AN EXHIBITION OF WOMEN'S SOCIALLY ENGAGED GRAPHIC ART





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parallel program





FEIIIRET PERCI. 2

Bettina, Ilmira Bolotyan, Oksana Bryukhovetskaya, Irina Vasilyeva, Natalia Vasyutina, the GANDHI crew, Alexandra Gart, Gluklya / Natalia Pershyna-Yakimanskaya, Nika Dubrovskaja, the ZHENA crew, Anna Zvyagintseva, ZuliF, Alevtina Kakhidze, Alexandra Kachko (Zoa Art), Koivo, Alina Kopitsa, Lydia Korovkina, Helena Laukkanen, Lilli Loge, Victoria Lomasko, Mannaya Kasha [Semolina], Maria Ivanova, Mikaela, Marina Naprushkina, Emma Narhova, Polina Petrushina, Julia Reznikova, Anna Repina, Yana Smetanina, Asya Umarova, Umnaya Masha [Smart Mary], Tatiana Faskhutdinova, Hagra, Lena Hades, Elke Steiner



photo: Olga Ahmeteva

The first Feminist Pencil took place in 2012 at Fabrika, a hostel in Moscow. It featured just six artists — the most that the space and our budget would allow. The second Feminist Pencil is happening as part of the MediaImpact Festival at the 5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art and has been organized with support from the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation. Their participation has allowed us to significantly increase the number of artists, publish this catalogue, and, most importantly, to organize a series of roundtable discussions and master-classes where feminist artists from around Russian and beyond could share their experiences with one another.

It became apparent to us that we needed a new, independent field of action after an incident at the Vera Mukhina Museum on March 8, 2013, when the works of Victoria Lomasko and Umnaya Masha were abruptly removed from the Feminism from the Avant-Garde to Today exhibition under the pretext of there not being "sufficient space" for the works, as well as their "bad quality". The true reason behind the curators' sudden decision was that one of Lomasko's drawings alluded to Pussy Riot. After the Feminist Initiative group issued a statement in protest, the curators responded with a statement accusing us of "self-promotion" and "provocation" denigrating the essay Nadia Plungian wrote for the exhibit about our generation of artists, and spurning her unpaid labor as a coordinator and curator.

There was a time when each of us preferred working on our own professional projects, focussing on drawing and researching the history of graphic art. Now, we have recognized the necessity of creating a platform that people with views and interests close to our own can take part in and benefit from.

It is important to us that the two of us — an art historian and an artist--are working together collaboratively. The contemporary art world is a calque of society at large, forcing hierarchies onto people — something we have both personally encountered. In several publications, texts about the first Feminist Pencil exhibition did not refer to Lomasko as one of the curators. We are both proudly responsible for the ideology behind our show and insist that we be mentioned together in the press, thereby overturning the post-Soviet archetype of the 'secondary' role of the artist-curator alongside the professional art historian-curator.

From our experience at the Mukhina Museum, we have learned that there is such a thing as normative feminist art in Russia, which forces political and social topics out of the galleries. The purpose of our exhibition is to emphasize the civic significance of feminism, which is often overlooked in Russia, and offer artists the opportunity to speak directly about what shapes their lives. It may be motherhood or childlessness; making it as a woman artist or domestic violence; relationships between various generations of women; divorce; abortions; histories of personal resistance; while the list of subjects is endless, in the artistic milieu, these topics are rarely addressed outside of private conversations.

Moreover, descriptions of women's lives are rarely in the first person: for many women, it is difficult to step out of the role of being an object and begin investigating the things that directly affect them. The tendency of female authors to speak openly about their problems has been, to some extent, explored in Russian literature and film, but is nearly absent in visual art. We would like to see this changed.

We are also interested in the figure of the woman researcher whose work deals with social marginalization and, in one way or another, incorporates the problematics of women's experience. This includes work on social inequality, the relationship between the capital city and the provinces, disability, issues related to healthcare, education, human trafficking, persecution on the basis of sexual orientation, nationality, age, and more.

The title of our exhibition refers to a political broadside called the Fighting Pencil, which was published by the Leningrad Lithographic Workshop in the 1940s. We are working at our own risk, against our own fear, bringing together artistic tasks and socially relevant subjects. Today, it is not only the everyday lives of women that are invisible in the public sphere, but also their contributions to the art world, to science, and to public life in general. We believe that women artists with a feminist mind-set who speak honestly and directly have the potential to change not only contemporary graphic art, but to influence the opinions of a segment of society and to sharpen the focus on a number of problems that are important for women, but considered too boring for prestigious gallery shows.

We hope that the Feminist Pencil will be not only an art show, but a movement uniting women artists, a platform where they will be able to hear one another and publicly initiate a dialogue.



Rosa Luxemburg was a woman among men, a person with disabilities among able-bodied people, and a foreigner in a strange land - but these are not the first things typically mentioned about her. Why is that? Could it be because the political groups that invoke Luxemburg in their ongoing battle for social justice and equal opportunity for people of diverse social positions have yet to fundamentally reconsider the meaning of these points of departure? It seems as though these groups still believe that the significance of distinguishing characteristics such as sex/gender, nationality/ethnicity, health/disability, age, and so on will, for the most part, be erased when class is abolished and resources are justly redistributed. Or is it that the dominant perceptions of the distinguishing characteristics listed above are also, on a deeper level, the results of power relationships which also have to be exposed and questioned? Nearly forty years ago, sociologist Ursula Scheu wrote that, "For Marx, the primary so-called "natural division of labor" was initially "none other than the division of labor during sexual intercourse..." He follows this, writing that "the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act[, then]: subsequentely there arose that division of labour which develops spontaneously or «naturally» by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g. physical strength), needs, accidents, and so on" and "the naturally occurring division of labor in the family." Where do these "natural advantages" come from? Since when do needs, as Marx defines them, determine social relations? Since when have 'accidents' been an explanation for anything?"¹ In his description of the division of labor between the sexes, Marx remains in our debt, failing to expose the mechanisms of power that form the foundation for capitalist relations of production, just as C.G. Jung failed in his theory of psychoanalysis to overcome biologically determined sexual dualism in his characterization of the male and female principles (animus and anima). Forty years ago, Ursula Baumgardt, who was, among other things, the Dean of the Jung Institute, wrote much the same: «The fact that it is constantly denied that women have a capacity for logic has to do with the character of the patriarchy. It is due to this that Jung attributes emotional qualities to the anima and by extension, women at large: she serves as the compensation [...] for men's unsuccessful effort – she is their solace . [...] Woman is presented as the weaker sex, one of the patriarchy's clichés that allows men to proceed from the position of power. At the same time, it forces men to do this, which makes them-from within the sexual duality - slaves to their own position.»²

Jung was far from being the only author to describe women as being a 'naturally' sensitive, empathetic, and caring counterpart to men. How should we evaluate these attributed characteristics? To answer this, let us turn to the graphic works collected by curators Victoria Lomasko and Nadia Plungian in the Feminist Pencil 2, a project unprecedented in its scope.

Sensitivity emanates from the works of Glukla, ZuliF, Irina Petrushina, Ilmira Bolotyan, Alexandra Gar, and Lena Heidiz, who invite the viewers into their subjective, fragile, dream-like and nightmarish worlds, posing riddles whose solutions remain shrouded in darkness. Empathy toward the marginalized is at the core of many of the pieces, including those of Tatiana Faskhutdinova, Umnaya Masha, Yana Smetanina, Victoria Lomasko, Oksana Brukhovetskaya, and Gahndi. These artists direct the viewer's eyes toward the so-called margins of society — or is it the blind spot at its center? We're asked to look at women whose deprivation is the direct result of their femininity, proceeding from the social roles forced onto them. These incisive visual statements testify to the significant degree to which social precarity affects women. Care is presented as a social expectation, a behavior that is socialized in women, which, all too often, is only met with forms of violence and abuse. These painful facts are manifest in the works of Alexandra Kachko, Alina Kopitsa, Mikaela, Yulia Reznikova, Anna Repina, and Maria Ivanova.

Natalia Vasyutina, Anna Zvyagintseva, Hagra, Emma Narkhova, Nika Dubrovskaya, ZHENA, Alevtina Kakhidza, Koivo, Lidia Korovnika, Umnaya Masha, Helena Laukkanen, Lilli Loge, and Marian Naprushkina speak of the often overpowering social pressure to conform to accepted norms of feminine behavior and life choices. Their work challenges mainstream images, at times mockingly superimposing them into novel contexts. For them, it is not a question of social expectations vis-à-vis "feminine" identities, but about the suppression of the formation of individual, un-prescribed identities outside the realm of societal expectation.

Elke Steiner and Bettina pull their heroines from the remote corners of history, set them in the center of their comics, and thus expand the horizons of historiographical differentiation. Finally, Asya Umarova and Mannaya Kasha critically scrutinize the role of women in contemporary civic activity.

Is there such a thing as women's art? This claim could be made, on the basis of the attributes discussed above. From the examples included in the Feminist Pencil 2, women's art sheds light on society's blind spots, giving voice to people who are usually marginalized. It decodes encrypted internal voices, whose presence is not anticipated in the public sphere. Women's art is brave and powerful--adjectives more often applied to men. Alongside sensitivity, empathy, and care, we find accurately observed social distortions and incisive analysis of societal norms that seek to redefine the realm of what is possible. The prism through which we see the world determines how we describe it. We are not born women (or men) — we are molded into them. As Ursula Baumgardt emphasizes, it is up to each woman to decide whether she will choose a different path for herself. «As women, we must finally acknowledge these definitions of femininity as masculine projections and constructs, and stop accepting them blindly as facts and living in accordance with them. Unless we do this, we will continue to share in the responsibility and blame for something men don't need to — and can't — do for themselves: furthering a false image of «woman», while we continue to offer up the obsolete image and thereby bolster its validity.» A picture is worth a thousand words. In supporting the Feminist Pencil 2, an exhibition and educational project, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation seeks to further visual art and graphic art in particular as accessible pathways not only for discussing social misperceptions, but also for addressing each viewer, and appealing to their individual duty to evaluate the conditions of their own lives.

Tina Farni, Director, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Moscow

- 1. Ursula Scheu: Wir werden nicht als Mädchen geboren, wir werden dazu gemacht. Frankfurt/M 1977, S. 27. Цит:. Маркс. Немецкая идеология. Глава: Фейербах.
- 2. Ursula Baumgardt: König Drosselbart und C.G. Jungs Frauenbild. Kritische Gedanken zu Anima und Animus. Olten 1979. S. 79.

Victoria Lomasko

My favorite definition of feminism comes from my mother. She said, "Feminism is self-worth." That is to say that feminism doesn't come from some external battle with someone over something, but from personal growth — the development of your own sense of self-worth and capacity to respect others. These internal changes breed new ways of interacting with the world; they invalidate the hierarchical structures in which you're supposed to curry the favor of some people and dismiss others.

Before, I would have never given up making my own work for months at a time in order to organize a large group show of women's art. "Women are a dime a dozen," "Women are man's best friend," "Women get in each other's way, they're always competing with one another," these are the things I'd been raised to believe by society, through verbal and non-verbal signals. It's hard to forget these clichés once they've been beaten into your skull. Curating The Feminist Pencil allowed me to put my new feminist principle, "Respect and opportunity for all," into practice.

Over and over, I encountered my own doubts and fears along this journey, alongside accusations of separatism. "Why aren't there male artists in the show?" Notes of disapproval can be found even on the pages of this catalogue, in the statements of some of the artists themselves. The Feminist Pencil was conceived as a platform where women—and not just artists—could openly share their professional and personal experiences through their work and in conversation; form alliances to further their professional growth (organizing exhibitions, publications, festivals, renting studio spaces together, and so on); and, when necessary, stand up against violence together. Our ultimate goal is for women to become completely confident in their own strength and independent development.

Many of the women who participated in The Feminist Pencil simultaneously took part in other projects where they worked with men. Male artists put on whatever shows they please and ally themselves with whomever they want. However, the tiny handful of Russian initiatives such as The Feminist Pencil, which seek to foster female solidarity, always cause alarm: "Won't men's rights suffer from this?"

Another reason a 'women's show' gets some female artists up in arms is the anxiety that "You're claiming that women's art is different from men's art, and it's not!" Nadia and I heard this from a number of our acquaintances. I believe that these words reflect the fear stemming from the common perception is that 'women's' is a term of disparagement when it stands in front of 'art'. The art it

describes is not serious: it's minor, inadequately expressive, lacking energy and coherence - in a word, there's less talent in it. For this reason, many female artists insist they be called 'artists'— in the masculine gender – and always appreciate compliments like, "Looking at this piece, I would have never thought a woman made it. This is real art." For people who see the world this way, a "women's show" is a losers' ghetto.

I don't believe that women's work is different from men's work in its technical aspects. However, women's art is distinguished by its subject matter and the smaller distance between the artist and the depicted subjects and events. This has to do with the place of women in society — it's easier for us to ally ourselves to the weak and invisible.

When I graduated from the University of Print Arts in 2003 and developed an interest in contemporary art, only two artists really gripped me: Gluklya and Olga Chernysheva. Both of them had graphic series in which, using symbolic images, they talked about our everyday lives and society (Olga Chernysheva's "Residents," 2004; Gluklya's "Café 'Odezhda' [clothes — trans.]," 2006). For me, both artists were true innovators in their time. However, their graphic series went largely unnoticed, and the artists became well-known for their videos, photography, performances, and installations instead. In the catalogue for the show "Contemplative Realism," Olga Chernysheva wrote, "The most important element of Russian realism is the modesty of the art, its desire to serve a higher purpose, which was replaced by the triumph of self-expression during the 20th century." For women who have no interest in taking on leading roles in the hierarchy of contemporary art, it's easier to remain modest.

A new generation of women artists who focus on social issues is very quickly evolving. They tend to draw on direct observation and depict concrete situations. Their works are stark, and they don't conceal their feminist orientation. When I was proofreading this catalogue, I took another look at all of the pieces and reread all of the artists' statements. It became very clear to me that we all complement one another; we are all moving in the same direction. We're part of a new wave of feminist art.

Nadia Plungian

I consider The Feminist Pencil and my collaboration with Vika Lomasko a huge success because this project has developed based on the principles I've always wanted to see shaping my work. First of all, it's at the intersection of art and human rights. Secondly, it promotes graphic art and returns civic significance to that genre. Finally, it creates a new, viable professional community that supports female artists and makes them feel in demand.

I believe that real and independent art should address the people, and that our focus on socially engaged graphic art is a very good format for that dialogue. It's wonderful that graphic art is back in the streets in the form of stencils, posters, and samizdat zines. It's even more exciting now than it was in Honore Daumier's day.

