

LAURINA PAPERINA

FUN WITH FROGS AND FRIVOLITY

text by Nick Muzycka, 2010

Laurina Paperina, a young Italian artist whose work has been enjoying a warm critical reception throughout Europe and internationally, has a selection of her work on display in 18 Gallery on the Bund. In this, her first China show, Paperina offers up her own particular brand of humor through a series of cartoon-like pieces that "give life to ironic protagonists such as superheroes and space frogs."

Many of her pieces focus on celebrity figures, and one continuing theme of her work is the death of the artist. In her rejection of the hyper-intellectualized conceptual art, which continues to dominate the international scene, Paperina often constructs witty pictures of over-serious modern artists being slain by their own artistic creations.

Although Paperina claims that she has no interest in producing work that can be framed conceptually, there is a sense in which she has been conceptualized, perhaps unwillingly, by the art world as "that girl who doesn't want to make serious art."

At least, this is how her work continues to be promoted by the numerous galleries interested in displaying her collections.

Paperina told the *Global Times* that she creates in a free, impulsive manner: "I travel a lot and take a lot of pictures while on the move. These then become inspiration for my works, but there is no general approach to my work. I just create whatever is in my mind," she said.

The vast majority of the pieces appear to conform to this model, especially the smaller ones, which sometimes look more like attentive doodling on a bar mat than anything else. Some of the photographic work, in which the artist has manipulated her photos using image-editing software in funky ways, also has a rushed aspect.

Some of these do work, however, such as the picture of a bathtub that has a simple line-drawn cartoon figure sketched onto the bathroom tiles so that its legs hang over the edge and into the water.

There is nothing profound about such art, but once the playful quality of Paperina's work has been grasped it has the ability to amuse in a quietly mischievous way. Humor, rendered in a kitschy way, peppers the whole exhibition. *Smoking Pack* is one of the cuter pieces, showing an empty cigarette packet with a face and arms drawn on and a burning cigarette in its mouth.

Paperina's work is also dominated by monsters. Sometimes these arrive in the form of an altered version of an element of popular culture, such the sharp-toothed "Pizza Pac-Man" who devours *Ninja Turtles*. In other pieces we are shown a mountain cave transformed into a crude yet vicious beast-like mouth, as well as aliens and mutated animals.

The 18 Gallery exhibition includes two large pieces created by the artist while in Shanghai. One of these works, *Battle of the Eyes*, shows a battleground where most of the characters are eyeballs, some human some alien. Amid the general carnage of the piece there are a few nice touches but, on the whole, the work is a little scrappy.