

City dwellers are able to shield themselves from the hell of other people with little more than a pair of earbuds and a scowl. Their psychic defenses must be honed to perfection, and any opportunity for privacy, however brief or restricted, must be seized without hesitation. Being from Moscow, Olga Chernysheva understands this condition; the artist's quiet but affecting new paintings and drawings focus on men and women who are at once caught up in the flow of a busy urban center and at pains to detach themselves from it, even as everyone else is doing the same thing.

Chernysheva's "Autoradio," her recent solo outing at Foxy Production, was organized around groups of works from three interconnected series, all meditations on how her fellow Moscovites publicly relish their own inner lives. In the first assembly of pieces, "Moscow River," 2017-, figures were shown wading in the titular body of water, occasionally interacting, but for the most part keeping a respectful distance from one another. Reflected in the water's gray-green surface, their silhouetted bodies assume a variety of postures, though they are mostly generic, interchangeable.

A series of paintings, "Autoradio," 2018-, for which the exhibition was named, depicted variations on a streamlined wedge. Set against wan, putty-colored grounds, shapes like narrowed eyes turn out to be car windows, each one framing a driver seemingly in a trancelike stare as he or she molders, we assume, in gridlock. Some occupants grip the steering wheel, perhaps getting ready to negotiate traffic, while others appear static and expressionless, lost in thought. There's no road rage here, just people watching and waiting. The rows of similar images suggested only incremental movement, like frames excerpted from a particularly uneventful movie (a fair parallel, given that Chernysheva also makes films).

A final set of four small watercolors on paper, "Escalation," 2016-, showed commuters on escalators. Bundled up in coats, scarves, and hats and seen from behind, they are even less identifiable than Chernysheva's anonymous waders and motorists. Ascending slowly toward unseen and unknown destinations (presumably just the street, though the works' off-white grounds give nothing away), these figures again encapsulate the way in which metropolitan areas, while also liberating, have the capacity to funnel their citizens along ever-narrower routes and routines. The eschewal of all background detail also lends these compositions a degree of abstraction, reducing their subjects still further until they suggest strange plants or rock formations, devolved from the human to the vegetable or mineral.

At the show's end was one modestly sized, square stand-alone panel, in which a uniformed worker was shown painting over a sloppy phallic graffiti on an exterior wall. Untitled, 2018, is a pleasingly nerdy example of a painting within a painting that also dances gracefully upon the fault line between figuration and abstraction. The piece adds another layer to Chernysheva's study of fellowship and alienation, as one person erases the work of another, likely at the behest of a faceless official body: Take out the custodian and you're left with an elegant stripe painting in wintry hues. The subject is a cog in the municipal machine but manages-barely, and in a way to which we're not even privy-to somehow remain an individual himself.

— Michael Wilson