

First, some quotes by Dolly Parton:

“The good thing is, I’ll probably look the same when I’m a hundred ‘cuz I’m more like a cartoon than anything else.”

“It costs a lot of money to look this cheap.”

“I’m not offended by all the dumb blonde jokes because I know I’m not dumb... and I also know that I’m not blonde.”

Dolly Parton has always been clear about how and why she created the image of herself that we know as Dolly Parton. She openly discusses, and pokes fun at; her infamous breasts, her plastic surgeries, her glittery outfits, her blond wigs, her femininity and her abundant make up. The clarity with which she announces her own manufactured-ness is a phenomenon that still holds some social taboo – a kind of open fakeness only granted to drag queens. We simultaneously see her sincerity and her deception, as she embodies what she knows we want her to be, even before we knew we wanted it. Part of her act is to regularly remind us of this blatant duality.

Ella Kruglyanskaya paints images of women. Neither pillars of the community nor the bottom of the barrel, the ladies play out their minor dramas on the painterly comedic stage. They usually come in pairs, with leisurely intentions, enjoying the middle class climate. It’s too bad they also come with petty jealousies, and with them a gaggle of characters come to life – the women, their clothes, their shadows, and finally, the artist, who, with a few nasty brush strokes, banishes one of the women from the canvas. Insults are thrown about. Offenses are taken. But there are no real casualties. Like Dolly, she reminds us, within the images themselves, that these are just images. She unapologetically employs insider jokes of the 2D world: optical illusions and trompe l’oeil. What does it mean to bring such lightness to painting which carries a history that, on good days, fought for liberty, expression, and innovation, and on the bad, privileged the heavy hand and penile heartache? For Kruglyanskaya, the pressure is in painting images of women with disciplined lightness, brevity, and transparency without losing touch of the heavy: the history of painting, feminism, capitalism, and the human condition. There are no dummies here, and it takes a lot of work to look this light.

- text by Lucy Kim

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