

RISING :

# LIVE Q&A TRANSCRIPT

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16 NOVEMBER 2020

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LIVE CONVERSATION: PUSSY RIOT'S NADYA TOLOKONNIKOVA AND AMRITA HEPI

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PREPARED BY: RISING

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CONVERSATION TRANSCRIPT

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## OVERVIEW

On 16 November, 2020, during a knife-edge, global political moment, we hosted a very special guest: the anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, pro-community, artist, activist and Pussy Riot co-founder Nadya Tolokonnikova.

For this live-streamed event, Tolokonnikova was joined by First Nations artist, choreographer and RISING curatorial consultant Amrita Hepi to discuss empowering art and political expression.

## TRANSCRIPT

*RISING's Land Back playlist plays. Speaking from Melbourne, Amrita Hepi appears on screen, superimposed with the Australian Aboriginal Flag. Speaking from Los Angeles, Nadya Tolokonnikova is sitting in front of a digital backdrop showing the Red Square in Moscow, Russia.*

**AMRITA HEPI:** Let's start my video. And we will wait for Nadya to come up as well. Hey, Nadya. I'm just gonna change my virtual background, one second.

**NADYA TOLOKONNIKOVA:** Hello.

**AMRITA:** Hey. So hello and welcome to this RISING in-conversation event. My name is Amrita Hepi and we hope you've been enjoying the music playlist that was curated by the RISING music team. Before we begin, I just want to describe myself. I am a woman, I have long black hair. I'm standing, or sitting, in front of a white background.

I will then introduce Nadya in one second, but before we do, I just would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands in which I live, I learn, and I work on and which RISING takes place on, which is the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I want to pay my respect to elders, past, present and emerging. And also to say that, I'm doing this talk and that the internet is a physical place. The internet is not a place that exists in the sky and it runs through many people's countries, territories, into the deep sea. And to acknowledge the countries and connections that we are embedded in, in unceded territories. We recognise the strength, resilience, and artistic endeavours of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client groups and language groups. It's a key focus for RISING to work closely with First Peoples and community to develop programming and experiences for First Peoples.

I also want to welcome people who are deaf or hard of hearing. We have live captioning available tonight and RISING will be providing a downloadable transcript of the in conversation on their website. We also welcome people who are blind or who have blurred vision. I've described myself. Housekeeping, we'll pick up our conversation in a moment. We'll also be taking questions submitted earlier today, and a couple of comment sections if we have time. You can submit your questions through the Q&A option at the bottom of your screen. And we'll have some additional information in the chat. Also at the bottom of your screen or via Facebook comments. Also to let you know, the session will be recorded. But anyway, enough of that.

Welcome, Nadya, to give everyone a quick introduction, even though we are all very familiar with your work and your art and activism. Yes, welcome. Nadya is a member of provocative street art group, Voina. and the punk rock feminist performance artists Pussy Riot. Nadya has been an unwavering challenge to oppressive conservatism. First time in her home country, first in her home country, now in the world. Nadya's art and activism saw her imprisoned by the Russian state at the notorious IK 14 penal colony. Where she was forced to

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long gruelling days, sewing police uniforms, subjected to violence when she undertook hunger strikes to protest the treatment of herself and fellow inmates. Nadya has taken, has now taken her activism global. She's written protest songs in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. And have written music and toured with musical production Riot Days, based on a book of the same name by fellow Pussy Riot member Maria Alyokhina.

In 2018, Nadya released the book *Read & Riot: The Pussy Riot Guide to Activism*, which I've recently read and it's wonderful. I encourage everyone to get a copy of it. It was based on Pussy Riot's prison experience and Nadya's advice to fellow activists on how to make effective protest actions. She's also founded an independent Russian news service, MediaZona, and an NGO for some prison reform and protecting prisoner rights. Her ongoing work encourages societal change through the sharing of personal narratives, collective protests, and community building.

Nadya, welcome. Thank you so much for joining us. And if you could just describe yourself for the people who are visually impaired.

**NADYA:** Amrita, thank you so much for having me here. I'm Nadya, I'm the co-founder of Pussy Riot. And currently, I have long blue hair, and I look like a woman, though I identify myself as a queer person. Thank you.

**AMRITA:** Look, I feel like I just rambled off a lot of the work that you've been doing, but I wanted to open this conversation by saying, what is the thing that feels most urgent to you right now? What's the thing that you want to talk about? Like what's, yeah, what's keeping the fire burning for you right now?

