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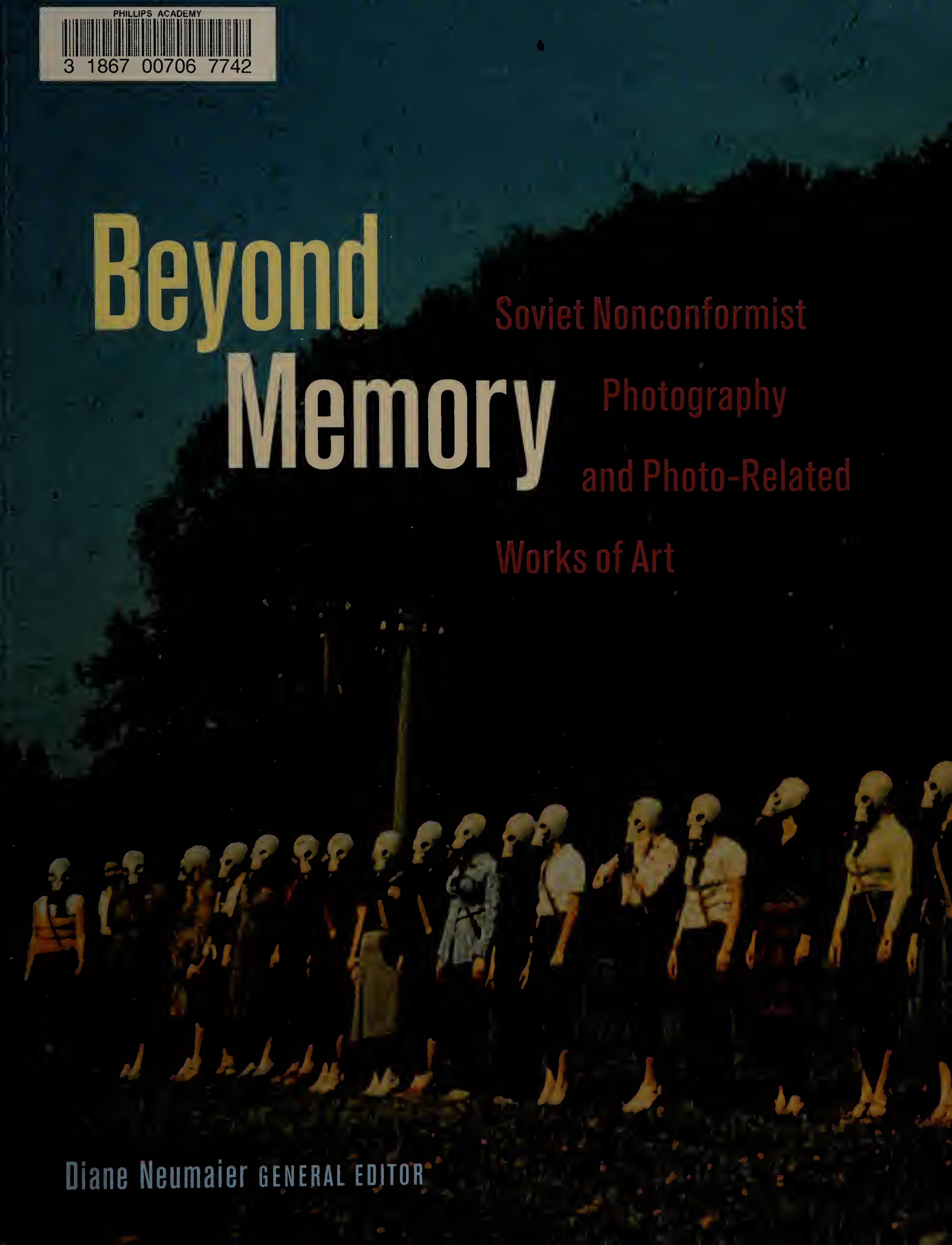

Beyond Memory

Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art

Diane Neumaier GENERAL EDITOR

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Beyond Memory

THE DODGE SOVIET NONCONFORMIST ART PUBLICATION SERIES

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The Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union, 1956–1986, which comprises more than twenty thousand works, is part of the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick.

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Diane Neumaier GENERAL EDITOR

Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art

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Foreword

Beyond Memory: Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art offers an interpretation of various aspects of unofficial photography and photo-related art produced in the Soviet Union over the past forty years. This publication, featuring contributions by leading American and Russian scholars, makes significant inroads into this relatively new area of art-historical study and presents to the American public—in many cases for the first time—the work of many important Soviet photographers and artists.

Though this anthology began to take shape little more than six years ago, the journey from its initial concept commenced several decades ago with the formation of the collection by Norton and Nancy Dodge. The Zimmerli's Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union, the largest and most comprehensive of its kind in the world, comprises more than twenty thousand works of art by over one thousand artists. It documents the artistic activities of underground artists from Moscow, Leningrad, and the former Soviet republics during the Cold War period: from 1956, the start of Nikita Khrushchev's cultural "thaw," to 1986, the beginning of Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika. The prohibited styles and movements featured in the Dodge Collection include abstraction, surrealism, expressionism, conceptual art, and sots art. The works address forbidden themes such as anti-Soviet political commentary, religion, and eroticism.

Over the past few years, Nailya Alexander, a Russian photography dealer, helped Dr. Dodge assemble —in addition to his holdings of painting, sculpture, and graphic arts—an outstanding collection of Soviet photography.

Diane Neumaier, Professor of Photography at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and herself an accomplished photographer, acted as both guest curator of the exhibition and editor of this catalogue. Ms. Neumaier has given generously of her time, knowledge, and expertise, consistently demonstrating a high level of scholarship and serious commitment to the project.

We are also extremely pleased that both Russian and American art historians, critics, and photography scholars were able to bring their insights to the project through their illuminating essays. In addition, the Zimmerli is grateful to Daniel Rishik and Jane Friedman for translating and editing the Russian-language essays.

Phillip Dennis Cate, Supervisor of Curatorial and Academic Activities, strongly supported this project from its very beginnings. Two members of the Zimmerli's curatorial staff were invaluable in helping Dr. Dodge and Ms. Neumaier realize this immense undertaking and in seeing both the book and the exhibition through every stage of their production. Dr. Alla Rosenfeld, Director and Curator of the Department of Russian and Soviet Nonconformist Art, coordinated the project and served as a liaison between the guest editor, the Zimmerli, and the publisher. Natalia Orlova-Gentes, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Russian and Soviet Art, was instrumental in organizing the intricate details of this publication, helping with photography coordination, corresponding with the authors, and preparing the manuscript for the publisher. We would also like to acknowledge Natalia Kolodzei, Elizabeth Royzman, and Dennis Sarkozi, the depatment's interns, as well as Natalia Kariaeva, a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Linguistics, who assisted in the earliest phases of this project.

The efforts of the museum's registration office were most vital. We are especially grateful to Cathleen Anderson, Leslie Kriff, Dasha Shkurpela, and Linda Strandberg for arranging access to relevant works in the collection, coordinating photography for the book, and helping in numerous other ways. Also of crucial importance was the work of Charles Fick, Norton Dodge's Collection Assistant, who helped process, photograph, and catalogue all the photography acquisitions. And, of course, the related exhibition could not have been realized without the assistance of Roberto Delgado, Preparator, and Edward Schwab, Director of Installations, at the Zimmerli.

I am confident that the efforts of all of those involved have served to make this catalogue and exhibition an enjoyable and useful introduction to Soviet photo-related artworks for both general and scholarly audiences with an interest in contemporary art and photography.

Gregory J. Perry
DIRECTOR

Preface

From 1955, early in Khrushchev's rule, and through the 1960s and 1970s I made nine trips to the Soviet Union. One of my goals on these trips was to photograph nonconformist art. Therefore I brought with me my Exakta, several lenses, and hundreds of rolls of film (mostly slide film, but also some black-and-white). I also used the film to document my widespread travels and adventures in the Soviet Union, including visits to Moscow, Leningrad, the Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and several of the Central Asian republics. In 1955 I traveled by boat from Rostov-on-the-Don to Stalingrad on the Volga Don Canal, which had just been finished. Some of my earliest photographs were published in *U.S. News and World Report* in 1955 and 1956 (see figs. 2 and 3, pp. 2 and 3).

From the beginning I was acutely aware of Soviet official censorship that prohibited photography of military installations, airports, railway stations, strategic bridges, factories, government buildings, etc., etc. However, sometimes the rules were not so clear. After militiamen confiscated two rolls of my film, I became aware that although photographing "streets and squares" was *usually* permitted, it was prohibited if the place was an "enterprise," such as a collective farm market—unless one had special permission from the director. This unexpected loss of film initiated my practice of self-censorship, which, naturally, increased and expanded the scope and effectiveness of the government's censorship restrictions.

Such self-inflicted censorship was, of course, an intended consequence of the official censorship decreed by the Communist Party and enforced by the militia, the KGB, and even irate party zealots who feared that a photographer might depict the Soviet Union in an unflattering manner. Relaxing self-censorship vigilance could have unfortunate consequences, as I discovered in the picturesque Central Asian city of Bokhara. I spent an hour or more at midday photographing the bustling collective farm market, where brightly costumed Uzbeks were buying and selling colorful goods of all kinds, from fresh fruit and vegetables to multicolored spices, flowers, fabrics, and bedding. I felt these were some of the best and most attractive photos I had ever taken, but I was so involved in capturing the scene that I momentarily forgot the risks of doing photography in the Soviet Union. Suddenly I felt a heavy hand grab my shoulder as I tried to take my next "great picture." A very large and irate party activist demanded to know why I was photographing "all this dirt." I responded, "This is not dirt! It's the streets of your market! They are beautiful. It's you who are talking about 'dirt.' " The activist didn't appreciate my ironic riposte and, making a "citizen's arrest," began to drag me (I resisted as much as I dared) to the market's militia headquarters. After hours of hopeless wrangling, I had to give up my film—they wanted all of it—but I kept my camera. As I left, the blond, blue-eyed Russian colonel, who had been called in to deal with my case, said, "You know how it is. When a citizen makes a complaint like this, we can't ignore it, but you have my personal permission to photograph tomorrow." Of course, no written permission was provided. I'm sure he knew that I was leaving for Tashkent early the next morning.

This experience cost me some precious, irreplaceable photographs and more than four hours of acute anxiety. However, had I been a Soviet photographer or artist who produced art deemed damaging to the regime, I might have lost my job or spent several years in a labor camp.

I describe this disturbing episode to provide a better understanding of how censorship in a totalitarian state like the Soviet Union, enforced by severe—even deadly—consequences for "transgressors," can magnify the effect of restricting freedom of expression while sparing the government the costs of enforcement. In these circumstances only the bravest (or most reckless) individuals can be expected to risk challenging the system. The restrictive effect of self-censorship is particularly insidious because it is evident only to those who employ it. Indeed, self-censorship represses self-expression even before it happens. How much creativity is lost can never be known.

Let us appreciate, therefore, the great contributions made by nonconformist photographers and other artists who used photography creatively in their art. Let us praise their courage in preserving the principle of freedom of expression under difficult and dangerous circumstances. The example they set should never be forgotten.

Norton T. Dodge

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

For *Beyond Memory*, we have followed the Library of Congress system of transliteration of Russian names and titles, with a few modifications. First, we have replaced the Russian *ye* with *e* (for example, Evgenii instead of Yevgenii) and used *ee* rather than *eye*; second, no symbols have been employed for the Cyrillic soft sign in the personal names.

Many Russian artists and writers have spent part of their lives in Western Europe, and often their names received various—even contradictory—transliterations from the original Russian into the language of their adopted home. Therefore, for the names of artists, we have combined two methods. For artists who were active chiefly in Russia, we have transliterated their names according to the modified Library of Congress system. In the case of persons well known in the West, we have used either the spelling the artists adopted or the one that has become common in the West (for example, El Lissitzky, not Lazar Lisitsky).

Beyond Memory

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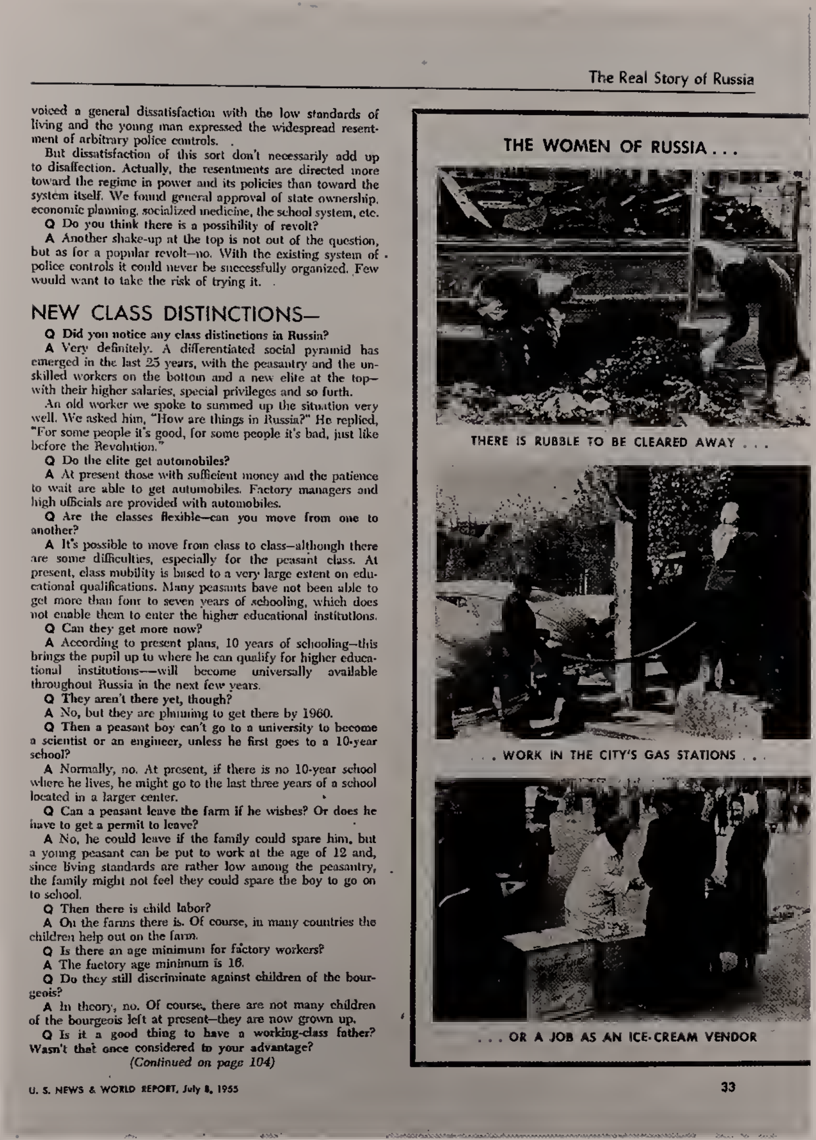
ОЛЬМИНСКОГО
ул Ольминского

Diane Neumaier

Introduction

I FIRST MET NORTON DODGE IN 1993, TWO YEARS BEFORE THE NORTON AND NANCY DODGE COLLECTION OF NONCONFORMIST ART FROM THE SOVIET UNION OPENED TO THE PUBLIC AT THE ZIMMERLI MUSEUM AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY. I had just returned from my third trip to Russia and was about to host what would be the largest international conference on Russian contemporary photography.[1] Soon thereafter Norton proposed that I curate an exhibition of photography from the Dodge Collection, and five years later we embarked on what has become both the exhibition and the volume of essays *Beyond Memory: Soviet*

Fig. 1 (*facing*). Igor Moukhin, *Leningrad, USSR* from the series *Young People in the Big City*, 1986. Gelatin silver print, 40 x 29 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16307.



The Real Story of Russia

voiced a general dissatisfaction with the low standards of living and the young man expressed the widespread resentment of arbitrary police controls.

But dissatisfaction of this sort don't necessarily add up to disaffection. Actually, the resentments are directed more toward the regime in power and its policies than toward the system itself. We found general approval of state ownership, economic planning, socialized medicine, the school system, etc.

Q Do you think there is a possibility of revolt?

A Another shake-up at the top is not out of the question, but as for a popular revolt—no. With the existing system of police controls it could never be successfully organized. Few would want to take the risk of trying it.

NEW CLASS DISTINCTIONS—

Q Did you notice any class distinctions in Russia?

A Very definitely. A differentiated social pyramid has emerged in the last 25 years, with the peasantry and the unskilled workers on the bottom and a new elite at the top—with their higher salaries, special privileges and so forth.

An old worker we spoke to summed up the situation very well. We asked him, "How are things in Russia?" He replied, "For some people it's good, for some people it's bad, just like before the Revolution."

Q Do the elite get automobiles?

A At present those with sufficient money and the patience to wait are able to get automobiles. Factory managers and high officials are provided with automobiles.

Q Are the classes flexible—can you move from one to another?

A It's possible to move from class to class—although there are some difficulties, especially for the peasant class. At present, class mobility is based to a very large extent on educational qualifications. Many peasants have not been able to get more than four to seven years of schooling, which does not enable them to enter the higher educational institutions.

Q Can they get more now?

A According to present plans, 10 years of schooling—this brings the pupil up to where he can qualify for higher educational institutions——will become universally available throughout Russia in the next few years.

Q They aren't there yet, though?

A No, but they are planning to get there by 1960.

Q Then a peasant boy can't go to a university to become a scientist or an engineer, unless he first goes to a 10-year school?

A Normally, no. At present, if there is no 10-year school where he lives, he might go to the last three years of a school located in a larger center.

Q Can a peasant leave the farm if he wishes? Or does he have to get a permit to leave?

A No, he could leave if the family could spare him, but a young peasant can be put to work at the age of 12 and, since living standards are rather low among the peasantry, the family might not feel they could spare the boy to go on to school.

Q Then there is child labor?

A On the farms there is. Of course, in many countries the children help out on the farm.

Q Is there an age minimum for factory workers?

A The factory age minimum is 16.

Q Do they still discriminate against children of the bourgeois?

A In theory, no. Of course, there are not many children of the bourgeois left at present—they are now grown up.

Q Is it a good thing to have a working-class father? Wasn't that once considered to your advantage?

(Continued on page 104)

THE WOMEN OF RUSSIA . . .

THERE IS RUBBLE TO BE CLEARED AWAY . . .

. . . WORK IN THE CITY'S GAS STATIONS . . .

. . . OR A JOB AS AN ICE-CREAM VENDOR

U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, July 8, 1955

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Fig. 2. Norton Dodge, *The Women of Russia . . .*, photographs reproduced in "Uncensored: The Real Story of Russia (Exclusive Eyewitness Account by Dr. Homer Dodge and Norton Dodge)," special issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, July 8, 1955. Courtesy of Norton Dodge.

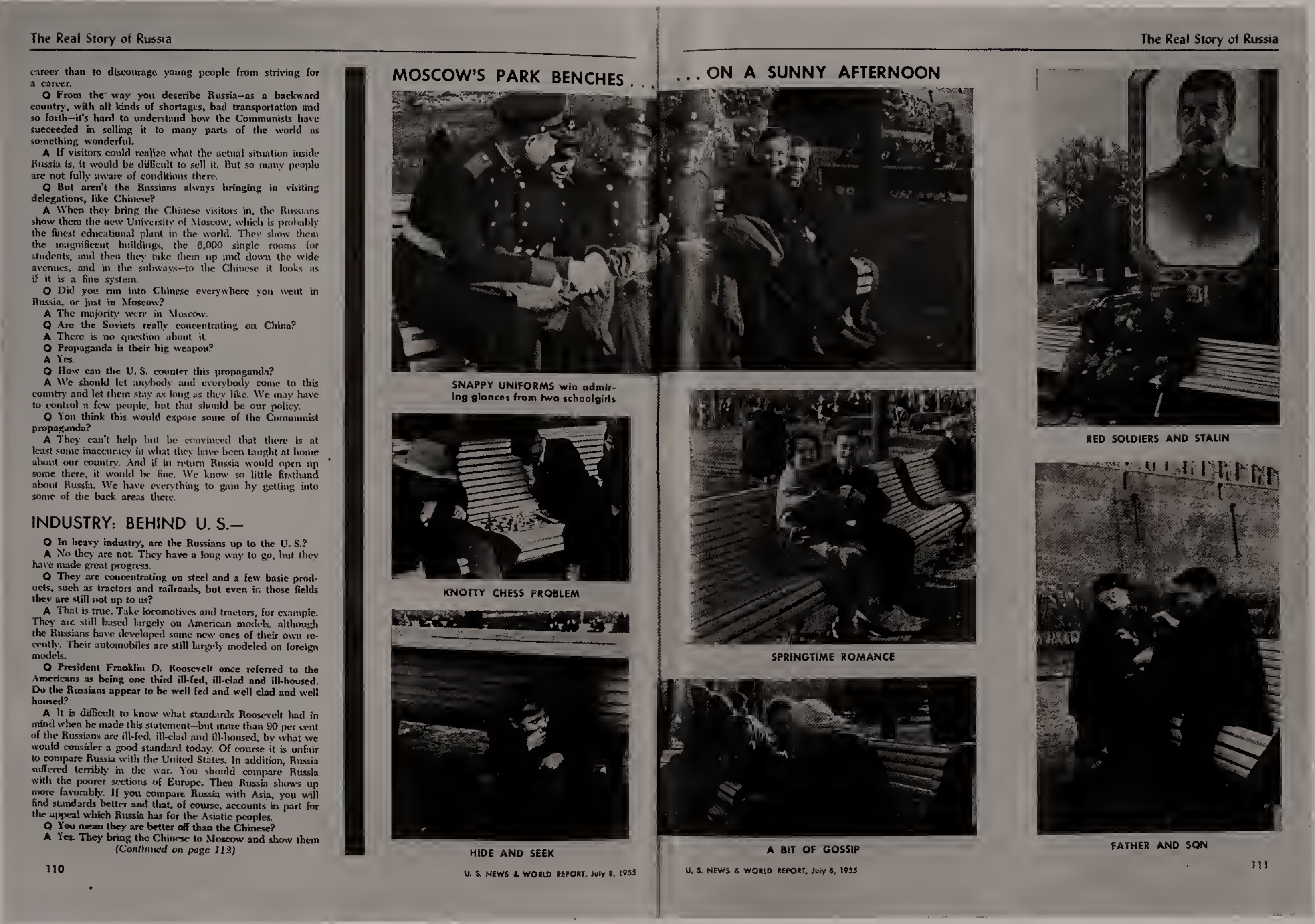
Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art. The title refers to photography's powerful ability to bear witness, to aid remembrance, to shape memory, and even to alter beliefs about the past.

Norton Dodge first began collecting Soviet nonconformist art in 1955. Initially he focused on paintings, prints, and drawings, but soon he expanded to include photography because in trying to develop a historical photographic record of the exhibitions and other activities of the artists, he discovered that a number of them also used photography in their artwork. This realization led Dodge to accumulate photographs and photo-dependent artworks as an integral part of the Dodge Collection. *Beyond Memory* focuses on the unusual integration of photography with other artworks, since the Dodge photography and photo-related works are indeed extensive enough to warrant serious study.

In getting to know Norton Dodge, I soon learned that (like me) he is a photographer. While we never trade camera stories, we do trade stories of what it has been like to photograph in Russia—in his case, beginning in the mid-1950s Soviet Union. Upon urging him to show me some of his pictures, I was astonished to see the excellent photo-essays he published half a century ago in *U.S. News and World Report* (figs. 2 and 3).[2] Unnerving as it must have been for him to photograph under implicit Soviet prohibitions, his photographs convey a warmth and ordinariness of everyday Soviet life. I find it moving that Dodge made these pictures during the height of the Cold War when Americans had nearly no idea of what Soviet society actually looked like, a time when many American schoolchildren like me were required to study "anti-communism" in our public schools.

Beyond Memory is a product of the post–Cold War cross-cultural network forged between artists and writers from previously separated societies. While new openness is promising and offers hope for a more peaceful world, artists' fragile bonds are already strained by a weakening art market and other economic crises. During the past thirty years many former Soviet artists have emigrated to the West. By the 1970s Soviet Jews were often permitted to leave, and by the time the U.S.S.R. dissolved in 1991 anyone who could find a country to enter was free to leave. Soviet émigrés often keep their former communities alive even after moving far away, sometimes showing little interest in their new local cultural environment. Given current American global political dominance and a history of melting-pot immigration, it is not surprising that culturally porous America shows little interest in understanding the cultures it absorbs. Cross-readings, then, are like descriptions of the proverbial elephant gathered from different limited vantage points. I continually remind myself that I experience the world as an American and that Russians experience it otherwise.[3] Photography's disarmingly easy access often leads to misconceptions, although the medium harbors common understandings as well. *Beyond Memory* seeks to build bridges by bringing together Eastern and Western voices.[4]

Soviet nonconformist artists made positive use of difficult circumstances. Their photography illustrates



The Real Story of Russia

career than to discourage young people from striving for a career.

Q From the way you describe Russia—as a backward country, with all kinds of shortages, bad transportation and so forth—it's hard to understand how the Communists have succeeded in selling it to many parts of the world as something wonderful.

A If visitors could realize what the actual situation inside Russia is, it would be difficult to sell it. But so many people are not fully aware of conditions there.

Q But aren't the Russians always bringing in visiting delegations, like Chinese?

A When they bring the Chinese visitors in, the Russians show them the new University of Moscow, which is probably the finest educational plant in the world. They show them the magnificent buildings, the 6,000 single rooms for students, and then they take them up and down the wide avenues, and in the subways—to the Chinese it looks as if it is a fine system.

Q Did you run into Chinese everywhere you went in Russia, or just in Moscow?

A The majority were in Moscow.

Q Are the Soviets really concentrating on China?

A There is no question about it.

Q Propaganda is their big weapon?

A Yes.

Q How can the U. S. counter this propaganda?

A We should let anybody and everybody come to this country and let them stay as long as they like. We may have to control a few people, but that should be our policy.

Q You think this would expose some of the Communist propaganda?

A They can't help but be convinced that there is at least some inaccuracy in what they have been taught at home about our country. And if in return Russia would open up some there, it would be fine. We know so little firsthand about Russia. We have everything to gain by getting into some of the back areas there.

INDUSTRY: BEHIND U. S.—

Q In heavy industry, are the Russians up to the U. S.?

A No they are not. They have a long way to go, but they have made great progress.

Q They are concentrating on steel and a few basic products, such as tractors and railroads, but even in those fields they are still not up to us?

A That is true. Take locomotives and tractors, for example. They are still based largely on American models, although the Russians have developed some new ones of their own recently. Their automobiles are still largely modeled on foreign models.

Q President Franklin D. Roosevelt once referred to the Americans as being one third ill-fed, ill-clad and ill-housed. Do the Russians appear to be well fed and well clad and well housed?

A It is difficult to know what standards Roosevelt had in mind when he made this statement—but more than 90 per cent of the Russians are ill-fed, ill-clad and ill-housed, by what we would consider a good standard today. Of course it is unfair to compare Russia with the United States. In addition, Russia suffered terribly in the war. You should compare Russia with the poorer sections of Europe. Then Russia shows up more favorably. If you compare Russia with Asia, you will find standards better and that, of course, accounts in part for the appeal which Russia has for the Asiatic peoples.

Q You mean they are better off than the Chinese?

A Yes. They bring the Chinese to Moscow and show them

(*Continued on page 112*)

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MOSCOW'S PARK BENCHES . . . . . . ON A SUNNY AFTERNOON

SNAPPY UNIFORMS win admiring glances from two schoolgirls

KNOTTY CHESS PROBLEM

HIDE AND SEEK

U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, July 8, 1955

SPRINGTIME ROMANCE

A BIT OF GOSSIP

U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, July 8, 1955

The Real Story of Russia

RED SOLDIERS AND STALIN

FATHER AND SON

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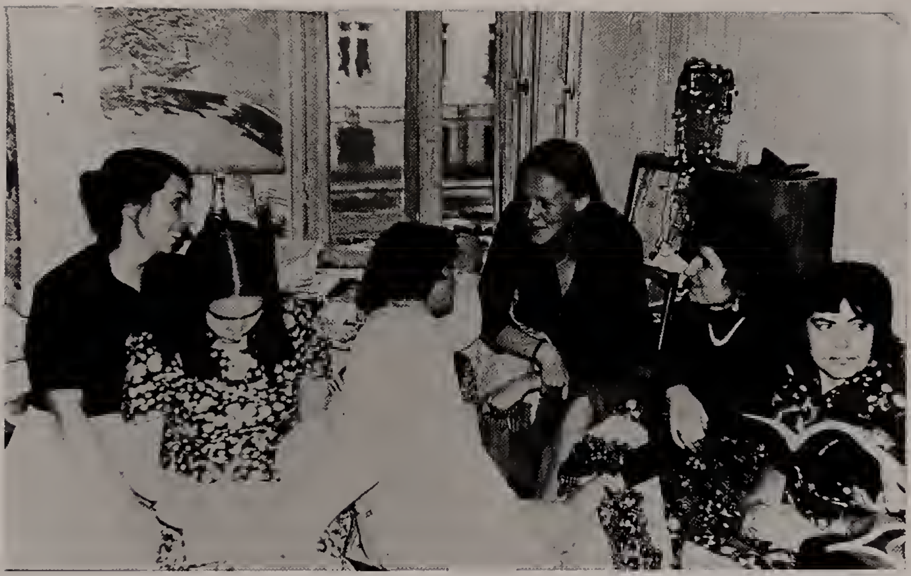
Fig. 3. Norton Dodge, *Moscow's Park Benches ... On a Sunny Afternoon*, photographs reproduced in "Uncensored: The Real Story of Russia (Exclusive Eyewitness Account by Dr. Homer Dodge and Norton Dodge)," special issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, July 8, 1955. Courtesy of Norton Dodge.

their resourcefulness in dodging state censorship and in getting by with very poor materials. *Beyond Memory* underscores Soviet artists' unusually ironic and inventive uses of photography that presage the medium's prominence today. While many similarities exist between Soviet and Western art photography, Soviet artists' finely honed irony, sense of absurdity, and biting wit remain unsurpassed. Their clever invention of means and meanings was in no way limited to photography; indeed, such ingenuity is characteristic of the nonconformist art movement as a whole, and an examination of photo-related art deepens understanding of the larger Soviet underground art movement.

While *Beyond Memory* specifically explores late Soviet photography, surprisingly it reveals the universal character, range, and potential of the photographic medium itself. *Beyond Memory* is doubly focused: one eye on Russian art, and the other on the medium of photography. Exceedingly canny Soviet uses shed light on photography's possibilities. Photography, which has everywhere challenged all aspects of art, culture, and media, is now in turn challenged by digital developments. That photography is a most fluid medium is evidenced by the Dodge Collection and is at the heart of *Beyond Memory*.

Within the framework of the Dodge Collection's more than twenty thousand works of visual art produced in the Soviet Union from approximately 1956 to 1986 are several thousand photographs and photo-related works of art, often not classified as such. The widely varied images echo photography's vast array of forms. Many are conventional black-and-white gelatin silver prints made from normal negatives. The collection also contains camera-manipulated images (close-up, blurred, out of focus, abstract, multiple exposures, and so on), darkroom-manipulated prints (including multiple negatives, montage, solarization, and toning), and altered prints (cut, folded, hand-colored, embellished, or with added handwritten or typed text). Included as well are works of other mediums (collage,



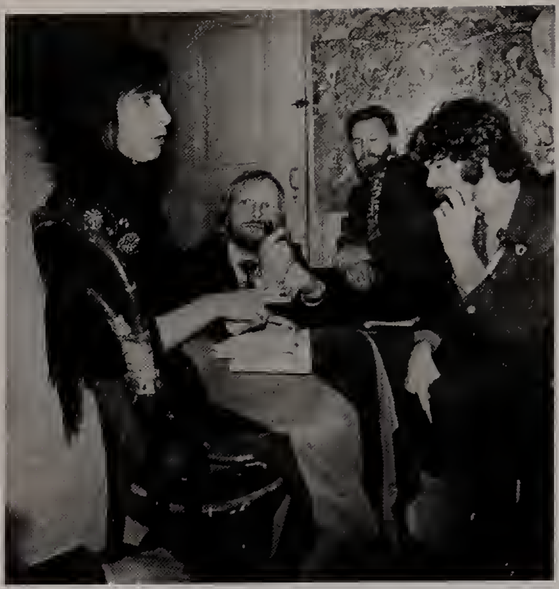


Fig. 4 (*above left*). At the apartment of N. Malakhovskaia, photographer and date unknown. Photo archive of Dodge Collection, ZAM.

Fig. 5 (*above right*). Elena Shvarts reciting poetry, the artist Yurii Zharkikh (with microphone), and Viktor Krivulin, Leningrad, photographer and date unknown. Photo archive of Dodge Collection, ZAM.

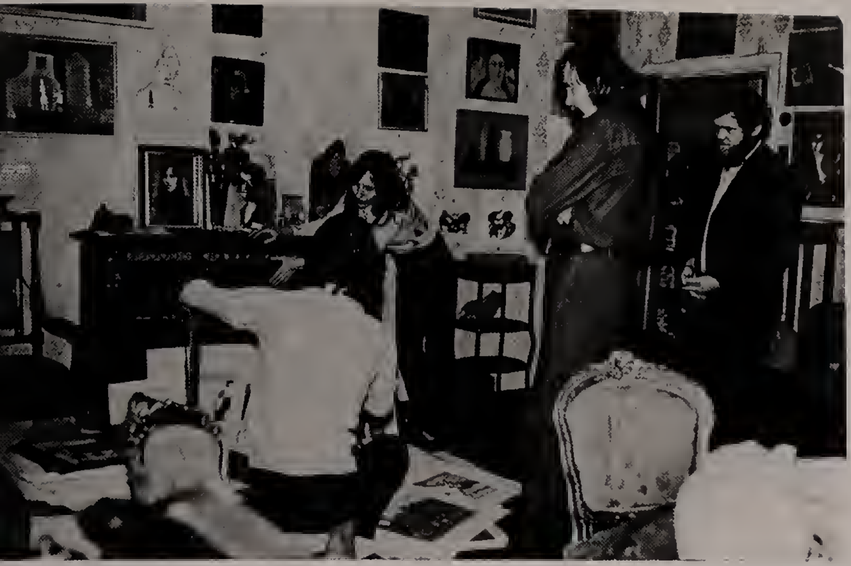
photo-mechanical printed matter, graphics, and painting) that incorporate photography and works that are not themselves photographic but are directly influenced by photography (photo-realist drawing, prints, and painting). Artist-made samizdat (self-published) books; complex, large-scale photo installations; and many other surprising applications of the medium also appear.

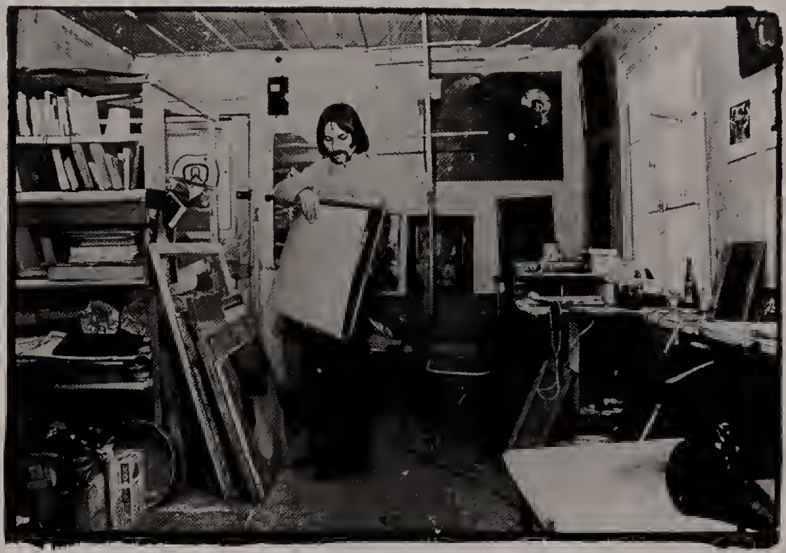
Just as the material range is immense, the nature of the imagery is tremendously varied. Late Soviet photography continued to enjoy the traditional approaches to landscape, portraiture, still life, narrative, and reportage that were prevalent elsewhere. The Dodge Collection is particularly strong in innovative, provocative photographs generally classified as conceptual art rather than as photography, even though photography is precisely what they are. For example, the collection includes photo-documentation of performance art that ultimately replaces the initial event and takes on a life of its own. In addition, although probably never intended as art, the collection's extensive archive of snapshots of Soviet artists and their world is of great historical and aesthetic value (figs. 4–9).

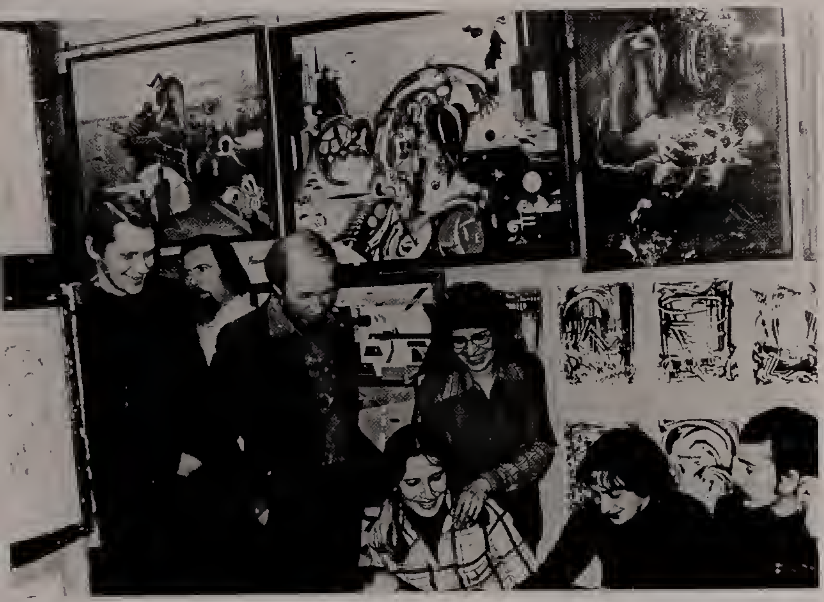
For the most part, historical and critical analysis of Soviet photography has been a post-Soviet discourse. With the exception of early constructivist masters, developments in Soviet and Russian photography are ignored in American and European histories of photography. Indeed, the scholarly study of photography itself only recently emerged in the West (coincidentally during the same period examined by the Dodge Collection). The contribution to the study of Soviet photography by art historian, critic, and curator Margarita Tupitsyn has fortunately begun to address this absence.[5]

My own experience in the Soviet Union began during its last days in the summer of 1991. Those days and the first days of the new "former Soviet Union" were an astounding, much-written-about time. I first went to Moscow to photograph as an exchange artist and quickly fell in love with the Moscow artists' community and with Russian art and photography.[6] My experience in Russia has radically transformed my photographic practice. I felt liberated by the beauty of dirty bad prints, impossible to mimic—although I saw many "fine" prints as defined by American academic standards—and I found Russian irony infectious. As a photographer, then, I have organized the present volume and exhibition.

In preparation for my first trip to Moscow, I cajoled my family into taking me to Baltimore so that I could see *Photomanifesto*, one of the first large contemporary Soviet photography exhibitions to be presented in the Unites States.[7] There, among a range of wonderful works, I found several collages by Gennady Goushchin (see fig. 107, p. 130; figs. 136 and 137, p. 164). In one, composed of layered, cut, photo-mechanical reproductions, Goushchin featured a familiar officially published portrait of then–Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, through whose face peered the Mona Lisa (fig. 10). Goushchin's work—which I read as a commentary on perestroika—so excited me that the hope of seeing more gave direction to my forthcoming trip. With some difficulty, I tracked Goushchin down through my newly found







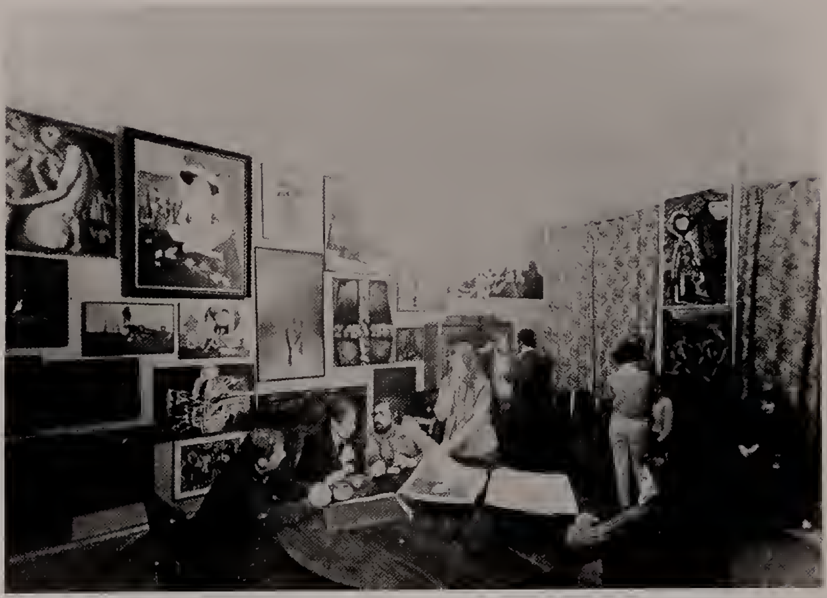


Fig. 6 (*top left*). Preparation for the February 1976 exhibition of works by Ukrainian artists at the apartment of Aida Khmeleva. From left to right: artist Volodymyr Strelnikov, Khmeleva, artist Feodosii Gumeniuk, and photographer Yurii Aksenov. Photograph by Valentin Serov, 1975. Photo archive of Dodge Collection, ZAM.

Fig. 7 (*top right*). Vladimir Makarenko in his studio, photographer unknown, 1976–77. Photo archive of Dodge Collection, ZAM.

Fig. 8 (*above left*). Apartment exhibition, Piskarevka, Leningrad, 1978. Photograph by Aliona (Valentina Sergeeva). Photo archive of Dodge Collection, ZAM.

Fig. 9 (*above right*). Apartment exhibition, Zheliabova Street, Leningrad, December 7–21, 1980. Photograph by Aliona (Valentina Sergeeva). Photo archive of Dodge Collection, ZAM.

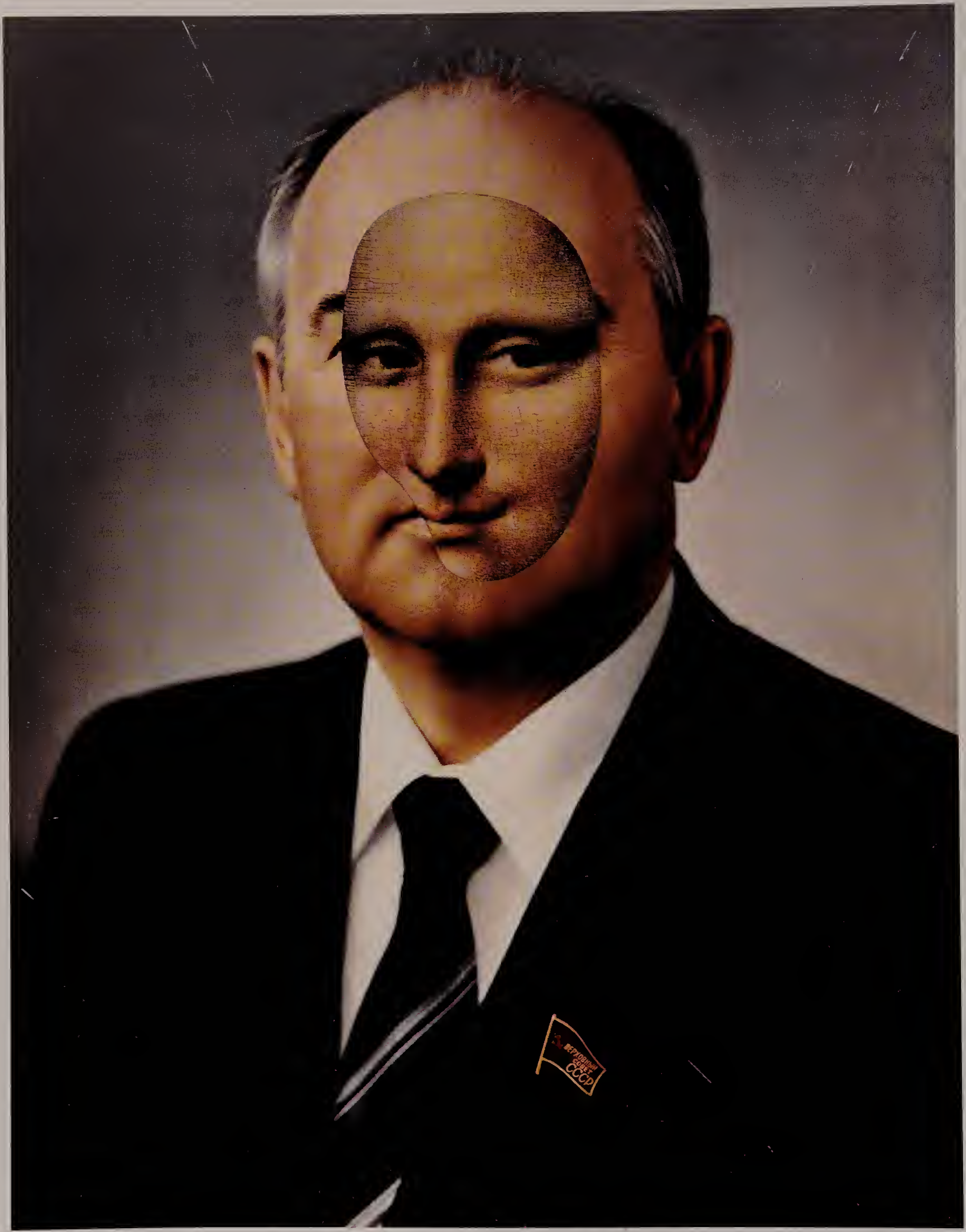

ВЕРХОВНЫЙ СОВЕТ СССР

Fig. 10. Gennady Goushchin, *Renaissance Portrait* from the series *Alternative Museum*, 1989–90.
Photo collage, 54.6 x 42.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14577.

friend, photographer and photo historian Valery Stigneev (see p. 67). I learned that Goushchin's works are commentaries on the history of painting, both Russian painting and Western painting as experienced in Soviet culture. They provoke intense debate and are far more complex than I had first understood. Goushchin showed me more works in his central Moscow studio (the former studio of painter Eric Bulatov, who had emigrated to Paris, leaving behind many traces of his work; Alla Rosenfeld discusses his work later in this volume). Through a cousin who generously interpreted for us on numerous occasions, Goushchin patiently introduced me to the history of Russian and Soviet art. His collages, which critique historical and contemporary politics, reflect his deep understanding of art history and its place in the Soviet public sphere. Years later I was pleased to see many of these same collages by Gennady Goushchin become part of the Dodge Collection.

My proximity to the collection in recent years has enabled me to discover many new works as well as to reacquaint myself with images I originally saw in Russia.[8] On that first trip I began what would become a long-standing working relationship between Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, and the Russian Union of Art Photographers (RUAP). Sergei Gitman, then secretary of RUAP, introduced me to many photographers who used a range of practices to produce work very different from that of Goushchin.[9] For example, Vladimir Diakonov[10] (fig. 11), a young photographer who worked for the union, and Galina Moskaleva (fig. 12), a well-known photographer from Minsk, Belarus, extended the medium of photography by toning and hand coloring their prints in ways especially popular in the 1980s.[11] Yet these two artists' works are dissimilar: Diakonov created an imaginary world, while Moskaleva drew on her personal and local Minsk history.

On my second trip to Russia in 1992, many friends introduced me to the work of Boris Mikhailov (figs. 13 and 14). Although I didn't then meet Mikhailov (who at that time had lived his entire life in Kharkov, Ukraine), I was taken with his work and recognized its significance. When I returned to New York I was asked to give a lecture on an MIT traveling exhibition curated by John P. Jacob, *The Missing Picture*,[12] which featured a large selection of Mikhailov's work along with the works of four younger conceptual artist-photographers from Moscow. I was so excited by the variety of Mikhailov's pieces I nearly convinced the host curators that more than one artist had created them. Ultimately Jacob had to set us straight—the works were indeed all made by one man.

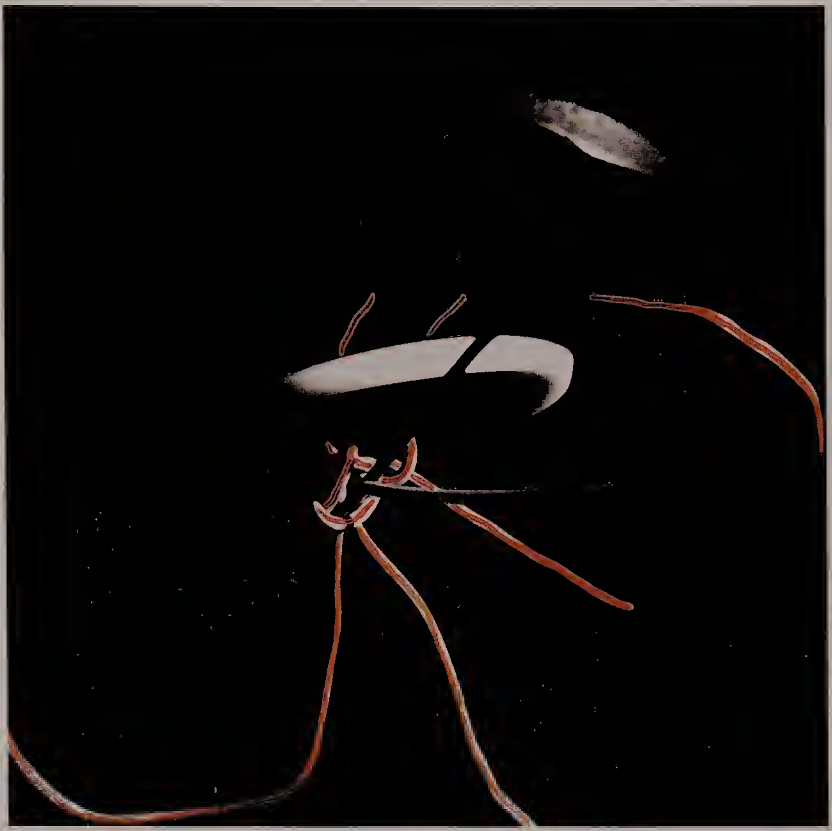


Fig. 11. Vladimir Diakonov, Untitled, undated. Tempera over gelatin silver print, 16.4 x 16.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14785.

A few months later, on my next trip to Moscow in January 1993, Mikhailov and I met. He stunned me by being the first Russian photographer to ask about my work, and with no shared language other than a Russian-English/English-Russian dictionary we passed back and forth, he insisted upon seeing it before sharing his own. (Such restraint is unusual. As I am sure Norton Dodge would confirm, Russian artists take any opportunity to show their works. I have spent many hours around kitchen tables—with tea or vodka—looking at boxes of hundreds of photos.) Mikhailov, a profoundly curious man, did as much looking as he did showing. He has had an enormous effect on other Russian photographers, and he has been the single greatest influence on my own work. Over the past decade many of his pieces have become part of the Dodge Collection, and numerous authors in this volume discuss his work.

The Dodge Collection also contains works by a few of the younger artists featured in *The Missing Picture*, including Vladimir Kupriyanov (see fig. 90, p. 106). Perhaps he crumpled his series of rephotographed

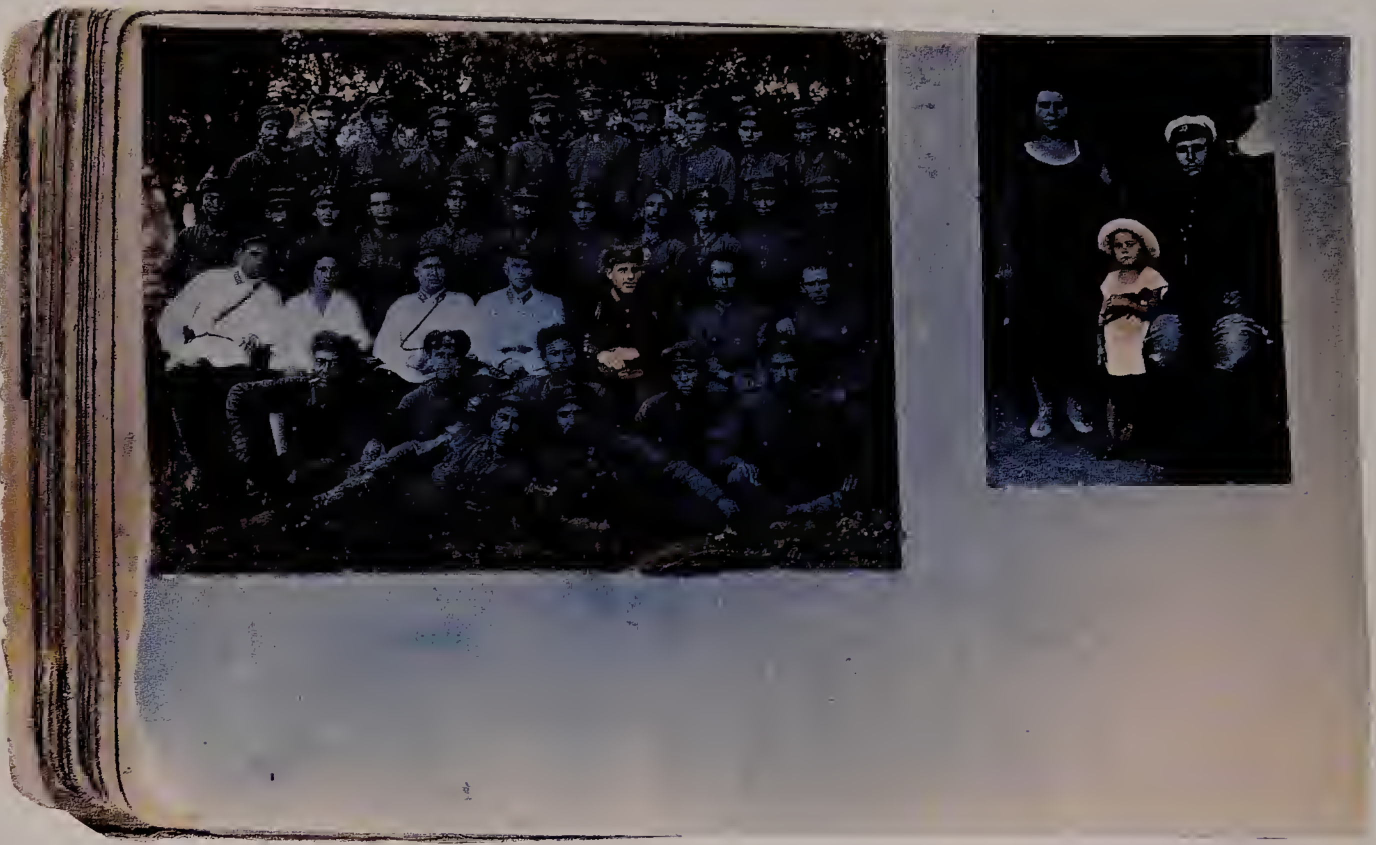


Fig. 12. Galina Moskaleva, No. 4 from the series *Soviet Album*, 1987. Toned gelatin silver print, 15 x 23.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16176.

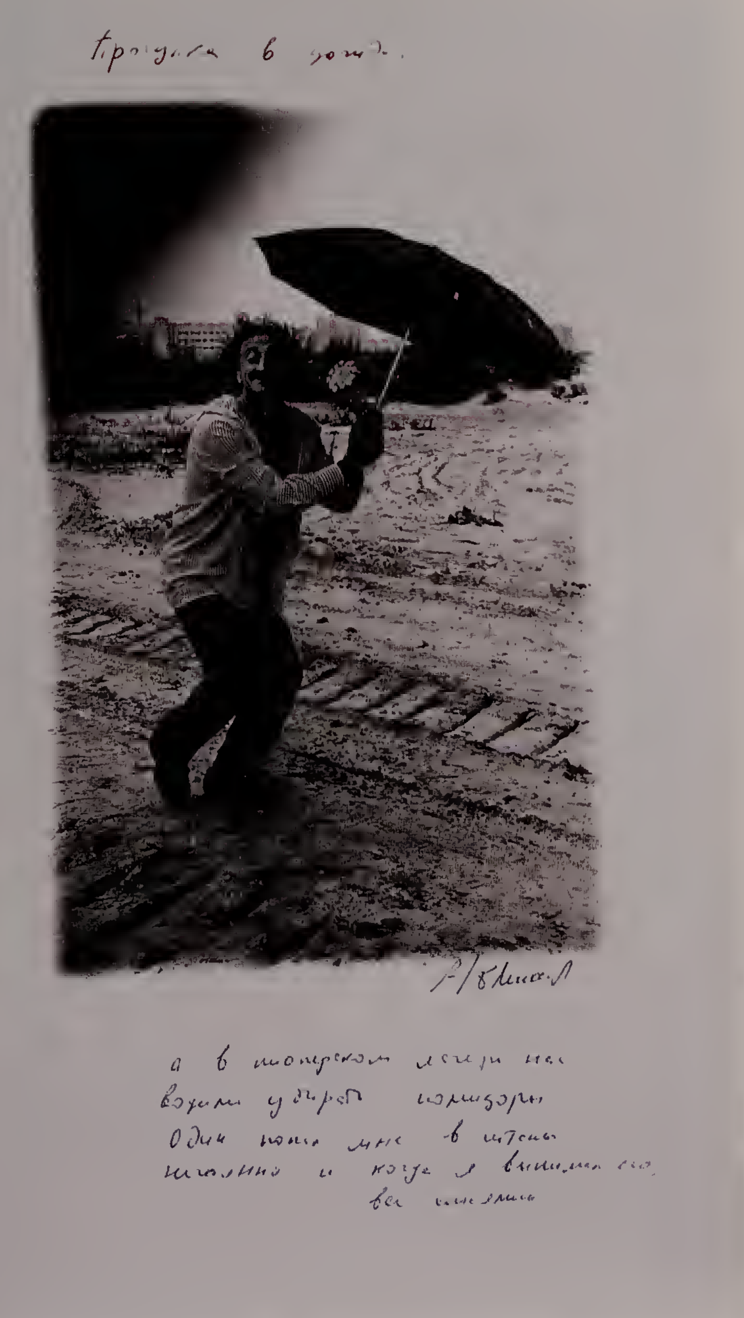
found portraits, *Middle Russian Landscape* (fig. 15), to symbolize thrown-away histories.

The collection itself is a living force that continues to grow. Last summer in Berlin, I was shown a conceptual sequence, *Mirror I* (figs. 16A and B), performed for the camera by Ivan Chuikov, an artist usually associated with painting whom I'd met in Moscow and who divides his time between there and Germany. The Dodge Collection has since acquired the witty series, allowing me to revisit the theatrical sleight of hand. Chuikov's cleverly constructed narrative defies reality's stronghold on photography by using conventional photos to record his staging of the impossible.

A unique photo-related work that attests to the scope of the collection was created by Valeriy Gerlovin and Rimma Gerlovina and presented to Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich on the occasion of their wedding (figs. 17A and B). *Novatsky's Wedding* is a reliquary of thirty-four plastic display boxes filled with significant items that are installed in a large grid. Bits and pieces of the objects inside the boxes have dislodged over time, and the Gerlovins themselves undertook the restoration in order to exhibit the works in *Beyond Memory*. Thus the Dodge Collection is more than an archive for exhibition and research materials; it is also active in art conservation.

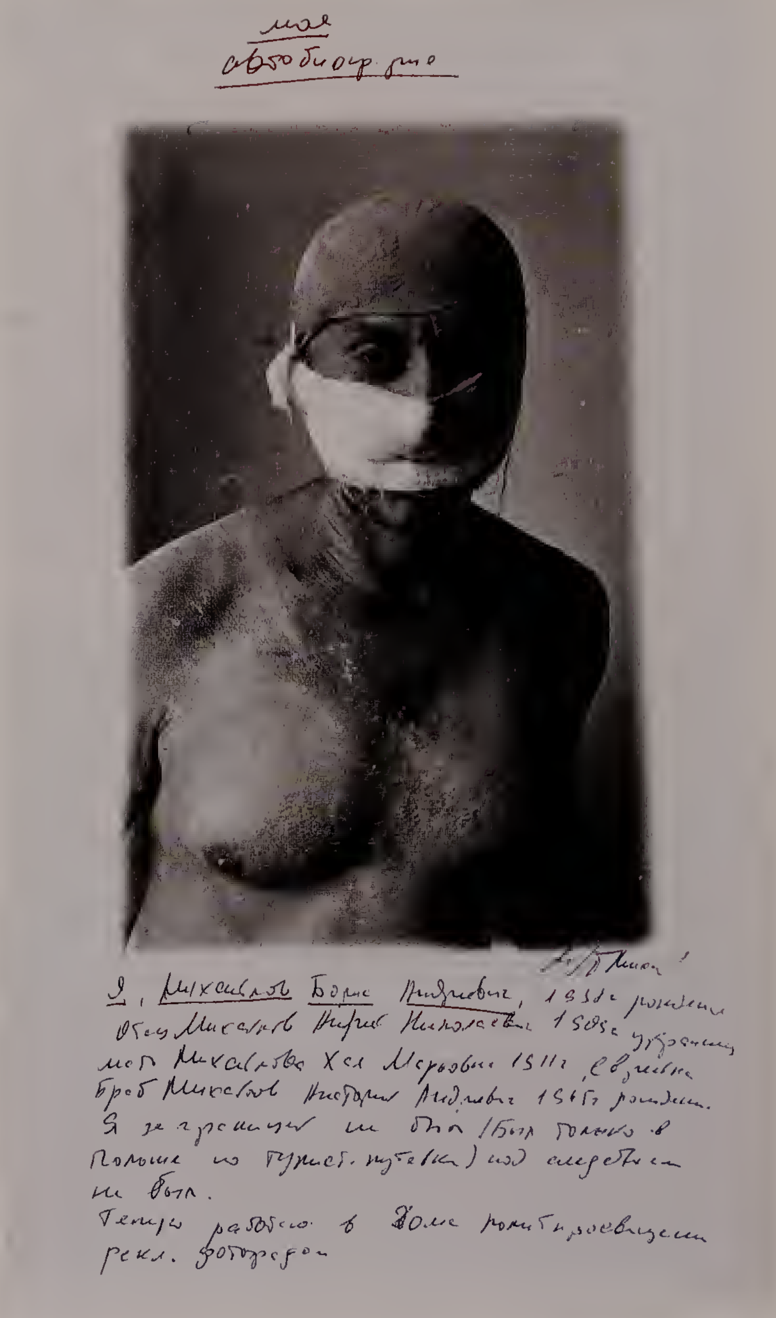
The importance of the Dodge Collection to art historians and other scholars is evident; less obvious is its enormous value to working artists.[13] Unlike most of his Soviet contemporaries, Francisco Infante, in his formal experiments with photographic illusion and perception, shared concerns with contemporaneous artists in the West (see figs. 128–30, pp. 158 and 159; and the back cover). *Artefacts* from the series *Life of a Triangle* (fig. 18) offers an excellent example of such a formal experiment that cannot be seen anywhere else in the United States, since Soviet artists have not been included in American and European histories of recent and contemporary art. Discovering Infante's exquisite handmade artist's book *Presence* (fig. 19) was a highlight of my research in the collection.[14]

Another artist's book I discovered in the archive, by Andrei Monastyrsky (figs. 20A and B), is as much *about* photography as it is an example *of* photography. The book's wonderful cover is made of a used red Unibrom photo-paper package—as recognizable to Soviets



Прогулка в дождь.

а в пионерском лагере нас водили убирать помидоры. Один попал мне в штаны нечаянно и когда я вынимал его, все смеялись



моя автобиография

Я, Михайлов Борис Андреевич, 1938г рождения украинец. Отец Михайлов Андрей Николаевич 1909г украинец, мать Михайлова Хая Марковна 1911г, еврейка, брат Михайлов Анатолий Андреевич 1945г рождения. Я за границей не был (был только в Польше по турист. путевке) под следствием не был. Теперь работаю в Доме политпросвещения рекл. фотографом

Fig. 13 (*above left*). Boris Mikhailov, *Walk in the Rain* from the series *Viscidity*, undated. Sepia-toned gelatin silver print with handwritten notes in crayon, 30 x 18 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25257. Translation:

> *A Walk in the Rain. At the Young Pioneers camp I was sent to gather tomatoes. One tomato slipped into my trousers. When I tried to get it out, they all laughed.*

Fig. 14 (*above right*). Boris Mikhailov, *My Autobiography* from the series *Viscidity*, undated. Sepia-toned gelatin silver print with handwritten notes in crayon, 30 x 18 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25259. Translation:

> *I, Mikhailov Boris Andreevich, born 1938, Ukrainian. Father Mikhailov Andrei Nikolaevich, Ukrainian, born 1909. Mother Mikhailova Khaya Markovna, Jewish, born 1911. Brother, Mikhailov Anatolii Andreevich. The only foreign country I have been to is Poland. I have no criminal record. Now I am employed as a photographer at the House of Political Education (in actual fact I am in charge of cleaning the floors). After my marriage to Marina I had the idea of renovating my apartment. It is 3 x 3 m = 9 m. I called my friend; we had been students together. He said it would cost 100 rubles and then we did it ourselves. That is normal. If you measure the biceps with a thread, the circumference is 30.5 cm.*

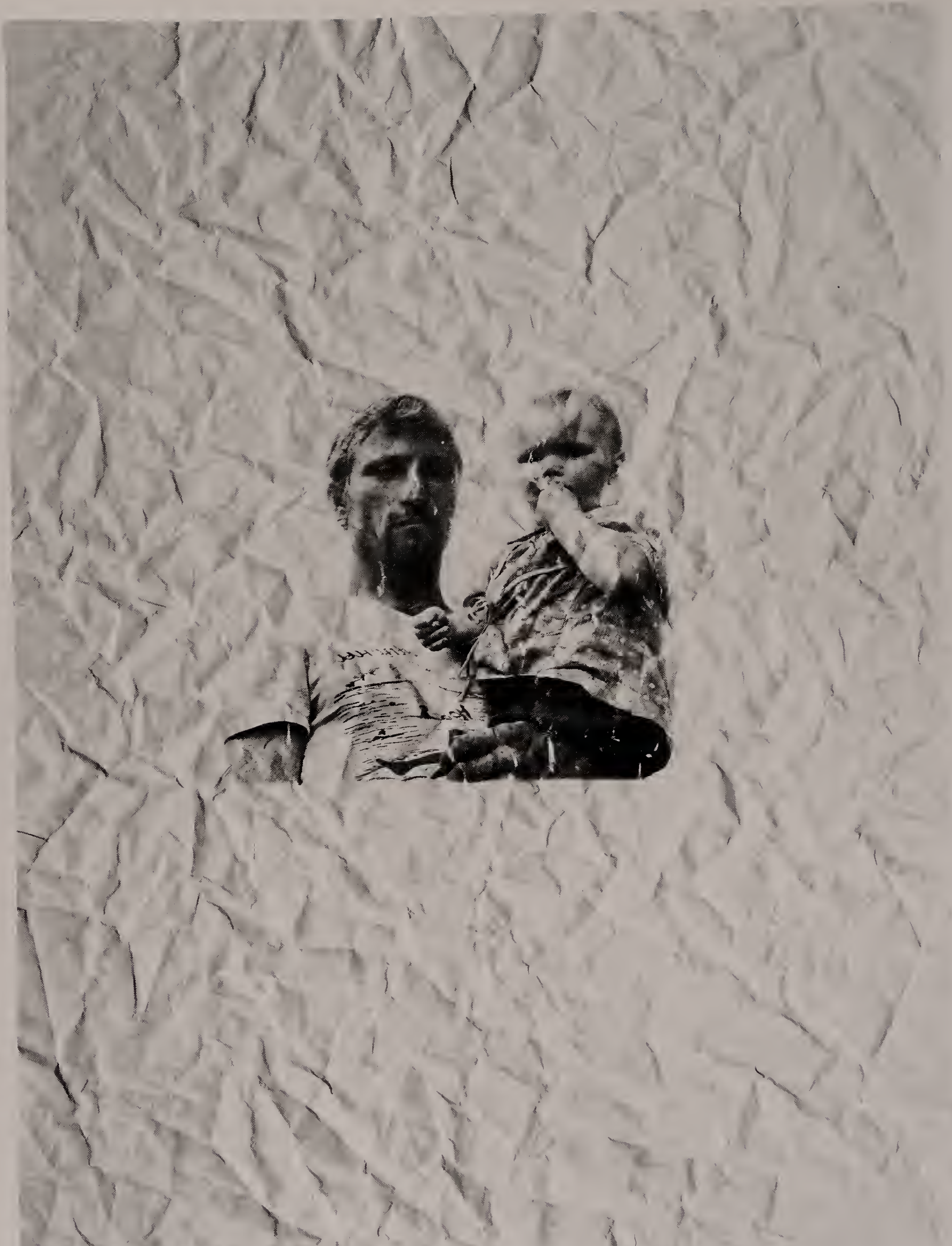


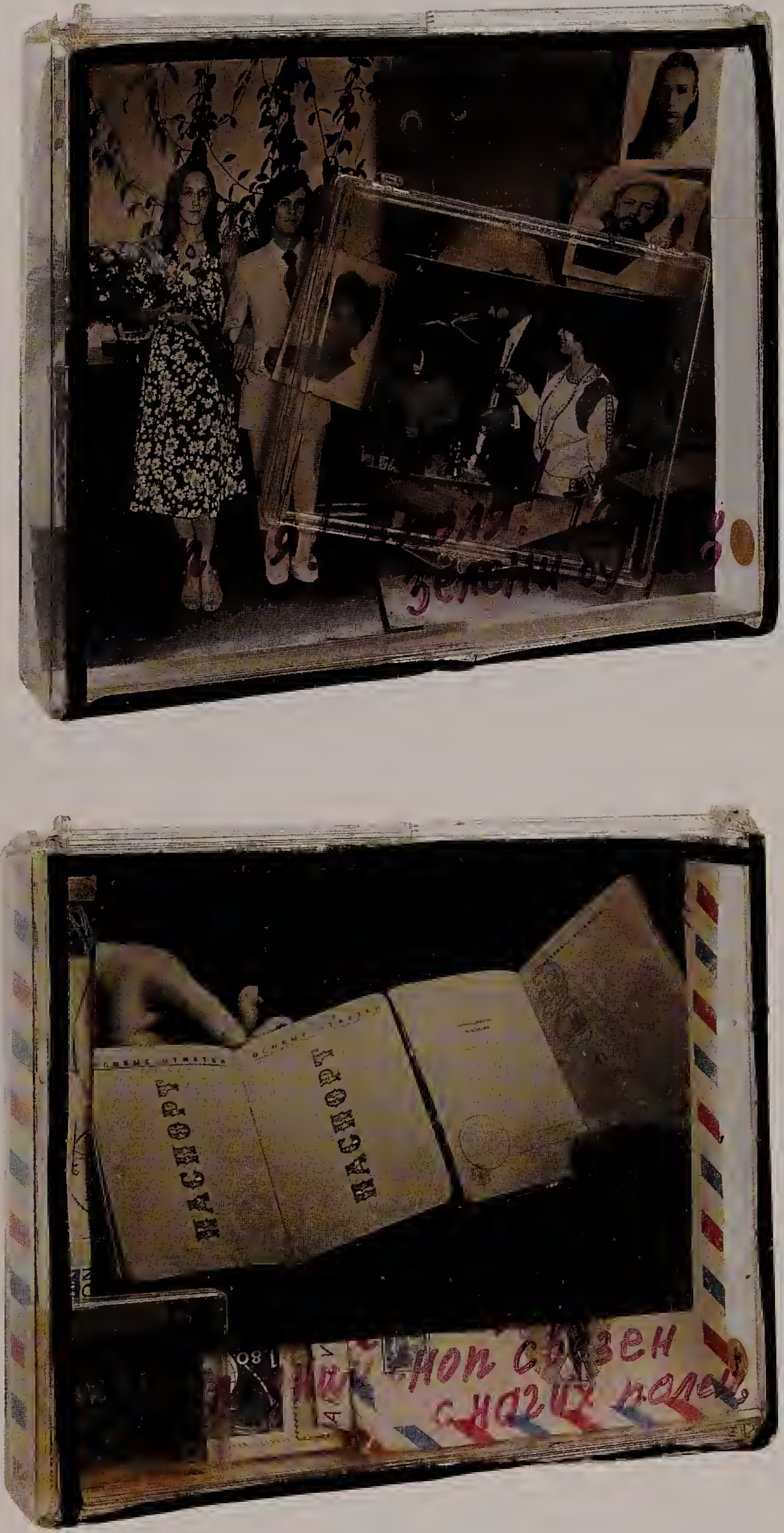
Fig 15. Vladimir Kupriyanov, No. 3 from the series *Middle Russian Landscape*, 1988. Gelatin silver print on paper, 39 x 29 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16093.

Figs. 16A and B. Ivan Chuikov, *Mirror I*, 1977. Gelatin silver prints, 24.3 x 19.2 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25185.01–03 and 25185.04–06.

as Kodak gold packaging is to Americans. The typed verses (musings about the nature of representation and the artist's and poet's mission) verbally echo the cityscapes seen in Igor Makarevich's photos of Moscow window views that are glued above the words. We could say of Monastyrsky's small work that the medium is the message and that this book can be judged by its cover.

During the last few days of preparing this book's illustrations to go to press, I noticed a work that lay on a table just at the edge of my field of vision. From a distance I was intrigued by its design, and as a treat to myself I arranged to take a good look after I completed my work. Like Monastyrsky's *Unibrom* book, the untitled arrangement of six pairs of images by Georgii Kizevalter (fig. 21) refers to the materiality of photography. In each pair, on the left is an actual graphic swatch, and to the right of each "original" is its black-and-white photographic reproduction. Thinking about this work made me reflect on how all the illustrations reproduced in *Beyond Memory* are possible only through yet another generation of photographic reproduction. Awareness that you are now looking at photomechanical reproductions as you read this volume extends Kizevalter's observation of the phenomenon of representation and reproduction.

Beyond Memory presents diverse thinking on the photography, aesthetics, and politics of late Soviet culture. The writings and images that compose this volume reflect an astonishing range of topics and photographic practices. Some writers are specialists in photography, while others are authorities on Soviet and Russian visual arts. The authors are journalists, art historians, art critics, and artist-photographers. Some have institutional affiliations; others do not. The contributors come from varied backgrounds: they are lifelong Americans, Balkans, and Russians as well as Soviet-born Americans and Europeans. One of the



Figs. 17A and B. Valeriy Gerlovin and Rimma Gerlovina, *The Interchangeable Graphic of Happiness (The Wedding of Liubov and Viktor Novatsky)*, Photographed by Igor Makarevich, Moscow, 1978. Mixed-media installation, 18 x 21 x 4 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 01385.09 and 01385.01.

most difficult aspects of orchestrating a group of such divergent voices is to protect their differences despite the necessity to translate and edit the works into one volume. All of these voices are critical to developing an understanding of Soviet nonconformist photographic practices.

In the opening essay, "Painting versus Photography: A Battle of Mediums in Twentieth-Century Russian Visual Culture," Kiev-born, Washington-based art historian Konstantin Akinsha scrutinizes Soviet art photography, identifying and assessing historical shifts in photography's position as an art medium since the Russian revolution. Akinsha demonstrates how photography's role within Soviet visual arts has always been intrinsically—if antagonistically—linked to the contemporaneous role of painting.

Elena Barkhatova, Head of the Print Department of the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, provides a context for nonconformist photography in her survey of state control, "Soviet Policy on Photography." This well-researched, detailed indictment of Soviet undermining of photography is complemented by Moscow photographer and photo historian Valery Stigneev's "The Force of the Medium: The Soviet Amateur Photography Movement," a study of the dynamic Soviet amateur photo club movement and its active part in the development of aesthetic tendencies in Soviet photography.

Both Alexander Borovsky, Head of the Contemporary Art Department at the Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg, and Moscow art critic Ekaterina Bobrinskaya address aspects of how the body is represented in photography. Borovsky's playful text, "Closer to the Body," explores subversive meanings of the photographed human body. He shows how, in spite of prohibitions, the nude subject did play a significant role in Soviet photography. In "Freeze Frame: Photography and Performance in Moscow Conceptual Art," Bobrinskaya examines photography's indispensable contribution to Moscow performance art in which photo documentation ultimately replaces the original artistic act.

Ekaterina Degot and Boris Groys also address Moscow conceptual art in their analyses of different aspects of that movement. In her essay, "The Copy Is the Crime: Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography," Moscow critic and curator

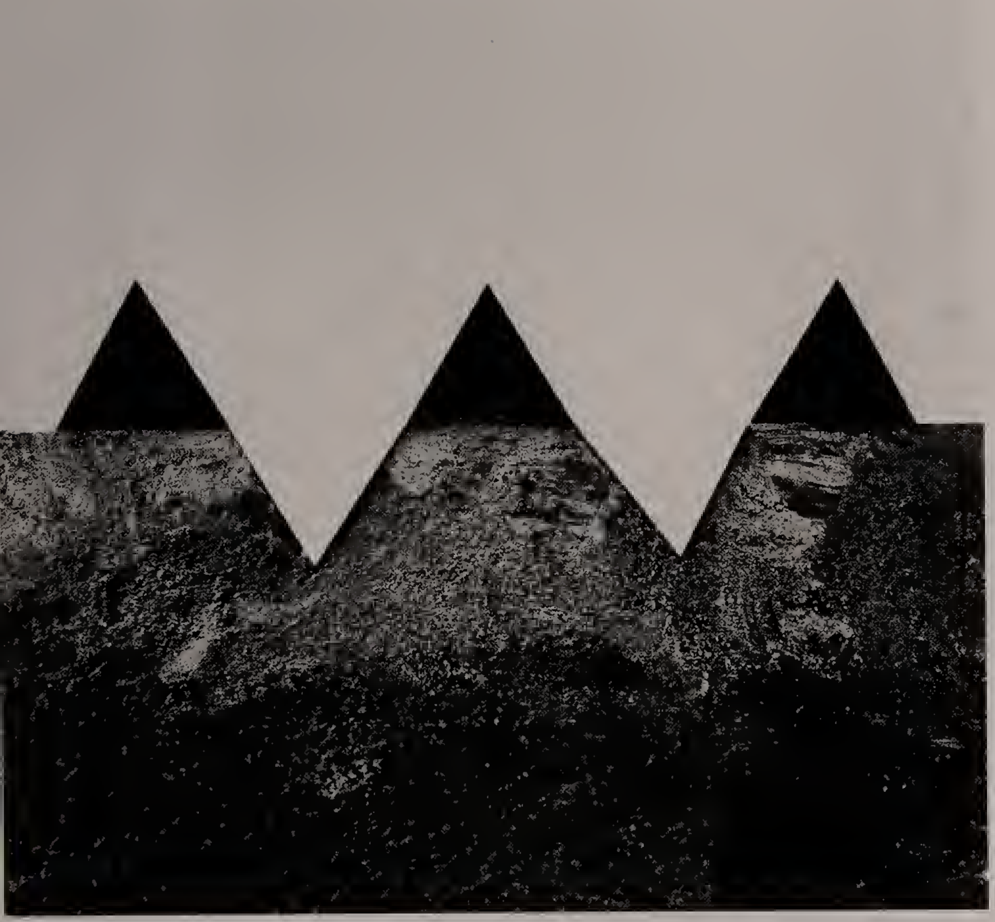
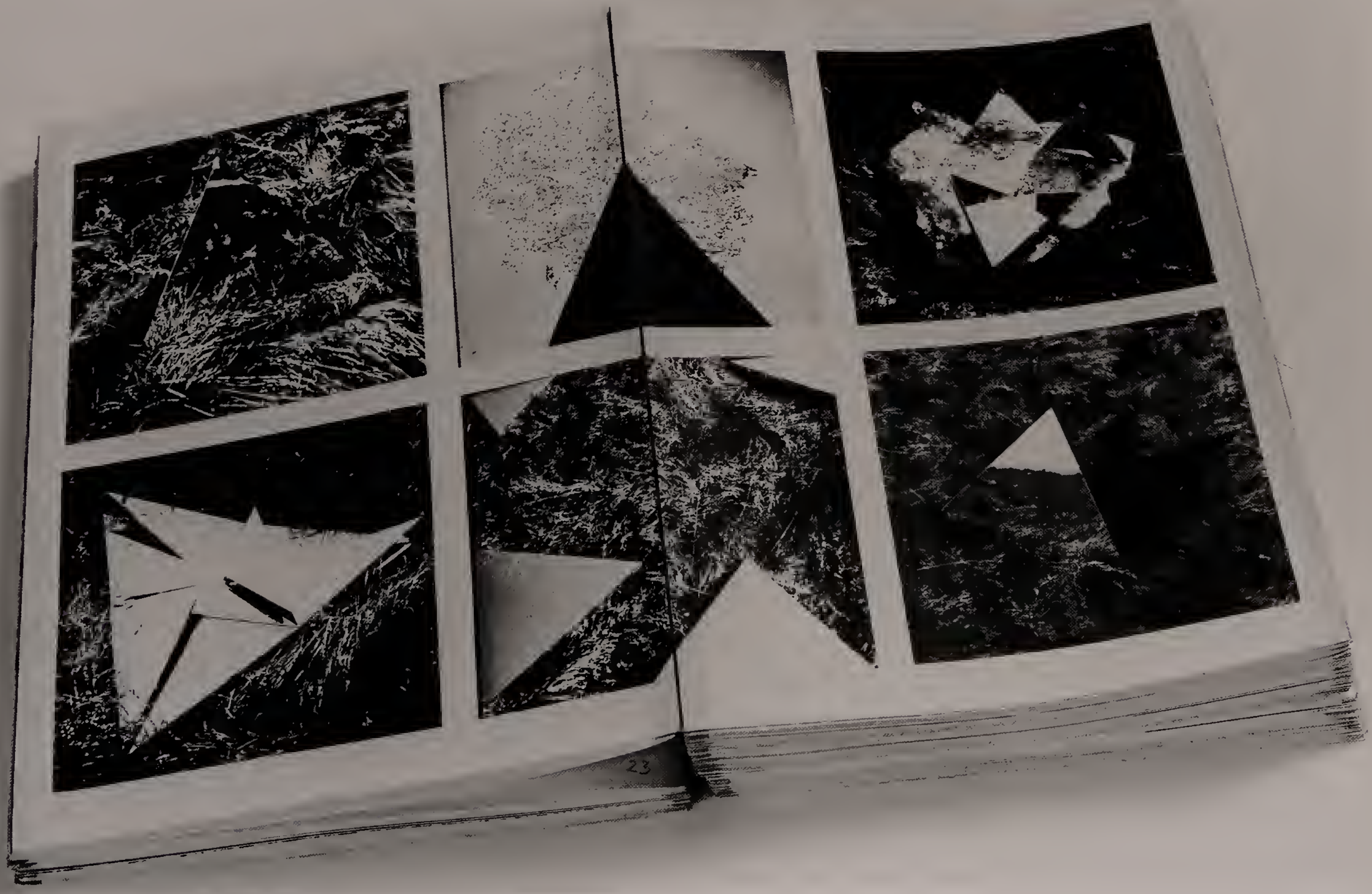


Fig. 18. Francisco Infante, *Artefacts* from the series *Life of a Triangle*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 50.6 x 50.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 03881.

Fig. 19. Francisco Infante, Artist's handmade book *Prisutstvie* (Presence), undated. A-Ya Archive, Dodge Collection, ZAM.



Figs. 20A and B. Andrei Monastyrsky, Cover and interior spread of artist's handmade book, 1987. Gelatin silver prints and printed text on paper, 21.3 x 14.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10036.

