

BORTOLAMI

Ella Kruglyanskaya

Keep Walking

29 October – 18 December 2021

Opening Friday, 29 October from 6:00 – 8:00pm

Both a mantra and a quip, the title of Ella Kruglyanskaya's first exhibition with Bortolami Gallery, *Keep Walking*, arms her trademark protagonists as they confront their audience with unabashed femininity. Drawing attention to the heightened plots of female sexuality and its mundanity alike, Kruglyanskaya's painted bodies reenact and subvert the womanhood canonized in traditions of western painting and in visual culture, infusing gendered tropes with her brash and comedic approach to representation.

Kruglyanskaya works non-hierarchically and seamlessly between painting and drawing mediums. Drawing becomes a site of experimentation, a refuge from the permanence of a brush stroke and as personal as one's own handwriting. Quick graphite gestures reveal the way her mercurial mind decodes and augments the manifold visual and literary references from which she works. Here, the dichotomy between drawing and painting becomes even less distinguishable for Kruglyanskaya, who lays and tapes paper edges against vivid plaid and ominous negative space.

Challenging the limitations of the frame has been a steady theme in Kruglyanskaya's paintings, and her latest works continue to negotiate the relationship between the spectator and her fictional characters. Features and identities are revealed and obscured by methodical cropping and superimposed trompe l'oeil tools of her trade, from used paint rags and torn paper to the dried paint on the handles and ferrules of the paintbrushes. Whether walking off the linen or writhing sensually within it, each of Kruglyanskaya's women is in the throes of an unspoken allegory, their momentum or stillness just a glimpse of the domesticity and fraught social and sexual dynamics that have pervaded in a time of self reflection and care.

Whereas past subjects donned bold, clinging swimsuits and patterned bodycon dresses, Kruglyanskaya has subdued her approach in *Keep Walking*. Allocating her fixation on textiles towards the notion of space, plaid becomes the foundation for works including *Moving on up (Plaid)*, in which two figures clutching hands camouflage into their surroundings, one hastily leading the other off-screen. Juxtaposed with a portrait of a woman napping on a lurid plaid sofa, Kruglyanskaya illustrates the disparity between the woman in public and in isolation. Kruglyanskaya's women sexually flourish in seclusion, a reclamation of femininity which is not to be mistaken for privacy. What are these women getting dressed for? As if to respond, another woman walks by carrying a bag of groceries.

Ella Kruglyanskaya (b. 1978, Latvia) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions of her work were staged at Thomas Dane Gallery in London, Feuilleton in Los Angeles, and Real Pain Fine Arts in Los Angeles. Past solo exhibitions have been held at venues including The Power Station, Dallas; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany; Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York and Rome, Italy; Kendall Koppe, Glasgow, Scotland; Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland; and Studio Voltaire, London, UK. Works by Kruglyanskaya have been included in group exhibitions at The Aishti Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon; kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, Latvia; The Baltic Triennial, Vilnius, Lithuania; The Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, Illinois; The Hepworth Wakefield, Hepworth, UK; Pace Gallery, London, UK; and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, where her work is on view through January 30, 2022.