

МІСТЕЦЬКИЙ  
АРСЕНАЛ  
MYSTETSKYI  
ARSENAL

ANNA ZVYAGINTSEVA'S  
PERSONAL EXHIBITION

06.03



04.05

*Finefly*

10-12 LAVRSKA ST., KYIV  
ARTARSENAL. IN . UA

# ANNA ZVYAGINTSEVA. FIREFLY

CURATORIAL TEXT

NATASHA CHYCHASOVA

The first stroke appears on a blank sheet of paper—thin, tentative. Perhaps it will grow into the trunk of a big tree, the face of a loved one, or a house with a round window. Or perhaps it will remain a simple mark on the page. Translucent thoughts take shape, unlocking doors that seemed shut forever. Drawing becomes their expression—a way of exploring reality, not merely mirroring the world. Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy writes about this in his book *Le Plaisir au dessin* (The Pleasure of Drawing): “To draw is to approach something that withdraws. It is not a matter of reproducing the visible, but of making something appear that would not exist otherwise.” Anna Zvyagintseva’s practice is centered on capturing life’s smallest motions. She plucks them from the stream of life, turning them into sketches in her notebook. There, they take their rightful place, fitting into a consistent narrative thread and confidently showing that everything around them makes sense.

Anna Zvyagintseva is an artist of sublime attentiveness. Her gaze gently captures the fleeting beauty of reality and the everyday—the glimmer of light on the walls

of St. Sophia of Kyiv, a blurred landscape seen through a dirty window, the sway of a curtain, the scribbles of a ballpoint pen, footprints in the snow, the warmth of an accidental touch. Each work begins with a drawing—a quick sketch from life, a first thought taking visual form, or finding shape in words. This approach allows her to build a consistent practice, where images from her notebooks migrate into her works, forming a holistic world of an artist. Anna Zvyagintseva works across a range of materials and media, from metal and paper to photography and painting. All of her works are fluid and ethereal, capable of disappearing at any moment.

She is constantly in dialogue with her own doubt: should an artist be a lens that merely reflects the outside world, or should they tell their own story? The acute awareness of her own presence—the notion of “I am in my works”—marked a significant stage in Anna Zvyagintseva’s artistic journey. Yet one thing has always remained unchanged: trust in her own feelings, which serve as a catalyst for deeper reflection. “Feeling is a crucial word and concept for me. Feelings and thoughts matter more than reaction, action, or outcome. Feelings are the basis, the base that helps to react and act,” says Anna.

The sense of vulnerability became pronounced in her works after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war (2014). Scenes of peaceful life, assembled from metal bars, crumble before the viewer's eyes, underscoring their fragility. Around the same time, a recurring image of a curtain emerges—from a familiar cozy drape, it turns into a ghost dancing in the wind in the emptiness of a window shattered by an explosion. During the full-scale war, Anna Zvyagintseva discovers a new materiality—dissolvable, transparent, yet undeniably alive. She frequently turns to textiles, a medium that evokes a sense of safety, even as it can become a burial shroud. Despite the proximity of death, the artist's works convey the potential for rebirth and hope—in a willow pole that has the power to sprout and become a tree, or in the weaving of a protective shirt made of nettles that will help you come back alive. Through her works, Anna Zvyagintseva shows that the war couldn't destroy the ability to dream and see beauty.

Amidst the uncertainties of war, she turns to the search for inner light. It is embodied by a firefly, which helps to overcome the fear of the path even through the darkest forest. Drawing on this feeling, the artist returns to painting, creating landscapes. They immerse you in a world where the real and the fantasy coexist. As you gaze at the still

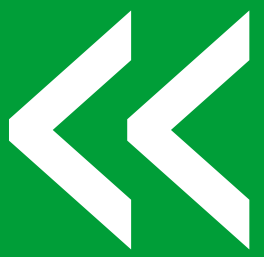
surface of the canvas, the landscape begins to feel familiar. You unconsciously want to start a journey to see its smallest details. This exhibition is a journey—into a stable and familiar world, where all the seeming coincidences take their place. A journey into the world of Anna Zvyagintseva—an artist who has caught a firefly and holds it gently in her hands.

## BIOGRAPHY OF ANNA ZVYAGINTSEVA



PHOTO: YEHOR YEFIMOV

Anna Zvyagintseva (b. 1986, Dnipro) is a Ukrainian artist. She studied painting at the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture at the Faculty of Painting in Vasyl Gurin's studio from 2004 to 2010. In 2020, as a recipient of the Gaude Polonia scholarship, she worked with Professor Mirosław Bałka in the media art department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. In 2021, she began a residency at the Jan Van Eyck Academie for Art, Design and Reflection. Since 2010, she has been a member of the Hudrada curatorial group. Zvyagintseva works with themes such as the body, paths, useless actions, and small gestures. Her artwork interweaves paintings she produces in various forms and transmedial variations such as sculpture, installation, video, and fabric objects.



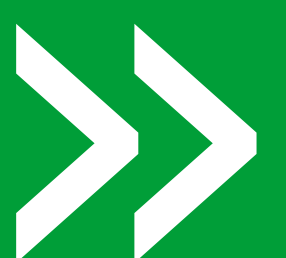
Firefly as a figure  
bravely moving through  
the forest.

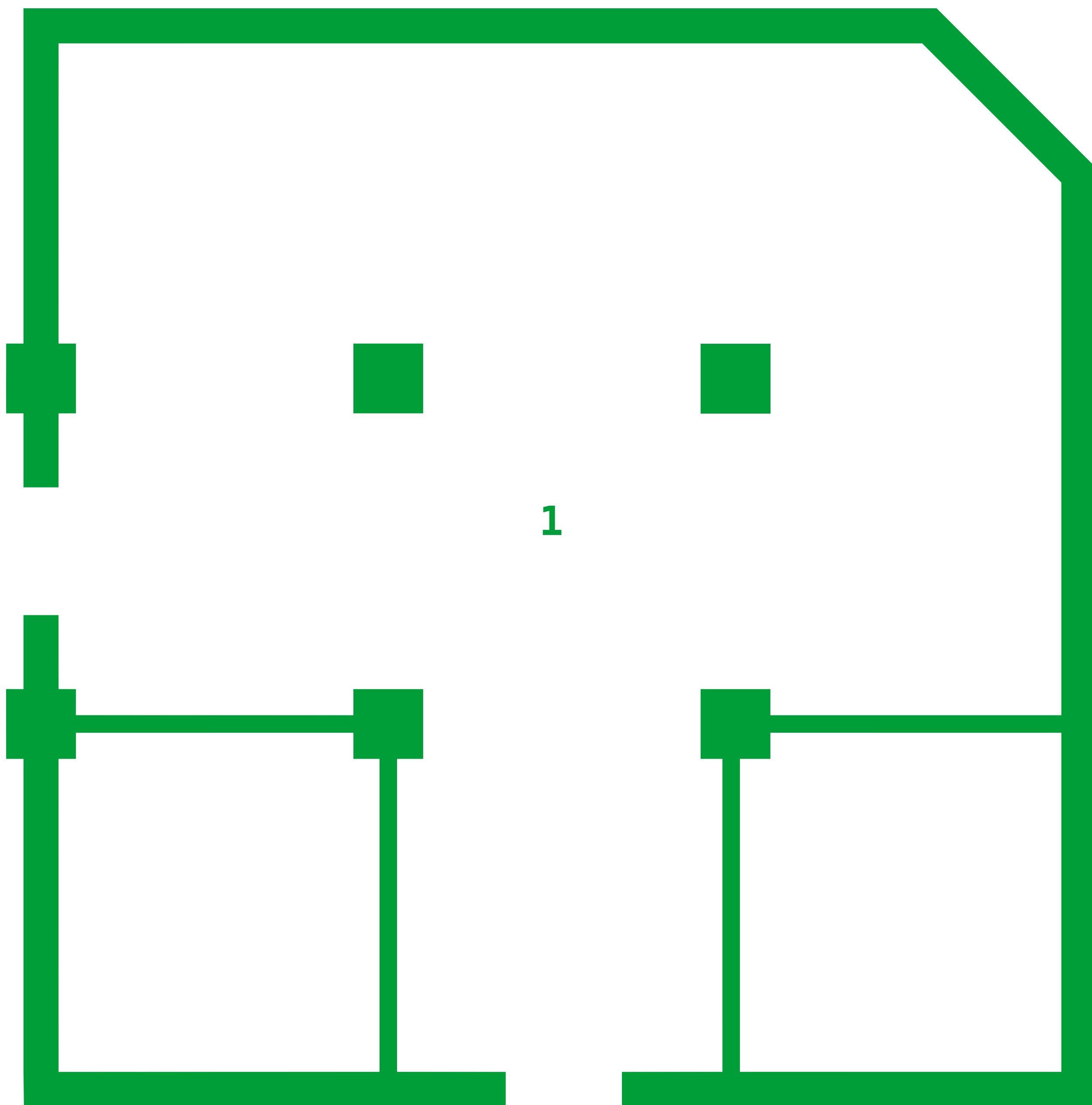
Through the  
pitch-dark forest.  
It is not frightened,  
it glows from within.

