

PORTFOLIO

JEANNA KOLESOVA

My artistic practice, rooted in research, encompasses various time-based media—films, video and digital installations, performance lectures, web, and writings. Within my works, I identify and critically examine issues that permeate and shape our daily lives. I am particularly fascinated by how history, information, and images support particular narratives, impact perception, and imprint themselves on human bodies, behavior, memories, as well as natural landscapes and (non)biological agents.

Beneath my artistic approach lies my personal experience of the Soviet Union's collapse, its aftermath—pervasive violence and the resurgence of imperial and colonial discourses and actions. I reflect on socio-historical dynamics, such as the role of social networks in military conflicts, state violence, technologies of propaganda, manipulation of collective memories, formation of national narratives among others. I am keen on understanding how these dynamics interrelate and influence our perception of “true” and “false.” Although I once fell into the traps of a manipulated past and present, I escaped, yet remnants linger in my personality, compelling me to meticulously deconstruct their influence.

Intrigued by the multiplicity of realities, I believe the personal and political, as well as personal and collective, are inherently intertwined. In my works, I seek out gaps demonstrating that diverse perceptions, experiences, and memories can coexist and serve as a tool to demythologize manipulative narratives pushing for “unity” under a nationalist/imperial umbrella.



Dissolution

Dissolution is a collaborative multimedia performance interweaving queer, trans, Indigenous, disabled, and nonhuman perspectives to reimagine interdependence and challenge colonial narratives of memory.

Kolesova's contribution examines the entwined fates of land and people through the lens of the Soviet-era peat mining industry. It immerses the audience in the harsh realities of peat mining through the digital game *Torf Hero* and its evocative characters: the Swamp Spirit, a spectral entity embodying the destruction of wetlands and the force of resistance; the Indefatigable Woman, a relentless laborer scarred by industrial exploitation and unfulfilled dreams; and the Determined Man, a figure tethered to a crumbling past, unable to relinquish the remains of a dying industry. At the performance's core lies the connection between the Swamp Spirit and Juzgun, a resilient desert shrub—an intricate exchange of pain and survival, where destruction and renewal are inseparable. Together, these narratives—which the mainstream discourse often overlooks—confront environmental devastation, human endurance, and historical trauma, while daring to imagine paths toward regeneration.

Performance

90 min

EN Spoken Language, EN Subtitles

2024

in collaboration with Miriam Cochanski, Ziliä Quansurá,
Victoria Sarangova, Kira Shmyreva

Trailer:

 <https://vimeo.com/1041190278>

Excerpt 4 min:

 <https://vimeo.com/1041175285>

Excerpt 22 min:

 <https://vimeo.com/1041499260>



Dissolution
Performance Berliner Ringtheater
Berlin, 2024



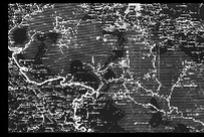
Dissolution
Performance Berliner Ringtheater
Berlin, 2024



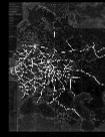




These particles in a forest are a swamp spirit



These scars began to appear in the 1870s when the first expedition arrived



Then, a long, thick railroad cutted the swamp spirit in two pieces



Electricity came last, along with the people who called themselves Bolsheviks

How does it feel to be infinitely useful and controllable?



The colonial system functions as an infrastructure for the relocation of resources



An animation shows a machine digging under a stump and uprooting it



Stumps are uprooted



Electric power plants were 'engaged in the electrical enlightenment of the masses'



The official title for women working in peat extraction was 'torfyanitsa'



During an 8-hour shift, one worker would carry up to 5 tons of peat on her shoulder



How many hours did she crawl in the peat sludge?



Peat fields are shrouded in smoke



Smoke, peat, water explode and mix together

How does it feel when people perceive you as nature's mistake?



Which dream led her to return season after season to the peat fields?

While working, she sang together with other girls on Tatar:

The spirits let the flame of anger burn underground, ensuring that the dry peat would never stop smoldering

Миннан калган киемнорне
Туганнарны кисеннәр.
Кызлар кайткан, анкама
Улән калды дисеннәр.

Let my remaining clothes
be worn by my relatives.
Girls, when you get back home,
please tell my mother
that I died on this land.



In 2016, the peat industry came back to my village



Since then, I haven't seen the swamp spirit

Let's skip it. Let's keep it.

Kolesova's part of lecture-performance traces the creation of Soviet-era peat extraction settlements, exploring their impact on community, identity, and the environment. It unfolds through the stories of a mysterious Swamp Spirit and the women who labored in the bogs. Marked by the scars of human intervention, the Spirit recalls how Soviet power reshaped the land for industry and energy, stripping it of its natural state. The torfushkas—female workers who once dreamed of earning money and moving to the city—were left with lifelong injuries and health issues from the grueling demands of peat work.

Through these intertwined voices, the lecture-performance reflects on Soviet ideals of progress and the drive to reshape both nature and people. It raises questions about spaces and communities built on exploitation, and whether they can ever truly heal.

