

**Kommersant Weekend, 15 January 2010**

## **EXHIBITIONS**

### **RUSSIANS IN LONDON**

#### **PHOTO I, PHOTO YOU AT CALVERT22**

**By ANNA TOLSTOVA**

The Calvert22 foundation opened last spring in London's East End, not far from Hoxton Square and the White Cube gallery, but, unlike Jay Jopling's project, it is an entirely not-for-profit organisation. Its aim is to provide a showcase in London for art from the former socialist bloc countries, particularly Russia, but also the other countries of Eastern Europe, setting it in a general European context. The founder of Calvert22, Nonna Materkova, is a beginner collector and has even done a contemporary art course at Sotheby's, but unlike most Moscow women art lovers, she doesn't feel she has a right to put together an exhibition programme herself. The curators here are specialists, some of them genuine celebrities.

The first exhibition, Pastfutureperfect, was curated by David Thorp, formerly director of the South London Gallery, who succeeded in transforming that staid Victorian building into one of London's most go-ahead exhibition spaces. This pilot project, featuring work by Alexander Brodsky, Pavel Pepperstein, Haim Sokol, Leonid Tishkov and Stas Volyazlovsky –Jean-Hubert Martin invited four of them to exhibit at the third Moscow Biennale – was a hit with the very picky East End audience. In celebration Calvert22 asked David Thorp to take on direction of the foundation.

Overall, Calvert22 likes Western curators who can look at the East with a fresh eye. The second exhibition, "Show Me a Hero", looking at the fortunes of painting and contemporary art in Hungary and Romania (Vitaly Pushnitsky was the only Russian taking part), was put together by Oxford art critic Jane Neal, who specialises in Eastern and Central Europe. And the third exhibition, "Re-imagining October", which was received enthusiastically by the press, was curated by two well-known Londoners, film director and video artist Isaac Julien and cinema and video researcher Mark Nash, a professor at the Royal College of Art, who co-curated Documenta 11 and the third Berlin Biennale. Neither actually knew much about Russian art, so Calvert22 arranged for them to go on a familiarisation trip to Moscow and St Petersburg.

The starting point of their project, examining the legacy of Soviet modernism in the contemporary art of the countries of the former USSR, was Derek Jarman's film "Imagining October", (1984). It was Isaac Julien who curated the Serpentine Gallery's Jarman retrospective that made a worldwide splash. In Jarman's film, targeted at the contemporary oppression of homosexuals in Britain, homoerotic motifs from the Eisenstein avant-garde and the Stalinist Empire style – the director made the documentary shots for the film in pre-Perestroika Moscow – form the basis of a fantasy about a new sexual revolution. In keeping with this model, the pieces selected for the exhibition re-interpreted revolutionary images and symbols in the current political/artistic context, ranging from ironic nostalgia to critical revision. The result was a motley collection of artists: where else would you see the Radek Community's "Demonstration" cheek by jowl with Alexander Sokurov's latest film, "Russian Ark"? But unexpected juxtapositions produce comical effects: Vadim Zakharov's inoffensive performance in which he hides Red Square behind the revolutionary "Black Square" makes a decent foil for the action by Estonian artist Kristina Norman, who set up a painted papier-maché gold soldier at the vacant site of the "Bronze Soldier" and was whisked off to the police station together with her work. In short, Isaac Julien and Mark Nash's Russian experiment was a clear success.

Calvert22's new exhibition, "Photo I, Photo You", is curated by Iara Boubnova, founder of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Sofia, who was a member of the curatorial teams for the first two Moscow biennales and knows contemporary Russian art inside out. Iara Boubnova has assembled an international team with a Balkan accent: Igor Eskinja from Croatia, Ján Mančuška from Slovakia, Nebojša Shoba Šerić<sup>1</sup> from Bosnia, and Kiril Prashkov, Stefania Batoeva and Vikenti Komitski from Bulgaria. Russia is represented by Anna Jermolaewa, formerly of St Petersburg, though she studied and now works in Vienna. These artists are well known on the European art scene and take part in various biennals, triennials and "manifestoes", but their common feature is that they were all born on the far side of the Berlin Wall, in the socialist camp. By their joint efforts they will construct a photo and video guide to its ruins: decrepit high-rises, neglected palaces of culture, and the decommissioned cruiser *Aurora*, photographed in such a spirit as to make you think that if they allowed Nebojša Shoba Šerić on to the ship she would surely open fire on some Winter Palace. And not with blanks.

Photo I, Photo You, Calvert22, London.  
From 27 January. [www.calvert22.org](http://www.calvert22.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: The name is given as in the Russian text