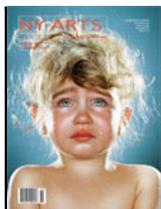


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Éva Pelczer talks to Margarita Gluzberg, a Russian-born British artist. Gluzberg's most recent show, *The Money Plot*, was on display at Paradise Row, London in June.



Margarita Gluzberg, *In The Blackout*, 2008. Oil on linen canvas, 160 x 160cm. Courtesy of Margarita Gluzberg and Paradise Row.

**Éva Pelczer:** The work in your new show, *The Money Plot*, shares thematic links with your work over the last decade. I see the progression of your *Soviet Sushi* pieces (2004-05) quite literally in the two works *The Industrial Revolution Will Lead to Yoga* (2008) and *Arcadism* (2008), but much more subtly in the rest of *The Money Plot*. Can you talk about how your representation of themes of commerce and the juxtaposition of Soviet to Western culture has evolved?

**Margarita Gluzberg:** When I made the sushi paintings, I hadn't actually anticipated how direct a juxtaposition they would propose. I was interested in something very specific at the time—I was interested in the undefined, the amorphous, the non-linear, the uncontainable, as opposed to objects designed for consumption: dark matter versus a Chanel vanity case. I wanted to present an almost absurdist take on these ideas—the dark matter of Soviet history, over which float the highly constructed/designed and prized food items, idolized by Western society. I've been to Japan and have always been fascinated by the ritualistic nature of its culture. At the same time I was reading [Georges] Bataille's *Visions of Excess* and *Theory of Religion*—both dealing with consumption and object value—and so many very specific and idiosyncratic factors went into the making of these images.

It is as though I find vessels to contain aspects of my autobiography or my own psychological space. The paintings in *The Money Plot* very much belong to the latter category, and the ambiguity you describe in them is the result of their emotional content. They belong to a specific part of my life, to a specific place and a specific relationship. I became fascinated with the post-Industrial architecture in the North of England, a place I have been visiting often to see someone I love—the dream of the Industrial Revolution with its promise of mass production, its Dark Satanic Mills and its intricate cast iron structures. From these, comes *Arcadism*.

The paintings in *The Money Plot* are my "visions of excess." In *Coming With Her Husband* (2008) with its fashionable "barely touched" langoustines, a small glitch appears in the right hand corner of the painting. It is a collaged section of the 1945 *Picture Post*—a picture of an Eastern European refugee with the inscription "Coming With Her Husband." Here is a comic interjection on several levels—the peasant coming to disrupt an upmarket meal, the vulgar Russian peasant who will at another point in history become the vulgar Russian oligarch eating his way through mountains of langoustines—the words themselves present an innuendo.

This language slippage also occurs in *Pravda* (2008). I used a cut-out of the Pravda newspaper logo (the main Soviet-era paper meaning "truth"), placed in the corner of the painting but with the letter "V" removed: PRA\_DA, the new truth (it is also interesting that in the 1990s, Luzhkov, the Moscow Mayor passed a law stating that all Western company shop front logos should be spelled in Cyrillic!) And it was around this time

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that the newspaper Pravda folded.

**ÉP:** In your earlier drawings you seem very conscious of the physical reality of the work. How do you see this approach, of blurring the line between painting and sculpture, having evolved in your newer pieces, specifically those in *The Money Plot*?

**MG:** I think it's not so much a blurring between sculpture and painting, rather a question of translation. I believe in a kind of structural interchange between mediums, a reconfiguration from one state to another. With the paintings this transference operates in a slightly different way. Many of the new paintings are painted on linen, which has a herringbone weave—the pattern of business suit cloth. I am painting on the cloth of commerce. At the same time the desirable quality of the paint itself reflects the desirable quality of the things the paintings describe, a kind of value exchanged between the subject and its medium. Hair becomes line, while the value and surface of the Prada bag, becomes the value and surface of paint and linen.

**ÉP:** You have spoken about “surface as matter,” as a plane that has its own possibilities. In separating one layer from another in your work, would you say you are creating a kind of hierarchy between background and foreground? Your surfaces continue to have their own agency. Has the intention behind this changed for you?

