

● June 19th, 2024

● RAGE. Nadya Tolokonnikova / Pussy Riot

June 21 – October 20, 2024, OK Linz

The OK Linz Museum will hold the first ever solo museum exhibit of the works of Nadya Tolokonnikova, artist and founder of the feminist collective Pussy Riot. In Russia, she is persecuted for her conceptual performances and artistic protests against the Putin regime. Her performance “Punk Prayer” in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, hailed by The Guardian as one of the most important artworks of the 21st century, led to her and her colleagues being imprisoned for “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.” Despite ongoing persecution by the Russian government, she continues to create art and fight against dominant structures. Her exhibition “RAGE” once again focuses on resistance and repression, rebellion against authoritarian regimes, and patriarchal structures.

With irony, subversion, and provocation, the artist undermines the prevailing control and defense mechanisms of the authoritarian state she grew up in. While studying philosophy at Moscow University, Tolokonnikova became a founding member of the group Voina. Voina (Russian for “war”) provokes through public actions and targets the political regime. They use videos and images of their performances, disseminated on Russian blogs and independent media, to spread their actions in a repressive state that controls media and public discourse.

With the founding of Pussy Riot in 2011, Tolokonnikova built on her experiences with Voina. The membership in the group was revolving, with most of the participants, known for their colorful balaclavas and stockings, joining for an action or two. Tolokonnikova was the creator and leader of the group.

With elaborately planned and coordinated actions in public spaces, they opposed the patriarchy, the regime, and the oppressive link between the government and the church. Today, Pussy Riot has become a global movement against authoritarian societal structures worldwide.

COURYARD CHAPEL

In the chapel on OK-Platz, the artist stages three sculptures: PUSSY RIOT SEX DOLLS. This work directly references the feminist actions of the group. Made from used sex dolls, these toys for men become symbols of female resistance through the artist's modification. Their placement in the church alludes to Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" action, which ultimately led to their arrest.

Tolokonnikova's work includes not only her performative pieces but also objects and installations in which she finds beauty in her political struggle. From a state of fear and repression, she developed a visual language that rebels against political conditions: anarchistic, radical, oppressive, and at the same time touching and ironic. The artist creates immersive stage-like settings for her exhibitions, taking up and furthering Illya Kabakov's concept of the "total installation." For the exhibition at OK Linz, she stages objects, videos, and sound in a dystopian environment.

RAGE CHAPEL

Visitors first enter a sacred-looking room with large-format icons: RAGE CHAPEL. At the center is a red glowing Cyrillic symbol, accompanied by a series of ICONS that formally reference medieval church painting but convey current messages. The room is dedicated to activists who fight and have fought against the Russian regime. Portraits of anonymous Pussy Riot members, recognizable by their typical balaclavas, line the walls, carrying messages of protest like a halo over their heads. Some are calls to action like "YOU CAN'T STOP THE FUTURE WITH BULLETS, POISONS OR PRISONS" slogans like "RAGE RAGE RAGE RAGE", "FEAR NO MORE", "ENLIGHTENING OF THE DARKNESS", "FEAR "IS COMING UP AGAIN HELP ME TO CHASE IT AWAY", a passage from Tolokonnikova's song "PANIC ATTACK."

The calligraphed crosses above the entrance wall reproduce the artist's closing statement in court before receiving her sentence, as well as the text of her song "RAGE," which she wrote after Alexey Navalny's imprisonment. The triptych MY MOTHERLAND LOVES ME AND I LOVE MY MOTHERLAND paraphrases Joseph Beuys' "I Like America and America Likes Me," or Oleg Kulik's "I Bite America and America Bites Me." An ironic comment, considering that the artist is persecuted as an extremist, terrorist, and foreign agent in her homeland.

PUTIN'S MAUSOLEUM

At the center of the next room is Tolokonnikova's 2023 video "PUTIN'S ASHES" Together with twelve women from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia who share her experiences of repression and aggression by the Russian president, she burned a portrait of Vladimir Putin in the desert and collected the ashes in small vials, which are displayed like relics in the exhibition. This setting is flanked by works from her 2024 series DARK MATTER. The artist refers to the new works and symbols she processes in them as "amulets of hope." In the engravings on birch wood, she combines images from her life as an activist in Russia with photographs of her vulva and other body parts, alongside self-designed symbols derived from Orthodox church calligraphy (vyaz). The room is titled PUTIN'S MAUSOLEUM, but it is more a tomb for Putin's power and a symbol of hope for a better future.

DAMOKLES SWORD

For the staircase of OK, the artist designed an oversized blade, DAMOCLES SWORD. This work is an extension of a series of pieces titled "KNIFE PLAY," which she began in 2023. The series consists of 100 "prison knives" made from metal scraps that the artist collected in an abandoned prison. Like Damokles' sword, the weapon hangs over the heads of the visitors, symbolizing the precarious situation of artists and activists in Russia, who, like Tolokonnikova herself, must constantly fear persecution by the Russian judiciary. The knife is flanked by velvet banners with the prayer-like repeated message "LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH".

The work commemorates Tolokonnikova's friend and colleague Alexey Navalny, who was murdered in a Russian penal colony in February of this year.

ISOLATION CELL

The reconstruction of her own prison cell stands at the center of the next room. In the oppressive confinement behind bars, she places her original letters, documents

and photographs documenting the harsh prison life and the psychological burden she endured in a showcase. The artist refers to her prison time as a durational performance, 2-years-long. On the walls outside is a series of other “shivs” in plush frames, harmless like souvenirs. Opposite is a wall with videos of past Pussy Riot actions, directly referencing the reason for her arrest and illustrating the disproportionality and inhumanity of the Russian state’s response to resistance.

Tolokonnikova’s work is of an intensity that leaves no one indifferent. For her, art is a necessity and a means of processing, and a powerful tool of critique. In interviews, she repeatedly refers to the French Situationists of the 1950s and ‘60s, whose goal was the fusion of art and life, or the overcoming of art in favor of a life in a state of revolution. Tolokonnikova herself lives by this concept: Even after her imprisonment and despite persecution, she continues to fight against the Russian regime with artistic means.

In her works, she explores the role of art and her role as an artist in the fight against global structures of power and repression.

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CURATORS

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LOCATION

OK Linz

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ARTIST TALK

June 19th, 2024, 6pm, OK Deck

OPENING

June 20th 2024, 7pm

with Live-Performance

DURATION

June 21st – October 20th 2024

OPENING HOURS

Thu – Sun, 10am – 6pm

Mondays closed

Press information and photographs for download: <https://www.ooekultur.at/presse>

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