

IV TOSHAIN

*I PRACTICE WHAT I PREACH**

Wolf Guenter Thiel

“This scar is the result of shrapnel that struck me in the face. The bomb hit the bunker where we had sought shelter on March 20, 2003, during a large-scale military operation carried out by the United States and its allies against Iraq.” I recall this statement by Iv Toshain, offered as commentary on her portrait photo in a glossy magazine. I did not know the artist at the time, but her words stayed with me. Only much later, when I met her and saw her works, did I grasp the radical nature of that comment. Her struggle against every form of totalitarianism was, quite literally, written on her face¹. Later, she slashed a mirror, shattering her own reflection with blades. The brutal nature of this performance is immanent—a remarkable act of self-destruction that she also imposes on the viewer in the reflection. It is an artistic act of deliberate world-denial and a final renunciation of her own glamorous self-staging.

So who is Iv Toshain? The AI system Grok, based on X, answers as follows: *“Iv Toshain is an Austrian artist, curator, and activist, born in 1980 in Sofia, Bulgaria, behind the Iron Curtain. She spent her early childhood in Iraq and Libya, which influenced her artistic perspective. Toshain studied at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia, the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan, and completed her master’s degree at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in the master class of Franz Graf (2004). She lives and works in Vienna.”*²

In response to the question about the nature of her artistic practice, the same AI explains: *“Iv Toshain’s work is radical, interdisciplinary, and deeply socially engaged. She employs a visually powerful and symbol-loaded language exploring themes such as globalization, freedom, democracy, and violence. Her work moves on the threshold of installation, sculpture, painting, performance, and activism, with cold weapons and slogans taking central roles. (...) She is a co-founder of the art collective FXXXism^{TC} (with Anna Ceeh), taking a critical stance toward ideologies in its projects. Performances such as MIP – MIPY – FRIEDE (2017, Venice Biennale; 2018, Red Square, Moscow) reveal her subversive approach. Her exhibition I FOR AN EYE (2024, Rocca Paolina Fortress, Perugia)³ addressed conflict, vengeance, and the necessity of empathy and peace.”*

These responses condense the artist’s online presence into a few sentences almost instantly, presenting the information in an apparently objective manner. The AI system Grok does not evaluate, prioritize, or omit; it offers neither political nor aesthetic judgment, but merely reflects what is available online.

“Authenticity exists where the distance between person and work is at its shortest,” Iv Toshain says.⁴ The AI system, however, prioritizes algorithmic objectivity over such authenticity. Here, authenticity means acting in accordance with one’s own values, convictions, and emotions — without pretending otherwise. In this sense, the artist and her works are equally authentic. For her, authenticity is an artistic paradigm, an indispensable precondition. In this respect it is the real experience that is essential in order to articulate her concerns — whether humanistic, cultural, or political — with intensity and activist urgency. The decisive difference from an AI system lies precisely in Iv Toshain’s intention to confront and persuade people directly through the mediation of real danger or extreme experience, rather than merely providing objective information.

Iv Toshain confronts the viewer by staging cold weapons as intricate art installations. Provoked, the tension asserts itself automatically. The viewer must become aware of the danger in order to guard against it. Only real danger confronts directly, aiming to prompt engagement with the content of the artwork. On the one hand, the artist showcases danger in her works, on the other, she hides it behind their sleek, polished aesthetics. The camouflage masks the weapon’s inherent banality while simultaneously serving as an artistic means of reflection on perception and identity. In any case, the alluring sheen is profoundly perfidious. In her work, she incorporates — almost casually — aspects of what is known as exposure therapy, a behavioral method in which patients are deliberately exposed to fear-inducing situations or objects.⁵ For Iv Toshain, however, the key is to convey the mindset that fear is necessary to face danger consciously—the very danger that, in her view, embodies what is truly real and authentic. In this sense, her works are genuinely fearsome.

