

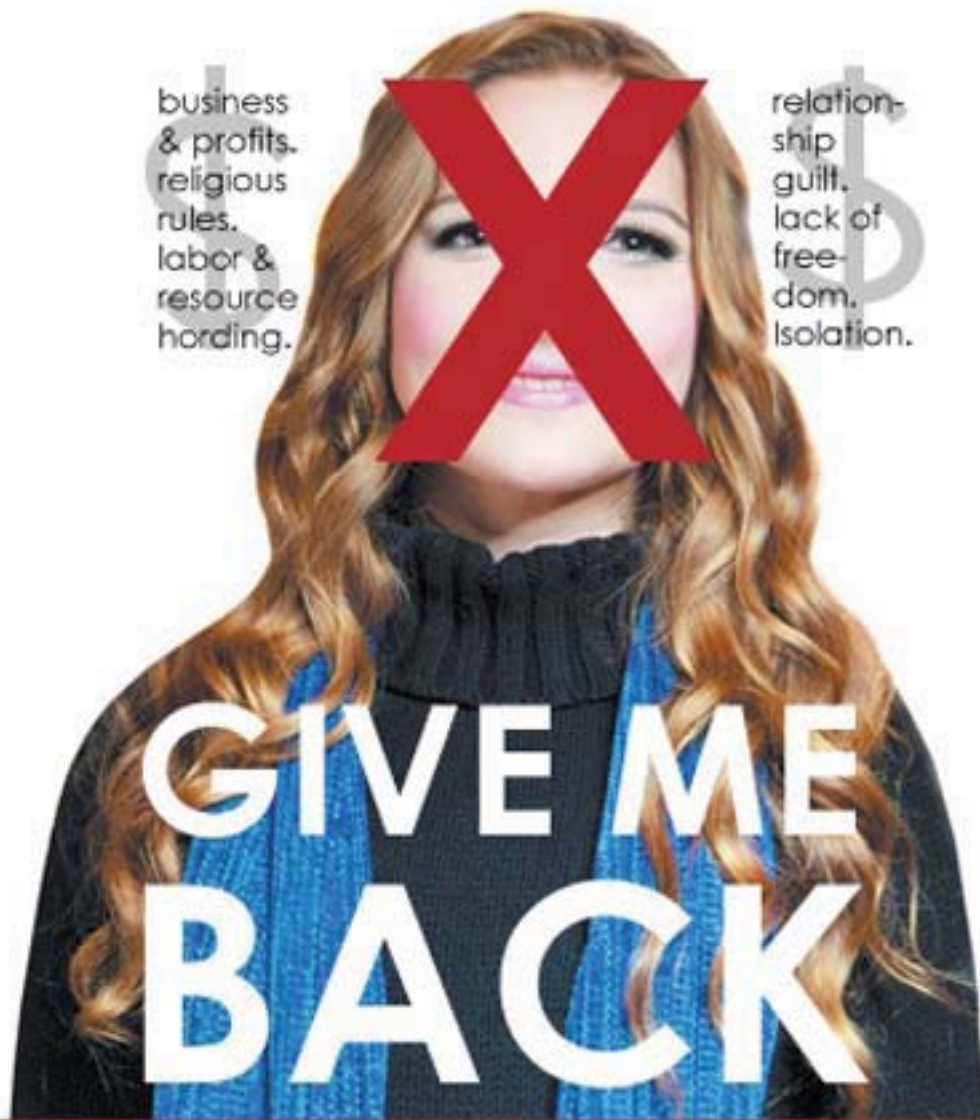
# JAVA

enter

arts/adverts

business  
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religious  
rules.  
labor &  
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hoarding.

relation-  
ship  
guilt.  
lack of  
free-  
dom.  
Isolation.



NO 208 • DEC 2012

antiquarian populist

GIVE ME  
BACK

CRAFT BOUTIQUES • JULIA FRIEDMAN • THE TECHNICOLORS • HOMELESS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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## JULIA FRIEDMAN'S ARTISTIC VISION

By Jenna Durican

In the past few years, Phoenix has been garnering more attention from the international arts and academic communities. And it's no wonder that brilliant minds are attracted to the city's foremost plans for development, extending mass transit and the explosive growth of the downtown arts and business districts. It seems everywhere you turn, something new is springing up—a *patisserie*, a jazz venue, another fine art gallery.

