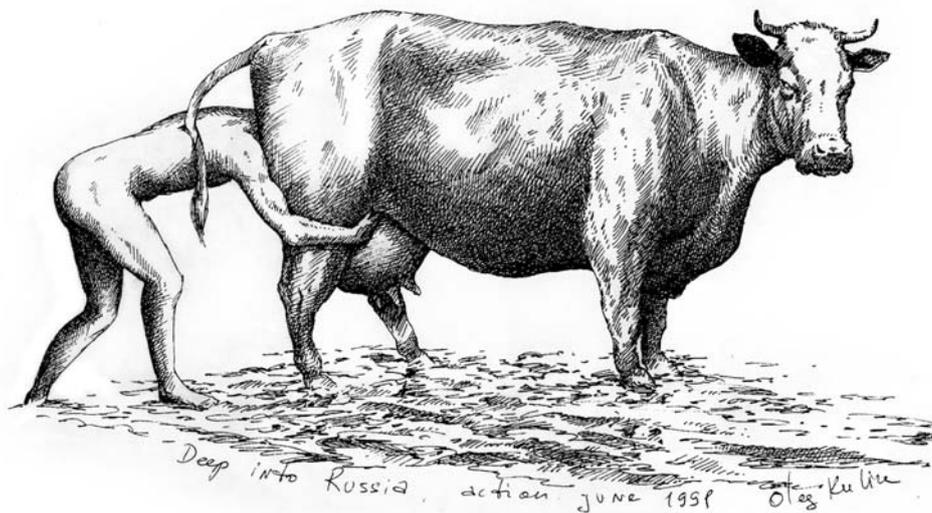


OLEG KULIK'S ANIMALITY

Oleg Kulik, ranks among the most interesting and controversial Russian artists. He has managed to attract attention of art critics and exhibition curators the world over by his performance shows characterised by 'strong' expression, where he himself assumes a role of 'artist-animal', or, more specifically, 'artist-dog'; or else, at times, he would be a bird, a fish, a bull. The artist thus asks the basic question about the essence of the human in a human, and what a reverting to the state of 'original animal' may mean.

Text by Victor Misiano



Oleg Kulik

Deep into Russia, Action, June 1998 ©

In the early 90s, Nature was viewed as a hopeless archaism, an ideological construct. Yet, for Kulik this category was something absolutely authentic: when a young man, he escaped into an out of the way village where he stayed several years (1981-84), devoting himself to the Tolstoy like simplification. Tolstoy, by the way, his juvenile idol, was the figure to whom Kulik dedicated his later program stating work. A wax figure of the Russian writer was placed under a real cage with chickens -- when the work was on display a layer of chicken dung accumulated on the head and shoulders of the wax figure. Thus reality to which Kulik drove through transparency was combined with natural physiological discharge.

This description can be amplified with another remark: the motive of defecation as a metaphor of natural authenticity makes Kulik's work close to that of his friend Vladimir Sorokin, a Moscow writer. In his direct dialogue with Sorokin's texts Kulik realized his Deep into Russia project, which took the form of a real trip to the countryside, to his native village, and in his creations it produced a photo series, a book and a film. And in his Windows this motive of moving deep into something is doubtless when the classic methods of pictorial illusion take the eye of the spectator from the surface of the painting, and carry it deep into aesthetic space, going deep into landscape. In the village cycle, as a matter of fact, this motive appeared for the first time and had another interpretation: it was the initiation to the primordial natural element realized in the act of coition with "children of nature", i.e. in bestiality. The photograph of Kulik stuffing his head into a cow's belly became the emblem of Deep into Russia...

Thus nature takes Kulik to another important and, perhaps, the most program-building category of his work: to zoophrenia. In this case we mean the theoretical program Kulik developed in collaboration with his wife Mila Bredikhina in 1993-94. In this program human civilization undergoes radical reduction with complete denunciation of the anthropological element. This appeal to the non-human, to the animal element Kulik declared back in 1992 at the animalistic festival conducted at the premises of the Regina Gallery by the efforts of different artists (including Kulik himself) who produced seven projects united by the compulsory use of live animals. Later the zoophrenic topicality was developed in a series of texts, works and expositions starting with his famous actions where he mastered his role of the dogman, and ending with his big project titled the Family of the Future where the artist presents his family life with a dog. Echoes of zoophrenia are felt in his Windows: desolate landscapes are populated with the characters of wild life -- only these characters dominate the world of virgin nature.

The zoophrenic program logically led Kulik to the mastering of such components of psychic

experience as affect, paroxysm, transgression. That is what lies in the bottom of his numerous provocative actions. But it is the mastering of the experience of death that logically completes his apology of the bestial. The theme of death triumphs, of course, in his Windows where close examination shows that the fauna populating his natural world is dead, that it is nothing but stuffed animals from the Museum of Nature. The interest to the category of death appeared quite early in Kulik's creation. Soon after his animalistic festival he was planning to produce another, unrealized yet project which he called the Festival of Thanatoid Projects. Kulik's own action, which, by the way, concluded the Festival of Animalistic Projects and was provocatively titled Piggly-Wiggly Makes Presents was, actually, a public butchering of a real piglet which was bought at a market and called Piggly-Wiggly.

As one of the interested followers of Kulik's creation remarked, "It was not a pig that was butchered at the Regina gallery, it was all the preceding Moscow tradition." He meant the Moscow conceptualism in this case but one could invoke a wider meaning. This scandalous action -- and the action actually aroused tremendous scandal in the public -- was an astounding mark of the new epoch. A radical economic reform started in those months thus ending the epoch of rationalism and freeing blind vitalism, naked instincts, hunger for violence and transgressive impulses. Yet the suicidal meaning of these transformations was fully explained later, at that period it was taken for a drive to innovation. And the artist himself felt that way in his St. Petersburg performance titled Kulik Is Still a Bird when he jumped out of the window at the top of an apartment block and made a soft landing gliding down with his hands spread like wings (1995).

Thus denunciation of rationalism and initiation to the primordial ritual of sacrifice are a revival of myth with its notions of cyclic development of being. Actually, it is not the fact of completion and ending that fascinates Kulik in death, on the contrary, it is the beginning and the opening perspective. If we turn back to Windows, a stuffed animal is not a dead animal, it is not a corpse. The most interesting thing in it is the dialectics of the living and the dead -- the end and the beginning meet here. It is the same neomythological motive of "eternal return" that was present in the above mentioned work where the wax figure of Tolstoy coexisted with live chickens. It is significant that Kulik supposed to present real childbirth as a performance in his unrealized Festival of Thanatoid Projects. The cycle of death and resurrection was death completed.

One could add that the cycle is played many times in his Windows as a rite should be played. This is not just the ambivalence of a stuffed animal. It is its interaction with the landscape. The empty and unpopulated nature of Windows might look more dead



Oleg Kulik

Kulik Is a Bird in Fact. Gallery 21, Saint Petersburg. September 22, 1995 ©

than dead animals. It could be taken for an illusionist background of a zoo compound where live animals were photographed. And last, but not least, there comes the third plane of aesthetic illusion of this work. It is the "reflection" of human figures on the surface of the work, which seems to present hypothetical spectators standing in front of it. It is significant that this new level of "live" presence kills all the rest. If we take these illusory reflections for life elements, it means that they are reflected on the surface of a painting, i.e. of the dead object.

A number of other preceding works of Kulik recognize themselves in the complex dialectic of the live and the dead; of illusion and reality characteristic of *Windows*. A dead painting in live hands is the image, which was literally reproduced by Kulik in his shocking installation titled *First-Hand Art*. Living people held paintings from the collection of the Regina gallery, their hands pulled through holes in false walls. In his other work, the *Alter Aegis*, Kulik hang in the air in the costume of a fairy-tale horned animal undressing a picturesque handsome youth wearing a tail coat at the beginning of the performance. Thus, "naked reality" made its way through a series of masquerade transformations. Using this classic literary motive of masquerade Kulik takes the theme of illusion and

reality to the no less classic the theme of illusion and reality to the no less classic motive of a double where the dialectic of the true and the illusory is rooted in the personal subjectivity. In the *Two Kuliks* performance the artist, whose authenticity was literally manifested -- Kulik appeared on stage totally naked and conducted a tormenting dialogue with the video of himself projected upon a glass screen. Reality comes back, as Kulik always has it, through the act of transgression: having exhausted the polemics with himself, Kulik breaks the "damned glass".

