

SVILOVA | VASYA RUN

SPECIAL EDITION

VASYA RUN

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VASYA RUN, Special Edition, 2015, image courtesy of the artist.

Text: Anastasiia Fedorova

What are the chances of having a deep conversation with a young Moscow thug? And what if you can't even see his face? The Vasya Run project comes from the world which normally stays far beneath the surface: from the habitat of urban Moscow youth. Vasya Run merges subcultures, performance art, theatre, sociology and spiritual emancipation techniques, and has always been a bit of a mystery: the mystery of piercing blue eyes above a bandana hiding someone's face, and the hidden personalities of artists and curators who insist on remaining anonymous. They are chasing two things completely alien to the contemporary selfie-obsessed world: anonymity and giving up ego.

Vasya Run started in Summer 2014 with a verbatim script written by Vasya, a Russian

graffiti artist, based on his experience of being arrested and charged for vandalism in Paris. His first name became a part of the project's title, and a night in a cell came to inspire the narrative of self-discovery on stage. The early uniform of the performance participants was borrowed from the subculture of graffiti artists - sweatpants and hoodies, bandanas and scarves to hide faces - to create a vision which goes hand in hand with society's idea of young renegades in trainers.

What was special about the project from the beginning however, was not the form or narrative, but the participants: the curators of the project cast young men between the ages of 14 and 27 who had previously had nothing to do with the art world. They were found on the street, in shops, or on the Moscow metro.

SVILOVA | VASYA RUN

They signed up for months of intense self-development involving a carefully curated set of practices assembled from various theatre schools, spiritual traditions and physical exercises. Their goal was to reach a state of self-awareness, to discover and perform their true selves.

Special Edition, the most recent Vasya Run performance (a silent documentation of which can be partly seen online at SVILOVA) is, in a way, a consequence of all the collaborative efforts of the anonymous team - of the hours they spent together engaging in developmental practice or just hanging out. Who knows if it was intended, but the title reflects the performance theme very well: it's about how special we all want to be, or at least to seem.

Special Edition is set on a street basketball court in Moscow. The guys are not playing,

just hanging out and talking. It's the usual lad talk: hip hop, family, problems with the police. Their voices are punctuated by the sound of a basketball hitting the ground: one of them doesn't enter the discussion and keeps playing. The guys are dressed in bright basketball kits quite common on courts in estates around the world. To ensure their anonymity, however, their heads are covered with detached black hoods with elastic fabric covering their mouths and noses. It gives the scene a surreal spin and, somehow, loads it with meanings of which curators of the project might not be aware. Observed from an angle of an indifferent surveillance camera, the hooded figures remind one of a metaphoric blend of Western fear of immigrants: their Eastern European accent, their Burka-looking headpieces and Nike trainers. The term *Special Edition* also recalls the sportswear obsession of society's rejects. The fears of a community come into play.



VASYA RUN, *Special Edition*, 2015, image courtesy of the artist.



*VASYA RUN, still image from **Special Edition**, 2015, image courtesy of the artist.*

The main aim of the performance is to explore socially imposed behaviour: the way we all play certain roles in certain situations gradually losing all sense of our real personalities. The Nike basketball becomes a token of freedom and truth and the centre of confrontation between the leader of the pack and the outsider. The outsider is not interested in hierarchies, achievements, future, his goal is self-awareness and the quest for the essence of self. “When you talk about yourself it’s sickening”, he drops. “It’s either moaning or vanity”. Wait a second, this is probably about all of us. “But everyone, everyone lives like this,” his opponent replies.

Issues raised in Vasya Run are universal: constant lies, pointless narcissism, vicious circles of performances we play out for others and the fear of losing it all. But it’s also very relevant to contemporary Russian youth: to their loss of spiritual and ideological

milestones, identity crisis, isolation and, in the case of boys, the pressure of society’s hyper-masculinity. When a little silver orthodox cross, so typical for post-Soviet kids to wear, suddenly peeks out of the Nike tank top, you can immediately hear how real the story is: the doubts, the efforts, the father who works in a factory, the will to be better, to be successful, to be special.

Vasya Run is about the way out, about finding the tranquil space outside ambitions and social convention. It’s in a way a utopia. But then, why not? There are not many ways out left, but there is always one we carry from day to day: inside ourselves.

ABOUT THE WRITER

[Anastasiia Fedorova](#) is a London-based writer and curator. She writes about photography, fashion and contemporary visual culture for various publications including Dazed & Confused, 032c, SHOWstudio, The Guardian, ZOO Magazine and The Calvert Journal.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

[VASYA RUN](#) is a Moscow based interactive social experiment on the bounds of theater, music, and contemporary art.

It is a space of organic interaction between contemporary artists, actors, renowned hiphop performers, street artists, choreographers, spiritual teachers and theorists.

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