

Physical Evidence Museum

11.05.-13.05. | 17:00-21:00

14.05. | 15:00-20:00

15.05. | 15:00-19:00

Bern, 2022

1. With these shoes I can escape for an early morning run. With them I can stay longer at workout, so that I don't have to come home. With them I can dance till sunrise to escape the pain.

2. Hearing the news that I am planning a trip to another city for opening of an arts event (I suggest that we go together), my husband hits me on the head with his hand and pushes me. I fall to the floor. He starts kicking me lying there with his hard boots. I manage to escape. I have bruises all over my body. I put on a shirt with long sleeves. I'm going. I'll not give up. I take pictures of my bruised body: belly, thighs, legs, arms. He spared my face.

3. I'm standing in the kitchen, next to the water kettle and making myself a cuppa. It's a dark autumn morning; the kitchen light is on. Reflected in the window, I see my husband entering quietly. He stops in the doorway. He makes a gun with his fingers and aims it at my back. He pulls the invisible trigger. I freeze. Shivers of fear run through my body. I'm dying as if he really killed me. I'm dying inside. I crumble. I can't believe it! My baby? The love of my life? Shooting me in the back?

4.

The kitchen. The dining table. There is eating, drinking and laughing. A beautiful evening is spent together. But the barrel is full to the brim. There is a talk around the barrel as if it could be made bigger and prevent the disaster. The moment comes: a look, a word, a gesture too much or too little or simply too long. Too. And. It. Begins. To. Bubble. Bubble over. Burn. In all directions. The worst thing is not the burn, that only affects the skin. But behind the skin there lies the heart and the potential memories, the memory. Too bitter and too hot for a child.

5.



My story is on the wall.

I am from Iraq, so is my ex-husband. He lived in Switzerland before me and I met him on the internet. He was very nice and we got married. When I came here to Switzerland, he was a totally different person. He forbade me everything, German classes, work, contact with people. I lived like in slavery for fourteen years. After the birth of the daughter I was sick. I couldn't sleep with the baby in my arms and he knew that. He left the stove on several times when he went to work at 3 in the morning. I noticed it and asked him, why are you doing that? And he whispered in my ear, „Have you seen what I can do? I can make fire. And if there's a fire in the apartment and the police comes, I will say, „Oh my heart is very hurt because my baby is living and sleeping in this apartment with such a sick woman. She did this, she has to go to jail! Then I'll take the baby away from you and you have to go back to Iraq.“ It was horrible, I had the baby in my arms, no language, I had no one and I was so afraid of him. To this day I can't sleep, I always go to check the cook stove at night.

6.



Open the cupboard.

At the age of 10, I went to a rather fancy restaurant with my parents. For dessert, I was given a scoop of ice cream in a metal cup with a metal spoon. The „best“ ice cream I ever had. I spooned it out to the last drop. My father threw a tantrum and said I was making extra noise. My mother explained that I was just trying to impress the girl at the next table. Beatings and withdrawal of love followed. No one asked me why I was doing this. I just wanted to enjoy the ice cream. The beatings and burns my parents inflicted on me until I was 44 were not the worst. Much worse were the love deprivations and devaluations: the ground crashed down and I didn't know why. Now I'm soon 47 and I'm still panic-stricken that people might not like me.

7.

When he was drunk, violence was especially brutal. That happened every week for more than two decades. When he was approaching home, I would look out of the window to figure out his level of drunkenness, to know how to behave. There was a time when I marked with colour the days in the calendar when he was drunk, and there were more and more of them. Till weeks where every single day in the calendar was coloured.

8.

WHENEVER I SEE THE NUMBER 8, EVEN THOUGH I UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S JUST A NUMBER, MY CELLS FREEZE. I RESIST THE MEMORIES THAT THE NUMBER 8 REMINDS ME OF BUT, NO MATTER THE CONTEXT, THE MOMENT WHEN I SEE OR HEAR NUMBER 8 I GET AN ANXIETY ATTACK. HIS BIRTHDAY WAS ON THE 8TH, WE MET FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE 8TH AND CELEBRATED IT EVERY YEAR. ALTHOUGH MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED, THE NUMBER STILL REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING UNPLEASANT AND DANGEROUS.

9.

My dad would sit in front of me with a wooden spoon while I was eating. When I could not eat anymore, he would hit my forehead until the plate was empty. If he left the kitchen for a bit, I would hide the food behind the couch or throw it out of the window.

