

Alexandra Sukhareva

(Moscow, 1983)

A few years ago, Alexandra Sukhareva set up her studio in the town of Dubna, around a hundred kilometres north of Moscow, where a major international nuclear research centre is based. Driven in part by the prestige of the scientific studies linked to the place, the artist in the meantime set up her own personal experimentation with toxic materials and substances, testing the corrosive capacities of liquids in combination with a range of supports. After producing a series of works on canvas making use of chlorine to stain and burn the surface, Sukhareva moved on to work with glass and mirrors, to which she applied formulae dating back to the eighteenth century, identified in a Soviet chemistry manual from the 1940s. These procedures, instable and monitorable only to a minimal degree, usually foresee the immersion of the plate into a silver nitrate solution which alters the colours of the glass, covering it with blurred stains; a second and more aggressive reaction is then triggered with other metals until new traces cover up the previous ones. This is an operational technique that the artist has defined in the past as 'pseudomorphosis': a term loaned from geology which refers to the phenomenon by which a mineral takes the shape of another exemplar in the light of a chemical process. But despite the fact she moves with confidence in an environment full of stimuli of a scientific nature, all of Sukhareva's research is strewn with references to the immaterial and to extra-sensorial reality. The shadows that emerge from the treated surface of the mirrors, in fact, seem to capture and reveal the impression of a person or an object, of a place from the past, of events lost in time, of personal traumas and memories removed. And while in the choice of material there is no lack of reference to the prediction of the future through the mirror – an age-old art particularly widespread in the Russian traditions – also the choice of involving other people in the creative process (who then remain anonymous and who establish a special bond with each work) must be read in this light.

Alongside a production directly linked to plastic, Sukhareva is the author of various interdisciplinary research and archive projects which, over the last few years, have led to the creation of books and exhibition projects. It's a challenging attitude that the artist adopts with regard to modern rationalism: ancient superstitions, divinatory practices and the occult sciences are deliberately brought to the surface with the intention of unveiling the ways in which they are expressed to this day. In her more recent works, the stress is placed on the history of Russia: from the set of beliefs and rituals which found fertile grounds among the population of Leningrad during the siege of 1941–1944 to the interests in exotericism and secret societies of many artists in the early 1960s, from the land of the Zar and that of Stalin.

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