



Daria Usova and her charming manager Denis are already seated at the bar when we arrive – we are somewhat bemused as she doesn't look much like an artist. In fact she looks more like the rich young wife of an oligarch, immaculately turned out in a fitted suit with perfect hair and make up, she looks much older than her twentysome years and better dressed to attend an important luncheon date with her friends rather than a non-shabby interview with yours truly.

Denis translates and sets about explaining Daria's art, as, to the waiter's great confusion, we order cheese strips to dip in strawberry jam. Daria specialises in a process which she calls Pieces Art, which involves cutting up glamorous magazines and collaging them on top of designs she has laid out on thin metal sheets. The technique harks back to the Russian tradition of quilt making and putting handmade fabric artworks on walls, and she is particularly keen on the textures of jewellery and precious stones. Somewhat amusingly her lawyer father has advised her to copyright her technique, and she is now able to sue anyone who copies her style – weirdly any part-time collages are there!

Currently living at home with her parents, Daria studied at art school as a child before becoming a fully fledged artist a mere three years ago. With no formal degree qualification she plans at some stage to decide a PhD to the art of collage and in the meantime she is training to be an art teacher.

Daria's most recent exhibition was called *Sticks & Pose*, which features poses used in advertising and in classical portraits of the 18th century. The minimalist use of a strict colour palette of red, black and white harks back to the style of Constructivism and the series is also reminiscent of Pop Art. The intricate collaging of the series alludes to the artificial skin of consumerism that we inhabit – Daria creates metaphorical representations of the world we live in, but ironically these are created out of the very magazines that most strongly encourage consumption, which are often specially purchased because Daria has spotted something that she wants to use in a particular piece. Not only this, but the buyers of her art are necessarily rich, and apparently often rich women who commission artworks full of nubile young men, often in subservient positions. Daria always interviews her clients first and then tries to reflect their personality in the choice of imagery that she uses to collage with. This process has reached its apogee in her portraits of famous people, which she has constructed from their sins. In the case of Michael Jackson the portrait is, naturally, made out of small children.

Another series called *Glossy Attraction* is based on movie stills – Daria practices movies of the precise moments that would

attract the least attention, thereby spotlighting the ordinary and familiar. We fairly recognise the poses and people but are not sure where from. When not creating expensive one-off pieces of artwork for exhibitions and rich clients, which sell for between \$1000 and \$3000, Daria creates illustrations for QQ, Official and Happen Magazine.

Her most recent works have started to move away from Daria's usual human subject matter. This is partly because she is bored of people and partly because she is becoming more aware and interested in her surroundings. So, ten reproductions of artificial fabrics are collaged to create a natural landscape and huge spacecraft are constructed out of garters and catheters.

She is currently in negotiation with a variety of sponsors for her next exhibition, and despite the modern post-Soviet art industry still being in development she has become very well known. I comment that Russian female contemporary artists seem to be hard to find and Daria explains that most women are not prepared to put in the necessary work to find sponsors to promote their work. At the moment however, she is beating them off with a stick. Currently she is in negotiations with both a car and a cigarette brand. Does this not feel a little ironic given the focus of her art? She doesn't like it but explains that she needs the money, and whilst she would never be willing to change her work to suit a sponsor she is willing to use their logos on publicity.

A glance at Daria's website reveals that she is probably lucky enough to inhabit the rich post-Soviet world of the fashionable few – *Sticks & Pose* was shown at the monthly posh Prado Cafe, and one doesn't get invited to such places without first having all the right contacts. Daria, in the mould of many of her contemporaries, has become incredibly successful in a very short amount of time, her work appeals to the right people, and possibly not because of the reasons she would like. Where she sees a commentary on today's society, they no doubt see yet more trashy opulence, something shiny and pretty and denoting cultural knowhow to decorate the walls of their mansions, the ultimate shrine to consumerism. Whether it be consuming small children for one's pleasure, or works of art to denote status, it's all consumption, and therein lies the dichotomy.

Daria smiles prettily and poses immaculately before leaving, no doubt to do a bit of shopping on one of Moscow's most expensive streets. I am still unsure whether Daria is aware of the glaring paradoxes inherent in her art.

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DARIA USOVA

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