

Personal ✨ Documentation

of

Eduard Martirosyan

Stockholm, Sweden 2024

Hello, my name is Eduard. I am one of the participants in the 'Positive Solidarity Project' 2024. I moved to Stockholm from Yerevan, Armenia. I have been living with HIV since November 2019. I identify as a member of the queer community. In the following pages, you will see various moments from my life, which I have experienced during the project, along with brief story.





MARCH

When I read the Positive Solidarity Project announcement, I was at a point in my life where I needed a change, especially an environment change, and this was a great opportunity. The work experience I gained in Armenia and abroad, within and for the community, gave me complete confidence to apply.

I arrived in Stockholm on March 25th, and the flights went fairly smoothly despite some delays. Due to delays in the residency permit application process, I lost about two months of my project.

In March and April, I lived with one of my PG colleagues, Ronja.

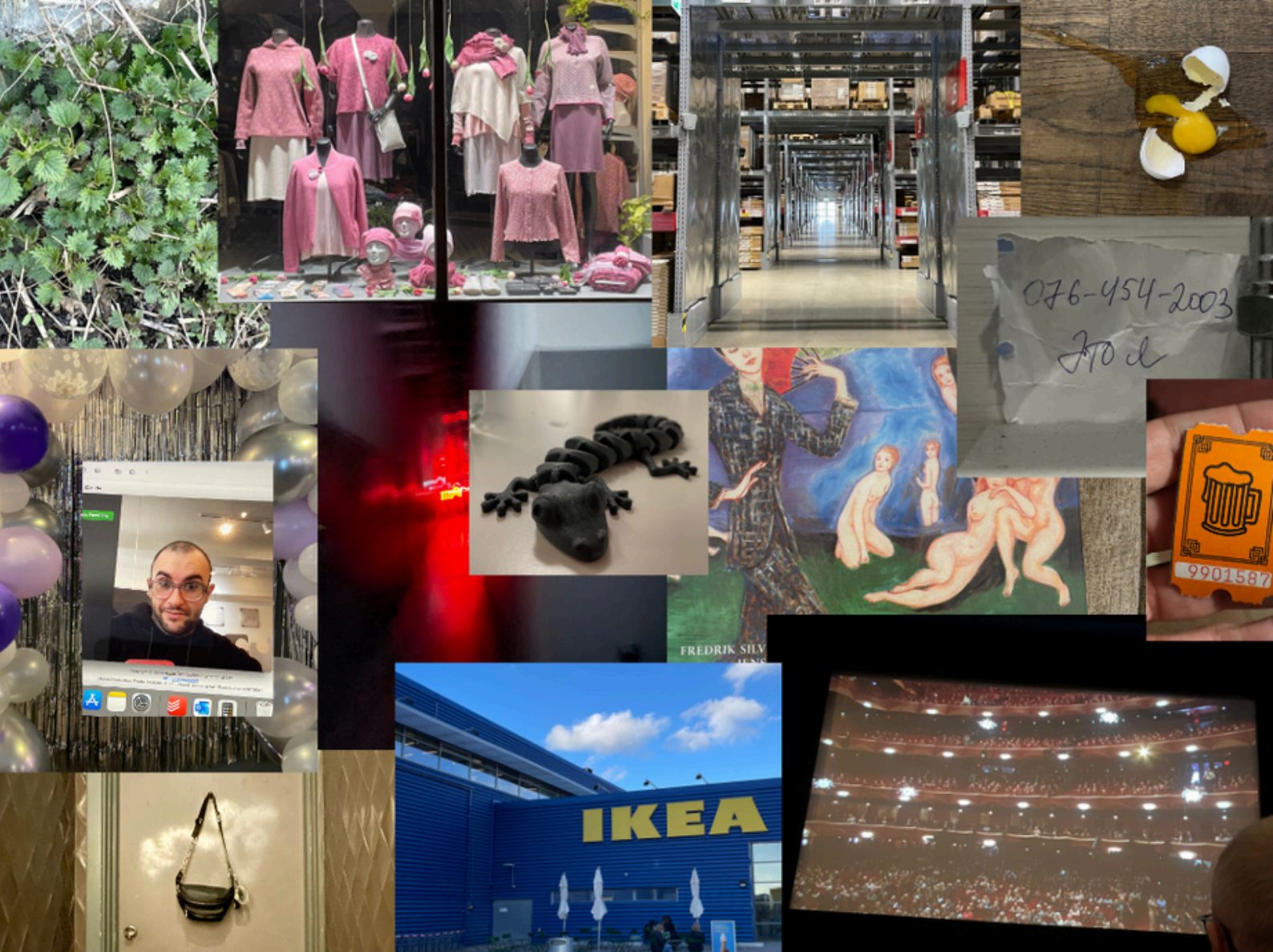
In March, I met Carlos, and since then, we worked together many Fridays during the Fredagsöppet (The "Friday Soup", open to people living with HIV and their close ones/loved ones).