Being a female artist in our society isn't easy. Almost everyone I've talked to has, at one point or another, had to tolerate mockery and scorn in order to find a place in the professional world — only to feel out of place in the end anyway. There aren't many options for women artists: they can disappear into the shadow of an artist husband, devote their lives to their children, or to continue working independently just to remain invisible loners. I don't see any freedom in the choice between family and career. The Feminist Pencil was intended to be a platform to support women in art from a feminist position, to value them and show them respect, intending to inspire them to believe in their own power. We the artists are the ones who should be assessing the significance and value of our work, not gallerists or collectors. These are the foundations for building an independent path that will make itself heard and transform the life of the artistic community.

The Feminist Pencil demonstrates various facets of the societal problems that affect women. For this reason, it is especially important for me that women from all over the country participate, representing many different cities like Kazan', Grozny, Novosibirsk, Omsk, and St.Petersburg. It's possible that with time, each one of these cities will have their own centers for socially-engaged graphic art with laboratories for comics, illustration, graffiti, wheat paste posters and fan art.

In Russia, people have long since grown used to a mocking, condescending attitude toward the discussion of social issues. It's not only in the newspapers: among curators, art historians, and activists, one constantly hears people say things like "we're the ones forcing ourselves into a ghetto," "we're making up this inequality," and "we're blaming society for everything" instead of "being more friendly" and "looking for the cause in ourselves."

Hannah Arendt, Andrea Dworkin, and Lidia Ginzburg all described the

mechanism of assimilation and fear. Internalized stigmatization has been thoroughly analyzed by Michel Foucault, Theodore Adorno, and Judith Butler. But just reading these authors is not enough if we want to stand up for our own beliefs. We have to learn to speak directly about our own experience, unafraid to call things by their true names, to expose and acknowledge sources of xenophobia in our own behavior, and then, in the world around us. Only then can we begin talking about sensitivity to social issues in art.



BETTINA

RENNES

My work is predominantly in illustration and graphic literary adaptation. When I was in art school, I discovered Russian language and literature. I think it could be worthwhile to adapt works of Russian literature that are lesser known in the West into comics. My current research concerns independent comics and reporting.

In the broadest sense, feminism is the battle for equality between men and women and the defense of women's rights. Women are still, unfortunately, considered the weaker sex; the woman's task is to take care of children, cook, and maintain her personal appearance. It is hard for women to escape from this social cage. Feminism allows women to win back many things, including equal pay and control over their own bodies.

The poet André Breton once wrote that "Women are the future of men." I think The Feminist Pencil is an interesting project. Naturally, I feel close to its subject matter because I am a comics artist and, until recently, there were very few women working in comics, even in France. Their work was rarely recognized or awarded prizes.

Unfortunately, few of these women were interested in women's rights. The pioneer of feminist comics in France was Chantal Montellier. She created a prize for feminist comics called the Artemisia.

I believe that it's essential for us to come together in order to provide women artists the opportunity to speak out. I am grateful that The Feminist Pencil makes this possible.

I hope that this movement will continue to grow and become international. I enjoy interacting and sharing experiences with other female artists and I think that this platform is an opportunity for discussing feminism that is especially important for female comic book artists and graphic storytellers.

ИНГЕРВЬЮ С ЕЛЕНОЙ АЛЁХИНОЙ



"Interview with Elena Alyokhina, a staff member of the State Museum of Mikhail Bulgakov in Moscow"

This comic based on Elena Alyokhina's stories about Margarita Ivanovna Rudomino, the founder of the All-Russian State Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow. Alyokhina [had] heard this story, which deals with how women of various social strata survived in the 1920s, from her grandmother.

There is very little room for women in official history, they're forced to tell their stories themselves. It was important for me to reproduce this wholly female oral history that was passed down and retold by women to other women. I didn't want to change anything in the story; I preserved the flow of our original conversation.



comics ink, paper 2012



ILMIRA BOLOTYAN

MOSCOW

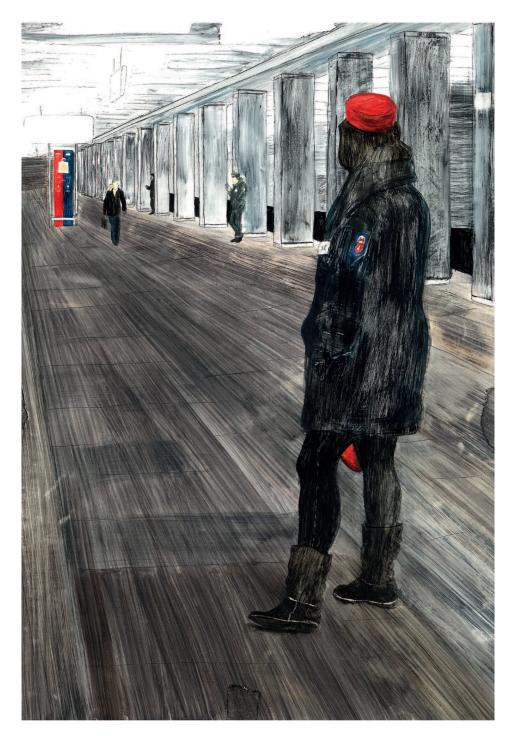
In drawing, I'm interested in the relationship between the tactile and the artificial, and the representation of contemporary mores. For me, feminism is first and foremost about women developing the self-worth and self-respect that makes it impossible for them to withstand degradation, assault and violence in any form, and provides them with the resources to support those in need.

I have always admired the work of Victoria Lomasko and Mikaela. I am in solidarity with their copious public statements. The participation of these and other remarkable female artists drew my attention to The Feminist Pencil. The show sheds light on acute social issues that are usually avoided or discussed in scornful tones.

Some Russian art writers use phrases like "women's art" and "overly feminine" to dismiss art made by women. The Feminist Pencil rejects this tendency, presenting 'the feminine' as a special phenomenon with a specific worldview and strategies for representing social reality. This show returns socially-engaged graphic art and women's issues to the professional art discourse— both in the world of visual art and society as a whole.

From where I stand, the Feminist Pencil is a socially- and culturally-oriented, altruistic and provocative action from an informal collective of feminist women artists that is based in transparent artistic practices (exhibitions, manifestos, individual speeches).

As a socio-cultural phenomenon, the movement is distinguished by the image of the world created by this group, a documentary approach, and the clearly defined social positions of the artists. It has an active influence on its milieu, striving to reform the injustice of the existing order and transforming it. Many of the artists combine their artistic and activist activities, volunteering at charitable organizations. In presenting their individual aesthetic perspectives on gender-related and social conflicts in contemporary society, the artists are striving to directly affect the fates of the archetypes and protagonists of their works.



graphic series oil on coated paper, 2012-13

"Metrorealism"

For over a year, I've been taking cellphone photos of people on the subway. I capture fellow passengers that catch my eye; not the ones who make an effort to stand out from the crowd, but the ones who, unintentionally, find themselves in unusual situations (for instance, accidentally synchronized motions between two strangers).

The photographs are the raw materials for my work. With expressive illustrations, I create realistic images of the photographs. However, even if this is realism, it is exaggerated. In my normal life, I don't openly stare at people on public transportation, and in fact, I intentionally do not wear my glasses since attentive observation is seen as a brute violation of personal boundaries among strangers. That's why I steal these images of Others using technology: so I may study and analyze them, sketch them in pencil, etch them in drypoint, and then amplify the results with paint.

I'm drawing these people, but I'm also drawing myself: my awkwardness, my tastelessness, my desire to stand out from the crowd, my alienation from others, my condescension. At the same time, I am accepting, integrating these people, accepting myself and life in general.

Emphasizing certain features and details or, on the contrary, drawing attention to the generic and universal, generalizing images is only a mechanism for coping with the everyday terrors of life in a megapolis and the daily experience of alienation.





OKSANA BRYUKHOVETSKAYA

KIEV

For the past several years, I have been working at the Visual Culture Research Center as a designer and curator for various exhibition projects. In 2011, Lesya Prokopeno and I curated an unusual exhibition called "Detstvo uncensored," [Childhood Uncensored — Trans.] which focused on the personal and social aspects of childhood and children's art, featuring children's drawings. In 2012, with Lesya Kulchinskaya we co-organized the exhibition "The Ukrainian Body," which was subsequently shut down by Serhiy Kvit, the president of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, which at that time housed the Visual Culture Research Center. The aim of the exhibition was to explore corporeality through the prism of Ukranian society. Seventeen Ukranian artists presented works that touched on 'the Ukrainian body' as a political, social, and sexual phenomenon.

Since 2011, I have been working as an artist and designer with the Feminist Ofenzyva group, as well as a number of leftist publications in Kiev, including Splin, Politicheskaya kritika, and Prostory, and most recently, with a new publishing project called Meduza.

I am very interested in corporeality — particularly women's experience of corporeality and how it is construed socially and politically. I believe in the idea that the personal is political—this is why feminism is important to me. Feminism is a progressive force which has had an impact on society and must continue to change it so that women, including myself, can feel like full-fledged members of society, and so that one of the forms of inequality that undermines love and life may be eliminated. We need to work together in order to achieve this, and an art show can be a form of this collective effort.

Isolating women and teaching them to compete for resources are tools the patriarchy uses to oppress women. Acting collectively, women can debunk many prejudices and have a significant impact on society. The cultural context is especially important for this kind of work, as it is a sphere where men have traditionally enjoyed privilege. A women artists' movement focusing on social issues is an opportunity to show solidarity and directly influence society.



artbook ink, gouache 2010

"Body #"

This series was inspired by my experience of motherhood, during a time when I was regularly taking my child to playgrounds. I used to take my child to playgrounds in courtyards all the time. At a certain point, my daughter started asking me questions, wondering why some people were digging in the trash: it's dirty there, are they allowed to do that? This was one of the stages of her socialization, and I needed to explain to her that there are people that have nothing to eat and have nowhere to live. At the same time, at the playgrounds, I'd hear other parents instilling disgust toward "these people" in their children; one shouldn't even sit on a bench after "one of them" has sat on it. I was shocked by the fact that along with physical hygiene, a very dangerous kind of "hygiene" was instilled in children. They were taught to see poor people as pariahs, evil, 'other,' essentially 'non-people. While trying to envelop childhood in the rosy wrapper of well-being, and to protect their children from "filth," when people go outside they are forced to come face to face with poverty, tragedy, hunger, and disease.

Seeing the homeless and impoverished in their own kind of ghetto, cut off from society by a wall of indifference, I began to ponder the isolation of various other groups of people. As the mother of a young child, I also felt cut off from society. My child and my home took over my entire life, I didn't have any time left to work or socialize. Mothers' and nannies' conversations at the playground were exclusively about children and the issues related to them, cutting us off from the rest of the world.

The concatenation of personal problems and social vulnerability can lead people to lose everything. This isn't only the case with the homeless, but also with the elderly, for whom old age often coincides with poverty and loneliness. An old woman on the street tried to sell me a little calendar with pictures of Victor Yanukovich glued into it for pennies, explaining that she didn't have the money to buy medicine.

In our society, women who have been affected by poverty, disease, and old age inspire disgust and disdain. In this series, portraits of such women are presented alongside cliché evocations of pleasure that hound us everywhere we go.



«And pleasure – it exists...»



«And the most happy day in a life exists as well...»



IRINA VASILYEVA

ST. PETERSBURG

I was born in 1970 in Leningrad into a family of engineers. I have an older brother and three children, two of whom are boys. I don't have a husband.

The main themes in my work are life as miracle and life as it is. Feminism is a necessary tool for protecting women's eyes, minds, and ears from masculine aggression. I suffer for Russian feminism. I don't know how it is in other countries, but our men break down women's psyches. Uncle Petyas and Vasya the alcoholics, what's there to say about them? It's not just that they can't take a decent photograph, they can't even turn on the TV. Perhaps the post-war period hasn't ended? Their mothers doted on over them, saying, "Sit up straight!" And there they are, sitting there.

I am participating in The Feminist Pencil because I want to show that feminism isn't a danger but a necessity.

To me, the movement to unite socially-oriented feminist artists seems difficult but essential.



"Women's Stories"

Everyday domestic life: laundry, cooking, sewing, and other handiwork, foraging for mushrooms in the forest and lying around on the couch all turn into sacred rites, accessible only to the few.





a series of lithographs 1988-2013



NATALIA VASYUTINA

NOVOSIBIRSK

I grew up in the stagnant era of the 1980s. For a while, I was what is known as a 'good girl,' and sincerely attempted to live my life according to the commandments prescribed by adults. However, there were a lot of these so-called commandments, and obeying all of them was unrealistic, since some of them were mutually exclusive. My thoughts growing up of why the skis of my consciousness didn't slide down the beaten path of the advice and admonishments of concerned adults eventually led me to feminism. Naturally, this didn't happen all at once.

For a long time, I sincerely believed that feminism was basically the belief that all men are jerks and that it had nothing to do with me. On the whole I am for peace and friendship; I still shave my legs. Ten years ago, I wanted to make a story about a civilization of women, but then I realized that I had no idea what it would be like. The contemporary idea of women seems like it was made up by someone other than women themselves. This was an interesting discovery.

For me, feminism isn't just about women having the same opportunities as men. It's about women learning about themselves. If we understand who we really are and what we really need from life, we can understand what to demand in terms of 'equal opportunities,' and how to better achieve this objective, which, after all, is just a milestone on the path to our ultimate goal: to expand the realm opportunities available to all of humankind.

I follow social processes rather than politics. I am most interested in how new stereotypes and attitudes related to gender are added on to 'time-honored' traditions, and how people attempt to make sense of all this in their minds and in their lives. Naturally, I analyze my own experience, uprooting whatever mental weeds I find. I want to know who I really am.

I am participating in The Feminist Pencil because I see it as my contribution toward shaping the society I live in. My worldview, as it appears in my work, may affect the worldview of those who see it; it's an exchange of information. Change is always preferable to stagnation because it opens up new horizons.



comics ink, digital graphics 2013

"It All Begins With Childhood"

The title of this series is intentionally banal and cliché, an overused and ostensible plagiarism.

All three of the comics address the theme of stereotypes — in this case, gender stereotypes. It is when we are children that we find out how we should look and act and think in order to survive in the world of people called "society." Very often, the information we receive is very paradoxical, especially when it has to do with gender roles.

Thus, the title of the series demonstrates the theme of the works and is in some ways its natural continuation.

