

WE SEE











Photo by femLENS  
Narva Street Exhibition, Estonia





**Photo by Natalia Vojkova**  
femLENS workshops 2020, Russian speaking online group

# WE SEE

The fourth issue of We See magazine is dedicated to 2020 and how we, as a global community have been dealing with new ways of living. 2020 happened to be the year when people started questioning the very fundamental aspects of everyday life. It also gave us a new look at how we perceive human rights, such as tolerance, safety, accessibility and digital literacy.

This was not the year we were planning when we were ringing in the new decade at the end of 2019. Instead, this year has presented new challenges, we have had to adapt our work and our lives to navigate it all.

Throughout the rough year, we've been lucky enough to continue sharing stories that restored our faith in humanity and make the voices of women heard.

By doing workshops in different countries with women from different walks of life, femLENS is aiming to connect grassroots communities across the globe. The Internet was meant to give us an accessible space, without physical barriers. 2021 is almost here, and we are still learning how to use it for our good.

By moving workshops online, femLENS has faced new obstacles. Issues like connectivity and mobile phone ownership are still serious! Literacy and digital skills should enable people to work and study from their home and also provide them a sense of protection and empowerment. Instead, this year has revealed the consequences of major inequalities.

Today we show our appreciation to photography! We are grateful to the people who serve this art, take out a camera or a phone and shoot - they help us get to know each other - all continents and all ages. To know means to become better, stronger, more confident, means to understand: life can not be defeated.

Dublin, December 2020





Photo by femLENS  
femLENS workshop Narva, Estonia

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# 2020: A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

By Jessica Couloute

The year 2020 has been defined by a novel virus, COVID-19. A global pandemic so pervasive it has impacted every fibre that makes the fabric of our lives. It has changed how we interact with one another from how we work, how we learn, how we celebrate to how we show affection. These circumstances have caused a quick shift so paramount, the ability to adapt can leave one sinking or swimming. While for some the tran-

**WHILE FOR SOME THE TRANSITION MAY HAVE POSED MINOR INCONVENIENCES, MANY ARE LEFT TO FACE LIFE-ALTERING CHALLENGES THAT CAN LEAVE THEM AT SEVERE DISADVANTAGES DOWN THE LINE**

sition may have posed minor inconveniences, many are left to face life-altering challenges that can leave them at severe disadvantages down the line. As the virus spread across communities, our ability to “commune” diminished.

For many people across the world, we were no longer able to sit in offices with colleagues, assemble together to learn, congregate in celebration or gather together for meals. While the accepted solution to combat the spread of coronavirus was to transition our lives from the physical to the digital, this further exposed the stark inequalities that already exist within our society. Communities are not suffering solely because of COVID-19 — many are also languishing because of pre-existing affliction of gross inequality. The pandemic has only emphasised

existing issues, and has expedited our sense of urgency to solve them.

### Digital Disparity

Adapting to the “new normal” was nothing short of an exercise of access and privilege. While health officials told people to stay home and encouraged schools and organisations to operate remotely if possible, many were unable to function with this option. The ability to work from home is not only contingent upon the nature of one’s job, but is also a matter of access to the Internet and technology; the contingency also applies to attending school online. Just over half of the global population at 55% have access to the Internet; with the most Internet users in China, India and the United States.

According to a CNN report, the 2018 US Census estimated that ap-

proximately 15% of American households do not have a home Internet subscription, and when focusing on low-income earners the number is more than double the national average. Additionally, NPR reports that the US federal government estimates that more than a third of rural regions have little to no Internet.

For many who do not have at home subscriptions, getting connected to the world wide web was accessible in public spaces such as libraries but with strict safety measures in place and closures of these public spaces many are left without that option. When we examine this disparity in the developing world, less than 1 in 5 people are connect to the Internet. The digital disparity is rather shocking considering the role Internet plays in our lives, especially now during the health cri-



A volunteer is greeted by a child at a social centre in Narva, Estonia  
Photo by Jekaterina Saveljeva

sis. When we examine this disparity even further, it is noted that women are affected more than men, further barring them from much needed resources and tools, such as education, which is vital to the enhancement of their lives.

### Gender Inequality

In addition to the more obvious inequalities like access to digital tools, COVID-19 has continued to perpetuate existing gender inequalities, and even backtrack our progress. Due to stay at home orders and widespread closures of schools, women are left to carry the unexpected burdens such as domestic work.

The Guardian reports that researchers across Europe have found that with lockdown measures, school and daycare closures, children attending school from home and with the majority of the household being at home - the pandemic has boxed women back into traditional roles of primary caretakers. Many women are challenged with juggling their professional lives, managing their kids schooling and care, and keeping up with house chores. This has led many to make the difficult decision to forfeit their paid positions to attend to their families which can potentially lead to setbacks in their career once they return to the workforce.

In addition to economic challenges, quarantine has also exposed women who are forced to quarantine with abusive partners to increasing threats. Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 3 women globally experienced abuse from an intimate partner. According to The New York Times, since shelter-in-place measures have taken effect advocacy groups across the world have reported significant surges in calls reporting domestic abuse.

Resources for women in these circumstance were already scarce prior to COVID-19, but now are even more strained given the current conditions. Experts note that the increase in cases of abuse are due to the long-term confinement with dangers increasing especially

**THROUGHOUT HISTORY WOMEN HAVE SERVED AS AGENTS OF CHANGE. FROM THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD OPERATION TO FREE SLAVES, LABOUR PROTESTS IN WORLD WAR I, WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE, THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, WOMEN’S EDUCATION RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN, TO THE MORE RECENT BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE OR ABORTION RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD**

during times that involve personal crises, such as unemployment or financial strain.

### Women on the Front Lines in the Fight for Change

Throughout history women have served as agents of change. From the Underground Railroad operation to free slaves, labour protests in World War I, women’s suffrage for the right to vote, the civil rights movement, women’s education rights in Pakistan, to the more recent Black Lives Matter movement for racial justice or abortion rights for women around the world.

Whether it is an issue that society faces as a collective or an issue that specifically impacts women; it is women who continue to be advocates and push for change. Today, as we continue to face a variety of challenges that are aggravated by

the pandemic - women continue to devote their energy to be a force in new outcomes.

A report by National Geographic highlights World Health Organization’s findings regarding the disparity of female leadership in global health. Presently, only 25% of leadership roles are held by women despite making up 70% of the global health workforce. During a global health crisis that is significantly impacting women socially and economically, there is an urgent need for female perspective in decision making processes.

According to WHO economist and health workforce specialist, Michelle McLissac, data suggests that while men are more likely to experience complications from the virus, women front-line health workers face a much greater risk than men of contracting the disease. Roopa Dhatt, the founder of the organisation Women in Global Health states, “[t]his pandemic has demonstrated that women are the ‘shock absorbers’ of society,” and that “[w]omen need to be shaping health systems at every level”.

In efforts to bridge the digital divide, according to The New York Times, women are spearheading solutions to help close this gap. Mariya Gabriel, a Bulgarian politician and European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, is part of the Digital Education Action Plan which aims to promote technical infrastructure and propose training programs for 40,000 people, targeting at least 40 percent women and girls specifically in technology and artificial intelligence.

The chief executive and founder of Lumachain, Jamila Gordon, built a technology platform that uses artificial intelligence to connect broken





6000 women gather to protest violence against women on IWD in Morelia, Mexico, March 8, 2020.  
Photo by Lucía Rodríguez

links in the global food supply chains and keep workers safe. As a leading woman of colour in tech, Gordon not only serves as a role model for women who wish to pursue careers in IT, but she is actively working to provide flexibility in her work place. She notes that many women have been requesting the flexibility to work from home and the pandemic has proven that this type of working environment can be a reality.

