ANNA JERMOLAEWA

Radical Hope

30.10.2026 – 29.03.2027



KUNSTMUSEUM LIECHTENSTEIN

Dear Visitors,

We are delighted to welcome you to *Radical Hope*, a major solo exhibition by Anna Jermolaewa.

Besides selected earlier works by the artist, *Radical Hope* brings together numerous new works created especially for this show. To research and produce the exhibition, Jermolaewa travelled to the Pyrenees to trace the path of Walter Benjamin and Lisa Fittko, who helped him escape Vichy France; then to Paris to meet up with Aleksandra Wysokińska, who helped the artist make her own escape; and finally to the Channel Island of Jersey, where she shot material for the project in Gerald Durrell's sanctuary for endangered species.

Jermolaewa's artistic practice is intimately linked to her biography. Many of her works are created over extended periods or further evolved over the course of several years. She revisits places, people and themes, allowing societal and historical changes to transform her own biography. In this way, the past becomes something alive, something that changes with each new encounter. For me, a particular strength of her work lies in this sustained, deeply humane way of seeing. Jermolaewa makes time itself a protagonist.

The exhibition *Radical Hope* is defined by three main aspects: the passion for collecting, the experience of exile and migration, and her special relationship with animals. Jermolaewa, who was born in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) and had to flee what was then the Soviet Union in 1989 at the age of eighteen, turns her attention to personal experiences and historical traces, confronting the political and societal realities of our time with radical hope.

She explains the title of the show as follows: 'The title goes back to the 2006 book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* by the philosopher Jonathan Lear. He asks how we can envisage a future amidst physical, social and cultural collapse. The answer is: with radical hope.'

Jermolaewa's practice is always very close to the reality of life. Her works are a testimony to the human capacity to create something beautiful and life-affirming, and thus also to an indomitable spark of hope.

Jermolaewa has previously featured in two group shows at Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein: *Parliament of Plants* (2020–21) and *On the Street* (2025). The collection includes two of the artist's works, both part of her contribution to the Austrian pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale. It is very gratifying for us to present her work in a major solo exhibition now.

I hope you will find your encounters with her work stimulating, and perhaps even surprising.

Warm wishes

Christiane Meyer-Stoll
Director

A Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein production curated by Christiane Meyer-Stoll with Henrik Utermöhle.

Unless otherwise stated, all works: on loan from the artist; courtesy of the artist.



1
Rehearsal, 2026
Lambda C-print on Fujicolor Crystal Archive paper, mounted on Dibond
3 parts, each 100 × 170 cm

This work is derived from the video installation *Rehearsal for Swan Lake* (2024), which refers to Soviet censorship: at times of political or social unrest (the death of a head of state, for example), state television would broadcast Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* continuously for days. In *Rehearsal for Swan Lake*, ballet dancers – led by Ukrainian ballet dancer and choreographer Oksana Serheieva – rehearse selected scenes from the famous ballet, calling for the ballet to be broadcast one more time, preparing for regime change.

In *Rehearsal*, the artist captured a moment when the pops and scuffs of shoes on wood, the stroke of piano keys and Serheieva's instructions stopped. The dancers take a break, soon return for the afternoon session and continue their call for political change. What they leave behind is an empty room, save for a mirror, a barre and tutus resting on the floor – an impressionist image of anticipation and hope.



2
Trying to Survive, 2000
Video, colour, sound
3’

A group of nevalyashkas (roly-poly dolls) stand upright in a white void. An outside force begins to act upon them and they start to move slightly. Soon they are rocking back and forth. No matter how much they tumble, they always bounce back up. But soon this outside force becomes overpowering: they spin about and roll away, never to stand up again. When they are out of sight, a loud bang is heard. When the last doll disappears, all that remains is a sterile, silent white. Then the video restarts and all the roly-polys are back, ready to fight another losing battle.



3
Museum of Radical Hope, 2026
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

The objects displayed in *Museum of Radical Hope* (2026) were made by prisoners incarcerated in the Soviet Union. These items were handmade (not mass-produced) using the only available materials: mostly acrylic plastic (Soviet military factories used it in large quantities – prisoners forced to work in them smuggled out leftover scraps) and bread (shaped, left to dry and painted), but also ebonite (a type of hard rubber used as electrical insulation), toothbrushes, combs, soot and even blood.

This collection, which the artist meticulously assembled, consists of playing cards, hand mirrors, pens, hairbrushes, bracelets, ornaments and various ephemera. Each item tells a story of suffering and sorrow, confinement and loss. And yet, these objects exist. In the midst of the end of a way of life, in the bleakest circumstances, someone had the strength to create, demonstrating a sliver of hope: a future, imaginable or not, exists, a hope best described as ‘radical’.



4
How to Sleep on a Public Bench, 2024
Marker on paper
12 parts, each 24 × 30 cm

Based on the positions Jermolaewa attempted in *Research for Sleeping Positions*, these drawings are of the artist trying to find a suitable way to sleep on a bench. The drawings are self-portraits that refer both to a traumatic time in her life (fleeing the Soviet Union, being a homeless refugee living in a train station) and to her reenactment of that time as a performance for the video. They serve as a sort of manual or user's guide for this subtle but inhospitable form of hostile architecture.



5
Research for Sleeping Positions, 2006
Video, colour, sound
16' 53"
Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz

In May 1989 Jermolaewa found herself in Vienna's Westbahnhof, where she spent a week on a bench. Seventeen years later she recreated the experience, this time being filmed as she tried to sleep. She struggled to find a comfortable position on a bench that now has metal armrests to deter the unhoused from sleeping on it. In 1989, the benches in this railway station at the end of Western Europe at least provided an opportunity for weary travellers, or those without shelter, to get some rest. *Research for Sleeping Positions* shows that this function has been eliminated – public transport hubs no longer accommodate persons of all means.



6
Summit (Dedicated to Lisa Fittko), 2026
12-colour pigment print on Fomei Archival Velvet paper
35.4 × 109 cm

At the halfway point of the Lisa Fittko Trail, over which Fittko (a Hungarian-born Resistance fighter) led refugees fleeing the Nazi regime, is a fence marking the border of France and Spain. This fence is located at the summit of Coll de Rumpissó, a historic mountain pass overlooking the Pyrenean coastline. In her autobiography, *Escape Through the Pyrenees* (1985), Fittko wrote that after leading a group through the stony switchbacks and vineyards of the French side (a feat she accomplished three to four times a week for several months), on reaching this scenic viewpoint she saw the sun rise over the sea. On the left, Vichy France, on the right, the safe haven of Spain. She wrote that it was so beautiful that she was speechless.



7
Untitled (Good Times, Bad Times), 2007
Pigment print on Fomei Archival Velvet paper
3 parts, each 32 × 47 cm

'Why is it that quarter to three, or quarter to five, is a better time than four minutes to five?' It turns out that some hours of the day offer more comfortable conditions for pigeons to perch on the hands and markings of a public clock face. *Untitled (Good Times, Bad Times)* consists of three unassuming photographs that capture a situation from everyday life. Unexpectedly loaded with additional emotional aspects, a discreet and somewhat mundane moment is transformed into a symbolic statement.
Iara Boubnova, 2010



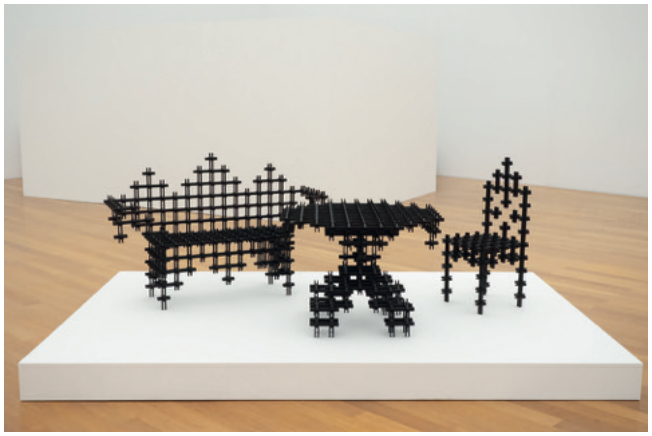
8
LAST SEEN SINCE 1970, 2025–ongoing
Installation comprising 54 works on paper (watercolour and ink on paper), each 76 × 56 cm and **Jersey Zoo, 2026** three-channel video, colour, sound, each 30'

Anna Jermolaewa's latest series of watercolours is based on animal species that have been declared extinct (or have not been seen in years) since 1970, the year of the artist's birth. The series begins with the Tacoma pocket gopher and Saudi gazelle (both last seen in 1970), and extends to the Caspian tiger (last seen in 1974), the golden toad (last seen 1989), Pyrenean ibex (declared extinct twice: last seen 2000; one was cloned in 2003 but it died shortly after birth), the Pinta giant tortoise (last seen 2012), and so on, until recent times, like Dabry's sturgeon (declared extinct in the wild in 2022).

