

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

Pam Rosenblatt

Somerville artist Anya Malkina and her unwearable art

ON A CHILLY THURSDAY, November 13, 2014, Wilderness House Literary Review's arts editor Pam Rosenblatt entered the creative, artistic studio of Somerville artist Anya Malkina, a mask maker, a puppeteer, a hat maker, and a painter, to interview Malkina. The article that follows developed from that interview.

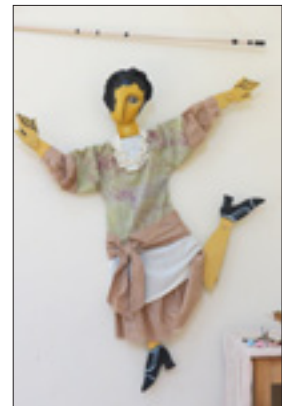
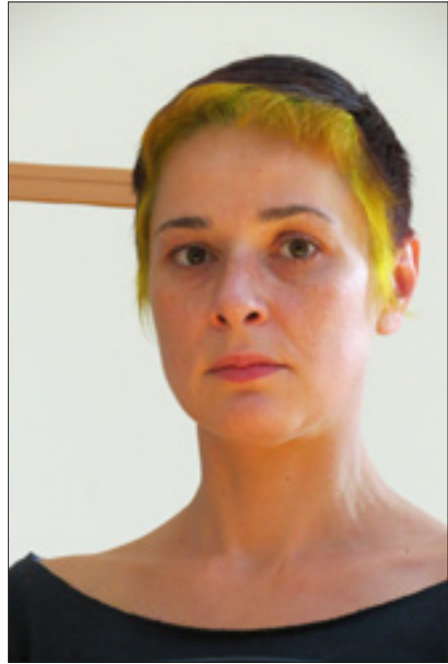
Clothes are often said to make the man – or the woman. And while she agrees that traditional clothing attire is often attractive, Somerville artist Anya Malkina thinks it may be worthwhile for the traditions to change. Perhaps men should try wearing skirts! Not the practical Scottish quilts that men wear at festive occasions or that they once used as blankets during wartime, but actual skirts and dresses that fashionable women put on every day. And why not? After all women often sport pants these days!

Malkina enjoys making things: masks; life-size puppets, or as she calls them “marionettes”; and hats. A lot of her artwork is unwearable art.

Her paper Marché masks are usually made to be decorative and perhaps to place on one of her life-size marionettes. Several of her creative masks have been used by the Boston Lyric Opera in their October 2013 production of “The Magic Flute” and by the A.R.T./MXAT institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University in “The Fourth Graders Present an Unnamed Love Suicide” directed by Marcus Stern.

She also creates dresses out of fabrics or simply out of paper. But these, too, are not wearable. Unwearable art is symbolic for Malkina. “[Clothing] is something created by people and used by people. And art is something of an idea, something that's very innovative. So there's a fine art and craft. I think that even though my dresses might seem like they are a craft, they're not. They are not wearable!”

“Behind the dress” is a large work-in-progress



Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

designed in the shape of a dress. It has green and magenta colored transparent fabrics in the shape of large squares with black fabric outlining the many squared dress. Malkina plans to place little vignettes behind the squares. So, while this artwork looks like a dress, it is not created to be worn by a woman, or a man! It is more of an installation piece.

Malkina hope to display "Behind the dress" somewhere once it is completed.

Like her unwearable dresses, she has created marionettes that are not your typical puppets, for they are five feet to six feet tall, are made out of paper, and show off fabrics that are no longer wearable by people. They have strings and have certain "joints" like at the upper torso that are movable, and wear hand-designed masks that are unwearable by people. She has created eight marionettes and some paintings that are part of her 2014 installation titled "Dancing Souls". Although she thinks that the puppets may be used on a stage, Malkina simply designed them as unwearable, decorative art.



Besides dresses and marionettes, Malkina also creates wearable hats made out of paper, fabric, wire, beads, glue, and more. Many of her hats show off her illustration ability as she has painted images of a brain, a fetus, and a heart on some of the hats. These hats may be worn but they look fine hanging up on a wall or even simply sitting on a table.



Malkina is also a painter. She enjoys working with acrylics and gauche. She paints people in imaginative scenes. "The Puppeteer" (30" x 40"), a 2014 acrylic on canvas, is an intriguing visual artwork of a "puppeteer person".

