



B I V I N S Y R Y S N I M I B G A L L E R Y

LIDIA VITKOVSKAYA

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A technological component is very important in the works by Lidia Vitkovskaya. That was my first impression – while standing before one of her objects I thought: it certainly reminds me of EAT. Of course there was no direct links with Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT), the famous New York group (despite today's relevance of the 60-ies). Simply the spectacular, thoroughly realized techno responds to the creative nature of the artist. The word “control” is frequent in the titles of her works, and it is not an accident. It is important to Vitkovskaya to retain control over the quality. But it concerns not only the perfectionism of the technological realization of the work – or rather, not in the first place. In the first place it concerns her own consciousness. Vitkovskaya is a modern artist: her mode of life is not the permanent self-expression, a continuous outburst. Her consciousness is ‘projective’: it's a special processuality – direction of the artist's consciousness towards a ‘project’, existing through a project, from one project to another. The pulsing character of creation of the works as a controllable process. One more observation concerning the idea of control: the artist needs to direct spectators' reactions, to synchronize the mode of perception with the time mode of the narrative realization. Yes, despite all technological gimmicks (touch screen, transparent screen, other interactive techniques) Vitkovskaya is a narrative artist. She likes good old craft of telling stories. Another thing is an absolutely contemporary understanding of what she means when she says ‘narrative’. But first of all – some moments in the artist's biography. Lidia graduated with a diploma from Moscow State University, she was major in sociology. The width of her interests was evident even in her student years: she eagerly attended ‘non-professional’ lectures, sometimes in other schools. As a result one year later she enrolled in Higher courses film writers and film directors, the directors department headed by a famous director Alexander Mitta. After that - New-York Academy of Film with a producer's diploma. In Russia she found time to work as a journalist. As I understand, it all went into a piggy-bank of story-telling. It's so interesting – this feeling of sophisticated ‘techno’ that I mentioned in the beginning, and this ‘screen-writeness’, this emanation of the narrative. Lidia really found herself at the very edge of the most interesting phenomena of today. The ‘animism’ theory is popular now in the West as a new way to ponder over things: as though beyond their materialism, their object side, their thingness. Of course, such “return of the object” takes part in the context of “the power of the commodity in capitalism, alongside capitalism's tendency to reduce human subjects to the status of objects” (1). But if one steps back from the leftist phraseology, one sees the meaning of this: the animism is the archaic, totem ‘living part’ of the material world, not connected with its primal function and the consumer's resource. Of course, today's ideas of animism are not so new (sufficient is to remember the “wooden postcard” by J.Beus), but in our case very timely especially in the connection with the narrative. (“The narrative discourse can exist as long as it tells a certain story,”- G.Genette). I think, Vitkovskaya in some of her works happened to be at the crossroads of these two trends – animism and narrative. I don't want judge – was it a reflective decision in the context of today's tendencies in art. Or – a sensuous impulse brought out by her soul's movement. But she is there. Let's discuss her work that seems to be quite simple from the outside, all the more so, as its unsophisticated, “postcardish” title «Wish you were here» seems to bring us down to earth. It's a suitcase as a ready-made. Authenticity and use of the object is ascertained by stickers. There is a transparent screen built in the suitcase with an image of an airplane. Unsteady, shown as if through a fogged-up

airplane window – representing itself – an image of a moving airplane. That’s where the story-telling begins. The use of an old suitcase is not something rare in art. Contemporary art having to deal with things conceptual and indirect, just adores used suitcases, old shoes, used clothes etc – as a resource of something “human, too human” (Let’s recall for example “Black Market” by Rauschenberg (1961): the artist demands the spectators to take out “personal effects” out of a suitcase and replace them with others). Understandable is the compulsory appellation to inexhaustible literary narrative connected to all these used things: Marshak, Nabokov, Salinger – each and every reader has his own story to tell ‘about the suitcase’... But an image of an airplane on a screen – no matter what media – is not very difficult either. So, the associations are predetermined, the plot is clear from the very starting point. So why does the object work in its own way? Why all the things that are well known find their place, begin to exist in a new dimension? In short, what is interesting in this story with its foretold development? I’ll try to find out. If we talk about the plot, about the story-telling we must at least in passing touch upon the “narrative turn” that colours today the humanitarian way of thinking. After structuralism distrust towards “big stories” this way of thinking turned to a short story as a form of organization of the existing reality, or rather narrative has become that organizing and structure-forming instance that helps to examine the “outer” reality. I’ll quote only two more or less conventional meanings of the term “narrative” which are used in academic circles. The first one, the broad one implies an “altered state of consciousness”.

