

ASLAN
GOISUM

Selected Press

‘Chechen Artist Aslan Goisum To Be The First Recipient Of The AES+F Artist Residency Award’

AES+F, a four-person Russian artist collective, in collaboration with ISCP, the International Studio & Curatorial Program in New York City, has announced that artist Aslan Goisum will be the first recipient of the AES+F Artist Residency Award. The AES+F Artist Residency Award was created for emerging artists from the Russian Federation who are at a pivotal stage in their careers, in order to offer them career development opportunities that they would not normally have access to.

The AES+F Artist Residency Award is currently the only grant of its kind in the Russian Federation, and the first one to be organized by Russian artists.

Aslan Goisum will be in residence at ISCP for three months, from May through July, 2020. Goisum has become known for films, installations, and works on paper that articulate the collective and individual upheaval marking the North Caucasus history and analyzing the colonial legacy of the Russian Empire. Goisum is developing an oeuvre that feeds on, but also transforms and transcends, personal and collective memory. His works are poised between visual immediacy and social commentary, between the momentary and the monumental.

Evgeny Svyatsky, member of AES+F, comments, “It is difficult for artists from Russia to participate in cultural exchange programs in the United States, including important international residencies like ISCP. We want to improve their representation abroad, to support a new generation, and with this initiative hope to encourage other institutions and individuals to start programs of their own.”

He continues, “International experiences play a fundamental part in an artist’s professional development. We were lucky to have been in several art residencies, including one in New York. This experience was very helpful for us, and so we are happy that we can now help our young colleagues. We are very grateful to ISCP, as well as the members of the expert committee and jury, that they responded to and support our initiative. We hope that this award will facilitate the growth of the artist’s career as well as cultural exchange in general.”

Susan Hapgood, director of ISCP, adds, “Here at ISCP we look forward with great anticipation to this residency for

emerging artists from Russia, and express our gratitude to AES+F for their sponsorship of this new initiative. With over 100 artists and curators in residence coming from all over the world annually, participating in our program for periods ranging from several months up to a year, ISCP offers an immersive community of diverse contemporary art approaches and practices. We are confident that the residency will be mutually and deeply beneficial--to the artist and to New York contemporary art circles.”

An open call took place between December 6, 2019 and January 31, 2020 with the criteria for applicants being visual artists under 40 years old from Russia, living in Russian Federation (Russian citizens), working in any media, with basic proficiency in the English language. To participate in the open call, artists applied at www.iscp-nyc.org/apply. The selection process was performed in two stages:

Stage 1: Short list. The expert committee selected 10 artists from the open call. The committee comprised Maria Kramar (curator, V-A-C foundation), Iaroslav Volovod (curator, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art), and Anton Svyatsky (curator and director of AES+F studio). The artists shortlisted for the residency were Aslan Goisum, Polina Kanis, German Lavrovskiy, Tanya Pioniker, Vasily Sumin, Alexey Taruts, Asya Volodina, Ustina Yakovleva, Alisa Yoffe, and Maria Zaikina.

Stage 2: Award recipient. Goisum was selected by an international jury comprising Marina Abramovic (artist, New York), AES+F (artist collective, Berlin, New York, and Moscow), Kate Fowle (director, MoMA PS1, New York; former chief curator, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow), Susan Hapgood (director, ISCP, New York), Joseph Kosuth (artist, New York and London), Ksenia Nouril (Jensen Bryan curator, The Print Center, Philadelphia), and Xiaoyu Weng (curator, Guggenheim Museum, New York).

Ksenia Nouril, Jensen Bryan Curator at The Print Center and a member of the jury, comments, “Geopolitical relations aside - art is the ultimate connector. The award will undoubtedly contribute to cross-cultural dialogues and increase the presence and impact of Russian contemporary art in New York and internationally today.”

‘Echoes from Chechnya’

- Jake McGrail

If No One Asks is the first solo North American exhibition for Chechen artist Aslan Gaisumov. Though the specific history behind the work hails from across the globe, Contemporary Art Gallery (CAG) curator Kimberly Phillips feels the issues it wrestles with can resonate just as strongly in Vancouver.