But it is not just the dialectic and interchangeability of the living and the dead, of reality and illusion that shows how close Kulik's mentality is to myth -- his imagination is determined by the system of mythological leading motives. Actually, a system of leading motives, as Richard Wagner showed it, is the only alternative to the rational causal procedures, which are inevitably and consistently renounced by the author of zoophrenia. Thus the motives of a pig, a dog, bestiality, Tolstoy, flight and some other go through all his works in various modifications. It is also essential that every motive has several meaningful, associative and metaphoric strata for Kulik in full correspondence with the structure of mythological mentality. The texts of the artist provide a detailed enough material that



Oleg Kulik

Holy Beast, 1993 ©

explains the program building meaning of his iconography. But it is important that any Kulik's leading motive has ultimately personal connotations referring it to deeply intimate circumstances.

So, when analyzing the motive of a dog characteristic for Kulik, not only obvious social and political meanings -- the image of a wild country and a "dog's life" -- are important. A dog is a mythologeme for Kulik, not a metaphor. It is of principal importance that a dog emerged in his life as a teenage trauma: his parents made him sell the cub he bought himself on the money he saved on breakfasts. So since his childhood a dog signals the loss of linkage with the primordial nature for Kulik, it signals the loss of the Other and the trauma of sociality. It was when Kulik brought his pet back to the market that Kulik planned the act of revenge he realized later, his escape to nature. It is also important that the leading motives that determine a myth are usually contaminated and intertwined. So a dog is at the same time the embodiment of natural and pure instincts that oppose civilization, it is the hypostasis of the Tolstoy values of "simplification" which are important for Kulik. At the same time a dog, being the most social animal, is one of the potential realizations of another important mythologeme, the mythologeme of a double who is able to combine oppositions. So, when Kulik found his lost "friend"

again, when he acquired his bulldog Quilty, the artist made his dog into the main character of most of his recent works. In other words, all the aesthetic system of Oleg Kulik is, in fact, nothing but the experiment on personal myth creation. It is logical that it is not enough for Kulik to recreate the leading motives of his creative work, he is to experience them himself. That is why he goes on all fours, bites or "flies" off a roof, escapes to the country and travels deep into Russia.

Personal myth creation takes us to the explanation of the utopian character of the zoophrenia program. As a matter of fact, the clauses of this program that suggest complete debasement of the human cannot be rationally explained: they lack any perspective for realization. And the artist would never admit that it is purely provocative or ironic. No, he takes it with passionate seriousness and he is ready to enthusiastically defend it. Thus the personal myth creation of Kulik explains the internal value of his art: unlike the artists of conceptualism, who built a powerful school, the art of Kulik does not have any obvious sources or immediate predecessors in Moscow. It seemed to emerge out of nowhere -- from the Russian depth. His art would not conduct an explicit dialogue with the art of his colleagues of the Moscow school: Kulik cannot be blamed for plagiarizing of influence. His creative work is governed by nothing

but elemental motivation, by obsession, and not by the cultural dialogue with the past and the present.

His obsession is always in the way Kulik informs the fruits of his creation. Having no rational arguments to rely on and creating his art as a myth, as a self-valued reality, the artist is not satisfied with the purely aesthetic statute of the reality he creates. He is prepared to take mortal risk in his actions, to subject himself to physical pain and mutilation proving thus the ultimate authenticity of his creative experience. The same refers to his *Windows*: obsessiveness is obvious in his drive to totality -- it looks like he wants to plunge the spectator into the simulacre of reality he created.

