

COLOUR, MOVEMENT, ENERGY

An interview with Marina Smith

Interview by Tatiana Andrianova

August 2023

collaboration

ASUR × ULTRAMARINA



collaboration prints photo artist music location London

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INTERVIEW

TATIANA / Congratulations on our first collaboration. I remember following your VK page a few years ago and thinking, 'How amazing would it be to print this on clothing?' I often have that thought when art really grips me. Tell me how it all began.

MARINA / Thank you. I studied psychology and worked as a journalist and editor. At one point I had an affair with my boss, and it was dramatic. That often happens when something begins too passionately. In the end, I left my editorial post.

While all of this was happening, I began photographing myself and making portraits. I sang, 'Words can't bring me down,' and laughed.

TATIANA / That is quite a form of therapy. How did you decide to change direction? Was the beginning difficult?

MARINA / I was already thirty. I did not want to return to an office or spend years retraining. I had always been a nonconformist, so instead of working through thick Photoshop manuals, I chose my own route. I decided I would edit directly on my phone because I liked doing it that way.

At eighteen, you think, 'This must be cool, that must be cool.' Later you understand that what is cool is the way you do something. I felt I had nothing to lose. I was living in St Petersburg with a little money saved, but I was poor. I began making my collages. The work was unusual, and people began asking for it.

TATIANA / Was there anyone who strongly shaped your way of seeing?

MARINA / There is an artist in St Petersburg called Sergey Egorov. He was my real teacher. He gave me a great deal and inspired me. He is a brilliant, real artist. He also photographed with a very old camera. Once he wrote to an optical factory and asked whether they had any broken lenses or a store of unwanted parts. They told him to come over. He returned with a collection of extraordinary lenses and even gave me a couple.

Among artists, I would name Sarah Moon, Elizaveta Porodina, Francis Bacon, and Expressionism more broadly.

TATIANA / So you were taught by a master of optical effects. How do you produce those strange and extraordinary distortions? Is there a recipe?

MARINA / I cannot tell you. It is a secret, my know-how. There is a particular kind of pixelation - not ugly pixels, but interesting ones. You can print them on a large canvas and they still look good.

My style emerged through experimentation and many hours spent with low-quality equipment and phone applications. I owned a DSLR and sometimes used it, but my main cameras were compact cameras from before the smartphone era.

TATIANA / We will leave space for the magic. What about subject matter? Do you begin with an image of the final result, or does everything happen intuitively?

MARINA / There is no plot. I make portraits or fashion images, or I simply walk through the city and photograph it. I am not someone who plans everything. I love improvisation. Colour, movement and energy are what I want to convey.

TATIANA / Some of your images are bold, provocative and charged with eroticism. Are they more difficult to make than less sexual scenes?

MARINA / Erotic photography is a strongly male-dominated field. I was drawn to the fact that so few women photographers work with nude models.

After St Petersburg I married and moved to England with my husband. Here I encountered many nude models whose bodies did not conform to conventional beauty standards. The internet had already made it clear that people are attracted to completely different configurations of the body. I was surprised, shocked and inspired by how uninhibited people were here, especially older people.

I continued working in my own way and refining it. I enjoyed no longer feeling embarrassed. I overcame my fears and became more at ease with people.

TATIANA / How do you choose a model? Or does the model choose you?

MARINA / I have always been attracted to the beauty of people. I would approach someone in a club and say, 'Come with me,' and they would. I have an organic need to absorb other people's beauty. Through photography I begin, quite literally, to possess that beauty and make it mine. It is a rather acquisitive feeling: I do not want simply to observe beauty; I want it for myself.

The boy on the /STRANGER/ top is Ollie, my best friend in London. We have worked together many times. It is curious that you chose his image for the collaboration, because I usually photograph strangers who come to me specifically for a shoot.

TATIANA / What did you think of our first collaboration?

MARINA / I was thrilled from the moment you sent the first prototype. I immediately wanted to post it, but I restrained myself. I understand your choice of works for the prints. The metallic corset is powerful: it has the atmosphere of a strong, futuristic robot woman. The blue image used for the dress is airy. The woman is there and absent at the same time, like a spirit of the wind. And then there is Oliver. [laughs] I was delighted to see the face of my best friend.

TATIANA / Imagine that the clothes pass something of your sensibility to the person wearing them - a kind of superpower. What would you call it?

MARINA / Synesthesia.

TATIANA / What are your plans for the future?

MARINA / I am studying at Central Saint Martins in London and experimenting with other forms - performance, sculpture, video and much more. It was a bold step for me to return to education as a mature student. My husband is very supportive of my artistic development.

The fashion students are extraordinary, like birds of paradise. I also wondered whether I should study fashion. But then I looked at it all and realised that you have to be obsessed to go into it. So I changed my mind, and that was absolutely the right decision. In fact, I think my main calling is family management - being a wife and a mother. I am very good at it.

TATIANA / To be honest, one drop was not enough for me. Shall we work together again?

MARINA / Yes. I am open to coming up with more things together. To play on a bigger scale, you need to practise. Let's practise together.







/STRANGER/

mesh crop top and gloves

ASUR x ULTRAMARINA

Artist collaboration and interview, 2023

Interview by Tatiana Andrianova

Artist: Marina Smith

Collaboration and garments: ASUR

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