

“Ostalgia” Extended Descriptions

Vyacheslav Akhunov

b. 1948 in Och, Kyrgyzstan

Vyacheslav Akhunov’s diverse practice includes collage, painting, installation, performance, as well as poetry and prose. Born in Kyrgyzstan, Akhunov started studying art in the capital city of Bishkek (then Frunze), and continued at the USSR Academy of Arts in Moscow. After finishing his studies, he relocated to Fergana, Uzbekistan, where a former local party official discovered his work and offered to set him up with an apartment and studio in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where he continues to reside.

Although Akhunov was formally trained as an artist, he created many works throughout the 1970s and ’80s that demonstrate his irreverent and critical attitude toward Soviet ideology. His group of collages *Lenin’s Plan of Monumental Propaganda* (1976-85) is a cheeky reinterpretation of what Akhunov calls the “Lenin-in-art genre” that arose in the early years of the Soviet Union. A precursor to Socialist realism—which was official state policy as of 1936—hagiographic depictions of Lenin were published in art books with print runs of as many as a hundred thousand copies. In his series of collages, Akhunov appropriates these images of Lenin and Soviet-era propaganda and renders them immobile—for example, waist-deep in a snow drift—in isolated landscapes. This simple yet deliberate maneuver is reminiscent of one executed in his series “The Doubts” (1976), for which Akhunov created small watercolor reproductions of propaganda posters that were identical to the originals save for a question mark inserted to the end of the Soviet slogans. With one gesture, Akhunov can make puzzles of political platitudes and gives the heraldic axioms of state power the third degree.

Victor Alimpiev

b. 1973 in Moscow, Russia

Impassioned and lyrical, Victor Alimpiev’s videos draw on dance, theater, and music to create allegorical vignettes that grapple with interpersonal innuendos and the relationship between the individual and the collective in contemporary Russian society. Using a vocabulary of everyday gestures, Alimpiev draws attention to actions that often go unnoticed: a contemplative stroke of the upper lip with the thumb; the thrumming of fingers on a tabletop; a telling caress; a fist; a breath. Alimpiev’s video *My Breath* (2007) focuses on two women, one of whom is singing in to the other’s ear. Their haunting, disjointed voices produce a sound similar to a lament and a vocal exercise. They are also the voices of the artist’s meta-narrative: they are singing a song about singing. The lyrics they pronounce are sharp instructions about breathing technique: “Listen! Correct your breath!” sings one into the other’s ear. The woman listening sings again in a different tempo, such that even the most reflexive of physiological functions—her breath—seems to involve constant effort and self-awareness.

Evgeny Antufiev

b. 1986 in Kyzyl, Russia

Evgeny Antufiev was born in the southern Siberian Republic of Tuva, one of Russia’s most remote regions. Isolated by its geography and half a century of Soviet annexation, Tuva has maintained its ties to local traditions through the practice of oral folklore and trance-like throat singing, as well as unique religious customs combining native shamanism with Tibetan Buddhism. These Tuvan characteristics

inform Antufiev's practice—in a real but mythic space, Antufiev plays the role of the artistic shaman, much like Joseph Beuys and others before him. An incubator of ancient rituals, ancestral ghosts, and nameless gods, Antufiev creates talismanic, doll-like figures and fashions occult-like arrangements of dried flowers and boiled bones. Antufiev's works invoke the past, but the result is as much guided by fiction as it is by longing.

The works on view tap into Tuva's mythic essence; the menacing, ashen mask (*Untitled*, 2010), whose gaping mouth is stuffed with the teeth of dogs and wolves, might evoke an animal spirit. Others works look like offerings taken from rituals of ancestor worship, like the slumped, supine doll that Antufiev has adorned with his mother's hair (*Untitled*, 2009). Whatever their mysterious purposes, Antufiev's works attempt to recuperate a past uncomplicated by Communist Russia, and as much a fiction as that which Vladimir Nabokov referred to as "the legendary Russia of my boyhood."

Vladimir Arkhipov

b. 1961 in Ryazan, Russia

While growing up in Russia under Soviet rule, Vladimir Arkhipov became familiar with all kinds of ingenious jury-rigged contraptions: a rustic radio receiver used to pick up Voice of America broadcasts; a hat that his grandmother made out of old skirts; a rudimentary TV antenna fashioned out of bent and twisted forks. These improvisations seemed normal to him, undifferentiated from the other practical commodities of everyday life, until he visited a friend and noticed a coat hook that had been constructed from the handle of an old toothbrush. It was then that Arkhipov realized that the improvised homemade objects of his childhood belonged to a much larger genre of the Soviet vernacular—one that attests to the conditions of scarcity and necessity in life under communism.

Since then, Arkhipov has traveled throughout Russia, gathering over a thousand examples of such DIY objects, which he has photographed, cataloged, and paired with accounts of their creation, including audio and video interviews with the people who made them. Arkhipov has referred to these collected objects as forms of "unintentional folklore." Even without their first-hand narratives, the objects themselves demonstrate the privation of Soviet life and confirm how quiet feats of human creativity can counter deprivation. Arkhipov points out that when viewed collectively, the objects expose not only a unique folk aesthetic, but also a particular mode of production in which necessity instigates creativity.

Said Atabekov

b. 1965 in Bes-Terek, Kazakhstan

In Said Atabekov's *Walkman* (2005), a figure in ragged, motley garb trudges slowly across the dusty steppes of Southern Kazakhstan, inexplicably lugging an upright bass on his back. The instrument has been modified so that its strings stretch steeply over an exaggerated bridge that protrudes out from its body and its stand is precariously elongated. Shaman, jester, and vagabond in one, the figure—repeatedly portrayed in Atabekov's videos and always at odds with his environment—appears to be a stranger in a strange land, a character from a realm marked by myth and mystic rites. As he moves across the barren landscape, he arrives on an incongruous forest of transmission towers whose power lines string like bridge cables towards the horizon.

In *Sniper* (2005), Atabekov's wife and children gently rock a child in a cradle whose handle resembles a Kalashnikov rifle. They go about their activities in an open steppe dotted with totemic sculptures. Atabekov's work has engaged with Kazakhstan's folk culture and history since his involvement with the Perestroika-era art collective Red Tractor. As in *Walkman*, the drama between folk culture and the intrusive presence of another world is enacted allegorically. But while the figure in *Walkman* is

confronted with monuments of a technological, global present, the characters in *Sniper* endure the remnants of Kazakhstan's Soviet past, an emblem of which looms over their baby as an introduction to history, or perhaps as a warning.

Nikolay Bakharev

b. 1946 in Mikhailovka, Russia

After being raised in an orphanage from the age of four and working as a mechanic in a metallurgy plant from the age of sixteen, Nikolay Bakharev eventually started taking photographs and found his talent for creating intimate and often casually immodest portraits of complete strangers. Bakharev began his career as a photographer working for the Communal Services Factory of Novokuznetsk, a provincial mining city in central southern Russia, where he received assignments for occasions such as local weddings, funerals, and school portraits. Bakharev grew tired of these projects, however, and in the late '70s began to venture out to the local public beach in search of something different. Bakharev initially set out to earn a little extra money soliciting portraits, but had to do so covertly; because it amounted to a private enterprise, it was illegal.

Bakharev soon realized he was capturing something unique in his pictures of lovers, families, and friends enjoying their leisure time in the sun. Throughout Soviet rule the criminal code forbade the distribution of photographs containing nudity. Bakharev observed that "the beach was the only place where people were allowed to bare their bodies without provoking a negative reaction from the Soviet society at the time." Because of this, these beach photographs document an innocent transgression, and the intimacy they reveal is a result of the trust the artist establishes with his sitters. These first experiments in portraiture eventually led Bakharev to persuade his subjects to pose nude for him in the privacy of their homes, allowing him to amass a collection of photographs that further chronicles the allure of recreational eroticism and transgression in the late Soviet period.

Mirosław Bałka

b. 1958 in Otwock, Poland

While Mirosław Bałka was still completing his studies at Warsaw's conservative Academy of Fine Arts, Polish society was undergoing a period of tremendous political repression and civil resistance. Beginning in the summer of 1980 with the emergence of Solidarity, the first non-Communist Party-controlled trade union in the Eastern Bloc, an anti-Soviet and non-violent social movement developed in Poland—largely with the support of the Catholic Church and Pope John Paul II, whose 1979 visit to his homeland galvanized opposition to communist rule. When membership in the Solidarity movement grew to include a third of Poland's working population, the authoritarian government implemented a martial law from 1981 until 1983 in an attempt to crush Solidarity and other pro-democracy movements. During this time, and throughout the 1980s, thousands of dissidents were jailed without charge and nearly a hundred people were killed.

