

APALAZZOGALLERY

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ALEXANDRA SUKHAREVA & DENIS KOSHKAREV

Denis: I suggest starting from afar. Why is it necessary to argue first, to insist on one's own, in order for a conversation to begin? It's as if something like that has to happen.

Alexandra: Sometimes it seems to me that this condition is an example of the world's latency.

D: One of the problems that I see, and perhaps that's why I started drawing, is because at some point I got tired of arguing. Tired of trying to prove something to someone. There's some functionality in it... And in drawings, I often start with the face. Here, for example, I wanted to depict some sort of stupidity. Impenetrability.

A: You mean this drawing, the one with a cigarette butt?

D: Yes, well... this one, this one, and that one...

A: But that one isn't stupid, he's suffering.

D: He's stupid, but stupidity... it's myself, too. They are stupid and so am I. But at the same time, you go on and keep doing it, you... can't stop living.

A: Then why do you emphasize stupidity?

D: Because it's like an object in itself. A completely autonomous object. Impenetrable. I'm not trying to draw it, I just need some offset simplicity. But the elementary itself is invisible.

A: Wait, did you say, "you can't stop living"?

D: ...if I could speak, I wouldn't draw. But I definitely don't mean to teach the person who looks at the drawings.

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D: When I create my works, there's enjoyment... I enjoy these images. Sometimes I ask myself, "Denis, if the world changed for the better, if we entered a new era, would you continue making these drawings? Or do you belong to your time period, do you find joy in it?"

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A: Hmm, what if you're playing hide-and-seeK? When you play... with masks of stupidity... under the mask you're playing with something that can threaten you. But that's just a hypothesis.

D: Am I pretending to be a hose?

A: I don't know. But the game of doubles, "They're stupid and so am I," is based on desire that's often destructive. Peter Weiss's early self-portraits, they are heroic. There, a young man looks at you from the cardboard like a hero. And this heroic pose is like camouflage for what could have represented terror for the artist in real life.

D: I try to make it funny and absurd in my drawings. There is no enemy in them.

A: But it's possible to not know what you're doing and keep doing it.

D: Well, okay... When I sit down to draw, I feel confronted. It's a strange sensation. I want to snatch my drawings away from someone, not to instrumentalize them.

A: You once talked about paint... At some point, you realized it existed, unlike yourself. It could be so present that it overshadowed you. Is that what you mean?

D: Yes, the force of denial can be strong. In this coldness... like, I don't know, the coldness of an abstractionist work when you start feeling as if the paint itself started talking to you. The painting is a real object, very real, and you're no longer as real. It can be cleansed of human "symbolisms" up to this level. That's just it, a dead-end. There's nothing beyond that point. Only matter: paint, canvas, fibers... Wall paint in Moscow hallways has the same effect. Streaks of turquoise oil paint. Something so raw and blatantly present that it creates an air flow into the non-existent.

A: It seems to me that in the drawings, there's no such radical approximation to what we're talking about. It's rather a missed reality. A recording of stupor, retardation. Despite what you're saying how there's no enemy in the drawings... this stupor seems to contain some personal disgust? But it's a familiar form of disgust: intestines, recurring gangrene-like growths, blackened noses... it's in these details where time is spent.

D: Some kind of biological cycle in its bare form.

A: ...and you add a hillbilly baseball hat and legs to it.

D: I can't say if I love this "bare life" or not. It just exists. Did Kafka love his characters? This life is impenetrable, in and of itself.

A: But it seems that the impenetrability of matter, paint, or, let's say, a mask, is already a concealment in itself. Kafka? He loved them because he gave them ambiguity.

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D: ...but with stupidity, it's as if there was no subject. Yet my characters are also martyrs. Comical martyrs, torn by desires.

A: You know that "martyr" as well as "shaheed" means "witness"?

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D: Do you have a specific goal?

A: I have a feeling that stands behind the canvases.

D: What is it?

A: It's a feeling of light, a yellowish hue. I remember Van Gogh's billiard room with the threatening light from the lamps. Or Kirchner, perhaps. One of my early works in terms of understanding why I use chlorine was "Doxa." I was wandering around the ZIL Cultural Center in Moscow while it was under reconstruction. There were hills with piles of bricks, and there was a blown-up monastery nearby. I realized I was in an environment with no way out of meaningless cycles of endless renovations. I encountered an all-devouring indifferent environment.

D: Chlorine, even its smell... it's omnipresent for me. And there's indifference in it.

A: Indifference, indeed, is impenetrable to thought. But chlorine doesn't burn anything. Everything burns without it.

D: You discard many elements from the images. Does that mean there's still an aspiration?

A: This canvas appeared without much effort. Last spring there was a time when I could be getting ready to go somewhere, I'd step out onto the street or into another room, and suddenly realize that I didn't remember at all and, in the end, couldn't even imagine what I was doing there. I would pause, not understanding why I rushed there, as if I had something to do, but the initial goal would be gone by this point, or maybe it had never existed in the first place. In those moments, I would look around the room and see that I didn't understand the meaning of simple things anymore... like this shape [a lamp], for example. I didn't know what their purpose was. Later on, I realized that my home was somehow erased by absurdity.

D: Here, it's working with clichés. And we feel ourselves at home in clichés. Clichés undergo something here. And there's also an unattainable desire. And perhaps, not everything is erased?

A: Well, for example, I cast a shadow!

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But the house was in that heat haze from the beginning. What do you think, which drawing could it be paired with?

D: That image is actually swarming, it's too dense...

A: There is a drawing... this one, for example. It's just that the other one features characters..

D: In general, your works tend to drag us somewhere, but in this one, there's a stop. There's no corridor, no path... It's like, "Here we are," so to speak.