10. I left my abuser after more than five years of living together. Sometimes when I hold a soup ladle in my hands, the memories of rape episodes come back when a soup ladle or a champagne cork or some other object with sharper edges was pushed into my body. These memories are so painful that I seem to freeze remembering the pain and horror of it.

11.  Open the cake box.

He told me it wasn't over, yanked me by my hair, knocked me to the floor and kicked me in the stomach. I wanted to leave but he had locked his door. I begged him to let me go. First, he wouldn't let me go to the toilet either. It was only a few hours later that I was able to inform a friend of mine. She came and picked me up. But before I could leave, he gave me an engagement ring and told me he didn't want to lose me, he wanted to marry me. One of the many amends gifts was also this cake with a heart necklace.


12. There was no big use of the police. They arrived quite some time later, so had the abuser wanted to silence me forever, he could have done it in no hurry. I didn't submit the police report of course. My abuser is the intelligent wife beater type, not a drunkard they would take away for the night to sober up. With other people around, he behaved perfectly, and the police was clearly disappointed that there was no visible proof...On the way out, one of the policemen noticed my husband's hockey equipment and asked: „Which club are you playing for?“ They looked at one another, my then husband answered and broke into a wide smile. At that moment my powerlessness grew out of proportions. I realized that I'm absolutely alone against my abuser and the world, and I lost heart altogether.

13. After our divorce, the child's father invited me for a talk. We were sitting in a cafe, the conversation was unpleasant and I decided to leave. At that moment I received a punch in my head. My ears were ringing. Adrenaline, panic, the need to get away as soon as possible. Some men in the cafe held him back. I don't even remember how I got home. Only later I found out that the earring's leg was straightened on the side where I was punched. I tried to bend it back, but it never looked the same again. Can't get myself to wear these again.

14. My stepmom hit me with the wires. In the changing room, girls in my class were in shock. I didn't understand why, because I thought that it's normal that parents hit their kids.

15. I took all sedative pills

16. Your tears mean nothing to me.

17.  My story is on the bathroom door.

In the bathroom I wasn't able to escape myself, but I was able to escape him. This was the only room in the flat, that had a lock on the door.

18.



Open the small door.

His car had a very strong smell. The smell was suffocating, just as the feeling of fear and worthlessness, which I often felt when being next to him. He was driving the car swiftly and with a great confidence. Often he would start driving before I could put on my seatbelt. Now all synthetic smells make me feel sick.

19.

Things that in his eyes made me attractive, made me feel like an object. I learned like a child - was that sexy?

20.

„I'll kill myself if you leave me.“ I left. And he is alive and well.

21.

As a child, I often witnessed domestic violence, not directly against women, but rather objects were broken by father or brothers. In our home, the sockets were always broken because of fist punches, even though they were always replaced. So as a child I thought it was normal for men to break objects, especially sockets. When I went to play at friends' houses, I was stunned that the sockets there were whole and beautiful...I can't forget looking at the sockets at girlfriends' houses for so long.

22.



Look under the bed.

I found this box at home under the bed. I was 11 or 12. I understood what it was, I didn't touch it or tell anyone because I thought that it belonged to my parents. Later I found out that my father was raping my sister and using it with her. She was 15. I feel terrible that I can't go back to the moment when I found the box. If I had taken that box to my mum or at least run around the house with it, perhaps the atrocity would have been discovered sooner.

23.

In public he was the perfect man - intelligent, charming, always dressed in suit and able to keep exciting conversation. That's why even my mum didn't believe me when I finally brought myself to tell that I was afraid to sleep because at night he would get on top of me and hit me with fists or smother with pillow. What for? For I got pregnant and he didn't want children. I ruined his future plans.

24.

This is the necklace my fiance gave me. I wore it almost all the time, then it hung on the window in my room so it had to see everything. How he called me names, tormented me, raped me, choked me on the floor until I passed out. Maybe I even had it around my neck then.

25. He often commented on how I should behave:

"A good girlfriend will wear that bikini on the beach that turns everyone's heads." I felt like a trophy, not his girlfriend.

26. First relationship is often associated with rose-tinted glasses, falling in love, childish happiness. In my case it's associated with emotional manipulation. Because I didn't agree to sleep with him, I was given an ultimatum - I had to at least send nudes because that's what all girlfriends do, especially ones who don't satisfy their partner physically. I had nobody to ask for advice. Later he used this to blackmail me and to make me feel afraid and ashamed of myself when I decided to leave the relationship.