This period of political strife was formative for Bałka's artistic practice, and much of the work he produced at the Academy in Warsaw refers to the upheavals that were occurring just outside his studio. *Black Pope and Black Sheep* (1987) grew out of this body of early work, and serves as an unsettling reminder of the period between the lifting of martial law and the political negotiations that led to Poland's first semi-free elections in 1989. The black pope—likely a stand-in for Pope John Paul II—is characterized as both an outcast from an ideological landscape hostile to religion, and as a weeping shepherd wracked with uncertainty about Poland's future. The figure of the black pope could also refer to the apocryphal prophecies of Nostradamus that were embraced in 1980s Poland, and which suggest a dark mentality that coexisted with the hope for change.

Irina Botea

b. 1970 in Ploiești, Romania

Irina Botea's video works often engage with Romanian life and history, particularly in relation to the legacy of Communism and the revolution that brought about its end. In December 1989, in the Transylvanian city of Timișoara, a small group of parishioners, neighbors, and students gathered to protest the eviction and harassment of László Tőkés, a pastor in the Hungarian Reformed church. This small gathering, a sight seldom seen during regime leader Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship, quickly gained momentum and took on an actively anti-Communist position. By the next day, the protesters had organized an anti-government rally that was attended by more than 2,500 Romanians. Ceaușescu responded by deploying the military and declaring martial law, but remained somewhat oblivious to the possibility that this unprecedented rebellion would grow into a full-scale revolution. Just days later, Ceaușescu attempted to condemn the revolts during a public address in Bucharest, but grossly misread the mood of the people. Midway through the speech, which was being broadcast live, protesters moved into the crowd and quickly turned the assembly into chaos and a city-wide riot. Officials tried to cut the live feed and Ceaușescu made a futile attempt to calm the crowd, but it was too late: the revolution had already been televised, and documentation of the violent street confrontations in the following days would also include footage shot by protesters, resident, and even tourists. The violent riots culminated in the trial and execution of Ceaușescu and his wife Elena by firing squad. The revolution became known as the first to unfold live on television.

In *Auditions for a Revolution* (2006), Botea restages televised scenes of the 1989 Revolution—further lifted from filmmaker Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's 1993 film *Videograms of a Revolution*—using a group of students in Chicago. The students, who do not speak Romanian, are instructed to recite news announcements and revolutionary slogans phonetically, unaware of their meanings. This gap between what is said and what is understood acts as a structuring metaphor throughout the work, pointing to our incomplete understanding of mediated events and to the facets of experience that are lost when such events are rewritten as historical memory.

Geta Brătescu

b. 1926 in Ploiești, Romania

Geta Brătescu is one of the most important figures in the Romanian avant-garde of the 1960s and '70s. Brătescu trained in both art and literature beginning in the 1940s, but abandoned her studies at Bucharest's Academy of Fine Arts in 1945, and was only able to finish her degree in 1967. According to Brătescu, her most important artistic work began after her graduation, at the age of forty-three, when she acquired a studio space of her own. Like her friend and occasional collaborator Ion Grigorescu, Brătescu engaged both traditional and new media mostly in relative isolation and in whatever free time she could find. Throughout the '60s and '70s, Brătescu worked professionally as a graphic designer for *Secolul 20* (20th Century), a leading cultural magazine in which she also published a number of essays.

In the mid-1970s, Brătescu began to use the studio as a stage, independently producing works in film and photography that document her explorations of psychological space and the body's relationship to its environment, and also recall similar investigations by Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Vito Acconci. In addition to these often-private performances and installations, Brătescu also created many collage works using fabrics and tapestries—as well as a variety of found objects from her everyday life. For Brătescu, collage was a technique that created “a distant eye,” allowing her to more freely imagine a visual equivalent for literary ideas. Between 1980 and 1981, she produced a series of minimal, machine-embroidered textile collages, each of which features an oblong nucleus surrounded by

obliquely allegorical hieroglyphics. The works, entitled *Portraits of Medea* borrow the qualities of traditional handicrafts, but offering a meditation on the mythical figure of Medea—one of the most complex female characters from classical mythology and literature, she is both enchantress and witch, victim and killer, and best known for her many acts of vengeance and bloodshed.

Anatoly Brusilovsky

b. 1932 in Odessa, Ukraine

Anatoly Brusilovsky remembers his childhood home as filled with a wide array of visual artifacts: illustrated encyclopedias, folios of Gustav Doré's fantastic literary illustrations, and old copies of *Niva*, an illustrated weekly from turn-of-the-century, pre-Soviet Russia. This radically diverse and liberal visual world clashed strongly with propaganda posters, official portraits of leaders, heraldic images of his everyday Soviet vernacular, and inspired Brusilovsky to begin making the complex and symbolic collage works that he eventually became known for. With image fragments in abrupt conjunctions and intersections of the sacred and the profane, many of his early works recall the surrealist game of exquisite corpse.

In the late 1960s, Brusilovsky began to juxtapose Socialist Realist imagery—including depictions of Soviet leaders like Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev—with typically surrealist elements such as menageries of wild animals, disembodied fragments of pinup girls, bourgeoisie characters dressed in top hats and tails, religious iconography, and images from nineteenth-century woodblock prints. Brusilovsky's composite images reveal clever associations and critical political statements. In *Acts of Belief* (1969) an Orthodox cross hangs above an iconic image of Lenin, which is overlaid with a picture of a self-immolating Buddhist monk, depicting a tension between these systems of belief and even suggesting their possible equivalence. His explicit political critiques put Brusilovsky in the company of other 20th century dissident collage artists like Hannah Höch and John Heartfield, and offer an important example of subversive visual criticism that escaped the censorship of Soviet authorities.

Erik Bulatov

b. 1933 in Sverdlovsk, Russia

Erik Bulatov, along with Ilya Kabakov, Viktor Pivovarov, Dimitri Prigov, and Andrei Monastyrski was one of the central figures of Moscow Conceptualism, an underground art movement that emerged in the 1960s, largely in response to strict ideological censorship. Bulatov's first mature works of the early 1970s are characterized by a sophisticated photorealism and critical parodies of Socialist Realism—features also shared by the Sots Art movement—but also share the Suprematists' examination of space, surface, and light. With *Entrance—No Entrance* (1974-1975), Bulatov began to expand his painting practice by including text, frequently rendered in an exaggerated vanishing point perspective to create the illusion of recession or advancement in space. Often, Bulatov's ideologically-loaded slogans and wordplays appear as monolithic edifices that seem to float on the painting's surface.

The incorporation of language marked Bulatov's shift away from an engagement with the symbolism of Soviet propaganda and towards an examination of the linguistic foundations of Soviet power—a characteristic concern of the Moscow Conceptualists, as well as other artists in "Ostalgia," such as Dimitri Prigov. In these works, the words both illustrate and caricature their role in Soviet society; in *House (Dom)* (1992), the text stands as a mute warden barring the viewer's access, just as the empty platitudes of Soviet newspeak blocked, or attempted to block, the ability to see the realities of life under Soviet rule. In others, like *Seva's Blue* (1979), the words invite the viewer to enter the space of the painting. Occasionally, these beckoning words function like a siren song, designed to lead the viewer astray. However, in the case of *Seva's Blue*, the words *Sevina Sineva* commemorate Vsevolod (Seva)

Nekrasov, a prominent poet in the unofficial Moscow art scene, whose poetry was a source of inspiration to Bulatov.

André Cadere

- b. 1934 in Poland
- d. 1978 in Paris, France

Part flâneur, part nomad, and part art world agitator, André Cadere established a unique practice in 1970s Paris before his death in 1978 at the age of 44. Cadere came to Paris from Romania in 1968, escaping the country just as Nicolae Ceaușescu began his dictatorial rule. Prior to his arrival in Paris, Cadere had shown paintings in various underground exhibitions in Romania, but it was not until he found himself in France—in a place where the market encouraged artistic production—that he began to make what would become his trademark works. These works, which Cadere titled *Barres de bois* (Wooden Bars, 1970-78), are poles of varying length and diameter, composed of hand-carved sections of colored wood arranged according to a mathematical system that Cadere devised himself.

As objects, the *Barres* appear to be rough tools for measurement, elements from an unfamiliar children's game, or ceremonial staffs. During the period of their production, Cadere's *Barres* were rarely installed in a way that would allow them to be understood as sculptures. Instead they were tools that Cadere employed in a practice that defined his own autonomy from galleries and institutions. Almost as a rule, Cadere used them to undermine the authority of what he found to be an exclusionary and market-driven art world. Cadere would often show up to gallery openings toting one of his iconic works, or surreptitiously insert them into exhibitions in which he was not included. Perhaps most notably, Cadere made a daily practice of strolling through the streets of Paris with his *Barres*, and—as a peripatetic embodiment of the artist-in-exile—personally displayed his art beyond the confines of the gallery.

Olga Chernysheva (b. 1962 in Moscow, Russia)

Olga Chernysheva's videos and photographs create candid vignettes of post-Soviet life, frequently focusing on quasi-allegorical figures: a woman who has carried a poster of Stalin to a parade, a man reciting Pushkin on a crowded train, a man numb and bewildered in an alcoholic daze. In *March* (2005), a group of young boys flank a red carpet in official-looking uniforms that seem to recall the Young Pioneers scout group of Russia's Soviet past. As a brass band plays a marching tune, they fidget with their gloves and lapels, and squirm out of boredom and discomfort. As the triumphal music bangs and blows ("I'm going to buy ear plugs," one boy says), a cheerleading squad appears as if conjured up by the idle minds of the uniformed cadets. Amid the curious Soviet-style pageantry, they are representatives of a Western-style fitness culture, and a reminder of the Voluntary Sport Societies of the Soviet past. With patriotic balloons carrying slogans of "Glory," "The Academy of Excellent Athletic Achievements," and corporate logos, the scene presents a vision of time out of joint. The inattentive cadets, who swear their perfunctory allegiance to Russia near the end of the video, mingle with women's modern silhouettes as they rhythmically rustle their pom-poms. It is a history that refuses clear-cut linearity: the present does not erase the past but must build provisionally upon its rubble.

Phil Collins

- b. 1970 in Runcorn, UK

Phil Collins's *marxism today (prologue)* (2010) focuses on a set of interviews with women who taught classes in Marxist-Leninist economics at vocational schools and universities in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Petra Mgoza-Zecky, Andrea Ferber, and

Marianne Koltz found that the suddenly unfashionable knowledge from their former professions could no longer sustain them. Over the course of the film, they recount their experiences and struggles to recover their identities in reunified, post-Wall Germany.

The transition appears hardest on Petra Mgoza-Zecky, who lost in rapid succession her job, her nation—which she still calls her “fatherland”—and her husband, an African socialist who resorted to suicide after the collapse of the GDR. Alternating with Collins’s interviews are clips from the GDR television program *Von Pädagogen für Pädagogen* (*By Educators, for Educators*), whose resemblance to didactic films produced in America and Western Europe reveals that even opposed ideologies share many of the same educational tools. All of these women recall the past as if the tide of history had carried away a part of their identities, and the wistfulness they express complicates the notion that the fall of the Wall was a universally liberating event.

Neil Cummings

b. 1947 in Aberdare, UK

Marysia Lewandowska

b. 1955 in Szczecin, Poland

For two years, Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska traveled across Poland in search of amateur films produced by the numerous state-sponsored film clubs that flourished during the period of communist rule, from the 1950s until the mid-1980s. These film clubs, which provided factory workers with cameras, film stock, and editing tables, were by far the most popular aspect of the Polish government’s effort to organize and regulate the use of leisure time; by 1967 there were 213 film clubs, mostly concentrated in the country’s industrial centers. The films produced by these clubs were screened widely through a network of dedicated film festivals, but after the fall of the communist government at the end of the 1980s, they were all but lost—pushed out of the public consciousness in an effort to purge any reminders of the communist past, and overlooked by archivists because of their amateur status.

The films unearthed by Cummings and Lewandowska, which the artists organized into three thematic programs (“Love,” “Longing,” and “Labor”), are a far cry from standard hobbyist fare. They aspire to the status of cinema by integrating formal techniques from the cinematic avant-garde and by addressing the personal and political realities that official newsreels and propaganda films managed to conveniently circumvent. The films are also poignant visual records of workers engaged in a different type of labor than that which was required of them by the state—a creative fabrication in which they were free to narrate their desires, anxieties, and dissent.

Tacita Dean (b. 1965 in Canterbury, UK)

Tacita Dean’s films are marked by loneliness, disappearances, and acts of mourning. It is therefore fitting that she chooses to work with 16mm celluloid film—a cumbersome, uncompromising medium that moves closer to obsolescence each day. The film *Palast* (2004) is composed of a series of close-up shots of the mirrored glass façade of the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) in former East Berlin, the parliamentary building of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1976 to 1990. Its perch on the banks of the Spree has even greater historical significance, however—this modern, utopian structure was erected on the site of the former Berliner Stadtschloss (the Berlin City Palace), a Baroque palace that had been home to nearly four centuries of royals. After the fall of communism, the *Palast* was host to the treaty-signing that led to German reunification, but was condemned for asbestos in 1990 and stood vacant for thirteen years—as much a monument to an extinct system as a memorial to a failed utopia. Once the asbestos was removed in 2003, cultural events were organized at the

Palast in order to repurpose the space. Dean captures this iconic piece of architecture in a way that suggests its state of limbo: the mirrored windows of its modernist façade reflect distorted images of the city's many changes and upheavals in the wake of German reunification. Like the 16mm film Dean uses to document it, the building was likewise bound for obsolescence: despite protests, demolition began in 2006, and by 2008 the Palast der Republik had been entirely dismantled to make way for a reconstruction of the Stadtschloss. Without its presence as a reminder, it may soon be easy to believe that the *Palast*—and perhaps even the GDR itself—never existed, unless only as a long and partly recalled dream.

Stano Filko

b. 1937 in Velká Hradná, Slovakia

On May Day, 1965, artists Stano Filko, Alex Mlynárčik, and art historian Zita Kostrová published the *Manifesto of 'Happsoc.'* A combination of the words “happening” and “society,” *happsoc* was defined as a kind of communal, social happening. Unlike an American happening, *happsoc* involved no localized event or performance. Taking cues from friends in the Nouveau Réalisme movement, the artists instead defined the reality of the city to be a kind of readymade. For *Happsoc I* (1965) Filko, Mlynárčik, and Kostrová declared that from May 1st to May 9th, the period of the official May Day celebrations, the entire city of Bratislava would function under the umbrella of their conceptual enterprise, with each day of the week part of the weeklong series of “realities.” In 1968, for *Happsoc IV* they expanded their found realities beyond the urban industrial city to the interstellar space: an invitation with a picture of a rocket ship bore the English inscription: “1968-69-70-71 and further years take the liberty to invite you for a TRAVEL IN SPACE mental and physical Everybody according to his possibilities and facilities.”

At the time of the creation of this cosmic *happsoc*, Filko was also working on a suite of prints on cardboard that dealt with cosmonautical themes inspired by the heated space race of the Cold War as well as his first environments, which included an inflated atmospheric globe of silver plastic and experiments with slide projection and radio broadcasts. Though it was clear even at the time that the race to the heavens stood for more than a scientific and technological competition, Filko's works short-circuit the militaristic impulses of the US-Soviet space race and revive the utopian goals of space exploration—both the primordial wish to touch the sky and its tacit injunction to cast aside petty terrestrial grievances and foster unity on a cosmic scale.

Hermann Glöckner

b. 1889 in Dresden, Germany; d. 1987 in Berlin, Germany

Hermann Glöckner was a painter, sculptor, and assemblage artist who endured the rule of the two nearly consecutive regimes that held power in Germany during his lifetime. Though he was originally trained as an academic painter, after World War I Glöckner was drawn to the work of the Russian Constructivists and abandoned realism to experiment with space and perception. This interest led to his lifelong engagement with geometric abstraction, a style condemned by the ideologies of both the Nazi Party and the communist GDR. As a result, Glöckner was forced to spend the majority of his artistic career producing work in secrecy.

Glöckner's earliest forays into abstraction were works on paper and cardboard that he would fold, flatten, and paint, using the folded lines as guides to creating polygonal forms. After World War II, Glöckner began a series of small sculptural assemblages, constructed out of the cast-off materials from his surroundings. Though humble in both material and scale, many of these works were created as maquettes for larger sculptures. Unfortunately, very few large-scale works were ever realized, as Glöckner died two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall and it wasn't until the mid 1980s that the GDR allowed him to erect any sculptures at all. Although Glöckner was forbidden from exhibiting and

realizing many of the works he intended to, the small sculptures he did leave behind are testament to the persistence of the imagination in the face of censorship—an artistic universe that fits onto a tabletop.

Ion Grigorescu

b. 1945 in Bucharest, Romania

Ion Grigorescu is one of the most important figures in the Romanian avant-garde of the 1970s and '80s. Much of Grigorescu's work during this period remained relatively unknown until after the fall of the country's communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989. Engaged in what he called "a process of self-discovery," Grigorescu initiated a series of solo performances enacted in the privacy of his own apartment and seen by only a small group of fellow artists.

The photographs and films that document these performances frequently depict Grigorescu fully nude and occasionally alternating gender representations; both acts were strictly prohibited during the Ceaușescu era. In one series of photographs titled *Delivery* (1977), Grigorescu presents a charade of giving birth, and in *Boxing* (1977), he created a film vignette in which he seems to pantomime, fully nude, a boxing match against himself. Despite the hermetic nature of Grigorescu's work, it is a scene that could easily represent the internal struggles, both psychic and artistic, that his isolation engendered. Understood in relation to the politics of that time, however, the work can also be seen as an allegory of private resistance in an environment of political oppression.

Andris Grīnbergs

b. 1946 in Riga, Latvia

Once an aspiring clothing designer, by the early 1970s Andris Grīnbergs had transformed himself into the flamboyant ringleader of a rotating circle of artists, poets, and musicians, who together pioneered performance art in Latvia. Grīnbergs's first foray into performance was an offbeat, unsanctioned staging of *Romeo and Juliet* that took place in 1969 at the pre-Soviet national war memorial in his native city of Riga, a hub for countercultural Soviet youth during the Brezhnev era. Soon after, Grīnbergs abandoned his interpretations of classical theater and began instead to stage ritualistic, pansexual happenings that drew from both the American hippie movement and Latvia's pagan past.

Like the happenings organized by Andrei Monastyrski's Collective Actions group in Russia, the majority of Grīnbergs's happenings took place in the countryside, away from the prying eyes of government censors. Once there, Grīnbergs and his collaborators set about the task of ecstatically merging art and life. In keeping with his burgeoning status as impresario of the transgressive, Grīnbergs took on the role of the messiah during a carnivalesque staging of his own wedding for *The Marriage of Jesus Christ* (1972), a characteristic performance of iconoclasm and megalomania. Grīnbergs's period of liberated sexuality, however, remained a fleeting one: in 1972, KGB agents raided his apartment during an exhibition opening and Grīnbergs was forced to cut up the only extant print of his subversive film *Self-Portrait* (1972), which he managed to disperse and conceal in secret locations throughout Riga until after the fall of Communism.

Aneta Grzeszykowska

b. 1974 in Warsaw, Poland

Aneta Grzeszykowska's *Album* (2005) is a collection of approximately two hundred family photographs from the artist's childhood; they resemble family albums in much of the world: a child in front of a Christmas tree, a class picture, a child's tea party with dolls. However, a closer look reveals a strange trend. The pictures are riddled with absences and haunted by the ghost of a missing figure.

Grzeszykowska has digitally removed herself from each image, erasing her presence from her past to create a personal history that is missing its protagonist.

These displacements hint at the inevitable fallibility of personal memory and the way that photographs can often fill those gaps, furnishing us with evidence on which we come to rely. Indirectly, however, the erased images of Grzeszykowska's childhood in Warsaw in the 1970s and 80s have a more menacing political resonance with the history of Soviet censorship and photographic erasure that accompanied the disappearance and execution of party "enemies" during Stalin's purges of the 1930s. With this history in mind, Grzeszykowska's altered album is a document that acknowledges the transience of both life and memory.

Tibor Hajas

b. 1946 in Budapest, Hungary

d. 1980 in Szeged, Hungary

By often testing his own physical and psychological limits in ritualistic and scatological performances, Tibor Hajas demonstrated a transgressive spirit similar to that of Viennese Actionists. Often, his actions suggest both the privations experienced under authoritarian regimes and an imagined rite of purification. The majority of Hajas's performances took place before an audience of one—his friend and collaborator János Vető, who regularly documented Hajas's works—though Hajas occasionally staged his performances in public, as was the case with *Dark Flash* (1978). For this piece, he had himself suspended from the ceiling by his wrists, and with camera in hand, photographed the audience until he passed out from pain. With Hajas hanging helpless, his audience was confronted with a moral dilemma, a situation reminiscent of those created by daredevil American performance artist Chris Burden. In the repressive political environment of 1970s Hungary, however, this kind of moral experiment also conveyed socio-political concerns by calling the audience's attention to their own agency with respect to civil disobedience and dissent.

A related situation is played out in *Self Fashion Show* (1976). In this film, Hajas asked passersby to pose however they like while he recorded them for one minute as they stood and fashioned themselves before the camera. In the finished work, Hajas added a vocal track that mimics the voice of a director, coaxing the film's subjects with phrases like, "Try to find the posture that suits you most," or "Try to make a good impression." These voices seem to reinforce an anonymous authorial power, suggesting their struggle to present themselves with claims like, "You are in control of the image being made of you." While the audience members of *Dark Flash* are offered a critical opportunity to affect change, the subjects of *Self Fashion Show* are denied even a superficial agency.

Petrit Halilaj

b. 1986 in Skënderaj, Kosovo

Petrit Halilaj's work engages with his experience as a migrant and a refugee who has lived through the experience of the Kosovo-Serbian War. It is no accident that for someone who has had such a troubled relationship with his native land, the themes of domesticity and hospitality would become central to his practice. Halilaj's installations often literally uproot materials and objects from his village in Kosovo, which are utilized to create precarious hideouts carved within various exhibition spaces.

For his first solo exhibition in Berlin, for example, he turned the gallery into a temporary apartment for his father. At a recent presentation in Art Statements in Basel he shipped to Switzerland a large portion of earth and grass, which he had extracted from his family property. And in his most ambitious installation to date—realized for the 6th Berlin Biennale—Halilaj reconstructed the entire wooden structure of his parents' house, creating a skeletal rendition of his childhood home.

In Halilaj's houses, live chickens can often be found strolling around and enjoying the surroundings: "They are lucky to be bourgeois hens," recites the title for these pieces, which seem to evoke a not-so-distant past in former Yugoslavia when having a proper house was enough to be accused of compliance with the bourgeoisie.

For his participation in "Ostalgia," Halilaj has recovered a collection of butterflies from the old natural history museum in the city of Pristina, Kosovo. Displaced during the war and then destroyed to make room for a much more fashionable convention center, the museum still resonated in Halilaj's memories. After much research, Halilaj tracked down a series of vitrines which had been discarded in a city storage, photographed them, and displays the images in an installation where a single light bulb swings above the projectors as though it were tracing the flight patterns of the butterflies, or the irregular trajectories of memories.

Hamlet Hovsepian

b. 1950 Ashnak, Armenia

In his short video works from the 1970s, Hamlet Hovsepian, a pioneering Armenian video and performance artist, illuminated the mundane actions of everyday life by recording instinctive and absurd gestures. Isolated by the camera's frame, Hovsepian's trivial repetitions take on existential weight and create allegorical meditations that recall the works of Western contemporaries like Vito Acconci and Bas Jan Ader. A man yawns; a woman bites her nails; a man is absorbed in thought; a man relentlessly scratches his back; a man washes his hair. As if doomed to some Sisyphean punishment, the figure in *Untitled* (1976) circles a tremendous boulder whose shape appears to have been carved by his endless pacing. But beyond the tragicomic minimalism that Hovsepian's work shares with Samuel Beckett and other poets of the absurd, his videos are also imbued with a subtle yet undeniable political commentary. In a society living under the Soviet rhetoric of efficiency, productivity and collectivity, Hovsepian's figures stand in silent opposition—quixotic sovereigns of their own private tedium.

Julius Koller

b. 1939 in Piestany, Slovakia

d. 2007 in Bratislava, Slovakia

Julius Koller was one of the key figures of the unofficial Slovak art scene of the 1970s and 80s, and later became an important mentor to a generation of post-conceptual Slovak artists—particularly Roman Ondák. Koller's early works from the mid-1960s were formed around his idea of the "anti-happening." Unlike happenings, whose status as discrete events Koller found too limiting, anti-happenings were multi-faceted productions, often accompanied by mini-tableaus—"anti-environments" that invited their viewer to reflect on the reality of their social surroundings.

In 1970, two years after the Soviet re-occupation of Czechoslovakia reversed the liberalizations of the Prague Spring, Koller gave his anti-happenings a cosmic twist, and began a series of annual self-portraits in which he hoped to map the coordinates of both his subjective life and the social context in which he operated. Casting himself as a being from the future—alienated from the present—he also dubbed himself a *UFOnaut*, taking on an acronym that would become ubiquitous in his practice and signify an assortment of possible meanings: Universal Futurological Organization, Universal Philosophical Ornament, and Underground Fantastic Organization, to name a few. Around this time, Koller also adopted the question mark, employing it as both a signature and a symbol of ultimate opacity. Taken in tandem with his time-traveling UFOnaut alter ego, Koller's question mark motif seems to playfully embrace both the openness of the future and the ambiguity of the present.

Jiří Kovanda

b. 1953 in Prague, Czech Republic

Unlike many of his academy-trained contemporaries, Jiří Kovanda began making art on his own, without any formal training. Kovanda's early drawings and collage works—made as a teenager during the de-Stalinization of 1960s Czechoslovakia—marked the beginning of a practice he continued throughout great political transformations. After liberal reforms brought about during the Prague Spring of 1968, a Soviet invasion returned the country to its state of occupation and re-tightened restrictions on media, speech, and travel. As a result, Kovanda and other Prague artists gravitated towards performance-based practices, influenced by the Viennese Actionists and by artists like Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Richard Long, whose work they knew either by smuggled documentation or from their own correspondence with the artists.

