

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Imperial Differences* is an ongoing project started at SPACES in the fall of 2015.

First and foremost: this work is dependent on the engagement of Russians living in Cleveland. I am deeply grateful for the trust you have shown me and the project, and for your generosity: Vladimir Vitlin, Katya Asmus, Slava Surikov, Zhanna Magaram, Lena Vitlin, Ella Nemirovsky, Natalia Tararova, Anna Tararova, Irena Protsyk.

Professor Ulla Manns (Södertörn University, Sweden): for theoretical reflections and engagement along the way, and for your text on *Imperial Differences*.

SPACES board and staff: for the generous art residency that made this project possible and your engagement.

Yana Mikho-Misho who helped me with contacts, with translations from Russian into English and as a video assistant. Juliet Perry, my patient and supportive assistant, who has been deeply involved in the research and text editing process.

Since the work at SPACES is shown as a work in progress, I continue to look for more participants as well as new angles to the project. For participation, please contact me directly: [info@annaviolahallberg.com](mailto:info@annaviolahallberg.com).



The SPACES World Artists Program (SWAP) offers residencies to international, national and local artists who explore and experiment. SWAP supports artists in the creation, presentation and discussion of new work, while facilitating opportunities for them to collaborate with artists and audiences in Northeast Ohio. Anna Viola Hallberg is SPACES' 53rd artist-in-residence as part of SWAP.

## SPONSORS

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# ANNA VIOLA HALLBERG

(Stockholm, Sweden)

*Imperial Differences*

November 20, 2015 – January 15, 2016

# IMPERIAL DIFFERENCES

Anna Viola Hallberg explores political containment via reflections from Cleveland-based Russian immigrants in *Imperial Differences*.

The two-channel video installation probes the notion of vulnerability, as it relates to the questioning of power, agency, and existence in-between cultures. This structure of the in-between advances a conceptual framework centered around geopolitical differences, authority, voice and transformability addressing political and ethical concerns.

*Imperial Differences* is the culmination of Hallberg's five-week residency through the SPACES World Artists Program (SWAP).

Title: **BORDERLAND**

Trt: loop

Format: hd video with sound, 2.35:1 (cinemascope)

Title: **OVERLAP BETWEEN TWO**

Trt: 20 min

Format: hd video with sound, 2.35:1 (cinemascope)

Language: English and Russian (English Subtitles).

concerning everyday life here and there, now and before, experiences of exile, ideas about home and belonging, and about Russia today are commented upon from individual perspectives. There is no consensus among the participants about these matters, and there is no reason to expect one. Individual experiences and backgrounds, reasons for migration, and ways of living a life in the US differ. What is common, though, is the location today: Cleveland, Ohio.

The stories and reflections we are invited to observe offer several trajectories to follow: the United States, still as the melting pot and promised land for anyone who is prepared to work hard; concerns about the geopolitical state of the world in general and of Russia and the US in particular; Cleveland as a special place for Russian communities; cosmopolitanism, exile, assimilation, and multiculturalism, to name a few

## Ulla Manns

Professor in Gender Studies, with a specialization in History, Södertörn University, Sweden

Recently I became aware of the *Kitchen Debate*, a series of discussions between USSR Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev and US Vice President Richard Nixon. The debates were held in a model American suburban kitchen shown at the *American National Exhibition* 1959 in Moscow. The Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cold War, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and later, in the early 1990s, the decline of the Soviet Union, have overshadowed this occasion, at least in my memory. Why? Probably because of my own ignorance of Cold War history and the impact of Northern European media representations.

The *Kitchen Debate* was important in the late 1950s. Prior to the exhibition in Moscow, a Soviet exhibition was shown in New York City. As in Moscow, *The Soviet National Exhibition* received a lot of attention. The heavily documented US exhibition in Moscow was one of two meetings organized to enhance communication and avoid escalation of the Cold War.

What strikes me today, as a historian, is the imperial aspect of the *Kitchen Debate*. Representatives from two extremely powerful and not very old nations acting as empires, discuss their political and economic models: capitalism versus communism. At the time, they were superpowers threatening each other and the rest of the world with extinction. These two superpowers were both (and still are) main producers of cultural values affecting large parts of the global world. The imperial Soviet is Russia, the geopolitical territory of the tsar and Russian Orthodoxy. The US one is “America,” the US lifestyle and its cultural values that are so influential in many parts of the world—including throughout Scandinavia and Sweden.

