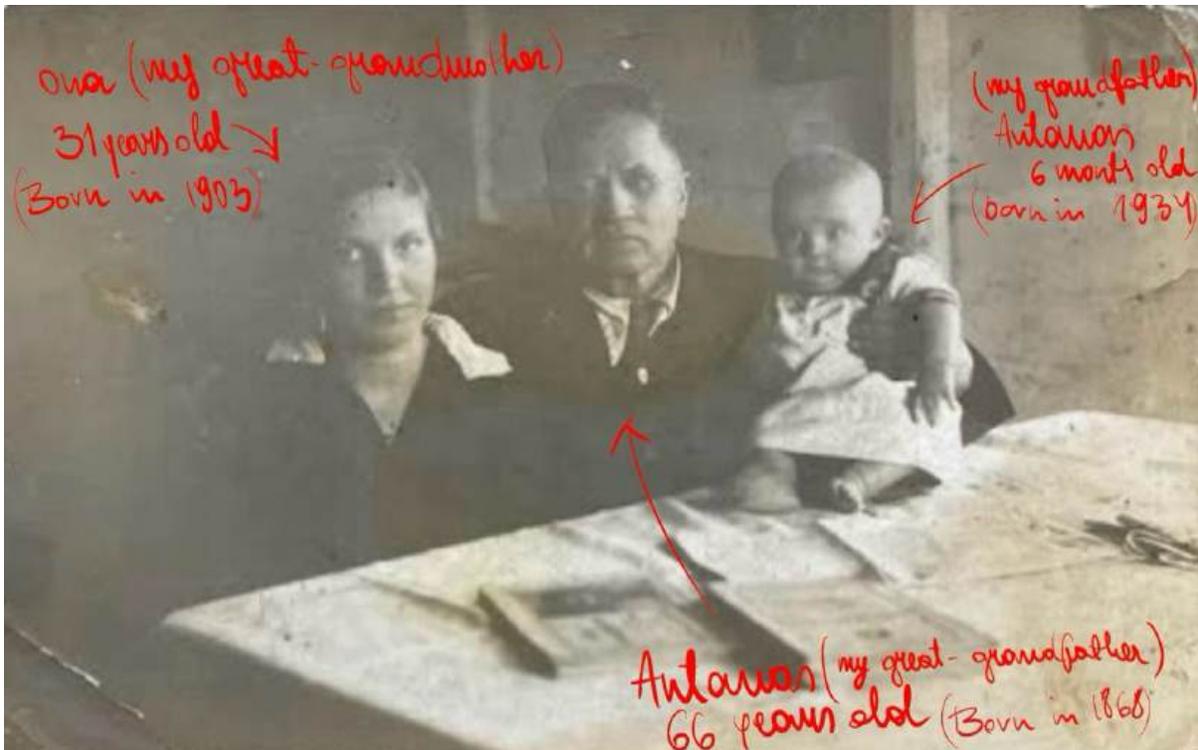
In conducting genealogical research, I received invaluable aid from my mother, Ona Packauskiene (2024), and aunt Rita Ivanauskiene (2024). I have been actively searching for photographs from our family's early years, and we discovered a particular album with images dating from the 1930s to the 1960s. It was challenging to ascertain the exact dates of the photographs since only a few had written dates on them. My mother mentioned that a drawn portrait of her grandfather was based on an existing image in the photo albums. During that first week of June, my mother, aunt, and I were eager to find this drawing or any related images. Unfortunately, our search yielded no results, leading us to conclude that it may have been misplaced, destroyed, or discarded.



Four generations of women looking at the old family photos, images from my archives

Since my mother is the eldest child and has the most vivid memories, I decided to show her a fascinating image from the oldest family photo album I had found. This old photograph depicts three individuals: a young woman, a baby, and an older man. My mother immediately identified the man as my great-grandfather, Antanas, noting that this image had inspired his portrait.

Upon closer examination, the photograph began to unveil minor yet crucial details. The man in the centre has his arms around both figures and although he doesn't appear to be smiling, his expression seems gentle and content during this uncomplicated moment. The home environment is simple, with minimal furniture, only a table covered by a wrinkled tablecloth, a handful of printed materials, books, and a few photographs adorning the wall. The faces of the figures are of key significance as they reveal their personalities. The young woman seems smiling, indicating she's not entirely unhappy. Yet, she also appears somewhat uneasy, as she doesn't seem to embrace the man fully but instead shows affection—nonetheless, the infant aided in estimating the year of the photo. My mother believes the baby is six months old since he can hold his head up but cannot sit without support, as evident by how his back and legs are positioned. My grandfather Antanas came into the world in 1934, and given the attire in the pictures, it's likely that this photo was captured on the day of his christening.



The only surviving image of my great-grandfather, images from my archives



Old family images from my archives

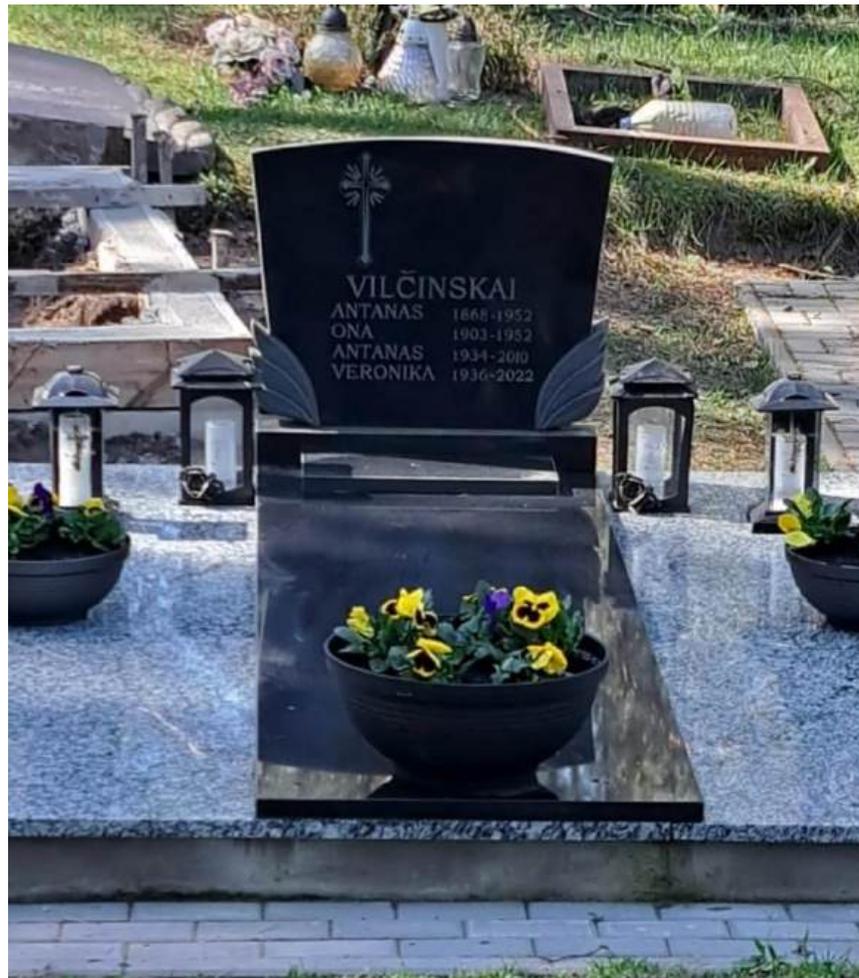


Old family images from my archives

The remaining family pictures showcase the bond individuals have with their land. Most, if not all, of the images are captured outdoors, depicting agricultural work or peaceful family moments set against the backdrop of the surrounding landscapes. I was fascinated by a collection of photographs showcasing diverse individuals from various generations, each wearing clothing that reflected the style of their era, the tools they used, and the beautiful, serene moments they shared. Regrettably, these pictures are just brief glimpses that do not capture the truth or the heartbreaking events.

During my short stay in Lithuania, I chose to visit a family gravesite to honour my loved ones, and the dates inscribed on the stone caught my eye, revealing information I had previously missed that clarified various events.

If my great-grandfather had spent forty years in America, he would have been young yet mature enough to have completed his military service before his departure. This implies that he left around 1890, at the end of the 19th century. Unfortunately, this also shows that he did not have a long life after returning to Lithuania and realising his dream.



Old family gravestone, image from my archives

Although I have successfully pinpointed the date of Antanas's journey to America, I was keen to uncover more details about his past before his return. Regrettably, I could only access limited information, so it was essential to note dates and create a brief mind map to further my research in the broader context.



Mind map, image from my digital sketchbook

While connecting different elements through pictures, dates, and visuals, I also focused on drawing for the rest of the time, trying to capture as much as possible in my sketches. I spent my evenings sketching while I envisioned the life of the era and the people that intrigued me. The images of individuals labouring in the fields and caring for horses particularly captivated me.



Agricultural scenes, images from my sketchbook

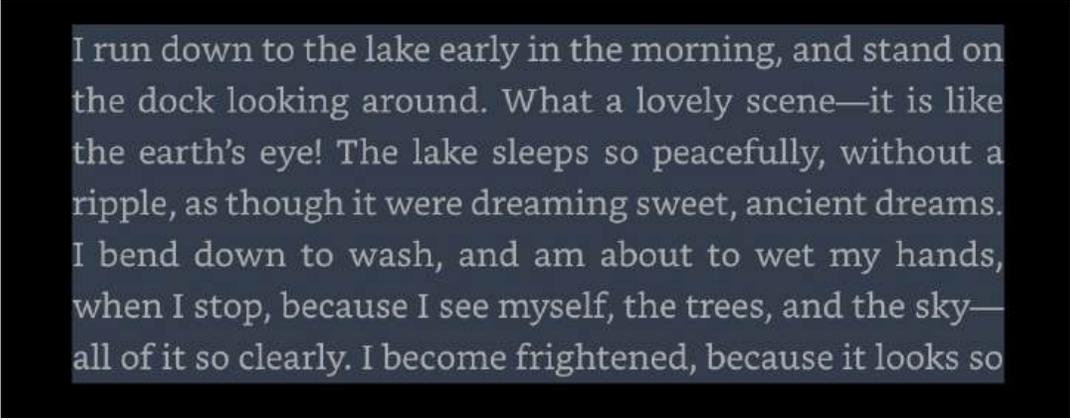


Agricultural scenes and people, images from my sketchbook

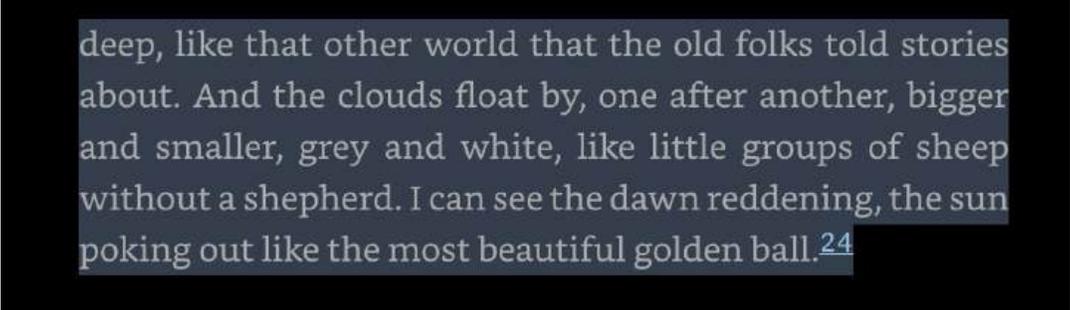
Folklore – The Connection Between Individuals and the Land in Memoirs

Through family photography, I observed the connection between people and the natural environment more closely, which is particularly significant to my great-grandfather's narrative. Following my proposal, I kept reading *The Story Telling Human: Lithuanian Folk Tradition Today* (2020), which includes an article by Radvilė Racenaite (2020) that explores the Lithuanian connection to the landscape.

Research indicates that Lithuanians have a multifaceted relationship with their landscape shaped by experiences of historical upheavals. As a people, we engage with this relationship through agricultural activities and as an integral part of our mentality, beliefs, worldview, and ethical principles. This connection and mindset prompt us to reflect on questions vital to our existence, transforming the static nature of our surroundings into a dynamic entity that directly witnesses our lived experiences and events. Consequently, how individuals describe their encounters with nature is unique since many are fond of a specific tree or location in the meadow or forest. This theme is often highlighted in many memoirs.



I run down to the lake early in the morning, and stand on the dock looking around. What a lovely scene—it is like the earth's eye! The lake sleeps so peacefully, without a ripple, as though it were dreaming sweet, ancient dreams. I bend down to wash, and am about to wet my hands, when I stop, because I see myself, the trees, and the sky—all of it so clearly. I become frightened, because it looks so



deep, like that other world that the old folks told stories about. And the clouds float by, one after another, bigger and smaller, grey and white, like little groups of sheep without a shepherd. I can see the dawn reddening, the sun poking out like the most beautiful golden ball.²⁴

Excerpt from Čepukienė's piece *The Lake*, 1973.

Čepukienė's piece *The Lake* (1973), concerning the cherished lake in her home village of Puodžiai, is acknowledged by folklorists and literary scholars as a poignant and lyrical ode to the beauty of nature. The author expresses a strong personal bond with the lake, emphasising the hours she spends outdoors observing and contemplating from morning until evening.

Another renowned folklore informant, Zalanskas (2008), similarly to Čepukienė (1973), conveys his bond with nature through vibrant human emotions and elevated feelings.

Oh, how the dear black earth waits for that bright, dear sun, for it to first warm up the loose dirt so that the black, loose earth could grow all sorts of flowers, all sorts of grasses, so that the black earth could adorn itself with all the beauty of spring, and all the people's hearts should flower with that beauty that comes from the bright sun. Not only will the dear folk revel in nature's beauty, but

so will all the little creatures of the forest who, while the earth was cold, had no shelter, and all those little bugs that were frozen into balls all winter. And when the warm spring comes and the bright sun gives heat, then beautiful nature awakens all the little creatures from their sleep. . . . And what joy there is when they all start to live life again!⁴¹

Excerpt from Zalanskas autobiographical narratives in *The Hawk Chirps and Coos*, 2008.

Zalanskas's (2008) perception of the world around him transcends ordinary aesthetic evaluations of landscapes, imbuing his observations with profound descriptive power. I admire his ability to perceive his environment, which embraces the universality of human experience—from the rich diversity of life on Earth to the radiant expanse of the sky above.

Although these writings provided a more aesthetically pleasing experience of the natural surroundings during peaceful moments, I aimed to explore what the nostalgic glorification of nature looked like during pivotal and turbulent times and the evolving reality.

The journey from a world so familiar was seen as violence, misfortune, loss, and interference by a foreign force into these rural folk's lives. Those who returned were now different and strange. . . . The pull of this small country's land was so strong—it nurtured, punished, forgave, and sheltered, until it was cut up by roads, highways, asphalt through which all of Lithuania then travelled over the pastures, meadows, school paths of my youth, until the land no longer welcomed back those who had left their homes, their birthplaces, their loved ones.⁵⁶

there are horrible, polluting machines digging, excavating, and plowing throughout. . . . Now, everywhere, the land is losing its name: homesteads and cemeteries are being trampled, rocks that had their own names are being split in half . . . so that the land can barely remember anything anymore.⁵⁷ . . . They have finally succeeded in fen-

cing man in, in separating him, with ditches and canals, from his past, his home, nature. That nature has now been spooked, constricted, and cut into pieces.⁵⁸

Excerpts from Martinaitis collection of essays *Bent Towards His Life*, 1998.

Lithuanian writer and poet Martinaitis (1998) vividly describes the dramatic changes during urbanisation and industrialisation and the dramatic shift in his understanding of space. This transformation is not seen as entirely negative, as it introduced new opportunities and advancements to address human needs and enhance traditional lifestyle constraints.

Nevertheless, the author conveys a persistent yearning as he reflects on his relationship, grappling with painful memories of a once-integrated existence that has been dismantled.

I too, after all, ran away from my village. Had I stayed there, I would not speak or write about it so positively, or with such nostalgia. The most beautiful things are those that we lose. That which is now far away is more easily loved and remembered fondly. Perhaps the more life recedes into memories, the more one loves it.⁶⁸

I told them about how I miss my native region, though none of it misses me. Except, perhaps, some green trees or those paths that I once walked on with healthy legs. Or

maybe, too, that lake, that clear water where I swam in the summers when I was little. Oh, how my heart ached, as though pierced by a sword—it has been so long, fifteen years, since I saw them, perhaps even more years will go by, or I may never see them again at all. . . . My path will grow over with green grass, then with green trees. Pied cuckoos will sing in them, but I, though a poor soul, will not cry over them. Let those green trees become full with fluttering peacock feathers, and I can even watch them from a different land, and see how they grow green there too. If only I could I would talk to them morning and night, and tell them everything about my troubles, my hard daily life.⁷³

Excerpts from Martinaitis collection of essays *Bent Towards His Life*, 1998.

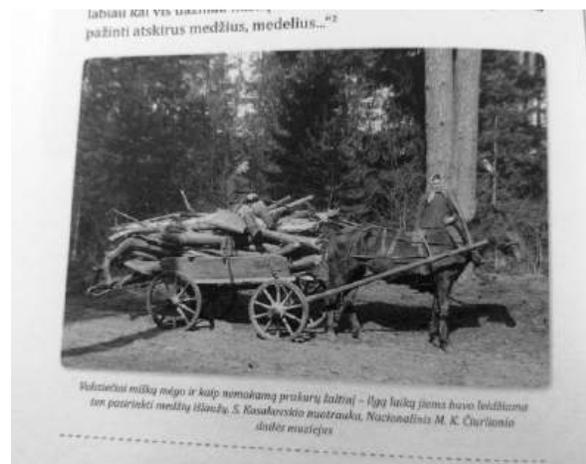
I began to imagine my great-grandfather's profound and significant connection with his homeland, especially since my mother noted his plans to return before he left. This underscores his challenging adjustment to urban and industrial life and a deep yearning for a more familiar setting. Such reflections assist in visualising the contemplation and tough choices he faced. I found the concept of homeland acting as an active character that sees and interacts with my great-grandfather Antanas quite enjoyable to explore.

Fact-checking

These were writings from more recent individuals. I was curious to learn even more about the Lithuanian people from a century ago, especially to understand what drove most people to emigrate.

It is reasonable to acknowledge that before the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian population suffered under the Russian Empire. They experienced a loss of autonomy, suppression of their language, and economic hardships. My great-grandfather was born following the Lithuanian uprising against tsarist authority. However, even after that, more difficult challenges of increased repression and control followed.

Historian Gediminas Kulikauskas (2018) sheds light on the lives of everyday individuals from that period in his book called *Lithuanian Code*. In the second chapter, named *People of the Forest and the Land*, he portrays typical Lithuanians as self-reliant individuals who, despite their exhaustion, persistently strive for freedom. Numerous Lithuanians have consistently seen emigration as an issue that leads to a declining population, yet the author describes it as a pure picture of continuous running. While some sought to escape economic poverty, others were evading problem-solving challenges. Mainly, those involved in agriculture resisted engaging in crafts and trade. Individuals committed to preserving agriculture encountered considerable obstacles in acquiring land, and following the rebellion, many were forced to make redemption payments.



Images from Gediminas Kulikauskas's book *Lithuanian Code*, 2018.

Individuals needed to find some means of livelihood to survive. At that time, Lithuanians were a marginalised group facing severe persecution. As a result, the majority, if not all, of the available jobs were occupied by other nationalities, such as Polish, Russian, or Jewish people. This information sheds light on why my great-grandfather Antanas, despite being Lithuanian, identified himself as Polish. From what I gather, this assisted him in securing employment and generating funds.

The historian elaborates that although peasants were technically permitted to purchase land following emancipation and could participate in land transactions, very few had the financial means. This possibility is the foundation for my great-grandfather's aspiration, which originates from a tiny seed of optimism.



Images from Gediminas Kulikauskas's book *Lithuanian Code*, 2018.

While visiting home, I maintained contact with Akvile Sadauskiene (2024), a PhD in Ethology from the Lithuanian Institute of History, who suggested I visit the National History Museum in Vilnius to check out an exhibition titled *A Worldwide Lithuania: Our Migration Story*. Sadauskiene (2024) mentioned that this exhibition would be valuable for me if I wanted to learn more about the emigration of the Lithuanian people.

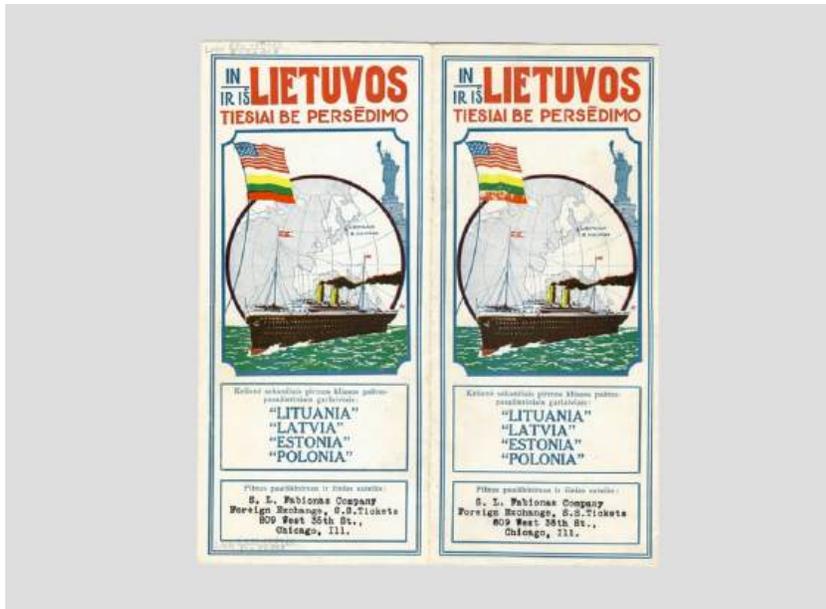
The exhibition guides visitors through three phases of emigration. My great-grandfather Antanas participated in the initial wave of Lithuanian migration to the United States during the late 19th century. Since emigration is a shared experience and a natural phenomenon for many Lithuanians, the information uncovered helped verify multiple aspects of the narrative and locate various image sources pertinent to that period.



An exhibition titled *A Worldwide Lithuania: Our Migration Story*. At the National History Museum, 2024.

There was a shared awareness and rationale for widespread emigration, primarily driven by economic circumstances. My mother, Packauskiene (2024), explained that Antanas merely aspired to own his land. She emphasised that he had not sold any family land since receiving none. As the proposal mistakenly stated, this is a crucial detail to correct. Through various rumours, he learned about the potential to earn money in the U.S. and achieve his dream.

Several artefacts captivated me, and I wanted to use them as visual elements for story development. Especially appealing was the Baltic-American line advertising brochure, which was circulating within Lithuanian communities to promote emigration.



An exhibition piece from *A Worldwide Lithuania: Our Migration Story*. At the National History Museum, 2024.

Moreover, the displayed items in the exhibition illustrate people's challenging experiences, particularly during prolonged travels when they could only carry essential possessions and basic food items that had to sustain them for several days and weeks.



An exhibition piece from *A Worldwide Lithuania: Our Migration Story*. At the National History Museum, 2024.



An exhibition of pieces from *A Worldwide Lithuania: Our Migration Story*. At the National History Museum, 2024.



An exhibition of pieces from *A Worldwide Lithuania: Our Migration Story*. At the National History Museum, 2024.

At the exhibition, I also discovered an old documentary film titled *Lithuania* — a promotional piece created by the Motuza Brothers in 1938 following their return from America to highlight the accomplishments of the newly restored Lithuanian Republic during the past two decades of independence.



Opening credits from documentary movie *Lithuania*, 1938.

The timeless quality film has captivated me with its nostalgic imagery. The transitioning scenes from individuals and their work, from customs to landscape visuals, emphasise the connection we Lithuanians have with our homeland. A 15-hour recorded chronicle was presented to Lithuanian communities overseas to showcase the genuine beauty and significance of Lithuanian land and its people and foster a deep and heartfelt bond and respect for one's motherland.



Images from the documentary movie *Lithuania*, 1938.



Images from the documentary movie *Lithuania, 1938*.

There were two images that, when positioned next to each other, highlighted a striking contrast between a young man and an older man working in the field, which I found intriguing and worth examining. This image motivated me to explore my great-grandfather's story through the symbolic cyclical nature of time. While the young man might be at the beginning of his journey, demonstrating physical strength and having his eyes set on something ahead of him, the older man epitomises enduring strength, wisdom, and resilience, as his gaze is more directed toward the land and the labour, reflecting introspection. This discovery was profoundly significant, and I aimed to incorporate it into the further development of the visual narrative.

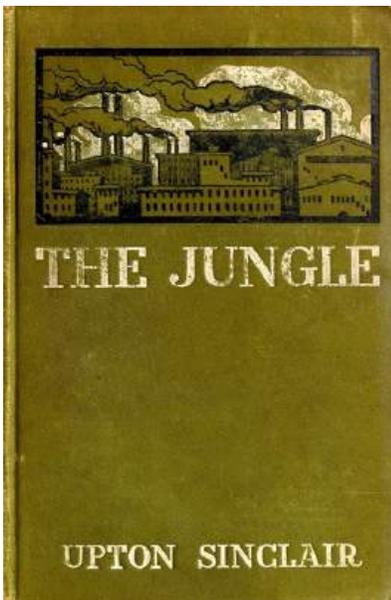


Images from the documentary movie *Lithuania*, 1938.

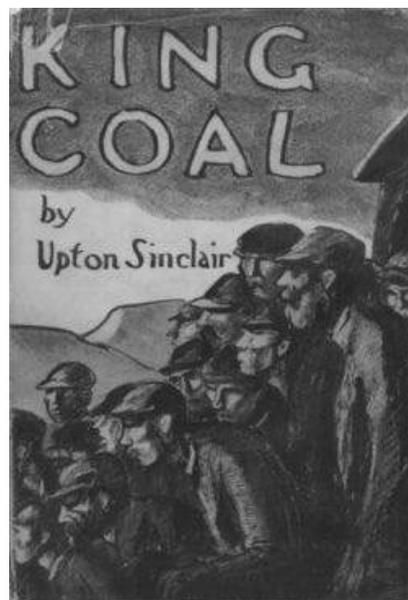
Additionally, the exhibition reinforces the idea that there were only a limited number of jobs available in America for migrant individuals, particularly for those who were uneducated, like my great-grandfather. The vast majority, if not all, could only find unskilled labour, such as employment in factories, farms, and railway construction, but the highest-paying yet most perilous job was in coal mining.

The work conditions were dire and challenging, to say the least, especially during the first part of Lithuanian migration that took place before the First World War. American journalist Upton Sinclair conducted undercover research and collected dreadful experiences of working conditions that he later described in his novels *The Jungle* (1906) and *King Coal* (1917). People experienced the lowest working conditions for immigrant workers. It describes conditions such as illnesses, pests, accidents, and deaths.

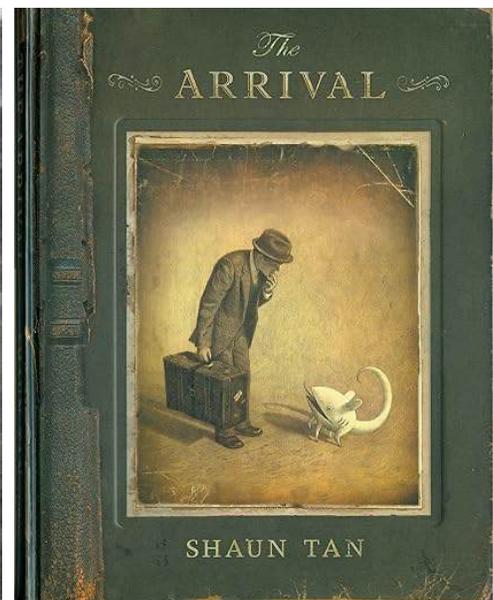
I can only imagine what my great-grandfather must have experienced not only by enduring the migration journey but also by labour. This can explain his limping, as, according to my mother, he must have injured himself through heavy labour. I am interested in demonstrating this in the story and dismantling the image of the so-called dreamland mentality adopted by people unfamiliar with migration. Most people now think how easy it must have been for those who left, but if one can pay the time to visit these stories, the dream becomes sort of a nightmare that I remember from Tan's (2007) illustrated book.



A book cover from Sinclair's *The Jungle*, 1906.



A book cover from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.



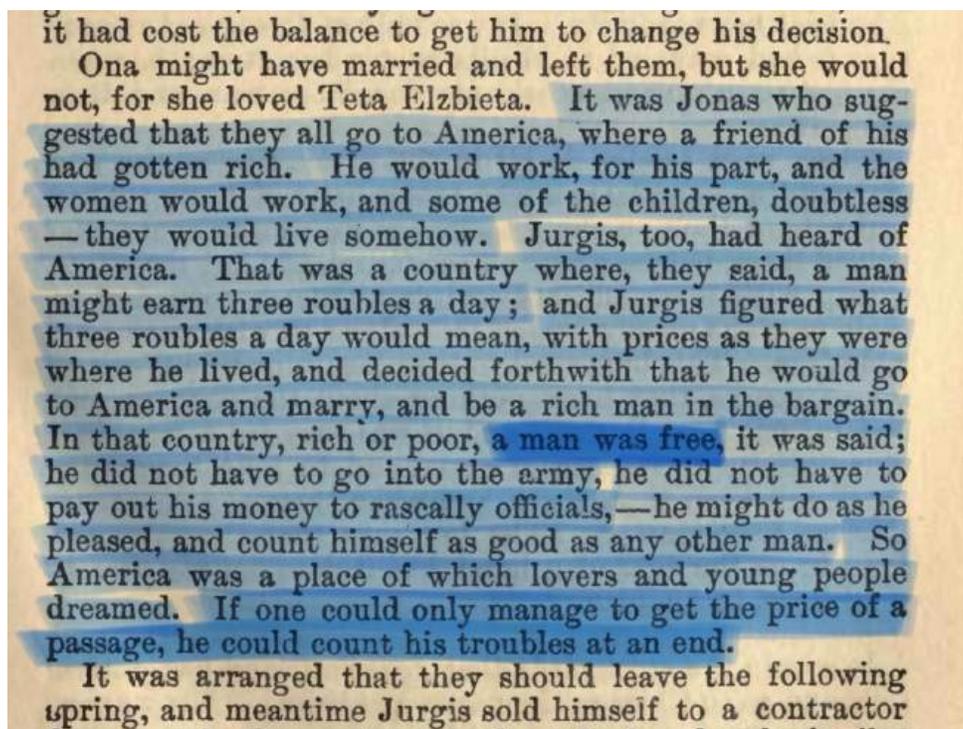
A book cover from Tan's *The Arrival*, 2007.

Upon further examination of Sinclair's novels, I discovered many details and stark truths about immigrant communities in the United States. A crucial point is that Sinclair was a journalist who conducted undercover research and based many of his novels on the actual lives and experiences of real people. During this period, the journalist was writing while interviewing many Eastern European immigrants, including those from Lithuania. He selected Lithuanians as his main characters because their experiences represented broader struggles. The oppression they faced under Russian control in their homeland highlighted a story of difficulty and resilience, which aligned with Sinclair's themes.

Due to my limited knowledge about my great-grandfather's emigration, these novels helped me understand the challenges he might have encountered. While analysing these texts, I had several questions about my great-grandfather's life and journey. This process sought various answers, enabling me to outline the story more effectively. I continued reading *The Jungle* (1906) and *King Coal* (1917), as these were the most relatable novels I found.

Beginning with *The Jungle* (1906), which reveals the problematic truths of immigrant workers' lives, I examined the events before that, including the choices made regarding emigration, saving money, and the journey itself. The protagonist, Jurgis, and his family pursued what they believed to be the "American Dream," but they soon found themselves disenchanted as they encountered severe poverty, corruption, and systemic exploitation.

Why did he leave?



Excerpts from Sinclair's *The Jungle*, 1906.

How did he manage to earn money for his travels?

dreamed. If one could only manage to get the price of a passage, he could count his troubles at an end.

It was arranged that they should leave the following spring, and meantime Jurgis sold himself to a contractor for a certain time, and tramped nearly four hundred miles

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THE JUNGLE

from home with a gang of men to work upon a railroad in Smolensk. This was a fearful experience, with filth and bad food and cruelty and overwork; but Jurgis stood it and came out in fine trim, and with eighty roubles sewed up in his coat. He did not drink or fight, because he was

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THE JUNGLE

from home with a gang of men to work upon a railroad in Smolensk. This was a fearful experience, with filth and bad food and cruelty and overwork; but Jurgis stood it and came out in fine trim, and with eighty roubles sewed up in his coat. He did not drink or fight, because he was thinking all the time of Ona; and for the rest, he was a quiet, steady man, who did what he was told to, did not lose his temper often, and when he did lose it made the offender anxious that he should not lose it again. When they paid him off he dodged the company gamblers and dramshops, and so they tried to kill him; but he escaped, and tramped it home, working at odd jobs, and sleeping always with one eye open.

So in the summer time they had all set out for America. At the last moment there joined them Marija Berczynskas, who was a cousin of Ona's. Marija was an orphan, and had worked since childhood for a rich farmer of Vilna, who beat her regularly. It was only at the age of twenty

Excerpts from Sinclair's *The Jungle*, 1906.

What occurred during the trip?

had worked since childhood for a rich farmer of Vilna, who beat her regularly. It was only at the age of twenty that it had occurred to Marija to try her strength, when she had risen up and nearly murdered the man, and then come away.

There were twelve in all in the party, five adults and six children—and Ona, who was a little of both. They had a hard time on the passage; there was an agent who helped them, but he proved a scoundrel, and got them into a trap with some officials, and cost them a good deal of their precious money, which they clung to with such horrible fear. This happened to them again in New York—for, of course, they knew nothing about the country, and had no one to tell them, and it was easy for a man in a blue uniform to lead them away, and to take them to a hotel and keep them there, and make them pay enormous charges to get away. The law says that the rate-card shall be on the door of a hotel, but it does not say that it shall be in Lithuanian.

Elzbieta recollected suddenly that Szedvilas had been the name of the mythical friend who had made his fortune in America. To find that he had been making it in the catessen business was an extraordinary piece of good fortune at this juncture; though it was well on in the morning, they had not breakfasted, and the children were beginning to whimper.

Thus was the happy ending of a woful voyage. The two families literally fell upon each other's necks—they had been years since Jokubas Szedvilas had met a Lithuanian from his part of Lithuania. Before half the day they were old lifelong friends. Jokubas understood all the pitfalls of this new world, and could explain all of its mysteries. He could tell them the things they ought to have done in the different emergencies—and what was still more to the point, he could tell them what to do now. He v

What occurred upon arrival?

of it one uninterrupted row of wretched little two-story frame buildings. Down every side street they could see, it was the same, — never a hill and never a hollow, but always the same endless vista of ugly and dirty little wooden buildings. Here and there would be a bridge crossing a filthy creek, with hard-baked mud shores and dingy sheds and docks along it; here and there would be a railroad crossing, with a tangle of switches, and locomotives puffing, and rattling freight-cars filing by; here and there would be a great factory, a dingy building with innumerable windows in it, and immense volumes of smoke pouring from the chimneys, darkening the air above and making filthy the earth beneath. But after each of these interruptions, the desolate procession would begin again — the procession of dreary little buildings.

A full hour before the party reached the city they had begun to note the perplexing changes in the atmosphere. It grew darker all the time, and upon the earth the grass seemed to grow less green. Every minute, as the train sped on, the colors of things became dingier; the fields were grown parched and yellow, the landscape hideous and bare. And along with the thickening smoke they began to notice another circumstance, a strange, pungent odor. They were not sure that it was unpleasant, this odor; some might have called it sickening, but their taste in odors was not developed, and they were only sure that it was curious. Now, sitting in the trolley car, they realized that they were on their way to the home of it — that they had travelled all the way from Lithuania to it. It was now no longer something far-off and faint, that you caught in whiffs; you could literally taste it, as well as smell it — you could take hold of it, almost, and examine it at your leisure. They were divided in their opinions about it. It was an elemental odor, raw and crude; it

Excerpts from Sinclair's *The Jungle*, 1906.

pay the prices that the railroad people asked them for food.

Yet, when they saw the home of the Widow Jukniene they could not but recoil, even so. In all their journey they had seen nothing so bad as this. Poni Aniele had a four-room flat in one of that wilderness of two-story frame tenements that lie "back of the yards." There were four such flats in each building, and each of the four was a "boarding-house" for the occupancy of foreigners — Lithuanians, Poles, Slovaks, or Bohemians. Some of these places were kept by private persons, some were coöperative. There would be an average of half a dozen boarders to each room — sometimes there were thirteen or fourteen to one room, fifty or sixty to a flat. Each one of the occupants furnished his own accommodations — that is, a mattress and some bedding. The mattresses would be spread upon the floor in rows — and there would be nothing else in the place except a stove. It was by no means unusual for two men to own the same mattress in common, one working by day and using it by night, and the other working at night and using it in the daytime.

take them to Poni Aniele, who kept a boarding-house the other side of the yards; old Mrs. Jukniene, he explained, had not what one would call choice accommodations, but they might do for the moment. To this Teta Elzbieta hastened to respond that nothing could be too cheap to suit them just then; for they were quite terrified over the sums they had had to expend. A very few days of practical experience in this land of high wages had been sufficient to make clear to them the cruel fact that it was also a land of high prices, and that in it the poor man was almost as poor as in any other corner of the earth; and so there vanished in a night all the wonderful dreams of wealth that had been haunting Jurgis. What had made the discovery all the more painful was that they were spending, at American prices, money which they had earned at home rates of wages — and so were really being cheated by the world! The last two days they had all but starved themselves — it made them quite sick to pay the prices that the railroad people asked them for food.

Yet, when they saw the home of the Widow Jukniene

In *King Coal* (1917), Sinclair addresses similar social and political issues as in *The Jungle* (1906), but this time, he focuses on the coal mining sector in the United States. The author underscores the brutal working environments, the exploitation, and the challenges faced by miners who influential coal companies dominate.

According to what my brother learned from our grandfather, our great-grandfather Antanas worked as a coal miner and might have used horses in the mining operations. With minimal information on how he coped and endured in his work, I kept analysing the novel to find answers to my questions.

How were coal miners perceived?

They spoke a compromise language, consisting mainly of English curse words and obscenities; the filthiness which their minds had spawned was incredible to one born and raised in the sunlight. They alleged obscenities of their mothers and their grandmothers; also of the Virgin Mary, the one mythological character they had heard of. Poor little creatures of the dark, their souls grimed and smutted even more quickly and irrevocably than their faces!

Hal had been advised by his boss to inquire for board at "Reminitzky's." He came up in the last car, at twilight, and was directed to a dimly lighted building of corrugated iron, where upon inquiry he was met by a

was to "undercut" it with a pick, and then blow it loose with a charge of powder. This meant that the miner had to lie on his side while working, and accounted for other physical peculiarities.

Thus, as always, when one understood the lives of men, one came to pity instead of despising. Here was a separate race of creatures, subterranean gnomes, pent up by society for purposes of its own. Outside in the sunshine-flooded canyon, long lines of cars rolled down with their freight of soft-coal; coal which would go to the ends of the earth, to places the miner never heard of, turning the wheels of industry whose products the miner would never

Excerpts from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.

What was the experience of being in the mines?

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KING COAL

mines. They were old mines — veritable cities tunnelled out beneath the mountains, the main passages running for miles. One day Hal stole off from his job, and took a trip with a “rope-rider,” and got through his physical senses a realisation of the vastness and strangeness and loneliness of this labyrinth of night. In Number Two mine the vein ran up at a slope of perhaps five degrees; in part of it the empty cars were hauled in long trains by an endless rope, but coming back loaded, they came of

THE DOMAIN OF KING COAL

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Valley was a place of fear. He listened to the tales of these underworld men, until it came so that he shuddered with dread each time that he went down in the cage.

There was a wire-haired and almond eyed Korean, named Cho, a “rope-rider” in Hal’s part of the mine. He was one of those who had charge of the long trains of cars, called “trips,” which were hauled through the main passage-ways; the name “rope-rider” came from the fact that he sat on the heavy iron ring to which the rope was attached. He invited Hal to a seat with him,

meant run-away cars, and fresh perils added to the everyday perils of coal-mining.

The vein varied from four to five feet in thickness; a cruelty of nature which made it necessary that the men at the “working face”—the place where new coal was being cut—should learn to shorten their stature. After Hal had squatted for a while and watched them at their tasks, he understood why they walked with head and shoulders bent over and arms hanging down, so that, seeing

Excerpts from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.

What were the challenges associated with coal mining work conditions?

you would never have guessed that the preacher had a body, which was nourished by food produced by the over-worked and under-nourished wage-slaves whom he taught!

§ 14. For the most part the victims of this system were cowed and spoke of their wrongs only in whispers; but there was one place in the camp, Hal found, where they could not keep silence, where their sense of outrage battled with their fear. This place was the solar plexus of the mine-organism, the centre of its nervous energies; to change the simile, it was the judgment-seat, where the miner had sentence passed upon him — sentence either to plenty, or to starvation and despair.

This place was the “tipple,” where the coal that came out of the mine was weighed and recorded. Every digger, as he came from the cage, made for this spot. There was a bulletin-board, and on it his number, and the record of

with gestures to explain what he meant. “Load cars, Bang! Bust like hell!”

Hal knew that the mountain air in this region was famous for its dryness; he learned now that the quality which meant life to invalids from every part of the world meant death to those who toiled to keep the invalids warm. Driven through the mines by great fans, this air took out every particle of moisture, and left coal dust so thick and dry that there were fatal explosions from the mere friction of loading-shovels. So it happened that these mines were killing several times as many men as other mines throughout the country.

