

Sergey Kishchenko

<https://www.sergeykishchenko.com/>

2024 Venice, Italy

A person wearing a ghillie suit stands in the center of a room. The walls are covered in blue insulation panels. The floor is cluttered with numerous black boots. The person is holding a long wooden staff or pole. The scene is dimly lit, with a blueish tint.

Sergey Kishchenko
Duck Test. 2013 to present

CYFEST-15. Yerevan Botanical Garden (2023)

Sergey Kishchenko

Venetiae: quintum corpus, series

Video installation, 2023

Bunker, video [00:06:00, color, sound, loop]

Video: Sergey Kishchenko

Music: Roza vetrov by Iraida Yusupova

Performance: Lydia Kavina, Theremin

Duck Test № 5 (Venetian), video [00:11:15, color, sound, loop]

Video: Sergey Kishchenko

Music: Mixolydia by Jorge Antunes

Performance: Lydia Kavina, Theremin

“Venetiae: Quintum Corpus” is a series of video-works prepared expressly for a joint performance with Lydia Kavina, composer and Theremin performer. They were created in Venice and dedicated to it. I have been living in this city for over half a year by now. My life here proved to be full of amazing, unexpected discoveries. I photographed umbrella pines in dense fogs in Alberoni, dunes and forest reserves in Lido and Pellestrina, lions with human faces in Venice and Chioggia, glass blowing in Murano, Venetian sky and courtyards and, finally, sinister bunkers and artillery fortifications left from the times of World War II.



Working on this series I used the philosophy of fluid flying screens in order to underline the world's fragility. One of the video sketches is dedicated to my alter ego “Duck-Man”, his memories of the lost motherland and his perceptions of Venice.

— Sergey Kishchenko



Duck Test. Who is guilty? & What to do?" (Performance), ArtNight-Venezia, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy. (2023)



"Duck Test N4 (Cherry)", Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, within the project "100 Ways to Live a Minute", Moscow, Russia (2020)





Sergey Kishchenko, *The Duck Test*

A man dressed as a duck wanders amidst the industrial ruins. The accompanying text from Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* leaves no doubt: the piece tells the story of the destruction of a passing era. The ZIL car plant, where the action takes place, was once the largest Moscow enterprise providing the whole country with trucks. The soil saturated with sweat, blood and fuel oil over a hundred years turns into an archetypal space of a myth, epitomizing the cyclical nature of creation and destruction.

The undated space of the abandoned factory, in which former industrial greatness has turned into an echoing vacuum, evokes the suffocating emptiness of the metaphysical landscapes by the forerunner of surrealism, Giorgio de Chirico. Like his mannequin characters, the Duck Man is a faceless hybrid figure, his facelessness allowing him to try on the characters of Chekhov's drama, since he himself cannot fully determine who he is: a senseless aristocrat, a fiery revolutionary, a beggar actor, a successful capitalist, an old serf left to die alone or just a madman.

The opening scene takes place in a former foundry. The solitary figure collecting artifacts cannot but evoke associations with Tarkovsky's *Stalker* and is accompanied by Gayev's monologue about fundamental values, beautiful and eternal, that have existed for many generations. The gloomy interiors of the former foundry give way to the image of an open sunny landscape. Petya Trofimov said: "All of Russia is our garden." After the cherry orchard of the old aristocracy was cut down, the workers' garden city emerged in its place, embodying the utopia, the great experiment of the 20th century. Its connate monumentalism and absurdism, revealed over time, are illustrated with a direct quote from Moscow conceptualism — a nest experiment by Grezdo (Nest) group.

Then again, the working class was also thrown to the sidelines of history. Only clothes and boots were left from the workers; visually referring to Beuys' performances, these remnants of things turn into signs of the tragic history of the 20th century: the Holocaust, repression, and infringement of rights. In the midst of this devastation, eccentric Firs continues to cultivate his already dead garden, being unable to understand or accept the new order. Outside, a new story is already being made: Lopakhin chops down the cherry orchard, and the industrial utopia turns into smoldering mountains of man-made waste.

Sergey Kishchenko is keen on major narratives and tries to gain insight into how the history functions and how to work with historical memory. His interdisciplinary projects comprise a multitude of layers and perspectives. For example, his *Observation Journal* integrates the tragic 20th century history, Nikolai Vavilov's biography and the history of the All-Union Plant Research Institute's seed collection, with many genres and methods intertwining: an archival research, visual artifacts, reconstructions, etc.

The *Duck Test* also captures and interlaces certain layers of history, different methods and visual components. The documentary is accompanied by Chekhov's text and performative actions of the absurd character. Where does the duck come from? The *Duck Test* is a classic example of abductive reasoning: "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck." During the Cold War this test became a tool for McCarthyists hunting out the sympathizers of communism in their ranks. Yet, Kishchenko employs this test with different goals: for him, it is a test for humanism on the one hand, and a way to understand his own artistic method, on the other.

Referring again to Tarkovsky, the artist recalls how the intelligent Ocean of Solaris tested scientists by sending them phantoms — which looked like people, were able to feel like people and capable of compassion and self-sacrifice. This experience turned out to be a test for humanism for the scientists themselves: one of them killed himself, another went crazy, the other two went uncooperative and evasive. Many perspectives converging in one work, like in Borges' *Garden of Forking Paths*, offer an infinite number of possibilities for a reality to manifest.

The reality we know could have been completely different in the absence of the subject, as Quentin Meillassoux argues. If we get rid of correlationism and separate reality from the subject who cognizes it, completely different perspectives open before us. The *Duck* hints that not all of these viewpoints are human; a man is only a creature, not the crown of nature. Criticizing the concept of the Anthropocene, Donna Haraway equated human and non-human agents by drawing a parallel between the human and humus. Looking at the crumbling remains of the former greatness built by man, rubbish, ruins and a robe of rags, there is no doubt that a man and his activities sooner or later become the same part of humus, like everything around.

Human creaturehood is an important concept of the Baroque era; it is no coincidence that the *Duck Man* is so reminiscent of Arcimboldo's allegorical series. What is the artist himself made of? Kishchenko tries to test himself, to reconstruct himself in a way. To look like an artist, he employs a type of artist who creates a piece of art of himself and his life. Ridiculous, awkward and slightly pathological, a freak made of tights — this is how this duck looks. How does it swim? "Is this an ironic cynic or an ardent revolutionary creating a new world? Is it a self-destructive and self-centered bohemian, or an empath who burns out with compassion? A rootless clown or a confident businessman? ... I tried all these roles on myself."

The question of how this duck quacks, Kishchenko turns into a discussion of the functions of art. What is it: a search for new forms and new languages? an adherence to eternal values? a creation of a new world and a new man? a figurative translation of your own experience? an ability to reflect time through images? a critical rethinking of reality through artistic practice? a scientific research that refers to the entire history and theory of art? a self-sacrifice for the sake of a beautiful dream? Kishchenko's artistic practice is the answer to all of these questions: the polyphony of the language of art is very important for him, and this project comprises languages of various artistic practices that he masters: theater, cinema, literature, performance.

The project is autobiographical not only from the perspective of artistic search. The territory of the ZIL plant is a dear place for Kishchenko. It was a space of hope when he tried to initiate advertising and manufacturing business here in the 2000s; later, his studio was located there. But once one of the buildings caught fire and absolutely everything burned down in it. The last shots of the film demonstrate the consequences of the fire, in which a certain period of the artist's life has bit the dust. The *Duck-Man*, like Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags*, combines the beauty of the past and the disaster of the present



Sergey Kishchenko
The Way of Grain. 2014 to present

“Hortus Conclusus”.

