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Art that requires attention (and time), or some comments on the works of Semyon Motolyanets and Alina Khalitova

In May 2022, Marina Gisich Gallery (St. Petersburg) hosted an exhibition of PARAZIT Group — “Searching for the trained spectator”^[1].

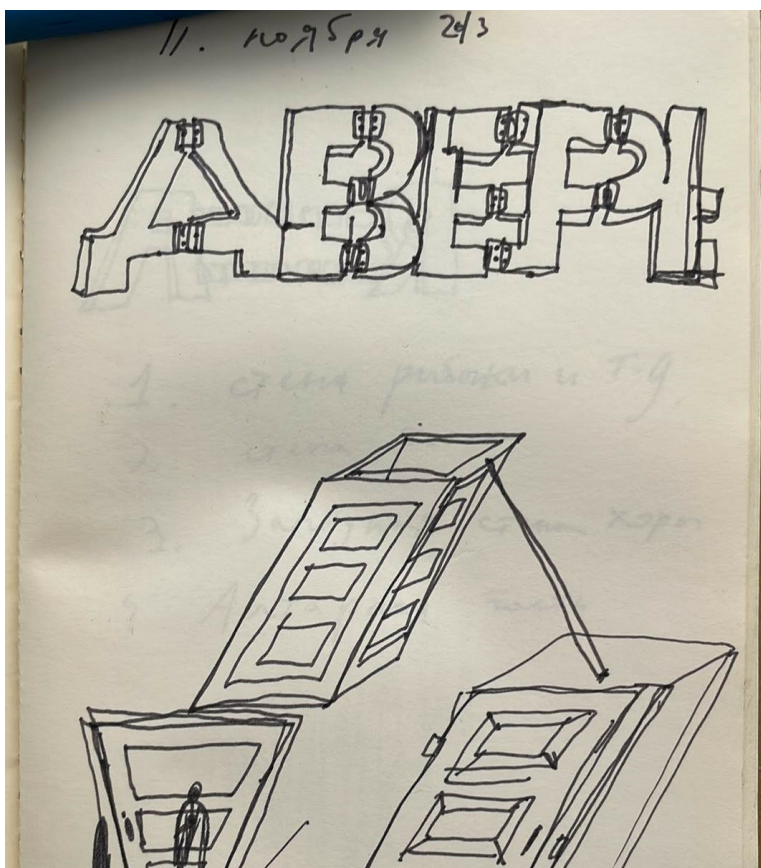
During the war, the artistic community of St. Petersburg finds the strength and ability to create critical art, which is good, by itself, given that the authorities are intensively registering (and censoring) the activities of the citizens in all its manifestations, places of deployment, publicity/intimacy: from artistic practices to social media posts.

What kind of art is possible in such a difficult time, when your country is an aggressor, and whether it is possible at all — this is a separate topic. I would like to talk first of all about what of the possible and happening in the artistic plane is still “possible” (i.e. happens, exists, survives) and what pains in the life of a person and society it triggers, or it does not.

Visiting the exhibition is not enough to write an essay “about”. It is necessary to return after a while to the subject, “but”. Writing a text based on photo documentation, looking at ready-made texts, is another form of distortion. Communication with the residents of the exhibition and art venues (Semyon Motolyanets, Alina Khalitova, Timur Musaev-Kagan, Vladimir Kozin, etc.) can help a lot here.

Pronunciation (the intelligible one) makes it possible to comment on the works, which, as I may assume, either were specified not clearly enough in the articles I’ve read before, or were not specified at all (interesting aspect of the exhibition name was missing, a lot has been written in this regard).

^[1] Link to exhibition materials on the website of Marina Gisich gallery — <https://www.gisich.com/ru/viewing-rooms/parazit22/>



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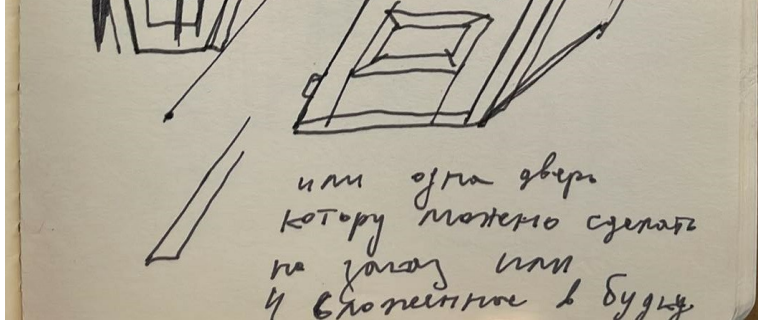
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Sketch from the series of works "Tambour" 2021 (from the archive of Semyon Motolyanets), contributed by the author



Tambour project photos, exhibition "Searching for the Trained Spectator", Marina Gisich Gallery, March-May 2022 (from the archive of Semyon Motolyanets), contributed by the author

"The crooked door/and" (orig. title: series "Tambour" — "westwind") by Semyon Motolyanets. It is difficult for me to say whether there were comparisons with the Leaning Tower of Pisa, but after multiple and repeated examinations of the art piece (formal features, clear verified shapes, inclination angle) it is this comparison that comes to my mind "here and now" and it somehow leads away from other contexts and readings on the topic: to make an effect. The effect of a room that is no longer suitable for accommodation? Taking into account (here and now) the forms and monocolour used, one might probably recall the minimalists. This room is not a lavatory, too cramped for an office. A door to nowhere has crooked, but has not fallen yet. In simple words, it's not even a room (it's not a garage, and not a part of the concrete structures of the building, speaking of Donald Judd's "cubes").



Donald Judd. Untitled. Concrete. 2011. Chinati Foundation, Texas (photo from the Internet)

Tambour(s) was (were) exhibited for the first time in 2021 in Brest at the exhibition "It's a pity that I don't make art every day".

Brest is the small motherland of Semyon Motolyanets. Anyone who follows his work more or less closely, especially in recent years (paintings, objects), will see minimalistic, conceptual references to the post-Soviet reality of Belarus (and today Russia). Semyon Motolyanets is essentially interested in the “inconvenience” of both human life in the post-Soviet climate, among people and things, and the “treacherous” disappearance of the very value (utilitarian, for example) of these things, objects. This is a new reality and materiality of objects with a taste of the recall of the Soviet Union, which no longer exists. That is why there are no people in the bus, but there is an imprint of sticky “leatherette” on the retina, and, probably, after staring at such works for a long time, one can leave with the appropriate aftertaste or the smell of gasoline and burning rubber tires of a long-worn bus. At the same time, these seats are perceived deeply personal (I lived it through, that’s why I’m writing this). However, the differentiated and repeatedly divided art of Motolyanets on “fatigue from Kabakov’s romanticism?” creates a gap, space for extra immersion, if you like — into the area of careful reading.

There is nothing superfluous, and as none of this is personal.

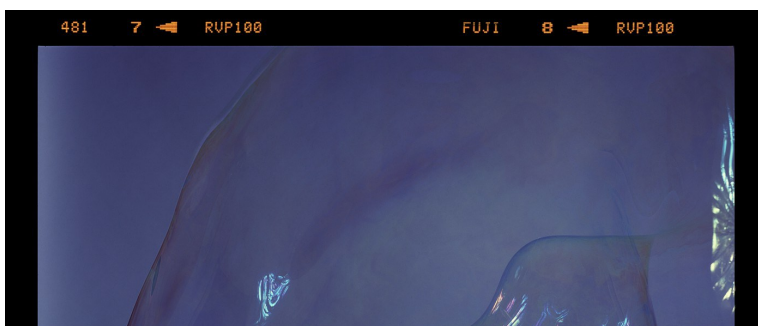
Camus had an “inappropriate person”, Motolyanets has inappropriate things, unsuitable — already, or actually — for interaction. At the same time, this is a subtle retort to the “falling non-falling” post-Soviet regime. In the Russian Federation, this work with a door turns into an office/closet/art space: just as stuffy, uncomfortable, and ultimately paralyzed. The place is “disabled”.

Further...

Alina Khalitova’s work “Asynchronization” from the series “O (0, 0, 0)” depicting the soap bubbles interested me not only because of the time of the exhibition, but also due to the perception change of the object after some time. Since Ms. Khalitova comprehends the concept of time and media as such, interpretation this work is impossible without paying attention to her other work — the installation “1X1=1” the image of vitrines. Basically, of course, it is possible, but in this case, interpretation might be crumpled, one-sided.



“Asynchronization” from the series “O (0, 0, 0)”, 2022, Marina Gisich Gallery, (from the archive of Semyon Motolyanets)





"The Double Bubble" from the series "O (0, 0, 0)", contributed by Alina Khalitova

It is also interesting that the work exists in the format of a conceptual photograph (a series of negatives) and it is in this format that one can "enjoy" (vulgarly, but still) all the colourful illusory nature of the object. A soap bubble is such a general (in its pure form) replica of childhood (to something light, fleeting and beautiful), but the static nature (a slice in time is another space of Alina Khalitova's work) of these bubbles, which as a "fact" presents us the author, creates a very complex and long "gap again", gives too much time for perception. By now we have already forgotten that this bubble existed for seconds, but in the form of a photograph, we may contemplate it for centuries. One may consider its structure, shades, colour, and trick of the light. The longer you look at it, the more you forget what you are dealing with. It is strange, yes, to look at a soap bubble during the war, which, if it existed, then when? What for? And certainly not as it is presented.