I was in Stockholm for the first time seven years ago, in January. It was interesting to observe the feelings of returning to Stockholm, especially how much the city had changed.

And, of course, I can't not mention the pleasant working conditions at the office. Everything was set up to work comfortably.

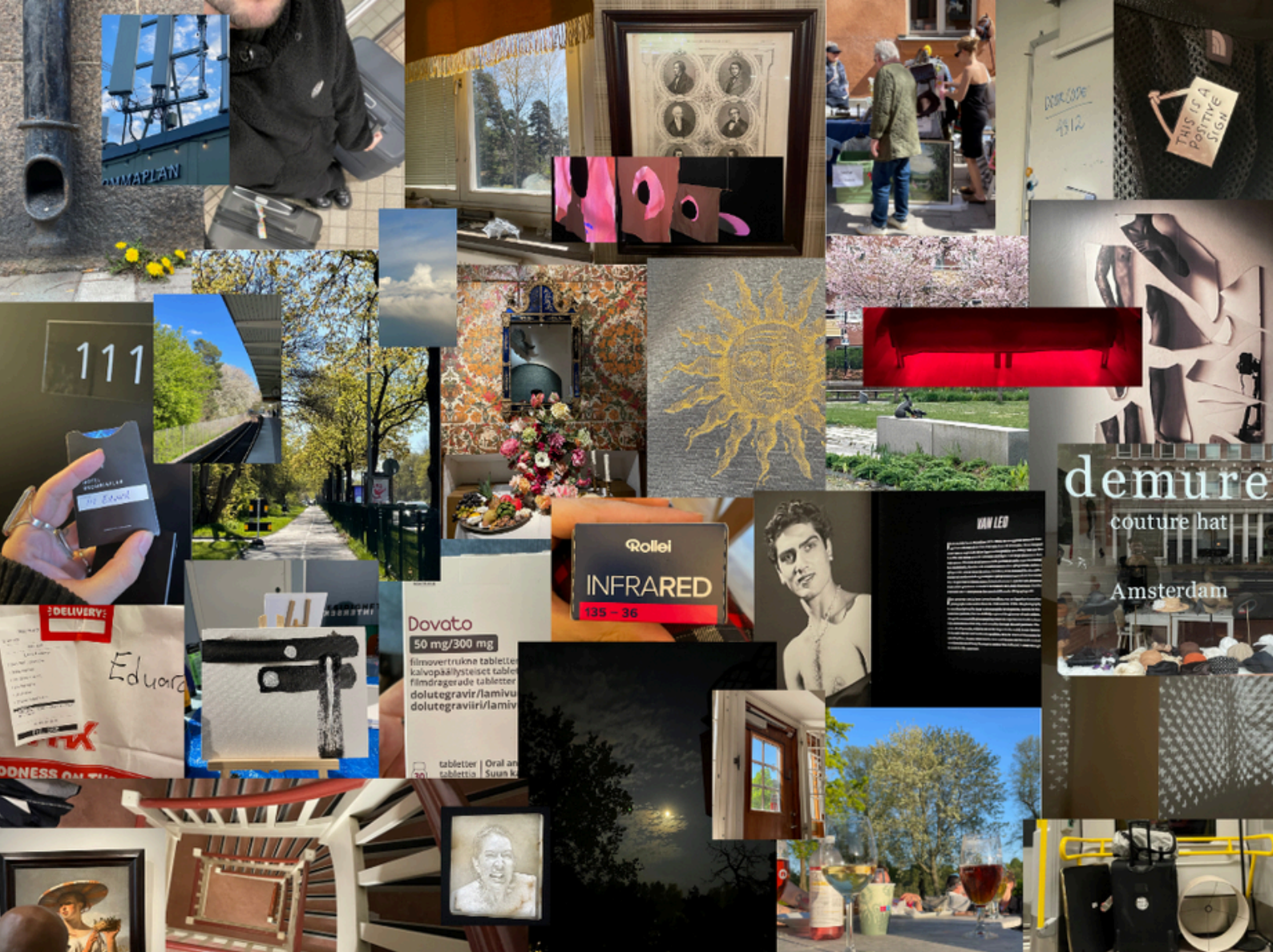
To say that I had full understanding of the project within a month would be an overstatement, but everything was definitely closer and within reach.

