



La Biennale di Venezia

60. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Media Information

Austrian Contribution to the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2024

Anna Jermolaewa

For the Austrian contribution to the Biennale Arte 2024, artist Anna Jermolaewa spans the arc from her experience as a political refugee to signifiers of revolution and subversion against non-democratic regimes.

Born in Leningrad, Jermolaewa became involved in the opposition party Democratic Union in the late 1980s and was co-editor of one of the party's weekly samizdat newspapers. Although it was the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, she and her then-husband were targeted by the KGB and had to flee the Soviet Union in 1989.

Jermolaewa was granted political asylum in Austria, where for the last thirty-five years she has developed a body of work that, while conceptual, touches on the poetry of everyday life. The starting point for much of her artistic work is personal memories of places, situations or events, whereby these individual memories are decoded and examined for their collective meaning and relevance. Her work, which often incorporates video, installation, drawing, and photography, asks us to analyze society and our social and political interactions within it.

Anna Jermolaewa's contribution to the Austrian pavilion fits seamlessly into the general theme of the Biennale Arte 2024, "Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere," formulated by curator Adriano Pedrosa and focused on subjects such as foreignness, migration, and questions of national identity.

The Austrian contribution is curated by Gabriele Spindler.

Anna Jermolaewa
The Austrian Pavilion at a Glance

Anna Jermolaewa presents five selected works, divided between the rooms of the pavilion and the inner courtyard.

Rehearsal for Swan Lake (2024)—realized in collaboration with Ukrainian ballet dancer and choreographer Oksana Serheieva—refers to a memory from Jermolaewa’s teen years. In times of political unrest, for instance the death of a head of state, Soviet television replaced their regularly scheduled broadcast with *Swan Lake* . . . in a loop sometimes for days. In Soviet cultural memory, Tchaikovsky’s famous ballet became code for a change in power. In *Rehearsal for Swan Lake*, a group of ballet dancers rehearse select scenes, transforming *Swan Lake* from a tool of censorship and distraction into a form of political protest—here, the dancers rehearse for regime change in Russia. Oksana Serheieva will perform live in the pavilion throughout the duration of the biennale on select dates.

The Penultimate (2017) consists of a series of plants: carnations, roses, tulips, cornflowers, lotuses, saffron crocuses, jasmine, a cedar and an orange tree. Each plant represents a “color revolution”: a popular uprising referred to or symbolized by a color or floral term. With red carnations, Portugal welcomed a military putsch against its dictatorship in 1974. A flower was also used as a symbol of protest by Georgia’s Rose Revolution in 2003 and Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution in 2007. Also characterized as color revolutions: Lebanon’s Cedar Revolution of 2005, Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution of 2010, and Egypt’s Lotus Revolution of 2011. Ukraine’s Orange Revolution in 2004, Myanmar’s Saffron Revolution of 2007, and Belarus’ unsuccessful Cornflower Revolution in 2006, their names based on the respective colors, are here represented with the color’s corresponding plant. Presented as a still life, these flowers and plants are a reminder of what undemocratic regimes fear most: an overthrow originating with the people.

In the postwar Soviet Union, people were banned from owning record albums containing popular music, especially rock or jazz from the West. For people caught with such contraband, prison time was a real possibility. In response, Soviet sound engineers developed a way to subvert the ban: they copied albums onto used X-ray films hospitals had discarded. These X-ray film records—nicknamed “ribs,” “music on bones,” and “bones”—were exchanged on the black market until the advent of the audio cassette tape. *Ribs* (2022/24) takes a sample of these Soviet recordings and returns them to their original function: displayed on a doctor’s X-ray film viewer. In the

Austrian pavilion, selected X-ray film records will also be played once a day on a record player in the room.

In *Research for Sleeping Positions* (2006), Jermolaewa, in a hooded sweatshirt and winter coat, tries to find sleep on a train station bench in Vienna's Westbahnhof. She tries multiple positions, all uncomfortable. Seventeen years earlier, when she arrived in Austria as a political refugee, she spent her first week on a bench in this station, sleeping on it every night before ending up in the refugee camp in Traiskirchen. The artist reenacts this experience but with one crucial difference: the bench now has armrests, installed as a deterrent for people trying to find rest.

The readymade *Untitled (Telephone Booths)* (2024) in the inner courtyard of the pavilion is a bank of original telephone booths from the refugee camp in Traiskirchen, Austria. At first glance they may seem unremarkable, but it's said that the most international calls made in Austria came from these six booths. Written on their walls, literally, are notes from asylum seekers. The booths are a capsule of a spectrum of emotion—the insecurity, but also hope, felt by those in transit, who have left their homes and do not know what will happen next. In 1989, Jermolaewa used these exact booths to contact her family back in Leningrad to tell them she'd arrived in the West. After they became obsolete due to the advent of smart phones, they were scheduled for removal. In the Giardini, they are experiencing a second life. The phones are fully functional for all pavilion visitors to use.

