

# Anna Sorokin Talks About Making Art

The group art show, “Free Anna Delvey,” is only the beginning for the imprisoned fake heiress.

**By Emily Palmer**

Palmer is an investigative reporter who covered the trial of Anna Sorokin.

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Down a narrow hallway packed with lockers and plumes of marijuana and cigarette smoke, at A2Z Delancey, a small pop-up art gallery on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, some 150 unmasked art goers attended an opening last Thursday night for Anna Sorokin’s first group gallery exhibition.

Sipping beers, viewers sat on couches, while some stepped outside to spray graffiti on a courtyard wall behind the space. A rock band was playing for about half an hour, musicians and guests furiously bobbing their heads, hair flying and convulsing in tandem.

For diehards of the Netflix series “Inventing Anna,” which described the fake German heiress’s meteoric rise into Manhattan society — she bilked banks, stole a private jet and skipped out on hotel bills in a ploy to turn the Anna Delvey Foundation, a members-only arts club on Park Avenue South, into a reality — the opening couldn’t have been less, well, Anna.

Of course, that’s not how Ms. Sorokin (her real name) saw the scene: “I liked that it was gritty,” Ms. Sorokin, 31, said from her cell at Orange County Correctional Facility in Goshen, N.Y, where she is now detained by immigration authorities after completing her four-year sentence for her eight-count conviction in 2019 for financial crimes.

“That superglam portrayal of me in the Netflix series is not that accurate,” she said.

The show, titled “Free Anna Delvey,” which closes March 27, references her long-preferred name and current detainment for overstaying her visa. It includes the works of 33 other artists inspired by Ms. Sorokin’s experience and centers on five 22-inch-by-30-inch Anna Delvey pencil and acrylic drawings, priced at \$10,000. (Fifteen percent of the sale price of one of the drawings will go to a children’s charity.)



Anna Sorokin and Alfredo Martinez, "Anna on Ice," 2022. Anna Sorokin and Alfredo Martinez

But none of the Anna Delvey artworks were drawn by Ms. Sorokin. Those pieces, displayed toward the back of the room, were reproduced by Alfredo Martinez from drawings she made while incarcerated and had friends post to her Instagram account. (Mr. Martinez served prison time in the early 2000s for mail and wire fraud related to his forged drawings of Jean-Michel Basquiat, the graffiti artist.)

### **The Fake Heiress Who Conned New York's Wealthy**

Anna Sorokin was found guilty of theft of services and grand larceny in 2019. She now faces deportation to Germany for overstaying her visa.

- **A Serial Scammer:** Ms. Sorokin, a Russian immigrant, pretended to be a German heiress, swindling New York's elite out of more than \$200,000.
- **(Con) Artist:** "Free Anna Delvey," Ms. Sorokin's first group gallery exhibition, features reproductions of drawings she made while incarcerated. Here is what she said about her art making process.
- **'Inventing Anna':** The mini-series by Shonda Rhimes works as a clichéd morality tale but stumbles as a piece of storytelling, writes our critic.
- **Fiction vs. Reality:** A reporter who covered Ms. Sorokin's trial in 2019 for The Times explains what the series gets right (and wrong).

