

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ben Schumacher

**REGISTER OF DOCUMENTS 1974-**

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James Fuentes LLC is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new work by Ben Schumacher, Register of Documents 1974-.

“He assiduously collects information for the samizdat journals, writes pseudonymous articles for samizdat and spends weeks on end retyping the Chronicle and other materials from Moscow in multiple copies. He is the quintessential samizdatchik.”

Samizdat was a key form of dissident activity across the Soviet bloc in which individuals reproduced censored publications by hand and passed the documents from reader to reader. For Vladimir Bukovsky, a leading member of the soviet dissidents Samizdat meant “I write it myself, I edit it myself, I censor it myself, I publish it myself, I distribute it myself, I sit in jail for it myself.” Inside the soviet Union samizdat consisted of many thousand pages of politically and non politically significant “documents” passed from hand to hand; of which only a small portion of the vast and variegated material has managed to find its way outside of Soviet Borders. Under Stalin, early samizdat circulated amongst students as typed copies of poems. The poems were always anonymous, and the content sometimes completely innocent. One would only come to know that who had written a particular poem when the person passing it would say under their breath: “This is Marina Tsvetaeva.”

The Register of Documents 1974- is a running register of samizdat material published in the Soviet Bloc from 1974 onwards. Unlike an archive which houses primary materials, the register merely points to and hopefully provides direction to where the primary materials may be dispersed. Here, samizdat is exemplary of the turmoil inherent in all forms of media: that is the dichotomy between the publicly circulating serialized verbatim document which in all actuality bears witness to multiple conflicting versions (whether it be defaced coinage currency, prints made from worn down blocks, miscopied manuscripts, bootlegged versions of films, or successively compressed jpegs) and the private ontic consumption of the imminent version. Because of the singularity of the

historical context that had motivated the emergence and spread of samizdat, this also engendered the peculiar logic of its circulation. A significant share of samizdat documents were smuggled out of the communist countries to the West, ending up in numerous organizations and private collections abroad which the register most often points to. In one such case, a lengthy theoretical tract, was written on cigarette paper in microscopic lettering and was mailed out of the "isolator" (a prison) in a matchbox.

In relation to the samizdat Register of Documents, Registration refers to the inscription of an artwork, or event into a symbolic network or a 'world'. According to quantum physics, the actual external reality of material objects existing in space and time is constituted by the collapse of the wave function that occurs when the quantum process affects the level defined by the second law of thermodynamics (irreversible temporality, etc.). In order to observe this collapse quantum physicists must resort to the metaphor's of language: that is the collapse of the wave function can occur only when a quantum event leaves a mark or a scar in the observation apparatus itself, the quantum event then only occurs if it is registered in some way. What is crucial here for an artwork or samizdat document is its relation to externality or the viewer. The work fully becomes itself or realizes itself only when its external surroundings take note of it. So in a way the Register protects against disappearance. The registration of a quantum event can be related to the contention that a work of art only exists for the art world once it has been published and distributed in the form of a magazine, so that the hard objective reality of the work is registered in its representational form for the symbolic network. Thus, the viewer unknowingly participates in the determination of the document. The viewer's awareness of the document affects and transforms the document itself. One cannot maintain that a work, inclusive of its properties, exists out there on the Internet irrespective of our consciousness of it. Just as with quantum physics, the modality and direction of our search participates in the creation of the object for which we are searching: if we decide to measure the position of a particle, it will 'collapse' from potentiality into one actual set of spatial coordinates, while the same particle's mass will remain potentially undecided and vice versa.

Because many samizdat documents were hand copied and distributed in multiple forms (The techniques to reproduce the forbidden literature and periodicals varied from making several copies of the content using carbon paper, either by hand or on a typewriter, to printing on mainframe printers during night shifts, to printing the books on semi-professional printing presses in larger quantities; Magnitizdat was the passing on of taped sound recordings and Roentgenizdat were underground samizdat recordings on

x-ray film) there exists multiple versions of the same document similar to the derivations that occur during a game of telephone. This phenomenon becomes of special interest when considering its effects on the vast amounts of non-conformist samizdat poetry. The central conundrum of quantum physics runs parallel to a work that exists as a distributed in multiple versions: one cannot fully perceive quantum phenomenon. To comprehend a quantum phenomenon is to locate it within our meaningful understanding of reality. Quantum physics functions autonomously yet as soon as one applies language and reason to its inner workings one is swallowed up into the black hole of unreason. “when, at what precise point, does the collapse of the wave function occur? By identifying it with the emergence of intersubjectively recognized meaning, we are dealing here neither with automatic registration in a machine (a photo, for example) nor with consciousness, but simply with language meaning.” (Wheeler) This is also the enigma of samizdat as well as freely circulating digital files, the moment that one of the permutations is singled out, observed and discussed, all of the other versions are negated and avoid registration. This is similar to wave particle duality where matter can demonstrate both particle and wave characteristics, but not both at the same time (that is, not within one and the same experimental arrangement). At some point a decision has to be forged to observe one phenomenon or the other. Since all of the circulating documents cannot be corralled and registered and viewed as a whole, the work in its totality can only be discussed using language and this is factored into the work's functioning and existence. The file/document in it's many versions, like quantum reality is the work of pure becoming, of an undetermined potentiality which by means of observation, 'collapses', into the determined being of its many permutations.

Ben Schumacher, 2011.

For more information please contact James Fuentes or Adrienne Rubenstein at [info@jamesfuentes.com](mailto:info@jamesfuentes.com) or 212-577-1201.