The following essay focuses on four large-scale installations:

Nomos Basileus, 2015, Winter Palace of Prince Eugene, Belvedere Vienna

Erewhelse, 2020, MONEV Contemporary, Sofia

Nullity is the Only Revolt, 2021, MOMA Tbilisi — Zurab Tsereteli Museum of Modern Art, Tbilisi, Georgia

Trousseau for Mars, 2024, National Gallery, Kvadrat 500, Sofia

In 2015, Iv Toshain presented *Nomos Basileus*, a large-scale sculpture, at the Winter Palace of Prince Eugene in Vienna—a mirror-polished steel morning star⁶ whose surface bears matte-engraved continents and an impressive overall diameter of 270 cm. The metal spikes, each 60 cm long, are intentionally sharp, reaching dangerously into the space. A neon inscription reading ‘Nomos Basileus’ encircles its equator. The spiked mace hangs in the middle of the antechamber, replacing the crystal chandelier, suspended from a Baroque ceiling mount by a 4-meter-long

gleaming chain, like a wrecking ball. The gold-plated, patinated, and intricate ceiling garlands—typical Baroque elements—stand in stark contrast to the aggressive, austere, and decidedly modern (postmodern) object. The monumental piece occupies the most central position in this opulent room, filling it deliberately—deliberately because the work expresses a clear and definite stance, opinion, decision, or intention, leaving no room for doubt or ambiguity.

Nomos Basileus refers to an ancient Greek concept that places the law (Nomos) as the highest king (Basileus) over all things, including gods and humans—a concept first appearing in a literary fragment by the poet Pindar⁷ and later thematized, among others, by Sophocles in *Antigone*.⁸ The dramatic conflict in Sophocles' *Antigone* between Creon and Antigone can be seen as a confrontation between divine and human law, or between different interpretations of 'Nomos'. It was also analyzed by the German constitutional law expert Carl Schmitt in his eponymous book, *Nomos Basileus oder Der Wille des Führers ist Gesetz (Nomos Basileus, or The Will of the Leader is Law, 1936)*.⁹

In the context of the work by the then-young artist, no authoritarian claim is implied. Rather, it asserts that the artist elevates her art to the highest authority. She empowers herself, sets the rules, and enforces them—partly subtly, yet decisively—with her 'weapon'. The interpretation intentionally remains mysterious. Within the opulent space of the Winter Palace, Iv Toshain's law applies, and her art embodies the highest exemplary authority. In doing so, she consciously plays with ambiguity, revealing the complex dynamics of power, control, and freedom to the viewer.

Beneath the mirror-polished surface of Iv Toshain's morning star lies considerable subversive potential. By 'subversive', I mean that this artwork seeks to undermine an existing order—particularly a political system historically staged in this opulent room—exposing the traditional decorative elements, such as stucco and paintings, as insignia of a fading power. Compared to the sublime force of the work, they are obviously weaker and, above all, outdated. Moreover, there is the artist's claim to transform the space, traditionally oriented to satisfy male representational needs, from a feminist perspective. As an artist and as a woman, Iv Toshain naturally claims the maximum freedom for herself and her work.

Hannah Arendt's understanding of the political provides a useful point of comparison. Her conception is closely linked to the ideas of freedom, plurality, and collective action, and differs fundamentally from moral or purely economic interests. For Arendt, the political is the sphere in which free individuals come together as equals to deliberate and to act within their shared reality, thereby preserving and expanding freedom.¹⁰ Iv Toshain enacts this unconditional claim to freedom in her work, rendering it immediately perceptible to exhibition visitors. In this, it can be both: a general claim she expresses and a personal concern. It can have universal validity and socio-political significance, while remaining distinctly feminist in its character.

Her works are both sublime and direct, seductively beautiful yet combative and brutal. In the sense of Arendt, Toshain's work is fundamentally meant to be political.

The installation *Erewhelse*, realized in 2020 in Sofia, embodies the ambivalence between personal concerns and socio-political relevance. Beneath the architrave of the neoclassical portico, with its stylized Ionic columns of a former military printing house, seven-meter-long, high-gloss colored chains hang. They represent—from left to right—the flag of Bulgaria, the European Community in the center, and Austria on the right. Each vertical flag, composed of fifty aluminum chain links, culminates in three stylized guillotines—execution blades—that appear to hover just above the column plinths. The guillotines themselves measure one and a half meters in height, two meters in width, and are made of 1 cm-thick duralumin.¹¹ Each plate weighs 60 kilograms and is sharpened¹² along its lower edge, from the bottom left to the top right, roughly following the proportions of the golden ratio. This creates a razor-sharp cutting edge, approximately 20 centimeters wide, slanting upwards. Unlike symbolic representations, these blades are real—they constitute an immediate, tangible danger.