Malkina said, "I decided not to put a lot of accent on his gender or age...It's like you talk or you have to present yourself somehow every day. You have to treat yourself with respect. You have to be careful with people you choose to be around. So it's pretty much like being your own puppeteer."

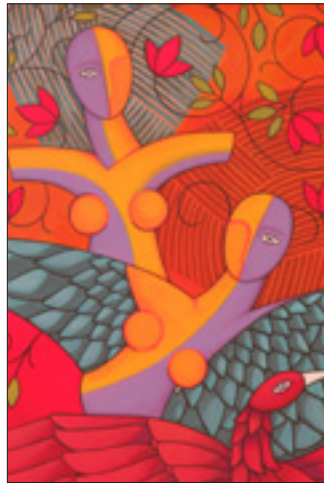
She placed small circular mirrors in "The Puppeteer" so that children can participate and be a part of that artwork. They can see their reflections in these tiny mirrors.

Malkina enjoys her puppets so much that she has decided to paint an artificial environment for them represented by several panels with oversized illustrations of a chair, a couch, a table with a vase, and more. There

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

are no human characters found in any of these panels. The details are intricate and eye-catching.

Interested in patterns, Malkina is not afraid to be “kitschy or mismatched...I am really confident that [what I am doing] is what is right!” she said. In fact, she is so positive about her artistic direction that she has made two novel acrylic on canvas paintings called “Kitch 1” (36” x 48”) and “Kitch 2” (24” x 36”).



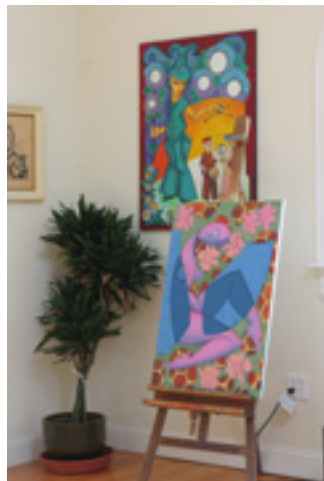
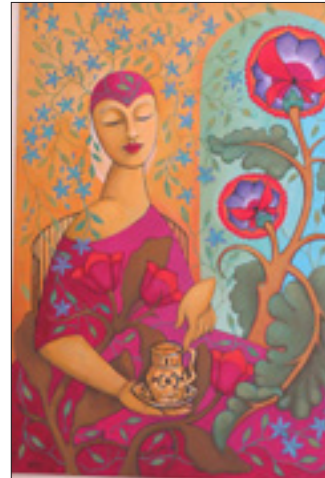
She likes to figure out what shapes go together and what shapes do not work well together. To Malkina, patterns show movement and the painted colors stimulate different emotions and feelings. “Red stimulates your appetite... while green calms you down. But patterns do the same thing. Sometimes you’re looking at a pattern and it makes you feel very calm....,” Malkina said.

Malkina tends to use a variety of colors in her paintings. She is not a big fan of minimalism.

“I don’t like minimalistic painting where there is minimal colors, minimal light,” she admitted. “It’s just not me.”

“Bird” (36” x 48”) is another interesting painting that Malkina completed in 2014. “I also had another ‘Bird’ painting, so I [named them] ‘Bird I’ and ‘Bird II’. I don’t know. It’s kind of personal. It was mostly coming out of a not very good situation. I needed to be strong. Not just fly out. And then becoming human again through experience....”

“Bird’ is pretty dynamic with this high contrast,” she commented.



Malkina would not term her art exactly illustration but she does call it “My art” and agrees that it is imaginative art a little similar to Marc Chagall, whose work she appreciates because of its storytelling. Pieces like her painting “The Puppeteer” or her bulky handmade mask of the Russian folklore character “Baba Yaga” suggest stories, too.

Communication is important to Malkina, and she tries to communicate ideas to her audience through her artworks. She believes people should create things. “I think making [art] is a very nice way of communicating!” she said.

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

Malkina is not the only artist in her family. Her mother is an artist and her father worked as a stage builder/designer in Russia. Malkina moved to the United States over eighteen years ago.

To contact Anya Malkina, please email her at schtuch@gmail.com.

