

Althuis Hofland Fine Arts

Tons de Lealdade

Yuri Rodekin

Classics never go out of style. This established assertion could clarify the charming, somewhat sinister, yet preciously joyful appeal of Yuri Rodekin's work. Initially influenced by the romantic vibe of P. G. Wodehouse's books and stories, they portray an idealized, serene, close-to-real world through stories of sophisticated, perhaps even pretentious gentlemen and ladies. Nostalgic for the potential future, it's a world that is "as happy as I see it, as beautiful as I see it, as ideal as I see it," as Rodekin excitedly describes it.

"I'd like each picture to connect to the one I did before," the Russian Austria-based artist explains his oeuvre's tight coherence and complementing appeal, "They should tell the same story, and although places are different, days are different, and I am different, the story still goes on." Although infused with vague tension and drama, Rodekin's images result from a playful, not dramatic, process of dealing with positive feelings. Strengthened by impassioned responses to books, stories, or personal experiences, they link reality with the imagination to devise an idea of a decadent dolce vita that could be. Driven by sincere joy, his painterly practice is a way of self-entertaining, an eternal play through which an ideal reflection of himself or visual representation of a literal character takes shape.

Continuously inspired by the books and influenced by movies, illustrations, comics, fashion, popular culture, and life, the works showcase dandy-like characters Rodekin genuinely believes in and is excited about. They are ageless, androgynous, fluid individuals who don't belong in any particular time or space and whose attitude is regularly affected by the stories in which the artist is immersed. They go through easy, idealized lives just eating, drinking, dressing up, and fooling around. With an aura of chicness, class, or even decadence, they are on a never-ending quest for love, companionship, and pleasure. Their elegance, or their effort 'to be more beautiful than they are,' as Rodekin chucklingly puts it, stems from the artist's brief stint in the fashion industry. As romantic as they are vicious, as flamboyant as they are restrained, and as outgoing as they are introverted, they intensify the open-endedness of their affairs. Even smoking becomes an act of 'contemplating the spirit' and revealing the soul to the viewer, rather than simply inhaling and puffing cigarette smoke. Believing in their existence and curious about their stories, Rodekin merely assists them in living their lives parallel to his - on the canvas. Equally, they rarely engage in distinct activities, and instead, they assist the artist in continuing his pursuits while sustaining their own existence.

Their panache and bohemian attitude are accentuated by a bubble-gum color palette evoking memories of idyllic, happy childhood moments, infusing the scenes with the joyous, laissez-faire atmosphere. Rodekin, seeing himself as an alchemist of sorts, uses elated emotions to guide how pigments melt into undefinable shades, often surprising himself. At the same time, the reference to the days gone by tints the images with melancholy and nostalgia. Not for the times that have passed but for the qualities and ways that have been lost. This sentiment manifests in the attentive choice and careful display of household items throughout the pictures. Nodding to the playfulness of the Dutch genre painting and the attention to everyday life, Rodekin frequently paints real-life objects around him. In constructing a sense of staged autobiographical *mise-en-scène*, the wallpapers, fabrics, books, furniture, and porcelain kitchenware are depicted as sources of comfort or mute friends. And under their shadows of faithfulness (*Tons de Lealdade*), the suave smooth operators are simply actors in their own movies, witnesses to their anachronistic existence

- Saša Bogojev