

The exhibition *Archaeologists of Memory: Vitols Contemporary Art Collection*

Descriptions of the artworks displayed at the exhibition

At the Kumu Art Museum from
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All artworks belong to
the Vitols Contemporary
Art Collection (Riga, Latvia)

1 Mircea Nicolae

(Romania, 1980–2020)

Romanian Kiosk Company. 2010. Single-channel HD video, colour and original sound



The author's personal history is combined with the tragic history of Romania in the second half of the 20th century. The story begins in 1953, when Joseph Stalin dies and the artist's mother is born. Both stories are told through the history of Bucharest's architecture, centring on street kiosks. The video uses different media: family snapshots, documentary film footage, and first-person narration's marked neutrality to increase credibility. Yet it verges on fiction, emphasising the fragmentary and constructed nature of memory, its connections with affect and emotion, and how memories are stored in the spaces and the material world surrounding a person.

Now and again, the augmented neutrality of the first-person narrator contrasts with the tragic course of the narrated events: the narrator, while supposedly objective, clearly represents a subjective perspective, challenging the conventions of history writing. While history writers are generally regarded as authorities, Nicolae questions this authority in several ways. Instead of grand historical narratives, it is the micro-history of a family that takes centre stage. Listening to this complex and multi-layered tale of the events of the second half of the 20th century, combining the story of a family with that of a nation, we experience cognitive dissonance. This calls for a critical reassessment of the narrated history and the narrator, and viewers may feel as if they are treading on somewhat uncertain ground. The idea, expressed through different media and strategies, seems to be that one should always take a critical view of stories, no matter how reliable they may at first seem.

2 Inga Meldere

(Latvia, b. 1979)

Crimea. 2007. Oil on canvas

Family Tree. 2007. Oil on canvas

A Valuable Purchase. 2008. Oil on canvas

A Tree. 2008. Oil on canvas



Untitled. 2007. Oil on canvas

The inspiration for these paintings came from Inga Meldere's grandfather's collection of family snapshots from the 1960s, recording mainly family vacations and other shared events and experiences. Several photos were taken at health resorts in Crimea, where the artist's grandfather stayed a few times due to lung disease. He liked to go for long walks and sit on park benches, reading books. *Crimea*, *Untitled* and *A Valuable Purchase* are inspired by the photos taken during these walks in the gardens and parks surrounding the health resort. *Family Tree* and *A Tree* show Meldere's grandmother, who lived on in the family's memory through the photos taken by the artist's grandfather. These works represent ordinary moments that two members of a family have imprinted on the family's personal, intimate memory, using different media. While the subjects of the photos and the paintings are the same, we can see how the memories mediated through the photos have been reinterpreted by a member of a younger generation.

3 Eva Kotátková

(Czechia, b. 1982)

Eva Kotátková has transformed representations of people and historical objects into distorted collages. Somewhat like an archaeologist, the artist has glued these visual fragments together to form bizarre anthropomorphic images, suggestive of retro surrealism. In this way, the artist has created a completely new context for historical objects and images of people and parts of the human body. On the one hand, she searches through material objects for human associations but, on the other, she connects human representations with historical objects. This leads to certain generalisations in which human beings, ideas and objects act out histories that, while making the viewer feel somewhat uneasy, are emotional and entertaining.



Selection of works from the *Untitled* series. 2013. Collage

4 Monika Sosnowska

(Poland, b. 1972)

Monika Sosnowska creates monumental sculptures with echoes of the heritage of Eastern European modernist architecture. The materials and forms familiar from Soviet-era high-rise blocks of flats have been detached from their original context and arranged into new spatio-visual narratives with no clearly defined beginning or end. The artist seems to regard built structures as “sites of memory”,



Untitled. 2017. Painted steel and concrete

vested with sociological, psychological and political significance. This is reflected in the sculpture, which appears as a fragment of a degraded concrete housing estate. An odd remnant of the past, it embodies the perception of changes that take place in time and space. Of particular interest to the artist seem to be the irregularities that unexpectedly occur in the otherwise bleak and austere regularity of the buildings and that are often attributable to human error. Each user of a space or building redefines their surroundings in visual and psychological terms, and so the story of the sculpture starts over again and again. At the moment when the viewer enters the space dominated by metal bars embedded in slabs of concrete, the familiar materials evoke a flood of memories, both specific and vague, triggered by smells, textures and body memory. The viewer is asked to find a balance between discomfort and the sublime.

