

# Breaking the Silence – A Conversation with Yuliya Lanina

by Yuko Oda

Yuliya Lanina is a Russian born multimedia artist exploring the human psyche through a genre-defying interweaving of painting, animation, robotics, and performance. I had the pleasure and honor to have an in-depth conversation with Yuliya about her most recent performance pieces which transported me into otherworldly landscapes of darkness and beauty. <http://www.yuliyalanina.com/>

**Yuko Oda (YO): What artworks are you exhibiting in Creative Tech Week 2019?**

**Yuliya Lanina (YL):** I will be premiering *Misread Signs*, a multimedia performance done in collaboration with composer José Martínez and choreographer Andrea Ariel. It will feature movement, sound and my animatronic sculptures and projected animation based on my paintings. The piece explores the effects of trauma on the human psyche. It will premiere at Five Myles gallery, 558 ST JOHNS PLACE, Brooklyn, NY on May 8th, at 7pm.



Caption: *Misread Signs*, documentation of the performance, photo by Scott David Gordon

I will also be participating in the CTW2019 Conference Hub with *Biocurious*, an animatronic child-doll which opines on the human-robot relationship. This piece will be exhibited at the CTW2019 Conference Hub on May 10th and 11th 2019, 10am-5pm at NYIT Auditorium on Broadway, 1871 Broadway, NY. The piece was made with the support of The Foundry at The University of Texas at Austin and with technical development support by Theodore Johnson.

**YO: Can you tell me a little about your first performance piece *Not a Sad Tale*? It is wonderful how the position of the objects is mapped to your body in the piece. For example, the butterfly of the animation lands on your actual hand.**



Caption: *Not a Sad Tale*, documentation of the performance, photo by Scott David Gordon

**YL:** Exactly. This is done by video production and projection that is made to fit my size and it took a lot of tries to get it right. The visuals often come first. When creating the animation, I had an idea of where I'd like to be in relation to my work and what type of costumes I might wear. After the video is done or partly done, I met with choreographer and composer. Andrea Ariel, with whom I've been working on all of my performance pieces, helped me decide on movement and placement. There was a lot of back and forth based on her and Vladimir Rannev's (composer) input. Then I went back to the video production to adjust the imagery, and bring in the audio. The same process was for my following performance piece *Within, Above and Beyond*, which I've performed at

CTW last year.

A lot of work goes into making each piece. The sad part is that after all of the effort, the piece is over in 20 minutes. But the collective experience and engaging my work in real time that is truly magical.

**YO: One thing I am wondering about is your make up and gestures and moves in the performance... and your costumes. Are they all decided by you or are you working with choreographers?**

**YL:** I decide on the costumes as I work on the piece, about halfway in the process. They are crucial to setting the tone of a performance. My costumed character often appears on the screen as well. In *Misread Signs* in addition to wearing a costume, I painted my face, bringing the painting, which serves as a foundation for my animations, into the costume.

**YO: Where do you show your work? How does that inform the size of your projections?**

**YL:** I started performing in gallery spaces, having a wall determine the size of my projections. Then I started to be invited to large festivals such as SIGGRAPH and SXSW instead of galleries. At the music festivals, where I am on the stage and there is a huge screen behind me, I realized I can have an even larger impact with if I did not limit the size of my projected video. For this new piece I decided to make the video much larger.

Following the CTW performance of *Misread Signs*, where it will be projected only on one wall, the piece will be featured at the grayDUCK gallery in Austin, where it will take up the whole room, making it more immersive. For that performance I will be using three projections on three adjacent walls. Once again, I am including animatronic sculptures – plastic anthropomorphic skeleton birds with human baby heads, lights shining out of their pupils, their presence adding more ambience to the piece.



**YO: That is so wonderful, Yuliya. It is brilliant – you have a lot of flexibility with scale because it is video, not a painting or a physical object.**

**YL:** Exactly. I first experimented with this while making films with robotic dolls. With the projection I was able to manipulate the size, make something small look huge and impactful. I took the same approach to my stop-motion animations, where an enlarged image makes it easy to interact with while preserving the painterly quality. My paintings serve as source materials for all of my animations; you can see the brushstrokes and the hand drawn textures in the projected videos that cannot be replicated.

**YO: So how long is this piece?**

**YL:** Most of my performances, including this one, are around 16 minutes, which seems short. Yet, being on stage for 16 minutes feels like an eternity.

**YO: How much of the paintings are you making for this new piece vs. pieces you are re-appropriating from your portfolio.**

**YL:** Almost all of these are new paintings I made over the past year. These paintings will be displayed at the grayDUCK show. It is always great to see the direct relationship between the paintings on the wall and animations.

**YO: It is really powerful, because it's all very custom for this particular story.**

**YL:** I make work based on what I am experiencing or working through in my life. Whatever work I make determines how the story unfolds. Then I let the process evolve naturally.

**YO: Your children participated in your previous performance and you are planning to include them in one of the performances for Misread Signs as well. Can you tell me the significance of having your children in your work?**



Caption: This is a Test, documentation of the performance, photo by Philip Rogers

**YL:** My work stems from my life experiences, and since my children are an integral part of my life, I wanted them to play a part somehow – they just needed to be old enough to want to do it and be reliable.

Last summer, I finally included them in a performance (This is a Test of Internal Emergency Broadcast System). It wasn't easy; luckily, Andrea Ariel (the choreographer) had a lot of experience working with children and had my twin girls engaged in no time. They even chose costumes. When it came to the performance, I had to let go of being their mother and embrace unpredictability.

Before the actual performance, I told them whatever happens, just keep going and go until the end. And they were amazing! They did everything they were supposed to do. Anya was so responsible. She just sat there and waited for the performance to start. She was so still, that the audience thought she was a doll. Then, in the middle of the performance, she moved, and the audience was startled!

After that performance, I saw my children in a different light. Not as my children but as my collaborators that I can rely on. It was strangely gratifying!



Caption: Misread Signs, documentation of the performance, photo by Scott David Gordon



**YO: I have known you for a long time and I know some of the themes you mention is personal and your current piece, Misread Signs, is particularly so. Can you talk about it?**



Caption: Misread Signs, documentation of the performance, photo by Scott David Gordon

**YL:** With this piece, I wanted to investigate a moment in my life when after a traumatic experience I became mute for a few days. And it stayed with me for some time. Maybe I didn't have the right words to describe what it was, or maybe there were no words that could describe what I was feeling – it was too overwhelming. Here, I am examining this inability to express and even connect with how they feel.

The piece also explores my complicated relationship with my mother, and with her emotional and physical absence. She passed away when I was 19 after a long battle with cancer.

My collaborator, composer José Martínez uses recordings of my voice as his audio material and renders what I say or sing beyond recognition, transforming my voice to the extreme in order to convey the urgency of expression. There are a few times when I address the audience directly, asking them to reflect on their own past. The piece ends with a modified lullaby sung to my mother and remembrance of those who passed away.



Caption: Misread Signs, documentation of the performance, photo by Scott David Gordon

I hope the show will transcend the particulars of my life experience into a universal story of perseverance and asks us to reflect on our connection to ourselves, to each other and to those who are no longer with us.

Yuko Oda is a multimedia artist living and working in Boston, MA. She is currently investigating synthetic nature and the intersection of art and technology. She teaches at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. [www.yukooda.com](http://www.yukooda.com)



Home > Art > Studio visit: Yuliya Lanina

## Studio visit: Yuliya Lanina

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin - November 9, 2017



Yuliya Lanina's performance "Within, Above and Beyond." Photo by Scott David Gordon.

When artist Yuliya Lanina was a child in Moscow, her parents sang her a haunting lullaby. Little one, don't lie near the edge of the bed, the lyrics went, otherwise a wolf will come and snatch you away and carry you off into the deep, dark woods.

"I remember going to sleep and just being terrified of the wolf might get me," says Lanina. "That lullaby still terrifies me if I hear it."

Rife with disturbing characters, scenarios and behaviors, folk tales are indeed the stuff of nightmares — at least in their original, non-Disneyfied versions.

Lanina's artistic oeuvre is often talked about solely through the lens of folk tales and fairy tales. And yes, that is salient to her practice.

But folk stories — present in cultures around the globe — bear potent psychological heft and are themselves a lens to the subconscious at its basest and most uncensored, the symbol-filled stories resonating profoundly in the human psyche. Which raises an inevitable question for Lanina that's met with a predicted answer. "Yes, psychoanalysts really love my work," she says.



Yuliya Lanina, "Red Shoes," acrylic and collage on paper, 2015.

In her studio — a converted one-car garage attached to her home — it is clear just how restless a creator Lanina is, never content to work within just one medium. Even among artists whose practices span media, Lanina's is particularly expansive. Drawing and painting form the root of her work, but from there Lanina makes animatronic sculpture, animated films, mechanized music boxes and highly original performances that are hybrid animations and solo pantomime.

A thick pile of recent paintings are tacked on a worktable. The paintings represent a series of portraits of hybrid figures, part animal, part human or perhaps part plant too. Many are charged with a lurid sexuality, others with violence.

From that series Lanina created a 20-minute performance "Within, Above and Beyond," which she presented at the warehouse arts space Museum of Human Achievement. Using figures from her paintings, Lanina constructed a vivid dream-like animated film. Standing against the screen, wearing all white while the film streamed on her, Lanina enacted an impeccably synchronized movement narrative with her own imaginative characters.





Her zeal to anthropomorphize is profound. One shelf in her holds some of her “mechanical paintings” as she calls them, three-dimensional automatons with flat-painted characters that move on different planes. Nearby are mechanical dolls, creepy and crazy-looking, crafted from reassembled parts and outfitted with sonar sensors and microcontrollers. One sexily-clad female doll punctuates a song by farting. Another’s



“Humpty Dumpty” was installed on the grounds of the Elisabet Ney Museum as part of the city’s TEMPO public art initiative. Photo courtesy the artist.

For all the micro-processors and hidden sensors, there’s an immeasurably pleasurable analog and hand-made quality to Lanina’s work, a tactility evident in brass wind-up levers on the music boxes, real garments on the dolls and sculpture, and on everything an unmistakable sense of the artist’s hand: her brushstrokes, finessed yet not hidden.

“Sure, surrealism was influence. But not necessarily as an art movement that I consciously look to for inspiration. It was more that (episodes) in my life felt surreal to me,” Lanina says.

Lanina was born in 1975 in Moscow to Jewish parents. Her father was an engineer; her mother a doctor. Long held anti-Semitism in the already anti-religious Soviet Union hardened in the 1970s under Brezhnev. Oppression and prejudice played a major part of the family’s life.

Then in 1991, just 16 and by herself, Lanina managed to come to the United States, courtesy of relatives who lived in the greater New York City area.

She recalls: “I was thrown into a completely new world. I could read English, but I couldn’t really speak it and I couldn’t understand American accents. And everything, everybody, looked so strange and surreal to me. I felt over-saturated.”

Lanina stayed in the U.S. for a couple of years, but when the situation with her relatives deteriorated she returned to Moscow. Then, together with her parents, she officially immigrated, this time with refugee status, part of a large wave of Russian Jews granted refugee entry to the United State in the 1990s. Lanina enrolled in the art program at the State University of New York at Purchase. Then tragedy struck. Her mother, passed away. Lanina was 20 and again felt adrift.

