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New Museum to Present “Ostalgia,” a Survey Devoted to Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics

Multi-floor Exhibition Will Be on View from July 14–September 25, 2011

New York, NY… This summer, the New Museum will present “Ostalgia,” an exhibition that brings together the work of more than fifty artists from twenty countries across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics. Contesting the format of a conventional geographical survey, the exhibition will include works produced by Western European artists who have depicted the reality and the myth of the East. “Ostalgia” is curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Associate Director and Director of Exhibitions with Jarrett Gregory, Assistant Curator, and will be on view at the New Museum from July 14 through September 25, 2011, occupying all four gallery floors and the lobby.

The exhibition takes its title from the German word ostalgie, a term that emerged in the 1990s to describe a sense of longing and nostalgia for the era before the collapse of the Communist Bloc. Twenty years ago, a process of dissolution began, leading to the break-up of the Soviet Union and of many other countries that had been united under communist governments. From the Baltic republics to the Balkans, from Central Europe to Central Asia, entire regions and nations were reconfigured, their constitutions rewritten, their borders redrawn. “Ostalgia” looks at the art produced in and about some of these countries, many of which did not formally exist two decades ago. Mixing private confessions and collective traumas, the exhibition traces a psychological landscape in which individuals and entire societies negotiate new relationships to history, geography, and ideology.
Some of the works in “Ostalgia”—both from the East and West—describe the collapse of the Communist system and offer a series of personal reportages on aspects of life under Communism and in the new post-Soviet countries. Romanian artist Irina Botea, for example, re-enacts the 1989 revolution as it was broadcast on TV, while Phil Collins interviews teachers of Marxist theory who were left jobless and disoriented by the fall of the Berlin Wall. Legendary photographer Helga Paris presents her poignant portraits of female factory workers in divided Germany, while Vladimir Arkhipov displays photographs of his collection of found objects, improvised tools, and survival designs conceived by Russian citizens during the economic crash of the early 1990s.

A remarkable group of Russian artists constitutes the core of the exhibition, presenting works that retrace the origins of Moscow Conceptualism, and others that point to new directions in contemporary art. Along with the austere paintings of Erik Bulatov, a site-specific installation by Andrei Monastyrski, the drawings of Dmitri Prigov, and the photographic interventions of Anatoly Osmolovsky, visitors will encounter the eccentric self-portraits of Alexander Lobanov, the everyday poetry of Olga Chernysheva’s videos, and the ritualistic gestures of Victor Alimpiev and Evgeny Antufiev. The collective Chto Delat? will create a timeline of the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. The portraits shot by Nikolay Bakharev on Siberian beaches will be presented along with the erotic fantasies of 14 year-old Evgenij Kozlov, collected in 150 pages from his Leningrad Album.

Composed as a visual archive, “Ostalgia” pays particular attention to the unique place that artists came to occupy in socialist countries, acting simultaneously as outcasts, visionaries, and witnesses. The miniaturized sculptural mocks-up by Hermann Glöckner will be shown next to the urbanistic fantasies of Pavel Pepperstein and the cosmic exploration of Stanislav Filko. The films by Polish workers rescued and archived by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska will be presented in dialogue with Mirostaw Batka’s uncanny reinterpretation of religious sculpture.

“Ostalgia” does not make a case for a unified history of art in the former Eastern Bloc: instead it illuminates similar atmospheres and sensibilities across nations, and points to dramatic differences, for “Ostalgia” is more about a state of mind than a specific place in time.

Some of the preoccupations that seem to unite the artists in “Ostalgia” are a romantic belief in the power of art as a transformative, almost curative agent; an obsession with language and particularly with its propagandistic use; the conception of a new aesthetic of the body to contrast with the heroic bodies of Socialist Realism; a fascination with the ruins of history as represented by monuments and architectural vestiges; and an understanding of the artwork as a form of sentimental documentary that mediates between cultural pressures and individual anxieties.

The video Dammi I Colori by Anri Sala—with his hallucinated vistas of the Albanian capital Tirana—chronicles the struggle to resuscitate a city with the collaboration of artists, while documentaries by Deimantas Narkevičius and Tacita Dean depict the urban fractures caused by revolutions. Dean’s Palast is a visual eulogy for the imminent destruction of the Palace of the Republic, the Parliament of the former German Democratic Republic in Berlin. The divided city also returns in the 100 photographs that compose Michael Schmidt’s tour de force U-NI-TY.
Combining seminal figures and younger artists, “Ostalgia” does not follow a chronological perspective, establishing instead a series of dialogues between different generations and geographies. Focusing, for example, on the conceptual performances of artists as diverse as Ion Grigorescu, Andris Grīnbergs, Hamlet Hovsepian, Sanja Iveković, Július Koller, and Jiří Kovanda, the exhibition exposes local avant-garde practices and highlights international affinities, while questioning the centrality of Western paradigms. In the work of younger artists, many of whom grew up after the fall of the Iron Curtain, one can detect a tension to recuperate the past through individual perspectives. Andro Wekua, for example, reconstructs a mental panorama of his native Georgian town; Roman Ondák satirizes on what it means to wait in line in the East and the West. Andra Ursuta presents the interior of her house in Salonta, Romania, while Paulina Ołowska transports to New York the decorations of an old Polish puppet theater.

Zig-zagging across distant geographies and personal histories, “Ostalgia” composes an imaginary landscape, tracing the cartography of the dreams that haunted the East, for ultimately “Ostalgia” is an exhibition about myths and their demise.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue featuring contributions by Massimiliano Gioni, Boris Groys, Ekaterina Degot, Viktor Misiano, and others, as well as texts by a selection of the exhibiting artists.

