

03.12.2022

Let's Talk! Interview with Marina Fedorova, figurative artist

Interview with prominent figurative artist Marina Fedorova currently living and working in Munich, who created a persuasively vivid image of the contemporary woman within the Cosmodreams project.

Marina Fedorova is one of the most prominent and sought-after contemporary artists. Her works were acquired by major art institutions and distinguished private collectors and exhibited in an impressive number of solo shows. The Artist's broad appeal to art experts and general public alike can be put down to her unique ability to stay consistently relevant and capture the spirit of time while at the same time retaining her trademark painting manner and the extraordinary inventiveness of artistic vision: 'Show me a hint of an opportunity — and I'll immediately start thinking of ways to put it to use!'

One of the major achievements that Ms. Fedorova can be credited with is the creation of a persuasively vivid image of the contemporary woman who exists within the coordinate systems of aestheticist sophistication, playful sensuality, and careless dreaminess, but also, quite remarkably, of social responsibility. Nearly a decade and a half of her professional career saw the emergence of an impressive body of works having at its core the life of a modern urbanite and the multifaceted image of the contemporary big city. Drawing her inspiration from sources as far-reaching and varied as the American hyperrealism, Japanese woodblock prints, pop art and modernism, the Artist cites Alex Kanevsky, Eric Fischl, Alex Katz, and Georgia O'Keeffe as her visual influences, also paying tribute to such Russian contemporaries as Rinat Voligamsi and Andrey Novikov.

Born in 1981 in Leningrad (USSR, now St. Petersburg, Russia), the Artist spent her childhood and formative years in the same city. For as long as she can remember, drawing was her primary means of com-



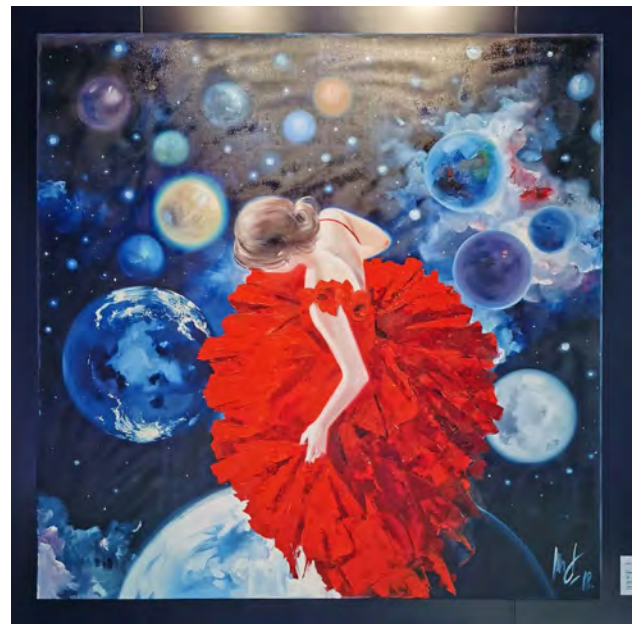
munication, with attendance of art classes proving instrumental in broadening the creative outlook and honing practical skills. In 1996, Marina entered the Nicholas Roerich Art School in St. Petersburg where she studied graphic design and developed an interest in fashion industry, hence the next logical step came in the form of enrolment at the Saint Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design (formerly known as the Vera Mukhina Art School) in 2000 where she majored in Fashion Design and Illustration. Her student years were associated with prolonged traineeships at the two leading fashion houses of St. Petersburg with active involvement in the creation of their advertising images and printed materials, as well as the staging

of fashion shows. Ms. Fedorova remains quite forthright about her infatuation with the fashion industry; however, by the time of her graduation in 2006 she already felt that she would ultimately have to jettison the career of a couturier in favour of that of a professional artist. In a true artistic spirit, she symbolically ditched the former at the time of her graduation project defence, replacing the standard presentation of a finished garment collection with an extravagant piece of performance art whereby she treated a white dress worn by one of the models as canvas to paint on right in the middle of the runway.

