



bad
samaritans



MIA BAILEY (GERMANY)

KIRA O'REILLY (UK)

VOINA (RUSSIA)

CURATED BY ALICIA KING

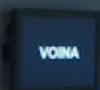


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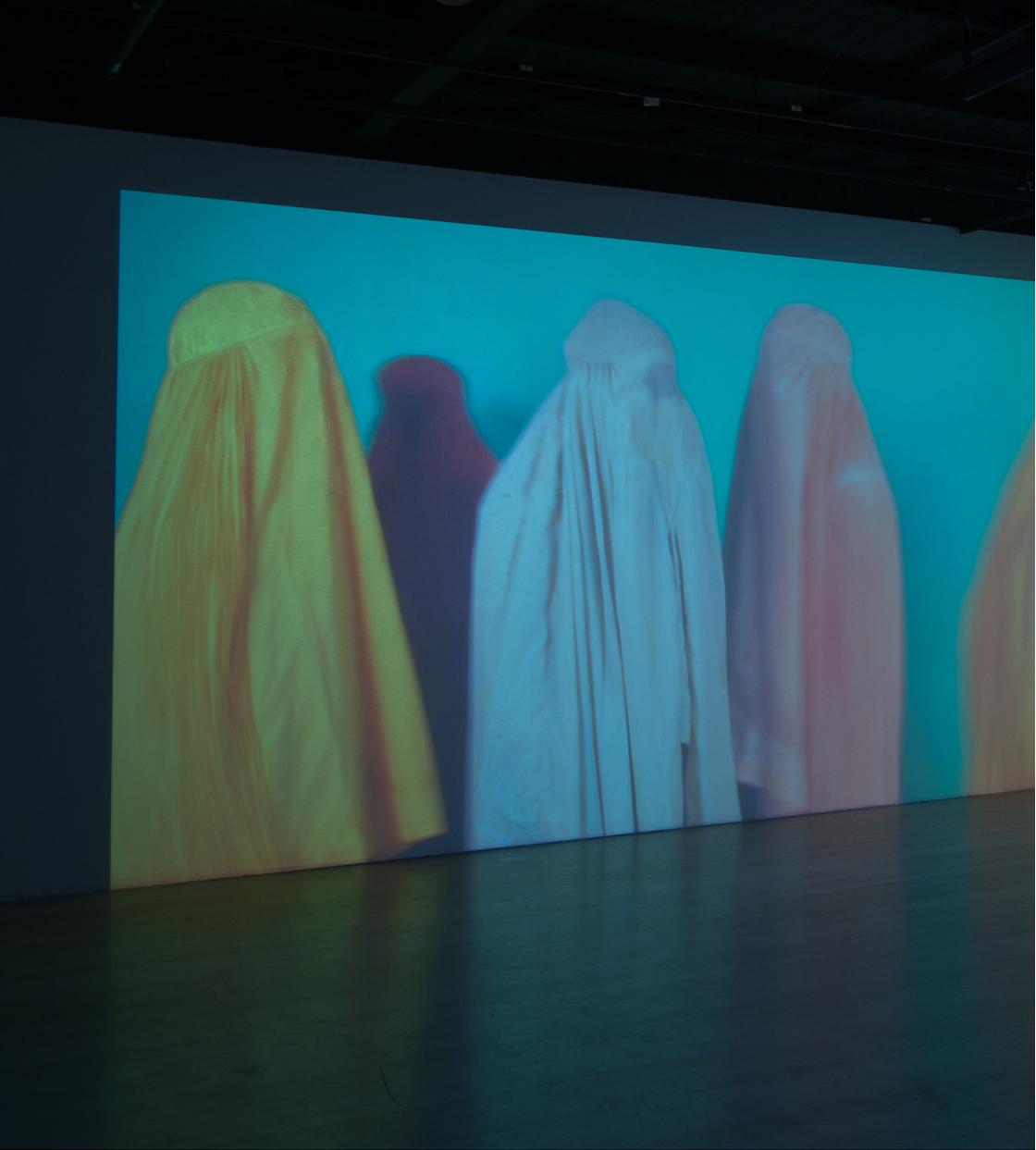














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⚡Joey ⚡Cannizzarro

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Jesus, saying, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said unto him, “What is written in the law? how readeest thou?” And he answering said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” And he said unto him, “Thou hast answered right: This do, and thou shalt live.” But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Your neighbor is stuffing a chicken into her vagina and walking out of the grocery store. Your neighbor just turned over that police car. Your neighbor is vigorously lubing up a model airplane. Your neighbor is in a derelict club dancing naked with a dead pig.