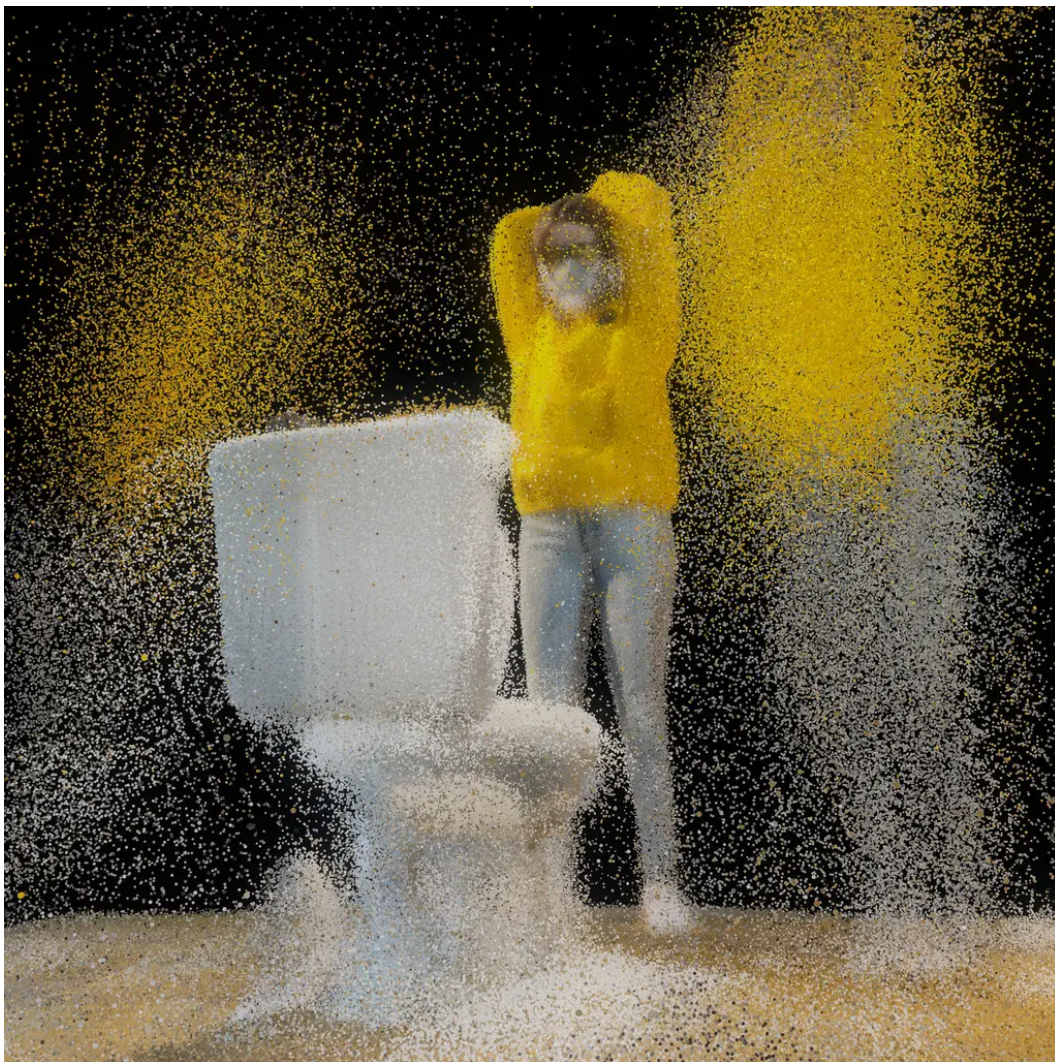
Ms. Sorokin said she had planned to make the larger-scale drawings herself, but the detention center restricted the size of the paper she could get inside the facility, so Mr. Martinez offered his expertise. "In the art world, it's very common to have an assistant," he said.

The collaborative drawings in the show include a woman corresponding with someone over a correctional services messaging system stating “Send Bitcoin” and a pencil drawing depicting a woman floating out to sea on a block of ice, entitled “Anna on ICE.”

Julia Morrison, an artist who created NFTs out of messages she said the actor Armie Hammer sent her, said she first came upon Ms. Sorokin’s sketches while scrolling through Instagram. Ms. Morrison, a co-curator of the show with Mr. Martinez, said she identified closely with Ms. Sorokin’s story because her own mother served time in an immigration detention facility.

Ms. Morrison, who introduced Mr. Martinez to Ms. Sorokin’s work, said most people had over-simplified her backstory: “No one is just a villain, or just a hero.”

Initially, Mr. Martinez didn’t know how to get in touch with Ms. Sorokin, who was then enjoying a media tour during her six-week stint of freedom between the end of her criminal sentence and her arrest by ICE officials. So, he said, he pitched an article to Page Six of The New York Post, that appeared with the headline: “Anna Sorokin’s artwork could get its own exhibition” and waited for her to call. And she did.



