



# **STURDY BLACK SHOES**

**TAUS  
MAKHACHEVA**

**SUPER  
TAUS**

**SUPER-  
HERO  
SIGHTING  
SOCIETY**

Curated by: Edit Molnár & Marcel Schwierin  
9. JULI - 4. OKTOBER 2020

Visitors guide

# STURDY BLACK SHOES

The Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art is pleased to present *Sturdy Black Shoes*, a comprehensive exhibition of the practices of *Taus Makhacheva*, *Super Taus* and *Superhero Sighting Society*, that opens on the 8 of July 2020.

The title of the exhibition, *Sturdy Black Shoes*, refers to the resilience of Super Taus, Makhacheva’s superhero alter ego – or vice versa, as some might say. These shoes are part of Super Taus’ mountain village outfit and a reference to the perseverance and resolve to overcome obstacles she encounters living in Dagestan in the Caucasus region of Russia, thereby inscribing heroism into everyday life.

Taus Makhacheva is an artist from Russia based in Moscow. Her practice reflects on day-to-day rituals, the unexpected meeting of cultures and traditions, and instances of the extraordinary in the everyday with playful and humorous overtones. Working across media such as installation, photography, video and performance, her projects are largely collaborative in nature. Through each work, she tries to develop and discover ways of sharing stories and ideas through a multiplicity of voices and contexts. Works in the exhibition such as *Tightrope* (2015), *On the Benefit of the Pyramids in Cultural Education, Strengthening of National Consciousness, and the Formation of Moral and Ethical Guideposts* (2015) and *Gamsutl* (2012) have been realized working closely with Rasul Abakarov, a fifth generation tightrope walker, choreographer Anna Abalikhina, dancer Usup Omarov, circus arts educator Elena Lvova to name a few.

Super Taus’s life affirming practice is presented in the exhibition with video documentations and a multi-channel video presentation of *Untitled 2* (2016) that started with a rediscovery of the forgotten story of two museum attendants at a museum in Dagestan—Maria Korkmasova and Khamisat Abdulaeva—who prevented a theft of an Alexander Rodchenko painting in the 1990s. By invoking the story of these two women, invisible art-care-workers are turned into museological heroes as Super Taus attempts to further inscribe their heroic deed into a larger art historical narrative. Since 2016, Super Taus has been carrying their statues from far-flung place to far-flung place until she finds the best home for them.

An initiative that sits in the center of the exhibition is *Superhero Sighting Society* (2019) conceived in collaboration with curator Sabih Ahmed. The Society was conceived keeping in mind questions such as, how can we reinvent the idea of a superhero, and the desire for supernatural forces that it embodies, for the needs of today? The superhero accounts gathered by *Superhero Sighting Society* come from all reaches of the world in multiple languages and have a radically different approach to their mission. By sharing their stories, the Society reveals the need for and importance of small acts in the realm of the everyday, uncovering the supernatural within the ordinary and sometimes simply portraying compassion. Hearing the superheroes’ stories researched and written by Jessica Saxby, the Society’s records clerk, the listener has the ability to not just travel to the different worlds those heroes inhabit but to observe transformation of helplessness into a life-affirming vocabulary.

