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From Red Square to Sloane Square: Saatchi show satirises Russian regime



A detail of Goshka Ostretsov's *Sex In The City* (2008)

Picture: The Saatchi Gallery

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A major new exhibition of Russian art will include

A major new exhibition of Russian art will include political works from some of the country's most cutting-edge artists.

It would take a brave gallery owner to display these artworks in Moscow.

Paintings and sculptures by contemporary Russian artists which satirise President Vladimir Putin's regime are to be exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in London.

They include works depicting government ministers as sinister figures hiding behind masks and comparing the state of modern Russia to a pile of rubbish.



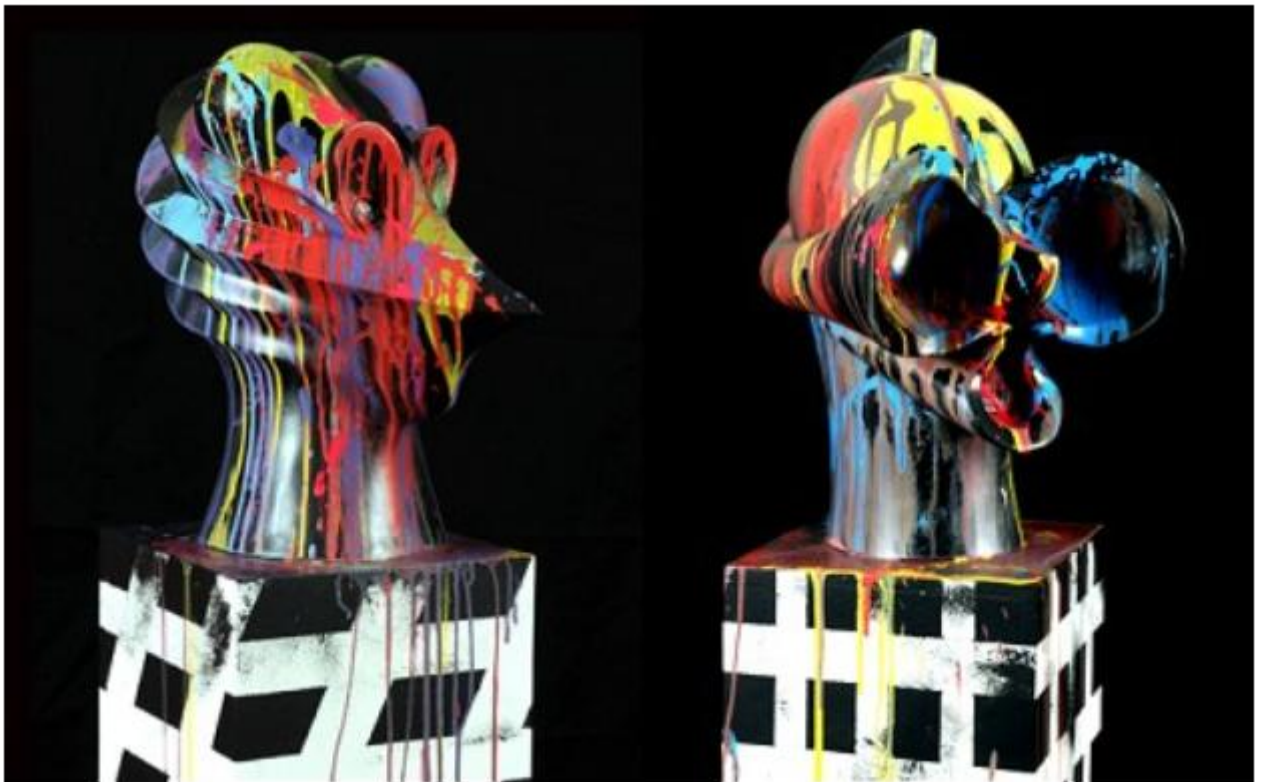
Gosha Ostretsov's Criminal Government - Cell 696 (2008)

While some of the emerging artists whose work is being exhibited live abroad, others are still based in their homeland, where Putin's government has been criticised over its suspected involvement in the murders of political dissidents, and over the recent trial and imprisonment of the punk band Pussy Riot.

Among the exhibits are a series of installations entitled *Criminal Government* by Gosha Ostretstov, featuring figures confined in prison-cells, some with severed limbs, and *Capital*, a 7ft sculpture of plastic bags filled with discarded clothing on a corrugated metal column.

Created by the Moscow-based artist Irina Korina, *Capital* is described as representing “the general condition of post-Soviet, post-socialist utopian disarray in the city centres of Russia today”.

Rebecca Wilson, director of the Saatchi Gallery, said: “Russian oligarchs are spending a lot of money on the big names in western art but they are not buying Russian work. There are not many galleries in Moscow where these artists would have the opportunity to show their work.”



Gosha Ostretsov's Heads Of New Government (2008)

Mr Ostretsov's works also include a series of sculptures called *Sex in the City – Heads of New Government*, featuring distorted heads splashed with paint, and *Mask of New Government*, a collection of five red latex masks mounted on plywood.

He said that his New Government works reflected “a government whose ... members always wear masks and can be replaced without the people being aware of any change”.

Mr Ostretsov, 44, a graduate of the Bolshoi Theatre Art School in Moscow, left for Paris in 1989 but returned to Russia 10 years later.

He said: “The country I left was dramatically different from the country to which I returned. I saw that the new Russian authorities did not appreciate the national culture and did nothing to help develop it. In the new Russia, where the party bosses have joined hands with criminals, the dominant art was of marketing.”

The titles and themes of his works will be seen by many as an attack on President Putin’s regime, which has come under closer scrutiny since the Pussy Riot trial.

The three female band members were sentenced to two years in jail in August for performing a song in a Moscow cathedral earlier this year, which included lyrics asking the Virgin Mary to remove the president from office.



The treatment of the women, who were championed by Madonna and Paul McCartney, has been criticised as politically motivated and raised concerns about freedom of expression in Russia.

Sergey Skaterschikov, an art market analyst, said: “The new [Russian] elite has a limited cultural background and they toe the party line, which is not supportive of contemporary creation.

“Pussy Riot created an acute awareness of the power of contemporary art, but then what happened sent a clear message from the government as to its limits.”

The exhibition, entitled *Gaiety is the Most Outstanding Feature of the Soviet Union: Art from Russia* takes its name from a phrase in a speech delivered by Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader, in 1935.

It will also explore the influence on Western art of the abstract Russian painters Kazimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko, pioneers of the Suprematist and Constructivist movements in the early 20th century.

The show is being curated by Charles Saatchi, the gallery's owner and art collector.

Gaiety is the Most Outstanding Feature of the Soviet Union: Art from Russia at the Saatchi Gallery, from November 21