At some point, such a replica to the reality as a bubble, or even a "bubble in a bubble" (this is how one of the works in the series looks like), overturns into realization that there is no past, there is no future, there was no "childhood". In general, these illusory categories: freedom, tomorrow, plans for future, goals — in fact exist (that is real, not an illusion, it is existing reality), and the form of life itself as a memory is possible only in the form of a text, document, snapshot (print).

One would think (imagine) that Ms. Khalitova shows us the illusory charm of a bubble, if not for the cut-offs in format and time on the film, always reminding us that we are not looking at a painting and not a real object, but its double reflection.

The text is never written at once, it requires multiple brining back the subject of research...

A day later, returning to a series of negatives of a soap bubble, very close in content (identical, but not a copy), I recalled the work of the Düsseldorf group, the founders of conceptual photography, Bernd and Hilla Becher, an impressive series of photographs of water towers[2], made more with the precision of an engineer than photographer.

[2] *An English-language article on Wikipedia, which provides a more or less full biography of the founders of Düsseldorf conceptual photography school — Bernd and Hilla Becher, as well as links to materials and works of the photographers:*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernd_and_Hilla_Becher





Water Towers. © Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Purchased with funds contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Jonas, 1981

What brings Alina Khalitova and the Dusseldorf residents closer together is more clear, when you look at the installation “1X1 = 1”.



Photos of the installation “1x1=1”, 2019, KUNSTvitrina, (from the archive of Alina Khalitova), contributed by the author

Ms. Khalitova is invited to join the exhibition at the KUNSTvitrina gallery, where she does not find a place for herself, or rather finds it in a somewhat unusual way — actually on the building facade. The spectator is simply forced to observe the art work from the outside, actually he becomes a passerby, who, of course, acts as an unobservant viewer: being a part of the interior, street, avenue, where the vitrine is located. They will only have to become viewers, when the entropy between the work and the time of creation of the work and the shooting location reaches such a point that it will be impossible not to pay attention to it.



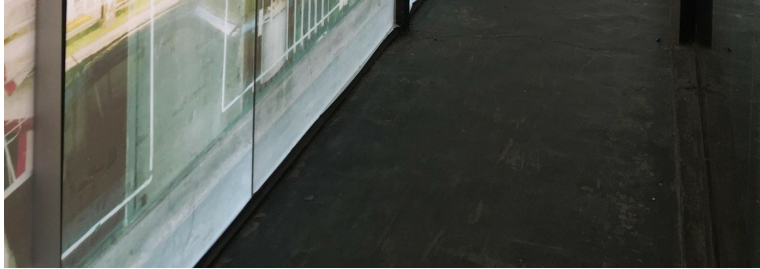


Photo taken when assembling the installation "1x1=1", 2019, KUNST vitrine, (from the archive of Alina Khalitova), contributed by the author

The image in the vitrine is the vitrine itself, but it is not a standard copy: this is how it would be if this photo was placed in a gallery or theatrically built into the interior of the city. Conceptual simplicity — to match the copy with the original. Could Kossuth glue a chair to his photo? [3] There was no such task. Ms. Khalitova goes further and at some point brings us back to the image. Over time, the difference between the copy and the original (at other times of the day, or even at night) reaches its peak, and we are more likely to see a painting behind the glass. In some approximation (proximity to reception), Becher series of “water towers” creates interest not in towers, but in architecture as such, in engineering, which is hinted at

[3] *We are talking about the installation of Joseph Kossuth “One and three chairs”, where there is a chair as a real object, its image hanging on the wall, and hanging next to it in the form of a text definition from the dictionary, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_and_Three_Chairs, (Marcel Pagnol College, 1970 and the Museum of Modern Art, 1965)*

by carefully verified “en face and in profile” photos. This is how the projection of a part is created on the drawing (view A, B, etc.).

In general, Alina Khalitova, flirting with conceptualism in her works, using the technique and overturning it, makes the image to be the “priority”. In other words, some art is cramped both within the conceptual and within the purely visual. It exists on the border, which gives the idea of conditionality of these borders.

Let's pause here ... (and again about time)

(to be continued)



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