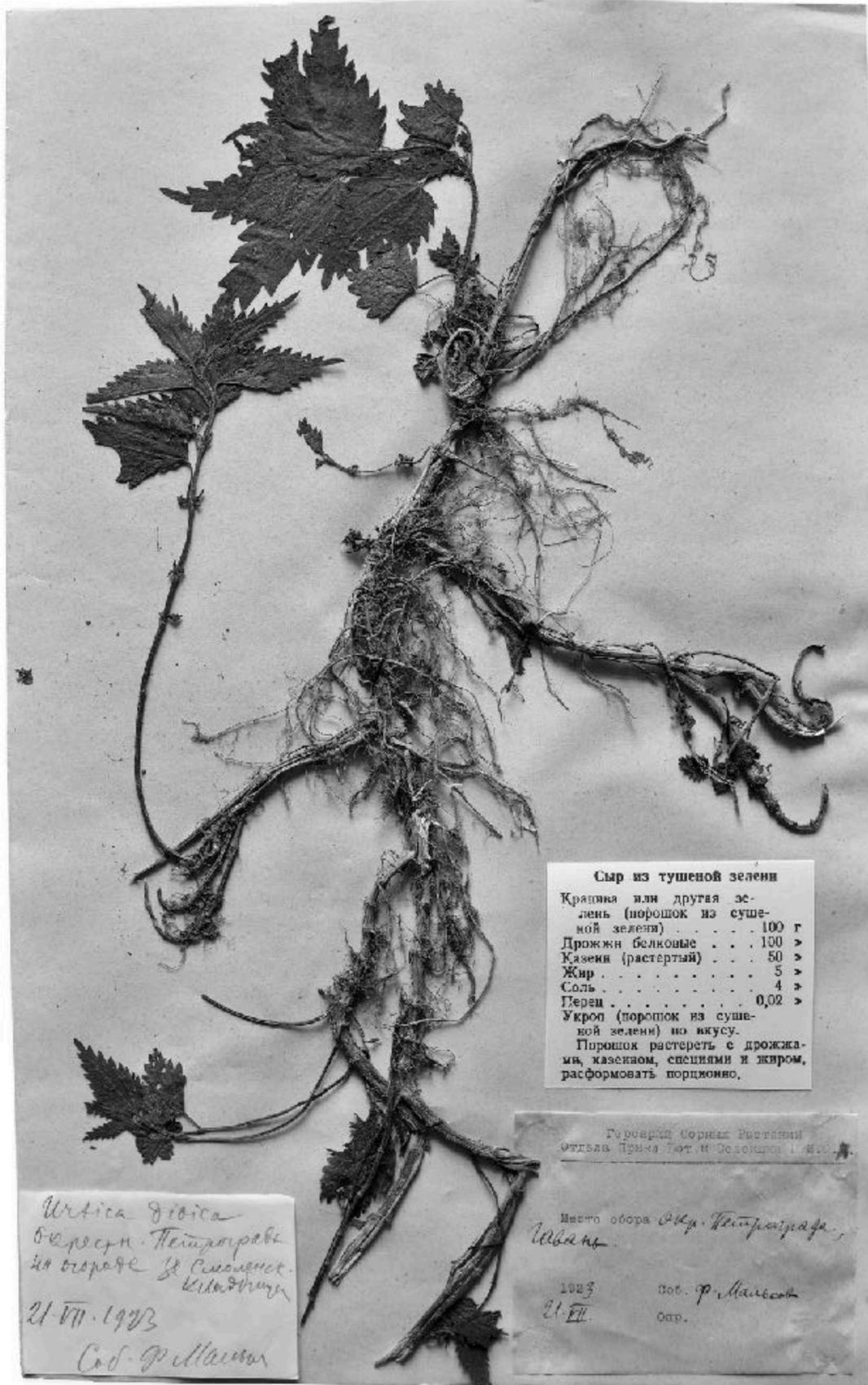
Academy of Fine Arts of Venice, and Center for Studies on Russian Art (Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Magazzini del Sale n. 3, Venice, Italy. (2023)