Lecture-performance

60 min

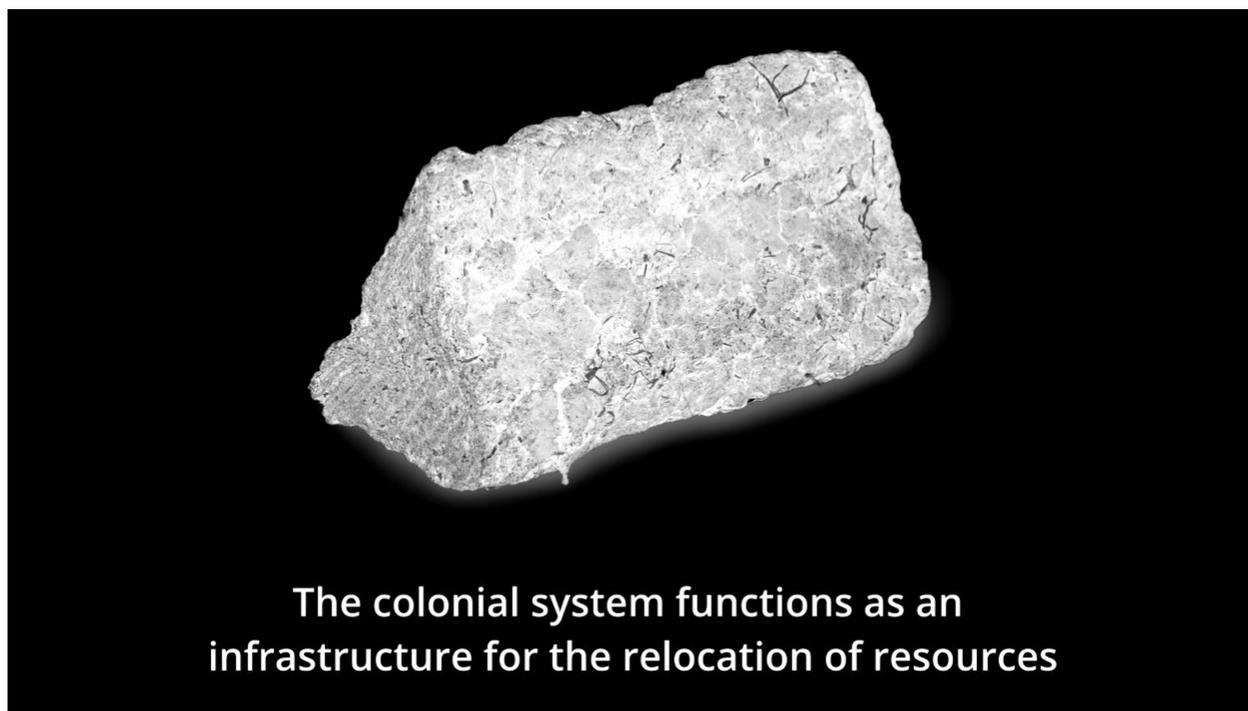
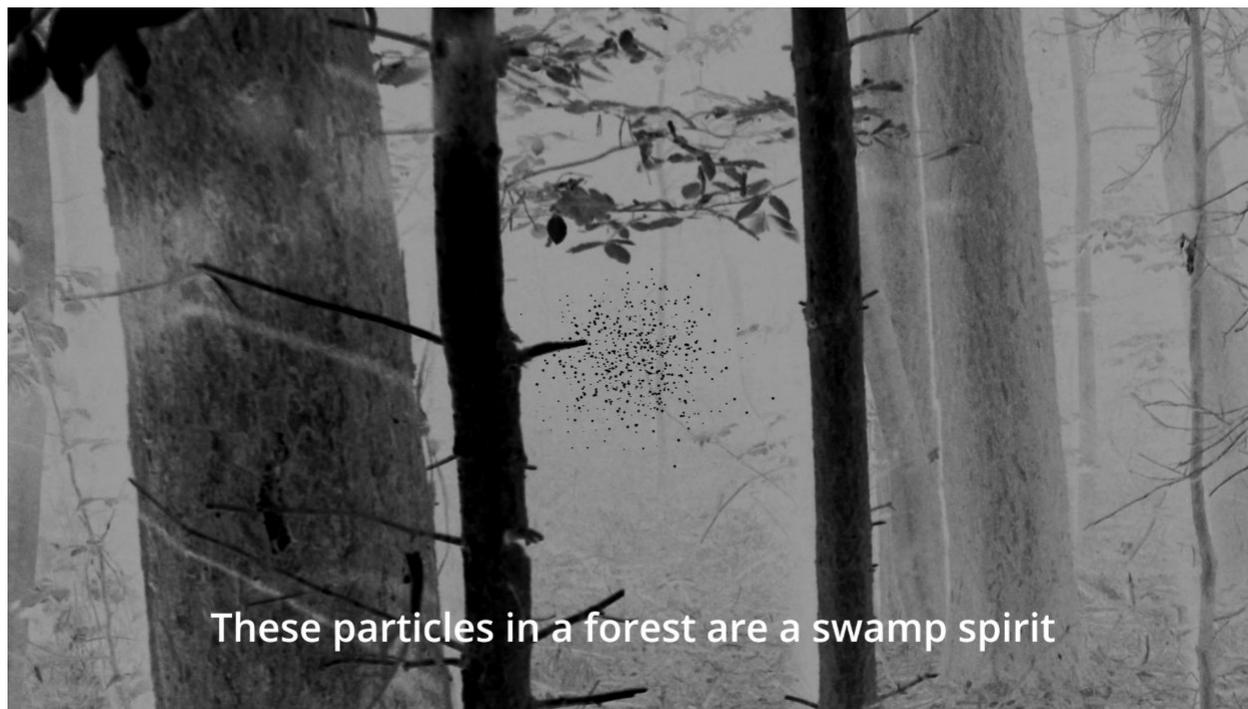
EN Spoken Language, EN Subtitles