While some of Kovanda's peers, like Petr Štembera, took a confrontational and endurance-based approach to performance, Kovanda created subtle, whimsical, and mischievous gestures that reveled in the margins of visibility. In some of these "actions" Kovanda attempts small transgressions in the everyday conventions of public space: impeding the flow of pedestrian traffic by standing motionless with his arms outstretched, or inviting a group of friends to gather in a public square only to flee upon their arrival, as he did for an action in 1978. In others, Kovanda invites sympathy, and seems to romanticize futility: he tries to scratch hearts off a wall with his nails; he cups water in his hands to carry down river; he waits for someone to call; he cries. These interruptions of public behavior have prompted political interpretations, but Kovanda insists on a more personal, quasi-Romantic reading, reminiscent of the work of Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader. While Kovanda's performances are not overtly political, they do stand as testaments to the persistence of individual agency within a stringently regulated public sphere.

Evgenij Kozlov (E-E)

b. 1955 in St. Petersburg, Russia

"One day, in Leningrad in the late sixties, a boy—or maybe two—endowed with a sensitive judgment and feeling for art imagined the following: how might the best girls, mentally, intellectually and visually seen, dream of him, although not only that..."

So muses a young Evgenij Kozlov in his introduction to what is now known as *The Leningrad Album*, a collection of over 250 ink drawings Kozlov produced between the ages of twelve and eighteen. The dedication reads: *Our dearest book. Dedicated to all youth and men in the world throughout the XXI, XXVI, XXXIX and LXIV centuries.*

In many of the drawings, Kozlov's smoldering yet innocent erotica are inspired not only by his feverish imagination, but by the intimate quarters of the communal apartment complex, or *Kommunalka*, in which he was raised. Not yet considered a man, he was welcomed into the female world; his mother often took him to the women's section of the sauna or brought him along when she went next door where the girls dressed and got ready to go out. Kozlov's female neighbors, who make up the cast of girls that appear in his drawings, are often pictured performing sexual acts in the domestic settings of his youth. These drawings sprung from the mind of a boy consumed by longing—a boy whose early efforts at copying masterworks from the Hermitage Museum enabled him to chronicle his own sexual awakening with pen and paper. The drawings are both startlingly explicit and tenderly naïve as they expose the intimate fantasies of the young artist through his virile alter ego.

Edward Krasiński

- b. 1925 in Lucka, Poland
- d. 2004 in Warsaw, Poland

A legendary figure of the 1960s and '70s Polish avant-garde, Edward Krasiński co-founded Warsaw's influential Foksal Gallery in 1966 and was active in the art scene until his death in 2004, at the age of 79. Beginning in the late 1960s, Krasiński became known for his methodical and trademark use of blue Scotch tape, which he began to stick "horizontally on everything and everywhere, at a height of 130 centimeters." Throughout his career, Krasiński used this tape as a tool to align the disparate spatial components of his installations—mirrors, photographs, architecture, and even, in the case of his first tape work in 1968, his own daughter—and also to connect the many elements of his practice as a whole.

As a stylistic and conceptual device, Krasiński's blue line investigates the tension of borders and boundaries while recalling the pure and rational geometry of the Polish Constructivists, whose work he knew through Henryk Stażewski—a close friend and studio mate who counted Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, and Jean Arp among his friends. In much of his work, Krasiński's interests correspond with those of French conceptualist Daniel Buren, with whom he had frequent exchanges beginning in 1970. However, unlike Buren's meticulously spaced vertical stripes, which both delineate a space and draw an object in opposition to its environment, Krasiński's horizontal lines unite the scattered fragments of the world under his own idiosyncratic schema. "Wolves pee to mark their territory," he said of his work, "I stick the blue tape to mark mine."

Alexander Lobanov

- b. 1924 in Mologa, Russia
- d. 2003 in Yaroslavl, Russia

After suffering from meningitis at the age of five, Alexander Lobanov became deaf and mute. In 1937, on the eve of World War II, a Soviet reservoir project relocated Lobanov's family from Mologa, Russia, to the nearby city of Yaroslavl—a move which also forced Lobanov to abandon the school for the deaf he had been attending. Further estranged and without access to support, Lobanov grew increasingly violent and resistant as a teenager. After his father's death, his discipline and care proved too great a burden for his mother, and in 1945, she committed her 21-year-old son to a local psychiatric hospital. Lobanov's violent behavior continued, and he spent eight years at the facility in Yaroslavl before he grew more reclusive and solitary—a change that allowed him to transfer to a hospital in the countryside town of Alfonino, where he resided for the remainder of his life.

Lobanov spent almost ten years in Alfonino before he began making drawings in the early 1960s. At first, Lobanov took to simply copying images and making rough collages using visual material he found close at hand, but within a few years he had developed a distinctive and cavalier style, consistent across the hundreds of works he produced. Lobanov's remarkably detailed drawings and 70s-era photographs reveal his passion for self-portraiture, Soviet revolutionary iconography and, most notably, his fascination with firearms—rifles, muskets, carbines, shotguns, pistols, and especially AK-47s—both real and imagined. Almost certainly, the ecstatic revolutionary militarism that pervades much of Lobanov's work was inspired by the early Soviet propaganda that saturated the visual environment he grew up in. But, perhaps distracted by Kalashnikovs, Lobanov seems to have eagerly dismissed the collectivist message of the Soviets; most likely in an expression of fantasy, he consistently depicted himself alone as the heroic protagonist—an individual isolated by a distinction and grandeur he never knew in his own life.

Jonas Mekas

- b. 1922 in Semeniškiai, Lithuania

Filmmaker, poet, archivist, critic, and theorist Jonas Mekas is one of the most well-known figures in American avant-garde cinema. In his early 20s, Mekas and his brother fled the Nazi invasion of his native Lithuania, eventually settling in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in 1949. Immediately upon arrival, they acquired a 16mm Bolex camera and began to record scenes from their everyday life. Mekas actively absorbed all of New York's film culture, and by the mid-'50s had established himself in city's independent cinema scene. In addition to hosting film screenings, in 1954 he co-founded and edited the influential journal *Film Culture*, and wrote a regular column for the Village Voice beginning in 1958. In 1964, Mekas founded the Filmmaker's Cinematheque, which later became Anthology Film Archives, and continues to be one of the world's most important resources for the preservation and exhibition of avant-garde and independent films. Throughout the 1960s, Mekas also established himself as an important figure in the New American Cinema movement, making films which, like his early Bolex experiments, were often inspired by the everyday.

In March of 1990, Lithuania became the first Soviet republic to declare its independence. Mekas's film *Lithuania and the Collapse of the USSR* (2008) consists of over four hours of television news coverage of the country's struggle to gain full independence from the Soviet Union. As the provisional process unfolded between 1989 and 1991, Mekas recorded footage from his home in New York, creating both a capsule of real-time media reactions to a weakening Soviet Union, and a meditation-in-exile on his homeland's process of transformation.

Boris Mikhailov

b. 1938 in Karkov, Ukraine

At the beginning of the 1960s, Boris Mikhailov was asked by his employer to make films and photographs of the plant where he worked as an engineer. Mikhailov also began making photographs on his own, a decision that soon got him fired from his engineering job when he was discovered developing photographs in the factory darkroom of nude models. Despite his dismissal and the threat of Soviet censure, Mikhailov continued to photograph, primarily in and around his native city of Karkov, and eventually emerged as one of the most prominent dissident artists of his generation.

Unlike the more direct critiques offered by some of his contemporaries—often a kind of homegrown counter-propaganda—Mikhailov's opposition to official Soviet culture was often more subtle. His Soviet-era photographs, like those in the series *Suzi Et Cetera* (1960s-70s), favor candid and direct representations of life under Communism as it was experienced by Mikhailov—shabby and vital, erotic and unidealized, and full of human imperfection. This reality is one that ran directly counter to the heroic, utopian visions provided by the official Soviet culture, which allowed only carefully stylized representations of the present and often favored images of an idealized future world.

Andrei Monastyrski

b. 1949 in Petsamo, Russia

Andrei Monastyrski is the founder of the Moscow-based artist group Collective Actions. This loose association of artists was founded in 1976 and practiced a brand of conceptualism which made use of poetic language and simple performative gestures. Monastyrski and his collaborators (Nikolai Panitkov, Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, Sabine Hänsgen, and Sergei Romashko) organized their works clandestinely with a limited audience that was actively involved in the creation of the work. In a typical Collective Actions event, a small group of viewers would be invited to travel to an isolated location on the outskirts of Moscow. There they would encounter a variety of mysterious actions and objects which made use of the surrounding landscape to activate the viewer's experience of the site. Possible events could include a man walking through an empty field and falling into a pit, the sound of single ringing bell,

or the presentation of enigmatic messages on banners hung from trees. For Monastyrski and his collaborators, the work extended beyond the event itself to include the duration of the viewer's journey and the persistence of the event in memory and written descriptions. Collective Actions adopted a distinctly romantic approach in which their strange slogans became captions transforming the landscape into a real-time film.