What makes a good citizen and what it would mean for an artist to work outside of those criteria— to make art which violates the social contract and disrupts the order and stability that such a contract ensures? Essentially, what is productive about making work that offends, disrupts, disgusts an audience, breaks the social code, or even the law, as an element of the artwork?

The social architecture we have created is not arbitrary or one-sidedly manipulative. Some contemporary theorists (particularly those in the field of Cognitive Studies) have come to interpret our social structures as an extension of the homeostatic impulse, arrived at through the process of natural selection, analogous to our biological developments. In basic terms homeostasis refers to an organism's tendency to maintain equilibrium by adjusting its physiological processes. The neuroscientist and theorist Antonio Damasio coined the term sociocultural homeostasis to describe the process by which human beings have extended our impulse toward homeostatic balance and thus the survival of the individual and community. Just as individual cells work in collaboration to better sustain the conglomerate (cells form tissue, tissue forms muscle, muscle forms organs, organs form systems, systems form organisms) humans have conglomerated to form a greater biological whole: society.

Though we are natural beings and subject to the natural order, daily survival is no longer our primary motivator. To ensure well-being in later human development - once surplus negated the daily struggle for sustenance- humans began to solidify laws to guarantee not just survival, but a certain quality of life. This factor, the quality of one's life, is the driving force behind sociocultural homeostasis.

If we accept an evolutionary basis of society, then it becomes more possible to approach the fundamental nature of various functions within that society— art among them. It's undeniable that art has staying power in society, so it can be deduced that it serves a homeostatic function to human beings. One of the primary functions of contemporary art is to disrupt stagnation in the social order and allow for transformations of the individual, the community, and the society by catalyzing cognitive re-evaluation both on the conscious and subconscious levels. With an understanding of this principal, art can be seen as the mutant cell within the greater societal organism: a radical variation which, if resonant and lasting, catalyzes necessary adaptation. Though sociocultural homeostasis is by no means a prominent concept in the public discourse, it seems that humans understand it on a deep, fundamental level. Consider reactions of revulsion and vehement rejection of art that defaces or endangers the body; the social organism has developed protections in the form of taboo and visceral disgust, which are triggered if and when a cell endangers itself, to prevent it from taking action which is perceived as a violation not just of an individual body and mind, but of one unit in the greater social body and psyche.

Seeing the body not solely as individual, but fundamentally constructed as part of the larger sustaining organism helps to explain its unique potency as a medium of communication and disruption. The artists presented in *Bad Samaritans* embrace practices which make the individual body vulnerable, while simultaneously celebrating the agency one has over that small portion of the vast social body.

Kira O'Reilly's performance, *Inthewrongplaceness* exemplifies contemporary art's homeostatic function both in the work itself and through public reaction. The piece also challenges notions of individuality and the idea that the boundary of the flesh is the boundary of the individual. Speaking about her work she says: "the materiality or fabric of the body, as well as its specificity is important, relationships between bodily interior/ exterior spaces are explored as a continuum, the permeable boundaries of the skin membrane defy it as an impenetrable container of a coherent or fixed 'self'." By juxtaposing and entwining her bare body with the carcass of a pig, she emphasizes their visual similarities to such an extent that there seems to be a physical continuity between the two beings. In performance, audience members were encouraged to touch both O'Reilly and the pig while wearing rubber gloves, creating a tactile experience to the same effect. The piece is affecting even without its critical context, but it's more or less impossible to investigate its homeostatic function without looking at it in connection to new scientific research and technology.

