

Moscow Calling

Throughout my career as an artist and art educator I have been privileged to teach at a number of institutions connected to radical developments in art education. For over twenty years I taught on the Foundation Course at Leeds College of Art. This programme was essentially the first Foundation course in the United Kingdom. It grew out of the 'Basic Design' course developed by Harry Thubron in the late 1950's, which itself was highly influenced by the Bauhaus. From this, and similar experiments undertaken by Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton at Kings College, Newcastle, a new introductory course for art, design and architecture students emerged, called the Foundation course which was adopted by other art schools across the country.

In January 2018, I moved to Moscow to teach on the Foundation programme at the British Higher School of Art and Design. There I became aware of the history of Russian art education and of the legendary art school VKhUTEMAS. The school was established in Moscow in 1920 as a result of radical reforms in art education after the October revolution, VKhUTEMAS is associated with the Russian avant garde and was a major centre for constructivism, rationalism and suprematism, Faculty members included: Naum Gabo, Vasily Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevich, Konstantin Melnikov, Lyubov Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko and Vladimir Tatlin. The school championed innovation in art and architecture and fostered an atmosphere of intellectual enquiry and practical experimentation. First year students were required to complete the 'Basic Course' which was an important part of the new teaching method and was considered the foundation of their art education. The schools influence extended far beyond Soviet Russia and it had strong links with the Bauhaus, first in Weimar and then in Dessau. Like the Bauhaus, VKhUTEMAS was short lived and was dissolved in 1930 due to government pressure, it was viewed by the Soviet state as an instrument of political manipulation by the west. The Foundation course now running at the British Higher School of Art and Design in Moscow builds on the radical tradition of art education established in Britain in the 1960's which in itself was based on the Bauhaus and VKhUTEMAS.

During the summer of 2018, whilst I was back in the UK, Ian Hartshorne (Course Leader, MA Painting, Manchester School of Art) suggested staging an exhibition of ex Foundation students from BHSAD in Manchester that aimed to establish a network between artists and art students in Manchester and Moscow. Ian has been instrumental in the realisation of this exhibition. He agreed to select the participating students from images of the 2017/18 Foundation exhibition, organised a critique of the exhibition with staff and students from Manchester School of Art and was the catalyst in introducing a range of other parties to the project. Ian has also organised for the Russian students to visit Chetham's library; the oldest free public reference library in the UK and the place where Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels would regularly meet in Manchester in 1845. The research they undertook there ultimately led to the 'The Communist Manifesto' and therefore indirectly to VKhUTEMAS (and perhaps even more indirectly to the development of the Foundation course in British art education).



Since arriving in Moscow I have worked closely with Valentin Boiangiu (Fine Art pathway leader), to develop a course which aims to progressively provide students with the means by which to develop an independent working practice. Through a range of open ended projects it enables them to work in ways that were previously unfamiliar, introducing them to a series of strategies and attitudes through which they may begin to engage with a broad range of media, workshops and possibilities. The course asks students to suspend their judgement and to challenge their preconceptions. The emphasis of the programme is on arriving at ideas rather than beginning with ideas, arriving at intention through exploring formal and material possibilities. Its structure provides a means by which students can begin to contextualise their work, whilst forming a knowledge and understanding of the current debates which inform contemporary fine art practice.

The students that I have come into contact with on the Foundation programme have consistently demonstrated an intelligent, open and motivated approach to testing and refining their developing concerns. The students taking part in this exhibition are a testament to the course and the work shown here ranges from drawing, printmaking and painting to sculpture, video, photography and sound recording.

Like the majority of students studying on the Fine Art pathway, four of the artists exhibiting progressed onto the BA (Hons) Fine Art programme at BHSAD, led by Ian Charlesworth along with John Lavell. I am grateful for Ian and John's support. Other students leave Moscow to study internationally. Elizaveta Kuzyakova is currently a first year student at Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten and Koninklijk Conservatorium in Den Haag.

