

Pavel Pepperstein FROM MORDOR WITH LOVE

June 30 - September 2, 2010

private view: Tuesday 29 June, 6-9pm

Regina is pleased to announce a solo show by acclaimed Russian artist Pavel Pepperstein.

The exhibition marks a significant formal departure for the artist. Known primarily for his enigmatic, figurative drawings and paintings, and for his forays into mass media via his popular novels and occasional rap songs, here Pepperstein brings his interests in alternative futurologies and political phantasms to bear on the history of utopian art making, from Kasimir Malevich to Barnett Newman.

Born in 1966 in Moscow to Irina Pivovarova, an author of children's books, and Viktor Pivovarov, a well-known painter, Pepperstein grew up in a household where art and literature were synonymous with popular culture. His date of birth is equally revealing: too young to have joined the ranks of the Moscow Conceptualists in the 1970s, for whom art served to circumvent state control, and coming of age in the 1980s when the Cold War was already fast-forwarding to its end, Pepperstein has witnessed first-hand the globalised art market's nostalgia for 'true' ideological imagery. Artist Ilya Kabakov celebrates Pepperstein's work in his interview for ArtChronika magazine: "To all of us Pasha is the reincarnation of Mozart. He would come to my studio with Vitya (his father, the artist Viktor Pivovarov) and sit next to him on the sofa and you couldn't get a word out of him. He was just a presence, like a spirit. And when at last his golden quill moved, everyone suddenly saw and heard what a sound it makes. In this way Pasha was always something incredible. He went through a stage of Buddhist-like silence and gave off this unbelievable aura of light. He is this incredible mixture, he has this huge range and feeling of improvisation, I just can't describe his importance for us today."

As one of the most acute portraitists of his generation, Pepperstein in his recent paintings performs the quest for symbols, insignia and official signs that once upon a time, in a distant mythical Cold War land, would have allowed the artist to find inner peace and outer prosperity. On their surface, these paintings appear to humorously mix folk references with 1970s psychedelia – see the Russian dolls and the Christmas tree in *Matryoshka* and *Fir-tree* (both 2010). Yet they betray a systematic attempt to expand the language of abstract painting – introducing humanising elements such as the volute (a spiral form found throughout nature and used in decorative architecture) as well as the aura of Benjamin made visible, emanating from the edges of shapes in luminescent bands.

Taking his cue from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Pepperstein invokes Mordor, the nefarious hangout of Sauron, whose ring would become the common object of pursuit for both the novel's good and evil. Likewise, in Pepperstein's paintings, Mordor becomes embroiled in contradictory symbols of super-powerful forces: the Soviet red star (*Red Star*, 2010), the American Flag (*USA Square*, 2010) and the Union Jack (*English Square*, 2010). Mordor's own flag is a composite of a National Socialist white circle against a red background, with at its centre a Malevich-inspired black square from whose corners sprout colourful Smithson-esque scrolls. Even the most explicit painting in the exhibition – *The Dying Gangster* (2010), depicting a wounded man identified as 'capitalism' – makes designating a 'hero' arduous: the only figure left standing is the gangster's erect penis, wearing a hat inscribed with the word 'Russia'.

Contemporary Russia, then, is the object of Pepperstein's futuristic fantasies, where tensions – such as those between Islam and Christianity (*Red Cross* and *4 Red Crescents*, 2010) – find uncomfortable, disjunctive aesthetic resolution. By 2224, the date mentioned in *Square with Scrolls* (2010), the country's ideological and political contradictions will have solidified into a single, coherent triangle, captioned with a phrase that would have made Ian Fleming proud: *From Mordor with Love* (2010).

Pavel Pepperstein has a long-standing relationship with Regina Gallery dating back to 2000. Solo exhibitions at Regina Moscow have included 'Either-Or' (2008), 'City of Russia' (2007), 'Hypnosis' (2004) and 'Battles' (2003). Other solo exhibitions have included 'Drawings' at Kunstmuseum, Basel (2006) and 'The Father and the Son', part of two-year residency at Kunsthaus Zug, Switzerland (1999–2000). Pepperstein was recently included in the Russian Pavilion and the group exhibition 'Making Worlds' both at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009). Public collections include Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Kunsthaus Zug, Kunstmuseum Basel, Moscow Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Sammlung Rheingold Art Foundation, Düsseldorf, and Deutsche Bank Collection, Berlin.

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