

**Tolia Astakhishvili**

*The First Finger*

**Opening: Friday 24 March, from 7pm**

25 March – 30 July 2023

**Tolia Astakhishvili's** *The First Finger* profoundly transforms the space of Bonner Kunstverein. Realised across architectural interventions, installation, paintings, drawings and moving images, the exhibition comprises a large body of newly conceived work, alongside collaborations with **Zurab Astakhishvili** and **James Richards**, and contributions by **Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili**, **Kirsty Bell**, **Vera Palme** and **Ser Serpas**.

Tolia Astakhishvili's materially charged practice keeps returning to the lived environment: to the composition and logic it acquires over time, to how it shapes and is shaped by its dwellers. There is a constant slippage between the need to create spaces of protection and continuity, and the compulsion towards more destructive and destabilising impulses. In some ways, this is a reflection on survival, or more specifically on *surviving*, and the ways in which the spirit of life and liveness rubs off on material environments. For Astakhishvili, it is a practice of attending to the discarded, to objects that have been used over time, employing and re-conceiving them beyond the functions they were once assigned.

The title of the show, *The First Finger*, testifies to a certain grappling with the idea of an embodied container, one where the integrity of inside and outside is stubbornly volatile. A body exposed to critically low temperatures sacrifices extremities to focus circulation in the core. It is an ambivalent, at times violent image that speaks of care and the labour of keeping things alive, even though they may be painful and compromised. This tension haunts the work in ways that start small and radiate outwards—rooted, specific, then traveling. Moving through the exhibition, there is an intimate, dream-like quality perforated by piercing encounters with the 'world out there'. In shifting between these registers, Tolia Astakhishvili conjures a sense of instability that starts from the human body but also evokes broader social and political dimensions. This porousness is further reflected in the formulation of *The First Finger* across two chapters, at Bonner Kunstverein and Haus am Waldsee. In a process of layering and accumulation, Astakhishvili treats space and time as something permeable, opening up wormholes and resonances between the two venues—a process traced and expanded on in newly commissioned writings by Kirsty Bell.

Tolia Astakhishvili's logic of zooming in and out, of slipping between realism and abstraction, unfolds ways of seeing that encompass large-scale spatial constructions as well as more intimate forms. A recurring element in *The First Finger* is the miniature and the model. The model house as proxy for the real thing, as plan or projection, an intersection of reality and play. The process of channeling the conditions and spirit of a material opens up to the possibility of a third mind, of a collaborative space between intention and matter. This logic also carries over into the collaborative works in *The First Finger*. In her work with James Richards, collaged and fractured stills become

animated, perambulating videos that keep blurring the experience of inside and out. The scenes have a painterly quality, layering and smudging what we might think of as the real and the imaginary. Space is approached as something experiential, as a kind of metaphorical body with circulations, openings, limbs, and pragmatic material forms—plasterboard, filler, vents and other infrastructures unraveled.

In the context of Tolia Astakhishvili's practice, survival is an ambivalent grappling with the difficulty of inhabiting the world, of existing within a counterpoint of assertion and doubt. To consider protection beyond the sphere of self-care and safeguarding of the tangible involves risk, one which Astakhishvili is acutely aware of, one she can't quite leave alone.

The exhibition is developed alongside an associated programme of events, including a performance by Michael Kleine and Roman Lemberg on May 20, and an evening of music, film and poetry, curated in collaboration with James Richards on December 2.

*The First Finger* is realised in two chapters: chapter I at Bonner Kunstverein, curated by Fatima Hellberg (March 25–July 30, 2023), and chapter II at Haus am Waldsee in Berlin, curated by Beatrice Hilke (June 23–September 24, 2023).