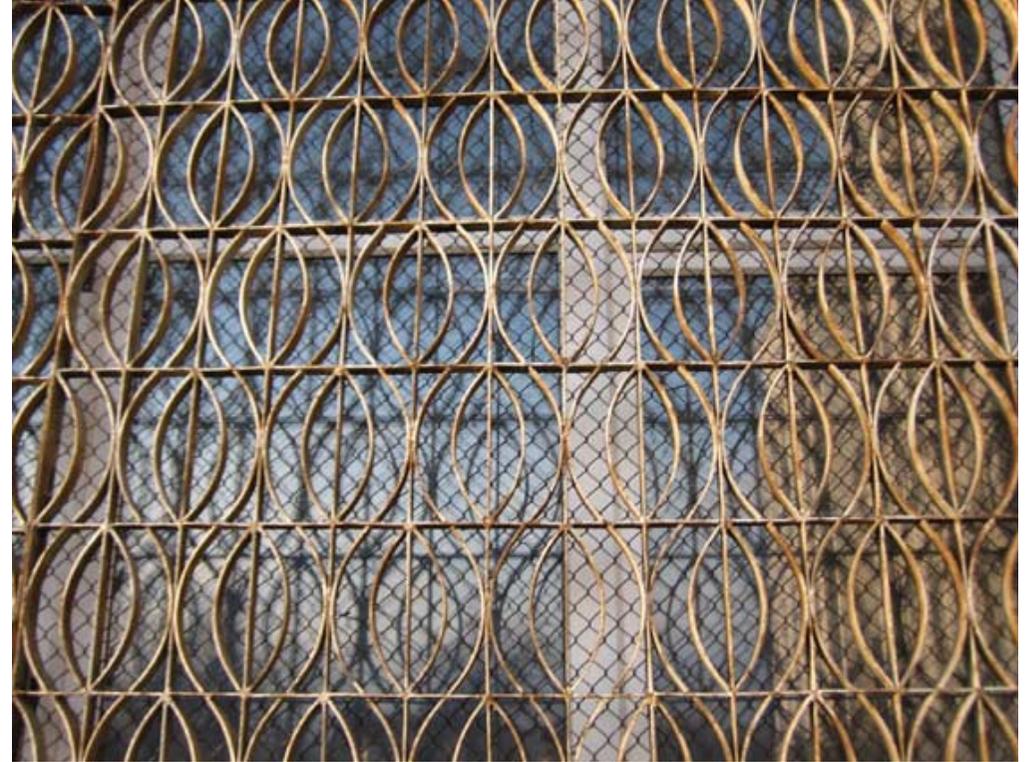


I spent a week in Kaunas in early December, during which I created a detailed sketchbook, with notes, drawings and so on. I also took about 350 photographs, focusing primarily on details, textures and surfaces, to build up a palette and a strong feel for the essential qualities of the place.

Before travelling, I had done a little initial research into traditional Lithuanian textiles and other folk crafts, so that I had an idea of where I would like to start. That said, however I also felt it was important to go without strong preconceptions, and to respond instinctively to what I found.

I have to admit that when David rang me a few months ago to raise the possibility of a residency, I had not even heard of Kaunas. The farthest east I had previously travelled in Europe was Switzerland! What a great opportunity then, to visit Lithuania during the Kaunas textile biennale, and to build up a bank of visual research from which to develop a new body of work.



One of the things I was most struck by in Kaunas, was the strong sense of layer upon layer of history. Medieval buildings sit next to twentieth century concrete, baroque detailing is juxtaposed with art deco ironwork. This sense of surfaces built up and worn away over time is very tangible - you feel you are seeing the bones and the scars of the city.

