

ANNA PARKINA
EYES INSTEAD OF THE EYE
14/11/2014 – 31/01/2014
Opening: 13 November, 19.00

The biography of Anna Parkina is somehow similar to the technique she prefers in art – it resembles a collage of cards with views of various cities and countries “assembled” by the personal effort of the artist, on the one hand, and thanks to ample opportunities opened to young Russians in the 1990-2000s, on the other. At the age of 18 Moscow-born Anna leaves home and starts for Paris where she earns living as a model while attending Ecole des Beaux-Arts. There she apprehends the techniques of working with images understood as a chain of endless citation and re-contextualization of visual material. Later Parkina is a student of the Institute of Design in Pasadena, California, where she spends half a year associating with first class American artists, the late Mike Kelly among them, and Mayo Thompson, a musician rather obscure to the Russian audience, co-founder of the cult avant-garde rock band Red Crayola. For some time Parkina lives in Berlin and Paris, takes part in the title project of the Venice Biennale 2009 (“Making Worlds” curated by Daniel Birnbaum), then returns to Moscow but keeps showing her works abroad mainly. Anna’s first solo exhibition in the motherland took place at the GMG gallery, now closed, in the long gone 2009. The exhibition at the Regina Gallery is her second one in Russia, and as those five years that passed between the two shows have been extremely rich with political and cultural events, for Moscow viewers “Eyes Instead of the Eye” comes rather as a fresh acquaintance with the artist than a regular appointment.

Collages and sculptures by Parkina are often seen in the light of the Soviet constructivism of the 1920s. Western critics are inclined to find in her works correlations to the brisk intensive montage of Alexander Rodchenko and Gustav Klutsis. In Russia, by contrast, our attention is cast on a kind of a purely European virtuosity applied by Parkina to avoid leveled and straightforward understanding of her works. Concerning Parkina we’d prefer to talk not about the constructivism seen by its founders as a montage of factual material inspired by a pioneering search of a new visuality coherent to the revolutionary ideals of equality and general availability, but about structure being external to the references used in a collage. Every work of Anna is a clash of multidirectional compositional techniques. To quote the title of one of her early videos, in that clash there are no winners, only witnesses. It must be added that the figure of a watcher is very important to Parkina as in quite a lot of her collages she applies the American film noir style. Among of the most essential conflicts in film noir is the pessimism of a protagonist concerning the results of his interfering in other people’s tragedies and his gloomy concord with inevitable evil seen as an innate characteristic of the society. Though the choice between optimism and pessimism is not Parkina’s deal. Structure that keeps the elements steady inside a composition is prior to simply reading the dramatic stories glimmering enigmatically behind the fragmentary photos. Among Parkina’s visual practices there is a counterpart to that invisible structure, namely, the artist’s favorite *jealousie* motif when rows of slats both obscure some other’s life and provide a rhythmical pattern. At the same time Parkina’s collages do not come up beyond any historical background, they are by no means mixes of references without kith or kin. Her accumulations of fragments and ornamental patterns can be compared to Kurt Schwitters’ collages which appeared as a reaction to the downfall of Germany after World War II when debris of images was all that was left of the adamant ideology of German superiority – thus came up the chip “merz” instead of “Kommerz”. Similarly, Parkina’s works could be seen as a reaction to the post-ideological phase in Russia in the 1990-2000s. The artist gives multiplicity and complexity back to the Post-Soviet world that looks like a catalogue of opportunities and goods.

In the new works Anna takes up her usual themes on quite another level. The artist puts aside dramatic dismantling of human images and turns instead to the pre-constructivist origins of collage, that is to early cubism which was developing within the still life genre. The first cubistic experiments of Picasso and Braque are settings of things and citations assembled in shaky equilibrium. “Every part and plane of the picture keeps changing place in relative depth with every other part and plane”, wrote Clement Greenberg, an American critic, about Braque’s “Fruit Dish” (1912). “It is as if the only stable relation left among the different parts of the picture is the ambivalent and ambiguous one that each has with the surface”. Something of the kind is seen in Parkina’s collages where the real things being photographed are multiplied in the rows of variously colored silhouettes, or may be shadows, or light projections. The conflict intrinsic to cubism, between decorativeness and the urge to break into the physical space of a viewer, into the so-called “reality”, is present in Parkina’s works as well. The “domestication” of con-

ceptions, that is the predilection for everyday items, brings to memory the passage from Dorothy Richardson about "female art" quoted by Linda Nochlin, an art historian, in her essay about the impressionist Mary Cassatt: "The art of making atmospheres... It doesn't show, like men's art. There's no drama, no advertising." Still, in Parkina's collages comfort is submitted to structure which makes that invisible atmosphere move centrifugally from object to abstraction and back, sometimes stiffening half way in the form of surreal images that somehow remind us of the excursions to the boundaries of sexuality undertaken by Louise Bourgeois and Max Ernst under the influence of psychoanalysis. That movement never satisfies the expectations of a happy end or any outcome but keeps provoking us to ask questions about what we are looking at, and that makes it impossible to turn the eyes away from the work.