

# MARGARITA GLUZBERG'S AVENUE DES GOBELINS

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**At her new exhibition, the photographer explores themes of consumerism and our hunger for luxury through layering images of shop fronts**



TEXT BY [CHANTELLE SYMESTER](#)

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Margarita Gluzberg's latest exhibition, Avenue des Gobelins, at Paradise Row explores the age old dilemma of society: a never ending lust for all things luxe. The London based photographer/artist's new work references French photographer Eugene Atget's own documentation of material desire and consumption during the 19th Century. Her layered images produce a myriad of consumer signs and motifs straight from the shop fronts that seduce the pennies from your purse!

In a world where more is more is more Avenue des Gobelins seems a timely (and ironic) illustration of how we are all caught in a consumerist web of desire, not to mention the fact that the shots of the luxury stores were taken during the London riots this summer. Here we discuss the power and allure of consumption and why it makes for such an intriguing collection of imagery.

**Dazed Digital: What attracted you to photography and how did you start?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** In the past, I have always thought 'photographically', but then felt compelled to 'translate' things into other mediums. I would photograph to gather a vast archive of images, which would then become something else – drawing, painting, performance. Being bilingual in Russian and English, I always saw translation as the natural operating mode, but then recently, I decided that the visual 'translation' did not need to happen every time. The camera mechanism itself is the apparatus that can depict a subject directly.

**DD: You named the exhibition after Eugene Atget's famed Avenue des Gobelins collection of photographs, were they the main inspiration for your new works?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** Atget is extremely interesting to me, because he recorded the machinations of a city at the point when the dawn of commodity fetishism was breaking - whilst perhaps now we are nearing its sunset, or at least experiencing an eclipse. I've been looking at his photographs of Parisian shop fronts for many years – and what has particularly intrigued me about them is the fact that they became psychological spaces, transmitting a new energy of a city where the commodity begins to generate a trance-like desire. It's the very same warped desire that I wanted to transmit through my own images - a new Avenue Es Gobelins. The title of the central series is The Consumystic, and Atget was an influential figure for the Surrealists, who also saw objects as having ulterior motives!

**DD: What was it like taking photographs of luxury goods whilst all the rioting and looting was going on?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** Strangely there seemed to be no looting on Bond Street or Sloane Street, but I had a feeling of vertigo, as though my images were somehow implicated. I started this body of work a year ago, and as it developed, I began to see the project as potentially a process of recording a dying territory. The desire for luxury as a given right in all its opulent display is no longer a viable proposition. Or at least, this desire cannot be viewed without being critical - even if the criticism is fake.

**DD: Did you encounter any looters or rioters?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** Every day, by five o'clock, the Primark on Oxford Street looks like a riot had swept through it.

**DD: Why do you think we as a society are so obsessed with luxury and consumerism?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** What we are in fact addicted to is consumer desire itself - "Just one more Chanel lipstick, and then I'll never do it again... honestly..." The chemical hit comes at the moment of possession, and maybe it would take a paradigm shift for this addiction to disappear. I always turn back to Flaubert's Madame Bovary as the best example of a victim of consumer lust, and of reckless credit giving. Emma Bovary attempts to reverse the deathly dissatisfaction of her provincial life by buying, on credit, into the dream of luxury goods as a substitute. She sees consumption as transubstantiation. There is a brilliant scene near the end of the novel, where on the verge of suicide, she pleads with her main creditor to save her from bankruptcy and disgrace, but ends up buying some more home furnishings from him.

**DD: Some of the images combine high and low branded store fronts, by doing this was there a particular comment or observation you were trying to make in your work? If so what statement are you making?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** The city's shops are spaces that promise a form of mystical fulfillment, and the camera blurs the different economic tiers into one consumystic fiction, which these spaces and displays are producing.

**DD: Where did the idea to layer several photos over one another come from? And was this a complex process?**

**Margarita Gluzberg:** I've been working exclusively in analogue photography, and everything is shot on 35mm black and white slide film with an old Pentax K1000. All very old-school. The same film goes through the camera two or three times, leaving it double and triple-exposed. This process closely mimics my physical experience of looking at the huge proliferation of consumer signs and spaces, where one thing merges with another, layer upon layer of product arrangements. This way, the 'image-event' takes place inside the camera, a singular moment recorded in the emulsion of the film.



**DD:** Are you working on any other projects? If so what?

**Margarita Gluzberg:** I'm continuing to develop my ongoing project Captive Bird Society. I've been collecting old 78rpm records of birdsong for a number of years, and have devised a series of installation-performances that have taken place across Europe, in which I play all the records simultaneously and dress up in haute couture outfits. It's a work about the mechanics of capture and desire – I never stray far from this subject...

*Margarita Gluzberg- 'Avenue des Gobelins', 18/11/2011 – 23/12/2011, Paradise Row, 74a Newman Street, London W1T 3DB*