

PRESS RELEASE

Red Balloon 86

25 May – 3 November 2013



Red Balloon 86 is an evocative exhibition of work by Czech artist Hana Vojáčková. Comprised of 5 large-format photographs and a video, it tells the story of a ghostly boy wandering around an abandoned city in the Chernobyl exclusion zone, and offers a personal response to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The display opened at the V&A Museum of Childhood on 25 May and runs until 3 November.

Project Red Balloon 86 was inspired by documentary footage found by the artist in the archive of CCCP television channel, showing a young boy chasing a football around the city of Pripjat, close to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. This footage was recorded in 1986, shortly before the nuclear accident made the city and surrounding area uninhabitable. Pripjat remains as it was when it was evacuated 27 years ago and the photographs reveal a quiet, abandoned place.

In winter 2009, Vojáčková gained rare access to the Chernobyl exclusion zone, entering the area with the help of a local fixer in order to be free of the restrictions usually imposed on visitors. This allowed her to enter the buildings and find remnants of the town's inhabitants, including furniture, fabrics and toys similar to those from her own childhood. The photographs she took there not only document the area, but also invite the viewer to remember their own past and to identify with those affected by the disaster.

Superimposed onto the photographs is a figure of a child holding a red balloon, representing the memory of the life that once occupied these spaces. The work also references Albert Lamorisse's classic film *The Red Balloon*, in which a boy is followed by a helium-filled balloon through the streets of Paris, re-imagining the childhood tale and exploring it in a different context. Strong colours and carefully staged imagery make the photographs reminiscent of illustrations from children's books, while maintaining a documentary feel.

Hana Vojáčková was born in Prague, Czech Republic in 1979. She graduated in Humanities from Charles University in Prague and studied cinematography in Universidad de Cine in Buenos Aires. She completed her studies with a postgraduate certificate in photography at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London. She has exhibited in a number of group exhibitions in the UK and internationally, and currently lives and works in London.

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA

Admission free. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30

Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. Tel: 020 8983 5200 www.museumofchildhood.org.uk