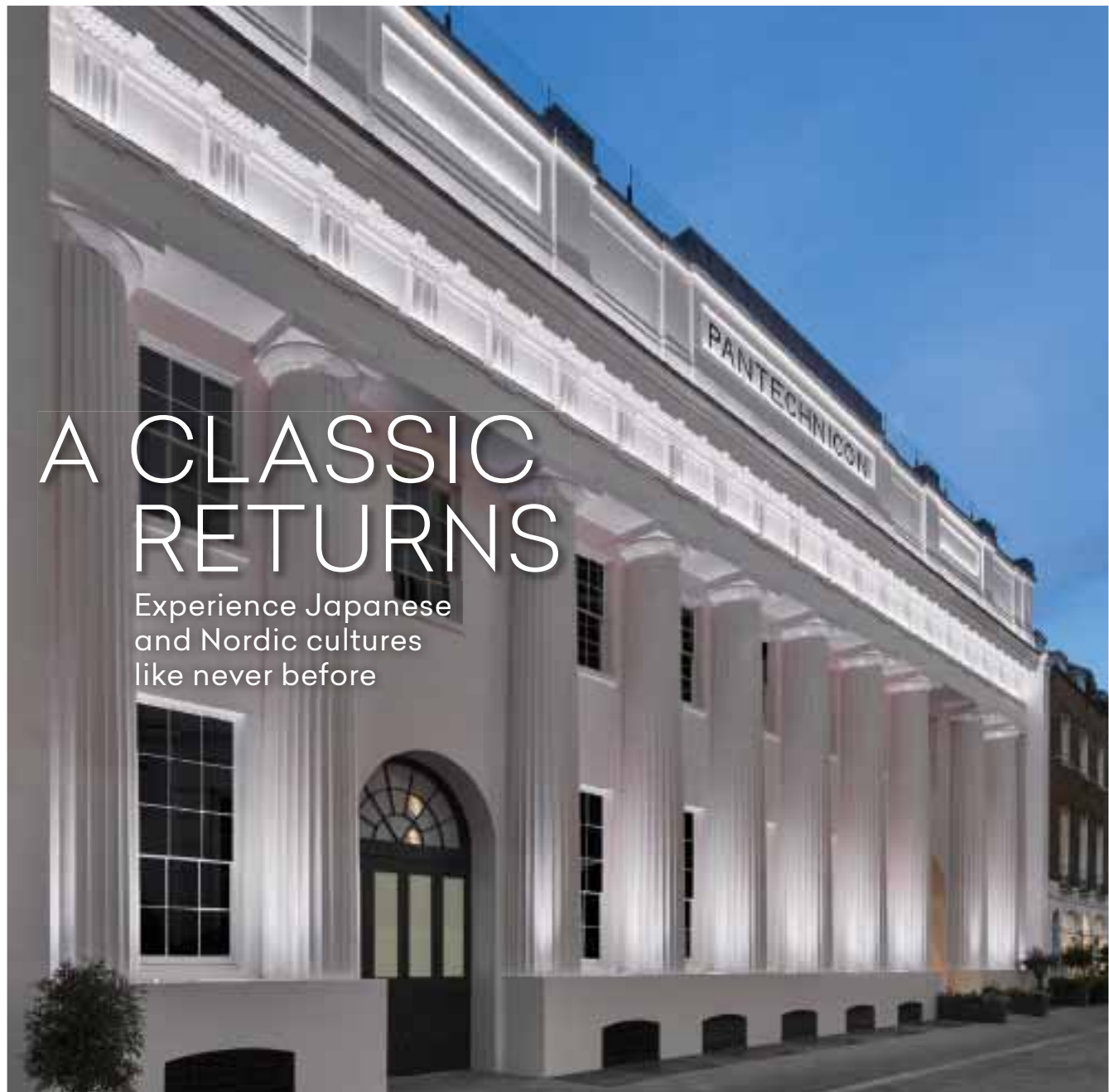


Belgravia

OCTOBER 2020 #163



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Meet Olga Lomaka, a Russian pop artist whose colourful work is reflected in her new Belgravia home

WORDS: ALEX BRIAND



Olga Lomaka moved to Belgravia for the first time in March – and then the world shut down. And, though the Russian-born artist is yet to host the all-important housewarming, it's been a time of renewed focus, self-reflection and expression.

“The outside world stopped distracting me, so I find that I’m creating more than ever. Time was always my biggest limitation but, somehow, time has become infinite. I have this strange feeling that it will never end. It gives me the freedom to be more creative.”

As evidenced by the playful dashes of colour throughout her new apartment, Lomaka is happy to be called a pop artist. “My work is abstract, familiar and uncanny,” she says.

“Viewed through the prism of pop art, I play with recognisable images and products of consumerism, pooling together contrasting beliefs, which give a second meaning to their symbolism.”

Lomaka’s first visit to the UK was for a summer school at the age of 14, and she says it was hard not to fall in love with the capital.

“The dream was sealed,” she says. I was determined that one

day I would live in this magical, totally bewildering city.”