“In some way I feel like I’m still trying to make sense of that big chunk of my life — when I came to the US and had a horrible experience, then came back, and my mother died. I watched my mother’s years-long battle with cancer and saw all of her anxiety about the disfiguring changes in her body caused by her illness.”



Lanina’s animated film “Mama” finds an adolescent girl on an epic journey to find her mother.

Graduate art school at Hunter College positioned Lanina in New York’s vibrant art scene and by the mid-aughts she was settled in Brooklyn, gaining some exposure for her work. In 2010 she netted a residency at the legendary artists colony Yaddo. Sharlat was in residency at the same time. Their relationship began when Lanina asked Sharlat to compose some music for one of her animations.

“It was a shift leaving New York and moving to Austin, but I got the chance of being a mom that’s wonderful.

Lanina teaches a class called “Gender, Race and Technology” at the University of Texas’ new School of Design and Creative Technologies. (Sharlat is full-time composition faculty in UT’s Butler School of Music).

Also this semester she’s held a week-long artist’s residency at the design school, during which she presented “Herstory,” a human-sized animatronic doll vaguely, but deliberately resembling Lanina. Equipped with a motion-activated sound device, the “Herstory” tells awkward anecdotes about gender and femininity, stories meant to unsettle and disconcert.

In her studio, Lanina says the irreverence and dark humor have a fundamental purpose in her work: “It’s all part of our human existence. We’re complicated.”





**JUNE 15TH, 2019, 5:15 PM (ONLY SHOWING)  
TEATRO SANTA ANA / \$250 PESOS**

## **UNMASKED**

**ANIMATIONS AND A PERFORMANCE  
BY YULIYA LANINA**

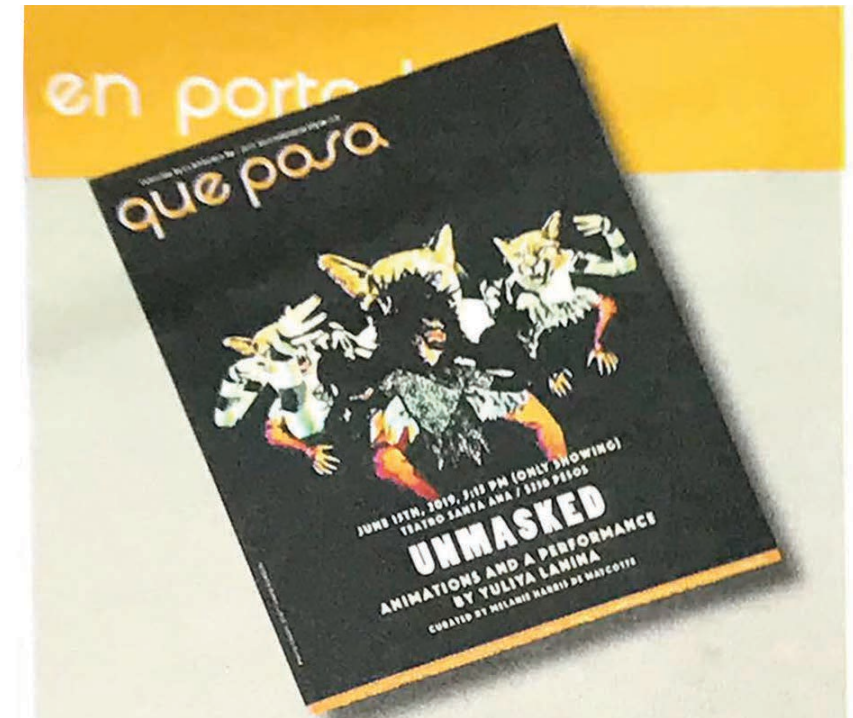
**CURATED BY MELANIE HARRIS DE MAYCOTTE**

PHOTO CREDIT: SCOTT DAVID GORDON

<-- *Que Pasa San Miguel*, Entertainment section cover

San Miguel De Allende, Mexico

*Que Pasa San Miguel* Inside:



### **Desenmascarada: Animaciones y un Performance por Yuliya Lanina**

Desenmascarada es una selección curatorial de animaciones y un performance por la artista multimedia de origen rusa, Yuliya Lanina. El opus de la noche será, Misread Signs (Señas malinterpretadas) su espectáculo de arte más reciente lo cual destaca sus esculturas animatrónicas, proyección de animación, música y movimientos corporales y explora el tema de los efectos de trauma en el psique humano. Las imágenes de Lanina son inspiradas por los movimientos surrealistas y dada y dejan que el subconsciente usurpa el pensamiento analítico y fluye lo absurdo y sorprendente. Al explorar la vida de criaturas fantásticas y extrañas, la artista es capaz de alcanzar lugares de la mente inalcanzables al yo razonable, invitando a la audiencia de hacer lo mismo. En esta obra, la mayoría de los personajes en la pantalla son enmascaradas. Al principio aparentan a no estar interesados en lo que pide Lanina; después los mismos le contestan con "let go of the past" (deja atrás el pasado).





## DISSONANT WHIMSY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST YULIYA LANINA

NOVEMBER 12, 2018 | ARTIST INTERVIEWS | HAZEL ROMANO

*Across a storied history and myriad of cultures, our common ground converges on a shared sense of wonder. We gravitate to the untouched, the unexplored, and the unreal. This curiosity inclines us to probe the balance and complexities of our natural and built environments.*

Russian-born multimedia and performance artist [Yuliya Lanina](#) seizes this sense of harmony and disrupts it. Her highly charged, whimsical works defy definition, consisting of eclectic paintings, performances, and objects that unapologetically resist convention and challenge audience members to reflect on assumed notions of being and community.

*The surreal, fantastical elements lull viewers into an alternative reality and subliminally invite them into an exploratory and uninhibited mode of consciousness. Yuliya's exhibits often display transfixing cultural props, such as dolls, animatronics, and music boxes that bombard the senses. In her performances, she transforms into a living protagonist of an animated fairy tale. Her unusual artifacts, performances, and exhibits evoke a "dark matter" that beckons viewers to delve further into a magnetic world seemingly built upon non sequitur.*

*We're always excited to share the amazing work of our talented [kadenze.com](#) instructors. We had the opportunity to speak with Yuliya and discuss her extensive body of work, honing in on the themes that her inspiring, thought-provoking art both embodies and deconstructs.*

### How did you get involved with practicing and teaching visual and performing arts?

I moved to the United States from the former Soviet Union in 1990. After a few years of studying liberal arts and science I found myself particularly drawn to visual art. After I graduated from college, I moved to New York and, to support myself, worked as a graphic designer. However, the distraction of a full-time job made practicing art impossible. I felt the calling of being a full-time artist particularly strong when 9/11 happened, when everyone thought it was the end. I quit my job and went back to being an artist as my primary job.



Dancers performing in *Flight of Fantasy* (2007). Concept, costumes, animation, installation and set design. Choreography by C. Eule Dance. Photo by Fred Hatt.



I always try to make sure my work reaches those who do not normally go to art and music events. I am working with Austin's first sober high school, on bringing students in recovery to the performance.

---

*I have been fortunate to work with people who understand visual art, and appreciate the alchemy that happens when visual art intersects with music and movement.*

---

Together with Jose Martinez, we will be reaching out to the Latinx community. We are planning to have a Q&A after each performance with the aim of further engaging the audiences and getting them interested in art and music going forward. Because the shows and performances will be free, anyone can experience them regardless of income.

**You specialize in multimedia art that highlight a wide range of social issues. What is your advice to students and artists who want to address complex or difficult subject matter?**

Do it! That's what being an artist is about. Hold up a mirror to the society and speak as clearly and as earnestly as you can.



Yuliya Lanina is an multimedia artist, whose interdisciplinary work spans different mediums such as painting, animation, performance, sculpture, and more. Photo by Scott David Gordon.

I try to foster love for art and collaboration among my students at The University of Texas at Austin, who often worry about their post-graduation job prospects. I teach them what is very much in line with what I do: creative projects that are collaborative, interactive, multi-disciplinary.

---

*My characters and stories exist in the realm that is unpredictable, illogical and absurd.*

---

**When incorporating different mediums like painting, sculpture, animation, etc., how do you decide the focal point of the artwork?**

My work is about life and life experiences. Life is neither linear nor logical, neither predictable nor safe, and at times it is quite absurd. In some way my work mimics that. My characters and stories exist in the realm that is unpredictable, illogical and absurd. Yet the world they inhabit is filled with beauty, wonder, humor and hope.

I am inspired by the Surrealist approach to creating images, where play and the subconscious take the lead, leaving analytical thinking behind. Often times I start by painting or collaging and, little by little, the project takes shape.



*Tales We Tell* (2016). Thumbelina, wind up mechanical music box. Acrylic paint, wood, metal, 6" x 4" x 10" Photo by Scott David Gordon.



## What are some of the challenges in practicing interdisciplinary art?

The main challenge is that there is no clear path. For example, this month I will participate in a gallery show, performance festival, film screening and prep a panel discussion for a conference at the SXSW Interactive conference. The variety of these activities can feel disorienting and overwhelming at times, especially compared to simply following one path. It keeps me on my toes.

## Community and collaboration play a big role in your practice. Can you describe how a balance of different themes is achieved? How do you ensure that each artist's voices are heard?

My main collaborators are composers, choreographers, and engineers. Each collaboration is different and has its own nuances. I have been fortunate to work with people who understand visual art and appreciate the alchemy that happens when visual art intersects with music and movement. The added elements bring new dimensions to storytelling in my work.



Yuliya performing in *This is a Test of the Internal Emergency Broadcast System* (2018). Multimedia performance featuring animatronic sculpture, projections, drawings, music, and movement. Photo by Leon Alesi.

Each project involves a huge amount of back-and-forth conversation. Working with engineers is mostly about solving problems, seeing what's possible, and how to get things done in a way that is durable and safe.

## Can you tell us about any educational/artistic community outreach projects that you're working on at the moment?

Right now, I am creating new work for an upcoming solo show at Austin's [Gray Duck](#) gallery. It will consist of paintings, animatronic pieces, installation, projections and performance. My creative team is very international: Colombian-born composer José Martínez, New York-based engineer and a lead researcher for AT&T Theodore Johnson, and Scottish projection designer Michael McKellar.

## What is a favorite project that you've worked on so far?

My favorite project is the one that keeps me busy in the present. It is always more interesting to be in the moment than to reflect on what's already been accomplished.

That being said, one of my favorite projects was my first performance piece *Not a Sad Tale* (2016) which was commissioned by [Fusebox Festival](#). It was the first time I collaborated with choreographer Andrea Ariel and composer Vladimir Rannev. The piece opened for me the door into the world of performance art and let me physically enter the animated worlds I create. Putting myself physically on the stage, inside my own work and in direct and intimate relation to the viewer has been the hardest and the most rewarding experience for me.



Yuliya Lanina in her first performance piece *Not A Sad Tale* (2016). Original music by Vladimir Rannev. Photo by Scott David Gordon.

## How do you hope your art will evolve in the future?

I hope to continue pushing the limits of painting and sculpture by creating immersive multimedia experiences that hopefully entrance and captivate the viewer. I also want to keep making work that reaches people deeply, brings them on a journey and gives them hope. And I wish to collaborate with new people from other creative fields. I'm sure this would push me as an artist beyond what I can envision today.

