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Press Release

Alexander Morozov. **LOST MEMORIES** **23.01–15.03.2025**

Lost Memories, Alexander Morozov's exhibition-essay, is the artist's debut in Belgium. Following the project's itinerary, this intense journey, largely dictated by sensory experiences, is tightly rolled up like the spiral of a hauling cable featured in one of the works comprising the show. It intertwines two series of paintings that the artist has been working on for many years. The **Black Book** cycle consists of replicas of "classical" works that were lost as a result of military conflicts or other extreme situations. The narrative, which seeks to reduce the distance to the legacy that was awarded a double crown — museum recognition and a place in the records of cultural losses, — needs a counterpoint to avoid being confined within the hermetic world of art.

A different tone is set by the tempera works in the **Icons** series. These pieces are usually based on the artist's photographic observations. They capture scenes of everyday life or some objects that are enigmatic enough to warrant their translation into painting.

The easiest interpretation of the alliance of two series could be brief. Alexander Morozov's works, freely interpreting lost "classics," naturally engage in a dialogue with images of a melancholic-looking dog, reeds, rope knots, and sea wind — if we imagine memory as an archive whose structure and hierarchies remain obscure not only to an outside observer but also to the person attempting to access his or her seemingly own recollections. A stone that looks suspiciously like a worker's glove may turn out to be as good as a madeleine cake. But why do the memories get lost if the author persistently works on their reproduction?

Most of the tempera works follow a recognizable logic of mimetic representation. However, the reality of the tempera-painted surface constructed by the artist does not create the illusion of "lifelikeness"; the scenes depicted within appear "chilled" or "dried," as if prepared for better preservation. Furthermore, the translation of external world objects into painting is mediated by photographic optics: they are presented through fragments taken in a close-up view, they are "cut out" of their context, suspended in a dense monochrome environment, or rendered in a negative color palette. Most commonly in Morozov's practice, these techniques complicate — but do not entirely sever — the referential ties between inanimate things, living creatures, and their images: a dog still resembles a dog, a stone remains a stone. One work in the **Icons** series, presented at the exhibition, stands out from the rest and can serve as a key or a point from which the journey begins.

The painting is titled *One of the Moments from the Past*. This phrase refers to a certain event that has occurred — but, otherwise, offers no clear interpretation. The painting itself is filled, from edge to edge, with swirling waves, and only a bright green streak cutting vertically through the work hints that what is being reproduced is not the state of water, but a pattern previously captured by someone else before the tempera's author. Bibliophiles may recognize in these swirls the design of marbled paper often used in bookbinding (commonly for endpapers). All the works in the series refer to specific places and events connected with the artist's roams, and this abstraction also alludes to an autobiographical narrative. It was inspired by the endpaper of an early edition of Oscar Wilde's works, discovered by Morozov in a friend's apartment in Paris, a temporary stop in his émigré peregrination. The motion of the waves, as a metaphor for memories that suddenly came crowding upon the mind, recurs as a refrain in various works displayed at the exhibition. The waves of water surfaces, in turn, are also a phenomenon that cannot be repeated, preserved, or remembered. If one abandons the idea of memory as a cinematic flashback, infinitely detailed and continuous, one discovers that memory — with its gaps and complicated access to the past — cannot replicate the ripples on a lake or the movement of sea waves. Therefore, the accidental swirls of paper fibers, capturing traces of water motion, turn out to be, in a way, more reliable than memory. Translating this image into painting — a seemingly tautological act — is perceived by the artist as an opportunity to engage with the moment of discovery, to revisit every swirl and stain, to impart monumental significance to this accidental encounter, and to discover that an attempt to reproduce an event takes much more time than the event itself. Could the artist now recreate his own painting from memory? Probably not.

Morozov works with an ancient technique of tempera painting on chalk gesso, or levkas, historically and genetically connected with icon painting. The effect of “lifelessness” in the image, as if moisture were removed from it and replaced with a glow, aligns with the artist's reflections on the abilities and inabilities of memory, but it is also largely dictated by the process of creating the work. The painted surface is built up very slowly, through countless tiny strokes, dabs and dots that do not dissolve with layering but remain visible. The impact of this meticulous fixation of each micro-gesture by the artist is described by art theorist Isabelle Graw as the ability of painting “to produce the sensation that it has captured living labor.” Graw argues that such existence of a picture in the cultural context leads to two types of vitalist projections related to this type of art works. On one hand, a painting is often seen as an object capable of “capturing” its creator. On the other, it is endowed with its own activity and agency, independent of the artist. For Morozov's constructed narrative of perpetually lost memories, all these interpretative lines tied to his practice are significant. Painting can “capture” what the author himself fails to commit to memory. A picture can preserve and reveal his labor. Where words fail him, it can speak of past losses and ongoing hostilities. It can encapsulate his personal “odyssey” and mark the emotional experience of the irreversibility of catastrophic events that shake the everyday. In the end, painting becomes for the artist a way to locate himself in the present, only to get access to it requires spiraling through time.

