

To
those
who
have
no time
to play

FRAMER BYAMED

EXHIBITION DATES

14 OCT–
22 JAN '23

Gluklya

Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya

IN COLLABORATION WITH

Murad Zorava

Roger Cremers

Anna Bitkina

Samira

Liah Frank

Natalia Grezina

Vladimir Rannev

Marianne Koeman

Zayna Ayazbekova

Dinara Akylova

Anisa Ibrayeva

Benjamin Roth

Matras Platform

Moawya Alkhadra

Shepherd Camara

Nurlan Alymseitov

Kunduz Asanakunova

Shaiymkan Chylgobaeva

Saadat Aitalieva (BiSCA)

Gulmira Tursunbaeva

Rahat Bolotbek kyzy

CURATOR

Charles Esche

OPENING

13 OCT 2022



INTRODUCTION

BY JOSIEN PIETERSE AND CAS BOOL

When we commissioned Gluklya's (Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya) exhibition three years ago, we never imagined it would take place in the context of a war in Europe. At the time of writing, seven months after the imperialist Russian invasion of Ukraine, Gluklya's work has become more confronting, especially her early protests against Putin and her plea for democratisation.

In 2015, Gluklya's work was part of *All the World's Futures*, an exhibition curated by Okwui Enwezor for the Venice Biennale. As part of this exhibition, she showcased a series of "protest clothes" that were part of various demonstrations against Putin's regime since 2011. The 2011 elections were a major turning point in Russian political history: intended to instrumentalise the subsequent election results for a constitutional amendment that helped Putin to ultimate power, which required a two-thirds majority. However, according to public opinion, election fraud had been committed and this so-called majority was a farce. Citizens then took to the streets advocating for fair elections.

To those who have no time to play carries protest as an ongoing theme. "I want to use my work to advocate for people's freedom of choice and challenge corruption and state repression", states Gluklya about her art practice.¹ Since 2011, Gluklya has participated in numerous May 1st demonstrations, a major annual occasion where progressive critics within Russia unite. Her work thus directly challenges existing power structures in the public urban space. Gluklya's video work depicting the May 1st protests shows how, over a two-year period, state repression increased, a pattern that cannot be separated from the current political situation.

Gluklya is an artist who looks to people's daily struggles with a critical eye; she aims to capture these struggles and their relation to systems of power through her art. In *To those who have no time to play*, she tells stories from various regions that ultimately reveal connections across them. Commitment, protest, encounters and humanity create interconnectedness, while themes such as exploitation and injustice present an important driving force, with clothing as a uniting symbol.

For Gluklya, clothing primarily symbolises a democratic and accessible form of protest. She explains this as such: "I work with clothes; clothes are my friends. Clothing is close to people, to their bodies. It forms the

1. Interview Biennale Arte 2015 – Gluklya (Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya), <https://youtu.be/FqdY7Kal-BQ>.

boundary between personality and society."² One of the core storylines in the current exhibition illustrates how clothing can also represent injustice. Gluklya's recent research focuses on clothing production in Kyrgyzstan as an inhumane form of exploitation and the outcome of a (post-) colonial policy of the former Soviet Union. Her research in Kyrgyzstan additionally consisted of mapping local modes of textile manufacturing under pressure from the current need for mass production.

Gluklya's research attempts to contribute to a still-developing decolonial discourse towards the former Soviet Union. Gluklya's previous exhibition *It Won't Be Long Now, Comrades!* (2017) at Framer Framed, by curators Inga Lāce and Katia Krupennikova, focused on how "post-communist" regions dealt with bottom-up political decision-making and how citizens could claim political power for themselves.

Another recurring theme in Gluklya's work is that of displacement and migration. In 2017, Gluklya's studio was temporarily located in the Bijlmerbajes, a former prison that housed both an artist residency and an asylum seekers' centre (AZC). At this location, she initiated the Utopian Unemployment Union (UUU), a platform for long-term collaborations with refugees, asylum seekers, students, art practitioners, scientists and others. Under the UUU umbrella, Gluklya developed *Carnival of the Oppressed Feelings* – a protest performance in the streets of Amsterdam – in collaboration with art platform TAAK and numerous others. Her stay in the Bijlmerbajes resulted in a diary exchange between herself and Murad, who stayed at the AZC and with whom she worked closely at the time. This correspondence resulted in a publication *Two Diaries*, which is also part of the installation.

Since 2017, Gluklya has worked with the platform We Are Here, a collective of people awaiting residence permits. With some of them, she formed Matras Platform. Through the COVID-19 lockdowns, her studio took the form of a gathering place where the group worked together to create clothes. These clothes in turn took on symbolic roles in parades or protest marches – and now here in the exhibition space. The studio hosted conversations about questions that concerned them, such as: "What is colder, weather or distance?"

These works illustrate how Gluklya speaks out about society, initiates long-term collaborations with others, whom she also platforms in her

work. She makes her own unique and personal connections between subjects, places, and objects in the exhibition. You try to grasp and deconstruct these connections, but the surreal world she creates becomes its own universe in which humour plays an important role. The stories take the shape of fairy tales, contemporary tragedies, parades and performances, which also appeal to the imagination and fantasy of the visitor.

Who has no time to play?