Was there no remedy for this, Hal asked, talking with

Excerpts from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.

Once, only last year, there had been an accident of that sort. A young mule-driver, a Croatian, told Hal about it while they sat munching the contents of their dinner-pails. The first cage-load of men had gone down into the mine, sullenly protesting; and soon afterwards some one had taken down a naked light, and there had been an explosion which had sounded like the blowing up of the inside of the world. Eight men had been killed, the force of the explosion being so great that some of the bodies had been wedged between the shaft wall and the cage, and it had been necessary to cut them to pieces to get them out. It was them Japs that were to blame, vowed Hal's informant. They hadn't ought to turn them loose in coal mines, for the devil himself couldn't keep a Jap from sneaking off to get a smoke.

So Hal understood how North Valley was a place of fear. What tales the old chambers of these mines could have told, if they had had voices! Hal watched the throngs pouring in to their labours, and reflected that according to the statisticians of the government eight or nine of every thousand of them were destined to die violent deaths before a year was out, and some thirty more would be badly injured. And they knew this, they knew it better than all the statisticians of the government; yet they went to their tasks! Reflecting upon this, Hal was full of wonder. What was the force that kept men at such a task? Was it a sense of duty? Did they understand that society had to have coal and that some one had to do the "dirty work" of providing it? Did they have a vision of a future, great and wonderful, which was to grow out of their ill-requited toil? Or were they simply fools or cowards, submitting blindly, because they had not the wit nor the will to do otherwise? Curiosity held him, he wanted to understand the inner souls of these silent and patient armies which through the ages have surrendered their lives to other men's control.

In Number Two mine a man was caught in this way. He stumbled as he ran, and the lower half of his body was pinned fast; the doctor had to come and pump opiates into him, while the rescue crew was digging him loose. The first Hal knew of the accident was when he saw the body stretched out on a plank, with a couple of old sacks to cover it. He noticed that nobody stopped for a second glance. Going up from work, he asked his friend Madvik, the mule driver, who answered, "Lit'uanian feller — got mash." And that was all. Nobody knew him, and nobody cared about him.

It happened that Mike Sikoria had been working nearby, and was one of those who helped to get the victim out. Mike's negro "buddy" had been in too great haste to get some of the rock out of the way, and had got his hand crushed, and would not be able to work for a month

or so. Mike told Hal about it, in his broken English. It was a terrible thing to see a man trapped like that, gasping, his eyes almost popping out of his head. Fortunately he was a young fellow, and had no family.

Hal asked what they would do with the body; the answer was they would bury him in the morning. The company had a piece of ground up the canyon.

"But won't they have an inquest?" he inquired.

"Inques'?" repeated the other. "What's he?"

"Doesn't the coroner see the body?"

The old Slovak shrugged his bowed shoulders; if there was a coroner in this part of the world, he had never heard of it; and he had worked in a good many mines, and seen a good many men put under the ground. "Put him in a box and dig a hole," was the way he described the pro-

quit.

Hal did not quit; but he would drag himself out towards night, so exhausted that he would fall asleep in the cage. He would fall asleep at supper, and go in and sink down on his cot and sleep like a log. And oh, the torture of being routed out before daybreak! Having to shake the sleep out of his head, and move his creaking joints, and become aware of the burning in his eyes, and the blisters and sores on his hands!

and nobody ever saw him again. After that they put a door onto the weigh-room, so that no one could see the scales.

The more Hal listened to the men and reflected upon these things, the more he came to see that the miner was a contractor who had no opportunity to determine the size of the contract before he took it on, nor afterwards to determine how much work he had done. More than that, he was obliged to use supplies, over the price and measurements of which he had no control. He used powder, and would find himself docked at the end of the month for a

Excerpts from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.

What was the salary of a coal miner?

trick by which a miner was cheated of his earnings. A miner was a little business man, a contractor, who took a certain job, with its expenses and its chance of profit or loss. A "place" was assigned to him by the boss — and he undertook to get out the coal from it, being paid at the

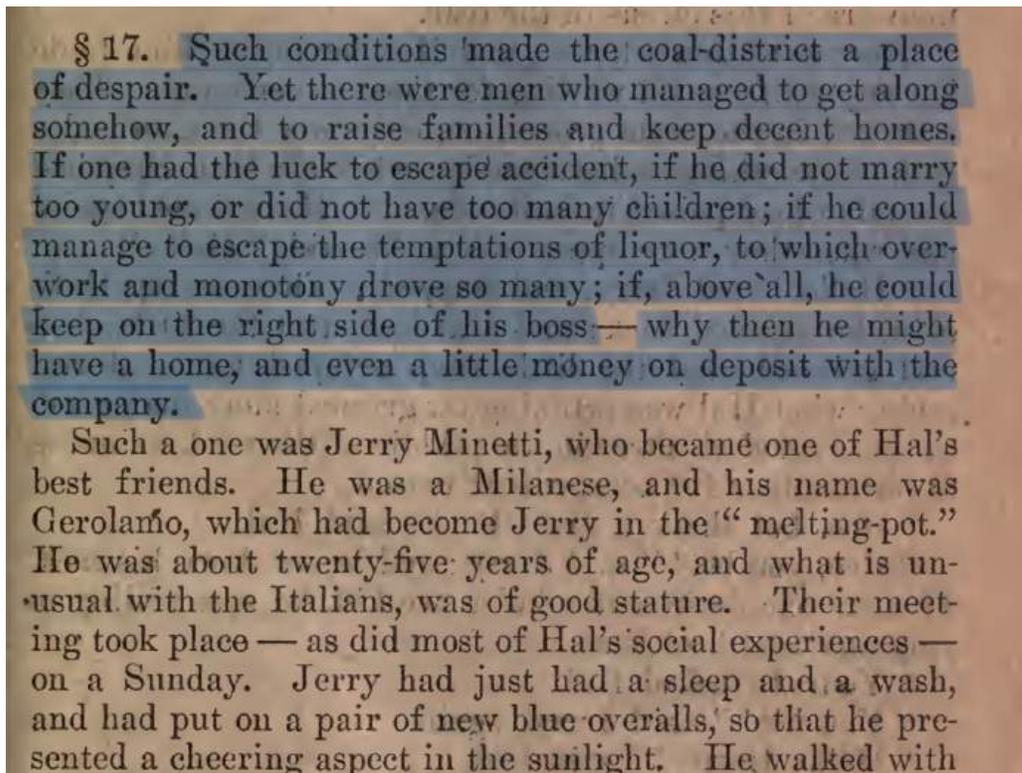
THE DOMAIN OF KING COAL

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rate of fifty-five cents a ton for each ton of clean coal. In some "places" a man could earn good money, and in others he would work for weeks, and not be able to keep up with his store-account.

Excerpts from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.

How did he succeed in working under those conditions for such an extended period?



Excerpts from Sinclair's *King Coal*, 1917.

Each page of these novels is filled with repetitive depictions of hardship and toil, and I began to envision the reality my great-grandfather encountered in such situations. Nonetheless, *King Coal* (1917) elucidates the reasons for my great-grandfather's four-decade tenure in the States without initiating a family. According to the author, it was significantly more manageable to remain family-free, maintain amicable relations with his employer, and evade alcohol and depression, thereby enabling him to survive and conserve financial resources. This leads me to believe that his life in America revolved around work and survival, which adds an even more sombre tone to his story.

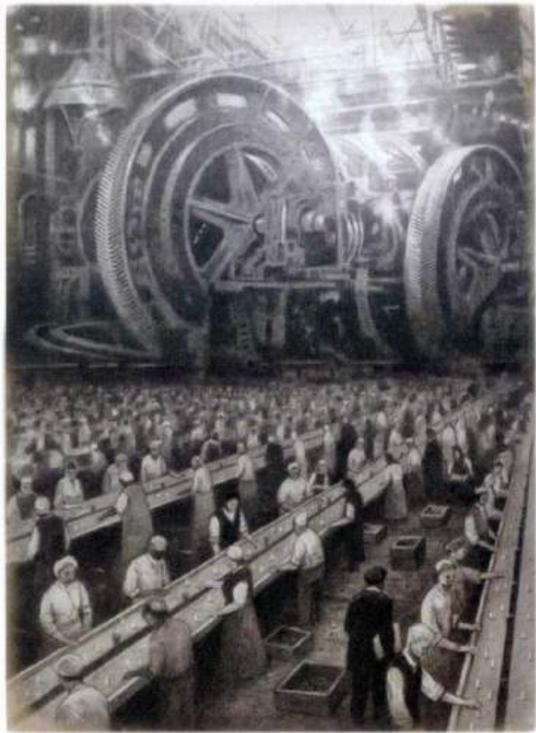
Throughout my reading process, I practised sketching to advance my creative efforts and ensure that my ideas were transferred to paper.



Images from my sketchbook



Images from Tan's *The Arrival*, 2007.



Images from Tan's *The Arrival*, 2007.

Building on this example, I was eager to keep delving into sequential illustrations for my project. Furthermore, my goal was to evoke nostalgia by utilising classic techniques and focusing on unadorned moments, enriching them through an emotional perspective.

While browsing the internet, I found a graphic novel titled *The Runways: Across the Sea to America* by Justinas Zilinskas and Ula Sveikauskaite (2022). While it bears thematic resemblances to Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2007), this novel resonates more closely with the story of my great-grandfather, offering a distinctive cultural and political perspective. I truly appreciated the selection of colours in this illustrative piece, particularly the use of green and the interaction between positive and negative spaces, which I think contributes depth to the narrative. The dynamic flow of the sequence, with subtle variations, kept my interest intact. As you delve deeper into the novel, it reveals the depth of rural existence. The enhanced pencil details evoke a raw emotional quality in the nature scenes, contrasting with the more static portrayals of individuals. This juxtaposition may symbolise freedom in the landscape, as opposed to the individuals striving to attain that freedom.

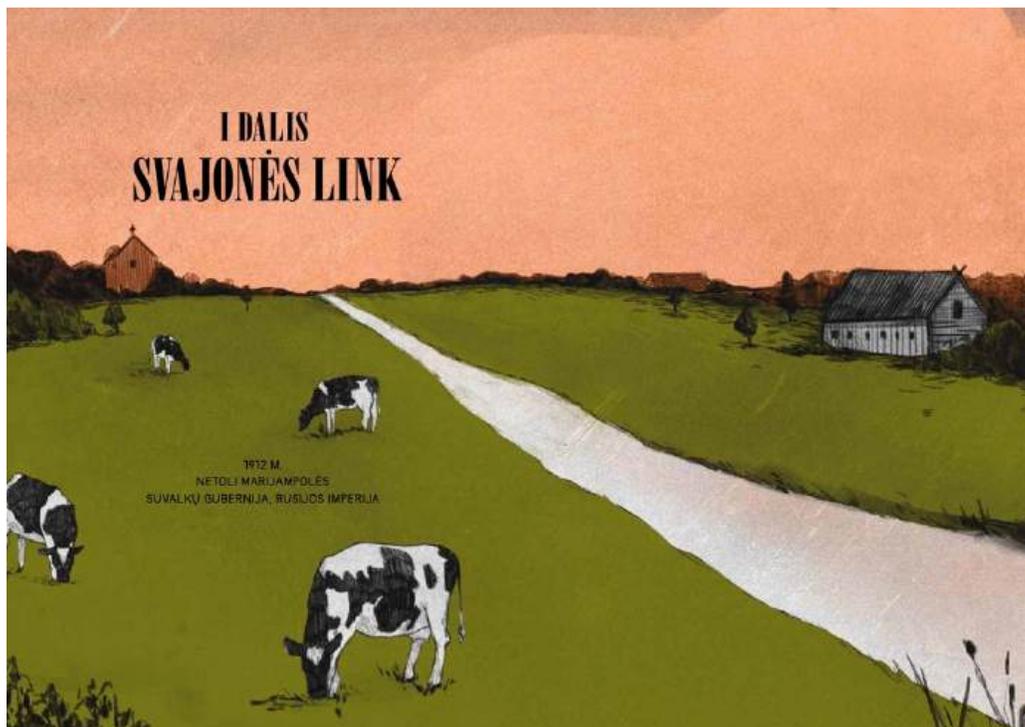
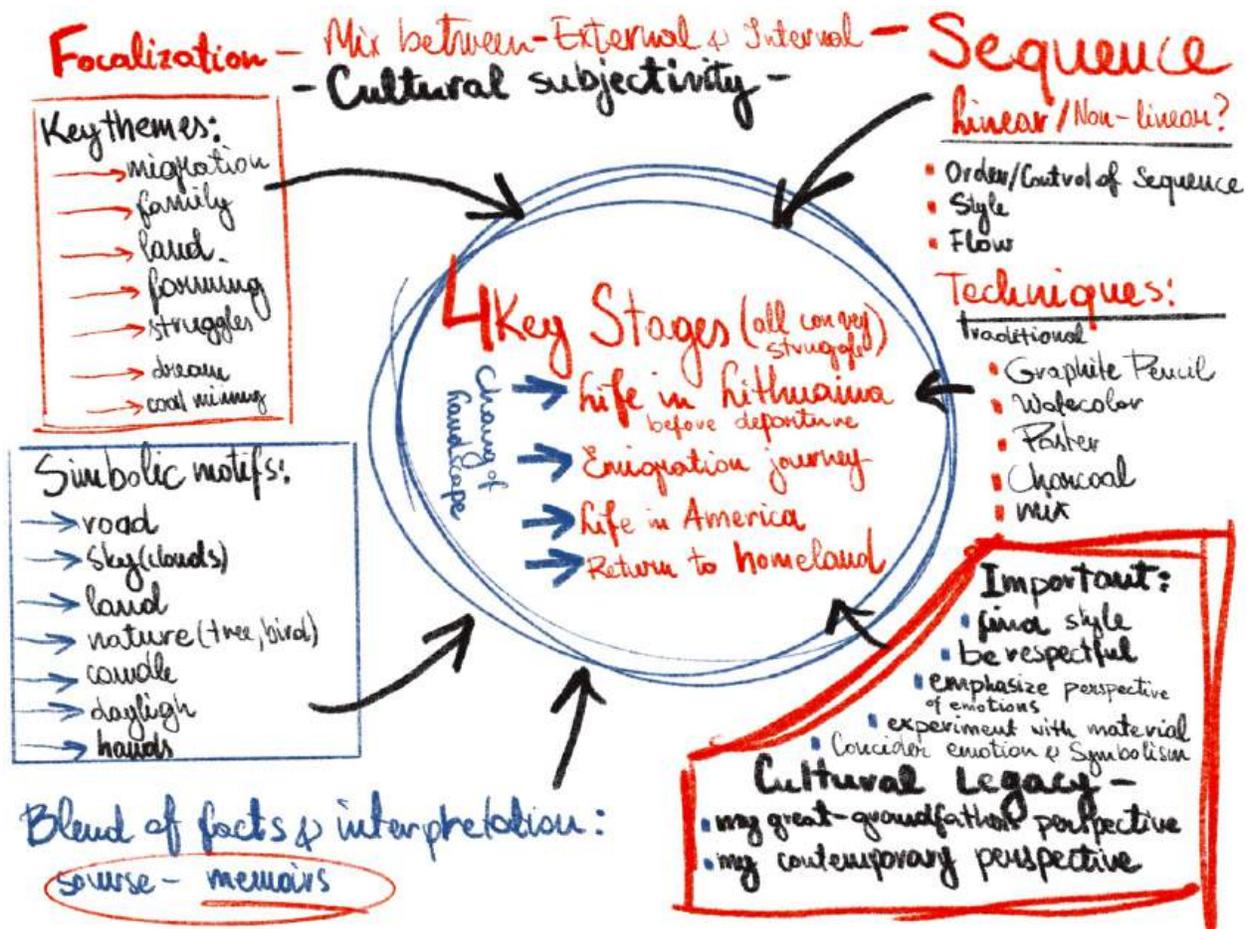


Image from Zilinskas graphic novel *The Runways: Across the Sea to America*, 2022.

The Narrative's Visual Construction

The initial oral accounts my mother and brother shared on my great-grandfather's emigration journey were somewhat lacking in detail. Nonetheless, multiple sources I investigated offered much of the previously lacking information, aided in confirming and clarifying details, and situated the narrative within a broader cultural context. Armed with this information, I discovered that it was simpler to craft the storyline and refine the character's development by employing the technique of focalisation.

In the book *Illustration Research Methods* by Rachel Gannon (2021), I encountered an Authorial practice framework that described how to handle conceptual construction and visual interpretation. In Authorial practice, focalisation refers to the perspective from which a narrative is presented. Because of my connection to the story, I deliberately aimed to manage the narrative's structure and development to impart a unique quality. Through my cultural subjectivity, I could pinpoint essential themes and values based on the research conducted.

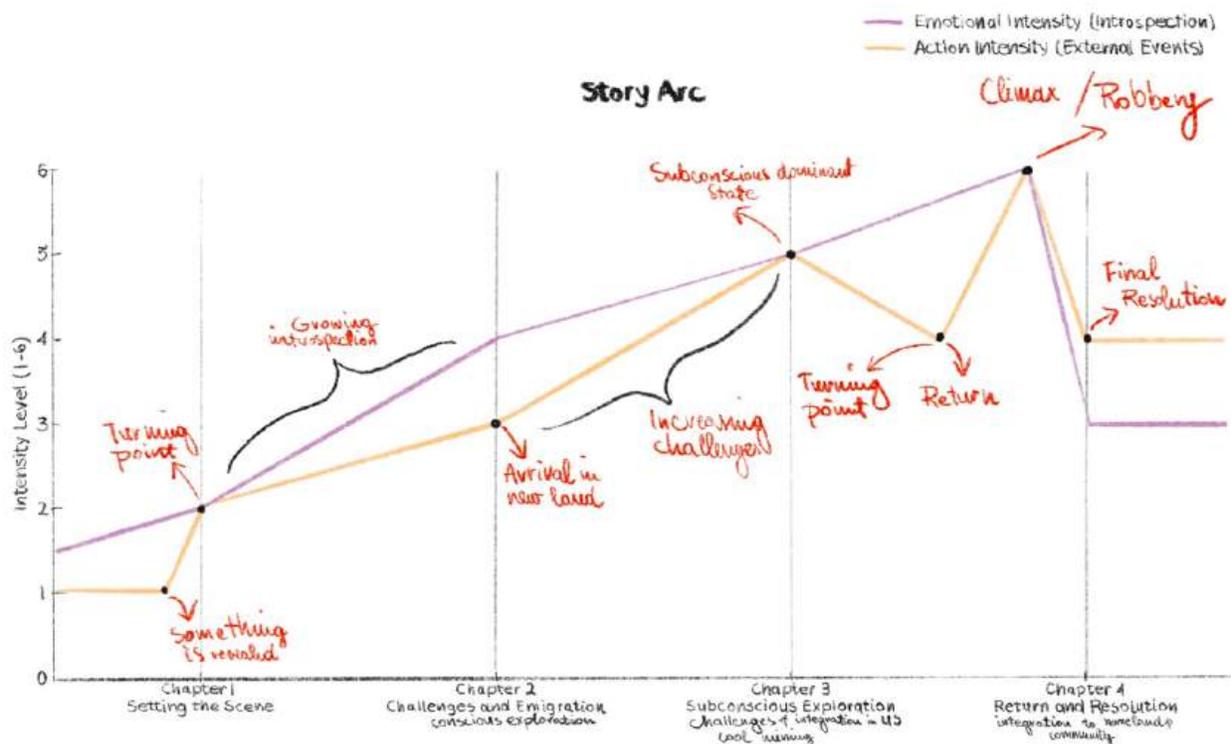


Mind map, image from my digital sketchbook

Upon further reflection, I understood that significant phases of my great-grandfather's life could be amplified and function as four chapters in a book. These phases particularly captivate my interest:

- Life in Lithuania before his departure
- Emigration journey
- Life in America
- Return to homeland

By breaking the story into chapters, I found more space for interpretation. Each chapter will illustrate my great-grandfather at a distinct age, revealing his emotions through changing viewpoints. Therefore, I aimed to highlight the evolving perspective of feelings influenced by his life experiences. Given that the land plays a crucial role in Anatana's narrative, I aimed to illustrate how the evolving landscape, shifting from agricultural to industrial, would profoundly affect his mental state. As a result, with each action and heightened challenge, his emotional condition and self-reflection would be further influenced.

