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**The written component of the MFA thesis:**

# **The Only One Year**

**18th of August 2024**

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## Abstract

My work's themes include memory, personality, body memory, rituals, routine, repetition, craft, family, and micro- and macrohistory. In my past practice, I worked extensively in a duo. My artistic practice is dedicated to memory but on a personal level. I am genuinely interested in memory, including long-term and short-term memory, details we remember, and things we associate with ourselves or others.

*The Only One Year* project reimagined my life in Saint Petersburg from 2009 to 2010, where I sewed new clothes for myself every day. I photographed myself daily for one year, and then, more than a decade later, I used those 365 photos to create tiny fabric appliqués. Clothing holds memories, and when I look at a particular garment, it brings back significant events, emotions and feelings from my past. The coloured wall represents my old kitchen, which was repainted years ago; I am reproducing the pink colour of the walls in this artwork.

I decided to implement this project because, years later, I began to need to remember details. Working on it helped me remember significant events from the past.

The practical component of the work consists of 365 10x15 cm appliqués, each hand-stitched. They are displayed on the pink-coloured wall with a floral pattern on top.

The written component consists of three chapters. Each chapter's name is bilingual—in English and Russian. While working on the project, I was reading Maria Stepanova's book *In Memory of Memory / Памяти Памяти* in two versions—in Russian and English. The book inspired me to use two languages.

In Chapter I, I write about 2009, its time, and how it motivated me to take everyday pictures. The first chapter also includes my memories of a few particular days of the year. Every memory is supported by pictures depicting my look on that day.

In the second chapter, I discuss my transition from painting to textiles and the phenomenon of so-called “textile painting”.

In Chapter III, I write about influential artists for this project, such as Tehching Hsieh and Cindy Sherman. The book *What Artists Wear* by Charlie Porter helped me immensely during this part of the project.

In part called *The Wallpaper as Trauma / Обои / Травма*, I write about the phenomena of wallpaper during the period of the late Soviet Union - the time of my childhood. I’m writing about it from the point of trauma and, as an example, using my past work called *Half a Room*.

For this text, I also worked with my photo archive, using pictures from 2009-2010 which were carefully selected and arranged chronologically.

Although the project seems very personal at first glance, I suggest looking at it from a different perspective and reflecting on the colours, composition, materials, and visual execution of the work as a whole.

I couldn't have implemented the project without the help of my partner Pavel Rotts and my supervisors, two incredible artists, Sini Vihma and Pauliina Turakka-Purhonen.

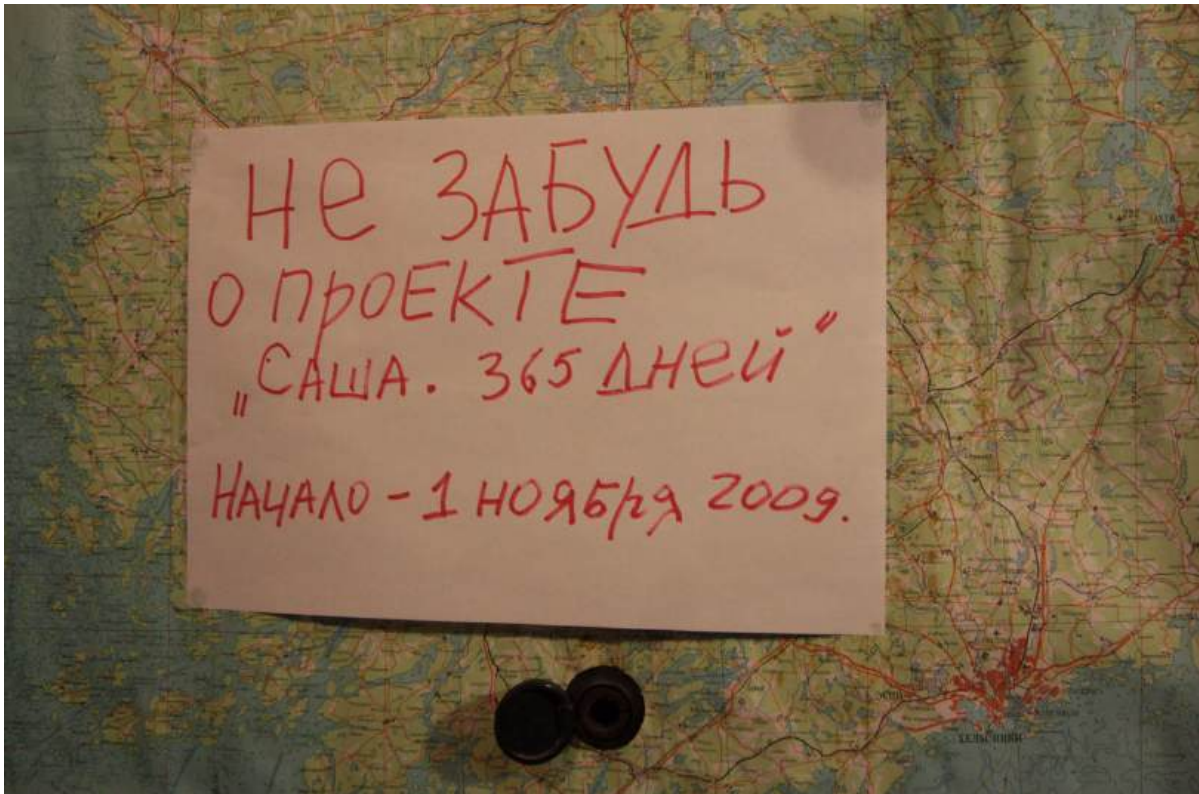
I would like to thank all of my colleagues and teachers for their fruitful comments and tips during the seminars in the painting department.

# Chapter I

## *Beginning / Начало*

In 2008, I graduated from Stieglitz Academy in Saint Petersburg with a degree in the Department of Art History. While studying there, I worked in the Museum of Russian Art's Soviet Graphic section. Being there, I saw a lot of Russian avant-garde heritage, which subconsciously influenced me. After graduation, I stopped working in the museum and, with my partner, opened a workshop in the city centre where we designed and created jewellery and, later on, textiles. The idea to start the Sasha 365 photo project came to me occasionally. During that time, the street fashion movement was at its peak, and online portals such as *Look At Me*, *Be-In*, and *Afisha* were super popular among urban fashionistas and partygoers. At that time, the city didn't have a mass market. My desire to stand out from the grey crowd was inspired by street fashion books and magazines, which I started collecting from my first European trips. My main treasure and instrument was a sewing machine that had belonged to my mother. I created a colourful outfit for myself almost every day and once decided to make a challenge - to fix my everyday look during the one year. I wrote a reminder about it and put it on the apartment's entrance door where we lived.

