

FORT GANSEVOORT



Zoya Cherkassky

Soviet Childhood

Opening On:

Saturday, February 15, 6 – 8 PM

February 15 – March 28, 2020

Fort Gansevoort is pleased to announce *Soviet Childhood*, presenting new works by Zoya Cherkassky (b. Kiev, 1976). A continuation of the 2019 exhibition at Fort Gansevoort New York, this exhibition will include paintings and drawings that evoke the specific social realities of mundane Soviet daily life, while uncovering the complex phenomenon of nostalgia that affects the final generation of Soviet children. Paradoxical in nature, these works explore notions of identity as it is constructed in relation to time, place, and human connection.

Cherkassky, just fifteen years old when the USSR collapsed, creates her work with precision. From rigidly structured school buildings to vibrant clothing, a multitude of artifacts fill and give life to her paintings. Representing varying Soviet realities, Cherkassky's work narrates specific stories and scenes in addition to such simple everyday situations as daily commutes and chores. Through historical research and memory, she gathers together recognizable objects and patterns to reconstruct a bygone era that defines millions of identities.

A unique blend of Soviet Realism and Modernism, Cherkassky's paintings evoke a childish gaze while recollecting the troubled Soviet times with sarcasm and humor. Having begun the Soviet Childhood series while pregnant with her daughter, Cherkassky portrays her own childhood utopia and simultaneously conjures a feeling of impending catastrophe, neither glorifying nor decrying Soviet life. That balance is found, for example, in *Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe*, which depicts a blissful Kiev family getaway in nature. A playful response to Édouard Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*, the painting reflects leisure and indulgence, qualities not typically associated with the Soviet Union. Such objects of happiness as fresh tomatoes, a blue river, and a dog, are offset by the presence of a transistor radio that through its ability to carry both music and unfortunate news of political upheaval, acts as a symbol of both pleasure and doom alike.

Cherkassky's depictions of women expand her dual narrative, bringing to light a sense of hope in spite of imminent political downfall. In *Divorcees*, two women relax in their slippers with tea and biscuits, one contentedly strumming a guitar while the other listens intently. The pairing of their cool-toned skin with the warm-hued objects reflects the pain of their past while suggesting optimism in their newfound independence. The importance of both self-autonomy and togetherness also inflects *The Three Graces*, which depicts three nude women gathered in a kitchen. Whether they are dancing, talking, or merely waiting for the nearby teapot to sound, their activity is undisclosed and unimportant. Their bodies, relaxed and facing one another, are the focus. As in many of Cherkassky's paintings, the teapot here serves as a symbol of fleeting liberty, suggesting self-ownership alongside national pride and freedom.

While the Western view of the USSR is largely negative, Soviet children were generally happy. Cherkassky masterfully intersects memory and fact with propaganda, navigating the opposing views of Soviet Russia and making space for both nostalgia and criticism. *Soviet Childhood* reopens a lost window in time and invites one to look through it, allowing viewers to question their own definition of ordinary life and their relationship with national identity.

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Zoya Cherkassky was born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1976. In 1991, she immigrated to Israel. She attended HaMidrasha School of Art at Bier Berl College. Her work has been shown internationally at institutions including; Rosenfeld Gallery Tel Aviv, Henrich Böll Foundation Gallery Tel Aviv, Circle1 Gallery Berlin, Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin, Guelman Gallery Moscow, and The Tel Aviv Museum of Art. In 2018, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem held a mid-career survey of her work. Cherkassky's work is included in the permanent collections of The Jewish Museum New York, Jewish Museum Berlin, Jewish Museum Vienna, The Israel Museum Jerusalem, Tel Aviv Museum of Art Tel Aviv, and The Doron Sebbag Art Collection Tel Aviv. Residencies include Chiliufim: Exchange of Artist and Art in Germany and Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin.

Image: Zoya Cherkassky, *80s Disco*, 2019, Oil on linen, 59 x 51.25 inches.