**Exhibition Support**

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**About the New Museum**

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum was conceived as a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding, dedicated building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of ongoing experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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**Artists**

Vyacheslav Akhunov  
Born in 1948 in Och, Kyrgyzstan  
Lives in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Victor Alimpiiev  
Born in 1973 in Moscow, Russia  
Lives in Moscow, Russia

Evgeny Antufiev  
Born in 1986 in Kyzyl, Russia  
Lives and works in Tuva, Russia, and Moscow, Russia

Vladimir Arkhipov  
Born in 1961 in Ryazan, Russia  
Lives in Moscow, Russia

Said Atabekov  
Born in 1965 in Bes-Terek, Kazakhstan  
Lives in Shymkent, Kazakhstan

Nikolay Bakharev  
Born in 1969 in Moscow, Russia

Anatoly Osmolovsky  
Lives in Bratislava, Slovakia

Roman Ondák  
Born in 1976 in Gdańsk, Poland  
Lives in Raba Niżna, Poland

Paulina Ołowska  
Born in 1964 in Utena, Lithuania  
Lives in Vilnius, Lithuania

Deimantas Narkevičius  
Born in 1949 in Petsamo, Russia  
Lives in Brooklyn, New York, USA

Hamlet Hovsepian  
Born in 1950 in Ashnak, Armenia  
Lives in Ashnak, Armenia

Alexander Lobanov  
Born in 1924 in Mologa, Russia  
Died in 1986 in Prague, Czech Republic

Andris Grinbergs  
Born in 1946 in Riga, Latvia  
Lives in Riga, Latvia

Aneta Grzeszykowska  
Born in 1974 in Warsaw, Poland  
Lives in Warsaw, Poland

Tibor Hajas  
Born in 1946 in Budapest, Hungary  
Died in 1980 in Szeged, Hungary

Petrit Halilaj  
Born in 1986 in Skenderaj, Kosovo  
Lives in Berlin, Germany

Hamlet Hovsepian  
Born in 1950 in Ashnak, Armenia  
Lives in Ashnak, Armenia

Sanja Iveković  
Born in 1949 in Zagreb, Croatia  
Lives in Zagreb, Croatia

Július Koller  
Born in 1939 in Piestany, Slovakia  
Died in 2007 in Bratislava, Slovakia

Jiří Kovanda  
Born in 1925 in Lucka, Poland  
Died in 2004 in Warsaw, Poland

Edward Krasinski  
Born in 1924 in Mologa, Russia  
Died in 2003 in Yaroslavl, Russia

Jonas Mekas  
Born in 1922 in Semeniškiai, Lithuania  
Died in 2003 in Brooklyn, New York, USA

Boris Mikhailov  
Born in 1938 in Karkov, Ukraine  
Lives in Kharkov, Ukraine, and Berlin, Germany

Andrei Monastyrski  
Born in 1949 in Potsamo, Russia  
Lives in Moscow, Russia

Deimantas Narkevičius  
Born in 1949 in Petsamo, Russia  
Lives in Vilnius, Lithuania

Paulina Ołowska  
Born in 1976 in Gdansk, Poland  
Lives in Raba Niżna, Poland

Roman Ondák  
Born in 1966 in Žilina, Slovakia  
Lives in Bratislava, Slovakia

Anatoly Osmolovsky  
Born in 1969 in Moscow, Russia  
Lives in Moscow, Russia

Helga Paris  
Born in 1938 in Goleniów, Poland  
Lives in Berlin, Germany

Pavel Pepperstein  
Born in 1966 in Moscow, Russia  
Lives in Moscow, Russia

Susan Philipsz  
Born in 1965 in Glasgow, UK  
Lives in Berlin, Germany

Viktor Pivovarov  
Born in 1937 in Moscow, Russia  
Lives in Prague, Czech Republic

Dmitri Prigov  
Born in 1940 in Moscow, Russia  
Died in 2007 in Moscow, Russia

Anri Sala  
Born in 1974 in Tirana, Albania  
Lives in Berlin, Germany

Michael Schmidt  
Born in 1945 in Berlin, Germany  
Lives in Berlin, Germany

Thomas Schütte  
Born in 1954 in Oldenburg, Germany  
Lives in Düsseldorf, Germany

Simon Starling  
Born in 1967 in Epsom, UK  
Lives in Copenhagen, Denmark

Mladen Stilinović  
Born in 1947 in Belgrade, Serbia  
Lives in Zagreb, Croatia

David Ter-Oganyan  
Born in 1982 in Rostov-on-Don, Russia  
Lives in Moscow, Russia

Jaan Toomik  
Born in 1961 in Tartu, Estonia  
Lives in Tallinn, Estonia

Andra Ursuta  
Born in 1979 in Salonta, Romania  
Lives in New York, USA

Andro Wekua  
Born in 1977 in Sukhumi, Georgia  
Lives in Zürich, Switzerland, and Berlin, Germany

The Workshop of the Film Form (Wojciech Bruszewski, Józef Robakowski, Ryszard Waśko)  
Founded 1970 in Łódź, Poland

Sergey Zarya  
Born in 1973 in Krivoy Rog, Ukraine  
Lives in Odessa, Ukraine

Jasmina Žbanić  
Born in 1974 in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina  
Lives in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Anna Zemánková  
Born in 1974 in Bratislava, Slovakia  
Lives in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Please note, locations are listed according to the current name of the city and nation. Many of these names have changed since 1989.