



APRIL 2026

WHAT WE KEPT

AN EXPERIMENTAL PROJECTION PROJECT

BY YANA MIKHAILAVA



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What We Kept takes place inside the Belarusian Orthodox Church hall in downtown Toronto, a space that has long served as a home for cultural preservation among the Belarusian diaspora in Canada.

At the center of the room stands a single performer. My mother wears a *kashulya*, a traditional Belarusian blouse whose linen was hand-woven by my great-grandmother, then sewn and embroidered by my mother. A hand-woven belt completes the partial costume. What is absent is deliberate: a woman's full traditional dress would include additional elements, but the costume is intentionally stripped back, leaving the lower half of the garment as a surface for projection. The rough linen texture becomes a canvas for digital intervention.

Audio-reactive visuals are projected onto the dress as the performer sings along to a recording of her own choir; she is present while the rest of the ensemble is only there in sound. The imagery draws from the motifs of the songs themselves, the sun dancing at its peak, the bonfire growing in the summer dark, rendered in light that moves with the music. The technology is not simply decorative; it acts as a means of restoration, returning physical context to a song that has been separated from the place and people it is sung by.

The title says it plainly. Cultural celebrations like Kupalle are no longer permitted within Belarus under the Lukashenko regime, and what survives exists here, in church halls and choir rooms, carried by elder generations who left the motherland but did not leave the culture behind. The solitary figure, the partial costume, the projected flame together speak to continuity and its cost. Not erasure, but incompleteness. A tradition kept alive, but only in pieces.

