



KESJA TABACZUK

Nostalgic Whimsy

By Erin E. Rand



A few years ago, Kesja Tabaczuk was working as a retail sales associate at Zara in Oslo, and painting portraits for her friends and family on the side. Growing up in Poland, she'd always been attracted to the arts, and even briefly enrolled in art school, but hadn't quite hit her stride. "It never occurred to me to try my luck in galleries or even post my paintings on social media," she says.

In the meantime, she began exploring the world of contemporary artists and came across paintings by artists like Jeremy Lipking and Casey Baugh. She says, "I couldn't believe there were living artists that were painting like that. I was so inspired, and after that I never stopped painting."

Everything clicked into place. Tabaczuk soon found representation with Galleri Ramfjord in Oslo and was able to quit her retail to paint full time. And this July, she will have her debut solo show in the United States at Arcadia Contemporary. When Steve Diamant, president of Arcadia, first reached out to her, Tabaczuk says she thought it was a scam. "Artists get scam messages every day," she says. "But it was real. And now, before I even had the chance to dream about an artistic career, it's happened."

Tabaczuk starts the process of painting by finding a face. "I don't usually have an idea to start with," she says. Instead, she does photo sessions, sometimes taking a thousand photos before she finds the face that she wants to paint. After she settles on a subject, she edits the photo using apps on her phone, sometimes changing the hair color, eye color and other features. Getting the eyebrows just right is particularly important. "You can change the facial expression so much by just changing the shape of the eyebrows," she explains. "When I'm changing the face, it's not about making it prettier, but about giving it subtle expression." By the time she's finished editing, the face may not look anything like it did when it started.

Once she's gotten the face just right, Tabaczuk begins to think about the other elements of the painting, sometimes adding a more detailed background or an animal, but she tries not to over-complicate things: the focal point of her paintings is always the face.





3

"In art school, they teach you to block everything in and go from larger elements to the details, but I do the opposite," Tabaczuk says of her painting process. "I always start with the eyes, using tiny brushes, and as I move on, I go for the bigger brushes and paint more freely."

The paintings for Tabaczuk's show at Arcadia don't necessarily have a common theme, but they do have

a common spirit. She typically paints girls and young women, and she often sees herself in her subjects. "I am very nostalgic, and I cherish my childhood and teenage years very much," she says. "It's probably some period of my life that I haven't said 'goodbye' to yet, or maybe I'll never say it."

Tabaczuk explains that her painting *Whimsical Joy* is a reflection of her childhood. In it, a girl wears

1
Remote Nooks, oil on
linen, 24 x 18"

2
Lost Crown, oil on
linen, 22 x 22"

3
Whimsical Joy, oil on
linen, 24 x 24"

a tattered, dirty dress, and is surrounded by cows. Though Tabaczuk grew up in the city, she asked her parents to take her to the countryside at every chance she could, and she spent much of her time surrounded by animals and nature. "I had a wonderful childhood with no computers, tablets or phones. No one cared much about appearances," she says. "*Whimsical Joy* captures the essence of my childhood, filled with simplicity, nature and boundless joy."

Windborne Tale depicts a girl in a moody Norwegian setting, with a bonfire raging behind her. "I wanted to show people a bit of Norway through my eyes," she says. "The climate is harsh and somewhat dark, yet incredibly majestic and inspiring." The cool purples and blues of the girl's dress and the dark forest in the background contrast with the warm tones of the fire.



4



5



6

In the painting *Lost Crown*, Tabaczuk departs from her usual oeuvre to portray a young boy. A golden crown rests on his head, slightly askew. “I wanted to illustrate how as adults, we often lose touch with our inner child, which can help us see life and its problems from a fresh perspective, free from complex thoughts,” she says. She hopes the image encourages viewers to take a step back from their complicated,

adult problems and take a moment to think about things from the perspective of a child.

Tabaczuk’s one-woman exhibition at Arcadia Contemporary in New York will feature 15 new paintings. It opens on July 11 and continues through July 24. ●

Arcadia Contemporary 421 W. Broadway • New York, NY
10012 • (646) 861-3941 • www.arcadiacontemporary.com

4
Wings of Wanderlust, oil
on linen, 43 x 43"

5
Hushed Flutter, oil on
linen, 24 x 24"

6
Windborne Tale, oil on
linen, 39 x 39"