Her intentions in working with a pig, relate to the use of pigs and pig tissue as stand-ins for human flesh in the biotechnology industry. The biotech industry itself is a function of the human drive to perpetually improve well-being: pigs, for example, are close enough to humans that research is being done which would allow for cross-species organ implantation, thereby extending our already extravagantly long lives. *Inthewrongplaceness* physicalizes the particularly complex conflict created by this element of our search for higher well-being through technology: it gives people the opportunity to sensually experience the pig as a human analogue; to feel, see, smell, the person and animal; it forces them to engage with the difficult questions which arise from the knowledge of the role pigs play and will play for the benefit of human beings, and the sacrifice that has to be made for that to happen.

O'Reilly was herself exposed to this conflict and came to the content of her piece through working with pigs and pig tissue during a residency at SymbioticA. Integrated relationships between artists and scientists such as this one are arguably unprecedented

and in themselves are a forum for artists to engage with socially disruptive bio-technologies. The results of her research are obviously vastly different from that of a scientist, but this is precisely what is exciting about it.

In the contemporary moment the relationship between human and animal, body and tissue are being destabilized and redefined on a fundamental level by advances in technology. An open, but critical, engagement such as we see in O'Reilly's work is as a vital form of participation in shaping these developments and interrogating our perception of, and potential reconciliation with, the utterly new.

That is not to say that this indicates an immediate or even imminent shift in the greater cultural perception of the individual and social body stemming from bio-art or bio-scientific practice. We have only to look at the reception of *Inthewrongplaceness* to be reminded of the innate conservative response that the public has to disruptive or radical artwork. The most important thing to note is that the piece, although widely denounced in the media, did in fact resonate with people and found its way into the public discourse. Work does not have to be accepted or liked to affect change in the public consciousness. The *Mutant cells* that propagate are those that help the organism adapt to changing environmental factors

Approaching these artworks from a cognitive-evolutionary standpoint allows for a subtle discussion of their potential as practical political tools, and produces a more nuanced understanding of the multiplicity of ways that art, or any act, can be seen as political and/or socially challenging. *Inthewrongplaceness* is a clear reminder of the fact that, as members of a society and thus cells in a sociocultural organism, no embodied action is truly private or individual.

The efficacy of Mia Bailey's work also relies on human sociocultural preservation mechanisms in relation to the individual body as a unit in a whole. Human beings have a cognitive predetermination toward interpreting inanimate objects as subjects with agency. It is evolutionarily advantageous to interpret something as living and respond accordingly than to accidentally assume otherwise (e.g. better to think a rock might eat you than to think a crocodile is a rock). This function is even stronger when the object may be a human face or body part. Both of Bailey's video pieces rely on the viewer accepting regular objects as human body analogues and having a reaction akin to visual capture, a sort of synaesthesia in which the visual image overrides other sensual stimulus. In *Transfusion*

it's almost painful to watch as the syringe enters the latex muscles and red stains the liquid inside. The cartoonish appearance of the arms does nothing to detract from the strong reaction one has to seeing flesh (even fictional flesh) punctured by a needle. This initial sympathetic somatic reaction connects the viewer to the central subject and makes the following twenty plus minutes of the video more compelling: as the procedure goes from being cold and clinical to messy and gruesome, a sense of the sadness and sickness of the action prevails. All of the actors are hooded and anonymous, which has the effect of removing their individuality, while never dehumanizing them or detracting from the empathy one feels for the central figure. At the same time, all three figures seem to be acting without incentive, repeating the motions with a sort of bureaucratic detachment, repeating and repeating with no personal stake in the result.