REFERENCE MOODBOARD

Figure 1 - Moodboard & Color Palette

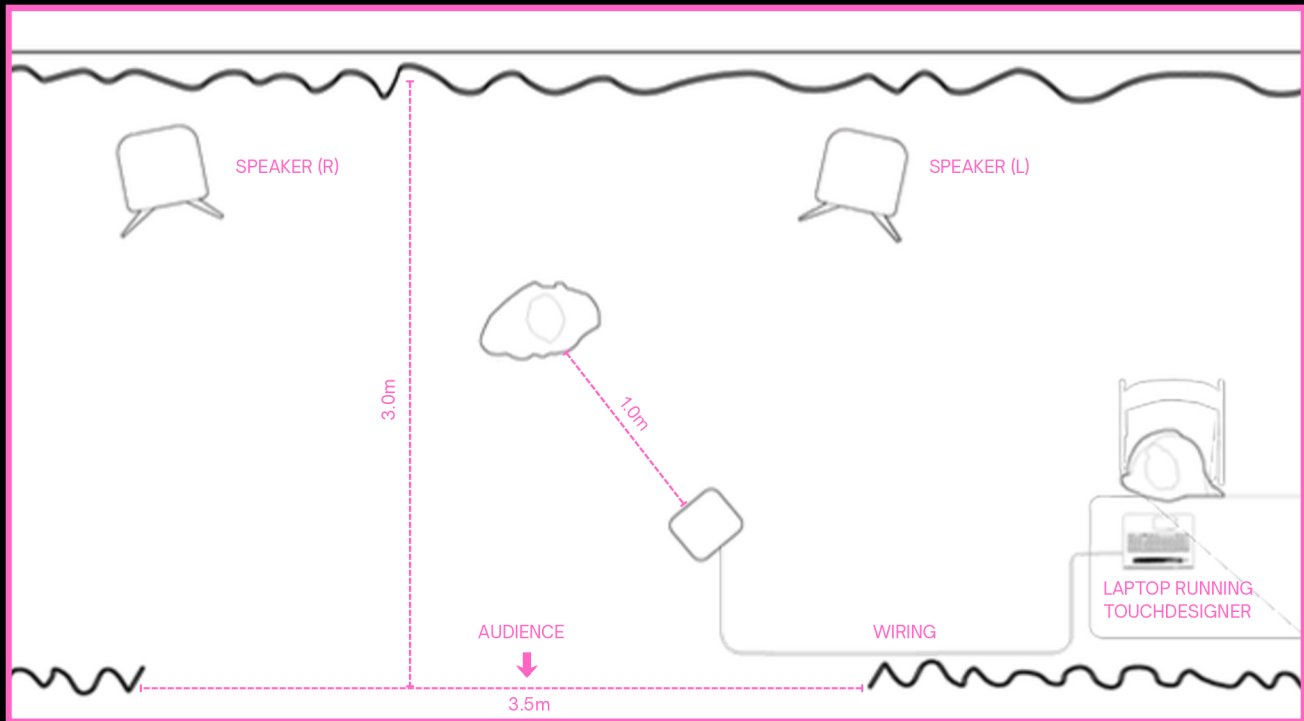


The visual language of the project is grounded in the symbolic duality central to Kupalle mythology, in which light and darkness are interdependent rather than opposing forces. Nature is understood as a source of wisdom and spiritual power, expressed through rituals of divination and purification that move between illumination and shadow. This informs the project's color palette, drawing from the two primary light sources of the celebration: solar light at its annual peak and the open flame of the bonfire. The digital content inhabits this tension through saturated warm tones set against deep cool shadows and atmospheric diffusion.

INSTALLATION DIAGRAMS

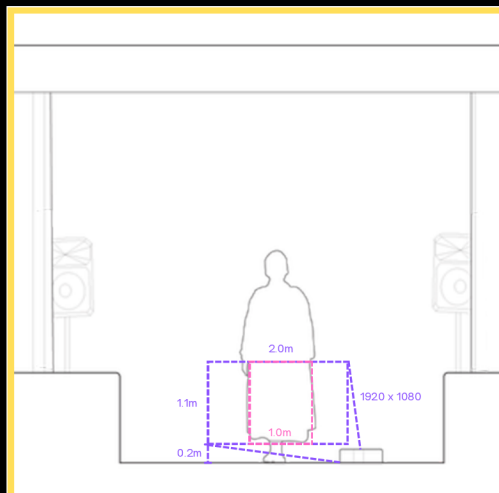
The performance space depicted within the illustration diagrams is the Belarusian Orthodox Church Hall, with two stage curtains framing the performance. One curtain at the back of the room, and a second set of curtains which denote the end of the stage space. This allows for the set-up of a laptop to be hidden behind the curtain, while only the projector remains visible

TOP VIEW

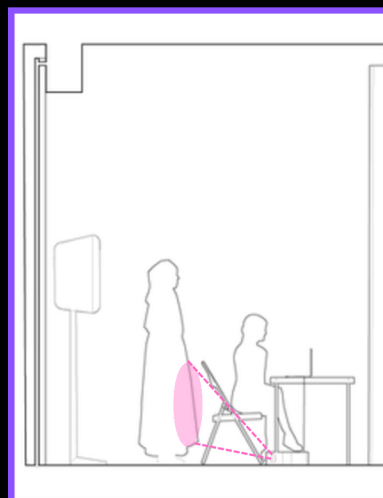


The projector placement in this scenario is designed for a one person performance and is therefore placed to maximize ppi on the projection area, at a distance of one meter.

FRONT SECTION VIEW



LEFT SECTION VIEW



The only projected area is the skirt of the performer, softly faded out into the dim surroundings.

While the projector remains visible to the audience, the TouchDesigner operator is conveniently hidden from view by the first layer of curtains.

CONTENT CREATION PROCESS

Three visual compositions were created in TouchDesigner, one for each performance song, and wrapped in an interactive envelope allowing smooth transitions between compositions via keypress.