To see more of Yuliya Lanina's works and learn about her other projects visit [yuliyalanina.com](#)

---

Yuliya Lanina teaches the course Gender, Race, and Technology offered by The University of Texas at Austin. You can enroll for free below:



# Yuliya Lanina Turns Dreams into Reality

By Yael Kanarek



Yuliya Lanina, photo by Bret Brookshire

Yulia Lanina is a Russian-born American multimedia artist. Lanina's projects are not confined to one art form, but exist at the intersection of visual and performing arts, technological innovation, and social issues like gender perception, sexual objectification and violence, loss, and motherhood. She is particularly interested in turning the traditional medium of painting into a multi-dimensional and immersive experience for the viewer.

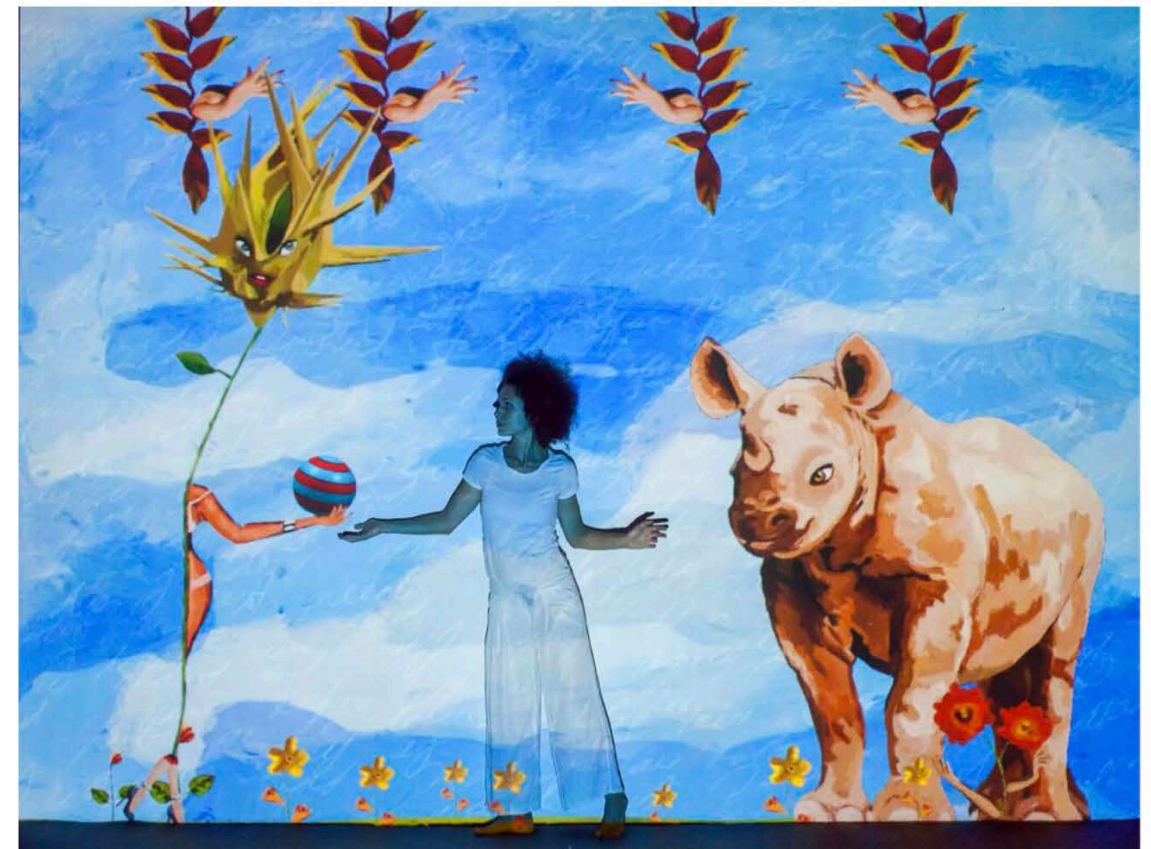
<http://www.yuliyalanina.com/>

**Yael Kanarek: Tell us about your background. How did you get into art and technology?**

**Yuliya Lanina:** Growing up in Moscow, I studied music and wanted to become a performer. When I came to the States right after high school, I did not speak much English nor did I have friends. I was going through a lot of bad stuff, and I used drawing as a way to express thoughts and feelings, to tell stories about my experiences. They were never literal, but they made sense to me. In time, drawing became painting, then came installations, films, animations, mechanized dolls and dioramas and more recently – multimedia installations and performances. Once I started working with animatronics and moving image, painting and static sculpture were no longer satisfactory. That was my entry point into technology. I very much enjoyed the complexity of narratives which time-based work allowed me to explore. Having musical background also pushed me to involve sound and movement in creating stories and experiences for the viewer.

**YK: You work in several areas, however it has a consistent language that often begins in paintings of characters that are human-animal hybrids and wink at fashion. Can you talk about how you come to your characters and how you build your stories?**

**YL:** One day I was waiting in my studio for a friend and started playing around with random objects. Next thing I knew I created a character with the body of a bird, the head of a butterfly and arms and legs of a human wearing red high-heeled shoes. I immediately fell in love with that creature. In a few weeks my studio was filled with characters made of various hybrids of human, bug, and bird parts. This project turned into an installation, animation and dance performance with anthropomorphic protagonists. At first I did not know any of this meant, but with time I came to realize that it was my way of reconstructing a whole new self, assembled from a bunch of mismatched pieces and sources. That first character ended up in an animation singing a children's song about what it means to be a bird. In some way, to this day I very much relate to that first animation. Life is constantly changing, my understanding of who I am and what I am meant to be is constantly shifting. All of my protagonists are on some kind of a journey, some of it external, some internal, but there is always movement that leads to self-discovery.



Within, Above and Beyond, photo by Scott David Gordon

**YK: How does your process benefit from collaboration?**

**YL:** Collaboration is at the core of most of my work. Even though I do a lot of work alone in the studio, the final version is very much a collaborative effort. I collaborate most with composer Yevgeniy Sharlat, who is my husband. In fact, collaboration brought us together the first time at Yaddo residency. We worked on a number of pieces including animations, mechanized sculptures and public art work. I also love to work with composers Russell Pinkston, Vladimir Rannev and Jeremy Kasha. Wonderful and very different, each of them brings their own aesthetic and sensibility to the pieces. Engineer Theodore Johnson has been my technical advisor for many years, helping me with programming and other technical issues. Among my other favorite collaborators are choreographers Caron Eule and Andrea Ariel, and poets Cecily Parks and Lisa Olstein. I believe that working collectively makes my pieces stronger, more meaningful.

**YK: For CTW you are performing "Within, Above and Beyond," your latest multimedia art performance piece. Can you tell us about the piece? How did it come about?**

**YL:** It all began with Not a Sad Tale, my first attempt at performing alongside my own animation, which I presented during last year's CTW. The experience was extremely rewarding, prompting me to create another one, which I called Within, Above and Beyond, borrowing from James Joyce. It uses projection and performance as well, but the choreography and my interaction with the characters are more complex and adventurous. There is also a motion tracking element in the music which allows me to manipulate sound in real time. University of Texas professor Russell Pinkston composed the music using a variety of bird-calls, and it perfectly articulates and underscores the visuals. Andrea Ariel choreographed the piece. I am not a dancer but she was able to work with my limitations and integrate my movement in a way that looked seamless and effortless.



# Yuliya Lanina Turns Dreams into Reality

By Yael Kanarek



*Within, Above and Beyond, animation still*



*Within, Above and Beyond, photo by Scott David Gordon*

In *Within, Above and Beyond* I explore what it is like to be inside the creative subconscious, what it would feel like to enter the space of a drawing. There is a lot of playfulness in the work as well as exploration of memory, violence, addiction, and self-acceptance.

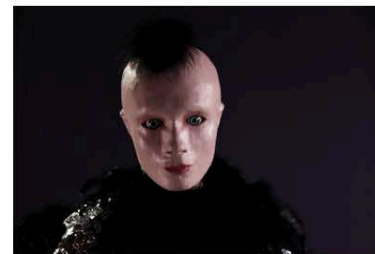
The piece begins with me writing in the journal and being overtaken by the white noise of my own mind out of which the story emerges. I used drawings from the journals I've kept as teenager as well as my most recent paintings, emphasizing the continuity in the image creation through time. At the end of the piece I am facing my own alter ego which leads me to the realization that the white noise is all internal chatter, the words of which I am yet to understand.

**YK: Your recent work also involves animatronics. Can you tell us about your latest piece you just showcased during SXSW 2018?**

**YL:** It's called *Herstory* and it came out of my residency at The Foundry at The University of Texas at Austin in the Fall of 2017. Previously I'd created animatronic dolls and interactive mini performances. In the past, I had also done work using my own body casts. This time, I combined both of these interests to create a sort of a mechanized version of myself. When 3D-printing my face I duplicated one side of my face to make it look more doll-like. When activated, the sculpture's head and arms start moving as if trying to reach out, her heart starts pulsating, and she attempts – and fails – to speak. Her companion, a fiddler bunny in a golden dress plays a somewhat distressed violin piece, created by Yevgeniy Sharlat. (As a child, the only toys I played with were toy rabbits.) The piece embodies humor, compassion, and silent sorrow of those who are hurting, yet are unable to speak up. It echoes my personal experience surviving sexual violence as an underaged, illegal immigrant in the US, unable to ask for help.

*Herstory* has a companion animatronic child-doll which makes comments about the human-robot relationship. It was fun to watch many people having lengthy conversations with the piece.

The exhibition was sponsored by SXSW and the City of Austin Cultural Arts Division and was a part of the UNESCO Media Arts Exhibition at SXSW.



*Herstory, photo by Lana Bernberg*

**YK: Where can we see your performance during Creative Tech Week?**

**YL:** The performance will take place on May 7th at FiveMyles Gallery, 558 St Johns Pl, Brooklyn, NY. 7pm. The event is FREE and open to public of all ages.

Yael Kanarek is an artist who works in various media exploring cultural dynamics of narrative and languages. She's known for pioneering use of the Internet and of multilingualism in works of art. Kanarek resides in New York City.



Three artists working in different mediums have taken the night sea journey of the Love Goddess heralding the Nietzschean dawn of a new collective value. This surrender to process reverses the linear time relation of subject/object; the proactive artist becomes the conscious object/ive of a creative experiment in *illo tempore*.

## YULIYA LANINA: THE KUNDALINI SPIRAL

The metamorphosis of the invisible primordial energy through the Yuliya Lanina aesthetic of the Kundalini spiral into visible form has produced a full cast of original 21<sup>st</sup> century icons—and a new role for the artist to cast herSelf creation thru DIY digital multimedia, incorporating personal corps/universal corpus. A beguiling ferocity of feminine holistic Beingness sourced in an erotically Self-contained bisexuality characterizes Lanina’s witty figures. The amorphous proactive pursuit of a Kairos reversal makes them the delightful icons embodying a *jouissance* liberated from the male gaze. Embodied meaning is the Third Eye of a 360 perception of a (r)evolution in feminine consciousness—the artist’s motif of multiple eye embodiment sourced in the female attuning her internal rhythm with the cosmos.

