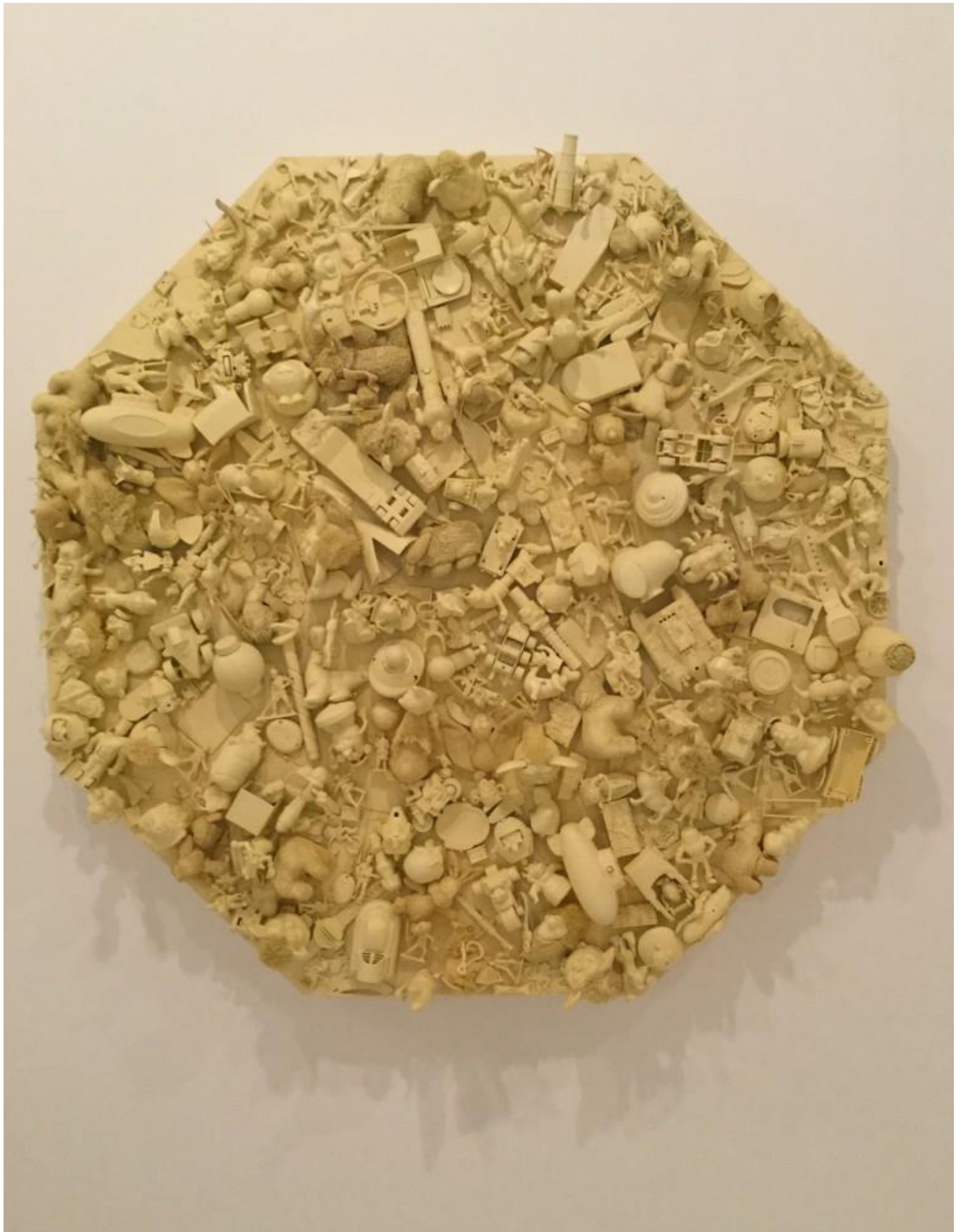


HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

From Brooklyn to Russia's Ural Region, Artists Cross Political and Geographic Borders

by [Peter Malone](#) on March 1, 2016



Margaret Roleke, "McDonaldland" (2014) plastic toys, plywood, paint (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Exhibitions generated by independent curators have grown over the past two decades in number and significance. Many of these curators are artists who mount shows that explore the work of colleagues who might otherwise remain unknown to all but a few friends. Among these

artist/curators is **Irina Danilova**, whose ideas for exhibitions come to her in such torrents that she found herself compelled to create an overarching entity called Project 59 Inc., a not-for-profit 501(c)(3), that serves as both a pragmatic and conceptual space in which her many international undertakings can be realized.

A quick and incomplete summary of her projects include the "59 Second Video Festival," which traveled to 20 cities around the globe; a gallery at 59 Franklin Street in lower Manhattan that in its one-year existence sponsored numerous pop-up shows and the first of the 59 Second Video festivals; and a number of major group shows held in university and alternative gallery spaces in Gowanus, Bushwick, the South Bronx, and in Russia and the Ukraine.



Irina Danilova with Ilya Shipilovskikh, curator of 'BRURAL: Crossroads of Equality and Irregularity'

The final chapter in one of Danilova's more substantial projects is currently at Temporary Storage Gallery in Bushwick. Called **BRURAL: Crossroads of Equality and Irregularity**, it is at the Temporary Storage Space and is the final Brooklyn edition of the BRURAL series Danilova initiated, in which curators and artists from Brooklyn and several locations in the Ural region of Russia collaborate on exhibitions, often with versions mounted in both Russia and Brooklyn. The first three editions were held, in chronological order, at Set Gallery in Gowanus, Active Space in Bushwick, **and the Bronx River Art Center's temporary quarters** in the South Bronx. The fourth series was held in three different locations including Temporary Storage in Bushwick, the Contemporary Arts Building of the Fine Arts Museum in Nizhny Tagil, Russia, and the Gallery of Modern Art "OkNo" in Chelyabinsk, also in Russia. Together the participating artists and curators successfully overcame considerable logistical difficulties in realizing related exhibitions held thousands of miles apart.