Iv Toshain is an Austrian artist born in Bulgaria, and the national flags reflect her own dual biographical identity. With the accession of Bulgaria and Austria to the European Union, certain cultural characteristics of each country were absorbed into a shared European identity. These cultural traits are rooted in distinct traditional self-conceptions, expressed through the respective national flags. The individual national flags reflect the cultural diversity within the community. Yet each flag is already the result of a national unification—a consolidation of diverse cultural and ethnic groups under a single banner. This principle applies even more strongly to the European unifying identity, which further homogenizes such national cultural differences. In this way, the nations are stylized as identical golden stars on a blue background. These radical ruptures are symbolized by the guillotines. Introduced during the French Revolution, the guillotine was intended to allow a faster, more uniform, and therefore more “humane” execution of the condemned. In her work, the artist draws attention to the ultimate danger—the one that threatens individual, collective, and ultimately national cultural identities. By addressing the public, and not merely the art audience, she underscores the broader political significance of her practice, making it part of public discourse.¹³

Hannah Arendt's understanding of the state focused on analyzing and defending against totalitarian rule. She examined the foundations of political action against the backdrop of National Socialism and the Shoah, emphasizing the importance of plurality, political responsibility, and freedom.¹⁴ For Arendt, political responsibility is an existential category, not merely a moral one. She saw the purpose of politics in freedom and stressed that its necessity must be incorporated into political decisions alongside the diverse perspectives and concerns of individuals.¹⁵ A central concept in Arendt's thought is “plurality,” which highlights the variety of human perspectives

and interests that must be considered within a just state.¹⁶ This is precisely what Iv Toshain advocates through her work: the plurality and maximal freedom of individuals and diverse cultural groups. Her work fundamentally seeks to prevent the paradigms of totalizing power, which aim for complete uniformity. The paradigm of the national is almost always a construct used to enable and exercise power. Arendt analyzed the origins, characteristics, and mechanisms of totalitarian regimes, emphasizing the role of terror, mass propaganda, and the pursuit of dominance and hegemony while Iv Toshain expresses her thoughts publicly and reinforces her concerns through powerful visual metaphors. Ultimately, it is a monument to freedom — both that of the individual and of individual nations.

Nullity is Only the Revolt is the title of a large-scale sculpture Iv Toshain created one year later at MOMA Tbilisi in Georgia. She transforms the same three national flags and guillotine blades into a new, site-specific indoor installation that evokes the Iron Curtain. Spanning 20 meters in length and 6 meters in width, the work fills the museum's main hall with a floor-to-ceiling wall of chains, forcing visitors to move along the side walls. Viewed from the front, the installation displays the three national flags with the guillotines. From behind, the chain colors fray irregularly so that, at the far end lying on the floor, they lose all color and appear uniformly silver. The artist herself extends and connects the chains on-site, performatively, using pliers. The sculptures from Tbilisi and Sofia reference each other, creating, in retrospect, an intertextuality¹⁷ deliberately orchestrated by Iv Toshain.

Installing this work in Tbilisi in 2021 is intended as a political commentary and demonstrative intervention in Georgia's internal affairs. It comments on the desire of the majority of Georgian civil society, expressed through ongoing demonstrations, to have Georgia admitted into the European Community. Toshain's commentary is less aggressive than laconic: it points to the cultural chaos that confronted cultural agents and institutions following Bulgaria's and Austria's accession to the Community. Instead of unifying diverse identities, a new amorphous, polychrome, and vibrant—in any case less rigid—identity emerges. For Toshain, this is deeply personal. Her installation embodies her experiences—and perhaps her disappointed expectations—expressing her perspective on a possible accession to the European Community. As Jenny Holzer once stated: *"Protect me from what I want."*¹⁸

With both works, Iv Toshain tests the limits of what can be politically articulated within institutional and museum contexts. As a diplomat of subversion, she analyzes complex situations and subtly exerts influence using powerful visual metaphors. She fights artistically and diplomatically for freedom of expression—particularly artistic expression—while reinforcing underground acts of opposition that fiercely defend these values. Leveraging her compelling imagery, Toshain creates a public space for engagement with oppositional and enlightening work in prominent, institutional, and state-supported contexts. She identifies as a feminist and is guided by feminist

principles. For example, she views the chain—which plays a fundamental and often constitutive role throughout her work—as analogous to a stitch in traditional female handcrafts. Similarly, she interprets the throwing stars, laid side by side, as lace, symbolically referencing the concept of dowry—the gifts a woman brings into marriage and traditionally makes herself—a homage to her grandmother. It goes without saying that Toshain places these elements in the service of her art and her politically, primarily feminist, worldview.

Trousseau for Mars (Dowry for the God of War Mars) is the title of the exhibition Iv Toshain realized in 2024 at the Bulgarian National Gallery—a carpet of 2,000 hand-polished, razor-sharp steel throwing stars, installed in the former tomb of a Christian. The carpet measures 5 by 4 meters, with some blades standing upright, reaching up to 35 centimeters in height. The work is set on a white marble floor, framed by two inlaid black marble friezes. The resulting rectangular marble field is accentuated at its corners by four marble columns. Along one side stands a 4th-century Roman tomb, built of old, partially plastered bricks, presumably belonging to a martyr.¹⁹ The artist herself manually arranged the work, placing the blades side by side over a period of 12 hours. The location is an integral part of the concept, arrangement, and execution of the artwork. *“For me, an artwork can only be considered contemporary if it is site-specific—intended for the space in which it is installed. Everything else is decoration.”*²⁰

Iv Toshain adapts her work to the given proportions and dimensions of the space. This creates the impression that her work has always been an integral part of the room. The belated nature of the installation is no longer perceptible; it seems as if it existed in situ forever from the start. In the aesthetics of her work, Toshain parodies the pathos of fascist—or, in any case, totalitarian—visual strategies. Her artistic intervention is directed against the sublime and totalitarian impetus of the space. By integrating seamlessly into this spatial ensemble of columns, floors, and friezes of marble and granite, the artist subverts the preexisting pathos. In general, she responds in her work to the radicalism of such totalitarian visual and linguistic paradigms also in a radical manner. In war, all means—including those of the enemy—are permitted; and Toshain is at war!

Hannah Arendt describes totalitarian systems as apolitical, since they are based on the elimination and prevention of freedom, and thus stand in direct opposition to Arendt’s concept of the political. In this regard, Iv Toshain is always political in her work—she fundamentally demands this freedom and embodies it in her practice. Her demonstrative resistance, by its very nature in situ, opposes all forms of totalitarianism and their aesthetics. In this context, totalitarian—and especially fascist—aesthetics are not a clearly defined, autonomous art genre. They manifest in various artistic and cultural forms that appropriate central elements of fascism and parody them, including myths and symbols such as the cross, the grave, or choral singing. Powerful, often recurring symbols are used to create a sublime sense of

collective identity. The martyr's tomb becomes a cult site, with the staging emphasizing the significance of the 'sacrifice.' Within the context of art itself, the artist's intervention becomes almost imperceptibly the antipode to what was previously described. Thus, this staging does not represent a political movement or totalitarian stance; rather, it conveys the opposite, its effect arising precisely from the danger posed by the razor-sharp throwing stars, camouflaged within a seemingly woven metallic carpet.

