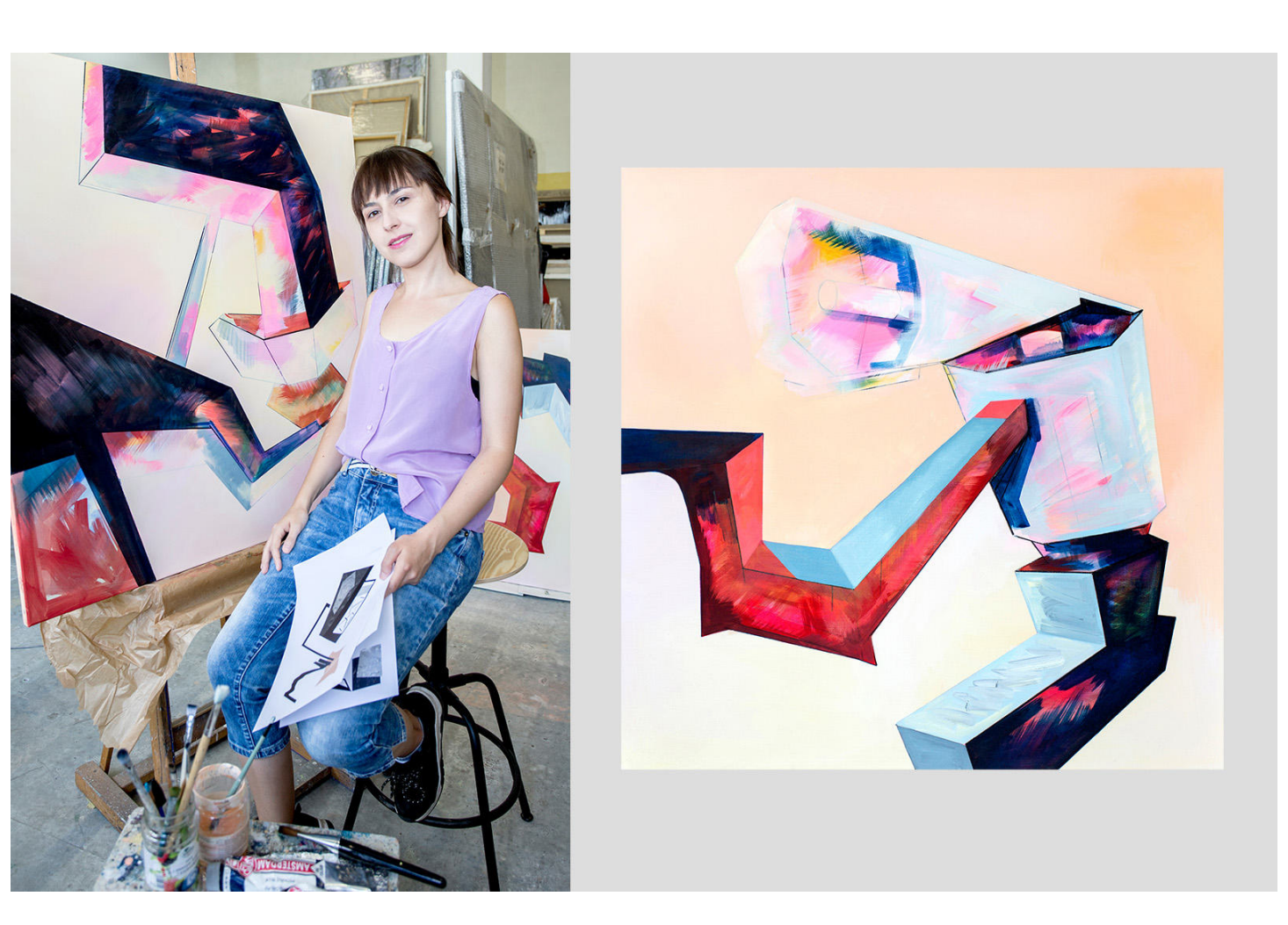
A WOMEN'S THING

Polish Artist Ewa Doroszenko Examines Beauty Standards in Between Artificiality and Reality

