

Shahin Zarinbal
Muskauer Straße 24, 10997 Berlin

Sinaida Michalskaja

Cat on tree

11 September – 24 October 2026

Exhibition text by Lara Scherrieble

A vicious cycle can take various forms. Rolling a stone up a hill, again and again, or being stuck in Samsāra and its constant cycles of rebirth. A Russian expression, наступать на одни и те же грабли (*nastupat' na odni i te zhe grabli*) – to step on the same rake(s) – describes a similar feeling, in which life is a hamster wheel of one's own making, and we repeat the same mistakes over and over again. The sudden upward jerk of a rake's handle literally punches us in the face as we try to take the next step, interrupting our forward motion with a knockout blow, and forcing us, the walking subject, to try again, anew.

But if picked up from the ground, a rake can be useful. It helps us bring what we need closer, to scrape things together – a physical tool for free association. Yet, something always slips through those narrow teeth, no matter how long or thoroughly the procedure goes on. For her exhibition *Cat on tree*, Sinaida Michalskaja draws from the functions of a rake, engaging in a continuous process of collecting, citing, referencing, combining, and interconnecting: titles and texts by artists and authors that lay open the reciprocal nature of all making, alongside materials ranging from mundane to spiritual manifestations of stories, knowledge, or belief systems – daring never to reach a definite conclusion.

Cat on tree centres on Michalskaja's body of work *Multipass*, a series of sculptures assembled from the artist's personal archive, each of which is built around a found rake. In the first gallery space, four *Multipass* works, all from 2026 – (*High Expectations*), (*Spread your wings and fly*), (*Hold your Horses*), and (*I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden / Judith*) – are presented alongside two *warm data* works, books enshrined in plexiglass boxes together with slides and prints. In the second room, a third *warm data* work is shown in dialogue with *Multipass* (*Only two can play this game / Cat on tree*), 2026 and *N&L*, 2015, a diptych from the artist's *Windows* series. *Free Speech for Cows*, 2026, a poem from George Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form* lecture, sporadically plays in the background.

The rakes in *Multipass* are secured in a way that avoids them being stepped on, sometimes floating at various heights, held only at their tipping point, at other times resting, delicately balanced on various support materials. Old garden tools, second-hand furniture, models of art works, animal figurines, photographs, jewels, collected over the years, are carefully grouped together, stacked or leaning against each other.

What we adorn ourselves with always refers back to our values, from a cat to a cross. The objects in *Multipass* are at once thoroughly generic, representing widely recognised motifs of beautification and spiritual elevation – rhinestones, butterflies, temporary tattoos, charms –, and at the same time deliberately domestic, precious and personal. They are all equally treasured by Michalskaja as specific souvenirs of connections to other objects, places and encounters; of a thought once thought, of a strange feeling: a pocket-sized monument of fun, shame, home, or a friend. A lover found the rose at the centre of *Multipass (Spread your wings and fly)*, decorated with the colours of a German flag at a supermarket, while the stones in the piece were given to the artist as gifts and inheritances. Some of its gemstones form the “Navaratna”, a specific constellation symbolising the solar system that the artist discovered while looking for a family tombstone. *Multipass (High Expectations)*, 2026, is based on a ready-made, Eiffel Tower-shaped piece of furniture that recalls both a bride and a post-Soviet Christmas tree. The work brings together objects that evoke ‘high expectations’ in one way or another, including the artist’s own photographs of the Uffizi collection, a photo of serious party prepping, and a significant number of rhinestones.

On the wall, *warm data (Volute, p. 312)*, 2026, shows a page of Shola von Reinhold’s novel *LOTE* offering a witty philosophical treatise on the ornament and the cyclical nature of ideas throughout history, itself embedded within photographs of house plants seen through a window, and a reflection of the sky. In *warm data (Ehre und Schande, p. 115)*, hanging in the second gallery space, the book sits within a c-printed detail of a window, a photograph taken at sunset, slides of a Hollywood film still and a church detail that used to be art-educational material. On the visible part of the page, Hans Castorp, the main character of Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, reflects on the liberating potential of a life of disgrace as opposed to the pressure inherent in the pursuit of honour.

Cat on tree works like a kaleidoscope, multiplying every object and its meanings – personal, cultural, historical and spiritual – into mirror images and fragments, a rabbit hole lined with strange strings of association and attachment: the absolute incomprehensibility and awkwardness of *everything*, encapsulated in a flimsy and specific *something*. Everything one touches changes the course of a thought, a word, an object through the world; its cycle and re-cycling of life are infinitely dependent on which hand passes it to which, and the meanings are confided in it. But one can’t always choose which ways things go, and not always reach them. Michalskaja collects the objects that come to her, and with them the fragments that bear the paradoxes of desire, connection, and belonging, in an infinite whirl of attentive moments, remembrance, and chance. They reveal themselves like constellations, piece by piece, in relation to each other: sometimes in loud-and-proud obviousness, sometimes in tiny, awkward affinities.

Opening hours

Thursday, Friday, Saturday 2–6 pm, and by appointment
info@shahinزارinbal.com shahinزارinbal.com