Early 2000s were marked by active involvement in group shows and first solo projects in which Ms. Fedorova initially took alternating roles of fashion designer and artist. Her preferred imagery at the start of the artistic journey can obviously be traced back to her long-running ties to the fashion world and contributions to Dress Code magazine as editorial illustrator: here abound stylish young people, pronouncedly European in appearance and surrounded by a plethora of objects and accessories that communicate a propensity for hedonism, luxury, and success. This instantly recognizable succession of images put special emphasis on fashionable details and glossy magazine-derived glamour, without, however, any deliberate over-exaggeration: the Artist sees them not as cult objects, but rather as the reflection of her everyday working routine.

Although her visual manner transformed over the years, her painting technique remained relatively unchanged: present throughout her entire oeuvre are the characteristic poster-like composition and a pronounced preference for pure colours, with the creative tasks immediately at hand requiring an alla prima working style, with its swift and direct administering of paint. Regardless of whether she is working with watercolours, tempera, acrylics or oil paints, Ms. Fedorova's approach is constantly focused on capturing and evoking various fleeting, transient moments and states.

The Artist might count among her indisputable achievements the signature treatment of visual scenes reminiscent of collages or digitally processed snapshots: the faces of protagonists and other meaningful elements are oftentimes left out, with casual gestures, postures, and arrangements of seemingly secondary



items brought to the fore. It seems as if the primary intention is not to portray the character, but to impart the impression of dreamy contemplation — and all visible elements ostensibly serve this goal. The Artist enhances her palette with liberal use of red, drawing on the symbolic implications and magnetism of this colour. Another trademark element is the incorporation of handwritten words and phrases that provide verbal commentary on and visual counterpoint to the picture.

The period between 2005 and 2009 saw Ms. Fedorova's collaboration with the leading St. Petersburg-based gallery D137, at that time closely involved with such trending local artists as Vladislav Mamyshv-Monroe, Georgy Guryanov, and Olga Tobreluts — proponents of the influential New Academy of Fine Arts. For the aspiring Artist, this turned out to be the first significant exhibition venue, a place of schooling, an art residency, and a creative stepping stone: the gallery staged her first solo shows (*One Fine Day*, 2005; *Autumn Time*, 2006; *Living in Paris*, 2007; *Lonely*, 2008) and showcased her art at major art fairs in Russia and abroad (*Art-Moscow*, *Arte Fiera* in Bologna, Italy, and *ArtVilnius* in Vilnius, Lithuania). An important factor of professional advancement was the role played by the gallery's director: Olga Osterberg was among the first heavyweights in the artistic community to put her faith in the up-and-coming Artist, allowing her to realise many ambitious ideas and projects and plunge headlong into the exciting whirlpool of creative life. At certain points the gallery served not only as the exhibition space, but as the Artist's makeshift

studio. Marina retains fond memories of that period: despite the sometimes strained living circumstances, work was easy and fun, while the genuine feeling of artistic kinship and shared creative ground provided an inspiring and empowering influence.

The paintings from that time display lots of readily identifiable visual motifs and luminaries from the worlds of fashion and film. The Artist depicts, among others, Yohji Yamamoto, Vivienne Westwood, Yves Saint-Laurent, and the celebrated Russian actress Renata Litvinova, at the same time copying stills from the European New Wave cinema and Wong Kar-Wai's movies and referencing the distinctive atmosphere of paintings by Edward Hopper and, to a certain degree, René Magritte. Such homages, on the one hand, declare the sublime style as the Artist's reference point, and, on the other, delineate the common ground where her already recognizable characters visually stand toe to toe with demigods.

The ambitious young Artist quickly and firmly established herself in the professional circles: in 2007, she became the official graphic designer of the 7th International Ballet Festival MARIINSKY, in 2008, was nominated for the prestigious Kandinsky Prize, and in 2010, participated in the Christie's Charity Gala Auction at the State Russian Museum.



The first trips abroad and experiences of new cities presented a rich and diverse field for creative exploration. The visit to Paris on a student exchange program to study theatrical costume set the visual code of stylish city life visibly present in many painting series and finding the most complete expression in *Living in Paris* (2007). France would continue to feature heavily in Marina's European projects: the Paris-based Orel Art gallery presented her *Brief Encounters* (2007) and *Retour — Stop — Cadre* (2009) exhibitions and showcased her works at Art Paris show; in 2008, she was named the Artist of the Year for the Nicolas Feuillatte Champagne; and finally in 2018, the Château d'Ardeley museum in Les Herbiers hosted an extensive retrospective of her art.