3D tour of the exhibition: <https://www.sergeykishchenko.com/>





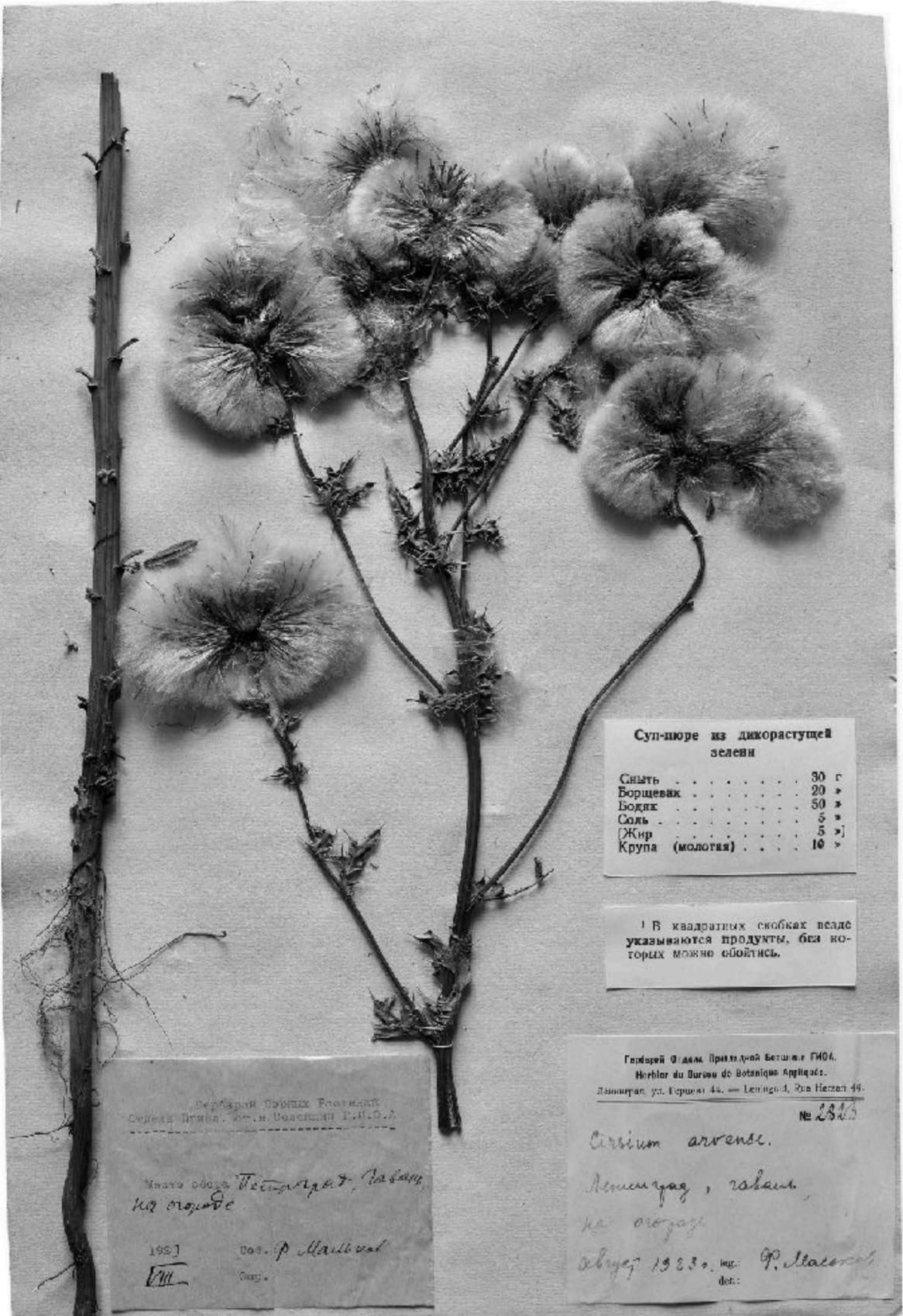




Сыр из тушеной зелени
 Крапива или другая зелень (порошок из сушеной зелени) 100 г
 Дрожжи белковые 100 »
 Казеин (растертый) 50 »
 Жир 5 »
 Соль 4 »
 Перец 0,02 »
 Укроп (порошок из сушеной зелени) по вкусу.
 Порошок растереть с дрожжами, казеином, специями и жиром, расформовать порционно.

Гербарий Ботанического института Ленинградского университета
 Отдел Прич. Тот. и Вегетации
 Место сбора: *С.к.р. Петрозаводск, Ивалы*
 1923 год. *Ф. Малинов*
 21.VI. Опр.

Urtica dioica
 Вегет. Петрозаводск
 на ороше в Сиверском
 Кладбище
 21.VI.1923
 Собр. Ф. Малинов



Суп-пюре из дикорастущей зелени
 Свекла 30 г
 Борщевик 20 »
 Бодяк 50 »
 Соль 5 »
 Жир 5 »
 Крупа (молотая) 10 »

! В квадратных скобках всегда указываются продукты, без которых можно обойтись.

Гербарий Ботанического института Ленинградского университета
 Отдел Прич. Тот. и Вегетации
 Место сбора: *Петрозаводск, Ивалы, на ороше*
 1923 год. *Ф. Малинов*
 21.VI. Опр.

Гербарий Отдела Прич. Тот. и Вегетации ГИОЛ.
 Herbar du Bureau de Botanique Appliquee.
 Ленинград, ул. Горького 44. — Ленинград, Rue Herzen 44.
 № 2343
Cirsium arvense.
 Петрозаводск, Ивалы,
 на ороше
 август 1923. *Ф. Малинов*
 det.