5 Jānis Avotiņš

(Latvia, b. 1981)

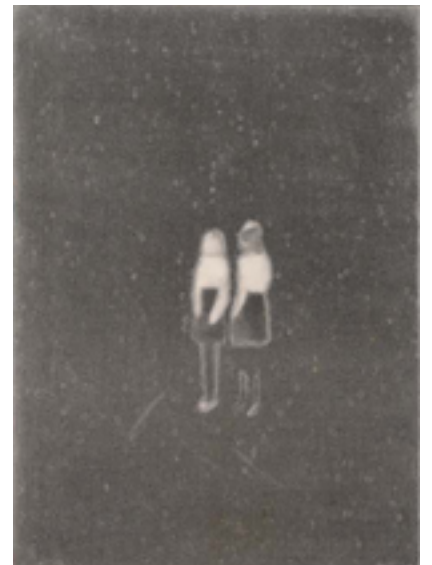
Untitled. 2015. Oil on canvas

Untitled. 2013. Oil on canvas

Untitled. 2017. Oil on canvas

Untitled. 2012. Pencil on paper

Untitled. 2012. Pencil on paper



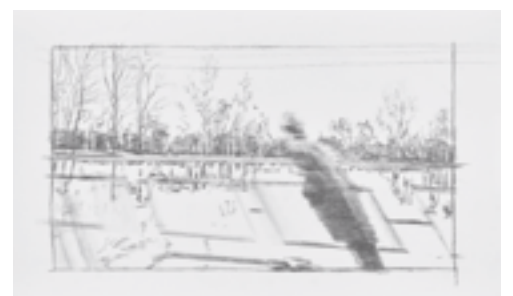
Untitled. 2012.
Oil on canvas

Jānis Avotiņš finds inspiration in the visual heritage of the Soviet-era history. The artist borrows and recycles themes from photos in national and private archives, retouched illustrations and city guides. From these materials, he often removes the semantic clues that might help the viewer locate the figures and images in a specific temporal and spatial context. The encounters in the paintings thus take place in a space that is hauntingly vague: fragments of the archive photos and books have been used in a new context with a renewed atmosphere. Such an approach calls attention to the relationship between archives and the present: an archive acquires significance through the person who works with it. This opens up a new, emotional perspective on archives, which is usually intertwined with institutional power relations.

6 Olga Chernysheva

(Russia, b. 1962)

Briefly. 2013. Eight charcoal drawings on paper



Combining social criticism and humour, Olga Chernysheva's sensitive works highlight people and things that for various reasons remain invisible in the everyday hustle and bustle. This series of eight drawings depicts the residents of small towns and villages glimpsed by a passenger looking out of the window of a high-speed train between Moscow and St Petersburg. Against the background of the static landscapes and townscapes, the figures appear blurred, as if melting into their surroundings. The artist took photos of these fleeting moments and brief encounters, and later used the snapshots as the inspiration for her drawings as a kind of memory practice and interpretation of recollections. The captured scenes are seemingly commonplace and insignificant, and yet these random meetings with strangers — moments when the paths, times and spaces of strange people cross momentarily — are rendered as valuable. The artist feels that in today's increasingly individualistic society, people no longer take an empathetic approach to or show a lively interest in their surroundings, attributing less and less value to collectivity.

7 Blue Noses Group

(Russia)

Alexander Shaburov (b. 1965)

Vyacheslav Mizin (b. 1962)

Kitchen Suprematism. 2005.

