

IVA GUEIRGUIEVA

David Loius Norr

Los Angeles-based Iva Gueorguieva's large-scale, turbulent paintings blend abstraction and figuration into a dizzying blur of coagulating bodies of marks, color streams, and strokes. Combining strategies of drawing and painting, and engaged with both the formal concerns of color and line and the social concerns of power and history, Gueorguieva's paintings are a compositional vortex of painted and collaged elements where nothing is static, dissolute or fully formed, but rather in constant flux—presenting an endless procession of interruptions.

Gueorguieva's paintings are intimate, despite their operatic scale. They insist on being investigated not just from afar, but up close. Working flat on the floor, she begins each work with pours, stains, and washes, in atmospheric swaths from background to foreground on unstretched raw canvas. Atop this terrain of sorts, Gueorguieva layers streams and dashes of collaged arcs with various scales of lines and colored forms that swirl tempestuously in the broad pictorial space of her compositions. Her method is characterized by an open-ended, if not circular impulse, which does not allow for distinctions between studies and finished works. Rather, each canvas is a world unto itself, governed by its own contingencies, though linked genealogically to a body of work that provides it with a core of meaning—which is why each painting looks so different in both structure and color.

Her works reveal a mix of borrowed and invented approaches to painting, appearing simultaneously canny and reverential. One can see Frankenthaler's washes, fragments from Bonnard's loose matrix of swatch-dots, and blotchy color smears reminiscent of Cezanne, all set behind the action-layered formations of paint and collage, channeling the swirling intensities of Futurism and vibrant excesses of the neo-expressionists. Gueorguieva's is a materialist logic that reflects a conception of history charged by discontinuity and interruption. Such methods are epitomized in the work *Clinamen* of 2009. The title refers to the indeterminate movement of atoms that was first used by Lucretius, who argued that without the *clinamen* there would be no contact between atoms and therefore no life. *Clinamen* reveals layers of distinct timelines, added and subtracted as adaptive traits, which become concretized together into a quilted coexistence of disturbing ruptures of color and shape. The action is built atop atmospheric swaths of paint and staging. Each removal or addition creates a kind of glitch in the fabric of the paintings.

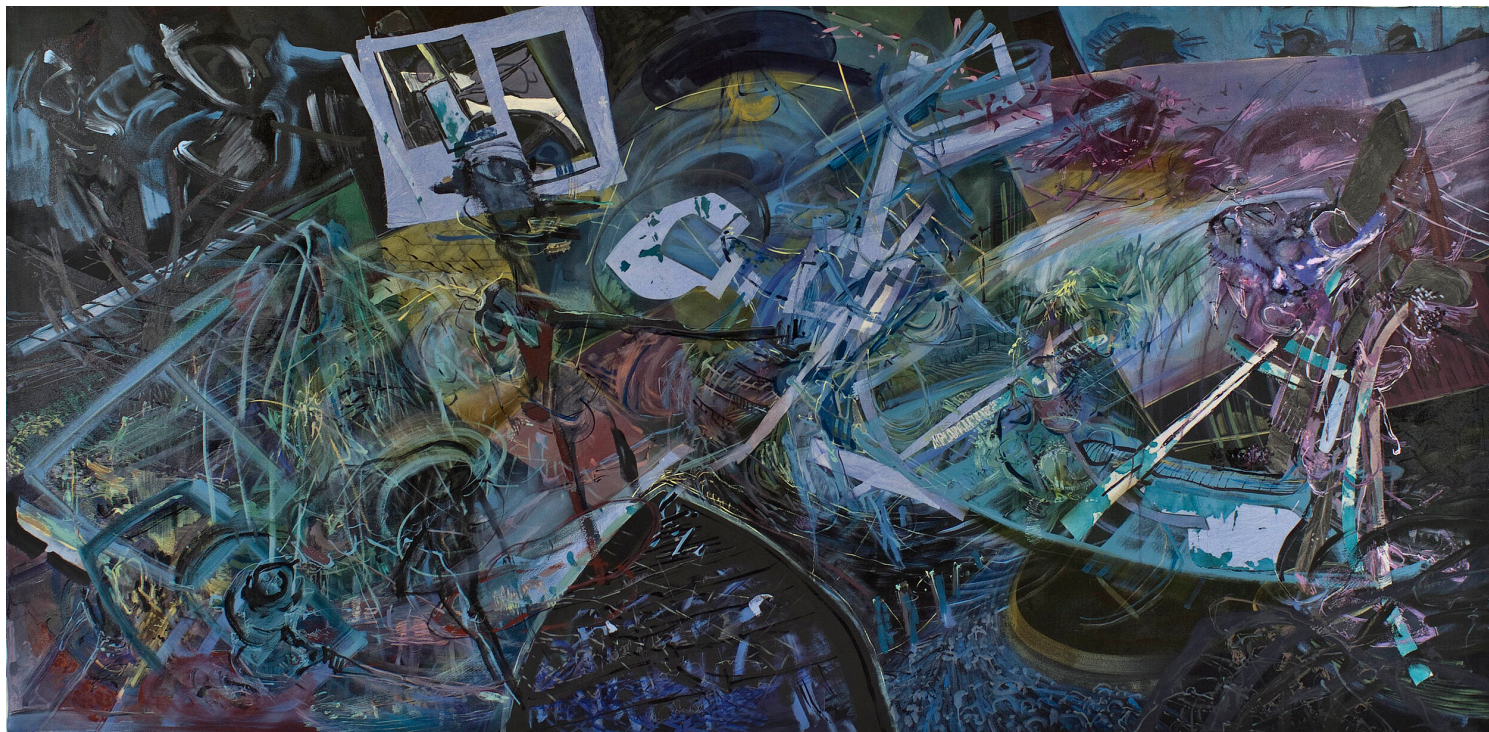
The disruptive character of Gueorguieva's materials, which are shaped and misshaped by her interruptive process, opens viewers to the periodic, if not chaotic, forces that structure these works—the adumbrative figures set within Gueorguieva's miasmatic web of paint and collage. If Gueorguieva's paintings need the figure, it's not for the sake of narrative—Gueorguieva's works are just as much about feeling and atmosphere as they are about a particular story—rather to explore the forces that occur between these