Her artistic journey started at Camberwell College of Arts, whose open attitude allowed her to find her individuality. “The teaching style allows for self-expression, which I found inspiring.” During her studies, she was surrounded by fresh, artistic talent but found a distinct lack of opportunities. So, she created a platform herself, setting up Lomaka Gallery in Chelsea. “Established commercial galleries mostly showcase established artists,” she says. “It’s a Catch-22. I always believed in diversity:

smaller dynamic artist-run galleries are a sure way to empower emerging artists to show groundbreaking new work.”

In 2016, a series of Lomaka’s works titled *Artefacts* – in which simple wooden carvings of Buddha are embellished with consumerist touchstones including Coke cans, cartoon characters and social media iconography – was exhibited in a solo show at the Saatchi Gallery in honour of the Queen’s 90th birthday. It went on to show at Art Monaco, and at the Florence Biennale the following year.

Last year, her series *Pink Magic* was selected by Grayson Perry to feature in the Royal Academy’s Summer Exhibition. Featuring iterations of the Pink Panther cheekily poking through slits in canvas, the works tell you



Maria’s Ministry



Ministry of Nomads launched in 2008 “as a commercial, educational and philanthropic platform for emerging and established artists and collectors”.

Maria Vega, the creative Spanish woman who runs the operation and lives in Belgravia, says she “organises pop-up exhibitions from international talent from culturally active places around the world.” The exhibitions are held at a variety of spaces around London (hence the name) and often feature talks and music as well as artwork.

There is also a Ministry of Nomads’ art foundation to help young and emerging artists. “A recent initiative was a collaboration with the Bolivian Embassy, which provided some money to three young Bolivian artists and flew one to London where they had a show with two of Bolivia’s leading artists, Gaston Ugalde and Sonia Falcone,” says Vega. “I feel an affinity with Latin artists such as those from Cuba. I was inspired when I first went as there was a purity to the art.”

Gaston Ugalde

everything you need to know about Lomaka as an artist – mixing the fun and off-kilter with the profound. And she’s not fussy about how people interpret her work: “I am who I am, and my work is what it is. I look for the atypical in everyday life to reveal spiritual and social concerns: what we consider reality, along with hidden dimensions of consciousness and possibility.”

Though she never planned to move to Belgravia, she immediately felt a connection. “A friend convinced me to check out this new flat that was not on the market,” she says of entering her Georgian townhouse for the first time. “It was so light and comfortable, and as soon as I walked in it felt like home. Belgravia is so beautiful, clean and quiet despite being so central. I’m around the corner from Belgrave Square and just five minutes’ walk from Hyde Park Corner where I go running every morning – bliss.”

Inside, the pop sensibilities have very much spread to the interiors. “Visually, my work reflects my personality – bright and colourful, with twists of playfulness and humour. My living space is not an exception.

“Strong, bright neon colours can have a powerful effect on your emotions. My rule is that I use bright colours only as accessories, in the art pieces and on some textiles – pillows, rugs, throws... I decorated my bedroom with hints of blue, light grey and some pastel powder pink. Blue is a very calming colour that can make us feel centred, relaxed and serene.”

Naturally, the space is peppered with a range of striking artworks –



some her own, and many from travels or by friends. On the kitchen walls are works by two artists she represents at Lomaka Gallery – Albeiro Tomedes and Noro Kim.

Once lockdown lifts fully, Lomaka is looking forward to a new exhibition and print release with East London’s Jealous gallery. And, despite missing the company (“I adore filling my house with friends!”), it has been a productive time for her. “I’m currently working on three series of works at the same time,” she says. “I started to catch up with my reading and writing, even learning Italian again. But, most importantly, I began to meditate twice a day for an hour each – something I have always wanted to put it into my daily routine, but it didn’t always work out.”

The new works will continue her favoured themes, with the benefit of six months of reflection: “Our day-to-day values of philosophy and spirituality. It’s about kindness and goodness, really – a personal journey to become a better self.” Perhaps, for all its limitations, 2020 has provided Lomaka with the space to continue that journey more than ever.

Olgalomaka.com

Tricky Woo

Marsden Woo has, for more than 20 years, been showing an uninterrupted series of solo and group exhibitions from a roster of internationally-recognised artists, talented newcomers and invited guests, alongside a changing display of representative works by key associates.

Since 2017, it has been based at 227B Ebury Street, just off Orange Square, and shows a carefully-curated selection of pieces, available for purchase there, as well as offering a range of specialist services, including art consultancy, commission facilitation and off-site curation.



Ken Eastman, Talking with Strangers (2015) image © Philip Sayer

Siobhan Feeney, one of the three directors (along with Tatjana Marsden and Nelson Woo), says “We also host in-focus presentations by selected artists and are currently showing a display of archive pieces by renowned ceramicist Martin Smith.”

The gallery also creates an ‘online showroom’ series, the latest instalment of which is a virtual visit to artist Bryan Illsley’s studio: marsdenwoo.com/virtual-showroom/

Visits to the showroom are by appointment only, info@marsdenwoo.com