

IMAGINE

NO. THE EXHIBITION
KUNSTRADIM
KREUZBERG/
BETHANEN
APRIL 26 – JULY 6,
2025



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CURATORIAL

In 2014, a team of independent journalists left Russia to escape pressure and censorship from the Kremlin. In exile, they created Meduza, now the world's leading independent Russian-language media outlet. The decade that saw Meduza grow from a small website into an industry leader has been marked by frustration and turmoil. War in Europe, the pandemic, the climate crisis, escalation in the Middle East, the right-wing turn, burgeoning support for dictatorships, and the emergence of cynicism as the prevailing attitude in politics — over the past ten years, people have been confronted with major historical events. Such catastrophic encounters always generate tragic stories. The exhibition "No" is a joint attempt by journalists and artists to examine and understand this pivotal shift in the world as we know it.

The title of the project is radical on purpose. No, "Нет" in Russian, is a symbol of disobedience, born of ten years of resilience, stubbornness and the will to fight. To say "No", to have the ability to object, is a basic human right, a possibility that is now being denied to so many people, including in Russia. The word "No" can get you arrested or imprisoned. It can get you murdered. This exhibition unites the voices that keep saying "No" against all odds. No to the war, No to dictatorship, No to fear. It pays homage to independent journalists, civic and political activists, and to all those who have the courage to disagree.

Using the approach that Meduza developed for building relationships with its readership, the project's curatorial collective breaks the fourth wall to bridge the distance between subjects and viewers. Once the invisible wall separating the authors from their readers is torn down, communication and empathy become possible. "No" immerses the audience into the experiences of ordinary people who have learned to live and work in extreme circumstances — an all-too-familiar reality in our time.

Based on analysis of news headlines from the last decade, nine major themes that shaped that era were selected with contributors being invited to reflect on them. International artists, with diverse backgrounds and methods, enter into a dialogue with journalists who have spent the last ten years witnessing various crises. The exhibition explores the notions of Resilience, Censorship, Polarization, Fear, Dictatorship, War, Exile, Loneliness, and finally, Hope.

The exhibition's storytelling is thus structured around two key narratives — the works of the artists and a documentary project commissioned specifically for the exhibition. 13 artists from different countries explore these themes and develop projects reflecting on them, each in their own unique manner. The documentary layer features the personal stories of Me-

duza writers and contributors. Directed by playwright Mikhail Durnenkov, this non-fiction part of the exhibit features close-up video portraits, in which narrators share the stories of people living under immense pressure while trying not to lose themselves.

The exhibition space is designed as separate rooms, bearing the names of the major themes, connected by an interweaving artistic and documentary narrative.

The first room is Dictatorship. Artist Stine Marie Jacobsen and writer Teobaldo Lagos Preller's new work "Quantum No" invites visitors to make use of their freedom of speech to write political statements as part of the long-term "Law Shifters" project that the duo began collaborating on in Chile in 2022. The project was created by Jacobsen in 2015 as a way for people to engage in participatory democracy and has since traveled to many different countries — from Greenland to Ukraine and Lebanon. Taking on the role of the narrator, Svetlana Reiter, an ex-Meduza investigative journalist, sheds light on how the cultural and intellectual elite become the backbone of an autocracy.

Resilience is the space's next theme. In his new commission for the exhibition, Fernando Sanchez Castillo has erected a monument that cannot be built in contemporary Russia — a statue of Alexey Navalny, who was murdered in prison in 2024. The iconic image of the politician making a heart shape with his hands is turned into a figurine — pocket-size statues that visitors can take home with them in exchange for leaving a note on resilience. A narrator named Alex, who is Meduza's Chief Technical Officer (his full name remains undisclosed for security reasons), discusses the practical side of resilience — he's the mastermind behind the anti-blocking tools that allow Meduza's newsroom to reach people in Russia, and helps the outlet survive constant cyberattacks.

In the next chapter, Censorship, the Danish art collective SUPERFLEX explores the power of accumulated data and its impact on humankind. The mural "All Data To The People" is translated into Russian ("Данные народу") and blatantly painted over, drawing attention to the current state-sponsored silencing of the media and self-censorship. In the same room, Galina Timchenko, Meduza's publisher, describes her life-long odyssey of fighting censorship as a media manager.

For the Exile chapter of the exhibition, the artist Alisa Yoffe has painted the long lines at the French migration offices where she waited to apply for refugee status, observing the crisis while being an émigrée herself. Film critic Anton Dolin, who was brutally driven out of Russia due to threats to him and his family, shares his experience of abandoning a settled day-to-day life and starting anew in exile.

The largest space is dedicated to the most painful theme of recent years — War. Three journalists — Elena Kostyuchenko, Taisia Bekbulatova and Lilia Yapparova — tell their stories from the Russia-Ukraine war as female reporters on the front-lines. Since Russian men of any age and profession were banned from entering Ukraine after the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the war has been predominantly reported on through the eyes of women. Artist Pilvi Takala's new commission is a video based on her experience attending the “National Defense Course” — an invite-only training that the Finnish military has been organising since the 1960s. The coveted course aims to rally support for national defense and foster preparedness in case of crisis or war. By observing how the course is designed to influence its participants, Takala examines the militarization of Finnish society and the social dynamics associated with it.

Sergei Prokofiev shows works from his “Hell” project. With a 3D pen, Prokofiev reproduces the carcass of the Donetsk International Airport (named after the famous composer who is the artist's full namesake) and the Mariupol Drama Theater. Both structures suffered heavily during Russia's invasion of Ukraine: The Donetsk airport was destroyed in 2014, and the Mariupol theater in 2022. The architectural artworks are accompanied by a recent graphic series made with the ashes of deliberately burned plastic structures.

Cristina Lucas's ongoing project “Tufting” is an embroidered map of aerial bombings committed all over the world — this grim map has recently been extended to include the atrocities caused by Russian bombs during the war in Ukraine. Another artist displayed in the same room, who has chosen to stay anonymous due to security reasons, launched the “Time of War” project in 2022, which currently includes 150 iterations of the phrase “I want the war to end” written in Russian, English, Ukrainian, German, French and other languages. Serving as an act of self-healing as well as a manifesto for peace, the project will continue during the show, inviting visitors to participate.

In the room devoted to Fear, Gülsün Karamustafa's “Where Continents Meet” is on display. This work is from 1997, but nevertheless directly relates to the current time of crisis and touches on the fear every parent has for their child. The work uses child-sized military uniforms, which the artist found in a store in Istanbul, as a powerful symbol for the useless sacrifice that wars demand, forcing mothers to feed the massacres with their own children. Ivan Kolpakov, Meduza's editor-in-chief, talks about the fear that permeates the lives of people doing journalism in exile — the fear for colleagues on the ground, for family members remaining in the country, and for the future.

The exhibition's next theme is Polarization, which has in recent years permeated all spheres of life, breaking apart families, friendships and marriages in the process. Here, Ukrainian writer Zhenia Berezhna, who has been under pressure due to her decision to continue writing in the Russian language, reflects on polarization through the prism of language — her main work instrument. The artist Semyon Khanin, in his new installation, makes the viewer quite literally see black as white and white as black, a visual demonstration of how polarization creates a funnel that sucks us in and makes us vulnerable to manipulation.

Loneliness is the subject of the next room. Alexander Gronsky, a photographer who intentionally stayed in Russia after 2022 to document the country during one of its most painful moments, reflects on loneliness, describing his role as being “the last one in the shop”. In this room, Gronsky is both the artist and the narrator. Along with his video interview, a captivating and meditative slideshow presents his works — images of Russia shot over the last three years, showing how television screens have pierced through the landscape, with streets and buildings that are recognizable yet different, imbued with propaganda, sadness and fear. In the same room, the artist Pavel Otdelnov presents his recent project “Primer”, inspired by an old Soviet alphabet book he had as a child. Large canvases portray pages with the letters of the alphabet illustrated by morbid scenes — R stands for “radiation”, and G for “grave”. Pavel's new series is a reflection by someone left alone with his fears.

Hope is the last theme of the exhibition. It is the coda to the entire project. A series of paintings by Aleksey Dubinsky shows people queuing at the Borisovskoye cemetery in Moscow during Alexey Navalny's funeral, an event that went down in history as “the burial of hope”. Both meanings of the phrase are present here: Some people think that his death shatters any hope for positive change in Russia in the near future; others, on the contrary, consider the tremendous lines of mourners to be a brave act of resilience in a country where you can be jailed for any act of protest.

The ambiguity of this statement is crucial to the whole story told by this exhibition. Despite its name, the last room, Hope, does not provide anything sweet or comforting — it's an open ending. In the video for that last theme, Meduza's team members answer a simple question: why do they keep doing what they do?

VENUE

The building currently housing the “No” exhibition was once a hospital that had been in operation for more than 100 years. The architects Ludwig Persius and Theodor August Stein designed it in the mid-19th century, under the patronage of the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. The hospital and nursing institute attached to it were called Bethanien, in honor of the location where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. A century later, the suburb in which the hospital was located merged with Berlin’s Kreuzberg district.

In 1970, when the hospital was closed, the West Berlin authorities announced plans to demolish the building on Marienplatz and build social housing on the site. Activists managed to stop them with squatters occupying the nurse dormitory adjacent to Bethanien and calling it the Georg von Rauch House, in memory of the radical left activist who was killed in a shootout with police. Among the squatters were members of the rock band Ton Steine Scherben, who described a police raid on the house in their song “Rauch-Haus-Song”. Police tried many times to evict the squatters. Ultimately, the authorities gave in and legalized the squat. Since 1973, the building has been a cultural and social center.

Two years later in 1975, a new institute held one of its highest-profile exhibitions — “Mehmet came from Anatolia” (Mehmet kam aus Anatolia) — with the participation of Turkish immigrant artists. The project was a reaction to the xenophobia of German society and the German government’s policies toward Turkish guest workers. That same year, for example, the government banned guest workers from moving to Kreuzberg and several other districts — the authorities were afraid that areas would become ghettos. Another project, which had great significance for Berlin’s Turkish community, was the Nazim Hikmet exhibition (1977), an homage to the Turkish communist poet who spent the better part of his life in prison and was exiled from Turkey.

Among the most important events of the new century was a series of street art exhibitions called “Back-jumps: The Live Issue”. These exhibitions ran from 2003 to 2012, helping street artists gain recognition in the art world. In 2004, the Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien showed a project titled “When Love Turns to Poison”, dedicated to sex and sexuality. The organizers were accused of displaying pornography and even pedophilia with tabloids launching a campaign against the exhibition and the art space that resulted in visitors attempting to destroy some of the exhibits. The protests nearly resulted in Kreuzberg district mayor Cornelia Reinauer’s resignation. That project’s curator was Stéphane Bauer, who took over leadership of the space in 2002 and continues to direct it today.

Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien runs five or six exhibitions a year. In addition to exhibitions, the venue

engages in educational projects in the cultural sphere. The former hospital building also houses other organizations, including the workshop of the Berlin Association of Illustrators, the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Music School, and the International Theater Institute.

The post-war history of Bethanien as a site of strength for dissident artists, political activists, and members of minority groups is, in essence, a history of resistance and of hope. The most optimistic sections of the “No” exhibition are devoted to these two concepts. Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien is the “No” exhibition’s most important partner. Its curatorial collective thanks the venue’s team for its support during all stages of this project’s creation.



DIGITAL WORKS

CENSORSHIP 42

EXILE 58

WAR 76

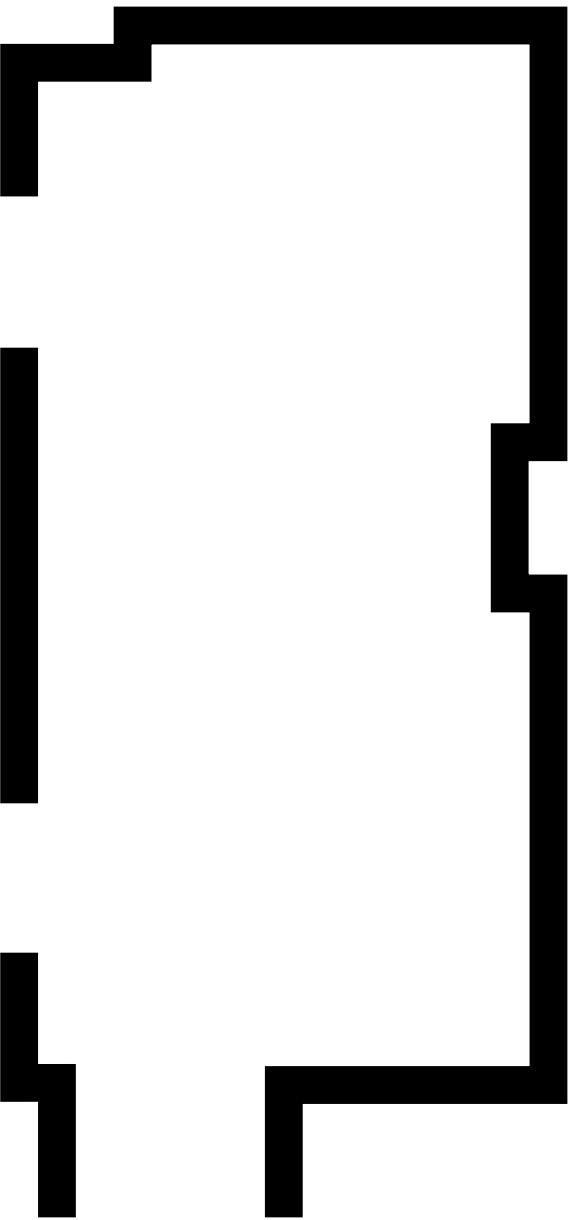
RESERVE 130

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The entry for “dictatorship” in the dictionary defines it as a type of political regime enforced by violent means in which — in the absence of any external controls and limitations — power is concentrated in the hands of one individual or a group of people. When we read this, we tend to pay attention to certain keywords like regime, power, and person. But what if we try to take apart this weighted term in a literal sense like we used to do in school?

The term dictator, which comes from the Latin *dictatus*, implies a kind of forcefulness or violence while the suffix emphasizes that it constitutes a regime based on this violence. In other words, dictatorships are the outcomes of violence, its ultimate result. Violence is at the heart of what's taking place in Russia at the moment. It's uncontrolled violence, unrestrained in its heterogeneity.

Dictatorships, from the standpoint of political science, usually have two features: mimicry and the capacity to take swift and decisive action. Therein lies the reason why dictatorships manage to start up so quickly (or relatively quickly) and continue to win (or winning again) today.

As for mimicry, violence masked as care is something recognizable and familiar to many of us. “Be home by 10 p.m.! We worry about you, you might get attacked”, “You won’t leave the table until you finish your food”, “I won’t let you go to the party, you’ll get drunk and be raped”, “Don’t you dare dream of sports — in our family, everyone is a lawyer”, “You’re not going outside until you get good grades”, “Marriage? What love? We forbid it”.

The main idea that people who employ violent means instill in their loved ones is simple: the outside world is dangerous and unpredictable, and only we can ensure your safety. But on one condition: absolute obedience.

In order to ensure your safety, the grownups have to act quickly and decisively (necessity is always used to justify violence). Close the door, hide the key, take away your documents, deprive you of money. All while engaging in the same classical manipulation: How can you not love your family? It takes care of you. How can you not listen to your elders? After all, they’ve given you everything.

Every dictator fancies himself to be the father of a huge family — the only one who can provide stability and ensure safety. But it comes at a cost, the cost of freedom — the freedom to choose your own fate, the freedom to say “no”. The self-anointed “father of the nation” will, of course, never allow himself to be controlled by his own unreasonable children.

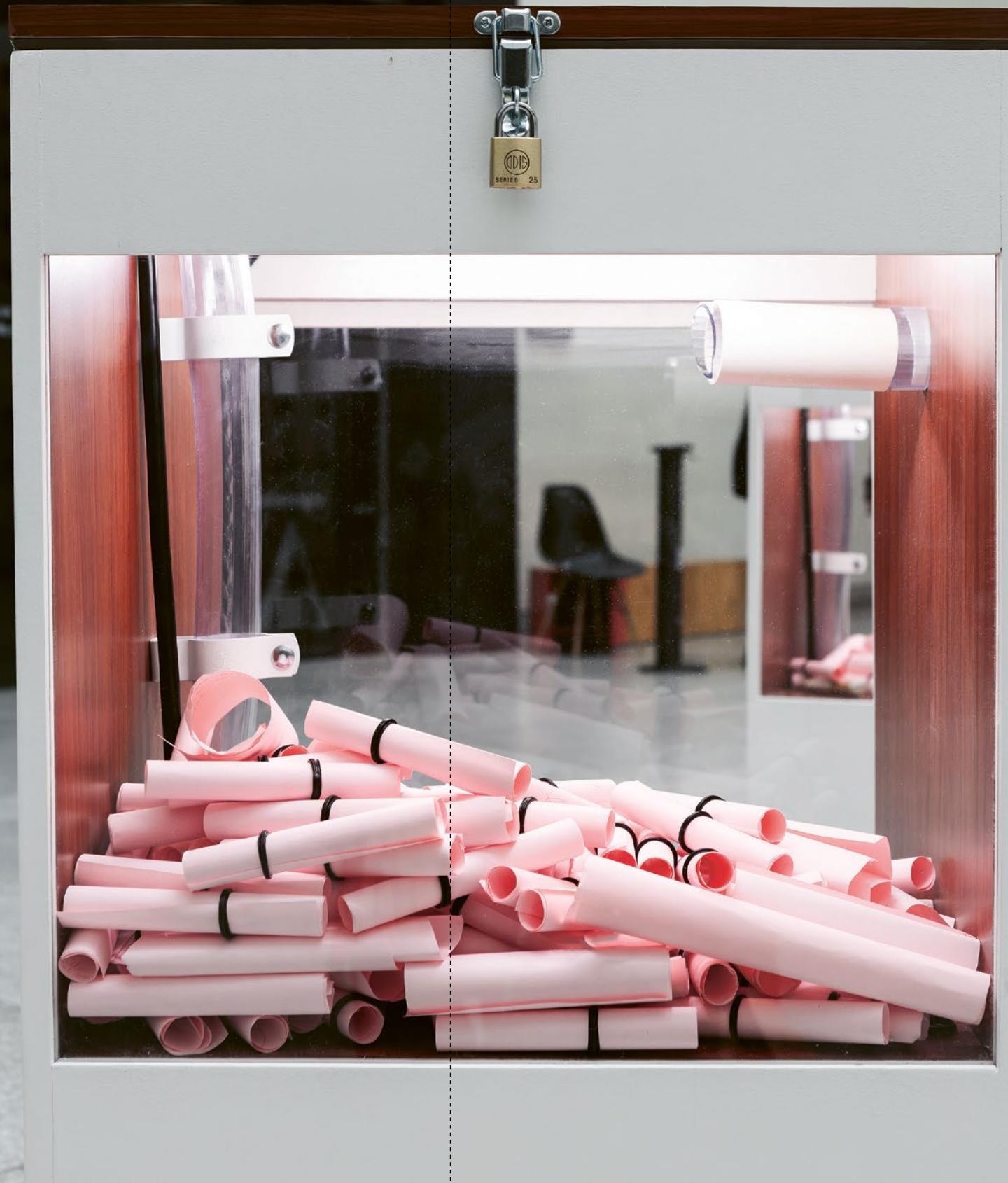
Why do people agree to be submissive and refuse to recognize violence? Just think for a moment about how much care — or at the very least freedom and reliability — people born and raised in the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century have experienced, particularly in Russia. This time period, as the poet Joseph Brodsky put it, left them naked in an existential cold. It’s not surprising that they so easily and naively believed in delusory care. They used the chance they were offered to get dressed, grab a bite, warm up, feel human and stop waiting for death as a deliverance. But they didn’t notice that, for the umpteenth time, the door had been locked behind them, barbed wire put up on the fences, and the security guards had armed themselves and multiplied. And all of this under the incessantly repeated slogan: “We don’t abandon our own”.

It is not only freedom that disappears as a result. Subjectivity disappears as well, turning people into a population, an object of care, or more accurately, an object of violence.

Survivors of domestic violence know that justifying the abuser, blaming themselves for everything, is, unfortunately, a common experience, and a long one at that, for those who have suffered at the hands of any abuser. However, as soon as they find within themselves the strength and courage to admit the obvious, to tear off the mask of the stern but caring “father” from the face of the criminal, all of his past merits and decisive actions cease to trigger anything but disgust and rage.

The same thing happens with state violence, that is to say, a dictatorship. The achievements of these “fathers of the nation” crumble over time and reveal those they were carefully concealing — ordinary criminals.







Stine Marie Jacobsen, Teobaldo Lagos Preller, "Law Shifters — Quantum No"

MOBILE LAW MACHINE SCULPTURE, 8 × 5 M, 2025

What is "Law Shifters" and how does your project relate to the theme of dictatorship?

Stine Marie Jacobsen: "Law Shifters" is a project I've been working on for more than 10 years, since 2015. It invites people from all over the world to imagine new laws. The result of this project can be anything from street posters to animations, cartoons with children, plays. We start by inviting people to a workshop to rejudge a real court case. The public rules on something that has already been given a ruling by legal experts.

Towards the end of the workshop, the participants are warmed up—and they imagine how we should legally regulate a certain kind of behavior. Participants in Chile told us that law cannot represent real life. So we decided to do something different this time: Now in Germany, we are asking the public to share with us their emotions, opinions and political statements on freedom of speech and anti-war. These statements the machine "sucks" in and on several screens it show them as street posters with slogans.

One of the best processes I had with this project, was when we were working with young teenagers from South London. They wanted to work on racial profiling and police brutality because as persons of color, they had experienced this themselves. They came up with three pieces of legislation that we were able to lobby to two politicians: you get automatic compensation if you are physically injured during a police search; you have the right to record your own arrest; if you refuse to be searched in public, the police have to take you to the police station. These three laws are obviously very just, so one might think they already exist. But they don't. So the children met two politicians

in private and had conversations with them and influenced them.

"Law Shifters" is not an antagonistic project but a political educational project, which I think is a gift to legislators and politicians who need to know what people feel and perceive. Who is supposed to define what constitutes a need? Isn't it the person in need?

Teobaldo Lagos Preller: We called this "Quantum No" because we want to explore as broad a spectrum as possible to approach freedom of expression. "No" is the most basic form of refusal. Quantum is the presence or absence of this expression simultaneously. We focused our thinking on the word "no" as both a negation of reality and a very primordial principle of rejection and resistance. It's one of the first words we learn. One of our first reactions when we are small children is to say "no".

On opening day, the public will be able to see draft proposals from Chile that have been turned into political posters. We will focus on using material that we gathered from different workshops in Chile and the interaction of a law machine with the public.

There was a point in Chile, during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, when the word "no" became something people relied on. In 1983, the group CADA (Collective of Art Actions) unfurled a banner on the Pío Nono Bridge with the word "no", a plus sign and a picture of a gun. The intention of the action was to denounce the numerous murders and human rights violation under Pinochet's regime (1973–1990).

It became a ubiquitous slogan—in graffiti, advertisements, on television, and finally as the official symbol of the opposition to Pinochet in a referendum on the question of whether to end the dictatorship

or prolong Pinochet's rule for another eight years. So we were very interested in this idea of rejection and what it means when we reject, even when we might not know what comes after that rejection.

Stine Marie Jacobsen is a conceptual artist who practices participatory art. Jacobsen does not create self-contained "works" but rather directs situations. Most of her projects help participants explore society and their own role in it.

Particularly important in her practice are educational programmes that the artist develops as a team with lawyers, educators and researchers. In 2012, for example, Jacobsen launched the long-term art project "Direct Approach", in which she invites people from all over the world to describe violent scene from a film—and then retake it, playing the perpetrator, victim or bystander of their choice. And in 2018, she created the art project "Pidgin Tongue", in which children from Riga, a bilingual city, wrote a new language dictionary based on Latvian and Russian.

Stine Marie Jacobsen was born in 1977 in Denmark. She studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles. The artist has had solo exhibitions in London, Berlin, Copenhagen and Galway, Ireland. Jacobsen has participated in many international biennials, including Manifesta 2020. She lives and works in Berlin and Copenhagen.

Teobaldo Lagos Preller is a curator and art researcher. He mainly works in the field of the arts and the public sphere, focusing on contact zones and artistic practices. In 2021, for example, Preller co-curated the exhibition "Museum of Democracy" at the New Society for Visual Art (nGbK) in Berlin, structuring a show on a fictional institution in a speculative scenario of the vanishing of Democracy in Latin America. The collection of this non existing museum was composed by many positions of Contemporary artists reflecting on recent and historical political movements and disruptions in the region.

Preller has curated some of Stine Marie Jacobsen's projects, including "Law Shifters" in Chile in 2023 and 2024. In this art project, participants conceive and formulate new laws. "Law Shifters" has taken place in several countries, but is particularly relevant to Chile, as much of the current country's constitution is a legacy of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.

Teobaldo Lagos Preller was born in Chile in 1978. He holds a PhD. In Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Barcelona, an M.A. in Interdisciplinary Latin American Studies at the Free University of Berlin and a B.A. in Communication Sciences at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City. He currently lectures aesthetics, art and fashion theory at the AMD Academy of Fashion & Design—Fresenius University of Applied Sciences in Berlin, where he lives and works.

Former special correspondent at Meduza,
investigative reporter. Works for BBC
Russian Service. Winner of several
journalistic awards

S V E T L A N A R E I T E R



SVETLANA REITER

Here's the thing I don't understand and never will: who do you have to be to hate your own people so much? My colleagues and I wrote about some national project, aimed at fighting for active aging. As it was described in the project's official literature, it would help increase Russia's population by 175,000–185,000 people, or something around there. I have nothing against the anti-aging project, but how is your head screwed on? Russia's losses in the war surpassed 185,000 a long time ago.

That's not even hatred for your own people, it's thinking of people as numbers. Soldiers, pensioners—they're just data, columns of figures required for important, global geopolitical objectives.

The dictator's methodology is the creation of controlled chaos. You sow chaos, and people lose control over their lives and run around panicked, and then you send them, like lab rats, through some gate.

What kind of person could benefit from this? Who would like it? Okay, so you turned a blind eye to repression. You don't see how police pin people face-down on the floor at gay clubs. But you go to the store and see butter sold at astronomical prices. You want to take out a mortgage and you can't.

I understand how it's possible to live in these conditions, I lived through the Soviet Union. I saw what it was—how you'd say one thing in the kitchen and another at work. My parents disliked the Soviet authorities, but they hardly gave a thought to how and when it would end, and simply tried to live according to their consciences.

[Since the start of the war] people in Russia haven't changed—it's just that they're now living in a different paradigm. Look, I'll give you my favorite example. We wrote a piece about the Institute for Internet Development (IID), a state-sponsored Russian non-profit that finances propaganda content and is on the EU's sanctions list. The IID gives money to just devilish propaganda and, at the same time, to cultural and scientific projects. Imagine that you're the editor-in-chief of a magazine. Your team left Russia as a sign of protest against the war—but you need to keep paying their salaries. And then, you go to the IID for money. Are you going to regard yourself as the person gathering shoes outside the gas chambers? No, you're going to think that you're helping people who left in protest against the war.

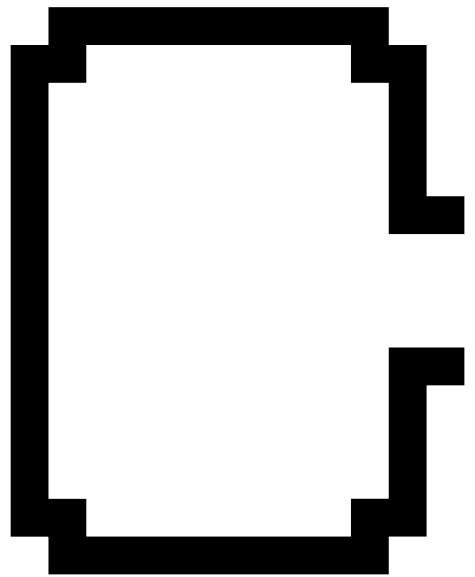
My colleagues who continue to work in Russia and, unlike me, have not cut ties with their relatives, say, "We're trying to do journalism, and we're slipping beneath the current". Someone else might say, "No, you're not trying at all". But it does seem like they really are trying. I'm not talking about people who are working anonymously, from inside Russia, for "foreign agent" publications, they are absolute heroes. I'm talking about people who work for publications that are fully within the system and who nonetheless are producing quality materials, and there are some of them.

I have friends left in Russia who made the choice for the benefit of their fathers, mothers, or kids. Should we play ping-pong with them now? No, of course not. I tell them, "Guys, I understand, you did everything right". And they say to me, "We understand you, too, you also did everything right". We are without reproach for one another.

CEVNGSORT

DICTIONARY

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Friends and acquaintances know me by one name, and my colleagues and sources — by another. I can't tell the full truth about myself to any of them. It's not worth it for the first group to know what I do for a living. As for the second group, the details of my personal life — where I was born, where I studied, where I work — need to be kept private. To put it bluntly, the life of a journalist working for independent media while remaining in Russia resembles that of a spy film.

Usually everything goes smoothly, but sometimes there are glitches. At the birthday party of a close friend, someone I didn't know extends his hand and says "Hi, I'm Lyosha". It takes me a few seconds to figure out how I should introduce myself in response — using my real name or my pseudonym. The whole time I'm trying to analyze whether this new acquaintance could become a potential protagonist in some of my work. Which name I choose depends on this.

I sometimes feel like a pathological liar. Someone tells me something personal, but I can't reciprocate — or even admit that I'm not telling them everything. It's depressing, I feel constantly ashamed. When I had to come up with a pseudonym, I felt completely stupid. I had to give myself a name out of nowhere. I passed through different stages of accepting this, from disappointment and sadness to incredible anger and fatigue.

I have the rare opportunity to do important things without facing censorship and, in contrast to colleagues who were forced to leave, I can stay in familiar, comfortable conditions. At the same time, I feel like an impostor. What I do now is journalism in exile, meaning free journalism. But I myself am not in exile.

I have a number of acquaintances who, despite everything, are still working in Russia at publications under censorship. These journalists continue to struggle over every comma and have parts of their texts deleted when management finds them alarming. I haven't faced that. What gets removed from my text is the boring bits — it doesn't happen due to censorship.

Of course, the editors have objective reasons to worry about my safety. Journalists in Russia truly do face persecution, fines and prison terms. To avoid that, I follow security protocols. I know my lawyer's phone number by heart, just in case.

It's hard to follow protocols, though. For example, I communicate with my editor via Signal, the messaging app. In Russia, it doesn't work without a VPN — this is pretty inconvenient, but we can't use other messengers for security reasons. I have three different VPNs on my phone — when one isn't working, I switch to another. I'm constantly juggling between these services, and sometimes I'm basically unable

to communicate for some period of time. When that happens, my editor gets extremely stressed, believing that she'll have to figure out how to extract me from somewhere. She worries about my safety way more than me or my own mother.

