

LUTZ BECKER



The Scream, 2012

Video, b/w, sound, 12 minutes

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

The video *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. Originally made for the First Kiev Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2012, *The Scream* was presented as an installation on three screens. It is shown here in a specially re-edited single-channel version. As an elegy to revolution, *The Scream*, questions the blind trust inherent to any faith in future utopias. With the wisdom of hindsight, it serves as a reflection upon history in a tragic loop of repetition – perhaps the very definition of revolution.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The Scream 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 present' 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 labor 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 'remolding' 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

BIO

Lutz Becker (born in 1941 in Germany, lives and works in London, UK, and Berlin, Germany).

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. His films, videos and curatorial projects have been shown internationally. His paintings are in institutional and private collections. Born in Germany, he has lived and worked in London for most of his adult life. He is of a generation still affected by the aftermath of the WW2, the rebuilding of Germany and the student's revolt of the late 60s. As a student in London, Lutz Becker embraced the forward looking spirit of abstraction and artistic internationalism. This led him towards the painterly procedures of informel. He got interested in the synthetic sound structures of electronic music, which lead him towards the making of experimental abstract films at the BBC. His preoccupation with movement and time influenced much of his film and video work. Becker is a director and producer of political and art documentaries such as *Double Headed Eagle*, *Lion of Judah* and *Vita Futurista* to name a few as well as TV productions, such as *Nuremberg in History*. He participated as an artist in the First Kiev Biennale in 2012 with the

video installation, *The Scream*, and is currently preparing the reconstruction of Sergei Eisenstein's film *Que viva Mexico!* - *Da zdravstvuyet Meksika!*

In addition to Lutz Becker's work as artist and filmmaker, he is also a curator, specialising in Russian Constructivism and Italian Futurism. He curated for the Hayward Gallery, *The Romantic Spirit in German Art* (1994), and *Art and Power* (1995); for Tate Modern, the Moscow section of *Century City* (2001); for the State Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki, *Construction: Tatlin and After* (2002); for the Estorick Collection, London, a survey of European photomontage *Cut & Paste* (2008); for Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, a show of 20th Century drawings *Modern Times: Responding to Chaos* (2010). Most recently he co-curated *Solomon Nikritin – George Grosz, Political Terror and Social Decadence in Europe between the Wars* at the State Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki.