



**TATIANA
DANILYANTS**
ANIMA RUSSA

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Anima Russa is the first big personal exhibition of the works of Tatiana Daniliyants in Italy. The exhibition presents a view of contemporary Russia, with its contradictory forces of tradition and innovation. The exhibition is made up of photographs and sculptures outlining the artistic career of this creative young Russian, who works as a poet, film director, photographer and artist. The title chosen by Tatiana Daniliyants for her first big exhibition in Italy is highly emblematic of the spirit of her work and of the mission of the Venice Projects gallery that is hosting it. Anima Russa is an attempt to convey the spirit of the Russian people, the cultural Weltanschauung of small cities near Moscow, whose people, stimulated by the artist, recall and relive the joys of their youth, through the lollipops that are common to popular festivals and childhood games alike. While some aspects of Daniliyants's work are almost documentary, and try to represent the Russian people, their habits and approach to life in a non-conventional way, her work with Murano glass strives to form a bridge with Italian culture and the people of Venice. I would therefore expand the exhibition's title and add the clarification "anima mundi" between brackets to convey, as is the artist's intention, the link with the universal soul that unites all peoples. The Latin term, "anima mundi" identifies the philosophical concept used by the followers of Platone to identify the life force of nature seen as a single living organism. It represents the unifying principle that binds together all peoples who, though widely different in specific characteristics, are united by a common, shared, universal soul.

Adriano Berengo

Reference to cultural roots and archetypes is one of the main vectors in the work of Tatiana Daniliyants. The general intonation of her art traditionally tends towards silence, clear light states, and the phenomenality of the white. Her latest project, called "Anima Russa", apparently diverges from this tradition. It is entirely permeated with a festive atmosphere, lofty emotions, elevated moods bordering on exaltation, all shades of red, and the carnival spirit of *commedia dell'arte*. The reds in Tatiana Daniliyants's project are objectified and enclosed in contours or, as Kazimir Malevich would have expressed himself, they are localized so that the images had no possibility to manifest their non-harmonious energies. The esthetic function of the reds is to achieve concentration and tension of the inner structure, even in the case of an ordinary lollypop, so that it could open up in a play situation and dramatic manifestation of its image. In the artistic realities of "Anima Russa" color accumulates within the sweet substance, creating sensual pleasure, which is equally open to the child and the grown-up in an ultimate contact with both. Lollypop as a toy suggests

a game carrying the players far outside its own limits and thus shaping a new existential context. Daniliyants transforms its ideal sugary matter into glass shapes while preserving its phenomenal transparency and playful selflessness. Her artistic gesture brings back the sweet taste of childhood with its poignant sense of space, the light vibrations within the crystalline layers of the lollypop, the acute tactile experience of touching it with your lips as in a kiss, the coolness of its surface which makes you remember winter in any season. Lollypop and ice come from the same root in Russian, Tatiana Daniliyants explains in her comments to "Anima Russa", and this bright, carnival, happy piece of colorful lollypop-ice conveys the irrepressibly joyous nature of the Russian people. She goes on to explain that finding himself in the atmosphere of Russian winter with its monochrome landscape, when nature conceals under huge white garments its bright-colored summer outfits, the lollypop made out of Murano glass becomes like precious jewelry, a magic stone, and a source of joy. Daniliyants chooses to convey her image-signs with the help of lollypops, which appeared in Russia back in

the early Middle Ages. They topped the facades of wooden houses, whirled as weather-vanes over aristocratic mansions, and finally they took the shape of ruby stars over Kremlin towers in Soviet times. As is well-known, the Moscow Kremlin, Russia's political and religious center, was built by Italian architects. It began with the Assumption Cathedral built by Aristotele Fioravanti at the same time as Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy*, and it was completed in the 15-16th century with the construction of the Kremlin walls and towers by Pietro Antonio Solari and Antonio Gislardi. The tent-shaped cones of the Kremlin towers, as if trying to tear away into the sky like space rockets, carried the secret of the five-pointed star for the larger part of the 20th century. Already in the new millennium, in the 21st century, Daniliyants returns to culture this original, magic archetype - not socialized or executed in radical technologies - the star made of Murano glass, now saturated with irony, reflection, and Venetian energy. This universal sign-object is placed in a wide context of contemporary European culture, such as the tradition of *arte povera*, the relevance of the ascetic imagery of the star, and the strategies of Gilberto Zorio. Zorio's