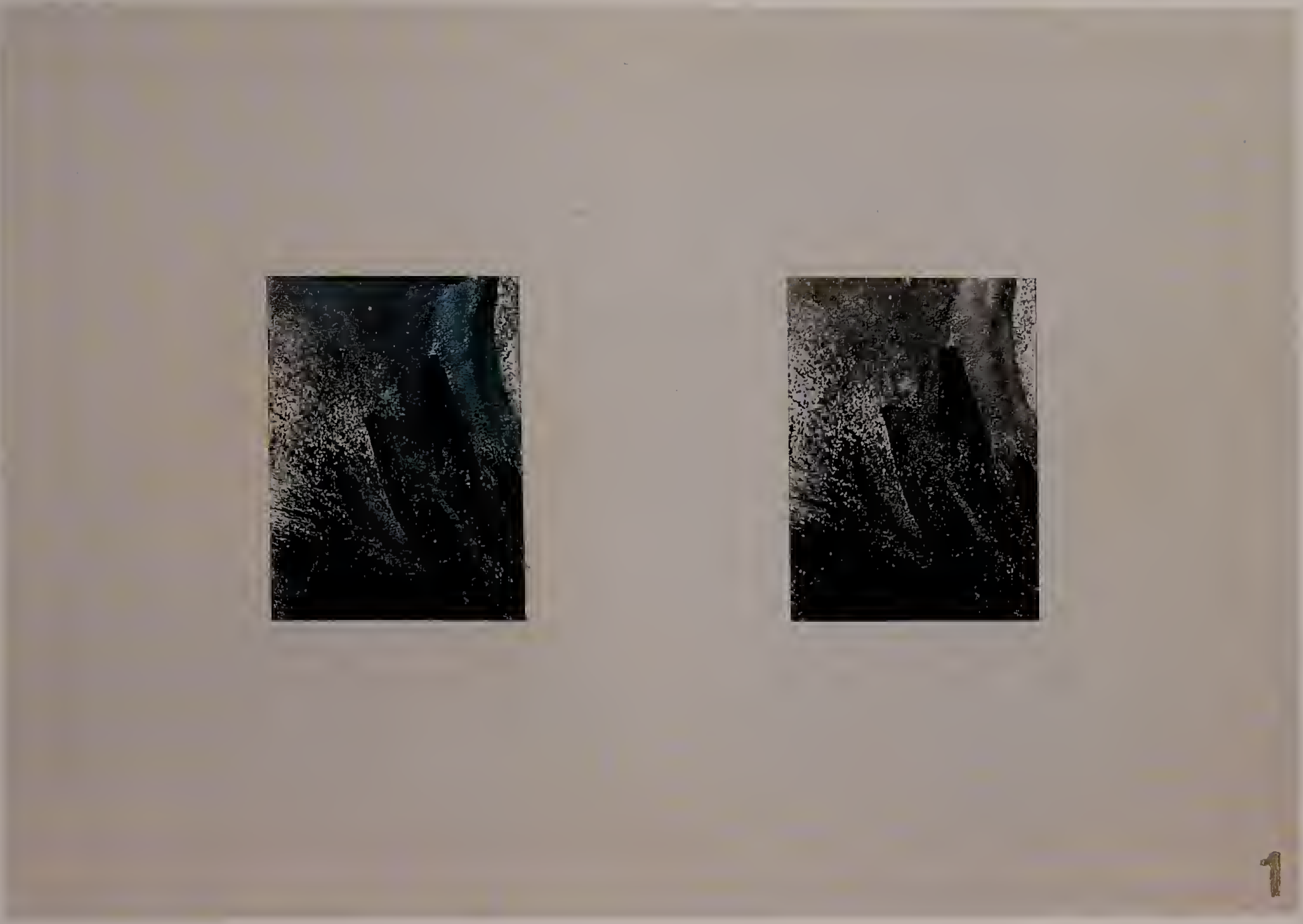


Fig. 21. Georgii Kizevalter, No. 1 in an untitled series, undated. Gouache and gelatin silver print, 20.4 x 28.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10067.01.

Degot establishes that Soviet drawing and painting borrowed photographic imagery even before such imagery was blatantly lifted by radical artists. In "Russian Photography in the Textual Context," Russian-educated Groys, Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe, considers the roles of photography and the Russian literary tradition in Moscow conceptual art.

As Director and Curator of Russian and Soviet Nonconformist Art at the Zimmerli Art Museum, Leningrad-born Alla Rosenfeld knows the Dodge Collection intimately and has researched the full scope of its photo-dependent works. In "Stretching the Limits: On Photo-Related Works of Art in the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection," she discusses a stunning array of artworks that rely upon photography, from straight photo documentation to collage and graphics that incorporate photography and on to photo-realist painting. While the other essays focus on particular issues within the collection, Rosenfeld's contribution reflects her knowledge of its rich range and serves as a key to the collection.

"Naked in the Grass: Absurdity and Play in the Ideological Field" is a cyber conversation between Russian-born Lev Manovich, Associate Professor of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego, and American photographer Nick Muellner, Assistant Professor of Visual Art at Ithaca College, who has a long-standing interest in Russian culture. In their e-mail dialogue, Manovich and Muellner delve into nonconformist Soviet art practices that they draw into the context of international 1970s and 1980s conceptual art, a linkage rarely recognized.

Ernest Larsen and Jason Francisco apply Western critical discourse to Soviet photography. New York–based American media critic Larsen brings a Western cultural studies perspective to his discussion of parallel U.S.S.R. and U.S. art tendencies and makes astute East-West Cold War connections in "Subversive Photography: U.S. Theory Meets Soviet Practice." Through "The Shock of the Posthumous: Vladimir Syomin's Caucasus Project," photographer Francisco, Assistant Professor of Visual Art at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, develops a way

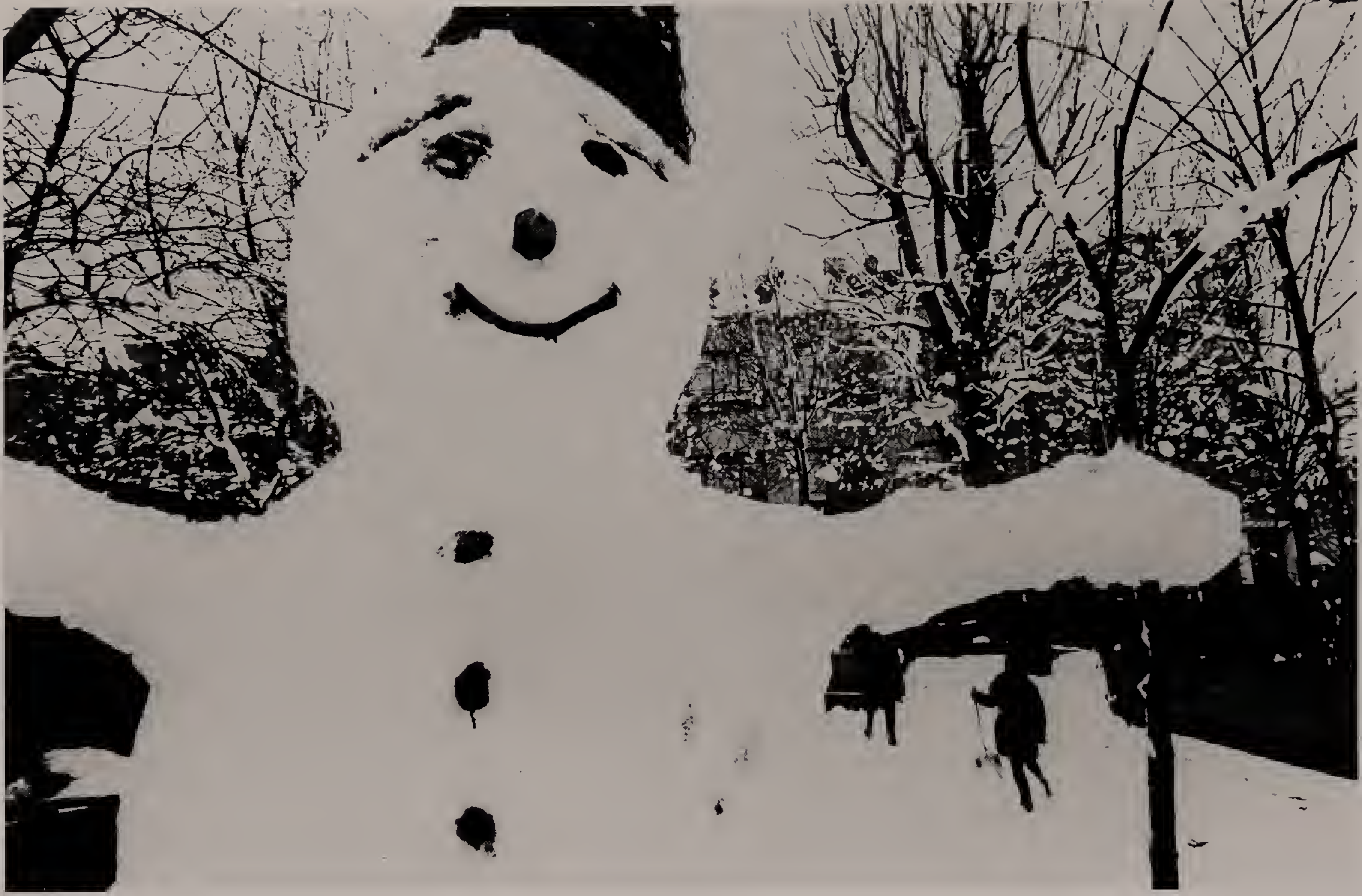


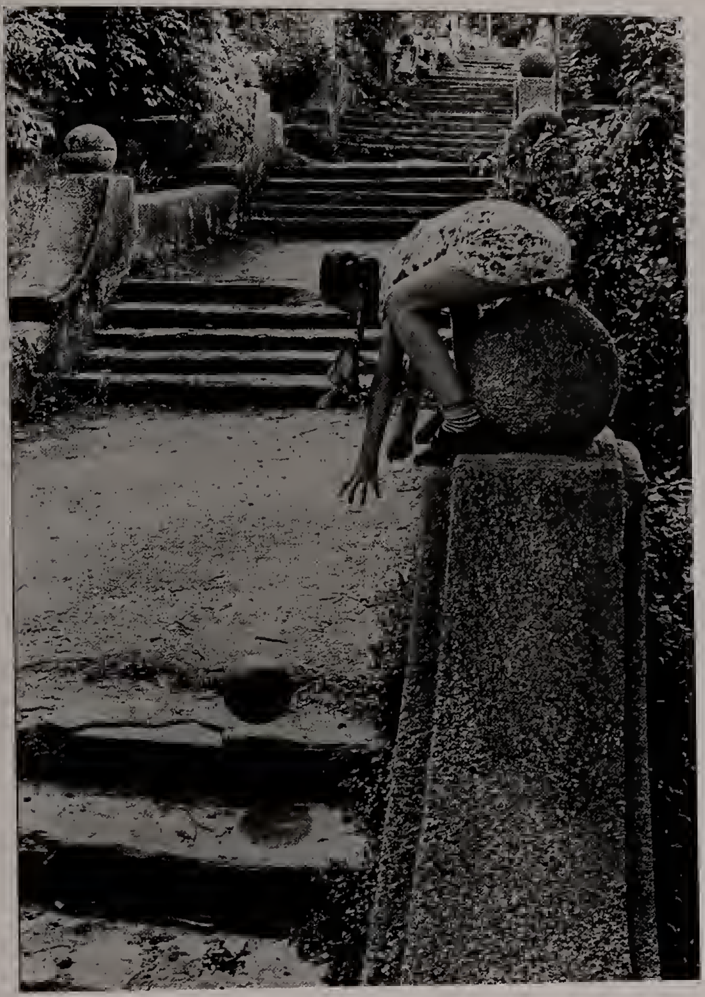
Fig. 22. Andrei Abramov, *Snowman and Kids*, 1972. Gelatin silver print, 19.6 x 29.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14887.

to read the work of a contemporary Russian photographer whose photojournalism we frequently see here in the United States.

A constellation of essays, collectively called "The Special Case of Baltic Experimental Photography," explores the characteristics of cultural production in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Baltic countries' comparatively late 1940s annexation by the Soviet Union distinguishes their histories from those of other republics of the U.S.S.R. Unique in both political and cultural terms, the Baltics have long been an important region in the development of East European and Soviet art photography. Baltic art was particularly influential in Soviet Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, as well as in the other Soviet republics, because the Baltics were the closest geographical link to the West and had the shortest Soviet history. Since Baltic photography is strongly featured in the Dodge Collection, the Baltic countries are examined individually in this volume. Sirje Helme, independent curator, critic, and lecturer in Tallinn, Estonia, focuses her attention on Estonian appropriation of photographic imagery in painting and other graphic arts in "Uses of Photography in Estonian Visual Art." Mark Allen Svede, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., Graduate Fellow at Ohio State University, Columbus, looks at Latvian photographers' varied innovative approaches to their medium in "On the Verge of Snapping: Latvian Nonconformist Artists and Photography." Raminta Jurenaite, who teaches at the Vilnius Academy of Arts in Vilnius, Lithuania, connects a new generation of art photographers to the well-established elder Lithuanian photography community in "Reclaiming the Salt of the Earth: Lithuanian Photography Reconsidered."

The final section of *Beyond Memory*, "Three Conversations with Photographer-Artists," is devoted to interviews with three well-known artists who are considered masters of their generation. Boris Mikhailov, Igor Makarevich, and Aleksandr Slyusarev have all become prominent abroad and remain active today. These eclectic firsthand artists' perspectives complement the critical essays they follow.

Ukraine-born Boris Mikhailov, who now lives in Berlin, is interviewed by St. Petersburg–born Alla Efimova, Chief Curator at the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, California. Mikhailov invented unique, provocative photographic formats for each of his



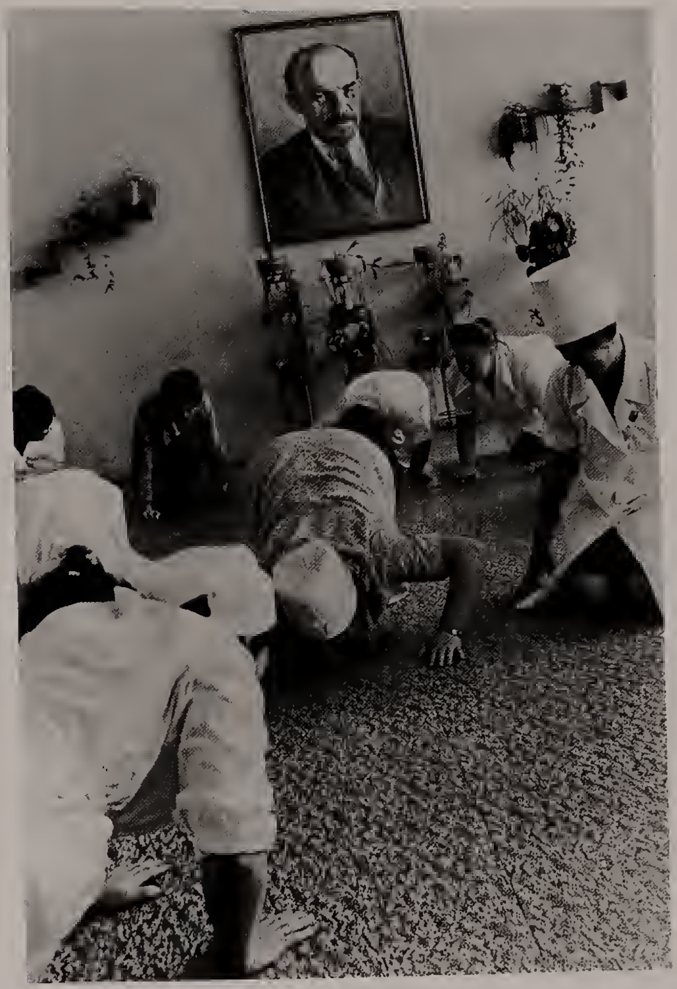


Fig. 23 (*above left*). Gennadii Bodrov, *Old Staircase*, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 34 x 23.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14961.

Fig. 24 (*above right*). Valerii Shchekoldin, Untitled, 1983. Gelatin silver print, 37 x 24.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14985.

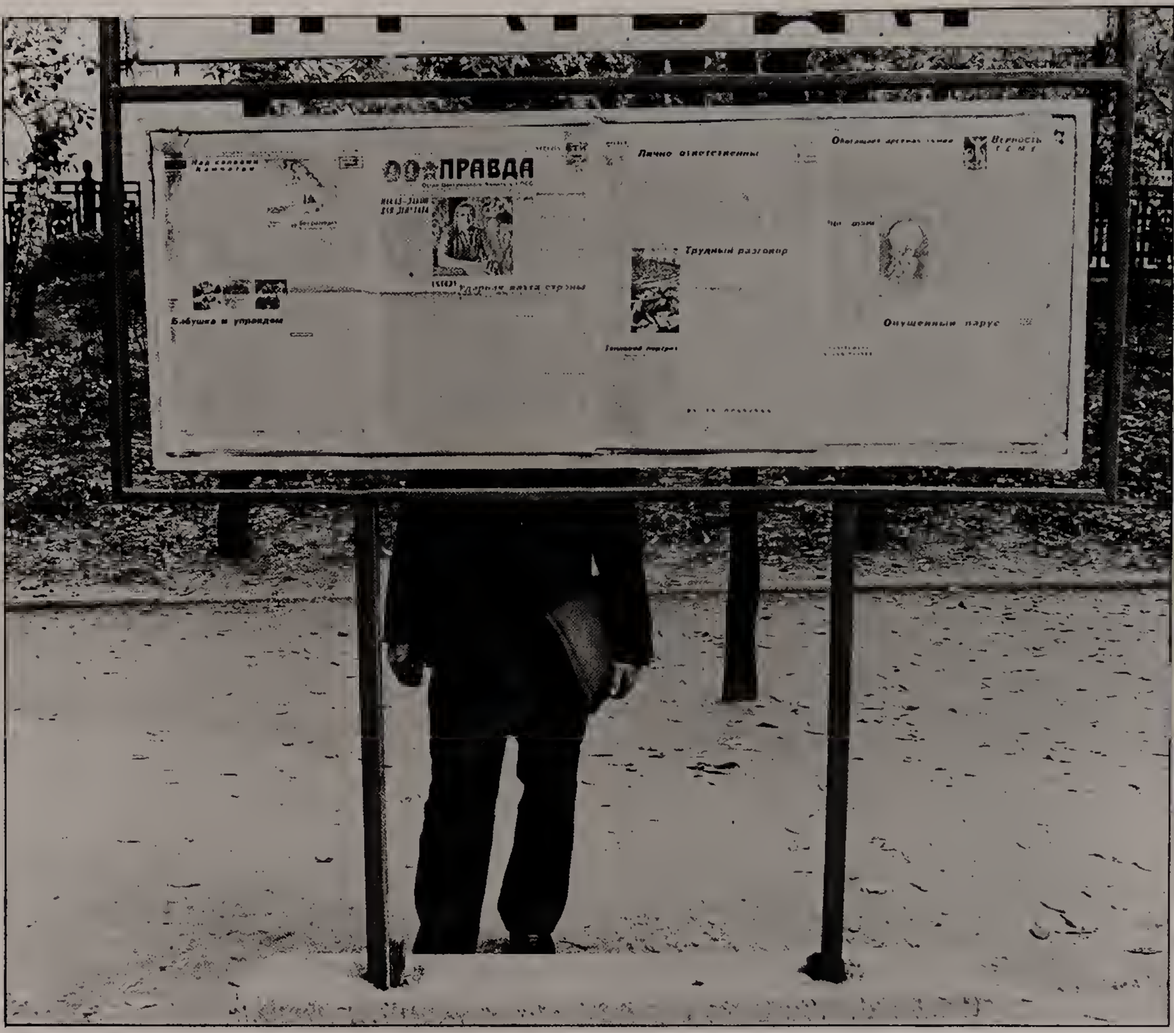
subversive projects. He may be the most overtly political of the late Soviet and post-Soviet artist-photographers. "Feeling Around" conveys his commitment to marrying social revelations with personal expression.

In "Unusual Perspectives/Fantastic Possibilities," Georgian-born Igor Makarevich, who for many years has lived in Moscow, discusses his work with longtime American friend Gerald Pirog, Rutgers Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature. Makarevich is not primarily a photographer, but throughout his career as an artist he has frequently turned to the medium. He also contributed his photographs to collective efforts of Moscow conceptual artists. Makarevich discusses with Pirog the continuity of his concerns and imagery as expressed through different mediums and how photography fits into his art practice.

Lifelong Muscovite Aleksandr Slyusarev is interviewed by Moscow art critic and curator Mikhail Sidlin. For more than forty years Slyusarev has made poetic, nearly abstract black-and-white images of his surroundings. He now often photographs in color, yet Slyusarev's straightforward, exquisite formal images have remained remarkably constant. His astute analysis of how photographic imagery works is uncommon in Russia, offering a valuable counterpoint to the other interviews. In "Hinting at Reality," Slyusarev confidently states the artistic principles he established for himself when he first began to photograph as a teenager.

What comes next in the study of late Soviet photography? I suggest addressing so-called "straight art photography," a topic curiously absent in most current discussions of the medium.[15] Although few contemporary writers show interest in the seemingly old-fashioned category, it has been the primary concern of many photographers during the period of this study. Moscow photography curator and critic Tatiana Salzirn has argued convincingly that in many ways "straight art photography" was the most radical Soviet photography practice between the early 1950s and late 1980s.[16] Thus I include here a selection of works from the Dodge Collection that quietly assert the personal visions of their makers (figs. 22–40).

As an American feminist, I am acutely aware of the absence of gender consciousness in Russia even though I was often told—ironically or with conviction—that the Soviets resolved this problem early in the 1920s. I anticipate feminist as well as other theories of difference will soon develop in Russia,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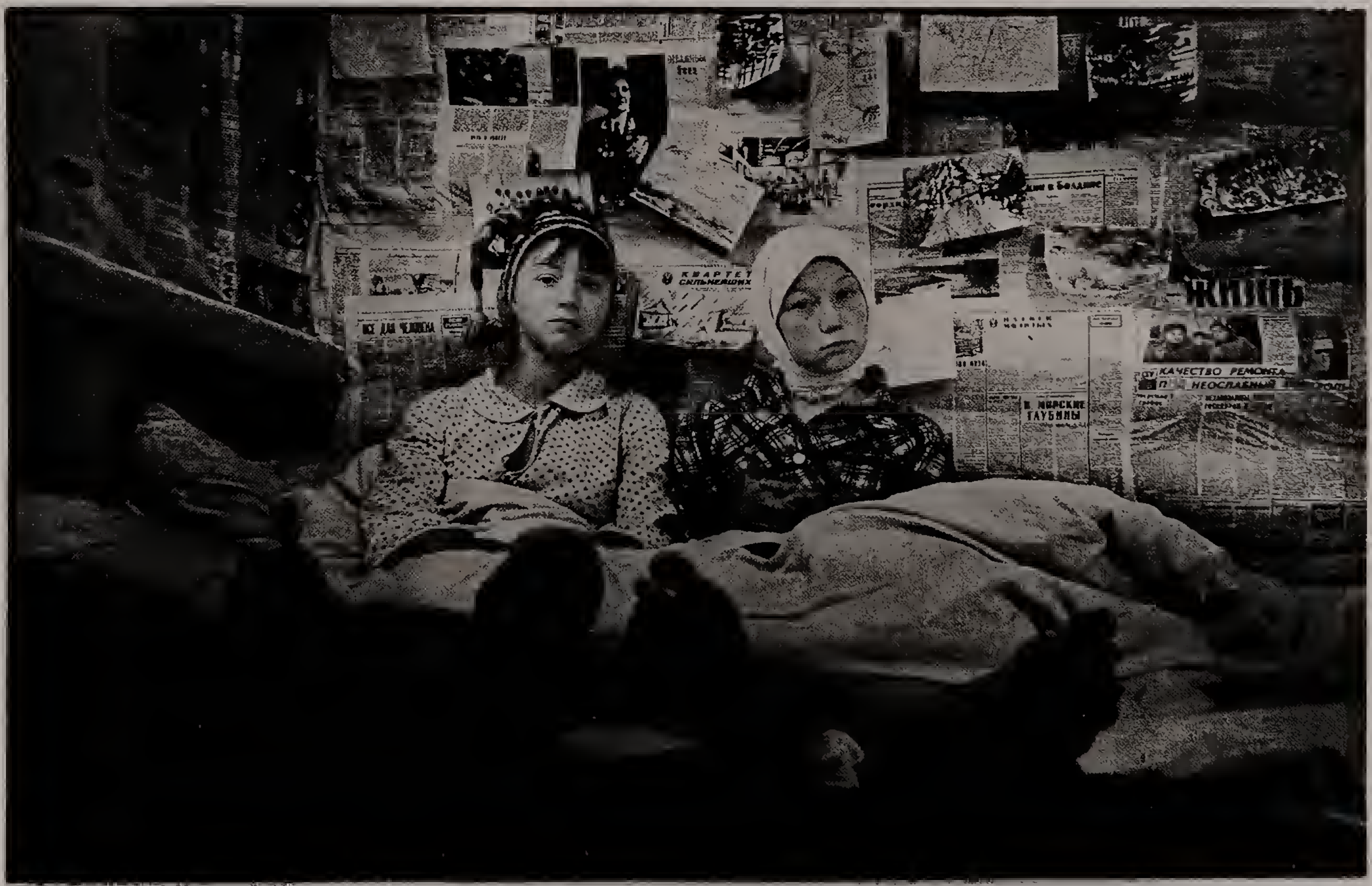

ЖИЗНЬ
КВАРТЕТ
КАЧЕСТВО РЕМОНТА
НЕОСЛАБНЫЙ
В. МОРСКИЕ ГЛУБИНЫ

Fig. 25 (*top*). Aleksandr Lapin, *Pravda*, 1981. Gelatin silver print, 28.6 x 35 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14944.

Fig. 26 (*above*). Boris Mikhalevkin, *After the Bath House*, 1982. Gelatin silver print, 31 x 48.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14688.

especially regarding post-Soviet ethnic policies and politics.

During my first visit in 1991, many Russian artists responded negatively to my cautions that the art market (in which they understandably had newly invested hope) doesn't actually serve most artists very well, in the East and West alike. "You don't understand—the market is a very good place for artists," they asserted. By 1994 they were instead saying, "You don't understand—the capitalist art market is a very bad place for Russian artists." Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the political, economic, and cultural reality of Russian artists has dramatically changed. The U.S. and international art markets have weakened. Artists in the former Soviet Union are now free to express themselves but haven't the means to do so. They no longer have state-supported studios or time to work. Artists struggle to make ends meet as they face new troubles with uncertainty. Thus, a fresh look at the resourceful example of Soviet nonconformist art is especially pertinent today.

I want to thank Norton and Nancy Dodge for their vision and insistence on collecting photographs within the broad spectrum of Soviet nonconformist art. The warmth and enthusiasm of their support for late Soviet photography is extraordinary, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to explore the works they have gathered.

I thank the writers and artists whose work and passion is presented here for their generous cooperation throughout this arduous process. I also want to express

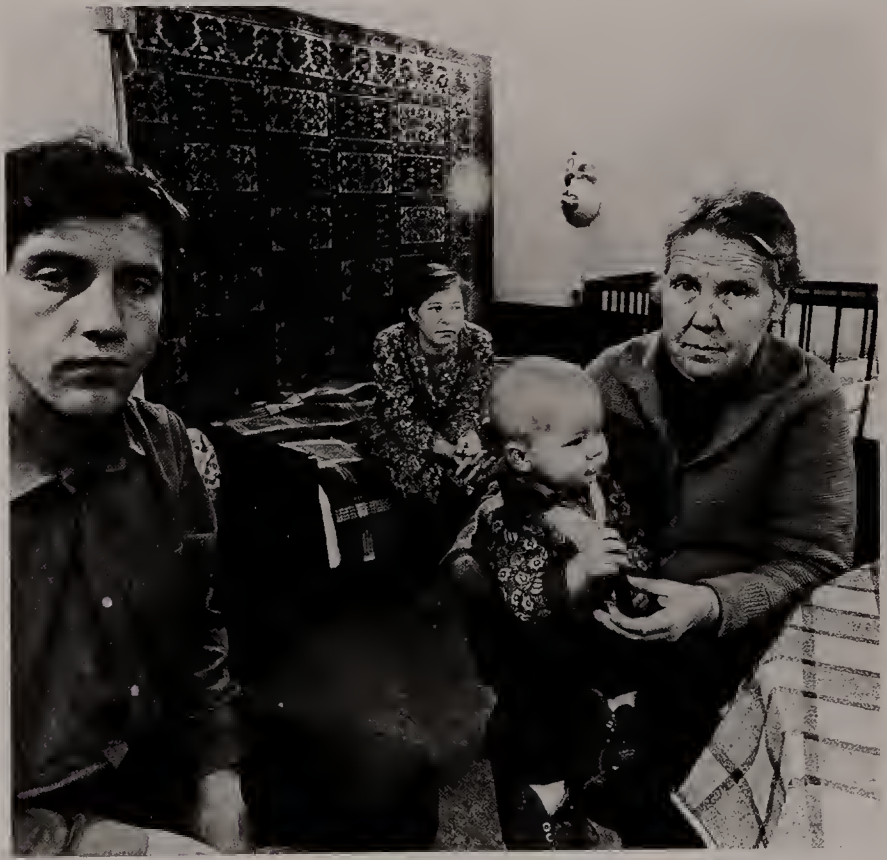
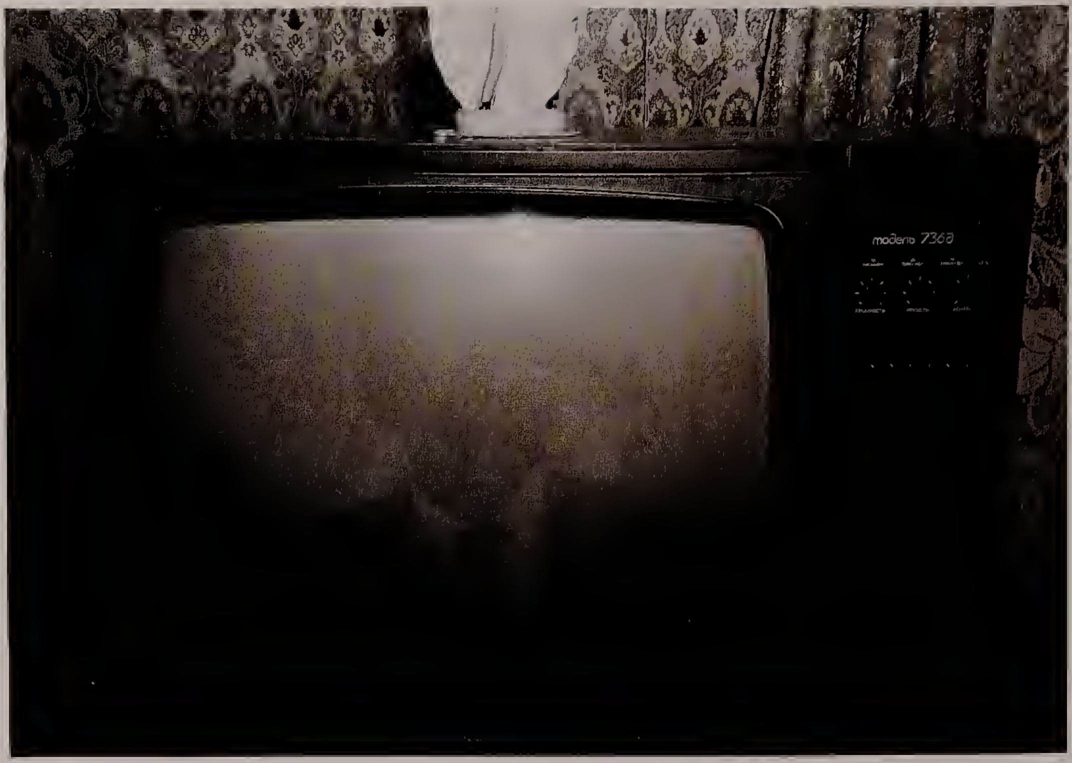


Fig. 27 (*top*). Boris Smelov, Untitled, 1996. Gelatin silver print, 24 x 36.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14651.

Fig. 28 (*above*). Evgeny Likhosherst, Untitled, 1982. Gelatin silver print, 22.9 x 23.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 18822.



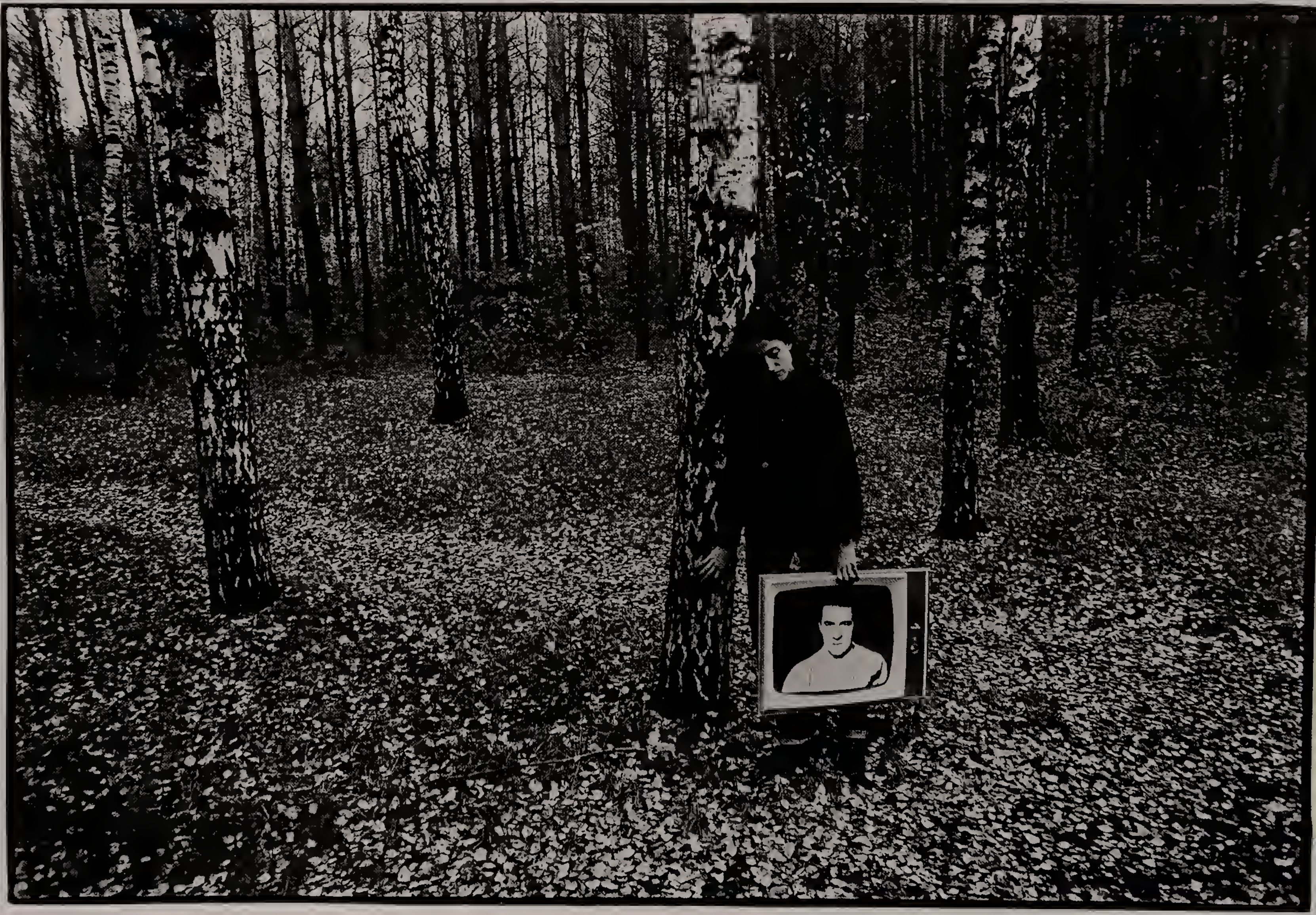
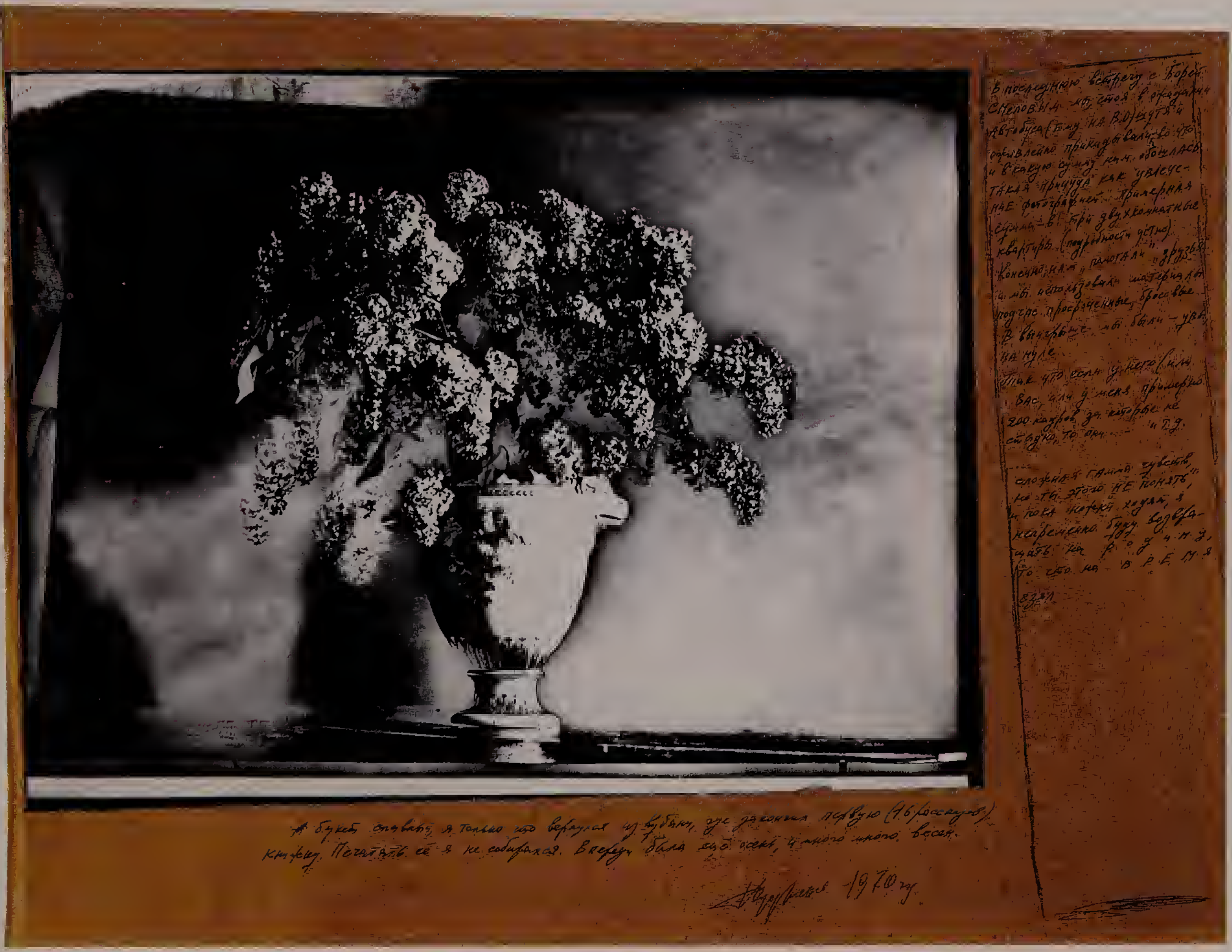


Fig. 29 (*top*). Sergei Kozhemiakin, *The First Channel (Gorby)*, 1986. Sepia-toned gelatin silver print, 22.2 x 31.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15022.

Fig. 30 (*above*). Aleksei Shulgin, Untitled, 1989. Gelatin silver print, 34.7 x 51.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 00668.



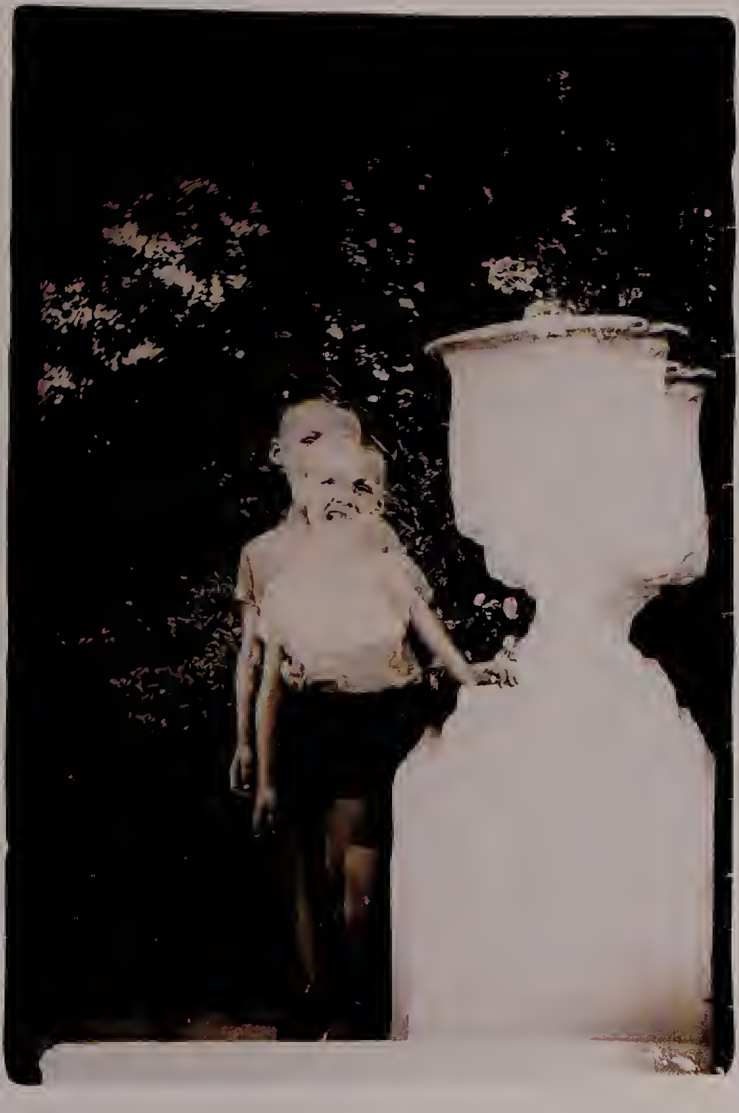
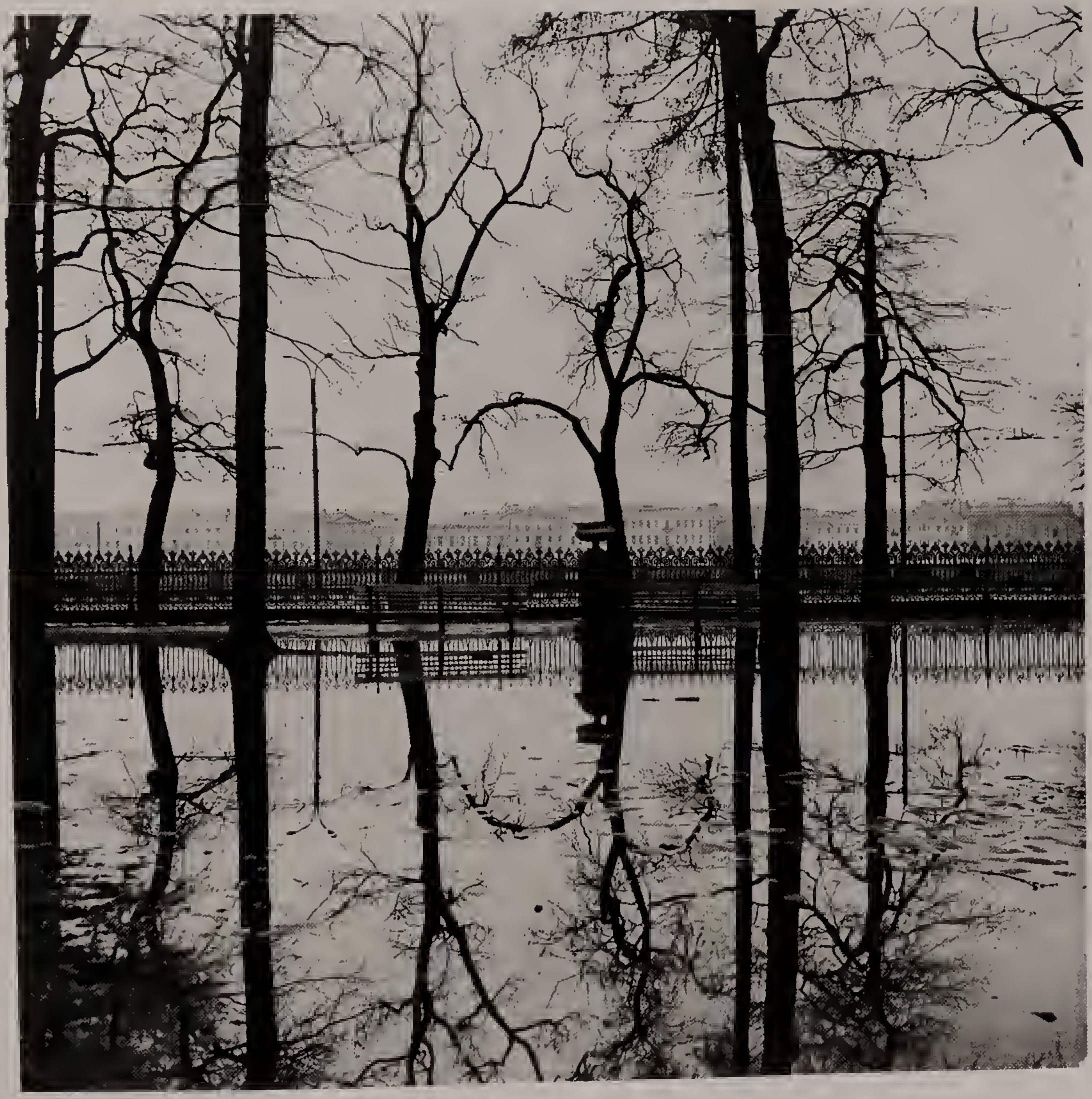


Fig. 31 (*above*). Boris Kudriakov, *The Bouquet*, 1970. Gelatin silver print mounted on illustration board with handwritten notes in ink, 38.3 x 51.1 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15833.