On display at the CAG now until March 24, 2019, If No One Asks consists of two pieces. The first is Memories of War, a single page from a found book to which Gaisumov applied black ink to redact most of the page's words. The second is People of No Consequence, a single-channel video that shows the gathering of 119 Chechen elders, all survivors of the 1944 Chechen and Ingush deportation forced by the Soviets. These two works were both created in 2016, but have never been shown together until now.

“We wanted to create an exhibition that would bring

[Gaisumov's] work together in a new way,” says Phillips. “To prompt a new set of questions – a new way of looking at the work – in front of a brand-new audience.”

Phillips has followed Gaisumov's work for a number of years, and last summer she saw two of his works exhibited at the Liverpool Biennial in the U.K. That display cemented her desire to bring his art to Vancouver.

“I felt that Aslan's work came from a different place,” says Phillips, “but would resonate in very powerful ways in the set of conditions we ourselves are grappling with.”

Phillips says Gaisumov fits with the CAG's mandate of bringing in work from artists all around the globe, but far from simply being a window into Chechnya and the Chechen people. The issues and ideas behind his pieces are far from foreign.

“The concerns of Aslan's work, of history and silence and the body as a witness to history, I felt like that would resonate very potently in Vancouver,” says Phillips.

While some art exhibitions fill galleries with a high number of individual pieces, If No One Asks looks to have the same effect with just two. For Phillips, this type of presentation works just as well – if not better – than any larger-scale works they could have brought to the CAG.

“I'm a fan of very edited exhibitions,” she says. “Instead of trying to say more with more things, you can often say a lot more with less. Work like this is very potent: it's work that deals with witnessing very difficult events in history, and brings up questions around war and displacement and trauma. I think there is so much that's already in the work that requires time to sit with and think about, so you don't need 25 other works to say similar things.”

Phillips feels that Gaisumov's message is powerful, and doesn't need to be conveyed through words. For People of No Consequence, he contacted hundreds of Chechen

survivors, inviting them to come to Grozny, Chechnya, to gather together. Those who appear in the video don't say anything, but they don't need to.

“I think one of Aslan's strengths is the incredible clarity in his work,” says Phillips. “The video is very clear, very matter of fact. The camera doesn't move, it's not flashy. The strength of his work is the tension of this clarity along with the utter opacity and the difficulty of actually bringing into language the atrocities these people endured.”

The history and concepts that Gaisumov touches on are deeply personal and complex, but Phillips believes he is able to explore them with a deft and thought-provoking touch.

“There are a lot of artists who work with difficult, traumatic works from the past, but it can be easy to say too much, or become overly melodramatic, and Aslan refuses to do that. His work is very measured, and quiet in a sense, but there's so much there that is both invisible and visible at the same time.”



‘Aslan Gaisumov’

- Kate Sutton

Artforum, Summer 2018, pp. 319

the 1950s and early 1960s. The materially spare, gesturally restrained works in this show, by contrast, manifest a partial return to Lazzari's roots in what Paola Ugolini, in the catalogue to this exhibition, calls “the decidedly avant-garde product of a functional modern furnishing, albeit still decorative, consistent with the ‘total art’ experiments of the Italian Futurists, the German Bauhaus and the French modernism of Le Corbusier”—though the artist herself claimed to dislike Futurism and to have been totally isolated from developments in abstract painting outside Italy during the long decades of Fascist rule. In her late work, the essentially structural and architectural idiom of her early abstraction has been almost entirely subjectivized, its geometry dissolved, reflecting what Lazzari herself would call the realization “that the achievement of a certain ‘quid’ requires silence and secrecy.”

What's perhaps most surprising is how the mysterious silence embodied by these late works of Lazzari's—which has more in common with that of Giorgio Morandi's still lifes than with the clamor of the Futurists or even the industrious bustle of the Bauhaus—feels innately musical. Lazzari's compositions float freely but with an internal pulse, a scansion, a distinctly rhythmic character that can give them, at times, the appearance of visual scores à la Morton Feldman or Cornelius Cardew. Her working method? “Listening carefully to a day's rhythm is what works best,” she said. She recorded these inner rhythms in patterns of mostly vertical and horizontal lines, marks replete with differences and divergences of weight, tone, thickness, intensity, and so on. Color might seem beside the point in most of the works, but that impression would be mistaken; it's simply that in Lazzari's hands, the infinite nuances of gray and white in both the ground and its inflections (acrylic, tempera, and graphite) somehow subsume all hues—and then a sudden shaft of red occurs as a glorious shock, like a cymbal clash underlining the structural solidity of what had seemed a gentle pulsing. But even the most emphatic mark seems to emerge from, rather than having been imposed on, the painting as a whole. For Lazzari, the danger in her pursuit of the elusive essence of experience, of what she disarmingly called—quoting Jean Fautrier—the *mieux que rien*, or “better than nothing,” was that somehow “the very canvas itself” would “disappear with the image.” It hasn't happened yet. Lazzari's canvases endure, unwavering.

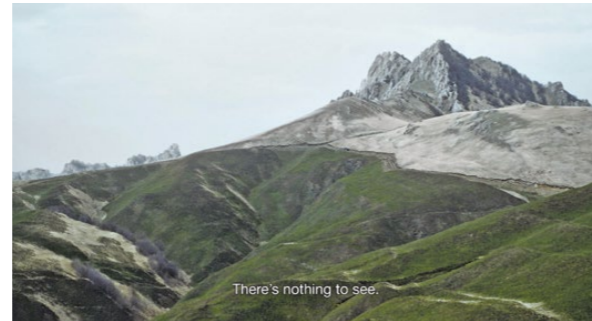
—Barry Schwabsky

Aslan Gaisumov

EMALIN

“Truth” and “reconciliation” do not always go together. The imperative to testify—particularly in instances of collective trauma—is presumed to outweigh any costs, emotional, psychological, or even legal. But who really has the right to demand those truths? To whom do they belong? For whose benefit are they shared? And to whose detriment? In his films and objects, Aslan Gaisumov walks the line between silence and articulation. Born in the Chechen capital of Grozny, he creates work that not only revisits the devastation of the recent conflicts, but also traces them back to their roots in the forced migration of the Chechen and Ingush peoples to other parts of the USSR in the 1940s, purportedly the largest and most brutal deportation in Soviet history.

In late February 1944, as part of Stalin's resettlement campaign, residents of Chechnya and Ingushetia—two neighboring republics in the northern Caucasus—were rounded up from their homes, loaded onto trains, and deposited in sparsely populated stretches of Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan. Of the nearly five hundred thousand people deported, an estimated 30 to 50 percent died as a result, prompting the European Parliament in 2004 to formally recognize the deportation—which Chechens call *Aardakb*, the exodus—as genocide. Yet even now, few



Aslan Gaisumov,
Keicheyuhea, 2017.
HD video, color,
sound, 26 minutes.

people outside the region are aware of the events and their repercussions. One primary reason is that for decades, the Soviet government forbade even speaking about the deportations, which were framed by propaganda as a generous, state-sponsored opportunity for “education” and “cultural exchange.” Today, on the anniversary of the *Aardakb*, Chechen citizens may still privately observe a day of mourning, but publicly the republic celebrates the Day of the Defenders of the Fatherland, a Russian holiday dating back to the aftermath of the Revolution.

The exhibition “All That You See Here, Forget” paired two of Gaisumov's films exploring the silence around the *Aardakb*. The first, *People of No Consequence*, 2016, is set in the anemic grandeur of a municipal hall in Grozny, empty save for rows of chairs. One by one, men file in and take their seats, with the wool-hatted elders accorded places of honor at the front. After all the men have entered, women start shuffling in, ambling over to the chairs at the back. Over the course of the eight-and-a-half-minute video, no one says a word. A closing title card explains that the artist has gathered these survivors of the deportations together for the first time. Why are they silent? Perhaps to speak would be to tear open decades-old wounds. And, really, what can be said?

In his most recent film, *Keicheyuhea*, 2017, Gaisumov pushes his own grandmother to give voice to her memories. The twenty-six-minute video follows her as she visits her former village, which she has not seen since the deportations. Her tears of joy and exuberant greetings to once-familiar places quickly give way to a crippling grief. At first, she coquettishly brushes away her grandson's off-camera inquiries (“Oh Aslanbek, this was something no one wants to hear about”) but by the end she cannot bear to speak. “Aslanbek, some things can be left unsaid,” she pleads, reasoning, “They're all in the past.”

