

# Russian Artist Grisha Bruskin Interweaves Kitsch and Kabbalah in Nonconformist Paintings and Sculptures

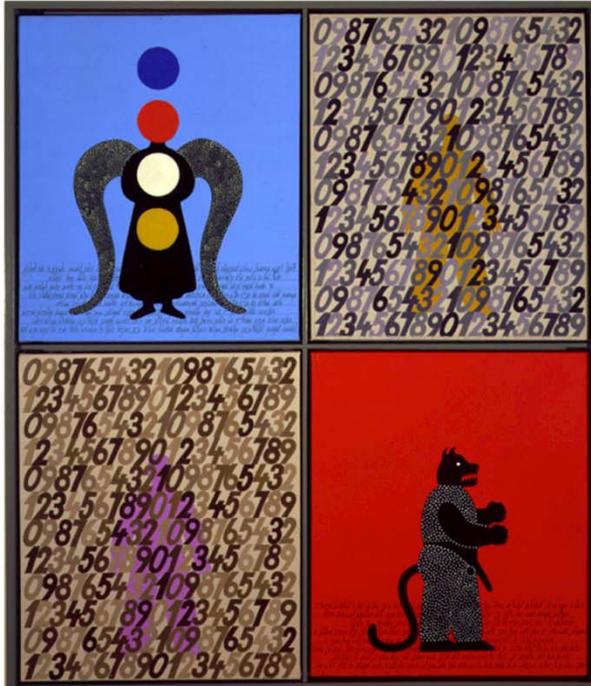
BY GRACE-YVETTE GEMMELL  
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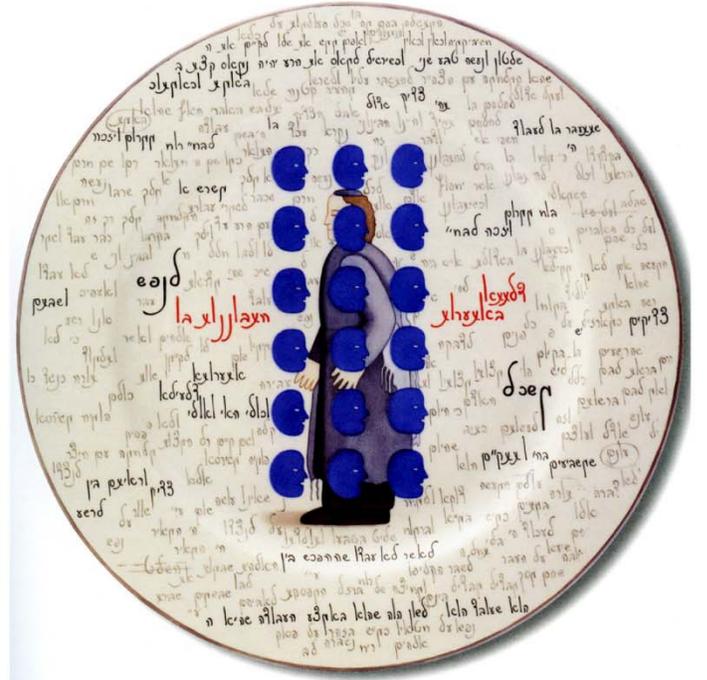
*Installation view of "Grisha Bruskin: Paintings and Sculpture" at Meyerovich Gallery, San Francisco. Courtesy of Meyerovich Gallery and the artist.*

Russian-American artist Grisha Bruskin is hard to pin down in terms of genre. Working within the context of mythologies and religions, particularly tied to his own Jewish heritage, and their associated iconographies, Bruskin takes an original approach. While rejecting the Socialist Realism style that was sanctioned in the USSR, where he spent his early career, he skillfully engages traditions of kitsch, social realism, and romanticism, and assumed an influential role within the Soviet Non-Conformist Art movement. In 1989, following major success at the 1988 Sotheby's Moscow sale, he immigrated to the U.S. and settled in New York, where he still resides.

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Grisha Bruskin  
*Metamorphoses 9*, 1993  
Meyerovich Gallery



Grisha Bruskin  
*Visage*, 1999  
Meyerovich Gallery

Often infusing propaganda, be it religious, political, or commercial, into his works, with a heady dose of irony, Bruskin's work has been known to ruffle more than a few feathers. This characteristic flippancy—which led the USSR to close several of his shows there, and earned him a Kandinsky prize in 2012 and inclusion in major museum collections like the Museum of Modern Art, New York—is on full display in an exhibition of the artist's sculptures, paintings, and works on paper at San Francisco's Meyerovich Gallery.

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Grisha Bruskin  
*Bandaged Boy*, 2008  
Meyerovich Gallery



Grisha Bruskin  
*Moonlight*, 2001  
Meyerovich Gallery

Diverse themes and archetypes culled from different cultures and traditions interweave and mutate with one another here. Popular culture cavorts alongside Kabbalistic folklore traditions and Jewish mysticism; Biblical and classical mythologies consort with the glorified, state-sanctioned Communist values found in the idealized art of Socialist realism, charged in Bruskin's hands with a wry measure of sharp satire and blatant absurdity. And ancient or lost civilizations re-emerge in a kind of archaeology of the future that casts a hypercritical glance on contemporary culture. It is in this last respect that works like *Bandaged Boy* (2008) are reminiscent of certain underlying themes pertaining to the imperatives of archaeological excavation and the significance of cultural artifacts. Other works, like *Moonlight* (2001), bring to mind the imp-like, cartoonish bronze sculptures by Tom Otterness, which address and ridicule things like cultural propaganda and class and social distinctions under a veneer of playfulness.

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Grisha Bruskin  
*Nota Bene II*, 2007  
Meyerovich Gallery

At their best, however, Bruskin’s works seem indistinguishable from the subjects that they lampoon, as in his *Nota Bene II* (2007) and *Visage*(1999); like all good satire, these works know their subjects better than the subjects know themselves.

*“Grisha Bruskin: Paintings and Sculpture”* is on view at Meyerovich Gallery, San Francisco, Oct. 1, 2015–Feb. 29, 2016.