

*Advertising&Beyond*  
*Context and Situatedness*  
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1022287

# *Research Publication*





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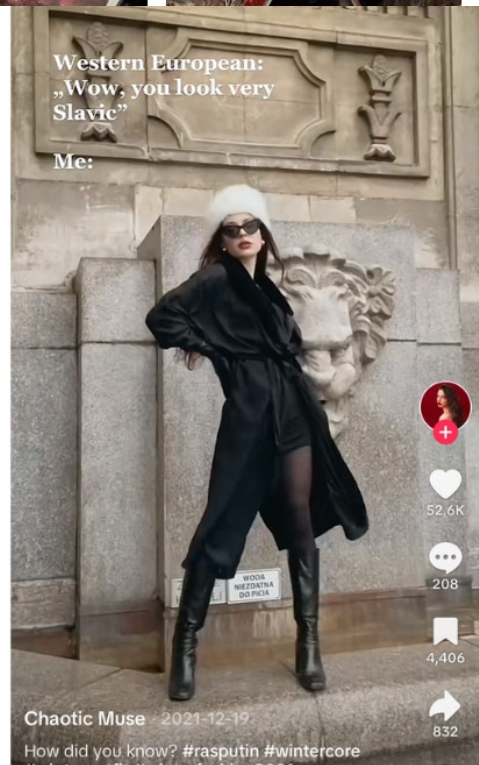
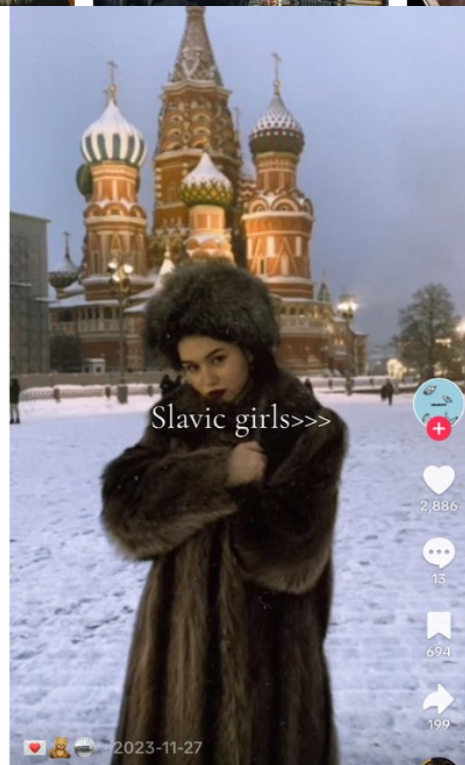
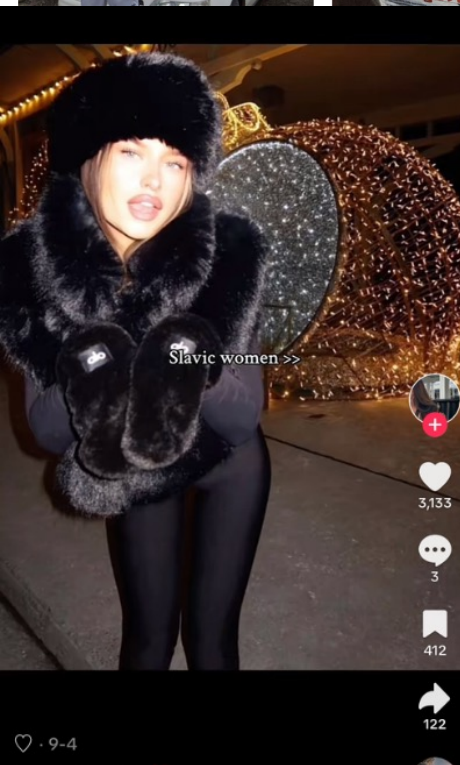
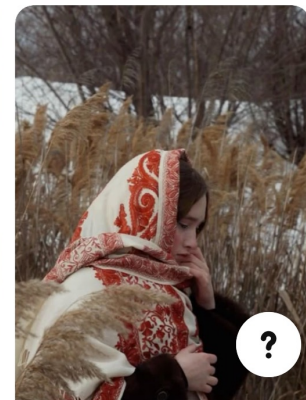
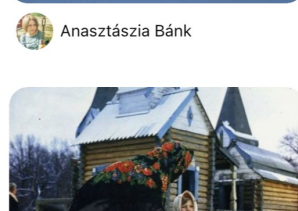
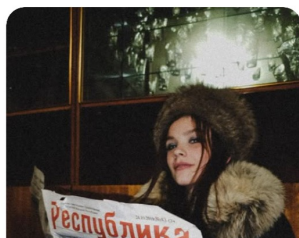
*Part I*  
*Introduction*

*Living abroad gives one the opportunity to see how your nationality is perceived. As a Polish woman working part-time as a waitress, many encounters were filled with stereotypical assumptions. This, combined with the recent rise of the 'Slavic Aesthetic' on social media, made me notice a deep misunderstanding of Polish women.*

*I started thinking “Why are these images and stereotypes hurting me so much?”*

*People’s perception of Polish women is upsettingly reduced to physical beauty. But what actually comes with being one of us, is not beautiful.*

*Therefore, after seeing another post on social media with the hashtag #SlavicCore, I knew what my next work would be about.*

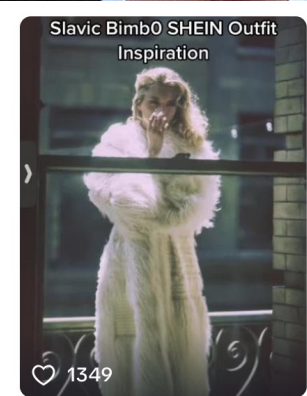


beautiful women ❤️  
#slavicwomen#slavic#pinterestaes... more

Screenshots from social media and images showing the Slavic aesthetic trend.

nd - @Chaotic Muse orig





#slavicbimbo...

slavicvika

48.5K



Slavic girls na shein★||...

tattydossant...

47.6K



guuys I have my own...

sheinthebest1

1333



Slavic girl outfit >>>...

isy\_mi

16.2K



#slavic #slavicgirl #viral...

the\_real.lea\_

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Screenshots from social media and images showing the Slavic aesthetic trend.



## *What is The Issue?*

*My project investigates the invisible emotional labour and responsibilities placed on young-adult Polish women - burdens shaped by history, family expectations, and gender norms.*

*Rooted in deep generational trauma, mental health problems are greatly present within Polish society. This results in various family dysfunctions, ranging from alcoholism to family affairs to unhealthy mother-daughter relationships...*

*As women, daughters are raised to be compassionate, understanding and self-sacrificing - to put themselves last. Later in their life, this results in overwhelming mental burdens. Their families see them as “The Savior” or “The Healer”, yet their efforts go unrecognized.*

## *What is The Goal?*

*I want to put these women on a pedestal – give them the recognition they deserve but rarely receive. At the same time, the first step towards any meaningful change, is to expose this reality and let people acknowledge it.*

*This work aims both to raise awareness within Polish society and to empower the women by making their efforts visible.*



## *Why Now?*

*Nowadays, this issue is practically invisible. It is so deeply engraved in Poland, that both the daughters and their families take it for granted.*

*Now, that mental health is getting recognized by Poland's younger generation, there is an opportunity to challenge old patterns and avoid adding another layer to an already complex generational trauma.*

## *Why Me?*

*To answer this question, I will quote Agnieszka Apoznańska – a Polish artist I met through my visit to Art Rotterdam in March and interviewed (see Appendix A).*

*"You know this topic from the inside, so that's an advantage. (...) You can really add your own voice to these women's voices. As someone who both analyses and experiences it. (...) You have your own perspective, which gives you the tools to be able to talk about it."*

*By being on the inside of the issue, I can ensure authenticity and depth.*

### Subject?

What is the daily reality of young-adult women born and raised in Poland and how impactful was generational trauma in their life?

- Slavic Aesthetic
- a straight-forward response to all shallow information about Slavic women getting popular online. In contrast to what is being shared on the Internet, the project shows what it really means to come from a small country.

### What?

show the ugly reality through stories of real women in a very visual way. By telling the work by the voice of all the women, I hope more people will come out of "telling their story" on falling for such shallow and inconsistent images without giving a thought to whether these stereotypes exist and what ugly truth might be behind them. No critical thinking and no comparison.

### How?

three main research points:  
- not important - the young women themselves and their stories, in-depth interviews about their life  
- how history affects the society, damage done so far over years is now coming out in very old ways in families - superstitions, old beliefs - where do the peak of it today  
- painting - how is elevated the subject to almost a saintly position  
- putting the women on paintings is giving them the highest admiration and appreciation they deserve. It is visually showing what reality is and giving people an opportunity to realize the truth that large silent battle about

### Me?

I am one of them and maybe one of few that realizes the wrongness of the situation and wants to do something about it. Since it's something that affects us deeply every single day, it keeps me strongly motivated and to that I am the worst as well, so I am telling it my real story - the reality it would get away reliable source.

### Urgency?

It brings the unconscious and subconscious going and might do light for the first time. These responsibilities are no present, nobody needs mean like a problem before of the mindset. The daughters were raised in, they were complaining but then struggle daily to manage their life and emotions.

### Innovative?

None. Nobody talks about this in

### HOW can I REPRESENT the life?

How can I represent the women born and raised in Poland in Polish families, aged 20-28, in an authentic way, that combats the recently popularised view on Slavic women called "Slavic Core"? and the strong stereotypes

✳️ **HOW can I REPRESENT** Emphasizes that it's coming from me and it's personal (a gift)

What medium is best for achieving the desired outcome?

✳️ **the WOMEN BORN and RAISED IN POLAND** How do I choose a good representative sample?  
Specifics and sets conditions for the represented and researched group

✳️ **in an AUTHENTIC WAY** How do I find out the real authentic image of these women?  
shows need to research (get the information from the source, so Participatory Research, specifically interviews

✳️ that combats the **STRONG STEREOTYPE** and the recently popularised view on Slavic women, called "**SLAVIC CORE**"?  
shows WHY this project is made and specific the aim of it towards a viewer.  
What is the current representation and image of Polish (Slavic) women in popular and visual culture?

**\*starting question\***

### The Research Question

What is the daily reality of being a young-adult Polish woman in present times?

### Research Questions?

Focus

medium

researcher

participants

Contexts

Structure

Interview

Can't to Main Question

### Research Stages

1. how are Polish (Slavic) women shown in pop and visual culture?

