

Media Release

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Hirshhorn Presents “Black Box: Risto-Pekka Blom”

April 27 – Aug. 9

Finnish Artist Combines “Shreds” Videos and Dada

Media artist Risto-Pekka Blom (Finnish, b. 1970, Mikkeli; lives and works in Tampere) is featured in the newest exhibition in the Black Box space at the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The exhibition consists of a single work, “Kurdrjavka [Little Ball of Fur]” (2013). It is the first U.S. museum presentation of the artist’s work.

On the surface, Blom’s video is a slyly unassuming homage to Laika (aka Kurdrjavka), who in November 1957, as the canine passenger of the Soviet spacecraft Sputnik 2, became the first animal to orbit the Earth. Although never intended to survive the voyage, the animal perished prematurely, a day or two into the flight, a fact that was suppressed for decades.

The short work focuses on a collage of archival footage shot in 1957, much of it from Finnish state holdings. Opening, closing and cityscape footage was shot by the artist in 2013 in Tampere.

With segments devoted to typical ceremonies for political leaders and government functionaries, this cine-poem is also a critique of the pomp and hypocrisy of officialdom. “In his juxtaposition of images, Blom employs the absurdist strategies developed by dada artists a century ago,” said Hirshhorn curator Kelly Gordon, who has organized the Black Box series since it was inaugurated in 2005. “But his sound editing draws on YouTube ‘Shreds’ videos, in which an invented soundtrack is synced with extant footage to subversive effect.”

Blom’s somber voiceover initiates the tone of his soulful narration: “Four hundred thousand kilometers per hour/in an expanding universe/in the cosmic noise of celebratory speeches/with an eye always blackened by a punch.” “Kurdrjavka” draws together fragments of sound and image to evoke broader notions of nostalgia—and its various forms, sublime and ridiculous, heartwarming and heartrending.

For more information about the artist, the exhibition and the Black Box series, which presents moving-image works by emerging and established artists, visit hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/black-box-series.

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