An independent journalist in Russia can be exposed at any moment, but for a long time I felt no fear at all. I even asked myself whether I was a psychopath, whether I was truly not afraid. But gradually the fear crept up on me. The more often loved ones asked me whether I was afraid and taking sufficient security measures, the stronger it got. At some point, I even requested that people not ask me about it. I just automatically look out of the corner of my eye to see if anyone is following me, if there are any suspicious people around. When I'm convinced that no one is there, I just live my life and do my work.

At the beginning of the war, I thought that people supported the war because they didn't know what was really happening. Then my friend and I started to print anti-war posters with slogans like "We need love, not war!" and hang them up on the streets of downtown Moscow.

There were times when we only managed to get a few meters away before someone would stop next to a poster and tear it down. Not municipal workers, but regular people — well-dressed, probably educated and well-off. That was really demoralizing. It turns out the problem isn't so much that journalists can't tell the truth about the war, but that people to whom that truth is addressed don't want to hear it.

A freelance journalist for Meduza who lives in Russia and whose name we cannot disclose for security reasons



In addition to the artworks on display, the “No” exhibition features an artifact related to Meduza’s history—the mobile phone of the outlet’s publisher Galina Timchenko, which was infected with Pegasus spyware in February 2023. Digital security experts consulted by Meduza believe that this took place under the auspices of the intelligence services of a European country (the Russian state does not have access to Pegasus). Neither the program’s developers, nor any European governments have commented on the incident. The exhibition’s curators chose to display the infected telephone in the “Censorship” room to remind visitors that freedom of speech is under threat, not only in authoritarian countries, but in established democracies as well. In September 2023, when Meduza went public with the incident, editor-in-chief Ivan Kolpakov released a statement about the risks faced by journalists working in exile. The following is an excerpt from that statement.

Galina Timchenko’s phone infected with Pegasus spyware

The case of Pegasus, which a European government likely installed on the phone of my friend, Meduza publisher and co-founder Galina Timchenko, is beyond our understanding. According to its developers, this software is used to fight against terrorism; in reality, however, it’s being systematically deployed against political dissidents and journalists. Often, its targets are subsequently murdered or imprisoned.

If the experts who examined Galina Timchenko’s phone are correct, the situation looks much worse than we had previously imagined. Independent journalists from Russia and other countries may be caught between a rock and a hard place: on the one side are their own governments, with their monstrous security apparatuses, and on the other side are the intelligence services of the countries where they’re seeking refuge.

We hope, first of all, that we can identify the people who did this. Secondly, we hope to receive a clear explanation of what happened—from the developers of Pegasus and from whomever initiated this breach.

The surveillance of journalists from independent media outlets using Pegasus has become commonplace. It’s likely that journalists working in exile are targeted even more often than Western reporters and media managers because the former are seen as inherently suspicious. We know from our colleagues at Access Now that the case of Galina Timchenko isn’t unique. It’s likely that some victims of similar hacks have decided against speaking out publicly out of fear of worsening their relations with the governments that they depend on (or believe to be dependent on).

Unfortunately, drawing from our highly negative experience in Russia, we must emphasize that this situation doesn’t just concern Meduza: it should concern all journalists in the European Union. If governments that profess their commitment to democratic values allow themselves to persecute journalists in exile, what’s to prevent them from treating their own journalists the same way? What about their own political activists or citizens?

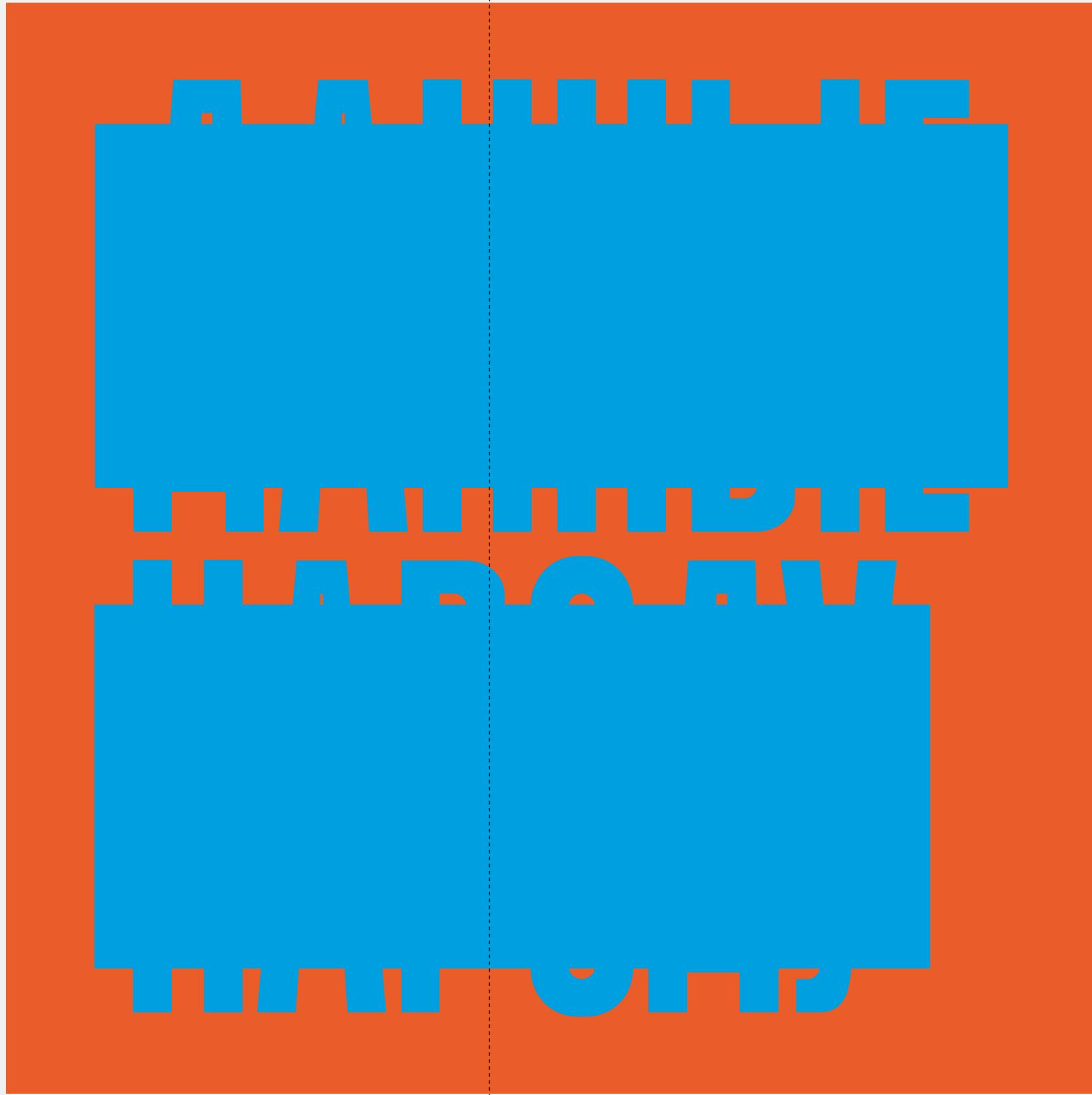
You all know the answer to this question: nothing.

This is an uncomfortable topic, and it would be easier to brush it aside, but the fact of the matter is that too few people in Europe are speaking openly about it. I’m writing this both as a journalist in exile and someone who’s been living in Europe for almost 10 years.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has made the situation significantly worse. Governments often target independent journalism, justifying their actions by security concerns. During wartime, it becomes easier for authorities to use these justifications—and for us to believe in them.

Unfortunately, all of this can easily occur in democratic countries. Fortunately, we’re not afraid to call things by their right name and we’re not afraid to stand up to external pressure—no matter where it’s coming from.

Ivan Kolpakov



SUPERFLEX, “All data to the people”

HANDPAINTED MURAL / POSTER, 2025

You reproduce this work in different languages. Tell us how it changes depending on the cultural context.

Our first work with this slogan was a mural in Holbæk, a little Danish town 60 kilometers from Copenhagen. Then we repeated it again and again and again in many languages. These words are understood differently in different places. In the USA, for example, there's a slogan "All power to the people" which was used by the Black Panthers. I think I actually first encountered this line in a hip-hop song, so it was in the back of our minds. We are active in discussions around open-sourcing, so we came up with "All data to the people"** as a clear reference to "All power to the people", but also as a way to express our belief that we can only make our own choices based on knowledge.

In China, we were censored. If you are going to make an exhibition in China, it will be tightly controlled. When they saw the translation of the text, they said that it was not acceptable. So, first we painted the slogan, then blacked it out, but did it in such a way that the letters were still visible, thereby emphasizing precisely the point we were trying to get across. I'm positive that self-censorship works differently in Russia. I know that there you have to censor yourself all the time, for your own safety and that of your community. Therefore, the slogan in Russian will also be blacked out.

It's a strategy we've often employed. In Brazil, for example, we had been working in the Amazon with local farmers who produce a caffeinated berry called guarana. These berries are made into a soft drink called Guarana Antarctica. Brazilians love the drink and consider it to be a part

of their identity. As it turns out, the Guarana brand is actually owned by a Belgian company that was underpaying the farmers. The farmers were telling us that they couldn't survive anymore because they were earning too little money from their raw materials. So we decided to put a spotlight on the issue by producing a new and better version of the cola with the farmers called Guarana Power, which would be directly owned by them.

We started making the soda and produced it at the Venice Biennale. Then, a curator wanted to show the work at the São Paulo Art Biennial, but we got a call on behalf of the president of the biennial telling us that we weren't allowed to exhibit our work because of copyright infringement. So we ended up censoring all of it, blacking out the labels and posters. The first question from a journalist at the opening press conference was: how come SUPERFLEX and the farmers' product is being censored? For us, that's an example of leveraging cultural capital through self-censorship?

I think this slogan is especially relevant in 2025, when tech company owners are expressing their loyalty to Trump's policies.

It's super scary what's going on right now. But somehow, I appreciate the fact that the manipulative power of these major institutions is now obvious. When the Internet first appeared, we all saluted it as a kind of anarchy, a path to freedom, or at least as something useful. I still believe that it provides access to so much.

But now we have to train our children to verify, know their sources, rely on different people and media sources, and then make their own choices about how to use this

data

information. It also requires you to take on the role of a participant rather than just a passive user. Every piece of information has been filtered, it is communicated by someone, like a journalist or a historian. We have to be very, very good at learning what to do with that information, how to archive it, how to build our own knowledge and beliefs. We have to just be a little more critical.

I understand this slogan as follows: it calls not only for access to data, but also for a better understanding of the plurality and the complexity of knowledge and what you do with it. At the end of the day, you have the responsibility and power as an individual to use that knowledge towards something. You can just follow along — and that's often the easiest option — or you can propose alternatives and do things differently.

*The Russian translation used in the show is «Данные Народу» ("Data to the people"). In Russian, the word «данные» means "data" (information or indicators that describe things) and also "something that was provided to someone". That's why the whole slogan can be read in two different ways: "Data to the people" or "Something that is given to the people" — for example, their rights.

SUPERFLEX is a group founded by three artists: Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Rosengren Nielsen and Bjørnstjerne Christiansen. The group's work goes far beyond the usual boundaries of art: like the Soviet avant-garde artists who designed workers' clubs, the artists produce and offer a wide variety of artworks and products.

For example, they partnered with brewers to develop "Free Beer" — their own brand of beer that can be produced by anyone. They created the "Superkilen" park in Copenhagen together with residents from neighboring houses, filling the park with urban details that reminded residents of their home countries or travels: a neon sign from Qatar, a bicycle parking lot from Finland, public bathrooms modeled on bathrooms in UN buildings and other powerful institutions.

The creation of various replicas, often large and complex in execution, is a characteristic technique of SUPERFLEX. One of the group's main principles is expressed in the slogan "If Value Then Copy", which refers to their critical attitude towards copyright.

Besides their focus on the free dissemination of ideas, their work also deals with other important themes such as the imbalance of power in society, immigration, the climate crisis, and coexistence with other biological species. Currently, the group is creating objects that can serve as sculptures on land and as homes for fish and other sea creatures underwater.

Fenger, Nielsen and Christiansen founded SUPERFLEX in Copenhagen in 1993. The group has had solo exhibitions in Basel, Leipzig, Frankfurt am Main, Los Angeles, and Tokyo, and collaborated with Tate Modern and many other prestigious institutions. SUPERFLEX has participated in the Venice Biennale, Istanbul Biennale, Shanghai Biennale, Sao Paulo Biennale and Gwangju Biennale. Their work is included in the collections of MoMA, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Kunsthaus Zürich, and other institutions. The members of the SUPERFLEX group live and work in Copenhagen.



GALINA TIMCHENKO

Co-founder and publisher at Meduza.
Former editor-in-chief at Lenta.ru.
Worked at Kommersant newspaper. Winner
of several journalistic awards

GALINA TIMCHENKO

Soon after the oligarch Alexander Mamut bought Lenta.ru¹, he said to me, “Galya, would you be upset if I called your editors and told them what topics are relevant?” I answered, “First of all, anyone who obeys you will be hung out to dry. You may be the ship owner, but you’ve hired a ship with a captain. If the sailors carry out your orders, that’s it, we’re done for. You’re telling me where to sail; I already know how to sail. What happens on my ship is none of your damn business”. That was the start of our confrontation.

In the beginning the biggest censors weren’t state authorities, but rather the owners, who were afraid their main businesses could take a hit and therefore crippled their media outlets to suit the Kremlin’s wishes. Later, state security services assumed that role.

In the history of Russia there was a period of about five years, from 1996 to 2001, when censorship was actually banned. The Internet remained uncensored for longer. That period shaped me. Before a new, technologically advanced generation of bureaucrats came of age, the Russian state understood nothing about the Internet. So, until Putin’s return to the Kremlin in 2012, there was practically no censorship online. And even after his return, acts of solidarity with journalists were still possible for a while.

¹ Alexander Mamut became the owner of the online publication Lenta.ru in 2013. A year later, in 2014, he fired editor-in-chief Galina Timchenko after she refused to comply with the Russian authorities’ censorship requirements. That same year, Timchenko and several former Lenta employees relocated to Latvia and launched Meduza there.

In 2013, my photographer Denis Sinyakov was arrested while taking pictures on a Greenpeace ship². They wanted to put him away for 10 years. The following day, all major publications replaced their photographers with black and gray squares. We showed what happens when photographers get arrested—and then he was released.

The last case of this kind happened in 2019 when the police planted drugs on Ivan Golunov, an ex-Meduza journalist. The police contrived to pin a drug charge on a journalist who as far as I know had never touched any drugs in his life. My colleagues, especially from business publications, accomplished a professional feat, and a feat of friendship, by supporting him. At the time all of Moscow and the whole country came out to protest. By 2020, when journalist Ivan Safronov was tried for treason, nothing of the sort happened.

Look at how vile this censorship is. Imagine, you put all your strength into an article, you investigate—and then Russia’s state censor bans it. Many outlets now limit access to some of their own articles to prevent the authorities from shutting them down entirely. It’s a particularly cruel form of torture that forces you to destroy your work with your own hands. Based on my experience, people who engage in this are not taking into account the risks. They don’t ask themselves: “What will happen if I spit on the rules?”

There’s a chance that absolutely nothing will happen to you. Many who follow absurd rules don’t even understand that their obedience will change nothing for them—you’ll endure numerous humiliations, they’ll eventually break you, and that’s it.

This is the trauma of the Putin era. People have simply forgotten that 20 years ago we could resist censorship. A whole generation of journalists—those who worked in the media in the 2010s—is broken. Maybe those who are growing up right now will not inherit this trauma—they do seem to be, on the whole, a little bit different.

Self-censorship is wildly disrespectful towards the lives of others. Readers of Meduza have, collectively, spent over 3,000 years with us. That’s time they’ve taken out of their lives. And you’re going to use that time to tell them lies and bow down to censorship?

Here’s another example: many publications, including Western ones, blur out disturbing photographs to avoid upsetting the readers’ delicate sensibilities. We don’t blur anything—we put a disclaimer: “You don’t have to look if you don’t want to, but this is what war looks like”. Censorship is a lack of respect. It’s a paternalistic approach that I abhor. It signals: “We’re a bunch of intelligent journalists or we’re the

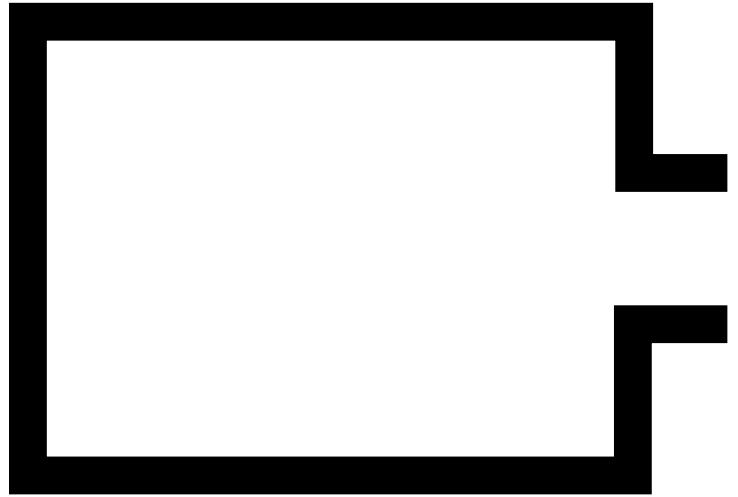
all-knowing state, we know how to address you, we know what’s best for you”. No, I’ll decide for myself what’s best for me—and that’s what I want to communicate to our readers. Decide for yourself what’s best for you: knowing or not knowing the truth, red pill or blue pill.

When we left the country in 2014, many people told me, “You’re insane, where are you running off to? Nothing’s happened yet”. But there was one exception: a former photo director of Lenta.ru. She said, “you guys are leaving to uphold the standards of your profession, to save your skill set. That’s something that will always come in handy because—besides all of the other things it does—censorship in Russia destroys a journalist’s ability to collect and verify information”.

One of our colleagues came up with a metaphor: Everything that’s happening to us now is an odyssey. Our task is to survive. Odysseus didn’t know how long his journey would last, but he did know where he wanted to return to. That’s us. We’re not sailing off into the future. We want to return home, but not to Russia, no. Speaking for myself, I’m certain I won’t be going back there—I have nothing left there anymore. We want to return to a world where journalism means something.

² In 2013, the Russian authorities charged Greenpeace activists with piracy when they tried to board a Barents Sea drilling platform from the Arctic Sunrise ship. In 2014, the defendants were granted amnesty.

dictatorship²⁶
censorship⁴²
EXILE
war⁷⁶
resilience¹³⁰
fear¹⁴⁸
loneliness¹⁶²
polarization¹⁹²
hope²⁰⁶



“Displacement and misplacement are this century’s commonplace”—does that sound relevant? It’s a line about the previous century, delivered by Joseph Brodsky during a speech on political exiles at the Wheatland Foundation, in Vienna, in 1987. In 2025, the U.N. estimates that 281 million people, 3.6% of the world’s population, will be displaced.

Some people become displaced because they’re fleeing war, others are escaping political persecution, and still others have lost their homes to the catastrophic effects of climate change. Though these people number in the millions, representing diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and legal standing, the U.N. uses one term to designate them all: “migrants”.

The word “migrant”, from the Latin “migrans”, exists in Russian, though its meaning is far from politically neutral. In the Soviet press, the term “emigrant” was a slur slightly stronger than “fascist”. In the post-Soviet period, “migrant” took root as a condescending and disdainful term for people who emigrated to Russia from neighboring countries—usually, it refers to those considered insufficiently integrated and insufficiently proficient in the Russian language. The German word “Ausländer” now appears to be acquiring similar connotations.

More than six million Ukrainians have arrived in Europe since 2022, as refugees and victims of war, receiving temporary asylum abroad. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, 650,000 Russians have left their country, and three years later still cannot agree on what to call themselves. Who are they? Political emigrants? Far from all of them. The relocated? Same problem. Simply “those who left”—as opposed to “those who stayed?” Journalists, writers, artists, directors—all people whose lives were closely connected to their native language and culture—opted to append the words “in exile” to their professions.

There are many examples of literary and cultural processes that are more interesting in exile than in the country left behind: Russia after the 1917 revolution, Nazi Germany, Franco’s Spain, Iran after the Islamic revolution. In the 2020s, in the midst of yet another humanitarian catastrophe, many have had a chance to experience firsthand what this process is like.

But what do artists in exile usually write, sing, make plays, and shoot films about? Their abandoned homeland, of course. About a place where everything’s sort of miserable, a place they may not love, but one they understand; a place that’s theirs.

The exile’s status is unique in its own way: it gives the exile the right to hang in limbo, and from there he can gaze into the past with angry nostalgia, dream about a

beautiful uncertain future, and completely ignore the present. Wasting energy that could have been spent immersing himself in a new culture on ruminations about where it all went wrong in the old one.

The exile dreams of returning, especially if he’s an exile “with soul and talent”, as has been true since Ovid’s time¹—except he doesn’t want to return somewhere, but somewhere. One can live in a “displaced and misplaced” state for years—gradually losing any connection to the country of his birth, while failing to establish a connection with the new one. Meanwhile, his native country and the country that has taken him in agree on one thing: he is welcome nowhere.

¹ In the year 8 A.D., the ancient Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso was exiled for unclear reasons to the city of Tomis, in present-day Romania, where he wrote the *Tristia*, an elegiac poetic cycle about longing for home. “With soul and talent” is an excerpt from one of Pushkin’s letters: “the devil guessed that I was born in Russia, with soul and talent”.

From Meduza's Slack

A law about punishment for spreading “deliberately false” information (in fact, this means any information that differs from the official narrative) about the actions of the Russian army was passed by Russian lawmakers in just two days, March 3–4, 2022. It carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison. Hundreds of independent journalists were forced to urgently leave the country under the threat of prison.

**FEBRUARY 2022
GENERAL CHANNEL**

Publisher: Dear colleagues, since SWIFT is going offline for us, and sanctions are supposed to come into force tomorrow, it's likely that the value of the ruble will nosedive, so today we're transferring two months worth of pay to everyone who receives a salary in rubles (ONLY TO THEM). We will be doing this as quickly as possible. Remember, this is two months pay in advance, so use the money as pragmatically as possible. If anyone runs into glitches or problems, I'll advise you on what to do. Everyone who works in Europe will be paid as usual. Hugs!

**FEBRUARY 2022
DIRECT MESSAGES**

Head of back office: Did you see? Belgium is supporting visa suspensions for ALL Russian nationals.

Managing editor: Well so far Latvia has only suggested doing this, so we need to try to hurry. It turns out I have 14 [employees] who need a visa. Please check to make sure I didn't forget anyone.

(...)

Managing editor: Well there goes that. Latvia will no longer issue visas.

Head of back office: Yeah I'm reading through it too, in Latvian — “except for special human considerations”.

Managing editor: Humanitarian [visas]

**March 2022
Direct messages**

Head of back office: Everyone is afraid is there a reason? Men might not be allowed to leave the country? Why is everyone so worked up?

Managing editor: The law about “fake news” has been passed and it can be used to lock people up for 15 years. This is really hard and bad for everyone, and everyone is running around like they won't be able to get out in time

Head of back office: Who told everyone that they need to urgently get out of Russia? Why is everyone in such hysteria?

Managing editor: The editor-in-chief and the publisher said at the briefing that it would be best to leave immediately. There's various non-public info out there

Head of back office: Ok, got it. I'll go calm them down

Managing editor: They need it, everyone needs it

**MARCH 2022
GENERAL CHANNEL**

IT project manager: Hi guys! There's now going to be a channel for those of you who are leaving Russia, we'll add everyone to it

Publisher: The tech desk set it up, put all your questions about evacuating from the country in that channel. I'm asking you all once again: please check that you have two-factor authentication on all your devices, security precautions mean the world to us. Back to the IT project manager.

IT project manager: Guys, if you didn't get an invitation to the channel, write me, I might have missed someone

Editor-in-chief: Dear friends, I don't want to scare anyone, but just in case, check whether your social media accounts show your place of work. It might be better to remove it because social media is monitored, but the decision, as always, is up to you.

**MARCH 2022
GENERAL CHANNEL**

Editor: Friends, the airlines that I can fly on with my dog aren't flying anywhere anymore. So we're crossing the border into Latvia on foot. If anyone else is considering this option, let's all chip in and we can get a bus to the border together.

Special correspondent: We would go, but we're waiting for visas

Instagram editor: If anything happens, I'll drive to the border and pick you up in my car!

IT project manager: No, I will!

Instagram editor: Let's go together. And yes, we'll need a second car to pick up our guys. Mine is already full of people coming to meet them :-)

**MARCH 2022
DIRECT MESSAGES**

Managing editor: What options do we have for apartments?

Head of back office: There are three ready for people who have arrived. And they can stay at my mom's, she'll be leaving for three months

Managing editor: There's another person arriving tomorrow

Head of communications: I'll put them up at my place, no question at all

Managing editor: I have three more people stuck in Istanbul, and I have money in dollars, I'll send them some for now and leave some for the future. I'm afraid that they'll be left without any money at all. We'll figure something out later.

**MARCH 2022
GENERAL CHANNEL**

Managing editor: Dear friends who have left Russia, please, withdraw all the money from your Russian bank accounts so that you have cash. We will figure out what to do so that you don't get stuck in Europe without any money. In the near term, we need to understand the financial situation of everyone who left!

**MARCH 2022
DIRECT MESSAGES**

Head of back office: I finally broke down a bit over something. For two weeks I was fine, but today I suddenly started sobbing in the car. I don't want to decide anything else today

Managing editor: I broke down today too. For 20 minutes, I was comforting everyone at the briefing and then I realized that I just couldn't anymore. I can't think straight

Head of communications: I'm off to have a cry now

Publisher: Do it! I just did

Editor-in-chief: I'd also need to cry, but haven't been able to so far.

Managing editor: God, I wonder if they'll let us into heaven, or maybe at least into the purgatory, for how much we did to get everyone out?

Head of back office: They won't let us in — we'll figure the code out and let ourselves in.





Alisa Yoffe, “Asylum Seekers”

CANVAS, ACRYLIC, 2025

Tell me the history of this work.

I arrived in Paris from Sakartvelo (Georgia) on October 19, 2023—I left Russia on March 5, 2022 and spent a year and a half in Tbilisi—and applied for asylum. France is one of a few countries that remains open to accepting immigrants, so there are tons of people in every government department, like l’OFII (the French Office for Immigration and Integration) and l’OFPRA (the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People). They come from all over the world and wait for their turn on the way to a new life.

In waiting rooms, I try to choose a good angle for drawing group portraits. Some people read while they wait, some look at their phones, some sleep, and some look straight ahead, as if they’re peering into eternity. I use my smartphone as a sketch pad, drawing with my finger on the screen in the Procreate app. I select a black brush and a white background—that lets me capture what I see.

[French-Soviet artist and Soviet Non-conformist Art leader] Mikhail Roginsky drew typical scenes from the everyday life of a Soviet person, like waiting in line. The work of [artists] Boris Turetsky and Semyon Faibisovich feature similar motifs. In working on this series, I keep in mind the nonconformist tradition as well as Faibisovich’s social portraits. At the same time, my group portraits of refugees are an attempt to discover myself: where am I, what am I doing, what do I look like, who am I?

How do you transfer images from a digital format to canvas?

I use a projector. I paint with a wide brush on the canvas, and I try to accurately

convey the particular plasticity of the digital line. I work in large format. At the “No” exhibition, the room on exile has a work from the “Asylum Seekers” series that stands on the floor, taking up the entire wall and blocking a window. The people depicted on the canvas are life-sized, to the viewer—it’s as if he can enter the waiting room and take his place there.

What does the word “exile” evoke in you? Is your emigration exile?

The French government has declared me a refugee. A year before I left Russia, I painted murals about the imprisonment of Alexey Navalny and those arrested at protests supporting him, as well as people detained at the migrant detention center in Sakharovo. Since February 2021, before the war started, I’ve been publishing anti-war statements and drawings. In Russia, I would be arrested and thrown in prison, and I already dedicated my 2017 exhibition “Lawlessness”, in Voronezh, to torture in prisons.

Since the beginning of my artistic career, I’ve worked with social and political themes and spoken out against the war in Ukraine. I refused to be silent and live in Russia just waiting for prison, paying taxes that fund the war. Perhaps my situation can be called exile—a “second exile”, because as a teenager I already went through emigration, with all the bureaucracy, adaptation, integration. I was born in Uzbekistan, and I left with my mother and grandmother in 2000: it became frightening to stay there because of burgeoning nationalism. We spent three and a half days on the train, crossed Kazakhstan, where we lost a portion of the money we’d gotten from selling our things—we paid it in bribes to Kazakh

border guards, who made a living by going from compartment to compartment demanding money. Sometimes they said people had overweight luggage—with us, it was because my grandmother didn’t have Russian citizenship; they threatened to throw her off the train.

I’m not Uzbek, but in school in Russia I got called “Uzbek” or “Jew”. I know how hard it is for immigrants from Central Asia to live in Russia. Russia is harder on migrants than France is. I’m not losing my homeland now, that happened long ago. But was Uzbekistan my homeland? Or were Russian speakers there occupiers, like we are in Sakartvelo?

Alisa Yoffe works in a very recognizable style: a minimalist black and white palette, broad brush strokes, deliberately nonchalant, but very legible images. This style, often found in traditionally analog media like graphic arts and painting, has migrated organically into digital art over time.

The drawings that Yoffe composes on her mobile phone look like hand-drawn work, in no way resembling the “perfected” images and symbols we’re accustomed to seeing on our gadget screens. Thus, the artist humanizes a cold digital environment. Yoffe transfers some of her drawings to canvases and walls—again, by hand—alongside random artifacts, like fragments of erased lines.

Alisa Yoffe was born in 1987 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She studied at the Free Workshops at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, the Institute of Problems in Contemporary Art, and under the artist Anatoly Osmolovsky.

Yoffe’s work has appeared in the most famous Russian art markets, Cosmopolitan and Blazar. Her work has been exhibited at solo shows in Russia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The artist’s work is also held in the collections of the Tretyakov Gallery, the V-A-C Foundation, the Perm Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Phoenix Art Museum. Alisa was nominated for the Joseph Brodsky Memorial Fellowship Fund (2017), the American Academy in Rome (2017–2018).

In addition to her solo projects, Yoffe is known for collaborations with a number of famous brands, including Comme des Garçons and Cartier. She has also worked with the Georgian humanitarian center Choose to Help, which aids Ukrainian refugees. The artist left Russia at the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. She now resides and works in Paris.

Film Critic at Meduza. Former editor-in-chief at Film Art magazine, author of several books about movies, including "Bad Russians"

ANTON BOEIN



ANTON DOLIN

I was scheduled to deliver a lecture on February 24, 2022. I woke up very early so I could get to the airport, and read that the war had started. I was among those who didn't believe that it would happen—I think we were probably the majority. In that instant, it became clear to me that everyone would have to start censoring themselves very soon, and I immediately decided that before the censorship began, I was going to write what I really thought on Facebook.

I think that everyone experienced a sense of helplessness that day. A complete loss of agency. But I'm a product of the 1990s, a period when Russian society was moving, on the contrary, toward agency. I'm used to feeling like an adult, a person who chooses his own trajectory.

Therefore, I had a situational, simple answer to the question "what is to be done?" We have to do something. You can't just freeze like a rabbit in front of a snake. But it's also impossible to pretend that everything was the same as before, that's a trap. So I flew to Samara, but I said to the people running the event, "Our topic has changed, I'll go on stage and I'm going to talk about the war. I can't talk about trends in film today, really sorry". I have to give credit where it's due: they didn't object.

I gave my speech and I had no doubt that the people in the lecture hall agreed with me—it's always possible, though, that that was an illusion. Then I thought: if no one in this randomly assembled audience, who know me primarily as some guy from TV, wants to spit on me, then that means that viewers of my YouTube channel, who know me well, are probably prepared for a more detailed and specific conversation.

That morning in the airport on the way back, I started calling around to filmmakers, asking who wanted to record a little anti-war manifesto with me. We did it, in the end, even though many refused. No one, however, was saying that Putin was doing everything right.

I wasn't planning to leave. But after our video, I started receiving threats. My children were threatened. In a very ugly fashion. It was obvious that the people doing this knew which buttons to

press. Then our Israeli friend called and said, "Listen, I can't fully vouch for the accuracy of this information, but we've heard that mobilization might be announced on March 8. If that's true, you and your oldest son won't be allowed out of the country". I started to think that we really needed to leave for a while.

Right at that time, the director Vitaly Mansky called and invited me to the Artdocfest in Riga. There were no flights to Europe, but you could get to Riga on the ground. I thought to myself: if the festival will also issue invitations to my wife and children, we can leave without arousing suspicion. We'll see what happens after that, maybe we'll return to Moscow. The thought didn't cross our minds that we'd be leaving forever.

My mom and my younger brother Matvey took us to the train station. They rang the doorbell, we opened the door, and they were absolutely pale. "Have you seen this? Has it been here long?" I stepped out and saw that the Latin letter Z (the unofficial symbol in support of Russia's invasion into Ukraine) was painted on my door. That was the first moment that I said to myself: "wow".

The second time happened the next day. After spending four hours at two borders, Russia and Estonia,

ANTON DOLIN

I turned on my phone and realized that I was being watched. We'd decided to tell the Russian border guard that we were taking the kids to France, to see their grandmother. We weren't intending to go there — we were all going to Riga. But I hadn't even reached Riga when my friend forwarded an announcement from an anonymous pro-Putin Telegram channel, that said "Anton Dolin fled to France". The story about France came directly from the border guard's booth. There's no other possible source.

I don't believe in the multiverse. I don't believe that things can be any way other than what they are. People torture themselves endlessly, asking "What if we'd taken a different fork in the road?" Life may not be predetermined, but there are choices you shouldn't gamble on. One of my favorite books is "Jacques the Fatalist and His Master" by Denis Diderot — it's all about that. The realization that I made a decision and now I have to deal with its consequences helps me a lot.

My life changed a lot less than reality around me. I think a lot about the absurd. 2024 was a year of absurdist theater — Yorgos

Lanthimos' "Kinds of Kindness" is just one example. The previous rise of absurdism in culture described the onset of Nazism. The absurd is always connected with alienation, when there are many people around you, but you're alone. It's always been easy for me to identify with Kafka's heroes, with Camus' stranger, even though I myself am not an outcast, and sometimes I'm even a real public favorite. But this is an internal impression, there's nothing to do about it.

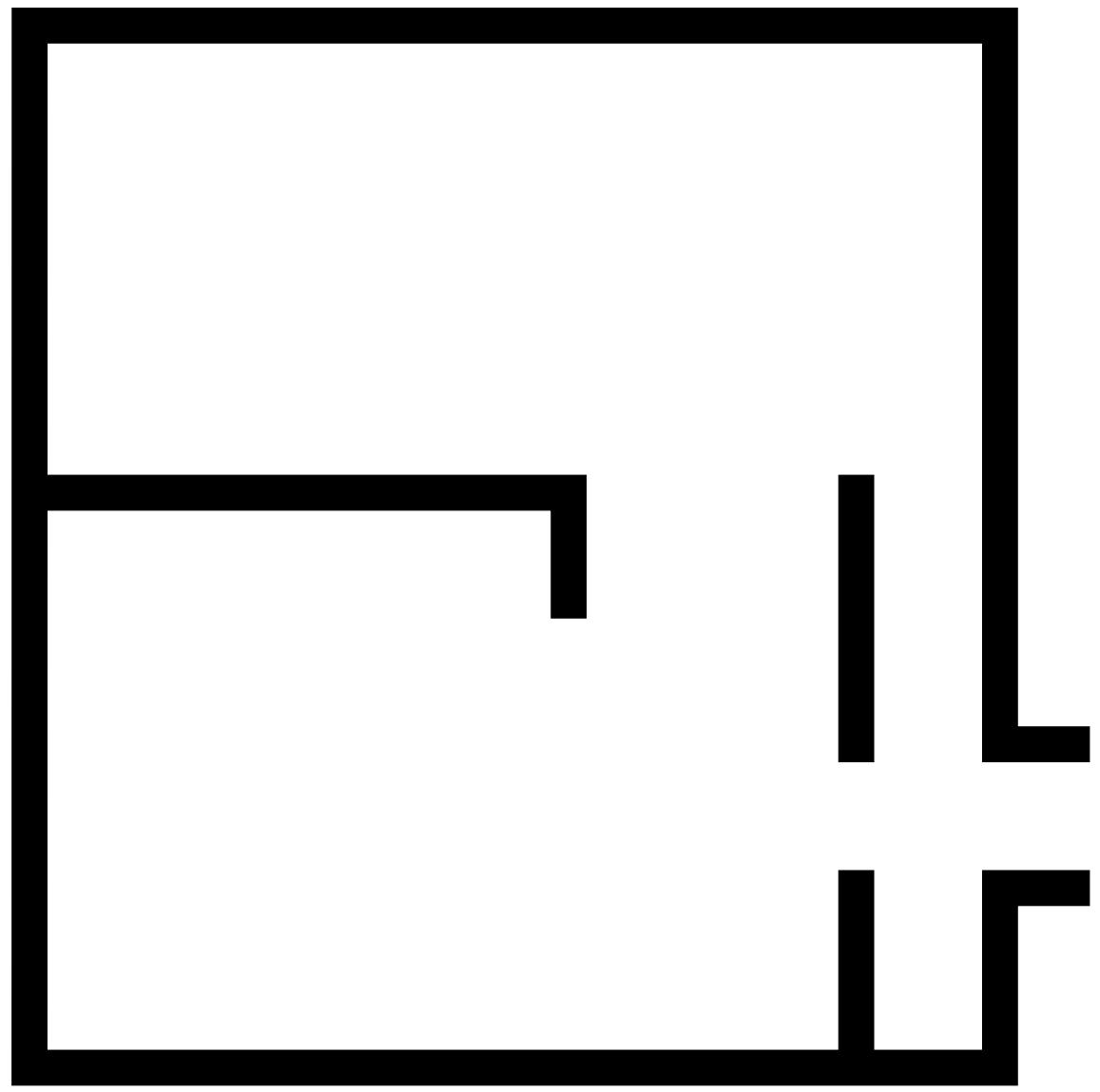
I never felt like I belonged in Russia. Like among film critics, for example. I have impostor syndrome, I'm an autodidact. I remember how outraged everyone was when I praised Fyodor Bondarchuk's film "Stalingrad" — for Russian film critics, it was a badge of honor to say what a piece of crap that film was. I very often realize that almost everyone I listen to, read, and respect thinks differently than I do. This feeling of solitude has its own honor and joy.

But now, traveling the globe, I meet people everywhere who think like me. I've met them in Detroit, in Ljubljana, in Chisinau. 400 people came to my lecture in Chisinau. And I've never even been there before. They asked me what my connection is to Moldova. I unexpectedly recalled that my great-grandfather was born in Bessarabia somewhere. Someone brought me the Jewish encyclopedia of Moldova, and I was in there. I was thinking, "Gosh, this is absolutely foreign to me", and then it turned out that no, it wasn't foreign. The Moscow in-group, famous critics — it suddenly turned out that all of that was totally not my thing.

I'm not on a quest in the spirit of Don Quixote. I'm traveling the world in search of my people. Not people who are against Putin — it's hard to say who's against Putin — but people who, in addition to being against Putin, also, for example, love Cervantes.

I'm generally obsessed with chivalric novels, though I only like one kind of knight — the wandering kind. The ones who set out in uncomfortable armor for the sake of something impossible. That kind of endless wandering interests me. Of course, it's good to have your own Camelot or La Mancha behind you, whatever yours is. I have no Camelot. But I like the feeling of the road.

DICTIONARY
CENSORSHIP²⁶
EXILE⁵⁸
WAR
RESERVE¹³⁰
FEAR¹⁴⁸
LONELINESS¹⁶²
POLARIZATION¹⁹²
HOPE²⁰⁶



"A people cannot perish heroically, cannot be criminal, cannot act morally or immorally; only its individuals can do so", wrote the German psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers.

This view applies to the ongoing debate surrounding the responsibility for the war in Ukraine, which has not died down in the three years since February 24, 2022. Terms such as "the nation", "the people", or "the majority of Russians" suit propagandists and the generals who order "meat grinder attacks". But when it comes to moral issues, they are of little help.

Over 140 million people live in Russia. One of them gave the order to launch the "special military operation"—the Kremlin's official euphemism for the war in Ukraine. Another supported it. A third shouted: "Fire!" A fourth pulled the trigger. A fifth filmed a propaganda news report. A sixth saved their employees from conscription, keeping them away from the trenches. A seventh posted an anti-war statement on social media and had the police pay them a visit. An eighth dedicated his life to fighting the regime and died behind bars.

Do they all bear the same degree of responsibility? Clearly not. But describing millions of distinct situations would take an eternity. A more productive approach would be to ask: What did I personally do? Would I have acted differently if I had known how the whole thing would turn out? Am I responsible and if so, to what extent?

When I, the author of this essay, ask myself this question, the answer is: Yes, I am, in my view, responsible.

It would be unfair, however, to expect the same degree of reflection on this issue from the CEO of a defense industry plant as from, say, their accountant—a single mother raising her children in a house without gas and central heating. Yet for each of them individually, such reflection would certainly be beneficial, since it shapes our daily lives and can help us from disengaging on a moral level.

In Russia, the mere act of speaking out against the war can mean years in prison, while supporting it often leads to career advancement and financial benefits. Like many other peoples, Russians face a choice between the "host of the beast" and the "host of the lamb", as Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll put it while describing citizens' moral dilemmas in Nazi Germany.

This choice feels so wrenching that many prefer not to think about it. But between these two paths lies an entire spectrum of actions, which only reflection makes visible. Reflection can also restore a sense of political agency that the Russian state works relentlessly

to erase. And most importantly, reflection allows us to live without turning away from even the most distressing and shameful aspects of reality.

Jaspers and his fellow philosophers expressed the same idea in different words: we must reflect on responsibility, not because it is demanded of us from the outside, but because it is a personal necessity. It is "a question of life for the soul". As Jaspers wrote, "Our own lives can attain dignity only in truthfulness with ourselves".

To consider where we stand, what we took part in, and what we did not do, is the least we can do. And we owe it, first and foremost, to ourselves.

From Meduza's Slack

On the night of February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. From February 24, Meduza has provided a daily live updates of the war.

FEBRUARY 24, 2022
GENERAL CHANNEL
3:04 A.M.

Editor-in-chief: Whoever's awake, let me know you're here

News editor 1: I'm here

News editor 2: me too

News editor 3: and me

Features editor 1: +

Photo editor 1: here

3:49 A.M.

Special correspondent 1: +

Special correspondent 2: Here

Special correspondent 1: I'm here, but I'm on my way to the airport to fly to Kyiv

Special correspondent 2: Airspace is closed there

Special correspondent 1: I just read that :(

4:36 A.M.

Managing editor: Hi dear friends. The war has started. All hands briefing at 8:30 Moscow time, 7:30 Riga time. Heads of desk, start waking your teams up in about 40 minutes. For now, here's the plan:

The main material is the liveblog of the war — news reporters are covering it in shifts

News feed — we're working in pairs today

News analysis — we'll decide during the briefing when that's happening

Editorial statement — written by the Head of the Explainers desk

Telegram — shifts have been drawn up

Article from Kyiv — we're talking to residents there. Features desk We're looking for people from border cities — special correspondents Watching out for protests in Moscow and other cities in Russia — news desk Map of Ukraine to be ready at noon Moscow time — design team Short explainer about the U.N. article and what Putin is hiding behind Attention, IMPORTANT: Don't flood channels and don't post indiscriminately across the different channels. The "Themes" channel is for liveblog info and news, important things only. The "General" channel is for organizational information about work and shifts, "Random" — conversations for the soul, "Daily Briefing" — ideas for articles. THAT'S IT! We'll talk again soon.

10:37 A.M.

Editor-in-chief: My dears, let there be no ambiguity. RKN [Roskomnadzor, Russia's main state censorship agency] demands that the war be covered only with reference to "official Russian sources". It goes without saying we don't give a shit about this rule.

1:32 P.M.

Managing editor: Dear friends, it looks like this evening there are walkouts, rallies, pickets, and protests planned in city centers around Russia. Svetlana Reiter is going to work in the Moscow's center — she has [official] accreditation [from the Russian Foreign Ministry] (and so she'll be carrying a press pass, an editorial assignment, a vest). No one else is going to work rallies anymore — there are no more accreditations, and besides, you are needed at work at your computers. If you wish to go out and take part in any political action as a citizen and not a journalist, you ABSOLUTELY MUST inform me about this via private message. We can't prohibit anyone from taking

part, but please remember 1) you are really needed at work, we don't have enough hands on deck and need to make sure we can spare you, 2) I need to know that you're going, and you need to keep in communication with me. Instructions about participating in protests are on the [editorial] wiki — plus, you'll need to study other safety instructions about how to behave, what to do, etc. We'll collect them all in one place — I'll post that separately. But before anything else, I need to know if anyone is planning to take part in anything like this. Thank you!

6:07 P.M.

Editor: Friends, I have one minute to write this, but here it goes. This morning I discovered that my family feels the war is justified. Can't even begin to say how shocked and devastated I am. And how incredibly glad I am that to be doing at least something to try to make it end sooner by reporting on it with all of you. Screw being tired, I love you and am proud of you all!

7:13 P.M.

Photo editor: Today is an infinitely heavy and sad day, but I want to say that I'm incredibly proud to be part of our media bulldozer. During breaks, I open up the site or our Instagram and I'm stunned at what you all (we) have managed to accomplish today, and at what level. Just wanted to say this to everyone!

Head of special correspondents: A huge thank you to everyone.

News desk head: Thank you and thanks to every single one of you. Hugs.

Editor: I also wanted to say that I'm awfully proud of Meduza as a phenomenon in our reality and of each of you as individuals and colleagues. You're all incredible, to be near you is an honor and a delight.

Publisher: Well, today you really kept up the good work. Thank you!



» Valtakunnalliset maanpuolustusk ...
@MPKurssit

#249mpk ensimmäisen kurssiviikon kruunaa räväät vierailut
@FinnishAirForce ja @Maavoimat esittelyineen #SATLSTO ja @PanssariPR

#maanpuolustuskurssit kiittää esittelijöitä!
#kokonaisturvallisuus

3.24 ip. · 12. syysk. 2024 · 2 463 Näyttöä

Q 1 T 4 H 92 B ↑

Julkaise Vasta

Jussi Kosone @kosoner · 12. syysk. ...
Hieno kurssipäivä hienossa porukassa #249mpk

0:10

Q 1 T 4 H 49 B 1t. ↑







Pilvi Takala “Feeling Defensive”

VIDEO, 13 MIN, 2025

In your project you describe the training you received from the military. What was it?

I attended this thing called the “National Defense Course”, which the Finnish Defense Forces (the Finnish military) have been organizing since the 1960s. It’s almost four weeks long and the idea is to invite a group of participants who are prominent in their fields—such as members of parliament, government administrators, and CEOs, along with others from the defense forces, the business world, the media, academia, the cultural sphere, and various NGOs—to come together and learn about defense and crisis preparedness. Attendees participate in lectures, field trips, and roleplay exercises where they practice decision making in a national crisis scenario.

There’s a kind of mythology surrounding the course, people are very proud to be invited, and their employees are proud of them as well, paying them a full salary while they attend.

What did you make of it?

Well, I was very much outside my comfort zone throughout the course. The recurring use of language like “fatherland” and the assumption of a shared patriotism felt wrong to me.

As a Finn, I have a lot of trust in the systems in place, and the course does manage to foster a commitment to working together in times of crisis. However, the defense forces were really overrepresented as the main safety organization, and so war was the main crisis scenario (instead of climate change, for example). The discourse was so one-sided that it

was hard to challenge, even though some of us tried to ask critical questions. There was barely any talk about de-escalation, peacebuilding, or international law. As much as I wanted to challenge the narrative, it’s extremely hard to carve out space for critical conversation because the course isn’t designed that way—it’s designed to integrate you into their system. Participation included posing next to tanks for group photos and being in uniform during our three-day stay at a military base, which ultimately felt like consenting to their agenda.

In my research, I pay attention to how this course is engineered to pull people in, looking at what worked on me and what didn’t. I’m also interested in my role as an artist in this course. Someone in the course asked a great question: how can we make artists create patriotic art in times of crisis if they’re all liberals and will just critique everything? I feel that my job as an artist is to deal with things that are difficult, complicated, or contain some kind of tension. I don’t think that role will change in times of crisis—it might actually become even more important.

Is it usual for people in Finland to talk about the threat of war in their everyday lives? Or is it something that’s started to happen more in the past three years because of the Russo-Ukrainian war?

More than half of the Finnish population have been involved in the military in some capacity: we have compulsory military service for men and voluntary supplementary training. People are primed to consider war with Russia as a very real possibility and are expected to be ready.

VOICES: PILVI TAKALA AND JOHANNA VUORELMA

CAMERA: KATHARINA DIESNER

SOUND EDITING: PINJA MUSTAJOKI

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS: TUURE LEPPÄNEN, IONA ROISIN

RESEARCH ASSISTANT: JESSIE BULLIVANT

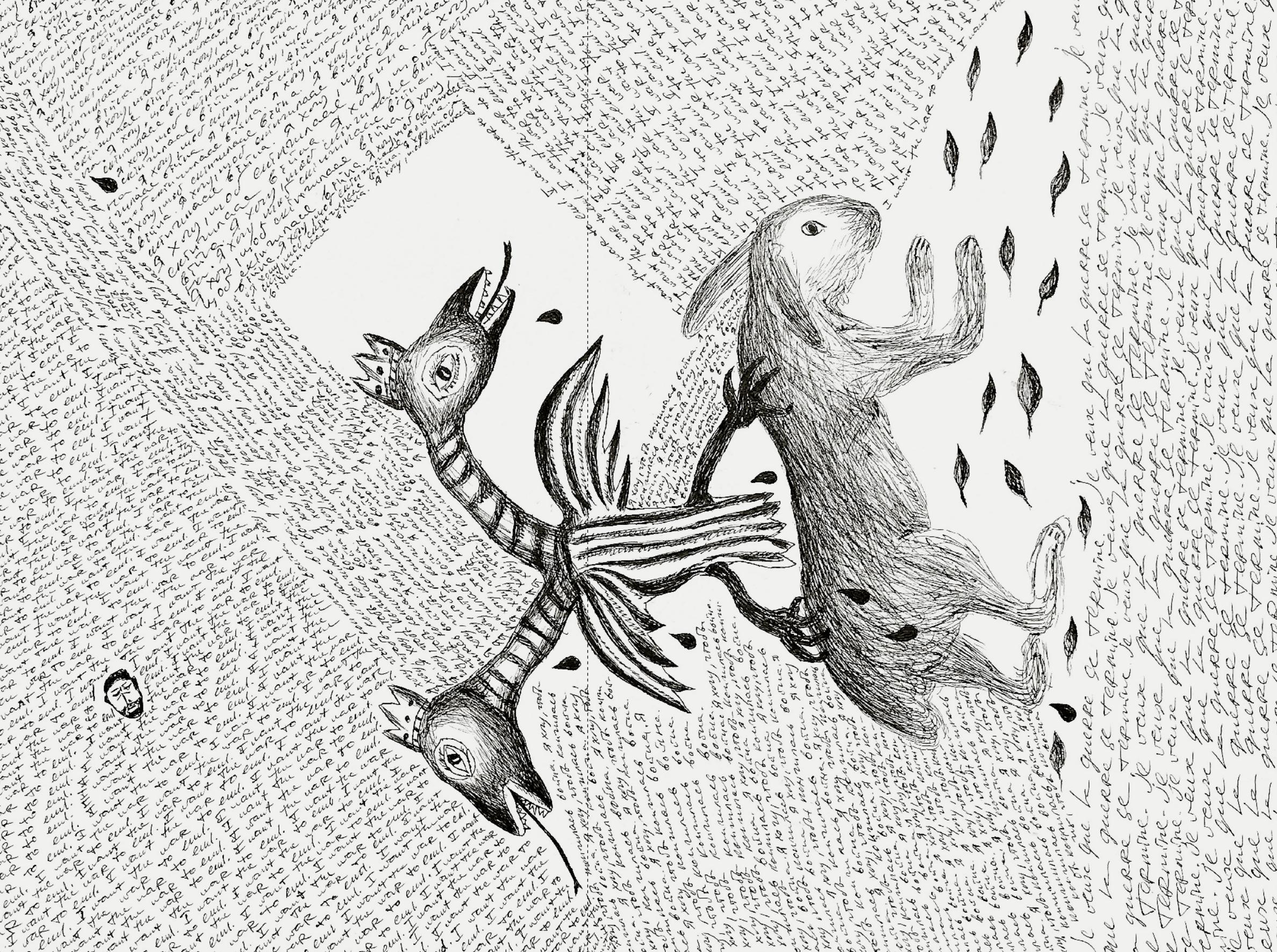
Even with all of that in the background, you can see how the reality of Russia invading Ukraine has totally shifted the public discourse. Finland immediately joined NATO and the move was largely uncontested. A society that was already pretty militarized has become even more so.

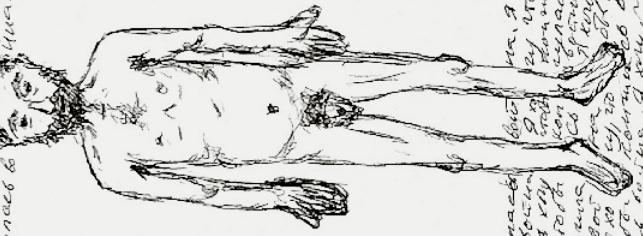
The national defense budget has snowballed too. Of course they will never say “hey, that’s enough money, we have everything we need now” because there is an unknown threat, so all eventualities have to be prepared for and you can never be 100 percent prepared. There is no end to this logic and it is hard to counter—the discourse around threat erases everything else.

Pilvi Takala’s video works are based on performative interventions in which she researches specific communities and institutions to question social structures. In her practice she shows that implicit normative rules for behaviour are often only revealed through disruption. For example, in “Bag Lady”, Takala walked around a shopping mall with a large amount of cash in a transparent bag: Staff became uncomfortable and visitors who were worried about the safety of the money persuaded the artist to hide it. For the project “Real Snow White”, the artist tried to enter Disneyland dressed as Snow White: Employees refused to let her in, arguing that she was not employed by the theme park and therefore did not answer to the company, but might do “something bad” in the character’s image. Takala’s performance called attention to the absurd logic of appealing to Snow White’s “real character” as well as Disneyland’s extreme discipline.

Sometimes Takala works more explicitly with groups. In “The Committee”, a work created by the artist after winning the Emdash Award, she invited children aged eight to twelve to come up with ideas for how to spend £7,000 of the prize money (the children spent it on a bouncy castle). Another example is a recent performance called “Close Watch”. Takala worked for six months as a security guard at a shopping center, after which she invited her former colleagues to take part in a participatory theater workshop to re-enact difficult work situations with the help of professional actors.

Pilvi Takala was born in Helsinki in 1981. She represented Finland at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. Her work has been shown at Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Seoul Mediacity Biennale, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, CCA Glasgow, Manifesta 11, Centre Pompidou, MoMA PS1, Palais de Tokyo, New Museum in New York, Kunsthalle Basel, Kunstinstituut Melly, and the 9th Istanbul Biennial. Takala lives and works in Helsinki and Berlin.





On the way back to town I stopped at the hotel and had a meal. The food was excellent and the service was very good. After my meal I went to the hotel bar and had a few drinks. I then took a taxi back to my room and slept until late afternoon. I then got up and went for a walk around the city. I visited the main shopping street and bought some souvenirs. I also visited the local market where I bought some fruit and vegetables. I then took a bus back to the hotel and had dinner there. The food was delicious and the service was great. I then took a taxi back to my room and slept until late afternoon. I then got up and went for a walk around the city. I visited the main shopping street and bought some fruit and vegetables. I then took a bus back to the hotel and had dinner there. The food was delicious and the service was great.



Anonymous artist, “Time of War”

PERFORMATIVE GRAPHIC. PAPER, BALLPOINT PEN.
65×50 CM, 150 SHEETS. 2022–2024

What's your working process for the “Time of War” series?

The series right now consists of 150 sheets of paper, covered in small inscriptions in ballpoint pen. The words “I want the war to end” are all over them in different languages.

I started this series on December 16, 2022, after I was forced to emigrate to France. It was in large part psychotherapy, the sublimation of a naive, childish desire, which millions of people across the political spectrum share with me.

I worked on it actively for around a year; sometimes I even did several pages a day. I always write in Russian, Ukrainian, and English — and I add the language spoken wherever I'm staying. Usually that's French, since France is my main location. But you can also see Armenian, Hebrew, German, Dutch, and Czech. Essentially, this is a visualization of time, filled with a single strong desire — an end to the killing.

I'll consider the series over when the war is over. One way or another, it's a work in progress. I'm working on it much less now than I was during the first year of the war. Initially I thought I could influence the situation in some mystical way. But it went in the opposite direction: yet another war broke out, and that couldn't help but dampen my energy for the work.

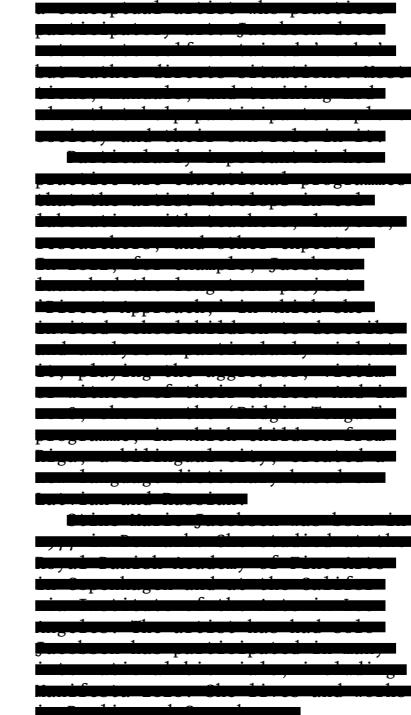
You call this series performative graphics. What is that?

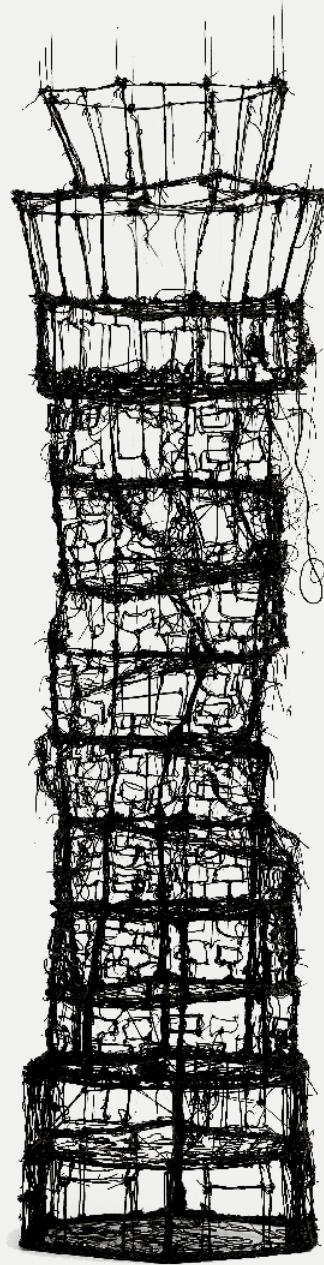
What's important isn't only the result, but the process itself. The process might even be more important than the way it looks. I didn't make any special graphics, I didn't choose a font, everything happened spontaneously.

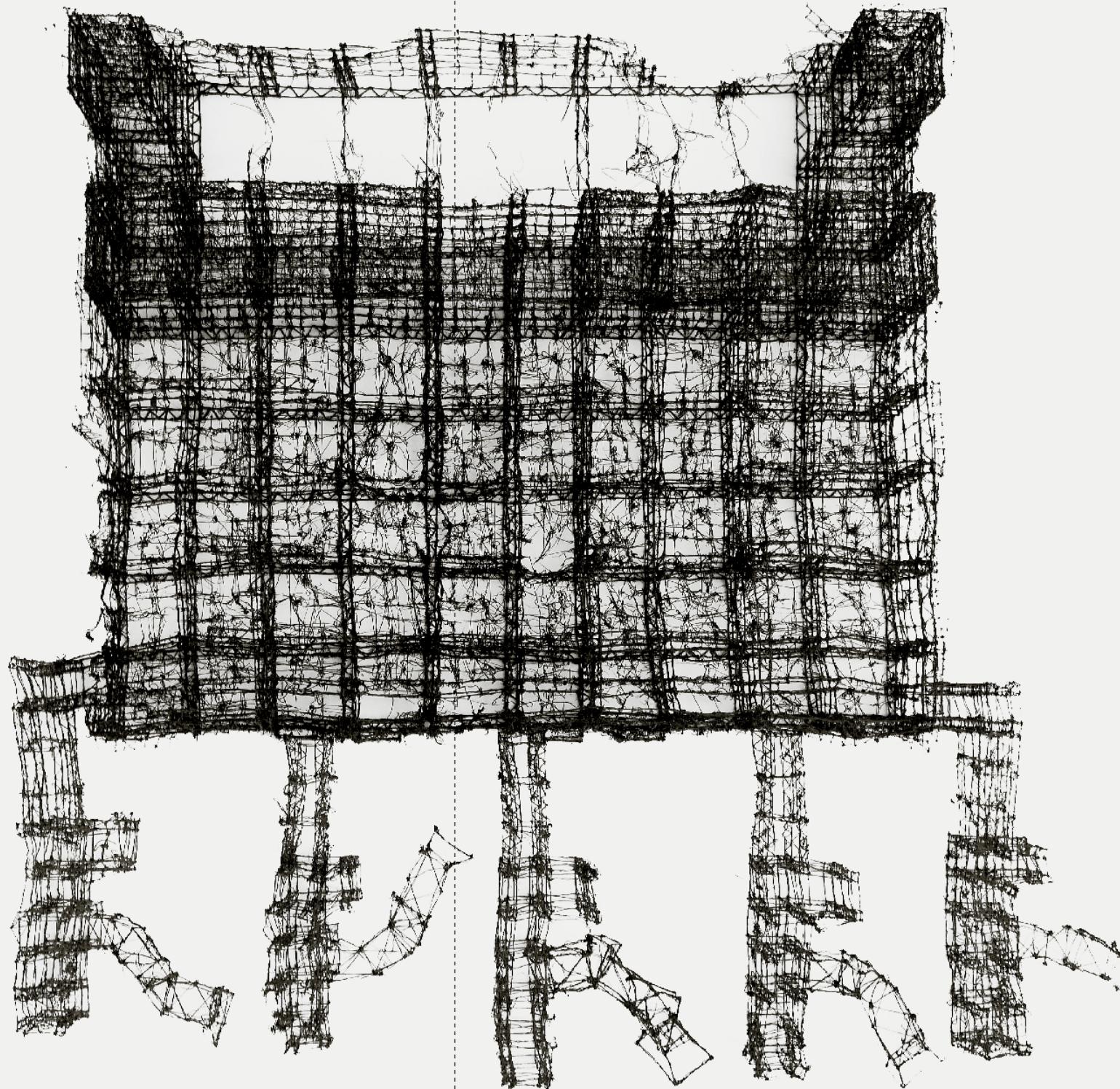
You write, “I want the war to end”, not “I want people to stop fighting”. As though it's a natural phenomenon.