2. interviewing women from different backgrounds to find out what it REALLY means to be a Polish woman?

3. what medium and how do I use to give the recognition to the Polish girls?

4. what criteria to create for the paintings, so research participants - what is the best way to include the text from the interviews

### Research Questions

Make reflection on your research question and sub-questions a regular part of your process. You can be playful and experimental in your approach.

o make all the words in your question as specific as possible. Instead of "people" say "year olds living in the city", "night become 'fictionalised documentary', 'technology' become 'algorithmic workplace'".

It, make terms such as 'more', 'or' or 'best' as specific as possible. How will you measure it? It doesn't have to be quantified. You can also describe or visualise it.

cover implicit ideas and phrases you have about your topic describing or visualising desired lines.

> Divide your research question into sub-questions and plot them on the circle model. Does the question require research by making, participatory research or research of context? Are certain actions missing?

> Reformulate your question and change it from "what" to "how" or vice versa. Is the question about theoretical knowledge or about making something? Is it about you or about others? Does it offer an action or a reflection?

> Add and remove the "I" from your question and see what happens. What are your stakes and curiosities? What can also position yourself in relation to your questions in a visual way.

> Say "why" five times to go deeper into your question. It works best if someone else asks you. What is your driving force and where do you see the urgency of your research? Why?

### Research question is:

specific, clear and concise;  
precise, clear and concise;  
structuring mechanism;  
work in progress;  
guide along the way.

Research question is:  
yet unanswered;  
open-ended (not a yes-or-no question);  
specific, clear and concise;  
structuring mechanism;  
work in progress;  
guide along the way.

must be also eye-catching and interesting to the viewer - because this is something that's not talked about a lot and it's not related to many people but I want people to acknowledge the issue and learn the stories of the wise Polish women

- it is something for the girl, for a tangible gesture? it has to have the grandness and the II MUST FEEL LIKE A GRAND GESTURE, a legacy piece

Research included in "Grand Plan"

2. Table of pros and cons

Conclusion:

Painting is the most suitable medium to achieve the main objective, which is giving the girls the tribute. It must be accompanied by something to include the parts of the interviews

Now need to:

- research painting (portrait) to make initial
- figure out how to include the text

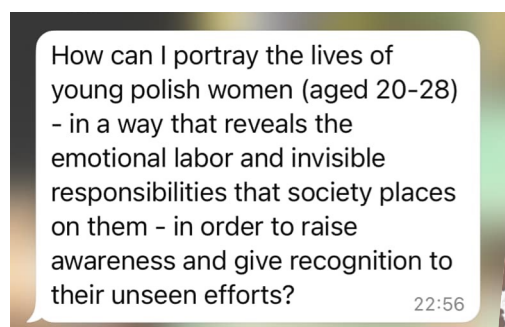
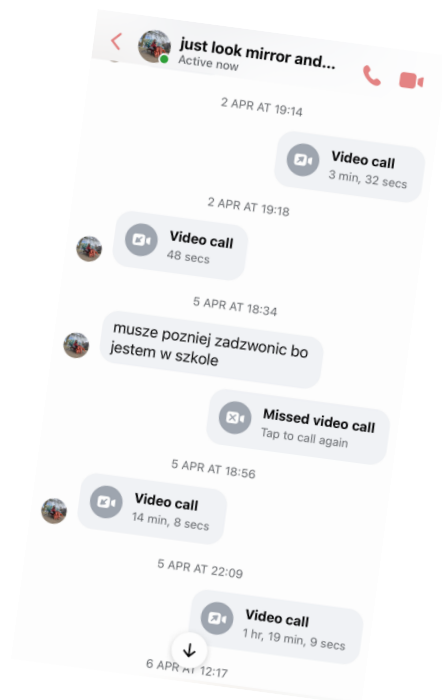
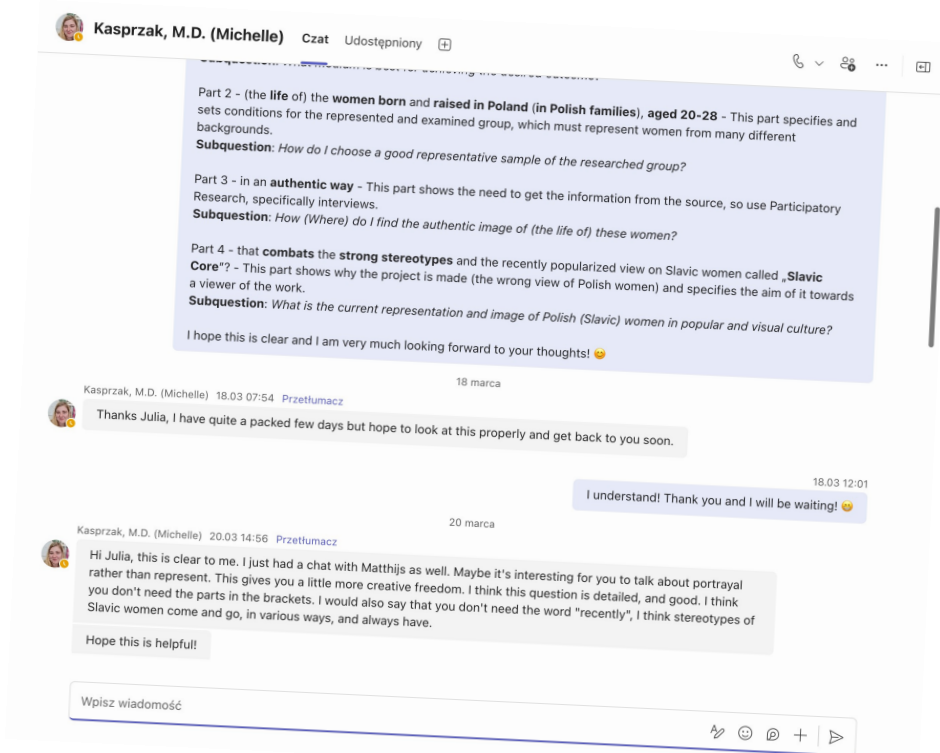
\*\*\* research

have a specific group women

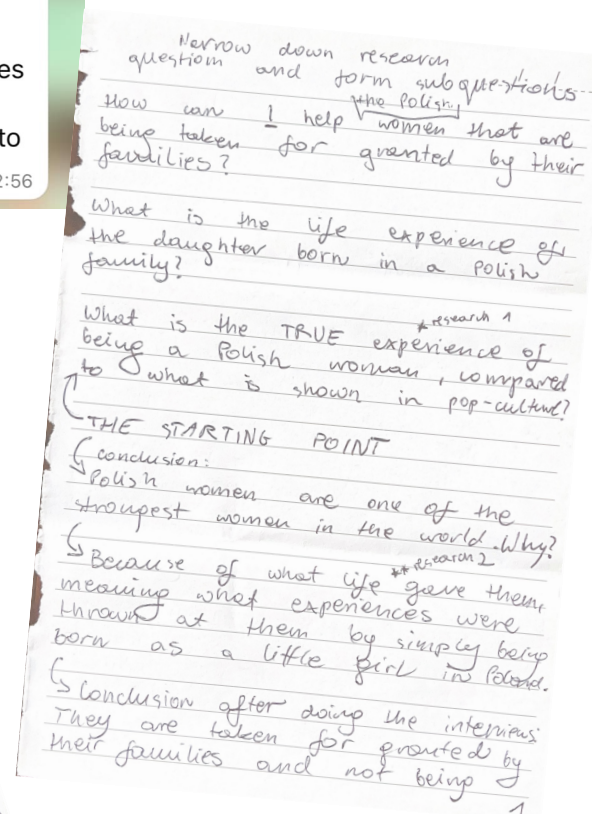
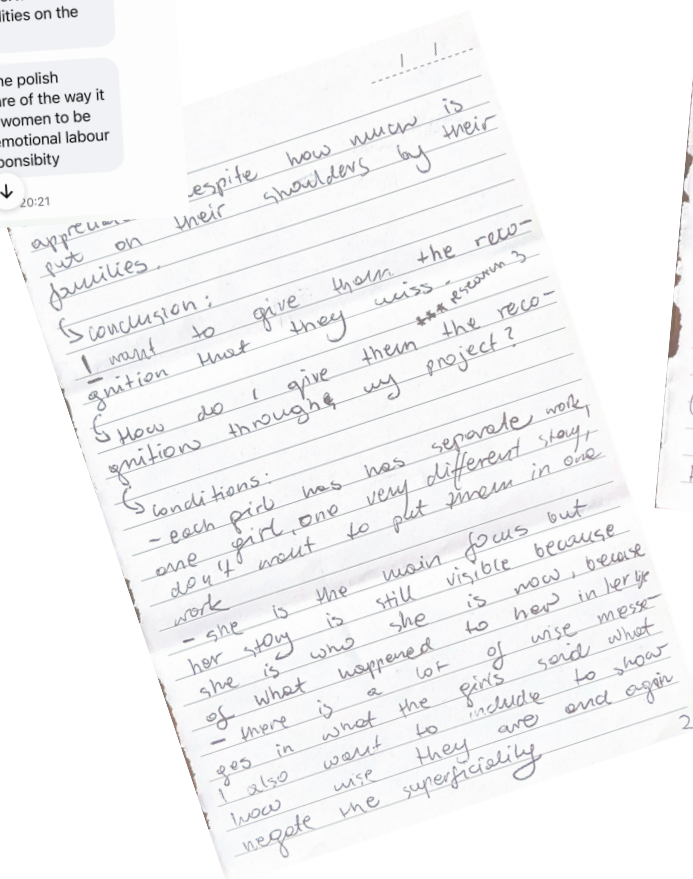
3. how can I represent them in a way that combats slavic aesthetic

- intention as an artist give a gift





*\*final question\**



*So, I finally asked...*

*How can I portray the lives of young adult Polish women in an authentic way, that reveals the invisible emotional labour and responsibilities society places on them, in order to raise awareness and give recognition to their unseen efforts?*

*And the main question posed a few sub-questions...*

*On authenticity and data collection*

*1. How can I ensure the authenticity of the stories and experiences of the women?*

*On the subject group*

*2. How do I select a representative and diverse sample of women?*

*On the content and issue*

*3. Why does this issue seem to be accepted by both society and the women themselves?*

