

## VIO – STORIES OF SINGLE FREE MOTHERS

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This exhibition is part of a domestic violence awareness campaign, *Tell us how you made it*, launched by A.L.E.G., a well-known Romanian association promoting gender freedom and equality. The action, which has been also supported by the famous artist, Dan Perjovschi, comprised three actions:

- ***Successes that don't make it into the news*** – on the Horizontal Newspaper in Sibiu, with the benevolence of Dan Perjovschi.
- ***The Wake Night for Silent Witnesses*** – an action of remembering and telling the shivering stories of women who died in domestic violence.
- ***VIO – STORIES OF SINGLE FREE MOTHERS*** – an art exhibition comprising ten works, whereas the artist, Cynthia Loris, used women's objects destroyed during aggressions. It is thought to be first exhibition of this kind in Romania.



**Cynthia Loris** is a 38-year old Romanian self-taught artist, who, after her mother's accidental death in 2008, turned her life around to dedicate it to art. One day, she left her career, packed a bag, told her husband she wanted to divorce and left Romania on a journey of becoming and self-knowledge. No matter where she lived (Germany, Luxembourg, Italy, Denmark or back in Romania), she improvised a studio for her work: in the laundry-room, in an attic, in a castle, in a garage, or in the kitchen on her baby's feeding chair. Nothing has stopped her from painting.

Returning to Romania in 2013, she had a son whom she raises alone. With this exhibition, the artist searches to raise awareness of the soaring inequalities between men and women in Romania (especially now with the amendment of the legislation on Justice), focusing on

domestic violence victims and their children. The paintings have real stories behind them, and even if her works differ very much, one can still trace her style in them. She uses mostly acrylics and mixed media on canvas, plywood or cardboard. None of the works have been done after sketches, the work is done on the spot. All her works come as they are. Being mostly a loner and an eccentric refusing most of the times to sell her art, her status as a self-taught artist has been disputed and argued, she was even publicly attacked by other artists. Still, she has continued being exactly what she is:



## PULMONARY TEDDY

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*(Acrylics on canvas and collage with a children's board game, the actual pulmonary X-ray of the child, gold leaf, pills as eyes and medical utensil for throat examination, 70/50 cm)*



This is the story of a ~~victim~~ survivor of domestic abuse and violence who, despite extreme shortcomings, managed to find freedom and take care of her child.

When her child fell ill, at the emergency room the mother witnessed how it was treated as if it were just a toy. Being a ~~single~~ free mother (she had fled an abusive husband), she was not given enough credit by the medical personnel, as married women surrounded by their families would receive. The one year old child, in addition to having been submitted unnecessarily and prematurely to a pulmonary X-ray, was misdiagnosed and prescribed an antibiotic overdose. Realizing that something was wrong, she returned to the emergency room with the baby but was rejected by the staff and sent away to a medical clinic for consultation. Humiliated and poor, she did not have the money for private consultations because she and her child lived from a 200 Lei monthly allowance (around 44 EURO). This allowance is what the Romanian state pays to a child under two; afterwards it is cut down to 80 Lei (17 EURO). In 2017, single-parent families still suffer from unimaginable poverty and live on the edge.

There are cases in which the parent has no one to leave their child with and work and support the small family, because the child is too young for daycare. There are women who suffer from hunger and cold to flee their abusers and protect their children. This woman, with the support of her friends, never gave up and managed have a beautiful and serene life later on.

# PORTRAIT OF UNCERTAIN DIMENSIONS ON A BROKEN CANVAS RECEIVED FROM A FRIEND

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*(Acrylics and collage with X-ray and cardboard, 70/50 cm)*



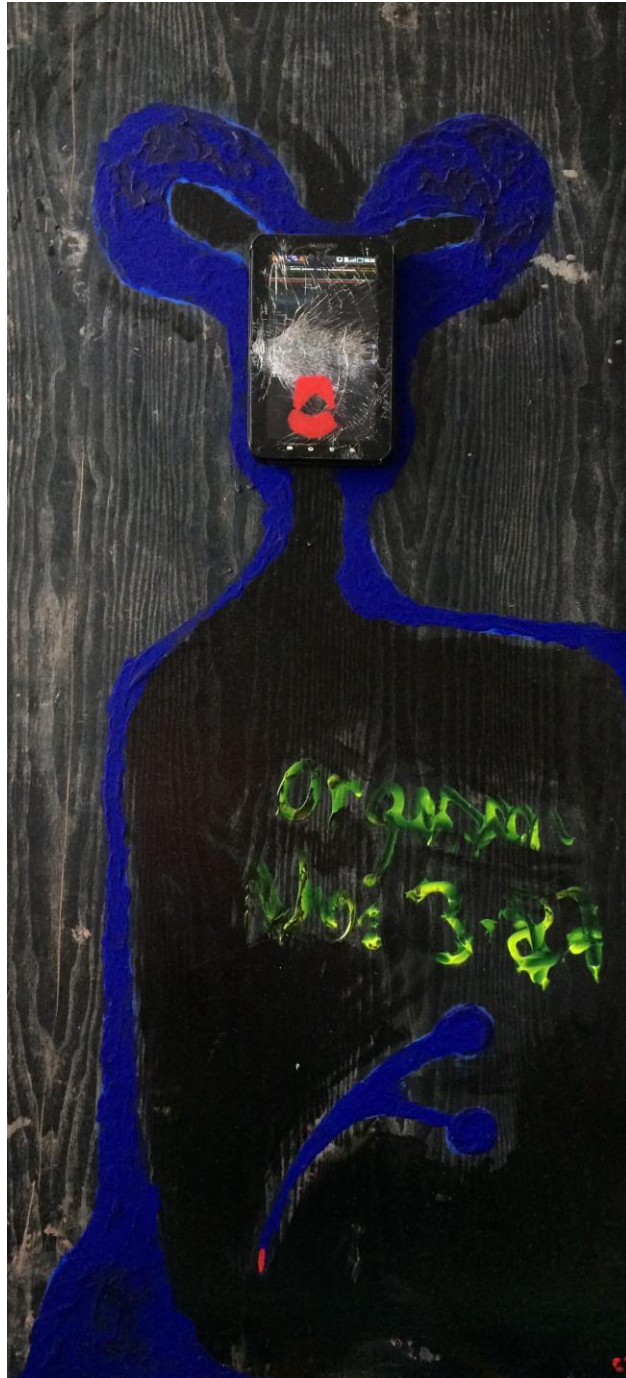
This portrait speaks about the loss and regain of identity. Domestic violence wipes women off the face of the earth. An abuser can get to control everything: how the partner dresses, with whom she talks, financially constrain her, and isolate her from the rest of the world. There were moments, hours, days, months, years, in which she stood in a corner of the house wanting to end her existence. Fear, shame and vertigo ... this is all she was feeling. She would shiver at every sound. She did not tell anyone the truth about what was going on at home. There was no place to run. She had become a prisoner.

Still, she found a way to change everything and one day overturned the situation and escaped. The escape is the most dangerous moment, because most serious aggressions and murders happen after the victim manages to leave, because then the aggressor has nothing more to lose.

## KISS TO UNLOCK SCREEN

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*(Tablet destroyed during domestic violence, while the victim was trying to call the emergency number, acrylics on plywood 120/50 cm)*





~~Victims~~ Survivors of abuse and domestic violence are very fragile. Most of the time, they no longer want to have any partner, are emotionally blocked, isolate themselves, and prefer only adventures, fleeting relationships, or even total solitude.

The traces of such experiences will never disappear. Psychological counseling and coming out towards the loved ones are a good way to grasp of and heal the trauma. There is the difficulty of cultivating healthy relationships; there will always be a fear of attachment and abandonment or lack of empathy. Any ~~victim~~ survivor needs so much affection and understanding. Comfort and love. Help.

## POINSON ME

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*(Acrylics and chalk on cardboard, 100/70 cm)*



Often, the abuser is attractive and successful in finding a partner, not giving out on his true character due to a huge capacity of dissimulation.

The painting illustrates how a woman, imprisoned in an abusive relationship, perceives the other women with whom her partner overtly sleeps. Busy and available as bees, these women poison the soul of an abused woman. There are cases where the abuser even brings them home. There cannot be two queens in a hive.

## HARDCORE CAFE

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*(T-shirt worn by a victim of domestic violence as she was aggressed by her partner, applied with band-aid on cardboard 100/70 cm)*



T-shirts of victims of abuses and domestic violence should also be placed in frames on walls, not just those of footballers or rock stars, as we often see on the walls cafes. Romania is swamped with cases of domestic violence in all social strata, even where nobody suspects.

