

ANXIETY

13.04.2024 – 15.09.2024

Opening Saturday 13 April 2024 | 16 – 20.30

GALLERIA CONTINUA is delighted to present "Anxiety", a solo exhibition by Zhanna Kadyrova. This Ukrainian artist is renowned on the international art scene for her ability to create works that explore the limits of material and form. She often uses recovered materials and found objects such as cement, ceramics, glass or metal. The military offensive launched by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on 24 February, 2022, marked a watershed in the artist's work; since then, her entire focus has been on the theme of war, interpreted in various aspects: destruction, the displacement of refugees, vulnerability, human suffering, the gap between living in one's own conflict-torn homeland and following events from a safe distance. With the exhibited works, Zhanna Kadyrova gives a voice to objects and materials to tell the story of Ukraine's struggle for freedom against Russia.

Kadyrova has questioned the artist's role in a country at war and has come to the conclusion that what she can do for her country is talk about life, culture and war in today's Ukraine. "For the first two weeks of the war, it seemed to me that art was a dream, that all twenty years of my professional life were just something I had seen while asleep, that art was absolutely powerless and ephemeral in comparison to the merciless military machine destroying peaceful cities and human lives. Now I no longer think so: I see that every artistic gesture makes us visible and makes our voices heard!" These are the artist's words on war in the section of her website dedicated to "PALIANYTSIA 2022".

PALIANYTSIA means bread in Ukrainian, a large

round wheat loaf, baked in the oven. Even before the war, this word began to take on new meanings, becoming a symbol for the Ukrainian people: it became a code for recognising friend from foe because the Russians were unable to pronounce it correctly. The artist fled Kiev after the invasion, and sought refuge in a remote and protected place on the border with Hungary, in Transcarpathia. A country house without electricity or heating, the mountains and rivers, poverty and the simple peasant life were a clean slate for starting again from nothing, resisting and existing. The watercourses that flow through the area, forcefully smoothing the large stones in the riverbed, were a source of inspiration: the perfect shapes sculpted by the currents reminded the artist of the loaves of "palianytsia". These were natural sculptures that could be sanded and cut into slices to set on tables, in order to remember life and history together, inviting the locals to come and gather around the new community. Art as daily bread. This is how the project originated. It was presented during the Venice Art Biennale 2022 and also featured in the exhibition in San Gimignano together with a video documenting its genesis and development.

Seen from a distance, Zhanna Kadyrova's latest works, "Data Extraction" (2023), might appear to be abstract paintings. However, a closer inspection reveals that they are actually large rectangles of asphalt – veritable chunks of road – pitted and scarred by violent showers of shrapnel. These portions of the road surface come from Irpin, the commuter town on the western edge of Kiev, occupied by Russian troops and the scene of some of the worst

fighting in the first months of the invasion. After the liberation of the city, and with the permission of the mayor, Kadyrova had these pieces cut out of the street. "They're ready-made", said the artist. "Part of their titles are the exact coordinates of the points at which we found them". Kadyrova decided exactly where the machines would have to cut and slice each piece of road, carefully considering the angles. These works, rather than being a representation of violence, are a trace of violence itself, taken out of its context and placed on the white walls of the art gallery. "Irpın was the closest place to the Russian-occupied capital. A quiet suburban town became a kind of hell: civilians fleeing have been killed in their cars or on the street. Some of those people who were killed lay there in the open for weeks, since it was impossible to retrieve their bodies safely. Others were killed by artillery fire. People hid in their basements without electricity, water or phone reception. Many buildings have been destroyed or burned. A few months later, the speed with which this relatively prosperous city was rebuilt was impressive. Some buildings, such as the grandiose Palace of Culture from the Soviet era, are still full of craters and roofless, but a large part of the city has already been repaired or rebuilt. For the casual visitor, it's hard to imagine the nightmares that took place here". Kadyrova says that she made sure that evidence of real, tangible, and palpable violence was preserved.