A: I don't know. Regarding aspiration, you asked... This work is compressed. It was actually done in half an hour. During that time, I didn't feel like an animal. Generally, I refuse to work on pieces that are agonizingly thought out—these days, a quick work is better.

D: In elaborate works, we get sick of ourselves. And besides, it's stolen time, those thirty minutes.

A: And do vectors within the drawing matter to you? How do you usually spend that stolen time?

D: It's often wandering within a specific image here and now.

A: Are you refusing distance?

D: Maybe to make them nearsighted, I make them just like that—in the moment. This "branching" also has to do with my ignorance, I wait for a chance.

A: Chance?

D: I have properly studied various techniques, the feeling of making things right, and I'm trying to escape this feeling. That's why I let my hand wander. And the chaos it creates... I cling to it in order to get amazed. And yes, this astonishment, this air flow, needs a windowsill, a framework.

A: Once I was in the Munich Pinakothek, walking there with two relatives who wanted me to explain everything to them on the spot. And at some point, I ran away and found myself in the Rubens room. I thought, "What a rogue." I saw the power of audacity, of astonishment, which I had never seen before. Rubens had always been presented to me within the framework of "style". And suddenly, I faced the opposition to his time and perhaps to the style itself, to the very idea of style... Rubens's draft turned out to be something indefinable. It was so funny! In a sense, I saw something that doesn't exist.

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A: I'm searching for something. And it often seems to me that I can only search through differentiation, that is, radical differentiation, and not the triviality of nuances. It's like "this exists, but that doesn't." And it's the absent that matters to me. The absence can't be lost.

What happened with the light was similar to the removal of differences. I was completely disoriented. It's the light that coaxes a sprout from a seed—we all know that. But the light, the way I got to see it at home, frightened me. It could no longer illuminate, and hence, differentiate. And yet it was omnipresent, even in the shadows. That's why my canvases are also samples of slight luminous yellowness, they contain that indifference: "everything exists."

As for latency, regarding this strange feeling of light, I slowly began to connect it with other things. For example, with your drawings. But that's about desire...

D: With my drawings?

A: At first, I saw plain stubbornness in them. That was at first. And then, you yourself spoke about the impossibility of dialogue since childhood... I connected that with tonal indifference, when all things are like each other's doubles. Those irradiating waves of absurdity, delirium. It's like... such stubbornness implies that someone else besides me...

D: ...it seems like there's not everything. And you try to fill that "not everything"...

A: And are you there, among everything that is there? Or not?

D: The total "everything" is sort of fluid. The light that makes all things gray, totally illuminated... That's why stubbornness is simply necessary. You search for an object through stubbornness, which you can lean on... and study it, love it. Love it so much that a semantic solidity emerges.

A: Perhaps that's why a simple language is needed, just a pencil on paper?

D: To me, these drawings are like slices of animation. But throughout my life, through work, a lot of tools have emerged, and understanding how they work...

A: ...and their impact and consequences...

D: Yes, ...it takes too much time. And there's a feeling that the more complex the tool, the less time you have. And also, works that are simplistic in their making seem to fall out of the reality of intricately made things, our reality.

A: Like strangers?

D: You approach the work and you understand how it's done.

A: On one hand, you understand, but on the other hand, you don't.

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D: Yes, thanks to this simplicity, you see that, yes, they took a canvas and poured chlorine on it. You can imagine that in your head. But working with the actual image? You understand the technique, but achieving the work, the tension within the system of that image?

For me, it's associated with a sense of disappointment.

A: The technological complexity of the world?

D: Yes, its repressiveness.

A: Today, a friend sent me a poem by Ingeborg Bachmann, "Should I // dress up a metaphor // with an almond blossom?" Should I collide stanzas for the sake of striking form?.. Here it is, read it. The meaning of simple words comes when I trace the line with my nose along the very bottom.

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D: I struggle with my own seriousness, with being cautious towards myself... Irony. It's just that only an idiotic consciousness takes itself and its own life very seriously. An ironic attitude towards oneself seems to have a chance to resist the hypnotism of life. Reality is arbitrary. And a serious attitude towards this reality is like expecting a sequence, as if that sequence is about to happen. It's amazing, yesterday I remembered more of what I wanted to say...

When we first met, I used to wash my paintings in the washing machine. You saw my old drawings back then, and I was able to remember how I once used to draw without caring about anyone's opinion. And how back then, a million years ago, I was attracted by images of outsiders with their incredible longing for life. Unwavering losers.

A: Are you joking?

D: No. Reality is a dead rat, dangling by its tail. You need to catch the dead rat in the spring, not swim breaststroke next to it.

A: You repeat your images. The ones you keep coming back to over and over again.

D: They are still different works. I understand my desire, but when a drawing is a "success", it often turns out bad because my desire has been fulfilled.

A: Fulfilled desires often lack meaning. And it seems that in the horizon of desire, any desire at all, moral foresight is absent.

D: What do you mean by moral foresight?

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A: We often don't foresee the consequences of our desires... What event they can lead us to. Why did I think that?...

It's hard to express, but there's something akin to ambivalence, when you are both the criminal and a witness to the crime. My methods can hardly be separated from that.

D: Drawings are my means of defense.

A: There you go, you said it yourself now... But any apotropaion is simply a monument to desire and, ultimately, junk.

D: Yes, that's true. But when you look at the drawings, at this junk, for the second and third time, and you fall in love with them...

A: ...it seems to me that you're falling in love not with them per se, but with what you missed. Or rather, not what you missed, but what was only retrospectively given, what was there when you created the work. We can look at the drawings after a month, a year... and unlike a memorable photograph, they are capable of reminding us of what is absent. What is not allowed for consideration... not permissible in your destiny.

D: And you understand that it can't be replicated. It's just like life that leads you in your work, and you say, "Yes, my dear."