

"Yuri Masnyj: London Exhibition," www.wallpaper.com, March 19, 2008

Staring at the still-life drawings of Yuri Masnyj can feel slightly voyeuristic, like looking at a stranger's private photographs, or through a keyhole into a locked room.

The intricate scenes he creates are littered with static household paraphernalia: piles of imaginary books, mail, cassette tapes, notepads, artworks, pot plants... and lots of cigarettes.

Yet despite the ostensible sterility and stillness, there exists about the work a distinct sense of vitality, even energy, as though the people who inhabit these spaces are hiding just out of frame.

For his New York show last July Masnyj combined flat sketches with neat, sculptural representations of his art. His current exhibition at Sutton Lane in London again mingles the two forms. This time, however, the single, central sculpture is abstract and wild, an almost Constructivist assemblage of myriad objects plucked from among his drawings like props from a dream.

The surrounding pictures give the three-dimensional figure its context. The figure, in turn, reveals the unreality of the drawn work; a tape cassette is made of wood, the tablecloth is cardboard and the bottles, books and cigarettes are branded with made-up logos.

The spare, bright colour palette and the lack of living subjects (faces feature seldom and obliquely) are typical of Masnyj's work and add to the feeling that these images are more memory or dream than firm reality. In that sense, then, our role as spectators might well be voyeuristic; only instead of staring at private photographs or locked rooms we are in fact looking straight at the subconscious of the artist himself.