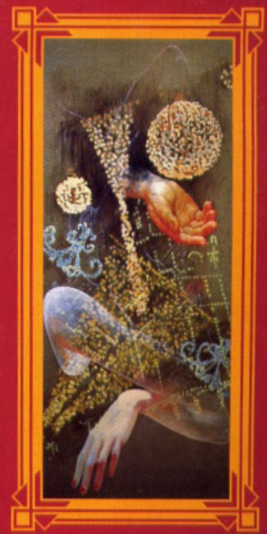




**Margarita Gluzberg.** *Coming With Her Husband.*  
Oil on linen canvas. 117 cms x 117 cms. 2008. ALL IMAGES  
COPYRIGHT MARGARITA GLUZBERG. COURTESY PARADISE ROW.



**Margarita Gluzberg.** *In The Blackout.* Oil on linen canvas.  
160 cms x 160 cms. 2008.



**Margarita Gluzberg.** *Christmas Bollocks.*  
Oil on linen canvas. 200 cms x 90 cms. 2008.

## THE COLOUR OF MONEY Allusions, illusions and the lure of lucre weave their way into Russian Margarita Gluzberg's latest offering at a London gallery, finds Lee Johnson.

CONTEMPORARY ART IS ENJOYING A moment. In the auction houses of New York and London, prices are escalating despite the recession. The buoyancy of the art market seems to be partly sustained by a new generation of super-rich collectors from emerging economies, such as India, China and especially Russia.

So, it was timely that Russian artist Margarita Gluzberg chose to comment on commerce and consumer desire in her exhibition, *The Money Plot*, from 2nd May to 8th June at Paradise Row in London. A series of provocative paintings as well as drawings, books, photographs and other items discussed – among other things – this boom in the art market. In a semi-autobiographical mode, they also examined Gluzberg's childhood in poverty-stricken Communist Russia.

Literary influences infiltrated Gluzberg's work. The title of the exhibition was borrowed from Honoré de Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*. Interestingly, in the appendix to the novel, its editors thought it essential to supply readers with *The Money Plot*, a synopsis explaining the financial connections between the protagonists.

*In the Blackout* depicted the UBS trading floor in London, filled with traders looking like

featureless clones. Their blank computer screens composed a pattern of coloured blocks, which Gluzberg overlaid with delicate blue flowers. In this painting, a ghostly quality reminiscent of Luc Tuymans's canvases was achieved through an Impressionistic attention to dappled light.

Another allusion to commerce, *Leeds Market*, was an architecturally accurate, yet painterly observation of one of Europe's largest markets, founded in the 19th Century at the beginning of the Western obsession with consumption that gave rise to The Great Exhibitions and the establishment of the first Department Stores. The painting also referenced Émile Zola, who penned a novel, titled, *The Ladies' Paradise*, about the world's first department store. In this work, Gluzberg explored this new world of visual merchandising where goods became valuable for their exoticism and not purely for their exchange value.

*Christmas Bollocks* was a visual feast of fantastical decorations, based on a Christmas window at the London department store Harrods, with a 'Russian Winter's Tale' theme. The painting was surreal: a *mêlée* of hands and jewels floated in space in a Chagallesque manner. Apart from alluding to Everyman's desire for jewellery, it also lampooned Russian oligarchs and their penchant

for ostentatious trinkets – perhaps, the same billionaires are now boosting the international art markets?

The suffering of Gluzberg's countrymen weighs heavily on her conscience and Russia's traumatic social and economic history explains her fascination with luxury items. The canvas *Coming with Her Husband* discussed both poverty and the desire for material things. A hand gently caressed a plate of tantalising pink langoustines. Also on the plate, just waiting to be squeezed onto the meat of the luscious shellfish, were enticing yellow lemons. At the bottom right hand corner of the painting was a minute picture of a Russian peasant taken in 1947. Gleaned from the photojournalistic magazine, *Picture Post*, the image marked the start of the Cold War, when Russia was ideologically rich but materially deprived.

*The Money Plot* was not just an examination of our desire for material things; it was also a veritable feast for the eyes and the senses. On a lighter note, by commenting on the relationship between desire and material value, Gluzberg unconsciously produced paintings that provoked a longing for possession.