Iv Toshain draws on a vocabulary extensively articulated by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his writings on the phenomenology of perception, embodiment, and existentialism. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the importance of the physical body and perception in understanding human existence in the world. He did not see the world as separate from us, but as something we experience and shape through our bodily presence. He opposed the traditional notion that knowledge is primarily based on reason (rationalism) or mere sensory experience (empiricism), instead emphasizing subjectivity as something constituted through the body and its interaction with the world. This embodied consciousness is crucial for experiencing *Trousseau for Mars*. Iv Toshain states: *"I negotiate a relationship between the authoritarian and the neoliberal in a highly aesthetic manner (...). Aesthetics becomes a field of conflict, a stage for performances that are uncompromising, ambivalent, critical, and bold. I am not interested in the aestheticization of pain, but in its real, unmediated presence (...). It is the real danger that makes the difference! Only real danger has the potential to liberate contemporary art from its decorative corset—as a pretentious commentary on social discourse..."*

For the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, pain reveals how the human body and consciousness manifest in the lifeworld, highlighting what is unintegrable and resistant. He suggests that we tend to 'split off' persistent pain, treating it as external to the body, yet this inevitably leads to a continual confrontation with the body's resistance. We perceive the throwing star not as a dangerous weapon but as a decorative, structuring element. Psychologically, we split off the sense of danger, even though the artist explicitly draws our attention to it, dedicating the installation explicitly to the god of war, Mars. Living in the era of the greatest war in Europe since the Second World War, yet we fail to perceive the danger and imminent harm. The artist's aim is to intensify our senses according to their original perception and to pierce the general cognitive dissonance²¹ in mainstream society, sharpening awareness once again in a defense against pain. The latter is a specific form of perception that reveals the limits and physical presence of our body in the world. It opposes all forms of passivity or neutrality. Toshain's work is therefore neither passive nor neutral.²² She knows that neutrality promotes the aggressor's wrongdoing and continuously weakens the victim's position. She acts. She sees

herself as a politically and feminist-motivated agent and activist within social discourse. She is never a victim, but always a warrior.²³

Pain here serves as a bridge to an explanatory framework familiar from monotheistic religions. Humanity has always sought reasons for suffering, attributing the role of a punishing god to a higher authority. Suffering is traced back to this deity's authority and interpreted as punishment. This punishing god is traditionally appeased through penance, prayer, or offerings. Here, deliberate and prescribed caution becomes an attitude of respect and reverence toward such assumed authority. The buried martyr becomes a witness and advocate for the artist and for those who perceive and experience the work as a metaphysical staging. In this way, the danger posed by a physical misstep becomes an occasion to reflect on the authority of a metaphysical instance.

The Greek Orthodox male choir *Johannes Koukouzelis—the Angel-Voiced*, which performed at the exhibition opening between the grave and the artwork, appealed through its prayer-like chants to precisely this higher authority. Prayer is understood here as a means of entering into contact with the deity, seeking proximity to it; it may also be read as a plea for forgiveness and as an expression of gratitude. The 4th-century tomb of a martyr, together with the artist's installation, gives particular weight to this prayer. For the artist herself and for those attuned to the metaphysical connection, the chanting expresses not only participation in the sublimity of the performative moment but also the desire to approach this deity through a mystical experience. In a religious context, mysticism denotes the endeavor to attain an immediate, personal experience or connection with a higher reality or the divine, involving a profound, often sublimely perceived spiritual awareness that transcends rational understanding.²⁴

The Orthodox Church emphasizes that mystical experience is inseparable from social responsibility, with respect for God's creation and acting in accordance with His will as central aspects.²⁵ In this context, the staging of Iv Toshain's works aligns with these principles. Her aim is to place, alongside the notion of freedom—which, following Hannah Arendt, we regard as profoundly political—the notion of self-chosen responsibility.

The Principle of Responsibility – An Attempt at an Ethics for the Technological Civilization is a book by Hans Jonas, published in 1979. In it, Jonas develops an ethics addressing the new challenges facing human civilization. In particular, it concerns the preservation of humanity as a whole and the recognition of the inherent rights of all nature²⁶, for which humans bear responsibility due to their capacity to act.²⁷ This responsibility encompasses respect for individual freedom while also highlighting its limits in light of both the Anthropocene and the current war in Europe²⁸, consequences of human actions. Both Hans Jonas and Hannah Arendt situate their philosophies within existentialism, emphasizing human freedom and responsibility. Arendt focused on renewing political thought, while Jonas

concentrated on continuing and developing traditional ethical concepts.²⁹ While Toshain, in her earlier works, engaged with the embodiment of individual, collective, and national freedom, since 2024 her focus has shifted primarily to the dimension of responsibility. Against the backdrop of Greek Orthodox social ethics, the previously central parameter of freedom is deconstructed through the paradigm of responsibility, expanding the political impetus from a politically liberal orientation to one that is politically, religiously, and ethically conscious. In line with this, Iv Toshain was baptized in the Greek Orthodox tradition in the sea on July 14, 2025.

