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Kon Trubkovich: *The Antepenultimate End*

Rachel Small



Kon Trubkovich, Golden Ratio (Orange), 2021. Oil on canvas. 79 x 100 inches. © Kon Trubkovich. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagasan

Kon Trubkovich’s solo show at Gagosian harkens back to a childhood thrown into disarray by explosive geopolitical upheaval, as the Soviet Union’s collapse led his family to flee their native Moscow for the United States in 1990. It figures, then, that the artist’s recollections of this tumultuous period would be benchmarked by critical historical moments that he witnessed through analog television broadcasts.

It’s this plane of memory — where the subjective act of remembering straddles the personal and the global—that Trubkovich tapped into for the five new paintings on view in “The Antepenultimate End.” Four of these scenes are direct references to mass media–disseminated narratives: Stunned pedestrians linger on empty streets of a freshly post-Soviet Moscow in *The Antepenultimate End* (2019) and *Barricade* (2021). And the spectacle of Ukrainian politicians throwing punches at opposing party members during a brawl at parliament in 2015 take on a Baroque drama in Trubkovich’s *Golden Ratio (Orange)* [pictured] and *Golden Ratio (Chartreuse)* (both 2020).

Bolts of television static — expertly rendered in oil paint as pointillistic dots and dashes — rip through the compositions in a trompe-l'œil flourish. This static-as-motif makes for a subversive declaration of anti-reality — after all, high-definition digital cameras were certainly around in 2015, and plenty were on hand in the Ukrainian Parliament to document the gamut of governmental proceedings on display, fist-fights and all.

Then there is the fifth painting in the exhibition: *Female Figure (After Popova)* (2021), Trubkovich's reimagining of an oil-on-canvas piece attributed to the Russian artist Lyubov Popova, who died in 1924 at age 35. Her body of work holds particular historical significance, in that her ability to travel freely throughout Europe as a young, aspiring artist pre-World War I facilitated her exposure to early modernist movements with disparate geographical origins — Futurism from Italy, Cubism from France, and both Suprematism and Constructivism from Russia. Popova — whose contributions were formative to the Russian zeitgeist upon her return to Moscow — skillfully synthesized these manifold styles into a technically sophisticated, geometry-driven aesthetic, and also one that, in often hovering ambiguously between abstraction and figuration, was notably ahead of its time.

Trubovich revisits Popova's undated painting of a nude woman, her form elegantly constructed out of geometric shapes in muted shades of red, yellow, green, and blue. While his recreation preserves the original's general composition and color scheme, an aggressive burst of TV static distorts the lower half of her form, while the same subtle yet enervating texture permeates her interior silhouette. But displacing the simple beauty of Popova's execution does not produce ugliness — far from it. This new piece is enigmatic and poignant, reminiscent of past and passing generations. A sense of loss remains palpable.