

MARGARET'S HOUSE 151 LONDON ROAD EDINBURGH EH7 6AE

CURATED BY ILIYANA NEDKOVA

EDINBURGH PA F

11AM-7PM MON-FRI

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THE FIRST UK SURVEY EXHIBITION BY MARE TRAL









THE FIRST UK SURVEY EXHIBITION BY

CURATED BY ILIYANA NEDKOVA

FREE & OPEN TO ALL

ST. MARGARET'S HOUSE 151 LONDON ROAD EDINBURGH EH7 6AE

11AM-7PM MON-FRI

12-5PM SAT & SUN

24 AUG – 10 SEPT

GALLERY 1 3RD FLOOR EDINBURGHPALETTE.CO.UK

FINISSAGE SAT 9 SEPT 3PM

ARTIST'S TALK FEATURING SPECIAL GUESTS

FINISSAGE SAT 9 SEPT 3PM FREE

ARTIST'S TALK FEATURING SPECIAL GUESTS SIGRID NIELSEN AND ANGELA DIMITRAKAKI

JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL FINISSAGE EVENT AS PART OF THE FINAL WEEKEND OF THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED – THE FIRST UK SURVEY EXHIBITION BY EDINBURGH-BASED ESTONIAN QUEER FEMINIST ARTIST MARE TRALLA.

THE EXHIBITING ARTIST MARE TRALLA WILL BE IN CONVERSATION WITH SIGRID NIELSEN AND ANGELA DIMITRAKAKI.

SIGRID NIELSEN IS AN LGBTQ+ ACTIVIST AND WRITER, AS WELL AS THE CO-FOUNDER OF LAVENDER MENACE, THE FIRST GAY AND LESBIAN BOOKSHOP IN EDINBURGH ESTABLISHED IN 1982.

ANGELA DIMITRAKAKI IS A WRITER AND CURATOR, AS WELL AS SENIOR LECTURER IN CONTEMPORARY ART HISTORY AND THEORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

THE CONVERSATION WILL REVOLVE AROUND THEMES EMERGING FROM TRALLA'S WORKS FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION, INCLUDING FEMINIST ACTIVISM, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RADICAL POTENTIAL OF PERFORMANCE ART FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION. THERE WILL BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR AUDIENCE QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS.

CURATED BY **ILIYANA NEDKOVA**, THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED IS PART OF THE STRAND OF EDINBURGH SUMMER FESTIVAL EXHIBITIONS IN 2023 AT EDINBURGH PALETTE. FEATURED ARE 25 OF TRALLA'S PERFORMATIVE WORKS SPANNING MORE THAN 20 YEARS, INCLUDING VIDEOS, INSTALLATIONS, PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTINGS. AT THE HEART OF HER PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE IS THE PROTEST TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND FIGHT PATRIARCHY OFTEN THROUGH THE POWER OF SELF-DEPRICATING IRONY AND DARK HUMOUR.

THIS CONVERSATION AND THE SURVEY EXHIBITION COULDN'T BE MORE TIMELY WHEN THE WORLD MARKS THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SCOTLAND FINISHES THE CONSULTATION PERIOD ON ITS PROPOSALS TO INTRODUCE A NEW HUMAN RIGHTS BILL FOR SCOTLAND AND YET THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF ALL HUMAN BEINGS HAVE BEEN ERODING GLOBALLY.

IN ADDITION, THE CONVERSATION WILL ALSO DELVE INTO **MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT**'S BOOK 'A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN' (1792) – NOW RECOGNISED AS THE FIRST STATEMENT OF LIBERAL FEMINISM. IT IS THE THIRD CHAPTER IN WOLLSTONECRAFT'S BOOK ENTITLED 'THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED' WHICH FEATURES PROMINENTLY IN ONE OF TRALLA'S WORKS.