Not a surprise, either, that the city is beginning to attract more internationally-minded visionaries and talent, notably in the arts and intellectual arenas.

One such exceedingly bright, but not-yet-well-known, star is Arizona State University's visiting professor of art history Julia Friedman.



At ASU's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, Friedman teaches several courses, seminars and lectures covering the European Avant-Garde art movement (1900-1925), Russian Modernism, San Francisco beat artists of the '50s and '60s and Modern Art in Europe.

Friedman has had an interesting, cross-global teaching and art criticism career, having lived in East Asia and Europe, and taught and lectured at almost a dozen different colleges and universities. She is an asset to the Arizona art community, having a wealth of fresh knowledge and associations from so many far stretches of the globe.

While her résumé/CV is extensive and varied, Friedman's focus has oft been on modernist and contemporary artists and scholars. She recently published an illustrated monograph on Russian modernist writer Aleksei Remizov, *Beyond Symbolism to Surrealism: Aleksei Remizov's Synthetic Art*, and is currently working on another about San Francisco artist Wally Hedrick. Her work on Remizov was the culmination of more than 14 years of research and writing about the connection and influence of Russian emigration and European Modernism.

When Friedman was in graduate school at Brown, she wrote a paper about nationalism and Russian rock. As a testament to her research and presentation skill, her essay was picked up and turned into a chapter in the book *Consuming Russia*. "I grew up in the Soviet Union, and when I was a child, my parents said things like, 'Don't repeat anything that you hear in the house.' But by the time I was 15, everything changed," she says.

"When I was a teenager in Russia, I really hit a lucky time. It was a period when the Russian alternative scene was really happening. I went to every concert I could from about 1986 to 1989." Some of the most influential Russian rock bands that she followed included Akvarium, Kino, Alisa, Zvuki Mu, and Nol. "After Perestroika, all of it became free and public. Before that, all of these concerts were up in people's apartments. And afterwards, they were in rock clubs."

"It was an amazing time to be a teenager. You know, the typical time when you rebel? Well, I was too distracted to rebel, because the whole country was changing," Friedman says.

In her teenage years Friedman embraced her true calling. When she was about 12 years old, she heard about a program at the State Hermitage Museum in Russia, one of the largest art museums in the world, in which scholars would be lectured, comprehensively, on art history. She asked her parents and with their permission, she enrolled. She studied for three hours a week at Hermitage Museum until she was 17 years old.

"The program was intense!" Friedman says. "They just have such an extensive collection. For instance, while they were lecturing you on Rembrandt, they would actually take you around the museum and show you Rembrandt. There were

no slides; it was all just discussion. That was the beginning. Later, I ended up doing art history when I got to the United States."

Friedman came to the United States as teenager. When she arrived, she did not speak a word of English. She moved directly to the Midwest and was living with her boyfriend at the time and started her college education at Madison Area Community College in Wisconsin. Then she transferred to medical school at age 19, attending University of Wisconsin.

Friedman, who was born in St. Petersburg to a family of doctors, grew up knowing there was an assumption that she would become a doctor. "I did pre-med, and I flunked out of medical school twice," she says.

At that point she knew she should go with her true passion—art. She changed her coursework to a double major in art history and Russian literature. Friedman completed her PhD in art history at Brown University in 2005. She has lectured at Stanford, University of Oregon, and the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

"I am arguing, essentially, that in Modernism an artist does not just work in one medium. Modernism is really medium breaching. You can see, as with Remizov, how a writer can also become a visual artist—a sculptor, a painter and more."

One of the dynamic things that Friedman did in her classroom last semester was round up several speakers—specialists on art history, curators and actual artists—and have roundtable discussions via Skype live in class.

"I also brought in a woman who had modeled in the late '80s for all of the major San Francisco artists [at the time]." The model was Claudia Channing, someone who had been a friend of Friedman's, but whom she'd lost contact with. Friedman says she ran into Channing at an art event and found out that she is now a veterinarian living in Phoenix.

A few years ago, Friedman found herself living, writing, and teaching in Japan. "When I was in Japan for three years, I was writing for *Artforum*, so I was in the scene," she says.

"First I was working for Temple University and then Ustinov College where I was teaching modern and contemporary art history. I was basically running their humanities department," she says.

In 2008 to 2009, Friedman spent the year doing research at the University of Tokyo. There she developed relationships with members of Tokyo's art world. She has been working on an art exchange

project with University of Tokyo and ASU, but it is currently on hold awaiting funding.

