

Pussy Riot Ruled an 'Extremist' Organization by Russian Court

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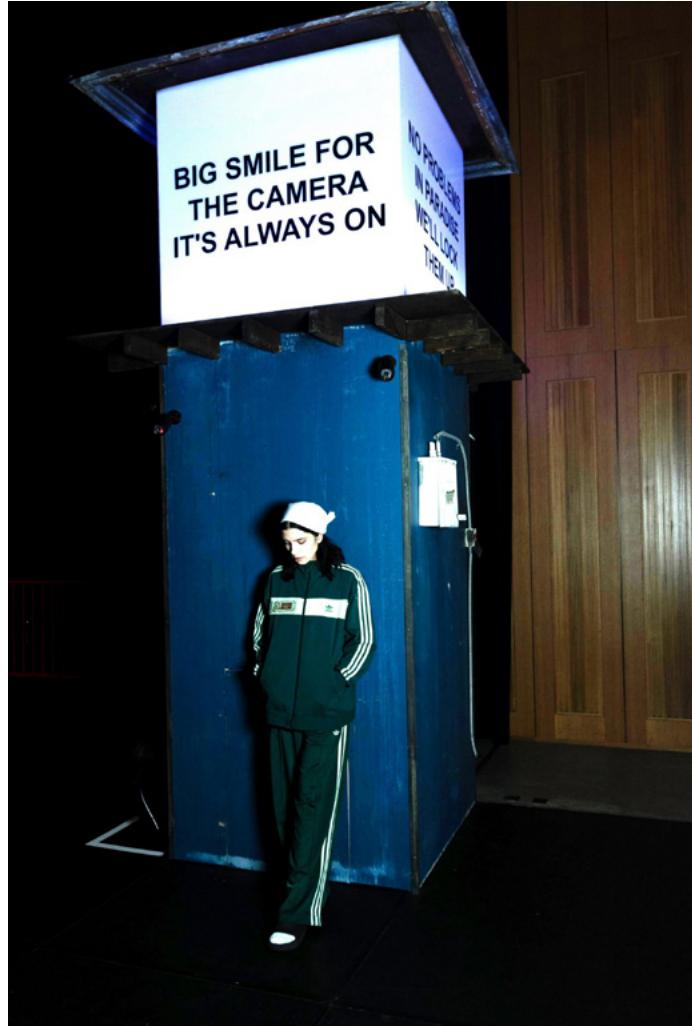
Nadya Tolokonnikova, *Police State* (2025). Photo: Alex Vasquez, courtesy MCA Chicago and Pussy Riot.

Pussy Riot founder Nadya Tolokonnikova has spoken out after the feminist art collective was designated an extremist organization by a Moscow court on Monday. "In today's Russia, telling the truth is extremism," she said. "So be it—we're proud extremists then."

The ruling, made during a hearing at Moscow's Tverskoy Court on December 15, comes after Russia's Ministry of Justice filed a lawsuit last month seeking to classify Pussy Riot as an extremist organization.

"This court order is designed to erase the very existence of Pussy Riot from the minds of Russians," Tolokonnikova said. "Owning a balaclava, having our song on your computer, or liking one of our posts could lead to prison time." She added that the ruling as even had repercussions outside of Russia. "I've already lost many acquaintances who prefer to stay away from someone with Putin's target on her back."

Tolokonnikova first heard about the lawsuit while finishing up the live durational performance Police State at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, which closed on November 30. For the length of the five-day performance, she sat sewing police uniforms beneath a guard tower bearing slogans like “no problems in paradise, we lock them up,” and “big smile for the camera, it’s always on.” Tolokonnikova described the artwork as a warning “about surveillance authoritarianism spreading around the world like a virus,” in a new statement outlining the irony of the Russian prosecutors’ filing.



Nadya Tolokonnikova, Police State (2025). Photo: Alex Vasquez, courtesy MCA Chicago and Pussy Riot.

“Is it a coincidence that I’m getting the news about [Pussy Riot] being added to the list of extremist organizations in Russia, or is the artwork once again merging with reality?” she asked. “I’m laughing in disbelief.”

Tolokonnikova co-founded Pussy Riot with several other Russian artists in 2011, intending it to be an amorphous and international group that anyone is free to join. The following year, she and two other members were arrested for performing anti-Putin songs at Moscow’s Christ the Saviour Cathedral. They were imprisoned for two years for “hooliganism.”

In her statement from late November, Tolokonnikova wrote: “Someone has to be the voice of common sense. And in this distorted world this voice now has to come from punks, artists, tricksters, holy fools.”

This is hardly the first time that Russian authorities have cracked down on Pussy Riot. In 2021, Tolokonnikova was listed as a “foreign agent” by the Ministry of Justice, and she was placed on Russia’s most wanted list in 2023. Other organizations that have been labelled as extremist by Russia include the international LGBT movement, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Meta platforms, and the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation.



Artist Nadia Tolokonnikova poses near Los Angeles Police Department officers standing outside the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles's Geffen branch during protests in that city.
Photo: John Caldwell / Pussy Riot.

Currently living in exile, Tolokonnikova has continued to exhibit internationally. Last year, she received her first museum retrospective of past and present activism at OK Linz in Austria. "It's very unusual for a museum to not try to censor the political content of art but actually encourage it," she told Artnet News at the time. "I've had a lot of private conversations with representatives for various [Western] institutions and they told me they support my mission but, unfortunately, it's not for them."

In June this year, she did an earlier iteration of her Police State performance at MOCA Geffen in Los Angeles. The performance continued even as the museum temporarily closed on June 8, when U.S. president Donald Trump ordered the National Guard to descend on the city amid protests against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in L.A.'s garment district.

"Durational performance is a scary thing to step into: once you said you're going to show up, you can't just leave simply because the National Guard had a whim to occupy the city, so my choice was to stay and continue doing my job as an artist," Tolokonnikova said in a statement provided by the museum.