



# Would-be worlds

featuring Veronica Smirnof  
30 May – 19 July

Erarta Galleries London is delighted to present *Would-be worlds* during Russian Art Week. Inspired by the work of Veronica Smirnof, a native of Moscow but educated at London's prestigious Slade School of Art and the Royal Academy of Art, the exhibition explores space as illusory, ephemeral places and fairy-tale worlds, both magical and somewhat foreboding. In this year of cultural exchange with Russia, the exhibition also presents work by Rinat Minnebaev, Anna Urazova, Valery Valran, and Evgeny Zarembo – a diverse group of artists, working across Russia and in London, all united by their examination of mystical vision.

All the artists in the exhibition approach time as an immemorial element, Smirnof's paintings harkening back to the traditions of icon painting in her native Russia. Her oak panels are made in a monastery outside Moscow and blessed before they journey to her London studio. Working in egg tempera, one of the earliest, and most finicky types of paint, she weaves a world combining the traditions of icon painting and the icons of contemporary culture, all steeped in her childhood memories of Russia. Her luminous paintings dissolve time and present a space that is neither here nor there, but somehow both. It is an enchanted yet mysterious world, oddly familiar with recognisable elements of early renaissance imagery, but ultimately a fragile and precious reality and one that is intensely personal.

Where Smirnof fragments and reassembles elements from pre-renaissance and icon painting to create a personal folkloric reality, Zarembo fuses a new vision of landscape through a kaleidoscope of colours and impasto paint. His world is beautiful, but it is equally ferocious as evidenced by the blast of searing yellow at heart of his painting *Lightning*. Working in a similarly abstract manner, Minnebaev's painting from the *Atlantrop* series shows what looks to be an almost crystalline wasteland, but rather than exploiting the buttery beauty of oil paint, he creates an alchemic, three-dimensional surface. Intricately textured, *Atlantrop* is actually made of paper through a rigorous and almost shamanistic technique. It is a strange surface, one that could be interpreted as geographic, biological, or otherworldly. The only clue he offers is a cluster of delicate perpendicular lines – an indication of roads, or perhaps the configuration of a far off constellation?

Valran's painting *Act* is a totem for unknown world, and the carefully rendered fish and shell are shown as if suspended in the ether. Traced against a twilight field, Valran's seemingly simple forms are, like Minnebaev's cluster of lines, emblematic of a lost constellation. Rendered with equal attention to detail as Valran's painting, Urazova's drawings immediately recall the tradition of botanical illustration. However, closer inspection reveals that these are not earthly creatures. Part plant, part animal, the forms are perhaps more aptly described as self-sufficient cosmoses. Harmonious and elegant, these nebulous forms are surely the flora and fauna of an otherworldly place, and one can easily imagine them finding a home and flourishing in one of Smirnof's evanescent worlds.

All the artwork in *Would-be worlds*, though by diverse artists and encompassing diverse media and approaches to image making, are auratic objects. They all embrace the preciousness of the materials with which they are made and the richness of history they reference. These worlds may be illusory, but they are more beautiful for it.

We will be hosting a reception in honour of this special exhibition on Thursday, 29 May from 6:00 – 8:30pm. The reception will be sponsored by *Abrau-Durso*, Russia's premier sparkling wine producer.

Erarta Galleries London will also be hosting the first curated exhibition and auction presented by Maxim Boxer. *Russian Cosmism: Modern & Contemporary Art* will be open from 29 May – 3 June on the lower ground floor. The auction will take place from 6pm on Tuesday 3 June.

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