BY CHARLES ESCHE

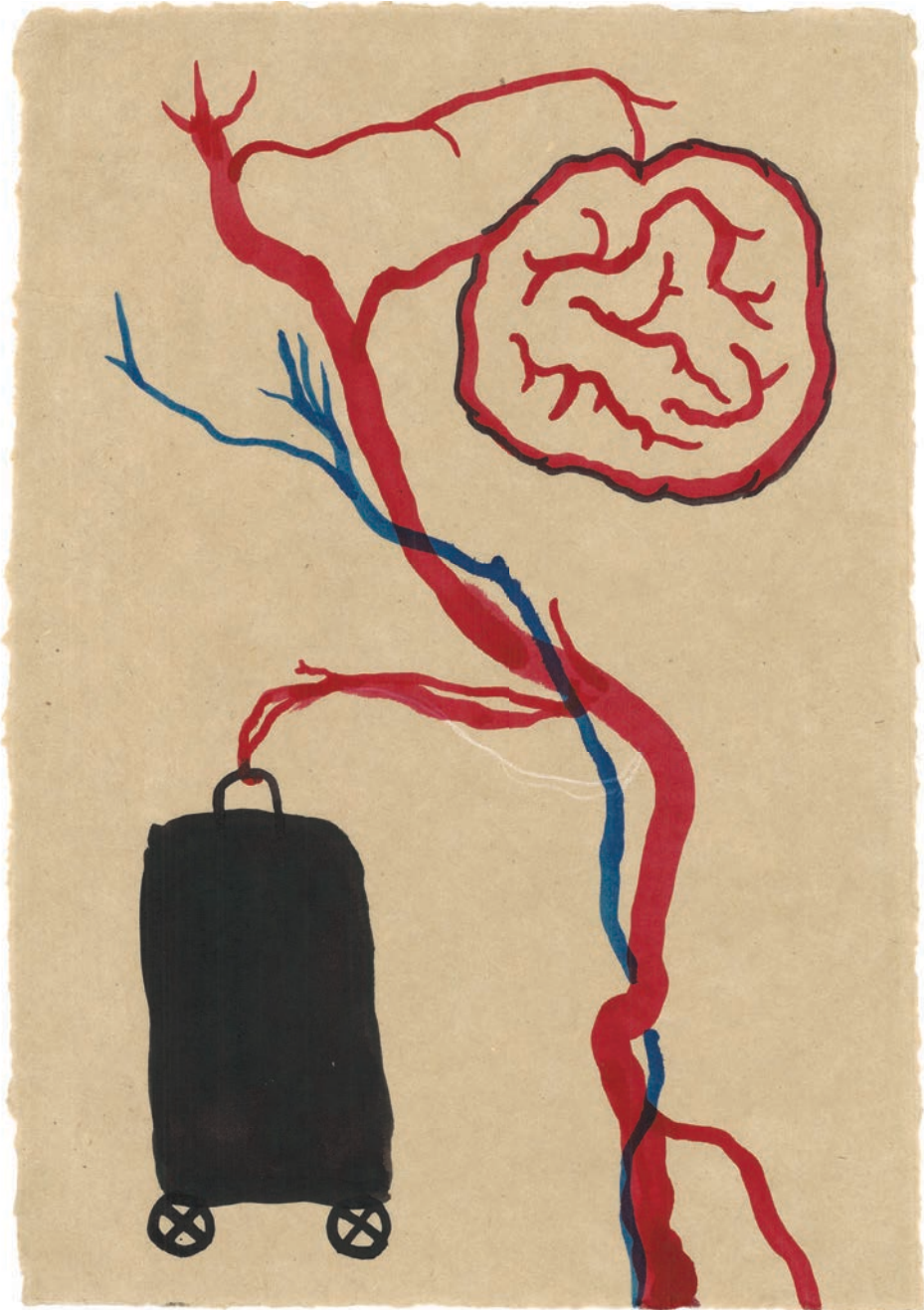
In Western European states like the Netherlands, the past thirty years appear to have been ones of relative ease. Despite occasional economic setbacks, the lives of many individual citizens have been conducted within a secure, supportive environment in which the means of survival was largely guaranteed. Even more fortunately, the system offered the promise of personal fulfilment of desires as a reasonable life horizon. While the dominance of the neoliberal political consensus increasingly privileged the owners of capital, its citizen-consumers could take comfort from a sense that representative democracy and the rule of law would probably avoid extreme social division or brutal economic exploitation. The decades on either side of the millennium harvested the fruits of victory for those who had won the Cold War and it appeared that any significant attempts to return to oligarchic rule or the demonisation of minorities could be safely ruled out across Western Europe.

Writing this in the summer of 2022, much of the social and economic architecture that maintained that 30-year-old system still feels to be in place. And yet... it also seems unremarkable to suggest that the disintegration of that liberal system is underway and will happen faster than anticipated even a year ago. The questions citizens of the Netherlands or indeed the European Union are faced with today, are not so much how to retain what was won, but how to respond to what comes next, both collectively (as a society) and as prec(ar)ious individuals. There are probably still a limited number of choices open to western societies, though the range is narrowing. One way to approach the future, could arguably be to look at societies where the loss or decay of a supportive social contract is already much further advanced. European citizens could look at what care and welfare; protest and reform; communal-ity and individuality; tradition and spirit mean for people that did not benefit from the relative ease common in Western Europe in the past in order to start planning how to adapt.

The problem with that approach is that it ignores Western European history and its convoluted present. From the moment of colonial and imperial expansion, Europe became entangled with its "Others" in ways



Gluklya, Zaina Story (2022)



Gluklya, *Dinara Story* (2022)

far too messy to ignore. Indeed, despite valiant attempts to build a false cultural border wall between enlightened modern European values and the dark side of colonial exploitation, the voices of the colonised would not be silenced. In a system based on economic engagement, trying to impose a moral or cultural separation was doomed to fail. Each new 21st century catastrophe only reconfirms the vitality of the entanglements and the dependency of the modern-colonial system on its others. The relative ease that Dutch citizens might have experienced in the 1990s and 2000s, was built on a whole set of destructive structures that reached right across the globe and were never likely to be sustainable, let alone socially just or ethically tolerable, over the longer term. It is precisely in the middle of this knot of past and present that Gluklya's artworks enter the fray. What Gluklya's work shows is not only empathy for that difficult truth, but how art offers a way to process the trials of global contemporary life and imagine a future that adjusts to reduced material security without despair.

To those who have no time to play is structured around four stories drawn from the artist's own experiences. Each narrative is represented by its own form of architecture and mode of reception. As someone looking at the exhibition, you are asked to perform different roles during your time there. You become a reader, a viewer, a listener, an emotional participant, an outsider caught in the midst of a protest, a collective presence in a chorus of sewing machines or any number of other roles you can define for yourself. There is a beauty in how the exhibition unfolds and how your attention is called to other people's struggles that ask to become part of your own, if only for a little while.

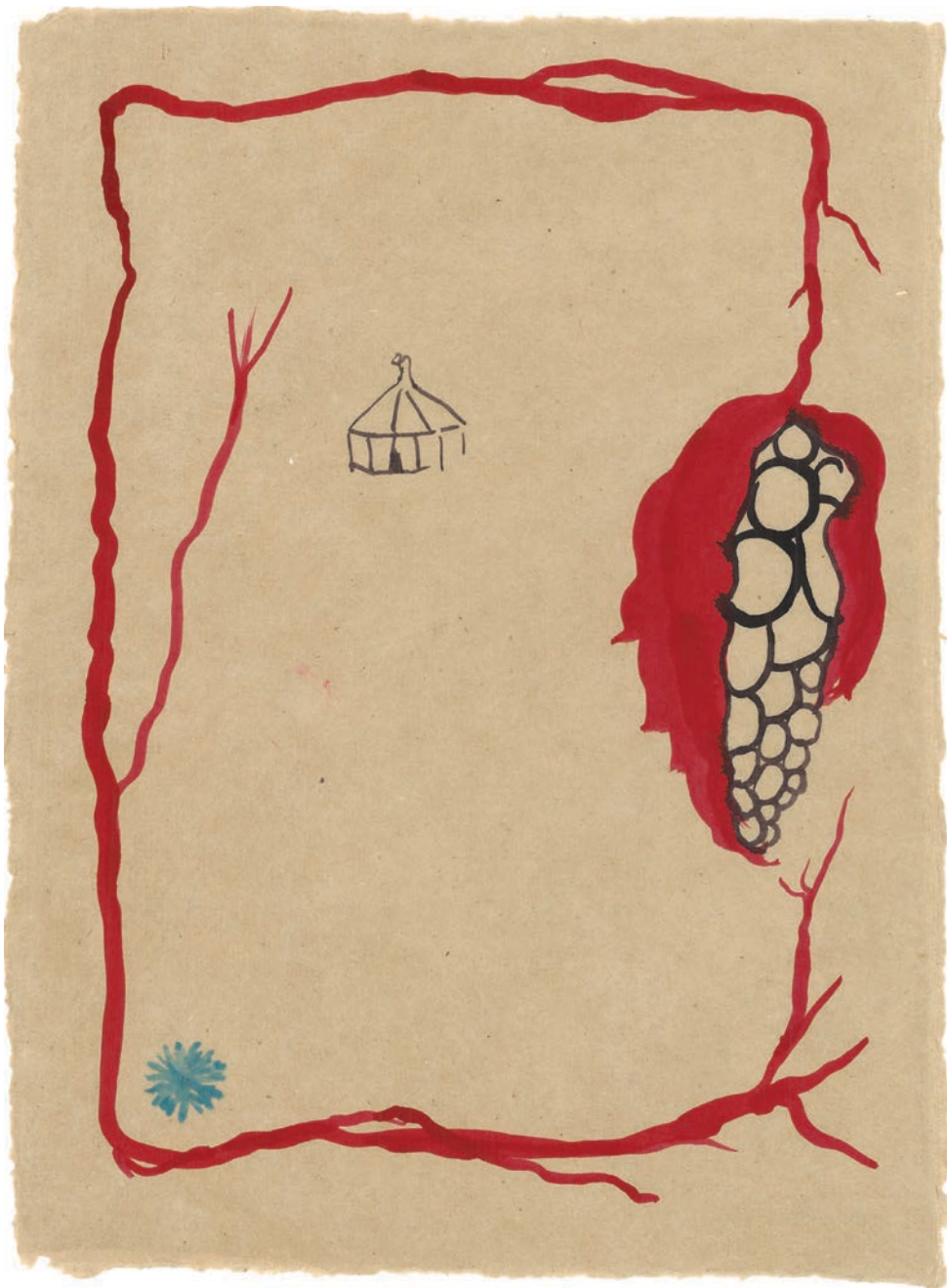
Two Yurts

There are two yurt-like structures, a dome, and a stage on which occasional live performances will take place. These are supplemented at intervals with wooden dividing screens on which the artist's drawings serve as a kind of visual commentary or guide to the exhibition as a whole. Each structure houses a different social and emotional geography. The smallest is an intimate space to read the two parallel diaries written by Gluklya and Murad, a Kurdish activist and poet looking for sanctuary in the Netherlands. They met while Gluklya had the oppor-

tunity, through a commission by the public art agency TAAK, to rent a studio in a building where an asylum seekers' centre was established. This building was in fact a disused prison called the Bijmerbajes, a few kilometres from Framer Framed. The *Two Diaries* broadly cover the same period in 2017 and touch each other in different places while chronicling two quite distinct experiences of migration, settlement and family. The environment in which you are encouraged to read the book is inspired by Central Asian yurts, as a way to displace both Gluklya and Murad's own stories and entangle them with others both near and far. The stories in the book as well as the drawings circling outside the yurt seem to speak about how to build a precarious understanding across cultures, one always threatened with collapse or the return of misunderstanding in a way that beautifully mirrors the experience of migration and resettling itself.