**NADYA:** Hmm. Well, a number of issues. The first thing that came to my mind was unfortunately, domestic violence, because this is something that is an ongoing issue for Russian feminists, and we don't have any specific law against domestic violence in Russia. And more than that, the 2017, parliament passed a law that actually legalised [decriminalised] domestic violence. So right now, if you are with someone in your household, you are going to be fined with something like \$15-20, and that's it, when I'm going to, they're sending me to prison. So this is an unfortunate part that inspires my art slash activism. But you know, the fortunate part of my life as an artist and activist is my community. And I've been, just yesterday, I've been writing a song with a supporter of ours. We have Patreon and we have an option for, for some patrons, they can write a song with us. And so yesterday we had been writing about self-love and focusing on, respect to each other in relationships. So I would say, I'm getting most definite positive emotions from community. And it helps me to go through all the negative issues that we all encounter in our activism. And what about you?

**AMRITA:** Oh, the things that feel most urgent to me right now?

**NADYA:** Yeah.

**AMRITA:** Well, you know, I've, I've been thinking a lot about, when the virus happened here in Naarm [Melbourne], it was like a confinement led us all to thinking about the fact that human beings should not be put in cages, or the confinement was difficult and hard, even though it was definitely not kind of in the same realm of being in prison. But I guess I've been thinking a lot about incarceration. Indigenous Australians are one of the most incarcerated, the most incarcerated people in the world. And then I've also been thinking a lot about, or feeling a lot about use, and usefulness in art. And I guess like really trying to kind of draw the ring around myself to have the time to be in my practice. And, it's hard to know, like with art making, the outcomes aren't always tangible, you know? You can't like measure them

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by the metric and say, I did this and it equals to this. And sometimes I find it. I don't know if you find that, like, I find that it's, I want to draw the ring around myself to protect the time that I used to make art and not do admin emails, even advocacy to a certain point, because I think that's the most useful part. But yeah, how do you, how do you get into that zone when there is so much to do in the world that can be useful?

**NADYA:** Well, I learned, I think I learned a little when I was 17 or something around that age that I always have to leave at least two or three days in a week for my own deep work. And even when I had to study in my university, I would not be an ideal student. I would skip classes two days a week because I knew that it's going to be more important for me to spend this time, just to myself, be let alone with my thoughts. And, sometimes I would just, you know, escape from my family and everyone was thinking that I'm in university, but I'm just somewhere reading a book. But I think this is something that we all need to remember in our super quick world that we need, as humans, we need this time to build our inner space. And if you wish to build our internal building, our internal church, or internal architecture to be able to perform punk prayers in there. Because if you don't have time. Internal work, yeah. You know, when I was describing myself, I didn't mention that I'm talking in front of the Red Square. I'm performing the role of our national leader. I'm representing Russia here instead of Vladimir Putin. That's why I'm performing from the Red Square Yeah, so I think self care is very important and it's really important to say no to a lot of projects or possibilities and not feel, not feel guilty about it. Because by protecting yourself, you're protecting also your artwork and your art can actually potentially change a lot. And you're so right about not being able to measure it. And sometimes it hits us hard. Sometimes we feel useless as artists, especially during the pandemic, because we're not essential workers and what the fuck are we doing? But then you meet people who you inspired to do some things, sometimes eight years ago, 10 years ago. And they tell you all you've done to change their lives. And, then you feel like, Oh, maybe I am doing something important in my life.

**AMRITA:** And I think there's also this like for me, it's like this intangible thing, the power of affects that is, not always as quantifiable. Like the idea that art can be threatening in a way when it's produced under the right conditions. And it's as much about the process of its production, as much as the kind of end results and its distribution. But you just talk about, you're representing your country and I know that you have a lot of pride for Russia, but you're also fighting against this regime and there's kind of this, I have a similar feeling, I am in this occupied territory colonial state of Australia, but I also have a lot of love for for this place and what it is, in times I feel very sentimental about it. And yeah. How do you, continue with loving your country and also under the oppression of it?

