

FORT GANSEVOORT



Zoya Cherkassky *Soviet Childhood*

Opening On:
Thursday, May 2, 6 – 8 PM
May 2 – June 15, 2019

Fort Gansevoort presents *Soviet Childhood*, the first solo exhibition in the United States featuring the work of Zoya Cherkassky. Through the depiction of the quotidian lives of the final generation of Soviet children, Cherkassky creates a nostalgic and approachable portrait of the Soviet Union. One can relate to the banality of these scenes, with only the fashions and details peppered throughout disclosing the strange time and place in which Cherkassky and her subjects lived.

Cherkassky was born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1976 while the country was still under the control of the Soviet Union. She and her family immigrated to Israel when she was fifteen years old in 1991, the year of the Soviet Union's collapse. By painting her personal narrative, Cherkassky's work is intrinsically political and complex; only to be amplified by her marriage to a Nigerian fellow immigrant into Israel. Cherkassky's mid-career survey at The Israel Museum this past year, titled "Pravda", explored the friction between the flux of immigrants from the Soviet Union and Israeli Society.

Soviet Childhood looks back. This exhibition focuses on her experience growing up in the Soviet Union, the period of her life preceding her immigration to Tel Aviv where she now continues to reside. This series begun while the artist was living in Israel and was expecting her first and only child, leading her to reflect on her own childhood. The series began as pen drawings, illustrating her memories of everyday life in the Soviet Union. The larger paintings included in the exhibition provide carefully chosen scenes from daily life under Soviet rule during the 1980s. These scenes are chosen from not only Cherkassky's own memories but are also thoroughly researched in an effort to provide as much historical accuracy as possible while also offering Cherkassky's wit and humor. She portrays a time when the Soviet aesthetic remained strong but evidence of Western influence had trickled through the iron curtain dominating children and teens' interests, making for an uncanny pairing. This phenomenon subtly extended into the older generation as well. This is unmistakable in the painting titled, *Vareniki* where a home cooked meal is prepared by a mother in a yellow T-Shirt affixed with the word "Crazy".

Soviet Childhood portrays the collective memory of the final generation of Soviet children, making for a nostalgic tone. Cherkassky's subjects are at times as simple as a city street scene busy with commuters on their way to work. Such scenes also act as distinct and easily recognizable architectural landscapes. She then focuses in on vignettes of the lives of these citizens through scenes familiar to all; this includes soccer practice, dancing and parties; their location only made evident by this period's peculiar fashions and design.

The eccentric influence of the West is clearly exemplified in Cherkassky's three life-sized portraits of teenage girls. Each of these pieces act as a time capsule of the era's styles. The exhibition pairs these characters with the strict and quintessential Soviet school uniforms in *September the 1st*. Cherkassky herself shared an esteem for Western punk culture with many teens of her generation. The piece titled, *Maverick* shows a young rebel punk juxtaposed with his conservative parents; each of their wall decor is descriptive of their political stance. This need for the Western influence is evident not only in fashion sense but also in political views and thinking, such as in *The Voice of America*.

Cherkassky clearly looks back at Soviet Realist painting, popular throughout her childhood. She makes use of the scenes depicted in these paintings, then used as idyllic portrayals of Soviet life meant as propaganda. Similarities can also be seen between Cherkassky and Mikhail Roginsky's work, a Soviet Nonconformist Artist working as the political opposition to the Soviet Realists. The same bleak scenes of foot traffic across city streets are found in both artists' oeuvres. Though her paintings are consistently tinged with criticism, Cherkassky uses these everyday scenes to create a feeling of nostalgia rather than that of political upheaval.

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