2024

in collaboration with Victoria Sarangova, Kira Shmyreva



Let's skip it. Let's keep it.
Performance Berliner Ringtheater
Berlin, 2024



Memory Is an Animal Which Barks with Various Mouths

Memory is an Animal which Barks with Various Mouths touches on the topic of collective memory in Russia related to the Second World War and how it was manipulated to form national narratives. I identify personal experiences and memories that intersect with those of society to combine the individual and public spheres. Public commemoration, the aggressive patriotic upbringing of children and adolescents, the cult of state power, and the cult of victory form a war-oriented identity. In contrast, the individual memory about the Second World War among those who experienced it instead reflects on the violent, destructive, and tragic side. This discrepancy allows me to identify algorithms of violence and memory manipulation. By highlighting gaps between individual and collective memory one can demythologize the past.

My main question is: When remembering past events, can we find a loophole to break out of the nationalist narrative?

2-Channel Film

15 min

B&W, Sound, EN/DE Subtitles

Installation 500 × 400 cm

16 Hand-dyed Fabrics 250 × 80 cm

Hand Embroidery 300 × 80 cm

Carpets 200 × 140 cm

2023

Full version:

<https://vimeo.com/849729349>

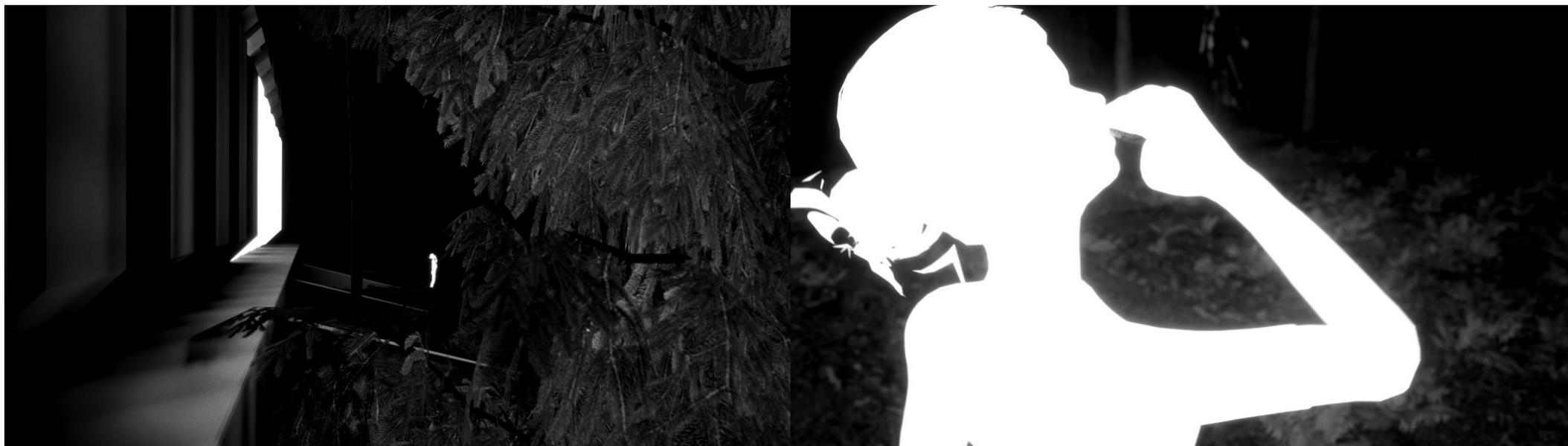
PW: Animal

Excerpt 5 min:

