



Vadim Fiskin  
*Don Quixote Pact*, 2010-12.  
wind turbine generator, 5 electric fans,  
table, glass, 225 x 400 x 230  
art. Photo: Markus Schwaner  
Courtesy Galerija Gregor Podnar,  
Berlin and Lubana

## Vadim Fiskin: Light Matters 2

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By John Quin

Readers of a certain age and nationality might remember a British TV show called *How*, which screened throughout the 1970s. Four presenters – wise, bearded pipe-fiddler Old Jack, bosomy maternal presence Bunty, resident boffin Jon and explicator extraordinaire Fred Dinenage – would solve a tricky problem that began with a ‘how?’ and then, raising their hands in Native American style, loudly chant together: “How!” If it had ever been shown in the USSR, Vadim Fiskin would have been a fan. One imagines the everquestioning artist (born in Russia, now based in Ljubljana) driving his parents, then teachers, then curators crazy with his incessant childlike asking: how does that happen, how does that work? But his often-humorous interrogation of science appears central to his practice.

There are five works in Fiskin’s second solo outing at Gregor Podnar. *Don Quixote Pact/ v. Alliance* (2010/2012) comes as a welcome relief as one enters the gallery during a 30-degree heatwave: five electric fans powering a wind turbine generator (or is it powering them?). Then there’s *Miss Christmas* (2012), a blue paint pot from which, within a spotlight circle on the pot, the shadow of a palm tree gently sways in the breeze (from next door’s gusts?) and which emerges from, well, from where exactly? (It’s part of the projection, assumedly.) *Orbit* (1994) features two silver prints of a Soviet-era building with what look like angels hovering over them. Chiming with this, *Sugar Twins* (2012) is two sugar cubes sat on an overhead projector, the projection suggesting twin tower blocks with little windows; *Unplugged* (2010) is an electric lightbulb that, somehow, is lit but not plugged in. The works sport around and, insistently, catch you out.

They could be read allegorically, as references to power and how it is shared, manipulated or, in the case of the two tower works, destroyed; but that, one suspects, would be to miss Fiskin’s deeper mission. Quiddity, rather than symbolism, is his concern. A distaste for magic or generalising systems is apparent, his work recalling Nabokov’s comment that there is ‘no science without fancy and no art without facts’. One imagines Fiskin agreeing with literary critic Leland de la Durantaye’s comment (in *Style Is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov*, 2007), that the ‘deception that Nabokov finds in art – and above all in his own – is nothing less than a reflection and a consequence of a deceptiveness present in Nature itself’. Quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay ‘Experience’ (1844), de la Durantaye goes on: “Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates.” Fiskin is often keen to show us up as willing dupes of nature, as with the amusing *Choose Your Day* (2005), where we sit in a room and press buttons that, via DVD projection, will delusively conjure up varied environments like a ‘sunny day’ or a ‘stormy night’. But it is the performance *Air Balloon in the Cave* (2000, not on show), in which the artist flies a 16-metre-tall hot air balloon inside the Postojna Cave in Slovenia, which begs that question again: just how did he do that?

Poetry in the seemingly impossible, then; poetry in the ‘How?’ Fiskin is devoid of Simon Starling’s redundancies, more cunningly deceptive than Ceal Floyer, funnier than the pofaced Olafur Eliasson and saner than Panamarenko. With his persuasive fascination with fascinating physics, he’s the Fred Dinenage of contemporary art.