

Afrika and Andrei Khlobystin at the Clocktower

Two young Leningrad artists, Afrika (Sergei Bugaev) and Andrei Khlobystin, recently brought separate installation works to New York. At the center of Afri-



Afrika: Installation view, 1991; at The Clocktower. (Review on p. 153.)

ka's *Donalddestruction* was a small, skirt-shaped metal door once part of a colossal Socialist Realist sculpture, *The Worker and the Farmer*, from the Stalin years. In a well-documented caper, the door was removed from the crotch of the female Farmer by Afrika and a partner, and set into a frame in which it rocks back and forth like a motorized pendulum. The excised door is a metaphor for the demise of Soviet ideology. But it is also, according to the artist, a kind of Trojan horse slipped into the U.S. as art, which with each swing throws off elements that will eventually destroy American ideology as well.

All this is spelled out in a catalogue text that careens between straightforward historical commentary and fantastic, manifesto-like pronouncements. The catalogue links the swinging door to the other works in the installation: a series of postcards on oxidized metal showing "Health Resorts of the USSR"; a series alluding to the three American Donalds—McDonald's, Donald Duck, Donald Trump; a photomontage mural of old Soviet propaganda photos; and depictions of the original stainless-steel *Worker and Farmer* sculpture. All this could be dumb or kitschy, but in the end Afrika's installation proves oddly poignant.

Upstairs, Khlobystin's installation *At Home* seemed looser, quirkier, more mystical—something like a crossing of Beuys and Mike Kelley. Arrayed around the room were teddy bears, a 20-

foot-high wall hanging made from pillows silk-screened with childhood photos of the artist and his wife, metal standing screens conveying vaguely anti-imperialist themes (tanks and burnies on one, soldiers and palm trees on another) and a paper statue of Apollo bedecked with children's scribbles. All this was overseen by a quote from Marx: "Antiquity is the childhood of mankind."

At Home was also accompanied by a manifesto, almost entirely in Russian; only the last paragraph, blown up and placed on the wall, was translated into English. If one had access to the show's press materials, it became possible to see that the various objects in the room had to do with a complicated theory: to wit, that American-dominated contemporary art is all surface and that spirituality lies in the "holes" or passages from surface to depth. Without this information, the viewer was left with a very eccentric but somehow disarming array of objects. For Khlobystin, as for Afrika, the overblown mock-ideology of the accompanying texts seems aimed less at persuasion than at deflating in advance any threat of pretentiousness or self-importance.

—Susan Tallman

November 1991