The heroine of these comics, a girl named Nyasha, is the generalized image of the child (not necessarily a girl) inside all of us. This child is special and starts out pure, but is, at the same time, extremely defenseless. Really, all of the characters in these comics and not just Nyasha are "pure, special, and defenseless," no matter what they talk about amongst themselves or what they say to Nyasha.

When children imitate adults in their speech and behavior, it usually looks funny and seems kind of awkward (at least to me). I believe that this kind of response on the part of adults is not just because children are still inexperienced at playing 'adult' roles, but because many societal norms for behavior and patterns of thoughts are actually obsolete and illogical (if they were ever useful at all or had practical explanations). This is what children show us when — like a mirror — they imitate adults, which they do un-hypocritically, purely, and directly. This is what I am trying to show in my work.

Современная женщина...



ЖЕНСКАЯ ПРИРОДА!!!



GANDHI

OMSK – ST. PETERSBURG

I am a representative of the street art collective Gandhi, which has a rotating roster of participants. We believe that art should be free of charge and free of the power structures of galleries, museums, and collectors. This is why we make street art. Our works come out of our love for all living things, which we try to manifest visually, and then present this worldview in the everyday spaces we live in. In many cases, it becomes necessary to address acute social issues such as xenophobia, endangered species, etc. — in one way or another, we strive for our works to inspire joy in our unified and diverse world.

We have barely read any theoretical writings on feminism and for many years believed that we occupied a neutral position toward this movement. Then, recently, I started following the activities of some feminist artists online. After reading some articles and interviews and examining my own experience, I realized that 80% of visual art happens in accordance to the same patriarchal rules as it did 150 years ago. What we do is like a drop into the stream that is carving out a path in the battle for equal rights in the professional art world. Although none of us have called ourselves feminists.

We were inspired to participate in The Feminist Pencil by the work and personal charisma of its curators.

When it comes to a movement of socially-engaged female artists, we would like to see it be more open. Which is to say that we'd like to see a movement of people, both men and women, whose work deals with social themes, and who are kind and just toward one another, regardless of gender. We acknowledge that this desire is idealistic and, for the time being, almost impossible.



"Kusana, Niso, Aisulu, and Nargiz"

Our posters depict four women we saw in Central Asia, while traveling to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Women who look like this are common on the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg. They do unskilled and often heavy labor. They were forced to leave their homes and families because there was no work for them in their countries or because the salaries there were insufficient to support their families.

Migration from Central Asian and Caucasian countries is a global government policy problem that negatively affects many individuals; the difficulties stemming from it are twice as challenging if the individuals are women. Female migrant workers face prejudice other obstacles from two cultures simultaneously—their own and the foreign one they find themselves in. Sometimes, cultural gender stereotypes can be diametrically opposed to one another (for instance, ideas of how women should dress). In our country, for many people, the jihab is worrisome and unattractive. At the same time, when a woman from Central Asia wears normal Russian clothes (say, jeans and a t-shirt) men from her own country may judge her.

We decided to show these women wearing their standard national costume. Many Russians say judgmentally, "They behave as though they're at home." This isn't true. These people feel foreign, and our fellow citizens enforce this. We ourselves oftentimes do not feel at home in our own country.

This series is a fantasy hoping that people, regardless of their nationality, may feel at home in any country. By this we mean that they will not be compelled to lie and assimilate. That they may feel safe and free.

These images were posted on the streets of St. Petersburg, and we will be happy if even a single person who sees them will be inspired to think about the lives of female migrant workers.





ALEXANDRA GART

ST. PETERSBURG

I graduated from the Herzen State Pedagogical Institute with a major in graphic art in 2010, after which I apprenticed at the St. Petersburg Print Studio for a year. I worked as art teacher in a middle school at a children's arts academy.

I organize and curate exhibition programs and work as a technical consultant at Graficheskii cabinet [Graphics Office], a print graphics studio.



"Chou - repaire In "

"Our own and Others"

For many of the pieces in this series, I used my old school photos. Otherwise, I drew from memory/imagination.

Most of all, I wanted to convey how school (and childhood in general) made me feel in actuality, in contrast with the standard descriptions of "carefree," "spontaneous," "happy," and so on.





Clour aprus Th

graphic series etching 2012



GLUKLYA / NATALIA PERSHYNA – YAKIMANSKAYA CAHKT-ПЕТЕРБУРГ – АМСТЕРААМ

I have considered myself a feminist since 1998, after I illegally crossed the Czech-German border as part of the cyberfeminist alliance the Old Boys Network.

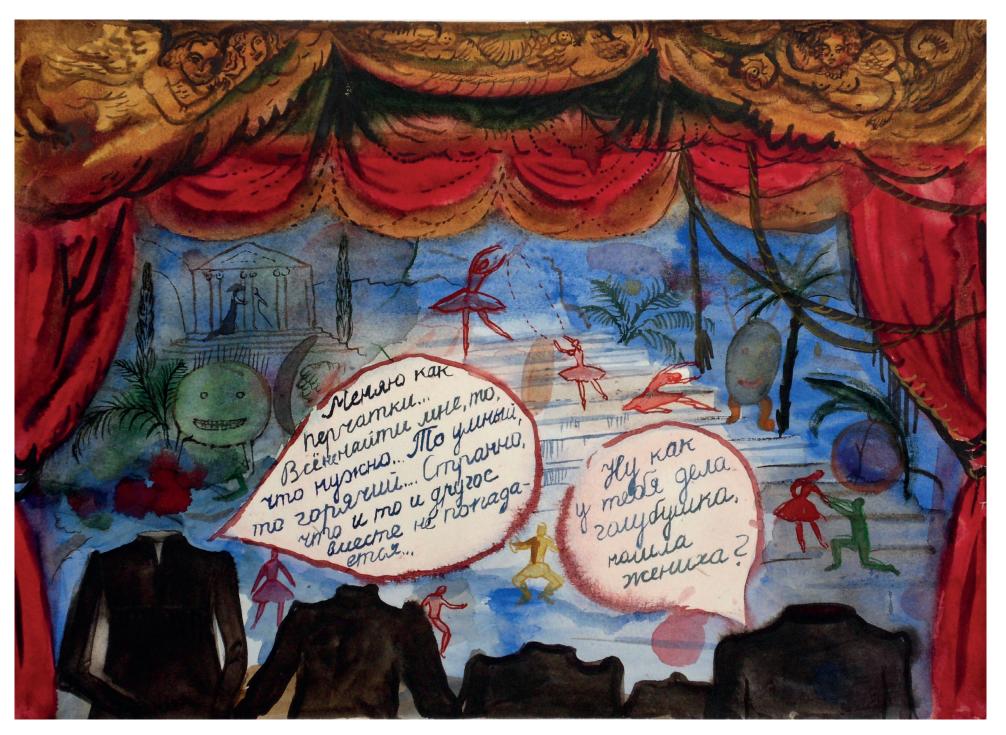
Despite the fact that I do not support separatism and don't believe that organizing exhibitions that exclusively feature female artists is a correct position, this is my second time participating in The Feminist Pencil because I believe it is important to support all attempts to change the patriarchal order of Russian society. I also believe that the presence of varying viewpoints at the show is crucially important. graphic series,part of the Clothes Café project watercolor 2006

"Kafe 'Odezhda' [Clothes Café]"

This series was part of the Clothes Café project (Anna Nova Gallery, St. Petersburg, 2006, curated by Ekaterina Andreeva). These drawings accompanied an installation that depicted a café populated by clothes instead of people. Several black suits sat at a table, with little clothes on their plates, which they were eating. There are usually pictures on cafe walls, and so there were pictures at the Clothes Café, too — except instead of people, they also showed only clothes.

The narratives in the pictures were inspired by fragments of conversation overheard in stores, at art shows, and on the street. I am playing with the chatter and gossip characteristic of contemporary neoliberal society, as represented by artistic cliques of the middle class bourgeoisie.

I remember how fun it was to go on these adventures with my notebook and talk to people. The main subjects of my research were "whining women" and "vain women." This idea came out of a long-term project, the Factory of Found Clothes and this series was the project's culmination, presenting its conclusions: aren't all of social mores just clothes in the end, if you take clothes to be a metaphor for consumption in human life or the absolute utilization of every single resource by the totalizing capitalist system?





NIKA DUBROVSKAJA

BERLIN

I was born in St. Peterburg. I studied with A.P. Zaitsev from the Vera Mukhina Higher School of Art. I devoted several years to copying Old Masters and Russian avant-garde paintings. In the 1990s, I emigrated. I have lived and worked in Poland, Israel, France, the US, and the Dominican Republic. I have made sculptures, installations, paintings; organized performances; and worked in book publishing.

For a long time, I believed that art was "eternal and sublime," a distant and enchanted land. However, it is impossible to talk about domestic violence, legal battles, or anything else from private life in a 'high style.' Discussing personal matters is considered shameful. However, I believe that institutionalized violence is exactly what needs to be discussed in the public sphere. For many Feminist Pencil participants, this show is their only chance to express and comprehend themselves, to formulate their positions and be supported. That's how it is for me. I have participated in a number of gallery and museum exhibitions, but this has been the only public space so far where I have been able to talk about what I am truly concerned with! Socially-engaged graphic art is the perfect genre for a personal conversation about society.

For the past several years, I have been raising my son and illustrating children's books. In my comic Divorce!, I am using the visual language I developed during this period. This is my first time drawing comics. It has been very difficult for me, and I am sincerely grateful to Vika Lomasko and Nadia Plungian for their help and support.



"Divorce!"

A year and a half ago, I got divorced. I thought that after we had fallen out of love, we would remain friends — after all, we had lived together for ten years and had a child.

But the divorce was awful! My husband appealed to three separate courts and wrote complaints about me to every possible administrative body. He demanded that I be denied custody and tried to take away my apartment. He's an American, and he tried to prove to the courts that as an exile from a third-world country, I was a marginalized artist and an unfit mother.

I was lucky: I won all the suits. However, I couldn't come to terms with the fact that I couldn't talk about what was happening to me. Societal models suggested that I see my story as an unfortunate circumstance, an accident — you live with someone for a while, and then they suddenly go off the rails. It's considered socially acceptable to talk about business, art, politics, and societal problems. Talking about ongoing and past family issues, legal troubles, and everything else that's thought of as private is considered shameful. Even my close friends would tell me, "Let go of it! Life goes on! Everything's fine now! Don't look back!"

The more I reflected on what had happened, the more I saw that my story was neither private nor an accident. This was something that happened to a lot of women. Our desire to love, give, and care for people is perceived as a duty, free labor in the most literal sense. The attempt to 'quit' is considered betrayal and is punished accordingly.

Sketches and socially conscious graphic art is the perfect genre for a private conversation about public issues. This is my first experiment in this genre. For the first time, I am telling strangers my own very personal story.





ZHENA

MOSCOW

The ZHENA crew is a loose and mostly spontaneous collective of people who make street art. Even when certain pieces have specific individual authors, we don't consider them the work of one person, as they are all the result of the group's activities. No art is created by just one individual. The artist is always surrounded by the people who inspired him or her, the people she shares experiences with, who provide her with resources and support. We don't want to devaluate the labor of those people. For this reason, we call ourselves a group. The word 'zhena' [wife — Trans.] was not chosen at random. It's meant as a challenge to traditional ideas about the role of women. It's also an acronym of the participants' initials.

The issues we address include discrimination, political protest, and the forms and limitations of art.

Feminism is a human rights movement that we wholeheartedly support. Feminism today is more sensitive to the many forms of discrimination. In addition to this, all marginalized groups — homosexuals, migrant workers, the disabled, the elderly — include women who are subject to two-fold oppression: as representatives of their marginalized group and as representatives of their sex. That's why we're feminists. The core of the group are women, and women will always hold positions of leadership in it.

We decided to participate in The Feminist Pencil because we believe our art is feminist and are happy to take part in this collective activity.



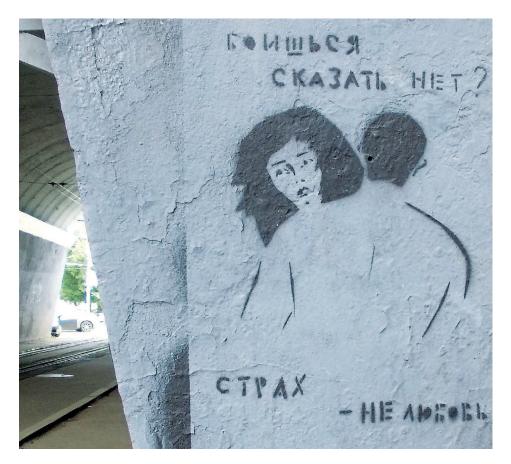
This series of stencils which directly address their viewers owes a lot to artist Mikaela's declaration that she wants to see personal statements from women on every wall. Any woman can be an artist: the desire to say something is reason enough to say it.

Every image has a personal story. The first piece ("Don't know what to be? Be a good father") is a response to the common situation when the wife or partner of an "intellectual in crisis' is forced to take care of domestic, material, and psychological problems (how should we deal with his depression?) as part of the generally unequal distribution of parental and domestic responsibilities. In addition, this piece reflects the stereotype that a woman's success is wholly determined by her being a good mother.

The second stencil ("Do you do this for everyone? What does everyone do for you?") considers the situation where one person is always doing everyone else's dirty work — boring labor that goes unnoticed and offers no professional development. To treat this kind of labor as a duty, to believe that 'they want to do it themselves, no one is making them,' is to refuse to take on an equal share of work around the house, and thus exploit another human being who does everything for you.

The third stencil ("Afraid to say no? Fear is not love") deals with sexual violence. We believe that a woman who has sex because she is afraid of upsetting or disappointing her partner is in a sexually violent situation. The question of whether the man in this situation is a rapist is open to discussion. We like active consent, when the woman shows initiative during sex, and doesn't just say yes or no in response to the man; when the woman talks about what she wants, unafraid of the man saying 'no'; 'no' during sex is completely normal.

The last piece in this series, ('Did you get yelled at when you were a kid?') is about the verbal abuse of children. This is something more or less everyone has been through. Enraged screaming that makes the child feel guilty are a common authoritarian tactic used by elders. When they get older, children often reconsider these experiences with a critical eye but remain psychologically traumatized. The majority of them treat their children and relatives exactly the same way. We see this as an opportunity to break the chain. In order to make this happen, people need to decide against manipulating and dominating their children.



stencil graffiti, 2013



ANNA ZVYAGINTSEVA

KIEV

My artistic practice, which includes installations, artists' books, video projects, murals, and graphic series, is rooted in spontaneous drawing from observation and a diary-like recording of observations, thoughts, and ideas. My constant sketching becomes a visual diary. An installation will be inspired by a sketch, a book, a journal kept in a notebook; videos are inspired by what I see out of the window every day. The themes of my pieces vary, but their diary-like nature always ties them to everyday life. My work happens in the space between 'realistic' subjective observation and generalization based on social issues. The journey from personal experience to the analysis of society has to be covered over and over in each piece. I also strive to notice small, nearly invisible, and accidental details. These are capable of pointing to things that are important but hidden.