**FIG. 5:** *Yuliya Lanina: Kundalini Awakening in ever-shifting Forms*





## Yuliya Lanina Channels the Dark Side of Children's Fairy Tales at Redbud Gallery

BY SUSIE TOMMANEY

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2016 AT 7 A.M.



*Red Riding Hood*, a mechanical music box by Yuliya Lanina (with original music by Yevgeniy Sharlat and technical development by Theodore Johnson), from the "Stories Untold" exhibit at Redbud Gallery.

Courtesy of the artist and Redbud Gallery

**A A** Fairy tales – or at least the original, unsanitized versions – are full of dark, menacing and downright disturbing stories of family homicide (*Beauty and the Beast*), child abandonment (*Hansel and Gretel*) and self-mutilation (*The Little Mermaid*, *Rumpelstiltskin*).

**f** **1**  
**t** **6**  
**+** **0**  
**u** **0**  
Austin-based multimedia artist Yuliya Lanina channels the dark side of children's lit in her new exhibit at Redbud Gallery, "Stories Untold." Mixed in with a dozen acrylic and collage works on paper are four of her ingenious mechanical music boxes that are both inventive and whimsical.

*Red Riding Hood* and *Vasilisa and Baba Yaga*, both from 2015's "Once Upon a Time" series, are definitely not child's play. In the former, gremlin-laden trees sway back and forth to the music, intermittently revealing a predatory wolf with toothy grin. There's no mistaking Red's scream of terror, in spite of the tuneful melody by collaborator Yevgeniy Sharlat.



In the Russian fairy tale, Vasilisa the Beautiful is sent out by her stepmother (why is there always a stepparent?) to get light from the evil witch Baba Yaga. For this music box, Lanina rotates a trio of skulls (which in the story served as skull lanterns) while the dark-eyed witch with pendulous breasts and black feline familiar leers at the little girl, who clutches for protection the tiny wooden doll given by her mother on her deathbed.

Lanina, never content to work in just one dimension, has been known to fuse media in the past with her performance art, animation, paintings, film, animatronics, public art and writings. In addition to original compositions by Sharlat and technical development by Theodore Johnson, these wind-up sculptures are accompanied by print-outs of stories from poets. Dean Young's words accompany *Vasilisa and Baba Yaga*, "All music after all is redundant meaning it won't end;" words by Cecily Parks are paired with *Red Riding Hood*, "The wolfish branches graze the soft outsides of her thighs" and – for *Havroshechka* from her 2016 series, "Once Upon a Time" – the text is by Taisia Kitaiskaia, "[I wish you] a dead fish coat so stinky no one will touch you. Teach you to fry evil eyes in a pan." Those "evil eyes," of course, refer to the daughters of Havroshechka's benefactor: One-Eye, Two-Eyes and Three-Eyes.



*Taimer* by Yuliya Lanina, part of the "Stories Untold" exhibit at Redbud Gallery.

The acrylic and collage works on paper – which display nicely on the dark red walls of Redbud Gallery with their generous use of negative space – mostly contain human-animal hybrids. The characters are sometimes engaged in provocative poses or self-gratification, with an overarching carnivalesque or circus theme. *Taimer* features a red-corseted female body holding a whip, though she sports an oversized tiger's head, while *Why?* shows a lion with human lips gazing inquisitively at the viewer as a human arm takes aim with a revolver.

A monkey-faced, single-breasted woman is engaged in self-pleasure in *Awww-kward*, though her stockings and red high heels suggest that sex was definitely on the menu. In *Sad*, the topless heroine is wearing a short, red skirt and thigh-high stockings, while a third arm grasps her left breast.

"Stories Untold" continues through September 25 at Redbud Gallery, 303 East 11th Street, open Fridays through Sundays, noon to 5 p.m., 713-862-2532, [redbudgallery.com](http://redbudgallery.com). Free.



# Yuliya Lanina's artistic tales tell fantastic, often dark stories

ARTS & THEATER By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) - American-Statesman Staff



Posted: 12:00 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 18, 2016

Yuliya Lanina mines folk tales, diving into original and decidedly less Disneyesque versions than we are accustomed to today.

The Russian-born, Austin-based artist creates wondrous paintings and small-scale mechanical sculptures — [music boxes that play melodies](#) by composer Yevgeniy Sharlat, Lanina's husband.

Since settling in Austin several years ago, Lanina [has had an intriguing solo exhibit at Women and Their Work](#), created a [whimsical public sculpture in Ramsey Park](#) and shown in pop-up shows. Now, her latest work gets the spotlight at Camiba Art Gallery through Sept. 10.

In Lanina's fictive universe, animals are anthropomorphized, or they resemble ancient half-human, half-animal demigods. Flora, trees and plants have human characteristics, too. And Lanina packs in more than an undercurrent of darkness and violence and sexuality.

Lanina injects each scene and tableaux with a kind of giddy fatalism, too. Hybrid human-animals may dance together, but that dance teeters on the edge of a melee.



Yuliya Lanina's fictive folk tale world is filled with anthropomorphic animals and hybrid humans. Her paintings, like "Brother Goat," are a ... [Read More](#)

## About the Author



**JEANNE CLAIRE VAN RYZIN**  
Jeanne Claire van Ryzin is the arts critic for the Austin American-Statesman



Lanina will reprise "Not a Sad Tale" on Sept. 10 in a free performance. Seating is limited, and reservations are a must. It's a wonderfully strange show not to be missed.

"Yuliya Lanina: Tales We Tell"

Camiba Art Gallery,

**Opening:** 6 to 8 p.m. Friday.  
Gallery hours: 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, noon to 5 p.m. Saturday.  
Exhibit continues through Sept. 10.



# Austin's Fusebox Festival serves up edgy, original performances

## ARTS & THEATER

By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) - American-Statesman Staff



Posted: 12:00 a.m. Thursday, March 31, 2016

It's a mash-up of every type of arts festival.

The Fusebox Festival offers theater, music, visual art, dance, film, performance art and every conceivable fusion thereof. It brings in creatives from the farthest edges of the international avant-garde and yet also hands the spotlight to locals whose artistic experimentations sometimes get overlooked...



SCOTT DAVID GORDON

Austin artist Yuliya Lanina's "Not A Sad Tale" is a 20-minute stage performance using Lanina's surreal drawings and paintings as the set.

### Fusebox faves: Reservation required

**"Not A Sad Tale."** 7 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 4 p.m. April 10. Salvage Vanguard Theater, 2803 Manor Road.

Though she's always created odd and surreal mechanical sculptures and animations, Austin artist Yuliya Lanina now takes her Russian folk tale-inspired imagery and presents it live in a 20-minute stage performance with electroacoustic music by Russian avant-garde composer, Vladimir Rannev.



ARTS

"ARCADIAN RHAPSODY"

**When:** through Feb. 6  
**Where:** Women & Their Work, 1710 Lavaca St.  
**Cost:** Free  
**Information:** 512-477-1064, [www.womenandtheirwork.org](http://www.womenandtheirwork.org)

FROM LEFT: "Theme and Variations", Video Still, stop-motion animation, 2013. "Fly Away" acrylic and collage on canvas, 2013.



# European sensibility

## Native folklore plays a part in Russian-born, Austin-based artist's work.

By Luke Quinton  
 Special to the American-Statesman

There's something very European about making art with anthropomorphized animals. The Brothers Grimm had their wolves, Beatrix Potter had a whole village, and Polish animators brought Peter and the Wolf eerily to life.

Austin-based painter and animator Yuliya Lanina takes visions of human-like animals and pieces them together, into a sort of Native American totem hybrid. Often they have the heads of birds, an eagle or a puffin. Sometimes a woman's head appears on a bee's body, or high-heeled legs reach out of poppy flowers.

"I grew up with Russian fairytales and folklore," Lanina says. The style of that country's animation was unique, and not much seen outside the Russian border. "The grass will be alive, the trees will talk," Lanina says. What she understood from these films was that "we are not separated from our environment."

Lanina, who was born in Russia, immigrated to the United States in her teens.

"When I moved here, people would ask the strangest questions. 'Does Russia have hot water?' 'Are there live bears in Red Square?'"

Eventually she studied painting and embarked on an art career in New York City, showing at

galleries and museums there, and as far abroad as Beijing.

Lanina met her future husband, the University of Texas music composition professor Yevgeniy Sharlat, at the Yaddo art residency in upstate New York, where she asked him to collaborate on an animation.

When you enter "Arcadian Rhapsody" — Lanina's solo exhibit at Austin's Women and Their Work gallery — you're greeted by a "family portrait" of sorts. In the center is a painting of two caterpillars with human heads, dangling from a branch. Lanina gave birth to twins two years ago, and she says the twins "are like caterpillars, just about to transform into butterflies." On the left is a painting of her beaked husband with a child's arms and legs wrapped around his neck.

"(Yevgeniy) always has one or two children on him," Lanina says.



Artist Yuliya Lanina at her exhibit "Arcadian Rhapsody" at Women & Their Work. CONTRIBUTED BY ABBY FINE.

And to complete the portrait, Lanina's alter ego is on the right: "Hostess," another bird-headed human, this time in an evening gown.

These surrealistic characters begin as a collage, and often take on the likeness of real people. They don't follow friends and neighbors exactly, "but they're quite close," Lanina says.

The centerpiece of Lanina's show is a 10-minute video called "Theme and Variations," a stop-motion animation accompanied with music by the 20th century French composer Olivier Messiaen. The animation is "describing a world," Lanina says.

And what a world. It's populated with bees, bugs, longhorns, a brush-stroked sky, hybrid humans and fluctuating patterns of peacock feathers. Owls have lips and human eyes, poppies sprout, and each of the fingers on a hand grows into a hand of its own.

This process is incredibly painstaking. Lanina paints every character in acrylic, then, turns it into an animation by digitally slicing and dicing each one. "I pretty much deconstruct them completely," she says. This took a year.

"I had to change the way my characters move," Lanina says.

"They had to be much more graceful."

Lanina continues to collaborate with modern composers, and her latest work has sounds from Sharlat, as well as UT professor Russell Pinkston whose music accompanies her short film, "Mama," which is on view in the current show.

Lanina also animates her characters in more analog ways, with what she calls "mechanical sculpture." Press a button, and gears whirr into motion, propelling a cast of characters through a landscape. Her husband, Sharlat, wrote some vintage music to accompany their journey.

In the first painting Lanina remembers making, a human head was replaced by an apple. The Greek myths, she says, also influenced her art.

If there's a European sensibility to her work, she says, "Maybe it's because life there has been a little less linear."



# Elegant New York

New York

Art

Fashion

Poetry

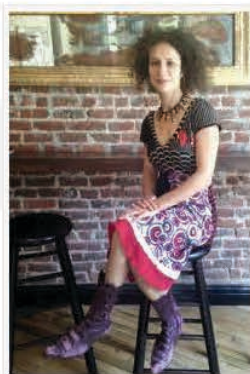
Social life

Travel

June 26, 2014

## Из осколков детства

Интервью с Юлией Ланиной. Нью-Йорк, июнь 2014.  
Интервью вела Гонель Ализеде.