*On the form of representation*

*4. What medium most effectively balances awareness-raising and recognition?*

*On dissemination*

*5. How can I make the work accessible to both the women portrayed and a wider Polish audience?*



*Part II*

*To Be a  
Polish Girl*

*Exploring the history of women in Poland, one of the first and most moving sources was the book “Chłopki: Opowieść o naszych babkach” (Peasants: The Story of Our Grandmothers) by Joanna Kuciel-Frydryszak. The title is a clever spin on the classic Polish novel “Chłopi (The Peasants)” by Władysław Reymont<sup>1</sup>. Kuciel-Frydryszak used the female version of the word, signalling a shift in focus.*

*The author chose a non-fiction approach to reveal the buried part of Polish history - the voices of peasant women. While many Poles could imagine what being a peasant woman meant, Kuciel-Frydryszak uses real stories to illustrate the harsh reality - domestic violence, poverty, and the endurance of these women - because reading it with your own eyes is much different from assuming.*

*“One autumn day, the seven-year-old daughter of the landlady with whom I was staying came back from the pasture, crying, frightened, and sick. While she was undressing for bed, her mother looked and saw that the child’s shirt was all bloody at the bottom, and the whole lower part of her belly was covered in congealed blood. Upon closer examination, it turned out that the girl had been raped. The child wandered around for a long time, sleepy and dazed, but on the third day, despite her cries, her mother sent her back out with the cows to the fallow field.”  
(Restorffowa)*

*This heavy but necessary book, that restored dignity for many women who suffered for generations, inspired me to use real stories in my work. My aim is to do for today’s generation of women what this book did for those of the past.*



*So, the question raised ...*

*How can I ensure the authenticity of  
the stories and experiences of young  
adult Polish women in the final work?*

*1 - who received the 1924 Nobel Prize in Literature for his work.*



*I chose to collect experiences of Polish women from diverse backgrounds, through in-depth interviews and keep a close collaboration throughout the whole project. The ongoing dialogue not only ensures genuine results, it also prevents me from projecting my own experience onto a whole demographic, since the project comes from a personal place.*



*The next step was clear – interview Polish women from Generation Z who have entered adulthood - defined here as at least two years post-high school (ages 20 to 28).*

*The interview structure had to be thoughtful and thorough to understand the past, present, and future of these women. Using guides from sources like “Strategies for Qualitative Interviews” (Harvard Department of Sociology), I began with preliminary research to acquaint myself with other aspects of living the life of a Polish woman, than the ones I know. I did that through more casual conversations with my Polish friends about their background, and by researching art from feminist Polish artists.*

*These preliminary conversations helped me to distance myself from my experience and reform some interview questions, for example, from “Do your parents put certain responsibilities on you daily?” to a more objective “Do you feel that because of your background, certain expectations and responsibilities are placed on you on regular basis?”*



Zofia Rydet, “Zapis Socjologiczny 1978-1990” – Picture zr\_01\_004\_03 portraying Joanna Papież, 1984.



Zofia Rydet, "Zapis Socjologiczny 1978-1990" – Picture zr\_01\_002\_05 portraying Aniela Mardula and Adam Matyga , 1984.



Zofia Rydet, "Zapis Socjologiczny 1978-1990" – Picture zr\_01\_006\_13 portraying Renata Antolak, 1984.





Iness Rychlik, "Self-Punishment", 2023.



Iness Rychlik, "The Maker", 2024.



Iness Rychlik, "The Edge of Subtlety", 2020.



Iness Rychlik, "Dissection", 2021.

*The works of Zofia Rydet, Natalia LL and Iness Rychlik had the biggest impact on what questions to ask (see Appendix B). In her photographic archive of Polish households, called “Zapis Socjologiczny (The Sociological Record)”, Rydet framed mostly women in their interiors. This inspired me to firstly get an image of my interviewees’ domestic backdrop in words, before moving to their feelings, copying Rydet’s idea that context comes before interpretation. At the same time, because of how she portrayed the women in their own, curated space, inspired me to ask about when and where in daily life the interviewed women feel at peace - a moment they “curate” for themselves.*

*Natalia LL’s “Sztuka Konsumpcyjna” (Consumer Art) exposes how post-war Polish society and Western media objectified women by filming women sensually eating bananas, sausages etc. This turn of an everyday act – eating - into a critique of women’s roles as providers of pleasure pushed me to ask about what roles and responsibilities the women feel are placed upon them and in contrast, how the women themselves see and read their own presence.*



Natalia LL, “Sztuka Konsumpcyjna”, 1972, Frames from film.





Natalia LL, "Sztuka Konsumpcyjna", 1972, Frames from film.



Now...

*How do I select a representative and  
diverse sample of women?*

*Living in Warsaw, having family across Poland, and moving to the Netherlands all gave me many occasions to meet different Polish women. To encourage interest without pressure, I shared an open call on social media, asking friends with different audiences to repost it. The response of women who wanted to share their stories was overwhelming...*



Screenshots of the open call posted by me on Instagram on September 24, 2024.

*I prioritized diversity in background when selecting interviewees - material situation, place of origin, religious background etc.*

1. Anna K – small countryside, medium material situation, neutral religious background, moved alone abroad, neutral family situation
2. Paulina G – bigger city, critical material situation, neutral religious background, moved alone abroad, heavily troubled family situation
3. Dominika P – big city, good material situation, neutral religious background, moved alone, troubled family situation
4. Maria K – big city, medium material situation, religious background, living with parents, troubled family situation
5. Zuzanna Z – big city, good material situation, neutral religious background, moved alone abroad, troubled family situation
6. Karolina B - big city, good material situation, religious background, patchwork family situation
7. Nina M – bigger city, good material situation, neutral religious background, moved alone abroad, patchwork family situation
8. Zuzanna K – big city, suddenly worsened material situation, neutral religious background, moved alone abroad, neutral family situation
9. Zofia K – bigger city, good material situation, slightly religious background, moved alone abroad, troubled family situation

Scan of the list of selected volunteers with attributes.

*Based on hours of interviews with the women (see Appendix C) I created a synthesis of the similarities and differences among all participants.*



## *Relationship with Polish Identity*

*All women express a deep connection to their Polish identity, with varying degrees of pride, criticism, or ambivalence. All women who moved abroad describe feeling more appreciative of their Polish roots after the big life change.*

*Karolina and Nina express the most cultural pride, especially traditions. Zuzanna K and Paulina initially felt alienated or held stereotypes about being Polish but eventually came to embrace it. Maria views her identity through a more historical and geopolitical lens.*

## *Childhood, Emotional Environment and Boundaries*

*Nearly all women describe being emotionally mature beyond their age, often taking on caregiving or mediating roles, lacking the freedom of a carefree childhood - Maria (parentified eldest), Paulina (emotional parent in alcoholic home), Zuza K (treated as an adult early), Anna (felt burdened despite supportive environment) ...*

*Parental emotional unavailability was also common through chronic conflict and frequent family fights, leading to children feeling unseen in their needs.*

*Almost all report emotionally open homes but the consequence of that was often blurred boundaries. Some are now learning to set boundaries.*

## *Mental Health*

*Most women are highly aware about mental health as opposed to their parents. They mention therapy, anxiety, ADHD, or family patterns. There is a shared sense that previous generations lacked the tools for emotional well-being.*

*Majority represent intergenerational shifts - they recognize harmful emotional patterns in their parents and aim to break them. A few explicitly note the Matka Polka (Polish Mother) archetype of Polish mothers who self-sacrifice, and they express their intent to do things differently (Maria, Nina, Dominika).*



## *Polish Womanhood & Societal Expectations*

*The image of the Polish woman as strong, selfless, endlessly giving appears across most interviews. Many struggle with internalized pressure to be productive, emotionally available, and “good”, even if they reject traditional roles. Several express no pressure from family but still feel internalized pressure to “succeed” or “be happy”.*

*Several mention Catholic-rooted modesty, shame, and self-criticism (especially Zuzanna K, Maria, Nina). Even in progressive households, cultural guilt and “my fault, my great fault” mentalities persist.*

## *Self-Reflection & Acceptance of the Past*

*Surprisingly, almost all women wouldn't change their upbringing. Even those with painful pasts, who say they wish their childhood looked different, are able to keep a positive attitude and acknowledge that their past shaped who they are now. I think this quote from Paulina's interview, who is a woman with unfortunately a very troubled past, strongly illustrates this conclusion:*

*“Despite all of this, I think I'm quite wise. I think that a lot of people who didn't go through what I went through are really naive. I am not. And I think I am really empathetic, which is not a trait that everyone has.”*

*This line beautifully captures her self-awareness and the strength she draws from her past.*

## *Stereotypes and Critique of Polish Society*

*A few spoke directly about visual stereotypes and mostly mentioned:*

- The “Matka Polka” image (Dominika, Maria).*
- Cultural rigidity around how women should appear, e.g., criticism from grandparents (Zuzanna Z, Zuzanna K).*
- Lack of joyful, emotionally open representations of Polish life and femininity, e.g., holidays feeling somber.*

## *Conclusion - A Portrait of the Contemporary Young Polish Woman*

*All nine interviews paint a complex yet deeply human picture of a young-adult Polish woman in the third decade of the 21st century.*





*She is shaped by both love and loss.  
She often bears emotional weight, even when it wasn't asked of her.  
She is often the first in her family to set boundaries, name trauma, and seek change.  
She feels a complicated pride in being Polish - aware of the pain, but also the strength, the traditions, and the culture.  
She doesn't want to erase where she came from - she wants to evolve it.  
She is strong, wise and motivated by hope.*













*Part IV*

*Finding  
The Right Way*

# *What medium most effectively balances awareness-raising and recognition?*

*The interviews I conducted left me feeling deeply inspired and impressed by the strength, wisdom and beauty (both inside and outside). To me, as an artist, the Polish women started feeling less like a research subject and more like my muses, someone who I felt a need to capture through my lens.*

*I started searching for inspiration on what medium could help me transform my research into a creative and powerful outlet. Overtime, the answer revealed itself to me.*



DK Welchman and Hugh Welchman, "Chłopi", 2023, Frame from film.

