



**SHIM  
MERI  
NG  
LAND**

29 APR — 16 SEP  
2023

Chrysalid  
gallery

SHIM  
MERI  
NG  
LAND

Natalia  
Grežina +  
Anton  
Yermolov

Curated by  
Marth von Loeben

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It is only in the imagination  
that what has escaped me  
in reality appears.

Dagmar Leupold

Natalia Grezina

+

Anton Yermolov

Shimmering

Land

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In Sevastopol, steeped in history, there is a place that particularly attracted me with its past — Chersonesos Taurica. I remember that I liked to enter the natural reserve not from the grand tourist entrance, but through a rusty gate in the middle of a wasteland, and then, gradually descending the hill towards the remains of the ancient city, to see the sea, the dry grass, the rubble of the columns and the archaeological excavations. It was pleasant to escape into such a past, it seemed vague and magical enough that its wars and catastrophes felt safe and poetic. Archaeology and its subject matter seemed far removed from politics and everyday life.

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This misconception lived in my mind until I learned about the legal case surrounding the Scythian gold collection. I was struck by the fact that objects created thousands of years ago -hidden first in burial mounds, then in museums, and now in storage- have become hostages of a complex political situation of our time. The exhibition "Crimea: Gold and Secrets of the Black Sea" in the Allard Pierson Museum (Amsterdam), showing the intersection of cultures in this area in the ancient world, became a crossroads of interests of different sides later on.

The historical significance of the heritage that the artefacts bear has changed because of the political situation outside the museum. The current "suspended" position of this collection of antiquities is now in my eyes a metaphor for the "phantom"

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status of Crimea, with its population caught between conflicting worlds. The documentary film "De Schatten van de Krim" (directed by Oeke Hoogendijk) includes footage of a sculpture of the Kerch goddess, mother of the Scythians, standing under the low vault of the museum storage among the boxes with other exhibits. The expression on her stone face changes from confused to angry, depending on the lighting. It is as if my feelings about finding myself in the "grey" zone of the Crimean context have taken shape, and gained substance. This difficult legal case is one of the many consequences of the annexation of Crimea, affecting the feelings and lives of people, especially archaeological scholars, museum staff and their visitors. And also the dead, who created these objects, buried with them in the

tombs as tokens and imbued them with important messages of farewell. These are true possessions in the afterlife. Therefore, objects that have already been found and studied could go back into the ground, to their true owners, thus ending this petty dispute amongst the living over possession of the past. The "Shimmering Land" project began by studying the exhibition catalogues, diving not only into the history of the peoples of Crimea in ancient times, archaeological excavations, and numerous articles about the trials, but also into the ethical, and emotional side of the conflict, which for me is the most important. All of this has led to questions: What does the heritage handed down from our ancestors say about us today? Is it a piece of research or a trophy? If heritage has been rendered inaccessible due to political processes, which tools



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and ways can be developed to still spread its story? The references of the artworks in the "Shimmering Land" project are the several objects from the Scythian Gold collection, the form and purpose of which are universal to any culture and were part of everyday life. The handmade objects of the exhibition are a connection to the physical world and the landscape that surrounds us and absorbs our memories. Digital objects are the dematerialisation of reality, reducing it to information. The emotional state of people trapped in uncertainty fills, like vessels, the objects trapped in boxes, distorting them and shimmering through the shell.

Here I want to return again to my memories of Chersonesos, to the sea. When you stand on the shore, remnants of ancient civilisations and layers of present-day people are

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pressing against your back, and in front of you, there is a raging element, with all the same rocks and bones rolling around at the bottom. When you look back in search of answers, it is clear that the past is waiting for new meanings. Looking ahead, there is a future, as fickle and ruthless as the sea. There, the war, like a ghost, lives in things, memories, and tears. In the mounds, among the jewellery, crockery and weapons, darkened bronze mirrors were often found. It is an object from the distant past that has lost its functionality, but we still look into it from the contradictory moment of the present. And what our modernity will in return leave to future generations will act as a mirror for their reality.

Natalia Grezina





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It was usually very quiet here, incredibly calm. Slumber came easily to weary limbs and it was the most wonderful seat to rest. Admittedly, a lonely stroller would sometimes find it nice to climb over my hill, either to have a nicer view of the surroundings or to catch the last rays of the evening, just before the sun would join us in the realm below. But I never did mind those kind of visits. It is true that the flora and fauna in my overhead garden were much more lively and active, always mutating, never standing still, and always fighting the dreadful night and the cold to keep alive. But that was a lovely background melody at best, and I always thought of myself as a guest in their land.

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When the delegation came, instead, that's when the stillness was broken and the thumping started. Very annoying, but distant at first, far enough to be easily ignored. When the thumping got louder and closer, the ground started to shake noticeably: I could feel it in my crown, my gifts, my horse; a strong rumble, deep into my bones. When the thumping stopped, the creeping silence that followed was a grim omen of what was about to happen next.

It came as a soft awakening, like a delicate nudge that would just have you open your eyes, all of a sudden. It became much more painful once I realized that all my gifts and all my animals were not around me anymore. Just like thieves in the night, they came and silently raided my burial palace, and were now coming for the last things that were left: my bones.

In the years that followed, I found myself being shuffled from place to place, crammed in a very tiny and dark box, only to be displayed later in a glass cage under bright lights. I was never reunited with all my belongings; only few of them would be lucky enough to travel with me to be ogled at by dull eyes, sardonic faces and groups of children of all ages. I met many others like me, stuck in this uncertain limbo, severed



from their precious belongings and wandering across seas and distant lands. I was once honoured with the presence of a goddess of the Pantikapaion: she was also adrift, fatigued by this uncomfortable residency and bitter about the Raid. It's been many years since she has been moved away, though, and I fear that she has descended into an even worse oblivion than ours, far below the sea level.

It's silent here too. But rest will never visit the halls of this confinement. All I can do is to lie awake and think of my former dwelling, where all my belongings were layed around me, secure and everlasting, and the cicadas were palying their perpetual tune while everything else was welcoming, serene and quiet.

Marth von Loeben

The Shimmering Land  
29 April — 16 September, 2023  
Chrysalid gallery

Artists: Natalia Grezina, Anton Yermolov  
Curator: Marth Von Loeben  
Text: Marth Von Loeben, Natalia Grezina  
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by Anton Yermolov

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