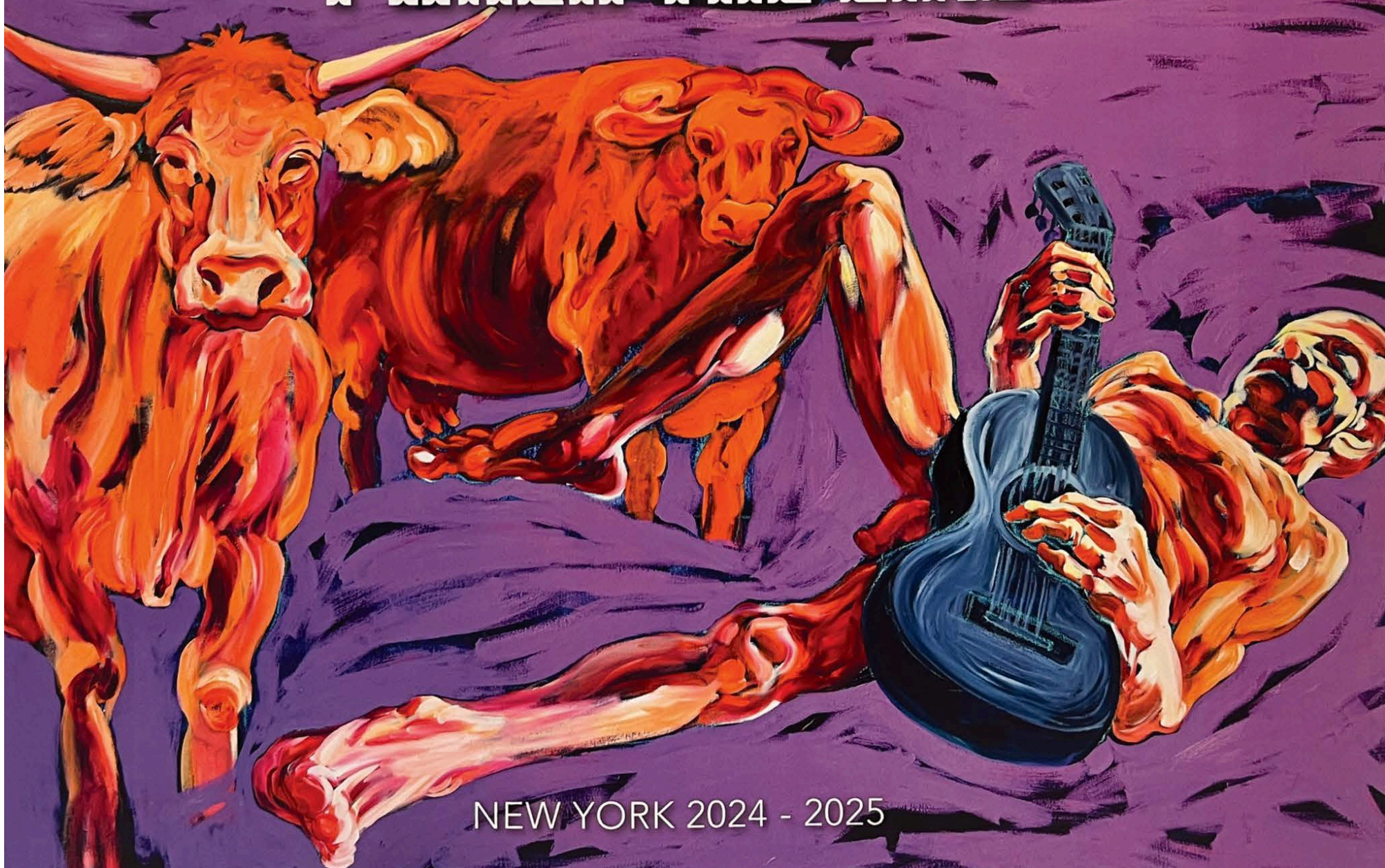


KATYA LEONOVICH
I WALK THE LINE



NEW YORK 2024 - 2025

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This multidiscipline exhibition comprised of some twelve oil paintings and three sculptures —made from repurposed acoustic folk guitars — draws much of its inspiration from American folklore. Hence the title, *I Walk the Line*, taken from a song by the iconic American folksinger Johnny Cash. Russian born Katya Leonovich is fascinated with such staples of American culture, particularly the genre of the American West, the Wild West as depicted in popular culture: Wide open plains, cowboys and ranchers, saloon fist fights and gunfighters.

