

Galerie Louis Gendre

Marcin Sobolev

Brooklyn by the sea

September 17, 2020 – Novembre 14, 2020

Opening September 16 – 5 pm

Marcin Sobolev. Free style.

By Anne Kerner

"A few years ago, I went to New York. My grandmother Nina was still alive and said to me, "It seems there is a Russian quarter in New York and I would like you to go and see how our fellow countrymen are living there." That's how I found myself at Coney Island.



Coney Island, 2020, acrylic, oil and gold on canvas, 114 x 145 cm

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Marcin Sobolev rocks, raps and break dances with the canvas, wood or ceramics. In free style. With anything that comes to hand. Always the same flexible and sure gesture. Whether he is taking off his parka on arrival at the studio in winter or when he mounts a meticulous sculpture or tags the wall of a building in summer. And yet, his hand rarely touches the cap on his head. Because behind his big burly look hides a shy and reserved artist. This native son of Central Asia, descending from Baba Yaga and Ivan le Terrible, but born in Brussels, in the heart of Europe, conceals his sharp eye from the world while wearing his smile like a banner. A white banner. His life and his work come down to the same thing. It relates, shares, exchanges and loves with passion. It all began with a house move, when the high school boy changed districts and found himself surrounded with schoolmates of many different nationalities and religions. This all continued thanks to his mother and venerated Russian grandmother whose portrait hangs on the studio wall. Nina always told him stories about a country that no longer exists. Setting off in quest of his origins, after ten years of confrontation between his far-away inner-self and his cabinetmaking apprenticeship, Sobolev's dream came true. As a graffiti artist, he tagged trains and doors, traveled widely and became an artist like his friends. A first escapade in Barcelona. Then Poland, Russia, Georgia, the Ukraine....and finally New York.



Tatianna, 2020, acrylic, oil and gold on canvas, 40 x 60 cm

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"I would like my artistic approach to show that it's essential to travel. You can never have an opinion about a people, about people in general, without meeting them. You have to go everywhere. Become aware of things for yourself."

Marcin Sobolev draws, paints, sculpts. And invents a work immediately revealing an exceptional artistic nature. Even though he flirts with the masters, sometimes coming close to the demanding realism of a Douanier Rousseau or releasing a few figurative signs like the Catalan artist Miro did when he began, more often than not he lets himself get carried away by his Slave temperament. His personality owes too much to his roots and to the subtle demons that govern them. He adds to this melting pot of yesterday and today, a wonderfully joyful mix of near and far, urban and ecological preoccupations, social exclusion and local life, as well as popular culture and folklore. Man. Nature. And all those little stories that tell nothing other than the great history of the world. Here, there is no violence, no cries or screaming. His genius lies elsewhere. Well away from conflicts, far from the tempestuous debate of man with his double. Because in each of his works with their perfectly mastered and dazzlingly fresh compositions, Sobolev invites us to participate in those first moments of celebration.

"In Manhattan, I took the subway for an hour and a half and when I came out of the station, I was in Russia. That made me laugh because there was a beach and a fairground Everything looked like the former Soviet Union."

The artist holds in his hands the painting that gave the exhibition its impetus. It's the portrait of Disco Freddy, the famous American performer from the 1970s. "This was the beginning of break dancing in New York that reminded emigrants of their Cossack and Jewish traditions", says the artist. Marcin Sobolev drew it blindfold, the radio in his hands and a solar crown above his head. In this way, the visitor discovers Coney Island on the edge of Brooklyn, the famous Little Odessa and its flavor of the former Soviet Union. Everything is there in the paintings. That outlandish district, the smells of pirojki, the Orthodox churches. The dust and the overhead subway. The fake palm trees, the fairground with its balloons and garlands all along the beach. Yet another balcony with a rosary of watermelons. And a lot, yes, a lot of dust wonderfully rendered by the artist thanks to the use of colored smoke. Impeccable flat tints, clear-cut drawing, a free and imaginative composition and fastidious shaping, all of these elements juggle with oriental lyricism. Marcin Sobolev outlines, formalizes, symbolizes, splits and composes, often he even divides the surface into squares. But in this space that reassures him, he opens the cage to hallucinations and fantasies of desire and of humor. Yet, all the while, Marcin's hand is guided by Nina's gentle hand too.

"When I am working, my initial research is about the colors. If I made my drawings in black and white, I would not be able to get the message across. The brutality and the violence, I keep for myself."

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Disco Freddy, 2020, acrylic and gold on canvas, 40 x 30 cm

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So, no darkness, no violence, even less danger in the suburbs, the cities and streets where Sobolev grew up, and that he likes to rediscover by wandering through Orients near and far. In fact, it's quite the contrary. Their banality hides a secret sensibility and the toughness of unexpected bonds.

"I make gloomy architectures colorful, because in these places there is something magical, overflowing with life."

Here, the artist recognizes mutual aid, fraternity and solidarity. Conviviality. Those emotions of everyday life, those good vibrations that he receives, recreates and multiplies. Because in his works, Marcin Sobolev relates a painting like we read a story. Each canvas, each sculpture gathers together codes that only he knows, like those birds tattooed on the hands of convicts in a Saint-Petersburg prison. "I use all popular symbols, also I always buy painting and small objects. I bargain-hunt. Each time, I really research all the countries I travel through." From painting to sculpture, in the heart of Coney Island, Marcin Sobolev finds, maintains and sets free immutable bonds and nurturing ties. The heart is beating fast. The symbols of his vocabulary flirt and snuggle up together. No doubt about it, Marcin Sobolev opens up a new passageway where the traces of everyone may be etched.



Self-portrait 2020

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**Opening Wednesday September 16 2020, 5pm.
Show September 17 – November 14 2020.**

Hours : From Wednesday to Friday 2-7pm, Saturday 10am -6pm.

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