

Dislocations.

Curated by BLACKWOOD, J.

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Dislocations

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“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

Arundhati Roy, “The Pandemic is a Portal”, The Financial Times, 3 April 2020.

So wrote Arundhati Roy in a much-commented article published in the Financial Times, published in early April 2020. Just over one month into the pandemic, Roy was not the only writer to grasp the magnitude of the moment. Back then it seemed possible that the COVID-19 pandemic might be the harbinger of a fundamental re-organisation of society, with many on the left expressing the hope that a society more orientated toward human needs and environmental justice would emerge, growing organically from the ruins of late capitalism and globalism.

For all the beauty of the metaphor, the experience of a pandemic doesn't really feel in practice like a portal we can skip through lightly. It is more a question of us trying to see a reflection of our old lives in the shards of a shattered mirror, in order to cling onto them. We cannot just walk away from multi-layered discontents in the short, endless, intense spiral of time since the global financial meltdown and credit crunch of 2008.

These discontents include gentrification, de-industrialisation, migration, the fraught merger between human and digital selves with as yet unintended consequences, and activist resistance to authoritarian populism in politics. Underpinning these problematics is of course a looming environmental collapse, a loss of belief in a collective future, and the satisfaction of minor consumer appetites in an ever more individualised, perpetual now. These videos are snapshots of realities lived out against these factors, of cultural, political and social problems that have been accelerated and intensified, rather than halted, in pandemic times.

The videos selected for this online exhibition reflect upon the individual and societal experiences of these ruptures in the socially liberal, late modern consensus of Europe, both within and beyond the EU. Deliberately, the exhibition was selected across a range of artists at different stages of their development, from the newly emerging to the well-established; the work selected spreads across the period from the financial crash to the present era of complex, inter-linked anti-government protest.

Olia Sosnovskaya and Alesia Zhitkevich's collaged video, *The F-Word*, takes place in the context of the popular uprising by Belarusian people against their authoritarian dictator, Aleksandr Lukashenko. The Belarusian regime's sclerotic and inept response to the emergence of the pandemic- trying to deny or downplay the significance of the virus and refusing to lock down or take preventative measures against it, unwittingly stimulated the emergence of an active civil society and mutual networks of support and solidarity in the Belarusian context. This support network, relying heavily online on the telegram private messaging app, mutated over the months into forming an organised bedrock of opposition to Lukashenko's regime, challenged by street protest and peaceful, leaderless resistance following the dictator's falsification of election results and usurping of state power from August 2020.

Olia and Alesia focus on a particular element of the popular resistance to authoritarianism; the particular nuances of the word Fascism in the context of Belarusian history & their contemporary deployment by the antagonists in the current existential struggle for power. The horrific Nazi occupation of Belarus in 1941-44, in which one in every four Belarusians lost their lives, is a collective national trauma and a founding narrative of post-war Soviet Belarus and, since 1991, the post-Soviet, independent Belarus.

The film, spread across three interlocking parts, shows the word “Fascist”, with its very particular resonance in the Belarusian context, being weaponised by the political opponents. Anti-government protestors denounce OMON riot squads as “fascists” whilst the authorities try to turn the toxic payload of associations of fascism on the protestors. Beyond the day to day or routine protests, repressions, beatings, arrests, all taking place in a claustrophobic atmosphere of fear, suspicion and paranoia, the film follows the semiotic thread of the word “fascism”, explains its different nuances both within and beyond Belarus, and acts as a thread of meaning stitching together the documentary, discursive, and performative elements of the work.

Ahmet Ögut’s two films feature struggles no less intense than the current events in Belarus; his two short films *Things We Count* (2008) and *Fikirtepe'de bir Ev* (2015) deal with the troubling linked processes of entropy, gentrification and transformation. *Things We Count* focuses on a graveyard of decommissioned military aircraft in the Sonoran desert in Arizona; a voice blandly counts through the aircraft one by one, in three languages; Kurdish, Turkish and English.

