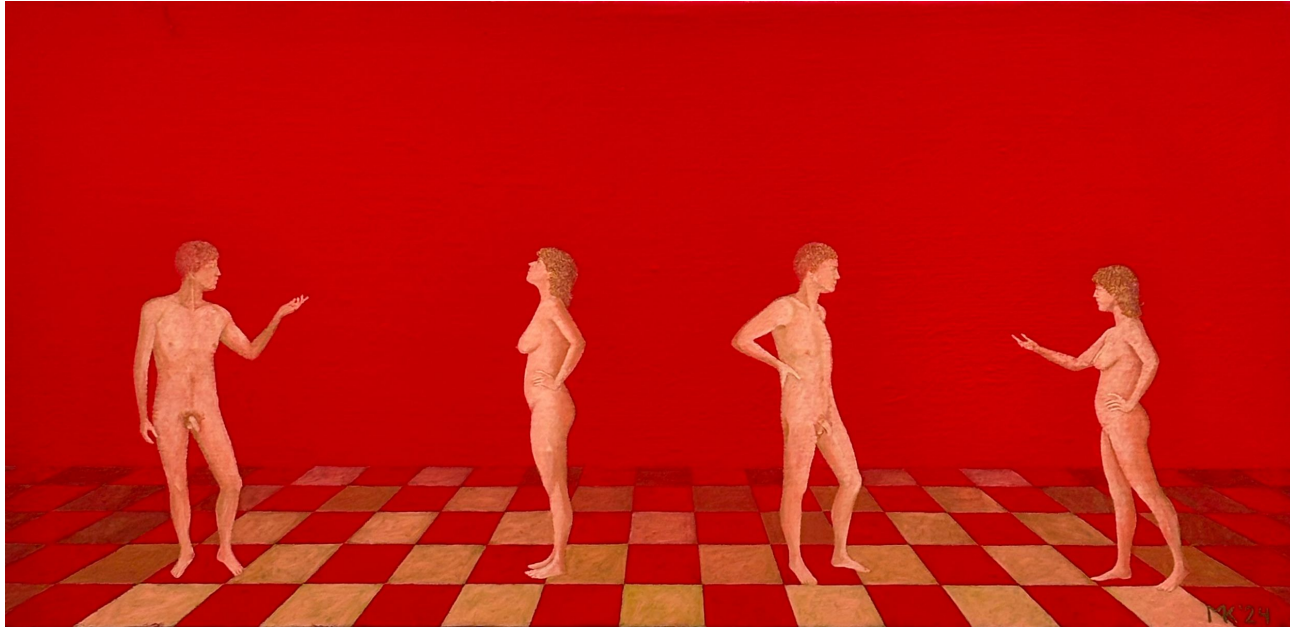


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Talking

Mikolaj Kasprzyk

March 8 - March 30, 2024



Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Adam & Eve (5), 2024

Oil on canvas

24 x 11.8 in

61 x 30 cm



Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Dialogue, 2019
Oil on canvas
11.8 x 11.8 in
30 x 30 cm



Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Rebound, 2020
Oil on canvas
11.8 x 11.8 in
30 x 30 cm



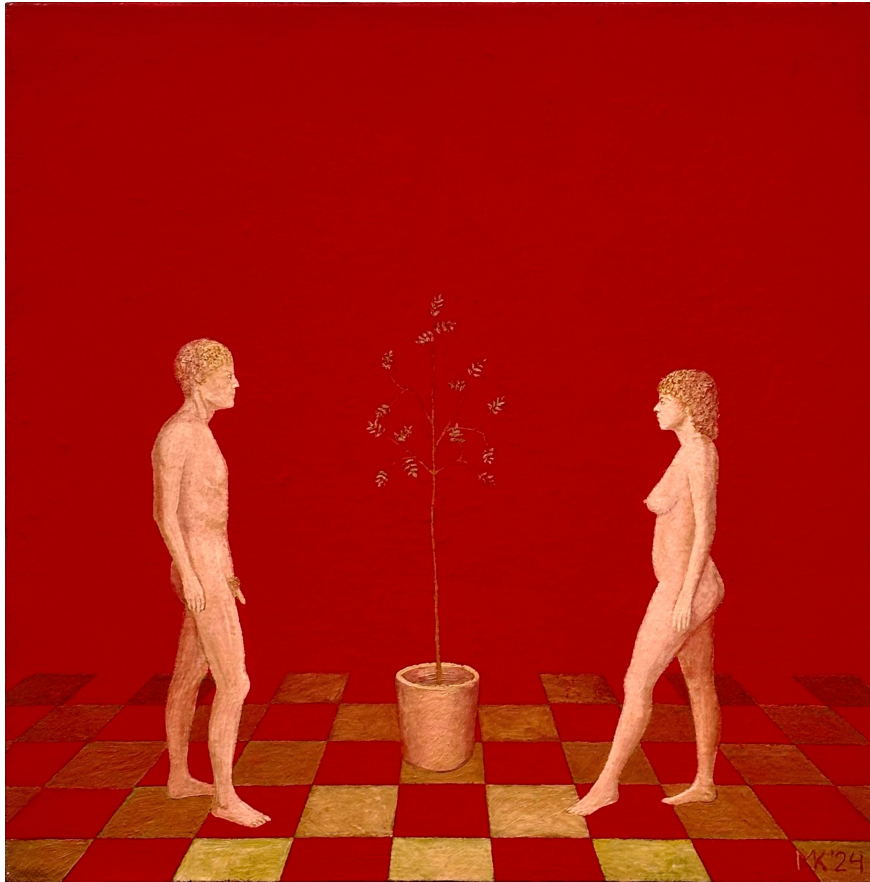
Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Adam & Eve (4), 2024