I know that Russia is responsible for the war. War begins by the will of people. But I'm not sure that it's possible to end it by force of will. It's like a plague. I have a feeling of powerlessness, senselessness — only the desire for all of it to stop.

The artist has chosen to stay anonymous due to security reasons.





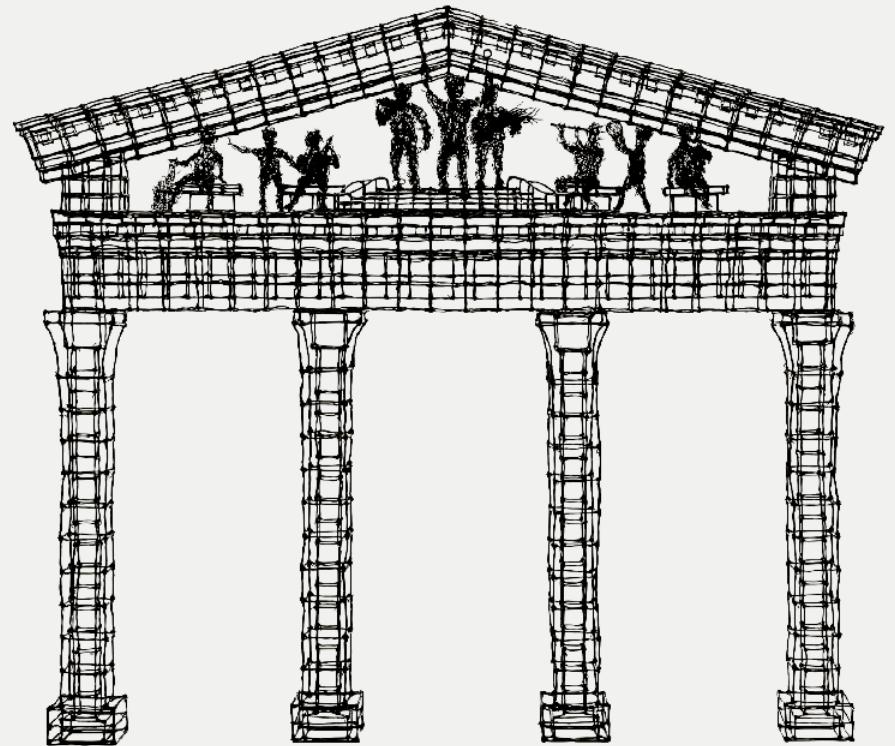


SERGEI PROKOFIEV, PROJECT "HELL".

"MARIUPOL DRAMATIC THEATER",

WAR

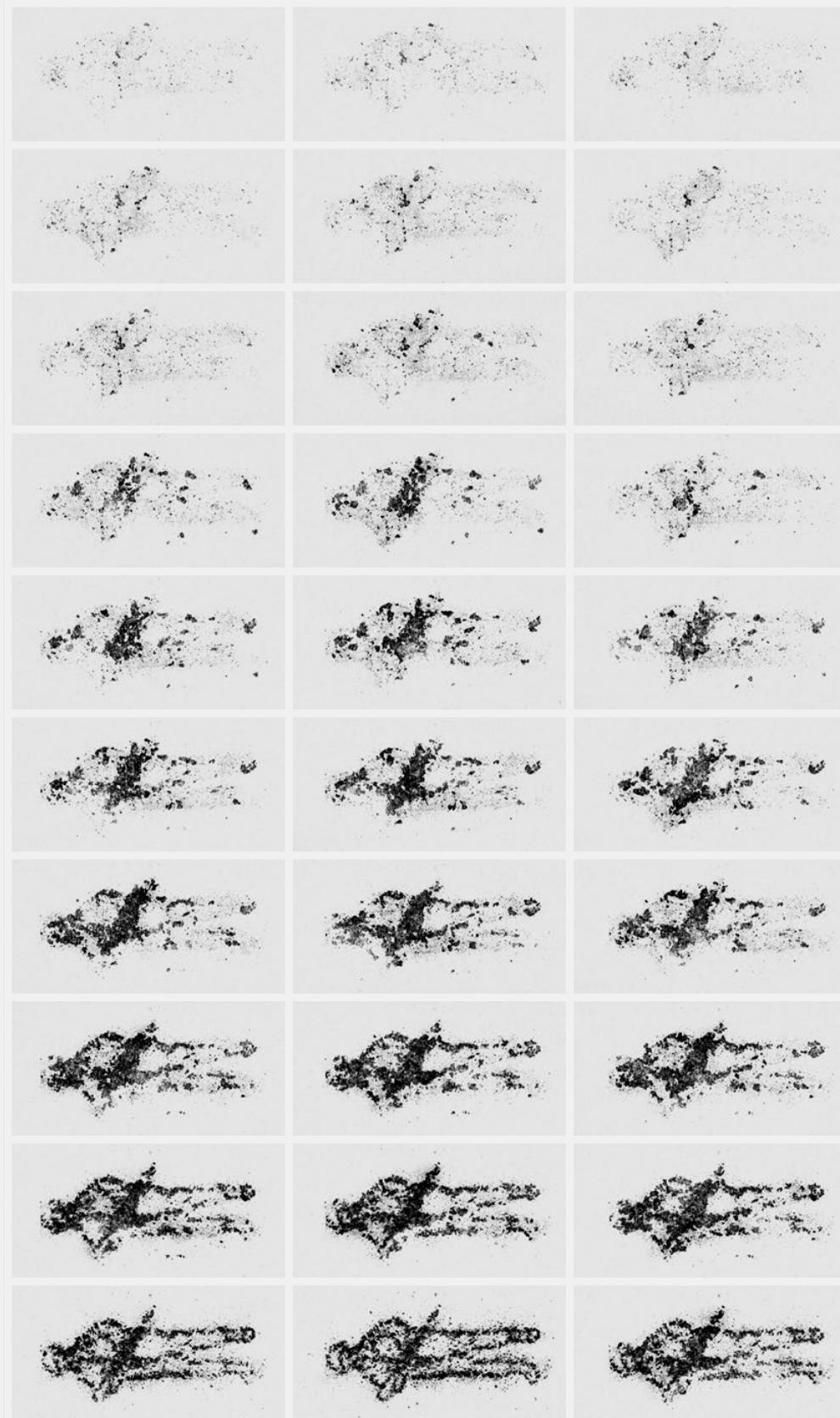
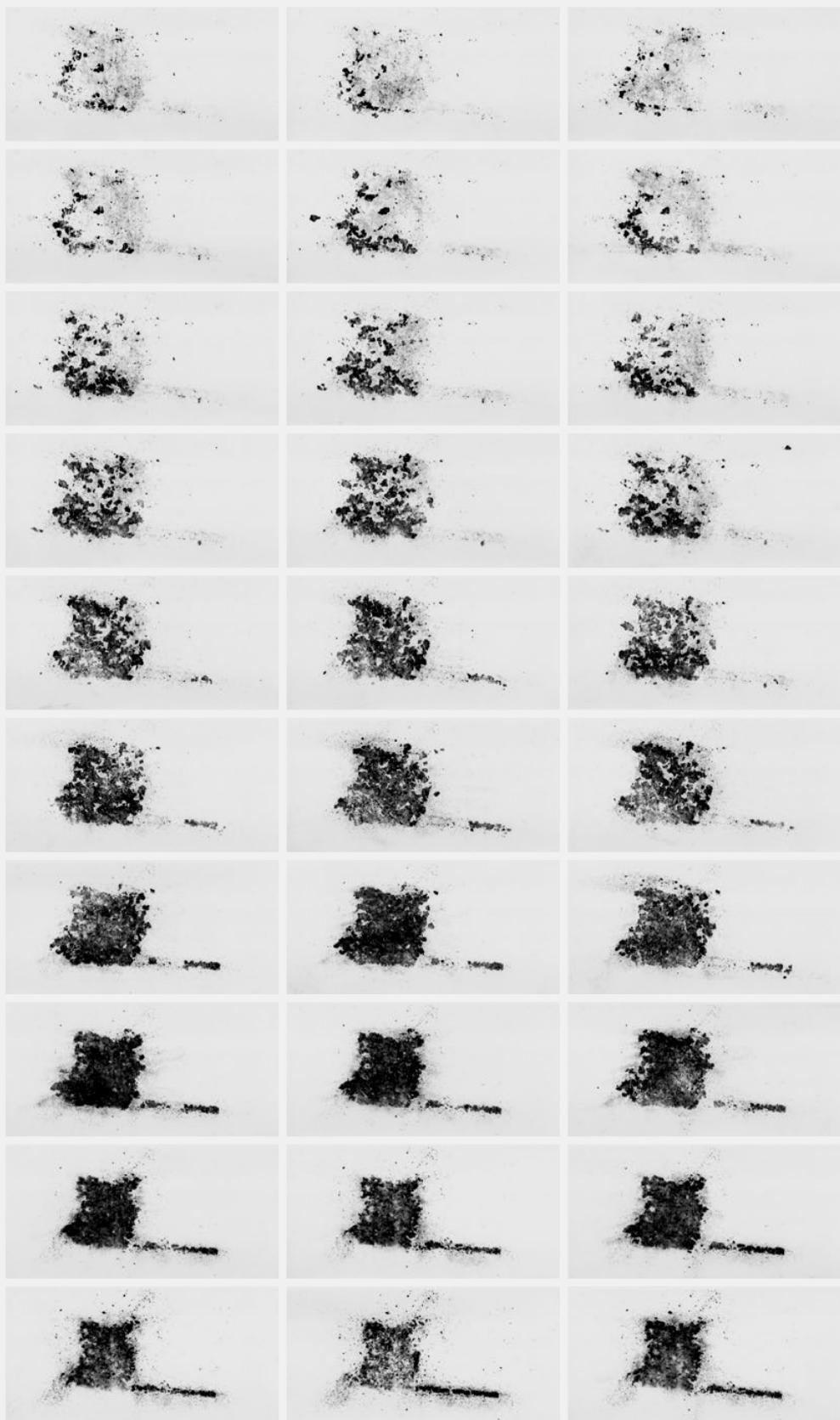
3D pen, PLA plastic.
70x10x75 cm. 2023



SERGEI PROKOFIEV, PROJECT "HELL", "FLAG OF FORGETTING" + "UNKNOWN SOLDIER"

Vintage paper 250 g/m², burned graphite
plastic, hand printing, 30x15 cm. 2023

WAR



Sergei “Hell” Prokofiev,

MIXED MEDIA, 2015–THE PRESENT

You've been working on the project "Hell" since 2015, almost since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. Describe the project's history.

The killing of [Russian opposition politician and reformer] Boris Nemtsov [in 2015] was a turning point for me. I realized that I could no longer continue making light installations. I became aware of photos and videos coming from the Donetsk airport, which at that time was a symbol of Ukrainian resistance. The texture of the destroyed airport, especially the new glass and steel terminal, matched the texture of the models I had been trying to make with a 3D pen: skeletal, burnt-out looking black structures. I realized that I needed to record this because the news has a tendency to fade into oblivion.

There was a lot of joy at that time in Russia, a morbid enthusiasm for the annexation of Crimea. There were a few sporadic art pieces that reflected on the situation, but I didn't see any artistic commentary about the war in the form of a large exhibition project — so I decided that it needed to be done.

When the full-scale invasion began, I reactivated this project. After a few months, my psyche activated a defense mechanism that pushed me away from unfolding events. That's why symbols connected to nature absorbing and processing traces of war started to permeate my work. Symbols related to memory also appeared. In the summer of 2023, I started burning sculptures, extracting graphite out of them, and using it to print a series of 30 sheets of paper: every print was fainter than the previous one. These series are very much about working with memory.

Many anti-war artists today are forced to ask questions like "Why do we need art in times of war?" or "Can art make sense of events that are happening right now?" How do you answer these questions for yourself?

I asked myself all of these questions in the spring of 2022. Not long before the full-scale invasion, I had been planning to go knocking on the doors of all Russian art institutions with my anti-war project: "Nothing is over, the war continues in a smoldering phase, we need to show it". In the end, life turned out differently. I realized that I needed to continue this work in the conditions and with the resources available to me. Can you make art in a time of war? I think you can and you must, you must do it here and now, even though nothing has cooled down yet. It needs to be recorded in physical form instead of getting lost in the ever-flowing media stream.

It is a practice of witnessing — and in my case it's meditative and actually quite archaic. Art works made with a 3D pen and graphite plastic, for example, look old, often resembling fossilized traces of plants and animals despite the fact that the technology itself is new. The scars of trenches cutting through farmland and fields in my last series of reliefs are reminiscent of geoglyphs from Chile. These archaic motifs are connected, for me, with the archaic nature of war itself.

Sergei Prokofiev creates sculpture, graphic art, video, and light installations. One of the artist's favorite techniques is a three dimensional linear drawing that unites features of sculpture and graphics. In the early 2010s, he "drew" with fluorescent lamps, producing objects in the spirit of classical minimalist Dan Flavin, before switching to a 3D pen.

Prokofiev's works often make reference to political reality, as, for example, with his early pieces "Block" and "Smart Bomb", which were a police barrier and a guided aerial bomb made of fluorescent lamps. Both pieces stem from the beginning of the 2010s, a period when many in Russia lost hope in swift democratization. The lamps contain toxic mercury vapor: the artist chose this material intentionally to depict symbols of power and the violence that it exerts.

Prokofiev has continued developing the same theme for over a decade as part of his "Hell" project on the Russia-Ukraine war. The series, which includes objects, graphics, and videos, began with an architectural model made with a 3D pen. It depicted the Donetsk airport destroyed by fighting, a place emblematic of the first phase of the war, during which Russia partially occupied the Donbas region (the airport, which now lies in ruins, bears the name of the Russian and Soviet composer Sergei Prokofiev, the artist's full namesake).

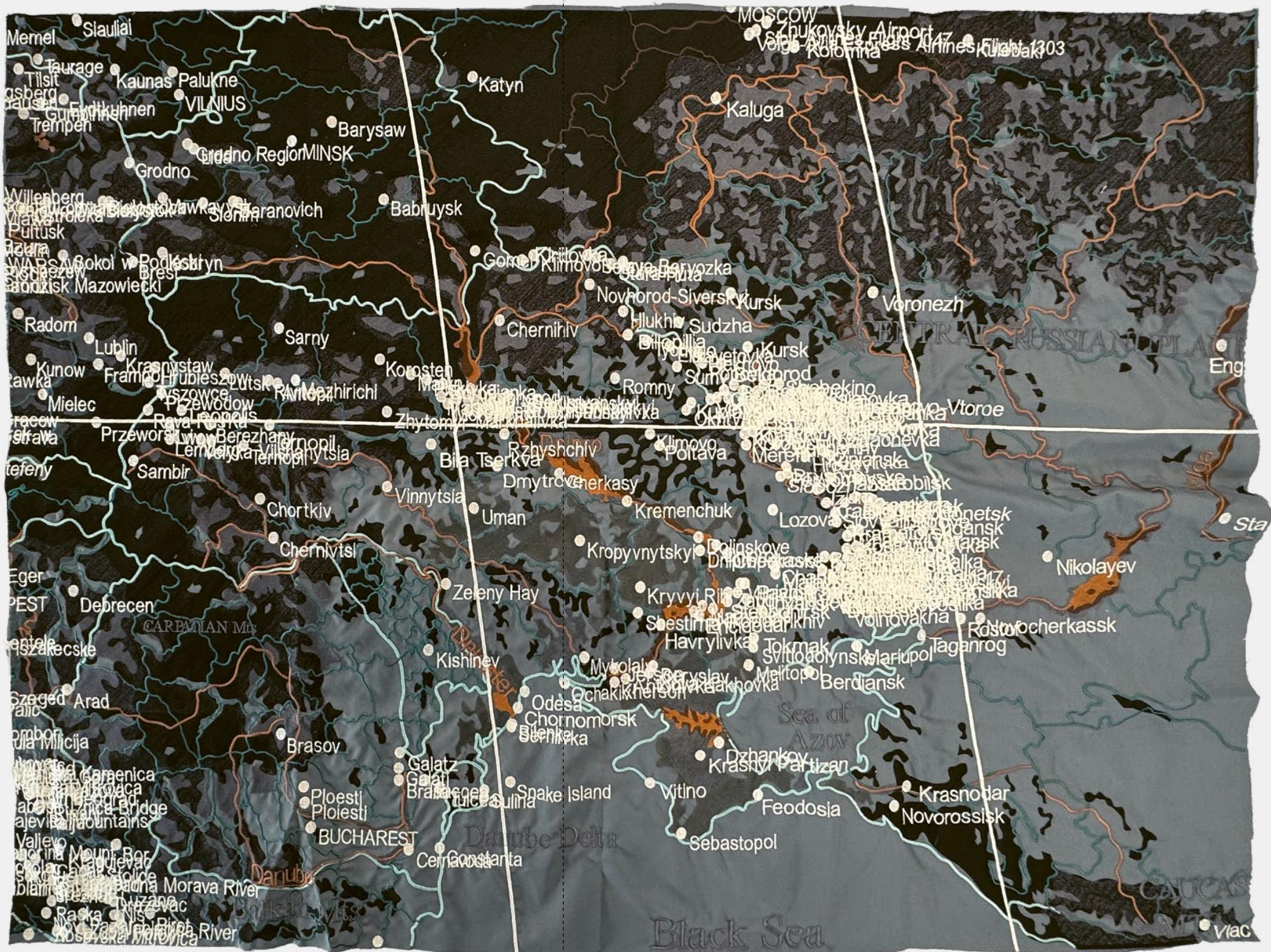
Prokofiev himself says that art for him is a form of resistance, not only to the outside world, but also against himself. He believes that this resistance is only possible because of a fundamental disagreement — with himself and the existing order of things.

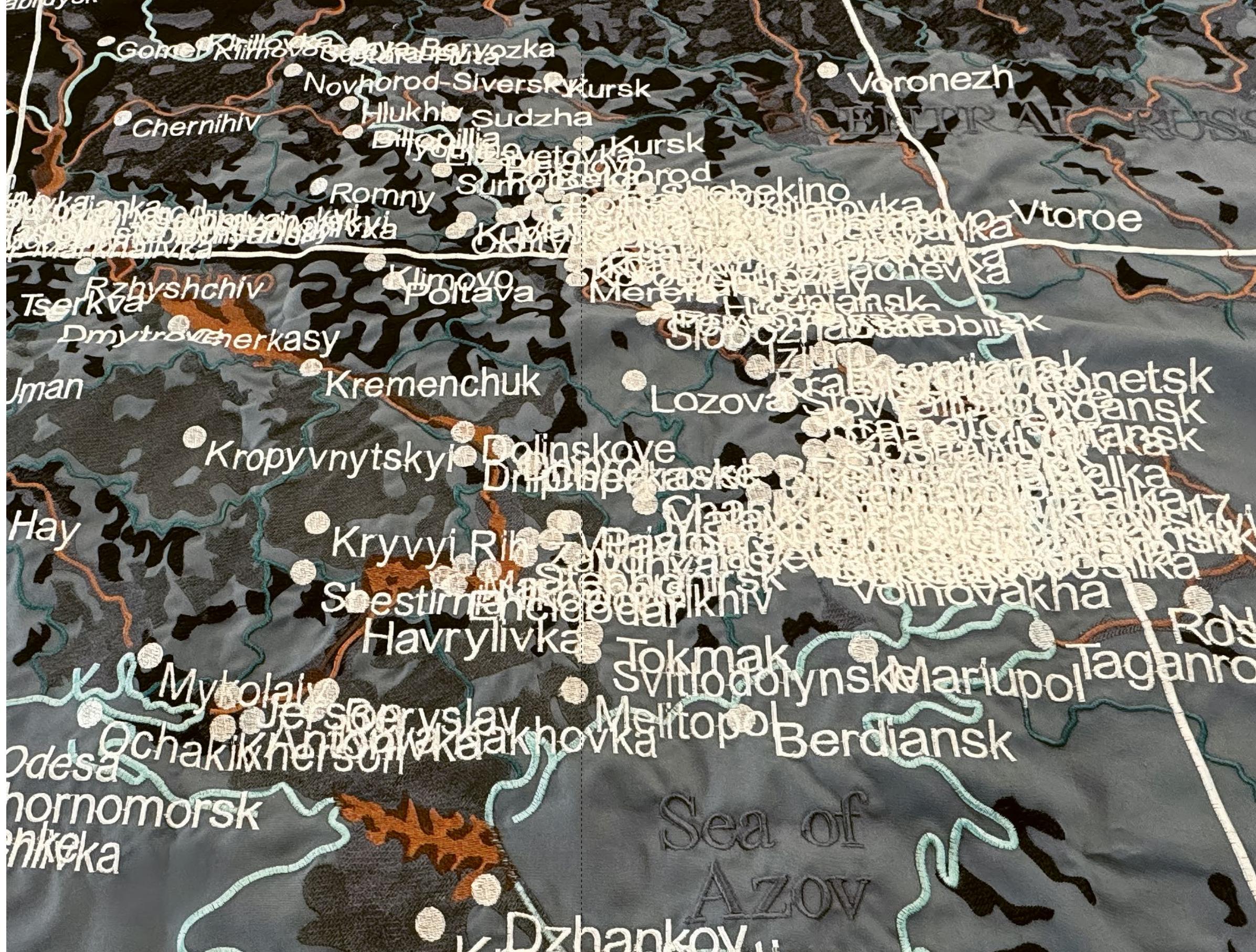
Sergei Prokofiev was born in Moscow in 1983. In 2013, he graduated from Moscow's Joseph Backstein Institute of Contemporary Art. Two years prior, in 2011, Prokofiev founded, alongside Andrei Mitenyov and Lyokha Garikovich, the art space "This is not here". In 2016, the artist joined the team at the Elektrozavod gallery. Prokofiev has had solo exhibitions in Russia, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, and France. He participated in the parallel program at the Manifesta Biennial in St. Petersburg, and in the Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art. Prokofiev's works are held by the Tretyakov Gallery and in the Luciano Benetton collection. He lives and works in Paris.

CRISTINA LUCAS,
“TUFTING” / “UKRAINE”

Machine-embroidered cloth.
Monotype. 128×95 cm. 2025

WAR





Cristina Lucas, “Tufting”/ “Ukraine 2025”

VIDEO INSTALLATION / MACHINE-EMBROIDERED CLOTH, 2017 – PRESENT

What's the story behind the project?

This work is deeply connected with Picasso's “Guernica”. Now in Spain, we are revisiting the memories of the Spanish Civil War. Once the dictator [Francisco Franco] died, all the democracy was based on a silent agreement. It seems a kind of sickness when you are unable to talk about your traumas. Recently, in the 21st century, some artists are working with the memory of the Civil War because there are a lot of Spanish victims from the Republican side still in the ground without being identified and without the families being able to lay them to rest. So it's a kind of healing process to talk about it again.

For the 75th anniversary of Picasso's painting, I was asked to make a commission about Guernica as a concept. I was not very much focused on the painting itself, but I was thinking about all the aerial bombing in the Spanish Civil War, which was a kind of rehearsal for World War II. I decided to make a compilation of all the aerial bombing of civilians from both sides, keeping in mind that the tragedy of the civilians is not a question of politics, it's a question of terror.

I decided to start searching for all the aerial bombing of civilians since it has been possible to fly, because flight was an old dream of humanity which suddenly turned into a nightmare. You can see all the data moving on three screens — and the embroideries are kind of a summary of all that information. So this is what we are going to show in the new exhibition, paying attention to what is going on today in Ukraine.

Why did you choose embroidery?

I was thinking it could be a print. But then I imagined the land as a kind of a fabric which is also made out of a lot of connections. An embroidery on an area that was heavily bombed is more emotional because it looks like a scar on the fabric.

Textile art is having a kind of a renaissance nowadays. Why do you think that is?

Maybe it's because this technique is connected with femininity. The people working on the database search in our project were mostly women. I should say, you need a huge amount of patience to collect all this data — this work feels much like embroidery.

Cristina Lucas works with data — whether it be the prices of chemical elements, global trade routes, or the slang names for genitalia in different cultures — in many of her projects. Although the language of art and the language of science are traditionally considered distinct from one another, the artist demonstrates that data can both help us understand reality and be used as an image. In the installation “Clockwise”, for example, Lucas hung 360 clocks around the perimeter of a circular room, showing all possible times on a globalized planet simultaneously. The chorus of out-of-sync clocks was reminiscent of the sound of rain.

The artist creates videos, installations, sculptures, and photographs. Her main themes are human rights, with a particular focus on women's, capitalism, and war — in a word, power. One of Lucas' favorite media is the geographical map, often dynamic, on which the viewer can follow certain events, such as the military expansion of states or the spread of democracy.

Cristina Lucas was born in Úbeda, Spain, in 1973. She studied at the Complutense University of Madrid, the University of California, Irvine, and the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. The artist has participated in the Manifesta Biennial in Palermo, and the Liverpool and Ural Industrial

Biennials, among others, and has had solo exhibitions in Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Luxembourg, and Mexico. Lucas's work has been acquired for the collections of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Kiasma Museum in Helsinki, and many other institutions. She lives and works in Madrid.



ELENA KOSTYUCHENKO

War correspondent and former reporter for Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta and Meduza, and the author of the book "I Love Russia: Reporting from a Lost Country"

ELENA KOSTYUCHENKO

Journalism is essentially a very ecological profession. You go out into the field, collect information, which can be really disturbing, but then once you write it all down that internal lived experience transforms into letters on the page. The moment the text comes out, it's already something wholly separate from you. In general, if you then sleep for a day, you should be ready to immerse yourself into something new. Unwritten texts are the worst. I haven't come around to writing about my most recent, incredibly difficult trip to Ukraine—and it has been eating me up inside this whole time. That's how a reporter's memory works: it all stays with you until you write up the

ple recognize and understand one another, not judge each other.

It's actually easier for women journalists to work during wartime. It may not be obvious, but it's true. War is a concentration of patriarchal culture, its manifestation. No one takes women seriously during war. We always look like someone's relative, bride or nurse. That's why we can access spaces where men aren't allowed in and we're entrusted with things that men can't be trusted with. No one's afraid of us—and that's absolutely crucial because in war when you're feared, you get shot.

story. Only afterwards can you let yourself forget.

During my last assignment, I spoke with a Ukrainian nurse who was working under Russian occupation in Kherson. Russian soldiers had come to her to get their wounds dressed. She had ripped one soldier's bandages off in a way to inflict pain on him. She was shaking as she told me about this. It was clear that it was the first time in her life she had done anything like that. And for her, as a nurse, it was unbearable to think about.

Journalists are professional outsiders. We don't live a real life like normal people. We're here today, there tomorrow. Usually, our lives are much easier than the lives of the people we encounter. That's why judgment is the worst thing journalism can do. We should help peo-

I have a lowered physical response to fear. This is very inconvenient in regular life: for example, when I cross the street, I need to consciously calculate the speed of driving cars—I have no automatic reaction to danger. This does, however, let me report from dangerous situations.

In all the time that I was traveling, there were only two instances when I couldn't cope with acute fear. I was working in the Donbas, on both sides of the front, but these two instances happened when I was on the territory of the unrecognized republics. One time was at Mine 6-7, near Horlivka. I couldn't get back to the city because of the curfew, so I spent the night in the mine's former office, where a unit from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic was stationed. At some point, the mine office came under mortar fire. One of the artillery shells hit

the first floor and wounded a boy, but I just couldn't find a place to stand during the shelling.

According to the rules, you're supposed to stand near a load-bearing wall with no windows or tiles. I didn't understand which walls were load-bearing and was rushing up and down a hallway. The company commander's wife came out, saw the state I was in, and brought me into her room, where her daughter was playing with dolls. I realized that you can't be afraid in front of children. So I also grabbed a doll, and we played until the shelling stopped.

This other time, I was working a source—a Russian commander. I knew that they were fighting on the frontlines, and I really wanted to get there so that I could report personally on what it was like. [The editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta Dmitry] Muratov called me—he could always sense when something was off. I told him that I was sick, but that there was also this opportunity to be at the storming of Vuhlehirsk. He told me, "No, just go home". Some time later, while working on a different assignment, I passed by a blackened field and asked what it was. "Vuhlehirsk used to be here", I was told. In that field, I had the distinct sensation that I could have died there. If I had chosen to go with the troops that night, I would have died.

The thing that irritates me most is the phrase, "Well, that's war". People think that war is like a natural disaster. No, it's not a natural disaster, it's mutual mass murder. Why is it that when one person kills another with a knife or pistol, we call

him a murderer and send him to prison, but when people try to kill each other in the name of their governments, it's somehow okay? The main thing is that they shouldn't torture each other, but the killing is allowed because it is, after all, a war. I don't understand how we can put up with this and why most war reporting is written in that tone of "well, it's a war". I don't know how to write in a way that calls this acceptance of war into question. I don't want my writing to be weaponized. I want my writing to force people to lay down their arms, but I don't understand how to do so.

TAISIA BEKBULATOVA



TAISIA BEKBULATOVA

I was only able to fully reflect on what was happening a long while after the start of the full-scale war. I think that having work during a time like this is a blessing. You don't really let yourself think, you just work, and you devote all your free time to trying to do something useful, something that will help inform people and expand their understanding of current events.

The start of the war was a particularly difficult experience. Of course, it's hard to even compare that to what people in Ukraine were going through at the time. All the same, I was restless, I felt like I needed to do something, to have some sort of impact on what was happening. I was in Tbilisi, a gorgeous city, everything around me was peaceful. I didn't understand how to align my internal state with conditions on the outside. It was only when I arrived in Kyiv that I managed, despite the sirens, to sleep peacefully for the first time in a long while. One night, during another bombing, my colleagues got really worried trying to find me, but I had just been asleep, it hadn't even woken me up.

