

Злато руно
Zlato runo
Golden Fleece

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KIBLA | PORTAL

Alter Aegis / Bifurcation (with the assistance of Alexey Tabashov).
Center of Contemporary Art on Jakimanka street, Moscow. June 20, 1995.

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(design Dorijan Šiško)

Oleg Kulik: Golden Fleece

Evgenia Kudelina, Peter Tomaž Dobrila

Kulik, the “Russian dog”, as referred to by Renata Salecl, performance artist and actionist, who used to promote Primal Ecology and Zoophrenia, is a sculptor and painter today. Kulik paints the portrait of the Russian President Vladimir Putin in acrylic on stools, and the image of the “Leader” is assembled like a puzzle out of the most democratic and affordable device for seating. The sculpture of Vladimir Lenin is placed in the center of a merry-go-round on wheels tied all over with young pioneer’s scarves from the recent soviet past, and the position of the Leader of all the Workers of the World at the top of the never built temple of the Palace of the Soviets is given to the female nude with iron hair on her head.

What is Russia today, yesterday, and tomorrow – an empire, or a democracy, the aggressor, or the bastion of spirit, the home of the “Primal People”, or an assembly of individual loners, a superpower, or an out-of-the-way province? Artist Oleg Kulik opens his personal retrospective to offer a revision of Russia’s myths, of its history and art, and a new interpretation of his own earlier works.

Sculpture as an art form is no longer an act for Kulik. Sessions of collective sculpting in clay or plasticine turn into happenings: the presence of the artist does not downgrade the improvisations and the highly individual creativity of volunteering workshop participants. The central part of the *Golden Fleece* exhibition is a construction, an installation, a set of hundreds (approximately one thousand) human, or animalistic figures hanging like ornaments from a mesh, a body, a tree, and comprising a multicellular organism out of unicellular ones.

The viewers’ perspective is defined by distance: from afar they are facing a metallic monster, a ram, but as they approach, the »fleece« is exposed more and more through the details, the hanging star-like creatures, formed from unique wire structures and transformed by means of additional mass into little, human-like or animal-resembling figurines. The individually designed figures created in group sessions thus provide a more detailed insight: rather than the forest, we can now see the »trees«, the miniature sculptures, each a specific form and character, just like all living beings are made out of cells, and just like all of nature is interconnected in terms of smaller parts, molecules, atoms and subatomic entities, which all, without exception, testify to the presence of energy.

It is indeed the notion of energy that best defines and captures the artistic work of Oleg Kulik. The subatomic levels of his creations are connected through various stages; through every possible media they expose the reality, which consists of a part that is real, but which also draws on the past and the present, in order to establish – in relation to the imaginary, the speculative, the contemplative – a metaphysical future. A future of its own and that of the society as a whole. Singularity and multitude. Fur and pelt, we become *beings* once we are able to tell apart and bring together simplicity and complexity.

Oleg Kulik lets all media equally enter his realm of creation: he sculpts, paints, makes videos and films, photographs, installs, performs, (co)acts collectively, explains, clarifies, presents, guides... His ideas do the drawing, as he takes on large-format paintings in color and his fingers are twisting wire and processing plasticine into expressive sculptures, which captures energy. The complexity of his artistic work is distinct both in terms of scope and depth, and regardless of the material used it emanates a fierce intensity of his creativity. The concept is always a cause for, but not always the path to, content. Kulik’s context is an inclusive, global and originally local one, whereby he always uses the surrounding environment to interpret the broader reality.

As seen in his works from the 1990s, the performance documentations and the photographs, he really likes animals. And animals like him. This love is, of course, expressed in different ways, it is an elevated and rapturous love, playful and reciprocal, physical and manifestative. He becomes an equal among equals, one among his kind, fellow to »species«, an animal among animals. Primordial and primal, and distinctly so. Bodily and physical. Straightforward in art, and sophisticated in assembling and dismantling. Human and alive. Someone, from whom the golden fleece has been taken and is still searching for it, so he can wear it.

