

Une sensation contemporaine

Mathis Altmann
Laurence Bonvin
Miriam Cahn
Jérémy Chevalier
Nicolas Cilins
Sylvie Fleury
Fabrice Gygi
Alain Huck
Alevtina Kakhidze
Elisa Larvego
Jérôme Leuba
Sherrie Levine
Kateryna Lysovenko
Gianni Motti
Amy O'Neill
Alexander Odermatt
Mai-Thu Perret
Anne-Julie Raccoursier
Jean-Frédéric Schnyder
Hinrich Sachs
Anna Zvyagintseva

1 October – 3 December 2023

Exhibition curators : Claire Hoffmann and Olga Osadtschy

This exhibition has been produced as part of the Geneva Canton Contemporary Art Fund (FCAC) Bursary for the curation of an exhibition, and conceived with works from their collection.

ENGLISH

Inspired by Miriam Cahn's painting *Zeitgenössisches Gefühl* (2009), the exhibition explores the idea of a contemporary "feeling" through a selection of works from the collection of the Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain de Genève (FCAC) and new works by three Ukrainian artists.

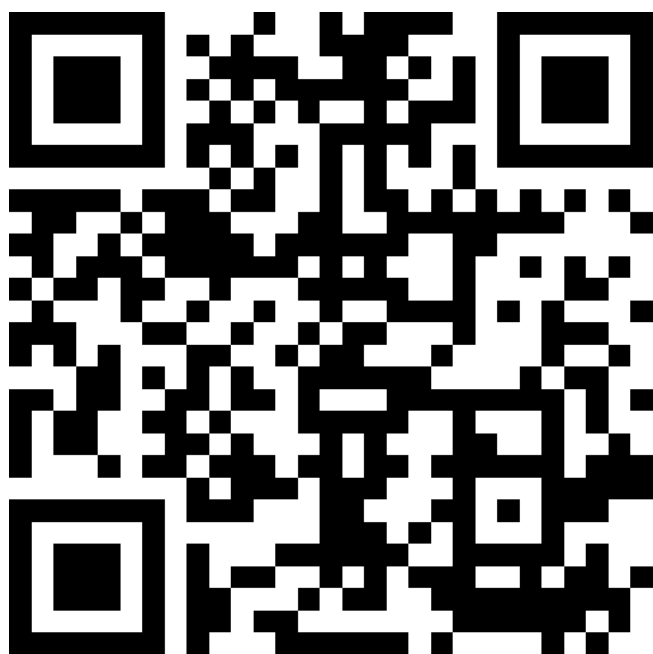
An immense, paradoxically interconnected sensation of isolation and the urgency of crises on a planetary scale that challenge all our hopes have put our view of contemporaneity to the test.

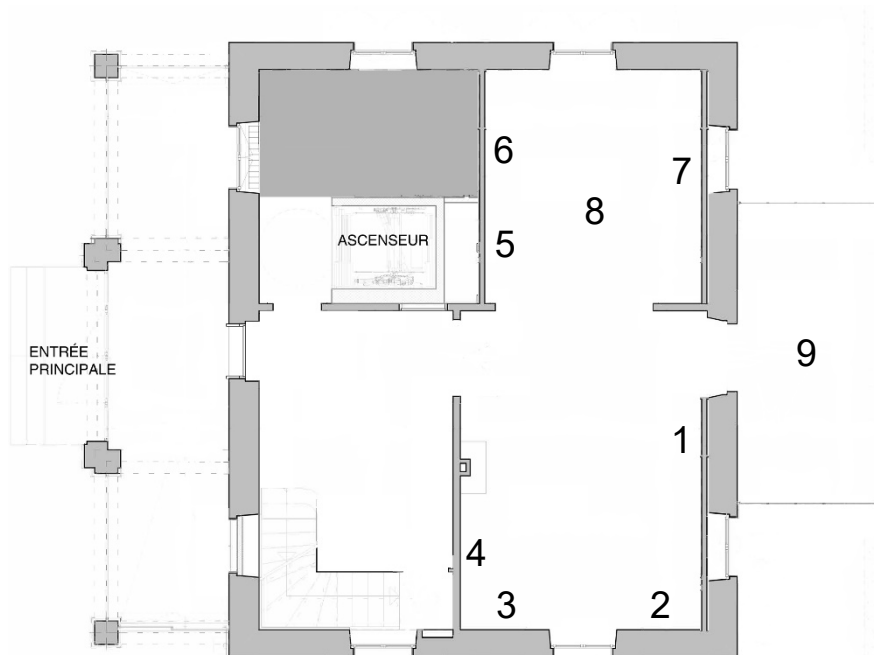
The result seems to be a fragile yet vibrant sense of reality. In this context, narrative and artistic appropriation can become a way to address the avalanche of information and misinformation that engulfs us. Thus, the main questions of the exhibition all revolve around how artists express themselves and their relationship to an age full of contradictions. The selected works oscillate between fact and fiction, narration and documentation, objectivity and poetic gaze.