There is much that is left unsaid in this film, such as the involvement of these end-of-life machines in the wars of two and three decades ago in the Middle East or, further back, in the generational conflict in Vietnam. The use of language implicitly suggests global interconnection and a silent rejection of the imposition of one particular world view (and associated cultures and languages) on another. Whilst in part this could be read as an attempt to portray these discarded relics of late modernism in a nostalgic fashion, in fact the effect of the film is quite the opposite; to suggest that we should not only learn from but perhaps not look back with any fondness on the culture and world view that produced, armed and flew these machines in conflicts around the world.

The more recent music video *Fikirtepe'de bir Ev*, meanwhile, takes this analysis of power relations and its effect on individuals a step further. Ögut has used drone technology regularly in recent work (see also *No Poem Loves its Poet*, 2019). The perspective drones afford, shows us the fundamental transformation by capital and power of individual neighbourhoods, in this case Istanbul. Property disputes and the refusal of individual owners to give up either individual property rights or, spectacularly, in the protests surrounding

Gezi Park in the same city during May-August 2013. The resulting footage shows the very real feelings of dislocation, anxiety and powerlessness that can visit individual citizens caught up in the legal upheavals of challenges to property rights and inheritance, and to the loss of a whole accumulated set of cultural experiences in the neighbourhood that had been flattened. This critical dislocation between individual agency and desire and the operation of power through finance capital and legal mechanism is a key battle addressed in this and other films by the artist.

Of course, this battle for control over land and property mutates differently in the context of de-industrialisation and the gradual erosion of what once seemed immutable norms and values associated with linked industrial working class cultures. Stella Rooney's film *Under the Face of a Timex Watch* (2020-21). The film sensitively yokes together images from the Timex factory in Dundee, which was closed down after a bitter, bitter strike that lasted from January to August 1993.

Rooney's documentary work focuses on the recollections of former Timex workers and strikers, who can be read as emblematic of a perception of the world and of society that has simply lost its material basis in the last thirty years. The powerful trade union that linked the Timex workforce, and the sense of a working community that made the enterprise as much as its instantly recognisable products, emerged from a series of norms surrounding the power of collective bargaining and mutual solidarity. In the film, the former workers reflect sadly on the loss of those norms, the passing of ever more repressive anti-union legislation, and the passing of that understanding of the world into a world of indifferent neoliberal subjects, concerned simply with working and holding onto those jobs no matter the cost.

This broader understanding of precarious labour is one of the key economic drivers of the immiseration of Millennials and Generation Z. Whilst the film is very particular to Dundee and the impact that the loss of Timex and a right-wing assault on local working conditions and practices had, it is a pattern wearily familiar on a global scale. Most cities located in the "Global North" or semi-peripheral economies have a Timex story of their own to tell; in that since this is a film whose specific dislocation has a universal audience. There is a sense that de-industrialisation- every bit as traumatic an experience as the one we are all living through, and spanning five decades now in the Global North, has been every bit as traumatic for some to live through.

A key issue in the European context since 2008 has been migration. Fear of migrants, and the bogus separation of migrants into “deserving migrants” and “economic migrants” has been rarely far from political prominence in the last decade, and successful populist propaganda seeking to demonise and stigmatise migrants has been one of the principal drivers in a resurgence of ethnic nationalism across Europe and the United States in this period.

Mila Panić’s film *Tante aus Deutschland* (2019). In the context of the former Yugoslavia and very particularly Bosnia-Herzegovina, the category of the Gastarbeiter or guest worker is a very familiar one; a family member rarely seen but who is associated with luck, prosperity, the desire to travel abroad and to try and construct a better life, whilst at the same time experiencing a diasporic longing for an idealised version of home. Touching and wryly humorous, this is a long discussion of the human stories behind migration, the motivations, and the real difficulties not only of integrating into a new society but also trying not to lose significant contact with the lived reality of friends and family at home. These are dislocations of a sense of self and belonging, and also a dislocation of individual and collective perceptions of home and identity.

