

**AN EXHIBITION
OF WOMEN'S
SOCIALY
ENGAGED
GRAPHIC ART**



FEMINIST PENCIL 2



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Bettina, Ilmira Bolotyán, 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

Moscow
2013



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 Russia 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.

Curators Victoria Lomasko, Nadia Plungian

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.

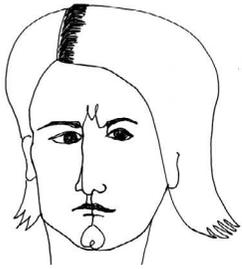
Being a female artist in our society isn't easy. Almost everyone I've talked to has, at one point or another, had to tolerate mockery and scorn in order to find a place in the professional world — only to feel out of place in the end anyway. There aren't many options for women artists: they can disappear 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.



ILMIRA BOLOTYAN

MOSCOW

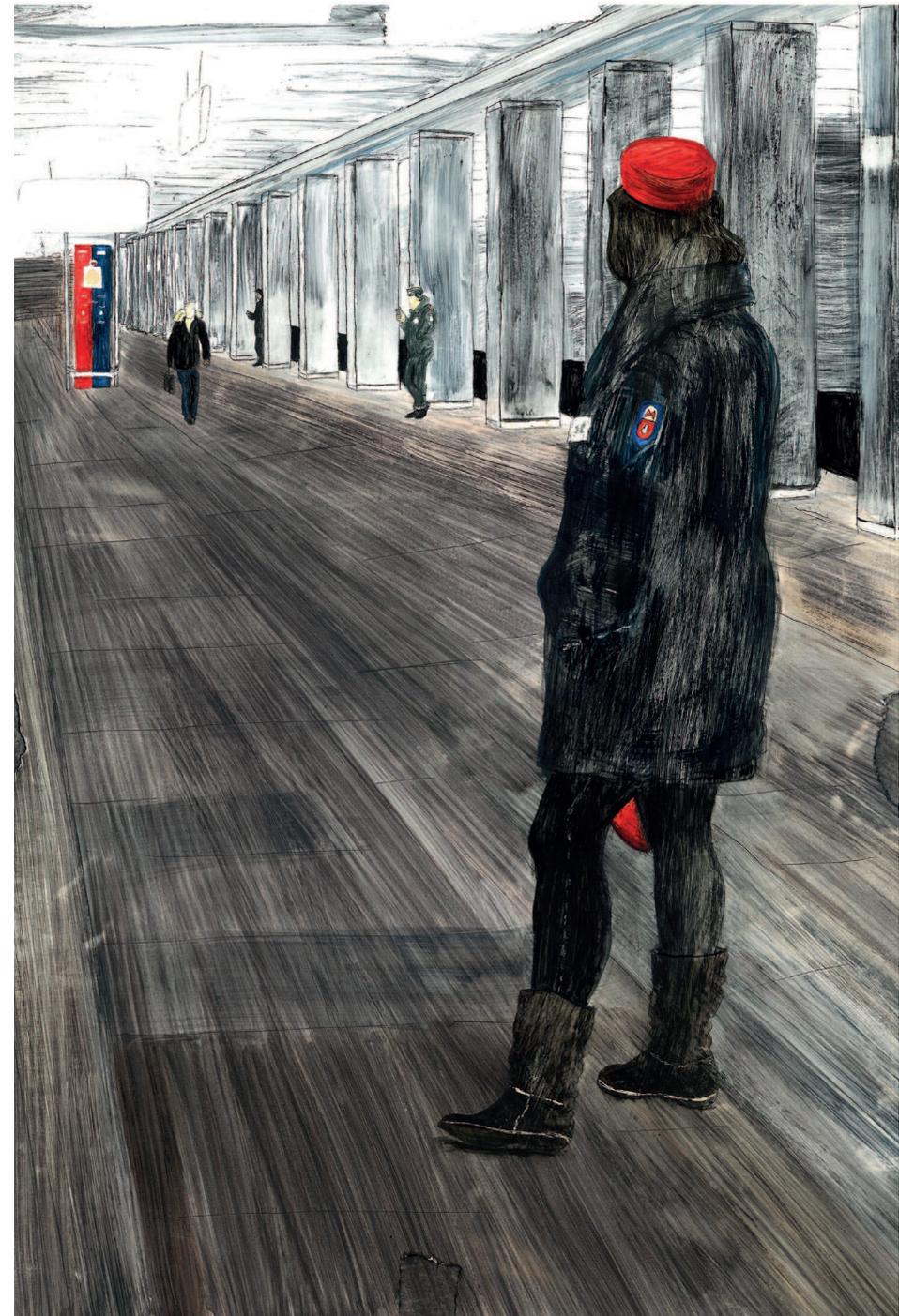
In drawing, I'm interested in the relationship between the tactile and the artificial, and the representation of contemporary mores. For me, feminism is first and foremost about women developing the self-worth and self-respect that makes it impossible for them to withstand degradation, assault and violence 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 Ukrainian society. Seventeen Ukrainian 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*



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 skirts 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.



“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 jibab 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.



