

Lucy McKenzie
"Global Joy"

7 September – 6 October 2001
opening reception on Friday, 7 September, 7-9 pm

SEMI-PRECIOUS RECORDS

It's St Petersburg under perestroika, and the company Aufon is bootlegging Western vinyl. Unlike the legit Melodia in Moscow, who published original recordings, Aufon was purely for bypassing the tricky importation laws to supply records to Russian ears. The sound is usually just a marginally poorer version of the original, though occasionally double lps are edited down to a single disk.

The proxy sleeves are not straight copies. Instead, there are imaginative approximations of people like David Bowie in pen and ink or coloured pencil. They look curious more than shabby, and often they are very nicely executed. Just because you have to 'make do' does not mean you have to do so without grace. Take the Glasgow painter Ronnie Heeps and his beautifully made CV dossier for example. In the section relating to his years as a light show and projections artist, there are gaps where he does not have an accompanying image for a particular concert or rave. He makes do with suggestion, a scan of the back of a prog rock lp.

Something that is positioned as alternative or sub-cultural necessarily needs the norms and perceived oppressions it is designed to challenge if it is to justify itself. Logically, if the oppression is taken away, it becomes redundant. But change the oppression, or substitute it with something more extreme, and a chemical reaction seems to take place, a transformation.

Lead into gold is achieved in the particularly poignant replacement for Sonic Youth's "Daydream Nation" by Aufon. The New York band are well known for their quality underground music and aesthetic refinement, their sleeves always a bit of a yardstick by which tastes of the day can be defined. For this album they have employed a photorealistic painting by Gerhard Richter of a candle, fittingly reflecting the cool, mature and universal mood of the songs. On the Russian imitation this has been eschewed in favour of a plain old photograph of a candle. It looks archaic and sweet, like a Christmas card. Its beauty now equals that of the charming Christmas card last year from my friend Olga Bogdanova. Her closing line on the accompanying letter was:

"Keep warm. Be brave. Smile. Love to your family. I wish you global joy."