"After Fukushima, it was clear that I had to leave. I have a son, who is now turning 10, he was eight at the time." Her son is Alexander, Sasha for short. "In Japan I had a full-time professor position," Friedman says. "I had to resign."

"There is a really important artist collective Chim[Pom] of five young people, and they have been doing really interesting work, performance, installation and some sculpture," Friedman says. "They had three or four shows before Fukushima went [dangerously atomic]," she says. "And then they did three or four more around the topic of atomics."

She was planning to bring them to ASU Art Museum, but there was an issue with fundraising and this is where the project was halted. "ASU has a residency, but we still needed to pay for plane tickets," she explains.

Friedman says that her initial plan was to bring Chim[Pom] to ASU for two weeks to do a residency and site-specific installation. They also had arrangements to travel to New Mexico and visit the Los Alamos nuclear test site, to tie the disaster at Fukushima to the grave stage of American history when developing nuclear arms was paramount.

"I have written about Japanese art quite a bit and I curated an exhibit in Singapore with a Japanese artist Chihiro Kabata," Friedman says. In 2010, Friedman helped promote Kabata's show *Stratosphere—Tracing the Self*, featuring numerous large-scale works of ballpoint pen on paper. This exhibit was curated by Tokyo mega-mind Masayuki Tanaka.

Friedman continues to maintain her English language blog covering modern-day Japanese contemporary art, *Contemporary Art Tokyo* (Wordpress.org), although she has not updated it in some time.

"Before [Japan], I was in England in Durham near Newcastle working on my book," she says. "I was there for two years, changing my dissertation into a manuscript." Friedman produced the 230-page monograph of Alexei Remizov, a Russian modernist writer who became an illustrator. She is exceedingly proud of the published result. The book is full of dozens of color illustrations.

Another of her projects involves Wally Hedrick, a San Francisco artist from the 1950s onward who was a maverick in the art world. He did really unique assemblages, flag paintings before Jasper Johns and self-destructing sculpture work before Tingley. "He was the first person to organize a public reading of *Howl*. It all started in Wally's gallery," Friedman says.

She is very enthusiastic about Hendrick and received a grant from Getty. "He is the most important protest artist, just incredible. Throughout his life, he kept reinventing himself. During the Vietnam War, he painted over many of his pieces in black, as a war protest. Whenever I see an exhibition that I think deserves recognition, I pitch it.

"I also have a blog in *Huffington Post*. It's as regular as I want it to be." One of her recent stories started a controversy surrounding the Marcelle Duchamp Prize, France's top prize for contemporary art. Through her own research and analysis, Friedman discovered that the 2005 recipient of *Le prix Marcel Duchamp* Claude Closky had been ripping off an American artist LG Williams, possibly for the last 15 years. Friedman posted this story to *Le Huffington Post*, and within two weeks it was the most read and shared article on the site.

Many people fought back or denied her claim. But the inherent question that her article raised was not only about authorship—it went even deeper. The article was questioning the very ethos of the Marcelle Duchamp prize. Was it intended to honor the best artist in all of France? Or was the award meant to honor true innovation—originality and creativity? If it was meant to be an award of the latter, then the whole system might need rethinking. "People really weren't happy to see this because it kind of undermines the whole system," she says of her exposé.

People started to write emails that her posting was a hoax and that the American artist she had discovered did not exist, that she had fabricated him. There's no way such blatant plagiarism could have occurred, they claimed. Yet, the proof was right there, lined up side-by-side, before their eyes, with the dates to prove that LG Williams had done it first. Friedman had uncovered it. "If I had thinner skin, I probably would have been upset. But as it is, it's just kind of bizarre. I mean, I compare images for a living, so I know what I'm talking about," she says.

After many years of moving around, Arizona feels like her permanent home. Her son Sasha loves the sunny weather and has taken to swimming lessons. He is enjoying life at his new school "I like this place. It's completely gorgeous and the weather is perfect about 80 percent of the time," she says.

Friedman also has a place in Los Angeles, and she spends a lot of time traveling back and forth. At present, she's working on a piece about the current Wade Guyton exhibition at the Whitney in New York for *Huffington Post*.

For more of Friedman's writing and ideas about art, visit *Artforum* magazine online and *Huffington Post*. She also maintains an art discussion blog at [juliafriedman.net](http://juliafriedman.net). ■