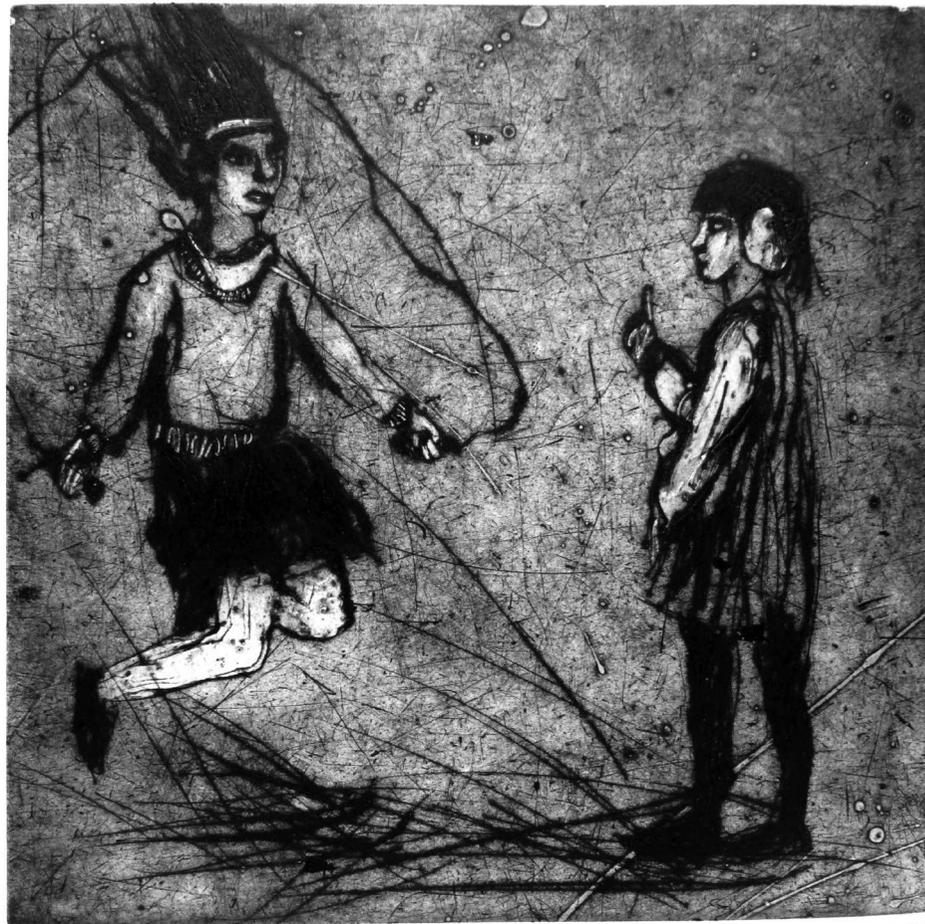


ALEXANDRA GART

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 kabinet [Graphics Office], a print graphics studio.



"Chou - yane VII"

Gart 92

“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.



“Our own and Others IV”

2012

*graphic series
etching
2012*



**GLUKLYA /
NATALIA
PERSHYNA –
YAKIMANSKAYA**

САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГ – АМСТЕРДАМ

*graphic series, part of the Clothes Café project
watercolor
2006*

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.

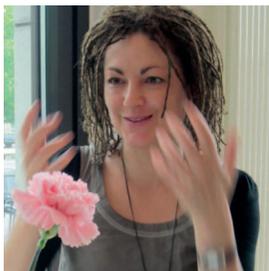
“Kafe ‘Odezhda’ [Clothes Café]”

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?





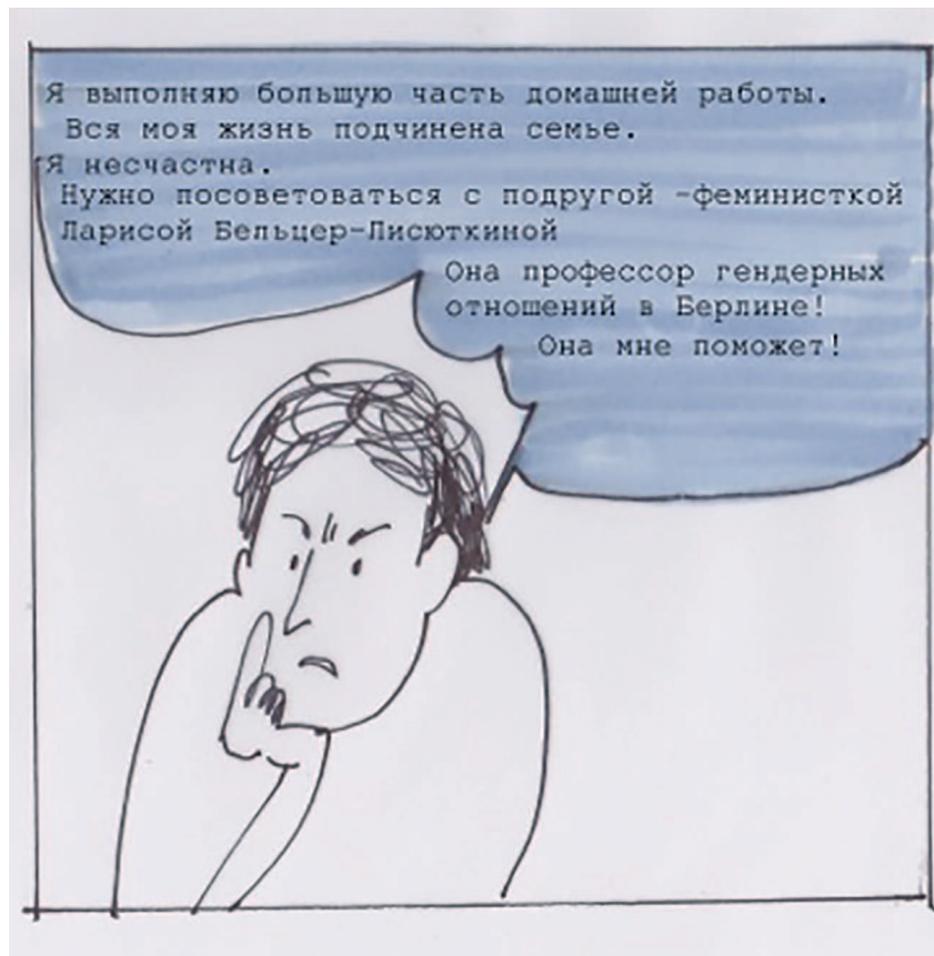
NIKA DUBROVSKAJA

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.





