

Ella Kruglyanskaya: Evening Lesson



In a series of canvases made over a year in Los Angeles spent largely in isolation, Ella Kruglyanskaya depicts the female figure in conflict with everything from the bounds of the frame, to the gaze of the viewer, to a lurid plaid pattern that emerges from the margins, threatening to overrun the scene with its mundane proliferation. Jockeying between “made” and “in the making,” Kruglyanskaya uses the tension between outside trompe-l’oeil marks and those left by a flick of the brush to confound our sense of scale and composure. With a remarkable economy of gesture, she often creates fully-elaborated figures from a single swoosh. Like a jazz standard, a perfect triple lutz, or a joke, told so many times that its meaning is shared, known, pointless to elaborate, the “stuff” of these paintings is found in their execution—one that, thankfully, is fetishized to no end. Their power however lies in Kruglyanskaya’s ability to use formal gestures to enact and reproduce the brutality of the male gaze directly, rather than “pointing at” or otherwise analyzing it. Like the old screenwriter’s adage “say don’t tell,” her paintings demonstrate the awful power of

unsentimental, unapologetic commoditized sex. Because the viewer completes the picture, they make us complicit in it, too. A woman glances furtively from repose, a would-be cozy scene were it not for her cruel foreshortening. A pair of diners relish a lobster dinner, their heads arbitrarily severed by the grips of a clipboard. A new wave duo ventures out for an evening, full of kinetic energy, their swinging fishnets and splashy trenchcoats oddly punctuated by a bolt of plaid. The lesson here is a hard one, with schadenfreude, and plenty of collateral damage. At a time of maddening ambiguity and hamfistedness, these pictures hit like an acme dumbbell, jolting awake dormant sensations and reminding us in equal measure of the pleasures and compromises that come with moving through the world in pumps and a clutch.

We are joined now by the artist and two standup comics: Jena Friedman and Steph Tolev.

ST: Have you ever cried after getting a haircut?

EK: Once.

JF: Who did you fuck to get where you are today?

EK: I love this question!

ST: Have you ever put anything inside you that some people may find upsetting?

EK: I haven't put enough things inside me.

JF: Why don't your women smile more?

EK: What would they be smiling about?

JF: Do you plan on finishing your paintings?

EK: Yes, and then no.

ST: What if you had boobs for eyes?

EK: Would I be able to see through them?

JF: Do you worry that your work sends the wrong message to young people?

EK: It won't be possible to answer that question until the young grow older and we can find out.

ST: Is the couch a good place for sex?

EK: Yeah.

JF: Why are you so angry?

EK: Should I be smiling more?

ST: Are "blue balls" a myth?

EK: Which part? The "blue?" Or the "balls?"

JF: Who hurt you?

EK: They know who they are. Or do they?

ST: Does breastmilk make good coffee creamer?

EK: I never had any to spare.

ST: Do Scottish men wear anything under their kilts?

EK: I don't *think* they do.