“Для интервью Юлия Ланина выбрала очень уютное кафе под названием *Ост* в Lower East Side. Я сразу же узнала автора, столь красочных и жизнеутрачивающих работ, как только она вошла: разноцветные платые *Designal* и фиолетовые сапожки отлично сочетались с веселым творческим беспорядком на голове à la афро и сразу стало понятно, что у нас будет интересная беседа.

62 people like this. Be the first of your friends.



Работы Юлии Ланиной были представлены в Художественном музее, в Сеуле (Южная Корея), Московском Музее Современного Искусства (Россия), Музее Людвиг (Германия), SIGGRAPH Азии (Япония), 798 Пекинском биенале (Китай), Сеульском Международном пресс-биенале, KunstFilmBiennale (Кельн, Германия) и других местах. Ланина получила “Знак Превосходства” (Award of Excellence) в Международном конкурсе Manhattan Arts, Стипендию Спенсера (Spencer Scholarship), Стипендию WCC за выдающиеся заслуги в академической сфере (Outstanding Achievements in Academiv Area), полную стипендию Студии Колледжа Хантер (Hunter College Studio) и другие. Последние персональные выставки включают Кливлендский Институт Искусств и Русский Культурный Центр в Хьюстоне. Москвичка, нью-йоркского разлива, уже несколько лет проживающая в Остине с мужем и трехлетними дочками – двойняшками, расскажет нам о создании своих сказочных персонажей.

—Юля, расскажите о том, как вы стали художником.

Я родилась и выросла в Москве. С детства активно занималась вокалом и хотела



стать певицей, а когда мне исполнилось 16 лет мы переехали в США и мои планы на будущее стали меняться. Несмотря на то, что я увлеклась рисованием и даже получила стипендию (scholarship) для обучения на факультете искусств, я не воспринимала это как свой путь, не собиралась строить в этом карьере: для меня это было просто увлечением и я все ждала, что вот “наиграюсь” и займусь чем-нибудь серьезным. И хотя родители меня не поддерживали в этом вопросе, я все же решила попробовать себя в живописи, чтобы, как говорят американцы, “get it out of my system” (“вывести это из своей системы”) и после заняться чем-нибудь более перспективным и стабильным в плане заработка как советовали мне мои родители. Получилось же все, как обычно, совсем иначе, но довольно просто, хотя и непредсказуемо: мне, то, что я решила лишь попробовать, очень понравилось, как говорить, легло на душу. И бросить я этого уже не смогла – по сей день занимаюсь искусством.

Наверное, если бы я не стала художницей, то, скорей всего, стала бы певицей. Думаю, что со временем я буду совмещать эти две мои страсти: любовь к русским романсам, джазу и живописи – я планирую записать несколько песен для музыкального фона своих инсталляций. Дальше могут возникнуть новые идеи и планы в этом направлении. Хочу создать мультимедийный проект, где мое выступление, мой голос, сливается бы в единое целое с персонажами. Мне важно, чтобы меня воспринимали не как создателя образов, а как их неотъемлемую часть.



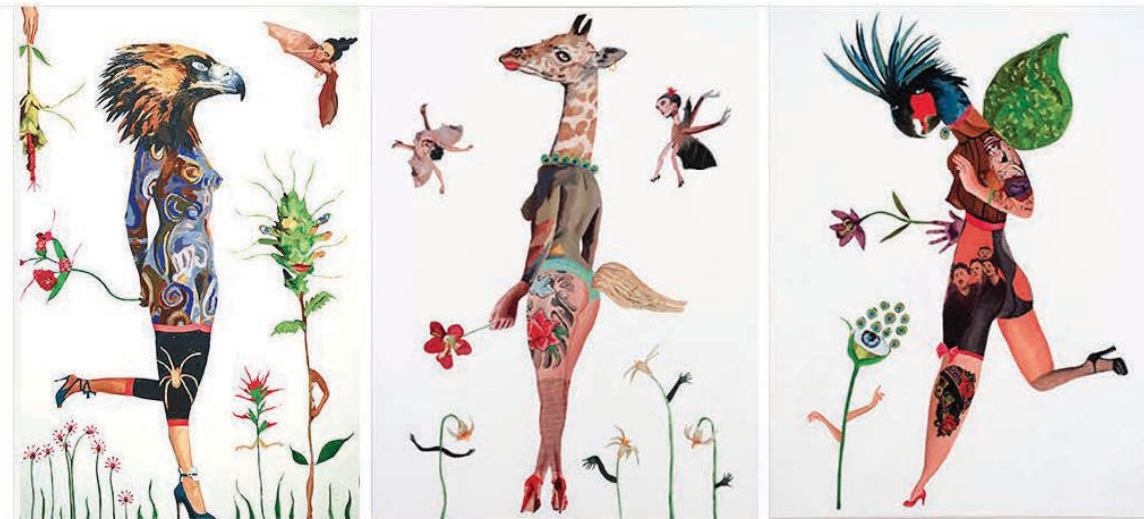
—Юля, можно ли сказать, что созданные Вами персонажи -это частички вас самой? Или они пришли из детских сказок – воспоминаний, или это плод вашего воображения как взрослого человека, или ваших сновидений? Кто они Ваши герои?

Мои работы в какой-то степени автобиографичны, они действительно пришли из моего далекого детства, когда я зачитывалась сказками и древнегреческой мифологией. Меня очень вдохновляют эти воспоминания и мои герои рождаются в них. Это сюрреалистические образы – немного животные, немного люди, немного заимствованные из мифов и немного придуманные мной. Еще когда мы жили в Москве я, будучи маленькой девочкой, очень любила книгу о творчестве Иеронима Босха и многотомник энциклопедии о жизни животных! Я могла часами рассматривать детали работ Босха. Его необычные образы привлекали меня своей загадочностью и немного даже пугали.

—Да, это очень интересно, ваши герои действительно напоминают невероятные существа из мира Босха, только живущие в наше время, или, скажем, рожденные в сознании современного человека. Очевидно, Ваши герои живут в своем фантастическом мире совершенно самостоятельной жизнью. Скажите, есть ли у Вас картины с продолжением, т.е. присутствует ли один и тот же герой в разных работах?

Да и это происходит довольно часто. Я рассматриваю свои работы, как историю с продолжением, где темы пересекаются, повторяются, герои возвращаются и видоизменяются. У этих историй нет конца, они не исчерпывают себя и возможны бесконечные интерпретации. Например, главный герой из фильма “Мишка” также участвовал в фильме “Мама”, но уже в роли гламурок скрипача. Влюбленная парочка оленей была использована не только в мультфильме, а также, в музыкальной шкатулке и

таких примеров много.



—В Ваших работах, на мой взгляд, скрыт интересный философский смысл. Приоткройте для нас занавес, расскажите в чем он. Я понимаю, каждый видит в Ваших картинах нечто свое, но мне бы хотелось узнать в чем идея автора

Я рассказываю сказки, на первый взгляд, по-детски наивные и веселые и, в то же время, моей основной идеей является – показать неоднозначность жизни, то, что у всего есть еще и обратная сторона. Мои работы сначала притягивают своей красотой и жизнеутрачивающей, но, приглядевшись, можно увидеть совершенно иные элементы – эти красивые истории скрывают боль и жестокость. В жизни любого человека наступает такой момент, когда он взрослеет и понимает, что жизнь – это не сказка, и иллюзии рассеиваются.



В моем представлении – это своего рода ваза, с цветами из детства, которая однажды, вдруг разбивается, – ведь это случается у каждого на каком-то этапе жизни. Ваза разбивается, а я пытаюсь собрать ее частички, разбросанные и растерянные воспоминания и надежды, создавая коллаж новой реальности из осколков детства. Увы, эта реальность, этот новый коллаж не всегда складывается так, как нам хотелось бы.....

—Насколько я знаю, Вы создаете своих кукол для фильмов. В каких фильмах они участвуют?

В основе моих работ лежит идея коллажа поэтому я собираю своих кукол из разных частей и шью для них костюмы. Сначала создаются персонажи, а потом уже придумываю сюжет и снимаю фильмы с их участием (“Мама”, “Journey”, “Mishka”, “Play With Me”, “Hungry Ghosts”). Музыка для некоторых фильмов и инсталляций для меня сочиняет мой муж-композитор.

Yuliya Lanina's Art Films

—Как создаются эти куклы? Они механические или в них есть компьютерная – технология? Немного подробнее об этом,

пожалуйста.

Я нахожу или использую куклы из своей коллекции, а также дети, которым нравятся мои работы, приносят мне свои игрушки. В основном, всех кукол я создаю своими руками и они механические, но для крупных инсталляций, как Музыкальная Шкатулка, приходится использовать более сложные технологии и прибегать к помощи профессионалов, потому что, если неправильно установить чипы, то может произойти короткое замыкание и у коллекционеров моих работ вспыхнет пожар! Поэтому, чтобы избежать технических проблем я прибегаю к помощи профессионалов.

—Принимают ли ваши девочки участие в создании образов и есть ли у них любимые персонажи?

Безусловно. Раньше в моих работах никогда не было такого количества парных образов, а после рождения Кати и Ани я и сама не заметила, как появились образы-двойняшки. В фильме “Мама” я использовала голос Кати, причем, на тот момент она была простужена и смех получился с хрипотцой, что отлично вписалось в образ и с тех пор она с удовольствием ждет именного этого момента. Дочки частенько приходят в мою студию и наблюдают за тем, как я работаю, досконально знают все фильмы и даже придумывают свои истории для героев т.е. для них мои работы – это неотъемлемая часть жизни и развития. Когда куклы “уезжают” на выставки, они очень скучают и с нетерпением ждут возвращения. Больше всего девочки любят мой последний фильм “Themes and Variations” и могу с гордостью заявить, что они от него никогда не устают и любят даже больше, чем мультфильм “Бременские Музыканты”.



—Есть ли у Вас творческая цель, где бы Вы хотели видеть свои работы помимо галерей и выставок?

Очень хотелось бы, чтобы мои работы были доступны всем, а не только ценителям искусства. К сожалению, галереи и музеи, в основном, посещают одни и те же люди. Искусство превратилось, в своего рода, закрытый клуб для посвященных. На мой взгляд, это плохо, искусство не должно быть эксклюзивным – на мой взгляд, нет необходимости иметь специальное образование или знания в этой области, чтобы оценить мои работы – они понятны и детям и взрослым. Я бы хотела видеть свои работы в школах, как образовательные пособия и наглядные примеры для детей и в театрах, может, как часть сценических декораций

—Действительно, это было бы здорово и мы от всей души

желаем вам чтобы все так и случилось. Ведь Ваши работы не оставляют равнодушными, совершенно разных людей. Они не только трогают душу, но и будоражат фантазию и заставляют искать ответы на загадки и интриги героев ваших картин и фильмов. Их образы остаются в памяти – они милы и необычны, они, словно живые, смотрят на нас из зеркала, напоминая одновременно и о беззаботном детстве с его фантазиями и страхами, и о ярких моментах юности, с ее лучезарной радостью и печально разочарований, об опыте потерь и жестокости жизни, о беспомощности и силе, об улыбках сквозь слезы и смехе вопреки всему. Другими словами, о том, что происходит с каждым из нас. Поэтому хотелось бы встречаться с вашими героями и видеть ваши работы не только на выставках, но и в повседневной жизни.

Желаем Юле Ланиной удачи и благодарим за интересное интервью.