Six colour photographs mounted on Dibond



The work of the Blue Noses Group is characterised by parody, humour and the grotesque, and an utter lack of reverence for the “high art” of the 20th century. The photo series *Kitchen Suprematism* alludes to Suprematism, an art movement started by Kazimir Malevich in 1915. Using pieces of bread, cheese and sausage, the Blue Noses Group created and photographed abstract compositions, with clear references to Malevich's artworks. The series was displayed in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. The installation was inspired by the 1915 exhibition in St Petersburg in which Malevich's iconic painting *Black Square* was first shown. The photo series of the Blue Noses Group may be regarded as merely a joke mocking the canons of art history. However, the juxtaposition of an exclusive art form with simple foodstuffs delivers a strong social commentary, calling attention to the hierarchies established in art history, and making it clear that art and its canonised history are not separate from the surrounding political and social circumstances.

8 Leonards Laganovskis

(Latvia, b. 1955)

In his works of the 1980s and 1990s, Leonards Laganovskis employed various clichés from

Soviet life and politics. By redefining familiar symbols, themes, signs and motifs to an extent that borders on the absurd, the artist criticised the power mechanisms in society, which he addressed in his work from political, social and commercial perspectives. These intellectual and conceptual mind games led to images and picture spaces often charged with dark humour.

McLenin I, a work from 2008, paradoxically combines Soviet socialism and US capitalism. Centre stage is given to Lenin's portrait, surrounded, somewhat less heroically, by photos of a variety of dishes. While the food on the plates does not look particularly healthy or delicious, one might ask what it is that gives the picture such an unpleasant feel: the food itself or the way it has been presented.



McLenin I. 2008. Digital print mounted on Dibond

9 Antanas Sutkus

(Lithuania, b. 1939)

The Soviet monuments may have been removed from public spaces but, to a greater or lesser extent, they will always live in the collective memory. The troubled and complex histories symbolised by these monuments, with the intertwined personal and collective traumas, should be addressed consciously, critically and constructively. We should not let these collective experiences fade into some kind of oblivion because they can come back to haunt us, as individuals or societies, in quite different and destructive ways.

Such conscious memory work is also important because should these carriers of memory remain suppressed and forgotten, their meanings may be appropriated by contemporary ideologies, with horrifying consequences, as we have only recently been reminded. This photo similarly reflects an awareness of the haunting power of symbols, signs and monuments, and the ideologies that created them.



Goodbye, Party Comrades! Vilnius. 1991. Black and white digital print

10 Goshka Macuga

(Poland/the UK, b. 1967)

Goshka Macuga's work examines the history of communism. Based on her work with archival materials, she assembles seemingly disparate images to create new narratives, offering



alternative perspectives for a critical review of historical processes. A central element of Macuga's art is irony, which she employs to highlight the intricate relationship between personal and collective histories. In *Death of Marxism, Women of All Lands Unite*, the artist has placed women from the voyeuristic and objectifying photos of the 20th-century Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý (1926–2011) around the tomb of Karl Marx. Tichý was an eccentric artist who in the 1950s started to take photos of women in his home town, capturing them unawares in their daily routines and intimate moments. In Macuga's feminist approach, female bodies are transformed from passive objects of the male gaze into active participants. The title of the collage is a paraphrase of the communist slogan "Workers of all lands, unite!"; the emphasis here has been shifted from abolishing class distinctions to ending patriarchal culture and sexist oppression.

Death of Marxism, Women of All Lands Unite. 2013. Wool tapestry

11 Deimantas Narkevičius

(Lithuania, b. 1964)

The Head. 2007. 35 mm film transferred to DVD, colour and sound (Russian and German audio, with English subtitles)



In much of his work, Deimantas Narkevičius explores the complex relationship between personal memory and political history. *The Head* was first shown in the *skulptur projekte münster* festival in 2007. At first he planned to have the giant monument of Karl Marx in Chemnitz by the Soviet sculptor Lev Kerbel (1917–2003) transported to Münster. His aim was to provoke discussion about communist utopias and the symbols of Soviet history. The local authorities, however, refused to grant permission to temporarily erect the monument or a copy in the city. As an alternative project, Narkevičius presented a film showing footage from the 1960s and 1970s of Kerbel working on the head of Karl Marx, combined with interviews with children and scenes of people going about their day-to-day business.

