

Daria Irincheeva

by Kyra Kordoski August 19, 2013

Daria Irincheeva, the former director of Family Business in Chelsea, on post-Soviet disillusionment and why New York isn't the best place for experimentation.



Detail: Upon a time, 2013. Photos, stucco. All images courtesy of the artist.

Throughout 2012, Daria Irincheeva was the director of Family Business, Maurizio Cattelan and Massimiliano Gioni's ephemeral storefront art space that was wedged into a crevice smack in the middle of Chelsea. She was 25 and had only recently moved from Russia, via France, to attend The School of Visual Arts. Having cut straight into the heart of the New York gallery scene at a pretty remarkable pace, she's continued to engage with communities outside of the art world's ostensible center.

Irincheeva's current exhibition, *Almost Aqua*, recently opened at Wilson Project Space in Sassari, Italy. The act of moving—as reflected in this conscious step away from an art mecca to a relatively remote Italian island—is integral to her work. She takes reflections on her socioeconomically dysfunctional post-Soviet childhood as a point of departure. For *Almost Aqua*, she's installed an arrangement of precarious, roughly constructed structures that mix a touch of good-natured bathos with a dose genuine poignancy, as a method of thinking through failure.

Wilson Project Space is small enough that the opening for *Almost Aqua*, like those of *Family Business*, happened mostly outside. The atmosphere on the street was similar, too, super relaxed and invigorated at once—with the nice addition of a hot, lingering Mediterranean sun. That evening, Daria and I sat down for a quick espresso around the corner from the gallery.

Kyra Kordoski In the press release, *Almost Aqua* is introduced as a project that evolved from re-thinking your life in post-Soviet Russia—essentially, your childhood. Could you talk a bit about that, and the impact of your early experiences on your work?

Daria Irincheeva I was born in '87 in Leningrad, and at that time things were falling apart. My family was very damaged by the political situation and the country was a total mess. But as a child you don't really understand political issues, you just take it as, "Okay, this is how things are." I come from a regular family that didn't enjoy any special privileges so I didn't have the chance to travel before the age of 19, and it was only then that I realized that things were completely different elsewhere.

This bubble in which I was living was full of failures, disappointments, and disasters. They were the everyday—it was normal and nobody expected anything different. Moving to New York showed me very brightly the contrast between American mentality and Russian mentality. For Americans, failure is worse than death. America has a history as a very happy, dreamy country, always looking for the future, for victories. There's no room for failure.

For me, failure—these topics of crash and collapse—are extremely beautiful concepts. It's a source for creation, for getting experience, and for understanding and learning many things.

I take these childhood feelings and that kind of mentality as just a starting point, though. I don't want to make projects just about failure. My work takes these broader feelings of every day life that people have, in America, Brazil, Russia, it doesn't matter, and puts them in an aesthetic perspective.

KK And as it happens, failure is becoming more and more a globalized experience.

DI Especially living in New York where, these days, you feel like the apocalypse is coming right now, or it just happened, or it will be tomorrow! But, for example, at the Venice Biennale, at the American Pavilion this year. . . the works of Sarah Sze

spoke to me, the idea of balance and of complex, fragile structures that can fail. I think, from her perspective, it's more about failure in the future, though, and anxiety about the future. While in my work, failure is an "already experienced" feeling. It's not the fear of failure but the anticipation of it.

KK It's interesting, with fragile structures, they may collapse more easily, but maybe in some cases they can be (re)built more quickly and easily as well. So the possibility of quite rapid cycles seems inherent.

DI Our lives are full of constant failures and we overcome them by gaining experience and becoming larger than any one incident. In this new project I deal with the day's cycle and the cycle of emotions during different points in the day. If you blow up these feelings to a bigger scale I think it can really describe how the world functions.

KK Do you find that the cycle of feelings is quite a consistent experience for you from day to day?

DI Say, in relation to the Morning Composition Morning Composition #015 and the Evening Composition Evening Composition #009, definitely. I wake up with really big expectations from myself and from the world, and in the evening, I think, Okay, tomorrow will be better. Of course, you don't feel disappointed every day, but you still have hope for the next morning.

KK You're not an artist who goes for Untitled much, and the titles you choose are very evocative. How does the relationship between title and artwork tend to unfold for you?

DI Titles come differently. Sometimes I just read a book and there's a really interesting combination of words, and I just steal them. I have a separate notebook where I have all my stolen, very interesting poetic combinations that I use for my titles.

