

# L'OBJET PETIT A

## NATACHA MERRITT SOLO EXHIBIT PROPOSAL FOR 2022

There is an empty room, silent and soothing, that opens up onto a hallway of Natacha Merritt's images. At the end of the hallway there is a small room with the video of the Polish man burning things. The exhibit then opens into the main room, with a van preserved in resin perched on a pedestal. The dirt and details of its time as an evacuation vehicle in the first weeks of the invasion of Ukraine, are locked in fossilized stillness.

Every van that goes into Ukraine as charity is registered as a vehicle that can not come out. Everything that goes in is expected to die there. Yet this one made it out. This object you are standing in front of now is art.

The van captures an ephemeral floating logic that orients our lives on a fundamental level. It connects the surplus of capitalism, via the cycle of that object as it comes back to us transformed by the journey it accomplished. From our surplus we donated the funds to acquire the van, to help the cause in the way it needed it the most in those early days. This in turn enabled another transformation: it turned this van into an object of urgent value, infused by the hope we put into it, the hope that we could actually be helpful.

On display is the incessant ingenuity humans have mastered in transforming all forms of matter and materials into marvelous objects of value. Embodied in this van's presence in front of us is that very ingenuity, the transformation and retention of value moving selfishly through history. In this new presentation, the object as art collides and colludes basking in the new questions it creates.

This new form of interactive art has an existential sense of humor. It's intentional and self-reflexive capturing the event of a hodge podge team of volunteers hacking war 3.0 with their interconnectedness. Their hopeful sarcasm enabled real results. In contrast the bystanders watching the war from afar struggle with the ethics of war-as-entertainment, while unable to look away. They are stuck. Subsumed by the terrifying cacophony of signs and images from the modern culture industry.

In a similar way the presence of this vehicle in Paris leaves the viewer in uncertain ethical waters. Should a critically useful machine have been removed from the frontlines of war for our viewing pleasure? The extraction of the object from the surreal theater and its return to us - the privileged - transformed the donation into an expensive collectors item, of which the original donors will see no part of the proceeds.

If we keep staring at it because it's a beautifully out-of-place object with a powerful historical role, in that meditation, perhaps we will understand more about the gaze of war; something about the lookers and the doers, the pity and ineptitude, the consumption of war-as-content or entertainment.

And yet, the piece says to the potential buyer/art world "look what we can do with one object. This is what makes humanity awesome." The object is the value. As such it proposes a new role for Art.

As people exit the room with the van they enter a dark screening room with the video, edited, of the evacuation mission. Across from it is the final video room with one last video. Exit.



28 March 2022