

HAVE THE EGG CARTONS AND MATTRESSES ARRIVED YET?

by *Laryssa Chreptowsky Reifel*

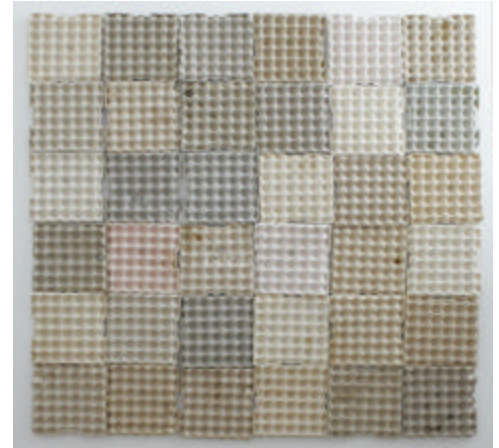
Stranger questions about modern art have been posed.

On December 1-2, the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago opened an exhibit titled “Artists Respond: Ukrainian Art and the Orange Revolution”.

The exhibit presented the selected works of a group of 15 young artists who participated in the demonstrations in Kyiv’s Independence Square during the Orange Revolution. The Center for Contemporary Art (CCA) in Kyiv, Ukraine is located directly on the square where the first demonstrations began. The Center opened its doors to students and artists transforming its gallery space into a collective studio for the production of new art. This union of artists, ideas, and physical site became known as the Revolutionary Experimental Space—in Ukrainian, *Revolutsyjnyj Experimentalnij Prostrir*.

Each artist’s work either interprets the events of the revolution, or induces one to contemplate serious questions about the revolution itself, the political process in Ukraine, and Ukraine’s evolution as a democratic entity. For example, one piece titled “Victory” by Artur Belorozov, is a compilation of egg cartons that hang on the wall.

Though egg cartons might not seem particularly consequential to the casual observer, they were critical to the revolution. The demonstrators stood on egg cartons to keep their feet off the cold ground during their vigil. This increased their endurance to remain outside during the revolution. The different types of egg cartons used in the piece symbolize the synthesis of a diverse group of people united in the cause for democracy. Other works in the exhibition are not as obviously tied to the “street”, as it were. There are pieces that offer both realism and abstraction, historical references and ironic commentary.



Victory
Artur Belorozov
Egg cartons



***Kolya Sawicki and
Yulia Vaganova***

The installation of the exhibit by co-curators Nicholas Sawicki of UIMA and Acting Director of the CCA Yulia Vaganova (who came from Kyiv to attend the installation and opening of the exhibit), is particularly compelling as it takes the viewer through a riveting emotional experience. Following a brief explanation of the Revolutionary Experimental Space, the viewer is instantly brought into the spirit of the exhibit as he begins with a particularly colorful piece called “Dobrij Den”, where a man is falling in a sea of color.

The exhibit then continues with many pieces that explore the political questions of the revolution – Yuschenko’s challenges, the pervasiveness of Yanukovich’s continued presence, and the legacy of Soviet politics. From there the viewer is taken directly to the street as rolled up, used mattresses bound by silver duct tape “Crowd” together to communicate the spirit and emotion of the revolution.



Dobrij Den
Volodymyr Kuznetsov
Linoleum and acrylic

The UIMA hosted a special opening for members of the press and dignitaries. There were over one hundred individuals in attendance that included members of the media, elected and appointed government officials, gallery and museum representatives, representatives from the Chicago Mayor’s office and members of the UIMA board of directors and executive committee. Greetings on the occasion of the opening of this significant exhibit were sent to the UIMA from First Lady Kateryna Yuschenko, as well as Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. The co-curator of the exhibit, Nicholas Sawicki, along with Professor Yohan Petrovsky-Shtern of Northwestern University, were interviewed at length on Chicago Public Radio’s program *World View* about the exhibit, as well as the current political situation in Ukraine.



Visitors at the opening

Other publications covered the event as well, including the Chicago Sun Times, which featured a full page article written by prominent art critic Kevin Nance with large pictures of the art work. Mr. Nance showcased the exhibition and recommended it to the general public. In recommending the exhibit, Mr. Nance wrote: "... the show's standouts are those which convey the rawness of revolutionary fervor with a raised fist followed by a wink - a wink that, while important, doesn't negate the fist."



From Left:

Selfreliance Chairman Michael Kos, State Senator Dan Rutherford, Selfreliance President Bohdan Watral, Selfreliance and UIMA Board Member Oleh Karawan

The response to this exhibit has been tremendous. The exhibit received press coverage on the front page of the Metro section in the Chicago Tribune. The article quoted Nicholas Sawicki stating that he chose works that would hold up over time and distance. "Propaganda doesn't hold up," Sawicki said. "You can't make an exhibition today of Yushchenko posters and have it speak beyond that particular moment. But once an artist begins to engage in the process of thinking about events, thinking about his or her medium or technique, things happen that really make a work stand up." The article was published on the day of the official opening to the public. Due to heavy marketing of the show and the press coverage, the public opening was attended by approximately 300 visitors. Visitors continue to attend the exhibit daily.



From Left:

. President of Heritage Foundation Julian Kulas, Cook County Commissioner Tony Peraika, UIMA Vice-Chairman Laryssa Chreptowsky Reifel, State Senator Walter Dudycz.

The exhibit was also covered by the Chicago Reader, and many other outlets of electronic communication, including the front page of the revolutionary website www.eng.maidan.ua.

One year ago, the exhibit "Artists Respond: Ukrainian Art and the Orange Revolution" was a vision of UIMA's Board of Directors. After nine months of negotiations and planning, and with the generous support of the Heritage Foundation of First Security Federal Savings Bank in Chicago, the volunteer operations team at the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in conjunction with the Center for Contemporary Art in Kyiv delivered a stunning art exhibit that will be enjoyed by the public until the end of February, 2006.

So yes, the egg cartons and mattresses have arrived ... they are even more generously received than expected.