In efforts to combat domestic abuse inflicted upon women, activist around the globe are protesting for an urgent end to violence against women — especially as cases are increasing during the COVID-19 crisis. In Ukraine, a member from Femen, a feminist activist group, protested outside the president's office with a brief topless protest. In Istanbul, about 2,000 women engaged in a peaceful demonstration calling for the Turkish government to remain committed to a European treaty on

combatting violence against women.

In Mexico, where 80 percent of women report not feeling safe in their country, activist have taken matters into their own hands. Feeling let down by public officials and institutions, “protesters kicked the

**WOMEN ARE SHOWING UP NOT ONLY TO SPEAK OUT, BUT TO HELP FACILITATE THESE PROTEST; IT IS THEIR EFFORTS THAT ALLOW MANY OF THEIR MALE COUNTERPART THE ABILITY TO SHOW UP TO THESE PROTESTS IN THE FIRST PLACE**

government workers out of the federal Human Rights Commission building in Mexico City. They covered the walls with the names of rape victims and hung posters with the faces of the dead”, and turned it into a place of sanctuary for women and children.

In India, women are speaking out amid the historic farmer movement. Protesters are opposing new laws that would essentially give control of the agricultural sector to big business. Women participating in this protest are bringing into focus how these policies impact women and are challenging existing notions of the female role in political discourse.

One of the female protesters, Anjali Sheoran, emphasises that the movement is not just a male-oriented issue. She states that “[w]henver a farmer is mentioned, only a male comes to our mind and this undermines the role of women and their labor. In my village, even in my family, I have seen women who work more than their male counterparts in the fields. What we need is to include the fight for land with other feminist issues. Without fighting for land rights, it is impossible to break the shackles of patriarchy.”

Women are showing up not only

to speak out, but to help facilitate these protest; it is their efforts that allow many of their male counterpart the ability to show up to these protests in the first place. Women are organising from village-to-village to bring supplies, allies, and more women to the frontlines; as well as setting up langar — or communal kitchens — for protesters. In doing so they break up patriarchal norms by challenging what activities can be done by men and women, all while simultaneously pushing for inclusive revolutionary change.

### femLENS Perspective

At femLENS, our mission is to visually educate and promote technological awareness of women from diverse backgrounds through documentary photography made accessible by mobile phone cameras. In doing so, we hope to achieve the empowerment and education of women all over the world to aid in

lifelong learning, development and support for communities. This is primarily facilitated through in-person workshops and forums.

However due to the pandemic, as an organisation we could no longer host these events in physical spaces without compromising the health and safety of our participants; and like the rest of the world had to transition to a digital format. We transitioned over to virtual workshops which afforded us the capability to expand our geographic scope and include more women from all over the world.

While there are benefits to facilitating virtual workshops, there were also challenges. From language barriers to reliable Internet access, we realised that there are areas we can enhance to better serve participants. Based on this new learning, we have established a new goal to build a femLENS online learning platform in 2021! The platform

would feature different languages and would be accessible at any time on a mobile device. So in the event someone encounters Internet issues and can't join a live workshop, they have the option to learn independently through a recorded session once their Internet connection is restored.

Our contribution to the advancement of women is only a part of a much larger phenomenon. The pursuit for progress and achieving equity for women takes the collective efforts of all us across the world. Regardless if these individual contributions are big or small, they have significance. We all have a role to play in this movement, and together we will continue to move the needle toward progress, one day healing our communities from the inequalities that afflict us.

femLENS online group with participants coming from Mexico, England and the DRC.





All things considered, femLENS had a very productive and successful year. 2020 marked our fifth anniversary, and while we were faced with many challenges presented by a global pandemic; as an organisation, we were able to adapt and grow in new ways.

To celebrate five years of femLENS documentary photography workshops, we published our first photo book, *Unlearning the Ordinary*: through a lens for the commons. The book features photo stories by women and girls from nine countries, a wide spectrum of nationalities, and ages ranging from fourteen to sixty-four; all of whom have participated in our workshops and have documented stories important to them. It has been a privilege to work with women from around the world and teach them skills to help them share their stories. This photo book amplifies their voices and tells their stories in print, providing a lasting and physical memory.

Our goal was to share twenty copies of the photo books with the communities where these stories originated. This year we set up a fundraiser to raise €672. Through crowdfunding, we successfully raised €365 which afforded us the ability to send ten books!

This year, we engaged our platform to bring support to our community in Lebanon. In August of 2020, a mass explosion occurred in Beirut resulting in tragedy throughout the capital. femLENS launched a campaign to support Faten Anbar and Halima Al Haj Ali and their families; who were femLENS’ documentary photography workshops participants in Beirut, Lebanon in 2017.

They created several photo projects about their everyday life in Shatila refugee camp, Beirut, Lebanon. In solidarity with Faten and Halima and their families, prints of their beautiful photographs were made available for purchase. 80% of the proceeds were given to the women and their families, while the remaining 20% covered production costs.

Due to the pandemic, we had to cease conducting workshops in person and switch to a digital format. While this transition was unexpected, the benefits allowed us to work with more women in more areas of the world. This year we held seven workshops, several of which were held online which included women from Congo, England, Mexico and Palestine. Before the pandemic started, we ran two sets of workshops: one in Berlin, Germany in partnership with Amal, Berlin! and in Narva, Estonia in partnership with VitaTiim.

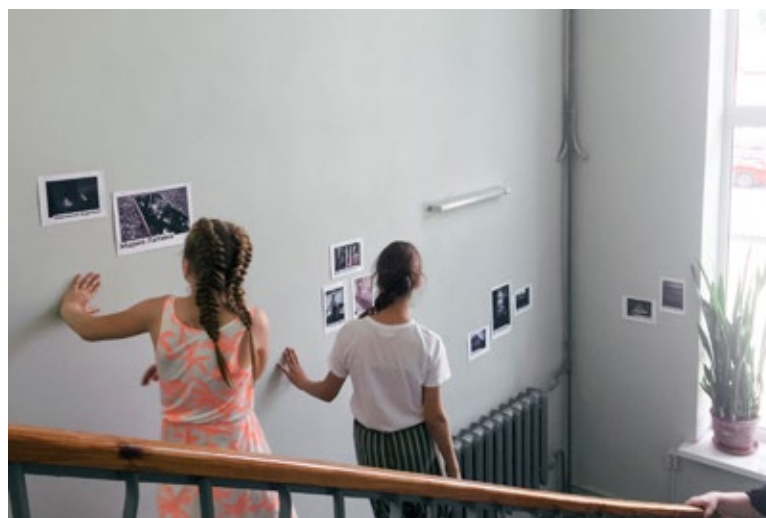
In addition to virtual workshops, we also held our first digital festival, *HER|visual|STORY*, in partnership with Foundation for International Girls in the Arts (F.I.G.A). The four-day festival was attended by women from twelve different countries, with the goal of deconstructing stereotypes and mainstream representation. Together, we collectively analysed the state of digital art and proposed new knowledge and best practices to conquer online and offline spaces.