Hallberg’s work takes its point of departure from the *Kitchen Debate* and the imperial showdown between the United States of America and the Soviet Union; superpowers of the “first world” and “second world.” In her two-channel video installation, different cohorts of Russian and former Soviet immigrants invite us into their own kitchens. In front of the camera they ponder on their respective places and locations, in present-day Cleveland as well as in the past. Questions

***Looking at the debate from a historical point of view, as well as to its background and what was to come, what strikes me today as a historian is the Imperial aspect of it.***

## INTERPRETATION

Migration is a complex process that is caused by many different factors and broadly connotes cosmopolitanism, exile, and diaspora. We may leave one country for another to satisfy curiosity, escape poverty, or avoid danger. Global migration due to armed conflict has resulted in approximately ten million people who are denied citizenship. They do not belong to any nation.

Hallberg has worked with the topics of migration and displacement in previous projects. She has also worked with contested communities in Russia. During her SWAP residency she explored the Russian community of Cleveland. The individuals with whom she engaged had a variety of reasons for immigrating to the United States. Hallberg asked them to discuss their lives in the US and Russia, and compare it with the Soviet

***Segments from longer conversations are put together as an assemblage in an essay film.***

era. Extracts from longer conversations are assembled in an essay film format, combining interview footage and reworked material from the public domain, with a looping cinematic prelude. The on-going project, *Imperial Differences*, shares the same title with the exhibition developed during Hallberg’s residency at SPACES.

Hallberg’s documentary format describes the experiences of individuals from contemporary and historical points of view. *Imperial Differences* is part of a dialogue with Professor Madina Tlostanova at Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, among others. Key references in the work presented at SPACES are The American National Exhibition in Moscow 1959 and the acclaimed *Kitchen Debate*, in which, by a series of serendipities, Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev discussed the benefits of communism and capitalism, as well as the film *Glimpses of the U.S.A* by Charles and Ray Eames.

*Imperial Differences* takes place in people's homes but stems from historical events. Who writes history, and how does this influence the world order in the future? How are immigrants received today? What do you know about immigrant communities in Cleveland? Freedom of expression in totalitarian societies is as present today as during the cold war. Where do the immigrants to the US come from today? What is done to make them feel welcome? How does your society look upon integration and assimilation?

To learn more about some of the topics in the video installation, read the introductory text by Juliet Perry and a reflection by Ulla Manns, a Gender Studies professor specializing in history.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Anna Viola Hallberg, based in Stockholm, Sweden, works with video, sound and photography, often in installation format. Hallberg takes a project-based approach with a multidisciplinary structure and often blends the roles of artist and curator. In recent years she has led a number of socially engaged art projects that focus on public space.

Hallberg is a graduate of Stockholm Film School. She also holds a B.A in Curatorial and Cinema Studies from Stockholm University, Sweden (2003) and an M.Sc in International Museum Studies, University of Gothenburg (2008). Hallberg was the co-founder of Fotografins Hus in Stockholm (2003) and the Residency Program at Skövde Art Museum (2014). She has held numerous presentations at institutions such as Moderna Museet in Stockholm, School of Photography in Moscow, Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, University of California at Berkeley and Santa Cruz as well as at One Archive/University of Southern California in Los Angeles. She has exhibited in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Austria, Mexico, the US and Sweden.

Hallberg has received funding from the Swedish National Arts Grant Committee, Swedish Institute, Swedish Embassy and West Sweden Region, among others. Her works are represented in private collections and museums in Sweden, including Gothenburg Art Museum.

# Imperial Differences - on a video installation by Swedish artist Anna Viola Hallberg

The center of a home has historically been portrayed as the kitchen. A place with a hearth, the kitchen is where food is prepared and where you can get warm. Hopefully, it is also a comforting place where you meet with family and friends, and where you welcome visitors. To invite somebody into your home is a gesture of hospitality and trust. It is also intimate in nature.

***The stories they tell are  
interleaved with snapshots  
of Cleveland bridges,  
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who has visited the city.***

“My home is my castle.” This is me, I let you in here.

In *Imperial Differences*, Anna Viola Hallberg reveals the different voices of people who immigrated to the US from the former Soviet Union and today's Russia. They reflect upon their past and present.

This is done in their own kitchens, in Cleveland, Ohio, during the fall of 2015. The stories they tell are interspersed with snapshots of Cleveland bridges—bridges familiar to anyone who has visited the city. The bridges not only connect the kitchen talks, they also separate the subjects from one another. They help us distinguish between the individual stories, each with their respective history to tell and their individual reflections to make.