The artists **Alevtina Kakhidze**, **Kateryna Lysovenko**, and **Anna Zvyagintseva** have been invited to use this exhibition as an open platform, a field for experimentation and expression, and an articulation of their lives and artistic practices disrupted by Russia's large-scale invasion in Ukraine in 2022. The works of the 18 artists selected from the FCAC collection and the three invited Ukrainian artists introduce multiple themes, which are structured into six chapters, emerging from the juxtaposition of the artworks and their mutual resonances: **(Re)writing history/ies**, **Traces of the real**, **Instruments of Violence**, **Nature / Culture**, **New Communities**, and **Making Monuments**.

Audio guide

Would you like to hear the artists speak about their works and their very individual “contemporary feeling”? The QR-code in this brochure as well as at the entrance of the exhibition, will direct you to a website with the artist’s and curators’ statements. The audio guide is web-based and you will not need to install an app. Due to the personal character of the questions we chose to not translate the statements. You will hear original recordings made for this exhibition.





Ground floor

Jérôme Leuba, *If you see something say something, battlefield#19*, 2005

1. Alain Huck, *Le Monde*, 3 novembre 2015, 2016, lithography on paper
2. Sherrie Levine, *Untitled (after Rodchenko: n° 9)*, 1987-1998, black and white photograph
3. Gianni Motti, *Assistant, G8 Genève (1)*, 2003, color photograph, C-Print
4. Gianni Motti, *Blitz 1*, 2003, C-Print on aluminum
5. Elisa Larvego, *Sans titre #3 (ZAD de Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France)*, *Série Chicanes*, 2015, inkjet print
6. Elisa Larvego, *Caravane, zone nord de la jungle de Calais* *Série Chemin des Dunes*, 2016, inkjet print
7. Laurence Bonvin, *On the Edges of Paradise*, 2005-2006, color photograph, Lambda C-Print
8. Anna Zvyaginsteva, *Unities*, 2012 (ongoing), sound installation
9. Anna Zvyaginsteva, *Схонок (The Nook)*, 2023, semi-transparent textile, pencil, charcoal

(Re)writing history/ies (I)

Knowing how easily facts can be revised, either to correct and make amends or to gloss over them in search of some “alternative truth”, we should be conscious of history as being constantly growing, changing, multi-layered and complex. Many battles around the state of affairs are being fought out in the arena of traditional mass media. (1) With his lithography *Le Monde*, 3. november 2015 (2016), **Alain Huck** presents a fragmented, kaleidoscopic view of the realm of news coverage. Just a few letters are enough to recognize the iconic logo of the newspaper, but the typeface seems to be dissolving – a nostalgic witness to an outdated notion of objectivity.

(2) **Sherrie Levine’s** photographic series merely replicates an original photographic series of the Russian and Soviet avant-gardist artist Alexander Rodchenko. Her technique of appropriation seems to be a way to play with a historic fact through repetition, inviting the viewer to cast another light and a new perspective on something of the past, potentially forgotten, and thus to bring it into the present again. Rodchenko used photography from the early 1930s onwards as a tool for social commentary, critically depicting the disparity between the idealized and lived Soviet experience. The images he made contrasted with Socialist Realism, which was declared the official style of art in the Soviet Union in 1934.