12 Vajiko Chachkhiani

(Georgia, b. 1985)

Winter Which Was Not There. 2017. Single-channel HD video, colour and sound



Vajiko Chachkhiani's video has been interpreted as a metaphor for the liberation

of an individual from his/her personal history, which has raised doubts as to the feasibility of such an aim. At the same time, the artist explores the collective memory and the status of an individual in the great narratives of history, as suggested by the giant monument of the protagonist dragged by a truck until the monument is destroyed. What chance does an individual have of imprinting their personal memory on the collective memory? The film also stimulates discussion about the memory practices that determine who are granted prominent places in the collective memory, why and how. How much does this affect our consciousness and personal sphere?

13 Blue Noses Group

(Russia)

Alexander Shaburov (b. 1965)

Vyacheslav Mizin (b. 1962)



Lenin Turning in His Grave. From the series *Little People*. 2005. Single-channel video, DVD, colour and original sound

Shortly after Lenin's death in 1924, his embalmed body was put on public display in a mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square. The Blue Noses Group's installation *Lenin Turning in His Grave* from the series *Little People* makes fun of the totalitarian country's absurd cult of personality, and of the need of societies for such symbols.

This artistic project challenges dogmas and critically questions the adequacy of the historical narratives of the Soviet past in present-day Russia.

14 Leonards Laganovskis

(Latvia, b. 1955)



Perspektivnaya. 2009. Oil on canvas

This ironic painting by Leonards Laganovskis plays with language, meaning, contradiction and the absurd. It makes us perceive the unreal and delusional nature of black-and-white conceptions.

The surface of the picture, featuring the word “perspektivnaya” (a Russian adjective

meaning “put in perspective”, “forward-looking” or “promising”) distorts perception and causes cognitive dissonance. Looking at the centre of the picture — presumably representing the future — we have to ask ourselves if perhaps we are looking into the past instead? Although the word “perspektivnaya” is shouted as if through a visual megaphone, the picture contains no other references to the future. The rigorous alternation of black and white makes the viewer’s head spin, as if showing that we cannot go on looking like that for long because it leads nowhere. Laganovskis calls into question the human ability to plan and predict the future in a linear manner. If we create a black-and-white vision of a prospective future, we may end up unsettled and unfulfilled, as life simply does not yield to black-and-white control but is polyphonic, multi-directional and dynamic.

15 Jānis Kalmīte

(Latvia, 1907–1996)



Rija. 25 paintings from the *Rija* series.
1970–1985. Oil on canvas and cardboard

In the first years of our collection, we paid attention to the artworks offered by the art galleries in Riga: mainly artworks of Latvian modernism of the period between the two wars. There was a very active art market in Latvia in 2005–2008, and we noticed that works by Latvian émigré artists from the US and Canada could be increasingly found in galleries and antique shops. The well-known exile painter Jānis Kalmīte immediately attracted our attention with his paintings of *rija* motifs so characteristic of the Latvian rural landscape, which at the same time reminded us of the artistic techniques typical of American expressionists. A *rija* was a well-known building for drying and threshing grain for many nations of north-east Europe; they were especially common in Estonia, in some parts of Finland and in Latvia. We found out that Kalmīte painted the series in the years of exile, turning *rija* into a strong symbol, which both strengthened the symbolic connection with Latvian culture and traditions, and served as a constant reminder of the Soviet-occupied homeland for the Latvian post-World War II diaspora community. Latvians in exile used to say that at least one Kalmīte’s *rija* painting was on the wall of almost every Latvian house on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. For the artist himself, the process of painting each *rija* was like an act (event) of remembrance of Latvia while abroad. We were interested in this phenomenon and for about two or three years we deliberately looked for paintings by Jānis Kalmīte to create our own small *rija* collection.