Moscow Calling is a joint blip blip / PS Mirabel / Bunker Gallery initiative. I am grateful to Richard Ward and Jack Doyle for hosting the exhibition at PS Mirabel. They have enthusiastically embraced the project and provided valuable technical assistance. It was at their suggestion that the artists collective Catflap, who run the Bunker Gallery at PS Mirabel, became involved. Catflap are a group of recent graduates from Manchester School of Art. I appreciate the time and effort that they have devoted to realising this project. The members of Catflap carried out an email correspondence with the Russian students which formed the basis of the catalogue texts published here. I would also like to express my gratitude to Harry Meadley, my co-director at the exhibitions programme blip blip blip who kindly agreed to undertake the design of this catalogue.

I would particularly like to thank Maria Goriyackina, Liza Kuzyakova, Anna Piltsova, Liza Podolskaya, Olga Popova and Rita Sergeeva. It was a pleasure to work with this group of highly committed students in my first academic year in Russia.

Maria Goriyackina

Hello Maria, for those that do not know you, could you please tell me about yourself and what artists and ideologies influence you to make the artwork that you make?

I am a fine art student at British Higher School of Art and Design in Moscow. I live and work here. I have participated in several exhibitions in different cities in Russia, including Moscow and Ryzan. As I am still searching for a visual language, I work with lots of different mediums from traditional drawing to video. My work often focusses on the relationship between two dimensions and three dimensions.

Overall, there is one main principle at the core of my developing practice. This is honesty. Honesty and truth that spread into every aspect of the work. It entails being honest about intentions and meanings, being true to the materials and to the audience. Since, only in this way can something good be made.

My experience of other artists sometimes helps force me find this truth. Lately, I have become interested in: Rachel Whiteread, Andrea Longacre-White and Analia Saban.

Lots of strong female influences! How does gender identity motivate your artwork? Do you think being a woman artist is a challenge?

Honestly, I think just being an artist is a challenge and a privilege at the same time for both men and women. I prefer not to manipulate my gender into my work, because it is usually irrelevant. With regard to the artists that I named, it was just a coincidence that they are all women, but for this project, I found them to be the most helpful. I have been influenced by male artists too.

> Can you tell me about your process and how you create these abstract compositions?

It started as a cast of a broken paper cup. I used to preserve the broken things in plaster and then I realized that what I had was a preserved memory: a memory of the object itself, a memory about the object, its current absence, past presence, a memory about the process the object endured and a memory about its weakness.

Then it developed into white delicate embossing's made directly from the cups using a hand printing press. These were destroyed in the process of casting, not being able to endure the plaster. Therefore, the cast became a memory of a memory, another layer of absence, another layer of the past. It moves, develops just like a memory, builds up, layer by layer, one instant at a time.

I added ink to the embossing to emphasize the details and to make the 'memories' more vivid and clear. The prints came the last. Just like the embossing's they are made directly from the objects, imprinting their existence. It is a delicate print (in its nature reminiscent of a fingerprint) on the surface, it also leaves physical marks on the paper itself (embossing-like), being in itself some kind of a relief, existing in the world, occupying space, giving the memory weight and value.

The delicate drawings that are built up of pattern, texture and line that flow across a two-dimensional surface appear to be very impulsive. What are you researching or responding to through this intuitive mark making?

They are not impulsive at all, they are very monotonous, tactical and delicate, even tactile, urging for a touch or a closer look. All the marks are ways of preserving information about a previous state of the object, creating the new instant, destroying the previous configuration. They are the memory in itself.

So, these marks are a permanent trace of a moment that's been left in the past. What memories are you specifically trying to capture? Until now, I have been exploring developing a visual language and a technical means to express the representation of memory. Now I am searching for a subject. I want it to be small and personal. Not responding to my memory only, but universally personal. Something that connects to everyone, but when it comes to each person it becomes more individual and unique.