Traces of the real (I)

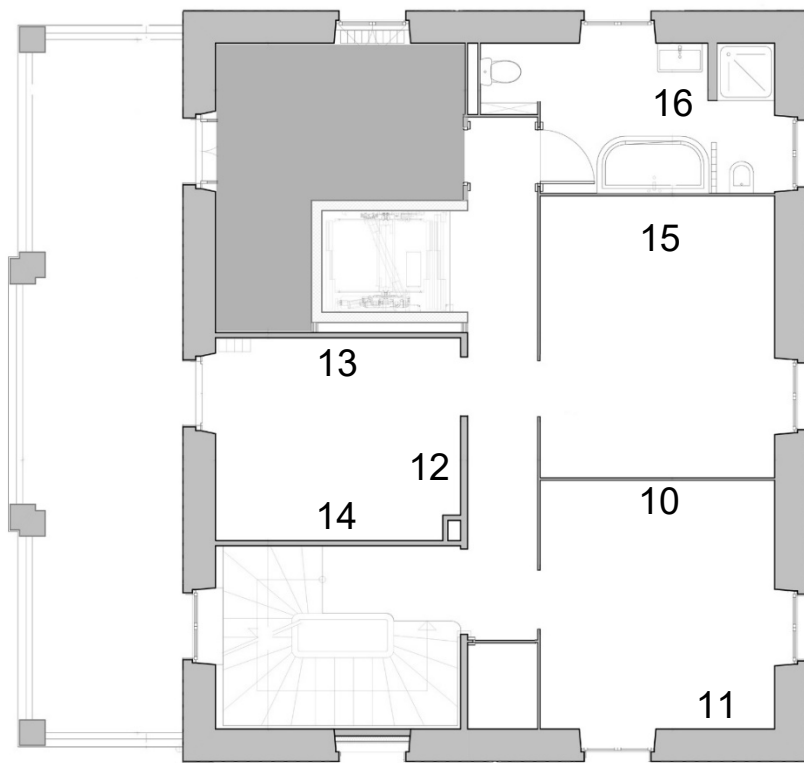
One leading thread of the exhibition is the question of how artists include, approach, register – or distort – the reality that surrounds us, from meticulous documentation to the construction of fictional narratives. The visual language and discursive principles of documentary photography constitute one such method of seeing, but also of making worlds. By

bringing people, places and objects into focus it allows parallel realities to emerge and to exist side by side – be it an idyllic gated community in Turkey (7, **Laurence Bonvin**), or an activist’s DIY housing (5 & 6, **Elisa Larvego**).

Elisa Larvego’s photographs document different communities in France, such as the huge camp of migrants hoping to pass to the UK from Calais (6), and an activist camp close to Nantes, protesting the construction of an airport (5). Over the nine years of existence before being dismantled, this community experimented with alternative economic systems, organized democratically, and created their own food supply and even currency.

In other cases, the aesthetics of the documentary is in fact used to depict fictitious and staged events, such as **Gianni Motti’s** “assistants” (3) infiltrating real activists’ movements as a sign of solidarity during the 28th G8 summit on June 1, 2003. Gianni Motti also invited soldiers of the US-Army to secure the first Prague Biennale, thus transforming the event into an exercise of control and observation (4).

Audible traces of the force of protest and unification are harnessed in **Anna Zvyagintseva’s** work *Unities*, voices of protest in Kyiv during the Revolution of Dignity emanate from a simple cooking pot – linking the private context and the public with the image of a “boiling” civilian anger (8). The artist’s new work, *Сховок (EN: The Nook)*, is made from semi-transparent fabric. The white gown, a hybrid between a shroud, a veil, and a wedding dress, is covered in scenes from the war in Ukraine. The drawings, traces of the artist’s hand rendered in white and grey on white, constitute a haunting object of mourning (9).



First floor

Jérôme Leuba, *If you see something say something, battlefield#19*, 2005

10. Sylvie Fleury, *Rays Guns*, 2005, two-color silkscreens on miricolor paper
11. Fabrice Gygi, *Sans titre*, 2009, lithograph on Zerkall paper
12. Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, *Kernkraftwerk Gösgen IX*, 1990, oil on canvas
13. Jérémy Chevalier, *Disques rayés (Champs)*, 2011, video, 6'34"
14. Amy O'Neill, *Chamonix, Mont-Blanc du Tacul, Glacier des Bossons*, 2009, charcoal and ink on paper
15. Mai-Thu Perret, *Display for a Celebration*, 2004, wood, glazed ceramics, silk, paper
16. Nicolas Cilins, *Le monde de Staline*, 2010-2013, video, 19'43"

Instruments of violence

Images of violence are omnipresent, especially when summoned by public fear mongers and endorsed in populist agendas. Their threat can come along in various appearances, from banal to glamorous. It can be **Jérôme Leuba's** sports bag left in a corner, which may trigger us according to the anti-terrorism-slogan "If you see something say something"; or a series of guns, in pop art inspired, glossy prints on bright, coloured backgrounds (10, **Sylvie Fleury**) or abstract black and white photograms of brass knuckles (11, **Fabrice Gygi**). The three artists work with tactics of abstraction and alienation. However, does the unusual depiction of instruments of violence help keep the threat in check? Can art be a way for a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies of violence employed by states or individuals? What happens when the violence unleashed by war, terror or natural catastrophes is greater than our capacity to process it with enough empathy to see the people behind the death tolls?

Nature / Culture

Long pitted against each other as opposites, nature and culture are woven together by discourse, political action, and minute everyday gestures. The climate crisis, which stands before us as the greatest threat of our time, is perhaps the extreme result of a way of thinking that (for centuries) has constructed nature as the opposition of culture, as "the other". Radically overcoming this supposed distinction will be one of our greatest missions. When **Amy O'Neill** draws the Glacier des Bossons (the group contains a total of 99 drawings), she exposes herself to the experience of "frozen" geological time (14). The series is a detailed and loving portrait of a natural phenomenon that seemed ageless and everlasting but that is now threatened by a man-made global catastrophe. Seriality and repetition make the

small-scale drawings appear monumental when considered all together.

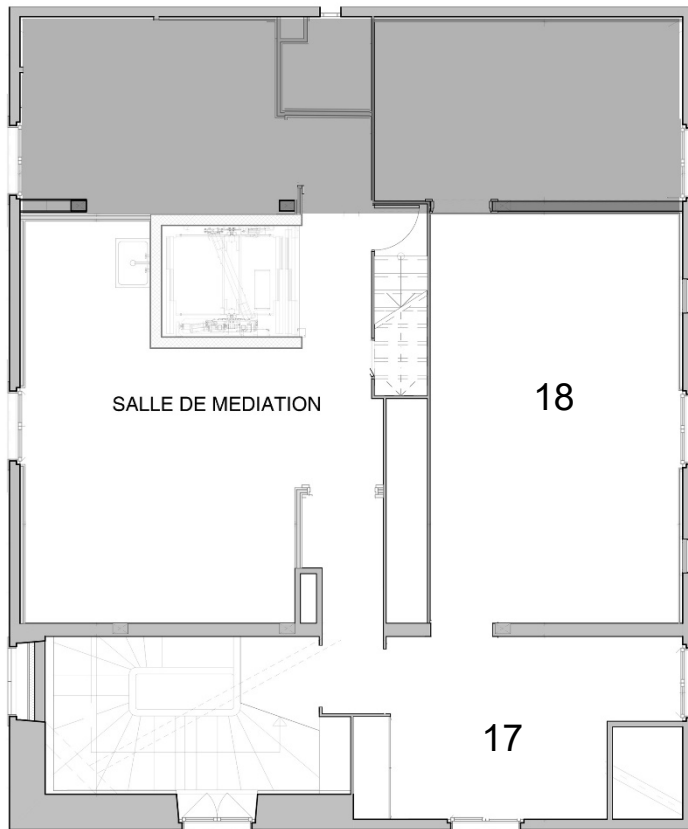
In his videos, *Disques rayés* (scratched records), **Jérémy Chevalier** plays with our expectations (13): The music video format, a staple of popular culture, is taken to absurd lengths by means of humor and alienation. The lone musician in a wheat field, playing the same sequence over and over again, concedes the role of the protagonist to the lush wheat field. Considering the importance of wheat and the colonial narrative of Ukraine as Europe's so-called "bread basket", this iconography takes on a new, unexpected relevance. **Jean-Frédéric Schnyder's** small scale painting showcases the exact same structure of a seemingly "natural" yet deeply artificial agricultural landscape (12); with its blue sky, yellow wheatfield and the darker strip of a forest. Amidst this scenery, the nuclear power plant and power poles stand prominently. It bundles together the unresolved dilemma between the threat of nuclear power and seemingly endless "clean" energy supply, becoming increasingly urgent in the contemporary crisis of energy and climate.

New Communities

In a fragmented societal structure, where extremist positions and populist tendencies draw the population apart, it becomes increasingly crucial to engage in acts of care, resistance and community building. **Mai-Thu Perret** has been working on a community project of this kind for years, her installation *Display for a Celebration* offers traces of a ritualistic celebratory moment enacted by a fictitious feminist group, living in the desert in autonomy and joy (15). Upon entering the installation, the spectators become part of this mysterious *Display for a Celebration*, an accomplice to those who left their traces behind and confidently proclaimed, that "THIS FIRE IS DAWN."

Making Monuments (I)

How do we speak about history? How do we record, celebrate or mourn it in public spaces? What are the (dis)functions of monuments, especially in view of new readings of historical events, and former heroes (and their statues) falling from grace. This exhibition questions the trope of commemoration and looks for reinterpretations of monument-making. In his video essay *Le Monde de Staline*, **Nicolas Cilins** gives insight into the Grūtas Park in Lithuania, which presents a series of toppled sculptures of soviet leaders dating from the occupation (16). The park itself, reminiscent of this historic period of occupation turns into an instrument of political propaganda.



Second floor

Jérôme Leuba, *If you see something say something, battlefield#19*, 2005

17. Alevtina Kakhidze, *Planted as Propagules*, 2023 (installation date), archival material, wood, 3D video tour and digitized files
18. Kateryna Lysovenko, *Three stories of one memorial*, 2023, installation, watercolour on paper, text, wood

(Re)writing history/ies (II)

Alevtina Kakhidze's artistic practise has always included preservation and archiving, a topic that has become more acute since the war in Ukraine cast the threat of wiping out her life's work. Instead of a conventional system of archiving her work in boxes, she has invited various researchers, curators, and peers to go through her archive and find joyful, unusual categories and associations in her important accumulation of documents, choosing the Swiss chard plant as a symbol for this organically evolving, multi-branched archive. For this exhibition, the artist has conceived a room for visitors to delve into her archive via a 3D tour of her studio accessible on the computer and a large selection of documents on display – ranging from artistic works to the everyday.

We kindly ask you not to touch or remove the original documents without assistance. Should you wish to look at the folders on the shelf, please contact the reception.

An explanation of the artist (original text on the wall):

Planted as Propagules (Alevtina Kakhidze)

Due to missile strikes launched from Russia and Belarus targeting the entire territory of Ukraine, my paper archive remains in danger. The archive includes some 10,000 paper documents, artefacts, and drawings, arranged in folders. I am not considering taking my archive to a peaceful country; I decided to stay and continue my artistic practice here, in Ukraine, and I need my archive to be where I work as an artist. The archive is my expanded memory, artistic vision is not possible without it. Looking for ways to prevent the worst-case scenario – the complete destruction of my archive – I borrowed the example of plants and took several documents from each folder so that they could be propagated like cuttings. If

necessary! This is the partial archive that I am taking to the West*. I call it *Planted*.

*Geneva, Villa Bernasconi, until December 3

Making Monuments (II)

With *Three stories of one memorial*, **Kateryna Lysovenko** reflects on the gruesome airstrike on the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theatre in Mariupol on March 16, 2022. Her installation of 13 drawings and a miniature monument in the form of a cube, explore the perception of historical events and the potential of artistic memorials to elicit empathy and compassion (18).

Please, find the translation of the texts in the frames below:

Three stories of one memorial (Kateryna Lysovenko)

Story 1, compiled from the words of survivors, published by the official media of the country that was attacked.