I am the light.

I will never be afraid  
in the darkest forest.

Anna Zvyagintseva





**1** **FIREFLY**  
2025  
Oil on canvas, fabric, charcoal, graphite, iron wire, lightbulb, sunbeam



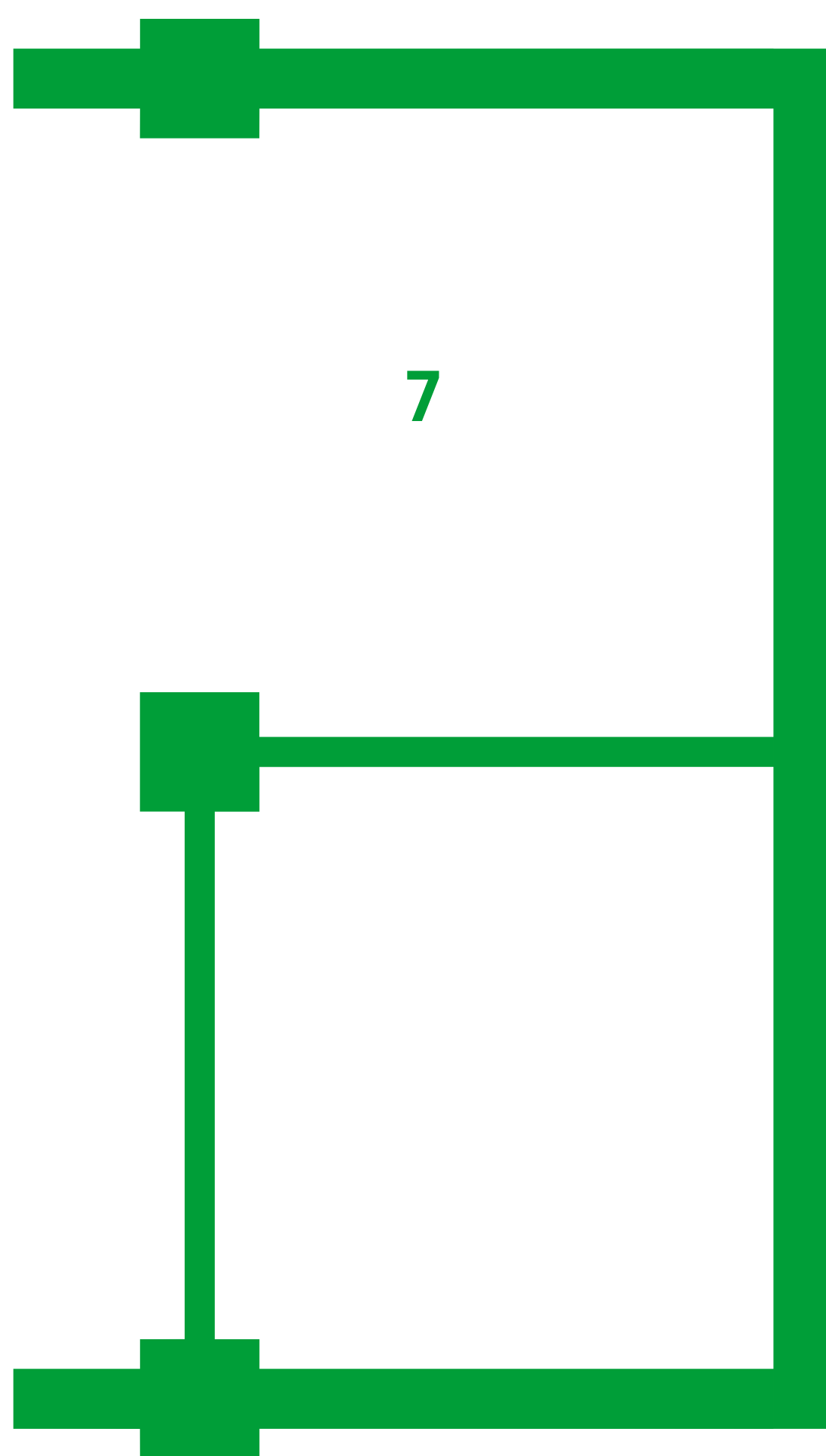
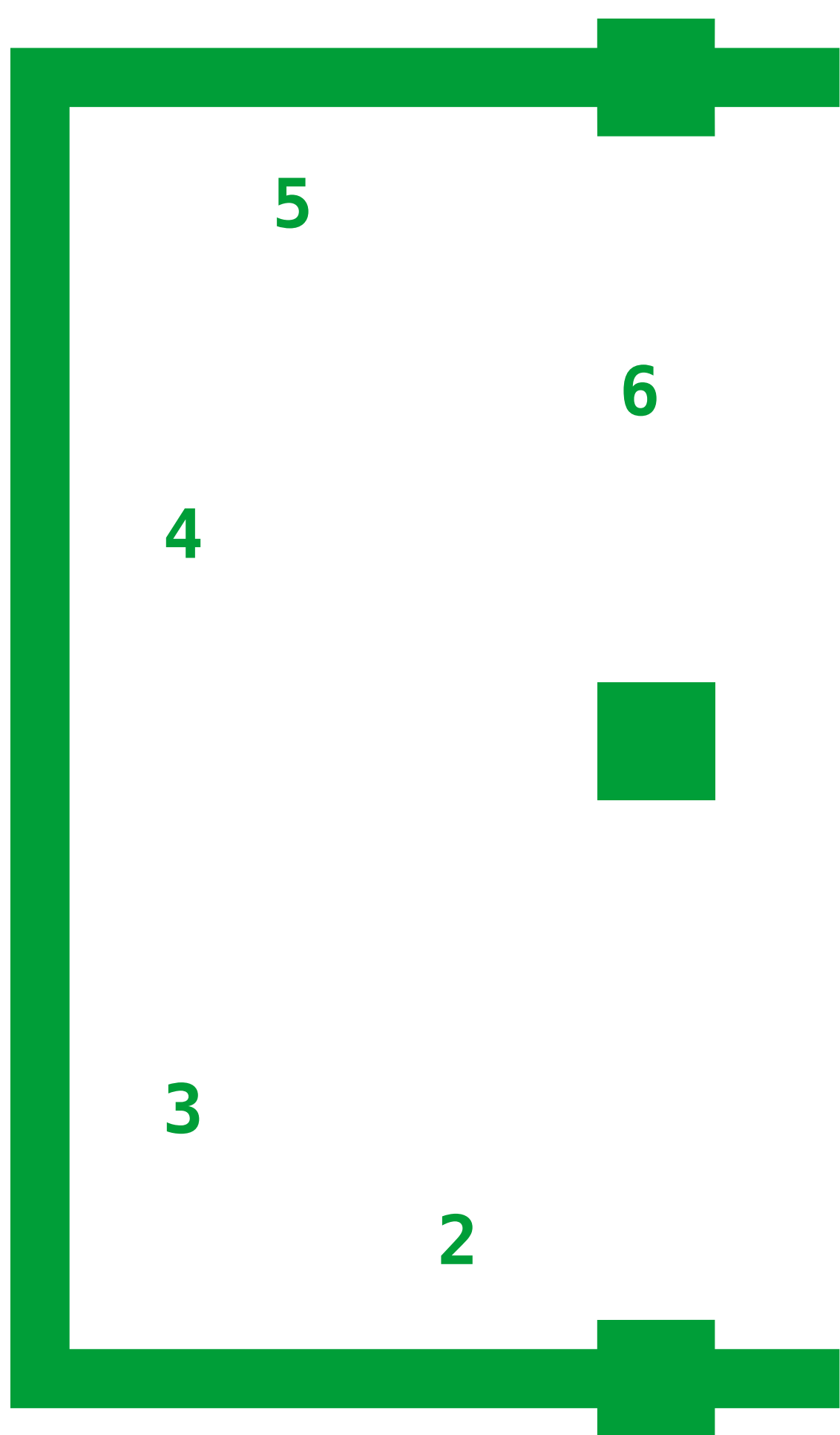
Painting holds special significance in Anna Zvyagintseva's practice. The artist's relationship with it was long, complicated, and full of internal doubts. For her, it seemed almost sacred and inaccessible, but at the same time was very much desired. Anna found her way to work with painting as a fantasy medium that allows her to reassemble reality. For the Firefly project, the artist created four paintings. These are fragments of landscapes that seem familiar and envelop you in warmth. The impetus for their creation was her inner desire to share a bright feeling that seemed to her strange and bold. In the notebooks of that period, she constantly returns to the image of intertwined grass and a dress that seems to glow from within in the forest darkness. In her landscape paintings, Anna creates a space where the viewer wants to stay. This feeling is further enhanced by the textile work—an enlarged shirt of the artist, which looks like a hut made of light and plants. A sunbeam becomes a guide to the fantasy world, transforming and animating the image with its flashing light. Even in the most hopeless moments, light shows the way. Firefly, the main character of the project, plays the same role of a guide, symbolizing the light inside each of us.