by The AWT Editors April 3, 2022

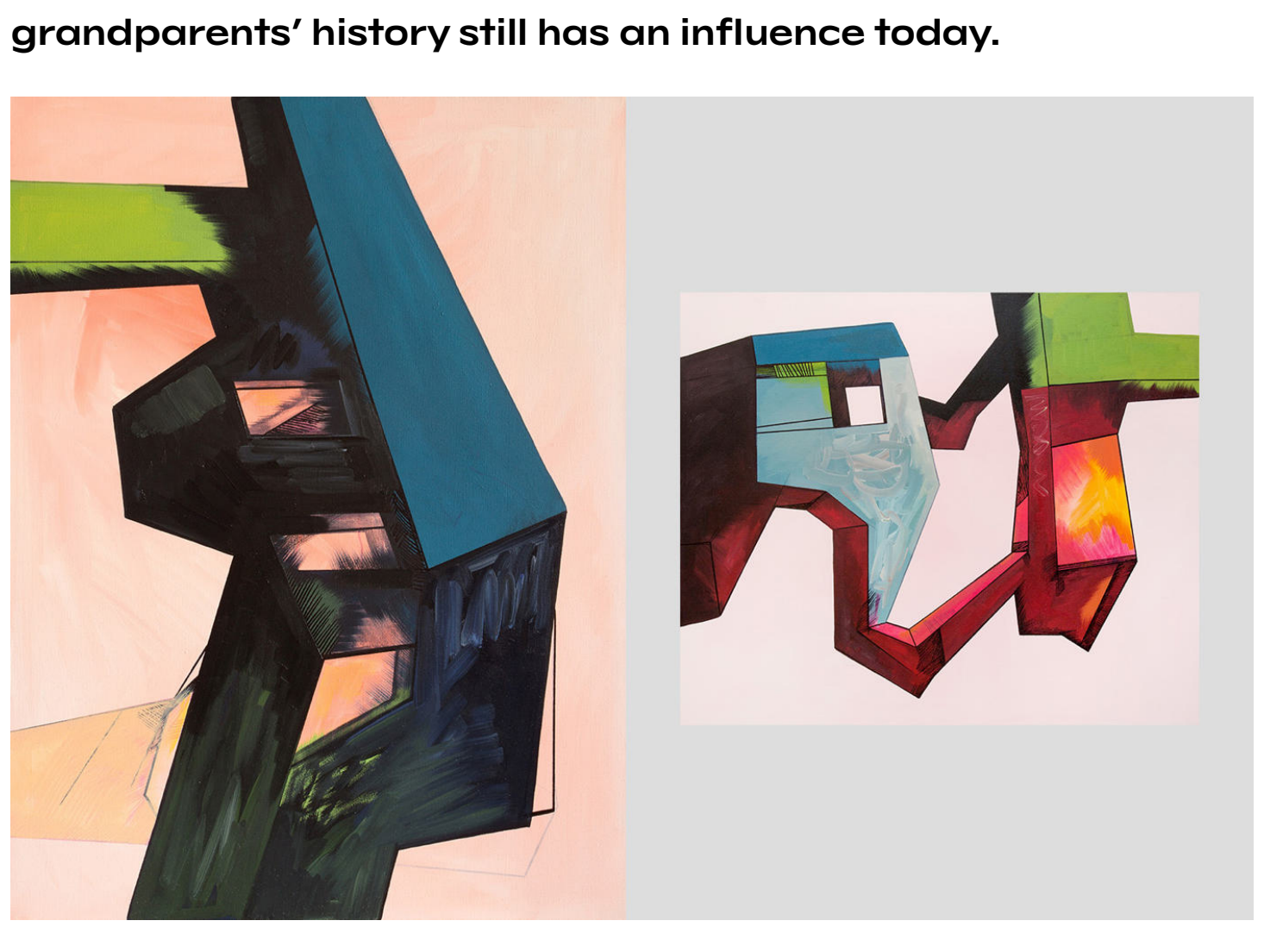


The artist in her studio. Right: Ewa Doroszenko, Fragile organism, oil and acrylic on canvas, 100 × 100 cm, 2019. All images courtesy of the artist.

