

Press release

Tolia Astakhishvili
The First Finger (chapter II)
June 23 – September 24, 2023

Tolia Astakhishvili (b. 1974 in Tbilisi, Georgia) transforms the Haus am Waldsee with an expansive installation that constitutes her solo exhibition *The First Finger (chapter II)*. In addition to structural interventions, drawings, paintings, text, and videos, the exhibition includes new collaborative works with Zurab Astakhishvili, Dylan Peirce, and James Richards, as well as contributions by Antonin Artaud, Alvin Baltrop, Kirsty Bell, Nat Marcus, Vera Palme, Andreas Rousounelis, Judith Scott, Ser Serpas, and Giorgi Zhorzholiani.

The First Finger begins with the image of an existential physical threat: a body exposed to extreme cold must set priorities in order to protect itself as a whole. For its survival, it rations its energy and sacrifices its most expendable extremities bit by bit, finger by finger, to ensure blood flow to the most important organs in the centre. For Astakhishvili, this reduction of a body to a life-sustaining core provides the starting point for the exhibition's titular metaphor, prompting fundamental reflections on the conditions of life and liveliness, protection and abandonment.

In her work and through a wide variety of media, Tolia Astakhishvili is intensely concerned with questions of space; how it is constituted, and how it reflects lived realities. Her works trace the structures and narratives of existing buildings and evoke real and imaginary histories through temporary installations and alterations. At Haus am Waldsee, Tolia Astakhishvili also devotes herself to the material nature of the institution, exploring its architectural layers and peripheral areas. Using found materials and structural interventions, she condenses the interior of the former residence into a haunting and fragile environment in which she explores the existential conditionality of human beings in their relationship to space.

Domestic spaces in particular are often emblematic of places of refuge that protect the private and where physical integrity can be maintained. In her exhibition, Astakhishvili allows this notion to become fragile and suggests that "home" is neither a stable concept nor necessarily a safe place that provides existential support. On the contrary, it can be a place of resistance, conflict, or violence. Tolia Astakhishvili makes this tension between the individual and its surrounding space tangible in her exhibition, as well as the mental and physical interactions between a closed environment and its inhabitants.

Starting with intimate, delicate drawings, she traces, condenses, and alters the atmospheres of her surroundings. By intervening in existing architectural structures, such as by building sheetrock walls, inserting new windows, or narrowing passageways, she navigates alternative possibilities for movement and orientation. Architecture and painting merge fluidly, almost completely dissolving the boundaries between textures. Objects and sounds simultaneously refer to traces of construction and deconstruction, to existences no longer present as well as abstract dreams, emotions, and visions. Astakhishvili allows different imaginary places and realities to encounter and coexist with the real world. Material traces become ambivalent markers of the past, revealing our built environment as a container of overlapping histories and images. Works by other artists are also part of this constellation and expand Tolia Astakhishvili's processes of layering and condensation.

The result is a fragile and tense arrangement within the rooms of Haus am Waldsee, defying any concentration on a centre. The poetic power and formal stringency of this environment invites us to fathom more deeply the different layers of consciousness sedimented in its material structure as well as to engage with its spatial tensions.

Tolia Astakhishvili lives and works in Berlin and Tbilisi. Her recent solo exhibitions include *The First Finger* at Bonner Kunstverein, I think it's closed at Kunstverein Bielefeld (both 2023) and *In Heat Wind Wounds Holes* at LC Queisser, Tbilisi (2021). Her works have been included in numerous group exhibitions, among them *I am the secret meat* which she curated at Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna; *The Main Entrance*, Shahin Zarinbal (both 2022); *The Holding Environment*, Bonner Kunstverein (2021); *The Displacement Effect*, Capitain Petzel, Berlin; *As I write, I am lying, I hope*, Art Hub Copenhagen; *SPEED 2*, Malmö Konsthall; *EARTH-BOUND. Tales of Man and Nature*, Goethe-Institut Bulgaria / Earth and Man National Museum, Sofia (all 2019) and *Ache*, Cabinet, London (2018).

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).

The exhibition is developed alongside an associated series of events, including a film programme conceived by Tolia Astakhishvili and Simon Lässig on July 2 and a reading by Kirsty Bell on August 26.

The exhibition is supported by



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