

The apparently mummified body of a woman, threatening scythes, models of the artist's parents' house, deformed concrete bunkers, inflatable fists made of cloth or anthropomorphic obelisks – the work of Andra Ursuta, who was born in Salonta (Romania) in 1979 and lives in New York, consists primarily of sculptures and installations that take on their unsettling and haunting effect through their dark, sometimes morbid or martial symbolism as well as their allusions to past and present systems of power and violence.

The points of departure for Ursuta's works are usually provided by personal experiences and memories connected with her Eastern European roots, the cultural codes of Romania and her family history. The artist links these with impressions from the present and with current topics. Images and ideas that have etched themselves into the collective consciousness or into the artist's own individual consciousness take on a new existence in these works – one that is disconcerting and sometimes disturbing for viewers. At the same time, her works are in no way conceived in terms of provocations; instead, they are full of art historical and cultural historical references. A seemingly uprooted column of wood constructed of rhomboidal elements and featuring a deadly tip stirs memories not only of Constantin Brâncuși's *La colonne sans fin (Endless column)*, 1918–1938, but also of the brutal atrocities of the Romanian ruler Vlad III – Drăculea, who indulged his taste for execution by impalement in the mid 15th century, during the struggle of resistance against the Ottoman Empire. Through its coating in black rubber, the object entitled *Ass to Mouth* is additionally provided with sexual connotations, resulting in an oscillation between very different perceptual possibilities. Both pleasure and desire are equally the subject of the 2011 work *Crush*, which represents a self-portrait of Ursuta. Here, light-coloured wax – which resembles male ejaculate and invests the work with a drastic quality – has been poured onto the surface of the female body pressed flat on the ground. The work *Lucian*, which consists of a house-like model of the garage of Ursuta's parents' home, carries with it an undertone that is no less persistent in getting under the viewer's skin. Upon closer inspection, a noose is to be discovered within the miniature building – making reference to the dramatic events surrounding a member of the artist's family. While the work of 2014 is defined by a certain relentlessness, the 2010 *Breath Hold (Discipline and Vanish)* still leaves substantially more room for hope. The noose, which is also present in this work, is fastened to a balloon hovering beneath the ceiling of the exhibition space: it could never support the weight of a human being and would instead permit the individual who had lost the will to live to float away. With the works *A Worm's Dream Home*, *Soft Power* and *Broken Obelisk*, in which Ursuta analyses and grotesquely exaggerates the conventions and iconography of representations of power, she completes the ensemble of works surrounded by an allegorical exhibition architecture consisting of balls of straw. This installation not only complements the new version of a scythe-like object, which she created specifically for the show, and the exhibition title correlated with it – it also

transfers into the present the motif of the Grim Reaper, which possesses a rich art historical tradition.

With *Scytheseeing* Kölnischer Kunstverein is presenting not only Andra Ursuta's first institutional solo exhibition in Germany, but also the most comprehensive survey of the artist's work to be shown to date in Europe: in addition to pieces created specifically for the exhibition, Ursuta is exhibiting a selection of works which make it possible to grasp the development of her artistic body of work in recent years.

Ursuta has recently participated in the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) and group exhibitions at MoMA PS1 (2013) and in New York's New Museum (2011) as well as through solo exhibitions at Milan's Peep-Hole (2014) and at Los Angeles's Hammer Museum (2014).

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