27. I was beaten up and kicked out of the house when I was wearing just this pinafore dress.


28. When I started my studies, I decided to adopt a dog. I chose skinny, black Soja - her tail was cut off with an ax. She was cute and I'd never been happier. At first I thought Soja was afraid of men because of her traumas. She never slept in the room where my then partner was, did not want to go for walks with him, did not let him touch her. One day, when I returned from my 12-hour work shift, she was not at home. My ex said that he lost her, that I had to stop crying, because eventually she would end up in the local dog shelter. I managed to find her, frightened, near the roundabout. Another time, during an argument, he kicked her so that her tiny body flew to the far end of the room. After the breakup, it turned out that Soja was not afraid of men - she was afraid of one violent, cheating man. Now I am in a happy relationship and Soja can't imagine a day without cuddling under the covers with my partner. My dog understood much faster than me who we were dealing with.

29. If you cut your hair short, I will break up with you.

30. He wouldn't let me cut bangs. I was holding it in for 6 years and one day finally did it. I was scared to go home. He is not talking to me for three days.

31. FATHER WAS SCREAMING THAT HE IS GOING TO CUT OFF MY BROTHER'S PENIS. I HEARD THAT FROM THE OTHER ROOM. WE WERE VERY YOUNG.

32. I was beaten so badly by my then partner in the 12th week of pregnancy that I lost the child. Every hematoma reminds me of this terrible event to this day.

33.  My story is in the box.

34.



My story is on the table.

It is still a painful subject to me. I am not able to write my cool texts anymore, I have no creative ideas, it has killed any creativity I had. I am not able to create anything because it all goes on - two-year long court case, constant interrogations from social and child services, battle over child custody, psychiatric and psychological examinations that court has ordered meeting each demand of the perpetrator. I, not the perpetrator, is being torn and dragged around all the possible institutions. It's him, not me that the court, social and child services are serving. I am an empty, functioning being. I don't have an item. I am an item that the system is trying to turn into something I'm not.

35.



Listen.

I have a favourite chair that I still love to sit on in the evenings thinking about a day that passed, drink wine and read books. However, sometimes when I look at it, I remember how my drunken husband tried to choke me. Just before that he threw our 2 month old baby onto the edge of the chair. I was laying on the floor whilst his hands were squeezing my neck, and either looking into his mad eyes and thinking that he was going to kill me or looking at the child, who could fall off the chair edge any second. At one moment I gathered up my strength to push him away from me, start screaming, grab my child and call for help. Later, my loved ones said that I probably was the one who provoked him to do that. When I left after two months, our mutual friends were saying how could I have done this to such a kind man.

36.



My story is written on the paper.

The first time he threw something at me (it was a fork, I think), I couldn't believe it was really happening. Since then, I've kept a couple of the fruits he hurled at me when I asked him to stop treating me the way he did. Talking gave way to shouting when he started insulting me and calling me names, often behind my back. He would stand behind me and hiss "you bitch", or "fuck you, whore." "You can't talk to me that way," I'd scream, and that's when he would start throwing things. Anything that was at hand. I ducked, otherwise I would have been hit in the face, in the eye, or had my glasses broken. Then he would lock himself in his workroom and play music at full blast. Afterwards, I often had dizzy spells, anxiety attacks, and I lost my balance. One day, the ambulance came and took me to the hospital. In the hospital report, they wrote: "response to severe stress occasioned by marital quarrel." Another time after he threw something - a mug or an apple, I can't remember - I fell and broke a tooth. No, he wasn't there when it happened. No, he didn't push me. It was because of him, but he wasn't there when I lost my balance. There's no accounting for the way you react to stress. I tripped and fell because I was being abused. It was my body's response to stress. So what if it was put off for a couple of minutes? It's been three years since he moved out. I'm slowly getting my balance back. I haven't tripped and fallen for three years now. I haven't lost my balance once.

37. My notebook is empty. It hurts so much that I am not able to write it down. I don't even see a point. It feels that by describing the situation, the world is going to get only darker.

38. In my diary there is almost nothing about him.


39. *These are not just tickets to the gig of my favourite band, which you tore apart so I could not go because I "have bad taste in music". You were also tearing my self-esteem and personality apart every single day.*

40.  Listen.

I was doing my homework on a closed piano because we didn't have a table. My little sister was studying in music school. My step mum decided that she had to play piano at that right moment. I needed just five more minutes to finish an exercise. Step mum pushed me off the chair and when I went to tell my dad, she started screaming, saying that I feel off on my own. When I tried to take my books off the piano, she pushed me again. I pushed her back. She called my dad, who rushed in and started choking me. He said: „I won't let you treat my wife like this“.

