



Birds with the people

Marina Naprushkina



PSM
Schöneberger Ufer 61
10785 Berlin

PHONE +49 30 246 492 00
EMAIL office@psm-gallery.com



Is birdsong an act of solidarity resistance? Despite the poetic form of this question, it carries an inherently political background. On February the 9th 2022, several weeks before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Belarusian regime liquidated the NGO "Ahova Ptushak Batkaushchyny" (Protection of Homeland Birds), an ecological organisation that had been active for almost a quarter of a century. One of the reasons for the organisation's closure was their use of the expression 'Birds with the people' on social media during the time of the protest movement.

Marina Naprushkina's exhibition *Birds with the People* is a complex, multi-layered history of the Belarusian revolution and the enduring social solidarity movement that began in 2020 and continues through to the present day. The work functions as a narrative of the practices of repression and violence carried out by the Belarusian regime not only at the level of disciplinary institutions but also permeating the fabric of everyday practice, taking place through systems of reproductive politics, forced labour, and consumption. Through the feminist lens and decolonial practice, Marina Naprushkina situates the history of Belarusian resistance in a global context.



As a committed participant in the activist movement in both Belarus and Germany, for Marina Naprushkina art is not about representation, but about non-heroic, infrastructural work. And of course, the dissolution of the organisation "Protection of Birds of the Homeland" is also a story about how nothing can exist outside of politics, and serves as evidence of instrumentalisation by repressive regimes worldwide that destroy nature, animals, birds and people alike.



The first room of the exhibition features free-hanging, double-sided paintings. The front side of the paintings underscores the traditional 'Maliavanka' representing an invisible, often female, nameless, and underpaid form of labour. It is simultaneously one of the few ways of expression of political imagination for residents of rural Belarusian villages, who did not leave memories in the form of diary entries or books. This simultaneous shape-shifting and constant retention of contradictions are distinctive features of Marina Naprushkina's work on various levels. For example, the herbs ornamented on the "Maliavanka" have medicinal properties, but can also be poisonous and cause harm.

The back of the "Maliavanka" paintings are decorated with lines from Belarusian folk songs. These songs were sung by women during the 2020 protests. These songs are non-heroic but rather embedded in the everyday practices of caring, as, for instance, words from "Kalykhanka" (eng: Lullaby). The utilisation of folk songs here seems to be a practice of decolonisation, not only because it opposes modern forms of knowledge but also because it breaks down the opposition between humans and nature in the face of violence.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
standard type 65-426/1, school building, 2023
acrylic on canvas
112,5 x 155 cm / 44 1/4 x 61 in
MN/P 1



backside

The painted carpets are traditionally a naive genre, into which Marina Naprushkina incorporates elements of avant-garde art (UNOVIS 10). Despite the fact that avant-garde art is often perceived as an emancipatory practice associated with the reorganisation of new life and thought, in Marina Naprushkina's works, supremacist compositions become typical architectural projects of repressive institutions, such as schools or prisons, where the formation of a subject of submission takes place through disciplinary bodily practices.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
lyuli-lyuli-lyuli, lyuli-lyuli-lyuli/ люлі-люлі-люлі, люлі-люлі-люлі, 2023
acrylic on canvas
107 x 154 cm / 42 1/8 x 60 5/8 in
MN/P 3



backside

The revolutions and global movements of modern history are often associated with flower names: the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in 2010, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon in 2005 or the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003.

Chrysanthemums, roses, asters and gladioli - all in white - were the flowers that women held in their scent during the protests against the violence of the patriarchal state in Belarus. The flowers created a different, non-heroic narrative of a revolution: a gentle power that sought a non-violent relationship with others, a weakness that gave birth to a strength, as the Belarusian philosopher and feminist Olga Shparaga summarises it when she talks about the protests that breathed through female bodies.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
State Enterprise "No. 4", 2023
acrylic on canvas
101 x 153 cm / 39 3/4 x 60 1/4 in
MN/P 5



backside

Large stones, relics of glacial movements, dot the Belarusian landscape, contributing to its distinct topography. These stones are not just silent witnesses of the past; they carry stories and histories within them. Acknowledging their cultural value, Belarus established a unique "The Museum of Stones", an initiative of the Academy of Sciences during the late Soviet period. Secondly, the stone has a shape-shifting symbolic meaning. It refers to protest dynamics and the famous phrase formulated in early Soviet history: "Stone is a weapon of the proletariat" adding a contemporary layer to this symbolism, Julia Cimafiejeva, a Belarusian poet, explores the metaphorical significance of stone in 'The Stone of Fear'. In this poem, the stone embodies intergenerational experiences of fear — stories of repression and the burden of history. Cimafiejeva poignantly articulates this through the imagery of a stone holding an uncomfortable legacy, a silent yet potent carrier of untold stories and unexpressed emotions: "The stone has no mouth, unable to either scream or speak."



