



THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF ART

RZ COLLECTION
CATALOGUE
& GUIDEBOOK



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FOREWORD

INTERVIEW WITH RAIVIS ZABIS

Why did you become an art collector?

It wasn't an intentional choice; I myself sometimes wonder why. Hard to say in a few words, you have to dig deep into yourself. I was born in the town of Liepāja, on the Baltic Sea shore. I love the countryside, I love the house where my ancestors lived, and I love the simple and unpretentious life, wheat fields, pine forest, and our cold grey sea.

The sea was within reach and yet inaccessible. I grew up in the Soviet times and then the seashore was a border zone, it was fenced with barbed wire and guarded by border troops. We, village boys, were extremely attracted to this forbidden dream – the sea with an endless horizon. This feeling coupled with a desire to overcome boundaries and prohibitions would come back to me again and again in the course of my life. Any restrictions were perceived as a challenge and an incentive to act, to overcome; anything far and unknown became the most interesting and appealing.

After school, in the early 1990s, I went to study in Germany. I did not think of myself outside of agriculture at that time and chose an Agricultural University. Following my studies there, I returned to Latvia and worked in the agro sector for several years, but soon enough I started feeling myself short on space there. I lacked opportunities for action and decided to leave for Russia, which was bustling with perestroika.

I worked in St Petersburg, Russia for fifteen years. Saying that it was hard is not to say anything. The first years were particularly difficult, and I didn't have much time to care for the beauties of Northern Venice. With that, the feeling that I was close to the Great Beauty never left

me from the very beginning. Do you remember *The Great Beauty*, a movie by Paolo Sorrentino? The movie is not really about that, but the title is spot on. For me, it echoed with the plight of my boyhood years: there was something beautiful and at the same time inaccessible nearby. When, after a couple of years of non-stop work race, I could already afford to have some time to spare on weekends, "the beautiful" became almost accessible, if not to mention long queues at the museum entrance on Sundays. But the queues only spurred my interest, and the fact that, once in the museum, I felt like a helpless kid thrown into the open sea, was my next challenge.

Is that when you realised you wanted to become an art collector?

Oh no, I would have to become an art historian then to rescue myself in this boundless sea! I don't remember exactly how it all evolved, but at a certain point I was able to put my finger on what exactly attracted and got me hooked. I was interested, before anything, in myself, that is, my reaction to these skilfully created pieces from the *world of beauty*. I liked some pieces and definitely detested others, and it felt as if I was exploring myself through them. And you know what, sometimes I appreciated artworks that were far from being beautiful, even ugly. One day I read the definition of art in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia: "Art is one of the ways of knowing the world". It made me feel better, and I went on.

Where did you get the courage to dive straight into contemporary art rather than start cautiously with the classics?

I knew straight away that I would only collect contemporary art. I live in the present time, and



I am interested in what my contemporaries do. For me, it's like "you can't go in the same water twice"; we are in the same boat with contemporary artists, and I'm interested in their vision of today's world, their thoughts, the way they live and work. Then again, I have an opportunity to compare their vision with my own world-view.

How do you choose artworks?

The selection process is very important to me, and it is a pleasure in its own right. I enjoy visiting artists' workshops, looking around, talking to artists, and getting to know them. I might not be as much interested in the artwork itself, as in what's behind it – the personality of the artist, his or her story, view of the world, how they work, and what inspires them – that's what has always been important to me. One of my principles is that I never buy works by artists whose personalities I

am not interested in or cannot relate to. Perhaps that's why, after ten years I'd been involved in art, I decided to make the first catalogue of my collection in 2015. There were fewer works then, just about a hundred. I intended to record and keep stories of the artists I met and the works I bought. Together with Inna Udovichenko, an art expert who had been helping me "stay on top" for several years at that time, we came up with the idea for the catalogue.

We didn't want to go the usual way and provide standard information about the artists, we also tried to avoid any sophisticated art articles or exhibition lists. Believe me, it wasn't easy, but we got all the artists to write down their own stories. We edited them a bit, of course, but never went beyond what artists said about themselves. To streamline the process, we asked everybody the same three questions: What do I want to tell

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about myself? How do I get inspired? What is my painting about? [the one purchased for the collection]. The catalogue helped me draw some conclusions. At that moment, I became aware that I could no longer imagine my life without art, and also I realised that plain collecting was no longer enough for me. As it happens, you seem to have started to understand something, gained some experience and knowledge, but then you stumble on some small stone and realise that your knowledge will never be enough. As the classics teach us, “The more I know, the more I recognize I know nothing” or something along these lines.

Can we say that after the first stage of collecting was over, you changed your approach and decided to do it differently?

Yes, I suddenly realised that I had a collection. It was, you know, like a sense of responsibility. I took hold of what I believed were the best works, and it didn't feel right that only my friend and I would see them. Visual art is called visual for a reason, it has to be seen, and it is certainly not

meant to be locked in a storeroom or just to decorate walls of a living room. Art should stay in motion. I would even say that if art is alive, if it bears the trace of an artist's soul, it creates movement around itself. Have you had a chance to watch camera footage from a good museum at high speed, seen those running streamlets of people in the mainstream flow?

Right, but quite often people walk past paintings, hardly ever linger, take a picture and run to the next one. What do you think of that?

Sure, some people confuse exhibitions with social media feeds, but that's normal. Perception process varies for everyone, young people absorb information at an incredible rate, and everyone takes as much as they can carry.

And you decided to take art to the masses?

It's a pretentious thing to say, who knows what those mass needs are. From my experience, I know that in the arts environment one can and should act more on intuition; logic serves here worse than, say, in business. It's not a calculated choice for me — whether to take art somewhere or take it nowhere — I just act according to the situation. Artists come to me, asking, for instance, to lend a painting for an exhibition or help with organisation; my art expert, Inna Udovichenko, also comes up with various creative ideas. As time goes by, I am seeing gradually increasing interest from exhibition promoters, business clubs, galleries and museums. Over the years, mostly in the last seven or eight years, we held more than twenty exhibitions featuring art pieces from my collection. It is also very important that we have made a good website (<https://rzcollection.com>) where each artist is represented and where

we publish materials about the exhibitions and promote our other projects. In 2018, the website won an award in the international *Awwwards* competition, and since then its traffic has been growing well.

What is your role in all this?

My role? I believe that before the interview we agreed that you would ask what role art played in my life? Well, work and family come first; art for me is definitely not a business or a financial investment. Of course, it is a popular form of investing, but I don't expect to live off art in my old age. My grandkids, though, will surely be the lucky ones! Agreed, my family doesn't always like the same paintings that I do, so we always have to compromise on what hangs in our home.

Believe me, art really gives me a lot of positivity and a good chance to interact with people. It gives me balance and an opportunity to switch between different activities all the time; you must have heard that it's good for keeping your brain active in the advanced years! I think we underestimate the influence of art on our lives. Maybe I am saying this now because once I used to attach less importance to art than, I am sure now, it deserves. I'll have to give it some more thought.

Sounds great, the way you cope with so many different areas of activity and succeed everywhere is enviable in a good way. However, you still avoided answering my question.

Do you want to know what my role in art is? My role in art, let me figure it out now. I am an observer. I like to observe everything that happens around art, I like to watch the process of making

art, people's reactions to art; what interests me the most, is the way art affects people. It's like with a stone thrown into the water, circles start at one point and spread out all over the surface, and the effect is amazing. Do you remember the exhibition of the Cuban artist Ítalo René Expósito in the Liepāja Museum, which made a lot of noise? There was so much controversy about it. I'm glad that art and freedom prevailed then, and the exhibition was not thrown out of the museum by the opposing tidal wave.

Granted, the power of art is not an easy challenge. I remember this exhibition; it was then talked about not only in Liepāja, but also in Riga and all over Latvia. Have you often seen a negative reaction to contemporary art?

It's not quite relevant what kind of reaction it is as long as there is a reaction. That's what really matters. I mentioned earlier that I was curious to see my own reaction to art, but that was just the beginning; very soon, I became much more interested in observing other people's reactions. To be honest, I wasn't as too keen on the judgement of



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art critics and other professionals in the field, I wanted to know the opinion and see the reaction of people who were not into art.

I have a diptych in my collection, *Stairs* by Nadezhda Anfalova. One morning I brought these two canvases to my office and hung them in the meeting room. From then on, *Stairs* were the traditional companion of any of our business negotiations. The flight of steps allows you to think, for example, about your aspirations and achievements in business and career, and on a different note, may hint at setbacks, a downslope.

It is an exciting example, and I've literally felt on a physical level how powerful this visual image is, and how many underlying meanings it can convey.

People feel this very well because we read visual codes non-verbally, we perceive them primarily on a subconscious level, and the logical mind is not of much help here. Why else do I always advocate having paintings in an office? At a place where pragmatism and logic go off-scale, there has to be, as I call it jokingly, a “corner of divergent thinking”. In addition, you shouldn't display classics there either; on the contrary, something modern, which creates an atmosphere of freedom and helps thinking outside the box. I have lent and am ready to lend my paintings out for a while so that people can see how a good art piece in the office, apart from trimming up the place, also affects people, facilitates communication, and contributes to the entire work process as a whole.

That is, art has begun to fill all areas of your life, not only your home, but also your office, right?

Yes, and it's a past stage, art is moving on.



What else can you think of? Let me guess, have you opened a gallery? Have you started painting?

I've had my eyes on a good place in old Riga, I have done some exhibition projects, but a gallery has to be an efficient business, and I don't feel that's my thing. So far, art for me is mainly a kind of experiment, a creative hobby, rather than a business that requires a sound economic foundation.

I didn't start painting either; I think that would have been trivial. Too many people paint pictures these days, while being a real artist is a vocation. I did something different though, I let artists into my house, and I used my old family farm to set up a residency for creative people. Now I don't need to go to artists' workshops looking for art, it is being born right at my place.

Very interesting, please tell me more about it! What were your goals when you created the residency? How do you see its mission?

Mission is a meaningful word. I'd rather speak about the mission of art and the mission of col-

lecting. There's an opinion that collecting is just a kind of manifestation of the natural possessive instinct: when I see something beautiful, I take it. There is surely something to it. Yet, art has long ceased to be beautiful; it doesn't look like *fine art* anymore. I find it very strange to be hearing that art should please the eye and bring joy and pleasure. Art has a right to be diverse; it may be grotesque, frightening, repulsive, but it does not make it less art.

Art is no longer a reflection of one part of life; it is increasingly becoming a representation of life in its fullness and depth. In the Russian language, the word *painting* is a combination of two roots, *life* and *to paint*, which I think is a good definition of the mission of painting and art in general. Look at how you live and what you live by and do not blame artists if you don't like what you see: art is just a mirror. What is the mission of a mirror? Probably to let us see and know ourselves.

At some point, having returned home to Latvia, I wanted, as I then thought, to learn to understand art. But now I would put it differently, I wanted to learn life, to understand it better. I didn't want to dive into the theory and philosophy of art, although you can't do without it either. If you want to learn something about life, you have to find out what other people think about it. But I was interested not only and not so much in the classics, I was much more concerned in my contemporaries, those with whom I could talk about things that mattered to me.

Back to residency though. When you are lucky enough to have friends, including many creative people and artists, you invite them to your place. It just happened, everything worked itself out

even before I realised that there was a special name for what I did — a residency for artists.

What would be your main message to the reader of the catalogue?

If there is something in your life that you do eagerly, your life becomes full of adventures — you develop, move forward, you feel alive. Each of us is unique and has amazing abilities and talents. Everyone has his own vision of the world, his own interpretation of events, and by exploring and living our lives; we create our own version of reality, our own unique painting. The more active and intense life we live, the deeper is our awareness of how we create our own life, and the more responsible we are for everything around. Life is an exciting journey into the unknown.

We have a traditional question: what type of collector are you: a trophy hunter, an entrepreneur, an expert or an aesthete?

Research aesthete. I am definitely not a pure aesthete. My collection gives me aesthetic pleasure, but what really matters to me is keeping up with the times, staying abreast of developments in the world of art and science and following up the younger generation trends. I am a collector who could quote Camus on “the greatness of art lies in the perpetual tension between beauty and pain, the love of men and the madness of creation, unbearable solitude and the exhausting crowd, rejection and consent”, a collector for whom advancement and observation are the essence of life.



ANDA KLAVINA

WHAT WAS IT?

On Saturdays, we would have coffee and éclairs at Entrée, our favourite café not far from Nevsky Avenue. We'd discuss the latest news from the art world and then call at a studio of one of the artists we knew. A lot has changed since then: Raivis returned to Latvia in 2018, the café closed during the pandemic, but we go on calling Saturday the éclair day between us.

Today, as we look back at the journey we have made, we seem to gain a new understanding of ourselves and we keep wondering at what's been happening to us and to art in general. In 2023, counting from the very first acquisitions, the Raivis collection will turn 18, the age of maturity. We never, were it at the beginning or along the way, thought about any strategic goals or objectives. We just looked around,

discussed things, argued, and made mistakes. It was not easy at times, but we would never let ourselves be stopped by the great physical, emotional and material cost. Why did we do this?

To be honest, eighteen years ago, I had virtually no experience working with contemporary art. The St Petersburg Academy of Arts, with all respect and gratitude to my alma mater, had little to offer me in this field. Before graduating from the Academy in 2006, I used to work as a lawyer. After fifteen years of building a career and making money, all I wanted was to just start living. Raivis was similarly far from any business agenda; art was a favourite hobby for him, a space for emotional relaxation and recharging.



How did we choose a course in the boundless ocean of art? Raivis said in his interview that he thought of himself as both a researcher and collector. I totally agree, we were not too keen on painters who had already gained some recognition, and whose works could most often be found in museums and galleries in our city. We looked wider, we went to artists' studios in search of variety and novelty.

The selection criteria were formed gradually, and quite often, the novice collector opposed recommendations of art experts in favour of his own choice. Still, we essentially shared the same opinion and were mostly guided by the aesthetics of visual expression of an artwork. We were not much interested in works that required additional verbal information to reveal their profound meaning. A talented artist can present any object as a work of art and choose a variety of art forms to do so. But, as the collection owner has strong personal preference for pictorial forms, the RZ Collection consists mostly of contemporary paintings.

The first catalogue of the RZ Collection that we published in March 2015 included paintings by sixteen artists. Over the past seven years, the collection has grown considerably and by September 2022, we have already worked with more than fifty artists. When preparing a new catalogue we wanted to take a wider approach and realized that the standard information about the artists and paintings provided in the first edition was no longer sufficient. As Raivis said in his interview, "art creates movement", and this movement has become something of an independent subject of our attention and interest. A wide range of articles revealing the history of the creation and *movement* of the collection makes

our catalogue more of a guidebook. We believe that the title of the publication, *The Ripple Effect of Art*, is the most appropriate and does a better job in explaining the essence of the processes taking place around us.



TSUNAMI

Cuban art first came to our attention in 2009. My quest of diversity and novelty took me to the Tenth Havana Biennale of Contemporary Art. What I saw there surpassed my expectations — an undiscovered world of art, surprisingly rich in talent, opened up to me. My colleagues and I were genuinely thrilled with the Tsunami installation by Cuban artist Humberto Díaz. With Raivis's consent, I invited Humberto to come and set up his installation in St Petersburg.

Personally, I can think of nothing as impressive as our *Tsunami* that unfolded in the advance hall of the Manège Central Exhibition Hall in St Petersburg. It was an amazing installation in terms of its proportions, complexity of making, and power

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of inspiration that made it possible to create the huge wave of ceramic tiles. Also, it meant a lot to me that we happened to have matching views with Raivis on contemporary Cuban art. Paintings by Cuban artists form a significant part of the RZ Collection and remain in favour to this day. You can read more about Cuban art and the *Tsunami* project in the article *Phenomenon of Cuban Art by Cuban art* historian Gabriela Hernández Brito and my article *Tsunami* on pages 020 and 028 respectively.

GOD. LOVE. CUBA

Another vivid impression we got in Havana was the work of the young Cuban painter Ítalo René Expósito. His paintings were very quickly picked up by buyers from the studio, so we agreed with him on a series of new large works for a solo exhibition. Ítalo was happy, he said he had long dreamt of making a few paintings on a very important subject for him — what is love?

Ítalo’s paintings were gladly welcomed at one of Riga’s oldest galleries *Pegazs* by the owner



Līga Sane and renowned art expert Sarmīte Sīle. Their highly professional and thoughtful approach contributed a lot to the success of the exhibition that aroused intense interest and discussion. You can read Sarmīte Sīle’s article about Ítalo’s works on page 030. The next exhibition took place in the City Museum of Liepāja. It was a smaller town, not like a capital city that had seen it all. The public there was more diverse and not as seasoned, and the exhibition was met with mixed reception. At one point, we even encountered a strong negative reaction from the Protestant community. You can find out more about the exhibition in an article by art critic and theologian Elena Bulgakova-Leskova on page 032.

RICHARD WAGNER

When we met the artist Viktor Vasiliev, we found out that he and Raivis came from the same place, both were born in Liepāja. Viktor was a historian by training and a great storyteller. He had been painting for as long as he remembered himself, but only after his career in big business was done with, he was able to fully apply himself to art. We loved visiting his studio. On one of our regular visits, he surprised us with canvases, as he put it, with “Wagner’s music painted and still wet”. Listening to music and looking at music-inspired paintings was just wonderful, like being in a dream that came true.

Soon Vyacheslav Vlasov, a writer, and Anton Boldyrev, a musician and composer, joined us in this dream. You can read more about this in Vyacheslav’s article *Inspired by Wagner* on page 036.

IN ENDLESS MOTION

In 2017, the Erarta Museum of Modern Art invited us to make an exhibition of paintings from the RZ Collection. We were interested in showing Latvian contemporary art in St Petersburg. It was also an incentive to get up to date on Latvian modern art, especially as Raivis was about to return home soon.

Raivis chose artists entirely on his own; he only occasionally used my advice or followed recommendations of Latvian art critics. One day I figured out how I could help him with this. I suggested asking artists about which of the Latvian classics they would choose as their teacher. Look at what inspires them and find out who they are, and that is how we did it. For the exhibition, we suggested that the artists should make replicas of paintings by their favourite “teachers”. You can read about the exhibition *In Endless Motion* and how painting inspires painting in the article *Long Live Painting* by art critic Maija Rudovska on page 042.

PAST AND FUTURE INDEFINITE

I never had any doubts that the RZ Collection would continue to grow regardless of where the collector was located, but I could hardly anticipate just how quickly things would develop. Raivis returned to Riga at the end of 2018, and as soon as in 2019, he was offered to make an exhibition in Liepāja, at the Lielais Dzintars (Great Amber) Concert and Exhibition Hall.

Choosing the concept for a large exhibition in Raivis’ hometown was a very interesting and demanding task. The world at that moment looked stable and prosperous, brimming with movement



and positive energy. We rejoiced at past successes and made plans for the new exhibition. There was a feeling of confidence and a desire to move forward, and whatever difficulties might have occurred only spurred our interest and inspired us.

I cannot remember exactly why we finally decided on the title *Past and Future Indefinite*. I think we just casually came across the name while discussing. As time has passed, now that the horsemen of the apocalypse have appeared in our reality, the choice of topic no longer seems so random. You can learn about how the artists and ourselves saw the past and the future in late 2019 and early 2020 from my article on the exhibition on page 038.

HOUSE BY THE SEA

The residency for artists came into our lives gradually, starting in 2017. In his interview, Raivis rightly pointed out that the residency came about because there was a house and there were artist friends. There also appeared a certain order or *modus operandi* of the residency, as a

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kind of complex summation of all the factors of existence.

The residency for artists *House by the Sea* is located on the Baltic coast, in a remote place away from civilisation, on the grounds of an old noble estate dating back to the early XIXth century. We tend to invite two or three artists who do not know each other to stay over at the residency at the same time. The intention is to allow the invited artists, while making the most of their individual potential, to work side by side in collaboration and discussion. To encourage an active and rewarding interaction, we usually suggest that participants prepare and make a joint exhibition.

We would like to believe that no artist has left the *House by the Sea* dissatisfied with his creative endeavour there. Perhaps, there were some who were not so fortunate to get as much inspiration as they might have hoped for. But it's beyond doubt that many wonderful works have been created there, including those that were presented at the *Searching for Freedom* exhibition in the City Museum of Liepaja. Read more about the creative work at the residence and subsequent exhibitions in my article *Searching for Freedom* and the article *Leaving the Farmsteads* by Linda Kilevica on pages 040 and 048.

STORY OF THE HOUSE BY THE SEA

In 2020, we expected the artist Viktor Vasiliev, the same historian who created the well-known series of paintings inspired by the music of Wagner, to come to stay at the residency. As we all know so well now, the future is too uncertain. And at the time of global isolation, we had no choice but to follow the conclusions we drew from the *Past and Future Indefinite* project.

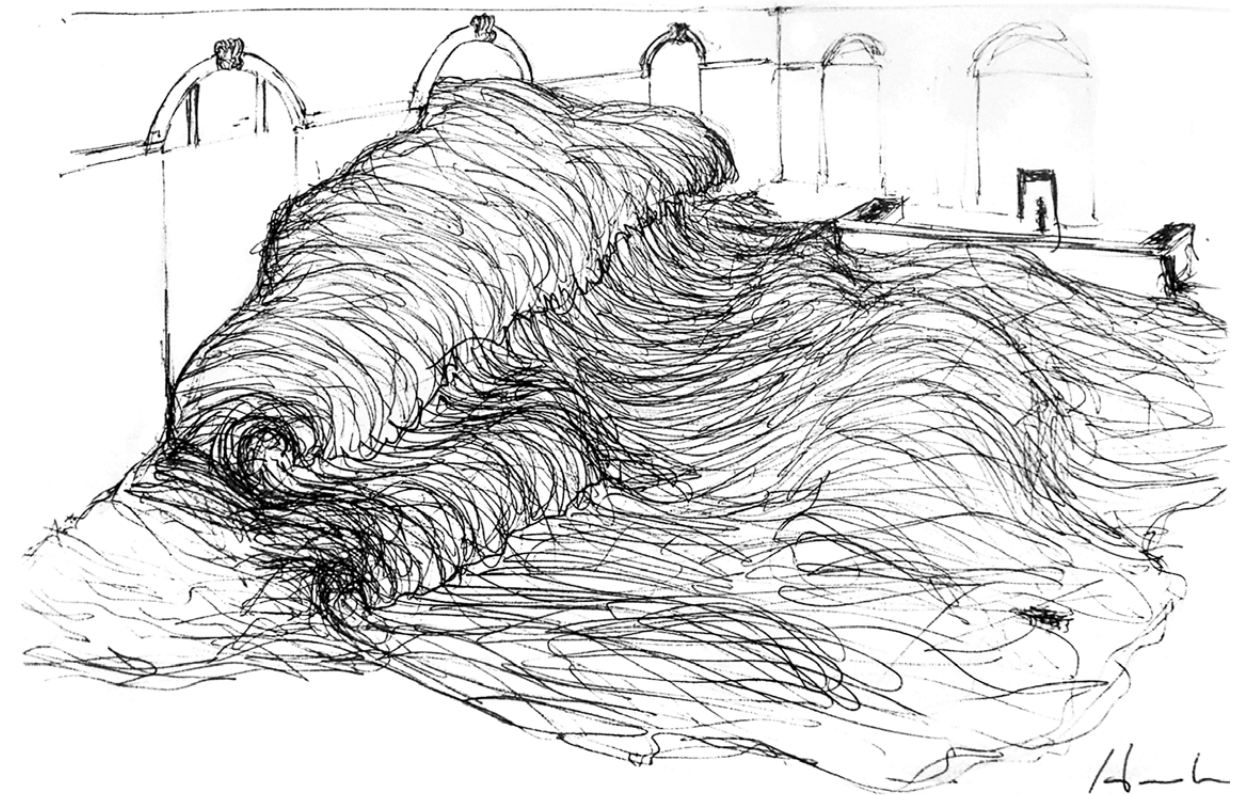
No matter what was happening around, we tried to remain ourselves. We did what we could do, holding back from constructing a future. We only observed the present and how it developed and transformed. Viktor Vasiliev and another artist Anastasia Kirillova (who is also a historian by training) researched the history of the house that dates back to the early XIXth century and its ex-owners from all available sources, and set about painting it despite being thousands of kilometres away from the cherished place.

The *House by the Sea* art and history project is running on right now. I believe you can dream in the present, no harm in doing that, and we want to share our dream with you. We dream of a small museum in one of the rooms of the house by the sea, where the history of this beautiful place will come to life in the paintings of contemporary artists.

INSPIRATION

I would like to conclude by answering the question posed in the title of this article: "What was it?" What has been driving us all these years? We couldn't find a better answer than inspiration. Artists, "servants of inspiration" according to one poet, create their work and send it out into the world so that their energy carries over to the audience and inspires them to create. Inspiration is a powerful constructive force through which our universe was undoubtedly created.

We asked each of our artists one question: What is inspiration for you? Their answers can be found in this Catalogue and Guidebook on pages 053–271. I hope that their sincere stories will be a fascinating and inspiring read for you.



INNA UDOVICHENKO

ARTICLES

PHENOMENON OF CUBAN ART

Approaching Cuban art implies getting closer to the reality of Cuba, a small island in the Caribbean that Columbus mistook for a continent and called “the most beautiful place on earth”, an archipelago whose history is marked by a mix of Hispanic, African, British and Haitian cultures. This small country, which for many must be exclusively a sun and beach destination, has become a milestone for the South American continent and the entire world.

Cuba was the first in many respects: it was the first country in Latin America to use the railway; it was the first country in America to broadcast television; in the 1950s, Havana was one of the most modern cities in the world, full of cinemas and cultural events. It was also one of the first countries in America to have a social revolution, opposing European and North American domination and creating a system designed for the people, which adopted the ideas of socialism and communism at a time when capitalism was the dominant system.

This small country has maintained socialism even when great powers like the USSR succumbed to capitalist dynamics. With a system that has survived for more than 60 years, with ups and downs, it has been a beacon of health care, sports and culture.

Perhaps my opinion is controversial, but I sincerely believe that Cuban art, one of the most advanced and original in the world, is the result of a unique historical environment. Let's make a very short tour through the history of Cuban art, which, I'm afraid, is only known in Europe by experts or those with a special interest in it.

Cuban fine art did not begin its journey until the XVIIIth century. For several centuries, when Cuba was a Spanish colony, the predominant artistic form there was engraving created mainly by foreigners. Full of a romantic vision, their work reflected their curiosity, which was a real driving force to explore and display a different world. Colonial period artists were particularly interested in images of Havana, which was just beginning to be built.

In 1818, the Academy of Drawing and Painting (later the San Alejandro Academy) directed by the French painter Juan Bautista Vermay was founded. It was the primary aesthetic authority of the time, as well as the leading training centre for artists. The usual main themes of painting were religion, portraits, landscapes, allegorical and genre scenes, and human figures.

The turn of the XIXth century was the time of the Neo-colonial Republic, which put Cuba under the power of the American government. It became the time of new ways of doing things, especially in painting. Art began to link itself with the surrounding reality, moving away gradually from the canons imported from Europe and the United States. The themes of artworks also expanded. Although art continued to be associated with academic models, the works began to show originality and a desire for independence.

After 1920, a lot of changes were taking place at the social level, especially the growth of the productive forces, the interference of the United States in the Cuban economy and domestic life. As it often happened in Europe, the historical avant-garde in Cuba was grouped around a nonconforming magazine. Committed to social

reality, the magazine called *Avance* supported the emerging artistic movement.

Looking for new routes for the plastic arts, the young artists illustrated the pages of *Avance*, and the magazine sponsored their exhibitions. This generation needed to be aware both of what was happening in the international art world and of national issues. They had a common starting point: their need to express what could still be called Cuban in a rather abstract form. That is why it was common for artists of the time to travel to Europe and get in touch with the most avant-garde ideas. However, these ideas were not imported as such; on the contrary, this knowledge was reinterpreted, adapted and returned to an art which became increasingly Cuban each time.

