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### **Moscow artist Oleg Frolov has brought 'smiley' boxes to Voronezh**

*In creating the 6 module sculptures, the author drew inspiration from contemporary urban realia.*



Yevgeny Yartsev

The solo exhibition of Moscow artist Oleg Frolov opened in the Voronezh Centre of Contemporary Art on Wednesday, 26 April. The artist brought six wooden anthropomorphic box sculptures that had not been displayed anywhere before.

The sculptures feature grinning mouths, long Pinocchio-like noses and eyes. The artist simply names his creations knocked together from sheets of plywood 'eyed boxes', and each sculpture has a peculiar nose: a plastic bottle on one face, a sock with space motifs on another, a tree branch on the third and a hot dog on the fourth. According to the artist, all of these are module sculptures symbolising the clichés of modern urban life.

"I am particularly interested in physical objects that are located in the same three-dimensional space as people. I think an interesting process of the interchanging of people and things is going on at the moment. Things acquire an emotional dimension, which is reflected in anthropomorphism. And people (especially in the work-place environment) obtain the characteristics of things. For example, an employee is to be multi-purpose and reliable in the same way as an object."

The artist's sculptures resemble smileys that seem essential in every online conversation. One cannot but recall Victor Pelevin's quote: "A smiley is a visual deodorant. It usually means that the user is afraid you might think he's made a bad smell and wants you to know that really he smells like a rose."

"The smiley was invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is related to the unmaterialised utopias of alternative movements when people thought that bringing positive emotions into the world would suffice," Oleg Frolov explains. "However, it apparently didn't work. The smiley is ambivalent. The paradox of the modern person existing in the field of never-ceasing online conversations lies in the hunger caused by the lack of human interaction. Hence the dead 'empty' eyes of my smiley sculptures.



“The viewer can see my sculptures as eyed boxes. But each one of us is an eyed box to a certain extent,” the artist remarks. “When we have a trip to another city ahead, we get in the car, spend six hours sitting still, and when we arrive at our destination, we depend on the people who meet us and put us up somewhere. When I leave Moscow to go to other cities, following the movement of the body always fascinates me. My body as an artist and my works.”

On the floor of the exhibition hall there is the so-called ‘Mariana Trench’: a box with a rubbish bin for its mouth. The visitors of the exhibition have readily made use of it.



As the artist admits, the 'Mariana Trench' was to be called 'The depth of the economic growth slowdown rate'. The artist sees this sculpture with a rubbish bin as a reference to ashtrays shaped as African women that were popular in the US in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the human body is reduced to either a rubbish bin or a container for dumping ash into. Next to it, we can see the works 'This nuisance of a proxy server', 'Natural filter' and 'Foundation for the support of non-verbal communication'.



“The titles of my works are related to urban life realia. For example, the ‘Foundation for the support of non-verbal communication’ is to say that society is quite institutionalised these days; Western society, in which this works, and Russian society, in which it does not. A foundation is an important notion for art in Moscow because this is the period of transition from galleries to foundations, bizarre organisations that are in possession of funds and order what they require from artists,” Oleg Frolov says. “It is an ‘Über-artist’ of sorts, who publishes books and defines the agenda. As to the notions of a ‘work of art’ and ‘artist’, these are losing value.”

Oleg Frolov compares himself to a foundation: according to the artist, all the ‘eyed boxes’ were made by different people. In this respect, modern art is not much unlike such business realities as, for example, outsourcing.