Fig. 32 (*left*). Liudmila Fedorenko, *The Time When I Was Not Born*, 1993. Toned gelatin silver print, 36.8 x 24.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14638.



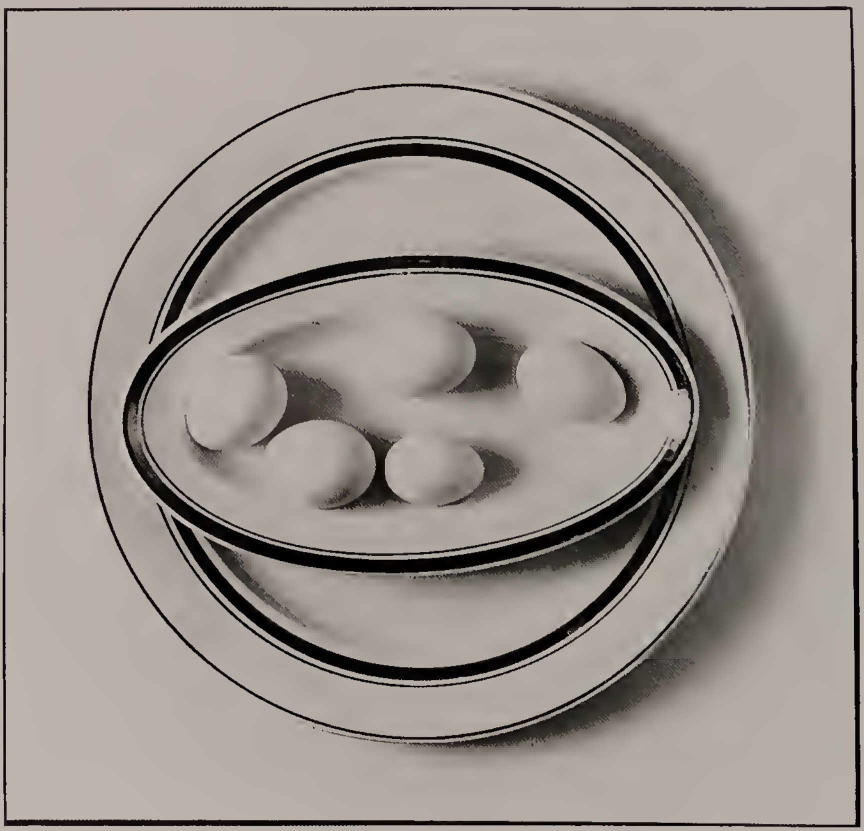
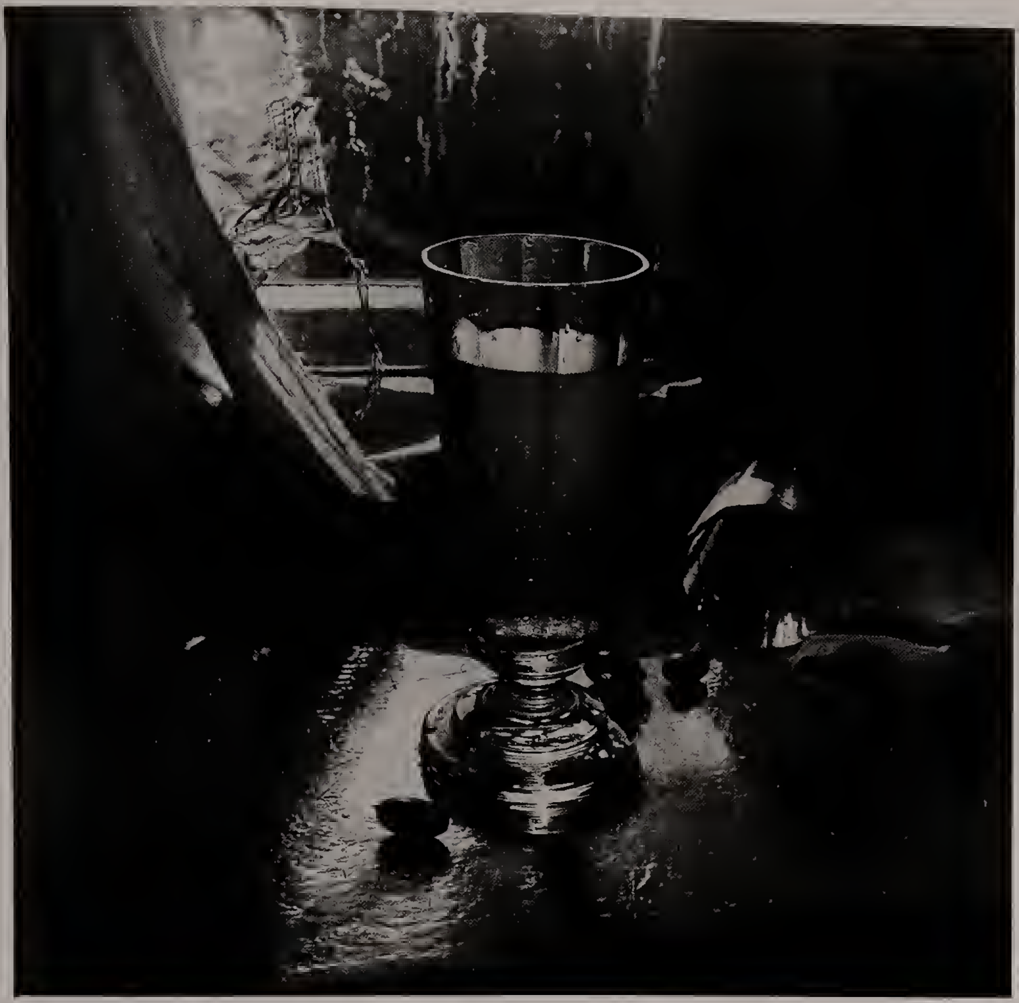


Fig. 33 (*top*). Maria Snigerevskaya, Untitled, 1987. Gelatin silver print, 26.3 x 26.3 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14623.

Fig. 34 (*above*). Anatolii Kulakov, *Still Life*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 23.7 x 24.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15096.



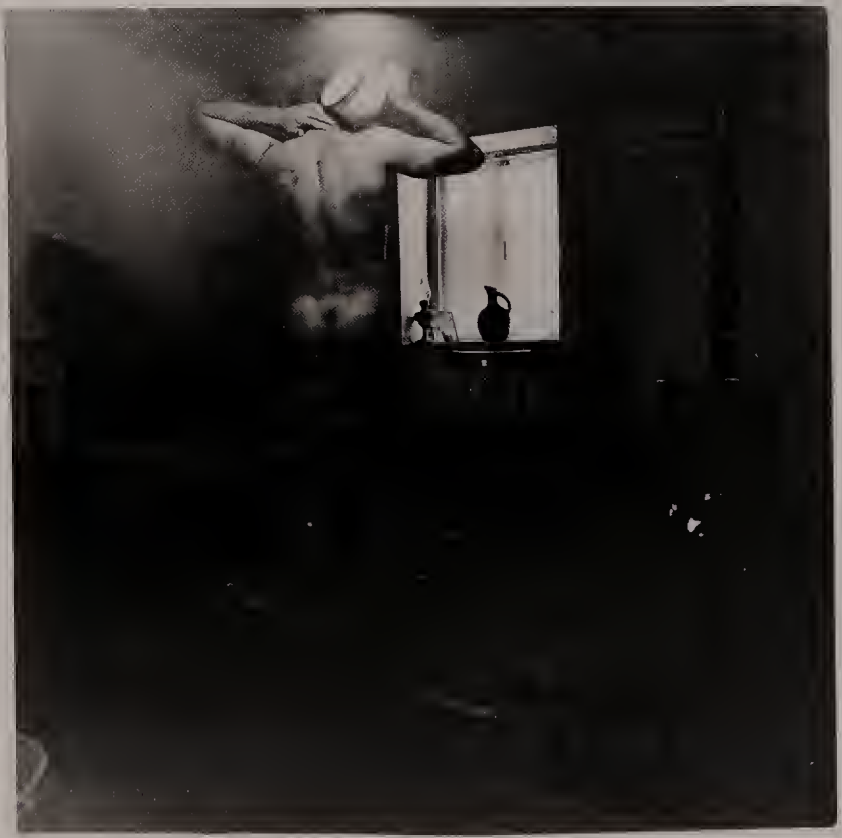
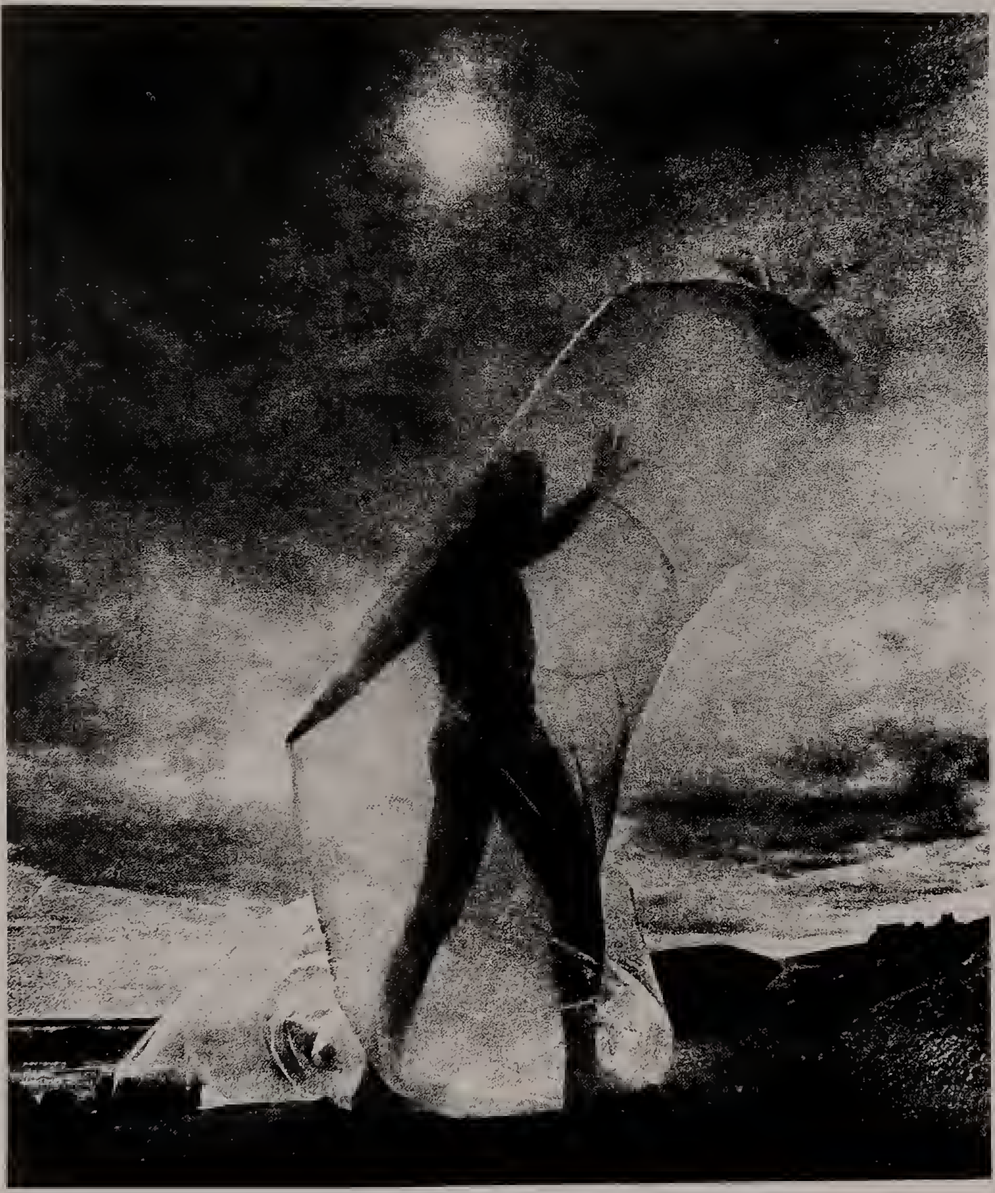
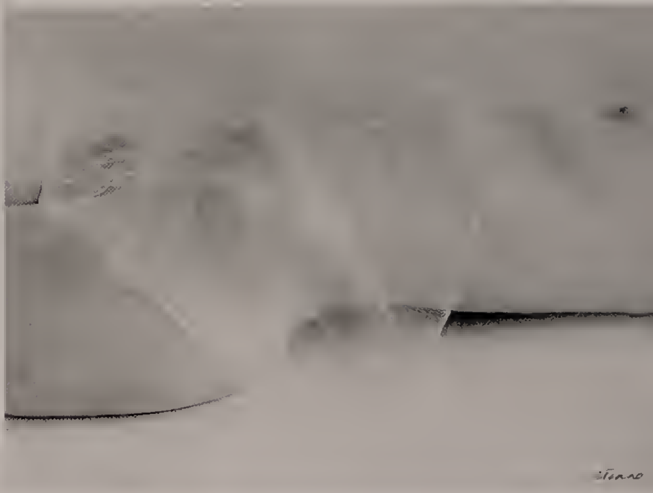


Fig. 35 (*top*). Viacheslav Bylin, *Still Life with Glass*, 1979.
Gelatin silver print, 43 x 43.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14773.

Fig. 36 (*above*). Sergei Gitman, from the series *Corner of a Room*, 1982.
Gelatin silver print, 34.7 x 34.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10722.





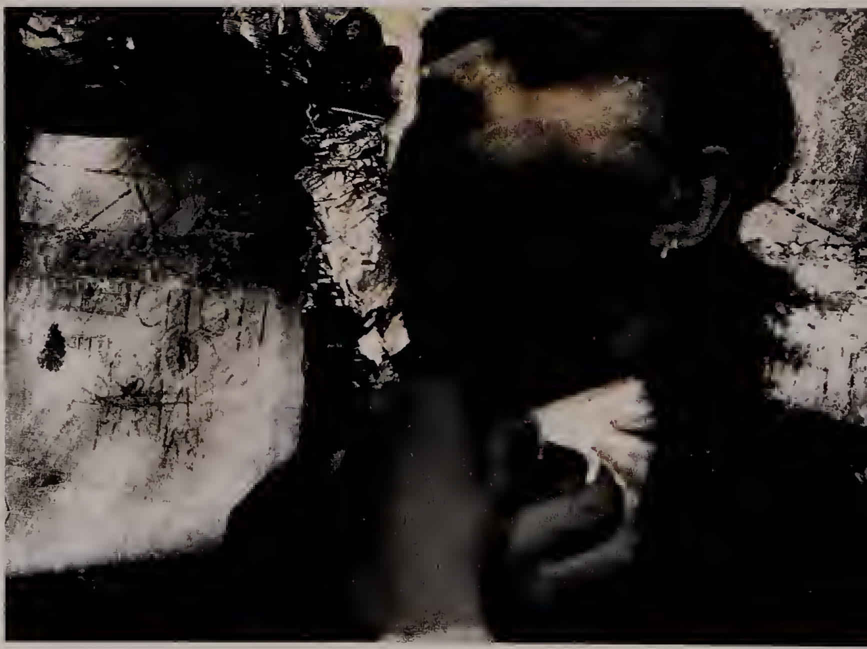


Fig. 37 (*top left*). Sergei Grigoriev, Untitled, 1983. Gelatin silver print, 53.2 x 44.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15128.

Fig. 38 (*top right*). Ann Tenno, Untitled, 1985–86. Gelatin silver print, 22.4 x 29.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16358.

Fig. 39 (*above*). Alexander Uglianitsa, Untitled, 1986. Toned gelatin silver print, 27.1 x 36.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15032.

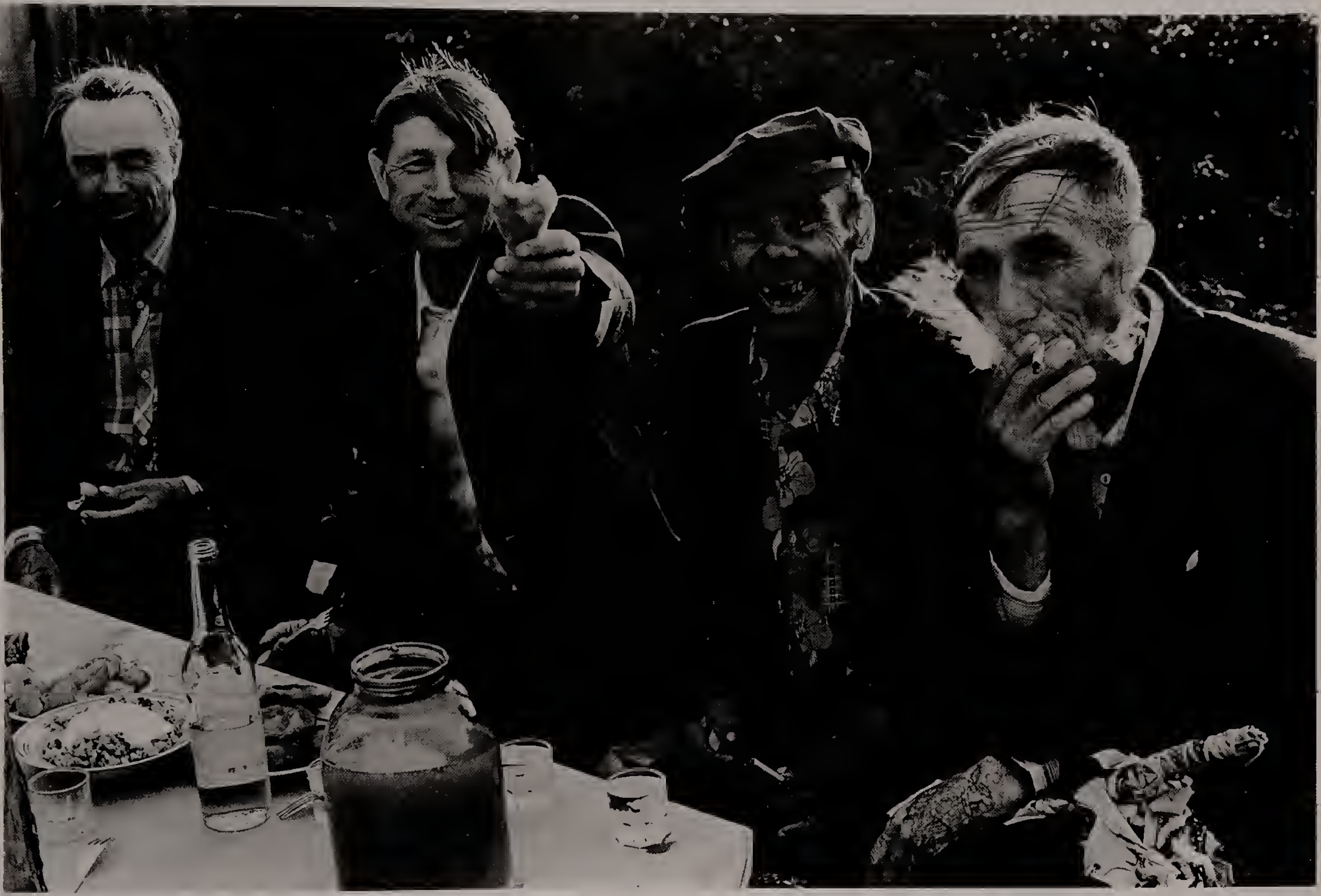


Fig. 40. Farit Gubayev, *Tatarstan*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 30 x 39.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 18811.

my appreciation to my many friends in Moscow who have shared their knowledge with me, especially Sergei Borosovsky, Sergei Gitman, Tatiana Salzirn, and Valery Stigneev.

I am grateful to Phillip Dennis Cate, former Director of the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Museum of Art, for supporting this project at its inception. I also thank Gregory P. Perry, current Director of the Zimmerli, who has also given his full support to *Beyond Memory*.

Dr. Alla Rosenfeld, Director and Curator of the Russian and Soviet Nonconformist Art Department at the Zimmerli, has contributed far more to this project than her important essay: indeed, she has made *Beyond Memory* possible. Alla has generously shared her knowledge of Soviet art as well as her expertise in art historical research and museum publication and exhibition. I am convinced it would take at least three people to do what she does for the museum and the field. Most important for me is that, through the course of this joint endeavor, Alla and I have become friends.

Beyond Memory turned out to be a much greater undertaking than I anticipated. Curatorial Assistant Natalia Orlova-Gentes somehow managed to keep the project together. Her intelligent, patient organization—and often she worked far beyond the call of duty—enabled the realization of both the book and the exhibition. Leslie Kriff, Associate Registrar of the Zimmerli collections, and Registrarial Assistant Dasha Shkurpela generously stayed after hours and facilitated my access to thousands of works.

Rutgers University students were also essential to this project. Inna Babaeva, a graduate student in visual art, spent many hours reviewing works with me. Her native Russian and her sensitivity to art made Inna invaluable. Undergraduate interns Benjamin Rosenfeld and Brad Resnick provided the youthful digital expertise I lack; throughout the process they efficiently supplied me with excellent documentation of needed images.

My son, Jed Lewison, and my parents, Virginia Neumaier and John J. Neumaier, have patiently let *Beyond Memory* eclipse family holidays while

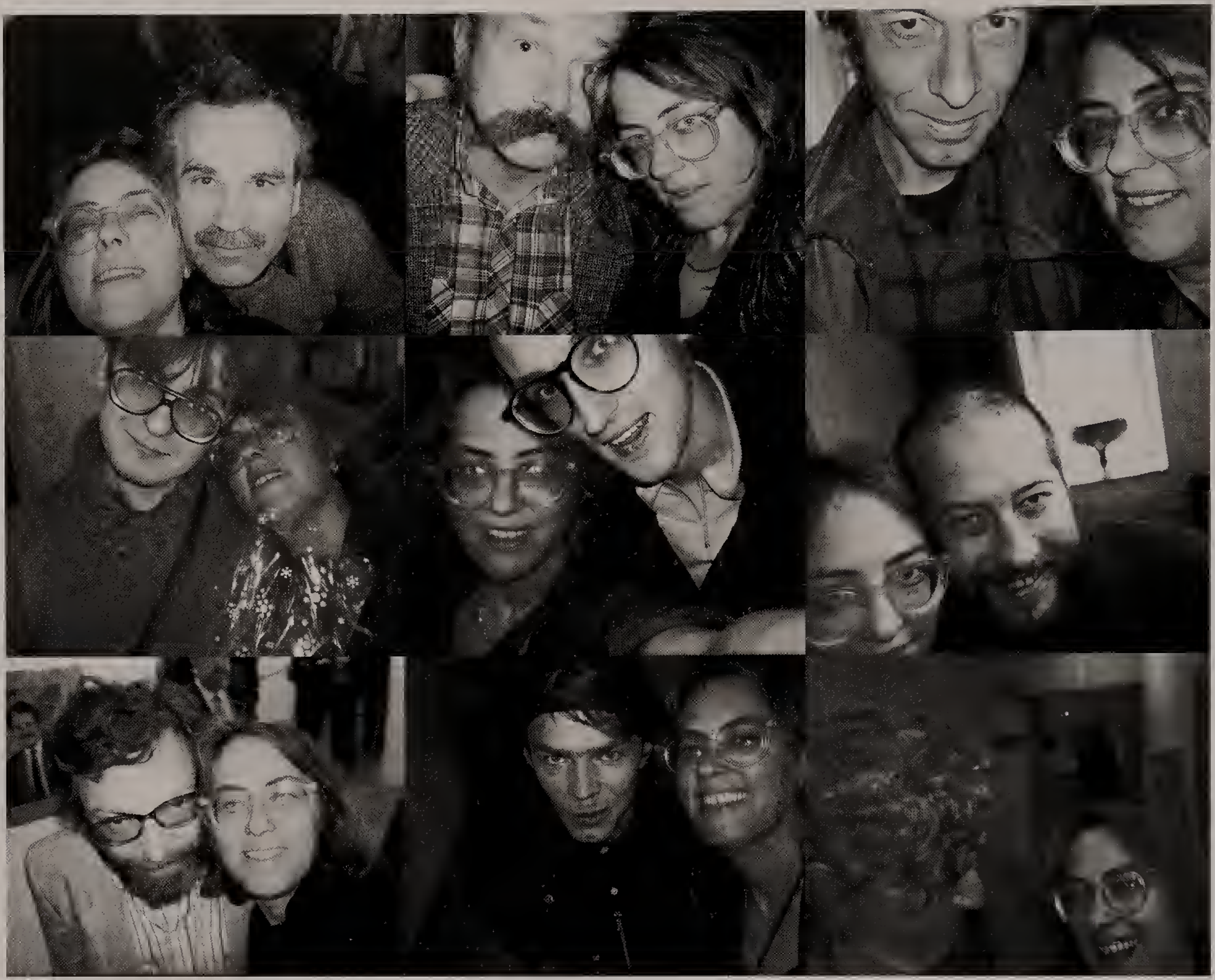


Fig. 41. Diane Neumaier, from the series *American Feminist Loves Russian Men*, 1994. Gelatin silver prints. Courtesy of Diane Neumaier. Self-portrait of the photographer with: (top row, left to right) Valery Stigneev, Aleksandr Slyusarev, Nikita Alekseev; (middle row, left to right) Mikhail Sidlin, Igor Moukhin, Mikhail Roshal (Gnezdo); (bottom row, left to right) Sergei Borisov, Afrika (Sergei Bugaev), Ivan Chuikov.

enthusiastically cheering on the project. As always, their unflagging support encourages me to pursue whatever I desire. In ways that cannot be described, my brothers, Roger Neumaier and John F. Neumaier, have been the ones to get me through this long-term project: I dedicate *Beyond Memory* to them.

NOTES

1. Photo/Foto: Conference and Exhibition on Contemporary Russian Photography, April 2–3, 1993, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding.

2. "Uncensored: The Real Story of Russia (Exclusive Eyewitness Account by Dr. Homer Dodge and Norton Dodge)," special issue of *U.S. News and World Report*, July 8, 1955.

3. Note that *Russian* often replaces the more correct terms *Soviet* or *former Soviet*. Although *Russian* is often precisely what is meant, it does not accurately refer to all the other former Soviet republics. The author hopes the reader can discern different uses of the term. Much of the Dodge Collection represents art from Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania because historically most Soviet nonconformist art was produced in those regions. Scholars need to further study nonconformist and other art practices of the Caucasian and Asian republics.

4. The most difficult task in this cross-cultural project has been negotiating the multiple layers of Russian-English translation, including Russian visual artists' clever and ironic use of wordplay, whose subtle and nuanced precision I cannot grasp without long-winded explanation. Not only does the language difference demand translators who understand a peculiar variety of issues, but the lack of mutual concerns—or even an awareness of others' personal concerns—impedes communication.

5. Margarita Tupitsyn has often served as a consultant to Norton Dodge, the Dodge Collection, and the Zimmerli Art Museum. In addition to her works listed in the Selected Bibliography, see *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Also see *Photography in Russia, 1840–1940*, ed. David Elliot (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

6. In June–July 1991 I went to Russia in an artists' exchange between the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Visual Art Department, and the Senej Print Center of the Russian Union of Artists; the exchange was organized by Rutgers University Professor Lynne Allen, Director of the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper. My subsequent artists' exchange residencies were supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Rutgers Research Council, and ArtsLink. Throughout 1994 I was a Fulbright Fellow based in Moscow.

7. The traveling exhibition *Photomanifesto* was organized by Joseph Walker, Christopher Ursitti, and Paul McCinniss and presented by the Baltimore Museum of Contemporary Art in May–July 1991. The curators also edited the exhibition's catalogue, *Photo Manifesto: Contemporary Photography in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1991).

8. The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Museum of Art (which includes the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union and the George Riabov Collection of Russian Art); Mason Gross School of the Arts, Visual Art Department (which includes the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper); and the Center for Russian, Central, and East European Studies are all part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

9. See Diane Neumaier, "Soviet Photography Today," *Afterimage* 19 (1992): 8; "RUAP Interviews," *Reticulatsia*, nos. 5–6 (1992); and "An American View of Russian Photography," in *Fotografiia* (Moscow, 1993).

10. Vladimir Diakonov was killed in an automobile accident in 2001.

11. *Photo/Foto* and *Multiple Exposures* were artists' exchange projects that included exhibitions on contemporary Russian photography presented at Mason Cross School of the Arts. Both were curated by Mason Cross artists who participated in the Russian Union of Art Photographers 1992 and 1993 Annual Cruises on the Volga River. The projects were supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding.

12. In October 1992, Lehmann College hosted *The Missing Picture*, curated by John P. Jacob. Jacob featured the works of Boris Mikhailov and those of four younger Moscow conceptual artist-photographers influenced by him: Vladimir Kupriyanov, Sergei Leontiev, Maria Serebriakova, and Aleksei Shulgin.

13. The Zimmerli Museum has organized a series of Research Fellowships for Rutgers faculty, including professors from Mason Gross School of the Arts, Visual Art Department.

14. The A-Ya Archive of Russian conceptual art was given to the Zimmerli Museum several years ago. Dr. Alla Rosenfeld, Director and Curator of the Russian and Soviet Department of the Zimmerli Museum, showed me this work by Infante and many other works I might otherwise have missed.

15. See Diane Neumaier, "Introduction," *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (Contemporary Russian Art Photography, ed. Diane Neumaier) (1994).

16. Tatiana Salzirn, in conversation with Alla Rosenfeld and Diane Neumaier during an October 2001 visit to the Dodge Collection.

On Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Art

Konstantin Akinsha

Painting versus Photography

A Battle of Mediums in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture

IN RUSSIAN CULTURE, PHOTOGRAPHY TRADITIONALLY HAD TENSE RELATIONS WITH PAINTING: PHOTOGRAPHY EITHER TRIED TO MIMIC OR WAS CALLED TO REPLACE PAINTING. The very fact that Ivan Kramskoy, the founding father of the Wanderers (the Itinerants) group, which in the second part of the nineteenth century established the critical realism movement, started his career as a photo retoucher is significant in understanding the art of his time. Kramskoy, as did many other painters of his generation, often used photography as raw material for his portraits; photography so influenced him he even attempted to paint monochromatically.[1] However, during those days when the future leader of

Fig. 42 (*facing*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Sots Art I*, 1975–86. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dye, 50.2 x 49.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12009.

critical realism was "improving" portrait prints in his provincial photo studio, photography was not interpreted as art and remained no more than an appealing technical novelty.

Realistic painting dominated Russian culture until the end of the nineteenth century. Despite photographs of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky printed in thousands of copies and available for sale around the country, Kramskoy's painting of the meditating Dostoyevsky and Ilya Repin's full-length painting of Tolstoy, barefoot and dressed in simple peasant garments, were treated as the true images of the great geniuses of Russian literature. Both writers remain in Russian visual memory primarily as painted images, while photographs merely provide details that enrich the reading of the paintings. Nobody questioned the superiority of a brush over a photo lens.

Despite efforts of photographers such as Andrei Karelin,[2] who mimicked paintings in his photos of the 1870s and 1880s, and a prophetic essay dedicated to his works written by Vasilii Nemirovich-Danchenko called "The Photography That Promises to Kill Painting,"[3] the promised ritual sacrifice of painting was far away. At that time the situation was rather the opposite—painting was positively starting to dominate photography. The first persistent claim of a place for photography on the Parnassus of fine arts was made in the beginning of the twentieth century by pictorialists, known in Russia as Alluzionists.[4] This wish of photographers to be equal to painters coincided with the beginning of modernism in Russian photography. Pictorialists, no different from their European and American contemporaries and striving for new expressive means, tried to make photography everything except itself. Mimicking the diffusiveness of impressionist painting; printing their opuses on paper colored in blue, purple, or green; and using complicated new processes such as photogravure, bromoil, or gum bichromate print, photographers such as Nikolai Petrov, Anatolii Tarapani, Nikolai Paola, and Yurii Eremin did everything possible to give their works the false appearance of paintings.[5] Decadent subjects such as Salome-like femmes fatales, erotic dancers, and unavoidable ruins borrowed from the rich repertoire of fin de siècle painterly kitsch made the similarity between the new artistic photography and "high" visual arts nearly complete. Times had changed—if Kramskoy, who started as a photo retoucher, dreamed of becoming a painter, Yurii Eremin, one of the leading pictorialists, betrayed his painterly career to become a photographer.[6] The pictorialists' claim for equal status with high art was based on the grounds of the similarity of the achieved results. The compelling difference of mediums was not mentioned. Photographers tried to prove that they could be creative and that a photo camera, like a painter's brush, was no more than an instrument helping to express the individual user.

The "silver age" of Russian photography was short.[7] It ended with the beginning of the October revolution. But pictorialism was not finished. The "second coming" of the movement happened in the mid-1920s.[8] During the first postrevolutionary years only one photographer linked to pictorialist "decadence," Moisei Nappelbaum, played an important role.[9] Nappelbaum's life and work were based on contradiction: his career began in the empire of the czar and continued in the new proletarian state. Starting as a "chamber" photographer-portraitist of the select few, Nappelbaum became perhaps the first Russian photographer destined to sample the endless possibilities of mechanical reproduction. Immediately after the transfer of the Soviet capital to Moscow, the photography studio of VTsIK (the All-Union Central Executive Committee) was established on his initiative. VTsIK supplied the Red Army with mass-produced photographs of the Soviet leaders.[10] Nappelbaum's portraits, stylish and technically perfect, incorporated painterly elements such as traces of brush strokes on the background and "impressionistic" atmosphere. The photographer, as did many other pictorialists, tried to buy credibility for his work by mimicking the means of high art. Nappelbaum, a mixture of Ivan Kramskoy and Richard Avedon, created an endless gallery of revolutionary celebrities whose photo images were as psychological as nineteenth-century Russian painted portraits. Being the official photographer of the new government and at the same time the fashionable portraitist of crème de la crème Russian intellectuals and cultural celebrities, Nappelbaum was burdened by an inferiority complex. All his life he tried to prove that photography was equal to high art. The photographer even called his memoirs "From Craft to Art."[11] In his book Nappelbaum proudly recollected that when he was photographing Lenin with a group of delegates of the congress of trade unions, the leader of communist Russia interrupted the delegates, advising the photographer, "Don't be hindered, now is the dictatorship of the photographer!"[12] Proud Nappelbaum probably didn't know that his contemporary and competitor, photographer-portraitist Petr Otsup, had already described in his earlier published memoirs a similar reaction by Lenin to his comrades' attempts to distract a photographer from the execution of his professional duties: "I remember, once Vladimir Ilich [Lenin] agreed to comply with a request of members of VTsIK to be photographed together with them. People who had to be photographed for a long time couldn't take their seats. Then Lenin called me and said: 'So, now is the dictatorship of the photographer! Comrade Otsup, please, place them as you need.' "[13] It seems that the words of Lenin, which so impressed his portraitists, were no more than a frequently repeated joke. The leader of Revolutionary Russia liked the word "dictatorship," whether it was applied to proletarians or photographers. As usual, Lenin's words were prophetic. The dictatorship of photographers was coming.

At the beginning of the 1920s the Russian avant-garde discovered photomontage. Just ten years earlier, radical arts circles had rejected photography as an anti-artistic medium. Benedict Livshits, an active participant in the futurist movement, remembered that "photography was," for the futurists, "an insulting word, a synonym of paintings of Wanderers or the World of Art group."[14] However, the situation changed, and the mechanical essence of photography looked much more appealing during the 1920s than during the 1910s.

The first montage experiments of Aleksandr Rodchenko paved the way for his famous illustrations for the Vladimir Mayakovsky poem "About This."[15] In many ways Rodchenko's experiments recalled the practice of the Dadaists, who not only were the first practitioners of the montage method but also coined the very term "photomontage," stressing its industrial fetishism so dear to European radical artists in the early twentieth century. Like his Dada predecessors, Rodchenko combined images "borrowed" from photo magazines and the works of other photographers in new compositions. Like Dadaists, he toyed with an easily achieved sense of absurdity resulting from the grotesque coexistence of "real" images. Images produced with the cold, mechanical objectivity of the photo lens entered the carnival of artificial coexistence without losing the quality of striking reality. They became semantic elements of a new visual language in which the meaning of any element could be changed by simple manipulation.

Montage became the cult medium of Russian constructivism. In 1923 *LEF* magazine announced photomontage as a new perspective, a new medium of visual arts, in a short article written by Liubov Popova.[16] Popova's admiration of the exceptional documentary qualities of photography was echoed in the statements of other *LEF* theoreticians, who regarded photography as the new dominant visual media of constructivism. The early 1920s crisis of the Russian avant-garde posed a question about the end of painting, a challenge that could be more broadly interpreted as questioning the end of art. The slogan "From easel to machine" formulated by Nikolai Tarabukin was put on the banner of the movement.[17] The mechanical medium of photography, which according to the beliefs of the constructivists granted a wished-for objectivity, became a substitute for painting. However, the contrast between the "natural objectivity" of photo images and the way they were assembled in the early photomontages betrayed a strong contradiction. Images of humans, objects, houses, and animals piled one upon another in the Rodchenko montage illustrations to the Mayakovsky poem "About This" create a feeling of absurdity because the traditional hierarchy of sizes is violated and because the artist rejects the rules of linear perspective. As did numerous innovators before him, Rodchenko acted as the involuntary archaist, tossing precise fixations of photographic images based on the illusion of three-dimensional space in new compositions constructed according to the principles of flatness.

The photomontages of Rodchenko are full of references from medieval canonical art. One such reference is the iconography of "a giant versus dwarfs" developed later in the constructivist tradition into the iconography of "the leader versus masses." The artist

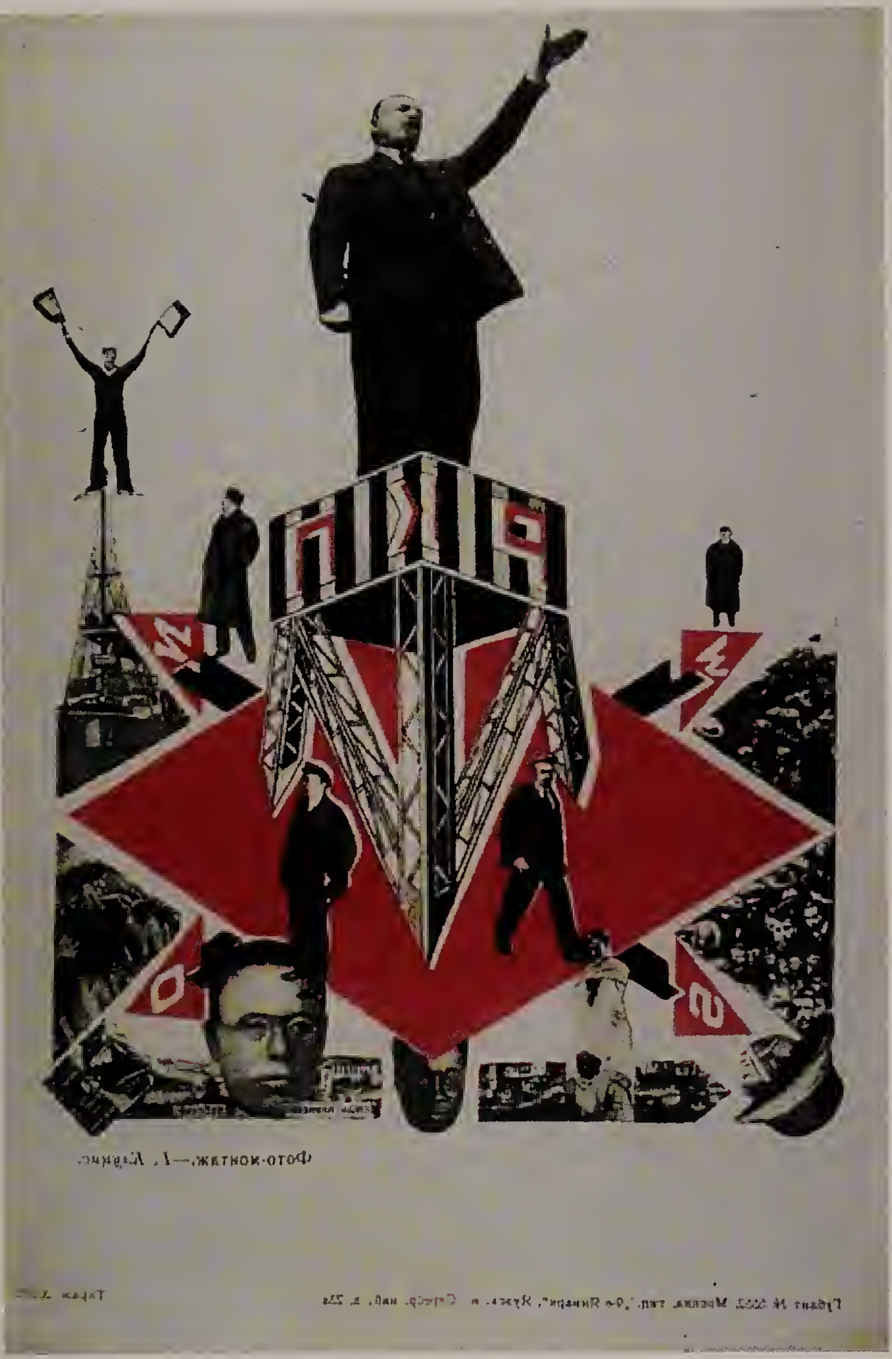


Фото-монтаж.—Г. Клуцис.

