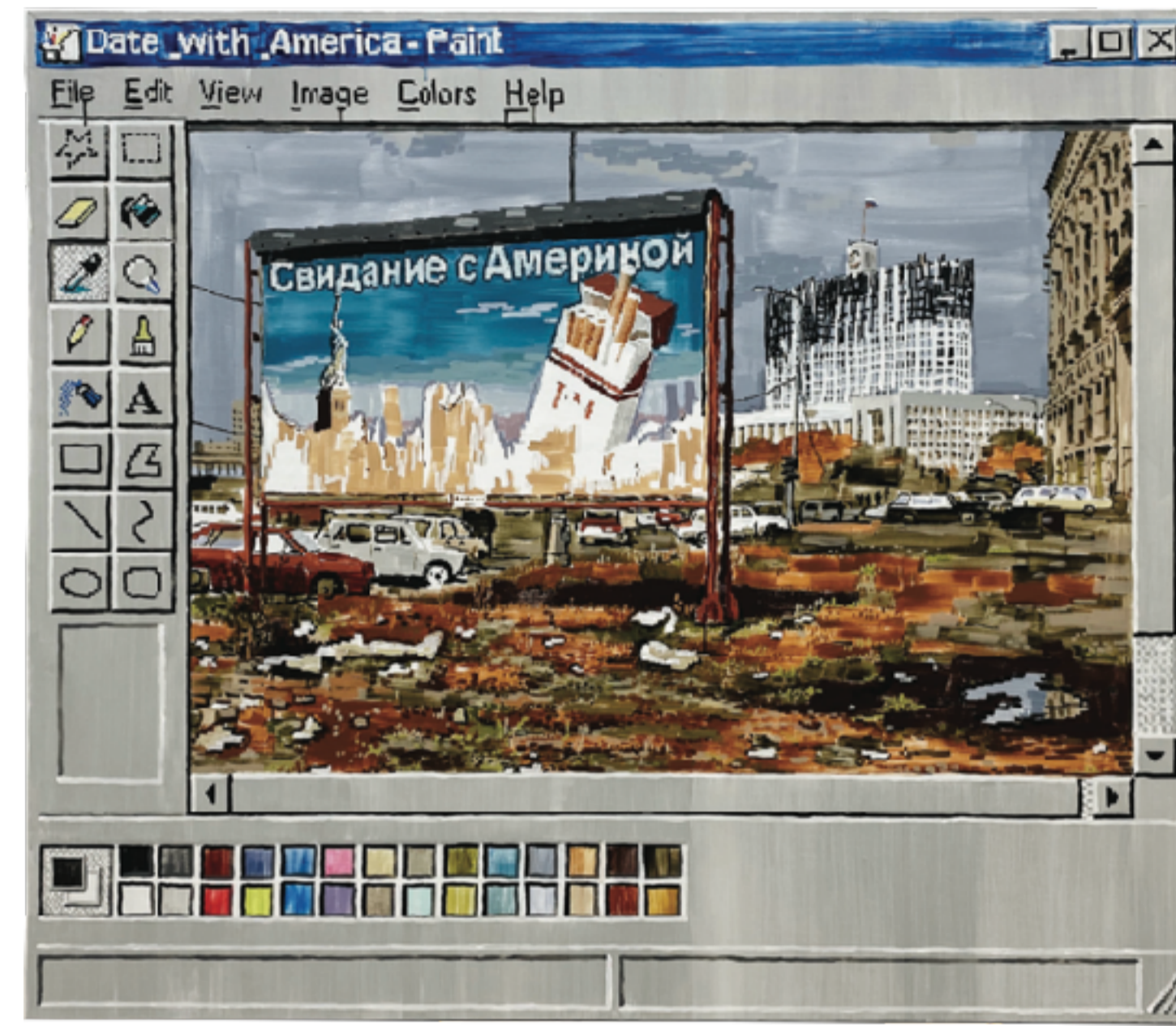


'Date with America'



