



## Tolia Astakhishvili's Eerie Ostalgia

At Felix Gaudlitz, the artist's installation-cum-exhibition blurs the line between display and artwork

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The theme of this year's Curated By – the cross-city curatorial project that takes place in Vienna each September – is 'kelet'. The Hungarian word for 'east', it references both the current war in Ukraine, which lies to the east of Vienna, and the influence of avantgarde Hungarian journal *Nyugat* (West, 1908–41). Organized by Georgian artist Tolia Astakhishvili, the group show 'I am the secret meat' at Felix Gaudlitz is the most evocative interpretation of the theme, creating an eerie Tarkovskyan atmosphere that hints of isolation and abandonment.



'I am the secret meat', installation view, Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna. Courtesy: the artists and Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna

At the heart of the show is an intervention by Astakhishvili – part of the room-sized installation *Windows, ways, doors, holes* (2022) – in which the glass and frame of the gallery's east-facing window have been removed to leave an abyss-like rectangle, opening the space to the elements. This single natural light source wanly illuminates a cluster of nine small, silver-gelatin prints by Hervé Guibert hung salon-style on one wall. Aligning Eros with Thanatos, many of the images, such as *Musée Grévin, Paris* (1977–78), depict disembodied wax feet, cropped heads and headless sculptural bodies from the eponymous French museum. Guibert's voyeuristic look behind the scenes of the institution seemingly reveals a private, erotic obsession. Here, memory is presented as something uncanny: a wax head wrapped in plastic and left on a shelf.



Hervé Guibert, *Musée Grévin, Paris, 1978*, Installation view. Courtesy: the estate of Hervé Guibert and Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna

Behind the gallery desk, a floor-to-ceiling love poem by Nat Marcus is fixed to the wall, addressing an object of affection that could be a person or embody the *ostalgia* (nostalgia for life in Communist East Germany) of a country no longer accessible (*Green Poem*, 2022). Windows are smeared with brown dirt, as if caked in years of dust. Small delicate drawings by Astakhishvili are scrawled into their surfaces, depicting delicate and, at times, demonic figurative elements (*I am the secret meat*, 2022). The final window of the gallery is walled up: another contribution by Astakhishvili, entitled *My year of rest and relaxation* (2022) after Ottessa Moshfegh's 2018 novelistic ode to isolation. The lack of accompanying exhibition literature only serves to intensify the physical sensation of being cut off from the outside world.



Tolia Astakhishvili, *I am the secret meat*, 2022, reverse glass painting in plywood structure, metal handles, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Felix Gaudlitz, Austria

Astakhishvili's central installation resembles an abandoned apartment. A waste bin, small mirror and sink sit against a wall smeared with sludge-like grey. An old sink contains two small photographs: one of a knife and fire irons; the other of a cluster of chickens sitting on a country bench. A skeletal drawing of a building and spindly figures is pinned to the opposite wall. The last sentence from Marcus's poem is hidden high above a shelf on a wall: 'In light of events more like / events shot through, backlit'. Here, as with much of Astakhishvili's work, the line between display and artwork dissolves.



Tolia Astakhishvili, *Windows, ways, doors, holes* (detail), 2022, mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna

The only artificial light in the show is an exposed bulb that hangs above a black stool and a white table piled with 38 photocopies. *Untitled* (2022) by Simon Lässig brings together strange blurry crops of unclear physical actions or slabs of what is possibly animal meat with texts whose lines are crossed out in thick black ink, leaving sentences about childhood trauma, ideas of perception, fantasy and mimicry.

'To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept,' wrote Jacques Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (1994). There is a sensitivity to this exhibition's take on hauntology that fulfils Derrida's challenge. Rather than focus on the spectral as the constant return of consumption or capitalism, however, *I am the secret meat* is a ghostly maze of personal trauma and hidden memories.

*'I am the secret meat'* is on view at Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna, until 8 October.

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