The golden fleece, which in Greek mythology represents the fleece of the winged ram of Chrysomallos, is also associated with Slovenia. Before the Trojan War, Jason and the Argonauts travelled to the island of Colchis, where the golden fleece was held, to steal it from King Aetes. Jason had to accomplish this task in order to become king of Thessaloniki. Argonauts – according to Pliny – sail into the river Danube and continue along the Sava and Ljubljana. In the Ljubljana marshland, Jason defeats the dragon. They then transfer the ship

across dry land to the Adriatic Sea and continue their journey to Greece.

Thus, through images of recent history, contemporary politics and art, Kulik's Russia is materialized, or the *Eastern neighbor of the Enlightened West*. The collective and the individual, the ornament of the mass and the will for power, are presented in several variants of combinations and interactions: the President, compiled from a thousand all-seeing eyes, Lenin, surrounded by a crowd of piled up heads, the golden fleece taken from the winged Ram, made from thousands of figures – the art works invite every visitor to become a part of the process, to ponder upon the latest issues of politics, history and art. Platform-frames of Kulik's new sculptures become recognizable objects: the merry-go-round, the mausoleum, the ram, and the historical figures as citations, visualize the role of a "person of no consequence" in the government machine, and question the very idea of a "monument" to the past, to great ideas and crimes. The artist's life is revealed through a documentation of his main performances: Kulik as a dog and a bird, a preacher and a devil with horns, explores the boundaries of the human and of the socially acceptable. Boxes-rooms with photos and videos are complemented with structures of the exhibition space and the environment. In the new sculptures of Oleg Kulik the dog-man is transformed into the Diogenes of Antiquity, while Leda is curled up with some Chinese dragon, rather than a swan. The personal mythology of the artist, his unique *magic historicism*, manifests a new turn in the spiral of Kulik's biography – a project of materializing actions and performances in *living paintings* with eyes and *living sculptures*, collective and individual(ized), entirely material and ultimately corporeal, momentary and spiritually stouthearted.

As part of an ambiance installation, Kulik has invited Ruben Östlund and his famous film *The Square* (2017; Cannes Golden Palm and European Film Academy Awards for Best Film, Comedy, Director, Screenplay, Actor and Set Design; Oscar Nominee for Best Foreign Language Film). In a provocative satire, the Swedish director refers to Kulik's performance *I Am A Beast for You* (С вами я зверь! at the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow, 27 June, 1995). The parallels are obvious. From action (Kulik) to provoc-a(c)tion (Östlund), reality and performance on one hand, and cinematic »reality« and staged »transformation« on the other. Being and depicting. Reciprocity is inevitable.

Kulik himself also made a film while spending several months in Mongolia, to where he has traveled many

times. He created a frank documentary about the life of the Mongolian people. He spent a lot of time there admiring nature as it passes through the seasons, and contemplating. Before and after that, the road has led him everywhere: the most notorious is his dog visit, the performance *I Bite America and America Bites Me* (1997) in the USA with a reference to Joseph Beuys' performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974). He has performed many variants of this performance around the world, as well as many others, exhibiting at the same time, participating in the Venice Biennale several times, meditating and withdrawing from the public and thinking about new projects.

The works of Oleg Kulik emphasize a domestic, Soviet and Russian traditional iconography, and his imagery is clearly recognizable and full of symbolism, which from an artistic standpoint structures the imaginary and establishes the social context as a link between various relationships: human (in the sense of each person), interpersonal (in the sense of all people) and mutual (in terms of different groups) and (all of) our own relationships related to secular and religious authority, ideologies and myths, life and death. In doing so, Kulik's artistry is rooted in the interpersonal (in the sense of each person) and the intimate (in the sense of the artist and the people close to him), which he externalizes in centers of his own ecosystem (in the broadest sense of the word), which (upgraded through the typical, expressive views of the surroundings) he assembles into a new veduta of collective consciousness, exposing the collective unconscious and the personal, authorial. To comprehend his expressive richness, personal readings of his works and knowledge of art history, history, the Soviet Union, Russia and the world, are inevitable.

