

## Nikita Kadan

Like media images, artistic representations of Kiev's Euromaidan – the wave of civil unrest that began in Ukraine in November 2013 – often zone in on human drama. A photo-journalistic approach exposes protesters struggling together against police violence; independent of the photographer's own intentions, a politicized narrative builds around such strong imagery, one that also has currency in the Western media's interpretation of events. Such images easily slip into the role of unwilling but useful servants in the theatre of propaganda. In his exhibition, 'Limits of Responsibility', Nikita Kadan side-stepped this problematic relationship between art and political action. Although his latest work deals with the Euromaidan, Kadan has shifted the focus to the 'means of visual agitation and propaganda' – a phrase taken from a book of prints produced in Soviet Russia in 1979 that were designed to communicate national economic growth. Reproduced by Kadan and hung in the entrance of the exhibition space, a selection of these images made a surprising opener to the show.

*Limits of Responsibility* (all works 2014) was also the title given to the central installation of the exhibition, a scale replica of the principal structure in these Soviet diagrams: a set of three display boards fixed to an A-shaped metal frame, anchored by a box filled with plants. This model was positioned at precisely the angle dictated by the original diagram, with neat rows of cabbages obediently blooming in the planter box, organic growth conforming to the original metaphor of economic success.

In 1920, Kazimir Malevich wrote that the new 'economic' visual forms advanced by the Russian Constructivists would spur on the growth of the Soviet economy to create 'a single, powerful image' of efficiency. In *Limits of Responsibility*, however, both the original diagram and the exhibited model's three display boards were left blank, still waiting to be filled by an official dogma of growth. With its clean, minimal lines and white surfaces, the structure slips easily between eras. It could have been built to demonstrate the imposed acceleration of the economy under Soviet rule or, equally, to display diagrams of economic growth promised by the free market.

*36 Maidan Colour Slides* presented an entirely different dynamic between organic growth and power, one played out in public space and based on events on the ground – quite literally. The piece comprises a slide projector that clicks

## About this review

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*Limits of Responsibility, 2014,*  
installation view

through a series of photographs made by Kadan throughout the Euromaidan protests. Rather than showing people, conflict and chaos, however, the images draw attention to an unlikely detail: garden beds planted and maintained by the occupiers of Maidan, the city square that was at the centre of the unrest. Between army-green tents, rows of ordered greenery. *Click*. Signs detailing types of vegetables. *Click*. In the background, a billboard strewn with golden wheat. *Click*. A cross, a wreath. *Click*. Trampled plants, a municipal worker looking on. *Click*. And, finally, the city square cleared of tents and repopulated by passers-by. The soil of Euromaidan was too contested to remain under the control of people planting and digging for long. *36 Maidan Colour Slides* documents a brief claim to public space, which was ultimately forcibly denied: the city square returned to normalcy while the abnormality of conflict continues elsewhere in Ukraine.

Finally, in a series of untitled, carefully executed watercolours, Kadan merged together various vegetables, human bones and architectural features of Kiev: parsley sprouts insolently from a guardhouse roof; a turnip nestles suggestively inside a pelvis; beneath a Soviet slogan sits a round, healthy cabbage. Despite mimicking the clinical style of architectural drawings and medical textbooks, these works achieved a marriage of form that is awkwardly human, finally establishing a visceral connection between the built city and its living organisms.

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