

I am not here to be stronger than you

Alyona Tokovenko & AntiGonna

curated by **Daša Anosova** and **Alexandra Tryanova**

Mimosa House

London, WC1X 8SP

Opening Wednesday, 3 May 2023

3rd May - 1st June 2023

Free admission

The first major presentation of works by Ukrainian artists Alyona Tokovenko and AntiGonna in the UK. In the exhibition, autobiographical narratives are manifested through the acts of (auto)eroticism, transgression and pornographic imagery incorporating painting, sculpture, installation, video, and viscerally embodied live art. Hurt and injured bodies are presented in the gallery space through moving images and morphing canvases. Pain as a visual language, and a key theme of the artists' works, addresses the politics of the current moment.

Alyona Tokovenko and AntiGonna are bright representatives of a new generation of Ukrainian women artists working with transgressive practices, radical intimacy, and personal traumatic memories. The artistic thinking of both artists develops through the media of live and fine art, keeping them deeply interconnected and letting painting become a part of their performative action. Taking up autobiographical fragments from their personal histories, Tokovenko and AntiGonna delve into a dialogue on their methods of breaking oppressive power streams. The title of the exhibition quotes Belgian poet and artist of Ukrainian origin Sophie Podolski from her major oeuvre *'Le pays où tout est permis'* (1972). Radically denying hierarchies, this phrase resonates deeply with the whirlpool of identitarian clichés the artists' and curators' explored during the ongoing war in Ukraine and their immigrant statuses, proposing a poetic response to current challenges of hierarchical power, displacement, limits of strength, instant demand for competition and self-explanation.

The exhibition gathers together the most recent large-scale acrylic paintings by Alyona Tokovenko, made during the artist's residencies since Alyona's displacement to Europe in April 2022. At the heart of the show is a body of moving image works produced by AntiGonna in Kyiv, while also in exile, reflecting her traumatic witnessing of the horrors of war, her vision of Kyiv's underground life and her stance regarding larger socio-political processes. Highlights include AntiGonna's and Alyona Tokovenko's

collaborative performance piece presented at the Mimosa House space during the first weekend of the show, as well as the public programme running in parallel under the auspices of the Perverting the Power Vertical event platform based at the UCL FRINGE Centre for Cultural Complexity.

The exhibition is curated by Daša Anosova and Alexandra Tryanova - Ukrainian researchers of Ukrainian art and culture and recent immigrants to the EU and the UK. They consider the show being a collaborative project of all four participants.

Poster and visuals design by Nikolay Karabinovich.

Curatorial text:

I am not here to be stronger than you

A duo show of Ukrainian artists AntiGonna and Alyona Tokovenko is a public, yet personal conversation on pain, radical intimacy, premonition, fear, traumatic memory, and mutual care. The artists are longtime friends; moreover, when fleeing the potential threat of experiencing the direct horrors of the Russian invasion, they supported each other in navigating an avalanche of sorrow and found their shelter in Paris. Then, in a significant instance, the radical and rebellious talent of Sophie Podolski (1953-1974), who is a Belgian poet and artist of Ukrainian origin, became an important referential point for this show's artistic collective. The bittersweet preciseness of Podolski's texts, as well as her life story, brought up numerous reflections and connections to the current state of each one of us. The title was borrowed from Podolski's magnum opus *Le pays ou tout est permis*, which opens up both political and personal dimensions of the conversation happening in the exhibition space.

Glorification of strength and heroism could overshadow individual fragility. In the face of unimaginable violence, one can easily forget that personal dramas are not put on hold but rather add up to the social horrors experienced. Amidst the ongoing circulation of effects, when the images of violence are disseminated on algorithm-based platforms — is there a place for an artist, whose work is filled with pornographic imagery, transgression and mysticism? In their works, the artists invite others to their mythical chamber, where transgression becomes the last resort for personal relief. It's a place where everything is dissolving, everything is permitted, where patriarchal frames of references crack, and where it is still possible to imagine an escape from the binary world.

How can such a conversation happen to avoid establishing hierarchies? The show's artistic team has been attempting to break the aforementioned boundaries for a long time - swinging across questionably differentiated roles of a performer, an accomplice, an artist, a model, a friend, a loved one, a curator, and a collaborator.