Text by Māris Vītols (2022)

16 Vladimir Arkhipov

(Russia, b. 1961)

Genady Vladimirovich's Bathtub-Bed. 2001. Mixed media

Nikolay Khaidarov's Gas Technician's Spanner. 2008.
Mixed media

Janitor's Shovel Made out of a Road Sign by Vladimir Antipov.
1998. Mixed media

Sledge Made out of a Chair by Alexander Popov. 1993. Mixed media

Apron Made out of Milk Packaging; unknown creator from the 1980s. Mixed media

Vladimir Arkhipov gathered a collection of curious items from the inhabitants of small villages in Russia. Living under constant shortages of consumer goods and materials, the makers of these items ingeniously recycled what resources they had at hand, turning them into practical everyday articles. The result is a selection of completely serviceable, if somewhat bizarre, hybrid objects: a sledge made out of a bench, a bathtub-bed, an apron sewn from milk packaging, a shovel made out of a traffic sign, etc. Arkhipov also collected the personal stories of the creators of these objects and documented the circumstances in which the items were discovered. However, this kind of recycling and making the most of one's scant resources were not due to environmental considerations. Instead, these strange objects, which in a way resemble archaeological finds, stand as visual evidence of the drastic social changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union, spotlighting the universal poverty but also the ingenuity and resilience of the people in the face of deprivation.



Oleg Petrishchev's Spoon with a Hole. 1994. Mixed media

17 Lucia Nimcová

(Slovakia, b. 1977)

Exercise. 2007. HD video



Lucia Nimcová has filmed people performing the exercises they remember from when “morning workout” was part of a daily routine for citizens under the communist regime. The movements demonstrated in this strangely comic video represent a part of the collective memory. The video shows, however, that for all its attempts to promote a homogeneous healthy and industrious society,

the communist health policy ultimately failed to eliminate the individualities of bodies. Performed by these different bodies and in dialogue with the surrounding spaces and the everyday sounds heard in the background, these exercise routines appear somehow very natural.

Memories stored in our bodies are a part of our subjective existence. In the video, a collective history of body politics — the practices and policies for regulating the human body — are intertwined with personal body memories. The artist, through her fascinating and compassionate approach, lends a convincing agency to the body and the body memory.

18 Victor Alimpiev

(Russia, b. 1973)

Magic Rustle. 2011. Two-channel HD video, colour and original sound



In this video by Victor Alimpiev, text functions as poetry and as a kind of map. The dancer-actress performs a monologue written by the artist, who has combined poetry by the Jewish-Romanian poet Paul Celan (1920–1970) with texts praising the Virgin Mary. While reciting the text, the dancer is searching for the most precise physical location on her body for the verbal statements. The asynchrony of the screens distorts the perception of and the linear progress of time, and renders the relationship between the dancer and the text abstract and magical. Although the performance takes place on a stage, the body that we see is not the institutionalised or instrumentalised body of an athlete or a ballet dancer representing a nation, but a textual-bodily manifestation of more universal and deeper values. The movements of the dancer, touching and charting her body, represent concord, which Alimpiev poetically compares to a “magic rustle”.

19 Adrian Paci

(Albania/Italy, b. 1969)

Him. 2019. Acrylic and oil on canvas



Adrian Paci's painting *Him* is part of a series of paintings with the same title, focused on movements of a male body. The inspiration for the series comes from a film shot by Camillo Negro (1861–1927), recording the patients at the neuropathology department of Turin's military hospital after the First World War. The figure in Paci's painting embodies memories of traumatic war events and experiences, and the fear and panic evoked by these memories, expressed only in gestures.

The embodied memory, if removed from its original context, grows into an intensive, abstract and poetic choreography. Addressing historical materials in this way is a kind of memory work: the experience expressed through traumatised minds and bodies is deliberately made visible and perceivable.

