

## Natalia Pastukhova

### ARTIST

I really want to have a precise definition of myself and to classify as a member of certain group. I have been drawing from the very early childhood. I have artistic education, to be more exact – a designer, an industrial designer. For a period of time after graduating I dedicated myself to design, and along with that I got involved with the public art stories. I participated in the festival “Yekaterinburg’s long stories” and we made a project on the fences around the city. That is when my career as an artist started, but I could never classify my artistic activity and work only in one stream. It happened so that all the visual arts, such as design and illustrations, the art in public spaces, have been interrelated in my activity. Now I work alone. I started in a group. We were five girls, we worked under a very funny name (“Ne s ruki” – “Awkward”). We were young and goofy, and basically we just had fun. The art was a sort of entertainment, it seemed funny to us. Then girls grew up and started moving to different cities, to form their own families and start their individual careers. Now I mostly work alone. I am the only author of my artworks. Sometimes I collaborate with other artists. For example, some time ago the guys from the “Sweater” gallery and I painted an airplane on an abandoned aerodrome close to Yekaterinburg. All of that was very interesting for us. We came there when it was raining, everything seemed unclear. On the first place, it was interesting, because we had to orientate ourselves very quickly, we had to make use only of what we had, and decide what we were going to do together, because everyone has his own artistic style. We had to put it all together in one artwork. We had to put our visions together and decide what we want to say. This experience is very important for me, it was interesting. But such things do not happen often. Usually, I work alone. As for me, an artist is a person, who communicates with the world by means of a visual language. It may be any visual story: the story of sound, the story of body, the dance. It is a person who brings his feelings, experience and thoughts to the outer world by means of artistic measures. Sounds a little bit strange.

### ARTWORK

I do not have a strict criteria about an artwork. It is another question that I have been wanting to answer myself for quite a long time. Almost anything can be an artwork. Everything that had been filled with a thought or an intention. I have a project “Dogs’ pack”, that began many years ago in Kyrgyzstan. It was a reaction at the clash between two cultures: the European and the Asian. In European culture a dog is your friend and your companion, while in Asian – it is just food, which resulted quite painful for me. I had such a friend throughout all my life and at that moment I realized that it could have been eaten. As a reaction to that a work emerged, that consisted of colorful dogs, that were placed in the street. It was a flock of tramp dogs. I looked for them in the city, took pictures of them and then painted their portraits. With the time passing, the project somewhat transformed. It was shown on different surfaces: we did it on a fence, we took it to different cities, it was exposed in big galleries and in different countries. Each times the dogs I drew were different. It was a project that was connected with the place. I found mongrel street dogs in the cities, drew their portraits and exposed them. It all went great until I started to work with the idea of reflection. I like the history of reflection a lot, how people react to their own reflection. The work fascinates a person more, when they see themselves in it. That is how an idea to create mirror dogs began. It was to make the same pack of dogs and place it in the city. It was a very interesting experience, because out of 26 dogs 15 were stolen. Within a month while the dogs were exposed, we had only 11 left. Besides, the photos of people carrying away the dogs started to appear in the internet. The media started to publish messages “People, please, do not take away the dogs”. But the peculiarity of this project was that these dogs were mongrel dogs, and people took them home with their reflection in it.