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 devalue 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.



“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
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2012-2013*

“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



ALEVINA 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.

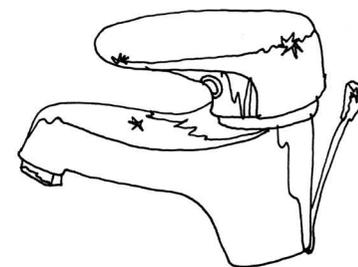
I am participating in The Feminist Pencil because I like the subject and the genre. The pencil is not a paintbrush, which means it's not a painting show, it's all about pictures! A picture is a story. My art is like one story after another. There's another aspect of the show that appeals to me: the artists 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”

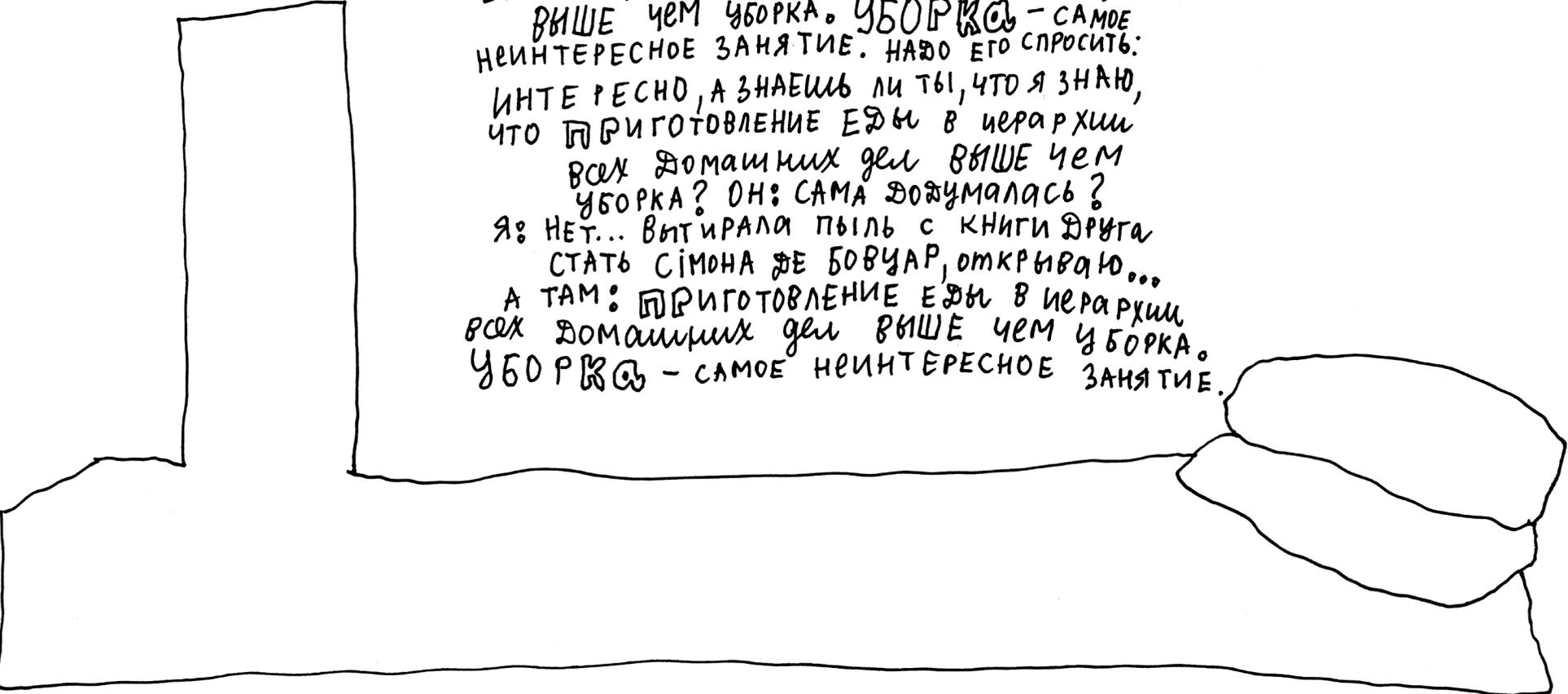
This is a series of texts and drawings I made while cleaning and doing other things around the house.

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.



