



Volodymyr Kostyrko, Judith, Head of Holofernes and Maidservant, fragment, 2015, oil on canvas

Art... & Of

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Volodymyr Kostyrko

– *It was like one of those catfish things. One of those bottom feeders you see going up the side of the aquarium. Sucking its way up the glass.*
– *Do you think she knew the kind of effect this might have on a guy?*
– *Jesus, she knows everything.*

Dialogue from the movie *The Counselor* directed by Ridley Scott (*The Counselor*, 2013)

Love and death are the only things worth to be drawn. Many artists think so, it will be in abundance in a new Vladimir Kostyrko's work. A famous hoaxer from new old art Kostyrko does not leave his favourite themes: the iconography of protest movements and criminal history. This time the subject of study is armed female hand.

According to the artist, "The main idea of the series appeared during the rebellion and established during the war, when feminists created Women's Sotnya. Then the doctrine of women's pacifist nature disappeared. From the fight for their rights to defending the land with deadly force and looking for a companion on this way, Kostyrko mainly has developed a series on the foundation of Artemisia Gentileschi's heritage – artist of Roman origin, the Caravaggesque's daughter, who worked in the early XVII century. The subjects of her works were mainly biblical stories of women. At nineteen Artemisia was raped by a private art teacher – the Florentine artist Agostino Tassi. Then she had a complicated legal process, in which the rapist was convicted. At this particular time, a well-known painting "Judith Slaying Holofernes" appeared (1611–1612).

In the first hall (Executioner's hall) – all the main characters Judith, Yael, Salome are shown both full face and profile in front of the criminalist's camera.

Judith, portrayed time to time with her servant Abra (someone has to bear head in a bag), is central to all women warriors. Jewish widow, who saved her native city from invasion of the Nebuchadnezzar's Assyrian army led by Holofernes, a woman who changed the course of the war recorded in the Old Testament "Book of Judith". Kostyrko devotes her several works, including Judith against the backdrop of the whole list of victims that after the movie "Kill Bill" has become a part of pop culture, and at the same time awakens in memories another, more modern Female Assassin.

Another figure mentioned in the Bible as the killer of commanders is Yael of Kenite tribe who killed Sisera, server of Jabin the king of Hazor. In the "Book of Judges" this incident is depicted with all details. Yael does not just kill her husband, she uses a tent peg: "Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple" [Book of Judges, 5:26]. Completion of this action is an universal peace: "And the land had rest forty years" [Book of Judges, 5:31]. Copying composition of this story with the same cool calm, as it painted Gentileschi, in the background Kostyrko creates its own remake of "Yael and Sisera" with true surprise on the Sisera face.

Finally, the Jewish princess Salome, who, in fact, did not anyone's head. Even strategic order it was not of her own devising "Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." [Matthew, 14:8]. Salome owns this small art feature – plate. The head should be held with dignity.

The manner of all three murders warns that the head will be punched and cut off in the warmest, most intimate places: in tents, in a dream, in prayer, in prison.

The danger in comfort is an ancient men phobia, which at the suggestion of Claude Levi-Strauss has received a generic name *Vagina dentata* (toothed vagina). It is the vagina that replaces supposed portraits of Judith and Abra in the Kostyrko's works. However, the biggest metamorphosis and adaptation this image receives in the second hall – Hall of sacrifice (victim), dedicated to Ophelia, a woman who did not take a blade into the hands and drowned falling into a river in a bout of madness. On numerous sketches "Instructions how to undress Ophelia" we can meet the vagina that forms a heart with the inscription "Ja & Ofeliju", one that fits in the center of the letter "O" (Ophelia) or is woven into the heraldic lily – a medieval symbol of purity. Even the outline of a crying eye is read in two ways.

Finally, "Art ... & Of" is an exposition that discusses with the last "Pink series". Turns out, there remains a colour, that makes stormy waves in our blade, colour that we still can see (also in the chromatic sense) in a victim, as well as in an executioner. And the faintest pink times (*The End of Art*) able to fill up with controversial (*Art ... & Of*), but intense red colour.

Borys Filonenko

Volodymyr Kostyrko was born in 1967. He lives and works in Lviv.

Graduated from Lviv College of Applied and Decorative Arts (1987) and Catholic University of Lublin (Institute of Art History, 1995). Since 1994 – author and participant in group and personal projects in Ukraine and abroad. Incredibly versatile and grotesque Kostyrko's painting is an attempt at artistic adaptation of historical figures to the "parameters" of modern perception, that the artist performs in the "new old masters" style.

For his native city Kostyrko is not only cult artist, but an art historian, designer, esthete and intellectual, also he is considered to be the main reconstructor of the esthetic myth image of Lviv and Halychyna in general as products of Latin civilization.

And his latest retrospective project "Louvre", realized in collaboration with Eugene Ravsky in Lviv Palace of Arts became one of the most visited exhibitions of Lviv art in the last twenty years.