

ANDREI MOLODKIN

Liquid Modernity (Grid and Greed)

22 April – 12 June 2009

On 22 April, Orel Art will mark its London arrival with **Liquid Modernity (Grid and Greed)**, the first UK solo exhibition of Russian contemporary artist, Andrei Molodkin. Running until 12 June, as a prelude to Molodkin's representation of Russia at the next 53rd Venice Biennale, the show will unveil two new monumental installations.

An ex-Soviet soldier and master draftsman, Molodkin started using a simple ballpoint pen – the only medium available to him when serving in the Russian military – to create his first canvases. Referencing tattooing, once illegal in USSR, and exhausting an army of pens, Molodkin's gigantic, labour-intensive drawings were first in a series of works to critically address iconization in a global contemporary culture (*Empire at War*, 2006; *Ceci n'est pas Carla*, 2007).

Crude oil – the 'black gold' Molodkin had to deliver in Siberia while in the army – became the core and energy of another body of work; his infamous 3-dimensional sculpture pieces. Using religious icons (Jesus, Mohammed) and political slogans (G8, Democracy) as indelible imprints, Molodkin deploys a system of barrels, compressors and piping to pump these hollowed, transparent acrylic blocks half-full with Iraqi or Chechen oil. Here, Molodkin confronts the role of oil as the source of cultural dominance and global communication.

Taking the capitalist system as its subject, **Liquid Modernity (Grid and Greed)** expands upon this model to bring oil and light together. *Das Kapital* presents the title of Marx's seminal text moulded out of transparent acrylic and pumped with Russian crude oil. In a corresponding replica, connected to the latter through pipes, the iconic phrase is erected in neon light. The tension between the two mediums, at once symbolically opposing and materially co-dependent, sets the pulse of the show.

Dominating the gallery floor, *Greed* presents two imposing grids, referencing the simplicity and austerity of Russian Constructivism. One built in acrylic 'bleeds' with oil while the other, connected via a system of compressors and pipes, glows with white light. This light, as born of oil, signals the inception of hope, a spark that lights up the very heart of utopia, 'life after death'. But the work also points to 'greed', to the desire of extract maximum profit from the trade of hydrocarbons.

At this point, the intersection between art and commerce is examined with black humour. The grid structure is connected to an electronic tableau, placed on the gallery wall and displaying current oil prices (in turn metaphorically referencing prices climbing up in the art market). Further away, in the background, five clocks mounted along the wall, indicate a different time zone, recalling the New York Stock Exchange.

Collectively, the two works present a stark aesthetic that considers the potential of oil as an icon of hope and despair, life and death, liberator and captor. Molodkin is set to explore these tensions further when he erects a colossal take on the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, pumped with crude oil and blood, at the forthcoming 53rd Venice Biennale.

Note to the Editors

The show is curated by leading art critic and scholar Victor Tupitsyn with catalogue written by Margarita Tupitsyn, Co-Curator of 'Rodchenko and Popova' at Tate Modern. Victor has written on Russian contemporary art for over 30 years and sits on the advisory board for *Third Text*. His latest work, *The Museological Unconscious* (MIT Press, May 2009) re-examines the history of Post-Soviet art from a communal perspective. Together, they pioneer new critical paradigms within which to explore Russian – and other – contemporary art.

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Press Preview, Wednesday 22 April, 9-11am

Orel Art

7 Howick Place

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Russian Pavillon, 53rd International Venice Biennale

7 June – 22 November 09

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