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After History: Alexandre Kojève...

BAK



"AFTER HISTORY: ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE AS A PHOTOGRAPHER," INSTALLATION VIEW, 2012, "AFTER HISTORY": COURTESY BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE. © NINA KOUSNETZOFF. PHOTO VICTOR NIEUWENHUIS.

IN THE 1957 WARNER BROS CARTOON SHOW *BIZ BUGS*, DAFFY DUCK commits suicide by blowing himself up in a stage performance after ingesting various chemicals and swallowing a match, finally upstaging Bugs Bunny who admits, "They loved it! They want more!" To which the ghost of Daffy replies, "I know, I know, but I can only do it once." At a lecture given by Boris Groys, the curator of "After History: Alexandre Kojève as a Photographer" at BAK in Utrecht, Groys noted that the Russian-born French philosopher and diplomat Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968), the nephew of Wassily Kandinsky, died while giving

a lecture and that a tape exists of his final demise, turning this unintentional act into a type of performance art.

In similar fashion, Groys has turned almost 400 photographs from Kojève's travels across Western Europe as well as China, Russia, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Iran and Nepal, in addition to over 1700 postcards of historical monuments and works of art that Kojève collected, into an exhibition that raises more questions than it answers. The exhibition is scheduled to travel around the world in the next two years and it could be argued that Groys' role is much more than that of a curator.

Seven projections imitate the workings of a slide projector, including the requisite clicking sound it makes when advancing, showing Kojève's travel photographs. Viewable throughout the room or by stepping onto one of the seven wooden viewing platforms made especially for the exhibit, the room exudes a calm, solemn atmosphere. In the upstairs gallery, nine shallow glass vitrines atop wooden tables contain Kojève's postcard collection. While Groys makes the somewhat tenuous argument that the archiving is similar to the practices of Andy Warhol or Richard Prince, Kojève's groupings admittedly have a beauty and physical presence that the projected photos downstairs lack.

Was Kojève, who claimed we were living in post-historical times, an artist or simply a documentarian? Groys makes the argument for the former, noting Kojève's photographs and postcards are extensions of Kojève's philosophical arguments, specifically, to keep a solid recollection of history through the role of a sage—in this case in the guise of a photographer and collector. This explanation could be repudiated however, since Kojève never intended this work to be exhibited. Groys in this sense could also be thought of as an equal collaborator, since he has not only realized the importance of Kojève's collection, but also installed it in a sensitive manner, evoking the practice of a conceptual artist. What then, would Kojève think of Groys' intervention? As Groys mentions in his essay for the exhibition catalog, Kojève believed that the end of history coincided with the French Revolution, which permitted the widespread acceptance of an individual's desires. Kojève, whose lectures Groys notes were attended by many of France's chief academicians, including Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan and André Breton, claimed to never intentionally utter any original ideas. Kojève could contend that Groys is not presenting anything new, yet without Groys as a catalyst, Kojève's visual output would be relegated to obscurity.

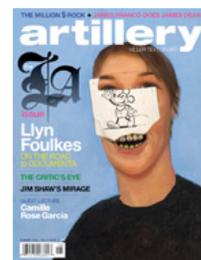
- Chris Bors

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