

# METRO PICTURES

Paulina Olowka

*Belavia*

November 15 – December 21, 2018

Metro Pictures presents *Belavia*, an exhibition by Paulina Olowka in the upstairs gallery featuring a new documentary film and related paintings. Since 2016, Olowka has made frequent trips to Belarus to photograph and record its capital Minsk. For the artist, Minsk feels “culturally frozen in time” and recalls memories of her childhood growing up in communist Poland. The works in the exhibition explore the architecture, style, and traditions of a country that, to Olowka, seems like a hidden socialist utopia.

A majority of the film, titled *Univermag*, was shot at the Minsk location of GUM (short for the Russian *Glávnyj Universányj Magazin*), a renowned department store found throughout cities of the former Soviet Union. Initially inspired by Émile Zola’s novel *The Ladies’ Paradise*, which recounts the rise of the modern department store in late nineteenth-century Paris, Olowka secretly filmed both customers and saleswomen at GUM. Unlike Zola’s fictional store—a symbol of capitalism and the rise of the modern city—GUM is like a time capsule; only products made in Belarus are available, with no trace of otherwise globally present Western brands.

Further exploring the themes of consumerism and feminism as they exist outside the workings of capitalism, Olowka’s new paintings imagine modern Belarusian women juxtaposed against the cityscapes of Minsk. Some of the women appear to anticipate their glamorous futures, while others seem to hold on to the past. In one work, a woman in a sleeveless red and white dress stares directly ahead at the viewer. In stark contrast to the austere architecture of the U Troitskogo apartment complex behind her, the woman’s skin and clothes are bathed in vibrant sunlight. In another, a woman and child dressed in a modern Belarusian style stand at the edge of a road; behind them is a high-rise housing complex on Minsk’s famous Independence Avenue. They stare off into the distance, far away from the silvery lunar-like landscape they have emerged from.

The exhibition is accompanied by original music from Belarusian musician Halina Zalatukha.

Special thanks to Celina Kanunnikava, Gleb Kanunnikau, and Kseniya Hrytskevich.

Paulina Olowka lives and works in Rabka Zdroj and Krakow, Poland. She has had one-person exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw. Olowka received the prestigious Aachen Art Prize in 2014, with an associated exhibition at the Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen, Germany. She has staged performances at Tate Modern, the Carnegie International, and the Museum of Modern Art. In January 2017 Olowka presented the ballet *Slavic Goddesses* at the Kitchen, New York, and again in 2018 as part of Fondazione Furla’s *Furla Series #01: Time after Time, Space after Space*, at the Museo del Novecento in Milan. Olowka recently released the second edition of *Pavilionesque*, an art-and-theatre periodical published by the artist since 2015 and was invited by *Vogue Polska* to guest edit the magazine’s very first art issue, published in October 2018. For the Liverpool Biennial 2018, Olowka created a new mosaic called *Grace, Charles and the Sunflower*, located on the side of the Invisible Wind Factory in Liverpool’s north docks.

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**Image:** Paulina Olowka, *Vitebsk Station*, 2018, oil and acrylic on canvas, 78 3/4 x 55 1/8 inches, 200 x 140 cm

