

frame to which Khalili is devoted: “These stories, they are there, all around us. And if we collect small loot, then it must be shared. Sharing images and stories, narrating them, translating for others, as if the word was always translation, and as if language is always born of translation.” Through these multiple voices, Khalili plays elegantly between despair and critique, as well as obligation and responsibility.

#### Anna Jermolaewa: Good Times, Bad Times

Zachęta – National Gallery of Art,  
Warsaw, 28. 2. – 10. 5. 2015

WRO Art Center, Wrocław,  
20. 10. – 20. 11. 2015

by Krzysztof Kościuczuk

If you’ve ever seen one, you’ll know that a *vanka-vstanka*, the traditional Russian roly-poly toy, is an item of specific charm. What is captivating, however, is its resilience: if pushed, it will rock in a hypnotic motion, only to return to its original upright position. In “Trying to Survive” (2000), a video that opened the first Polish solo show of the Russian-born, Vienna-based artist Anna Jermolaewa, several *vanka-vstanka* dolls could be seen rocking more and more violently, and then drifting away, until none were left inside the frame. For Jermolaewa, whose practice oscillates between the highly personal and the patently political, the work is a statement on both her own biography and the more general forces that shape human behaviour. At the heart of her recent Warsaw exhibition was precisely this interweaving of individual and historical narratives, in which visitors were invited to recognise themselves.

“Untitled (Gulag)” (2012) combines objects, snapshots, and video material, making for an unsettling account of an expedition through the snow-covered woodlands of Russia’s Perm region, where part of Jermolaewa’s family was deported in 1930 as *kulaks*, or “affluent” peasants, deemed beyond rehabilitation in the new Soviet state. The muddy dirt roads, derelict buildings, and crooked barbed-wire fences no longer pre-



Anna Jermolaewa, *Self-Portrait with Dictator*, 2007. Digital print, 87 × 97 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Kerstin Engholm Gallery, Vienna. Copyright: Bildrecht, Vienna 2015.

vent anyone from escaping. But the time of *The Gulag Archipelago*, famously portrayed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, is far from over. The area is still home to a number of labour camps holding political prisoners, such as Maria Alyokhina,

member of the protest group Pussy Riot, who, as we learn from the accompanying text, served her sentence in the region at the time the material was shot. “To acknowledge the guilt is not enough” reads a sign that the artist had brought back as a haunting testimony to that era, which feels acutely topical today.

The video “Methods of Social Resistance on Russian Examples” (2012) catalogues the diverse practices used by activists, including civil observation, discussions, hunger strikes, and proactive gestures such as the intervention of the Pussy Riot group. Among them was the footage from the Siberian city of Barnaul, home to a thriving student community, which featured children’s toys holding miniature banners. This “nano rally”, held in lieu of a full-scale demonstration, was nonetheless treated with deadpan earnestness by the local police, who filed a report on the displayed slogans; some of the original figures were displayed in the gallery on a large table. Many of the documented actions were a response to the disputed elections of 2012, which saw Vladimir Putin return as President of Russia. Shown in a nearby corner was “Self-Portrait with Dictator” (2007), a rectangular photograph of the artist next to a wax figure of Putin, set against a pitch-black background. Seen from a distance, it brought to mind Kazimir Malevich’s iconic painting and, by extension, the traditional Orthodox “icon corner” still found in rural homes, where those looking at the images faced in an easterly direction.

In referencing history, Jermolaewa also speaks a great deal of herself. Like in the moving installation “Shopping with Family” (2013), in which she is seen trying on different wigs, anticipating her cancer treatment. Or in the video “Aleksandra Wysokińska / 20 Jahre danach” (20 Years After, 2009), where the artist set out on a journey to Poland, retracing her steps from 1989 when, as a co-founder of the first opposition party in the Soviet Union, she had fled to seek refuge in the West. The help she received at the time from a young Polish woman — Aleksandra Wysokińska — allowed her to reach Austria, where she was granted asylum. Two decades later, Jermolaewa contacted Wysokińska, likewise living abroad, who agreed to return to Kraków and speak of how she aided the teenage activist. When asked about the reasons behind her actions, the latter answered evasively: “It is the typical Polish hospitality.”

