



Sergey Fedotov, *Spring Abstract Landscape*, 2010
Oil on canvas, 55.1 x 47.2 in. (140 x 120 cm).

ARTISTS TO WATCH

From Russia with Love - Sergey Fedotov

BY BRUCE HELANDER

Most art critics will tell you that there is nothing more exciting than discovering an artist that you are unfamiliar with; immediately, the work offers something totally original and stays with you long after the first encounter. The late Ivan Karp, the art dealer who discovered John Chamberlain and Robert Rauschenberg, among others, once told me that I always should accept offers to judge exhibitions that are far from the mainstream of the art world, and for example, all offers from North Dakota or Timbuktu should be given serious consideration, because those opportunities allow for a serendipitous introduction to an unfamiliar artist's work. It is possible that one can make a discovery that is original, fresh and consistently pushing boundaries with solid talent behind its energy. This recommendation has proved to be a valuable tool for me as an art writer, because several times in my career I have come across artists of immense intuitive ability that I would have missed without following my own explorative hunches and professional advice.

It was because of the opportunity to see new artists from around the world that I accepted an invitation to speak on the legacy of Andy Warhol at SeaFair, the floating art fair on board a megayacht docked in Sarasota, Florida. The ship is a specially constructed, multi-level, sailing art fair that visits distinguished ports around the world. After my lecture, I proceeded into the exhibition, notepad in hand, "fishing" for a special species of unusual talent that I hoped to encounter. I came upon an ambitious line-up of curious paintings by a Russian artist named Sergey Fedotov that I knew at once were highly unusual and consistently aggressive in their technique and style. Here was an artist who apparently had been painting for less than fifteen years, after a successful career as a physicist while he maintained an equal, ongoing passion for artistic expression that in the end won the battle. Influenced by the emotional experiences and lasting impressions of visual harmony, the artist applied his ambitious appetite for experimentation and intellectual curiosity from his other disciplines directly to finding his own idiosyncratic voice on a canvas surface. After my further research and a careful investigation of his latest, impressive book, which catalogs a good portion of his career, I concluded that indeed I had tripped over a mid-career

talent worth writing about that I might not have found through conventional exhibition environments. My trip to the Gulf Coast of Florida was indeed blessed with a new discovery of genuine talent: this artist mixes together a tossed salad of abstract narrative imagery, traditional color field painting and aggressive textural surfaces, along with a natural, almost primitive force that cleverly balances the old and the new, sophistication with naivety, while celebrating connections over and over again to a wide variety of pioneer artists in his recent series of work.

A careful and critical examination of Mr. Fedotov's vigorous paintings shows a sharp perspective and an awareness of many of the major players in the history of developmental contemporary art, and, perhaps more importantly, the suspicion that the artist, who grew up in relative isolation from the major art centers of the world, also was creating a style that was not an off-shoot of another or a conscience decision to follow the stylistic lead of others, but stemmed from a genesis of intuitive talent and a burning desire to express oneself in a completely unique manner. Even without a complete perspective on individual artists who share at arm's length some of the stylistic personalities and categorical elements of certain movements or, in particular, a link to an elusive spirited flavor by established artists like Dubuffet, Modigliani, Gauguin, Gerhard Richter, Jackson Pollock or Philip Guston (his early works), Fedotov has created his own secure world of spinning and often dreamlike sequences that naturally ebb and flow like the ocean's natural tide.

The artist's love of painting is obvious, revealed by the complete emersion into a magical world that seems to propel his subjects into a post-surrealist trance with bits and pieces of recognizable forms that go in and out of our consciousness. Sergey obviously is enjoying his journey into the realm of bringing to life portraits of artists whom he admires, such as Van Gogh and Cézanne. In one series of self-portraits, the artist captures his personality as reflected in a studio mirror, which sets a dramatic mood and echoes in his titles: *Self-Portrait for Hell* and *Self-Portrait in a Straight Jacket*. Other artists who come to mind that share the same decisiveness in working over a portrait are Georg Baselitz; Frank Auerbach's *Head of Ruth Brom-*



Sergey Fedotov, *Fish*, 2005, Oil on canvas, 19.7 x 19.7 in. (50 x 50 cm)

berg and *Atom Age Vampire* by Glenn Brown (featured in the record-breaking Sotheby's London auction, June 2012); Francis Bacon, *Study for Self-Portrait* (at Christie's, with a pre-auction estimate of \$11 million).

