

Artist statement by Julia Abzaltdinova

I am a multidisciplinary artist. I am largely working with visual media such as photography, installation and video. Photography has always remained my primary medium. I am actively expanding its traditional boundaries. I closely intertwine photo installations and photo sculptures with sound, video, and performance. I also work with the physicality of photographs. For instance, I stitched together parts of ripped personal printed photos that have been discarded. I designed tactile lightboxes and photo sculptures. I printed photos on a variety of industrial and artistic materials. Moreover, I modify photos or create new ones with the use of neural networks. This way, I am creating a hybrid of photography with other media, exploring synaesthesia in art.

Initially, my art practice focused on the themes of state and national identity, human impact on the natural environment. I am currently working on a project about the lives and worldview of blind and visually impaired audiences, lives of African migrants in Russia and challenges the self-identification of a female artist.

In my most recent projects, I often use psychological methods, including self-reflection, empathetic interaction with project participants, art therapy, and neurosis research. This interdisciplinary approach allows me to push the boundaries of contemporary art and offer the audience new authorial conclusions.

My personal experience is the foundation of almost all my projects. Often crucial events in my life is impetus in my artistic practice. My artistic message takes shape at the intersection of my identities that is important for me. Rather than identifying as a Russian national, I bring to the forefront my ethnic identity that belongs to national minorities of Russia. I am half Tatar, half Bashkir — both Turkic groups that led a nomadic life. The nomadic aspect has influenced the geography of my projects.

In the past, Tatars ruled over colonized people and conquered Russian principalities among other territories. While the Bashkirs throughout their history were twice subjugated by feudal Russia. Therefore, the problems of colonization and decolonization are important to me as a representative of different cultures. My multicultural identity is valuable for going beyond the local and building a dialogue between the artist and the international audience.

Photography is usually seen as a tool of social communication and its effectiveness is tied to creating new visual narratives. I approach photography in a wider sense, as a modern model of thinking. I create a visual ornament of Russian reality. Through photography, I address the viewers daring them to start a dialogue about life, the challenges of our time and our hopes for the future.