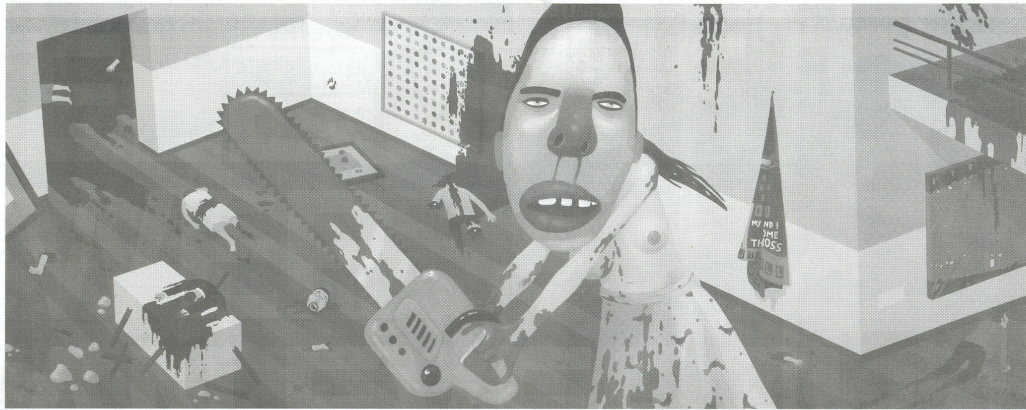


# FORT GANSEVOORT

## USELESS 5

### NEW BLOOD: Zoya Cherkassky Takes Action

Ella Levitt



LIKE THERE IS NO TOMORROW, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 2005

# NEW BLOOD

words: Ella Levitt

artwork: courtesy of Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel-Aviv  
www.rg.co.il

## ARTIST ZOYA CHERKASSKY TAKES ACTION

Museums are mausoleums, and it takes a special kind of artist to romp around those graveyard tombs, waking the dead. But painter Zoya Cherkassky does just that with a nonchalant, anarchistic panache that takes on art, the establishment, and our understanding of the two. Her recent exhibition, *Action Painting*, rocked the Tel Aviv Museum of Art's contemporary art pavilion with giant, graphic paintings that expose the art system's mashed up beauty.

Cherkassky has done time within the

hallowed halls of the world's great museums and is perhaps best known for her paintings of massacres and spectacles staged inside museum walls. For instance, *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (2005), where a giant naked lady appears in the contemporary art section of an established museum and terrifies the public, provokes the viewer to consider how pieces enter major collections and the art world's historical canon. While the giant nude woman was clearly more controversial than the Antoni Tapies and Jonathan Messe works on view, the

museum did not acquire the *50 Foot Woman* piece according to their official procedures, and Cherkassky is thus seen as a threatening presence in the museum.

By fusing elements of pop culture and a sci-fi sensibility with an astute knowledge of art history, Cherkassky critiques and reveals the dark side of institutions through the violent fantasies that she's staged in sterile environments—museums, banks, a government waiting room, a hospital. The works are uncanny in the classical sense, but Cherkassky's comic-like, legible style is

perhaps more accessible and "lower" than surreal paintings by artists such as Dalí or Magritte.

The artist currently lives in Berlin and Tel Aviv but she was born in Kiev and immigrated to Israel as a teenager, and traces of all three cities and cultures are visible in her work. In *Together* (2006), she presents an exceedingly banal German waiting room where a dozen foreign workers sit in chairs with both feet on the khaki grid floor and both hands in their laps. The subjects wear western garb and dwell passively, but each worker's face is a striking spin-off of traditional African masks. They feature vacuous rectangular mouths, horns, and wide-awake saucer eyes. The heads are inhuman, compelling, and disrupt the immaculate quiet of the stark government interior with multiple visual assaults. By inserting the exotic into the realm of the routine, the picture surfs the border between conventional social behavior and freakdom.

The element of fun in these pieces stems from Cherkassky's ability to observe and recreate the status quo in all of its stable, predictable glory... and then knock it over; that's the case in the diptych *Everybody is Cool/No. 1 and Everybody is Cool/No. 2* (2006). In the first image, unattractive and bored characters wait in line and go about their business in a bank. The next shot shows the same drones in a state of panic, collapsed on the floor in reaction to an "everybody-stay-cool-this-is-a-robbery" moment, even though there are no robbers present. In the center of the second scenario, one woman who was previously lumpy has morphed into a fetching sex object. Seen from behind with her head down, the lady's shapeless long skirt comes up, throwing a gleaming silver of white panties and black knee high boots into eyeshot. In a sense, the viewer is the unseen robber, stealing a sneaky little glimpse and evoking a sense of sex and danger.

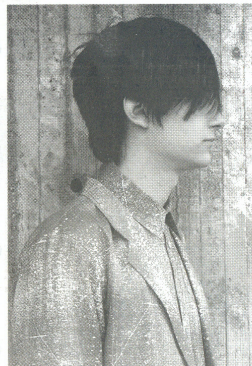
Back in the museum, the artist re-mixes the principles of Modernism with her *Action Painting* No. 1. Here, flat character types similar to those in the diptych wander around a gallery with notebooks and dropped jaws while trying to understand the installation. On the surface of the canvas, Cherkassky skews the situation even further with Pollock-esque drips and splatters that partially conceal the picture window, destroying and enhancing the quality of her work at the same time. The artist is painting peoples' understanding of art, and she's made each of us her subject in the process.

## TENDER MELANCHOLY

words: Danica Lo

photography: courtesy of LAITINEN

### THE LAITINEN FAMILY AFFAIR



## USELESS #5 NEWER THAN EVER

Br...  
La...  
the...  
a Twin Peaks-y small town in eastern Finland," Tuomas says. And their work speaks volumes for it. "Being an outsider, listening to Suede, and trying desperately to mimic Brett Anderson's looks with rather dodgy vintage clothes," Tuomas says, really shaped their current collection, along with Roger Mayne's photos on Smiths album covers and Hanif Kureishi's film *London Kills Me*. After having let his heart lead him to London, where he completed the prestigious MA Fashion at Central Saint Martins, Tuomas moved first to Paris and then to Finland - becoming a professor of menswear at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki and, later, the fashion editor of the country's premier design magazine, *Muoto*.

With his sister, Anna, an artist who studied and exhibited in Helsinki and, later, Barcelona, he created LAITINEN, which won them a special jury prize at last year's Festival d'Hyères.

Demeulemeester, and a sponsorship from Italian fabric manufacturer Puntosesta, whose other clients include everyone from Balenciaga to Jil Sander to Bernhard Wilhelm. Their first showroom, held during men's fashion week in Paris this past January, was supported by Maria Luisa, and garnered immediate international buzz amongst the industry and audience alike.

An antithesis to the flash and dash of street-wear, and the peacock movements in men's fashion of late, LAITINEN "tries to capture some sort of tender melancholy with a touch of dark humor," Tuomas says. "The clothes or the inspiration behind them should never be too obvious. Hopefully we'll never do a punk collection or full-on grunge look. Our world is a very uncalculated mix of memories and present life — the things we love and hate or love to hate."

USELESS#5 - NEWER THAN EVER