*One of the first sparks of clarity came from the film *Chłopi* (2023) by DK and Hugh Welchman - a reinterpretation of the Polish literary classic which shifted the narrative focus to the female protagonist, Jagna. What stood out to me, beside the film's relevance to a 21st-century viewer while keeping the deep cultural context, was the striking visual form. The entire movie was oil-painted by over a hundred painters. This choice added such a sense of depth and honour to the story that a normal film couldn't have achieved.*

*Motivated by this, I visited the Chelmoński exhibition in National Museum in Warsaw, whose paintings had partly inspired the film. His works present Polish life in landscape, symbolism, and emotion. The exhibition broke attendance record<sup>2</sup> and it became clear that Polish society still holds classical painting in high regard, likely because of how much our sense of national pride connects with history. Many writers, poets, and artists kept Poland alive during war and the 123 years when Poland disappeared from the world map. Using painting as a tool in my own work I could tap into a collective emotional response that is already ingrained in Polish identity.*

<sup>2</sup> - with an outstanding over 170 thousand tickets sold, which overruled the previous record in the National Museum set by the exhibition of Picasso.





Józef Chełmoński, "Babie Lato", 1875, 119,7x156,5 cm – Photo by me, from exhibition in National Museum in Warsaw, 2025.



Józef Chełmoński, "Burza", 1896, 107×163 cm – Photo by me, from exhibition in National Museum in Warsaw, 2025.





Józef Chełmoński, "Krzyż w zadymce", 1907,  
137×106 cm – Photo by me, from exhibition in  
National Museum in Warsaw, 2025.



Józef Chełmoński, "Dziewczyna na tle krajobrazu", 1869,  
53,5x44,5 cm – Photo by me, from exhibition in National  
Museum in Warsaw, 2025.

*Figurative painting is quietly making a comeback in new contexts. Having previously studied Fashion Design before moving into Advertising & Beyond, I've always been fascinated by where these worlds meet - fashion and lifestyle magazines. One striking example was the December 2024 issue of Vogue, guest-edited by Marc Jacobs, which featured a painted portrait of Kaia Gerber by Anna Weyant on the cover.*



Miu Miu's 2025 leather goods campaign starring Gigi Hadid, by Steven Meisel.



# VOGUE

DEC

A SPECIAL ISSUE  
EDITED BY  
MARC JACOBS

THE DREAMLIFE OF  
KAIA GERBER

Cover of the December 2024 special edition of Vogue, edited by Marc Jacobs, featuring Anna Weyant's painting of Kaia Gerber.





Miu Miu's 2025 leather goods campaign starring Gigi Hadid, by Steven Meisel.

*Seeing such a traditional, slow, and personal medium presented in the context of fast-paced and commercial magazine was a moment of inspiration. Not long after that, Miu Miu's 2025 Leather Goods Campaign, featuring paintings of Gigi Hadid photographed by Steven Meisel, gave a further validation. These campaigns didn't use painting for aesthetic value - they used it to elevate the women, to frame them as icons. As Marc Jacobs said, "I love the idea of Kaia seen by Anna - I wanted a young woman looking at a young woman" (Kazanjian). And that's exactly what I want to do for the women in my project – elevate and celebrate them.*

*In the book "Painting People" by Charlotte Mullins, I read a powerful reflection on why painting, especially portraiture, has not only survived the digital age but is going through a resurrection. In a world flooded by fast-moving images, a painting slows and calms the viewer down. It demands time and gives a break from the same images we see on billboards and social media all day long.*

*I realized - painting was the right medium for this work. It offered something that photography, film, or digital media could not - it offered a personal gesture, a kind of tribute and an emotional response from a Polish viewer.*

*Painting effortlessly met the three conditions I had set before choosing a medium.*

*1. Show how engraved the issue is in Polish society.*

*Through scenes of daily rituals like getting a coffee etc., I can paint the women in their quietest moments and layer symbolic elements from their stories into the scene. Every viewer knows a "Zuza" or an "Ania" - this approach allows the audience to see not "another suffering woman," but someone they might know, love, or be.*

*2. To offer a gift.*

*I didn't just want to represent these women; I wanted to honour them. A painting is time-consuming, intentional, handcrafted. It feels like something permanent, a legacy object, a gesture of care. It is a deserved form of attention in a world where women's emotional labour often goes unseen.*

*3. Use the real, talked-about, harsh experiences.*

*Painting allows me to contrast a soft moment with a darker presence through symbolism. And by using quotes from the interviews, in a form of book or slogan, it would help people decode the painting faster; since recognizing and understanding symbols could be harder for a regular viewer without context.*



*Ultimately, painting is the only medium that met both of my goals - to raise awareness in the public sphere, and to offer genuine recognition to the women who shared their stories with me. It brings together the historical, emotional, personal, and public threads of the project - allowing me to transform theory and research into something physical and visual.*



*Part V*

# *The Making*



Starting the practical phase was exciting yet challenging, because I had little experience with and no professional training in the medium. To build my skills, I relied on four primary sources: the books “Painting People” by Charlotte Mullins and “How Painting Happens” by Martin Gayford, practical online tutorials, and consultations with Polish painter Agnieszka Apoznańska.



### *Theoretical Grounding - “How painting happens” M. Gayford*

“If painting is so difficult, you might ask, why begin at all?” (Gayford, p.37) - The story of Alfred Wallis – a retired seaman, who took up painting “to pass away time” and was later recognized as “refreshing” by critics – shows the advantage of an intuitive process. He was free of artistic conventions, simply because he didn’t know about them.



Alfred Wallis, “Brigantine Sailing Past Green Fields”, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 41,8x48,8 cm.



*Quoting Willem de Kooning “People tend (...) to make signs of art” - imitating a signature style, copying brushstroke etc. – “Rather than work towards something you really could call art. You’ve got to find something you love and try to deal with it.” (Gayford, p.45) This let me portray each woman in an emotionally honest way, not performative.*

*Gayford’s analysis of Rembrandt’s *The Jewish Bride* led me to symbolically include the Polish flag’s red and white in every painting - showing that every woman expressed a sense of pride for being Polish.*



Rembrandt, “The Jewish Bride”, c. 1665-1669, 121.5×166.5 cm.

*The chapter about connection between colour and emotion (Kapoor’s work) guided my palette choices. Anna’s darker tones reflect the weight of her story, Paulina’s soft pastels capture her longing for peace, Zuzanna’s contrasts express her world view through values of “good” and “sinful.”*

*Inspired by Newman’s “Vir Heroicus Sublime” and Kapoor’s “Yellow”, I aimed to create a space the viewer can “enter”. James Rielly’s portraits encouraged this “irresistible” force to be the women’s eyes. The viewer feels almost forced to look back and acknowledge their presence. The author also points out that the painter can control the viewers feelings, with the right scale, thus I chose to work on a 70x70 cm canvas, which allowed almost real-size faces.*



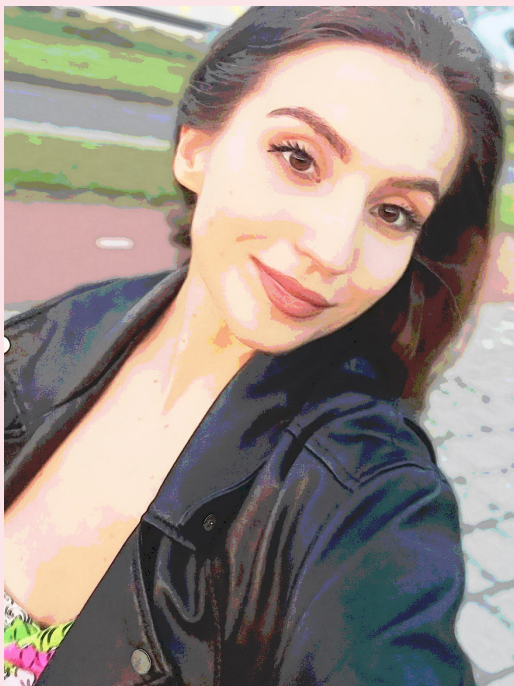


Anish Kapoor, "Yellow", 1999, 600×600x300 cm.



James Rielly, "Deep Down I'm Shallow", 2004, 203x182 cm.

*Gayford mentions how painting from a photo is easier for beginners than a live figure, not having to transfer a three-dimensional figure onto a flat canvas. Because of that I was also able to help myself by Photoshopping some images to see shadows clearer (example below).*



Reference photographs for the painting of Paulina G, edited by me to block out shadows.

*Lastly, he explains that a title can supply "a touch of poetry" but also provide additional information gently shaping interpretation. An extreme example of contextualization is Turner's "Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel left Harwich"*

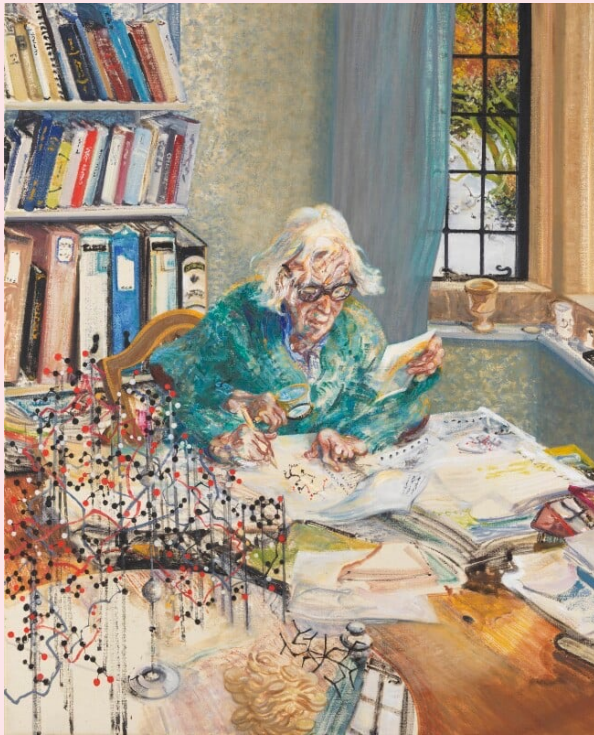


## *Conceptual Direction - "Painting People" C. Mullins*

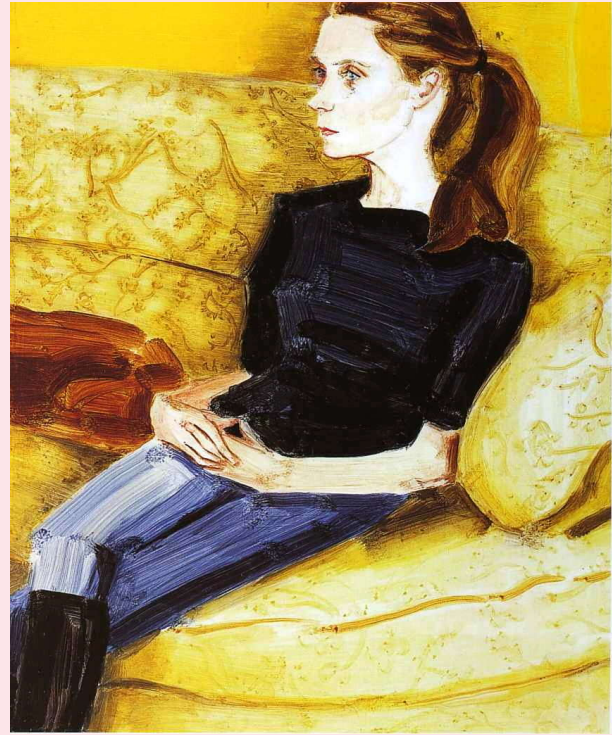
*My composition was inspired by Maggi Hambling's portrait of Dorothy Hodgkin. She portrayed a particular scientist, which shapes perception of all scientists. So, by showing a Polish woman, I hope to challenge the viewer's idea of all Polish women.*

