

ARTFORUM

Andra Ursuta

RAMIKEN CRUCIBLE

389 Grand Street

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Romanian-born, New York-based artist Andra Ursuta cheekily confronts her cultural identity in the exhibition “The Management of Barbarism.” The first piece encountered on entering the show is a pile comprising thousands of eggshells painted in the Eastern European folk tradition and then systematically defiled: crushed, doused in spitlike resin, impaled with dozens of arrows, and buried with clumps of dirt as if a vulgar reenactment of a mass murder. Ursuta’s tendency to renounce and recognize patrimony resurfaces in *Ass to Mouth* (all works 2010), a sculpture propped against the wall that is half wooden spike (its top whittled to conjure Vlad the Impaler) and half scale model of Constantin Brancusi’s 1938 *Endless Column* (cannily dipped in black rubber to resemble an anal toy). With this sardonic homage, Ursuta metaphorically drives her stake into the heart—or worse—of her Romanian forefathers.



Ass to Mouth, 2010, wood, rubber, concrete, iodine, dirt, 120 x 5 x 5 inches

The nearby installation *Extinction Kit* (*Songs to Die for*) offers a slower death: A pink coffin-shaped tent sits next to a mound of potatoes. These food staples are wired, bomblike, to function as a homespun battery that powers a Walkman playing Hungarian folk songs. This haven for tradition proves to be a trap, however, as the music will gradually stop playing when the potatoes rot. Two other sculptures underscore Ursuta’s ambivalence: In one corner, a cast balloon with a noose for a string hangs from the ceiling, at once an impossible suicide rope and an escape vehicle. Across the room is a wall-mounted punching bag made of charred peasant bread—a visual pun noting the absurdity of pummeling your ancestry. These pieces, too, lay bare the artist’s soul, caught in purgatory somewhere between Eastern Europe’s past and contemporary art’s present.

- Emily Weiner