A new work begins from  
the memory of a sensation.  
There is something small,  
hardly perceptible, that's  
difficult to describe.  
I try to capture it and  
show it, using the  
instruments of art.



Anna Zvyagintseva's manifesto for  
the Secondary Archive platform



- 2 TO PLANT A STICK**  
2019-2022  
Willow stick, field,  
photo made on Tachihara 8x10  
analog camera, found note
- 3 THE NOOK**  
2023  
Fabric, pencil
- 4 ON RETURN**  
2023  
Drawing, nettle plant,  
thread making, knitting
- 5 ZAPILLYA (from Ukrainian  
background, behind the  
battlefield)**  
2023  
Pencil on paper, video,  
4 min.
- 6 GROUND SHADOWS**  
2023  
Paper, ink, graphite,  
charcoal, metal
- 7 SUSTAINABLE COSTUME  
FOR AN INVADER**  
2022  
Dissoluble materials, rabbit  
skin glue, seeds

At the beginning of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war, Anna Zvyagintseva, like many other artists, asked herself: “Will I be able to work? How can I make art now?” Continuing her artistic practice became a way for her to resist the war and find a connection with herself. For many years, she based her work on reality and turned to subjects from the life around her. The full-scale Russian invasion changed the artist’s approach, and she began to work “from her mind” drawing places and objects from memory.

One of her first sketches of that time was an image of a person hiding in the corridor of her apartment. This image was inspired by her father’s story about her family hiding from shelling.

In the artworks of this period, the artist is constantly searching for anything that might save and protect her, realizing that this is ephemeral. This idea is revealed in her work *The Nook* (2023), which reproduces the shape of a tent where a dress seems to be hidden. It gives a sense of safety, but in times of war, it can become a burial gown anytime. The tent, as if enchanted by various symbols so important to the artist, forms a safe place. What catches the eye is a small house with a round window—her

daughter's drawing.

Anna Zvyagintseva observes her personal feelings a lot, which prompt further reflection. She transforms her inexplicable fear—when her child asks if she can run on the grass—into the artwork *Zapillya* (from Ukrainian background, behind the battlefield) (2023). The artist reveals what the field might hide in itself—stones, a tooth, dry leaves, iron, or something barely recognizable. This way, she shows that the landscape retains traces of the disaster, rather than dissolves them. *Ground Shadows* (2023) is about remembering tragic stories. Using different types of paper, Anna Zvyagintseva draws wounded tree trunks and plants, motionless witnesses of disasters. However, in her artworks, the landscape is often a space of hope and love. The field becomes such a space, which can give strength and life. A willow stick sprouts on it (*To Plant a Stick*, 2019-2022) as a tribute to the artist's grandfather. At the same time, nettles can also grow in the field, from which the artist makes threads and weaves a shirt, like the heroine of the fairy tale "Wild Geese" (*On Return*, 2023).

While studying at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Anna had access to the Future Materials Lab, where she continued to work with

