

Urban Fauna Lab

[Anastasia Potemkina, Alex Buldakov]

Outer Green

4 September – 31 October 2014

Reception: 3 September, 8 pm

All-Russian Exhibition Center, pavilion №59, "Grain"

119 Mira Ave, Building 59, Moscow

Opening times: Tue - Sun 11 am – 10 pm

V-A-C Foundation is delighted to present a new project by Urban Fauna Lab collective in the "Grain" pavilion at the All-Russian Exhibition Center. The group is a multidisciplinary platform conceived to explore parasitic and symbiotic relationships in the urban environment and their associated adaptations. The artists continue their investigation into and problematization of the social and cultural status of animals and plants and their role in history.

Such urban parasites as pigeons and rats, the common nettle and dandelion are at one and the same time in conflict with, and the product of, the city's cultural environment; staying at the periphery of public attention, they occupy new territories, delimit and occupy environments, or take over the empty spaces which emerge out of urban renovation and development.

Proclaiming equality between all biological species, the artists fill the temple-like grain store of the All-Russian Exhibition Center with invasive flora and undesirable plants, which spread beyond the territory normally allocated to them by humans, and use them as a metaphor for the evolution of any expansive form of life.

The triumph of harvest, the fruition of undesirable plantlife, collected from different districts of Moscow, will unfold in the "Grain" Pavilion which was built for the opening of the All-Russian Exhibition Center in 1939. Under the

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district flags of the city, everyday examples of rampant plant life – common nettle, tarragon, pigweed, burdock, dandelion – will invade the space. *Outer Green* celebrates harvest and abundance as well as the endless cycle of life and death in the modern age, which thousands of years after the invention of agriculture still creates “blind harvesters”, who are out there to collect the yield of lives on the battlefields of wars.

The cultivation of domesticated plants is celebrated in the interiors of the “Grain” pavilion: the depictions of potatoes, cabbages, grapes and wheat, etched onto brass-coloured stained glass windows have survived to the present day, whereas the painted murals depicting pastorals on the greenhouse production, fat herds and mirror carp of Mosoblsovarkhoz (the Regional Economic Council of Moscow Region) have disappeared from the pavilion’s walls without trace. The All-Russian Exhibition Center, originally built to celebrate the technological developments and agricultural achievements of the Soviet era, has since the dissolution of the USSR become a bohemian flea market. The new life of small businesses was conceived amid the dust and rotten flesh of the former citadel to materialistic ideology. Since then small forms of life, both flora and fauna, have occupied this huge drowned ship. The big and small “mystery plays” prospered here for twenty years among sharks, butterflies and relict fish. Today the All-Russian Exhibition Center faces a new phase of dynamic reconstruction and modernization – and soon this period of history will be buried by yet another layer, and new cultural agents will take over the territory of the Center.

Urban Fauna Lab collective gives free rein to these urban parasites by harvesting these normally undesirable plants. The artists act as a catalyst for the city’s new ‘greening up’ policy, opening up the doors of our built environment to the natural world outside; they thus prepare the ground for bringing the bio-political utopia where cross-species co-habit harmoniously ever nearer.

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Urban Fauna Lab is a collective, formed in 2011 in Moscow by the artists Alex Buldakov and Anastasia Potemkina. The group started its work with the project 'Urban Fauna Zoo' as part of Art Squat Forum (a special project of the 4th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art). Since then it has participated in a number of Russian and international exhibitions: 'The False Calculations Presidium', Moscow (2012), 'The Way of Enthusiasts' as part of the 13th International Architecture Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia (2012), 'Monday Begins on Saturday', the main project of First Bergen Assembly (2013), and 'IK-00', Venice (2014).

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Stained glass window by A.S. Pavlovsky and K.V. Edelstein

The "Grain" pavilion was built in 1939 for the opening of VSKhV (All-Union Agricultural Exhibition), which was later re-named VDNHk (vystavka dostizheniy narodnogo khozyaystva, or the Exhibition of Achievements of the People's Economy), and finally changed its name to the All-Russian Exhibition Center. It was the project of the architect Dmitry Chechulin and was initially called the Moscow, Tula and Ryazan Region pavilion (later on Kaluga and Bruansk were added to its title). The building underwent numerous construction works and its appearance has changed gradually over time. The title "Grain" was given to it in 1964 when the work of the exhibition center was reorganised by the economic sector division of the city's administration. After the dissolution of the USSR, the pavilion, as well as the whole VDNHk site, was rented out to retail outlets and warehouses.

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V-A-C Foundation is a non-profit organization, founded in 2009 in Moscow, which aims to develop contemporary art in Russia through the delivery of exhibition projects, educational and editorial programmes. Collaborating with international institutions, V-A-C Foundation supports the professional development of Russian artists, curators and researchers. Realizing the growing importance of art produced in Russia, as well as new Russian artists, V-A-C works to create the best conditions for the creation of new works, the organization of the exhibitions and the publishing of catalogues and other books.

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