Fig. 43. Gustav Klucis, Photo-relief illustration for *Molodaia gvardiia* (Young Guards), no. 2–3 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1924). Riabov Collection, ZAM, Frank and Katherine Martucci Art Acquisition Fund, 1992.0064.

places the gigantic figure of Mayakovsky on the top of the Kremlin's Ivan the Great bell tower, or he puts the colossus of the poet near a bridge, arches of which hardly reach his knees. Another archaism he employs is the placement of multiple images of Mayakovsky and Lilia Brik in the space of one composition, referencing so-called "syntagmatic construction" of iconography typical of medieval art.[18] In other illustrations, however, Rodchenko uses image repetition merely as a design factor. In contrast to Russian icons or Botticelli drawings, the photomontages produced for "About This" lack linear narrative. Rodchenko's images do not tell a story. In the true fashion of another medieval tradition, they visualize Mayakovsky metaphors. Such verbatim illustration of idiomatic expressions was typical for the canonical Christian depictions of the biblical parables. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, in his famous *Flemish Proverbs*, took advantage of the absurdity of literary visualization of figures of speech; Rodchenko's method is truly Brueghelian. Such archaism is understandable, given the Russian avant-garde's practice of incorporating archaic and naive art forms. The rejection of the three-dimensional illusionism of the European tradition of visual art based on vanishing-point linear perspective became one of the most important characteristics of European modernism in general and the Russian avant-garde in particular.[19]

One year after the publication of the Mayakovsky poem with Rodchenko's illustrations, the principle of photomontage was further developed when Rodchenko, Gustav Klucis (Klutsis) and Sergei Senkin produced a circle of photomontages on the occasion of Lenin's death. On the one hand, these works are reminiscent of the illustrations for "About This." On the other hand, the funeral circle is different: the artists are trying to exile absurdity from their works. Their task is to create iconography of the deceased chief of proletarians. In these montages, photo images are doomed to play an even stranger role than in Rodchenko's visualization of Mayakovsky's metaphors. The hierarchy of the size of figures becomes in the Lenin funeral montages truly archaic—the gigantic figure of Lenin dominates the masses, and the huge face of the mourning Krupskaya is surrounded by little heads of Stalin, Zinoviev, and other members of the Central Committee. The artists return to the archetypal iconography of "the king-god" already known to the ancient Egyptians (fig. 43). In marked difference from the illustrations produced for the Mayakovsky poem, the Lenin montages strongly contrast the illusionist convexity of photo elements with the flatness of backgrounds, often using red or black backgrounds. Photo images are reduced to the size of iconic symbols and are surrounded by signs such as black and red arrows that symbolize decline and progress. In his illustrations for the Mayakovsky poem Rodchenko used "faked" syntagmatic construction; in the funeral montages the multiple images of Lenin instead have a narrative function, in one montage demonstrating different activities of the chief of proletarians and in

Klucis's photomontage *Deti i Lenin* (Children and Lenin) the leader at different ages. Many montages, especially works by Klucis, transform into compositional mandalas—symmetric geometrical constructions with the image of Lenin in the center. The photomontages of the funeral circle represent a transition from the Dadaist tradition of absurdity to the new iconography of the constructivist "positive" montage exemplified by *Lenin with Masses, Children and Lenin,* and *Lenin and Proletarians of the World.* Thus, by 1924 avant-garde artists working with photomontage managed to develop a nucleus of numerous iconographical types, which later became canonical for Soviet painting and were exploited until the end of the 1980s.

In the mid-1920s two types of photomontage developed. One type continued the tradition of the grotesque Dada montage, which is the reality of absurdity; the other was used to replace reality by creating a "refinished" version of it. The difference between the two types of photomontage echoed an opposition between two types of iconography in medieval cathedrals: grotesque, screaming demons versus motionless, silent saints. Both kinds of photomontages had the same application: they were used for propaganda. Thus the constructivists replaced the painted poster with photomontage, the true product of mechanical reproduction aimed at the broad mass of viewers. By 1923 Popova had already noticed the striking propaganda possibilities of photography in general and photomontage in particular: "A poster about famine with photographs of hungry people makes a stronger impression than a poster with sketches of the hungry."[20] If the grotesque montage rooted in Dada gave birth to "negative propaganda" called upon to demonize the enemy, the necessity of the establishment of the Bolshevik state's new iconography provoked creation of the positive montage. The initial unity of hyperrealistic photo images and archaic composition gravitated to flatness and stressed geometrical character, which step-by-step began to be replaced by the "illusionist" photomontage that bordered the creation of virtual reality.

Photomontage became the main medium of the Soviet poster of the mid-1920s to early 1930s. It proved to be the ersatz painting reproduced in hundreds of thousands of copies. During this period the conservative adversaries of the constructivists—painters affiliated with AKhRR (Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia)—tried to exploit both the notion of the "death of the author," advocated by the Left Front of the Arts (LEF) and other radical groups, and the tool of mechanical reproduction. Struggling for creation of so-called "mass painting," they produced numerous "Soviet *lubki*."[21] These *lubki* were nothing more than oil paintings dedicated to the topic of the day, reproduced without mentioning the name of the artist but supplied with the party line explanatory text.[22] However, the conservatives lost the competition to the constructivists, whose posters with their trademark gigantic figures of leaders communicated propagandistic message much better than the reproductions of the multifigured paintings, which, their scale having been decreased for reproduction purposes, looked more like visual puzzles than clear slogans translated into iconic signs.

Use of the archaic composition led to the establishment of the new constructivist canon, which began to ossify by the end of the 1920s. At the same time, this compositional archaism gave to photomontage monumental qualities the competing conservative painters lacked. This monumentality in turn led to the use of larger and larger formats for posters and reached its peak in the so-called photo friezes produced by El Lissitzky in collaboration with Senkin and Klucis for the 1928 Presse exhibition in Cologne.[23] The photo frieze, or, as it was also called, the photo fresco, was a strange terminological construction, especially if one keeps in mind that it was coined by diehard constructivists, who rejected the very possibility of the existence of art. On the one hand, the photo fresco was a manifestation of the triumph of technology, making possible the decorating of a new Sistine Chapel with the help of a simple Leica camera. On the other, the necessity for such decoration, from the perspective of constructivist theory, looked like a highly questionable undertaking.[24]

However, the creation of frescos printed on photo paper did not satisfy constructivist artists. Sergei Senkin, who worked with Lissitzky on the decoration of the Soviet pavilion at the Cologne exhibition, researched and worked out the innovative process of covering stone and concrete with photographic emulsion, which enabled artists to print photomontages and photo frescos directly on the walls of buildings.[25]

Photomontage became the true ersatz painting of the time. It was so popular that it influenced both painting and graphics, which in turn mimicked the compositional structure and archaic hierarchies of montage imagery by replacing photo elements with conventional painted images (fig. 44).

Some contemporaries noticed the visible contradictions of the new medium. Viktor Shklovsky, who belonged to the core of LEF, disregarded his group loyalties and criticized the fad of photomontage:

> In the recent past of Soviet art we saw photomontage coming to full flower. Photomontagists, in my opinion, didn't belong to people of great creativity. They took someone else's photo material without taking into account the special character of every snapshot. They worked with differently photographed material as if it was photographed from the same distance. They had a bad feeling of aesthetic, demonstrating a certain coquetry with an interconnection of materials.[26]

Shklovsky not only disapproved of domination of the new ersatz painting in the form of photomontage; he astutely suspected the character of the substitution of photography for painting. In a conversation with Lidia Ginzburg, he noted sardonically, "Well, industrial art, photomontages by Rodchenko . . . are hanging on the walls of Brik's and Lilia looks beautiful in them.[27] Only the motivation did change."[28]

If photomontage became the substitute for painting by painters toying with the medium of photography (some, like Rodchenko, forever exchanged the brush for a Leica camera), the more traditional professional photographers linked to the avant-garde movement were shocked by the false pride of the "surrogate painters." By the beginning of the 1930s the avant-garde tactic of snapshots and unexpected foreshortening was changed by the domination of more conventional images.[29] Photojournalism played an important role not only in the process of the defragmentation of images but also in the establishment of the false "photography of fact." The subjectivity of the photo lens was forgotten for the sake of the perfection of the image. Life could not necessarily or usually supply photographers with both perfect scenery and perfect action: thus corrections had to be made. Such manipulation of "factography" had already begun in the culture of photomontage, when needed images were staged with models.[30] In the case of conventional photographs, the whole image had to be manipulated. One of the most striking examples of such "virtual reality" was produced in the form of photo reportage. In 1930 Max Alpert published in the magazine *U.S.S.R. in Construction* a "photo-essay" about a certain Kalmikov working on the construction of the naval ship *Magnitogorsk*. Some of the photographs were no more than "reconstructions" of the Kalmikov story.[31] Another important photographer of the period, Max Penson, who was active in Uzbekistan, was constantly criticized for "directing" his photos. Trying to compliment Penson's works, the well-known Soviet photo critic Sergei Morozov noted that in his photographs one can see "the touch of a hand of the photographer-director."[32] Alpert and Penson were not exceptions—many photographers of the period became "photographer-directors" who, like academic painters, staged their photo pictures.

Nikolai Troshin, the well-known designer of *U.S.S.R. in Construction*, even formulated the tasks of the staged photo picture:

> Another way of creating photo pictures is through staging. It is very difficult, demanding deep knowledge of life. Here a photographer is not taking life as it is, but rather imitating it according to his design. Here many things depend on those helping the photographer to construct his picture and on those "acting" for him, as well as on the surroundings and the general rhythm of movements used in the plot. . . . In this way a photographer can escape the accidental and can produce strong works, dictated by the creative will of artists.[33]

For Troshin the creation of the photo picture became nearly equal to the practice of theater and cinema. He believed that content was even more important for the "photographer-artist" than for the painter. He dreamed of new, gigantic photo canvases: "A large size will force the work to become clear and accurate, because incompleteness and blurredness will be very visible and will give the image negative impression."[34] A naive belief in the "economy" of the production of

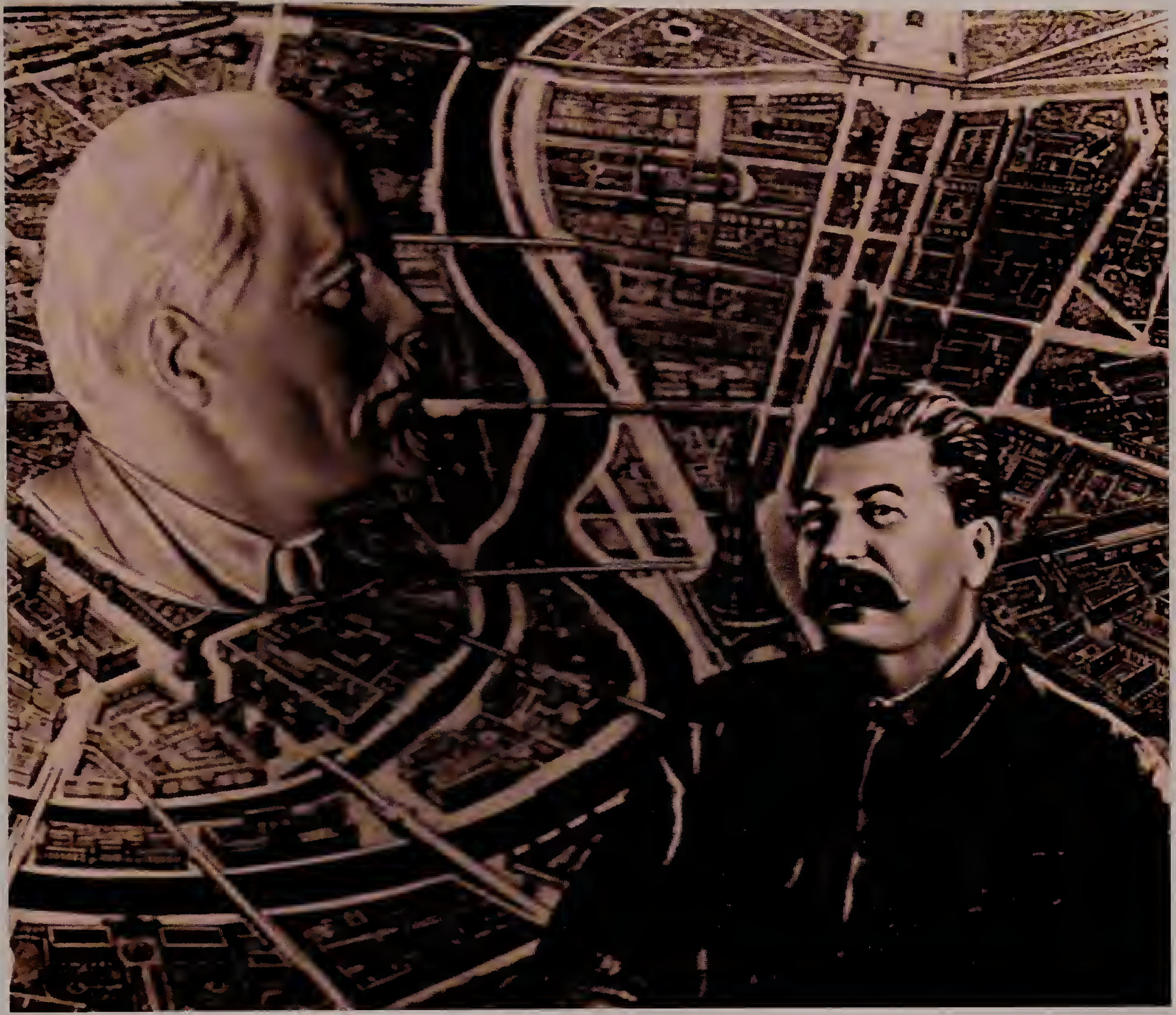


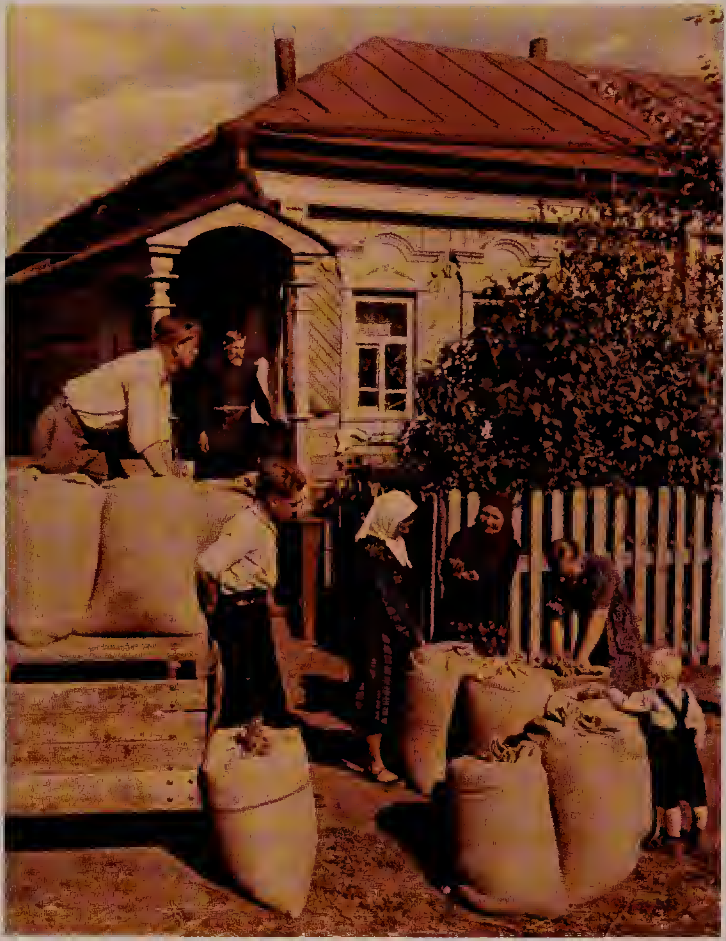
Fig. 44. Solomon Telingater, *Stalin with the Plan of Reconstruction of Moscow*, 1936. Drawing. Collection of Konstantin Akinsha.

pictures by way of the photo process gave Troshin reassurance that in reality photographers were the last artists. In contrast to paintings, photo pictures could be mechanically reproduced "without diminishing the value of the original."[35] Thus, photography was destined to transform into the most democratic of all arts. Photo pictures could be exhibited in clubs, village reading rooms, and factories.

But this was not enough. Troshin dreamed of the establishment in "cities and villages" of experimental "museums of photo culture," which were to become the real centers of photography.[36] In 1929, when Troshin's book was published, the Museum of Painterly Culture, which he used as a prototype for the imaginary chain of photo museums, had already ceased to exist, while "experimental" paintings were removed to the vaults of the Tretyakov Gallery or were exiled to various provincial museums. The museum of photo culture was never established; the time of "the dictatorship of photographers" was rapidly coming to an end.

Photography became the Trojan horse of the Russian avant-garde. The return to figuration, even in photography, made the victory of conservative painting much easier. Photography became the last manifestation of radical visual culture, remaining alive longer than other practices of artistic radicalism only because it was useful for the propagandistic purposes of the state. Constructivist photomontage and photography—which didn't want to be simply equal to painting but pretended to become its substitute—were doomed to play the role of the "servant of the state." To a great extent this role guaranteed the new Russian photography a relatively long life and soft transition from "formalism" to socialist realism.

In 1936, during the ritual discussion about "formalism and naturalism in photo art," the well-known photographer Semen Fridliand attacked Rodchenko, who



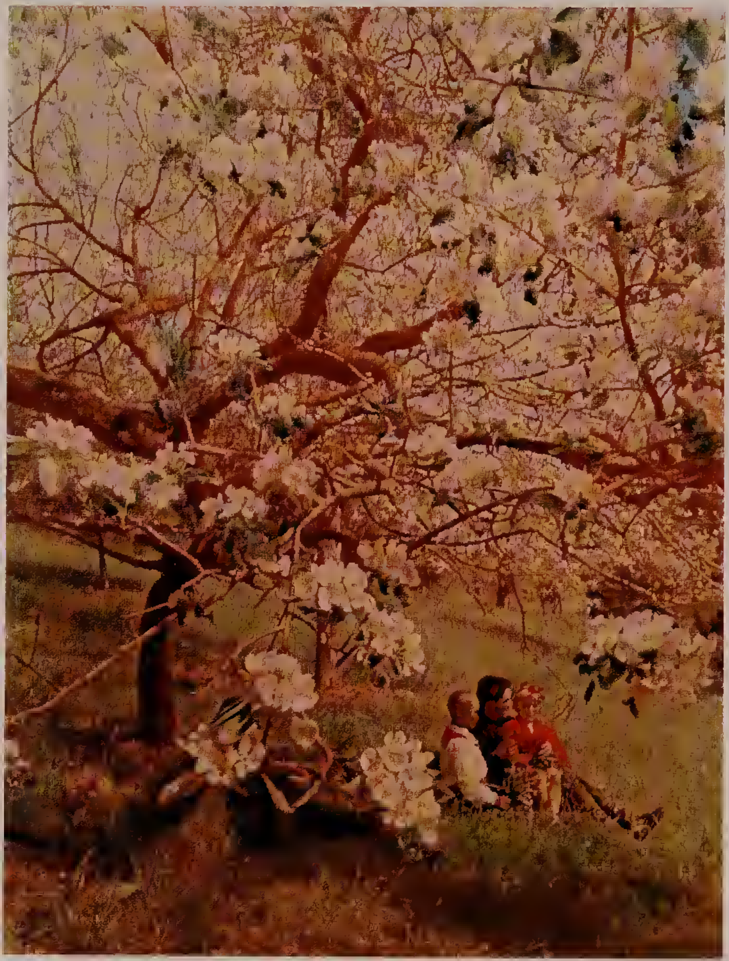


Fig. 45 (*top*). Arkadii Shishkin, *In Exchange for Working Days*, ca. 1950s. Color photograph. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 22139.
Fig. 46 (*above*). Arkadii Shishkin, *Happy Childhood*, ca. 1950s. Color photograph. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 22140.

had already conveniently confessed to his formalistic heresy. Fridliand believed that the father of constructivist photography was not vigorous enough in his self-criticism. Fridliand was especially offended by Rodchenko's remarks about photographers who spend too much time in the Tretyakov Gallery. "There is something to learn in the Tretyakov Gallery!" he exclaimed. "You can probably learn as much as Rodchenko." According to Fridliand, the question was "how to assimilate the rich experience of the art of painting."[37] Times had changed; now photographers had to learn from painting. However, such a conversion was not so difficult; the only change was the change in status. The photo picture was no longer the only possible art form of the future; it was merely the lower form of the high art of painting. Thus, the school of the Tretyakov Gallery was taken very seriously by photographers.

By the end of the 1930s photography was deprived of its claim to monumentality. Photo frescos were replaced by normal frescos, and instead of newly produced, large-scale photo pictures, traditional oil paintings in gilded baguette frames appeared on the walls of clubs and village reading halls. Even in the production of posters, the former kingdom of constructivism's photomontage, photography was replaced by drawing and painting. Photography was not needed anymore even for such traditional applications as the production of leaders' portraits. Gustav Klucis could spend as much time as he wanted retouching the traces of smallpox on the cheeks of comrade Stalin, but it wouldn't help. The once-glorified "objectivity of the photo lens" became a dangerous quality. Painting was a much more suitable media for creating the idealized portraits/icons of the Soviet leader. The application of photography was strictly limited, although the medium was still used for illustrations in newspapers and magazines. From time to time the "masters of Soviet photographic art" were honored by the opportunity to display their works at photo exhibitions. Yesterday's dictatorship was doomed to a marginalized existence.

The bankruptcy of the ambitions of the "alternative" medium was sweetened with the official semi-recognition of photography as art. During the 1936 campaign against formalism, Platon Kerzhenstsev, the chairman of the Committee of Arts of the Council of the People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R., stated that "photography is undoubtedly becoming art and that for it the problem of the creative mode [i.e., socialist realism] is as actual as for other arts."[38] Nonetheless, the artistic essence of photography remained somehow in doubt in the context of Soviet culture. It could be art, of course, but at the same time it could be produced by any person who owned a camera. The famous socialist realist painter Boris Ioganson explained the difference between "high and low" in the practice of photographers: "A casually snapped color photograph in which composition and the purposeful will of the photographer are absent is pure naturalism. A color photograph taken with a definite purpose in mind and edited by the photographer's will, however, is a manifestation of conscious realism."[39]

Such "manifestations of conscious realism" became the main element of exemplary Soviet photography from the late 1930s through the early 1950s. Staged photographs recalled both socialist realist painting and nineteenth-century Russian genre paintings (figs. 45–47). The photo picture was realized not in the form of heroic, large-scale photo canvases but in the form of the anecdotal photo Biedermeier.

Of course, as was true of all manifestations of socialist realism, photography was changing under the influence of different obstacles. During World War II the art of photo reportage enjoyed a period of true renaissance, which was provoked by the necessity to provide "urgent" visual information for the print media. But after the war ended, photography immediately started to ossify.

The death of Stalin and the beginning of Khrushchev's "thaw" finally divorced photography and painting. The staged photographs of the 1930s through the early 1950s were criticized as the "mechanical application of the principles of socialist realism to photography."[40] Genre paintings of happy collective farmers disappeared, but the happy collective farmers remained. Now their happiness was repackaged in the form of photo reportage in many ways inspired by paintings of the early 1930s. After more than twenty years of pressure, photographers didn't want to study in the Tretyakov Gallery anymore. This period of reform, however, was short-lived. By the late 1960s optimistic photo "factography" from the beginning of the Khrushchev era turned into boring officialdom. By this time Soviet photographers, as were all other strata of Soviet society, were living a double life. Official snapshots of smiling steel founders began to coexist with "artistic photography" produced for photo exhibitions and private circles of admirers.

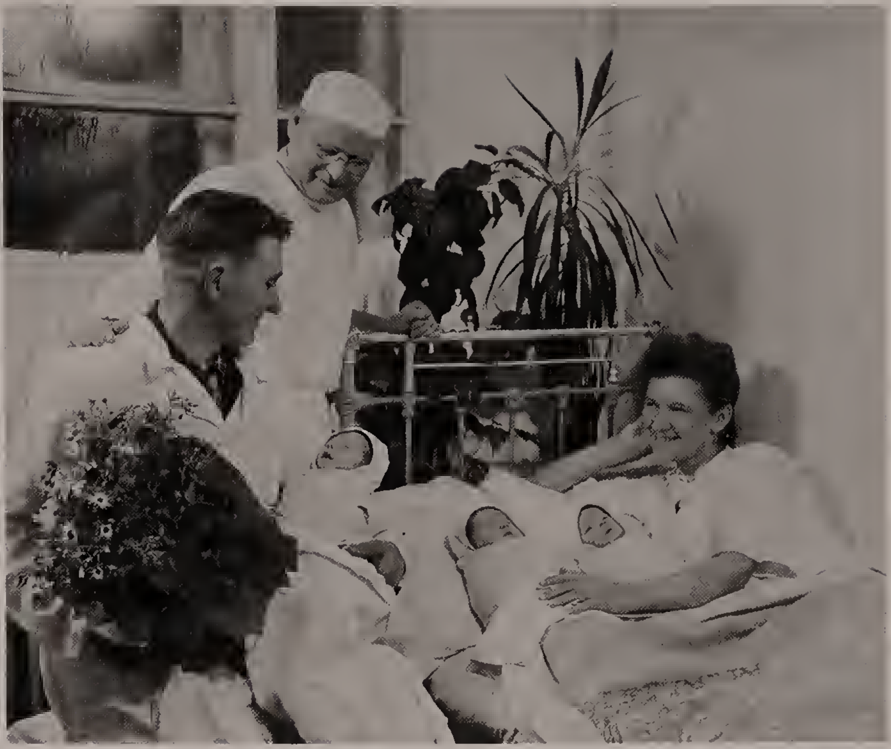


Fig. 47. Iakov Riumkin, *Triplets*, 1950s. Gelatin silver print. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 22141.

Photography again wanted to become art. This time it mimicked not painting but graphics. The beginning of the 1970s became the period of so-called "photographics." Like the early pictorialist photographers, photographers again did everything possible to make their works *not* look like photographs. Complicated processes such as solarization and pseudo-relief helped them create prints that looked like drawings, etchings, or linocuts. Silhouettes of dark trees, crossed branches, and church domes became trademarks of this trend.[41] While many photographers tried to mimic graphic arts, others, inspired by the Czech photo magazine *Fotografiia* (which introduced Soviet readership to the works of Joseph Sudek), produced endless quantities of lyrical still lifes. Still-life subjects, with the predictable "à la mode" selection of objects—dried flowers, old glass vases, broken antique clocks, and so on—were the common ground that united painting and photography during the period. The culture of the lyrical and pessimistic "intimate" art, opposing the false bravery of officialdom, became one of the signs of the fatal corrosion of socialist realism.

Although the lyrical photography of the 1970s and early 1980s wanted to be "artistic," it was not brave enough to even think about claiming the role of the leading art. The Stalinist model of culture had crumbled and had begun to decompose by the end of the 1950s, but it left a serious legacy that was not challenged by the regime's political and cultural opposition. This legacy was the fetishism of culture, typical of the Soviet Union until its last days. The hierarchy of "high and low" arts continued to rule the thoughts of the Soviet people. In this hierarchy painting undoubtedly stood higher than photography, just as poetry stood higher than prose.

Against this background, the appearance of Boris Mikhailov was a completely unexpected event.[42] A photographer from the provincial Ukrainian city of Kharkov, Mikhailov, whose practice was as far as possible from the technical perfection other photo artists of his generation sought, threw in the face of the public a sort of raw meat "photography per se." His work did not connect to the tradition of avant-garde photography or to the pictorial tradition of "soft modernist" 1970s–1980s art photography. Mikhailov came from a world where painting didn't exist, or if it existed it was found only in the lowest form of stereotypical slogans or official portraits, painted in the technique of so-called dry brush. Mikhailov came straight from the ordinary Soviet photo studio that produced passport pictures and more elaborate but no less slapdash family portraits. Such photography had nothing in common either with "art" or with "painting." Mikhailov's 1980s ugly snapshots of Soviet reality, hand-colored with aniline dye, became the true "factography" of the period of the socialist system's final decline (fig. 42, p. 30; fig. 48).

As part of the Soviet avant-garde project, photography sought to replace painting, while in the framework of socialist realism it became painting's shadow. Photography spent Brezhnev's "epoch of stagnation" cultivating a split-personality disorder, manufacturing the false images of bravura photo reports. This "tribute to Caesar" more or less guaranteed the right to enjoy "the sweet lollypop of art"[43] of chamber lyricism. Mikhailov, this Captain Lebediakin (Dostoyevsky's insane poet) of photography, depriving his work of any trace of technical perfectionism or artistic ambitions, ironically finished the history of Soviet photography.

During the first post-Soviet years numerous photographers with artistic ambitions remained faithful to the medium of black-and-white photography. Absolutely archaic at the end of the twentieth century, which was dominated by color photography available to every amateur, a traditional black-and-white print by definition had "artistic" aura. Some photographers such as Anatolii Zhuravlev came through the temptation of postmodernist imagery photographing Roman sculptures.[44] Others, like Vladimir Kupriyanov and Maria Serebriakova, printed their works on glass and entered the fashionable game of "photo installation," trying to overcome the essential two-dimensional flatness of the medium.[45] Nevertheless, neither conceptualist games nor installation efforts changed the essence of their works. Photographs by the nostalgic surrealists Vladislav Efimov and Igor Moukhin often gravitated toward lyrical conceptualism, thus remaining "artistic."[46] By the end of the 1980s photography was finally widely recognized as high art. Photographers such as Alexei Titarenko (fig. 49), who produced romantic landscapes of St. Petersburg (through long camera exposures and the production of unique prints), returned to pictorial candy-box beauty.[47] Such work, barely hidden by the archaic aura of black-and-white tradition, provoked unavoidable reference to the beginning of the twentieth century. Late-1980s and early-1990s Russian photography did not need to mimic painting because it was no longer necessary to prove photography was art. According to photography critic Vladimir Levashov, "A photographer had no place in history anymore if he didn't gain the status of the photo artist."[48] But if photographers had already become artists, artists soon had to become photographers.

Compared to photography, painting was not in great shape. The idea of the "death of painting" became a common belief by the mid-1990s. Yesterday's painters, who had just come through the short but stormy local version of trans-avant-garde and postmodernist games with "painterly installations," unexpectedly found themselves deprived of their habitual means of artistic self-expression. Their hysterical attempts to convert to conceptualism finally came to an end, thanks to a discovery made in St. Petersburg. There, in 1995, a group of young artists—Olga

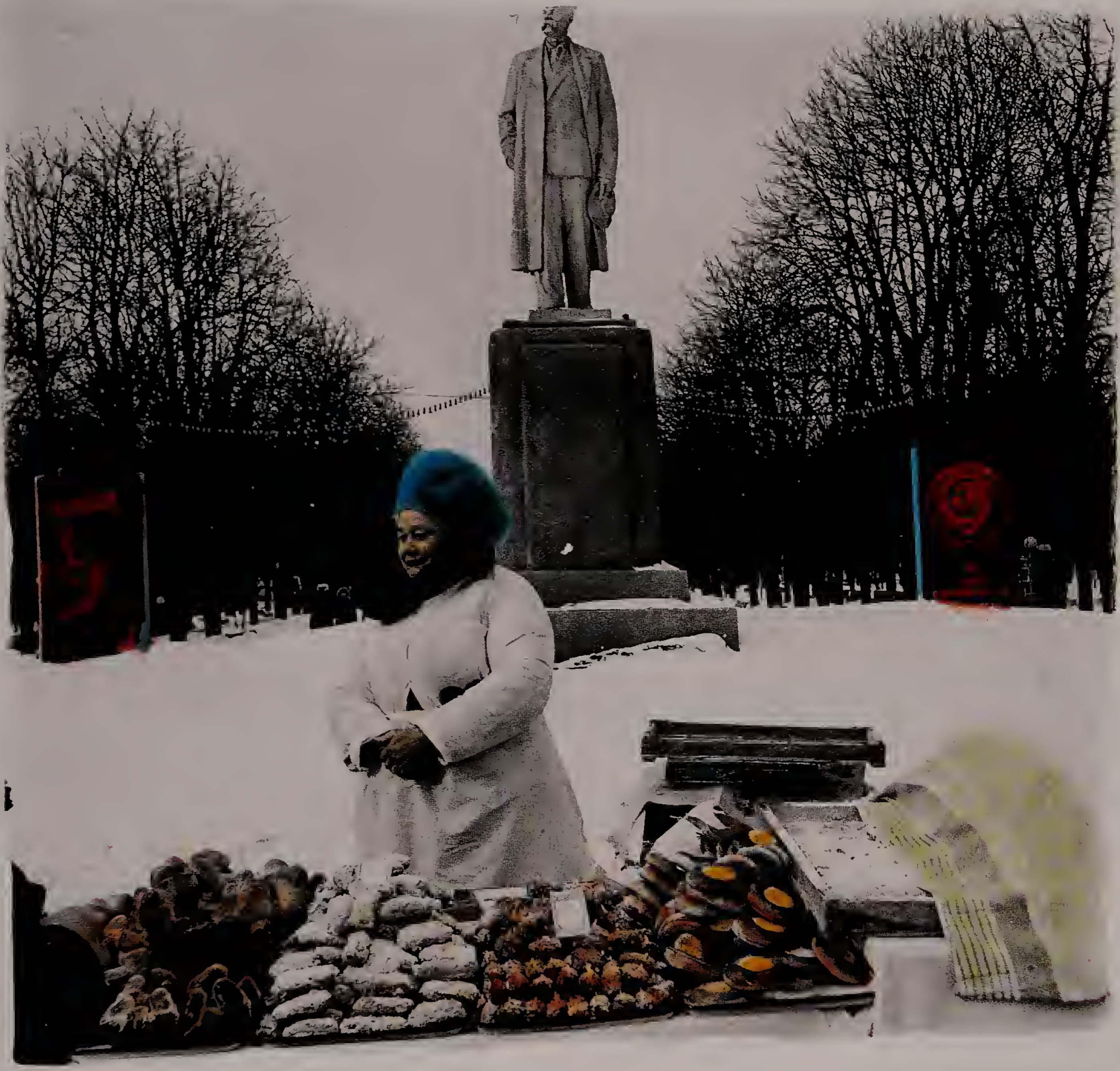


Fig. 48. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Sots Art I*, 1975–86. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dye, 50 x 50 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16016.

Torbulets, Konstantin Goncharov, and Aleksei Sokolov—produced photo illustrations for *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius.[49] This project was not a typical photographic exercise. The artists found a new tool: the "cut and paste" computer program. Unexpectedly, the forgotten form of montage returned to the Russian art scene. This time, though, montage did not ruin the traditional spatial character of conventional photography; instead, it tried to pass as the old medium. Artists wanted to create "virtual reality." What they produced was kitschy postmodernist pastiche, a mixture of staged photographs of fancy models and unrelated striking images (anything from a view of the Great Wall of China to Italian landscapes, used to create the appropriate background or set).

This simple "computer game" was continued in the works of Olga Torbulets, who exploited classical recycled images by the postmodernists painting just a few years before. Unlike her predecessors, Torbulets did not dissect creations of Bellini or Antonello da Messina. Her task was the opposite of the "fragmentation" or multiplication of classical images favored by painters; she tried to create new meanings without destroying the delusory entirety of an image.[50] Pasting the face of Leonardo di Caprio on the body of Bellini's St. Sebastian exemplifies this practice.

No matter how ironic they were, these naive attempts at "reconstruction" of the narrative figurative image provoked an art critic from St. Petersburg to write an article that in many ways recalled the old

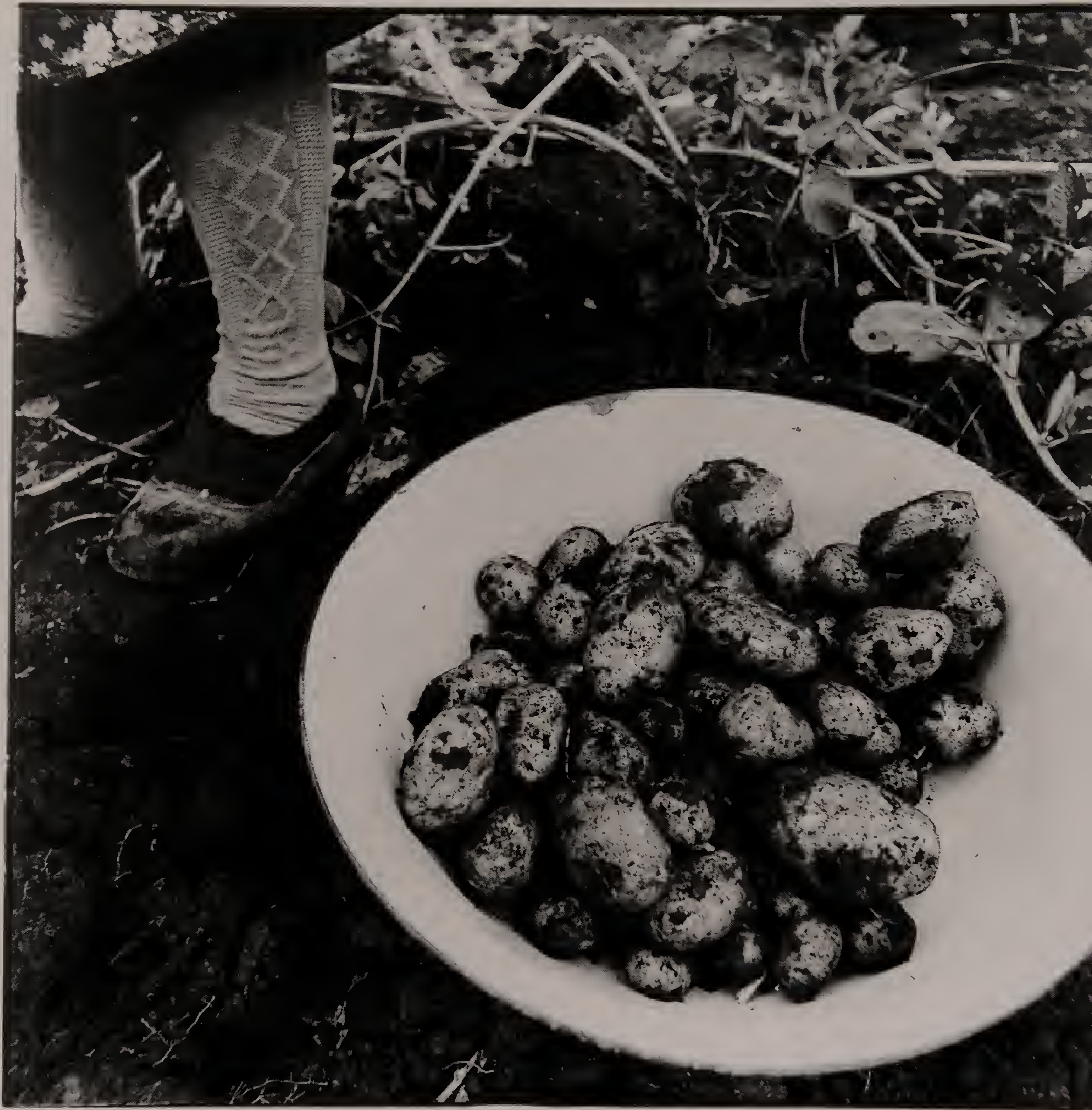


Fig. 49. Alexei Titarenko, from the series *Dacha*, 1981.
Sepia-toned gelatin silver print, 31.5 x 31.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14580.

manifesto of Troshin. Like her historical predecessor, Ekaterina Andreeva saw the photo picture as the future hope of art, only now this picture was digitized and created not only by a photo lens but also with the help of computer manipulation: "In the 1990s, with the help of the computer in editing the art of photography, the space of the picture as the space of the symbolic and the trustworthy was rediscovered in the space of virtual reality. Computer editing allows the break with the discrete photo and the means to reassemble them into new homogeneous environments without damage to the utopian integrity of a space."[51]

Andreeva dreamed that the new photo picture could solve all the problems of the visual arts:

> The desire for a picture, obviously, is in many contemporary photographs the desire for adventures and journeys in an ideal world; it cannot be satisfied by moving pictures, such as cinema, because it requires an inner sight be turned on and focused in a subjective world, waiting to be discovered, "where no film ever stepped." Contemporary painting cannot satisfy this desire either, because it is perceived literally as an object, which has become "pure art," offering to the eye its own texture. Only photography . . . can open up as a field of adventure, as a dynamic landscape.[52]

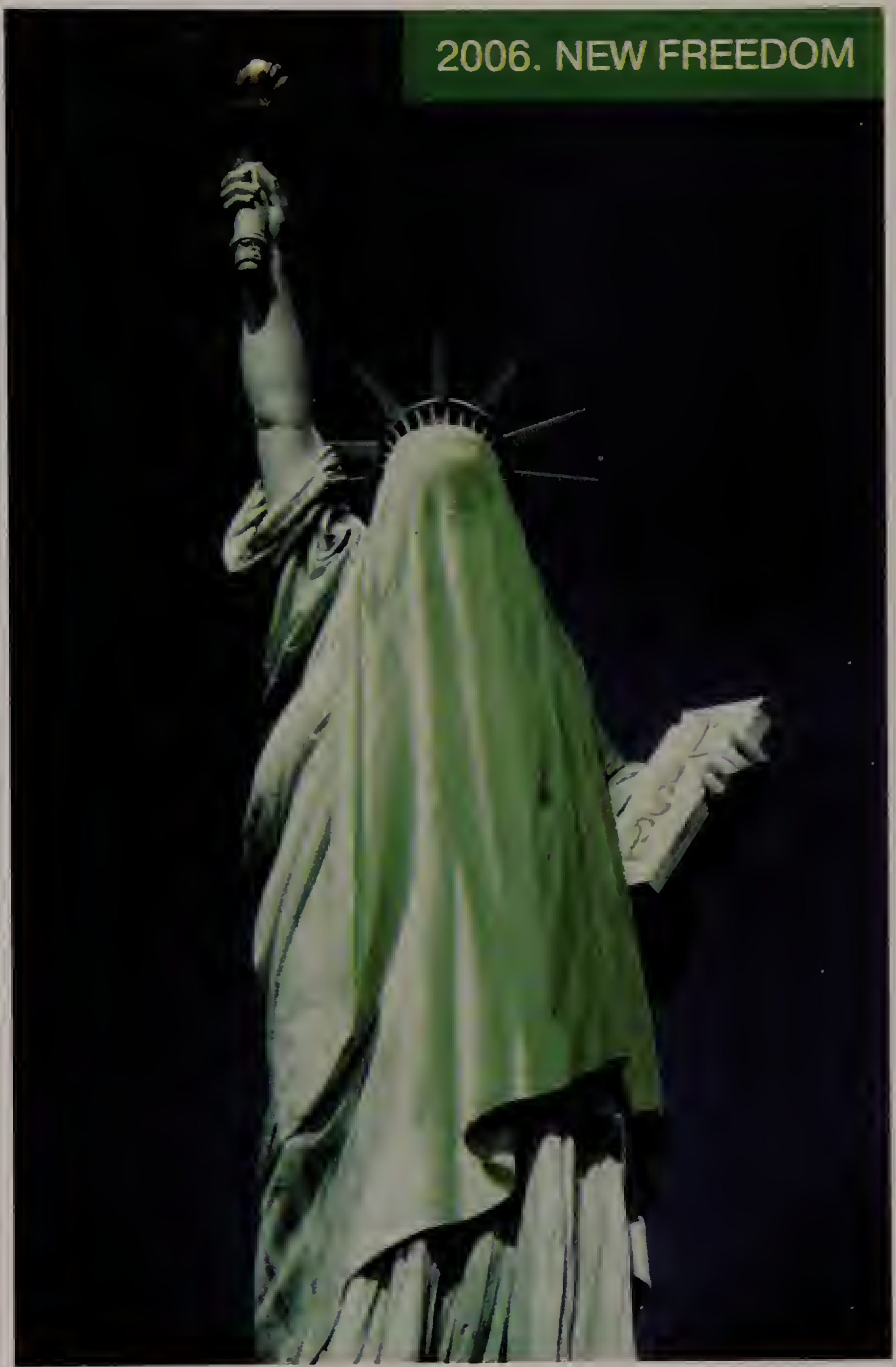


Fig. 50. AES (Tatiana Arzamasova, Lev Evzovich, and Evgenii Sviatsky), *New Liberty*, 1996. Computer print, part of *Islamic Project* installation. Collection of AES.

