

# ARTFORUM

## Deimantas Narkevicius

GB AGENCY

20, rue Louise Weiss

November 14–December 23

The Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevicius is best known for his semidocumentary film and video works dealing with the perception and transmission of history. In this exhibition, he presents his latest work, *Into the Unknown*, 2009, alongside three early sculptures—which likewise deal with memory, judgment, and the conventions that fashion our understanding of reality.

Commissioned by the British Film Institute on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, *Into the Unknown* is based on found footage culled from East German documentary films. Eschewing stereotyped political symbols, it focuses instead on the socialist way of life, a radical experiment in social engineering of which little was known in the West. Shots of rectangular tower blocks alternate with an orderly row of neatly curtained windows or a street lined with identical Trabants, while serene, archetypal figures—nurses, factory workers, elderly people—at work and at play in this brave new world are framed by order and regularity. However, incongruous voice-overs, in which anonymous individuals speak of their difficulty in adapting to their environment, mock this idyll. These fragmented utterances extracted from other documentaries of the time reflect the plight of the GDR's citizens, a number of whom, according to Narkevicius's accompanying text, suffered from mild schizophrenia as a result of constant surveillance. The regime has vanished, but the questions it raised are not so easily dispelled.

Narkevicius's sculptures question our preconceptions regarding day-to-day objects, assigning them new and indeterminate functions. *Half Shrunken Coat*, 1994, is a coat showing signs of wear, reassembled by the artist into an unwearably narrow cut, while an old wardrobe has had its sides removed and is now too flat to hold clothes. Next to it crouch two wooden tables that have been forcibly embedded into each other. Unshapely and deformed, they, too, exude a strange familiarity.

— Rahma Khazam



Deimantas Narkevicius, *Into the Unknown*, 2009, still from found footage transferred to HD video, 19 minutes 45 seconds.