

Infinitely Replicating

Interview by Jana Astanov.



[photo: Walter Wlodarczyk]

Julia Sinelnikova (<http://www.juliasinelnikova.com>) is an interdisciplinary artist (<http://chasm.nyc>) who works with holograms, performance, and digital culture. Her light installations have been exhibited internationally, and she has performed widely as The Oracle of Vector Gallery. She has received commissions from Pace University, Michael Madden (Maroon 5), SELECT Fair, Webster Hall, and Norte Maar. Heavily inspired by electronic music, Sinelnikova has designed sculptural sets for performers including Lee Burridge, Machinedrum, The GZA (Wu Tang Clan), and Aurora Halal. Selected profiles of her work have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, VICE, Artnet, Huffington Post, The

Creators Project, PAPER Mag, and The New Criterion. Her work has been presented at the Contemporary Art Museum of Houston, The Oulu Museum of Art, and Williamsburg Art & Historical Center. Sinelnikova has also exhibited site-specific installations for Miami Art Week / Art Basel annually since 2011. She holds a BFA in Sculpture from The Fashion Institute of Technology (SUNY). She lives (http://instagram.com/or_acle) and works (<http://vimeo.com/oracle666>) in Brooklyn.

3:AM: How did it all start? What made you a performance artist?

Julia Sinelnikova: As a child, I took classes in all forms of performing arts, and in middle school toured around the country with a group called Austin Girls Choir. I subsequently entered the contemporary art world through my initial participation in open mic poetry readings. At Helios (now Avante Garden) and Notsuoh, two infamous underground nightlife spots in Houston, Texas, I met writers, visual artists, and performers of all ages and backgrounds. This launched my participation in a local artist collective, with whom I curated exhibitions, designed installations and participated in open studio events.

As an adult I abandoned performance for a long time while perfecting my visual practice. Shortly out of art school, I met artist JJ Brine through a mysterious craigslist post advertising “The Official Art Gallery of Satan,” aka Vector Gallery. Since 2013 I have collaborated with the gallery as a performer, artist and curator at our three permanent locations in Lower Manhattan, as well as pop ups in Los Angeles, Brooklyn, and Art Basel Miami. It is JJ who virtually forced me back into performance at the first physical home of Vector on Clinton St. in the Lower East Side, when he first called me “The Oracle.”

3:AM: How does your performance practice inscribe into your work as a sculptor?

JS: Sculpture is my primary practice, the starting point for all my projects. When I am building the works there is a lot of schematic drawing and slow, detailed cutting – the process to create each sculpture can take months or years. This process seems like the most intimate performance to me, a sort of hypnotic meditation in which the work creates itself. When the sculptures are completed and lit, I interact with them in character as “The Oracle,” performing movement and spoken word in and around them. I draw audiences close and ask them to sit, relax, and close their eyes at times, chanting meditations meant to create a sense of transcendental mindfulness within a supernatural setting.



[photo: Organ Farm Installation shot by Walter Włodarczyk]

3:AM: What are the themes that you explore?

JS: The work explores the role of the visceral body in a post-digital world. The hand cut, cluster-like hanging sculptures are called “Fairy Organs (<http://vimeo.com/176096668>),” alluding to fabrication and modification of the physical and digital self. Some reference familiar organs, such as the

heart and lungs, while others are more fantastical. The alien, yet familiar form of these works questions the role of fluid transformation to the body and external identity in the modern era, in which one's appearance and persona can be changed with relatively simple tools. It is a dance with dangerous beauty.

Over the past few years, my site-specific installations have been themed around surveillance. There is no issue more relevant to the future of positive creativity than preserving the independent voice. Thus, I use code, live video and installation to illustrate the disconcerting nature of unsecured data in works such as Data Log (<http://vimeo.com/191566102>) and PentAutomaton. I siphon unprotected webcam feeds found by browsing the internet into projection-mapped light sculptures, which also reflect live webcam feeds of their audiences, juxtaposing the playful nature of selfie culture with the unease inherent to viewing people who are not aware they are a part of the installation. I ask the viewer to ask themselves, how much of yourself are you willing to give to the cloud?