Looking at *Girly* we see similar themes, but separated and juxtaposed instead of conflated. Seeing the elements in isolation helps to reveal the significance of the relationship between the two screens that comprise the work. Surrogate body parts and visual capture are utilized, as gloved hands clumsily lubricate phallic toy planes and rhythmically thrust them into greasy latex gloves that obviously resemble orifices. Although the sympathetic somatic reaction is not quite so direct as in *Transfusion*, the scene succeeds in creating an involuntary physical response situated somewhere between the repellent and erotic. On the second screen, in stark contrast, women in colourful Muslim clothing, move and shift subtly, almost ghost-like, slowly exiting the frame over time. The image of the planes penetrating the gloves, can read as a metaphor for the grotesque overuse, even fetishization, of the plane and tower footage from 9/11. The violence of that action next to the smooth choreography of the Muslim women might imply a condemnation of the subjects of the airplane metaphor (the media, politicians, etc.) via an ugly/frenetic action versus beautiful/graceful action binary, but something more is at play. As in *Transfusion*, the faces of the figures are completely obscured -- the Muslim women are hidden by their burkas and the frame of the other video only shows gloved forearms and hands. The impression that the anonymity of institutional or clinical guises can act to excuse unjust action seems consistent in both pieces. The works together can be seen as critical of the thoughtless actions people allow themselves to passively perform because of the demands or incentives of an impersonal outside source: look at the complacency of the central subject in *Transfusion*; the cold, disinterested inertia of the clinicians injecting the central figure; the mindless lubrication and repetitive, mechanical insertion of the planes; the lost shuffling of the Muslim women who appear not even to walk of their own accord, but to float ambivalently and then disappear. Whether referring to the de-individ-

uation perpetrated by medical institutions, governments, or religions, blind acceptance is shown to be destructive to the both the individual and the society organism. None of the individuals in Bailey's work are demonized -- the subtle horror of the work can only be attributed to the invisible force that motivates the troubling action.

In the Voina Collective's work, as in Bailey's, there is emphasis placed on the troubling nature of inert behavior and tacit acceptance. Their actions are blatantly political to such an extent that the discourse surrounding them frequently questions whether they are more political activists than "artists" in any traditional sense (Voina means War in Russian). That said, it's important to look at Voina's spoken intention that the work be received as art, and the way their methods of political and social disruption embrace the absurd and the shocking as a means of interrupting, not just the political or social order, but the deeper psyches of civilian witnesses and those government officials who are paying attention. In *Memory of the Decemberists* documents a Voina action in which two homosexual activists and three central Asian immigrants were ceremoniously "hanged" in a grocery store. The message of the action is straightforward, but the performance itself in relation to the documentation of it and its dissemination are complex. The video emphasizes the mundane, officiant attitude of the victims' last march and the almost bovine complacency of onlookers and employees, in contrast with the violent image of broken-necked jerking and flailing, and the victims' bodies lynched and limp, glowing in the florescent lights of the megamart. The initial action must have caused a response of shock and discomfort in onlookers, if not something more dramatic, but the video piece leaves the viewer with something of a haunting numbness in the shadow between violent imagery and disaffected response.

The subtitles work to editorialize the occurrence, narrating an ironic, almost comical sub-text to what was factually occurring. These editorial moments ("Senior store staff meets the convoy... sets the place for hanging", "Appears man in black suit from Mayor's office. Lynching certificate check-up") illustrate one of the defining characteristics of Voina's work. We are essentially looking at propaganda – it's clearly satirizing the propaganda they seek to counter, while simultaneously using those strategies to communicate their message. They know that, while only a handful of people will witness the initial political action, their platform for distribution is the internet, so the video piece, the artwork, is what will get the most exposure and have the greatest effect. The internet is an unprecedented means of cell to cell communication within the sociocultural organism – a fact which Voina understands and harnesses as a political and artistic platform. As O'Reilly

entered the public discourse through the bastardization of her piece in the media, Voina acts as their own bad press, producing skewed documentation of their deviant behaviour in satire and critique of a deeply corrupt political and social system.

The videos and actions could easily be seen as profane, sensationalist, at times adolescent, but this is the point. Some of their most well-known works include the drawing of a 65 meter penis on the drawbridge leading to Moscow's Federal Police Services, and the performance/video Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear!, a planned orgy in The Museum of Biology in Moscow. Oleg Vorotnikov, one of Voina's key members is quoted as saying (paraphrased in translation): "if people are deprived of a political choice, activity moves from their brain into a lower part of their body." The statement is an observation and a threat; if the Russian government seeks to infantilize or make animals of their people, then they will behave in a way that exaggerates that position by taking it to the extreme. Furthermore, these actions will not only be performed publicly, but will be widely disseminated as editorialized documentary videos, using a platform of communication which is too vast and decentralized to be effectively censored or controlled. Within the sociocultural organism, government bodies are by no means centrally influential – they are one organizing element among many. Destabilizing, disruptive cells can undermine conservative efforts to maintain power on the part of individual leaders or governing bodies if they utilize modes of communication that circumvent these controls and connect directly to other cells; we are living in the nascent moments of just such a medium.

