

Olga Kundina: Balcony to the Aegean

04.09.25 — 25.10.25

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The current body of work continues and expands upon the thematic and stylistic trajectory initiated in the exhibition **Sessions with Aphrodite**, which marked a significant turning point in Kundina's practice - from painting that documented external reality to a more reflexive mode, one that centers on the studio and her inner world.

In these new works, the external and internal realms are interwoven. The outside world reflects the Zeitgeist: Tel Aviv's streets, endlessly dug up; the daily struggles of migrant workers; protesters crying out in public squares; the view of Shapira neighborhood as seen from the artist's rooftop. These motifs are typically rendered in a realistic idiom, grounded in painting from observation. The inner world, by contrast - a tangle of emotions, thoughts, dreams, and anxieties - is painted in a fantastical style, often abstract, in vivid colors and with swift, expressive lines. As concrete reality grows increasingly chaotic and difficult, her canvases become ever more populated with motifs of imagination, dream, and hallucination.

As in her previous body of work, images of classical sculptures of Aphrodite and Antinous recur here as well. In the tradition of academic painting, such figures served as models for 'still life' painting. In Kundina's work, these classical motifs - part of the heritage of Western culture - function like a chorus in a Greek tragedy. Alongside them appear impressions of India, where the artist recently spent an extended period; these sometimes emerge as idyllic scenes, and at other times as nightmarish visions.

The painting **Nelly in the Living Room** refers to the iconic **Las Meninas**. At the center of the scene stands the artist's granddaughter, cast as Velázquez's Infanta, while at the easel Kundina positions her own self-portrait. The role of the royal dog is taken by a monumental cat - at once guardian and threat. Corinthian columns support the ceiling, while from the balcony the deep blue of the Aegean Sea comes into view. On the horizon, the Himalayan range appears, and there sits a golden Buddha. If Velázquez's composition attested to the power and stability of the royal court, Kundina likewise seeks to offer an imagined idyll for her granddaughter, and perhaps a hope for a new order.

In the project room (Rosy), works on paper are presented from **Balfour-Kaplan**, a large-scale series that began in 2020 and continues to the present. This project documents the continuum of public protest - from the Balfour demonstrations during the Covid-19 crisis, through the Kaplan protests against the judicial overhaul, to the current war and rallies calling for the release of hostages and an end to the war. Kundina participated actively in many of these protests, documenting their dramatic unfolding in dozens of sketches on paper, some of which evolved into large-scale works.

Olga Kundina (b. 1965) holds an MA from the Moscow Institute of Design and Graphic Arts (1990). She immigrated to Israel that same year and is a founding member of 'The New Barbizon' group. Kundina has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Israel and abroad, including: Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2016, 2023); De Appel, Amsterdam (2020); Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv (2019); The Midrasha Gallery, Tel Aviv (2019); Mishkan Museum of Art, Ein Harod (2017); Haifa Museum of Art (2014); Circle 1 Gallery, Berlin, among others. Her works are included in both private and public collections, among them: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Bar-David Museum, Discount Bank Collection, Israel Makov Collection, the Knesset Collection, and more.