



Ukrainian artist Daria Marchenko works on a portrait of Russian President Vladimir Putin "The Face of War" in her studio in Kiev, made out of 5,000 bullet shells collected in the separatist east. — AFP

'Face of War': Ukraine artist creates Putin portrait with bullet shells

A young Ukrainian artist has captured global media attention by creating a striking portrait of Russian President Vladimir Putin out of 5,000 bullet shells collected in the separatist east. Daria Marchenko's "The Face of War"—a remarkably realistic and politically tinged depiction of Putin in a dark suit and red tie—stands more than two meters tall and dominates the artist's studio apartment.

"Sleeping in the same room with him was a bit scary at first," says the 33-year-old artist and graphics designer. "But I got used to it." She draws the window curtains and picks up a hand-held lamp to reveal how the 62-year-old Russian leader's face changes expression under different light. His deep-set eyes turn from gloomy to more lighthearted as Marchenko—her own right eyebrow pierced and fingers weighed down by heavy metal rings—shines the lamp around her unusual work.

"He can be proud, confused or serious," says the artist. "He can look like a person on a Soviet poster or he can be Superman." Her story has been covered by Britain's top media outlets as well as major European and Australian papers and television channels. But the artist has received

barely a mention in Russia-Ukraine's giant neighbor where Putin's approval rating is huge and denial of any involvement in the 16-month conflict is ever-present in the state-dominated media. Only Russia's popular Moskovsky Komsomolets broadsheet broke ranks by devoting a two-sentence paragraph to Marchenko's work last month.

'Interrupted life'

Marchenko does not conceal her deep-seated suspicion that Putin personally instigated a conflict that has killed nearly 7,000 people since breaking out after Kiev's ouster of a Kremlin-backed president. "When people see his expression change, it reveals certain things. To me, this war is different from all others because it is built on a lie."

Buckets and wooden crates filled with bullet cases occupy the centre of the artist's small room. Her first handful of shells came from her boyfriend—an active member of the Euromaidan movement that toppled the corruption-stained and deeply unpopular president Viktor Yanukovich and forced him into self-imposed Russian exile. But her peculiar art supplies now come from friends fighting across the war zone in eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland.

"A bullet shell is a symbol of an interrupted life," she says gravely. "The world does not realize just how much my country has lost. So this desire to work with more and more shells came naturally." Putin's portrait is the first in a series entitled "The Five Elements of War". Two others—to be possibly constructed out of weapons or other battle remnants from the devastated front—will be dedicated to the "heart and spirit" of warfare, Marchenko says.

Another might be called "The Brains Behind the War" but she says the final work's title is still a secret. "Unfortunately, war gives artists like me a lot of material to work with," she says. Putin often denies paying much attention to the media or thinking about his historic legacy. But Marchenko is certain that the Russian leader—more and more portrayed as a hero in Moscow's art galleries—has already seen images of her work. "I might be too naive, but I do hope that he at least thinks about it and asks himself whether this is how he would like to be remembered," she says. — AFP



The bust of Edward Snowden, by Anthony Tider and Jeff Greenspan, is displayed on August 7, 2015 in New York. — AFP

Snowden bust kicks off New York art festival

A cement bust of America's most-wanted whistleblower Edward Snowden, once famously confiscated by police, returned to public display in New York on Friday to kick off a street art festival. The 100-pound (45-kilo) likeness stands proud on a plinth in Manhattan's tourist-clogged Little Italy neighborhood, to be guarded round the clock until the weekend Lo Man Art Festival closes. "If any shenanigans begin they (volunteers) find our security guards and we make sure we keep everyone safe," says comedy manager Wayne Rada, who founded the festival and Little Italy Street Art Project. Coming four months after it hit the headlines for being erected on a war memorial without permission, organizers hope it'll help put the small art festival on the map.

The bust takes up pride of place on empty ground nicknamed "temper tot lot" for two towering depictions of angry toddlers by artist Ron English. "If there's a little bit of talk or eyebrow raising that's not a bad thing," says Rada. "All they (the artists) want to do is show off the Snowden bust and create a discussion—whether you agree or disagree, that really doesn't matter."

Artists Jeff Greenspan and Andrew Tider say they erected the bust on an American Revolution war memorial in Brooklyn last April "to highlight those who sacrifice their safety in the fight against modern-day tyrannies. It would be a dishonor to those memorialized here to not laud those who protect the ideals they fought for, as Edward Snowden has," they said.

The 32-year-old former contractor at the US National Security Agency, has lived in exile in Russia since 2013 after revealing the extent of mass spying programs by the United States and its allies. The US administration has branded him a hacker and a traitor who endangered lives, but he has been twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and won a string of international free speech awards.

Fist shaking

Rada says he set up the festival to relive the glory days of street art, which in the 70s and 80s cemented New York's status as world capital of sub-culture and coolest place on the planet. Two dozen acclaimed mural artists from around the world have been invited to create original work across Lower Manhattan.

Organizers hope that up to 60,000 people will visit the 21 odd pieces of art on display around the area, film events and children's activities. Rising rents have forced out many artists and musicians, and it has become trendy to dismiss Manhattan as a mecca to corporate money-making, where the subculture scene is on the skids.—AFP

'Daily Show' finale is second most viewed episode in show's history

Jon Stewart's farewell helped his "Daily Show" capture some of the best viewership in the series' history, with approximately 3.5 million viewers tuning in to see the witty host bid adieu to the program.