Это не просто
Сгладить
Хромированные краны
Сияют ими***



УЖЕ НЕСКОЛЬКО ЛЕТ ОН ГОТОВИТ, А Я
 ДЕЛАЮ УБОРКУ... И ВРОДЕ БИ МЫ ПОДЕЛИЛИ
 ОБЯЗАННОСТИ... ИНТЕРЕСНО, А ЗНАЕТ
 ЛИ ОН, ЧТО Я ЗНАЮ, ЧТО ПРИГОТОВЛЕНИЕ
 ЕДЫ В ИЕРАРХИИ ВСЕХ ДОМАШНИХ ДЕЛ
 ВЫШЕ ЧЕМ УБОРКА. УБОРКА - САМОЕ
 НЕИНТЕРЕСНОЕ ЗАНЯТИЕ. НАДО ЕГО СПРОСИТЬ:
 ИНТЕРЕСНО, А ЗНАЕШЬ ЛИ ТЫ, ЧТО Я ЗНАЮ,
 ЧТО ПРИГОТОВЛЕНИЕ ЕДЫ В ИЕРАРХИИ
 ВСЕХ ДОМАШНИХ ДЕЛ ВЫШЕ ЧЕМ
 УБОРКА? ОН: САМА ДОДУМАЛАСЬ?
 Я: НЕТ... ВЫТИРАЛА ПЫЛЬ С КНИГИ ДРУГА
 СТАТЬ СІМОНА ДЕ БОВУАР, ОТКРЫВАЮ...
 А ТАМ: ПРИГОТОВЛЕНИЕ ЕДЫ В ИЕРАРХИИ
 ВСЕХ ДОМАШНИХ ДЕЛ ВЫШЕ ЧЕМ УБОРКА.
 УБОРКА - САМОЕ НЕИНТЕРЕСНОЕ ЗАНЯТИЕ.

*“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.

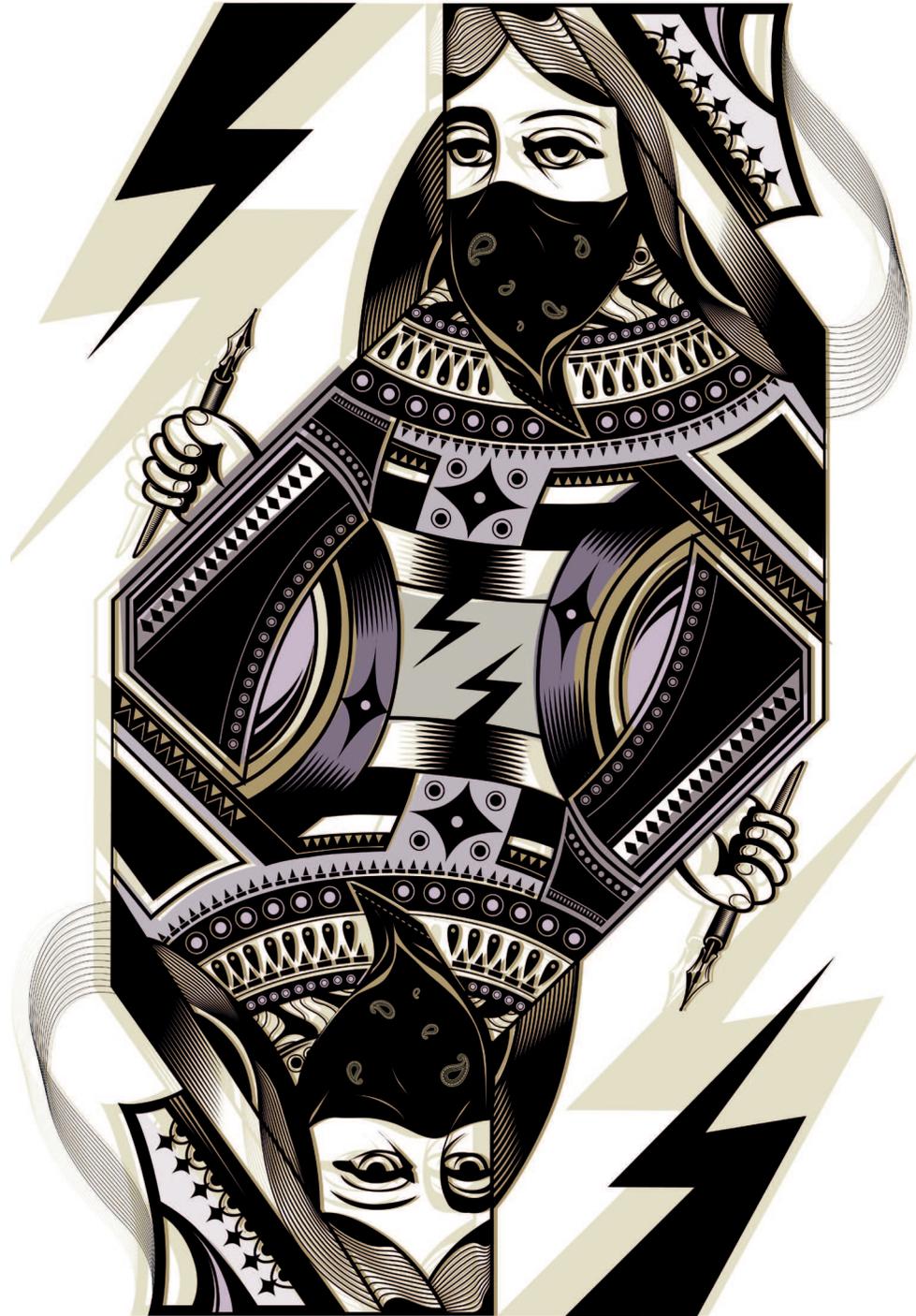
I think that even though the movement uniting feminist artists will be diverse, its art shows and magazines, plus spontaneous print materials, will come together to create an accurate image of the society. It's not out of the question that this movement will start to resemble an underground partisan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

