

KHARKIV SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY
FROM SOVIET CENSORSHIP TO NEW AESTHETICS



1970 — 2015

EXHIBITION CURATORS:
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VASA : CENTER FOR MEDIA STUDIES

This catalog is an interactive e-publication linking the reader to the VASA exhibition entitled:

*Kharkiv School of Photography:
From Soviet Censorship to New Aesthetics
1970-2015*

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This publication attempts to demonstrate the evolution of Kharkiv School visual language throughout over four decades of its life. We have traced the formal side of the language (overlays, photomontage and post production techniques), and showed the approaches that are commonly used and shared among the Kharkiv artists in their collective oeuvre. Each part is preceded by a short description and a list of artists.

The illustrations are linked to the artists' online portfolios. The catalog also provides excerpts from the essays and screen grabs of video pages linked to the corresponding online essay and video pages.

Still, this catalog doesn't embrace all the variety shown in the project. More images, individual techniques, and artists can be found on the project pages of the VASA site. The Artist Index provides a list of all artists represented in the project with links to their individual pages in all four exhibitions on the VASA site.

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KHARKIV SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY: 1970 -2015

In the early 1970s, resisting the aesthetic criteria imposed by the socialist realism doctrine, eight photographers in Kharkiv, created images free from predetermined ideological prescriptions. Joining efforts in fighting the Soviet aesthetic canon they formed the *Vremya* group. For 15 Soviet years, despite censorship and persecution by all sorts of ideological watchdogs, official art critics to the KGB who would search their darkrooms and apartments, and despite the closing of exhibitions, the artists managed to secretly create and exhibit new art.

They started the fight for artistic freedom by trying to look behind the ideological façade of socialist realism. They pictured food shortage queues, drunks and whores, the hypocrisy of May Day demonstrations and the pomp of Victory Day parades. They portrayed ugliness, nudity and lust. But the artists were soon to discover that at least one of the socialist realism dogmas—stating the “inextricable

connection” between form and content—was, after all, true, and that the conventional means of art photography expression were not good enough for the sought-after thematic novelty. Thus, the search for a new visual language and imagery in Kharkiv fine art photography began.

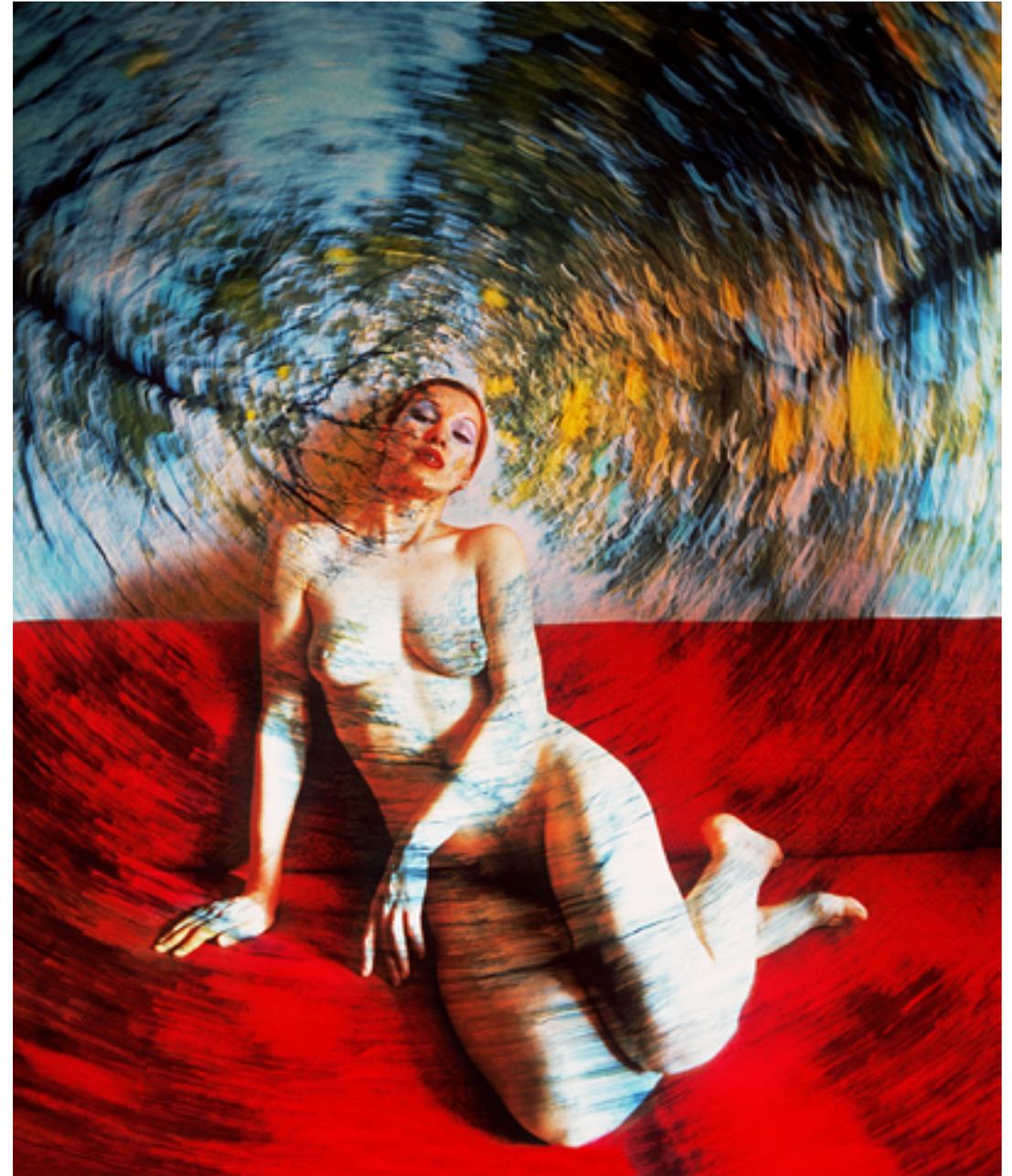
This underground artistic movement gave life to a new avant-garde aesthetic that was taken further during the Perestroika years (1986 - 1991) when ideological barriers and censorship were gradually dropped. A new generation of photographers adopted and further developed the new aesthetics, thus postulating the emergence of a school with common artistic goals and shared principles. The 1990s and 2000s showed further dissemination of Kharkiv School ideas. These days younger emerging artists, both from Kharkiv and other regions of Ukraine, use this aesthetic context as a springboard for their artistic research, continuing the traditions of Kharkiv photography, today.

OVERLAYS

“Overlays” (or “superimpositions,” or “sandwiches,” as the artists sometimes called them) were probably the first Kharkiv photographers’ invention on the way to the new and more complex means of visual language. Two overimposed color slide film frames were either projected on a screen as a slide show or printed on color photopaper. The technique produced a result similar to multiexposure, but allowed clearer detailing and more combinatory possibilities. The images looked formally new, surrealistic, and grotesque and gave room for multiple interpretations.

LIST OF ARTISTS:

*Oleg Malevany
Boris Mikhailov
Eugeny Pavlov
Roman Pyatkovka
Lana Yankovska*



Oleg Malevany. *Autumn Love* (1979)

Boris Mikhailov is believed to be the inventor of this technique. His work in overlays, as in all his oeuvre, has acute social focus.

Eugeny Pavlov's overlays often consist of two unequal primary images: the main figurative one and the accessory one with textures, object surfaces or other almost abstract pictures. The resulting two-layered combination of realistic and abstract elements produces a complicated and obscure painting-like image.

Oleg Malevany used this technique to achieve sophisticated color effects. According to the artist: "first images were almost arbitrary combinations, later I learned how to combine frames in a more conscious and systematic way. It eventually developed towards more paradoxical images, as if out of a parallel world, towards new pictorial reality."

In Malevany's later work, this technique became more complex. For example, the artist exposed the slide film to red light while developing, used aniline dyes for hand-coloring prints, etc.



Boris Mikhailov (1970s)



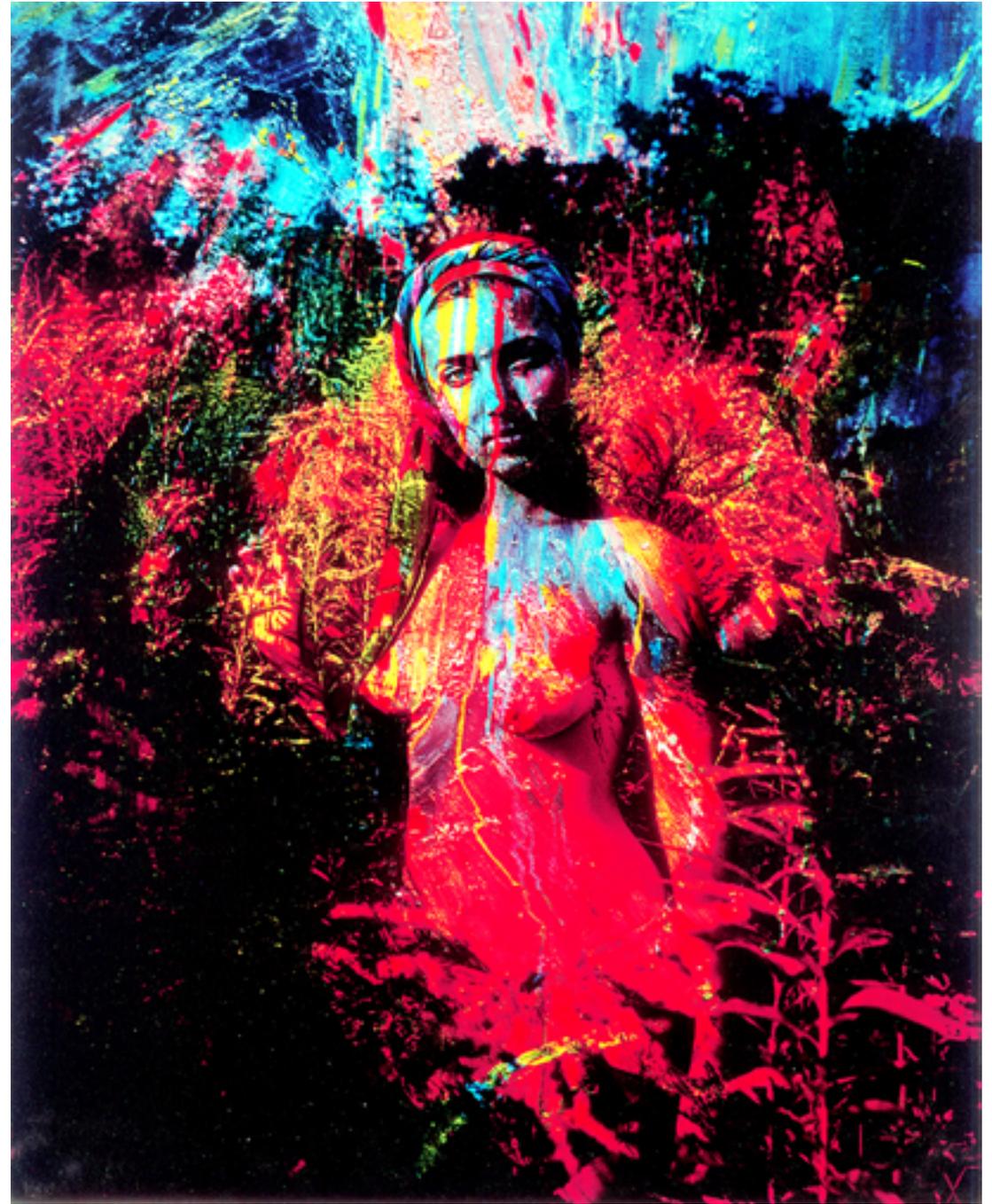
Eugeny Pavlov (1974)



Boris Mikhailov (1970s)



Oleg Malevany. *Foreboding (Vitas Lutskus)* (1971)



Oleg Malevany. *D.* (1989-1990)

Lana Yankovska, in *Drowned Memories* (2012), uses the overlay technique based on found material, namely, scanned negative film of the artist's grandfather's amateur images portraying the family history. To create an image of the flow of time that buries one's past, Yankovska digitally merges "found memories" with photos of water.