While we have found success operating online, this is not without its challenges. From language barriers to reliable Internet access, we realised that there are areas we can enhance to better serve participants. Based on this



Photo exhibition at the Visual Hack Space, Berlin, Germany, January 2020





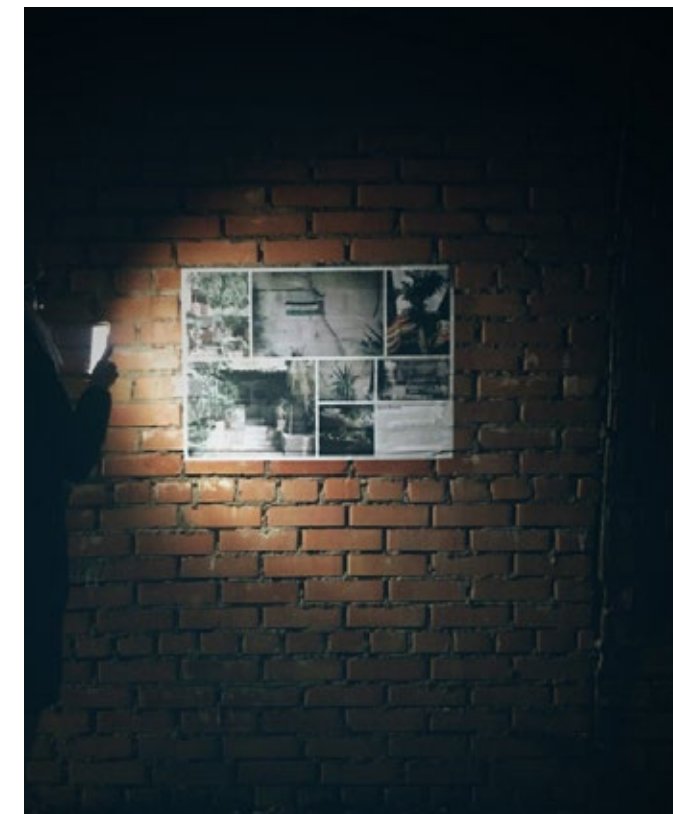
Post-workshop exhibition at Likool, Narva, Estonia June 2020

new learning, we have established a new goal to build a femLENS online learning platform in 2021.

The platform would feature different languages and would be accessible at any time on a mobile device. So in the event someone encounters Internet issues and can't join a live workshop, they have the option to learn independently through a recorded session once their Internet connection is restored.

We have accomplished so much in a challenging year, and it would not have been possible without the efforts of our femLENS' volunteer team. Over the course of five years, we have grown from a team of two volunteers to fifteen. This year alone, they have dedicated and donated over 1,000 hours to make all of our efforts possible. Through the time and dedication of our volunteer team, we were able to host seven workshops, three exhibitions and one festival, and publish fifteen articles, two magazine issues, and our first-ever photo book.

As we wrap up on what has been one of the most turbulent years in recent human history, we are humbled by the ability to persevere despite these hurdles. It is truly a gift to work with women all over the world — to learn from them and hear their stories. Together we empower each other to continue to do this work, share these stories and record our collective herstory.



Street photo exhibition in Narva, Estonia, November 2020







Photo workshop in Berlin, Germany, January 2020

Photo workshop with teenage girls in Narva, Estonia, March 2020





FEATURED  
PHOTOGRAPHER  
EMILIA  
MARTIN

We See magazine aims to support and promote women photographers in print as well as online. On the following pages, Polish photographer Emilia Martin talks about her photographic practice

A CONVERSATION ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY  
WITH EMILIA MARTIN

by Jekaterina Saveljeva

**City/Country**  
Hague The Netherlands (but I’m originally from Poland).

**What do you enjoy most about photography?**  
What I enjoy most about photography is the encounters and collaborative processes. My photography usually involves people, but it doesn’t always necessarily mean photographing others. Sometimes it means working with others, being inspired by others or photographing others through places or things. I believe photography is by its nature a collaborative process – we need to understand people, places, things in order to photograph them. There needs to be some chemistry between a person photographing and a person or an object photographed. This chemistry is something I’m deeply interested in, it’s also something that we can see in the photographs later on. I like to think of photography as an encounter happening between a photographer and what we can later see in the photograph.

**Was there anything that inspired you to start making photos?**  
I think it was a natural desire to try and discover myself through photography. Photography is such an instinctive process – it helped me to navigate myself through the world so many times. It’s also a perfect diary tool. There hasn’t been one motivation or one inspiration, but definitely a strong desire to capture some magic, some tension, some emotion, some essence.

I started taking photography very seriously when I worked for Emirates as a cabin crew – I was constantly flying somewhere else, never knowing anybody, and so camera became very important to me. I think that there is a reason why photography and travelling go together so well – camera is a perfect tool to discover and investigate a new, unknown place.

**What is your favourite object/subject/topic to photograph?**  
I feel like all my projects deal to an extent with the theme of identity – who am I, how do I function within bigger contexts, how does society shape my reality. I love photographing people because I feel like when I do that I can never be sure exactly of what will happen. It keeps me alert, keeps me present and opens doors to serendipity. Serendipity is something that definitely excites me in photography and in life.

**Do you feel it is important to share your vision on social media?**  
To be perfectly honest with you – not so much. I feel like social media is not really a good place for photography. It’s been designed to entertain, to scroll. Selfies are blended with pieces of art, personal stories with advertised product. I acknowledge the fact that social media is a wonderfully democratic space to be – it has its obvious strengths. Social media provokes many questions: what is art anyway? What is “good art”? What makes one thing valuable and other not? I believe these are very important questions to ask.



I personally enjoy sharing my work in other places, but I still choose to participate in social media.

**Who do you think is your aimed audience?**  
I don’t come from the artistic family. My mother has been a very creative person and my father is extremely sensitive, but art wasn’t really present in our everyday. I would like to aim towards the audience that is not necessarily high brow. I want to open conversations that are personal and emotional, I want to engage people and create things that are accessible and inclusive.

**Do you like working on stories at home/in your local community? If yes/no – why?**  
I believe that choosing to work on a story or a project is a huge commitment. It requires a huge amount of dedication and time. Considering this, it just makes sense to me that I should commit to topics and themes that I deeply care about. I always work on things that are close to me, that I deal with personally or I can refer to on a very personal level. It feels

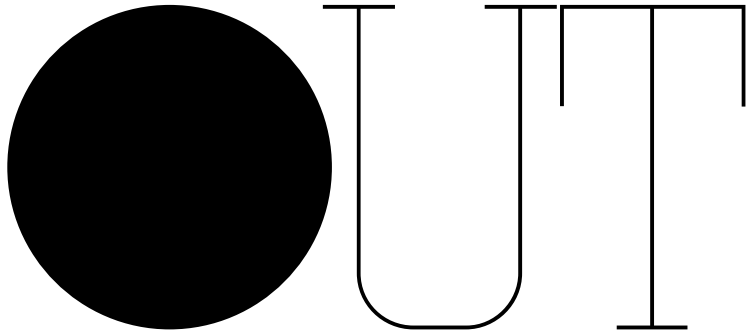
very important to me, and I feel like I can learn something new about myself with each project. This learning process is something that really excites me.

**Do you think photography could change someone’s life? In what way?**  
I don’t believe that photography can be an antidote to present day problems. It’s not going to solve poverty, won’t stop wars or hunger. I believe the visual culture we have accepted and are used to is so problematic. Should we continue on photographing violence and therefore normalise it, or should we rebel against it? Should we continue photographing impoverished people or should we give them the privacy they deserve? I don’t know answers to these questions but I believe these are complicated discussions to have. But I also believe, that photography is first and foremost an encounter between people. If you get at least two people with open hearts and willingness to be real and honest, magic can happen. It has certainly changed my life. ■









by Emilia Martin

After a period of fascination with liberty, outwardness, open borders and the European Union, Poland has turned its face towards Catholicism and nationalism in recent years. With this, inevitably, has come repression of freedom and choice. The ruling party, elected into Presidential office in 2015, has openly attacked LGBTQ minorities and turned a blind eye to the rising levels of aggression and discrimination directed at them.