Gluklya calls the larger yurt in this exhibition the *Red Yurt*, in reference to the Soviet emancipatory struggle and the ambivalent impact it had on its many different territories. The yurt form here is more directly associated with its origins as it introduces stories and artworks from Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. It is perhaps useful to know that of all the Central Asian republics that emerged since the end of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan has been the least authoritarian and most subject to influence by the citizens of the state. These democratic freedoms have also led to a poor economic record and consistently poor working conditions. The struggles of Kyrgyz women in particular are what animates the *Red Yurt*.

On the outside, a red dress is held aloft by felt compositions of bodily organs intermingled with the organic forms of nature. The felt drawings were produced together with women textile workers from the Felt Art Studio, Issyk-Kul. The dress has no head but instead a hand held up in protest, symbolising the rebellious dreams of the women, while the red tulip sewn onto some of the clothes references the symbol of the successful 2005 Tulip Revolution. This outer shell shapes the interior, where stories Gluklya gathered during her visits to Kyrgyzstan while researching post-soviet colonialism are dramatized by the actor Gulmira Tursunbaeva. The stories mix accounts of life in Bishkek told to Gluklya by Samira, a seamstress the artist came to know particularly well, and other women with older tales from the Soviet past, when socialist emancipation clashed with local patriarchy and the traditional oppression of



Gluklya, *Rahat Story* (2022)

women. Like the other textile workers, Samira does not live in a yurt but works under the harsh conditions of domestic production in Soviet-built apartment blocks in the capital city. Her language is a mix of Kyrgyz and Russian, meaning that Gluklya could often understand words or half sentences in her stories, while needing the rest translated for her. This impression of listening to something between music and language finds its way onto the interior walls. Russian for Gluklya is both familiar and a constant reminder of the presence of a European imperial occupier in the heart of Central Asia. In this way the entanglements of the past are shown to partly shape present conditions, while leaving room for productive misunderstandings to emerge and older mythologies to retake their place in people's lives.

May 1st, Labour Day

Around a third space – a white dome that Gluklya named a *Melting Snowball*, a precarious relative of the revolutionary cobblestone – clothes are propped up against the base. Clothes are a returning motif in Gluklya's work, and these items were carried as banners by people who participated in the May 1st (Labour Day) protests in St. Petersburg from 2015-19. Inside, a film shows scenes from various years of the protests up to the year it was made illegal. On one textile, the words "Queer-Peace-May" appear, words that are also banned in Putin's Russia today. The video surrounds you as though you have been unknowingly caught up in the middle of the demonstration. The clothes animate the walls of the dome and carry the figures in the video out into the Amsterdam gallery and beyond. In this way, then and now, here and there become confused. At the time of writing, this is even more poignant as many of Gluklya's friends in St. Petersburg have had to leave the city in exile as the attack on Ukraine becomes ever more costly and destructive.

Antigone Update

The final element is not closed on itself but a stage that opens out to the exhibition space. On the stage, eight figures sing in turn in a new version of the classical Greek play *Antigone*. Keeping the structure of the

ancient tragedy, *Antigone Update* features a chorus spread out among the actual visitors. In this new version, the protagonists sing as ghosts from the past and the chorus speaks from the present. The script has been developed in an experimental collaboration that Gluklya proposed to Matras Platform, an informal group of migrants and travellers from around the world who are living in Amsterdam.

The play follows most of the plot of the original *Antigone*, though changed in important ways such as the fact that both sisters plot to bury their brother together. As Gluklya explains:

“Antigone and Ismene are doing the act of burial together as opposed to the individual act of the heroic deed and romanticised loneliness of the single hero.”

Another innovation in the update concerns the chorus, which is split into two parts. The twelve dressed sculptures with sewing machine heads stand with the public, bringing the visitors into the action; a second chorus is sometimes present in real life and its script is based on comments and responses from the Matras Platform group to the plot of *Antigone*. The story concludes with the chorus questioning the meaning of the play but also demanding that it ends not in redemption or reconciliation but in simple, unending tragedy. “All is back, all is back, all is back” they shout in unison at the end, accepting fate and the cycle of events as a way to confront the cruelty of modern propaganda and progress that raise hopes only to crush them again.

