

## DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

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# frieze

Frieze Magazine, July 7, 2010



*Ciprian Mureșan, Incorrigible Believers, 2009*

### **Ciprian Mureșan**

Neuer Berliner Kunstverein and Galeria Plan B, Berlin, Germany

In the midst of an unseasonably hot Berlin summer, Patriarch Teoctist, former head of the Romanian Orthodox church, found himself pinned between a stray meteorite and the floor of the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein. This blasphemous tableau, *The End of the Five-Year Plan* (2004), is Romanian artist Ciprian Mureșan's interpretation of Maurizio Catellan's *La Nona Orta* (*The Ninth Hour*, 1999), in which Pope John Paul II is felled by a meteorite. Teoctist's inert body lay opposite *Incorrigible Believers* (2009), an arrangement of eight black pews and an altar, topped with an open copy of Franz Kafka's unfinished novel *The Castle* (1926).

These installations formed the weighty epicentre of Mureșan's first institutional solo exhibition in Europe, coinciding with the smaller show, 'How I Wonder What You Are', at the Berlin outpost of Cluj-based Galeria Plan B. While re-purposing a plethora of appropriated images, Mureșan maintains resolute faith in the ability of his own hand to conduct expression and experience.

*Pioneer* (2010), an animation comprised of loose graphite drawings, presents the flickering visage of a boy blowing into and sucking the air out of a plastic bag, a handkerchief around his neck signifying membership in the Pioneers, a 'value-building' youth group initiated by the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Is this youngster huffing glue, as photographs of Romanian children recognizable from post-1989 revolution media reports might suggest, or mischievously anticipating the bag's inevitable explosion?

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Without missing a beat, the child glances up to meet the viewer's perplexed gaze. In this fleeting moment, a fissure appears in the persistent attempts of a state to compose its own image.

From multiple historical channels, Mureşan has located and extracted instances of disagreement between official cultural ontologies and conflicted human situations. *3D Rubliov* (2004) is a digital re-creation of scenes from *Andrei Rublev* (1966), a film by Andrei Tarkovsky that is loosely based on the life of the canonical Russian icon painter from whom the film takes its name. In a scene borrowed from the film's prologue, a character named Yefim escapes his earthbound existence to float in a hot air balloon over surreal visions of the Russian countryside which, in Mureşan's work, take on the simple quality of the three-dimensional computer games of the late 1990s. As the animation's eerie minimal soundtrack hastens towards an anxious crescendo, Yefim and his balloon follow the same path as the cosmic rock that made short work of Teoctist, tumbling violently towards the earth.

Mureşan, and the rest of the 'Cluj Generation' with which he is loosely affiliated, came of age in post-communist Romania. It was in the revolutionary climate of 1989 that our prone Patriarch resigned under accusations of collaboration with Nicolai Ceauşescu's brutal regime. But it was in the murky circumstances that followed that he was reinstated by the Holy Synod of the Church, which refused to accept his resignation. Comprehensions of reality have the troubling tendency of dissolving into fogs of confusion and cliché. Against this predicament, Mureşan offers a diverse selection of works that behave as so many awry lenses, providing refractory visions of the collusion between urges to simultaneously emulate and interrogate the figures and systems that give our lives form. – MITCH SPEED