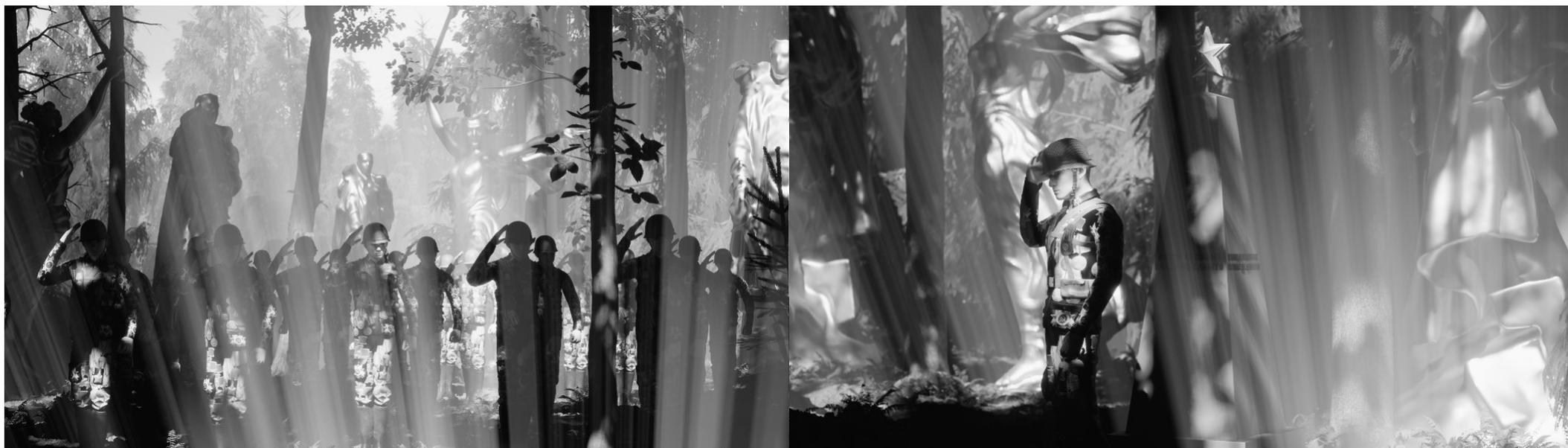
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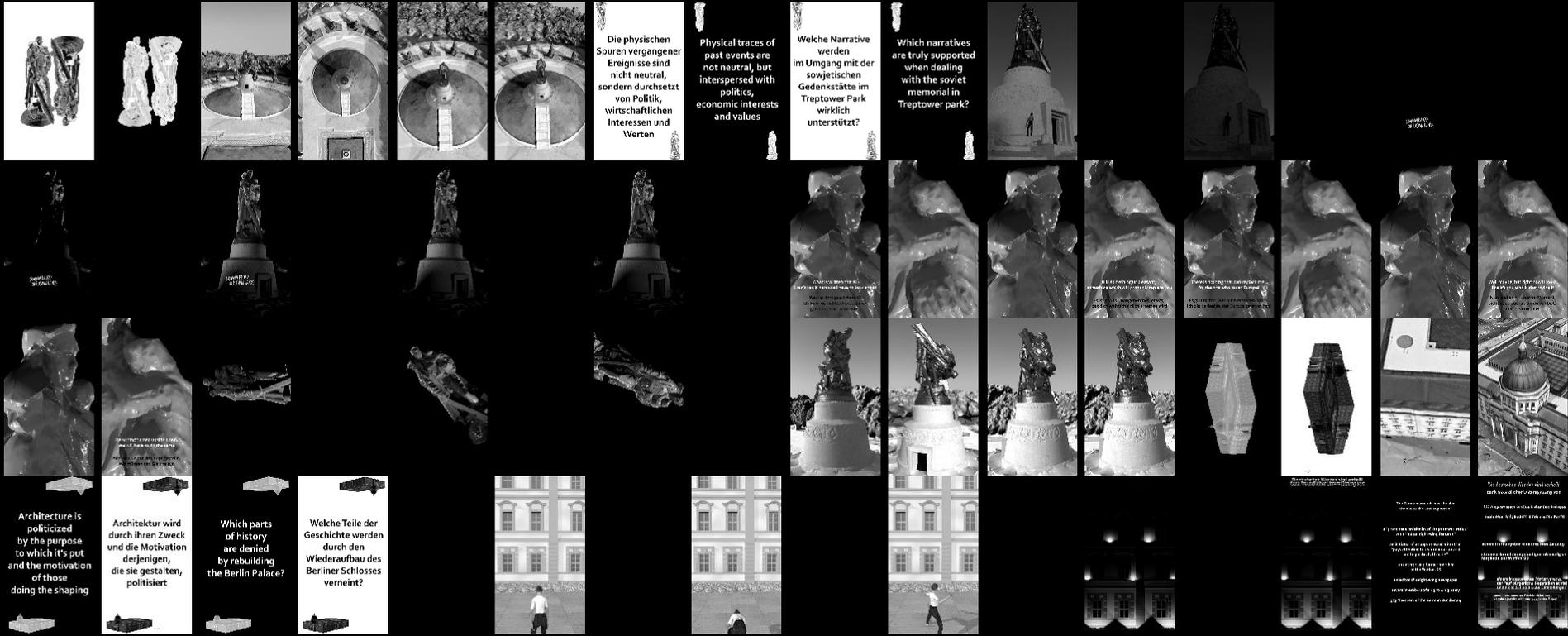
Memory Is an Animal Which Barks with Various Mouths
Installation view: Karl Hofer Scholarship Award
UdK Berlin, 2023



Memory Is an Animal Which Barks with Various Mouths
Film stills
15 min



Memory Is an Animal Which Barks with Various Mouths
Film stils
15 min



NARBE//SCAR

Two contrasting historical monuments in Berlin—the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park and the Humboldt Forum—highlight similar tactics of reshaping history. The narrative of WWII as a liberation from fascism is deeply embedded in Russian imperialism, with war memorials used to justify Russia’s ongoing claim to “fight fascism.” The presence and protection of these monuments in Germany benefit narratives that Russia leverages to support its actions, including the invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the demolition of the Palace of the Republic and reconstruction of the Prussian royal palace in Berlin reflects Germany’s shift toward reimagining its past. Calls from public figures to move beyond the “cult of guilt” and focus on Germany’s positive history are aligned with private investments from individuals linked to Nazi legacies or right-wing movements.

