

REVIEWS

Sanya Kantarovsky

Casey Kaplan / New York

For his first solo show in New York, Sanya Kantarovsky presents "Allergies," a series of paintings that portray bizarre couples caught in oddly charged moments of daily life. The characters often look like marionettes or cartoonish illustrations of jokes; all seem to derive from a mysterious realm from another time and another country. Their twisted bodies and wiry legs suggest a dynamic, almost violent, impulsion. Overall, dreams seem to infect the reality of these imaginary personages – the surrealist cartoon character turns into the naïve narrator of the artist's unfolding unconscious.

The scenes are intentionally painted with a consistent palette. A deep, Yves Klein-like blue appears recurrently, mainly to embody Kantarovsky's principal subjects. Olive-oil greens, silk pink, Chinese violet, beige, dirty yellows and light reds also come into play. "The palette here refers to AGIT PLAKAT," says Russian-born Kantarovsky, "which was a series of non-utopian, didactic, satirical posters in a post-Stalinist Soviet Union. These educational posters described darker subject matter, such as poverty and alcoholism. In order to allude to this abject content without being literal and overly antagonistic, the authors of these posters radically changed their palette." This new critical gaze at Soviet society triggered a new set of colors in order to depict darker, often shameful social realities.

Kantarovsky is also playing with a history of colors being used to address specific emotions. Paul Sérusier, Paul Gauguin and James Ensor actively took part in this quest to use colors as emotional catalysts. Tacitly referencing these masters, Kantarovsky invites us to partake in his own specific strings of conflicted color-based emotions. As the comical confronts the morose, as sweetness faces mockery, the painter explores the eternal paradox of the tension between subject matter and color, and from this tension manifests an electrifying and exotic mood.

by Alexandre Stipanovich

