



Valery Katsuba. Project Good morning, Madrid! El Prado. *Dancers and Hippomenes and Atalanta II* (painting by Guido Reni) . © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2025

Valery Katsuba

Romantic Realism I

Photographs (2000-2025)

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The Public Agency for the Management of the Birthplace of Pablo Ruiz Picasso and Other Museum and Cultural Facilities aims, among other things, to promote dialogue between contemporary visual arts and the artistic legacy that has shaped the cultural identity of Malaga. This is the framework of the exhibition dedicated to Valery Katsuba, an artist whose work delicately combines the tradition of classical portraiture with a profoundly contemporary exploration of the body, time and identity.

Katsuba, originally coming from Belarus, is an artist with a cosmopolitan background. He has developed a photographic language that lies somewhere between sculpture, dance and visual poetry. His series —inhabited by athletes, acrobats, dancers or anonymous citizens— are reflections on beauty, discipline and the transience of existence. In Katsuba's work, the body is as a space of balance and vulnerability, a territory where the ideals and contradictions of the human condition are inscribed.

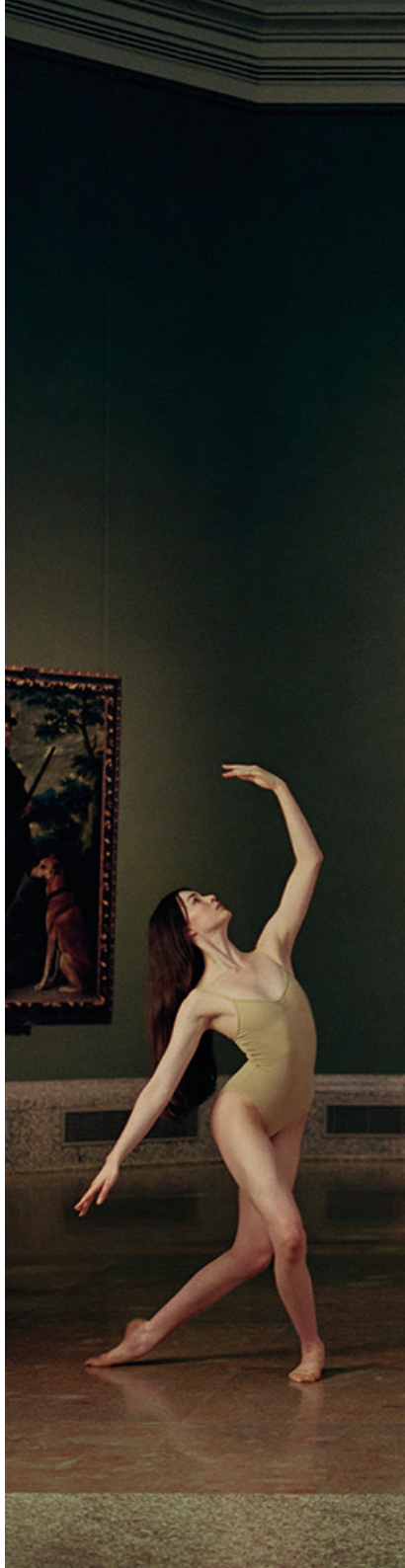
With this exhibition, our Museums reaffirm their commitment to a programme open to aesthetic plurality and the international dimension of art. Malaga provides Katsuba's work — exhibited in prestigious institutions in both Europe and America— a propitious context for dialogue between the classical and the contemporary, between memory and contemporary creation.

In these images, visitors will discover an atmosphere suspended between gesture and silence, between technical precision and restrained emotion. In short, they are an invitation to contemplate the human body as form and symbol, in continuity with the search for harmony and beauty that defines the romantic realism that Katsuba pursues.

Our Agency welcomes the opportunity to host this exhibition and highlight the work of an artist who reminds us that photography can be, at the same time, a document and a metaphor, a record of the instant and an aspiration for eternity.

Luis Lafuente Batanero

Director of the Public Agency for the Management of the Birthplace of Pablo Ruiz Picasso and other Museum and Cultural Facilities



Valery Katsuba, Project Good morning, Madrid: El Prado. Imaginary sculptures in the Diego Velázquez Hall. © Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid. 2025



VALERY KATSUBA

Romantic Realism

Photographs (2000-2025)

Russian Museum Collection

Malaga, November 2025

Valery Katsuba's work is rooted in the tradition of analogue photography and shaped by a perspective that transcends disciplines. The retrospective unfolds in two stages: four projects are presented in this first exhibition, while the remaining three will be shown later, together forming a broad and continuous interpretation of his work. This gradual unfolding allows us to discover all seven projects that have defined his creative universe over the past twenty-five years. Conceived independently, they expand like constellations that dialogue with one another.

