

CRITIC'S PICK ALEXANDER TIMOFEEV

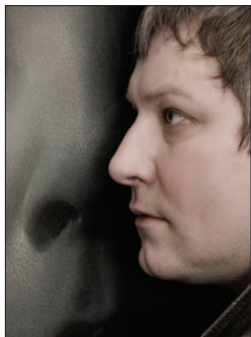


Letter to Nowhere III (left) and Requiem Poco Sanaute III, both 2007.

In the rich chiaroscuro of Alexander Timofeev's paintings, commonplace but enigmatic details evoke a sense of dread: a doll, a smear of lipstick, a stiletto-heeled shoe, a crumpled cigarette pack. They hint at an interrupted narrative, much as film stills communicate provocative fragments of a story. One might also think of individual panels from detective comics. Born in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) in 1971, the painter is indeed a fan of noir comics, and he has developed painterly strategies closely linked to film.

For each new series, Timofeev writes a script and assembles costumes, props, and actors (professionals or artist friends) for a photo shoot that may last several days. From the thousands of resulting images, he selects a few as subjects for paintings. His players, who enact dramas of betrayal and dependency, suicide and seduction, inhabit a kind of "Secret Room," to cite the title of his retrospective last year at the Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg. The deep shadows of this vaguely defined space suggest not only physical but also psychic dangers. What the viewer/voyeur witnesses is a kind of theater of the mind (and libido), where games are played that can suddenly turn deadly.

Timofeev's painting has been compared to the novels of Dostoevsky. His favorite artists include El Greco, Francis Bacon, and the Wyeths. As a student at the Arts Academy in Saint Petersburg, he repeatedly visited a show of works by the three Wyeths that spoke to his own deep respect for the craft of painting. His formal training, which included intensive instruction in life-drawing, began at the age of eleven, when he was admitted to the academy's school for artistically gifted children.



Timofeev had moved on to the academy proper and completed his training before he immigrated with his family to Germany in 1994. He continued his studies at the College of Fine Arts in Nuremberg, but a successful exhibition at the Gallery Rutzmoser in Munich two years later convinced him to leave school and paint full-time. In an upcoming show at Galerie Caprice Horn in Berlin, prices will range from about \$25,000 to about \$115,000.

Timofeev and his wife, the photographer Nadezhda Timofeeva, settled in Berlin last year. His spacious new studio seems far removed from the ominous atmosphere of his "Secret Room." But here, in his latest series of works, he is endowing the story of a child and a doll—a familiar motif—with surprisingly new, enigmatic twists and sinister turns, as though Snow White had joined forces with the Marquis de Sade.

—David Galloway

David Galloway is the Wuppertal correspondent for ARTnews.

TOP LEFT: GALERIE NOORDEINDE, THE HAGUE; TOP RIGHT: PRIVATE COLLECTION, THE NETHERLANDS