



1. Elizaveta Spivakovskaya, Mikhail Kolchin, "Exhibition of things No. 2", "Room No. 1", Moscow, 2020. Photo: N. Bazova

Apartment exhibitions

In search for the spaces of authenticity

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The realness of the history

Recent years were marked by a growing interest in the ways of representing personal memories and family histories in different cultural spheres including literature, documentary theatre and especially contemporary art. So, in artistic production the attention was shifted to the personal documents and oral histories as well as tactile and physical materials. Grandmother's embroidery that has been hanging on the wall for many years suddenly becomes a starting point for the documentary play or personal things found in the apartment appear to be part of the exhibition. For instance, the "Exhibition of things No. 2" organized in a Moscow apartment in 2020 by curators Elizaveta Spivakovskaya and Mikhail Kolchin focused on the personal memories the space saves. The curators showed the objects that were found in the family apartment and also invited artists to rethink their own childhood memories. The exhibition appears to be an interesting example of an interaction between personal history and artistic expression that tends to create an alternative way of memory representation. Therefore, to understand how this alternative can be developed it is crucial to comprehend how artistic and documentary materials are represented together as well as how the apartment can become a space for showing the lives of generations of one family.

The problems of personal memory representation start to be discussed within the exhibitions devoted to the exploring of the archives and histories. For instance, a series of exhibitions in the Jewish Museum in Moscow was based on diaries and memoirs of Holocaust witnesses where real stories behind the diaries interacted with the works of contemporary artists. In personal texts the historical events as well as everyday life fragments, first loves and family occasions were described, so different dimensions of the diaries gave the visitors an opportunity to feel the story behind them.



¹ T. Kranz, *The Pedagogy of Remembrance as a Form of Museum Education*, "The Person and the Challenges" 2014, No. 2.

² E. Stańczyk, *Commemorating the Children of World War II in Poland: Combative Remembrance*, Cham 2019, p. 107,

³ J. E. Tunbridge, G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, Chichester 1996, p. 314.

At the same time, the Biological Museum initiated the project "Dried – to believe" which explored the history of prisoners of Solovki camp during the repressions. The herbariums made by prisoners and other natural materials which were found on Solovki during the expeditions were shown to represent the tragedies of people exiled to the camp; stones, dried flowers and water-washed pieces of wood became a metaphor of traces left from their lives.

Thereby, no sooner did artists turn to memory and history, then they realized the value of the documentary materials which we are surrounded by. But why are they so precious? Why is almost every exhibition devoted to family history and memory research based on photographs, souvenirs or memorabilia, letters or diaries? The leading artists who work with memory concepts turn to the witnesses and documents to feel the history itself. For instance, Israeli artist Michal Rovner for the work in Auschwitz *Traces of Life: the World of Children* used the children's drawings from the Auschwitz archives, and Christian Boltanski brought an enormous amount of worn clothes to create the installation *No Man's Land* for the Monumenta exhibition, and now this work is associated with the representation of the Holocaust. Something in this documentary materials must attract artists as well as curators, something that can connect artistic production with real fragments of everyday life.

When Holocaust witnesses wrote about the events in their diaries, it was not only horror that they described but love, music, little events that made their life real. So, this is what makes documentary materials so important for artists – the realness that they can give. This can be called authenticity – the feeling that artists search for in the albums, family stories and childhood memories.

What can be understood by authenticity? When we appeal to authenticity in terms of memory representation, this concept can be defined differently according to the context of the use. Firstly, the authentic things, the evidence of the history like household items, clothes or even toys become sufficient for the pedagogy of remembrance as a form of museum education in spaces of former concentration camps and sites of violence and trauma. The author of numerous studies on the pedagogy of remembrance Tomasz Kranz writes that facing the real evidence or listening to the real stories from witnesses is the core mechanism of critical rethinking our past¹. At the same time it allows museum workers "elicit emotional and reflective response from participants", states the other researcher Ewa Stańczyk².

Secondly, authenticity is a quite important notion in the heritage studies where the concept is used in the context of description of ancient materials the houses were built from or technologies that were used when the object was created. In other words, it is connected with the physical features of the object of heritage. Moreover, if we return to the memory questions, we should mention the "dissonant heritage"³, the notion from museology studies that was invented by

John Tunbridge and Gregory John Ashworth, which deals with the controversial episodes of the history like repressions, genocides, the Holocaust. The authenticity of this heritage is an essential feature, since such objects as photos, artifacts and personal diaries influence the creation of instruments for the social and political recognition of these events⁴.

The mentioned ways of understanding the authenticity appear to be quite important, since they involve contemporary art in the sphere of memory studies and include the artistic representation of the past in the common discussion about the ways of working and exhibiting evidence and documents.

However, the understanding of the authenticity given by the documentary theatre researchers allows us to widen this concept. For instance, cultural researcher Olga Roginskaya writes that “the authentic thing influences the viewer by its givenness and the feeling of ‘self’”⁵. At the same time, Elena Gordienko, addressing to Charles Sanders Peirce’s concept of signs, states that things from everyday life which appear in documentary performances become authentic due to their “not symbolical but physical connection”⁶ to the viewer. In other words, the authenticity of an object not only changes the attitude towards some controversial episodes of history but also allows us to build qualitatively different relationships with the past.

When we listen to the stories of our grandfather or grandmother or when witnesses of the great events share their memories, it creates a very special point of view to history. Such first person stories are very sharp due to the moment of realness as well as photos and memorabilia that we can touch and feel the memory itself. It can be described with what Jan Assman called the “living memory” that “goes no further back than 80 years after which, separated by the floating gap, come, instead of myths of origin, the dates from school-books and monuments”⁷. For instance, the project *Between telling and listening* by Esther Shalev-Gerz is based on the interviews with the Holocaust survivors which brings this “living memory” to the surface. After talking to them, Shalev-Gerz cut out all the moments where her interviewees told their stories and left only those where they were silent, unable to talk or even cry. This work influences the viewer due to these pauses, inability to tell awful stories we can hardly listen to. Such authentic moments artist or writer cannot fake, and at the same time they represent history as it is.

Spaces of authenticity

In search for ways to find these real objects and stories artists tend to work with non-artistic spaces, where they can find these authentic traces, among which are the places of conscience, museums or places of memory. The places of conscience include memorials, former territories of concentration camps, museums of Holocaust, repres-



⁴ A. Assman, *Novoe nedovol'stvo memorial'noj kulturoj (New discontent with memorial culture)*, Transl. B. Khlebnikov, Moscow 2016, p. 66.

⁵ O. Roginskaia, “Nastoiashchaia” veshch' v sovremennom teatre: muzei – barakholka – veshchevoi ryok (*The “real” thing in contemporary theatre: Museum – flea market – clothing market*), “Peterburgskii teatral'nyi zhurnal” (Petersburg theatre magazine) 2013, No. 1, p. 45.

⁶ E. Gordienko, *Spektakli in situ: dokumental'noe prostranstvo igry (Site-specific theatre: the documentary space of the performance)*, “SHAGI/STEPS” 2017, No. 3, p. 82.

⁷ J. Assman, *Communicative and Cultural Memory*, [in:] *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin – New York 2008, p. 110.



⁸ See N. Abalakova, A. Zhigalov, *Tot Art. Russkaya ruletka (Those Art. Russian roulette)*, Moscow 1999, p. 6.

⁹ O. Roginskaia, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

sions and other crimes against humanity, also, it is usually told that such places work with the historic events about which no consensus has been reached yet. Since these events can be considered as more or less recent, a quite amount of documents and evidence still exist and are exhibited in the museums. As regards the places of memory, a wide range of spaces can be included, for instance, industrial ruins so favourite among artists since the history is literally dissolved in the landscape. A large number of former factories have been transformed to art spaces, but now we can witness a new phase of interest in their history. Moreover, places of memory include other quite important spaces for exhibitions, one of them is apartments.

Apartment exhibitions were a great part of Soviet art scene in the 1980s. Artists opened their flats for exhibitions as well as actions and performances, which became widespread in the beginning of the 1980s and received the name “APTART”. The name was invented by the artist Nikita Alekseev, whose apartment became a space for several events which Mikhail Roshal, Victor Skersis, Andrey Monastirskii, Tot Art group and others who are commonly referred to as Soviet underground artists took part in⁸. “APTART” initiatives tended to consider the apartment as an alternative to the galleries and other exhibition spaces which were not represented in the art system of that time. Therefore, the apartments became a specific variation of the white cube spaces where the works were shown. Artists consider apartments as places for sharing and representation, so the specifics of these places were not the central part of the events. At the same time, gatherings in the artists’ flats created the situation where open discussions were possible, where performances and actions can be shown.

Nowadays this awareness in apartment exhibitions is associated with the interest in personal memory and family history which the apartments tend to keep. In other words, the apartment is transformed to the “artistically complete space”⁹ of art. From now on, the specific atmosphere, the stories that the apartment hides become part of the exhibition, and even more, the starting point of it. For instance, the curators of the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art moved a part of the exhibition to the apartment of Riga philanthropist Kristaps Morberg, including its history as an active part of the project.

However, every flat is a mixture of different layers of the past, where different items coexist with each other. For example, we can often see that Soviet items stay near the 19th-century family tableware in one cupboard. So how can we define authenticity in the context of different histories? What does it give to the artists who explore the 1990s or the 1950s? The things from the past we cannot remember proves that the story artist works with is true and real. However, why are we searching for realness when we talk about the most recent past that still surrounds us? In general, one of the core questions

is: how can we define authenticity in different contexts? In other words: how can the authentic documentary materials be represented?

These questions can be considered on the example of the “Exhibition of things No. 2” organized in the beginning of 2020 by Spivakovskaya and Kolchin. It was the second initiative – the first, “Exhibition of things” was organized in Kazan flat when it was put on market after the owner died. Here, in Moscow, they showed the old things found in the flat as well as artworks made especially for the project. In one of the reviews of the exhibition the author Aleksandra Vorobiova wrote:

People’s relations with things are always a microdrama. Things make us happy, yield benefits, get broken or get lost... Forgotten odds and ends: a favorite teenage T-shirt, a kitchen knife from the old flat or a stuffed animal – they touch the invisible trigger of human memory¹⁰.

The relationships between personal things and memories becomes the central point of the “Exhibition of things No. 2”.

Turning the apartment into a place of art

“Exhibition of things No. 2” was organized in the apartment where Spivakovskaya grew up. Her great-grandmother, grandparents and four-year old father moved to the two-bedroom apartment in 4 Grazhdanskaya street from kommunalka in the center of Moscow in 1969. Compared to kommunalka, the apartment where the exhibition took place is quite far from the city center, near the station Preobrazhenskaya ploschad’. The viewers should have taken a long walk from the station through the commuter settlement where the typical five-story building in the line of the same ones built in 1959 was located.

Spivakovskaya with her parents lived in the flat till 2008 while part of the family moved to Israel in the beginning of the 1990s. In this apartment Spivakovskaya’s uncle learned to play the piano, her grandfather, radio engineer, painted the door with Disney heroes, and for Elizaveta her father made a map of a starry sky on the ceiling. And, how Spivakovskaya wrote in the text for the exhibition, surprisingly but neither great-grandmother nor grandmother, also an engineer, left any personal things there.

This apartment stayed in the same condition it was when the last tenants moved out in 2019, and in the process of cleaning the space Spivakovskaya found objects that “waited” to be found: all the furniture remained as well as old toys and household items. After the renovation the interior changed because the apartment was painted white, thus emphasizing the effect made by Soviet wardrobes and cupboards which were left when the family stopped living there. This gesture made the exhibition possible since it clears the space for the artistic intervention as well as for the reorganization of the whole



¹⁰ See A. Vorobiova. *Thing-in-itself: Children of the 1990s Look at Their Childhood from the Distance*, http://oteatre.info/veshhi-v-sebe-tekto-ros-v-90-e-vzglyanuli-na-svoe-detstvo-so-storonny/?fbclid=IwAR3l3YatXatbjD4Al_QCfxusXlo5B-cRR9VuIV3-LTkYZch43ts-WogyR8o (access date: 22.02.2021).



2. Elizaveta Spivakovskaya, Mikhail Kolchin, "Exhibition of things No. 2", "Room No. 1", Moscow, 2020. Photo: N. Bazova

space. While painting the apartment white curators transformed it from the ordinary Soviet apartment/warehouse with old unnecessary households stocked there to the place of art where every object becomes the part of exhibition. For instance, the interior of the curator's childhood room remained the same, there was the bed in front of the table, the chair and the lamp, near the table stood the wardrobe with the books and dolls. Yet, with the white walls clear from photos and paintings these objects become visible not as a part of the room but as a scenery for the exhibition.

The space was divided into several halls named "Room No. 1", curators's childhood troom, "Room No. 2", space for artistic works, "Room No. 3", devoted to the curator's father and grandfather. Every room tells the story of different generations of the family at the same time using different means of representation and interaction with the visitors, which will be described below. Moreover, every part examines the question of the representation of the authentic things in different contexts: the period of the 1990s, the Sovies period and the current time. Therefore, "Apartment exhibition No. 2" can be considered as a puzzle where visitors collect the pieces moving from one room to another.

The memory of the 1990s. The ownership of someone else's recollections

The first part of the exhibition at once raises the crucial question: how can we represent the recent past? We consider the World War II as the recent past since the witnesses are still alive and we have almost no distance towards it: we still live with the consequences, mourn the victims, while in Russia the Victory is still the greatest ideological point. Therefore, how can we work with the memory of the even later events that have happened so recently, it feels like yesterday?

The curators turn to the reconstruction of the experience as a means of representing the period of the 1990s. In the article *Lost and invented: places and things off/in the family history* the personal memories researcher Natalia Gramatchikova, describing documentary prose and memoirs, writes that “reconstruction of the world which no longer exists in reality but defines the author’s childhood years and remains important for him”¹¹ appears to be quite a common strategy in literature. However, not only writers but also contemporary artists apply to reconstruction as a method of recreating the past events and experiences.

However, in terms of “Exhibition of things No. 2” we deal with a specific type of reconstruction. First of all, the recreation of the interior is based on the real things which belonged to the family. Secondly, it is not a question of presenting the things as an evidence of the past civilizations which no longer exist in analogy with anthropological museums or art museums that reconstruct the important moments in the history of art (the reconstruction of *The Worker’s Club* by Rodchenko in New Tretyakov gallery); the main aim is to organize the objects in such a way, so visitors find themselves interacting with them.

The first room on the exhibition was Elizaveta’s childhood room where the interior stayed the same: her old furniture and personal belongings stood in the same places that when she was a child. The point of view of an adult who looks at her childhood from the present moment makes curators choose to show different things which were important for the child. The room is filled with old toys, Barbie dolls as well as old magazines for teenagers from the 1990s and 2000s with clippings collected by Liza. The visitors could play with the dolls and change their outfits or paint with the markers with the smell of apple, mango and raspberry. Those were popular in the 2000th and were the object of desire of many girls. Moreover, the visitors could look through the old drawings and magazines in search of funny sections of old TV stars whose songs were popular 20 years ago. Also, such magazines were the platforms for meeting people, sharing the same interests in music and exchanging the posters of favourite artists. These things that were normal for us as kids and teenagers in the 1990s now become an exotic and sometimes funny phenomenon which is almost forgotten [Fig. 1–2].



¹¹ N. Gramatchikova, *Utracheny i pridumany: mesta i veshchi semejnoy istorii* (*Lost and invented: places and things off/in the family history*), “Labirint” (Labyrinth) 2020, No. 1, p. 20.



— 3. Elizaveta Spivakovskaya, Mikhail Kolchin, "Exhibition of things No. 2", "Room No. 3", Moscow, 2020, Photo: N. Bazova

The visitors of the exhibitions were mostly young people in their late 20s or early 30s, so they could more or less share some childhood memories in the 1990s. So, this part of the exhibition became quite popular as girls could play with the Barbies they most likely had when they were kids or share the most favourite songs from MTV channel in its golden age. In other words, when the visitors dive into someone else's memory they start to recollect their own events from childhood. Reviewing the old magazines or dolls you can see something familiar; you might have had the same dress for the Barbie doll or you might have hung the same poster on the wall. This moment of ownership and memory recollection becomes one of the crucial points of the exhibition.

Thus, reconstruction of the childhood room creates the fragile border between personal and collective memories. On the one hand, curators show a particular room of a particular person with her own preferences in music and in dolls. On the other hand, the nostalgic attitude towards the 1990s from the point of view of an adult recollecting her childhood memories is the optics that can be shared by most visitors. The first part of the exhibition becomes a kind of a playground for the nostalgic audience.

The game *Little secrets* as a way of representing the past

The "Room No. 3" in the exhibition was devoted to the history of the curator's father and grandfather who was a radio engineer. And if the first part strives to reconstruct the childhood experience of the 1990s shared by many visitors, the second part focuses on finding a way to represent a more distant past. Therefore, there is no need in reconstruction of the space, this problem requires other means of exhibition, and curators turn to the children's game as a way to organize the documentary material. This children's game has a name – "*sekretiki*" ("little secrets") [Fig. 3].

In the end of 2019 the Garage Museum in Moscow organized the exhibition *Sekretiki: Digging Up Soviet Underground Culture, 1966–1985*, employing the metaphor of the same children's game. It consists in the collection of pretty objects as pieces of wood, stones or small toys which are later buried in the ground under a piece of glass. The objects are hidden but at the same time can be seen by an eagle-eyed viewer or, in case of the children's games, a member of the group of friends. Curators use this comparison to explore the Soviet underground art practices "art as a form of secret knowledge shared by a circle of friends and collaborators and requiring protection from the outside forces of ideological control and censorship"¹². In other words, Garage Museum curators use this means for highlighting the hidden nature of underground. The mention of this exhibition exemplifies the popularity and importance of this game in the aspect of representing history that we can witness no more, so we are forced to collect it piece by piece.



¹² See *Sekretiki: Digging Up Soviet Underground Culture, 1966–1985*, <https://garagemca.org/en/exhibition/i-sekretiki-digging-up-soviet-underground-culture-1966-1985-i> (access date: 27.12.2020).

Therefore, the curators of “Exhibition of things No. 2” decided to show the story of a more longtime past with the concept of “little secrets”. This room was darker than Elizaveta’s one, so visitors needed to search for the fragments of the family history. For instance, they could open the desk drawer and find the MP3 player where they can hear the curator’s grandfather. The record was found in the apartment by accident, and it was the first time Spivakovskaya heard the voice of her grandfather. She never saw him, he died before she was born because of the mistake of the doctors and the wrong medicine he took. On the desk the viewers could see the details from the building toy with the bottle from this medicine found by accident in the box with the toy.

Moving further, to the middle of the room the viewers could find a sideboard with a hidden children’s railway, every carriage of which Elizaveta’s grandfather bought saving money from the salary. Visitors opening the sideboard reminded of the children searching for the New Year gifts: the old Soviet railroad looked really beautiful surrounded by old Christmas lights [Fig. 4]. Near the railroad there is a piano with the ski boots under it. Each boot is filled with the newspapers from the Perestroika period which marks the new episode of family history: before Putsch Elizaveta’s great-grandmother with her grandmother and her uncle moved to Israel.

The lights in the room were focused on particular fragments of the exhibition, for instance, the desk drawer with the record or the objects in the closet including old instruments and skaters. It reminded of theatre performances where the most important fragments are highlighted to create the dramatic effect. The same effect we can see on the exhibition where curators hide the “treasures” but give the visitors clues to help find them, so the lights come to the aid.

The term “little secrets” becomes a metaphor for the hidden history we can learn only by pieces of memories found here and there. The viewers can find every secret with the help of curators, or can recognize only one or two, so, nevertheless, the important part is that the viewers experience this children’s game of inventing the past. This means distances the viewers from the past and at the same time makes them immerse into the family history.

Artistic interaction as a way of distancing from the past

How to distance from the history in the apartment which preserves it, is filled with it? This question is raised by invited artists Anastasia Kuzmina, Vanya Bowden, Katya Kanke-Zaikanova, Alina Zhurina, Natasha Bazova, Katerina Motilyova, Vika Sorokina who interact with the environment of the apartment. Artists used almost the same materials as were represented in the exhibition including toys, trinkets and household items. In that regard, one might wonder where is the border between documentary material and artistic works? Before



4. Elizaveta Spivakovskaya, Mikhail Kolchin, "Exhibition of things No. 2", "Room No. 3", Moscow, the railroad, 2020, Photo: N. Bazova



5. Vanya Bowden, *Children and animals. The catalogue of interests from 1993 to 2001*, "Exhibition of things No. 2", "Room No. 2", Moscow, 2020. Photo: N. Bazova

curators opened the apartment for the exhibition it was a common uninhabitable space. But what happened when they came in?