I am interested in women's labor, the status of artistic labor, xenophobia, and hate speech. In addition, I examine 'the politics of the gaze,' the problem of perception, the 'façade' of public life and what is hidden behind it.

For me, feminism means understanding the mechanisms of inequality and fighting for equality.

I am interested in both the subjects and the medium suggested to artists by the Feminist Pencil. When I was in art school in Kiev, people there treated sketches as incomplete, like preparatory materials for 'real' work. For me, sketches have always seemed to be independent pieces. The speed I draw them with minimizes the distance between observation and expression, for instance, in the courtroom, where photography is forbidden.

The movement to bring together feminist artists must simultaneously exist in institutional and activist realms and create connections between the two. Perhaps it should even create its own art activist institution.





"The Catalogue of Women's Work"

This 'catalogue' is a series of sketches that can keep going for a long time, practically indefinitely. Right now, it only includes depictions of 'domestic labor.' The woman is almost always in the same position — bent over (sometimes very low to the ground), cleaning, washing, or gathering things. At first glance, the images seem monotonous, but actually, they document a multitude of domestic tasks that are hard to tell apart from an outside perspective and which are nullified by falling under the category of 'domestic' for the woman doing the work.

I often hear from women that it's easier for them to make a routine of domestic work and do it all automatically without paying attention to their own thoughts and motions, and not even notice the results of their labor, treating them like they're a given. This is a valid position. However, to me it seems important to illustrate the variety and complexity of domestic labor and to emphasize the individual significance of each task. Art is a tool for turning one's attention to things that are otherwise hidden.



a selection of 11 drawings paper, ink, pencil 2012-2013



ZULIF

MOSCOW

In first grade, my teacher asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Without even having to think about it, I said "An artist."

I never became a so-called professional artist. I have two degrees, both in the fields of my other professions. Nonetheless, I am an artist in terms of how I perceive the world. I believe that no matter what you do — whether it be washing floors, compiling financial reports, or whatever else — you can approach it as a maker, a creator. The difference between a creator and a craftsman is a sense of dissatisfaction with the product as it is made, the feeling that it could be better. I see myself as a creator.

The main subject of my work is the life of an independent, regular person as illustrated in the small details of her material existence. Putting this kind of life into art is how I personally make sense of feminism. This is what draws the radical line between a regular woman-helpmate and a liberated woman, who thinks of herself as a human being.

A liberated woman is, first and foremost, a creator. I am not talking about the reproductive function, which even amoebas have. I am talking about the creative powers of the conscious mind.

Mature women tend to accept the rules of the game as they are presented in popular culture. The word 'art' is practically derogatory to the majority of people. Women become slaves to consumption and cripple their own will. In their minds, they belong to someone else who provides for them. They treat themselves as objects and not subjects. I think that feminism needs to break the glass ceiling over women's wills, which was built by male egoism.

For me, feminist art should unite women artists and celebrate creativity. The creative woman cannot be shackled.

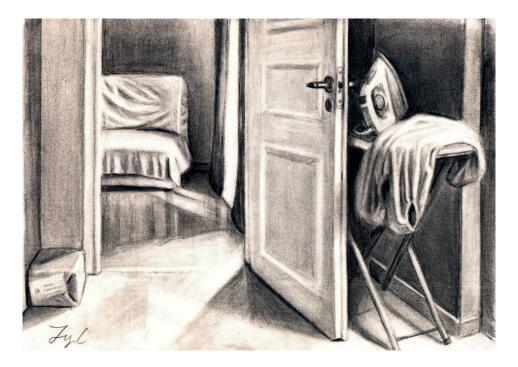


I do not align myself with anyone or anything. I am just me. I draw in order to relax. Drawing is a barometer of my internal state, my self-esteem, my mood, and how I perceive the world around me. There is an alternative meaning in my drawings, which I believe others will see. For me, it remains hidden because when you make something, it is as if the thing floats in the air and is understood internally, and can't just be put into words and sentences.

I don't want to call what I'm doing a project. My work is like a river that flows along the shores of life and which hasn't stopped yet (I hope), whereas a project has phases and a beginning and an end.

The majority of the works here were made between the autumn of 2012 and spring 2013. This was a very difficult time for me.

I draw with a pencil and charcoal. Sometimes I use both of them together. I use a smudge stick since it's not always possible to get shading with hatching. For me, the most important part of a drawing is the shading. It's the volume and light. If there's no light, there must be light!



graphic series gharcoal, pencil 2012-2013



MARIA IVANOVA

MOSCOW

I was born at the tail end of the 1960s, which meant that I grew up during the time when the world was discussing 'making love not war,' and also the sexual revolution. That was when I started drawing. Frogs and tanks, both green. They looked similar. The frogs had eyes and the tanks had guns.

I spent a long time studying to be an artist. This period coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the time we could have been proud of if everything hadn't gone as usual. Which is to say that until recently I had been hoping for better.

I grew up and became more interested in people than I was in tanks and frogs. Relationships between men and women when sex = love. I wondered why it was just sex sometimes and other times just love. Examining all of this, I saw that women don't have the same rights as men. I don't like sexism in commercials, and how women are objectified. It irritates me when clients ask me to put more T&A in my comics or illustrations. I argue with them.

I am proud of the time I was brash enough to essentially change the plot of a Russian folk tale for a cartoon screenplay. I transformed the main character, who was male, into a little girl, so that my daughter could watch a cartoon about a girl, who, incidentally, doesn't kill anyone when she defeats the kidnapping fox. The evil in the Fox is punishment in itself (but not painful punishment)... This story is a cartoon now.

I am just a woman, struggling and searching. Unfortunately, women in today's Russia are forced to hide behind pseudonyms and change them often in order to escape being subjected to general derision.

As an artist and writer — and not a politician, academic, or philosopher — I am best at expressing myself in my drawings, comics, and stories, and not in tracts or at protests. I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in this exhibition because it's one of the only opportunities to express my position under the conditions of intensified moral censorship.



"Not Love"

I am presenting the chapter "Not Love," a story about a rape told from the perspective of the survivor, and not the position of "It's your own fault." It originally appeared as part of my book, The Inscrutable. This book tells the story of the heroine's sexual development and sexual behavior in a social context.

My heroine grows up the same way as many Soviet children, in an atmosphere where everything is forbidden. Unsympathetic to the child's problems and fears, the parents work to convince the girl that she cannot be free and independent because she is a girl. Hanging out with boys is bad, dangerous, and potentially scandalous. The child is controlled by being made to feel guilty, ashamed, and degraded. This leads to her developing complexes that it might take her the rest of her life to overcome.

In young adulthood, having intuitively fallen in line with liberal philosophies of freedom and equality, the heroine attempts to realize her right to a love and sex life from this vantage point. However, she finds herself coming up against the same difficulties, fears, and problems as many other women living in a society with a double standard for male and female behavior. When the double standard has taken hold, it becomes difficult for a woman to talk to the people close to her about the problems that come up on the path of taking charge of her rights to sex and love. She finds herself facing significant physical and psychological health risks, risks to the life of herself and her child, as well as her reputation.

> a chapter from the book "The Inscrutable" pencil, digital graphics 2012





ALEVTINA KAKHIDZE

KIEV

I am an artist. I make drawings, texts, design objects, performances, installations, and events. Everything created has to be based in personal experience and observation.

I have always had trouble presenting a selected CV (why should I name one project and not name another, based on relative importance?) — it feels as though I'm marginalizing my own gestures.

The main themes of my work are consumer cultures, animals (dogs), and feminism.

Feminism is transformation. If it weren't for art, everything would be different: art forces me to develop new qualities and change the way I think.

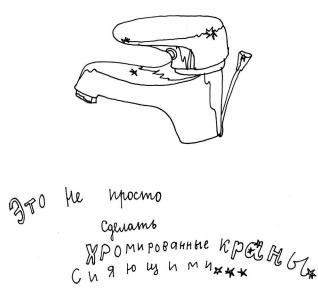
I am participating in The Feminist Pencil because I like the subject and the genre. The pencil is not a paintbrush, which means it's not a painting show, it's all about pictures! A picture is a story. My art is like one story after another. There's another aspect of the show that appeals to me: the artists are sharing their experiences in order to construct new models for action collectively. Not the same one for everyone, but several different models. All of us are very different.

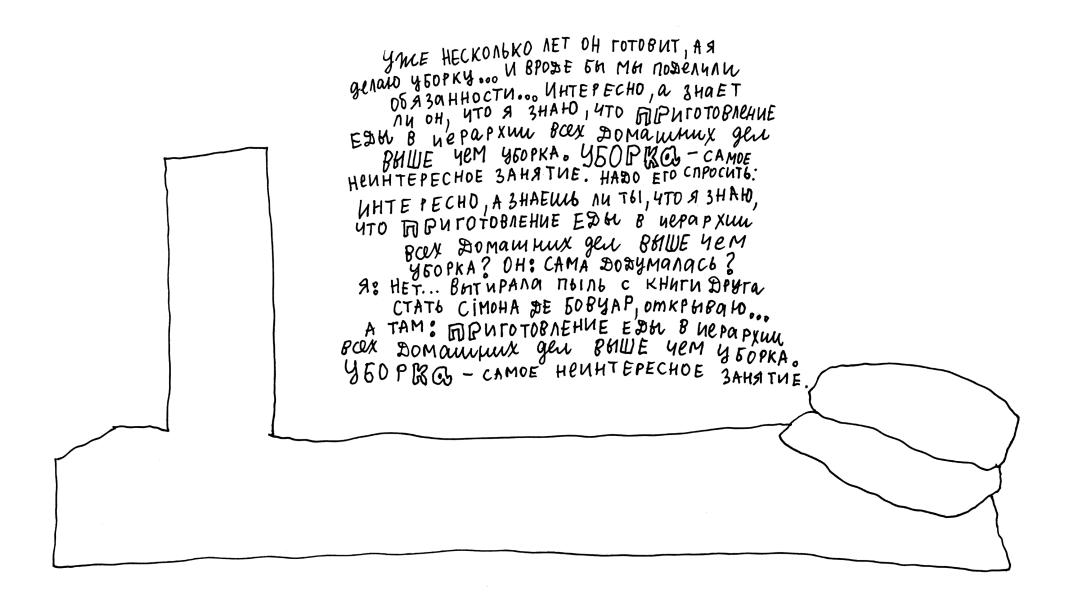
"For Speeding Up Cleaning"

This is a series of texts and drawings I made while cleaning and doing other things around the house.

When I'm cleaning chrome faucets, dusting, or sewing, I take breaks to write things down or draw pictures. I have observed that switching activities is a kind of rest: cleaning and then drawing and then cleaning again is less exhausting than just cleaning.

One last thing: I am not a commercially successful artist with the option of reassigning my boring domestic tasks to other women.





graphic series gel pen 2013



ALEXANDRA KACHKO (ZOA ART) ST. PETERSBURG

I am a person who puts up wheat paste posters. By my example, I want to demonstrate that people can do things other than just consume. I want to support people, especially women, in their activism.

The central theme of my work is street fairies, mythical creatures spawned by the city. That was the initial idea. Otherwise, I address a rather wide range of topics depending on what or who is inspiring me. Generally, it's oppositional, feminist, city preservationist, and lyrical themes, as well as site-specific street art. I don't have a system.

For me, feminism means liberating women from their dependence on a male opinion of themselves, from self-disparagement and violence against themselves. Today, I clearly understand that I am completely emotionally isolated and don't feel anything other than fear, alarm, and constant self-flagellation. I don't think that I am the only one. I have not yet found the courage to express my true feelings in art.

Feminism helps me find value in my labor, my art, and my personality.

I decided to participate in the Feminist Pencil because I think that the show addresses real issues that all women face every day but which it's customary to ignore.

I would like women artists to unite into a political movement and for their artistic statements to be presented as manifestos; for art shows to resemble protests. That's why I'm a street art activist. I would like this movement to influence public opinion.

> "Don't hit me!" paper poster digital graphics 2013



"This state doesn't need your children" paper poster digital graphics 2013

Right now I am trying to recover my repressed childhood feelings about my alcoholic father and the things I lived through in my family. I wanted to convey my pain and fear, which is still alive in me and continues to have an impact on everything I do.

It's like I feel guilty for existing. Like I want to be invisible and isolate myself. I don't want to feel this way.

I don't like the fact that alcoholism is talked about like it's a fact of life that everyone is used to and shouldn't bother trying to change. I know that I can't change how other people are, but I want to have the strength and courage to at least change myself. Pity and the false hope that the alcoholic person will get well of his own accord destroy everything. Children of alcoholics are the most vulnerable and defenseless. They grow up sick and incapable of having normal relationships with healthy people. For instance, I understood that my ever-present sense of not being safe and the complete absence of calm get in the way of my being able to live and enjoy my life and feel happy. I am horrified at the thought of how many people like me there are in Russia. I want the victims of domestic violence stemming from alcoholism to realize that it isn't "all fine," that not "everyone lives like this," and that it's not "her own damn fault," and it's not "just a sick person." I want them to understand that they need help.

> "Don't touch me" paper poster digital graphics 2013







KOIVO

ST.PETERSBURG - IVANOVO

I am a freelance artist, designer, and illustrator, and I live in St. Petersburg. I make digital images and use old printing techniques; sometimes I combine the two. I work with form and color. Sometimes I like to see how black and white interact. Despite the fact that I make my work on a computer, I'm not interested in art after 1950. I don't know anything about the specifics of contemporary art, but in the broader sense, everything that's happening today is contemporary art. I like succession and dialogue; I don't understand the desire to chase after special effects and innovation in art.

For me, feminism is a way to make sense of existence. I would like it if more women made art, supported one another, and came together. I stand behind women's autonomy and solidarity.

I decided to participate in this show because it's an independent project. I am happy that it's been put together exclusively by women for women. My feminist friends are in it and it's important for me to be among them.

I think that even though the movement uniting feminist artists will be diverse, its art shows and magazines, plus spontaneous print materials, will come together to create an accurate image of the society. It's not out of the question that this movement will start to resemble an underground partisan movement.

