

Marius Bercea

Blue Silk

April 23 - May 28, 2022



François Ghebaly is proud to present *Blue Silk*, Romanian artist Marius Bercea's first solo exhibition in New York City.

When asked about his attitudes toward the future, painter and portraitist Marius Bercea describes a faith in, among other things, the "test of time." The paintings that comprise Bercea's newest body of work, *Blue Silk*, were completed during the nearly two-years of global shutdown, an era that for many was defined by the disruption if not total estrangement of familiar relationships with time.

Bercea's paintings find this most recent and unresolved stage in global life negotiated alongside the patchwork of generational histories that regularly undergird his social portraiture. His artistic practice has long explored the wake of the Cold War, in particular the complex, radically uncertain cultural realities it continues to pose for his generation of Romanians. Cast in the artist's sonorous painted vocabularies, and in the shadow of pandemic, *Blue Silk* represents Bercea's most recent studies on memory, solitude, and collective ordeal.

Across the exhibition, Bercea's subjects quietly and solemnly enact the rituals of interior life. Each figure, cloistered in his corner of the domestic labyrinth, appears petrified in moments of respite or pensive focus. Gestures are inward and gazes conspicuously averted. The exhibition title alludes fittingly to Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period,' a short and monochrome stretch of the artist's early career defined by melancholy, contemplation, and figurative solitude. *Sour Milk (George)* (2022) and *So white the light* (2022) are particularly evocative and feature two figures who appear to face each other, each seated before a swathe of blue backdrop. Although the composition suggests togetherness, the scene is divided in two separate canvases, further divorcing the figures as their glances already seem to avoid both viewer and each other.

In his process especially, Bercea intuitively reflects the tenor of the times. Gone are the large sets of models, stylists, and photographers from which his vibrant tableaux were previously derived. Instead, scenes are painted slowly and loosely, with figures drawn from the artist's close friends (many works are entitled with their names in parentheses). Muted palettes of blue, green, and pale gray are reminiscent of the sorts of stoic hues preferred by the German Romantics, while planes of view are tight and close.

The resultant effect—quiet, deliberate—heightens the contemplative feeling of Bercea’s subjects, equally embroiled in the affairs of newly insular life as in the collective anxieties of regime change, global crisis, or encroaching Westernization.

Similarly, Bercea’s rich textile study, among other references to turn-of-the-century schools like Les Nabis, relate his works with longstanding traditions of social commentary in portraiture. The ‘blue silk’ in question, which Bercea maps onto garments in works like *Blue Silk (Vanessa)* (2022) and *So white the light* (2022), conjures equally the ‘free Europe’ metaphorized in the blue E.U. flag as it does the sort of Hellenic blue whose titular empires bridged both Western and Eastern worlds. Even in poetic influence, Bercea draws as much from Verlaine and Rimbaud’s libertine love poems as from the serious, embattled literature of Romanian author Nichita Stănescu. This perspective—entrenched in the complex post-Communist geography and historicism of Eastern Europe—bears an urgent importance in light of our most recent global affairs.

Marius Bercea (b. 1979, Cluj-Napoca, Romania) lives and works in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. He holds a master’s degree from the University of Art and Design in Cluj. Recent solo exhibitions include MAKI Gallery, Japan; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; and Blain|Southern, Berlin. Bercea’s work is held in the collections of Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia, USA; ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark; Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, USA; Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker, Norway; Zabłudowicz Collection, United Kingdom; Olbricht Collection, Berlin, Germany; and Space K Museum, Seoul, South Korea.