

ERARTA

L O N D O N

8 Berkeley Street W1J 6D



Peter and the Wolf:

Contemporary Painting from St. Petersburg

14 September – 8 October

Private View: 13 September, 6-8:30

Erarta Galleries are proud to present ‘Peter and the Wolf: Contemporary Painting from St. Petersburg’, the inaugural exhibition at their new venue in the heart of London. The exhibition features work by two different generations of artists from St. Petersburg – the city where the Erarta Museum and original gallery is based. While art stemming from Moscow has received much exposure in recent years, international audiences are less familiar with art from St. Petersburg and the rest of Russia, and it is this imbalance that Erarta Galleries was established in 2008 to address.

Taking its title from Sergei Prokofiev’s famous symphony for children, ‘Peter and the Wolf’ is meant as a deliberately wry statement about the exposure of artists from St. Petersburg and their dramatic encounter with the international gallery circuit – a predatory system that’s ever hungry for new talent and spectacle. More significantly, the title also refers to a common strain within painting in St. Petersburg: the tendency towards fantasy – towards myth and folklore, and the structures of imagination. Indeed, it is important to recognize the particular role that these elements play within

the context of recent Russian art – given the way that Soviet authorities sought to rationalise and regulate artistic creativity through the ideology of Socialist Realism. The celebration of fantasy, then, was one of the principal forms of dissent available to independently minded artists of the ‘60s and ‘70s – the retrospectively labelled Nonconformist generation.

Half the artists in this exhibition belong to this Nonconformist generation. **Vladimir Ovchinnikov**, indeed, is one of its foremost figures – prominent both as a painter of primitivist, socially satirical, mythologically inspired scenes, and also as an organiser of unofficial and illegal exhibitions held in apartment buildings across Leningrad (as St. Petersburg was then known). Another important figure is **Vyacheslav Mikhailov**, one of the founders of the group ‘The Three Bogatyrs’ (heroes from Russian folk epics). Although his work has become progressively more abstract and formal over time, it is always characterised by the use of heavily encrusted *levkas* – a primer used principally in traditional icon painting. Finally, the practice of **David Plaksin**, though perhaps less well known, deserves wider recognition, with its strange mixture of acute observation and wild surrealism, as in his melancholy series of works on paper from the ‘70s exhibited here.

The other three artists belong to a younger generation, growing up during the era of glasnost and perestroika, and adapting the ethos and style of the Nonconformist heritage to suit contemporary concerns. This is particularly true of **Tatiana Sergeeva**, whose small, brooding works evince a sort of nostalgia for childhood, for both its joys and miseries, its mysterious objects and urgent images – including the objects and images of the late Soviet era, which are made to appear venerable, mesmerising, vaguely sinister. The paintings of **Maria Garkavenko**, on the other hand, are much more overtly fantastic, with their flat, simple, folkloric style, and their images suggestive of ritual, sorcery, and enchantment. Lastly, there is **Aleksandr Dashevsky**, one of the most rapidly rising stars of the St. Petersburg artworld, best known for his depictions of dilapidated, abstracted, Soviet-era buildings. While his realist works may initially seem to suggest the opposite of fantasy, they actually show the lurking ambiguities, the dark and secret spaces that remain within even the most rationally constructed environments.

Curated by: Gabriel Coxhead

ERARTA
8 Berkeley Street
London W1J 6DN
Monday – Friday 10-6
Saturday 10-5

Contact: Beth Morrow
Tel: 020 7499 7861
info@erartagalleries.com