



ArtSun Gallery

2017

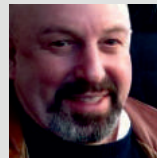


ABOUT VLADIMIR FEOKTISTOV

One of the most reclusive and mysterious artists of Russia. A hermit who deliberately remains invisible while being surrounded by social networks, mass media and professional artist's organizations. He received his formative experiences long ago in the horror and havoc of Chechnya's war of independence from Russia. Chechens evicted Russians from their homes, pillaging their belongings, and unexpectedly one night the artist's neighbors told him to be gone by the next morning. His family left behind a large number of paintings, personal belongings, and the home that he himself had built. Too much blood had been spilled by the Russian Empire in the 19th century when it had conquered Chechnya. The artist lost all his paintings but trained himself to observe the people and world around him and to reproduce his works from scratch.

Living in isolation, he spent all his time working. Like a lens, his vision was focused on the grotesqueness of his past life. He is a master of the grotesque on the level of caricature, but these cartoons make one catch one's breath. The cruelty and senselessness of human life cannot be beautiful. The master understands this, and transforms horror and chaos into silvery-lilac ornament whose details disclose human reality.

These fascinating scenarios are filled with typically post-Soviet characters, gestures and glances, details and architecture. The world conveyed by the artist is so dense that one more moment and this world will explode with scents and sounds.



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'Weekend'

1983, 36x24 in, oil, canvas



We are gazing at strange metaphysical activity. A man and a woman in the center of the painting are walking together, deep in conversation; the woman is saying something, she has a cutting board in her hand, while the man distractedly listens to her. He presses his right hand to his heart in a gesture of pure intentions, while his left hand opens the coat he is wearing... maybe he is reaching for money... and here we realize with horror that the man has three hands, and the third hand is reaching toward a flaming-red chicken! Three-handedness is the symbol of deceit – not purity! This couple is obviously aiming to grab the mottled chicken – the fabled bird of Russian fairy-tales... but where is the golden egg? The only golden object in the painting is a golden cube, lying on the belly of a sleeping young woman. The three-handed man's gaze is obviously turned in her direction. A small blind old man with a child's little red Soviet flag is trying to grab the three-handed man. If he is a symbol of the past which is stubbornly pulling at the three-handed one, then the sleeping girl with the golden cube is un-awakened future. In the foreground is an enormous white plant – but what kind of plant it is is unknown.

The background is the context of the story being told. Closest to us is a woman in a white dress. She is completely uninterested in what is transpiring. She is standing with her back to us, and her gaze is directed at the triangular arc of an electrical transmission pole, from the top of which a black raven is observing everything. A grazing horse also appears before us. The world is drowning in a sea of green leaves. The houses around look like playing dice tossed into this sea of green by the hand of fate. A little van is quietly sleeping with its driver, and in the van are two women, one of whom is also falling asleep... the third woman in the group is picking something off the ground. An older couple is walking behind the three-handed man. The old man is obviously interested in what is going on, but they are too far away to be part of the scene.

'Family'

1979, 30x22 in, tempera, paper



A Chechen family is returning home. At the center of the picture is the mother – the largest and most brilliant element. The figure is somewhat mannish – at the side of her cheek is a lock of hair somewhat resembling sideburns. A typical Caucasus beauty hardened by the struggle for survival. She presses her son to her side, because he is demanding attention and probably needs to visit the toilet. The figure of the boy is not proportionate: it's more like that of a small-sized man, which is typical of Caucasus people – there children grow up quickly. His sister is walking behind them with a doomed look. Behind the left shoulder of the woman is part of a male figure – apparently the father of the family. The gestures of the group speak of tiredness and irritation. For this reason, the action in the picture seems to be that of a family returning to its village from the big town. The city has rejected them, or they themselves have fallen out of it.

The city in the painting is in the background. An ancient building with windows like black eyes, to which other buildings and garages have been attached. Delapidated walls of various structures are drowning in unkempt, wild greenery. A drunkard, drinking straight from a bottle, sits by one of the garages. On the steps beside the house is an old woman with a green teapot; she has almost left the painting. Were out heroes visiting her? A tin can is lying on the ground, encircled by flies. Such expeditions to town from surrounding villages to buy basic goods were the norm in the era of stagnation.

Art as a means of teleportation carries our heroes from the city which oppresses them, straight home. Where is their home? Home is the place where the soul is at peace. In the right corner we see two little white foals who have bent their heads down, waiting for their masters. Every Chechen is an equestrian, and a white stallion for him is a symbol of high achievements.

'Club'

1983, 32x29 in, tempera, paper

Two plump women occupy almost the space of the painting. One of them, in a white beret, is coquettishly looking at us. Her smile and gesture beckon to us, they flirt with us. A second bald woman is gloomily and intently looking away, squeezing a cigarette between her lips.