It is logical that devoting himself to mythological life building Kulik is inclined to "powerful gestures". Reality itself is deprived of meaning, meaning is given to it by the external demiurge effort. Therefore the stronger the will, the more the meaning. That is why the curatorship of Kulik, which he symptomatically called the "practice of exposition", took extremely obsessive forms. In the *Logic of Paradox*, a show Kulik organized in 1988, he actually produced exquisite expositional herbariums of other artists' works.



Oleg Kulik and "Nikolay" group

Piggly-Wiggly Making Presents. April 11, 1992 ©

Victor Misiano is an art historian, an art critic, and the curator of numerous international art exhibitions including the Hamburg Project, Interpol, Conjugations, Moscow, and the Third Rome. He was the chief curator of the Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1995 and 2003, and of the same exhibition in Central Asia in 2005. He is also the author of many publications on contemporary art, and the editor-in-chief of Moscow Art Magazine (AM), the only Russian publication dedicated to the theory of contemporary art. Umelec Magazine, published (#4/2004) an article describing the preparations for the First Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2005), and the scandal surrounding Viktor Misiano - who was not only one of the curators, but also the main author of the Big Project for Russia - and his exclusion from the event.

This text is a segment extracted from Oleg Kulik: Windows, originally published in House&Windows, Yugoslav Pavilion (catalogue), La Biennale di Venezia, 2001.

This text in its edited version has been authorised for publication by Victor Misiano.

OLEG KULIK: ARTIFICIAL PARADISE

*Oleg Kulik, who has long existed in the hypostasis of the “Dog-man”, suggests a radically new strategy in his project titled *The New Paradise: a suicidal, doomed attempt to transgress the borders of the human and the borders of culture.**

Text by Irina Kulik translated by Andrey Patrikeev



Oleg Kulik

The New Paradise. Leopards, 2000-2001©

When Kulik became an animal in his earlier projects and performances, he inevitably turned into a show himself, instead of being an artist or a spectator, and his response to the eternal “don’t-touch” impermeability of a museum was to bit spectators breaking through the barrier from the opposite side. The New Paradise is a project where Kulik goes back to the human. He tries to restore the image of the lost paradise combining the images of man with the natural world, which has long appeared to be the world, which is possible only when we are absent.

Yet this combination could be but virtual. The figures of nude “Adam and Eve” (often taking risky frank poses) appear only as reflections on the glass of the show cases in a zoological museum with its painted dioramas and stuffed animals. Man projects himself into the decorations of the “wild”, pre-human nature he has reincarnated himself.

Either man or nature is to sacrifice their immediate reality, their life to make this combination possible. Stuffed animals acquire the illusion of life. Our eyes do not notice painted backgrounds, seams, supports and lines holding birds “floating” in the air, predators frozen in their jumps, racing antelopes. Yet, in exchange for that, the reflections of living people on glass emerge as semi-transparent phantoms, ghosts, hallucinations appearing in somebody’s eyes, or as visitors from the grave trying to return to the natural world they left, who still remain underincarnated, hardly visible shadows. If man wants to bring life back to dead nature, he is to agree that he must stay as nothing but a visiting ghost not to confuse the “indifferent nature”, which never needed him, with his living presence.

It is not in the open space of ecological reserves natural parks where the fatal heterogeneity of man and nature, which informs the notion of



Oleg Kulik

The New Paradise. Zebras, 2000-2001©

“environment”, finds its best correspondence, it is in the closed space of the zoo with its fenced areas and show cases of sheltered aquariums and terrariums where man strolls along the paths allocated for him, observing the sacred inviolability of the border between man and the realm of nature. Nature as a museum exhibit agrees to present itself only when the “don’t-touch” rule is strictly observed. Expositions of zoological museums strengthen our conviction that nature is inaccessible for human scrutiny in the full authenticity of its being. If you want to display animals in the natural state when they are not scared off by the naughty human presence, they are to be killed, stuffed and placed under glass in dioramas painted by artists.

