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Margarita Gluzberg

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05.02.08-06.08.08 Paradise Row

The images of commerce that provide the baseplate for Margarita Gluzberg's semiautobiographical show at Paradise Row are iconic and intriguing. A salon-style hang across one expanse of wall presents multiple brown-hued paintings to their best advantage—if spread across four walls, their tonal resonance would have been lost.

In these still lifes, an almost comical duo of langoustines is perhaps the lunch of a city financier; the furtive exchange of an envelope under a table completes a dodgy deal; the expanse of a market-hall ceiling in Leeds is reminiscent of the Great Exhibition. The muted but luscious tones and the recurring motif of cast iron in Gluzberg's paintings conjure the middle of the nineteenth century, and references to the Industrial Revolution proliferate. Indeed, the show's title is lifted directly from a nineteenth-century work of fiction—Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* (1846). Editors of that novel decided its readership needed a synopsis detailing the network of the characters' financial entanglements: They called this appendix "The Money Plot."

Gluzberg's attempt to link her themes to the present results in numerous still lifes of luxury goods; a Prada handbag stands out. But for all their elements of modernity, even these paintings seem like nostalgic portraits of fashion gone by. Central to the show is *In the Blackout*, 2008, a faithful representation of UBS's London trading floor, painted on herringbone linen, material equally appropriate for a business suit. As the paint seeps into the porous fabric, it takes on the appearance of chalk or graphite—a dusty effect that brings to mind the work of Luc Tuymans. In the corner of the painting is a small scrap cut from a 1940s-era magazine, printed with the title of the work. Gluzberg seems to be asking, with some glee, perhaps: What would happen if the plug were pulled? What would the next Black Monday look like?

A rough-hewn circular wooden stand, midgallery and reminiscent of a 1930s trade fair, holds a number of eclectic texts about commerce, all of them collected by the artist. A first edition of Eric Gill's *Clothes* (1931) is next to a 1960s-era Moscow guidebook depicting images of the GUM, the famous department store. "The Money Plot" is about the effect of money on human character, but it's also a journey through the artist's Soviet childhood, when consumer lust was no doubt a constant for many.