Many of the paintings here are inspired by American folk songs and ballads, telling tales of the old west. Then there are the classic film westerns, Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*, which juxtaposes a facsimile of the cowboy with a modern metropolis, New York City.

Ironically, it was largely European filmmakers, such as Sergio Leone and Wim Wenders who were responsible for popularizing the ideal of the America West around the globe, creating the "Spaghetti Western" — films shot in Italy and elsewhere, depicting a fictionalized American West, replete with gunfighters who would challenge each other to a duel in the street to see who could draw his gun the fastest. And of course, there are the campfire songs, a cowboy and his guitar, parodied in Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*.

Leonovich uses her signature heavy, expressive brushstrokes in the painting, *Wacky Tobaccy*, 2024, which depicts three members of a musical ensemble performing in the nude, set against an intense blue background. A seeming male rendition of French Baroque painter, Eustache Le Sueur's *The Three Muses*, with muscular bodies and brooding faces, their musical instruments and microphone appear as an extension of their bodies.

Leonovich often depicts the male nude in her work, exaggerating the masculine features. In *Take Me Home Country Road*, a man holding a guitar sits next to a horse, both are rendered in subdued hues of blue, against a purple background. The scene evokes nostalgia for the plight of the lonesome cowboy. The title is taken from a folk song by the American singer songwriter John Denver, who would often praise the great outdoors.

We have a similar feeling of longing in the painting, *Kiss an Angel Good Morning* (title taken from the song by Charly Price). The nude musician, depicted using pink and brown flesh tone colors, holds a green guitar, lying on his back, and appears to serenade two cows.

Leonovich's use of bold, primary colors and thick texture in her highly stylized landscapes recalls the Dutch painter, Vincent Van Gogh and Munch. In *She's All I Got* (title taken from the song by Johnny Paycheck), we see a figure with a green face and body in brown tones, who holds a gun in one hand, a guitar in the other, seemingly attacking someone on the ground. It appears to be a saloon brawl, typical of the Wild West.

Hey, Good Looking (title of the song by Hank Williams), a prairie like intensely green background shows off the blue and pink colors of a guitar player, as two nearby deer dance to his music. Leonovich often uses animal characters to portray humans. The color scheme and dense brushstrokes of the background set off the characters in the foreground, not unlike the German Expressionist Franz Marc, a member of *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), in his painting, *Fighting Cows* (1911). Each bold color represents a state of mind, setting up a struggle between the material and spiritual world.

The three sculptural pieces in the show are named after female greats in the world of country and western music, *Dolly* (Parton), *Emily* (Harris) and *Loretta* (Lynn). Leonovich has disassembled acoustic guitars that she purchased on the web, and reconstructed them on a wooden board, finished with grey silver paint. The result is a curvaceous, constructivist assemblage.

The work is decidedly Pop, in its reference to existing objects and connection to popular culture. Utilizing the womanly hour glass shape of the guitar, the three sculptures resonate with Pop Art of the late 1960s, such as Tom Wesselmann, whose mixed media collage on wood, included everyday items; a clock, a radio, a cigarette case. The deformation of an object shows us a different perspective, a new meaning, seen through the artist's eye. That was of course the essence of the early Dada movement: Duchamp, elevating ordinary prefabricated objects such as a bicycle wheel, a dirt shovel or a urinal to iconic status.

In this regard, Leonovich is influenced by another Dada artist, Kurt Schwitters. His *Merzbau* — a word he invented for his abstract, walk-in collage of found objects in his studio — likewise suggests a playful exploration of the world around us, both the tangible and the intangible.