Times of expansive transition, such as the one in which we live, can be particularly revealing of the extent to which art functions as an agent of transformation in contemporary society. No single factor is the primary catalyst of mass-scale shifts in social consciousness; rather there are sprawling, intersecting webs of processes which affect cultural mutation. Still, looking at art which challenges political and social structures by disrupting the comfort of the individual, we are able to understand the potential positive echoes it affects socioculturally and politically. The paradox evoked by the title resolves itself: one way to be a Good Samaritan is to allow yourself to be seen as sick, destructive, in the plainest term "bad." We can understand the artists of Bad Samaritans as positive deviants, seemingly working against the law, against the stability of society, but with

the ultimate potential to contribute to the necessary adaptation of the sociocultural organism.

Joey Cannizzaro is a Brooklyn based writer and performer.

WORKS



KIRA O'REILLY 2005 *inthewrongplaceness* photo: Manuel Vason

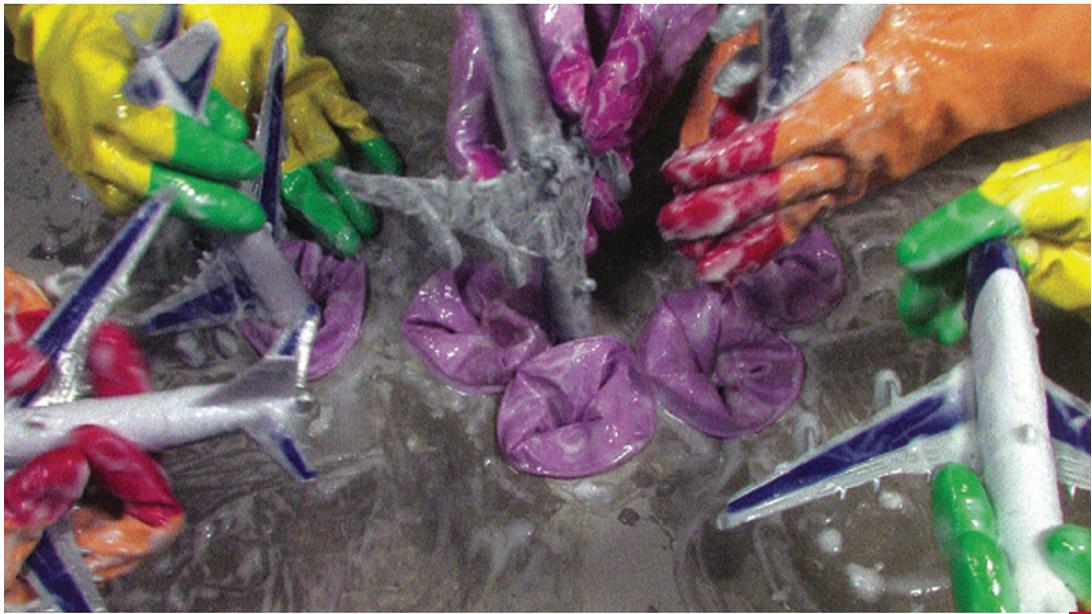


KIRA O'REILLY 2005 *inthewrongplaceness* photo: Manuel Vason





MIA BAILEY 2009 Girly (monitor 1) video still Image courtesy of the Artist



MIA BAILEY 2009 Girly (monitor 2) video still Image courtesy of the Artist



MIA BAILEY 2008 Transfusion video still Singer: Denise Seyhan
Image courtesy of the Artist





VOINA *In Memory of the Decembrists* 2008 Performance video still
Image courtesy of the Artist



VOINA *Palace Revolution* 2010 Performance video still
Image courtesy of the Artist



VOINA *How to snatch a chicken* 2010 Video performance still Image courtesy of the artist





VOINA *How to snatch a chicken* 2010 Video performance still Image courtesy of the artist







VOINA *Leo the Fucknut is our president* 2010 Performance still Image courtesy of the Artist

interview

with Oleg Vorotnikov

from VOIR

[ALICIA KING] You've said that your artwork "Fuck for the heir Bear Cub!" (report in Russian:<http://plucer.livejournal.com/55710.html>) is satire of the Russian elections. Were you surprised to see Putin regain Presidency in the recent elections, and do you expect he'll be able to maintain his political power for a full term? Has it significantly changed the atmosphere in St Petersburg, where you are based?

