



**Leonhard Lapin**

## Suprealist art, suprealist life

Suprealism is a "movement" pioneered by Leonard Lapin that combines suprematism and realism; it mirrors the "suprealist world", where art is packaged for consumer culture.

In 1993, when I started the suprealist phase of my work, which was followed by the "Suprealist manifesto" and the exhibition at Vaal gallery in Tallinn, a prominent art critic proclaimed that it represented the "hara-kiri of the old avant-garde". A decade has passed, and the "old avant-gardist" and his suprealism are still alive and kicking, while, as if following my prophecy, life and its cultural representations have become more and more suprealist.

The term "suprealism" emerged quite naturally: its first half originates from the "suprematism" of the early twentieth-century Russian avant-garde, which claimed to represent the highest form of being, abandoning Earth and conquering space. The other half relates to the familiar, dogmatically imposed "realism", which was the only officially tolerated style under communist rule. Initially, I attempted to bring to the concept the structures of high art and images from mass culture. The most popular domain which attracted most attention was of course pornography. During my 1996 exhibition at the Latvian Museum of Foreign Art, in Riga, the exhibition room containing 30 of my "pornographical works" was closed. There were similar incidents in Bristol, where some of my pieces were censored, not to speak about angry reactions in Estonia. It is remarkable that it is art that highlights what is otherwise hypocritically hidden behind cellophane in news kiosks. But nobody is dismantling the kiosks — the rage is directed at an artist's exhibition.

An important event in the history of suprealism happened in 2001, when the Estonian Art Museum held an exhibition on the anniversary of the nineteenth-century Estonian academic painter Johan Köler. The exhibition was advertised with posters representing Köler's sugary painting "A maid at a well", sometimes ten times the size of the original. Since during the Soviet rule, Köler was officially turned into a predecessor of socialist realism, our generation has a complex and ambiguous relationship with this master. When the 2001 exhibition repeated the old stereotypical clichés about the artist, I expressed my disappointment by relating the exhibition posters to modern commercial packaging, advertisements, and catalogues. It was the starting point of the series "Suprealist artists", which I am still continuing, using cheap reproductions of classical and modern art and packages, puzzles, flyers, ads, and so on, belonging to the contemporary consumer world. I use them to make new visual structures for the new century.

The "rape of art" as an advertising method is becoming more and more visible: many famous twentieth-century modernists are used in some way in advertising, which brings the images of Dali, Magritte, or Picasso to the consuming masses.

The advertising industry turns art into soulless signs which refer to some product or service and give it some "mysterious flavour". The marketing specialists know that people are attracted to spheres which are somehow non-rational and intuitive. A spade is still a spade, but when it is sold with some necrophile appendage, the tool assumes a wider, even timeless meaning.

Such a fate has struck performance art, which is now exploited in commercial events, and installation art, which is put into the service of tradeshows. An innocent who happens to walk into an art gallery may think that artists get their ideas from exhibition centres and supermarkets. A generously financed commercial publication or catalogue may be more striking in its appearance and more imaginative in its verbal content than a cultural magazine. This is nothing else than a surrealist cultural paradigm.

As time goes by, I have become more and more aware that the art-people of the younger generations — artists, architects, musicians, writers — tend to move near the big money. The circle of bohemian artists has withered. This type of artist — shabby, unshaved, hairy, smelling of wine and tobacco — is an endangered species. The conversation in cafés and clubs circulates around politics and society gossip, which has replaced art and spirituality as possible topics. Seeming is more important than being — and this is none other than the surrealist world.

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