

PEREMOGA /victory/ukr.



Olia Fedorova, Anger Exercises, paper, ink, 2022.

PEREMOGA /victory/ukr:

WhiteBox (<https://whiteboxnyc.org/>)

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As you pass through the front door, the first work on view is *Anger Exercises* by Olia Fedorova. "Don't ask me to fight my anger as long as my anger helps me fight", is inscribed across the main wall adjacent to a monumental, improvised Ukrainian flag. Coming from the voice of a woman, this statement prompts us to visualize the war as a social conflict, in which gender is a variable that affects the roles of the bodies in people's daily lives. WhiteBox New York closes its '22 Winter season with the exhibition

PEREMOGA, Victory / Ukr. Curated by Irina Danilove; it includes five Ukrainian artists; their work manifests the current conflict that has devastated the country and destabilized the globalized economy.

Irina Danilova is also a diaspora artist living in NYC. She was born in Ukraine, when it was still under Soviet control. Throughout her life, she held a pacifist position against the war. She understands Ukrainian, but her first language is Russian; however, she mentions that nowadays, that language is recognized as the enemy tongue. The five female artists who are part of this exhibition were born and raised in Ukraine, a nation re-established after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Russian occupation of Crimea and military invasion of the Donbass marked their early adulthood. These tragic events and the following Russian violence shaped their artistic perspectives. Olia Fedorova (Kharkiv), Darya Koltsova (Kharkiv), Maria Kulikovska (Kerch, Crimea), Natalia Lisova (Vinnytsia), and Maria Proshkowska (Kyiv).



Maria Proshkowska, Macogon, video performance Kyiv region, February 2022.

The place of women in any war has traditionally been granted from the social complexities of the genre. For this reason, war crimes against women have historically been sidelined as an inevitable side effect. Belatedly, rape was included among one of the horrors of war—though it took until the ad-hoc tribunals created for the former Yugoslavian (1993) and Rwandan (1994) nations that it was legally recognized. However, war probably exacerbates gender-based violence perpetrated against women in peacetime. In addition to this, in the past, it was considered that women could not go to war to defend the homeland, so they were not worthy of being considered citizens, and therefore they did not have the right to vote. From a gender perspective, PEREMOGA shows how a group of Ukrainian women express their positions and experiences in the face of the current conflict. The exhibition's works acknowledge how the war disrupted their lives, bodies, ethical and political positions, and social ties. At the same time that there are sentiments of strength and solidarity, the vulnerability of life and the social structures also become visible.

In an interview, the artists express their pride in Ukrainian women, who, together with men, defend their territory, save lives, volunteer, and have been forced to move with their children or raise money to support their country. They also speak about how the war has marked a shift in the societal role of women; they have become generals, politicians, communicators, and international messengers of solidarity and support—constant heroic acts taken to support the country's economy, from intimate and everyday spaces, to the public spheres.

On February 24, 2022, hours before the first Russian aggression, the artist Maria Proshkowska pondered the imminence of what could happen. The show includes a video—documentation of a performance made by the artist in those intense hours. Using the movements of a sharpener, she seems to turn an old makogin and coins into a weapon, exploring the role of women in war. That was the only artistic-defensive object that Proshkowska took with her during the forced evacuation, traveling with her son almost 7,000 kilometers. To protect his integrity, Maria had to separate from the child's father; they are in a small town in the United Kingdom and she points out that "War happens in real life [...] it is scary and it is necessary to know it, realize it and call things by its name".



Natalia Lisova, No Face. Video documentation of performances in Berlin, Germany, 2018. Video: Anton Saitenko.

Daria Koltsova believes that society has always been afraid of the strength of women, and thus we have been made to hide it. She also believes the war gave her "freedom to release her inner dragons, to learn to sublimate the powerful vital energy of her strength as a woman into actions and transform the world around her". She remarks: "It is a great privilege for a woman to be born Ukrainian because we are a country of freedom, and the war has shown it". One of Koltsova's works included in the exhibition is the Theory of Protection, an international solidarity action to Ukraine 2015-2022. As is common in wartime, buildings become documents that preserve memories; suddenly, personal belongings, peeling walls, and broken glass are part of people's daily lives. Many have stayed for weeks inside their houses, moving to and from the bomb shelter on a daily basis. So, a relevant connection with the outside world are the windows, through them they observe the environment that changes drastically.

The state of emergency in Ukraine has transformed the privacy of homes. The protective masking tapes arranged in geometric patterns on the glass of the windows have the function of saving lives or fending off injury in the case of bombing. At the same time they are an announcement of fragility and latent danger, like wounds in everyday architecture. Koltsova's work is a participatory proposal, an invitation to "draw geometric shapes, with masking tape, on the windows of the houses, and in this way carry out an act of solidarity with the inhabitants of Ukraine". These are the artist's instructions (with full descriptions available through the WhiteBox website): "For now, you must try not to die. First step: window taping. Second step: protective spell—text. Activity three: waiting."



Maria Kulikovska, Dinner Set, non-breakable polymer, microwave and dishwasher safe, 6 plates, 2022.

After the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014, Maria Kulikovska lived and worked in exile in Kyiv, Donetsk, Malmo, Liverpool, London, Munich, and Stockholm (she never returned to her hometown). During the last 2 years, Maria and her partner and co-author, Uleg Vinnichenko, lived in Kyiv. After February 24, 2022, Maria and her newborn baby were forced to flee to Linz, Austria. The exhibition includes her work Dinner Set, non-breakable polymer, microwave and dishwasher safe, six plates, 2022. The work is a table with six red doilies and six plates, with images of women's bodies, breasts, vagina and the belly of a pregnant woman. Bodies painted with textures and gouache that resemble blood, this is a dinner set to reflect the realities of those who are watching news of blood and violence while having dinner. Also in the exhibition is the work Performative Sculpture, Photography on wallpaper, 2014. Performative Sculpture is a definition of the objects created by the artist from ephemeral, often non-traditional sculpture materials, such as soap bars. Kulikovska's sculpture objects are the exact clone copies of her entire body, or certain parts. Uleg Vinnichenko makes all the casts. The Fortified soap sculptures were exhibited at the DPZP Center in Donetsk, and were captured and looted by the DPR militants. On June 9, a group of pro-Russian terrorists shot at Kulikovska's soap sculptures, using them as targets.

In the exhibition the space acquires relevance; WhiteBox chipboard wood walls are non-neutral. They are not white walls, they are made of recycled wood with a story behind them. Thus, the design of the space is itself a statement. Effectively and in joint effort, the curator and the artists developed works mostly in-situ, which take advantage of the rawness in the textures of the wooden walls to transport from their daily life, the living conditions that constitute their fears, violence, and hopes. Peremoga means victory, this exhibition is a premonition, a door to victory, a recognition of the struggle and resilience of women who assume the body and its social implications amid the cruelty of war.