**NADYA:** In Russian language? We would differ. Okay, the most important difference for any Russian person I think is between the country and the government. And this is important for English speakers too but I feel for Russian people, it's like it's anthological big philosophical category that actually defines our existence. Because over the last century, we've been fucked a lot by different governments, different ideologies, different regimes coming and leaving. And, but, but we always knew that something that is with us is our land and is our country and our people. And this is, this is not to be mixed with, with the state, it is not to be mixed with the government. So for me, this distinction is really clear. And, you know, the thing that I want is just our government to be sane. I'm not gonna, no, I'm not requiring anything like, it's not rocket science. I just don't want them to be crazy self-obsessed people who are thinking just about personal gain and personal power and not connecting their lives at all with Russia. Because most of

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our elites, they actually have their financial and life interests outside of Russia. And most of the Russian people, 75% of Russian people, they've never left Russia. They just don't have enough money to leave Russia. And by extracting wealth from our country, it is just exploiting all of those people. And, you know, for, for me, this distinction between government and people who live on our land is very clear. And I want our government to actually serve the people because we, in the end of this story, I think this is the role of Pussy Riot for the last 10 years, which is reminding everyone that governments are just bureaucrats, they're just clerks who we hired and we're paying them to make our lives better, not in the other way, because sometimes they forget about their duty to serve us. And they think that it's our duty to serve them, which is not the case.

**AMRITA:** So true, something that I always come back to is you know, if you, if you don't know how to serve, then you do not know how to lead and unless you can serve and serve with grace, then there is no way, you know how to be a leader. And I think that's, you know, it's very true of, yeah, I guess like thinking about the fact that, you know, when the state becomes so entrenched, in some ways within the kind of within, within the, within culture, it can be hard sometimes for people to separate, but I truly believe that and I said this a few times is that, you know, politics are posterior to culture. Like culture is first and kind of runs downstream from that. If it is that you can continue and making culture. And we're doing that all the time, I guess, within art-making, but in other maybe even in unconscious interior ways to continue to inform politics and culture, because they inform each other, I guess. Yeah, I guess like, there's that role of, like, where do you like draw the line as an artist of like, I think in Australia and also, you know, in the US too, where you're kind of being funded by different institutions, like where do you draw that ethical line in order to make art, but then continue to live? And is there a line that artists should draw or should they just take what they can to make what they need to get it out there?

**NADYA:** I think, I think ethics is really important for everyone, including artists. And it's really important to be aware of, of the means of the economical side of your art. And it's really important to be aware of the context in which you make your art. And I always, I always was asking other artists to, to be 100% aware of that. And to me, well, I don't have general, I don't have general rules for everyone. But personally I would not take money from, from agencies. Like, you know, like CIA obviously, or organisations like that are not in line with my political beliefs, but when it comes to individuals, it depends on again on their politics. So you always have to, you have to see, but I don't think, I don't think you can take everything, everything, and just use it for your art. You have to really see where do you gain the money. So for me, crowdfunding is becoming a really important tool because, you know, it's like, it's basically the same as for the politicians. You know, it's much better, like it's much nicer the model of Bernie Sanders who was funded by, by people - who are giving five, 10, 20 dollars - than Joe Biden or Hillary Clinton who are paid by big corporations.

**AMRITA:** I feel like I wonder, I know that a lot of people would be introduced to your work from Pussy Riot. And I know that you guys have the mantra that "Anybody Can Be Pussy Riot". And I guess, you know, what does Pussy Riot look like after the year we've had in 2020? And then what about going into 2021?

**NADYA:** When we started, it was just me and my friend Kat, and we were doing our best to actually make, to make appearance of, of a movement called Pussy Riot. It was really difficult in the beginning

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because at the time when we created Pussy Riot, it was not, it was not cool, it was not fashionable to be an activist. But it is right now in Russia, and in the whole world. And it wasn't the case in the 2010, 2012. I guess in 2012, it started to be more fashionable, but then 2011 and before it was a lost case. I mean, you would not get laid if you're an activist. It's just, it was really, and our job was to make it more attractive to people, including those people who are not nerds because we were nerds. Right, and wanted like, so-called, I dunno, party people to be involved in activism too. It was really difficult. But then over time through our prison sentence and you know, it was difficult, it wasn't an easy path, but I think, us and other activists who are working in Russia since, you know, some of them are working since early 2000s. We managed to make it happen so today, kids on TikTok, they're all saying "fuck Putin". And in schools, they're always arguing with teachers about, about Putin and our ruling party. So it's coming, it's becoming mainstream. And it's our goal because we knew that it was comfortable for us to be in our niche as it is comfortable for everyone to be in their bubble. But we wanted to get outside of this bubble and actually reach bigger amount of people. And that's why we were trying to make really loud and someone would say provocative actions. Because we knew if we were just going to make comfortable concerts for dumb people like us, it will be nice and everybody will be pleased and probably will get drunk and they'll have hangover over the next day, but nothing probably is going to change. So our goal was to reach more people. And so then when we reached television, I think our impact, it was like right after that action, the City of Christ the Saviour, we were not detained right away. We were not put in prison right away. But then this action ended up on national television. And I think somebody saw it, somebody from, from really high level officials saw it and possibly, I mean, I wasn't there, but reconstructing the events. I think it was like this. And after two weeks, after two weeks, we were arrested and then Putin commented on our case. And then Patrick, president of the church said something. Anyway, it hit us hard. It was not particularly pleasant experience to spend three years in jail. But I think overall, looking back what we've done, we did shift something. And we brought politics to this mainstream place. Opposition of politics.

