

There is no other city in the world that inspires as many fantasies as the French capital. Notions of the "city of love", the "fashion metropolis", the "city of artists and intellectuals", "La ville lumière" are firmly inscribed in our collective consciousness. They are present even in those, who have never travelled to Paris themselves. With her new cycle of paintings, Ekaterina Zacharova is now striving to closer explore these enduring myths, that surround the metropolis and to creating a canon of works that capture this specific tension between fantastical dream and an authentic search for fulfillment.

Since 2010 the artist has been involved in numerous projects, where she demonstrated her unique approach to capturing the atmosphere of international metropolises in snap-shots and thereby telling stories of their inhabitants. The first series of paintings in Europe, "In general public", "Pantha rhei - Come Along!" and "Two", were the result of extensive travels to New York, Shanghai and Havana. "Apéro à Paris" is now an exploration of Paris and the city's infinite draw. Eustache Deschamps once described it thus: "Even all cities that will ever be will not be able to compare with you, oh only one". The motivation for the series was provided by Zacharova's involvement in the production of Puccini's "La Bohème" for the Chiemgau opera festival. In addition to being presented in an independent exhibition, they can also be seen as part of the stage design for the operetta.

For centuries, Paris was the undisputed capital of Europe. Neither the bloody revolution nor the political turbulences of the 18th century could put a dent in this image. Instead, cultural and intellectual currents of the Age of Enlightenment merged here, the world of Old Europe with a new concept of modernity that tore down the prevailing image of man in order to replace it with a new one. Paris still benefits from this interweaving of the past and historical legacy, although its residents live uncompromisingly in the present. Here the spiritually sublime is combined with the frivolous and carefree. Whether you see the many camera-packed Japanese tourists on the Champs Elysees lined up in front of the entrance to Luis Vuitton during Fashion Week, or imagine how Sartre, inspired by the waiter in Deux Magots, formulates his treatise on existentialism - all these images are part of the myth of Paris. They all embody the unbroken joie de vivre of the city, which even the terrorist attacks of recent years could not change. As often as the Parisians' living environment was attacked, a few days later the street cafes were filled with people again and the hustle and bustle on the banks of the Seine continued its course. Because the Parisians and those who immerse themselves in their world for a while, have in common the belief that life, despite all its low points, is worth living.

Paris is also a city of the night and only really comes to life once the sun has set. Illuminated by milky light, the Sacre Coeur rises like a fairy tale castle over the city, music and a babble of voices can be heard from the small alleys of the Latin Quarter. While many municipalities and cities have replaced their old street lamps with blue-tinged LED street lamps, Paris is still bathed in warm light, as in the time when Matisse and Mondigliani strolled along the streets. Zacharova skillfully captures this mystical, unreal atmosphere in her portraits of the city. Red accents of color can be found throughout the series, but are particularly evident in the evening scene.

With all its glamor and gleaming facades, Paris has always had a problem with poverty and neglect. Homelessness is a part of the cityscape today, as it was a hundred years ago. The romantic nickname "City of Lights" makes you forget that the eponymous lighting was installed under the Sun King in order to make dark corners and alleys passable in the dark and thus to put a stop to crime. Since then, the idea of the starving

artist in the attic apartment is just as much a symbol of the city as the towering facade of Notre Dame.

As romantic as it may be and far from reality, it still carries an authentic hope for "more", a true, unfiltered attitude towards life. Ekaterina Zacharova succeeds in sensitively capturing the energy and the contrasts that define Paris. Because it becomes clear that Paris could never be so intoxicating, hedonistic or romantic without its dark sides.

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