Exhibited Works

Rehearsal for Swan Lake (with Oksana Serheieva)

2024

video (150 minutes), installation, barre, mirror, performance

Live performances by Oksana Serheieva

April 17–19: daily at 12:30, 3:00, and 5:30 PM

April 20–May 5: daily at 1:30, 4:00, and 6:30 PM

May 17–September 30: every two weeks on Fri, Sat and Sun
at 1:30, 4:00, and 6:30 PM

October 4–November 17: every two weeks on Fri, Sat and Sun
at 12:30, 3:00, and 5:30 PM

Information on the specific dates can be found on the website at
biennalearte.at/en/exhibition

The Penultimate

2017

installation (flowers, plants, stool, chairs, flower stands)

Research for Sleeping Positions

2006

video, 17 minutes

Ribs

2022/24

X-ray film record albums, X-ray film viewers, record player

With music by Duke Ellington, Elvis Presley, The Doors, The Rolling Stones,
Petula Clark, The Beatles, Ray Charles, Ivie Anderson, and others

Playback of selected “ribs,” daily at 2:00 PM

Untitled (Telephone Booths)

2024

*six telephone booths from the refugee camp in Traiskirchen, Austria, fully
functioning payphones*

Biographies

Anna Jermolaewa is an Austrian conceptual artist born in Leningrad (USSR) in 1970. After being accused of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda as one of the original members of the first political opposition party and co-editor of one of its newspapers, she fled to Austria in 1989 and was granted political asylum.

Her artistic practice comprises a wide spectrum of media, ranging from video, installation, drawing, performance, and photography to sculpture. Since 2019, Anna Jermolaewa has been Professor of Experimental Art at the University of Arts Linz, Austria.

In addition to numerous solo exhibitions, she has taken part in various biennials (Biennale Arte 1999 in Venice, Berlin Biennale 2012, Gwangju Biennale 2014, Moscow Biennale 2015, Kyiv Biennale 2015).

Anna Jermolaewa's works are included in numerous collections. Along with many other honors, she was recently awarded the City of Vienna's Karl Renner Prize for her social commitment as a member of the association Ariadne – Wir Flüchtlinge für Österreich (We Refugees for Austria).

For detailed biographical information, please visit Anna Jermolaewa's website at www.jermolaewa.com

Oksana Serheieva was born in Odessa (Ukraine) in 1986. In 2005, she graduated from the Odessa School of Art and Culture in classical choreography and ballet. She then worked as a ballet dancer at the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre in Odessa (including solo parts in *Don Quixote*, *Swan Lake*, *Carmen Suite*, *The Firebird*). In 2015, she opened a classical ballet school in Cherkasy, of which she remained the successful director until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Oksana Serheieva lives in Lower Austria.

Gabriele Spindler (b. 1972) studied art history at the University of Salzburg. She has been a curator of modern and contemporary art since 2000 and head of the Department of Art and Cultural Science at OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH since 2022. From 2012 to 2020, she was the director of Landesgalerie Linz at Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum. She curated the largest solo exhibition of Anna Jermolaewa at Schlossmuseum Linz in 2022.

Statements

Gabriele Spindler, curator

“What I appreciate in Anna Jermolaewa’s work is the timeliness and social relevance of her themes as well as the precision with which she realizes her concepts. With the works collected in the Austrian pavilion, the artist offers a contribution that is at once political and poetically captivating by taking the very specific experience of a person’s life and turning it into something that might be relevant to the human condition at large, highly conceptual yet deeply empathetic.”

Andrea Mayer, Austrian Secretary of State for Arts and Culture

“The sixtieth edition of the Biennale Arte, probably the most important art exhibition in the world, takes place in a time of global political crises. The show adheres to the principle of national pavilions—but this year’s general theme, “Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere,” also critically questions the concept of how a nation portrays itself. I am particularly pleased that curator Gabriele Spindler has brought in the artist Anna Jermolaewa for the Austrian pavilion. Anna Jermolaewa knows firsthand what it feels like to leave one’s home and have to assert oneself in an initially foreign country. She has experienced flight, migration, and foreignness, and negotiated these themes in her artistic practice. Along with their artistic potency, Anna Jermolaewa’s works possess poetry and humor—and yet, they are unequivocal in their message. They are characterized by an acutely vigilant sense of human and social nuance. Her art is deeply political, even sociopolitical, but its realization is always playful and light. Viewers recognize her striking critical stance and senses her urgent call for political change and for challenging power structures.”

Publication

The catalog *Anna Jermolaewa* is published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln in conjunction with the artist's exhibition at the Austrian pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2024. The book documents the works Anna Jermolaewa presents in her contribution in short essays, numerous installation views, and research materials offering an in-depth look at the background and development process of these works.

In the second section, philosopher and art theorist Boris Groys delves into the cultural, social, and political meaning of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* in the Soviet Union as well as other aspects of the political element in Jermolaewa's practice. In her equally insightful essay, cultural scientist Aleida Assmann deals with themes such as flight and displacement, travel, and memory in the work of Anna Jermolaewa.

Collaboration with Phileas – The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art

In collaboration with **Phileas – The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art**, an exhibition by Anna Jermolaewa will open on May 7, 2024 in Vienna. The exhibition is accompanied by a public programme with students of the University of Arts Linz's Experimental Art department, which Jermolaewa has led since 2019.

Anna Jermolaewa: Assemblé

Phileas – The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art

Opernring 17, 1010 Vienna

Opening: May 7, 2024, 7:00 PM

On view from May 8 to September 14, 2024

www.phileas.art/exhibition-space/annajermolaewa

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Visitor Information

Austrian Pavilion

Biennale Arte 24

60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

www.biennalearte.at

Preview days: April 17–19, 2024

Exhibition duration: April 20–November 24, 2024

Opening hours: 11:00 AM–7:00 PM pm (from April 20 to September 30),
10:00 AM–6:00 PM (from October 1 to November 24) (Mondays closed)

Press conference and opening of the Austrian pavilion:

April 18, 2024 (press conference: 1:00 PM, opening: 3:00 PM)

Giardini della Biennale

Sestiere Castello, 30122 Venice, Italy

www.labiennale.org

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