Information is control, and unbridled surveillance by governments and corporations has already created an era of increased censorship in the arts. Artists are going to jail in Turkey and China, some of them dying there.

3:AM: What are some of your notable past projects?

JS: Recently I exhibited my newest collection of resin sculptures and collages, "ORGAN FARM," at Brooklyn's Industry City. This body of work is entirely hand cut and activated by sunlight, LED lights, and projected video to create an immersive installation comprised of intricate, singular objects. Some of the artworks are still available on Artsy (<https://www.artsy.net/show/wallplay-organ-farm-at-industry-city>).

My coded surveillance project, manifested in various sculptural video installations, has been exhibited over the past few years at The Banff Centre, Bell Labs in New Jersey, Creative Technology Week New York, The Brooklyn Hangar, and Chateau De La Napoule near Cannes, France. I continue to adapt this project, and aim to bring together some related research on the Dark Web together with themes from some of my favorite cyberpunk novels, such as *Snow Crash* and *Neuromancer*, together in the next iteration.

3:AM: Please tell us about your curatorial project Chasm?

JS: I started Chasm (<http://chasm.nyc>) last fall to bring together experimental light art and live music performances in my social realm. Ironically the launch project landed on the weekend after Ghost Ship, and two of the four planned nights were shut down preemptively due to threats from NYC law enforcement. I wrote an op-ed about protecting DIY spaces in the event's wake for Creators, and the subsequent Chasm took place as part of the Nasty Women fundraiser at Knockdown Center. So, you could say that from its conception the project was thrust into the politics of when, where and how POC and queer artist can do their art, as these artists have made up the majority of my rosters to date.

Currently I am developing Chasm as a blog documenting the project and its artists, as well as promoting opportunities for underrepresented independent artists in NYC and beyond. It can be viewed at <http://chasm.nyc>. I really hope to present another curated showcase of installations and performances soon, but have to acknowledge that the environment for event production in New York has been under aggressive fire since the launch of the Trump administration. The NYPD has been abusing the Cabaret Law to prevent DIY spaces as well as longstanding legal venues from operating, cracking down on social dancing. Unfortunately, Mayor De Blasio's administration has supported and

defended this law, which has historically been used to target queer and POC venues. With the backdrop of the Trump administration's violent rhetoric and the prevalence of police operatives and conservative trolls on Facebook, it's just more dangerous to do these kinds of events publicly, which is sad. We must keep doing our work and show our strength in light of these oppressive circumstances.



3:AM: Who are some of the most interesting artists you have been working with as a curator?

JS: I really enjoyed working with performing artist Richard Kennedy for the second of the three Chasm events I have put together. Working fluidly between movement, song, and conceptual work, he taps into pure emotion in his operas and solo performances. He is currently completing his MFA at Bard College.

It has also been a pleasure to work with my dear friend Laura Weyl, aka Metagasm. For Chasm she performed a psychedelic oil-projection technique over moving dancers. Outside of this project we have collaborated extensively on a collection of narrative photographs, which have been featured in Creators (http://creators.vice.com/en_us/article/ez5wnj/ghost-photo-series-energy-abandoned-red-hook-building) and at various exhibitions.

3:AM: I heard some of your poetry read as part of the performances at Vector gallery so I am curious to know if you have published any poetry books?

JS: Not really, because it is not my focus, though it is a starting point and glue for much of my work. But I read my poetry when I set up an environment, bringing the audience into a meditative state, sort of a surrealist meditation to make people access and unlock their repressed emotions.

I published my first chapbook of poems when I was fifteen, it was the first art project which I handed out, but I never done anything like that since because I am focused on my visual art.