The contemporary big city is both an action scene and an actor here: the stories unfurling in certain locations were triggered by these locations in the first place. The person depicted, be it the Artist's favourite model or twin, a highly stylised partner, or a secondary character spotlighted in the crowd, is inconceivable without his or her urban environment. Each painting is a film still telling a story, while each exhibition in its entirety acts as a shot-by-shot breakdown of a generalised metanarrative. Ms. Fedorova is an exceptionally attentive observer: impressions of Moscow, various Italian cities, New York, and London subsequently find way into such thematically contained series as *Stolichnaya* (2011), *Italy in My Heart* (2013), *NY/New You* (2015), and *British Accent* (2017), focusing not so much on iconic landmarks as on capturing the spirit and energy of a particular city or landscape. Kremlin or Big Ben provide a backdrop for what is happen-

ing to an individual instead of merely serving as place markers.

A sequence of important life events and, in particular, the birth of two children helped the Artist substantially re-evaluate the role of art in her life, at the same time expanding her subject range. The artworks become increasingly more personal, and the gap between the protagonist and the Artist narrows. Central to Ms. Fedorova's art now is the modern sensitive and sensible woman who seems to close the viewer's attention on herself: even in the absence of a female character, one cannot help perceiving the unravelling scene from the female perspective.

The pointedly more brutal, at times unsettling images created for *08.08.08.* (2009), *Bluebeard* (2010), *Sacrifice* (2012), and *Reflections* (2012) are fraught with the motifs of violence, threat, estrangement, and despair, but this is obviously not to dumbfound the viewers, but rather to immerse them in a certain disturbing atmosphere. With realism as her departure point, Ms. Fedorova nevertheless seems to 'auto correct' the picture: painting real life scenes, she does not strive for hyperrealism with its tendency towards overemphasising various unsavoury details. As such, the images of armoured vehicles, garbage heaps, discarded mannequins, meat, and blood are subconsciously interpreted not as an angered protest, but as a creative meditation on the subject of destructive human relations and unsustainable consumption. The Artist's social and aesthetic outcry is probably at its most vocal in the large-scale triptych from 2015, *The Landfill of Consumer Society*, created for the New Russian Storytellers group show at the State Russian Museum.

Another group exhibition from roughly the same time, *Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe* (Lazarev Gallery, St. Petersburg, 2012), brought out a totally different side of the Artist, yielding a series of light and airy, fairytale-like images replete with joie de vivre and fullness of being. From then on, children, representing discovery and learning, joy and sincere emotion, start to appear repeatedly in the Artist's various projects, most palpably so in the serene and luminous *Prolonging the Summer* (Erarta Museum of Contemporary Art, St. Petersburg, 2015). 'The theme of childhood is the most intimate one in my entire oeuvre, most pristine, poignant, and



engaging: after all, I am a mother of two who remains an artist,' reflects Marina.

Providing assistance to children in need of aid and support was also the main reason behind the Artist's involvement in various charity projects: *Contemporary Artists for Anton's Right Here Foundation* (Novy Museum, St. Petersburg, 2014), *The Art of Being There* (Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2015), and *Inspired by Childhood* (joint charity exhibition by Life Line Foundation and K35 gallery, Moscow, 2016).

2010s were marked by a succession of important solo exhibitions in Russia and Europe, mostly in collaboration with such Russian institutions as Lazarev Gallery and K35 and the Finnish Gallery Kadieff (Helsinki). In 2012, Lazarev Gallery staged *Non-Accidental Encounters and Reflections*. The landmark *Reflections* drew a kind of bottom line under the Artist's creative journey to that date and featured an impressive number of novel visual approaches: alignment of planes and angles, distortion of reflective surfaces, imitation of textures. Caught in the imaginary viewfinder are not only clearly visible objects, but apparently peripheral

images. It could be argued that Reflections established Ms. Fedorova as an accomplished mature artist. Lazarev Gallery also represented her at such high-profile art fairs as Art-Moscow (2012), Art Monaco (2012), and Art Stage Singapore (2013).