Warsaw-based intermedia artist Ewa Doroszenko's practice is a graphic showcase of blending classic photography with digital manipulation and traditional painting.

Doroszenko's works are made with great attention to detail—and an emphasis toward aesthetics. Yet underneath the obvious layers of beauty, the viewer can find the hidden, deeper issues, as if Doroszenko wants to tell us that, after all, everything is much more complicated than it seems.

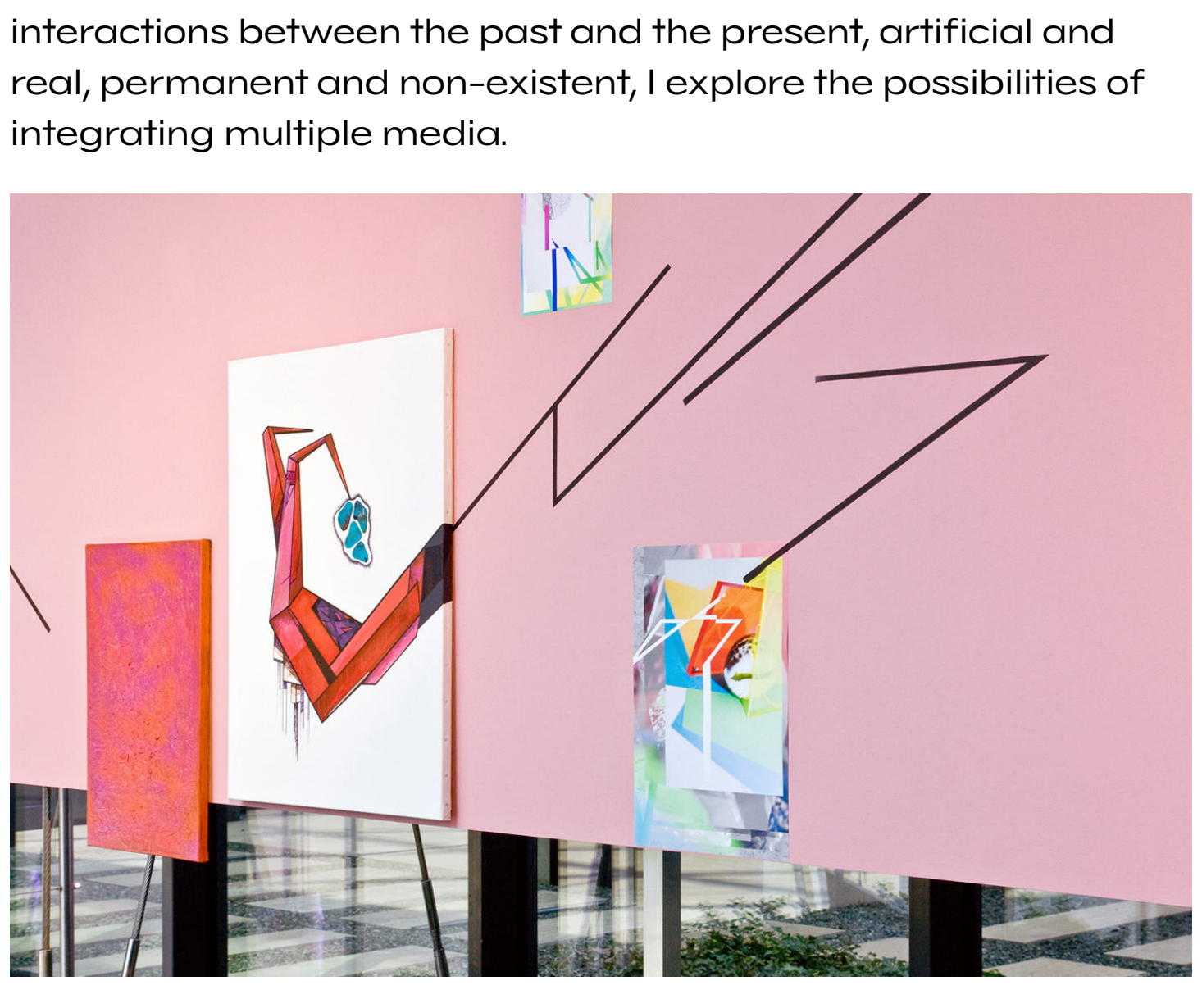
We spoke with Doroszenko about what her typical day as an artist looks like, how the people of her home country Poland are helping Ukrainians during the war, and how her grandparents' history still has an influence today.