**MG:** I think that “surface as matter” remains fundamental to my work, though there is something concrete being represented, a description—I am also very interested in how it functions in abstract material terms. Each image is a kind of event—the layers (for example in *Referee* and *Supermarket Panic*) function as a dynamic force within the matter that exists on the paper. Drawings are produced either from photographing existing events (I went to many boxing matches to make works for my show *Funk of Terror into Psychic Bricks*, 2007), or staging them first. To construct the image I project onto the blank canvas-paper and at that moment I become the tracer, the printer—my body becomes a mechanism for image production. This is the technology I employ—from the event, to the photograph, then through me: the drawing machine, and onto the picture surface. I believe in matter, not metaphor. And the body remains crucial to this—from the wigs and their absent heads, the sushi paintings, to the boxing drawings and the works in *The Money Plot*—all deal with a certain animal physiology, perhaps a certain nascent violence.

**ÉP:** How is this animalism linked to the consumerism you deal with in your paintings? I'd also like to bring up your preoccupation with the “monstrous” here, a term you have talked about extensively in relation to your earlier work, depictions of wigs and creatures.

**MG:** I have always been fascinated by the notion of the animal—as a symbol, but more significantly, as a kind of physical entity. Bataille, in *Theory of Religion*, talks about a space he calls “animal intimacy”—a conceptual space or age that has existed before the age of human production/consumption, which introduced a fundamental hierarchy. But he also talks about the basic principles of consumption that exist within the animal world at primary and unconscious level. I am intrigued by the animal, in the way that humans are animals—their drives and desires, activated by the same mechanism. The monstrous, which is connected to the notion of an unrestrained animal, to me is a kind of rhizomatic growth of excess—matter out of control.

I see the fashion machine, and now the financial machine, its symbolic structure, as a breathing organism that generates fantastical and sometimes grotesque creatures, which permeate and dominate our own animal instincts for consumption. The sexuality I describe is intricately and inextricably interlinked with consumption and with my own version of animal biology—many of the images in the last two shows are overtly sexual.

**ÉP:** You also use literary inspiration, especially that which is based on philosophy or a sociology, as a vehicle through which to examine what is going on in modern Western society. Can you comment on the relationship of the works in *The Money Plot* to your interpretation of its literary origins in Balzac's novel?

**MG:** This subject of literary and theoretical influence was something that came up [in a previous interview]. I would like to emphasize the term “influence.” I am very interested in the existence of influences, a kind of mesh in the world, a set of strange attractors. I believe that as an artist you operate in a system of influences that you yourself construct. So literary sources are very much part of the mesh—it is not that I choose a work to illustrate or to turn into art, rather everything becomes a field of operations. I find parallels. I find simultaneous spaces.

The show's title, “The Money Plot,” has origins that are quite direct. In my edition of *Cousin Bette*, a novel of love, intrigue, and money, the editors supply a synopsis of the novel but in terms of all of the financial transactions between the characters. The implication is that in order to properly understand all the human relations in the novel, the reader must understand how they connect to one another financially! It struck me then that every seemingly romantic novel I read seemed to be about money. In *Jane Eyre*, the heroine doesn't actually find love and happiness until she comes into an unexpected inheritance. *Wuthering Heights* is a novel about class and wealth—very similar to *The Great Gatsby*. And then back to my own situation at the time—I returned to the autobiographical—the mesh started to form.

**ÉP:** You have mentioned that to you, “the superficial world is full of depth and emotion,” wryly attributing this to your Soviet childhood. I am interested in hearing you expand on this idea further, since your latest paintings seem to deride that very world.

**MG:** I have to insist that my position is not cynical. I believe in the reality of emotions in relation to material desires—or certainly their significance. Let me give you a literary example [of *Emma Bovary* from *Madame Bovary*]. This is such a modern novel—it is a novel about the construction of personal identity through the fiction of shopping with credit, the only way [Emma] can escape from the drudgery of her mundane existence.

My paintings are ambiguous—they do not assume a moral stance. I cannot get away from the pleasure of their production, but I suppose there is a darkness in them, a kind of inevitability.

**ÉP:** The contemporary art coming out of post-Soviet countries, much of which is politically based, has gotten quite a bit of attention, especially Ukraine after its Venice Biennale showing. How do you see yourself in relation to this work? In what context would you place your own work, with its political undertones?

**MG:** I suppose I cannot share the experience of those who still remain in Eastern Europe, and whose

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entire lives lie there, but being completely bio-lingual, I feel a kind of linguistic affiliation with its cultural space.

In terms of politics, my work is not so much a Marxist critique (though in a way, it owes very much to the existence of that critique), rather a contemplation on the psycho-economic flows of the world.

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