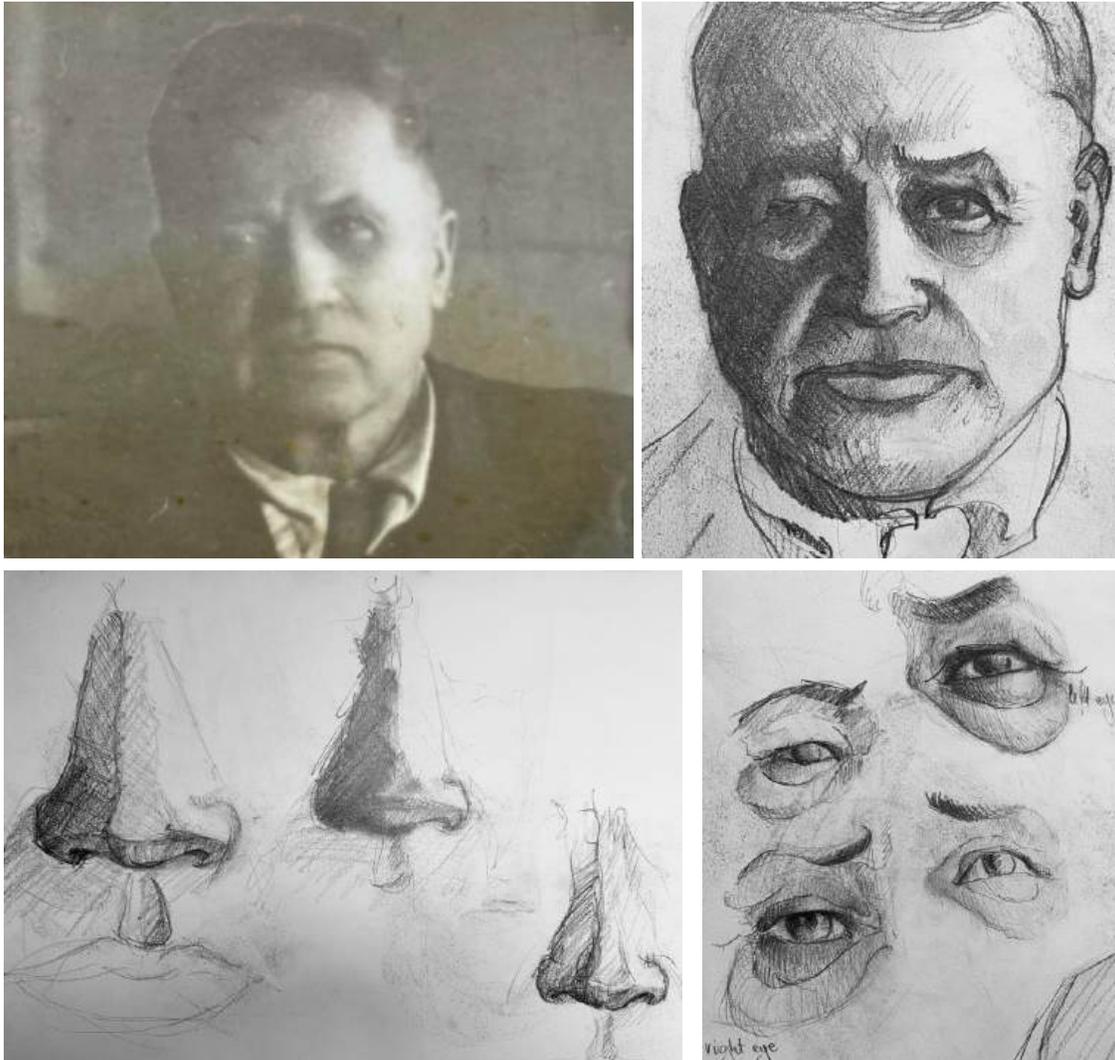


Story arc, image from my digital sketchbook

Although this framework does not precisely mirror the original narratives and may encourage imaginative speculation, this organisation would challenge my artistic abilities and creative thinking. The story arc helped me visualise the overall intent from beginning to end. Although it does not depict minor occurrences, it can still illustrate the progression of the narrative across four chapters.

Character Development

From this point onward, I dedicated most of my time to visual work, beginning with character design. I started by analysing and isolating the facial features of my great-grandfather. The most distinctive characteristics that make a person recognisable are the eyes, nose, head shape, lips, and ears. I was unearthing these characteristics and attempting to locate them since, although the head shape was apparent in the image, one side of the face was shrouded in an intense shadow. As a painter, I've dedicated many years to capturing faces, and I've observed that the key feature that gives a face uniqueness is its asymmetry. This is what I attempt to discern in the sole surviving photograph of my great-grandfather.



Images from my archives and sketchbook

Although the results were imperfect, I could grasp his features quite well. The next challenge was to analyse his characteristics from a profile perspective, considering aspects like the length of his nose, the roundness of his head, and the shape of his jawline.

The profile image yields satisfactory results. However, not all elements conform to my preferences. Through these images, I have realised that pursuing perfection is not the primary objective. I intended to familiarise myself with his characteristics and incorporate them into illustrations so I could portray him in a more youthful manner.



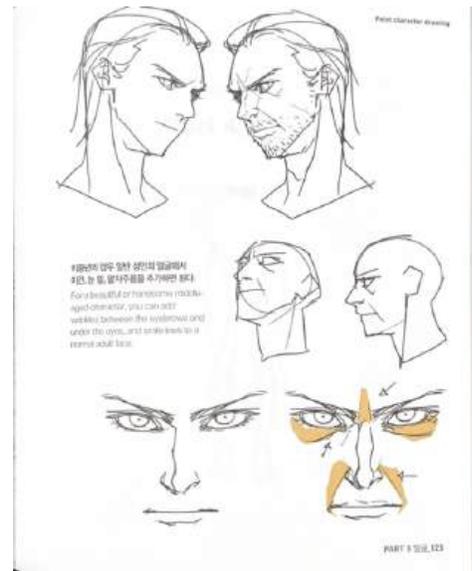
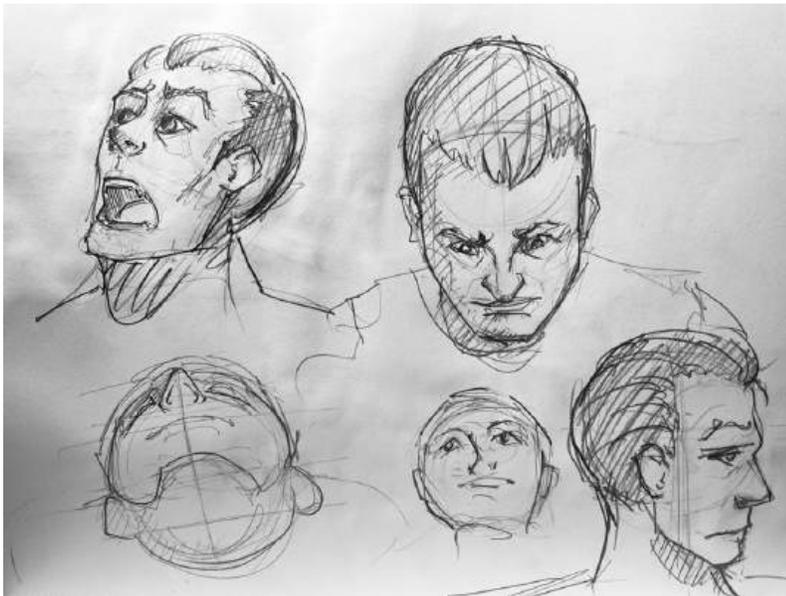
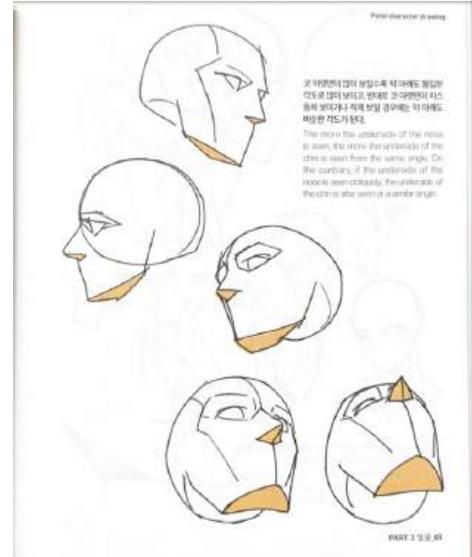
Image from my sketchbook

I attempted to illustrate my great-grandfather at different stages of his life in one image, displayed side by side. The figure on the left represents him in his 20s to 30s, the figure on the far right depicts him in his 40s, and the middle figure shows him in his 50s to 60s.



Image from my sketchbook

Based on my observations, his most notable characteristics include tightly shut eyes with thick eyelids, the contour of his brow, the downward slant of his lip corners, and a defined jawline that gives him a serious expression. He was a striking young man, notably tall, similar to my grandfather's height.



Images from my sketchbook

Images from *Point Character Drawing* by Taco, 2021.

I continued refining his features throughout the sketching process because, this time, I had to focus on expressions and hairline while trying out various facial shapes and viewpoints. I struggle with consistency, and this requires practice.

Project Development

I collected numerous resources and outlined the narrative as part of my preparatory efforts. Since the project covers various aspects of illustration and has a broad scope, I aim to maintain clarity by discussing each visual chapter individually. I intentionally planned to create each chapter using a different creative method to match the medium to each segment's emotional and narrative focus. I aimed to enhance the storytelling and reflect on my great-grandfather's evolving experience and perspective.

Chapter 1. Youth and Life Before Emigration

This first chapter sets the story's emotional tone, weaving together themes of agriculture, community, and the deep connection to nature. Through the subtle, almost imperceptible changes in the landscape, I wanted to show a growing sense of introspection. Once fertile and full of promise, the land now reflects the weight of a looming decision to emigrate—a choice heavy with hope and sorrow. As the environment shifts, so do the emotions of those tied to it, revealing the complex interplay between place, identity, and the pull of an uncertain future.

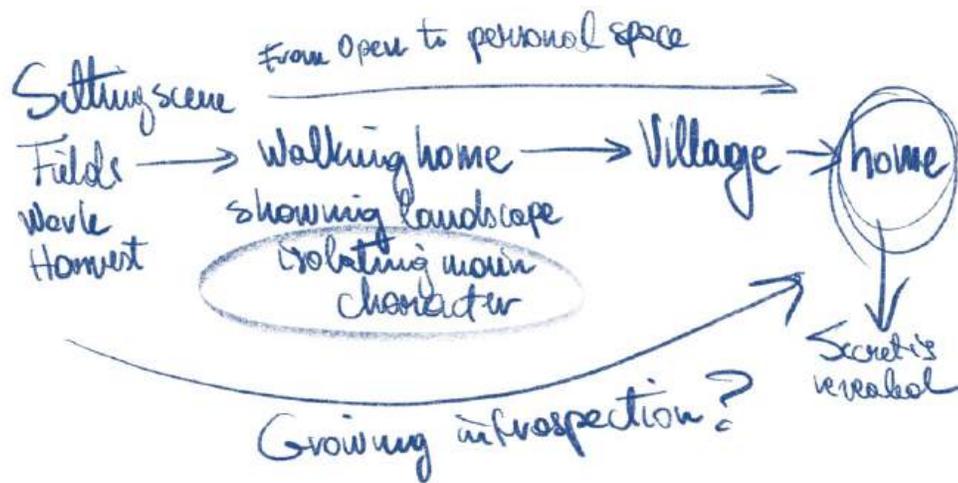


Image from my sketchbook

The journey to articulating these ideas was not straightforward. Crafting the first chapter proved particularly challenging, requiring a focus on various technical aspects. However, I have come to appreciate the unpredictability of materials. I started with the conviction that setting the scene is essential, managing technical obstacles and exploring ways to make progress.

I relied heavily on reference images and brainstorming to create emotionally resonant and thematically rich visuals.

While reviewing some of the reference imagery, I noticed the enchanting qualities of Lithuanian landscapes. These landscapes are unpretentious, marked by expansive open fields, surrounding forests, and a few modest houses and trees in the village. Nevertheless, the restricted yet vibrant colours enhance their sense of calm.



Rural scenes from the Lithuanian Ethnographic Museum in Rumsiskes, images from my archives

I noticed subtle natural elements that added a sense of calm and intrigue, such as the gentle wind or the interplay of shadow and light. Most importantly, the camera's movement in some images introduced a sensation of blurriness, which felt evocative. This effect is as if the water in the air contributed to the atmosphere I wanted to capture in my work. The blurriness was not just a technical artefact – it was integral to creating the feeling of depth and impermanence that alights with a vision of memory as fluid and transient.



Rural scenes from the Lithuanian Ethnographic Museum in Rumsiskes, images from my archives

I experimented with various mediums and engaged in practical drawing while observing reference images, hoping to uncover ideas for capturing my vision. I focused on elements of nature and rural landscapes. While I appreciated all the traditional mediums, I found a particular nostalgia when working with coloured pencils—mainly when employed in a more impressionistic style. However, this approach would be more fitting for further story development.



Image from my sketchbook

I continued experimenting with watercolour, using an expressive approach. I enjoyed layering graphite pencils with watercolour, allowing the pencil strokes to show through. Ink appeared to work quite well, but it felt too expected, and, in a way, these images lacked warmth.



Image from my sketchbook

I continued to seek further progression in agricultural scenes. Agriculture served as my family's primary source of income, alongside various other jobs. Traditional harvesting methods—whether by hand or with a scythe—were cherished during my upbringing. My father and eldest brother are the last family members proficient in using the traditional scythe, so I aimed to depict this labour. Reference imagery helped to see physical movements in motion, along with the garments of the era and other environmental features typical of the late 19th century.

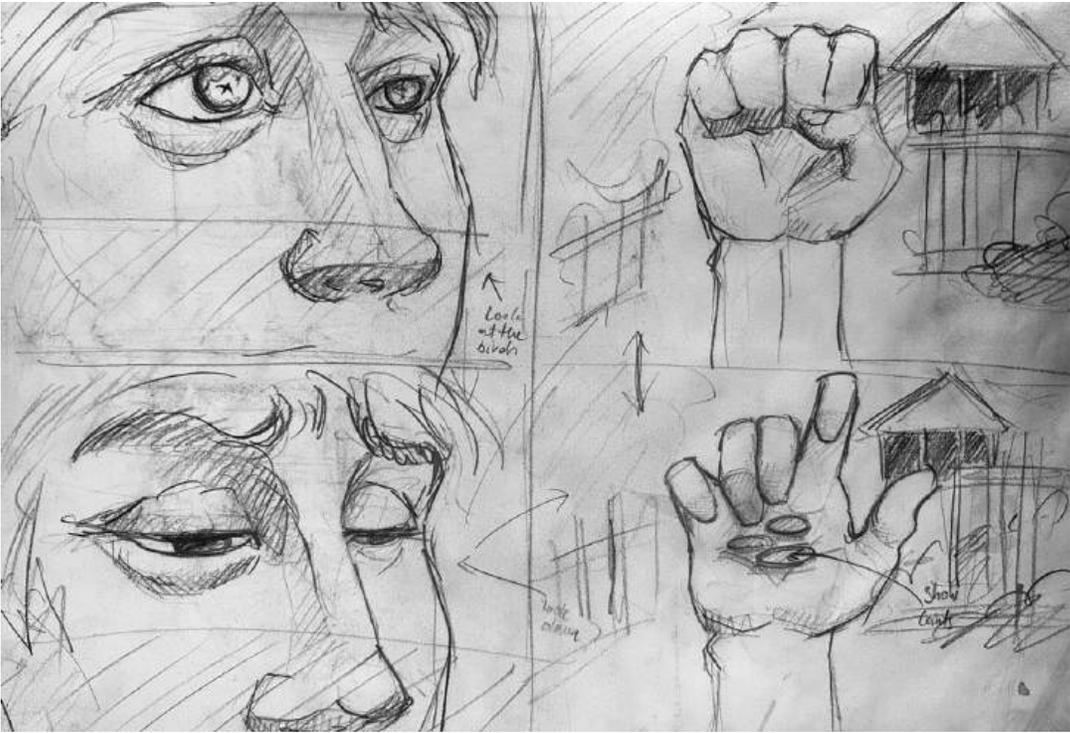


Agricultural reference images sourced from my Pinterest archives

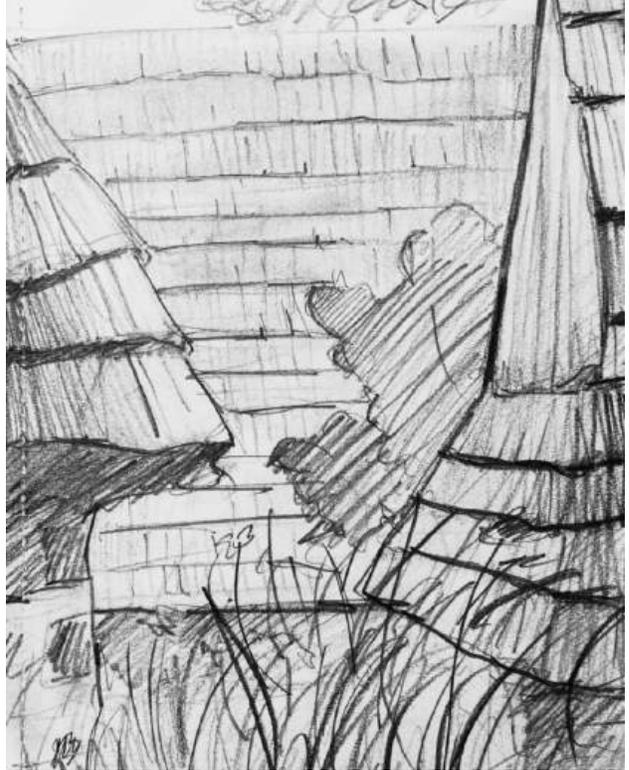


Agricultural reference images sourced from my Pinterest archives

Drawing inspiration from diverse agricultural and rural lifestyle reference images, I sketched extensively to shape and outline a narrative visually. This approach allowed me to develop compositions for various scenes and actions. Additionally, through storyboarding, I could organise and adjust the sequence of events throughout the process.



Images from my archives and sketchbook



Images from my sketchbook

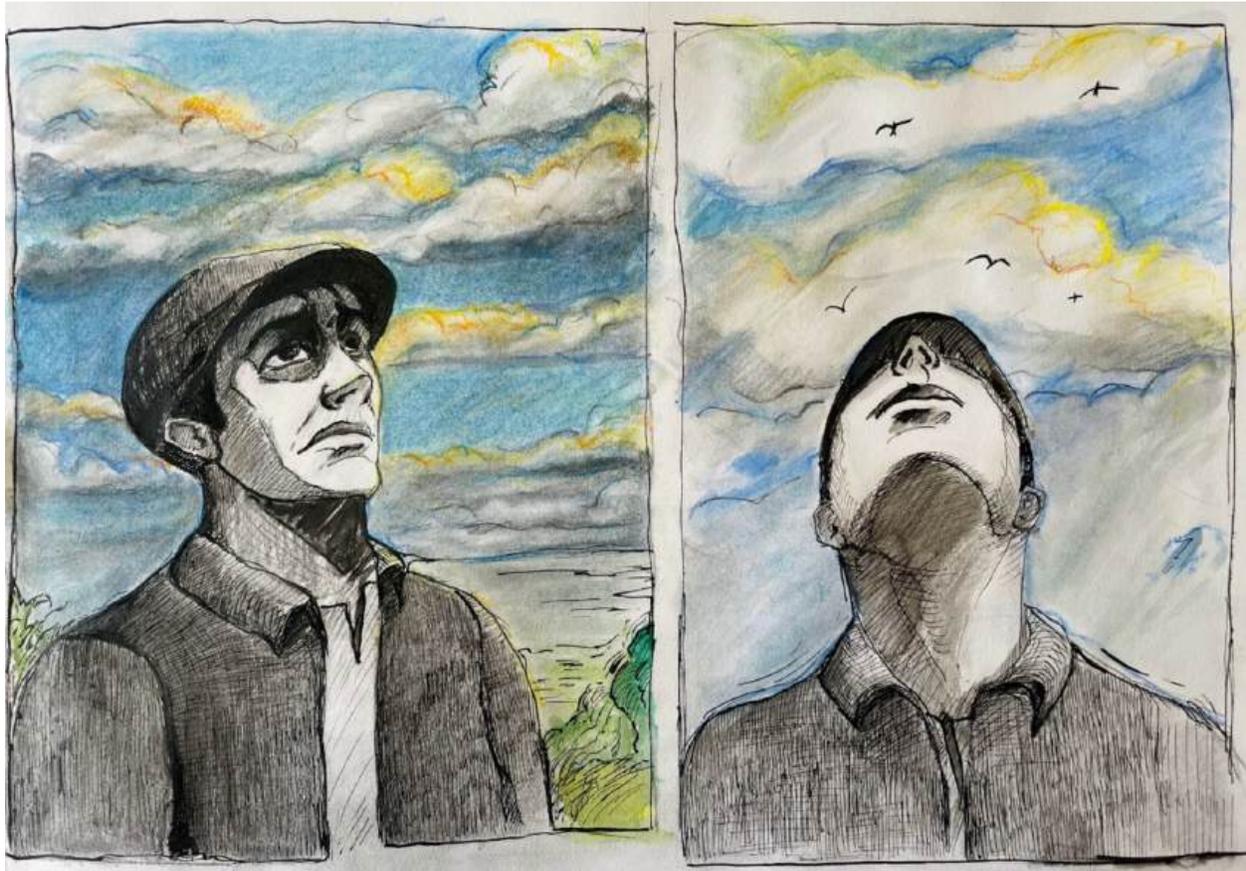
In my ongoing practice, I created more sequential images while exploring various mediums, such as graphite, watercolour, pencil, and soft pastel. I experimented with layering these techniques to observe how they interact. Some images resonated with me, though not always positively. Some compositions felt too overwhelming, leaving my eyes uncertain where to focus. The photos also lacked the softened effect and a sense of nostalgic memory.



