

**Austrian Cultural Forum New York  
1989: The End of History or the Beginning of the Future?  
Video Art Comments on a Paradigm Shift.**

**WALL TEXTS**

**MARINA ABRAMOVIC**

(\*1946 in Belgrade, Serbia, lives and works in New York City, USA)

In her film "Count on Us: Only Chorus" Abramovic conducts a children's choir singing a "hymn" to the UN in Serbo-Croatian as a symbol of understanding among nations. It was in former Yugoslavia in particular that hopes for a better and new world of brotherhood were brutally destroyed by the specter of nationalism, racism and war. The work can also be understood to unveil the cynicism of the post communist language surrounding the end of history.

Marina is a performance artist who began her career in the early 1970s. Active for over three decades, she has recently begun to describe herself as the "grandmother of performance art". Her work explores the relationship between the performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind.

Marina was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade from 1965-70. She completed her post-graduate studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Croatia in 1971. From 1973-1975 she taught at the Academy of Fine Arts at Novi Sad, while implementing her first solo performances. She is a performance artist who began her career in the early 1970s. Active for over three decades, she has recently begun to describe herself as the "grandmother of performance art". Her work explores the relationship between the performer and audience, the limits of the body, and the possibilities of the mind.

**JOSEF DABERNIG**

(\*1956 in Lienz, Austria, and lives and works in Vienna, Austria)

In Josef Dabernig's "Rosa Coeli", the viewer is acoustically led into a cave or a pipe – the chasm of memory, the dark abyss of forgetting. The narrative is caught in a slip-stream, in a frenzy of memory. As though through a medium, deeper and deeper levels of the past are brought forth by the off-camera voice, from a time long before the main character's own story. The images, on the contrary, move on the surface, around the factual nature of the phenomena: the gaze remains fixed on potted plants or on the actors' signature on a few pieces of paper. When the camera focuses into the depths of the room, or films through a window, we see nothing – nothing behind, nothing out in front: nothing special. The gaze is aimless, what it shows us is unforeseeable: A succession

of plain interiors in the styles of the 1950s and 1960s; views of a small industrial town in the fog and cold. Time has frozen. The man sits and waits, waiting to leave.

Josef's oeuvre is characterized by his broad conceptual interest in ordering systems. These systems include mathematics, urban planning, architecture, standardized materials, theoretical or scientific texts, but also normed behavior. He incorporates parameters from the outside world in his concept using them as variable factors in a given work or entire project.

He studied from 1975 till 1983 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna under Ferdinand Weiz, Joannis Avramidis and Edelbert Koeb.

## **THOMAS DRASCHAN**

(\*1967 Linz, Austria, lives and works in Vienna)

In his video, "Icon Delirium", Thomas Draschan takes a close look at the transformed symbolic meanings of communism and socialism, where former aggressive messages of political change have developed into consumerist pop culture items. The images flash up within seconds of each other leaving the viewer with strong imagery flashes.

Thomas studied theatre studies and journalism at the University of Vienna as well as Film at the Academy of Fine Arts in Frankfurt and at Cooper Union in NY. He works with video, film, and collages. The re-combination of existing images into a new, condensed and enriched form is his main focus.

## **HARUN FAROCKI**

(\*1944 in the Czech Republic, lives and works in Berlin, Germany) and

## **ANDREJ UJICA**

(\*1951 in Timisoara, Romania, lives and works in Heidelberg)

In "Videograms of a Revolution", Harun Farocki and Andrej Ujica document the moments of change and the manipulative nature of TV and media. It is a landmark film on the relationship between political power and the media in Europe and in the end of the Cold War Europe. "Videograms of a Revolution" was made entirely from found footage. The work thematizes the interactions of historic processes and their representation in the media. It is quite evident that mass media continues to be a powerful tool in the hands of the new ruling classes.

Harun studied at the German Cinematic and Television Academy (DFFB) in Berlin, from which he was expelled in 1968 for political reasons. In addition to writing theoretical texts, he has scripted

numerous films and television productions. His work was shown at Documenta 12 in Kassel and in numerous international retrospectives and has received many awards.

Andrej has a background in literature and has published a number of stories and essays since 1968. He has lived and worked in Germany since 1981 where he teaches literature, film and media theory. As of 1990, he decided to devote himself to cinema.

## **ANNA JERMOLAEWA**

(\*1970 in St. Petersburg, Russia, lives and works in Vienna, Austria)

In Anna Jermolaewa's video, "Aleksandra Wysokinska /20 Years later", she tells her story as a democratic, activist and Soviet refugee. This movie was produced as a reenactment 20 years following her escape from the Soviet Union to Austria in May/June 1989.