It was a war that came to the city by the sea. You could leave the city surrounded by invaders only at the risk of being shot or sent to a filtration camp, there were no green corridors. They were all trapped. Electricity, gas, water, food, medicine disappeared. Many houses, schools, both hospitals were destroyed. Those who lost a roof over their heads gathered in groups and looked for shelters. The theater was a repository. The theater was also a possible place of evacuation. They set up a field kitchen in the theater, helped each other, shared products. They used rainwater or technical water, food that could be found, sometimes something was brought by the defenders of the city, who were also surrounded. It was dangerous to look for food and water, they were fired upon if they went out into the open. They were targets everywhere. Those who survived told about collecting water from puddles,

about relatives who were shot while searching for food and water. Some never returned with water, some were brought to the theater injured. Without food, warmth, clean water and medicine, diseases began. Those who survived talked about the cries of sick children and the groans of the wounded. They hoped to survive and wrote huge words - CHILDREN around the theater, visible to the invaders in tanks and planes, they believed that children could not be targets. Those who survived talk about the noise from the planes nearby, the explosion, the collapse of the theater and the flames. They tell about crying and screaming, how they searched for relatives and survivors, how they fled from there because of shelling and because the flames were burning. Hundreds of dead remained under the rubble. They say: I heard the cry of the boy, and the father who was looking for him, I do not know if the father found the boy. I saw a human corpse. Everyone who was in the field kitchen died. Those who survived left there to look for safer places. Some died on the road, some vanished in filtration camps, some reached cities where people live, not die, where it is possible to prevent all people from becoming targets. Later, they made a memorial to all those who died.

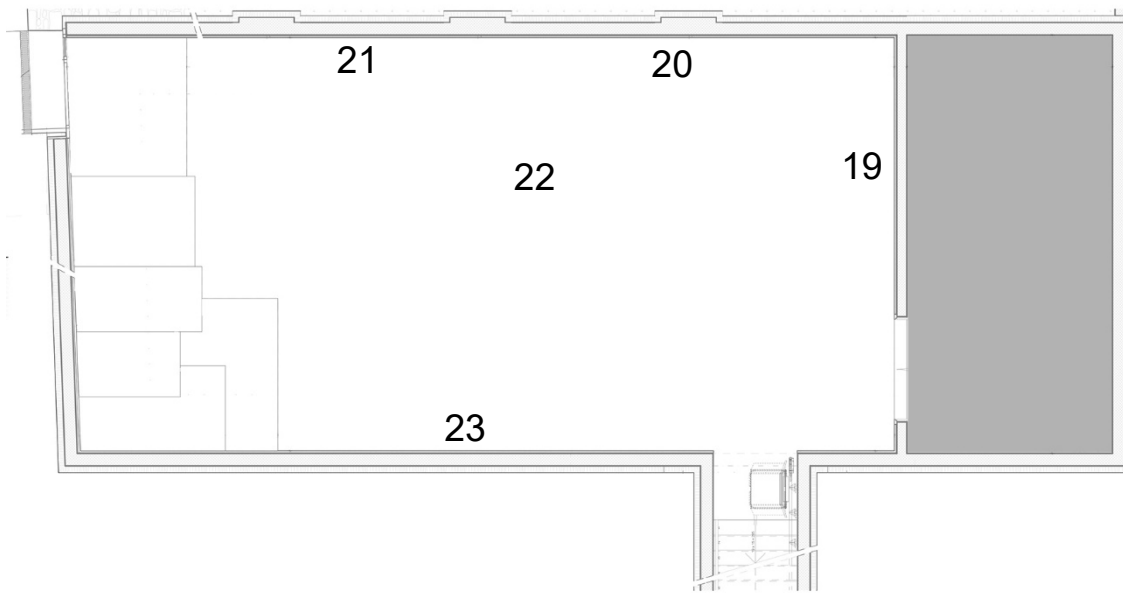
Story 2, from the words of the invaders, written for the general public by the official media of their country.

