

My past is not a *myth*

EN



Artists

Tudor BRATU^(RO/NL)

Cihad CANER^(TR)

Julia WARAKSA^(PL/NL)

Curated by

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Introduction

Alexandra Mihalas

myth, noun

1. a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a *practice*, *belief*, or *natural phenomenon*;
2. a popular *belief* or *tradition* that has grown up around something or someone especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society.

Memories function as subtle imprints that transport us to the past, a realm we can only truly comprehend by valuing the recollections of those who lived through it. Yet, in contemporary times, memories often undergo a reductionist transformation into general stories or myths, driven by cause-and-effect logic that overlooks the profound experiences of those who lived through historical moments.

My Past is Not a Myth stands as a reflective exhibition that embarks on a profound exploration of history as an intricate tapestry woven with diverse narratives, encompassing both personal and collective memories.

This exhibition endeavors to challenge the prevalent perception of history as a monolithic, preordained narrative shaped by political and economic forces. Instead, it proposes the appreciation of personal memories, treating them as imaginative artifacts preserving emotional imprints of the past.

Navigating the intricate narrative of Moldova's past, a country positioned at the crossroads of major political powers, reveals that interpreting Moldova's history is perhaps even more contentious than understanding its present reality or envisioning its future. This historical complexity is intensified by the very nature of the past, an ephemeral, impermeable space that seems impossible to directly access. The bridge connecting the present to past histories is built solely through the memories and testimonies of those who lived through moments that have now become the past for us. Consequently, the only means to grasp the reality of the past is through the knowledge of minor, individual, and personalized narratives that collectively shape the abstract space known as the past.

Inspired by the intricate context of Moldova's history and influenced by theorists like Keith Jenkins, the *My Past is Not a Myth* exhibition emerges as an initiative to explore history through the prism of personal experiences and collective memories. It beckons visitors to critically scrutinize the con-

structed nature of history and acknowledge the vital role of diverse voices and personal memories as invaluable insights into our shared understanding of the past.

Through the lens of photographer Tudor BRATU, the exhibition seeks to unravel the narrative thread of one personal story, that encompasses the social and historical context for hundreds of people who have lived their destinies in this territory. Personal memories, coupled with contemporary photographs of the urban landscape, chart the course from past to present—streets, buildings, and people encapsulated through the camera lens serve as artifacts or imprints of events that persist in the past but still wield influence over present reality.

With three invited artists – Tudor BRATU, Cihad CANER, and Julia WARAKSA – the exhibition establishes three parameters for engaging with the past: collective memory, personal narrative, and imaginative reconstructions. Each artist brings their unique exploration of the concepts of the past, memory, and history, collectively advocating for an understanding of the past through narratives yet to be fully appreciated or recounted. Through the exhibition, visitors are invited to personally identify with the statement *My Past is Not a Myth*, and thus embrace the authenticity of their individual pasts, as well as those of their families and communities. By doing so, individuals can acknowledge the diverse layers of historical content waiting to be revealed through the myriad personal memories woven into the fabric of their collective experiences.



“My Past is not a Myth”

Kiki Petratou

“My Past is not a Myth,” is an engaging exhibition that delves into the intricate interplay between personal narratives, historical threads, and the enduring power of myth. As a Greek curator collaborating with a Moldovan counterpart, we embark on a journey through time and space to explore the dynamic interconnection of memory, history, and myth.

In the spirit of Maurice Halbwachs⁽¹⁾, who proclaimed that “Memory is never a precise duplicate of the original; it is a continuing act of creation,” we present artists whose works breathe life into the concept of memory as a living, evolving force. The curated selection, shaped by the cultural perspectives of not only Greece and Moldova but also Turkey and The Netherlands, delves into the complexities of remembrance, challenging conventional narratives.

In a world saturated with facts and figures, “My Past is not a Myth” seeks to unravel the stories that linger beneath the surface of collective memory. Through the lens of contemporary art, this exhibition becomes a space where personal narratives weave seamlessly into the fabric of historical truths, creating a dialogue that transcends time.

As one navigates through the exhibition space, one will encounter photographic works and video and site-specific installations that present dual perspectives—where personal reflections harmonize with the echoes of significant historical moments. The participating artists have ingeniously melded personal experiences with ‘relics’ of the past, illustrating the interconnected nature of individual lives and the broader historical narrative.

The non-chronological timeline offers a visual journey, inviting the viewer to traverse the corridors of time where personal stories and historical events intersect. Shadow boxes of memory beckon the audience to peer into the intimate recesses of lived experiences, where mementos and historical relics coexist, each casting a unique shadow on the other.

“My Past is not a Myth” is not merely an exhibition; it is an invitation to engage in a narrative dialogue that transcends generations; to witness the living connection between personal tales and historical landscapes, and discover the stories that resonate within the spaces where individual and collective histories converge; to embark on this journey through time, where threads of personal histories intertwine with the warp and weft of historical narratives, creating a rich tableau of shared human experience.

