Stalking With Stories

The Pioneers
of the Immemorable

Apexart
291 Church Street, TriBeCa
Through Nov. 3

The lesson of the telephone
game, that stories change
through repeated telling, is re-
inforced here by European phi-
losophy and art in which narra-
tive is run through the cogs of
history, memory and nostalgia.

Personalized narratives are
the most striking. Artur Zmijew-
ski’s video of a young German
woman named Lisa, who moved
to Israel, driven by a conviction
that in a former life she was a 12-
year-old Jewish boy killed by the
Nazis, is a disturbing case study
of internalized national guilt.

Katerina Seda’s artist’s book
and video details how she coaxed
her withdrawn Eastern Euro-
pean grandmother back into ac-
tive life by persuading her to
draw tools from the shop where
she worked for 33 years.

Most of the pieces take a wider
scope, including Ahmet Oğut’s
wall drawing of a car project,
meant to modernize Turkey, that
went awry, or Sanja Ivekovic’s
signs for stores in socialist Yugo-
slavia that called themselves
Freedom, Knowledge or Unity.
Felix Gmelin’s split-screen film,
in which young people carrying a
red flag run through the streets
of Berlin (in 1968) and Stockholm
(in 2002), juxtaposes the level of
political engagement in the two
eras.

Inspired by events in Europe
during the last 70 years, the
stories here lack happy endings
(except, perhaps, that of the
grandmother, who “recovers”
enough to reside contentedly in
the past). Rather, they follow the
pattern of fictional narratives,
which gain interest when filled
with conflict, tension, tragedy
and loss.

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