**AMRITA:** Yeah. I think, you know, it's this thing where you're saying, or the thing that I liked about hearing this story is that I think a lot of the time that, again, there's obviously there is activists that are really working in policy change. But there's also activists that are working in cultural shifts, which are getting like happening with kids, you know, on TikTok. I mean, I have questions about the internet and how we're using it in activism now that activism is cool. But I guess it's like that kind of thing of going like, if I could have, if I played my part to bring it, yeah, to kids who are now like saying the same things that you wanted to achieve outside of the echo chamber of me and my 10 mates. This is nice to think about cultural shifts as much as policy changes.

**NADYA:** It's important.

**AMRITA:** Yeah, it is. It is. And again, like to come back to that thing that I think it's, you know, I'm obsessed with is like hard to measure, hard to go, you know, how do we put that on. On that note too, I guess, you know, the internet obviously is being a really great kind of organisational tool. And it's, you know, it's been like this matrix of DIY propaganda, and it's very important for organising, but it's also, in some ways become a kind of pedagogical tool and has led to this kind of like, I mean, there was already a far left and a far right, but it's kind of rising in moral righteousness and virtue signalling, but there's also, you know, a lot of use that comes out of it. What's your, you know, where are you landing on the internet?

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**NADYA:** I love internet because I see big changes that have been happening over the last 10 years, because of different internet media, that started up here in Russia. People use a lot on YouTube obviously, and Alexei Navalny, the main opposition leader in Russia who was just poisoned. He's in Germany right now recovering. He started making his website like 10 years ago, and now he has a really popular YouTube channel and more people watch his YouTube channel than Putin's speeches on YouTube. And I know that Putin has unique access to all the mainstream television networks. And so it still really works for him. There's a lot of people that their media consumption is still based on television. But, you know, we can see our media consumption shifting towards internet, we see more and more people are starting to be suspicious towards the regime in Russia. Because obviously internet is much more free and Russia is not China. We don't have such massive censorship. There are cases against journalists for sure, but they, they're not able to shut everybody up. So unless you personally are the one to get in trouble, I mean, so basically all the, all their oppression against media are pretty random. So it means that you don't really know if it will, if it will touch you, maybe it will. Maybe it will not. And that's why we didn't know if we were going to go to jail or not. Because they take just one activist out of 100 and they make the case out of this activist to scare everyone else. Sorry for not being always clear, but it is my, it's not my native language. So yeah, but also saying all of that is really important to have something that I call internet hygiene. And it means monitor constantly your own media consumption and your relationships with internet, and social networks. And I know recently it's been a big conversation about big tech, about privacy, about surveillance, and about our rights that we have towards our own personal data. And we have to be careful, obviously, because the big tech, they have completely different interests. Their interests are like.

**AMRITA:** They're like beyond the, I feel like big tech. It's like another kind of, it's the other camp now, you know. It's like, there's the people, there's the state, there's the government. And then there's the technocracy.

**NADYA:** Absolutely. Yeah. It is so weird because I remember I've been talking about it with Perry Chen, who is the person who started Kickstarter. And he was the first person who told me about this. And I started to think, well, Jesus Christ, I never thought about it this way, but it's actually, I think he's really right about it because, so he said, think about it. You're basically living in a government. You're being ruled by the government. But you don't know rules of this government. It's like, you're not, when you're on Facebook, Instagram, you're spending there big chunk of your, of your life. It's like living in Russia, but not even knowing the constitution of Russia because those places that are completely non-transparent and we are actually by being, being citizens of this country we are still being slaves because we didn't have any, any rights about any, we don't have any vote about what's going to happen. And though we do invest a lot of our efforts. We do provide them a lot of content. We don't have a word to say about where these big tech companies are going to go. And I think over time we should claim it. And without big mass people's movements, nothing's going to change.

**AMRITA:** Yeah, I was going to say, Nadya, do you wanna, do you wanna start a, a third party, kind of a conglomeration, internet conglomeration where we can have our own technocracy, we just need some things, a few other things to start it. That'll be the art project.

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**NADYA:** We should do it because you know, all these capitalists and governments, they are forming unions to protect their interests. And I think activists should form much more unions than we do have right now.

