

# Ruin Value

Curated by Steven Claydon

10.06.2022

08.07.2022

"Who are you then?"

"I am part of that power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good.

Goethe. Faust.

Ruin Value, which takes its name from a work in the show, is a presentation of a new series of paintings by Tahmina Negmat. The works come about through a symbiotic encounter with Vladimir Sorokin's novel Nastya. Included in the show is a single work by Swiss symbolist, Arnold Böcklin. In a sense this show might act as a virtual lens, though partially occluded, through which we may examine a new turn toward the incorporation and co-option of historical motif and mythological symbolism. The Faustian act of hitching your political wagon to a historical narrative has led to a full scale European war. In the context of these horrific events the fragmentary employment of archetypal and culturally specific symbols that we find in Negmat's work seems somehow timely. Especially as we collectively attempt to psychoanalyse the fundamental changes signalling a new global epoch of expansionist ambition, plague, economic instability and domestic ambivalence. Certainly, if art is to be a reflection of the present, replete with the ghosts of the past, it can't help but engage such self-legitimising polemics head on. Might we as a society led by artists and poets need to develop new rituals, symbols and cosmologies in order to metabolise this new world disorder by chewing off and swallowing a little rancid meat?

Steven Claydon

Nastya is turning 16. Her moral-conscious, luxury-communist, Marxist (nearly), ripe for rope walking, Nietzschean parents are calling friends, clergy and dignitaries, for a celebratory feast. Of course, they prepare her and then consume her. Simple, sober stove cooking. Once the consumption begins, her mother becomes an unwanted central protagonist, and I watch her fixedly. I lurk at her over the table.

My curiosity for this relationship between the Mother and a Child brought about my own interpretation of that motif, culminating in 'Self-portrait from Hell' and an attempt to grasp what on earth is happening with my country, which is turning its large and tiresome back on me.

Tahmina Negmat

The Nietzschean ideal of overcoming stifling and compromising religious and ethical constraints such as the binary of good versus evil were seen as the dawning of a new age of human self-becoming with superstition and the shackles of feudalism consigned to history. But these ideas were complex and paradoxical, leading to misinterpretation and perversions of Nietzsche's thinking. In the post-soviet Russian federation this sacrifice of enlightenment principles at the altar of emotive fatalism conjures tyrannical forces into a paradoxical collage of tsarist imperialism, kleptocracy and Stalinist totalitarianism. This can be seen as a kind of evolved or accelerated Ruin Value. An aesthetic that resides in the past and the future at the expense of the present, and, when the present is expendable then jackals stalk the earth.

Russian invasion of Ukraine: This possessive projection onto the sovereign territory of another could be equated psychoanalytically, with the traumatic loss of identity, of selfhood resulting in the cannibalistic tendency to destroy and consume the unrequited other, to defile the object of desire. Thus the mother consumes her children under the geological stresses of sacrificial absolution. Nastya's mother pulls at her daughters cooked skin with her teeth: chews her over, masticating as she attends to the polite dialogue and the etiquette of the table. Words uttered through the soft flesh of her offspring. The act of swallowing becomes a caress, the rhythmic kiss of the oesophagus, she chokes.

The skin on Nastya's legs and shoulders was rapidly stretching and soon, like drops, blisters rushed over it. Nastya squirmed. The chains dug into her blood and held her back firmly. Her head shook so rapidly her face turned into a solid red mouth.

Skins adorn the recent paintings of Negmat, astrakhan pelts, surfaces rippling with a dense crimp of supple curls like a Parthian beard. Mink and fox too, live-objects that still hold the febrile tension of an animal cornered by a trapper or instinctually gnawing at its own limbs to escape a toothed iron trap. Mythical figures populate the penumbra of these fractal suppurating landscapes too. Horned Pan-like figures confront us with an ambivalent gaze as sirens wail. Fixed eyes like the luminous lenses of heat-sensitive, night-vision headsets survey the viewer with anxiety... or perhaps curiosity. Faustian pacts are played out here under the engorged, glazed gaze of the sacred bull. Its swollen eye made gory motif. Legions of eyes, wheeling in their sockets like planetary eggs.

Crusts of gold and ochre hues, earth-coloured like excrement mingle in the Dionysian atmosphere of metamorphosis and transformation. Naiads shed the salt-tears of Eros into the thorny scrub while the patterns and puzzles of inevitable tributaries and streams percolate and drain away: Mesopotamia. You know instinctively that these are not your fairytales, not your stories. Hold your breath somewhere in between the ribcage as your words fail. This viscous, vitreous mess of oil and crinkled skin holds within it the digital filaments of global pulped identity. Bound-up in networks of dead affect and new anachronism, held beyond logical and linguistic jurisdiction and well beyond good and evil. The price of entry to that swampy mythical compound of knowledge is your integrity. Medea is here, tragedy is here yes, but also a new unfamiliar, acrid but cleansing smoke... Matriarchs from unknowable texts and traditions perfume the totems with incense and perform the ritual cycles, the sacred choreography of oblique geometries, thereby invoking a pantheon of benevolent monsters. What can this cosmological detritus be enabling? And what course is charted through this night and fog of simultaneous emergence and veiling? Can we, through these non-linear narratives and coruscating ice particles, discern the viral spores of a newly metabolised symbolism? Cannibalised from the refuse of exhausted signs and equipped to reflect and combat the ignoble imperatives of the multi-self, reconstituted from disinformation and conjured from false verity? O' Mimesis of mimes, beautiful agents of decay and

becoming! Metastasis! Evolve and eschew your lovely camouflage, release us from the surplus of false idols, from the stupidity of technocracy, from mithering, from middling!

A. Barbarigo

Born in Bukhara Uzbekistan, of Tajik and Korean heritage Tahmina Negmat grew up in Moscow. She studied in London where she lives and works.

Arnold Böcklin was born in Basel and studied in Düsseldorf. He died in Florence where he lived for much of his life.