If Mila’s work very effectively teases out some of the personal issues associated with migration, then the collaborative work of Elena Chemerska and Ivana Mirchevska focuses in on speculative discontents associated with the post-digital and our uneven and uncertain fusion with Web 4.0- a growing symbiosis between human and machine. This is the work’s third iteration, having first been shown as part of an online residency at Jadro Centre in Skopje, the Macedonian capital, before forming part of a broader display of video and installation at a feminist festival at the Skopje Youth Cultural Centre.

The work, *Speculative Manual on Haunted Thresholds* (2020) feature both artists as avatars- Helena (Chermerska) and Europa (Mirchevska). The work derives directly from the collapse in our physical and geographical space during the pandemic, and an attempt to re-imagine it in algorithmic, gendered terms. The work implicitly offers a comparator of real and virtual space, and considers the interaction of an avatar body double in a constantly shifting, uncertain virtual space. The work focuses on bodily experience and alternative imaginaries, not as a means of escape from the day to day realities of the pandemic, but as a means of imagining speculative futures where the most basic assumptions of the pre-COVID world and post-digital culture are challenged.

The dislocation here, in a parallel manner to the work of Ögut and Rooney, is one of a sense of self, and the rediscovery, perhaps uniquely amongst this selection, of a sense of exploration and wonder at the contours of a hybrid new reality that we do not yet fully understand. This provocative, performative work touches on xenofeminist ideas, yet also is in a clear lineage of development from the work of critically informed digital art from artists such as Estonia's Katja Novitskova and artist-critic Hito Steyerl. It points intriguingly, perhaps, to a permanent rupture in our ability to know much beyond the broadest trends in contemporary art' as contemporary art and artists vanish down subcultural holes on closed facebook pages and discord servers, navigating these new, algorithmically determined subjects will become a harder task than ever.

The selection of work for this show is not a collective exercise in miserabilism but a broader plea to look beyond the supposed force majeure event of COVID-19, but to try and look deeper into the causes of discontent in the pre-February 2020 world, and to understand how these factors have been subject to acceleration and intensification during the pandemic period. There are no answers here, but, taken in the round, a sense that these problems on a global scale require a response on the same, interconnected level. It's the disturbing paradox of the perpetual now; a strong desire for time, strength and resource to understand and develop collective responses to these problems; coupled with an awareness that time has almost run out.

Jon Blackwood

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Elena Chemerska & Ivana Mirchevska - Speculative Manual on Haunted Thresholds, 2020

Elena Chemerska (1991) is a visual artist and researcher from Skopje, North Macedonia whose work explores the relationships between aesthetics, materiality and politics. Her main interest lies in thinking through artistic means about the ways in which humans create the basis for the future in relation to memory and the attempt to grasp history in its image. Within her practice, she uses and combines different media and strategies to accentuate and stratify narratives woven into cultural structures where the particular and the universal converge. Her work materializes through painting, drawings, objects, video and interventions in the public sphere.

She holds a Master in Art and Design in Fine Arts from the Master Institute of Visual Cultures, AKV St. Joost Academy of Art and Design, 's-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands.

Her work has been presented in North Macedonia and internationally. Exhibitions include: “Thresholds of No-body in Particular” in collaboration with Ivana Mirchevska, YCC, Skopje (2020); Fuori Visioni Festival 6 | Il confine-Atto II, Piacenza, Italy (2021); The Biennial of Young Artists, MOCA- Skopje (2021); AIR program of TheHubofEphemerall-hiddeninsight, Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb, Croatia; “Monumental Fluxus”, Expoplu, Nijmegen (2019); “Monument to Freedom-Conversations”, Private Print Studio, Skopje (2019); “Transition” video screening program, Eye Museum, Amsterdam (2018) etc. In 2021 she received the Denes Award for Young Visual Artist up to 35 in North Macedonia.

She is currently based between Skopje, North Macedonia and Berlin, Germany.

Ivana Mirchevska (b.1992, Skopje) is a visual artist and a researcher whose practice is rooted in time-based media, visual anthropology, memory studies and painting. Through experimenting in the hybridizing genre of the documentary, she investigates how technologies of vision work to create subjects and subjectivity. In particular, she looks at the ambivalence of the image in re/representing the realities of labor, gender, media, surveillance, while searching for the aesthetic potential of the individual and collective body to generate viable propositions and strategies. Using the essayistic as a frame, her practice spans between moving images, archives and installations. Ivana holds a BFA in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Skopje (2015) and MFA in visual arts from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan, Italy (2018/2019).

