



This page, clockwise from above: *Morning* (detailed view), 2014; *Quiet Melody*, *Singing Fish* (detailed view), 2014, Anna Berezovskaya.

ART REPUBLIK TAKES A PEEK INTO THE CURIOUS MIND OF ANNA BEREZOVSKAYA, A RUSSIAN ARTIST WHO CREATES VIVID PAINTINGS THAT BLEND FOLK ART AND FAIRY TALES. BY NADYA WANG

Musings On Life

'The Diet' (2014) is one of the artist's strongest works to date. A young lady sits front and centre, her gaze fixed on the viewer. She wears a light blue-green off-shoulder dress with a full skirt covered with birds. These have been set free from the bird cages behind her on the long table that occupies the length of the painting. Trapped in the cages are instead a myriad of confections – a bundt cake, a croquembouche, cream-filled layered cakes, individual glazed cupcakes with cherries on top, éclairs and bonbons. While the painting's subject holds the keys to the tempting treats, she chooses to resist them. Berezovskaya describes her style as poetic realism, and this painting is a perfect example: the artist charmingly portrays the individual's eternal internal struggle between yielding to temptation or exercising self-control – a familiar and relatable conundrum.

Speaking about her artistic process, Berezovskaya reveals that some ideas for her work come to her easily, while others take months to formulate. However, they are all personal to her. She says, "I mainly use ideas from my normal regular everyday life but these can still be serious things that I try to convey in my paintings in a humorous way." This is not only seen in 'The Diet', but in her other works from 2014, including the paintings 'Morning' and 'Evening', which, when seen together, reveal an almost naïve romanticism that dwells in her works.

Complementing each other, the maiden in 'Morning' pines for the return of her lover, a clock buried in her hair a constant reminder of the time that has passed, and the uncertainty of when her love will return. Similarly, the knight in 'Evening', his metallic armour symbolising his strength, is eager to return home to his love after a long absence, with the anchor and rope representing his desire to hold on to what he treasures the most back home. The common tale of the heart's yearnings






is retold in Anna's colourful and whimsical visual vocabulary and brims with optimism.

Whether it is a large work like 'The Diet' or smaller works such as 'Morning' and 'Evening', the artist's skill in maximising space on a canvas for her storytelling is apparent. In her paintings, unexpected juxtapositions of seemingly incongruent elements, such as cakes paired with seashells or fishes wearing armour, come together to form a cohesive narrative. Whereas some artists work directly on the canvas, Berezovskaya sketches every detail of the final painting before she begins work on the canvas, leaving nothing to chance, and making sure the tale she wants to tell comes through.

In addressing the human condition, the artist's works draw inspiration from nature, nostalgia and music as well. In an earlier work from 2013, 'Autumn and Melody', the artist links the seasons with emotions – the happiness of summer, the reflectiveness that autumn encourages, and the darkness that winter brings, depicted through each of the woman-snail hybrids. The shadows of the trees' branches falls on their bodies and contrast with the light from the soft autumn sun that bathes them. And in 'Kissing the Birch' from 2014, Berezovskaya recalls her childhood walks in the forest to collect sap to drink from the Birch tree, noting that the simplicity of a walk in the forest can be a welcomed restorative break from the stresses of life, no matter one's age.

Although the artist draws inspiration from various sources, music is a theme that recurs in the current set of works. "Everything inspires, my life inspires, and good music inspires, world cinematography, glorious literature. Sometimes the word in a poem catches me and from these comes out a picture." 'Quiet Melody, Singing Fish' (2014) pays homage to the soundtrack of life that we forget to listen to, from the sound of snow beneath boots to the wind rustling fallen leaves to the chirping of the birds. The music stands in the water allude to the beauty in nature that we often miss, and act as reminders not be caught up in the frantic pace of urban life. For this work, Berezovskaya cites as inspiration Russian composer Mikhail Glinka's observation: "Composers are just arrangers of music. It is the people and nature – they are the real music creators".

Even though Berezovskaya's works are deeply personal – or perhaps precisely because they are – she is adept at bringing to life common experiences on her canvases, but always with touches of whimsy that make them less sentimental. Her works are beautiful works of art, but more importantly, they are her attempts to make sense of universal human struggles centring on the pursuit of happiness and the numerous obstacles and occasional triumphs that come with it. The artist's paintings manage to eloquently articulate this turbulent journey in parts, striking a chord with viewers.

REDSEA Gallery, Singapore, will be presenting a solo exhibition of Anna Berezovskaya works titled 'Edge of the World' from 15 May to 14 June 2015. 



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The Diet, 2014; *Autumn and Melody*,
2014, Anna Berezovskaya.

Facing page: *Evening (detailed view)*,
2014, Anna Berezovskaya.



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