

MAMOTH

Stanislava Kovalcikova *Cautionary Tales*

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MAMOTH, 3 Endsleigh St, WC1H 0DS



Kovalcikova montages figures in boundless scenes suggestive of recurring nightmares, their ghost-like features fixed in pastel and oil bars. Drawn to the techniques of the Old Masters and using a palette of umber, crimson and jade, Kovalcikova's canvases reference the canonical paintings of Giorgione, Titian and Velázquez, her subjects' longing gazes offering a similar mystique to those of the Renaissance muses. Quite often her protagonists are looking away – rarely at the observer, and each at something different – their haunting expressions suggestive of our dual personalities and inner demons, too. A recurring theme of Kovalcikova's paintings is how perceptions and representations of the female body – and, less particularly, of women in general – have shifted over time. While echoing Manet's Olympia and Bonnard's bathers, her eye is drawn to portraying women with a much more complex curiosity, which tackles motherhood, pregnancy and beauty.

Kovalcikova's paintings merge distinctive textures of palette knife smudges, gold leaf dustings and washes of turpentine to build up layers on the surface that dry to look as if they've been eroded by time, like the patina of copper. With the appearance of collage, Kovalcikova's mingling of people moulders on the surface, facial characteristics melting away by her repeated sanding of the canvas, while residues of a haunted smirk or grimace appear underneath. Completed over long periods using found pigments and old mixtures, her paintings often don't leave the studio until they've had three years of perusing and refinement. Writer Joan Didion sleeps with her books before they're published – for Kovalcikova painting is as intimate as a night's sleep, and she frequently permits the characters that emerge in her subconscious to reappear, their familiarity stiffened in oil.

Stanislava Kovalcikova (b. 1988, Slovakia) lives and works in Düsseldorf. Drawing on the contemporary and historical perspective of the female nude, Kovalcikova uses paint as a tool for introspective examining of the body, where her works directly reference 16th-19th century paintings. Her works have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Mendes Wood DM in Brussels and Tramps in London.