During this period, the works were characterised by an intensity of tropical light, manifested mostly through radical suppression of shadows and half tones, and preferred use of pure colours. Although a deliberate rejection of any kind of nostalgia was all too evident, this universe sought its true sources in the concluded past, such as our colonial architecture. As a result, one of the first groups of avant-garde artists became fascinated with Criollismo, Afro-Cubanism and social issues.

In 1938 the Second National Salon of Painting and Sculpture was held, bringing together an impressive collection of contemporary Cuban art. Several interesting aspects stood out: the rise of new artists, the strong influence of Mexican painting and the consolidation of those who followed the modern ideas that were dominating academic attitudes. Many young people preferred to go to Mexico rather than Europe. Painting with political and social themes lost the drive of previous years

and virtually disappeared. Criollismo, interested in rural or peasant themes, turned to other hidden and expressive trends, and avant-garde Afro-Cubanism was swept away with the appearance of Wifredo Lam and Roberto Diago.

Poetics of the two avant-garde generations in Cuba are numerous and varied. They have a common feature of absorbing external influences,



Gallo. Mariano Rodríguez
Oil on paper. 25 x 31 cm. 1941
Private Collection (SLG), Havana, Cuba

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but they are always critical of the surrounding reality, and far from academic conformism. Many of these artists continue to be a reference point and a significant influence on contemporary Cuban art.

The artistic panorama formed in Cuba during the 1950s was marked by the rise of new artists who were determined to bring Cuban painting to an international level. But, at the same time, different generations of artists continued their work. They represented the historical continuity of contemporary painting, which since the 1920s had featured national themes. This new generation of artists, which emerged in the early 1950s, sought to promote a language consistent with what was being created around the world under the influence of the two most important post-war cultural centres, Paris and New York.



Sin título. Pedro de Oraá
Acrylic on canvas. 100 x 73 cm. 2019
Private Collection (SLG), Havana, Cuba

This is how both American Abstract Expressionism and the new current of Concretismo (Concrete Art) developed in Paris and Latin America respectively, reached Cuba with extraordinary speed. It should be made clear, however, that although Cuban art of the time managed to cross borders and create a language in tune with the international context, it was by no means a mere imitation of the original. Our artists were able to wisely adapt to new forms of expression and create art that was connected to our reality and the context of the island. Abstract language is never free from a desire to protect the national; it should be understood as another way of describing, deepening and analysing it.

Political and social life was characterised by crime, murder and corruption resulting from a dictatorship that favoured the US government. On the art scene, this time was marked by the coexistence of two trends in the Cuban avant-garde. On the one hand, there was predominantly figurative art, and on the other, a movement that tried to distance itself from this reality and fight against it by making abstraction its aesthetic motto.

These circumstances forced the new artists to make a radical break with the past. This led to the emergence of two groups of abstract artists: Los Once (*Eleven*) and Diez Pintores Concretos (*Ten Concrete Artists*).

Eleven was a group of artists who shared a common generation attitude, as they were all born around the 1930s, and an interest in abstraction. They did not develop a consistent aesthetic vision; they had a variety of interests and different poetics, in fact closer to Informalism and Abstract Expressionism in general. If the group had anything in common, it was above all

a critical attitude towards social realities and opposition to authorities.

The second of these groups, called *Ten Concrete Artists*, was gathered around the Color-Luz Gallery with the financial support of Van Doesburg. These artists did not belong to the same generation or age. What they had in common was an interest in Concretismo and the creation of a universal language, the exclusion of any elements referring to nature and the construction of a picture from absolutely pure plastic elements – the square, rectangle, circle and other basic geometric forms.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 put an end to the old life of society in all aspects, and art was no exception. The decade of the 1960s was a turbulent period in the history of Cuban culture. It was a controversial time with an atmosphere of insecurity, where artists, writers and architects suffered from instability, censorship and other pressures. Called by Ambrosio Fornet *The Fifteen Grey Years* (Quinquenio Gris), this period was a stage in our cultural history when everything foreign and alluding to capitalism was rejected in favour of building a new socialist society; but it was also the beginning of an intense theoretical debate of crucial importance for the future development of Cuban art.

Thus, after some discussion, in 1961 Fidel Castro gave his famous *Words to the Intellectuals*, in which he outlined the cultural policy to be followed at the time:

In the first place, permit me to tell you that the Revolution defends freedom; that the Revolution has brought a very large number of freedoms to this country; that the Revolution cannot be an



Palmira. Servando Cabrera Moreno
Oil on canvas. 91 x 60 cm. 1973
Private Collection (SLG), Havana, Cuba

enemy of freedoms [...] The Revolution cannot attempt to stifle art or culture when the development of art and culture is one of the goals and one of the basic objectives of the Revolution, precisely in order that art and culture will come to be a genuine patrimony of the people. [...] And just as the Revolution is concerned with the development of the conditions and the forces, which permit the satisfaction of all the material needs of the people, so do we also want to develop the conditions, which will permit the satisfaction of all the cultural needs of the people.

So it became clear that the new social process protected art and artists and that it would not impede creative freedom, although many artists and intellectuals did not fully agree with this programme and the way it was implemented. But in this regard, Fidel Castro said:

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And the Revolution must have a policy for that part of the people. The Revolution must have an attitude for that part of the intellectuals and writers. The Revolution must understand that reality, and consequently must act in such a way that the entire sector of artists and intellectuals who are not genuinely revolutionary find a place to work and to create within the Revolution and so that their creative spirit will have an opportunity and freedom for expression within the Revolution, even though they are not revolutionary writers or artists. This means that



Un espejo para Carola. De la serie Interior de la Manigua. Nelson Domínguez
Oil on canvas. 174 x 174 cm. 1983
Private Collection (SLG), Havana, Cuba

within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing...

After this legendary speech, the process of artistic development started by creating institutions that promoted and defended the various art forms; events were organised to promote art and artists, and in 1962 art schools were founded - a task of primary importance in the history of Cuban art, since they were the cradle for most of the creators of the current artistic scene. Art schools encourage interest in creativity and artistic processes from an early age to the university stage, while provincial academies look for hidden talents in the remotest corners of the country. From the very start, Fidel Castro was clear about their intentions for art schools: they were to be the largest institutions on the continent where different generations and artistic views would converge; they were to be a cultural beacon at the regional level.

In its creative effort, the revolution provided art with all the tools it needed to develop, so the art world has always enjoyed certain opportunities to accelerate its growth. Unlike, for example, the countries of the socialist camp, where any deviation from socialist approaches was punished or banned, artistic creation in Cuba was encouraged to accompany the changes proposed by the revolution. The art of the 1960s was therefore characterised by the fusion of generations in action, the recognition of an avant-garde tradition in Cuban art, the influence of social events on selected themes, harmony with the international artistic agenda and, at the same time, disagreement with it, when Neo-Expressionism and Pop Art were adopted as the predominant artistic languages. In a similar way, there was an obvious break with earlier forms of expression, abstrac-

tion and especially too-sweet figurativism. Such themes as *Cuban, national or identity* became unacceptable; there were certain - unwritten - rules for dealing with subjects like heroes, sex, history or the human being.

The 1970s, on the contrary, were characterised by a narrow-minded and iron-fisted cultural policy, dictated by leaders and officials “from above”, who clipped the wings of freedom of creativity and knowledge, forcing artists to follow the directives of socialist realism coming from the Soviet Union, and cutting them off almost completely from any communication with the outside world. All these made it impossible for Cuban artists to access and learn from the new trends that were then in vogue in other parts of the world. On the other hand, it was a period when young artists had more places to study, and art schools graduates had better opportunities to exhibit and gain recognition for their work thanks to a growing number of salons, biennials and prizes.

Indeed, it is interesting to observe how Cuban artists of the time were able to take advantage of the conditions imposed by cultural art policy and, within their frame, offer the public their work that was part of Neo-Expressionism and Hyperrealism. At the same time, some managed to preserve their own language, which could not be fitted into either of these two trends. In general, however, the artists turned to themes related to national - Cuban - nature, popular beliefs, the revolutionary process and its most important figures. They had to portray realistically a nation immersed in a state of change, hope and triumph, praising the new regime and its achievements. Despite this, young artists whose work emerged at the time were able to absorb foreign influences and fuse them with

Cuban and officially required themes, and thus managed to renew the country’s plastic language and respond to the challenges of the times.

In the 1980s, the institutional system of the plastic arts was strengthened; a higher level of art



Héroe. José Bedia
Mixed technique on canvas. 90 x 63 cm. 2013
Private Collection (SLG), Havana, Cuba

education was introduced with the establishment of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), giving rise to new generations of artists and new aesthetic proposals. It was also a time of action and projects of social integration. During this period, important institutes and events in the visual arts emerged, such as the Centre for Visual Arts Development (Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales), the Wifredo Lam Centre (Centro Wifredo Lam) and the Havana Biennial, the most important visual arts event in Cuba, which has ranked the island among the world’s great art capitals. At the political level, a process of correcting

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the errors in cultural policy took place, reflecting the change in discourse from the preceding decade to a more flexible one, while in the arts a variety of new themes and concepts blossomed. Identity debates continued, with more emphasis on a critical view of art and social issues such as history, heroes, patriotic symbols, sex or morality, and humour was used as the main discursive strategy.

The 1990s began with the so-called *Special Period*, a time of economic crisis in which emigration was a key factor also affecting art. However, it was a period in which the system of institutions responsible for the promotion of art and artists was further established, and when an important series of exhibitions were held. Moreover, ISA’s constant work and its educational projects have ensured the continuity of the national subsystem of art education, a fundamental element for understanding the history of Cuban art. The period was characterised by the consolidation of installation artists, the recovery and relative autonomy of art forms neglected in the 1980s such as engraving, sculpture and photography, the growing development of performance, video and digital art, and the consistent critical tradition, ethics and conceptuality of Cuban art.

In the XXIst century, the situation in Cuba has changed, due to a process of rectifying mistakes and improving the economy, but it has also opened up to the world to catch up in various areas of public life. However, it is now immersed in a deep economic, political and social crisis that has led to the worst wave of emigration in our history, along with the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the entire world. This is why, in contrast to the direct criticism of the art of the 1980s and the complexity of the 1990s, the art-



A los ojos de la historia
Alexis Leyva Machado (Kcho)
Comte on linen. 140 x 111 cm. 2009
Private Collection (SLG), Havana, Cuba

works of the new millennium reflect the uncertainty of the moment and address not only Cuban reality, but also more universal problems.

I would dare say that Cuban visual art has developed a more complex and metaphorical language than at the end of the XXth century, although it is now hidden under *a cloak of naivety*. Our contemporary art is indirect, it does not give answers to the viewer, it only puts up problems and the viewer solves them himself. An artist creates a text full of elements suggesting multiple meanings, which depend on the knowledge and previous experience of the audience. Behind this naive and empty look, therefore, is a whole investigation of the surrounding world.

Currently, there is a great diversity of different generations with contrasting artistic discourses, that together make up a very specific phenomenon — contemporary Cuban art. This, along with the variety of genres, trends and different elements of historical styles co-existing today, makes Cuban art the fruit of a postmodernist sensibility. Artists in this century do not aim to destroy the principles of previous generations, but rather to reinterpret and mix them to create a new art. Moreover, today they have no interest in attracting the public; on the contrary, the public must be interested and knowledgeable enough to be capable of absorbing the complexity of the ideas that art offers.

What follows from the above is that art is a product of its time and of the historical and

social circumstances in which it develops, and it will always respond to the problems of artists as subjects of society at any given moment in history. The utopia of changing the world by means of art, through direct constructive criticism of this reality, is no longer there. The goal now is to make the viewer aware of the need for both change and action in the face of current circumstances. It is no longer engaged art attacking the situation of the country and its government or proposing solutions to specific problems, but rather an intermediary between the individual and reality, responsible for making the individual aware of the need for change and becoming its main actor.



GABRIELA HERNÁNDEZ BRITO

TSUNAMI

The world was horrified by the scale of the disaster that hit the Indian Ocean in December 2004. A giant wave swept across the coast of South East Asia, causing devastation and loss of life on its way. Cuban artist Humberto Díaz admits that, as a man with an apocalyptic way of thinking, he was shocked by the event and totally engrossed in it.

Artists tend to be people of a delicate mindset and a very susceptible nature. Also, creative people know that translating their emotional experiences into a tangible form helps alleviate or even completely relieves stress. For Humberto, an art object in the form of a terrifying wave has become a cherished dream and an expression of a physical need at the same time.

Tsunami, a huge installation of 800 square metres and 7.5 metres high, set up at one of the Tenth Havana Biennial venues, made a stunning impression and provoked heated discussions among viewers. At some point, we were approached by a young man who came forward to answer our questions. It was Humberto Díaz, the



designer of the installation. He told us how the idea had been born, and how he had been thrilled with it for four years, noting, however, that his vision never got fully realised.

Do you remember having completely implausible dreams? They may not seem unrealistic while you are asleep, and only after waking up you are surprised at how that is even possible. After a long time agonising over the choice of a material that could adequately convey all the strength and power of the ocean wave, Humberto once saw himself on the crest of a wave of ceramic roof tiles. When he woke up, he realised that this was exactly what his installation should look like. According to the artist, the combination of a menacing form of a wave with a material that symbolises shelter and protection enhances the image of an all-destroying power.

Turning a fantasy dream into reality is not an easy task. Due to safety concerns, the Havana Biennial administration disallowed the use of heavy ceramic tiles in an art object. Rather than giving up his dream altogether, Humberto compromised on making the installation out of custom-made polystyrene plates shaped and painted as roof tiles.

The artist's inspiration was not lost on us; Humberto's dream became our dream too. Thrilled with the prospect of setting up the *Tsunami* installation in St Petersburg, I was able to secure financial support from Raivis, to get approval for the project to participate in the St Petersburg International Biennial, and even to negotiate a sponsorship from a manufacturer of ceramic tiles. At one point, I thought I mostly succeeded in my efforts, but how naive I was.

A pencil sketch, then a detailed design, experiments with materials and finally the calculations performed by Humberto seemed almost magical to me. Then I had to get more actively involved in the process. We had to not only purchase an estimated 18 tons of tiles and 5 thousand square metres of cardboard along with a large quantity of accessory building materials and to deliver those to the Manège Central Exhibition Hall, but also to arrange for the construction of this giant structure while meeting all stability and safety requirements. We had less than two weeks to do all this.

The last tile to top off the crest of a five and a half metre wave, that unfolded over 700 square metres in the entrance hall of the Manège, was placed by Humberto in the beginning of August 2009, just two hours before the official opening time of the Biennial. Words cannot describe how many sleepless nights and how much emotional and physical effort and commitment it took us to complete the job. The tsunami wave that grew before our eyes was probably the best reflection of the tremendous energy that grew in us to realise this idea. As Humberto precisely phrased it, we'd had "a great opportunity to perceive all the power of natural forces through the material object created with our hands". This artistic exercise allowed us to gain insight into the force of nature, pass over fear, and appreciate the beauty hidden behind the destructive power and threat of disaster.



I would like to finish off by expressing our endless gratitude to those people who were with us at this important and very challenging moment in our lives. First of all our thanks go to the volunteers who came forward to cut out cardboard waves, fasten plastic profiles that supported tiles on the surface of the structure, and lay tiles. The volunteers included all three generations of my family, most of my friends, friends of my friends, friends of friends of my friends and just people willing to lend us a hand. It should be noted too that social media networks were not nearly as widespread at that time as they are now. People joined us answering the call of their hearts, attracted by the grand idea and stimulated by the power and energy of the artist's inspiration.



INNA UDOVICHENKO

GOD. LOVE. CUBA

Love. Man and Woman. Death. Pain. Conversations with Him. All those ancient themes, as old as the world... Each artist treats them in his own language, interprets them according to his views and skills.

Faith. Hope. Love. How deep is faith in God or is there only faith in Love? Is Hope really the last thing to die? What is more important — body or soul? Are we really immortal? What is it that expects us after death? Does Death exist at all?... People have always tried to find answers to these questions.

In this exhibition, Ítalo René Expósito, a young Cuban artist, tries to tell his story, to show his searches, findings and answers to these questions. He is a Catholic who, like many others in his country, has a mix of blood. Due to his Italian origin on his mother's side, Ítalo has a very special relation with the figure of the Son of God. His attitude to Christ is dual. Ítalo believes in the divine, but Christ for him is more earthy and CLOSER to the mundane life. It is very much alike the ancient Greeks. They worshipped their gods but at the same time they saw them as fine

people of either good or bad character, sitting at the feast tables and welcoming their guests.

The works of Ítalo Expósito are, no doubt, professional in the form and bear a dash of childish naivety in the content. The painter is familiar with the history of art and it allows us to see behind his works the influence of diverse artistic periods and old day masters. At the same time, he is an original and interesting artist with his own style.

We believe, hope and love. We are the children of God and, just like children, we often misbehave, mistake, hurt ourselves and make our parents suffer. However, pain is a lesson, even purification. It is an incentive to start thinking and draw conclusions. This is what Ítalo talks about. And also, he shows the beauty of the human being, beauty of the body and pure innocence of the soul. He talks about self-sacrifice. The only question that remains open is whether it is possible to maintain that fragile light in the darkness and keep creating.

Riga, 2013



CLOSING THE CIRCLE

Innovation in visual arts has always caused controversy. Anything new, incomprehensible or requiring some thinking tends to cause rejection or even strong opposition from society, especially as regards religious subjects in art. Even in the context of secular art, any new vision or interpretation of a religious theme may be perceived by religious followers as offensive.

Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Cross in the Mountains* challenged the academic manner and was regarded as offensive by contemporaries. The traditional subject of the crucifixion was interpreted by the artist as a landscape, which at the beginning of the XIXth century was considered a low genre. Nowadays, the rejection of this painting looks rather strange and archaic.

In 2014, the Liepāja City Museum hosted the *God. Love. Cuba* exhibition by Cuban artist Ítalo René Expósito. It provoked an intense debate and even a demand that the exhibition be removed from the museum. My opinion is that one shouldn't take a stand on such issues before analysing the art piece and understanding the artist's idea and the essence of the work.

I first came across Ítalo's work in 2013 at an exhibition opening at the *Pegazs Gallery* in Riga. The paintings were certainly difficult to understand. But, to tell the truth, I was so attracted by the painting *Angels* that I couldn't stop looking at it and literally fell in love with the image. The painting deeply affected me and urged me to try to understand the artist's message as well as any hidden meanings.

There are three angels in front of us, male, female, and child full-length figures with wings behind their backs. The colour of the wings is

different, red for the male figure, blue for the female, and the little angel has white wings. According to Christian symbolism, red is the colour of Easter and the Resurrection of Christ. Easter is the kingly victory of Christ over death. The red colour of Easter sacred vestments combines two meanings — martyr's blood and the colour of victory, of imperial triumph. The Holy Scripture narrates that the soldiers put a purple-coloured mantle on the Saviour who had been sentenced to execution. They mocked Him and his alleged desire to become an earthly king, failing to realise that the Lord spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The blue colour in church symbolism signifies the highest purity and immaculacy. Blue vestments are used for the feasts of the Most Holy Mother of God; the colour indicates the heavenly purity and spiritual highness of the Virgin Mary. The white is a universal symbol of the presence of God. It is adopted for the feasts of the Nativity, Epiphany, Transfiguration and Ascension of the Lord and represents the Uncreated Light of God.

The shape of the wings of the angels, both male and female, is unusual enough to immediately attract attention. The wings are depicted as two huge hearts and refer to the iconography of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Heart of the Son of God is the highly venerated ecclesiastical symbol of the power of Love that God has for humanity, the power that gave Him strength to accept humiliation, torture and death. The veneration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is based on pristine Love for God the Father, maternal Love for the son Jesus, and compassionate Love for all mankind.

People intuitively perceive the heart as the centre of human passions, the place where emotions



arise. The heart has always been seen as the vital part of a person, the intimate merging point of body and spirit, of deep and sincere feelings and thoughts. The Sacred Heart, as an iconographic element, is a perfect example of visualising that is common in Christianity, and, in this case, it is a visualisation of the desire for the spiritual transformation of the body. It is accepted that Christianity is a religion that sanctifies the human body by identifying it with the body of Christ the Son of God. And here we come to what I believe was the stumbling block that prevented the audience

from accepting the artist's message, the nakedness of the figures in the painting.

The first article about the *God. Love. Cuba* exhibition was written by the renowned Latvian art critic Sarmīte Sīle. When analysing the artist's work, she drew a parallel with the ancient Greek art. Statues of ancient gods, perfect in their naked beauty, are a customary part of our cultural space. Ancient gods in our understanding were not rid of human bodily passions. Christian images, on the other hand, always imparted only spir-

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

itual beauty. Why would Ítalo reveal images of Mary and Jesus through nakedness? Ítalo chose a direct and straightforward way of portrayal and deliberately emphasised the human, fleshly nature of the God-man and His Mother. By doing so he pointed up that the heavenly virtues inherent in Them are also available to us. I agree with Sarmite, who believes that the “childlike naivety in presenting the deeper content” intends to make the Divine “closer to the earth”, to humans. Note that the exhibition title is very symbolic in this sense.

Looking further into the issue of spiritual beauty and nakedness, let us turn to the third image of the painting. The angel is painted in a different, mannerist tradition, the figure is unnaturally S-shaped, with arms exaltedly raised above the head. Pretentiousness, brokenness and unnaturalness notably distinguish the image from the rest. The word *angel* (ἄγγελος) is Greek and translates as harbinger or messenger. Angels are “ministering spirits” and therefore incorporeal. By employing a different artistic manner in depicting the angel, the artist seeks to distinguish between corporeality and incorporeality, to separate the flesh and disembodiment.

The hands of the little angel are clasped together and form a circle. The circle is a very important symbol in iconography. Having neither beginning nor end, it symbolises Eternity. Eternity in the truest sense of the word, eternity as the transcendence of time. The space outlined by the angel’s arms appears to me a symbol of convergence of the heavenly power, the Divine breath, and the Divine message. This gesture can also be interpreted as putting a ring on Mary’s hand, the ring being a symbol of vow and alliance. It is both the vow of virginity given by Mary to God

and her consent to the Divine plan for the future birth of Jesus Christ from her womb. “Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). These words are very significant; without the Virgin Mary’s submission, without her Faith, the Divine plan would not have been realised.

According to the teachings of St Irenaeus of Lyon on the Christian doctrine of Redemption, the Annunciation is interpreted as the high point in salvation history, whereas the Virgin Mary’s obedience counterbalances and heals Eve’s disobedience. Mary becomes New Eve. The text of the famous Catholic hymn *AVE MARIS STELLA* that dates back to the IXth century says that the name Eve (Eva in Latin) is an anagram of the word Ave (“Hail”) with which the Archangel Gabriel salutes New Eve. Here we return to the understanding of the angel’s nakedness. The angel with blue wings is a symbolic parallel between Eve and Mary.

The Scripture says of Adam and Eve, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). The original Old Testament text uses the Hebrew word *arom* in this phrase, which means “unashamed nakedness”. Babies are born this way, knowing no shame, as they have nothing to hide, especially before their mother. Likewise, Adam and Eve appeared before God, and they had nothing to hide from each other either.



er either. The state of “unashamed nakedness” in real life is only possible between people who love and trust each other endlessly. In *Angels*, Ítalo René Expósito combined a variety of biblical subjects and symbols. Of course, from the canonical point of view, the artist broke many rules, crossed the line, so to say, but his idea and goal was making a painting about Love, about the Love of God for Man and the Love of Man for God. As the Gospel of John has it, “Love is God”.

A Catholic by faith and his spiritual affinity, Ítalo grew up in a family that observed Christian traditions. His family always talked a lot about Christ and about art as well. Anybody who wants to get a better feel for Ítalo’s work would be well advised to read his account of himself included in this Catalogue and Guidebook. Ítalo would be hard-pressed to reflect on Love outside the context of God. God is Love, that is the artist’s

canon. That was his stance when he began working on the cherished subject, *What is Love?*

To understand art is to understand the artist, to understand the artist is to understand art. There is no doubt that Ítalo’s work deserves serious study, a separate monograph, perhaps. This article by no means claims to be a sufficient analysis, even for a single painting in a series of ten. I have only outlined an approach to research such a deep and infinitely complex topic. As far as I am concerned, I am encouraged and inspired by Ítalo’s hard work and his sincere willingness to share his feelings and thoughts with us.

I don’t know if Ítalo was listening to music while he was working on the painting. If he were, it might have been the song *We Are the World* by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie performed by a group of top celebrity musicians. Speaking for myself, when I was looking at the white angel in the picture with his arms closed above his head, I couldn’t help hearing a refrain from the resembling song *Closing the Circle*, written by Chris Kelmi and Margarita Pushkina and performed by a group of well-known Russian singers. It was argued that *Closing the Circle* was inspired by and echoed the already famous *We Are the World*. It’s not important if this is true or not, each composition has its own place, and I would like to finish up with the well-suited line from *We Are the World*:

We’re all a part of God’s great big family
And the truth, you know, love is all we need.



ELENA BULGAKOVA-LESKOVA

INSPIRED BY WAGNER

For a quarter of a century, my life has been inextricably linked to the work of the great composer Richard Wagner. I was in my early twenties when I first heard his mystery *Parsifal*. I tried for a long time to find an epithet for my feelings: the music simply struck me, and this would be perhaps the most accurate thing to say. I was also stunned by how close it was to me: the music captivated me completely and did not let go, it made my mind search for reasons of its fantastic appeal and power and reflect on its philosophical significance. Listening to this music gives me the feeling of eternity.

As my knowledge of Wagner's masterpieces grew, so did my desire to understand why he had chosen a particular theme for a particular opera and what exactly he had sought to express with them. I began to share my thoughts with friends in short notes on opera performances, and as soon as I met like-minded people in the creative community, my inspiration began to take on a more substantial form, grow, and develop.

The artist Viktor Vasilyev is undoubtedly one of the brightest interpreters of the Wagnerian heritage in the fine arts. I well remember my first impressions of Viktor's paintings presented in 2017 at an exhibition in St Petersburg. The paintings were not just images of characters from Wagner's operas that I knew well but, rather, were an immersion in the world of their feelings and experiences: Erda's concern for the fate of her daughter, the Valkyrie Brunnhilde; Waltraute's sadness about the deplorable fate of her father, the supreme god Wotan; Brunnhilde's happiness at the opportunity to save the world from the curse of the Nibelung's ring; the unbridled passion of Tristan and Isolde. It was amazing: Viktor portrayed on canvas exactly

the feelings that I wrote about in my notes! Two like-minded people could not help but get to know each other.

Since then, our strong "Wagnerian friendship", conversations and correspondence about Wagner's works have helped us with Viktor Vasilyev to complement each other creatively. Over the past years, I have written stories about Wagner's life in Riga, St Petersburg and Venice, and Viktor has brought these stories to canvas. Completing the set of paintings based on *The Nibelung's Ring* and *Parsifal*, Viktor explained his emotional bonds with Wagner's music as follows: "The specific feature of Wagner's music, in my opinion, is its emotionality, for all its severity. I visualize it in cold colours: blue, grey, black, and gold, of course. Wagner's music is congenial to me in terms of its *sound of colour* if I can put



it that way... My teacher, the St Petersburg artist V. Lukka, once used the term *Baltic-German* to describe my colour palette, and, as I understand, this unites me with Wagner, or either he is close to me. We see and feel the world in the same way..."

The creative dialogue and kindred spirit of the two artists inspired me to accompany each of Viktor's works with a short text "What would Wagner say about Viktor Vasilyev's paintings?" Our joint work was embodied in the *Wagner Everywhere* exhibition presented to the St Petersburg public and online in 2020.

I was delighted when we were joined by composer and pianist Anton Boldyrev who, along with such giants of pianism as Liszt, Tausig and von Bülow, has created his own paraphrases of Wagner's music. "The idea of the paraphrase came to me after attending *Parsifal* in 2002," Anton says. "The piano composer definitely *vanished* inside Wagner, and I had to shorten the opera several times to create a 40-minute suite based on the opera's leitmotifs. I worked with enthusiasm, so it was easy. As for the colour sensation, a lot depends on the tone. I feel close to Scriabin's colour palette. In other words, for me, it is music with different shades of red. Like an orange-cap



boletus!" Anton traditionally accompanies public presentations of Viktor's new works.

The perceptive interpretation of Wagner's masterpieces in colour, and in relation not only to a specific operatic work but also to "direct speech", to quotes from his characters, inspires as much interest in the composer's music as in the poetic text of librettos of his operas. The spectator thus naturally perceives the cultural synthesis of different types of art: music, painting and prose, which is exactly what Richard Wagner was striving for.



VIACHESLAV VLASOV

PAST AND FUTURE INDEFINITE

The past and the future are illusions of our mind: frescoes of the past have faded away while pictures of the future are nothing else than our surreal dreams that are not very likely to ever become a reality. However, we spend most of our lives worrying about our mistakes and dreaming to see our wishes come true. Our mind, like a hungry giraffe, keeps reaching far out beyond the clouds, as it seems that leaves on the tree-tops are always greener, and that the future is always more brilliant than the present. And somewhere out there, far away, at the very feet of the long-necked animal, lies the real world which we so often take only as the building material for a *bright future*.

Is it possible to turn off the scrolling text of our mind? People seem to be less perfect than mobile phones, and we can't switch to offline mode by simply pressing a button. But in fact things may be not so sad. Perhaps art was invented for this very purpose. Painting is a suspended moment, a still frame that gives us a chance to see a time point captured in a two-dimensional space.

One of the great minds remarked that looking at a painting, we learn to admire the world around us, to see the beautiful in everything, in all reality around us, — *reality* being the key word here. Hopefully, art images would help us notice the beauty under our feet, see carpet of leaves

and flowers before they turn into earth again. After all, the world does not stop for a second, but at the crossroads of time, we do not always manage to notice this subtle movement, this self-making harmony.

We are used to searching for meanings in art, building concepts, and arguing about philosophical ideas. Still, you can look at art in a different way: you can look at it while tuning your mind to silence, giving yourself a chance to feel the magic of immersion in the vivid space of suspended time.

Painting and installations, flat and 3D art space of the exhibition: they all are attempts of the artists to outplay the time, attempts to help us stop and define something very important for ourselves. And, perhaps, we will want to change the existential questions once posed by Paul Gauguin in the title of his picture [*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*] to more current phrasing: What am I feeling now? What is the surrounding reality filled with? Can I just be myself?

The Past and Future Indefinite exhibition features works by three contemporary artists: Dace Dēliņa-Lipska (Liepaja, Latvia), Vladimir Migachev (Krasnodar, Russia), and Ilya Gaponov (St Petersburg, Russia).



INNA UDOVICHENKO

SEARCHING FOR FREEDOM

Artists, like anybody else, can sometimes benefit from moving to a different environment, getting into an unfamiliar situation, meeting new people. Being in a different setting gives you a fresh look at the world around you, at the things that interest or concern you, and at yourself as well. We have invited two artists to stay in a completely new place to research side by side a topic equally important for them.

The lines coming from two geographical points, Havana and Moscow, have converged in the vicinity of Liepaja. The angle between these two straight lines, seen on the surface on the map, is practically flat. Likewise, the artists have addressed the topic of the study from totally opposite perspectives. The theme of freedom chosen as the research object has become a difficult challenge for both. One has been seeking freedom in an external world, while the other has plunged into his own inner universe to find freedom in harmony with nature and himself.

Within this project we present two artists who search for answers to the questions: What is freedom? and Where to look for it?

UNITY SYNDROME [by Misha Levin]*

The theme of freedom is one of the key items in my work and the one I have been constantly turning to for more than ten years. This project is based on the study of the history of Latvia with an emphasis on the events I believe to be the most significant for the topic under review. I have studied documentary materials on the *Baltic Way* of 1989 and made use of pictures of the Lenin monument being taken down in the city of Bauska in 1990, pictures of the Europe Day celebration in Riga and sports victories at the



Summer Olympics in 2012, as well as items and images taken from the contemporary daily life.

Unity syndrome is a devised term that refers to the idea of the European Union and to what is happening in it now. Back in the times of the Cold War, the idea of the united Europe was to a great extent based on the opposition to the socialist dictatorship, but after the collapse of the USSR purely economic goals prevailed. Striving to promote the material well-being and to establish uniform life quality standards has had the result of many European countries now actually losing their identity.

The installation includes paintings which are an integral feature of a wealthy house and, at the same time, an artistic way of testifying to historical facts. Stones that have been collected near the World War II memorial (the *Forest* memorial, Riga) are painted in red and somewhat resemble a heart shape. Fragments of stucco molding, a symbol of former power and greatness, are painted in colors associated with the Soviet aesthetics. Old harvest boxes serve as a support to the stones, molding fragments and old local

magazines. Although these and other installation elements duly belong either to the decoration of a house or everyday household activities, they leave an impression of incompatibility and confrontation.

By mixing up and intertwining the iconic elements of the past and everyday life items, I try to create an awareness of how the pieces of identity and the historical context on the whole are being blurred and lost in the current moment. By creating a visual conflict, I aim to evoke the emotional tension and a desire to start a discussion about the contradiction between freedom and economic benefits, between the comfort of uniform life standards and the national identity.

I AM WHAT I AM [by Ítalo René Expósito]*

It is good to create, to talk and to write about freedom in free format. At the same time, any kind of form, shell or border already represent a certain limitation, a kind of non-freedom.

We are born in the material world and come to be dependent of matter. Wary of becoming money-bound, I did not go to live to Italy, the home country of my maternal ancestors. It seemed to me that it was impossible to stay free in a world where money ruled, least of all, to be a free artist there. So I am staying where I was born, on the Island of Freedom. This name was given to Cuba by people who craved *freedom* at any cost. They got what they wanted. And this can be in this world where God gave everyone the right to choose their path.

As a gift to a little girl, Ítalo brought a shell from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. He did not know yet that the little souvenir would inspire him to

create a canvas that would become key to his work on the coast of the Baltic Sea. He did not yet know that the shell would turn into a unique symbol of freedom for him.

– Put the shell to your ear, can you hear the wash of waves?!
– Is the ocean talking to me like that? How did it fit in there? Or is it like a mobile phone?
– Good thinking! You know, a person is like a shell, what we see is no more than a shell cover, but there are so many feelings, thoughts and images inside that the whole universe could hardly accommodate them.

I believe that we live in a world created from our ideas about it. My world is inside my paintings, they show my feelings and give an idea about my fears and problems. And, perhaps, only with the help of paints and canvas, I begin to understand who I really am.

I do not often paint landscapes. But when I do, I learn from nature, learn to be myself, learn not to be constrained by fears and limitations, learn to just be. I was struck by the nature of the Baltic coast, its beauty and inner balance. This grass and forests possess a great strength, a power that allows to die in winter, keeping the memory of life and the sun, and then to reborn again in the spring. If we could learn from nature this inherent freedom of being, no one would ever be able to take away from us this wonderful feeling, the sense of inner freedom!

*The artists' views as retold by I. U.



INNA UDOVICHENKO

LONG LIVE PAINTING

Painting, one of the oldest mediums of fine arts has been impregnated with many contradictions, including its decline and recurrence during the last decades. Its position slowly shifted with the arrival of photography in XIXth century, when modernism completely changed the attitude towards painting, focusing on its flatness instead of optical qualities. Later although announced to be dead, the painting resurrected again, persistently proving its importance and potential with a new force in XXIth century. Nowadays painting can be almost everything – it has transformed into and merged with objects, sculptures, video works and performances, it has become eatable, touchable and wearable. This medium embodies extraordinary versatility and accommodates myriad explorations. If painting remains important today, it is because

artists have sought for new ways of challenges when dealing with this medium, constantly diversifying the components of its production and presentation. In this article my interest is to point on the traditional tools of painting, – when it’s realized on canvas with the alluring qualities of color conquests, relations of proportion and surfaces, the patchiness and expression of a brush – all of which is a ground for imagination and endless inspiration.

The Latvian artists invited to be part of the exhibition In Endless Motion at Erarta museum in Saint Petersburg – Daiga Krūze, Līga Ķempe, Atis Jākobsons, Kaspars Perskis, Dace Dēliņa– Lipska and Ilgvars Zalāns, all have obtained their education from the Art Academy of Latvia and their work has been well known in the

particular art circles for years. Although the local contemporary art scene has not been very favorable towards painting, those who are actively pursuing this medium have proved that the painting has never lost its prominence in Latvia. It has been admired and even worshiped as one of the strongest medium of arts. What has kept the interest and why the painting that is based in the classical means of expression still has a huge attention? What are the qualities that never get old? When looking more closely at the artists’ work selected for this exhibition the questions that interest me are which qualities in painting the artists value, which conceptual and formal strategies, which modes of presentation and diffusion do they practice?

Painting is as object with many aspirations – it can be a gesture, a method and a training. It carries a historical legacy with all its burden and challenge. Artists often work by reviving and transforming the unconscious of contemporary culture. Hence in painting it’s always interesting how both the consciously chosen themes meet the unconscious, intuitive matters that reveal themselves in the material, surface, and colour. One of the artists whose work is very grounded in an intuitive mastery is Daiga Krūze. She tends to play with the surfaces of colour and brush stroke building abstract imaginary lands, taking the departure point in landscape and her surroundings that are not always based in the reality that we know but instead are coming from her emotional landscape revealing itself in a very intimate way. “When I paint, I immerse myself in the process so that the reality ceases to exist, I forget that I’m in the studio and I paint intuitively, without knowing what will happen next. At the beginning I paint the environment, a landscape, but later the landscape in my paint-



ing changes. I destroy it by playing with colour fields and lines. At the end I can say that I was there, inside my painting, looked around, walked there, left marks of my presence,” says Daiga. Visually her work is an organization of irregular areas, bigger and smaller spaces clashing and complementing, fighting and moving with each other. Three large scale paintings with the title Meeting point (2016), selected for the exhibition consist of the dark colour splashes, mainly blue, gray and black turbulently mashed together with interference of some pink and red. Their appearance resembles a thunderstorm when a sky is dealing with the fight of contrasting forces, going through different phases and color schemes. Her own words about the approach towards painting makes it very clear that the whole work is intuitively lead, encompassing this energy which is rather felt than explicitly explained. An intuitive lead that is quite common to many Latvian artists draws an attention to a more therapeutic practice of arts and many who engage with painting as viewers find it very important, even significant for the perception of an art piece.



LONG LIVE PAINTING

For the exhibition the artists have been asked to work with a replica, an artwork from the past of Latvian classics, linking today's practice with the tradition, creating a dialogue, an answer or a conversation over time. Interestingly that Krūze has chosen to paint a replica of Voldemārs Irbe [1893–1944], who is well known Latvian classic that could be characterized as a master of capturing socially relevant images as well as landscapes and outskirts of the city, mostly in pastel colours. Using an expressive language, his paintings and drawings reveal an atmosphere and a mood focusing on the interaction of a man and nature in the first half of XXth century. His work brought some inspiration to Daiga due to the spatial qualities Irbe managed to achieve in his work, as well as the lightness and delicateness of the visual language he used.

Similarly to Daiga's work an artist Ilgvars Zalāns deals with the expression of painting, which is one of the main tasks and also challenges of his practice. As a self-taught artist Ilgvars has engaged with many different approaches throughout his artistic career, favoring work that originates in action painting and performance, which he has been practicing since 2007. He produces paintings on canvas as well, that we see in the exhibition. Yet there's a close link between his work on two-dimensional surface and an action painting, latter encompassing lots of spontaneity, impulsiveness, the wildness of colour and unexpectedness — these qualities he managed to transfer to the canvas as well. The works reveal the explosion of primal colours as splashes and dribbles on the surface, almost like a colour can has slipped out of the arms and fell on the canvas leaving the mess on it. However, there's a certain composure in the works achieved by carefully choosing the



relationship between the splashy surfaces and the background colour, for example it can be even gold, adding some decorativity and glittery effect to the piece.

Technique as a tool, a method and a quality that is embedded in the medium of painting seems to me an important mean to achieve a particular affect and elevate a painting to its appreciation. Even today when the painting has gone through different phases of rejection, especially suffering from constraints of neo-conceptual art, there are questions that are important to ask: how the layers of colour are applied, what relationships they tend to build, why a certain system of layering is important to the artist? What is achieved by colour and brush stroke, as well as other more technical methods?

An artist Līga Ķempe is particularly focused on these aspects in her work. Building her paintings with many layers of colour, scratching, glazing, smoothing, grinding, etc, she seeks for a certain glaze of the work. The paintings often literally become a polished piece of gem.

Although her work might be put in the frame of a more decorative/salon art, it still carries thematically interesting aspects, for example focusing on women. There are often themes of relationship and life embodied in her work. At Erarta she represents a polyptych encompassing four seasons as life cycles by picturing a couple living and bearing love through various centuries. Additionally they are accompanied with musical pieces. The postcard type of painting is very direct in its content but at the same time provides with a greatly executed, visually appealing appearance.

An interest in a human figure and the image of it, the way it's depicted is one of the reasons Līga chose to paint a replica of Latvian well acclaimed painter Boriss Bērziņš [1930–2002] who was a master in creative virtuosity. Her variations of Bērziņš one of the favorite themes, — curvy ladies' backs corresponds with Līga's interest in unconventional body of a woman, praising the ladies that are more realistic in their appearance than the ones conforming the beauty standards of the XXIth century. Līga



says that she is drawn by the archetypical, intuitive and sexual of a woman and the cycles that the woman has to engage with throughout the age, — the actions, intentions and knowledge that come with it. Yet it's not only the notion and legacy of a woman depicted in a painting but also the figure as an object, the configuration itself that Līga is captivated with. As almost any artist she likes to explore the form, the contour, the line and relationships between them and the colours, as well as the result that might be achieved, — where lie the endless possibilities of working with these matters.

Another artist interested in the topic of womanhood is Dace Dēliņa-Lipska. Her paintings consist of multicolored, bright brush strokes revealing complex characters. There's an interesting relationship between the momentum the artist tries to capture and the subject full of complicit contextual information. For example, in the recent series she explores the woman of suiti and seti, ethnic groups with long historical traditions living in Western part of Latvia and in Southern part of Estonia and Russia. The focus is on their visual appearance — the posture, the clothes, the sturdiness of their faces — signifying the strength that is part of these women's identity built throughout the centuries and kept till today. Artist's work is about a woman who is supposed to play different roles complementing the society's expectations at the same time keeping her own character and emotional stability. As we know the strength shall be worn to hide the weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which becomes part of the agenda in these paintings.

Dace continues to deal with the theme of woman in her choice of replica as well deciding to work with the painting of well known Latvian

LONG LIVE PAINTING

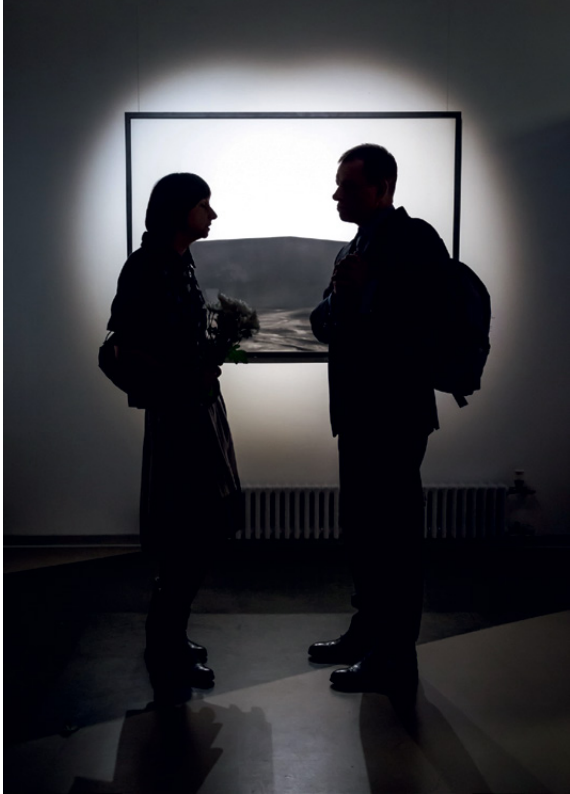
modernist artist Kārlis Padeģs [1911–1940]. His work “Okay, Baby” [1934] depicts a young and flirtatious woman (in another version of the same work Padeģs paints an older face of the same character) who is looking at the viewer with wide huge eyes, a seductive smile and uncovered breast with a teasing nipple while in the background we see a man leaving the apartment, thus indicating on an intimate encounter that happened there. Seems that this work for Dace has been interesting due to the lusty nature. The young attractive lady is seen as an embodiment of youth, beauty and complacency, serving both as an object of desire and embodiment of power. For Dace’s style, which is full of enthusiastic painting advocating for women this is an interesting challenge to deal with, repainting the vigorous character, and adding another layer of interpretation to it.

In contract to Dace’s radiant painting Kaspars Perskis work bears a monochrome palette. He focuses mostly on a black, muddy colour and saturated gray as the main elements of his work. The opaque colours and rather rough



brushwork yet tends to engage with a lyrical tone, most often capturing a figure of a human, in many paintings a woman. There’s a certain minimalism in his work, not much going on. The presence of a human figure rather builds a feeling, a condition of a mood instead of aiming for a mimetic reality. The minimal expression, reduced to the simpleness of footprint of a brush stroke and a layer of dark matte tone is the most captivating qualities of Kaspars work, deep and meditative. His choice to interpret Rūdolfs Pinnis [1902–1992] work in the replica, an artist who was a master of relationship of abstractness and almost geometric metaphysics, apparently points to Kaspars’ interest in the organization of elements and their arrangement on the canvas. He is focusing on the structural elements of painting, paying attention to the basics, looking for a clear and minimal expression as a departure point of everything else in the painting.

Atis Jākobsons’, the last one in the list of Latvian artists exhibited in the show, attention is pointed towards the explorations of a gender, looking for the liminal space that declares what is feminine and masculine. By playing with different images and characters, especially in the genre of portrait, he is experimenting with the perception of a viewer, trying to challenge our conjectures. Atis’ work in general masterly combines the explorations of selfies on social media like Instagram and Facebook, following today’s obsession with narcissistic image and his interest of traditions of painting and drawing refocusing again on the classical genre of portrait which for many centuries served as a mirror to the representation of both the social class, wealth, as well as self-expression and reflection. The production of his work always



involves engagement with the captured people either carrying conversations with them, sketching and photographing, therefore gaining a certain access to their psychological map that is important aspect for the final picture. Prac-

ticing art in its traditional manner, including painting can be a certain tool for him to regain one to one communication with another human being, something we are slowly losing in our lives due to technological impact.

The diversity these six painters show affirms that the painting today is so varied and multidimensional that it can offer an exciting experience for almost everyone. The painting as a medium continues to challenge itself and others, it asks to be investigated and evaluated, especially when we look at the traditional means of its expression. There is no outdated language today, at least not inside the medium. The exhibition *In Endless Motion* at Erarta with the artists it shows stands for the diverse practices, re-negotiating the representation of painting and aiming to give the voice to many talents, asserting a certain democracy in the field of painting.



MAIJA RUDOVSKA

LEAVING THE FARMSTEADS

An artist residence near Liepaja run by a patron, businessman, and art collector Raivis Zabis hosted two artists during August of 2019. Liudmila López Domínguez came from Havana, Cuba, and Natalia Spechinskaya was from St Petersburg. Artists from all over the world have been staying there already for several years and the founder is full of confidence to open up this place one day to the public as a place of cultural significance.

THE FOOTWEAR FOR THE MUSIC

Liudmila López Domínguez visited Riga last year with her family. It was her first time in Kurzeme (Kurland). “I feel very relaxed here because the scenery is very beautiful. Everything is so fresh and green. The surroundings calm me down, I feel very free here, and it helps me to create. In Cuba the water is bluer, however the sea is still the sea”, says the artist. She travels a lot as it helps her to get new impressions, which in turn adds new value to her artwork.

Liudmila has been an artist for 20 years now. Her work focuses on gender, and she has chosen to work with the theme of legs. “Legs are a very important part of a female body”, she says. While in residency in Latvia she created footwear which resulted in four impressive artwork exhibits. It has been already eight years now since Liudmila created her first sculpture. In the beginning her artworks were flat, but later they were transformed into 3-D images. Having received the invitation to the residence in Latvia, the artist worked out ideas and sent them to be digitalized while still in Cuba. To get their spatial shape, the shoes were firstly brought to Spain. Latvian residency

is the final stage to create the sculptures. “The work has to be precise, there are many details that have to be put together. The components of the artwork are cut on a flat surface, that’s why the end result is unexpected even for me,” says Liudmila.

“Liepaja has strong ties with music, there is a symphony orchestra in the town, and I wanted to reflect it in these shoes,” says Liudmila. She does not play any instrument herself, but the artist’s daughter is a pianist. These four artworks were created in ten days, which is less time than usual. The fact that the residence is very quiet has helped her a lot to get the work done in such a short period of time. “These sculptures definitely have the energy of Latvia. My goal was to get Latvians, especially the people of Liepaja, to see a part of themselves in this artwork”, says the artist.

ENCOUNTER WITH A BADGER

According to Natalia Spechinskaya, artists are divided into realists, who make academic high-level art, and modernists, who have a distorted understanding of art. “I belong to the second group,” she laughs. “I like eclecticism – a mix of styles and techniques. I don’t like to paint an obvious storyline. I like to encrypt it, to make a puzzle. It’s the transmission of dreams. Everything is well understood, but it doesn’t look like reality.”

The work represents events from Natalia’s life, but they are not important to the viewers, who have to decipher the painting themselves. The artist has been to Latvia many times because her family has a summer house in Ainaži. The sea and dunes evoke memories and associa-

tions that also indirectly end up in her artwork. Natalia’s upcoming work is called “Those following the footsteps”, and it consists of three parts. “I have a lot of segmented works in such way. Each canvas can be a separate painting in itself,” she says. Mostly the artist works with oil paints that have to dry, that’s why the process is time consuming. During the time spent in the residence, one painting entitled “Caryatides” has already been completed. “It is a greeting from St Petersburg, where a great deal of atlantes and caryatides support the buildings. This painting also consists of three segments which can be viewed separately, and their position can be changed,” Spechinskaya admits.

Working in the old building of the residence is a pure pleasure for Natalia, maybe lacking a bit of light. “But I am a person of an older generation, and I can work under any conditions. There is a wonderful vibe that comes from the old house, the countryside, and the animals. I will never forget the encounter with a badger! It came straight at me – it was so huge and well-groomed. I have also seen a fox and roes. It all gives inspiration for painting,” says the artist. St Petersburg has little sun, everything is grey, there is a lack of colours, therefore the painter really likes to get out of it and offer colourful emotions to the viewer.

ART INCUBATOR IS BEING CREATED

Raivis Zabis admits that he likes to work with people who have already achieved something and know what they want in life. “My idea is to turn this place into an art incubator. I hope to succeed with it during the next decade. The buildings are slowly being renovated, the artists have a place to work and live. I organize brainstorming sessions with young architects to find out how to use the former cattle-shed, which could become a museum or a cultural center for the art created here. I am not introducing this place to many people now because it is not finished. Until everything is sorted out, I don’t want to talk about it.”

There have been no Latvian artists in the residence so far, although there is a possibility that a local artist from Liepaja could join following the two artists. According to Raivis Zabis, the art in Latvia is currently still weak, while in many other countries art is recognized as a proof of national identity and also as an export commodity. If we want art as an export commodity in Latvia, we need to start networking with artists from other countries. Artists who have stayed in this residence, help each other out. If one holds an exhibition, he invites the others. They live in different parts of the world, but they find ways to collaborate. They spread the word about Latvia and Liepaja around the world. This is the way to get recognition.



LINDA KILEVICA



ARTISTS

ILYA GAPONOV



For me, the surrounding world consists of lines, be it the brutal graphics of metal structures of the Kuzbass industrial giants or the soft lines of the endless variety of the countryside in Hungary. The main source of my inspiration is learning the world through form and line, searching for meanings and their graphic expression. Understanding aesthetics through scarce monochrome and limited space on canvas becomes a primary motivation for me to move, develop and achieve harmony between my inner vision of the image and its external manifestation.



The Altar of Thyatira
Oil on board. 180 x 180 cm. 2012



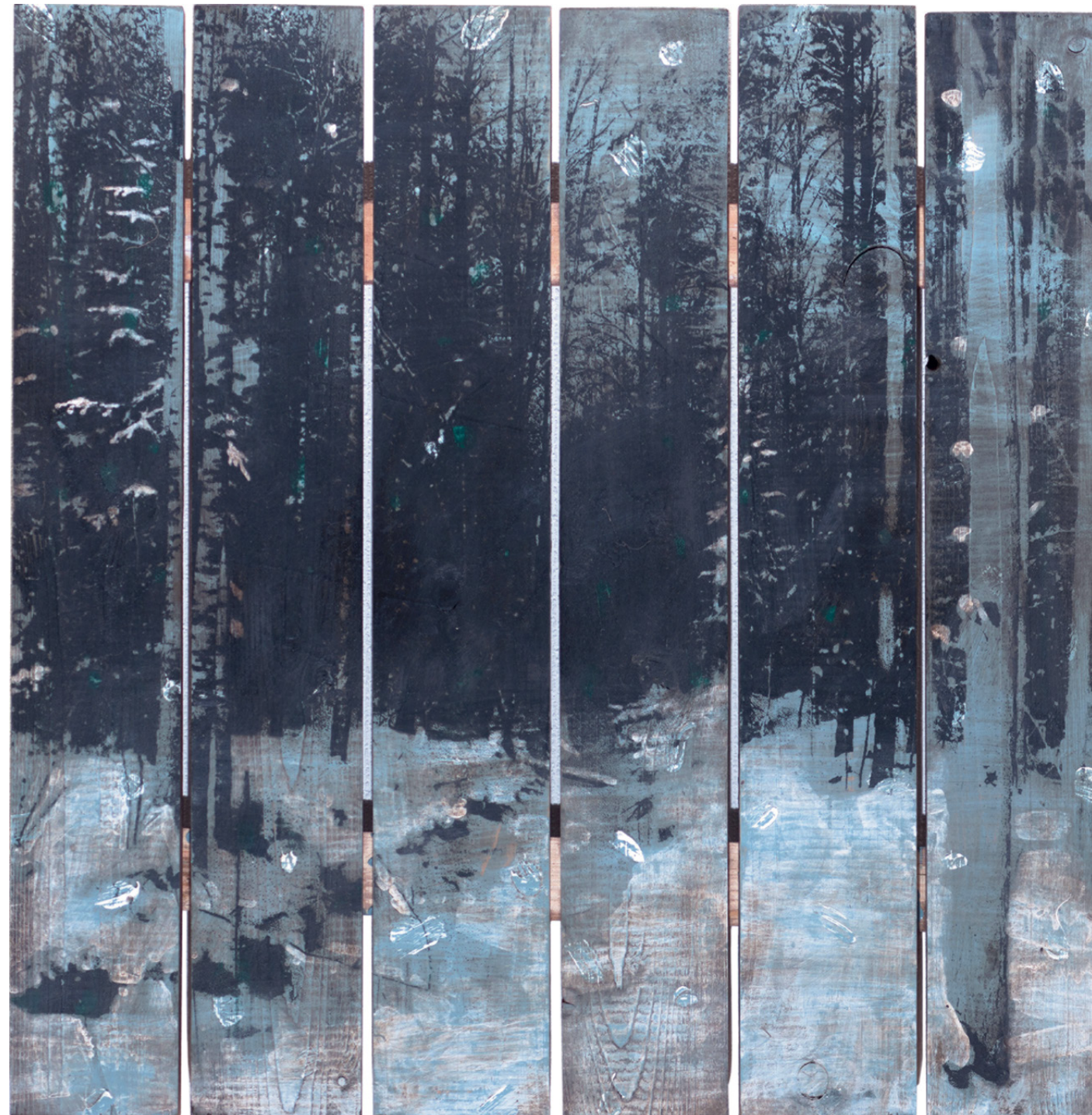
Serpentine
Oil on board. 60 x 58 cm. 2014



The Altar of Thyatira 2
 Diptych. Oil on board. 180 x 180 cm each. 2012



ILYA GAPONOV



Serpentine 2
Diptych. Oil on board
60 x 58 cm each. 2014



Quiet Conversation No.1
Oil on canvas. 180 x 180 cm. 2020



Silence
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2015



From the Expectation Series [2]
Oil on canvas. 180 x 180 cm. 2011

DAIGA KRŪZE



For me, there is no better way to get inspired than taking a good long walk in the countryside, listening to birds singing and watching wildlife. I am open to new impressions, now and then I might develop a new interest or find a new hobby, but emotions coming from nature are always the driving force of my work.

