

STYLE FILES

# Elena Soboleva

For ARTSY'S globetrotting curator of *SPECIAL PROJECTS*, art is *MUCH MORE* than a job—it's a *LIFESTYLE*.

BY ANDREA KARR



SOBOLEVA, IMMERSED IN A JON RAFMAN VR PIECE AT FRIEZE LONDON



SOBOLEVA AT BURNING MAN



PRADA MARFA, TEXAS



DIOR CRÈME DE ROSE, \$35



AGNES MARTIN, GRATITUDE, 2001



SOBOLEVA WITH A HELIO OITICICA PIECE AT INHOTIM ART CENTER, BRAZIL



ALTUZARRA CALLIE THIGH HIGH BOOT



SOBOLEVA AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

Elena Soboleva's fascination with art started when she first encountered Henri Matisse's brightly coloured paintings *Music* and *Dance*, housed at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, where she was born. As a child, Soboleva would visit the works with her parents and marvel at their power. Though she was born into a family of scientists, her parents fostered the fascination for art that began to flicker inside her. Eventually, that interest grew to influence every important decision in her life.

Soboleva moved to Canada at the age of seven in 1993, and by the time she enrolled at the University of Toronto to study art history and economics, art was her everything. She interned at Christie's Auctions and Private Sales, and worked at Toronto's Georgia Scherman Projects. Later, she completed a master's degree and moved to New York City to work at the

well-respected Jack Shainman Gallery, while also writing for the online publication *Art Market Monitor*. "I had little time for anything else, but all of these projects allowed me to see the many facets of the art world," she says.

Now, at age 30, Soboleva is a vibrant, stylish New Yorker (just check out her art- and fashion-heavy Instagram account @elenasoboleva). She's also head of special projects at Artsy, a website that aims to make art accessible by creating the most comprehensive resource for learning about and collecting art from the world's top galleries, museums, art fairs, and auctions. Her role? To advise top-tier collectors and create site-specific art installations, performances, and activations around the world to extend Artsy's reach to life both online and offline.

When she joined the fledgling startup four years ago, the site was still in beta testing, but

she felt it was time to take a risk in her career. "I realized that what was going to be significant with art in my generation was shifting into the online sphere and that would be transformative within the art world." Now Artsy has a staff of 150 people and works with around 60 global art fairs.

Soboleva's ability to take risks makes her busy life varied, but it's her devotion to art that makes it sustainable. With an average seven-day work-week packed with studio visits, meetings, gallery openings, museum tours, and trips to art fairs around the world (she visited more than 35 last year including Frieze London and Art Basel in Switzerland), Soboleva doesn't have a lot of time for a personal life. "My career is a complete work/life integration," she says. "It's not about trying to balance the two. It's about pursuing something that you love."

From left: Soboleva portrait; Frieze London installation.

Prada Marfa, 2005. Photo by James Evans. © 2015 Agnes Martin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Canada, with red sculpture. Alexander Calder Sculpture at The Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Venice Biennale 2015.

## ON WEEKEND PLANS:

"Even though my weekends are still very art-focused, it's nice to be able to do yoga or walk the High Line. Chelsea Market is also close to me, so I go there and find the most seasonal ingredients and cook up something."

## ON HER DREAM ART PIECE:

"An Agnes Martin from the late '60s. A lot of artwork right now is spectacular and loud, and I can enjoy and embrace that, but there's an absolute stillness and contemplation in her work. There's so much that goes into a [Martin] canvas that's perfectly composed."

## ON CURRENT ART TRENDS:

"Right now there's a rise in female artists, especially strong figurative painters and digital artists. One name is the Guerrilla Girls. It's an anonymous collective and the women wear gorilla masks. They've been around since the '80s, making artwork that highlights the discrimination of women in museums."

## ON HER FAVOURITE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES:

"Go to the The Hermitage in St. Petersburg for the avant-garde masters, [MoMA] PS1 in New York for the contemporary scene, the

National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa for a fantastic collection of post-war Canadian art, Marfa [in Texas] for the whole town as an art experience, and Inhotim in Brazil for the most exotic art destination."

## ON WHAT SHE'S COVETING:

"Céline's latest collection, with art inspired by Yves Klein. Beauty!"

## ON HER BEAUTY GO-TOS:

"I use Dior Crème de Rose Smoothing Plumping Lip Balm for a soft pout, Bobbi Brown liquid liners and cream shadow sticks for perfect eyes."

## ON HER MUST-FOLLOW TRAVEL TIPS:

"I don't wear makeup on the plane

and I apply a light hydrating mask in the last half hour. I pack fabrics that don't wrinkle, swapping out silks for Pink Tartan power-stretch dresses and Issey Miyake pleats."

## ON HER FAVOURITE TRAVEL DESTINATIONS:

"I went to Black Rock City, Nevada, for Burning Man for the first time this year and it was amazing! Then there's Venice, which holds the Art Biennale every two years and brings together the best of the art world."

## A STANDOUT PIECE IN HER WARDROBE:

"Altuzarra over-the-knee leather boots."