## PRODUCTION

From the beginning I did graphics and drew on different surfaces. I started drawing on the fences. Then, of course, I felt like drawing on the walls. The peak of my activity was the movie theatre in the city of Kudimkar, its surface was over 1200 square meters. It was really big, and took a lot of time. It was my first monumental work and it was very interesting. I still paint on the walls, but now I also have dimensional works in the city, installations in the city. Most of times I work with helpers. When I paint on big walls, it is not like there are volunteers, but there is always someone who helps me. A crowd of people gets together behind me –five or six people– who help me to paint the background and then I work on the details. Speaking about big works, if I work on installations, of course, I need help, because I do not know how to do such things as cut iron, weld iron, dig, use a perforator. Most of the times, wherever I do it, I get volunteers, or I find friends who are willing to help. To be honest, when I say: "I am going to make art", go to paint a wall, to stick a poster, to put together an installation, there is always someone ready to help, someone who wants to help you, because it is something people are interested in and want to form a part of. And it is really interesting. I do all of the preparatory work at home. It is like a have a workshop at home. I do sketches there, I do small works, like this one, because its sizes allow to do so. Then I do whatever is required in the street. I do not have a necessity to have a big workshops with all the materials. The question of whether a project is finished or not is quite tricky. It is clear when you make an installation, you have an idea, you work it all the way through, you get a complete object, and realize that yes, it is what you wanted. You put it together in the street and you can say: "Yes, that's it" and go further. When you paint, this moment takes long to come, because it is difficult to stop, really difficult. When I was painting this work, could have been finishing, and finishing, and finishing it up to now, but at some point the deadline arrived, I turned it in, we exposed it and everything was great, but it is really difficult for me to stop when the work is being painted.

## MATERIAL

Traditionally I work with the walls, I work on the walls. I work with aqueous emulsion paint and a brush. Working with sprays is not for me, I do not like how they smell. Of course, they are wonderful, but they give you a headache. That is why I work with brushes and markers. At a certain point I got interested in a material that is new for me – the mirror. I chose not exactly a mirror, but a mirror-like aluminum. It is very durable, light and safe, because when contacting with the man, the nature, the street, when it falls, when someone tries to take it away, it won't cause injuries. Perhaps, this material is my favorite one at the moment, because it is a mirror-like surface and it interacts amazingly with people, it gets them involved inside of it, because painting on the walls attracts the viewer greatly, but in this case the process is important as well. It is difficult to overcome the fact, that when people see a beautiful picture, they do not think about the contents. Some time later the artists that I know tell me: "Oh, you had a story, a thought behind it?" It's a difficult moment for me. When you work with such a material, as the mirror, it is simple, laconic and, at the same time, it is your reflection. For me at this point it reviles more opportunities and interests, and it is the material I want to continue working with.

## MEDIUM

I work with the graphics technique and the choice of different surfaces. The choice of techniques is limited by my possibilities, by my skills, it is the way how can I present my idea and how can I do it best. It is also conditioned.. Actually, it is drawing in the city, and moving to the space of the city,

because the viewer and the context appears there immediately. These works begin their existence there in a certain context, that the gallery or museum space do not have.

## PROCESS

What do I start with? Once in a while the process of creating an artwork gets stretched out for an unbelievable time. Usually it all starts with an idea. I have an idea and almost always I have the visual solution for this idea. Sometimes when a project is created, such as my project with dogs, with time, being exposed in different spaces and different places it gets polished and changes, when getting into different contexts. For example, when we did this project in Azerbaijan, we came there after Eurovision, the city was spotlessly clean, it was new and beautiful, sparkling. At the same time we couldn't find any mongrel dog and we found out, that before the event an insane number of animals was killed, a monstrous number. At such moments it gets much more intense, when you realize that your project is connected with a real story. Your project becomes interlaced with the story of this place, everything becomes more interesting. For example, sometimes happen such stories as last year with the mirror project, when out of 26 dogs 15 got stolen, one of them was taken all over the city. The guys who did it created a profile in Instagram and downloaded pictures of how the dog travels in the mountains and by the lakes, and says "hi" to me, sends pictures. It happened so that the project found its continuation in the project of these people. That is why the processes of creation at times are quite peculiar.