"The Playing Card"

I am showing an old work, from 2008. I made it long before I knew about feminism, but it reflected my proto-feminist credo: "I am an independent woman artist, and if I need to, I will choose an illegal existence rather than conform. If you dare try to stop me, I will be forced to use this quill to defend myself."

My technique is in part an imitation of linocut, which I have always wanted to try, but hadn't been able to until relatively recently. When I made this piece, I did not know the work of the avant-gardist/suprematist Olga Rozanova. She was one of the first Russian artists to enthusiastically adopt relief printing and created a whole series of works based around playing cards.

It is hard to express my excitement when I got my hands on a book of Olga Rozanova's work — we have so much in common. I am an absolute fan and a follower of her art: by day, I create suprematist compositions, using pure colors, clearly defined forms; then, at the stroke of midnight, I grab a knife and cut linoleum, creating expressive black and white prints on a tiny press.



poster vector graphics 2008



ALINA KOPITSA

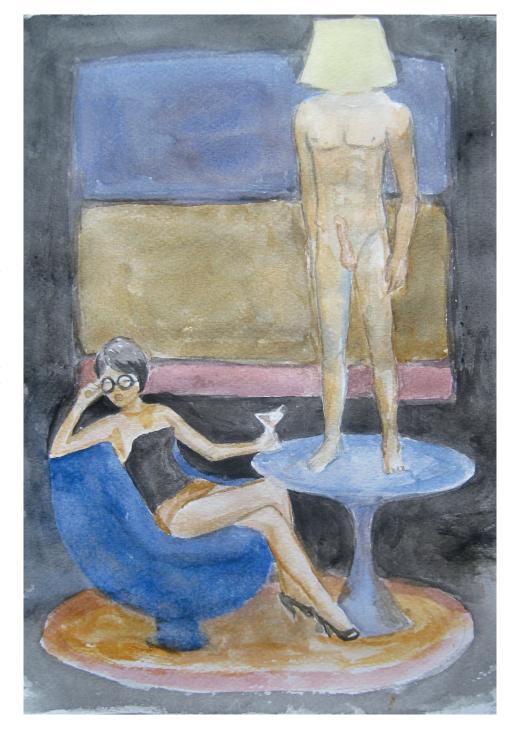
KIEV

Much of my work is aimed at drawing attention to pollution by making art out of upcycled objects. I am also interested in actively engaging viewers in dialogue with various kinds of actions and public performances. Finally, I create pieces in which I talk about sexuality — specifically, women's sexuality.

I think of feminism in conjunction with other movements for rights and equality: labor and anti-capitalist activism, anti-oligarchy, environmental activism, defending the rights of sexual minorities, anti-racism campaigns, animal rights activism, and so on.

I believe that the environmentalist model of thinking, the desire and effort to understand and accept the Other, to try to live in harmony with society and nature, is what everyone should aspire to. Ideally, this is what we should be teaching our children, considering the fact that changing an adult's mind is practically impossible.

I don't particularly feel like there is a movement that supports feminist artists in Kiev. I hope that participating in The Feminist Pencil will help me learn more about the movement that exists in Moscow.



"Games"

This is a drawing of something that actually happened to me and my friend when we were six years old. A dozen older boys surrounded us, and waved around a bunch of thin switches, saying they were going to beat us, but never did it.

As a part of the scene and as an artist, I am interested in BDSM. I think it's full of symbolism, ambiguity, and, most importantly, play — that is to say, everything I value the most in art.

When they play at inequality (where someone is the master, and the other person, the slave), the players play as equals. I believe that this is much better than the opposite, when a real relationship between two individuals is built on fear and submission, and equality exists in name only.

graphic series watercolor 2013



LYDIA KOROVKINA

MOSCOW

I was born in Moscow, where I live now, with a regualr family. My main amusements are art and sports. I am of a non-traditional sexual orientation and am often harassed because of it. I started calling myself a feminist relatively recently, although in my heart, I have probably been one since I was little. The relative I am closest with is my sister Olesya. We have always had a very tense relationship with our parents, especially our mother, because we decided to join forces and not allow them to make decisions about our lives. My sister was the one who told me about the feminism, for which I am very grateful.

To be perfectly honest, as a feminist, I think I take a very moderate position. All I do to fight for women's rights is try to talk about it at school and sometimes make artwork about it. Sometimes, my sister and I go to feminist meetings and talk about the situation in our family. This helps me sort out my problems and feel stronger, but my options for action are limited by my age (I'm 14). I can't actively take part in protests or discussions, but I can provide moral support to those that do.

I try to fight for children's rights, but here, too, my activities are limited to conversations at school, paintings, and arguments with my mother, who hits her children in public. Not many people listen to me or treat me like a human being with experience or understanding, but I try not to notice this and do whatever is in my power in order to respect and uphold human rights.



"Happy Motherhood" graphic pencil 2013 This work symbolizes domestic violence against women who find themselves in a weak position because of their attachment to their children, and depicts how the pressure from men and the helplessness of the young generation exhaust the already power-less mother. I have heard a number of stories about men manipulating women using their children. "You want a divorce? You'd leave the kids without a father? You want them to grow up in a broken family? You won't be able to support them! Alimony isn't a real thing!" These are very widespread notions that force women and children to continue to endure the tyranny of their husbands and fathers.

Sooner or later, the violent situation in the home takes its toll on the children. I know this from personal experience and the experience of my friends. For me, any patriarchal family resembles something like a ladder. The first and most powerful rung is the husband. The second is the wife. The third and final rung are the children. Any family fight is like an electric current that passes through the first two steps and then strikes the children with twice its force.

However, while the child is too small to make any sense of its family situation, the wife bears the brunt of this so-called domestic bliss. She is squeezed between the husband and the children and forced come to terms with her destiny as a floor-washer, teacher, laundress, and also a model for all women. I am not the kind of person who can talk about these things from personal experience, but these kinds of situations seem like real jail to me. In my drawing, I depicted my ideas about this kind fo violence. It's an image that looks peaceful to outsiders, and seems respectable and worthy of emulation, but from the inside, it feels like real hell.



"What's the difference?" grafitti and colored pencil, ballpoint pen 2013



HELENA LAUKKANEN

UPPSALA

Most of my work is centered around everyday life. Even the most insignificantseeming thing may attract my attention and pique my curiosity.

I have the privilege of living in Sweden, where I enjoy the right to express myself freely and can take up space however I please. It saddens me that we are still obliged to fight for our place in society, for equal rights with men and for justice. There's a lot of work ahead of us. Feminism isn't a choice, and it can't be ignored: it's the pure, logical and humanistic movement toward a more balanced world — there's no turning back from the progress we've made.

When I was younger, I would try to convince myself that my art is outside of gender. It was important to me that people judge me as an artist and not a woman artist. I would regularly hear people say things like "You have a masculine mind!" "You're strong like a man!" I was always being compared to men.

I am part of the Haka group. We are a group of women who periodically put on collective shows. We didn't start out as a feminist project, but our interests and themes often fall in line with feminism. For me, it's important to participate in The Feminist Pencil so that my voice can be heard among others' as part of the bigger picture. The work of all of the show's participants is part of an important historical phase in our fight for independence and a society that is open to everyone.

graphic silk screen series linocut 2010-2012





"Great Catch"

I make relief prints and silk screens that are usually inspired by spontaneous sketches with ink and pencil. I let my thoughts flow freely and after a little while the pictures begin to speak in a language of their own.

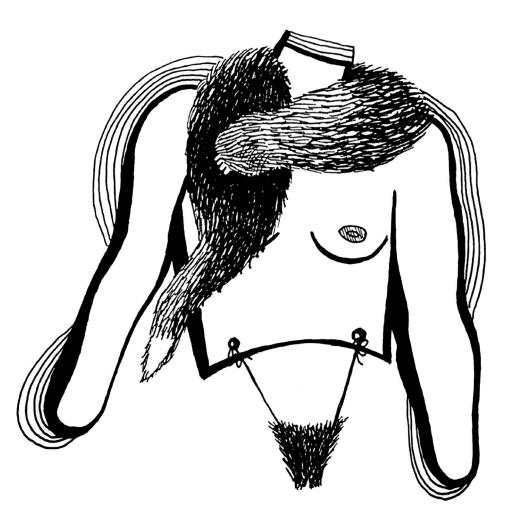
My drawings are dialogues or contemplations about the direction that one or another conversation could take. They often deal with women's experiences and injustices concealed in our social position. I make about a drawing a day and I save them like a kind of wordless diary. I am often inspired by absurd texts from women's magazines about how we "should" look and behave.

The drawing called "Fur" is about the absurd idea of removing all natural body hair, and then replacing it with a 'wig' out of the fur of dead animals. I was inspired by a documentary about women who undergo this kind of procedure.

"Great Catch" is about women who are forced to become extremely strong during divorce, when they have to extract themselves from unhealthy relationships. This title refers to a Swedish word that means two things: 'to catch' and to 'completely sever.' The woman in my image finally acquires the strength of the man on the path to her own future.

"Feel My Heat" is about loving your body no matter how bad you feel. When my mother had cancer and I had a broken spine, I understood how hard it was for me to love my body and felt angry at the social expectations that pressure us to always be happy and sexy.

This series includes several more pieces about the body and the internal world. For instance, "In the Meanwhile" is about sensitivity and the 'unpleasant but sweet' feeling that happens sometimes during sex. Even when things are going badly you can enjoy the warmth of physical contact. I was inspired to make this piece by the years my spine and body were in constant pain but I still hungered for regular physical affection. "The Abyss" is about feelings that emerge from deep within and how one becomes conscious of them, how they become intense, until it finally becomes possible to share them with another, important, person.





LILLI LOGE

BERLIN

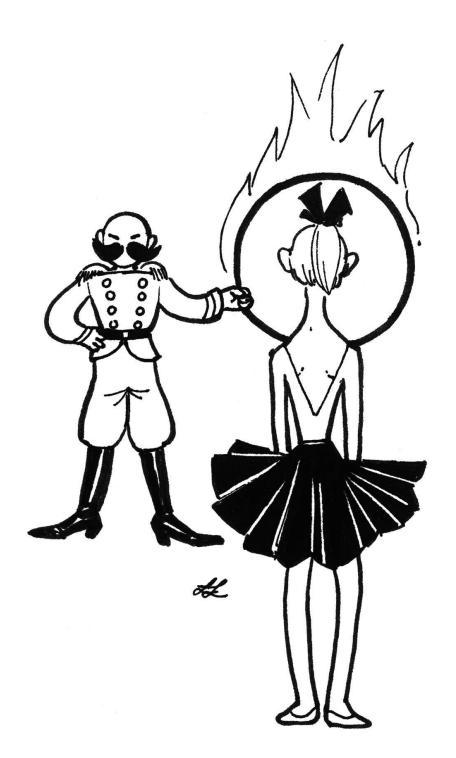
I have always thought that my main objective in studying art was to answer the question "Why are YOU an artist?"

There's one answer that would never satisfy any of my professors: "Because it's fun!" People act as though this is a sign of being insufficiently serious about art. I have to say that I was not one of the students who would answer this way. I had always had this image of a starving artist who suffers for her art and can't make any money off of it, or a woman who makes her living through art, but contorts herself so much to do it that she forgets that it used to make her happy.

It's possible that people don't put stock in "I make art for pleasure" because we assume that the pleasure is a given. I think that for women in particular 'pleasure' is rarely a deciding criterion in life. Take the stock phrase "beauty requires sacrifice" — it already says so much about how little women are taught to value their own needs.

For me, none of this is a given. After many years of thinking, I can finally say that I make art because it's fun!

"It's your time to shine, circus child!" felt-tip pen, paper 2007



I don't think there is a central theme to my work, but feminism is probably one of the most common themes. My latest book of comics, which I self-published, focuses on trauma and repressed memories.

The most popular tags on my blog are "everyday life," "feminism," and "art and the artist." Right now, I am working on a graphic novel that is a critique of capitalism and also deals with the woman artist, love, and queerness.

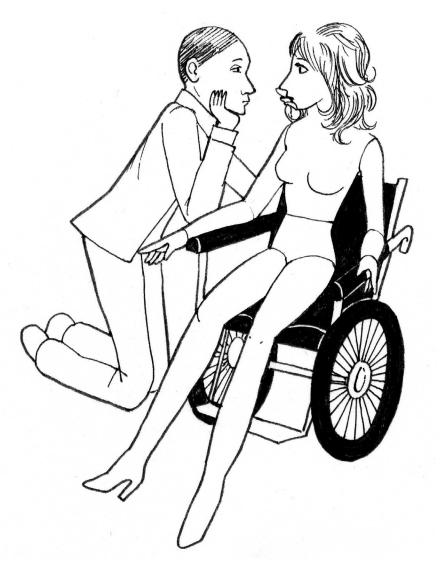
For me feminism is a reminder that men and women are still not equal.

I decided to take part in The Feminist Pencil because I think it's an excellent project, especially in the current repressive political climate. This show is a brave step forward for Russian women artists and I want to support them from Germany (where it does not take as much courage!). As a feminist and an artist, I know how rarely these things come together, which meant that I just had to take part.

I saw that bringing together art and politics isn't easy while helping put together an art show with the international society of women comics artists, Chicks on Comics (chicksoncomics.blogspot.de) at the Berlin feminist gallery Alpha Nova. Most often, one of the two components suffers. Many prefer art — free, unencumbered art--and even if the given content is feminism, it's still seen as a limitation.

On the other hand, political art is often so focused on its content that form gets left behind, and it is therefore not taken seriously by the art world.

I would like to see the emergence of a new feminist art movement where art and politics are not at odds, but instead buttress one another. Naturally, I am interested in the perspectives of artists from other countries — after all, it's not like there's such a thing as 'the real' feminism. I hope that the Feminist Pencil movement will present different perspectives on different feminist topics as well as a variety of individual forms of artistic self-expression. I hope for an artistic exchange between the artists that will allow us to learn from one another.



"Let's play real love" calligraphy pen, felt-tip pen, paper 2006



VICTORIA LOMASKO

MOSCOW – SERPUKHOV

I want to reflect what is happening around me, in our country, in our time. In various cities and villages, in different communities and social groups. I want to leave my room. To expand my awareness of what's going on in the world.

I prefer realist art that the viewer can understand.

Since 2008, I have been developing a body of work in the graphic reporting genre. These are documentary stories told in a visual language. My work combines three components: drawings created at the site of the events, quotes from its participants, and my own commentary.

Over the past several years, I have created graphic reports from political trials, collective farms, rural schools, juvenile detention centers, opposition protests... People will ask me why I chose some particular subject, "Wouldn't it be better to draw orphanages than prisons?" "It would be better to draw strikes than protests," and so on. I would like to draw everything!