What is most important to me is to be able to show emotions, feelings, energy, strength, purity, and beauty, I prefer dynamic over quieter setups, and I often look for new ways to demonstrate all these. I do not search for a subject to be painted, but rather allow myself to wait until the

right moment happens. I never plan the creative process in advance. My works always turn out different, a thing that I both like and dislike.

I have been fond of Jean-Michel Basquiat since my student years at the Academy. Looking at his works, I tell myself that I think the same, that I like these colour spots too. I admire the way he can speak out or draw the theme so freely. All of these look very convincing to me. There were of course other artists I liked or got inspired by, Vincent Van Gogh and Joan Miró to name a few: artists that encouraged me and made me think.



Bathing

Oil on canvas. 60 x 70 cm. 2017



A Walk with Irbīte

Oil on canvas. 94 x 120 cm. 2018



Exercise. A Journey from Picture to Picture No. 1
Oil on canvas. 92 x 120 cm. 2016



Exercise. A Journey from Picture to Picture No. 2
Oil on canvas. 92 x 120 cm. 2016

DAIGA KRŪZE

KATERINA BORODAVCHENKO



I'm inspired by someone else's success! By works of other artists. I like visiting exhibitions and museums. When I am thrilled with something, I feel like immediately getting back to work. If I see a really good piece of work, I have an urge to do something incredible and absolutely new at that, something that can not be compared or equaled to existing works. No doubt, the history of fine art is so rich that you can hardly be singular and unique all the time and, still, I try to do uniquely different things. And it's not about my ego or a trivial desire just to be different from everyone. The point is to make some kind of discovery in art in general and to stay away from repeating,

assimilating known techniques, styles, and concepts, even if it is very tempting.

My global theme is the relation between nature and humans. Most of my works are images of trees with a mirror effect. This effect is present in all my paintings, symmetry being a symbol of harmony, tranquility and perfection (which I lack in my everyday life). I try to create symbolic works and in this respect an analogy can be drawn with the artworks of the past where each character, pose or object has a meaning or symbolizes something.



Homunculus
Oil on canvas. 130 x 90 cm. 2016



Fertility
Oil on canvas. 135 x 100 cm. 2016

KASPARS PERSKIS



Again, I climb up the stairs to my workshop. It's a bit cold, I light the fire. There is a black canvas next to the fireplace, my old leather jacket is thrown carelessly on it, some torn out book pages are scattered around.

I find a photo of a muscled man... hmm, I scotch-tape it to the black canvas. I sit for a while and look at my old jacket, the black canvas and the photo... Some time has passed, one more cigarette smoked... All this fits well together, I think...

I would like the character to become a symbol of a certain moment. It's not that important where exactly he is shown, his nature is what matters. Partially, I work by intuition, without giving much thought about details...

...black canvas, a little of grey, very little of white... very little, just as a subtle hint... Black Jacket on Black

Street
Acrylic on canvas
85 x 91 cm. 2021





Lady Back
Acrylic and oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm. 2017



Shoes
Acrylic and oil on canvas
60 x 58 cm. 2017



Black Jacket on Black
Acrylic and oil on canvas
110 x 100 cm. 2016



Girl on Sofa
Oil on canvas
150 x 130 cm. 2018

KASPARS PERSKIS

VADIM KOLOBOVNIKOV



I get inspired by strength. That unrestrained, vibrant energy that is present everywhere and is expressed in colour, in an emotional grip of a song, in a confrontation, in a battle.

I get inspired by nature, by its pensiveness, by its temper, by all those things you can hardly put into words, things you can only grasp while observing, smelling, sensing, soaking every single bit of the world. The boundaries between objects dim out; the sky becomes a part of the water; birds, a part of the foliage; yourself, a part of the earth. I love trees — big, wise, sophisticated, seeking out the sun and the wind, and animals, and people sometimes. I am inspired by loneliness. An in-depth conversation with yourself. Not an explanation of the reality, rather an analysis of how it is perceived.

The beginning is inspiring. A blank canvas, if you will. A breath you take before you start singing or dive into the water. Complexity is inspiring. Our world is too complex for us to fail to admire it. An apple fallen from a table might bring about a meeting of two people that are meant for each other or an unseen disaster or, on the opposite, might prevent something happening. The chain of these events, the way they flow from each other as well as the end result are fascinating. This is complexity. Ambiguity.

The extremes are inspiring. Silence and outcry. Laughter and tears. Brightness and dullness. Peace of mind and madness. Simply put, no matter where you look, there is always something that enables metamorphosis of your thoughts and development of your creativity.

Female Goat on a Hillside
Oil on canvas
50 x 70 cm. 2005



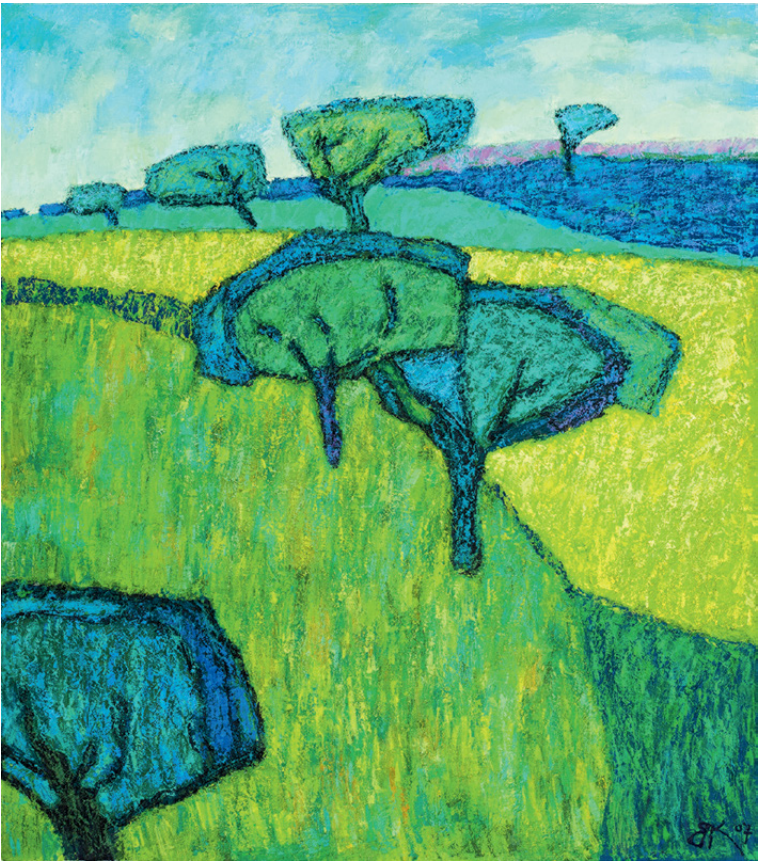
Barmaley the Cat
Oil on canvas
48 x 46 cm. 2006



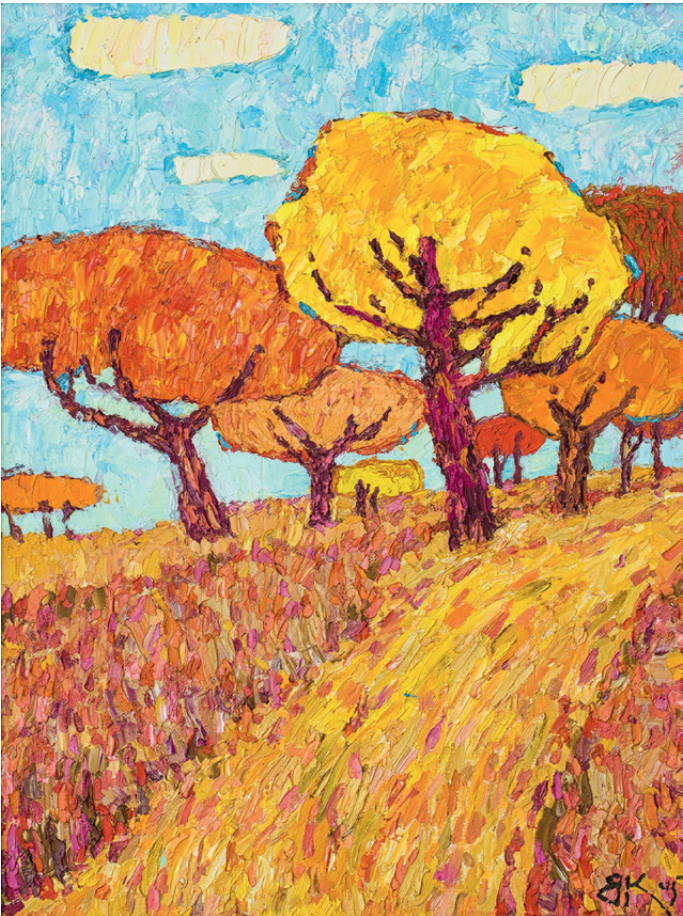


Last Day of a Very Snowy Winter
Oil on canvas. 42 x 48 cm. 2004

Nothing But Life
Oil on canvas. 96 x 85 cm. 2007



Yellow Sea
Oil on canvas. 60 x 60 cm. 2004



Clouds and Trees
Oil on canvas. 80 x 60 cm. 2005

Whiter Than White Hills
Oil on canvas. 65 x 78 cm. 2004



JOSÉ GABRIEL CAPAZ SUÁREZ



My dad died three years ago, and my mum works in a school. My family is creative and inventive, but there are no artists in it!

My mum loved to see me painting; she was the one to realise that I was able to create. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have even known that. I took art classes as a child and ever since, I've really wanted to try becoming an artist. That's what I'm still trying to do!!

I was born in Regla, a small town on the outskirts of Havana, very close to everything and at the same time very isolated by the Havana Bay. It's a very industrial place, with few trees, but with an energy that stays in memory forever!! I now live and work between Old Havana and Vedado, the two places are a perfect mix, the former is very lively and the latter is much quieter and cosier.

The more I work, the more images come to me, one project leads to another and if I stop, my mind just cuts off. Most of my work comes from

my memory; I think that in a way I am retelling my whole past. In the place where I was born, I found all the conceptual and existential problems that I am now trying to solve.

I cannot name just one single teacher. I try not to look too much at other artists' work, but there are always new teachers along the way!

What kind of success are we talking about? I can think of two types of success, external and internal, I believe more in the latter, and it's the one I am striving for.

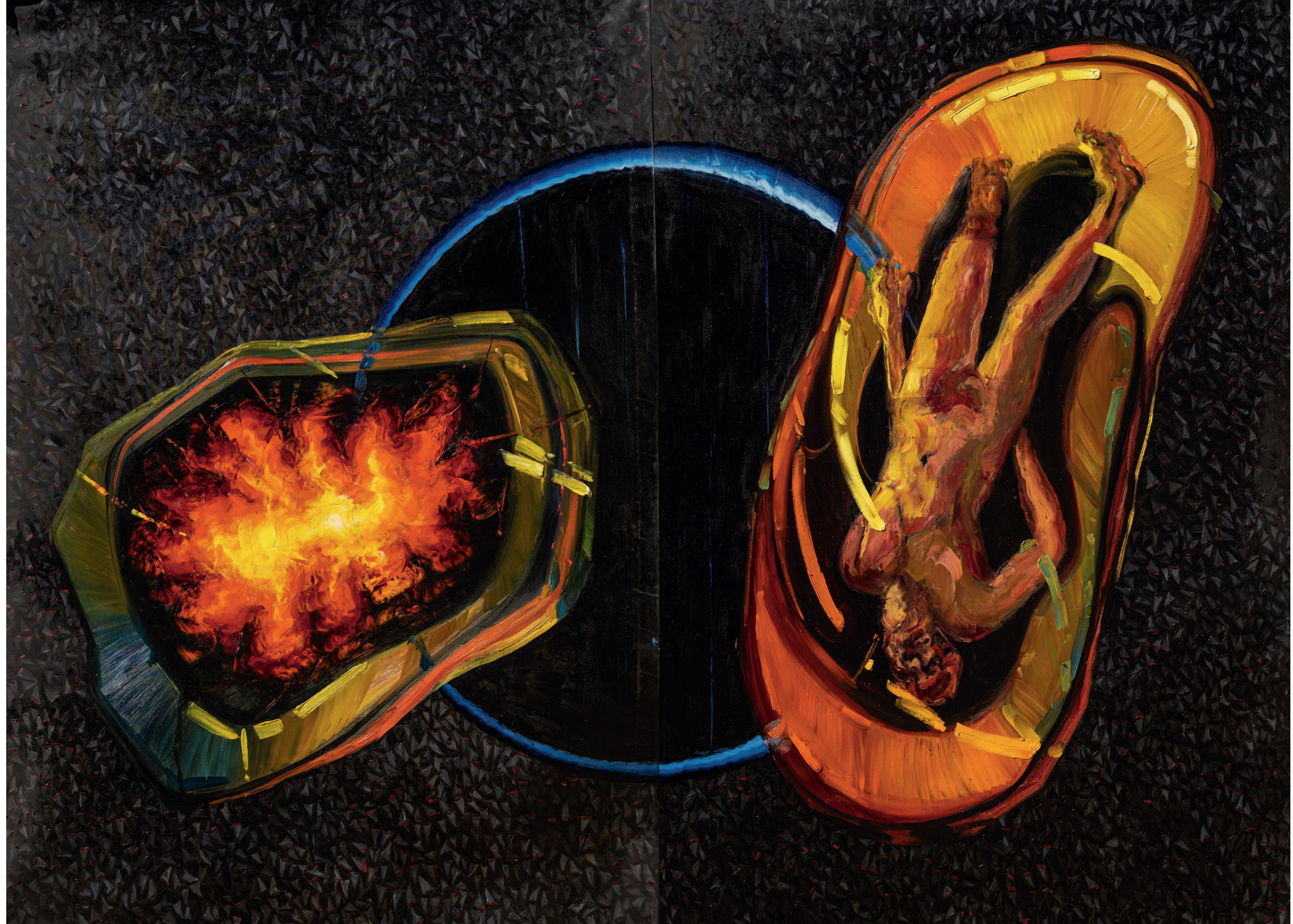
What I like most about my work is what I like least after looking at it for a while (and sometimes it's the other way around).

I have a new dream every day, and then there comes a time when I stop believing in them. I believe in every completed project and try to make the next one even better.



Human Eclipse

Oil on canvas. 180 x 180 cm. 2022



The Legend of Time
Oil on canvas. 250 x 300 cm. 2022

NATALIA SPECHINSKAYA



I'm not sure that an artist should or can explain the nature of his inspiration. Basically, almost anything can inspire, the least expected setting may spark off an aesthetic response.

Absolutely different circumstances, or better yet, their successful confluence, as well as an emotional drama, can be strong motivators. One can get inspired when visiting an exhibition or browsing online pictures, by the plastic of a human body or by an industrial landscape. I am extremely inspired by the energy contained in sudden incidental things – a stain of rust, a leak of paint, a color. Beyond doubt, the most important thing for me is the color. It is my instrument of choice to express emotions and to convey meanings.

Consequences, or Still Life with a Knife
Oil on canvas. 60 x 120 cm. 2017



Caryatids VI
Triptych. Mixed media on canvas. 150 x 90 cm each. 2019





The Gypsy Kiss
Oil on canvas. 80 x 120 cm. 2017

NATALIA SPECHINSKAYA



Reflection
Oil on canvas. 100 x 80 cm. 2017

SEMYON MOTOLYANETS



Thinking of what art means to me, I come to the conclusion that I am not quite the right artist. I felt this irregularity as soon as I started my studies, back at the art school. They explained to me that first you had to draw the sky and then pass to drawing the leaves on the trees, so as not to colour each leaf separately. So many years have passed, but I still do not understand why this is the way things are, and how the background would *stick* to the pictorial object.

This silly story constantly brings me back to the question of the right method for an artist. Resistance to retinal art once pushed me into performance experiments and the complete rejection of image as an unacceptable method of contemporary art. Further on, I came to rethinking of the tasks and ideas of compactness of the picture since it is a universal and most common art object: an image in the rectangle.

The semantic aspects have always interested me more than plastic questions, and therefore I have always experienced problems while back in

art school. I have always wanted to understand the art, and this *understanding* put an insurmountable barrier between the rational and the sensual-intuitive in the art.

I keep doing my job in the hope of a new discovery. At the same time I do understand that there is a significant and fundamental difference between creative and scientific practices, and that the discovery method in the arts, unlike the one in science, is exclusively empirical. At times, it is a discovery of the trivial and obvious, to some extent, of something *already discovered*. It is fine art precisely that poses the questions of cognoscibility to us: why do we go to see a familiar work a thousand times, what do we want to find in it? We repeat subjects; we walk around the same themes and always find a different vision. And it is an endless round dance.

I believe that art creates a mechanism for reflection. A successful art work is an operating mechanism; a poor work is a mechanism that failed to function, although all the signs, name-

ly the formal signs, might be present. While realizing this I do not deny any other opposing creative practices.

An obstacle to understanding (how can you understand a colored spot, or an emotional stroke, or smudges, or splashes, and in general, any image?), is the main inspiration and incentive to work for me. I love art because it is an eternal struggle with boredom. Art is the establishment of rules, new rules of its own, quite possibly not very correct and logical, but working. Sometimes I stand in front of an art work and don't even understand what I feel it with – my head, heart,

guts or skin. One can love art exactly for this, it gives everyone a chance to make his own statement, and this statement can be heard.

Somebody will read this short text and might want to see the photos of my works in the hope of finding confirmation or denial of my conclusions. I wonder if one finds there what I write above, and sees the connection between my thoughts and their artistic implementation. I understand that this gap can accommodate the whole world. That is why art is an inexhaustible field for action, provocation, new rules, silence, denial and other creative acts.



Natural stone 249 kg, stone carving,
yellow paint for road marking
54 x 72 x 49 cm. 2018



SANDRA STRĒLE



I try to combine traditional painting with a contemporary context, creating large-scale installations from painting, where the narrative is usually based on text, sound or objects.

I believe that visual art, especially painting, is the best and freest platform to create different narratives. The visuality of the painting and the text complement each other in a way that surprises and fascinates me, and always leaves room for some unseen “magic” ideas to emerge.

I offer the viewer the role of an observer. To deliver a complete and distinct storyline, I make artist’s books where small fragments of texts are collected in the form of notes and stories.

I never heard anyone
Coming back or leaving.
I watched through the windows
Of the holiday house
And even the trees around
Were afraid to show their silhouettes.
It was quiet. There was no wind.
I watched the house
Both in life and in the picture.
And the thought overwhelmed me
That someone — without me hearing it —
Had just entered the house.



Nostalgia No.3

Acrylic, mixed technic on canvas. 270 x 405 cm. 2019

EUGENIA GOLANT



I took art studies for quite a while until at some point I began to feel that too much schooling kills the artist, if only because the traditional school requires a lot of technical drawing from nature. Then, one day in 2005, we decided to make an exhibition of paintings of a local produce market. When I came to the marketplace with a sketchbook and canvas, I was surrounded by some cheerful and boisterous people. One vendor even composed a poem for me, another gave me some fruit and would call me Pirosmani, the third came up with a name for my style that he said was “brute”, and the fourth got so upset with his

portrait I had to flee. Since then, an atmosphere, an aura of the place and a spontaneous response you get from people have become a major part of my work. Besides, I realized that the interaction between an artist and a model was the most valuable thing for me and that the arousing tension was an inherent part of the creative process. Surrounding reality becomes a breeding ground, and I turn into a sponge absorbing and transforming it. And sometimes I have a feeling that I draw practically with my eyes rather than by hand. Often this kind of creative process means strange, at times, dicey company.

Mother with Fish
Oil on canvas
120 x 80 cm. 2011





Kitchen
 Diptych. Oil on canvas
 120 x 90, 120 x 60 cm. 2009

EUGENIA GOLANT



Still Life with a Red Scarf
 Oil on canvas
 120 x 90 cm. 2009

IEVA CARUKA



Ideally, I want my work to follow the same line as it used to when I was a child: to draw and to talk at the same time. To regain that perception of myself and the world around.

My work will never be dominated by a concept. I believe that the history of man, his image bearing world is so rich, diverse and contradictory that it can not fit into the boundaries of one word or a concept. Our thoughts, the palette of our emotions can dramatically change in a minute — that's why I like the live line, a sort of a shepherd's song in the desert, what you see is what you sing. I guess I'm centuries behind....

Farm Work
Watercolor and ink on paper
72 x 50 cm. 2009





Opera
Watercolor and ink on paper. 50 x 72 cm. 2009



Spring. Bastejkalns
Watercolor and ink on paper. 50 x 72 cm. 2009



Festival. Bastejkalns
Watercolor and ink on paper. 50 x 72 cm. 2009



Dance with a Rooster
Watercolor and ink on paper. 50 x 72 cm. 2011

IEVA CARUKA

TATYANA PODMARKOVA



At my studies, when we drew from life, I used to have a feeling that the sitter would suddenly stand up and leave, or that the sun would suddenly be down when we worked in the open air. That sort of a fitful feeling of elusiveness and unsteadiness. André Breton had the expression: “La beauté sera convulsive ou ne sera pas. Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all.” This is said about an image that can not be retained, as everything changes, transforms and disappears. I’m inspired in this sense by the human body, I’m interested in a form that can change. And I am excited with the very process of working with a model when I can separate the “physical” from the person. At this moment I think about the fact that people have bodies that they control.

Head No. 8
Oil on canvas
60 x 60 cm. 2017





From the Hands Series
Oil on canvas. 40 x 40 cm. 2016

Angels Sent out on a Mission to Minister
Oil on canvas. 130 x 100 cm. 2012



Substance No. 2
From the Lazarus series
Oil on canvas. 120 x 120 cm. 2015

GAFUR MENDAGALIEV



Whenever a strive for work and creation combines with a passion for art, a person turns into a single whole. He becomes like a pyramid above the world, and lightning bolts of inspiration jolt him at any time hitting on the top of the pyramid and energizing each thing made by the artist.

Portrait
Oil on canvas
62 x 91 cm. 1998



MĀRIS ČAČKA



I was born in 1976 in the small town of Varakļāni in eastern Latvia. I have a master's degree in art and a doctorate in art education from Daugavpils University [2009].

I have managed to create a unique hybrid method of abstract expression, combining painting and graphics. My works are multi-layered both technically and in content. They arise as imaginary dialogues with my contemporaries about the world. The aim of intuitive expression is to achieve emotional harmony.

There is a potential for openness both in the decorative design and in the symbolic message through different elements: colour, dark and light areas and rhythmic structures.

I am inspired by people, people's stories and direct and indirect conversations with them. The themes of dialogue and contact (literal and figurative) were present in my first solo exhibition in 1998 entitled *Home*.

I continue to be inspired by the silence and stillness that I disrupt with energetic actions, and the technical sounds that can be heard on a sensory level when I create a work of art.

I am also inspired by nature, entering it and acting in it, it is also my creator of colour, which manifests on a subconscious level and determines the tone in which the artwork is created.



Letterpress

Acrylic on canvas. 190 x 190 cm. 2019

NIKA CHERNYAEVA



Through my work, I explore the aggressive and visually overloaded communication environment that surrounds a person today. Amidst the ongoing flow of information, it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to distinguish the real from the fictitious, a fact from a well-constructed mythology. Going through a massive flow of visual information, I observe the intricate way the resulting images are refracted in the mind; they create a kind of hybrid space that has nothing in common with the source. In painting, I am interested in a similar process — by assembling new configurations from known and familiar images; I explore the delicate balance between the imaginary and the real. In my work I try to reflect a very important sense of confusion, anxiety, contradiction, strangeness, and lack of support, all of which I experience when interacting with the surrounding reality.

Liepaja
Acrylic and oil on canvas
180 x 180 cm. 2022





Zoe
Acrylic and oil on canvas
80 x 80 cm. 2022

NIKA CHERNYAEVA



Safe Space
Acrylic and oil on canvas (not framed)
79 x 71 cm. 2022

HUMBERTO DÍAZ



An artist's mind works mysteriously. In my case, inspiration comes in the most unexpected and funny ways. No matter how hard I try to force myself to sit down at the studio and do some work, most of the time it just does not work like that. I get many of my ideas when I am somehow relaxed, either at the beach, or when making love, or in my dreams. I remember one dream I had: I was visiting an exhibition and was amazed by an installation on show. Everybody around started talking, congratulating me for the magnificent piece I have made. I woke up to immediately draw it in my sketchbook before I forgot it. I try to give new substance to apparently meaningless things. It might be an object or a situation from daily life that catches my attention. I just put it aside for a while and it stays at the back of my mind until it makes perfect sense in combination with something else.



Tsunami

Ceramic tiles (18 tons), corrugated cardboard (5,000 m²). 2009

NADEZHDA KOSINSKAYA



Inspiration comes in different ways... Impulses from the outside world. Impressions, both external and internal. Feelings. Dreams. Strong emotions. Anxiety. All these are sublimated into clear visual images. There is a need for expression. The theme of a human being... the image of a human being. Simple subjects. A picture suddenly appears in my mind and I draw it.



From the Elderling Series
Gel pen on paper
20 x 15 cm. 2013





Timur at the Window
Oil on canvas
50 x 60 cm. 2018

NADEZHDA KOSINSKAYA

Jeanne
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 cm. 2018



LIUDMILA LÓPEZ DOMÍNGUEZ



My inspirations are femininity, sensuality, and female life. My goal is to show my vision of political, social and psychological issues facing women today.

I have a real passion for women’s shoes, they inspire me. It’s a sort of a genetic thing, as my mom is also a shoe fanatic. Shoes are reflection of my interest in gender problems and my way to symbolically depict them. My work is self-referential. To bring it to sculpture, I summarize the female body and adapt it to shoes — those

everyday objects which can tell you about your life, your path, your dreams, desires and sorrows, the stories of an era, and a person’s life...

There is nothing more important than shoes when it comes to depicting human emotion and a person’s thoughts. It allows me to make connections between my own personal history and the collective one.

I never intended or thought to be anything other than an artist with gorgeous shoes on.



The Guitar
Laser cutting and engraving on acrylic and bilayer materials. 50 x 65 x 26 cm. 2019



French Horn
Laser cutting and engraving on acrylic and bilayer materials 35 x 85 x 21 cm. 2019



Violin
Laser cutting and engraving
on acrylic and bilayer materials
47 x 60 x 21 cm. 2019

LIUDMILA LÓPEZ DOMÍNGUEZ



Harp Shoe Art Object
Laser cutting and engraving
on acrylic and bilayer materials
48 x 57 x 20 cm. 2019

VADIM BO



The concept of a painting sometimes takes shape on the go, when I have already started working on the painting, along with the process of its development, in the course of overlaying colour patches and accumulating material. I believe that creation of a painting should be a long process, that a painting should grow — much alike a tree or like a mineral crystal in a cave gradually evolving into a precious stone. Usually I work on several canvases at a time and slowly, one by one, they convert into independent works of art. The Paintings. Symbols, signs, recognizable objects, sometimes figures gradually appear. Sometimes a plot emerges. The longer the process of creation of a painting, the more extended is the impact on the viewer. Once in a while, I understand the meaning of some of my works only after they get finished. One might say that it is my subconscious mind that makes a painting. All of the images are recognizable and can be easily read but viewers are free to interpret them differently, the way they see them.

