

Varvara Shavrova. 'Threads of Surveillance- Dare Mighty Things' .

New installation presented at the Hangar space, Design and Innovation Building, Royal College of Art, London.

My practice focusses on excavating layers of history through the process of remembering, retracing and re-enacting stories. By engaging memory, nostalgia and reflection, I create installations that make connections between historic and current narratives, between the archival and the present.

In my current work I examine symbols of power and authority and investigate their relationship to the individual. The materiality of my installations is intended to evoke a commentary on women's labour and includes objects made of thread, yarn and fabric, with methodologies of weaving, embroidery and knitting in combination with digital technologies and the moving image. Thematically, my work investigates 'borders' in physical, geo-political and gendered terms.

In my '*Threads of Surveillance. Soft Drones*' series (2020-2021) I examine the technology of surveillance, questioning the notion of privacy and attempting to address the meaning of civil liberties in the context of the recent pandemic. By the end of March 2020, nearly 3 billion people, or every 5th person on this planet, found themselves under total or partial lockdown. Quarantine enforcement, contact tracing, flow modelling and social graph-making are some of the data tools used to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. In the varying states of emergency that different countries around the world continue to experience, mass surveillance is becoming normalised. As citizens, we are being asked to sacrifice our right to privacy and thereby give up hard-fought civil liberties in order to defeat the virus; but what will happen once this state of emergency is over?

Contemplating this nexus of profound, historic appropriations of social freedoms I explore ideas around tangible and intangible flying objects, conjuring up various aspects of modern surveillance technology. Hand-embroidered drawings of drones are sewn directly onto soft fabric material to evoke a sense of domesticity and comfort. This reassuring materiality is in stark contrast with the purpose of the objects that I am depicting, thereby reflecting on the notion of surveillance interfering with every aspect of our daily existence.

The process of making a drawing using thread references surveillance technologies deployed as domestic 'traps'. The associations that I am developing are akin to insects being trapped in a spider's web; or of images of airplanes following flight charts, or surveillance and spy maps used by pilots. The threaded and embroidered drawings will be further developed into sculptural objects that develop to eventually inhabit the space around them, creating spider's web-like structures with objects suspended, pulled and stretched within their physical environments; intended to lure the viewer inside them.

My most ambitious textile and fibre work to date '*Dare Mighty Things*' (2021-2022), is a large scale, woollen-knitted installation inspired by the design and pattern of the Mars Rover landing parachutes that were used to lower the robotic explorers onto the surface of the Red Planet. By scaling the parachute form from an original 21 meters diameter to a

reduced, but still huge 7-meters diameter, my intention is to vest in it a domestic quality; to recreate this otherwise remote object by re-imagining it with the softness and tactility of merino wool – a material we more readily associate with warm, comfortable clothing rather than an object designed for the extremes of inter-planetary exploration.

By giving the parachute a domestic, haptically reassuring quality, it is intended to remove it from the domain of quasi-military technology usually associated with masculine themes of competitive conflict. In the domain where exploratory appropriation can be seen as an aspect of toxic masculinity this artwork suggests an alternative, post-feminist outlook towards the exploration of the solar system and the vastness of space.

Varvara Keidan Shavrova is a visual artist born in the USSR who lives and works between London, Dublin and Berlin. She studied at the Moscow State University of Printing Arts, and received her Masters in Fine Arts from Goldsmiths, University of London. Shavrova is a LAHP-funded PhD by Practice Candidate at the School of Arts & Humanities at the Royal College of Art, London.

Keidan Shavrova exhibited internationally, including at Temple Beijing, MOMENTUM Berlin, Photo Museum Ireland, Venice Biennale of Architecture, Espacio Cultural El Tanque, Virginia Commonwealth University gallery in Doha, Qatar, and many others. She received multiple awards from London Arts & Humanities Partnership (LAHP-AHRC), the National Lottery Arts Council England, Arts Council Ireland, Culture Ireland, British Council, The Prince's Trust. Keidan Shavrova curated ambitious international exhibitions, including 'The Sea is the Limit' at York Art Gallery and at Virginia Commonwealth University, Doha Qatar. She co-curated (with Feng Boyi and offiCina Beijing) 'Map Games: Dynamics of Change' exhibition of chinese and international artists and architects reflecting on fast-changing city, that toured to Today Art Museum, Beijing, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, UK and CAOS Centre for Contemporary Arts, Terni, Italy.

Her works are in public collections of the Office for Public Works and at the Department of Foreign Affairs Ireland, MOMENTUM Collection and IKONO-TV Berlin, Ballinglen Museum of Contemporary Art Ireland, Minsheng Art Museum Beijing, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Museum of the History of St. Petersburg.

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