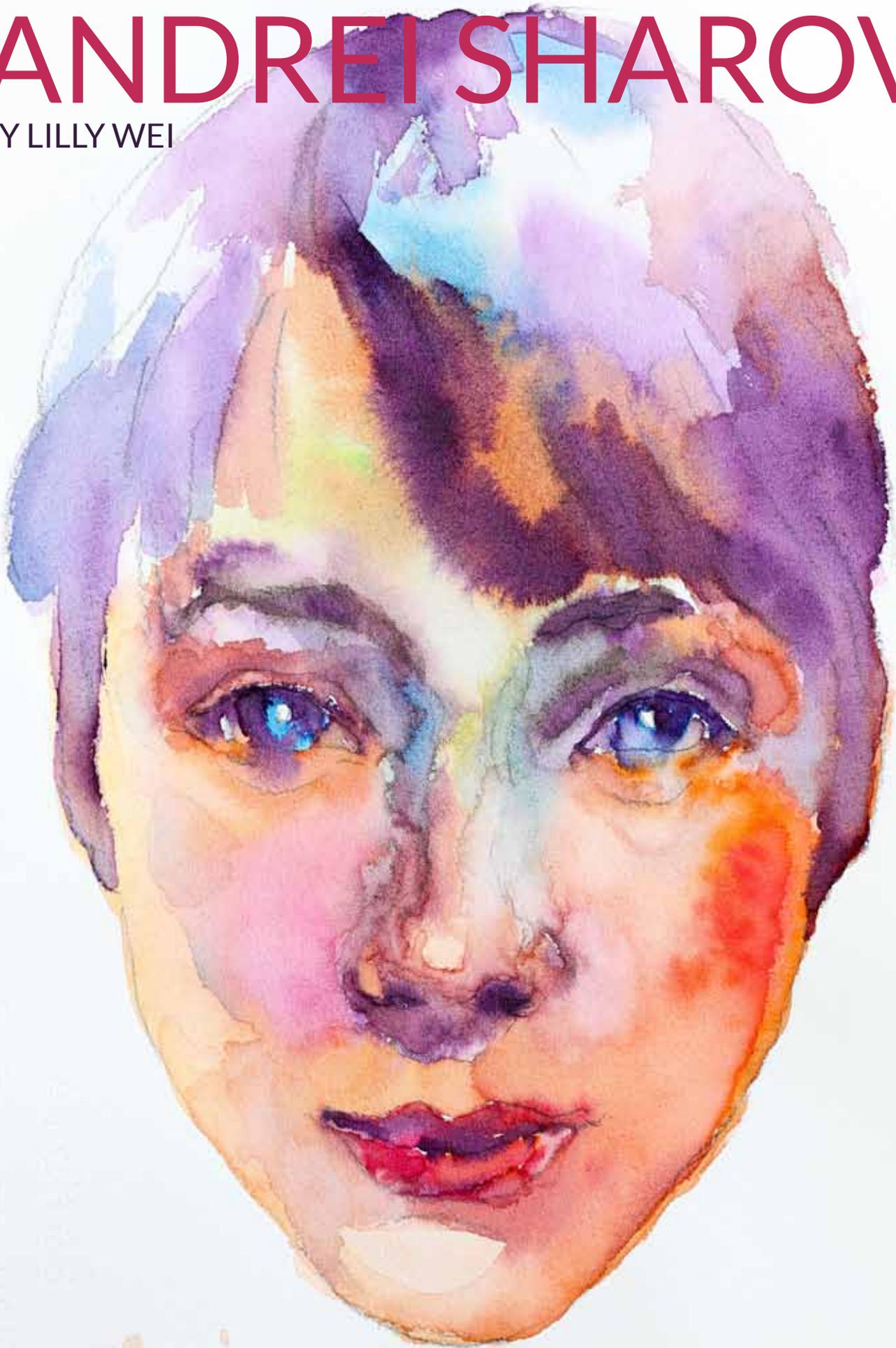


ANDREI SHAROV:

BY LILLY WEI



AT HOME IN THE WORLD

Untitled Series: Untitled (No.2)
watercolor on paper, 19.85 x 20.86in., 2014

Andrei Sharov is a multidisciplinary Russian artist of international repute whose projects have taken him all over the world. Like countless artists before him, including such illustrious compatriots as Mikhail Vrubel, Kazimir Malevich, Aleksandr Rodchenko and Liubov Popova as well as others such as Picasso who famously collaborated with Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes, Sharov is enthralled by theatre and dance and is a celebrated designer of costumes and stage sets. Commissioned by Renault, he designed a Formula One racecar for Fernando Alonso, acclaimed as the most beautiful automobile at the Grand Prix of Turkey in 2006. He is a couturier of great originality and flair, his interest in fashion of longstanding. In addition, Sharov is a photographer, particularly interested in portraits that investigate the inner life of their sitters. He is also a painter of note, his temperament inevitably leads him toward the expressionistic, dramatic and extravagant—a hallmark of all his projects—and toward increasingly brilliant, combustible hues. His vivid, often high-contrast paintings can be rough as well as fluid, driven by his love of the pigment's materiality, by its sensuousness and versatility. His paintings crackle with energy, at times brimming over with an emotionality uncannily produced by color and brushstroke. Because Sharov works across disciplines, even though they might overlap, he does not want to belong to any particular group of artists, preferring the independence of an outsider. And he is always willing to take creative risks, open to new stimuli supported by a vast archive of historical sources.