What are those images? It is hard to say definitely. They are letters, texts, half-erased pictures, images of a pomegranate, the moon, boats (as a symbol of movement, road and travel), an image of home, etc. Sometimes they migrate from painting to painting or may add up into series (*Aliens' Letters, Long Journey, A Place on the Earth and others*).

There are also symbols referring to icons or frescoes in my works, first of all, the image of the Virgin Hodegetria (the Virgin and Child as the eternal theme of motherhood). These works may also evolve into cycles (*Burnt Icon, Restoration, The Other Side of the Icon, Dark Panels, etc.*).

A painting will never succeed if it does not convey energy and magic and if there is no mystery in it. After all, a work of art is just a blast of steam coming out of the spout of a boiling kettle, a litmus test of the work that takes place in the artist's mind. Therefore, it is always obvious if an artist is honest with himself or only pretending.

Virgin Hodegetria
Oil on canvas
100 x 70 cm. 2008





Twosome (with Birds)
Oil on canvas. 120 x 100 cm. 2012



Phantoms of Fruits in the Full Moonlight
Oil on canvas. 100 x 80 cm. 2006



The Noah's Arch
Oil on canvas. 110 x 80 cm. 2004

ALDIS DOBENBERGS



Ideas of images and inspiration to create them come from nature through research and imagination. Some astronomical observations I did with a telescope put me up to including the theme of the universe in my paintings. While watching the life of yard birds, I came up with the theme of crows. Before that, I took to the theme of slums which inspired me by their mysticism. These are the most important themes for me.

In any aspect of my work I rely solely on my intuition and try to avoid falling under the influence of other people’s advice, recommendations or wishes.

I am very inspired by a dream that one of my works might be shown in the Louvre museum.

Pay Attention
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm. 2017



Untitled
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm. 2015





Words That Change Nothing ...
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm. 2016

Untitled
Oil on canvas
50 x 70 cm. 2015



NADEZHDA ANFALOVA



Speaking of creativity, I have to say that I have many different sides in me. I think that a modern painter must always be on the watch out for new impressions, should travel and look around as much as possible. He needs an understanding that he is not anything but a small part of a huge world: there he is, but then there are other very talented creative people around. As a matter of fact, the profession of an artist is sort of presumptuous and self-conceited to a point of easily depraving the mind and the soul. The idea that

you are the one and the best, that nobody is just smart enough to understand you is so readily available and so compelling that you quickly learn to live with it. In practice, you can hardly find anything that has not been done a thousand times before you... With that, when I put my experience and emotions into my work, it becomes my personal message to the viewer. Virtually any subject gives an artist a chance to reveal yet another facet of himself and to experiment with a new technique, light and sound.

Withered Roses
Tempera on cardboard
57 x 42 cm. 2000





Greek Stairs I
Tempera on canvas. 90 x 70 cm. 2006



Greek Stairs II
Tempera on canvas. 90 x 70 cm. 2006

NADEZHDA ANFALOVA

MIKHAIL GRACHIOV



An impulse to get started is akin to singing. Images arise when you feel good at heart. An idea to paint something may come unexpectedly or might have been nurtured for years — it varies from picture to picture. I usually make sketches with a pencil or a pen or with whatever can draw or with all that together at the same time, and I go on sketching until I get what I like and what corresponds to the concept of the painting. I always make stretchers and prime canvas myself. I buy canvas and then apply sizing and ground all by myself. I love the preparation routine not less than painting, it is a great pleasure for me.

I do not paint from nature — I always let it pass through the prism of my imagination first. I work on a painting for a long time, sometimes for years, to give myself time enough to reflect, to see, and to understand. Sometimes, an idea gets transformed and takes an entirely new form; sometimes nuances, unexpected aspects, or even a new vision of the subject might appear. I am constantly on the lookout for a new form of image presentation since, in my opinion, it is the great form that makes and characterizes an artist.



Brutal
Oil on canvas
105 x 75 cm. 2014

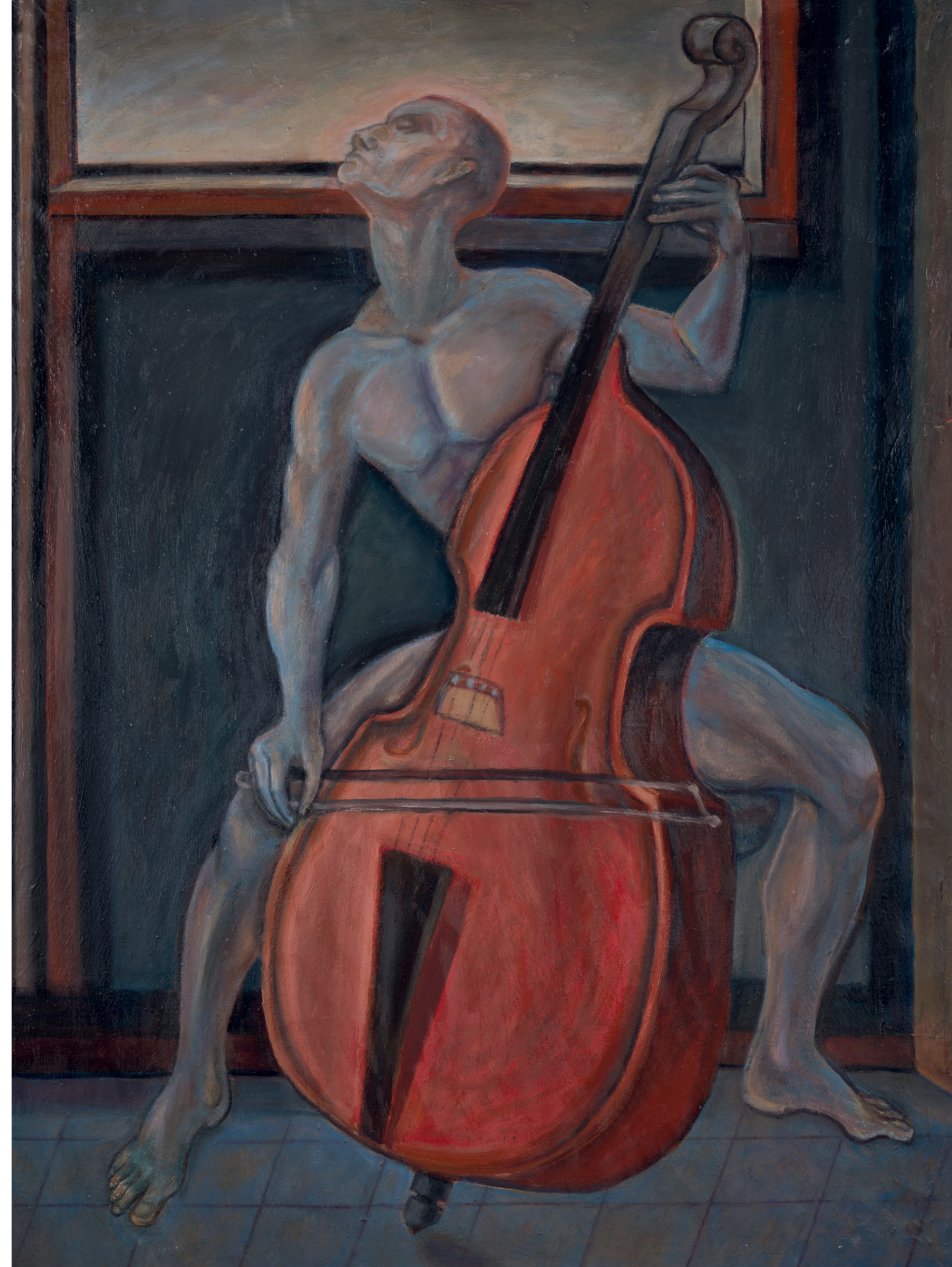


Post Mortem
Oil on canvas
75 x 75 cm. 2014



A Common Girl
Oil on canvas
100 x 70 cm. 1993

MIKHAIL GRACHIOV



Musician, or Music-Playing
Oil on canvas
120 x 90 cm. 2014

ALEXEY SEMICHOV



It is hardly possible to put into words the “mechanics” of how the inspiration to paint something comes. Most often, it remains a mystery where the starting point was and when the first urge came, or it is just impossible to remember. I would say that we are inspired by the very process of what is happening around us. At any rate, we cannot help feeling that we are living in a fantastic reality, a kind of reality that was generated by the turning-points of the modern history of Russia. And the apparent strangeness, the seeming absurdity of our themes come directly from life itself.

The Cold Forest
Oil on canvas
75 x 60 cm. 2005



ALEXANDER DASHEVSKY



I have to say, I do not like to use this word. There is something passive about it, as though you need to keep waiting until you are blessed with a desire to get down to work. I am an up-and-doing kind and I am almost always eager to work. Add to that some quality art materials within reach, a new tool, an idea buzzing in your head as a bumblebee in an empty room, and the desire to work becomes overwhelming.

A Girl in the Bathroom
Oil on canvas
50 x 60 cm. 2008



ILGVARS ZALĀNS



I focus on the creation of images and motifs that are archetypal by nature, universal in human experience, crystal clear for everybody, and are not determined by any social group. Perhaps that is the reason I take great pleasure in working in whatever part of the world that at the moment seems to be the most dynamic, rich in ideas, and promising in the eyes of the contemporary art community. Since 2008, the Southeast Asia – Malaysia and China, Indonesia and Japan, Korea and the Philippines – is the essence of my palette and the direction of my artistic search.

Farmstead
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 100 cm. 2018





Winter
Oil on canvas
180 x 140 cm. 2015



Summer
Oil on canvas
180 x 140 cm. 2015



Spring
Oil on canvas
180 x 140 cm. 2015

Latvians 1
Oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm. 2004



Latvians 3
Oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm. 2004



Latvians 2
Oil on canvas
120 x 100 cm. 2004



Mom with a Tiger Cub
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm. 2010

Indonesian Girl
Oil on canvas
180 x 140 cm. 2014





Monsoon in Beserah
Oil on canvas. 80 x 120 cm. 2010



Bridge in Putrajaya
Oil on canvas. 77 x 120 cm. 2010



Typhoon
Oil on canvas. 130 x 150 cm. 2001

ILGVARS ZALĀNS



Fin
Oil on canvas. 180 x 520 cm. 2011

ILGVARS ZALĀNS

LAURIS OZOLS



I do not like “art”. I do not like “artists”. I believe that everyone is an “artist”. I understand that this is 4th sentence I started with I.. and it is for a reason. I am afraid I do not paint to make world a better place., or share “my inner world” with others.. I just do it to remain sane. We are all selfish. and thats OK.

Life is amazing.

Everything around me that creates “feels” (feelings) is inspiration now: perfectly developed neverpooping Facebook girl profiles; retired, most likely well respected, western sugar daddies with their fifteen year old boyfriends in local cafes; the way the hypocritical hippy-world-explorer guy eats his McDonalds burger right in front of

me... or maybe just a nice sunrise at 5am over beautiful smoggy “City of Angels” skyline .. I find inspiration in everything that makes me feel. From my early personal works I only like the paintings that were done primarily with “feels”.. mind was a destructive force. I could never fix or improve my works after the initial craze of emotion escaped however lately I have been trying to tame the mind and let it work with “feels”. Also there is still a lot of Marriage Counselling that needs to be done to reach the iron union.

I have been lucky with having right people around me at right time to speed the process up.*

*Presented in the original author's wording.

26803233-1
Acrylic on canvas
90 x 90 cm. 2013



Eva
Acrylic on canvas
90 x 90 cm. 2013



Silence
Acrylic on canvas. 90 x 90 cm. 2013



26803233-2
Acrylic on canvas. 90 x 90 cm. 2013

LAURIS OZOLS

ÍTALO RENÉ EXPÓSITO



I think that painting has always accompanied me, as long as I can remember at least. I grew up seeing a painting of a great Cuban artist Maria Pepa La Marque — three white flowers in a vase, the three falls of Christ, according to the painter. It is one of the first images that my mind preserves and, for me, it is like an image of the soul of my family. We are of Italian origin on my mother's side and there was a good deal of talk in the family about Christ and about great painters, about Leonardo as one of the greatest, and about Gioconda, the supreme painting. About her enigmatic smile. These talks were as if addressed to someone destined to become a painter. Therefore, it was not by accident that one day when I was fourteen, the painter's vocation knocked on my door. I took a piece of cardboard, found a print of the Mona Lisa and started to sketch from it with a pencil. It has been 19 years since the day I started this work and I still go on with it, it just becomes more intense every day. I continue to study the Mona Lisa.

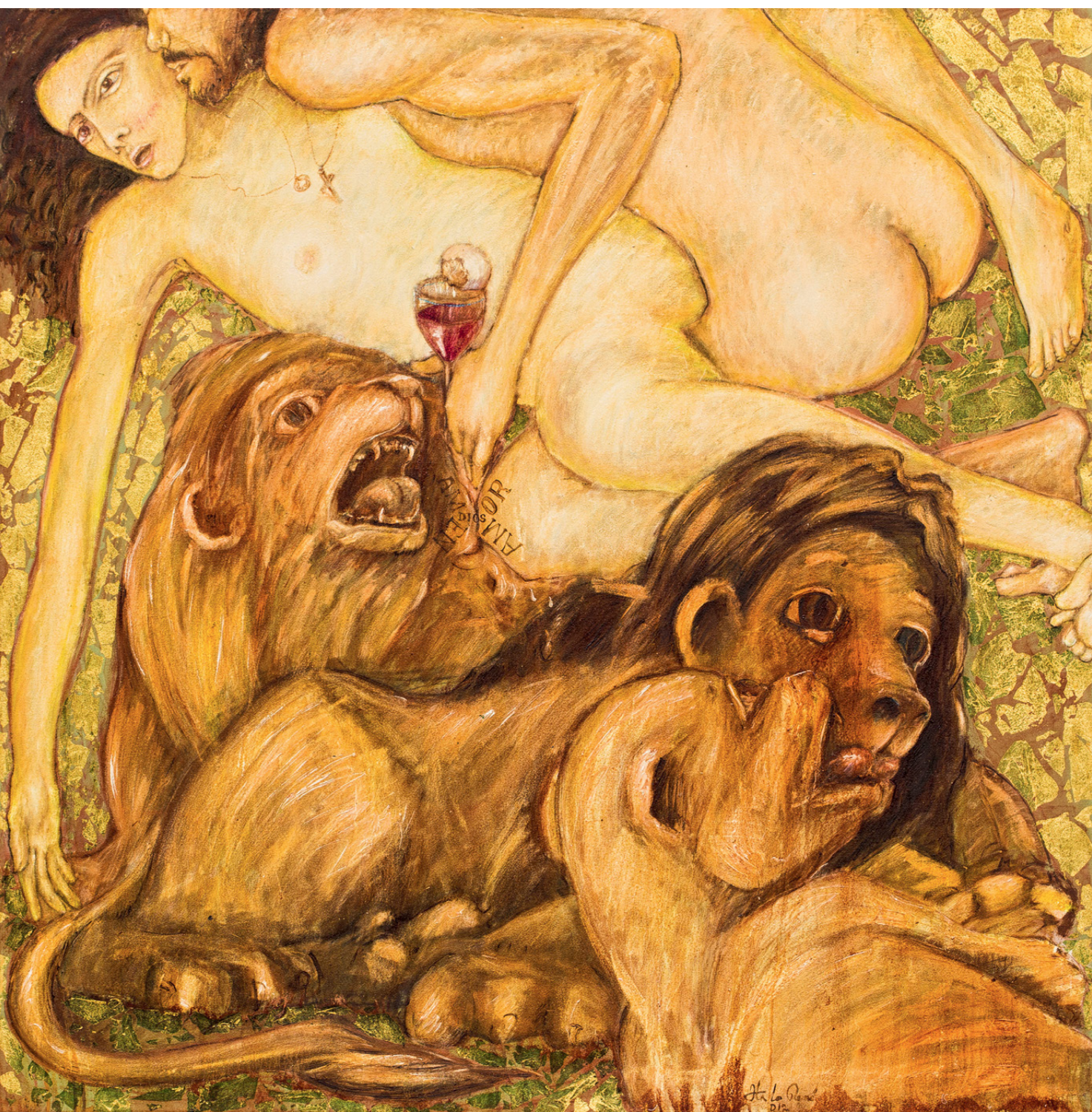
A personal history of a man gets memorized by and physically reflected on his body. By the same token, the history of the human race gets reflected in art, which is a true physical reflection, a memory of the soul of the man throughout history. Since when there is art, there is the man; since when there is the man, there is art. An artist is a person who, driven by his vocation, enters this memory of the soul and then his personal history becomes part of universal memory. From that moment, his history acquires an additional dimension — along with having been in the past a kid, a teenager, a young man and so forth, he also has been the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, etc. The artist's work, while remaining intimate, goes beyond the personal to the extent that the artist recapitulates the universal memory by his own hands.

So we enter a world that extends from the most contemporary avant-garde back to the primitive arts, as far back as the very origin of the man. The artist explores this world. While studying the universal memory he creates his own work; by creating his work, he studies the universal memory. The mirror of the soul, that is what art is.

...These thoughts come to my mind when I think of my work as a painter and of painting as a job. They are explained in most general terms since in this case it is impossible to delve into the specifics of a job of 19 years of constant dedication to the personal as well as to the artistic memory as old as the man himself...



Love
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2012



Amen
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2012

ÍTALO RENÉ EXPÓSITO



Nectar of Sufferings
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2012



Nectar of Holy Mary. Passion of Christ
Oil on canvas. 180 x 100 cm. 2012



Angels
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2013



Son of Man on the Land of Gods
Oil on canvas. 240 x 150 cm. 2013



No Sin in Love
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2012

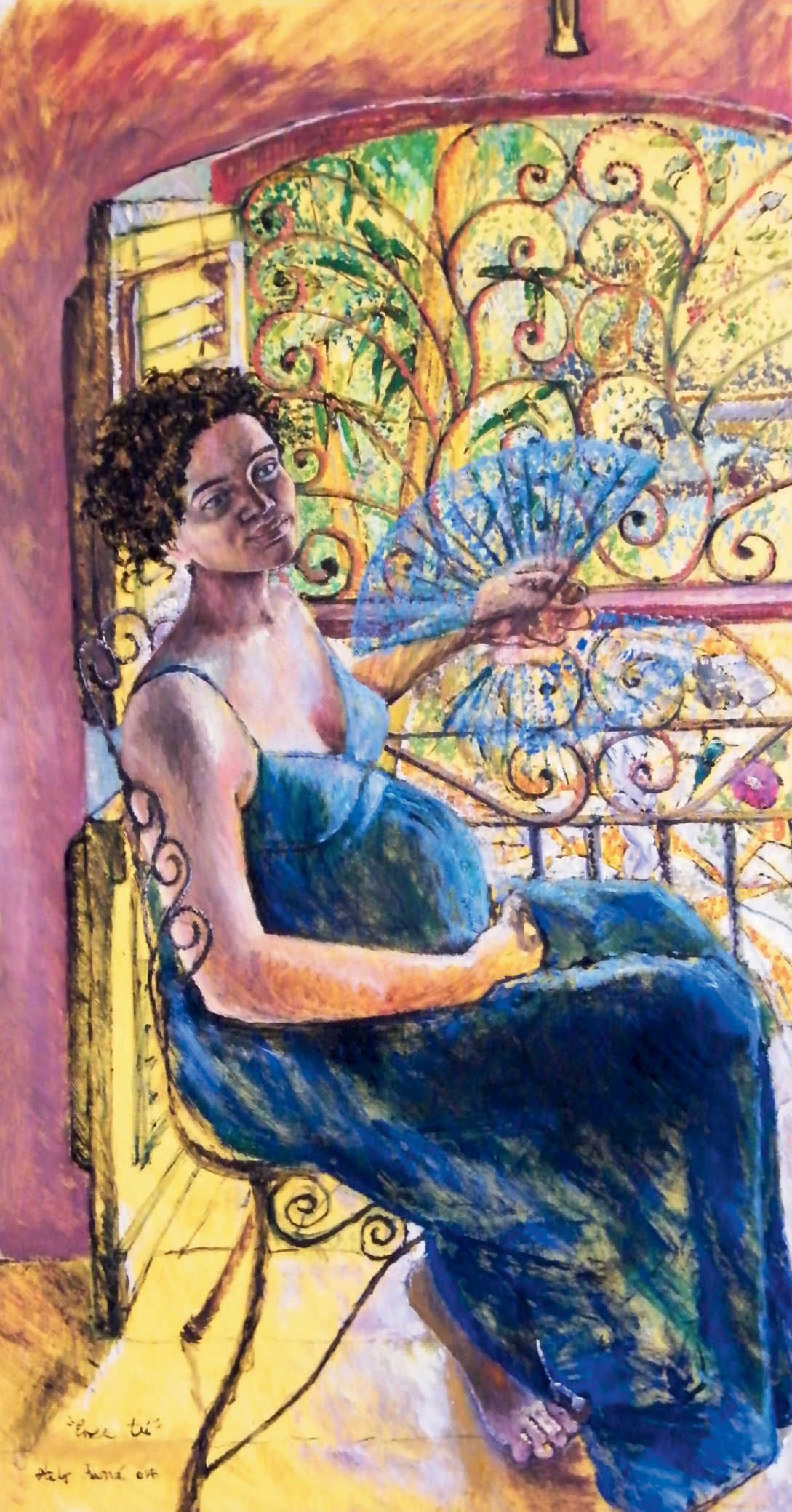


This is Pure Love
Oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm. 2013

ÍTALO RENÉ EXPÓSITO

Love of Sentenced to Death
Oil on canvas
240 x 150 cm. 2013

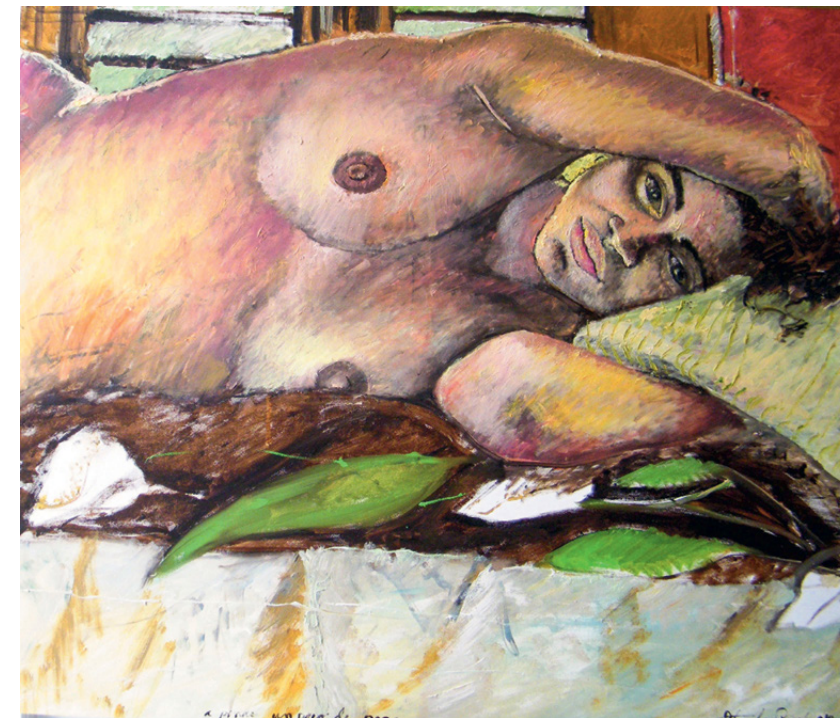




It's You
Oil on canvas. 75 x 60 cm. 2014



Venus and Maria
Oil on canvas. 90 x 120 cm. 2011



A Bit of Rest at Least
Oil on canvas. 60 x 75 cm. 2014



Forest
Oil on canvas. 70 x 50 cm. 2017



Cornfield
Oil on canvas. 50 x 70 cm. 2017



Country House
Oil on canvas. 50 x 70 cm. 2017

ÍTALO RENÉ EXPÓSITO

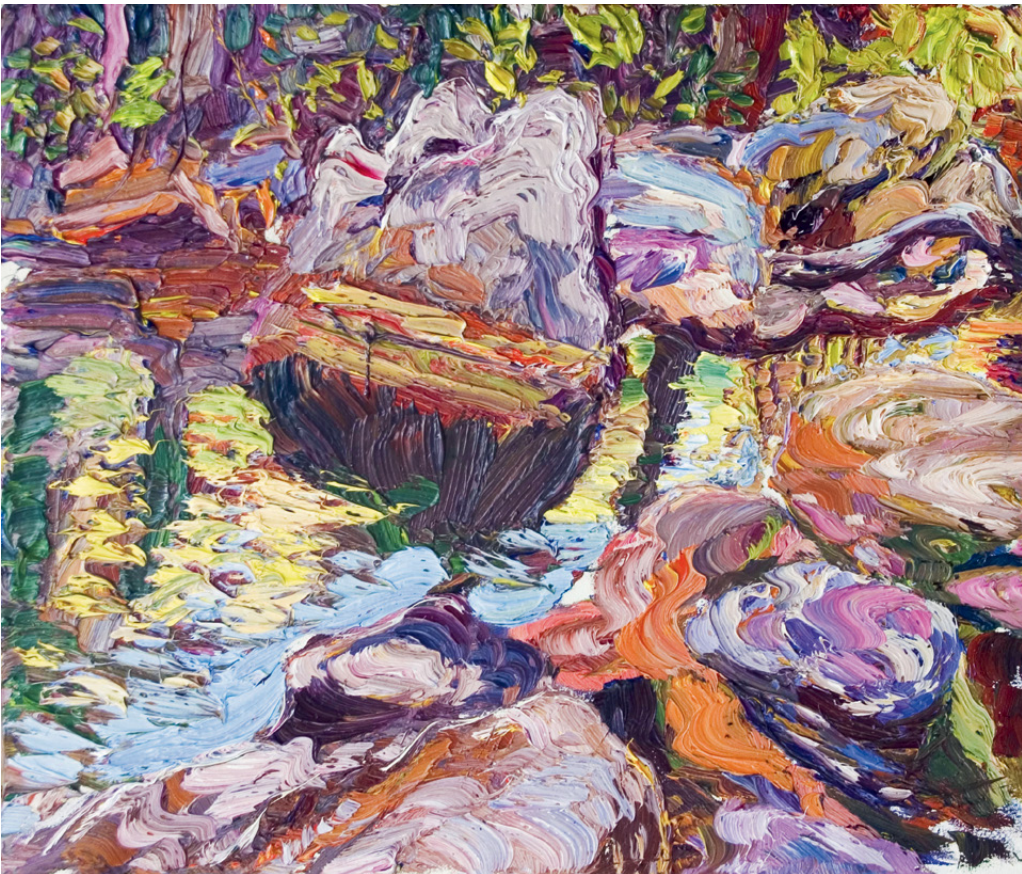


Shell
Oil on canvas. 150 x 150 cm. 2017

ÍTALO RENÉ EXPÓSITO



Valley Under the Rain
Oil on canvas. 50 x 70 cm. 2008



Japanese Garden
Oil on canvas. 60 x 70 cm. 2008



Havana
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm. 2012



**Hardy Flower of Rembrandt
and Van Gogh**
Oil on canvas
95 x 70 cm. 2013



Teacher
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm. 2017



With a Book in Hand
Oil on canvas
50 x 70 cm. 2016

ADONIS MUIÑO ROMERO



I do not consider myself an artist of inspiration. Usually, the first thing I do is to build up a story from images, events, symbolic or allegorical elements I deal with. For me it is more important “to say” than “to paint”, because I believe art to be an act of communication where the artist, on top of talent and skills, has to offer a story, a scene where the viewer is attracted and gets involved in a dialogue with the art piece instead of just contemplating the object. Whenever I work with familiar images, I prefer to have them decontextualized and put within a different story: then everything from the technique to the art piece title becomes part of the story and provides clues to the viewer.