I agree, I think it is important to make work that your audience can connect and respond to. It is great to hear that you are considering how your artwork will be received in a gallery context. 'universally personal' is a thoughtprovoking term. It brings to mind Lubaina Himid and how she considers memories of the past in her work by addressing black history. Similarly, the photographer Don McCullin reflects on history by making work about war in Vietnam, Berlin and Northern Ireland. A personal favorite, Peter Blake encourages nostalgia in his artwork by creating memories of his childhood by referencing his collection of old toys. Do any of these practices share similarities to your intensions?

Yes, there is a tradition in Russia, to give to a baby a small silver spoon when it starts teething. It is simple. But it does have its importance, significance. As in a way a representation of one of the early 'memories'. This spoon is a memory of early life.

Why have you chosen to work with banal and ordinary objects? Is the everyday important to your practice?

I tend to work with the banal and the ordinary because it is my way of saying that not only do the big things matter, but that smaller things sometimes matter even more.

This approach is important. It is always gentle and small, it is created with a touch, intentional or unintentional. It is a 'finger-print' memory, deeply personal to the source as well as disconnected from it by absence. What materials do you use and why?

Up to this point I have concentrated on certain materials. When working in three dimensions I have often used plaster. I personally enjoy this material. In relation to this project it helps evoke memory as visually the white smooth casts in plaster have a visual connection to fossils. The ancient prints of birds and other creatures which are fossilized in the stone are memories also, just more distant.

I am also interested in resin because I like its translucency and smooth texture. Just like plaster, it has a connotation as an 'ancient memory preserver'. It has a connection to amber, which itself is a fossilized resin.

How do you think being in Manchester will influence your work?

I hope it will give more perspectives on how to develop the work further. Being in a foreign environment, being seen by people with a different mentality, and exhibiting alongside other artists, the work will gain more context, as well as elicit a response. Because no matter what meaning I intend for the work, the context, as well as the viewers' life experience, always brings something else.

Thank you Maria! It has been lovely to speak to you about your practice. I look forward to meeting you in person and seeing how your work progresses in preparation for the exhibition.





Elizaveta Kuzyakova

Who are you and what do you do?

Right now, I'm in my second year of art school. I would describe myself as an audio-visual artist working mainly in new media art formats: video, photography, sound, light, performance, installation. Traditional media such as painting, sculpture and collage are not in my field of interest.

I would say, that the main theme of my practice is the relationship between the human and nature, the questions of coexistence, mutual influence and perception. I deal a lot with tracing or marking my observations and my work allow a deeper experience of those findings, to pay attention to small details and to make shifts in our perception of reality. Another thing that fascinates me is that I like to be immersed in the inner state of being, a sort of meditation, in a surreal world, where sensations and thoughts merge with each other. It is important for me to leave enough space for private connections so that works tend to be subtle, minimalistic and opening doors/ raising questions, rather than creating rigid frameworks.

For me the main idea of the current project is to find new ways of feeling nature. Again it is about this shift in perception to the subtle: sounds, vibrations, ways to look at nature, to touch it. feel its temperature etc. It is a very personal practice but I don't consider it to be performative. For me the whole project can be broken into two aspects: on the one hand it is about my experience, the body and the location, but at the same time the photographs and the video create some tension between the act of me shaping forms and a viewer. It becomes possible for the viewer to reconnect to the natural space and to feel feedback within their own mind and body.

Who are the artist/writers who influence you?

Quite often I turn to the works by Jacob Kirkegaard, he is one of my main inspirations. However, this is more about the current sound works that I am makng, it doesn't have such a strong connection with the current project, even though I discovered him right before it.

Speaking about this project, one of the artists that has influenced me the most is Dennis Oppenheim, especially his work 'Parallel Stress' and also Carey Young's 'Body Techniques' series. I used these as reference points. During work on this project last year I was told be about Anna Mendieta's work and I also discovered VALIE EXPORT's 'Body Configurations' series. However, I became acquainted with them after the first series of photographs from Crimea was made, so in that sense they did not influence the work.