Today, more and more people are returning to realism and the representation of social issues. If socially-engaged art becomes a powerful movement, it will become capable of depicting the kaleidoscope of Russian society, the full spectrum of our issues, capable of opposing the official media and influencing what goes on in people's minds while also preserving a detailed image of our day and age, and our experience.

graphic sketch marker 2013





"The 'Girls' of Nizhny Novgorod"

Nizhny Novgorod social activist Andrea Amirova put me in touch with the 'girls' (sex workers).

I was able to spend between 5 and 15 minutes at each 'office' (a rented apartment where women offer sex services), talking to the women between clients. I had to draw very quickly, and make final copies on the spot. We visited over ten 'offices.'

It's almost impossible for an outsider to get into an office, especially if you're a woman who isn't a 'girl.' This was a invaluable experience: I could draw portraits, write down what the women told me, and ask questions. The way prostitutes are depicted in the media is dramatically different from the 'girls' we met. The 'girls' were in solidarity with one another, they fought off aggressive behavior from men (and not just their clients), harshly criticized the government (bureaucrats, the police), and worked to maintain their personal boundaries despite the nature of their work (which practically seems like a utopia to me).

Meeting these women made me reflect on situations in my life when I had experienced psychological and physical violence from men but stubbornly insisted that it was just a normal part of life.





MANNAYA KASHA [SEMOLINA] MOSCOW – NOVOSIBIRSK

I don't consider myself an artist because I want to avoid the way society exceptionalizes artists. Being an artist is almost like being a man: you're considered a little above others, and you're always being tested on whether you're 'real' or not. When you're a woman, the test is harsher; especially if your artistic expression is about and for women. There will always be some man who cares enough to get offended: how dare you, art should never forget about men, or else it's not art, but some "lady stuff."

I think that that art is as 'totalizing' as politics. Anyone can express themselves in the language of art even if she's never even thought about it before. There's no such thing as 'real' or 'not real' in art, just as there are not 'real' and 'fake' women, or 'beauty' and 'ugliness.' For me, feminist art is a fight against hierarchy. The weapon is a multitool with a double edge: it's not just aimed at women viewers, but also functions as an instrument of unceasing self-analysis for the artists themselves.

I am most interested in the fight against discrimination: like the social evil wherein gender hierarchies lead to homophobia; like when the repressiveness of the 'right' look renders a vast majority of women invisible if they haven't managed to fit into the totalitarian framework for a 'healthy body.' Those who call for equality and risk their own privileges in doing so only mean that people should consent to tolerate being side by side with lesbians, transsexuals, migrant women, and other minorities. Even within marginalized groups, people discriminate against one another: the cisgendered women against the transgendered women, the heterosexual women again the homosexual, the masculine lesbians against the feminine.

All of this nonsense is built on the prevailing gender structure, the destruction of which is the shared goal of the whole universe of feminist art.

«Феминистское знамя»

I drew a sketch of the 'flags' after I saw an illustration in which three workers are making their banner out of a tablecloth from the table where capitalists are eating. Turning oppression into empowerment, everyday humiliation into struggle, was the good, powerful message from this artist, whose name I never learned. However, in the class war being waged by artists, there's no room for women. They're invisible, they're not marching at the avant-garde with a banner; even here, they are an undeveloped dark continent. It's especially unfortunate given the fact that capitalism presents even more traps than usual for women: it not only turns them into products, but also engenders forms of discrimination like lookism and ableism, racism, and the custom of appreciating colonialist 'exoticism.'

On the left, people like to say that the liberation of humanity will either be total or it won't happen at all, forgetting that total liberation entails the liberation of women, lesbians, transsexuals and gay men, people with disabilities and citizens of other countries — not only the muscled, heterosexual young men who for some reason symbolize 'universal equality.'

The woman in pink is an obvious reference to Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin's The Laundress. It was my ally Anna Scherbakova's idea to include her. Women are tasked with unending labor in the service of others. Over the course of the nearly 300 years that separate The Laundress from my Banner, the snow white linens of male aristocrats or parvenus has turned into the color of feminine resistance, the color of the banner uniting activists and housewives. The Banner is a call for solidarity among women. It brings them all together, so that now, a woman doing laundry is considering casting aside the tub of soapy water and joining the struggle.

Anyway, sisters, feminism for all!



street sticker digital graphics 2012-2013



MIKAELA

MOSCOW

My name is mikaela, I am a feminist artist, my genres are street art and performance. I am interested in making statements about the zone of silence surrounding feminine experience, women's history, and domestic violence. My task as an artist is to make sense of my personal story as a political experience; thus, I consider my work both an artistic and political gesture. Feminism means returning the role of the subject to myself and all women, and with it, the opportunity to make decisions and stand up for oneself. Feminism means working toward acknowledging social hierarchies (first and foremost, those related to gender, heteronormativity, class, physical health, and age). It also means creating a space for women that is maximally free of social pressure. Feminist art requires a reevaluation of art as an expensive amusement for the upper and middle classes, as well as the creation of alternative artistic spaces that don't have anything to do with large institutions.

I am participating in The Feminist Pencil because it's very important to me to meet with other artists who are interested in social issues and for us to look at each other's work. I want a scene, an exchange of ideas, an art show, and this show responds to all of these needs. Seeing other artist's explorations is a kind of support and a source of inspiration. I would like feminist artists to have their own free space, workshops and residencies, where they can socialize, come up with collaborative projects, educate themselves, share experiences, experiment, and, most importantly, support one another. This is a difficult thing to create and that's why I think that the Feminist Pencil group show is an excellent first step toward launching this movement. If the show evolves into a festival, this could be the next stage of development and give rise to the organization of more feminist initiatives.

street stencil 2013

"Little Girls Should Listen"

"Being a girl" isn't the same thing as "being a kid" and entirely different from "being a boy." This is something you learn at home. The reason you learn this is that you (and other girls) are dressed up in pretty, tidy clothing that's uncomfortable to be active in and you can't get it dirty because "girls have to be neat." "Put on a skirt, make Daddy happy, you're a girl, good job." You can't climb trees in a skirt because it's embarrassing when someone sees your underwear. So if you're five years old, it's like your body already doesn't belong to you, you're already limited in how you can move around and explore yourself. You're also not allowed to swear, get into fights, express resistance or rage. You can cry but you can't get mad or talk back. "That's impolite and unfeminine." even if you're five years old and your anger is justified, you'll hear that from your mother or grandmother, your father or your brother. Your feelings aren't entirely your own, either – girls have to learn to be friendly, patient, attentive to others and so on. The endless list of qualities you can use to fill in the sentences "a good daughter always..." seamlessly turns into the list for "a real woman must..." When there's constant pressure like this, the forces cannot be equal. If within us former and current girls the protest survives and gains force, it's an impressive thing, it costs us dearly, and has the potential to transform the situations in our families, in our interpersonal relationships, with our children, and with the government and society at large.





MARINA NAPRUSHKINA

BERLIN — MINSK

I was born in Minsk, Belarus. I graduated from the Glebov Art College in Minsk and the Frankfurt Academy of Visual Arts. In 2007, I started the Office for Anti-Propaganda.

The Office for Anti-Propaganda began as an art project, an archive focusing on political propaganda and the institutions in political systems. The Office is currently an unregistered organization in the activist and art worlds. The Office works with activists from other organizations, feminist and civic initiatives, and supports campaigns including, among others, "Caution, Police!" which fights against police violence toward women in Belarus and "Don't Play With the Dictator," which opposes holding the world ice hockey championship in Minsk. It also publishes the newspapers Ubeditel'naya pobeda [Definitive Victory — Trans.], Samoupravlenie [Self-rule — Trans.], and others.

My work focuses on analyzing and deconstructing the language of power; examining contemporary Belarus as a patriarchal society and state; feminist practice; discrimination in society; the search for alternatives and reinforcing political self-consciousness.

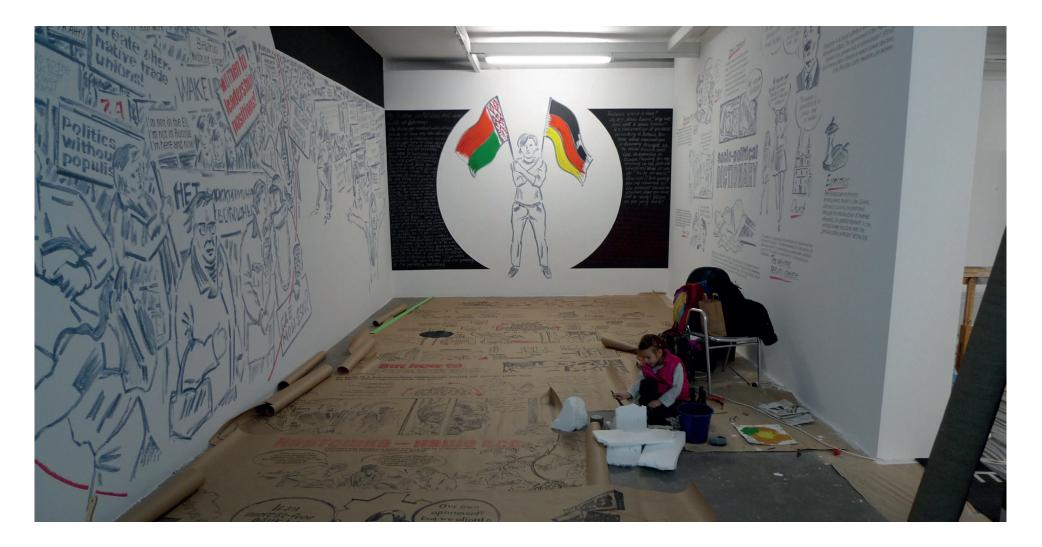
For me, feminism means not silently enduring discrimination against yourself and against other people around you.

For me, being a feminist — whether you're male or female—means being a normal, modern person.

Art has a lot of potential for bringing about change. We can return political power to art. We can discuss issues using our own media, that we ourselves create, organize shows and talks. We can be independent and create our own networks. Solidarity and internationalism are the primary building blocks for creating a movement since feminism itself doesn't offer a specific solution to these problems.

"My Mother On Politics, Art, and the Role of Women"

"Why are you getting caught up in politics? You don't know anything about these things. You're not an historian or an economist, you don't understand anything about politics. You're an artist and as an artist, you've buried yourself. You were so talented, you were so good at drawing. Why have you given up painting? You're not thinking of your family, but at least think of your child! You're thirty already, pretty soon, you'll be an old woman. What do you need all of this for? These are the best years of your life. What have you accomplished? You don't make any money, what are you going to live on? You want to start a revolution? Thank you very much, we've already seen how these "orange revolutions" end. I don't need any more political change in my country! I live in Belarus and I am satisfied with everything. Where do you want to end up with your activities? They'll arrest you, you'll see, they'll get you in Germany. There's an article in the Belarus criminal code for what you do. If you end up in prison, who's going to be able to help you? Your family? Your child? A child can't help its mother. Of course, it's all your husband's fault! He should have nipped all of this in the bud. Have you even considered what could happen to your relatives whose last name also starts with N? Your father is in a state of constant fear at his job. Your grandmother and grandfather are over 80, have you thought about them? How are you going to be able to see them if you're forbidden entry into Belarus? I live in this country. I know what I'm talking about. I'm satisfied with everything.»



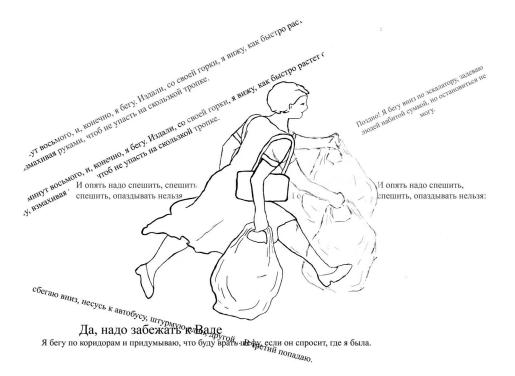


As an artist (and as Emma Narhova), I appeared in this world not very long ago. In large part, thanks to the Feminist Pencil, When I saw an open call online seeking artists for a feminist art show I thought, "Now that's something worth drawing for," and so I picked up a pencil.

I felt that this show could be a friendly, creative space, where people listen to women's voices, even the ones that are very quiet. A space where art and feminism are not mutually exclusive. Where people openly criticize things that are not only silenced in the art world, but in society at large, such as violence, exploitation, and discrimination. Where a new reality is being sketched out.

Appreciating the importance of this show gave me courage and inspiration: that's how I began working on my first project, which examines the patriarchy in everyday life. What happens next - I don't know. The only thing I know for sure about Emma Narkhova is that her drawings will be stitched with purple, black and red, green, and rainbow-colored political threads.

I think that this palate (and its component parts) is already familiar to many feminist artists, and will only grow more so. The movement uniting sociallyengaged feminist artists is bound to grow more radical and colorful.



graphic series pencil, edited on the computer 2013

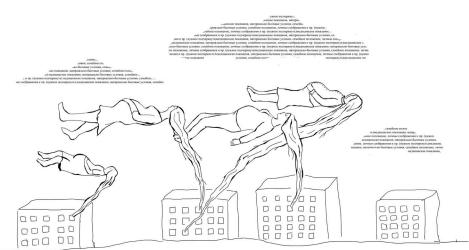
"Just a Regular Week"

"Just a regular week" is the title of a story by Natalia Baransky written at the very end of the 1960s. The text in my drawings are also taken from it. However, this isn't an illustration project. Rather, I wanted to take liberties with the story in order to jump into something different that wasn't in the original text but which exists in our context, the "everyday patriarchy".

"Just a regular week" goes on for decades. Every week, women are forced to: run, lie down, endure, keep quiet, justify their own actions and the actions of others, cheer people up and be happy themselves. And run, run, run toward the unwashed floor, the unfed children, the unfinished work, the misunderstood people. Toward the mirages of unfulfilled wishes — they're so close, just a little bit further, and...

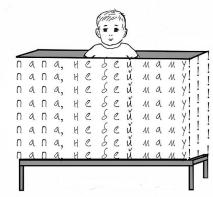
I wanted to leave the relationship between the viewers and the protagonists of the drawings open: we don't know how the story ends, we don't even know the plot. Each picture is a moment chosen from "the regular week" but perhaps this week something new will happen? Something liberating? Emancipatory?