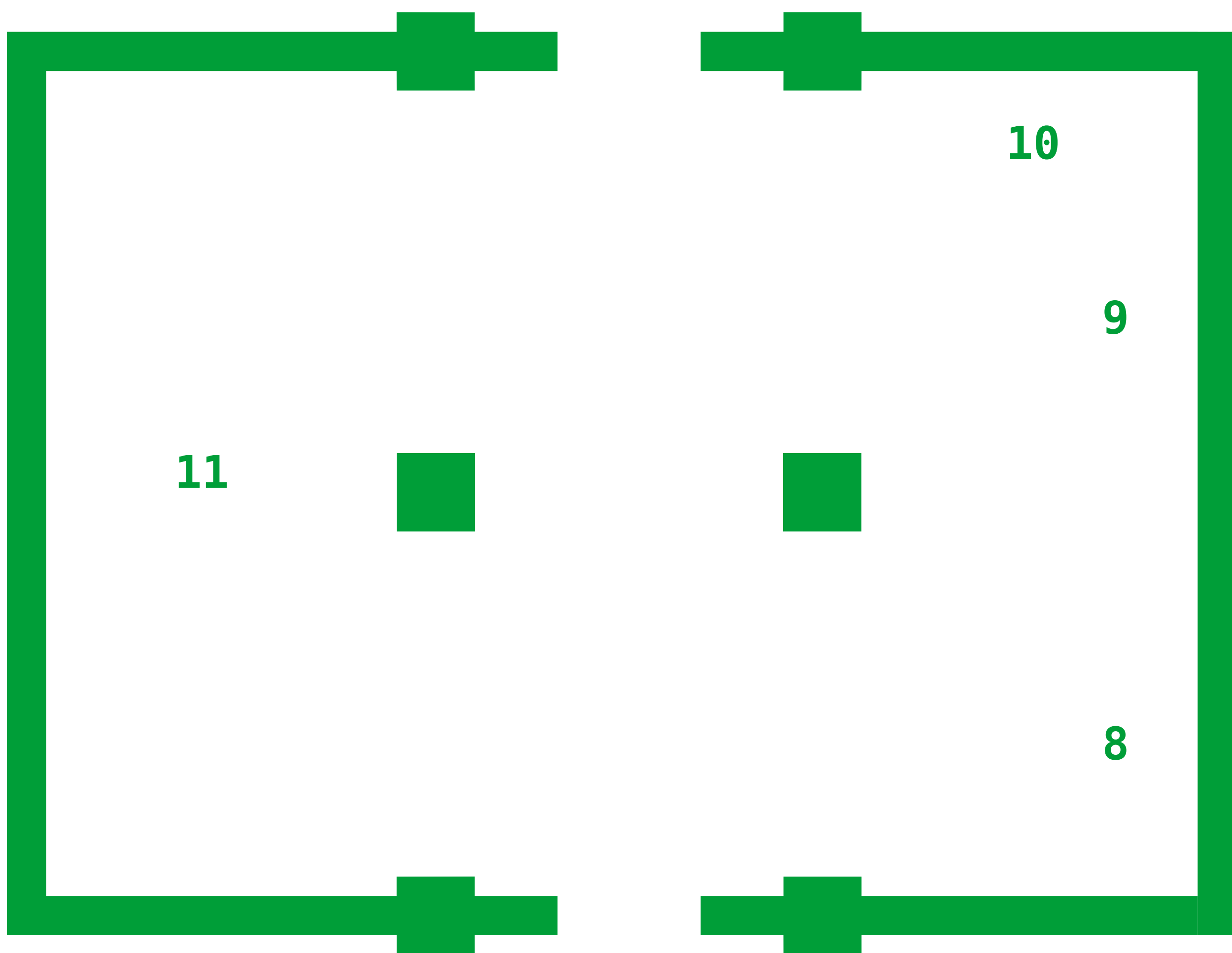
sustainable materials. Experimenting with them, the artist created her Sustainable Costume for an Invader (2022). Using rabbit skin glue and seeds, the artist creates underwear and emphasizes that no matter how much we want to dehumanize the enemy, these are real people who do evil.



I draw. This helps me to pull myself together. I realized that the war aims to kill or paralyze all living beings. To continue artistic practice means to resist the war.



Tissue of War, Tissue of Justice.  
Anna Zvyagintseva in conversation  
with Maria Vtorushina.  
BLOK Magazine



**8** A SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE ARTIST'S SOLO EXHIBITION "THE EMPTY SPACES OF DOORS AND WINDOWS ALLOW THE ROOM TO BE INHABITED" AT THE NAKED ROOM GALLERY, KYIV 2019  
Oil on canvas

**9** SINGLE ENTRIES  
2016  
Fabric, machine embroidery

**10** FOUND DRAWINGS  
2018  
Digital print, lightbox

**11** DECLARATION OF INTENT AND DOUBT  
2019  
3 channel video,  
7 min. 15 s.



Useless actions and random gestures—this is how Anna Zvyagintseva's practice is often described. For a long time, her artistic method has been focused on observing and capturing unnoticed traces of human presence. This way, she explores the thought process, which is embodied in the scribbles of ballpoint pens. The artist collects sheets with them in various stationery stores and, enlarging one of them, creates the embroidery *Single Entries* (2016). At first glance, all the scribbles look similar, but if examined closely, they show their uniqueness. Anna Zvyagintseva carefully collects various unconscious drawings, such as scratches on a door handle or cigarette butt marks on the walls. The artist grants them the status of artistic drawings and practically highlights them in *Found Drawings* (2018).

