

Vladimir Dubossarsky is one of the best known and significant contemporary Russian artists. Having acquired a thorough classical training at the Surikov Academy, Dubossarsky has been developing his very own masterly and independent artistic language from the earliest stages of his career. Unlike most contemporary artists of his generation, he primarily focuses on painting. He used large, sometimes monumental formats conducive to his unique style based on combining images approved for representation in the art of socialist realism with phantasms of the Hollywood “dream factory” and the ghostly images of the world of advertising, with any aesthetic differences becoming completely lost in this fusion.

In the mid-1990s he was producing together with Alexander Vinogradov (“the Dubossarsky-Vinogradov creative duo”), paintings in larger-than-life formats mixing pop culture and fairy-tale imagery and employing very queer chromatic palette. Those works were most typical of the fragmented and schizophrenic spirit of that period of Russian history. Dubossarsky featured Hollywood stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger, teddy bears, collective farmers in orgies, Barbies and other media icons dragging the viewers into their weird world and stunning them with the choice of

their colors, their sheer format, and their artistic finesse. Unlike the Russian artists of elitist and intellectualist camp who stood in opposition to the collapsing Soviet state, Dubossarsky’s art reflected the realities of that new vibrant, unbridled and chaotic life. It conveyed, in very direct and unfiltered way, the very atmosphere of the new life and spoke directly to “the masses,” that is, to each and every one. Rather than being applicable to the realities of Russia alone, this idea of taking up the commonest themes proved to be more universally appealing, which allowed the artist to

find resonance abroad. The artist held numerous exhibitions in the UK, the US, France and Italy. Their works were acquired by some of the most famous museums, such as the Pompidou Center in Paris, the

Museum of Fine Arts Houston and the Vienna Secession.

This exhibition, *Grandpa Tales*, aptly displays the key features of Vladimir Dubossarsky work making them so instantly recognizable. It takes up both floors of the gallery, with the two cycles of paintings being so different that one gets the impression they belong to different artists. In *The Animal World* series, monkeys, giraffes, and dinosaurs appear in typical mass-construction apartment blocks of the Khrushchev era. Humans can be seen here only as images in pop-art paintings decorating the interiors of these apartments, as creatures from a totally different reality. Phenomena separated by space, time, and the artistic manner are equidistant from each other, helping the viewer to grasp the full degree of tension and inconsistency between different manifestations of reality and different objects presented. Dubossarsky employs similar technique in his ‘1001 Sea View’ cycle. The artist uses enigmatic two-component works (reminiscent of Mark Rothko) to play ad infinitum on the same endless “earth and heaven” theme. Strong accents of gesture give each work its individuality, emphasizing its unique tone and manner and allowing the artist to defy all expectations associated with works of art of this type.

Starting from Andy Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe paintings (at the latest) and his Campbell soup cans (if not before), the aesthetics of mass production and the media imagery moved to the foreground of pop art. Dubossarsky tries to intercept the viewer in those anticipations by deliberately employing a variety of techniques in all the works of this series executed with

perfect skill. Thus, each painting becomes unique and any similarity with mass-produced items is avoided.

Critically important to Dubossarsky art is that it allows the audience to feel the difference between their own expectations and the state of uncertainty they eventually experience.

The artist points this out in his text commenting on the exhibition, stressing that he strove to ignore any social and political associations brought about by his works, treating them as sheer escapist creations. They are not mimetic paintings prompting any kind of action and do not depict any particular universe or object. They work as a kind of references to varying, often contradictory, concepts of the world and reality.

‘The Grandpa Tales’ series was inspired by ‘The Tales of Uncle Remus’. In that incredibly popular masterpiece of American “children” literature, their author, journalist and folklorist Joel Chandler Harris, takes characters from African and Native American fairy tales and myths to the very south of the United States shortly after the end of the American Civil War.

Following Harris with his Brother Rabbit, Brother Wolf and Brother Fox, Dubossarsky populates Soviet-time apartments with dinosaurs, giraffes and monkeys.

The artist breaks allusions in similar way in his ‘1001 Sea View’ cycle. Although he starts with references to Katsushiki Hokusai’s iconic 36 Views of Fuji and the Arabian Nights, they are progressively wiped out by the almost obsessive serial replication of images within the cycle. Vladimir Dubossarsky art brings up new reality and new truth clashing with the order of things accepted in rational and logical systems and, thus, questions that order as such. His works are a manifesto of creative action independent of political or logical narrative. It is an art causing an existential shock that affords a momentary, flash-like glimpse of some new, different kind of human freedom.