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Parallax of Antiquity. “Orgies” by Dmitry Gutov

“Orgies” is a series of works by Dmitry Gutov where intimate scenes created by ancient artists intertwine with the eroticism of Picasso. The series are the continuation of the artist’s experiments with metals used as a sculpting medium for recreating famous scenes from classical and European art, as well as with samples of calligraphy and working drafts of philosophers and composers. In Russia, the most well-known of Gutov’s series is “Shapes”, which was made in the same technique. In these series the artist worked with figures from Byzantine and Russian iconography. Making its first appearance in the country during the revived social debate on the choice of a cultural paradigm, “Shapes” were predictably interpreted in the context of this controversy. It seemed important for Gutov to express his right as a modern artist to freely take any element from a cultural tradition (including religion) and create new images and concepts in its field. For society, however, the debate was short lived. “Orgies” exhibited only a year later under the exotic title “Genius Needs Orgies”, was viewed as the artist’s symmetrical response to the debate’s conclusion, a demonstrative gesture of escapism to the social and cultural agenda of the day.

If we look at the genealogy of Dmitry Gutov’s metallic works, we’ll see a direct correlation with the theme of owning, seizing, or even defending field. According to the artist, the idea for this series was prompted by the homemade metal fences made from garbage, which enclosed land occupied by people in the outlying districts of Moscow. “To protect their meager harvest, they built surprisingly durable fences out of old metal beds, beams, wires, caging, and pipes. This is now all dilapidated, but it has gained significance ...I was attracted to this twisted steel... how it resembles drafts, calligraphy, and sketches,” writes Gutov [2, p. 8].

The brutal naivety of these protective constructions is embodied in all of Gutov’s metallic works. As a medium, the artist uses non-galvanized steel. Rust, signs of welding, menacing angles of fringing iron bars — it all plays an integral role to the works’ aesthetics. And at the same time, in the words of Plato, “if one uncovers such strength, he will find the bodies of the gods inside himself” [4, p. 351]. When an onlooker finds the right point in three-dimensional space for viewing these works, the once metallic chaos transforms into the images of ancient and classical European art.

This is why it seems that from the very start, the idea of the artist claiming field for his art was the premise behind this series. Keep in mind that this field is not a field considered contiguous to today’s art (politics, science, innovative technologies etc.), or an area modern artists usually expand into. Gutov captures the most artistic tradition, the heritage of which remains an issue of the debate for modern art today. For Gutov, what’s important are the rightful and sentimental aspects of the relationship to this heritage. In one interview given during the opening of his “Orgies” exhibit, he refers to himself as “a barbarian on the ruins

Дмитрий Гутов. Из серии «Оргии». Сцена любви на килике (Мастер Триптолема, V в. до н.э.). Металл, сварка. 2012–2013. Диаметр 120 см. Глубина 40 см.

of Rome, a lover of what was destroyed" [1] and draws the line between himself and a "real artist". By doing so, however, he highlights a key feature of the avant-garde understanding of art and the artist's figure with respect to preceding traditions. The avant-garde artist opposes the capitalism-imposed logic of cultural production and consumption. This opposition is the principle behind the European avant-garde from the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century. However, today we see that this opposition to cultural production and the expansion into adjacent fields in the second half of the 20th century became the main product of avant-garde artists and was consumed by modern capitalist society.

In essence, an attempt to realize a modern artist's creativity in the field of classical art is a possible strategy for evading the overwhelming pressure of today's mainstream.

Thus, in Gutov's "Orgies", there is an intimate (as told by the artist) reproduction of the works of ancient artists using modern techniques, and then pulling new ideas, perhaps even moral teachings, from them. The former is achieved via the monumentalization of original ancient sources ("this is the miracle of ancient art, it can withstand any growth," comments Gutov [2, p. 12]), and giving the initially flat image real volume (for example, his metallic tondo based on an antique vase painting is 120 cm in diameter and 40 cm deep). Monumentalization, however, does not only mean an increase in size. The metallic works of Gutov are designed to be exhibited in a specific kind of space. This space is the modern gallery, the so called white cube [5], which allows works of art to be abstracted from any domestic or interior context. Additionally, the viewer should be able to fully circle the work, viewing it literally from every angle and always on a sterile white backdrop. When these conditions are met, Gutov's "Orgies" creates a parallax affect; the work is transformed by the onlooker's own movements. If we see the outline of a classical subject from one specific point (at a distance of around 10 meters from the object and at a direct angle relative to the surface of its frame), then changing our position relative to it, such as by moving closer and sharpening our visual angle, we see how the metallic image opens up into the space,

turning firstly from a work of expressionism to the abstract. Approaching to the piece, we can even sense the very fence that at one time inspired Gutov. By disregarding distance and having no panoramic view of the work, we find only a hollow, formless metallic construction.

It's obvious that the programmed parallax effect here has not only formal, but also conceptual significance. As Anatoliy Osmolovskiy fairly remarked, the entire history of art unfolds before the onlooker of these works of art, and he would seem "capable of choosing which 'side' the 'art' is most fitting" [3, p. 2]. The antique "Orgies", with their concrete subjects, transform into an intrinsic enigma, an intense sensation that accompanies viewing art from various epochs in a single work. In this way, Gutov proves the relationship between ancient and modern art, the possibility of their implicit pairing in one material object, and consequently, the artist's right to work in the field of classical heritage.

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Abstract. The article focuses on the works of the established Moscow artist Dmitry Gutov in their relation to ancient cultural heritage. In 2012–2013 Gutov created a series of his objects-paintings made from iron bars wedged together. The artist uses an original and deliberately brutal technique in orderto recreate scenes of Greek vase painting and "ancient" drawings by Picasso. These artworks raise a number of questions about the place of antiquity in contemporary art, as well as the position of the contemporary artist in relation to classical heritage.

The author of the article concludes that Gutov manages to fill his interpretation of ancient works with actual meanings and thus to prove the right of the contemporary avant-garde artist to work in the field of classical art.
Keywords: avant-garde; Dmitry Gutov; antiquity; contemporary art; interpetation.

Название статьи. Параллакс античности. «Оргии» Дмитрия Гутова.
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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается творчество известного московского художника Дмитрия Гутова в его отношении к античному культурному наследию. В 2012–2013 гг. Гутов посвятил античным сюжетам серию своих картин-объектов, созданных из железных полос посредством сварки. Оригинальная, нарочито брутальная техника, используемая художником для воссоздания сюжетов древнегреческой вазописи, а также «античных» рисунков Пикассо, поднимает целый ряд вопросов о месте античности в современной художественной культуре, а также о позиции современного художника в отношении классического наследия.

Автор статьи приходит к выводу о том, что Гутову удается заложить в свои интерпретации античных работ актуальные смыслы и тем самым доказать право современного художника-авангардиста работать на территории классического искусства.
Ключевые слова: авангард; Дмитрий Гутов; античность; современное искусство; интерпретация.

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