strange attractors. They become situational, orchestrating the tensions between material states and drawing out relationships between the distinct phrases and spaces within them. Paired with materials, Gueorguieva's figures become agents, embodying action and movement and offering viewers the chance to interact with materials in a state of fluxion—much as water's solid, liquid, and gas phases may coexist.

The critical result that emerges from Gueorguieva's volatile mixtures of subject and material—as models of bare life—is that they never appear separate from the explosive atmosphere they inhabit, not in a phenomenological sense, at least. Rather, Gueorguieva constructs her figures as if all we could see of people was the sinewy structure of feelings and emotions—where the bones are and the flesh once was. They become anti-photographic in that their presence bears no trace of the photograph, of its ease, however horrific, to inform and persuade. To the contrary, the pitch of intensity we find in Gueorguieva's paintings has everything to do with the paintings not being flat images. Never offering anything close to realism or photographic veracity, Gueorguieva's paintings instead provide a material intensity sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of the work's dynamism.

Born in Sofia, Bulgaria, Gueorguieva lived there until 1989 when the communist government collapsed. Overnight everything changed and within a short time her family ended up in inner city Baltimore. This sense of rupture and upheaval has become the organizing principle of Gueorguieva's method of working. What her process allows us to see are the meeting points of substances. The entanglements of diverse but overlapping elements, where each compounded materialization is adjunct to another, caught between base material and referent. The fluxion occurs not just at the material level but at the level of forms which move in and out of spaces, shifting between corporeality and spirit. If the process of sedimentation happens through the slow accumulation of broken down elements which re-calcify into a mixture of substances, Gueorguieva's paintings appear of igneous origins—volatile and combustive, as hot magma mixing at high temperatures, solidifying rapidly into a hardened state. These are protean works, as in Proteus, the sea god, who could change form at will.

A STAGE ABOVE THE CATACOMBS
Acrylic and Collage on canvas, 74 X 152"



Of course, there are things that don't change even if we wish they did. We've been burning, burying, and stashing our trash since the dawn of humanity. And while most of our refuse breaks down into some form of simple matter like carbon or oxygen, the exception to biodegradation is most obviously plastics which "photodegrade." A process where sunlight breaks material down into progressively smaller size bits but is incapable of completely degrading the material, so that even at the molecular level there remains a plastic polymer, forever. Would he have known about it, perhaps plastic—the manmade petrochemical masterpiece it has become—would fit into what Georges Bataille described in 1933 as an "unproductive expenditure," as the unintended consequence of progress. Ten years later, in an update and expansion to his arguments titled *The Accursed Share*, Bataille tracks in more depth the destiny of such surpluses, which he deemed fated to erupt in "catastrophe," in a fashion that would avenge the "mindless misuse" of energies: "The industrial development of the entire world demands of Americans that they lucidly grasp the necessity, for an economy such as theirs, of having a margin of profitless operations. An immense industrial network cannot be managed in the same way that one changes a tire... It presses a circuit of cosmic energy on which it depends, which it cannot limit, and whose laws it cannot ignore without consequences. Woe to those who, to the very end, insist on regulating the movement that exceeds them with the narrow mind of the mechanic who changes a tire."

Such prophecies demand imagination. Gueorguieva titled a 2007 exhibition *Gyre Carling*. Gyres are vortexes of air or water. For oceanographers, a gyre is a rotating ocean current caused by the Coriolis effect. There are gyres in every ocean. The issue is that gyre's rotational pattern pulls in waste material captured in currents, drawing loose trash, mostly plastic of all sorts, into their centers to spin. So, plastics that have made their way into our oceans have been accumulating and fragmenting into a massive, swirling sewer of flotsam and jetsam that is almost entirely invisible even from the air, since most of this activity happens below the surface. Gyre here not only refers to the swirling currents in our oceans, but to the gigantic and malignant mother witch of Scottish folklor—the gyre carling. Legend says she could control the weather, take whatever form she wanted, and had a bad temper. A troubling mix, no doubt. In Gueorguieva's painting, the swirling debris caught within the vortex of the gyre becomes a key compositional referent, a gothic transmutation or witches brew of collaged elements and paint in a hyperbolic swirl of feminine forces, unleashing a darker ecological storm which lurks hidden, slowly growing and choking out life.