Before digitized pictures became a common medium of contemporary art, other computer-generated photomontages demonstrated the qualities of the rediscovered avant-garde practice. While Torbulets, Goncharov, and Sokolov appeared on the Russian art scene as a kind of collective Rodchenko, illustrating the new version of "About This" (in the context of a postmodernist irony, the satirical novel of Apuleius was more than appropriate for such reading), their followers soon turned the computer montage into an overtly politicized medium. In 1996–97 the Moscow collaborative artists' group called AES—Tatiana Arzamasova, Lev Evzovich, and Evgenii Sviatsky—produced a cycle of photomontages called *Witness of the Future: Islamic Project*. The artists were negatively inspired by the fashionable theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" coined by archconservative American political analyst Richard Huntington. According to one art critic, the AES strategy was to take Huntington's ideas to an exaggerated extreme by proposing "the worst imaginable scenario." Using computer-generated imagery, they produced cityscapes of the main Western capitals from New York to Paris, Rome to Sydney, Moscow to Berlin, envisioning how they might be in the year 2006 under Islamic occupation. Western historical monuments are turned into mosques, surrounded by Islamic gunmen and nomadic tents. Even the Statue of Liberty is covered from top to bottom by an Islamic veil, the Declaration of Independence in her hand replaced by the Koran[53] (fig. 50). The irony of the "Islamic project" was poisonous and, to a great extent, prophetic—in four years "the worst imaginable scenario" was realized in New

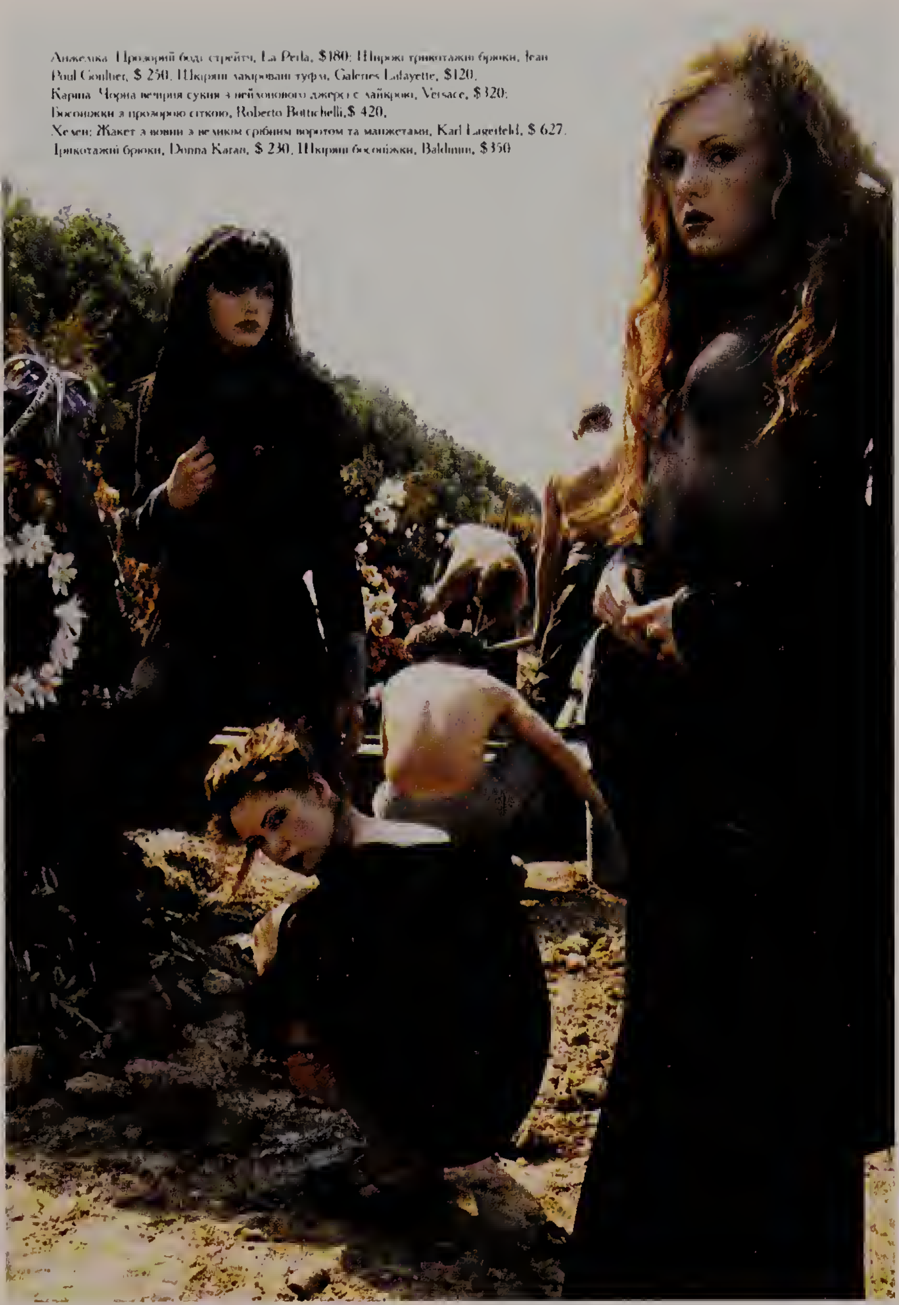

Анжеліка: Прозорий боді стрейч, La Perla, $180; Широкі трикотажні брюки, Jean Paul Gaultier, $ 250. Шкіряні лаковані туфлі, Galeries Lafayette, $120.
Карина: Чорна вечірня сукня з нейлонового джерсі с лайкрою, Versace, $320; Босоніжки з прозорою сіткою, Roberto Botticelli,$ 420.
Хелен: Жакет з вовни з великим срібним коротом та манжетами, Karl Lagerfeld, $ 627. Трикотажні брюки, Donna Karan, $ 230. Шкіряні босоніжки, Baldinini, $350

Fig. 51. Arsen Savadov, Untitled from the series *Graveyard Fashion,* 1998. Type-C color photograph, 182.5 x 100 cm. Collection of Arsen Savadov.

York. *Witness of the Future* made AES internationally known.[54]

Photomontage's revival was short-lived; ironic computer montage failed to become common practice. Instead, the photo picture gave former Soviet artists another opportunity not to paint. Their new photo pictures were often narrative (or pseudo-narrative); they were printed in expensive, huge formats and, in contrast to archaic black-and-white "photographers' photographs," in color. AES, as well as the former painter from Kiev, Arsen Savadov, and many others, began manufacturing monumental color photo images (fig. 51).[55] Like the photo pictures of the late 1930s, these new "post-painting" pictures are staged. However, one important difference exists: their creators are directors, not photographers. AES, Arsen Savadov, and Oleg Kulik do not know how to operate a camera, and they have never been in a darkroom.[56] Such practical knowledge is completely unnecessary for them. Photographers, whose names are sometimes mentioned in small type, are paid to shoot and to print. Like advertisers, the authors of the new photo pictures work with models and create "images." Their art is an art of pure vision, a vision that became slick, overblown prints, fake replacements of paintings. For the moment, the rules of this Russian game do not allow artists to paint anymore.

NOTES

1. Tatiana Saburova, "Early Masters of Russian Photography," in *Photography in Russia, 1840–1940,* ed. David Eliot (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 39.

2. Andrei Osipovich Karelin, *Tvortcheskoe nasledie* (Nizhni Novgorod: Volgo-Viatskoe Knizhnoe izdatelstvo, 1990).

3. Saburova, "Early Masters," 38.

4. Elena Barkhatova, "Pictorealism: Photography as Art," in *Photography in Russia,* 51.

5. *Rossiiskaia piktorialnaia fotografiia: Katalog k vystavke. Iz gosudarstvennykh, obschestvennykh i chastnykh sobranii* (Moscow: Ministerstvo kultury Rossiskoi Federatsii, Galereia fotograficheskogo iskusstva Tondo, 2001).

6. Barkhatova, "Pictorealism," 56.

7. The term "silver age" is used in this case as an ironic reference to the common cliché widely employed to describe different phenomena of Russian culture of the fin de siècle period. See Omri Ronen, *Serebrianyi vek kak umysel i vymysel* (Moscow: OGI, 2000).

8. Barkhatova, "Pictorealism," 56.

9. Moses Nappelbaum, *Our Age,* ed. Ilia Rudaik (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984); M. Nappelbaum, *Izbrannye fotografii* (Moscow: Planeta, 1985).

10. Moisei Nappelbaum, *Ot remesla k iskusstvu: Iskusstvo fotoportreta* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1958), 80.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 63.

13. Petr Otsup, "Vstrechi s Leninym," *Sovetskoe foto,* no. 4 (1936): 7.

14. Benedict Livshits, *Polutoraglazyi strelets* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel, 1989), 343.

15. Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Das bewusste thema* (Berlin: Ars Nicolai, 1994).

16. Liubov Popova, "O fotomontazhe," *LEF,* no. 3 (1923): 41.

17. Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot molberta k mashine* (Moscow: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1923).

18. Such construction united different (at a minimum, two)

narrative elements in one composition. The syntagmatic construction is typical for Russian icons that depict a life story of a saint, different chronological elements of which are represented in the same pictorial space. Botticelli used it in illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where "the figure of the poet himself and of his guide Virgil are repeated a few times axial to their movement in the same drawing." Urii Lotman, "Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki," in *Ob iskusstve* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2000), 342.

19. "The very antithesis of 'natural—conventionalized' is originating during an epoch of cultural crisis, abrupt changes, when people are looking at the system from outside through the eyes of another system. It is defining the cultural-typological conditionality of the periodically arising wish to address art, not normalized and 'strange' from the point of view of the traditional norms of conventionality (for example, children, archaic, exotic). It is perceived as 'natural' when the traditional systems of the communicative connections look 'abnormal' and 'unnatural.' " Urii Lotman, "Uslovnost v iskusstve," in *Ob iskusstve*, 375–76.

20. Popova, "O fotomontazhe," 41.

21. *Lubki* (sing., *lubok*) are Russian popular prints.

22. *Russkii sovetskii lubok (pechatnaia massovaia kartina v sobranii Gosudarstvennoi Publichnoi biblioteki im. M. E. Saltykova-Schedrina), 1921–1945* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoi Publichnoi biblioteki im. Saltykova-Sched, 1962).

23. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 84–88.

24. The photo decorations of architecture became so popular that in 1937 during the International Exhibition in Paris practically every national pavilion was decorated with oversized photo images. In her review of the exhibition, the photographer and scholar Gisele Freund criticized the vogue of photographic murals. Gisele Freund, "La photographie à l'Exposition," *Arts et métiers graphique*, no. 62 (1938): 37–38. She pointed out that "the medium's apparent transparency—coupled with its ability to create a point of view without seeming to—made photography a powerful propagandistic tool." Kim Sichel and Germaine Krull, *Photographer of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 126.

25. This new technology was never used. Alexander Lavrentiev, *Labaratoriia konstruktivizma* (Moscow: Grant, 2000), 119.

26. Viktor Shklovsky, "Fotografiia i ee tembr," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1926): 195.

27. Osip Brik, critic, theoretician of constructivism, and active member of LEF; Lilia Brik, his wife, the mistress of Mayakovsky. The poem "About This" ("Pro eto") was dedicated to Lilia Brik. Rodchenko used her numerous photographs for his montages-illustrations.

28. Lidia Ginzburg, *Chelovek za pismennym stolom: Esse. Iz vospominanii. Chetyre povestvovaniia* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel, 1989), 38.

29. Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). See the chapter "Photo-Still versus Photo-Picture."

30. Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984).

31. Sergei Morozov, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia fotografiia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1958), 50.

32. Ibid., 76.

33. Nikolai Troshin, *Osnovi kompozitsii v fotografii* (Moscow: Ogoniok, 1929), 108.

34. Ibid., 110.

35. Ibid., 111.

36. Ibid.

37. Semen Fridliand, "Trevoznie signali," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5–6 (1936): 26.

38. L. M., "O pravde i iasnosti v iskusstve," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1936): 3.

39. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54.

40. Morozov, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia fotografia*, 88.

41. N. Agokas, "Fotografika—za i protiv," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1972): 25–27.

42. Victor Tupitsyn, "Mercury Barrier: Boris Mikhailov in the Context of Russian Photographic Discourse," in *Boris Michajlov*, ed. Brigitte Kölle (Stuttgart: Oktagon, 1995).

43. The metaphor belongs to Georgii Ivanov. Georgii Ivanov, *Desiat stikhotvorenii* (Paris: Orion, 1947), 14.

44. *Contemporary Photographic Art from Moscow*, ed. Alexander Tolnay (Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag 1995), 91–93, 122.

45. Ibid., 63–66, 116, 85–87, 120.

46. Ibid., 49–50, 114, 78–81, 119.

47. Alexei Titarenko, *City of Shadows* (St. Petersburg: Art Tema, 2001).

48. Vladimir Levashov, *Fotovek* (Nizhni Novgorod: 10 Let. Tsentr sovremennogo iskusstva Kariatida, 2002), 104.

49. *Back to Photography*, ed. Vladimir Levashov (Moscow: Ganimed, 1996), 322–23.

50. Ibid., 330–31.

51. Ekaterina Andreeva, "The Desire for a Picture," in *Back to Photography*, ed. Vladimir Levashov (Moscow: Ganimed, 1996), 67.

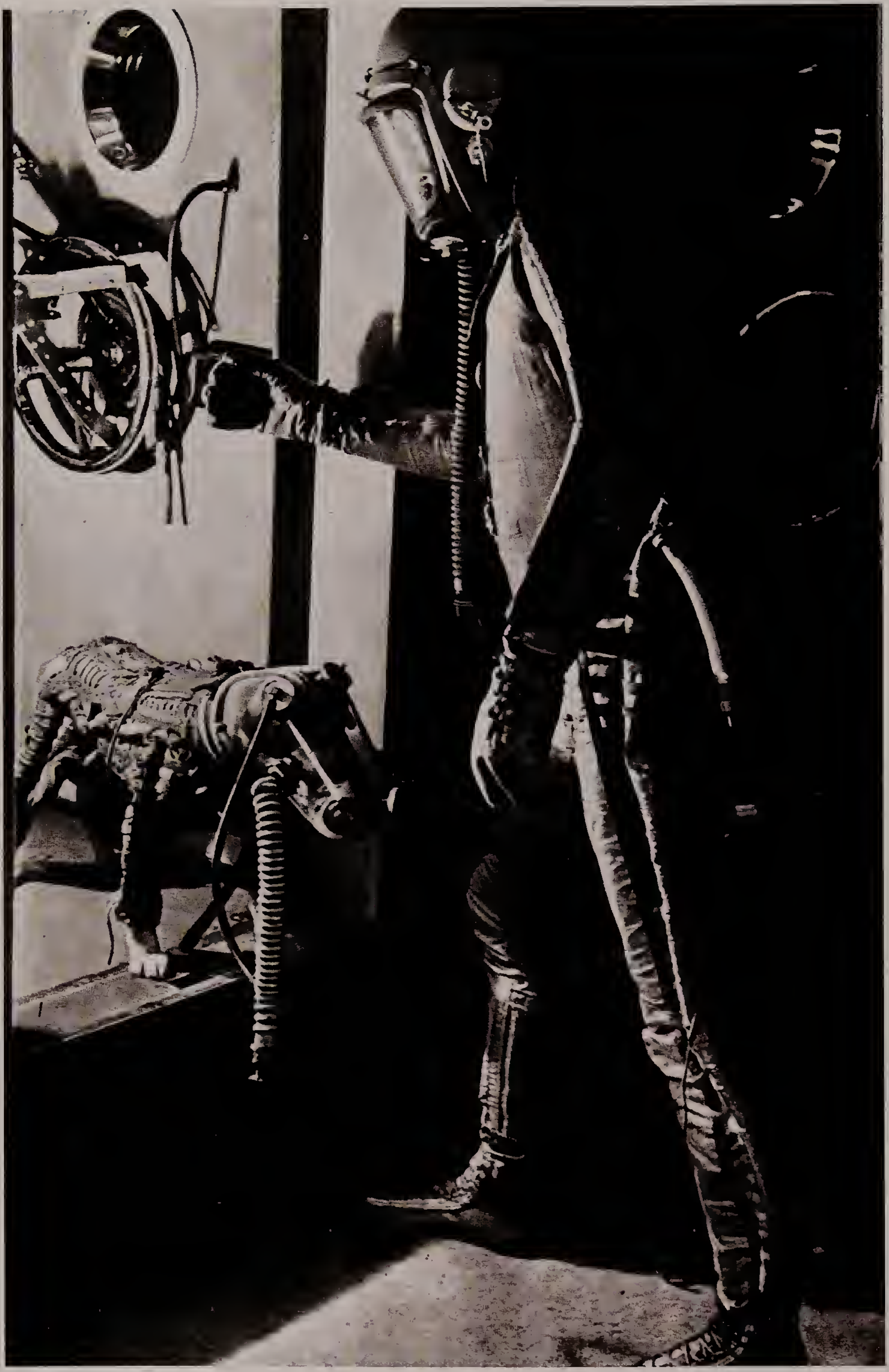
52. Ibid., 67–68.

53. Hou Hanru, "AES group," in *Cream: Contemporary Art in Culture* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 160–63.

54. Mika Hannula, "The World According to Mr. Huntington," *SIKSI* 12 (Spring 1997): 50–53; Sylvia Hochfield, "3 Penny Exhibition," *ARTnews* (June 1998): 130; Emmanuelle Gerges, "Islamic Project, Allah Morphosé," *Libération*, May 4, 2001, T15.

55. Konstantin Akinsha, "Contemporary Ukrainian Artists: Post-Modernism from a Pre-Modern Country," in *On the Margin*, ed. Betsy Warland (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Mendel Art Gallery, 2000), 11–14.

56. Oleg Kulik, www.guelman.ru/artists/kulik-en.html.



Elena Barkhatova

Soviet Policy on Photography

In order to deprive our enemies of the possibility to distort and discredit the evidence of words and figures we decided to turn to "light-writing," to the work of the sun—photography.

MAKSIM GORKY

IN AUGUST 1919, THE HEAD OF THE FIRST SOVIET GOVERNMENT, VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN, SIGNED A DECREE NATIONALIZING THE FILM INDUSTRY AND PLACING IT UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT OF EDUCATION. The relatively young genre of photojournalism was thus for a long time firmly subordinated in Russia to the propaganda needs of the Bolsheviks and the glorification of the Soviet system.

During the civil war and the years of war communism (1918–22), which caused economic destruction, almost none of the printing houses were in operation. As a result, photography existed without a press, illustrated magazines, and newspapers. Thus photojournalism was forced into the streets.

Fig. 52 (*facing*). Vladimir Shakhovskoi, *Aviation Training*, 1960. Gelatin silver print.

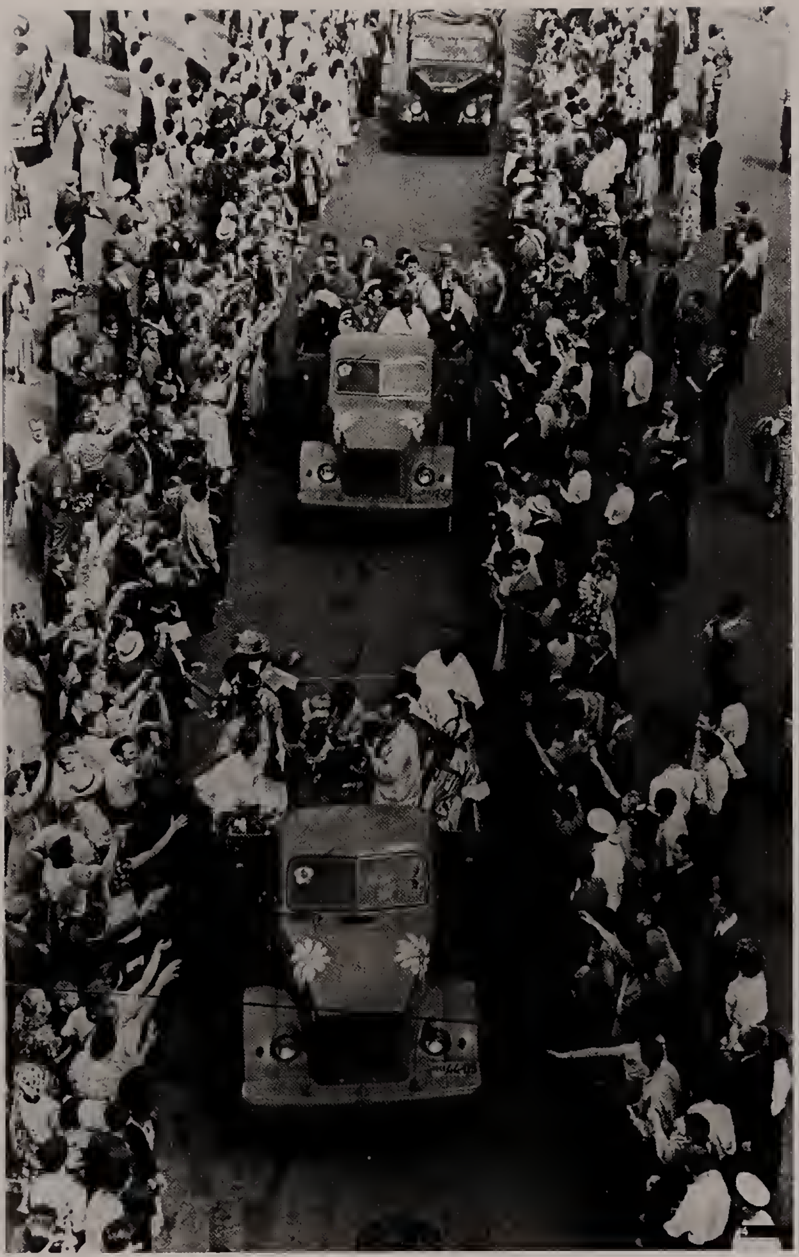


Fig. 53. Vadim Kovrigin, *Arrival of Foreign Participants of the International Youth and Student Festival, Moscow*, 1957. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Moscow House of Photography.

Photographs by many masters were exhibited on building walls, shop windows, and the windows of local newspaper offices. "Photographic committees" in Moscow and Petrograd, which received negatives from all over the country, composed series that were then distributed to propagandists and sent to servicemen's clubs and units of the Red Army. Photo series were given to participants of Comintern, the Bolshevik party, and Soviet and trade union congresses. In 1920, the All-Russian Photography and Cinema Department began to prepare special photographic exhibits.

These traditions existed in Russia for many years. In early 1956, in conjunction with the historic XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, at which Khrushchev denounced Stalin's personality cult, an original photographic exhibition was held in Moscow that included the work of Evgeny Khaldey, Vasilii Egorov, Vasilii Malyshev, and Yurii Skuratov. The critics wrote that "photojournalism was recovering its lost simplicity and directness."[1]

These qualities became important aesthetic principles in all of the arts during the so-called "cultural thaw" period (1953–64). The country began to rid itself of the Stalinist camps, Beria's fearsome state security apparatus, and the enslavement of the Soviet peasants. The budget for the armed forces was cut, freeing up funds for housing construction. Culture, including the development of book publishing and the cinema, received a huge infusion of funds. Alongside established newspapers such as *Pravda* (Truth), *Izvestiia* (News), and *Komsomolskaia pravda* (Komsomol Truth) and popular illustrated magazines such as *Sovetskii Soiuz* (Soviet Union), *Sovetskaia zhenshchina* (Soviet Woman), *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker), *Krestianka* (Peasant Woman), and *Smena* (Shift), new centrally published newspapers such as *Sovetskaia Rossiia* (Soviet Russia) and *Literaturnaia Rossiia* (Literary Russia) appeared. Journals dedicated to the arts also appeared: *Decorative Arts of the U.S.S.R.*, *The Soviet Screen*, *Creativity*, and *Variety and Circus* in 1957; and *The Artist* and *Theater Life* in 1958. This flourishing prompted the development of photography, now an active part of mass communication. Photographers came from the ranks of the amateur photography movement. In 1953 the first photography club in the country was founded at the Vyborg Palace of Culture in Leningrad. It trained a whole generation of photojournalists and served as a model for the creation of amateur photography clubs all over the Soviet Union.

In 1957 the publication of the journal *Soviet Photo* was resumed. It called on its readers, amateur photographers, to be "active participants in public life" because "future historians would see how the countenance of the great country of socialism had changed."[2] The journal's theoreticians pronounced photojournalism "the real future of photography."[3] Photojournalism was singled out of the many photographic genres because of its close relationship to the print media, the most powerful propaganda tool. "Staged" photojournalism was denounced, stressing the importance and necessity of truthful documentary photo reporting. For the first time official criticism appeared of photographers who preferred "not to observe life and record its manifestations, [but rather] to 'organize'

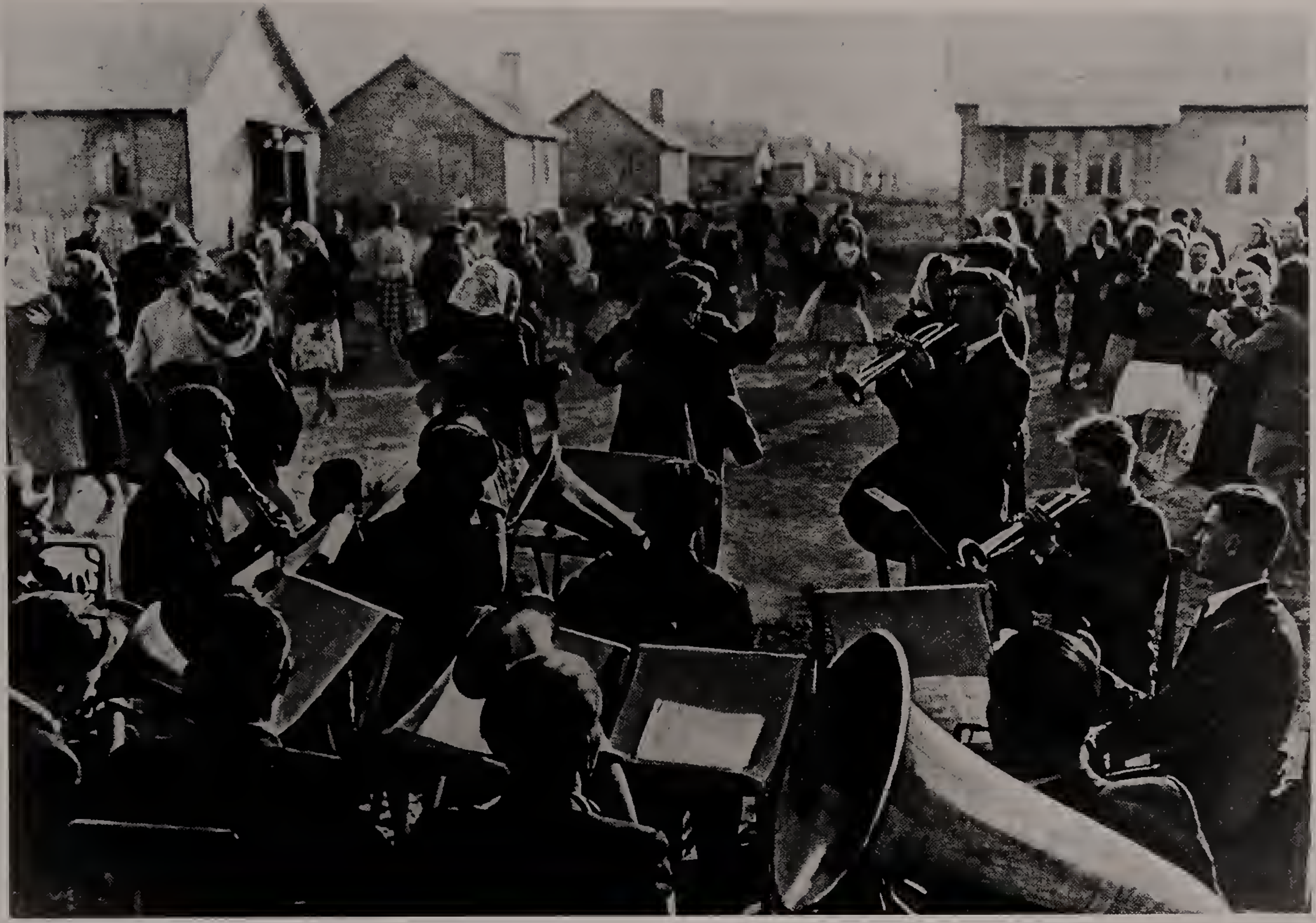


Fig. 54. Isaak Tunkel, *Celebration at a "Virgin Soil" Farm*, 1957. Gelatin silver print.

these manifestations in a manner suitable to them."[4] In 1957 the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students took place in Moscow (fig. 53). For the first time Soviet people were able to freely meet foreigners, not only representatives of socialist countries but also those of capitalist countries.

An international exhibition of photography was held as part of the festival, and at the Science House, another exhibition featured great European photographers of the older generation. The theorists of photography noted with satisfaction that "the main tendency of the work of the photographers from a majority of the countries is towards the realistic school." At the same time they expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that the international exhibition "also showed us other paths on which certain of the foreign masters are attempting to tread. These are the paths of the formal search, representative of the narrowly subjective views of the artist."[5]

The Western photographers, who were members of the jury of the international exhibition, and who closely observed professional and amateur Russian works, also were not pleased with everything they saw. The editor of the magazine *Camera*, Rotbary Re-Martines, noted that along with directness and expressiveness the Russian works also lacked "brevity of form, experience in plasticity and formal research."[6] Such wishes were seen as dangerously seditious, and the admirers of formalism were indignantly admonished on the pages of *Soviet Photo*.[7]

A fierce struggle against the "noxious" influence of the West began in 1957, the year of the festival. This campaign continued actively in 1958, when the central committee of the Communist Party was forced to intervene by passing a special resolution, "On the Incorrect Tactic of Excessive Illustration in Certain Newspapers."[8]

In September 1958, after issuing the resolution "On the Serious Deficiencies in the Content of the Magazine *Ogonyok*,"[9] the party decided to closely monitor the anniversary exposition *Photographic Art in the U.S.S.R.*, which was to be held in Moscow after a long hiatus (the last all-union exposition had been held in 1937). In addition to the brilliant retrospective, this exhibition had a section for contemporary works that documented important sites from contemporary Soviet life, such as the Antarctic, which was being explored at that time; the virgin lands, which were being settled following an appeal by the Communist Party (fig. 54); and industrial plants and power plants

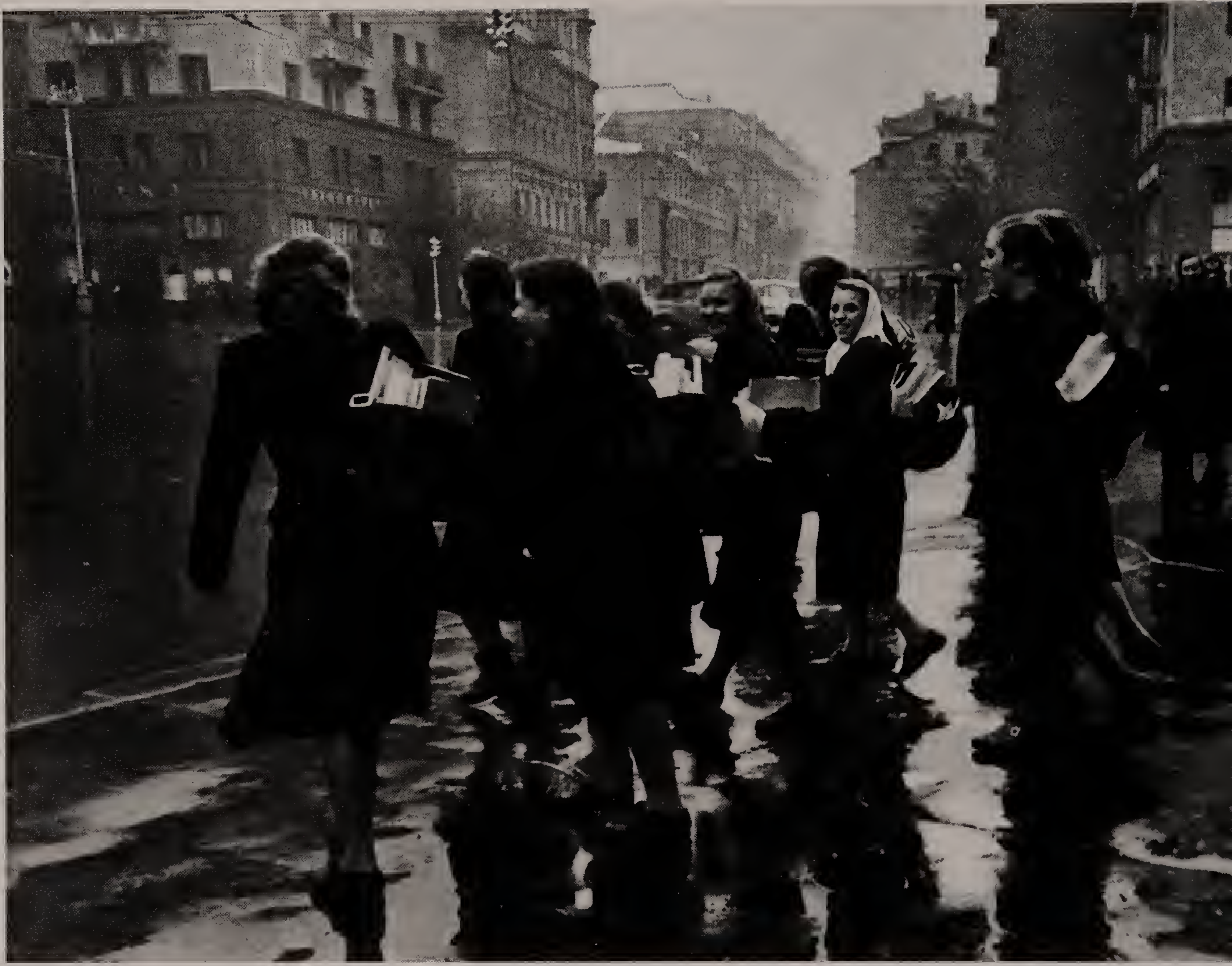


Fig. 55. Grigorii Dubinsky, *Morning Mail*, 1958. Gelatin silver print.

under construction. There were even two photographs of "Square-Nest Planting of Corn," a current topic, as Khrushchev was actively promoting corn cultivation throughout the Soviet Union.

At the 1958 exhibition special attention was given to a work by Grigorii Dubinsky, *Morning Mail* (fig. 55), which was published in the central organ, *Pravda*, and on the cover of *Soviet Photo*. This rather modest photograph became a distinctive "aesthetic ideal" in the late 1950s. It actually did differ substantially from the numerous traditional, pompous, and bombastic photographs at the 1958 exhibition.[10] However, many of the pictures in the 1958 exhibition, including *Morning Mail*, were accused of making use of the "staged method." As an example of a clear expression of "spontaneous life-like scenes," they were counterpoised with the works of the following *All-Union Exhibition* of 1959, whose themes seemed to derive from official party documents: "The confident tread of heavy industry, the precipitous growth of agriculture, the brilliant achievements of Soviet science, hitherto unseen rates of housing construction, great increases in power-generating capacity—all of this the spectator will find on the walls of the exhibition."[11] The spectators did find many "smoking factories pictures," many photographs of massive silhouettes of hydroelectric power plants (fig. 56). The exhibition also contained many images of heavy agricultural equipment in the fields and photographs of new construction.

Almost all of these photographs were original reportages of trips taken by photojournalists around the country (fig. 52, p. 46). Frequently they were accompanied by text that received broad exposure in newspapers and magazines. In *Soviet Photo* the photographs were even printed without titles. Under each picture appeared captions such as "Scheduled Figures on the Development of the Economy in the U.S.S.R. from 1959–1965," "From the Resolution of the Twenty-First Congress of the CPSU," and "From the Resolution of the June Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the CPSU."

Soviet photography in the late 1950s was tightly regimented, fully subservient to the current tasks of the party, and subject to stringent ideological constraints. And yet the *All-Union Exhibition* of 1959 was noteworthy for the appearance of young photographers such as Valerii Gende-Rote and Nikolai Rakhmanov, whose works were already almost free of ideological clichés and false official posturing. It was symptomatic that they were given a qualified green light: "They are young, lacking in the inertia of old errors and are the leading and strongest fighters for spontaneity and vital truth in photo art."[12]

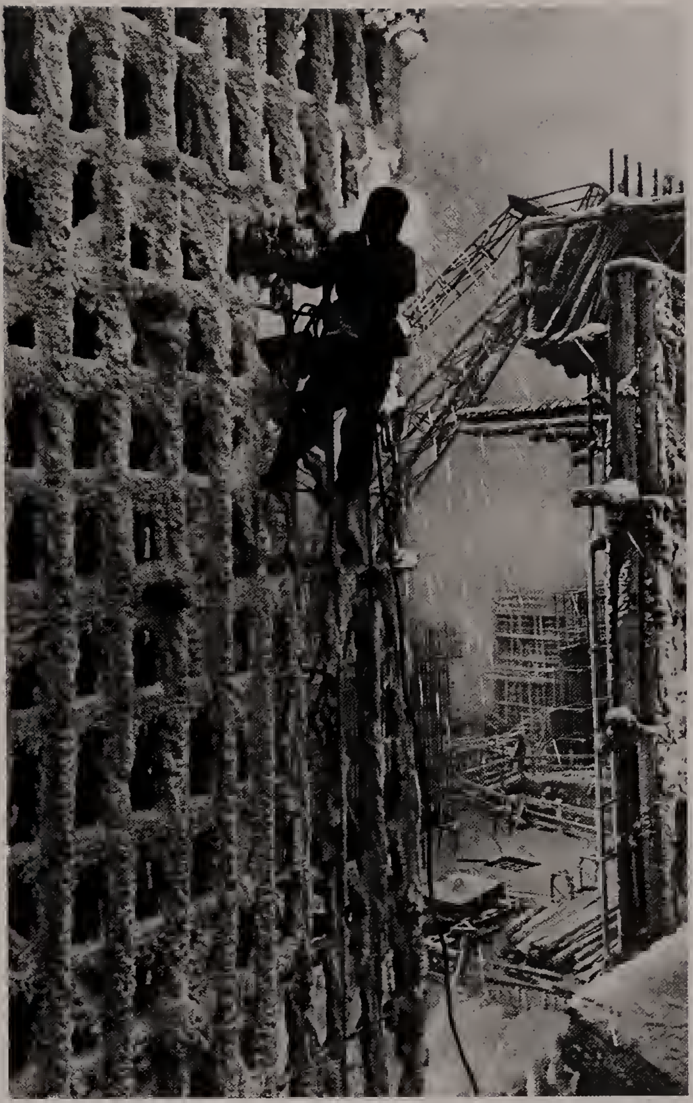


Fig. 56. Yurii Bagriansky, *Irkutsk Hydroelectric Plant Construction Site*, 1959. Gelatin silver print.

A definition such as "fighter for vital truth" seems to be courageous and full of positive meaning compared to other definitions that were given in that same year by the director of TASS, the central photographic service of the country: "The photojournalist is a political fighter, who consciously and purposefully struggles for communism."[13] "Vital truth" and "communism" were the two principal, albeit diametrically opposed, topics of Soviet photojournalism. Soviet photojournalism emerged from the isolation of the Stalinist epoch and encountered the rapid development of world press photography, which, beginning in 1955, was exhibited annually in the Netherlands.

