

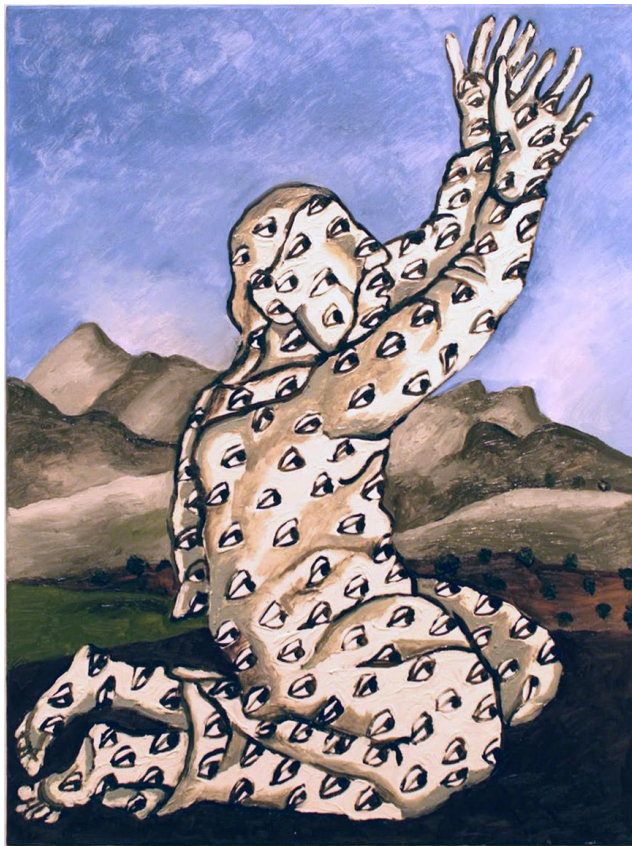
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Natalya Nesterova: Counterpoint

On View: 20 April 2023 - 28 June 2023

Opening: 20 April 2023, 6 - 8pm



Natalya Nesterova, *Entreaty*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in.

Hal Bromm Gallery is pleased to present *Natalya Nesterova: Counterpoint*, a solo exhibition of works by the late Russian-born artist Natalya Nesterova, featuring a selection of her figurative paintings, inspired by folk art, set in playfully onerous environments.

90 WEST BROADWAY NEW YORK 10007 (212) 732-6196
www.halbromm.com

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Born in Moscow in 1944, Nesterova was a well-known Soviet artist who rose to prominence in the early 1970s for her complex style of painting that combined Socialist realism traditions with humor and satire to subtly subvert the excessive censorship and political ideology found in sanctioned art of the Soviet Union.

Unlike some underground Soviet artists, Nesterova joined the Union of Soviet Artists in 1968 at the age of twenty after completing her education at the Moscow Art Institute. This was a prestigious position in the USSR and it brought with it substantial material benefits, including being widely exhibited on a regular basis. She soon rose to prominence and was considered a leading member of the left wing of the Union, and at age twenty-two took part in the exhibits of the Young Moscow Artists.

Nesterova was an artist of bright wit and slick guile. Like the great composer Dmitri Shostakovich, her work was so beautiful as to be given all the awards and renown the Russian State could offer her (under Brezhnev and Putin alike) while simultaneously covertly conveying messages to its viewers that were and are decidedly anti-authoritarian.

While Nesterova was never counted among the core of Russian “dissident” artists, her highly independent creative stance provoked criticism from the Soviet art establishment. Creating works in a figurative primitivist manner while often depicting grotesque imagery, Nesterova was sometimes accused of undermining the foundations of Russian professional artistic training. The appeal and popularity of her work seemed only enhanced by such critiques.



Natalya Nesterova, *The Three of Them (triptych)*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.

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Nesterova had her first exhibition in the United States at Hal Bromm Gallery in 1988 followed by a major career retrospective at the Montreal Musee des Beaux Arts staged in 1992. She has been featured in over sixty exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe including Maya Polsky Gallery (Chicago), Charles Cowell Gallery (Chicago), the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.), the Ludwig Gallery (Cologne), the Guggenheim Museum (New York), the State Russian Museum (St. Petersburg), the State Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow), and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Moscow). During her distinguished career, Nesterova received numerous prestigious awards in Russia, including the National Award in Fine Arts, the Gold Medal of the Academy of Fine Arts, and the titles of Honorary Artist and Academician. In 1991, Nesterova was appointed Professor of Painting at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts in Moscow.