Last night's fade was the second most-watched episode in the program's tenure, according to "live plus same-day" Nielsen data released by Comedy Central on Friday afternoon. The most-watched "Daily Show" ever remains an October 29, 2008, episode during which Sen. Barack Obama paid Stewart a visit, which lured 3.577 million viewers overall. (See chart below, which illustrates that politics was the biggest ratings driver for the show over the years.)

An average of 1.8 million viewers between 18 and 49 (a 1.4 rating) watched the landmark episode, according to Nielsen, tying for the show's second best rating ever—behind only a 1.7 rating for that October visit by Obama six days before his first presidential election.

Though "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart" has been a popular latenight stop for many—especially liberals living on the coasts—it has never been a ratings juggernaut nationally. By comparison, the May finale of CBS' "Late Show With David Letterman" did a 3.1 same-night rating in adults 18-49 and 13.76 million viewers overall, and Jay Leno's final night as host of NBC's "Tonight Show" in February 2014 did a 3.8 in the demo and 14.64 million total viewers.

Stewart's goodbye did stack up well against other cable latenight host departures like Chelsea Handler's final crack at "Chelsea Lately" on E! last August and Stephen Colbert's poignant finale on Comedy Central's "Colbert Report" late last year.

Comedy Central said an additional 1 million full episode streams of the August 6 episode were transmitted via its own mobile app, the "Daily Show" website and Hulu. More than most programs that air multiple times throughout the week, "Daily Show" sees meaningful ratings increases in DVR playback in the days following a telecast. For the week beginning July 27, for example, its average same-night viewership grew about 60% in "live plus-3," which incorporates three days' worth of time-shifted viewing. Stewart announced in February that he would be departing "The Daily Show" after 17 years as host. He will be replaced by South African comedian Trevor Noah, who recently spoke about the pressure he feels in taking over the institution. — Reuters



The marquee for The Daily Show with Jon Stewart is seen on August 7, 2015 in New York City. — AFP

Why YouTube's Epic Rap Battles guys are launching an 82-Day Live Tour

Nice Peter and EpicLloyd—the maestros of Epic Rap Battles of History, the epically popular YouTube channel—are powering down their studio for the next three months as they hit the road in their first tour. The ERB tour, which will give fans a chance to rub elbows with the duo and even join them in onstage battles, will span 51 cities in 14 countries over the course of 82 days. It kicks off Aug. 16 at L.A.'s Whiskey a Go-Go and is slated to wrap Nov. 1 in Paris, making stops across the U.S. and Europe in between.

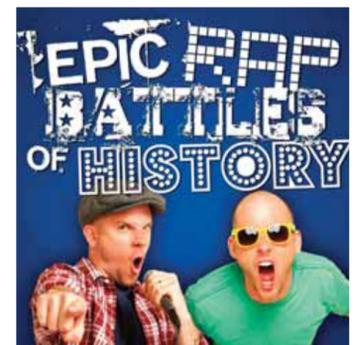
That may sound like a grueling schedule, but Nice Peter and EpicLloyd actually see the in-real-life tour as a welcome break from their workaday YouTube careers. "We have worked 100 days in a row making videos this year," said Nice Peter (above left), whose real name is Peter Shukoff. "We regularly work 14-hour days, so it will be nice to get away from the computer."

Epic Rap Battles of History, affiliated with Disney's Maker Studios multichannel network, is among the most-subscribed channels on YouTube, with 12.4 million followers. ERB's videos juxtapose famous personages past and present in one-on-one rap throwdowns, a conceit that's resulted in more than 3 billion views across multiple platforms. Their greatest hits—many of which they'll perform on tour—include Barack Obama vs. Mitt Romney (110 million YouTube views), Steve Jobs vs. Bill Gates (99 million) and Hitler vs. Vader 2 (74 million).

Digital brands

One thing the ERBers claim they don't expect from the road trip: a profit. While other major YouTubers are extending their digital brands into moneymaking ventures like books, products and merchandise, music labels and feature-length movies, Nice Peter says he and EpicLloyd are mainly looking to have fun and connect with their fanbase.

"We didn't set out to tour to make money," Shukoff said. "As much money as we're going to bring in, we're investing that much into the tour." For example, he said, ERB splurged on a high-end tour bus for themselves and their eight-person crew: "We wanted to be comfortable," he laughed. Tickets for the concerts, which will each run about 90 minutes, will be \$18-\$25 depending on the venue. "We were just honest with ourselves," said Shukoff. "We wanted to make it so we could afford to do what we wanted for the tour, but also make it so people can afford to come."



The ERB team briefly considered selling a premium VIP pass that would offer exclusive in-person facetime with them but ended up scrapping the idea. "We wanted to let everyone who comes to the shows have a chance to meet us," Shukoff said.

"It will be great to interact with the audience," added EpicLloyd, aka Lloyd Ahlquist. "Everywhere we go, people tell us who they want to see in a rap battle. If the audience starts talking about something, we definitely want to fit it in."

While ERB is on tour, they're not planning to release additional rap battles on YouTube, although there will be behind-the-scenes footage they'll share with fans. "The thing we've been blessed with is, these videos continue to get watched and re-watched," Shukoff said.

Epic Rap Battles, like many of the biggest YouTube channels, was an accidental hit. Originally, Shukoff and Ahlquist, who met in Chicago and worked together in a touring improv-comedy troupe, launched ERB on YouTube in 2006 in hopes that it would lead to bigger music and entertainment projects. Instead, they found that making rap-battle parodies on the Internet actually let them pay the bills. — Reuters