I believe that every creator has a hidden goal, a dream or an objective to fulfil. In my case, the only thing I ask for is to continue creating. I think that the achievements and goals are met as the work progresses, everything else just comes along with it. It is obvious that I also want my art

to be appreciated nationally and internationally and exhibited in museums, galleries and important collections. That is why, as I said before, I go on and will keep working.

Success in the world of arts can be misleading, because not everything commercially successful or the most exhibited in galleries is necessarily the best. Still, the recognition of the work, acceptance and enjoyment, first by the artist and then by the public is a very important factor. As far as I am concerned, I consider myself an artist both artistically and commercially viable.

I suppose that I owe my success to my own language within the emerging Cuban art scene, to the themes I deal with, and to the use of visual elements that distinguish me and give me a personal stamp. I believe that my young career is making a good progress between acceptance and the road to recognition.

Alice Syndrome
Oil on canvas
90 x 110 cm. 2020



Breakfast in the Wild or a Day Without Alicia
Oil on canvas. 90 x 110 cm. 2020



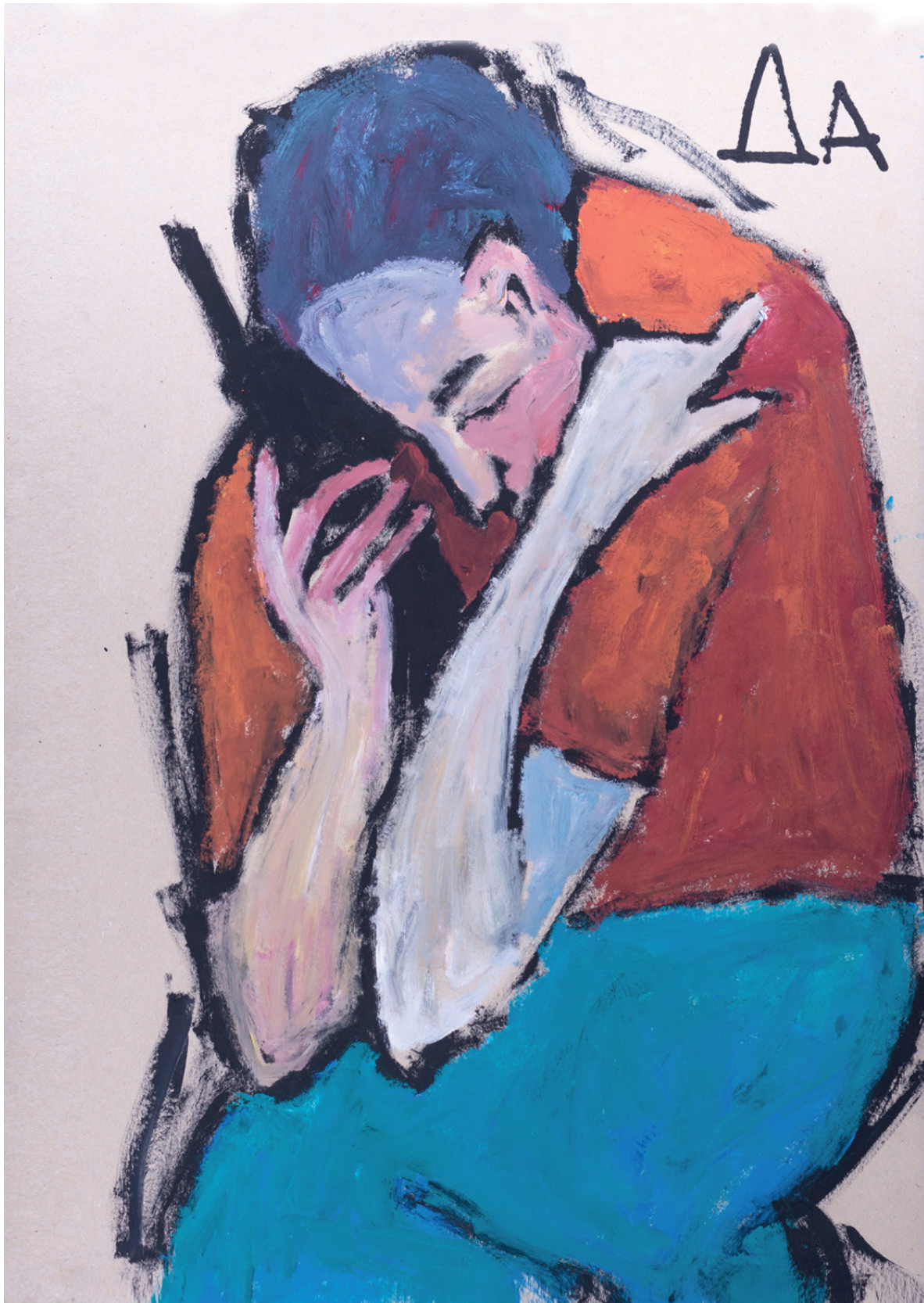
ANNA ZHOLUD



The rain from the sky falls, falls. That snow flakes, big drops. And soul washing toils, toils. Sometimes escapes drops. Sometimes that escapes the line steep, dotted. sometimes. Sometimes strip continuous black, my life as rope twisted and probably I fateful... And the rain from the sky falls, falls that snow flakes that big drops and soul washing is broken off sometimes spreads pools. A round dance leaves will begin to spin, and it is time to have supper probably, and heating boots in reflections, to scoop accidentally inspiration.

Cops in Sunlight
Gouache on cardboard
50 x 40 cm. 2005





Anna
Gouache on cardboard
95 x 70 cm. 2005



Can with Tulips
Gouache on cardboard
95 x 70 cm. 2005



Fish No. 4
Oil on cardboard. 54 x 58 cm. 2017



Fish No. 1
Oil on cardboard. 54 x 58 cm. 2017



Fish No. 3
Oil on cardboard. 54 x 58 cm. 2017



Bream and Sabrefish
Oil on cardboard. 90 x 65 cm. 2017



Vobla on Green Cardboard
Oil on cardboard. 70 x 65 cm. 2017



Sabrefish on Red
Oil on cardboard. 90 x 70 cm. 2017



Rudd
Oil on cardboard. 80 x 65 cm. 2017



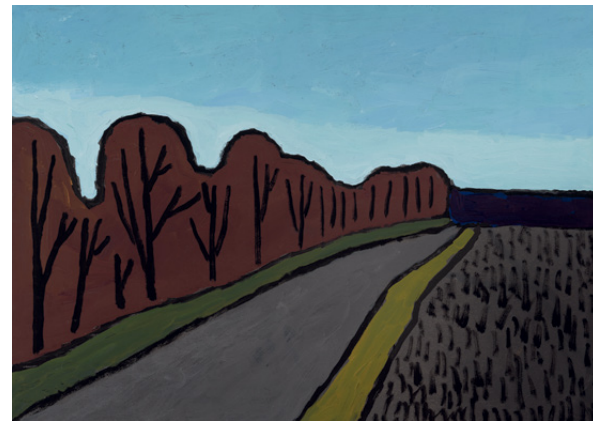
Perch
Oil on cardboard. 70 x 90 cm. 2017



Fish No. 2
Oil on cardboard. 54 x 58 cm. 2017



Fish
Oil on cardboard. 65 x 80 cm. 2017



From the Landscape with Road Series
Acril on paper. 53 x 70 cm. 2019



From the Landscape with Road Series
Acril on paper. 50 x 60 cm. 2019



From the Landscape with Road Series
Acril on paper. 50 x 60 cm. 2019



From the Instead of Landscape series
Acril on cardboard. 100 x 75 cm. 2019

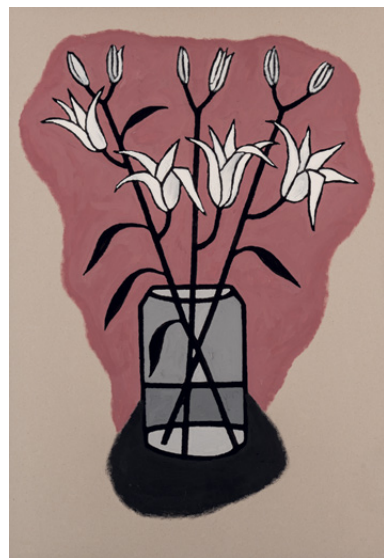
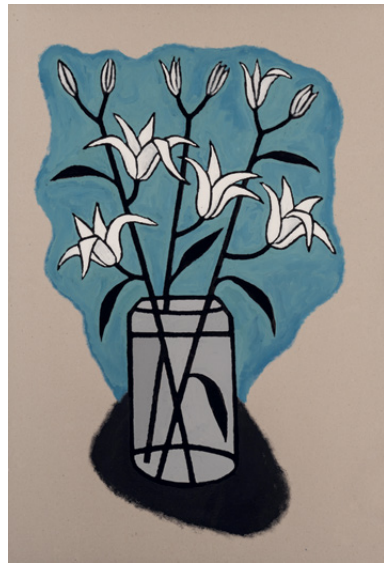


From the Instead of Landscape Series
Acril on paper. 40 x 50 cm. 2019

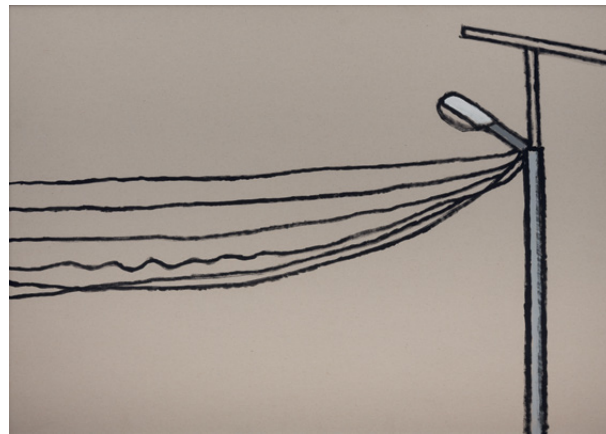


From the Instead of Landscape Series
Acril on paper. 50 x 60 cm. 2019

ANNA ZHOLUD



From the Unpresented Bouquet Series
Acril on cardboard. 105 x 75 cm. 2018

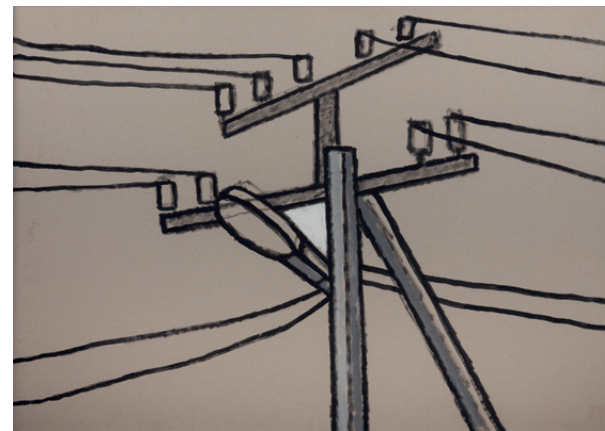


No. 1

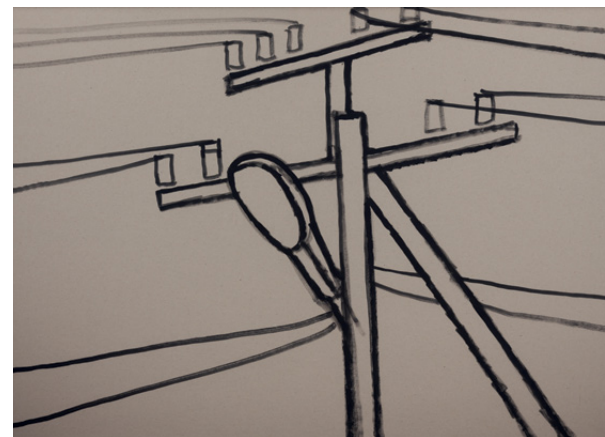


No. 3

The Way Series
Oil on cardboard. 75 x 105 cm. 2017



No. 2



No. 4



Still Life with Pomegranates
Gouache on cardboard
70 x 50 cm. 2005



Can with Roses
Oil on plywood
60 x 50 cm. 2017



Two Bums
Oil on canvas
25 x 30 cm. 2005



Garlic
Gouache on cardboard
70 x 50 cm. 2006

VIKTOR VASILIEV



Francis Bacon once said in an interview that sometimes the less expected things like, for instance, *the Manual of Oral Cavity Diseases*, could inspire creative ideas. Back in the day, I was stunned and inspired by one of the paintings by Mikalojus Čiurlionis and after that I went through a similar experience several times. So it happened when I saw a calligraphic scroll with a poem by Du Fu, the VIIIth century Chinese poet. It was a large scroll of 2.0 by 0.8 meters and it was fully covered with hieroglyphs in the cǎoshū-style cursive script. This is a very particular style with script characters resembling flowing seaweed in the water. The scroll emanated an extraordinary power.

I was very surprised to learn though that my Chinese teacher, a language scholar, an intellectual

who had practiced calligraphy for six years, failed to translate this manuscript. He said he could make out only a few characters. From an inscription on one side of the scroll he was aware that it was a verse by Du Fu whose poems he loved and knew well but still he was unable to read the entire text.

In fact, in some ways the cǎoshū style is nothing else but a visual expression of the unconscious. Can you tell me where else we have a chance to really see the unconscious? That is exactly why the cǎoshū-style script is both elusive and attractive and in many cases proves unreadable... High art is not much interested in an artist's conscious objective unless it is supported by the artist's essence and soul, by his true feelings, his openness and sincerity.



Untitled
Oil on canvas. 60 x 80 cm. 1989



Venus of Willendorf
Triptych
Mixed media. 45 x 60 cm each. 2016



Target Destination
Oil on canvas. 60 x 80 cm. 2003





Big Black Cock
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm. 2007



Black Butterfly
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm. 2007



Big Butterfly
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm. 2007

VIKTOR VASILIEV

ALEXANDER VOLKOV



Sometimes, inspiration comes while working on a painting much alike the appetite that, as we know, grows with eating or else it can be compared with going on a mushroom picking field trip. Sometimes it just hits you all out of the blue – while taking the kid to school – when the brain is not yet fully engaged with the global reality. A number of things might come helpful, like roaming aimlessly through the city, contemplating bubbling water in a canal, visiting a shared residence in an old-Petersburg-style apartment or other inspiring places like jazz and fusion sessions.

Breakfast for an Astronaut
Oil on canvas
90 x 150 cm. 2011





The Fontanka River. Twilight
Oil on canvas
70 x 80 cm. 2006

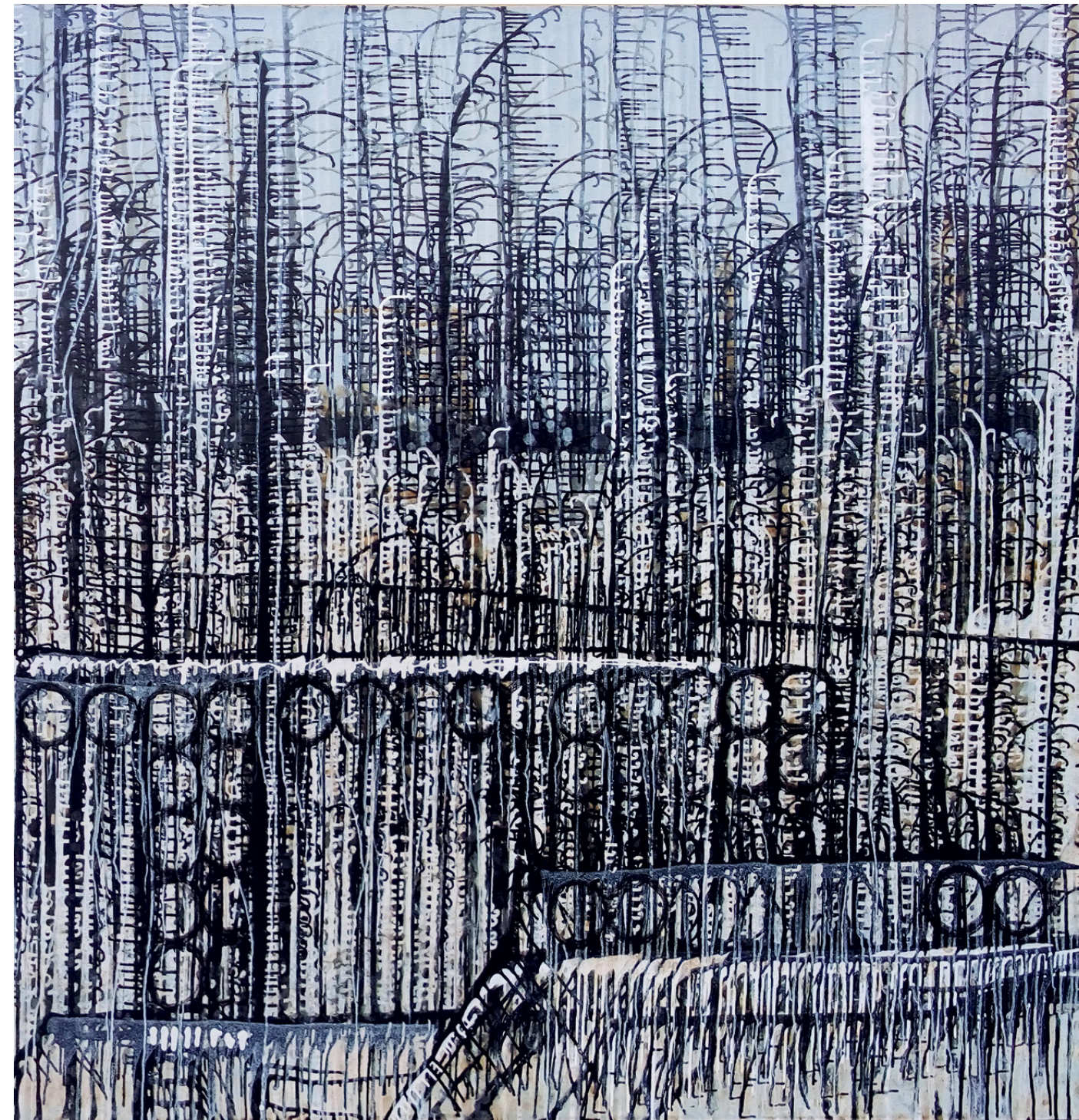
TIGRAN MALKHASYAN



As a man of a systemic mind-set, I always find it difficult to talk in terms that are not clearly defined. When talking about inspiration, I'd suggest defining it as "the phase of creative drive", and, as I am inclined to think of this phenomenon in psychiatric terms, I would describe it as an acute condition in the "creative personality disorder" of an artist, a manic episode accompanied by a characteristic feeling of euphoria, a burst of energy,

and a subjective sense of limitless possibilities.

The controlled use of psychic properties along with the skilful stimulation of such condition often helps me in my creative work. Although the Malkhasian-style inspiration might sound somewhat extreme, I have to confess that I actually don't need to overstrain myself to get it working.



Structures

Oil on canvas. 160 x 160 cm. 2018

Lady
Oil on canvas
160 x 200 cm. 2017



NATALIA MALTSEVA



Viewers often wonder what prompted the artist to make this or that painting. To anticipate the question about my paintings from this collection, I would like to tell you of an episode that happened to me in the late 80s. Some buyers from Poland hesitated over choosing a painting and asked me why my works were so different. Without thinking twice, I said that one of the paintings was made after I went to buy groceries and failed to find sausage and the other one, which ap-

peared more cheerful, panned out because that time shopping went well. They did appreciate the joke and had no more questions on inspiration any longer.

Painting for me is larger than work — it is my life. Perhaps that is the reason why I am not a single subject painter. All I do is just putting my life impressions on the canvas.



Sea
Oil on canvas
115 x 160 cm. 2018



Near the Sea
Oil on canvas
115 x 160 cm. 2018



Winter
Oil on canvas
48 x 68 cm. 2005



Cornfield
Oil on canvas
65 x 115 cm. 2018



Still Life
Oil on canvas
50 x 60 cm. 2005



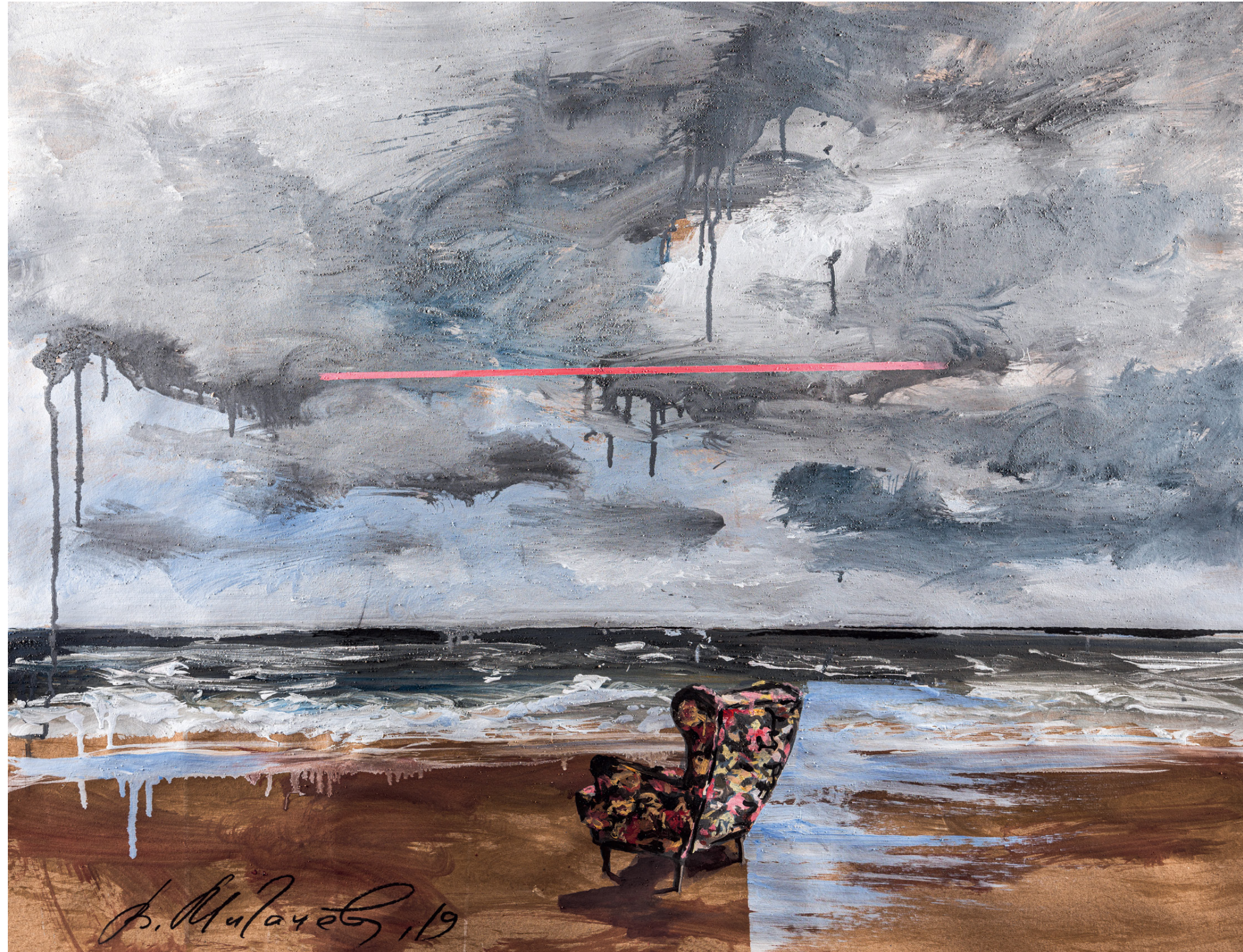
Road to the Sea
Oil on canvas
115 x 70 cm. 2018

VLADIMIR MIGACHEV



I believe that inspiration exists. At a young age, you think of it as a divine manifestation: "When feelings and emotions come over you, you become enlightened, and you create something that surprises you". Eventually you realise that it doesn't work that way. The artist is a conduit of feelings, emotions and revelations. The artist is a tool! You always have to be ready to accept the new, the unexpected. When you are ready, there is no need to wait for inspiration. It becomes part of your own existence!

Untitled
Acrylic on paper
70 x 90 cm. 2019





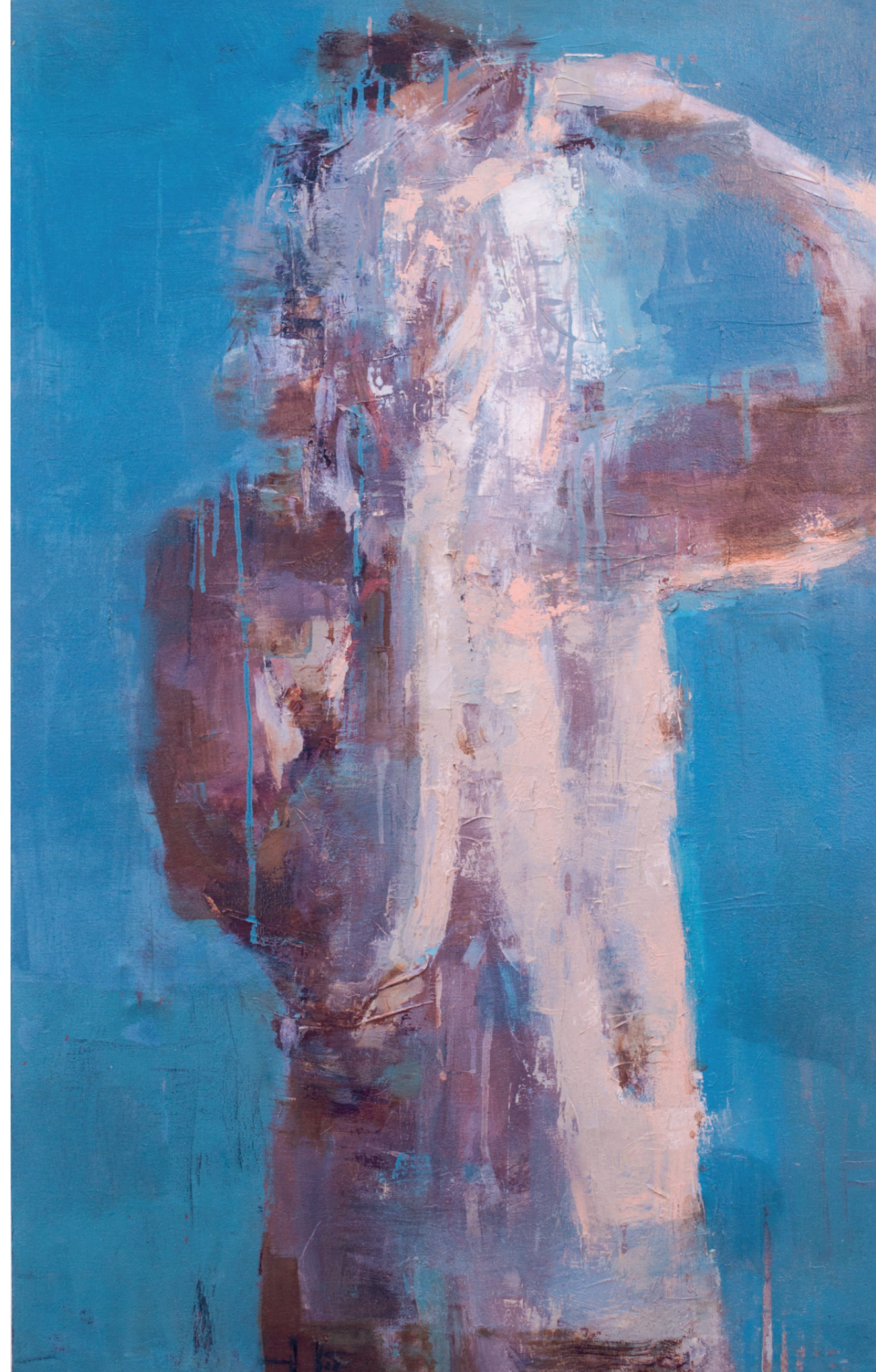
Hope is Never Lost
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 200 cm. 2019

ALEXANDER KABIN



I am inspired by strength and beauty. By art too, whatever it is. I am inspired by the mere fact that art exists in this world. And music... Music, even if it is not exactly a source of inspiration, has a very special place in my work. I am not used to work in silence and I always have some music on when I paint. More often than not, I prefer some relaxing ambient music. If someone wants to get a better feeling of my works, it probably makes sense to turn on music.