But the artist does not seem satisfied with easy answers. “Both White (after Valeria Mukhina)” (2015) is an installation whose central element is a wooden sculpture of two pyramidal shapes, one white, the other black. The title, however, claims otherwise — it references the studies of the psychologist Valeria Mukhina, who examined the impact of peer pressure on individual behaviour in the USSR during the 1970s. Mukhina drew upon the conformity experiments carried out earlier in the US by the Polish-born pioneer in social psychology Solomon E. Asch, cited in the adjacent neon sculpture “Number Two (after Solomon Asch)” (2015). Working with children and young adults, Mukhina investigated how the opinion of the majority could lead one to deny even the most obvious truth and claim that white is, in fact, black. This study in social resilience — the degree to which one can be swayed and still keep their inner compass — is, in other words, also a lesson in what Solzhenitsyn called “the main problem of the twentieth century”, that is, “is it permissible merely to carry out orders and commit one’s conscience to some-

one else’s keeping?”<sup>1</sup> Amidst all the drama and humour that permeate her work, Jermolaewa is interested in just that.

1 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–56*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney and Harry Willets (London: Harvill Press, 2003), p. 385.

#### Aurélien Froment: News from Earth

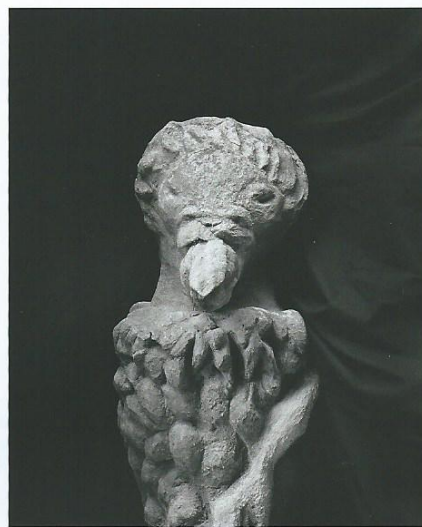
Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe,  
24. 4. – 21. 6. 2015

#### Aurélien Froment: Fröbel gefröbelt

Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg,  
23. 4. – 21. 6. 2015

von Gisliind Nabakowski

In der Ausstellung »Aurélien Froment: News from Earth« im Badischen Kunstverein Karlsruhe, kuratiert von Anja Casser, reihen sich drei Projekte spielerisch aneinander. Sie umkreisen Recherchen zu historischen Persönlichkeiten und



Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* 48-07, 2014. Pigment-Print auf Barytpapier, 64,1 × 52,3 cm. Courtesy: der Künstler und Marcelle Alix, Paris.

den von ihnen gestalteten Objekten, Ideen und Schauplätzen: Ferdinand Chevalls (1836 – 1924) Palais idéal, die experimentelle Stadt Arcosanti des Architekten Paolo Soleri (1919 – 2013) in Arizona, die seit den 1950er Jahren durch die Arcology-Bewegung nach seinem architektur-ökologischem Konzept entsteht und als Stiftung fortbesteht. Das »Gedächtnistheater« des Renaissance-Philosophen Giulio Camillo (1480 – 1544) war in den zwei Videoinstallationen »Camillo’s Idea« (2013) szenisch umgesetzt.

Diese drei ungleichen historischen Gedankengebäude zeigen Aurélien Froments neo-konzeptuelle Aneignung von Geschichte durch Kunst. Über allem stand als Erlebnis die Erfahrung von Räumen und Ideen mit heterogenen Inhalten. Zur Frage, wie sie sich ins Heute übertragen lassen, nutzte der Künstler Fotografien, Remontagen, Filme, Texte, Rezitationen und Skulpturen: 21 keramische Windglocken nach Paolo Soleri wurden beispielsweise in Arizona für den Badischen Kunstverein gegossen.