I was very young and productive at that time. In the neighbourhood where we lived was a textile shop where I bought fabrics and immediately created something to wear. I've never used any patterns or taken the proper measurements. Earlier, I had been on a short sewing course, but these numbers and measurements were boring, complex, and uninteresting. Usually, I draw straight on the fabric, cut it out, and sometimes, without stitching, sew it on the machine. My clothes were wild, weird, and defiant. I liked to attract people's glances and stand out from the crowd. At that time, I didn't think in advance, and the idea was to see out the year and not forget to take a picture even if I was sick and stayed home. I did it. At the end of 2010, I had 365 images, and a one-year challenge was completed. I continued creating outfits, but not as intensively as before.



"Don't forget about SASHA 365 project" - reminder hanging on the entrance door, photo by Nikita Vasilevsky, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2009

## ***A year / Год***

While working on this project, I've often referred back to the events of 2009 - 2010. It was a year when all of my grandparents passed away; that summer in Moscow was abnormally hot, and many people escaped to Saint Petersburg to avoid it. That year, I used to play the accordion but quit it in the autumn. That year, I travelled a lot.

In her book *In Memory of Memory*, Maria Stepanova writes: "I started travelling as soon as I had the opportunity and I have never stopped. Perhaps this is why I get an almost physical thrill from being under the glass-and-metal roofs of railway stations." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stepanova, Maria, *In Memory of Memory*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, London, United Kingdom, 2023, page 404

The idea of working on the road has always been very close to me. At first, these were notes and sketches of ideas that were implemented upon arrival home. Later, I began to take my embroideries on trips, which did not take up much space and easily fit into a backpack.

Once, in one interview, I read that the artist Timur Novikov had started to create art on textile pieces because of the practical choice: when the Iron Curtain collapsed, and artists started to travel, it was much easier to transport artwork made on textile: you paint on the textile without any frame or stretching, fold it, put it into a suitcase, and then, unfold it and bring it to the exhibition.



Timur Novikov, *Dirigible and the White House*. 1989  
Acrylic on textile, paper, foil. 200 x 200 cm  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (cat. N° 198)

It was a new year in my life. I had a new status - not being a student, but new work and new experiences. That year, I'd been to Asia, the Middle East, and Berlin for the first time. Looking at these pictures, it is sometimes hard to understand the season. I didn't divide my clothes according to the season—I just added an extra layer in wintertime.

My relationship with textiles was similar to that of painting. I remember how I painted straight on a leather jacket—first with white and then with red—inspired by the artwork of Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Sasha in the leather jacket painted by her, photo by Nikita Vasilevsky, Berlin, Germany, 2009

I didn't wear much black. I didn't have a black dress for my grandma's funeral, so I borrowed one from my friend Lubov. Her name means Love in Russian. She got this dress from a Berlin charity shop for free. It was a summer dress. Grandma's funeral was in December, so I was cold.

## ***Memory / Память***

In her book, Maria Stepanova has divided memory into three types:

“The memory of what is lost, inconsolable, melancholy, keeping tally of these losses while knowing that nothing can be returned.

The memory of what has been received: sated after-dinner memory, contended with one’s lot.

The memory of what has never been - seeding ghosts in place of the real. Like the magic comb of Russian fairy tale: a deep dark wood springs up where the comb is thrown down and helps the hero to escape pursuit. The phantom memory does much the same for whole communities, protecting them from naked reality and its draughts.

The object of remembrance can be the same in all cases. In fact, it is always the same.”<sup>2</sup>

My own object of remembrance is also my starting point. I mentioned above that my memory works differently if I look at myself wearing particular garments, and my object of remembrance is always the same - it is I, Sasha Rotts, the artist, woman, and human being. Here, I now show a few examples of random days of the year 2010:

*18th of February 2010:*

During that period, we had money. We ran a small workshop in the city centre, and after Christmas selling, we decided to go to Thailand and have a rest. This picture was taken in Bangkok. I'm wearing trousers made out of a striped shirt. We were sitting in a cafe, and I noticed one group, a young woman with two guys. I don't remember the faces, but I remember the woman's tattoos. Two big ships in black and red colours. She also had a small ship pendant wearing on-chain. She was wearing a short white dress and black sandals. That day, I had fried eggs, coffee, and orange juice for breakfast. Now, I have 19 tattoos on my body.

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<sup>2</sup> Stepanova, Maria, *In Memory of Memory*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, London, United Kingdom, 2023, pages 243 - 244



18th of February 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, Bangkok, Thailand

*9th of March 2010:*

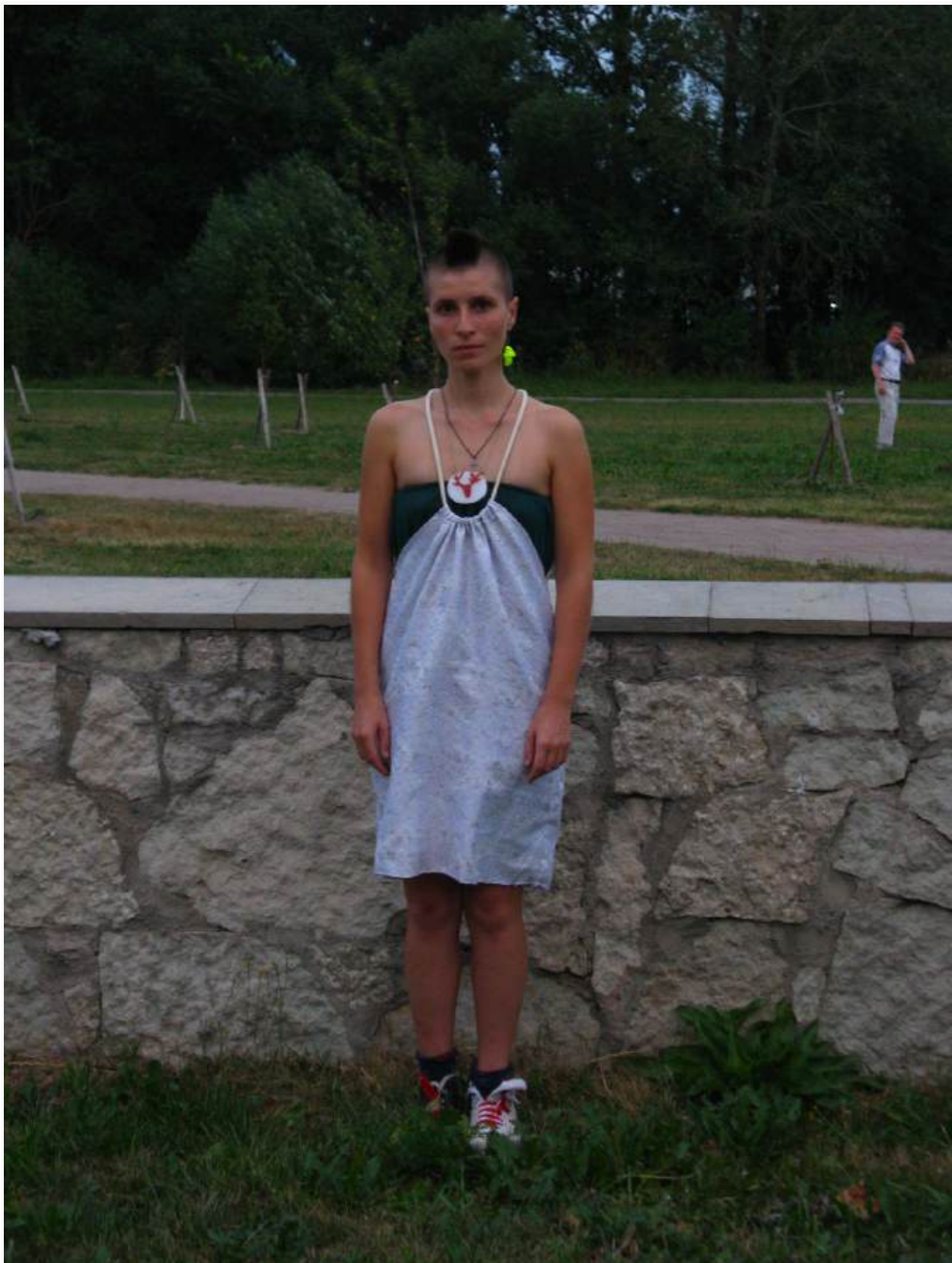
I am wearing a T-shirt I bought in Bangkok and pants I made from the shirt. In the morning, my mother and I went to the cemetery. We were carrying the ashes of my grandmother, which we dug into the grave. Later, the same day, I went to the concert of the indie rock band Auktyon. It was an excellent gig with American musicians Marc Ribot and John Medeski. I bought a new CD there.



