

EXHIBITION: BILLY CHILDISH, HARRY ADAMS and EDGEWORTH JOHNSTONE

Our Friend Larionov

curated by Nana Zhvitiashvili

at **Pushkin House, 5a Bloomsbury Square, WC1A 2TA**

in association with L-13 Light Industrial Workshop and ART&SPACE Gallery

supported by ARTiculate Contemporary Art Fund

9 – 21 October 2014

opening 6pm-8pm **Wednesday 8 October 2014**

artists' talk: **Saturday 18 October 2014**



PUSHKIN HOUSE, the independent home of Russian culture in London, has invited **Billy Childish** and **Harry Adams** to present an exhibition of paintings as an expression of a current British response to the inspiration of Russian culture. For this the artists have chosen to collaborate on making paintings which celebrate the work of Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964) in the spirit of an international unity of artists, in a time beset by geo-political tensions.

The title and idea for the exhibition was first mooted by Childish in 2006: recognising a kindred spirit, he'd made several paintings in homage to Larionov's Neo-Primitive style which was itself a fusion of modernism with traditional Russian folk-art, so when the invitation came from Pushkin House it seemed a perfect time to make new paintings and realize the exhibition. In this instance Childish will collaborate in painting new homages to Larionov with Harry Adams and Edgeworth in a 'studio approach' to making the work. These paintings will all be made in the month preceding the exhibition.

Following a long period of abstinence and rejection of Art in the early 1990s, Harry Adams (a collaboration between the artists Steve Lowe and Adam Wood) has been painting with intent since 2006. Adams also collaborates with Childish on the Art Hate Archive and many other projects through the L-13 Light Industrial Workshop – a studio, publisher and presentational platform for a small group of artists founded by Steve Lowe in 2003. Edgeworth Johnstone, a painter who has collaborated with Childish on a special series of works since 2013, makes unmediated and expressionistic paintings, and the work they make together reflect Childish's paintings from the late 1990s which were similarly raw and direct.

Through their individual and collaborative practices these artists honour the ideals which arose from the work and ideas proposed by the modernists and avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, making work which similarly defies the dominant trends, now that apparently radical forms have become passé.

And so, refusing the socio-political constraints of orthodox contemporary culture in favour of spiritual freedom, movement towards individuation, and the encouragement of demiurgic dimensions in art, they share a commitment to the traditions of painting built on the foundations of their anti-art credentials. Through a betrothal to their craft they divulge worlds of harmony and discord – taking the figurative form as its anchor that nonetheless seeks and celebrates its elemental make-up.

As a direct result of this exhibition a new radical painter's group *Heckle's Horse* will be founded. A document in the form of a manifesto outlining the aims and ideals of this group will be published on the opening day and a number of small works by younger members of the group will also be displayed.

NOTES ON LARIONOV

"We all went through Larionov's school", said the poet Mayakovsky. Before he left the country in 1915, Larionov was Russian art's most restless genius. Larionov started his artistic career with a success as a postimpressionist, but subsequently rejected the professional recognition he had achieved in favour of different aesthetic explorations, which became an 'evolving' model for most avant-garde artists. Larionov wrote: "my task is not to assert the new art, since after that it would cease to be new, but to attempt as much as possible to move it forward. In a word, to do what life itself does as it every second gives birth to new people and creates new ways of life, out of which new possibilities are continually born".

As the art historian Nina Gurianova wrote, "His provocative ideas tested limits and anticipated the postmodernist mentality in their "everythingness" and deliberate aesthetic eclecticism. He even rejected the major modernist stipulation of authenticity and originality, arguing that there is no difference between a copy and an original".

Betting on the provocative aspect of his work, Larionov deliberately injected the established art world with the "low" tradition of the urban primitive. This action was not aimed so much to shock as to create a new aesthetic system with different points of reference, a system in which the borders between "high" and "low" in art would be eroded.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Billy Childish

Billy Childish was born in Chatham, Kent in 1959. After leaving school at 16, he worked at the Naval Dockyard in Chatham as an apprentice stonemason. Initially denied an interview to the local art school, he later gained entry to St. Martin's School of Art. However Childish's defiance led to his eventual expulsion from art school in 1981. He then embarked on an artistic odyssey.

Billy Childish has exhibited internationally, including in New York, London, and Berlin. His work was included in *British Art Show 5* in 2010, and was the subject of major concurrent survey exhibitions at the ICA in London and White Columns in New York.

Edgeworth Johnstone

Was in born Brussels in 1977, and lives and works in London. He has played guitar in bands since 14 years of age and started painting at 28. He maintains an ardent daily practice of making paintings drawings and prints, exhibiting widely in group shows including *No Soul for Sale*, Tate Modern (London 2010). Since 2013 he's been visiting Billy Childish's studio every Monday where he makes paintings in collaboration with him.

Harry Adams

Harry Adams is the name of the artistic partnership between Steven Lowe and Adam Wood. They have collaborated together closely since meeting at art school. In recent years, the focus of their activity has been the L-13 Light Industrial Workshop. This is a gallery, publisher and workshop premises set up by Steven Lowe which provides a vehicle not only for Harry Adams but also for other artists, including Jimmy Cauty, Jamie Reid and Billy Childish. The Harry Adams paintings have only been exhibited outside of L-13 since 2013, since when they have enjoyed successful solo exhibitions in Munich and Milan.

ABOUT ARTiculate Contemporary Art Fund

"Our Friend Larionov" is supported by the ARTiculate contemporary art fund. ARTiculate is a private, London-based contemporary art fund established in 2007 by a group of collectors with Russian backgrounds. Nana Zhvitiashvili, curator of this exhibition, is one of the founders of the ARTiculate fund. Articulate is building an international art collection. Its objective is to identify, assemble and promote outstanding artworks from the world of contemporary art. At the heart of the collection is the reference by contemporary artists to the legacy of the Russian Avant-Garde. ARTiculate's collection includes works by internationally recognized and emerging artists in a variety of media. www.articulatefund.com

ABOUT PUSHKIN HOUSE

Pushkin House is the oldest independent Russian cultural centre in the UK. It was set up in 1954, 60 years ago this year, by a group of Russian friends in a house in London as a meeting-place for people of all nationalities who are interested in Russian culture: 'for the enjoyment, understanding and promotion of Russian culture in all its forms, and for the exchange of views in a lively, informal atmosphere, with freedom of speech a core principle'. Today, you can enjoy the Pushkin House programme of Russian literature, poetry, art, film, music, theatre and dance, history, philosophy and politics, in our 300-year-old house on Bloomsbury Square. Events include lectures and talks, exhibitions, films, concerts and readings, as well as special events for children and families. Pushkin House is a politically independent Registered UK Charity, owned and run by the Pushkin House Trust.

DATES + TIMES

9-21 October

Monday – Friday, 14.00-18.00

Saturday – Sunday, 11.00-16.00

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