An image of Julia Morrison, a co-curator of “Free Anna Delvey,” smashing a toilet stuffed with shredded papers. The sculpture is part of the exhibit. Julia Morrison

But her ICE detention within days of their call halted the planning process, they both said, adding that they reconnected through the texting app at the correctional facility and resumed planning earlier this year.

The night of the opening, Ms. Sorokin called Mr. Martinez to check in. He placed the call on speaker phone and held it high as people clambered to get a chance to say hello and congratulate her on the show.

“Free Anna Delvey!” people chanted before the call ended.

Among those in attendance was Todd Spodek, her trial lawyer, who did not leave with any of the drawings.

“I already have a few select pieces from the one-woman private art show that happened at 111 Centre Street,” he quipped, referencing the location of her trial where she often sketched. But, he said, he was glad to see people’s interest in her work.

“Anna Delvey affects women now the way ‘Fight Club’ affected men in the ’90s,” Mr. Martinez said of Ms. Sorokin’s appeal. “All the women who were in the show said yes before I finished my sentence.”

More than half of the artists in the show are women. Rina Oh’s pastel on paper titled “Her Royal Highness Princess Annoushka (Anna Delvey) Louise of Savoy” mimicked a portrait of Marie Antoinette, casting Ms. Sorokin as a member of the Russian monarchy.

“I’m making fun of the royals,” Ms. Oh said. “Because she took advantage of those kinds of people and they usually take advantage of us.”

For the show, Ms. Morrison took a sledgehammer to a commode stuffed with shredded papers inspired by former President Donald J. Trump. (She is now in the process of minting several NFTs of images captured during the smashing.)

Mr. Martinez said he hoped the exhibition would show immigration authorities that Ms. Sorokin would have more to offer if she were able to get out from behind bars.

Chris Martine, an art dealer who has represented Ms. Sorokin for several months, said he is now planning a second exhibit — her first solo show — opening with 20 drawings at “an upscale Manhattan location,” as early as April, with the hope of later taking it to Los Angeles, Miami, London and Paris, among other large cities. He expected Ms. Sorokin would complete “the last few pieces” by next week.

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Rina Oh, “Her Royal Highness Princess Annoushka (Anna Delvey) Louise of Savoy,” 2022. The image is on display in the show “Free Anna Delvey.” Rina Oh

But producing a show while detained is complicated. Ms. Sorokin confirmed she received 9”x 12” watercolor paper and 12 non-toxic colored pencils but her set of watercolors — mistaken for makeup — did not pass through the metal detector. She isn’t allowed to use the pencil sharpener, so asks a correctional officer to sharpen her pencils. She’s also working without erasers: “So def can’t afford to make any mistakes,” Ms. Sorokin texted.

Mr. Martine said he had texted her photographs that she requested for inspiration, among them: Balthazar Restaurant and Sant Ambroeus in SoHo; La Mamounia, the luxurious hotel in Marrakesh where she once stayed; Passages Malibu, the addiction treatment center just outside of which law enforcement officials arrested her in 2017; and the New York courthouse steps.

In order to help coordinate the show, and because her facility-issued tablet battery dies quickly, Ms. Sorokin has had to barter with a volunteer team of detainees, who have swapped access to their devices for vending machine snacks that she buys through her commissary account. “I’m contributing to the local economy,” Ms. Sorokin said.

But Mr. Martine said the hassle has been worth it: “We want the world to get a glimpse of Anna’s legitimate entrance into the fine art world.”

He added, “But beyond that, art is only partly about talent and determination and even more so about the artist’s ability to demand attention through their personality and story. And this is where she really shines.”

From her detention cell, Ms. Sorokin reflected on how far her art career had come, built upon the failed attempt to start her foundation, and the series of events that had kept her behind bars for much of the last four and a half years.

“It’s ironic,” she said. “How after having failed so publicly while trying to build A.D.F. a couple of years ago, people are way more interested in hearing my voice now than they were back in 2017.”

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