The video component of *LAST SEEN SINCE 1970* was filmed at Jersey Zoo, Channel Islands, the headquarters of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. The trust was founded by Gerald Durrell, a wildlife conservationist and the author of books about his childhood growing up amongst the fauna of Corfu or about his expeditions to find rare animals. When she was young, Jermolaewa read many of his books and they inspired a fascination with (and respect for) animals that is evident in many of her works. This video shows animals at the zoo, most of them endangered species, being cared for by team members and experts who not only feed them and monitor their health, but also facilitate captive breeding programmes (with the goal of releasing them back into the wild) and teach visitors about these fascinating species and the importance of conservation efforts.



Jermolaewa, whose works have covered the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals (*Hermitage Cats*, 2013; *Famous Pigeons,* 2021) and the effect of human destruction of animal habitats (*Chernobyl Safari,* 2014/21), now addresses, through the paintings of *LAST SEEN SINCE 1970*, irrevocable loss. However, there is still hope. As the video shows, there are effective and ongoing wildlife conservation efforts that can make a difference and some of the species she paints, though not seen in years, have not yet been declared extinct. Jermolaewa paints these animals in the faint hope that one day they will be seen again in their natural habitats.



9
Benjamin's Toys, 2026
Installation comprising a wooden table, chair and bench, vintage toys, and 13 b/w photographs of Russian toys from the Moscow Toy Museum, 1926–27, photographer unknown, with inscriptions by Walter Benjamin on the reverse
Dimensions variable

Photographs: *Puppe aus Stroh* [Straw Doll], *Droschke mit zwei Pferden bespannt* [Horse-Drawn Carriage with Two Horses], *Nussknacker* [Nutcracker], *Hölzernes Modell einer Nähmaschine* [Wooden Model of a Sewing Machine], *Samowar und Trommler* [Samovar and Drummer], *Bonne mit zwei Kindern* [Nanny with Two Children], *Bacchus auf einem Ziegenbock* [Bacchus Riding a Goat], *Möbelgarnitur für die Puppenstube* [Set of Furniture for a Doll's House], *Die Erde auf drei Walfischen* [The Earth on Three Whales], *Wjatka-Puppen* [Nesting Russian Dolls], *Altes Holzpferdchen* [Old Wooden Horse], *Tisch mit russischen Spielsachen* [Table with Russian Toys] (2 photographs).
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archiv, WBA 1582–1594 / Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur

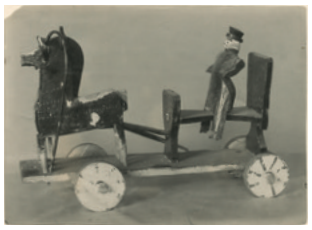
Walter Benjamin was an avid collector of children's toys. In 1940, he fled the Nazis, leaving his precious toy collection behind. Benjamin's flight ended in tragedy. Facing possible deportation back to France, he committed suicide in the border town of Portbou, Spain. The whereabouts of his toy collection are unknown, lost in the rubbish dump of history. The only remains are photographs of toys, some of which have been identified as part of his collection; the images accompanied a Berlin newspaper article he wrote about toys. He described purchasing them numerous times in his *Moscow Diary* (written in 1926–27), at the Moscow Kustarnyj Muzeum gift shop and other Moscow toy museums. In addition, he mentioned in his *Diary* that he visited several markets, where he also bought toys that he described in detail. Benjamin also had a radio series, broadcast

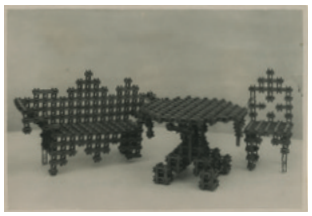
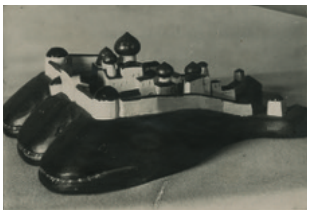
from Berlin, that focused on toys. Indeed, Benjamin wrote often about collections and the act of collecting; for him, collectors' collections mirror their worlds.

