

# *Enter the Universe*

## Curatorial Concept

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IT IS A QUESTION that artists, poets and philosophers have been posing for ages: how do we, as sentient, intelligent and sensual creatures, bounded by the constraints set by everyday cultural experience, reconcile the mysterious with the mundane?



New York City-based poet and visual artist  
Maria Dimanshtein (photo courtesy of the artist)

*Enter the Universe* is an exhibition of recent work by a woman who grapples with questions inherent to this and other relevant dichotomies: societal norms versus individual freedom, the comfort of the ordinary versus the ecstasy of escape. Informed by discourses that have proven highly productive in modern and contemporary art, she has combined her passion for humankind's most privileged form of artistic expression—language—with the visual motif of the grid, an artificial form that promotes order, predictability and routine.

A beautiful, balanced structure at the heart of innumerable modern-day visual schemes from window panes to city blocks to pixels on computer screens, the grid is all around us. Reluctant to accept the ambiguity of what we do not understand, we create and inhabit systems which, like grids, comfort and protect us from the anxiety and the uncertainty of the irrational and unknown.



*Space Pussy: Enter the Universe*  
(2017), 40" x 40", stacked wood  
panels, spray paint

At the focal point of *Enter the Universe*, Maria Dimanshtein (b. 1981) asks us to imagine an opening in the grid – a break in the pattern that beckons us to a sublime spiritual realm beyond. Several large-format gold-over-black wall pieces form the focal point of this exhibition of two dozen artworks. Honoring the essential female anatomy in her own voice, she calls each wall piece a Space Pussy. This is in feminist terms both descriptive and provocative. Open to vast interpretation, it is indubitably an essential universal motif. One may also simply imagine Space Pussy as an invitation to transcend the routine, cross over and dive into the unknown.

Dimanshtein is an emerging visual artist and poet who has lived in the quintessential grid that is New York City since 2013 and who wonders what it means to be a human—and a woman in particular—in the context of the Universe. Having experimented with a variety of visual forms, Dimanshtein is keenly aware of the role language can play in the visual arts, not least because the language that bubbles up from her soul and onto her drawings here is not her native one.



*What the mind likes (answering questions)* (2017), 6" x 6", white ink on black paper

she compromises neither for the other, she can combine the two to create art that is, at once, image, statement and object. A reverberation of the spirit of the historical avant-garde, text and image reveal conceptual angles through which the viewer can begin to grasp the show's premise.

In *Enter the Universe*, two grid-like arrays of black square-format drawings on the gallery wall—a selection of works from the artist's "States of Mine" series—may strike some viewers as a nod towards a revolutionary style explored by one of contemporary art's most revered forefathers, Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935), the founder of the Russian Suprematist movement who with *Black Square* (1915) boldly declared the supremacy of total abstraction. However, while not disavowing this interpretation, Dimanshtein insists that her works owes more to the legacy of Russian Futurist poets, such as Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), and the artists in the Constructivist movement of the 1910s and 1920s who famously combined text and image in typography, book design and posters.

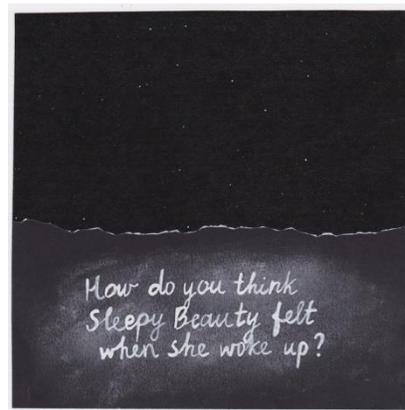


*I'm the best I've ever been* (2017) 6" x 6", white ink, black glitter on black paper

From this starting point, we can begin to understand that, just as the historical avant-garde sought to do, Dimanshtein seeks to blur the boundaries between art and life. As she goes about her daily routine in New York City, she reflects on her own position on the grid, in relation to others and the systems that connect us. Observing and analyzing the feelings of people and situations she encounters, she composes short poems in the Notes app on her phone wherever the inspiration comes to her: at home, on the subway, or at Starbucks. These she inserts in her own handwriting

Born and raised in a Russian-speaking household in Riga, Latvia, Dimanshtein emigrated with her family to Chicago at age 17, initially studying graphic design at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She worked in this profession for some time pursuing her M.F.A. in painting at Northern Illinois University. She has participated in five fully-funded artist residency programs, including LindArt in Slovenia and Studioworks in Eastport, Maine. Her work has been shown in galleries throughout New York City as well as further afield in Illinois, Arizona, and abroad.

Poetry is just as important to Dimanshtein's practice as painting is. And because



*Sleepy Beauty* (2017), 6" x 6" White ink, printout on black paper

Dimanshtein can express very specific thoughts that she feels neither abstraction, nor any kind of visual art, can manage to do quite as effectively.

Language in the visual arts also opens conceptual directions where the artist finds fertile ground for creative expression. By combining text and image on a black picture plane reminiscent of the void of space or a starry night sky, Dimanshtein breaks down the distinction between literary and visual artforms while tacitly acknowledging the discrepancy in status conferred upon them between the two cultures she has lived in. Compared to visual artists, poets in the United States are hardly superstars, but in northeastern Europe and Russia, the lyric arts, literature, and especially poetry have long been revered as those societies' premier forms of cultural expression.

Just as in a book, where words and phrases form ever expanding and more complicated elements of a larger whole, Dimanshtein's poems carry greater weight on the gallery wall. Liberated from books, which rarely see the light of day, they stand on their own as both word and image, beckoning viewers to encounter their essence. A celebration of the lyricism of life, they delve into inner thoughts that ponder the inner machinations of the universe.

Thus Dimanshtein's work comes to occupy a liminal zone between word and image; between picture and object. Coupled with the dichotomy of the constraints of the grid versus the limitlessness of what lies beyond, the motif of the portal between one universe and another—Space Pussy—makes an empowering statement about the possibility to transcend towards an awe-inspiring place of bravery, openness, and self-acceptance. The essential feminist motif suggests the possibility for women to break free of the norms and judgments inherently imposed on them.

Dimanshtein's work is a gift to all of us who reflect on the possibility of transcending the everyday and leaping into a realm beyond – an invitation to ***Enter the Universe***.

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*Space Pussy: Dear God (2017), 40" x 40"  
stacked wood panels, spray paint*