Deimantas Narkevičius
The Unanimous Life

This is the largest retrospective of Deimantas Narkevičius’s work to date. Narkevičius is an artist who has worked mainly in film and video although he has also produced sculptural pieces. These sculptures contribute to the creation of a rare synthesis between filmed reality and the almost preformative presence of objects in space. This Lithuanian artist’s career subtly develops an underlying theme of contemporary society: our relationship with temporality and memory. The transition that took place in Lithuania from a Soviet society to an independent democratic state gave Narkevičius the opportunity to insist on the importance of understanding the emergence of a new dimension of historical time.

The fact that most of his works—excluding two—are films will require the visitors’ utmost attention, as screening lasts a total of nearly four hours. The best way to enjoy the exhibition would be to consider repeated visits. Narkevičius captures and transforms images in very different ways, sometimes recurring to historical—but not professional—formats, such as 16mm or appropriating existing material and combining it with his own original images; other times he uses technology to highlight aspects of a more cinematic nature. His work is a confirmation of the difficulty of portraying history through images. As such, experiencing the images is of equal or greater importance than the story they tell.

It would be a mistake to describe his film production as “documentary” cinema, although the relationship between record, memory and testimonial it displays is at the forefront. In the various stages that make up his filmmaking, one perceives that historiography is an exercise in the interpretation of images and spaces. At the same time, it feeds on listening and conversing. The reception and production of the past depends to a large extent on an unstable and complex negotiation between fact and fiction in which we as individuals and part of a group or society, all engage.

Deimantas Narkevičius’s different works have allowed us to understand is that what is experienced and what is imagined is strongly present in the films Scena, Energy Lithuania and in a more radical way, one of his latest works Revisiting Solaris, to mention three examples. The latter takes the assemblage of extremely disparate materials, a technique used frequently in his work, to the extreme.

Following the definition of the philosopher Manuel de Landa, this is about combining elements that make up the “content” of history—in this case the architectural spaces conceived by the modern project to convey the rationality of progress—with other diachronically different material, such as references to a classical example of the science fiction genre as seen in Revisiting Solaris. This apparent play between references to a real historical project and a fictional utopia seeks to reveal history as a complex subject, heterogeneous and non-linear.

In these works the linguistic aspects, the scope of the different narratives that link each of the protagonists, has just as much significance as the visual dimension, the spatial investigation, which takes place through the camera. From the very start, there is immersed in a situation where he is forced to distinguish between useful pasts and those to be discarded, just as he realises the importance of “remembering the future”, that is, producing a collective imaging of what lies ahead.

Chus Martínez
Curator of the exhibition

Disappearance of a Tribe
2005
Lithuanian title: Gyvenimas
Betacam SP video, b&w, stereo sound. Running time: 9’16’’
Exhibition format: DVD

Disappearance of a tribe is the continuation of a series of work examining the period of radical social experimentation that took place in Soviet Europe in the post-war period. This examination is not inspired by a sentiment of a utopian past. The creation of a multicultural mega-state under the common “idea of an international socialist community, which covered nearly half the planet, ironically, is similar to the current moment, when we are facing the challenges of European Union integration. Disappearance of a tribe is a cinematic assembly of private photographs, which portrays the life story of a family. The pictures depict a common life in the Socialist era and that experience, which seem to have been totally lost.

Francisco Cordero
Curator of the exhibition

1.- Disappearance of a Tribe, 2005. 9’16’’
2.- The Head, 2007. 23’20’’
3.- No-History. 1997. 12’15’’
4.- Clandestin 2002. 19’
5.- The Dud Effect. 2008. 20’47’’
6.- Matraškys 2005. 23’20’’

On my way home, walking along Gediminas Avenue (formerly called Lenin Avenue), I dived into a mob, which, overcome with enthusiasm, had been waiting for something to happen. This was an ubiquitous feeling, during August and September of 1991, right after the hapless Moscow coup attempt to regain its Lithuanian colony. The atmosphere was brimming with the anticipation of change—although it wasn’t clear what type of change or what it would bring. The “Velvet Revolutions” passed by quite peacefully (they were also endorsed by the Communist elites) and did not draw borders of ethnic or political separation—at least at the time—and there was no clearly distinguishable enemy (apparent collaborators disappeared in the far reaches of Russia or mingled in the same rejecting mob), which could be identified as the “defeated”. Initially, the entusiastic mob began spontaneously disassembling Communist regime symbols (although Communism in its true sense had never been implemented), and its objects of public political propaganda—namely, the monuments...