Anna graduated with a degree in Art History from the University of Vienna in 1998. In 2002 she received another degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in Painting and Graphic Art / New Media. Since 2005 she is a Professor for Media Arts, at the State School of Design / ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany

## **JOHANNA KANDL**

(\*1954 in Austria, lives and works in Vienna, Austria and Berlin, Germany)

Johanna Kandler's snap shot paintings often confront language and reality: "Privatization" is one of the fashion words that continues to have both an influential and dramatic meaning for many.

She paints in a realistic style which invokes the return of figuration. At the same time, however, she avoids outright figuration by using critical sentences and quotations from various sources such as daily newspapers to comment on the pictures. In doing so she lifted the banishment of the verbal from the dogmatism of modern art, which had concentrated on the interplay of form and color. The act of linking the ostracized figure to ostracized literature has produced an unusual post-modern style of painting which casts a light on the current situation of the world to a much sharper degree than the new media, precisely because of the apparent historicity of the media she uses. By choosing to look at everyday life that seems to be fantastic, at a homeland that appears to be foreign, and by underpinning her choice with texts that often describe the pictures from a cold distance, she provides a window on to the status quo of global society.

Johanna studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Art from 1972 to 1980 and was one of the first Austrian artists to react discursively, in her work, to transformations caused by globalization, particularly in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. For her deconstruction of the – still pervasive – colonial view she uses the medium of painting, the basis of which frequently consists of snapshots taken with her camera. After her critical exploration of the documentary image, she produced paintings which use personal, emotional interpretations to distance themselves from the narrative realism of the model on which they are based.

## **JONAS MEKAS**

(\*1922 Lithuania, lives and works in New York, USA)

Forces of time, memory and change collide in Jonas Mekas's compelling work "Lithuania and the Collapse of the USSR" (2008). The work's title refers to the historical time when the world watched as Jonas's home country of Lithuania fought for independence from the stronghold of Soviet rule. With a video camera, Jonas recorded newscasts that played daily in 1991 on his television set at home.

From 1946-48, Jonas studied philosophy at the University of Mainz and in 1949 he emigrated with his brother to the U.S. Jonas is a film maker, writer, and curator who has often been called "the godfather of American avant-garde cinema."

"The video is made up of footage that I took with my Sony from the television newscasts during the collapse of the USSR, with the home noises in the background. It's a capsule of record of what happened and how it happened during that crucial period as recorded by the television newscasters. It can be viewed as a classic Greek drama in which the destinies of nations are changed drastically by the unbending, bordering on irrational will of one single man (Vytautas Landsbergis), one small nation determined to regain its freedom, backed by its fight against the Might & Power, against the Impossible." Jonas Mekas

## **CSABA NEMES**

(\*1966 Kisvarda, Hungary, lives and works in Budapest, Hungary)

In "Remake I-X", Csaba Nemes tells the story of the Budapest Freedom Square and the violent protests of the year 2006. He points at the ugly face of nationalism. Politics of memory seem to be the focus for the interpretation of both the past and present political scene in Eastern Europe.

Csaba graduated from the Academy of Arts in Budapest in 1990.

## **JAKUB NEPRAS**

(\*1981 in Prague, Czech Republic)

In the video, "Generator p-730", Jakub Nepras tells the story of his arrival in the modern capitalist industrialized world. Nothing has changed. The circuit board is transformed into a microcosm of everyday life. Boundaries between the 'real' and the illusory are blurred.

Jakub explores subjective experiences of urban reality. He uses new media in his work as a device to facilitate the reconstruction or the creation of functional units. His main fascination is with the system as the dynamic structure of a unit and its translation (a reconstructive model) into visual form. He uses various elements of expression such as movement, color, sound, rhythm, scale, contour, and so on. Each of these individual elements is removed from reality, recorded separately on a medium, and prepared like an ingredient in the mixture that makes up a contemplated unit. Each individual situational instance is enclosed within a time loop, and gives each one its own unchanging and defined mark or form.

Jakub is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts (2001-2006) in Prague. He has exhibited in a number of group exhibitions and is represented by the Gallery Vernon, Prague.

## **MARCEL ODENBACH**

(\*1953 in Cologne, lives and works in Cologne, Germany)

Marcel Odenbach's video installation, "Niemand ist mehr dort, wo er anfing", deconstructs TV material, mostly from the German Democratic Republic during the collapse of the Berlin Wall, juxtaposing pictures of past violence with scenes of cheer and joy. He shows that repression and revolution are two sides of the same coin.