# TOP 10 NYC ARTISTS NOW



## Duron Jackson

**Born in Harlem, New York**

Duron Jackson has made art since a very young age and currently works in the medium of sculpture. His work is about a way of being that's widely misunderstood, and narrowly represented. His greatest artistic challenge? "Saying a lot in the most simple way." Working out of his studio in Brooklyn, Duron showed in four exhibitions last fall including a solo show at the Brooklyn Museum. Currently, he's in Salvador da Bahia on a Fulbright Research Fellowship where he's concurrently doing a residency at Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia. His plan is to "make art, eat, drink and be merry."

**[www.duronjackson.com/home.html](http://www.duronjackson.com/home.html)**



## Yuliya Lanina

**Born 1973 in Moscow, Russia**

When Yuliya first moved to the U.S. she planned to be a musician, but when she could not get access to musical instruments or musicians, she started drawing instead. Today she does painting, animatronic sculpture, animation and performance. Her work is about "looking at uncomfortable realities with a wink and a smile." Having recently relocated to Austin, TX she splits her time between Austin and New York City and says "Having Internet in my studio," is her greatest artistic challenge. After two recent solo shows in New York (Figureworks) and Cleveland (Cleveland Art Institute) she is currently working on a new animation and mechanical sculptures for her solo exhibitions at the Russian Cultural Center in Houston and W&TW in Austin. She also has a performance piece in the works.

**[www.yuliyalanina.com](http://www.yuliyalanina.com)**



> archive

**Yuliya Lanina at Figureworks**

Figureworks  
 2013-04-01



Fantastical. Alluring. Playful. Mysterious. These are just a handful of descriptors that describe the current work of artist Yuliya Lanina, on view (through April 21) at Figureworks (168 N. 6th St.). This solo show, made up primarily of acrylic paintings on paper, fills the sun-filled rooms of the gallery with equally sunny subject matter, as mythological animal-human hybrids frolic contentedly across white backgrounds, intermittently sprinkled with amusing flora and fauna forms.

The artist has an earlier body of engaging collage work which seem to have directly influenced the free and easy mélange of parts which populate these

paintings; fingers connect to feathers which conjoin to flowery faces, smiling naively out at the viewer. Said to be influenced by Greek mythology as well as Russian fairy tales, this Russian-born artist's work has brightened of late ... former shadowy subtexts and psychologically unnerving undertones giving way to a warmer palette, both chromatically and temperamentally, with overall tones of unreserved optimism throughout.

Primary among these is the self-portrait, "Hostess" wherein an elegantly gloved female form fills the frame, one un-gloved hand set protectively across her sundress-covered belly. Bright red specks of fingernail polish and an elongated pelican beak on her tropical bird head, presence the legend of a mother pelican, who, in times of famine, would strike her breast with her own beak to draw blood to feed to her young. Nearby hangs "Three Fates", where three owls, stand ins for the Greek Goddesses of birth, longevity and death, perch atop a high-heeled tree branch, googly-eyes peering out from under headwear that indicate their various functions (top hat, lotus flower, and dunce cap). Other works dispense with classical symbolism such as the tender "Love", which depicts two elephants regarding each other placidly while grinning flowers sprout from their heads and the amusing "Daddy-o", in which a bird-man, bedecked in Hawaiian-shirt, calmly endures the clamoring child and/or lover's limbs that sprout wantonly from behind his neck.

My favorite work of the show "Barbershop Quartet" shows a tattooed chorus girl dancing a Fosse-like turn toward the viewer; her Prussian blue bird-head feathers ruffled and agitated like a rock and roll star. By her feet, a peacock feathered flower sways in time to her syncopated beat.

The show includes one mechanical painting entitled "Honky-tonk Belles" with whom the artist collaborated with Theodore Johnson (technical direction). Here figures from the artist's paintings glide across this animatronic sculpture while fantastical characters from the artist's Texan environs (a longhorn bull and blistering southwest sun) join this theatrical fray. Composer Yevgeniy Sharlat (musical score) adds an aural accompaniment that cements the early vaudevillian and nickelodeon feel of this work. The artist and her burgeoning family (twin girls and husband) spend part of their time in Austin, TX from which we can infer the "honky-tonk" title of this piece. From the joyous, vibrant colors and carefree whimsy of these works, we can infer that "Belles" or "beautiful" is a world that not only Lanina's creations, but that the artist herself, currently inhabits and enjoys.

—Enrico Gomez

sponsors...

wagmag blog

find us on facebook

follow us twitter

BROOKLYN ART GUIDE  
**wagmag**  
 BENEFIT!  
 TUESDAY MAY 21ST  
 GET TICKETS!



**new york**  
 contemporary art fair  
 may 10-13, 2013

WAGMAG'S MOBILE APP:



GREENPOINT  
 GALLERY NIGHT  
 FRIDAY, MAY 10TH  
 6-9PM  
 GREENPOINTGALLERIES.ORG

crest arts  
 CALL



# artcritical

the online magazine of art and ideas



**LET NEW YORK TURN YOUR GREAT PRESS INTO SMART MARKETING.**

Order Custom Reprints Today! 347-227-3382 or [reprints@newyorkmag.com](mailto:reprints@newyorkmag.com)

CRITICISM

FEATURES

ART WORLD

DEPARTMENTS

THE REVIEW PANEL

SEARCH:

[ARCHIVE](#) | [LISTINGS](#) | [BULLETIN](#) | [ABOUT US](#) | [ADVERTISE/SUPPORT](#)



## Old World Voices in Festival of New City

by *THE EDITORS*

Gentleman from Cracow by Yuliya Lanina and Yevgeniy Sharlat at New York Studio Gallery tonight ...

[Read more..](#)

## The Aldrich at a Crossroads

by *Stephen Maine*

Portraiture at the Aldrich occasions a portrait of the institution itself as the author ponders its change...

[Read more..](#)

## Alberto de Lacerda: A Poet Amongst Artists

by *Adrien Dannatt*

Insolent Grace: The Transatlantic Life of Alberto de Lacerda, at Poets House through June 18 ...

[Read more..](#)



Norman Bluhm: Paintings, 1967-74 remains on view at Loretta Howard Gallery, 525 West 26th Street, until May 27...

...

[View Full Image ▶](#)



[> archive](#)

## "Play with Me" by Yulia Lanina

*Realform Space*  
2006-11-01



BLACK, is the emblematic color of New York. Whether it's the "little black dress", the black paintings of Reinhardt and Stella, or the deep shadows of Film noir, we can't seem to get enough of it. "Play With Me", the latest installation by Yulia Lanina, is a miniature diorama in which doll sized hybrids act out a narrative that is part cartoon fairytale, part Marquise de Sade, all staged in settings keyed to

various sheens of black. Kewpie doll cuteness turns sinister, and whimsical child's play takes on a Surrealistic creepiness as flowers bloom with eyeball centers, carrots have sex, and the cuddly characters are outfitted in S&M costumes. Birds with little girl heads harass the anti-heroes like flying monkeys, or the harpies depicted on 6th century BC Greek vases. "Play With Me" is like the popular Black Russian cocktail: though initially sweet and creamy, if you imbibe incautiously, its potent hidden ingredients, will leave your head spinning, and your knees shaking.

—James Kalm



## Play with me

Fred Hatt

"Play With Me!"—it sounds like the entreaty of a bossy child. In this scorched and blackened landscape set around a tumorous tree, creepy baby dolls, human-headed birds and human-vegetable hybrids play out perverse games. Looking upon Yuliya Lanina's Boschian orgy, it seems at times innocent, at times twisted. These feelings never quite resolve, but remain in a kind of sustained cognitive dissonance. The scene may evoke queasy laughter, a detached feeling of bemusement and/or disgust, but the title says "Play With Me"—we are asked to enter into this scene with a sense of childlike wonder and abandon.

Lanina tells us the story that is depicted in this diorama in an entry on curator David Gibson's blog. It seems to be a tale of lost innocence like the Garden of Eden story. A young hell-raiser slays a white dove, causing eyes of awareness to emerge from the birds and flowers and to summon the wrath of a drunken baby god. In the diorama, the exultant killer appears not as a virile savage, but as an absurd, plump baby with the face of a little old man dressed in S&M leather gear, with a huge ring pierced through his tiny penis. This killer is neither heroic nor evil, he is, simply, ridiculous, but he deals death all the same.

The vengeful god is just as ridiculous as the object of his wrath. Stubby little infant extremities protrude from a fetish-masked head. Inside the gaping mouth, we see another baby figure, perhaps, like the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain, a human figure pretending to be God.

The setting for all of this is a black landscape, maybe burned by war or polluted by industry. The creatures inhabiting this world, however, are cute and whimsical despite their fetish wear or their perverse activities. There are white flowers, pretty birds, deer and monkeys. There is even a pair of fornicating carrots.

This imaginary world seems to represent the world we live in, where violence emerges from the most infantile impulses, and where softness and sweetness keep thriving amid all the darkness and horror. How are we to live in such a place? Yuliya Lanina's answer is to assert the childlike spirit of curiosity and joy: Come out and play!



"Play with me" Yuliya Lanina, details  
Courtesy of the artist.



ENTERTAINMENT



## Personal Disturbances at Dam Stuhltrager Gallery

Feb 04, 2009  
by Kristina Narizhnaya

Whether documented in fairy tales or horror films, epic poems or sweeping literary masterpieces, stories of personal journeys have populated literature, visual arts and cultural traditions for as long as anyone can remember. Odysseus blinded the Cyclops on his journey back to Ithaca; Alice fell down a rabbit hole into the alternate dimension of Wonderland; Dorothy wandered along the yellow brick road on a quest for higher knowledge in the land of Oz; and most recently, at Williamsburg's Dam, Stuhltrager Gallery, Mishka, a half bear-quarter monkey-quarter person creature, along with two punked-out baby dolls, embarks on a journey of his own in "Scene One," an exhibit of two short films by Moscow-born Williamsburg-based artist Yuliya Lanina.

The show features surreal forays into the self-discovery of robotic children's toys in two films and the four animatronic stages that inspired them. Lanina, whose influences range from Russian and Greek fairy tales to stop animation to feminist art, said in her artist statement that she likes to disassemble familiar elements and put them together in new ways, often juxtaposing opposing themes, offering the viewer and opportunity to draw his own parallels. She said her work centers around sexuality and combines aspects of her Russian roots with her identity as a New Yorker.

"In my work I explore cultural identity and sexuality through images of perverse yet innocent dolls. Taking cute and cuddly ready-mades and turning them into fetishistic objects, I construct my work on the intensity of coexistence of opposite extremes and remain open to a multiplicity of interpretations," Lanina said.