Works that are impressive on a thematic basis are the swirling landscapes, which substitute swaying trees for limber dancers, color field compositions that pay a remote homage to contemporary abstract landscape painters like Wolf Kahn, and surprising outdoor narrative works by Jules Olitski and Larry Poons, who, up until the last decade, were celebrated for their textural surfaces without a hint of realism.

Sergey Fedotov enjoys a subject that can withstand the creative challenge of repeated exploration without duplication. Good examples are his unique color field paintings with storyteller titles such as *Black Forest*, *Spring Forest* and *Oak Wood*. In many ways, these odd interpretations that marry entities such as tree limbs with a rainbow ground cover of bright leaves may be the breakthrough element that simply is not found in other artists' works. At one moment, we are conscious of a grove of swaying trees, and in the next, the objects disappear as they are overcome by the antagonistic painterly surfaces that consume, like a pre-meditated asteroid blast, anything less powerful and ambulatory.

One remarkable facet of Sergey's unique style is the swirling, idiosyncratic surface energy he is able to create, which enables the viewer's attention to flow effortlessly and subconsciously from one side of the canvas to the other in an uninterrupted, predetermined pattern. Also, it is important and appropriate to note that the artist considers each brushstroke carefully, as he builds a physical and theological visual storyboard that requires a steady hand moving quickly and intuitively. In fact, some pictures, such as *Winter*, capture the same amazing spirit with which Willem de Kooning enjoyed experiment-

ing during the mid-1970s, where he completely abandoned any narrative references, for example a female form or an abstract face, complete with red lips. The gracefulness of Fedotov's abstract paintings, particularly those celebrating the four seasons, illustrates the earthy flavor of the month, capped off with a dusting of thick paint mixed in with zinc white. In the gloriously colorful *Lilacs*, Fedotov again seems to pay a distant homage to de Kooning, the father of Abstract Expressionism. Here he finalizes his feather-like performance with a curious balancing act in the upper half of the square painting, where luscious reds mix pleasurably with other complementary colors to form a rhythmic chorus of dancing smudges, undulating scrapes and wide, sexy, inventive strokes that keep the party rocking late into the night. These works seem destined to remain as fresh as a recently picked bouquet of flowers tossed by a bride over her shoulder to outstretched hands. In the painting *Autumn*, Sergey again utilizes beautiful and memorable brushstrokes to form an image that honors the colors of autumn and makes a subtle prediction that this organic palette will go into frozen hibernation until the early sprouts of spring begin to push through the ground, beginning another cycle of color evolutions. The pure consistency of varied marks and improvised gestures in all directions continue to form a powerful all over composition that

stays in one's memory like the first breath of spring. These multi-layered surfaces are full of passionate, determined strokes that take full advantage of each purposeful drip, broken line and harmonious juxtapositions of ambulatory shapes that mysteriously link together like a Sunday crossword puzzle, ultimately spelling out success.