**AMRITA:** Mm hmm. Yeah, that's interesting . The kind of the unionisation, the conversations around unionisation. Like I, I know in Australia, in the arts, in particular, we've spoken about starting unions and I'm very inspired by, you know, a lot of union movements though it's like this thing where, you know, if a strike is only as good as the labour that it denies, then how do artists, it's like the artists can never strike, you know, because there was already this kind of like overwhelming amount of culture. So, and the labor won't be denied. So it's like the union is, needs to be for artists thinking about their modes of production to, yeah, it's like to protect themselves in order to continue. But I have this, I have a question. With your art, I guess, you know, you're trying to, you know, is it important to you to reach people on the opposite end of the political spectrum? Like, do you, and do you think it's important to bridge that gap? Yeah, like when you're kind of entering into those conversations with people. Yeah, that don't share those same beliefs as you, yeah, what do you think about that?

**NADYA:** Hm, to me personally, it differs from one piece to another. And sometimes I'm more thoughtful and more conscious about people on the opposite political spectrum and sometimes art is just, you know, this, I'm just channelling my anger and in that case, I guess I'm not that thoughtful, but I recently had a conversation with an amazing queer pop artist. Dorian Electra. And they told me a saying that actually stayed with me. They said that if we are not taking into account people on the opposite political spectrum, then we just work of convincing them to go even further from us because we can say something that will offend them in their industry if we don't take them into account when they make our, our action or a song. And so then maybe some people who are still undecided, who are, let's say they're young libertarians, you know, a lot of young kids in Russia, at least. And I know in the United States as well. They find libertarianism really attractive because libertarianism tells them that you will be independent from everyone. And everyone wants to be independent when they're 14 years old. And so they're like "you will be independent from everything, from the government, from your parents, from everyone". And so if we're going to say something, if you're just going to say fuck libertarians, probably those kids will be like, "oh, now I'm a hero because she says, fuck me". Right, so if we're not conscious of that, but again, you know, you cannot always be 100% conscious because sometimes, sometimes you just need to say, "fuck you".

**AMRITA:** Yeah, exactly.

**NADYA:** So I'm trying to balance, but I guess with age, I didn't, I didn't want to admit it's aging, you're becoming more thoughtful and actually conscious of existence of different spectrum of political views. I think it's happening with me. So when I was 10 years ago, when I was 21, not 31, I was totally like, I was talking like literally to 10 people around me who would share the most radical and edgy political ideas that I was sharing. But I think that jail really changed me a lot because I realised that actually I can be friends with people who are, who do not share my political views and it's valid. And it's even more important sometimes because you realise that there's something deep inside you, like something human on some profound level. Sometimes it's just emotion. Sometimes it's an aesthetical thing that you share and it doesn't have to be political. And I've become friends with people who, who are Putin supporters and

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it was a beautiful feeling of unity. What about you? Do you think about people that are on the opposite side of the spectrum?

**AMRITA:** Yeah, I do. And I think about, you know, I don't want to be so morally... you're right. Getting older has changed me, I'm also 31. I'm thinking, you know, about myself at 20 where I was like, yeah, fuck every single fucking institution and establishment ever. And don't fucking talk to me until, you know, X, Y, Z, but sorry if I, whatever, I was going to apologise for swearing, but. I think now, especially in these complex times, I am, and especially with the internet, I'm, you know, listening to more things, trying to discover where misinformation is for myself. And I think like I never want to be like, I never want to be so morally righteous that I can't be nimble in my approach to thinking about politics, to thinking about art. And I think that the internet tends to exacerbate this a lot. And you know, that like, if you were, if you dare to talk to somebody who is seen as like morally wrong or evil, it's platforming them and I'm like, well, can they not, can we not hold two ideas at the same time? Do we need to condemn that person? Or can we continue to exist in the making of what we're making with enough resistance to know that when I meet somebody that this is where I stand. And like, it's such a, it's such a, a minefield sometimes to navigate. And I, yeah, like I do think that it's important to, yeah. I can't be so extreme, I can't be, I'm still as radical as I was before, but I'm trying to do it with like a really discerning kind of listening and comprehension of the subject that I'm talking to, because there's also this like thing, you know, when you're like, oh, you know, if we just get this guy out of office, then everything will be fine. And that is part of it, like in terms of Putin, but it's also the whole, all of the work that goes underneath to change the system that's in place, and to dislodge it as much as it is the one person.

**NADYA:** Definitely. It was a big reason why we started Pussy Riot because we just noticed, because before Pussy Riot, we were making just actions against Putin and against the Kremlin, and then we realised that a lot of friends of ours, they are not feminists, they're not proud of LGBTQ. So we were like, hey, like we're all against Putin, but also like, you should be more vocal about women's rights, about rights of gay people, rights for other queer people. And they're like, "oh, this is a not important issues". And then we were like, "oh, I thought, I thought it is". So we realised that it's important to make a group that combines anti-authoritarian values with pro LGBTQ and feminist values. So yeah, it means a lot to me of, you know, not trying to just displace someone, but also try to build something constructively, while tried to displace someone. Because it doesn't work for me to just, you know, to make revolution. And then after the revolution, you're going to be like, standing, "oh, what am I doing, what am I building?" Like, "what are my values actually?".

**AMRITA:** Yeah, yeah. I agree totally. And who is it that is with me the whole way on the intersections of every, of every, because no activist is purely an activist. They are also, you know, a multiple in everything that they are doing, even if their focus and their attention is on that act. Hey, I wanted to, I mean, I, I mean, I can talk about art and politics and action, but I also wanted to talk to you about, you know, what are some of the, well, actually, who are some of the artists and activists that you're engaging with at the moment that you feel are, are really inspiring you? 'Cause I really enjoyed when you were talking about, you know, framing protest as a fight for another concept of a world, rather than the fight against something, yeah, and the future of activism and art as well.

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**NADYA:** Well... The latest thing that I collaborated with someone was my agenda with, Dorian Electra, this queer artist and The Village People, legendary band. And it was, it was a quite provocative song where we were playing on the fears of people on the opposite side of the political spectrum actually. We were, we were toying with their fears. You know, about us gay activists to try to turn everything homosexual, including frogs. So I feel like humour is a big part of being an activist. And this is something that first of all, helps to communicate with, with the persons of another political beliefs, because they realise that, oh, you're not, you're not here to kill them, right? Like you're not here to shout at them. You're maybe here to make fun of them or maybe make fun of yourself and it really helps to establish a human attraction. So, yeah. Who else, musically? I think I'm still under the influence of Sophie. She's just fucking amazing. And what else? I'm listening to a lot of, a lot of actually pop music and a lot of trap music. And I'm trying to figure out how to make it more political, because I'm really obsessed about merging pop culture with politics more because I want to see more political art. Because in the last four years, in the United States, especially, I've seen a lot of, I mean, because of Trump, obviously, a lot of pop artists and rap artists and television stars, they would say something about politics, but they would not make a political art because it's like different things, you know. Lady Gaga can go on stage and sing about love, but then she would be like, oh, I'm pro gay. But another thing is to make a song about feminism and LGBTQ alliance. So we've seen that happening. It's like, 'This is America' music video that was so popular for a reason because I think people need more of art like this. So I'm just going through a lot of viral hits and I'm thinking, oh, what if this person would sing about, you know, feminism instead of the Friday party?

**AMRITA:** Yeah, that was, yeah, the other Donald with 'This is America', he's wonderful. It's kind of like the merging with, with politics and then with also with art as well. And especially in popular culture, I feel like one person who has done that really well, but I guess it's more like philosophy and politics and pop culture is, Slavoj Zizek, which I know you guys had, you're writing letters back and forth to each other, but kind of, I kind of obsessed with his political commentary with on pop culture and on things to be able to kind of like push the kind of boat on both ways. And I, you know, I know you guys corresponded, do you ever speak to him at all after the correspondence?

**NADYA:** Well, I had a correspondence from him when I was in prison. We were about to meet, but something happened and we didn't. I really hope that we are going to, because yeah, I read his books and I love him. Well, like we're not agreeing on absolutely everything. I know that he is, he's much more fond of Bolsheviks than I happen to be, but yeah. I mean his method and his way of thinking is really helpful for me too in my own analysis of political situations here and there and everywhere.

**AMRITA:** And then there's also like a, I guess in times of like pop culture, pop culture, you know, like, yeah, it's, it's that thing where it's like, there's this like apathy to make a stand and then rather than yeah, to not place yourself in the firing line of it, but then there's also the thing of going, well, do I use it to, am I using it to like, kind of, I don't know, sway, like, like you want to know that the person that you're backing is really like walking the talk. And I wonder if that like stops people from doing that at that level, but at the same time, I'm like, you know, 150 million people in America showed up to vote and it's, it was such a captive audience. I know that you're dialling in from America. And yeah, I just like, how, how, how is the feeling, that now Biden is in and yeah. How was that, that kind of process?