The future promised to be bright.



APRIL

In April, the weather was pleasant, and it really started to feel like spring. I walked a lot around the city, visited various stores, explored different neighborhoods— simply getting to know my new surroundings. The green spaces of Stockholm, of course, added a special pleasure to this exploration. In April, I also participated in a few events for people living with HIV, starting to meet members of the community. It was in April that I took my first steps to reobserve Stockholm's queer life and scene. Since I was supposed to move into a private apartment in May, I, of course, visited IKEA. I went with PG mentor Mohammed and his sister several times, and I must say that they introduced me to IKEA's culture as much as possible. As a lover of club culture, I also tried to find spaces that would match my needs. To say that I succeeded would be untrue. I discovered the RFSL's "Stockholm Newcomers" group, where I met queer individuals. I can declare that April was my busiest month of integration.



MAY

Finally, spring knocked on my door too. The presence of greenery was long-awaited for me, especially after a long and eventful winter. So many things happened to me in May.

First, I switched my ART regime to Dovato, which has one less component compared to the medication I was previously taking, meaning potentially less harm.

In May, I also had my first ESC meeting in Bromma Folkhögskola—it was pleasant to meet other volunteers and hear about their motivations for volunteering. Here, I have to say that I regret there weren't any other project representatives from Stockholm.

I also had my first vacation—I travelled to Amsterdam to visit a very close friend I hadn't seen in about six years. It was a long-awaited reunion. I loved Amsterdam, visited so many museums there and already have my favorites. By the way, I also went to museums in Stockholm this month, and it was heartwarming to see the works of an Armenian photographer at the main exhibition of the Fotografiska Museum.

In May, I also participated in Run for Pride with Posithiva Gruppen. Of course, I couldn't run because I had received a vaccine the day before and my muscles were sore, but it was still nice to be present and interact with colleagues outside the office.

At the beginning of the month, I moved into a new apartment to live alone—a place where I spent my days until the end of the program. It's an apartment with an unbearably beautiful view that welcomed me with care.

I want to emphasize that in May, I started to feel existential questions knocking on my door, and already thought about seeking help.

I loved May in Stockholm.



JUNE

Of course, June has been the brightest month for me. I had never experienced anything like it—the day never turned dark. The weather was much more pleasant, so I didn't miss the chance to explore both the reservoir near my neighborhood and other green areas. I can confidently say that it was a huge relief for my mental world.

What's June without Midsommar? I'm so happy I got to see how locals truly celebrate Midsommar, and I can confirm that the famous movie of the same name isn't very accurate. This month, the PG staff and I visited a small confectionery factory, where we had a workshop and made pralines. At the end, we each took some home. It was so delightful to eat chocolate made by the team's hands.

Coming from a relatively unsafe country, I hadn't had the opportunity to pierce my ears for a long time, but I did it this June here in Stockholm. It felt as if a lost piece of me had returned to my body. Other types of experiments with self-expression also brought pleasant results.

In June, I also attended an event at the Museum of Spirits about Absolut's advertising HIV campaign posters from the last century in the U.S. During a speech, PG's Mohammed, reminded us that it wasn't all that long ago, which gave me a lot to think about.

But the most beautiful and warmest moment of the month for me was when I looked out of my apartment window and saw a deer in the park.

We simply stared at each other for almost five minutes.



JULY

July was the lowest point for my mental health—or at least, that’s how I felt at the time. During this period, I also realized how much I missed electronic music, rave culture, and nightlife. I wasn’t able to find a community or club in Stockholm where I would feel comfortable.