Gaisumov leaves intact the various ethical entanglements of the action, so that the viewer feels uncomfortably implicated in the central act of cruelty underlying the film's premise. In doing so, however, he raises the question of who can lay claim to collective memory. Technically, he is part of this community—this trauma is his heritage—but does that mean he has the right to extract it? After all, the trouble with speaking one's truth is that the moment something is articulated, it no longer belongs to the speaker alone. Whose story is it to tell then?

—Kate Sutton

PARIS

Younès Rahmoun

GALERIE IMANE FARES

“*Hijra*,” the title of Younès Rahmoun's most recent exhibition, refers to the departure, in the year 622, of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib, the pre-Islamic name of Medina.

'Aslan Gaisumov's Chechen Stories'

- Anya Harrison

A 4x4 snakes up a road, dwarfed between the mountains and expanse of sky. Save for occasional patches of greenery, there are no other signs of life. In the backseat sits a woman in her 80s, modestly dressed, her hair covered by a scarf, a string of prayer beads in her hand. As the vehicle continues through this desolate landscape, pangs of anxiety and recognition flash across her face, hints of tears in her eyes. Her name is Zayanu Khasueva and she is the artist's grandmother.

In *Keicheyuhea* (2017), one of two films that form 'All That You See Here, Forget', Aslan Gaisumov's first exhibition at Emalin, curated by Anna Smolak, the artist follows his grandmother as she returns for the first time in 73 years to the titular settlement in the Caucasus mountains that used to be her family's home. That is until the winter of 1944, when the entire Chechen and Ingush nations, some half a million people, were deported to Central Asia, accused by the Soviet state of collusion with Nazi Germany – a fact that is known but little discussed in official historical narratives.

For Gaisumov, who lives and works in the Chechen Republic's capital of Grozny, the unspeakable horrors of war have continuously seeped from life into art. His works to date, from one of his earliest pieces, 'Untitled (War)' (2008–17), to the more recent *Volga* (2015), have addressed the military conflict with Russia that tore apart the autonomous region during the 1990s and early 2000s, and testify to the struggle to find a visual language capable of representing personal and historical trauma. Installed back to back in the darkened gallery, *Keicheyuhea* and *People of No Consequence* (2016) offer complementary ways of approaching and exorcizing this past: as shared experience and personal story. If the former recuperates this memory from oblivion, the latter, as the exhibition's title suggests, stops it from becoming yet another statistic while also allowing a space for healing.

The personal demands an audible voice and in *Keicheyuhea* it is only Khasueva's that animates the film's 26 minutes, as she recalls snippets of the village's former way of life and the deaths of her two sisters during their arduous journey to Kazakhstan. Mourning often calls for silence: in *People of No Consequence*, the usual commemorative minute is prolonged to eight. Enough time for the rows of empty chairs in a municipal hall in Grozny to be filled by elderly men and women who slowly file in and take their seats facing the camera, the quiet occasionally interrupted by the shuffling of feet and the scraping of chairs. It is only once the room is full and the frame cuts to black that we learn their identities: survivors of the 1944 expulsions, brought together for the first time at the invitation of the artist.

Together, these works trigger painful questions of how these traumas sit within a wider national myth-making bent on exclusion. In a country where World War II is officially referred to as the Great Patriotic War and where its human sacrifice has been increasingly used by the current government to stoke the flames of patriotism, they ask: whose history? A giant poster of 21st-century Grozny, all gleaming skyscrapers, hangs behind the gathered witnesses in *People of No Consequence*: a reminder that multiple historical erasures are under way.

Looked at from the position of today's geopolitics, where forced migration has become a ubiquitous newspaper headline and where histories can seemingly be rewritten on a whim, how do we maintain awareness? In their matter-of-fact directness, these two films steer clear of pathos to attain a measured dignity of their own: the most anti-monumental of memorials.

