

Process.
Case Studies at the Museum

Distinguishing Features
11 November – 11 December
2016
GULAG History State Museum
1-y Samotechniy Pereulok 9,
Building 1

Curated by:
Katerina Chuchalina
Anna Ilchenko
Maria Kramar

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V-A-C Foundation presents work by Hito Steyerl, Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman at the GULAG History State Museum in Moscow

This autumn V-A-C Foundation presents *Distinguishing Features*, a new exhibition at the GULAG History State Museum in Moscow as part of the ongoing programme *Process. Case Studies at the Museum*.

The programme looks at ideas around historical representation, from the capacity of objects and images to embody reality and the limitations of the documentary form, to the complexity surrounding the depiction of historic trauma and violence. It is divided into sections which focus on subjects including evidence, hearings, landscape, observation and monuments. The range of international contemporary works on display, alongside the series of talks and accompanying newspapers, raise questions and stimulate wider discussion.

Distinguishing Features (11 November - 11 December 2016) is the second exhibition in the programme and explores the forensic analysis of human remains and how this contributes to our understanding of war crimes or crimes against humanity. Keenan and Weizman's installation *Mengele's Skull* (2012) focuses on the forensic examination and identification of the remains of infamous Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele who drowned in Brazil in 1979. The authors demonstrate the shift that has taken place in such investigations, transitioning from the "era of the witness", where eyewitness testimony made a huge impact on common perceptions of violence, to an "era of forensics" where the material object became an effective instrument in the legal system. In Steyerl's two-channel video work *Leibniz' Skull* (2012), a pastor, an anatomist and an antiquarian bookseller discuss the authenticity of a cast of the skull of mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

The exhibition will feature documentation of mass execution sites that existed during World War II and times of political repression in Russia including Dubovka in the Voronezh region, Butovo Firing Range in Moscow, Mednoye in the Tver region and many others.

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Process. Case Studies at the Museum aims to highlight themes and intersections of expertise and interest between the art community and historians, archivists and other specialists working in this field and form the basis for an ongoing art and theory platform. It is part of V-A-C's long term programme to introduce contemporary art to non-art museums, as a way of dialoguing with the structure, exploring its identity and contents, and of encouraging many different audiences to engage with contemporary art.

Notes to Editors:

THOMAS KEENAN

Thomas Keenan is the Director of the Human Rights Project at Bard College, New York, where he teaches on media theory, literature and human rights.

HITO STEYERL

Hito Steyerl is an artist and media theoretician who holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Steyerl is currently a professor at the University of Arts Berlin (UdK Berlin).

EYAL WEIZMAN

Eyal Weizman is an artist, researcher, architect, founder of the Forensic Architecture project, and Professor of Visual Cultures and director of the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London.

V-A-C FOUNDATION is dedicated to the international presentation, production and development of Russian contemporary art – across a multitude of forms and within the framework of an invigorated and informed exhibition, education and publishing programme. Particularly important to the new generation of artists in Russia, V-A-C's focus is on practically supporting and expanding the platform for home-grown talent, giving artists the opportunity to experience, engage with and interrogate international cultural practices whilst developing an authentic and autonomous artistic language. It is deservedly considered as one of the key proponents in opening out contemporary Russian culture to the wider world, and practically supporting and developing

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emergent artists through finding new international platforms for exhibition and opportunities for commissions as well as ways of encouraging cross-cultural exchange – especially important in the current climate.

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GULAG History State Museum was founded in 2001 by Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, a well-known historian, writer and public figure, who himself survived 13 years in forced labor camps. The museum collection comprises a documentary archive, letters and memoirs by former GULAG prisoners, their personal belongings and a collection of artworks by former GULAG inmates and contemporary artists offering their own vision of the subject.

GULAG History State Museum's exhibition is dedicated to the history of the rise, development and decline of the Soviet labor camp system, an instrumental and integral part of the Soviet state machinery in the 1930s – 50s, and its political, administrative and economic role.

Exhibition Programme

23 October - 6 November 2016
Mikhail Tolmachev Pact of Silence (2016)
22 photographs and a 7-channel audio installation.

11 November – 11 December 2016
Distinguishing Features Hito Steyerl Leibniz' Skull (2012)
Video, 2-channel installation.

Thomas Keenan, Eyal Weizman. Mengele's Skull (2012).
Video, installation.

17 December 2016 – 13 January 2017
Rossella Biscotti The Trial
6-hour performance.

18 January – 11 March 2017
Urban Fauna Lab. New Leaders of Regional Development
(2014). Video installation.

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March 2017

David Gissen The Mound of Vendôme.
Lecture performance.

March – April 2017

Judy Radul World Rehearsal Court (2009).
Multi-channel video installation.

April 2017

Kristina Norman. A Monument to Please Everyone (2011).
Video.

Further details of the upcoming programme and artists'
biographies available upon request.