Male Torso
Oil on canvas
80 x 50 cm. 2012





Mail Boxes
Oil on canvas. 90 x 90 cm. 2012



Object No.1
Oil on canvas. 100 x 100 cm. 2014



Just Passing Through No. 2
Oil on canvas. 61 x 98 cm. 2016



Full Moon
Oil on canvas. 75 x 67 cm. 2016

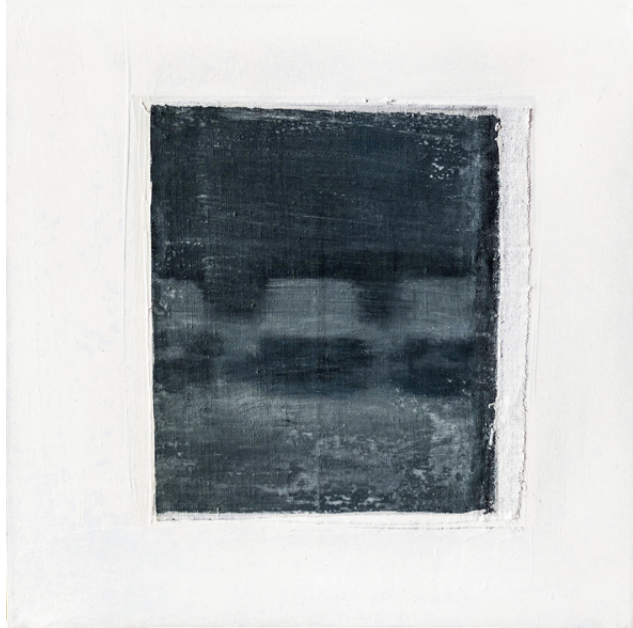


Bed
Mixed media
78 x 78 cm. 2015

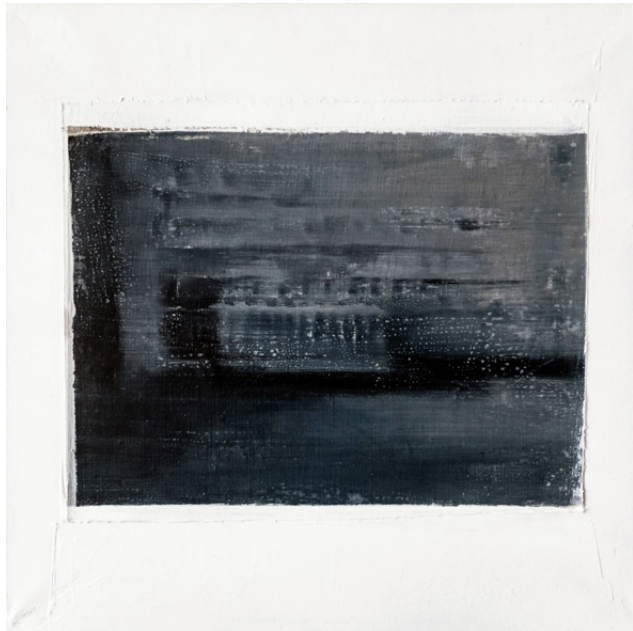


New Moon
Oil on canvas. 75 x 67 cm. 2016

No. 1-3



No. 4-6



No. 7-9



No. 10-12



Twelve Series
Oil, acrylic on canvas
50 x 50 cm each. 2016

IRINA BIRULYA



Characters of my paintings may be anything but... people. I am not as interested in live models. My true interest is to search for dramatic conflicts, to reveal personality, to guess histories of old things, or to unveil shades of mood of Petersburg's shaft-like courtyards, roofs, old-time gates, and splendid buildings barely discernible through fog or snowfall... But then, I think that in fact my paintings are full of people. It is only that they... have just left the table under an old greenish shade, have just milled coffee in that old hand-mill, for many years have been sitting behind that sewing machine or putting carefully that muzzle on a dog before going for a walk...

Bread
Oil on canvas
80 x 60 cm. 2000



ANASTASIA KIRILLOVA



Art is my inspiration. I love to immerse myself in art, to breathe it and be inspired by it, to bring images of this beautiful reality into my daily life. Inspiration doesn't come in an instant, it's like I slowly submerge myself in it. I don't envision a ready colour picture; I rather get a feel of future work, a kind of energy. The sort of energy I feel in paintings by Dürer, Picasso, Gauguin or other artists.

Likewise, each subject goes through different stages, it evolves in my mind gradually. Until I soak it up completely, I never begin to work with

the canvas. When the painting has fully ripened in my mind, I begin to work on the composition of space and colour combinations that can properly express my feelings and ideas. Sometimes I put a canvas aside and stay away from it for a long time, but I always come back — a painting must definitely be born no matter how long it takes!

Stylistically, I stay closer to the artists of the Paris School. Also, I admire the old masters of Northern Europe. My other great love is European medieval art, from there I take the exaggerated ornateness, naivety and fairy-tale spirit.

My Evening Tea on April 15 2019
Oil on canvas. 50 x 35 cm. 2019



DACE DĒLIŅA-LIPSKA



Vital presence of colours and my interest in the human, especially in the psychological portrayal of a woman, dominate in my paintings, graphic arts, costumes and figure drafts.

Observations of nature and outward manifestation of people's feelings inspire me to create new works.

Midsummer Baby
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 100 cm. 2018





Wolf
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 110 cm. 2016



Forest II
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 110 cm. 2016

Forest I
Acrylic on canvas
140 x 110 cm. 2016



YUNIEL DELGADO CASTILLO



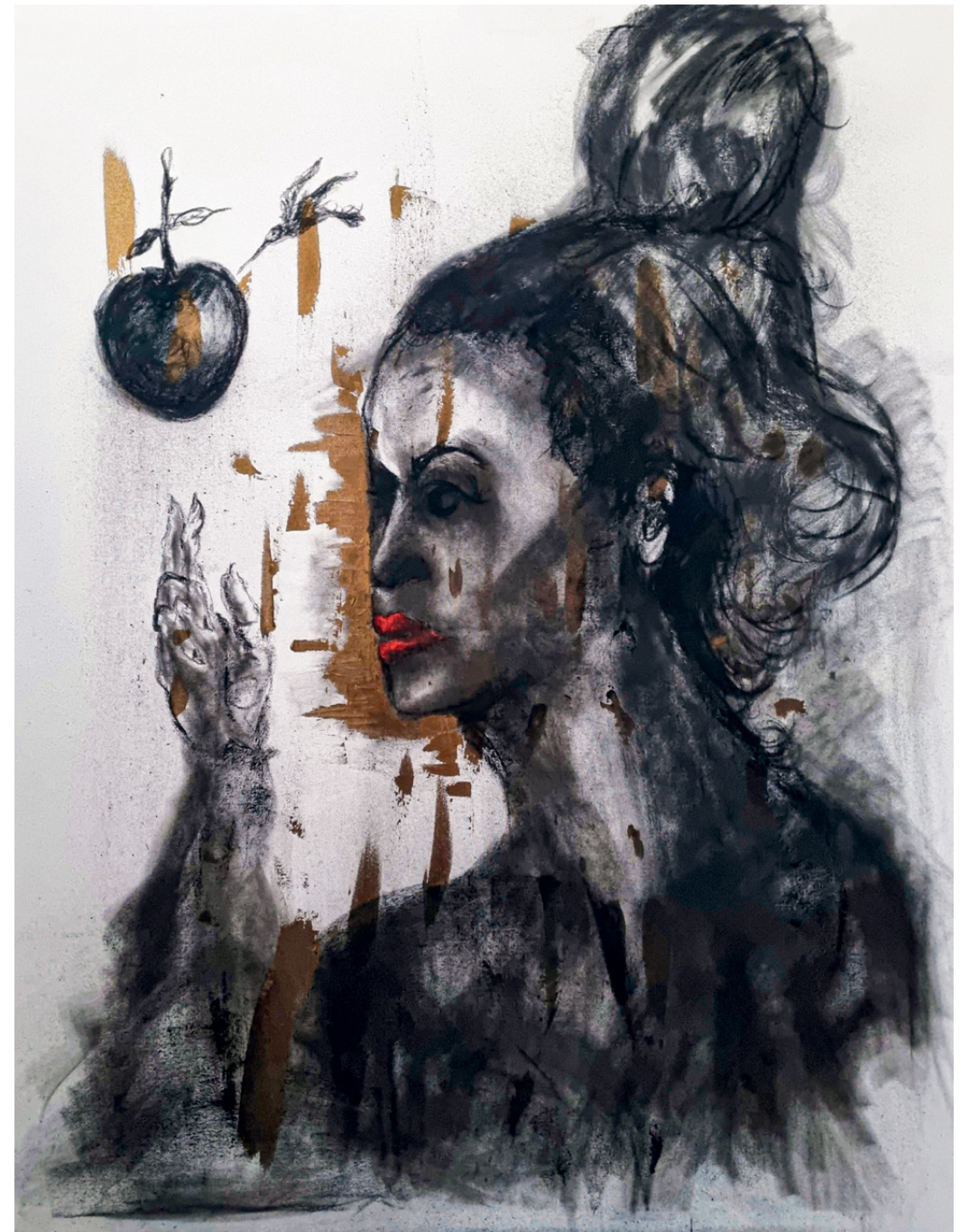
I have never believed in inspiration; for me the need to work on an image, or to reproduce an event from present or past, is no longer a creative act, but a pictorial exercise. I work out of pure love and instinct, I never make sketches or keep images in my head, everything is made spontaneously. When I work I am almost always in a state of trance, all of this is related to my feelings from the time I was a child.

My Hands Desperately
Seek the Touch of Freedom
Mixed on canvas
180 x 180 cm. 2021





Ferile Soil Bend
Charcoal and oil on canvas. 150 x 200 cm. 2021



The Voices of Two Souls Speak to the Apple
Charcoal and oil on canvas. 120 x 150 cm. 2021

ATIS JĀKOBSONS



My current art practice is deeply related to the exploration of mental heritage and archetypes in contemporary Western cultures, while at the same time addressing the myths and mysticism of the Far and Middle East. My artwork has also been largely influenced by my travels to India, Nepal, Mexico, Guatemala, North America, Iceland, Israel, Palestine and Jordan, where I isolated myself from civilisation on several occasions and took part in various authentic spiritual rites. These experiences have had a fundamental influence on my artistic practice, resulting in the development of my *psycho mystic* creative method.

The contemporary Western art tradition fascinates me by the way it uses ancient and arche-

typal codes found in the collective memory and genes.

Currently, the connection between the art I have created and my own mental experience is so close that it is difficult to separate them. I am interested in the research of spirituality and its manifestation in contemporary art forms. For several years, I have been studying ancient psychic practices in various theories – pagan traditions, shamanism, witchcraft, as well as religious practices and historical evidence, looking for signs that these practices and ideas are still present in contemporary thinking.

Untitled
Oil on canvas
53 x 42 cm. 2014



Untitled 44
Charcoal on paper
101 x 151 cm. 2015

Untitled 36
Charcoal on paper
111 x 151 cm. 2014



YUDAL FRANCISCO CRUZ



In my case, inspiration usually comes from vivid memories, films, classic paintings, good music, often from reading, and if nothing of the kind happens, I simply close my eyes, take a deep breath, open them again and start painting; there is always something inside to guide me.



A Bean on the Island
Oil on canvas. 90 x 70 cm. 2021



Apartment 33
Oil and canvas. 77 x 137 cm. 2021

PIPPA EL-KADHI BROWN



I have always felt deeply inquisitive about the matter of being; a topic which when questioned leaves me as terrified as it does inspired. It is as if every other organism exists with a natural purpose, a clear motive, with no philosophies to complicate the weird and wonderful journey from life to death.

Unlike others, our fear for life and/or death comes with various and complex emotions, rather than a singular primitive survival instinct. In some ways, I envy this blissful way of living,

freely and organically, with no capability of questioning one's own existence and unconscious of one's self.

The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch resonates in me this same sensation and inspires me to make paintings that celebrate the beauty of being, as well as confront it. Emphasising the notion that chaos and disorder are inevitably present within us as a species, I am moved by Bosch's intricate and frenzied interpretation of being.

Two of Hearts
Acrylic on canvas
148 x 148 cm. 2019



KLĀVS LORIS



My mother was a medical doctor and my father was a professional athlete (bobsleigher and athlete). My first great inspiration was my father who used to make little paper houses for us children and paint them. They looked beautiful, and we were really amazed then. My mother also encouraged us to be creative. Besides, we had art books at home that inspired me as well. I remember a book that frightened me. It was a Rozentāls book with drawings of Bible stories that looked scary, and I would sometimes get the book off the shelf on purpose to get frightened. Ever since I was a child, I loved to paint, draw and make things with my hands. My brother played the bassoon, my sister played the piano and I went to art school.

I get my inspiration from works of other artists, music, films and people. I definitely don't have

one favourite artist or a guiding example in art. For me there are so many, and I keep discovering new artists whose work I am inspired by. I love the process and persistent experiments with techniques and materials. I discover something new every time I paint. And it's very interesting to look back at how I worked in the past and how my art and ideas are progressing today.

I don't intentionally look for inspiration, it comes when it comes. Most often, you have to start working and the process itself is a trigger. When I paint, I work with different themes depending on what is important at a particular moment — it can be abstract compositions, figurative themes where the human element is crucial, or even existential and psychological subjects.

Europe Dancing in Eternal Darkness
Oil, textile pigment, varnish on canvas
170 x 140 cm. 2022



ANNA ANDRZHIEVSKAYA



When I was a child, my relatives used to say, “Anya is so good at drawing, she is sure to become an artist”. As for me, I wanted to be a banker and still wonder what and when exactly went wrong. I can’t single out any certain moment in my lifeline, I seem to have always been inclined to some sort of creative activities. I am inspired by images of the world around me; many of them look peculiar, and I try to tell a story about each one. The countryside around Liepāja is rather deserted compared to St Petersburg, but then there’s a lot of wildlife. Fields and houses are well maintained. You get the impression that dwellers hide themselves from the eye of a stranger, but no sooner you turn around than you see them. I try to imagine who they might be and what they do in their spare time.



Animal
Acrylic and oil on canvas
30 x 30 cm. 2022



Sunrise Melody
Acrylic and oil on canvas
120 x 150 cm. 2022

LĪGA ĶEMPE

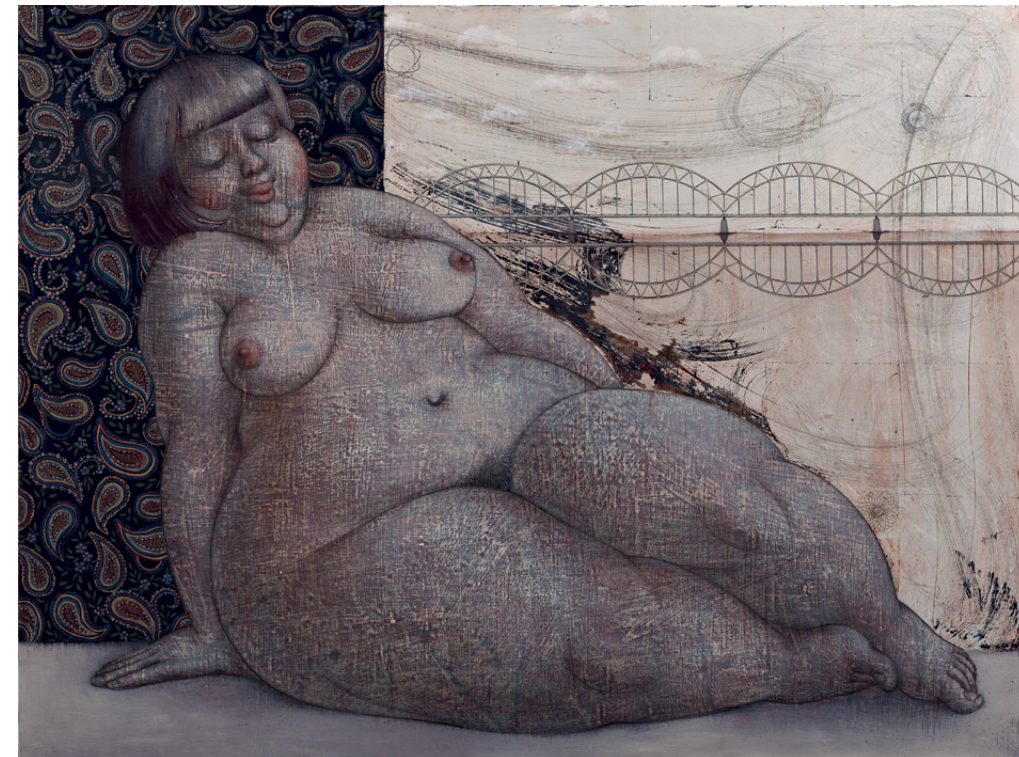
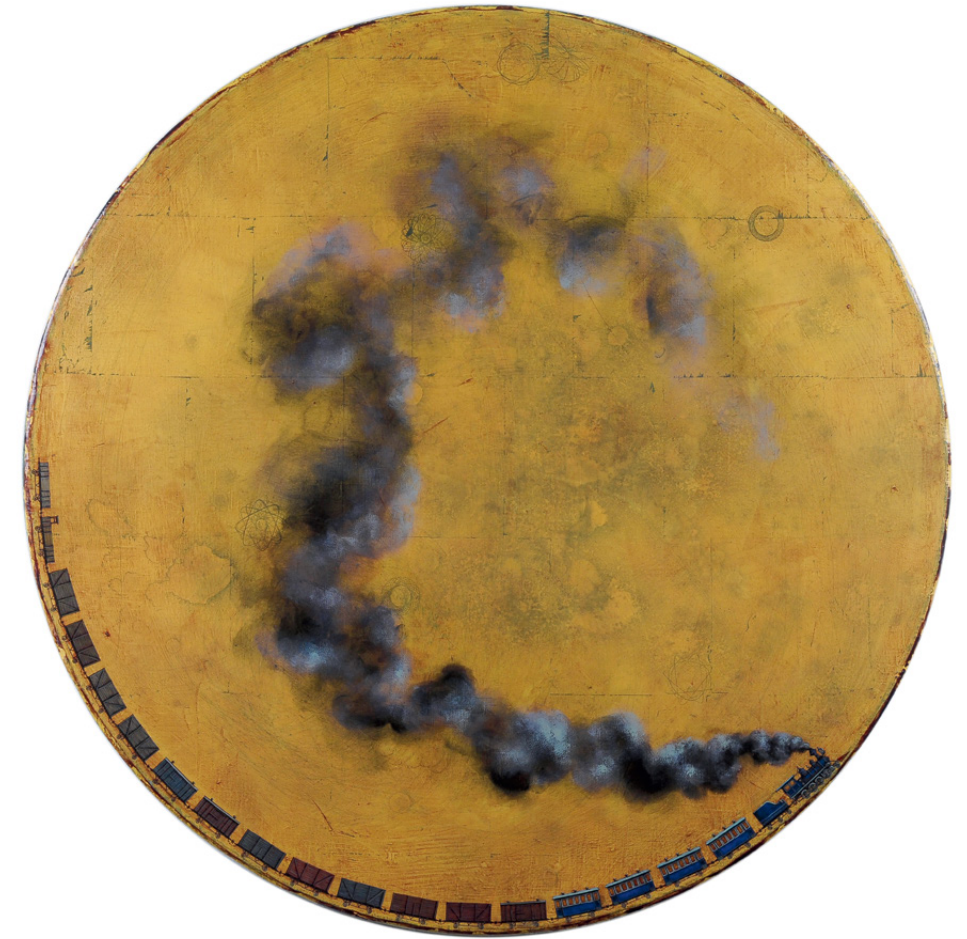


My inspiration is everyday life. I exist. My essence vibrates. I go where my nose points. What is on my mind is at the tip of my brush. Openness is my priority. Art allows me to see what is otherwise invisible in the world around us. I take painterly themes that I come across in everyday life and dress them in a prosaically natural environment of light and shadow, decorative elements and vibrant spaces of colour. Applying layer upon layer of paint to canvas in a deliberately old-fashioned manner, I am fascinated by the classic technique of oil painting, where textures reveal a clear expression of personal strokes and colour symbolism.

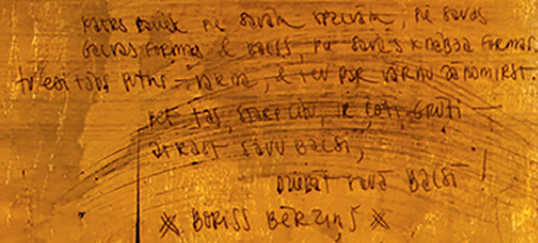
I choose tones that are pleasing to me from a wide palette of colours. There is a conversation between the tones on the canvas. My artistic signature. Flat painting combined with flexible form. A laborious process. Spontaneous images of fantasy and reflections of imagination in the frame of everyday life, a moment caught in the long flow of time, awakening feelings and emotions. Painting fascinates me — I compress stories into flat planes and small faces and artfully translate them into three dimensions.

Painting is not eternal, it is endless.

Orbit
Oil and metal on canvas
92 x 92 cm. 2016



Blueberry
Oil and metal on canvas
90 x 120 cm. 2017



LİGA KEMPE

MISHA LEVIN



Pictorial language has always been for me the main tool to communicate things that I deem important, things of interest and concern, things that I want to dig out of the depths of my inner world and reveal to the viewer. This instrument is of great importance to me and, for many years of working with it, has become an integral part of everyday life to the point that I cannot imagine my existence without it.

Besides, one of the main sources of thoughts and ideas behind my work is the feeling of confrontation. This feeling certainly goes back to the history of my family in relation to the Soviet authorities, and I, so to speak, followed up on it in the post-Soviet period. I felt this very clearly during my studies in the UK due to the exposure to an opposite value system and an apprecia-

tion of the mental and moral differences. As a result, I gained understanding of how important and relevant for my opposition stance were such topics as the history of the political past and the present and the theme of challenging the system and current realities of the consumer society. I reflect on the time that we live in and talk about those things that matter and are significant for the present reality. The visuality of modern society has always extremely attracted me and been inspiring for my work. This is where images, compositional solutions and color relations are born. Color itself is of major importance, and often the emotional perception of color or a color contrast becomes the starting point for an idea or concept as a kind of association with specific events, insights, and impressions.

Golden Medal
Oil on canvas
200 x 100 cm. 2017





Two Females Smoking
Oil on canvas. 110 x 180 cm. 2005



Europa Day
Oil on canvas. 200 x 300 cm. 2017



STOP is Forbidden
Oil on canvas. 180 x 300 cm. 2017



Rib-eye
From the Carpets series. Oil on linen. 152 x 204 cm. 2016

VLAD KULKOV



For a relatively long time I have been focusing on abstract expressionism. This artistic technique resembles *auto-painting*, where the artist depicts what is going on in his subconscious with minimal means of artistic expression, while actually hiding deeper thoughts behind them. I want to outline a vector for the creative process as well as for inaction. To create or, conversely, to hide in certain situations. To achieve a goal with minimal means or with limited effort, that is, to embrace the incomprehensible.

Untitled
Oil on canvas
140 x 110 cm. 2019





Untitled
Oil on canvas
195 x 275 cm. 2018



Dehiscence 1
Oil on canvas
57 x 90 cm. 2017



Dehiscence 2
Oil on canvas
57 x 90 cm. 2017



Wicked Irridescence
Oil on canvas
210 x 180 cm. 2017

VLAD KULKOV

ALAN KHATAGTI



I would call it the moment when you come up with a new visual image. All of a sudden, you see how a pictorial three-dimensional object can express and embody an idea, a thought or a meaning that has come across your mind. As if a new object comes into existence and helps the idea to take shape and substance and to become a part of the material world. No matter accepted or rejected, understood or misinterpreted, the idea goes on with its own life in objective reality.

What inspires me is life. The interaction of a person with the world around him, his perception of himself and the environment. A reflective person with his self assessment, on the one hand, and the transcendent reality beyond his control, on the other. My interest lies in visually expressing this collision. The collision of the Man, his actions, desires, fantasies — and the living breath of the Unknowable.



Conscience Above Judgment
Oil on canvas. 135 x 100 cm. 2016



Under a Vail
Sauce on paper. 84 x 74 cm. 2019



Mary
Oil on canvas
100 x 128 cm. 2016

EDVARTS LOGINS



Since graduating from the Latvian Academy of Art with a Bachelor's degree in painting, I have developed both a strong personal attachment to the practice of art and a set of skills that I can use to implement it. That said, I have some reservations when it comes to using them. I am still in search of something, a new medium or a new approach that I might consider reliable enough to make my practice rewarding. I find it difficult to talk to Westerners: they are loud, overconfident, and unaware of what lies beneath their impulses and values, which is a constant reminder of the common distrust we all share. This is a real predicament, and I wish my practice found a way around it, and that it had sufficiently pure and true qualities to prevent conscious acts of rebellion. Largely, this is what I am looking for. Perhaps the revelation has not yet come to me, so I don't look deeper into things that limit my work in this way. Perhaps I have distorted rationale and/or feelings, or my standards are poorly justified. Well, we'll see.

Although I admit that, I have mostly been trying to keep a safe distance between the contemporary art world and myself, I still believe that it has enormous value to others and is ultimately

irreplaceable. Surely not the most radical point of view out there... I see it as a means of filling in the gaps in our communication, which the verbal language simply cannot complete. For me, those gaps seem so large that I cannot imagine that any intimate understanding of each other can arise without the involvement of visual art. So I'm sure I need to have a reasonable basis for my work, conceptually and aesthetically, because the real, main result of a work of art has to be achieved in the mind of the viewer (or so I believe). This makes me rely on my knowledge of the viewer: what does the viewer really need?

What can I provide? I am aware of limitations when creating my work because I am not interested in visual art that is not primarily focused on the viewer, and I don't see any point in it. It raises the question, "What about artists who don't care if their work isn't exhibited? What if they make art to please themselves?", which for me ties in with a similar question, "Is talking to oneself a form of communication, or is it a method of comprehending one's own mentality and reasoning (besides just being an exercise that can be done)?" I don't presume to have a generally satisfactory answer to this question, but I at least think that the answer to the first question should correlate with the answer to the second. With an audience in mind, I try to explore all the various impressions people might have and store them in a kind of library that I work with, combining and recreating those impressions. It's easy for me to collect them. As for what I would like to convey with my work, I feel that simply casting doubt on values in which people tend to seek comfort can be more rewarding than making a statement about them.

The Image of a Woman
Mix on plywood
140 x 180 cm. 2021



ANDREY KUZMIN & ALEXSEY SEMICHOV



Inspiration is an ecstatic state. I am inspired by:

- The dramatic impact of nature;
- Changeability;
- Pessimistic self-reflection;
- Myth making;
- Human existence in an isolated society;
- Prevision and mystical insight;
- Anticipation and mystical insight;
- Overcoming my own underlying traumas.