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**NADYA:** Well, the whole Donald Trump, Donald Trump presidency was like bad dream. And I remember when I was on the plane to Los Angeles, like within maybe my first time or second time going to Los Angeles and the world just talks about Trump possibly being a candidate. I was like, Jesus fucking Christ. I wish I could just turn the plane back. 'Cause I could not believe that people are going to like seriously consider this person to be a candidate and then let alone being the president. But I always try to overcome my fears and anxieties with art. So I just channel them in art and that's how 'Make America Great Again' music video happened. And, you know, singing that, that was really pretty fucking dark, but also the song is light. And the song is this, you know, playful, playful tune with no even slang words. And it was a conscious decision because we wanted actually to reach people maybe who are not as aesthetically radical as Pussy Riot, normally Pussy Riot is. And we wanted to speak with them and maybe some of the people would change their minds. But the video is dark, the video is like, the whole, the whole concept of the video is these Trump guards, the police that wears the Trump wigs and they all look the same, they look like Trump. They're stamping me with words that Trump said about different minorities. Like, you know, he was fat shaming people and he was shaming people for where they're from. And my idea was really simple is that even when you're, when you're not president yet, it was done in the beginning of 2016 before he was elected president, your words as a public figure can actually physically hurt so many individuals. So I wanted to show that simple process, you know. I knew that a lot of kids in schools started to get bullied just because they do not look like Donald Trump. I mean they're not...

**AMRITA:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I have a couple of questions.

**NADYA:** So basically I'm really relieved that he's out of office.

**AMRITA:** Yes, and I know that they would pro- I mean, I'm gonna, I am very relieved as well. I'm also, I guess, yeah. I'm like, I wonder about our political... Yeah, America's politics is almost like the kind of keeps the world as a captive audience and it's almost like, I mean, it's real and it affects people, but it is, it becomes this kind of place for a moral theatre to play out. But you have people dying to ask a lot of questions. So we have got, there's a Q&A here. Oh, I like this question. "Is it possible for Nadya to enter politics in Russia officially and aim for Putin's job one day?"

**NADYA:** I love this question. Officially, I will be able to, to be elected as anyone. I mean, as someone, in two years because for 10 years after, oh no, shit, no, not in 10 years, in four years. 10 years after you're released from prison, you can not be elected anywhere. So I was released in the end of 2013 that in the end of 2000- shit. I will not be able to be elected somewhere. But that's fine with me because for now, I'm cool with just being an artist. But actually I would love to run for some kind of, some kind of official job one day. Because I really love those people and have deep respect for those people who make it. Personally, it will be really hard for me because I'm an introvert. And the reason why I really love to make art is because you don't have to be in the public side all the time. And, you know, being a politician is completely different job. But also I'm one of those people who say that, you know, the minds of a lot of people, politics is a boring and great place, but the thing is that it's going to be boring and grey until you enter the politics and they make it colourful and bright and painted with rainbow colours.

**AMRITA:** I think, okay, so Nadya will be going into politics in Russia and try to do it fast.

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**NADYA:** One day.

**AMRITA:** One day, one day. The next question is: "On the funding question. How does an anarchist punk reconcile selling merchandise and what are your ethics around merchandising? Thank you."

**NADYA:** Well, I have to find our everyday activity and participation of people who will help Pussy Riot to make music who help them to make videos. And I don't feel good about just telling all those people that they have to work forever for free. So all the money that we raised through merch, they go into creation of art and creation of activism, including besides paying salaries for those people who participate in our projects, they go into paying for products that we send to our guild members. And we just had Sasha Safif spending 30 days in year jail. And unfortunately, when you are in jail, you still have to eat and they give you shitty food. And so like all these sorts of expenses.

**AMRITA:** And I think there's also, you know, I understand the kind of, the desire to rile against capitalism but there is, you know, that age old thing, like we are all living under the capitalism and need to be able to provide for ourselves and our communities and if it is selling merchandise, I don't believe that that is necessarily participating in the broader capitalist kind of regime. So I would say anarchist punk, you can reconcile that and sell your merchandise. And also it's like, I don't know, merchandise is always one of those things that you have forever and you can kind of like, it kind of starts a conversation with other people or with other activists.

**NADYA:** I mean, really also I'm obsessed with creating clothes. I don't know if it's a good excuse, but I've always been dreaming about creating clothes. And so for me, it's one of the, one of the ways of creating art and it's bigger than just, you know, putting Pussy Riot on clothes and selling it, like, we do put a lot of thought and it's like, I have a lot of people with who I work with together on that. So I don't know, to me as important as a piece of art as a music video or a protest performance. But I totally see how other people can see it in a different way, but you know, I always say that I'm not a \$100 bill. I don't have to be loved by everyone. And I'm fine with that.