In the Soviet Republics, these sculptures were primarily interpreted as domination markers of the occupying state. Public mobilisation to peacefully break free from Russian occupation was a principal desire of the Lithuanian people and was successfully implemented with firmness and patience in the years to follow. Meanwhile, the disintegration and transformation of the Socialist bureaucratic state has been continuing ever since, though has yet to be implemented in all areas of the state sector. Hence, in a matter of days, with the support of the joyful crowd, the monuments to Socialist Realism were dismantled: Communist ideologists, creators of the Soviet state and portraits of subsequent political figures. Monuments of the same period and style, depicting Lithuanian cultural figures, escaped this fate. The disused monuments were stored away and left—just as if any concept of what to do with them had, for the moment, been exhausted. No historic period passes without leaving a trace, and its aftermath does not disappear naturally, especially such a dramatic, extensive, radical and overwhelming title as Soviet ideology. After nearly two decades, it remains difficult to reflect upon the period without guilt and it feels uncomfortable to analyse the cultural genes of this period. Moreover, the change in contemporary aesthetics is so complete that the Soviet past is simply difficult to recognise, and the heritage is so sizeable, that its impact is being felt over a longer term than it was possible to expect. The historical circumstances of the Cold War are well known and will not be discussed here. Despite this awareness, one might question whether the visual synodence of

by Chus Martínez

The Head
2007
Lithuanian title: Gyvenimas
35mm film footage transferred to Betacam SP video, colour, mono sound
Original version: Russian and German. Subtitles: Spanish. Running time: 12’15’’
Exhibition format: DVD
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia
Gift of the artist
from Modernist art. It was an art style in service to ideology that formally referred to a fashionable style, Socialist Realism is an equally valuable art style within the nation ideology was not tolerated. By their very nature, Socialist Realist monuments in central squares of East European cities visually softens or falsifies the development— even now—because of relative political situations. The removal of monuments from this aesthetic repression are still felt in the former Eastern Bloc. Meanwhile, the individuals from their creatively constrained art works—even if the consequences of individual creativity was reduced to a minimum in the face of canonical require-
ments. Monuments became sculptures again, just like any other that can be transported, deposited, displayed elsewhere or returned to their former sites. My proposal for skulptų projektas münster (7) is to dismantle the monumental sculptural portal of Karl Marx in the town of Chemnitz and transport it to Münster for the period of the exhibition, and then return it to the same place in Chemnitz.

The Dud Effect
Lithuanian title: Nesprogus bandomos poveikis
16mm film transferred to HD video, colour, stereo sound
Original version: Russian. Subtitles: Spanish. Running time: 19’40”
Exhibition format: Blu-ray Disc
Courtesy the artist, Jan Mot, Brussels, gb agency, Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

Abandoned Soviet nuclear rocket launch bases form the subject of this film. There is a base like this here in Lithuania. It was closed down back in 1977, but the footage from the 70’s that was filmed around Lithuania (the area is actually very beautiful; it is one of the country’s few national parks with a rich fauna). There are also some unique black-and-white photographs of the R-14 complex ready to illustrate such an act. It is still more about filming this rather large territory of nature and its features in detail, accompanied by photographs: snapshots of her first days in the strange city. The first reflections of traveling, moving house and new experiences are compared with the point of departure, the city they know well, and from the first moment of departure, this starting point becomes an object of remembrance.

