

Stas Orlovski: "Nocturne" at Traywick Contemporary

By Dewitt Cheng MARCH 2020

reviews



Modernism, a revolt against bourgeois conformity, generated its own sects, schisms, sects and warring 'isms'; it also devolved, in the fullness of time, into a new orthodoxy, especially when everything became fair game for postmodern appropriation, quotation and, alas, "referencing." In 2006, two Los Angeles critics saw in that eclecticism a "mix and match hybridity... an odd sort of orthodoxy [or] conformity," and discerned in "the dystopian wing of the 'newbrow' aesthetic ... nothing more meaningful than 'ecstatic apocalypse.'" Now granted: 1), Ecological collapse is in the air these days; and 2), it often seems to be presented, appallingly, as entertainment for eloi (the helpless flower children in *The Time Machine*). However, one of the targets of this critical dyspepsia was Stas Orlovski, a Moldovan-born artist raised now living in Tinseltown, and popular for his somber, moody nearly-monochromatic mixed-media collages with charcoal, Xerox transfer, watercolor, gouache, oil and printed papers. Reconciling "poetry and pathology," his work combines Cornelian nostalgia (no imagery later than the 19th century is used) with a dark surreal poetry reminiscent of Odilon Redon or Roland Topor; they also recapitulate the history of animated film, suggesting stills from some obscure film about enchanted lost worlds like *Wonderland* or *Neverland*, the *Edens of children*.

"Nocturne" comprises thirteen pieces on Japanese paper. *Nocturne with Pine Tree and Bird*, *Russian Nocturne*, *Nocturne with Head and Flowers*, *Interior with Paintings and Bonsai*, and *Songbird with Russian Sky* feature clusters of drawn and collaged elements (birds, flowers, trees, light beams, moons, musical notes) set within large fields of torn paper fragments, gradated like Cubist planes, or Malevich's geometric peasants. These large pieces, mounted on canvas, verge on mere handsomeness. More successful are the magical smaller works: the portentous *Three Clouds*, the spiritualized still life of *Bonsai*, the oddly curtained vista of *Alpine* and the small, strange, ambiguous drawings of blob-like heads, featureless but for a single ear, consorting with statues or sprouting incomprehensible cactus buds.

