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From Bustling Tokyo to a Soviet Union Society in Disarray

By WILLIAM MEYERS

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James Whitlow Delano:

"Mangaland: A Tokyo Retrospective"

Sous Les Etoiles Gallery

560 Broadway

212-966-0796

Through Jan. 31

James Whitlow Delano has been photographing in Japan since 1993, and the 30 black-and-white pictures here include an image from that date, "Buddhist Monk in Shinjuko Station, Tokyo." The station is the busiest in the world. The monk stands erect and isolated with his back to a wall; he wears a long black robe over a white robe, and white leggings and *tabi*. In the dim light we can make out that his left hand is raised and may hold a begging bowl. In Mr. Delano's characteristic style, there is vignetting around the periphery of the image, and a soft focus in which little is clear, but a light falling on the monk's conical hat makes it look like a lampshade. Is that meant to be comical or emblematic of his spirituality?

Other photographs are equally adept at personalizing isolated individuals in this densely populated city. "Pony Tails, Piercing Glance and a Cigarette, Shibuya, Tokyo" (1998) describes the teenage girl in this fashionable shopping area. All we see of the woman in "Elevator Encounter, Shinjuko, Tokyo" (1996) is her furrowed brow and one eye peering over the shoulder of a man standing before her. It is a woman's buttocks and thong that we see on the screen in "Late Night TV Program, Tokyo" (1995). Because of discoloration and the dim lighting, "Daibutso (Great Buddha) at Night, Kamakura" (2003) is not so much placidly benign as determinedly grim.

Prix Pictet: Power

Aperture

547 W. 27th St.

212-505-5555

Through Jan. 30

Pictet, a Geneva wealth- and asset-management group, is responsible for the Prix Pictet, a global award in photography and sustainability. This year's theme was power, both political power and energy, resulting in a diverse group of images submitted by 650 photographers. Aperture has on display works by Luc Delahaye, the winner, and 11 others from the short list. One of Mr. Delahaye's two large-format pictures is "Les Pillards" (2010), which shows looters pilfering in the wreckage-strewn streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. In Guy Tillim's "Presidential Candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba Enters a Stadium in Central Kinshasa Flanked by His Bodyguards During an Election Rally" (2006), we see the broad-shouldered candidate from behind, and to the left, the face of a bodyguard wearing the requisite gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses as he scans the crowd.

Joel Sternfeld's "William J. Clinton, Former President, United States" (2005), shows President Clinton somber-faced behind a podium addressing a U.N. climate-change conference. Robert Adams is represented by medium-format black-and-white pictures of trees and clear-cut lumbering taken in Oregon in 1999. The two pictures of mob violence by Mohamed Bourouissa weren't taken in third-world countries, but in the suburbs of Paris; "Le Cercle Imaginaire" (2007-08) shows a young man wearing jeans, sneakers and a death's-head mask standing casually in a ring of fire.

*Boris Mikhailov:
Four Decades*

Dominique Lévy

909 Madison Ave.

212-772-2004, Through Feb. 8

Boris Mikhailov was born in Kharkov, Ukraine, in 1938, at the height of Stalin's Great Purge. His disdain for the culture of the Soviet Union led him to develop a visual style closer to George Grosz than to any Marxist's idea of Socialist Realism. Lévy has on display works from two series that Mr. Mikhailov took before the breakup of the Soviet Union, and work from two series since Ukraine became an independent country. In the latter two, Ukraine looks like hell. The 110 pictures from "At Dusk" (1990-93) are toned a murky blue, at once reminiscent of 19th-century cyanotype prints, a part of photography's heritage, but also, according to Mr. Mikhailov, "the color of the blockade, of hunger and war." The gallery is showing 68 of these pictures as 5 1/8--by-11 3/4--inch prints and 20 as 24-by-50 3/4--inch prints. Shot on the streets of Kharkov, frequently with tilted horizons suggesting a society out of kilter, they reveal the detritus left behind in the collapse of Communism.

Drunks vomit, urinate, fall to the sidewalk and sleep on the street. The disabled get around on canes, crutches or little wheeled platforms. No one pays any attention; the humans are just another form of litter. Vendors hustle for trade from shabby kiosks. A woman shows her legs in a way that suggests she is a prostitute. Soviet-era apartment houses are depressing in their endless uniformity. Older buildings are missing their windows. Children lark amid the rubble. A railway station platform sports a hammer and sickle.