Anastasia Kotyleva, art historian

Born in 1974 in Luhansk (UA), Alexander Morozov graduated from the St. Petersburg State Repin Academy of Fine Arts in 2002 and completed the Educational Program “Practicum. New Technology in the contemporary art” at ProArte Institute, St. Petersburg in 2000. Since 2023, he lives and works in Paris.

Nominee of the Artaward International Strabag Prize (Austria, 2013), and the Sergey Kuryokhin Contemporary Art Award (St. Petersburg, 2013). Nominee of the 12th Kandinsky Art Prize in the nomination Project of the Year (2019). Winner of the Sergey Kuryokhin Contemporary Art Award (2018) in the Best Visual Project category. Finalist of the 13th Kandinsky Art Prize in the nomination Project of the Year for the project Station Dystopia (2021). Special Prize of the Anatoly Zverev Prize from PJSC Vysochaishy (2021).

His works are included in the collections of the Copelouzos Family Art Museum (Greece), The State Russian Museum, Perm State Art Gallery, Anatoly Zverev Museum, The Street Art Museum, and the Sergey Kuryokhin Centre for Contemporary Art, Open Museum (Russia), as well as in private collections worldwide.

Selected solo exhibitions include:

No sand in the sky. Galerie Dix9 Hélène Lacharmoise, Paris (FR), 2024; *Diary.* Cité Internationale des arts. Paris (FR), 2023; *The rest.* KultProject Gallery. Moscow (RU), 2021; *Railway Opera.* Russian Railways Museum. St Petersburg (RU), 2019; *Tired plastic.* Museum-apartment of Lev Gumilyov, St Petersburg (RU), 2019; *Birds Flight Records.* Petersburg art space, Berlin (DE), 2019; *Akchim. coordinates.* Perm State Art Gallery, Perm (RU), 2018; *Simple things.* Triumph Gallery, Moscow (RU), 2017; *Masses.* Sphere Contemporary Art Foundation (The Foundation of Vladimir Smirnov and Konstantin Sorokin), Moscow (RU), 2017; *Politia.* CCI Fabrika, Moscow (RU), 2016; *Space Lines.* CCA Zarya, Vladivostok (RU), 2016; *Cosa Mentale.* Marina Gisich Gallery, St Petersburg (RU), 2015; *Garden.* Book Graphics Library, St Petersburg (RU), 2015.

Selected group exhibitions include:

Yes, Fountain. Albatross space, Paris (FR) 2024; *Colonial Endurance. Detecting the Algorithm of Violence in Infrastructures.* Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam (NL), 2023; *Communication.* Studio 44, Stockholm (SE), 2022; *The Thinking Landscape.* Museum of Moscow, Moscow (RU), 2022; *Whisper.* Artplay Open Museum, Moscow (RU), 2021; *Passion according to Faust.* Museum of Theatrical and Musical Art, St Petersburg (RU), 2021; *Exhibition of nominees for the Zverev Art Prize.* Winzavod, Moscow (RU), 2021; *Exhibition of nominees for the 13th Kandinsky Prize.* MMOMA, Moscow (RU) 2021; *Intensive Places.* Estonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Tallinn (EE), 2021; *2nd Garage Triennial of Russian Contemporary art.* Moscow (RU), 2020; *Exhibition of nominees for the Kandinsky Prize.* MMOMA, Moscow (RU), 2019; *Angels in the art of XX–XXI centuries.* Russian Museum, St Petersburg (RU), 2019; *Exhibition of nominees for the XI Kuryokhin Prize.* Sergey Kuryokhin Center, St Petersburg (RU), 2019; *Portal Zaryadye.* Wing Ruin of the Shchusev Architecture Museum, Moscow (RU), 2019; *Russia. Realism. XXI Century.* State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan (RU), 2018; *Russia. Realism. XXI Century.* The Russian Museum, St Petersburg (RU), 2015; *The practice of contact.* XI Krasnoyarsk Museum Biennale, Krasnoyarsk (RU), 2015; *Signs of the Time, or In Search of Identity.* Special Projects of the 6th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art. KultProekt Gallery, Moscow (RU), 2015; *No Time.* Special Projects of the 6th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art. WINZAVOD CCA, Moscow (RU), 2015; *The 3rd Ural Industrial biennial of contemporary art.* Artist-in-Residence Program. Ekaterinburg (RU), 2015; *Black envy.* Parallel Events of the Manifesta 10, Borey Gallery, St Petersburg (RU), 2014.