9th of March 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, St.Petersburg, Russia

*12th of August 2010:*

My mother asked me to visit my grandma. It was my only day off after the long working week. I visited her but was very annoyed on my way to her place. I ate hummus and bread on the road. I was wearing a dress made out of a curtain. After a few months, my grandma passed away. It was winter. I wore a black dress, which I had borrowed from a friend.



12th of August 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, St.Petersburg, Russia

*25th of October 2010:*

It was cold. Here I'm wearing a blue fur coat. At first, it was beautiful, but after washing, it lost its luxurious look. That day, I was feeding stray dogs. I don't like dogs, only cats. I don't remember what I ate for lunch that day. I remember only a big orange persimmon. I always eat persimmons in October.



25th of October 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, St.Petersburg, Russia

My first ever memory about myself: I'm going up the stairs, holding on to the railing at kindergarten. I'm wearing an orange and green checkered shirt. I even remember the feeling of this material on my body. It was flannel, and I inherited this shirt from my cousin. Most of my childhood clothes were inherited from her. From one child to another. Maybe that's why these clothes were so cosy. Her father was a seaman, and he brought many clothes for her from his trips. When it was too small for her, I started to wear it. The fabric wasn't new, and this made it comfortable for me. Cloth keeps the memory. Now, my passion for old fabric stems from my childhood.

In his book *What Artists Wear*, Charlie Porter writes: "Our clothing is an unspoken language that tells stories of our selves. What you are wearing right now is sending messages about who you are, what you think, and how you feel. This goes beyond the limitations of fashion: it is a daily, even hourly, signalling of our beliefs, emotions, intentions. Much of it is intuitive: we sharpen up to impress; cocoon ourselves when we're feeling blue; make an effort on a date. But when we put on our clothes, we don't fully acknowledge their loaded meaning. We just wear them. [...]"

Artists live a different way. The work of an artist is not office-based. It breaks from the rhythm of 9 to 5, weekdays and weekends. It is a continual push for self-expression. Artists create their own circumstances, their studios becoming self-contained worlds. Their work can question, or it can reinforce, generally accepted ways of being. What artist wear can be a tool in their practice."<sup>3</sup>

A tool in their practice—this is probably the precise definition I was looking for. I think every artist uses a garment as a tool of practice, even if it is a demonstrative—dismissive style.

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<sup>3</sup> Porter, Charlie, *What Artists Wear*, Penguin Random House Ireland, Dublin, 2019, pages 4-5

In my choice of styling, I was often guided by the rule that everything has potential. The similar approach that soviet punks had was where punk aesthetics mixed and digested everything that came to hand, including frankly unwearable things.



Lesha Uksus, Moscow, 1988, photo by Igor Mukhin

## Chapter II

### *Finland / Финляндия*

In Finland, I've decided to continue my studies in Vapaa Taidekoulu. Once, we got a task called "Archive of Mine". I immediately started to paint my looks from 2009. Unfortunately, I don't have this painting. I sold it in the art sales soon afterwards. It was successful, and my teacher gave me a "Congratulations" comment. It was the first compliment I had ever received about my artwork. It was interesting, but after selling this painting, I felt I had to continue working on the project to live this year again. For some reason, I didn't paint it.



From Sasha 365 series, a painting by Sasha Rotts,  
oil on board, 40x75 cm, Helsinki, 2017,  
photo by Pavel Rotts

A few years ago, already in Finland, I worked as an assistant for the Finnish artist Pauliina Turakka-Purhonen. Turakka-Purhonen is one of my supervisors, and I have been following her practice for a while. Her personality and members of her family are frequent heroes of her works. Pauliina works with her memory, with memoirs from childhood, dreams, and situations from the past. She combines sewing and embroidery, applique and collages, bringing beads, pieces of glass, and paper into the sculptures. I know that for her, the working process is very important. Duration of time, hand stitching, the birth of one or another character. I



have one very personal and mystical story connected with Pauliina. Some years ago, my mother had serious heart surgery. At the same time, I had a plane ticket to Armenia, but of course, I cancelled it due to serious circumstances. After this situation, Armenia was associated to me with this terrible time, and I was afraid to travel there despite really wanting to go. Some years later, when I was assisting Pauliina in a public art festival in Pello, Lapland, we built up a huge sculpture of a human heart hanging between two trees. A few days after being back in Helsinki, I travelled to Yerevan without any fear of my mother's heart; Pauliina built a new one, and I became calm.

Pauliina Turakka-Purhonen (with the help of Sasha Rotts),  
Paikattu sydän, Oranki Art, 2019, photo by Pauliina Turakka-Purhonen

## ***From painting to textile / От картины к текстилю***

In the winter of 2020, I tried to experiment; after making a sketch, instead of using paint, I decided to use textiles and “sew” a painting.