[photo: Dendridite hand cut resin sculpture at ORGAN FARM by Walter Włodarczyk]

3:AM: What strikes me the most about your practice it's the totality of the experience within the environments you create that include performance, sculpture, poetry, video...

JS: Yes, it's all feeding into itself. Projections which illuminate the work to create the final installation are often videos of me performing in the previous installation work. So I am always feeding them into each other. I use the sculptural props to set up environments, or use them in a whole different way in my studio, outdoors, or as part of residency, so as to interact with them in different ways. These "Fairy Organs" as I call them,

these finished singular hanging works, they are living objects, they are things that I gave birth to, so I need the constant sense of interaction with them. They look delicate but the process of making them is like giving birth: and it's brutal. So when I am done with them, and when I finish the technical aspects they always lose some of their life because they are finished, and so they have to be activated, they have to speak to me. The goal of my process is to experience the total immersion of multimedia.



SAMJNA @ Holocenter NYC by The Oracle ft. Einerlei Music

Julia Sinelnikova

Another thing with my poetry, I just started recording it professionally this year. I haven't released anything yet, but sometimes my poem is the subject for the video piece, or to make the environments I project the words to reflect the light on the walls.... I want to destroy the walls, I want to create the sense of disembodiment in the viewer, because it is the opposite of art history to me. We are used to these square portals on the walls; however, why wouldn't you want to feel that you are being taken to a different place? And ideally, an opening-your-soul kind of place, and

maybe a place that makes you understand the spiritual nature of technology. Why wouldn't you want that out of a work of art? I agree with you, it's a total experience and I am always pushing it to be more. I strive as a person to transform space through my structures, light and movement.

When I see the room, or an outdoor area to install in, I do a lot of math in my head right away. It's not numerical math but it kind of feels that way, that part of my brain is itching, asking, how would this space come out, and bloom? Where would be the right places to add or transform or hide, to somehow bring the space to life.

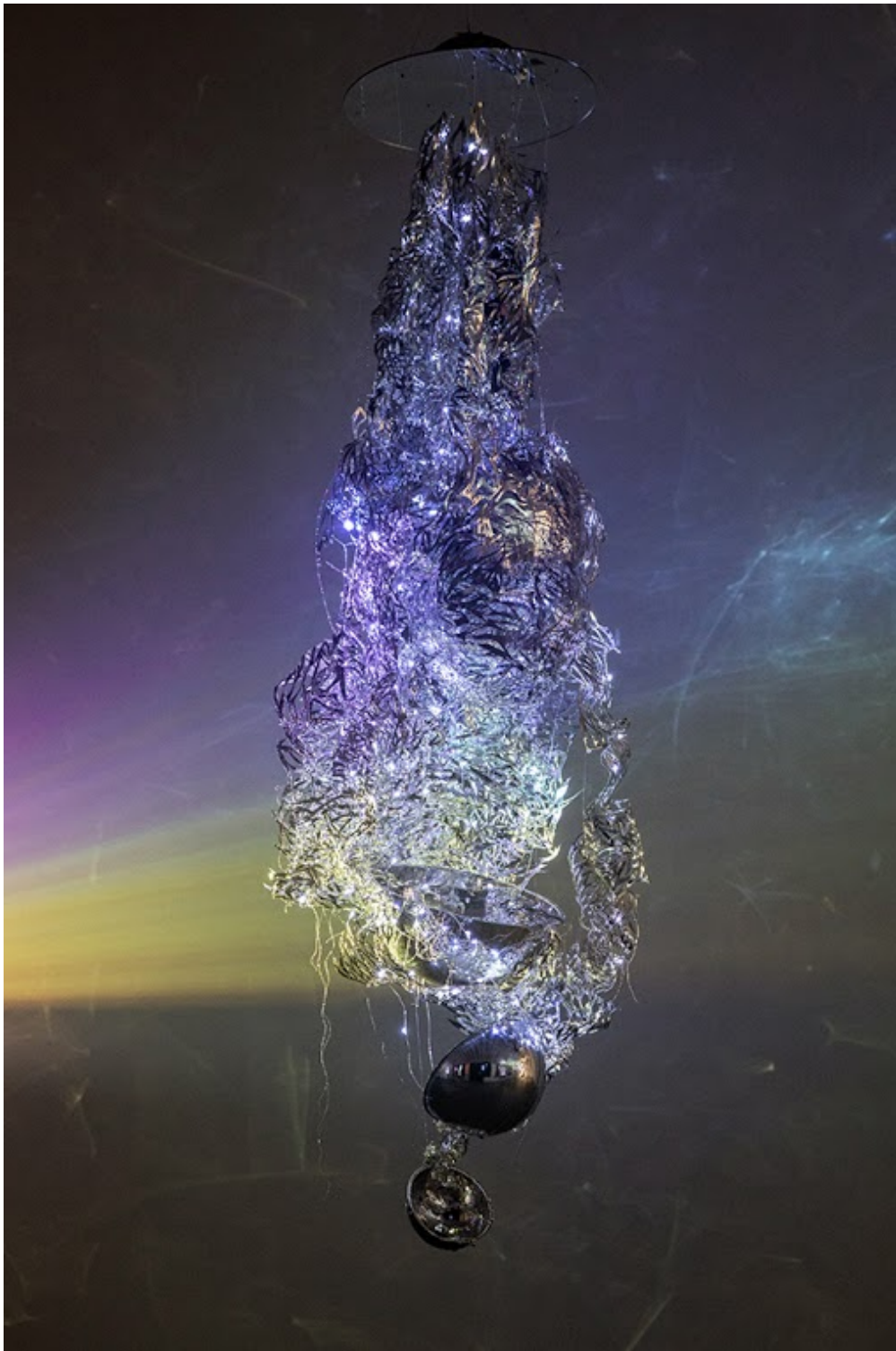
3:AM: What's your experience collaborating with other artists? Bowie said the best things you do you do them on your own and when you start collaborating it's when the worst comes out of you...

