

Margarita Gluzberg  
AVENUE DES GOBELINS



*Captive Bird Society*, 2009  
12-hour performance-installation, incorporating the Haute Couture collection  
of Didier Ludot, Nuit Blanche commission, École Normale Supérieure, Paris

As far back as 1992 Margarita Gluzberg walked down Bond Street in the West End of London, camera in hand, taking black and white photographs of exclusive shop fronts and people in front of them window shopping. From this point on one of her central interests has been the psychological dimension of consumer culture and an exploration of the manner in which consumers are affected by desire and the promise inherent in the luxury object intermediated by the gaze; the way in which viewers look at images of people.

Gluzberg however cannot be categorised as a photographer, more as an artist who uses photography sometimes because her practice follows several different trajectories. She is well known for her large-scale drawings as much as for her performance and sound works as well as painting and photography. In her recent body of work *Avenue des Gobelins*, Gluzberg also employs video as part of a series of works that are structured around her use of the carousel slide projector, analogue and mechanical technology.

Gluzberg's utilisation of retro technology is apparent in her earlier work *The Captive Bird Society* that she describes as 'a sonic and visual landscape' and which includes about a dozen old style record players playing vinyl recordings of bird song. The recordings play out as metaphors for notions of entrapment and desire that characterise constraints in society that Gluzberg wants to highlight in this work. The relationship between the impression of the bird as an archetypal free creature and the stranglehold consumer culture (in this instance haute couture fashion) has on the up market shopper.

The French photographer Eugène Atget inspired the surrealists with his early photographs of Parisian street scenes. The title for his 1927 series of iconic photographs of Parisian shop fronts, *Avenue des Gobelins*, has been borrowed by Gluzberg for her exhibition. With Atget in mind Gluzberg broadens her retro model by using an old Pentax K1000 camera. She delights in the mechanical action of the Pentax, the approximation of the light settings, the single lens reflex and, particularly, the film being turned on by hand. This movement allows her to dispense with separate frames between each image. It creates a flow of one into another and allows for the possibility of double and triple exposure, superimposing one picture over another, adopting the photographic techniques of the surrealists to produce a mesh of consumer signs and spaces.

A circularity runs throughout Gluzberg's *Avenue des Gobelins* both aesthetically and mechanically. Gluzberg gazes at the window shopper gazing in the window and we gaze at Gluzberg's resulting images. The entire display is accompanied by the clunk-click of two carousel slide projectors running through related sequences of 35 mm slides. As the carousels turn they set up a regular rhythm that accompanies the circularity of the work. Her looped videos run round and round endlessly. The carousel projectors also have a three-dimensional presence in the gallery that becomes part of the complete installation. A presence that in the past prompted artists to consider the way in which moving image technology might manifest itself in a gallery as part of the work.

So when in *Avenue des Gobelins* Gluzberg projects either slide or video, (having already acknowledged the sculptural presence implicit in some her work when the record players in *The Captive Bird Society* were displayed on plinths) she recognises the object nature of her projection in the gallery space. Each projected image is shown on a small paper screen the surface of which is covered in graphite. Pinned to the wall it is in effect a minimal drawing on which the black and white image gleams more vividly than on a white screen. This combination of drawing and projection synchronise two aspects of Gluzberg's practice, drawing and photography, and enlarges the small 35 mm images. Images that made straight form the original film stock unmediated by any secondary process have a kind of integrity intrinsic to analogue technology, retaining the qualities for which film was invented.

Gluzberg has a concern with scale, most notably in her earlier huge drawings that manifest a theatrical presence in a gallery. And while her projections in *Avenue des Gobelins* are not huge, they nevertheless demonstrate an awareness of the way in which projections can govern image size; whether that is in the form of a photographic print projected by the old style darkroom enlarger, the carousel slide projector or the video projector. Each of which have a part to play here. Gluzberg's series of platinum prints made from the same 35 mm slide film images, reference fashion photography and resemble the luminous qualities produced when projecting onto the graphite coated 'screens'. Something that Gluzberg was conscious of when choosing this printing process.

The platinum prints and the continuous flow of images in the videos free Gluzberg from the 35mm format of the slide holder. The video is a combination of digital and analogue technologies constructed from 35mm black and white filmstrip wound on in such a way that there are no separate frames. The photographs from which both the videos and the platinum prints are made have been taken very quickly partly because the luxury department stores in which Gluzberg takes her photographs do not permit photography and she works clandestinely before frequently being asked to leave. The work is completed with a soundtrack loop made from the crackle of a vinyl recording of love songs; in all reminiscent of the old tape slide installation much loved by artists pioneering the linking of image and sound.

The affect that aspects of consumer culture have on human relations is an underlying focus of Gluzberg's work that she has described as a 'meditation on the mystical, ritual nature of material desire and consumption'; an exploration of the numinous quality of consumerism and the 'magic' of photography.

—David Thorp











# Colophon

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