[OLEG VOROTNIKOV] It would be inaccurate to call it satire. I view that action not as satire, but as gifting of a new political language to the Russian public. The absence of legal politics in Russia had rendered the old political language useless, and because of that people had fallen completely silent. They found themselves unable to speak up against the regime's impudence, in a situation when democratic elections were effectively done away with in favour of autocracy and succession. I am talking of course about the 2008 presidential elections, which amounted to Putin temporarily handing over power to Medvedev. Putin snuck his heir in through the back door of history and propped him up on the throne like a teddy bear. The people, raped and humiliated, stared dumbfounded at this toy, as one would stare at a consolatory gift after forced sex. Those elections in themselves were an entirely pornographic affair. The regime fucked the speechless Russian people with a teddy bear. At that point, the people desperately needed to regain their ability to speak, and thus to exist.

There were no words in which to speak out on what was happening. The old way of making political statements had been buried by the pornographic faux elections as well as other equally pornographic shenanigans of the regime. It was in this context that we came forward with our orgy. The situation called for artists to find a succinct form in which to express the pornography that surrounded us. We knew that no one else was capable of that. It couldn't be done by politicians, journalists, human rights activists, experts or observers. It was our time to attack -- and we opened fire. Thus began our artistic bombardment of the reality, our Voina. There was a need for a new political language, for a new way of speaking -- and we provided it. It was precisely the language of actionism that the protest masses chose to adopt for themselves, as evidenced by the events that followed, up to and including the civil unrest of December 2011 - March 2012. Russian poet Anna Akhmatova once said, speaking of her contribution to the Russian society of the 20th century, "I've taught women to speak". Likewise, I can say that in the 21st century we taught the protest to speak. Like Pushkin's six-winged seraph, we opened the nation's silent mouth and placed on its tongue a burning, fiery word.

Putin's third term (which should be thought of as his fourth consecutive term, since Medvedev was but a sock-puppet) was to be expected. If one were to judge by the pointless activity of the opposition, impotent but still eager to lick the regime's ass whenever the opportunity presents itself, one would conclude that Putin and Putinism are here to stay forever. Alas, as it turns out, citizens and activists are not prepared to fight for their rights to the very end. The opposition increasingly resembles a drunk clown dancing on the circus floor, with corpses of common Russians littered around him. As we proclaimed back in 2008, in Russia one has but two options: to be a clown employed by assholes, or an asshole employed by clowns. Militant groups such as Voina are incredibly rare in the uncomplaining Russia.

There was a short-lived feeling of slight civil euphoria in the December of 2011, when it seemed as though everyone was about to take to the streets, and Putin would never be president. Yet the popular uprising was promptly quenched through the efforts of sell-out opposition leaders and the regime's cynical neutralization tactics. The events in Moscow were especially dramatic. The true, honest activists were made into a laughingstock, the idea of radical protest marginalized by crowds of placid idlers clutching white balloons.

[A.K] How has being harassed and arrested by the Kremlin changed your attitude to your art actions - will it change the kind of actions you do, or how you orchestrate them?

[O.N] In 2010, we rejected the idea of peaceful “artistic” actions (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-vGbKXKhGk>) of symbolic value in favour of extra-artistic direct actions. The time for symbolic actions has passed. This is coming from us as masters of symbolic art actionism. It’s over, dead, obsolete. It’s art history. Right now, at this point in history, Russia needs to put aside the humour (irony, wit and all the other synonyms of cowardice) and attack the regime with dead seriousness. The problem that I see with today’s protest movement is that, as a result of the actionism trend sparked by Voina, actions have become something for young people to hide behind. Instead of developing the approach further, activists simply keep exploiting the same strategies. Of course, fighting against the regime can be difficult and dangerous. And thus, young people inspired by Voina’s success feel that all they ought to do is do “actions”. The actionist virus has infected everyone, even those who seemingly have nothing to gain from it, such as anarchists, left radicals, extremist organizations. Actions are all they do nowadays, they are what they spend all of their energy on. Fearing real struggle, they are hiding behind an endless series of petty amusing actions, peaceful, witty, ironic and completely useless in today’s Russia. And we, Voina, are to blame for infecting the newly-born protest movement with this virus of symbolic actionism. We created activists and put those ideas into them. That is why we now reject symbolic actionism, and begin acting instead as a guerrilla squad in the civil war between the people and the occupation government. We are becoming art bandits, art guerrilla, art terrorists. And we call on everyone to follow us.

