

HONORARY PRIZE 2025

Andrej Kiripolsky

Have You Ever Seen Coal Burn? (2025)



Have You Ever Seen Coal Burn?, 2025 and Andrej Kiripolsky © Davy Denke, Rytter & Denke

Andrej Kiripolsky is awarded the 15 June Foundation's Honorary Prize 2025.

The 15 June Foundation's art jury has selected Andrej Kiripolsky on the basis of his graduation work at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts: *Have You Ever Seen Coal Burn? (2025)*.

The jury consists of Mikkel Bogh, professor and center director at the University of Copenhagen, Tore Hallas, visual artist, and Mai Misfeldt, art and literature critic.

Motivation text by Mikkel Bogh.

At the Royal Academy's Graduation Exhibition 2025, in one of Kunsthal Charlottenborg's largest rooms, we encounter two separate yet closely interconnected works. Both strike the viewer with their unusual combination of expressive simplicity, intense physical presence, and discreet restraint. They are the work of Andrej Kiripolsky and revolve around the shutdown of a major coal-fired power plant in the Slovakian town of Nováky, where the artist was born and raised.

On a large television screen mounted vertically against the wall, we see a clip of a helicopter hovering in the air, its rotor blades vibrating. It is transporting a massive lid or grille to cover the top of a colossal industrial chimney as part of the decommissioning of the coal plant. Yet although it is a moving image, the helicopter seems caught in minimal motion, shifting only slightly back and forth, leaving unresolved the direction of its flight. Enchanted and held back in a state of aesthetic suspense, it hovers in an unfulfilled moment just before the task is completed. On the way to closure—and yet not.

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The second work fills the exhibition space with its marked volume and sculptural materiality. A four-meter-long stainless steel pipe hangs suspended from the ceiling by thin wires, slanting slightly so that the water forming or being released inside the pipe drips slowly out of its lower end. At rhythmic intervals, drops fall into a depression in the middle of a larger pile of ash placed on the floor beneath the pipe's opening. In the depression, a sticky, muddy puddle forms. The amplified sound of the drops striking the puddle's surface resonates loudly through the room, creating an atmosphere of closure, loss, and disillusionment, but also of emptiness, waiting, and calm. Something is shutting down, but the installation keeps it open for just a while longer.

Although both the video and the sculptural installation stand on their own—visually suggestive, poetic, and open to interpretation as they are—a bit of historical background adds perspective. The coal-fired power plant in Nováky was permanently shut down in 2023 after operating for more than 70 years. It had provided the town with jobs and the region with electricity and district heating, while at the same time causing massive and destructive pollution. The plant ranked among the EU's most harmful to both the environment and human health. For decades, vast amounts of ash from coal burning were buried in the ground, where they still remain. Harmful particles from the combustion were released into the air through the chimneys. Invisible to the eye, they nonetheless cost lives and diminished well-being. And what of the town and its residents? They never received the compensation promised after the plant's closure, and today the community faces an uncertain future. As ruinous traces of a dismantled infrastructure, a system of rusting pipes still runs through the industrial area. Once, they carried ash and water from coal burning. Only their shells remain. Post-industrial could hardly be more tangible.

Andrej Kiripolsky's two interrelated works do not mourn the situation as such. Instead, in their discreet, disillusioned way, they keep both history and future open. They situate themselves in the indeterminacy of the moment, between an unwritten history and an uncertain future—a future whose direction depends again on how the story is told, and by whom. Hovering in this in-between, in this extended present, the works refuse the notion that the closure of an industrial facility also means the closure of history. The helicopter never completes its task, the water still runs through the pipe, and the pile of ash brought from Nováky remains in plain sight. The works exert their power through an insistent presence, reminding us that the transition from an industrial capitalism that has caused as much destruction as it has generated growth and prosperity, to whatever comes after, is not a smooth one. Nor is it necessarily a transition to a more balanced, just, or considerate world.

Yet the strength of the works lies precisely in their refusal to moralize or to point out solutions. Instead, they open up a space, an environment, a landscape where we as visitors and viewers can step into a place where conversation can begin.

Andrej Kiripolsky is awarded the 15. Juni Foundation's Honorary Prize as an encouragement to and recognition of a highly promising artistic practice which, with these two works, demonstrates the aesthetic rigor and poetic precision required to address questions as difficult and necessary as these: Who and what shape the future, when the very structures that have sustained society — for better and for worse — are phased out?