

BORIS MIKHAILOV: FOUR DECADES IN RED, BLUE, SEPIA, AND GREEN

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Boris Mikhailov's haunting, candid images of Ukrainian streets are currently on view at **Dominique Levy Gallery** in New York. The pictures are overlaid with tones of red, sepia, blue and green, each color depicting a different era of life in the former Soviet Union over his over 30-year long career. The prints range from snapshot-sized to life-sized, reflective of both an individual and collective experience. Mikhailov, born in the Ukraine in 1938, has become a renowned documentarian of social, economic and ideological institutional changes in his country.

The early "Red" series was created between 1968 and 1975, when the Ukraine was still under Soviet rule. Referencing the color's significance to the communist movement while cleverly undermining its integrity, the "Red" series juxtaposes everyday red objects in common environments where people are indifferent to the color's context. *Untitled*, an almost painterly image of a young boy standing naked in front of a wall streaked with red, is both disturbing and mundane, as the wall stain could either be blood or tomato sauce.

The sepia-toned "Crimean Snobbism" series chronicles Mikhailov's friends taking a fictitious vacation at Gursuf on the Crimean Peninsula, a meeting place for Russian artists and intellectuals. He posed his friends as leisurely tourists, creating the guise of the series as a holiday scrapbook, the irony being that this kind of relaxed and carefree vacation could never exist in the Soviet Union at that time. Still, beneath the fabrication there is a sense of playfulness and charm to these images, proving that even under totalitarian circumstances there are moments of insouciance.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Mikhailov embarked on an excursion through post-communist Kharkov, where he was born. He produced three series of what he called the requiem: "By the Ground," "At Dusk," and "Case History." The places he visited brought to mind **Maxim Gorky's** play *The Lower Depths*, which describes the abject poverty of Russia before the revolution in 1917. Mikhailov captured social outcasts within urban environments. The sepia and blue hues evoke the sense of a bygone era, but one that is not necessarily nostalgic, instead presented as intentionally grainy and antiquated.

The "At Dusk" or "Green" series is associated with warfare, a constant reality in Eastern Europe. "Blue for me is the color of the blockade, of hunger and war," says Mikhailov. The images are grim yet underlie a sense of survival among the people, who smile while bundled up in the bleak, snow-covered Ukrainian roads.

"Case History," Mikhailov's last body of work is comprised of portraits of the *bomzhes*, homeless people of Kharkov. The shots are panoramic and overlaid with a toxic green tint, by far the darkest images in the exhibit. The red, blue, sepia, and green waves of images take the viewer through a volatile and compelling history of the Ukraine from the lens of a photographer who both documented and obscured that history.

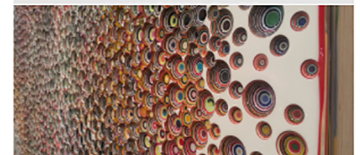
"**Boris Mikhailov: Four Decades**" will be on view at the **Dominique Levy Gallery** through February 8.

SOLA AGUSTSSON | DECEMBER 13, 2013

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At Dusk 2
1993
gelatin silver prints, blue hand toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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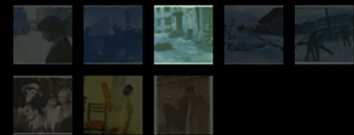
At Dusk 4
1993
gelatin silver prints, blue hand toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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At Dusk 5
1993
gelatin silver prints, blue hand toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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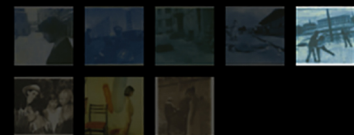
At Dusk 9
1993
gelatin silver prints, blue hand toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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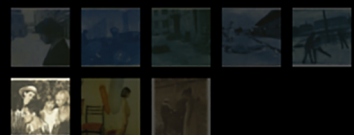
At Dusk 11
1993
gelatin silver prints, blue hand toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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Crimean Snobbery 14
1981
gelatin silver prints
sepia toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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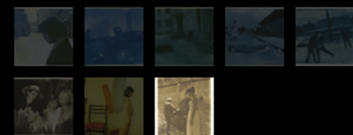
Untitled, Yesterday's Sandwich
1968-1975
Chromogenic Print
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery



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Crimean Snobbery 1
1981
gelatin silver prints
sepia toned
Courtesy of Dominique Levy Gallery