The work *FR4978* from the 'Maliavanka' painting series installed on the wall in the loggia.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
FR4978, 2023
acrylic on canvas
109,5 x 153 cm / 43 1/8 x 60 1/4 in
MN/P 9



backside

The work *FR4978* shows the flight route of Ryanair flight FR4978, which was hijacked by Belarus, in an abstract form. The Boeing 737 had taken off from the Greek capital Athens. Its destination was the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. A good two hours after take-off, the aircraft changed course over Belarusian airspace and headed for Minsk - apparently at the behest of the power clique around long-term dictator Alexander Lukashenko, who arrested the opposition member Protassevich on board. The remaining passengers were only able to continue their journey to Vilnius hours later. The incident is a clear violation of international rules and a further escalation on the part of the regime in Minsk.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
ИК 4. Oh, le-li le-li-li-le / ИК 4. Ой, лё-лі лё-лі-лі-лє, 2023
acrylic on canvas
126 x 154 cm / 49 5/8 x 60 5/8 in
MN/P 10



backside

In the work "IK 4. Oh, le-li le-li li-le" Marina Naprushkina explores the forced labour of female inmates at the correctional colonies, particularly Gomel Correctional Colony No. 4, where many female political prisoners are held. In this colony, many of the inmates engage in sewing. The products they are compelled to make, working 10-12 hours a day often without days off, are intertwined with economic, political, and ideological components. In this colony, they sew uniforms for Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel who carry out violence against detainees and are a key support for the regime, hockey uniforms—a favourite sport of Lukashenko, and vyshyvankas, traditional outfits for which individuals can be detained if caught wearing in public that are nonetheless produced and sold to foreigners. Besides these, the colony produces everyday items such as bedding, blankets, and pillows, which means that the forced labour of inmates is, on one hand, invisible, and on the other hand, integrated into everyday life. Many of the products created by inmates are exported, not only to Russia but also to Europe and China.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
Oh, little river, little river, Why are you not full? / Ой, рэчанька-рэчанька, Чаму ж ты ня поўная?,
2023
acrylic on canvas
131 x 153,5 cm / 51 5/8 x 60 3/8 in
MN/P 15



backside

Resourcification is a technique used in colonial dependencies that label relationships to space and people as territory and resources and integrated them into an extractive economic system. An instance of this process is land reclamation - the draining of swamps to convert these areas into agricultural land, which was prevalent in Belarus during the Soviet era, particularly during the 1960s and 70s. Approximately 64% of all bogs were destroyed, consequently disrupting the ecosystems of the country's regions. This caused large scale desertification, the destruction of rivers and lakes, and loss of entire populations of flora and fauna.



frontside

Marina Naprushkina
little river / Ой, рэчанька-рэчанька, 2023
acrylic on canvas
124 x 154,5 cm / 48 7/8 x 60 7/8 in
MN/P 12



backside

Belarus is characterised by colonial entanglements, with intersecting lines of colonial dependencies. For instance, the potato is a crucial crop in Belarus, covering nearly 60% of the country's cultivated land. The introduction of the potato to Belarus was a consequence of colonial expansion, and it played a significant role in shaping the country's resourcification policy.



Marina Naprushkina
Chrysanthemums, roses, asters, gladioli, 2022
C-print on paper, dimensions variable, edition 1 of 5 + 2AP
MN/P 18

The poster series under the title “Chrysanthemums, roses, asters, gladioli” refers to the latest protests against the violence of the patriarchal state in Belarus. The posters depict motives from the images taken by the artist during the protest events in Belarus in 2020. The depiction is reduced to a few details: parts of the female body, hands, flowers, and hands holding the mobile devices which are equated as living bodies of protest and media information carriers.

This creates a different, non heroic narrative of a revolution: A soft power that seeks a non-violent relationship to the other, a weakness that produces a strength like the Belarusian philosopher and feminist Olga Shparaga sums it up when she talks about the protests which are breathing through female bodies.



The second room of the exhibition contains the wall installation *Chrysanthemums, roses, asters, gladioli* and the video work *Future for everybody*.



for everyone,



for everyone,

Marina Naprushkina
Future for everyone, 2020, video, 1:35 min, loop,
Edition 1 of 5 + 2AP
MN/V 1

[click here to view](#)

The future will be unlimited, bright, with joy, success, progressive, creative, for everyone, soon, impartial,
open, attentive and caring, for all ages, beneficial, eternally contemporary,
The future belongs to us, you, me, it is for women, women, it brings no work, no coercion, no more
illnesses, no debts, love,
The future exists for the hungry, the poor, the nameless, we will be excited, amazed, free, warm, full of
love, surprisingly colorful, informative, surprisingly diverse, rarery, female, peaceful,
we will experience the world, the world will see us, we will remember everything, will know everything,
without pain and death, without humiliation, without gender,
the future will exceed all our expectations, in all languages, beautiful,
in the future we will belong to ourselves, create for everyone, in motion, in understanding, in justice, in the
future everything will be accessible, forever,
the future for everyone!