Final TouchDesigner Patch

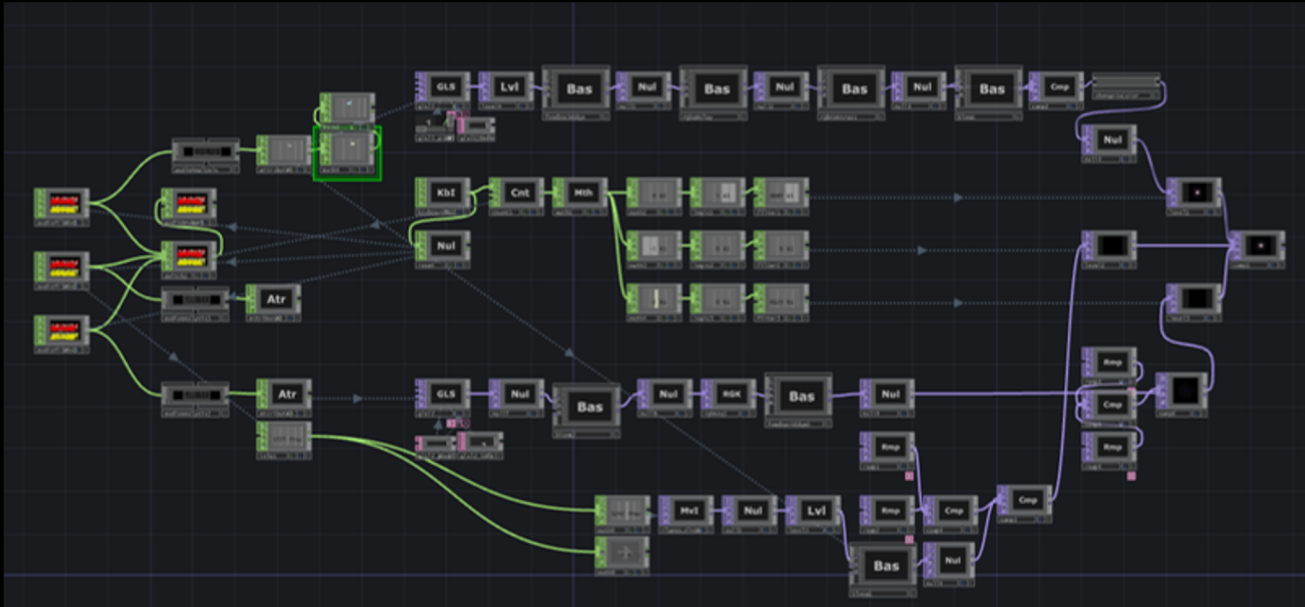


Figure 1 depicts the final TouchDesigner document, the three individual visual patches and the cycling logic via which they are interfaced.

