



BALTIC TRIENNIAL 13

Ola Vasiljeva

Ola Vasiljeva was born in 1981 in Latvia, and live and work in the Netherlands. They create imaginary environments in which sculpture, drawing, video and found objects commingle. Recent exhibitions took place at Indipendenza Roma; Quartz Studio, Turin; Grazer Kunstverein; Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; Supportico Lopez, Berlin; Passerelle CAC, Brest; Kunstverein München, Munich; Galerie Antoine Levi, Paris; and Vleeshal Markt, Middelburg, among others.

Location: Tallinn



Ola Vasiljeva Installation view of *Zefiro Torna* at Passerelle Centre d'art Contemporain, Brest 2017

Mixed media Courtesy the artist, Galerie Antoine Levi and Supportico Lopez

Photo: Aurélien Mole

Commonplace bizarreness is the delightful term that describes the disjunctive cognition of dreams – certain breaks of rationale that do not strike us as bizarre as they would in waking life. Being able to recognise a person despite a difference in appearance is one such disjunction, the interobject, ('I dreamt of something between a cat and toaster oven') is another. It is dream logic, in which rationality must give way to an intuitive and immediate understanding of a situation.

Dream logic is all that should be relied on when engaging with the work of Ola Vasiljeva, though the impetus is to find narratives in their installations. It is tempting to try to decipher the clues that have been left for us – to believe that a drama has been staged and the key to its emotional climax, to the

beginning and the end, is to be found among characters and their props. Instead, Vasiljeva urges the viewer to forget the narrative impulse, unlearn this desire for resolution, for character development, for drama and to delve into the realm of the unconscious.

This is not to say that fiction has no place here – indeed, the liberty that fiction affords is central to the artist's practice, perhaps most obviously evident in The Oceans Academy of Arts (OAOA), at once an amorphous, anonymous artist's collective, semi-fictional institution, and experimental platform that probes at the porous divisions of contemporary art and its actors. The same desires that led to Vasiljeva founding OAOA – engaging with non-hierarchical systems, methods of unlearning, paradigms outside of society's established and constrictive norms – are the life-blood for the rest of their practice. Vasiljeva's installations are born from intuition, not logic, and are the result of time spent with the space and its location, objects found in the area, and the unfolding of a relationship between these elements and their own productions. Their sculptures and drawings, often in glass, ceramic, and metal, belie both their fascination with the inherent qualities of material and an ability to tease out suggestive evocations from them. This, along with the architecture itself, co-habituates the space with other material (tools, notes) that further disregards hierarchy and the accepted definitions of 'art' or 'exhibition' or 'artwork'. These all become symbols – carriers for the associations the viewer will bring to the work, rather than the inverse.

For the Baltic Triennial 13, these symbols have been pared down to perhaps the most evocative in a series of steel sculptures. Drawing is another key component to Vasiljeva's practice – not quite unconscious doodles, they are nonetheless an intuitive and direct channeling of idea to form. Influence from caricature, satire, coded or symbolic illustration is evident in *Mister Sister Cabbage*, one such dream-like character. This cabbage figure is an interobject, not quite this, not quite that, playfully alluding to notions of non-binary gender identity among other things in its resistance to categorisation. Other figures enter this dreamscape in what might be called the 'interspace' of an art context – marginalised areas usually deemed unfit for the exhibition of artworks. If there is a key to be found to interpret Vasiljeva's dreams, it will be an ambiguous one – with poetry and intuition as the guiding principles, radical for its elusiveness and disregard for the efficiency and productivity so cherished in the waking world.

Ana Iwataki