Narbe//Scar explores the need to rethink our relationship with built heritage, questioning the authority of historical gatekeepers and arguing that material representations of violent histories should evoke shame, not pride.

2-Channel Video

3D Animation

3 min

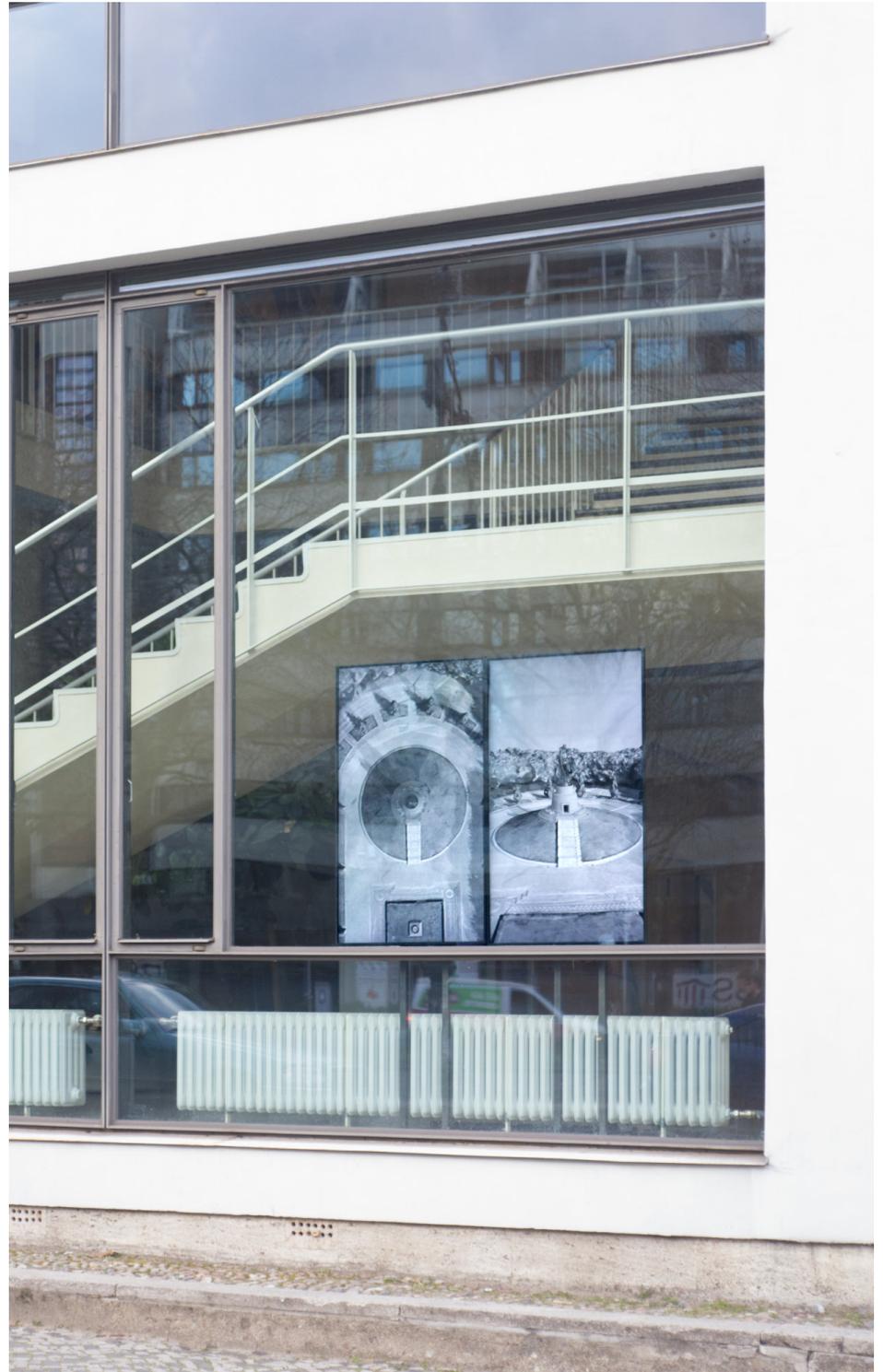
B&W, No Sound, EN/DE Subtitles

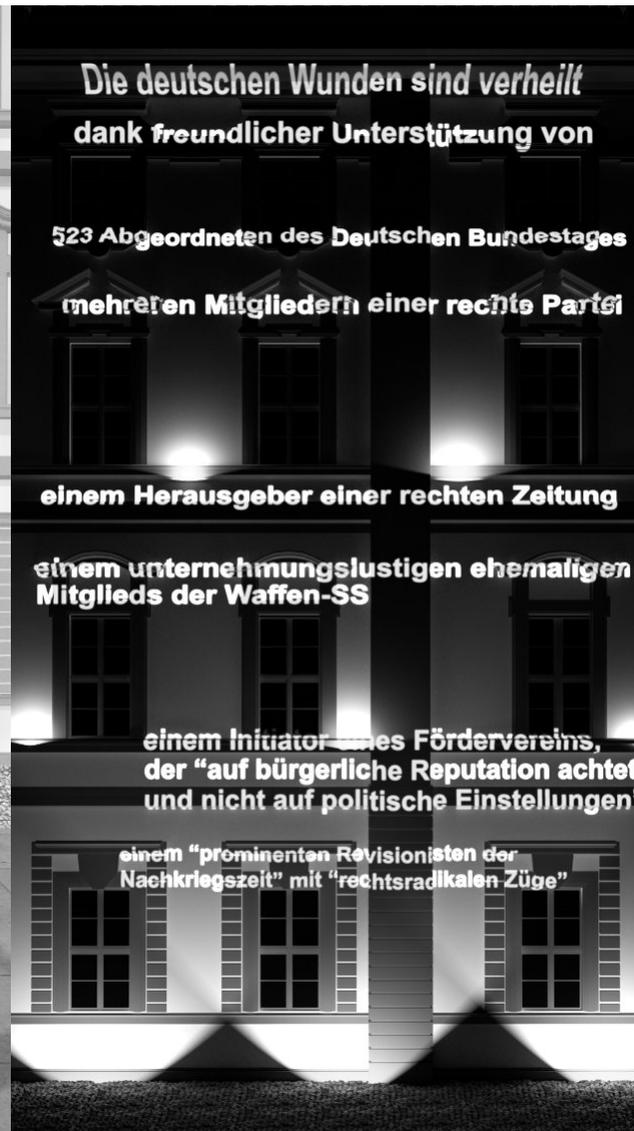
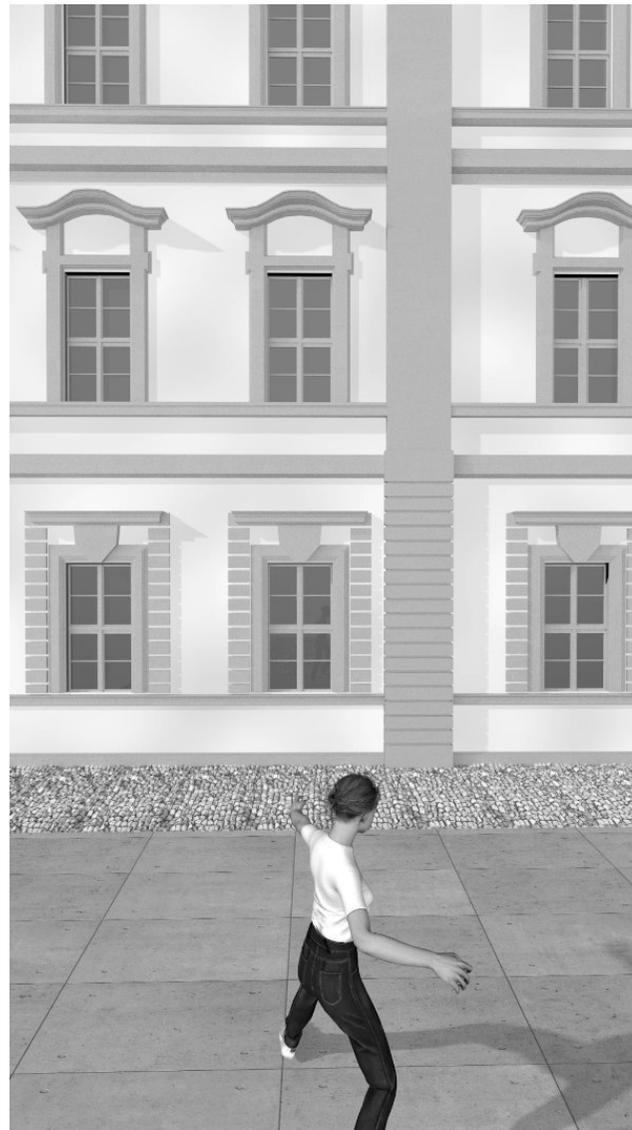
2023

Full version:

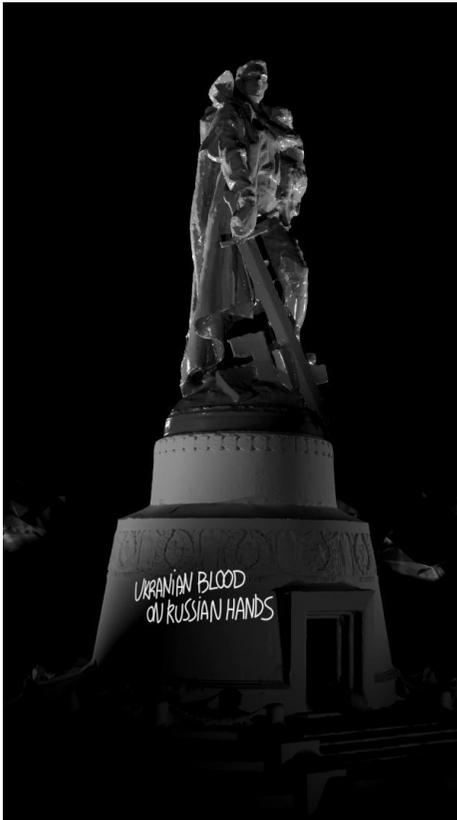
 <https://vimeo.com/812545660>

NARBE//SCAR
Installation view: European Month of Photography
EMOP Berlin, 2023
aka **disthene**





NARBE/SCAR
Video stills
3 min



Memory and War

Collective memory develops non-linearly, shaped by the present and the interests of social actors. Similarly, individual memory, influenced by personal and loved ones' experiences, shapes our perception of both the past and future.

