



Afrika, *Donald Destruction*, 1991, mixed media, installation view.

SAN FRANCISCO
AFRIKA
 SOUTHERN EXPOSURE
 GALLERY

Afrika (born Sergei Bugaev in 1966) is part of the generation of Russian artists who began to show just before glasnost and have subsequently received the full benefit of Gorbachev's 1988 decision to encourage Russian artists to exhibit abroad. This installation, exhibited at the Lenin Museum in Leningrad last September, and now beginning a tour of the U.S., Canada, and Europe, operates at the fulcrum of East/West cultural symbolic systems where sacred and ideological values contend.

At the center of *Donald Destruction*, 1991, is a large pendulum, mounted on a makeshift armature and placed in front of a painted world map on which the U.S.A. and the USSR are connected by a blood-red swathe. The weight of the pendulum is a 3-by-4-foot piece of riveted sheet metal, which turns out to be a hatch or door, snatched from between the legs of a gigantic female figure in what is probably the most well-known monument to official Soviet values in the

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world. The massive stainless-steel sculpture (*The Worker & the Farmer*), depicting a man and woman striding forward into a glorious Socialist future while lifting a hammer and sickle skyward, was commissioned by Stalin and designed by sculptor Vera Mukhina for the Soviet Pavilion at the International Exposition held in Paris in 1937. Part of "Les Arts et Techniques à la Vie Moderne" (The arts and technologies of modern life), the Soviet entry was flanked by the German pavilion, featuring the Nazi eagle and idealized nude models of the pure Aryan race, and the pavilion of Republican Spain, featuring Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937. After the exposition, Mukhina's movement was returned to Moscow, where it has stood ever since at the entrance to the Exhibition Hall of the Achievements of the National Economy of the USSR. Afrika and Conceptual artist Sergei Anufriev "liberated" the door from the monument in broad daylight, a few weeks before Gorbachev passed a law criminalizing the destruction of Socialist monuments.

Surrounding the painted map on the wall behind the pendulum is a montage of photographs from 1937 issues of *Soviet Life* magazine, picturing robust smiling workers, farmers, and soldiers engaged in various wholesome pursuits. Running along the base of this wall is a row of Socialist Realist painted portraits of 12 officially recognized and feted scientists, writers, and poets. All of these paintings were produced in one special factory, and their eerie uniformity recalls

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Andrei Monastyrsky's comment that "Socialist Realism is also conceptualism." Afrika has intervened in this official conceptualism by stamping each portrait with the official Droney "Donald Club" logo.

As it swings, the Mukhina fragment pendulum links two corresponding sets of East/West cultural signs, depicted against riveted sheet-metal grounds and hung in threes on opposite walls. In the Soviet trinity, the Father is symbolized by a rocket (the height of Soviet science and industry) designed by a mental patient; the Son is a well-known cartoon character named "I Dunno" ("I don't know," personifying public acquiescence); and the Holy Ghost is Lenin (represented by the Lenin Mausoleum in copper on steel). The U.S. trinity on the opposite wall consists of Father, McDonald's (the Moscow branch); Son, Donald Duck; and Holy Ghost, Donald Trump (represented here by his Taj Mahal).

Aside from one inscrutable (in this context) panel—displaying petri dishes full of various bacteria, a bottle of bacteria-growing solution, and a chemical equation—which provided the seed for Afrika's next installation (having to do with the Tatars in the Crimea, in an homage to Joseph Beuys at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle), all parts of *Donald Destruction* are related to healing the U.S./USSR cultural schism through direct symbolic agency. Although the correspondences among these many parts are intricate and involve all kinds of

extratextual allusions and references (in the Beuysian manner), the representations themselves are compelling enough to draw one in.

Although *Donald Destruction* clearly shows the influence of Afrika's friend and collaborator Anufriev and his brand of "medical hermeneutics," it may also signal another new strain of Soviet post-Modernism, a kind of schizoid art that deals with splits in consciousness, including the old avant-garde/kitsch dichotomy as well as various East/West splits, as synapses or spark gaps between electrodes rather than as voids to be filled. In this art, all things signify, so nothing is left behind as kitsch. Within this practice, deconstruction of dominant and official representations does not remain in parody, but is reintegrated into fluid readings and apotropically effective manipulations of symbols by nonadic agents.

—David Levi Strauss