*Manet's "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère" demonstrates how painting allows impossible compositions. The single man and crowd are seen only in the reflection, showing how lonely the bartender feels, this couldn't be achieved with other mediums.*

*Inspired by Elizabeth Peyton's idea of stagnant and calm subjects, I aimed to create a moment with the viewer – the painted woman paused her action to look at you.*



Maggi Hambling, "Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin", 1985, 93,2x76 cm.



Elizabeth Peyton, "Pauline", 2005, 27,9x35,6 cm.

*John Currin's visual metaphors helped me create clear symbolic elements. His "Thanksgiving" shows a readable message about deflowering –one fresh rose, a turkey ready to be stuffed and an open mouth.*

*Later, Maria Lassnig's more grotesque art, touching the taboo topic of older women's bodies, created a counter thought – the topic of emotional labour in Poland is already treated as unserious, and I want to finally show it as an urgent problem.*







Édouard Manet, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère", 1882, 96x130 cm.



John Currin, "Thanksgiving", 2003, 172,9x132,3 cm.



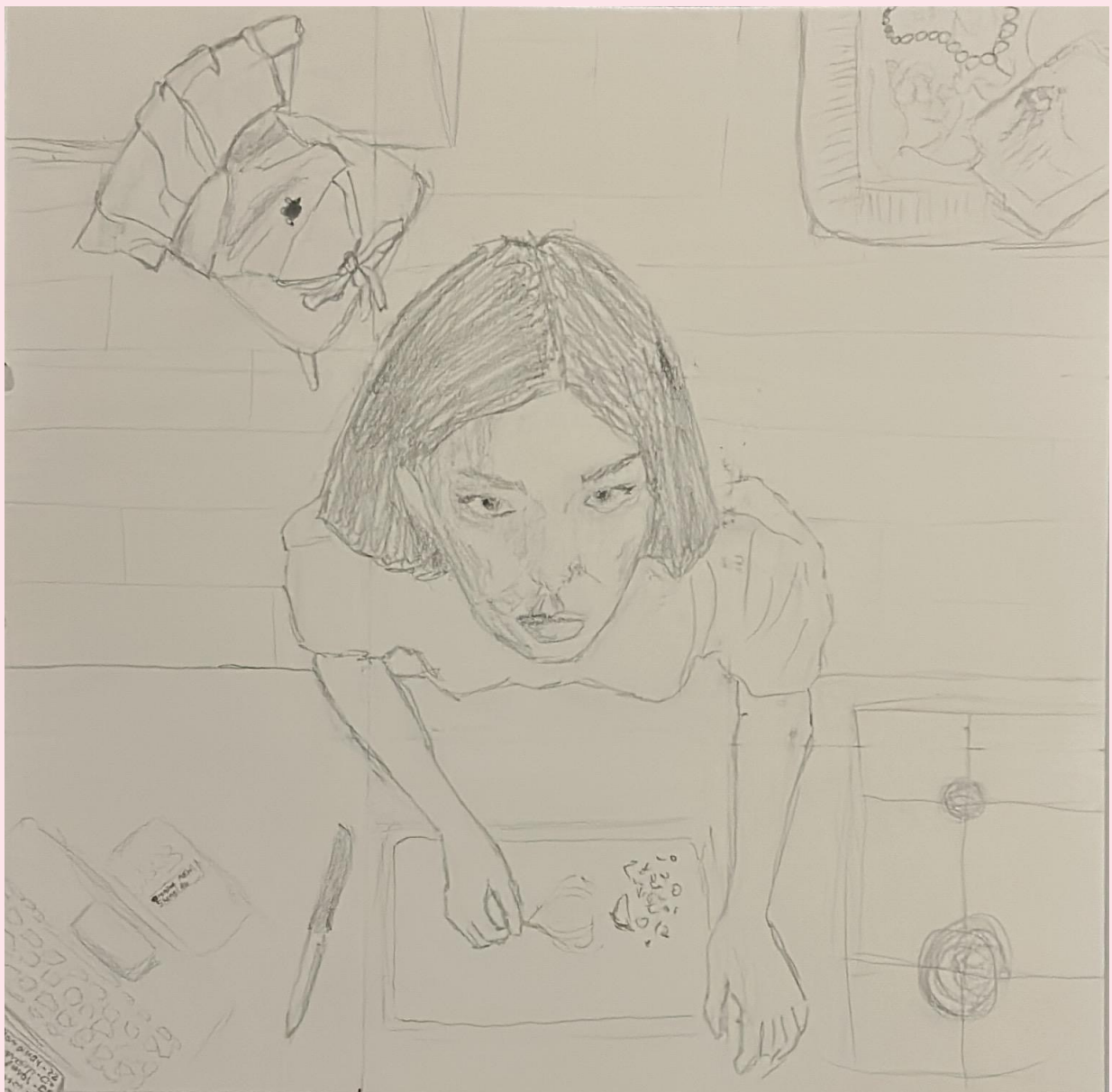
Maria Lassnig, "Selbst mit Meerschweinchen", 2000, 126x100 cm.



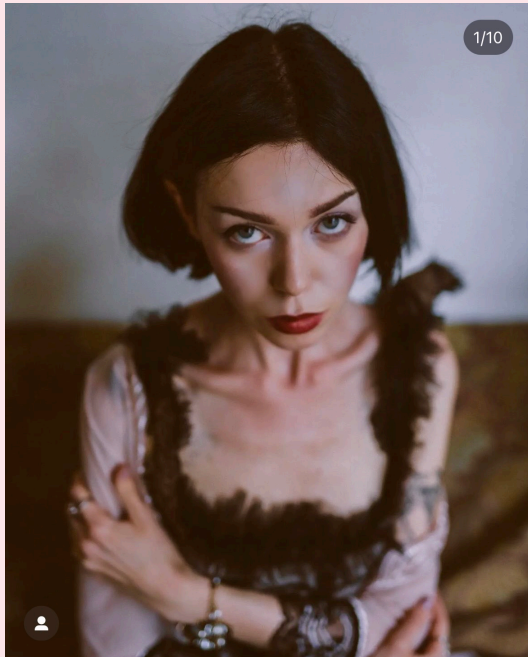
*After this research, I analysed my interviews though a storytelling lens and created the compositions and a prototype book (see Appendix D). Also, the ongoing collaboration with my “muses” let me adapt some points, avoiding e.g. stereotypes (ADHD) or misinterpretations.*

*The first out of three portraits (that combine into a triptych), was Anna’s. Her special moment in the daily life is cooking. Key points that emerged from her story were:*

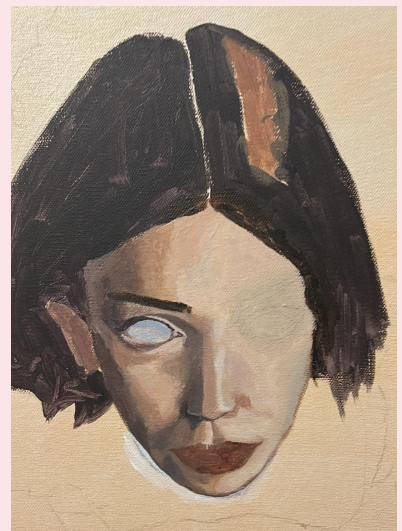
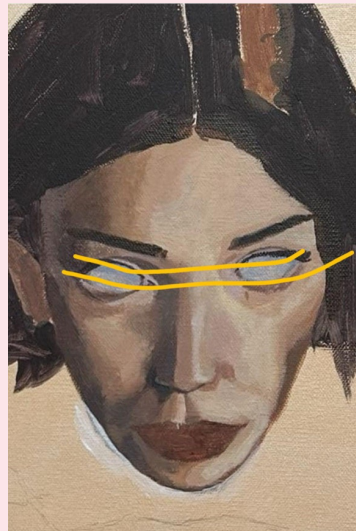
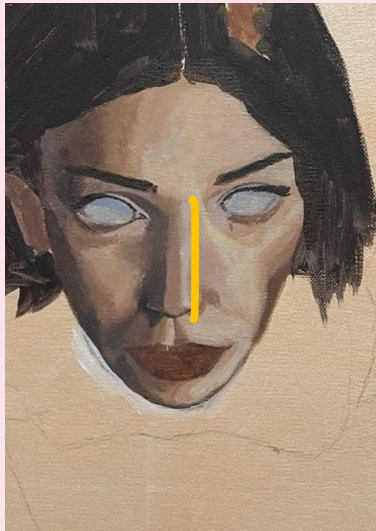
- Feeling like a black sheep in her family (A sheep on the T-shirt Anna is wearing).*
- Taught workaholism – waking up before 6 AM and having a tight daily schedule to follow (Early hour and a detailed schedule).*
- An overbearing mother, calling multiple times a day, expecting to know everything (Multiple missed calls covering up the wallpaper of Anna with her favourite horse, meaning the expectations are overtaking her personal life).*
- “Feeling like an onion” – having multiple versions of herself, mostly ones she doesn’t show publicly (Cutting the onion meaning she is highly self-aware).*
- Wanting a more creative future but feeling guilty about it (Anna’s own paintings covered with a traditional Polish cloth, representing internalised expectations).*



Small scale first sketch of the painting of Anna K, 2024.