Grey Communist era housing blocks, smog, financial stresses and strains and the lingering feeling of unease at being “the other” in a hostile society. This is the landscape in which Magda and Daria are living their love story.

I was born into a very grey, patriarchal, religious society that had a very strong idea

for who I was supposed to be. I felt like I had entire set of roles prescribed to me. I was rejected by my mother and I was constantly punished for the way I was thinking, the way I behaved or the dreams I had. I can understand the feeling of being “the other” in the hostile environment, and even though my situation has been so different, I’ve realised that both me and girls had in common way more than we could have once admitted. The camera has become a mirror.

Daria once told me that if a photograph on social media is hashtagged “#girlskissgirl”, “#polishlesbians” or “#girllovesgirl” it tends to go viral. They say if they use them too often, they feel bad about themselves.

“As if you’re creating a caricature of yourself?”, I thought out loud. She quietly nodded.





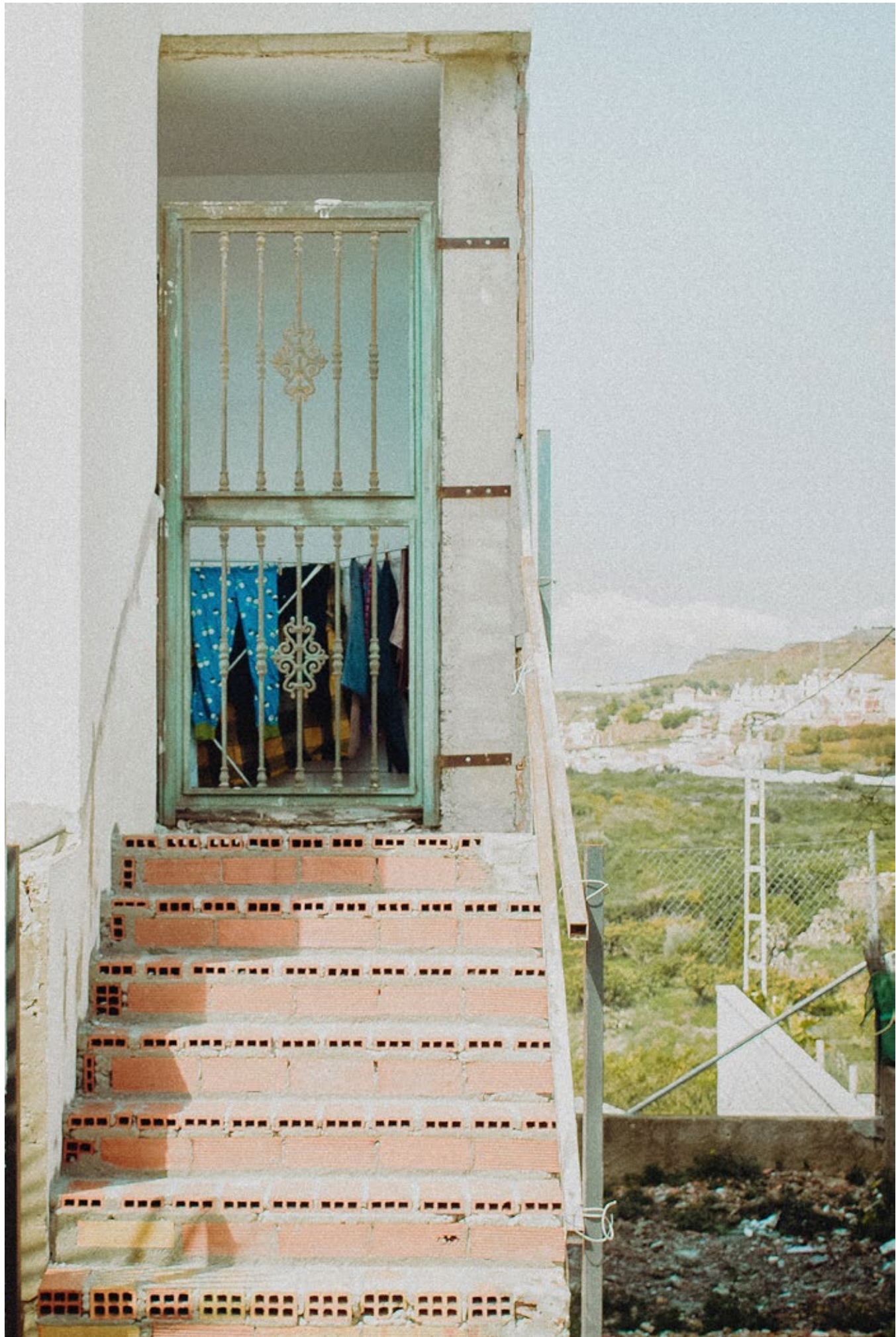
COLLECTIVE PROJECT:  
COVID-19

by Viktoria Gorbach, Zhytomyr, Ukraine | Bella  
Antonyan-Shevchuk, Zhytomyr, Ukraine | Eva Rico  
Narvâez, Torrox, Spain | Ewa Drewa, Gdynia, Poland |  
Faten Anbar, Shatila camp, Beirut, Lebanon | Kateryna  
Gorbachova, Berlin, Germany

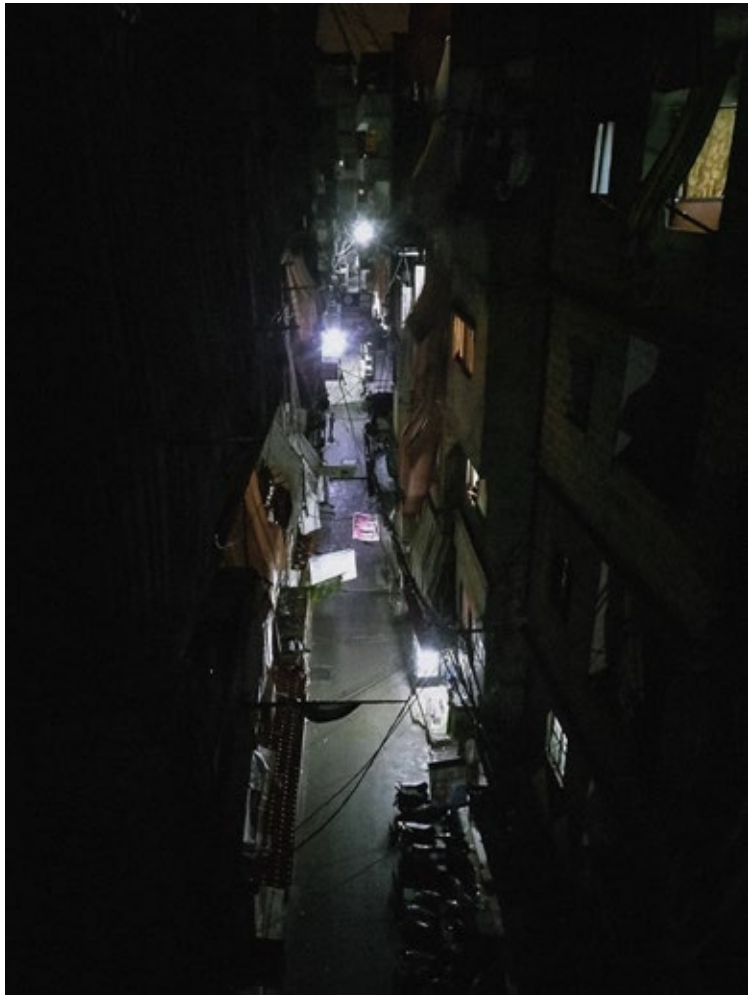














# CITY GARDEN

by Elena Kombolina

A little slice of village life in a courtyard in Bonn, Germany. The non-profit project StadtFrüchtchen ('City Fruit') aims to make the city 'more liveable'.