Oil on canvas

11.8 x 11.8 in

30 x 30 cm



Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Adam & Eve (1), 2024

Oil on canvas

11.8 x 11.8 in

30 x 30 cm



Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Adam & Eve (2), 2024

Oil on canvas

11.8 x 11.8 in

30 x 30 cm



Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Adam & Eve, 2024

Oil on canvas

18.1 x 18.1 in

46 x 46 cm



Press Release

Title

Talking

Artist

Mikolaj Kasprzyk

Dates

Mar. 8 - , 2024

Opening

Mar. 8, 6-8 pm

Location

136 Baxter Street New York, NY 10013

In 1977, Mikolaj Kasprzyk graduated from his apprenticeship in the atelier of renowned abstractionist Jacek Sienicki, commencing a practice of his own that has continued uninterrupted for nearly half a century into the present day. Kasprzyk is a painter of few compromises, completely dedicated and confident in his own vernacular. His work often raises more questions than are answered; there is a sense of austerity and ambiguity to his paintings. A compulsion for figural narrative drives his work, with conversations and relationships set into strange, sparse settings.

Like his mentor, Sienicki, Kasprzyk was born, lives and works in the city of Warsaw, Poland. An ancient city, Warsaw is brimming with art and architecture of the medieval era, a theme ever-present in his oeuvre. Against their heavenly backgrounds, the characters of these paintings are reminiscent of Giotto's seraphim, their delicate features completely serene. The spaces themselves mimic the ambiguity of the landscapes found in early Renaissance illustration – in Kasprzyk's world, checkerboard flooring fades into pure monochromatic firmament. Shades of ultramarine and scarlet recall illuminated Books of Hours and the court portraiture of Hans Holbein the Younger.

Decoration is nearly entirely ignored: There is space and then there are subjects at their center. The constant unadorned settings of his world draws the viewer towards the importance of the core narrative he constructs and its variables. Small gestures become immense in the face of the unwaveringly quiet world in which they exist.

Press Release (cont.)

There is an unwavering stillness to these scenes, his figures are frozen in place even in moments of action. In one work, a man readies himself to jump off the side of the composition, a moment of reckless abandon completely petrified and motionless. Even in their calmest states, the central figures seem deep in conversation, as if the viewer found them at a brief pause in an ongoing dialogue. There is a sense of confrontation to these works, that the viewer is peering into a private world.

Kasprzyk notes that all of his depictions of people in these works are self portraits. In some instances, the resemblance is clear, and his likeness – a thin man with tightly cropped hair and hollowed cheeks – is clear. In others, the artist presents himself with classical blonde ringlets and as the female counterpart to the male subject. These couples appear twinlike in their features, presenting not only a duality the artist sees within relationships, but within his own spirit.

Central to this body of work is a series of three panels, each entitled “Adam and Eve”. A budding tree, like a child, grows and blossoms between the couple, deep in conversation. Richly rendered tendrils begin to envelop the tonal background that was so ubiquitous in earlier panels. In states of dress and undress, the couple stand across from each other as the Garden comes to life in front of them. As in Genesis, their nudity only becomes shameful when they are expunged from their earthly paradise.

- Eli Harper, Art Critic & Historian

The exhibition is accompanied by an additional text from Dorota Kruczalak.

