

# Performance *Art*

Pantomime and dance serve as crucial inspiration for Ukrainian painter Denis Sarazhin's new show at Arcadia Contemporary.

BY MICHAEL CLAWSON

**F**ailing limbs, shirtless torsos twisted in a writhing bundles of skin and ribs, cocked elbows, ruddy exposed knees angled down and out, calve muscles flexing under rolled pant legs, bare feet arched against the hum of an unheard song somewhere in the infinity of a white or black backgrounds. This isn't ballet. It's more primal, more spontaneous, more bombastic.

For Denis Sarazhin, his dancing figures are expressions of the human form in their rawest state. His figures appear to be moving to their own impulsive beat, an improvisational rhythm that sends the male figures into a state of bohemian bliss, their bodies rejecting their rigid forms and collapsing into a contorted, spinning and dipping mass.

The Ukraine-based painter will be showing his newest works starting December 16 at Arcadia Contemporary in Culver City, California. Works in the show include entries in a number of series, such as *Pantomime* and *The Dancing Men*.

"I take themes from personal experience and feelings. They are born from my observations of life. I'm in touch with the emotions of the people around me," Sarazhin says. "Very often I will use a story from life, something I observed and which really impressed on me. The words or phrases can be an impetus to create some composition based on them."

The two major series he will be exploring at the show are similar, but with subtle and important differences. In *Pantomime*, the artist paints a single figure in various stages of movement, as if a strobe

light has captured a dance sequence in a multiple-exposure photograph. In *Pantomime No. 5*, for instance, a male figure dances alone against a white background. His blue-shirted torso remains mostly still as six arms, three legs and two heads move around the image. In *Pantomime No. 16*, a single figure contorts and shapes his hands and fingers into a jumble of body parts, each limb an echo of a movement that occurred a fraction of a second earlier.

"Pantomime, it's a kind of performing art, a way of expressing information or telling a story without words by using body movements and facial expressions," he says. "I'm very impressed with plasticity, beauty and the aesthetics and grace of the human figure. But it's also the nonverbal language, which can say more than words. No words are able to surpass the force of expressiveness of the human body. There is simply so many expressions, feelings and emotions hiding in the gestures of the figure."

For *The Dancing Men* series, Sarazhin focuses on groups of male dancers, each dressed in brightly colored shirts or pants. In *The Dancing Men No. 5*, he uses vibrant color with an almost antique, rusty quality to give the three figures their own personality as they writhe next to each other. "I just want to emphasize that color is an important part of composition as a whole. Color sends a message that it wishes to convey some tension or the other way around, to convey calm," he adds. "Color has a visual psychological impact and can encourage feelings and mood. Because of that, color has powerful language to impart information that could not be realized any other way."

He continues, "The idea of *The Dancing Men* haven't gone very far from the *Pantomime* series. They feature more certain action and dance. But it is a very absurd dance, whether the men are dancing or whether they're squeezing

1  
Denis Sarazhin working on one of a painting in his *Dancing Men* series.

2  
*The Dancing Men 4*, oil on canvas, 43½ x 43½"







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3

*Pantomime No. 15*, oil on canvas, 33½ x 33½"

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*The Dancing Men 5*, oil on canvas, 43½ x 43½"

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*Pantomime No. 5*, oil on canvas, 59 x 51¼"

6

*Pantomime No. 16*, oil on canvas, 39½ x 39½"

5



6

or creating this pressure—it all goes around the dance within the picture. The stylization of what is happening, that reinforces the concentration on the main characters of this story. The flatness of the canvas space is used similar to cave art. Primitive visual language is very similar to how the men are dancing here. And why are they dancing? What is it, to dance? That is a very distant question to the main question of human existence.”

In addition to *Pantomime* and *The Dancing Men*, Sarazhin will be exhibiting his *Dreamer* series, which shows round portraits of female figures with arrangements of flowers in the corners. Additionally, in *Embodiment*, the artist brings that round composition into the center of the painting, where the flowers now take center stage. In *Embodiment No. 11* a mournful face looks down out of the painting while a bouquet

of flowers is arranged like a crown around the back of her head.

Sarazhin lives and works in a historic district in the heart of Kharkiv, Ukraine. His studio space, with big windows and high ceilings, is next to the studio of his wife, Victoria Kalaichi. He has worked with many galleries since 2005, and admits that they were often less than ideal pairings. “With Steve [Diamant], director of Arcadia Contemporary, we have worked together for less than a year, but it is the most powerful and intensive year of collaboration,” he says.

With a gallery supporting him, and new pieces coming at a steady clip, Sarazhin is ready to begin showing off his new work and watch viewers react to the imagery. “I really hope that people who are looking at my canvases can find pieces of their own

feelings and emotions within them. Those emotions can be different and not similar at all with each other,” he says. “I want to give viewers the opportunity to have a free interpretation of what they saw on the canvas. What they see may depend on their own worldview and life experience, but the viewers’ story will always be unique, unrepeatably and one of a kind.” ●

## DENIS SARAZHIN: SOLO EXHIBITION

**When:** December 16-31, 2017

**Where:** Arcadia Contemporary,  
9428 Washington Boulevard, Culver City, CA 90232

**Information:** (424) 603-4656

[www.arcadiaccontemporary.com](http://www.arcadiaccontemporary.com)