Images from my sketchbook

I realised that excessive layering of various techniques can undermine my ability to control the medium effectively. As an artist, I understand that each method requires a different approach. For instance, watercolour can be manipulated by varying the amount of water used, which influences how the colour spreads and can be lifted if needed. This also involves brush control and layering techniques. In contrast, soft pastel requires control through applied pressure, blending tools, and strategies, including erasing and using a dry cloth. As I experimented with these mediums, I found it challenging to manage them simultaneously since each demanded various levels of attention. Upon reviewing my drawings, I noticed they appeared too cartoonish while I was aiming for a hint of realism.

Further, I confronted yet another dilemma concerning my technical approach. I decided to isolate the character using ink and depict the surrounding landscape using a contrasting medium. While the concept effectively isolates the character, it needs further refinement. The two contrasting mediums required challenging one another and visually harmonising. Although this seemed almost impossible, I was determined to achieve it.



Images from my sketchbook

I created several iterations of the same image at this stage to facilitate a comparative analysis. I sketched a man walking home and then layered it with watercolour.

I used soft pastel techniques in the first version to create a vivid and detailed composition. In contrast, for the second version, I exercised greater control over the watercolour medium, intentionally limiting the application of colour to create the illusion of light interacting with the surfaces of the grass and filtering through the trees.

While the first image appeared more vibrant, the second conveyed a sense of intentionality, resulting in a deeper emotional resonance when the figure was portrayed against a muted background. Both figures were rendered using ink to explore how an ink-only character idea would look in these images. The first image obscured the figure within the surrounding vibrancy, whereas the second made it more distinct, establishing a stronger emotional connection with the viewer.



Images from my sketchbook

I decided to continue developing this concept by creating images that depict the man working and walking home from different distances. Each image featured a soft, washed-out watercolour background, while sharp graphite pencil lines added a sense of structure. The figure was outlined with expressive ink lines, enhancing the overall composition.



Images from my sketchbook

The intention was to prioritise expression and atmosphere over strict technical precision to evoke an organic feeling. Using watercolour and graphite pencil, I developed a muted, earthy palette that beautifully conveys a nostalgic and grounded atmosphere, embodying themes of nature, community, and rural life. I lifted excess pigment using a dry brush technique, creating a subtle interplay of light and shadow. Although not overly precise, this approach contributes to a strong sense of place and emotional tone—particularly in the indoor and dusk scenes.



Image from my sketchbook

Incorporating environmental details, I aim to establish a narrative momentum that encourages viewers to journey alongside the character. By shifting environments, I reflect on the emotional transitions throughout the story. After completing all four chapters, I want to focus on tighter framing, reimagining, and altering the narrative flow to enhance the pacing and viewing experience.



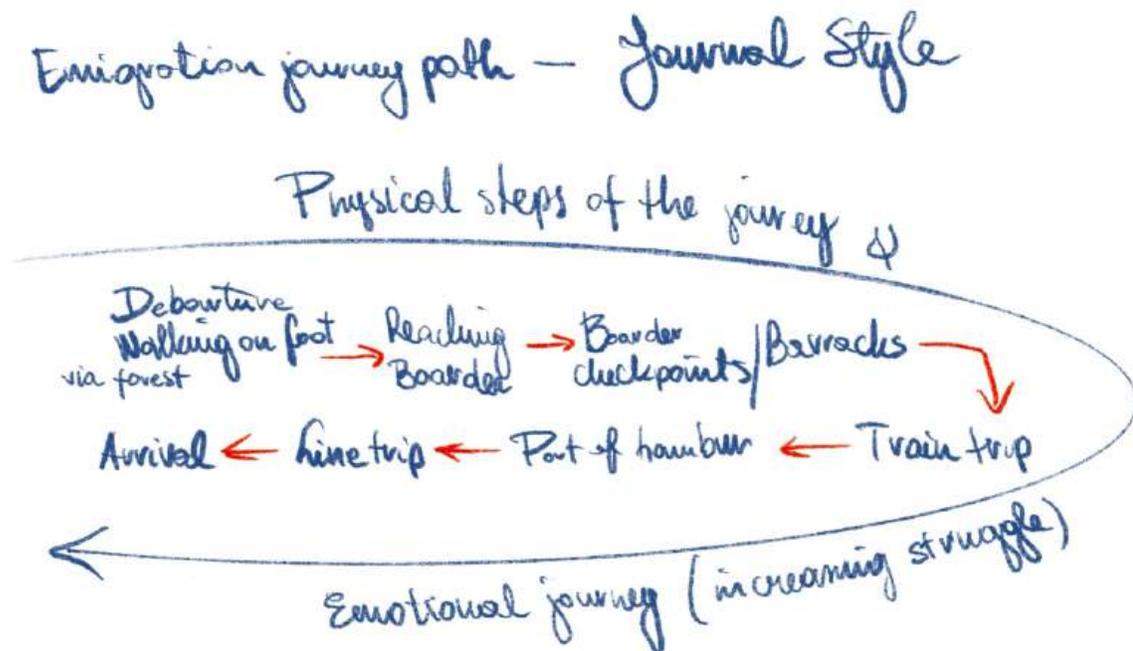
Image from my sketchbook



Images from my sketchbook

Chapter 2. The Journey from Lithuania to the United States

The second chapter revolves around themes of migration, the historical significance of travel, and personal memories. In contrast to the first chapter, this segment expands to encompass a broader world, emphasising collective experiences and how individual journeys are perceived within a communal framework. From the outset, I aimed to employ a journal style to give my great-grandfather a space to process his thoughts, fears and hopes in real time. By reinterpreting my thoughts, I aimed to show a longing for order amidst the chaos and a wish to bring clarity to the turmoil surrounding him. The shifting physical environment reflects his emotional condition, as shown by the evolving style of the coloured pencil work and handwriting. Through uncovered details in my research, I wanted to show the physical steps of my great-grandfather's travel and the tensions he felt between the inner world and external reality.



Images from my digital sketchbook

The choice of a journal format allowed me to embrace unpredictable moments and the emotions that may influence artistic control. I decided this chapter would not be visually perfect nor showcase a polished technique. Instead, it would highlight the changing and evolving methods of drawing and handwriting that reflect shifting mental and emotional states. As I tried to navigate this next part of my great-grandfather's life, about which I have little to no detail, I relied on collective experiences and imagined walking in his shoes. I recorded these thoughts daily while reading and envisioning each aspect of this challenging journey.

I did not plan to make a storyboard since I intended to draw spontaneously as if I only had a few fleeting moments or a small piece of parchment. However, I realised that I still needed to reflect on the path and direction of the journey to understand the difficulty my great-grandfather faced each step of the way. While looking at various maps illustrating Lithuanian emigration, I contemplated the total travel time, direction, and transportation, which might range from 20 to 40 days, encompassing walking, train travel, waiting, and the voyage itself.



Image from Eidinas book *Lithuania and Mass Emigration in 1868-2020*, 2021.

People would have travelled several days to the nearest customs border control station for sanitary inspections, immigration processing, and other checks. Unfortunately, I do not know where my grandfather grew up or lived before his departure, making identifying the station he used challenging. While the Tilze and Eikūnai stations provided the safest routes, the Tilze post was closer to Germany, where major stations and ports were. My great-grandfather was astute enough to plan his journey to minimise resource expenditure and physical strain, so he likely chose the more straightforward and safer route.

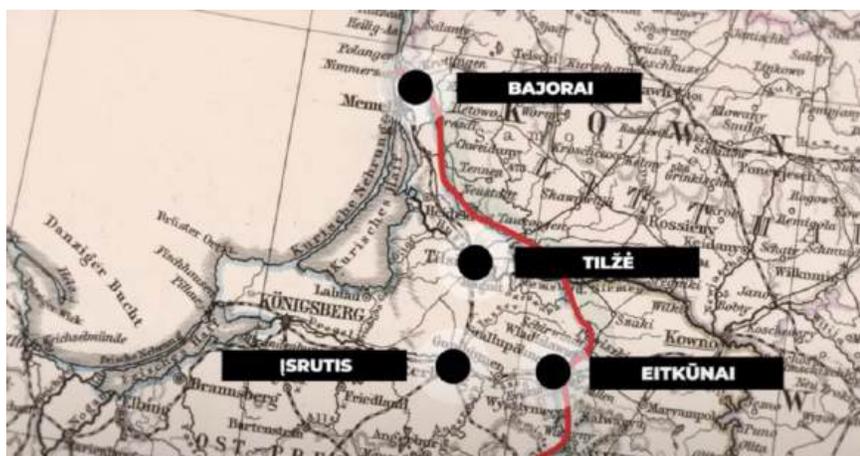


Image from the virtual exhibition at Lithuanian Sea Museum *Towards the American Dream*, 2022.

Thus, the train journey spanned hundreds of miles and, due to delays and stops, typically took a minimum of five to seven days to reach the significant port of Hamburg. Many individuals encountered additional delays and prolonged waiting times resulting from medical assessments and ticket acquisitions. Historians note that delays were common due to the many people at the ports.

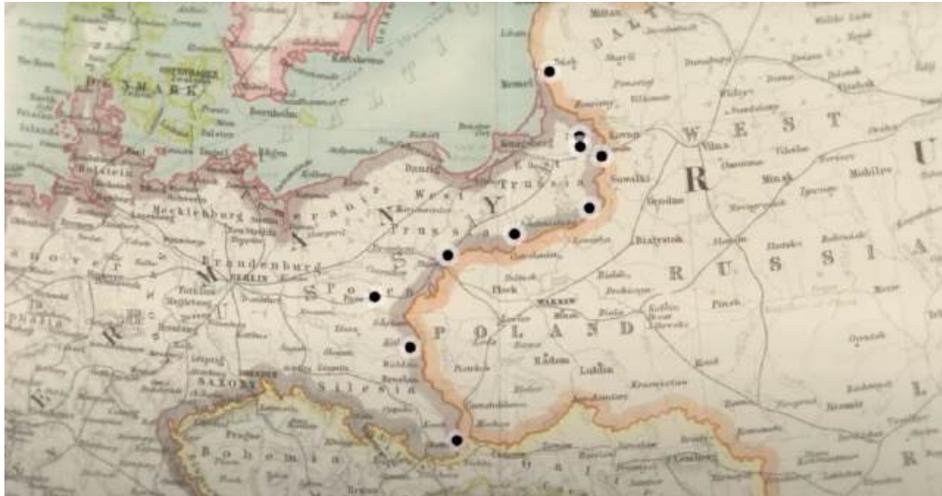


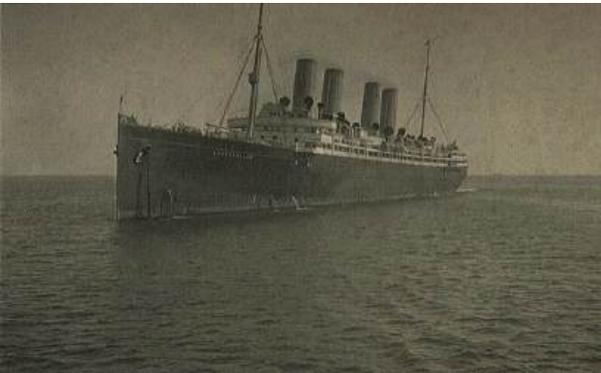
Image from the virtual exhibition at Lithuanian Sea Museum *Towards the American Dream*, 2022.

The final stage involves crossing the Atlantic on steamships, which, despite being the quickest travel method, still takes ten to fourteen days. This journey brought uncomfortable situations due to large groups of people, limited food availability, ongoing exhaustion, illness, and even death. From what I gather, this experience transformed the lives of many. Although arduous, my great-grandfather maintained enough passion to persevere and discover happiness in the most straightforward and difficult moments.



Image from the virtual exhibition at Lithuanian Sea Museum *Towards the American Dream*, 2022.

The aspects of emigration in the late 19th century that captivated my interest included steamliners, voyages, and diverse crowds of people. I find it challenging to draw complex crowd scenes due to the multitude of movements and facial expressions, which complicate the composition. Additionally, I am not particularly adept at rendering vehicles, as they demand precision in capturing intricate details. For this reason, reference imagery has been vital to me.



Late 19th-century emigration reference images sourced from my Pinterest archives

I have been immersed in the visual diaries of artists who often depict landscapes and people encountered during their travels. These intimate works, created in ink and pencil, showcase their artistic talents and capture meaningful moments. Through this exploration, I have realised that visual journals are profoundly personal and offer an expansive creative outlet for self-expression.



Artist sketchbook by Cusack in *An Illustrative Life*, 2011.



Artist sketchbook by Rodriguez in *An Illustrative Life*, 2011.



Artist sketchbook by Jean in *An Illustrative Life*, 2011.

To find my flow of expression, I began by testing materials and drawing techniques to isolate the best approach. Envisioning that my great-grandfather kept a travel journal prompts me to reflect on the simple tools he might have carried. Considering the best medium for travel in the late 19th century, colour pencils would have offered a practical and portable solution despite not being the cheapest option. Given the desperate times he lived in, it is possible he got pencils through necessity, finding or even stealing them before his journey.



Image from my sketchbook

I imagined that he would have brought a small bottle of ink and either a bird feather or a small twig to write with, which could have shaped his writing style and the emotions he experienced. While I acknowledge that this involves some speculation that fuels my imagination, it has helped me plan my work.

My initial attempts were in a small, bound book. I sketched in a particular style but soon transitioned to more impressionistic pencil lines.



Images from my sketchbook

Despite my efforts, I struggled to find my desired rhythm and composition. Therefore, I ended up creating individual images and scenes. I wanted to develop a cohesive composition by applying techniques and principles articulated by artist Ian Roberts (2020), such as considering the viewer's perspective and making intentional choices, whether they be mistakes or details that engage the observer and draw them into the artwork. In my initial efforts, I approached my work cautiously, guided by my uncertainty, which led me to employ more straightforward techniques. As a result, these images lacked depth.

Acknowledging my mistakes, I created more dynamic images and textured compositions featuring richer shading and expressive pencil work. I found it essential to soften unbalanced areas to better direct the viewer's attention. Using a modelling knife and a kneadable eraser, I successfully removed colour in parts that needed modification, resulting in more nostalgic and vintage images.

The handwriting style varied according to the context and setting within the narrative. Specific visuals showcased smooth, cohesive flows with a deliberate tempo, while others were purposefully untidy and chaotic. These changes are subtly evident. In particular images, I intentionally combined water with ink to illustrate the fragility of traditional methods during more turbulent moments.

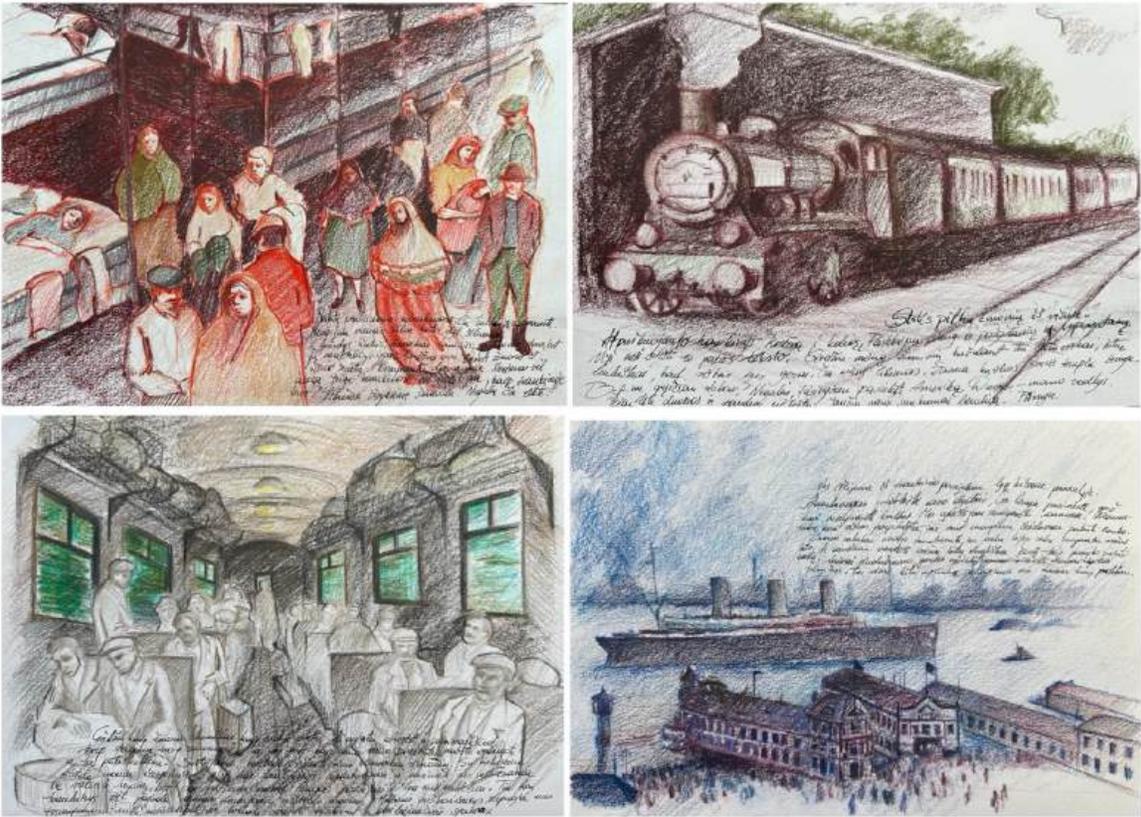


Illustration images from my sketchbooks

I appreciate how these flawed images embody aspects of contemplation and introspection. The changing intensity of the colour is intended to mirror the spectrum of emotions, from their peaks to their lows. I wanted to show that by concentrating the mind on specific moments, objects, and emotions in a scene, we create the most memorable impressions that stay timeless in human memory. Utilising a consistent framing style facilitated a more profound connection with the technical elements of this chapter. Nonetheless, I am interested in examining different methods for organisation and progression.