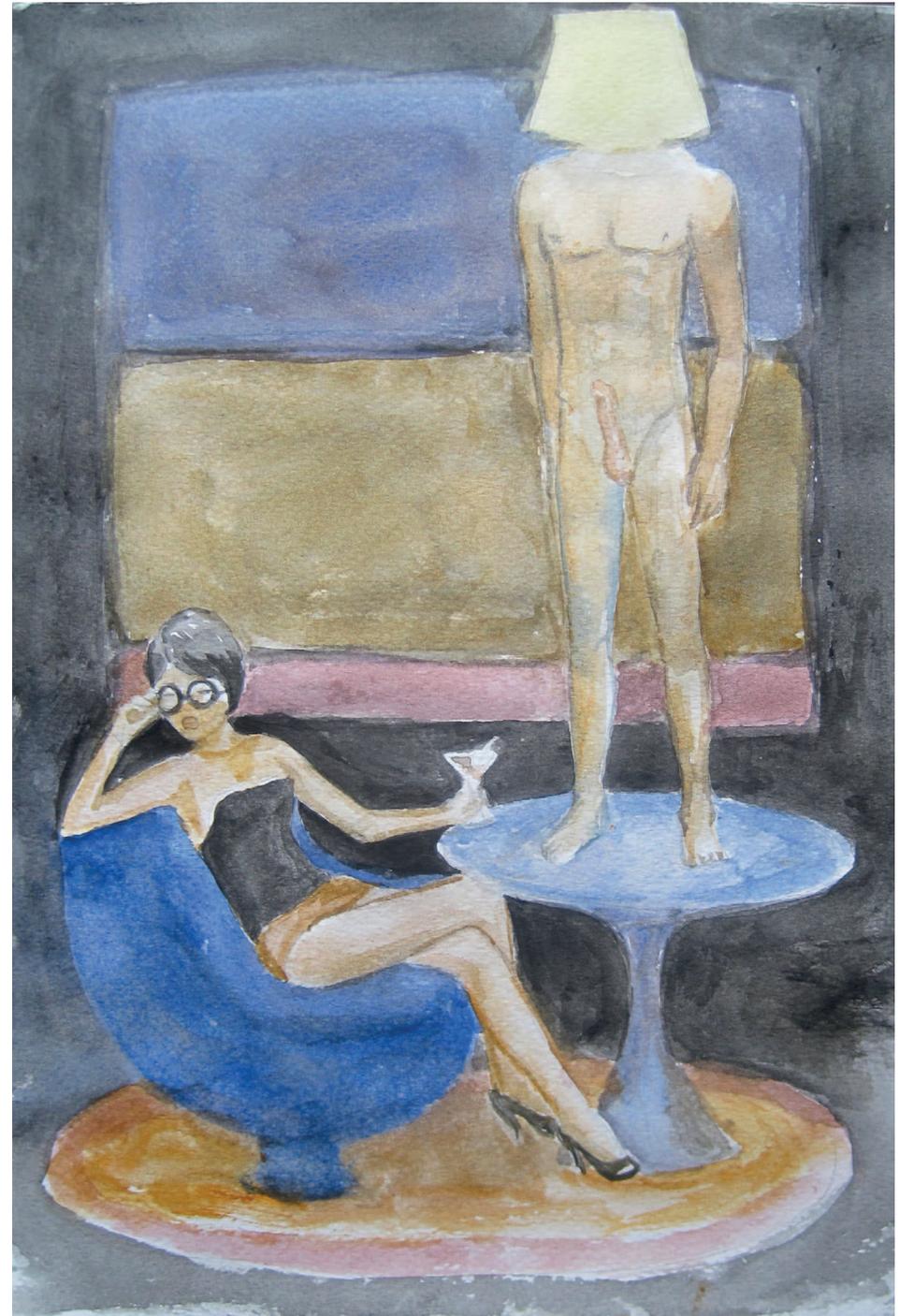
KIEV

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 regular 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 powerless 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 of 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?”
graffiti and colored pencil, ballpoint pen
2013



HELENA LAUKKANEN

UPPSALA

Most of my work is centered around everyday life. Even the most insignificant-seeming 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.

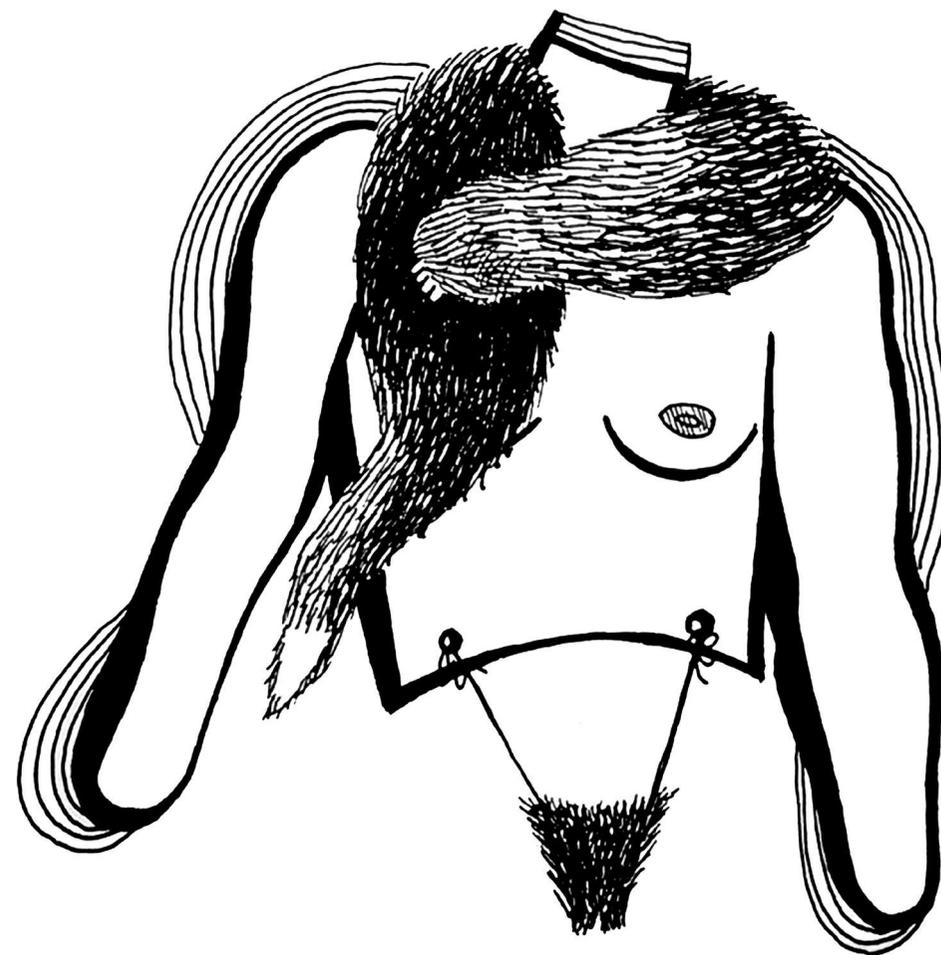
My drawings are dialogues or contemplations about the direction that one or another conversation could take. They often deal with women’s experiences and injustices concealed in our social position. I make about a drawing a day and I save them like a kind of wordless diary. I am often inspired by absurd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