The heterogeneity of the virtual combination of the human and of the natural, non-anthropomorphic worlds is also conspicuous in the difference between the temporal characteristics of the frozen “living picture” of the museum exposition and the stop frame that stops the moment of living human characters. The spectator’s head swims with confusion when it is impossible to make out whether the static of the picture in front of him is a natural stopped frame, or it is a staged photograph where models freeze before the camera to imitate tension and motion. Every photograph of *The New Paradise* bears the superimposition of the two heterogeneous “stops of the time” - the static of the photograph that stopped the motion of living figure reflected on the glass, and the static of the stuffed living pictures in the show windows of a museum, which imitate motion stopped in its “flight”. The living and the dead, the natural and the human could only be combined in the ambiguity of the stopped time - in the “small death” of the photograph or of the bogus *mises en scene* of the museum resurrectionists made up to resemble life.

Man and nature meet in the false stopped time deprived of continuation, and the false, unidimensional space deprived of depth - on the glistening glass protecting a museum painting. Glass, the symbols and the effects of which Kulik used in his early series titled *Transparency*, turn out to be the only possible interface where two incompatible worlds interact. It is an interface both in the psychoanalytical sense - a sort of a skin, a surface that provides contact and divides like the skin between the mother and the child, and in everyday computer sense - a sort of a guide that effectuates contact with the virtual world. For the sake of this possibility of contact between the two worlds one of these worlds, either the natural, or the human one, must inevitably remain virtual sacrificing the fullness of its presence.

While usually it was nature that sacrificed itself, man and nature change their places in *The New Paradise*: man agrees to become a sort of “environment” for the ideal images of the lost paradise mute in their airless eternity. Human figures turn into fluctuations of air, into phantoms that confirm the

presence of air as a substance capable of refracting rays of light and generating mirages. Man falls apart losing material character to turn into the substance that coats nature animating it with itself and giving a semblance of life to it.

In your career you have famously coined the term ‘artist-animal’ by becoming a bird, a fish, or a bull. In a number of ways your work questions the essence of being human, and what a reverting to the state of ‘original animal’ may mean. Could you tell us how this concept formed and who are your philosophical and artistic references within this context?

This concept was called “zoophrenia”, and it was developed by my years’ long partner and comrade Mila Bredikhina, in cooperation with me, of course. This notion is juxtaposed to the total schizophrenia of the man of culture, or of the “social animal”, as Marx put it. Initially it was quite original in nature, so to say, and it was oriented either at the Cynics, or at the works by Pavlov and Efrimson, or the American notion of the Political Animal, or the Russian context of 1990s. Later it turned to the contemporary European philosophy. We took our own everywhere we could. Thus, in 1995, for instance, Mila found an article in the *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* where its authors, Vinogradov, Mikhailovsky and Monin, called mankind “forward to nature”. Later, if I’m not mistaken, the authors moved to America and joined the deep ecology movement. The *Theses for the Manifesta I* catalogue on the smooth reduction of the planet’s population and collaboration with squirrels and mice, which Daniel Birnbaum found awfully gloomy in *Artforum*, were composed under the influence of the Vinogradov and Co-optimistic concept. You will agree, I think, that the world is not something to garnish our meal. We are a part of it, and not the best part. By the way, it wasn’t our fault that the bibliography was dropped in that catalogue, the designer just didn’t have enough room for it.

The European context of discussion appeared immediately after the scandal around *Interpol* and *Pavlov’s Dog* actions – I mean Deleuze-Guattari and Derrida with his idea of deconstructing everything, besides the original animal. It also involved the Ljubljana School of philosophy and Lacan.

As for art, I have always felt close with the figures of late Tolstoy and early Malevich.

What is your take of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Becoming Animal’ and does it play any role in your work?



Oleg Kulik

The Mad Dog or The Last Taboo Guarded by Alone Cerber. Jakimanka Street, Moscow, November 23, 1994 ©

