

SERGEY BRATKOV | *Balaklava Drive*
Leo Koenig Inc., 541 West 23rd Street
September 13 - October 20, 2012
Opening reception, Thursday, September 13, 6-8 pm

Leo Koenig Inc. is pleased to announce the opening of *Balaklava Drive* (2009), a video and multi-media installation by Ukrainian-born, Moscow-based artist Sergey Bratkov.

Screened on a loop, *Balaklava Drive* is populated by a cast of young, impossibly thin boys jumping into water at first hesitantly, and then with increasing gusto and fearlessness. The platform from which they all jump invokes a post-industrial setting, an abandoned place that they've probably entered surreptitiously. The young boys that we see here resemble the young boys we see everywhere – awkward and lanky, jostling amongst themselves for the archetypal positions of leader, follower, and joker. Shot in black and white, Bratkov's video succinctly captures the immediacy, intimacy and nostalgia of shared adolescent danger, as the viewer bears witness to the unfolding inevitability of societal pecking orders, while still bracing themselves as each boy takes his turn.

Bratkov's adroit installation subtly directs the viewer's attention to what literally and figuratively lies hidden beneath the surface. The location of the diving platform in the video is actually an underwater receptacle of marine debris from the Crimean war, the war that ended Russian dominance over the South-Eastern European continent and -- as some historians would argue -- contributed to the seeds of the 1917 Russian Revolution. The waters at Balaklava are therefore a repository of Russian history, as well as a place where boys begin their complex journey to manhood. The two threads are separate but inseparable, as is the fate of these young boys. But in the moments that Bratkov records, there is no indication of this inevitable intertwining.

The artist calls material attention to this history through the forms of installed concrete and rusted rebar detritus that is scattered between viewing platform and screen. Bratkov's assertion that photography and video are more closely related to sculpture than to painting compels the artist to present an audience with more than just a screen. The artist communicates a sense of place and pushes viewers to take part in an experiential dialogue as they navigate both the space and the projected image. Real-life markers that suggest harm, and stairs that place the viewer on a perch overlooking the sharp debris clearly reminds us of the dangers that lurk in dark waters.

Sergey Bratkov was born 1960 in Kharkov, Ukraine. He graduated Repin Art College, Kharkov, Ukraine, 1978 and the Polytechnical Academy, Kharkov, Ukraine, from the Department of Industrial Electronics, 1983. In 1994, Bratkov organized the "Fast reaction group" with Boris Michailov, Sergei Salonsky and Victoria Michailova. In 2010, Bratkov's video installation *Batalavsky Drive* (2009) won first prize of the 5th Annual All-Russian Awards for innovation in the field of contemporary visual art. Bratkov has lived and worked in Moscow since 2000.

For more information, please contact Stephanie Schumann at Stephanie@leokoenig.com or 212.334.9255. Hours of operation are Tuesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm