

## LUTZ BECKER

### *The Scream, 2012*

single-channel version of 3-channel video installation montage of films  
by Aleksandr Dovzhenko, video, 12 min

Born in 1941 in Berlin, Germany lives and works in London, UK.

Lutz Becker is an artist, filmmaker, curator and film-historian. He studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, where he graduated under Thorold Dickinson and became a distinguished director of political and art documentaries. A practicing painter, he is also a curator of exhibitions. He collaborated with the Hayward Gallery on *The Romantic Spirit in German Art* (1994), *Art and Power* (1995), and *Tate Modern on Century City* (2001). As of 2003, Becker has been working for the Mexican Picture Partnership Ltd.'s reconstruction project of Sergei M. Eisenstein's film *iQue viva Mexico! - Da zdravstvuyet Meksika!*

### THE SCREAM, 2012

'The video installation THE SCREAM is an homage to the Ukrainian filmmaker and poet Aleksandr Dovzhenko (1894-1956). It is a reflection on Dovzhenko as a poet who told his stories in the form of the classical eclogue, in which pastoral simplicity stands in contrast with modernist self-consciousness. Even in his more overtly political films Dovzhenko's perspective remained subjective, attached to the old art of story telling, its allegorical elements, symbols and types.

The installation, originally presented on three screens, is shown here as a single-channel version especially created for this exhibition. The work is a montage of segments from Dovzhenko's films, based on dramatic interactions and accidental synchronicities of images and scenes, the play of affinities and contrast, textures, details, and the monumentalisation of the human face. Quoting from Dovzhenko's films, made between 1927 and 1935, I am presenting images of poetic revelation he created of the people and the land of the Ukraine at moments of political danger and social crisis. Driven by a sense of personal calling to contribute with his films to Ukrainian visual culture, Dovzhenko pursued the idea of a national Ukrainian cinema. The Soviet studio system provided the director with the conditions for his work, but at the same time stifled his creativity

through political interference and censorship. Formed by the more moderate political climate of the early nineteen twenties, Dovzhenko believed in a multicultural settlement for the nationalities within the Soviet Union; the pan-Soviet aspirations of Stalinism which included a gradual suppression of the Ukrainian language were completely contrary to his beliefs. Family bonds and connectedness with the land, with language and poetry, were for him the truest, most natural sources of human identity, overriding the ideological denominators of 'class consciousness' and Party doctrine. In his films the social idea is bound up with the question of fate; the political emotion is closely linked to a personalised, even psychological, interpretation of symptomatic conflicts and anxieties repressed in Soviet command-society. Dovzhenko did not advocate a forced imposition of change but believed in the possibility of a voluntary adaptation to social and technological advances. No wonder, the Soviet leadership was growing critical of his avoidance of ideological simplifications and his difficulties of adhering to the shifting expectations of the guardians of Socialist Realism. He tried, within the limits the system allowed, to give vent to the anxieties prevalent in Ukrainian society, brought about by accelerated processes of industrialisation, collectivisation and the ideological deformation of reality. Official propaganda did not alleviate the rise of widespread uncertainties and individual fears. Quite the opposite; while projecting utopian visions, it played on individual feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

THE SCREAM explores the subtext of Dovzhenko's films, the layers underneath the political message. It traces some revealing emotional reflexes, the echoes of suppression and self-suppression as well as the director's self-doubts. THE SCREAM presents a succession of images which carry reverberations of the past and what had once been experienced as 'the presence' or aspired to be 'possible future'. Visual associations, unattached to narrative functions, are experienced in poetic juxtapositions of moments of stillness, progression and crisis. The sound structure of the work emphasizes the associative, allegorical nature of the screen events. THE SCREAM is the call to the spirits of his ancestors of an Old Believer being executed, a scene symbolic of the inhuman demands of the Regime, the tragedy of fratricide and total alienation. The violence of revolution and of the elimination of the past is contrasted by illusions of social peace, but also by the solidity of the symbols of the Ukrainian metal worker and farm worker, two types less defined by the revolution than by their struggle for a national identity. The sounds of factory sirens and of locomotive whistles are not just the sounds of the triumph of productive labour but also signals of Party discipline and subjugation. In the context of this analysis individuals are caught up between contradictory forces; seemingly engaged in a process of emancipation but in reality reduced to actors in front of an ideological backdrop made up of exaggerated promises and demands for self-



denial and sacrifice. When viewed from hindsight, Dovzhenko revealed the ideological dictates of his time as symptoms of collective obsessions, expressed in the 'remoulding' of all aspects of social life, conditions in which the individual, lost and isolated, was seeking comfort within the shared distress of the collective. Dovzhenko, facing personal dangers, painful compromises, even years of banishment from Ukraine, remained critical of the ideological absolutes current in his lifetime. He continued to be faithful to his truth which he concealed 'between the lines' in carefully crafted poetic allusions.' [LUTZ BECKER]

#### **SELECTED EXHIBITIONS**

- 2004** *Farbe als Farbe*, Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund
- 2003** *Seeing Red*, Hunter College, New York
- 2002** *Colour A Life of its Own*, Mücsarnok, Budapest
- 2000** *Die Farbe rot hat mich*, Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, Hagen

#### **SELECTED VIDEO EXHIBITIONS**

- 2010** *Les Promesses du Passé*, Centre Pompidou, Paris
- 2009** *Where Everything is Going to Happen*, Galerija Terzic, Banja Luka  
*Lecture-Performance'*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne
- 2008** *Artist-Citizen - Contextual Art Practices*, October Salon, Belgrade
- 1999/2000** *Gewalt der Kunst*, Altes Museum, Berlin  
*After the Wall*, Sound Installation, Moderna Museet, Stockholm,  
Museum Ludwig, Budapest, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin