

Hot Coffee Conversations



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Hot Coffee with artist Jakub Tomáš, interview with Nina Mdivani

Jakub Tomáš, a contemporary Czech artist takes distortions seriously in his ongoing solo show at [Asya Geisberg Gallery](#) in New York. Working with intersection of man-made and organic figures Tomáš puts them into various scenarios. A girl repairing a robot, a family cozily surrounding a robotic dog, a woman who is half-human and half-machine - they all are part of a hybrid reality that is dawning upon us. Tomáš just puts these changes in front of our faces using a blend of Cubo-Futurism that is somewhat ironic and thus lacking in anxiety.

Nina Mdivani: Imagine you are in your favorite coffee or tea spot. Where is it? What are you drinking? What are the three things you see right now?

Jakub: As the first thing that comes to mind is not a café or tea house, but my mother's garden, where I drink gyokuro tea and gaze at an old apple tree, a stone well, and an old house. Of course, I have favorite cafes and tea houses in cities, but the old garden is an intimate place for me, where I can be alone and enjoy a moment of absolute peace.



Jakub Tomáš, Beekeepers, 2023. Oil on canvas, 63h x 47.25w in, 160.02h x 120.02w cm. Image courtesy of the gallery and the artist.

Nina: Please tell me more about your ongoing exhibition at Asya Geisberg Gallery, titled "The Field Robot of Myself." Why this quirky title? What themes are you looking at here?

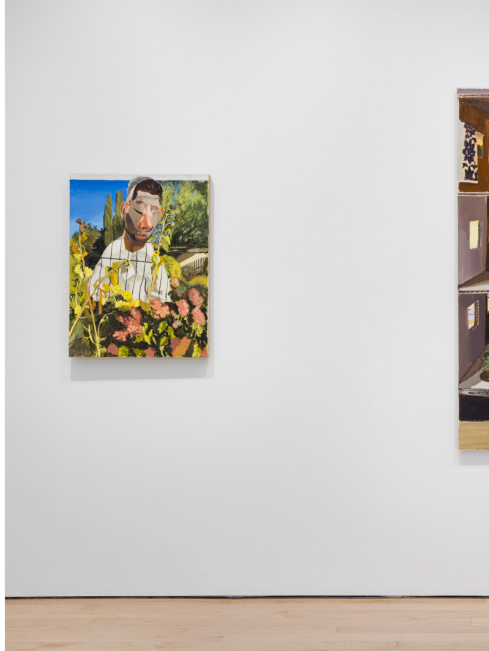
Jakub: The exhibition at Asya Geisberg Gallery is the culmination of a larger series of paintings exploring the relationship between humans and new technologies. Robots and drones appear here not only as assistants, but also as pets or partners. I want to explore the possibilities of coexistence between two entities: humans and machines, where the machine in my paintings can acquire mental or physical parameters of a human or an animal. "The Field Robot of Myself" is a title that emerged with the help of a generative word model. This can also be considered a certain type of collaboration between human and machine. I input prompts related to my interest in the topic (human/machine), and through gradual correction of the machine's outputs, we arrived at this somewhat surrealist title. It could be said that it is a kind of verbal self-portrait from my recent period, encompassing my interest in work.



Jakub Tomáš, *Update*, 2024 Oil on canvas, 55.25h x 71w in 140.34h x 180.34w cm. Image courtesy of the gallery and the artist.

Nina: Could you pick one work currently on view and zero in on it. What is it called? What influenced you when you were working on it? How does it fit the overall direction of your artistic practice?

Jakub: I will choose a painting titled "Update," which refers to an activity known to anyone who uses technology: updating. Metaphorically, it can be understood as regeneration, rebirth, or renaissance. The painting depicts a group of people standing over a robot, with a seated girl repairing the robot while the male figures around her look at her with distrust. While painting, I thought about how competencies related to machine and technology repair are no longer and will not be exclusively male domains. More and more software and hardware tasks may be better handled by women, for their patience and ability to solve multiple problems at once.



Jakub Tomáš, *In the Garden*, 2023. Oil on canvas 31.50h x 23.75w in 80h x 60.33w cm. Image courtesy of the gallery and the artist.

Nina: How would you characterize the Czech art scene? Is it robust? Are there many interesting artists working within a supportive institutional or commercial environment?

Jakub: I think the Czech art scene is having a great moment on the international stage. There are many artists who have managed to attract the attention of significant institutions, galleries, and collectors. In a matter of the last fifteen years, the art market in the Czech Republic began to function better, which helped establish several prominent galleries and artists on the international scene. There are certainly many interesting artists in the Czech scene who are somewhat dependent on institutional support from the state or various grant funds. Although the art market in the Czech Republic is already developed, it is not to the extent that it can absorb conceptual, social, or performative projects. Projects of this type are therefore more reliant on public sources.



Jakub Tomáš, *The Shoe in the Bowl*, 2023. Oil on canvas, 59h x 79w in 149.86h x 200.66w cm. Photo courtesy of the gallery and the artist.

Nina: As a researcher I am very much interested in the idea of how historical traumas have affected art history and how we could trace them in visual arts. What do you think about this connection when it comes to the Czech art of the XX and XXI centuries?

Jakub: Totalitarian regimes that touched our country certainly influenced the development in visual arts, simply

because there was censorship of themes or styles. During communism, the official style of socialist realism dominated here, which was entirely under the influence of the ruling elite. Of course, many interesting things were happening in the underground, influenced by Western art, but there was practically no opportunity for presentation neither domestically nor abroad. One story from my professor comes to mind, who recounted that art magazines from abroad were secretly smuggled into the country, but in a reduced color scale, which probably also influenced the colorfulness of the emerging works here. Members of art groups were reportedly expelled for using a different color scale than what was permissible in the group. Imagine the surprise when the Czech scene later gained access to full-color reproductions or originals. I don't know how true this story is, but I think it well illustrates the limitations of access to anything other than official art at that time.



Installation view, Jakub Tomáš, *The Field Robot of Myself*. Asya Geisberg Gallery, New York. March 8 - April 20, 2024

Nina: What are the next projects you are working towards in 2024?

Jakub: I am currently finishing paintings that I didn't manage to complete for the exhibition in NY, and then I will slowly prepare for a month-long residency in LA at La Brea Studio, which will be concluded with an exhibition at the Cabin Gallery. Furthermore, I have an exhibition in the Czech Republic in the city of Plzeň in September and at the end of the year, an exhibition in the Netherlands (hopefully, I will manage everything).