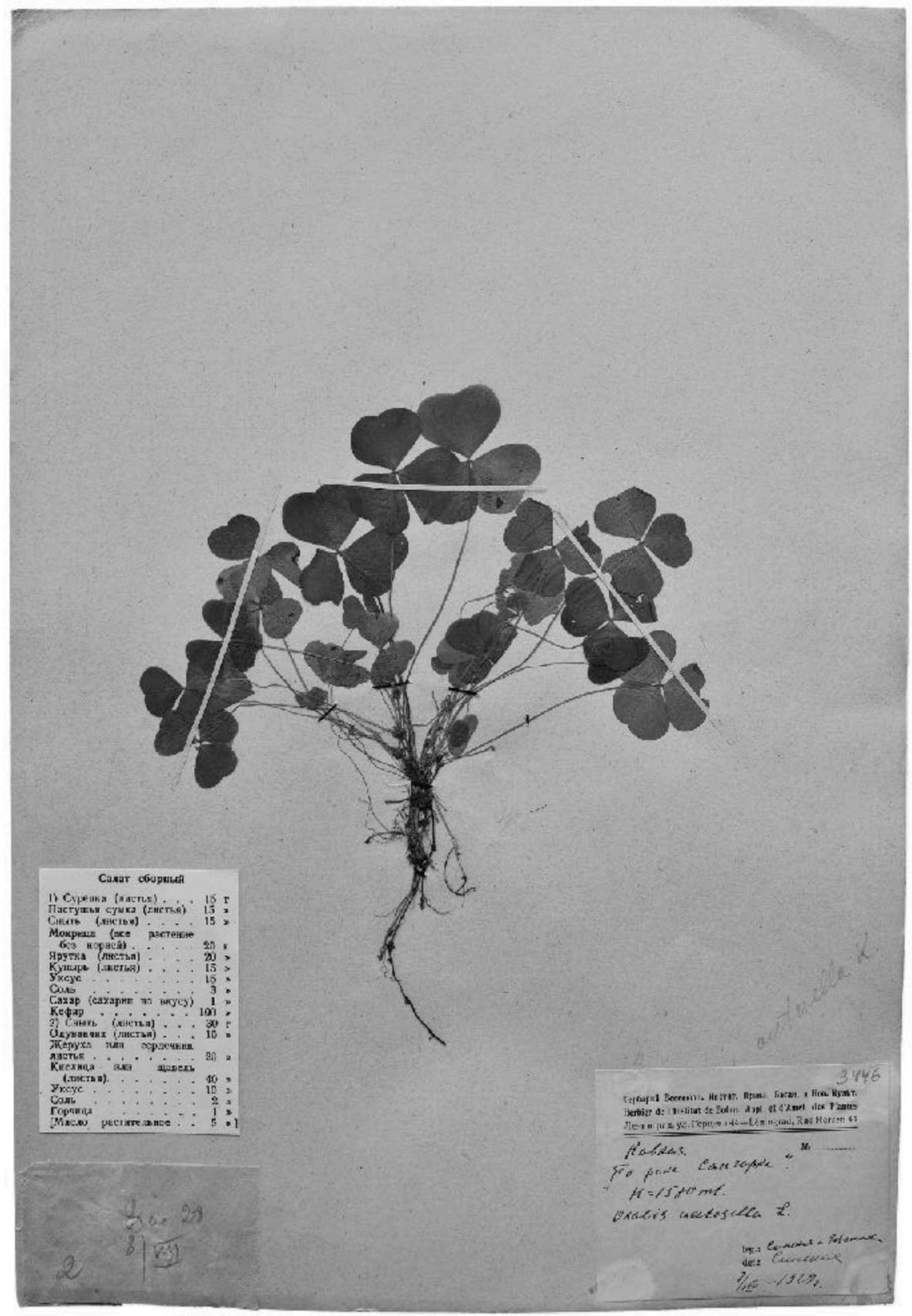


II. Котлеты из корней лопухника с крупой

Крупа	40
Лопухник (корни)	100
Сахар	10
Соль	5
Перец молотый	0,03
Лук	5
Жиры	10

Государственный Центральный Ботанический сад ГИОА.
Herbier du Bureau de Botanique Appliquée.
Leningrad, ul. Garshina 46. — Ленинград, Вилл Гертнера 44.