20 Alice Kask

(Estonia, b. 1976)

Untitled. 2011. Oil on canvas

Alice Kask depicts seemingly small and insignificant scenes which acquire universal meanings in the picture space. Two different but somehow similar actors – the dynamic figure and the plastic bag, positioned expectantly in the abstract room – become symbols that the artist has captured on the two-dimensional and static surface of the painting, an expression of fleeting moments that go unnoticed in grand narratives. This balancing between motion and stillness causes tension and expectation.



Untitled. 2009. Oil on canvas

The time dimension becomes relevant, along with the object, figure and spatial relations. We see the interweaving of two time systems: one moment and action has not yet finished, and we cannot predict what is coming next. In this way, the artist makes us let go of linearity, in search of an alternative experience and conceptualisation of existence, time and space.

21 Dmitry Gutov

(Russia, b. 1960)

Thaw. 2006. Single-channel video, DVD, colour and sound



The man struggling to climb out of the deep puddle in the middle of an impassable country road in early spring is the artist himself. Containing a number of spatio-temporal references and cultural and historical allusions, *Thaw* emphasises the oscillating dynamics of historical processes, as revolutionary passion alternates with disappointment.

The title of the work refers to the Khrushchev Thaw, but also to Gorbachev's perestroika, a period of which the artist had first-hand experience. Featured on the soundtrack is music by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975), whose personal history takes us back to the 1930s, triggering memories of the early days of Stalin's oppressive regime. After a violent history, is there hope for a brighter future, or are we just left floating in endless collective violence?

22 Artur Żmijewski

(Poland, b. 1966)

Singing Lesson 1. 2001. Single-channel video, colour and original sound



Artur Żmijewski has defined his art as “philosophy in action”, linking the term to artistic practices which destabilise political, social or religious status quos. Through art, he creates situations of conflict in order to reorganise social relations. In the video, this philosophy is manifested in shifting social structures. The singers in the film are graduates of the Institute for the Deaf in Warsaw; the artist has asked them to perform Jan Maklakiewicz’s (1899–1954) *Polish Mass* from 1944 with organ music backing their voices. Although the performers cannot hear the sounds they make, they are clearly enjoying themselves. Against the backdrop of this cacophony of sound, the video poses questions about the otherness in society of people with disabilities, and asserts the right of self-expression for these people, who are often deprived of chances to participate in collective practices.

In a way, *Singing Lesson 1* also undermines our expectations about traditional church music and can be viewed as a critical examination of religious practices. By combining the discordant human voices and the accordant sounds of the instrument, it challenges the superiority of tonal music over other music systems.

23 Rasa Jansone

(Latvia, b. 1973)

Once upon a time there lived a woman artist. Sometimes small, hasty Crumbs of Memory came her way at the most unexpected and inappropriate moments, for example her mum’s or boss’s scolding, or a child’s annoyance at her parents being busy. All of these were frozen moments and one could count them, classify and arrange them into a certain system. Sometimes these Crumbs of Memory annoyed the woman artist and by pouring them into amber she turned them into autonomous artworks. These are memories from somebody’s personal experience: shy and ordinary but when shown in the right light and at the right angle, they shine like real gemstones.

Maybe this is the way to count and measure Time: the true master of human life.

Text by Rasa Jansone (2008)



Lost Treasures. 2008.
Installation

24 Matei Bejenaru

(Romania, b. 1963)

High Voltage Lab in Iași. From the series *Between Two Worlds*. 2011. Epson Digigraphie
Archival inkjet print

These two photos by Matei Bejenaru are from the series *Between Two Worlds*, a creative project documenting Romanian museums, science labs, public spaces and industrial buildings that functioned under the communist regime as sites for the development of rational knowledge, but which after the fall of communism had no place or purpose in the new society. These photos highlight the material remnants of two memory institutions through which historical memory is manifested. For the artist, these images reflect the change of mentalities that took place after 1989. Bejenaru finds that by visiting environments and institutions from the past or by thinking about obsolete technologies, one can, to an extent, reverse the process of forgetting, which is slowly deleting our memory of socialist modernism. As a result, the scientific ideals of the former society have been replaced with a consumerist vision of the future. Such reversal is important to the artist as it allows for a critical reassessment of these processes and the current situation in society.