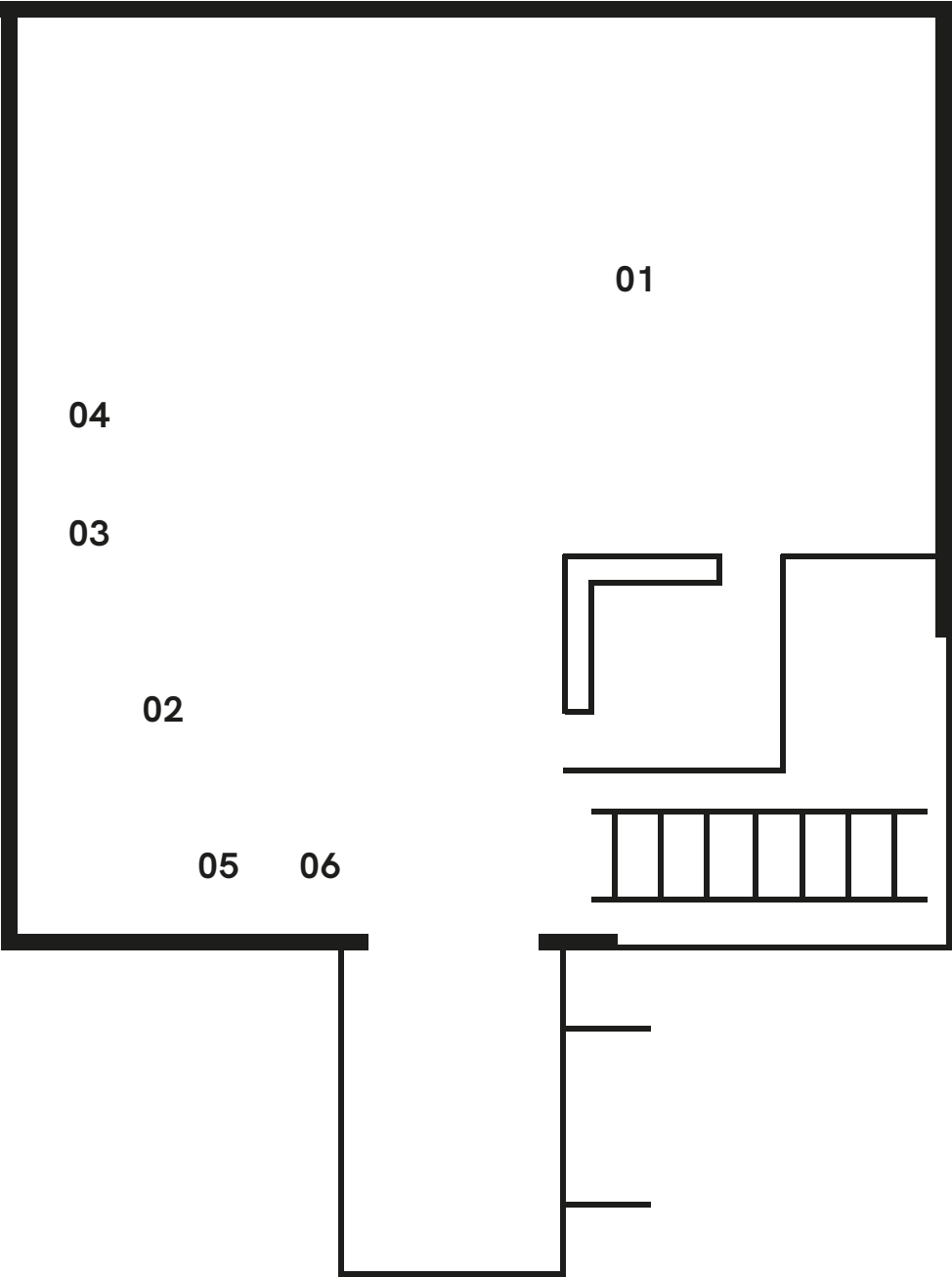
Makhacheva’s seemingly straightforward metaphors contain an entangled web of cultural and historical references, a web that unfurls layer by layer in the process of perceiving her oeuvre. Looking for stories in muffled whispers and navigating opaque realities is key to Taus Makhacheva’s methodology that informs this exhibition.

*Sturdy Black Shoes* continues until 4 of October 2020.

The title of this exhibition comes from Uzma Z. Rizvi’s essay “Taut Detective: On the Art of Taus Makhacheva” (2020).

Superhero Sighting Society was commissioned by KADIST Foundation, Paris

Supported by narrative projects, London.



01  
Sabih Ahmed, Taus Makhacheva with Jessica Saxby  
SUPERHERO SIGHTING SOCIETY

2019  
Installation, mixed media, sound, dimensions variable

Superhero Sighting Society gathers witness accounts of superhero sightings from all around the world and presents a scenography by Super Taus. Maintaining anonymity of its members, the Society raises awareness and promotes conversations around new figurations of power that have emerged amidst the seismic planetary and geopolitical shifts of the 21st century. In 2011, while referencing superheroes in an essay titled 'Is it a Bird? A Plane? No, It's a Magic Chair', Lawrence Liang proposed that, "the transformation of Clark Kent into Superman is always precipitated by a crisis, usually one large enough to potentially destroy the world. But what if it is not a monumental end-of-the-world that scares us, but the prospect of losing the small worlds that we inhabit and know: a bookstore disappearing, a public organization running out of funds, an independent gallery shutting down?" This work aims to invoke many such worlds (big and small). It invites all to conjure images and apparitions from a cacophony of voices; to re-render living environments through a congestion of narratives; and, to propose new morphologies of the contemporary through figures, personas, places and desires. An impetus behind this work is to open a question that first brought Superhero Sighting Society together: How have different landscapes and geographies demanded different superpowers of the heroes arising from there?

Superhero Sighting Society is conceived by the Society's Founding Secretary Members, Sabih Ahmed and Taus Makhacheva, in collaboration with the Society's Records Clerk,

Jessica Saxby. Scenography by Super Taus.

Production : Clément Caignart, Kristina Cherniavskaia, Corégie Expo, Andrey Efits, Sophie Potelon, Guillaume Thireau

Installation production: Carlo Bas-Sancho, Sasha Dykhne, Mark Kuzin, Maria Plavinskaya, Mathis Oesterlen, Albert Romantsov, Svetlana Yefremova, Mark Yesin

Sound design: Denis Dronov

Texts: Jessica Saxby

Translation: Pio Abad, Ayò Akínwándé, Abdelmalek Ben Salah, Chen Chen, Alfredo Hubard Escalera, Hiroyuki Kojima, Bruno Leitão, Magda Mietka, Iheanyi Onwuegbucha, Mégane Paradis, Rosa Preuss Ililonga, Lala Raščić, Sini Rinne-Kanto, Jessica Saxby, Ruijun Shen, Jonas Staal

Voice actors: Falak Ali, Ahmed Abouelela, Henriikka Ahtiainen, Roman Bashtovoj, Daniel Begon, Sofia Poppius Brichta, Christopher Caffrey, Mike Cole, Jacob Ferree, Amira Gherbaoui, Ruben Gorkink, Olaoeye Tundee Habeeb, Nishida Hidemi, Vojtech Jirka, Michael Koriche, Johan Brink Lorenz, Njegoš Manojlović, Victoria Moya, Martyna Nowinska, Ayodele Oluwaseun, Mary Rose, Talib Shillaev, Marie Vacher, Joa Verrijzer, Natalja Verrijzer, Olyvia Wilde, Xia Yin

Research: Andrey Efits, Katia Porro, Sophie Potelon

Commisioned by KADIST Foundation, Paris

Supported by narrative projects, London

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02  
Super Taus  
UNTITLED (QUICK FIX)

2019  
Installation, mixed media, life-affirming practice

In 1868, teenager Jimmy Quinn and local man Paddy Flanagan, while digging for potatoes in the Irish fields, found the precious Ardagh chalice, a religious artifact whose loose replica made in 1928 became the Sam McGuire Cup, biggest soccer trophy in Ireland. In 2004, Frank Gehry designed a minimalist, acrylic-and-metal version of Hockey World Cup, which caused a big controversy and criticism from players not very keen to kiss it as they usually do during celebration. In 2018, during FIFA World Cup Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed El-Shenawy refused to accept Man of the Match award, since it was sponsored by Budweiser.

Inspired by these and other stories, Super Taus gives a playful twist to phenomenon of the sports trophies. During the performance, custom-made, kitschy and cheap sports cups of all sorts will be distributed freely to the audience. Somewhat parallel to the art history, the history of such trophies shows that everyday tableware or merely decorative utensils like chalices found in the thrift shops may become legendary objects. It is a collective sculpture, a readymade though always in the making, constantly engraved with new names and sometimes expanded with additional elements due to the lack of space for information. Given the increasing absence of traditional prizes from art events, Super Taus will exhibit sports cups found by the superhero in the vaults of Amazon and AliExpress. Just to remind we're all superheroes, during the opening a pop-up display will be opened and the trophies will be distributed for free based on a throw of a dice. Super Taus will engrave on the cup of choice the mention of achievements, either

accounted by visitors themselves or from a pre-made list of wonderful deeds and exploits.

Note: As Super Taus will not be able attend the opening due to the pandemic, the performance will possibly take place at the finissage of the exhibition.