The women in the drawings are simultaneously real and unreal — you can recognize them in photographs, in the faces of your friends, online and on the streets. Some of them are already running somewhere and others are just beginning. If any (of them, of you, of us) stop for a moment in front of one of these pieces and makes an important decision about their own lives, then all of it will not have been for nothing.



Если вы не имеете детей, то по какой причине: медицинские показания, материально-бытовые условия, семейное положение, личные соображения и пр. (нужное подчеркнуть)







POLINA PETRUSHINA

STRASBURG

I behave like a person, and not like a woman, especially in my work. Feminism is not a bad word, it's a beautiful word. It's the fight for freedom, equality, and tolerance. I am an independent being, my body belongs to me and anyone who does not agree is definitely not a feminist.

When a woman artist combines her social and political consciousness with her art practice, she can feel at home in the Feminist Pencil.

As I see it, more than by our gender assignment, we are united by our social activity, our intention to understand and illustrate the world around us. Of course, our gender influences how we experience the world, and this also brings us together. The most important thing is that each of us feels complete freedom in art.



Я ИХ ВСЕХ ЛЮбЛЮ, ПО ОЧЕРЕДИ, ОТДАЮ ЧТО ЕСТЬ, ВРУ О ТОМ, ЧЕГО НЕТ.

"The Hysterical Writings of Polina P."

In the beginning, the story turns from personal to feminine. This is living material, like a print of one's body, the search for deep feminine solitude rendered by the hand of a young and naive lady.

In this series, I wanted to turn the text into a poster. The pathetic whisper into a motto. At the same time, it was important to preserve the form of a story in pictures, breaking the full picture up into a little over twenty snapshots.

In my illustrated stories, heroines often chase after men, seeking love and domestic bliss, hoping and deceiving themselves. It's the woman's experience. The fight for the happiness that was promised to us. In reality, it's not happiness, but an image of a traditional social model which is very hard to defeat, even when you understand how obsolete and fruitless it really is.

About the title: oftentimes, things are so painful that they can only be described in very harsh terms. It's typical for women to be called hysterical when they express their pain. It's time to reappropriate this word and give it a new meaning. Let it be an expression of feminine consciousness. We can't get rid of the word, and we will always be called hysterical.

The majority of my illustrated stories are stories about life and love. Sometimes they're funny, they're often metaphorical, and sometimes, they're even absurd. Several years ago, I learned about graphic reporting. At first, I just observed, read, and translated this kind of work into French. In 2012, I decided to quietly join the movement, which resulted in two projects: an illustrated story of Pussy Riot, and an illustrated report from Sochi which was published in the magazine Internazionale in Italy.

УЙТИ В ЛЕС, ЕСТЬ букашек, Завести клещей, им то можно довериться, жить с ними. С НИМИ ЛУЧШЕ, ЧЕМ С СОбОЙ ЛУЧШЕ, ЧЕМ С МУЖЧИНОЙ



graphic novel watercolor and ink on paper 2013

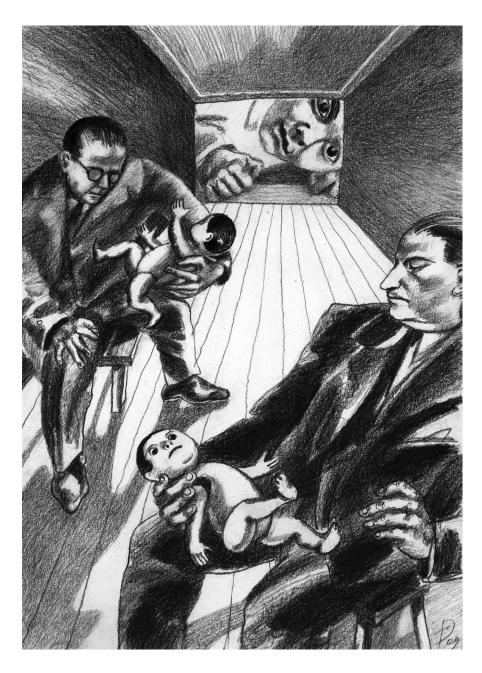


YULIA REZNIKOVA

MOSCOW

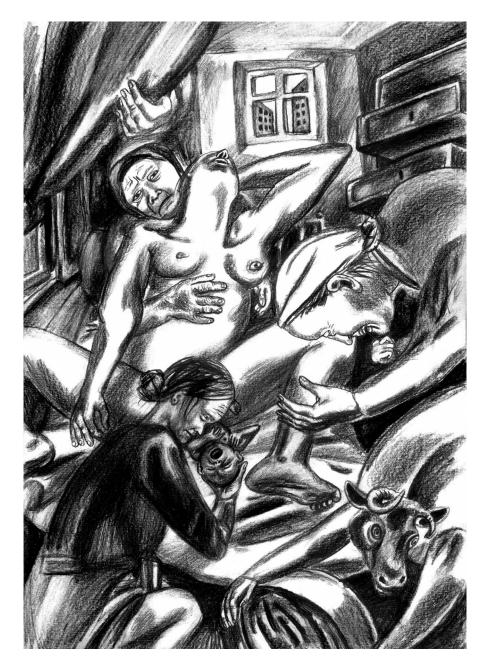
I am not a big fan of art shows organized according to gender. However, I think it would be unwise to deny that I am a woman artist. The artist who is limited by her own body and soul is sincere in her work. My pieces deal with deeply personal experiences, like a secret diary, and the issues they raise resonate with the world of women. Feminist themes are not particularly important to me; strong people are always in control of their own lives. Comparing myself to the other half has never occurred to me. We are all equal and everyone is free to play their part.

I am participating in this show because I consider social issues to be of the gravest importance at the moment, especially when so many artificial and empty fantasies are being aired in the art world while the endless suffering all around us simply goes unnoticed.



"The Doll House," from the series "The Father Figure" paper, black pencil 2009

My drawings are my diary. For ten years, I drew them on my knees. Without a studio. *Next to a crib. I never thought that anyone would buy any of thm. I made these drawings then put them away.* I didn't care about what would happen to them. They came out of me like exhalations. And I would feel a little better. I didn't give much thought to whether the results were pretty. I need to express myself. My fear. *My loneliness.* My guilt. The quiet joys of childhood. And the pain of aging. Expectations of love. Again: *Expectations of love.* That's how the series "Women's Caprichos" was born. Small-format pages. Drawn between caring for my child, housework and trying to earn just a little bit of money. My Caprichos have spent many years hidden away in black folders. Awaiting their audience.



"Birth" paper, black pencil 2006



ANNA REPINA

PODOLSK

My name is Anna Repina, I am 35 years old and I am a radical feminist. I have drawn since I was little, embroidered pictures, made flowers out of beads. Art has always been an important part of my life. For the past several years, I have been making dolls. In the past, my work didn't have to do with social issues, but after I realized I was a feminist, I saw that my art could be a pathway for expressing my ideas and values and communicating them to others.

For me, feminism is a way of life. Feminism means freedom of choice, accepting yourself as you are, trusting yourself and your thoughts and feelings. Feminism is also women supporting each other, which paves the way for us to think of ourselves a powerful force.

The Feminist Pencil is a great opportunity to display my worldview and turn people's attention to the issues I am concerned with. At the same time, it's an opportunity to self-actualize in art, to be seen and evaluated, to get feedback from viewers. I believe that many different women would want to be part of a collective of female graphic artists. It would be interesting to ask professional female illustrators to make pieces on feminist subjects. At the same time, it's important to encourage and inspire regular women to try to express themselves through art, to be unafraid to attempt things they've never tried before.



One of the things my posters deal with is domestic violence. Even though one in every three women is a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband or romantic partner, it's a subject rarely discussed.

Domestic violence is something women are forced to face alone, which they are ashamed and afraid of talking about, often not even discussing their experiences with their close friends. Many people see domestic violence a personal, family issue that shouldn't be intervened with by outsiders. Often, the victim herself is blamed for her "bad" behavior in relation to the aggressor.

Violence is not the victim's fault. Violence is always the aggressor's fault.

I think it's important to talk about how common domestic violence really is. To show that victims aren't responsible for aggressors' actions. It's essential for women to know that 'happy' families don't need to be built on their pain and suffering, and that they have the right to a normal, safe, and psychologically comfortable life.

Another poster I made is about freedom of choice. Unfortunately, women today live under the constant psychological pressure of the state and society, "Women must..." But no one has the right to force women to choose any lifestyle, or pressure them to get married and have children. Having a child is something a woman can do, something she can choose, but never her 'purpose' or 'function.' A woman is not an appliance with specific functions or a domestic animal that needs to breed a certain number of offspring. A woman is a full-fledged free citizen and only she has the power to choose how she should live her life, how and where she should work and study, whether or not she should get married, how many children she should have, and whether she should have any at all. Any and all of her choices are right because it's her life and not anyone else's.



Если вы не видите вокруг себя женщин со следами побоев, это не значит, что домашнего насилия не существует!

КАЖДАЯ ТРЕТЬЯ ЖЕНЩИНА В РОССИИ СТРАДАЕТ ОТ ФИЗИЧЕСКОГО НАСИЛИЯ СО СТОРОНЫ МУЖА!



YANA SMETANINA

MOSCOW – BELEBEY

I am interested art's social responsibility. There have been a number of turning points in my life and all of them have had to do with art.

In our technological era, as time seems to move ever faster, I feel drawn to the human and emotional. I like to look closely at people. Everyone has a story, a path. I am interested in finding out the kind of things that make a person do one thing and not another. I think that art should inspire emotions. Emotions make people think. An artist who is trying to express her emotions in her art understands (and probably has to) what the result of her statement, gesture, and action will be.

Texts created on the computer and Skype conversations strip words of a very important element (even if it's not the most important one — the most important one is meaning): intonation. In the sea of information, what artists say makes a big impact. It's not for selling the work; in this respect, you (the artist) are free, and people will co-empathize (alongside you). Will you make people smile or furious or sad? It's very important.

For me, feminism is the quest for an eternally unattainable hope, and one of the roads toward it. I couldn't pass by The Feminist Pencil because it's my subject. I had been excited about this project for a long time and immediately wrote to Vika Lomasko to say that I wanted to be part of it.

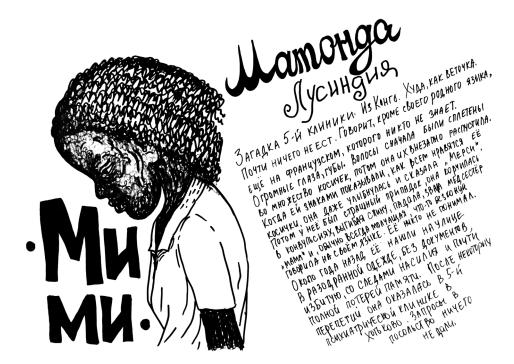
I think that there are a lot of issues to address, and there need to be as many shows as possible — we need to go public, do street art. Art addressing social issues needs a lot of exposure.



"The Patients of Psychiatric Hospital No. 5 in Khot'kovo"

Growing up, I was always afraid of "crazies." There were two of them in our small town. The huge, slow-witted Kolya and the drool-covered Rim. Whenever they ran into each other (again, it was a small town), Rim would laugh hysterically and point at Kolya, screaming, "Here comes the moron! The moron!" Kolya would grunt unintelligibly in response; he was basically non-verbal.

When, almost three decades later, fate brought me together with the patients of psychiatric hospital no.5 in Khot'kovo, I was amazed to realize that almost all of the women there had been victims of violence. It was what had caused them to lose their reason or had destroyed their will to live. They were survivors, but they were not "crazies." Childhood sexual abuse, including incest, attacks in the street, domestic abuse at the hands of their husbands. Alone, without any support from their families or the state, they were unable to thrive in their domestic situations and ended up in the hospital. There was practically no way back for them. They told me their stories, chain-smoking, and not a single one of them blamed anyone.



graphic novel felt tip pen 2013



ASYA UMAROVA

GROZNY

From a young age, I've been an artistic type — I was a soloist in the choir at the Children's House of Art (I was a contralto, a rare type of voice), I played guitar, drew, and acted in the youth theater. It seemed inevitable that my profession would be creative. Then, my parents surprised me by picking out a different path for me: "You're going to be a journalist. Everything you've been doing has been a hobby."

According to Chechen custom and tradition, I have no right to disobey my parents and must respect their choice, especially since I'm a girl. I don't think that their decision had to do with what they wanted as individuals, I think that it was imposed from the outside.

It's true what they say: those closest to you have the greatest power to hurt you. I would cry standing in the wings during performances. I saw how other girls' parents would run up to them and hug them, supporting them. I would walk home with a heavy heart through a dusty field and had to hurry, too, because I still had to clean, water the plants in the garden, cook dinner, and do my homework. After I'd finished the final state exam, my father suddenly died. Although I had been planning to change my parents' minds, after the death of my father, I lost all strength. I didn't want to live anymore. I saw my mother, exhausted and adrift, trying to figure out how to feed everyone. My problem seemed infinitesimal in comparison.

A year later, I began performing again, in secret. I was a soloist in two state ensembles and was even accepted into an art department at a university. When I would walk around the city with my guitar, people would sneer and make fun of me. In primary guitar school, I was the only girl, the rest of the students were boys. It was hard to do everything. I gave up. I quit school and stopped singing in the ensemble. I was depressed all the time, I could spend whole mornings crying, or disappear to the cemetery where my father is buried. I was sad about the time I was wasting working on something other than my true vocation. After that, I just went with the flow. I stopped caring. At the same time, studying journalism gave me a lot of experience and I started seeing the world differently. dreaming all over the place pencil 2013

"The Absence of Choice"

I have always wanted to work through my feelings and troubles on paper.

My work often deals with loneliness, social issues, war, fear, the lack of safety, apathy, inescapable situations, passing time, but sometimes confidence in dreams coming true. I am impressionable and sensitive, it's easy to hurt me. I have to take breaks from making art. Behind my back, people have said that my paintings are horrible and that they should not be shown. When I've heard things like this, it has made me want to give up, but I then have found the strength to keep working.

For me, feminism means striving toward ensuring that women have the same rights as men in all social realms. No matter their nationality, creed, race, or position in society, women's rights should not be infringed upon, and women should not be discriminated against on the basis of their gender.

I decided to participate in the Feminist Pencil because I wanted to share my personal story of having been discriminated against as a woman, but continuing to fight; and about how I now do whatever I please.

I believe that the movement, the unification of feminist artists, will continue to develop dynamically and serve to disseminate information about violations and infringements on women's rights.





UMNAYA MASHA [SMART MARY] MOCKBA – KOTTEHFATEH

My name is Umnaya Masha and I am pretty smart. I got this name from the graphic stories that Bronislav Malakhovski drew for the legendary Chizh magazine in the 1930s, about the adventures of smart Masha and her stupid brother Vitya. I try to live everywhere and nowhere, I travel a lot and do not stay long in any one city. I work anonymously. I spoke publicly only once in Kiev, but I prefer drawing to speaking. In addition to drawing I sew banners for feminist marches, which must change the world; I make stencils and stickers, I make up comics and illustrate booklets.

Recently I have been thinking about inclusive feminism, a feminism that speaks to the intersection of various forms of oppression. In Russia, some activists believe that the politics of inclusion demand that they step away from purely feminist concerns to discuss the issues of disadvantaged men: gay men, the disabled, the elderly, and migrant workers. Strange, but these women do not notice that among them there are women who are disabled, lesbians, elderly, migrant workers, and HIV positive. They ignore these facts. They call these personal issues that have nothing to do with the feminist cause. But the result of the politics of "purity" is always the same. The discussions are always about white heterosexual women, at the height of their strength and financial success.

Women in Russia have grown accustomed to remaining silent about their problems and serving, thus displaying their "strength" and "female wisdom". But I have no ambition to become the "wise Masha." I believe that in order to achieve civic victory, we have to recognize our individual weaknesses, and to speak out about them. The cult of strength and purity leads only to fascism and segregation.

> "This is not love" a series of 7 posters digital graphics 2013





"On – Off" poster digital graphics 2013

My project "This is Not Love" is dedicated to the repulsive laws banning homosexual propaganda which were enacted this summer in Russia. I consider "propaganda" to be a delusional term, much like "conspiracy of the parasites" [A stock expression from early Soviet anti-intelligenstia propaganda — Trans.]. This project depicts lesbian relationships against the backdrop of the law forbidding the open expression of love, affection, desire, and other common human feelings.

Whenever I say "lesbian relationships," people in Russia ask me to repeat myself, as if I could be speaking about some other type of relationships. Even when on a dayto-day basis, Russia is a truly female-dominated country. There are plenty of allwomen communities. The housing administrations and hospitals are staffed entirely by women. They give each other flowers, kiss each other when they meet, dress up for one another, raise children cooperatively, go shopping and out to the theater together. But these Relationships are somehow Defective. This is homosexual behavior, not an *identity*. Because if an alcoholic plumber were to appear on the scene, everyone would suddenly jump to their feet and run over to bow down to him as if he were a religious relic. I do not know why this is the case. It seems that in Russia, Proper Relationships necessarily entail violence, disrespect, and willing servitude. When these elements are absent, people look askance and start thinking that orgies are somehow involved or perhaps something even worse. When women are over 60, they can even move in together, but no one would think to call this a civil union or to respect them as a couple. Just like in the Viktor Tsoi song, we hear only a terrible howl and the lamenting refrain: "Oh! But this is not love."

The Patriarchal world is built on segregation and is full many kinds of ghettos. Real people live in all of them and they feel things for one another. At the police department, at the ballet, at school and in sport, women constantly form partnerships and special bonds. But everyone is still afraid of the fictional lesbians from non-existent orgies.





TATIANA FASKHUTDINOVA

IZHEVSK

I started my first graphic illustrations in 2009. At that time, I was interested in abstraction and the search for universal forms. My abstract images have been interpreted by colleagues of both genders as "male," which was considered a compliment.

Under a modicum of my teacher, Sergei Orlov's, influence, I turned to figurative drawing and painting. At first, I worked with color. I was consumed with depicting pregnancy and pregnant women in general. Later, my focus switched to the fetus or embryo. A hidden mystery: when the fetus is at the "exit" stage, it has nothing to do with its previous life, inside. Embryos and fetuses simultaneously inspired disgust and fear of the unknown, awe in the face of mystery, terror and recognition. I have recently moved away from "obvious" topics such as birth, pregnancy and gestation. I became interested in details, in regular everyday objects. I wanted to start working with social themes, but once again, through details – specific people (a comic about real events in the life of a friend), situations (taking a walk through a village with its inhabitants). I think that this cardinal shift toward new themes and even a new expressive language (I started working with ink, which triggered a stylistic change) was influenced by interacting with and admiring the work of Vika Lomasko and Anton Nikolayev. My personal involvement in a given subject is the most important thing to me in my work (i.e. the issues faced by my disabled friend; the life in a village that I am closely tied to). It turns out that the problems I come across in my daily life and issues that affect me personally are easily transformed into materials for art, and moreover, they're interesting to people other than just me. This is why I am participating in the Feminist Pencil, which specializes in women's social-engaged graphic art, for the second time.

I never thought of myself as a radical feminist, and am not fully competent in the theoretical trappings of this concept. For me, feminism is narrowly defined as the revelation of feminine essence, which is neither better nor worse, neither more or less dominant, neither higher nor lower, neither thicker nor thinner, but simply different.



Вова

Это баня у них. А вон и сам дядя Веня. Что еще про них рассказать?

Стёпа

У них есть мотоблок. Нынче купили. Рыжий только, а тачка – зеленая!

Вова

У них однажды свинья отравилась. Не свинья, а самец – боров. Я к ним прихожу, а он весь зеленый.

"Kuchor. Portrait of a Village"

Kuchor has been my favorite village since childhood. Every year, we vacationed there with my grandparents.

I still love going there, I get an enormous charge from being there. All the same smells and sounds, the same slow, stretched-out time. Meanwhile, the landscape changes with every visit. The village is disappearing right before my eyes. The old die, the young move away. Houses that were once upon a time carefully constructed, log by log, are being pulled apart for firewood and gradually carried off, or simply left standing vacant. Two thirds of the houses are already abandoned, and the inhabitants have no work. The fields are left fallow, as they are slowly taken back by the forest.

Ambivalent impressions abound: I feel closeness to the soil, the vividness of life, a strong sense of safety, as if I'm under an umbrella; and at the same time, I am plagued by the sensation that the world is broken and this village is abandoned.

I wanted to stop time and pin down this moment.

Each of the houses are are presented by the boys, who live in Kuchora. They are my second cousins – Andrei, Vova, and Styopa. They have lived in the village since they were born. They walk five kilometers to school in the nearest township. They are shy with strangers and completely open with me. They told me stories about the people who live in the village, their neighbors and friends, the village news, about school, and the abandoned houses. They also told me where people go when they leave Kuchora.

I sketched every house, I recorded their words and their ideas about the situation. I created a portrait of a village. Their village.

P.S.: I have to say--these boys have so much fun! City kids don't know how to have that much fun. Or maybe I've just never seen it. They scale the roofs of houses, roll

down the sides and wrestle each other on the frozen grass, smash through ice, run around on the surface of deep frozen puddles, and stage battles on the ice. They find the helmets of Yuri Gagarin or of Belka and Strelka [Two Soviet canine cosmonauts — Trans.] and show me rainbows caught in the ice. They run down to the swamp to pick cattails, fly across the scary log, hunt imaginary beavers, to catch some fish from under the ice with their bare hands, and talk me into going to the beaver pond. All this while I am walking around, taking pictures and listening to their stories.



Вова

Это у Дрягина первый дом. Сейчас никто не живет. Там стены нет. Но мы лазили – там ничего интересного.

graphic novel quill and feather 2013



HAGRA

KAZAN'

I have wanted to be an artist since I was little. I went to an art school (to be honest, I never graduated). But then, I slowly stopped drawing, mostly because of self-censorship. I felt that drawing what I wanted to draw the way I wanted to draw it would be indecent, and that I was somehow wrong. Only when I was able to accept myself did drawing come back into my life.

The central subjects of my work are women's subjectivity and sexuality, but not in the sense of a woman as an object; rather, in terms of how and where the sexuality is directed. This includes my gaze as a woman at men as the objects of sexual desire. I am also interested in sexual orientation, gender roles, and people who, in one way or another, exist outside of the accepted laws of society, such as drug addicts.

Right now, for me, feminism means fighting for the equal rights of people regardless of their gender and sex, as well as the fight against androcentrism.

I heard a lot about the first Feminist Pencil. I really liked the idea of the show and was sad that I couldn't go see it. Then, all of this fell out of my field of vision. I found out that there would be a second show when I got a letter from Nadia Plungian inviting me to participate in the Feminist Pencil 2. It would have never occurred to me that my drawings would be shown anywhere, so I was very surprised, but also very happy.

I haven't yet given serious thought to what I would like to see from a movement that unites feminist artists. I think that it's important to create as many platforms as possible (including those online) where it would be easy to socialize and discuss feminist art, without having to wear out my jaw proving to other people that women have the right to create.



"The Redhead" marker, colored pencil, rapidograph pen 2013

I see very few images of strong and independent women in the visual art world. When women like this are represented, they are so idealized and perfect that I can't relate to them. For men, there are plenty of images of regular guys who have the right to their opinions and happiness, while women only have two options: either be a brilliant superwoman, or stay at home and obey your husband or father. It's as though only an extraordinary woman who is head and shoulders above every man around her has the right to a voice.

I wanted to create autonomous and coherent heroines that don't need men to make their lives interesting. At the same time, I wanted these women to not be perfect, I wanted them to have the right to make mistakes — lots of them — because that's what people do, and it doesn't make them any worse or weaker. These women have the right to their opinions and they discuss them openly regardless of what other people think of them.

> from the series "Women and Sport" rapidograph pen, watercolor, digital graphics 2013





LENA HADES

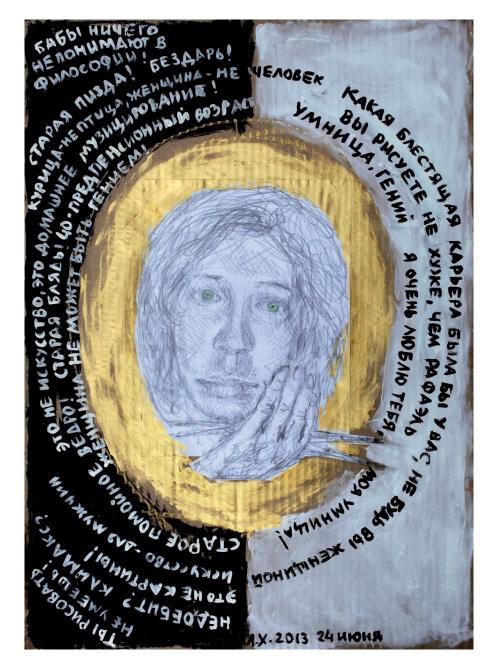
MOSCOW

Before I was an artist, I worked as a translator (German, Polish, English, French, Italian, and Spanish). I have a degree in pedagogy (physics and mathematics). I became an artist because I had wanted to do it my whole life, but had been afraid. I thought that being an artist was so important, so serious and laden with responsibility, that for a long time, I considered myself unworthy of being one. When I was 35, I got up the nerve, quit my job, and dove in head first.

The object of my work was so-called 'sacred knowledge,' but not the things that are written in esoteric literature, which I have never entirely taken seriously. As an artist and researcher, I am curious about where man comes from, what he is and what he lives for, where ancient languages came from, for instance, Sanskrit. I want to know why Pythagoreans believed that "number is everything" and why it was ancient India and ancient Egypt that had such an effect on Pythagoras. In order to learn about these things, in addition to painting, I spent several years learning Sanskrit, ancient Egyptian, Tibetan and ancient Greek — I already had a good grasp of Latin.

I have become interested in feminism in the past few years, especially in its radical form. I started attentively reading everything I could find on the subject, and I am very grateful to radical feminism for clearing my consciousness of patriarchal garbage and letting me see the problem of gender without rose-tinted glasses. I believe that radical feminism is not so much a discourse that supports women, but a contemporary philosophy of gender. This theory opened my eyes to the patriarchy in its hierarchical and violent form that has no room for true knowledge. This knowledge is fevered and it's indispensable and I am very remiss not to have known about feminism earlier.

In opinion, the only hierarchy that has the right to existence is the hierarchy of learning. I believe that the world should be ruled by 'wisemen.' However, my conceptions of wisdom and knowledge are not chauvinistic and sexist but deep and essential. Knowledge should not be manipulated by those in power and in fact should have nothing to do with power at all. The wise ones can be men or women. This is a utopian vision, but as an artist, I have a right to it.



self-portrait paper, ink, gouache, watercolor 2013

Pieces from the "Girl with Ribbons" series are autobiographical. I became an artist at a mature age - I was 35 - but at the same time, remained a small and brave girl, for whom there is nothing more important than learning about the world, about herself, about the origins of man, and why people exist and what will happen to them in the future. This was my goal when I was a 'little girl,' then an adolescent, and then a grown woman. In other words, knowledge is my passion and life purpose...

from the series "Girl with Ribbons" paper, ink, gouache, watercolor 1995





ELKE STEINER

BERLIN

I mainly draw historical comics and biographies, including those on Jewish-German history. A significant portion of my work is research and I enjoy it at least as much as I enjoy drawing.

I grew up on feminism because my family was all women, but I didn't understand the significance of all this until later. For me, feminism means standing against sexism. It is a movement fighting for the equal rights and self-determination of women. I am fascinated by historical and current feminist movements in other countries.

I was thrilled when Victoria Lomasko invited me to participate in The Feminist Pencil. She is an artist I feel a deep connection with and I am very impressed with her work. I can't wait to meet Nadia Plungian! It's a great joy and honor for me. As a feminist, I have met a handful of Russian activists through the RESPECT project and will be very glad to work together with them and present our common mission and shared perspective in Moscow.

How do I imagine a movement of feminist artists? Just like this! Or like the online project Chicks on Comics. I am grateful that these kinds of initiatives exist.



"Regina Jonas: The First Woman Rabbi"

This is a comic about the life and work of Regina Jonas, the world's first female rabbi. She was born in Berlin in 1902 and decided early in life to become a rabbi. The journey to achieving this was long and arduous and her difficulties did not end with being ordained. Her rabbinical certificate was signed in 1935. That year, the persecution of Jews was cemented into German legislation.

Together with her mother, she was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp and murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. After the Holocaust, the memory of Regina Jonas's work was forgotten for a long time. She didn't return to the public eye until 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when East German archives once again became accessible.

Regina Jonas lives on in the work of her students, and her male and female followers. I was incredibly lucky to meet one of them—Rabbi Elisa Klapheck from the Egalitarian Minyan in Frankfurt-am-Main, which published Jonas' dissertation on female rabbinical practice in 1999. She shared her knowledge with me and helped me with the graphic novel.

Not too long ago (2004), her book, Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: The Story of the First Woman Rabbi was published in English.



historical graphic novel china ink on paper 2010

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