It needs to be pointed out that in the societies of Caucasus mountain people, women should not smoke – particularly in public places. A smoking woman among the Chechen people is reckoned to be a prostitute. An even more evident indication of a fallen woman is baldness: shaving an easy woman was a common punishment among the Chechens mountain tribes. A shaven woman in the Caucasus is a woman who has been punished. It is not an element of style. Our female friends may not be of maidenly freshness, but despite the fact that social custom condemns them, they care strong enough to continue to smile and to conduct themselves as they see fit.

The context of the dual portrait is the CLUB building; we can see a fragment of the sign – “CL”. Our girlfriends were apparently spending time there and went outside to smoke. A sign reading “Entry Forbidden” is next to the door of the building, but looking at it we can tell that it is the wrong sign. The right sign is a red circle with a white horizontal line. A white circle with a thin red outline and without (!) a horizontal white line is the sign that moving is forbidden... i.e., this sign was brought to the club and then altered. Behind the sign are two grey, ‘correct’ women who are obviously yelling something at our friends. Somewhat further down the street are two more identical grey zombie-like figures, like picketers.

The common link between the foreground and the background is the figure of a young naked girl. She is running away from the picture space and crying something in the direction of the grey women, emphasizing her words with her raised hand. She has long black hair, a blue scarf in her left hand, and a tail is sprouting from her buttocks! We detect that the naked girl is an illusion, who is falling from the breast of the bald woman. The left hand of the bald woman, which has just tucked the cigarette in the corner of her mouth, for some reason remain behind the running girl: this is an obvious violation of proportion and tells us that this is an illusion. What does this illusion symbolize? Damnation on those who shaved her bald? A challenge to primitive traditions, to social opinion which leaves no room for individuality?



'Downtown'

1988, 34.5x26 in, tempera, paper



A bazaar. A man in an old hat is showing off his proud white hen. He strokes her feathers and offers to show her strutting on the ground. He isn't looking around – he is singing to his merchandise. All this theatre is for the benefit of a young fashionista, probably not local but arrived from the city. That she is not from the village is evident from her uncovered head and her loose hair. This is contrary to local custom. The conversation interests her: she looks at the chicken attentively and somewhat sadly. The gestures of the two people amplify their conversation: the man praises his merchandise, while the woman observes skeptically....

Reality splinters into a thousand pieces. The center of the small town is this bazaar. In the midday heat the colors fade, and the wavy architecture with arches and towers seems to swim away. Everything shimmers in the haze. The building in the center is a club, which is indicated by a sign. A woman is tidying on the porch. A phantom figure observes everything from a round window in the tower. A man with a child is almost dissolving in the air under the arch by the club... The club is probably the only common building in the town, since behind it are small simple buildings barely sketched in.

'The book laws'

1983, 34x26 in, oil, canvas



People have gathered in the square. An elderly Chechen in a hat holds a book – obviously the Koran. People surrounding him – including many women – are obviously in support of him while he regards a laughing young Chechen man. An old woman holds a plate with a vegetable resembling the male member. All the people in the square have either clenched their fists or are pointing at something. And only the young Chechen has opened his palm, thrown back his head and is laughing One of the main laws of the Caucasus mountains has been violated` ; respect and submission to the older generation. What are the old people demanding, who hold in their hand the book of laws (Koran)? Maybe to halt the stealing and violence?

In the background is a panorama of a city broken into rubble. There is not one undistorted house, and even the tower in the background (a minaret) is broken in half. Most windows, roofs, doors, walls and drawn in differing perspectives. The city is disintegrating, the laws which made it a city have ceased to function... On a cross hangs a crucified man. A naked woman, a naked man sheltering on a rooftop, someone has hidden himself like a child under a table... In the next room a clothed man is obviously dragging something out of the house. And sheep are grazing nearby.

'Afternoon'

1984, 34x26 in, tempera, paper



A strange afternoon, with strange people in a strange, expressive conversation. A woman facing a man. Their argument is obviously in raised tones. The friend of the woman is whispering something in her ear, supporting her and egging on the argument. The man cannot deal with the situation and pushes the woman in the shoulder. A strange animal that looks like a foal has noticed the artist; it has entered into the painting and is looking in his direction. Life flows on.

The small Chechen village begins at the minaret. It is at the center of the town and at the center of the composition. A raven perches on the minaret, and a flock is circling above. Nearby are houses with arched windows, in distorted perspective and slate roofs: these seem to be the central streets of the town. A strange couple is standing by the houses; someone in blue is helping a woman who has fallen – he is obviously leading her towards a door. In the background are houses and a field. At the crossroads among the houses stands the dark figure of an old woman.



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