Elga Wimmer
December 2024



Bloody Mary Morning 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Roll On Buddy 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Friends In Low Places 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Hey, Good Looking 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Old Pal Of My Heart 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



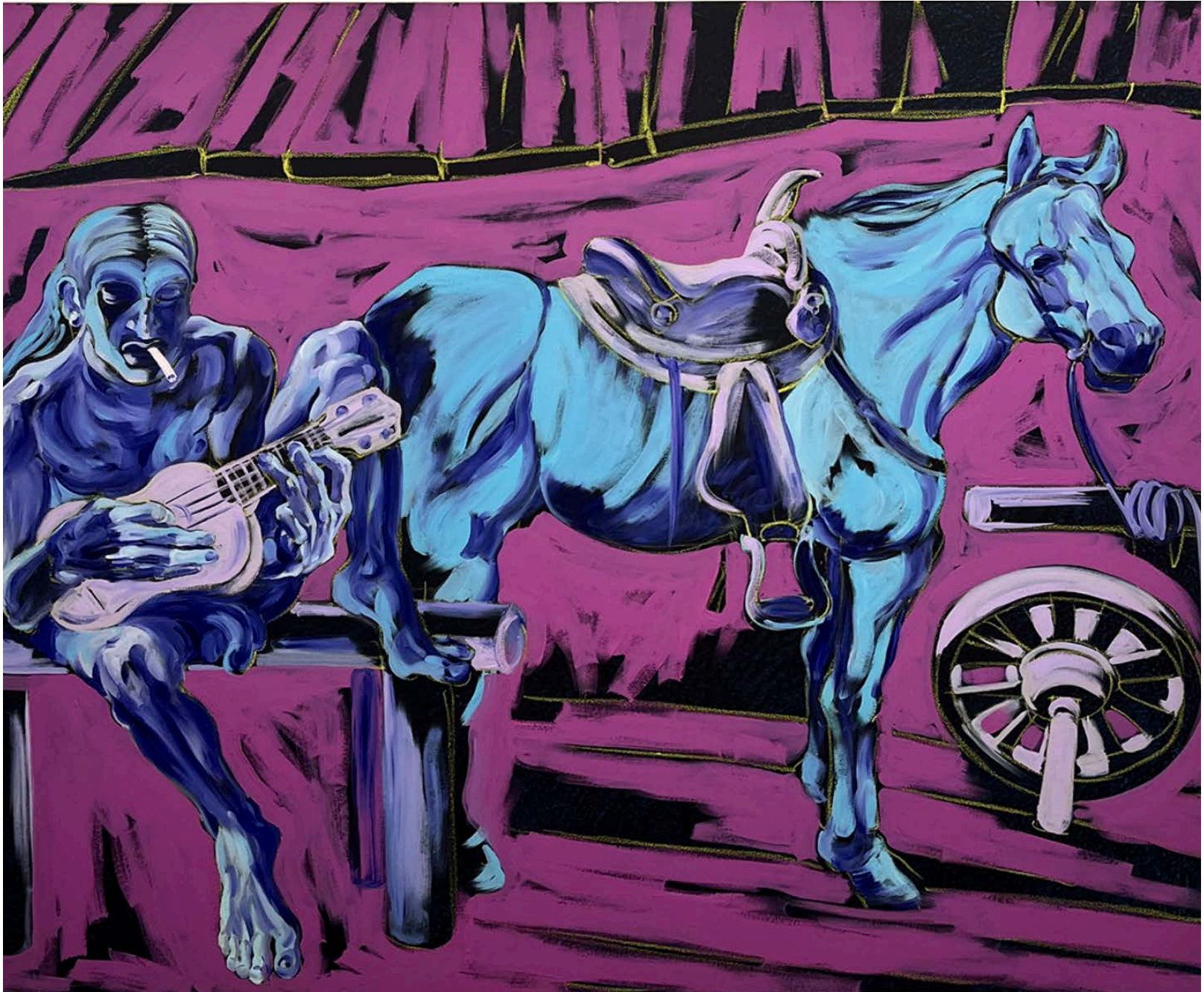
Don't Blame Your Drunk On Me 2025 Oil on canvas 60"x72"



Kiss An Angel Good Morning 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Wacky Tobaccy 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Take Me Home, Country Road 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



She's All I Got 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



I'm Just Me 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Wagon Wheel 2025 Oil on canvas 60"X72"



Dolly 2025 Reconstructed guitar



Emily 2025 Reconstructed guitar



Loretta 2025 Reconstructed guitar