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A guide to Israeli Art and Israeli Artists

Studio Visit: Zoya Cherkassky

Sarah Penguin, October 22, 2013



Last week I finally visited Zoya Cherkassky's studio, after my friend and colleague Rufina Valsky, had made the introduction.

Cherkassky's studio is located at the "Kiryat Hamelacha" compound in the South of Tel Aviv.

The studio is based in the same building as the gallery which represents her, Rosenfeld. Upon entering the studio, I could immediately notice, thanks to

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the amount of works scattered on the walls and piled in every corner of the space, that Cherkassky works hard.



During my visit Cherkassky told me about the two projects she is currently working on.

“Aliyah-91” is a humorous project”, says Zoya Cherkassky about the body of works she’s been working on since 2009.

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This project depicts the life of the people who came to Israel from ex-USSR, before and after their “Aliyah”, their emigration to Israel. “The before and the after is bad to the same extent... it’s all bad”, as Cherkassky puts it.

And indeed, when I observed the preparatory sketches and the paintings in process for this series, I didn’t know if to laugh or to cry.



"Humiliation at School" (Part 2) 2011, acrylic and markers on canvas, 30x40cm

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Humiliation at School" (Part 2) 2011, acrylic and markers on canvas, 30x40cm

The caricatures-like figures and satirical situations described in her works, seem to be a way for the artist to deal with taboos and burning subjects related to the Israeli society and culture.

At one point I ask Cherkassky if the works tell her personal story (Cherkassky emigrated to Israel at the age of 14 from USSR). She denies my assumption, telling me that her story is not that interesting and that the works are about her community.

This opened up a key for me to understand her work. Cherkassky's pieces are about her community but also about communities in general.

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Jaffa Dalet, 2012, oil on canvas, 150x200 cm

Look for example at this painting of Russian youngsters hanging out on a bench in Jaffa, and behind them two muslim women walking.

It's a culture clash, like many of Cherkassky's paintings.

The second project Cherkassky is currently involved in and working on, is the group she has created, the "New Barbizon", together with four other artists: Natalia Zourabova, Anna Lukashovsky, Asia Lukin and Olga Kundina

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The “New Barbizon” painting in Rabbin Square, Tel Aviv

The group’s name derives from the “Barbizon School” which was working in the 19th century in the Barbizon village in France, painting outside, “en plein air”, as a reaction to the period’s dominating Romantic Movement.

The artists of the New Barbizon meet to paint outside. What started out for Cherkassky as a way of working on her painting technique, as a means to depart from her previous “animation-like” style and to “be calibrated” as she explains, has slowly become an artistic project of its own.

The results, like Cherkassky’s entire oeuvre, are striking, relevant and powerful.

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"Rabin Square", 2013, oil on canvas, 120x190 cm

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"The ceaper buing", 2013, oil on canvas, 60x80 cm