For *Benjamin's Toys*, Jermolaewa partially recreated this lost collection. As the exact toys that comprised it are debated, she studied the *Diary*, radio series and few remaining visual records of the toys in order to 'recreate' the collection. This reimagining focuses on a set of doll-sized furniture (that Benjamin noted, on the back of his photos, was made by prisoners in Siberia) that Jermolaewa made life-size. The rest of the collection is represented by a few toys (similar to those in the photographs that Jermolaewa found and added to her personal collection) and the photos in the Berlin newspaper article.

This work is about a collector, imagining a lost collection, about fragments and information forever lost, but with ways to reclaim it, or fill the gaps, through imagination.









10
Roly-Poly, 2026
Collage of found historical photographs in a wooden frame
144 × 364 × 9 cm

The nevalyashka (roly-poly doll) was one of the most popular Soviet children's toys in the 1960s and '70s. The toy was invented in the 1920s and later mass-produced as a form of 'soft' propaganda promoting Soviet solidarity and resilience: it can be knocked down, punched, or even thrown across a room but it still stands up, turning itself upright, its expression remaining the same. These photographs of children with roly-poly dolls – images that Jermolaewa collected from various post-Soviet countries over the last few years – capture the innocence of youth. The children hold a plaything rich in symbolism, unaware of the Soviet Union's impending collapse and the rise of new regimes that would usher their generation into an era of political insecurity, oppression and bloodshed.



11
Jukebox, 2026
Jukebox
130 × 108 × 70 cm

This jukebox is from Kainz guesthouse in Jennersdorf, Austria, where it sat in the dining room. Jermolaewa and her partner arrived there in late 1989 after a month in the refugee camp at Traiskirchen, waiting for political refugee status. At the time, the guesthouse was a part of an Austrian government programme to house refugees and was populated by immigrants. None of the tenants had any money to spend on the jukebox, so it sat there, silent. In fact, Jermolaewa didn't hear it play even once, even in celebration on 9 November when she and her fellow residents sat in the dining area and listened to the live broadcast of the Berlin Wall falling.

Many years later, the artist returned to visit the guesthouse and, to her surprise, the jukebox was still in the dining room and still silent. She managed to acquire the machine, along with all of its original records, and for the first time was able to hear its music. And now everyone else can too.



12
‘F’ Route, 2021/2026
Pigment prints on Hahnemühle FineArt Baryta paper
24 parts, each 29.7 × 42 cm

The ‘F’ Route (also known as the Lisa Fittko Trail, Walter Benjamin Route, or Enrique Lister Route) is a trail that crosses the French-Spanish border, over the easternmost Pyrenees, between Banyuls-sur-Mer and Portbou. This secret route was used multiple times in the 20th century by refugees fleeing oppression, incarceration or death, whether it was partisans fleeing the Franco regime in Spain or Jews seeking refuge from the Nazis and their Vichy-government collaborators.

Vineyards have been tucked into the mountainside along the French side for generations, leaving traces in the form of dead vines and roots that litter the trail. Fleeing immigrants would start early in the morning to blend in with the vineyard workers, climbing between the grapevines along part of the route. Jermolaewa collected some of these weathered vines and roots (that can live up to a hundred years) along the trail in 2021 and 2026. These pieces of wood once witnessed the flight of thousands who hoped to find safety on the other side of the mountain. One such person was the well-known theorist (and toy collector) Walter Benjamin, who used this route to flee from the Nazis to Spain. In fact, the ‘F’ Route’s vineyards were among the last things he saw before he died. And if one looks at these roots and vines from a certain perspective, they become figurative – looking like a horse, a dog or a snake – as if sharing an aspect of the trail’s sombre story as the most ancient ‘toy’ in human history, a piece of dead wood.



13
Aleksandra Wysokińska / 20 Years Later / 35 Years Later, 2009/2026
Two-channel video, colour, sound
41' and 39'

In May 1989, a young woman gave Jermolaewa a great deal of help when she was fleeing the USSR for political reasons (she was a co-founder of the first opposition party, the Democratic Union, and co-publisher of the party newspaper). She and her partner reached Krakow, Poland, and met Aleksandra Wysokińska, who gave them shelter for two weeks. She also organized and financed their travel to Vienna, even accompanying them to ensure a safe journey.