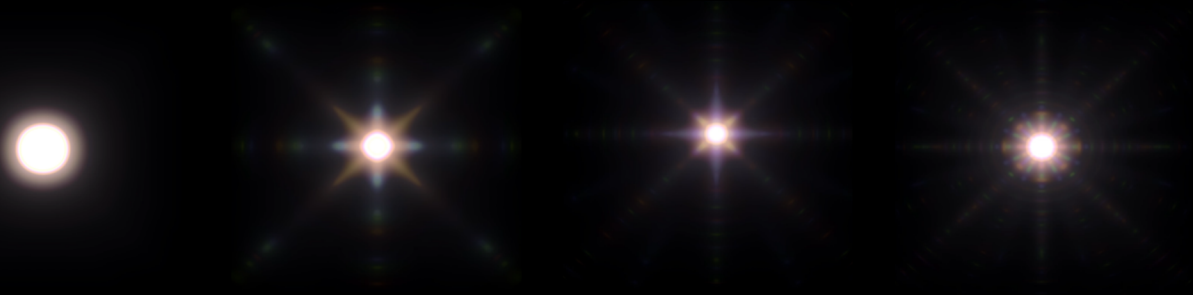
```

gls_touchdesigner.mdc x
01_Assets > glsl_touchdesigner.mdc
Review Next File
Apply Manually This rule needs to be mentioned to be included
1 ---
2 alwaysApply: false
3 ---
4 @https://derivative.ca/UserGuide/GLSL
5 @https://derivative.ca/UserGuide/Write a GLSL TOP
6
7 always define a Uniform for resolution first named uResolution
8 never list the version
9 never define vUV since its pre defined
10 never define vUV since its pre defined
11 never define input textures as uniforms, they are already defined with sTD2Inputs[0]
12
13 To ensure cross platform support between Windows and macOS, any color written to a texture should be first passed
    through vec4 IDOutputSwizzle(vec4). This function will ensure the correct channels go in the correct output channels
    depending on the destination texture format. For example alpha-only textures do not atually exist, and are stored as
    red-only textures.
14
15 Think step by step about whether a simpler, more elegant, and robust solution exists that avoids over-engineering while
    aligning with KISS, YAGNI, DRY, and SOLID principles.
  
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The code for the GLSL shaders was written in collaboration with Cursor AI. The key success factor for this process is a rules file on how to format the code to be used for the express purpose of being used within the TouchDesigner GLSL shader TOP.

VISUALIZER 1 - “NA INVANA SOLTNTSE GRALA”

A morning Kupalle song describing the sun's apparent dance across the sky on the summer solstice. The audio-reactive visual is built from a custom GLSL shader adapted from a [Shadertoy](#) reference and modified for TouchDesigner and audio-reactivity via prompting with Cursor AI.



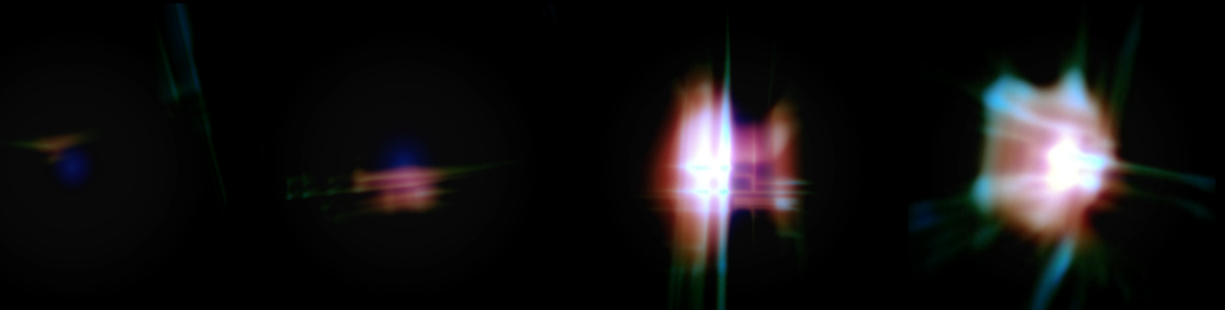
VISUALIZER 2 - “TO TO TO”

ToToTo is traditionally sung in a circle around the bonfire, this song increases in tempo with each recitation as the fire grows and participants begin to run. The visual uses a video loop of fire whose playback speed scales with the tempo of the track, mirroring the song's escalating energy.



VISUALIZER 3 - “NA KUPALYE TEMNIYE NOCHI”

The final song engages the tension at the heart of Kupalle, the night forest as a site of mystery and the unknown. The visual is an original abstract GLSL shader inspired by the optical phenomena experienced by the human eye adjusting to complete darkness, simulating the kind of visual disturbances one might encounter in a lightless forest. The code for this visualizer was also written in collaboration with Cursor AI while applying the TouchDesigner GLSL shader protocol.



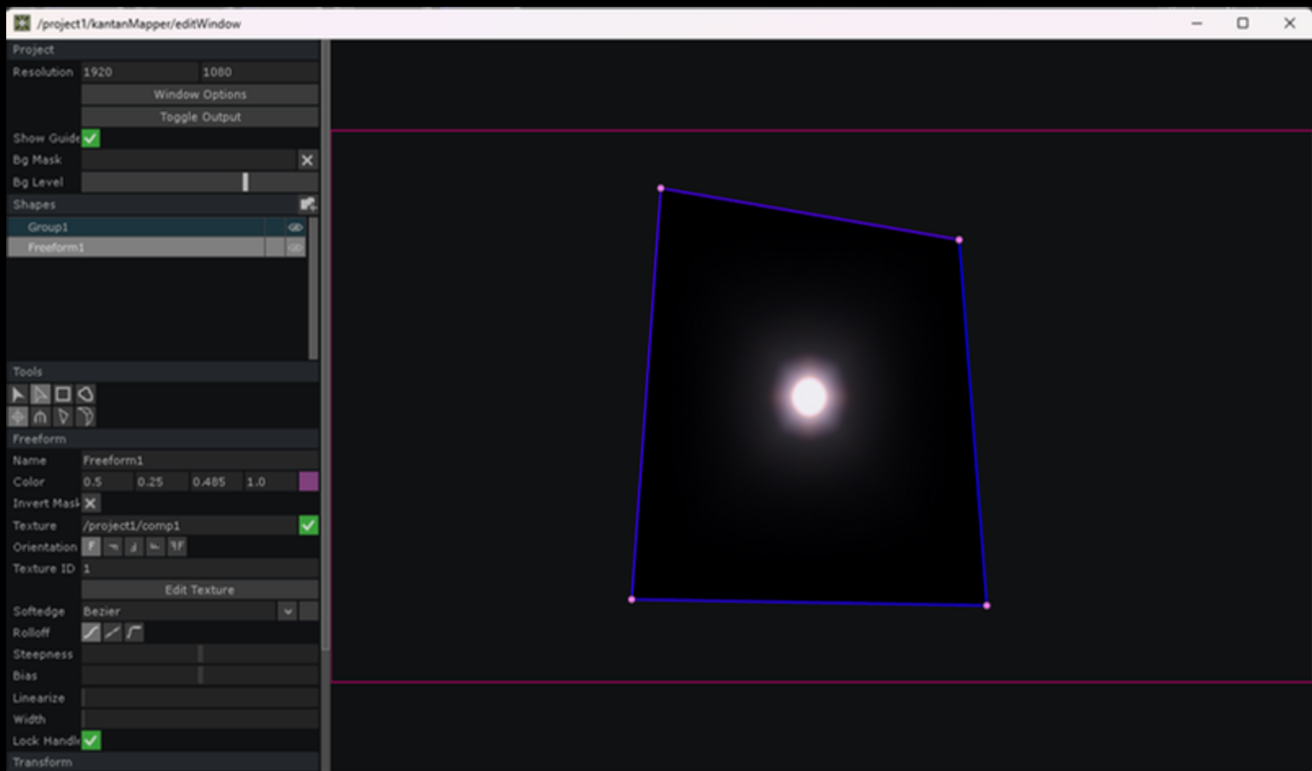
