

## Anna Jermolaewa

SALZBURGER KUNSTVEREIN

Hung in a corner, the central picture in this show was easy to overlook. A small untitled black-and-white photograph, it shows five young women and one young man. Taken in 1986 at a high school for the arts in what used to be Leningrad, it shows Anna Jermolaewa with her classmates; the artist came across the picture years later on a social-networking site. In May 1989, shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, she had fled Leningrad as an eighteen-year-old opposition sympathizer. Settling in Vienna, she later became known for video installations that on first glance seem to show a quite direct reproduction of the real world, but are in fact subtle reflections on the transitory, ephemeral nature of reality—snapshots of time in a state of flux.

In this exhibition, “*Das vierzigste Jahr*” (The Fortieth Year), the element of time also played a central role. More precisely, the show was about memory—not unlike Ingeborg Bachmann’s well-known story “*Das dreißigste Jahr*” (The Thirtieth Year), whose protagonist wakes up one day with the “wondrous new ability to remember” and discovers that the future no longer lies open to him in all directions. In the video portraits created for this show, Jermolaewa’s former classmates in turn sum up their—now over forty-year-long—lives, and for them too the framework for their reflections has already been established. In unobtrusively shot and edited sequences, they respond to the artist’s questions, telling of fulfilled wishes and missed opportunities, the consequences of being uprooted, finding new bearings, and growing older.

This striking collage of individual portraits was presented through side-by-side projections of various dimensions. As in earlier works by the artist, she introduces her protagonists through conversations, sketching them, as it were, through their interactions, the way they tell stories, the references they make, what they leave out. She usually films them in their own domestic surroundings, which become an important



Anna Jermolaewa,  
*Lena B.*, 2011,  
still from a color HD  
video, 40 minutes.

element in their characterizations. Jermolaewa captures each interviewee’s particularities glancingly yet also atmospherically and pithily, as when a businesswoman who’s immigrated to the US proudly displays her fashion collection (*Lena B.*, 2011), or when a woman who stayed behind in Russia presents a tranquil-sounding summary of her anything-but-stable life (*Anja M.*, 2011). For one woman, who now lives in Hong Kong with her wealthy husband and doesn’t want to reveal any personal details, the artist shows—instead of her subject’s home—long traveling shots of Hong Kong’s river landscapes (*Nastja A.*, 2011), while the only man in the group didn’t want to appear on camera and so is represented by drawn portraits.

Jermolaewa gives us a portrait of a generation whose lives were—and continue to be—determined by the societal upheavals in the Soviet Union/Russia. Whether her subjects chose withdrawal into a private sphere, emigration, or a steadfast shrug of the shoulders, the fates of these individuals provide a concentrated reflection of the political and social realities of a country to which its former and present inhabitants have responded in quite different ways. Perhaps Jermolaewa hints at the kind of future she hopes the country will have in the digital slide show *St. Petersburg 10.12.2011*, 2012, which documents a demonstration against Vladimir Putin’s autocracy and for greater participation in the country’s political life.

—Astrid Wege

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.