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Vladey Prepares for Auction of Russian Conceptualists

By D. Garrison Golubock

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Yury Avvakumov's mausoleum made of dominoes is among the lots. **D. Garrison Golubock**

Russian artists are fond of deploring the sad state of the market for modern art in Russia. As the Fifth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art has unfolded, numerous well-known Russian artists who work abroad have returned, accompanied by foreign critics, to comment on the impossibility of working as an artist in Russia.

The fall auction of modern art from the Vladey auction house aims to demonstrate that this is not the full picture. Presenting 100 lots ranging in price from a symbolic $100 dollars up to 150,000 euros ($202,605), the exhibit has includes works by many prominent Russian artists of the post-Soviet era and has gathered works by some of the best-known representatives of the Moscow Conceptualist school.

"I think that the market is currently at a stage where the interest in modern Russian art will only grow," said Vladey auction house founder Vladimir Ovcharenko in an interview with RBK

Daily. Ovcharenko is also the owner the Regina Gallery and a well-known figure on the Moscow arts scene, who has used his connections with both artists and collectors in jumpstarting his new auction house, the only one of its kind in Russia.

"Even when the market was at its peak from 2005 to 2007, nobody tried to hold contemporary art auctions in Russia," Ovcharenko said. "But we tried it, we got a taste for it, and we are moving forward."

Vladey's spring show was reportedly a financial success, and the hype that the upcoming fall sale has received suggests a good turnout. However, Ovcharenko's success is not due just to luck or good PR: A glance at the catalog of the upcoming show reveals a selection tailor-made for the tastes of Russian art consumers.

The collection heavily favors painting, a medium preferred by Russian buyers even more so than collectors elsewhere, and mostly includes moderately sized paintings that would not look out of place in someone's living room. While everyone has their own opinion, many Moscow gallery owners say that collectors here tend to avoid overly showy or conceptual works, preferring pieces that are easy on the eyes. Lastly, the pieces are relatively cheap, with many works priced under $20,000.

While this description makes the collection sound somewhat bland, Ovcharenko has gathered some interesting works for the fall auction: Two late pieces by Oskar Rabin show off the artist's signature style, while pieces by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov are pleasingly whimsical and sure to get attention.

Pavel Pepperstein, Konstantin Zvezdochyotov and Anatoly Osmolovsky, all of whom came to prominence in the hectic '90s art scene, are among the numerous well-known artists represented in the show, while younger stars like Rostan Tavasiev have also contributed works.

The Vladey Fall Auction will take place Oct. 17 at Novy Manezh, 3/3 Georgiyevsky Pereulok, Metro Teatralnaya. The lots will be on display at Novy Manezh until the day of the auction or can be seen at the Vladey website, where users can also register for the auction: vladey.net*.*

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