1 in 4 Romanian women were physically or sexually assaulted by their partner at least once in their life, and 75% of these cases were not reported (FRA study, 2014)

55% of Romanians believe that sexual intercourse without consent is justified in certain situations and only 22% of Romanians are informed about the existence of services for victims of domestic violence (Eurobarometer 449, 2016).

33% of Romanians believe that partner / partner control should not be outlawed by banning family or friends, by depriving them of money or by confiscating their mobile phone or official documents (Eurobarometer 449, 2016).

50% of victims of domestic violence withdraw their previous complaint. 2% of pre-trial complaints are finalized in court. Victims of abuse should be protected against secondary and repeated victimization, as well as against intimidation and revenge, receive adequate support to facilitate their recovery and have sufficient access to justice. (2012/29 / EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 25 October 2012 laying down minimum rules on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220 / JHA).

## MOTHER'S CAMELEONS

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*(Acrylics on canvas, collage with wooden elements from a game of a child witness to domestic violence 100/70 cm)*



A young child, unaware of what bruises are, asked the mother what the colorful traces on her skin were, why they disappear and reappear. To hide the truth, she invented a story in which her bruises were actually chameleons, while she was the tree in which they sometimes play hide and seek.

Children that witness aggression, especially when the victim is their mother, are the most vulnerable and are also considered victims (the domino effect). The biggest mistake a woman can do is stay with the aggressor in the name of family ... this is not a family. Living with the aggressor, children learn and perpetuate the model seen at home. These children may remain traumatized for life, have difficulties at school, and problems in relationships. Often, they become addicted to substances and become aggressive with their own children or partners. Hitting isn't loving.

The situation of children witnesses to domestic violence is classified as a form of child abuse and is enshrined in the Istanbul Convention ratified by Romania in 2016.

**PLEASE HOLD ME, I FEEL SO FUCKING COLD (right) &  
WE SAT THERE IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM, DRINKING GOLD AND  
SMELLING PERFUME (left)**

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*(Installation made from two works connected by the IV of the child,  
acrylics, sand and chalk on canvas)*



The white work illustrates the state of lethargy, permanent cold, physical and mental disintegration felt by an abused woman, aggressed by her partner. The sand from her lungs and the red&white ribbon from her the neck symbolize the inability to speak.



The blue painting is a hospital room in which she stayed at one point with her child as it fell ill. The connection between mother and child is sacred, she must be a protector, and keep the child in a feeling of security and balance, without visibly breaking down. She must absorb all the evil and make everything look like play. That's why she invented a story in those difficult moments, while they were completely isolated and alone. In order to make the child eat, she told her that the soup they received was made of gold and that it would give the child magical powers. The child would shine like the sun. She used the perfume in her bag to give her the impression of being on fields of flower, far away from the hospital bed with metal bars.

# I WONDER HOW MANY KM<sup>2</sup> OF LESIONS DID THE FORENSIC MEDICINE RULER MEASURE

*(Acrylics on canvas and collage with band-aid dipped in Rivanol - cutaneous solution)*