The Nazis took over our land. Puppets of NATO, they turned to the path of death. They forgot what a mother is, what a father is, and what is the mission of Slavic peoples and true Orthodox Christians. We must reclaim our historical heritage, cleanse the land of filth, save everyone we can and destroy all the guilty and the eternally lost. When we came to the city that our great-grandfathers once liberated, the Nazis tried to make all the civilians human shields. We didn't kill a single innocent person, only the Nazis were our targets. We learned that the bombed theater was the work of the Nazis. There were very few people hiding there, very small groups of people were captured on the

video of eyewitnesses. Maybe no one died then and the whole story is a fake of the Nazis to get more help from their allies and put us in a bad light. We don't kill civilians, everyone we destroy is a Nazi. It is not profitable for us to kill children and women, pretending to be criminals. We are not criminals, so we have not killed anyone. We will not turn a blind eye to fakes and hostile provocations. We erected a memorial in honor of a special military operation, our fallen heroes, innocently killed people who were used by the Nazis as human shields.

Story 3, in the words of the invaders, written a year after the capture of the city, in which crime is turned into a triumph und holiday.

It was a heroic year of the return of the city to the friendly family from which it was temporarily separated by hostile forces. The faces of the people saved from Western decay shine with happiness and satisfaction at the fulfillment of historical justice, every citizen knows that he is on the right side! The city is experiencing unprecedented prosperity and reconstruction, which our best architects and builders are working on. We will demolish the ruins of the theater and build a new, better theater in which our first artists will proudly perform. During the dismantling of the ruins of the theater and houses destroyed by the Nazis, no bodies of the dead were found, the statement about the death of hundreds of people, as we assumed, was a fake, Nazi soldiers were hiding there and perhaps several Nazis and Nazi henchmen died. Forward to new victories, the truth is with us!



Basement

Jérôme Leuba, *If you see something say something, battlefield#19*, 2005

19. Miriam Cahn, *Zeitgenössisches Gefühl*, 2009, oil on canvas
20. Alexander Odermatt, *Intimacy, Série System Research # 2*, 2006, C-print color photograph mounted on aluminum
21. Anne-Julie Raccoursier, *Remote Viewer 3*, 2007, color photograph, Lambda print mounted on aluminum
22. Mathis Altmann, *Untitled*, 2015, concrete, metal, wood, plastic, LED, paper
23. Hinrich Sachs, *Die Muttersprache (Bangla / Bangladesh, année inconnue)*, 1992; *Die Muttersprache (Chinois / République populaire de Chine, 1992-93)*, 1993; *Die Muttersprache (Aymara / Bolivie, année inconnue)*, 1992; *Die Muttersprache (Uygur / République populaire de Chine, année inconnue)*, 1993; *Die Muttersprache (Attié / Côte d'Ivoire, 1980)*, 1992; *Die Muttersprache (Igede / Nigeria, année inconnue)*, 1992; *Die Muttersprache (Français / France, 1982)*, 1992, watercolour on paper



Traces of the real (II)

Miriam Cahn's painting of a naked human figure, holding its hands in warning, defence or maybe to give a sign and reach out, its eyes wide open in observation, is an image of profound humanity, a fragility of existence which has given the exhibition its title: *Zeitgenössisches Gefühl*, a contemporary feeling (19). The force of this expressive painting and its title allowed to bring together these seemingly disparate artworks, all reactions and positioning to a certain aspect of the reality of today. On this floor, this encompasses **Hinrich Sachs'** meticulous visual research (23); the sharp and yet empathic documentary observation of meagre personal belongings of six rejected asylum seekers in a detention facility in Berlin Köpenick, kept in containers next to their beds (20, **Alexander Odermatt**); the absurdity of a neatly organized cemetery of discarded aircrafts in the desert (21, **Anne-Julie Raccoursier**); or the assemblage sculpture, as **Mathis Altmann's** accumulated abject relicts of civilization. He thereby creates a kind of microcosm of ruins, objects, which are opaque in terms of their function but loaded with memories of what used to be (22).

(Re)writing history/ies (III)

Schoolbooks are central to the debate on the (re)writing of history, in the wake of new editions being published by the educational department of the Russian Federation, revising the history of the Former Soviet Union. **Hinrich Sachs'** series of watercolour drawings, *Mother Tongue*, is an ongoing project and research into primary school books all over the world (23). Each drawing depicts the cover of a primer and herewith, an ideology of learning, reflective of national or ethnic identities.

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