

ARTFORUM

“The Creative Act”

HENIE ONSTAD ART CENTER

Sonja Henies väg 31

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One expects so much from the genre of political art: It needs to be decisive, yet open; sophisticated, yet accessible. Hence, contradictions inevitably abound in our desires. But what does political art want from us? No doubt to be noticed. Although how it gets noticed is paramount to its *raison d'être*, as that situation often tends to implicate the viewer in a political-aesthetic stratagem. This is the logic explored by the exhibition “The Creative Act,” curated by Tone Hansen. Carlos Motta’s *Six Acts: An Experiment in Narrative Justice* (all works cited, 2010) is a video that restages political speeches by assassinated left-wing Colombian leaders. The most affecting moment in the work comes when elderly onlookers mistake the performance for an actual political rally, imploring the actor to take up the cause of the elderly, and then have to be informed sheepishly by the actor that it is only an art performance. The artists are caught in the creative act, as it were, literalizing the Duchampian notion of the spectator’s participation in the work of art.



Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas, *Splitnik*, 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view.

Several recent texts have taken up the utility of reenactment in contemporary art—a term that may actually obscure more than illuminate. Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere’s *The War Song*, a video that documents an orchestral performance arranged by the artists of Culture Club’s 1984 hit of the same name, is not a “re” anything. Rather, it performs the historical uncanny via a pop idiom. Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas’s *Splitnik* takes as one of its points of departure the Soviet critic A. V. Kukarkin’s *Beyond Welfare* (1974), an anticapitalist text that is critical of Western culture. The duo repurposes Kukarkin’s words to problematize historical triumphalism and lingering nostalgia for the cold war era. The artists in the exhibition employ history as another form of material, as palpable as any earthen matter, which imbues the show with a charged atmosphere that reflects the confounding vicissitudes of history and its imbrication with the present.

— Zachary Cahill

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