Anna Piltsova

Can you briefly explain the work you will be exhibiting or the work you are currently making?

I will show two paintings of common objects on a scale of 1:1, one depicts a floor hatch from the Moscow metro and the other is water hatch from Manchester.

My current project is about my neighbourhood Balashikha (a city in the Moscow suburbs). I look for the outlines of letters and details within the architecture around me, which I then photograph and draw. Last month I started an oil painting, which depicts a dilapidated brick pavement within the background, and a green dustbin in the foreground. The pavement in the painting was inspired by a park in Balashikha.

What is it about the everyday that fascinates you?

Often I draw and paint what others perceive as 'ordinary' or 'boring'. It is difficult to separate a particular attribute of the everyday that is the most important to me, rather it is a mixture of admiration for the colours, surfaces and shapes of simple things surrounding me. I also enjoy the element of observation that is involved in documenting the city's architecture.

> Describe the process involved within the preparation and creation of your paintings.

I often use acrylic and acrylic medium (slow-drying extender). Some paintings I've made have around twenty thin layers, which takes around two weeks to finish. The preparatory work actually takes more time than the act of painting itself. For example, during my metro project photos, measurements and sketches of 30 metro stations were taken. Ten of these were printed to scale, and only after this did I start making the work. As you have mentioned previously, you often try and realistically re-create everyday objects in your paintings. I know within my own practice I can get frustrated when I try and create a realistic depiction of something. Does this ever frustrate you?

Absolutely not, I very much enjoy the process involved. Even if I were to do something simple like prime a canvas with layers of white gesso, I would still enjoy it. I do also create more abstract paintings. In the case of my abstractions, I prefer the question 'why did you do that?' rather than 'what is it?'. In truth, I do not care what I draw or paint. It is the process that remains exciting to me.

I can compare the intensity of my emotions during painting, to what I felt when reading as a child. My favourite book was 'Carlson on the Roof' by Astrid Lindgren, which I begged be read to me before bed. When I was older and reread the book, the plot was familiar but my new-found skill of reading seemed wonderful. I still keep my three main children's books: 'Carlson on the Roof' and two ABC-books. I guess the joy I felt as a child when learning this new found skill, can be compared to the enjoyment I feel when I have to adapt and learn new skills in painting.

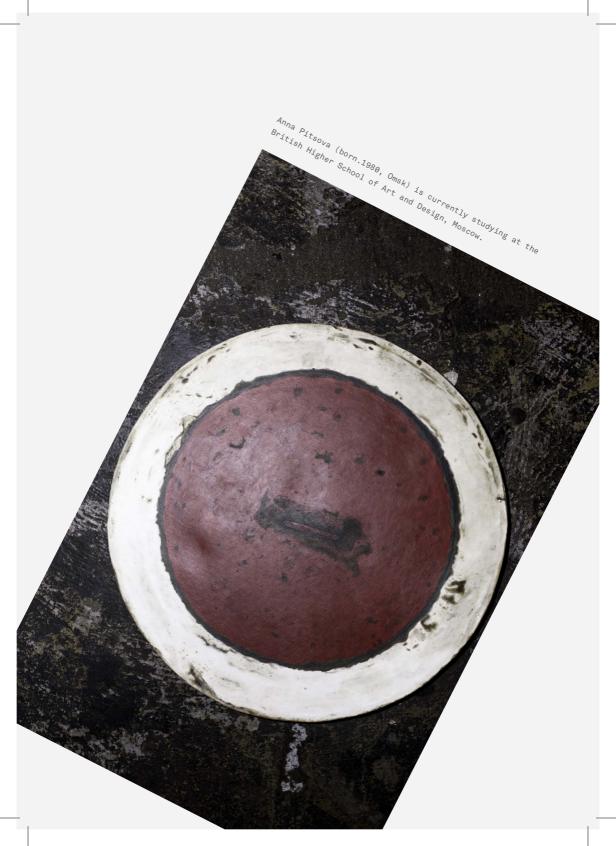
> Do you think attending an English speaking art school instead of a Russian speaking art school has affected your practice?

