

Tales of Bright and Brittle

The new body of work explores fairy-tale worlds, both magical and bright but somewhat fragile - breakable, albeit not at all perishable.

I present illusory places and stories of magic that dissolve time and exist in a space that is neither here nor there but unerringly both.

In real life as in fairy-tales just about everything is bright and brittle- it is my sentiment towards the whole world we live in. I strive to create a mysterious yet familiar, personal, perhaps a tad muddled up, folkloric reality, delicate and beautiful in design despite its mythical and practical defects.

Working in egg tempera on wood, one of the oldest and finicky techniques, I use elements of icon and early renaissance painting, Asian tradition and folk art as well as contemporary cultural references. This particular visual language is partly steeped in my Russian roots but evidently informed from elsewhere - I take materials, symbols, ideas and gestures from a multitude of sources and refashion them through transformative process of painting. In a way I employ process to add meaning and validity to my subjects, constantly examining and reinterpreting imagery from the outside and within.

I create drawings of tiny dots or thick outlines, then follow the old masters' technique to transfer images onto the gessoed panel. Ideas originate from loose sketching, peculiar sensation from something around me, marking down impressions I feel compelled by, eventually they start to move into form, emerging from playful combinations of different pictorial registers, overlapped imagery, relative positions of objects in a composition with often distorted perspective and flat moulding of certain areas.

There's a purposeful tension between how much I acknowledge of the original and how much is pure intuition and irrational proximity.

The magic of daring to relate something always happens in the mental space.

It is the test of imagination which as Einstein maintained, is more important than knowledge. It suggests moving freely in the realm of fantasy and fairy tales are the wonderful vehicles for that. They tell something of the arbitrariness of Nature and its mystery, somehow remind us of the miracle of humanity itself, more vivid than any marvels of technology and intellect. Everyone loves a good story - that child like notion is deeply inserted in our collective memory- it evokes the ancient instinct of elementary wonder and astonishment we once possessed. In words of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, it is so alive, ' that you are always afraid that...it has gone and changed, has shifted like a river...'

In fairyland, the lack of mental connection between incomprehensible things results in a perfect plausibility that is called magic. There is no relation between a pumpkin and a carriage, much like flying and laying eggs are logically unrelated..

This set of paintings are inspired by my experiences of places but foremost by my love for books and tales, the richness of history, myths, old epics and folklore that people of the world hold in common. It reflects in the preciousness of the materials, in an open ended plots and tentative visions that hang upon the strange conjunction of the old and the new. They all embrace the sense of opportunity, belief and self-doubt, assumption and adventure.

Veronica Smirnoff