This was a conscious choice - I always used solid, primarily colours in a painting. I found precisely the same hues in textiles and, based on my sketch, stitched them together. It was the first example, after which I started using this approach. I called it the *textile painting*.

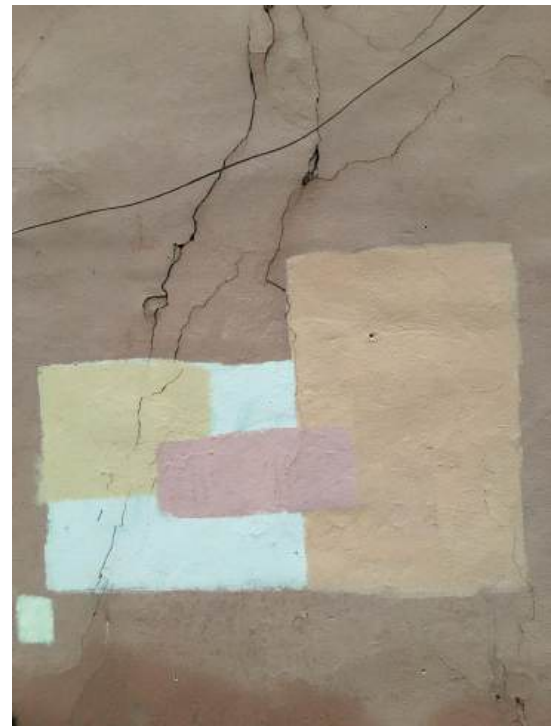
My first inspiration for the textile painting motif was so-called social graffiti, which is not popular in Finland, but in my home country, people use it a lot. Random hashtags are often painted over with another layer of paint, sometimes with different colours. I was collecting them by taking pictures and was always inspired by maintenance choices (I'm pretty sure that it was because of the lack of colours, but I prefer to think about it as a conscious choice).



Graffiti in St.Petersburg, Russia, 2021, photo by Sasha Rotts



Graffiti in St.Petersburg, Russia, 2021, photo by Sasha Rotts



Graffiti in St.Petersburg, Russia, 2021, photo by Pavel Rotts

My first exhibition experience with the new technique was a Rönsy group show in Hämeenlinna where textile paintings were exhibited inside the space. It was the only time when works were displayed like this. In the future, I will use a “traditional” textile hanging - on the wall.



Sasha Rotts, Manifests, Rönsy group exhibition in Hämeenlinna, Finland, 2021, photo by Sasha Rotts

In the following winter of 2021, I participated in an online artist residency in Japan. As a topic for my research, I've chosen Senninbari. Senninbari (千人針, 'thousand person stitches') was a unique mascot made by women and was given to the soldiers on their way to war. Very often, it has the shape of a belt and is covered with 1000 stitches. A different woman made every single stitch. During the work on Senninbari, women stayed in crowded places such as market squares or railways, which was a way to ask other women to contribute to the Senninbari. For the residency project, I created my own Senninbari and made 1000 stitches by myself. The idea was to live emotions through the process of stitching.



Senninbari (千人針, 'thousand person stitches'), woodcut print on canvas, embroidery, 35x120 cm, Helsinki, Finland, 2021, photo by Pavel Rotts



Senninbari (千人針, 'thousand person stitches'), woodcut print on canvas, embroidery, 35x120 cm, Helsinki, Finland, 2021, photo by Pavel Rotts

The same approach was used for the Only One Year project—I had suggestions for helping with implementation, but it was essential to do everything myself to keep the same “handwriting” throughout the project.

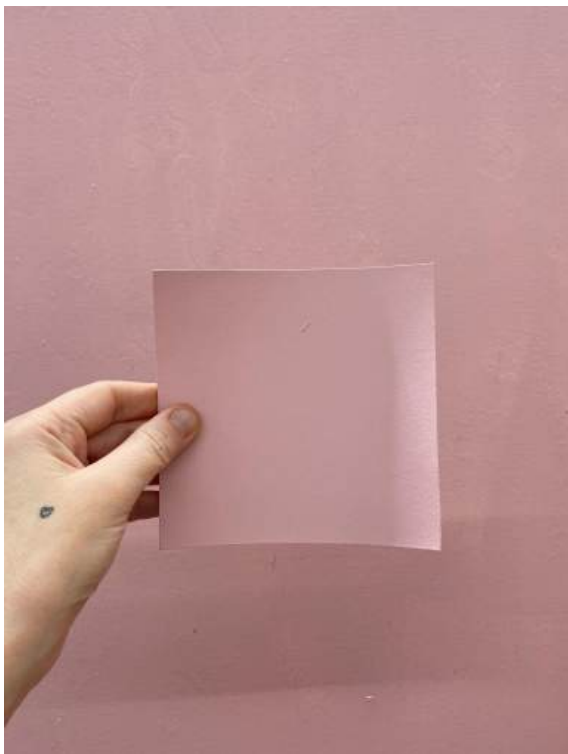
I like the expression of slow stitching and can apply it to my artistic approach. I could outsource this role to the sewing machine, but I don't want to - it's important to do everything by hand, touch, and have this path from the beginning to the end.

### ***The background value / Фон важен***

When I was four, my mother, sister and I went to Crimea for a holiday. My father was alone in Saint Petersburg, and the night before we got back, he renovated our kitchen. I don't remember what kind of atmosphere and interior was there before, but when we came back, he had painted everything pale pink, put up white tiles and made a floral

decoration on top of the wall. After a few days, all the tiles fell off, but we lived for at least ten years with these pink walls.

Unfortunately, I didn't find any pictures of this kitchen, but recently, I asked my father about the floral pattern. He said that the painter who used to work in the same factory made the stencil for him. This is interesting to think about because it means it was my father's request. When I asked him about the choice of colour, he said, "To make it beautiful."



Colour test for Kuvan Kevät exhibition, Helsinki, Finland, 2024, photo by Sasha Rotts

When I took an everyday picture of myself, I lived in another apartment, but this pink wall didn't give me peace. When I started to work on the installation, the question of the background was solved.

I decided to remake the pink colour from my memory - the wall on the exhibition is the wall of my childhood. I also had an attempt to create a floral ribbon, which the painter from the factory made for my dad. I don't remember how many rows of flowers were there, but I remember the colour - Bordeaux.