For me, art education in English is a good way of understanding the diversity of the modern art world today. The vast majority of art literature is written in English, and native speaking tutors often assist in defining certain terms and their specific meaning. The practice of writing an academic essay, thoroughly examining sources and selecting information informs my work.

What do you want people to feel when they encounter your work?

I want them to feel free to waste time on the common and the unusual and to become lost in the everyday.





Elizaveta Podolskaya

Can you briefly explain the work you intend to exhibit or the work you are currently making?

The work I'm intending to exhibit are outcomes of the two correlated projects I have been developing over the last year. Both projects employ appropriated objects as a source of imagery through a graphical trace. For the original project titled 'Extended Extraction' I worked with found anonymous objects that I had extracted from the top 'archaeological' layer of the city floor and analysed to produce two kinds of outcomes: mixed-media white prints on primed wood and relief sculptures cast in glycerin mass. The project I am currently working on has taken a lot from the previous one - it also deals with appropriation and tracing (in fact it utilizes the same tracing-drawing process I came up with originally). As with the other one it has gone through several stages of development from tracing to tonal drawing and is currently at a stage of multi-layered collages. I am now interested in working with everyday objects.

You mentioned that you enjoy 'the process of transforming a descriptive representation of a chosen object, to non-descriptive abstraction'. What is it about this process that excites you?

I find the idea of rationalised, informed abstraction very appealing, because, to my mind, it adds some sort of hidden dimension to a work of art that is (when it comes to abstraction at least) otherwise pretty detached from the world outside the studio or gallery. I like abstractions that have their roots in the non-art sphere of life, just as I enjoy works of art meddling with the areas of life where they are not particularly welcome. Furthermore, I believe, that whatever our mind is able to generate comes from something we have already see or heard, something that touched us and remained as a feeling or a malformed memory. An abstraction that is not in any way explained communicates to the viewer as an unspecified sign language; informed abstraction is, to me at least, closer to the language of speech.

What artists do you use as a reference within your work?

I look at Anselm Kiefer 's work quite a lot, as I find his use of material and mixedmedia objects very exciting. Also, the sculptures of Joseph Beuys, system- and appropriation- based art, artists, who work with sculptural casts, such as Asta Gröting. I wouldn't say that all of them I take as a direct reference, but they have definitely influenced my line of thinking.

Is there any reasoning/symbolism in your choice of the materials?

I mostly choose materials based on their physical and visual qualities and, because of how minimal my work tends to be, it can take a while to select the right combination of materials that work perfectly together. For example, I did not introduce any colour into my printed objects, as it was not justified, but I used a variety of white and transparent substances (such as white acrylic paint, white primer, and transparent texture gels) to have some sense of depth in an image through different textures and densities of the layers.

Another example is the relief sculptures, where the choice of material happened to be more conceptually than physically justified. The sculptures were cast in glycerin mass - the same thing used to make soap. It appealed to me because of the conflict between the source (the objects and the materials they were made of) and the qualities of the substance I chose to reproduce it. The objects were made to be durable, precise and cheap, so the materials were plastic, plywood, and corrosible metal, whereas glycerin demonstrated the qualities that were completely the opposite - it was soft, liquefiable, reactive to

temperatures and very hard to control. I found this contradiction of a form, taken from something dead and artificial and reproduced in something that is almost alive, very exciting.

What is the process involved behind producing your work?

