



— Process

Katya Grokhovskiy: Bad Woman

“The wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood that she must become something other than herself, deny her true feelings, in order to attract and please others” – bell hooks

MY WORK REFLECTS MY EXPERIENCE AS A WOMAN AND AN IMMIGRANT, THROUGH A LIFELONG DECONDITIONING PROJECT. OPERATING IN A CYCLICAL MANNER, FROM RESEARCH TO ARCHIVAL AND HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION, AS WELL AS PERSONAL OBSERVATION, I CULTIVATE MY OWN METHODOLOGY CONTINUOUSLY, THROUGH EXTENSIVE TRIAL AND NUMEROUS ERRORS. FROM DRAWING AND WRITING TO MATERIAL EXPERIMENTATION AND WORLD-BUILDING, MY PRACTICE OCCUPIES A TERRITORY OF INTERDISCIPLINARY INQUIRY.

01 *Bad Bad Woman*, 2018, found objects, plywood, video, plaster, fabric, enamel, acrylic, toys, performance, dimensions variable, 30 minutes, at SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York City, photographed by Walter Wlodarczyk

02 *Fantasyland*, 2021, found objects, plywood, parachutes, video, plaster, fabric, enamel, acrylic, toys, neon, inflatables, dimensions variable, installation view at Smack Mellon, New York City, photographed by Walter Wlodarczyk

Ever since I remember, I was a decidedly artistic and imaginative being, struggling to exist in the prescribed reality and expressing myself mainly through elements of painting, drawing, writing, dance, theatre, and music. I was born and raised in Odessa, Ukraine, where I attended an academic art school for children. In 1992, I migrated to Australia with my family, where my first education was in women’s fashion design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University). It seemed the right compromise at that time – a way to achieve an approved job, a somewhat familiar, stable life. Coming from an immigrant family, the art world seemed inaccessible: a fantastical reality assigned to others. Fashion, however, inadvertently changed my life and delivered me to the world of artmaking. Through this creative detour, I learned principles of colour, design, and construction, skills which contribute to my work to this day.

I eventually landed in the painting department at the Victorian College of the Arts, where, as an undergraduate student, I began exploring my own relationship to patriarchy and to the history of art and feminist theory, as well as my family’s





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“ Re-emerging once again to fight for freedom, democracy, and reproductive rights ”

adaptation to the Western world, which included a lot of cultural misunderstanding. Many of my early experiments included rejection of traditional flat-surface mediums, such as painting, in favour of spatial and bodily explorations, such as crouching durationally in a dog cage, lying on a patch of dirt for hours, and deconstructing my own fashion collections in site-responsive installations. As an initiation into the challenging lifelong commitment to a career in art, especially as a woman, I cut off my long hair, looking at the audience as if into a reflecting surface of a mirror, seeking validation, advice and haircut guidance. Several of the fallen hair strands were then immortalised in bronze, as a symbol of an eternal struggle against objectification, erasure, exploitation, and undervaluation by patriarchal and capitalist regimes.

After completing my BFA [Bachelor of Fine Arts], I moved to the US to pursue an MFA [Master of Fine Arts] at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. My work there morphed into a fully-fledged interdisciplinary practice, probing my consistent displacement and confused identity through a remix of punk-Dada performances, absurd surrealist material deconstructions, and grotesque semi-figurative sculptural and fibre assemblages. Pop-cultural costuming, as well as discarded and found object collecting, ritualistic gestures, and humorous protest activist actions entered the work. Basing some of my installations, sculptures, mixed media works, performances, and videos on the invisibility of immigrant labor, domestic servitude and the American consumerist, materialist obsession with excess – often in collaboration with others in a form of a collective consciousness chorus – I began incorporating my voice and rage directly into the work.

In 2017, after Trump’s election, I came back to Australia for a few months, where, whilst contemplating the possibility of return, as a form of objection, I constructed a composite alter-ego character: Bad Woman. Filmed in my parents’

backyard in Melbourne, a woman in an oversized, mouthless mask and plaster-caked wig – part wild beast, part serial killer, a combination of ghostly presences of generations of oppressed women, dressed in my mother’s nightgown and my grandmother’s fake fur coat, with red ink dripping down her virginal white stockings – silently fidgets against a bleak suburban non-place. Later, she would begin speaking, and would appear at many venues across the US, now re-emerging once again to fight for freedom, democracy, and reproductive rights. Bad Woman jump-started a practice of persona embodiment in my work, which I now employ often to cultivate total art experiences in many mediums.

Currently, although I am still grappling with the effects of the pandemic on my work and how my relationship to space, site, and audience has changed and evolved, I am now also attempting to come to terms with my country of birth and childhood being at war and on the brink of genocide. My muses are somewhat subdued, yet never fully silenced, and I am pondering the meaning of cultural legacy and artistic heritage, as well as the rise and eventual hopeful fall of the evil of imperialist power. I am armed with art as my savior, and even though my brushes seem to fall through my fingers, my needles don’t wish to pierce fabric, and tools lay down helplessly before the descending darkness, I am learning to build and begin, once again. ■

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EXHIBITIONS

Katya Grokhovsky: Point A, at New American Fellowship Showcase
September 2022
American Immigration Council and Brooklyn Arts Council, New York City

03 *Utopia 16000*, 2015, found objects, banners, fabric, enamel, acrylic, furniture, rope, ribbon, performance, dimensions variable, 3 hours, installation view at Hudson Valley MOCA, Peekskill, New York, photographed by Natasha Frisch