



Luxury Russia, Moscow, 2004, c-print, framed, 152 x 102 cm, edition of 5. Courtesy the artist, Galerie Nicola von Senger, Zurich, and Magnum Photos

Martin Parr
Luxury

Galerie Nicola von Senger, Zurich
7 February – 21 March

Smiling, and with a glint in his eye, Martin Parr declares that he cannot, as a British photographer, tell what constitutes the quality of his photographs. A Magnum photographer since 1994, and internationally recognised, Parr is debuting at Zurich's Nicola von Senger a series which will this year tour galleries in France, the Netherlands, the USA and of course his native Britain, before finding its final shape in a publication in the autumn.

Of the thousands of images snatched here and there since the late 1990s – but especially from the last five or six years – *Luxury* comprises around 100 pictures selected by Parr. Colourful, lively, dynamic, these 110 shots all focus on the mixture of festivity, banality and self-conscious posturing of art's many social gatherings and the people who attend them. Whether in Moscow or under the burning sun of Australia, in England or in Kassel, the alcohol just keeps flowing, sequins dazzle, sunglasses set up their wearers as if they were stars, heels are sharp as needles, dresses are silky and lipstick is *de rigueur*. Faced with the cosmetic excess of this leisured society, one's glance begins to give up under the weight of detail that betrays the vulgarity and superficiality of this vacuous decor.

Never looking for a staged shot, Parr's lens nevertheless manages to focus in on a thick stomach held in a tight-fitting dress stained by a drink served in haste; or on the ridiculous mannerism of a man who, during some evening reception, uses his small dog as

an accessory that enhances his own appearance. Parr has a knack for emphasising the gestures people adopt when they wish to appear sophisticated and debonair, just as he revels in the less-guarded demeanour of those on the lookout for the next passing canapé.

In Parr's framings, vivid colour bursts out, shapes overflow, and blurry and in-focus shots jostle. In their content, this festive world quickly turns into a circus of derision, of nonsense and absurdity. We're invited into a party at which we meet no one, exchange and learn nothing, and, in the end, can do little more than feel awkward. But before leaving this party, we might still notice the wry, smiling attention of Martin Parr, who really did enter this 'beautiful' world, if only to bring us these few critical and comic reflections of it. It's a constant to-and-fro between attraction and repulsion. Close to social documentary, *Luxury*, with its absence of pity for the human race, recalls Parr's earlier work on the apparent absurdity of mass tourism, where everything can seem beautiful or cruel. "Everyone", he explains, "is free to interpret my images as they wish". *Karine Tissot*