¹ The depiction of the scar became the invitation motif for her 2004 diploma exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, in the class of Franz Graf. The wound from the bunker in Iraq is a cut, whose line signifies resistance.

² The AI system Grok responds to this question as cited here; cf. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iv_Toshain. Grok's statement closely aligns with the artist's self-description on Wikipedia.

³ At the same exhibition venue within the fortress, the groundbreaking exhibition Joseph Beuys – Alberto Burri, organized by Italo Tomassoni, took place on April 3, 1980. It presented works by both artists, including Beuys's *Opera Unica* and Burri's *Grande Ferro RP 80*.

⁴ Iv Toshain in a WhatsApp message dated July 23, 2025.

⁵ Cf.: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konfrontationstherapie>, accessed July 25, 2025.

⁶ The morning star was a medieval striking weapon, consisting of a wooden handle and a spherical head of wood or iron fitted with sharp spikes. In depictions of battles and tournaments, it is described as the weapon of fearless warriors.

⁷ The idea that the law is the highest authority (*Nomos Basileus*) represents an early and important foundation for what later became known as Western democracy. It is a key element in a long historical process, spanning from the ancient Greek polis to modern democratic states.

⁸ *Nomos* (νόμος) in Ancient Greek means law, custom, order, habit, or convention. *Basileus* (βασιλεύς) is an Ancient Greek term for king, ruler, or monarch, and in the Byzantine context it can also mean emperor. Cf.: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nomos-Greek-philosophy> and <https://www.britannica.com/topic/basileus>, accessed July 23, 2025.

⁹ Cf.: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Schmitt. This conviction—that a leader stands above the law—is, incidentally, the very belief that the Trump administration has been reviving. Even the U.S. Supreme Court has not explicitly contradicted this approach.

¹⁰ *What Is Politics? Fragments from the Literary Estate* | Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in East Germany (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur), *Hannah Arendt – Woman in Focus*, July 15, 2025.

¹¹ Duralumin, also known as Dural, is a high-strength aluminum alloy composed primarily of aluminum, copper, manganese, magnesium, and silicon. It combines high strength with low weight, making it ideal for applications in aircraft and vehicle construction.

¹² Sharpening metal plates generally involves removing material from the edges to create a sharp, well-defined edge. This can be done by grinding, filing, or other mechanical processes. Using the correct technique and appropriate tools is essential to avoid injury and achieve a precise, satisfactory result.

¹³ Immanuel Kant emphasizes the fundamental importance of national character, spirit, and language for a nation. He states that the loss of these elements represents irreparable damage to society. The quote, “No greater harm can be done to a nation than to rob it of its national character, the distinctiveness of its spirit and language,” underscores that the loss of a country’s cultural identity can cause the greatest harm. Kant, an influential philosopher, saw the preservation of a nation’s national character, its distinctive spirit, and language as an essential foundation for its prosperity and development. The loss of these elements would deprive the nation of its unique identity and heritage, constituting irreversible damage. This is precisely what happens when countries abandon large parts of their cultural identity in favor of a European identity. The guillotine symbolizes this irreparable transformation of individual identities, leaving behind an amorphous cultural identity.

14. Cf.: *Politics and Responsibility* | Hannah Arendt | bpb.de, accessed July 15, 2025.

¹⁵ Cf.: *Politics and Responsibility* | Hannah Arendt | bpb.de, accessed July 15, 2025.

¹⁶ Cf.: *Hannah Arendt – Woman in Focus*, accessed July 15, 2025.

¹⁷ The term *intertextuality*, coined by philosopher Julia Kristeva, describes how no text exists in isolation but is always connected to other works, allowing readers to draw intuitively on their prior knowledge and intellectual experience.

