

Vladimir Kartashov

Spellbound

Curatorial text by Domenico de Chirico

A child of the convulsive and ultramodern digital era, the young Russian artist Vladimir Kartashov (born in Novosibirsk in 1997) is known for his insightful and ingenious approach to contemporary art that juggles the cluster of dilemmas typical of today's society, the hybrid heterogeneity, and the chimerical notion of relational goods to explore the increasingly challenging human condition of today. Masterfully encompassing realism, surrealism, magic realism, symbolism, existentialism, and profound reflection on spiritual matters, Kartashov's vivid aesthetic sensitivity is instrumental in comprehending and subsequently shaping the deepest emotions and most diverse human experiences without ever casting aside the neuralgic issue of the self.

Kartashov's *modus cogitandi* implies that abstract concepts find their best manifestation in images. This way, he uses his canvases to generate a plethora of perpetually novel experiments aimed at creating visual effects beyond description. His research in expression is substantiated by extraordinary compositions that vacillate between the tangible and the imaginary. Their skilful balance and witty designs attest to a certain attention to details while achieving a general visual harmony.

An opulent and vibrant colour palette allows Kartashov to create bold contrasts through juxtapositions of dazzling hues. He uses colour as an expressive mode of highlighting certain themes or symbols, an essential tool for creating riveting atmospheres and inducing obliviousness. Pushing the boundaries ever further, his canvases are lively and textured, with the thick layers of paint emphasising their physical presence and conferring a nearly sculptural, multilayered, three-dimensional quality to their surface. The resulting idiosyncratic worldview is abundantly complex, immediate, intense, and engaging.

Taking his cue from the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács, Kartashov emphasises the value of representing the social and historical realities through the category of *particularity*: elevating himself to the position of omniscient narrator, the artist skilfully blends the countless symbolic elements that in their conjunctions narrate and explore the most complex themes through astonishing visual metaphors. Each narrative, be it allusive or devoid of subtexts, is a fecund union of Eros and Thanatos—the two impulses that dominate the human condition and in this particular case contribute an additional allure and an aura of mystery. Thus, Kartashov's work tempts the viewer to venture into the most intimate or audacious interpretations.

Influenced by various iconographies, traditions, and mythologies, Kartashov's signature multi-layered style draws upon collective experiences, parallel dimensions, and the oneiric hemisphere to achieve a fine balance between the realistic and the fantastic. The artist often employs symbols referring to the universal themes of life and death or time and spirituality while probing into emotional conditions and the human psyche in general. His paintings, perfectly capable of conveying a wide range of complex feelings, oscillate between introspection and wonder as well as between streams of consciousness and the most procacious irreverence.

Vladimir Kartashov's art is defined by its ability to transport the viewer into highly symbolic imaginary worlds by means of a fortunate combination of elaborate realism and surreal imagination. Indeed, his new paintings take us on a visual and emotional journey of discovery into the deepest abysses of human experience.

Spellbound's frescoes daringly reveal themselves in their full glory of exuberant impulses, brimming with narcissism, temptation, solitude, and voyeurism, flaunting their strongly allegorical, astute, self-regenerating vital force in a tempo apparently conducted by a bombastic and shrewdly up-to-the-minute musicality.

Magniloquent and lavish scenes are populated by clusters of little figures, strange objects and everyday items, micro-narratives, symbols, emoticons, dominant human protagonists, hyperreal details, neologisms, codes, love potions, witches, rituals, and spells that enrich the copious overall image apparently heralding an unprecedented plastic surrealism poised to challenge the swarms of conventional rules of perspective, logic, and reality.

Moreover, following the so-called post-humanist trajectory, the artist produces a series of powerful and enigmatic visions engendering new pictorial heterotopies along the lines of the Foucauldian *counter-sites*, the non-spaces that provide societies with critical mirrors perceived as deviation scenarios, patterns of contestation or inversion of social and cultural conventions. There, the sacred and the profane, the beautiful and the grotesque, the heavenly and the infernal, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or in essence the good and the evil coexist in perfect eurhythmy.

In consonance with the thinking of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, known for his heavy criticism of the established structures of power and knowledge, Vladimir Kartashov in *Spellbound* intends to suggest to others along with himself some alternative trains of reasoning, this time based on fluidity, multiplicity, and the bliss of eternal creativity, having confidence in the fact that "anyone can read the *Ethics* if they're prepared to be swept up in its wind, its fire (2)."

(1) Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, commonly known as the *Ethics* (originally published in 1667).

(2) Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 140.