

M O S C O W

OLEG KULIK

CENTRAL HOUSE OF ARTISTS

The retrospective "Oleg Kulik: Chronicle. 1987-2007," sprawled around three floors of the Moscow Central House of Artists this past July, presented provocative videos, shocking photographs and exaggerated installations. Via his alter ego of a mad, biting dog, Kulik continues to attack the hypocrisy and foibles of contemporary Russian society.

The artist announces his dry wit in the installation *Deep into Russia*. The viewer is invited to experience Russia via an alternative route: ass-backwards, according to Kulik. By placing one's head into a sculptural representation of a cow's backside, the visitor is able to watch the artist's videos. In 1993, Kulik actually enacted this performance with an animal, by inserting his head into a cow's vagina. With this dire action he takes on the desire for Russian nationalism and the state of infinite disorder chosen by his countrymen.

The exhibition design was critical in creating a 'natural' environment. The walls and floors were covered by brown plastic garbage bags. The dim lights and scent of plastic from the walls rendered a softness and comfort that the artist likened to "a womb." However, the effect generated was different: the viewer wondered if he/she was inside a large trash bin, and would soon be tossed out with the rest of modern Russia's refuse.

Nature, or rather Kulik, has his revenge in the installation *Dog Hotel* (1999), where numerous video monitors transmitting a snarling and barking artist were put into cages. This installation harks back to *I Bite America and America Bites Me*, the artist's international breakout performance realized in 1997 at Deitch Projects, New York. Kulik's photographs *Architectural Extravagances* (2003), which show his well-groomed dog taking a disapproving piss on the new architectural designs of Moscow, are made to appraise the excess of today's society.

Yulia Tikhonova

T O R O N T O

KRISTAN HORTON

ART GALLERY

OF YORK UNIVERSITY

The most curious aspect of Kristan Horton's *Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove* is the number of times the artist claims to have seen Kubrick's movie: by his count, over 800. The figure is excessive, to the point that you are tempted to doubt it. I have probably seen the Reese Witherspoon comedy *Legally Blonde* 10 times. That's an estimate, and it was partly for

practical reasons: laziness and a dearth of home entertainment options. In Horton's case, the number of viewings may suggest fandom shading into fanaticism, or even something less comprehensible than that, but it is also simply in keeping with the conceptual rigor of his project.

A student of the film, Horton has been engaged in an ongoing process of reconstructing it. In each of the works 200 diptychs, a still from the movie is mirrored by its hand-fabricated facsimile. For each one, the artist begins by making compositions that break down the volumes of light and shadow in the Kubrick original. Working with objects close to hand in his apartment, the wit of the enterprise comes with his choices of substitutions: a fork for an airplane fuselage, a tight close-up on a scoop of vanilla ice cream for clouds, a plastic bag for the sky. The net effect splits the difference between Horton's artistic ingenuity and his humbling of the British filmmaker's cinematic artistry into a mere series of constructions. Pursuing this line of enquiry helps to place Horton's work within a larger trend that sees artists using the hand-made as a way to puncture the spell of illusionism. Considering that much of contemporary life is undergoing a process of fusion with the virtual world, it is a reassuring development, one that proves art's relevance as a corrective to tendencies in the wider culture.

Rosemary Heather

B E I J I N G

ZHU MING

CHINESE CONTEMPORARY

Playing "chicken" with stoic Chinese sang-froid, in each of his performances Zhu Ming stages an ontological gambit. This retrospective covering often-illicit performances from the mid 1990s through 2006 (Zhu was jailed for three months in 1994) starts with early actions reminiscent of Ana Mendieta, wherein Zhu had himself completely buried in soil or suds. More recently Zhu stuffed farm animals into a congregation of large bubbles. Beyond bringing to mind inhumane factory farm practices, a passive goat peering out blankly from a round death chamber recalls the poignant ending of the Russian film *My Life as a Dog*, when the narrator's pet is sent into space with no return ticket. Zhu's sealed-up gentle creatures defy civilized culture's pathological greed, savagery and flagrant exploitation of nature. Equally stirring are Zhu Ming's water-born bubble works. In a live performance, the splendor of taut, volumetric globes placidly gliding along swells of dense sea at first generate an ineffable suspension of time. Gradually however, disquiet over the precariousness of Zhu's state shakes up the reverie. Ultimately defenseless, naked primal-human Zhu is dependent on the caprice of dispassionate elements: wayward currents, predatory fish, diminishing air pressure, leaks, his own physical failures and even armed coast guard boats. In his existential solo, sitting on cold water with the skin-like, plastic-membrane



OLEG KULIK, *Alisa vs Lolita*, 2000. Installation view. Photo: Serge Golovach.



KRISTAN HORTON, *Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove*, 2003-06. Giclee print on archival paper, 28 x 76 cm.