

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

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THE PEPPERS (Ludmila Skripkina & Oleg Petrenko)

CHARTING THE SOVIET UNION: 1989 - 1991

January 5 - February 9, 2008

The Peppers chart the pointless scientism of a dreary existence predicated on an official jargon that long ago lost its conviction or even its reason to describe the real world. They operate from the site where the pathology of the banal meets the banality of the pathological.
Michael Odom, *In Pittsburgh*, 1991

The Feldman Gallery will exhibit paintings and sculpture from 1989 to 1991 by Ludmila Skripkina and Oleg Petrenko, a collaborative team from Odessa known as The Peppers. Their work, which chronicles the mundane horrors of life in the former Soviet Union, is characterized by the juxtaposition of charts and numerical tables with common objects.

The youngest generation to grow up in the pre-Glasnost era, the Peppers became a part of the Moscow conceptual group of unofficial artists in the early 80's. Many of the works in this exhibition were exhibited at the Feldman Gallery in 1991 when the Peppers were in their twenties. The exhibition is a rediscovery of that moment in contemporary art history when the Russian artistic underground, previously unknown to the West, burst onto the international art scene to critical acclaim during Perestroika.

The exhibition features the reconstruction of the "Potato Room" installation from 1991 and mounds of sculpted green peas which contrast the boredom of the Soviet diet with the state's pride in its production. Jars of fatty preserves sit in two worn slippers – while the women cook, the men rest. Large paintings on Masonite are renditions of pseudoscientific studies which are comic in their ludicrous ineffectuality, such as the relationship of the arts to worker productivity. Other studies, *Data concerning discharge as related to the degree of vaginal cleanliness...* and *The Gait of a Dog after Removal of the Cerebellum*, are frightening, relating absolute systems and rigid order to the sinister use of science. Objects that have lost their function, a severed coffee pot, a bisected accordion, stand for the break-down of society.

The exhibition also includes a series of paintings on patterned handkerchiefs that portray moments of daily life which have been invaded by the Pepper's odd objects to amusing effect, and several works include references to other Moscow conceptualists, a common practice within that hermetic world. These are allusions to alternative realities.

Institutions in the United States which mounted solo exhibitions by the Peppers in the early 90's include Gallery 210, University of Missouri, St. Louis; Ronald Feldman Fine Arts; Fundacion San German, Puerto Rico; and the Pittsburg Center for the Arts. Group exhibitions in the 90's include: *After Perestroika: Kitchenmaids or Stateswomen*, Independent Curators (traveling); *Perspectives of Conceptualism*, The Clocktower, New York (traveling); *Soviet Art*, Museo d'arte Contemporanea, Prato, Italy; *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, Tacoma Art Museum and traveling to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and the Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; *The Green Show*, Exit Art, New York; and *Moscow-Vienna-New York*, Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, Austria.

Opening reception: January 5, 6 – 8. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 – 6. Monday by appointment. For more information contact Sarah Paulson at (212) 226-3232 or sarah@feldmangallery.com.