Reference pictures for the painting of Anna K.



Process of repainting Anna's eyes, as they weren't naturally in-line.



Process of painting Anna's arms.

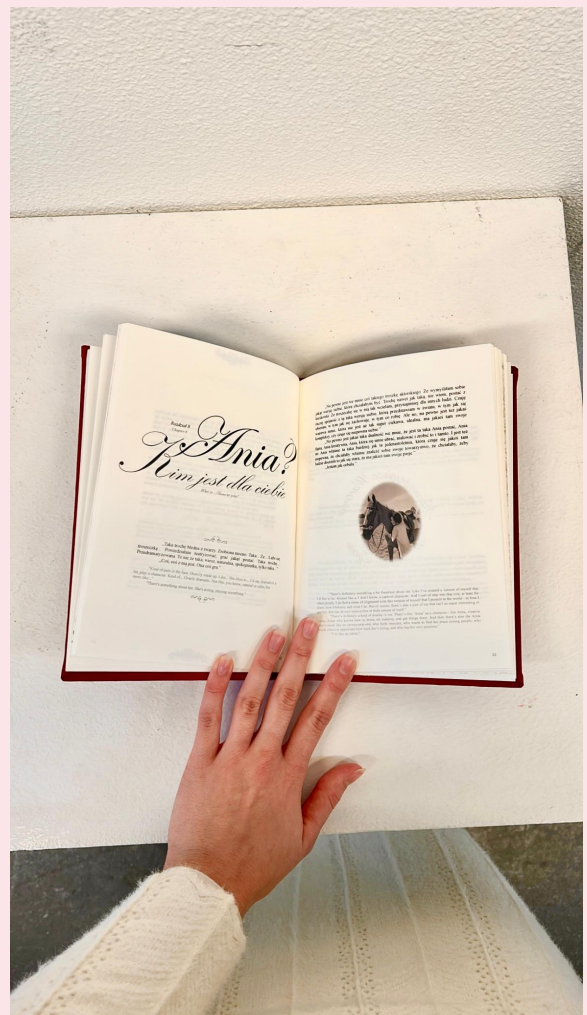
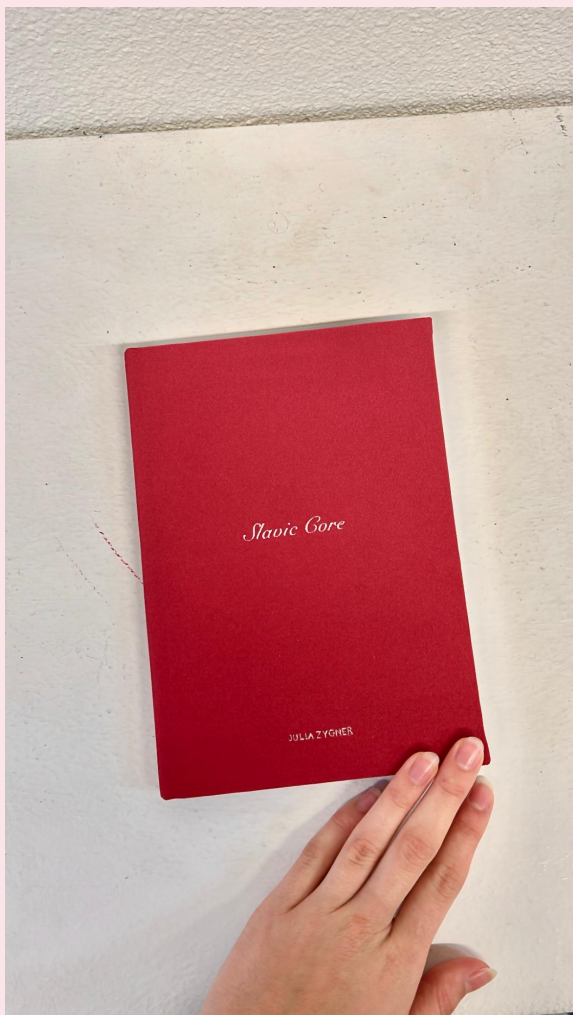


Anna's original phone wallpaper and its painted version.





Anna K standing next to her portrait mid-process and reading the prototype book.

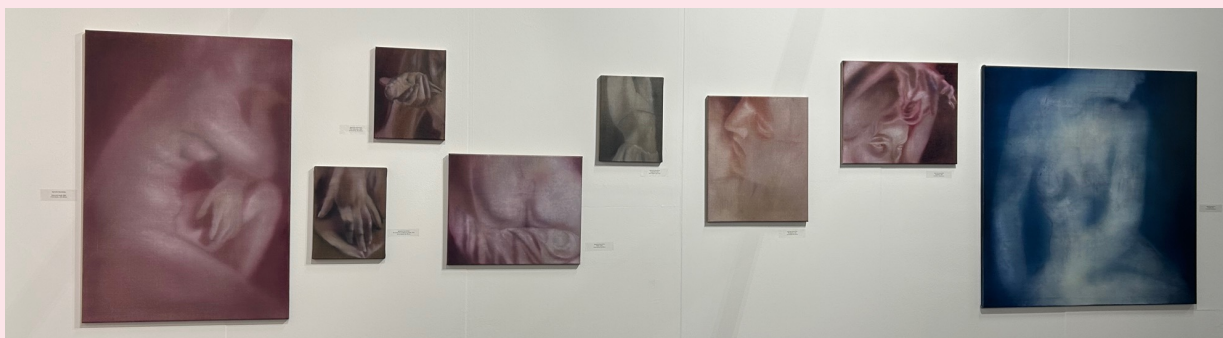


The prototype book cover and a page from chapter about Anna.



## *Art Rotterdam 2025 - Agnieszka Apoznańska*

*Mid-making I visited Art Rotterdam, where I found inspiration in a Polish painter's works. I reached out to her and scheduled a video consultation, hoping she could look at my project through a professional eye. Her feedback helped me, starting from the concept, all the way to technicalities of my paintings, like perspective, etc. She welcomed future contact for painting advice and was excited about the collaboration.*



Agnieszka Apoznańska's selected works at Art Rotterdam 2025, photo by me.



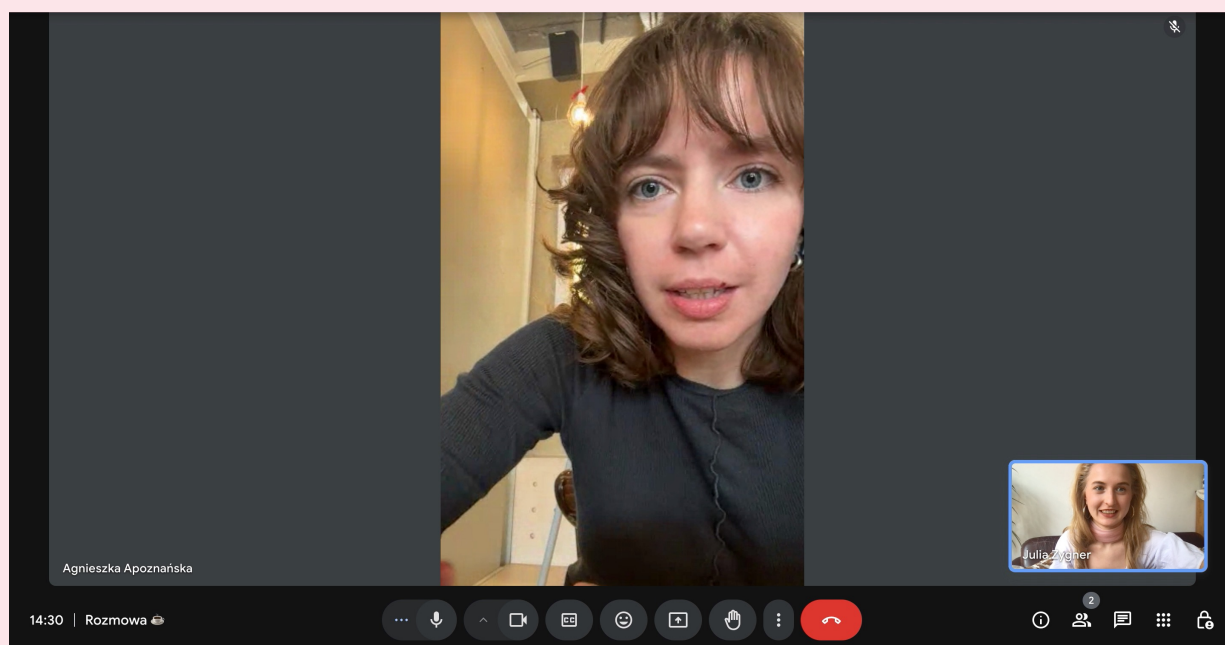
Agnieszka Apoznańska, "Big Point, White Skirt", 2024, 160x150 cm.



Agnieszka Apoznańska, "Deep Blue", 2024, 120x120 cm – Photo by me, from Art Rotterdam 2025.



Agnieszka Apoznańska, "Upside down", 2024, 40x30 cm – Photo by me, from Art Rotterdam 2025.



Screenshot from my video call with Agnieszka, 2025.





Process of repainting the table legs, as the perspective was wrong.



Reference photos for the chair with the apron.



Process of establishing the light source and painting the shadows.