41. When we were kids, mum would always buy us new stickers to make us feel better after her fights with dad. She couldn't afford anything more than that.

42. To make sure I grew up properly, my dad put CCTV in my room.

43.  My story is on page 178.

We weren't allowed to laugh on Fridays, because Jesus died on Friday and if you have fun on Friday, you'll cry on Sunday. Our dad was punishing us if we broke that rule. We often cried on Sunday, because we were punished for our Friday's fun. Before hitting us he would say: „I told you you'll be crying on Sunday!“

44. When I drank two glasses of cooled boiled water and forgot to boil more, my stepmom punished me by dragging me by my hair. She would do that often. Later, when braiding my hair, she asked why I have bald spots.

45. She always got angry when I had friends over and afterwards the toys were left laying on the floor. Once I had a playdate with a friend from kindergarten. I remember that when her mother came to pick her up and they were closing the door, I shouted at them not to go, because my mother would start yelling at me right away. I wanted to make a joke, I don't remember how the friends now reacted. That's something I don't remember from my childhood at all - reactions from adults. I don't remember a single teacher noticing my body was always covered in bruises. And I don't remember the faces of my neighbours in the morning when I had screamed for help at the top of my lungs the night before.

46. Father wanted to give my brother to the orphanage because „There was something wrong with him“ He was just scared.

47. "Why are you even trying, you will never be a dancer, you can't even do splits and you have a crooked back," said my dad. I was dancing HipHop, so the splits weren't even necessary.

48.  Take the lego train for a ride.

I was pregnant with my youngest child. My man didn't like my oldest son's behaviour and attitude. He often used it as an excuse for aggressive talks and screaming around. I vividly remember how I had to cover my son with my big stomach to not let the man get him. My son was just calmly playing with legos.

49. My father had forbidden me to ask my grandfather to buy me something when I was shopping. My grandfather offered to give me a blouse. When we returned, my father threw a tantrum at the sight of the blouse; he lifted me up by the neck with one hand to strangle me. I was eight years old.

50. Follow the red line out of the room

Physical Evidence Museum

Jana Jacuka, Laura Stašāne (Riga)

Like many important things, it evolves gradually and then suddenly. At the beginning everything is ok, even nice and romantic, until it turns out that you do everything wrong. Suddenly you are controlled, your belongings, choices, self-esteem and even thoughts are taken away, replaced by freezing fear and shame.

Or - you are a kid, you have a house and parents and that's exactly what a kid needs. But then you understand that something is wrong at home, that there is something happening that should not be taking place. Yet, the whole world of yours is made of your parents, you don't know another life and even if you did, there is no place to go.

A survey conducted in Switzerland in autumn 2021, revealed that 42% of women have been subject to domestic violence at least once. Half of these cases were kept silent by victims or others who knew about it.

«Physical Evidence Museum» is an exhibition in an ordinary apartment made of everyday things that have been collected with the help of many women in Switzerland, Poland, Estonia and Latvia. All the objects on display are witnesses of domestic violence yet they would never be accepted as credible evidence in court or police. Violence as seen through the eyes of the women opens up a space to share not only pain but also empathy, tenderness and triumph.

Reading of Testimonies in the Exhibition
15.05. from 19:00 to 22:00

Women who are survivors, friends and supporters will read personal stories of domestic violence, each of them will read a story of another, in a symbolic act to confront the silence with voice.

Authors: Jana Jacuka, Laura Stašāne

Artist: Izolde Cēsniece

Designer: Sabīne Ozoliņa

Sound: Jēkabs Nīmanis

Production assistant: Jana Aizupe

Production: Laura Stašāne, Jana Jacuka, New Theatre Institute of Latvia Co-funded by „Magic Carpets“ platform of the „Creative Europe“ programme

Dramaturgy Bern: Ruth Huber

Scenography Bern: Jasmin Wiesli

Technicians Bern: Petz Luginbühl, Jonas Fehr

Museum Guard Bern: Lou Steiger

Graphic Design Bern: Judith Rügger

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Premiere September 2020 in Riga at the International festival of contemporary theatre Homo Novus

If you have a story to share, you are welcome to do it here:

www.evidencemuseum.com

www.auawirleben.ch