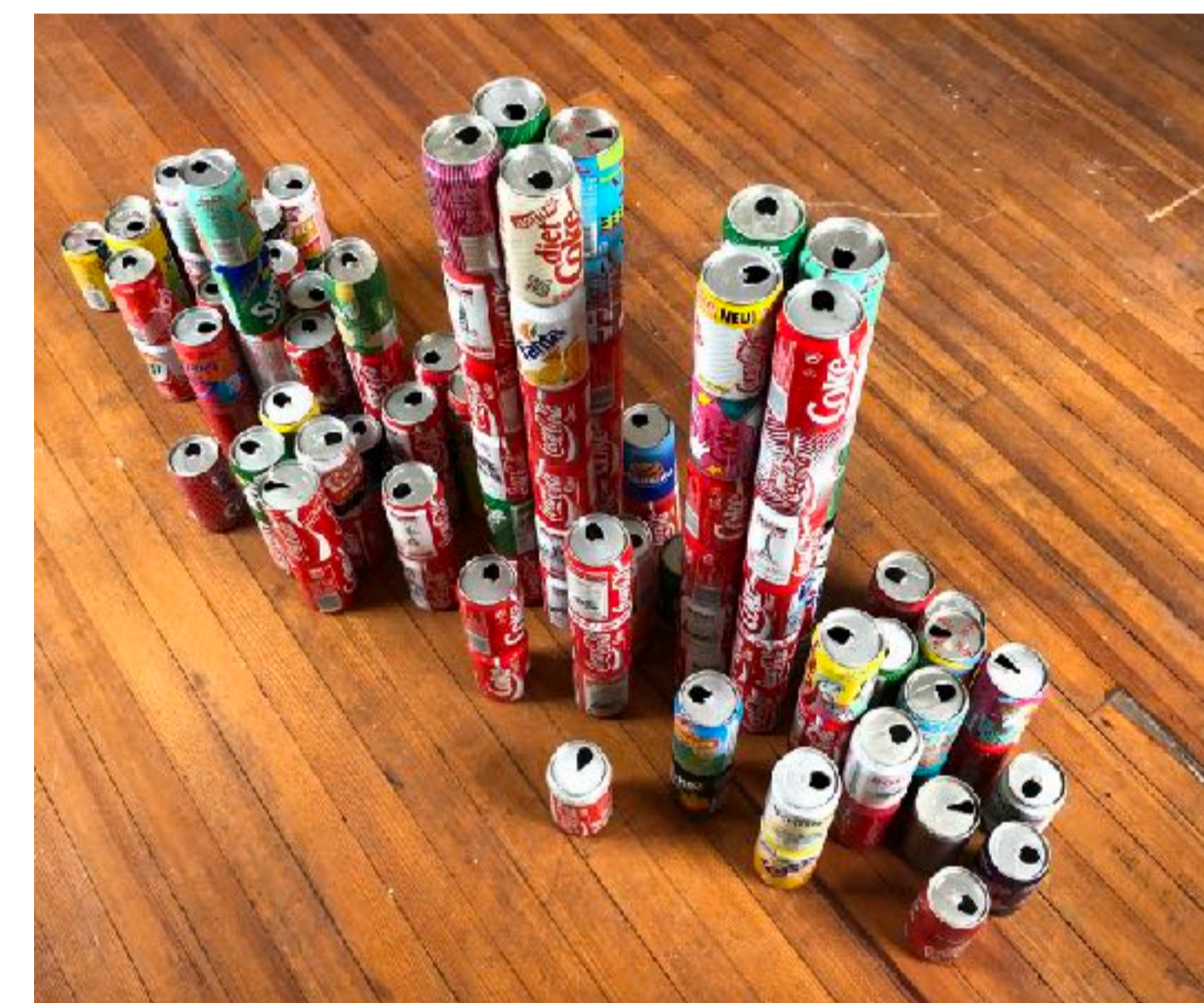
Dagnini
Unexpected Error, 2021
Tapestry, hand embroidery
Edition of 2, all unique
38 x 19 inch / 96 x 48 cm



Dagnini
Date with America, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
51 x 59 inch / 130 x 150 cm



Dagnini
Alla Borisovna's limo, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
7 x 9,4 inch / 18 x 24 cm



Alexander Shchurenkov
Skyline, 2021
Vintage collectible soft-drink aluminium cans produced in 1989-1994
Various dimensions



Alexander Shchurenkov
My Cowboys, 2021
15 vintage 'Marlboro Cowboy' plastic bags, metal hook
55 x 45 cm



Alexander Shchurenkov
Statue of Liberty, 2021
Four tourist postcards on a mirror surface



Alexander Shchurenkov
House flowers, 2021
Artificial flowers, glass vases
Various dimensions

'Date with America'

Two artists from Russia, Dagnini and Alexander Shchurenkov, are presenting at NADA House a project entitled "Date with America" devoted to post-Soviet interpretation of the American Dream. That dream was never a rigid, clearly established construct — its outline and aura were constantly evolving. In the 1950s for example the American Dream was the embodiment of a consumer paradise: stable work, a private house in the suburbs, a large car, a well turned-out wife concentrating exclusively on home-building, a bunch of children and shared suppers at the family table. This image was forever being reproduced in popular films and advertisements. In the 1980s and 1990s the American Dream was "money, success, fame, glamour" and a dramatic rise from rags to riches...