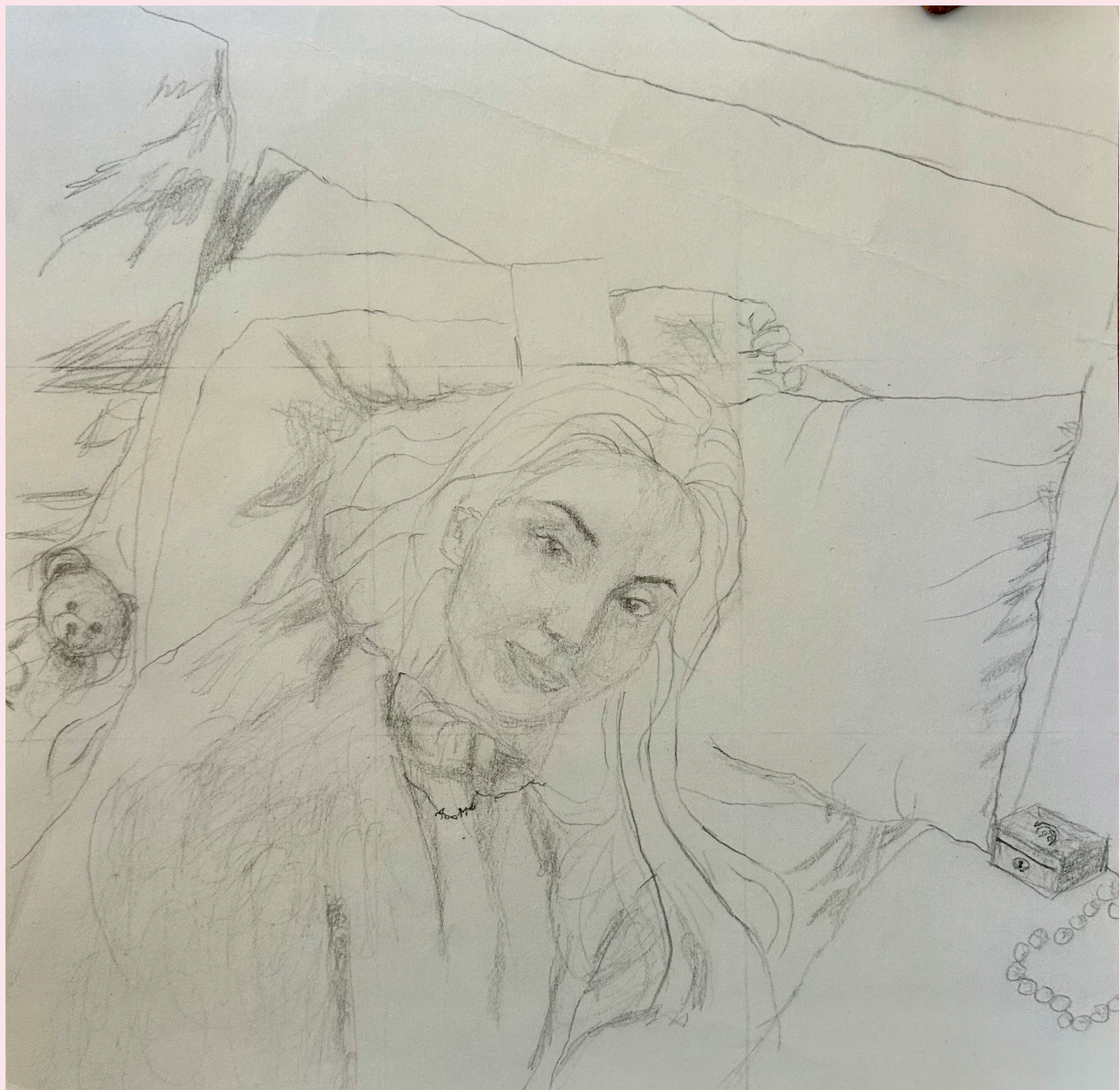


Latest version (not finished) of the portrait of Anna, when this document was created.



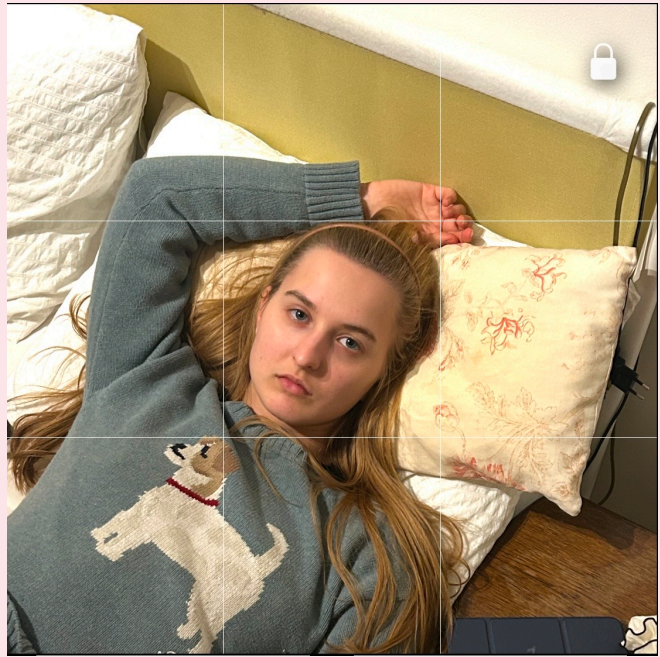
*The second story I tell is Paulina's. Her favourite time in the day is when she can lay down in her bed doing nothing. Her story includes:*

- A very troubled childhood, that she says is "Locked in a box with the key thrown far away" (A box with Paulina's childhood years, closed with no key).*
- Having to take on very adult responsibilities as a child in an alcoholic home (A photo of a small girl, that looks like Paulina, wearing too big and mature shoes).*
- Cutting contact with all her family, except her sister and niece, to free herself (Two hung, empty frames, meaning some people who "should" be in her life are not there by choice).*
- Deep love and loyalty to the sister and niece, them being her only sure "forever" (A bracelet with their initials, meaning they're always close).*
- Heavily needing calmness and peace in her life (A cup of tea).*
- Finding out she has ADHD as an adult, because nobody cared about her mental well-being as a child.*



Small scale first sketch of the painting of Paulina G, 2025.

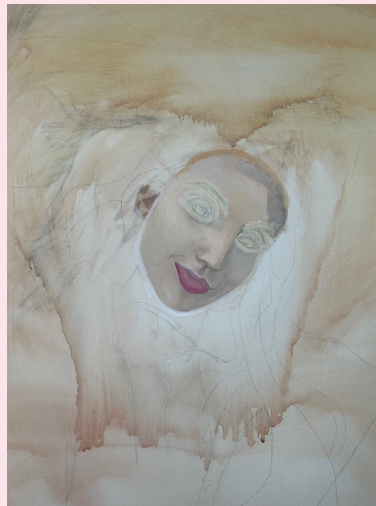




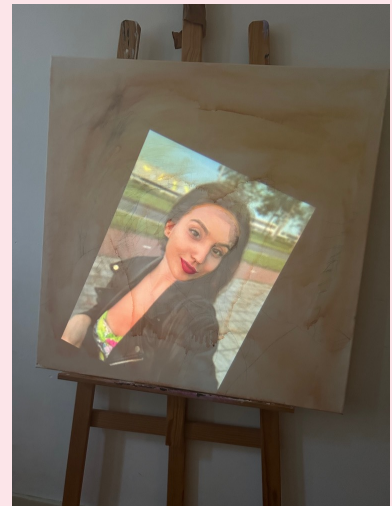
Reference pictures for the painting of Paulina G.



Projecting the sketch on canvas.



Repainting Paulina's eyes.



Projecting the reference photo to resketch the eyes.



Repainted eyes.



Process of painting the sweater.



Reference photo for the table.





Frames from timelapse of the process of Paulina's portrait.





Latest version (not finished) of the portrait of Paulina, when this document was created.



The last portrait of the triptych is Zuzanna K's, whose favourite moment for herself is going to a café and reading. Her story consists of:

- Unpredicted tragedies: parents' bankruptcy and the loss of their home, grandfather's sudden death which Zuzanna witnessed, resulting in her needing to be overprepared for everything.
- Maturing too early, because of the adult treatment received from her family.
- Being an extremely sensitive person but trying to see it as a good thing.
- Becoming financially independent at 18, with no support from her parents after moving abroad.
- Her mother's harsh and self-critical attitude, while Zuzanna viewed her as an "angel/saint" impacting her own self-esteem.
- Internalised Catholic morals resulting in a deep need to be "good" and not "sinful".
- Parents, especially her father, projecting their own life disappointments onto her with the hope she won't repeat their mistakes.



Taught by experience - taking multiple reference photos of Zuzanna K, to make the composition-making easier.





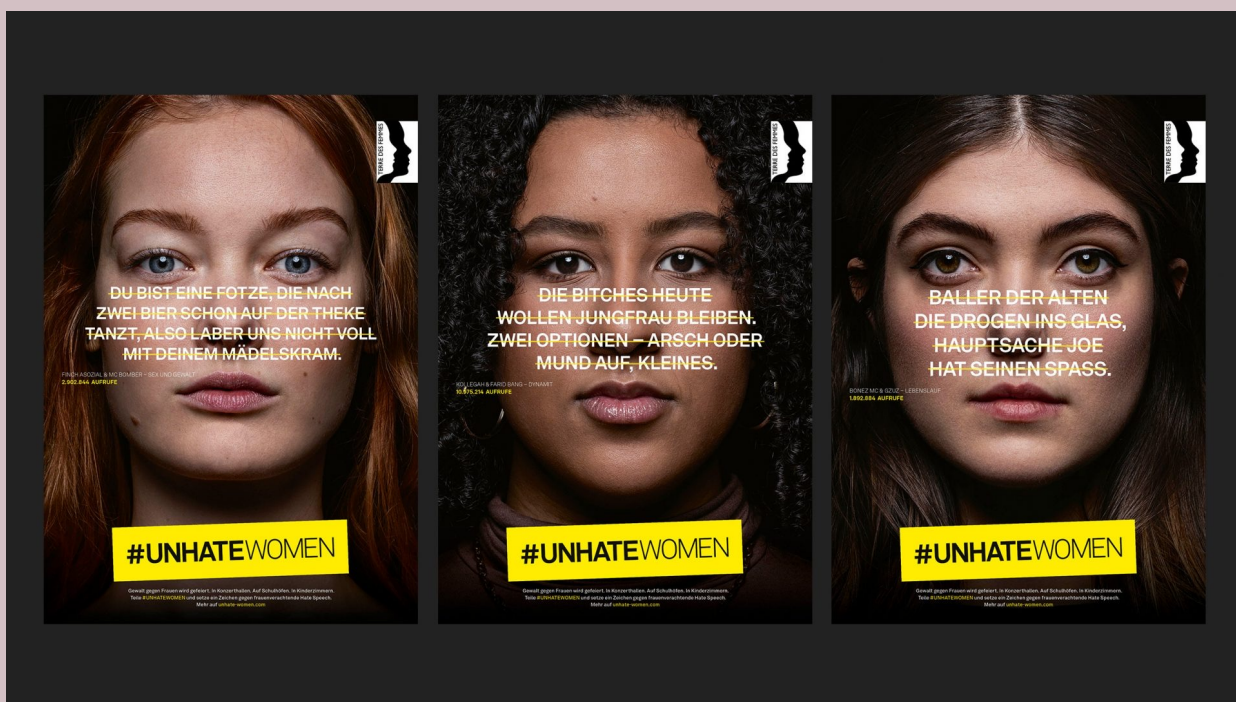


# *How can I make the work accessible to both the women portrayed and a wider Polish audience?*

*To describe what the future of my project is, I created a few steps the paintings will go through until graduation:*

*1. Creating a package of assets for project advertisement:*

- Social media clips, that include reaction of the women to their portraits.*
- Posters with the painting, a powerful quote from the portrayed woman and a strong title that ties the two together (Inspired by the #UnHateWomen campaign).*
- Postcards with the paintings on one side and a quote and title on the other (inspired by postcardsfromhome.eu).*



Terre des Femmes and fischerAppelt's campaign "#UnHateWomen".