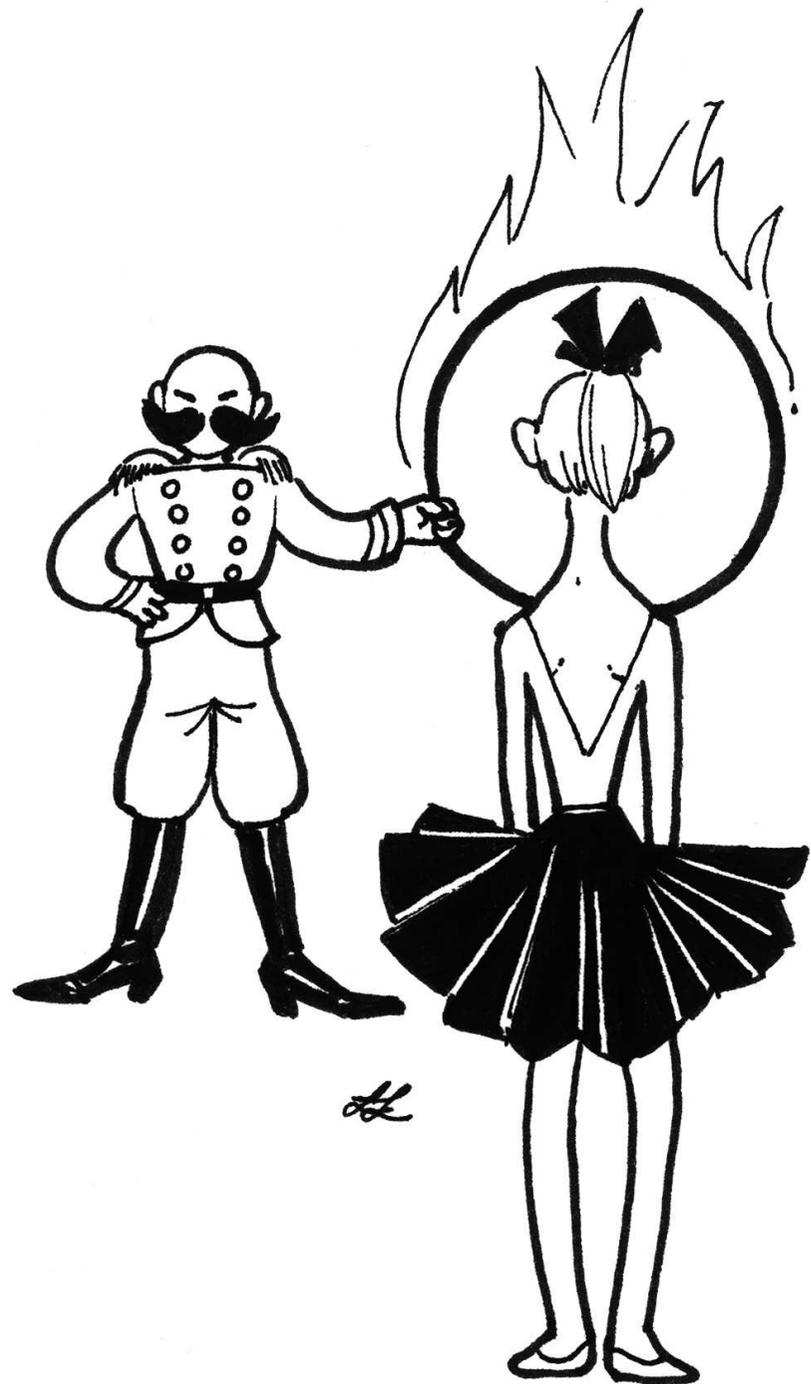
BERLIN

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.