This sense of the reality - the desire to display the thing itself and not merely a representation - pervades other works made by Kadyrova since the beginning of the Russian invasion. The cracked and scarred tiles, "Shots", have also been turned into works: their apparent restraint, almost post-minimalist, belies the aggressive act that created them. "The perception of art is that it is a 'civilised' act (...). Well, war is an uncivil war, a matter of brutal killings and rapes, and nothing that the civilized world has created, such as dialogue, helps. (...) I'm using real violence to create art. My first thought was what happens to the human body: if you put three of these tiles together, the bullets will go through you", stated the artist. She had initially asked a firearms instructor to shoot at them, but then he persuaded her to do it herself, telling her that, "Everyone does it here". Using a repertoire of poor materials, the artist created the series "Shots", which refer to the war that is still going on in eastern Ukraine. In fact, the entire production began in 2010, a year regarded as the end of the Orange Revolution, the return to power of threatening political forces and the censorship of the press. Squares and circles, composed of ceramic shattered by shots fired from real Kalashnikovs, translate this fragile balance in a sculptural way, a balance now

threatened, and expressed through the violent shattering of forms as a presentiment of an overwhelming future change. In fact, the major demonstrations, the Maïdan, which have been going on in Kiev since 2013, forced President Viktor Yanukovich to flee. Then came the war in the Donbass, whose outcome is evident in the current division of Ukraine, as demonstrated by the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. In her work, Zhanna Kadyrova uses ceramics as a direct reference to the tiles used to cover the facades of Ukrainian buildings, a legacy of the Soviet era and therefore a reference to the everyday life of Ukrainians and inhabitants of the former Soviet republics. But this daily life is now pierced, fractured by war, which explains why the artist resumed the "Shots" series again in 2014, this time with artworks filled with fractures and actual gunshots.

In 2022, Zhanna Kadyrova began going to markets in different countries and buying small cross-stitched tapestries depicting cosy traditional scenes, the sort of things that might hang in an elderly person's home: swans in a country landscape, dancing Cossacks, a fox stealing a hen, kittens in a basket, are just a few examples. Above them, she embroiders Ukrainian words to send the message that this war is not so far away from all of us. In the works that give this exhibition its title, "Anxiety", we find the words "air-raid warning".

Later, when she began travelling around Europe and elsewhere, for exhibitions and projects, she produced a series of rocket stickers that pursue their deadly trajectory through the skies. Like a guerrilla warrior, she sticks them onto train windows, creating the optical illusion of a rocket travelling over Paris, or rural Austria, or Taipei, as the train is moving: this is the "RUSSIAN ROCKET PROJECT". On the one hand, this playful gesture shows the reality of war, but on the other, it simulates it by projecting it into the landscapes of our everyday life. We are startled by the sight of our own landscapes under the enemy rocket, places we recognise and that are close to us.

This exhibition by Zhanna Kadyrova offers us a space for reflection and mourning, but it also gives us a glimpse, through her works, of hope, humour and unrelenting determination.

About the artist:

Zhanna Kadyrova was born in 1981 in Brovary in the Kiev region of Ukraine. She currently lives and works in Rome. Kadyrova has had great national and international success, participating in biennials and solo and group exhibitions in some 15 countries. In 2019, she took part in the Venice Biennale in the exhibition "May You Live In Interesting Times". She also represented Ukraine at the Biennale in 2013. Since the invasion of Russia in 2022, Zhanna Kadyrova's art has focused on the effects of war. During this time she also started working on the humanitarian project. "Palianytsia. Daily Bread" was the artist's first major retrospective, held in 2023 at the Kunstverein in Hanover. That same year, the solo exhibition "Flying Trajectories" was held at the PinchukArtCentre in Kiev. Also running at the Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague (Czech Republic) is the solo exhibition "Unexpected", and at the Uppsala Art Museum, Uppsala (Sweden), "Border Memory".

About the gallery:

Founded in 1990 in San Gimignano, Italy, GALLERIA CONTINUA has expanded its locations to Beijing, Les Moulins, Havana, São Paulo, Rome, Paris, and Dubai.

GALLERIA CONTINUA represents a desire for continuity between times and a desire to write a current history. Thanks to its investment in forgotten and unconventional sites, the gallery has always chosen atypical locations, developing a strong identity and an original positioning in over thirty years of activity. The home of Galleria Continua, an ex-cinema, it has hosted many prolific exhibitions and installations over the last 34 years. It is a unique and exciting space for artists and the gallery to have to consider when planning and executing exhibitions.

Galleria Continua / San Gimignano

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