Sharov was born in Moscow in 1966. He studied at the Moscow Institute of Technology, graduating with a degree in fashion design in 1987. He has always wanted to be an artist; for him there were never any other possibilities. He studied painting and drawing privately at first, encouraged by his parents, although his father was a physicist and his mother a mathematician. He continued to study fine arts at the Moscow Institute, even while pursuing a degree in fashion. His influences are many but artists to whom he feels particularly close include Vrubel, Gustav Klimt, Vincent van Gogh, Willem de Kooning, Andy Warhol, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Sharov, like several of these artists, values spontaneity. He does not use preliminary sketches and prefers to make his paintings in one session as one prolonged, continuous burst of energy, similar to the processes of Zen masters, capturing the forces of the moment.

Sharov maintains a large studio in Moscow but also has one in Monaco and in other European art centers such as Paris and Amsterdam, as the need and inclination arise. He says he finds it invigorating to work in different studios; they give him fresh impetus. He also prefers to work without interruption and when in work mode, he shuts his studio doors for complete privacy, so engrossed that he loses track of time, he says. His medium at the moment is oil, but he has also experimented with less traditional materials, some of which have been highly toxic to work with, if also very beautiful.

Sharov's first acknowledged painting was *Big Paunch with Ear and Eye (Bolshepuzui Uhoglaz)* from 1987, which depicts a satiric, cartoonish figure with sociopolitical implications. In this painting, it can be seen that he has always been a colorist, his insistent, staccato brushwork already in evidence, already assured. He is a painter of abstracted figurative forms, his subjects often based on portraits, still lifes, interiors, and combinations of these genres which he sometimes presents as assemblages of sorts, his palette a full spectrum, with red a favorite hue, the star of his color repertoire.

In his painted portraits, as in his photographs, he is deeply engaged by states of feelings, embodied as much through the treatment of the paint as through facial expression. One portrait is that of a girl with an abundance of soft brown hair and a lushly brushed red hat that recalls Modigliani in the pure oval of the face, the extended line of the nose. The eyes are cast down, the mouth omitted, her thoughts enigmatic. But it is the richly textured, tremulous markings that bear the burden of expression, and the picture is all the more compelling because of sensitive brushwork.

Sharov likes to re-work the same themes, reconfiguring them to explore other meanings, other readings, each ultimately unique. Some of his recent paintings have appropriated famous nudes, such as Ingres' Grande Odalisque, translating the smooth elegance and sumptuous details of the Neoclassical masterpiece into flickered strokes of paint and bold, jarring patches of colors that convey not only Sharov's personal intensity and restlessness but also the agitated tempo and dissonances that characterize current culture. The head of Sharov's pink and white nude, *Old Courtesan (Nude Woman Reclining on a Sofa)*, 2012, is set off by a crimson ground like a profane

