PRESS RELEASE

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**Nikita Shalenny exhibits a surreal and imaginative watercolor-depiction of a Russian state of mind**

**A new solo exhibition by Nikita Shalenny opens at Sabsay on December 1st showing more than 40 impressively detailed watercolors and a large painting. Through a surreal and fabled depiction, the exhibited works touch upon the subject of people’s inanity and absurd irrationality.**

According to Shalenny, who lives and works in Ukraine, the intention is to show episodes of common Russian people’s daily life, as they appear in his fabled fantasy. “*I imagine, they have wild magic worlds, because their life is absurd irrational and surreal. It is a fantasy world – fantasy life,*” he says.

The artist has chosen to portray a semi-fairy mushroom culture, dwelling somewhere in the middle of nowhere in the Russian forests, as a metaphor of the common people living in the outskirts of Russia, who are carriers of a particular Russian mind-set. “*These people have a very closed mentality, with deeply rooted fear of America. They advocate going back to the past and making a great soviet empire,*” says Masha Sabsay, founder of Sabsay, and adds “*It is a very symbolical portrayal of a state of mind*”.

Shalenny believes that these peculiar creatures – which he portrays as mushrooms – live their autonomous lives as they find salvation in barely perceptible values, half-forgotten traditions, their special understanding of mental values and total rejection of the new. “*They must somehow be stuck in the past and they do not see the problem. They are building an isolated world based on this situation*,” the artist notes.

**Shalenny’s universe is built on an old American article titled “The most delicious American mushrooms”.**

In Soviet times there used to be a magazine called "America". It was an illustrated monthly publication in Russia, issued by the US State Secretary Department between 1956 and 1995. As a counterpart to Soviet Propaganda the magazine was intended to inform Soviet citizens about American life. Shalenny finds the magazine interesting both historically and anthropologically, because it slightly lifted the curtain on the American life, people, cities, and goods. “*I saw this picture as a child and through it learned about the culture and aesthetics,*” he says.

One of the articles in the “America” magazine dated approximately 1973-1975 was titled "The most delicious American mushrooms" and described the 17 kinds of most exquisite mushrooms in America. This article became the basis for Shalenny’s project and this series of paintings and watercolors.

Shalenny emphasizes the importance of irony in his works. In Russia, the symbol of a mushroom carries several meanings: The mushroom is at the same time a symbol of a magic forest man, a symbol of a drug, a phallus symbol, and a symbol of a nuclear explosion.

“*The United States and the Soviet Union have two completely polar ideologies. America has always been the greatest enemy and the worst nightmare – especially for ordinary people,*” Shalenny says.Rooted in the Russian forest, serving as a component of cultural identity, the mushroom people are – according to the artist – specialties afraid of being consumed by the American mind-set.

**The exhibition brings attention back to watercolors – a rare medium in Denmark nowadays.**

Nikita Shalenny works with different mediums ranging from painting, drawing and photography to video and installation. This exhibition is the first time Shalenny exhibits in Denmark. “*Shalenny’s exhibition is going to bring attention back to the watercolors – a media which is not easy to find in the artistic practice in Denmark nowadays,*” says Sabsay.

Shalenny was born in 1982 in Dnipro, Ukraine, where he lives and works today. He graduated from the department of Architecture at the Prydniprovska State Academy of Civil Engineering and Architecture, where he later worked as an architect and a lecturer. Since 2011 he has worked full time as a visual artist.

Sabsay opened in May 2016 and is located in Central Copenhagen. According to Sabsay, the purpose of the exhibition space is to enrich the Danish art scene with new names and practices as well as to encourage joint projects between international and local artists and curators.

**Nikita Shalenny: *The most delicious American mushrooms***

**01.12.2016 – 18.02.2017**

***Opening December 1st from 5-8 pm***

*Store Strandstræde 19, 1255 Copenhagen, Denmark.*

*Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 12-18 and Saturday 11-15 or by appointment.*

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