*2. Reaching out to feminist social media accounts and physical cafés and bookstores (in Warsaw for now), to ask for their help with sharing the created assets and reaching their audiences.*

I remember spending my time cooking in my mother's kitchen when i was a kid and i was living with my parents. The kitchen is my mother's favorite part of the house. Where my mother spends her time, she cooks for me and my father many times and for other people. She spends most of her hours in the chair watching TV because of major problems with her legs. I also sit in this place when I go to see her. I took this photo as part of the project I've been working on for 2 years with the title Urban Stories. My mother didn't want to be photographed at first, but she finally agreed because she wanted me to have a recent photo of her that would accurately record ,her everyday life!

Postcards  
from home®

Urban stories

from  
©Xrissa Sougioul

@xrissa\_ssss

Back of Xrissa Sougioul's postcard sent to postcardsfromhome.eu, received on 21.06.2024.

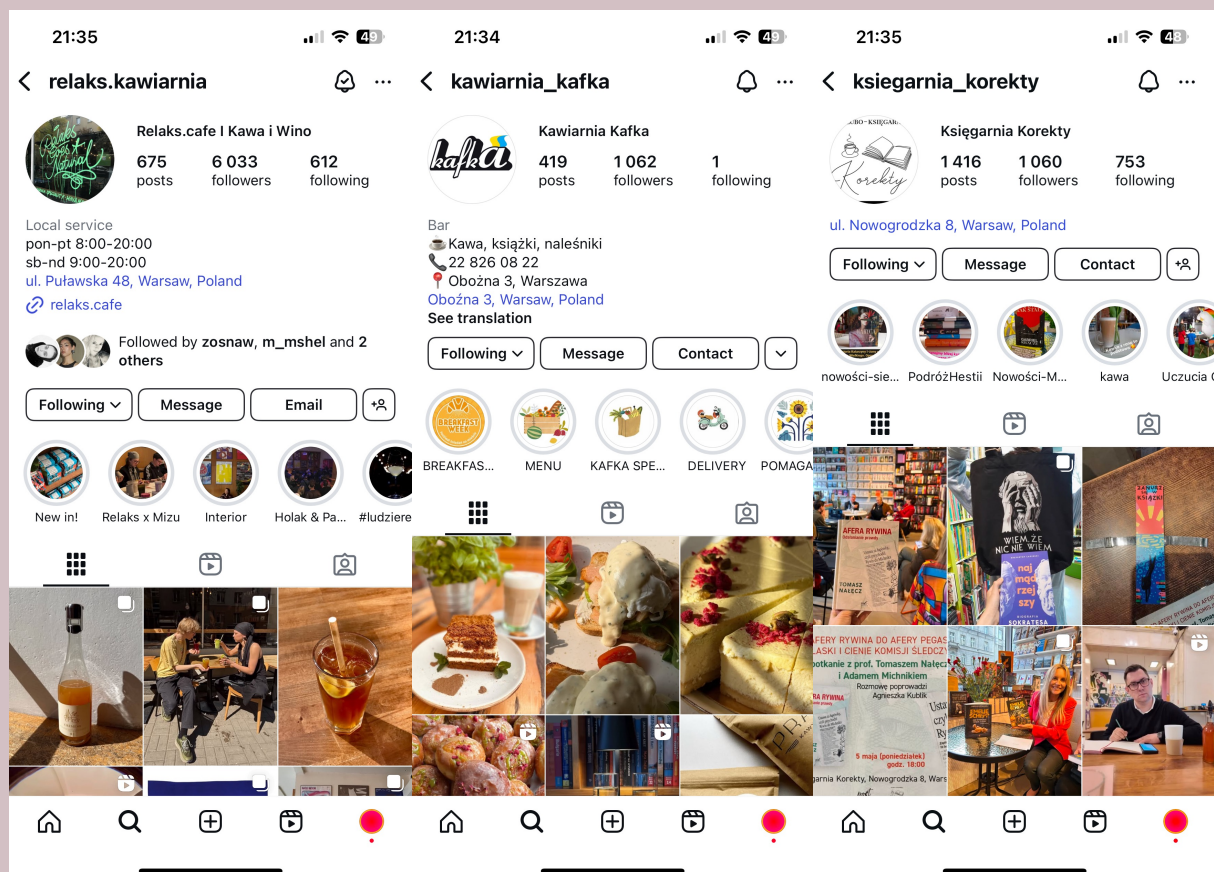


Front of Xrissa Sougioul's postcard sent to postcardsfromhome.eu, received on 21.06.2024.

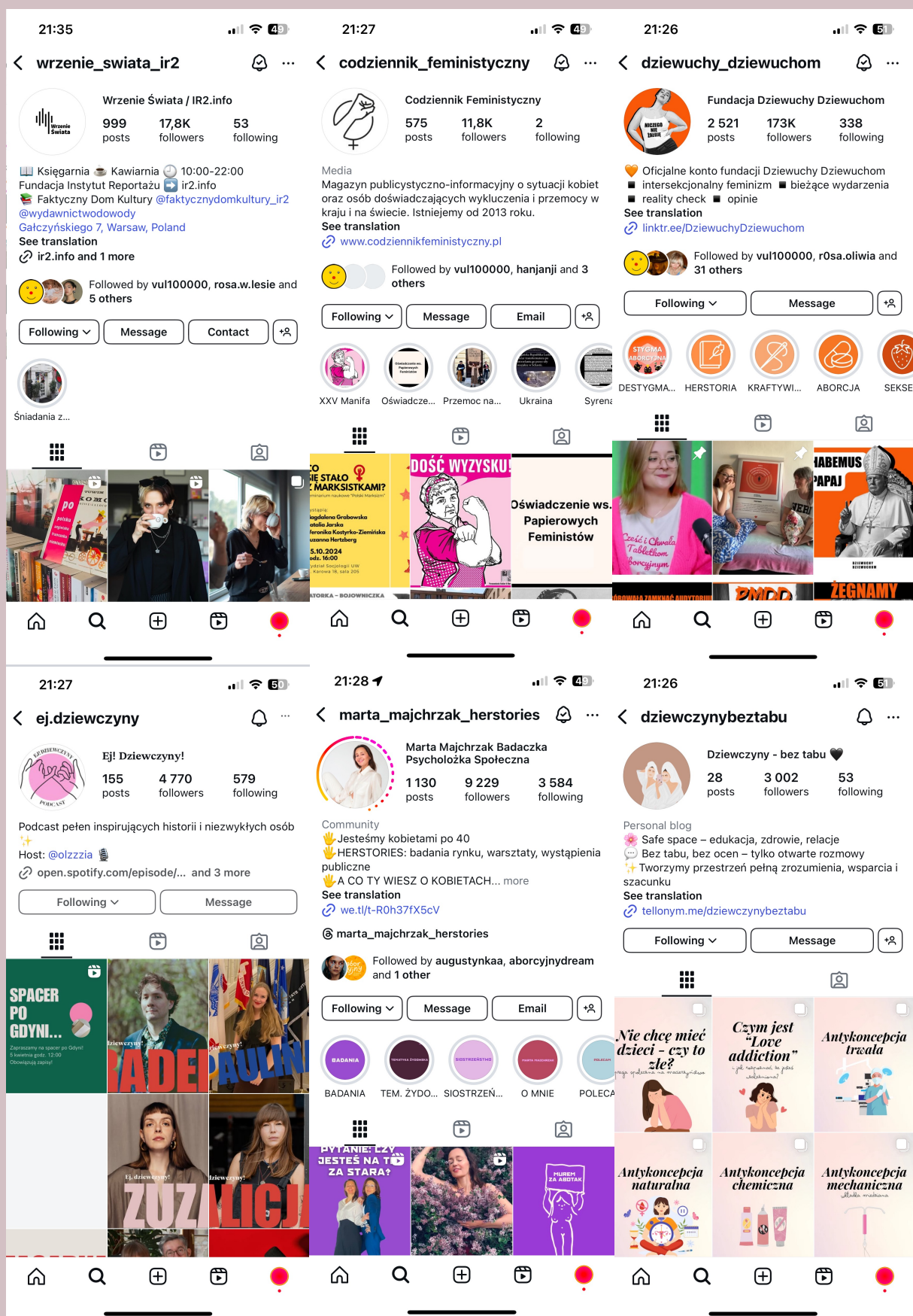


3. Creating an archive website which people can find access to via the advertising assets. This way interested parties can find out more about the project. Most importantly, next to a digital version of the painting, they will find a book with edited and revised version of the interview with the woman they are looking at. This allows to read her whole story.

4. The last step is a call to action that will be found on the website – a list of relevant places and charities that an interested party can donate to or help.



Screenshots of Instagram pages of cafés and bookstores I will contact.



Screenshots of feminist Instagram pages I will contact.

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## Appendices

*Appendix A, full transcribed and translated interview with Agnieszka Apoznańska.*

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*Appendix B, list of interview questions.*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oPkBHS3MbIEKqJJKZts9BacgpuKfUjVo/view?usp=sharing>

*Appendix C, full transcribed and translated interviews with Anna K, Paulina G, Dominika P,*

*Maria K, Zuzanna Z, Karolina B, Nina M and Zuzanna K.*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13gSmXpUwWlV9aTBYL4wsga2IhZiK5c7y/view?usp=sharing>

*Appendix D, digital version of the prototype book that accompanies the paintings.*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lfUG4EbgQOeUchvha9ctff-zPZ-kFzdG/view?usp=sharing>

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*Julia Zygmier*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Julia Zygmier'. The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Julia' and last name 'Zygmier' clearly distinguishable.

