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HYDE PARK HERALD

Disrobing 'The Global Political Crisis' at Neubauer Collegium

Jared Brown - January 7, 2026



"Love" by Zoya Cherkassky, on view in the show "The Global Political Crisis" at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, 5701 S. Woodlawn Ave.

As Chicago residents brace for winter — stacking layers of turtlenecks, sweaters, UNIQLO heat tech and down jackets to brave the outdoors — artist Zoya Cherkassky strips down the human body to an object of pleasure and political unrest.

This stripping makes up her show "The Global Political Crisis," now on view at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, 5701 S. Woodlawn Ave. The provocative show begins with a scarlet velvet curtain with an explicit content warning for guests, building anticipation. Stepping inside, the viewer is confronted by a mixed-media piece titled "Love." It's a 14-by-14-inch square fabric banner with the word "love" repeated in Hebrew, Arabic and English. The banner, installed higher than the average eye level, perhaps functions as an intention or provocation for the artist and those that come in contact with the show. Is love all we need? Can love truly fix every obstacle in our world?

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Zoya Cherkassky, *Sunny Side Up*, 2025, acrylic on paper, 34.75 x 24.25 in

There are five large, bold, cartoon-like paintings installed on the wood-paneled walls around the gallery. The paintings depict intimate moments in solitude and between people. In “Sunny Side Up,” for example, a woman is in a kitchen preparing breakfast wearing nothing but an apron covering her bottom half; her exposed top mirrored by a pair of frying eggs. In “First Date,” a man and woman sit on a couch and raise their glasses in a toast. The man wears nothing but underwear while the woman wears nothing but a skirt and high heels. In “Morning Routine,” one of the more provocative large-scale paintings, topless women have coffee and wash the dishes while another couple engages in fellatio. What all the paintings share are windows — blinds up — looming in the background, an element that perpetuates a feeling of being surveilled by neighbors and voyeurs alike.

But is surveillance the global political crisis of the show’s namesake, or something else? Cherkassky’s biography certainly suggests a sustained tension between private desire and political catastrophe. Cherkassky was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 1976. In 1991, she immigrated to Israel where she became a founding member of the artist collective New Barbizon, a group composed entirely of women painters from the former Soviet Union. The artist has described this show as an “apparent flight into the private imagination as a way to cope with the stress caused by the political demands made on art and artists in our current moment.”

Controversy is not atypical of Cherkassky’s work. A December 2023 show at the Jewish Museum in New York City that depicted the aftermath of Hamas’ October 7, 2023 attack in Israel, which killed roughly 1,200 people, drew protest. At the time, as Israel expanded its military operations in Gaza, displacing at least 150,000 Palestinians and killing an estimated 30,000, protesters accused Cherkassky of perpetuating “imperial propaganda.” Cherkassky defended the museum for not being “scared to present the Israeli perspective.”

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On its website, the Neubauer describes itself as a gallery prioritizing the importance of inquiry with complex topics. Artist collectives such as the Raqs Media Collective, the Otolith Group and artist Betye Saar have all presented work there in the last year, suggesting that the gallery is committed to presenting works by artists that may express unresolved or complicated viewpoints through their respective mediums.

“Untitled (Drawing Table)” is literally the centerpiece of the show. This structure functions as a table for grounding small sculptures like a porcelain coin bank in the shape of a naked woman with her buttocks in the air (the entryway for the coins) and a vitrine for smaller works — mostly watercolors by Cherkassky dating as far back as 2008. Much like the larger paintings, the drawings depict things like beach orgy scenes in which a lonely protester holds a sign that reads “you are headed for hell” and couples engaging in sex next to heavy artillery. “The Best Sexual Experience of My Life” is a painted aluminum cast sculpture of a Caucasian flesh-toned painted vagina and an erect penis painted a similar shade of brown as the wood-paneled walls of the gallery. This sculpture tethers both sets of genitals to one another with a warped metal wire. The mechanism allows the penis to rise to phallic expectations, while the vaginal model remains comparatively docile. The viewer must look down at Cherkassky’s figures in “Untitled (Drawing Table),” an action that possibly mirrors the way many social media users consume most media — quick, vulgar scenes interwoven with political takes nestled between insensitive, AI-generated misinformation.

These scenes on the drawing table never make clear where their politics of pleasure, sexuality or revolution ultimately land, either within the work or beyond the gallery walls. These cheeky artwork titles, observational style drawings of sexuality signed by a “Dr.” Zoya Cherkassky postures the work to be a clinical study or some sort of diagnosis but, with no clear crisis, let alone a cure for it, on display.

“Zoya Cherkassky: The Global Political Crisis” is on view at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, 5701 S. Woodlawn Ave. until January 9.