



# THE BASILISK

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YANA KONONOVA

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03.10.2025 – 10.01.2026



STIMULTANIA  
STRASBOURG

Pôle de photographie

An exhibition organized by Stimultania, photography center in Strasbourg.

The exhibition is co-produced with the Armenian Heritage Center in Valence.

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Radiations of War #54, 2022 © Yana Kononova

# EDITORIAL

In the Saint Gérald street, one must think of Japanese gardens. One must crush the nettles and stop exactly at the spot where the trickle of water appears, the stones, the thick, palmate leaves, the branch reaching in from the right. There, every day – before, because now I am no longer there – I think: it is beautiful. Here, it is beautiful.

Since the beginning of the aerial battles, Yana Kononova says that contemplation has become impossible, because the past crackles against the present. The before of now is not the before of before. Things have shifted place. In this new theatre, there is no longer a fourth wall, and so what Yana contemplates is already beyond. Beyond the sky and beyond the mossy branch.

The photographer was in Strasbourg in May 2022, for the exhibition *Tell Them of Battles, Meteors, and Eggplant Caviar*. At that time, I thought we needed to keep artists working, to present their subjects from before the invasion, to ask them – for the duration of an opening – about their photographic craft, their personal themes, the representation of the male body, of motherhood, of student residences, and of eggplant caviar. Yana had come by bus, I remember very clearly the moment when I said goodbye to her.

Today, Yana shows us the visible and invisible impacts of war. She speaks of water and earth, of the Dniro River and the fractures of Kaniv, the deepest ravines in Europe. The artist follows in the tracks of the wild boars who are already forging post-human geology. She prepares her threads of wool and weaves giant buffalo sleeping on the Danube. We are on Yermakov Island and on the new islands of Kakhovka, where the basilisk crosses the sky between the thick, palmate leaves. On the right edge of the tapestry, a branch.

Céline Duval

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The series *Radiations of War* runs throughout the exhibition. The artist and curator chose not to light these images, made at the beginning of the war in 2022. They remind us of the context: war leaves traces we cannot see – damaged lands, destroyed landscapes, emptiness.

Yana Kononova calls these traces *radiations*, as if war pollutes both soil and memory. It is an invisible presence, like a muffled sound, a vibration that passes through places and generations. It is something that endures, embedded in the earth, persisting long after the explosions.



*Izyum Forest* is a photographic work dedicated to the discovery of several mass graves in September 2022. In this pine forest near the city of Izyum, in eastern Ukraine, 471 Ukrainians – mostly civilians – were buried.

The artist presents a monumental format, like a historical painting. Five large black-and-white photographs depict the gestures of rescuers and doctors digging the soil. Dressed in white or blue suits, they appear as silent, almost ritual figures. We do not see the bodies – only the forest, the earth, the movements, and the presences.

Through visual effects (blur, overlays, textures), the images blur the boundary between humans and nature. Trees, soil, and silhouettes merge, as if the forest absorbs the memory of violence. This work questions how to represent horror without showing it brutally. The forest becomes a living memory of trauma, a place of contemplation. *Izyum Forest* is both a tribute to the victims and a reflection on collective mourning and the role of photography in front of the unspeakable.





*Desperation of Landscape* speaks of war's effects on nature. The series was produced in June 2023 after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, which caused a massive humanitarian and ecological disaster. For the first time, the European Parliament used the term ecocide in Ukraine.

Rather than showing the dam's destruction itself, the artist focuses on the traces: dried soils, collapsed banks, cracked earth, shattered landscapes. Her black-and-white photos blend testimony and poetry, realism and abstraction.

Figures appear exploring new lands – small islands, rocks, sandy zones. These silhouettes contrast with the dam's massive structures, reflecting on the relationship between humans, nature, and technology.

For Yana Kononova, the landscape is a memory. *Desperation of Landscape* questions how to represent these ecological ruins and confronts us with the lasting impact of war on life and territory.



In *Boar Gardening*, we are deep in the Kaniv dislocations, Europe's deepest ravines. Shaped in the Ice Age and reshaped by postwar reforestation, this nature reserve shelters hundreds of animal, insect, plant, and bird species – many endangered.