Production: Andrey Efits

Research: Andrey Efits

Commissioned by Armory Show, New York

Production supported by narrative projects gallery, London

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03  
Super Taus  
UNTITLED 1

2014  
viral video  
2:16 min

Super Taus is Taus Makhacheva’s superhero alter-ego and appeared after the artist met Super Sohrab, a superhero from Iran. Super Taus lives and works in the Tsada Mountain village in Dagestan, and uses her superhuman strength in acts of everyday heroism, like the action captured in this viral video footage. Super Taus considers her actions as “life affirming practices”, and as Makhacheva describes “she is like a child’s fantasy, a dream of woman who grew up and lives in a patriarchal society.”

04  
Super Taus  
UNTITLED 2

2016  
video documentation in 4 parts:  
Dagestan / 10:18 min, MMOMA / 12:37min,  
Road to Moscow / 5:10min, Centre Pompidou /  
14:20min

Super Taus searches for an appropriate place for a monument to Maria Korkmasova and Khamisat Abdulaeva — two Dagestan museum attendants who saved the canvas “Abstract Composition” by Alexander Rodchenko seizing it from a robber’s hands in the early 1990s. Khamisat Abdulaeva worked as a museum attendant in the room 6, and Maria Korkmasova in the room 7 where that work was hanging. Some robber cut out the picture, rolled it up, tucked it in and rushed away. Khamisat noticed an empty frame, told Maria quickly, so Maria ran after him and seized the canvas and thereby prevented the robbery. This story told like something ordinary seemed to Super Taus to be a true feat. As there is not many monuments to particular women in Dagestan and after coming to the conclusion that those museum attendants are also heroes, she decided to set up a monument to them.

Super Taus looks for a place to set it up in Makhachkala, Moscow Museum of Modern art and Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. The journey also includes hiking from Makhachkala to Moscow with the monument on her back, in the end superhero does not find a suitable location and only documentation of the search exists.

Sculpture production: Maria Kalmykova,  
Maksim Protsenko, Vasilisa Zemskova

Production: Malika Alieva

Text: Andrey Efits

Special thanks to Shamil Akhmed

Production supported by the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, narrative projects, London, and Galerie Iragui, Moscow

05  
SUPER TAUS WITH NSK STATE  
PASSPORT

2020

Super Taus’ passport issued by NSK State\*

\*NSK State in Time was created as a conceptual art project in 1992 by the groups comprising the Slovene collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). Amongst others these included the groups IRWIN, Laibach, Cosmokinetical Cabinet Noordung, New Collectivism and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. In its founding statements, the NSK State rejects the categories of (defined) territory and the principle of national borders and advocates the law of transnationality.

06  
SUPER TAUS AND CAMEL YASHA

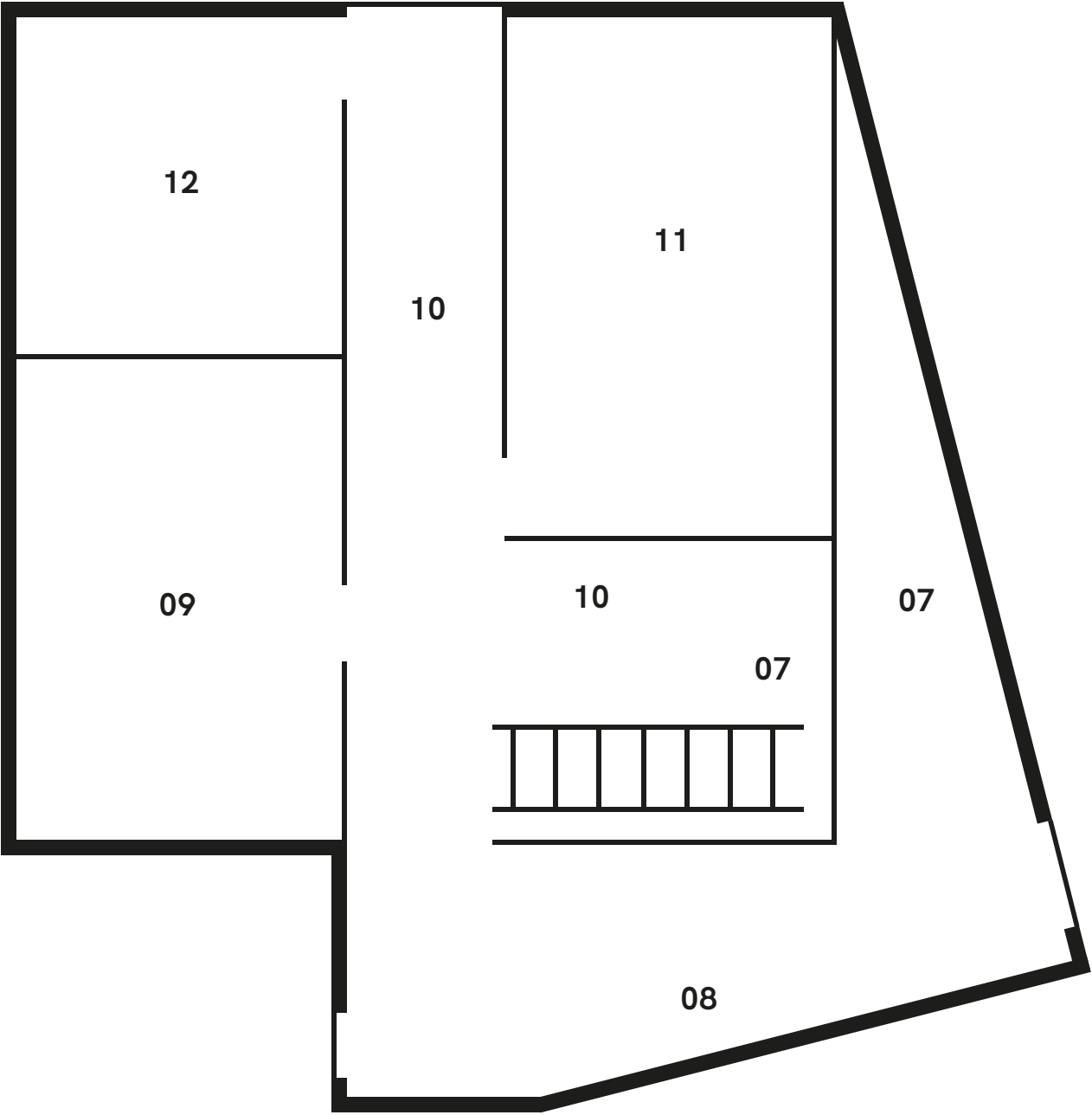
2017

Takeaway poster based on photoshoot for  
R&D magazine, Kaspiisk, Dagestan, 2014

Photo: Imam Guseinov

Special thanks to Naida Omarova and  
Dzhamilya Dagirova

Commissioned by Leo Xu Projects



07  
Taus Makhacheva  
VOCABULARY

2012 - ongoing  
2 channel video collection  
duration variable

Acting as a contemporary anthropologist, in this work Makhacheva observes the gestural vocabulary in the street life of Makhachkala (Dagestan), predominantly performed by men. She records a theatre of masculinity constantly on display: men with torn ears (tokens of practicing wrestling), a peculiar way of showing off back underarm muscles (popularly known as "wings"), and many others. Captured and isolated by the artist's camera, the gestures of power and ritualized violence come across as self-consciously artificial and constructed, forming their own codified space. They defy rational explanation or straightforward interpretation, translating however "the symbolic forms and spatial origins characteristic of the ambivalent contemporary Caucasus masculinity" (M. Tlostanova).

Performed by Shamil Alibegov, Magomed Kerimov

Text: Elena Sorokina

08  
Taus Makhacheva  
ENDEAVOUR

2010  
video 9 min, colour, sound

As suggested by its title, Endeavour shows a human figure engaged in the impossible task of moving a massive rock. As writer Ilina Koralov describes, "the chosen position of the camera emphasises the subordination of the body", whilst the video also takes on a humorous tone, as the hopelessness and absurdity of this effort is played out.

