

MOSCOW PARTISAN CONCEPTUALISM

Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein

25 March – 22 May 2010

Orel Art UK presents *Moscow Partisan Conceptualism: Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein* from 25 March to 22 May 2010. The two artists are key figures in the Moscow conceptual school (MoKSh), the most famous and influential trend in post-war Russian art. Its formation and subsequent development in the early 1970s occurred in the absence of an audience, art institutions, critics or an art market. These, unparalleled in the history of modernism conditions, led to Moscow conceptualists' emphasis on collective production, a lack of interest in commercial aspects of art, and creation in an active dialogue about the nature of contemporary art. In this exhibition Nakhova and Pepperstein—both of whom had the conceptual artist Victor Pivovarov (a close friend of Ilya Kabakov) as their first mentor—serve as the agents of MoKSh's formal and theoretical strategies.

In the mid-1970s, Nakhova (b. 1955) was the only female member of MoKSh working alongside Ilya Kabakov and Andrei Monastyrsky. Nakhova won particular attention among her colleagues when, during the uneventful period of the Brezhnev regime, she transformed her studio apartment into four different environments that she called *Rooms* (1983-86). Most Moscow conceptualists visited *Rooms* and their comments were recorded and became part of the project. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nakhova divided her time between Moscow and New York, where she had her debut exhibition at Phyllis Kind Gallery in 1990, and in 1999 participated in an international exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*.

Pepperstein (b.1966) gained his reputation in the age of Perestroika as a writer and a member of the conceptual collective Medical Hermeneutics. In this role, he participated in many exhibitions, including *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (1990). In the last decade, Pepperstein has worked alone producing videos, poetry, novels, works on paper and wall painting. Recently, in order to appeal to younger audiences, Pepperstein has disseminated his poetry by rapping, redefining MoKSh's practice to reach young Soviet citizens by illustrating children's literature. Pepperstein's nomadic way of life is significantly different from that of many contemporary artists, for not being interested in the creation of his public persona, he travels to escape, rather than join, important art events. In that sense Pepperstein's favorite folk personality *kolobok* (gingerbread boy) could be viewed as an imaginary self-portrait.

Nakhova's *Resuscitation* (2008-09) is a large interactive inflatable sculpture composed of four heads and two hearts sewn of grey parachute silk and operating through the hearts as one organism. Following in the tradition of Russian Constructivism, Nakhova relies on her precise drawings to produce her sculpture like a factory seamstress. The sculpture's recurring inflation and deflation positions it against the deliberate monumentality of Western neo-pop sculptures.

Pepperstein's poem, *Souz-Apollo* (2009), which is mechanically inscribed on several acrylic panels, attacks—in the accusatory style of Vladimir Mayakovsky—the modern age's environmental, political, and cultural failures and debunks cold war clichés. The exhibition also includes Pepperstein's drawings made for the Medical Hermeneutics installation, *A Pipe or an Alley of Longevity* (1995); these are grotesque images that question perceptions of time and age; other drawings mock the Soviet myth of Lenin's immortality—constructed in the 1920s by the avant-garde

artists and exploited by the Soviet propaganda machine. Pepperstein's drawing skills and deconstructive mind, transform Lenin's image into a vulnerable and pathetic anti-hero.

Nakhova's series *Skins* (2008-09), offers life-size human skin hides that are printed on a thin voile fabric, and treated with gel-medium. The tattoos are printed or drawn with ink. Each skin rendering is accompanied by a story in which Nakhova creates gruesome montages out of plots of brutality and glamour.

Moscow Partisan Conceptualism: Irina Nakhova and Pavel Pepperstein is curated by Margarita Tupitsyn and Victor Tupitsyn, who since the mid-1970s have exhibited and theorized Moscow conceptual art in the West. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, which includes essays by the curators and their interviews with the artists.

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Private View: 25 March, 6 to 9pm

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