She often says that her attentiveness to everything around her is derived from boredom, which creates space for thought. Watching the movement of light in her studio, she notices a sudden sunbeam touching the surface of the canvas and seemingly reviving it. Anna Zvyagintseva tries to capture this volatile feeling of change and searches for it on different surfaces. She captures her observations in a series of paintings from her solo exhibition *The Empty Spaces Of*

Doors And Windows Allow the Room To Be Inhabited (2019).

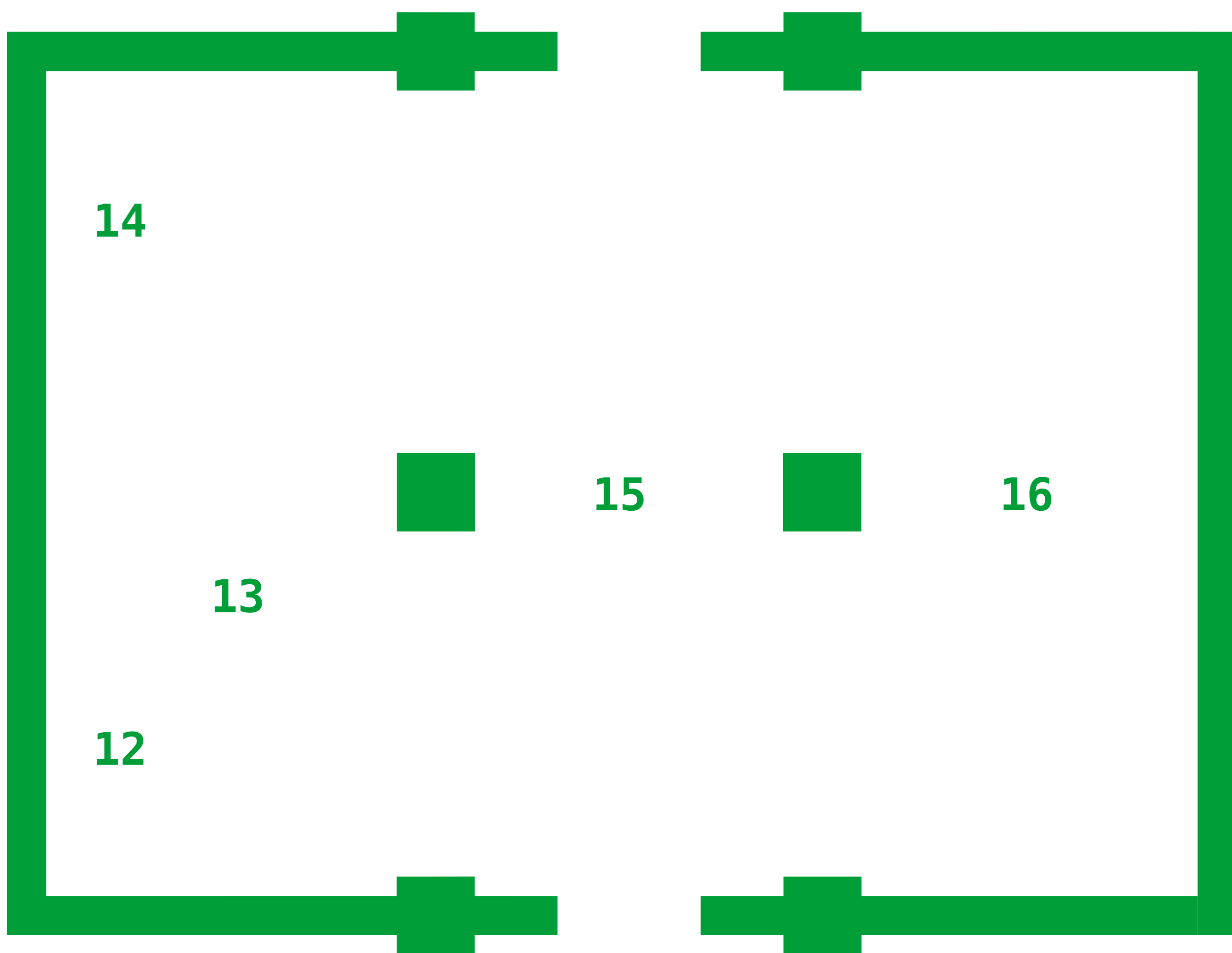
Despite such consistency in her practice, doubt has become a constant companion of the artist. She defines it as a potential state: “The solution found in doubt becomes yours.” To doubt means to make many attempts, not knowing which one will lead to what you are looking for. The search process itself and its traces are often more valuable to the artist than the final result. In this process, Anna Zvyagintseva makes an important discovery—her works speak about herself. The artist manifests this discovery in the Declaration of Intent and Doubt project (2019).