Twenty years later, the artist met with Wysokińska in Krakow to make a video portrait of her and thank her properly for her generosity. Fifteen years after this meeting, they met again (this time at Wysokińska's flat in Paris) to catch up and share their memories about Jermolaewa's flight. Two years later, as the artist was passing through Paris, the two met again to complete the film.

Each time they met, Jermolaewa was struck by how much Wysokińska remembered, and how much she herself had forgotten about this harrowing experience. Through these additional meetings, the work not only serves as a portrait of Wysokińska and her inspirational generosity, but it also speaks of memory – how it changes as the years pass: things forgotten and remembered in conversation with a dear friend.



14
Five Year Plan, 1996–ongoing
Seven-channel video, colour, sound
Each 1' 30"

It's a five-year plan for eternity: two escalators parallel to one another and running in opposite directions. One is going down and there are people on it; the other is going up and carries the camera. There is no safe point from which to observe, just as there is no moment of arrival, neither onto an underground platform nor into daylight. Everything is governed by the rules of the loop. Jermolaewa pursues the issue of historical progress, one embedded in the term 'five-year plan' under socialist regimes, in a video installation where linear movement is conveyed in a loop: the escalator itself. The people who traverse the image are a random crowd. This first became of interest to filmmakers in the 1920s, when films were made showing average people in typical situations: films about everyday life in a town or community that did not focus on the extraordinary but rather on the everyday, the rhythms of communal life. Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) effectively took stock of revolutionary Soviet society. *Five Year Plan* is based on a camera perspective that could have been inspired by Vertov, with Jermolaewa filming using a discreet camera; she moves amongst the people with an interest in 'cinematic truth'. These people are still recognizable as the descendants of Soviet citizens from the 1920s, even if they are not explicitly identified as such. It is the montage that closes the differences between two epochs: that of the emergence and end of Soviet society. […]

Bert Rebhandl, 'Staccatoed Ideas. Anna Jermolaewa's Adaptations of the Movie Apparatus' in: *Anna Jermolaewa: Big Sister/The Five-Year Plan*, Vienna: Triton, 2002, pp. 25–27.

Anna Jermolaewa

* 1970 in Saint Petersburg, Russia

Anna Jermolaewa was born and grew up in Leningrad in the former Soviet Union. After being accused of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda (as one of the original members of the first opposition party, the Democratic Union, and co-publisher of its illustrated weekly), aged eighteen she fled via Poland to Vienna in 1989, where she has since been living and working. From 2006 to 2011 she was a professor of Media Art at the Center of Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany. She has been professor of Experimental Art at the University of Art and Design Linz, Austria, since 2018.
Her work has been shown at numerous international solo and group exhibitions, and she is represented in several renowned collections, including Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; mumok Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien and Belvedere, Vienna.
The artist has been awarded several residencies, including the MAK Schindler Scholarship (2017), and prizes such as the Austrian Art Prize for Fine Arts (2020) and the Otto Breicha Award (2021).
She recently gained wide international recognition as Austria's representative at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

www.jermolaewa.com

Publication and edition

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue with texts by Sandra Frimmel, Leonie Huber and Christiane Meyer-Stoll, as well as the artist's limited-edition photograph *Rehearsal*.

Editing
Christiane Meyer-Stoll and Henrik Utermöhle

Texts
All texts by Scott Clifford Evans, unless otherwise credited

Copyediting
David Gray

Picture Editing
Henrik Utermöhle

Graphic Design
Sylvia Fröhlich
(Cover design by Neuland visuelle Gestaltung, featuring a detail of **1**, photo: Manuel Gorkiewicz)

Printing
Gutenberg AG, Schaan

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p. 25: Historical photographs from the Moscow Toy Museum, 1927. Photographer unknown. From left to right, top to bottom: *Bacchus auf einem Ziegenbock* (WBA 1588), *Puppe aus Stroh* (WBA 1582), *Droschke mit zwei Pferden bespannt* (WBA 1583), *Bonne mit zwei Kindern* (WBA 1587), *Möbelgarnitur für die Puppenstube* (WBA 1589), *Die Erde auf drei Walfischen* (WBA 1590), *Altes Holzpferdchen* (WBA 1592), *Wjatka-Puppen* (WBA 1591).
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archiv / Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur

8, 11: Photo: Anna Jermolaewa
9: Photo: Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein
3, 4: Photo: Studio Heinz Preute, Schaanwald

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