Espace Sculpture

Vera Jacyk: Chysto, Chysto, Chysto

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Art public et communautés
Number 88, 2009

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/8921ac

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Publisher(s)
Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN
0821-9222 (print)
1923-2551 (digital)

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Cite this article
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Richly coloured eggs, red and black embroidery, gravity defying Cossack dancers, wooden parquetry and distinctive ceramics project comfortable ideas about Ukrainian heritage within our multicultural mosaic. Sometimes artists use this iconography to celebrate or to criticize old country ways.

In Chysto, Chysto, Chysto, Vera Jacik uses these cultural references to focus upon the modern historical trauma that Ukraine has undergone as it endured both Nazi and Soviet rule and as subsequent generations sensed the unspoken histories of resistance and subjugation.

Devoid of the characteristic colours and patterns of Ukrainian arts and crafts, Jacik's pristine installation is a severe and nightmarish environment. Small scale and disembodied fragments of a home are depicted in matte white — a closet, a pantry, and stairs that go nowhere — communicating bleak sorrow and loss. One small suit hangs in a closet, the kind of dark clothing seen in old postcards and wedding photographs. A cupboard, its door ajar, reveals a bust of Stalin composed of wax and wheat seeds, recalling the famine and forced starvation the tyrant wreaked upon Ukrainian people. On the stairs are scattered small disembodied arms, implying a life fragmented, and people displaced.

A blackboard drawing of a healthy child goose-stepping obediently suggests another grim aspect of the country's history. In the drawer lies a partially embroidered swastika. A child's lower torso and a woman stretched into agonized elongation are created from barbed wire. Two pynkies are positioned at a child-sized table where the artist, as a little girl, might have played quietly while hearing the silence and tension endured by adults around her, those who brought these histories and terrible memories to Canada. But these eggs are not coloured in the symbols representative of their culture, they are black with white...
lettering, which spells the Ukrainian national anthem in both Cyrillic and Latin script. Jacyk describes the silences of her elders, making the point that, as Ukraine was battered between warring ideologies, the people who inherited these memories were traumatized into silence.

The 2007 theft and destruction of the bronze monument to 19th century figure Taras Shevchenko brought an earlier aspect of Ukrainian culture to media attention. Donated in 1951 by the Soviet Union, it commemorated the 60th anniversary of Ukrainian immigration to Canada. Shevchenko, a poet, writer, artist and activist was arrested and imprisoned repeatedly during his lifetime for his defiance of Czarist Russia and its control over Ukraine. While the valorization of this heroic figure effectively sidestepped the bloody 20th century, Jacyk will not allow her viewers to do so. Chysto, Chysto. Chysto means clean, clean, clean, a title suggestive of white wash and erasure. Jacyk illuminates a facet of the Ukrainian tragedy that has ongoing reverberations.

Vera JACYK: Chysto, Chysto, Chysto
MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Ontario
March 5 - June 7, 2009

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NOTE
1. An orphaned serf, his freedom was purchased for 2500 rubles through funds raised by a community of artists who recognized his brilliance. His paintings and romantic poems about Kateryna have captured Ukrainian imaginations for decades, and his burial site by the Dnipro River is a sacred site for the Ukrainian people. (http://www.infoukes.com/shevchenkomuseum/bio.htm).