



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
NEUBAUER COLLEGIUM
FOR CULTURE & SOCIETY

Zoya Cherkassky: The Global Political Crisis

Sept. 25, 2025 – Jan. 9, 2026

A suite of new paintings and drawings by the Soviet-born Israeli artist foregrounds the politics of sexual pleasure.



CHICAGO—The Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society is pleased to present *Zoya Cherkassky: The Global Political Crisis*, on view from September 25, 2025, through January 9, 2026. This will be the first solo presentation by the Soviet-born Israeli artist since relocating from Tel Aviv to Long Island earlier this year.

The exhibition is centrally grounded in the glaring contradiction between its title and its content. A suite of five mid-sized acrylic paintings and an assembly of some fifty smaller watercolor drawings are rendered in the artist's signature diaristic, observational style. They depict scenes of a mostly erotic nature – nudes, couples in varying stages of undress, people having sex. The exhibition also includes an erotic sculpture and a small collection of jokey pornographic tchotchkes. The artist, whose penchant for pithy cartoonish commentary has made her no stranger to controversy, has described this apparent flight into the private imaginary as a way to cope with the stress caused by the political demands

made on art and artists in our current moment.

“It’s not much of a pleasure to find yourself at the epicenter of history, but I’ve had the dubious luck of doing so twice in recent years: with the start of the war in Ukraine and the war that started on October 7 in Israel,” Cherkassky remarked about this body of work. “When the guns speak, the muses must fall silent — and it’s hard to know what can be said in the midst of all this horror, when any statement is never sufficient and is being immediately interpreted by each reader through the lens of their own agenda, losing the last drops of meaning along the way. The desire to escape the need to speak out by retreating into the personal and intimate is, of course, naive and unrealistic — as we know, the personal is political too.”

In fact, Cherkassky’s new works suggest, the personal is *exceedingly* political in an age that seems to be obsessed with policing and politicizing sexual practices and preferences. Recent challenges to reproductive rights offer a particularly powerful example of “biopolitics” at its most intrusive, and the sexual politics of the era have been theorized in ways that evoke both the climate crisis (“sex drought”) and economic struggle (“sex recession”). Further in the background of Cherkassky’s venture, one can discern the simmering natter of urgent questions concerning censorship, consent, and freedom of expression.

Cherkassky's humorous paean to sexual desire stands in knowing, defiant contrast with these everyday realities. The works on view depict an atmosphere of generalized, quasi-farcical friskiness. One of the larger paintings in the exhibition depicts a naked woman reading a book while lying on her belly in the grass. The title of the book, *Capital After Globalism*, is also the title of the painting – a clear reference to the currently ubiquitous talk of “deglobalization” in academia and among the commentariat amid a surge in nationalism. Two nude figures wading into a little stream in the background seem to have strolled straight out of Paul Cézanne's *Bathers*. (As is often the case in Cherkassky's work, this exhibition is peppered with winking references to canonical art history.)



The painting *First Date* depicts another leisurely scene disorientingly at odds with the pomp and gravitas of the exhibition's title. A man seated on a couch wearing only his underpants and a handlebar mustache shares a bottle of red wine with a topless woman in heels. Yet another painting, titled *The Loner*, depicts a similarly hirsute man absorbed in a book that hides his nakedness like a fig leaf. His melancholy mien appears in sync with the oppressive atmosphere of polycrisis, but perhaps he was simply not invited on a second date?



“At a time when political and cultural leaders seem to have very clear ideas about what art should say and do (or, just as patronizingly, what it *shouldn't* say and do), Cherkassky's turn toward an old-fashioned and mostly lighthearted *ars erotica* is understandable,” said Neubauer Collegium Curator

Dieter Roelstraete. “But it would be misguided to disparage her departure as an escapist fantasy born of political fatigue. Inevitably, the tension between the exhibition's title and these jocular scenes suggests a new politics of pleasure.”

Zoya Cherkassky: The Global Political Crisis is made possible by the Neubauer Family Foundation and the Brenda Mulmed Shapiro Fund, with thanks to Fort Gansevoort, New York, for their support.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Zoya Cherkassky was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 1976. In 1991, she immigrated to Israel, where she attended the HaMidrasha School of Art at Beit Berl College. In 2010, she became a founding member of the artist collective New Barbizon, composed entirely of female painters born in the former USSR. In 2018, she was the subject of a mid-career survey show at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Her work has been exhibited at the Jewish Museums of Berlin, New York, and Vienna; Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin; the Museum of Sex in New York; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; and the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis. She is represented by Fort Gansevoort, New York, and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

ABOUT THE NEUBAUER COLLEGIUM

The Neubauer Collegium cultivates new communities of inquiry at the University of Chicago. Our faculty-led research projects bring together scholars and practitioners whose collaboration is required to address complex questions on any topic. Our Visiting Fellows program brings the most creative thinkers from around the world for collaboration, animating the intellectual and creative environment on campus. Our gallery presents art exhibitions in the context of academic research, and our public events invite broad engagement with the scholarly inquiries we support. The aim of these activities is to deepen knowledge about the world and our place in it.

IMAGES *(from top)*:

Zoya Cherkassky, *The Loner*, 2025. Acrylic on paper. 34 x 24.25 in.

Zoya Cherkassky, *Capital After Globalism*, 2025. Acrylic on paper. 27.75 x 52 in.

Zoya Cherkassky, *First Date*, 2025. Acrylic on paper. 39 x 47.5 in.

All works © Zoya Cherkassky. Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort, New York.

MEDIA INQUIRIES

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GENERAL INFORMATION

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