Seeing Clearly, in Rapture -

Dorota Kruczalak

What constitutes the significance of a work of art? Not only painting, but also literature, music, or film? What makes a certain work of art overpower us, whether through provocation, or harmony, or any other form of emotional or intellectual rapture?

Is it the ability to perceive the mystery? But how can one perceive a mystery when its essence is secrecy? But isn't it precisely because we sense something, that something enchants us, that we begin to see more clearly, in delight, and the mystery slowly becomes illuminated?

Many years ago, while walking along the streets of the Old Town in Warsaw, I saw in the window of an art gallery a painting that captivated me with its mystery contained in an extremely detailed and carefully presented rendering of many figures building a complex structure, one reminiscent of medieval painted images of the Tower of Babel. I knew I had to have it, but due to various circumstances, I couldn't buy it immediately. I requested this work to be put on reserve. When I returned to get the painting, Mikołaj Kasprzyk was also in the gallery—and that's how our long-term friendship began. My fascination with his works has obvious literary sources to which I am strongly attached, mainly because, having run a bookstore for many years, I have profuse access to various important publications on an ongoing basis. Our first conversation revolved around verbal and non-verbal meanings, for which the Tower of Babel is a perfect pretext. We also focused on analyzing the symbolism of light, so important in the implementation of Mikołaj's ideas.

Seeing Clearly, in Rapture -(cont.)

Dorota Kruczalak

Jon Fosse, laureate of the 2023 Nobel Prize in Literature (also a painter in his early years), wrote in the second part of *Septology* (2019) about an aging painter that "I constantly want to look at my paintings in the dark, so much so that I can even paint in the dark, because in the dark something happens to the painting, yes, the colors disappear in a sense, but in another sense they become clearer, this luminous darkness that I always try to paint becomes visible in the dark, yes, the darker it is, the clearer becomes what shines with invisible light in the painting, and many different colors can shine, but the darkest ones are the strongest."

Mikołaj Kasprzyk, in his incredibly fleeting events, which are his canvases, allows us to experience the magic of light that permeates them, illuminating the stories told in them.

Mikołaj constructs the images out of enchantment with the past and fascination with masters of early eras, often unknown by name. As he states in one interview (2004):

"Anonymous masters of a single painting of the trecento, quattrocento, are my favorite painters. And of the famous ones, I really like Piero della Francesca, the Lorenzetti brothers, Sassetta, Giotto, Fra Angelico—but most of all painters of altar predellas, because that is my scale."

If we look at the stories recorded on the above-mentioned altar predellas, this magic of the illuminated mystery becomes entrancing, because the predella miniatures were clearly less limited by religious restrictions than the paintings of the main altar, which rested on the predella. Their creators could therefore enjoy greater freedom in choosing the topic and its artistic implementation.

Seeing Clearly, in Rapture -(cont.)

Dorota Krucalak

Speaking about Mikołaj's paintings, we can cite the writer Joseph Conrad that "each story [...] can be true or false, each is constructed by someone and accepted by someone with more or less faith—it takes place between people trying to cope with an inaccessible reality. Both sides of this basic relationship in which the story is created are both individually lonely and socially entangled. The teller says what and how he wants or can tell, and the listener accepts what he wants or can hear in accordance with his beliefs, emotions, and experience. A story is a search for an explanation, but that single explanation will never be achieved." (*Tales of Unrest*, 1898).

In Mikołaj Kasprzyk's paintings—frequently examined in search of an explanation—we are often dealing with two people in conversation, exchanging glances, searching for each other, getting lost. This happens in an encounter sphere that looks surreal, unreal, perfect, implying loneliness. This sphere, encompassing the event of a conversation or doing some activity together, is usually dominated by the arrangement of objects surrounding this meeting of two people who may be together, but it is also difficult to get rid of the impression of their separateness.

Against pale backgrounds, well-delineated figures encounter each other, even at times embrace, yet their connection is serene and obscure. An intriguing and always unclear situation appears before our eyes, but it has no resolution. It only opens the viewer to the possibility, but not the necessity, of seeing clearly, and in delight.

Will we ever uncover the focus of the surreal positioning of characters in Mikołaj Kasprzyk's paintings?

"I don't know. And I will never know" declares the narrator of one of Joseph Conrad's stories, who within the complicated labyrinth of his own tale, also turns out to be his own protagonist, and as a protagonist, he is also the listener to another person's story.

The enigma leads clearly to seeing in rapture.

*** Jan Błoński, *Widzieć jasno w zachwyceniu/ To See Clearly in Ecstasy*, 1965

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mikolaj Kasprzyk (b.1952)