№ 1716
Taraxacum officinale Gaertn.
Белорусия, Минск, Белорусский ботанический сад.
13. V - 1924 г.



Салат сборный

1) Сурепка (листья)	15 г
Пастушья сумка (листья)	15 »
Синяк (листья)	15 »
Мокрица (все растение без корней)	20 »
Ярутка (листья)	20 »
Кушарь (листья)	15 »
Укроп	15 »
Соль	3 »
Сахар (сахарный песок)	1 »
Кефир	100 »
2) Синяк (листья)	30 г
Одуванчик (листья)	10 »
Жеруха или горчичник (листья)	20 »
Кислица или щавель (листья)	40 »
Укроп	10 »
Соль	2 »
Горчица	1 »
Масло растительное	5 »

3446
Leningrad, ul. Garshina 46. — Ленинград, Вилл Гертнера 44.

Trifolium pratense L.
Роберт.
Ffo pnde Cantoppe.
H-1570 ml.
1/10-1313.
1924

The Way of Grain.

Namely this method is used in Sergey Kishchenko's project "Observation Journal" – the analysis of the modern world through the study and re-examination of history, understanding historical memory as an integral part of social reality. Using historical memory as an artistic approach, the artist works with current views on democratic ideals, with the illusions and aspirations of the Great Russian Revolution and those of Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Sergey Kishchenko is attempting to find an answer to the question – why in Russia do all reforms, all modernism and all innovations inevitably turn into regression and sink into primitive archaic forms? Why did the Great October Revolution turn out to be a utopia, and the State that arose out of it – fake? Why did the Soviet Union, declared a society of aspirations, justice and universal happiness, become a society of denunciations, repression, terror and fear? Why in Art did the Russian Avant-Garde project come to nought? Can any analogies between Russia today and the year 1936 be drawn?

The historical core of the project "Observation Journal" is the study of the tragic fate of the great scientist N.I. Vavilov and the history of how the seed collection created by this prominent Soviet scientist and the specialists of the All-Union Plant Research Institute (VIR) was saved during the Siege of Leningrad. It is also about the fate of some of the seeds that had been seized by the Nazis in the occupied eastern territories, which later became the basis for the experimental crops of the SS Institute of Plant Genetics, located at Lannach Castle, near Graz in Austria.

The history of the project "Observation Journal" consists of three main stages:

- Historical research – a series of documentary-graphic works ("Daily Bread", 2014), created by the artist Sergey Kishchenko during his research which paved the way for the project "Observation Journal";
- Empirical art research – a historical art reconstruction of the events of the Second World War, co-authored with the Austrian art group RESANITA (Anita Fuchs, Reza Pernthaller), (the public art project "Field of Communication" 2015);
- Scientific research (which has been ongoing since 2016) – work being conducted in cooperation with the specialists of the institutes: the N.I. Vavilov All-Russian Institute of Plant Genetic Resources – VIR (Russia) and the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences – BOKU (Austria).

This is the project's 5th year. An important event for the artist took place in the winter of 2017-2018 – the exhibition "Observation Journal 2014-2107" in All-Russian Institute of Plant Genetic Resources (VIR). A large part of the exposition was displayed in the Institute's Scientific Agricultural Library, amongst Russia's oldest, which houses one of the most comprehensive collections of biological and agricultural documents.

This exhibition became the nominee and prize-winner of two important Russian Art awards – the Innovation Art Prize 2018 and the Kuryokhin Award 2018. (Finalist of the Sergey Kuryokhin Awards (2018) in category "The best work of visual art" and Nominee of the "Innovation" prize (2018) in category "Artist of the Year").

The Innovation Nominees' Exhibition took place in Moscow, in the Russian State Library (the former Lenin State Library, before that the Rumyantsev Library that was founded in 1862).

In early 2018 work began on a new stage of the project "Observation Journal" – a large international scientific and artistic study involving institutes from Russia, Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. Sergey Kishchenko plans to show the results of this work in Venice, in May 2019. It is also planned that this exhibition will be featured as part of the Special Projects of the 58th Venice Biennale.

Working on the project this year, the artist has been placing extra emphasis on the symbolic interpretation of models of historical reality; he has also continued to develop the theme of the library's identity – as the oldest means of storing information, and that of DNA – as the most ancient and complete archive in the world. The library, the genetic bank and DNA are viewed by the artist as places where the bonds between communities concentrate. When implementing his projects, the artist pays great attention to interaction with contexts and space. Interaction and cooperation are, perhaps, the key words that determine the art of Sergey Kishchenko.