She is the co-author of the exhibition *Thresholds of no-body in particular*, in collaboration with Elena Chemerska, in YCC Gallery-Skopje, for the *FIRSTBORN GIRL Festival*, (2020). She had participated in *Fuori Visioni Festival 6| Tra muro e confine-Atto I e II*, Piacenza, Italy (2020-2021); *The Biennial of Young Artists*, MOCA- Skopje (2021) AIR program of *The Hub of Ephemeral – hidden in sight*, Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb, Croatia; AIR program *The Voids- Culture Hub Croatia*, Split (2020); *ENGAGE- Public school for Social Engagement in Artistic Research*, curated by Viafarini, DOCVA Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan, Italy (2017). Her video-essay *SHE* has been published at *PHROOM* - a Milan based international research platform for contemporary photography and video art (2019) and exhibited at the *Utopic Method*, International exhibition for Video narration in Granada (2019), Spain and 'Zapping the archive' *Odesa Photo Days Festival 2020*, Odessa, Ukraine (2020).

Ivana is part of the curatorial team of the festival *Underground is easier to Breathe* organized by Kula Collective.



Ahmet Ögüt - "'Fikirtepe'de bir Ev" (2015) music video, part of Reverb, courtesy of the artist and KOW Gallery.

Ahmet Ögüt

Born in Silvan, Diyarbakir, Ahmet Ögüt (*1981) lives and works in Amsterdam and Istanbul. Following Diyarbakir Fine Art high school, he completed his BA from the Fine Arts Faculty at Hacettepe University, Ankara, MA from Art and Design Faculty at Yıldız Teknik University, Istanbul.

He works across different media and has exhibited widely, more recently with solo presentations at Kunstverein Dresden, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Chisenhale Gallery, and Van Abbemuseum.

He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including Asia Society Triennial: We Do Not Dream Alone (2021); In the Presence of Absence, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2020); Zero Gravity at Nam SeMA, Seoul Museum of Art (2019); Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale (2018); the British Art Show 8 (2015-2017); the 13th Biennale de Lyon (2015); Performa 13, the Fifth Biennial of Visual Art Performance, New York (2013); the 7th Liverpool Biennial (2012); the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011); the New Museum Triennial, New York (2009); and the 5th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art (2008). Ögüt has been a guest mentor, guest tutor, advisor and research teacher at several schools. Among the schools are Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht; Sandberg Institute Amsterdam; Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki; TransArts - Transdisziplinäre Kunst, Institut für Bildende und Mediale Kunst Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien; and DAI (Dutch Art Institute) Arnhem. Ögüt was awarded the Visible Award for the Silent University (2013); the special prize of the Future Generation Art Prize, Pinchuk Art Centre, Ukraine (2012); the De Volkskrant Beeldende Kunst Prijs 2011, Netherlands; and the Kunstpreis Europas Zukunft, Muse.



