

Ani Gurashvili: Double Gaze

30 Orchard St, Gallery 1 ▪ Feb 16 - Mar 17, 2024



Harkawik is pleased to present *Double Gaze*, our third solo exhibition with Tbilisi-born, Vienna-based painter Ani Gurashvili. “Like living on top of a cake,” is how Gurashvili describes the ornamental density of the Viennese cityscape that is her adopted home. It is tempting to imagine that an analogous density of surface effect in her paintings reflects a simple embrace of this legacy, but this would be a failure to register just how resolutely engaged her pictures are with the feeling of letting paint do as it wants to do and as it has to do. If every surface in her pictures feels kaleidoscopic,

the formal dimensions of this are inseparable from the dance of balancing viscosity and opacity that painting in oil demands. In this sense, pattern is more an effect of translucence than fragmentation. It is an ongoing side effect of a fundamental resistance to allowing any volume to settle into rote corporeal density. *Captured Daze* puts a fine point on this as two faces converge at the shared tip of a nose, while eyes, mouths, limbs, ricochet out into pattern and repetition. The stark symmetries underscored by the seeming rigidity of a perspectival box make the spatial ambiguity of the picture all the more unsettling, and the seeming quickness of her handling achieves an almost mesmeric elegance.

Gurashvili's commitment to oil painting is conditioned above all by an acute sensitivity to its temporality, and more precisely to the remarkable slowness that it demands in the face of nearly every other kind of image. If there is a dreamscape in her work, it is motivated neither by the ambiguously symbolic language of a crypto-surrealism, nor the exhilarated weightlessness of atmospheric abstraction, but by the overwhelming vertigo of deceleration produced when contemporary visual languages—everything from the preponderance of fantasy narrative in anime and video games, to the jagged tapestry of urban space, to the non-place of the technological sublime—are pressed through the exigencies of 500 years of oil painting, a thickness which is as much about the technicalities of handling as it is about a tendency to think itself in its own terms. The literal temporality of the medium is inseparable from this historical dimension in Gurashvili's process. Her work evinces a capaciousness which welcomes painting's visionary omnivalence, but also insists on painting as a process which is neither analytic nor essentializing but expansive and atmospheric.

In Gurashvili's universe, one is thus by turns peering down through a half-stitched tear into an uncertain scene; backstage in a puppet theater where the dramatization of paint and canvas spills out into iconographic overload; drifting through an undefined space where ornamental flourish becomes precisely the frame through which you seem to look not into but out of the painting; or again in an almost exact inversion of this, peering into the painting as though looking into a shallow box, a chest of drawers, a series of compartments whose contents disperse under the still strange weight of painting's promise to deliver some recognizable moment of grace. Shocks of nearly deadpan humor punctuate passages of textural intensity and compositional reflexivity. The cartoonish shadow hand in *Trickster's Pantry* theatricalizes this fundamental desire to enter into the picture, to experience its promise of interiority as something other than our own reflection, which happens also to be staring back at us in the mirror finish of the door handle. But even so definitive an object as this polished handle seems rather to be floating in a thickened field of undifferentiated space than affixed to any palpable surface. And it projects a luminosity that makes its reflectiveness oddly expansive. What is most remarkable in this new work is this unflinching embrace of architectural form, that dimension of pictorial language which signals the solidity of the object world most loudly, and Gurashvili's certainty that she can make every object disappear beneath the effect of its radiance.

—Edward Sterrett