THE EXHIBITION RUNS 24 AUG-10 SEPT 2023 AT EDINBURGH PALETTE ST MARGARET'S HOUSE, 151 LONDON ROAD, EDINBURGH EH7 6AE, 3RD FLOOR, GALLERY 1 OPEN MON-FRI 11AM-7PM AND SAT-SUN 12-5PM FREE ADMISSION. DOG FRIENDLY. FREE SPOTLIGHT TOURS AVAILABLE DAILY

THE FINISSAGE EVENT IS CURATED IN COLLABORATION WITH LAVENDER MENACE QUEER BOOKS ARCHIVE THE EVENT IS FREE AND FAMILY FRIENDLY BUT DISCRETION IS ADVISED AS THE WORKS FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION CONTAIN NUDITY AND SEXUAL IMAGERY FOR FULL DIRECTIONS AND ACCESS, PLEASE VISIT HTTPS://LINKTR.EE/ILIYANANEDKOVA

SAME OLD, SAME OLD

INTRODUCTION BY ILIYANA NEDKOVA

Having discovered the work of the queer feminist UK-based Estonian artist and activist **Mare Tralla** in 1996, it has been my curatorial privilege ever since to explore, commission and champion Mare's practice. I am really pleased that as part of its strand of Edinburgh summer festival exhibitions in 2023, Edinburgh Palette play host Tralla's the first and well-overdue UK survey exhibition *The Same Subject Continued*.

Featured are 25 of Tralla's performative works spanning more than 20 years, including videos, installations, photography and paintings. At the heart of her performative practice is the protest to protect human rights and fight patriarchy often through the power of self-depricating irony and dark humour.

This survey show couldn't be more timely when the world marks the 75th anniversary of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Scotland finishes the consultation period (running to 5 October 2023) on its proposals to introduce a new Human Rights Bill for Scotland and yet the rights and freedoms of all human beings have been eroding globally.

The exhibition *The Same Subject Continued*, as well as one of the featured works, take its title from a chapter in Mary Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) – now recognised as the first statement of liberal feminism. Throughout the book the author describes the difficult situation women faced at the end of the 18th Century on the basis of her personal experiences. Wollstonecraft argues that men and women should be given equal opportunities.

In Tralla's words, "In the last 200 years women's position in society has improved dramatically, also thanks to feminists, activists and advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft. However, even today when women criticise patriarchy, their personality is attacked and professional activities ignored. Furthermore, it is common for women to be threatened with rape and death. As a queer feminist I seem to be continually fighting the same old, same old."

Not shying away from difficult questions, emotional outbursts and nuanced debate is where contemporary art, including Tralla's survey exhibition, is best positioned to continue this centuries-old struggle.

THAT'S ALL WHAT MAKES ME SO BEAUTIFUL (2000)

Photography and mixed media objects installation

A tongue-in-cheek comment on the pressures women experience to appear beautiful. Tralla performs to the camera in an ironic attempt to take a most glamourous self-portrait fit for a fashion magazine cover or perhaps a survey exhibition poster. Then she deconstructs the illusion of beauty by displaying all the make-up and jewellery used in the photoshoot by encapsulating the products into pouches with sanitary pads and tampons.

PERFORMANCES AND ACTIONS (1995–2022)

A suite of 16 photographs and video stills

A whistle-stop tour through a wide range of Tralla's performances and actions, including the vaccine justice campaign *Covid Plants – Free the Vaccine; Sing With Me! –* investigating the Estonian Singing Revolution following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the role of singing in the country's nationalism and resistance; *This Is How We Gave Birth To Estonian Feminism* produced for the est.fem exhibition in 1995 – one of the first clearly identified feminist art manifestations in Estonia.

A TOY (1995)

Two-channel video installation acquired for the collection of KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn

A critical reflection on consumerism during the shock capitalist transition period in Eastern Europe during the 1990s when women 'discovered' the beauty industry and men – the emerging ICT sector. Could new technology create the ideal virtual woman able to fulfill male sexual fantasies? Is the ideal woman an easily manipulated toy or a feisty rebel?

