

# VIKTOR PIVOVAROV PAVEL PEPPERSTEIN OPHELIA

6 APRIL – 19 MAY, 2012  
OPENING: THURSDAY 5 APRIL, 6-8 PM

Regina Gallery is pleased to present a two-person show featuring father and son artists Viktor Pivovarov (b. 1937) and Pavel Pepperstein (b. 1966). Conceived as two separate bodies of work, the exhibition includes new drawings, paintings and sculpture by both practitioners, taking as their shared starting point scenes from the life of Ophelia and the 19th Century model and muse Elizabeth Siddal.

For their first exhibition together in London, Pivovarov and Pepperstein have chosen subjects that are both connected to the most English and literary of early avant-gardes - the Pre-Raphaelites. Ophelia is perhaps best known through John Everett Millais' representation of her in the collection of Tate Britain. She is the lover of Hamlet, who drowns herself in Shakespeare's play when the Prince's family make efforts to misguidedly keep them apart. The model employed by Millais to sit for his picture, meanwhile, was Siddal herself, who famously almost caught pneumonia whilst posing for him and went on to be an accomplished painter in her own right.

For the current show, Pivovarov's works take the form of a series of visitations by Siddal to figures from literary history - including those authors who inspired her and her circle. Pepperstein's watercolours follow on the narrative of Ophelia, describing a group of fish-tailed mermaids, who battle against a troupe of angels, perhaps as an allegory of what might have happened to Ophelia after her death, or what she might imagine for herself in another life. Pepperstein has also written of the mermaids and angels representing the coupling of the two languages that bridge the show - English and the author's native Russian.

For two artists for whom literary elements have always been extremely important, Viktor Pivovarov's practice is most closely linked to his early professional career. He began as a children's book illustrator during the 1960s and 70s. At that time in Moscow he developed in parallel to his professional output - and along with peers such as Ilya Kabakov - the form of the 'Album'. These conceptual series often followed a narrative logic, one drawing following on to the next, and allowed for private ideas to be passed around among members of the local underground scene.

Growing up in such surroundings - his father being a well-known illustrator and pioneer of conceptual art - it is perhaps unsurprising that Pepperstein's art has maintained such strong literary ties. This is exemplified by the fact that Pepperstein has himself authored several novels and continues to produce illustrations for his own stories. Pepperstein's work has also followed the form of an 'Album' at times, for example in his black and white illustrations for his book *A Prague Night* published in 2011.

Whilst Pivovarov and Pepperstein have successfully developed distinctive artistic careers, belonging to two separate periods of Russian art history, their practices remain intimately linked. Pivovarov and Pepperstein's works both often featured simply described characters, coloured with a sparse palette, and laid out on the page in a way that is familiar from the illustrations of earlier 20th Century practitioners from Aubrey Beardsley through to Robert Crumb. Pivovarov's work in particular takes the simple, autonomous character-types found in late-Malevich paintings, whilst Pepperstein often refers back to the modernising projects of Suprematism and their visions of a future world. Pepperstein's work especially draws upon a language of signs, symbols and Utopic predictions.

The current show is one of only a few times the pair have worked together since their landmark project at Kunsthaus Zug in 1999. As such the exhibition offers a rare opportunity to compare and relate the practices of these two artists who are widely regarded as among the most innovative and challenging exponents of their generations.

Victor Pivovarov grew up in Moscow and since 1982 has lived and worked in Prague, Czech Republic. Recent exhibitions include the group show 'Undeniably Me' at the Galerie Rudolfinum, Praha (2011), 'Ostalgia' at the New Museum, New York (2011), and the solo exhibitions 'Lemon Eaters' and 'Them', both at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Moscow (2006, 2011).

Pavel Pepperstein grew up in Moscow, where he continues to live and work. During the 1990s he was a founder member of the group 'Medical Hermeneutics Inspection'. Group exhibitions include 'Modernikon' at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2010) and 'Making Worlds' curated by Daniel Birnbaum at the 53rd Venice Biennale, Venice (2009). His first solo show at Regina Gallery was in 2000, titled 'The Russian Novel', and his most recent solo show at Regina London was 'From Mordor With Love' (2010).

VIKTOR PIVOVAROV  
PAVEL PEPPERSTEIN  
OPHELIA

## ARTISTS' STATEMENTS:

The exhibition is about the relationship between two languages, Russian and English, the English intended here being that language possessed by all nations – ever-present, all-encompassing, ground down by the guttural larynxes of various tribes, impoverished in itself, yet rich in something different, outwardly a wretched slave, yet inwardly an obstinate master who rules as the sea waves rule over the stones. One could, of course, exclaim in protest that the English language is a beautiful oceanic mermaid who is raped in all the ports of the world. They violate her everywhere, taking revenge on her for the dominance of the civilisation with which she is woven together into a single braid. This brutal mastery of English speech is the only universally accessible form of protest against the new order that has been established on the Earth. This is how it should be done: in every home will be a closet with this maritime 'chick' chained inside it. But, try to simplify her as you will, she's tricky, she is the secret mistress of the world. As for Russian speech, everyone knows that she is also a water-creature – a nymph – and therefore, if every once in a while the rivalry between these two imperial seductresses – the maritime and the riverine – gives way to love, cold sex takes place between them. The intercourse of the nymphic and mermaidian languages engenders a mute scream, but if intercourse has taken place in summer and far from water, the sound is of laboured breathing. This lesbian scene unfolds in the palace of the river queen, where the sea queen plays the role of maidservant, but the river queen was long ago entwined and rendered captive by the spellbinding charms of her odious friend. Screams of passion, becoming a guiding star; screams of passion, leading out of a maze, like a ray of light; screams of passion filled with a supra-biological hope for blessed deliverance from trouble and woe; shrieks of passion as the watchdog of heaven, his eyes obsessively enamoured with life.

- Pavel Pepperstein, April 2012

Our exhibition is titled 'Ophelia'. Not so much Shakespeare's Ophelia as much as the Ophelia of John Everett Millais. Through this touching and tragic image we get a glimpse of English culture in the 19th century, of the Pre-Raphaelites, the sublime Romantics and idealists. Just as the Pre-Raphaelites found their source of inspiration in Italian art before Raphael, we find in the Pre-Raphaelites the lost paradise of innocence, the innocence of images and innocence of artistic embodiment.

This project, offered to you the viewer, is titled *The Séances of Lizzie Siddal* and coincides with the 150th anniversary of her death. It was quite fashionable in Victorian times to attempt to communicate with the Spirits; however, in this case we are talking about an imaginary séance which Lizzie Siddal might have attended, about those imaginary spirits she might have contacted.

This year marks yet another important anniversary – it is 150 years since the famous river trip of Dr Dodgson with the three daughters of Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church College, Oxford, when, on the 4 July 1862, was born Alice in Wonderland. Alice Liddell, to whom Lewis Carroll dedicated his fairy tale, died in 1934. This is three years before one of us was born. It is difficult to believe in this closeness. Alice, Dr Dodgson, Elizabeth Siddal – they are all within our reach.

Lizzie and Alice did not, and could not, know each other in life; however, there is a thread connecting these two girls. This 'thread' is John Ruskin. It is a known fact that Ruskin taught Alice to draw. The less well known story concerns when Alice Liddell invited her art teacher over for a cup of tea, when her parents were out. Just as they had settled by a roaring fire, Alice's parents unexpectedly returned. The evening, according to Ruskin, was hopelessly ruined.

John Ruskin, the ideologist of the Pre-Raphaelites, not only taught Alice Liddell, but Lizzie Siddal also came under his patronage. He provided her with funds and bought her works. In our exhibition Alice is present in the form of a spirit, as is Lizzie. It seems this exhibition could be called *The Girls' pink garden*, the same title as one of the photographs by Julia Cameron. Let's take a run straight into the rabbit's hole! Hooray! We are flying.

- Viktor Pivovarov, April 2012