

Olga Kundina : Sessions with Aphrodite

01.06.23 — 15.07.23

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

For over three decades Olga Kundina documents in her paintings the many places she had visited, lived and worked in: from Jerusalem, Rosh Pina and Tel Aviv; to London, Paris and Texas. At the core of her work is her desire to capture her Zeitgeist, or the spirit of time and place. By choosing to go out of her studio onto the street she had practiced painting from observation which allowed her to establish a clear cut between herself and her art, between the reality she observes, and the reality that makes up her life.

The present body of work represents a significant shift in her creative process, represented through the themes in her paintings, her formal language and her different practice. During the past two years, which were filled with uncertainties and elaborate changes both in her personal life, and also at the backdrop of the Israeli public crisis, Kundina left behind the outdoor and withdrew back to her private studio and her inner world.

As part of a vast artistic tradition at large, her studio (now her home) has become a central theme in her works. The character of the artist living and working in it appears in the paintings in a myriad of ways, in different forms and reflections, alongside guests that come into and out of the frame or people she shares a life with. In his book on Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze writes that it is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface. The painter has many things in his head, around him, or in his studio and everything is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, before he begins his work. The painter, therefore, does not have to cover a blank surface, but instead, he has to clear it, and empty it out.¹ Many works in the show might allude to such processes of emptying out, of reduction and abstraction. The realistic painting identified with The New Barbizon group is now converted by Kundina into a quick, graphic-like drawing, set against a saturated, colorful, fantastic surfaces. To her oil palette she now added wallpaper pieces, paper cutouts and colorful spray paints. The works feature familiar objects that regularly occupy the space, these perpetuate from one piece to the next - classic sculptures of Aphrodite and Antinous, a mannequin the artist picked off the street, or numerous other objects that serve as models in her Still Life drawings. All these seem to come to life in her imagination and join a surrealist theatre in which the artist is at once the playwright, the director, and the leading actor. Art and life have become one.

Olga Kundina (b. 1965), graduated with an MA from The Institute for the Graphic Arts, Moscow (1990). Moved to Israel in 1990. One of the founders of The 'New Barbizon' Group. Lecturer at The Arts Institute, Tel Hai College. Her work was exhibited in one-person and group shows in Israel and abroad, among them are De Apple Museum, Amsterdam (2020), Erez Israel Museum, Tel Aviv (2019), Hamidrasha Gallery, Tel Aviv (2019), Mishkan Museum of Art, Ein Harod (2017), Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2016, 2023), Haifa Museum of Art (2014), Circle1 gallery, Berlin, and more. Her work is included in many public and private collections both in Israel and abroad including The Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Bar-David Museum, Israel Makov collection, Discount Bank art collection, The Israeli Knesset art collection, and more.

¹Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London; New York: Continuum, 2003), 86.