



# **Nadya Tolokonnikova (Pussy Riot) *POLICE STATE***

June 5–15, 2025

The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

In *POLICE STATE*, Nadya Tolokonnikova (b. 1989 Norilsk, Russia) explores the omnipresent mechanisms of control, surveillance, and the alienation of living under systems of power. The work transforms WAREHOUSE into a visceral panopticon—a space where observers and the observed exist in a perpetual dance of oppression, resistance, and exposure.

This durational performance and installation centers on a confined cell—a symbolic nucleus of human resilience to state power. Tolokonnikova occupies the cell at all times throughout the performance, sewing garments as she did in prison and creating a spectrum of soundscapes, from eerie lullabies to harsh bursts of noise. Artworks sent to Tolokonnikova by current and formerly incarcerated Russian, Belarusian, and American political prisoners line the interior walls of the cell. The space becomes both a prison and a sanctuary, a site where despair meets defiance and silence gives way to radical acts of creation.

Surrounding the cell, the installation integrates Tolokonnikova's signature iconography with elements that reinforce the weight of surveillance—custom banners and a neon cross hang next to a guard tower and a live feed of Tolokonnikova streams alongside archival footage from Russian prisons. Works from Tolokonnikova's *Icon* series, featuring bed sheets made by American and Belarussian prison industries, watch over the space, morphing into characters in Tolokonnikova's world.

A paradox of confinement and liberation, *POLICE STATE* both confronts the brutality of control and insists on the possibility of catharsis and connection.

“In *POLICE STATE*, the audience’s role is crucial. They navigate the voyeuristic architecture of the installation, peering through peepholes to catch fractured glimpses of my exhibitionist presence. In this act, they become complicit in the structures of surveillance. ‘We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism,’ writes Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

As I proceeded back to jail after receiving my two-year sentence in 2012, surrounded by a motorcade of police cars—in front, behind, on the right and left—me and my Pussy Riot comrades rushed along the streets of Moscow. If you screw your eyes shut, there’s now no difference between me and Putin—he gets sped through the city in his motorcade and I’m getting sped through the city in mine. The rest is mere detail. As in Foucault, whose *Discipline and Punish* I read in my cell: ‘In the darkest region of the political field the condemned man represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king.’

Freedom, to me, is the courage to stick to ideals and dreams in a world that’s abandoned both. In a Hunger Games society, we’re stubborn enough to start a new religion—through art. A punk faith that empowers the powerless and resists the transformation of our world into a global police state. I invite the audience to grapple with the mechanisms of oppression while seeking the sparks of hope that resist it.

*POLICE STATE* is a call to find light in the darkest places and to resist through creation.”

—Nadya Tolokonnikova

*POLICE STATE* concludes on Sunday June 15, 2025 with a conversation between Tolokonnikova and artists **Fulton Leroy Washington (aka MR WASH)** and **Aleksandra “Sasha” Skochilenko**, moderated by Alex Sloane, Associate Curator. The talk is followed by a concert with **Pussy Riot Siberia**.



Tolokonnikova wishes to acknowledge and celebrate the following political prisoners and ex-political prisoners who sent their artworks to be included in *POLICE STATE*:

Yegor Balazeykin	Pavel Krisevich*
Anya Bazhutova	Zhenya Makarenko
Andrey Boyarshinov	MERCH (MAD SOCIETY)*
Sergey Brukhanov	Oleg Navalny*
Ilya Chabovsky (Belarus)*	Network Case: Ilya Shakursky,
Aleksandr Dotsenko	Dima Pchelintsev
Asya Dudyaeva	Angel Nikolaev
DEAD CITY PUNX*	Oleg Orlov*
Polina Evtushenko	Ludmila Razumova
Manzur Guzman*	Sasha Skochilenko*
Sergey Kabanov	Tumen Case: Daniil Chertykov,
Artem Kamardi	Nikita Oleynik, Yury Neznamov,
Yan Katelevskiy	Denis Aidyn
Daniil Kluka	Xadad*
Pavel Korshunov	

\*Ex-political prisoners

## BIO

**Nadya Tolokonnikova** is a conceptual performance artist, activist, and the creator of Pussy Riot, a global feminist art movement. In 2012, she was sentenced to two years' imprisonment following an anti-Putin performance *Punk Prayer*. The Guardian named *Punk Prayer* among the best art pieces of the 21st century.

Tolokonnikova's presentation of her installation *Putin's Ashes* at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, Los Angeles in 2023 propelled her into a new criminal case and put her on Russia's most wanted criminal list. In 2024 her debut museum exhibition *RAGE*, opened at OK Linz, Linz, Austria, and the eponymous performance was presented at Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany.

Tolokonnikova's work is in the collections of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; Museum of Art and Design, New York; and the American Folk Art Museum, New York among others.

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With thanks to Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin; Honor Fraser Gallery, Los Angeles; and Turner Carroll Gallery, Santa Fe.

## DONATE

**Mediazona:** A Russian-language media outlet focused on political prisoners and Russia's war on Ukraine. Co-founded by Nadya Tolokonnikova in 2014 following her release from prison. It is one of the most widely read independent media outlets in Russia. <https://donate.zona.media/en>



**Art Action Foundation:** Founded and led by Nadya Tolokonnikova, dedicated to fighting the erasure of artists by authoritarian or pro-authoritarian governments and preserving their legacies against censorship and repression, as well as assisting artists-at-risk in staying alive.

<https://donate.stripe.com/6oEdT8coy28CdmUdQQ>



Nadya Tolokonnikova (Pussy Riot), *POLICE STATE*, is presented as part of Wonmi's WAREHOUSE Programs.

Wonmi's WAREHOUSE Programs is organized by Alex Sloane, Associate Curator, and is produced by Amelia Charter, Producer of Performance and Programs with Michele Huizar, Performance Coordinator, The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles.

Wonmi's WAREHOUSE Programs is founded by Wonmi & Kihong Kwon and Family.

Performances at MOCA are supported by the MOCA Fund for Performance with generous funding provided by Betsy Greenberg and The Lenore S. and Bernard A. Greenberg Fund.

Cover: Nadya Tolokonnikova, July 27, 2019 Moscow, Russia. Image courtesy of Pussy Riot.

Page 4: Pussy Riot Siberia. Performance documentation from Neue Nationalgalerie, July 4 2024.

Photo by Max Avdeev.