For "Ostalgia," the New Museum is re-presenting Monastyrski's work *Slogan* (1977) on an isolated location on Governors Island. The work consists of a red and white banner which carries the message in Russian: "I DO NOT COMPLAIN ABOUT ANYTHING AND I ALMOST LIKE IT HERE, ALTHOUGH I HAVE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE AND KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THIS PLACE." Facing the Statue of Liberty, the banner turns into a moving commentary on the history of displacement and relocation that characterizes New York's harbor. This installation of the work maintains the sense of hermetic discovery inherent in Monastyrski's original actions while allowing the message to reverberate to an entirely new audience.

Anatoly Osmolovsky

b. 1969 in Moscow, Russia

During the 1990s, Anatoly Osmolovsky rose to prominence as one of Russia's most important non-conformist and dissident artists. Originally active in literary groups as a writer, Osmolovsky began his artistic career leading the radical group of interventionist artists known as ETI (Expropriation of Art Territories). Between 1990 and 1992, Osmolovsky and ETI staged a number of iconoclastic actions, including hanging a massive banner with the anarchistic slogan "against all" on the front of Lenin's mausoleum and using the bodies of ETI collaborators to spell out the Russian slang term for 'penis' in the middle of Moscow's Red Square.

Forgotten face (installation fragment) (2001) has clear political overtones. This work appropriates a 1917 photograph of a young Lenin disguised as the worker Konstantin Ivanov on the eve of the October revolution, and lends itself to many interpretations, including, perhaps Osmolovsky's hope that radical politics return under the guise of a more formal art. Osmolovsky's *A Voyage of Netsezudik to Brobdignag (Mayakovsky—Osmolovsky)* (1993/2011) is photo documentation of a performance in which Osmolovsky perched on the shoulder of a monument of Futurist poet and radical Vladimir Mayakovsky. Although Osmolovsky's gesture could be read an attempt to insert himself into history and monumentalize himself as an artist, the work's title—derived from the island of giants in Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels*—points instead to Isaac Newton's famously humble declaration: "If I have seen a little farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

David Ter-Oganyan

b. 1982 in Rostov-on-Don, Russia

David Ter-Oganyan is one of a number of younger Russian artists whose work applies radical politics to a variety of aesthetic approaches. Ter-Oganyan was formerly a member of the collective, Radek, founded by his mentor Anatoly Osmolovsky. In the mid 1990s, the group began publishing a journal and undertook a series of radical street actions throughout Moscow. Radek emerged from the work and teaching of Avdey Ter-Oganyan, David's father, who was eventually exiled to Prague after an exhibition in which he chopped up reproductions of religious icon paintings. The younger artist's work has extended these politically charged actions to objects which engage with the complex relationship between protest, violence, and contemporary Russian life.

Ter-Oganyan's sculptures in the exhibition, all titled *This is Not a Bomb* (2006), turn a variety of everyday objects from soda bottles to vegetables into icons of terrorist action. Spread throughout the

Museum, these readymade devices evoke the bombings in Moscow during the late 1990s and early 2000s, attributed to Chechen separatists. With their use of recognizable Western products, they suggest the ubiquity of terrorist acts and the network of international forces involved in and affected by them.

Helga Paris

b. 1938 in Goleniów, Poland

In the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), photographers enjoyed much more freedom than artists working in painting and sculpture. While other visual artists were subject to close scrutiny and rigorous censorship by state authorities, East German photographers were able to operate with relative autonomy because the government's communist ideology did not consider photography to be art. This lack of recognition prevented East German photographers from organizing any formal exhibitions until the 1980s when political liberalization permitted the appearance of a number of artist-run galleries that showed photography, but it also allowed a small but significant group of committed photographers to create unregulated art while also documenting the GDR. Before she began exploring photography, Helga Paris studied fashion design in Berlin, but in the late 1960s she took a job as a photo technician, and soon after began to take on freelance assignments. Paris worked throughout the '70s and even exhibited her work occasionally, but was eventually censored for her project *Halle: Hauser und Gesichter* (*Halle: Houses and Faces*), which depicted the medieval city of Halle contaminated and disfigured by pollution and socialist building programs.

Paris's photographs from the series *Women at the Treffmodelle Clothing Factory* (1984) initially appear to be documents—closer to the typological pictures of August Sander's Weimar-era compendium of the German populace, *People of the 20th Century*—but in fact they discern individuals with an acute sensitivity. For this series, Paris returned to the textile mill where she herself had trained during her fashion design studies and photographed the women who worked there. In doing so, she portrayed them not simply as a type—or as representation of a work ethic—but as her peers, as women, as citizens, and as workers. The gravity and empathy in Paris's work imparts a radical subjectivity. Paris's thoughtful portraits of individuals candidly offer a powerful counterpoint to the generic imagery of idealized labor typical of communist propaganda.

Pavel Pepperstein

b. 1966 in Moscow, Russia

Pavel Pepperstein grew up exploring imaginary worlds in both visual art and literature. Both of his parents were active in the Moscow Conceptualist scene of the 1960s and '70s, and his father Viktor Pivovarov was also a prolific children's book illustrator. Pepperstein graduated from the Prague Academy of Fine Arts in 1987, and soon after founded the art group Inspection Medical Hermeneutics with Sergey Anufriev and Yuri Leiderman. Drawing from theology, philosophy, psychology, and pharmacology, the group aimed to examine and deconstruct the layers of symbolic content in everyday objects—and then recreate the discourse in their lectures, installations, and performances. After the group disbanded in 1991, Pepperstein continued to create lyrical and fanciful works that often combine theory and folklore to create a radical and romantic fiction.

Pavel Pepperstein's proposal for the creation of a new Russian capital, "The City of Russia," encapsulates his hope that the Russia of the future returns to the utopia of its Suprematist and Constructivist past. In this series of paintings, Pepperstein combines science fiction fantasy with an architecture of inflated and crisp geometries, much like the type pioneered by eighteenth-century French architect Étienne-Louis Boullée. In order to express his opposition to the post-communist

redevelopment that razed and reconfigured sections of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Pepperstein sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, and Saint Petersburg Governor Valentina Matvienko outlining his plans for the creation of this city. In this letter, Pepperstein proposed that Moscow and Saint Petersburg be preserved as cultural and architectural repositories of an allegedly “Russian essence,” and that The City of Russia serve alternatively as an locus of forward momentum, a space in which both cultural and economic development could take place without doing collateral damage to history. However, in keeping with his reverence for the past, Pepperstein’s designs for his future capital lack the ahistorical quality of other such utopian developments, both realized (Oscar Niemeyer’s *Brasília*) and not (Le Corbusier’s *Ville Contemporaine*). The massive, Malevich-inspired black cube tower in *City of Russia* (2007) stands as a monument to Russia’s early 20th century avant-garde and as a reminder that, paradoxically, the vision of a marvelous future is informed by the ideals of the past.

Viktor Pivovarov

b. 1937 in Moscow, Russia

Viktor Pivovarov was one of the leading artists of Moscow Conceptualism in the 1960s and '70s, along with Ilya Kabakov, Eric Bulatov, Dimitri Prigov, Andrei Monastyrski, and the collaborative duo Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid. Like his non-conformist contemporaries, Pivovarov produced work in secret, avoiding the prying eyes of the KGB and sharing his work only with a select group of his peers. In the absence of an art market, Pivovarov—like many artists at the time, including his friend Ilya Kabakov—made a living illustrating children’s books, often rendered in a Surrealist style that he had developed in his personal artworks. Pivovarov’s artistic kinship with illustration is shared by his son, Pavel Pepperstein, whose fantastical plans for a future Russian capital are also included in the exhibition.

Pivovarov referred to these personal works, which often contain both painted images and supplemental texts, as “representational literature,” an appellation that belies their veiled autobiographical nature. In the suite of works, *A Project for a Lonely Man* (1975), Pivovarov outlines the dreams, living space, personal effects, and daily routine of the protagonist as if he were attempting to delineate an archetype of the solitary everyman. But the lonely man is clearly Pivovarov himself; an artist forced into a marginalized and monastic lifestyle by the aesthetic and ideological impulses of a repressive government. Pivovarov did not view his isolation negatively, however. In fact, he went so far as to devise a hierarchized scale of loneliness in which the fourth and final state is a kind of beatified isolation, a solitude characterized by “the attaining of a true freedom and the joining with the infinite.”