I've been on pins and needles since February 24 [2022]. There was this sense that someone needed to go to Ukraine. Ukraine obviously wasn't letting in men with Russian citizenship, but women journalists could get in. Though even for us, it was a real challenge. I spent around five hours waiting at the border. We made calls to anyone we could, explained the situation, and tried to convince them to let me in.

Only once in Ukraine was I treated differently because of being Russian. It was during a conversation at an excavated grave. I had been going around, covering the war crimes committed in the Kyiv region when it was under Russian occupation. They were digging up the bodies of murdered people in front of me. One elderly man had run out of his home and tried to block the road against advancing Russian columns. He died a horrific death, his head run over by a tank. I spoke with his adult son, asked him to send me any photos he had of

his father — I wanted to include them in my reporting. I gave him my contact information and seeing my Russian phone number, he naturally tensed up. He asked me whether I was a provocateur and promised to confiscate my phone if I was. I explained to him, calmly, that I was indeed from Russia, but that I had come as a journalist to write about the war.

A bit later, standing on the same spot, a European colleague approached and started asking me questions. I told her my story: who I was and how I had gotten there. The man I'd spoken to earlier was standing nearby and overheard our conversation. He came up to me and said something along the lines of "good job". This touched me to my very core: you're experiencing such grief, Russia has attacked your country, and yet you're telling a Russian journalist that she's doing a good job.

Now this might be a rather unpopular opinion, but I'm convinced of one thing: when journalists stop thinking about objectivity, about fact-checking; when they start writing things mechanically, attributing all the evil to one side and all the good to another — they're doing everyone a disservice. When we do that we hurt ourselves, the truth, and history. I can't get on board with people who say that impartial journalism is impossible in times of war. Sure, maintaining impartiality is difficult, but that's a different issue. It's a huge challenge, but trying to preserve it is our duty as journalists.

Journalists need to distance themselves — put up a transparent wall between themselves and what they're reporting on. I try to do this — sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Everyone has their own soft spot, things that you cannot process with your brain, but go straight to the heart. That's the case with me and anything that has to do with animals. The first story that really pierced my armor — it sounds absurd, considering all the horrors, but I admit it — was about a cat who had been left behind in an apartment after his owners fled from advancing Russian troops. This cat starved to death in a child's crib.

If I were to make a rational decision, I would choose to assimilate in the country where I currently live: find some work, have children, get a few cats. But I don't see this as an option for myself. My identity is firmly tied to Russia. I can't see myself outside of that bond and any attempt to sever it would be destructive for me. I can't exist in a situation where I've banished Russia from my life.



LILIA YAPPAROVA

On February 24, my alarm woke me up to go to the airport, no one had called me. I was supposed to fly to Kyiv—we were planning to report on how Kyivans were preparing for a possible war that would maybe never start. I'd scheduled interviews with families whose children had, for several months, been practicing how to evacuate in case of rocket strikes. And also with businessmen who weren't sure how to pivot their businesses in case a war suddenly broke out. But then at work they said "What airport? The air-space is closed".

So I just opened my file and started calling all of the people in Kyiv with whom I had interviews

lined up. Some were bundling up their kids, some were packing their backpacks. A few admitted to me "Lilia, my attitude toward you changed overnight, understand?" I heard the words "May you all be damned" a few times. You stay patiently silent—you have this skill, it's like calling people who have just lost someone in a plane crash, or arriving at a funeral with a camera, something every journalist has experienced often enough in their lifetime. But my hands were shaking for three days straight afterward. Once on assignment, though, nothing was shaking anymore.

On the seventh or tenth day of being in Kyiv we recorded a podcast. For the first time since the start of the war, I cried—and it happened while I was on the air. The host said, "Lil, but you've always wanted to go cover a war". I reproached myself so much for wanting to go experience the war, because it meant a war needed to break out. But I had really wanted to experience it—I had thought it was possibly the coolest thing in the world of journalism. But when you see it all up close, you become disgusted by the thought that you had at some point wanted this.

In Ukraine, I was alone, without a car, without any money, without the ability to legally rent an apartment—and if I had let slip anything about my Russian passport anywhere, I would have had major problems. I had to keep the incoming flow of impressions under close control. It was only when I left somewhere, after filing a story or making it out of a shelled city, that I allowed myself to relax, to cry. I was in besieged Chernihiv. There was no water, no medicine. Every tree was riddled with holes. In Chernihiv, I saw a

bomb shelter located under one of the city's elementary schools. When I went down there, I found myself in the dark with 400 people—and all of them were talking. Because of the basement's acoustics, I heard everything. And I could also smell different odors: "Mivina," a type of food that's quick to prepare; the dampness; the rot; the sweat; and something medicinal. I lay down and felt for the first time that I couldn't cope with the flow of incoming information. I kept working out of inertia, like a dictaphone, trying to remember everything.

In the morning my friend called me, a volunteer who had gotten me into Chernihiv. "You need to leave urgently, Russian troops are occupying the city." Nobody's phones were really working, it was a miracle that his call had gotten through. I informed the volunteers, and we went to the hospital—doctors are always the first to get information from the armed forces. We walked the hospital corridors and realized that the rumor that the city was being shut down was literally spreading with us, no one else knew anything yet. The last route out of the city was a narrow footbridge with heart-shaped locks.

Leaving Chernihiv felt frightening and shameful: so many people remained there, and I couldn't understand where I had obtained this privilege—to leave. I literally ran to this bridge. There were really loud booms. Russian troops were trying to blow up absolutely everything—they were even shooting people who were trying to escape on little boats after all the bridges had been destroyed. I was among the last to leave Chernihiv until the Russian encirclement was completely lifted.

I live in Riga now. It's a very, very quiet city. On my first night here I stepped out to go to the pharmacy—for some reason, I decided late in the evening that I should go get some medicine. I went outside, and there was no one on the street. Then I became paranoid. I thought, "these streets have been cleared out because of me, there's going to be some kind of attack now".

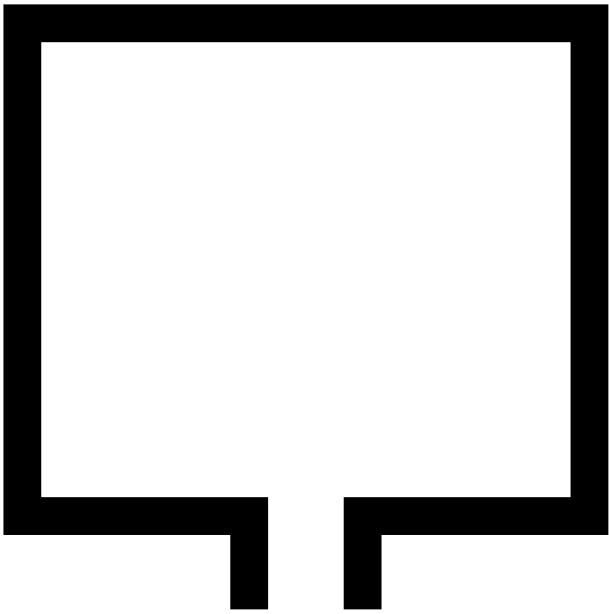
Anyone who has ever been under shelling describes experiencing a reaction to sounds—I had that too, when you wake up because something fell in your neighbor's apartment. Even though in Kyiv, I had slept through the sirens. I've also stopped watching my favorite shows that have grotesque violence, things like "The Boys" on Amazon. I've developed a sense of aesthetic contradiction: Why even show this? It's not real.

I don't know anything about the frontlines. There are still a billion other situations where I could have ended up, a billion situations where I might not have survived. The career of a war correspondent is an endless test. I also realized that since I managed to brazenly force myself to not be afraid, it probably means that I need to keep going.

DICTIONARY
CENSORSHIP²⁶
EXILE⁴²
WAR⁵⁸
76

PERIL ENCORE

FEAR¹⁴⁸
LONELINESS¹⁶²
POLARIZATION¹⁹²
HOPE²⁰⁶



Contemporary culture leans heavily on the image of the weak triumphing over the strong, on justice over injustice. In news headlines and film titles, we read time and again about heroic resistance to dictatorships, tyranny, violence, and war. Reality, unfortunately, is a lot more complicated and dark.

In literature, resistance usually leads to victory. In real life, it is accompanied by frustration, powerlessness, fear, and leads to countless defeats. We all know the story of David defeating Goliath, but how many Davids throughout human history have been so thoroughly crushed by a Goliath that no one even noticed?

If you take an outside look at the modern Russian resistance, which has spent decades unsuccessfully opposing Putin, its results seem catastrophically bad. Inside the country, we have a decimated civil society, corruption, opposition leaders killed or imprisoned, and people who have fallen into a state of apathy. Externally, there is the attack on Ukraine and an alliance with the worst political regimes on the planet.

But based on what results should we evaluate the resistance? Particularly given that the enemy has practically limitless resources and no moral barriers. In Russia, for example, authorities can dole out a multiyear prison sentence to someone for touching—merely touching—an armed police officer and thereby “causing him moral harm”. Are the people who came out with no weapons against armed forces to blame for the fact that they couldn’t win? After all, even David had a slingshot.

Right now, we don’t know whether the Russian anti-Putin resistance will figure among the heroic movements that have brought down tyrants. Right now, it seems like we’re infinitely far from that point. But even now, we know of people who have spent years speaking out against authoritarianism, dictatorship, and war. We know of journalists who continue to do their jobs while their profession is banned; of activists helping people desert from the Russian army and assisting Ukrainians. We know of hundreds of political prisons and of their loved ones who have not abandoned them; of politicians landing in prison and perishing there; of teachers who try to keep propaganda out of their schools; of normal people attempting to convince their loved ones that what they see on television isn’t the truth.

The anti-Putin resistance is a couple of decades old, but the Russian tradition of resisting evil is centuries long, and was rarely based on the hope of a swift victory. Soviet dissident Alexander Daniel once told the author of this text that “the majority, it seems, even probably the overwhelming majority [of dissidents] had no hope for the future”. Tsarist dissident

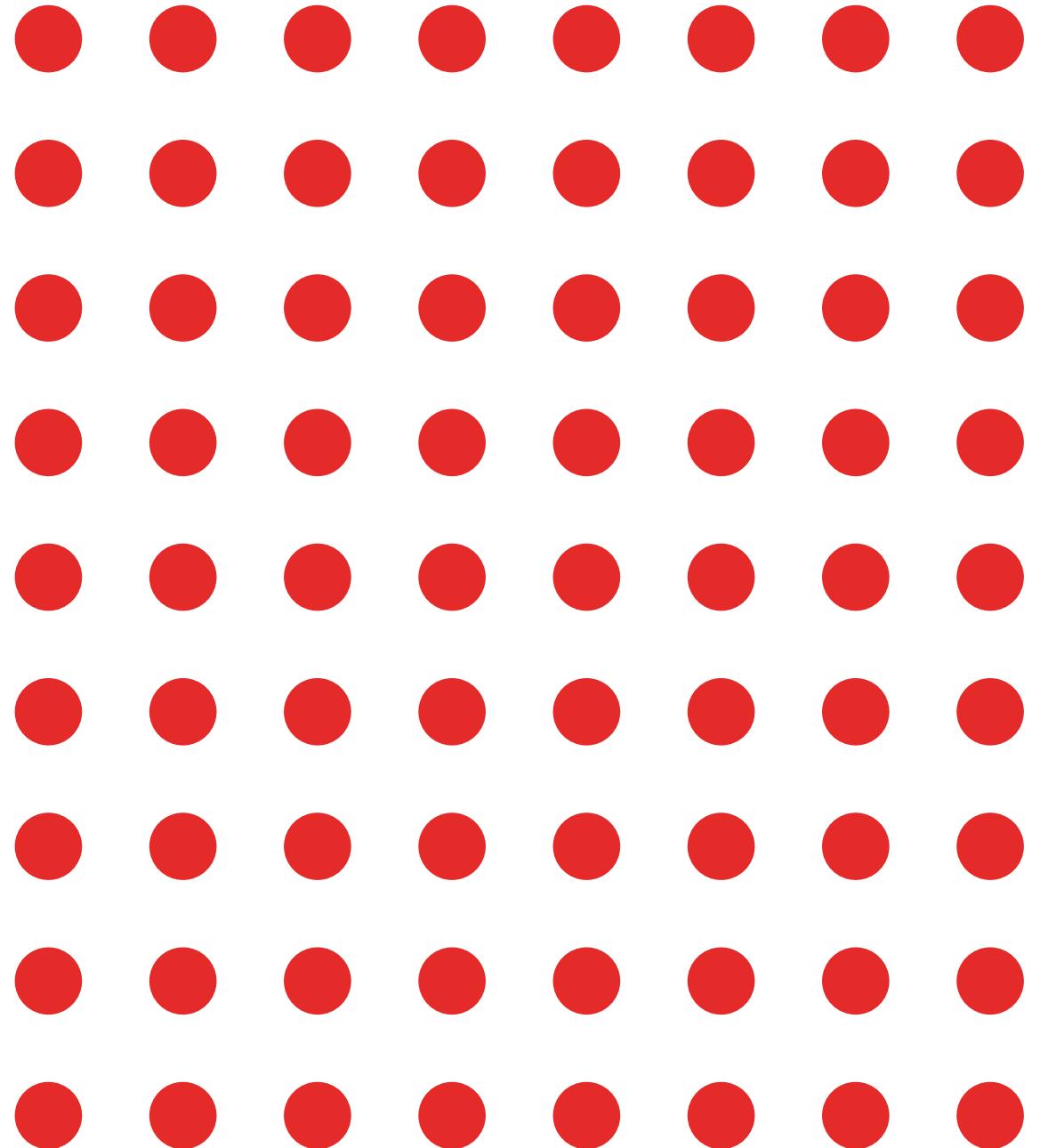
and emigré Alexander Herzen wrote in “My Past and Thoughts” about the harm hope can cause. However, this gloomy realization did not stop Daniel, Herzen, or any number of others from resisting. Even when it’s impossible to win, we can save ourselves, our family, friends, values, and sense of self-esteem.

In this context, the very existence of Russian resistance and the incredible tenacity of protestors seem like a miracle, a reason to be proud of one’s compatriots and a source of hope.

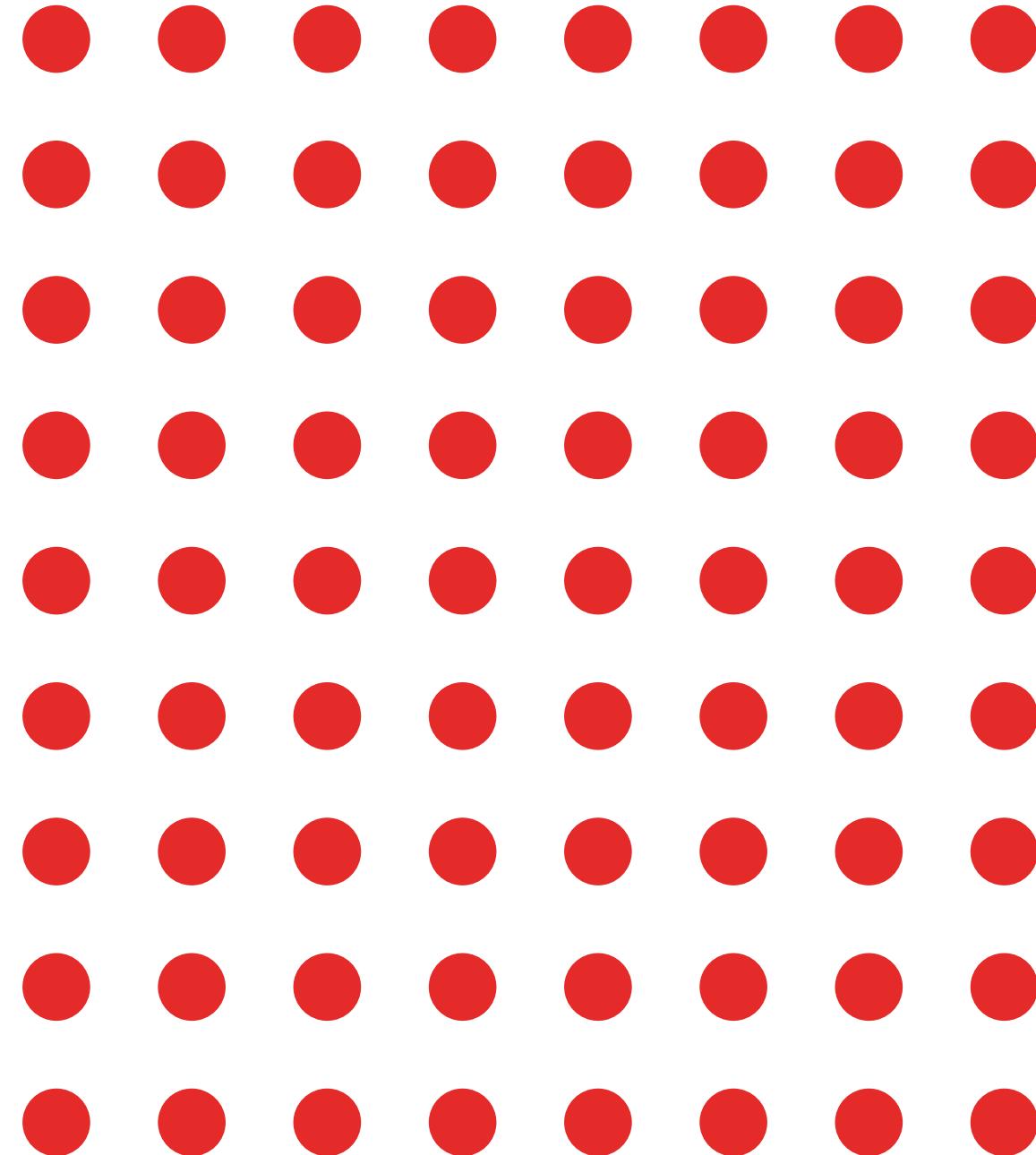
Ilya Krasilshchik

Red light: When Meduza comes under attack?

Meduza's infrastructure has for years been subjected to various attacks — from phishing and hacking of our social media accounts to attempts to disrupt our email newsletters and DDoS attacks. After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin blocked Meduza completely. The Russian authorities are also constantly trying to block our site's mirrors: in 2024 alone we had to generate 12,000 mirrors.



In February 2023, the Meduza publisher's mobile phone was infected with Pegasus spyware. And right after the 2024 Russian presidential elections, where Putin was elected for the fifth time, Meduza survived the largest DDoS attack in its history: in the 48 hours that it lasted, the tech department recorded two billion requests on the site's server. On average, Meduza gets blocked about once every 10 minutes — the same frequency with which the red light turns on in the No exhibition space.



From Meduza's Slack

In 2023, Meduza was declared an “undesirable organization” in Russia. Since then, any interaction with the media outlet is considered a crime. In the first weeks of the full-scale invasion, the government blocked access to Meduza’s website. From that moment on, Meduza has been under constant and overwhelming attack from the Russian authorities.

JANUARY 26, 2023
GENERAL CHANNEL
1:29 P.M.

Editor-in-chief: In half an hour there’s an all-hands on deck call with the editorial board (Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate you on our latest achievement; keep up the good work!) [Meduza being designated as an “undesirable organization”]

Head of special correspondents: Do we have a list of what other awards we can look forward to :-)

Features editor: Such a hard choice... but maybe being prosecuted for failing to submit reports to the Justice Ministry [which all “foreign agents” are required to do] or for collaboration with an undesirable [organization]

Editor: Tell me, pls, will we have some kind of mechanism for tracking people being prosecuted for undesirability [being accused of collaborating with an “undesirable organization”]? Can we add freelancers’ names to it? They’re asking how we’re going to watch out for them. And sorry, one more question — we’re now recommending that all our writers (and readers too) delete all links to any Meduza content from all their social media accounts, right?

2:13 P.M.

Head of communications: An important and short announcement. Confirm that you’ve read it. This new status [“undesirable organization”] brings enormous risk to all of us. In regards to this, I want to outline all our rules concerning public comments. Please don’t comment to anyone about the undesirable organization label. Direct all questions to me. I understand that your friends and loved ones are writing to you right now. It just so happens that many of them are

journalists. :-) Do not tell anyone how we’re planning to continue our work. Just say that everything is ok, that we’ve been preparing for that, that there’s a plan. So basically don’t tell anyone anything! This means we don’t tell anyone the address of our office, we don’t bring any guests here, and we don’t order deliveries (pick up any food orders outside on the street). We will continue to work remotely from home. Sometimes we may need to meet up in person by prior agreement, but remember, if anyone asks, there is no office as such. Yes, the rules are getting stricter. But a single careless word here could put both you and your colleagues in danger. And then we’ll have less room to move around in to keep you and your loved ones safe.

2:49 P.M.

Deputy editor-in-chief: Our action plan [following news that Meduza had been declared an “undesirable organization”]:
 — live-blog
 — reactions, separately
 — editorial
 — Q & A — an explainer + feedback at the end
 — ultrashort version of Q & A in the morning
 — one picture — with other “undesirable” media
 — a letter to our readers
 — podcast with the NGO Mass Media Defense Centre

APRIL 16, 2024
TECH DESK CHANNEL
7:16 A.M.

CTO: FYI, we have an incredibly aggressive and clever DDoS attack from yesterday evening that’s still ongoing. The team and I stayed up all night trying to fight it off. At the moment, the site and CMS [editorial software] are working. Traffic increased by 2,790 percent. Here

it shows what that looks like compared to our normal traffic.

Publisher: Oh, you poor things. How is the situation now? Have they backed off of us? And are we going to go public with this?

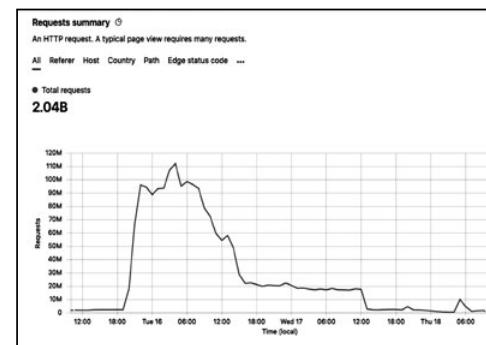
CTO: They still haven’t backed off, but they’ve dialed down the intensity of the attack. We have a plan — it’s working already. Things are more or less okay at this point.

CTO: I’m inclined to go public with it — we’ve already collected data for partners who might help us identify where the attack came from. We’ll see what comes out of it, we’ll discuss this and I’ll get back to you

MARCH 11, 2025
DIRECT MESSAGES
4:10 P.M.

Publisher: Sorry, where’s the graph of the attacks on us?

CTO: My first thought was you’re asking when the next attack’s going to be :-) I’ll find the graph now. Here it is.



FERNANDO SÁNCHEZ CASTILLO, "EXPANDED
MEMORIAL FOR ALEXEY NAVALNY"

Sculpture. 90 cm. Bronze
with bismuth patina. 2025

RESILIENCE





Fernando Sánchez Castillo, “Expanded Memorial” for Alexey Navalny

SCULPTURE. 90 CM. BRONZE WITH BISMUTH PATINA.
FIGURINES. 2000 PIECES, HEIGHT 8,5 CM. PVC. 2025

Please tell me about the sculptures you create.

The project is called “Expanded Memorial” because it spreads to the people. You can grab a figurine and take it to your home, office, or keep it in your pocket. There isn’t just Navalny — it’s a series of other characters. Recently, it’s been mostly women like, for instance, Celeste Caeiro who put flowers in soldiers’ rifles during Portugal’s Carnation Revolution in 1974. Simple, peaceful actions of people in the face of dictatorship or violence generate an image that triggers a different way of acting and thinking.

In Spain we are used to seeing representations of people with guns at war memorials instead of civilian figures who took peaceful action and had a positive influence on society. Toys for children are also very violent: soldiers, tanks. As a kid I had a huge collection of these plastic figurines. There were animals as well. Back then I thought there was a modest artist behind these beautiful animals. He wasn’t able to build a monument, but could make a toy with which my imagination could create a different world. Now, I feel like I can do something similar but with other, more inspiring images.

I remember your installation in Moscow dedicated to August Landmesser, a worker who kept his arms crossed while standing in a crowd where everyone was making a Nazi salute. But there was a requirement: you could only grab a figurine if you wrote something on a piece of paper and left it behind.

It’s not a requirement, but rather an invitation. People are invited to leave a comment, a drawing or something that can be exchanged. They take an object, but also can leave an object. It’s an exercise in the freedom to write something — or not.

In Mexico, we created 18,000 figurines based on an archival photo of a student demonstration in 1968. It is estimated that more than 50,000 people have been disappeared for political reasons from 1968 to today. At first, people wouldn’t dare grab a figurine and take it home with them because they were so respectful of this monument. So I had to encourage them to take one. You are allowed to grab one, you’re allowed to write on a post-it, you’re allowed to stick it on the wall. You can, but you don’t have to.

What is special about the new chapter dedicated to Navalny?

Normally, I don’t work with recent events, but in the case of Navalny I can’t afford to wait 40 or 80 years.

Actually, every time I’ve been to Russia, I’ve loved it so much. I was impressed by how Russian society is so respectful of art and artists. Spain was very much linked to Russia and the Soviet Union during the Civil War. Many Spanish refugees, particularly kids, went there and were very well received. So, yeah, I wanted to be a part of that.

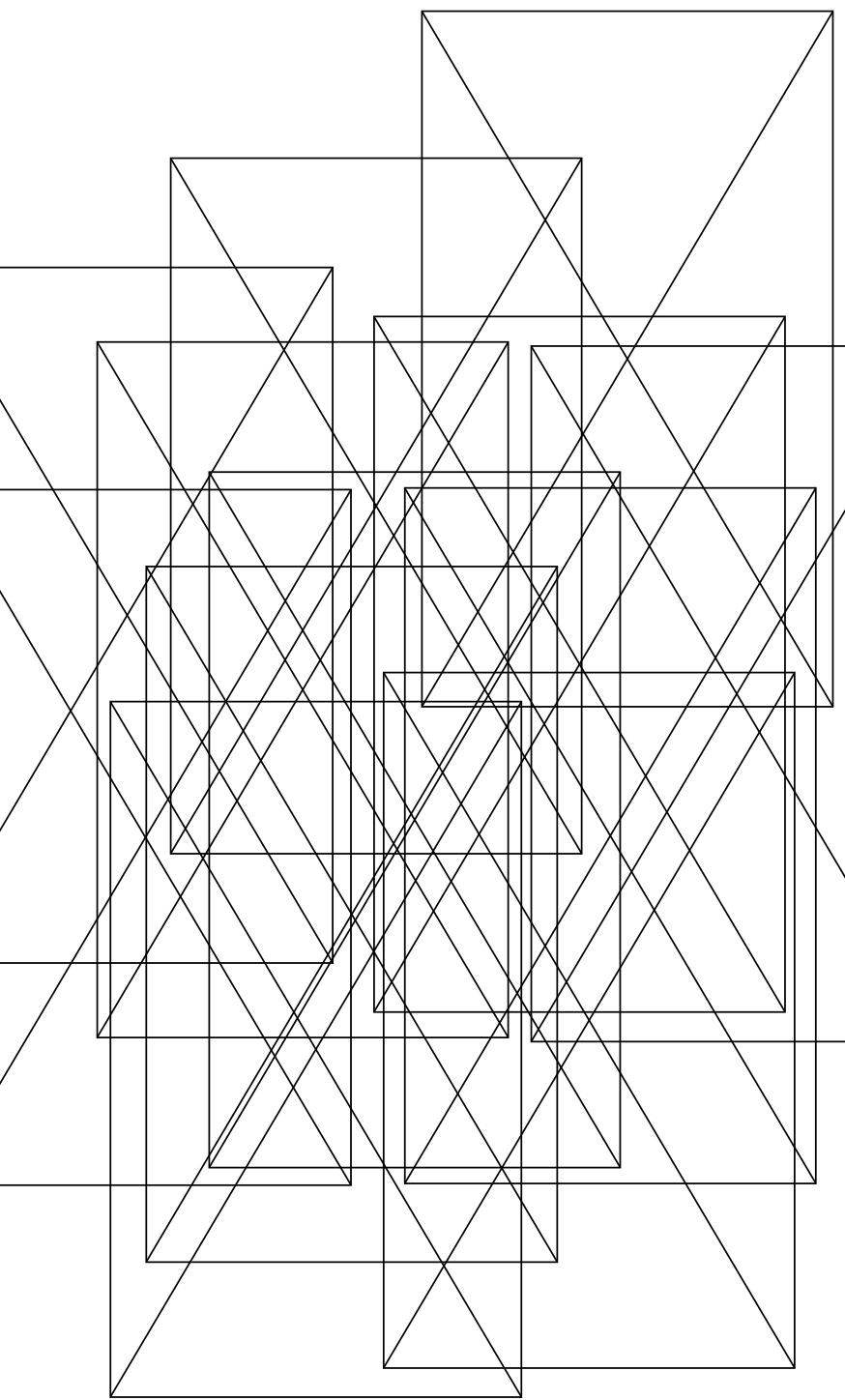
I love the stubbornness of those Russian people who think differently. I hope that this small memorial can spread like a tiny fire, creating peaceful fires in other people. I think the pose of this figurine is beautiful because it’s a guy sending out a heart to his wife or to the beloved people.

Fernando Sánchez Castillo is a Spanish artist who works with themes of history, memory and resistance. Born in Madrid in 1970, he studied Fine Arts at the Facultad de Bellas Artes, Universidad Complutense Madrid, and Philosophy at the Instituto de Estética Contemporánea, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Sánchez Castillo has had solo exhibitions in Spain, Mexico, Germany, Austria and other countries. His works are included in the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, the Dutch Central Bank and other institutions.

Among Sánchez Castillo’s most famous projects is “Expanded Memorial”, a series of interactive installations in which visitors can take home a small plastic figure of a protester or freedom fighter and leave a message in the exhibition space. Like collectible superhero figurines, these small sculptures help their owners express themselves, reminding them of how they see themselves — the emotional connection to them is stronger than to large street monuments.

In late 2021, months before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the New Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow opened the exhibition “Diversity United”, the last major international art exhibition before the country’s cultural isolation. One of the most memorable exhibits was Sánchez Castillo’s monument to August Landmesser, a German worker known from a historic photograph in which he is the only one in a crowd not raising his arm in a Nazi salute. At least two participants in the documentary part of the exhibition “No” took figurines of Landmesser with them into exile.

Specifically for the “No” exhibition, Sánchez Castillo created a sculpture of the politician Alexei Navalny, who remained Vladimir Putin’s main opponent until he was killed in a Russian prison in 2024. The work is the first monument of its kind to Navalny.



ALEX (CTO)

ALEX (CTO)

Meduza was, in principle, conceived as a high-tech bulletproof media organization. Bulletproof from state or any other influence. From the very beginning [in 2014], we decided that we would be prepared to bypass Internet blockers, and we assumed that they would get stronger over time. And we set up overseas from the start, so that there would be no physical pressure from the state.

The start of the war was a shock. By that point, we'd established processes in the department, everything was working well and stably. I'd even started to put my phone on Do Not Disturb mode. This mode can be bypassed if someone calls three times in a row. At six in the morning I got an alert: they told me the war had started. More shock. I don't even remember anything about it. Well, then you're sitting at your laptop and the calls are coming in super quickly. We need some kind of plan, what we're doing and in what order, what problems might arise — and fast.

At that point, we had no office, we had an apartment we could gather in. And we started flocking to this apartment. I remember that I ordered a ton of McDonalds. And we were sitting there and it was really scary, everyone was shaking. I also remember the shock when I went outside. I stepped out and there were people skateboarding, someone laughed, that is, people were continuing to

live as they had. But for me, the world was turned on its head. It would never be the same. Yes, and since I turned off Do Not Disturb then, I haven't turned it back on.

That was a marathon that lasted for almost with no break. We were solving extraordinarily complex problems that none of us had solved before — from evacuating colleagues to rebuilding our infrastructure for a new working mode. And a huge amount of security, security, security for our coworkers. It was just such a hard year. It's a little easier now. Today I saw an ad for infrastructure services on sale for 30 percent off if you sign a three-year contract. I had the thought, "I have to get this". And then I had the thought, "It seems like there are some prospects".

This doesn't mean everything is great now. Today I had a call that began with the words, "We have a perfect storm." This is the state we live in. First, some kind of panic sets in. You need to sit down and calm yourself. I do as we were taught in school. The data. The current conditions. What we need to solve. If the problems are complex and unsolvable, you need to break them into two — if necessary, 50; if necessary, into 1,000 easily solved problems — and then you solve them. This allows us to remember that even a hopeless situation has a way out. When

you've lived through three or four such crises, in principle you're as calm as if you were a forensic pathologist.

One of the more recent blows was the Russian authorities' order to remove apps from the App Store in Russia. It started with the removal of VPNs. Then it spread to the apps of media organizations declared "undesirable", like Meduza. This is a direct threat to us. Unambiguously risky for us. So, this is a reason to conduct some risk-mitigation planning for what we'll do.

Over there — on that side — many people work, and there's a lot of money, but that's their weakness. They have a lot of money, but they're not creative, they shower everything with money, but they're not motivated. Those people have tasks passed on to them by not very effective managers. They just perform their tasks, do their jobs. They're not very creative. That is, for them it's KPIs. But for us, it's a quest, a question of survival. This is our advantage, our strong point. We're always trying to think up something clever, something strange, creative, like a version of the site that you can print like a newspaper, and when it takes off, it's just super.

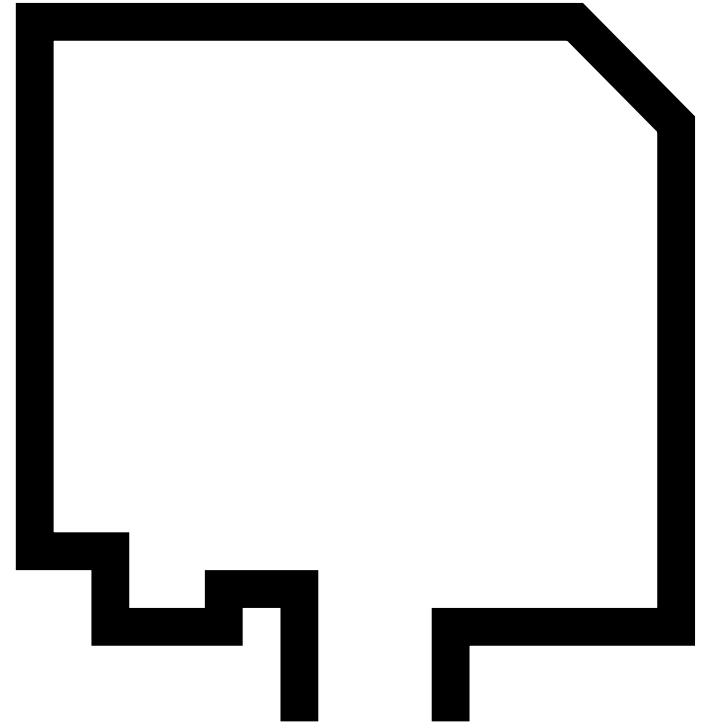
I was a successful employee of a large pharmaceutical company. Why did I choose to work at Meduza? Social responsibility. The

second reason is that it's the opposite of a corporation. There, expensive consultants are trying to make a shiny organization. Here, we're already shiny, but no one knows what that means. It's possible that my previous work wasn't just a random choice — it was a company that deals with serious illnesses. Everyone has different reasons, of course, but the majority of developers have empathy, a desire to not stand aside, to do what they can. The sense of injustice, and the desire to restore justice, also work as fuel... But the most important thing is still impact, getting a result. When you've done something with your own hands, and you see the consequences, the impact of those actions, it really nourishes you.

At some point, before the war, there were rosy dreams. Like, for example, I thought that I would move to Switzerland, breed geese, live on a farm. I'd be a happy person, like in the movies. Then those dreams were fully shattered. I was left with the sense that I had to just stay alive, just not go crazy. At some point when I was a kid, I realized that people retire when they get old, they receive a pension, and don't have to do anything. I thought, "I'll play video games! I'll spend my old age playing video games and beating them all". All the games that came out while I was studying and working. That was my childhood dream.

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DICTIONARY
CENSORSHIP²⁶
EXILE⁴²
WAR⁵⁸
REVENGE⁷⁶
RESPONSE¹³⁰
FEAR
LONELINESS¹⁶²
POLARIZATION¹⁹²
HOPE²⁰⁶



I'm afraid of being powerless and unable to control my own life. I'm afraid of my loved ones falling ill.

I'm afraid of being raped. I'm afraid to return to Russia and get thrown in prison. I'm afraid of a long and painful death.

I'm afraid of torture.

I'm afraid that I won't see my grandmother and grandfather again. I'm afraid I'll never get back to my apartment. I'm afraid of loneliness because my favorite people all live in different cities.

I'm afraid that my hometown has become completely foreign to me.

I'm afraid of losing my loved ones. I'm afraid of terminal illnesses. I'm afraid of being left without work and without money.

I'm afraid that my mom will get searched or fired from her job. I'm afraid that my messaging apps will get hacked.

I'm afraid that I'm starting to forget Moscow.

I'm afraid of making a mistake that can't be fixed. I'm afraid of becoming the reason my loved ones suffer or becoming the reason that strangers suffer.

I'm afraid of letting my wife down and not giving her the future that she deserves. I'm afraid of my children dying.

I'm afraid of cops and border patrol — all of them, in any country.

I'm afraid of conflicts and of making decisions. I'm afraid of sharp objects. I'm afraid I'll become stupid and helpless. I'm afraid of uncertainty. I'm afraid of going blind.

I'm afraid for my safety. I'm afraid of losing the legal status that allows me to work in the EU.

I'm afraid that I'll be unhappy at work but unable to leave.

I'm afraid of remaining eternally an emigrant, unsettled until the end of my life.

I'm afraid that in a few years there will be nowhere left to run, because there will be no democracy left anywhere at all.

I'm afraid that a rocket will strike a house where my relatives live — and that I'll have to write the news about

it. I'm afraid that I won't make it to my loved one's funerals, and I won't even be able to say goodbye.

I'm afraid that we're underestimating Putin's madness.

I'm afraid of nuclear war.

I'm afraid that Russia will attack European countries.

I'm afraid that the world will never be normal again, or at least not for a very long time.

I'm afraid of no longer being a carefree person who feels young and beautiful.

I'm afraid that I won't have time to build a life. I'm afraid that time will pass too quickly. I'm afraid of having a child.

I'm afraid of living life in vain, half-heartedly.

I'm afraid that the war will come to my home.

I'm afraid of returning to Russia and going to prison.

I'm afraid of never returning to Russia.

I'm afraid of the future.

I'm afraid of losing my mind.

On February 24, 2025, we asked Meduza employees to anonymously share their fears, including those that arose after the beginning of the full-scale Russo-Ukraine war. 48 people participated. Some of their answers have been edited for clarity.



Objects found in Tahtakale on the European coast at 14.37h pm, 24th March 1997. Photo found in Kadıköy on the Asian coast at 11.25h am, 7th April 1997, in İstanbul (where the continents meet).



Gülsün Karamustafa, ‘Where the Continents Meet’

INSTALLATION. CHILDREN UNIFORMS, PHOTO,
VINYL LETTERING. DIMENSIONS VARY. 1997

There's a practice in Russia where parents buy their children military clothing to celebrate May 9, the holiday commemorating the USSR's victory in World War II (The Great Patriotic War, as it is called in Russia). An image of a child in camouflage is very familiar and very painful for us as Russian political emigrants. You have a similar tradition in Turkey, right?

Yes, this situation became widespread during the Cyprus War between the Greeks and Turks, which happened in 1974. It was a severe war situation and since then Turkey considers the Republic of Northern Cyprus a small independent country. Everything turned militaristic in Turkey, and these children's camouflage dresses were very fashionable at that time, but it never stopped, of course. People like to dress up their children in this way for ceremonies on national holidays.

This project was born in 1997. I saw these dresses on the streets of Istanbul in one of the shops. It had lots of them, maybe hundreds, because this shop was producing them and sending them to places in Anatolia, in Cyprus or wherever. And I said, I should buy some of these so they may become something as a work of art. You never know.

I had only money for the 20 of them. So I took them back to my studio. Then I had a call from an exhibition in a small town in Sweden, Borås. At that time, we were really willing to have some shows outside of Turkey. I thought, well, this is a good occasion to do something and work for this exhibition.

At that time, the Yugoslavian wars had not ended yet. Only two years had passed after the Srebrenica massacre. At the same time, when you look at the Middle East,

there were non-stop wars popping up here and there all the time. The name of that show was “Around Us, Inside Us”—that name inspired this work.

With all those wars happening around me, I thought about these small children's uniforms. So I said, “Why not go around and find a photograph with a child in a uniform like that?” I looked for a photograph in the vitrines of the photographers in Istanbul: it was very fashionable to take such photos.

I found one and asked the photographer for it, and I was very lucky because this was his niece—so we didn't have any copyright problems. First, the project was shown in Borås, then later in Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel at the “Echolot” show. These are the very early experiences of Turkish contemporary art. It was shown later in my solo show in Istanbul in 2013 at Salt. Now, I think, it is possible to show it again due to repetition of the history.

Do you have a theory about why parents want to dress their kids as soldiers?

First of all, it is based on a militaristic feeling. There is always a current of these militaristic feelings in Turkey. Also, for example, there is a ceremony in Turkey—I don't know whether it happens in other parts of the world—where you send your son to military service, and all his friends and families come together for celebration. They applaud the guy who's ready to give his life for his country. In all these ceremonies, these small children wear this kind of dress, pretending to be their big brother who is going to war. Families show that they have lots of other children whom they can sacrifice for their country. It's like a kind of proposal for sacrifice probably.

That sounds a little like Greek mythology, when Agamemnon kills his daughter as a sacrifice meant to ensure victory in war. Like you have to feed the war with children.

Yes, wars are fed with children, and children are war's targets.

Gülsün Karamustafa is one of Turkey's most renowned contemporary artists. Throughout her career, which spans more than 60 years, she has explored themes of identity, migration and gender, trying to make sense of the changes that urbanization and globalization have brought to her country. Karamustafa works in a variety of media, from traditional figurative painting to installation and film.

Born in Ankara in 1946, she graduated from the State Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul in 1969. In 1971, the conflict between right-wing and left-wing political groups in Turkey reached its peak, and the military staged a coup d'état, claiming it would put an end to the unrest.

Gülsün Karamustafa and her husband Sadık were imprisoned for taking part in the protests: he served two and a half years, she six months. The artist has reflected on her experience of political persecution in a number of projects, including the cycle “Prison Paintings”, created in 1972 and first exhibited in 2013.

Karamustafa has received many awards, both Turkish and international, including the Dutch Prince Claus Award. She has participated in major exhibitions around the world and represented her country at the Venice Biennale in 2024. Karamustafa's first major solo exhibitions took place at Salt Beyoğlu and Galata in Istanbul in 2013,

and outside Turkey at the Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart (Hamburger Bahnhof) in Berlin in 2016. The artist's work is included in the collections of the Tate Modern, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Ludwig Foundation in Vienna, Istanbul Modern and many other institutions.

Co-founder and editor-in-chief at Meduza,
author of the book "We lost", editor
of the book about Lenta.ru



IVAN KOLPAKOV

As far back as I can remember, I've always been scared. I've met people who appeared fearless. It's hard for me to compare the feelings. I can't look into their heads. But it seems to me that I just have more fear than other people do. When I was 20, I found this fun and cool: facing your fears, overcoming them, I was sure if you passed a certain point then some sort of happiness would come, or some sort of Zen. It never comes, though. Either you're happy with the fear, or you'll just never be happy at all. Recently I had the thought that fear isn't all that bad. It helps you stay vigilant, it helps you get through dangerous situations carefully. I no longer hate myself for being afraid. My fear has probably helped both me and the organization I work for survive.

I can't do anything to help the people who work with us from inside Russia. I can find them a lawyer, but these days that amounts to palliative legal care. A lawyer ensures there's no completely arbitrary abuse of power, that you don't get beaten in pre-trial detention. I've learned to live with fear for my colleagues: at the end of the day, they're journalists and they understand what could happen to them. The situation that's much harder to bear is that of our loved ones in Russia, who are at serious risk even though they have nothing to do with journalism.

In search of answers, I acquainted myself with the experiences of people involved in activism and political struggle. Their situation is much more brutal, and it practically always puts their loved ones at high risk. Therefore, I think, it's especially important for those people to live with integrity. You have to choose your path, your own personal belief. Otherwise you just won't be anything—it won't ease your loved ones' burdens if you betray yourself. It does seem impossible to do this job if you don't have 100% faith in your work. But I'm the biggest skeptic of journalism that you can imagine. I doubt all the time that it's a necessity.

This explanation lets you convince yourself that there really is no choice—or if there is, that it's the right choice. But it's a crappy explanation, it doesn't relieve the guilt. I have no answer for how to dig yourself out of that guilt. I don't think you can, that's just the price of our work.

I understand, for example, how much harm journalism does, alongside the good. And I understand how frequently we don't do our work well enough. We don't try hard enough, we don't tell important stories precisely enough. Sometimes, after publication, a subject's life changes irreversibly. It's not always possible to know whether you've done everything correctly. The most unfortunate thing is when you realize: no, not everything.

I envy people who can say: "I do my work because I believe in journalism. Adults should

have the full breadth of information so they can make an informed choice". I don't think that people read the news in order to make an informed choice. It's more like one among many types of entertainment. For us it's not, for them it is.

The sense of life's clarity, of relief from this existential complexity, is the sole reason that we continue this kind of work. Life is much simpler when you face a mortal threat. Under those circumstances, you have something like an innate survival instinct. You mobilize yourself and everything becomes black-and-white, very simple. Many people like this state, because it helps them disconnect from real life. Real life is much more complicated than survival situations. I think that many working journalists, activists, and people in other dangerous professions do it because it's simpler than living a normal, complicated life.

In 2021, when Meduza was declared a "foreign agent" in Russia, we told our colleagues, "Guys, it's been fun, but it's impossible to continue". It was no longer possible to do journalism in Russia, it became a banned profession. It was very easy to figure out what would happen next. The only thing left was life after death. The doors you used to kick open would now have a hundred locks on them. Your employees would be persecuted. I didn't want to be part of that. But we didn't close Meduza, because the team wasn't ready to close. And neither was management.

In 2022, when the world fell apart around us, I realized that we were really needed here and now. That was the most important year in my professional life: 2022. If we'd believed 2021's "safe" calculations, we wouldn't have done the rescue work in 2022 that helped prevent us from collapsing inward alongside Russia and the rest of the world. Of course, after 2022 everything changed. We're another kind of publication—no longer for the wider public, but for people who are highly motivated to read the news.

Professionally and on a human level, I'm still most interested in those who find themselves in isolation, those who are locked away in an authoritarian situation and know it. These people are becoming less and less visible. But our work instructs us to notice the people who have wound up in the most vulnerable positions.

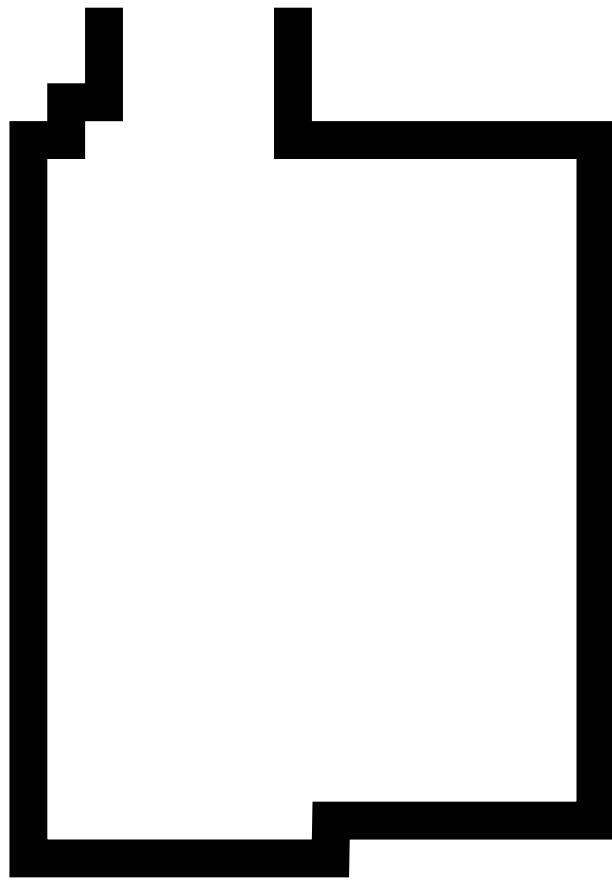
This, in fact, is the reason that I love journalism: one of the profession's greatest ideas is to pay attention to those who have no voice, who feel themselves to be outsiders. It's true that journalism usually focuses on specific problems, social ills. But it seems to me that sometimes the problem is that a person is simply different. He has some kind of different idea about himself and the world. In the end, you understand that you yourself are like that, different, that in helping such people you're doing the same thing for yourself.

DICTIONARY
CENSORSHIP²⁶
EXILE⁴²

WAR⁵⁸

RESILIENCE⁷⁶
FEAR¹⁴⁸

LOVE¹³⁰
POLARIZATION¹⁹²
HOPE²⁰⁶



The last time I saw my son was in 2019. At that point, the thought that our separation would last years didn't cross my mind. But first there was the coronavirus pandemic, then the "special military operation" followed by a new operation to purge any dissent. They started to declare journalists "foreign agents", which essentially means enemies of the people. So I realized that my son could no longer return to Russia.

My son told me that I needed to hide all materials relating to him and our family outside of my home — photo albums, books, and other mementos. This was necessary in case law enforcement would come to search me, as his mother, and start rifling through everything with their dirty paws. To hell with them, let them break boxes and smash stuff — personal things should remain untouched, they are irreplaceable.

Sorting through the archives, packing them up and transporting them was unbelievably difficult. I was in my own home. This is my homeland, where I was born, damn it, where I lived under peaceful skies, confident in the future, and suddenly I have to be deprived of my own memories. And for what? Because my son calls a spade a spade?

Because of all of this, I had to vacate my old apartment and move into a new one. Now, this is how I communicate with my neighbors: we run into each other by chance in the stairwell, say hi, and that's it. One neighbor tried to become friends with me — I politely but forcefully shut down the attempt. It could lead to danger: one word leads to another, and you don't know what might slip out.

At my job I also don't share my inner thoughts. My colleagues and I know each other well, we've worked together for more than two decades. Everyone knows that my son is abroad and where he works. But no one is prying into my private life. Everyone is trying to save their own skin, so we don't discuss anything. I don't know how we got to this point, but we're scared of each other.

It's an awful feeling: you have to constantly control yourself, and always remember that any person could be smiling at you one day but snitching on you the next. Not because they don't like you — they might even do it unconsciously.

I find no peace at work, or at home, or at the store. It stays with me when I go to sleep and is still there when I wake up. I'm actually living through a double horror because I'm afraid both for myself and for my son. I'm always writing to him, "How are you over there? Please, look after yourself". Other parents like me are afraid in the same way. That said, I have no quarrel with my son's life choices. Moreover, I'm proud of him.

I know of other Russian families who have wound up in similar situations. Ours is a collective horror. But we can't even unite. If we start to get to know each other and meet up, there will definitely be some kind soul who turns up and carefully writes a denunciation — just like the granny who diligently added kindling to the fire that burned Giordano Bruno alive.

Of course, in a certain sense it's easier for spouses than parents — they can cut all their ties with a country and follow the persecuted family member abroad. Meanwhile, we sit here. We're all of an age where there's nowhere for us to go, no one wants us anywhere. We're no longer able to easily find employment, no one needs us — and it's perfectly understandable and natural.

I have never been abroad and I can't imagine what it would be like for me there. Here in Russia, my loneliness is internal. Everything around me is what I'm used to: my native language, customs, manners, cities. But you are totally turned inward.

In the meantime everything remains as it is: my son and I talk on the phone, write to each other constantly. Outwardly, we're just like we were before: we talk, we do things, we laugh. But there's a horror living inside of us. An unceasing, inescapable horror from everything: from the doorbell ringing, from the latest news, from someone's words, from separation, from thoughts about the future.

There is still a glimmer of hope, though. I can't imagine how my son and I will meet again, but I know that it will be magical: to hold him, hug him, sit near him, look into his eyes. I always look up at him from below. Not even because he's a head taller than me — morally, he's very big, I have immeasurable respect for his judgment, for the way he thinks. My little, big son.

I hope that our future meeting is certain.

**The mother of a Meduza journalist, who lives in Russia.
For security reasons, we cannot disclose her name.**











Alexander Gronsky, “Moscow 2022–”

PHOTOGRAPHS, SLIDESHOW. 2022–2024

Your project, “Moscow 2022–” has been ongoing for three years. What does your work day look like?

I always feel like I need to justify myself with this project because it doesn't have any kind of conceptual script — it just came together on its own. I walk around and bear witness, like a Google Street View car. A perfect day is when I wake up, eat breakfast, and wander around until it starts getting dark. I mostly go on foot, but recently I've started intentionally driving out to somewhere I've definitely never been before because I got tired of always combing over the same neighborhoods.

Where do you mainly go in Moscow?

I'm generally accustomed to moving along the edges of its territory: wooded parks, residential areas, the boundaries of the city as such. But in recent years, that's no longer been my priority and I'm primarily attracted to spaces filled with signs — billboards, inscriptions and so on.

Your project's most recognizable motif is digital billboards with propagandistic content. How do you manage to capture such eloquent scenes from those videos? Do you stand in front of the screen and wait?

Sometimes it takes preparation in advance: for example, when I know that Putin is addressing the Federal Assembly and that his speech will be shown on a digital billboard. Sometimes it's just luck. Combining text (especially if it's ideologically

charged) and landscape is a tradition of unofficial Soviet art, like the work of painter Erik Bulatov.

Are you consciously referencing this tradition?

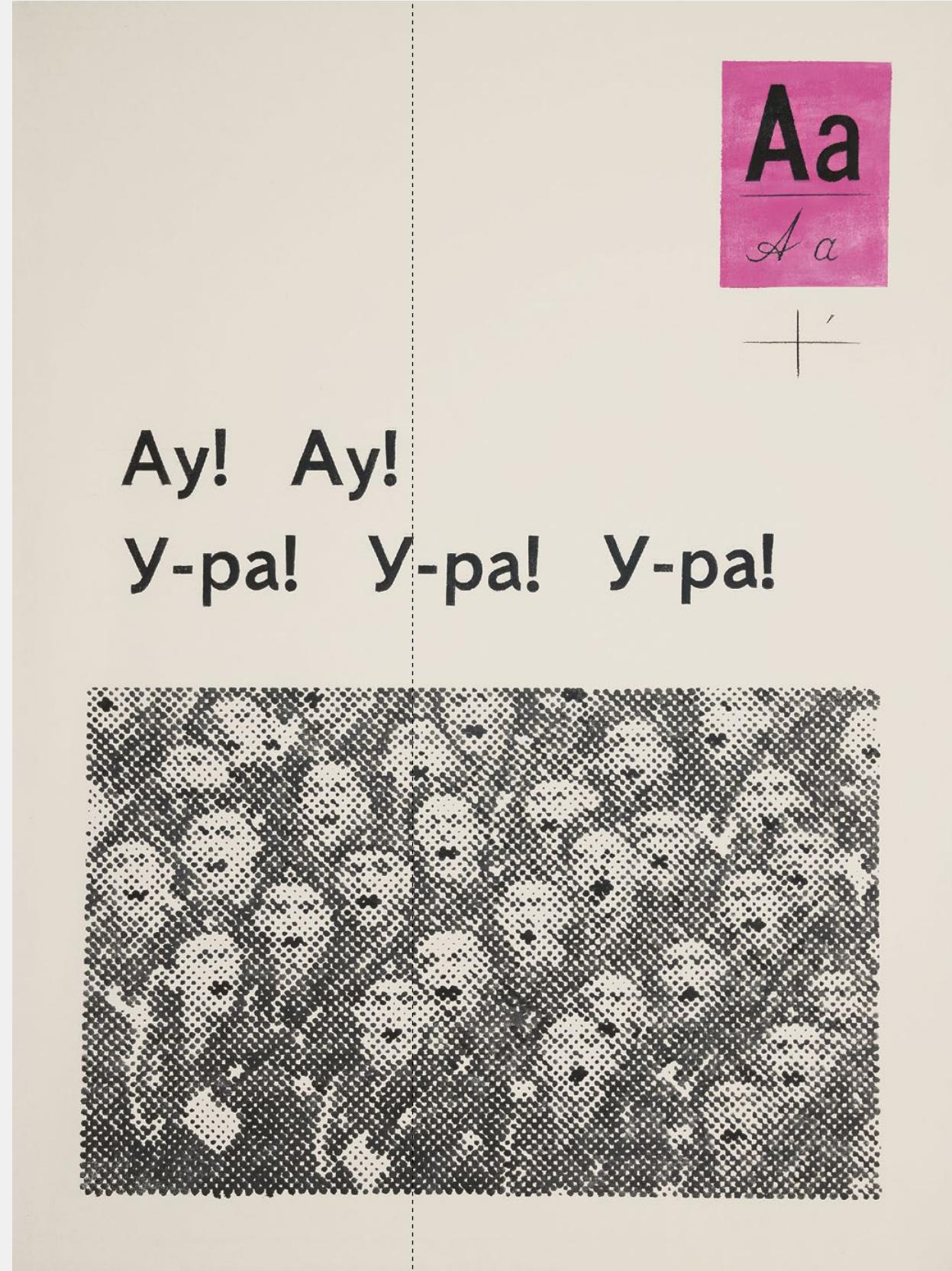
No, it's not intentional. But I'm glad that such echoes arise. In Russia, when a text appears in urban space, we understand that it's censored, that it's undergone some kind of approval. It turns out that these texts are united by a common narrative of power. That really is reminiscent of the late USSR when any text that appeared in public looked like a set of letters, ritualistic phrases or incantations. Since all of these words are totally incompatible with the urban landscape, it's as if their meaning slips off of them. On the street, the text starts to behave unpredictably — sometimes it can, for example, acquire a meaning that's the opposite of its original meaning. It's possible that this is the project's central theme.

Alexander Gronsky has been called the first Russian representative of deadpan — the deliberately “boring”, detached, dispassionate photography associated with the Dusseldorf School. Gronsky's main genre is landscape; the typical environments of his photographs are the Moscow outskirts, wooded parks and residential areas built up with identical high-rise buildings. In one of his early projects, “Pastoral”, views of Moscow recalled classical landscape painting and, by association, seemed to become more attractive. The photographer showed that we see “beauty” where cultural habit tells us to.

Another important theme in Gronsky's work, closely connected with the problematics of photography in general, deals with counterfeits, fakes and imitations. He has shot, for example, battle reenactments and architecture that mimics historical forms. “Moscow 2022–,” the project Gronsky has been working on since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, unites both motifs. He photographs the big city that tries not to notice the war, but inevitably changes under its influence.

Alexander Gronsky was born in Tallinn in 1980. At the end of the 1990s, he began working as a photojournalist, and at the end of the 2010s as an art photographer. He has won numerous prestigious awards, including the World Press Photo, the Foam Paul Huf Award, and the Russian “Innovation”

Prize. His solo exhibitions have been shown in Paris, London, New York, Amsterdam, Tokyo, and other cities. The photographer's works are held by Amsterdam's Foam Museum, New York's Aperture Foundation, and Paris' Maison Européenne de la Photographie. Gronsky lives and works in Moscow.





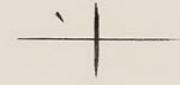
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Pavel Otdelnov, “Primer”

CANVAS, ACRYLIC. 2024

Is your “Primer” series connected, in your mind, to the concept of loneliness?

On the contrary, “Primer” might be described as the collective hallucinations of my generation. My project is about finding common ground — that includes people with diametrically different positions. Regardless, we were all educated in the same Soviet system, with the same basic configurations and ideas about the world. In the “Primer” series, I plumb the depths of my childhood memories in pursuit of those configurations. Instead of using pictures from a real school alphabet primer, I capture the words and images that were truly formative for me and many other people of my generation.

The letter Я — pit (яма/yama) is about the fear of death, the awareness of mortality that came to us in childhood. Т is for television (телевизор), an object that structured Soviet family life: sometimes the kids watched it, at other times the adults did. В is for the abyss (бездна/bezdna), the image of catastrophe that is connected with my country, with Russia. С is for toy soldiers (солдатики/soldatiki): war was the main game of the sandbox — no one wondered why these soldiers were fighting. А is for toy soldiers again, shouting “Aau! Hoorah!” (Ay! Ура!). When I was a kid it seemed that “hoorah” always brought everyone together. I never expected that I’d hear a kind of “hoorah” I’d want nothing to do with.

R is for radiation (радиация), something frightening and invisible, that might be anywhere. Z is for winter (зима/zima) — nuclear, it stands to reason. U is for shelter (убежище/ubezhishche), another concept associated with childhood fear. In elementary school, Konstantin Lopushansky’s film

“Dead Man’s Letters” made a very strong impression on me. In the movie, there’s a nuclear winter after an atomic war, and all these people lose their minds and die in dark shelters. I decided that if there was a nuclear war, I wouldn’t go into any shelter, in fact I’d go out on the street specifically to die a quick death, rather than dying from hunger and suffocation. When I told my classmates this, one of them told on me and my parents were called into school. L is for Lenin, the chief deity. From today’s perspective, these ubiquitous portraits of Lenin strike me as a justification of terror for the sake of great ideas.

The letter combinations МYa, RYa, VYa, SYa, PYa, TYa, NYa (МЯ, РЯ, ВЯ, СЯ, ПЯ, ТЯ, НЯ) are taken from a real primer. It’s practically avant-garde poetry, almost like “Dyr bul shchyl” by Alexey Kruchenykh. They sound as though someone is trying to start talking about something unpleasant, something people try to ignore. Of course I was thinking of war: in my childhood, when the war with Afghanistan was going on, it was also a repressed topic, like it is in Russia today.

It’s hard not to see echoes here of the Moscow conceptualists and conceptualism in general. Is this analogy meaningful to you?

It’s always important to me, not just in this series. The work of Moscow conceptualism is built on the idea of a break, a gap between word and image, where something unspoken fits in. I’ve worked with this before, for example, in my “Industrial Zone” series I painted the ruins of factories alongside quotes from a book of my dad’s, who worked his whole life in Dzerzhinsk chemical plants. My dad’s memoirs, which I display in the

exhibition, and the cold ruins in my pictures not only don’t illustrate each other; they almost negate each other.

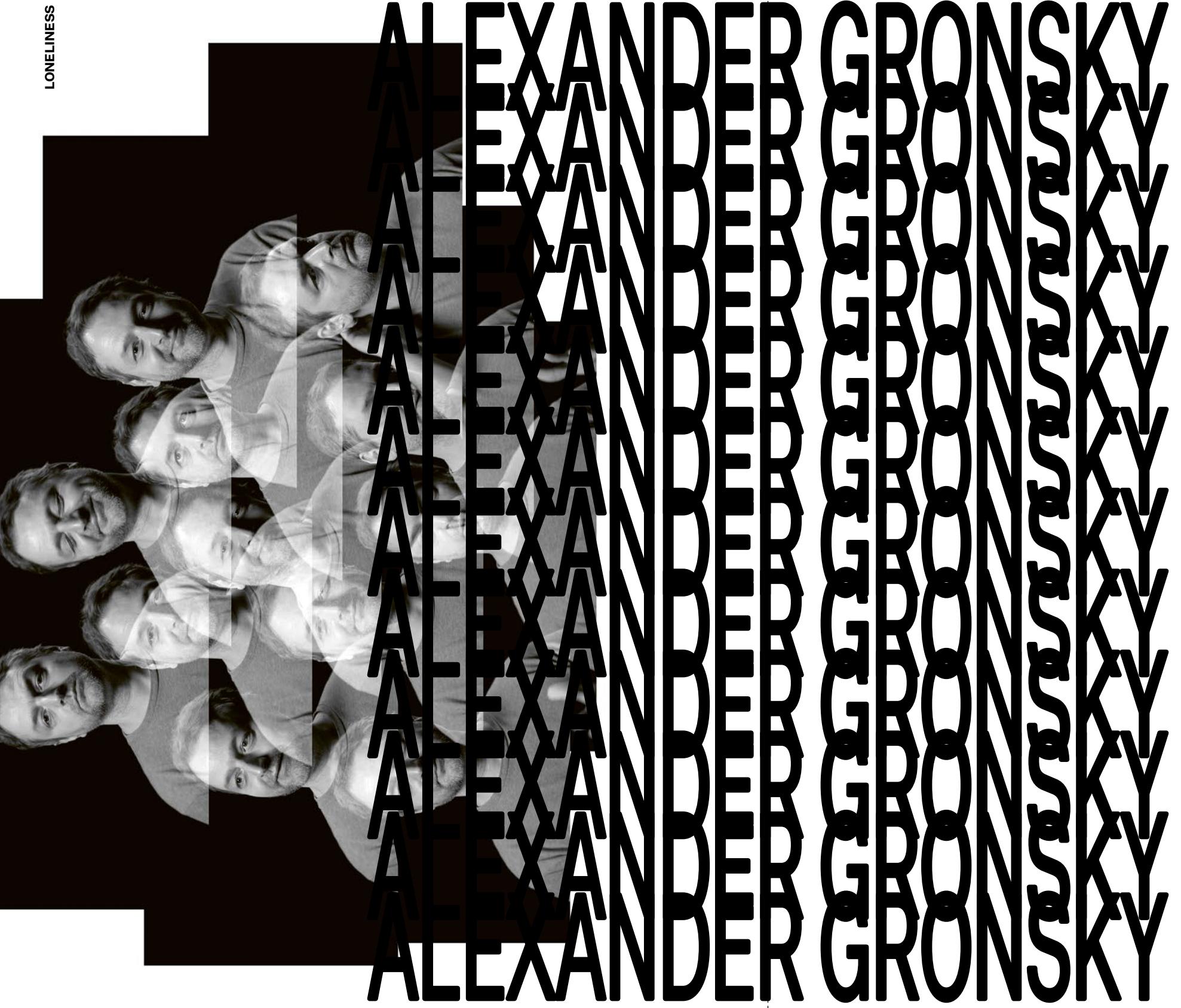
Apart from Moscow conceptualism, some of my work references Ed Ruscha, an American artist who worked with words on landscape. In his work, the word itself turned into landscape and shaped it. But where Ruscha works from a world of endless advertising slogans that have shaped the U.S. space, like the Hollywood sign, I use the words and meanings that define the habitat I’m accustomed to.

Pavel Otdelnov works in painting, graphic arts, installation, photography, and video. His main genre is landscape. Otdelnov paints industrial parks, residential areas, landfills and other uninviting spaces. He produces figurative art, but at the same time many of his works, like the “Neon Landscape” series with blurred city lights, are reminiscent of abstract painting.

Otdelnov was born in 1979 in Dzerzhinsk, in the Nizhny Novgorod region — a city kept alive by the chemical and defense industries. His childhood in Dzerzhinsk defined his sphere of interests: the fate of Soviet ideology, daily life in industrial regions, militarism and state violence.

The artist unites his works in conceptual cycles, which he exhibits in a particular fashion. The “Ringing Trace” project, for example, was essentially a total installation in an abandoned constructivist dormitory in Sinezhinsk. It portrayed the Kyshtym radiation disaster through painting as well as texts and found objects.

Otdelnov studied in Moscow, where he graduated from the Surikov State Academic Institute of Fine Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Art. He has participated in the Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art and the Ural Industrial Biennale. In 2020, Otdelnov won the Innovation Prize and the Moscow International Market for Contemporary Art Cosmopolitan named him Artist of the Year. He has lived and worked in London since 2022.



ALEXANDER GRONSKY

My first creative experience as a child was wanting to draw the entire view from my window, the whole panorama, all the homes and the park. I didn't know how to draw, it was hard. But I had this need for a complete picture of the world, a complete artistic event, a complete drawing. The tree, sun or house standing on their own just didn't cut it.

I continue to work in that spirit today — like a Google Street View machine that assembles giant panoramas.

I've found myself, of course, in a wild situation, but I'm the best-equipped individual to handle it. I have experience that has prepared me, or maybe more accurately, a certain random but relevant set of qualities: I know how to exist on my own, to barely communicate with the outside world, and I know how not to panic about being arrested. I feel well-suited for my current role. Of course that doesn't cancel out my dismay at what's happening. At the same time, it's probably the first time in my life that I've felt social responsibility. It sounds silly, but if not me, then who?

In my field, it's like I've been left in charge: if I don't shoot something, don't record it, no one else will. Or maybe someone will suddenly think to do it, but they'll be too late. These are new experiences for me, and it's quite exciting. It's like catching a ball out of nowhere. I was minding my own business, walking around the stadium, and suddenly there's a ball. Now I just have to run with it because there's no one else to pass to.

Every day, I read about horrific events, but I can picture them in my mind. I understand that it's happening somewhere out there, but fortunately I don't usually witness them directly. Ever so often a catastrophe actually happens in close proximity to me. The abstract world of the news and everyday reality converge. I'm not a press photographer, so it's a strange situation for me. As a rule, I want to step back, make a wider frame, and show not only the fire that will make the news, but also the inconspicuous yard around it. It's as if major events can pierce through the surrounding reality.

I started to feel something similar when the discourse and images on TV started to seep into the landscape, onto digital billboards in the midst of trees and garages. It was like reality was floating, and that hidden, unseen

world that we talk about in the news, but which we almost never encounter in everyday life, appeared inside of it.

Before, when I lived without a television, I almost never came into contact with news from [Russian state news broadcaster] Channel One in my everyday life. Now I can't hide from it: there are propaganda announcements on digital billboards. The border that allowed people to go into internal emigration has been breached.

At the same time, some of the statements on television have ceased to function as messages — they're more like ornaments made of words. New euphemisms emerge. For example, when there's a drone attack absolutely all media outlets will say: "Debris [from shot down drones] fell". Why does debris fall so precisely? We know the answer to this question and simply put the phrase in quotation marks.

But during real-life communication, there inevitably comes a moment when you don't know where your interlocutor puts those quotes. It's interesting to try to determine where, exactly, they're implied.

I don't always understand how people see my photographs. I understand perfectly how people who have been out of the country for the last three years see them — many of them write me comments. But how do people who live in Russia, especially people with different viewpoints, see them — that's unclear. I don't know if it's permissible to show these photos in Russia right now. What do they show? Does anyone see in my photos a denigration of reality? In three years, I've never had any serious complaints. Maybe I'm within the bounds of what's permitted, or maybe no one has yet to pay any serious attention to me.

I think that my work has some effect, above all because there seems to be an audience for it. A sense of unity, a sense of connection is of the highest value right now. Let's say two people meet up, one will say, "I like Gronsky's photographs", and the other will answer, "Me too". If this brings them closer together, if they can share these images of loneliness with each other, then perhaps that's my social contribution.

DICTIONARY
CENSORSHIP²⁶
EXILE⁴²

WAR⁵⁸

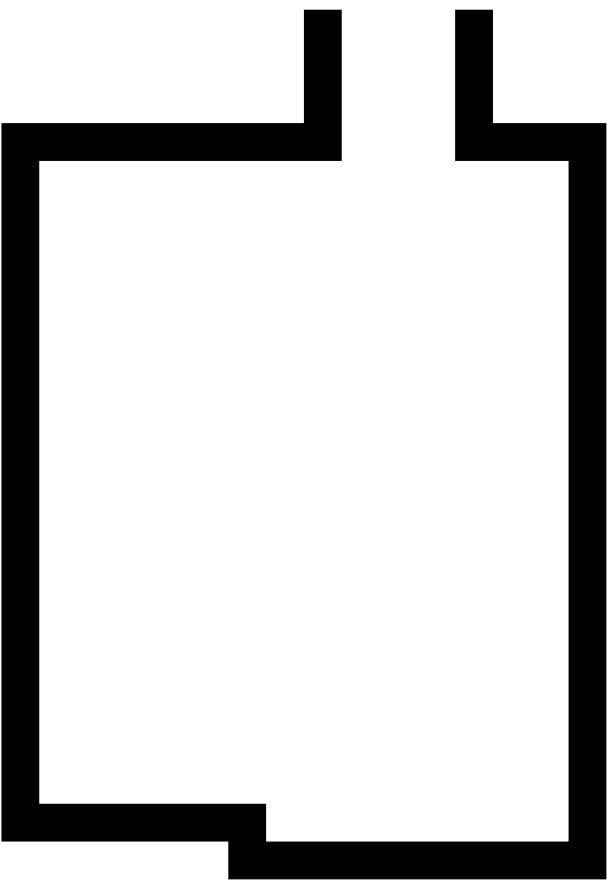
REVENGE⁷⁶

FEAR¹⁴⁸

LONELINESS¹⁶²

POLARIZATION

HOPE²⁰⁶



We live in a contradictory world. The best of our human qualities can become destructive. The pursuit of truth and justice can turn into dogmatism and self-righteous anger. Willingness to rally in defense of one's homeland and one's ideals can lead to bloodshed; once years have passed, it becomes impossible to sort out who's right and who's wrong. Empathy for "your own" can dehumanize others. Everything that lifts us up and brings us together can also make us blind.

In times of conflict, we have an especially acute sense that the world becomes two-dimensional: there are friends and enemies, heroes and traitors, oppressors and oppressed, aggressors and victims. It may seem that absolute clarity has come to the world at last, which only a scoundrel or an idiot could fail to see.

In such moments, we react harshly to anyone who attempts to complicate our worldview. To avoid being exposed to unnecessary doubts, we only interact with people who already share our views and feelings—this is particularly easy to do in the world of social media, where anyone can assemble a group of like-minded people and then believe that they know the whole truth.

The position that "not everything is clear cut" becomes unseemly. Dissidents and doubters are driven away or compelled to be silent. Every group involved in the conflict begins to live by the principle that "whoever isn't with us is against us".

We hide our own radicalism from ourselves by imagining the myriad circumstances that supposedly leave us no choice. Once, that force was the will of God. Nowadays, "common sense", "progress", "civilization", "norms", or "historical inevitability" increasingly take its place. It is "they" who are senseless, fanatical, backward barbarians, while "we" are their polar opposite. It wasn't us who decided to set out on the warpath; they forced us. And we're on the right side of history.

In the modern world, conflict is not limited to open clashes between people. Whatever makes us uncomfortable can turn out to be a battlefield. A newspaper we dislike is participating in information warfare, a competing firm from another country is doing trade war—a Hollywood film—culture war, a monument we hate, memory war.

I would love to write that there's some simple means to free ourselves from this obsession with polarization. To get from a black-and-white world to a full-color world. But there isn't any simple answer. The problem is that evil really exists in the world. It's not illusory. There are liars who manipulate information, dictators who invade other countries, war criminals

who give out sadistic and illegal orders, and soldiers who carry them out.

Taken together, this leaves us to face a difficult test—will we be able to transform the polarizing force that acts within each of us? Will we, in a moment of pain, fear and despair, refuse to join forces with those who admit no doubt? Will we want to? When all is said and done, maybe there are some ends which justify the dehumanization of others?

Semyon Khanin, “Polarcone”

MIXED MEDIA. 2025

What is “Polarcone”?

It's a hollow metal cone: black on the outside, white on the inside. The inner part is illuminated and equipped with polarizing filters. These allow us to discern what cannot be seen with the naked eye, but by uncovering a certain image and revealing what is hidden, they also alter our visual perception. We literally start seeing white as black. It is this metaphor, at least partly, that forms the work's foundation. The polarization of light, like the polarization of opinion, does not allow us to see real processes in their entirety — it places blinders or filters on us. The work isn't, however, just limited to this metaphor. It's not only the shape of an object itself, but also light effects, the detection of polarization, and so on, that leave room for further interpretations.

How did you discover this shape, and how do you interpret it yourself?

I had come up with the general shape and color of the object a long time ago — a black cone that resembles both a funnel and a horn. When I came around to implementing the idea, I recalled Santiago Sierra's piece, which is also called “The Black Cone”. This marvellous thing was also shown at an exhibition called “No”. I like this namesake, but that's where the overlap ends. The subtitle of Sierra's work is “Monument to Civil Disobedience” and it's a two-meter high monolith split by a black metal cone, which is displayed in Iceland's capital to commemorate the Pots and Pans Revolution (the nickname for peaceful protests in Iceland during the 2008–2009 financial crisis).

Sierra's message is perfectly clearcut, even poster-like, visually it seems to refer to El Lissitzky's “Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge”.

“Polarcone” is a more melancholic artwork. It doesn't bear such a straightforward message, since the piece deals with the challenges of delivering a message and having it properly received. We take a look inside, get to the root of the matter, trying to distinguish white from black and light from darkness. Polarizing filters allow us to see certain things, but obscure others. This ambiguity is also part and parcel of our ability or inability to process information. Our brain picks out those fragments that we already have some notions about, but leaves out anything that could change our understanding of what's happening. It's a funnel that sucks us in.

Semyon Khanin is a Latvian artist and poet who writes in Russian. He's a member of the art collective Orbita. The most important direction of his artistic practice is work with urban space. His first project in that area was a map of the non-existent Riga metro called “Riga Underground Subway”, which he imagined to connect movie theaters with cemeteries. Today, Khanin continues to work on the guerrilla art project “Will the Corners Be Named?” The artist gives names to street corners and installs signs on corner houses.

“Corners” echoes some of Khanin's other works, which create new environments for text to exist in. The artist gives everyday things a new function — a “delivery” of poetic text to the reader. The interactive low-tech object “Poetry-to-go”, for example, consists of a few pairs of flip-flops and an inkpad. The sandals leave traces of poetry: one imprint is the original text, and another is its translation.

The work “Poe3D” literally embodies the observation made by avant-garde Russian poet Daniil Kharms that “One should write poetry so that if you throw a poem at a window, the glass will shatter”. To begin, Khanin created his first spatial poem — metal tube-shaped words that intersected like a three-dimensional crossword puzzle. Then, he launched the Poe3D website, which allowed users to write similar 3D texts. One of the artist's latest works is a personal musical instrument for poetic performances, which he calls the “khafon”.

Semyon Khanin was born in Riga in 1970. His first collection of poetry “Just Now / Tikko” came out in 2003. In 2011, he compiled an anthology entitled “Latvian/Russian Poetry: Poems by Latvian Poets, Written in Russian”. He lives and works in Riga.

ZHENIA BEREZHINA



ZHENIA BEREZHNA

When I was little, I would see refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Kyiv. At the time I thought that they had ended up in this situation because they had been living somewhere very far away, probably in some kind of mud huts. Back then I had no idea that war doesn't discriminate between people. It doesn't matter where you live, what your social status is, how much money you make, how intelligent you are, what your educational background is: when war comes, it comes for everyone.

Speaking in fairy-tale terms: it felt like I had gone for a walk in an enchanted forest, fallen asleep, and then been awakened to a reality that was no longer my own. It sounds marvelous, but in fact it's anything but. You lose all your bearings all at once. There are things without which a normal life is impossible. When you live in one place for a long time, you have your favorite spots that act as anchors when you're sad, need to gather your strength, or just want to take your friends out to your favorite restaurant. Then, suddenly, it's all gone and you're in a completely new world.

The break is not only physical, but also emotional. Physically, you can return home. I can visit Ukraine and bring my German family along with me. I hope it will happen one day. But I don't know how to make these two parts of my life fit together. It's literally two different lives, and between them lies

a giant black line that I'm not able to cross. I often miss my past self—and the past experiences I can rely on.

If a piece of you is cut off, it won't grow back. You'll always feel that something is missing. It will always make you feel lonely, cold, scared. If anything—from loud noises on the street to a movie—can theoretically retraumatize you, then it's bound to happen. To this day, I have thoughts like, "it's not worth buying too much furniture for the new apartment or too many clothes because what if we suddenly have to flee and leave everything behind?"

I will always be Ukrainian and I don't want to be anything else. I want my German family to know that I'm Ukrainian, and my kids, if I have any here, to know that their mom is Ukrainian. I don't feel conflicted about it. I think it's normal to come to a new country, integrate, but remain who you were before.

At the same time, I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian and I insist on this: I have the right to speak Russian, I will continue to write in Russian, whether you like it or not. You can choose to not support me, for example, by not reading or buying my books. But you can't take away my passport or forbid me from calling myself Ukrainian.

There's a huge part of the population of Ukraine that speaks Russian. Yes, many

now refuse to use Russian—I understand and even support them. If my friends ask me to speak Ukrainian with them, no problem. But I'll decide for myself which language to write in, because it's about my life now, about my survival, and no one will help me if I don't help myself.

When someone is in danger and feels helpless, he needs to find an understandable and concrete perpetrator that can be dehumanized and debased. Then you have something to dump your emotions onto. This is normal when you're huddled in a basement getting shelled. Under fire, you tell yourself "The Russian soldiers who came into my home aren't human". You won't be able to survive if you think about the fact that they actually also have families or that they were sent here. The same thing happens on the frontlines.

Refugees who arrive here in Germany are also confronted with this feeling of helplessness. So they construct for themselves a nominal enemy—for example, the Russian language. It's quite convenient because the Russian language can't talk back. After all, it's just a language, an instrument.

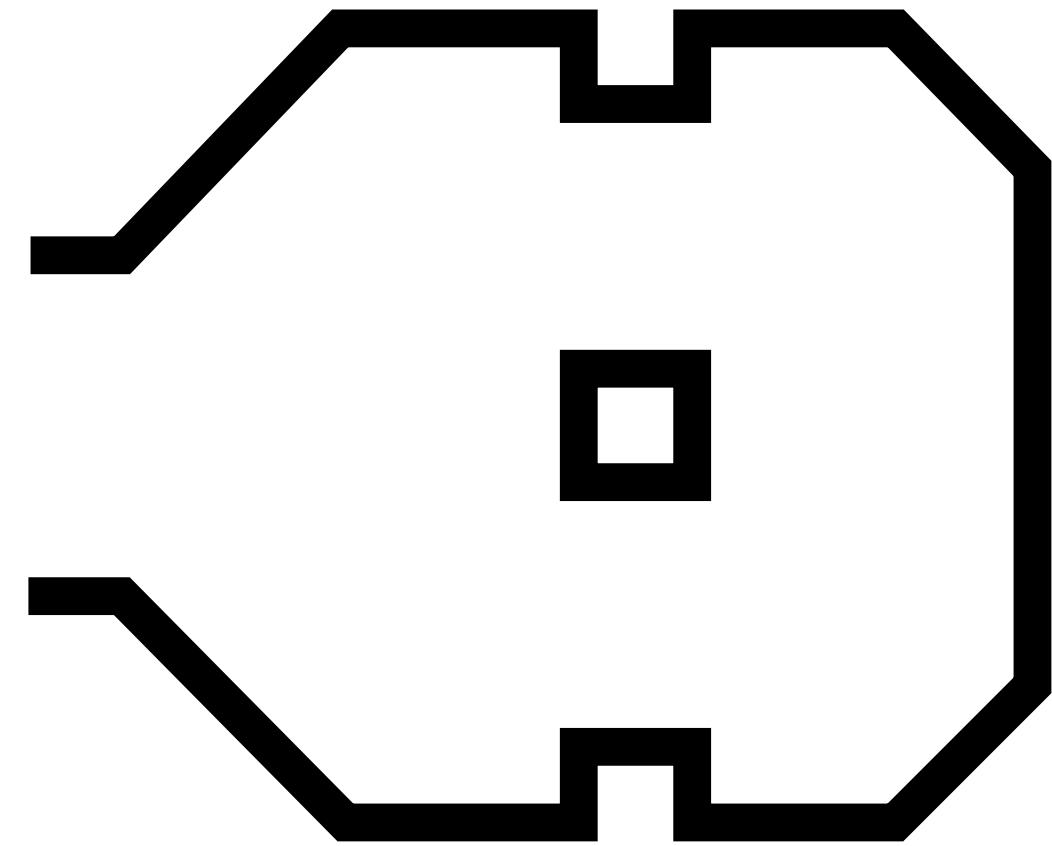
I hear a lot of cognitive distortions: "You're speaking the language of the occupiers", "It's because of you speaking Russian that Putin still hasn't lost". I understand how far-fetched it all sounds. But people think that way because it helps them survive and re-

lease difficult emotions. It's easier than telling yourself that the world is very complex or asking yourself questions like "What is language, anyway?" or "How should I treat Ukrainians from Russian-speaking regions?" I think people just don't have the energy for that. They come here to find work, shelter, raise their children, learn a new language.

I believe that we can find a balance by continuing to follow events, not turning away, not closing off our hearts and our thoughts while also building our own lives here or in another country. I wanted to demonstrate this using myself as an example, so that people would empathize and understand that there's nothing reprehensible about it.

As a writer, I have a lot of possibilities. My situation is more fortunate than that of other refugees: I have the strength and the opportunity to reflect. If I can do that, it means that I must, because not everyone can afford to. People are often simply overwhelmed emotionally. They have no more time or strength left. That means that it is up to the writers, artists and playwrights to do so—their work provides space for this kind of reflection.

DICTIONARY
CENSORSHIP²⁶
EXILE⁴²
WAR⁵⁸
REFUGEE⁷⁶
FEAR¹³⁰
LONELINESS¹⁴⁸
POLARIZATION¹⁶²
HATE



A century ago, hope was mainstream in Western art. The most influential artists of that era believed that new aesthetics would create a new, free and just society. They no longer wanted merely to reproduce reality, as their predecessors had done. They dreamed, instead, of producing a different, better reality. The First World War didn't shake their belief that a bright future was possible. In fact, it only deepened their conviction that the old order was no good, and that a radical restructuring of culture and society was necessary.

Bauhaus was one example of this philosophy. Its founder and first director, the architect Walter Gropius, emerged from the war convinced that the mission of intellectuals in general, and artists in particular, was to build a world free from violence.

Bauhaus revolutionized arts education and design, but even more than that, it was a revolutionary interpretation of the essence of art. The leaders of Bauhaus insisted that the artist create for the people, offering them a total way of life, not only beautiful objects in isolation, like paintings and sculptures. Moreover, the artist should work for everyone, not just for the wealthy. In fact, the Bauhaus movement's most important objective was designing affordable housing.

The utopia envisioned by the early modernists collapsed. The Nazis shut down the Bauhaus school. Vkhutemas, its Soviet analog, was destroyed during the Stalin era. Totalitarian dictatorships destroyed the institutions on which idealistic artists depended for their livelihoods, and they also, more generally, undermined broadly shared hopes for a better world. Humanity, having seen enough of dystopia, fell out of love with utopia.

As it turned out, modernism was fated for a legacy very different from the one desired by the modernists themselves, who dreamed of equality and made art for a world without wealth or poverty. Instead their works have become luxury items — today, few can afford the “originals” designed by the teachers and students of the Bauhaus school.

It seems obvious that the 21st century will not produce anything like Bauhaus or the Soviet avant-garde — in fact, it's unlikely that anything like that artistic moment will ever happen again. That kind of cultural phenomenon is possible when there's unconditional faith in the future, and we don't exactly live in those conditions. And yet, artists and altruists still exist. How do they work today? What are they working on?

Contemporary artists are not piecing together a future world, but repairing the present one, trying to make it a bit more liveable. The Japanese architect Shigeru Ban fashions shelters for refugees out of plastic and

cardboard — the structures are beautiful, light, durable, and designed so that even the most inexperienced builder can assemble them. The Russian artist Alisa Yoffe paints, in her characteristic style, navigation signs at humanitarian aid centers for displaced Ukrainians in Tbilisi, Georgia. German actor and director Georg Genoux, who runs Thespis Zentrum in Bautzen, invites immigrants onto the professional stage to describe their experiences, rather than having professional actors play them. This approach is known as documentary theater.

These artists work with vulnerable groups, cultures, and languages to protect disappearing cultural and historical memory. They also document the era, making it harder for future dictators and propagandists to retroactively falsify its memory.

How much hope is there in this work? Far from none, but this hope takes a different form. Today's artists and idealists are not hoping for a new world or a better world, but for horizontal connections, grassroots initiatives and targeted resistance to evil. They're hopeful about individuals and independent communities.

This may be the only form of hope we have left today. We can't save everything — but what if we at least try to help someone? We can't count on a fundamental rebuilding of humanity — but maybe we should at least count on one another. What gives us hope, if not solidarity?

Anton Khitrov

From Meduza's Slack

On February 16, 2024, it came out that Alexey Navalny, Putin's most prominent opponent, had died in prison under unclear circumstances. The opposition is certain he was murdered.

FEBRUARY 16, 2024
GENERAL CHANNEL
12:20 P.M.

News editor: UFSIN YaNAO [Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region] REPORTS THAT NAVALNY IS DEAD. I'm posting the news

Editor-in-chief: colleagues, unfortunately, we have confirmation about Navalny from high-ranking sources we can't name. Hugs to everyone. All-hands on deck briefing in a few minutes

Repost from Mediazona's Telegram channel: "Putin is talking to employees now. Statements forthcoming"

Editor: I wonder if he'll finally say his name [When Navalny was alive, Putin refused to pronounce his name in public, preferring to refer to him only euphemistically as "that person" or "that citizen". Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, also avoided using Navalny's name, instead calling him things like "the Berlin patient" after Navalny was poisoned with a chemical weapon called "Novichok" and evacuated to Germany for treatment.]

Podcasts editor: russian news agencies and propaganda sites have posted almost nothing about Navalny on their homepages over the past hour since the news broke, but the front pages of all the main Western outlets are on it

Publisher: let's compile list of Navalny's important investigations? Make a playlist? Listicle?

Instagram editor: playlist is actually a great idea. I was just thinking we could also include the most heartbreaking things he posted on social media

(...)

Editor-in-chief: "Navalny is dead. Statement from Meduza's editors"

Photo editor: Our beliefs are the future. Navalny's beliefs are the future. I'd switch the order of those phrases

Features editor: it's a little weird to put "remember this day" right in the first paragraph and not say a word about Navalny's family

Editor-in-chief: adding something about the family now

Podcasts editor: if you don't agree, ignore this, but the transition to outrage feels too quick to me — I feel like the grief is too great to describe with just one short phrase. because it's also paralyzing. maybe at least make a paragraph break. Or add: Enormous, monstrous grief. I don't know.

Editor-in-chief: I've taken everything i could into account. thanks guys

4:42 P.M.

Head of communications: I've heard from some acquaintances in exile that they're worried about going to the embassies, because they think everyone there will be "photographed and recorded", and that will cause them problems if they need to go home [to Russia]

News editor: the main thing is to try to restrain yourself and not burn your Russian passport...

FEBRUARY 17, 2024
GENERAL CHANNEL
1:04 A.M.

Head of communications: You've probably already discussed this, but what's happening from the religious perspective — are there people praying in churches abroad? Quietly lighting a candle in churches in Russia?

7:45 A.M.

Explainers editor: I think in the next week we need an interview with a psychologist who specializes in grieving and can talk about grief being possible not only when you lose a loved one, but also when a person you didn't know personally dies and in a number of other situations. Even some people might be skeptical of this. It can help to get through this and talk to loved ones about it. I can take this on myself.











Aleksey Dubinsky, “The First Day of Spring, 2024”

OIL STICKS ON CANVAS. 2024

Your work is about the funeral of Alexey Navalny, Vladimir Putin's main opponent. Navalny was killed in prison on February 16, 2024. Tens of thousands of people turned out in Moscow to mourn him, even though protests are banned in Russia. You first posted a digital version of the work on social media on March 1, the day of the funeral. How did that come about?

By that point, the idea of depicting a funeral was already bouncing around in my head — lately, they've become one of the most common events. March 1, 2024 was a sunny spring day in Tbilisi. When I saw the news coming from Moscow, the sun gradually started going behind the clouds. I watched videos, I read the latest updates. I was amazed by how many people came to bid him farewell. In my thoughts, I was transported to that river, and it seemed endless. I couldn't personally participate — it's as if I started to paint everything I was seeing on the news, to compensate for that loss.

There was no need to come up with a special color palette. A harsh, gray, snowy Moscow morning and a black ribbon of people who had come out to mourn. The bare, gray trees and the colorful dots of bouquets in people's hands. Monotonous, quiet, anxious.

What do you think about the common opinion that hope was buried alongside Navalny?

The world has been and will be cruel, catastrophe follows catastrophe. One of those catastrophes is depicted in my paintings. It seems that we have no strength left to resist; all signs and symbols are against

us. But the fact that people are also unified seems just as obvious to me. They try in every possible way to divide and alienate us, but we end up united in grief. I think truth and strength lie in sticking together — in joy and in sorrow. As for killing off hope — let the power to do that not rest with those who want to divide us.

You didn't previously use your work to respond so directly to events in the news. What made you want to paint Navalny's funeral?

When I'm developing a project, I lean heavily on real events, but then I sometimes change both the characters and the setting dramatically. As a result, the subject that undergirds the work is hidden. So it's true, my work does not often reference the news directly. But in the story about the funeral there was no need to make complex structural changes: the events spoke for themselves. I worked more like an illustrator would.