Finally “My Past is not a Myth” aims to inspire contemplation, dialogue, and a deeper understanding of the intricate dance between personal stories and the unfolding fabric of history.

Urban Chronicles

Navigating the Streets of Ancestry

In the lens of Tudor Bratu’s camera, the streets and urban landscape of Moldova become a canvas for a poignant journey through family history. Each photograph is not merely a composition of buildings, streets, and city life; it is a visual narrative that seeks to untangle the threads of the past.

As the artist captures the architectural nuances and street scenes, there’s a deliberate attempt to understand, or perhaps reinterpret, the layers of history embedded in the urban fabric. The streets, like the veins of a family tree, carry the imprints of time, witnessing the unfolding of personal narratives against the backdrop of broader historical events.

This visual exploration serves as a form of *contemplative archaeology*, where the artist navigates the physical spaces of Moldova with an emotional compass, seeking as it were to connect with the lived experiences of family members who once walked these same streets. In each frame, there’s an attempt to bridge the gap between the past and the present, creating a visual dialogue that transcends generations.

The urban landscape becomes a palimpsest, where the artist overlays personal memories onto the architecture, streets, and everyday scenes. The photographs, in this context, become a form of visual storytelling, inviting viewers to decipher the layers of history and memory embedded within the cityscape.

In this journey, the streets may also carry a mythical resonance. As the artist retraces the steps of ancestors, there’s a subtle intertwining of personal memories with the collective mythos of a place. The city becomes not just a physical location but also a vessel for the myths and stories that shape family narratives.

Through this photographic odyssey, Tudor Bratu invites viewers to join in the exploration of a nuanced *triad*—past, memory, and perhaps a touch of myth. The streets of Moldova, frozen in pixels, beckon us to reflect on how our understanding of family history is shaped by the landscapes we traverse, the buildings that sheltered our forebears, and the untold stories that echo through the urban corridors.

I, The Green Marble

The (Hi)story Of My Witness and Memory

Caner’s artistic approach introduces a non-linear narrative, playfully blurring the lines between fact-based incidents and fictional tales. What if the green marble platform could articulate its experiences? What stories would it choose to tell?

This imaginative exercise breathes life into an inanimate object, transforming it into a protagonist with a unique perspective on the world. The use of mocap CGI video provides a visually compelling medium for this exploration, allowing the virtual protagonist to navigate through the complexities of its own history. The non-linear narrative further invites viewers to question the nature of memory, considering how we construct and interpret the past based on a blend of factual events and imaginative reconstructions.

Beyond the captivating storytelling aspect, Caner’s work serves as a thought-provoking commentary on the malleability of remembrance in the face of changing political landscapes. As political tides shift, existing forms of commemoration may undergo transformation, reinterpretation, or even demolition, giving rise to new symbols and narratives. The overarching aim of the project is to engage in an exercise of memory and witness against forgetting. Caner emphasizes that remembering, like forgetting, is a social and highly politicized process. By animating the green marble platform’s imagined voice, the artist prompts viewers to reflect on the selective nature of memory and the agency involved in shaping historical narratives.

In essence, Cihad Caner’s work becomes a dynamic exploration of the interplay between materiality, memory, and politics. It invites the audience to contemplate the stories embedded in

seemingly inert objects, encouraging a deeper understanding of how our collective past is both constructed and reconstructed through the intricate dance of historical facts and imaginative storytelling. In the context of Joseph Campbell's idea⁽³⁾ that "Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation to life and death," Caner's work becomes a modern myth, inviting viewers to contemplate the role of inanimate objects as witnesses to history.

A Bear Trap in No Man's Land

Unveiling the Silent Narratives of Collective Trauma

In the shadow of monuments and the weight of historical records, Julia Waraksa's work stands as a poignant reflection on the complexities of memory, the fragmented nature of the past, and the subtle mythologies woven into the fabric of collective trauma.

The project boldly challenges the conventional approach to preserving history, contending that monuments and documents, while intended to stand as witnesses, inadvertently create a passive silence. Rather than actively engaging with the memory of atrocities, the act of enshrining history in physical forms and categorizing victims into statistics risks distancing us from the visceral context that birthed these mementos.

Through the intertwined archives of photographic records and literary reflections, the artist dismantles the detached nature of historical documentation. By relegating facts to an index and placing visual and literary representations side by side, the audience is invited to experience history in a more immersive and emotionally resonant way. This approach disrupts the passive reception of historical facts and compels the viewer to engage actively in the act of remembering and mourning.

The installation, accompanied by a selection of archival records, which depict sites and recollected fragments of historical conflict, brings forth the stark reality of neglected collective memories. These forlorn sites, now scattered representations of an inexpressible absence, speak volumes about the enduring impact of historical trauma on both the physical and psychological landscapes.

Within these landscapes, the language of heroism that is perpetuated through these sites of remembrance is scrutinized as it attempts to rewrite senseless death as martyrdom. Echoing Roland Barthes' words⁽²⁾ –“Myth is the hidden part of every story”– here, the artist confronts the notion of myth, questioning how the narratives constructed around these sites shape our understanding of the past. By doing so, the project prompts a critical reflection on the administration of a regime of tragedy that characterized the twentieth century.

