

## Sergey Kononov *Celso and the past*

1 May – 4 June 2025

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

Opening: Thursday, 1 May, 6 – 8pm



Sergey Kononov, *Svitlana and Slavik*, 2024, photo: def image

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *Celso and the past*, an exhibition of ten paintings by **Sergey Kononov** at Bleibtreustraße 45 in Berlin. This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

In his intimate portraits, Ukrainian painter Sergey Kononov captures quiet moments of solitude or togetherness. Light-drenched and pooled in grainy, ochre tones, Kononov's canvases exude a tenderness and familiarity reminiscent of a bygone era, thus probing the conventions of realist painting. 'It's important for me to capture a luminosity. I want to recreate the look of old films – that grain, that warm light – which I've loved my whole life,' the artist explains.<sup>1</sup>

In the present exhibition, three closely cropped portraits depict faces obscured by cascading locks of golden hair. Subsumed in their inner selves, eyes closed or cast downward in martyr-like poses, Kononov's subjects are imbued with the immediacy of photographic snapshots and the timelessness of ancient frescoes.

In other compositions, Kononov presents lingering glimpses of domestic solitude. A girl falls asleep in the study of an Italian palazzo, slumped over an open book. In another painting, she languidly rests her head on an ornate chair, seemingly caught in a moment of melancholy, the tiled floor beneath her providing a mosaic backdrop. Set in these anachronistic interiors, the contemporary body takes on a distinct ethereal quality, as though suspended in time and place.

Kononov's subjects are intimate by nature: they usually depict people he is close to, photographed and later eternalised in paint. In one work, a man rests in his companion's lap, his arms slung around her upper body. In another, a couple sprawls across a sumptuous orange sofa, a vintage rug slipping out from under their bare bodies and onto the wooden floor. As enigmatic as they are exposed, these paintings radiate with raw vulnerability. Rendered against a flat swathe of vivid ochre, a solitary sitter confronts the viewer's gaze in another composition. With fists raised, he displays his gold-ringed fingers.

Carnal, bold and nostalgic, Kononov's paintings offer searing tributes to youth in a time of socio-political turbulence. In his depictions, Kononov is meticulous, as attuned to posture as he is to drapery

<sup>1</sup> S. Kononov, 'Sergey Kononov doesn't like to be rushed', *Plaster Magazine*, October 2024.

and pattern. Each surface is rendered with care, built up from diminutive marks and haloed in a golden light that speaks to the artist's varied influences – from Impressionism to Lucian Freud, Andrew Wyeth and Sandro Botticelli. At once haunting and familiar, fleeting and timeless, Kononov's portraits unlock something of his protagonists' inner lives, imbuing the quotidian with a new – and needed – sensuality.

**Sergey Kononov** (b. 1994, Odesa, Ukraine) lives and works in Paris, France. The artist's work has been the subject of institutional solo exhibitions at Théâtre National de La Criée, Marseille (2020); Ukraine National Art Museum, Kyiv (2015); and the Museum of Odesa Modern Art (2014). Kononov's works are in the public collections of Fondation Francès, Clichy / Senlis; and the Museum of Odesa Modern Art.

#### Further exhibitions and events

##### BERLIN

Thomas Struth  
25 April – 21 June 2025  
Potsdamer Straße 77-87  
10785 Berlin

Leilah Babirye  
*Ekimyula Ekijjankunene (The Gorgeous Grottesque / Die prächtige Grotteske)*  
1 May – 28 June 2025  
Goethestraße 2/3  
10623 Berlin

Leilah Babirye  
*Ekimyula Ekijjankunene (The Gorgeous Grottesque / Die prächtige Grotteske)*  
1 May – 4 June 2025  
Bleibtreustraße 15/16  
10623 Berlin

##### PARIS

Sarah Crowner  
*Tableaux en Laine, Pierres en Bronze*  
26 April – 21 June 2025  
46 & 57, rue du Temple  
75004 Paris

##### LONDON

Jake Longstreth  
*California Landscapes*  
24 April – 8 June 2025  
41 Dover Street  
London W1S 4NS

##### MARFA

Richard Prince  
*Posters*  
17 May – 7 December 2025  
1976 Antelope Hills Road  
Marfa, Texas

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