¹⁸ “Protect me from what I want” is a famous slogan by the artist Jenny Holzer. It appeared in the 1980s on billboards and in other contexts. The phrase is provocative because it questions human desire and its potential negative consequences. It can be interpreted in several ways—for example, as a critique of consumerism or as a reflection on self-sabotage and the darker aspects of human longing. Cf.: <https://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/holzer/>

¹⁹ The tomb is part of the eastern necropolis of ancient Serdica. Its core lies beneath and around the Basilica of Sveta Sofia and extends eastward across the entire square surrounding the memorial church of Sveti Alexander Nevski.

²⁰ Iv Toshain in a feed dated July 24, 2025.

²¹ Cognitive dissonance describes an uncomfortable state that occurs when two or more cognitions (thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, or opinions) of a person are in conflict. This state leads individuals to try to reduce the dissonance by adjusting their cognitions or their behavior. Cf.: <https://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/definition/kognitive-dissonanz-37371>, accessed July 24, 2025.

²² As an Austrian, Iv Toshain takes an ostentatious opposing stance to the Habsburg maxim *Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube*. She is decidedly not neutral, as political Austria still claims to be, but instead aggressively combative.

²³ At the time the tomb was created, Iv Toshain might have been called a Fury, like the frenzied, wrathful goddess of vengeance in Roman mythology who spreads fear and terror. Less as a goddess of revenge and more as a combative feminist, she dedicates her so-called dowry or trousseau to the god of war, Mars.

²⁴ Cf.: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysticism>

²⁵ Cf.: *Social Ethics / Social Doctrine of the Orthodox Church*, accessed July 25, 2025; Rudolf Hertz: *The Social Ethics of the Orthodox Church*, in: *Church and Society in the Changing Times. Festschrift for Gabriel Adriányi*, edited by Hermann-

Josef Scheidgen, Sabine Prorok, Helmut Rönz, Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2012, pp. 671–692.

²⁶ Today, we speak of the Anthropocene and humanity's responsibility for Gaia, the Earth as an organic whole. Bruno Latour has engaged extensively with the concept of the Anthropocene, regarding it as a new geological epoch in which humans play a decisive role in altering the planet. He argues that the impacts of human activity on the environment are so profound that they leave geological traces and mark the beginning of a new era. Latour also links the Anthropocene to political and social questions, emphasizing the need to rethink humanity's role in nature and to establish a fairer relationship with the environment. Cf.: *Anthropocene Lecture: Bruno Latour*, accessed July 25, 2025.

²⁷ Cf.: *The Principle of Responsibility – Wikipedia*, accessed July 25, 2025.

²⁸ Hans Jonas and Hannah Arendt were friends and maintained a close intellectual relationship, although their thinking emphasized different areas. Both were important figures in 20th-century political philosophy and existentialism. Their relationship was marked by mutual respect and intellectual exchange, particularly regarding their engagement with the work of Augustine and questions of human responsibility. Cf.: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003439882-5/hans-jonas-hannah-arendt-variations-st-augustine-yael-almog>, accessed July 25, 2025.

²⁹ Cf.: <https://www.swr.de/swrkultur/wissen/hans-jonas-und-die-ethik-der-verantwortung-100.html>

*The slogan “*I PRACTICE WHAT I PREACH*” is an artwork by Iv Toshain.

Iv Toshain was born in 1980. Her artistic practice is influenced by childhood experiences in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. She studied at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, completed an MA in the master class of Franz Graf at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, earned a second MA at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, and pursued postgraduate studies at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan. Her work has been shown in leading Austrian institutions, including the Belvedere Museum Vienna, Lentos Art Museum Linz, the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) Vienna, the Heidi Horten Collection, Künstlerhaus Vienna, and Kunstraum Innsbruck. She presented her first solo museum exhibition in 2021 at MoMA Tbilisi, followed by solo exhibitions at the Rocca Paolina Fortress in Perugia and the National Gallery in Sofia. In 2025/26, she will participate in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India. In 2012, together with Anna Ceeh, she co-founded the ideology-critical artist collective FXXXism^{TC}, which staged guerrilla peace performances at the Venice Biennale in 2017 and at Red Square in Moscow in 2018.