

*ret
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vers*

Stanislava Kovalčíková

04 October – 16 November 2024

Emalin is pleased to present *ret rie vers*, a solo exhibition by Stanislava Kovalčíková (b. 1988, Slovakia). This is the artist's first exhibition with the gallery.

Poised and libidinal, Kovalčíková's paintings exist as much through their mythological imagery as in their settings: theatrical environments she stages for their mysteries to play out, featuring her play with light, mirrors, textiles and restrictions of our access to the painting itself. Modernism and contemporary decay moulder together on the surface of her paintings and sculptures, piled with fragmented detritus of today's life. In *ret rie vers*, Kovalčíková turns specifically to our nervous attachment to time with a series of paintings on decommissioned 19th century Prussian clock dials.

Two sounds pervade the exhibition space: a ticking metronome resounds from inside the chimney, set to the speed of our heartbeat – except at times the sound contracts, expands and warps, as if our hearts could protest time by slowing down. The other ambient sound comes from the headphones of a sculpture – *Kranke Frau* (2016-2024), the “sick woman” – an homage to Isa Genzken, quietly playing the Mozart symphony used in healthcare phone queues and labour wards. She is there, alongside the sounds, to chaperone us around Kovalčíková's paintings. While the practice can be understood as obsessive studies of painting itself – its essence, its materiality and history – Kovalčíková's work unfolds just as much through this stage-setting.

Each environment is transformed. The floor of the gallery is carpeted with the District Line moquette – a type of industrial upholstery fabric engineered for seating on the London Underground. This pattern, though nicknamed ‘Misha Black’ after the man who commissioned its design, was actually created in the 1970s by the influential Czech-Jewish textile designer, Jacqueline Groag. Its dominating orange and contrasting browns, chartreuse, black, pervade the entire exhibition, intense and intrusive. Light enters the space, orange, through tinted windows and dimmed lights – and, before we know the exhibition has begun, it lets us peer in through the peeping hole of a copper pipe from the street level.

On the inside of the gallery, this peeping hole – a glory hole – stabs through the entryway of a clock face, center of the coin-like painting *Dandelion* (2024). It was that central hole through which the clock's inner mechanism, hidden behind the dial, would have revealed itself with its indexical hands. Kovalčíková sourced the surfaces for this series of paintings from an antique dealer of Prussian clocks that were dismantled over the decades from 19th century watchtowers. While

their mechanisms are sought-after historic relics, their dials, lacking hands, are of secondary importance and often discarded. Their surfaces were coated with enamel that has degraded over time, chipped and peeled off, revealing raw rusted copper underneath. Kovalčíková describes the enamel's surface as absorbent and velvety – consuming the paint and a little like a hungry womb. The Roman numerals, originally embossed in gold on the dials' black background to proudly resolve confusion, meet Kovalčíková's brush to either disappear or melt away.

