



Leonardo Silaghi, untitled, oil on canvas, 84" x 120", 2010. Silaghi's work is on display at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, part of the exhibit "After the Fall."

Iron Curtain Call

The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill is currently hosting "After the Fall," an exhibit featuring the work of both established and up-and-coming modern Eastern European artists. On display since September, the exhibit is a manifestation of the dramatic cultural, political, and social changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe since the end of Communist rule in the early 1990s.

The title of "Eastern European Artist" is a loaded label. It conjures up a bevy of images ranging from the cliché to the austere. However, whatever it used to mean has changed dramatically in the two decades following the fall of the Iron Curtain. Just as Eastern Europe is a region in flux, so is the art that it produces. The exhibit consists of the work of 18 artists from six different nations, each one of whom represents the transition that the area is undergoing. While all of the featured artists were born during the Communist period, the vast majority of their educations, particularly their artistic educations, occurred in a post-1991 world where artistic expression had suddenly become freer.

Art patrons looking for ironic takes on Soviet iconography or displays of Ostalgia may be disappointed, as that is not what "After the Fall" is about. It really is an exhibit of what Eastern European art is today and the direction that it is heading in. Multifaceted, the art featured represents not only the geographic diversity of the artists brought together but also of their life experiences, worldviews, and historical memory.

Some of the artists, like HVCCA's most recent artist-in-residence Leonardo Silaghi, produce art that is seemingly devoid of the ethnocultural markers that Western audiences often expect to see in an exhibition of postsocialist Eastern European art. This in effect begs the questions: What is postsocialist Eastern European art? Is it art that should be immediately ascribable to a particular geographic locale? Is it still a distinct

genre? While the answer to this last question is certainly yes, it does remain a genre; it is a genre that is being redefined.

That is not to say, though, that there are no historical echoes ringing through some of the works on display. The shadow of the region's history strikes one immediately upon entrance into the gallery. Prominently displayed and bisecting the gallery into two different atmospheric spheres, one realist and the other more surreal, is Adrian Ghenie's portrait of the late Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. His image sets the mood for the entire exhibit. On the one hand, his figure looms heavy and foreboding, embodying a palpable malevolence. However, upon closer examination the work reveals a surrealist detail: Ceausescu is depicted without hands.

Historical memory also permeates rather distinctly through the works of Zsolt Bodoni. His paintings Tito's Cadillac and Green Uniform drip with a blurring of imagery pertaining to the late Yugoslav dictator Josef Tito. It goes without saying that the historical significance of the subject, along with the generally dark mood surrounding Bodoni's paintings, is a clear connection to the dark chapters in Eastern Europe's recent history.

Still other featured works tackle historical memory by utilizing enduring cultural images created by past Eastern European artists. Daniel Pitin, for instance, uses stills from 1970s-era Czech television as fodder for his work; four of his paintings are in the show. Elvis Krstulovic's painting Blurred Narratives/Stalker is a reimagining of Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*. Taken in aggregate, the exhibit, with its breadth and depth, is an impressive collection of work. "After the Fall" will be exhibited through July 24, 2011, at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill. (914) 788-7166; www.hvcca.org.

by Andrew Glikin-Gusinsky, November 29, 2010