The War Game
Russian title: Matriožkas
1965
Formato de exposición: DVD
Country the artist, Jan Mot, Brussels, gb agency, Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

The Dud Effect is a documentary-style video that is, in effect, a re-enactment of a fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in Belgium, are re-telling the fictional story. Three professional actresses, who took part in the commercial television project “Matriožkas” produced by VTM in比利时, are re-telling the scenario of that film as if it was biographical. The fictional story, “based on a true story” is presented as a documentary that traces the experiences of three individuals. The project questions the current or imbalance between fictional narrative and documentary practice in contemporary popular media.
tell her story in the film. (I found out later that her experience during that time was
compressed into a story that takes an hour to tell. Fania spans the entire 20th
century in the course of her story.
A super-8 film camera was programmed to shoot one frame per minute over a
period of 24 hours. In this way, the 24 hours of shooting became 14 minutes of
viewing time. The result is similar to an animated film. Four days and nights are
compressed into a story that takes an hour to tell. Fania spans the entire 20th
century in the course of her story.

Part two: Fania Brantsovskaya is telling the story of her youth in pre-war and
wartime Vilnius. The fundamental topography of the film is made up of four aspects
of the city: the childhood street, the school façade, the ghetto yard and the
Rudininkai forest. All of these locations are dramatically associated with Lithuanian
Jewish history, and visually they remain largely unchanged since the mid-1940s.

An instrumentalist, production-oriented society was an actual realisation of the
avant-garde visions of the early 20th century. Lithuania in the second half of the last
century was undergoing vastly more radical changes than the artworks of the period
would ever allow you to sense. In Lithuania, the avant-garde ideas of 20th-century
art were more successfully implemented in other areas of life. This is why I have
been looking for thematic and aesthetic impulses for my films in the reality of indus-
trial society. The film Energy Lithuania is a documentary study of an industrial
installation (an electric power plant), which includes conversations with people who
have worked there. Although the power plant is functioning, it has now become like
a museum of industrial thought. Still, the livelihood of thousands of people depends
on it. It will not be easy to reform industrial society. The biggest challenge is to find a
credible intellectual replacement for positivist industrial Romanticism.

Part three: Chasia Spannerflieg is performing a partisan song, in Yiddish, exactly as
she did onstage in a little theatre during the ghetto years. Chasia did not agree to
tell her story in the film. (I found out later that her experience during that time was
even more dramatic).

This film is based on already existing video material. I acquired material from
Lithuanian National TV archives which documents the action of taking down the
sculpture of Lenin. In addition, I bought video footage of the same action from a
freelance video reporter. Consequently, there is a two-camera perspective on the
event. The images of taking down the sculpture of Lenin in Vilnius are very familiar
because they were widely broadcasted by CNN and several other major news net-
works. The images of Lenin hanging above the crowd and waving his hand were
repeated a thousand times by CNN during the last decade as the symbol of the
disintegration of the Soviet Union and failure of the idea of communism.

In this new work, the materials are edited in a way that will make it look like the
crowd is prepar-

Legend Coming True, 1999
Lithuanian title: Legendos šipildymas
Super 8mm film transferred to Betacam SP video, colour, stereo sound
Format of exhibition: DVD
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (R. AD04937)

The film is divided into three parts.
Part one: A small girl’s trembling voice reads an excerpt from a romantic legend
about a city, which is supposed to become world-renowned. Indeed, this fame was
acquired in the middle of the 20th century. Vilnius became a symbol of the Holocaust.

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even more dramatic).

Energy Lithuania, 2000
Lithuanian title: Lietuvos Energija
Super 8mm film transferred to Betacam SP video, colour, stereo sound
Original version: Lithuanian. Subtitles: Spanish. Running time: 17’36”
Exhibition format: DVD
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (R. AD04936)

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avant-garde visions of the early 20th century. Lithuania in the second half of the last
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on it. It will not be easy to reform industrial society. The biggest challenge is to find a
credible intellectual replacement for positivist industrial Romanticism.

Once in the XX Century, 2004
Lithuanian title: Kartą XX amžiuje
Betacam SP video, colour, mono sound. Running time: 7’56”
Exhibition format: DVD
Courtesy the artist, Jan Mot, Brussels, gb agency, Paris, and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

This film is based on already existing video material. I acquired material from
Lithuanian National TV archives which documents the action of taking down the
sculpture of Lenin. In addition, I bought video footage of the same action from a
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disintegration of the Soviet Union and failure of the idea of communism.