In this exploration, *A Bear Trap in No Man's Land* becomes a beacon inviting viewers to delve into the complexities of memory, question the silences embedded in collective history, and challenge the mythologies that arise from attempts to grapple with the past. It serves as a call to action, urging us to move beyond passive detachment and actively engage in the work of memory, understanding, and remembrance.

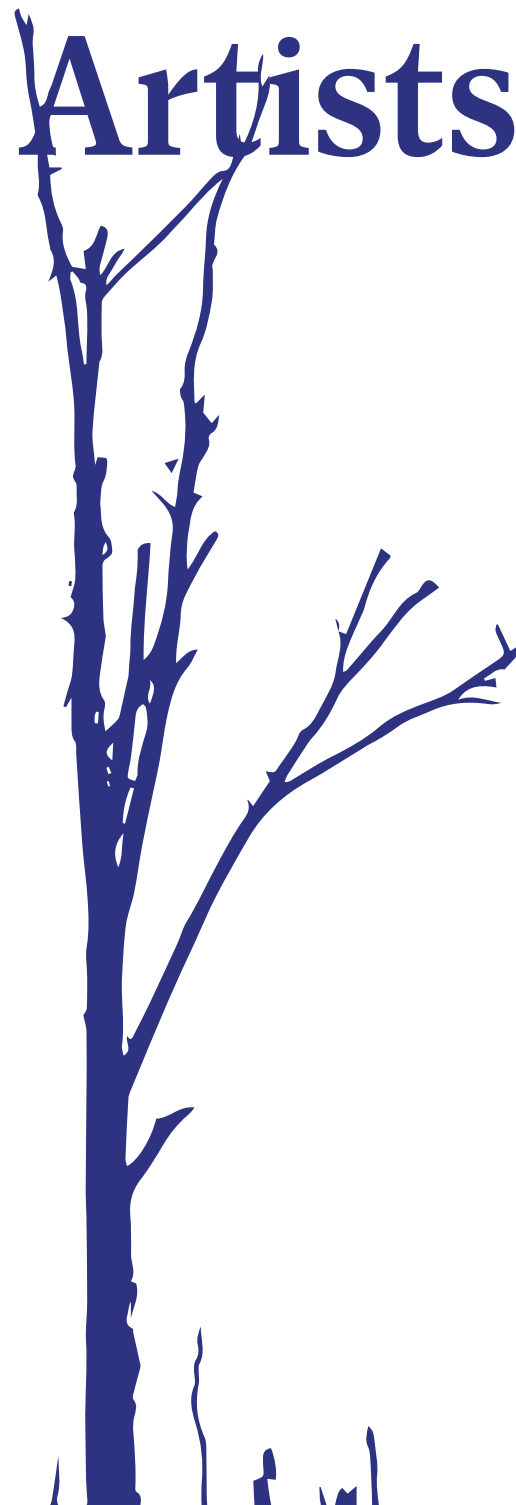
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Artists



Tudor Bratu (1977) is an internationally active artist currently living and working in Amsterdam and Bucharest. Besides his involvement with visual art, his activities include teaching, lecturing and critical writing. Bratu graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in 2003. He pursued studies in Art History at the University of Amsterdam, and finished a two-year Research Residency at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in 2008.

Since 2010 Bratu has been the managing director of Bucharest AiR, an artists residency program located in Bucharest, Romania. Between 2014 – 2016 Bratu was the artistic director of Chongqing Artists-in-Residency, an international residency program located in the city of Chongqing, China. Bratu's works in photography, bookmaking and installation are part of various international collections, such as the Bibliotheque Kandinsky of the Centre Pompidou, the Amsterdam Photography Museum FOAM, the collection of the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten, Utopicus in Barcelona, and the Allard Jakobs Collection, a.o.

Cihad Caner (1990) is an artist living and working in Rotterdam and Istanbul. His practice explores the politics of the image through the mediums of video, photography, music, motion-capture, and CGI. Caner combines historical and contemporary references to confront issues related to (re)presentation, language, marginalization, alterity, and the process of image production, and circulation. Recently he has exhibited at The Finnish Museum of Photography, Hong Kong Arts Center, Bohai Galerie, Kasseler Kunstverein, Corridor Project Space, Blitz Malta, and EYE Filmmuseum.

In 2018 Caner completed an ARCUS Residency in Japan and was the recipient of the Mondriaan Fonds Young Talent grant. Caner holds a Masters in Media Design and Communication (2016), from the Piet Zwart Institute, and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten (2021–2023).

Julia Waraksa (1998) is an artist based in Antwerp, Belgium, working within the disciplines of archival practices, bookmaking and installation in the form of scenography. She studied at the Royal Academy of Arts (KABK) in The Hague (2018 – 2022) and has a technical background in graphic design. Her artistic research is based on the topics of collective memory, historical trauma, ethics and representation.



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