Most of the organization’s employees were on vacation throughout the month, and not much happened as such.

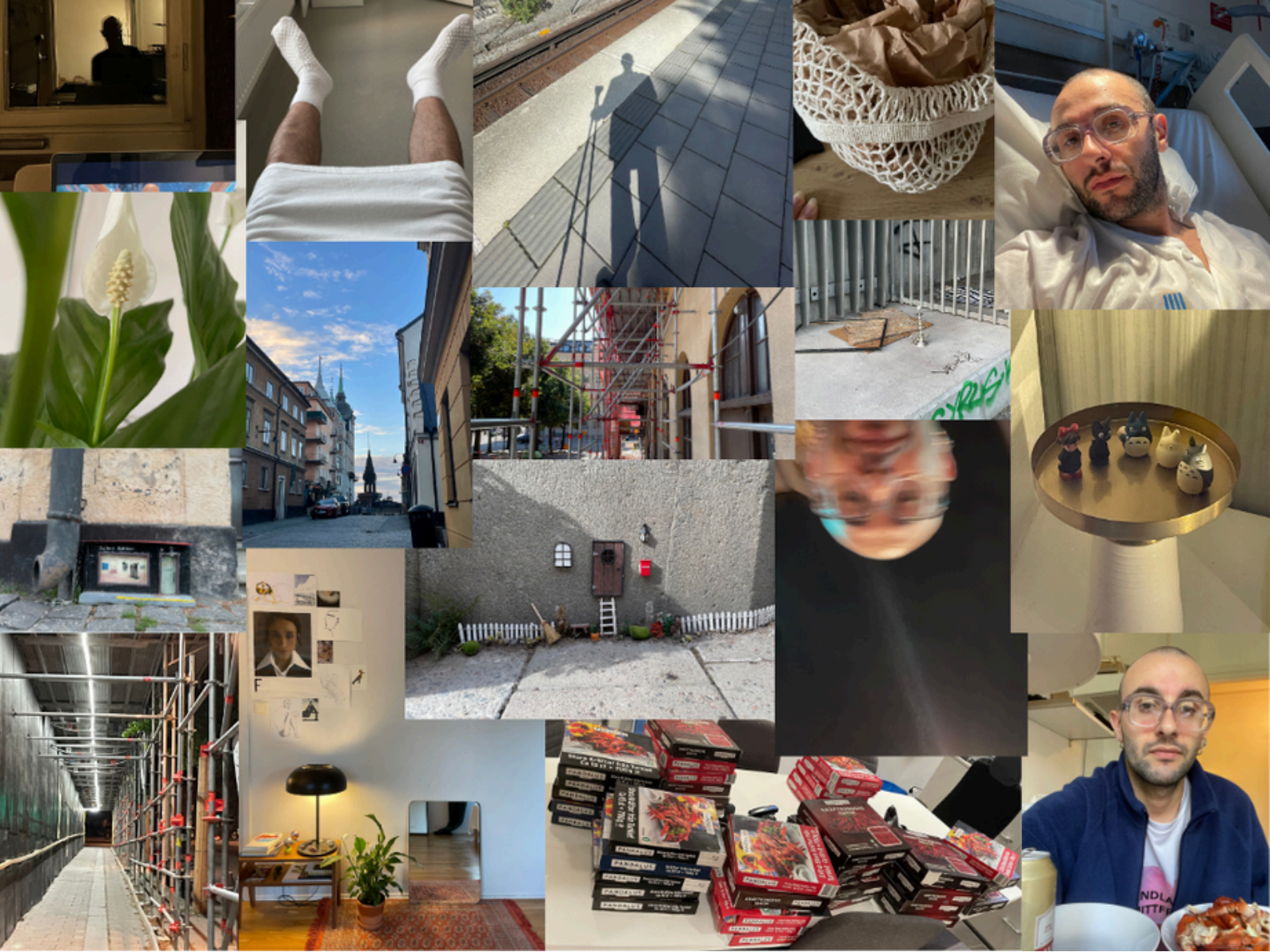
I spent a lot of time in the forests, enjoying the berries I picked with my own hands. I organized “dates” for myself and with myself.

Toward the end of the month, some activity started to pick up as Stockholm Pride approached (it began at the end of the month, but most of it happened in August).

It was an interesting experience to see how political parties address queer issues, as well as how various public and private institutions engage with them.

It was deeply moving to see the support of non-queer family members for queer individuals, demonstrated by their presence.

July wasn’t an easy month for me.



AUGUST

First, I have to talk about my hospitalisation experience. I went through hell due to the unprofessionalism of the medical staff (of course, not all of them). I was operated on without any necessity, when just one ultrasound examination could have prevented it. This was my first surgery in life.

The hardest part was going through the postoperative period alone.

I am very grateful to Leon, Jovan, Andy, and Vide for being by my side, and to all my friends abroad who didn't leave me alone online for even a minute, from the very beginning to the very end.

The first three weeks of August were lost for me, so to speak. It was very difficult emotionally. The end of the month, however, was kinder. After celebrating Crayfish Day at the organization, I also celebrated it at home, alone, with myself.

August will remain unforgettable for me.



SEPTEMBER

Our ESC midterm meeting was in September. From my previous group, there was only one familiar person; everyone else was new. It was pleasant to hear how things had gone for others and what thoughts they had about the future.

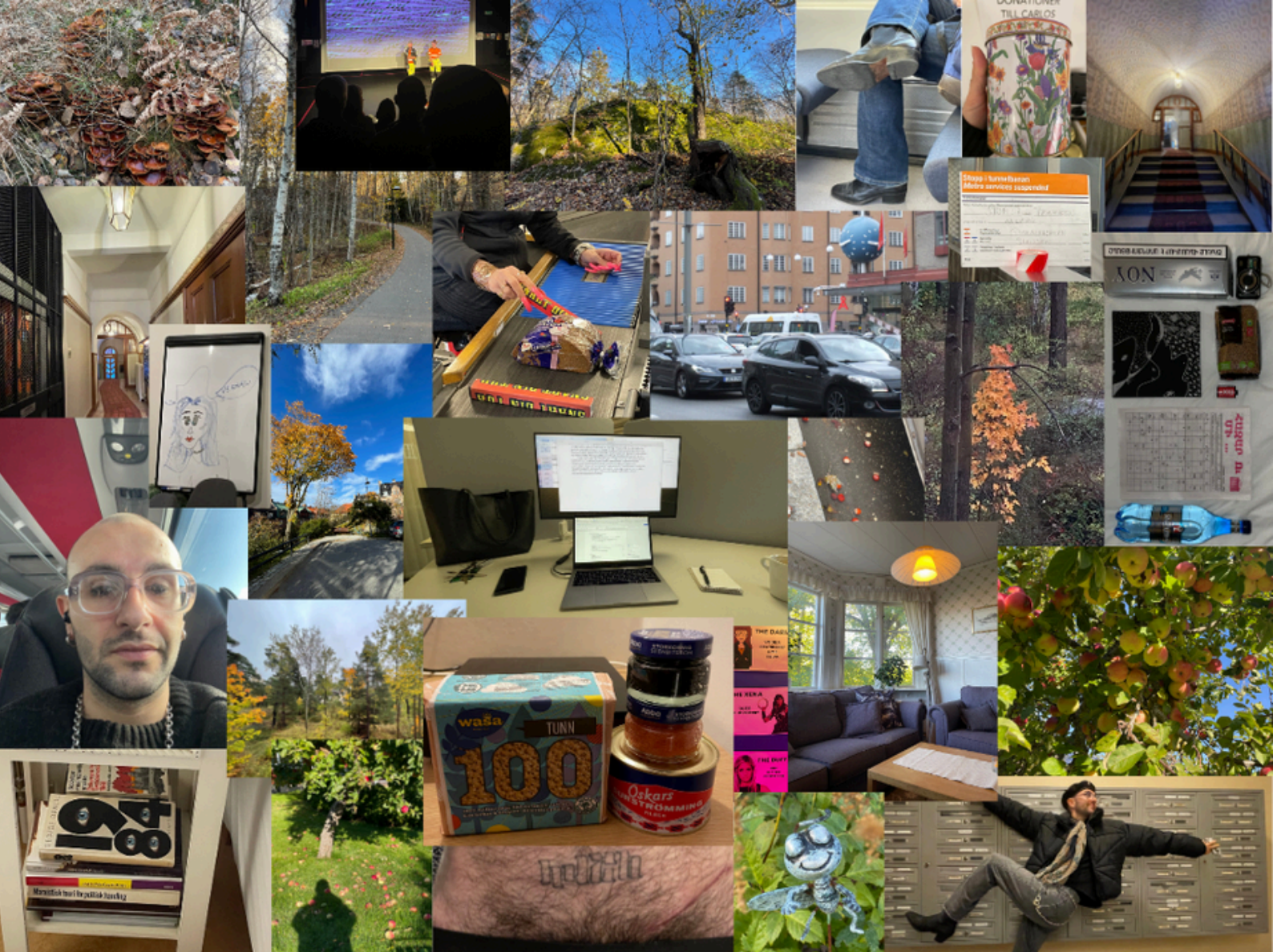
The breath of autumn was already felt in the city; the air had changed its scent. The days had noticeably shortened.

I continued my meetings with the psychologist and the kurator (counsellor in the HIV clinic). August had been very hard on me, and it was clear that I needed to recover somehow. I decided to take a vacation and go to Amsterdam to visit my friends—just to be with them, to not be alone. It was one of the smartest decisions I've made, because it was exactly what I needed.

This vacation was about cooking and sharing meals together, taking evening walks, having morning coffees, watching movies, laughing, crying, feeling alive, and truly living — things I deeply missed in Stockholm. Of course, I also took the opportunity to attend a few cultural events in Amsterdam.

And one very interesting thing: I joined one of my friends for one of their lectures and realized how much I missed the university atmosphere.

This gave me a lot to think about regarding my future.



OCTOBER

October began with being involved in the selection of participants for next year's ESC program, together with Andy. Closed and open discussions, interviews, more discussions, and in the end, we had two participants selected. It was an enjoyable process.

At the beginning of the month, I also attended a conference for young people living with HIV, organized by the Karolinska hospital. It was my first time at such an event—a space where every youth present, in one way or another, shared the experience of living with HIV. It was incredibly inspiring and emotional. One of my friends came from Armenia and brought me a small package, and the thing I was most excited about was the bottled mineral water—it was something I had missed so much. My social mentor and I went to Cinema Queer, where we watched two films from the last century. During one of them, we couldn't stop laughing and making comments—it's likely some people in the audience wanted to kick us out by then. I must mention that as a result of lengthy back-and-forth communication between the insurance company and the hospital, I reached a point where I did no longer care about what happened next. Nothing had been resolved yet, and the bureaucratic chaos was just draining.



NOVEMBER

At the beginning of November, I was invited to what you might call an "HIV birthday party," and the apartment was in the same neighborhood where I had lived during the early phase of the project. It was very nostalgic to be back in that courtyard, recalling different moments and emotions I had experienced on those streets.

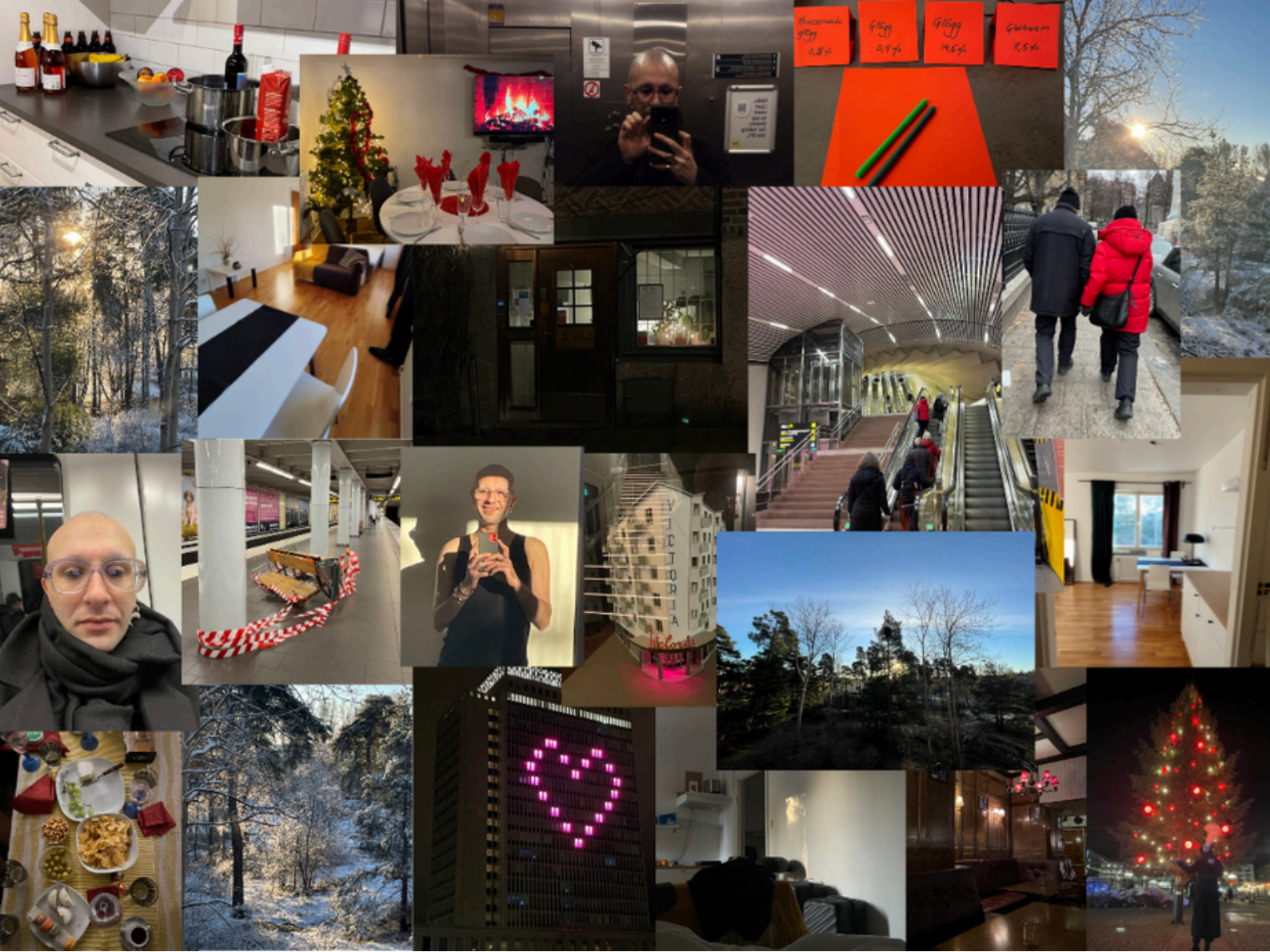
I also want to share that street fashion in Stockholm is quite modest. Of course, there are individuals with unique styles, but for the most part, specific styles dominate among specific age groups.

In the first half of the month, I visited Gothenburg to attend an event, but I also took the opportunity to explore the Gothenburg Museum of Art. There were some very beloved pieces, both by familiar artists and those unknown to me. Overall, I liked Gothenburg—it was cozy.

The cold weather, the project nearing its end, and the festive mood all combined to create a feeling that was preparing me to say goodbye to Stockholm. I managed to overcome this melancholy with warm evenings spent with friends.

At the end of the month, I also participated in an event dedicated to World AIDS Day, where I met a woman who had worked as a nurse in HIV clinics during the 1980s.

This was incredibly epic for me.



DECEMBER

Snow, winter, Stockholm. I loved it so much. The landscapes and views were indescribably beautiful. Evening walks became even more enjoyable, especially on the streets adorned for the holidays, giving hope that these short and dark days would soon come to an end. It was only in December that I began to wonder if there was anything or anyone I would miss. Yes, there are. Friends, places, my small apartment, which had become so dear to me. Seeing it completely empty, without pieces of me, brought a different kind of sadness. The pre-holiday dinner we had at the organization was both pleasant and bittersweet. That day, we shared closing words for the year, expressing gratitude and celebrating successes. It was emotional, especially realizing that yet another journey had come to an end. I'm grateful to the circumstances, to life, to myself, and to the colleagues I've met for making this project a reality and for giving me such a valuable experience.

With all warmth and love,
Yours, Eduard