Marcel's videotapes and installations have been exhibited widely at festivals and institutions throughout the world. Since the mid 1970s, he has produced an extensive body of tapes, performances, drawings and installations, and has gained recognition as one of Germany's most important artists working in video. His works engage in a provocative discourse on the construction of self in relation to historical and cultural representation. He uses video as a means to probe the cultural identity of his native Germany.

Marcel studied art history, architecture and semiotics in Aachen, Germany. He was a recipient of the prestigious First Marl Video Art Award in 1984, and won the Grand Prize at the Locarno Video Festival in the same year. In 1987 he was commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris to produce an installation.

## **MAREK PIWOWSKI**

(\*1935 in Warsaw, lives and works in Warsaw, Poland)

In "Rejs", Marek Piwowski shows how normal people survived the harsh and cold rules of everyday communist life in Poland with irony and pragmatism.

Marek is a Polish director and script writer who studied Journalism in Warsaw. Upon graduating in 1963 he studied film directing at the Film Academy in Lodz where he graduated in 1968. In 1970 he had his motion picture debut with the movie "Rejs". This movie is a legendary cult film of Polish cinema.

## **HARITON PUSHWAGNER**

(\*1940 in Oslo, lives and works in Oslo, Norway)

Hariton Pushwagner's video, "Soft City" (picture novel 1968-1976, film 2006-2008), outlines a capitalist future of man's standardization which in its enforced conformity hardly differs from the communist past. It depicts the mental, psychological and socio-economic effects of how people are organizing or are being organized.

Pushwagner finished his education at the State's School of Art and Design of Oslo in 1959. He stated that he quit drawing for a period of time after his studies, for he was struggling with finding his personal style.

## **JOANNA RAJKOWSKA**

(\*1968 in Bydgoszcz, Poland, lives and works in Warsaw, Poland)

Joanna Rajkowska's film, "Let Me Wash Your Hands", explores metaphorically the attempts of society to deal with a cloudy or even dirty past. It painfully reminds us of purification, guilt and amnesia.

Her works reflect changes in the reception and expectations towards art and its social functions, referring to the complexity of identity problems affecting Eastern European countries following their economic and political transformation of the 1990s. Joanna describes her work as a means to build relationships with other people. She often only sets up the context of a meeting, allowing it to be an open experience for herself and for the viewers (participants).

Joanna received her MA in Art history at Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland in 1992 and her MFA in 1993 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Poland, where she studied painting. She also

completed a Studio Semester Program at the State University of New York, from 1994-1995. She works with objects, films, installations, ephemeral actions, as well as interventions in public space.

## **ISA ROSENBERGER**

(\*1969 Salzburg, Austria, lives and works in Vienna, Austria)

In "Nový Most", Isa Rosenberg focuses on Bratislava's Novy Most Bridge through the eyes of three women of different generations. The bridge which straddles the Danube River with its UFO-top is a product of 1960's socialist engineering, and its construction demolished important sections of the historical center. By juxtaposing subjective views and everyday biographies with the canonized representations of history, she examines the construction of reality and the power of images related to it. Her laconic characters move through a collage of documentary footage and staged moments to reflect on the impact of the East/West divide on Slovaks' changing perception of place and identity.

In her works, she examines radical political changes and their social and economic consequences, with the developments in post-socialist Europe as the main focus of her artistic-aesthetic analyses. The starting point of Isa's investigations are often ideologically charged architectural and monumental manifestations in urban space and its public spheres, for the reason that they exemplarily reveal the changes in the prevailing order of perception. In order to retrace these changes, the artist enters into a communicative process of exchange with contemporary witnesses living there, asking them about their personal experiences and views of (recent) historical events.

Isa studied at the Academy for Applied Arts in Vienna

## **MIHA ŠTRUKELJ**

(\* 1973 in Ljubljana, Slovenia; lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Miha Štrukelj searched for a topic that would connect different works in the exhibition and somehow embody the complex reality after the fall of the Berlin wall. He said, " I remembered that cranes were a constant motif in cities all across Europe. They have somehow evolved into "new landmarks". I therefore sought to connect realities primarily with architecture and the grid, with interventions of geographical and human elements which seek to interpret the same topic from a different perspective".

Miha received his BFA and MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana. This year he is representing Slovenia at the 53rd Venice Biennial.

## **MAGDA TOTHOVA**

(\*1976, Bratislava, Slovakia, lives and works in Vienna, Austria)

Magda Tothova's video "Lenin and the Maiden" uses a satirical approach to false desires for a renewed golden age.

Her work is typically delicate and playful. It is full of light poetry, melancholy and focus on the unpleasant aspects of society.

Magda studied at the University for Applied Arts in Vienna (2000 – 2005), as well as at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, (2003-2004).