Tokovenko and AntiGonna speak with very different mediums — the former with painting and the latter with the moving image — yet their dialogue has been built around common themes for decades of their friendship. Speaking of pain and trauma with masochistic and ritual vocabulary, they strive to escape the oppression of conservative discourse. Their artistic practices have been rooted in such conversion for more than a decade, and since 2022 their shared language further sharpened to talk about violence and vulnerability while sharing pain and sharing love.

AntiGonna
Daša Anosova
Alyona Tokovenko
Alexandra Tryanova

Notes to Editors:

Bios

Alyona Tokovenko (born in Odesa, Ukraine; based in Paris) is an artist working across mediums including painting, installation, sculpture, but also video and performance, exploring questions of trauma and fetish and its flow in our consciousness and memory.

In 2022-2023 Alyona was a resident of Cité Internationale Des Arts in Paris and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin. She currently studies at the fine art department at École des Beaux-arts at Mimosa Echard's studio.

AntiGonna

AntiGonna (born in 1986, Vinnytsya, Ukraine; based in Paris) is an independent filmmaker, artist and trash model who focuses on questions of fear, violence, death and sexuality expressed by narrative post-porn and body-horror moving images; she works with a form of experimental documentary combined with a music video, live art, photography and VR.

Her works were exhibited at Castello di Rivoli Museo (Turin); Haus der Kunst (Munich, Germany); Moderna Museet (Stockholm); Cité Internationale Des Arts (Paris); Arsenal Gallery (Białystok, Poland); PinchukArtCentre (Kyiv), but also became a part of the screening programs at 56th edition of Tampere film festival and 33-rd edition of Fid /Marseille.

Daša Anosova

Daša is a researcher and cultural worker from Kyiv, Ukraine. She is the 2020/2021 Chevening cohort alumna; graduated from King's College London with an MA in Education in the Arts and Cultural settings. She developed a number of art and cultural projects as a part of self-organised Ukrainian art collectives and continuously collaborated with a Ukrainian pressist publishing as an editor and translator. She's been teaching at the Kyiv Academy of Media Arts since 2019 and at the British Council Ukraine from 2016-2019. She is currently a PhD student at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European studies. Her current research is focused on the operational strategies and aesthetic-political vocabulary developed by Ukrainian art and cultural initiatives. Together with Vlad(a) Vazheyevsky, she is a co-convenor of the Perverting the Power Vertical seminar and platform series (2022/23 iteration) at the UCL SSEES FRINGE Centre for the Study of Social and Cultural Complexity. Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Daša has co-organised a number of initiatives benefiting Ukrainian fundraising and post-war reconstruction efforts such as the Records of War archive, Oberih project, and the Reconstruction of Ukraine symposium.

Alexandra Tryanova

Alexandra is an independent curator and researcher, a member of the Culture Commons Quest Office at the Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (Antwerp University). She graduated from the Kask Curatorial Studies course in 2022 and holds MA's in cultural studies and law. In her work Alexandra focuses on artistic practices connected with recreation, gender, collective memory, and Eastern European avant-gardes. Recent projects and exhibitions: Just like Arcadia, Kunsthal Extra City, Antwerp, Belgium (2022); Series of online-talks Conflict Zones at Jester, Genk, Belgium (2022); Velniai, Klaipeda Cultural

Communication Centre, Klaipeda, Lithuania (2021). Recent publications: *Passivity: Between Resignation and Pacifism* (co-edited with Pascal Gielen), 2023, Valiz, Amsterdam. Previously Alexandra held the position of curator at the Museum of Odesa Modern Art and PinchukArtCentre (Kyiv). Since 2017, She runs an independent non-production residency Kunsthalle Lustdorf based on temporary independent artistic and curatorial associations for open practices and technologies in the area of the Green Valley in the suburbs of Odesa. Lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium.

Supporters:

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Public programme events:

Artists and Curators tour. Dates TBC

AntiGonna & Alyona Tokovenko live performance in two parts. Dates TBC

Art Histories from the Ukrainian South: a talk by Alexandra Tryanova. 5 May 2023, details [here](#).

Pain and its Politics: a talk by Rachel Warriner moderated by Daša Anosova. 26 May 2023, details [here](#).

About Mimosa House:

Mimosa House is an independent, non-profit art institution in the heart of London. Mimosa House, 47 Theobalds Rd, London, WC1X 8SP

Open Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm Admission free | Mimosahouse.co.uk | [@mimosahouselondon](https://www.instagram.com/mimosahouselondon)
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Images and press requests:

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