With genuine indignation the definition of press photography given by its organizers was quoted: "The last portrait of a statesman taken an hour before his death, a worn-out model ... a priest, representing his God on a battlefield ... a turned-over car after a crash."[14] Soviet theoreticians advanced their definition of the essence of "photo-information," which "serves to mobilize the broad masses to successfully complete the tasks proposed by the party and the government at the separate stages of communist construction."[15]

International photographic exhibitions were viewed as nothing but "arenas of acute ideological struggle." However, the works of Soviet masters—mainly the official correspondents of such magazines as *Sovetskii Soiuz*, *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, and *Ogonyok*—were entered. Soviet photojournalists could also take part in foreign exhibitions through the photographic section of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies.[16]

Rallying around the slogan "Photography brings the peoples closer together," the House of Friendship in the late 1950s actively organized and held international exhibitions in Moscow. However, a difficult situation for official circles occurred in connection with the exhibition of Edward Steichen's work *The Family of Man* held as part of the American exhibition in 1959. Steichen's photographs offered no answers to the question of "how the world should be," which in terms of Soviet ideology meant that "they were lacking in ideals." However, their philosophical content and the dramatic aspect of the images and the perfection of formal language had a shattering effect on Moscow audiences. At the House of Friendship, Steichen met leading Soviet photographers, who hastened to note they did not see any abstract photographs at the exhibition. This point essentially rehabilitated the dean of American photographers in the eyes of officialdom, whose position was well known: "modernists of photography ... attempt to spread their noxious influence also on the photographic art of the socialist camp."[17]

Those most in need of protection against the "noxious" influences in the late 1950s and the early 1960s turned out to be the Polish colleagues, who traditionally "turned" to the West.[18]

Photography in socialist Czechoslovakia, which paid close attention to the development of photographic art, occupied "a firm position regarding realism." However, Czech colleagues set their Russian colleagues an example with their fundamental attention to questions relating to image forms.[19]

The German Democratic Republic demonstrated its dedication to realism at the Berlin international exhibition of 1959, and later in Moscow under the slogan "Socialism Is Victorious." In a review of the exhibition one of the German colleagues pointed out that certain photographers "understand the building of socialism only as the work of construction cranes, tractors, smoking factory smokestacks," and that "they accord technology too much attention, instead of studying human beings."[20]

The topicality and obviousness of this conclusion were also confirmed at the *All-Union Photographic Exhibition* of 1960 in Moscow dedicated to "The Seven-Year Plan in Action." A review of the exhibition noted that "there is too much metal, fire, construction, pipes and explosions at the exhibition, and an inadequate exploration of the spiritual world of the builders of communism ... human beings are not shown enough."[21]

The exhibition did indeed have a great many traditional "production" pictures dedicated to stock construction sites.[22] Many of the sites were photographed from helicopters, which critics saw as "the necessity of the photographer-artist to fully and broadly grasp the vast expanses and legendary seope of the seven-year plan."[23]

Works in many genres were selected to correspond to ideological tasks. Landscapes, for example, showed nature "transformed by the labor of Soviet man" in which the "presence of the seven-year plan" should be felt. A limited number of still-life photographs were admitted, as they bore witness to the fact that the "abundance of foodstuffs and household appliances is becoming more discernible."[24] Portrait photographers were sternly admonished that only work determines character and the "subject of the portrait cannot be removed from the environment of his work activity"[25] (fig. 57).

In January 1960, the first Constituent Congress of the Union of Journalists of the U.S.S.R. took place. In greeting the participants, Nikita Khrushchev called on them to be the "helpmeet of the party" and reflect the sweep of industry in the Soviet Union, the creation brigades of communist labor, the universities of

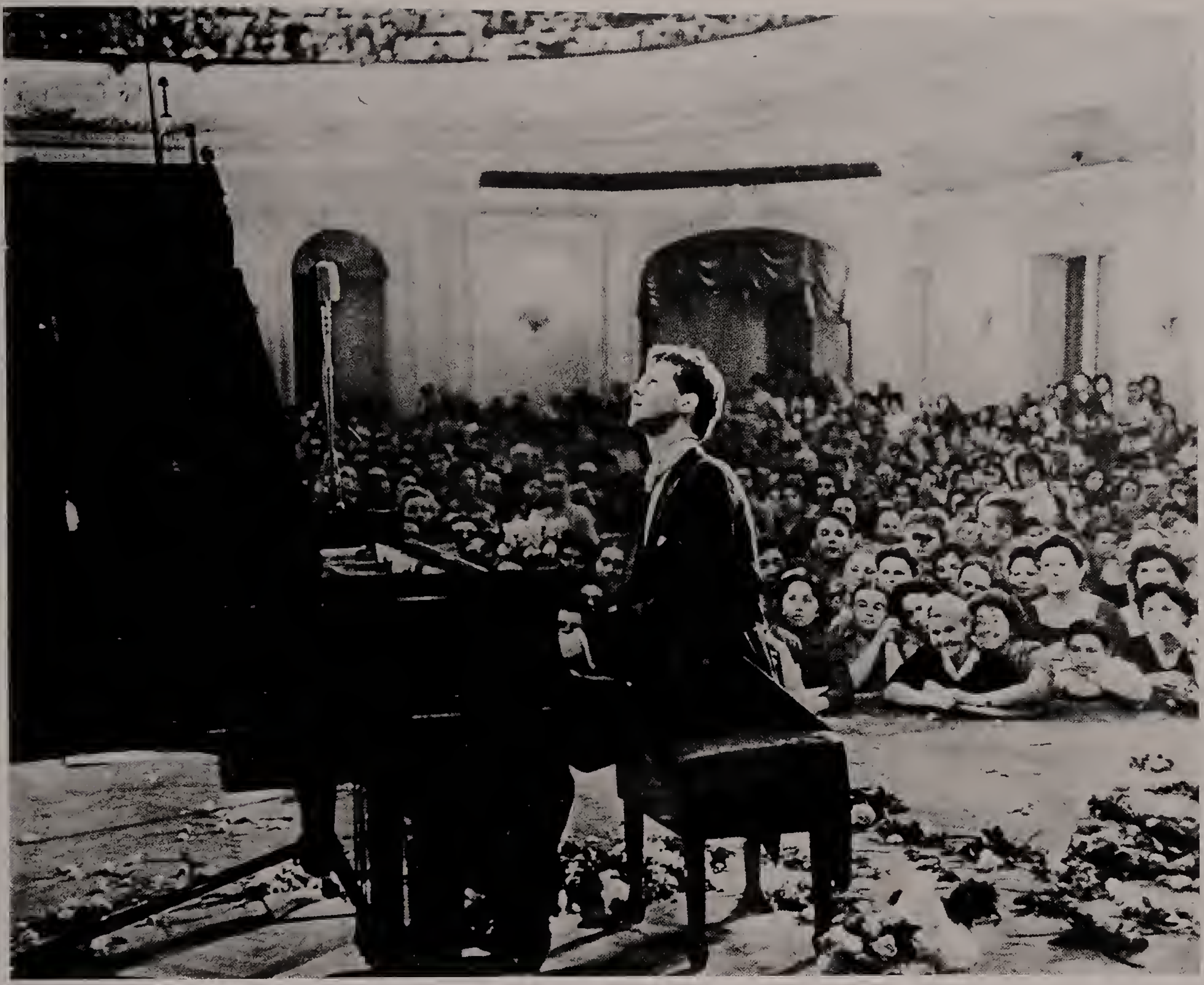


Fig. 57. Mikhail Ozersky, *Van Cliburn Performs "Moscow Nights,"* 1962. Gelatin silver print.

culture, and even prefab construction. A special photographic section was organized in the newly formed union of journalists, urging them to create a "documentary photographic chronicle of the life and struggle of our people, which is building communism."[26] In addition to the general resolutions regarding the party's ideological tasks, the main resolution that was adopted called for raising the importance of photographic art in the life of the country because it is "the most popular, energetic [art form] and stands closest of all to the people."[27] For this goal it was necessary to publish books and photographic albums and to organize personal and thematic organizations.[28]

The Central House of the Journalist began to offer a two-year correspondence course for the advanced training of journalists and photojournalists.[29] In 1960 the first All-Union Seminar of Photojournalists was held, testifying to the importance of photography.

The importance of photojournalism was noted not only in Moscow but also in Berlin, where in 1960 the First International Conference of Photojournalists and Editors took place. In conjunction with the Berlin conference the first *Interpress-Photo* exhibition was held. Thereafter, this exhibition would take place every two years and to a certain degree compete with the *World Press Photo* exhibition. For Soviet and socialist bloc photographers, *Interpress-Photo* became an important forum for exhibiting their work. The main forum in the Soviet Union was the exhibition *The Seven-Year Plan in Action*.

The second exhibition under this name took place in 1961 in conditions of considerable advancement in the country. The public's genuine enthusiasm was connected with actual achievements in the development of industry and agriculture, the increase in housing construction, improvements in the economy, and the daily life improvements and accomplishments in the area of culture. After many years of cultural isolation, the Soviet Union was opening up to the outside world. Among the important cultural achievements of the time were Mikhail Kalatozov's 1957 film *The Cranes Are Flying*, which received the first prize at the

Cannes festival, the 1959 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, and 1959 international film festivals.

An enormous factor in national pride and the growth of the Soviet Union's global influence was the first space flight by Yurii Gagarin on April 12, 1961. This event greatly influenced Soviet photojournalism, which suddenly found itself in the center of the world's attention. The best masters of photography at TASS photographed the first cosmonaut on board the *IL-18* and his emotional meeting with Khrushchev at the airport.

The second manned space flight was marked by the truly fantastic but accurate documentary photographic images taken by cosmonaut German Titov from outer space. *The Earth in the Photographs of German Titov*, the name of a special stand, could have served as a unique epigraph for the upcoming 1961 *International Moscow Exhibition of Photography*. The photographic images from outer space rendered insignificant and petty such concepts as the "cold war" or the "iron curtain." Numerous foreign guests arrived in 1961 not only to visit the successful international photography exhibition but also to take part in the International Youth Forum, for which the large photographic exhibition *Youth of the World* was also organized.

That same year the news agency Agenstvo Pechati Novosti (APN) was created to provide foreign audiences with photographic images of the Soviet Union. Unlike the state-run TASS, APN was a non-state entity founded by the Union of Journalists of the U.S.S.R., the Union of Writers of the U.S.S.R., the Union of Friendship Societies, and the Znanie Society. It performed the standard functions of an information agency by publishing newspapers, magazines, and books in twenty-eight languages. It also provided photographers with an enormous new forum and began competing with the correspondents of TASS.

The unusual increase in the role of photography in the life of the country continued to grow in 1962. In Moscow, for example, many exhibitions were organized: *The First Army Exhibition*, *Trade Unions of the U.S.S.R.*, and *Our Youth*. Personal exhibitions by leading masters such as Max Alpert and Dmitry Baltermants took place. In Leningrad, the first All-Union gathering of photo amateurs took place, organized by the Vyborg Palace of Culture Photo Club.

The main venue, however, remained *The Seven-Year Plan in Action*. In 1962 this exhibition was for the first time distinguished by its stylistic integrity. In the majority of cases, even a suspicion of staging or intervention by the photographer was reason for an image to be rejected. The works were selected out of the current creative work of photographers who were no longer afraid to demand from the editors "choice and breadth in the search of new thematic material and original interpretations." The photographers rejected "an embellished view of our life,"[30] and they were unafraid of formal experiments. Fewer "production" photographs appeared at the *Seven-Year Plan* 62 exhibition, as well as fewer tiring clichés of silhouettes of cement plants and steel constructions and panoramas of plowed fields.

"Ideologically correct" works continued to receive awards. However, the *Seven-Year Plan* 62 prize was awarded to Mikhail Anan'in for *This Should Not Happen Again*, in which an invalid with a crutch leans against the stone wall of the Brest fortress. In the 1960s, one of the most important themes of Soviet photography, World War II, was shown from a new perspective, without the obligatory heroic bathos. Instead of the thunder of victorious war drums, a tragic requiem was heard.

Under the pressure of new artistic possibilities and aesthetic passions, the formerly immutable ideological prohibitions were giving way. In 1962, for example, at the height of Khrushchev's "thaw," the literary journal *Novyi mir*—the most important bulwark of free thought in the Soviet Union—published Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. This work, which told the story of a prisoner in the Stalinist camps, became the main symbol of the changes taking place in the country.

A symbolic event also occurred in the world of photography in 1962. The Central Writers' House held an exhibition of the works of Aleksandr Rodchenko, who had been consigned to oblivion as the main symbol of formalism.[31]

Young photographers and journalists who were now rediscovering the art of the 1920s and 1930s Russian avant-garde, kept under wraps in Stalinist times,

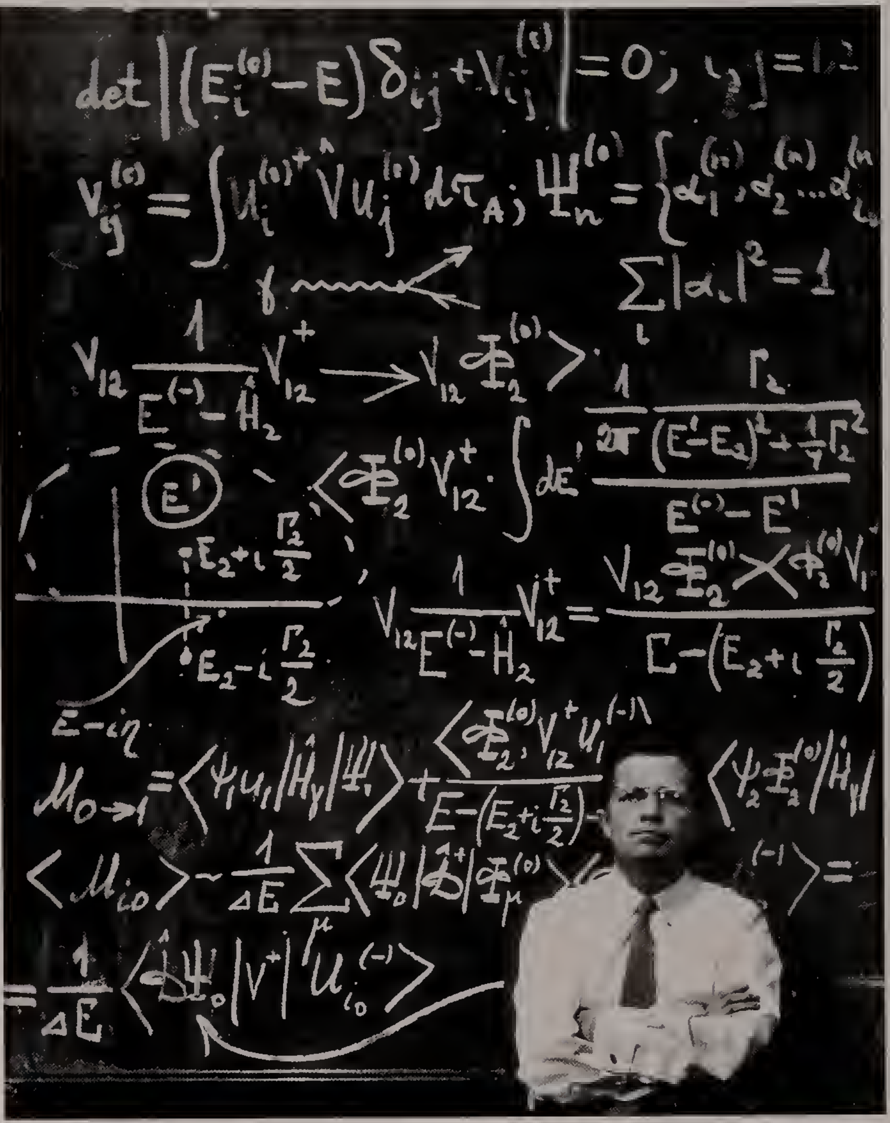


Fig. 58. Vsevolod Tarasevich, *The Duel* from the series *MGU* (Moscow State University), ca. 1960s. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Moscow House of Photography.

were now eager to disregard the requirements of the party or of the authorities.

The aftermath of Khrushchev's visit to the Manege exhibition was extremely negative.[32] The pressure of party organs on art, including photography, increased significantly. Experimentation with pure forms such as "unfocused frames," "lowest points of the exposure," "unfocused pictures," "unusual perspective," "linear rhythms," and pictures taken "through a rain-drenched window or windshield" was subjected to severe, indignant criticism.[33] The theorists of photography were reprimanded that since 1957 "the basic procedure of creative photojournalism was mistakenly called reporting method,"[34] whereas in Soviet photography and art in general only one method existed—the method of socialist realism, in which the center of attention is the representation of the human being—the builder of communism.

At the opening of the exhibition *The Seven-Year Plan in Action 63* the minister of culture, E. A. Furtseva, made a speech titled "The Art of Photography as an Important Area of Ideological Work." Numerous articles followed, with titles such as "The Art of Photography Is a Weapon on the Ideological Front" and "Socialist Realism Is Our Weapon." Carrying out an agitation campaign among Soviet master photographers to produce "art that is close to and comprehensible to the people," authorities even remembered a page out of the history of American photography, when, between 1935 and 1943, the Department of Agriculture commissioned more than two thousand documentary photographs, which recorded the impoverished conditions of rural workers.[35]

Such examples, which were relevant in the context of Soviet photography in the 1930s, were no longer so for the photojournalists of the 1960s. They recorded current events that were continuously changing under the influence of technological advances, unimaginable in the recent past, such as space exploration or splitting the atom. This romantic era of new discoveries gave rise to new heroes, whose work was becoming more complex and more intellectual. Therefore, it was fitting that the photographs of *The Seven-Year Plan 63*, in addition to portraying the usual steel workers, erectors, and virgin-lands farmers, depicted famous physicists. Nuclear physicists, from students to academicians, were the heroes of the photographic series *MGU* (Moscow State University) that was enormously popular. The photograph *The Duel* (fig. 58) became especially famous. In it the photographer wanted to "photographically depict the idea of the development and formation of the intellect."[36]

The 1963 exhibition also contained many photographs depicting people with difficult but romantic occupations, such as alpinists, meteorologists, and explorers of uninhabited lands. No doubt this selection reflected the country's mood in the 1960s, when poems and "bard" songs were written about these people. In everyday life, as well as in art, a genuine enthusiasm and romanticism was evident regarding the renewal of the country. An entire generation became enthralled by innovative film directors, avant-garde painters, and poets, whose readings attracted millions of listeners to stadiums. The exhibition *The Five-Year Plan 63* included for the first time many photographs of musicians.

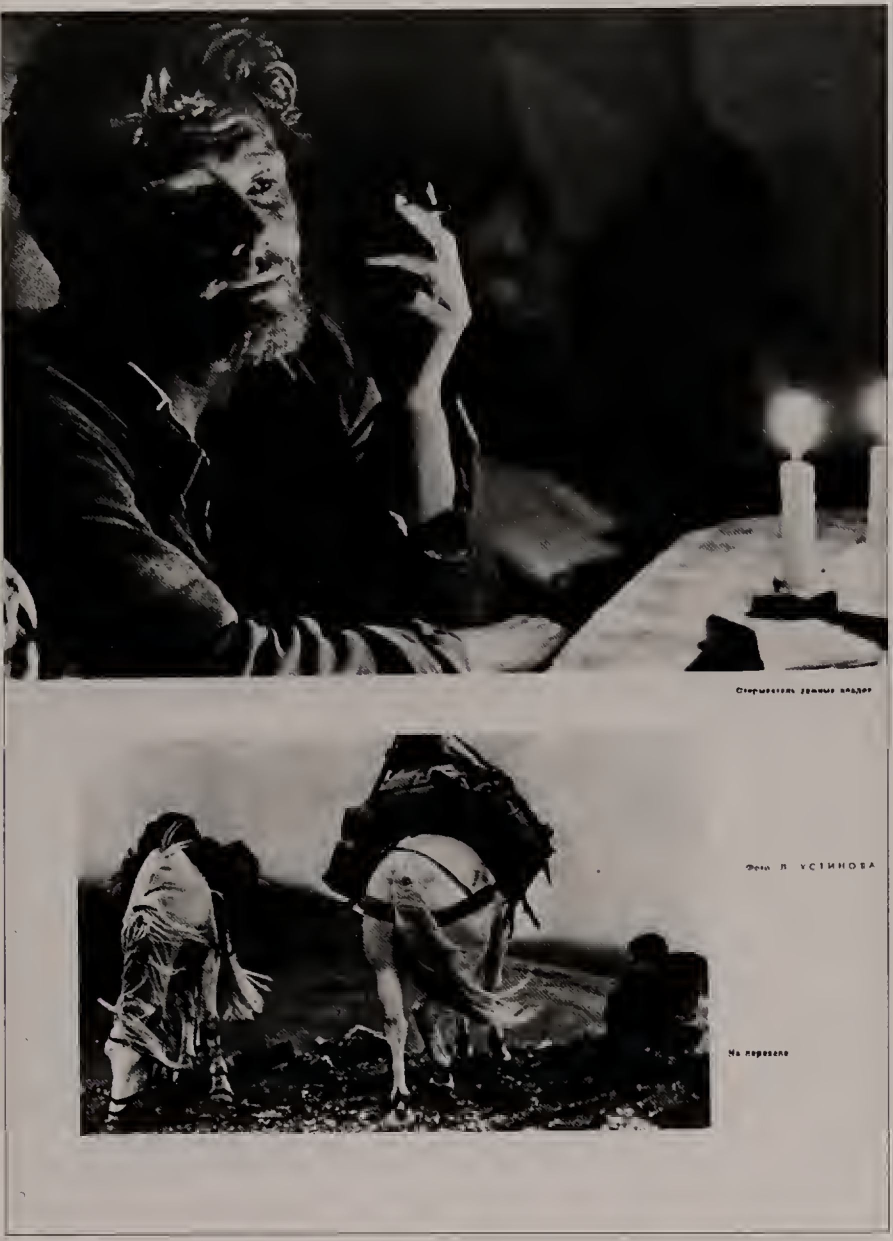


Fig. 59. Lev Ustinov, Page layout from the photo-essay *Kolyma*, 1964. TOP: *Discoverer of the Earth's Treasures* (no. 2). BOTTOM: *At the Pass* (no. 3). Gelatin silver prints.

As a response to the Communist Party's plenary session on the development of the chemical industry, photos of big chemical construction projects and young girls with test tubes were plentiful in several exhibitions that took place in 1964. Nevertheless, a tendency toward a more complex photojournalism was discernible. While not dispensing with the required ideological content, photojournalists produced images that expressed dramatic conflict and encouraged psychological interpretation. Official photojournalist images were filled not only with emotion and passion (*T. Adil Making a Speech Before the World Congress of Women* by Max Alpert and *The Fiery Fidel Speaks*) but also with more intimate subject matter (*The Divorce* by Lev Porter and *The Teacher* by E. Tikhanov). The photo-essay *Lamps of the Twentieth Century* by Nikolai Rakhmanov received an award. The "big" topic of electrification was shown in the everyday life of a large city and its citizens rather than through the prism of the usual "heroic creation."

Gennadii Koposov showed the exotic nature of the North in an especially original manner in his photograph *Minus 55 Degrees—Evenkia*, which received many international awards in 1964.[37] His recognition marked the first time that a majority of the international photographic community noted the high degree of skill of the Soviet photographers, completely devoid of ideology. Such a statement could not be made of another Soviet work that was distinguished in The Hague in 1964 by a special diploma. This photo-essay by the young photographer Lev Ustinov, titled *Kolyma* (fig. 59), consisted of many dramatic photographs of "the land of fetters," an area associated with the Stalinist camps. For this reason the essay *Kolyma* provoked many heated discussions.[38] Although Ustinov's photographs were praised for their "humanity, romantic sensibility, heart-felt warmth," he was indignantly accused of "Hemingwayism." At that time Ernest Hemingway had become "the most important American in Soviet life."[39] The most important element of the Hemingway vogue was independence from the state and ideology. Ustinov's geologists and gold prospectors—strong, grim men set against the background of the wild nature of the terrible Kolyma region—were thus associated with Hemingway's philosophy. Such independence was unacceptable to the authorities.

In that same year, the newspaper *Komsomolskaia pravda* held a photographic competition titled "Twentieth-Century Youth," while the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* held a competition for the photographic clubs of the Russian Federation (RSFSR) called "Russia My Love." In Moscow's Central Park of Culture and Rest an exhibition of rural amateurs called *Russia My Motherland* was held. "The happiness of creation" and "optimism" were prevalent, and prizes were awarded to those photographs that showed the "active builders of society," who bore little relationship to Ustinov's bearded, intelligent geologists.

However, *Kolyma* was awarded a prize—albeit the most modest one, the third-category diploma—at the *Sixth All-Union Photographic Exhibition* of 1966. Ustinov's photos were published in the journal *Soviet Life* and were widely circulated and well received abroad.[40]

In 1966 foreign photographers took part in the fourth *Interpress-Photo* exhibition in Moscow. This exposition set records in terms of the number of participants—2,182 photographers from 71 countries. After Moscow, where more than five hundred thousand spectators viewed it, *Interpress-Photo 66* triumphantly toured the U.S.S.R. Many spectators were astonished to see "no tiresome photographs in which reinforced concrete hides the builder, the machine the worker and the machine parts the designer."[41] Reviewers noted with consternation that in contrast to their Polish colleagues, for example, the Soviet photographers did not show enough pictures of everyday life, "the family, street, passers by, courtyards and apartments," and called on them to "insert themselves into real life."[42]

The appeals to "humanize" photojournalism were of little concern to the authorities, who in that same year, 1966, called on photographers to chronicle the new five-year plan (1966–77), launched by the Twenty-third Party Congress of the CPSU, and also to aid the party in its titanic endeavor of bringing up "the new man, the man of the communist formation."

The photojournalists of TASS and APN widely published abroad their photo-essays on such varied topics as the Moscow film festival, the ballet, and the circus, while the official critics admonished them for taking pictures of artists and poets, scientists and writers, and for not "praising the labor of workers" and proving that "the profession of worker is not only necessary but beautiful."[43]

In 1966 the management of APN attempted to commercially distribute the work of Soviet photographers through such agencies as Camera Press (U.K.), Black Star, and others, while in that same year a city university with a focus on visual agitation was organized at the Moscow House of Political Education in which a special photojournalism department was formed, the activities of which were to prove that "Soviet photojournalism is radically different from its bourgeois counterpart."[44]

By 1966, *Interpress-Photo 66* had become a full-fledged participant in the worldwide development of photography, actively absorbing universal human values and freedom of thought and seeking to further develop the expressiveness of the language of photography and participate in its renewal.[45] Interest in such work abounded. For example, in 1966 at the eighth exhibition of the famous Moscow Photographic Club Novator, the participants sought ways to express "aesthetic essence, phenomena, and objects." The works of the oldest master of applied photography, Alexander Khlebnikov, and the photos of Gennadii Kolosov and Igor Palmin evinced an obvious search for new forms and a desire to prove that "aesthetic information on the contemporary view of the world by contemporary man" is no less important than reporting information.[46]

In 1968 the first exhibition of the Baltic republics—*Land of Amber*—took place. The Lithuanian photographers were the first in the Soviet Union to organize their own photographic club. The psychologically expressive photographs of Antanas Sutkus, the photographs of the subtle lyricist Romualdas Rakauskas, and Rimtautas Dichavičius's poetic compositions of nudes set against the background of the severe Baltic landscape were widely known and published in both the Lithuanian and the central press. They were included in the first photographic almanac, *Foto—70*, published by the publishing house Planeta, which was founded in 1969. At the exhibition *Landscapes of the Motherland*, organized by the Rīga Photographic Club in 1970, the Latvian photographers also demonstrated an interest in artistic photographs.

The creative impulses from the Baltic republics were influential in the country as a whole in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not coincidentally, an enormous exhibition in the capital titled *Our Motherland in Artistic Photographs* featured photographers from all over the Soviet Union exhibiting poetic photographs and pictures of local landscapes that were far removed from ideological themes and remarkable for their aesthetic qualities.

By that time the struggle between "staged" and "live" photographs was long past, and the latter had firmly established itself, as it had elsewhere in the world. "Live" photography became the subject of a broad discussion at a symposium that took place in Moscow in April 1970, during the international exhibition dedicated to the centenary of the birth of Lenin.

That same year, at the Eleventh International Congress of Photographic Art in Turin, the International Federation of Photographic Art accepted into its ranks the two greatest powers on earth—the Soviet Union and the United States.[47] That year the U.S. exhibition *Education in the U.S.A.* was shown in six cities of the U.S.S.R., and the Soviet exhibition *U.S.S.R.—Photo—70* was shown in New York, Washington, Chicago, San Antonio, and New Orleans. Both exhibitions were in a certain sense propagandistic, but 1,200 works by 400 Soviet photographers presented a broad view of photography in the U.S.S.R. The exhibition was put together by APN, where many photographers of both the old and the new generations were working. The former included Max Alpert, Georgii Zelma, and Vsevolod Tarasevich, and the latter included Oleg Makarov, Yurii Abramochkin, Valerii Shustov, Dmitrii Donskoy, Vladimir Viatkin, and Eduard Pesov. This leading group of photographers received an important prize at the Leipzig International Exhibition. Less encumbered by ideological constraints than the photographers of TASS, they produced photographic series and essays that were widely discussed in professional circles. Some theorists thought that the photo-essay was no longer relevant and that the term "essay" itself belonged in journalism but not in photography. The APN photographers, however, defended the photo-essay. They interpreted it as a special narrative form that captured a unique series of events linked in subject matter over a period of time. Their opponents felt that photography should not be called upon to perform functions not intrinsic to the medium and insisted that photography had its own visual language, different from that of literature. In the course of their polemics, the two sides recalled the beginnings of the Soviet photo-essay in the 1930s. The genre originated in a work by Arkadii Shaikhet, Max Alpert, and Solomon Tules that appeared on the pages of the magazine *U.S.S.R. in Construction.* The essay consisted of fifty-two photographs that told the life of the family of Nikolai Filippov, a Moscow metalworker from the Red Proletariat plant. The work became a classic and influenced "workers' photography" in prewar Germany and "social photography" in Czechoslovakia. Soviet photographers remembered this genre in the 1970s and took into consideration the experience of the 1930s, when new forms were put to the service of the propaganda needs of the state.

The photo-essays produced in the 1970s became famous and were critically acclaimed. They included Yurii Abramochkin and Lev Ustinov's *The Working Family Karpov* and Anatolii Garanin's *Eight Questions Put to Vinogradov.*[48] These photographic narratives showed "the life of the Soviet worker in the 1970s—the glory and love of our country always and forever."[49] The ideological content of these photographs was time-tested by analogous works from the 1930s. The same approaches were used in the 1970s, and the works were widely circulated. However, the heritage of the 1930s was used uncritically in these "worker" photo-essays, and they amount to no more than borrowings from the past. The photo-documentary experience of the 1930s was based on an innovative appeal; "from the photo-series to long-term observation," which could not be carried out due to a lack of photographers in the country. In the 1970s this scarcity was no longer a problem, and the leading master photographers began to implement the idea of "long-term observation" by various means. The older generation went back to their old works and turned to the same themes in historically different conditions. Boris Kudriakov produced the series *Central Asia: 1920s–1970s.* Georgii Zelma created the photo-essay *Good Day Odessa* by counterpoising his wartime photographs from 1941 and 1944 with new work from 1973.

"Constant photographic observation," which could only be dreamt about in the 1930s, was organized at the largest construction sites in the country. In the opinion of critics, this move transformed the photo-essay into an "important large-scale genre" of journalism. The most outstanding example of this genre was the work of Gennadii Koposov and Lev Sherstennikov of APN, who photographed the construction of the Kama automobile plant from 1970 to 1977. These photographs, which were widely circulated in the press, received the Union of Journalists of the U.S.S.R. prize and were later published in the book *Comrade Kamaz* (1979). Aleksandr Abaza, working for the *Komsomolskaia pravda,* and others photographed the construction of the Baikal-Amur rail line over a period of ten years. Mai Nachinkin, for *Sovetskii Soiuz,* "photographically mastered" the greatest oil territory, Tiumen, providing a "photographic cross-section."[50]

As in the 1930s, the photographers of the 1970s were working on the basis of ideological orders given by the authorities to maintain a photographic chronicle of the "superindustrialization" and economic expansion that was being carried out in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev. In the 1970s, the Soviet Union began to produce more steel, pig iron, coke, and iron ore than any other country. New oil and gas fields opened up, which stimulated new construction, the creation of new industrial centers, and new railroad lines. Photographers were charged with carrying out a propaganda campaign to promote these activities. The organizers of the exhibition *TASS 71* stated that "for us sensational news is a road built through the tundra, a completed gas pipeline or blast furnace or new work record set by a worker."[51]

Newspapers and magazines organized photographic competitions under such titles as "The Heroes of the Five-Year Plan," "The Photo Screen of Advanced Experience," and "Routes of the Five-Year Plan." In Moscow an exhibition called *Moscow 1973, the Decisive Year of the Five-Year Plan* took place. Critics called on photographers to "involve themselves in the business of the five-year plan" and to reflect the dynamics of the times rather than search for unnecessary aesthetic approaches.[52] The search for a new aesthetic was significantly curtailed in such endless photo-essays and "epics" as *The Communists of Samotlor, Norilsk-City in the Tundra,* and *In the Lens—Ust-Ilim.* These mass-produced "photo-narratives" were similar to each other and full of the clichés that were well criticized in the 1960s. The theoreticians of the 1970s called for showing "the deep ties between the heroes and their work."[53] They noted that "similarities in the different photographs" were due to the "newness and freshness of the vital material" that "subjects the photographers to itself."[54] This material also subjected the organizers of the *All-Union Photographic Exhibition* of 1976, which consisted of stands dedicated to BAM (Baikal-Amur mainline), KAMAZ (Kama Automobile Plant), the Sayano-Shushensky Hydroelectric Plant, and so on. As at one time in the late 1950s, the photographs in this exhibition, which opened to coincide with the Twenty-fifth Congress of the CPSU, served as "illustrations to the speeches of the delegates."[55]

A newly organized publishing house, Plakat (1975), was charged with exalting the Brezhnevite construction projects of the century. Every month it issued collections of photographs with such names as *BAM—Railway of Courage* and *The Motherland to BAM* as well as portraits of the heroes of labor. These editions had print runs in the hundreds of thousands.

Certainly, human labor always was and will be an important theme. *The Second Biennale Europe—75* in Europe was organized around the theme "Man and His Labor." The 1977 Czech international photographic exhibition was called *Man and Labor,* and a Lithuanian exposition (1983) was called *Labor—The Wings of Man.* Soviet photographers in the 1970s, however, were required not only to photograph people of labor but also to praise them. The heroes in these photographs had to be simple workers and their communist leaders. Physicists, pilots, and people with romantic and creative occupations whom the photographers of the 1960s strove to praise appeared less and less in the photographs of the 1970s. The ever-increasing requirement was to strike a positive chord in drawn-out, wordy "workers' " photo-essays and series that abundantly "decorated" newspapers and magazines.

The pompous, official climate of the Brezhnevite era, when many of the liberal tendencies of the Khrushchev era had fallen by the wayside, required the "thunder of tympanies," and the showing of "the broad horizons" in the creation of "developed socialism." Writers, artists, and photographers who refused to go along with these strictures fell away from contemporary artistic life. Their only recourse was samizdat,[56] organizing exhibitions in apartments, and, soon thereafter, emigration. In the suffocating atmosphere of the period of "stagnation," ideological pressures became more acute. Lithuanian photography, which was only recently admired for its artistry, was criticized for "its narrow world of the landscape."[57] The Lithuanians, who ordinarily depicted not masses and collectives but individuals who lived according to the traditions of their people, were now required to depict "contemporary village life."

The increasingly important role of ideology vis-à-vis the arts during the Brezhnev years became especially onerous in the case of photography in 1977. The unanimous opinion among official critics was that photography "is a form of ideological activity."

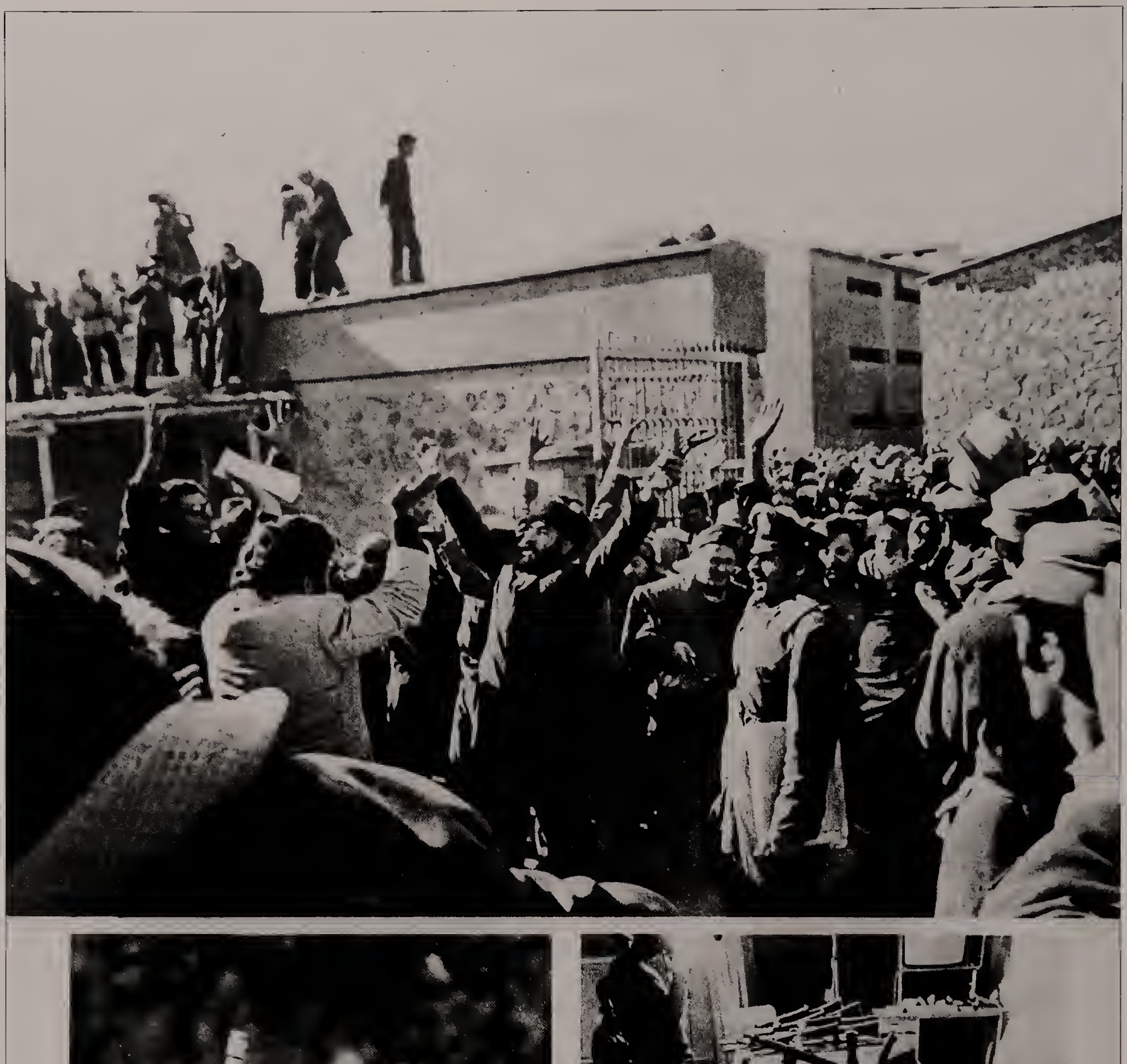


Fig. 60. Georgii Nadezhdin, Page layout from *Afghan Report*, 1980. Gelatin silver print.

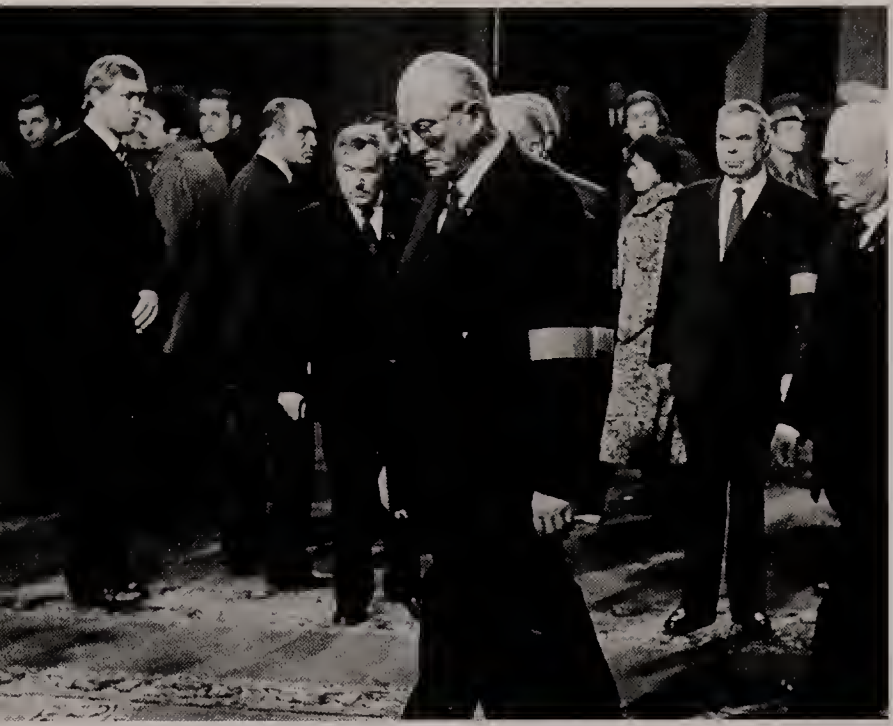
Photography was assigned one of the key roles in the enormous and pompous Soviet anniversary; three photo exhibitions at the *Exhibition of the Achievements of the Economy* (VDNKh) were included in the program. One consisted of 1,800 works by professional photographers, another showed 830 works by amateurs, and the third was the *Eighth International Exposition of Interpress-Photo 77*, consisting of 1,200 works. The House of Friendship had its *Second International Photo Exhibition,* APN held its anniversary exhibition in the lobby of the Oktyabr movie theater, and TASS held an exhibition in the lobby of the Rossiia hall. The main subject of many of the photographs was the increasingly "bronzing" head of the Soviet state, for whose depiction prizes were awarded.[58] There were also many photographs dedicated to the revolutionary struggle in Africa and Asia. An important event during the celebrations was the roundtable discussion sponsored by the journal *Sovetskoe foto*. The editors of the journal discussed "the role of photography in the struggle for peace and mutual understanding among peoples," while a West German photographer permitted himself to state that he and his colleagues "do not see their work as an instrument for influencing society" but work only to earn money.[59]

The editor-in-chief of *Sovetskoe foto* had another opportunity to speak about the radically different "ideological and moral position of Soviet journalists" at a 1977 symposium that took place in conjunction with the exhibition *Photography in the U.S.A.*, which was shown in five cities in the Soviet Union and completed its tour in Moscow. The U.S. exhibition consisted of five sections: in advertising, amateur photography, scientific photography, art photography, and photojournalism. It included color slide shows, holograms, new model cameras, and an extensive photographic library. Such comprehensive exhibitions were typical for the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries even in pre-revolutionary Russia. This practice contrasted greatly with the ideological photo exhibitions in the U.S.S.R. in the 1970s, which included the *Thirty-fifth Anniversary of the Battle on the Small Land*, where Brezhnev fought (1978); the *Sixtieth Anniversary of Lenin's Decree on the Nationalization of the Photo and Film Industries* (1979); the Twenty-sixth Congress of the CPSU (*We Are Building Communism*) (1981); Brezhnev's seventy-fifth birthday celebration (*Ardent Fighter for Communism*) (1982); and *The Sixtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the U.S.S.R.* (1982).