Aleksey Dubinsky, painter and graphic artist, calls his method "everyday surrealism". He produces figurative art, with his main subjects being portrait and still life; in depicting people and everyday objects like houseplants and dishes, the artist tries to see them as if for the first time.

Until recently, his work was largely apolitical — he gravitated toward traditional motifs, like flowers or antiquity, and the main themes of his paintings and drawings were questions of a purely graphic nature, like explorations of non-standard relationships between point and line. The artist has developed a recognizable style, using graphic techniques in painting, and combining thin lines and silhouettes with bold, bright color fills.

Dubinsky responded to the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine with an animation depicting burning houses. Since then, he has continued to take up new subjects from time to time — like terror and civil resistance — while treating them in his characteristic style.

Aleksey Dubinsky was born in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, in 1985. In 2011, he graduated from the Ilya Glazunov Russian Academy of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, where he majored in historical and religious painting. He won the Martini Art Weekend prize upon graduation, which allowed him to further his arts education at

Central Saint Martins in London. From 2014 to 2017, Dubinsky was part of a team that decorated the window displays at TsUM, a famous Moscow department store. His first solo exhibition took place in 2018 at the Moscow gallery Triumph. His work has been shown at MMOMA (the Moscow Museum of Modern Art) and sold on Moscow's main art markets, Cosmoscow and Blazar. Today, the artist lives and works in Tbilisi.



The image features a central vertical axis of symmetry. On the left side, the name "KRISTINA" is written vertically in large, bold, black letters. The letters are partially cut out, creating a stencil effect that reveals a blurred, sepia-toned photograph of a person's face in profile, looking towards the right. On the right side, the name "SAFONOVA" is written vertically in large, bold, black letters, also with a similar cut-out effect. A vertical dashed line runs down the center, marking the axis of symmetry between the two names.

KRISTINA SAFONOVA

What I miss most, in exile, is the courts. I still write about the politically motivated persecution of people in Russia, but now I work almost exclusively with documents and people who are willing to speak with an “undesirable organization” (many are afraid to talk to us even anonymously — they can be fined and prosecuted for doing so).

It's no longer possible for me to go to the courts at seven in the morning, stand out for two hours in the cold, then jostle with other journalists for a small space on a hard bench and spend the entire day in a stuffy courtroom with basically no break. And then when the judge finally decides that everyone needs a little break — choose between the toilet, a smoke or a snack.

Oh, yeah, there are also excellent security procedures at the entrance [to the courthouse]. I tried to make them more fun and enjoyable for both sides by buying various new passport covers. I had a pink one with a kitten on it, the bailiffs really liked that one. Often they don't let you bring water inside, so you have to find it in the courthouse. Then you get home late in the evening and write up a text in a couple of hours. I miss that.

Was it hard to report on court proceedings? Well, I was working, and those are special conditions. At the time, I thought of it like documentary theater. Everyone knew their role ahead of time, everyone said what they

were supposed to, nothing surprising happened. At the same time, it was interesting to document. It's true, I don't really think these stories of persecution will matter much in the future. Experience shows that we don't always learn the lessons of the past.

I don't think that I, as a journalist, can influence the situation. And that's not my goal, I just find it interesting. Journalists are often presented as selfless heroes without any needs — no food, no water, no salary, they just want to work and save the world. I don't agree much with this approach. We're all people with our own desires, and not all of these desires are always acceptable to voice. Some are driven by vanity, many others by passion. This is normal.

Everyone has their own good, too. I'm sure that the employees of the judicial and law enforcement systems in Russia don't wake up with the thought: “Let's go do some evil!” Why is it that my good is correct, where did I get that from?

If I had the opportunity to live several lives, I probably wouldn't be a journalist again in the next one, just because I'd want to try something new. But I'm grateful to myself that I picked journalism at some point because I've learned so many interesting stories. I have the joy of telling these stories and the joy of working with talented people, whom I really value.

Editor of the Explainers desk at Meduza,
co-author of the book “We Can Repeat.
The Language of Putin’s Propaganda”

The image consists of a grid of text elements. The top row contains the names "VITALY VASYL ČENKO" in a large, bold, black font. Below this, there are approximately 15 rows of the same text, "VITALY VASYL ČENKO", stacked vertically. To the right of the text grid, there is a vertical strip showing a close-up of a person's face. The person has dark hair and is wearing glasses. They are looking towards the right side of the frame. The overall composition is a graphic design where the text serves as a background or overlay for the portrait.



VITALY VASYLČENKO

I don't think that the news is a product, or that the media should be subject to market logic. The news is hygiene. You brush your teeth, wash your face, change your sheets and bathe—and you read the news in the same way, because world events influence you, the people around you, and the place you live. It's understandable that people experiencing depression sometimes have trouble brushing their teeth. Hygiene is the first thing that suffers when something goes wrong in your life. But it's weird to blame the media for the fact that you feel bad.

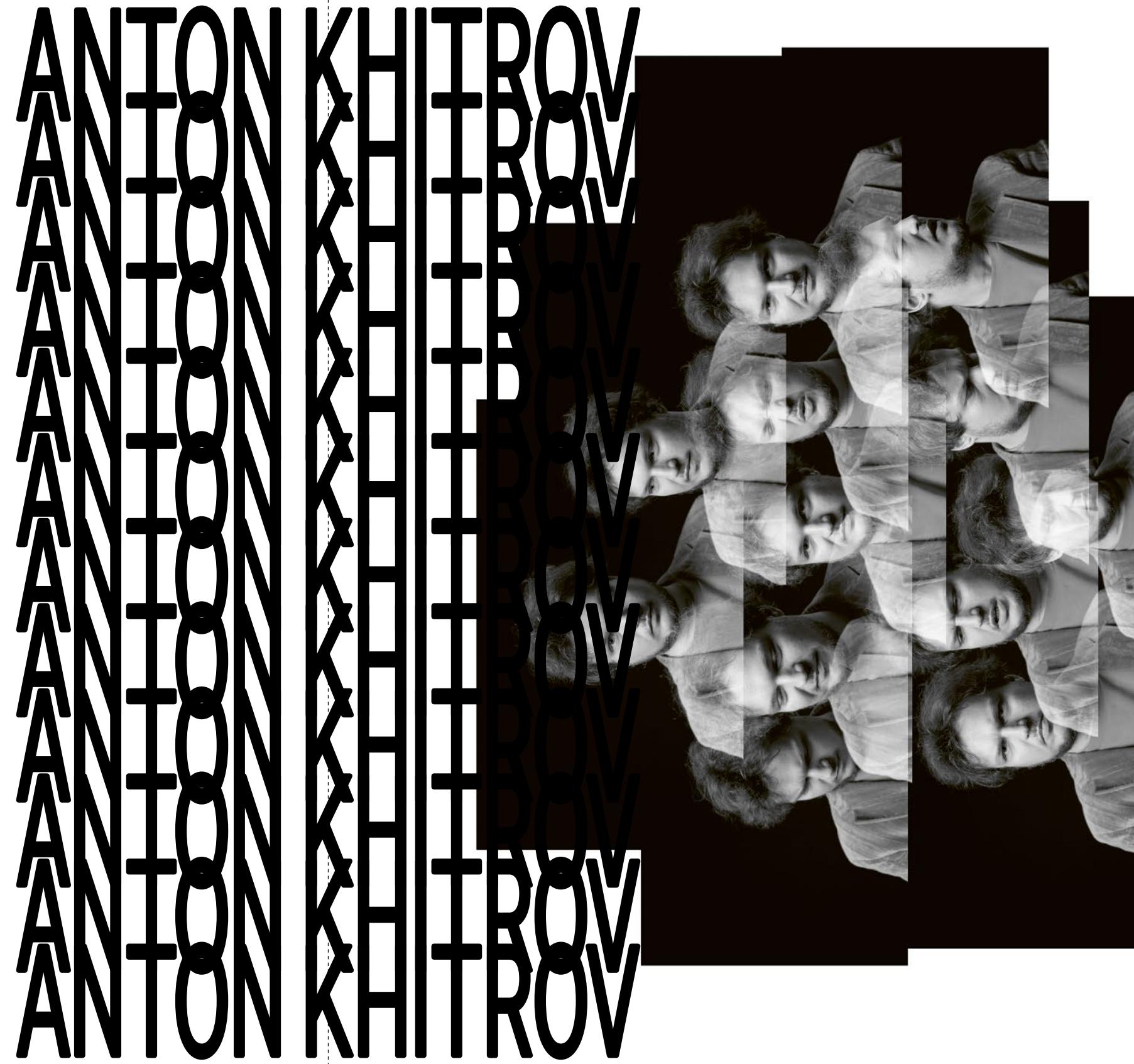
We're now in a historical moment when readers are having the burden of systemic problems dumped on them, and they're being left to bear that burden alone. A caveat: I believe collective responsibility exists, as much as many of us would like to pretend it doesn't. And of course, an individual person can't always be held responsible for—or respond to—systemic systemic problems on their own. Therefore, readers' reactions to current events are pretty logical: "What can I personally do about the climate crisis, injustice, genocide, and war crimes? Nothing". The first reaction is to turn off the news, stop reading and retreat into your own little life. The problem is that your own little life is pierced through with politics. We can judge people who avoid the news and politics,

or we can choose not to judge them. I think, though, that this situation isn't the main problem; rather, it's a symptom of the polycrisis in which the world now finds itself.

Unfortunately, I've read too many books to deceive myself into thinking that the future will be better. Judging by what's happening in the world now, it'll probably be worse. In my view, this is just the reality we need to accept. Hope is overrated. It does probably help some people live. I'm happy for those people: they found something that helps them cope. But I think that hope can also paralyze—and impede us from doing something in the here and now. Hope for something better can deprive us of agency.

I want the world to have less violence—systemic, military, gendered, socio-economic, colonial, physical, psychological, symbolic, cultural, etc. I want people in every part of the world to live free, autonomous, independent and happy lives, and for that freedom to be material, not just on paper. And I want violence over one group of people to never become the conditions of freedom for another. This clearly won't happen in my lifetime, but I will still behave as if a world free from violence depends on each of my actions and decisions.

Culture editor at Meduza, worked for
The Village, Living City Foundation for
Support of Contemporary Art, Old House
Theater, Golden Mask Festival



ANTON KHITROV

I'm currently living in a democratic country for the first time, and my impression is that everything works like this: The left uses the right to scare voters, and the right uses the left the same way. The more afraid we are of each other, the more likely we are to go to the polls, so that we don't let our opponents gain power. Politicians peddle simple answers, and for me, the most valuable part of my work with my colleagues, real journalists, is that they try to do the opposite, to make the world more complex.

Does it bother me that people read less of the news? I'm more worried about why we're asking ourselves this question. Maybe we're just really damn arrogant and we choose to suffer from the news, from our awareness, from our concern about the world. Because in the moment, we seem like hot shit to ourselves. "Look how much I'm fucking suffering, I'm Hamlet. And you—you're not suffering? You chose yourself, stopped reading the news, you're eating healthy, you stopped smoking? Fuck off". I think this is one of any number of ways to feel comfort, through suffering and self-congratulation.

On the other hand, when I speak with Germans, they're usually shocked. They want to talk about the weather, and I'm saying, "Is this

a comforting topic for you? Pretty soon we're all going to be climate refugees". So, that's why I don't have any German friends.

I don't feel the need to base my identity on my passport or ethnicity. Right now, I identify as a migrant. I'll speak German with an accent all my life, and I'll never fit in here. I'm fine with it: I already have trauma from belonging to a dominant society. I like the marginal position better.

The idea that everything was fine before the pandemic is our generation's main delusion. Everything was bad, just not for us. The 2000s and the 2010s were frightening, bloody, problematic times. It's just that there were certain groups within society who had the privilege not to notice. If the full-scale war had not begun, but the nature of the Putin regime had still been what it is, I think I would have stayed in Russia and eventually become a worse person. I would collaborate with some unsavory institutions and convince myself that it was all for the sake of art.

Hope is like anxiety—I don't control it, I just have it. I can think of it as either detrimental or beneficial for me, but it's there in my mind regardless of the value I assign to it. I don't know that there's been a time in my life when I haven't had hope.



The image consists of two vertical columns of text. The left column contains the name 'EKATERINA' repeated five times in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The right column contains the name 'BALABAN' repeated six times in the same style. The text is set against a dark, almost black, background. In the bottom left corner, there is a small, semi-transparent watermark or logo that appears to be a stylized 'E' or 'K' inside a square frame.

EKATERINA BALABAN

At the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, a photographer working for Meduza covered New Year's celebrations in half-ruined cities and villages in eastern Ukraine. In one of the photos, there was a little boy with a toy made out of cotton wool. It was a very simple photograph, but it stayed with me and I later asked the photographer whether he could visit the boy and his family again. He went back in the spring, but they were forced to evacuate and the photographer lost track of them.

It was important for me to know this little boy's fate. The photographer told me it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Then he found out that the family had been evacuated to Kharkiv, so he went around organizations that help refugees and finally managed to find the boy and his family. We hope that we can continue to tell their story. These kinds of photographs that show the war's underside resonate more with me than images from the frontlines with people standing around howitzers.

When the war started, I was grateful to be in the right place at the right time—I felt like I could help people see something regardless of how pompous or presumptuous that may sound. In the beginning, every morning I would pick out a photograph with the caption "War" to be placed on our website that would cover half of the landing page. I would try to understand

my own feelings: what did war mean to me on that particular day?

In my work, it's important for me not to lose myself in the world and try to help readers to latch onto something, at least with a glance. In these moments, I'm interested to know if the person looking at their screen will feel what I feel. If they're not in the war zone, but looking at it from afar, they won't be really able to feel it viscerally. But giving readers the opportunity to encounter and reflect, even if only a tiny bit, on the reality of war—that's already something.

How do I cope with these experiences? It's helpful to be in touch with photographers in Ukraine. They'll tell me things like, "I went to photograph Kharkiv, but the hotel got shot up", and all of my own hardships start to seem very petty. When you're always in contact with people on the other side, you can manage to stay afloat.

We show photographs from the war every single day. Sometimes it can feel like there's a concrete wall in front of us that keeps getting thicker and thicker, and we're just endlessly striking at it with tiny hammers. This wall is hardening, muffling any sounds, but I hope that one day we'll accidentally hit a pebble in the wall that will make the whole thing crumble. The main thing is to keep chipping away, and the more people do it, the greater the certainty that someday that moment will come.

Communications director at Meduza. Worked at the Help Needed foundation. One of the organizers of the project "Let's Help" that helps Ukrainians affected by the war

A black and white portrait of a woman with blonde hair, looking slightly to the side. The background is filled with large, bold, black text that reads "KATERINA ABRAMOVA" repeated multiple times in a grid-like pattern.



KATERINA ABRAMOVA

In Russian media, there's always been a big debate about where to draw the line between journalism and activism. I think that we're journalists, not activists, and we're trying to stay that way. At the same time, in the past few years my colleagues and I have run several charitable campaigns: one called "Let's Help" in support of Ukrainian civilians, another—a marathon in support of political prisoners. There's no textbook answer on how to strike a balance between activism and journalism. It's up to us to decide where that line is every time.

If you've left Russia, you're already in a fairly privileged position. Obviously, there are plenty of challenges here. Let's leave aside issues of security and just consider access to information: you can read, watch and listen to whatever you want to. And if you happen to know another language, it opens up the whole world to you.

People read Meduza in a lot of countries, but our main priority is readers inside Russia—there are still millions. They're in a completely different situation from us, but they rely on our work. They need the news, and they need to sense that they're not alone, that they haven't lost their minds, that they're not the only ones who see what's happening.

I have a dream of opening a restaurant, I've thought about it on and off for many

years. Last winter such an opportunity came up—I received a proposal to participate in the opening of a new project and there was enough money to make it happen. I was thinking: "What if I quit my job and start a new life?"

I was imagining how I would think through the menu, in detail... and then Navalny was killed, and all of those fantasies dissipated. I understood that the only thing I wanted was to be in an editorial office. I don't need any other kind of life. Maybe someday, but definitely not now.

On the one hand, it's all atrociously hard; on the other, it's awfully interesting work. I have the impression that I'm on the pages of history as it unfolds. I think, for non-Russians who participate in our crowdfunding efforts, what we do is like something straight out of Star Wars, Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings.

It's a story of resistance that may seem doomed to fail. It's the archetypical story of struggle and overcoming adversity, when a group of random idiots strive towards an unattainable goal. These stories give us hope. And we're the characters inside one such story.

So, the hope is still there. It's easy to forget about it, but it's a constant presence. If you have no hope, at some point you'll just grind to a halt.



A black and white portrait of a man with short hair and a neutral expression. The image is heavily edited with large, bold, black text overlays. On the left side, the word "SULTAN" is repeated vertically, and below it, the name "SULEIMANOV" is written vertically. On the right side, the word "MANOV" is repeated vertically. The text is a thick, sans-serif font, creating a graphic and abstract effect over the subject's face.

SULTAN SULEIMANOV

I think journalists have two roles: telling people what they want to know and telling people what they don't want to know. In the latter case, you need to not only understand an issue, but also convince readers that they should know about it, even if they never wanted to hear about it in the first place. These days our readership is tired of war; they read the news less and less, but we need to keep writing about it.

This goes for not just the war, but also other, less global issues. We often hear from readers things along the lines of: ok, so some journalists exposed a corrupt official, but instead of going to prison, he got promoted. So then they ask themselves: why did I read about this? And then they get mad at journalists. So why should people know about this stuff? It's like choosing between eating potato chips tonight or losing weight in six months. If you don't read about disagreeable things, it will be easier in the moment, but then six months or a year later you'll wonder: who are these new people in power and why is this guy unjustly imprisoned?

Over the past year and a half, I've been interested in artificial intelligence and whether or not it will kill journalism. I think that as soon as AI learns to write news items and simple texts, it will turn into a kind of media junk food. A lot of people will read what AI produces, it's possible it will even be tailored to their needs: if you want, you can read the news with curse words, with emotions, long-form or short-form. It will be a mass-market, cheap, and superficial product, but it will be what people want. Traditional media will become an elite product, a handmade craft without the use of machines. The wealthy will be able to order news from real people and be informed about things that the masses won't know about.

It's a really dangerous trajectory. When journalists think about this, they probably see themselves working in these elite media outlets. We'll stick around, they say, our audience will shrink, we'll have to ask them for more money, but we won't produce junk food. I'm afraid that, just based on the theory of probability, most of us will end up training a model to retell the latest Kim Kardashian scandal.

Another dangerous trend is the personalization and fragmentation of media. With

AI, a small team can produce an exhaustive amount of content. We could end up with each school running its own little media outlet, with audiences splintering into various "bubbles". At the same time, if you look at it from a positive angle, each community will be able to get exactly the type of information that it's interested in.

As a news journalist, I still get a kick from major current events. My eyes light up and I get straight to work. These "highs" are incredibly important for journalists even though they can also lead to a burn-out. But they bring you back to basics, back to your roots. You're overloaded, deadlines are looming, your boss is breathing down your neck. Then something major happens—and off you go. What deadlines? You write everything in 10–20 minutes. No excuses like "I'll send it tomorrow, I didn't have time to finish". Then you get back to your routine, exhale, but that drive stays with you. I can't say it's a positive emotion—usually you're dealing with really upsetting news. But in those moments you pull yourself together, focus, and feel like your team is still working like a well-oiled machine.

It doesn't matter that you're on vacation, it doesn't matter that it's the middle of the night. You open your laptop and realize that instead of just sitting there clicking away anxiously, like you would as a reader, you can actually help your audience figure out what's going on.

POSTSCRIPT

Since 2021, when Meduza lost its advertising revenue because of its “foreign agent” status within Russia and launched its crowdfunding campaign, the founders, Ivan Kolpakov and Galina Timchenko, have, once every few months, addressed readers thanks to whom the publication exists. Usually, they send out these letters in moments when it seems like readers are in particular need of support. As you might guess, this often happens in the wake of distressing events (for example, after Navalny’s murder), although sometimes there are also pleasant occasions (like the publication’s 10-year anniversary).

In January 2022, a month before the start of full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine, Meduza’s founders sent out a letter, a fragment of which is presented below.

January 27, 5:25 p.m. Our 2022 wishlist.

A letter from Meduza’s founders

Here we are at last. Once again, we congratulate you on the arrival of 2022 and the end of 2021. For some reason, it seems like a very long time has passed since the previous letter. That’s probably an effect of the holiday season. Whatever the case, we have missed you terribly.

Regardless of the fact that January (again) turned out to be extremely gloomy (it’s hard to find the right word), we’re not losing hope. We have even made a short wishlist:

In 2022, we hope that:

1. We’ll have the strength to continue our work.
2. We’ll have the strength (and will) to rest when we need to.
3. Our friends and family will be healthy—and we’ll manage to see them more than we did last year.
4. All Meduza employees who have gotten COVID will make speedy and full recoveries.
5. Torture in prisons will cease.

The following points were difficult to formulate in a way that didn’t make them sound like slogans. So apologies in advance.

6. “Foreign agents”, “undesirables”, and “extremists” will be fully rehabilitated.
7. Navalny and other political prisoners will be released.
8. The Putin era in Russia will come to an end.
(And perhaps the most important?)
9. Our readers will continue to be with us.
10. And no war of any kind.

(...) We know that this all seems naive and implausible. But so what? Be realistic—demand the impossible. In contemporary Russia, that sounds more appropriate than ever.

We made this list as a clever lead-up (to the extent that it’s possible) to a question we’d like to ask you. What are you hoping for this year? What are your expectations? What do you dream of? Tell us, please. You can simply reply to this letter. If you don’t object, we’ll publish a few of your responses in future letters.

Thank you for still being here

Every letter that Meduza's founders send out gets hundreds of replies from readers. The editors keep them all. Moreover, the most interesting always get posted to our General channel on Slack, so that all Meduza journalists and editors can read them. In the most difficult of times, these letters inspire us and give us strength. The curators of the "No" exhibition selected some of these letters specifically for this book.

You are our support and our aid. Thanks to you I don't feel like I'm alone.

Take care of yourselves, and thank you for still being here.

Thank you so much for this end of year letter. It was a clear and humane reminder that whoever we are we need news, and hope, and the shelter of each other. May the brightest blessing of freedom for both Russian and Ukraine come to pass in 2025.

I wish you fortitude and endurance — your news is critically important for me, as it is for millions of other readers. Not everything is within our power, but let us improve the world a little bit, at least in our own small orbit. Let it be a neighbor, or a mail carrier. It doesn't matter, whoever is around us. Do that which we have control over. Take care of yourselves. Don't burden yourselves with responsibility for the entire world. Thank you, dear friends. Your reporting and commentary help our faltering belief that someday a reasonable social order will once again be established in our abandoned homeland. Please continue your efforts. They give us hope.

Dear Meduza! You can't imagine how important your news and beloved podcast, "What Happened?" are for people in Russia. You help us not only to get news, but to bolster our spirits; with you, it feels like we're not alone, that everything that's happening here is not normal. Thank you so much, I wish you more of the most generous sponsors possible. Take care, please.

It's so wonderful to be alive and get letters from you for

so many years. Regardless of (alas, it's often something terrible) the occasion.. I read them often. Your letters are so timely that I get goosebumps. I can't imagine how you keep doing this — hanging on. (...) I admire you with all my strength. Thank you. For my childhood, my youth...an innumerable number of projects, the best articles. For all the great authors, longreads, reporting... And for continuing to exist. The love in you is so strong!!! Thank you. You're the best. The very best.

Dear Meduzochka, an enormous thank you. For existing, for writing such important things for us. You find strength within yourselves and you give us strength. There are no words to describe everything that's inside me. I just wanted to thank you.

Thank you, guys, for everything you do! Once I've read a letter from you, I feel a little lighter, especially when I realize that I'm not the only one struggling right now.

Thank you for your support — I feel like crap :(But I have faith!!! In the fatal faith-hope-love trifecta, I am still holding on to the first. We will defeat the darkness!!!

Dear Meduza, thank you for just being close all this time. It made it less frightening for us and less lonely. Even inside Russia right now, it all seems a little less hopeless, because thanks to you I know how many people remain human and continue to resist in these dark times. Against all odds and in spite of everything, my word of the year was the word "hope".

Thank you for existing. Thank you for not surrendering. Thank you for giving us hope. Thank you for trying to figure out and explain what's going on.

Hi, Meduza. May your hopes come true!

AFTERWORD

Help the continuing resistance. Help Meduza

We conceived of this exhibition as a way to draw attention to Meduza and to the state of journalism as a whole. Recent years have been harrowing for our profession, and there is a general consensus that the industry is in deep crisis. There are people who believe that journalism won't survive at all.

All the same, we haven't joined the skeptics. We still believe that without journalism there can be no freedom and democracy. If we want to avoid a future devoid of meaningful journalism, we must fight for our profession: for standards, for independence, for the right to speak our minds and to go our own way. And for maintaining the trust of our readers.

Many people are convinced that the journalists who need to defend their right to professional activity are not those who live in some far-off, troubled region or countries without freedom of expression. Employees of even the most successful institutions in the U.S. and Europe, like the Washington Post or Gazeta Wyborcza, experience pressure from their governments or media owners. And those who have no experience interacting with state censors have to deal with the no less complex phenomenon of self-censorship.

Meduza was established in the European Union in 2014 because we couldn't launch a media outlet free of censorship in Russia. Unfortunately, we quickly realized that Europe provides journalists and civil activists a sense of security, but not real security. Even here, journalists and activists are beaten, killed, threatened and attacked in the most diverse and sophisticated ways.

Of course, journalism rarely lives up to expectations and generally arouses little sympathy. Journalists deliver bad news. Journalists "spread narratives". Journalists don't say what audiences want to hear. Journalists make mistakes. Journalists are either unable to keep up with social changes or rush them too much. Journalists are either too partisan or, on the contrary, too indifferent to politics. Journalists behave like human rights activists or, conversely, occupy the supposedly convenient position of an outside observer. The list of grievances could be endless, and many of them are indeed justified.

Nonetheless, journalists continue to do what they are supposed to by default: gather information and report on what needs to be reported — regardless of the price they pay for it. As we see it, the media is not only the cause of many problems, but also their solution. The media not only contributes to a deepening of social rifts, but also helps to build bridges between enemy camps. It's no coincidence that bridges are the first things to get blown up during war.

Media in exile literally act as a bridge between different parts of society and different countries. With the reemergence of dictatorships worldwide, such publications are becoming more and more common. At the same time, they are teetering on the edge of survival.

Meduza has been outlawed in Russia — and our freelance journalists, who do clandestine reporting there, work under the threat of imprisonment. The slightest mistake could cost them their freedom or even their lives. Meduza, despite operating in exile, was at one point a successful business, but our advertising model was destroyed by the state, which declared our publication first a "foreign agent" and then an "undesirable organization". Because of this, we are no longer in a position to earn money — we can only collect donations. Moreover, we can only collect them abroad and not where most of our readership lives because in Russia any interaction with Meduza could lead to criminal prosecution.

Meduza works for readers all over the world, but our top priority and the biggest reason we continue our work is to deliver honest news to people in Russia surrounded by propaganda. Our site is blocked in Russia, but we are constantly finding new ways to circumvent censorship in order to deliver our work to all readers, everywhere, regardless of their views. They need the news. In today's conditions, under a brutal dictatorship, news helps save lives.

If you believe even a little in the future of journalism, help us right now. Don't put it off. Your donation could be critical for Meduza. Recurring donations are better than one-time contributions, but we'll be grateful for any help.



No. The Exhibition
Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien
April 26 – July 6, 2025

Some participants have chosen to remain anonymous or use pseudonyms to protect their safety. Meduza is outlawed as an “undesirable organization” in Russia, and any collaboration with us is a punishable offense that can land you in prison.

Artists

Anonymous Artist (Russia), Aleksey Dubinsky (Russia), Alexander Gronsky (Russia), Stine Marie Jacobsen (Denmark/Germany), Semyon Khanin (Latvia), Gülsün Karamustafa (Turkey), Teobaldo Lagos Preller (Chile), Cristina Lucas (Spain), Pavel Otdelnov (Russia), Sergei Prokofiev (Russia), Fernando Sánchez Castillo (Spain), SUPERFLEX (Denmark), Pilvi Takala (Finland), Alisa Yoffe (France/Russia)

Narrators

Katerina Abramova, Alex, Katya Balaban, Taisia Bekbulatova, Zhenia Berezhna, Anton Dolin, Alexander Gronsky, Anton Khitrov, Ivan Kolpakov, Elena Kostyuchenko, Andrei Pertsev, Svetlana Reiter, Kristina Safanova, Sultan Suleimanov, Galina Timchenko, Vitaly Vasylchenko, Lilia Yapparova

Curators

A.B., Ivan Kolpakov, Galina Timchenko

Exhibition team

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Lead editor Anton Khitrov
Art director Yaroslav M.
Designers Anastasia Yarovaya,
Alisa Milyukhina, Nadia A.
Photographer, designer Daria G.
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Agata S.
Technical support Alex, Fisha Momkin,
Nikita S., Kirill B.
Games editor K.B.

English language editors

Kevin Rothrock, Eilish Hart,
Sam Breazeale, Emily S.

German language editor

Vitaly Vasylchenko

Administrative support
Jekaterina Levina

Documentary project

Author and director Mikhail Durnenkov
Cameraman, editor, photographer
Artur Bergart
Producer Ekaterina Sokolov

Exhibition space

Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien

Exhibition design

Tom Postma design

Equipment

Eidotech

Support from Meduza's side

Aleksandr Amzin, Jekaterina Artjušina,
Anna Ch., Artem Efimov, Tatiana Ershova,
Marat K., David Kharebov, Sascha K. O.K.,
Emily Laskin, Yulia Leonkina, Ulyana M.,
Kristina Safanova, Sultan Suleimanov,
Sonia V., Vitaly Vasylčenko, Violeta
Veištorta, Sofia Vorobyova

Exhibition partners

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Fritt Ord Foundation
Stichting Editors Choice
JX Fund
Committee to Protect Journalists
Network of Exiled Media Outlets

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Alisa Yoffe — Olga Alter, Andrey
Aranovich, Giorgi Arziani, Zurab
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Depaule, Evgeniya Filatova, Jan
Froehlich, Lika Gakharia, Davit
Khipashvili, Filip Khulamkhanov,
Arsenii Morozov, Louise Morin, Larisa
Petrova, Mariam Pesvianidze, Baia
Tsikoridze, Emelyan Zakharov
Sergei Prokofiev — Augustenborg Project

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and

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with us all these years to make our
products better.
Everyone who participated in our
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helping Meduza survive.

No. The Book
Riga: Meduza. 2025

Some participants have chosen to remain anonymous or use pseudonyms to protect their safety. Meduza is outlawed as an “undesirable organization” in Russia, and any collaboration with us is a punishable offense that can land you in prison.

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Editors A.B., Ivan Kolpakov,*

Galina Timchenko

Essay editor Margarita Latourova

Essay authors anonymous mother

of a Meduza journalist in Russia

(Loneliness), anonymous Meduza

journalist in Russia (Censorship),

Anton Khitrov (Hope), Ilya

Krasilshchik (Resilience),

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WAG