

ANACHRONISMS DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS

Curator: Christian Mosar assisted by Charlotte Masse.
Scenography: 2001.

In collaboration with Esch2022, European Capital of Culture.

AS PART OF
E22
ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE
EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

1. DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS *ANACHRONISMS*

24.09.2022 - 15.01.2023

Konschthl Esch is thrilled to present *Anachronisms*, a new solo exhibition project by Deimantas Narkevičius. The show presents the work of the Lithuanian artist spanning from *Europa 54° 54' - 24° 19'*, which debuted in 1997, to the premiere of *Wailing Waters*, a stereoscopic short film, co-produced by Konschthl Esch in 2022. With a filmography of ten cinematographic works and three installations, *Anachronisms* retraces 25 years of the body of work of the leading Lithuanian artist. Research and the most recent publication 'Art, History, and Anachronic Interventions Since 1990' by art historian Dr Eva Kernbauer inform the exhibition's title.

Events and ideologies that until recently were perceived as anachronistic, obsolete and banished from existence, have presented themselves again in full force, in a violent attempt to reshape the European and the global political, social and economic landscape of the 21st century. The exhibition highlights the array of anachronic modes and techniques of narration employed throughout Narkevičius' moving image oeuvre to unsettle both the ideological-filmic constructions of the subject and time as well as the reductive or simply complacent readings of twentieth-century history, which (until recently) disregarded the latent ramifications of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The latest work *Wailing Waters* takes the viewers back to late-nineteenth-century Lithuania, constituting a cinematic universe in 3D, wherein the modern and indigenous ways of relating to the world, in an anachronic manner, co-exist simultaneously.

It is the second time that the work of Deimantas Narkevičius is to be shown in Luxembourg. The first was the single presentation of *Europa 54° 54' - 24° 19'* in the context of Manifesta 2 in 1998, the second edition of the 'European' biennial whose principal aims were to represent and reflect the new, unified European art landscape post-1989.

The works of Deimantas Narkevičius contest the concept of common historical memories. The artist breaks up linear timelines and uses unorthodox cinematographic techniques to question the conventional narration of historical records and recollections. His films show an entanglement of references from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Lithuania to autobiographical and biographical elements, as well as clear, but always subtle, hints to cinema history. Deimantas Narkevičius' work also sheds new light on the current political situation, in the Baltic region and well beyond its borders.

The museography of the exhibition was designed by the architectural firm *2001*, offering an architectural alternative to conventional black boxes. The various projection modules offer modes of viewing and listening, specially adapted to the different formats of Deimantas Narkevičius' film works.

The Konschthl of Esch is proud to co-fund the production of *Wailing Waters*, implementing its stereoscopic presentation.

With the support of Esch22 - European Capital of Culture. For their contributions, thanks to: Amplitude, Centre omnisports Henri Schmitz - Service des Sports (Esch-sur-Alzette), Ministère des Sports (Luxembourg) and Mudam Luxembourg.

2. DEIMANTAS NARKEVIČIUS

Deimantas Narkevičius (born 24 May 1964 in Utena, Lithuanian SSR) is one of the most consistent and widely recognised Lithuanian artists on the international art scene. Originally trained as a sculptor, Narkevičius has mainly worked with film and video. Employing documentary footage, voice-overs, interviews, re-enactments and found photographs, his films submit historical events to the narrative structures of storytelling and cinema. In his artistic practice Narkevičius examines the relationship of personal memories to political histories, particularly those of his native Lithuania. For the artist, history itself has become both material and methodology.

Since 1992 Narkevičius has exhibited extensively in important contemporary art venues and events worldwide, including Centre Pompidou (Paris), Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid), Tate Modern (London), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam). He represented Lithuania at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001 and two years later exhibited at the 50th Venice Biennale in Utopia Station curated by Molly Nesbit and Hans Ulrich Obrist. Narkevičius's work was shown at Manifesta II (Luxembourg, 1998) and Manifesta X (St. Petersburg, 2014). Amongst his most recent solo shows are 20 July, 2015 at Maureen Paley (London, 2017), Books on Shelves and Without Letters at The Blank Contemporary Art (Bergamo, 2016), Archeology of Memories at former KGB building (Riga, 2015). Narkevičius's major retrospective opens at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, Lithuania, in December 2017.

3. WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION



Wailing Waters, 2022

Single channel 3D HD video film (16:9)

Colour, Sound, Lithuanian spoken, English subtitles

Duration 16 min

The film *Wailing Waters* strives to reignite an interest in the magical lore, which was an integral part of the way Lithuanians thought and lived up until the middle of the 20th century. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, everyday communication in the Western world has become dominated by functional language based on technical terms, cleansed from semantic interpretations and more abstract, symbolic meanings. In contrast, daily communication in Lithuania was still characterised by archaic/esoteric expression replete with Catholic symbolism that manifested itself in language, songs, prayers, games and incantations. Peasant, will-o'-the-wisp, musicians communing with birds and other wild animals, treasure-bearing spirits, faeries and imps mingling among people, healers wandering in the dark were every bit as real as an apple tree growing in the yard.

The stereoscopic view is used to imbue images, all hailing from the period's photographic tradition, with a degree of physicality, grounding this highly effective format. The soundtrack invokes the harmonious coexistence between the human imagination, economic activity and the surrounding natural environment, inspired by the polyphony of sounds originating from the anthropological and the biological realms.

The Head, 2007

35 mm film footage transferred to video (4:3)

Colour and black & white, sound, Russian and German spoken, English subtitles

Duration 12 min 14 sec

As my initial proposal to transport the original Karl Marx monument from the city of Chemnitz to the city of Münster for the duration of the *skulptur projekte münster 07* exhibition was not possible, I did continue working on the project with the intention to present physical work on this subject at the exhibition. My aim was to create a documentary film based on existing (film and photo) materials available in archives in Germany featuring the process of creating the Karl Marx monument, as well as the transformation of the physical space of a city into a significant, even exemplary, public monument of the Soviet period.

The film *The Head* is edited out of existing footage and photo material from the 60's and 70's featuring the process of creation of the largest head (portrait) monument on the continent modelled by sculptor Lev Yefimovitch Kerbel. This monument to Karl

Marx was erected in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz) in 1971. All the used materials for this film were produced by official GDR Television for the purpose of information and propaganda. It documents a unique process in its scope and intentions which could be understood as anachronistic, or sharply contradicting with current aesthetics of public spaces in most European cities.



Revisiting Solaris, 2007

35 mm film transferred to video (16:9)

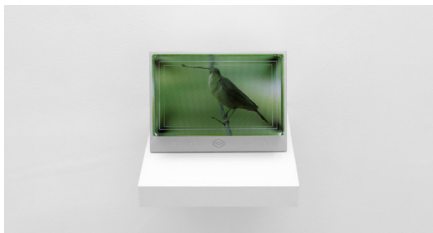
Colour, sound, Lithuanian spoken, English subtitles

Duration 18 min

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. 'I 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 psychological 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 Mykalojus Konstantinas 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.



The Fifer, 2019

Installation composed of holographic film with stereo sound, two photographs black & white (framed), bronze cast object. Dimensions variable

The Fifer installation is made up of minimal and simple elements that take the form of a holographic video, a sculpture of a flute and two framed black & white photographs and also a melody emitted through two special speakers. The flute is presented in its essence - or as its ghost - as it is proposed as a bronze fusion of its interior and displayed on a shelf with the four pieces that make it up in sequence. The holographic screen, on the other hand, allows the manifestation of the volumetric image of a nightingale, which flies in and out of our field of vision. This digital bird reproduces the rhythms and melodies of nightingales in nature, however, mixing with the natural sounds imitated by a flute. The dialogue between natural and artificial, between copy and original intertwine seamlessly. The same tension is also staged by the two photographs on display, one of which is an archive piece from the 1920s, the other a digital reconstruction of the simulation of the scene seen from the outside, that is, from outside the window.