The project was initiated by two agricultural science graduates, Imke and Miriam. Three years ago, they rented a small plot of land from the city and assembled a team of like-minded people.

Having your own patch of land in the middle of a modern city allows you to buy fewer vegetables and herbs, make new friends - and for some, finally learn where your food comes from. Or learn how to hold a hammer.

Plant beds and pots are the two permitted forms of planting; according to the contract, you may not plant trees or shrubs on the plot. Anyone who wants to plant a bed here pays 30 euros a year into the "common pot". The money is used to pay the rent, buy seedlings and tools.







The idea of “urban gardening” is gaining ground, but there are still few actual projects. The StadtFrüchtchen are local celebrities - they have been in many newspapers and were even featured in one of Germany’s most popular children’s shows, The Mouse Show.

The community hosts regular general meeting, and discuss issues like the construction of a new fence. This is

not for aesthetic purposes: vegetables and berries are systematically stolen. Anyone can enter the vegetable garden, and lately someone has started taking the crops grown by others on a weekly basis. From now on, the area where the beds are located will be closed off from outsiders. Only project participants will be able to enter it, and a clearing will be reserved for guests.





FURS



by Natalia Vojkova

These animals will no longer be killed for their fur - they are safe. For three years now, Moscow-based artist Yulia Kuzhim has been buying up foxes, raccoons and sables from fur farms, saving their lives. Now she keeps almost two hundred animals. There are even pumas and lynxes. Soon they will have their own space, close to the wilderness: the woman and her 16-year-old daughter have decided to rehabilitate a swampy piece of land near Moscow to create a space like the popular Japanese fox village Jiao, where animals live in their natural habitat.

“Foxes, raccoons, they are like dogs - affectionate and reach out to humans,” says Yulia. “It is frightening to imagine that thousands of these animals are killed every year for fur coats.”

The volume of the fur market in Russia is estimated at 10 to 20 billion roubles. Fur-bearing animals in the country are not included in the Law “On Responsible Treatment of Animals” and, therefore, fur farms have no regulations either in terms of housing or slaughtering - everyone chooses their own methods. The methods can be brutal. Sometimes the fur is skinned off of live animals so that the commodity “does not lose its qualities”.

Animal rights activists try to fight against animal concentration camps, but in the absence of law it is hard to do. A few fur-bearing animals get lucky: they are bought back from fur farms by caring people like Yulia. Now her task is to find a curator for each animal.

















# INSIDE JORDAN VALLEY



Text and photos by Nivin

Nivin is a 22-year old Palestinian woman living in the Jordan Valley. She sent femLENS her photographs saying:

"I finished my university studies last year with a specialisation as a teacher for children. I started teaching children in my town, and now with the coronavirus, I help my family with pasturing. My region is called Khallat Al Makhoul and there are about five tribes living here. They mostly do animal farming (like sheep and poultry).

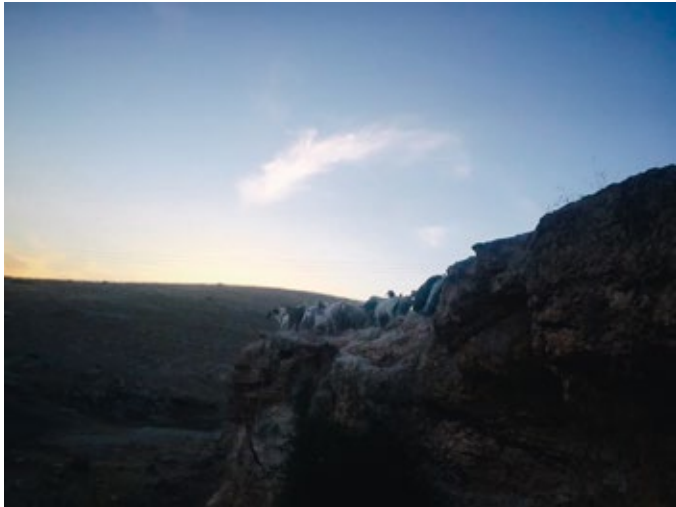
The situation is difficult for them. In the winter there is not enough sun for producing solar energy, it's just enough for lights. As for water, it is transported from Ein al-Beida. There is a water line for the army that is not far away but we are not allowed to take from it.

The idea of photography came to me for a number of reasons. To convey the suffering and feelings of the people, what they are exposed to by the Israeli occupation.

The other reason is because the place is charming and beautiful, and pictures are better at touching the feelings of people."













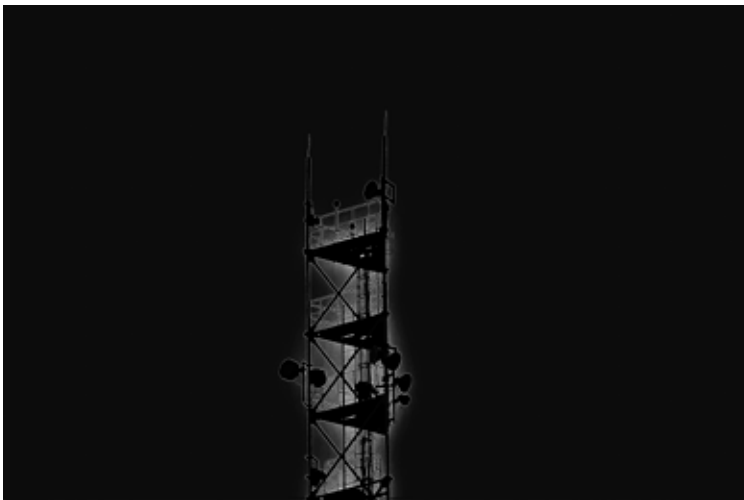
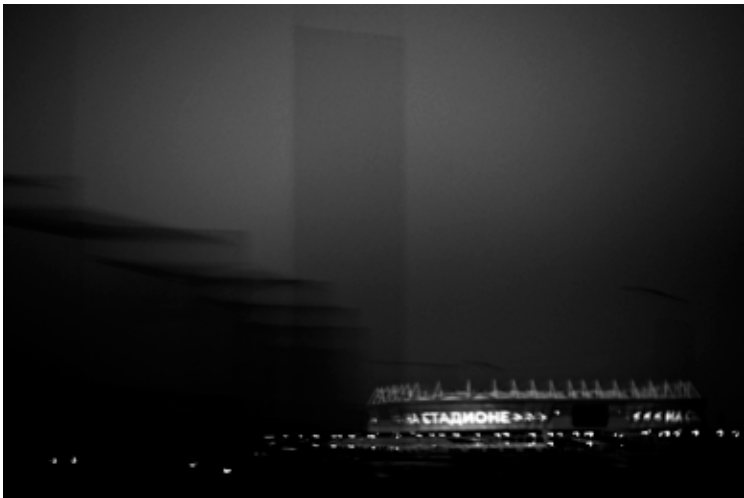
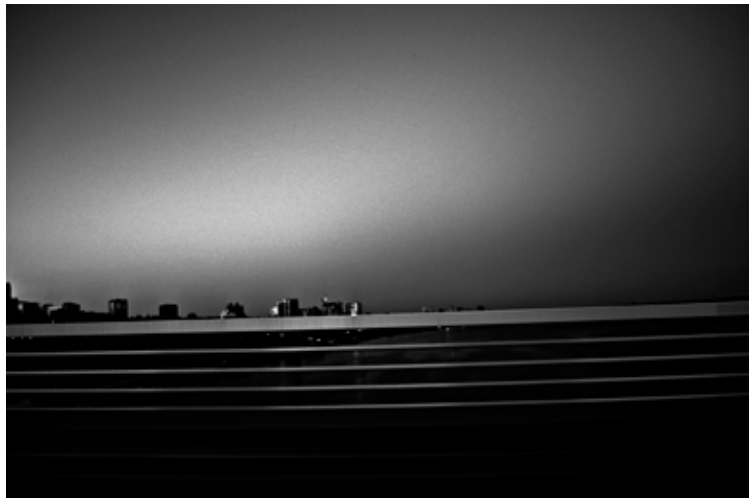
# TRANSMISSION LINES