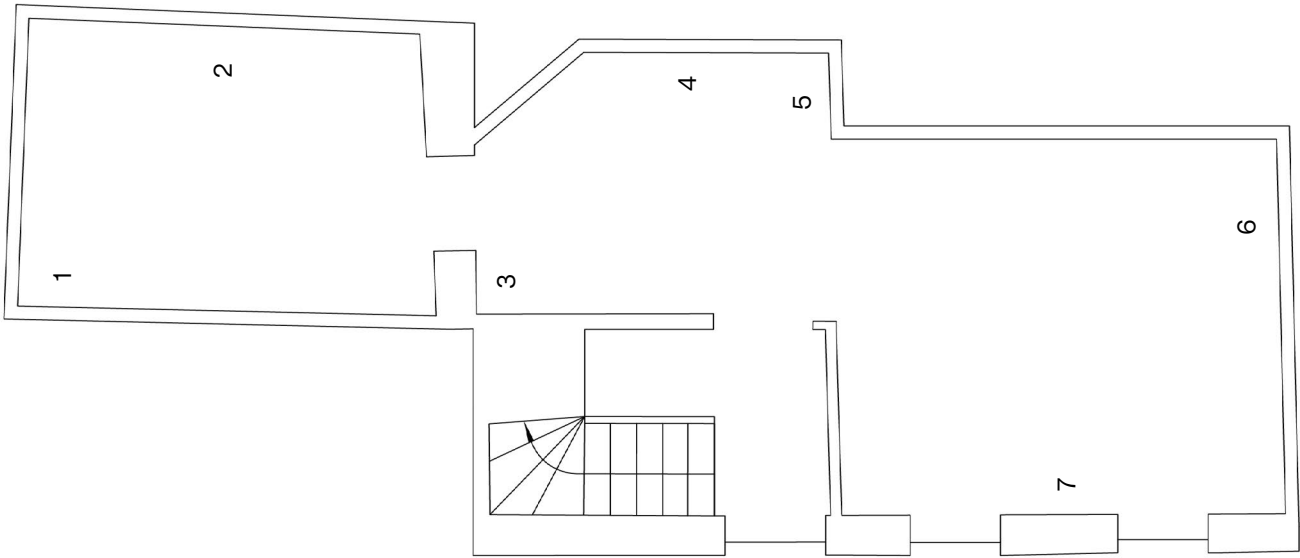
Prussia, to Kovalčíková, stands for every kind of cultural regime and conservatism that she dislikes about Germany. So does time – to her, demanding and controlling like a jealous lover, a phenomenon that some seem to have under control and to which some struggle to submit. It expands and contracts in different bodies the way metal does in swinging temperature. In her references, too, Kovalčíková arches through time – mythological expressions of desire and pain make sense alongside the celestial face from 1902's *A Trip to the Moon* and 1972's *Solaris*, alongside 2024's brats and cyclists and violinists. Orange returns in *Lovers on Mars* (2024), a semi-circle installed over the gallery's schooldesk where women in prison-like uniforms are embracing, dribbled with wax, in a tiled underground tunnel. The painted mosaic spells out, just barely: AMOR FATI, a shorthand for the Nietzschean concept of loving one's fate, whatever may befall us. Sweeping through centuries like so, the velvety watch surfaces set the stage for a sprawling contemporaneity and psychosexual abandon of Kovalčíková's analysis – retrieving history's grief as much as our present escapes.

The building's top floor is a low-ceilinged attic, the oppressive Victorian quarters for servants or children, open to the public for the first time in this exhibition. Its floors, now entirely lined with mirrors, reflect the semi-circular *Clerk's Medusa* (2024), closing the roundness of Medusa's ancient snarling face with 18th century's wooden beams now above and below her. Kovalčíková likes discomfort zones. In *ret rie vers*, she challenged herself, on a personal level, to techniques she did not see herself using in the past – among which she names using acrylic paint, heavy frames or projections, having an assistant or finishing a painting in a time span shorter than a year. Somehow, working through confrontation, fear, and compulsion, Kovalčíková reveals the final work's soft, tender entrails.

Retrievers are gun dogs that hold on to game and retrieve it to the hunter. They are bred for 'soft mouths' – a specialist term describing their self-control – and a great desire to please, learn, and obey. These tensions of desirous power, ego, manipulation, ambition and submission are the essential material of Stanislava Kovalčíková's work. This – alongside the ways in which we try to preserve ourselves from going to the dogs.

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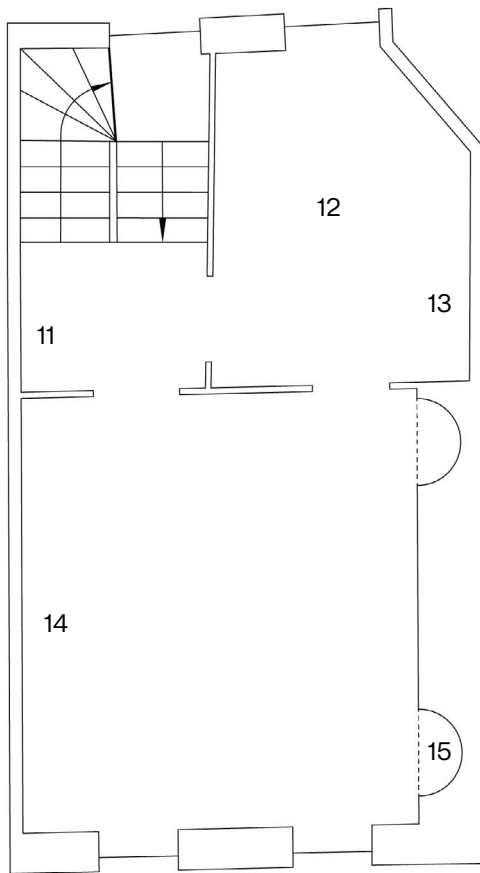


