



Elena RABKINA

About the artist

Elena Rabkina is a Belarusian artist, curator, and researcher working primarily with documentary photography and interactive art. She combines her artistic, journalistic, and psychological background to create interactive pieces in social illustration and public art.

Her journey as an artist has been shaped by her experience as a refugee, having left Belarus due to political protests and the war in Ukraine. This displacement led her to explore public spaces as places of belonging, inspiring her work on theatres as semi-public spaces in transition.

Elena's practice operates on two levels: one driven by curiosity and sensitivity, the other by a desire to challenge the status quo. She describes herself as a curious mind with a camera, investigating every corner of a space, particularly by spending days and weeks within the same environment, she becomes attuned to the subtleties of her subjects, creating safe spaces for genuine expression and discovery. Simultaneously, she pushes boundaries by questioning existing structures and embracing transformation as a method of social innovation and engagement through her art.

Her works have been exhibited at National Center for Contemporary Arts (Belarus), SÜDBAHNHOF fotografische Werke (Germany), Mark Rothko Art Center (Latvia), Dnipro Center for Contemporary Culture (Ukraine), Toruń Centre of Contemporary Art (Poland), Brunnenpassage, Ars Electronica (Austria), Pakhuis de Zwijger (Netherlands).

About the research

Elena Rabkina's research highlighted the dynamics of labor rights, inclusion, and how semi-public spaces can transition to be more inclusive and relevant to both audience and workers.

The research focuses on theatre across Europe, specifically in Poland, France, and Portugal, representing Eastern, Central and South Europe and fosters a dialogue between two often-separated groups in the theatre ecosystem: workers and visitors.

- In each theatre, when allowed, Elena installed a "manifesto" in an open space, encouraging both workers and visitors to contribute their thoughts over a period of two weeks. This manifest served as a place for discussion and brought together over 650 submissions that reflect personal perspectives on what theatre can and should be.
- Elena used documentary photography to further deepen her exploration. She shadowed two workers in each theatre, using photography as a way to push forward the research and facilitate non-formal conversations. These interactions revealed what might not have emerged in more structured interviews and allowed her to capture not only the physical space but also the unseen, private aspects of the workers' experiences in these semi-public environments, as well as to bring closer visitors and workers through visual art.
- In addition, Elena engaged with local communities and student groups, encouraging conversations around the challenges they face. Together, they filled out cards and fostered discussions on the issues within the theatre industry.

The culmination of this research is Elena's book, *Between Public and Private*, which documents her findings and shares practical ideas of care and inclusion in the theatre space.

About the presentation

Elena Rabkina will present her book *Between Private and Public. A Journey into the Theatre Transformation through Photography and Artistic Research*, along with a series of documentary photography created during her residencies. She will also display the Manifesto of Workers and Visitors of the Theatre, which includes 650+ submissions from participants in Poland, France, and Portugal. This will be the first time the manifesto is presented as a complete collection.



- Nowy Teatr: 29th May – 9th June 2023
- Comédie, CDN de Reims: 29th March – 12th April 2024
- Teatro Municipal do Porto: 13th – 26th May 2024