**AMRITA:** They also have another question here: "Is the movement towards establishing cyborg rights useful in facing big tech and surveillance capitalism?"

**NADYA:** Establishing what?

**AMRITA:** Cyborg rights. The movement towards establishing cyborg rights useful in facing big tech and surveillance capitalism

**NADYA:** Do we have cyborgs whose rights we need to protect?

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AMRITA: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

NADYA: I mean, yeah. Are we talking about someone, are we talking about AI?

AMRITA: Yeah, and if we're talking about AI, then it doesn't need protection because it is manufactured. I think that a lot of the time we were talking about AI that people like to divorce it from the fact that it's actually made by people and used by people. And that it's not, it's still a computer that is generated through us. Random question: "Do you play video games, Nadya?"

NADYA: No. I wish I had time to play video games. But last time I played them, I was like 13 years old. Amrita, do you play video games?

AMRITA: I do not play video games. But I think, I wonder. I mean, they have such a captive audience. I wonder about using the kind of, the machinations of video games and gaming as a way to, as like, I think it's really interesting as an artistic practice and also think that it could be used in activism in certain ways. And I like the idea of creating a new world that, yeah, I think it could be useful and maybe I need to learn how to, yeah, how to code a little bit more or do that. But yeah.

NADYA: I participated in, Pussy Riot participated in, a concert that's being held in Minecraft.

AMRITA: Oh, cool.

NADYA: It is awesome. I mean, I still didn't know how to play really well. It was not really required, but the audience there was really, I mean, some of the people just came because of, just because of the concert. But I think some of the people came because they actually do play Minecraft. And I made an extremely political DJ set in there with quotes from Bernie Sanders. And I created one song that was called 'Fuck Capitalism'. And it actually was met really really warmly.

AMRITA: I think like, yeah, I was, I also watched the f- I mean, I'm a dancer by trade, a dancer and choreographer. And I, my, a lot of young people around me and families and cousins were, are into this game called Fortnite. And so I watched the Fortnite games and that was incredible to kind of see this, like the translation of the body into these dances and yeah, I mean I didn't really know what was going on, but like millions of people that joined. So I think it's interesting. I have another question here: "Can you speak more about the tension between virtue signalling and actually setting an example for a new standard of practice and discourse for what's acceptable?"

NADYA: Hmm. I think it's more a question for you because you spoke about virtue signalling, right?

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**AMRITA:** Yeah. I mean, like, let's, if we can discuss it together, like, I feel like, you know, I want to give people the, I feel like, they always have this thing where I'm like, I'm always hopeful and I wanna give people the benefit of the doubt that like, while on one side of things, you know, good intentions pave the path to hell, but on the other side, it's like, everybody is hopefully trying their best to yeah, to participate. And if the internet or the latest election has showed us anything, it's that people want to participate and they want to be a part of things. And they want to be involved. And whether, I mean, maybe it's, and maybe that's like something that activism can talk to, you know, is that you have the right to participate and the desire to, and so in regards to like virtue signalling, it's like, if it is that you're a participating, then I think it's like, it's on the discernment of us all to kind of think about where it is that you stand. And yeah, there's a lot of noise and you just gotta view it like if you're trying to put your best foot forward, then that's in some, it hopefully will be enough. And if not, it's like enough to start a conversation about something. Where do you sit on it? Look, I, we're about to go over time. So I just wanted to say a really big thank you for joining me in conversation today and yeah. For somebody who is so radically revered to continue with kindness and with grace and openness, I'm, you know, I'm really in awe of you. It's inspiring.

**NADYA:** Thank you, Amrita. It was really, really, really awesome to talk to you.

**AMRITA:** Thank you. I just have to do a little wrap up to also say thank you to the team at RISING. And, you know, we'd love your feedback on how tonight's event went. If you'd like to be able to hear more about the, RISING's program announcement, make sure you're subscribed to the newsletter. And we've posted the playlist from the start of tonight's event. You can follow RISING on Spotify, it was called Land Back. It was to celebrate NAIDOC week and to talk with the resilience and mourning of Aboriginal people in this country. But yeah, once again, thank you so much, Nadya. And it's been such a pleasure to talk to you. And yeah, look, I hope to cross paths with you in the real world one day.

**NADYA:** Same. I hope to see you.

**AMRITA:** Yeah, yeah. All right, bye!

**NADYA:** Bye. Thank you everyone for joining.

**AMRITA:** Thank you everyone for joining.

*Livestream ends.*