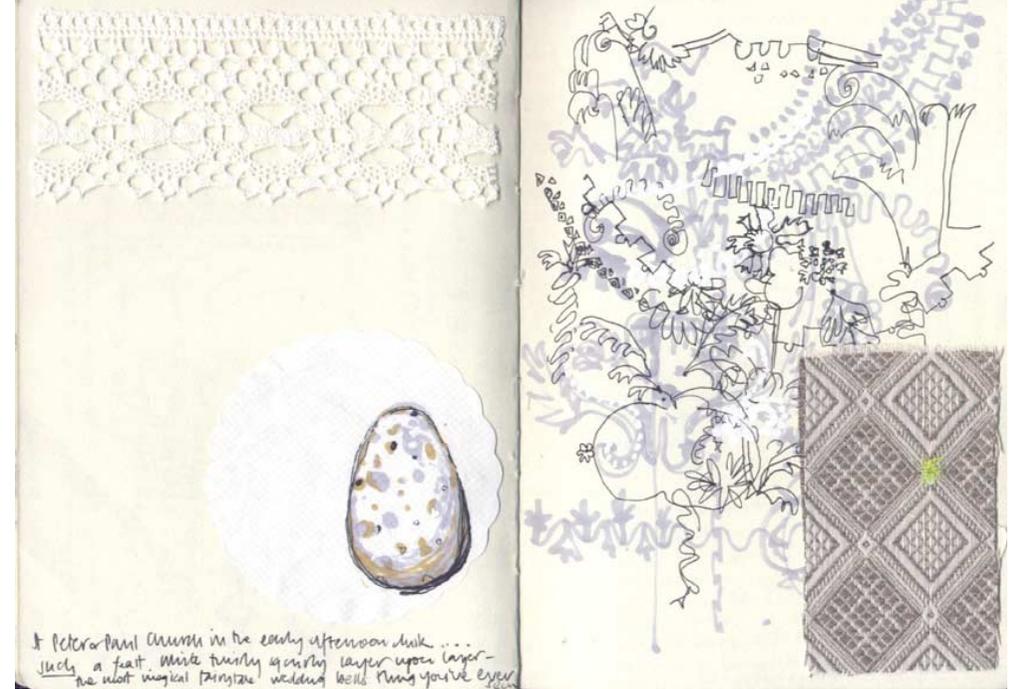
I also found myself very drawn to the untold stories of the 'ghost' windows - blanked in and forgotten - blocked views of another time.

These are both themes which I will return to in my responses to the trip.



I was also very drawn to the strong sense of pattern throughout - from architectural details such as wrought ironwork crosses, baroque stucco work (the interior of St Peter and Paul in Vilnius is spectacular), and carved wooden gables - through to the traditional textiles at the National Museum at Vilnius with their double-cloth and extra warp and weft patterning. The museum also holds a wonderful collection of agricultural and household implements decorated with folk motifs. I would very much like to draw on some of these beautiful rhythmic patterns in my own responses to the work.

I have brought home several pieces of Lithuanian linen which I am planning to work into - perhaps exploring drawn thread techniques to echo the sense of fragmented pattern. My favourites are the fabrics with a cotton warp, and linen weft - beautiful repeat structure patterns created by the interaction of the white cotton, and the undyed linen.



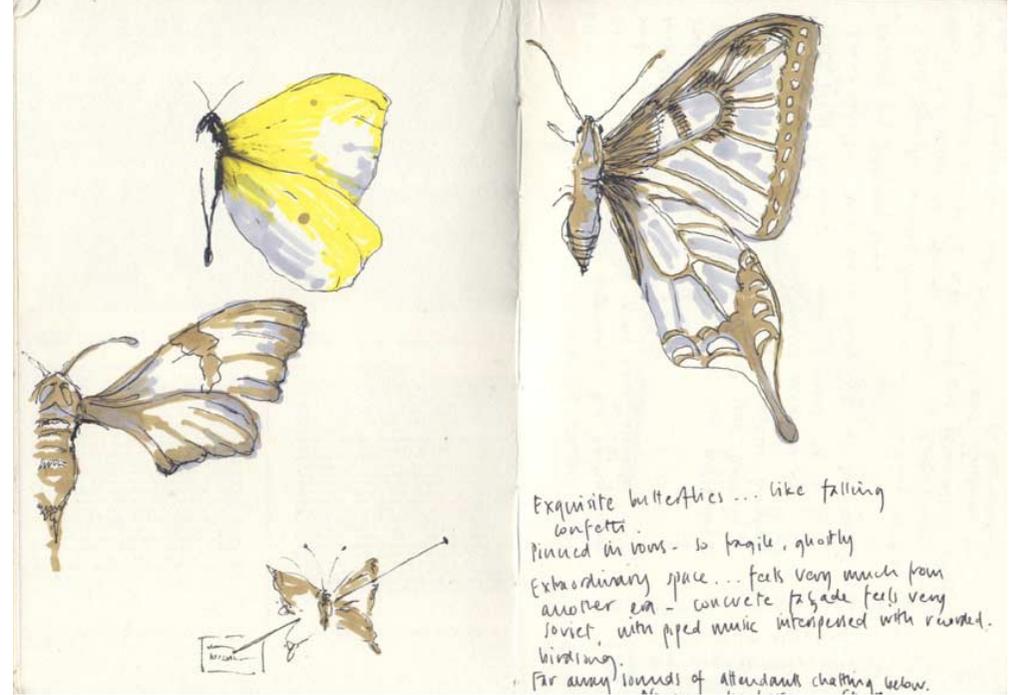
One of the areas which I was particularly keen to explore was the Lithuanian tradition of papercuts or *Karpiniai*. I had found some images on the internet of traditional forms of these, but I was really excited to find that it is still very much in use today. *Karpiniai* are clearly made now for Christmas decorations, and I found several examples in the windows of schools, as well as some very beautiful elaborate ones in a bookshop.