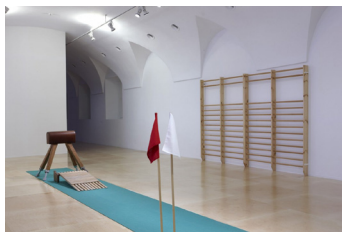


The Dud Effect, 2008

16 mm film transferred to video (4:3)
Colour and black & white
Sound, Russian spoken and English subtitles
Duration 15 min 40 sec

Abandoned Soviet nuclear rocket launch bases form the subject of this film. There is a base like this here in Lithuania closed down back in 1977, but the underground catacomb structure is still impressive by its scale and scope. I have found a few people who did serve in such a base and who provided me with all technical and particular information on the way it was functioning. My basic idea is to create a film in which the scenario would be a shot of such a rocket from the site in Lithuania. Fortunately, such a

thing never happened during the Cold War era, but with the new political atmosphere between West and East (including Russia), the horror - which we thought was gone - of a possible strategic nuclear weapons conflict is rising from the past. The other source of inspiration for this theme is the outstanding film by Peter Watkins, *The War Game*. I do not want to comment extensively on this film, but the fact that such a film appeared in 1965 shows the individual and collective concern about the danger of nuclear weapon competition that existed in the UK back in the 1960s. Unfortunately, such a concern has never sprouted in the former Eastern Bloc. I am afraid there is much less will to understand the deadly potential of weapons of mass destruction, which are still available today. My basic scenario for this work is to (re)create a shot of an R-14 rocket launch on the site. I am not using animation or 3D technologies to illustrate such an act. It is still more about filming this rather large territory of nature (with the remains of the base) as well as the structure of the catacombs, with the intention of conveying a psychological perception of consternation in the face of such a possible act and its outcome. In addition, I am using some extra found footage from the 1970s 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 launch an attack, taken during practical training at an identical site used for the film. To recreate the «launch,» I used the very modest media of film collage (more like a suggestion), including the black-and-white photo shots and a soundtrack of commands in Russian. I actually met a Russian officer who still remembers them by heart.



Individual and Team Contest, 1995

Two flags, carpet (gymnastic mat), gymnastic «horse», jumping «bridge», gym ladders
Dimensions variables

The *Individual and Team Contest* is a site-specific installation. This work, first exhibited in 1995, consists of several attributes of the Soviet period used in physical education lessons. A gymnastic “horse”, a jumping “bridge”, a mattress on the floor are directly related to the physical tests that every child had to experience under the conditions of repressive pedagogy.

image : © Aurelien Mole ; gb agency, Paris



Matching the Tu-144, 2012

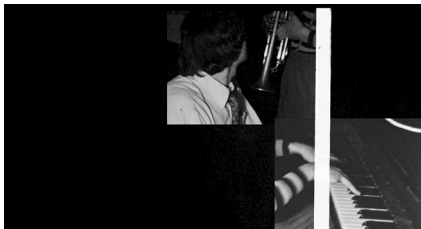
Sound piece

Duration 10 min

Matching the Tu-144 (a suite for noise and voice) is a sonic piece assembled out of recorded sounds in a domestic and everyday environment added with some ambience from old (analogue) sound libraries, used for mixing film soundtracks. The piece would start in a quietness, then there will be more and more sound layers coming on top of each other, until it will become noise matching a sound of Soviet supersonic jet Tu-144. After the peak of noise, the sound will go to quietness again, but with some very high sound distortion,

typical for overused (de-magnetised) reel to reel tapes [...]. Tu-144 was the Soviet version of Concorde, but bigger, faster and built a year earlier. For sure it was a technological achievement, much ahead of its time. But the airplane also was famous for intolerable sound, unbearable for humans. Partly it is why Tu-144 was never put into regular civil aviation service.

Image © Dario Lasagni



Stains and Scratches, 2017

Single channel 3D HD video (16:9)

Black and white, sound (ambient), English subtitles

Duration 8 min

Film reel and its material qualities are inseparable from the image it carries. Digitally scanned files are twofold in their nature: it exists both as a visual image and as the surface of a chemically developed analogue film.

The polarity between physical marks on the celluloid and photographic image that it supports was an inspiration to create a stereoscopic sculptural illusion, titled Stains and Scratches. A freshly pressed double LP of rock opera Jesus Christ Super Star got through to the underground scene of Vilnius. The score of the opera was re-written by ear upon hearing the record. The musical was staged at the Vilnius Art Institute on 25th of

December 1971. One more performance was played a few months later at the Engineering Institute. Both events were filmed on Super 8mm film.

Digitalisation of this silent black and white footage, and its transformation into 3D projection is an attempt to imagine a time of conflicting gestures. Essential political aspirations mix up with the raving youthful joy of self-expression in a period of informational regulation and general stillness.



Europa 54° 54' – 25° 19', 1997

16 mm film transferred to video (4:3)

Colour, sound, English spoken (no subtitles)

Duration 10 min

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.