Ewa Doroszenko, Female robot, oil and acrylic on canvas, 80 × 60 cm, 2017.
Right: Daily virtuality, oil, acrylic and marker on canvas, 80 × 100 cm, 2017.

What inspires you to create?

Ewa Doroszenko: I've long been inspired by recent technological changes, their impact on us, and the environment in which we live. I look at civilization's dependence on digital technology and its implications for everyday life in my work. I am a painter by education, but after graduation, I gradually expanded the scope of my work to other media: photography, video, web art, and digital graphics. However, regardless of the tools I chose, my artistic interests oscillate around the broadly understood relationship of humanity with technology. Using the interactions between the past and the present, artificial and real, permanent and non-existent, I explore the possibilities of integrating multiple media.

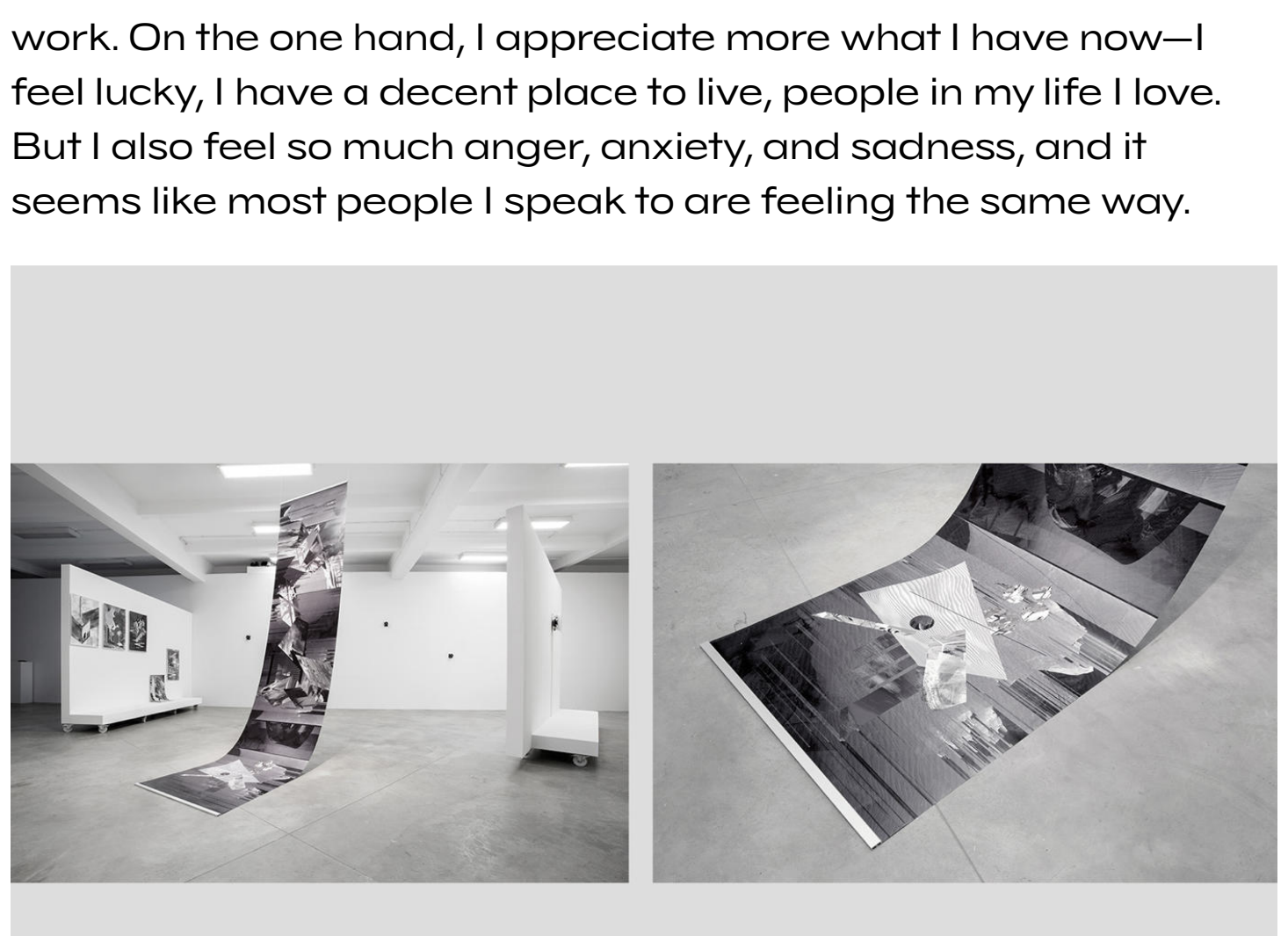


Ewa Doroszenko, Future sex based on Parade amoureuse by Francis Picabia, painting installation, Starak Family Foundation, Warsaw, 2013.

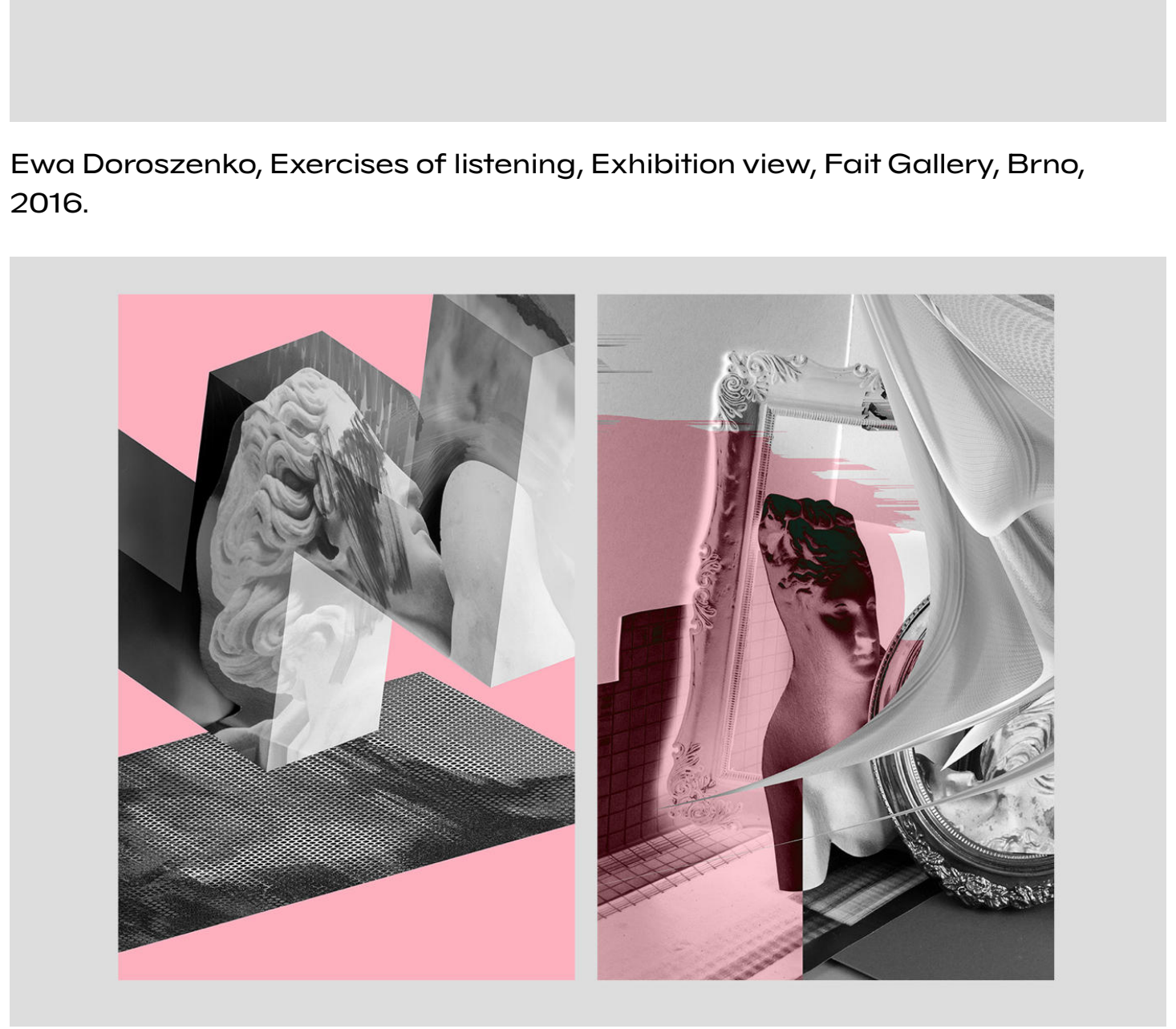
What's a typical day like for you? What did you do today?