Dimitri Prigov

b. 1940 in Moscow, Russia

d. 2007 in Moscow, Russia

Dimitri Prigov was a key figure in the Moscow Conceptualist movement, along with Ilya Kabakov, Viktor Pivovarov, Erik Bulatov, and Andrei Monastyrski. Prigov’s practice is arguably the most formally diverse among them—ranging across painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, performance, music, and poetry—and his critiques of the linguistic dimension of Soviet power were particularly influential. His allegiance lay with the non-conformist practices of his peers in the unofficial art scene, but unlike many of his contemporaries who were never recognized by the state, Prigov also worked in an official capacity as a sculptor throughout the Soviet era.

Prigov’s other work initially centered around poetry, a practice in which he excelled, and he forged a distinctive voice that straddled the line between satire and lament. Much of Prigov’s later work resulted

from the Soviet climate of censorship surrounding cultural production. Inspired by *samizdat* publishing, in which forbidden texts were copied using typewriters and distributed by hand, Prigov began creating typewritten works on paper that turned propagandistic language into concrete poetry using bombastic slogans like, “If the enemy does not surrender, he will be destroyed,” and “Citizens, air raid warning.” These works are closely related to a number of text-based pieces that Prigov produced in the 1980s using a variety of official Soviet newspapers and documents. For these works, Prigov obscured blocks of these official texts under clouds of ink that sharply outline charged words like “Glasnost,” “Perestroika,” “Acceleration,” and “Moscow.” As reminders of the primacy of language in Soviet propaganda and rhetoric, these works invite reflection on the meaning of the words themselves—what they can communicate or obscure.

Anri Sala

b. 1974 in Tirana, Albania

Anri Sala’s *Dammi i Colori (Give Me the Colors)* (2003) is structured like a tour of his hometown of Tirana, Albania, narrated by the city’s mayor Edi Rama. A longstanding friend of Sala’s, Rama was a painter and a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana before entering his life as a politician as the Albanian Minister of Culture in 1998. Even during his time as an artist, Rama was deeply involved in politics. In the early 1990s he was a participant in the democratic movement that brought about the fall of the Communist state, and in 1997 and 1998 he was active in the Movement for Democracy, a group that played a decisive role in the struggle for Albanian democracy.

In his video, Sala documents the most immediately visible of the many urban redevelopment projects that Rama initiated as mayor after his election in 2000: his decision to repaint the facades of the city’s housing blocks and civic structures in bright colors. The goal of Rama’s vibrant redecoration—which was executed in grand Modernist style, without the explicit consent of the residents—was to fashion Tirana’s moldering urban landscape into a continuous visual fabric, one that would serve to “bind together” the city’s impoverished inhabitants, and begin to transform Tirana “from a city where you are doomed to live by fate into a city where you choose to live.” As such, Sala’s documentation of the painterly reinvention of his hometown not only provides a picture of one of the world’s most unique revitalization undertakings, but also speaks to the continued possibility of utopian artistic projects in an era when they have all but been dismissed.

Michael Schmidt

b. 1945 in Berlin, Germany

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 initiated a seismic shift in the balance of world power: within a year Germany was unified, and within two years the Soviet Union officially dissolved—the final domino in the wave of revolutionary independence movements that had erupted across the former Soviet empire. In the wake of this historic turning point, Berlin-based photographer Michael Schmidt began work on *U-NI-TY* (1991-94), his seminal collection of photographs addressing Germany’s complex past and uncertain future in a post-Cold War and post-Soviet world.

Schmidt’s ironically divided title suggests a more apprehensive vision of post-Wall Germany than that suggested by the jubilant news images broadcast around the world. The muted black-and-white images combine photos taken on his many excursions around Berlin with re-photographed material. In these works, the drab and nondescript architecture of the former GDR intermingles with Berlin’s disoriented youth, grainy stills of the Nuremberg rally lifted from Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* obliquely reflect a photograph of synchronized gymnastics, an image of a young boy with his letter to the Stasi denouncing his parents, and an overcast seascape that recalls the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. Collected and recombined without a consistent principle, the photographs form a constellation of visual

and material culture, disparate but drawn together—a poetic reflection of the country itself. Rich with references, allusions, and truncated texts, *U-NI-TY* relates the historical experience of the German people at a time of transition and reveals Schmidt's meditations on the instability of both the past and the future.

Thomas Schütte

b. 1954 in Oldenburg, Germany

After training at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf with Fritz Schwegler, Benjamin Buchloh, and Gerhard Richter in the late 1970s, Thomas Schütte began working primarily in sculpture and took a particular interest in experimental theater and scenography. Since then, Schütte has created diverse installations, sculptures, and theatrical and architectural models—many of which are macabre, ironic, and mischievous, and nearly all of which are steeped in social and political themes. Swaddled in blankets with their mouths agape, the totemic threesome in Schütte's *Three Capacity Men* (2005) looms as if engaged in an evil invocation, frozen in the act of chanting an ominous, synchronous moan. Their oversized silicone heads add to their motley appearance—with hunched bodies constructed from rough wire armatures, they otherwise appear to be emaciated refugees, forced to huddle together for warmth.

Though the human figure has been a common motif in Schütte's recent works, *Three Capacity Men* also suggests a formal kinship with an earlier sculptural series, *United Enemies* (1992-93). Often interpreted as a metaphor for the reunification of Germany, this series also recalls the caricatures of Honoré Daumier and George Grosz, yet Schütte's critique offers more than a judgment. In these works, the grotesquely caricatured figures—sometimes accompanied by photographic close-ups of their twisted wax faces—are political rivals whom Schütte has condemned to be bound together. Created more than a decade after the *United Enemies* series, *Three Capacity Men* could be read as a representation of the past's lingering ghosts. Rather than fading or diminishing, these ghosts seem to have grown larger and more powerful—monstrous incarnations of the obscure, corrupt forces that have emerged on top since the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc.

Simon Starling

b. 1967 in Epsom, UK

In 2002, Simon Starling drove a red Fiat 126 from Turin, Italy—where it had been produced in 1974—to a contemporary Fiat factory in the town of Bielsku-Biala, near Cieszyn, Poland. Once there, Starling replaced the car's hood, trunk, and doors with white parts that had been manufactured by Fiat Auto Poland, and then drove back to Turin. Upon his return, Starling gutted the car and mounted its body to the wall so that with its modified colors and orientation, the car resembled the Polish flag.

In some ways, *Flaga* (1972—2002) became a 1290 km road trip to transform a car into a memento of the journey, a steel and fiberglass version of a postcard. However, the two-tone hybrid that Starling presents is symbolic of a major cultural change: a conceptual illustration of Fiat's manufacturing move from Italy to Poland. Despite the Fiat 126's iconic status as the Italian proletarian's car, the company sought cheaper labor and relocated its production in the early '70s, at a time when communist Poland briefly enjoyed one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. This change in manufacturing location precipitated the Fiat 126's emblematic shift as the *Polski Fiat* became available to a growing Polish market. Even when Fiat halted production for its Western markets in 1982, manufacturing in Poland continued until 2000—by which point, the 126 had long since been transformed from an emblem of Italian culture and industry into an icon of Polish life under Communism.

Mladen Stilinović

b. 1946 in Belgrade, Serbia

In 1977, Mladen Stilinović created *The Game of Pain*, a work that consisted of a single white die that was inscribed with the word *bol* (pain) on every face, and an accompanying instruction sheet that read: “Only one player, the die is cast according to its own rhythm, the game lasts 7 minutes.” The work was the first in a series in which Stilinović addressed the living conditions in the former Yugoslavia using “pain” as the only appropriate utterance, and it offers—in place of recreation—a somber meditation on the absence of alternatives and a future that seemed predetermined. “During the time of socialism, in the seventies,” Stilinović observed, “questions of power and lack of power were important. This lack of power was constant pain.”

Unfortunately, even after the end of Socialist Yugoslavia, this pain did not disappear. As the country faced collapse in 1990, nationalism brought brutal ethnic violence and human rights violations leading to the Yugoslav Wars from 1991-95. In the wake of these deadly conflicts and the tumultuous process of secession, Stilinović created his *Dictionary of Pain* (2000-03), a collection of dictionary pages in which he covered each word’s definition with white correction fluid before writing in the word “pain.” These substitutions create a new lexicon *that* confirms the limitless manifestations of pain with the echo of each encounter. While the *Dictionary of Pain* constructs a vocabulary of pain, it acquires its greatest weight in its silence, as a representation of the effacement of language in the face of tragedy.