'Young Russian Art Goes Global'

Today, the interest for contemporary young Russian art is expanding and not limited to Russia and Russian-speaking collectors. Successful exhibition of young Russian artists, including Irina Korina and Taus Makhacheva, at the main pavilion of Venice Biennale, has contributed to it. They were chosen by Christine Macel to present their projects for the first time. Such events play crucial role for both individual artists and their future careers. Taus, for example, will participate in the forthcoming edition of the Liverpool Biennial (14 July – 28 October).

This is also positive trend for the market in general. As a result, we see increasing interest from international dealers and collectors who pay more attention to the Russian names. This spring we have seen a clear surge of interest for the contemporary Russian art throughout whole Europe from London to Basel. Even more, at Phillips' latest New Now auction in New York, young Russian

artist Nikolay Koshelev has showed an impressive result. Is Russian art really getting a momentum today? Below you will find some solid evidence for that as well as some names to follow.

We start with Aslan Gaisumov's first solo exhibition in the UK titled "All That You See Here, Forget" that has opened at Emalin Gallery, London this week and will last until 28 April. Curated by Anna Smolak, an independent curator based in Krakow, Poland, this exhibition debuted Aslan's new video work, "Keicheyuhea", produced with the support of the Han Nefkens Foundation, Barcelona. Aslan Gaisumov (b. 1991) is the Russian artist who lives and works in Grozny, Chechnya; his project follows the artist's grandmother and her impressions of return to her native Chechen village that remained a closed territory during the USSR and has only recently become accessible to its former residents. Aslan's work can be found in the

Today, the interest for contemporary young Russian art is expanding and not limited to Russia and Russian-speaking collectors. Successful exhibition of young Russian artists, including Irina Korina and Taus Makhacheva, at the main pavilion of Venice Biennale, has contributed to it. They were chosen by Christine Macel to present their projects for the first time. Such events play crucial role for both individual artists and their future careers. Taus, for example, will participate in the forthcoming edition of the Liverpool Biennial (14 July – 28 October).

This is also positive trend for the market in general. As a result, we see increasing interest from international dealers and collectors who pay more attention to the Russian names. This spring we have seen a clear surge of interest for the contemporary Russian art throughout whole Europe from London to Basel. Even more, at Phillips' latest New Now auction in New York, young Russian artist Nikolay Koshelev has showed an impressive result. Is Russian art really getting a momentum today? Below you will find some solid evidence for that as well as some names to follow.

We start with Aslan Gaisumov's first solo exhibition in the UK titled "All That You See Here, Forget" that has opened at Emalin Gallery, London this week and will last until 28 April. Curated by Anna Smolak, an independent curator based in Krakow, Poland, this exhibition debuted Aslan's new video work, "Keicheyuhea", produced with the support of the Han Nefkens Foundation, Barcelona. Aslan Gaisumov (b. 1991) is the Russian artist who lives and works in Grozny, Chechnya; his project follows the artist's grandmother and her impressions of return to her native Chechen village that remained a closed territory during the USSR and has only recently become accessible to its former residents. Aslan's work can be found in the collection of the State Hermitage museum. He was also awarded the Innovation Prize (Russia) in 2016. According to Leopold Thun, Emalin Gallery co-director, he became aware and drawn to the contemporary Russian art through the work of such institutions like the V-A-C and Calvert 22. As a gallerist, he started working with Evgeny Antufiev and Aslan Gaisumov, who have introduced him to a whole host of exciting artists currently living and working in Russia.

"I think that the next step is for collectors and curators to stop distinguishing between Russian and international art, as the work is already embedded into an international context and does not need to rely on such differentiation," says Leopold Thun, an independent curator, co-director of the Emalin Gallery.

The group exhibition "Future Love. Desire and Kinship in Hypernature" in Basel's HeK (through April 15) features a number of works by Russian artists such as Olga Fedorova and Dmitry Morozov (aka :vtol:). The exhibition examines the impact of new technologies and social media on our affective relationships and sexuality.

Olga Fedorova (b. 1980) is a Moscow-born artist who currently lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. Her works and projects have been the subject of solo and group exhibition in galleries and museums across Europe. Most recently, her first UK solo show of lenticular images titled "Generic Jungle" was held at the Annka Kultys Gallery, London.

Moscow-based media artist Dmitry Morozov (b. 1986) primarily works on projects with a focus on technological art. His robotic sound installation "Silk" was exhibited as part of Cosmocoew 2015 Non-Commercial Programme.