Roman Pyatkovka's *Soviet Photo* is a digital reproduction of the technique. "The Soviet Photo" magazine was the only printed periodical for photographers in the USSR and, like any other publication, it was state-run, heavily political and strictly censored, yet another outlet for Communist propaganda. To get one's image on its pages was an artistic achievement and a dream cherished by many, but Pyatkovka's brutal imagery of voluptuous nudes had no chance. In his *Soviet Photo* project the artist digitally imposed his Soviet period nude photos over the magazine page scans.



Lana Yankovska. From *Drowned Memories* (2012)

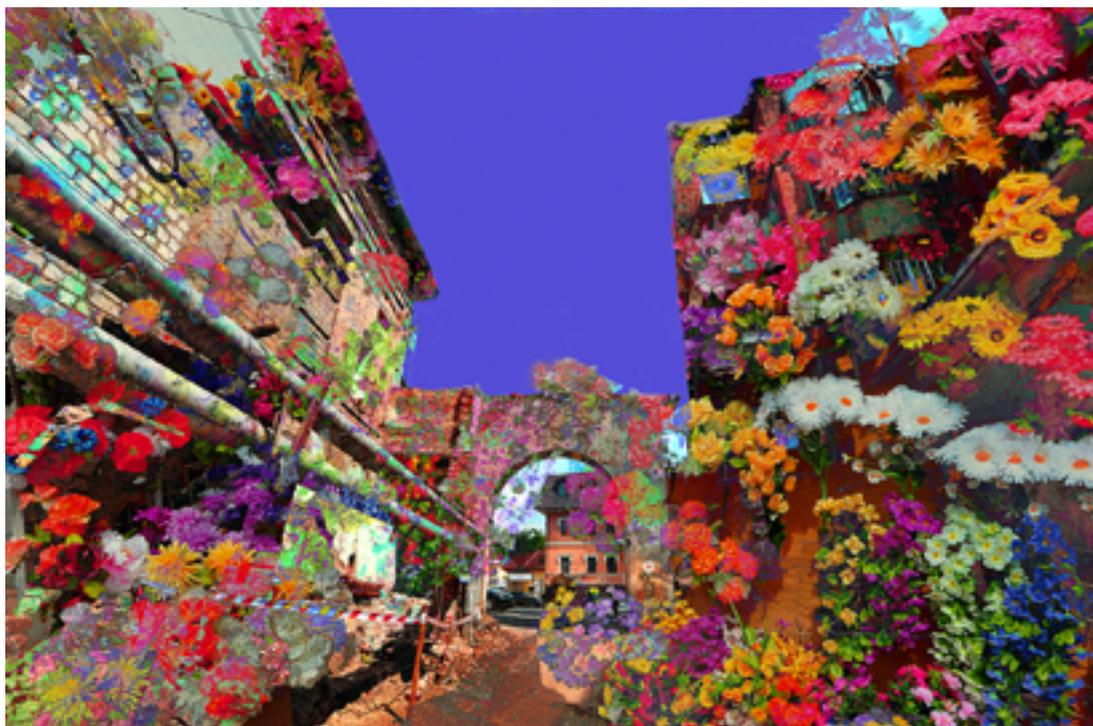


Lana Yankovska. From *Drowned Memories* (2012)



Roman Pyatkovka. From *Soviet Photo* (2012)





Oleg Malevany. From *The Feast That Is Always with Me* (2013-2014)



Oleg Malevany's work of 2000 - 2015 uses digital techniques to emulate the analog overlays of the 1970s and 1980s. Compared to combining analog film frames, the digital overlaying of the layers allows a much broader range of opportunities to control the final outcome.

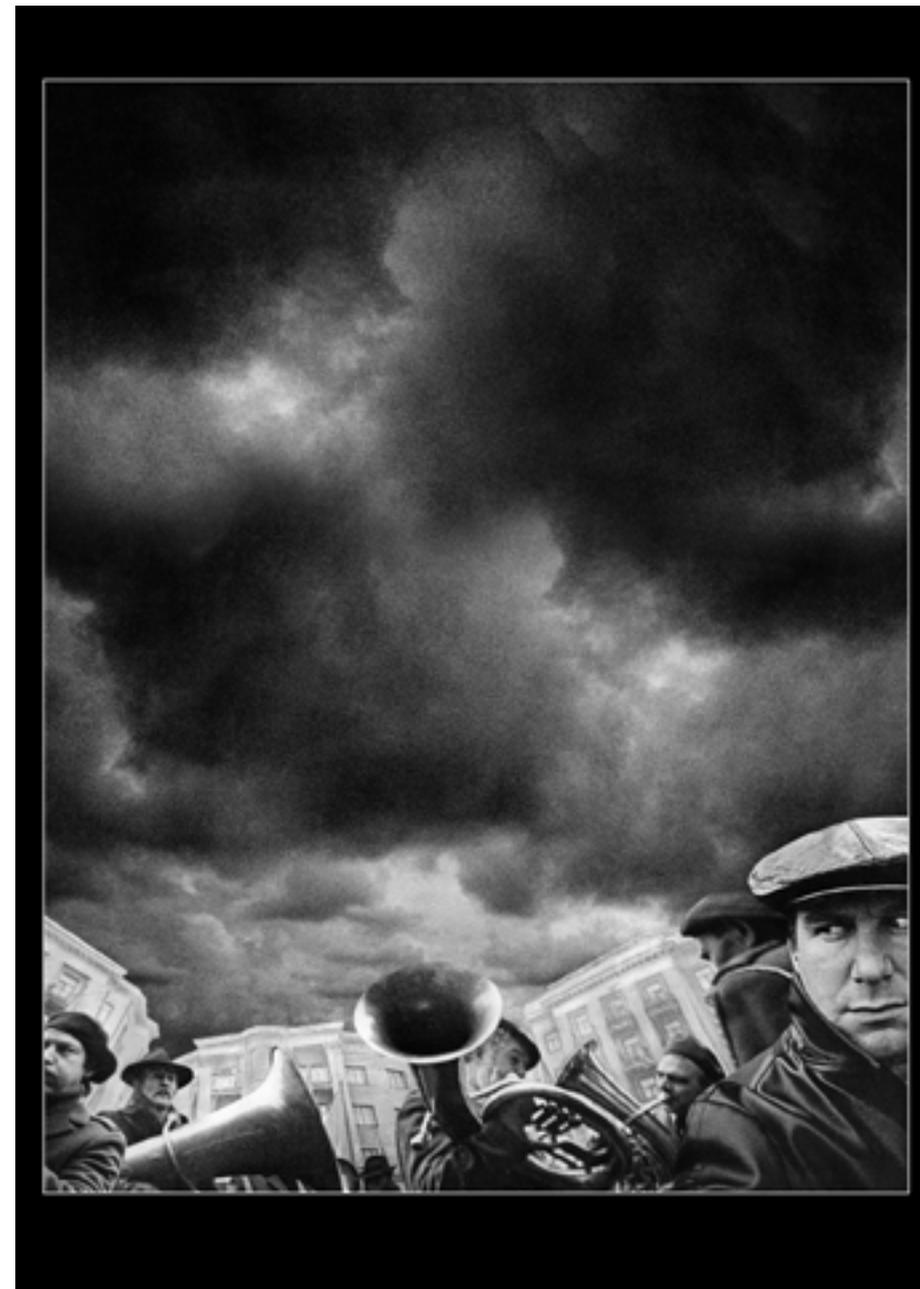
PHOTOMONTAGE / COLLAGE

For Kharkiv artists photomontage has been part of the visual language since 1974 when they discovered the work of the Lithuanian artist Vitaly Butyrin in this technique.

The Vremya group artists improved the Lithuanian know-how: instead of masking the paper while printing, they invented the method of cutting out fragments, mounting them and reproducing the resulting image. In the pre-Photoshop 1970s, it was a laborious manual process requiring both dexterity and meticulousness.

LIST OF ARTISTS:

*Sergei Bratkov
Igor Karpenko
Oksana Kurchanova
Oleg Malevany
Eugeny Pavlov
Roman Pyatkovka
Elmira Sidiyak
Sergei Solonsky
Yaroslav Solop
Alexandr Suprun*



Alexandr Suprun. *Selfportrait with Orchestra* (1986)

Alexandr Suprun favored photomontage as the main method in his work. His models were mostly elderly people and kids, the most vulnerable society groups, often placed against a sinister-looking background with dramatic high-contrast skies. Alexandr Suprun used a candid camera concealed in a shopping bag to get material for his photomontages. That is one of the reasons why most of his images are taken from the lower angle.

“In most cases this technique requires an idea before one starts shooting: the image must be conceived in the mind before assembling it. The ideas behind my collages were far from the optimistic repertoire, prescribed by the Soviet clichés. A journalist from Moscow once told me that my Gravitation series had foreseen the Chernobyl catastrophe 10 years before it happened.” —Oleg Malevany



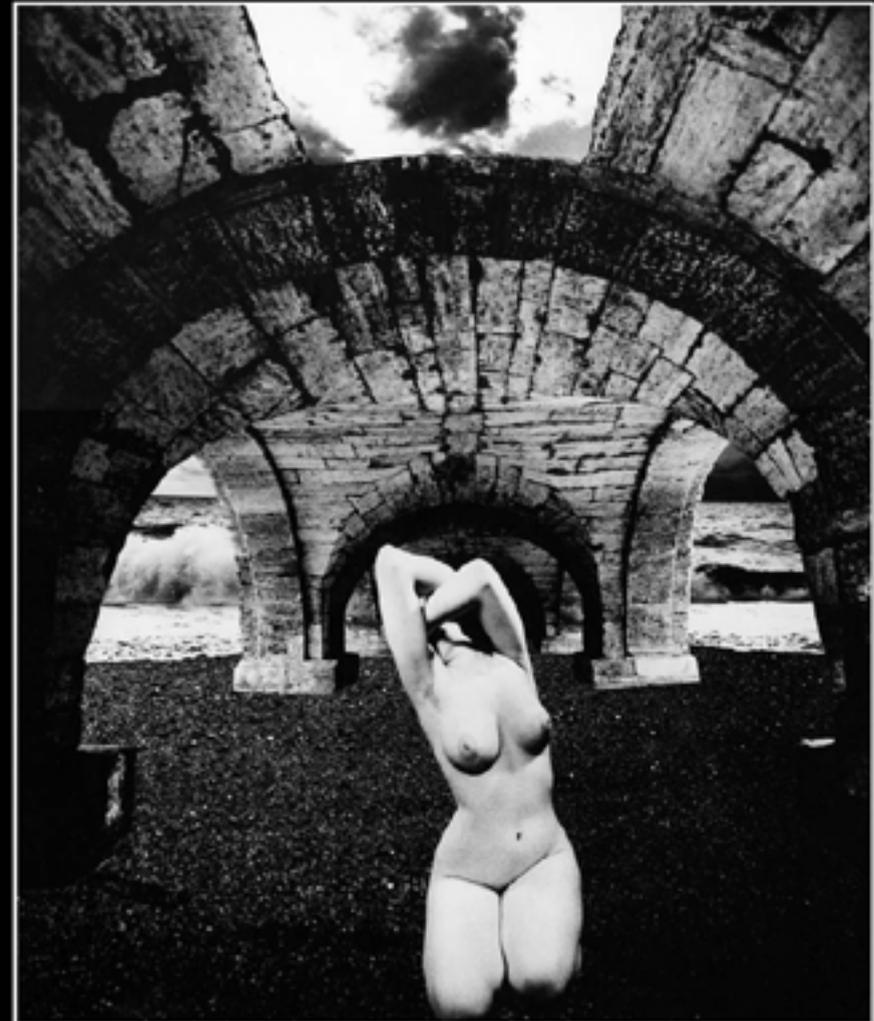
Alexandr Suprun (1975)



Alexandr Suprun (1975)



Oleg Malevany. From *Gravitation* (1976)

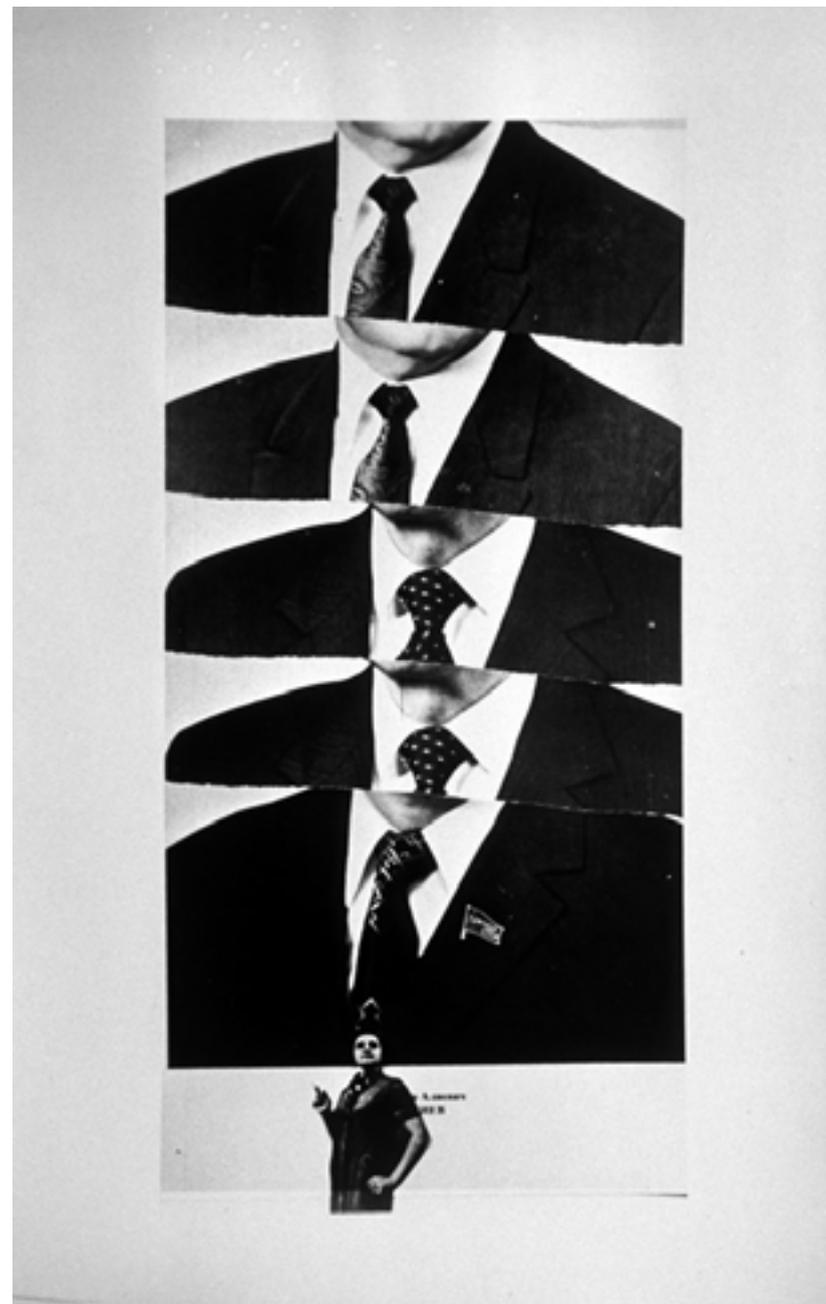


Oleg Malevany. *Cloud* (1978)

Sergei Bratkov made only one attempt at collage. His crudely pasted *Vera Frantsevna Ivanova, An Ordinary Soviet Woman* series plays with political symbols of the communist era.

Eugeny Pavlov's 1980s photomontages do not try to simulate real-life pictures, creating what can be called a 'could-be' reality. Rather, they appeal to imagination and exist in a virtual, psychological space of phantasmagorical 'would-be' reality. This approach freed an artist's hands to combine meanings without restraints or resemblance to a documentary image.

In his 1990s works, Eugeny Pavlov rejects all attempts at imitating documentary reality: black-and-white and color fragments combined with manual coloring and scratching result in masterful complex images. The artist transforms dust and scratches on film emulsion, ragged edges of torn-out fragments, and other artifacts into elements of his visual language.



Sergei Bratkov. From *Vera Frantsevna Ivanova*(1984)



Eugeny Pavlov (1986)



Eugeny Pavlov (1991)



Eugeny Pavlov (1994)

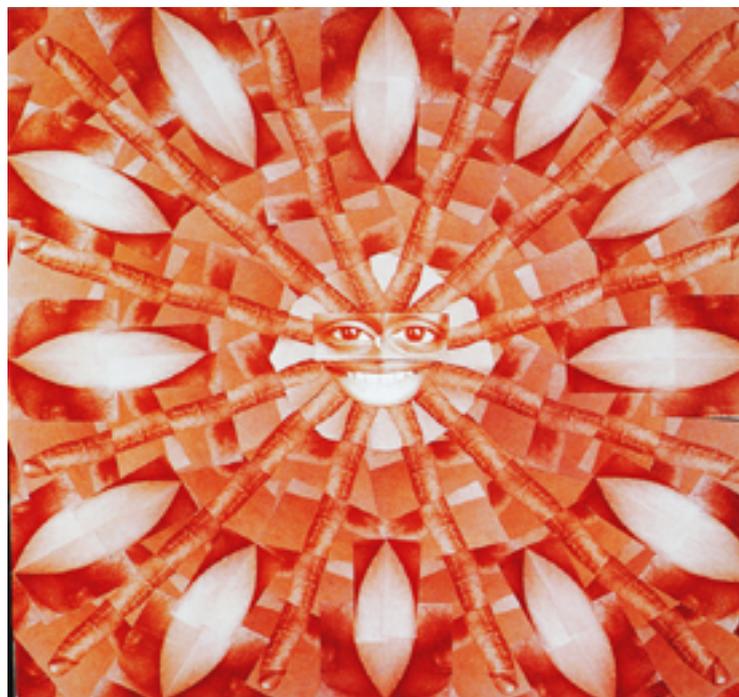
In 1995, with *The Games of Libido* (“the carnival insolence of shameless youth” according to the artist’s statement), Roman Pyatkovka invented a “negative montage” technique in which fragments of original black-and-white negatives were glued onto a glass plaque surface and printed immediately while the glue corroded the film. The resulting images produced a strikingly unusual multi-layered visual effect and, depending on the dexterity of the printer, were limited to an issue of 3 to 5.

Sergei Solonsky in *The Bestiary* photomontages (1991 – 1998) used overlays, printing deformation and toning along with the usual manual collage techniques.

Another of Solonsky’s projects, *Phallic Heraldry* (1996), is a series of black and white toned collages consisting of repetitive penis image fragments composed into what looks like national emblems and symbols.



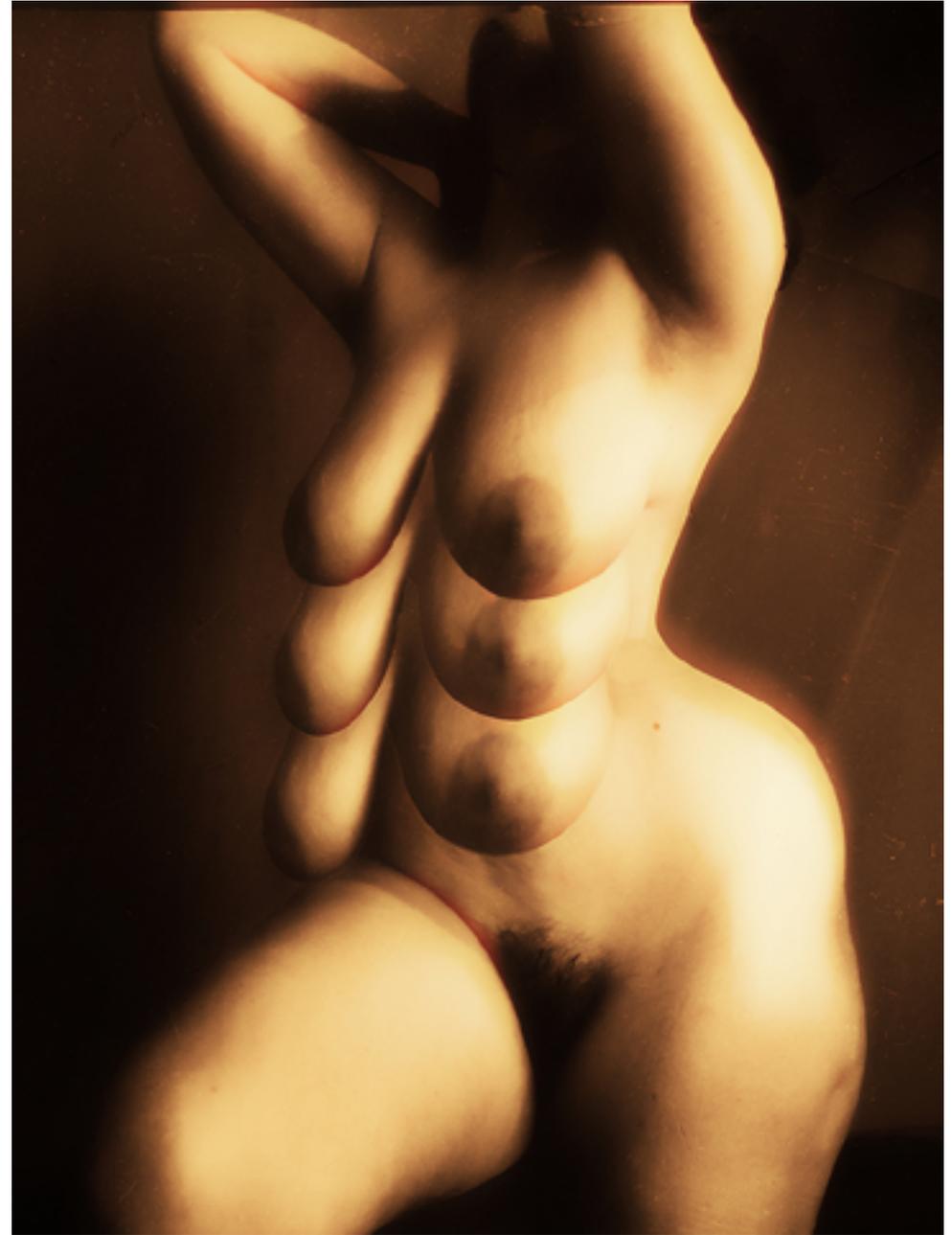
Roman Pyatkovka. From *The Games of Libido* (1995)



Sergei Solonsky. From *Phallic Heraldry* (1996)



Sergei Solonsky. From *The Bestiary* (1991 – 1998)



Igor Karpenko's *The Ideal World* (2006 - 2014) is a series of staged images and digital montages, where he used multi-exposure to inhabit his images with people, animals and objects. Karpenko says that his work is an attempt to "counter the unstable today's reality with something whole and ideal".