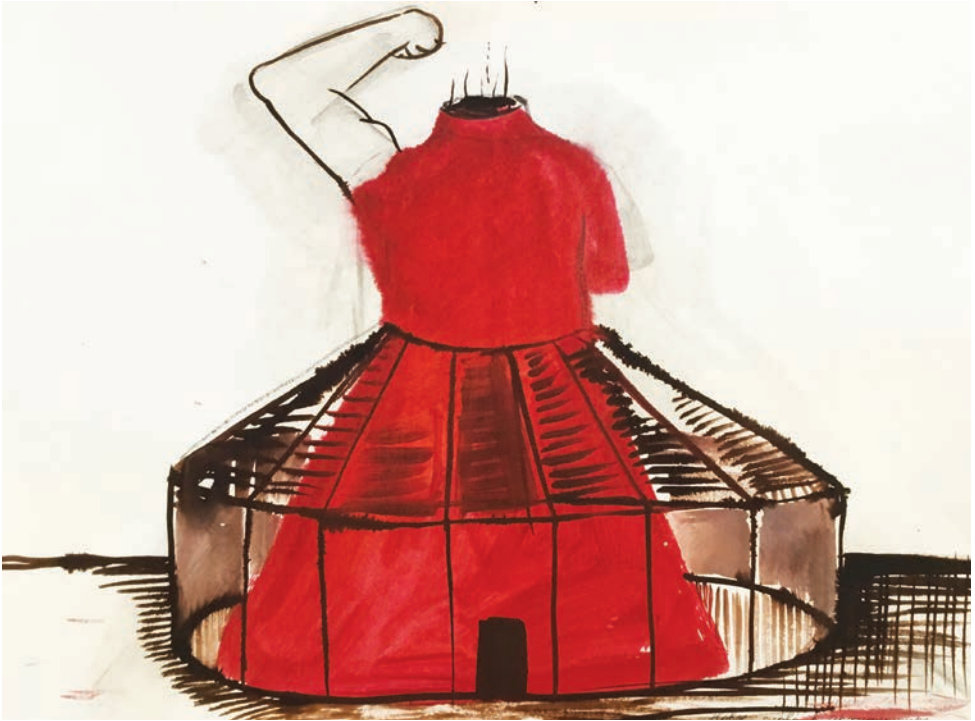
Growing Solidarity

Although tragic returns and the social conditions in Bishkek, St. Petersburg or ancient Thebes might seem a long way from the contemporary Dutch social imagination, this exhibition brings them squarely into focus. This is achieved through the intimacy and ambiguity that art can access to create emotion and understanding out of raw material. Gluklya’s works rarely fail to elicit empathy for their subjects and they regularly short-circuit the distance between the old, colonial West and East that media and political analysts still strive hard to maintain. Simply by bringing different locations in dialogue through art already empha-

sises connections and relations, but the exhibition does more than this. It is not simply a report from elsewhere, but a clear statement of interdependency and the need to share the care that has been limited to the chosen few. In the multiple disasters looming on the horizon – the climate collapse, extreme social inequality, the threat and actuality of war – there is little sense in defining a here and a there. The realisation that might be at the heart of this exhibition is that forced migration, economic globalisation, western comfort and the abuse of power all walk hand-in-hand, and that mitigating one can only be achieved by reordering the value systems of them all. To understand where this goes, we perhaps need to return to the title of the exhibition. *To those who have no time to play* appears at first glance to be a gesture of recognition of people who are not able to come to see this exhibition at all; a call to take note and remember them. But what if that is not its only intention? What if the people being addressed are precisely the people in this room; the one writing this text? What if we are the ones with no time to play, the docile subjects of Creon, following painstakingly the laws of apparently secure citizen-consumers in a rigid, careless Amsterdam?

To conclude with some optimism, I would like to quote what Murad writes towards the end of his contribution to the *Two Diaries*:

“We are like a summary of the marginalised of this world. I am not stating this from an arabesque sensibility or because of depression. I hate the literature of victimhood. Mine is an objective reading of reality... These people are running from the governance of those who cannot tolerate differences and who want freedoms only for themselves and at the expense of their desires. The reason they are here is to be as far as possible from the bigoted herds organised by these regressive governments and their dark worlds. It is not just running away to be safe. Coming here is a struggle and insistence for existence. And I think coming here carries with it the hope to return home one day stronger, having cultivated more freedom for those who are forced to migrate for political reasons. This is why to understand and to be understood is not that difficult. The sharing and solidarity between so many from different geographies and cultures gives one strength. If we, the marginalised – meaning those alienated because of their opinions, beliefs, ethnicity or sexual orientation – stand upright, grow our solidarity and bring our resistances from all over the world together, what a beautiful world this would be!”



Gluklya, Sketch of *Red Yurt* (2022)

The exhibition leaves me with just one last question. How can you and I, dear visitor and reader, join Gluklya, Murad, Samira, Antigone, the May 1st protestors and all the rest to find the long-term solidarity and resistance that will be necessary to become part of that beautiful world? I hope we can find an answer together before it really is too late.

WORKS

BY GLUKLYA

STRUCTURES

Red Yurt (2021-2022)

Bamboo, felt | d 7.00 x h 3.50 m

Two Diaries (2017-2022)

Willow branches, textile | d 4.00 x h 2.30 m

Melting Snowball (2017-2019)

Plastic tubing, textile | d 6.00 x h 3.00 m

Antigone Update (2020-2022)

Wood, textile | 9.00 x 2.70 m, h: variable

Red Yurt

In 2020, I was invited to participate in the research laboratory Space 1520, organised by Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, which focused on Soviet and post-Soviet colonialism. I was at this point already concerned with the issue of exploitation of women working in textile and fashion industries. During my research with Space 1520, I discovered Kyrgyzstan as a country with one of the largest textile industries, sewing the garments for export mainly to Russia. So, I travelled there and finally saw the working conditions of seamstresses with my own eyes. This profoundly changed my view of reality.

The title of the exhibition at Framer Framed *To those who have no time to play* came from my visit to the house of the seamstress Rahat, where I was shocked by her living conditions and realised that all the words and questions that might fall from my mouth will be futile in this context. I had a myriad of reactions: feelings of confusion and guilt, combined with the urge to try and do something. I made an effort and asked her: "What were you playing in your childhood?" Rahat answered that she played with stones.