Marina Naprushkina
I want a president, 2021
acrylic on canvas, b/w print on paper, canvas: 215 x187 cm / 84,65 x 73,62 in
MN/P16

Marina Naprushkina's piece, *I Want a President* included in this exhibition, refers to the mass protests against the Lukashenko government in Belarus, her country of birth, during the summer and fall of 2020. The peaceful actions on the part of the protesters were largely carried out by women. The Belarusian philosopher Olga Sparaga calls this movement a "revolution in progress" and a "post-national revolution". The artist's work is a homage to Zoe Leonard's seminal work "I want a president" from 1992, which departs from white, patriarchal, orthodoxy-determining politics and calls for a new, more pluralist and inclusive political imaginary, as well as to the musician and activist Maryia Kalesnikava, who has been imprisoned in Belarus since 2020 and sentenced to eleven years.

Similarly, Naprushkina tries to imagine a new kind of politician in her work. The text conveys the urgency of rethinking political concepts, representation and ultimately, governance. Moreover, Naprushkina refers to the manipulation of the presidential election in 2020, in which the wives of the three previously arrested opposition members ran against President Alexander Lukashenko, but were unable to win the elections due to demonstrable manipulations.

The text on the canvas is written in Russian, the imposed official and national language in Belarus, which the population of Belarus had and still has to learn and speak. For this reason, people are often no longer able to speak the original Belarusian language and can usually only read and write it. The translations into English and Belarusian are available next to the canvas as double-sided printed papers for viewing and taking away.



Я хочу женщину президентку. Президентку домохозяйку, уборщицу, учительницу, медсестру, повитуху. Безработную, пенсионерку, без детей, многодетную, мать одиночку. Женщину, которая любит другую.

Президентку в юбке, в штанах, в спортивном костюме. Которая не говорит о нации, которая нелегалка, у которой не белая кожа, у которой родные и друзья не говорят о нации.

Я хочу президентку, которая не скрывает что пьет, употребляет наркотики, страдает депрессиями, не скрывает, что боится остаться одна.

Я хочу президентку, которую тошнит от насилия, которая понимает, что наказание не работает.

Президентку, которая вынуждена была воровать и торговать своим телом, ночевала на улице, которая не пойдет служить в армию, не станет милиционеркой, высмеет стукачество, уволит КГБ.

Президентку художницу, актрису, музыкантку, безденежную поэтку.

Президентку, которая слушает. Президентку, которая не говорит на белорусском, которая не говорит на русском. Которая немая, которая знает, что язык это власть, что язык может нести насилие, президентку, которая не обругивает народ.

Президентку, которая не строит себе дворцов, атомных станций, не устраивает парадов. Президентку, которая с рождения не видит, которая чувствует своих безымянных бабушек, которая знает, что такое фашизм.

Президентку, которая знает, что прошлое всегда с нами, а будущее уже сейчас.

Президентку не экономистку, потому что государство, это не бизнес, а забота о слабых, о невидимых, об исключенных, государство, это не обогащение и власть, а забота.



I want a president who is a housewife, a cleaner, a teacher, a nurse, a midwife. Unemployed, a pensioner, childless, a mother of five, a single parent. A woman who loves a woman. A president who wears a skirt, trousers, a sweat suit.

A president who doesn't speak about the nation, who is undocumented, who is not white, whose relatives and friends do not speak about the nation.

I want a president who doesn't hide the fact that she drinks, takes drugs, suffers from depression, is scared of being left alone.

I want a president who won't tolerate violence, who knows that punishment doesn't work. A president who has been forced to steal, to sell her body, who has lived on the street, a president who will not join the army, or the police, who laughs at the informers and dismisses the KGB.

A president as artist, actor, musician, penniless poet. A president who listens. Who doesn't speak Belarusian, who doesn't speak Russian. Who knows that language is power, that language can become violence, a president who does not insult people.

I want a president who doesn't have to be guarded, who doesn't need OMON, but who does need medicines in hospitals, who doesn't build palaces for herself, or nuclear power stations, who organizes no parades, who knows that we are all politics, that war and repression mean the end of politics. A president who has been blind from birth. Who is in touch with her nameless grandmothers, who understands what fascism means, a president who knows that the past is always with us and that the future is already here. Who knows what violence means, who has endured it and who no longer wishes to endure it. A president who does not conceal dependence, weakness, illness, old age. A president who is not a businesswoman, who knows that the state is not about making deals but about caring for the weak, the invisible, the excluded.





Marina Naprushkina
August, 2020
video, 0:23 mins, loop, edition 1 of 5 + 2AP
MN/V 2

[click here to view](#)

The V-sign has different meanings depending on the circumstances and the way it is shown. Belarusian women used it as a sign of peaceful protest while holding out in long human chains.

The filmed hand trembles with exhaustion.

The relief "Solidarnost" (Solidarity) on the House of Fashion in Minsk / Belarus can be seen in the background; the relief stands for the unity of workers from all over the world.



Marina Naprushkina
View from the window, 2023

video, 2:00 mins loop, edition 1 of 5 + 2AP

MN/V 3

[click here to view](#)

The view from the artist's former childhood bedroom in Minsk was filmed once during the protests in 2020-2021 and a second time after the protests had failed. The choreography of the protests contrasts with the choreography of the regimes.