On March 17 exhibition of works by Arte Laguna Prize finalists was opened at the Arsenale of Venice. The international jury selected 115 names from all over the world, including Russian artist Maria Agureeva with her project titled "Gardens of compromises always grow faster" who has been selected as a winner of the Prize alongside 4 artists. Creating works that deliberately balance between naturalism and abstraction, Maria Agureeva (b. 1985) is an artist, who sees her job in "showing how the body becomes a hybrid space where materiality of flesh is connected with an individual consciousness and identity". 5 winners of the Prize will be announced at the same day, stay tuned!

In February young Russian artist Nikolay Koshelev (b. 1987) made his debut at an international auction. His "Antwerp 7:07 (The Moon Pool Project)" was sold for \$25,000 during Phillips New Now auction. Nikolay Koshelev was born in Moscow, and now lives and works in New York. He graduated from the Stroganov State Academy in Moscow (2010) and the New York Academy of Art (2014). Images in his works seem to appear as if by themselves, resembling the peculiar results of destruction or distortion. It is worth mentioning that the price for the work by the upcoming artist at the Phillips auction was higher than the price paid for the piece by Dubossarsky and Vinogradov, two well established Russian artists (\$12 500), demonstrating the revitalization of contemporary Russian art image at the international art scene.

- Artsy, 21 March 2018



'12 apostles: Aslan Gaisumov'

Masha Kuresha

to get to something, I cannot tell you anything about how to do it. I was very fortunate in my life, I am surrounded by incredible people, without whom I would not have succeeded.

MK: What do you do on a regular day?

AG: There are no regular days in Chechnya, every day brings in something new.

Conversations about the Chechen artist Aslan Gaisumov began five years ago, when his worn out books from the "Untitled (war)" series appeared at the Biennale of Young Art. Today, he is the youngest artist in the Hermitage collection, and his solo exhibition took place in Antwerp. Gaisumov studies in Ghent, he partly spends his time in Belgium, and partly in Chechnya, from where he ran away during the war of 1995. He categorically refuses to communicate with the press verbally, he replied to our questions via e-mail, and asked not to edit the text. We publish this interview with no changes.

side of "reality", I can say that the reality of war cannot be imagined, understood and told. My first work was an attempt to write a story and find an opportunity to read it. The war in Chechnya, especially in Russia, is considered as a finished story, but everything continues, although in a different form. And it's getting harder and harder to talk about it.

MK: Next year you are having a dozen of exhibitions in various European institutions, including Stedelijk in Amsterdam. What are you going to present there?

MK: How and when did you realize that you want to become an artist? Did this happen after you moved to Moscow? You said that you did not care about which university to enter, that you just wanted to break out into a peaceful environment. Did you want to express yourself creatively?

AG: All the exhibitions are still in the process, we are selecting the works, etc, so there is not much I can say yet.

MK: Tell us how the artist can get to the personal exhibition in a European museum "from scratch"? How did you do it?

AG: I struggle to answer the question of "when have I decided to become an artist". It was not my decision or desire, just as in many other events in my life, it simply happened. And it is still a question - did I become an artist?

AG: I got to the museum not "from scratch", but after a huge work done. My first personal museum exhibition was held in 2016 in the Museum of Contemporary Art M HKA in Antwerp. I met the curator of the museum Anders Kruger in 2011 and showed him my work. After our meeting, he hasn't replied for a long time and I thought that I would never get an answer. I was living and working in Chechnya, far away from the rest of the world, without thinking of whether they would invite me to the museum or not. After 4 years we met in Tbilisi, and Anders offered to me to launch a personal exhibition in M HKA, which he has curated.

MK: Nowadays you are well known as an artist who speaks of war. Is there anything else that you want to say at the moment? What themes would you like to appeal to?

AG: If I am known as an artist who speaks of war, then I am not known very well.

MK: You said that your first work - "Untitled (war)" - appeared in order to settle the events of the first Chechen war in your head. Have you managed to do it? Is it easier now to talk about this?

MK: You have moved from objects to photos and videos. Why? What can you say about the differences in forms and approaches in installations, photos and video?