I especially liked this one, with the rabbits and the TV ariels or telegraph poles - such a lovely example of a reinterpretation of an age old tradition in a contemporary context.



Perhaps the most interesting things however were the least expected...

One of the eeriest times I had in Kaunas was in the Zoological Museum. The museum has an enormous collection of butterflies - thousands and thousands pinned onto boards in huge glass cases. The soft, fragile shadows cast had a particular resonance, echoing thoughts of shadows and 'ghost' windows. There was something so beautiful and so incongruous about these tiny scraps of confetti, with the light drawing in, and the temperature falling outside, and Danny Boy playing on a loop sound system while the old ladies knitted.



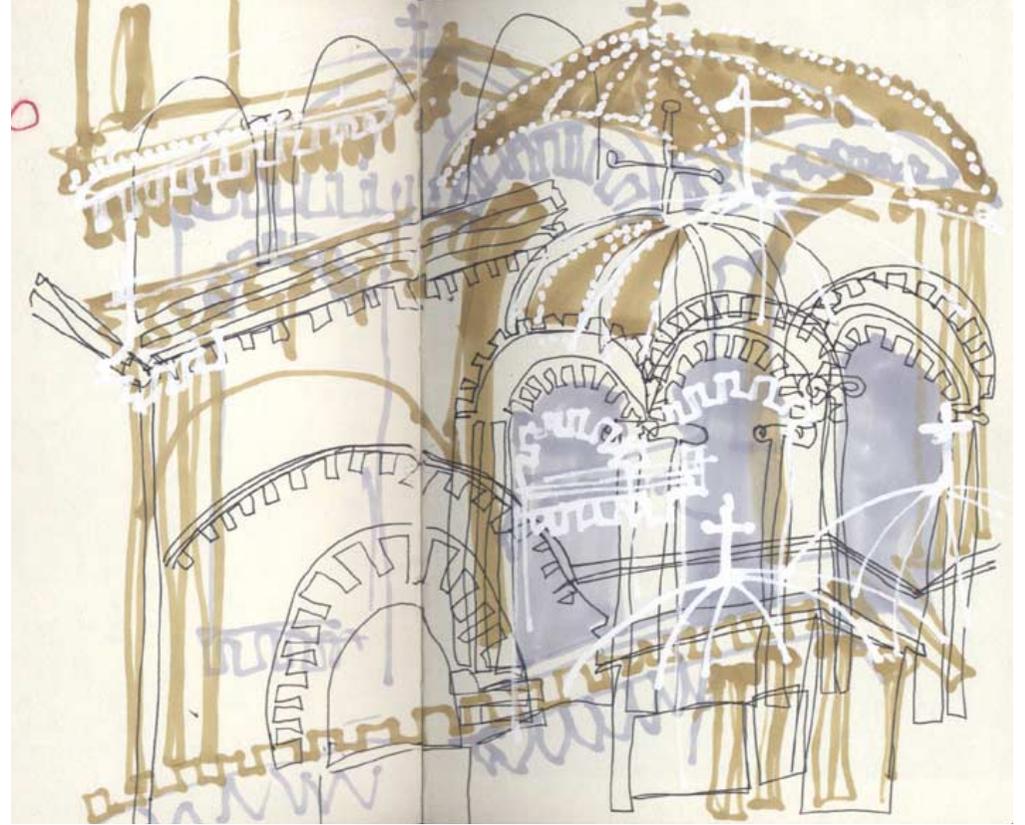
Snow

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes -
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one's hands -
There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

Louis MacNeice



It was wonderful to be in Kaunas during the biennale. The sense of energy and creativity in the city was very inspiring, and it was great to have a chance to see so much exciting new work.

This trip feels to me very much like the beginning of a journey. I am well stocked with my precious cargo of visual provisions, which I will develop and play with over the coming months. I very much hope to have an opportunity to show the work which I make in response to my visit at the next biennale in 2009.

Huge thanks to Vita and Ed for their very warmest of welcomes; to Virginia for her kindness, and help with all the arrangements; to Laima for her warmth and enthusiasm; to Jurate for the much treasured little book on Karpiniai; and to David in London for all his encouragement and support, and for setting the wheels in motion!

