



**'I find a lot of contemporary art today rather ugly. A lot of it doesn't speak to me.'**

*— Anna Berezovskaya who prefers beautifully finished paintings with a wealth of symbols, emotions and humour (left and below)*



PHOTOS: ANNA BEREZOVSKAYA

# Rise and rise of Berezovskaya

In just eight years, 26-year-old Russian artist Anna Berezovskaya has seen the value of her artworks soar more than a hundredfold, reports **HELMY YUSOF**

**E**VEN before the doors open tomorrow for Anna Berezovskaya's exhibition at Redsea Gallery, more than 90 per cent of her drawings and paintings have already been sold.

Yes, we know. Anna who?

Berezovskaya is a Russian painter who hails from a small town 60km north of Moscow called Jakhroma. Though she's relatively unknown in the corridors of art power, she's had one sold-out show after another since she was 18.

It's an extraordinary feat considering, firstly, her art is not cheap: A painting costs between \$30,000 and \$150,000 – although eight years ago, it was just \$500.

Secondly, her whimsical, dreamlike artworks are in stark contrast to much of today's pricey contemporary art, which tends to be conceptual, oblique and not necessarily attractive.

Thirdly, she is only 26 years old.

Berezovskaya's paintings are girlish, romantic and almost, well, unchallenging. They depict characters carrying out ordinary activities like walking in the woods, doing the laundry, playing and falling in love. But the images are beautifully rendered and imbued with a bounty of whimsical touches that weave a fantastical story around the characters.

Look closely at her canvases and one finds a wealth of symbols, emotions and humour. There's always a compelling main narrative augmented by surrealistic touches.



Here, a fish wearing glasses. There, a pig with pearl earrings. Elsewhere, a bird flies out of a woman's large hat. One could liken her to pop surrealist artists such as Mark Ryden and Ciou whose works are sometimes snubbed by critics yet sell like hotcakes.

Berezovskaya is unabashed to admit: "I find a lot of contemporary art today rather ugly. A lot of it doesn't speak to me."

Berezovskaya criticises today's art scene with a fair knowledge of art history. She has gone to art school, learnt about the great masters, and even married an art teacher twice her age. Her bookshelves are stocked with books on great artists.

Of major Russian artist Kazimir Malevich who originated the avant-garde Suprematist movement by painting a black square on white canvas

in 1915, she says: "There was a purpose to his art back then because it changed the way people think about what a painting can do. But that kind of art doesn't appeal to me. I want to put emotions, colour and stories into my work. I want my works to be enjoyed."

Her fans couldn't agree more. They've made a beeline for her works and snapped up almost every piece despite their meteoric price rise.

In fact, judging by how quickly they sold, Redsea Gallery's managing director Chris Churcher says: "I think we underpriced them."

Four years ago, Churcher was introduced to her works by one of his Russian clients. He liked them instantly and contacted her to hold a solo show.

The first show, held two years ago at his gallery, sold out within two days. The prices of the works then were between \$15,000 and \$70,000 – half of what they are today.

Churcher reckons that the prices will only go higher over time – and time will tell. Meanwhile, Berezovskaya retains an almost beatific calmness about her stunning success, quietly saying: "I really just want to paint. I don't think a lot about the success."

*Anna Berezovskaya: An Enchanted Story art exhibition will open tomorrow at Redsea Gallery at Block 9, Dempsey Road (next to Jones The Grocer). Call 6732 6711*