Analysing the work of Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, professor Marianne Hirsch

emphasises the role of objects and places as triggers of bodily and sensory memory and the division between, as Assmann calls it, verbal and declarative "I am memory" (ich-Gedächtnis) and a more passive "me-memory" (mich-Gedächtnis) linked with the body and feelings rather than with language and reason. "Me-memory," according to Assmann and Hirsh, is a space of involuntary memory, often set in motion and mediated by interaction with objects and places from the past.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes, I turn left in the kitchen if I'm in Saint Petersburg and visiting my old flat. When I lived there, we had a mirror hanging on a wall. Many years later, my body remembered it and always turned to look at myself.

Being recently in the exhibition *The Girl Who Turned Into a Rosebush*, curated by Asta Kihlman, I found the quotation that fascinated me very strongly:

"When we look at someone in a picture, we conclude who the person is and what they are like based on their demeanour or "habitus". Associations might be suggested by a forest-green background, a vigorous painting style or identifiable symbols. Clothing, too, has expressive power. Garments can convey historical allusions or express a political stance, for instance, by challenging entrenched ideas about what clothing should be worn by men, women or other genders. Clothing can make a powerful statement for inclusivity and diversity."

Was my outfit my statement? It was.

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<sup>4</sup> Hirsch, Marianne, *Поколение постпамяти; Письмо и визуальная культура после Холокоста*, Новое Издательство, Москва, 2021, page 305-306

## Chapter III

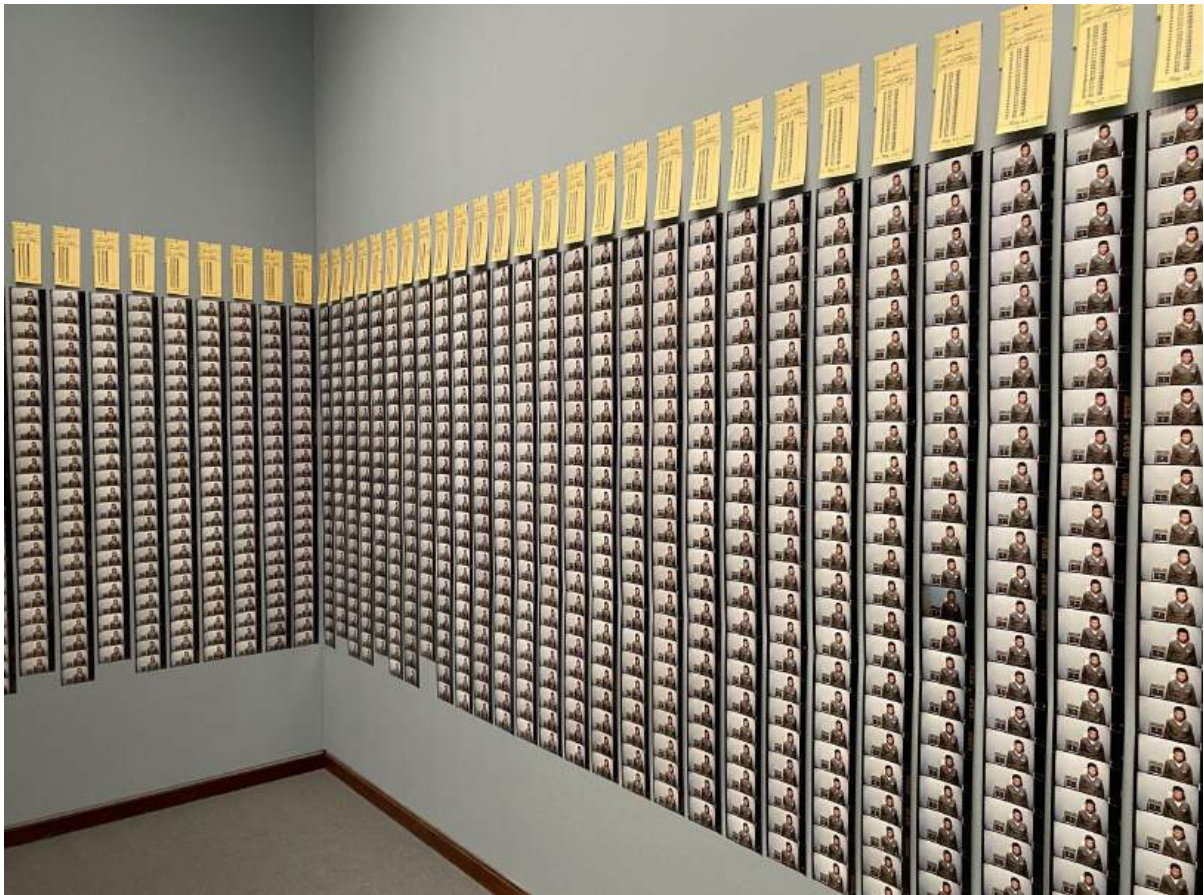
### *I like the routine / Я люблю рутину*

Last summer in Berlin, I visited an exhibition by Tehching Hsieh. It showcased documentation of his performances, most of which were created 20-30 years ago. One of them greatly influenced my graduation practice at the Academy. It was his one-year 1980-1981 performance, where he took a picture of himself every hour. Obsessed with time and surveillance, both pervasive topics in his work, “Time Clock Piece” was a durational performance piece that examined the socially/ culturally constructed “clock” as a measure of time versus the duration of lived experiences. Every hourly picture during the year depicted him in the same costume - a working uniform. The images are almost identical, showing only how his hair grew and how fresh or tired his face looked. This idea of repetition and documentation is really close to my practice.

Hsieh’s initial status as an illegal immigrant (after jumping ship from his job as a Taiwanese cargo ship seaman) was a common point of discourse regarding its influence on his work. However, Hsieh has denied personal ties to his work, preferring for his projects to be viewed as a broader analysis of humans “doing time”.



Tehching Hsieh exhibition in Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany, 2023, photo by Sasha Rotts



Tehching Hsieh exhibition in Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany, 2023, photo by Sasha Rotts

Another artist which I would like to mention here is Cindy Sherman.

In his book, Charlie Porter writes: “From the beginning, clothes were central to Sherman’s work. In the 1975 work *Air Shutter Release Fashions*, she used an air shutter release cable to outline different garments on her naked body. Many of the garments she chose to convey compound the objectification of women, such as the *Playboy* bunny outfit.

Sherman has since dedicated her practice to taking on the role of multiple unnamed personas in her photographs, performing in front of her camera within the sets she creates.[...] What Sherman wears allows her to address gender stereotypes, societal archetypes and emotional states: fear, sadness, pride, horror.

