

Andrew Gilbert & Anna Parkina

Sacred Ambush is full of Parrots Screaming

curated by Dmitry Zabavin

8. 9. – 20. 10. 2012

1. This exhibition is remarkable in that it is taking place at all. Indeed, these two artists are so different from each other that it is difficult to imagine their work juxtaposed in a single exhibition.

Andrew Gilbert's illustrations are like artwork from children's books. They show the world for its cruelty using childlike detail and color, revealing scenes of shocking violence in contrast to this, the multi-layered collages of Anna Parkina are deep and laden with hidden extralinguistic meanings. Perhaps the only thing that links the two artists is the subject of war as a metaphor for mundane life.

2. It might seem that Andrew deliberately and needlessly presses the point, trying to discourage us with exaggerated yet ubiquitous scenes of violence. But Andrew, whether it seems odd or not, really draws on nothing more than what is commonly accepted as a rendering of the "hermetic" world, which tries to be instilled in children in school, and which has long since taken root in our subconscious as axiomatic. (It's that world, in which nothing comes from nothing and nothing goes to non-being.) The only difference is that Andrew describes this world more honestly than we would have liked: he shies from nothing and hides nothing. As we have already said, according to "hermetic logic, the world doesn't leave anything to nonbeing. Therefore, evil, even if we can manage to punish it, can never be eliminated. This world recognizes evil as integral. Therefore, in life in this world feelings of fear and anxiety are integral. Anxiety from an unpredictable future. And in fact, maybe no other picture can more precisely express this state than an image of war (particularly relevant is Andrew's work, "The Soldier's nightmare").

3. In a way, this theme is reflected in every part of the exhibition. But the peak of expression is certainly reached in the exhibition's central work, the video entitled "Dream of the Volunteer." As the name implies, it is a depiction of dancing girl in a white representing the dreams of the volunteers: primarily it is a picture of Victory triumphant over Evil, and ultimately an image of victorious Righteousness, and Righteous revenge. This idea is reinforced in the second depiction evidently speculating on the form of the girl. I have in mind the image of Motherland in a war propaganda poster in which her sons are summoned to take revenge in her defense. However, upon closer examination, the picture this dancing girl reveals something suddenly from an entirely unexpected quarter. Maybe it is not immediately apparent, but this picture completely unconsciously resonates on the subject of Salome. The girl, who seduced King Herod by her dance, and demanded the head of John the Baptist as a reward.

The fact is that John had revealed the mother's infidelity against her husband and called on her to abandon her sinful life. Salome's offense was basically to take revenge on John for having her mother tormented by a guilty conscience so that she could not continue to lead her dissolute life as before.

What is there to add? At issue is a point in which empathy for the mother, by itself an uncontested foundation for just negotiation, is transformed into hatred for truth. Separately, it is noteworthy that, in both cases, revenge is undertaken. What is it? Coincidence?

By combining in one image of the character Motherland with the image of Salome, Anna brings us to a sharp edge, where the difference between "revenge for evil" and "hatred of the good" is lost.

4. The sculptures Andrew Gilbert in this exhibition also have a dual symbolic importance. On one hand, they are again depictions volunteers for Motherland-Salome who are prepared to do anything as long as it is for something noble, such as revenge against perpetrators of evil. On the other hand it is a depiction of soldiers surrounded for whom there is nothing remaining than past dreams of eternal heroic glory. They wait for the moment of their destruction. And it is at that very moment when dancing girl display their last expression, as if they have revealed their hidden essence, transformed to an image of death.

5. And even this doesn't exhaust this picture of all its meanings. Now, the main secret of the „Hermetic“ world is unveiled. Death delineates a human lifetime, and plunges the individual into a dependency. His will is only dependant on how he consumes his time. In other words, the more is redeemed. Death doesn't make the individual the lord of one's on life. Death forces him to hasten with experiences, and to consider ever new forms of pleasure. Death requires the surrounding with luxury, and overall it is death who makes mundane pleasures so significant and precious. Furthermore it is death who commands individuals to take revenge on those who harmed them. In fact it is death, and no one else: The Motherland. Death is rendered as a staff around which the world functions. She is the cause of all causes, the first absolute.

6. The exhibition includes one image but that clearly does not fit into the established subject: the depiction of soldiers in white in Anna Parkina's drawings. The hermetic aspect with which the world is depicted elsewhere has been disrupted. Unlike the soldiers with bandaged faces, these soldiers are calm, with strong gestures. Enemy troops are before them of them as if at their fingertip; they needn't do anything more than pull the trigger and the battle is decided. There is nothing in their composure indicating

weakness; their victory is only a matter of time, and as it seems, that would be rather brief. But the main thing that draws attention to them is that their faces are not rendered in detail, which is the key to interpretation. Indeed, the very idea of capturing their faces is blasphemous. The illustration of these soldiers is a clear reference to depictions of angels of destruction. And this reference undoubtedly carries its own particular meaning.

But first, we ask a different, equally complicated question. Why are the soldiers, who are fully combat ready, not engaged in battle? And why do they maintain their grip on their weapons without taking their gaze from the sights? What are they waiting for? Apparently, their fire shouldn't reach everyone. Friends and enemies distinguish one from another no longer according to the color of their uniform. Otherwise there'd be no reason to expect anything.

It seems that the reason for their anticipation is that they have no room for error. So they are prepared to wait until the last minute so as not to confuse, and distinguish the essence of each of the combatants. But there is a deeper explanation. The reason they wait is that they want to make sure to give all the combatants a final chance to decide which side they are on. They don't intervene in the battle only to make sure this decision is really sincere and unconditional.

7. But has anything changed, at least something, when these soldiers were discovered? First of all from now on Truth is their opinion, and not ours at all, which represents the victory of good over evil. And the only question of any significance from now on is: will they consider good what we consider good? Will that army liberate us, or are we going to be destroyed? But mainly, the answer to this question from now isn't dependent on whether we are right, or on our power, but on their mercy. The mere thought of that makes it difficult to return to any "hermetic" logic.

Text by Dmitry Zabavin