Commissioned by the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia for the exhibition Biotopia, Tralla produced this work in her bedroom and edited it on a VHS recorder using only a remote control and a microphone.

HER.SPACE (1996-1997)

Interactive CD-ROM installation

Who were our female role models while growing up in the USSR? Milkmaids, weavers, tractor drivers, cosmonauts all adorned with the title 'Heroines of The Socialist Labour' but mistreated in both their public and private lives. Finally, after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the heroines could happily stay at home and learn how to be like... Barbie dolls in a beauty factory. Do post-socialist women need feminism? Just some of the of the questions posed in this tragi-comic venture in the space of a female digital artisan.

EYEBLIMP (1999-2020)

Video documentation of an interactive digital sculpture

Fondle me! Interact with me! This is the voice of an object floating in space made of silicone, LCD screen and a camera. The built-in camera constantly captures an image of those who dare to touch the silicone skinned object. The reward? Intimate whispers as long as the hugging continues.

Commissioned by FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) as part of Video Positive Festival 2000. Initially shown at Spacecraft exhibition, Bluecoat Display Centre, Liverpool

MY PRIVACY SETTINGS (2019)

Wearable technology performance artefact and documentary photograph

How do technological algorithms affect our bodies? Social media platforms remove images of female and queer bodies by identifying nipples and other body parts. As an artist exploring nudity often through representations of her own body, Tralla's work has been censored numerous times. This artist's dress, polka dotted with images of nipples, is Tralla's wearable technology public intervention across Vienna. While wearing the dress mobile devices in the pockets of the dress were simultaneously broadcasting live to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

PROTECTED. TEDDY BEAR (2008)

Video installation featuring a hand-knitted digital sculpture with built-in cameras

Hand-crafted CCTV surveillance objects? What about mini-spy cameras embedded into knitted and felted sculptural objects adding another layer of watching and being watched from cradle to death.

"We take being watched whilst doing everyday actions for granted, but we should not. Watching someone else's life should make us uneasy. By placing the Nanny Cams in the eyes of an oversized cuddly Teddy Bear 'safeguarding' the toddler, I attempted to make the viewer uncomfortable, reassess their vulnerability and role in the big game of watching which we are all part of." **Mare Tralla**

VIDEO WORKS (1995-2011)

Total viewing time: 35 min running on a loop

A selection of Tralla's video works ranging from political mocumentaries to quiet, melancholy pieces which collectively deliver a powerful punch to patriarchy and the constraints of binary oppositions. Featured are:

- A TOY (1995) 9 MIN (also showing as a two-channel video installation)
- FELTBOOTS (2000) 3 MIN
- UNFORGETTABLE HITS (2006) 4 MIN
- PLOVDIV (2002) 4 MIN
- THE HEROINE OF POST-SOCIALIST LABOUR (2004) 4 MIN
- FAT KID PRETTY KID (2010) 1 MIN
- WHEN ESTONIAN PEASANT MEETS RUSSIAN MINER OR (2008) 4 MIN
- READING FACES (2011) 6 MIN

KISS (1999)

Performative video documentation

Picture Estonia in the 1990s. The artist and activist **Mare Tralla** is a household name. She is featured in the mainstream media almost every week, often rebelling against patriarchy and capitalism. Here Tralla interviews a few of important men in the Estonian art world at the time, posing the question: *What to you think of Mare Tralla*? The responses are mostly dismissive or sexualising. Tralla projects the interviews on a mirror screen, sits in front of the screen and looks at her two reflections as a young female artist – the first one in the mirror and the other via the male gaze. She puts on a lipstick and either gives a kiss to the critics or 'punishes' them by throwing the lipstick at the mirror.

THIS BODY IS PROTECTED BY ... (2007)

Performative photography installation

A performance to camera investigating some of the products and institutions sold to us, supposedly to 'protect' us – NATO, passwords, UN, laws, trademarks, the army...