The Museum of Natural History in Iași. From the series *Between Two Worlds*. 2015. Epson Digigraphie
Archival inkjet print

25 Vendula Knopová

(Czechia, b. 1987)

Tutorial. 2015. Single-channel video, DVD,
colour and original sound



The protagonist of Vendula Knopová's playful, and yet strikingly frank, video is the artist herself, who is looking through an artist's book that she has created mainly of her family photos. These photos were selected from the hard drive folder "Big kids" on her mother's computer. She damages and changes the photos, and complements them with new drawings. Knopová, who has defined herself as "an ambassador of humour" in her interviews, displays a playful and somewhat ambiguous relationship with the images of herself and her family members. Photos, the documents of memory, are treated here in a rather unusual manner, as if to highlight the curious and somewhat random or even violent nature of family albums.

Yet this randomness reveals a deep frankness and honesty. The personal memory constructed in this way is dynamic, multidirectional, conflicting and multi-layered, and yet extremely organic and actual.

26 Severija Inčirauskaitė-Kriaunevičienė

(Lithuania, b. 1977)

Kill for Peace. 2016. Installation. 10 soldier's helmets, and carpets made out of soldier's sweaters. Cross-stitch, drilling and industrial needle punching



Kill for Peace is the ironic title of a 1966 Vietnam war-era protest song by the New York rock band The Fugs. Along with their musical activity, its members were known for playing a prominent part in such actions as the attempt to collectively circle the Pentagon and make it levitate through the power of the mind. This was a naive pacifist but also deeply sarcastic act. The idea of this work is similar, as the author is fully aware how naive it is to expect universal peaceful coexistence from humankind at its current stage of biological and societal development. After all, at least one of the warring factions, and usually all of them, go to war “for the sake of the peace and well-being of its citizens”. The installation employs helmets used by the armies of various countries in different military conflict zones. Perhaps the concept of this work contains less an actionist protest than an urge to reflect why people — members of the same *Homo sapiens* species but of different communities and nations — deal with the chimeras of their past in such contrasting ways. Why are some able to repent and gain redemption for the atrocious past sins of their genetic forebears both financially and especially morally, while others are anxious to repeat them? The historical consciousness of a group of people, seemingly a blurred and incomprehensible notion, suddenly acquires immense force and erupts through real group actions, causing bloodshed. Can we attribute certain traits or collective responsibility to an entire nation? We know from history how dangerous this is. Yet if it is perfectly natural to feel collective pride for the accomplishments of geniuses, great artists, even athletes of one's home country, so maybe it is just as natural to feel remorse and collective responsibility for the crimes committed by one's compatriots.

Text by Tomas Kriaunevičius (2016)

27 Joanna Piotrowska

(Poland/the UK, b. 1985)

Joanna Piotrowska's series deals with physical and structural violence against women. The photo series depicts young women in domestic settings posing in various positions described in self-defence manuals. Their bodies mediate memories of violence. The poses are unnatural and disturbing; it is not clear whether the movements are friendly or threatening. It is also unclear whether the depicted women are



themselves being aggressive or are being attacked. Similar to Piotrowska's earlier series *Frowst* (2014), it has been stated that Piotrowska's work examines "unconscious psychological dynamics within a pervasive atmosphere of intangible threat: there is a haunting sense of anxiety, an airless discomfort in the domestic sphere."

Self-Defence series. 2015.
Silver gelatin hand print

28 Kristaps Ģelzis

(Latvia, b. 1962)

Presentation. 2010. Pencil on paper

Kristaps Ģelzis's gigantic drawings represent fragments of spaces and objects associated with recording, presentation and control. The depicted motifs are narrative, and yet it is difficult to understand where in time and space they have been placed by the artist. In these drawings, time seems to stand still or move in circles.