JS: Collaboration for me happens only when you both desperately want it: it has to be natural.

A real artist is focused on a singular vision of their own, and collaboration happens fluidly with your friends, the people who you love. My friend Laura Weyl photographs me a lot for example. She has shot an extensive series of artistic nudes with me throughout the world. I have rarely done fashion modeling — it has been always artistic collaboration with friends. For me this happens spontaneously: we simply decided to work together. It's a vibe thing.

However, it can be hard to do collaborations, you create and you learn because there are people who will twist the concept, wanting to take all the credit for your work. In these situations I think it is always best to let things go. The karma for protecting your energy will come back to you

through another opportunity. What's important is to always protect your own work, by registering images with the Library of Congress, having an arts lawyer on call, etc.



[photo: Mere Angel hand cut mylar resin sculpture at Organ Farm may 2017 photo by Walter Włodarczyk]

3:AM: What are the art world dos and don'ts you would like to share with other artists?

JS: Protecting your work is a really huge thing. Having a sense of ownership is my number one do. Not allowing anyone to take that away from you. You have to know what is your work, your original concept. Then you have to document everything and write it down. Ideally register your copyright, register your trademark, register your images with the library of Congress for \$35 and catalog your art. As a young female artist you are in this situation all the time when people want to fetishize you, while they say want to collaborate with you. Sometimes they just want your idea. Young femme and LGBTQ artist are like the gems of the world now since, there are so many people coming out, as if we are experiencing the blossoming of the world, a true Age of Aquarius. So this is our time, and we really have to protect ourselves, rather than to compete aggressively with each other. I strongly believe you have to help those around you in order to succeed.

The number one don't is: don't try to see yourself as a singular vessel that will only succeed at the cost of someone else's failure – this is a 100% wrong. Sadly this is an attitude our capitalist society really encourages. Instead we should be absolutely unified and protective over each other as American artists and only in this way will we be able to make money, succeed and influence history. Everybody's artwork would be better too, because we wouldn't spend so much time bickering.