The audio-visual performance *Memory and War* grew from research into how the Russian government manipulates WWII memory to create national myths. Over 23 years, Putin's regime has crafted a victorious nationalist narrative, making paramilitary courage and patriotism mainstream, while erasing the individual memory that holds the true weight of war. This manipulation promotes the idea that collective memory evolves linearly, reinforcing the regime's control over history.

What do we choose to remember? Can we alter the past or create future memories? Can individual memory influence collective memory? Using Russia as a case study, the mockumentary performance explores how collective memory is manipulated, using children's games of burying and excavating memories to demonstrate the non-linearity of individual memory.

Performative Video Lecture

20 min

Color, EN/DE Subtitles

2022

Full version, first edition:

 <https://vimeo.com/941598212>



Memory and War
Performative Video Lecture: Ballhaus OST
Berlin, 2022



Memory and War
Video still
20 min



Silver-indium alloy has a high reflection coefficient and was used for mirrors of air defense searchlights.

Eine Silber-Indium Legierung hat einen hohen Reflektionskoeffizienten und wurde für Spiegel und Luftabwehrsuchlichter genutzt.



This one is from April 2022. You see the Treptower Park monument with graffitied text on top of it which says "why?", "ukrainian blood on russian hands", "putin = stalin". Stones and bronze remembers both - celebrating people as well as graffiti.

Das hier ist vom April 2022. Auf das Denkmal hat jemand mit Graffiti geschrieben "why?", "ukrainian blood in russian hands", "putin = stalin." Stein und Bronze erinnern beides-feiernde Leute und Graffiti.

(IN)VISIBLE PROTEST



write your statement



This project was realized by Jeanna Kolesova — jeannakolesova.com

(In)visible Protest

There is one place in St. Petersburg without police—Kanonersky Island, a strip of land connected by a tunnel. This polluted island, home to a sewage treatment plant and a motorway above its few inhabitants, became a safe space to express civic positions. In March 2019, we gathered there for two hours, writing statements to the Russian government without fear of arrest. Though the protest remained invisible and brought no political changes, it marked a personal shift for some of us—two hours without fear.

Since 2016, Russia's political climate has grown increasingly repressive, with peaceful protesters facing police brutality and arrests. One person in this photo was detained for 10 days after a peaceful rally in January 2021.

I invited people from Russia to join an online rally, where they could write statements without fear of arrest. Participants sent one-sentence slogan, which appeared on monitors held by those in the photo, creating a space for (in)visible resistance.

Website

Installation

C-Print 110 × 75 cm

6 Screens

2021

Website:

 www.invisibleprotest.de



(In)visible Protest
Installation view: Nothing ever happened (yet)
Photography Museum, Berlin, 2021



(In)visible Protest
Installation view: Nothing ever happened (yet)
Photography Museum, Berlin, 2021



Parallel Universe

Is it possible to cope with boundless, uncontrollable fear? The fear that spans generations, fear for your life, mental health, or the future of loved ones. The fear of what hasn't yet happened but certainly could. I'm referring to the fear of a totalitarian state—a repressive system that crushes everything in its path. For me, it is the fear and powerlessness before the Russian state, its police, and judicial system. My attempts to withdraw, protest, or migrate have not eased this fear.

In *Parallel Universe*, I create an imaginary world where I confront this system by following my fears. It's a world where anything and nothing is possible, where my actions may be a link in a chain yet change nothing. This world reflects reality but is not reality, a space where I both can and cannot cope with fear and powerlessness. In this fictional space, I prepare myself to face the real violence of the system.

Video

3D Animation

9 min

Color, Sound, EN Subtitles

2021

Full version:

 <https://vimeo.com/663272136>

Excerpt 4 min:

 <https://vimeo.com/699036333>



Parallel Universe
Exhibition view: Conditions of a Necessity
Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, 2021



Parallel Universe
Video stills
9 min

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread for the account 'To all victims' (@To_all_victims). The thread consists of multiple tweets, each featuring a photograph of a group of people lying on the floor in a room, with some people appearing to be in a state of distress or death. The tweets are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with each tweet having its own header and interaction buttons (reply, retweet, like, share). The tweets include the following text:

- Tweet 1:** "Russia and U.S are playing Dominos in Syria God help this peoples..."
- Tweet 2:** "Why does the west care about internal wars in the middle east? Let them run their own country?"
- Tweet 3:** "Anyone here before we go to world war 3? The people who are effected by the war?"
- Tweet 4:** "Assad has slaughtered 300,000 Syrians and this loser thinks it's cool?"
- Tweet 5:** "people who die for nothing while others fill their pockets and laugh"
- Tweet 6:** "Help the ukrainians"
- Tweet 7:** "So many people have suffered horribly from the 'hostile environment'. Many have died."
- Tweet 8:** "This is a Proxy war between Iran & the Persian Gulf States."
- Tweet 9:** "What an amazing photo."