Nikolai Vavilov. The Scientist – Futurist.

The scope of Nikolai Vavilov's work is astounding – studies, practical training, working in the world's leading biological institutes and laboratories, hundreds of scientific articles, dozens of major scientific discoveries, thousands of letters of scientific value, 180 scientific expeditions over the entire globe. Vavilov was the founder of the two largest institutes in the USSR (and subsequently in Russia today): The All-Union Institute of Plant Genetic Resources (VIR), which had an extensive network of 25 experimental research stations throughout the Soviet Union, and the Institute of General Genetics RAS, of which he was the first Director. Vavilov carried out all this work with enthusiasm, collating a huge amount of factual material, both his own – intellectual and experimental, and from literature, drawing far-reaching general conclusions. Nikolai Vavilov dreamed of turning his laboratories into a world centre for genetics.

In 1940, Nikolai Vavilov was repressed and he died in a prison camp in 1943. The scientist, who dreamed of feeding the whole of mankind, died of starvation in one of Stalin's prisons.

The Siege of Leningrad (Блокада Ленинграда)

The Siege of Leningrad was a prolonged military blockade undertaken from the south by the Army Group North of Nazi Germany against the Russian city of Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on the Eastern Front in World War II. The siege started on 8 September 1941, when the last road to the city was severed. Although the Soviet forces managed to open a narrow land corridor to the city on 18 January 1943, the siege was not lifted until 27 January 1944, 872 days after it began. It was one of the longest and most destructive sieges in history, and possibly the costliest in casualties suffered. Some historians classify it as genocide. (From Wikipedia) Specialists of the All-Union Plant Research Institute (VIR), at the cost of their own lives, saved a unique Vavilov collection of crops, containing several tons of seeds and tubers. During the the Siege of Leningrad, not a single grain, not a single potato tuber was touched. 28 employees of the institute have died from hunger, but retained the unique genetic collection of cultivated plants.

Sergey Kishchenko – the initiator of the project, the artist:

"The value of the "Observation Journal" project, in my opinion, lies in the fact that it is viewed as one of the links in the global communications network, in the fields of history, Art history, Art theory, philosophy, science and so on. It is an attempt to introduce a small amount of new knowledge into this global network.

In one of his interviews, Alexander Sokurov says that when he works with the theme of war, death and catastrophes are not of interest to him, that he does not make films about how people died. What interests him is life and human stories about the fight against death and victory over it. It seems to me that our project deals with this as well.

"Observation Journal" is a project about the future, where the ideologies of totalitarianism and death have no place. The "field" of the project – is the territory of the search for new meanings, exchanges, discoveries and communications, the territory where mutual empathy and tolerance are cultivated".

“Venetiae: quintum corpus”

(Video mapping performance, together with Lidiya Kavina), ArtNight-Venezia, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy. (2023)





6_DVD-R-Uberlango_2-55_CONTRAST_fin-0611.mpg

9_BUNKER-Razo-Vorrov_6-40_CONTRAST_fin-0612.mpg

“Representation of the heroes of F.M. Dostoevsky in theater and cinema”.

(Panoramic video installation), Museum Center "Moscow House of Dostoevsky", Moscow, Russia (2021)

“Representation of the heroes of F.M. Dostoevsky in book illustration”.

(Panoramic video installation), Museum Center "Moscow House of Dostoevsky", Moscow, Russia (2021)





Sergey Kishchenko

The Temple of Venus. 2019 to present





Informational text on a wall panel.

The Temple of Venus, 2019

Installation, video

In his new work produced specially for the Garage Museum, Sergey Kishchenko draws upon his long-term research of fertility cult and, in part, upon the architecture of the exhibition, which reminds of the space station from Tarkovsky's film. Different elements of the installation come together to form a sacred space full of various images. They make up the temple of Venus represented by an ancient statue of the Earth Mother.

The key to the understanding of this work is Giulio Camillo's Theater of Memory. The Italian Renaissance philosopher had an ambitious project to create an archive of human knowledge intended to tell the structure of the universe through the imagery of hermeneutic systems of the time. The archive was supposed to be organized as an amphitheater in order to demonstrate all the possible connections between things in the universe and in our minds. It was based on the method of loci — one of memorization techniques adopted in ancient Roman and Greek rhetorical treatises — and was intended to bring the viewer to memorizing the knowledge about the universe.