As I tend to vary techniques and materials and often end up with series of outcomes made with several different media, I don't have a single process even for one project. On the other hand, I find it really interesting to somehow try and bring my manufactory processes together under one concept. For example, during my 'Extended Extraction' project I used tracings of found objects that I would transform somehow (by erasing or replicating certain elements) so that they are not identical to the object's outline yet still recognisable if compared, these tracings I would then turn into stencils and use for prints. So, I took an object, turned it into an indexical image, then altered the image in a regular way, and then created another object with it through layering some kind of substance on a wooden base. The same concept I wanted to transfer into 3D, and for me, the process behind the sculpture was a kind of 3D double of the 2D process of tracing | used for the prints: I made plaster casts (negative and positive) of some of my found objects and placed them into a rectangular mould that I would then use to cast the sculptures. Making plaster casts was necessary because it allowed me the same freedom of action as I had with the tracings of the objects. In the same manner, I would erase or reproduce multiple times certain elements in the drawings before making them into stencils. I would break plaster casts of my objects apart, rearrange them or sand away parts of them - something I would not be able to do with the plastic and metal objects themselves. This way, I took an object, reproduced it in neutral white matter, then deconstructed it and used it as a mould (a 3D stencil) to make another object through layering another kind of substance.

Do you think attending an English speaking art school instead of a Russian speaking art school has affected your practice?

It is not really a matter of spoken language, but an educational system that is completely different from what is found in other art schools in Russia. Unfortunately, it seems that, while having exceptional standards and programs of classical painting and drawing, most of art education facilities in Moscow are well behind, when it comes to contemporary art and design practices. I got primarily interested in applying for a Fine Art course at BHSAD because of the specific approach to the learning process, when research, analysis, and project development are prioritised over technical skills workshops (which are also available, but as a personal choice, not an obligation).

What do you want the audience to feel when they see your work?

The process, through which my objects come to exist, tends to take after the processes of natural transformations and emergences - a thing pressed into a softer material leaves marks that remain for years later, broken and polished by the elements, and then get covered with liquid something that hardens and makes artefacts of things that are no longer there (or never have been). I don't reference objects of nature in my work, but mimic the general pace of events, it is a simulation of nature, if that makes sense. So, I would like the viewers to look at my work in the same way they would look at objects of nature - in a more physical way, like when one looks at a piece of mineral behind glass and imagines how it must feel, what it consists of and what is inside of it.





Olga Popova

Can you tell me a little bit about your art practice and what motivates you to make work?

I realised that emotional involvement in the work is extremely important for me. For me, nothing good comes out in the art project if it is not hitting close to personal experience or interests. started working on eyesight conditions because I, for one, have some perception issues, which shape the way I see the world around me. Blur was the closest characteristic of a picture to me, and also the simplest. It is also relatable everyone is familiar at least with an idea of unclear sight so I decided to explore it. I believe that it is an incredible visual and artistic tool which allows us to hide or, on the contrary, reveal something.

Which artists are you most interested in at the moment?

Being inspired by Antony Gormley's Blind Light work, I wanted to create something spatial that interacts with the audience members. In addition to Gormley, my work has been inspired by Gerhard Richter and I am fascinated by Francis Bacon. Now as I am exploring photography, I am interested in Gregory Crewdson, William Eggleston and Boris Mikhailov. I'm really interested in how you bring your experience of a distorted perception to the work. Can you briefly tell me what you are planning for this exhibition?

For the exhibition I am planning three to four works that would be placed all around and maybe outside the space. The work is very site specific. Originally, they were mounted on Dibond (aluminum sheets with some material in between) and works had wooden frames on the back, so I could attach them anywhere. But this time I think it would be better to use something foamy, so it can be produced faster and cheaper.

What do you want people to feel looking at your work?

I want them to feel surprised that there is something actually there, on the wall. And I would like people to feel curious so they approach the work and figure out what they see.

What is it like getting your work out there? Are there many opportunities to exhibit your work in Moscow?