RECENT ARTICLES

**THE PROTESTANTS: A quick-talking, oddball family portrait of a play**  
Feb 04, 2009

**Personal Disturbances at Dam Stuhltrager Gallery**  
Feb 04, 2009

**Brooklyn v. Baltimore at 1896**  
Feb 04, 2009

**Foodie on Duty - tipicobk**  
Feb 04, 2009

**Laughs at Matchless: Free Comedy in North Brooklyn**  
Jan 30, 2009

**Abandoned Brooklyn: Nate Kensinger at Union Docs**  
Jan 30, 2009

**A Sweet Experiment at Zebulon Bar**  
Jan 30, 2009

**Hugh Pool and John Ragusa: "Feelin' good blues never felt better."**  
Jan 30, 2009

**Foodie on Duty - Momofuku Milk Bar**  
Jan 30, 2009

**The Future of Art at Ad Hoc**  
Jan 21, 2009

Ads by Google  
**THANK DOG kennel Brooklyn**  
cageless/ Williamsburg Southside  
718-302-3647  
delivery service FREE  
thankdog.com

**Wizard Of Oz Dolls**  
Wizard Of Oz Dolls. Many Fun Toys For Your Children!  
KidsToys.Kidica.com

**Baby Doll Stuff**  
The American Girl® Official Site - Find Bitty Baby Accessories & More!  
www.AmericanGirl.com

**Toys Baby Dolls**  
Find great deals and save! Compare products, prices & stores  
www.Shopping.com

dead like me Life After Death  
OWN THE NEW MOVIE  
ONLY AVAILABLE ON DVD 2/17  
deadlikemedvd.com

E-LIST SIGNUP

Type your name and email address below, then click "Submit" to be added to our spam-free email list.

Name:

Email:

A film projection titled "Mishka," which is Russian for teddy bear, as well as a diminutive of a popular Russian name Misha, is the centerpiece of the exhibit. The film documents Mishka's journey through a series of grotesque, yet beautiful landscapes. It opens with a shot of red curtains parting on a red-lit scene reminiscent of a brothel from hell. A white bunny displays her breasts to a panting dog. Mishka smokes a hand-rolled cigarette as he watches them. Three scantily-clad female dolls with bunny ears dance to a silly song and expose their breasts at equally timed intervals. Mishka then mounts a white doll with a glowing third-eye and rides it into "Winter Wonderland." The music slows down as the camera pans around an icy white set with angelic white birds and insects. When Mishka climbs a white tree to poach an egg from a nest, a mythical bird snatches him and drops him into a red sweltering jungle with copulating carrots, moths and red birds. A knife-wielding voodoo doll approaches him to the beat of the African drum. He covers his eyes and screams. All turns black. Mishka's journey ends on a tinsel stage as he transforms into a black-pleather-wearing rock star performing alongside an owl. Champagne glasses clink as women whisper. He comes back to the world he tried to leave with greater wisdom and experience. The end.

The second film, "Play with Me" features baby dolls with Mohawks and piercings motorecycling through a sinister wonderland. The trip is punctuated by haunting child-like laughter and heavy music evocative of the industrial metal sounds of the German band Rammstein, as they pass a black masked face among many other absurdities. Suddenly, all stops as one of the dolls shoots a white bird with an arrow. It slowly falls to the sounds of a Russian Orthodox prayer as all the creatures stare and whisper. A large black being descends as trippy music plays. The film ends with nightmarish laughing head with big hair and blinking red eyes.

Four stages, three of them from the films, are displayed alongside the video projections. The season-appropriate "Winter Wonderland" lines the windowsill of the gallery's frosted window. The sill is covered with white Papier Mache shavings, with white tree-like sculptures. Angelic white human-headed dolls and insects sit atop some of the "trees" and some "branches" are hung with white fuzzy breasts. Two cherubic faces emerge from a flesh-colored chrysalis and white heads populate the space.

The other three sets are theatrical stages that rest on stockinged women's legs with velvet-gloved hands parting the red and black curtains. Lanina said the stages harked back to the maternal womb, to life happening inside a woman's body.

"Once..." is a black stage with a mirrored background. A tree-like structure grows at the center with eye-flowers, perched with human-headed birds with half humans-half goats grazing underneath.

The third stage "Celebration" features a heavily intoxicated Mishka passed out in the middle of the stage with his wine glass lying next to him. The three scantily-clad female creatures that are seen in the film sing "Happy Birthday," dance and expose their cleavage as a disco ball hangs from a white menacing red-eyed doll's head suspended from the ceiling.

"Lullaby" houses a giant red monster with a diamond studded tooth holding a baby doll. The stage is decorated with erotic portraits of different stuffed animals. When the stage is activated by clapping, the monster begins to rock the doll, all the while singing "Rockabye baby."

The innocence of children's toys is jarring when they are put in adult situations. Lanina purposely used ambiguous sexualized and otherwise disturbing themes in her pieces to evoke strong emotions. The show is repulsive, yet addictive at the same time. The viewer leaves with an insight into the personal journeys of fictional characters that will perhaps influence his own self-discovery in beautiful, and disturbing, ways.



## Pre-pubescent Bosch

Scope Miami 2007

Carla Gannis on The Mechanical Dolls of Yuliya Lanina

Art Basel Miami 2007 and its numerous satellite fairs, must be one of the largest "moveable art feasts" to date. However the abundance of fun and sun influenced my art picks counter-intuitively. The works I found most intriguing exposed the dark and heavy underbelly of a culture on an obsessive/compulsive binge. Such creative inclinations have been characterized by luminaries like Robert Storr and Suzanne Anker as the "new grotesque" in art. At Scope Miami Yuliya Lanina, a young Brooklyn-based artist, presented one of the freshest incarnations of the "new grotesque" impulse. Lanina's simultaneously creepy and whimsical Mechanical Doll series was on view at ADA Contemporary Fine Art, a Richmond-based gallery owned and operated by the enthusiastic dealer/artist John Pollard. This was the second year ADA showed with Scope Miami, a more established fair that maintains an independent and experimental aesthetic.

The grotesque in mainstream media and within the arts has certainly been on the rise over the past several years. Television shows like *Nip/Tuck* (originally based in Miami) and *Dexter* possess a broad cultural appeal. Subversive works by the Chapman Brothers and the absurdist, animatronic installations of Peter Caine have raised the pitch even higher in the visual arts, as they probe our attraction and repulsion to dolls and automatons as representations of the human condition.

In the past three years Lanina has moved from cast sculpture and painting to readymades and animatronics. Like the Chapmans and Caine there is an irreverence and dark humor that runs throughout Lanina's work. She delivers a punked out, pre-pubescent "Boschian" universe, one for the morally relativistic set. Distinctions between good and evil are ambiguous, and Lanina's



"Red dress" Yuliya Lanina  
Courtesy of the artist.

fantastically original freakshow of chimeras animate at the flip of a switch. "Rabbit", a dolled up bunny with human-like hands and lips wears a polka-dotted dress and comes to life by kicking up her furry leg. She then lifts her dress and with a vacant stare flashes her curvaceous female breasts at the viewer. In "Lullaby", red curtains part to reveal a post-apocalyptic tableau. A gnarled and sooty tree, sprouting eye flowers, grows out of the center of the stage. Nested behind the tree hipster mutants and refugees mechanically carry on rituals of life.

Lanina has commented about her most recent work:

I explore cultural identity and sexuality through images of perverse yet innocent dolls. Taking cute and cuddly readymades and turning them into fetishistic objects, I construct my work on the intensity of coexistence of opposite extremes. It remains open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

In earlier works Lanina dealt overtly with female body politics and themes of loss and renewal—often specifically in relation to the loss of her mother. Lanina has broadened the scope of her work over the past few years. More voices now accompany her feminist voice. Violence, neglect, addictions, and non-conformity are reflected through the prism of a fractured human identity. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* bears some resemblance to Lanina's creative process, as Lanina disassembles and reassembles her "dead" doll parts to bring to life a frightful yet naive creation.

Lanina inhabits psychic space both with Shelley and her famous mother, the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft who in 1792 wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. At 38 Wollstonecraft died leaving behind a ten-day-old daughter who would become Mary Shelley. Shelley chose fiction over political treatise. Her creature, made of an amalgam of disparate parts, remains a powerful symbol of the body and of the lost and bewildered child waking up to a world of adult turmoil.



"Lullaby" Yuliya Lanina  
Courtesy of the artist.





## Shows Star Butterflies, Torn Origami, Foot Marks: Chelsea Art

By Katya Kazakina



Yuliya Lanina, "Love", photo by F.Hatt

July 25 (Bloomberg) -- From a \$2 million butterfly triptych by Damien Hirst to a \$350 butterfly by Russian-born artist Yuliya Lanina, Chelsea's summer exhibitions offer opportunities for almost every taste and wallet.

Hirst's glossy butterfly paintings, as ubiquitous as the season's group shows, are on view at Gagosian Gallery.

Lanina's single butterfly inhabits a colorful fantasy landscape, where a centaur and Pegasus with kewpie-doll faces sport mohawks and dreadlocks.

Rooted in Greek mythology and Soviet-era children's animation, her elaborate mixed-media works are part of a two-artist show (with artist Ho Sup Hwang) at 2x13 Gallery. Lanina's tableaus also feature large heads covered with fake moss and flowers, golden birds perched on golden branches and cherubs with butterfly wings.

Those playful and sinister characters also appear in the artist's video "Journey." Projected onto a wall with a Soviet children's song as soundtrack, it stars an energetic redheaded doll in a white bonnet. Oblivious to all the weirdness around her, the little girl marches ahead on wobbly heron legs.

The works range from \$350 to \$7,000. The show is on view through July 28 at 531 W. 26th St.; +1-212-563-3365; <http://www.2x13gallery.com>.



# Art Review:

The most innovative voice in contemporary art

Yuliya Lanina

*Scene One* /

Dam, Stuhltrager Gallery

*Scene One* leaves me speechless. Lanina manipulates and reconstructs children's toys as hypersexualised animatronic characters for her films *Mishka* (2008) and *Play With Me* (2007), her characters showing naked skin and smoking stogies as they shift between scenes of depraved sexuality and scenes of judgement. Meanwhile, the gallery has displayed the sets in the main gallery space. Each is a curtained box perched atop a pair of mannequin legs. When I parted the curtains, I found a snowy, night-time landscape with glittering trees and crushed velvet. Another housed a burlesque club, complete with a rotating disco ball. The best thing about it: when I clapped, the little children's toys giggled in unison then flashed their tiny tattooed breasts. Astounding.