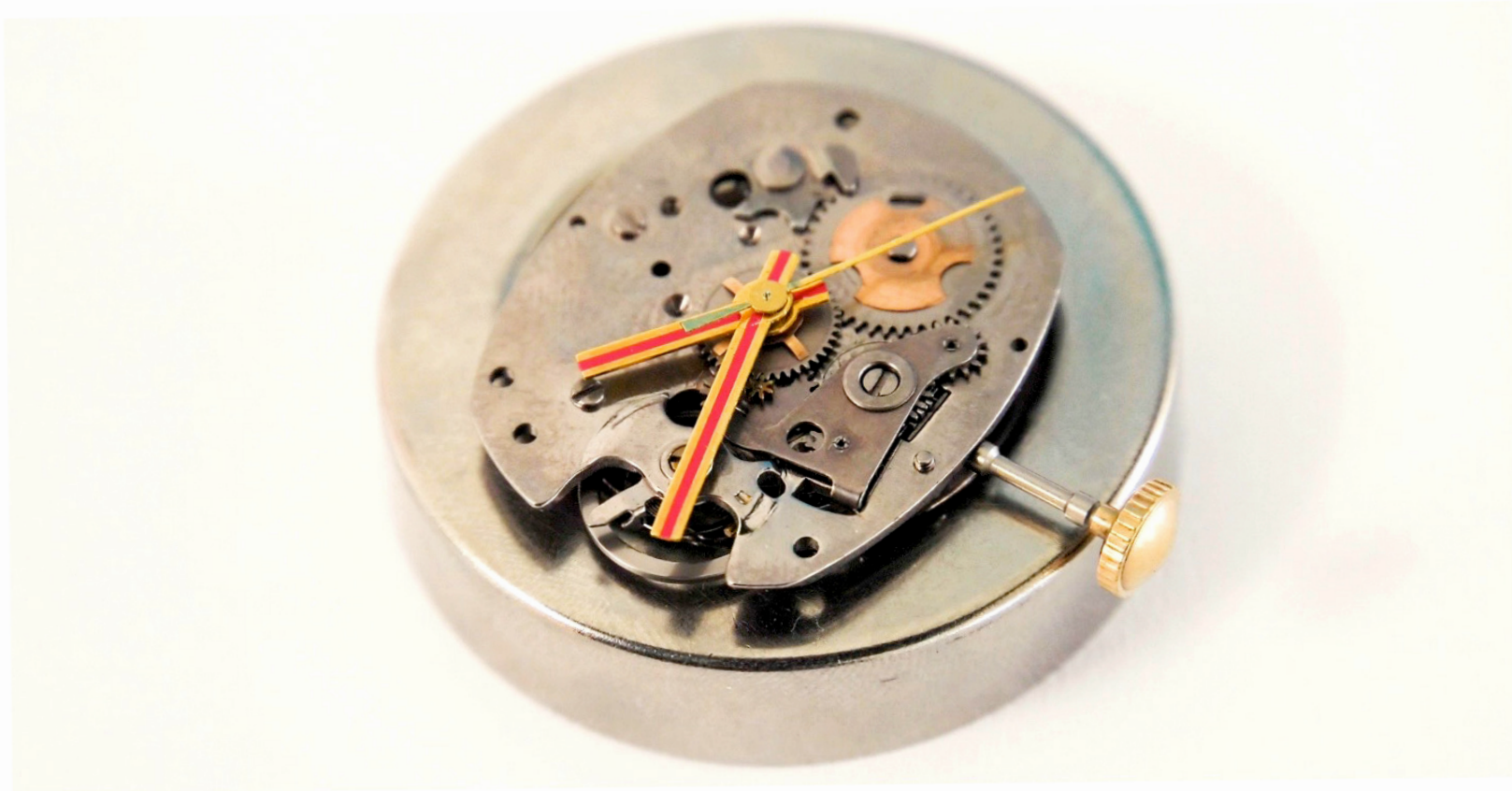
TANTE AUS DEUTSCHLAND

Mila Panić - Tante aus Deutschland 2019, HD Video, still

Mila Panić (b. 1991), Bosnian-born artist, researcher and aspiring comedian. In 2015, she moved to Germany, where she completed the MFA Public Art and New Art Strategies at Bauhaus University Weimar, after completing the BA at the Academy of Arts, University of Banja Luka, BiH. The artist's practice ranges from personalized documentation to highly poetic visual and discursive elements, from drawings to family videos, found footage, food and photographs, creating a cycle that interprets the various inheritances of migration by providing the glimpses into the consequences of the process itself revealing what is not documented, shaping the whole picture, de-masks the different cultural narratives existing subtly in the very idea of migration. In this process Panić addresses the constant aspiration for a better life counterbalancing personal expectations and guilt with intimacy as a tool for resistance.