The second one takes into account not only the “altered state” but also the transfer of this altering by way of some narrative instance” (Wolf Schmid. *Narratologie*). So, the “narrative instance” is an object, a symbiosis of the retro-industrial ready-made and of the modern technological ready-made (an old suitcase and a screen). (In another work – “Katarinka”, this instance-object is an vintage movable barrel organ, no matter authentic or recreated, but the one that incorporates its own “techno” – a screen. The object is a messenger and a message in itself. The broadcast of a very expected message – that of a sentimental and old-fashioned kind. But the event of the story, an image on the screen behind a hanging curtain, should exactly erase the expected and propose something different. Its components broadcast their trivial stories: the suitcase, one may presume, tells “about itself”, the image of the airplane does exactly the same thing: something like “all systems of the aircraft are functioning properly”. Of course, here lies a potential possibility of any suspense (even of the Lockberry type: a suitcase with a bomb inside in a belly of an airplane, etc). But the potential of the external plot is not (or in this case) in demand. Here is another story. The image of the plane (as if in flight, in the state of flight – that’s why all these gimmicks with then transparent screen) – in the belly of the suitcase. The “anthropological”, mutually self-directed, non-cultural scream. There is no dialog in “Prohibited” whatsoever. The spectator is supposed to stand between the screen, between the guns aimed at him. It is he, and not the digital shooters who is that storytelling instance that – according to the theory – is necessary for comprehensive dialog. And the spectator who finds him – or herself “in the line of fire” has a lot to tell about his feelings. It is customary to expect certain results – social, informative, educational, didactic, recreational (the game itself) and other, from the participative art (the art of involvement, of participating). Vitkovskaya does not betray these expectations. In “Digital Suprematism” and in “Classic hopscotch” she poses the tasks that are educational and at the same time vitalizing the creative thinking. But the propaedeutics in this case is combined with the direct creation: The level of appellation to the original sources is very high, this “growing into the alien matter” could itself be a summary of the piece of work.

The project “Voting with our feet” poses different problems. (Who said that the participative art must always use the most new technologies? Here we deal with traditional painting “on molds of feet of famous artists”, I don’t know if that is true or it’s all part of the game). The process of group painting of these molds creates micro-teams and at the same time – a penetrating dialogism, a situation of operative rapprochements and repulsions. Everyone in a group motivates his – or her – choice, creative and educational (an attempt to show their attitude towards an artist by way of drawings on their legs and feet), politicized (the slogan’s original meaning was linked to the elections), aesthetic and independent, linked to games, etc. And again, the most important for the artist in the context of participativeness is the resource of story-telling.

As I have already said, Vitkovskaya does not always rely on “techno”. The main thing is she always perfectly calculates the result, the outcome. Even if the result is the absence of outcome. The “Toad a la Russe” sculpture is an image of a two-bodied toad, and the bodies grown together are of different color. The witty object brings forth a directional stream of associations. Of course, there is a theme of ambivalence of the image of a toad in the Russian

folklore and literature: the conversion of a toad into a princess and vice versa. And also political, even heraldic associations: two-heads-ness, etc. The artist does not elaborate on her position, the mission of the image is to last, constantly broadcast the associative array and the very possibility of spectators' choice.

Vitkovskaya told me that she likes her work «Woman.net 2011». A woman's figure in bondages. Nothing digital – a traditional sculpture with arms and legs tangled up in ropes. Bondages – everything that ties a modern woman up: family, routine, social, gender, career commitments and who knows what else. Today's life adds to them social networks: virtual bondages are no less strong than those of everyday life. The contents of the meaning every spectator will find for himself, I don't want to barge in. I'll just point to the realization of the project. In her complex technological works Vitkovskaya often turned to, let's say, the virtual for the animation, animation of the material. Here the rough material, the tactile (rope, epoxy resin, etc) appeals to the virtual. The artist broadens her abilities. New stories “after Vitkovskaya” are in store for us.

Translated by Andrei Gavrilov

LIDIA VITKOVSKAYA

Born 1977, Russia

EDUCATION

1999 PhD, Sociology, Moscow State University
New York Academy of Film, Producer
Journalist's Union
1997 Literator's Union

AWARDS

2015 "Special Excellence" Prize, London Biennale

BIENNALE AND EXHIBITIONS

2015 X Florence Biennale (Florence, Italy)
London Art Biennale 2015 (London, UK)
2013 "The Controller Compromises," Special Project of 5 Moscow Biennale
2013 "Born to Fly . . . And Crawl," Russian State Museum (St. Petersburg, Russia)
2011 Cyberfest, digital art festival, State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg, Russia)
"Personal Transfokator," Special Project
"Kill Einstein," Special Project of the 4th Moscow Biennale (Moscow, Russia)
Special Project, Art Moscow International
Art Fair (Moscow, Russia)
2009 Universal Art Fair, parallel program of Moscow Biennale (Moscow, Russia)
"To Be Dead," Special Project, Universal Art Fair (Moscow, Russia)
Art Miami, Everything is Art Gallery (Miami, FL)
Art Riga, Everything is Art Gallery (Riga, Latvia)
Affordable Art Fair, Everything is Art Gallery (Seoul, South Korea)
Affordable Art Fair, Everything is Art Gallery (Singapore)
Concept Art Fair, Gallery Marcoux (Miami, FL)
Kolner Liste, Everything is Art Gallery (Cologne, Germany)
Aqua Art Miami, Everything is Art Gallery (Miami, FL)
Context Art Miami, Dmitriy Semenov Gallery (Miami, FL)
Art Moscow International Art Fair, Dmitriy Semenov Gallery (Moscow, Russia)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014 Zverev Centre of Contemporary Art (Moscow, Russia)
2012 Digital installation "ME," Central House of Artists (Moscow, Russia)
2011 «Moth» Central House of Artists (Moscow, Russia)
2008 Centre of Contemporary Art Wynzavod (Moscow, Russia); multimedia project «Digital suprematism»

COLLECTIONS

Works are in collections of The State Russian Museum and in private collections in Europe and North America.