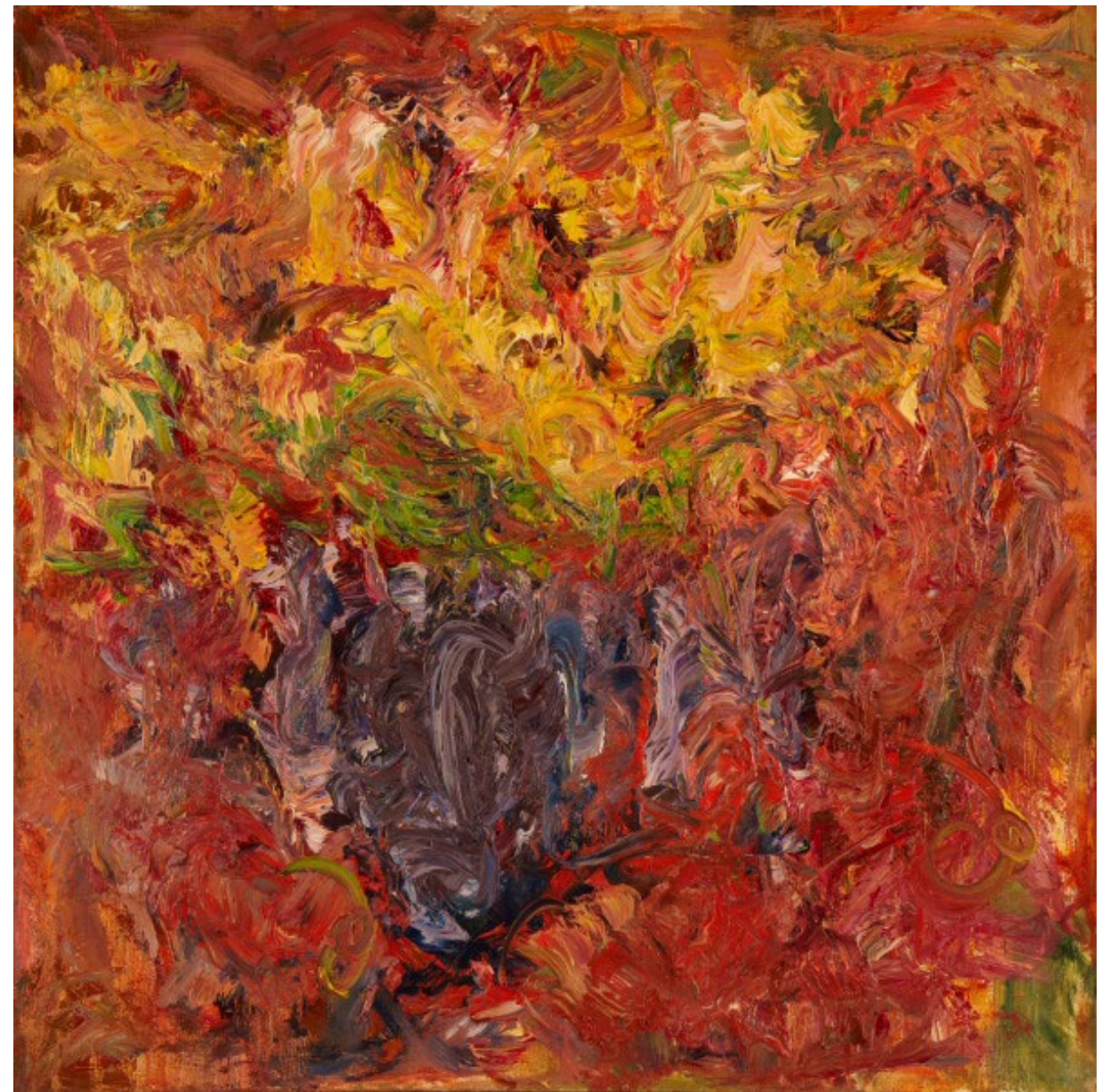
So, in the final analysis, the artist, poet, risk taker, philosopher and physicist (and illusionist), Sergey Fedotov, has connected the scattered influential fragments of his life and rolled them into one classic, engagingly beautiful canvas series that all at once portrays a three-ringed performance that carefully and meticulously balances the seemingly endless subjects that the artist is willing to tackle with results that are at once surprising and memorable. These works demonstrate a rare talent that ties together eccentric, often barely recognizable forms, with a passion and conviction that seem to light an eternal flame while dancing to the original tune of a maestro in total control who clearly enjoys orchestrating the harmony from his soul.

For more information on Sergey Fedotov and his work, please contact his representative in the USA: Maria Bruckman (T. 775.745.7827, maria.bruckman@gmail.com).

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—Bruce Helander, West Palm Beach

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Sergey Fedotov, *Flowers*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 39.4 x 39.4 in. (100 x 100 cm)