She is the initiator of Fully Funded Residencies association and online platform that serves for disseminating open calls, assisting artists with funded residency opportunities and for sharing experiences and critical reflection on AiR programmes. Her works have been exhibited internationally among others at Kunsthaus Dresden (Germany), the Moscow Biennale for Young Art, Künstlerhaus Wien (Austria), and the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje (North Macedonia) etc. and solo exhibitions realized in Belgrade, Berlin and Leipzig. Panić has participated in several residencies, festivals and talks such as Künstlerhaus Lukas, Ahrenshoop, Germany; Kultur-Kontakt Residency, Vienna, Austria; ADATA AiR Plovdiv, Bulgaria etc. She is the winner of ZVONO Art Award 2020 for Young Visual Artist in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Currently, Panić lives, mingles and multitasks in Berlin.



Stella Rooney - Under the Face of a Timex Watch, 2020-21

Stella Rooney is a film-maker and visual artist who investigates labour from the perspective of both past and present. Long ago, workers once fought for access to a clock within the workplace, or for the right to an eight-hour day. Today, the precarity of labour continues to erode the workers right to control one's own time. Considering the rise of the service economy and the decline of organised labour, her practice wrestles with the ghosts of deindustrialisation. Working with photography and moving image, her work is a point of engagement with both collective histories and personal memories.

Her most recent work is influenced by the post-industrial landscape of Dundee. Timex once served as a mass employer in the city, employing thousands of workers: the factory was part of Dundee's social fabric. Today, Timex has long been closed, with the former Milton site now housing a retail park featuring an ASDA and McDonalds. These two employers have both been the target of recent strike action from workers, both have considerably worse pay and conditions than the former watch factory. Through conducting interviews with workers and examining archival material Rooney examines the consequences of deindustrialisation. With the intent to identify past, present and future points of both disruption and solidarity, Rooney seeks to suppose that our future timelines are not yet fixed.

Stella Rooney graduated with a BA in Art and Philosophy from Duncan of Jordanstone in 2020. Her work has been selected for Futureproof 2020 and RSA New Contemporaries 2021. She has also been selected for the Hospitalfield Graduate Residency 2021-22 and has become recently employed as a college lecturer delivering community art classes.



Olia Sosnovskaya & Alesia Zhitkevich - The F-Word, video still, 2020-21

The video “F-Word” by artists Olya Sosnovskaya and Alesia Zhitkevich is part of the “Armed and Dangerous” project by Ukrainian artist Mykola Ridnyi (www.ozbroeni.in.ua). The video series is devoted to the war in Donbas, militarization of society and attitudes on violence in modern Ukraine.

Olya Sosnovskaya and Alesia Zhitkevich refer to the current protests in Belarus, political struggle, police and state violence through the discourse of fascism. In both the Western and post-Socialist contexts, this concept is a space of symbolic struggle. The topic of fascism and victory over it has for a long time been instrumentalized by the Belarusian government in its official narrative and is central to the modern state ideology of Belarus. Since the start of the protests, the ideological state apparatus has been trying to paint those who take to the streets as nationalists and fascists, particularly by pointing to the use of the white-red-white flag (a symbol of the protests) by Belarusian collaborators in WWII. Meanwhile, the protesters also call the authorities and law enforcement “fascists.” They point to the repressive apparatus, which ignores the law and applies all forms of violence against “others” – those who don’t support the government’s status quo. Both of these positions, in turn, are criticized by the academic community for historical untruths.

The artists trace the context of the use of the concept of fascism and show the political, social, affective and symbolic effects they produce.

Olia Sosnovskaya (Vienna/Minsk) is an artist, researcher and writer. She works with text, performance and visual art, intertwining the notions of festivity and the political within the post-socialist contexts and beyond. Currently a PhD candidate at the PhD-in-Practice, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Co-founder of the WORK HARD! PLAY HARD! collective platform (www.workhardplay.pw) and member of the artistic-research group Problem Collective.

<http://oliasosnovskaya.com/>

Alesia Zhitkevich is an artist, born in Potsdam (Germany) in 1990, and who lives and works in Minsk (Belarus). She is a graduate of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts. Her main artistic media are graphics, video art, & installations. She works with the themes of the interconnection between politics, sexuality & feminism. She is a member of the artistic research group "Problem Collective".

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