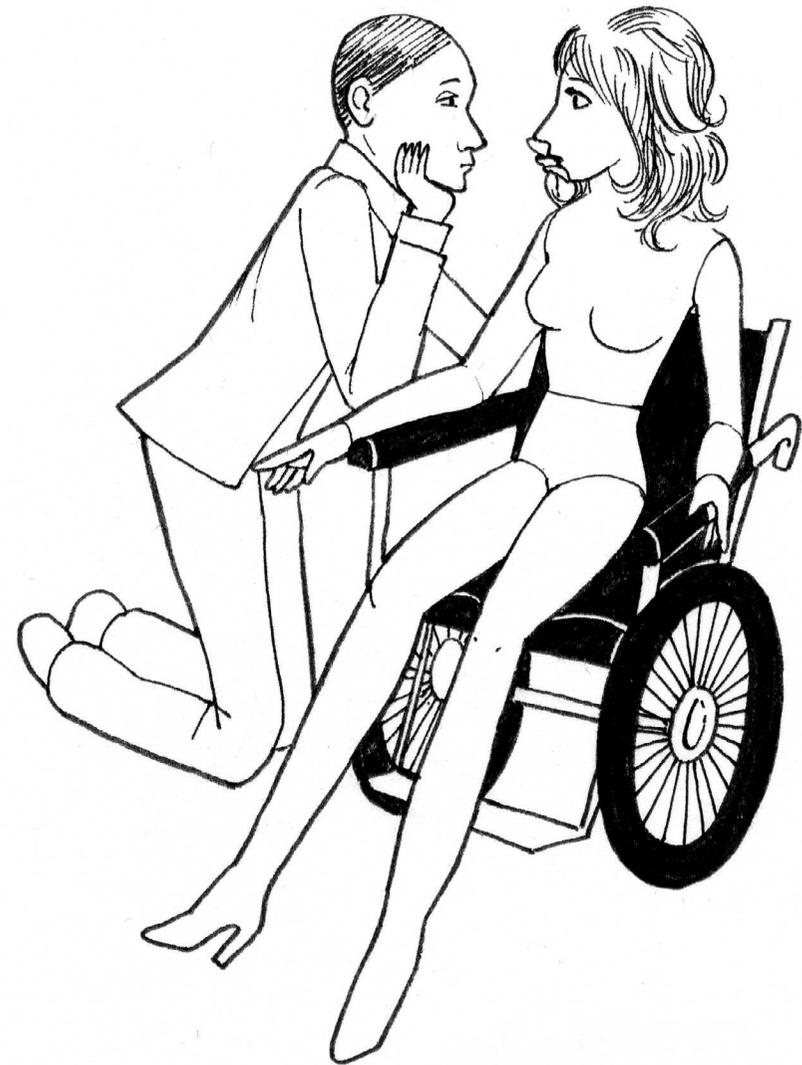
For me feminism is a reminder that men and women are still not equal.

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*

“The ‘Girls’ of Nizhny Novgorod”

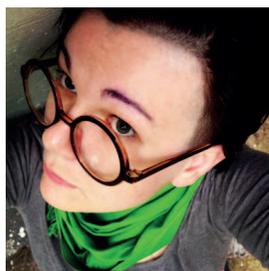
Nizhny Novgorod social activist Andrea Amirova put me in touch with the ‘girls’ (sex workers).

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 against 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 un-developed 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.*

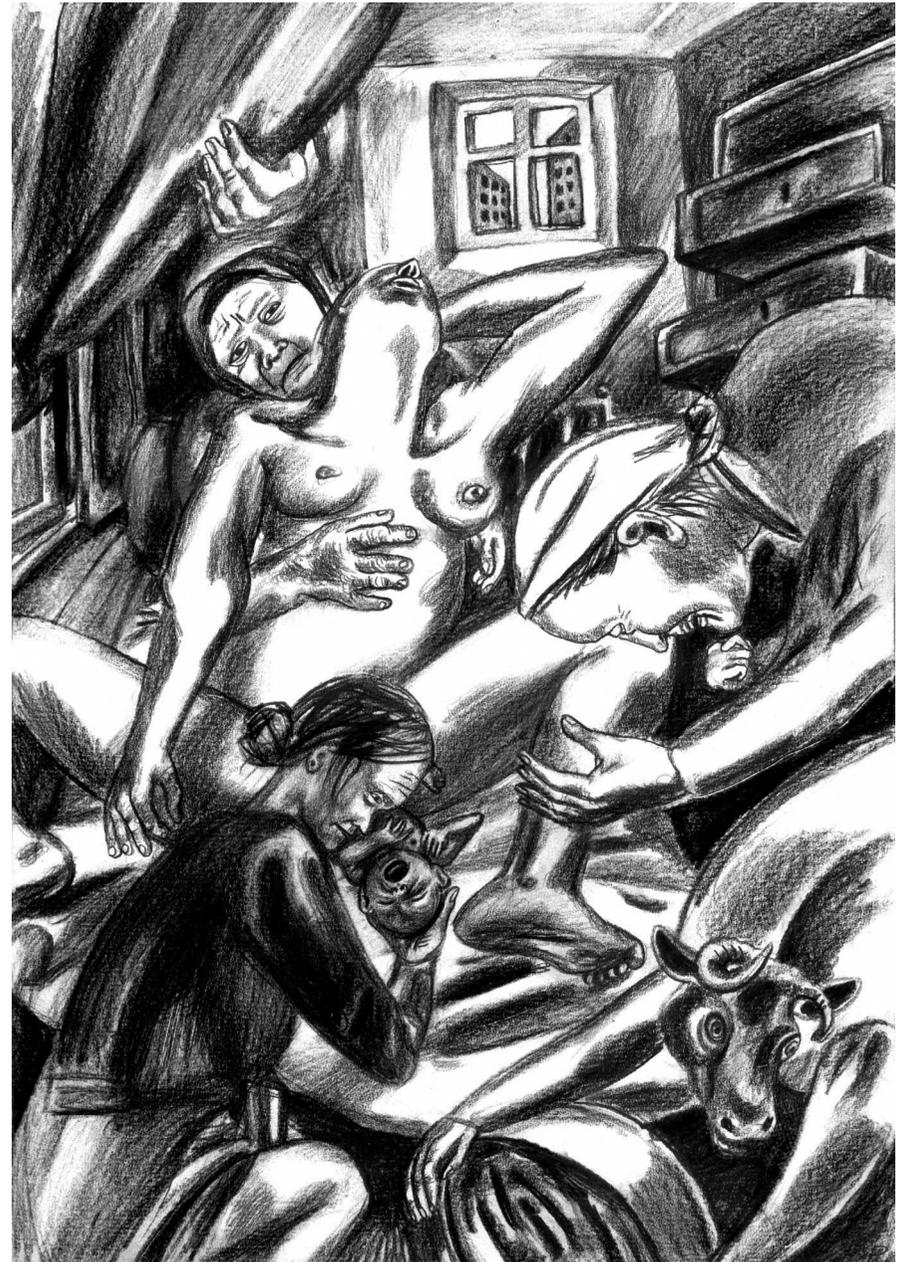
Anyway, sisters, feminism for all!