"When I first arrived in London in 1996, I was surprised by the number of signs warning me of visible and invisible CCTV cameras, including in the pubs' toilets. I questioned how much private space is left free of surveillance. Is it impossible to live in a contemporary urban setting without being observed? What happens with the recorded material? We believe there are laws and regulations protecting us. In fact, capitalism is obsessed with 'the protection' of property and us as citizens. Protecting us from 'any' harm is a big business." Mare Tralla

FREEDOM TO SPEECH (2018)

Singe-screen video installation

A symbolic act of protest to protect human rights and fight patriarchal power. Performed as a reaction to the UK government's plan to ditch the Human Rights Act. This work also refers to the artist's childhood in the Soviet Union, where human rights and freedom of speech were merely formal notions in the constitution and not something ordinary citizens could actually use.

"Ditching the Human Rights Act is a controversial and highly troubling plan. It demonstrates the fragility of the rights we have. Once abolished, this will lead to the freedom of speech denied to everyone" **Mare Tralla**

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED (2020)

Two-channel projection installation

In this titular work Tralla creates a link between contemporary and 18th-century value systems for women. It is comprised of two parts. A performative reading of the third chapter of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) entitled '*The Same Subject Continued*' is paired with the second video projection where the artist walks through a landscape ploughing through hate messages sent to her as a daring feminist artist. The work calls for solidarity with all women attacked and ridiculed on social media, especially those in the public eye, activists, social critics or any voices of dissent from the status-quo.

TO SIT INTO BRIGHT FUTURE (1999)

Performative photography installation

Although almost 10 years apart, this work of self-portraiture is conceptually linked to *Wee Views* (2008) (not featured in this exhibition) as both are set in the private public spaces of toilet cubicles at museums, galleries and art institutions across the globe. A cheeky social critique using the toilets, in this case those of the Video Data Bank outpost in New York, as an example for a world ill-designed to barely fit any oversized, non-normative bodies. Ultimately, a world (and toilets) designed for men as further detailed in Caroline Criado-Perez's book *Invisible Women. Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (2019).

WRITTEN INTO SPACE (2010-11)

Performative photography installation

A series of self-ironic actions performed over the course of a year about the process of coming out. The installation captures the artist's feelings of not fitting into the everyday environment of normative heterosexual domesticity. Tralla attempts to squeeze her 'oversized' naked body into confined or far too small spaces: under the bed and dining table, into the rabbit cage, the washing machine, in the sandpit, playing in her child's bed, the closet, hanging from a beam, being sandwiched between a door. The photographic series culminates in a final image – a stereotypical take – of the artist stepping out of the clothes closet as a changed person.

The title *Written into Space* is an homage to Jeanette Winterson's book *Written on the Body* (1992)

PROTECTED (2007-2011)

Hand-knitted security camera, paintings on canvas and board and street performance video documentation from Edinburgh, London, Tallinn, Berlin, Graz and Århus

A series of artist's plein-air performances across Europe, painting images of CCTV cameras. Apparently, because of the terrorism threat, it was illegal to take photos of the cameras in public spaces. However, no law existed to forbid us from painting them.

"When passers-by saw that I was painting something as worthless as a CCTV camera, they immediately asked questions. My aim was not merely to make paintings, but to have discussions and conversations about our 24/7 surveillance society." **Mare Tralla**

WE STILL HAVE CHICKENS TO PLUCK (2018)

Dress of feathers, a quartet of watercolour, ink on feathers and performance video documentation

White other? Immigrant? Woman? Queer feminist? All of the above. Slurs applied to women or Eastern European migrants are inscribed on each of the feathers sewn on this little black dress. It is stripped bare as the artist twists and rubs against an oversized plucking wall, based on commercial chicken plucking devices made of phallic 'teeth'. The plucking teeth are in turn inscribed with words and terms of oppressions. A liberation is achieved with equal doses of violence and vulnerability.

