**My mother’s dress**

One day, during my first semester in Germany, I got to talking to a classmate of mine. We talked about the *sovietwave* trend: music in Russian, such as MolchatDoma, or shabby, baggy clothes à la Balenciaga. I asked him what he saw in that, and he said: well, it's cool! At that moment I caught myself thinking that I was probably traumatised by the second-hand, often wrong-sized, old clothes from my childhood. And to accept this easy, self-critical style, I had to not have it as my own past.

Between 18 and 21 August 1991 ordinary Soviet citizens were anxious: while Tchaikovsky's ballet Swan Lake was being repeated on all TV channels for three of those days, the fate of the whole country was being decided in the Kremlin. Only when everything had happened was it announced that the Soviet Union no longer existed and that all the former republics had gained their independence.

It was the shock of the post-Soviet nineties, when Coca-Cola was already in place but no money for it yet. Almost all the inefficient Soviet factories were abruptly shut down, leaving millions of people jobless. People simply took everything out of their homes and tried to sell or exchange it for food. Often bankrupt businesses paid their salaries in products, as was the case with my mother, who regularly brought home cuts of old-fashioned, barbed suit cloth from her dying textile factory. One day we were a little luckier: my stepfather brought home a whole box of oiled sardine liver. It was disgusting for my brother and me, but at least it was edible. Thank you)

The market economy, which did not exist in Soviet times, was just beginning to take its first unsure steps. Those who were bolder and younger tried their hand at small retail: they went to Turkey, China and Eastern European countries, bought clothes there and sold them back home. After the standard cotton dresses and Soviet school uniforms, there seemed suddenly to be jeans, colourful jumpers, snickers - everything that was either forbidden or impossible to get in Soviet times.

My project is an attempt to reprocess this childhood trauma: to visualize how I perceive these old things now, to digest my post-Soviet childhood. I reflect not only on the trauma of poverty in clothing choices, but also on the trauma of school uniforms, strictly gendered snowflake and bunny New Year costumes, and the difficulty to show my individuality. In the fashion pictures, I try to aestheticise the 'old' clothes that many of my generation and culture and I have complicated, painful feelings about. It helps me realise my past and no longer see it in terms of a victim, it removes the resentment I felt towards my parents, time and circumstances.

The exhibition is multimedia and is meant to appeal to all channels of perception: hearing, smell, touch, sight and taste. The photo series consists of stylised pictures with vintage clothes from the 90s and children's photos (of me and my Russian-speaking Instagram followers)

Since February 2022, everything has changed. In my life, in the lives of my Ukrainian contacts and friends and in the history of my country, Russia. At first, I decided that my rag-tag project, with its almost imperial, nostalgic memories, was totally inappropriate and not worth finishing and showing. But when international brands announced their exit from Russia and my co-citizens formed huge queues at IKEA, Zara and Uniqlo, instead of all protesting together in some way against the war or blocking their social media and press, it scratched me hard.

I saw that my generation, once traumatised by childhood poverty, does not yet see the value in democracy and freedom. In democracy and freedom, which in those three days between August 18 and 21, 1991, unfortunately, were apparently given to us too easily. That the unspoken pact of the oil 2000s "we let you earn, dress, mortgage and go to the sea - you are not interested in politics" still works.