

## Sunrise I Missed

– Text by Ewelina Węgiel

Kamil Kak is a queer multimedia artist and an immigrant from Eastern Europe working in Svalbard during their stays at Artica Svalbard and Ny-Ålesund Research Station since 2024. Kak explored the idea of an indirect interview and hosted workshops during which the residents responded with drawings to spontaneously posed questions; they were asked to draw an object they had recently touched, something they had lost, or something they were missing or longing for. The questions evolved as the process unfolded (e.g. trees, which do not exist on the island in their conventional form, began to appear in the drawings). Kak documented the location itself, incorporating drawings from years past left in guest books in wooden cabins, illustrations from 1980s newspapers, and so on. In this way, Kak collected interviews with people who live(d) in Svalbard and those who left traces.

The artist established a close collaboration with researchers working in Svalbard. Kak accompanied them during fieldwork in the tundra and absorbed their methods for observing and studying the environment. Through these collaborations, Kak accessed scientific data, such as drone images of the valley recorded at wavelengths outside the visible spectrum. Invisible to the human eye (saved in seven channels), these were later processed into three-channel images that we can comprehend. While processing these drone recordings, the artist asks what we can see, what remains invisible, and what we choose to see (or actively choose not to).

During their several-month stay in the field, Kak immersed themselves in the ambiance and grappled directly with the terrain and its extreme conditions. They spent a lot of time outdoors, facing sudden weather changes, low temperatures, and the unique Arctic circumstances. They learned to navigate these rapid climate changes and documented the shifting conditions, which significantly impacted Kak's creative process.

Kamil Kak understands the Svalbard archipelago as a 'magnifying glass' of the world, where everything happens faster and more intensely. Where climate change progresses fastest, decisions are often made without flinching, and rapid changes in global dynamics are corporeal. The political situation of the archipelago is unique. Its residents are subject to specific laws, and in recent years, their rights and opportunities to participate in local political life have been restricted. New regulations on voting rights have resulted in some Svalbard residents no longer being able to vote in local elections. The fate of Svalbard is largely determined by the central government. Kak is interested in the relationship between the island's residents and the state that administers this remote territory. They ask how decisions made in Oslo affect the functioning of the local community. At the same time, this place is

becoming increasingly important in the context of potential new trade routes and growing interest in the Arctic amid climate change.

'Performance, then workshops, then embroidery, then work, then a change in that work'. Kamil Kak's pieces are constantly evolving; the artist transforms them, layering on new meanings and interpretations. Their stories are nonlinear. Emotionally charged remixes of data. Kak uses documentary media, photographs, and film, but transforms them, blending facts with fiction and personal aesthetic, which they have been meticulously developing for years. Kak eschews presenting raw scientific facts.

Like scientists, Kamil Kak uses machines: an industrial embroidery machine, printers, computers, and cameras to process data, but their data is quite different: it consists of emotions, curiosity, helplessness, a queer perspective, ghosts, stones, rain, cold, and a drawing of a rotten apple by a Svalbard resident who feels just like their own doodle.

In their practice, Kak employs methods that can be interpreted through the lens of queer ecology. There are many other ways to create stories.

Svalbard has no native folklore or culture, so the artist is interested in creating something new. They invite residents, scientists, permanent and temporary workers, tourists, and even non-human actors inhabiting the space to participate.

A place undergoing such rapid change requires new ways of storytelling all the more.

In a world where we no longer make pottery or do embroidery, nor do we dance, sing, or tell stories together, Kak attempts to revive such practices with the local community and, together, tell stories about this strange time and place in which we live.

As a queer artist and migrant working alongside scholars, they draw from various sources and experiences, not subjecting them to hierarchies but drawing inspiration from them. Alongside scientific archives, they create new ones (equally meaningful) based on emotions, memories, touch, and unsystematized knowledge. They ask: who should decide in a place (and on what basis) and what should influence their decisions? The government, scientists, international capital, residents, or maybe the weather? Perhaps it is worth considering not only strictly scientific data in these decisions, but also folklore, emotions, intuition, and memories. How to forge connections with a place, create archives, and record stories?