"I use the tools of patriarchy to take off layers of oppression from my body". Mare Tralla

Live performance commissioned for the Baltic Triennial 13 and conceived for Bastard Voices, held at the South London Gallery in 2018

A DIARY (2009-2011)

Text and a series of performative photographs. Acquired by for the collection of Tartu Art Museum, Estonia

Perhaps one of the most autobiographical of Tralla's works, it features diary extracts documenting the artist's own journey of coming out in her 40s. It is set against the background of her largely homophobic home country of Estonia and her experience as a stay-at-home Mum in London.

"In 2009 my life changed and it became clear, that I can no longer continue to live within a heterosexual normative model. During that time I began to write a diary and take daily snapshots of my body from the angles I can view it without a mirror. This process was important to me and helped me make sense with what was happening. These texts and images were not intended to be made public but this changed when I received the curatorial invitation to participate in Untold Stories – the first major queer art exhibition in Estonia." Mare Tralla

WOMEN'S LIVES MATTER (2017)

Performative photography installation

This work bridges the artist's socially-engaged practice with her protest activities as an activist. It features the artist's banner *Women's Lives Matter* carried in marches on the streets of London, here superimposed on archival images of Estonian women toiling in the countryside from the time when Tralla's grandmother was coming of age – thus linking generations and centuries of feminist struggle.

MARE TRALLA

Born 1967 Tallinn. Lives and works in the UK since 1996. Based in Edinburgh since 2023

Mare Tralla is a queer feminist artist and activist who uses a variety of media – from painting, photography, performance and video to fabric, fibre, text and interactivity.

Her professional artistic practice started in the early 1990s in Estonia, where she became one of the leading interdisciplinary artists of the younger generation. Tralla graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn with a BA in Painting in 1995 and received an MA in Hypermedia from the University of Westminster, London in 1997. As a writer, speaker and activist, Mare has contributed to a wide range of conferences, protests and books.

Drawing from her personal history and everyday experience her practice was in direct critical response to how the transition of East-European societies affected women. Tralla co-curated the first Estonian feminist exhibition *Est.Fem* in 1995 and the touring Estonian-British feminist exhibition *Private Views*, 1998-99. Tralla's recent socially-engaged performative projects deal with queer experiences and investigate issues of sustainability and economics. She has been involved with Act Up London, No Pride in War and LGSMigrants.

Tralla's recent exhibitions include Consequences. Art and Activism in the Nuclear Age, Out of the Blue Drill Hall, Edinburgh, 2022; Covid Plants - Free the Vaccine, London, 2020; Woman & Woman, City Gallery, Pärnu, 2020 and 2019; A-tishoo, A-tishoo, We All Fall Down, Museum of Contemporary Art Estonia, Tallinn/EKKM, 2019; Machine Divas, steirischerherbst'20, Schaumbad, Graz, 2019; The X-Files. Registry of the Nineties, Art Museum of Estonia KUMU, Tallinn, 2018-2019; Give Up the Ghost, Baltic Triennial 13, Kim?, Riga, 2018; Bastard Voices, Baltic Triennial 13, South London Gallery, London, 2018; Women, Threshold artspace, Perth, 2017-2018; Amor, Oi Futuro, Rio De Janeiro, 2016; Love at the Edge, Gallery Arsenal Powerstation, Białystok, 2015: Aferlife of Gardens, Art Museum of Estonia KUMU, Tallinn, 2013; Girls Next Door, Visby Art Museum, 2013; Hetro.g.b, Museu do Chiado, Lisbon, 2013; re.act feminism 2, Academy of Arts, Berlin and Tallinn Art Hall, 2013 and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2012; Untold Stories, Tallinn Art Hall, 2011; Gender Check, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2010 and MUMOK Vienna, 2009; Angled towards the Other, Pamenkalnio Galerja, Vilnius & City Gallery, Tallinn, 2011; Crazy Love, Tartu Art House, Tartu, 2011; Retrospective video exhibition, Threshold artspace, Perth, 2011; Marketplace, ARC Projects, Sofia 2009-10 and Mutatis Mutandis, Embassy Annex, Edinburgh, 2008 as part of the 2nd Annual Edinburgh Art Festival.