I never work from the words, though. To tell you the truth, I'm really bad with words. I feel visual language and I understand visual language very well, but verbal language is a bit more alien. I definitely separate music, visual language, and literature in my mind. I have a lot of trouble finding words, writing press releases. It's usually really painful for me, actually.

KK As director of Family Business you curated a show called Toasting to the Revolution which seems like it had similar origins to Almost Aqua, along the lines of post-Soviet disillusionment. How do you see the development from one show to the other?

DI Toasting to the Revolution was my first experience with the concept of reconstruction. I transformed the whole space based on that idea. I use a lot of construction materials in my work now. It really fascinates me, because I lived in a construction site my whole childhood. We were always repairing something ourselves at home. And that's what's happening now to my country and to many other countries. People try to do things themselves, to reconstruct their personal environments. They function as architects and designers of their own lives, but sometimes with minimal access to materials.

Toasting to the Revolution was pretty pessimistic but quite realistic about the situation in Russia. Through the Internet and the news you get the feeling that there is a strong opposition movement, and that there are protests, but in reality when you go to Russia you just feel like huge masses of people are not ready for any kind of change, that they're just tired. They don't want to protest, they don't want to think about what's happening in their country, they don't want to travel and see other things, they don't want to be exposed. There is a limit to curiosity, and to expectations from life, which comes partly from the Perestroika period.

My goal with Toasting to the Revolution was to say that things will change, but that a lot of time is needed for that change because people's mentality needs to change first. So yes, it was pessimistic. But then, my art can also be pretty pessimistic. At the same time, though, I combine comedy and tragedy. I find that a lot of my pieces have a sense of humor and it's not that I'm complaining about my life, it's more like I'm looking at it as human, taking it as it is, finding what's interesting and funny



Left: Remembered Something at 5pm, 2013. Contact paper, dimensions variable. Right: Morning Composition #015. Bubble wrap, wood, contact paper, cement, neon light, paper, paint samples on canvas.

I'm complaining about my life, it's more like I'm looking at it as human, taking it as it is, finding what's interesting and funny and surreal.

Also, in this new stage I'm moving into a more international language, not speaking as much about a specific situation in Russia, or the U.S.S.R. during Perestroika. I'm talking more about these general concepts of the collapse of huge systems, of huge expectations, and of huge works.

KK You were talking earlier about the importance of travel and international experience. So much of the movement around art tends to be inwards, towards well-established scenes. You're moving in the opposite direction to an extent here, by showing work in Sassari, a small city on a beautiful Mediterranean island—quite a contrast to New York.

DI I love doing experimental exhibitions in different places. New York is amazing for education, for getting very intense experience, but for experimentation. . . I don't find it as experimental a place as others around the world. Everything goes in New York, it's difficult to surprise and be surprised. There can be a lack of really sharp, theoretical conversation, which is sometimes a bit depressing for me.

I did a big exhibition in St. Petersburg in an abandoned palace that had been closed for a hundred years and we were the first ones to open it. The work was strong there because it was about that place, so it addressed those people. Even though the level of education in contemporary art in St. Petersburg is very low compared to New York, the works spoke really strongly to locals, and differently for them for than, for example, the same works would speak to New Yorkers or Sardinians.



Evening Composition #009, 2013. Wood, air plants, paper tape, contact paper, newspaper, paint samples on canvas

KK How does your work feel to you here in Sardinia?

DI It's not created specifically for Italians, but I think they can relate. They also live in a country where the economic and political situation is really failing and I feel the same level of disappointment and vibrations in the air. People are really disappointed in the expectations that they had for Berlusconi in the '90s.

And I don't speak Italian, so I can't talk to people about the work the way that I can talk to you. It's very interesting to bring work here without being able to talk about it, and to see how the work alone can actually speak to people from a different country. Of course there's the press release, which explains some things, but still. . . It's a way of checking the power of the visual language I have right now, which I understand is still very much in development because I'm a young artist.

I like making work in an environment that's not like New York, where people are already saturated with art. I don't want to be limited to New York, London, and Berlin. Of course, everybody ends up there as they become more and more professional. But it's important to get in and get out.

KK Do you think you'll keep New York as your home base for the time being, though?

DI I just found an awesome studio in Greenpoint, a huge one. I can't wait to get back and attack my studio, and to make more work for this project, because this is just the start. I've just made the beginning and the end, the morning and the evening. Definitely, there's going to be lots happening during the day. And a lot will happen during the night. The surreal things that happen to you when you're unconscious and asleep really intrigue me.