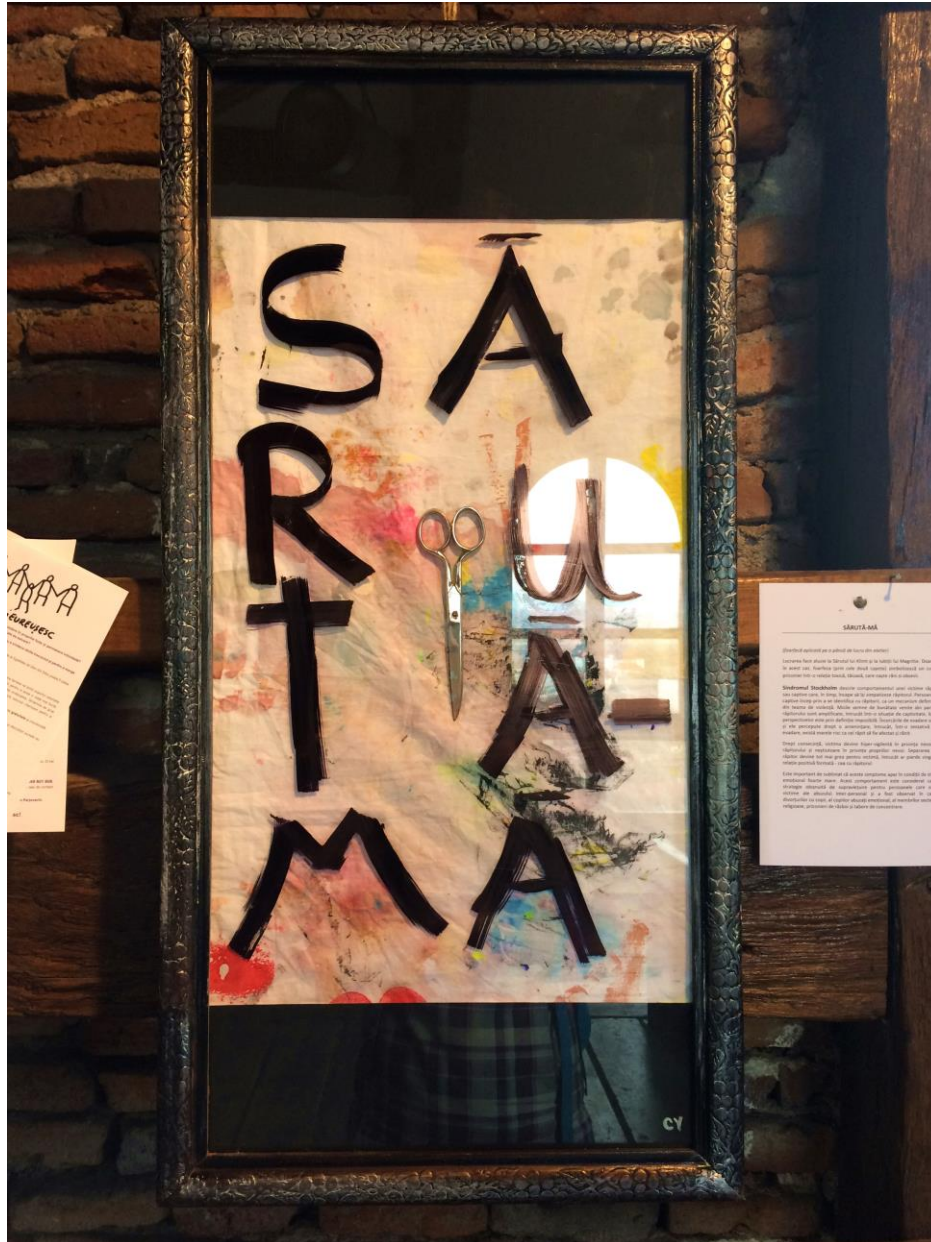


Once she decides to go to forensic medicine, an aggressed woman will face uncomfortable, perhaps even traumatic situations. She has to strip down in front a team of forensic medics and nurses for examination. The lesions are measured with a ruler and noted in a forensic certificate. As strangers see her naked, touch her and ask questions, she has to make a detailed account of what has happened. The forensic certificate costs 38 lei (8 Euro), money that many abused women do not have.

The woman from this work felt so exposed. So empty. So alone. She stared around her and had the impression that she was in a dream. She arrived there with her child because her husband aggressed her again, but this time she had made a decision to obtain a restraining order. While the cold ruler measured her bruises, she breastfed her one year old child, wondering how many women have gone and will go through this.

# KISS ME (SĂRUTĂ-MĂ)

*(Scissors applied on a working cloth from the artist's studio)*



The work makes reference to Klimt's Kiss and to Magritte's Lovers. Though in this case, the scissors (through the two round heads) symbolizes a couple imprisoned in a toxic, acid relationship that nurtures pain and obsessions.

**The Stockholm Syndrome** describes the behavior of an abducted or captive victim who, over time, begins to sympathize with the kidnapper. Captive people begin having these feelings as a defensive mechanism, for fear of violence. The small signs of kindness coming from the kidnapper are amplified, because the lack of perspectives, escape is impossible. Escape attempts are also perceived as a threat because it might affect the kidnapper.

As a consequence, the victim becomes hyper-vigilant about the needs of the kidnapper and ignorant of their own needs. Separation from the kidnapper is becoming more and more difficult for the victim, as it would lose the only positive relationship formed - that with the kidnapper.

It is important to stress that these symptoms occur under very high emotional stress. This behavior is considered as a common survival strategy for people who are victims of inter-personal abuse and has been noticed in the case of divorces with children, emotionally abused children, and members of religious sects, prisoners of war and concentration camps.