by Veronika Ishchenko

I walk out of the house and bump into lines, lines horizontal, lines vertical. I am surrounded by these lines, they cut through space. I wanted to do a little research: how human perception is affected by horizontal and vertical lines. How do I feel within the boundaries of the lines? How do I cross these lines, boundaries? Is this transition possible?









by Halima Al Haj Ali

I am photographing and documenting what happened in Beirut so that the world sees the great destruction and suffering caused by the explosion. On the other hand I'm doing it so that the world knows the help and love that exists among all the people in Lebanon despite everything that the politicians do and despite everything that has happened here. There is still a beautiful thing here – caring for the others and helping them.

When the explosion happened, I was sitting with my family eating food. We felt a very strong vibration. We thought it was an earthquake and the building was going to collapse from the sway. My husband got up trying to protect our older child in the corner of the house. I took the little boy but I did not know where to go to protect him. Immediately after that we heard the sound of the explosion and it reminded me of when we were in Syria. I said “bombing, this is

### MY HUSBAND WORKS NEAR THE AREA OF THE EXPLOSION AND EVERY DAY PASSES THE FRONT OF THE HARBOUR AROUND WHERE THE EXPLOSION HAPPENED

a bombing”. We were all screaming and afraid. My children were crying and looking at us and asking what will happen. Will we die? What will we do? Do we go? Then my husband said we should go to the street, maybe we will find a safe place for the children and for us.

I approached the balcony of the house and saw people lying on the ground in fear. I thought that a building in Shatila had fallen to the ground from the intensity of the vibration that had occurred. It shook all of Beirut and shook our hearts with it, and brought us back to memories we thought we had forgotten about the war we fled from, and which still terrify us.

My oldest son was born in Syria, but I brought him here when he was just 6 months old. He always asked if we would go back to Syria and if the war will end there. And when the explosion happened here, he said, “Will it happen like in Syria? Will there be a war?” I told him, “No, this is just an explosion.”

My husband works near the area of the explosion and every day passes the front of the harbour around where the explosion happened. It was our good fortune that on the day of the explosion he arrived home at 5:50pm, that is, shortly before the explosion, because the explosion happened at 6:09pm. That is his usual time to get home unless there is a bad traffic jam. We thank God that he reached the house before the explosion.

An hour after the explosion, the employer called my husband and told him that he must come back to work because the place was damaged, and that he must sleep at work, my husband and all the workers. Our little boy heard this and was crying because he was scared. He was asking my husband to take him with or not to go and was screaming hysterically. I tried to calm him and sooth his fear, I told him “I am here, beside





you, do not worry”, and finally after a long time he fell asleep. His older brother asked me whether there will be another explosion. Will something happen to us? Will it happen here like in Syria? Will something happen? My husband and I answered, trying to make them feel safe, which I also needed. My husband returned after two days.

On the morning after the explosion, an official from a local association came to ask who wants to volunteer at the scene of the explosion and I agreed to help without thinking. I told them, “I will go with you. Send us someone who takes us to the place and who brings us back at the end of the day.”

We are a group of Syrians, Palestinians and Lebanese who work with love with each other and our goal is to help and relieve the affected people.

I felt that I had to go and do anything to help. I remembered when I was in Syria and I wanted someone to help and relieve us. We were all affected there and we needed someone to stand beside us. I felt that it was my duty to go to the streets, a duty towards the country that opened its doors to me when I was fleeing from war. It has given me safety and I consider it my second country, and now it needs someone to relieve it and its people. Even if I am tired from what has happened in Syria, doing this, helping out, makes me feel much better.











# SKATER

by Darina Shuparskaia

It often happens that many things go unnoticed to our eyes. We live our lives and only care about what concerns us. We often pass by the unusual, often do not notice the beauty and often miss the beautiful. A beautiful life can only be on a phone screen, that's what some people think today, especially those who live in a small town like mine.

I have a friend, his name is William, he lives in a small resort town Narva-Jõesuu, which is located on the shore of the Baltic Gulf. A young man who's devoted most of his time to skateboarding. Every day he allocates time for his hobby, every day he tries to learn something new, every day he faces his own difficulties, and feels the joy of the first-time tricks. To improve, to move forward despite losses and misses, to try again and again sounds like a big deal, but this is exactly what I saw in his life.

He started skateboarding back at the beginning of the second decade of 2000 when he and his brother were still riding scooters. But today that's the most embarrassing thing he's ever done in his life. Then he bought his first skateboard and he stood out among others, because in our small town there are only a few people riding skateboards. In the beginning it was difficult, nobody to learn from, even nowhere to ride, because a skating ramp was installed in our city very recently. I asked, what do you like so much about it? For passers-by, he's just a boy who rides on a board and makes a lot of noise. It is also possible that he is stereotypically considered to be a hooligan and a show-off (he told me that apparently that's relevant to people who ride scooters). But I was touched by the answer: "Doing this brings me peace

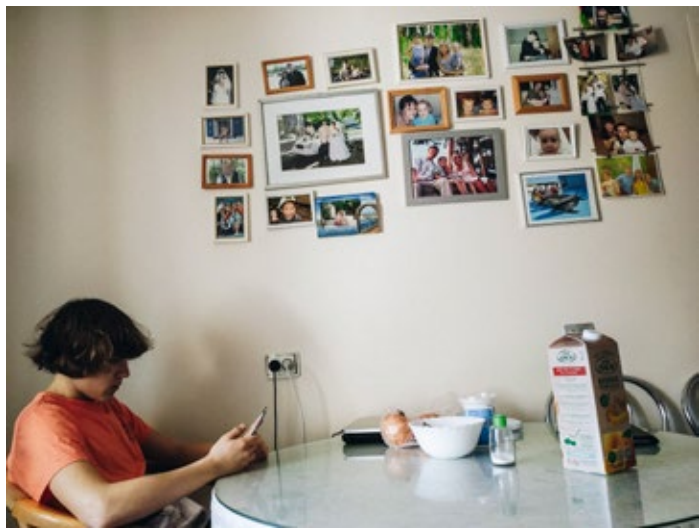
of mind and it's not just something I like to do. If I'm having a bad day, all I have to do is get up on the board and it's already a little better".

It's easy to judge when you're standing on the sidelines. But your opinion changes when you get closer. My idea of skater culture has turned upside down. There is so much to know, so much to learn, so much time to give to have growth. Bruises, scratches, holes in your shoes, dirty clothes – these are all steps towards the goal, these are all steps towards skill. It's all so beautiful when you get to know it.