## PRESENTATION

There are several options of presenting my work: the spaces of galleries, museums, including the open-air ones, and the streets, the artwork in the city. Both have their aspects and positive sides. For example, I have done several artworks in the "Sweater" gallery, in the big room and in the basement. There is an opportunity to work in comfortable conditions. You can come, do what you want, spend the time you want on it, draw it in details and all of that – in comfortable conditions, not in the street. On the other hand, working in the street supposes completely different conditions, it is a work of different character, and respectively the viewer is different. People, who come to the gallery, do it intentionally, to see the exposition, to see your work. In the street, nobody guarantees you, that you will be noticed. People go to the galleries with an aim to receive an experience or they have certain expectations and they know where are they going, in the street – it is each person that you meet, can be anyone. It is much more interesting to work there, because you meet a reaction there. The most interesting thing is creating an artwork in the street, because the people that pass by react mostly positively, some of them get involved in the process, some of them have a completely negative reaction, because whatever you do, you are there and the complaints spoken out are something like "Purple is the color of Satan, you are promoting Satanism here". For example, one time we were painting a fence in the Shorsa street and there was a bus driver, who brought us something – chocolate bar - each time when he stopped at the the bus stop. He participated in the process, because he liked what we were doing. He wanted to thank us somehow for that. At the same time it was nice to realize that our work was noticed and some unforeseen, but pleasant participants got enrolled.

## INTENTION

I can say, that being an artist is my profession, the same as being an illustrator or being a designer. And, perhaps, I do it, because I can, because I know how to do it and because I like it. This is my way

to communicate with the outer world. I have this certain egoism that I want to express myself the way I want, I do not want to adjust to someone so they could understand. But the thought that everything is perceived as a beautiful picture or illustration makes me look for different ways. Art has an investigational function. Sometimes, it scares me, how investigational the function of the art is, because on different stages of life it reviles certain limits: limits of consciousness, limits of society, social and moral norms. Once in a while it really scares me, but it is interesting.

## METHOD

The only rule that I follow in my work is "Do it", because when you start a project, even if you do not know clearly, what to do and how to do it, you need to start searching, you need to try. The idea is not always on the surface. And not always you can get started with the context. You come and see the place and sometimes it is difficult to find the connection with it. Then I reach out to my personal feelings, personal experience, I would say existential experience. It starts working and that is how I find themes. For example, I had a work at Perm Museum PerMM. It was about the Little Mermaid. There was a skeleton of the Little Mermaid, the Kama river, and black background – petroleum. But in reality this work was about how terrifying it is to leave the places where you are already settled, how the spirit, which is presented in the form of a fox, cannot leave the body of the Little Mermaid, even though nothing is left. The fox was settled there: it made a house, a room, and got really attached to this place. The fox was so scared to move forward that it was ready to live in the skeleton. The search for the theme was based on personal feelings, because at that point of time I had a similar picture in my personal context, as this fox. After an idea is found, I pass to the process of making. I do not have any special method of work. I do not have a romantic hobby to paint in the fields or forests. I just sit down and start doing, wherever I have to: at home, in the car, in a café. Doing is my only method.

## ART

I haven't decided exactly what is art for me, because its criteria at this moment of time are as blurry as they can be. I have been asking myself this question for a long time, and I understand that for me at the first place art is creation. On the other hand, documentation is also art. It is not connected with creation that much. There can be a lot of different forms inside of art. I would like to get it all organized and have a clear definition of art, such as "Art is ...", but for me art is this, this, this, this and this, and a lot of things, that is why I leave this question opened for now. I will answer it sometime later. Maybe in ten years: ten years of thinking, then ten years more. But firstly it is creation.

## Bio

Natalia Pastukhova was born in 1985 in Sverdlovsk, Russia. She received a diploma in product design at the USAA and a bachelor degree in design at the University of Huddersfield. An active participant of the street art community in Yekaterinburg, Natalia works in various media, which varies from objects to monumental graphics. A theme of animalistic images, ornaments and geometric motifs are dominant in her work. Her first city piece was created in 2003 within the framework of the festival Long Stories of Yekaterinburg. Natalia worked in different cities and countries, such as Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan etc.  
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### **Credits**

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