In his photographs, Valery Katsuba explores human beauty and emotion, natural or architectural landscapes and everyday gestures, with a sensitivity that constantly interacts with other artistic languages such as painting, sculpture, dance and architecture. The very identity of Katsuba is made of pure literature and his pursuit of knowledge through continuous learning, reading and absorbing the contexts in which he moves. In his work and through his own gestures and personal actions, he conveys an anthropological and vivid gaze.

In his universe, Valery Katsuba acts as a traveller and a witness, a cartographer of the sensible world. Like the romantic maps of the 18th century, his images map the territories of emotions and the body, where the gaze is guided by a balance between reason and feeling. Katsuba evokes the memory of explorers such as Marco Polo —'the man of a thousand stories'—to construct his own book of wonders, a visual narrative that traverses geographies, biographies and eras reflected through his works. He thus narrates his experiences with reminiscences of his own biography, from his childhood to the present day.

This exhibition features seven works by Valery Katsuba, exhibited in various rooms of the Picture Gallery and Ionian Sculpture Gallery at the Museo del Prado. The work carried out in 2025 is being presented to the public for the first time. The artist reconfigures the museum space, with his ballerinas engaging in dialogue with a meticulous selection of works by admired masters who form part of our collective, affective and aesthetic memory. In front of paintings such as *Atalanta and Hippomenes* (1608–1609) by Guido Reni, or *The Forge of Vulcan* (1630) and *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez, while ballerinas dance alongside the sculptures of the Ionic Gallery and a young man poses before El Greco's portraits of noblemen, Katsuba creates new visual layers that expand upon the original scenes. It extends the classical composition into a contemporary space where the gaze is reactivated and history breathes anew.

The artist says: "I ask my heroes - athletes, workers, ballerinas and people close to me - to stop. In them, I would like to reveal beauty, grandeur and fragility. I want them to be remembered". His work seeks this interconnection between time and space, between the real and the romantic in it, between the monumental and the everyday, where humans become a measure and a reflection of the world. His gaze is

anthropological and artistic at the same time artistic look, it is elegant acrobatics with a nostalgic vision of an idealised and refined past, it is at the same time bound to and infused with a discerning and hopeful reflection on the present moments we inhabit.

Sebastià Mascaró

Valery Katsuba. Project Good morning, Madrid! El Prado. *Dancers and Hippomenes and Atalanta I* (painting by Guido Reni).
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Valery Katsuba. Project The Academic Tradition: St Petersburg – Madrid. *Painting session (male models)*. Academy of Arts. Saint Petersburg, 2013

Valery Katsuba. Project The Academic Tradition: St Petersburg – Madrid. *Nude female models*. Academy of Arts. Saint Petersburg, 2013



VALERY KATSUBA

Valery Katsuba was born in 1965 in Belarus, then part of the USSR. In 1982, he moved to Leningrad (now St Petersburg) to study at the State Maritime and Navigation University. After graduating, he completed a postgraduate course in meteorology. He then left his maritime career and focuses on writing articles and stories about art. During the mid-1990s, he became active in artistic circles and ultimately devoted himself to photography. His *Phiscultura* series was exhibited in Madrid, at the Círculo de Bellas Artes, in 2006, and the Community of Madrid edited and published a book on it; it was also exhibited at the Georges Pompidou National Centre for Art and Culture in Paris (2016); at the Museum of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid (2017); at the National Museum of San Carlos in Mexico City (2019); and at the Shanghai Centre of Photography (2021). He also participated in *Manifesta 10*, The European Biennial of Contemporary Art (Saint Petersburg, 2014) and the 15th Havana Biennial (2025); his work was also exhibited at Photo London, PHotoESPAÑA (PHE), and Festival OFF (exhibition *Morning* which El País included in the *Ten exhibitions of PHE 2023 not to be missed*), among many others.