The account profile information is visible on the left side of the screenshot, including the name 'To all victims', the handle '@To_all_victims', and a bio that reads: "Texts are taken from youtube/twitter/fb from comments about war. A project by Joanna Keler." The account also shows a link to 'behance.net/joannakeler' and the date 'Joined May 2018'.

To All Victims

To all victims explores the expropriation of war through its constant circulation in global media. The overwhelming flow of images and data on military conflicts, shared via social media, creates a superficial sense of proximity to others' suffering. However, empathy often remains confined to the digital realm, manifesting through countless comments on posts about distant tragedies.

I invite viewers to question the power of images and reflect on the real-life powerlessness masked by "online activism." The installation features figures lying on the floor, a camera overhead, and a tablet displaying a Twitter feed. Participants can press a button to take a photo, which generates an automatic tweet using random comments from social media posts about military conflicts. Participants have the option to delete the post.

Installation

Eight Figures

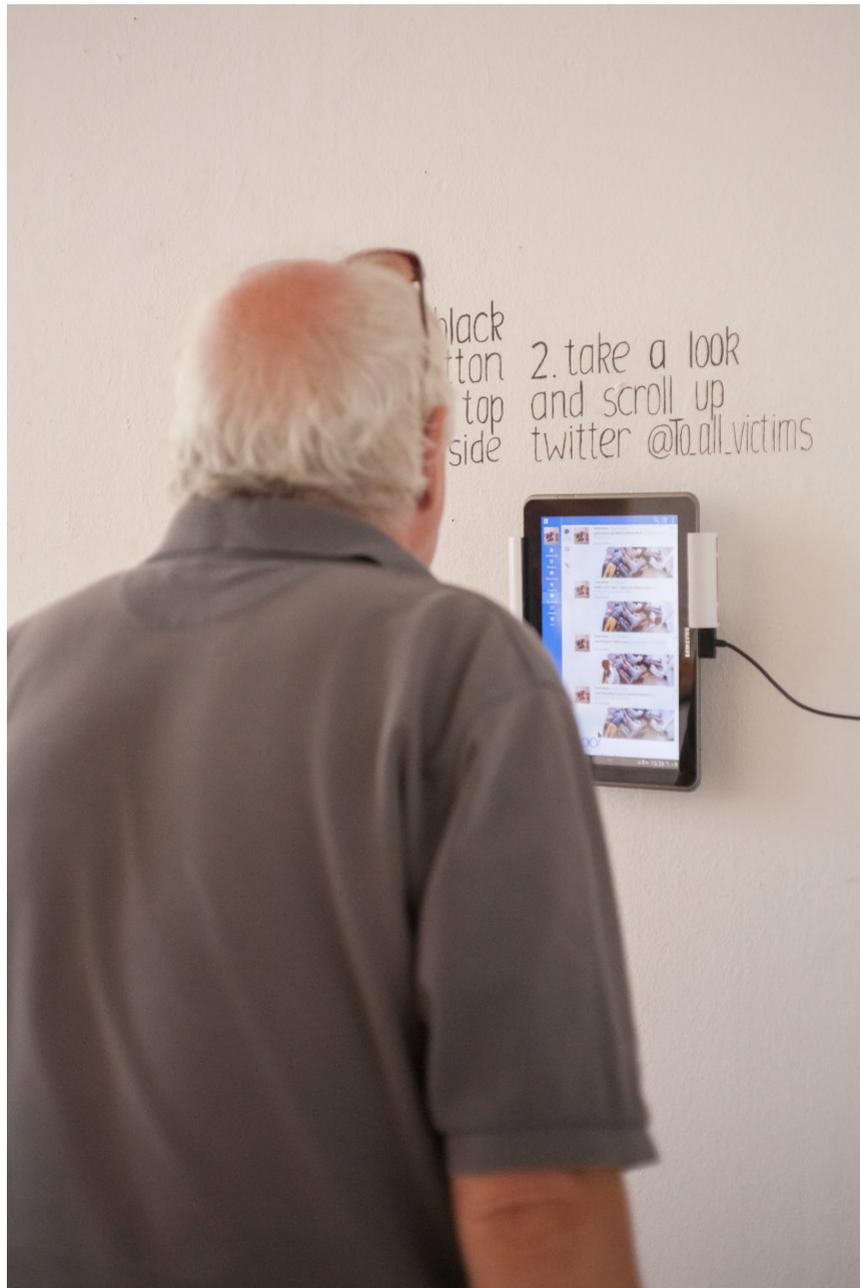
Camera

Tablet with Twitter Account

2018

To All Victims
Installation view: Rundgang
UdK, Berlin, 2018





To All Victims
Installation view: Rundgang
UdK, Berlin, 2018