Everybody has their own story, and there's not one that's not worth telling. I'm really glad that I could see his life from a new perspective. How he lives on the streets of a post-Soviet city, how he lives during quarantine, in these new conditions. I am glad that he is ready to move on and "plans to perform in competitions", albeit small, but for him, as someone who is just beginning his journey to a dream, it will be a big and meaningful step. And before that, he will challenge himself again and again every day.

There are so many views on life, and I was happy to see life through his eyes. Through this story, I want to inspire us to take an interest in the lives of our friends. Everyone has a special treasure in their life. If your friend is passionate about drawing, if your friend has devoted herself to children, if your friend found herself singing, then do not miss the opportunity to learn a little more about it... If a person has found what he or she likes, then he or she is happy. And seeing a happy person next to you is the best gift that a person can get.







# BAHÁ'Í

by Khaterreh Rahmani

In my opinion, the faith of a person is a wonderful thing. A spiritual person only sees the beautiful things in life, including grace and intimacy.

They see the entire human race as their brothers and sisters, no matter which colour the skin, which tongue is spoken or which country their place of birth is. They love every human being reasonably. However, it is terrible that one has to worry about expressing ones faith freely and cannot leave this fear behind.



**THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH IS ONE OF THE YOUNGEST OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR RELIGIONS. IT WAS FOUNDED BY BAHÁ'U'LLAH IN IRAN IN THE 19TH CENTURY.**









by Agata Read, England







by Lucía Rodríguez, Mexico



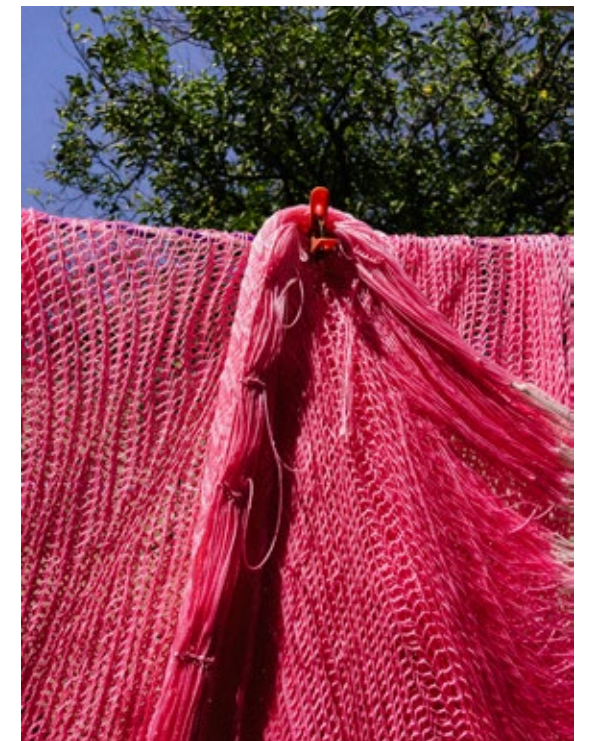




by Yulia Razina, Russia



by Viviana Ceballos, Mexico











by Inna Nichiporuk, Kazakhstan





by Nadezhda Mikhailova, Estonia















# MILA SHAHBAZI

Berlin, Germany

The name of this basketball club is “BSC”, which is based in Berlin. The team you see in the pictures is called “Herren3”.

They do a lot of intensive training two days a week and their goal is to prepare for the Bezirksliga. In addition to Germans, the players are of other nationalities, such as Ukrainians and Syrians. Which, of course, shows the separation of sport from politics.

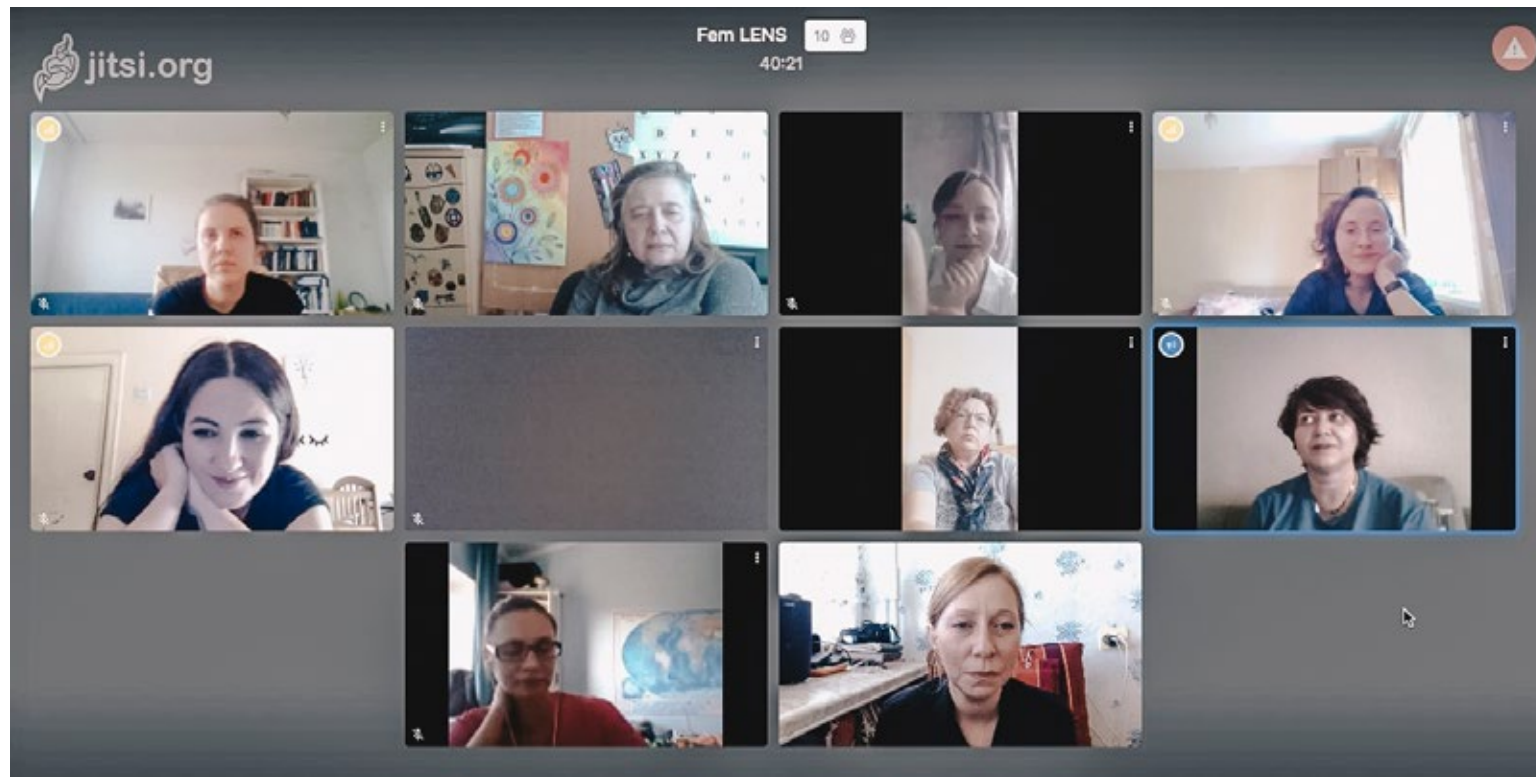
My goal in accompanying and photographing this team was to show behind the scenes the hard training of a basketball team, the serious effort of the team coach, and sometimes funny unconscious gestures and faces of the players.











