



A.E.C.
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ANTIFRANKENSTEIN

Elena Selina

At last the long awaited AES's «Body Space» exhibition opened in the Central House of Artists. So why do we take risk of opening the exhibition by two of the group's participants just three days later?

Pros and cons of the large projects is in the long term preparations; since the idea is articulated it takes several months to materialise it. At the time art process and the artists continue producing new ideas.

The «Body Space» project has been designed with firm and elegance, to be developed in time and space. Parts of the installation had to be shown one by one in considerably small exhibition spaces. First came out the sudden «Suture», at Guelman Gallery in 1994. «Holes and Heads» were planned to be exposed at XL Gallery soon after that. The compound installation at Central House of Artists should have sounded a final chord. Though some mysterious forces along with objective obstacles, like XL's moving to the new space, made showing «Holes and Heads» impossible; and that was for good. Then came the substitution with the «Family Portrait in the Interior». The project was assigned an inside title of «The New Frankenstein», and was designed according to the new gallery's space.

Why, then, this illogical curator's delight? The answer is generation of almost electrical tension between the two exhibitions. The elegantly discursive «Body Space», that violently treat the viewers with its «physiological» activity, though effect the latter with rather strong portion of reasoning; at this point the projects may be considered sort of final cut for visual theory of bodily problems and stuff like that. On the contrary, «Family Portrait in the Interior» opens up a new page in Moscow contemporary art's story. In this sense, the title of «The New Frankenstein» was absolutely adequate. The project, precisely designed as it is typical for AES, is a compressed formula of «the right to misery», that includes performance, body-art, meta'n'physics of the family life, delicate echoes of «corporeity», the theme of violence, drama and parody, allu-

sions on Tarantino and Tinto Brass, the distinct virtuality of the visual and so on. Following Mary Shelly's «Frankenstein», this metaphor of the family life derives from hell, but unlike the Romantic monster story, this metaphor is not compelled but consciously destructive. As much as Shelly's hero has suffered from his own imperfection, our «weird couple» ultimately exposes and decomposes its own construction, with obvious pleasure; or to be precise it fixates the state of the ultimate decay. That's why came out the latest version of the project's title - «Antifrankenstein».

Farewell ye branching discourse, welcome the rigid and capacious metaphor of condition!

Forecast is an ungrateful business, but we'd try to predict a new trend at Moscow art scene, generating this difficult yet exciting method of working with the «material». ✂

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW

with Lev Evzovich

...Frankenstein, sewed together of different body parts, haven't been released; we fought for the right to happiness, now we have nothing to do but gain the right to misery..

...In general we're interested in taking the theme to its extreme. Our working method is taking an ultimate theme and deletion of the theme itself. Taken to the extreme, the theme is destroyed and some new quality emerges. Now that discourse and strategic speculation is exhausted, we've refined the tactic of driving to idiosyncrasy. There are just two ways of dealing with contemporary situation: either artificially stimulate the discourse or terminate it.

We intend most to the theme of violence. After the cold and icy surface it's so natural to go inside the body. This installation is literally destruction of the family and personal theme. Here we have a direct statement, family suicide, and realized relationship of man and woman; there are nails, just an everyday life's moment - people lived together for a long time, having cut a lot of nails.

Now Moscow, tired of Conceptualism, has got an illusion of the actual presence in art. Though tempting it'll vanish soon, because neither art is life nor life is art. The strange gap between both is really interesting, and it's the only thing that could yet work as art. We're interested in falling «in between».

I'm convinced that the closer we get to body, i.e. to performance, the farther from it we appear to be. Physical body, posted in some definite space is not actual. We're all already living in the other reality, and the «framed» or screened view is what's important for us.

In the Western civilization movie industry sells artificial violence to a wealthy society; real pain is substituted with the on-screen anaestecised pain. Here in Russia everything is upside down; there's practically no local «screen» culture, while street gangs' combat actions increase dramatically. It's like a stereo effect, from one side you got gunshots in American movies, from another side you got it live in your neighborhood. Even my unshavedness, pretending a «five o'clock shadow», gets me in daily ID checking by police as they take me for a Chechen.