Doroszenko: Many hours in the studio and in front of the computer screen is what my typical day looks like. But despite the structured practice, there is also room in my life for experimentation and creative opportunity. I am the type of person that does everything at once. When I think about creating new work, I try to create structures with many layers of meaning. Much of my work is just growing organically. As I mainly work on long-term projects, at one point, my head acts as a set of drawers in which I sort my pictures. I love working with lots of open books around me. Before each new project, I create a kind of reading base around me; I read and take notes.

Today is a less creative day. I am frightened by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. So it is hard for me to focus on creative work. On the one hand, I appreciate more what I have now—I feel lucky, I have a decent place to live, people in my life I love. But I also feel so much anger, anxiety, and sadness, and it seems like most people I speak to are feeling the same way.



Ewa Doroszenko, Exercises of listening, Exhibition view, Fait Gallery, Brno, 2016.



Ewa Doroszenko, The Promise of Sublime Words, photographic print on archival paper, 2018.

How do you balance the creativity of being an artist with the business demands of being an entrepreneur? What are the biggest challenges that come with both?

Doroszenko: It is difficult to navigate the art world's rules because they seem to change from case to case. Also, I have to find the motivation and discipline to keep regular studio hours and stay focused; no one else will dictate that to me. Another challenge that I think many of us can relate to is balancing my studio practice with the need to survive. My studio practice always comes first, but my time and energy are precious resources that I am forced to share. Furthermore, I feel it is difficult to do new things when people know you from what you have done. Even if evolution and growth are necessary, they can sometimes be against market demands.

Do you think that artists are obligated to be socially and politically engaged? Can you talk a little about the situation in Poland with the current war in Ukraine?

Doroszenko: In the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Polish folks have shown extraordinary mobilization and solidarity. More than 1.6 million people have come to Poland from Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's invasion. The scale of the problem is enormous, and as of today, it's difficult to imagine what the actual effects will be in the coming years. Since its start, Poles have been helping refugees from Ukraine in extraordinary ways. According to current polls, three out of four Poles have been or are involved in helping refugees from Ukraine. They offer shelter, transport people and gifts, rent hotels and help prepare temporary accommodation in schools or kindergartens. Many localities conduct material collections and establish first contact points, night shelters, and hotlines.

Artists are helping too, for example, by donating their works to auctions in support of people from Ukraine. Polish artists document and investigate manifestations of social activism, grassroots initiatives to oppose political decisions, and violations of democratic principles and human rights. Instead of regular exhibition activities, many cultural institutions help organize the lives of Ukrainians in Poland. For example, the Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin set up a daycare center for refugee children and youth from Ukraine in one of its spaces, providing care and several creative activities with Ukrainian speakers. The ING Polish Art Foundation, usually preparing educational projects for Polish visual artists, is expanding its program this year with classes for Ukrainian artists.

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Our society has shown acts of solidarity in the past, but they concerned smaller groups. I live in Warsaw, where the influence of World War II can still be felt today. My grandparents spent many years of their lives in Soviet camps, which had a huge impact on my parents' lives and indirectly my life as well. The Second World War is key to understanding Poland's historical mentality regarding traumatic experiences and the process of seeking identity. The significance of the war for Polish culture is, therefore, mostly psychological. For many artists of those times, for example Jonasz Stern, Andrzej Wróblewski, Tadeusz Kantor, Mirosław Bałka or even Zbigniew Libera, the search for identity became a very important element.