[A.K] The allegations against you seem to be in flux - ie you and Leo [Leonid Nikolaev] were acquitted of all charges with bail to be returned to them, yet the next day new international arrest warrants were issued for offenses relating to ‘hooliganism’. Do you ever feel a sense of stability?

[O.V] An artist should not expect stability. On the contrary, the nature of art is continuous and violent escape from any kind of comfort. The authorities used to call us

hooligans -- now they recognize that we have grown into a gang. I do not belong to this world anymore. I belong to actionism. If an artist is good at doing actions, his own momentum carries him upwards until eventually he finds himself hanging alone among empty space, all by himself. Lack of air, of company, loss of connection with the world are all signs of success in art. Art is not a field for personal gain. In the end, artistic practices are always destructive for the artist. You lose everything -- your health, your blood, your personality.

The absolute in art is when everything is hell. That is something to keep in mind when doing the kind of socially valuable and concretely useful art that Voina is doing. The good news is that you might not live long enough to reach this vacuum of outer space. The regime will not settle until it physically eliminates every single one of us. That is also something we understand very well. For a political artist, criminal persecution is the only adequate sign of recognition that he can receive while still alive. We make a point of rejecting any monetary prizes or other contemporary art awards. Money and artistic careers do not interest us. We haven't even used money since 1998. Thus, the only way to judge our success is by the extent of the state repression against us. In this logic, the ultimate award is for the artist to be murdered by the state. Indeed, the regime has on multiple occasions attempted to physically eliminate us (with the hands of Center E, the Criminal Investigation Department or the OMON).

But killing us is not going to be easy. We are experts at clandestine living. The police are simply incapable of tracking us down. And we are always on full alert. Constantly switching to higher gear. That's what distinguishes contemporary art. You have to go flat out, lest the cops catch up to you or you fall apart. As soon as you lose speed, pieces start falling off of you. If you want to remain intact, you have to keep outrunning this process of disintegration. And that withdraws you from everything "human", from human "needs".

And because we didn't want to feel sad about that, we got together and formed a collective. Since we went into hiding, Koza has given birth to a girl, a baby activist. Her name is Mama Can't-Take-Our-Eyes-Off-Her (<http://fotki.yandex.ru/users/riot-starter2011/tags/%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0%20%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F/view/533608?page=4>).

Another Voina activist Kapsper (<http://fotki.yandex.ru/users/riotstarter2011/tags/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%20%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B9/view/444036?page=2>), who is 3, has already become the youngest art curator (<http://www.berlinbiennale.de/blog/uber-uns/team>) of all time. Because of them, our actions have to be especially quick. Everything has to be done in 10 minutes, so speed is key. Speed and momentum -- to transcend art for good.

[A.K] Since your work receiving international awareness of your actions, do you feel like you're part of an arts community, albeit a fractured one? (an activist arts community, not the commercial arts)

[O.V] We really don't. All the international recognition we receive, all the exhibitions and actions of support worldwide -- all of that seems to be passing us by. We live an altogether different life -- an underground life of poverty and homelessness, deprived of rights and opportunities. Our youngest activist Mama (who is just 3 months old) does not legally exist, as a consequence of the international arrest warrants issued for her parents Vor and Koza. Another consequence of this is that we are unable to attend the Berlin Biennale in which we participate as co-curators. We are effectively being denied the opportunity to fulfil our international duties. But we don't necessarily consider that a bad thing. We wouldn't want to belong to the art community. "Artists" is too trivial a title for us. We despise the worthlessness of art. It's time to admit that we are not artists, but makers. And now is the time to make history.