Camera: Alexander Sinyagin

Costume: Zulfiya Kayumova

The text is based on the writings of Ilina Koralova

09  
Taus Makhacheva  
GAMSUTL

2012  
video 16 min, colour, sound

Gamsutl is an abandoned and hard-to-reach ancient settlement situated in the Avarian Mountain region of the Caucasus. The village was built on rocks to ensure self-sufficiency and protection from invaders, whilst also more precious high-altitude lands for pastures and farming. Gamsutl had only one remaining resident at the time of work production and is now in ruins, blending harmoniously with the wild landscape. Makhacheva describes the scene "as if Gamsutl's life cycle has come to an end and it is time for nature to take back its rocks from human beings. We can palpably feel how much effort it takes for humans to carve out a small space in the rugged mountains and how quickly it reverts to the natural world." The protagonist of this video is a young man who takes part in a peculiar ritual of remembering and re-enactment. The dancer carefully recreates the spatial memory of the past embodying various identities associated with this dying settlement. He imagines himself as a defender, an invader, a warrior, and may be an inhabitant. He mimics inanimate objects, becoming a tombstone, a watchtower and a crack in the wall. Symbols of Soviet modernity are also incorporated into his dance like the Dance of Collective Farm Brigade Leader from 1939 Soviet Folk Art, and other movements evoke figures from the battle paintings of Russian artist Franz Roubaud (1856-1928), renowned for his series of Caucasian War paintings set in the area around Gamsutl. The strange ritual exists as a palimpsest of forgotten histories, impossible to separate one layer from another.

Camera: Alexander Sinyagin

Performer: Usup Omarov

Choreographer: Anna Abalikhina

The text is based on the writings of Madina V. Tlostanova

Special thanks to Alexey Maslyaev, Abdusalil Abdusalilov, Patimat Tanaeva, Hadzhimurad Surganov

Production supported by Gazprombank and Art Finance, Moscow



**10**  
**Taus Makhacheva**  
**ON THE BENEFITS OF PYRAMIDS IN**  
**CULTURAL EDUCATION, STRENGTHENING**  
**OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE**  
**FORMATION OF MORAL AND ETHICAL**  
**GUIDEPOSTS**

2015  
photo wallpaper, 7 photo prints on acrylic glass

A photo documentation of a performance. The performance work is a continuation of the video *Tightrope* and continues the development of similar ideas around the unstable situation of culture in the Caucasian region, questions of preservation and individual artistic fear of art production. What one has to do to make an imprint in the history of art? To earn a place in the rigid mental structure of national/ international history of art. 61 artworks are copies from the Dagestan Museum of Fine Art named after P.S.Gamzatova. This selection is an attempt to outline the 20th century fine art history of the Republic. For the performance the metal structures from the video with all the works inside were placed in the exhibition space. Once a day circus acrobats came into the space and used a selection of artworks from this structures to build different figures with their bodies, paintings and works on paper. They sustained these figures for as long as they could. Each day the the artworks used in various pyramids were different.

Performers Kiev: Evgeniy Emelyanenko, Roman Kushnirenko, Kristina Potopalskaya, Konstantin Petrov, Vladislav Rudenko

Photo: Maksim Belousov

Comissioned by Kiev Biennial

Production supported by Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

Performers Moscow: Denis Goncharov, Tatiyana Krymko, Elena Lvova, Raf Karakhanyan, Nikolai Kozin, Ruslan Polyakov, Ilya Salmov, Dmitrii Sarafanov, Leonid Sheiko, Artem Tkachenko, Denis Trunov, Leonid Sheiko, Alexey Teslin, Svyatoslav Savin, Valerii Bordiyan, Dmitrii Belobrov, Ilya Nurutdinov

Photo: Ivan Erofeev

Comissioned by Moscow Biennial

Production supported by Moscow Biennial and Cosmoscw Artists' Patrons Programme

**11**  
**Taus Makhacheva**  
**TIGHTROPE**

2015  
video 58:10 min., colour, sound

In this film, we see a tightrope walker crossing a canyon in the highlands of the Caucasus Mountains with a collection of 20th century artworks by Dagestani artists. Rasul Abakarov, who is descended from 5 generations of famous tightrope walkers, carefully carries the paintings and works on paper from one side of the mountain to the other, placing them into a structure resembling museum storage racks. By staging this risky feat, Makhacheva questions the subjectivity of institutional art history, evoking the fragile balance between post-soviet traditions and contemporary culture in the way artworks are moved precariously above the canyon's void.