In these ravines, wild boars dig tunnels and carve their own paths. During the summer of 2024 –marked by extreme heat and the ongoing war in Ukraine – the artist descended into these ravines, observing how nature, animals, and climate shape the land far beyond human influence.





*Thresholds*, by Yana Kononova, is a new work created here for the first time. These panels are inspired by the iconostasis of Orthodox churches – a decorated screen separating the altar from the faithful, concealing one part while revealing another. This idea of visible and invisible boundaries echoes the artist's wartime experience, where time seems frozen between uncertainty and rupture with ordinary life.

During her travels in Europe, Yana Kononova felt a disconnection, as if people lived in a parallel reality, protected by a veil like the iconostasis. To express this feeling, she created a work blending contemporary symbols, war traces, landscapes, and fragments of memory.

The series gathers black-and-white photographs taken over more than two years: Yermakov Island in the Danube Delta with grazing buffaloes, devastated sites, burned lands, and heaps of metal. It also includes historical references, such as the depiction of the Siege of Izmil during the Russo-Turkish War (1787–1792).

*Thresholds* thus becomes a space of passage – between visible and invisible, past and present.



# YANA KONONOVA

Yana Kononova is one of seven Ukrainian photographers exhibited at Stimultania in *Tell Them of Battles, Meteors, and Eggplant Caviar* in 2022.

Yana Kononova is a Ukrainian artist whose practice combines photography, writing, and experimental printing techniques. Through her work, she explores the landscape as a historical process, in dialogue with her sensibilities, while adopting ecocritical and speculative approaches. Her work interrogates the materiality of the photographic image, oscillating between technical gesture and visual representation.

She holds a PhD in sociology and a degree in art and curatorial practices from the New Center for Research & Practice. Yana Kononova received the Bird in Flight Prize for Emerging Photography (2019) and the Hariban Award, presented by Benrido (2022). She was also selected by FOTODOK for the FUTURES talent network (2023).

Her work has benefited from grants and support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts (2023), the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM, 2024), and Faktura10, a major initiative of Ribbon International (2025). Her work has been widely exhibited internationally, including at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (USA), the Museum für Kommunikation, Berlin (Germany), FOTODOK, Utrecht (Netherlands), the Penumbra Foundation, New York (USA), Mystetskyi Arsenal, Kyiv (Ukraine), and the Jam Factory, Lviv (Ukraine).

**The work of Yana Kononova, Ukrainian artist and photographer, lies at the intersection of art, documentary, and research into the traces left by war and ecological disasters. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion in 2022, she has been developing a body of work marked by a constant attention to the visible and invisible forms of trauma – whether human, territorial, or environmental. In several of her recent series presented at Stimultania (*Radiations of War, Desperation of Landscape, Boar Gardening*), Yana Kononova investigates the imprint of violence on landscapes, producing a reading of ecocide that is both critical and poetic.**

The term ecocide, now at the heart of contemporary legal and ethical discussions, refers to the massive and intentional destruction of an ecosystem. In Ukraine, events such as the 2023 rupture of the Kakhovka dam – which caused widespread flooding, the death of animal species, and contamination of vast agricultural areas – fall within this dynamic. Yana Kononova captures both the tangible and diffuse consequences of these transformations.

In *Desperation of Landscape*, for example, she shows the dried banks of the Dnipro, emerging islands, and combines scenes of collective excursions with the imposing ruins of the dam.

In *Radiations of War*, the series that punctuates the exhibition, Yana Kononova conveys what she calls the *radiations* of war – not only chemical contamination but the invisible wave of trauma that persists in bodies, soils, and objects. The land thus becomes archive, wound, and sensitive organ all at once.

The two installations, *Izyum Forest* (presented in 2024 during the Venice Biennale) and *Thresholds* (produced specifically for the exhibition at Stimultania), are conceived as immersive, almost liturgical experiences. The first is a tribute to the victims of Izyum; the second draws inspiration from the iconostases of Orthodox churches to explore the threshold between parallel and dissonant realities.

# STIMULTANIA

33 rue Kageneck

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Exhibition : free entrance

Wednesday to Saturday

14 h – 18 h 30

[www.stimultania.org](http://www.stimultania.org)