[A.K] Do you have support from any sector in the Russian arts community, and is the activist art community in Russia growing, with groups like Pussy Riot also gaining international attention?

[O.V] No, we don't see any such support. For one thing, we wouldn't want to have anything to do with Russian art. Pussy Riot may be following in our footsteps, but even without them there are plenty of Voina imitators engaging in peaceful media activism. All they are doing is exploiting the groundwork laid by Voina three years ago. The same kind of worthless and, in today's context,

weak symbolism that I was talking about. And that is the reason why they are viewed as victims, as poor innocent girls rather than heroes, even with all the media uproar. I pity them. I feel sorry if this is the end result of Voina's work in Russia. We choose War.

[A.K] Is your work influenced by other socially/politically engaged artists, for example the Russian artist Oleg Mavromatti, the Yes Men, or the Viennese Actionists?

[O.V] I would be dishonest if I were to say so. Of course, art has been an influence on us. We studied it thoroughly in our college days and we raised ourselves on a mixture of extremism, political struggle, punk, postmodernism and conceptual art. But art means nothing to us anymore. Nothing inspires us. We've had enough of that. Getting inspired requires time, which we don't have. We are hobos. We have experienced a life of poverty. All that is left is for us to be an inspiration to others.

We have previously restricted ourselves to art actions, because we realized that we were incapable of anything bigger than art. But this year of underground existence has led us to overcome this powerlessness. And we are going to do everything to make people stop associating us with impotent art.

[A.K] Through talking to people about your work I've noticed there seems to be a contradictory expectation that despite being a political activist group Voina also lives some kind of luxurious international artist lifestyle - that you would also be travelling around the world to your exhibition openings (despite having international warrants out for your arrest). It seems that we in privileged countries, like here in Australia, have an inability to really comprehend that an artist would risk so much for their work and political beliefs, as being an artist is normally seen as such a bourgeois occupation. It also insinuates that your work is a meal ticket, ie a ticket out of Russia. Is the idea that people think you would prefer to flee Russia and live in the USA or elsewhere insulting? Have you encountered this attitude firsthand?

[O.V] Of course. First and foremost, if we were to leave the country, we would make the Russian regime very happy. But that is not going to happen. Here is where the front line is. Well educated Russians are fleeing the country by the hundreds of thousands. Of those who stayed, millions have had their life plans thwarted by the regime. Thousands of political prisoners remain behind bars. And thus emigration is not an option for us. This is a war of liberation, in which the authorities and the police represent an occupation force that engages in anti-civilian warfare, just as the Nazis did.

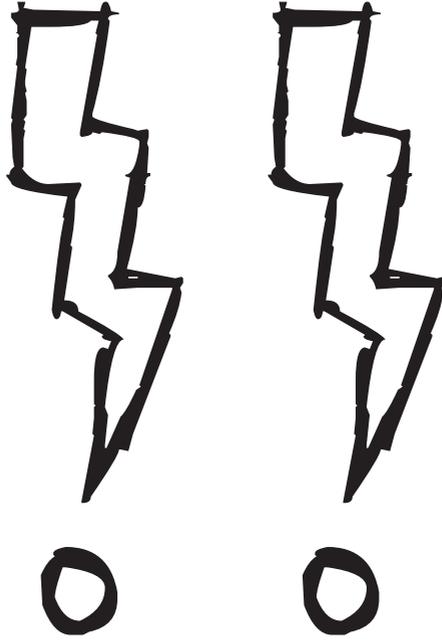
[A.K] Do you think contemporary Art and the State can only be mutually exclusive?

[O.V] Absolutely. The state is antagonistic to art and must be transformed all the way down to its foundations.

[A.K] Which of your works do you think has been your most successful art action so far?

[O.V] Dick Captured by the FSB!
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMXQ3U3FSyw>). Our Dick inspired the people to rise. Another work of ours that is enjoying a resurgence of relevance is our punk concert in the courtroom (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUaJLNonytg>) which was titled A Cock in the Ass! (CIA for short).

I don't care much about our previous works, though. My interest lies in struggle, not in memories of past success.



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