starry structures are examples not so much of plastic merits as of the exalted meaning carried by this classical archetype: the star uniting cosmism and fundamental social positions. The star shapes are naturally rhymed with the other play objects in "Anima Russa", such as skates, roosters, fishes, birds, all existing in their peculiar duality: the realm of food-related rituals and sweet pleasure, and at the same time in complete absence of any functionality, as absolute symbols of the super-personal. The unique quality of this festive world created by Daniliyants is precisely in its ability to be a natural medium and exist simultaneously in everyday sphere and that of the game, to overcome all taboos, to flow easily from the world of sacral values into a profane world and then back again into spiritual reality so as to take its rightful place in the cosmic hierarchies. The photo-session that Daniliyants devoted to the phenomenon of unstable equilibrium "in-between", in between the selflessness of the game and purely sensual pleasure, in between universal signs and immediate communication with them - conveys this counterpoint,

PLAY AS PROOF OF ARTISTIC LOYALTY TO ONESELF

“the light
clings to the glass
breaking open
my eye like
it were a clam”

Joseph Brodsky
Fondamenta degli incurabili

a critical point of balance between art and life, with remarkable precision. This series of winter photographs of the Russian provinces is rich in nostalgic white colors and brings out all the advantages of Daniliyants's artistic language which is noted for its intimate qualities hidden within the clearly formalized imagery of the frame. Each composition in this series carries the cultural characteristics of the early avant-garde with its medium long shots and close-ups, with occasional resort to the strategies of Expressionism and Constructivism - juxtaposition of the heavy and the lightweight, of the fragile and the solid, of the comic and the socially significant, of the traditionally folksy and the radically modern. Daniliyants explores the pauses and their rhythmic interlacing in action-packed game situations: she peers into every spatial opening and emphasizes the pictures' festive thrust. Never losing touch with our mundane reality but at the same time fully involved in the games suggested by the artist, Daniliyants's characters achieve a special status of "liberation" which enables them to express their feelings in gestures and movements outside the rules prescribed by art. They stand still or move paradoxically

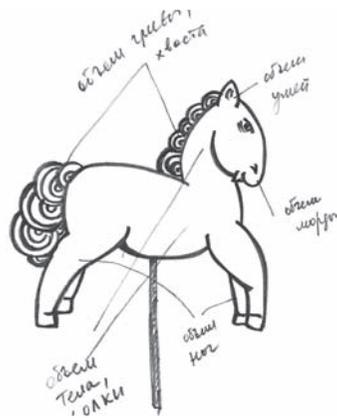
within their stroboscopic stage sets while staying true to natural self-expression not dictated by any social necessity. Their images transpire in quite different visual qualities, they can be scanned and bared in their inner states and that free esthetics of a real-life action, which Dziga Vertov explored and affirmed in his documentary film theory. The photographic vision of Tatiana Daniliyants focuses on people who resume their natural state, leave behind their cares and anxieties, and join this creative game consisting of very simple regular actions. She shows in her blow-ups the eternal values of everyday life, resurrected by her childhood memories, and thus compels us to pay attention to the preciousness of each moment symbolized here as a toy, a lollipop, a festive pause amidst our day-to-day existence. Within the space of her photo frames Daniliyants sets up, or rather captures mise-en-scenes capable of spotlighting both the outer and inner aspects of life with its festive poignancy and human stability, showing us the ideals not only on the examples of concrete events but also as a phenomenon of the universal human community. Her sculptural objects carry the ideals

of Constructivism and bring to mind Alexander Rodchenko, Naum Gabo, and Anton Pevzner. At the same time they rediscover images of folk culture with its symbols of wholesome nobility and naturalness. Born in the realm of Little Venice, in Murano, they derive from a great multi-layered culture enriched with the life of glass. So what is the message intended by the "Anima Russa" project that sounds in Italian but carries the mysticism of the Russian soul? Its images elucidate very specific crystalline-structured substance, which not simply lets light through but also radiates light of its own. Its objects are clearly symbolic and at the same time are endowed with obvious realism. Oppositions and agreements, games and solid truths, traditions and radicalism - these reference points are all concentrated in the universal nature of the sugary lollipop transformed by the techniques of the Murano glass into an objectified metaphor of "Anima Russa". Glass as the civilization of "transparent reality" exists in our culture as a wonderful dream where defenselessness and the staunch courage of fragility triumph despite their doomed danger of complete physical destruction. The memories underlying the ascetic

multi-meaningful images of "Anima Russa" and passing through the age-old Venetian glass like tangible rays of light, testify to the possibility of recovering losses and transforming original forms into new emanations. Tatiana Daniliyants maintains that the essence of modern-day cultural strategies is determined by the natural uniqueness of those elements from our own day and age, which recognize the mythological universals inherent in them. The archaism of glass is presented in "Anima Russa" as a special partiality of this fragile matter to newly emerging things and borderline critical states in which "crystals of events are born and the structure of history is perceived", to quote Walter Benjamin. A simple lollipop and its new material, the Murano glass, acquire a new life and open up towards the future in a reverse perspective, as a "passive voice", when form derives within itself in an attempt to impress, to emboss on its matter the message of its age. Looking back on the past, Tatiana Daniliyants undertakes, in fact, a magic leap forward with her project, in order to show, as Joseph Brodsky said in his essay "Fondamenta degli incurabili", "the supremacy of my own veracity over that of the glass by standing behind it."



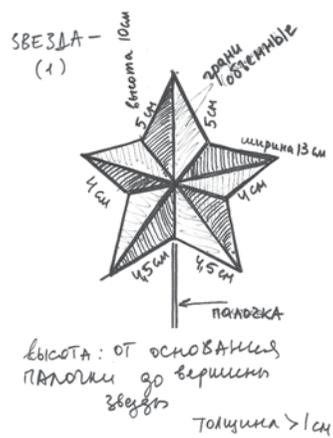
“At first, I created the sketches of lollypops, bigger than normal size, then they were executed in plaster. I found the only factory in Russia that still produces traditional Russian lollypops. The factory was in Orel, a mid-size city with great and rich history...”



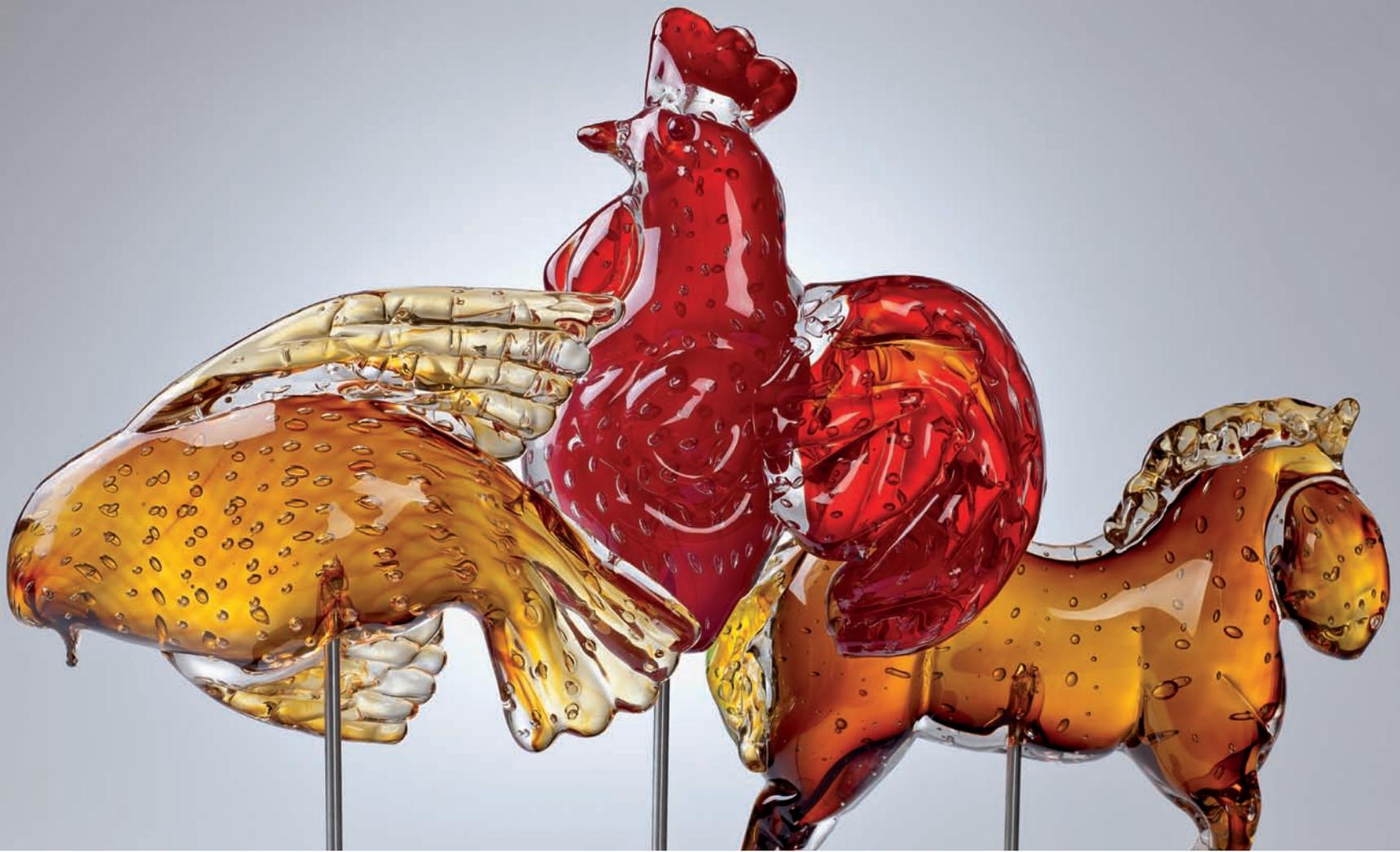
Anima Russa, 2011 / colour photo / 60 x 90 cm



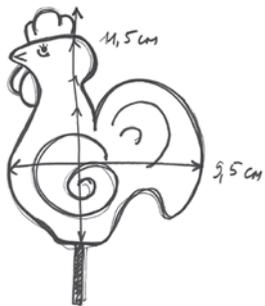
“I took my lollypops
and travelled to see
the people in several
small russian cities
not far from Moscow”



“I made a number of portraits; interviewing people about the lollipops. It was a touching, funny, lively experience”



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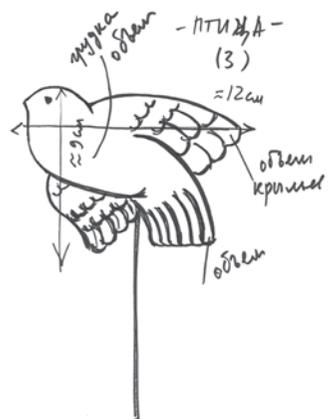


“The circle was completed:
through the Russian
people, *anima russa*,
the traditional lollypop
received an eternal feature,
an eternal life”





18



Anima Russa, 2011 / colour photo / 60 x 90 cm

19



20 Anima Russa, 2011 / Murano glass / 28 x 22 cm / 26 x 17 cm



“And, to finalize the idea,
I produced the magic
immortal *lollypop* from
glass at murano!”





BIOGRAPHY Tatiana Daniliyants was graduated as a Master of Fine Art at the Moscow Academy of Fine Arts (named after Vasily Surikov) in 1994 and Higher Courses of Film Directing and Script Writing (faculty of film-directing) in Moscow in 2004. She passed master-class of Polish film-director Andzei Waida in Cracow, Poland in 1997. She also received a 3 month stipendium at Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice in 1995. Tatiana Daniliyants is author of several short-metragage fictions and full-metragage documentaries, including "Frescoes of Dreams" (short fiction, 2006, with Cecilia Dazzi), "Hidden Garden" (doc essay, 2008), "Venice. Afloat" (doc, 2011), etc. Tatiana Daniliyants is the author of two books of poetry ("Venetian", 2005, "free-poetry"; "Whiteness", 2006, poetry serial by "OGI" Publishing House). Her book "Venetian/Venezianita" was re-edited and published in Italy in "Editoria Universitaria Venezia" in 2007 and presented at San Marco Square during the days of the opening of the Biennale of Contemporary Art in Venice. Tatiana Daniliyants is the Lauriat of poetry prize "Nosside" (Italy, 2008). Since 1995, Tatiana Daniliyants has been a member of the International Union of Art-photographers (Moscow) and participant of numerous art-exhibitions and art-events.

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