As the inspiration for the series, Danilova credits Tamara Aleksandrovna Galeeva, whom Danilova describes as a maverick professor at the Ural Federal University. According to Danilova, it was partly Galeeva's introduction of modern art into the very conservative environment of the Ural region that triggered the art scene it now enjoys. Three of Galeeva's former students, Agata Jordan, Daria Kostina, and Svetlana Shlyapnikova, each served as curators for the first three BRURAL exhibitions respectively. The fourth was curated by Vladimir Seleznev of the National Center for Contemporary Arts in Yekaterinburg.



Rachel Owens, "Paid in Full (price of Brooklyn 1645)" (2016), burnt canvas (click to enlarge)

BRURAL: Crossroads of Equality and Irregularity was curated by Ilya Shipilovskikh, the director of the Art Gallery at Boris Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg, who spent a month in Bushwick selecting and organizing the current show. It includes 25 artists and their interpretation of what the press release describes as the, "... irregularity of perceived time, geographical parameters, sociopolitical structures, and cultural environments [that] contribute to varying degrees of freedom, equality, and social consciousness." Though the proposal sounds complicated, it's actually a simple idea that is aptly relevant to the entire project. As the exhibition's curator puts it:

Both the Ural region and Brooklyn have an industrial heritage that is being replaced by forces of gentrification. Bushwick is already losing artists to a steady increase in rents. In the Ural region the art system is still in a process of development and those few who enjoy modest success move on to Moscow, St. Petersburg and further into Europe or even the USA, specifically and ironically to Brooklyn, which spins the whole process into a vortex of inequalities and irregularities, the core concept of this last in the series.

In mixing together the work of artists at both ends of the cultural bridge, similarities and differences are amplified.

The work in the show is as varied in materials and genres as one might expect of a conceptual art exhibition. Rachel Owens hung a rectangle of canvas on the wall with a short list of items burned into it. Called "Paid in Full (price of Brooklyn 1645), burnt canvas" (2016) it tells us that the Dutch West Indian Trading Company gave six coats, six kettles, twelve knives, and a few other trivial items to the native inhabitants in exchange for their homeland, what we now call Brooklyn, indicating a clash of realities that is as stunning as it is instructive in today's corporate dominated economy.

Nicholas Fraser presents videos, tee shirts designed for impromptu baseball teams, and a signed ball, all titled "Ground Rules" (2012). Fraser drew a baseball diamond in chalk on a lot in Nizhny Tagil, an industrial city in the Ural region not unlike Brooklyn's Bush Terminal area. Teams were formed and the game was played for the first time by players who had only a brief outline of the rules. In the artist's words, "Despite minimal training and no prior experience, knowledge of the game [became] less important than the willingness to try something unfamiliar, without concern if the results [were] pretty or professional."



Nicholas Fraser, "Ground Rules" (2012), Tee shirts, softball, video

Margaret Roleke's "McDonaldland" (2014) is an octagon of shallow relief made of war toys

distributed to small children along with fast food meals. The toys are not immediately visible, having been painted a dull yellow that resembles the camouflage paint used on US field equipment in the Iraq War, though Roleke provides no indication that the paint is the actual color used in the war. The octagonal shape and the title reference to "land" call to mind the aerial photos of Homs in the Syrian conflict.

Nicolás Dumit Estévez and Meredith Holch's video, "The Orange Cowboy" (2007) is a parody of the Hollywood Western, in which a wannabe cowboy, wearing what appears to be orange traffic safety gear, is frustrated by "No Trespassing" signs. More than most pieces in the show, this one doesn't exactly travel well. The rather obvious gag is likely to fall flat from an American perspective. Still, questions raised by losses in translation may be considered both an expected part of the entire series and of contemporary art in general.



Irina Danilova and Hiram Levy, "Hub of the Universe" (1999–2015), plastic bottle caps, shelf, accompanying video

Some of the pieces are ambitious in both their duration and goals. Danilova's contribution, along with partner Hiram Levy, is called *Hub of the Universe*, a series of proposed monument designs made of stacked plastic container caps (59 caps each) of varying shapes and colors. However, the proposed location of the monument, 59 ° longitude and 59 ° N latitude, is literally in the depths of the Siberian Forest, where Danilova left a marker in 1999 after a harrowing mosquito-infested trek with a guide who swore he would never do it again.

Each work in this show is rich in connotations, though not always easy to absorb. Be ready to

spend more than a few minutes here. From having seen several shows in the series, I've noticed a tendency to put in as many artists as the space can fit, an understandable fault considering the exhibits are for practical reasons more like artist-run efforts than the sort with strict curatorial budgeting and generous gallery space. But it is that slightly manic atmosphere that best serves the grassroots spirit of the project. As art exhibitions, they are not meant to illustrate a fixed idea in the mind of each curator, but to demonstrate the living and evolving experiences of artists who share much in common, in spite of cultural, geographical, and political distances between their studios.

Brural: Crossroads of Equality and Irregularity continues at Temporary Storage Space (119 Ingham St, Bushwick, Brooklyn) through March 5.

Bruralrina Danilova Temporary Storage Space