Oleg Kulik's art is rapturous in the most straightforward sense of the word, as well as in all the metaphors it triggers, although we cannot, by any means, refer to him as a metaphorical artist, but rather as a realist – for whatever exactly that means – and therefore a symbolist, impressionist, constructivist, suprematist, expressionist, dadaist, futurist, actionist, avant-gardist par excellence; of course, primarily a realist, but still, the easiest way of referring to him is by his first and last name. We rarely come across such a unique and extraordinary artist, but even less often we can see him in moments of creative bliss, or have the chance to showcase (watch, hear, smell and feel) his oeuvre in its striking, primordial and natural entirety.

Translation and proofreading by Helena Fošnar

Oleg Kulik (1961, Kiev, Ukraine) graduated from the Kiev Art School in 1979 and was later awarded a Pollock-Krasner Foundation fellowship (1990) and a scholarship by the Berlin Senate in (1995). Apart from numerous international awards, Kulik was awarded with the medal "The Worthy" by the Russian Art Academy. He lives and works in Moscow. At the Venice Biennale he has represented Russia (where he lives), Ukraine (where he was born), and Montenegro.

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9 August–7 September 2019
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The exhibition will be showing until 7 September 2019.



Creative Europe

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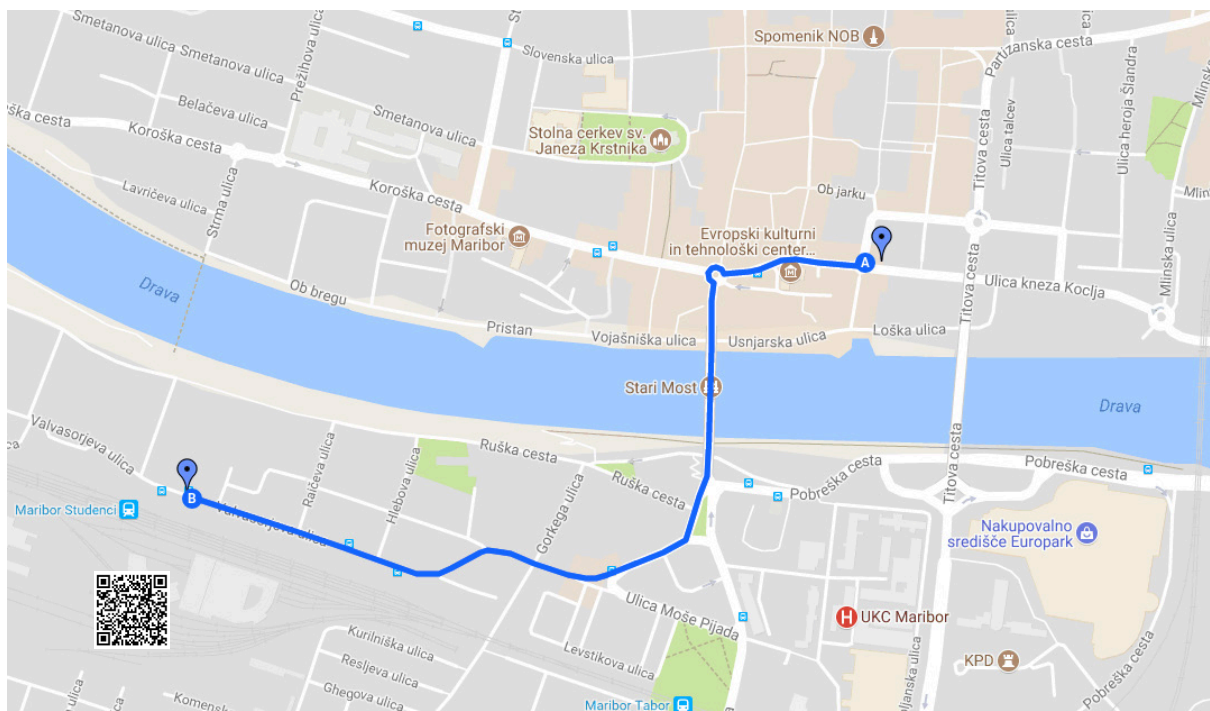
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