Bowden for the work *Children and animals. The catalogue of interests from 1993 to 2001* [Fig. 5] collected her old toys among which were Barbie dolls, toy horses and a bug in a box, and then catalogued them. Such "archive" was exhibited in the sideboard behind glass similarly to the museum objects. Standing one next to the other these toys reminded of the archeological exhibition in a small museum of childhood.

We found almost the same toys in Liza's childhood room but they are simply toys there in contrast to the Bowden's installation, and such difference becomes the crucial point of the whole exhibition. When we play or at least see someone playing with Barbie dolls and then we find the same objects behind the glass as important fragile pieces, it creates the distance from them. We see ordinary things from a different point of view and they become more than they are – an evidence of the past.

Another artist Sorokina made almost transparent decals using photographs of her childhood friends (*Exhibition of stickers*) [Fig. 6], and then she placed them on the windows of the apartment. Like the highlighted record or the railroad, the decals became the lightnings of memory which are almost invisible for a naked eye. This work corresponded with the paintings of Disney characters on the door Eliza-



6. Vika Sorokina, *Exhibition of stickers*, “Exhibition of things No. 2”, “Room No. 2”, Moscow, 2020, Photo: N. Bazova

veta’s grandfather made in the 1970s. The door, which was unhinged in the 1990s, stood in the “Room No. 3” for the visitors to look at the small images copied from the magazine.

Kuzmina’s object *The Dowry* [Fig. 7] was not connected with the whole exhibition through the same materials as in Bowden’s work and was not linked with the other spaces as Sorokina’s decals. She brought her briefcase with the dowry her grandmother collected for her and then placed it on the pedestal with the two church candles framing it. The dowry is hidden from the viewer, we see only a quite full briefcase in analogy with the idea of the hidden past. Moreover, the candles and the pedestal shift our perception from its function and turn it into an almost sacred object, in this way distancing it from the viewer. Kuzmina represented the fragile feeling of “in-between”: the apartment exists between the place of art and living space, and all the things are in a transitional position, from the utilitarian objects to the traces of memory.

Role shift: from art exhibition to theatre performance

The exhibitions in apartments and in private homes have a great potential in representing the personal memories from the de-institutionalized point of view. We can see that nowadays the museums turn to work with personal histories, however they are often used as

7. Anastasia Kuzmina, *The Dowry*, "Exhibition of things No. 2", "Room No. 2", Moscow, 2020, Photo: N. Bazova



a part of a bigger narrative: representation of the Holocaust, Soviet past etc., which becomes the frame for the works that are shown in the exhibitions. Although, when curators concentrate on a particular family, these narratives appear from the inside, being already a part of people's lives. There is no need to generalize the stories because when we see different generations, we see the whole epoch through their photos, furniture, personal things. The power of those projects consist in the extreme personalization which gives the effect of presence when every viewer can recognize something familiar and at the same time make the history transparent. Interaction between these two processes makes de-ideologization of the memory representation possible.

Writing about site-specific documentary performances devoted to historical memory Elena Gordienko states that they "bring to the

surface the memory that already persists in the space”¹³. “Exhibition of things No. 2” is a project that works on bringing this memory with different means, including 1) reconstruction of the environment, 2) children’s games “little secrets” and 3) artistic interventions. So, in every part curators examine the question of how to work with the apartment space as a space of family memories, memorabilia and everyday objects that were once used. Due to the variety of the ways, exhibition might be thought to be divided into several individual parts, but when the visitors find themselves in the space of artistic interventions, the exhibition becomes united. The objects and installations focus different parts on a single spot – the apartment space as a place of personal memories.



