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2022

Belvedere 21
Arsenalstrasse 1
1030 Vienna

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday
11 am to 6 pm
Late night: Thursday
11 am - 9 pm
Monday only open on
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Installation view *Stanislava Kovalcikova. Grotto*, Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna

STANISLAVA KOVALCIKOVA

GROTTO

16 September 2022 to 5 February 2023

In her first solo show in Austria, Stanislava Kovalcikova is offering an insight into her enthralling and enigmatic work. Her paintings revolve around questions of personal identity and its construction. They often capture intimate, fleeting moments, instilled with dreamlike, surrealist moods.

Stella Rollig, General Director of the Belvedere and curator of the exhibition, said: "*Stanislava Kovalcikova's paintings exude a powerful presence and urgency. Kovalcikova's position is notable in the context of current neo-figurative painting, which she charges with bold notions of a non-identitarian society.*"

Stanislava Kovalcikova creates dreamlike, bizarre scenarios inhabited by human and animal characters who operate outside of social norms. The alienation of the familiar is a key stylistic device she employs. Her paintings' protagonists defy categorization, are gender-fluid, fantasy beings with ambiguous social origins, timeless age, and indeterminable skin color, as well as inscrutable intentions. Their relationships cannot be interpreted with any clarity and appear both captivating and disturbing.

Kovalcikova's figurative painting draws on the canon of art history. She has a profound knowledge of the history of painting, often quoting from great masters, such as Titian, Giorgione, Goya, Gauguin, Van Gogh or Manet, and combines these references with a consistently contemporary perspective on controversial present-day issues. Her paintings link collective scenes to the myth of Dionysus—the

god of wine and ecstasy. In her tragicomic depiction of nocturnal excesses, the artist makes references to hedonistic sexuality, which at the present time appears as an imperiled refuge.

Kovalcikova describes her position of painter as one of alienation, of deep-seated non-conformity, of the external gaze—shaped by a feeling of homelessness and of being different, her experience of early motherhood as a student at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art, and her many years working nights as a bouncer at a club.

Her working method is extremely lengthy and meditative—each painting takes several years to create and involves repeated overpainting and reworking of the surface. This results in a gloomy darkness pierced by toxic red hues, a paradoxically matt glow, and unusually heterogeneous surfaces combining sheen and smoothness with fissures and scratches.

The artist's intentions are revealed to some extent in her choreography of the exhibition at the Belvedere 21. The title *Grotto* takes its name from the artificial grotto at the Los Angeles mansion of Hugh Hefner, former editor-in-chief of *Playboy*. After his death, reports emerged about sexual abuse and drug excesses at his parties there. The title alludes to the interplay of toxic masculinity, money, power, and the sexual exploitation of women. A further facet is the term grotesque—derived from the Italian word *grotto*—which, in the history of art, represents the violation of formal rules and design principles: a leitmotif in Kovalcikova's work.

The impression of the parallel world conveyed by Kovalcikova's painting, a world in which longings, desires, threats, and fears are acted out in a surreal manner, is transferred into the exhibition space by introducing an orange film over the windows. The filtered daylight not only changes the space but also time. On entering the exhibition, you step out of the chronological flow of your own perception. Kovalcikova invites visitors to contemplate her compelling and enigmatic work—and in this way to look inside themselves as well.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Stanislava Kovalcikova was born in Czechoslovakia in 1988. Her mother is from the Russian island Sakhalin in the Pacific, her father from the small town Komárno in modern-day Slovakia. Kovalcikova's childhood and teenage years were spent in various places in Europe. She studied painting at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art with Tomma Abts and Peter Doig. Experiences of crossing boundaries in life, of not belonging in a community, and her role as a mother are all addressed in her work. Her art revolves around questions of familiarity, alienation, personal identity and its construction. The artist lives and works in Düsseldorf.

CATALOGUE

Stanislava Kovalcikova

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	Stanislava Kovalcikova. <i>Grotto</i>
Curator	Stella Rollig
Assistant Curator	Johanna Hofer
Duration	16 September, 2022 to 5 February, 2023
Exhibition venue	Belvedere 21 Arsenalstrasse 1, 1030 Vienna
Opening hours	Tuesday to Sunday 11 am - 6 pm Late night: Thursday 11 am - 9 pm Only open Mondays on holidays
Tickets	Regular € 8,90 €; 10,50 € on site Reduced € 6,90 Euro online; € 8 on site Belvedere annual ticket € 39 Children and youth up to the age of 18 free
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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit belvedere.at/en/press.