I'd rather say that becoming an animal is becoming what you actually are. And it is not that simple. I'd rather prefer the absence of any mention of evolution, of transition to the more (or less) perfect state in Deleuze and Guattari. It is also pleasant to find formal coincidences in discourse, like the insistence on the radical symbiosis of creatures belonging to different species. Yet, my *Family of the Future* could hardly be the same thing as their symbiosis of a wasp and an orchid. I understand the idea that it is real for the human being to become an animal even if there is no actual animal into which man transforms, in fact; and to become the *Other* of the animal is more real, even if this *Other* is not real. Our zoophrenia concept takes the animal as the "non-anthropomorphic *Other* of the human being" which stays inside the human being and meets his or her demands for the *Other*, including the *Big Other*. It is a problem whether it is possible in every concrete case. But I cannot claim that the non-anthropomorphic *Other* of man cannot succeed the human being and that transformations are not possible here. The notion of zoophrenia was derived from the category of transparency in art (of the transparent borderline

between art and non-art, in particular), and which stays inside the human being and meets his or her demands for the *Other*, including the *Big Other*. It is a problem whether it is possible in every concrete case. But I cannot claim that the non-anthropomorphic *Other* of man cannot succeed the human being and that transformations are not possible here. The notion of zoophrenia was derived from the category of transparency in art (of the transparent borderline between art and non-art, in particular), and transparency does not fit into the Post-Modernism of Deleuze and Guattari for it is partially dissolved in it and partially goes beyond its limits.

By the way, becoming an animal gives me an opportunity to return to my earlier works and earlier states.

It has been claimed that your work with animals addresses the prevailing Western conviction that Russians are "some uncivilised race", one of savages living in the never-explored steppes of Asia. The 'artist-dog' figure takes roots also, in this specific case, in



Oleg Kulik
Zoophrenia I. Series of b/w photographs ©

a deep conviction that in the present-day world, traditional means of communication have proved a failure and that people should rather seek for a more adequate way of how to communicate. Why a dog?

There is an opinion in the West that everything that is not the West is wild. I faced it repeatedly. Wild Arabs, Wild Russian, Wild blacks, Wild Asians, etc. And I observed the same phenomenon in Asia, in China, for instance... and in Russia, in respect to the neighboring states. But this is not really important... The dog emerged as a metaphor of the borderline state of the human being positioned between nature and the socium. Just as the dog, the human being has been out of nature for a long time and can no longer survive in it in the "wild" state (isn't that the basis for our belated fears of any "wildness"?). Man – for the time being, at least! – cannot survive without water, air, the sun. But simultaneously man is not a part of the social machine, a gear in its pure form either. Today civilization is no less frightening than the former wildness. So, for myself, the dog is the most tragic and convincing metaphor of this borderline state of the human being. A horse could have actually emerged instead of the dog here. Both creatures have been transformed into seminatural-semisocial creatures during their life side

by side with man. They are included into man, abide in man, in a sense. But the horse is the least adopted creature... alas.

And here is what I can say about traditional means of communication. The exchange of information can no longer make anyone happy. And the "animal" communication, animal "knowledge" of the other person could do it. And we cut them short in vain, staying lonely and miserable. It is not information and communication people want, it is love, attention, hugging, food, sleep... very simple things. And, naturally, I eliminate aggression from the animal qualities. Unmotivated aggression is the human, social thing. Mad dogs die very quickly, you know...

What does it mean 'to live a dog life'?

If you refer to the article titled *On Becoming a Dog By Acting Like One* by Roberta Smith (*The New York Times*), it was the compliment I deserved. Just as it was in *Pavlov's Dog*, I submitted all the power of imagination, project consciousness, my understanding of social topicality, my notions of the integrity of form and content, of everything that is usually ascribed to a decent artist, to one goal: to be a dog for a month in my performance titled *I Bite America, America Bites Me*. And it worked. And it wasn't that easy. Try it when you have time to spare. Initially this performance was a polemic with the performance of Joseph Beuys and the coyote *I Like America, America Likes Me*. Yet, this polemic disappeared as soon as I turned into a dog... And I don't think I communicated really much. People entering my cage faced very simple questions, like whether I would bite or would not bite them, whether I'm clever or an idiot. But the main thing was that they interpreted me as some biological creature which does not belong to any definite species and has no status at all. They examined this unprecedented "becoming an animal" and even looked if it matched them.

Notoriously, in an exhibition in Sweden, you ended up biting a number of visitors, a critic and a curator. As a result you were arrested. Was it all part of the performance?

