

Stas Orlovski: *Chimera*

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For many years, Stas Orlovski was content to work in his studio making drawings, paintings, and prints. These works are delicate and minimalistic. Almost monochromatic, they fuse hand-drawn elements with printed sources (ranging from Victorian-era illustrations and pages from Russian children's books, to Japanese prints and botanical illustrations) that were collaged or transferred to canvas. The works, whose subjects touch on the magic of the natural world as an ever-changing place of contemplation and awe, also present a sense of nostalgia for the printed communication of bygone eras. Featureless heads, exotic birds, flowers, moons, stars, and falling rain populate his compositions. The images range from nocturnal landscapes, in which the subject is illuminated by a beam of moonlight, to somber gardens surrounded by forests of carefully drawn trees.

Orlovski has often worked in series, repeating imagery from canvas to canvas and thinking about the relationships between them and how to weave narratives through their sequences. These works can be seen as frames comprising a growing animation. Yet rather than imply the motion, Orlovski invented a way to animate his works. The impetus to move from static to dynamic was the simple desire to see his imagery in motion. What seemed simple at the outset, however, turned out to be a complex integration of new and old techniques. Though not trained as an animator, Orlovski found collaborators to work with and arrived upon a compelling way to extend his practice, resulting in the fusion of site-specific wall drawings with collage and projected animation.

During the past few years, Orlovski has had the opportunity to present his animations in both museum and gallery contexts. Because every installation is site-specific, he has found a way to streamline his process by creating templates to facilitate the placement of the wall collages and drawings. In *Chimera* (2014), his most ambitious installation to date, he creates two intricate twenty-six-minute animations that morph in unexpected and uncanny ways. A chimera is defined as "a monster from Greek mythology that breathes fire and has a lion's head, a goat's body, and a snake's tail," and as "something that exists only in the imagination and is not possible in reality."¹ Using the dual aspects of this definition as a point of departure, Orlovski brings to life an ever-changing fantasy world, in which the whole is made from the sum of disparate and seemingly unrelated parts.

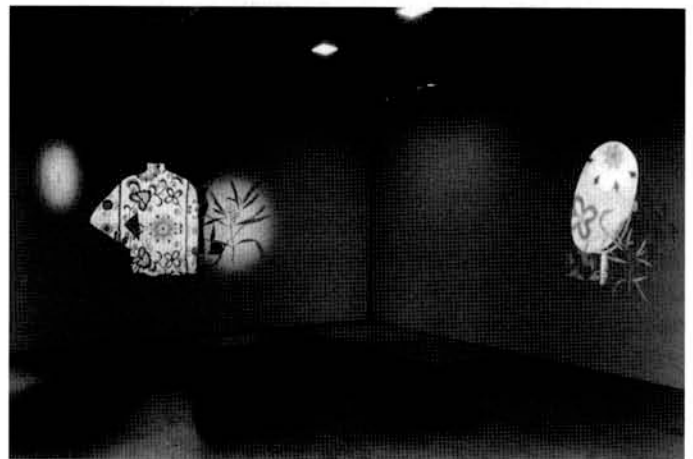
At the beginning of the animation (the work is meant to be a continuous loop without a well-defined start or end point), a headless silhouette is revealed and brought into the foreground among flowing ink lines that dance like ribbons within a vignett-ed frame. The ribbons dissolve into rapid lines of rain that create puddles of pulsating concentric circles as they hit the ground. Next, musical notes flutter across the scene as day turns to night. A headless human form, upon whose shoulder rests a bird, emerges from this darkness. The image of the bird appears throughout the animation, often in conjunction with musical notation.

The who, what, and why of Orlovski's narrative is never articulated. Rather, he takes us on a fantastical journey, in which real and imagined scenarios intertwine. As the action unfolds on the "main" wall, a video projection is reflected in an oval mirror on an adjacent wall. At times, the image in the mirror is a full-sized reflection. Yet it also becomes an animated close-up, and in some instances it even follows the quirky movements of an invisible camera. A hauntingly ephemeral soundtrack by Steve Roden envelops the space, at times in synch and at other times at odds with the projection, which loops every twenty minutes rather than coinciding with the twenty-six-minute duration of the animations.

Orlovski's works draw from avant-garde cinema and stop-motion film techniques, while acknowledging William Kentridge's animated drawings and Ezra Johnson's moving paintings, as well as Nathalie Djurberg's exotic claymations. What makes Orlovski's work unique is the way he integrates his animations with the elements he draws and collages directly on the wall. Hidden by the darkness is the nearly invisible shape of a cutout body—which serves as the frame for much of the animation—collaged to the wall and surrounded by carefully drawn plant matter and trees. The outline of an oval—the mirror—is similarly adhered to the adjacent wall. The animation illuminates and obscures these elements at different times. The animated sequences are delightful and fascinating collages of moving hand-drawn elements. Orlovski creates discreet animations one frame at a time, and then composites them into specific sequences that are later masked and composited again to coincide in different ways with the static elements. Orlovski has amassed an archive of animated clips that he uses as raw material in much the same way that he selects from his archive of printed matter.

Orlovski has developed a personal iconography that includes images of birds, statues, busts, rain, plants, and flowers, and he carefully layers sequences of these elements within the framework of his animations. The animations fluctuate from full frame,

Installation view of *Stas Orlovski: Chimera* (2014); © Don Milici; photograph by Don Milici



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to vignettted oval, to a tiny element in the corner of the projection. It is difficult to discern exactly how large the “work” is, as Orlovski so carefully plays with scale and motion across the two walls of the installation. The project is as much about foreground/background relationships as it is about what is within and outside the frame. In bringing his drawings and paintings to life, and in essence exploring a new form—animated drawing—Orlovski offers so much more than what can happen within the borders of a piece of paper or canvas. In his static work, formal ideas like foreground/background relationships, the use of texture, or the various ways a line can be drawn are depicted at a fixed point in time. Within his animations, the process of making is revealed, as well as the nuances of why a line looks a certain way or a form occupies a specific position, the camera’s point of view, and the speed of the tracking; all of these work in concert to explore Orlovski’s

entanglement with the forces of nature and their effects on an imagined landscape.

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NOTE 1. In Merriam Webster Online, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chimera.