Further details: tralla.net

ILIYANA NEDKOVA

Born 1968 Sofia. Lives and works in the UK since 1994. Based in Edinburgh since 2001

Iliyana Nedkova is a curator of contemporary art, as well as performing arts, design and works on screen.

Most recently she curated *We Refused to be Scapegoats* by Pam Skelton at P21 Gallery, London; *Duets* – Gabriel Schmitz first solo exhibition in Scotland; *Arrivals Departures* by Albena Mihaylova-Bendji as part of the 59th Venice Biennale 2022 and *Peace Cranes* – exhibitions and events about the impact of nuclear power on peace, people the planet.

Her interests include arts and activism, artist's moving image culture, women artists practices, intangible cultural heritage and literature in translation.

Currently, Nedkova is TRACS Curator at Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland, Curator-in-Residence at Abbeyhill Primary School and Development Manager of Cutting Edge Theatre. Most recently, Nedkova held curatorships at Peace & Justice (Scotland) (2020-22); Perth Theatre and Concert Hall where she founded the Threshold artspace (2005–20) commissioning and acquiring 350 works by over 150 artists, Screen.dance – Scotland's festival of dance on screen (2016-21), Sofia's ARC Projects (2007-10), Edinburgh's Stills (2001-03) and Liverpool's Foundation for Art & Creative Technology (1996-01).

Nedkova holds an MPhil in Curating Contemporary Art from Liverpool John Moores University and an MLitt in English and American Studies with History and Theory of Culture from the University of Sofia. As a writer, speaker and literary translator, Iliyana has contributed to a wide range of conferences, publications and books.

Further details: linktr.ee/iliyananedkova

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Follow the trail of artworks from left to right in the exhibition space



- 1. THAT'S ALL WHAT MAKES ME SO BEAUTIFUL (2000)
- 2. PERFORMANCES & ACTIONS (1995-2022)
- 3. A TOY (1995)
- 4. PUBLICATIONS & PHOTOGRAPHS (LIMITED EDITION OF 20 + AP): £25, £35 & £45
- 5. HER.SPACE (1996-97)
- 6. EYEBLIMP (1999/2020)
- 7. MY PRIVACY SETTINGS (2019)
- 8. PROTECTED. TEDDY BEAR (2008)
- 9. VIDEO WORKS (1995-2011)*
- 10. KISS (1996)
- 11. THIS BODY IS PROTECTED BY (2007)
- 12. FREEDOM TO SPEECH (2018)
- 13. THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED (2020)
- 14. TO SIT INTO BRIGHT FUTURE (1999)
- 15. WRITTEN INTO SPACE (2010-2011)
- 16. PROTECTED (2007-2011)
- 17. WE STILL HAVE CHICKENS TO PLUCK (2018)
- 18. CRAZY LOVE (2013)
- 19. A DIARY (2009-2011)
- 20. WOMEN'S LIVES MATTER (2017)

* VIDEO WORKS (1995-2011)

- 1. A TOY (1995) 9 MIN
- 2. FELTBOOTS (2000) 3 MIN
- 3. UNFORGETTABLE HITS (2006) 4 MIN
- 4. PLOVDIV (2002) 4 MIN
- 5. THE HEROINE OF POST-SOCIALIST LABOUR (2004) 4 MIN
- 6. FAT KID, PRETTY KID (2010) 1 MIN
- 7. WHEN ESTONIAN PEASANT MEETS RUSSIAN MINER OR (2008) 4 MIN (IN COLLABORATION WITH OLGA JÜRGENSON)
- 8. READING FACES (2011) 6 MIN

DISCRETION ADVISED. WORKS CONTAIN NUDITY AND SEXUAL IMAGERY

#maretralla



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