Terminologically speaking, *The Dog House* was planned to be a performance of the Diogenes type, but it turned out to be an action in the spirit of the Moscow radical Actionism. The *Interpol* show dealt with the problem of the dialogue between the West and the East which went on for years, and I was invited at the last moment as a kind of a readymade, a sort of a "Russian dog", although I wanted to be the philosopher of a dog. I wanted significantly reject insignificant communication. According to my plans and in correspondence with warnings displayed, the socium was to respond with the same thoughtful rejection. But the viewers did not follow instructions. When they



Oleg Kulik

I Bite America and America Bites Me. Deitch Projects, New York, April 12-26, 1997 ©

came to the forbidden territory, my territory, and pulled at my collar, this was significant communication. And I could not but start the dialogue. I bit a visitor, a Swedish art expert. The Swedish curator who faced me hit me in the eye. And that was also quite significant. Everything that is unexpectedly pulled out in the action is especially significant.

You founded an 'animal party' and announced yourself a candidate in the general presidential election, in disguise of a bull; some of your actions become then part of the pre-electoral shows. Why did you choose a bull to send your message, and how did the public react to the project?

When I was collecting signatures in the center of Moscow with bull-horns and nipples all over my jacket, the audience was really enthusiastic about it. Everybody said that it was an ideal election campaign for they could have a drink of vodka and give their signature to support anybody. And it was all right if it was a bull. The authorities were engaged in the same kind of bribery campaign, but it was not that straightforward and artistic. I demonstrated the hidden, "animal" nature of politics (in the meaning of the

Political Animal) in a pleasant way, when people are awelessly promised and even given some sausages, cakes, drinks and snacks in exchange for some symbolic power they give to manage their lives. Why the bull? The bull is a mighty animal, with horns reaching the sky and hooves crumpling the earth. My zodiac sign is Taurus, by the way, there is no hiding it...

When did your interest for animals begin?

My interest for animals emerged in my early childhood. I was born on April 15, 1961, and all the maternity home enthusiastically discussed whether they sent a human being into outer space, and not some dog again...

What role does beauty play in your work?

Beauty has no function at all in my work. Beauty is not something I am engaged in. There is some sharpness and measure, some harmony in the performance of my thoughts, but there is no beauty in them...

Your work White Man, Black Dog aimed at establishing close relations with a black dog in



Oleg Kulik
Reservoir Dog, Kunsthhaus, Zurich, Switzerland.
30 March 1995 © Courtesy of Kovalev

complete darkness, split intermittently by camera flashes made by two photographers documenting the action. This process revealed a surprising effect when temporal imprints appeared on the retina of the spectators' eyes. Such ephemeral 'documentation', where in your opinion the only true, 'absolutely real' art. In this work, like in many others, you appear naked in 'dangerous proximity' to animals. How did the audience react to it?

I got an astonishing reaction in Zagreb where I had this performance. Firstly, they let people in for two hours, searching them. A huge packed crowd of sitting people gathered. I didn't expect that at all. When the doors were closed and the light went down, the dog and I found ourselves in utter darkness somewhere in the middle of the public, and it was not what we were doing and how this was photographed that was really interesting in the process. It was the presence of several thousand people packed in an absolutely dark room. This weighed on our shoulders like some tremendous force acting at the animal level. There was a feeling that this mass could move at any moment and crush you. Everybody told me about it later. And the dog felt it too, he just wouldn't behave as we have arranged to behave with him. He felt that tremendous mass of people around us. I was even afraid that his behavior would be inadequate, that he would bite and yelp. But he just went to people. And he moved over their heads because there was no other way to do it. And all I could do was to follow him. I tried to find the way out of that room in the dark and walked over people. In flashes people suddenly saw a man, and a naked one, move over to them. I was afraid that somebody would hit me in the stomach, tear away something. But the public was in bewilderment, in a shock. I remember crushing somebody's glasses, on stepping on somebody's face... But somehow we found the way out. When the performance was over, the audience would not disperse, they waited for me. To be honest, I was afraid of their reaction, but still I went to meet them. But, as a matter of fact, people were grateful for the incredible experience: to some people it resembled the uterus, others were reminded of the army in it... People are helpless in the dark, in a packed crowd, without any social support.