## Celebrating Female Fertility

Lisa Paul Streitfeld

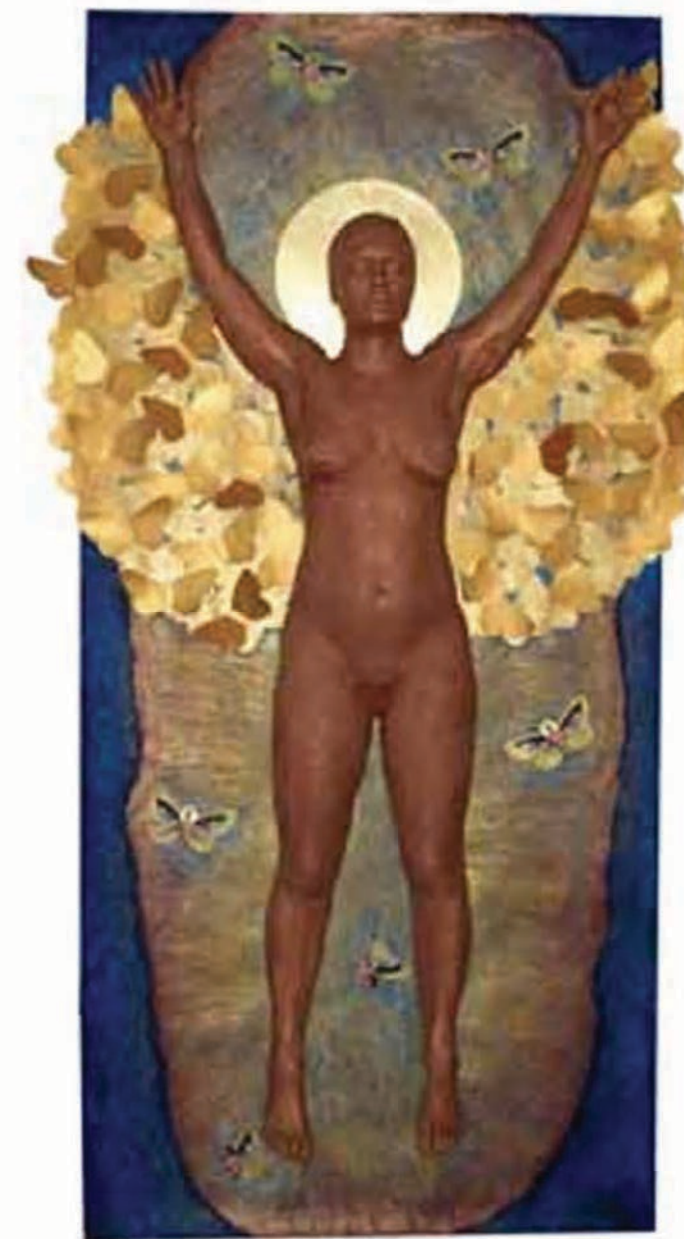
Amidst a constant media barrage regarding the reproductive capacity of celebrities, Yuliya Lanina comes along with her joyous, resplendent "Transfigurations of Queen Butterfly" to reveal why we do indeed care about celebrating female fertility.

Lanina was born in Russia where she experienced the gradual liberation of her nation before arriving in America in 1990. With work completed this year, she delivers a grassroots movement of authentic female liberation to Williamsburg. Indeed, the gallery kpb ([kleinblueproductions.com](http://kleinblueproductions.com)) has been transformed into a contemporary Garden of Eden where the female breaks out of patriarchal stereotypes to celebrate the liberation of her soul. The artist interweaves sculpture, painting, assemblage and collage with installation to narrate a contemporary mythology of spiritual rebirth reflecting her own swift passage from obscurity to the limelight.

She takes the viewer/participant through the four stages of spiritual transformation through assemblage/installation created from sculpture cast of her own body. The exhibition works so well because Lanina does have a new form of body, curvy but androgynous with a robust belly portending birth.

The narrative begins with Emergence, where layers of cultural graffiti are peeled away to reveal the vulnerability of the nude body bordered by a collage of female media stereotypes. It passes through the repose of Contemplation where the body in birthing position lies in a soft bed of flowers. Lanina dramatically assumes the throne with the celebratory pose of Liberation, crowned with golden halo. Following this spiritual exaltation, there is the inevitable return to the body, represented by the raging figure of Rebirth, expelled from the dark womb plastered with S&M imagery. Finally, there is the central Flower, where the body-integrated now between masculine and feminine—lies inside a flowered womb while six butterfly collages above express various facets of womanhood. Here is a reminder that true freedom comes with the full liberation of expression.

Lanina, a practicing yogi, realizes the potential that contemporary women artists have to ride into the zeitgeist through a refreshing combination of talent, inner contemplation and zest for surpassing ego identity. There is a nearly perfect balance here between conscious/unconscious, light/dark and joy/rage. Giving birth to oneself is surely painful, but the engaging charm of "Transfigurations of Queen Butterfly" leaves us with the feeling that the journey is essential—not only for the artist, but for the society at large.



*"Liberation" Yuliya Lanina  
Courtesy of the artist.*



## Yuliya Lanina

### *Transfigurations of Queen Butterfly*

KBP

Much ink has been spilled and many voices have become hoarse in recent discussions on the current state of “feminist art,” and intentionally or not, *Transfigurations of Queen Butterfly* places Yuliya Lanina firmly within this contentious dialogue. Composed of five large, mostly wall-mounted pieces, Lanina’s recent show combines elements of cast body parts, fabric constructions, and painting and collage on paper into a narrative cycle, a kind of feminine *Stations of the Cross*.

In “Flower” (2005), gestation is represented as a fetal positioned figure in a flower-padded pocket, the only freestanding sculptural piece in the show. “Birth” (2005) depicts a grasping torso with a skein of vascular red hair emerging from a fanged vaginal shape. Consciousness appears like the page from an adolescent girl’s diary, growing breasts, lips, and feet surfacing prominently through holes in the script covered paper in “Emergence” (2005). “Contemplation” (2005) depicts awareness as a flowery field, a realization of erotic potential and reproductive fecundity with golden legs held apart in an inviting gesture. Enlightenment completes the cycle in “Liberation” (2005), in which a near Baroque angel stands erect with upheld arms, a halo and wings of golden butterflies on a ground of deep ultra-blue.

*Transfigurations of Queen Butterfly* seems a mélange of several tendencies of “feminist art” that have evolved over the last thirty years. The body casts reflect not only the pop influence of George Segal or the socially engaged art of John Ahearn, but by using herself as the model Lanina commingles aspects of performance, and by appearing alongside this highly detailed rendition of her own nude body, she creates an effigy of vulnerability. The broad use of silk flowers, metallic gold, pastel colors, and pattern brings an amplified sense of the decorative that in some cases approaches the extravagant. These glittering materials have been used in illuminated manuscripts and sacred icons for their spiritual

implications, and might relate to the artists’ Russian heritage. The use of classic forms like the butterfly—a symbol of transformation and immortality that is able to regenerate life out of death and corruption—and the vaginal shaped madorla—an almond shaped variant of the halo which surrounds the body symbolizing the power of spirituality—links the images to the “Great Goddess” cult, a contrivance of the essentialism of the first generation of feminist artists. With a swarm of tiny butterflies hanging from the ceiling and a scattering of flower petals over the floor, an environment somewhere between a movie set and the ritual sites rumored to exist deep within the Amazon jungle for lepidopteristic worship are evoked.

Today’s art world is populated by a vast majority of both men and women who would identify themselves as feminists, yet there is a cadre of young female artists who shrink at the mere mention of the word, and seem intent on exploiting every nasty girl cliché just to get a rise out of those upholding the orthodoxy. Is this a generational reaction against their elders, or a genuine disagreement with the goals and ideals of the movement? Perhaps one of the most appealing prospects of our new sense of hyper awareness is the potential for subversion through subtle satire and critique through parody. Yet this requires a thorough knowledge of history and precedents. With works by artists like Ana Mendieta, Hannah Wilke, Eva Hesse, and Carolee Schneemann having established the canon, Lanina is free to use or abuse these sources in creative and critical ways. Whereas Ana Mendieta’s voids were transitory and organic, Lanina’s “Birth” can be “in your face.” If the colors of a Hesse were subdued and industrial, Lanina’s chromatic sensibility might be garish and gimcrack. The struggle to balance historical precedents and current art world politics provides Lanina with ample material to develop her own feminist aesthetic as an ongoing dialogue.

—James Kalm



Yuliya Lanina, “Liberation” (2005), plaster body cast and mixed media.





Upon entering the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition Pier Show, which opened on May 8th, I was immediately drawn to the display of painted mannequins, petite recreations of the female bust reimagined by artist Yuliya Lanina. Bodies that once modeled lingerie for simple consumption now sport painted faces, a variety of eyes and mouths exhibit-

## Refiguring the Facade

Morgan Schulman

ing a full range of emotions such as disbelief, satisfaction and love. Lanina, who lives and works in Williamsburg, puts a unique facial expression on each bust, with a nose running along the phalanx, a mouth at the nip of the waistline and a pair of eyes on the breast molds.

It is the eyes that draw the viewer to Lanina's work. The eyes are as full and round as the breasts themselves, with pupils where nipples would be, prisms upon the apex of femininity. As each piece conveys a distinct face with its own body language and bodily expression, the eyes set each work apart. Deep, lucid eyes convey contented warmth. Red, heavily-lidded eyes suggest malaise. Bold blue eyes with hearts for pupils present love, mirrored by a heart-shaped mouth. Eyes hidden by hands, express the body's reaction to the unknown. One bust features feathers for hair, a ruffled, matted texture crowning too-crystalline watery blue eyes. Another face has a penis for a nose, lying between the breast slopes, pointing towards the mouth.

The brilliance of Lanina's work is that the viewer initially forgets that he or she is looking at a bust of the human form and becomes transfixed by the acrylic face and the playful corporeal details. The phallic nose or voluptuous eyes remind the viewer that this is a body, a commercial plastic recreation of the female form meant to sell bras or girdles, and remade by the expressivity of Lanina's faces. With vibrant images painted on the (plastic) body, Lanina offers a re-vision of body art and representations of the female form. Although these images take up the often serious, earnest task of displaying the body within its socio-cultural context, they are light-hearted and playful, as bodies that play and smirk as well as signify.

Lanina has created these forms out of her own experience as a woman, and on the day of the opening she modeled one of the faces on her own bust. Viewer emotional response to the display was mixed, with some laughter as well as more disturbed reactions; as the multi-layered work takes the body and its presence as a backdrop in and out of context, it is both humorous and pleasurable to look at. It is also discomfiting, however, as the plastic bodies display much sensation usually hidden beneath a plastic surface. □

## Sylvia Wald Challenges Convension

Fu Chia-Wen Lien



The recent wave and renewal of abstract expressionism and surrealism sweeping the New York gallery scene has opened doors for emerging and re-emerging artists alike. The encounter with *Sylvia Wald: Polymorphs*, a recent exhibit at the Tenri Gallery curated by the art historian Thalia Vrachopoulos, was an experience full of surprises and learning.

Wald uses both traditional material (plaster and wire) for sculpture and the traditional female craft (textile and handicraft) of weaving. She manipulates and processes them while transforming their function and domain creatively to cross the boundaries of their defined role. The interchange between sculpture and weaving is her challenge to the division and hierarchy of the male and the female in the artistic tradition. Likewise, the contrast of manmade and natural are constantly struggling in her art to create a bizarre tension of beauty, strength and energy.

Wald has been making art in a consistent style, with intense conceptual interest and visual strength

since the 30s, yet she has remained surprisingly unknown. Wald's pieces are in the permanent collections of many well known museums nationwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. One can't help but feel guilty for not being familiar with her works and grateful to the Tenri for featuring them presently.

Curator Dr. Vrachopoulos chose to retrospect a group of sculptures by Wald that have never before been exhibited together. The fourteen works were beautifully installed, complemented by the pristine atmosphere of the Tenri Gallery. Instead of being absorbed or becoming dwarfed by the towering twenty-foot ceilings, the power of each piece held the magnitude of the walls, and economic installation means allowed for an airy feeling. The amount of space allotted to each work made for a very engaging encounter, guiding the viewer rhythmically through the gallery.

Entering near the spectacular window installation, comprised of eight triangular, woven panels made of wire, thread, fabric, bamboo and colorful plaster, the viewer was encouraged through their placement to move toward several more intimately scaled mixed-media reliefs on the adjacent wall.

continues on [www.nyartsmagazine.com](http://www.nyartsmagazine.com)