Energy Lithuania, 2000

Super 8mm film transferred on to video (4:3)

Colour, sound, Lithuanian spoken, English subtitles

Duration 17 min

Instrumentalist, production-oriented society was an actual realisation of the avant-garde visions of the early 20th century. Lithuania in the second half of 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. That is why I have been looking for thematic and aesthetic impulses for my films in the reality of industrial society.

The film *Energy in 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 depend 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

Digital Film video (4:3)

Colour, sound (ambient)

Duration 8 min

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 networks. 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 preparing for and then celebrating the erection of the sculpture of Lenin. The concept underlying the work is not nostalgia for the olden days. In many Eastern European countries (which are going under an extreme new liberal development of their economies), there are quite large numbers of people who still long for certain socialist ideas, dreams or even utopias. As the reality of the Soviet Union is becoming alien and forgotten to the majority of Eastern Europeans, the ideas of socialism are resurfacing as a possible alternative to the extreme new liberalism. For the younger generation, communism is becoming something very exotic. In their mind, it definitely doesn't represent a state of terror versus the individual or the ideology of colonising entire nations. On the other hand, the recent past in the East is denied by the new politicians. Some of them (who launched their political careers before the changes of the 1990s) are becoming something akin to right-wing populists. Oftentimes, their rhetoric is rather reminiscent of something from the past, and there is something scary about even the vaguest possibility of repeating the not-so-distant past.



Into the Unknown, 2009

35 mm film found footage transferred to video (4:3)

Colour and Black & white, sound, English spoken
(no subtitles)

Duration 19 min 45 sec

The film is edited from material sourced from the E-TV archive, specifically footage from films produced by DEFA in the former-GDR. In the images there is everyday life of East Berliners documented over the course of 20 years (with a high proportion of footage from the 1970s and 1980s). The everyday scenes are of both

the city and countryside, close-ups of people when they are relaxing, and hard at work, and of big crowds at an official outdoor gathering. The interior views are of private and public spaces. The images are suggestive of the ordering of the people's lives. Individuals are squeezed into strict social systems. The images, originally made to promote socialist way of living, show us how «well balanced» the socialist lifestyle was.

The Role of a Lifetime, 2003

8 mm, Super 8 and 35 mm films transferred on digital film video (4:3)

Colour and Black & White, sound, English spoken (no subtitles)

Duration 16 min 49 sec

In Vilnius during the period between 2000 and 2002 my meetings with Peter Watkins and discussions about politics, cinema and mass media have ended with a recorded interview. It was edited into a 15-minute-long monologue, which became a voice over for a film featuring Mindaugas Lukošaitis' winter landscape drawings, heading a viewer towards an unusual theme park, a repository of statues from the Soviet era. Those drawings animate Watkins' temporary presence in Lithuania, which he chose for self-imposed exile from Britain. In combination, the scene Brighton shot during the 1960s and 1970s by an amateur film enthusiast Geoffrey Cook and never intended for public consumption, brings us back to England when Watkins' political views were formed. These nostalgic and sometimes elegiac film sequences provide a surprisingly opposite counterpoint to Watkins' commentary on the work of the documentary film director: The Role of a Lifetime raises questions about the ethical and social responsibilities of the artist and about the relationship between cinematic representation and historical record. This film emphasises the value of doubt and the impossibility of objectivity, while providing us with an intimate portrait of Britain's most distinguished and original filmmakers

4. The framework program will be launched on konschthal.lu

FREE GUIDED TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION every saturday at 3pm

(no registration needed)

25.10.2022 – 3pm

***Once the XXI Century*, Talk with Deimantas Narkevičius and
Christian Mosar, artistic director of Konschthal Esch.**

In english, free, no registration needed.

5. Press visuals & credits on request



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All images / works: Courtesy of the artist, gb agency, Paris and Gallery Maureen Paley, London.



Wailing Waters



Once in the XX Century



Once in the XX Century



The Dud Effect



ENERGY LITHUANIA

View(s) of the exhibition Deimantas Narkevičius *Anachronisms*,
Konschthal Esch, 2022 © photo: Christof Weber / Konschthal Esch



All press kits are available for download on konschthal.lu/presse

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Free admission

WED 11AM - 6PM

THU 11AM - 8PM

FRI/SAT/SUN 11AM - 6PM

MON/TUE closed