

STAS ORLOVSKI : MIMETIC PROJECTORS

"As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being." - Carl Jung

Across video installations, mixed media paintings, and projection-mapped sculptural works, Stas Orlovski's fresh variations on form and refined interventions in space generate a nuanced language of images and objects sourced, with deliberation and a bit of magic, from the past. Orlovski's studio practice as it is performed manifests in works of art built from layers of not only materials, but of time and light, enacting how memories, identities, and cultures come to be.

The materials and mediums comprising Orlovski's project of the last decade, especially the advent of animation as a central element, began with an inquiry as to how to make a painting or drawing literally perform movement and change. He experimented with mimeography and trace elements left behind by mechanical reproductions into his scenes, in penmanship that spoke to tenacious, lingering history. Later, based on these and other paper, print, and collage-based techniques, Orlovski began a process of stop-motion animation, in which elements of his own works starred in choreographed sequences. Often the videos made this way were then projected on stationary presentations of its own two- and three-dimensional components, both on the wall and occupying architectural space.

Importantly, the animating of his compositions not only created engaging poetic spectacles, but also transformed the structure of his process into the main action of the work. Developments in projection-mapping technology allow for the centrality of his beloved found objects as not only muses and imagery but as integral elements of the works, organized in concert his animations into beguiling stand-alone pieces. Endless rearrangements suggest themselves across mediums, as Orlovski conceives pensive yet playful vignettes of pleasure and meaning. "The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect," wrote Jung, "but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves."

Orlovski's love for found objects runs toward the vintage, toward small-scale garment models, cobblers' foot-forms, and faceless haberdashery heads. This relates to the ways in which his other source materials evoke and appropriate children's books and antique graphics, all of which share an earthy, black, white and ecru palette. This he calls "the color of an archive," as it embodies the kind of histories carried in faded ink, on foxed and injured paper. More than an aesthetic taste or an historical gesture, this visual language is also an excavation of his own, much more specific identity as a person and a student of art.

Orlovski deeply appreciates how projection can be understood as material and descriptive, but more so as psychological. In a sense, his style manifests as a kind of Jungian shadow self, minus the disease. There is a Russian-ness which insists upon its due, even in the full flower of Orlovski's life as an American artist. Russia surfaces in his dreams, in his antique library, in his love for orphaned 100-year old objects, in books with worn covers and Cyrillic captions, in stark snowy landscapes, men in dark coats and tall fur hats, and the ghost of Kasimir Malevich.

In the affecting projection-mapped video sculpture "Figure With Suprematist Composition," all of these facets of material and meaning come together in an assembly of persona and history. A jewel-like animation is projected through a wide crevice into the interior of a child- or even doll-size mannequin torso. The body's rough, dark linen skin approximates both canvas and bronze; it's very old. One must bow one's head slightly to catch full sight of the video, flickering at the back of the forms interior like the lights in Plato's cave. The animation addresses one of the most influential movements in Russian culture and art history generally, remixed and transformed into an allegorical monument rife with symbolism.

In both "Feet with Flags" and the single "Flag" sculptures, the projections delight in service of ambient illusion, as flickering white surfaces give a sense of billowing fabric belonging to kinetic flying flags of state or sport. One ambivalently indicates a rusty surrender, the other evokes the winged feet of the messenger god Mercury. Most of Orlovski's hybrid projection sculptures are more narrative, in that they portray dreamlike figures, objects, and landscape. Frequently, the figures which Orlovski develops in paintings make appearances in the animations. This has included birds, women, the moon, and waterfalls; and the more recent introduction of a silhouetted man in a squat winter coat, who seems to be in a hurry.

There's no getting past it, the man looks Russian. He moves alone and in dense crowds of his clones, in layered perspective and fractal flows, on canvases such as "Night Hike" and in sculptural projections such as "Head with Running Man." Here the head gradually fills entirely with projected light until it becomes like a lantern, and the light recedes as its animation dismantles itself, before repeating on an endless loop. The distinctive cinematic flicker is actually ambient studio light, as the filming process takes so long that the natural light changes, and the work comes to encapsulate the very passage of time.

In "Head with Waves" a burlap head hosts a swelling and receding tide of water and light. Perhaps they are brainwaves, or ocean squalls, or both, in ways related to water as chief among Jungian archetypes. Water in certain literary modes is a reliable signifier of the state of the subconscious - be it a rushing river, a peaceful ocean, a misty waterfall, a gentle or catastrophic rain. That a laboriously hand-wrought symbology of the mind be culled from individual and collected memories and then projected onto an actual head is surely among the great Jungian gestures in contemporary art, completing a perfect loop of form, material, and meaning.

Shana Nys Dambrot