



Vladimir Logutov. Video installation on 'Advertising of nature' exhibition from the series 'Meetings', 2013-2014
Oil on canvas. 184 x 275 cm
Courtesy Vladey

WHO WILL BE TAKEN INTO THE FUTURE?



Which young and mid-career Russian artists will make a good investment in the long run? We asked art market expert Jo Vickery to name a few whose careers are now on the rise.



Jo Vickery
Leading art expert,
former International
Director of Russian
Art, Sotheby's

Russian contemporary artists who came of age in the millennium, termed 'Generation 21' by the State Tretyakov Gallery, are now reaching their creative peak. Born in the late 1970s and 1980s, many are graduates of Moscow's ICA and Osmolovsky's BAZA institute, conceptually-minded, higher educational art colleges formed after Perestroika. They have had unprecedented opportunities to travel and study abroad and are already sought after by major state museums in both Russia and the West, such as the State Tretyakov Gallery, Tate Modern and MoMA. However, their names are still absent from the international auction market. Which of these mid-career artists will finally get their breakthrough and when will the art of their generation become collectable cultural assets?

Post-Soviet Russia's 'Generation 21' has lived through the rapid rise of capitalism. Fast change has radically undermined past values which once seemed absolute. Perhaps, as a consequence, these artists are deeply suspicious of any systemic value and mistrust all kinds of institutional power, including the art market itself.

The prevailing taste today among major Russian collectors is on the whole conservative and their values run counter to this generation's anarchic antics. These artists use ethereal, often inexpensive materials or organic matter to create sculptural objects or installations, which can be documented and dismantled, rather than preserved. They inherited this directly from the Moscow Conceptualists of the 1970s. Painting, which is the most traditional of all art forms and sits at the very top of the art market hierarchy, has in Russia been relegated to the shadow of a collective unconscious.



Alisa Yoffe. Concert. 2 (148th graduation of the Moscow Conservatory), 2017
Ink on paper. 26x24.5 cm. Courtesy Vladey

Where painting features in their art practice, it is often characterized by a stylistic preference for the naïve, recalling children's book illustrations, a source of inspiration in Russian art that was appropriated by the non-conformists. Some of the best artists representative of this trend are Alexander Povzner (b. 1976), Anastasia Ryabova (b.1985) and Alisa Yoffe (b. 1987). Defining the contemporary zeitgeist, their works have been offered at auctions in Moscow, although not yet on the international auction market. Their works can certainly be regarded as interesting acquisitions for new collectors with a limited budget. In a different vein, embracing more sophistication and finish, the upbeat humour of Vladimir Logutov's (b. 1980) art has an easy decorative and appealing quality, alongside its more challenging conceptual punches. His work has already been offered over the past five years, ranging from around USD 2,000 to 20,000.

The Russian-born, but New York-based artist Sanya Kantarovsky (b. 1982) produces large scale, figurative paintings, which employ modernist iconography. He was represented at a recent exhibition in London's Whitechapel Gallery featuring 10 artists who have rediscovered the fine art of painting. Although he emigrated as a child, his artistic sensibility retains a strong element of Russian inspiration. The use of dark humour paired with a childlike painterly style in bright colours and an allusion to some kind of narrative, has many parallels in Russian contemporary art. He has already broken through onto the international art market, having first been sold at Sotheby's in New York in 2014 in a Contemporary Curated auction. Most recently, his painting 'Contamination' sold for USD 145,000 in an online sale based out of Hong Kong. His challenging, yet delightful, art is easily marketable and shows promise in terms of investment potential, even in the short term.

The art of Evgeny Antufiev (b.1986), the prize-winning artist whose works were recently acquired by Tate Modern spans a variety of media. In 2016, he participated in Manifesta 11 where his cathedral project 'Eternal Garden' was particularly popular. He creates thought-provoking experimental sculptures using found materials, textiles, bronze and ceramic. These objects are often exhibited together as an entire installation, in site-specific locations. Institutional collectors could consider acquiring a whole ensemble, but although there are additional layers of meaning around the pieces when shown together, each object is ultimately created to exist on its own in different contexts.



Evgeny Antufiev. Untitled, 2015. Wood, amber. 109x40x40 cm. Courtesy Artwin Gallery

Arseny Zhilyaev's (b.1984) art practice is primarily based on large scale installations, where he builds entire exhibitions created from multiple sculptural objects. His signature works are three-dimensional sculptural wall assemblages made of 'vyaz' text, an ornate written form of medieval Cyrillic executed in a constructivist style. It's a type of minimalist Pop Art using old Soviet furniture re-fashioned into highly charged words as slogans written in striking fonts. They have the kind of decorative appeal which is always desired by private collectors.

Sergei Sapozhnikov's (b.1984) art practice spans installation, performance and photography. Staying true to his roots, living and working in his native city of Rostov-on-Don, he builds intriguing theatrical and abstract temporary installations, which he photographs before dismantling them. At the heart of the ethereal and temporary vibe of these constructions lies a mature, singular vision. His is a voice for the gloomy fallout of the post-industrial urban landscape filled with debris and detritus. Sapozhnikov has already curated a solo show of his own work at the State Tretyakov Gallery and exhibited at Manifesta 12. He is certainly an artist to watch.

It may take many decades for the art of Russia's millennial artists to be fully appreciated as valued assets. In the meantime, collectors who are thinking of investing in Russian contemporary art should take a long-term view. Today's Russian artists may appear to be making slow progress in immediate economic terms, but the future will decide who eventually wins a race that has only just started.