

# CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

## *Blue Sky Red*

A Solo Exhibition by Veronica Smirnoff  
Cromwell Place, Gallery 12 & Wing Gallery  
20 May to 26 May 2024

### Press Release



Veronica Smirnoff, *The Painted Veil*, 2024

**London, United Kingdom, May 2024** – Candida Stevens Gallery is delighted to present *Blue Sky Red* at Cromwell Place, the largest solo exhibition of Veronica Smirnoff's work to date in the UK.

*Blue Sky Red* presents the latest series by British-based Russian-Born artist's practice, featuring vibrant new paintings and drawings bursting with colour and confidence, such as *Thinking Red* (2024) portraying a female figure in a voluminous crimson dress. Doing away with the constraints of 'high' and 'low' subjects, Smirnoff blends the sacred and the profane, the sublime and earthly, pulling the viewer into a realm of magic and mystery, illusory and irresistible – guided by Smirnoff's boundless imagination and ultimately by the paint itself.

The exhibition also includes three new, never-seen-before large-scale tapestries commissioned by the artist over the last year, translating her mesmerising visual language into the tactility of textiles. Each embroidery references a small panel painting by Smirnoff, digitally printed onto the fabric first, then embroidered by hand to explore sculptural and textural possibilities, while still employing an ancient artistic technique with its own long history rooted in collective storytelling.

Over two decades, Smirnoff has become a master of egg tempera painting – a technique associated with Byzantine and pre-Renaissance art. She began to train in the ancient art making method – widely practiced until the 15th century when it was replaced with oil paint – while Smirnoff was a student at the Slade School of Art. But it was the Russian monks at the Optina Pustyn Eastern Orthodox Monastic centre, on the outskirts of Moscow, that helped Smirnoff finesse her skills in her chosen medium, studying how to grind precious stones to make her own pigment powder, a traditional process that is completed by adding white wine and egg yolk. The quick-drying egg tempera is then applied laboriously, in thin layers, to gessoed wood panels; Smirnoff still sources the panels used for her paintings from the monastery, where they are made and blessed by the monks – adding a spiritual layer before the paint.

Smirnoff's fascinating engagement with egg tempera and her careful choice of materials is the starting point for understanding her lucid, jewel-like paintings. Intimate in scale and rich in details and symbolism, Smirnoff draws on her own life experiences and memories, as well as a voracious range of cultural and political references, and taking inspiration from throughout art history, from Persian miniature painting to Japanese screens and Chinese scroll painting, to religious iconography and folklore.

4 Cromwell Place, South Kensington, London SW7 2JE

Wednesday - Saturday: 10am - 6pm

Sunday: 10am - 4pm

And by appointment: [info@thewickculture.com](mailto:info@thewickculture.com), +44 7717 733891

**ENDS**

For more information please contact

**Katy Wickremesinghe** [katy@ktwlondon.com](mailto:katy@ktwlondon.com) | +447717733891

**Veronika Kailich** [veronika@ktwlondon.com](mailto:veronika@ktwlondon.com) | +447849 738605

#### **Notes to editors**

**Veronica Smirnoff** is a British artist of Russian origin, (born Moscow, Russia, 1979). She earned a BA from the Slade School of Art and postgraduate diploma from the Royal Academy of Arts. She was awarded the Terence Cuneo Prize in 2004 and selected for the John Moores Painting Prize UK in 2010 and Women to Watch UK in 2009. She has exhibited internationally in Milan, Paris, Berlin, London, and New York. She currently lives and works in London.

**Candida Stevens Gallery** is a curation-led gallery established in 2013. The gallery produces exhibitions that explore important themes through the responses of new or relevant work by some of the finest emerging and established artists working in the UK today.

**KTW** | **THE WICK**