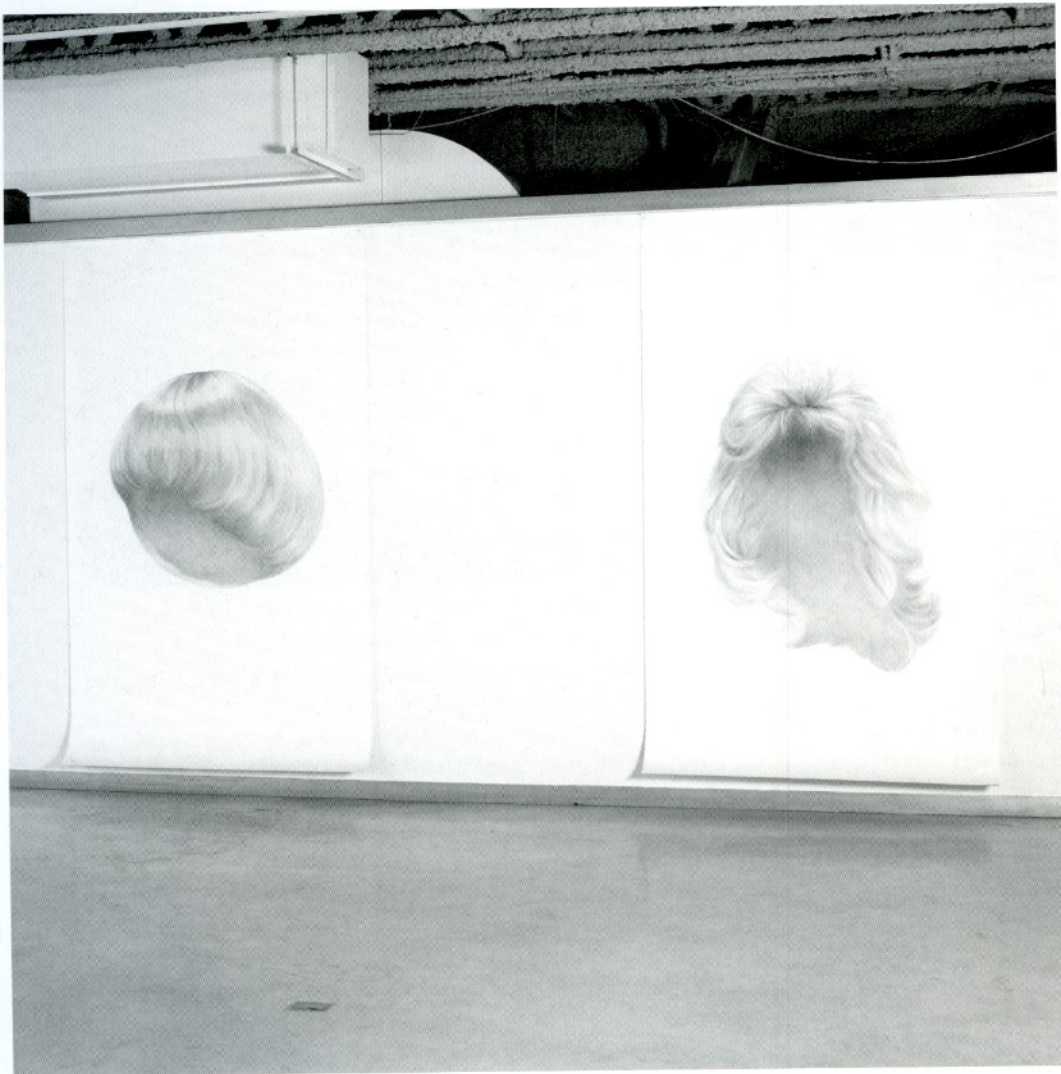


# Margarita Gluzberg Interview by Milly Thompson

MT Dear Margy, here are some questions, disregard any you are not interested in: For some reason I have an idea that you read a lot of brainy books. Yes/no? Don't be coy. How do they influence your work? Or do you prefer to see your work existing in some more sort of ethereal space that exists outside of language? You always seem to be cheerful and I don't associate you with dried-up academicism. I have sent you a picture of a lake. I like nature, do you? Or do you like the SUPA natural? love from Milly

MG Dear Milly, I want to reply to all your questions, that is surely your prerogative as interviewer to ask me questions I don't want to answer – you know, about my sordid personal life, etc. Anyway, let's start with question one – on the subject of brainy books. Yes, I guess I have read quite a few in my day. Coming from a nice Russian intellectual family, I was encouraged to read *Crime and Punishment* at the age of eleven, which was almost certainly completely wasted on me. However, in terms of now, I did go through a phase – well, a number of years – when I felt that I needed to read a lot of philosophy. So I read Kierkegaard, Bataille, Blanchot, Nietzsche, Frankfurt School, which was very educational, but I entered a very strange stage in my life when I thought it was necessary to explain the meaning of everything and it really wasn't at all beneficial for my own work. And then I realised that the discipline of philosophical enquiry wasn't mine and that I wasn't a writer, and that essentially I was a looker-oner, and so now I mainly read fiction. I'm not so interested in the abstract – the existential "who am I?" business, but more in the machinations of life. So the only philosophy I find myself reading is Deleuze and Guattari, because they are so much about matter and specificity. Actually, I'm obsessed with the superficial (because I am superficial, myself). I think my drawings are so much about the perceived appearance of things, sometimes false appearance. So recently I've been reading Balzac, Thackeray and Brett Easton-Ellis, because they all write about the surface. There's a recurring line in *Glamorama*: "We'll slip down the surface of things." In other words, what figures foremost in their writing is the exterior construction of life – like clothes, physiognomy, hairstyles, cars, houses – while the effect produced is profound, grotesque and incredibly witty. Oh yes, I'm also half-way through Tom Wolfe's, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, which is even better twenty years later. More on this subject?