I believe that in the current political situation, any level of social engagement is necessary. But I don't think that every artist is obliged to change the artistic formula they have worked out over the years of social activism. Art is a very broad space where social and political activities occupy an important place, but they are not the only ones.

What challenges have you encountered on your artistic journey that you didn't expect at the beginning?

Doroszenko: There have been many! I am a bit of an introverted person, but the whole art industry is largely based on making contacts and reaching out to people. I still have huge problems with it. I don't like vernissages; I prefer to spend my time working in my studio. Money is another challenge. Creating works and showing them to people, such as preparing exhibitions, applying for competitions, grants, etc., is incredibly expensive and time-consuming.

What would you like to tell the world through your art? What feelings do you hope to inspire in the viewer?

Doroszenko: I am interested in various contemporary issues, especially in the importance of the image in a technological reality, the fluidity of female beauty standards, and the relationship between the environment and technology.

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Each of my projects focuses on a slightly different issue—I would like to invite the viewer through the project's subject matter and its form. My projects are made with great attention to detail, and I think they can evoke positive associations. However, under the layer of the aesthetic visible form, there are deeper issues hidden. I would like the form of my project to attract the viewer's attention but provoke reflection at the same time. After all, everything is much more complicated than it seems.

If you weren't an artist, what would you do?

Doroszenko: It's difficult for me to imagine an alternative scenario of my life. For as long as I can remember, I have been very fond of biology. I have been particularly fascinated by evolutionary psychology and neurobiology. So I suppose I would choose a profession related to that field of study.

What was a moment when you were very discouraged, and how did you get past it?

Doroszenko: Discouragement is a common feeling in any artist's life, and I think we are all aware of that. Like many of us, I struggled at times with the lack of resources necessary to create, or from the inadequate demands of an employer. There have been times when I have been asked to work for free or to give my work away for free, or I received payment for the work I have done late. The same old stories! I think issues around the value of artwork are still some of the most salient in the creative industries.

Tell us about your next big project.

Doroszenko: There are some interesting projects ahead of me. Together with my husband, Jacek Doroszenko, I am working on "View of the oceans," an exhibition that will be included in the main program of this year's Krakow Photomonth. Our project consists of video and photography works created as part of the Artist-in-Residence programs in Greece, Lithuania, and Portugal. We explore how digital images and the latest technologies mediate perception of the natural world. Looking at the textures of landscapes and surfaces—both naturally occurring and simulated—we try to emphasize the role of photography through navigating the current world.

Ewa Doroszenko, Double speaker, Exhibition view, Exgirlfriend Gallery, Berlin, 2018.

