

AUTHENTICATION
IN ART



'I have a 1% chance of being acquitted': Russian activist faces six years in prison for posting vagina drawings online

Police say the body-positive images, accompanied by captions like 'Real women have body fat and it's normal,' violate pornography laws

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Yulia Tsvetkova's drawings include captions such as "Real women have body fat and it's normal" and "Real women have wrinkles and grey hair and it's normal" © Yulia Tsvetkova/Facebook

Russian authorities have charged an LGBTQ activist with distributing pornography after she posted body-positive drawings of naked women and vaginas online. Yulia Tsvetkova, 27, from the city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, faces up to six years behind bars following a six-month investigation into an art group called “Vagina Monologues” she set up on the social media site VK. The community is dedicated to “removing the stigma around the vagina and female physiology as a whole.”

Tsvetkova was placed under house arrest on 22 November 2019 for publishing the drawings with captions including “Real women have body fat and it’s normal” and “Real women have wrinkles and grey hair and it’s normal.” When she was released on 19 March she wrote that, “The investigation has big plans, but perhaps we had a small victory today.” Amnesty International slammed her arrest as “absurd” and said she was a “prisoner of conscience.”

“I am from a small Russian city in a remote region, the whole place is censored by the city administration,” Tsvetkova tells *The Art Newspaper*. “I set up a theatre and community centre, and have actively spoken out on social media, so I went against their censorship. The persecution of activists, LGBTQ people, and feminists is a state policy, it’s happening all over Russia.”

The activist has received death threats for her views and is not optimistic about the outcome of her imminent trial: “I’m trying not to lose hope but in Russia only 1% of cases are acquitted. This suggests that I only have a 1% [chance] to get out of this completely free. Such a disappointing forecast.”

This is not the first time Tsvetkova has faced pressure from Russia’s authorities for her art and activism. In December 2019, she was fined \$730 for violating Russia’s controversial law against gay propaganda—which bans the promotion of “non-traditional sexual relationships” among minors—for content on her personal VK page.

Many prominent figures have publicly expressed support for Tsvetkova, such as the Russian writer Lyudmila Petrushevskaya and the television host and former presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak. Instagram users are also posting selfies with abstract images of vaginas under the hashtag #forYulia.

“I see that the cause has already been boosted and this is what warms me,” Tsvetkova says. “I see that so many people are now in favour of LGBTQ, for women. So the government, ironically, did not silence us, but made it possible to loudly declare injustice.”