In this new work, the materials are edited in a way that will make it look like the
crowd is prepar-
Russia or Poland. It could have been anywhere in Europe. and had seen the spot. Maybe it was in Lithuania, or perhaps it was somewhere in elsewhere. As I got closer to that place, I got the feeling I had been there before different directions were also evenly distributed around the town I knew best. So I had spent the same amount of time in the West. The distances I had travelled in I had spent in Russia, in places east of the centre. I discovered, however, that time I had spent elsewhere. I looked at the map, trying to remind myself of the time It occurred to me that it was also the centre of my travels, the central point in the number of visitors has plummeted in comparison with the days when it was The Palace of Arts and offered an artistic programme for “all the people.” Consequently, the institution has isolated itself from the local infrastructure because it has refused to compromise with its programme in order to "bring back the masses." The modernistic building has become a refuge for the people who work there. There is everyday life going on inside the institution, which seems to contradict its purpose, but in fact the people working there are supporting this Utopia with their activities even if they do so unintentionally. Most of them are special characters.

This film is a simple documentary of a trip I made one morning from my former flat to the geographical centre of Europe. One Friday morning, I got the urge to go and see the centre of Europe. Though I had been aware for some time that the centre of Europe was in Lithuania, I had simply disregarded the fact as unimportant, as one of the many phenomena of the ethnocentric ideology typical of a young country. That morning I asked myself what my relationship was to that geographical fact. It occurred to me that it was also the centre of my travels, the central point in the time I had spent elsewhere. I looked at the map, trying to remind myself of the time I had spent in Russia, in places east of the centre. I discovered, however, that I had spent the same amount of time in the West. The distances I had travelled in different directions were also evenly distributed around the town I knew best. So I decided to go and see the centre of my travels and of the time I had spent elsewhere. As I got closer to that place, I got the feeling I had been there before and had seen the spot. Maybe it was in Lithuania, or perhaps it was somewhere in Russia or Poland. It could have been anywhere in Europe.

The futurologist Stanislaw Lem predicted that technological development would increasingly dominate human relations. Artificial (machine) intelligence would even go so far as to attempt to substitute feelings inherent to human beings. ‘It will not.” Lem stated in one of his late interviews. He knew that true artificial intelligence could not be created; better and better imitations would appear instead. The electronic device called the computer already pretends to have intelligence, and is even capable of being a conscious conversation partner for human beings, but that is neither deception nor substitution, only imitation. Materialised psychical projections based on an individual’s memory appear in Lem’s space drama Solaris. The astronaut Chris Kelvin is visited by a woman who is outwardly identical to his dead wife. Legendary Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, who interpreted the novel quite freely, filmed the story in 1972. In his film, Tarkovsky added a family element, so that the astronaut visits his father and his family home before going to outer space. Additionally, quite a long part of the film version takes place on earth – both the astronaut’s departure from it and his return at the end of the film when he goes back to his father’s house. Due to the way the film is constructed, or more precisely, composed, the frames of nature scenes have quite a symbolic meaning and are visually connected to the paintings of Renaissance or Romantic masters. To me it seemed that Tarkovsky was less critical than Lem of the increasing impact of the electronic media (or media in general) on human relations. In my short film, Revisiting Solaris, the actor Donatas Banionis again appears in his role as Chris Kelvin, more than forty years after Andrej Tarkovsky’s Solaris was made. Revisiting Solaris is based on the last chapter of Lem’s book, the part that had been left out of Tarkovsky’s version. In this last chapter, Kelvin reflects on his brief visit on the “soil” of the planet Solaris shortly before his return from the space mission. As material to visualise the landscape of Solaris, I used a series of photographs made by the Lithuanian symbolist painter and composer Mykaliojus Čiurlionis in 1905 in Anapa. Čiurlionis’ works are marked by an original conception of space, producing the impression of an infinite expanse and limitless time. The pictures thus take on a quality of cosmic vision and deep inner concentration. I found it very interesting that in 1971 Andrej Tarkovsky filmed the same surface of the Black Sea in Crimea to represent the landscape of the mysterious ocean.

All synopses by Deimantas Narkevičius
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Opening Times
Mondays to Saturdays: 10.00 - 21.00
Sundays: 10.00 - 14.30
Closed Tuesdays
The exhibition rooms will be vacated 15 minutes before the museum closes

Illustrations
- Deimantas Narkevičius,

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