

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Moldan, Tessa. 'Ella Kruglyanskaya Steals from Art History, Takes Back Gaze'. *Ocula*, March 27, 2020

# OCULA

## Ella Kruglyanskaya Steals from Art History, Takes Back Gaze



Installation view, Ella Kruglyanskaya, *This is a Robbery*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 2020;  
courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery

**Shamelessly titled *This is a Robbery* (10 March–23 May 2020), Ella Kruglyanskaya's solo exhibition at Thomas Dane Gallery steals the juiciest segments of art history to reclaim the gaze with broad, sweeping lines and brazen colours that build commanding female figures in compositions on canvas, paper, and linen.**

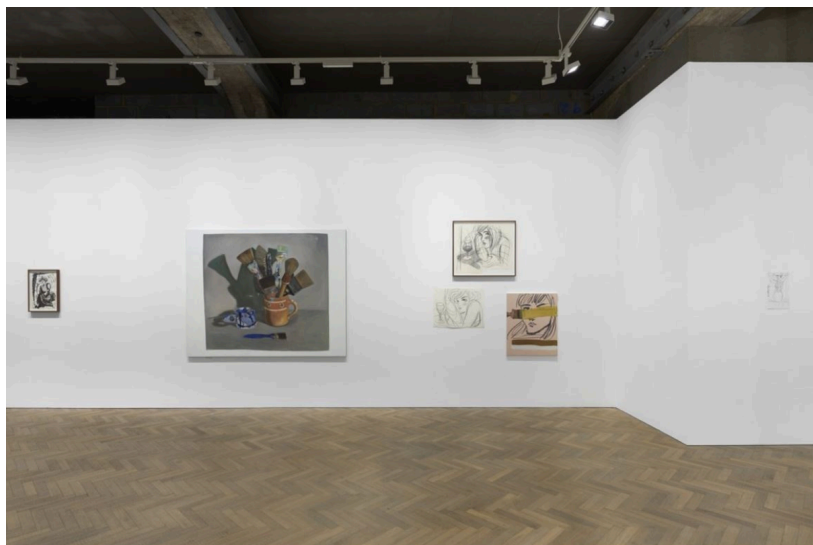
Kruglyanskaya was born in Latvia in 1978 and relocated to Philadelphia aged 17, pursuing a career in art first at The Cooper Union, followed by an MFA at Yale School of Art. Her experience as an advertising art director, combined with influences ranging from Philip Guston to 1950s film and fashion posters, feed into Kruglyanskaya's emphasis on bold, energetic lines and colours with a graphic sensibility. Drawing occupies a vast place in the artist's painting process, and after seeking formal substance through numerous drafts, images are finally cast onto canvas, sometimes depicting graphite lines or pieces of paper in photorealistic renditions.

These self-referential acts are included in the first part of Kruglyanskaya's exhibition, which is set up as a 'continuous collage' of pieces. Gliding paint brushes are spotted in works such as *Running Ink* (2020), where the sweeping form of a woman rendered in coral pink oil stick is mirrored by a hovering paintbrush, with black oil paint made to resemble ink dripping from its hairs.

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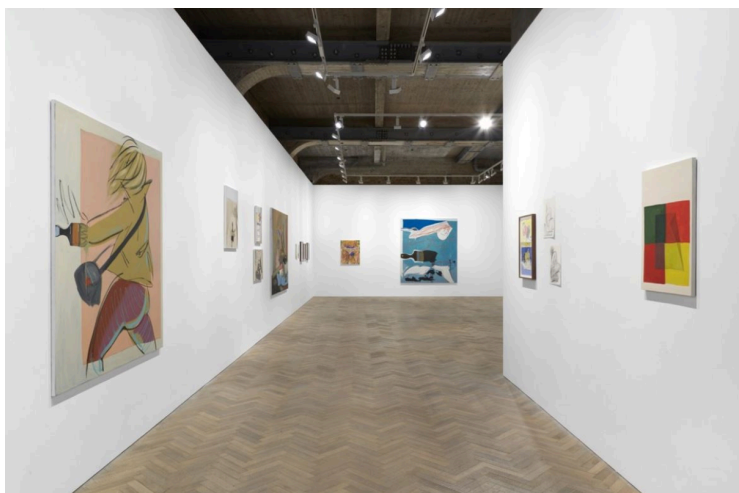
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Installation view, Ella Kruglyanskaya, *This is a Robbery*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 2020;  
courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery

From German Expressionism to ancient Etruscan wall painting, Kruglyanskaya has claimed many different art historical references, using traditional materials such as egg tempura to harness these. *LA Mugs* (2019), one of the show's more classical renditions, pictures earthy-toned paintbrushes in a pot against an ashen background, seated beside a deep blue paintbrush and blue mug. Placed directly across from this work in the show is a less conventional still life, titled *The Arrangement* (2019). A roll of parchment has been painted as the backdrop, on top of which a face has been drawn. Flowers brush against the surface of this paper, their petals mirroring the figure's lashes, while crumpled blue paper below is nestled beneath another piece that is small and cut into cartoonish looking teeth arranged as the figure's mouth.



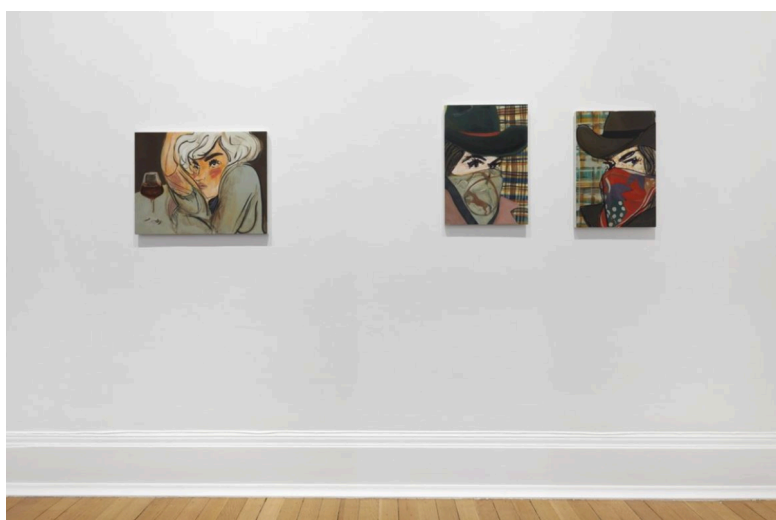
Installation view, Ella Kruglyanskaya, *This is a Robbery*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 2020;  
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Kruglyanskaya's uncanny compositions convey the euphoric tension between colour and form that can be achieved through painting—tensions that are explored in Josef Albers' seminal book, *Interaction of Colour* (1963), the cover of which Kruglyanskaya has reworked into the painting *Albers Veil* (2020). 'I like it when my paintings look as if they just happened to be that way,' she has explained.

In her paintings of jubilant and curvaceous female figures—a collection of which occupy the second gallery—waists, thighs, arms, and pouting faces twist and turn within their frames, caught in mid-pose. These bodies take up space,

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occupy the picture plane, or appear as if they are fleeing onwards and out of reach. In *Entrenched* (2020), for example, two women with large black sunglasses glance to their left—both wrapped in fashionable, coloured and patterned trench coats with large angular collars—and appear to be swiftly moving onward. In the cartoonish, two-part painting, *Over & Under* (2020), two playfully defiant figures manage to retain their authority while walking on their hands and feet, their exaggerated curves echoed in two graphite on paper works that zoom in on pairs of butt cheeks, strokes of paint—rendered in oil stick—being painted across their surface by an anonymous hand.



Installation view, Ella Kruglyanskaya, *This is a Robbery*; Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 2020; courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery

Kruglyanskaya signals the richness of female experience and the many possibilities of paint with drama and humour, turning representation on its head in the process. In the exhibition's final room, paintings are decidedly cinematic. Villainous female characters peer out slyly from between cowboy hats and bandanas covering their faces (*This is a Robbery*, 2019; *This is a Robbery II*, 2020), while figures gaze out from canvases such as *Thoughts and Feelings* (2020) rendered in egg tempura on gessoed panel, picturing a defiant, rosy-cheeked character with thick brows and lashes, sitting with a glass of wine. These figures are not at the mercy of representation—rather, they command it.

<https://ocula.com/magazine/insights/ella-kruglyanskaya-thomas-dane-gallery-london/>