AG: During the war, it was difficult to imagine that there is another reality with normal life in parallel to our hell. When today you are watching news from Syria and the East of Ukraine, it is impossible to understand that there is another reality where people are experiencing the same horror. As a person who lived on this and the other

AG: I still make objects, just like photos and videos, I'm even trying to draw these days.

MK: What do you consider your biggest success and what influences artist's success the most?

AG: Success is different for everyone, and if you want



'People of No Consequence' by Aslan Gaisumov'

- Anna Smolak

On a double-sided postcard that someone handed me in Grozny, the capital city of the Chechen Republic, a young, armed soldier gazes with pride into the distance. The boldly-colored image—in a design ubiquitous in a past, yet not so distant epoch—is complemented by the slogan: 23 Fievralia, Den' zashchitnika Otechestva [23rd of February, Defender of the Fatherland Day; former Red Army Day]. Yet, when you turn the postcard over, there appears another, very different image: from behind a wooden fence, greyish faces look out at us sorrowfully, fearfully. The same date, the 23rd of February, is also referred to as the date of the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush nations.

It was on this day in 1944 that Lavrentiy Beria executed Stalin's plan: mass expulsion of the Chechen and Ingush peoples accused of collaboration with the Nazi troops, regardless of whether they were children, women, old men, and even those who were dead. It is estimated that during the 13 years of exile, half the Chechen population perished, those who escaped the mass killings falling victim to exhaustion, illness and famine. It was only in 1957, four years after Stalin's death, that those who had survived were allowed to return from the remote regions of Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan, and even then only to Chechnya.

In the winter and spring of 2016, Aslan Gaisumov traveled throughout Chechnya in order to meet the witnesses of those traumatic events. He spoke with almost 300 people who, like his own grandmothers, had been exiled during the Second World War. Of these, 119 agreed to meet in Grozny, the youngest was just one month old when deported.

Aslan Gaisumov himself was born in Grozny—where he still lives and works—in 1991, a few years before the First Chechen War started. As did most of his peers, he grew up in the refugee camps. He says that to understand the last war, one needs to acknowledge the previous one. It is, however, not only a firm belief in his own responsibility as an artist to mediate the past, but also an urge to rediscover

his personal story through the experiences of others that has become a driving force for his poignant works. People of No Consequence is a video by Aslan Gaisumov that depicts the first encounter of the Chechens who had survived the deportation, taking place almost 60 years after their repatriation. We see them entering, one by one, the empty hall of a public institution, seating themselves row by row, in the traditional manner of their communities: men first, women behind. We note their occasional, tentative, friendly gestures. On the wall at the back of the room, a large poster with a panorama of Grozny depicts the city in its present shape, with all traces of recent wars erased and consequently replaced by a kind of hybrid, imaginary architecture.

The camera fixes the frame as its central point, thus forcing the viewer to watch the scene directly, without changing position. The video continues until the last chair is occupied, with no words expressed, no extra movements taken. The sound remains almost inaudible. The closing text rolls on: factual, dispassionate, it describes the historical circumstances of the meeting.

Aslan Gaisumov's language is simple, unambiguous and direct. His humble approach to the history is far from any kind of sensationalism. The silence that formally defines his artistic vocabulary becomes a statement, a form of re-enactment of the disregarded history that, until now, has not found its own articulation.

The power of Gaisumov's artistic gesture lies in his crafting the circumstances for the artwork rather than in its transformative features, while the artwork itself functions here as a by-product, an echo of everything that has happened backstage.

Susan Sontag observes that "to designate the hell is not to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell and how to moderate the hell's flames."¹ Yet, even to simply acknowledge the existence of human suffering caused by other's depravity is positive in itself as it disrupts superficiality, naïve innocence, and amnesia.

There is no doubt that today's media support this process efficiently. With instant coverage of almost every act of terror, the images of war and violence are accessible globally. Their formal language is radical, provocative and compelling but it does not provide a critical space where the connection between different temporalities and modalities—the past and the present, the suppressed and dominant narratives—could be negotiated. If there is anything that art can do within the noise produced by contemporary streams of information, it is to subvert the language of representation and articulation of time and its relevant powers.

