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Mela Yerka

## And the — the surface is fine and powdery

Private view: 11 September 2014, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Exhibition dates: 12 September – 18 October 2014

Opening hours: Tues - Fri 11am - 6pm, Sat 11am - 3pm or by appointment

Maria Stenfors is delighted to present Mela Yerka's second solo show at the gallery. The exhibition title derives from Neil Armstrong's second sentence on the surface of the Moon. It is sincere and full of the joy of exploration, but remains barely known, inevitably overshadowed by his more famous utterance.

Yerka's portrait paintings capture 19th Century women — aristocrats, writers, actresses, models, courtesans — and the stories of their lives remembered in history only through their intimate relationships with prominent men of the time. Each of the women craved personal freedom and social appreciation, but in pursuit of it had to rely on male lust and love. Using these stories as a starting point, Yerka creates work that comes to embody the struggle for individuality.

In her landscapes, Yerka looks at the human drive to prove oneself and explore. The paintings are inspired by the planned colonisation of Mars — a journey not into the unknown, but for the sake of experiencing and seeing more. Yerka's Martian landscapes are not immediately discernible in daylight, but once covered in darkness, a vast and mysterious extraterrestrial landscape is revealed. Light paints the picture here: flat, abstract surfaces are defined by reflected daylight, while dramatic, rocky vistas are shaped by the glowing light emitted from the painting.

Yerka playfully combines various techniques, art motifs and surprising references, using each story as an opportunity to reinterpret art history and explore its contemporary vantage point. Empty, captivating gazes and blank, flat bodies form uneasy portraits that are difficult to place in time. The landscapes from Mars deceive the viewer's visual perception with rocks and mountains made of light — appearing in the vacuum and conforming to some unearthly laws of space. The diverse works in the exhibition reveal hidden landscapes and vivid colours, while the various materials — wax, oil colours, acrylic paint, marble dust or fluorescent pigment — all serve one purpose: to unsettle and defamiliarise the viewer.

Mela Yerka was born in Poland and lives and works in London. After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, she graduated from Central St Martins College of Art, London, in 2011. Mela Yerka's solo exhibition 'What red blue is in?' was held at Maria Stenfors in 2013. She has also exhibited as part of 'Young galleries presentation', Maria Stenfors, Art13, London and in 'part is fame [art as game]' at Schleifmuehlgasse 12-14 in Vienna, Austria in 2014.

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