The protective distance for human beings from becoming robots comes through play and humour. But it turns out that the game itself is a luxury that cannot be afforded by people who are overworked and cannot take time to reflect or even read a bedtime story to their children. The neoliberal structure of the market puts the responsibility of the working day on the individual, there is no control to limit the working hours as it was during the Soviet era, where seamstresses were coming in at 8:00 and leaving at 17:00. Seamstresses become like machines, filled with concern for producing as much as possible, since it is the amount of production that determines the amount of money they will be paid. They are regularly tortured by overworking, often through the night, until their bodies become full of pain. Let me share a fragment of an interview with seamstress Dinara:

"Hard to recall good days. Every day is in a bad mood. You take a lot of work and work 18-20 hours at times to have it finished. Often, I work up until two or three in the morning. It is beneficial to the owner, in as much as his profits grow the more we work. Taxi expenses are taken

from my pocket. And so, on almost every day. No time for recess. There's a family to feed. It should be eight hours of work as a norm, but I have not ever even tried to. At a minimum it is 10 hours a day, but mostly 15-16 hours. It even happens to work 24 hours without sufficient sleep. After work I rush to lay down and sleep. On my day off I strive to replenish my energy sleeping."

The title of this space *Red Yurt* references not only the controversial Soviet Likbez ("liquidation of illiteracy") campaign among women in Central Asia, but also the sacrifice of the women oppressed by the new wave of patriarchal orthodoxy, which came along with the freedom of Kyrgyzstan from Soviet power.¹ One example of this is in the tradition of bride-kidnapping, or *Ala kachuu* (meaning "to take a young woman and run away"). While the tradition was suppressed during Soviet rule, it has re-appeared in Kyrgyzstan's search for a new/old identity after the collapse of the USSR.

A reflection and artistic digestion on this phenomenon of becoming the nation unfolds inside the *Red Yurt* in a video installation showing the performance of actress Gulmira Tursunbaeva, who plays the role of a TV host telling feminist fairy tales as the video cuts to scenes of dance and street performance. The stories in this film are based on my interviews with the Bishkek seamstresses, material from the human rights organisation Open Line and materials from the Moscow archive of female workers in the USSR. Outside, the yurt is decorated by the outcome of my workshops with Felt Art Studio, Issyk Kul, which I have visited during my research in Kyrgyzstan in 2021. The felt paintings displayed at Framer Framed have been produced in collaboration with the studio, based on my sketches and through their felt production method.

To speak of activism sounds confusing in this context of misery and despair, but I have approached my collaboration with the seamstresses in Kyrgyzstan as a way of processing the huge gap between us, and an attempt at building forms of support and sharing that might exist between myself and these women.

1. Szálkai, Kinga. "The Soviet Union as a 'Feminist Colonialist?': The Women's Question in Early Soviet Central Asia." *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2019): pp. 4-14.



Gluklya, Installation detail *Red Yurt* (2022) | Photo: Maarten Nauw, Framer Framed



Gluklya, *Red Yurt* (2022) | Photo: Maarten Nauw, Framer Framed





Gluklya, *Enlightment Jacket* (2022) | Photo: Maarten Nauw, Framer Framed

Two Diaries Shelter

This space references the publication of the same name, which emerged as a collaboration with Kurdish activist and poet Murad Zorava. In 2017, I was renting a studio in one of the two towers of the Bijlmerbajes, a former prison in Amsterdam Zuid-Oost. The second tower was then being used by the government as an asylum seekers' centre (AZC). My plan was to attempt a collaboration with the refugees staying there at the time, among whom was Murad.

Fragment from Murad's Diary, when he first arrived to the AZC in the Bijlmerbajes:

"When in the room, something that is crucial to me attracted my attention. There was no pillow on the bed. Pillow... is crucial to me. When I was just 16, I was taken into custody for the first time and tortured a lot. There was no pillow in the room where they were keeping me after the torture. I lay down without a pillow for a few nights, but I couldn't get a wink of sleep. The reason for my lack of sleep surely wasn't the lack of a pillow, it was my fear from being beaten and becoming helpless... But it seemed as if that pillow had been a symbol of the hard, dark and horrible times... After this terrible experience I went through, I never again could fall asleep without a pillow. To top it all, I always used to use two pillows when sleeping.

I turned to the official and said, 'I need a pillow.' And the official responded, saying to me, 'I can't give you a pillow today because we are at the end of the shift, and the attendant responsible for pillows and mattresses has gone home. But tomorrow come to the reception desk and we will give you one.' And after this response he left the room and went back to his work."

In and around this shelter you will see flying pillows and lying pillows, pillows of hope and sorrow, humor and fear and some come from the game *Language of Fragility*.

Fragment from Gluklya's Diary:

"Slowly I am coming to understand that the project should revolve around the topic of language. What could be the concept of a language that opposes the verticals of power, money, and the Cartesian vision of the world? I think that creating our language might embrace the phonetic pronunciations of words in our different languages. Imagine, it is a universal language somewhere, before the Babylon tower. Mistakes and confusion are definitely a part of this game, together with the humour. For example, the Dutch word 'dom' (stupid) to the Russian ear sounds like the word for 'house' or 'home'."

We started to draw pictures together with refugees, and compare words from their languages to words in Dutch, English, Russian. It was surprising how this helped us to become friends. I believe that the game of the *Language of Fragility* that started as an attempt to understand each other's inner worlds, is in fact an attempt of transition or, more precisely, representation of complex and sometimes painful relationship of a migrant with the language of their destination.

During my project in the Bijlmerbajes, I was confronted with eye-opening questions: What does equality mean, when it is equality between a refugee and an artist? Can we imagine rethinking and abandoning the idea of enlightenment? How to deal with the notion of Care without falling into patronization, but soberly stay within the frame of Radical Care?

At the start of my research, I visited AZC meetings. These were some of the regular lessons provided to the refugees to teach them about the social structure of the Netherlands and what they could expect here. Nothing was said during those meetings about the culture and art, let alone contemporary art. This was surprising to me. It felt as if these people were held not equal to us, Westerners, as many Westerners believe they cannot survive without a breath of cultural or artistic air. Another thing that struck me was the fact of placing people in the environment of a prison: bars on windows, no locks form inside the rooms, no actual privacy, and unpleasant communal places.

