

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Russian evolution on a factory floor

By Marisa Mazria-Katz

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Hours before the temporary Gagosian Gallery in Moscow opened its "For What You Are About to Receive" exhibition, trading on the Russian stock market was suspended, President Dmitry Medvedev condemned Nato, and the country's deputy prime minister, Igor Sechin, made a pitstop in Venezuela to praise the country as "one of Russia's most reliable partners".

Yet on the third floor of the former Red October Chocolate Factory - with views of the Moscow River and the Kremlin - geopolitical and economic tensions seemed only to create an electrifying ambience for the 70 pieces scattered across 26,000 sq ft of interim gallery space.

This exhibition is not Gagosian's first foray into the Russian art scene. Just last year, the New York-based gallery hosted an impromptu show of 40 works at a high-end mall as a kind of litmus test for any future endeavours. Spearheading the Russian undertaking is the gallery's UK director and Belarus native, Victoria Gelfand, who has visited the country on and off for the past four years anxiously calibrating the right moment to strike. Taking into account the country's emerging status in the global art scene, curator Sam Orlofsky has carefully constructed an exhibit that he describes as "one that acknowledges the obstacles new audiences may have for contemporary or avant-garde art".

The result is a survey that introduces Russia's budding art collectors to a wide swath of the 20th century's most well-known and established artists, beginning with Arshile Gorky and including Jeff Koons, Cy Twombly, Richard Serra, David Smith, Richard Prince and

Aaron Young. Sales from "For What You Are About to Receive" could yield as much as \$300m.

Incorporating the history of the factory as a former bastion of mass-produced goods, "For What You Are About to Receive" succinctly illuminates the evolution of art over the past 100 years. The journey begins in a small foyer lit by the soft white glow of Dan Flavin's "Monument for V. Tatlin 22" (1964). On the opposite side is the never-before-seen "Untitled (Eosinophilia)" by Piotr Uklanski. The red-drenched glossy resin on canvas painting, named after a blood disorder, stands 11 ft high. The vivid colours harness memories not only of Russia's communist past but also of recent clashes with Georgia, setting a politically relevant tone.

The progression of gestural abstraction moves from the splashes of Jackson Pollock's "Rhythmical Dance" (1948) to the more controlled Takashi Murakami's "Want to be Splashed With a Cellular Shower" (2008), which looks like plumes of autumn-coloured smoke rising against a solid gold backdrop. Orlofsky has succinctly positioned each painting so there is a mellifluous flow from one to the next, evoking a sensation that, in spite of the gaps in age, each was created with the other in mind. The wall culminates with Willem de Koonig's "Untitled VII" (1977) and "Untitled XIV" (1981), which forms a triumphant endpoint for the room by generously highlighting each painting's common themes through its undulating and voluptuous red and blue tones. Acting as a kind of grand finale to the exhibition's first section are six Cy Twombly paintings never before seen, which are a continuation of the intensely primordial Bacchus series.

Perhaps Orlofsky was attempting to soften the blow for first-time buyers by placing the posse of artists who represent the most radical break from contemporary 20th century art farthest from the entrance. Here in the rectangular room lined with windows facing the Moscow River is Aaron Young's gold-plated, sledgehammered fence, entitled "WeDon'tNeedNo.... ED-U-Kat-I-On! (No Solutions)" (2008).

Across the room is Richard Prince's "Untitled" (2008), which consists of a white backboard lodged close to the ceiling with streams of empty beer cans connected by

plastic rings, cascading down from a basketball hoop. At the centre of it all is Jeff Koons "Baroque Egg with Bow (Turquoise/ Magenta)" (1994-2006). On display for the first time, Koons' high-chromium stainless-steel structure, doused in turquoise and wrapped in a scintillating pink bow, gives the impression of being a giant chocolate egg left over from the factory days.

On the night of the opening, soon after Aaron Young and a handful of menacing Russian motorcyclists burned rubber circles on dozens of black canvases for his "Arc Light" performance, local businessmen were milling around Koons' egg. One was a boisterous stock trader named Maxim, for whom the country's frozen financial markets hardly damped his acquisitional desires. "I am here tonight because we have nothing to fear since the worst has happened," he mused. "We are at the bottom and this is how we are celebrating." *www.gagosian.com*

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