Artist Sergey Kishchenko allocates a certain place to each object in the Temple of Venus. In the center of the installation there is a sculptural group called Goddesses — the scaled-up copies of Paleolithic Venus figurines: Venus of Bryansk, Venus of Yeliseevichi, Venus of Khotylev, Venus of Savignano, and other ones. The Upper Paleolithic ritual figurines date back to 21–24,000 years ago. By scaling them up, the author emphasizes their characteristic feature — gender, which is related to the fertility cult.

Across from the sculptures there is a group of scaled-up photographic images of seeds, grains and their ancestors (wheat, rye, oat, barley, and aegilops). The author applied his original technique of *hyperdocumental photography*. Seeds on the prints size the same as a person, thus forming a single chain: seed — goddess — fertility. A series of works on the opposite side refers to the carbonized Herculaneum papyri: the documents from the most ancient library on Earth for a long time wait for technologies that would bring back the knowledge lost by humanity and preserved by the Earth Mother.

According to Kishchenko, such interior may belong to a spacecraft that departs from a perishing planet. The image of fertility migrates from photographic seeds to Paleolithic Venus sculptures, from videos with "White clothes", produced on the fields of experimental stations to papyri, where magic signs of either past or present show through.

The author links contemporary forms and dynamics with the experience of the magic past. Memory acts as a form of preservation and communication of energy, as a property of living matter to react upon an event long after it happened.

Today visual arts may act as mnemonic devices, as "theaters of memory," where our memories of the past and reflections about the future are played out, thus creating reference points for collective memory.



Sergey Kishchenko

Sergey Kishchenko was born in 1975 in Stavropol, Russia.

He lives and works in Venice.

After receiving his theater education (1994-1998) and studying Cultural Economics (1998-2002) at the Russian Academy of Theater Arts (RATI/GITIS), Kishchenko concentrated entirely on his artistic practice. He studied at the Institute of Contemporary Art Problems (IPSI/ICA Moscow, 2012-2014), the Open School of Manezh/MediaArtLab (2013-2015), and did an internship at Goldsmiths College in London, UK (2013).

Sergey Kishchenko works with contemporary notions of democratic ideals, illusions and dreams of post-Soviet Russia. Through a synthesis of media - and in his work the genres of performance, theater, film, video-art, installation, and photo-documentation are equally present - he constructs a contemporary mythological invention and explores the attributes that have become signs of cultural tradition in their modern interpretation.

Sergey Kishchenko's works should be regarded as a part of global process of intercultural communications where the work itself is not a final point, not a result, but a part of continuous process, one of the links in the chain of infinity of signs and their referential meanings.

Talking about his works, Sergey Kishchenko, first of all, mentions that he is inclined to consider art as one of the fields of knowledge. On the one hand, considering it impossible to talk about art outside of contexts and analysis, history and theory of art, on the other hand, being aware that art is subjective and irrational, and that the tools for cognition of art can be /are/ the so-called feelings of the second order. Art itself is a powerful intellectual and emotional regulation of human relations with the surrounding world, and artists need to be aware of themselves as part of the process of cognition, it is important to articulate their desire for new discoveries.

The recent projects where the artist's works were exhibited: "Hortus Conclusus", Academy of Fine Arts of Venice, Magazzini del Sale n. 3, Venice, Italy. (2023) "Duck Test N4 (Cherry)", Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, within the project "100 Ways to Live a Minute", Moscow, Russia (2020), "Temple of Venus", Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, within the project "The World to Come: Ecology as New Politics. 2030-2100", Moscow, Russia (2019) "Leaving Tomorrow". Program of the VI Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Vinzavod, Moscow, Russia (2015); "Pink Box. ERARTA Museum and Gallery of Modern Art, St. Petersburg, Russia (2015); "Liberation continued". Graz Museum, Graz, Austria (2015).

Awards and prizes:

- Nominee of the "Moscow Art Prize" (2020) in the category "Fine Art and Architecture" (Currently)
- Finalist for the Sergei Kuryokhin Award (2017) in the "Best Visual Art Work" category
- Nominee for the Innovation Award (2017) in the category "Artist of the Year"

In 2022, Sergey left Russia, disagreeing with the unjust and aggressive war unleashed by the Russian Federation. The artist currently lives and works in Venice, Italy.