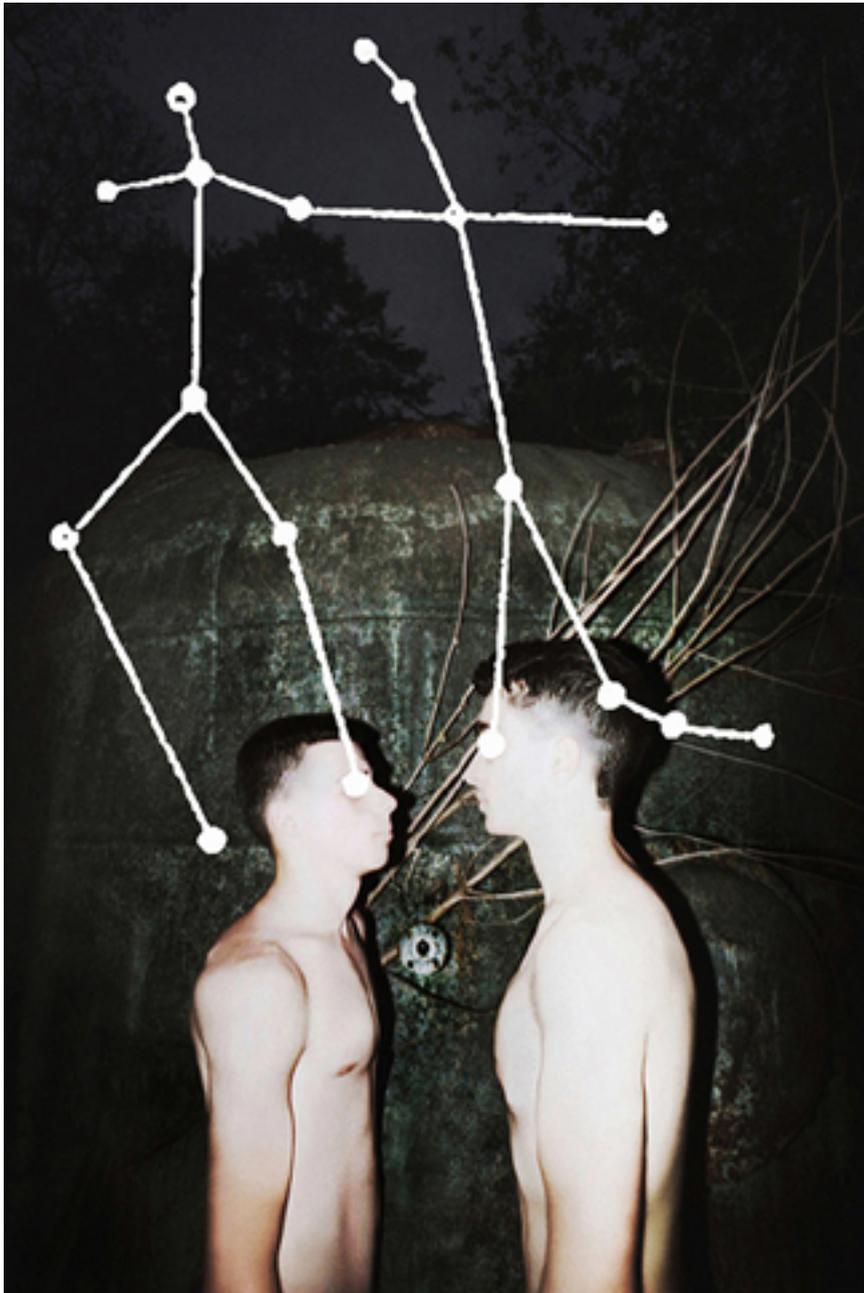
In 2011, Yaroslav Solop started his *Plastic Mythology* project, in which he advanced the photomontage technique. The artist used a variety of sources, including Internet graphics, fragments of his own and somebody else's photos, sometimes hand-colored, which he digitally pasted over his analog images of naked young people to make ironic illustrations of ancient myths.



Igor Karpenko. From *The Ideal World* (2006 - 2014)



Igor Karpenko. From *The Ideal World* (2006 - 2014)



Yaroslav Solop. From *Plastic Mythology* (2011, ongoing)



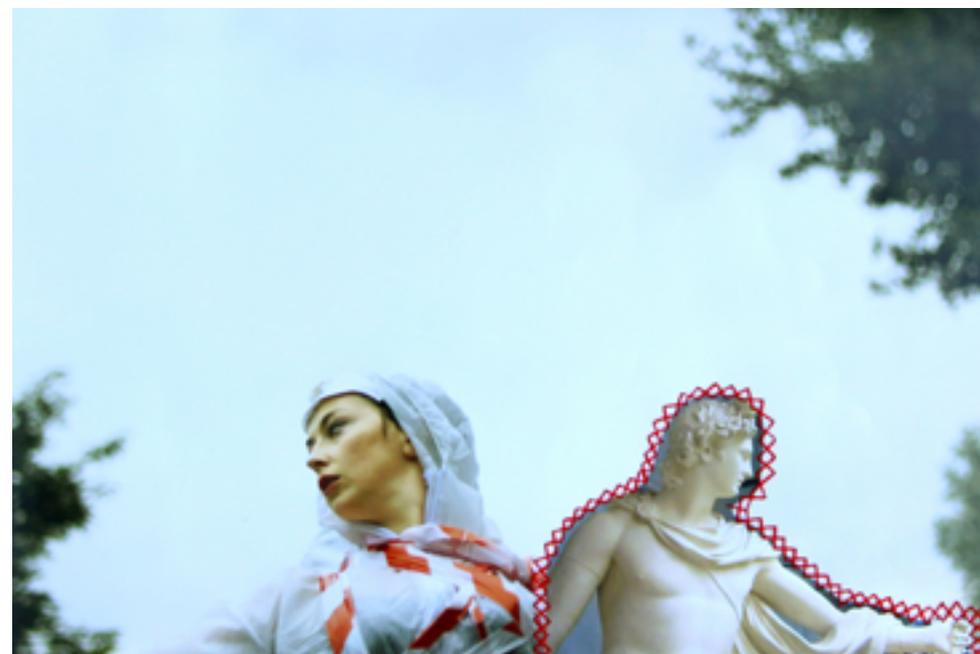
Elmira Sidiyak's *Building Kit (Build a Woman)* project (2012) is a series of collages in which likenesses of the female face are "built" out of pieces of torn photographs depicting women in their apartments and everyday surroundings.

In *Regional Studies* (2014), the artist uses a thread and a needle to literally sew together fragments of photographs taken in different regions of Ukraine, thus offering an artistic solution to the problem of cultural and mental discrepancies between the country's geographic parts and differing regional, political preferences.

Oksana Kurchanova's 2013 *Kolezhanki (Colleagues)* is a series of digital collages combining black-and-white photos with digital coloring and added textures. It is this complicated technique that transforms images telling a story of three young concubines into glossy magazine pages, visualizing them where they would like to belong.



Elmira Sidiyak. From *Building Kit (Build a Woman)* (2012)



Elmira Sidiyak. From *Regional Studies* (2012)



Oksana Kurchanova. From *Kolezhanki* (2013)



HAND-COLORING

and other post-production techniques

Adding color and/or drawing to an originally black-and-white photograph becomes a popular technique in Kharkiv photography in the late 1980s as a conceptualist response to the complexity and expensive cost of the color process.

LIST OF ARTISTS:

*Igor Chursin
Bohdan Gulyay
Victor Kochetov
Vlad Krasnoshchok
Anatoly Makienko
Igor Manko
Boris Mikhailov
Roman Minin
Eugeny Pavlov
Roman Pyatkovka
Elmira Sidiyak*



Anatoly Makienko (1995)

Manual coloring as an artistic technique originated in the popular in the Soviet Union illegal commercial practice of enlarging and colorizing black-and-white photos. Such portraits were commissioned by people living in remote parts of the country where color studio photography was non-existent. Boris Mikhailov conceptualized this technique in his famous *Luriki* series.

A specifically Soviet product called “a lurik” was a mounted, or framed, enlarged and retouched hand-colored portrait, post-mortem portraits included. Family or passport photos by origin, these desperate examples of true folk art sometimes included instructions: to remove a hat or add more hair, to make a montage coupling two people in one photo of a would-be family, etc.



Boris Mikhailov. From *Luriki* (1985)



Boris Mikhailov. From *Luriki* (1985)

Victor Kochetov's coloring is brutal and uncompromising. It turns his originally realistic gloomy black-and-white scenes of Soviet life into a work of kitsch, as if taking to its extreme the social realism doctrine of showing the brighter side of reality in an effort to change it by means of art.



Victor Kochetov (1976)



Victor Kochetov (1983)

Igor Manko used a special technique where an overexposed black-and-white print was consecutively processed in two or three chemical color intensifiers. The resulting images, while following the hand-colored Kharkiv photography pattern, were more subtle and unpredictable in color delivery.

“Childhood Memories largely centers around the ‘mother and child’ imagery. However, the playful child is actually not the artist, but his son, and the child’s mother is not the mother of his memories. The pictures depict family scenes at a countryside cottage, where Igor Manko spent his childhood. But the name of the series prevents it from being merely a broadcast of events; it places a lens in front of the viewer, which transforms the picture and places the focus of impression squarely in the past. ... The nostalgic atmosphere, so important in awakening memories, is created through the classic technique of photo ‘aging,’ making it sepia-toned. The pictures look worn with age. Like faded memories, they erase the line between real and make-believe; father and son are no longer simply similar, they become identical, all differences washed away. All this is achieved through ‘straight’ photography.” —Tatiana Pavlova



Igor Manko. From *Landscape with Flying Helicopter* (1990)



Igor Manko. From *Memories of Childhood* (1988)

Roman Pyatkovka, in *The Maternity Ward* series (1989), transforms a critical reportage of the miserable state of Soviet hospitals into an art photography project by locally applying aniline dyes to black and white documentary prints.

In 1990, Pyatkovka created *The Phantoms of the 1930s*, a series of portraits dedicated to the Great Famine of 1932 – 1933 in Ukraine, when millions of people were starved to death by the Communist regime. It was partly based on found material of the period and partly staged. In both cases, Pyatkovka used multiple reproductions of the original images with hand scratching of the photo.

Igor Chursin's *Halomania* was produced by drawing and coloring black and white prints using pencil, chalk or airbrush. Halos and crescents, exotic props, mysterious ambiance, emphatic facial expressions and erotic poses of the models reveal the artist's ironic attitude to the pomp of commercial art tastes.



Roman Pyatkovka. From *The Phantoms of the 1930's* (1990)



Roman Pyatkovka. From *The Maternity Ward* (1989)



Igor Chursin. From *Halomania* (1991-1993)



In *Total Photography* (1990 - 1994), Eugeny Pavlov uses all available techniques to illustrate the concept that any photographic image (including found materials) can be made into a work of art. (This project also appears in the “Conceptual photography” chapter.)

Victor Kochetov’s *Crimea* series (2002) simulated the photo-postcard style. These works give new life to the artist’s favored hand-coloring technique (now combined with digital toning) and ironical approach, with postcard-like inscriptions over deliberately unglamorous, low-key images.

The Common Field (1996), *Parnography* (1998) and *The Second Heaven* (2003) are collaborative projects of Eugeny Pavlov and the painter Vladimir Shaposhnikov.

Painting over a photographic print was an extreme, albeit logical development of the Kharkiv School manual coloring visual discourse.



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Total Photography* (1990-1994)



Victor Kochetov. From *Crimea* (2002)



Eugeny Pavlov and Vladimir Shaposhnikov. From *The Second Heaven* (2003)



Roman Pyatkovka. From *The Communal Apartment* (2008)

Roman Pyatkovka's *The Communal Apartment* (2008) is a series of staged hand-colored images that satirize the living conditions of "communal" apartments—a 1920s Soviet invention to force social equality by having several families share the kitchen and the bathroom in a large apartment.



Vlad Krasnoshchok. From *Negatives Preserved* (2011)

Negatives Preserved (2011) is Vlad Krasnoshchok's (Shilo group) solo project. He made vintage, flea market photos look like a Dadaist experiment, or a child's drawing exercise. Clearly, Krasnoshchok looked back at Mikhailov's *Luriki* and Pyatkovka's *Phantoms of the 1930s*, rendering the approach null and void in an overt artistic gesture.



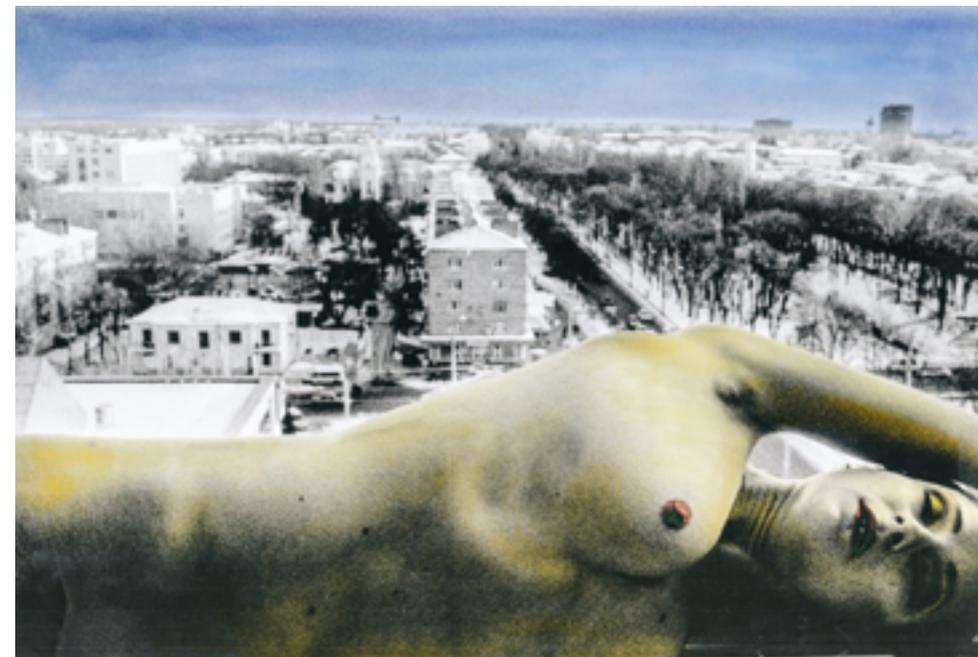
Roman Minin. From *Dreams about War* (2011)

Roman Minin uses photographic media as a background for his primitivist color drawings. Minin draws with color markers over 60 mm black-and-white negatives, which he then prints on color photopaper.