‘Clothes are very important in my work’, she emailed, ‘because they play a major factor in giving clues to a character’s personality. And I feel that’s true for everyone, not just in my work.’”<sup>5</sup>

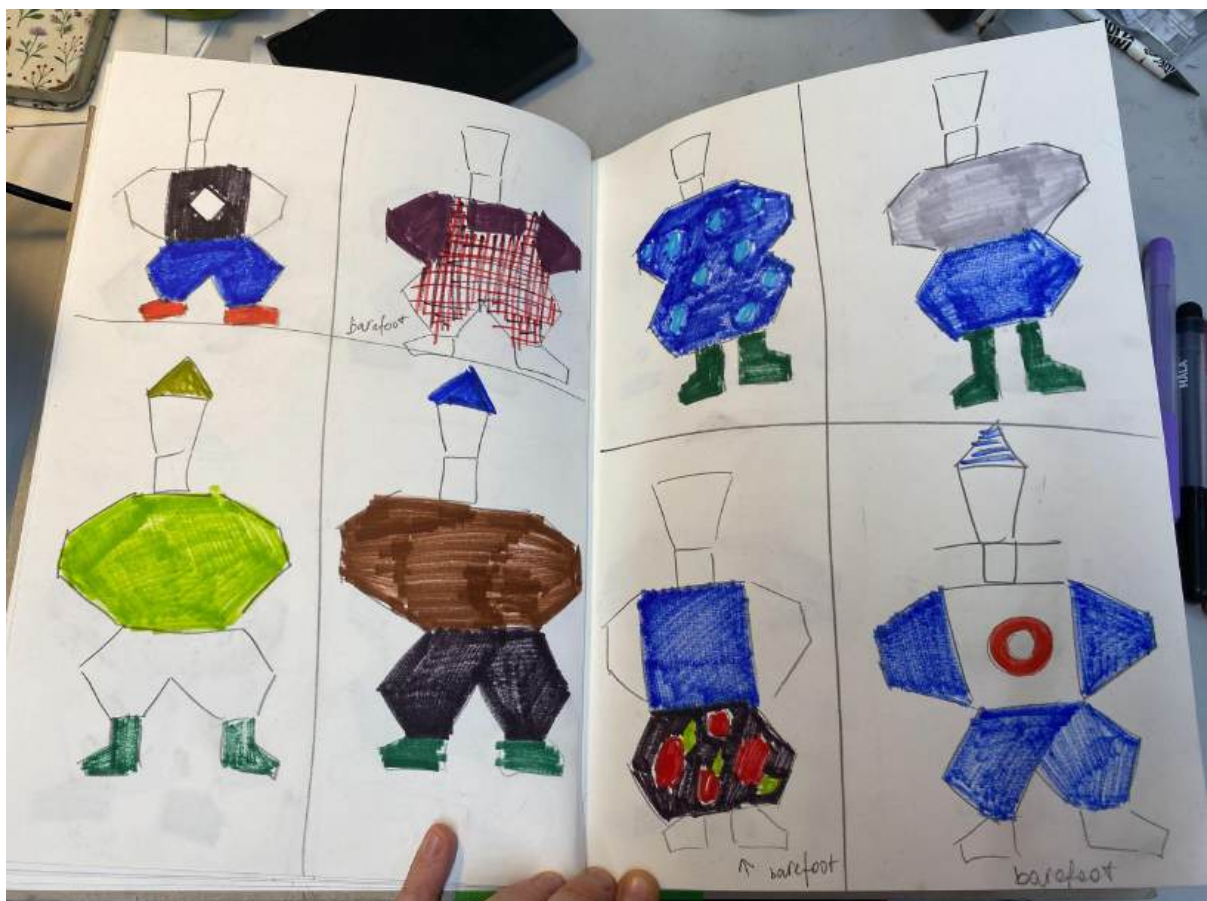
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<sup>5</sup> Porter, Charlie, *What Artists Wear*, Penguin Random House Ireland, Dublin, 2019, pages 204-205

Here, I'll repeat Sherman's phrase: Clothes are essential for everyone, not only for the artists who work with them.

### ***Everyday life and work / Повседневная жизнь и работа***

While working on the project, I stitched some appliqués every day from three to thirteen. When I looked at the photos, the day's events appeared in my memory. Even though the project is very personal, I decided to depersonalise it and omit any features from the characters. This is why the figures on the appliqué have no features; their faces are blank. We can see only solid colours, mostly bright.



Fragment of the sketchbook, 2023-2024, Helsinki, Finland, photo by Sasha Rotts



From the Only a One Year project, 2023-2024, Helsinki, Finland, photo by Sasha Rotts

I cut out little stencils for every type of cloth. This helped me make it faster, keep the same style, and make my handiwork mechanical.

I like routine. I feel comfortable having an idea in advance and it goes according to the plan. Routine is a ritual, a meditation, a process of thinking, a way of working. When I started the project, I wasn't sure that I would complete it in time without help from outside. But I managed to do it. There was a certain number of pieces that I produced every day. It was a very cool routine.

My process usually begins with the analysis of visual material, which leads to coloured sketches, cutouts, and stitching. The finished pieces are ironed and affixed to the wall with two pins. I embrace the art of slow stitching and choose to do everything by hand, valuing the tactile experience from start to finish.

As a significant portion of my looks from 2009-2010 involved recycled materials, I often incorporate found pieces into my projects. I frequent secondhand stores, recycling centres, and dumps, and friends and colleagues contribute leftover fabrics and old clothes. I perceive these

small works as part of a larger patchwork, appreciating the idea that something big can emerge from small leftovers.