That is what all of my work in recent years is about, that's where it came from. Anything can trigger an ecstatic state, that is, inspire – a casually dropped phrase or even a word, someone's face, a way of speaking, a movie I saw (no matter what the quality), a bend of a tree, a personal emotion. I cannot describe the state of inspiration itself, because it requires at least a minimal understanding. And how do you understand something that is outside you, beyond your limits? [by Andrey Kuzmin]



Aerodynamics
Alexsey Semichov & Andrey Kuzmin
Oil on canvas. 200 x 220 cm. 1998

REVIEWS

BUILDING ART COLLECTION AS AN INTELLECTUAL ADVENTURE

“... the ripple effect is huge when something like this happens ...”
(Google.com)

It seems an almost impossible mission to describe a collector with the right words. And just what are they, art collectors? It has already been several years since I met Raivis Zabis, a businessman, art enthusiast and collector. If someone asked me how I would describe him as a collector, I would probably say that I don't know. I should mention, however, that art is something essential to Raivis and that it adds significant value to his life. His primary driving force seems to be his own curiosity: I would even name it *a thirst for knowledge*, and for a reason. Raivis knows how to see artists and their potential before others have noticed them. He has a gift to spot the artistic potential where institutions and curators haven't yet set foot. I might say that Raivis is more like a detective and a traveller, or even a XIXth-century traveller who went on an expedition to find one thing, only to discover something else along the way.

Perhaps that is where we should start. A collector is formed, first and foremost, by his approach to art and the world in general, that is, how much he is attracted to the new, how much interested and involved he is in the artist's creative process, when and how he follows it, and whether he supports it. Raivis' concept of collecting is inseparable from his idea of per-

ceiving, creating and experiencing art.

He not only “collects” art pieces but also supports their creation by providing a place and a space at his artist residency near Liepāja, with the idea that it will expand as an incubator for art and culture in the coming years. As stated on the website of his collection, “When the purchase of artworks goes beyond accidental purchases and assumes a character of deliberate and more or less permanent activity, the process itself becomes a kind of art. The art of buying art.”¹

In my discussions with Raivis, I have noticed his increased interest in the art process, particularly in painting. However, he is not a blind follower of current trends in the art world, a visitor of biennials and art fairs or a buyer of uncommon artists' works, but rather a careful and considered developer of his own taste. Perhaps the cultural environment of St Petersburg, where Raivis spent several years, was the starting point for his affair with art.

In the last decade, the collector's role in the Latvian art scene has undeniably increased, and the art world has been dominated by several individuals who acquire contemporary art. While entrepreneur Jānis Zuzāns, who purchased a

number of works from the *Candy Bomber* exhibition of contemporary paintings in 2008, entered the art market in the late 2000s, several other local collectors, such as Māris Vitols, Vita Liberte, the Teterevs couple, and others, followed in his footsteps in recent years.

Notably, the collector in Latvia today preserves, in his own way, contemporary art for future generations, thereby filling a niche that should be served by a non-existent contemporary art museum. Although contemporary art is sporadically acquired by the Latvian National Museum of Art, the collector is able to buy it much more freely and often more effectively, to better respond to current trends, and to create exciting and original art combinations, sometimes even stepping into the shoes of a curator.

Obviously, this does not make an artistic act any less important, as Raivis pointed out in an interview. Collecting as a phenomenon, however, should also be viewed critically, given that collecting is ultimately a matter of a certain individual taste. Assembling a collection is based to a large extent on personal subjective criteria, so a collector cannot be expected to cover the entire art scene or be familiar with regular artistic practices. But since the collector is not isolated from the general ecosystem of the art world and is an essential participant in it, he also has a certain responsibility for the art process and, consequently, for the way how society consumes and perceives art.

Raivis keeps emphasising that his collection is largely based on his love for painting, a classical

yet contemporary artistic medium that has been experiencing a renaissance in the last decade. According to art theorist Isabelle Graw, “... from the early modern period to the present, painting has been continuously associated with intellectual capacities: it has either been thought to display knowledge ... or assumed to possess the power to do things and act.”²

Since the historical avant-garde of the XXth century, painting as a medium has expanded its boundaries and has gone beyond plain painting on canvas that deals with exploring an object. In a broader sense, the definition of painting, along with the artistic process itself, should include the conceptual environment or the idea as well as its “agents”, that is, institutions, gallery owners, collectors, critics, and the like, who, apart from the artist himself, are also involved in the process.

The idea of the canvas as a plane has changed, as can be clearly seen, for example, in paintings by contemporary artist Katharina Grosse, whose work Raivis also greatly admires.

While Raivis sticks to the classical parameters of painting, with its language dominated by the presence of craftsmanship, emotional and sensual component, and figurativeness (multi-layered, but also abstract themes), his choice shows a desire to open up to broader experimentation with pictorial language, and a certain fascination with painting as a form.

“Visible brushstrokes and glossy oil paint can trigger a haptic longing to touch the painting's

1. About the RZ Collection <https://rzcollection.com/about> [retrieved: 07.07.2022].

2. Isabelle Graw. The Love of Painting. Genealogy of a Success Medium. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), p. 12.

BUILDING ART COLLECTION AS AN INTELLECTUAL ADVENTURE

surface ... this kind of haptic events can give rise to what I call "vitalistic fantasies": for example, the belief, going back to painting theorists in antiquity, that paintings bear some resemblance to their creators. Despite actually being absent, the artist is imagined into the picture she or he has created and seems to maintain a ghostly presence within the work."³

This idea can be related to Raivis' approach of staying in close (even constant) contact with the artists whose work is included in his collection. Such communication, discussion and knowledge of artistic practice seem to add value to artworks in the collection. Everything is complemented by Raivis' belief in the artist's growth and career progression. This is something that can be described as a potential investment in the future with a certain risk premium.

Painting for Raivis is like an intellectual exercise that is exciting to engage in, exploring the relations of this medium with both the historical and the contemporary. Below I will review a selection of works by some Latvian artists from the RZ Collection, looking at how their identities and aesthetic views form a mutual connection, and how they fit into the current processes of contemporary Latvian painting.

The RZ Collection features artists from different generations. Many of them are not the most prominent figures on the contemporary art scene. It says a lot about Raivis' aesthetic taste as a collector: he is not so much focused on contemporary art trends, but rather prefers

a broader perspective and pays attention to marginal names too, for example, Dace Dēliņa-Lipska with her vivid images of Suiti women or Aldis Dobenbergs who specialises in expressive images of birds. You won't find these artists at contemporary art exhibitions in Riga; their work is most commonly seen at local art museums in Liepāja or Valmiera.

Even so, Raivis has noticed and highly appreciated the work of these artists, no matter that they follow the values of classical painting with the emphasis on the effective pictorial image. In a similar way, Kaspars Perskis uses the language of academic painting. However, his work, like the Mannerist experiments of Atis Jākobsons who explored the ideal beauty, attracts by a cultivated form that appeals to the viewer with the free expression of brushstrokes and romantic images.

Daiga Krūze, whose pictorial vision with its purity, dynamic colour relations and inner paradoxes is highly regarded by the local school of painting, also creates this kind of ideal imaginary landscape.

Sandra Strēle, a younger generation artist, addresses similar landscape themes too, but her paintings lack Daiga's fluidity and intuitive emotionality. Sandra rather focuses on schematic architectural landscapes where the scene is structured and organised to an extent that sometimes it may look like an image from a design magazine.

The collection also features works by Lauris Ozols and Klāvs Loris. These young artists, although fairly new to painting, show interesting qualities of pictorial language: the ability to go beyond the mainstream academic school of painting and address new challenges. Their presence in the collection shows that Raivis likes to broaden his horizons in painting by ac-

tively following the latest trends and including those names that are still at the beginning of their artistic career.

Raivis' collection is not homogeneous and is constantly evolving; his artistic choices are often contrasting and full of paradoxes. This is his signature collecting approach and style.

3. Ibid, p. 20.



MAIJA RUDOVSKA

CUBAN ART COLLECTING

In the article *Phenomenon of Cuban Art* on page 020, we examined the main stages and drivers of Cuban art, which are typically reviewed and debated by art historians. Coming to the special nature of art collecting, we change the angle slightly in order to look at the personality and interests of the collector himself. After all, trends and movements in art are not only determined by the supply coming from artists, but also by the demand created by the public who buy their work.

Perhaps the first approach of many collectors to Cuban art was precisely in search of traditional Cuban clichés: tobacco, rum, exotic beaches and feminine sensuality. On other occasions, this interest has been to discover the particularities of a country that lives in the XXIst century under the influence of socialism as a social regime. What in many cases begins as an approach to Cuba with a political touch, ends with the discovery of its art and culture.

Most collectors who turned to Cuban art were probably mostly passive observers attracted by its new ideas, polemics of politics, culture and society. Cuban cultural politics tried to promote art that accompanied and represented the achievements of the revolution. However, Cuban art has avoided censorship by using resources that characterize it today, such as insight, double meaning, satire and irony. It is a critical art that confronts both reality and the viewer and makes him a participant in its questioning.

In the mid-1980s, the early entry of some Cuban artists into the world of major New York galleries and auction houses was provided by foreign intermediaries — tourists, diplomats and some gallery owners who bought Cuban works at very

low prices from artists, galleries and projects of the Cuban Cultural Property Foundation. The Cuban Cultural Assets Fund (El Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales) is a company belonging to the Ministry of Culture of Cuba with more than 40 years of experience. As part of its dual economic and cultural mission, over the last decade it has taken on new roles in its efforts to present, promote and market works of plastic and applied art and related interior design and decoration services at national and international level.

Some collectors sincerely believed in the patrimonial value of Cuban art, and a small sector of the émigré community showed a certain sensitivity to the subject because of its sentimental value. A few dealers and gallery owners bet on Cuban art because of the profitability of the business and the low prices compared to the rest of the world, rather than the value of the work itself.

The Havana Biennial, in my opinion, is another key factor in understanding Cuban art collecting. The Biennial, which emerged in the early 1980s, placed the island once again in the focus of global attention by staging a large-scale event and promoting the art of the region. The number of foreign visitors, especially from the United States, was increasing from one Biennial to the other. The success of this event encouraged gallerists and art dealers to visit the Cuban capital in search of artists whose works could be promoted and sold abroad.

Of particular note is the case of German entrepreneur Peter Ludwig, who visited the Third Havana Biennial in 1989 and in the following years assembled one of the largest and most important collections of contemporary Cuban art. He began

acquiring works by Cuban artists and inviting them to take up residencies abroad in order to encourage their development. Ludwig also brought the Havana Biennial to Aachen, an event that made Cuban art very visible abroad. More than a fair valuation of the Cuban art market by collectors, the so-called *boom* in Cuban art was due to the figure of Peter Ludwig, as well as to the superb management of the auction market and the ease of dealing in the 1980s.

And now I would like to turn to the RZ Collection. I was happy to get to know Raivis Zabis and his collection, if only in absentia, but many of my Cuban artist friends know him personally and well. I was very curious to find out what exactly attracted Raivis to Cuban art. What do we know about the Cuban part of his collection?

There are currently seven Cuban artists in the RZ Collection out of a total of fifty, which I believe is no small number. Most of the works were acquired in the Tenth of the XXIst century. Raivis went to Cuba, where he first met Ítalo René Expósito and Humberto Díaz. Then, through the Internet, he got to know the other artists, who later visited him at his residency in Latvia.

Let's talk a bit about each of the artists.

The works of Ítalo René Expósito have a unique personality, these are paintings full of symbolism, with allusions to existential issues. Religion, landscape, portraits, nudes and still lifes are some of his favourite themes. His work is half-way between Expressionism and Symbolism: rapid brushstrokes, vivid colours, impasto and altered perspectives full of symbols that become metaphors for a critical mind. Sexuality and eroticism are ever-present in his works, and even

his religious images are full of nudes, ecstasy and characters in obvious sexual poses.

Adonis Muiño, for his part, also presents works rooted in pictorial tradition, timeless paintings that play with the viewer through symbols. In this case, the white rabbit becomes a clear allusion to *Alice in Wonderland*. Dark images that hide a disturbing mystical element, arising from his imaginary world, from his deepest inner concerns: the surrealness of these works contrasts with the reality and uncertainty of today's world, or, more locally, his native Cuba.

José Gabriel Capaz is another young Cuban artist in this collection. His works show a clear reference to the history of art, especially Neo-figuration and Expressionism; however, his poetics are totally anchored to the contemporary world and the current problems affecting human beings today. His paintings reflect spaces that emerge from his imagination where he configures a holo-caustic reality; landscapes and characters that convey desolation and pessimism largely owing to the impressive colour violence. In Capaz's work, fire, wood and suffering faces are constant symbols that question the contemporary individual and his behaviour, the problems that surround him, dehumanisation and general discontent.

Yudel Francisco Cruz's work also belongs to the Expressionist tradition. His paintings thrill with their shocking, sarcastic and wild character, poetic power, symbolism of images, parody and sarcasm. Far from any notion of perfection, his works are characterised by vigorous strokes, blurred edges, affecting gestures and use of a chromatic palette that is both disturbing and refined. Yudel's phantasmagorical figures and frequent use of animals, such as the hyena, give

his paintings a range of symbols that allude to the predatory behaviour and habits of today's human beings.

The work of Yuniel Delgado Castillo, also influenced by Expressionist painting, is characterised by a poetics that shows a deep commitment to the social, political and cultural concerns of society. Just like an archaeologist, he delves into sensitive areas of reality and deals with delicate issues of day-to-day life. The characters he creates are somewhere between reality and fiction, nameless figures who become constructs of his most intimate concerns. Two main features characterise Yuniel's work: the colour, which on many occasions even acquires corporeality; and the line, which gives his characters a strong expressiveness in an animal-like instinct. Irony, humour, hypnotism and metaphor are all tools of his artistic expression.

While most of the artworks in this collection are paintings, there are also several sculptures and installations. Examples of these include the sculptures by Liudmila Lopez, each representing a musical instrument and a shoe, a symbol that has been part of fashion since time immemorial. Her pieces reflect a play with meanings and forms, and these clear allusions to music and femininity are what make Liudmila's work so poetic.

Humberto Diaz's work knows no limits; space interacts in a constant dialogue with architecture and the environment. His works are always linked to the surrounding reality and the problems that concern him; they are a reflection of his inner self: a mixture of chaos and stability. There is a restrained movement in his poetics. The works seem to be alive, interacting with the viewer, making him a participant in their dynamics.

Humberto is interested in playing with materials, forms and structures. Sometimes it seems that the laws of physics do not exist in his work, as he defies gravity, time and matter, while at the same time he is interested in ideas of balance, false stability, fragility and tension, generating diverse concern for the common phenomena of our daily life that often go unnoticed by the public.

What unites these works by Cuban artists in the RZ Collection, in my opinion, is precisely the diversity of their ideas. As in the entire history of Cuban art, each stage is shaped by different interests and personalities, and this small example is no exception; artists of different generations, using different ways of expression, share their particular vision of the world.

When I asked Raivis about his interest in Cuban art, he told me that he was deeply impressed by Cubans' openness, cordiality, mutual help and active social life; their ability to live for today, to enjoy the simplest things; their incredible creativity and strong charisma, confidence in themselves and in the strength of their talent; Cubans remain, in the hardest times and in very difficult circumstances, extremely cheerful and sunny people, full of creative ideas.

It is incredibly interesting to discuss art, especially when you talk to someone who is in love with the art of your compatriots. I know from the interview with Raivis that the artist's personality is very important to him when choosing works of art, and one of the things he is always interested in is the theme of inspiration.

What do we know about inspiration? It is a state of ultimate excitement that activates all emotional and physical forces. In a state of creative

inspiration, one is carried along by a *flow*, which is accompanied by visions and revelations. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato, reflecting on the state of inspiration, called it *ex stasis*, going beyond oneself, entering the transcendent world. To describe creative inspiration, artists use the same words that describe any subjective experience of inspiration: ecstasy, euphoria, spiritual joy, love, and a state of inner freedom.

In my opinion, what Raivis said about Cubans, what most foreigners who come to Cuba notice

— the temperament, character, lifestyle and self-expression of Cubans — is very similar to the way a state of inspiration is usually described.

No matter how the character and lifestyle of Cubans may have evolved, be it due to climatic, geographical, historical or other conditions, it is impossible to overlook their unique nature. Could a special power of inspiration in the air of the Island be the main reason that attracts collectors' attention to Cuban art?



GABRIELA HERNÁNDEZ BRITO

KEY TO THE COLLECTION

According to some researchers, people are genetically predisposed to collecting, which seems to be kind of instinctive¹. For thousands of years, people collected not only objects that were of practical value, but also those that could not be directly used for material purposes and yet had some special properties. For example, the inhabitants of the Hyena Cave (Arcy-sur-Cure, France) collected stones and shells of unusual shape and colour, which demonstrates that our distant ancestors had a sense of beauty.

These days, deliberation about the phenomenon of collecting and the figure of the collector is becoming increasingly relevant. When acquiring artworks, collectors get the right to interpret, systematize, promote, and preserve them, all of which has a direct influence on the concept of art as such. This influence may be expressed either in a change in artistic values and their hierarchy or in a distortion of evaluation criteria, when, say, market considerations (how much an art piece costs) prevail over aesthetic judgement (what we expect from an artwork and why we like it).

The collector in today's world is a mysterious figure staying in the background, and the viewer can't help having questions on what guides collectors' choices and on the personality of a collector. There are not so many examples of a collection of contemporary art that, while representing a variety of cultures, also allow drawing rational distinctions based on the geography of works. A more common case is a geographically based mono-collection that is aimed to support domestic artists working here and now (or a little earlier).

1. Tatiana Nesvetailo, art expert, senior researcher at the State Russian Museum

Even more interesting is a collection that actually has two extensive composite parts, Latvian and Russian, with the inclusion of works by Cuban artists.

The Russian side of this collection is represented mainly by St Petersburg painters, Alexander Dashevsky, Vlad Kulkov and Vladimir Migachev, which is most likely due to fact that Raivis Zabis, the mastermind and founder of the collection, spent quite a long time in this city, where he was getting acquainted with the artistic environment and institutional structure. A certain collector's toolkit that was acquired then and there had a major impact on the principle of selecting artists and works.

St Petersburg has always been considered a kind of pictorial Mecca, a triumph of colour and, in most cases, an obligatory artistic school base. It's curious enough that although artists living and working in the northern capital commonly treat the latter as a cornerstone, sometimes it becomes a point of controversy, prompting an internal argument on how important it is for an artist to follow pictorial principles. Thus, Alexander Dashevsky's project *A Pack Of Malingerers/J10*, timed to the anniversary of the author's collaboration with his alma mater, Anna Nova Gallery, and conducted under the supportive guidance of curator Anastasia Kotyleva, conveys the following message: "Easel figurative painting on the territory of contemporary art is always under suspicion... Doesn't its mimetic nature help to discourage the viewer, accusing him to passive contemplation, enjoyment of mesmerizing resemblance? Doesn't it fit too

easily into the interior, indulging the tastes of collectors?"²

And this is an important reference point for looking at the pictorial part of the RZ Collection. On the one hand, we see works by artists keen on colour and canvas painting or works created in the phase when artists were keen on such; on the other, there are attempts to break out and go beyond the canvas by experimenting with materials, for example, a work by Semyon Motolyanets representing an art object of natural stone, created following his stay in the Latvian art residency.

Another example is Anna Zholud who is represented in the collection specifically by paintings, although she is more known for her multi-piece metal installations, which look like images drawn in space with an imaginary black marker.

Worth noting are subtle, touching and very personal paintings by Nadezhda Kosinskaya, who since then has evolved into making much larger pieces with nails, as if drawing pencil lines by placing nails on a surface. This collection presents several drawings and a painting by the artist.

These experiments with the space of the canvas, or rather going beyond it, are echoed by works of Liudmila López Domínguez and Humberto Díaz in the Cuban part of the collection.

Also interesting to note is the line of body images in the collection. Namely, figurative painting with a well-defined contour line in works by the already mentioned Dashevsky, Kosinskaya and

Podmarkova who also lived and worked in St Petersburg at the time when her works became part of the collection. Then there is a body image by Lauris Ozols (with a vigorous colour spot), as well as female images of Ilgvar Zalāns, Ieva Caruka, Dace Dēliņa-Lipska and others.

Worth mentioning too are numerous landscapes in the collection. On the Latvian side, it is probably due to the fact that this genre is particularly well-developed at the Latvian Academy of Arts in Riga, as testified by works of a number of rectors of the Academy. For artists who lived or were trained in St Petersburg and Russia in general, this is also a common genre, as it echoes the format of painters' training — lessons at art schools and colleges that help students to master painting techniques.

Of particular importance is the correlation of the pictorial language in the Russian and Latvian parts of the collection. The language is extremely similar, a complex colour scheme and a dark, sometimes gloomy palette.

Said likeness may be due to centuries of cultural ties or a similarity of mentality; otherwise, it may be a good illustration of how the figure of the collector directly influences the artistic process which in this case is a multi-geographical selection of technically and semantically close works. One way or the other, it is fair to say that both parts of the collection are remarkably consistent, that they are technically close and conceptually complement each other.



MARIA TURKINA

2. Curator's text by Anastasia Kotyleva for the project at Anna Nova Gallery.

NOT A REVIEW

By definition, a review involves a judgement or a discussion of qualities of the object under study, a look at its good and bad points. Is a review of an art collection feasible? Not in the full sense of the word. For the simple reason that a collection cannot have weak and strong points. Art collections — private or public, large or small — have for centuries been shaped by a variety of circumstances, personal tastes, ambitions, state policies, chance events, systematic work, and often all of these combined. The largest collections, usually state-owned and with a rather long history, be it the Louvre in Paris, the Art Gallery in Berlin or the Hermitage in St Petersburg, have seen all of the above, and every turn in their fate has affected the composition of collections. Is it possible to assess the quality of these collections? No. The only thing we can say about them is that they are huge!

With a smaller collection size, the problem of evaluation is even more pronounced. A small collection, what is it exactly? Raivis Zabis, speaking in an interview about the first catalogue of his collection, said that in 2015 it had about a hundred works. Was it small then? Now that the collection has crossed the three hundred items mark, can it be seen as big? If you come to collect Kiefer, or if you get passionate about installation art and attempt to collect it, even one work is already a lot. Just in terms of footprint. So again, it's all about subjectivity and approximation.

Names? Cost? Museum worthiness (the latter usually refers to the artistic quality of an artwork)? All these criteria change over time. In XVIIIth-century Rome, there was no market for authentic antique sculpture fragments, as no one really needed hands, torsos or heads; the concept of a fragment's value did not exist yet,

that had to wait until the XIXth century. Antiques dealers worked tirelessly to churn out “antique Frankensteins”, offering *Antinouses* and *Venuses* for good money to the European royalty, especially enlightened rulers, who took to the fashion of having Vatican-like sculpture galleries. In the XIXth century, the word *impressionism* first appeared in a critical article on Monet and kept having exclusively negative connotations for quite a while. Or, moving forth to the XXth century, let us take an example of Vladimir Serov, the Soviet artist who was greatly favoured by the authorities. President of the USSR Academy of Arts, People's Artist of the USSR, two-time winner of the Stalin Prize (1948, 1951); his name was synonymous with prestige and success throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the XXIst century, however, hardly anyone would care to open an album with reproductions of his works as he went from being famous to becoming odious. Forever? Who knows!

The value of works, present or future, is also a separate matter. European and American auctions often sell works by famous artists, and they sell better and more expensive year by year. Frida Kahlo's sales record is \$34, 9 million (2021), Monet's is 110 million (2019). Kahlo created only about 250 works, and most of them are now owned by various institutions. Monet lived a long life, he was a very prolific painter, and quite a lot of his work ended up in private collections; and voilà — now what, not to collect works by artists who work slowly?

Thus, step by step, we have come to conclude that the best one can do in respect of any collection is to describe it in a fairly brief and general manner. Always remembering that the description will be relevant for only a certain while, as

art collections tend to grow and change, sometimes in the most bizarre ways.

SO WHAT DOES THE RZ COLLECTION LOOK LIKE IN 2022?

The collection has a lot of paintings.

Paintings of the kind where artists are fascinated by material capabilities, if not outright adventures, of oil paint, by its ability to convey or imitate physical properties of surfaces and materials. Oil on canvas. Two instruments to help create illusions that are different for each viewer. The materials for *trompe l'oeil*. The paintings in the RZ Collection blend together like pieces of glass in a toy kaleidoscope to create patterns and tell narratives of the thorny paths of XXIst century art.

The collection features works by Latvian, Russian and Cuban artists.

It's not a frequent combination. Still, an interesting common denominator can be seen here. All these countries went through a period — the

1930s in Russia, the 1940s in Latvia, and the 1960s in Cuba — when the natural course of art's evolution was broken by Socialist Realism, and contemporary artists have to overcome these traumas of the past or put up with them. Strange as it may seem, all of them have to cope, one way or another, with consequences of a conversation that took place as far back as a century and a half ago between Vladimir Lenin and Clara Zetkin, in which Lenin made it clear that he preferred the classics.

The collection is evolving and growing.

Just like the collar demands a striped sofa (as in *Life and Collar* by Nadezhda Teffi), a large assemblage of art requires publicity and sometimes also a kind of institutional arrangement. Exhibitions, new acquisitions, new reviews — it all starts to take on a life of its own and dictate terms to the owner. Well, there you have it, dear collector, that's a foretaste of the future. Art is a powerful thing. But then, you must already know that much.



KATARINA LOPATKINA

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF ART

There are so many avenues open for a collector today, but one of the most prestigious and popular is collecting art. Collecting, of course, is not the same for all, as it tends to have different purposes and objectives. There's an academic debate about two fundamental types of collecting, and art professionals use different terms, collection and selection, to distinguish them.¹ The difference lies in that an art collection is created within a certain semantic context; it has to be bound by some kind of common logic, internal purpose or essence. An art selection, on the other hand, usually consists of items that are not connected in any way other than belonging to same line or genre of art.

Collectors use different principles of selection, and the easiest one is whether you like an item or not. That's the way how the RZ Collection started, which is what Raivis Zabis told us in the first catalogue. Has anything changed in eighteen years? Is the RZ Collection, formally speaking, a selection, or has it grown to become a collection unified by a certain inner meaning? Not claiming to be exactly right, I would venture to express my view, and would be happy to discuss it with anybody who might be interested. My opinion is that the RZ Collection can definitely be called a collection of contemporary art. How could I prove this? I'm afraid that, unfortunately, any brief explanation would not sound too convincing. Answers to such questions are usually read between the lines and have to be time-tested.

1. Pearse, Susan M. On collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in European Tradition. Published 1999 by Routledge.

I would say that the unifying inner meaning of the RZ Collection lies in the relationship and communication between the collector and artists, in the events taking place around artworks of the collection, in how the collection evolves, and, just as important, how it has affected the owner and how it keeps influencing others.

In this Catalogue and Guidebook, we did our best to discuss this issue quite openly and in detail. Even if you take only a quick look at the contents, you will surely notice that the cornerstone of the RZ Collection, the focal point of discussion and consideration in the course of forming the collection, has always been the theme of creative inspiration. It is just as appealing to the collector, as to the artists and art critics who work with us. As I see it, the interest in the subject of inspiration was one of the main incentives for the selection and acquisition of artworks, and became the kernel of the interesting and unique RZ Collection.

You must have seen the fascinating ripple effect caused by a stone thrown into the water. Ripples expanding across the water, spreading out over a larger and larger area, sometimes covering the whole surface of water. We think it is a great metaphor to compare the ever-expanding ripples across the water to a spreading effect of inspiration and its influence on people's lives. Inspiration of an artist gets embodied in an art piece; it is transmitted to viewers, delights and inspires them. Yet more viewers get encouraged to come to love art, to recognise and explore it, to speak, write and sing about it, to enrich their

lives with it, to acquire and preserve it, to found museums, galleries and exhibition halls, to bring art to yet more people and further inspire them to be creative; and finally, to inspire all of us to think and reflect on everything that happens

to and around us, to make sense of our lives. To paraphrase an idea once expressed by Albert Einstein, we could put it this way: "Strive not to succeed, but to make your life meaningful".



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