The exhibitions at the Moscow K35 gallery Moments. Expectations (2013) and Parallel (2015) trace the gradual progression of such motifs as loneliness and the relations between men and women, with much attention paid to female portraits and nudes. In Parallel, the ambivalence of the world being pictured is reinforced by the colour scheme: the well-grounded everyday objects rendered in soft tones are seen next to vibrantly vivid fantasy visions outlined with the Artist's favourite red, black, and white.

Finally, Helsinki-based Kadieff Gallery hosted such projects as In Red (2010), She Who Runs on the Waves (2011), and For Versace (2012). Specifically for the off-site program of the 2013 Venetian Biennale, Marina created a series of paintings titled Italy in My Heart, juxtaposing her insightful observations of the country against multiple quotes from the post-WWII Italian cinema. Working closely with the Finnish gallery, the Artist spent a lot of time in Finland contemplating the Nordic nature, which quite understandably had an obvious bearing on her art, where new subjects and nuances started to surface. One obvious example is the ever-increasing presence of cool blue hues referencing the colour of the sea and the sky, of



calm meditative detachment, with natural landscapes progressively coming to the fore.

Subsequently such desolate and seemingly uninhabited landscapes will become a mainstay in Ms. Fedorova's art. The very titles of such group shows as Depopulating the Landscape (Agency. Art Ru, Moscow, 2014) and Laden Emptiness (K35, 2015) allude to the narrative of empty spaces variously interpreted by the participating artists. The maximum possible distancing from city art was achieved with the introspective project East of the Sun (K35, 2018) inspired by trips to the Alps. Almost entirely consisting of new-romanticist, emotionally charged mountain views, it touches on traces of human presence only obliquely.

A standout fixture in the Artist's creative output of the 2010s is the large-scale Kresty series (Triumph, Moscow, 2014) devoted to the drama of separation and long wait for the significant other and, to a certain extent, to the accompanying romance. In essence a visual report documenting the life of the infamous jail, the series explores the various female roles of mother, sister, wife, or lover, be it an unknown average woman or the celebrated Russian poet Anna Akhmatova who in this case acts a composite character representing all



women whose loved ones are in penal custody. Featuring eloquent portraits of inmates, sombre St. Petersburg cityscapes and interior views of the cells, the series foregrounds the symbolic implications of the prison's name (translated literally from the Russian as 'the Crosses'), the cruciform layout of its building, and the sign of the cross in general in all its simplicity and richness of meaning.

Far from limiting her creative expression to traditional painting, in 2009 the Artist turned to the new medium of a three-dimensional object: the first such pieces were crafted out of wood for the Gates and Doors group exhibition at the State Russian Museum and hovered on the cusp between painting and sculpture. From then onward, thematically related objects made of Plexiglas, foam plastic and other materials serve to visually complement and comment on the paintings in many conceptual series. Such are the Tree (Sacrifice, 2012), Assol (Prolonging the Summer, 2015), and She (Parallel, 2015), to name just a few.

Since 2017, Marina has been working on the large-scale Cosmodreams project. The exhibition designed to reflect the Artist's ruminations on the theme of space on several different levels is scheduled to be unveiled in 2020. Its complicated concept aside, the series encompasses profoundly lyrical artworks alluding to the archetypal imagery of outer space as the romantic realm of countless options. Encapsulating many subjects ranging from a tribute to and celebration of the Soviet space exploration heroes through the attempts to visualise the prospects of extraterrestrial colonisation and up to meditative reflections on the mystery of the Creation and its possible alternative versions, the exhibition space should provide a carefully segmented and engrossing immersive experience.



The Artist acknowledges that the importance of cinematic influences still rings true for her creations, but the nature of this impact has changed, sidestepping direct visual quotes in favour of a solid conceptual framework. In a way, the pronounced focus on the technical sophistication of the exhibition builds on the groundbreaking ideas of such genre-bending series as Black Mirror and Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams: the strikingly innovative paintings will feature alongside virtual and augmented reality functions, the ever more evident signifiers of the future that has already arrived.



watch video

source:

<https://lifereport.net/en/lets-talk-interview-with-marina-fedorova-figurative-artist/>