Tightrope walker: Rasul Abakarov

Director of Photography: Alexander Sinyagin

Camera: Pavel Philkov

Camera of quadrocopter: Shamil Gadzhidadaev

Sound: Alexander Khokhlov

Executive Producer: Malika Alieva

Film Editor: Alexandra Pustynnova

Colour: Alexandra Yastrebova, Mikhail Perelman

Sound-effects technician: Sergey Radzievskiy

Technical assistance: Mukhtar Abakarov

The text is based on the writings of Silvia Franceschini

Production supported by Cosmoscw Artists' Patrons Programme



**12**  
**Taus Makhacheva**  
**LET ME BE PART OF A NARRATIVE**

2012  
3 channel video installation

Dog fights, interviews  
video, colour, sound, 13:22 min  
Dagestan 2012  
Camera: Shamil Gadzhidadaev  
Sound: Mike Wyeld  
Subtitles: Igor Malahov  
German voice over: Andreas Dobberkau, Lisa Hoffmann

Dog fights  
video, colour, sound, 19:51 min  
Dagestan 2012  
Camera: Shamil Gadzhidadaev, Nariman Gafurov  
Sound: Andrey Tsvetkov  
Subtitles: Igor Malahov

Archival chronicles of the North Ossetian Television studio  
video, b/w, sound, 23:19 min  
Subtitles: Igor Malahov  
German voice over: Andreas Dobberkau

The installation *LET ME BE A PART OF A NARRATIVE* is about how in the gap between official history and personal and/or collective history/memory there is something that makes our experience of history diverse, polyphonic. Maybe it is the memories of witnesses and oral histories; maybe the literature of witness; maybe fictional films and documentaries, theatrical performances, public events and works of visual culture...

In a story of sporting achievements and victories something allows us to catch sight of an intimately human drama of defeats and difficulties amidst the medals and cups. And in a tale about dog fighting competitions in the Republic of Dagestan something forces us to overcome the image of the region broadcast

by official media and to imagine alternative symbols inherent to a particular cultural context, symbols that are neither imposed nor imported by the outside world.

Taus Makhacheva's project presents multi-layered narratives (only a few characters, of course, only a few symbols) that have a direct impact on our image systems. It raises the question of how to create and represent a text that is not monological but intersubjective, a text based on the dialogic principle of knowledge production.

Text: Alexei Maslyaev

Special thanks to Ramazan Rabadanov

Production supported by Paperworks Gallery

**13**  
**Taus Makhacheva**  
**ON HISTORICAL IDEALS OF LABOUR IN THE COUNTRY THAT CONQUERED SPACE**

2013  
2 channel video installation  
Archival videos  
Artist Collection  
Duration variable

**Taus Makhacheva** lives and works in Moscow, Russia and is predominantly known for performance and video works that critically examine what happens when different cultures and traditions come into contact with one another. Makhacheva’s work always originates from a story told or an experience shared and expands out into wider collections of narratives and disciplines. Often humorous, her works attempt to test the resilience of images, objects and bodies in today’s world. Taus has a BA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths (2007) and MFA from Royal College of Art (2013).

**Super Taus** lives and works in Tsada Mountain village, having graduated from the Department of Philology at the Dagestan Pedagogical State University. She considers her actions as “life affirming practices”. Super Taus was awarded the Kandinsky Prize in 2016 as young artist of the year.

**Superhero Sighting Society** was formed in the spring of 2019 after the resurfacing of a rare photograph taken in 1979 of Aydamir Aydamirov just as he was about to take flight in the mountains near Makhachkala (Republic of Dagestan, Russia). Maintaining the anonymity of its members, the Society gathers witness accounts of superhero sightings from all around the world. The aim of the Society is to raise awareness and to promote conversations around new figurations of power that have emerged amidst the seismic planetary and geopolitical shifts of the 21st century. Superhero Sighting Society’s findings are put together by its Founding Secretary Members, Sabih Ahmed and Taus Makhacheva, and the Society’s Records Clerk, Jessica Saxby.

## colophon

### Production:

Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst

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