



Christian Jankowski's video *Heavy Weight History*. Courtesy Green Art Gallery

## Proposals on Monumentality explores whether monuments can go beyond representing memories

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"Bravo, bravo," shouts the commentator as a team of champion Polish weight-lifters attempt to move the gigantic *Brotherhood in Arms* Statue, a monument built in 1945 to symbolise Polish and Russian relations after the Second World War.

"At least a fragment of history has been removed," the speaker adds, as the beefy men manage to shift the enormous bronze and stone weight a few inches off the ground.

It is a scene from *Heavy Weight History*, a 26-minute video artwork created by the Berlin-based artist Christian Jankowski in 2013, which is showing in Dubai's Green Art Gallery.

It is part of an ambitious show titled *Proposals on Monumentality*, which seeks to explore whether monuments can go beyond representing the past and evoking collective memory, to expressing fragmentation and forgetting.

The pieces in the show offer a starting point for this dialogue from numerous geographical perspectives.

Jankowski's piece, for instance, is set in Warsaw and is loaded with rhetoric referencing the Holocaust and political relationships in Europe. The

characters in the video – real sporting champions – are physically lifting the weight of history off their own shoulders and proposing a different kind of reality beyond the entrenched histories represented by the five different statues in the video.

After the show opened last month, Jankowski was selected as the curator for 2016's Manifesta, the roving European Biennial of Contemporary Art that will be in Zurich for its next edition.

This importance of Jankowski's piece and its conversation reflects a shrewd choice by the show's curator Ipek Ulusoy Akgul.

"I started discussing how we could approach the notion of monumentality from a new perspective with the gallery during the summer," says Akgul. "We began looking at Dubai and understanding monuments here, which are shaped by the dimensions of structures from an urban and architectural standpoint, but we were also interested in engaging in other concepts such as memory and history."

She says that the dual purposes of remembering and forgetting, erecting and erasing, were what she was looking to explore with this show.

To do so, she chose Aslı Çavusoglu, a Turkish artist whose five mixed-media works, titled *The Demolition of the Russian Monument at Ayastefanos* (2011), explore the deliberate destruction of a monument in a suburb of Istanbul not long after it was built in 1914.

"One of the key questions this exhibition poses is if monuments can go beyond representing memory and represent fragmentation – I think this is clear in this work," says Akgul. "The artist based her project on two found images of the real event and she recreated this history of something that was trying to be forgotten. There is a play between remembering and forgetting in this work."

This is echoed, too, in Seher Shah's *Mammoth: Aerial Landscape proposals* (2012). The artist inserts geometric, black shapes into aerial photographs to represent monumental objects.

"The simultaneous process of adding and erasing brings us back to the remembering and forgetting," says Akgul. "I found these formal gestures very powerful, particularly because they are also referencing something that does not exist."

The motif recurs in Santiago Sierra's *Conceptual Monument* (2012). The simple, written document is a real proposal for a €6 million (Dh27.47m) monument for the Design Competition for the Leipzig Freedom and Unity Memorial. But it is a monument that will never be built, thus directly challenging our preconceptions of the concept of monumentality – something Akgul describes as a "breath of fresh air" in the wider discussion of this subject.

The other two artists in this exhibition are Amina Menia, an Algerian photographic artist who is interested in tracing places of memory and presents a series called *Chrysanthemums*, and Iman Issa, an Egyptian who subtly refers to monuments she has been familiar with since childhood through an abstract sculpture bestowed with the cumbersome title *Material for a Sculpture Commemorating a Singer whose Singing became a Source of Unity of Disparate and often Opposing Forces*.

"As a viewer, we can't really know which monument she is referring to," says Akgul. This, she says, adds to the subtlety of the project, which has been deliberately kept open-ended.

“We were after some potential and to bring some new perspective on these issues rather than an end result,” she says. “Hopefully it will bring us to new questions and the viewers will be part of that, too.”

• **Proposals on Monumentality** runs until January 4 at Green Art Gallery. Visit [www.gagallery.com](http://www.gagallery.com)

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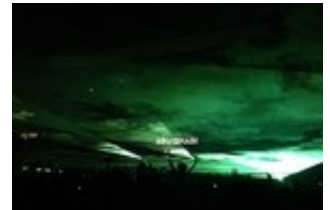
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