# WOMEN AND PHOTOGRAPHY

by Emily Cai

The mission of femLENS is rooted in female empowerment and gender equality. Over the past years, femLENS has had the opportunity to work with women in countries such as Poland, Ireland, Ukraine, Lebanon, Germany, Spain, setting up photography workshops in order to help women tell their stories. As an organisation whose values stem from human rights, femLENS not only uses its platform to shine a light on issues that disproportionately affect women, such as human trafficking and migration, it also aims to raise awareness of the importance of women's perspectives and experiences.

Through documentary photography and storytelling, femLENS fights for gender equality by empowering women – but what exactly about this approach is effective in dismantling inequality? Why does femLENS focus on women, and why, in particular, on photography and storytelling?

Empowering women has long-reaching benefits not just in terms of equality, but in terms of promoting peace and stability in society, as well as driving change in communities. From UN Women to the Council on Foreign Relations, research demonstrates the benefits of women representation and leadership:

from advocating fairer policies, to promoting bipartisanship, to a more stable society and a better economy. In spite of this, women still remain underrepresented, not only in positions of leadership, but also in a significant number of fields ranging from science, to business, to art.

The field of photography is no exception. Photography largely remains a male-dominated field, where women face compounded barriers from sexism to industry stereotypes, from lack of opportunity to workplace discrimination. Additionally, in countries like the UK, arts in general have morphed into a bastion of the middle-class, increasingly accessible only to the privileged, where systemic inequality affects women more than it does men. Women typically struggle to gain a foothold due to economic and societal barriers, and all the while male-generated perspectives and images dominate the output of artistic mediums.

This imbalance in gender dynamics is perpetuated through what Audre Lorde describes as the “mythical norm” — that is, the dominant and powerful group in society (by US standards, for example, this would be the white, non-disabled, heterosexual male). This dominant group, according to Beverly Daniel Tatum, holds power and authority, in addition to determining everything from job distribution, societal structure, and historical narrative. Society itself is constructed based on the perspectives and stories of the mythical norm.

The general exclusion of women's stories from the dominant narrative is explained in Tatum's observations: “Dominant groups generally don't like to be reminded of the existence of inequality... The truth is that the dominants do not really know what the experiences of the subordinate is.” The mainstream narrative is neither constructed by or with

women, nor is it receptive to identifying or hearing the experiences of women. The reality is that not only are women in most societies often relegated to secondary status, but the majority of the voices and narratives which could serve to identify, explain, or even fight against this condition are drowned out by the clamour of the mythical norm.

The guiding mission of femLENS comes as a way of changing this reality. In order to combat the status quo, femLENS seeks to create a channel where the stories of women can be told and heard: to facilitate and produce a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative. By providing an accessible means of storytelling and empowering women to share their stories, femLENS ultimately hopes to plant the seeds of a more gender-equal society by promoting women's voices and subverting the mythical norm.

Through focus on accessibility, femLENS' approach to documentary photography breaks down several traditional barriers faced by women. Firstly, femLENS' methods strive to overcome the economic and class barriers that come hand-in-hand with art, and that are compounded by gender inequality. Free courses and workshops are offered in different countries to educate women in documentary photography techniques. Photos are taken using basic, everyday equipment: mobile phones. The images – taken by women and offering insight into their lives – are collected and published via femLENS' free online magazine, to be accessed and viewed by anyone with an internet connection.

Additionally, through the visual medium of documentary photography, barriers that are traditionally posed by linguistic differences are transcended. Using documentary photography for storytelling ensures “intellectual accessibility” on both the part of the artist and



**“ACCORDING TO SENEHI, STORYTELLING IS DESCRIBED AS A “READILY ATTAINABLE MEANS WHEREBY PERSONS CAN ACCESS AT LEAST SOME NARRATOR POTENCY”. GIVEN THAT EMPOWERMENT IS LITERALLY DEFINED AS “THE PROCESS OF BECOMING STRONGER AND MORE CONFIDENT, ESPECIALLY IN CONTROLLING ONE’S LIFE AND CLAIMING ONE’S RIGHTS”, STORYTELLING, WHICH IS THE ABILITY TO CONSTRUCT AND CONTROL ONE’S OWN NARRATIVE, IS THEREFORE LITERALLY THE DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT.”**

the audience, as, according to Jessica Senehi, “no special training or literacy is required for its communication.”

This important and prevalent element of accessibility in femLENS’ work guarantees not only that women have the means with which to tell their story, but that the public has the means with which to view these stories. Ultimately, the more women’s stories are told and shared, the more women are empowered to build and take control of their own narrative.

While accessibility is an important part of femLENS’ process of female empowerment, just as important and valuable is teaching and encouraging the artistic form of storytelling through photography. Anyone can tell a story and everyone has a story to tell – this is what makes storytelling not only an accessible medium, but also an empowering means of narrative.

According to Senehi, storytelling is described as a “readily attainable means whereby persons can access at least some narrator potency”. Given that empowerment is literally defined as “the process of becoming stronger and more

confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights”, storytelling, which is the ability to construct and control one’s own narrative, is therefore literally the definition of empowerment.

Storytelling is the means of giving form to one’s own identity – what could be more empowering? Through photography, femLENS empowers women to give voice to their stories by sharing their perspectives and presenting their experiences.

In order to foster this spirit of empowerment, femLENS seeks to provide a community whereby women feel supported to come together and tell their stories. As long as the narrative of the mythical norm dominates society unchallenged, the perception will be that there is little acceptance or room for stories told by others. However, as Olafur Eliasson explains, “The important thing is not that we agree about the experience that we share, but that we consider it worthwhile sharing an experience at all.”

In the face of an overbearing mythical norm, femLENS provides a place where women whose stories have traditionally



gone untold are able to come together, a place where women feel that their voices and their perspectives matters. This safe place is important in terms of nurturing storytelling and empowering women: a key element to effective storytelling is “finding a place; a community which invites you to share difficult narratives.” Ultimately, the community created by femLENS is meant to be conducive to storytelling, where women can express their lived experiences and vision through photography, and where the stories told by women can be openly shared and celebrated.

Ensuring women have both the means and the environment to tell their stories is femLENS’ way of challenging current systems of power. Providing an accessible channel for the voices and perspectives of women is invaluable in deconstructing the mythical norm. Documentary photography allows women to speak truth to power by explicitly communicating in images the personal and lived experiences of the artist. Storytelling in particular is described as “deliciously subversive” — there is an inherent element of activism in the act of women simply telling their stories, as their perspectives directly re-

fute the picture of reality painted by the mythical norm.

There should be nothing radical about a society where everyone has an equal voice. A peaceful community is correlated with the ability of everyone, not just those in power, to contribute to knowledge production and societal discourse. Therefore, by empowering women to tell their stories and providing a community where these stories can be heard and shared, femLENS supports not only women, but a more equal society, as well as the ability for communities to build sustainable peace.

The mission of femLENS is rooted in female empowerment and gender equality: women who feel their stories are worth telling, who, through documentary photography, are able to create and share their own experiences, perspectives, and lives, and who are able to advocate for a fairer society by countering the narrative of the mythical norm. To empower women is to promote equality and peace. To empower women is to empower entire communities. Ultimately, femLENS’ goal is to serve as the origin of a boundless ripple-effect that changes society for the better.



PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED IN THIS  
MAGAZINE WERE TAKEN BY WOMEN WHO  
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**Darina Shuparskaia**

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Photo by Nivin  
femLENS Online workshop with Palestinian Women