... I think that today's Moscow art, dissolved and atomized, has just started constructing a new language, adequate enough to appropriate the new reality.

With the «Suture» object we tried to create some «new body» (or «The New Frankenstein»), to create an art object from the document of real pain, that was a photograph of the after-operative suture.

...This project, «Family Portrait in the Interior», is interesting to us as a game of «artificial to on-screen» and real. Considering personal problems, we are interested in the «sex through violence», in the family as hell. Should an ordinary person, ignorant of contemporary art and having never seen Tarantino's movies, come to our exhibition, he'd think «Boy, what a hell these guys live in! What a couple...» But we are a weird couple. ✂

IF YOU WANT BLOOD, YOU GOT IT

Serge Khripoun

Title of the exhibition by AES group, actually by its 2/3, could disorient only the one who is not versed in contemporary art. A typical, i.e. devoted, viewer is ready to accept anything but the sweet picture of a cosy family nest; hence Tatyana Arzamasova and Lev Evzovich have even waived the group's trinity for a purity of matrimonial status. One might at first remind their exhibition «Art of the Possible», shown two years at Guelman Gallery. The story was about dramatic love; everything started with a portrait of happy couple (maybe even a family) - a brave officer and a beautiful girl; and ended with a photo of the officer's cut head. If the AES couple weren't as smart and prudent as only contemporary artist should be, we'd better invite a psychoanalyst for comments. To comment not the artists' work but their mental health; fortunately, we all needn't it. The artists very well understand what and why do they do, or at least pretend that they understand, which is almost the same in contemporary art situation.

So, just a couple of days after they displayed their «Body Space» at Central House of Artists, AES artists again are treating body space, this time with scissors. Basically both the visual images and the commentary appeal to virtual reality. The theme of violence, that AES are so interested in, is the main drivetrain of this world besides basic and less exciting stimuli already studied and prescribed by Freudians. Violence is a basis for literature, cinema, video, music, electronic and computer entertainment, for mass-media as a source of the news of the world, and finally for life itself. Archaic «cops and thieves» stuff transformed into bloody plots of cartridge and computer games. Natural is desire to consume sound and image with the quality of Dolby Stereo, CD and satellite communication; so natural is a thrive for maximum realism of electronic virtual violence, from the conventionally primitive arcanoids to the concrete kick-n-bunch action games like Mortal Kombat to unlimited insanity of 3D virtual helmets-gloves-joysticks which give DOOM fans total freedom of demolition.

Violence, as a theme, an idea and a state of mind, is already becoming ungratifying stuff to speak of; let's leave it for puritans and partisans of political correctness. To do violence - that's a worthy task for creative individuals around the world, and first of all for contemporary artists as their avant-garde. David Lynch and Steven Spielberg to Oliver Stone and Quentin Tarantino, AC/DC and Sting to Red Hot Chili Pepper and acid house, Bruce Nauman and Cindy Sherman to Anatoly Osmolovsky and Oleg Kulik to AES group - all of them force their heroes, themselves and us to cry, bleed, kill and be killed. At this point the Frankenstein image produced by AES (mind that Lev Evzovich looks much alike his alter ego) resembles with the same «dreadful» and artificial Freddie Krueger, or his «younger brother» Eddy the Scissorhands. Full-blooded and safe violence, remote by screen frame or exhibition space, is certainly more interesting than safe sex wrapped into rubber sheets in fear of AIDS. Although directors of the «Terminators» and «Die Hards» can't afford Pentagon's might to produce anything like «Desert Storm», but CNN has outstripped itself in coverage of this typical action movie. The war at the Gulf «didn't happened» as much as Gannibal Lector didn't bite his victims' noses. That is the war did happen. Good guys almost always overcome bad guys; but the main idea is that bad guys should be really bad, really tough and kick good guys' ass; if not - they wouldn't be worth seeing.