Natalya Nesterova, *Untitled (Beach Scene 1, 2, & 3)*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in. each, 50 x 120 in. overall

Most recently, Nesterova and her work have enraged the Russian establishment for their repudiation of and refusal to conform to the parameters of modern Russian propaganda. In February 2023, Nesterova was named in a visitor complaint sent to the Russian Ministry of Culture, which ultimately led to the removal of the museum's longtime General Director Zelfira Tregulova. The complaint cited several works on display that exhibited "signs of a destructive ideology," including Nesterova's painting *The Last Supper*. After viewing the work, the visitor, unable to correctly identify Judas, determined the piece was a cultural statement against the traditional Russian spiritual and moral values. After a government investigation, Tregulova—a

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well respected art historian who has expressed skepticism of the extreme nationalism of Putin and his sympathizers— was expelled from her position.

But this most recent derision too seems to have only enhanced the appeal of Nesterova's art. Whether touted as a national treasure or derided as a base apostate, Natalya answered only to her own work. The critic Dr. Aleksandra Shatskikh observed:

“Nesterova, who worked beyond borders and barriers, always obeyed only her violent pictorial temperament, strong emotions and endless imagination. An atmosphere of wonder, spiritual significance and lyrical penetration, characteristic of the canvases of Natalya Nesterova, subordinates the viewer to their charm, makes them imbued with a powerful emotional aura and encourages the unraveling of hidden and very significant messages within the paintings.”

In a 1992 interview with curator Louise D'Argencourt, the artist stated, *“my paintings are not 'true to life'. I transpose nothing concrete, no personal feelings. All the 'life' is in my head, it's all images.”*

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Natalya Nesterova, a figurative artist, became a member of the Artists' Union of the USSR in 1969, a short year after graduating from Moscow's Surikov Art Institute. She was soon considered a leading member of the left wing of the Union, and at age twenty-two took part in the exhibits of the Young Moscow Artists. Creating works in a figurative primitivist manner while often depicting grotesque imagery, Nesterova was sometimes accused of undermining the foundations of Russian professional artistic training. The appeal and popularity of her work seemed only enhanced by such critiques. Nesterova returns often to the theme of fate and enlightenment with religious connotations and elements of theater. At the opening of her major 1992 retrospective at the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Nesterova was asked to explain the meaning of her works. In halting English, she explained that she wants the viewer to find their own meaning in her work stating, “my work is about what you see.”

Nesterova was a member of the Russian Academy of Arts since 2001, and her works are included in the collections of museums world-wide, including the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York, the National Museum of Art of China in

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Beijing, the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal, the Marc Chagall Museum in Vitebsk among others.

ABOUT HAL BROMM

A downtown pioneer, Hal Bromm established Tribeca's first contemporary gallery in 1975, followed by an East Village branch in 1984.

Since its establishment, Hal Bromm Gallery has organized historically significant exhibitions in New York City, presenting and championing the early work of many important contemporary artists including Derek Jarman, Rosemarie Castoro, Richard Nonas, Suzanne Harris, Lynn Umlauf, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Lucio Pozzi, Andre Cadere, Ted Stamm, Alain Kirili, Peter Downsbrough, Joe Zucker, Paolo Icaro, Michael Goldberg, Alice Adams, Jody Pinto, Keith Haring, Jeff Wall, Carlos Alfonzo, Joel Fisher, David Wojnarowicz, Mike Bidlo, Judy Glantzman, Russell Sharon, Nicholas Moufarrege, Greer Lankton, Luis Frangella, Bobby G, Walter Robinson, Rick Prol, Arch Connelly, Kiki Smith, Huck Snyder, Greer Lankton, Keiko Bonk, and Martin Wong, highlighting the energy and depth of talent surfacing in Downtown Manhattan throughout the 1970s and 1980s..

For nearly five decades, Hal Bromm has remained committed to its rich history of collaborating with artists, galleries, museums and institutions on the development and curation of avant-garde exhibitions that provide meaningful context around storied moments in contemporary art.

General Inquiries: Hal Bromm, hal@halbromm.com

Press Contact: Kristin Sancken, kristin@kristinsancken.com

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