GROUND FLOOR

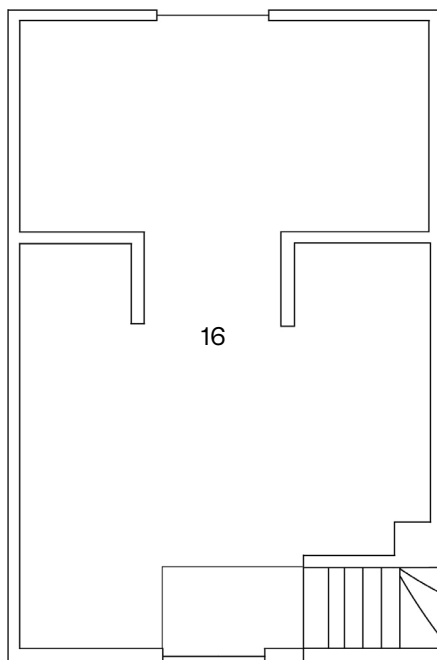
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|----|---|----|--|
| 1. | <i>Kranke Frau</i> , 2016-2024
steel, found object, hair, headphones,
rubber band, cactus
40 x 26 x 24 cm
15 ¾ x 10 ¼ x 9 ½ inches | 5. | <i>Follow The Boys (Shoe)</i> , 2024
mixed media
29 x 27 x 10 cm
11 ¾ x 10 ⅝ x 4 inches |
| 2. | <i>Lovers on Mars</i> , 2024
oil, acrylic, foil, wax, watercolour, antique
Prussian church clock face, reinforced
wooden frame
122 x 219 cm
48 x 86 ¼ inches | 6. | <i>Dandelion</i> , 2024
oil, foil, antique Prussian church clock face
152 ø cm
59 ⅞ x 4 inches |
| 3. | Untitled, 2024
oil, foil, collage stamp and pin on MDF
board
20 x 23.2 cm
7 ⅞ x 9 ⅞ inches | 7. | <i>Why Would You Like to Win at a Loser's
Game?</i> , 2024
oil, linol, acrylic, antique Prussian church
clock face
180 x 180 cm
70 ⅞ x 70 ⅞ inches |
| 4. | <i>Solaris</i> , 2024
oil, foil, antique Prussian church
clock face
130 ø cm
51 ⅞ inches | | |

Stanislava Kovalčíková (b. 1988, Slovakia) lives and works in Düsseldorf, DE. She completed her degrees in painting at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the studios of Tomma Abts and Peter Doig. Recent solo and duo exhibitions have been held at the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2024); Antenna Space, Shanghai (2023); Galerie Khoshbakht (with Tom Hardwick-Allan), Cologne (2023); Caprii, Düsseldorf (2023); Museum of Contemporary Art – Belvedere 21, Vienna (2022); Peres Projects, Berlin (2022); 15 Orient, New York (2021); Open Forum, Berlin (2020); and Mamoth, London (2020). Kovalčíková's work has been included in group exhibitions at the 9th Biennale of Painting, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle (2024); BRAUNSFELDER, Cologne (2023); Antenna Space, Shanghai (2023); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2023); Michael Werner Gallery, London (2022); Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2022); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2021); and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2019). From 2024, Kovalčíková runs The White Ermine, an artist project space in Düsseldorf.

FIRST FLOOR



11. *Untitled*, 2014
oil on linen
80 × 60 × 2 cm
31 ½ × 23 ⅝ × ¾ inches
12. *Setter*, 2016
disassembled wood sculpture, found objects, plaster, wire, hair
160 × 160 × 160 cm
63 × 63 × 63 inches
13. *Verses from the Eastern Dynasty*, 2023
ink, currency collage, paper, linen, sheepskin fur frame
approx. 60 × 77 × 8 cm (framed)
23 ⅝ × 30 ¼ × 3 ⅞ inches
14. *Wolkenkratzer*, 2024
oil, wool, antique Prussian church clock face
148 × 147 cm
58 ¼ × 57 ⅞ inches
15. *Untitled*, 2024
gilded plaster
34 ø cm
9 ¾ × 11 ¾ inches



ATTIC

16. *Clerk's Medusa*, 2024
oil, watercolour, antique Prussian church clock face, reinforced wooden frame
100 × 219 cm
39 ⅜ × 86 ¼ inches