



GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING **LES MOULINS** HABANA

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 Open from Wednesdays to Sundays from noon to 6pm and by appointment.

ZHANNA KADYROVA

Resistance of Matter

Curated by Elena Sorokina

Opening on Sunday, October 13, 2019, as from noon
 Exhibition until December 29, 2019

The exhibition features a selection of projects by Zhanna Kadyrova and uses as its starting point the relationship between architecture and mosaic in Ukraine and other countries. Monumental mosaic panels once often decorated the concrete “grey cubes” of the socialist housing projects, institutions, and factories that were built between the 1960s and 1980s. Today, this architecture is in decay or transition. Buildings are often abandoned or caught between life and death. They are undergoing all kinds of transformations, restructuring strategies, and the pressures of so-called “urban rationalisation”. Curiously, the mosaic panels or ceramic tiles decorating these buildings display a much stronger physical resistance to the effects of time, the absence of public interest, and the lack of renovation and care than the buildings themselves. To all appearances, they are more durable than the architecture they are supposed to decorate.

This astounding endurance is due to their material. The tiles are made from smalt, a word that comes from “schmelzen” or “melt”, and names a kind of opaque glass known to humanity for millennia. Smalt was famously used for mosaics in the Byzantine basilicas and later in orthodox churches as the chief medium for divine spaces and Christian saints. Like glass, smalt has an ambiguous status between materiality and immateriality. Paradoxically enough, in the late 1950s, smalt started to spread all over the Soviet territories. Sometimes combined with ceramic tiles, this privileged material of sacred spaces was destined to cover grey facades with images of workers, athletes, cosmonauts, marvels of industrialisation or wonders of atomic energy. Kadyrova’s project “Monumental Propaganda” explores this paradoxical encounter between concrete, the foundational stone of modernity – cheap, addictive and polluting – and its “Other”, smalt – exclusive, secret, expensive, and almost indestructible.

Further examining uses of material in Kadyrova’s work, the exhibition connects other examples of “modern matter” with more ancient archetypes. Smalt and ceramic tiles, glass, concrete and asphalt coexist in the exhibition, invoking various histories of manmade (wonder) materials, their impacts, their dangers, and our current addiction to them. Often, these materials accompanied the dramatic transformations of the 20th century.

In the “Second Hand” project, Kadyrova uses tiles, which are predominantly taken from destroyed or abandoned sites. More specifically, they come from the Hospital Antituberculoso Joaquin G. Lebreo in Havana, Cuba, and two former Soviet Ukrainian factories. The first is the silk factory “Darnitsa”, and the second is Kiev Film Copy Factory, which produced film reels to be projected in the cinemas of the fifteen republics. Both were typical city-factories of the Soviet era, monsters of modernity, life-as-labor facilities responsible for everything - work and leisure, marriages and burials, food and fun. One produced film stock, the currently extinct analog matter of the moving image, a highly perishable and inflammable “dangerous material”. The other over-flooded the country with “artificial silk”, of which some varieties are also cellulose based. Different brands of these synthetic or cellulose based fibres served for women’s dresses and cosmonaut wear alike. Today, one factory has been destroyed and the other has been turned into a commercial centre.

As for the hospital in Havana, one of the principal sites of modern Cuban medicine, the country’s major emblem and pride, this closed down after the Soviet subsidies ceased. Today, it is progressively being taken apart by the inhabitants of the city, piece by piece and stone by stone. It is also being repurposed for other uses, for example as a cruising site for the local gay community. The artist

collected the rare remaining tiles from the hospital to produce her work - a new addition to the series "Second Hand".

Through the diverse stories of disappearing buildings, or buildings turning again into "raw material", the exhibition highlights Kadyrova's long-standing interest for recycling and re-use. She includes in her work remnants, vestiges or relics of modernist industrial architecture, sites of "material labor" and sites of production, transformed today into places of consumption. In the context of the exhibition, her objects, which often recycle this "matter of the 20th century", resonate at once as monuments and anti-monuments. They reflect on the consequences of human activities which are often far removed from their initial emancipatory ideals. Film reels, ceramic and synthetic fibres, smalt and concrete buildings here provide a broader frame for reflection on the wide range of the environmental and social consequences of the materials we invent and use, and the artistic responsibility to engage with these questions.

Elena Sorokina

Zhanna Kadyrova was born in Brovary, Ukraine in 1981 and nowadays lives and works in Kyiv. Over the past years she has held solo exhibitions in Galleria Continua, Havana and San Gimignano; Bureau for Cultural Translations, Leipzig and the Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria among others. She participated in collective exhibitions at: Garage, Moscow; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Centquatre, Paris; Ukrainian Pavilion, 55th and 56th Venice Biennale; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; Polish Institute, Dusseldorf; Saatchi Gallery, London; Architekturzentrum, Vienna; Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt; Zimmerstraße, Berlin; Museum of Moscow, Moscow; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Izolyatsia, Platform for Cultural Initiatives and the Donetsk Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw among others. She won the Miami Beach Pulse Prize, PinchukArtCentre Prize in 2011 and, in 2013, the Kazimir Malevich Artist Award. In 2019 Kadyrova takes part in the International Exhibition of the 58th Venice Biennale curated by Ralph Rugoff, as well as the Ljubljana Graphic Biennale, curated by Slavs and Tatars.

Elena Sorokina is a Paris-based curator and art historian. She was a curator of the HISK (High Institute of Fine Arts, Belgium). Between 2015-2017, she was a curatorial advisor of documenta 14 in Athens/Kassel. Sorokina organized exhibitions and projects for Museum of Modern Art (Paris, France), Centre Pompidou (Paris, France), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, Holland), BOZAR (Brussels, Belgium), White Columns (New York, USA), YBCA (San Francisco, USA), among others. Involved in numerous exhibitions and publications, Sorokina writes for Artforum, Flash Art, Cabinet Magazine, Manifesta Journal, Moscow Art Magazine, etc.