Translation of each page from Lithuanian to English:

Lithuanian:	English:
<p>Pagaliau iskeliavom. Rytas ukanotas ir pilnas paslapciu. Buvo sunku keltis zinant, kad kuri laika nemiegosiu lovoj. Dabar ten kur pulsio ten ir desiu galva. Dar laiko yra atsigresti atgal, bet galva nesisuka. Vakarai saukia.</p>	<p>Finally, we set out. The morning is misty and full of secrets. It was hard to get up knowing that for a while, I won't be sleeping in a bed. Now, wherever I fall, that's where I'll lay my head. There's still time to look back, but my head doesn't turn. The West is calling.</p>
<p>Keliaujam jau ne viena diena. Maisto turim nedaug tad kiekviena diena tarytum pasninkas. Praeja ne viena kaima ir miska slapciomis ir sutikom obeli. Ji mus apdovanojo daugybe saldziu obuoliu. Palengevejimas. Dievas mus aprupina, kad ir kas bebutu. Reikejo skinti nakti, tyliai. Pasak zmoniu Amerikoje teka medaus upes ir stovi aukso kalnai. Kiek ten tiesos, neaisku. Mes keliaujame vilties vedami suzinoti. Kol obels lapai siurena rudens vejyje bandau galvoti, kur esame. Negalvojau, kad iki Prusijos sitiek eit. Tikiuosi esame netoli. Kad ir su didele viltim tusciu skrandziu toli nenukialiausi. Duona ir bulves dar saugau. Zinau persistengiu, bet paskiau sau padekosiu. Kol turim obuolius bent kelis tol gerai.</p>	<p>We've been traveling for several days now. We don't have much food, so every day feels like a fast. We've passed through several villages and forests in secret, and we came across an apple tree. It rewarded us with plenty of sweet apples. Relief. God provides for us, no matter what happens. We had to pick them at night, quietly. People say that in America rivers flow with honey, and mountains of gold stand tall. How much of that is true, no one knows. We travel, led by hope, to find out. As the apple tree's leaves rustle in the autumn wind, I try to think about where we are. I never thought it would take this long to reach Prussia. I hope we're close. Even with great hope, an empty stomach won't take you far. I'm still holding on to the bread and potatoes. I know I'm being cautious, but later, I'll thank myself. If we have even a few apples left, we're okay.</p>
<p>Triacia diena jau einame pesti. Dabar jau ne svajone o alkis spartina musu zingsnius. Maistas pilnai nesibaige, bet mes storiai pasninkaunam, kad uztektu. Pagaliau. Pasienis netoli Tilzes stoties. Mus pasitiko du pareigunai. Vienas ju raitas. Uz kisi jie sutiko mus palydet. Nesu tikras kiek jais galime pasitiketi. Bet manau pasirinkimo neturime. Jie kas minute ar dvi vis klausia, kur keliaujame, kodel, ka zadame daryti. Mes nebegam nuo nusikaltimo, bet bet kas gali itarti bet ka. Pradedu nerimauti. Tikiuosi be reikalo.</p>	<p>It's the third day we've been walking on foot. Now it's not dreams but hunger that quickens our steps. The food hasn't completely run out, but we're fasting heavily to make it last. Finally. The border is near the Tilžė station. We were met by two officers, one of them on horseback. For a bribe, they agreed to escort us. I'm not sure how much we can trust them, but I suppose we have no choice. Every minute or two, they keep asking where we're headed, why, and what we plan to do. We're not running from any crime, but anyone can suspect anything. I'm starting to feel uneasy. I hope it's for nothing.</p>
<p>Atvykome i Prusia ir lyg palengevejimas nuplove nerima nuo krutines. Zinoma kelione laukia dar ilga. Perejus patikra reikia keliauti i uosta ir kazkaip i Amerika. Didelio nuovargio nejauciu, nes esu nekantrus, noriu judeti toliau. Jau kai nesame Lietuvoje jauciu, kaip viltis auga ir baime pasitrauke. Muitineje pilna zmoniu lyg skruzdelynas, bet ne vieno pasimetusio keliautojo. Visi zinom, kur judam. Naktys vis labiau salteja tad geriau jauciuosi islindes is misko ir purvynu. Miegojau nepazystamu zmoniu tvartuose ir klonyse, ir misko samanose. Buti tarp daug zmoniu yra visai kas kita. Jauciuosi gerai tad ir sveikata gera, nepersalau, manau tureciau patikra praeit.</p>	<p>We've arrived in Prussia, and it feels as though relief has washed away the anxiety from my chest. Of course, the journey ahead is still long. After passing through the checkpoint, we need to travel to the port and somehow make our way to America. I don't feel overwhelming exhaustion because I'm impatient—I want to keep moving forward. Now that we're no longer in Lithuania, I feel my hope growing and my fear fading. The customs office is teeming with people, like an anthill, but not a single traveler seems lost. We all know where we're headed. The nights are getting colder, so I feel better being out of the forests and swamps. I've slept in strangers' barns, granaries, and on forest moss. Being among so many people</p>

<p>Bijau, kad neuzstrikumem nes zmoniu daug. Galvut nakti reikes praleisti barakuose.</p>	<p>feels entirely different. I feel good, and my health is holding up—I haven't caught a cold, so I think I should pass the inspection. I'm afraid of getting stuck, as there are so many people. Perhaps we'll have to spend the night in the barracks.</p>
<p>Nakti praleidome barakuose. Cia salti ir suspausti. Miegojom vienas salia kito del silumos. Grindys kietos, barakai tamsus, paklodes storos, bet ju neuzteko, o ypac sviezio oro. Berots zmones is visur suleke. Nesuorantu daugumos. Nerimas vel auga. Jeigu barakuose vos vietos yra, kaip traukinyje bus? Tikiuosi isvuksime siandien. Negaliu cia likti.</p>	<p>We spent the night in the barracks. It's cold and cramped here. We slept side by side for warmth. The floors are hard, the barracks dark, and the blankets are thick, but they weren't enough—especially with so little fresh air. It seems like people have flocked here from everywhere. I can't understand most of them. The anxiety is growing again. If there's barely any space in the barracks, what will it be like on the train? I hope we can leave today. I can't stay here</p>
<p>Stotis pilna smoniu is visur. Atpuskuojantis traukinys kviecia i kelione. Pastebejau daug ir pazystamu ir nepazystamu. Visi mes suristi to paties tikslo. Girdziu minia zmoniu kuzdant ten lietuviskai, kitur lenkiskai, kad viskas bus gerai. Cia musu likinas. Zinoma kazkoks svoris tempia zemyn. Bet ar grisciau dabar? Negaliu. Pasiryzausi pasiekti Amerika. Dievas yra mano vedlys. Jeigu tik duonos ir vandens ustektu. Jauciu nauji sunkumai laukia. Pirmyn.</p>	<p>The station is full of people from everywhere. The huffing train calls us to the journey ahead. I noticed many familiar and unfamiliar faces. We are all bound by the same goal. I hear the murmurs of the crowd—some speaking Lithuanian, others Polish—reassuring each other that everything will be fine. This is our fate. Of course, there's a certain weight pulling me down. But would I turn back now? I cannot. I am determined to reach America. God is my guide. If only there's enough bread and water, it will be enough. I sense new challenges lie ahead. Onward.</p>
<p>Girdziu kaip zmones skundziasi kaip sunku sedeti. As megstu atsistoti ir pasivaikscioti tarp vagonu, tarp zmoniu. Cia ne tas pats kaip nuo vieno prie kito miesto vaziuoti, ne ta pati kelione. Sustojame kartais priimti dar daugiau zmoniu. Su kiekviena stotele nauja inspekcija. Visi mes jauciames nepatogiai ir pasimete, nes mes esame be vietos ir namu, bet per patikras mums lengva pasijusti lyg nusikalteliai. Tik kai traukinys vel pajuda ramybe trumpam uzpildo vagonus. Malonus puskavimas suopuoja mus trumpam uzmigti, nusiraminti ar toliau svajoti beziurinti i besiliejančias spalvas.</p>	<p>I hear people complaining about how hard it is to sit. I like to stand up and walk between the train cars, among the people. This isn't the same as traveling from one city to another—it's not the same kind of journey. Sometimes we stop to take on even more passengers. With each stop comes a new inspection. We all feel uncomfortable and lost because we are without place or home, but during the inspections, it's easy to feel like criminals. Only when the train starts moving again does a brief calm fill the cars. The pleasant puffing of the engine lulls us into short moments of sleep, peace, or daydreams as we watch the colors outside blur together.</p>
<p>Vos islipome is traukinio pasijutau lyg kitame pasaulyje. Hamburgas pribloske savo dydziu. Cia pengva pasimesti, ypac kai nesupranti kalbos. Mes apsistojome emigrantu namuose. Nenuostabu, kad viskas perpildyta, tai bent trumpam iseidavau pabuti lauke. Zmones nelabai norejo bendrauti nes arba bijojo arba nesuprasdavo viens kito. As bandziau vartoti viena kita Angliska zodi, taip pavyko prieiti uosta. Laivai pluduriavo, garsus varikliai garsai ir tirsti dumai uzpilde plaucius. Tai visai kita aplinka palyginus su kaimu kuri palikau.</p>	<p>As soon as we stepped off the train, I felt like I was in another world. Hamburg overwhelmed me with its size. It's easy to get lost here, especially when you don't understand the language. We stayed in an emigrant house. Unsurprisingly, it was overcrowded, so I would go outside for a while just to get some air. People weren't very eager to talk—either they were afraid or couldn't understand each other. I tried using a few English words, which helped me find my way to the port. Ships floated in the harbor, their loud engines roaring, and thick smoke filled the air and my lungs. This environment is entirely different from the village I left behind.</p>

<p>Su kiekviena diena minia buvo vis didesne. Eiles prie medicininės patikros dideles. Triuksmas augo. Pirma karta matau laiva. Ar istiesu sis metalinis laivas nuolukdys mus saugiai per Atlanta?</p>	<p>With each passing day, the crowd grew larger. The lines for medical inspections were long, and the noise kept increasing. It was my first time seeing a ship. Can this metal vessel truly carry us safely across the Atlantic?</p>
<p>Krantas vis labiau tolsta, artinasi naktis. Kolkas vandenys ramus. Pasak zmoniu plauksime apie septynias dienas, meldziuosi, kad Atlanto ramybe mus lydes visa kelia. Laivas pilnutelis, mes miegoti ruosiames ant denio nes nera pakankamai gultu. Susitarem su keliata pakeliaiviu keistis vietom, taip palengvinti poilsi. Koklas bandau nesiskusti, nes nezinau ka kelione atnes. Noriu pasimegauti sio vakaro ramybe.</p>	<p>The shore grows more distant, and night approaches. So far, the waters are calm. People say the journey will take about seven days, and I pray that the Atlantic's peace will accompany us the entire way. The ship is completely full, and we're preparing to sleep on the deck because there aren't enough bunks. We made an agreement with a few fellow travelers to take turns sharing spaces, making rest a bit easier. For now, I try not to complain because I don't know what this journey will bring. I want to savor the tranquility of this evening.</p>
<p>Viena nakti baisi audra uzklupo laiva. Ta nakti as miegojau zemutinyje denyje. Pabudau permirkęs nuo salto ruraus vandens. Galvojau gal vel prakaitas, nes truputeli negalavau nuo pastovaus laivo siubavimo. Ne, tai ne liga, mus uztvinde audra. Ta nakt galvojau, kad tai musu galas. Tamsoje maciau, kaip zmones buvo uzlieti ne tik vandens, bet ir baimes nuskesti. Visgi mums pasiseke, nes pasak igulos taip nutinka daznai audru metu. Siam chause mes vienas kitam padejom arba tie kas maste blaiviai padejo kitiems. Slapi ar ne, mes visi pazinom Dieva, nes visi ta nakti meldemes auksciausiajam. Nuo tos nakties meldemes kasnakt, kad laivas pasiektu sausuma.</p>	<p>One night, a terrible storm struck the ship. That night, I was sleeping in the lower deck. I woke up drenched from the cold, salty water. At first, I thought it was just sweat because I had been feeling unwell from the constant rocking of the ship. No, it wasn't illness—it was the storm flooding us. That night, I thought it was the end for us. In the darkness, I saw how people were drenched not only by water but also by the fear of drowning. Still, we were fortunate, as the crew said this happens often during storms. In the chaos, we helped each other, or those who remained clear-headed helped the others. Whether wet or not, we all knew God, because we all prayed to the Almighty that night. Since that night, we've prayed every night for the ship to reach land.</p>
<p>Pagaliau isauso rytas ir audra traukesi. Saule gloste jura, kad nurimtu. Mes visi kas miegojome zemutinyje denyje pasitikome saule. Su Dievo pagalba isgyveno visi. Nebuvo pats geriausias rytas, nes mes buvome visi permirke ir issigande, susiguzia ant denio. Kad ir kokie permirke ir susale, kurenome vilti, kuri mus silde. Galiu prisiekti girdejau kaip zmones tyliai daunavo. Mes buvom dekingi galedami pasitikti ryta kartu. Jeigu isgyvensim sita kelione, nera nieko ko neveiksime.</p>	<p>Finally, the storm passed, and the morning dawned. The sun gently touched the sea, calming it. Those of us who had been sleeping in the lower deck greeted the sun. With God's help, everyone survived. It wasn't the best morning, as we were all soaked, frightened, and huddled together on the deck. No matter how wet and cold we were, we kindled hope, which warmed us. I can swear I heard people quietly humming. We were grateful to be able to greet the morning together. If we survive this journey, there's nothing we can't overcome.</p>
<p>Po tos nakties kajutes buvo slapios, drabuziai slapi. Kad ir kur eiciau ten salta, nuo to nepabegsi, kad ir kaip mes stengemes. Jauciau kaip saltis ir dregme skverbesi i kaulus. O kazkada maniau, kad miske sunku miegoti. Jeigu saule patekedavo bandziau sedeti denyje ir dziovinti drabuzius, ypac batus. Nusimoves batus juos ant peciu nesiojau, nes su jais buti buvo sunkiau negu buti basam. Su kiekviena diena girdejau kaip zmones kosejo ir kalatojosi. Vienas</p>	<p>After that night, the cabins were damp, and our clothes were soaked. No matter where I went, it was cold, and we couldn't escape it, no matter how hard we tried. I felt the cold and dampness seep into my bones. I used to think it was hard to sleep in the forest. When the sun rose, I tried to sit on deck to dry my clothes, especially my shoes. I carried my shoes on my shoulders because it was harder to wear them than to walk barefoot. With each passing day, I heard people coughing and</p>

<p>kitas sugebejo gauti sausa paklode, kuri ir ta suslapdavo. Visgi buvo pagaliau malonu gauti karso viralo. Nuo silto maisto pasijusdavau siek tiek geriau. Nezinau ka gaudavau, turbūt sriuba, bet buvo panasiau i likucius maisto sumestus i vandeni. Siek tiek morku ir vistienos gabaliukai plaukiodavo vandenyje su siek tiek driskos. Del to ir vadindavau viralu. Bet po tos nakties ir tai buvo gerai, nes maistas buvo karstas. Svarbiausia buvo jo gauti, pirmiausia reikejo perbrsisti minia zmoniu, kuri kaip ir as trosko siek tiek silumos ir maiso isgyventi. O isgyventi nori visi. Kai kada minios prie viralo buvo mazesnes, nes nuo laivo siubavimo nebuvo lengva vakgyti. As jauciausi stiprus po keliu dienu, nes turejau biski sudziuvusios mesos, as ja kramtydavau per silpnuma ir tai padedavo, kai negalejau valgyt nieko kito. Cia ir dosniu zmoniu, kurie dalinosi savo rysuleliais. Nelengva prisitaikyti, bet mes stegiames tai daryti kartu.</p>	<p>groaning. A few managed to get a dry blanket, but they would dampen it quickly. Still, it was a relief to finally get some hot soup. I don't know exactly what it was—probably soup, but it tasted more like leftovers thrown into water. Some carrots and pieces of chicken floated in the water, along with some gristle. That's why I called it "gruel." But after that night, it was good enough because the food was hot. The most important thing was to get it, which meant first having to get through the crowd of people, all of whom, like me, were yearning for some warmth and a bit of sustenance. And everyone wants to survive. Sometimes, the crowds around the gruel were smaller because it wasn't easy to eat with the ship rocking. I felt strong after a few days, as I had some dried meat. I chewed it from weakness, and it helped when I couldn't eat anything else. There were also generous people who shared their bundles. It wasn't easy to adapt, but we were all trying to do it together.</p>
<p>Negalejau patiketi savo akimis. Po ilgu ir sunkiu dienu keliones jura, stai stovi pries mus, sauke i kranta, laisve. Minia supludo i virsutini deni vos pasigirdo sukiai, kad matosi tolumoje. Ar nerimas, ar jaudulys, nezinau kas, bet jausmas, nepazystamas jausmas skverbese i krutine. Jauciuosi palengvejas, iveikias sita etapa, bet kas toliau? Dabar viskas imanoma. Niekada nejauciau laisves ir baimes ja pazinti. Turbut tai ir yra tas jausmas pazinti laisve.</p>	<p>I could hardly believe my eyes. After long and difficult days of traveling at sea, there it was before us—the shore, shouting to us, freedom. The crowd rushed to the upper deck as soon as the shout went out that land was visible in the distance. Whether it was fear or excitement, I'm not sure, but the feeling—a strange, unfamiliar feeling—pressed against my chest. I feel relieved, having passed this stage, but what comes next? Now, everything seems possible. I've never felt freedom so strongly, and the fear of getting to know it. Perhaps, this is what it feels like to truly experience freedom.</p>

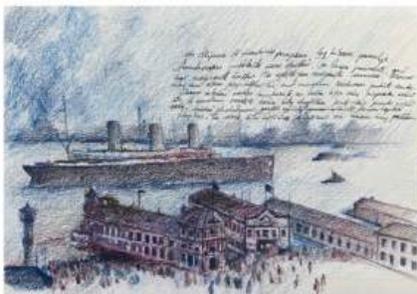


Illustration images from my sketchbooks

Chapter 3. Life in the United States

The third chapter explores themes of industrialisation and urban life and the complexities of community and isolation, suffering, and hardship in coal mining labour. In contrast to earlier chapters, this section delves into a broader introspection, reflecting fragmented images of the subconscious mind. I envisioned a dream that ultimately became a burden for my great-grandfather, who endured forty years of arduous labour with a hope for survival and a brighter future. This part of the narrative draws heavily on the works of Upton Sinclair (1917), which powerfully depict the harsh realities of coal mining and the plight of immigrant workers. While life in America was often romanticised as a dream, I aimed to craft a profoundly introspective chapter that challenges this notion.

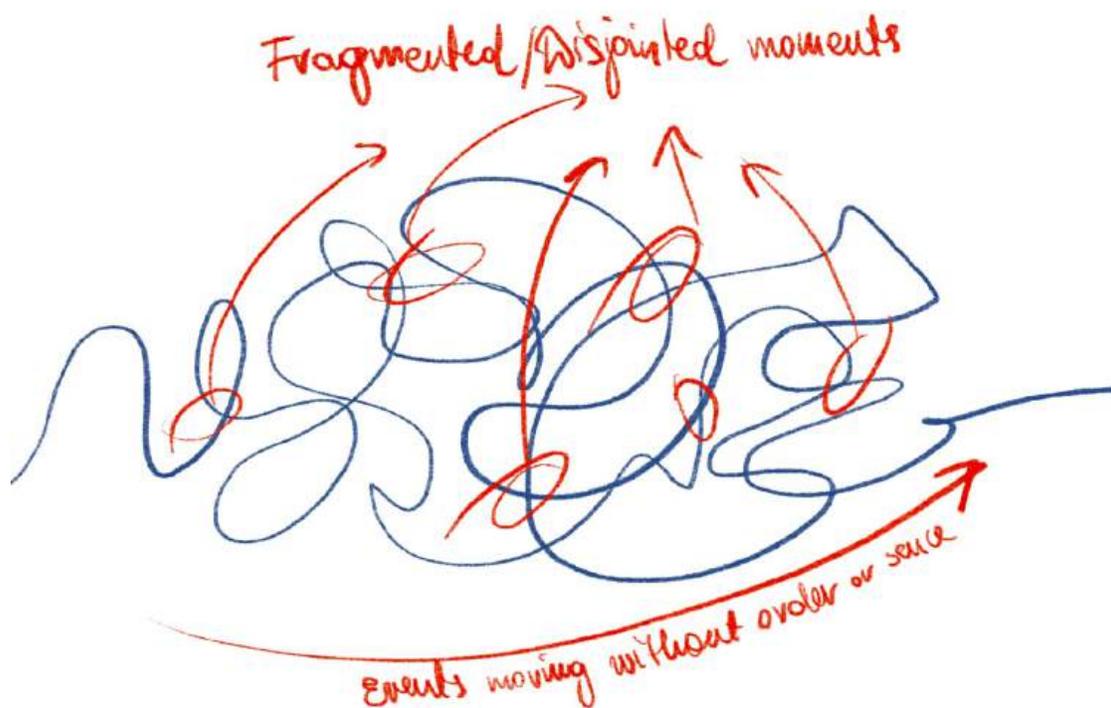
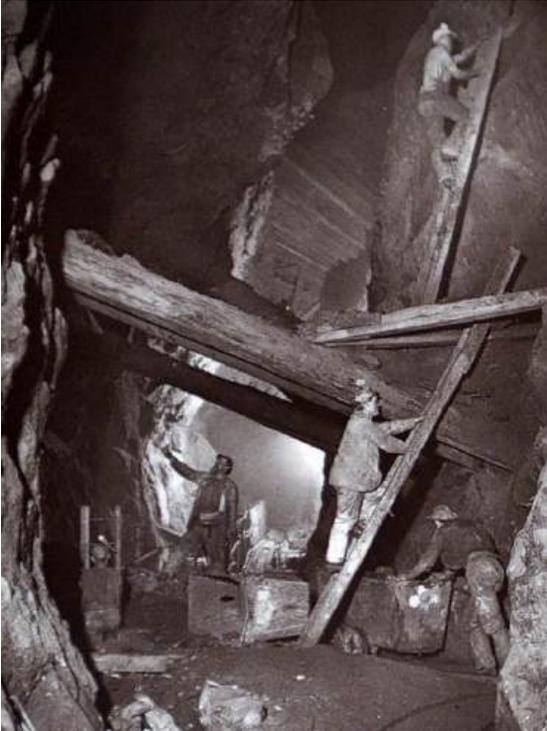


Illustration images from my digital sketchbook

The conflict between the mind and reality serves a purpose and is demonstrated through the selection of linear visual sequences and the technical medium used. Coming to this conclusion was effortless for me, as I drew inspiration from the concept of dreams and their symbolic significance.

As I searched for images of coal mining, I found a recurring theme of visuals that echo Sinclair's (1917) portrayals of mining shafts and the horrific working conditions.



Coalmining reference images sourced from my Pinterest archives

In addition, I needed images that would illustrate the scenery and the reality of life in an industrial setting. These reference images were crucial for helping me visualise the transformation that would contrast with the earlier rural landscape.



Industrial landscape and life in late 19-century reference images sourced from my Pinterest archives

In addition, Helen Ward's (2024) captivating and mysterious topography deeply moved me. These scenes motivated me to illustrate my upcoming chapter in a series of landscapes, simultaneously employing charcoal and ink techniques.



Landscapes in print by Ward, 2024.

From a technical standpoint, this chapter was the most enjoyable to create. I approached this part of the story without a structured beginning, middle, or end. Instead, I embraced a dreamlike perspective with no linear timeline, and symbolic images shifted in a nonsensical pattern. I tested this idea while constructing the first chapter and created an image describing many themes.



