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Two New Exhibits Open at Tsereteli Arts Gallery

By Jennifer Monaghan

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French sculptor Mateo Mornar's bronze works differ widely in content. **Vladimir Filonov**

Speaking Friday at the opening night of "20 x 1," or "Venti Per Una" to use its Italian name, artistic director Martina Corgnati said she wanted to teach the audience to understand "the language of modern art."

In truth, the exhibition is perhaps a little heavy for visitors uninitated in modern art, though with some reflection it is possible to discern larger social commentaries swirling beneath the surface of several of the pieces in this collection.

Venti Per Una, which is running as part of the 5th Moscow Biennale, is located in two rooms at the Zurab Tsereteli Art Gallery and comprises of photographs, videos and sculptures by different artists, each hailing from one of different regions in Italy.

One of the most resonant pieces in the collection is Danilo Correale's "The Surface of my Eye

is Deeper than the Ocean": a video installation, in which anonymous gamblers (we only ever see their hands) scratch away at pot-luck cards. The monotony of this action, accompanied by the gentle lull of the scratching, is surprisingly reassuring, and it is easy to see how this action could become a source of comfort for the gamers, even superseding the ultimate goal itself — winning big. More widely, the piece highlights the relationship between the larger social constructions that shape our world — be it wealth, consumerism or addiction — and their realities in the present.

Emilio Isgro's "Russland" is a play on this same idea — the interplay between the micro and the macro — and finds expression in an old German map of northern Russia with all possible references to scale, author or place names blacked out. In Isgro's piece, Russland is instead returned to a more primitive state of being and reminds us that this land existed — and will continue to exist — regardless of human attempts to label, measure and claim it as our own.

"The Cow Lola" by Stefano Cagol, poses further questions about the relationship between the macro and the micro. The installation consists of a number of different animal hides, all of which are branded with the same name, "Lola," a often used in Italy to call in the cows. A plaque next to Cargol's piece draws attention to the "hypocritical" behaviour of humans toward animals, which he believes can lead to a "cancellation" of other species.

While "20 x 1" is a small exhibition, several of its pieces convey messages that resonate beyond the boundaries of Italy's national borders. That said, the jury remains out on whether this exhibition can — as Corgnati hopes — really help its audience to understand the "language of modern art."

Downstairs at the same gallery, and displayed as part of an official visit by Prince Albert II of Monaco to Moscow, the Croatian-born French artist Mateo Mornar is showing 100 of his works in the exhibition "Sculpture; Life; Passion."

Monar is known for his work with the female body form, which is evidently a source of much inspiration for the artist, but in his latest offering he has incorporated a new theme into the mix: predators.

On one side of the room, full-bodied women cast out of bronze take on a variety of different poses. By employing rounded edges, and working the smoothness of the bronze to create sensual objects of art, Mornar only heightens the juxtaposition with the predators sculptures that stand on the other side of the room.

In contrast, works such as "Rhinoceros" and "Tiger," employ jagged cuts and sharp geometrical angles to create powerful representations of their namesakes, and it is a testament to Mornar's abilities to work with this media that two such differing "passions" can be captured in the same show.

At the back of the room, and drawing the immediate eye of visitors, "Eagle" almost acts as a mediator between the women and the beasts. The only white sculpture in the room, "Eagle" — with its wings spread and talons ready to strike — displays all the signs of a classic predator, yet still manages to say something of the purity and beauty of nature. It is a striking piece.

Outside, visitors can see four of Mornar's larger predator pieces, including a 5-1/2-meter winged horse and an almost 3-1/2-meter-high polar bear. Similar to "Eagle," these pieces manage to capture both the strength and the beauty of these creatures, while also allowing their perceived personalities to shine through.

"20 x 1" runs until October 20 and "Sculpture. Life. Passion" runs until Oct. 13 at the Zurab Tsereteli Arts Gallery, 19 Prechistenka. Metro Kropotkinskaya, 495-637-2569. For more information, visit rah.ru*.*

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