

remote territories that comprised the Russian empire, Mann explores the discrepancies and dichotomies that informed both the people and the landscape during that turbulent time in Russian history.

Counterbalancing images drawn from the sprawling urbanized Russian empire and the poorer more countrified provinces, Mann gives us striking imagery that not only serves to document the everyday lives and struggles of the people of Russia, but also provides a small window into the complexities that inform human relationships, commerce and the makings of a shattered utopia. Works like *Romanov Garden* (2008) exemplify the grandiose sensibility of the elite classes with



Becca Mann, *Prince Menshikov's Troika*, 2008

their soaring spires and ornate gardens, yet the work is infused with a sense of frailty and sadness. The image captures the fading decadence of a culture in transition.

Other works like *A Young Bull About To Be Sacrificed by the Cheremis c. 1900*, (2008/9) show what appears to be several young men out in the woods surrounded by their worldly possessions. The central figure stands facing the viewer, awkward and self-conscious as he holds the reins of his old horse. To his left, another man leads a young bull apparently to slaughter. What is strange about this image is the history it evokes, a history informed by the basic human struggle to stay alive in wintertime in a countryside that is as unforgiving as it is brutal. The Cheremis were rural Volga-Finnic people living in eastern Russia. They traditionally practiced a pagan faith that closely connected the individual to nature. According to their beliefs, nature exerts a magical influence over people: They relate to it as a sacred, powerful, and living being outside of which man cannot exist. Nature serves as a source of absolute good

and can be an aid to man as long as he does not harm or oppose it. Mann captures a sense of magic and witchcraft wherein the slaughtering of the sacred bull is more than likely an offering to a pagan God.

Works like *Prince Menshikov's Troika* (2008) show a three-horse-drawn carriage. The horses are spirited, lifting their legs high off the ground. Again, there is a strange tranquility to the image as the "troika" stands empty, leading the viewer to wonder what happened to the esteemed prince.

—Eve Wood

DORIT MARGREITER

MAK Center

DORIT MARGREITER, AN AUSTRIAN artist currently showing at the Schindler House (Kings Road residence, brought to you by the MAK Center for Art and Architecture) has a love affair with filmmaking. Industrialized societies in the world — particularly in the West — have bred the language of film so thoroughly into the consciousness of its citizens that it is quite impossible to regard anything, even architecture, without having a kind of cinematic reflex to it. It's become a second-nature processing routine, a motion-picturing of the external world around us.

The benefit of this is sexier stimuli; the cost is arrested development by way of a gimmick, an artificial language (film) that we employ in order to process/ascribe the potential meaning of a thing at the expense of "getting to the bottom of it." In other words, filmic treatment of reality keeps us lonely, cut off from the person, place or thing we mistakenly feel we're taking to bed with us because we've "captured" it.

In the three projection-based installations, Margreiter spreads this film dialectic of holding and losing across the subject of architecture with an international consciousness (two buildings in America, one in Germany) and a welcome degree of technical and artistic dexterity that does justice to both her subjects and Schindler's once-private residence that frames them.

Failed Model for an Enclosed System (2006) is a slide show consisting of some 80 images of a failed biosphere experiment in the Arizona desert. Margreiter manages to come off here as a location scout offering her reconnaissance to Hollywood types in search of a movie. The intentionally amateurish snapshots frame the parts and whole of the domed structure, adjacent parking lots, access roads and postcard mountain backdrops with an implicit logic



Dorit Margreiter, *Zentrum*, Part III of *Locus Remix*, 2006

and sovereign indifference that leaves the viewer inexorably lonely and forsaken.

Zentrum (2006) is a grainy, black-and-white, 3-minute, 16mm film loop showcasing the front façade of an abandoned Soviet-era strip mall building in Leipzig, Germany at night. Two people (film students? a young director and his or her DP?) send hand-held spotlights roaming over different aspects of the façade, especially the dead neon text, "Brühlzentrum," that yesterday translated into lively commerce inside its four walls, but today means economic and political failure. As with *Failed Model*, there is a kind of movie scouting treatment here that serves to resurrect the dead structure: Hollywood's Lazarus may come back somewhat less than flesh and blood, but he always rises.

10104 Angelo View Drive (2004) is a gorgeous, Kubrickian exploration of one of John Lautner's most famous LA houses. Many aspects of this triangular-patterned home — windows, skylights, TV pop-up console — are motorized in accordance with early '60s gee-whiz, push-button innovations, and Margreiter capitalizes on these actuated seductions to full cinematic glory. Rather than emulating some "haunting" alluded to in the MAK Center's press release, this 6½-minute silent color film engenders the bold, if not melancholic, heroism that is part of Southern Californian self-determinism.

—Darrin Little

SAN FRANCISCO

NIKOLAI ATANASSOV

Noma Gallery

ART VIEWERS ACCUSTOMED TO THE esoteric conceptual art inculcated by today's MFA programs are thunderstruck by the generous, ambitious, spiritual oil paintings of San Franciscan Nikolai Atanassov. Brilliantly