¹³ E. Gordienko, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

The first space became a reconstruction of a childhood room with a little mess around as if the girl has just left and will soon come back. The liveness of the environment arranged by curators allows visitors to become more like guests in this space, who can look, play or listen to music. The “Room No. 3” with memories of her father and grandfather addressed the children’s game “little secrets” (“*sekreti-ki*”) where objects were hidden for visitors to find them. And again the objects that look like they were accidentally left and will soon be used are meticulously exhibited by Spivakovskaya and Kolchin.

Artworks implemented in the environment of the apartment frame the space and outline the border between the artistic and documentary contexts. In this situation visitors understand that there is a fictional, illusional space they are in, which is emphasized by the decals by Sorokina or an old suitcase in Kuzmina’s installation. At the same time the sense of authenticity of things and the whole space itself which is the starting point of the project is never questioned because every object is connected with the particular memories and life that once was there.

The “Exhibition of things No. 2” shows the quite important shift in the roles of curator and viewer in the context of interaction with memory and history. Even the objects are no longer what they were: after the transformation of the apartment into a museum of a family, the tableware is no longer a tableware but the evidence of the time, the sideboard becomes the storage for the installations and not for the family photographs.

Firstly, what is the role of the curator in this exhibition? Spivakovskaya and Kolchin organized the space and painted the walls white turning it into a place of art. They also arranged the found objects according to the stories they wanted to tell. Every object is placed on the particular position, we can especially feel it in the father’s and grandfather’s room where the railroad and the boots were highlighted as if they appear to be a part of the stage decorations. The exhibition without people reminded of the empty stage waiting for the actors to start the performance. So, are curators stage artists or even directors who arrange the space for the further actions?

Secondly, if each room becomes a kind of stage for performers to act, the visitors become active participants or even performers who can play, paint or read and seek for the hidden memories. In reviews on Facebook visitors wrote that they were glad to find the things that reminded them of their youth and childhood like toys or old jewelries and also to play treasure hunters searching for the hidden objects. Moving from one room to another, the visitors take part in a promenade and start to pay attention to what happens in the space itself. They also have the opportunity to try different roles from the guest, child or performance participant. Such ambiguity appears to be the reason to assume that such kinds of projects exist in-between contemporary art and theatre, opening the space for the further research of the ways of public representation of the past.

Słowa kluczowe

studia pamięci, wystawy w mieszkaniach, reprezentacja historii w sztuce współczesnej, kuratorskie praktyki reprezentacji pamięci, sztuka współczesna w przestrzeniach nieartystycznych

Keywords

memory studies, apartment exhibitions, representation of history in contemporary art, curatorial practices of memory representation, contemporary art in non-artistic spaces

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Summary

TATIANA MIRONOVA (Higher School of Economics in Moscow) / Apartment exhibitions. In search for the spaces of authenticity

Nowadays contemporary artists start to work on the representation of memory and history which leads them to the non-artistic spaces. Among such are the museums of conscience which provide the documents and evidences of the Holocaust, repressions, genocides, or places of memory, e.g. industrial ruins, where the history is dissolved in the landscape. Also, apartment exhibitions start gaining popularity again. However, the understanding of such spaces is quite different from Soviet underground artists, who used the apartment as a substitute of a gallery or an alternative to the white cube, creating a specific environment for showing the works. Artists distanced from the atmosphere of the place to focus on works they present. Nowadays this awareness is associated with the interest in personal memory and family history which the apartments tend to keep.

What do artists find so special in the apartment spaces? How do they work with the authentic artifacts and documents left there? And how can the exhibition space, where the artistic and documentary materials are mixed, be constructed? These questions can be considered on the example of the “Exhibition of things No. 2” that was organized in Moscow in 2020 and was curated by Elizaveta Spivakovskaya and Mikhail Kolchin. The exhibition took place in Spivakovskaya’s family apartment. It is divided into several parts devoted to particular periods in the family history, each located in different rooms focused on Spivakovskaya’s childhood in the 1990s and fragments of her father and grandfather’s life. The “Room No.2” is filled with the artworks which are made using the same materials and objects that are shown in the other rooms like toys and decals, yet this exact part allows us to shift the focus from the apartment to the exhibition space.

The exhibition gathers around the real objects which were found in the apartment to represent the memory of the family who once lived there. The visitors become inventors who discover the fragments of the past life so their role is transformed from the viewers to the active participants of the exhibition.