“One night I had a dream that there was war action in Kharkiv. When I woke up I took my camera and went out to take pictures. The city was peaceful, but I couldn’t get rid of my nightmare.”
—Roman Minin

A Chernihiv artist Bohdan Gulyay's *My Sexy Chernihiv*, first exhibited in Kharkiv in 2014, featured hand-colored black-and-white images as a tribute to the Kharkiv School aesthetics.

In *Alternative Standard* (2015), Elmira Sidiyak turns to Kharkiv School's favorite manual coloring technique giving it a new slant. While the traditional approach was coloring a black-and-white picture, the artist uses oil paints over a color print, achieving an unusual visual effect.



Bohdan Gulyay. From *My Sexy Chernihiv* (2014)



Elmira Sidiyak. From *Alternative Standard* (2015)

"STRAIGHT" SOCIAL REPORTAGE

The approach, started with The Vremya group's critical documentary imagery, has split into two threads that often overlap. One was "straight" documentation of far from ideal realities (rendered in both black-and-white and color), the other—a conceptual direction, the foundation for which was laid in Boris Mikhailov's "bad photography".

LIST OF ARTISTS:

*Sergei Bratkov
Igor Chekachkov
Kirill Golovchenko
Guennadi Maslov
Boris Mikhailov
Grygoriy Okun
Eugeny Pavlov
Misha Pedan
Leonid Pesin
Boris Redko
Juri Rupin
Vladimir Starko
The Zhuzhalka group*



Boris Redko (late 1980s)

In the 1970s, the Vremya group started its fight for artistic freedom by trying to look behind the ideological façade of socialist realism.

Boris Mikhailov's *Red Series* assigned an additional meaning to the red color favored by the Communist party's decorators, making it the color of feigned loyalty and simulated enthusiasm. Even innocently occasional red objects in this work appear repulsive and annoying.

Juri Rupin's *November 7* debunked the hypocrisy of the Great October Revolution Day demonstrations.



Juri Rupin. From *November 7* (1980s)



Boris Mikhailov. From *Red Series* (1965-1978)



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Black-and-White Archive*, 1974



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Black-and-White Archive*, 1974

In the mid-1980s, another generation of Kharkiv photographers entered the scene. The Gosprom group totaled eight artists who continued their senior colleagues' black-and-white social reportage approach. They used closed down aperture when shooting and "point light" when printing images to achieve extra sharpness and depth of field. The artists exhibited as a group until the early 1990s.

"Photography is a mirror; the camera is like scissors, it cuts out the part of reality corresponding with the artist's perceptions, thoughts and even philosophy at the moment of pressing the shutter release button. So any interference with the image, cropping included, is a sign of inferiority, as if photography itself weren't good enough." —Vladimir Starko, a Gosprom artist

Leonid Pesin's *1984* refers to the well-known novel by George Orwell, and was, in fact, produced that year. It is a reportage from a correctional facility for juvenile offenders, and to be allowed to take photos there the artist had to pretend he was applying for a job as a photographer with the institution. When, already during Perestroika times, the artist risked exhibiting this work in Kharkiv, it was immediately confiscated. The next day the police arrived to search his darkroom, but Pesin had managed to make copies of the *1984* negatives.



Vladimir Starko. *Untitled* (1986)



Vladimir Starko. *The Pravda Newspaper* (1986)



Leonid Pesin. From *1984* (1984)



Guennadi Maslov. (1985)



Guennadi Maslov. (1984)



Guennadi Maslov. (1989)

Guennadi Maslov's (as well as some other of his Gosprom groupmates') aesthetic grounds deviated from the "merciless documentaries" of their predecessors in search of finer compositional arrangements and more philosophical or humorous attitudes.

Misha Pedan's *The End of La Belle Époque* is a street photography project that portrayed the decay of the Soviet empire before its collapse in 1991. Pedan's mainly documentary aesthetics did not resort to strong uncompromised criticism. Rather, the criticism was dissolved in irony, as there were no strong feelings left towards the once formidable and sinister state.



Misha Pedan. From *The End of La Belle Époque* (late 1980s - early 1990s)



Misha Pedan. From *The End of La Belle Époque* (late 1980s - early 1990s)

The straight documentary approach in Grygoriy Okun's work connects his imagery to that of the Gosprom artists, even though he never formally belonged to the group.

In 1995, Sergei Bratkov (once a Gosprom artist, too) made his *No Heaven* series—a very personal picture of his family and himself. A caption under one of the images reads:

My Mom and Dad met each other at the time of war. Dad came home on a 3-day leave and met a beautiful girl at a party. He got drunk and threw up onto her white dress. That girl became my Mom.



Grygoriy Okun (early 1990s)



Grygoriy Okun (early 1990s)

In the late 1990s, Boris Mikhailov began his famous *Case History* project, which has been exhibited in many prestigious galleries around the world. Though not quite adhering to the genre of strict reportage (he made his "models" pose for the camera), the artist demonstrated the miserable conditions of a whole stratum of post-Soviet society, those incapable of adapting to the new rules of the game after the USSR collapsed.

Mikhailov's *Tea, Coffee, Cappuccino* (2000 - 2010) appears to follow his socially critical works of the previous decades: his characters again are low-class drunks, hobos and thugs, his images continue to be desolate city slums and crumbling small towns.



Boris Mikhailov. From *Tea, Coffee, Cappuccino* (2000 - 2010)



Boris Mikhailov. From *Tea, Coffee, Cappuccino* (2000 - 2010)



Boris Mikhailov. From *Case History* (late 1990s)



Eugeny Pavlov's *Home Life Book* is a series of black-and-white images portraying an everyday artist's being. Ranging in genre from street photography to still life to portraiture, his work is a visual documentation of the mundane—an existential view on life itself.

Proletarka (The Proletarian district) project by the Zhuzhalka group was made in 2012 and is dedicated to a Donetsk district inhabited by working-class people. It offers a direct and critical view on the life of the so-called proletariat, who, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, "got stuck in time" and "either reached the retirement age, or lost itself into drinking to become unskilled labor force," according to the artists.



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Home Life Book* (2002)



Zhuzhalka group. From *Proletarka* (2012)

Igor Chekachkov's *Veterans* project shows World War II survivors on their annual V-Day gatherings. The communist ideology has always been the critical focus of Kharkiv photographers.

In his *Kotlovan (The Foundation Pit)* project, Kirill Golovchenko packs his images of street markets with as many details as possible.

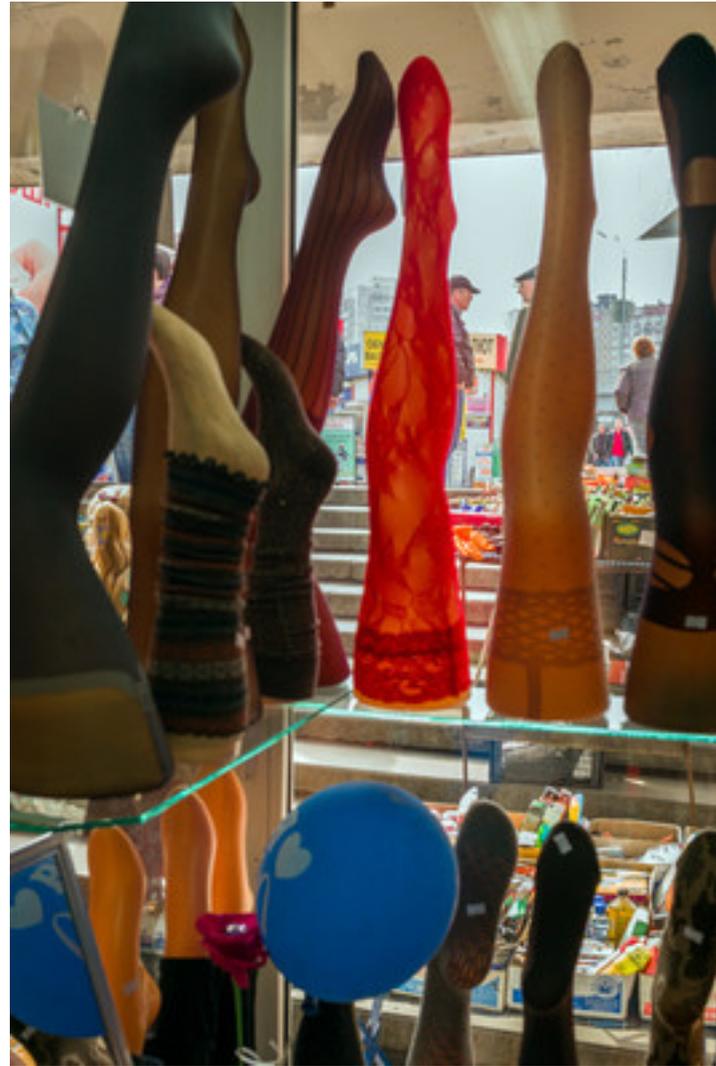
"When I'm in Ukraine, I see a chaos in society, politics, and lastly in the human souls. Many areas of public life reflect this. Public areas are littered with kiosks, shops and advertising. All shelves in stores are overfilled. Every free space is used. The concept and ideology of the current post-socialist society in Ukraine is money."
—Kirill Golovchenko



Igor Chekachkov. From *Veterans* (2013-2015)



Igor Chekachkov. From *Veterans* (2013-2015)



Kirill Golovchenko. From *Kotlovan* (2013-2014)

CONCEPTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY

In the late 1970s, Kharkiv photographers started experimenting with conceptualism. Boris Mikhailov claimed that a high-quality, glossy image was unable to depict the Soviet reality with its poor life standards (including poor quality of Soviet-made film, paper and chemicals), and suggested the concept of 'bad photography for bad reality' instead: small sloppily printed black-and-white photos, often blurred, low contrast, showing film defects or perforation.

This chapter shows the most typical conceptualist works, although traces of conceptualist approach are evident in other projects. Conceptualism in Kharkiv photography played with print quality, found material, text comments, post-production techniques, etc.

LIST OF ARTISTS:

*Andrey Avdeyenko
The Boba group
Victor Kochetov
Oksana Kurchanova
Boris Mikhailov
Eugeny Pavlov
Ilya Pavlov
The Shilo group
The Zhuzhalka group*



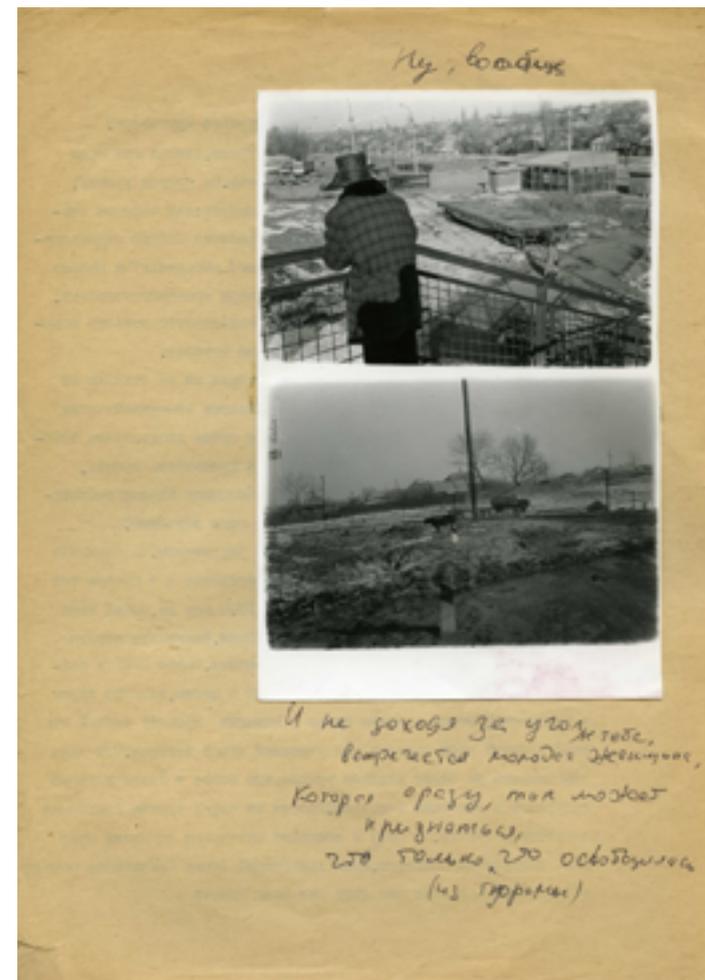
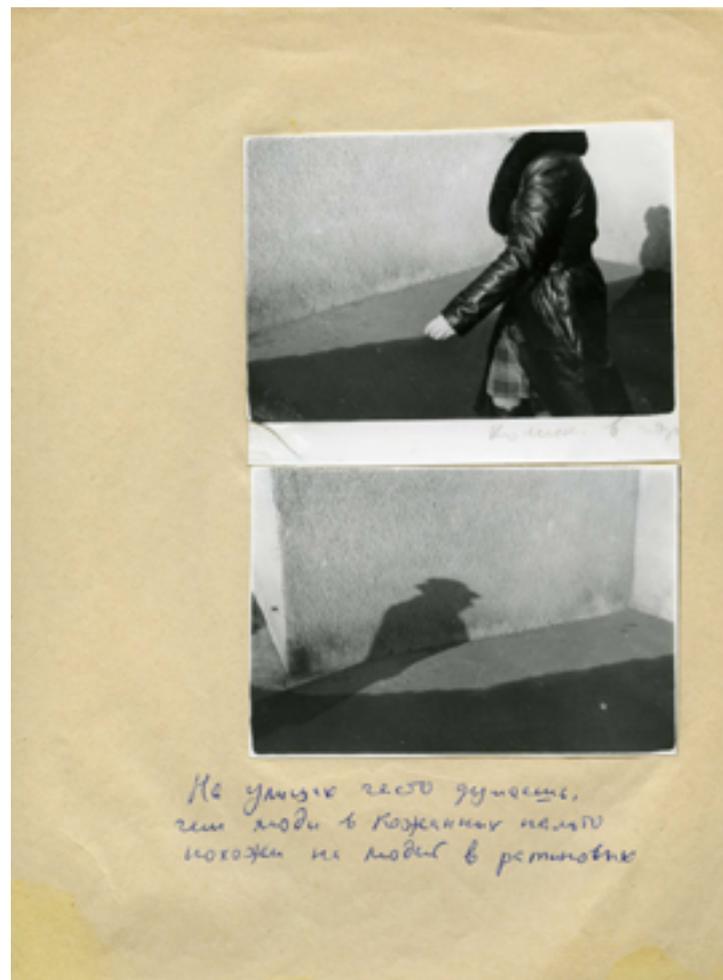
Eugeny Pavlov. From *Total Photography* (1990-1994)

“Mikhailov introduced ‘bad photography’ as a method to undermine the Soviet compositional canon and the optimistic narrative that the canon served to represent. For Mikhailov, depicting the Soviet reality at the moment of its irreversible and violent break-up, ‘bad photography’ became a tool of aesthetic and social critique.” —Iryna Sandomirskaya

This method was later used in Boris Mikhailov’s famous *The Unfinished Dissertation* (1984 – 1985, published in 1998), where black-and-white images pasted on the back of someone’s lecture notes were accompanied by hand-written comments, autobiographical and philosophical notes, etc.



Boris Mikhailov. From *Twos* (late 1970s - early 1980s)



Boris Mikhailov. From *Unfinished Dissertation* (1984-1985)

In the early 1990s, Boris Mikhailov made a significant contribution to his “bad photography” concept with two large documentary series of chemically-toned black-and-white images. *At Dusk* (1993) and *By the Ground* (1991), a.k.a. The Blue and The Brown Series, used stains and other defects of color toning as a visual representation of deteriorating life standards of post-Soviet reality.

(Another of Mikhailov’s conceptual works, his 1985 *Luriki* series, is shown in the “Manual coloring and other post-production techniques” chapter of this catalog.)



Boris Mikhailov. From *By The Ground* (1991)



Boris Mikhailov. From *At Dusk* (1992)

In his *Glassballs* series (1994), Andrey Avdeyenko photographed a handful of glass balls in a variety of different settings, thus producing a very integral and personal project. The artist utilized a number of genres, ranging from still life and photographics to self-portraiture, photomontage and social reportage.

Using these “found objects” (the glass balls) allowed Avdeyenko to research a range of semantic possibilities resulting from the relationships constructed between the object(s) and their different visual contexts.



Andrey Avdeyenko. From *Glassballs* (1994)



Andrey Avdeyenko. From *Glassballs* (1994)

In *Total Photography*, Eugeny Pavlov uses all possible techniques available to him in order to illustrate the project concept that any photographic image can be made into a work of art.

The artist uses found material, torn prints and film; he applies collaging techniques combining black-and-white and color fragments, hand-coloring and drawing. Dust and scratches on film emulsion, ragged edges of torn-out fragments, and other artifacts are all transformed into elements of his visual language.

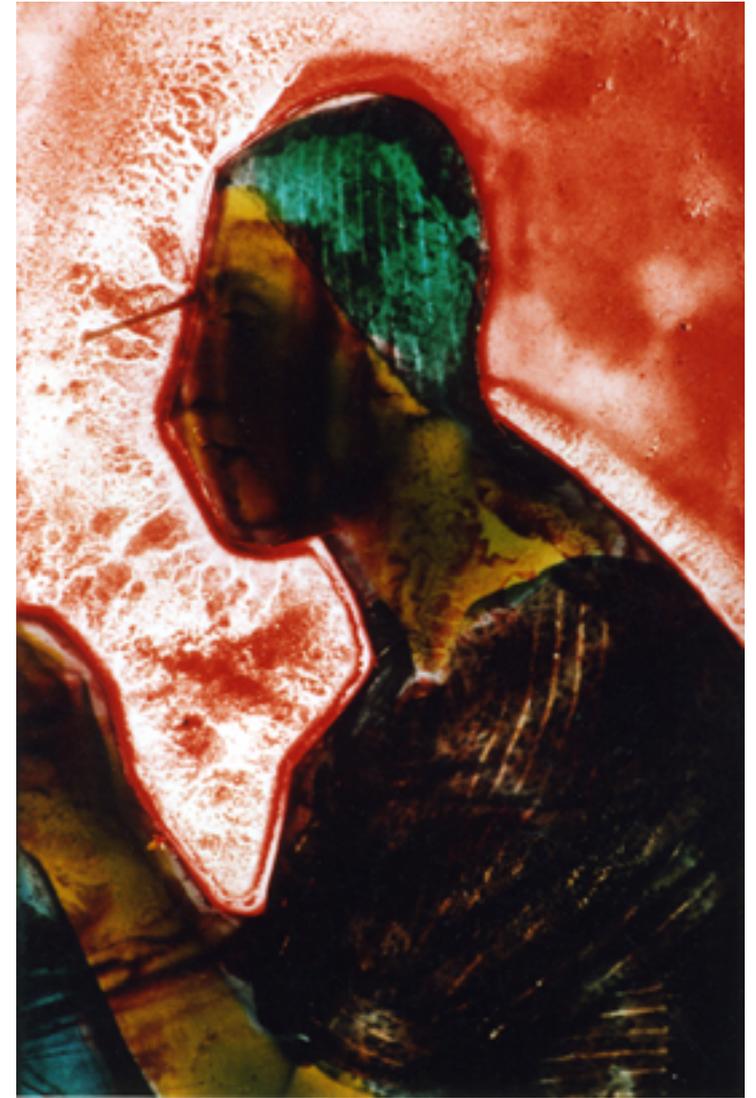
This sophisticated technical experimentation with form and color results in masterful complex images.



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Total Photography* (1990-1994)



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Total Photography* (1990-1994)



Eugeny Pavlov. From *Total Photography* (1990-1994)

In *Take Two*, Victor Kochetov juxtaposes two, or sometimes three, digitally-toned images showing the same location at different shooting points. The idea behind this approach, first formulated by Boris Mikhailov, is the recognition that a single “ideal shot,” taken at the right place, time and angle, is not a sufficient representation of the object of shooting, and that multiple images add to the “objectivity” of photography.



Victor Kochetov. From *Take Two* (2000-2004)

A new angle of conceptual photography was explored by Ilia Pavlov. His *At the Belly Level* series requires viewers to address the ideation that the camera, the lens, the viewfinder, all remove us from the experience of the actual object. Experience, in this case, is the result of various layers and modifications. Pavlov makes us address the subjectivity of the machine and the machine user. His work asks us to consider that we are looking at “looking.”

Oksana Kurchanova's *Boudoir* (2012) was shot on a smartphone camera using the hipstomatic application which is responsible for the blurred images and brutal and toxic colors. This deliberate downgrade in quality emphasizes the irony of the series title and is reminiscent of Boris Mikhailov's concept of “bad photography” for imperfect reality.



Ilia Pavlov. From *At the Belly Level* (2005)



Oksana Kurchanova. From *Boudoir* (2012)

Artists of the Shilo group use a Lith printing technique that produces grainy, high-contrast images and ignores shades of grey and finer details.

In 2013, the artists presented *The Finished Dissertation* project, where they forcefully placed themselves into the Kharkiv Photography School in a symbolic art gesture of pasting their prints over Boris Mikailov's photos in his *Unfinished Dissertation* photobook, leaving Mikhailov's text comments intact.



The Shilo Group. From *The Finished Dissertation* (2013)

The *Voyeved* project by the Boba group is based on found materials, namely, a box with 60mm negative film frames found in a deserted cantonment not far from their Kharkiv home. Half-destroyed negatives portraying decorated military men, most likely shot for an honor roll appearance, were reproduced with dried floral fragments and insects added, to become what looks like a ghost portrait gallery of the Soviet era heroes.

The Zhuzhalka group's critical view on the Donbass region is evident in the *Postcards from Rzhavchino* project (2014). The pictures of the imaginary town of Rzhavchino were taken in Yenakiyev, a town in the Donetsk region known to all Ukrainians as the birthplace of Ukraine's notorious runaway president Victor Yanukovich. The artists used overdue Agfa color film which was poorly developed and printed with all the dust, scratches and other artifacts intact, "showing our attitude to what we photographed," one of the artists commented.



The Boba Group. From *Voyeved* (2012)



The Zhuzhalka Group. From *Postcards from Rzhavchino* (2014)

"NAKED SELFIES"

A naked artist posing in front of his own camera as a way of telling a personal story is hardly a "technique" in the literal sense of the word, nor it is unique in art photography. Yet, it was an audacious artistic gesture in a society where nudity was strictly censored. This thematic approach has been consistently used by a number of Kharkiv School artists since the 1970s.

LIST OF ARTISTS:

*The Boba group
Bella Logacheva
Boris Mikhailov
Juri Rupin
Sergei Solonsky*



Boris Mikhailov. From *I Am Not I* (1992)

Juri Rupin based his own work on breaking the Soviet taboos and conventions in art. Nude photography, one of the worst sins according to the socialist realism canons, was an efficient way to achieve that purpose.

Boris Mikhailov's scandalous *I Am Not I* (1992) series of nude self-portraits was first shown in Kharkiv in 1993 in the Up-Down Gallery, an "unofficial" private art-space run by Sergey Bratkov. The following year, when Mikhailov attempted to exhibit this work in the municipally run Kharkiv Fine Art Museum, the exhibition was closed on the day of its opening.