Image from my sketchbook

I utilised charcoal sticks of varying softness to create diverse depths and a striking contrast between light and dark moments. This technique, known as Chiaroscuro, enhances the sombre, dream-like quality of the scenes. The dramatic effect carries symbolic weight, representing the struggle between hope and despair. Continuing with my intention to depict the main character in ink, I found that the interplay between charcoal and ink produced intriguing textures and meanings. The ink nearly vanished in these compositions, illustrating how the main character becomes lost within a larger narrative—foreshadowing my research. Further, I wanted more visual variety and atmospheric effect in my ongoing composition, so I combined soft pastels to bring the vibrance and natural emotional elements. I layered these techniques from light to dark tones while intuitively using my fingers to blend and control the outcome of the image.



Image from my sketchbook

Chapter 4. Return to Homeland

The motif of belonging is a constant thread throughout the narrative, developing as my great-grandfather navigates his internal conflict. While searching for a resolution, he is grappling with questions about his identity, origins, and place in the world.

The closing chapter highlights the pivotal moments of my great-grandfather's journey home, illustrating his challenges as he seeks to reconnect with his homeland, reintegrate into the community, and confront his reality. He must navigate the challenges of finding his place once more while striving to heal from his past experiences and the pain of displacement.

I intentionally shifted the artistic method towards a gentler, more vivid, and expansive style to highlight the desire for emotional closure. The shift from charcoal and soft pastel to oil pastel is closely linked to the story's narrative progression. The delicate use of ink no longer confines the main character but disperses throughout the chapter as Antanas re-engages and reconnects with what he once abandoned.

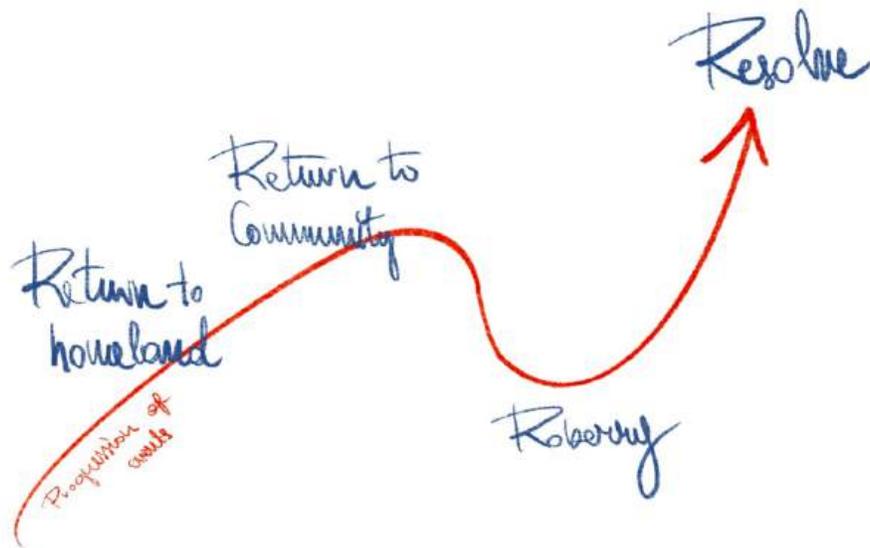


Image from my sketchbook

Crafting these ideas proved to be as challenging as developing the first chapter. However, I revisited the story my mother originally shared, extracting its most essential elements—namely, his return and the immediate recognition that sparked the town's gossip, ultimately leading to my great-grandfather being robbed. While he did acquire lands and forests, I desired a more satisfying ending for him, one that afforded him a moment of peace. Although he built a family that faced numerous misfortunes, as I gazed at the only existing photograph of him—with his wife and newborn in his embrace—I aimed to depict that moment in a more uplifting light, envisioning his family as his greatest treasure.

I spent considerable time delving into technical concepts and visual mediums to contrast previous ideas. While reviewing various images, I discovered an extraordinary progression sequence in the graphic novel *Bandonéon* by Gonzalez (2013) that influenced my final chapter ideas. Through its exquisite arrangements of gradually evolving images, the book narrates the story of an Argentinean emigrant who returns to his homeland to rediscover the essence of being Argentinian. This novel shows a slow progression of an isolated moment that grabbed my attention.

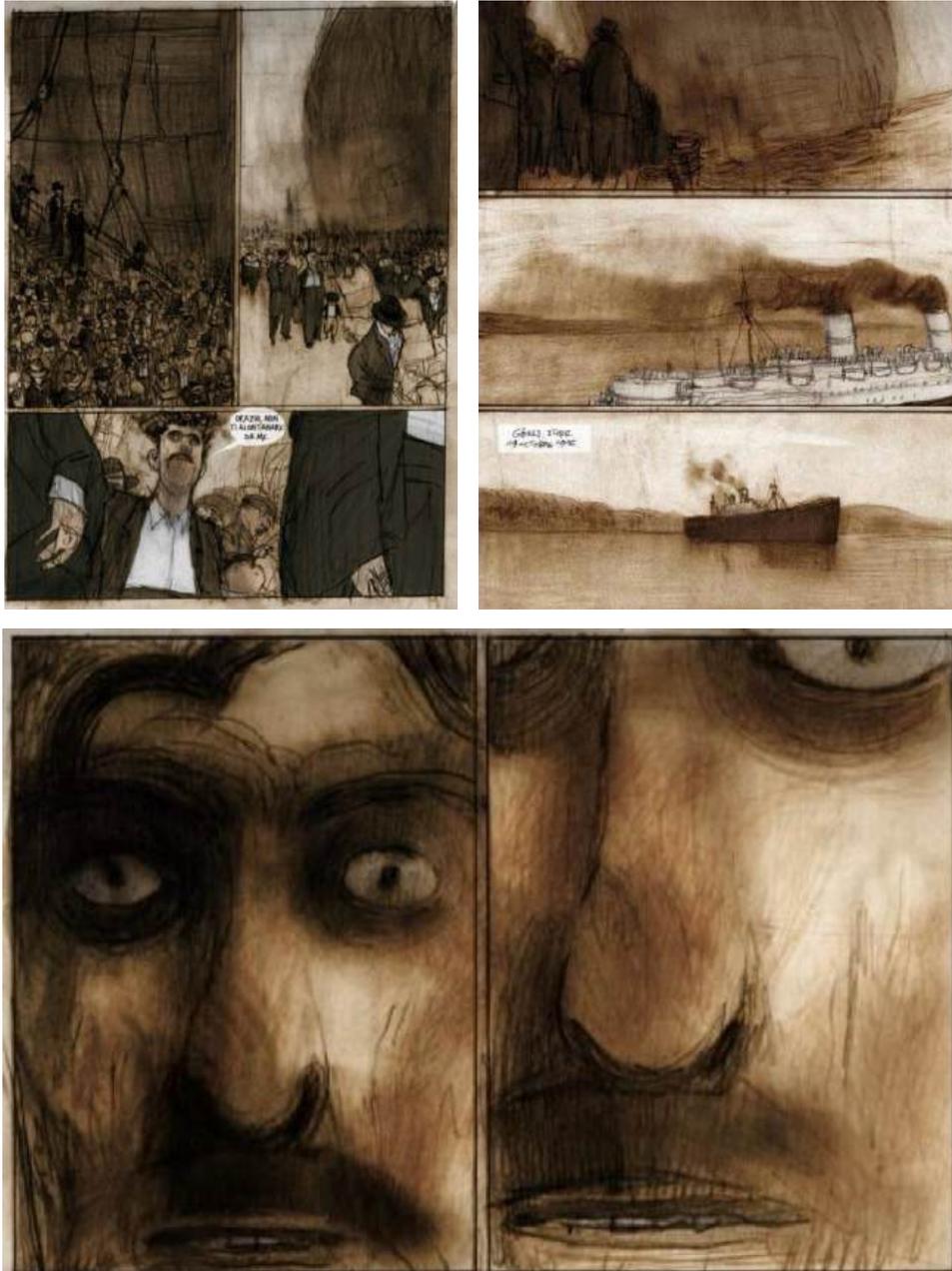
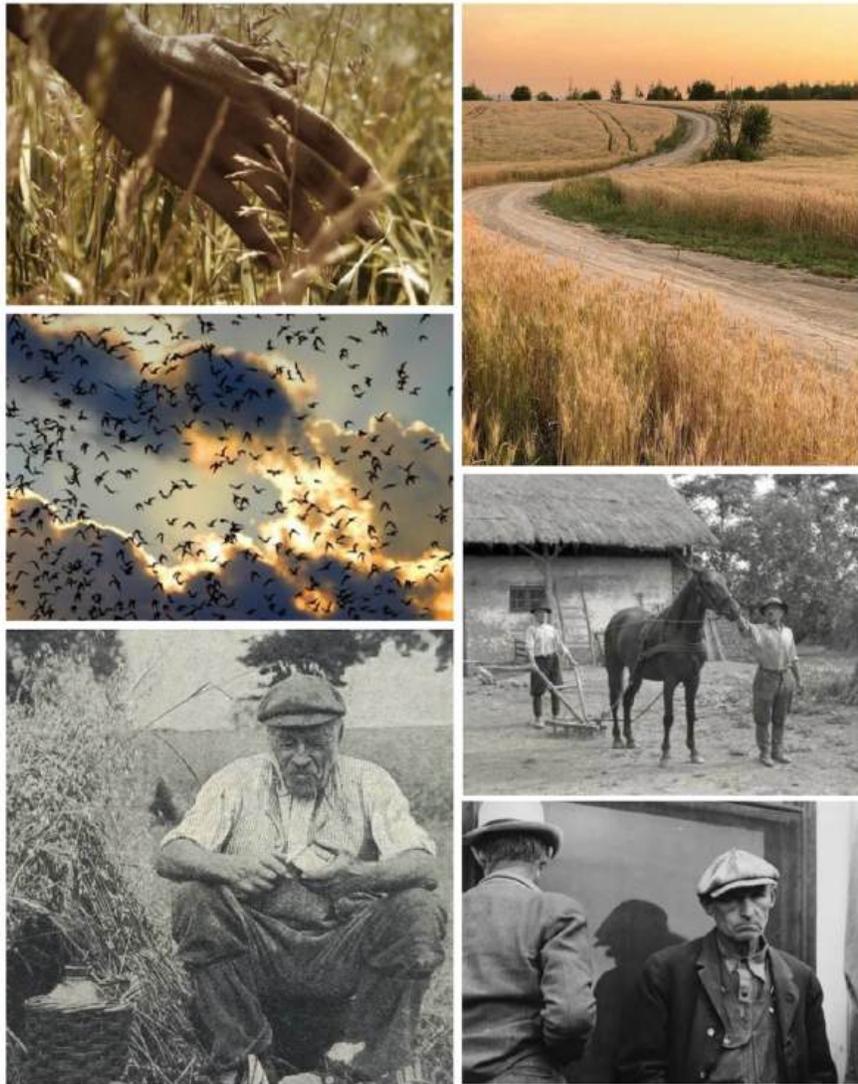


Image from *Bandonéon* by Gonzalez, 2013.

I drew inspiration from this novel to emphasise a significant moment of return in my great-grandfather's narrative and to linger on it before introducing an unexpected change that leads him to a moment of realisation. In a way, this is a very realistic pattern that we may experience in real life.

In the first and second chapters, I depicted my great-grandfather journeying further away from his homeland. Naturally, I envisioned his return mirroring that departure. However, the difference lies in his age and the reality that his transformed self can no longer recognise the land as it once was. Yet, I imagined that nature acknowledges his return by parting the clouds as he moves closer to the landscape. Just as he left with the season of harvest, he is welcomed back by it once more.



Images of rural landscapes and life in the early 20th century sourced from my Pinterest archives

I looked for various reference images to inspire my creativity. The photos depicted two key characters: one representing nature and the other embodying the local people who react to and accept Antanas in distinct ways. While the nature scenes are crucial in conveying a warm welcome, the contrasting images carry equal and more intricate meanings about people's behaviour and mannerisms when welcoming a stranger upon his arrival.

This chapter demanded considerable time and effort to produce. Although I created many sketches in a single day, my progress was slow. This was not only due to the composition but also to the challenges of working with oil pastels. However, I chose to work with this medium because of its brighter and lighter pigments and striking contrast to previous techniques.



Images from my archive and sketchbook

As I focused on composition, I started to draw in a way that resembled a storyboard-like narrative. The structure's rhythm begins with a consistent pace, which later transitions more abruptly from broad, open scenes to intimate, smaller moments. I wanted nature to be visually dominant but, at the same time, have interwoven human elements.

From the more dramatic and restless line work in the earlier segments, I transitioned to smoother and more deliberate textures while maintaining expression.



Images from my archive

In each chapter, I aimed to evoke a feeling of history and nostalgia through traditional techniques. I utilised blending paper with oil pastel to enhance the application while preserving textures in certain spots for added colour depth. I further developed the piece by lifting colour with the edge of a round modelling knife, which introduced a sense of illumination. Additionally, I applied a thin and light layer of black ink to offer more definition and subtle detail in specific areas. Because the ink did not adhere well to the oil pastel, I sprayed it with a workable fixative to secure the colours and textures before applying the ink.



Images from my archive and sketchbook

Unfortunately, I did not have the time to consider agricultural scenes with more dynamic actions. As a result, I concentrated on portraying simple, solitary, and remote moments that express meaning in a clear and atmospheric way that is truthful to the Lithuanian character.



Images from sketchbook

The resolution I looked for was straightforward, beautifully reflected in the sight of my great-grandfather's perspective, which is his family positioned in the landscape of his homeland.

I understand that there is significant compositional repetition. The main character is often positioned near the edges of the frame, adding a sense of movement to the otherwise static images. However, this choice was deliberate, conveying his continual advancement in facing challenges.



Images from my sketchbook

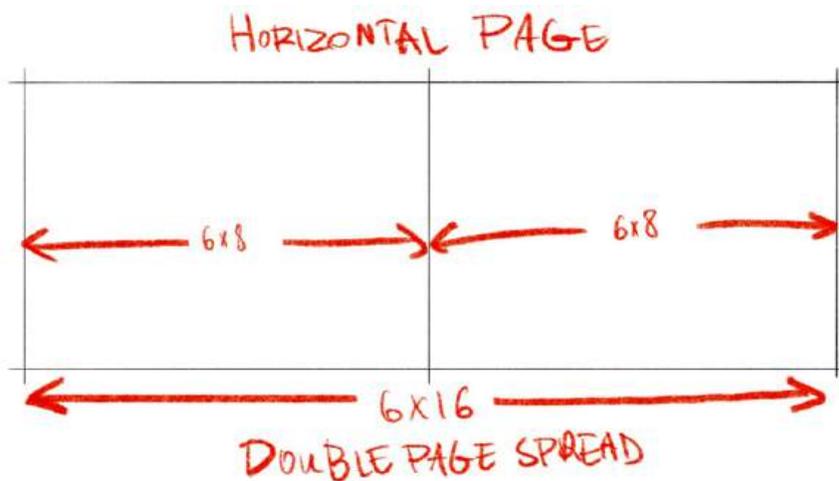
Formatting and Layout

After finishing my drawings, I continued to consider how to seamlessly integrate these four chapters into a cohesive work. Feedback from my lecturers was invaluable in guiding my decisions to improve the piece constructively. As the lecturer in Visual Communication, Andrew Cross (2024), suggested, I must contemplate how my narrated story might impact a reader when presented in a traditional book format.

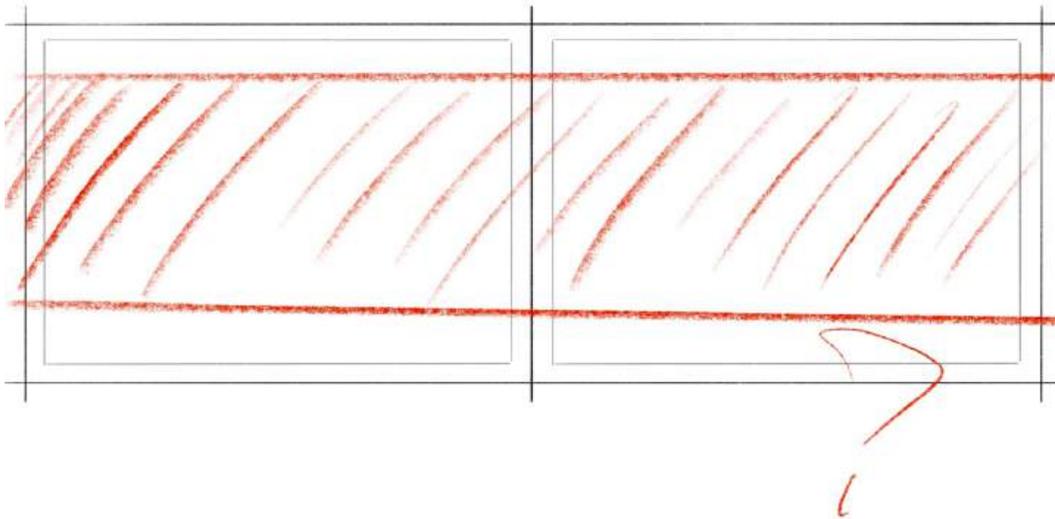
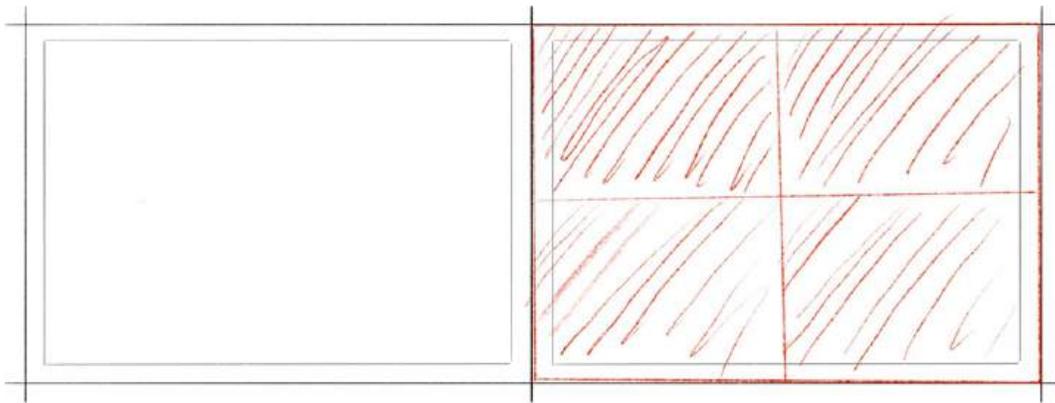
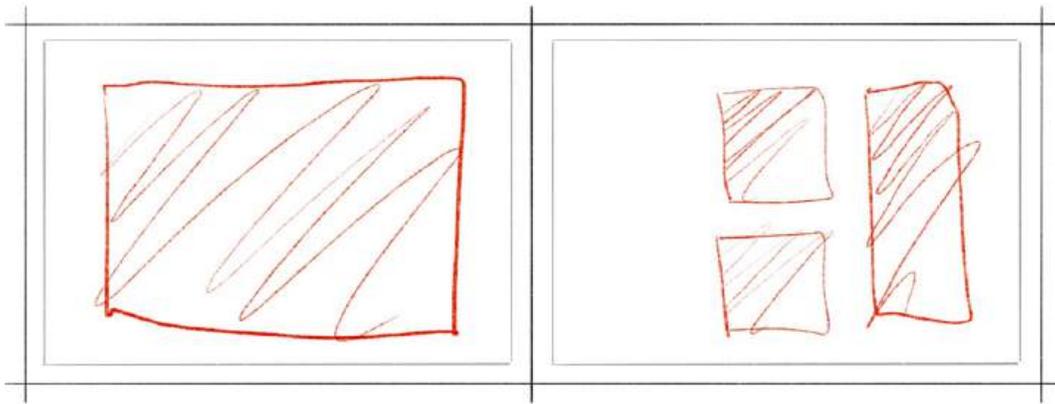


Images from my archive

I could have explored more unpredictable and unconventional methods of showcasing my work, including individual or collective exhibitions, art book design, or film. However, the insight from Cross (2024) allowed me to focus on how these chapters interconnect visually to tell a narrative across four technically independent sections. A more straightforward double-page spread format allowed me to concentrate on this objective.



Images from my digital sketchbook



Images from my digital sketchbook

My drawings adhered to a specific pattern, but I realised there was room for improvement. I experimented with image placement and created several digital dummy books to visualise better how to manipulate these illustrations. Progression sequence images were relatively easy to manage and opened many possibilities, while landscape or journal drawings proved more challenging due to their static and repetitive nature.