In the USSR and in post-Soviet space (from the end of the 1980s to the mid-1990s) a specific, highly romanticised version of the American Dream was the order of the day. It had nothing in common with an actual state, but was associated with an imagined utopian country the vision of which had been shaped by songs, films and photographs in glossy magazines. In this land which embodied ideas of universal equality, people could busy themselves with whatever they pleased, live in comfortable conditions in keeping with "western standards", which were unattainable in the USSR — a country worn down by endless shortages. Since most Soviet citizens were unable to leave their homeland, the American Dream was embodied in symbols drawn from everyday life and objects which people could display in their immediate surroundings. A widespread hobby in those days was collecting empty cans of imported fizzy drinks (Pepsi, Coca-cola, Fanta, Sprite etc.) or empty cigarette packets (Marlboro, Camel, Lucky Strike and the like). Collectors would create 'trophy walls' out of them inside their modest flats. Plastic bags bearing pictures of cowboys, the Statue of Liberty and other well-known symbols of the USA became highly prestigious accessories, bringing their owners closer to the special fairy-tale world of the better life. These bags were handled with the utmost care: they were washed and dried so as to extend their useful lives for as long as possible. That was how the American Dream came to be embodied in simple everyday objects, giving them a magical, mystical significance akin to a cargo cult.

The venue where artists present their work to the public is highly significant and the building where Dagnini's and Shchurenkov's project is exhibited was where Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR, met the then President of the USA, Ronald Reagan, and the next incumbent of the White House, George Bush (senior). What followed from that meeting was the Malta Summit, which took place a year later when Bush and Gorbachev declared that the Cold War was over.

The installation exhibited by Alexander Shchurenkov has been assembled from those very same aluminium cans from the 1990s, which had once been objects of cult status in post-Soviet space. It is reminiscent of the iconic view of Manhattan, as seen from Governors Island in 1988 and on tourist postcards. The installation is also a metaphor for the collapsed Iron Curtain and the destroyed Berlin Wall of which only the skeleton survived.

Alexander Shchurenkov arranges two bouquets of artificial flowers in this space: one of them is a throwback to the bouquet which stood on the table at the official briefing delivered by Reagan and Gorbachev and the second had stood on the table where the leaders later dined behind closed doors.

For the artist the flowers become silent witnesses to history in the making, demonstrating the dual nature of politics, which has to be both in plain sight and away from the public gaze. Inside Soviet flats, because both money and furnishings were hard to come by, artificial flowers were a commonplace: they were not just gathering dust but also 'history' on a very different scale.

Dagnini's canvas recreates the subject of one of the iconic documentary photographs taken during the dramatic events unfolding in Russia in 1993. The political crisis had led to armed clashes on the streets of Moscow and subsequent involvement of troops: as a result at least 158 people are known to have perished. Those events put a violent end to the Soviet model of power which had held sway since 1917. The artist chose the Windows 95 operating system, known for its slow speed and unstable nature, as a symbol of those political crises and the upheavals of that period in Russian history. Dagnini uses elements of its interface in her work.

Dagnini's picture depicting the charred White House in Moscow shot at by government troops, which became a symbol of Russia's unfulfilled dream of democracy, provides the background for a torn poster advertising cigarettes and complete with the Statue of Liberty and the slogan "Date with America". Dagnini's work complements Alexander Shchurenkov's installation, but at the same time links us in with current events in the United States, where the socio-political system has undergone a seismic shift and is currently caught up in an unstable, turbulent phase.

Hanging carpets on walls is another Soviet tradition, reflecting both familiar domestic interiors and a certain slice of life from days gone by. In the past, tapestries had often depicted fairy-tales or romantic idylls. In the post-Soviet era carpets came to be regarded as relics from the past and were the object of ridicule, but in Soviet times they had been held in high regard and were a status symbol. Dagnini had come across some original American tapestries complete with an image of John F. Kennedy. His image against a background of the White House perfectly embodied the American Dream in its post-Soviet version. Here was a man straight out of a fairy-tale: handsome, at the top of the political tree, with a beautiful wife and a beautiful life. But then came Kennedy's assassination — a major tragedy for the USA. Dagnini's embroidery in the style of the "Error Message Box" from Windows 95 challenges the beholder to re-examine those events, still bound up with so many unanswered questions.

The interplay of "fairy-tale" and "tragedy" runs like a leitmotif through the whole project presented by these artists. This site-specific installation created by Dagnini and Alexander Shchurenkov reflects, on the one hand, how the American Dream has been reduced to a collection of things after their metamorphosis into unremarkable everyday objects or even household trash and, on the other, it prompts us to ponder on the image of that dream, which can be bound up with loss and tragedy.

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