

Sergei Isupov: Past & Present at Ferrin Contemporary, North Adams

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Sergei Isupov: PAST & PRESENT is on view at Ferrin Contemporary, North Adams

May 7 – June 26, 2022

Ferrin Contemporary is proud to present new works from internationally renowned sculptor Sergei Isupov. Sergei Isupov: PAST & PRESENT features new ceramic sculptures presented with both a multi-dimensional, mixed-media wall installation and independent pedestal based works. Isupov and Ferrin Contemporary have been working together and presenting exhibitions internationally since 1996 and this will be the artist's third solo show in our North Adams gallery location.

This exhibition comes at a particularly sensitive time for the artist. Born in Stravapole, Russia in 1963, Isupov is the son of a painter and sculptor. He was raised and educated in Kyiv, Ukraine and Tallinn, Estonia when both of these now separate countries were part of the USSR. International recognition came early in his career, working in independent Estonia prior to his move to the United States in 1994. Isupov has been based in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts since 2006. Now, with his wife, artist Kadri Parnaments and their daughter Roosi, they divide their time between two studios/homes in the USA and Estonia.

Isupov's family, his father, mother and brother, all established artists, currently reside in Kyiv, Ukraine. With the backdrop of the current war there and threats of Russian aggression in Estonia, Isupov's recent studio work took on an urgency to counter the overwhelming anxiety and concern for his family facing down threats to their safety and the loss of their formerly peaceful lives.

This show was especially poignant to watch develop and see the images emerge that express fear, worry, and emotions through the narratives he paints. We are neighbors and share a daily exchange. Concerned about the awful news coming out of Kyiv, I would ask about his mother Nelli, learn she was OK, momentarily relieved. Sergei would return to the studio, to the cycle of worry, processing emotions through the illustration details in his time intensive surfaces.

Leslie Ferrin, founding director of Ferrin Contemporary and Project Art, where this exhibition was produced.

This exhibition places him in an unintentional conversation with those post-war artists who were processing the horrors of WWII through their art, artists such as Dorothea Tanning, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dalí. "Isupov has always worked with themes and methods associated with the surrealists. Using the subconscious as a guide and a unique approach to representing the body, traditional narratives are upended. Couple that with a distinct material approach and Isupov evokes a deep emotional response in the viewer," says Lauren Levato Coyne, gallery director.

This nonlinear narration, combined with Isupov's unmatched masterful skills as both painter and sculptor resulted in works that draw from the past and reflect on the present. Semi-autobiographical, Isupov's intimate narratives interweave poignant representations of men and women, parents and children, shown alongside one another, their pets pointing to the naive sense of security we hold in our daily lives. These works explore individual, interior landscapes and the continually expanding dualities of the self within complex psychological relationships. Intensely personal yet universal, these works in the context of the present day, remind and call upon us to value, protect and preserve the precarious balance we all stand to lose at any present moment.

Isupov pushes the "in the round" idea of a sculpture to its apex by creating a narrative form that is then painted, using stain and glaze, to deepen the story. "Like an Eternity," pictured above, is a prime example of Isupov's skill. He sculpts a form that becomes both man ready to fight and another man, or possibly a moon or ghost, in quiet observation. Two couples occupy different landscapes on their journeys, recto and verso of the piece, and their nakedity and or their brightly clothed bodies reveal and conceal their emotional states. Symbols of hope and confusion depicted as decorative shapes feature threatening clouds, caged animals, beams of light. We can't help but wonder what did, or what will, become of them.

Sergei Isupov: PAST & PRESENT is a body of several new works in ceramic including a wall-based installation of both ceramic, paper, and other materials. The work was produced at Project Art in Cummington, MA and runs Sat., May 7 – Sun., June 26 with an artist talk and reception at the gallery on Sat., June 4 from 4 – 6pm. All events at Ferrin Contemporary are free.

TurnPark Art Space: Earth & Sky fire sculpture

In addition to his solo exhibition at Ferrin Contemporary, Isupov will be building his first US, site-specific, massive standing dual figural sculpture to be fired on Sat., June 11 at TurnPark Art Space. This Earth & Sky fire sculpture and performance firing event is the third collaboration with Estonian Andres Allik who has designed and built petal kilns with Isupov in Star, NC and Skaelskor, Denmark. This will be the first petal kiln in New England. TurnPark Art Space is a sculpture park, contemporary art center, and event venue in West Stockbridge, MA.

Additionally, TurnPark will present Proximal Duality, a collection of Isupov's works that are conceptually related to the Earth & Sky fire sculpture. Curated by Grigori Faytev, these works explore duality in relationships through physical forms, painted surfaces, and large scale drawings on paper since 2008. Isupov's Earth & Sky fire sculpture will be the centerpiece of TurnPark's Annual Summer Festival which presents an array of multicultural performances, visual artworks, and music under the theme of Healing Flames. The festival begins at 4pm during the hottest part of the firing and will continue until the kiln is opened and reveals the red hot sculpture at 10pm. This event will also serve as a fundraiser to help the people of Ukraine.

A variety of performances and visual artworks will be presented on the TurnPark Art Space grounds along with music, food, drink, and activities for kids. Visit turnpark.com for more info and to purchase tickets; children under 12 free.

About Sergei Isupov (b. 1963)

Stavropole, USSR, lives and works between Cummington, MA, USA and Tallinn, Estonia

Sergei Isupov is an Estonian-American sculptor internationally known for his highly detailed, narrative works. Isupov explores painterly figure-ground relationships, creating surreal sculptures with a complex artistic vocabulary that combines two- and three-dimensional narratives and animal/human hybrids. He works in ceramics using traditional hand building and sculpting techniques to combine surface and form with narrative painting using colored stains highlighted with clear glaze.

Isupov has a long international resume with work included in numerous collections and exhibitions, including the National Gallery of Australia, Museum Angewandte in Kunst, Germany, and in the US at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Crocker Art Museum, Everson Museum of Art, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, Museum of Arts and Design, Museum of Fine Arts–Boston, Museum of Fine Arts–Houston, Mint Museum of Art, and Racine Art Museum. In 2017, his solo exhibition at The Erie Art Museum presented selected works in a 20-year career survey titled Hidden Messages, followed by Surreal Promenade, another survey solo in 2019 at the Russian Museum of Art in Minnesota.

About Ferrin Contemporary & Project Art

For more than 40 years, Ferrin Contemporary has been a leading source for contemporary and modern ceramic art. Located on MASS MoCA's 16-acre campus in North Adams, MA, Ferrin Contemporary serves as both a project incubator and traditional commercial gallery program. Curated exhibitions are presented in conjunction with partner galleries, museums, and educational institutions throughout the country. In addition to our gallery and museum programs, we specialize in the sale of primary and secondary market works by leading international artists whose primary medium is clay. Led by founding director, Leslie Ferrin, our team of specialists provide collection and estate management services for collectors and artists and to provide support acquisition for public collections of ceramics 1950 – present.

Both of Isupov's 2022 exhibitions include works in porcelain and mixed-media drawings produced at Project Art in Cummington, MA. Project Art is a former 19th-Century mill building he owns with Leslie Ferrin, Founding Director of Ferrin Contemporary. The space hosts exhibitions, events, workshops, and artist residencies.

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