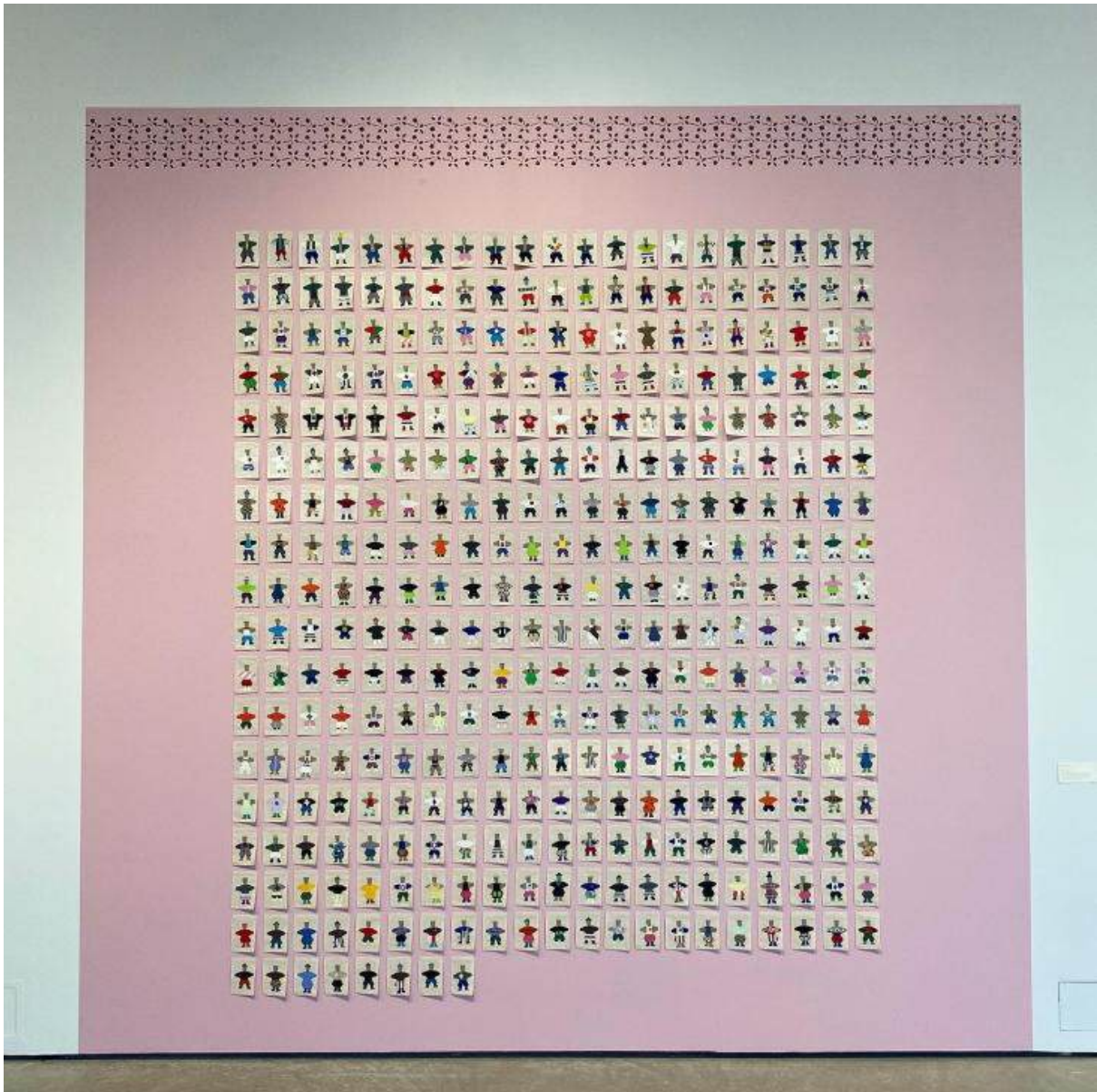


In the studio, 2024, Helsinki, Finland, photo by Sasha Rotts

My initial idea about the human figure was more about anthropomorphic form. But when I made the first one, I understood that it didn't work. The project is personal, and in this textile implementation, I would like to look at it from the side, depriving the person of their individual features and making it faceless. In the summer of 2023, I participated in a group exhibition in Rotterdam, Netherlands. The exhibition took place at Nieuwe Institute, where another exhibition dedicated to the history of uniforms was held at that time. The costumes were exhibited on flat wooden mannequins, which depicted the human figures schematically. I appropriated this shape and used it as a starting point for my 365 collection.



Workwear exhibition in Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2023, photo by Sasha Rotts



The Only a One Year project, exhibition view, Kuvan Kevät 2024, photo by Sasha Rotts

## ***The wallpaper as trauma / Обои / Травма***

I've printed wallpaper with a simple one-colour pattern for my recent projects. I've become obsessed with this idea. Before my first printed edition for the exhibition in Huuto Gallery in April 2022, I read and found pictures and information about the project curated by Jeremy Deller, where he exhibited works by Andy Warhol hanging on the wall with printed wallpaper by William Morris. The idea that the wallpaper could be a part of the artwork fascinated me.

I've realised that I have had a problematic relationship with wallpaper since an early age. There was brown and green wallpaper in a room where I used to live, and I dreamed about painting the wall white. Later, I hung posters with pop stars to hide the brown and green pattern. I felt that wallpaper kept information, absorbing everything that happened at home like a sponge.

Another attempt to reframe trauma was in the summer of 2023 in Mänttä Kuvataideviikkot, where I made an installation called Half A Room. It was exploring the phenomenon of a child raised by “life behind a closet”.

The phrase “life behind the closet” is familiar to almost everyone who was born in the Soviet Union. I'm not an exception. What does life behind the closet mean?

Very often, and even more likely, as a rule, the child did not have his own room. The room was one for the whole family, and thus, the child was sharing with his parents. Sometimes, while attempting to create a private space, a rearrangement was made in the room and usually, it was the closet that divided it into two halves. Occasionally, it was not a closet at all, but some kind of curtain, screen, etc., but the expression “life behind the closet” has become firmly established in everyday life.

I also spent most of my childhood literally behind a closet. There was my bed, a chair, and a desk. And this space was covered with wallpaper—the ones I will remember for the rest of my life. Green diamonds on a white background. That's probably all. Such a minimalistic, even rather Scandinavian design was completely atypical for Soviet life.

I remade these wallpapers from my memory and pasted them over the floor of the room.



Natalia Fadeeva, the artist's sister craft from kindergarten, matches on cardboard, applique, 1980, photo by Sasha Rotts



Sasha Rotts, Half a Room, exhibition in Mänttä Kuvataideviikot, 2023, photo by Sasha Rotts

The second part of the installation was a Panel of Matches. For it, I brought up some questions which have occupied me for a long time:

What is the reason to make crafts in kindergarten and primary school? To develop imagination? Or motor skills? I really don't know why. And yet, a question that has long interested me: who comes up with the ideas of these crafts? There are probably some manuals for teachers, but who writes them? In my childhood, we often made these same crafts from improvised materials. Those that were in every home and those that, apparently, were never in short supply. I recently found a panel made out of matches by my sister when she was a kid. It's pretty funny to realise that a child makes a panel from matches, since from childhood on we were told "matches are not a toy for children". This is probably true, and matches are really not toys but materials designed to develop fine motor skills, imagination and accuracy, especially since these are not matches at all because all their sulphur heads have been removed in advance.

My sister was a kid when she made this panel of matches. I am an adult now and will make a large panel of matches. There's half a wall in half of my room that's just the right size to put it on.

My attempt to work with the background is my way of subjugating space, separating and emphasising my area, and establishing a nominal border.

In the above-mentioned exhibition at Huuto Gallery, I was trying to reflect on my memory from my childhood in the Soviet Union. One of the installation parts was called "Secretiki", or Little Secrets in Russian. Inside the huge pile of soil - kept under the glass - were hidden drawings, which I had made at kindergarten. This game - to hide something under the bottle, such as a piece of foil, a flower, or candy paper was popular among my friends in childhood. We didn't have Buble gums or bright comics from the West and sweets, and it was a time when we watched depressing Soviet cartoons and played games in the yard.