I'm interested in capturing what is difficult to capture. Invisible, ephemeral, routine actions often have no result, they may even be unattractive, but they represent an everyday activity that is meaningful.



Kateryna Yakovlenko, The Emptiness of Routine: artist Anna Zvyagintseva on her exhibition at The Naked Room gallery. Vogue UA



- 12 PATHS**  
2013  
Ink on paper, video,  
10 min. 41 s.
- 13 SCULPTURES OF MY FATHER**  
2013  
Found objects
- 14 ORDER OF THINGS**  
2015  
Bar reinforcement, welding,  
iron wire
- 15 TO DRAW YOUR OWN WINDOW,  
TO CRUMPLE THE PAPER**  
2015  
Bar reinforcement, welding  
Architects of the work:  
ΦOPMA
- 16 MISPLACED TOUCHES**  
2017  
Metal, gypsum

Anna Zvyagintseva has been surrounded by art since childhood, as her grandfather, father, mother, and aunt are all artists. One of her first strong impressions of art was the work of Sergei Parajanov, who created sculptures from scrap materials in prison. The artist was fascinated by how everyday things can be turned into something new and fabulous. Perhaps that feeling formed her work method—capturing insignificant everyday things from the flow of life and turning them into art. That is why Anna Zvyagintseva refers to her artistic practice as realistic. For example, in *Paths* (2013), she notices a pattern in the trails that are trodden bypassing existing roads, and, in *Sculptures of My Father* (2013), she sees a sculpture in candy wrappers and pieces of paper that her father used to roll up unknowingly and leave everywhere.

Motherhood has greatly influenced Anna Zvyagintseva; with the birth of a child, she has been thinking a lot about the importance of physical contact and the feelings that follow—not only between mother and daughter but also in broader social life. The project *Misplaced Touches* (2017) refers to this experience.

Careful observation of reality allows us to feel its slightest changes. Since the Revolu-

tion of Dignity and the occupation of Crimea and parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions, the artist has been looking for a way to talk about the war while staying in “peaceful” Kyiv. Anna refers to her early drawings of everyday scenes and creates metal objects with fragments crumbling before the viewer’s eyes (*Order of Things*, 2015). The crumpled drawing of a curtain in *To Draw Your Own Window, To Crumple The Paper* (2015) also proves that the everyday course of life has been disrupted.



I remember my first strong impression of art: I was seven years old; it was an exhibition of works that Sergei Parajanov had made in secret while in prison. Using the colored foil caps from the dairy drinks (milk, kefir, ryazhanka) he received from friends, Parajanov crafted medallions decorated with various images. I was impressed. Something magical had been created out of everyday things. Sometimes I think that this is what made me become an artist.



Anna Zvyagintseva's manifesto for the Secondary Archive platform

**HALL 4**

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Natasha Chychasova

### **PROJECT MANAGER**

Anastasiia Garazd

### **TECHNICAL DIRECTOR**

Serhii Diptan

### **TECHNICAL MANAGER**

Rima Abdalla

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Oleh Hashynov

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Ihor Trotsenko

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#### **GRAPHIC DESIGN**

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Olha Dudenko

Olha Kryzhanovska

Oksana Matsiuk

### **PHOTO AND VIDEO**

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Volodymyr Cheppel

### **TEXT EDITING**

Oleksandr Stukalo

### **TRANSLATION**

Tania Rodionova

Burshtyna

Tereshchenko

The exhibition is organized in cooperation with Art Arsenal Community NGO.





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