At the same time, these highly laborious and technically complex works suggest a premonition of dark violence. While the focus seems to be on the absence of something, the cinematic feel of the drawings nevertheless causes unease. Who is sitting behind these machines and constructing the stories based on the information the machines record or present? Who or what is being watched and who is in control?



Nothing Happens Again. 2010.
Pencil on paper

29 Tõnis Saadoja

(Estonia, b. 1980)

In this series, Tõnis Saadoja looks for points of convergence and divergence between photography and painting. These works describe a seemingly ordinary natural phenomenon: the gradual melting of an ice cube into water. The artist's painstakingly meticulous approach is rigorous, patient and accurately detailed. His aim was to paint something "unimportant and usual", creating a composition where not much is going on in terms of action or significance, but at the same time investing a great deal of time and effort in recording the process down to the smallest detail. These paintings are like frames on a film roll, where we see the unfolding of a "small" history. At the same time, the focus is not on the beginning or end of the story, but the attention tends to



The Melting of an Ice Cube.
2003. 20 oil paintings on HDF

shift to the invisible space between these frames. By emphasising the process itself, Saadoja makes the concept of timelessness visible and perceptible.

30 Ievgen Petrov

(Ukraine, b. 1972)

This painting by the Ukrainian artist Ievgen Petrov seems like a dark prophesy from the past. We see an aggressive, enraged animal against the backdrop of a gloomy landscape: this apocalyptic scene takes on such a tragic meaning today.



Dirt. 2012. Oil on canvas

Petrov has depicted dogs in several of his paintings. In 2014, Māris Vītols initiated the idea of the exhibition *Petrov's Dogs* in the Riga Art Space. In these works, dogs are seen as “conceptual characters“, through whom the artist has rather mercilessly challenged the view of the human being as a “rational animal”. Petrov has said: “I paint what irritates me in reality. In the case of dogs, I often draw myself.” He has depicted animals in circumstances created by human beings, who have also devised the script and the space of action. The world created by humans and the relationships that prevail there are perceived by the artist as cruel, unfair and inhumane.

31 Rustam Mirzoev

(Ukraine, b. 1974)

Snow is like nature-induced amnesia, which enables us to rediscover landscapes, forms, structures and environments in spring, and to remember summer in winter. Yet Mirzoev's painting is not inspired by sweet nostalgia, but expresses the tension caused by time standing still. A sense of waiting. These wheels



Two Wheels. 2012. Oil on canvas

seem to come from another time and space. The disappearance of familiar signs, the visual and psychological change of landscapes and cities is, however, illusory because the forms and structures eventually melt into something recognisable again. Are things and spaces easier to remember when there are more details, as in snowless periods, or do we remember them better as snow-covered abstract shapes? What is it that causes nostalgia: the sense of impermanence evoked by a blanket of snow over everything or the recognition of familiar signs, such as details of playgrounds, barely visible under the snow?

Snow inspires poetry, peace and tenderness, and helps to clear minds and memories, while war – which also redefines many familiar structures and spaces – covers everything with a sweeping veil of trauma and suffering.

32 Krišs Salmanis

(Latvia, b. 1977)

Swelter. 2009. 35mm film transferred to DVD,
colour and original sound



The protagonist of the video by Krišs Salmanis is an idyllic Latvian summer scene with a farmstead. Yet the seemingly languid scene hides a surprise. The landscapes may be viewed as carriers of memory, and the viewer also experiences a distorted sense of time and reality. The changes in familiar landscapes often go unnoticed, as the processes that change the planet Earth are extremely slow.

It is usually human-induced change that triggers or shapes our memories of landscape: forests that we destroy, newly constructed buildings, agricultural plots, plants that we grow, roads we maintain, and wetlands that we drain. Humans tend to treat the landscape as useful or available to meet their needs. So, landscape embodies power relations between human beings, nature and other animals. One must slow down to experience the “useless” and to be able to show consideration and care.