I think this is especially rooted within female identifying people because historically we were so driven by the patriarchy to be jealous and afraid of each other. It's totally backwards. Collaboration is a different word for me than to make an artistic product together. I talked to a famous artist who I was fabricating for, who is in her eighties and well established – someone who overcame a lot, since there are not that many female artists from that

era who have gone so far. I asked her what was her word of advice for all of us to get to her level and survive, and she said one word: “cooperate.” She said it in a sense of making things happen together. It doesn’t mean let your artistic ideas be manipulated, or be taken away from you for free, but instead make each other’s shows happen, protect each other’s work, don’t let people talk disparagingly about each other in short-sighted attempts to “get ahead” in the art world.

Does that answer it?

3:AM: Absolutely!

JS: The main point is that cooperation and collaboration have subtle meanings, but I think it is super important to maintain the voice of the individual. Don’t let anyone to absorb your idea through any sort of collaboration! Also don’t try to push everyone down to get up, it doesn’t work, we can only go up all together, but I think we can do this while still preserving the voice of the individual.



[photo: Fairy Organ I at Organ Farm by Walter Wlodarczyk]

3:AM: "Where are you looking for inspiration?"

JS: My inspiration comes from far away from what you see on the surface of the final product. I am really inspired by nature (laugh), this is such a classic answer. Nature holds this magical code. It translates into everything around us, in all ancient cultures and religions, the heart of the culture consists of patterns . I am inspired by mandalas and fractals, types of infinitely replicating but simple code. I am looking at shadows of light that you can only see at one moment, no one else will ever see it that way. I wouldn't say psychedelics are a big influence, but when you are tripping you will see some of those patterns that are reflected in the nature. If you are visually tapped in, you see those patterns naturally throughout the day—they are encoded into the natural forms around us, and into people. This is such an abstract explanation, but I try to capture those patterns in the structures that I am building. Sometimes I see a pattern of shadows from plants and I scribble it down.

Surveillance issues are also a big inspiration in my work. I am always keeping close track of the news in this regard. For example Edward Snowden and Anonymous are big inspirations to me. A lot of the projects I have done within the last couple of years are centered around the topic of surveillance, using code and projection mapping. Data Log video (<http://vimeo.com/176096668>) will give you a better idea of what I do.

3:AM: What are you working on at the moment?

JS: I am thrilled to begin work on my first commission for the City of New York, for which I will design and build a custom sculpture in Brower Park. The work will be on view for one year starting in October. I am also an artist resident with Lightbox Lab in the Times Square area for the next few months, and will create an installation for a two week exhibition there

at the end of October. In December I am looking forward to presenting my first solo booth at Miami Art Week / Basel as part of the Satellite Art Show.

In the studio, I have turned my attention to mold-making and casting, after years of experimenting with poured resin. I am working to replicate unusual natural objects, such as seeds and bulbs with a fractal-like visual quality. For those interested in seeing my sculptural work up close, I am opening my studio for Bushwick Open Studios in late September. The open studio event will be accompanied by a live performance in the studio, incorporating projected light.

3:AM: As a character in art history, what impact do you think you've had? How have you changed the ways in which people look at art?

JS: I am working to change the narrative about art as an object-making industry, to an experience-making spiritual practice. That is what my immersive works, encompassing spatial design, performance, and light, represent. I am creating a space where the feminine sorceress can hold and direct power.



ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Jana Astanov is a multidisciplinary artist, poetess and Priestess of Impermanence at Red Temple. Her work includes photography, poetry, performance and new media. She published three collections of poetry: *Antidivine*, *Grimoire* and *Sublunar*. She can be found here: website (<http://www.janaastanov.com/>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/janaastanov?lang=en>), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/jadeiverasos>), Instagram (http://www.imgrum.org/user/jana_astanov/1939723401).

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