We have a lot of galleries and a growing amount of contemporary exhibition spaces, we also sometimes have open calls for artists and designers, but I think that the key factor is just being persistent and actually contacting people, suggesting collaborations, etc. So I guess if you are willing to show your work it is possible to find a way and a place. But of course contacts and acquaintances play a huge role.



Margarita Sergeeva

What are the current ideas behind your work?

My practice is based on pure sound and noise research, how it is connected to emotions and could be represented with imagery or photography. I am working with different forms of sound and how people perceive it in different surroundings (places, light conditions, space).

What is the process in which you work?

I am very much into system based working processes. It is not supposed to be obvious or at least noticeable, because that is not the main point, but just to structure the work itself.

What work are you creating for the exhibition?

At this moment, I'm working on a sound based piece, which contains a quartertone scale as a system for sound recording and creation. This is supposed to be the first part of my sound piece, which later will be developed with digital post processing of a sequence of prime numbers. This can be described as the audio part of my work. I also would like to add some visual background. It will be represented with digital and film photographs.

How do you get started in the studio?

I don't work in the studio a lot, because I always go outside and look for new interesting locations with unexpected noise, and the same thing for my images. So, I spend more time in the dark room or just with my laptop and different pieces of technical sound equipment for the sound processing. I can work anywhere. Most of the time my working process is very spontaneous because of my sensation and perception of the environment. What artists are significant to you and why?

I always look for new experience and knowledge, especially in the art world or the music scene, so there were, and still are, lots of different people who influence my work and inspire me. In terms of sound those would be Thom Yorke, Yasunao Tone, Ivan Wyschnegradsky and Alfred Schnittke. For the visual element - Johan Österholm. Christian Boltanski. particularalry his work 'Vitrine of Reference', Brittany Nelson and Matthew Brandt. All of them are guite different, but at the same time work with a sense of memory, experience of space and comparison of different media.

Do you ever return to the locations you have visited to see whether you may have different experiences or perceptions? Also, how do you think your experience/perceptions of a location would change if you were to repeat visiting it?

Well, most of my experience depends on the location itself. I rarely come back after I have made all the recordings. I want to have a unique time/space experience, and as many of my recordings were made spontaneously, for example, on my way to the studio, they became very time-based. I never meant this to be a "repetitive" activity (in terms of location). I guess my perception would be different if I returned to a location with a specific purpose several times.

Have you considered how the sound may be experienced on its own or do you feel it is essential for there to be images and film alongside the sounds you record?

For my previous project, images and objects were as essential for the perception of locations as the sound pieces. As for now, I have been analysing the necessity of imagery and have attempted eliminating the visual part, but then I came back to it. I figured, sound cannot exist without a material source (recording/transferring/ playback). Therefore, I suppose that some kind of object/imagery/ visualisation may be, if not essential, quite important.

Although you say work is spontaneous, what do you think makes you decide to start recording sound/photographing your surroundings?

Usually, something catches my attention (bright light, unexpected noise, some unusual natural event or found object) and makes me stop for a moment and take a closer look.

Are you more interested in your own reactions to an experience of a location or how a viewer will experience what you are exhibiting?

My presence is not represented in my work, as it is based on a very detached system of documentation, so I just want to produce an immersive experience for a viewer and put them into an unfamiliar environment.

To you as the artist, which do you think is more significant: the experience and atmosphere of the locations you visit and sounds you record? Or how these locations and sounds are perceived and experienced in the gallery?

As my work does not represent my locations in a realistic manner, they are meant to be experienced on their own and not directly connected to the place. Furthermore, for my current activities, I am not as involved with a location but with generated sound and comparison of analogue and digital ways of playback and reproduction. (e.g. conflict and coexistence of different versions of recording and presenting sound).



Moscow Calling Maria Goriyackina Elizaveta Kuzyakova Anna Piltsova Elizaveta Podolskaya Olga Popova Margarita Sergeeva 03/05/19 - 09/05/19

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