Gaisumov rejects the hyper-reality of the language of the media; instead of the gruesome images that we face each day to the point of complete anaesthesia, he confronts us with the impassive faces of the trauma survivors. Those silent images, accompanied by the calm, factual narrative of historical events, convey the impossibility of coming to terms with and expressing the pain endured. "This is not a silence, actually," Gaisumov says. "It is a form of renouncing speech, very powerful. And they are waiting for someone to give them answers. Because why that they are the ones who should do the talking? For most of

them, I was the very first person who has ever recalled that time. After so many years. Can you imagine..."

In the quiet gathering of survivors, more than half a century after the dramatic events, the discrepancy between history and memory has manifested itself. The Chechen history is still largely ousted from official historical accounts: but history, as written by the victors, is a single narrative with little regard for those who perished. Gaisumov seems to be desperately trying to embody the history in the momentarily captured faces of survivors before their stories disappear irretrievably.



'Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA)'



M HKA's IN SITU programme offers medium-scale monographic exhibitions by significant early- and mid-career artists from all over the world. It focuses on the commissioning of new work and seeks to foreground experimental practices in the museum's largest exhibition space.

The third artist to be featured is Aslan Gaisumov, born in 1991 in Grozny, Chechnya. Gaisumov is developing an oeuvre that feeds on, but also transforms and transcends, personal and collective memory. His works are poised between visual immediacy and social commentary, between the momentary and the monumental. They are mostly videos and installations incorporating found and purposely crafted objects, but sometimes also photographs and works on paper.

People of No Consequence is the title Gaisumov chose for his newest video installation, a single shot of a gathering by a group of seniors. These men and women all experienced the Soviet authorities' deportation of the entire Chechen people to Central Asia in the winter of 1944, an atrocity that remains too little known.

Gaisumov reuses his title for this entire constellation of three recent works. The exhibition also includes the video installation Volga (2015), a re-enactment of how the artist's family fled the bombs falling on Grozny in 1995, and the three-dimensional work Household (2016), which consists of two large sealed wooden crates with household objects belonging to the artist's family.

This is Gaisumov's first museum solo exhibition. All the works are accompanied by short narrative wall texts doubling as captions. In the list of objects that make up Household one item in particular—tarpaulin sheets from UNICEF—reveals to the attentive viewer that Gaisumov must have his own memories of enforced nomadism.

Gaisumov graduated from the Institute of Contemporary Art in Moscow in 2012. From 2016 he is enrolled in the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK) in Ghent. His solo exhibitions to date include Untitled (War) at Vinzavod Center of Contemporary Art, Moscow, in 2011; Memory Belongs to the Stones at KROMUS + ZINK, Berlin; and When You Ride in a Chechen Cart, Sing a Chechen Song at Contemporary Art Center, Grozny, in 2015.

Aslan Gaisumov has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, notably the 3rd Moscow Biennale for Young Art and I Am Who I Am at Kunst im Tunnel, Düsseldorf, in 2012; the 5th Moscow Biennale in 2013; two collateral exhibitions for Manifesta 10 in St Petersburg, and Burning News at Hayward Gallery, London, in 2014; as well as Lines of Tangency at the Museum of Fine Arts (MSK), Ghent; Austeria at BWA Sokol Gallery, Nowy Sacz, Poland; and Glasstress Gotika, a collateral exhibition for the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. In 2014 he was awarded the Special Prize of the Future Generation Art Prize of the Pinchuk Art Centre in Kiev, the Ukraine, and in 2016 the Innovation Prize of the National Centre for contemporary Arts in Moscow, in the category "New Generation."

An extensive catalogue with specially commissioned essays and interviews will be co-published in 2016 by M HKA and Occasional Papers, Antwerp. The works in the exhibition were in part produced with the creative and financial support of FLACC, Workplace for Visual Artists in Genk, Belgium. The project is organised by Anders Kreuger, Senior Curator at M HKA.

M HKA is a Flemish Community Initiative and receives support from Stad Antwerpen, Klara, Cobra.be, H ART, Bank Degroof, De Olifant and Allen & Overly.

General Inquiries
info@emalin.co.uk

Leopold Thun
leopold@emalin.co.uk

Angelina Volk
angelina@emalin.co.uk