In a number of occasions you have advocated the opportunity for interspecies sexual encounter. Could you tell us more about this take?

I am not defending any sexual contacts. And I do not attack any of them. I defend love, intimacy and mutual understanding. And if this love and intimacy result in certain contacts and mutual experience of life, if you pull somebody's tail or kiss somebody in the forehead

gently, it is your personal business. Why should I interfere with it?

What do you think of animal rights activism?

One animal species disappear every day in our planet... And I haven't heard of any species that was saved. The zoos do not count. Zoos are prisons.

In 1992, you staged a hugely controversial performance called 'Piglet gives presents'. Its action consisted of publicly killing a pig and giving out, instead of exhibition catalogues, bits of the pig's meat in special bags of the Regina Gallery for the guests. You said that: "We wanted to make a human voice heard in the area of art, a human voice as a voice of individuality. For a living voice, keen cry, true pain, groan were heard in the arts 's area, for real blood was flooding there. Although the nature of it was quite different". In this case the killing of the animal was symbolically linked to socio-political controversy. Why did you decide to use a pig and what do you think of that performance now, sixteen years after it was first staged?

The *PigglyWiggly Gives Presents* action involving the killing of a pig was my reaction to the social processes. The Supreme Soviet of Russia was debating the capital punishment then, and not a single deputy of it, not a single one, I emphasize it, voted for the ban of it. It looked like a hundred percent of Russians supported the capital punishment of man. Crime was outrageous then, time was hard, of course... But still wasn't that a surprise? And here I kill a pig. They are killed in infinite numbers every day. But the problem was that the butcher killed the pig not at the market slaughterhouse, but in the gallery. I just demonstrated it, and we just talked about it. People were indignant in the streets – we are ready to eat a crocodile as long as you don't show us how it was killed. So, you can kill everybody as usual, in other words, but please do it quietly as you did it before. That was what my performance dealt with: we still lived in the country of secret violence. And that was terrible. And I was accused of being cruel, a murderer who spoilt everybody's appetite. But I had already been a vegetarian for a long time, and I still don't see anything awful in the fact that people eat meat. Like Mongols, for instance... They live in symbiosis with their animals, they help each other as they can, and they can't live without each other. And that frail girl wearing high heels ate a very rare beefsteak and almost fainted when somebody happened to hurt her doggy in the street... What's that? And isn't that a surprise...

Can you tell us something about Deep in



Oleg Kulik

White Man, Black Dog. Zagreb, Museum of Contemporary Art. June 17, 1999 ©

Russia?

Deep into Russia is a project involving many Russian artists. Russia is a huge country, it is an atavistic country, and quite a mysterious one in this respect. Many old, unarticulated links with nature survived in it, and I like it personally.

15) The photo series 'New Paradise' shows how close kitsch, wit and pornography can get: a couple having sex with each other are cast like one of Rodin's sculptures or take on attitude in rehearsed porn poses. The ironic twist appears through the reflection in the glass panes of natural history dioramas.

How did the idea for this work come about?

When I saw my reflection in the showcases of the Zoology Museum, it was really funny because dead animals looked alive, and I looked like a ghost. It is funny that the contemporary person can get the most convincing illusion of the paradise in the Museum of Dead Nature using stuffed animals, lifeless glass panes and artless registration of reflections. When we shot this pornography, we strived to do it in an ultimately

convincing way, but everything that was in the semitransparent state acquired a shade of the unreachable fairytale, of the lost paradise under the stares of zebras and bears.

Do you have an interest for a western artist whose work involves animals?

I like Wim Delvoye very much, in a human way. And I have an interest for Matthew Barney, for instance.

Are there animals that you would never consider using in an artwork?

Germs and bacteria are difficult to work with. But Wim was able to do it.

What are you currently working on?

I think of nothing but becoming a human being now, for I have never been a human being.

I want to create a modern ceremony to combine mystic sensibility and state-of-the-art contemporary means of expression. So I am staging Claudio Monteverdi's Vespers mass of 1610 in the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.