Sasha Rotts, *Secrets, Fragile Narratives* exhibition in the Huuto Gallery, Helsinki, Finland, 2022, photo by Sasha Rotts

I grew up in the 90s when we had a uniform at school. The pioneer organization had already been cancelled, and we didn't wear pins with little Ilyich (Lenin), but the brown dress with an apron for girls and blue costumes for boys was obligatory to wear every day at school. In her book, Maria Stepanova writes :

“Anything that could be interpreted as outlandish behaviour (even earrings in the ears of schoolgirls) was seen as an attempt to break through into a space labelled ‘unacceptable exclusivity’ and *that sort of thing* - opulence, plumes and tails, silk stockings and sparklers - was in danger of destroying the general equilibrium and had to be kept at bay. Perhaps that is why it now feels to me as if the ‘little secrets’, filled with the ‘outlandish’, a concentration of the burlesque, forbidden beauty, crystal beads, cut out paper, roses, became political refuges, crossing both state and other boundaries.”<sup>6</sup>

Sekretiki were our personal treasures, and we could express ourselves without fear of judgment from others.

The only day in the working week when we didn't have to wear a uniform was Wednesday when we had a physical exercises lesson. That day, we were able to wear sweatpants and a hoody, and it was happiness. The class was never so colourful. I remember that this day, on the way to school, I was singing *The Blue Coach song / Голубой вагон* (song by Vladimir Shainsky):

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<sup>6</sup> Stepanova, Maria, *In Memory of Memory*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, London, United Kingdom, 2023, page 341

*All the minutes gradually fly away -  
And you shouldn't wait for them again  
And, of course, we're sorry about the past, but yet  
All the best is certainly ahead!*

*Spreading the tablecloth distant way goes on  
And it can reach right heaven's horizon  
Everyone everyone should believe in the best  
The blue coach is rolling, rolling on*

so happy and powerful I was in my sportswear.

In the end, I would like to share one of the messages by Charlotte Prodger, an artist from Charlie Porter's book: "Clothes are analogues of bodies. Not only because they are cut in the shape of the body but because they are next to it. Next to it for a day, for five years, a decade".<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, clothes live much longer than their owners. A person is no longer in the world, but the clothes are. Clothes keep smells, memories, and emotions. Clothes are important.

## **Conclusion / Заключение**

I decided to implement the Only One Year project because I realized that I started to forget things that were very important in the past. It was a compliment to memory, an attempt to go back a decade. Because of the war and the current political situation in Russia, I wanted to remind myself about the happy time I spent there.

In this project, I was trying to convey my unlimited devotion to the Russian Avangard and to my time in the Museum of Russian Art. One

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<sup>7</sup> Porter, Charlie, *What Artists Wear*, Penguin Random House Ireland, Dublin, 2019, page 303

of the main discussions about art was with my colleagues. I remember when I asked one of them why she was not working with contemporary art, her answer was: “Sasha, because there is nothing better than the Russian avant-garde.”

While working on the project, I read books related to my work. I first read *In Memory of Memory* by Maria Stepanova in the original Russian language in 2019. I returned to this book again in 2024 and, this time read it simultaneously in Russian and English. The very personal approach and links to the other books and places really inspired my writing component.

The book *What Artists Wear* by Charlie Porter was first presented in a course organized by the printmaking department. It helped me not to be shy about talking about everyday things and to convey the idea that garments play an important role in artistic life.

In my early projects, I often worked with Soviet heritage. I conducted research based on materials produced years ago.

Later, in the other projects, I worked with my own archive, which consisted of my drawings, appliques, and embroideries from my childhood.

In the Only One Year project, I worked with material from my nearest past, when I was already an adult female artist. Some people told me they perceive it as one project, but I disagree. I used my collection of pictures as a starting point for my memory. Looking at these photos brings me another feeling. I concentrated not only on my garments and remembering the events of one or another day but also on noticing how young and carefree I was.

In the Only One Year project, I removed all the details depicted in the photos and used only colour combinations, sometimes removing small details. While working on it, I went back to the past, and when another day was stitched, I didn't go back to it anymore. The idea was to live the year again and consolidate memories of the past.

When the exhibition was open, I lost my feeling of anxiety; I managed to complete all 365 appliqués and relive the important events of that time for me.

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## List of illustrations

“Don't forget about SASHA 365 project“ - reminder hanging on the entrance door, photo by Nikita Vasilevsky, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2009

Timur Novikov, Dirigible and the White House. 1989 Acrylic on textile, paper, foil. 200 x 200 cm Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (cat. № 198), photo: <https://timurnovikov.ru/en>

Sasha in the leather jacket painted by her, photo by Nikita Vasilevsky, Berlin, Germany, 2009

18th of February 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, Bangkok, Thailand

9th of March 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, St.Petersburg, Russia

12th of August 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, St.Petersburg, Russia

25th of October 2010, photo by Pavel Rotts, St.Petersburg, Russia

Lesha Uksus, Moscow,1988, photo by Igor Mukhin

From Sasha 365 series, a painting by Sasha Rotts, oil on board, 40x75 cm, Helsinki, 2017, photo by Pavel Rotts

Pauliina Turakka-Purhonen (with the help of Sasha Rotts), Paikattu sydän, Oranki Art, 2019, photo by Pauliina Turakka-Purhonen

Graffiti in St.Petersburg, Russia, 2021, photo by Sasha Rotts

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Graffiti in St.Petersburg, Russia, 2021, photo by Pavel Rotts

Sasha Rotts, Manifests, Rönsy group exhibition in Hämeenlinna, Finland, 2021, photo by Sasha Rotts

Senninbari (千人針, 'thousand person stitches'), woodcut print on canvas, embroidery, 35x120 cm, Helsinki, Finland, 2021, photo by Pavel Rotts

Senninbari (千人針, 'thousand person stitches'), woodcut print on canvas, embroidery, 35x120 cm, Helsinki, Finland, 2021, photo by Pavel Rotts

Colour test for Kuvan Kevät exhibition, Helsinki, Finland, 2024, photo by Sasha Rotts

Tehching Hsieh exhibition in Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany, 2023, photo by Sasha Rotts

Fragment of the sketchbook, 2023-2024, Helsinki, Finland, photo by Sasha Rotts

From the Only a One Year project, 2023-2024, Helsinki, Finland, photo by Sasha Rotts

In the studio, 2024, Helsinki, Finland, photo by Sasha Rotts

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The Only a One Year project, exhibition view, Kuvan Kevät 2024, photo by Sasha Rotts

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# ***Photo documentation of the thesis artistic component***