Jaan Toomik

b. 1961 in Tartu, Estonia

In the 1990s, Jan Toomik became well known outside of his native Estonia for his short, performative video works, which feature him engaged in a variety of simple, allegorically charged actions that are often characterized by their oblique engagement with death and disappearance. For instance, his work *Untitled* (2002) finds Toomik hanging from a wire that has been strung tautly between the branches of two tall trees. When the limits of his strength are reached, he falls and is unexpectedly swallowed up by the earth below him—an action that directly recalls Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader’s work *Broken Fall* (*Organic*) (1971), and may allude to Ader’s tragic disappearance at sea in 1975.

Others of Toomik’s works allude to the loss of a more specific and personal nature: his father’s death when Toomik was just nine years old. Toomik’s most direct address of this loss comes in his video *Dancing with Dad* (2003), which finds him engaged in a frantic, irreverent jig on his father’s grave, a dance of death that is both a tribute and an attempt to exorcise grief. For his work *Father and Son* (1998), Toomik addresses his father’s death in terms of his own mortality. In the work, Toomik ice-skates naked on a frozen, snow-covered lake to the sound of his young son singing a haunting, ethereal requiem. As this plaintive song reaches its finale, Toomik skates off over the horizon, alone and vulnerable, leaving his absent son bereft, as his father before him.

Andra Ursuta

b. 1979 in Salonta, Romania

Andra Ursuta’s work explores the national character of her native Romania, often through an introspective engagement with her past and her immigration to the United States. These aspects manifest by way of symbols of Romanian life and culture: tricolored flags with images seared into their fabric, pointed perversions of Brancusi’s iconic forms, and fat links of salami—a food that was so hard to obtain in communist Romania, it acquired an almost fetishistic status. At times, Ursuta expands her meditations on Eastern Europe to include a broader view of the region in the aftermath of the Soviet

Union's collapse. This is the case in *Man From the Internet* (2007-current), a series which, when completed, will consist of one hundred drawings made from an image Ursuta found on the Internet of the decomposing body of a Chechen rebel soldier—an obsessive enterprise that conveys a kind of penance in the repeated portrayal of a corporeal mortification.

T. Vladimirescu Nr. 5, an International Psychic Maneuver (2007-10) is a model of the modest room Ursuta shared with her parents as a child in Salonta, which she recreated in order to exorcize her family's past. The faceless, ghost-like presence that stands center stage is made from soap, a material register of her family's practice of making soap from animal fat. This waxy statuette also presents itself as the anointed fetish object, constructed from a personally powerful ingredient and ordained with a power to carry out "an international psychic maneuver," as indicated in the title. Like many of her works, this tableau imparts a certain wit, which Ursuta uses to negotiate her perception and representation of a past both foreign and unearthly.

Andro Wekua

b. 1977 in Sukhumi, Georgia

Andro Wekua creates psychologically charged sculptures, drawings, and films in carefully conceived installations that often draw from the uncanny and frightening world of dreams and his own childhood memories. Wekua grew up in the coastal city of Sukhumi, a once-prosperous Soviet resort town on the Black Sea that in the early '90s became the center of an intense and exceptionally violent geopolitical conflict that remains unresolved to this day. After the fall of the USSR, ethnic tensions between Georgians and Abkhazians escalated into a conflict that included a full-scale ethnic cleansing which killed over 10,000 Georgians and forced out nearly a quarter of a million refugees.

For *Pink Wave Hunter* (2010–11), Wekua has reconstructed, from the unreliable building blocks of his own memory, a series of edifices from his hometown. In one sense, these models are subjective fictions based on the Soviet Georgia of Wekua's youth. In another sense, however, they are monuments to a past and to a place that cannot be revisited. Sukhumi not only suffered daily air strikes and shelling during the conflict, but remains contested, and unwelcoming to Georgians. In place of a visit that he cannot make, Wekua has constructed a personal landscape from memory—subject to revisions, distortions, and omissions, but perhaps, for Wekua, less flawed than the place itself.

Workshop of the Film Form

Founded 1970 in Łódź, Poland

In the 1970s, a group of students and alumni from the directing and cinematography departments of the Łódź Film School in Poland founded the Workshop of the Film Form (WFF), which later became the most important laboratory for Structuralist filmmaking in Central and Eastern Europe. The Workshop's members sought to rid their films of narrative content and instead explored the fundamental properties of the medium itself—an initiative which created a stark contrast to the narrative filmmaking of a number of their contemporaries, whose late '70s works are often referred to as the "Cinema of Moral Anxiety." Although the film experiments of WFF are not well-known in North America and Western Europe, their explorations parallel those of avant-garde filmmakers like Hollis Frampton, Stan Brakhage, and Michael Snow, as well as Paul Sharits, who collaborated with Józef Robakowski on the film *Attention! Light!* (2004), a remake of a lost film that Sharits had shot in Robakowski's apartment in the early '80s.

The Workshop of the Film Form was broadly inclusive during its seven years in existence, but was anchored by four core members: Józef Robakowski, Ryazard Waško, Paweł Kwiek, and Wojciech

Bruszewski. Although the conceptual and political content of their films often diverged, the artists's reflections on the faculties of perception remained constant. Despite these variations in form and production, what is consistently demonstrated in the experiments of the Workshop is an integration of experimental theory and practice and a deconstruction of the capacity of film.

Sergey Zarva

b. 1973 in Krivoy Rog, Ukraine

Sergey Zarva's work fuses the traditions of Socialist Realism and expressionism to examine the legacy of Communist rule in Russia. Zarva works by painting over Soviet-era documents, transforming them into deformed and disturbing versions of their former selves. Zarva first employed this strategy using a collection of his own family's photographs, which he altered to create a mutant album depicting the often-observed familial relationships that he associated with life in the Soviet Union.

For his next series, Zarva painted over the mid-twentieth-century covers of the illustrated magazine *Ogonyok*, one of the oldest weekly publications in Russia. In Zarva's hands, the cover photographs are distorted into grotesque, expressionistic caricatures—both politicians and peasants are defaced, twisted, bruised, and even rendered vaguely simian. With Zarva's transformation, the covers of *Ogonyok*—once a familiar and reassuring presence in Soviet life—conjure up a much more grim and dismal retrospective. Like Zarva's work with his family's photographs, this series summons the realities of life under Soviet rule that *Ogonyok's* pleasant and prosaic photographs overlooked, and hints at the layers of the human soul.

Jasmila Žbanić

b. 1974 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Bosnian War came about as a result of the breakup of Yugoslavia. Following the Slovenian and Croatian secessions from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina passed a referendum for independence on February 29th, 1992. Once the Republic declared its separation from Yugoslavia, civil war erupted almost immediately between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat entities. Throughout the War, Serb forces surrounded Sarajevo, holding it without power, water, or medical supplies for nearly four years—the longest siege in the history of modern warfare. Emblematic of the region's turmoil and bitter conflicts following the breakup of Yugoslavia, these years of ethnic cleansing, systematic rape, and shelling and sniper attacks on civilians—in schools, hospitals, and marketplaces—created a constant state of terror for the city's inhabitants. A total death toll for the War is estimated at 200,000, the vast majority of whom were Bosniaks.

Since 1995, Sarajevo filmmaker Jasmila Žbanić has produced a series of documentary and feature films about the Bosnian War and its aftermath, many of which focus on the siege of her home city. For *After, After (Poslije, poslije)* (1997), Žbanić created a heartbreaking documentary portrait of a group of school children that lived through the conflict, focusing on a shy but courageous young girl who suffered a particularly harrowing series of traumas. Confronting the humanitarian violations and the trauma of children who endured sniper attacks or witnessed atrocities during the siege of Sarajevo, Žbanić's video reveals the lasting devastation of the conflict—the damages to a new generation of Sarajevans.

Anna Zemánková

b. 1908 in Olomouc, Czech Republic; d. 1986 in Prague, Czech Republic

Until the 1950s, Anna Zemánková had lived a relatively stable life. Born in Olomouc, Moravia (now the Czech Republic) in 1908, Zemánková was trained in dentistry and worked as a dental technician until 1933, when she married a military officer, and began to raise a family. The family moved to Brno, where they weathered World War II with their four children, and to Prague in 1948, just as the Czechoslovak Communist Party took control.

In an attempt to alleviate the depression that Zemánková began suffering from in the late 1950s, her son Bohumil, an artist, bought her a set of paints and pastels. Zemánková immediately loved drawing. She awoke each morning at 4 a.m. and worked feverishly, as if in a trance, for three uninterrupted hours, after which she would pack up her things and go about her daily household routine. Zemánková believed that these intricate, almost psychedelic works she produced during these early-morning reveries—delicately colored biomorphic forms, occasionally embellished with beading, silk appliqué, and embroidery—were channeled through her. According to Zemánková, “I am growing flowers that are not grown anywhere else.” Although her fantastical flowers are entirely unique, their stylistic kinship to regional art practices suggests that Zemánková was also looking back to the Moravia of her youth.