

„Маршруты движения“ – „The lines of approach“ – „Die Marschroueten“ – is the first solo exhibition by the St. Petersburg-based artist and animator Kirill Agranovsky, opening on December, 3th at Pflüger68 Gallery in Berlin.

The exhibition will feature 15 works through which the artist relives the events of the past. Here is the story of how they came to be.

“In 1991 I returned home after military service. A month later, I bought a Krasnogorsk 16mm film camera. In September, my friends and I gathered near the Obuhovsky Oborony Prospect and began shooting a film. Then, we continued shooting in Avtovo, in December. It was cold, everyone was freezing. The film kept tearing. At some point, some people came out from behind a train car and told us that shooting was forbidden. We didn’t gather again ...

The wardrobe in my room was chock full of developed film. My friends were asking me about the film we were going to make. When I reviewed the material, it became clear to me that the story we had in mind would not work out, and that it would be impossible to create something with a unified plot. My friends kept nagging me. So I took a scalpel and some scotch tape, turned off the light in the room, and began to slowly cut the film into pieces which could then be put together. Come summer, the film was finished. Instead of the hour we expected, it was 7 minutes long. After watching it, we went out and bought some vodka without saying a word. There was the feeling that I had betrayed everyone ...

Fifteen years later, each frame of the film was used as a basis for graphic works...”

Agranovsky’s style is distinctive; having seen one work, you will always recognize the others. He uses cardboard as the base, sometimes partially covering the surface with foil, on which he paints with gouache, ink and oil markers. Despite the great variety of materials he uses, his works always look whole and organic. The collage approach helps emphasize the stylistic tendency toward the primitive – the formal simplification of the thing being pictured.

The artist depicts street scenes that appear strictly everyday at first, and yet endows these seemingly quotidian plots with mystical, fearful elements. He populates them with fantastical creatures, animates robots, makes buildings animate, striving for a choice of an object of attention that creates a certain organic tension via an unusual view to the object slipping away: through a window, a keyhole, into the depths of a backstreet, a public toilet.

The landscapes and interiors are rife with shadows: at times large and menacing ones, yet barely noticeable or slipping-away ones, sometimes shadows that aren’t even depicted and yet are tacitly there among the light of the streetlights and lamps, since wherever their light is, there must also be shadow. Convention is subverted into high caricature, reality made near dream: perambulating bridges, smiling stoves, live corridor walls and trains staring though eyes – these are the real masters of the city. The people in these landscapes serve precisely to underscore their barrenness and reverberating silence. Lamps casting light onto empty rooms, notes left on tables, the scarcity of objects; they all intimate the presence of people, yet emphasize their absence.

It is difficult to escape the constant sensation of movement and of locomotion that fills Agranovsky’s work. Specters hover, clouds rack by, red and white glowing orbs hijack the gaze, trains and trams run, the smoke billowing from pipes is blown to the side, snow is falling, solitary figures blown out into the space of the landscape or an interior are running, tumbling, flying. All moves.

The feeling of anxiety, melancholy, loneliness intensifies, reaching a climax in the many landscapes depicting a road, a street, railroad tracks that, traversing a piece of cardboard from the bottom up force the viewer, per the laws of linear perspective, to move toward the convergence point beyond which something will happen... This art is like a road every step on which is a step into yet another dimension. And in its plot this art is also connected with the theme of the road of self-discovery that the artist must tread. As decorative elements for all this we have the readily recognizable embankments of St. Petersburg, its palace silhouettes, factory pipes, fire division walls, courtyards, chutes, backstreets and railway lines. This city, with its grim, bloody past; a witness to nightmares and human tragedies, an accomplice in myriad crimes; the bog out of which countless feverish ideas and theories sprang becomes the ideal background for Agranovsky's works. Yet the tension within us as viewers is born not so much of the cerebral, the knowledge of certain circumstances, but rather of the flexibility of intellectual perception.

The frugal use of light begets what the poet Andrei Bely called "the dingy swarms of fog" against the background interplay of black, gray, blue and yellow spots. On a gray-green there are red flashes: a red streetlight, a traffic light and a red window. The artist is able to reconstruct on paper the piercing chill of winter in this city, the frightening barrenness of the streets and the apocalyptic street scape so characteristic of the image of St. Petersburg created by Russian literature and the city's history.

The ancients coined the concept of *genius loci*, the special spirit of a place. In time, the meaning of this phrase outgrew its origins in Roman mythology and became applicable to someone who jealously guards the irrepeatable atmosphere of a place. It is this very ambiguity of interpretation that is evident in Kirill Agranovsky's works. Without fail they radiate the city's metaphysical presence, while displaying the artist's clear and conscious choice of certain plots and formal artistic approaches. After all, an artist's connection to a city may be all-encompassing: emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and even definitive of his style. Where an artist's art and the place where he lives intersect, a new reality is born – a reality accessible only via this melding, this symbiosis. "Places and localities... act upon us as living things might, and with them we strike up the most profound and satisfying friendship."

Natalie Nesher Aman
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Translated from Russian to English by Gennady Pritsker