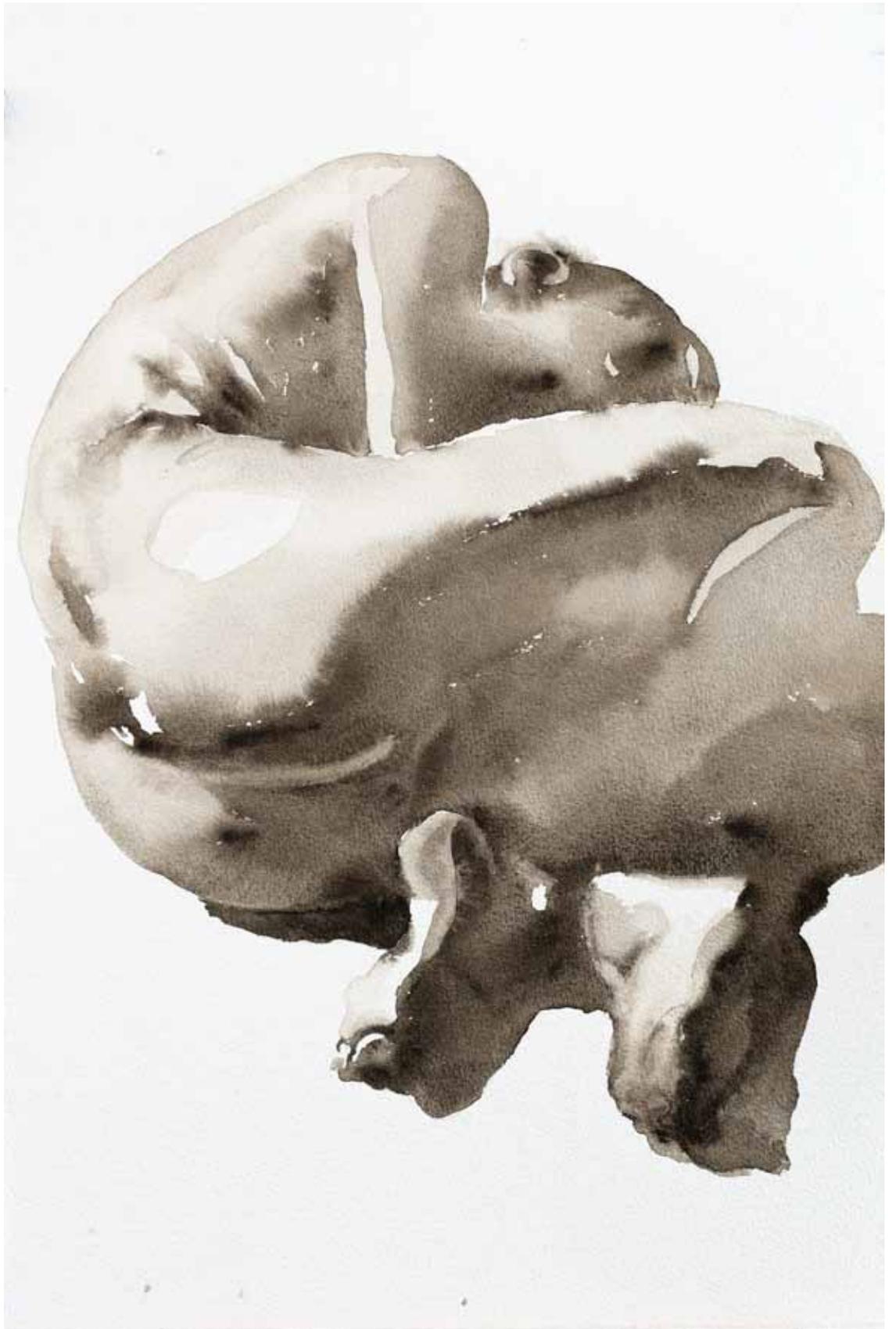
halo. She is holding a turquoise fan, a cloud of bright, yolk-colored yellow nearby increasing the voltage, the interior presented as a mélange of brash patterns that is the antithesis of the cool, knowing unflappability of the Ingres. Sharov's nude is sexier, heated, more intimate, much more Miami or Las Vegas than 19th century Paris.

Another nude figure is also based on Ingres, on the Valpinçon Bather, her voluptuous back to us, transformed by Sharov into a slimmer, more modish woman configured to today's standards, half sheathed in a lipstick red that clashes sharply with the burgundy daubed next to it. Whether this form is nude or not is uncertain visually, although the title is *Nude Woman in a Red Chair*, 2012. Spotlit, she is seated on the arm of a couch, perhaps in a club, emerging from the velvety dimness of the background, looking far more sexually challenging than Ingres' rather chaste nude. Another painting portrays a male figure, a black man, a hipster, wearing sunglasses and a coolie-like hat, his arms folded, hands yellow and orange, encircled by a lightening strip of red that seems to charge him with energy. He leans out of a painterly ground that is reminiscent of a Clyfford Still, the American Abstract Expressionist of magnificently jagged force fields. Sharov likes to play with narrative intention and to find unexpected associations. Other nude figures evoke a relationship with the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, the Fauves and Matisse, their riotous colors reappearing in these paintings, the application of pigment verging on the pointillist at times, the tossed strokes of color displaying Sharov's considerable talent for absorbing and transforming. One nude, holding a towel before her, seems solarized, garbed in electrified hues that suggest a futuristic body suit, the towel to preserve her modesty made redundant. Another nude, reclining, seems almost sculpted by small quick hammer strokes of blistered paint, the colors the crimson orange, turquoise blue and sunny yellow that he often uses, enhanced by violets and lavenders, deep and pale greens in the field behind. The figure's pose is awkward, but it makes her presence all the more powerful, all the more felt. Another female nude is more graceful, her body delicately curved, but the flesh is flagellated by thick punctuations of white, yellow, and earth-colored marks, accented by reds, pinks, a touch of green and blue, stretched out, floating in a dark void. A lovely still life of a pastel bowl of pears seen close-up, on the other hand, while equally flickered by paint, is more refined in effect with a whiff of danger, presenting a fragile-appearing surface that suggests crystal on the verge of shattering.

Andrei Sharov is constantly searching for ways to expand his vision and create more complex work, to extend the limits of what he knows in order to enrich his art, pushing beyond his familiar boundaries in order to make himself increasingly cosmopolitan, an ardent chronicler of today's fast-paced, always changing world.



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(facing page top) **Light Shadow Series: M1 Yuri**
watercolor on paper, 19.85 x 20.86in., 2014

(facing page bottom) **Light Shadow Series: M2 Untitled (Male)**
watercolor on paper, 19.85 x 20.86in., 2014 2011

(above) **Untitled Series: Untitled (Reclining Nude No.1)**
watercolor on paper, 19.85 x 20.86in., 2014 2011