#21

Images from my creative archive

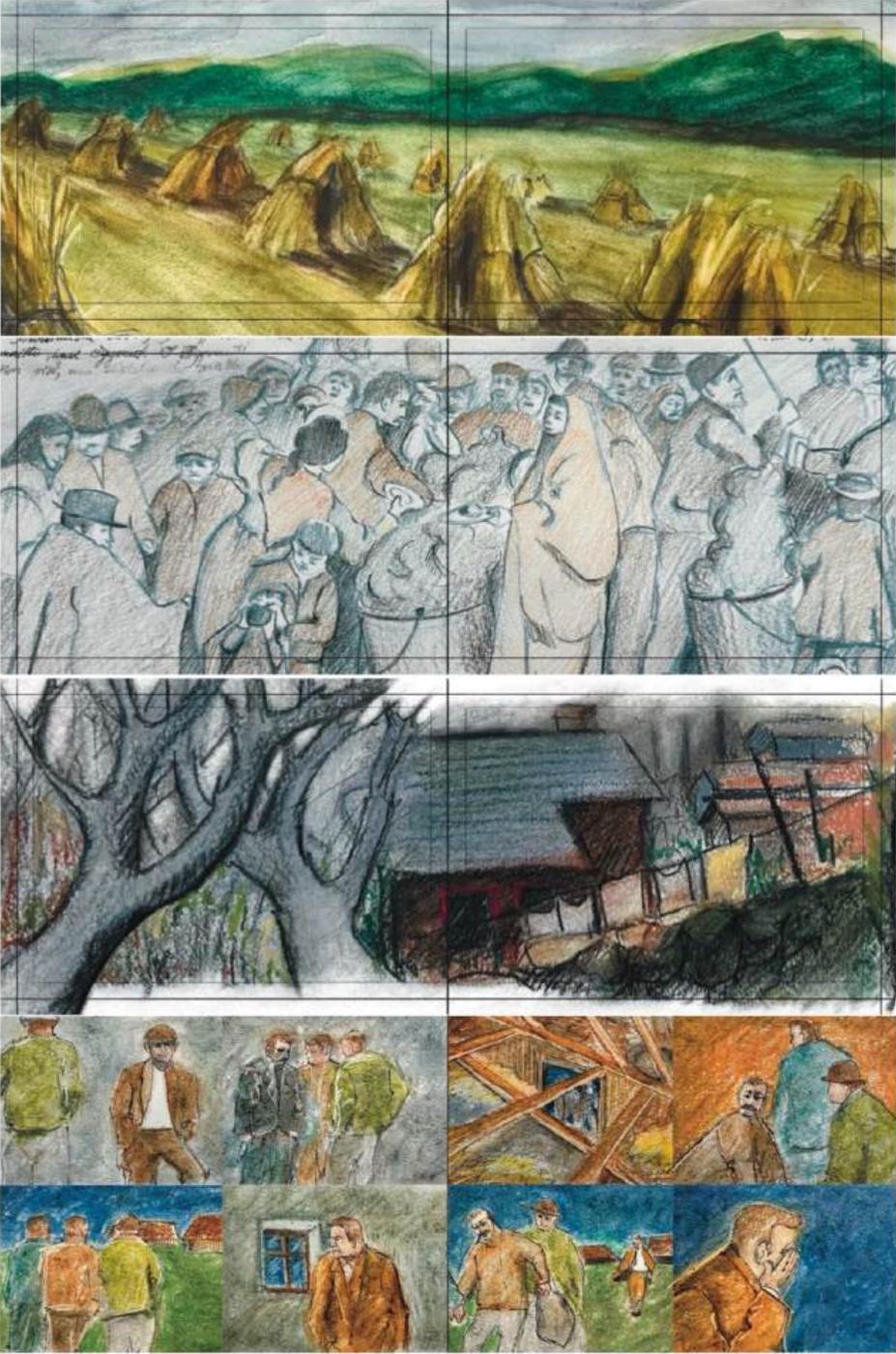
As I continued working, I became aware of certain elements I appreciated and aspects I should avoid. My image placement felt stagnant and uninspired, yet I struggled to find a solution because I was too apprehensive to take bold risks. At that moment, my focus leaned more towards maintaining tidy placements rather than creating a narrative flow, which frustrated me.



Images from my creative archives

Following a thorough examination of all chapters with the lecturer in Visual Communication Venables (2024), I realised I must arrange the visual aspects of my narrative to guide the reader's attention, highlight important sections, and intentionally slow the pace when necessary. This approach is known as visual hierarchy.

I began experimenting with visuals that could span the left and right pages. These modifications helped highlight scenes such as open fields, bustling crowds, or sequential actions. This approach allows each chapter to pause, providing a moment for reflection.



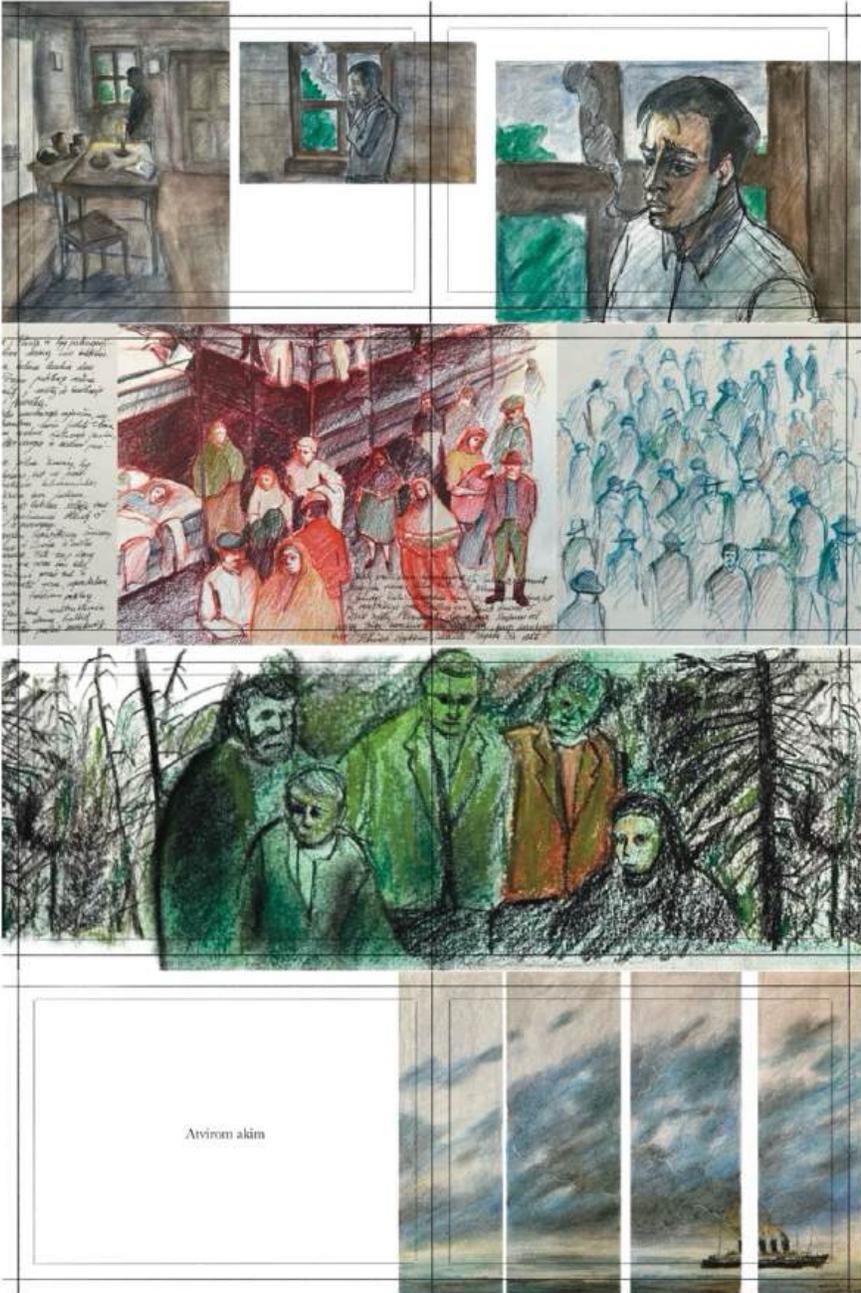
Images from my creative archives

I then worked on showing focal points, like eye-catching images, and surrounding them with plenty of negative space to attract attention naturally.



Images from my creative archives

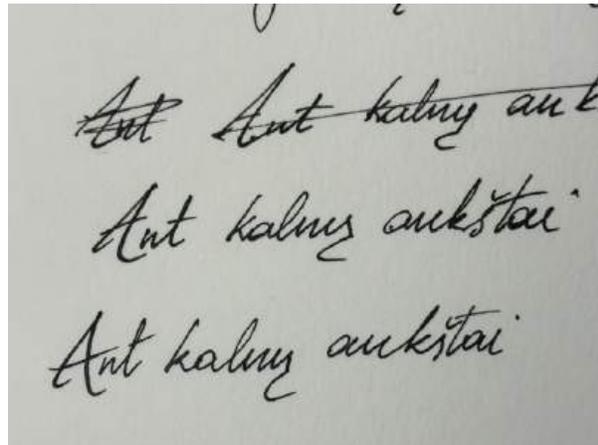
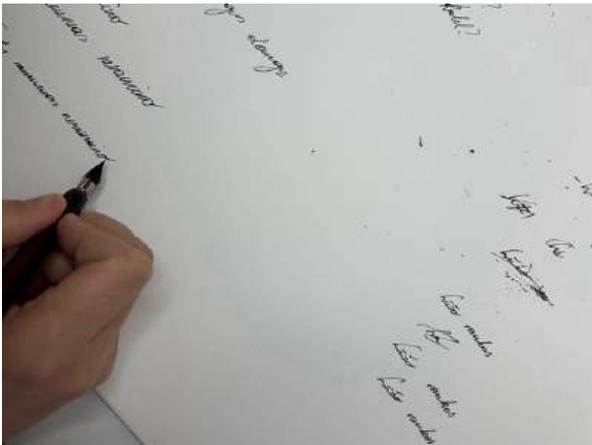
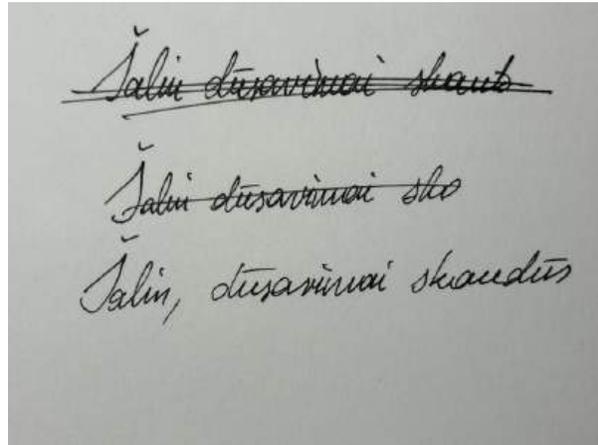
I concentrated on manipulating the movement of panels within full spreads, exploring how surrounding images and negative space could support the main focal points. This method resulted in a vibrant flow, a dynamic and engaging visual rhythm that guides the viewer's eye across the page and enhances the sense of movement in my illustrations. In some spreads, I displayed the progression of action across the page by deconstructing images and letting them interact with each other through negative space. In other examples, I brought specific elements to the forefront while subtly softening the background, capturing the viewer's attention and directing their focus.



Images from my creative archives

Text Integration

While arranging spreads, I noticed the significant use of negative space. This space offered an excellent opportunity to incorporate individual words and phrases as supporting visual components. These textual elements are not just captions or descriptions but integral parts of the visual narrative. They could improve visual appeal and narrative continuity. As I experimented with typed and handwritten text, I found handwritten, scribbled ink writing most captivating.



Images from my creative archives

To bring a poetic rhythm to the project, I explored the well-known works of Lithuanian poet Maironis, particularly his 1895 collection titled *The Voices of Spring*. In these published poems, I found numerous distinct phrases that resonated with my illustrative themes of homeland and memory. I adapted and restructured these phrases to suit the areas I needed.

After several attempts, I captured images of each word and phrase and extracted the handwriting from the paper using digital media tools in Procreate. I aimed to preserve the natural qualities of the ink, particularly its wet appearance and light reflections, as well as the dynamic movement of the letters.



Images from my creative archives

The task was quite time-consuming and required significant effort. I revisited the process multiple times as I discovered more effective phrases and added further meaning. However, thanks to the high-quality resolution of my iPhone 14 Pro Max and the overhead phone mount with ring light, I could capture excellent images even in the evenings without the need for natural daylight. As a result, I completed this task in just a few weeks.

Aut kalbų aukštai nebe kumėnis vargši?
 Juos pavojai veltioja Nilti matau
 Gykimu nujautimas širdimui šnekeji
 Lūis rankos
 Rebenų takai
 Nekuro žodžių mi draugiš
 Ir aš
 Famažu
 Naugan keletas
 Gantės ramumės
 neraminio
 Kažkada, kažkaip skaudėtis
 paucioi mēbris
 Šalin, dusaninui skaudėtis
 Kaip kas moka, numato ir gali
 laimina Dievas sijamą gūndą
 Kuo toliau
 Tuo toliau
 Silpnas kelias, tūntas grūvė
 Ukauna

Duona be skonio
 Atvirom akim
 Taip morkai paromės ant tos žemės
 Iš lūpy skundų neįgirdėjau
 Tam dienom krūto po dalgiu laukos
 užnūgdyti tarp girnių
 Per laimėnės udeletis nesuvertė akies
 Naujų pasaulį jis matė
 Nemurimūsi išto dvaria
 Kaip vėintų žuogam
 Taip mainos pasaulio darbai!
 Prabigo jūmatėi ir jos vėseliai
 Neflekstė savo duobės užkastos
 Tarp žmonių vėra širdies
 krūta po dalgiu laukos,
 gražius vegejimas prapuoletė
 Į darba, į darbą, kaip Dievas įtiki
 Rodos kiekvienas kelias su
 Aušra teka
 Svajoni

Images from my creative archives

Translation from Lithuanian to English

Title of the book:

Lithuanian:	English:
Svajone	Dream

Title of each chapter:

Debesu takai	Cloud trails
Kuo tuoliau Tuo tuoliau	The further, the further away
Duona be skonio	Tasteless bread
Atvirom akim	With open eyes

Individual words and phrases:

Tom dienom krito po dalgiu lankos	On those days, the fields fell under the scythe
Luzo rankos	The hands broke
Cykiai nujautimas sirdziai snekejo	Silently, a feeling of dread crept into the heart
Gamtos ramumas neramino	The tranquility of nature was unsettling
Pamazu	Little by little
Nebuvo zodziu nei dvejones	There were no words or hesitation
Rodos kiekvienas keliauja sau	It seems, everyone is on their own journey
Ir as vilti matau	And I see hope
Uzmigyti tarp giriu	Sleeping amongst woods
Is lupu skundu negirdejau	I haven't heard complaints from their lips
Juos pavojai vilioja	They are attracted by dangers
Vargas kietas	Hard trouble
Salin, dusavimai skaudus	Go away, heavy sighs
Ukana	Mist
I darba, I darba kaip Dievas isake	To work, to work as God commanded
Kazkada, kazkaip skaudus panciai nukris	Someday, somehow, the chain will fall
Kaip mintys zmogaus taip mainos pasaulio darbai!	As the thoughts of the person, so the works of the world change
Nenurimusi iesko dvasia	The restless seeking spirit
Silpnas kelia, tvirtas griuva	The weak path, the strong falls
Kaip kas moka, numato ir gali	As one knows, predicts, and can
Per kiauras naktis nesumerke akiu	I do not close my eyes through the sleepless night
Netrokstu savo duobes uzkastos	I do not desire my grave to be dug
Grazus regejismas prapuole	The beautiful vision has disappeared
Prabego jaunatve ir jos viesulai	Youth has passed, along with its storms
Ausra teka	The dawn is breaking
Laimina Dievas sejama gruda	God blesses the seed that is sown
Taip mazai paramos ant tos zemes	So little support on this earth
Ant kalnu auskstai ar nebekruvins vargai?	On the high mountains, will the hardships no longer bleed?

Final closing dedication:

<p>Si istorija skirta mano proseneliui Antanui Vilcinskui. Noriu, kad pasaulis isgirstu apie jo gyvenima ir jis nebutu pamirstas.</p>	<p>This story is dedicated to my great-grandfather Antanas Vilcinskas. I want the world to hear about his life, and that he is not forgotten.</p>
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I enjoy that these brief reflections on individual words and phrases can be woven together to create a poem. By merging these phrases, a metaphorical reflection emerges, offering a layered and symbolic perspective that transcends their literal meaning. For instance, the chosen title, *Dream*, encapsulates the project's purpose and conveys a more profound, multilayered significance, ranging from technical progression to the complex concept of the American dream and its intricate aspirations.

As I advanced in merging handwritten text with illustrations, it added a distinctive and captivating aspect to the narrative, creating opportunities to pause and contemplate.



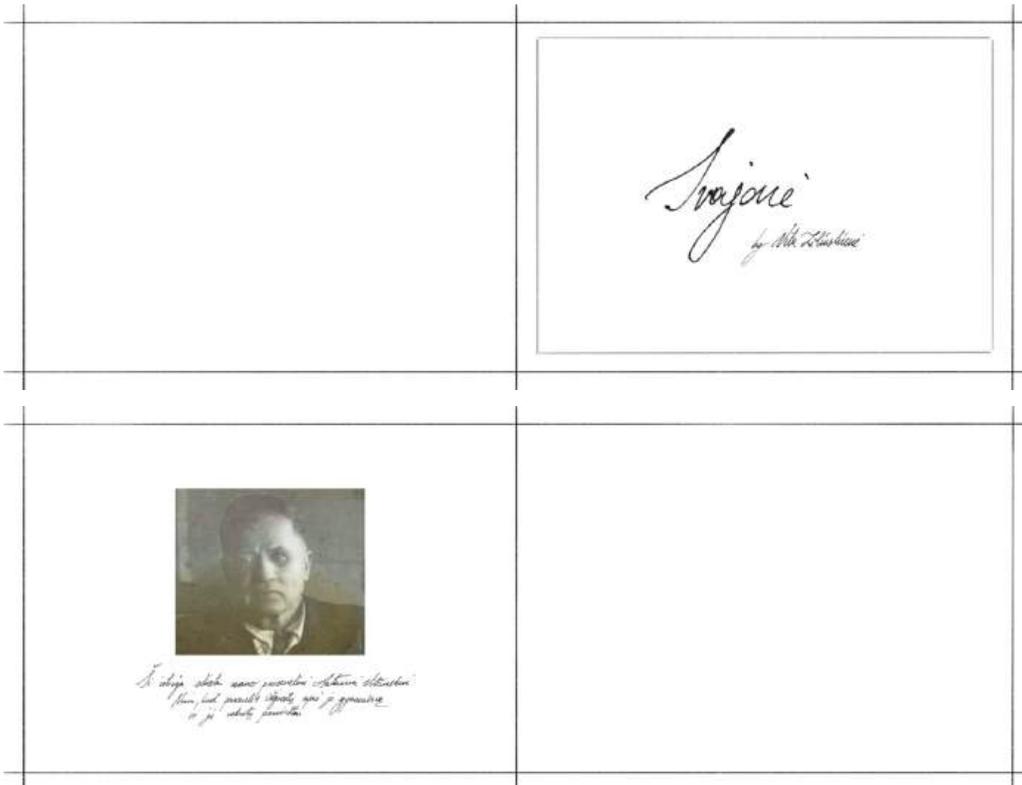
Images from my creative archives

I included a title for each chapter after the introductory image. I intentionally left some blank pages where text could exist independently as a visual idea. At the same time, in other spreads, the words complement the images visually and are well-balanced within the surrounding negative space.

Supporting Elements

As the project neared completion, I made several additions to enhance the book's overall concept, including a full cover, a title page, and a dedication page at the end. Each of these elements enriches the visual experience. To create the cover, I layered several elements to give the impression of an old design damaged by water, ink, and smoke.

The cover introduces me as the author, presents the book's title, and establishes the tone. The title page offers clarity, while the dedication page adds a personal touch as I express the book's purpose in a handwritten note.



Images from my creative archives

Conclusion

This project has been a deeply personal and transformative journey, intertwining historical exploration, artistic development, and storytelling. I have sought to preserve and honour my great-grandfather's life through extensive research, creative experimentation, and personal reflection. His story—marked by migration, resilience, and a profound connection to his homeland—resonates with universal themes of identity, belonging, and perseverance.

Through genealogical research, oral narratives, and historical context, I gathered fragmented yet vivid imaginings of his life. Each chapter of this visual narrative reflects the stages of his journey, my evolving understanding of his experiences, and the artistic methods best suited to convey them. Incorporating Lithuanian cultural elements and poetic phrases further bridges the past with the present.

This work transcends mere storytelling. It challenges contemporary perceptions of migration and highlights the sacrifices and hardships that shape family histories. By blending visual art, folklore, and historical facts, I aim to ensure that my great-grandfather's life is remembered and respected.

This project reaffirms the power of narrative to connect us to our roots and inspire reflection. Although the development process was not without its challenges, reconstructing a fragmented family story required navigating gaps in oral accounts, piecing together scarce historical evidence, and creatively imagining missing details. Surprisingly, these obstacles enriched the project.

Looking ahead, this endeavour aims to transform into a published book. If published, I hope this story will resonate with others and spark a deeper appreciation for those who came before us.

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