Being haunted by this image of Murad in the cell of former prison, I started to think about what exactly I could do in this situation. During one of the workshops, I proposed participants to write a diary, and



Gluklya, Making of *Two Diaries Shelter* (2022) | Photo: Maarten Nauw, Framer Framed

Murad accepted this idea. I am very happy to hope that the project had a practical outcome in reality. Murad believes that working on publishing his diary helped him to settle down in Amsterdam, in a flat in central part of the town – near the park after all.



Gluklya, *Pluniversal Spy* (2021)

Melting Snowball

The installation consists of three videos of demonstrations unfolding in the streets of St. Petersburg on May 1st 2017, 2018 and 2019. These demonstrations took place almost every year since Soviet times. Now it has stopped, an unbearable and tragic reality.

The title comes from the playful winter fight when children are throwing snowballs at each other. In the context of protest, the snowball might be seen as a precarious relative of the revolutionary cobblestone – as the Russian protest is fragile. May 1st – *the day of Labour and Spring* – became an important possibility for the artistic community of St. Petersburg to express political protest. This day was the only one during which it could be imaginable to unite progressive critical thinkers with other citizens. Year after year, it became a sort of protest art festival. More and more people were joining. The imagination of artists brought unique aesthetics to the expression of indignation.

We began to film the May 1st demonstrations in 2017, inviting Nastya Molchanova as a camera person. In preparation, I invited people for a workshop at my studio in St. Petersburg to create costumes to wear during the protest and banners using their clothes (I had conceived of these banners, *clothes on conceptual sticks*, during the first May 1st protest in 2012). We decided to name the demonstration *Column of Fragility*. Our costumes took the form of green cucumbers, referencing the young mind as a reflection on the slow process of raising critical voices among the Russian population. Already in the first ten minutes of our appearance at the square where the march would depart from, the police came and demanded to make a hole in the costumes, explaining that it was forbidden to cover one's face during the demonstration. We submitted to the demand with regret.

In 2018, I was invited by the *Union of Convalescents* to join the demonstration together and filmed it myself¹ The debate revolved around the topic of forced hospitalization in mental institutions and stigmatization of people with diagnoses of mental illness. Covering both problems: the topic of protestors being sent to psychiatric hospitals to shut them up and the orthodox condition of the post-Soviet countries regarding correct diagnoses, horrible treatment of patients and the lack of the support for institutions of care in general.

1. *Union of Convalescents* consisted of:
Natalia Nikulenkova, Egor Safronov and Pavel Mitenko.



Gluklya, Sketch of *Antigone Update* (2022)

2019 brought the topic of police corruption, abuse of power, cruel torture of prisoners and extreme work conditions, especially for migrants. I had decided to film with two cameras; while I focused on people, Vanya Shatravin Dostov would film the police. But this year we faced a new obstacle; the police had installed a check point, like in an airport, and investigated every item of our protest banners. They asked, why is this written here? What does it mean? Why are they looking so ugly and so on... And then they confiscated it all and threw it in the garbage! After the demonstration, we came back and took what had survived.

I do not know when or if the May 1st demonstrations will ever be possible again. Most of the artistic groups and individuals seen in the videos – my dear friends – are now facing investigations by the Russian government for their political position, with many forced to evacuate the country.

Antigone Update

The idea to create this performance in the context of the long-term project Matras Platform came to me after the start of the war in Ukraine. Since 2012 I was busy developing the concept of a theatre for migrants, where professional and nonprofessional actors might blend their energies to create a performance together. During the pandemic, I came to realise the necessity to call for collaborators living here in Amsterdam, and after my first meeting with Khalid Jone from We Are Here (a refugee action collective), came the title – Matras Platform. The name derived from our sessions of writing questions on mattresses left out on the streets, directed to the city as an open environment for exploring a new way of communication. We started to meet regularly at my studio, talking on different topics, developing trust and trying to understand what kind of performance we should produce which might unite us despite gender, status and experience differences.

But 24 February 2022 changed everything. Following the outbreak of the war, I proposed to read the tragedy *Antigone* written by Sophocles. The core Matras Platform group accepted it, and we agreed that I would write the script to then be debated and developed from meeting to meeting. The trust necessary in this process was facilitated by amazing Marianne Koeman. The war also brought an old friend again: I started to correspond with composer Vladimir Rannev and proposed him to write music to our performance, introducing him to my dream of combining singing dresses and live performance together. Through our communication, we developed the structure of this multimedia installation combining soft- and hardware programming with the synchronization of sound and light.

The choice to work with the classic play came largely as a result of thinking how to show the enormous gap between Europe and the rest of the world. Ancient Greek mythology is ruling the game here, penetrating our cultural environment with codes that only people who grew up with them can understand, excluding the newcomers. Our sessions in studio became like a school of sharing and unlearning these codes together.

The first thing that struck me when I was reading *Antigone* in Russian was Antigone's double attempt to bury her brother. My second thought was the realisation of the absence of enslaved people in the story, and

another intriguing thing was the doubt of the sentry, who after capturing Antigone said, But here is what is very strange:

"I felt sadness coming over me, which showed his
unsureness in what he had done."

After reading several versions of *Antigone*, I was inspired mostly by Bonnie Honig's *Antigone Interrupted*, who interestingly speculates around the topic of the double burial and the role of Ismene, Antigone's sister.¹ In my script, I dramatised the proposition that the sisters did the heroic deed together, highlighting the topic of a sororal politics, feminist sisterhood and the problems with self-organisation among women. The doubt of the sentry is emphasised in the performance by splitting the character between the singing dress on the stage and a live performance by Shepherd Camara. The general structure of *Antigone Update* remains from the classic tragedy, but with a twist of protagonists who sing from the stage and a chorus who speaks from our times.²

The chorus consists of Matras Platform members: Marianne Koeman, Natalia Grezina, Shepherd Camara, Anna Bitkina, Elena Melkumova and Liah Frank. Through the rehearsal we were learning from each other, becoming a sort of chosen family for this period of time, without the obligation to be devoted to the project forever.

