

THE STORY OF THE PAPER SOLDIER

BY *DMITRY VILENSKY*



The sculpture "OUR PAPER SOLDIER" was made for the "Into the City" festival, conceived by the Chto Delat collective under the title "WHAT IS MONUMENTAL TODAY?" in May and June 2014. The sculpture was placed in a middle of a specially constructed public forum, facing the "Heroes' Monument of the Red Army" on Schwarzenberg Platz in Vienna. The festival focused on issues of memory politics and practices of commemoration in urban space. How can groups excluded from the public sphere enact material and performative forms of commemoration nowadays? What kind of tangible structures and rituals could be developed to counter the imposed monumentality of power?

The sculpture was created as a queer replica of the Soviet-era Stalinist monument to the unknown soldier killed in the battle to liberate Vienna in 1945. The whole idea of the sculpture was to bring to the fore the struggle against fascism and the kind of meaning we load onto this old historical conflict today.

The urgent impulse to make this piece came from the war in Ukraine, in which two ways of misusing history clash: the 19th century paradigm of nation-building versus the myth of the Soviet imperial past that culminates in the victory of Stalinism over Nazism. The bloody clash of these two ghosts of the past has developed into an unresolvable situation, manipulated by the oligarchy and by Cold War rhetoric. The conflict has brought out a wide range of forces in Russia, forces now made very visible by a politics of memory that speculates on past anti-fascist struggle and mixes it with today's nationalisms. An extremely weird ideological cocktail that blew many people's minds – and that of the state – in a dangerous way. The situation demanded that we intervene to convey new possibilities for an anti-fascism rooted in the tradition internationalism and class struggle.



On the shield held by the soldier is written: "Antifaschistische Aktion". The helmet is inscribed: "To remember means to fight". "Our Paper Soldier" contributed to various debates and witnessed many positions, peacefully surviving the days of the Vienna project. (See documentation of the project at www.chtodelat.org.)

By chance, s/he was called one day to visit Berlin. There s/he was placed in front of the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, where Chto Delat had been invited to make a new learning play about monumentality. S/he stood there for just one night: early in the morning of June 25th s/he was set on fire by person/s unknown. "Our Paper Soldier" was fire-proofed, so s/he was not so easy to set ablaze. But once on fire s/he burned completely in the few minutes before the fire brigade arrived.

The police investigation has brought no result so far. And Chto Delat had to produce another learning play, entitled "Who Burned a Paper Soldier?", on July 7th, 2014.





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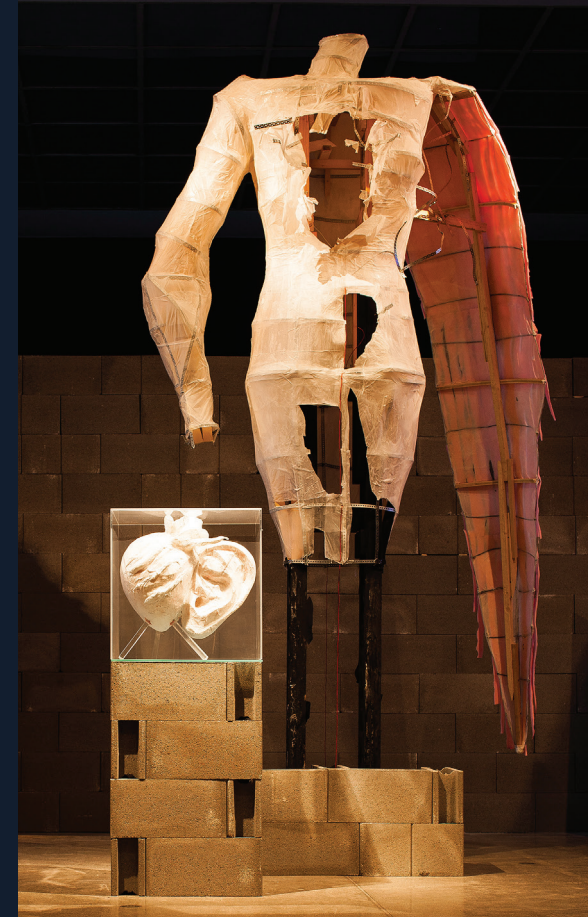
Brandanschlag am Haus der Berliner Festspiele

Von Ulrich Seidler



Das Kunstwerk nach der Vernichtung. Foto: berliner festspiele

BERLIN – Kaum stand der sechs Meter große russische „Papiersoldat“ des Künstlerkollektivs Chto Delat vor dem Haus der Berliner Festspiele, da wurde er auch schon angezündet und brannte nieder. Eine Tat mit politischem Hintergrund? Jedenfalls eine mit Symbolwert.



It was a pretty tough experience to get to know about this accident when your Face Book feed was full of photographs of burned corpses from Eastern Ukraine and the pictures with the remnants from Berlin looks quite similar to them. So we need to deal somehow with trauma and one day we had decided that we need to continue with this story and in a middle of our installation in Seccesion we decided to make a new sculpture piece – a sculpture of resurrected (zombie)soldier who kind of return to Vienna and stays surrounded by some iconic images of recent catastrophes which has happened in a meanwhile in the world. By this gesture we want to demonstrate that all repressed and destroyed memories have a chance of another life and this life has a serious potential to interfere and changes the course of the future if we open up to its traumatic experiences.