

STAS ORLOVSKI

Born 1969 Kishinev, Moldova; lives and works in Los Angeles



The gardens in Stas Orlovski's sumptuous works on paper are curious enclaves, open to the public after hours, for private visitations only. Background landscapes are only sparsely defined; no one besides the viewer is ever around. Cued by birdsong, vague associations of not-quite-remembered art objects and not-quite-familiar flowers haunt a visit, recalling books once read and fuzzily remembered, engravings once glimpsed in dusty junk shops. Seemingly random clusters of classical sculptural fragments on pedestals and busily angular modernist sculptures are crowded out by full-bodied blossoms and crisply articulated vegetation under the huge pockmarked moon.

Orlovski thinks of this series of works as "nocturnes"—tranquil, expressive, lyrical compositions in which images repeat like the strains of Chopin, delicately echoing major refrains. A sculptural fragment of a foot, a drawing of a delicate fern appear in multiple works, dislodging specific locations and arrangements. Orlovski cobbles the compositions from a variety of mediums, including drawing, painting, lithography, Xerox transfer, and found images. Varying the sources of imagery keeps the artist's touch light, displacing autobiography, obsession, and confession. Yet these are deeply personal works, the result of a specific sensibility attracting images like a magnet.



Garden, 1999
Charcoal, ink, watercolor and Xerox transfer on paper on canvas
96 x 84 inches

With the recent birth of his son, Orlovski rediscovered the children's books of his Russian upbringing in the 1970s, whose illustrations are in a fantastic mishmash of styles, ranging from social realism to constructivism to folk art. These books suggested new possibilities for an artist who had developed his own hothouse style over the past decade in masterful figurative drawings of disembodied noses, flying eyeballs and butterflies, and Redon-like mystical flowers and cacti. Suddenly an expanded world of printed images in every style seemed open to him.

Developed over the past year with his C.O.L.A. funding, the new mash-ups feature images ripe with surprising correlations. Finely rendered birds roost in the sleek folds of a modernist sculpture. A lush hand-drawn copy of a flower from a Dutch botanical engraving may appear over the edge of a Xerox transfer of a ruffled page from the *Los Angeles Times*. Drawings from the artist's hand mingle with images taken from the recycling bin. All seems part of the accumulation of time, the result of everyday happenstance. Orlovski works on Japanese paper applied to stretched canvas, and the paper's rich surfaces absorb the shadows of lithography as well as the sensitive textures of pencil drawing.

The nocturnes are sophisticated collages that transcend the particular qualities and limitations of their various media. They admit viewers into the realm of the page, the world of the book, the encyclopedia of images that fill the mind and crowd our consciousness. As it reclaims and reinterprets forgotten or lost images, collage inherently flirts with nostalgia and sentiment. Orlovski is wary of their allure—as well as of the penchant of his fine draftsmanship to render images as perfect and pretty things. His use of found materials and jumbled compositions grounds his facility, making his gardens seem both cultivated and wild, both individually crafted and randomly structured. Somewhat recalling the fantastical settings of the works of Tom Knechtel, Thomas Woodruff, and Julie Heffernan, Orlovski's nocturnes evoke less jocular, more brooding feelings. They are odd, haunted still lifes from the rarefied corners of nature and culture that slowly, quietly play unsettled, unsettling refrains.

Michael Duncan