

NATALIA VODIANOVA
On the Naked
Heart Foundation

MOSCOW MEETS MAYFAIR
Anglo-Russian special

RUSSIAN ART WEEK
An in-depth guide

Gallery Elena Shchukina is set on a pleasant cobblestone mews just off Lees Place. Although Mayfair is filled with galleries, the new, two-storey showroom is alone on the street, which is fitting for an eponymous space set to challenge the traditional gallery format.

I meet Elena at the gallery on a blustery Wednesday, and she talks with fervor about her new venture. She wants to create an immersive aesthetic environment, where painting, furniture, lighting and wall coverings are in dialogue – the antithesis of the traditional “white cube” environment seen in most galleries. “The furniture is there to surround and add support to the painting – not to distract from it, but to add to the experience,” she explains.

The gallery-cum-interiors-shop is the result of Elena’s combined passions. She was born and raised in Siberia, and completed a law degree at Moscow State Law Academy before deciding to pursue her enthusiasm for art and design by studying at Moscow Design School. The course involved periods of study in London and at the prestigious Instituto Marangoni in Milan, where she began experimenting with furniture making and painting.

One element of the course was to create themed environments where all aspects of interiors came together in a harmonious whole. This sparked Elena’s imagination to create a new kind of gallery, one that, rather than showing art in a traditional blank-page format, would instead create a living space filled with painting, sculpture, furniture, objets and lighting.

“I am passionate about furniture, so I wanted to show how it can work alongside beautiful works of art, and become an art piece itself,” she explains. “I also think if you go to these white-cube-style galleries, you need quite a lot of imagination to see the painting in your home. So having the furniture around it assists that idea.”

After moving to London in 2009 and completing a course at Sotheby’s Institute of Fine Art, Elena knew Mayfair had to be the place for her new venture. “When I talked about furniture, a lot of people said, ‘Go to Chelsea’,” she says. “But the main focus is the art, and all the galleries are here.”

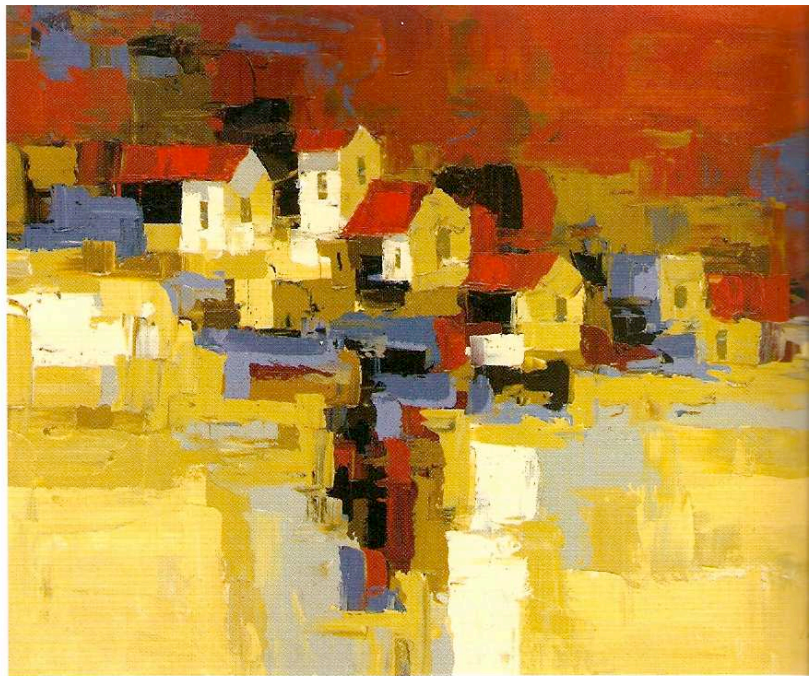
“I also like that this space is not square, so it is more like a home already.” The gallery is set over two floors, with a L-shaped first floor and narrow staircase leading down to a more open basement.

We’re sat amongst works by Onyeka Ibe, portraits, landscapes and still lifes made up of richly painted, colourful blocks, on show at the gallery until November 9. “I choose art that is to my taste, that I personally like and want to share with people,” Elena explains. The show is the Nigerian artist’s first in Europe, highlighting another of Elena’s goals: to host artists not seen before in the UK.

To accompany the works, Elena collaborated with bespoke furniture maker Ian Parker and made a selection of tables, chairs, candles and even jewellery boxes adorned with the distinct coloured blocks from Ibe’s works.

The next artist she’s showing is Kyosuke Tchinai (November 21-January 25), whose works follow ancient Japanese painting traditions. He paints with acrylic on paper, after having drawn the outline of his subjects, but then uses sand, gold leaf and tracing paper to develop a unique, contemporary form of expression. Again, Elena will source furniture to complement the striking works.

Gallery Elena Shchukina is at 10 Lees Place.



Art house



ELENA SHCHUKINA TELLS LORNA DAVIES HOW HER NEW GALLERY COMBINES HER DUAL PASSIONS FOR ART AND INTERIORS, SETTING EACH ARTIST’S WORK WITHIN A DESIGN SCHEME WITH MATCHING FURNITURE AND LIGHTING

TOP OF PAGE: ONYEKA IBE, LOCAL BARN
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LEFT: THIS CHAIR IS ONE OF THE INTERIOR PIECES DESIGNED BY ELENA SHCHUKINA, INSPIRED BY ONYEKA IBE’S PAINTINGS.

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