Anyway AES have a view of their own. If the CNN cameraman is driven to a bloody battlefield, besides high payment, by pathological intention to deliver «truth as it is», then Arzamasova and Evzovich are a kind of meta-cameramen, who capture their own life from beyond the good and evil. In the above mentioned Mortal

Kombat game a player and his computer counterparts slice and slash each other to death. Being asked by a Newsweek correspondent about the violence and destruction of the game, the salesman at Manhattan computer store said, grinning «Oh, no. It's really educational. It teaches all about parts of the body and how to perform surgery». The answer worth to be heard at a seminar in the Institute of Philosophy. We have no choice but follow methods of politically correct censorship from the friendly superpower, and label this «family» exhibition catalog with a warning sticker «Mature. Ages 17+». By the way, one outstanding game maker designed his own rating «PC» (which usually means «politically correct») - for «profound carnage». That could be a contemporary artwork, a kind of multimedia ready-made.

To end up with AES, let's remind that the term «virtual» is derived from «virtue», that means not only inherent power, but also goodness, moral excellence and uprightness. So Viva Virtual Violence! ➤

Tatyana ARZAMASOVA

Born in 1955

1978 - graduated from

Moscow Architecture Institute

Since 1987 - members of the AES group

Lev EVZOVICH

Born in 1958

1982 - graduated from

Moscow Architecture Institute

EXHIBITIONS BY AES GROUP

1989 - «Bldg 100» Gallery. Moscow

-Howard Yesersky Gallery. Boston

-Carpenter center. Harvard University. Cambridge. USA

1990 - «Patetische Rhetoric». Inter Art Gallery. Berlin

1991 -East-West Gallery. London

-«Das irdische Paradies». IFA-Galerie. Berlin

1992 -«Children's Bible». Kulturzentrum des Landes Schleswig-Holstein. Germany

-«AES - Drei Kunstler aus Moskau». Die Galerie der Stadt Esslingen. Germany

1993 -«Art of the Possible». Guelman Gallery. Moscow

-«Kain and Abel». Caspar Bingemer Galerie. Hamburg

1994 -«Suture». Guelman Gallery. Moscow

1995 -«AES». Cristoff Mereane Foundation. Basel

-«Family Portrait in the Interior». XL Gallery. Moscow

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (in a body of AES group)

1988 -«Eidos». Palace of Youth. Moscow

-18th Youth exhibition. Manege Exhibition Hall. Moscow

1989 -«Drawings by Moscow Artists». Central House of Artists. Moscow

1990 -Tampere Art Museum. Tampere. Finland

-Exhibition of Book Illustrations. Moscow

-«Moscow in Cambridge». Cambridge. Great Britain

-Imperial College. London

1991 -National Museum. Stockholm

-«Aesthetic Studies». Kuskovo Museum. Moscow

-«Ars Baltica Prolog. Face to Face». Kunsthalle. Kiel. Germany

-«Ars Baltica Prolog. Face to Face». «Latvija» Exhibition hall. Riga

1992 -«Ars Baltica Prolog. Face to Face». Kunsterhaus Betanien. Berlin

-«Style». Kiev

-«Diaspora». Central House of Artists. Moscow

-«Aidan Gallery». Central House of Artists. Moscow

1993 -Art Hamburg. Hamburg

-«Conversion». Guelman Gallery. Central House of Artists. Moscow

-ART-MIF. Guelman Gallery. Manege Exhibition Hall. Moscow

-«777». Distance Communication. Aspex Gallery. Portsmouth;

Kunstnerhus. Arhus. Denmark; Museum of Arts. Reykjavik;

Galeria Nova. Bratislava; Storm Gallery. Amsterdam; Guelman Gallery

1994 -«Conversion». Electronic Arts Festival. Helsinki

1995 -«Body Space». Central House of Artists. Moscow