I asked you the other day about nature and also about books. You talked about books a lot, but what about nature? If you're obsessed with the superficial then does nature have a part to play in that? Can nature be superficial? I keep harping on about this because of your drawings: spiders, wigs, butterflies (all with eyes), earlier works like the ghost at a bus stop and newer works that no-one else has seen. Do you see a connection between nature and the superficial, or is it something you're just not interested in at all?



left: *Wig*, 1997, pencil on paper, 250 x 150 cm; right: *Wig*, 1997, pencil on paper, 250 x 150 cm

*Wig* (detail), 1997, pencil on paper, 250 x 150 cm







Well, nature is superficial. Nature is only what we make of it – “Oh, so Caspar David Friedrich!” – one might say, and one might get their head kicked in. But in terms of my interest in nature, I like to pretend to be God. Everyone wants to play God, if they're honest with themselves. So basically, with my drawings, I seek ultimate control over the universe. With this uber-control, I can make gigantic spiders, grow monster wigs, möbius cats and other unidentifiable things. And I want them to be just too perfect in their construction. Unsettling. Initially this may seem to indicate that I am a dictatorial nightmare, but what I'm referring to specifically is the making of work; once it's let loose on the world my control over it diminishes, and I am quite happy for that to be the case.

But more on nature. One thing I'm getting really tired of is everyone talking about this idea of 'artificial nature'. I like the two words separately but not together. What the term presumes is that there is some kind of pure, unadulterated nature, and then there is this suspect, unreal nature, which is only pretend nature and is to do with science and weirdness, and maybe kitsch – and everyone gets very excited about this. You might manipulate nature, but that doesn't necessarily make it artificial. The world is what it is. I used to talk a lot more about science and Dr Frankenstein, but I don't want to anymore. In the end, drawing just allows me to make things up.

You are very interested in clothes, and this seeps into your work. I was particularly amazed by a pair of plastic red, low-heeled court shoes that you bought from a cheap shop. Normally, middle-aged women wear shoes like that to shuffle in and out of bargain food shops. You made them look different. Do you think that this is possible because of your general middle-class *laissez faire* attitude to life, or is it simply a style thing?

First, I have to correct you, they weren't court shoes – they had more of a stiletto heel and they weren't red but pink. Actually, it's nothing to do with middle-class *laissez faire*, but with my recent desire to look like an Eastern European hooker. And that's going back to my Russian roots again! Anyway, there's a lot of *laissez faire* about everywhere these days. I guess my basic aim is to look as Gucci as possible for about 50p. And as I said, I like a bit of cultural reference in my appearance. I was at Goldsmiths (where I teach) recently, and when I went into a meeting everyone fell over backwards. Someone said, “Margarita, was it your intention to look like a character out of Dallas?” “More like ‘Debbie does Dallas’”, said someone else.

Clothes are getting very conceptual these days – and I don't mean the 'COMME des GARÇONS' kind of conceptual. I mean all the allusions to other things. With some people I know exactly why they are wearing certain garments, the references they are making, the effect they are hoping to achieve. It's quite like art. With certain work, you know that it's doing all the right things, and you can see exactly the trendy odd details it tries to include. And if the person wearing the clothes gets it right, and the person making the art gets it right, everyone thinks they are cool.

Good connections are very important to professional career artists like us. Have you sold your soul like some we could mention, or are you going to pretend that you would never think about your audience before you start working on a new piece or series? Is this issue something that gets more pertinent, what with the endless swarm of art students snapping at our heels?

Well, this leads on directly from my previous answer. The question is – can you really make successful art in the same way that you can be successful at putting together a cool look? I don't actually think so. I think work that's desperate at being successful, even if it's fashionable for awhile, will ultimately fail. But I think that there are some brilliant artists, like Sigmar Polke, that just always seem completely new and amazing and 'fashionable'. It's a bit like the people who look ultra-cool at ninety, as opposed to ageing rock-stars who only looked good at one certain point in history. I think you have to be individual, but you also have to pay attention to your surroundings, and to life in general, otherwise why should anyone else be interested in your particular disconnected concern? And I think you should avoid becoming eccentric.

How do you see yourself in 5 years time? How old will you be? What will you be wearing, doing on a daily basis? Yoga? Drinking? Fox hunting? Where will you be living? Money? Lots or none? In short, what sort of a person do you hope to be? Don't be pretentious. Your answers will probably be the same as mine.

Wearing vintage Prada. Drinking lots of Vodka Martinis, with you probably! Living in an enormous apartment, but absolutely NOT a loft conversion. And I hope to become more realistic about life. Actually, what to wear when you are really much older is an interesting question. I always imagine myself at seventy and I invariably seem to be dressed in a sharp, black trouser suit and expensive pointy shoes . . . strange.

Oh yes, I'm still thinking about your question about Royal Academy art and techno . . . and trying to recover from last night. Margarita xxx