*All of the song tracks are folk songs which were arranged, recorded and generously provide for use within this project by the Belarusian folk choir group [Javarovy Ludzi.](#)

FINAL PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The final performance was set-up using the ViewSonic LS711HD. Considering the approximate projection mapping site of 1.1m x 1.0m, the resolution of the projected visuals at the time of the performance was about 960 x 1080ppi.

ViewSonic LS711HD
Throw Ratio: 0.496
Brightness: 4200 ANSI Lumens
Resolution: 1920 x 1080

USING KANTAN MAPPER



The projection mapping for this project was done within Kantan Mapper in TouchDesigner. Since there is only one projection surface, the mapping patch itself is simple.

TECHNICAL REFERENCES

Mastering GLSL in TouchDesigner by Lake Heckaman

Creating GLSL Shaders in TouchDesigner with Cursor AI by Jascha Suss

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WHAT WE KEPT

PHOTO DOCUMENTATION



FINAL PROJECT REFLECTION

At the start of this course, I had nearly no experience with TouchDesigner, little familiarity with coding, and no idea what a GLSL shader was. What We Kept represents a significant technical leap, but more than that, it is the most personally meaningful project I have made in this program.

I chose this subject because it is an ultimate expression of who I am as an artist and a person: my Belarusian heritage, my community in Toronto, and my desire to contribute to the preservation of a culture being actively suppressed. I felt the weight of responsibility while working with my mom's choir, a garment hand-woven by my great-grandmother, and building visuals that reflected on ancient tradition.

The project demanded more than I anticipated. Learning to write and adapt GLSL shaders, building audio-reactive systems, and constructing an interactive envelope that could move fluidly between three distinct compositions during a live performance were all skills I developed from scratch. The final patch does not look exactly like what I imagined in my proposal, but fully embraces the spirit of iterative exploration.

My favorite part of the project is incidentally also the one that caused me the most strife. The documentation video. Working with sound layering, pacing, and visual atmosphere to bring the piece to life in a secondary format felt like an extension of the work itself. I am proud of it as a standalone piece, however I also wish the quality of my footage was better. The most difficult aspect was capturing usable footage on the night of the performance. The low-light conditions made most of it unusable. If I were to continue developing this project, I would invest in a secondary lighting setup, as the projector alone does not illuminate the space adequately for documentation.