Juri Rupin. *Selfportrait* (1975)



Juri Rupin. *We* (1970s)



Boris Mikhailov. From *I Am Not I* (1992)



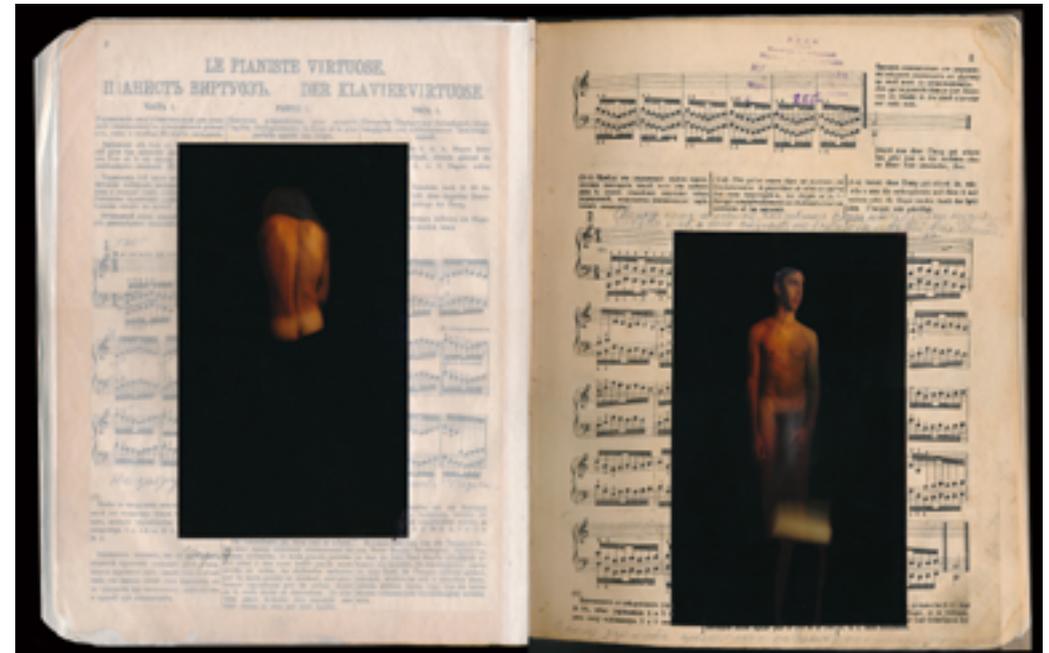
Sergei Solonsky produced the *Naked Selfies* series of 150 cm prints, in the beginning of the 1990s. With the camera on a self-timer and the shutter speed set for a long exposure, he used himself as one of his models, posing with bodily movements for the camera.



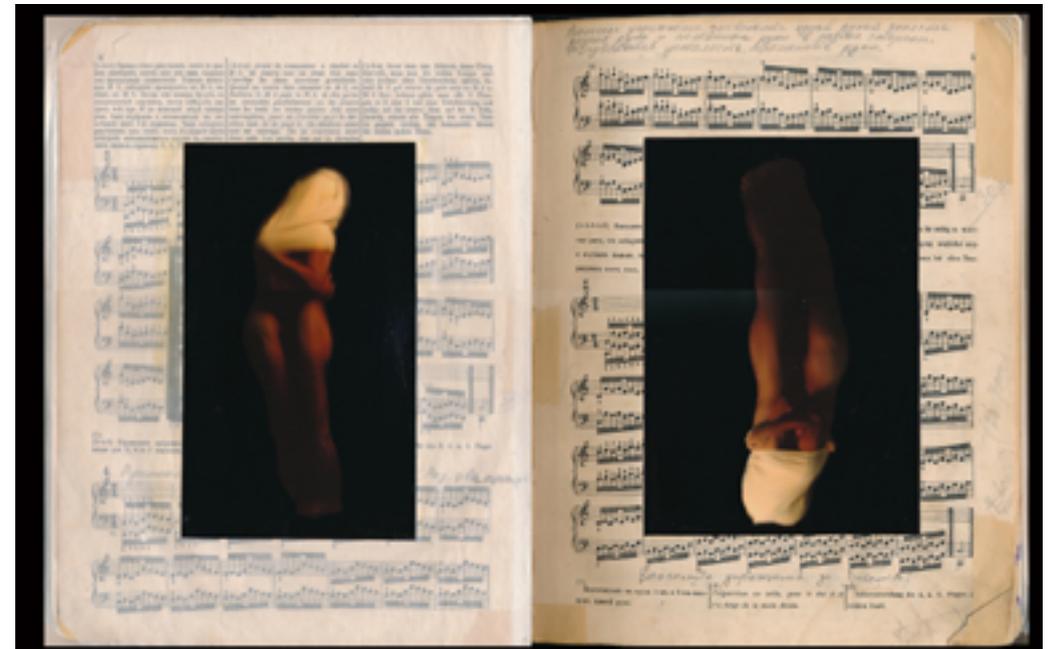
Sergei Solonsky. From *Naked Selfies* (1991-1995)

Bella Logacheva's *Home Exercises* (2011-2012) is an artbook in which retouched analog and digital photos are pasted over pages of sheet music ("early 20th century Schmitt's piano exercises found at the bouquiniste market in Kharkiv," as the artist's statement proudly claims). The hand-written comments supply advice on everyday home gymnastics and expand on its comparison with the Soviet Young Pioneers' morning exercise rites. The artist defines the project concept as "outer world intrusion into the intimate space of two young people".

In their 2012 *Furtiture from Gadyach* series, the Boba group (Yulia Drozdek and Vasilisa Nezabarom) tell their story among pieces of antique 1950s furniture salvaged from one of the spouses' grandma's abandoned home in a town of Gadyach.



Bella Logacheva.. From *Home Exercises* (2011-2012)



Bella Logacheva. From *Home Exercises* (2011-2012)



The Boba group. From *Furniture from Gadyach* (2012)



ESSAY EXCERPTS

Tatiana Pavlova:

Late 1960s to 1980s—

The Vremya Group's Time

The crackdown on the Ukrainian avant-garde movement, a movement that thrived in Kharkiv in the 1920s, came to be known as Executed Renaissance. One of the avant-garde movement's high points was Constructivist photography. By the 1930s, any efforts at experimenting with the medium had been extinguished. The strengthening "totalitarian discourse" spelled death for independent Ukrainian photography, with photographers now forced to "document" a fictionalized version of reality. In the 1930s, the future-oriented Constructivist dynamic of Ukrainian photography was replaced with measured narratives, the bold camera angles abandoned in favor of classic ones. Shooting from high vantage points, popular in the 1920s for the unusual angles it allowed, was pronounced taboo. One had to obtain a special permit ...

Read more:

<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-1/tatiana-essay.php>

Igor Manko:

The Kharkiv School

of Fine Art Photography

Proclaiming socialist realism as the only true method meant that all other forms of art were denounced as decadent and therefore anti-Communist and were severely censored. A dissident Soviet writer Andrei Sinyavsky in his 1959 essay *On Socialist Realism* mockingly compared it to a teleological system that would not tolerate the heresy of debate or doubt: "If even once you allow an assumption that the God had unwittingly sinned with Eve, and, jealous of her to Adam, expelled the unblessed spouses into a forced labor camp on Earth, the entire creation concept will go to the dogs, making it impossible to restore the faith in the same form." The practical application of socialist realism resulted in oversimplified and quasi-optimistic depiction and glorification of the Soviet reality, "the 'boy meets girl meets tractor' genre" ...

Read more:

<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-1/igor-paper2.php>

Tatiana Pavlova:

Avanguard red and green:

From “Blow theory” to “Kontakt”

In their early, “communal” period the Vremya collective, and the Kharkiv photographers loosely allied with it, created a basic visual language system in their art. Later, they fleshed out their initial ideas, embracing a more comprehensive approach. The period between the late 1980s to early 1990s was a time of great change and transformation in the Ukrainian society as a result of the so-called Perestroika (“Rebuilding,” a term coined by Mikhail Gorbachev in Leningrad and popularized by the media) and the de-facto collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time, the Kharkiv photographic school was enriched by a new generation of authors, who brought in a great variety of topics and techniques. ... In 1989 the French magazine *Photo* published material on the Soviet photographic avant-garde of the 1980, mostly represented by ...

Read more:

<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-2/tatiana-2-essay.php>

Guennadi Maslov:

The Kharkov Burst

The man I met by a park bench in Shevchenko Garden was not much older than myself, a university student of 23 - 24. The combination of his casual dress and bad breath confused me. No, they did not want anything from me right then. No, of course, there was nothing really bad about belonging to Semaphore Camera Club but there was “some information about some club members”... and they would really appreciate “a signal” about anything even potentially subversive. ... The man did not write down his phone number but gave me a piece of paper and pen to do so. “So call any time. Prepare to be helpful.” A sly smile. In a subway, when the passenger car doors open, a thin gap appears between the car and platform. My hands probably trembled a little, when on my way home I rolled the paper into a small ball and dropped it into the gap ...

Read more:

<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-2/maslov-essay.php>

Tatiana Pavlova:

*Kharkiv Photography in Independent Ukraine:
Vita heroica vs. Vita minima*

It was in the “Up-Down” gallery that Boris Mikhailov’s scandalous *I am not I* project (1992) was shown for the first time. The first exhibition of this work mixed ritual and magic with a shade of blasphemy. Entrance to the show demanded involuntary participation in the profanation of the author’s body by stepping over it on the dark stairway. This stairway, then, led into the exhibition space requiring one to participate further in his rehabilitation—the raising and canonization which took place in an interior similar to a Christian chapel being the second part of the action (family gallery as interpreted by the author). Traditional icons in the exhibition’s opening were replaced by the images of the author, represented naked in erotic hieratic and other poses with various props, among which a ...

Read more:

<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-3-2/tatina-essay.php>

Rui Cepeda:

*Historical (Cultural) Dysfunction and Disarrays:
On the Kharkiv School of Photography*

Consequently, from the mid-1980s onward Conceptualism, as a movement in art, and Social Documentary (situated on the threshold between critical representation and factual reporting) were disseminated around the world. In some moments they converge and intertwine; in others, they are two completely distinguished sets of attitudes, observing the function of art in society and societal adaptations to specific political, economic, or cultural ideas. This is a condition that is quite visible in the images generated by the Kharkiv photographers who used photomontages, hand colouring, or a combination of the two techniques. In these works, the relationship between artist (photographer), artwork (photography) and audience is the focus. Boris Mikhailov’s photographic work, *The Unfinished Dissertation* ...

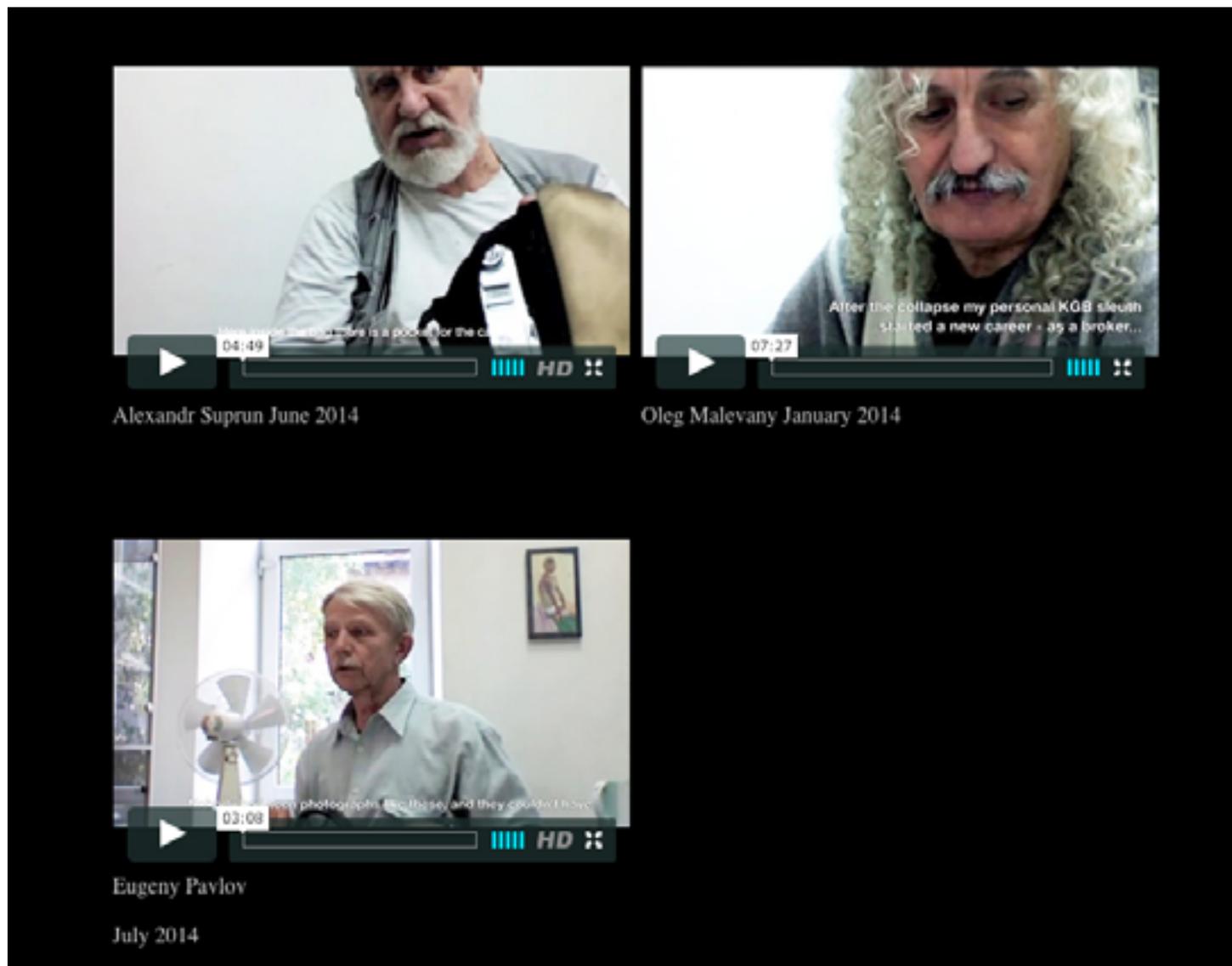
Read more:

<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-3-2/rui-essay.php>

VIDEO MATERIAL

from Exhibition 1 (1970 - mid-1980s)

Interviews of the Vremya group artists Alexandr Suprun, Oleg Malevany and Eugeny Pavlov, who tell stories about Soviet censorship, bans and persecution of artists - and the tricks they used to dodge them.



VIDEO MATERIAL

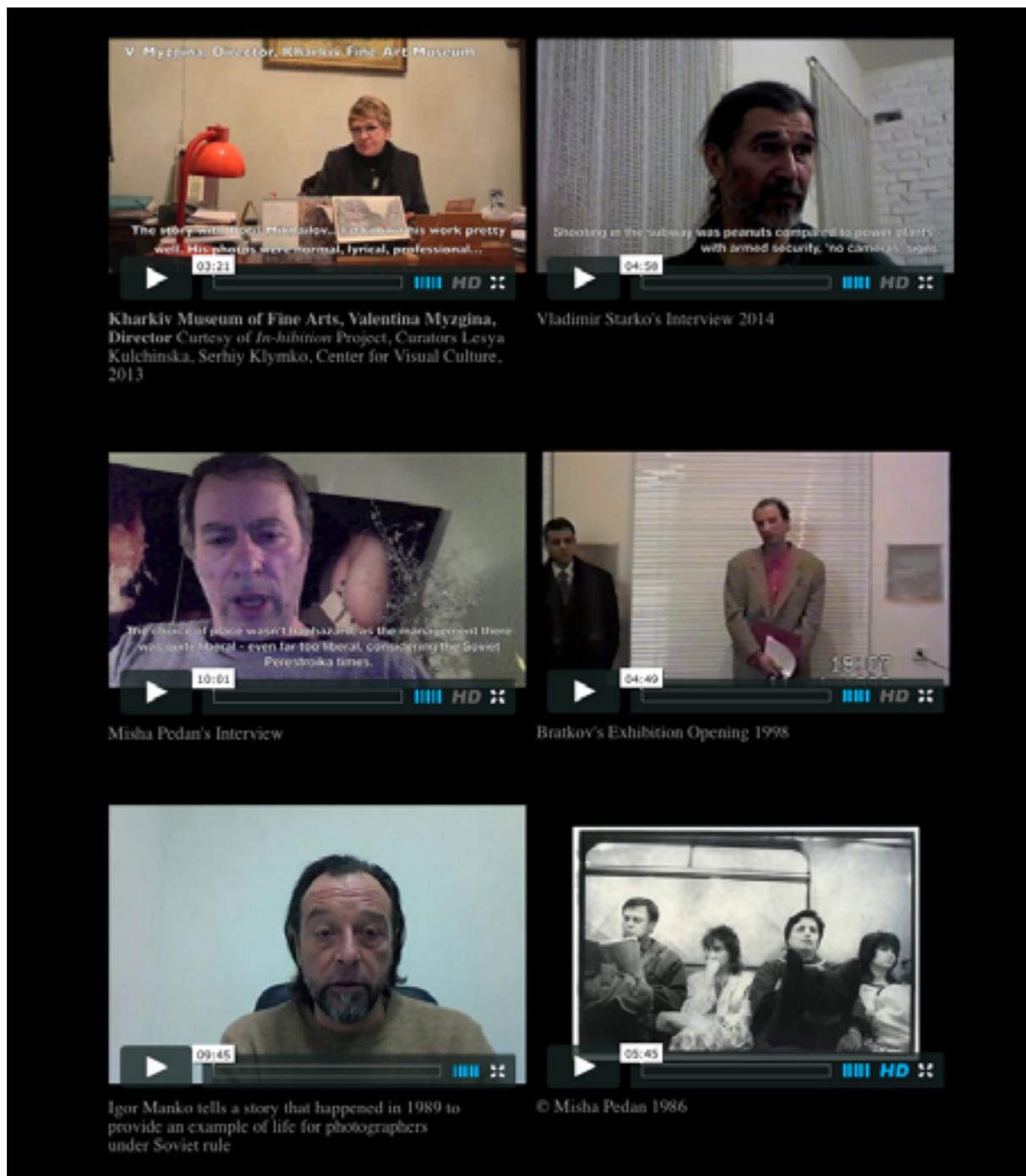
from Exhibition 2 (mid-1980s - 2000)

Valentina Myzgina, The Kharkiv Fine Arts Museum Director on closing Boris Mikhailov's scandalous *I Am Not I* exhibition;

The Gosprom group artists Vladimir Starko, Misha Pedan and Igor Manko on taking photos at train stations, attempts to close the first gala show of Kharkiv photography in Perestroika time and a race with a KGB car;

Segrei Bratkov's exhibition opening in Kharkiv in 1998;

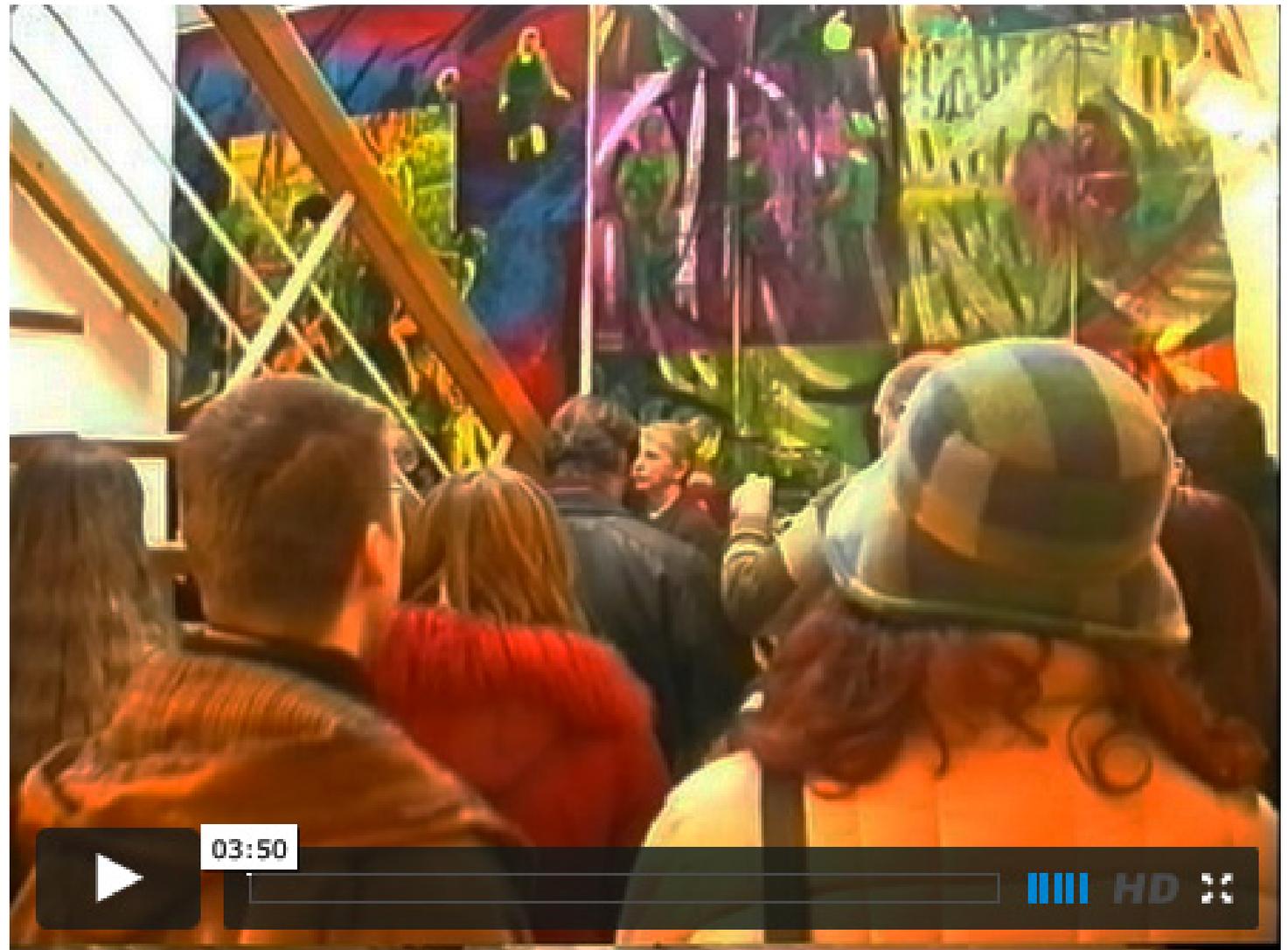
Misha Pedan's video trailer on his *M* photobook.



VIDEO MATERIAL
from Exhibition 3 (2000 - 2015)

The Second Heaven exhibition
by Eugeny Pavlov and Vladimir
Shaposhnikov, curated
by Tatiana Pavlova.

The project was completed in 2003
and exhibited in 2004.



ARTIST INDEX

The list of artists whose works are shown in the internet-based *Kharkiv School of Photography* project with links to artist pages in the four VASA exhibitions.

Key and direct links to *Kharkiv School of Photography: From Soviet Censorship to New Aesthetics* VASA exhibitions:

- 1 **1970s - mid-1980s**
(<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-1/>)
- 2 **Mid-1980s - 2000**
(<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-2/>)
- 3.1 **Contemporary I**
(<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-3-1/>)
- 3.2 **Contemporary II**
(<http://www.vasa-project.com/gallery/ukraine-3-2/>)

VASA:
<http://vasa-project.com>

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Gera Artemova <u>3.2</u> | Sergei Lebedinsky <u>3.2</u> | Leonid Pesin <u>2</u> |
| Andrey Avdeyenko <u>2</u> | Bella Logacheva <u>3.2</u> | Roman Pyatkovka <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> |
| Sergei Bratkov <u>2</u> | Anatoly Makienko <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> | Boris Redko <u>2</u> |
| Igor Chekachkov <u>3.2</u> | Oleg Malevany <u>1</u> , <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> | Juri Rupin <u>1</u> |
| Igor Chursin <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> | Igor Manko <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> | Elmira Sidiyak <u>3.2</u> |
| Victor Corwic <u>3.2</u> | Guennadi Maslov <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> | Vyacheslav Sokolov <u>3.2</u> |
| Yulia Drozdek <u>3.2</u> | Kirill Meshkov <u>3.2</u> | Sergei Solonsky <u>2</u> |
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| Oksana Kurchanova <u>3.2</u> | Misha Pedan <u>2</u> , <u>3.1</u> | |



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