street sticker
digital graphics
2012-2013



*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*



A. Umarova

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.

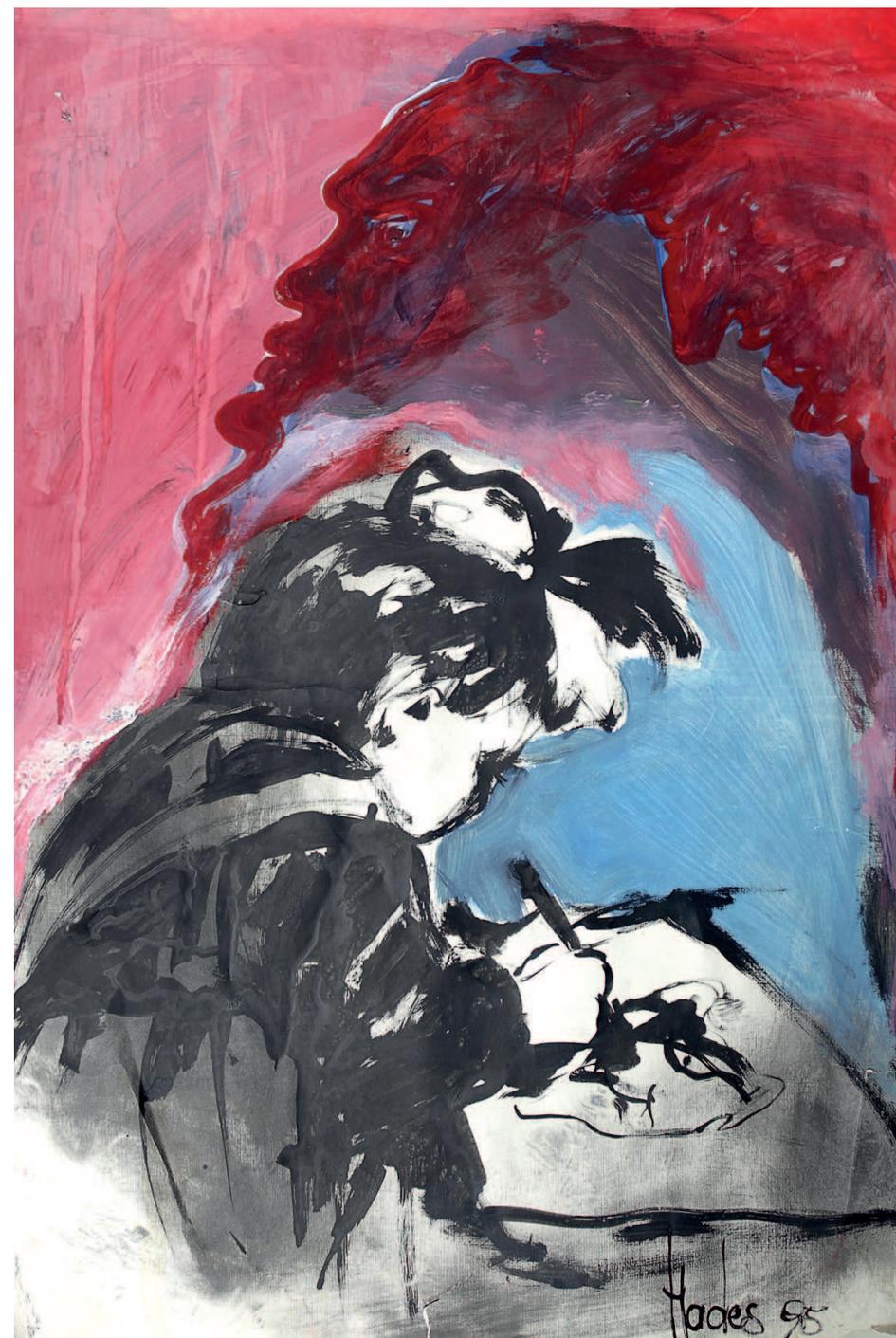
I wanted to create autonomous and coherent heroines that don't need men to make their lives interesting. At the same time, I wanted these women to not be perfect, I wanted them to have the right to make mistakes — lots of them — because that's what people do, and it doesn't make them any worse or weaker.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



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*



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