AWT

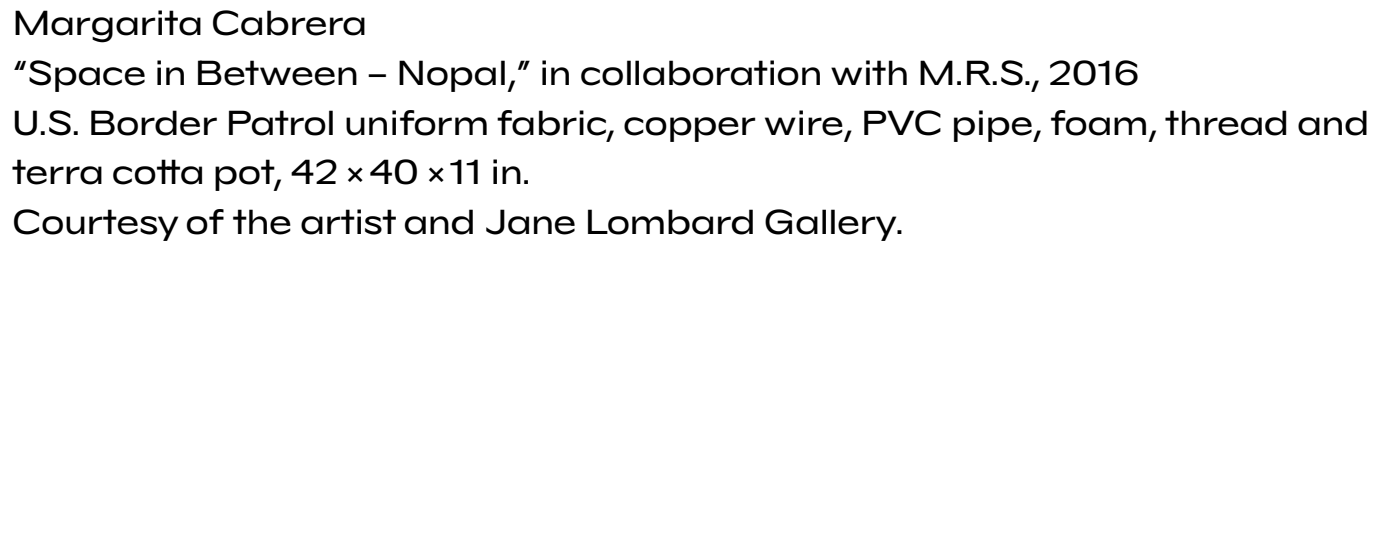
By The AWT Editors

We are a publication dedicated to reshaping society's ideas of "women's things" within arts and culture. At present, gender and racial parity have not been reached when it comes to publishing, museum acquisitions, gallery showings, and film and theater works.

Soft Sculpture, Hard Politics at Frieze Los Angeles

March 02, 2026

On view at Frieze Los Angeles from Feb. 26 to March 1, 2026, Margarita Cabrera's "Space in Between" filled Jane Lombard Gallery's booth with soft sculptures of desert plants. Each form began with a U.S. Border Patrol uniform and ended as a saguaro or prickly pear, sewn in community workshops. The installation situated immigration policy within a living ecosystem. Cabrera reflects on transformation, care and collective authorship.



Margarita Cabrera
"Space in Between – Nopal," in collaboration with M.R.S., 2016
U.S. Border Patrol uniform fabric, copper wire, PVC pipe, foam, thread and terra cotta pot, 42 × 40 × 11 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery.

Margarita Cabrera
"Space in Between – Bisnaga," in collaboration with J.D. (Mexico/USA), 2016
U.S. Border Patrol uniform fabric, copper wire, PVC pipe, foam, thread and terra cotta pot, 50 × 18 × 18 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Jane Lombard Gallery.

Your work often begins with U.S. border officer uniforms and ends as indigenous desert plants. What does the shift from fabric that's no longer "worn" but "grown" mean to you?

Margarita Cabrera: "The Space in Between" project centers the resilience of the desert landscape as cacti are able to survive and thrive in the most extreme and harsh of environments.

The main material of the "Space in Between" project is the border patrol uniform fabric which functions as a symbol of power and control representing violence, family separation, deportation, and death. The deconstruction of the uniform as a power symbol is cathartic for the participants who experience a strong emotional release as they cut through uniform leg seams, zippers, linings, and more and collectively construct new landscapes of belonging and care where all individuals have the right to a dignified life and self-determination.

> Embroidery as a textile artform exists as a live archive, a form of memory.

In many works, the pockets, seams, patches, and labels remain visible. What do you want the viewer to recognize once they notice those remnants?

MC: The soft sculptures' anthropomorphic shapes are presented as a new landscape meant to physically engage the viewer in a discovery of uniform elements. The various life-size sculptural saguaros, prickly pears, and agaves, invite viewers to literally move about the existing clustered landscape in an investigative mode much like the antagonistic role of an ICE officer "hunting" for bodies. On the other hand, I see the soft image of a power/military symbol simultaneously implies that new forms are possible, and that we are capable of transforming elements of violence into artistic elements of hope.

The stitched imagery and text feel like both ornament and evidence. How do you think about embroidery in your practice?

MC: Embroidery as a textile artform exists as a live archive, a form of memory. Inscribed epistemology of creating/making and imagining futurity. Sewing with colorful threads is a form of resistance where each thread protects the stories of communities that refuse to be erased.

You've worked with immigrant seamstresses and community workshop participants whose contributions carry specific personal histories. How do you structure collaboration, so it stays ethical and reciprocal rather than extractive?