At the same time, Katsuba developed photographic projects for Christian Dior, Max Mara and Jacquemus. In addition to his photography work, he was the artistic director of Mick Jagger's party at the Yusupov Palace; he has also produced videos, performances and continues to pursue his literary activity. In 2020, his short story *Una bolsa verde llena de viento* (*A Green Bag Full of Wind*), about the lockdown in Madrid, won the *20-sos* international short story competition for works in Spanish language. He is in the process of publishing a collection of short stories, *Far from Home - 22 short stories with an epilogue*, to be released in 2026.

His works are currently found in the collections of the Centre National d'Art et Culture Georges Pompidou (Paris), the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (Madrid), the Museo de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (Madrid), the National Museum of Wroclaw and the Shanghai Centre of Photography, among others.

He has been living in Madrid since 2015.



Karl Bulla. "Bogatyr" physical education societ. Gymnastics demonstrations. Saint Petersburg, 1912.

Physculture

In 2000, while working at the Archive of Film and Photographic Documents at St Petersburg — a collection of more than half a million images dating back to 1860— Katsuba discovered a collection of photographs related to sports societies from the late 19th and early 20th centuries .

Inspired by those images, almost forgotten, and by figures such as Dr Vladislav Kraevsky —the precursor of weightlifting and advocate of the possibility for “man to create his own health and beauty by exercising with weights”— or Prince Sergey Volkonsky, who introduced eurhythmly for women, Valery Katsuba traces the origins of modern physical culture.

This is the origin of *Physculture*, a visual narrative reflecting the importance of physical culture throughout the 20th century and the way it influenced and shaped professional and amateur

sports in the 2000s. In this way, Katsuba reflects on the representation of physical effort and the search for balance between strength and spirituality, and turns the protagonists of his photographs into metaphors of time.



Valery Katsuba. *Physical culture lesson*. Stone Island. Saint Petersburg, 2006

Good morning, Madrid!

We are fortunate to enjoy for the first time several previously unseen works that Valery Katsuba has created over the past year in the galleries of the Prado National Museum, where the ballerinas of the Nacho Duato Academy, among other models, engage in dialogue with renowned paintings and the museum's own spaces.

This series offers a double vision of the city: the outside view of a foreign artist living in Madrid and the inside view of someone who already belongs to its streets, houses and rhythms.

In this project, Katsuba turns the everyday into the epic. Madrid appears as a stage and as a body, breathing through its human gestures, its lights and its silences.

Valery Katsuba. *Dancer in the Ionian Gallery II*. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2025



Valery Katsuba. *Imaginary sculpture in the background of the Forge of Vulcan* (painting by Diego Velázquez). Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2025



The Academic Tradition: St Petersburg – Madrid

For centuries, the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg and the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid have shared the common practice of choosing living models whose proportions evoked the harmony of classical sculptures. From the 18th century to the present day, generations of artists have drawn these figures and have thus become heirs to a canon that unites past and present.

Inspired by the works of Greek and Roman sculptors, students and teachers have reinterpreted the ancient canon from a modern perspective. In Katsuba's images, athletes and contemporary ballerinas pose alongside ancient gods and heroes, masters and apprentices, in the same symbolic space where time is dilated and eternity is suggested.

These scenes — at once real and allegorical— evoke the persistence of the classical ideal in European visual culture and its reinvention in the present. They are a tribute to artistic teaching and to the silent transmission of gesture, posture and gaze.



Valery Katsuba. *Gymnast and Victoria Samotracia (2)*
Academy of Arts, Saint Petersburg, 2008



Valery Katsuba. *Anatomy classroom. Model in a posing session.*
Faculty of Fine Arts, Complutense University of Madrid, 2016.

Morning

Morning is a photography series dedicated to the epicurean instant par excellence, that is, the intimate moment when the day begins and the body awakens to the world. Katsuba portrays his characters in private or anonymous spaces — rooms, courtyards, home interiors— where the first light caresses their gestures and reveals an almost sacred stillness.

It is a suspended time, poised before the day's vertigo. A time of introspection and self-knowledge, where the characters seem to converse with themselves. The artist captures the beauty of introspection: the attention to the body, the silence of thought, the awareness of one's own being.

The images, charged with sensuality and formal precision, invite viewers to observe slowly, to let themselves be carried away by the elegance of the movements and the delicacy of the postures.

The project travels through various cities —London, New York, Santiago de Chile, St Petersburg, Mallorca— and proposes a visual journey through human and urban architectures that merge into a single emotion, that of awakening.

Valery Katsuba. *Danny*. The Pacific. Mexico, 2023



Valery Katsuba. *Marcia*. Santiago de Chile, 2013



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