1. "Sophocles' *Antigone* is a touchstone in democratic, feminist and legal theory, and possibly the most commented upon play in the history of philosophy and political theory. Bonnie Honig's rereading of it therefore involves intervening in a host of literatures and unsettling many of their governing assumptions. Exploring the power of *Antigone* in a variety of political, cultural, and theoretical settings, Honig identifies the 'Antigone-effect' – which moves those who enlist Antigone for their politics from activism into lamentation. She argues that Antigone's own lamentations can be seen not just as signs of dissidence but rather as markers of a rival world view with its own sovereignty and vitality. Honig argues that the play does not offer simply a model for resistance politics or 'equal dignity in death', but a more positive politics of counter-sovereignty and solidarity which emphasizes equality in life."

(Simon Critchley, *The New School for Social Research*).



Gluklya, Installation detail *Antigone Update: Protagonist of Chorus II* (2022)
Photo: Maarten Nauw, Framed Framed



Gluklya, Installation detail *Antigone Update: Protagonist of Chorus II* (2022)
Photo: Maarten Nauw, Framed Framed



Video still *Gulmira Fairytales* (2022) | Edited by: Nelly Erkin



Video still *Gulmira Fairytales* (2022) | Edited by: Nelly Erkin



Gluklya, Installation sketch (2022)

ARTIST

Gluklya / Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya lives and works in Amsterdam. Considered one of the pioneers of Russian performance art, her research is concentrated on finding ways to talk about the traumatic divisions within society and their implications on people's lives. The conflict between the political regime and the inner world of the person forms the subject of her surreal drawings, performances in collaboration with diverse people, installations with poetic texts and things, and the Utopian Clothes. She is also part of Chto Delat, a multidisciplinary collective of which she has been an active member since 2003.

CURATOR

Charles Esche is the director of Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; an advisor at Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht and professor of contemporary art and curating at Central Saint Martins, UAL, London. He (co)curated *The Meeting that Never Was* (2022), MO Museum, Vilnius; *Hurting and Healing* (2022), Tens-ta Konsthall, Stockholm; *Power and Other Things* (2017), Europalia, BOZAR, Brussels; *Art Turns, Word Turns* (2017); Museum MACAN, Jakarta; Jakarta Biennale 2015; 31st Sao Paulo Bienal 2014; U3 Triennale 2011, Ljubljana; RIWAQ Biennale 2007 and 2009, Palestine; Istanbul Biennale 2005; Gwangju Biennale 2002, as well as many Van Abbemuseum exhibitions. He received the 2012 Princess Margriet Award and the 2014 CCS Bard College Prize for Curatorial Excellence.

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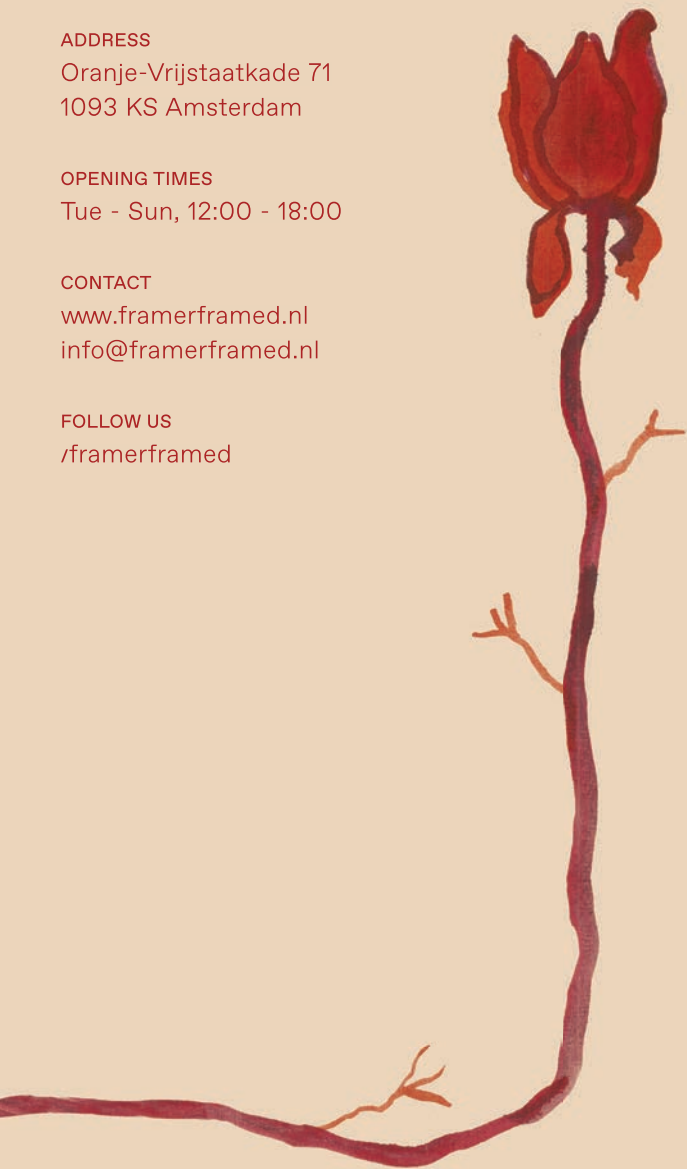
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