The majority of the photographic exhibitions served ideological propaganda needs and were by definition one-dimensional. One-day exhibitions to serve current party needs were even held. In 1980 a one-day exhibition on the Soviet village was shown at the Moscow House of Journalism, in conjunction with discussions on agricultural policies and the resultant food shortages, which took place at the Central Committee of the CPSU.[60] The editorial management at Plakat went so far as to offer print exhibitions based on "special scenarios."[61] It was as if the struggle against staged photography in the late 1950s had never taken place.

Official photography had an enormous potential and system for producing visual propaganda. By the early 1980s, however, the system was obviously winding down. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain the praise heaped on a run-of-the-mill APN production, the huge photographic essay by Viktor Chernov on the worker Vasilii Blokov. The hero of this hopelessly clichéd "photo-narrative" took evening courses at an institute, produced a self-published newspaper, and was in general an example of "the new worker generation of the 1980s." A photo album on Magnitogorsk (Plakat, 1981) also lacked originality. Its creators utilized an approach discovered in the 1930s by Max Alpert and A. Smolian in their photo-essay *Growth of the Construction Site and Man (Giant and Builder)*.[62]

In the 1980s, *Sovetskaia Rossiia* introduced "the latest word" in photojournalism, the " 'through' photo-essay," which appeared in several editions of the paper.[63] These photographs stood out for their truthfulness and psychological insight and were an important element in the paper's structure. However, this form, too, was a repetition of the traditional photo story and photo-essay (fig. 60). The unshakability of the main postulate of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics on the "primacy of content in art" brought about the domination of ideology and limited creativity.[64] Soviet photographers, even though they were being ignored by the



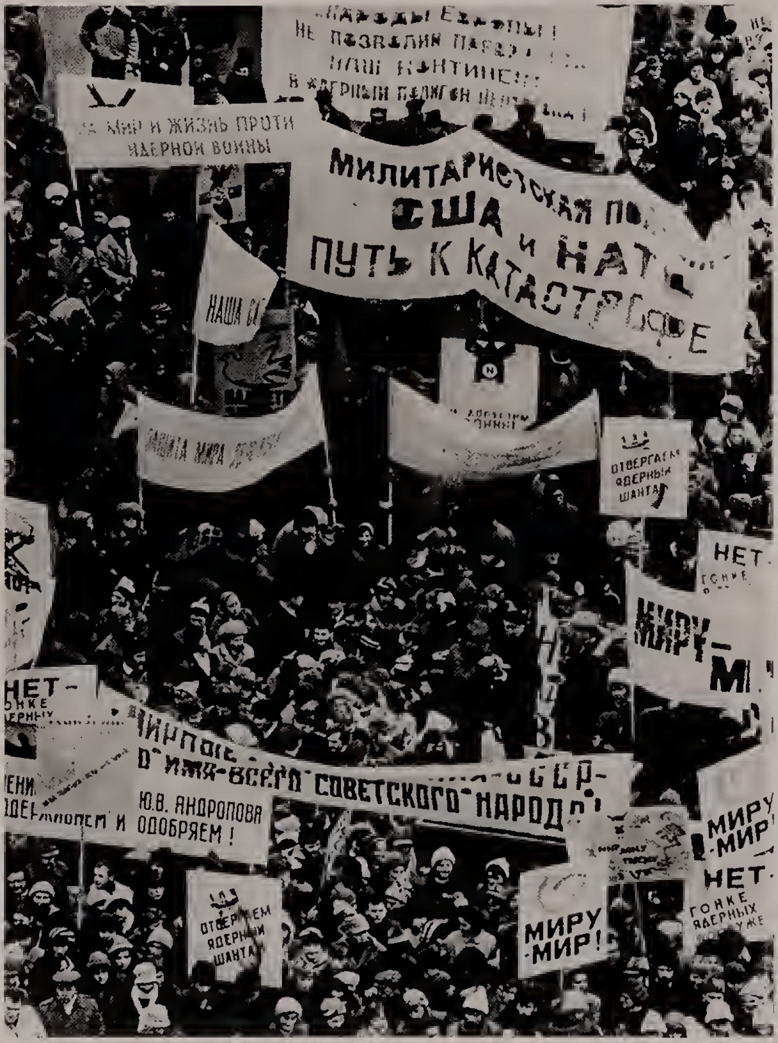

ЗА МИР И ЖИЗНЬ ПРОТИВ ЯДЕРНОЙ ВОЙНЫ
МИЛИТАРИСТСКАЯ ПО… США и НАТО ПУТЬ К КАТАСТРОФЕ
НАША ОБ…
ЗАЩИТА МИРА
ОТВЕРГАЕМ ЯДЕРНЫЙ ШАНТАЖ
НЕТ-ГОНКЕ ЯДЕРНЫХ…
МИРУ-МИР!
…ВСЕГО СОВЕТСКОГО НАРОДА
Ю.В. АНДРОПОВА …ОДОБРЯЕМ !

Fig. 61 (*top*). Dmitry Baltermants, *Iurii Andropov at Leonid Brezhnev's Funeral*, 1982. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Moscow House of Photography.

Fig. 62 (*above*). Aleksandr Zemlianichenko, *Anti-War Demonstration, Moscow*, October 1, 1983. Gelatin silver print.

establishment, constantly faced questions relating to applied photography, advertising photography, and design. Not coincidentally, the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* conducted a roundtable discussion called "Applied Photography: A Catalogue of Problems" in 1979. They also published articles on the history of graphic design as well as the achievements of Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky, who were 1920s and 1930s pioneers of photo graphics and photo typographics.[65]

In 1979 the *First Exposition of Photographic Art* was held at the exposition hall on Malaia Gruzinskaia Street in Moscow, at which four hundred nonofficial works from all over the country were displayed, representing a wide range of genres and styles and including experimental works. A record number of works were displayed at the 1981 Fifth Inter-Club exhibition *Fotografika* in Minsk;[66] and at the 1981 All-Union art exhibition *We Are Building Communism*, photographs were shown, next to such sections as Architecture, Monumental Art, Design, and Set Designs.

From 1982 to 1985 three leaders—Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko—died in succession (fig. 61), and, as a result, ideological pressures noticeably eased. The All-Union exhibition *The Photographic Lens and Life* was organized in a manner similar to that of exhibitions before the revolution of 1917. Many different sections exhibited the latest photographic technology, photojournalist pictures, and artistic photography. The exhibition also included a retrospective, reports and essays on Kamaz and BAM, and photographs of Chernenko and workers. But what made the exposition enormously popular and gave hope to those yearning for change was a section in which works were mixed in terms of genre, type, style, form, and technical experimentation. Such hopes were realized. Change began soon thereafter. The long-awaited perestroika of the country would begin in 1985 (fig. 62).

Translated by Daniel Rishik

NOTES

1. S. Morozov, "Sovetskaia epokha v obrazakh fotoiskusstva" (The Soviet Epoch in Photographic Images), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 11 (1957): 12.

2. Yu. Olesha, "Photoliubiteli" (Photo Amateurs), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1957): 26.

3. L. Dyko, "Reportazh—nastoiashchee i budushchee fotografii" (Report—The Present and Future of Photography), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1957): 19.

4. Ya. Gik, "Fotoreporter—eto zhurnalist" (The Photo-Reporter Is a Journalist), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1957): 14.

5. L. Dyko, "Razmyshleniia na vystavke" (Thoughts at the Exhibition), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1957): 25.

6. Rotbory Re-Martines, "Zametki chlena zhuri" (Notes of a Member of the Jury), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1957): 26.

7. L. Dyko. Even the innocent poetic photograph by the Russian photographer Anatolii Mukosei, *Rainy Day*, which was awarded a silver medal by the international jury, was subjected to severe criticism. The critics found "nothing except for a formalist trick ... art which is wholly consumed by the search for forms, is incapable of serving these ideas, it is by its very nature reactionary." S. Evgenev, "Davaite posporim" (Let Us Debate), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1958): 5.

8. *Komsomolskaia pravda* was criticized for filling up entire columns with enormous photographs without any accompanying text, while the newspaper *Sovetskii Patriot* (Soviet Patriot) was taken to task for daring to print in its New Year's edition more than thirty photographs. Other periodicals were criticized because, in the opinion of the party ideologues, their activity "was the result of the influence of the Western bourgeois press." *O partiinoi i sovetskoi pechati, radioveshchanii i televidenii: Kollektsiia dokumentov i materialov* (On Party and Soviet Press, Radio and Television Broadcast: Collection of Documents and Materials) (Moscow, 1972), 304.

9. The editorial board of *Ogonyok* "had lost all sense of proportion by publishing without any purpose dozens of photographs on foreign topics, without exhibiting the necessary initiative and artistic taste in selecting illustrations of Soviet life." *O partiinoi i sovetskoi pechati*, 314.

10. The critics hastened to declare that this lyrical photograph was "an inspired narrative of the industry of socialism." In order to prove this thesis, an analysis of the subject matter of the photograph and its ideological subtext was undertaken. The photograph depicts a small group of female letter carriers. "Their bags are heavy, they contain many magazines and newspapers.... Based on the contents of their bags you can see the expansion of culture in our country, where due to the efforts of the builders and industrial strength this beautiful city emerged." A. Litvak, "Razgovor na ser'eznuiu temu" (Conversation on a Serious Theme), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1958): 7.

11. S. Fridliand, "Ser'eznye sdvigi" (Important Achievements), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1959): 8.

12. Ibid.

13. N. Pal'gunov, "Fotoinformatsiia na novom etape" (Photographic Information at the New Stage), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1959): 1.

14. A. Gusev, "Fotoinformatsiia—zhanr fotoreportazha" (Photo Information—A Genre of Photojournalism), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1959): 7.

15. Ibid.

16. In 1958 alone, Soviet photojournalists took part in twenty-four international photographic exhibitions held in eighteen countries. "Sovetskoe fotoiskusstvo za rubezhom" (Soviet Photographic Art Abroad), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1959): 78.

17. S. Zabolotskii, "Beseduia s druz'iami" (Conversations with Friends), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1959): 31.

18. Not coincidentally, in a review of the *Eighth All-Polish Exhibition of Photography* (1959), reproaches were made regarding the imitation of neorealism, and a tendency toward "the perfection of forms without regard to content" was noted. A. Bocharov, "V tvorcheskikh poiskakh" (Exploration of Creativity), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1959): 3.

19. L. Lingart, "Na tverdykh pozitsiiakh realizma" (On the Firm Foundations of Realism), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1960): 35–37. The review "Fotografia 59" was published in Russian in Czechoslovakia and was very popular in the U.S.S.R.

20. "Sotsializm pobezhdaet: Vystavka khudozhestvennoi fotografii sotsialistichkikh stran" (Socialism Is Winning: Exhibition of Art Photography from the Socialist Countries), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1960): 19.

21. E. Riabchikov, "Dykhanie sovremennosti" (The Influence of Modernity), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1960): 4.

22. The first prizes were won by M. Alpert, for *The Construction of a Canal in Tadjikistan*, and S. Fridliand, for *Builders of a Gas Pipeline in the Desert of Kyzylkum*.

23. Riabchikov, "Dykhanie sovremennosti," 3.

24. A. Levitan, "Poeziia bol'shoi pravdy" (The Poetry of the Great Truth), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1960): 13.

25. G. Vail', "Portret sovremennika" (Portrait of a Contemporary), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1960): 4.

26. "Sozdavat' fotoproizvedeniia, sozvuchnye vremeni" (Create Photography That Reflects Our Time), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 9 (1960): 1.

27. Ibid.

28. Among the first was, for example, the exhibition *Masters of Harvest* by Ya. Khalip, which was shown during the December 1960 plenary session of the Central Committee of the CPSU dedicated to improving agriculture. Later it was shown in the lobby of the Udarnik, Moscow's biggest movie theater, in virgin soil regions, and in many of the country's large cities. In 1962 Ya. Khalip's work was exhibited at the Royal Society of Photography in London.

29. In 1960, five hundred people studied there.

30. Vs. Tarasevich, "Alye kosynki" (Scarlet Kerchiefs), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (1960): 24.

31. The exhibition's opening attracted a huge crowd, including representatives of the creative intelligentsia. The poet Semen Kirsanov wrote, "Besides the many dire consequences of the cult of personality, there was also a cult of the tastes of personality in art for many years. The advanced movement in art was ... replaced by the development of false monumental and pompous eclectic

forms. Sometimes young artists are accused of imitating the West. This is a mistake based on the loss of memory. Mayakovsky, Eisenstein, Meierhold, Rodchenko, Tatlin and like-minded artists are the pride of the history of socialist art." S. Kirsanov, "Iskusstvo smotret' vpred" (Art Must Look to the Future), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1962): 25.

32. The art exhibition held in the Moscow Manege in December 1962 (30 *Years of the Moscow Section of the Union of Soviet Artists*) exemplified the search for artistic expression. When Khrushchev, whose own taste in art gravitated toward extreme realism, visited the exhibition, he reacted negatively to the experimental works of some of the painters and sculptors, almost accusing them of treason.

33. L. Dyko, "O traditsiiakh i novatorstve" (Tradition and Innovation), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1963): 7.

34. "Sotsialisticheskii realizm—nashe oruzhie" (Socialist Realism Is Our Weapon), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1963): 2.

35. The comparison between Soviet and American photography of that time would take place at a later date at the exhibition *Propaganda and Dreams: Photography of the* 1930s *in the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A.*, which was held in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

36. G. Koposov and L. Sherstennikov, *V fokuse—fotoreporter* (In Focus—The Photojournalist) (Moscow, 1967), 145.

37. This picture, made from two negatives, stood out for its virtuosic compositional completeness. Koposov received the grand prix at the third international competition "For Socialist Photographic Art," a gold medal at the exhibition *Interpress Photo '64* in Warsaw, and first prize at the *World Press Photo '64* in The Hague.

38. Supporters of Ustinov inferred an "optimistic subtext": "in the photo [*The Mountain Pass*] there is only the back of a man, but at the same time the picture is full of faith in him ... a confirmation of his strength. This is an expression of faith and an aspiration to extol and sing the praises of a citizen of this country." R. Grigoriev, "Na vystavke APN-64" (At the APN-64 Exhibition), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1965): 11. His critics, however, had a negative view of his work: "An extensive collection of works that are many cases repetitive ... What is their general idea? Theme? The political and social content? Doesn't the photographer leave the spectator with too much space for creative conjecture? Is there even one hint that these are Soviet geologists in contemporary Kolyma?" E. Kravchuk, "O Fotoocherke" (On the Photo-Essay), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 5 (1965): 19.

39. P. Vail' and A. Genis, *Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (The World of the Soviet Man) (Moscow, 1998), 64.

40. A. Porozhniakov, "V postoiannom poiske" (Permanent Search), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1966): 17.

41. M. Gromov, "Zhivoe iskusstvo" (Live Art), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1967): 11.

42. R. Grigoriev, "Liudi, vremia, sobytia" (People, Time, Events), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1967): 14.

43. Iu. Balanenko, "Fotoletopis velikikh svershenii" (Photo Record of Great Achievements), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1966): 3.

44. N. Palgunov, "Povyshat' kachestvo fotoinformatsii" (Raise the Quality of Photo Information), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1966): 30.

45. An outstanding example of this process was the awarding of the 1966 prize of the Union of Journalists of the U.S.S.R. to Lev Ustinov for his tragic series *Kolyma*.

46. A. Aleksandrov, "Iskusstvo esteticheskoi informatsii" (The Art of Aesthetic Information), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1967): 17.

47. A paper titled "Aesthetic and Informational Aspects and Expressive Tendencies in Photography in Comparison with the Contemporary Fine Arts" was presented.

48. Garanin's photo-essay was awarded the prize of the Union of Journalists of the U.S.S.R. in 1972.

49. V. Pankina, "Priznanie talanta" (Recognition of Talent), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1972): 14.

50. M. Nachinkin, "Marshrut—Tiumen'" (Route to Tiumen), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1981): 22–25.

51. K. Vishnevitsky, "Prodolzhenie znakomstva: Zametki s vystavki TASS-foto-71" (Getting Acquainted: Notes from the Exhibition TASS-Photo-71), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1972): 13.

52. V. Kichin, "Letopis' tret'ego reshaiushchego" (The Chronicle of the Third Determining), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1973), 12.

53. Ibid.

54. A. Vartanov, "K voprosu o sovremennom videnii" (On the Question on Contemporary Vision), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1976): 24.

55. V. Alekseev, "Otobrazit' vremia velikikh svershenii" (Reflect the Time of Great Deeds), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1976): 1.

56. See "O fotograficheskom samizdate, o samodel'nykh fotoknigakh," "Pokhorony A. Akhmatovoi," and "Rus' ukhodiashchaia" (On Photographic Samizdat, On Self-Made Photo-Books, A. Akhmatova's Funeral, and Disappearing Russia), reminiscences of V. Nikitin in *Vtoraia real'nost'* (The Second Reality) (St. Petersburg, 1999), 34.

57. "Iantarnyi Krai" (Amber Region), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 (1971): 32.

58. The first prize of *Interpress-Photo '77* was given to Vladimir Musaelian for his work *Comrade Lucho Is With Us (Meeting in the Kremlin of L. I. Brehznev with L. Korvalan, freed from the Chilean junta torture chambers)*. The special prize of the Second International Photo Exhibition was given to Yurii Abramochkin for his *The Awarding of the J. Curie Gold Medal of Peace to Comrade L. I. Brezhnev*.

59. "Sotsial'nye funktsii sovremennoi fotografii" (The Social Function of Contemporary Photography), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1978): 24.

60. It is paradoxical that photographers were given as an example the prose of Valentin Rasputin, Viktor Astafiev, Vasilii Shukshin, and Fedor Abramov, who show "the everyday life of those whose labor, from time immemorial, was a vital necessity." V. Aniutin, "The Earth of People," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (1980): 2–9. This superficial parallelism ignores the critical direction of "country prose."

61. A. Shumakov, "Plakat: opyt i perspektivy Sovetskogo foto" (Experience and Perspectives of Soviet Photography), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1979): 13.

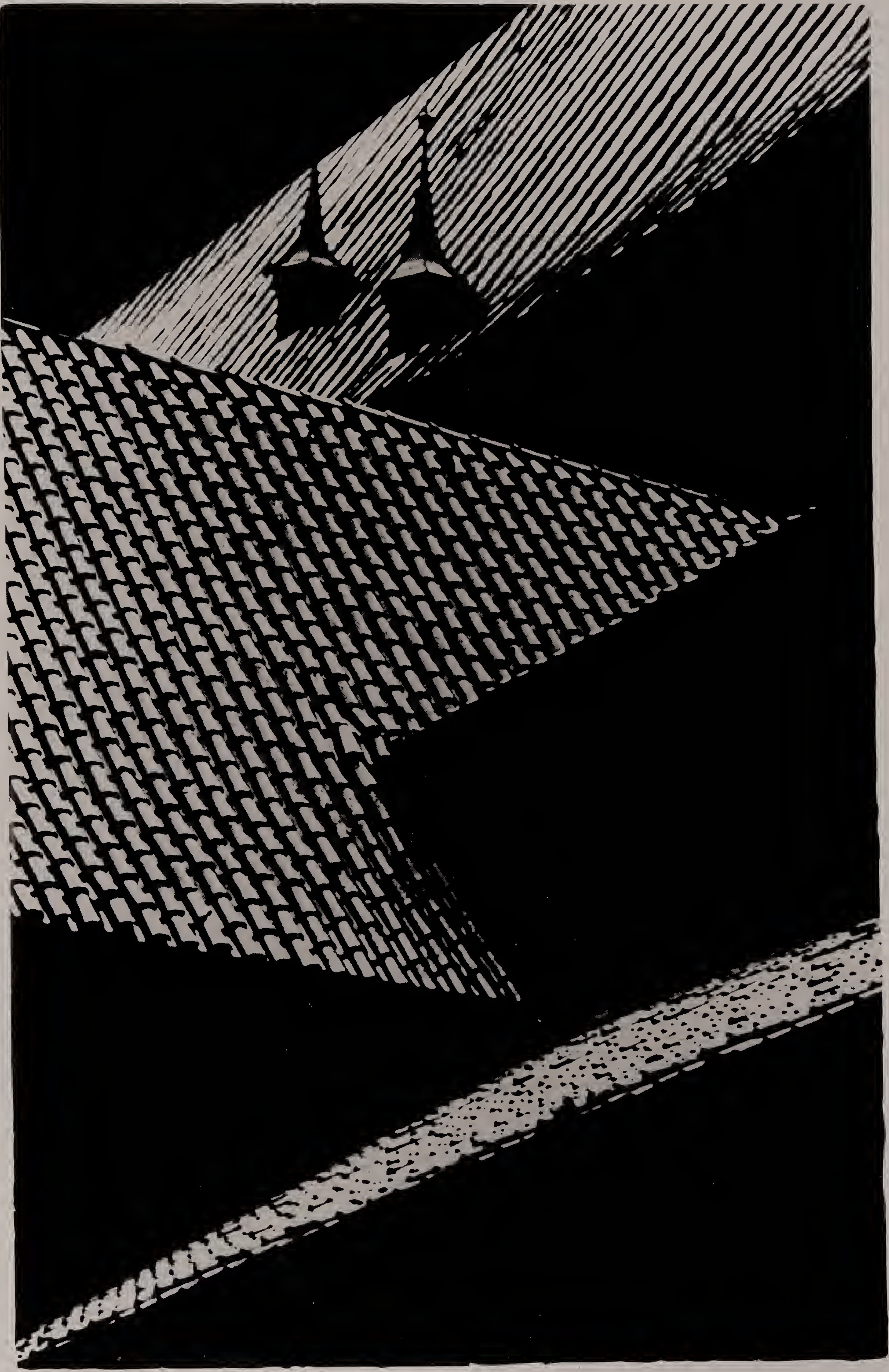
62. Supporters of the photo album claimed that it followed a "principle of photographic narrative," that it was a continuation of a tradition. The worker featured, Vassilii Naumkin, was pronounced a direct descendant of Viktor Kalmykov, the hero of the first five-year plan. Iu. Krivonosov, "Stavshaia legendoi (k 50—letiiu Magnitki)" (It Became a Legend [The Fiftieth Anniversary of Magnitogorsk]), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 3 (1982): 7.

63. The new photo-essay was discussed, for example, at an art seminar, "Photography and Contemporary Life," held at the Central House of the Journalist, at the end of 1982. *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 1 (1983): 2–3; N. Parlashkevich, "Litso gazety" (The Face of the Newspaper), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 8 [1982]: 6–13). Some photo critics considered that "the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, even in the worst years of stagnation, served as a criterion for the art of press photography." B. N. Golovko, *Iskusstvo press fotografii: Ocherk istorii, teorii i praktiki* (The Art of Press Photography: An Essay on History, Theory and Practice) (Moscow, 1990), 16.

64. L. Dyko, "Prodolzhenie realisticheskikh traditsii" (The Continuation of Realistic Traditions), *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1958): 15.

65. E. Chernevich, "The History of Graphic Design," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 2 (1979): 18–21; Iu. Gerchuk, "Fotopisets E. Lisitskii," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 6 (1979): 42–45.

66. In 1971, at the First Exhibition Fotografika, 753 works of 215 photographers were shown; in 1981, 1,231 works of 276 photographers were displayed. M. Leontiev, "'Chto' i 'kak' v fotografii," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 4 (1982): 29.



Valery Stigneev

The Force of the Medium

The Soviet Amateur Photography Movement

AFTER WORLD WAR II ENDED, THE RESTORATION OF THE SOVIET ECONOMY BEGAN. By the early 1950s the photographic industry was providing the public with cheap cameras and equipment. Much of this development was due to the removal of equipment and technology from Germany as reparations. The standard of living had gone up, so a camera was within reach of practically any Soviet family.

All anyone needed to make portraits of friends and family and take landscape pictures during vacation was a Lubitel camera, packages of photo chemicals, and Unibrom photographic paper, all of which could be bought in a city or village department store. Since a network of development labs

Fig. 63 (*facing*). Oleg Burbovsky, *Roofs*, 1971. Gelatin silver print, 30.5 x 19.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21785.

did not exist, amateur photographers had to develop and print their own film, which many considered a pleasant activity.

Photo amateurs in the 1950s numbered in the millions. This number included people who took pictures of their relatives from time to time, those who used their cameras only on vacation, and those who submitted their pictures to newspapers and magazines; it included as well both those who were interested in technological innovations and those who expressed themselves artistically by means of photography. Millions of pictures taken by amateurs became part of the mass of "people's photography." This universal interest in photography became an important part of the culture.

This article will not cover the full range of "people's photography"; instead, it will be devoted to discussion of photo clubs and studios organized by its most advanced practitioners. These people were not engaged in photography temporarily or haphazardly but on a regular, permanent basis. This amateur photography movement had its own history and documentary archive, and its development can be followed in detail. The photo clubs were materially supported by cultural institutions and labor unions that existed in the Soviet system. They provided free space and photo lab equipment, paid for trips to festivals and seminars as well as exhibition space, and funded the publication of catalogues. All of the preceding were part of the state system of subsidizing the arts and promoted the development of amateur photography.

During the post-Stalinist "thaw," like-minded people enjoyed greater freedom to associate with each other—and photographers were no exception. The photography clubs at the Houses of Culture (which existed in every city and town) got their start with photographers talking to each other in photo stores. While in 1958 only one photo club existed in the whole country, at the Vyborg Palace of Culture in Leningrad (the VDK), by the early 1960s more than one hundred fifty had been established. The biggest clubs were the VDK in Leningrad, Novator in Moscow, and the Rīga and Minsk photo clubs, both named after their home cities, and others in Tallinn, Sevastopol, and Cheliabinsk. These clubs quickly became virtual universities of photographic culture a full decade before departments of photography were established in state universities. The Moscow club Novator had as many as three hundred members. The club was divided into sections at the head of which stood such leading lights of Russian photography as Boris Ignatovich, S. Ivanov-Alliluev, and Alexander Khlebnikov. Eminent educators read lectures on general topics. The club's annual exhibition became an important event in the cultural life of Moscow. More than forty thousand Moscow residents saw the Novator exhibition that was held in Moscow's Central Park of Culture (Gorky Park).

In the 1960s large photographic exhibitions organized by the photo clubs became common. The photo club of the city of Zaporozhye held a nationwide portrait exhibition in 1965, while in 1967 the photo club of the small Ural mountain city of Miassk boldly organized the all-union landscape exhibition entitled *My Country*. Without reticence, amateurs exhibited their works next to those of professionals.

Exhibitions organized by the clubs became major cultural phenomena, providing an outlet for talented people to express themselves and show their work. In 1966 an amateur photographer from the Moscow suburbs, L. Assanov, won a bronze medal for his picture *Birch Trees* (fig. 64) at the Moscow exhibition *Interpress-Photo* 66, which included works by the best photographers in the world. This event inspired many amateur photographers, who saw the award as a recognition of the high artistic level of amateur photography.

The Weeks of Photographic Art held in Tallinn and Sevastopol (1962, 1964) brought together amateurs from all over the country and showed the importance of such informal personal contacts. Amateur get-togethers, seminars, and competitions become a regular feature in the country. These gatherings allowed people to exchange information, and they provided forums for informal exhibitions of their works, which were widely discussed. The amateurs did not have their own publication, as the official publication of professional photographers, *Sovetskoe foto*, was unable to dedicate space to amateurs' work.

By the end of the 1960s, organizers of major photo exhibitions stopped exhibiting professional and amateur photographs separately—a situation that would have been impossible in the other arts. This phenomenon occurred only in photography because the photographic arts arose in the 1960s and 1970s mostly due to the efforts of amateurs. The importance of the amateur movement in photography is thus directly linked to the fact that amateurs played a decisive role in the creation of a professional arts genre (fig. 63, p. 66). This development is paradoxical, since the Russian school of art photography was practically liquidated in the 1930s and photography became the exclusive province of photojournalists who worked for newspapers, magazines, and publishing houses, and art photography became associated with these models. Due to the absence of formal photographic training, amateurs had become practically the only source of material for photojournalism.

In the 1960s a group of talented photographers emerged from the Leningrad VDK photo club to take up leading positions as press photographers. V. Yakobson began working for *Pravda*, Gennadii Koposov and Lev Sherstennikov for *Ogonyok*, Vladimir Bogdanov for *Literaturnaia gazeta*, and Oleg Makarov for Agenstvo Pechati Novosti (APN). Many other photojournalists followed the same path but did not lose their ties with amateur photography, which protected them from the clichés of newspaper photography and helped them to preserve their artistic approach to photojournalism.

By the late 1960s photo clubs had brought forth a pleiad of photographers who were the equals of experienced photojournalists in terms of artistic vision and technical mastery. This group of extraordinary nonprofessionals clearly stood out from the mass of run-of-the-mill amateurs and soon became known as the "elite of photo amateurs." These amateur photographers did not earn their money as photographers; they kept their jobs as engineers, physicians, teachers, and workers. In reality, however, since they considered photography the most important activity in their lives, they moved into the category of professionals. Their obsession with the medium and the high level of their skill had moved them out of the amateur category (fig. 65). Only in Lithuania, where the Society for the Photographic Arts had been founded in 1972, amateurs could, after joining the association, declare themselves freelance professional photographers without having to be employed by a state entity.

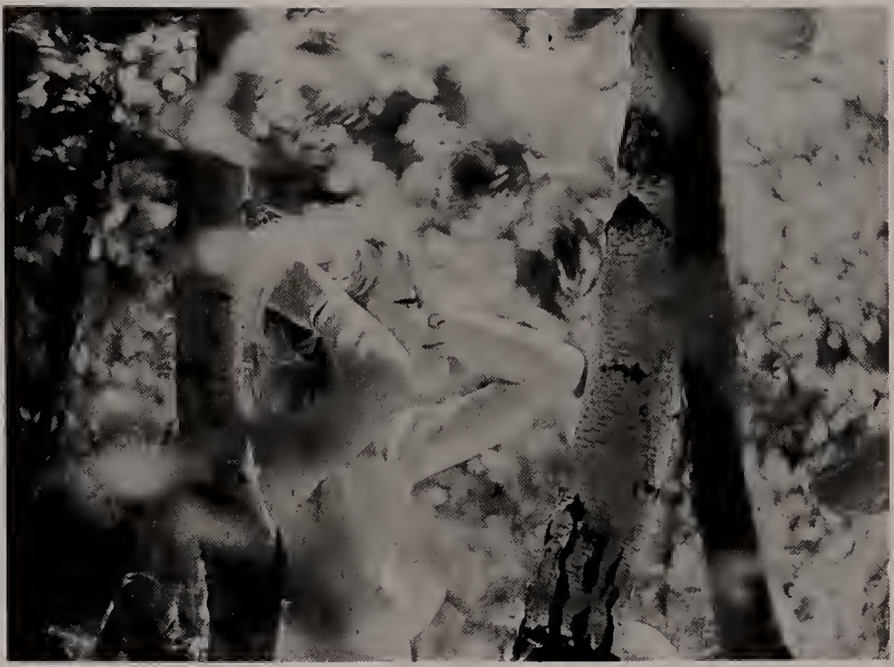


Fig. 64. L. Assanov, *Birch Trees*, 1965. Gelatin silver print, 18 x 24 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21780.

As far as the cultural bureaucrats were concerned, art photography was still a sub-genre, albeit possibly a superior one, of photojournalism. For them it was a given that every amateur was obliged to adhere not only to the strictures of official ideology (which was taken for granted) but also to the aesthetics of the official photojournalism as practiced by the correspondents of newspapers and magazines. The examples of this were ubiquitous and included the newspapers *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and *Sovetskaia kultura* and the magazines *Ogonyok* and *Smena*. If an amateur persisted in taking pictures on forbidden themes and exhibiting them, or interpreted traditional material in a different way, he or she unwittingly entered into a confrontation with the supervisor (curator) from the local and/or city government, the editor of the publication, and the censorship authority. Confrontations between photographers who wished to exhibit a risqué (from the official point of view) photograph and the censorship authority occurred frequently in those days.

Prior to the opening of an amateur photo exhibition, a representative of the authorities would first view the show and invariably remove at least one picture. For example, in the early 1970s an exhibition by the talented photographer Boris Smelov, who was associated with the Leningrad photo club VDK, was never allowed to open. The censor objected to and had no understanding of his mystical, obscure cityscapes that elicited a viewer's somber mood.

In early exhibitions photographers had rejected salon portraits and postcard landscapes in favor of a more realistic mirroring of actual life. The amateurs discovered for themselves the richness and

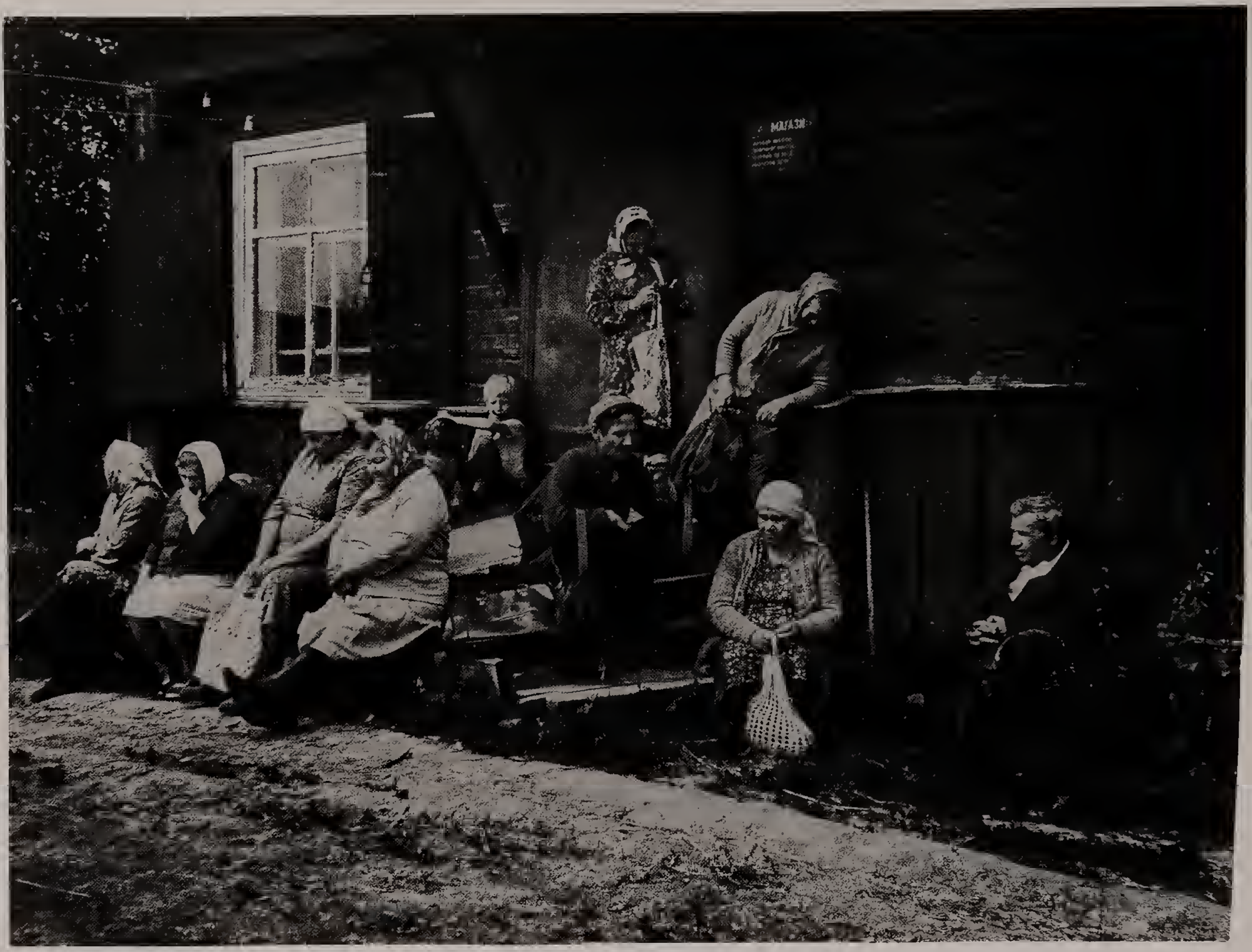


Fig. 65. Boris Mikhalevkin, *Waiting for the Store to Open*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, 29.5 x 39 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21786.

far-reaching possibilities of photographic reporting. In fact, that discovery was the foundation of the amateur photography movement. The creative approaches of the photographers were not uniform, however. In Russia, so-called genre photography—a recording of everyday life—became the most prevalent form of expression. In Latvia, photographers tended toward more romantic imagery. In Lithuania, photographers engaged in direct reporting, albeit with elements of staging, and an austere recording of realistic detail. These differences came out of profound cultural traditions and in time would lead photographers in distinct directions of photographic creativity.

In content, the amateurs of the Baltics were the most original and created national schools of photography. When the Kaunas photo club showed its collection at the Tsentralnyi Dom Zhurnalista (Central House of Artists) in Moscow in 1969, the masters of Moscow photojournalism could not understand the style of the Lithuanian photographers' works. The elder colleagues objected to the unusually free plasticity in the photographs. Actually, they were perturbed by the frank and honest presentation of reality. Antanas Sutkus, Aleksandras Mačiauskas, and Vitas Luckus captured a beauty and significance in the real world that the professionals did not see.

The creative method of the photographers from neighboring Latvia differed from those of Lithuanian photographers. Their aesthetic discoveries consisted of symbolizing the moment and shifting the center of gravity from the dynamic of the occurrence to the dynamic of the internal life. The photographs of Gunārs Binde, Egons Spuris, and the other photographers of Rīga's photo club were imbued with a romantic atmosphere, which transposed the representation of reality from the mundane to the philosophical plane. As a whole, Latvian photography had an important influence on photography in other parts of the Soviet Union.

While photo reportage was the dominant form in the 1960s, the 1970s saw the development and perfection of photographic language and a rehabilitation of conventional forms. Photographers in Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian photo clubs came to realize that a photograph is a definite form of the aesthetic transformation of nature and that in it one can not only represent reality but also recreate it. The works of M. Shagin, S. Yavorsky, and R. Penov, from the photo club Volga in Gorky, stand out because of their free use of different forms and methods of photography.

Staged photography, which allows photographers to analyze life situations with the help of characters, turned out to be fruitful for amateurs from the photo clubs Rakus and Tair in the Volga cities of Cheboksary and Ioshkar-Ola. S. Chilikov, the initiator of the exhibition *Analytic Photography*, readily used theatricalization, carefully selecting models and props for his photo performances. Evgeny Likhosherst created mise-en-scènes in which various roles were played by characters and objects in realistic conditions or used in games with passersby who were not let in on his provocative schemes. His colleague Mikhail Ladeishchikov attempted to show alienation from society by inserting figures in fragmentary compositions of cityscapes with piled-on buildings and metal and construction parts.

The 1970s saw a great deal of enthusiasm for altering negatives and positives, which changed a picture's artistic structure. At various club exhibitions, works that emphasized the graphics aspect became more common. These works were soon known as "photo-graphics." A wide spectrum of techniques were applied to this process. The photo club Minsk was the initiator and leading proponent of this work and organized several exhibitions called *Photo-graphics* in which many amateur organizations participated. However, the element of innovation that was introduced by "photo-graphics" soon became dated because of repetition and rapid distribution.

Some photographers added photomontage to "photo-graphics," thus leading the way toward surrealistic photography (naturally avoiding this name in reference to their works). The head of the Zaporozhye photo club, Vladimir Filonov, created a series of montage compositions in which he combined acute themes—loneliness, lack of communication, aggressiveness—with a high level of execution (fig. 66). Photographers were inspired by science fiction, futurology, UFOs, and environmental problems. Photomontage engendered its own system of symbols: rows of buildings or automobiles stood for the soulless nature of industrial civilization; used tire dumps or puddles of water with oil spots symbolized humankind's intrusion into nature and the destruction of the environment; leafless trees in water symbolized environmental disasters. Among the photographers whose works stood out at exhibitions were S. Kostromin from the Moscow photo club Kadr, A. Lashkov from the photo club Novosibirsk, and V. Teselkin from the photo club Severomorsk. The most comprehensive oeuvre in the style was created by Vilgelm Mikhailovsky from the photo club Rīga.

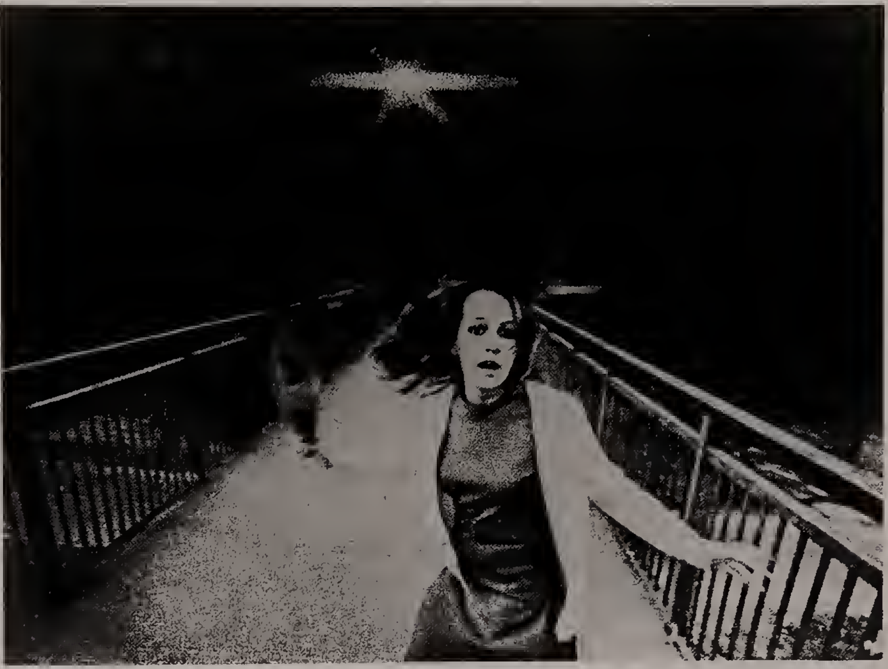
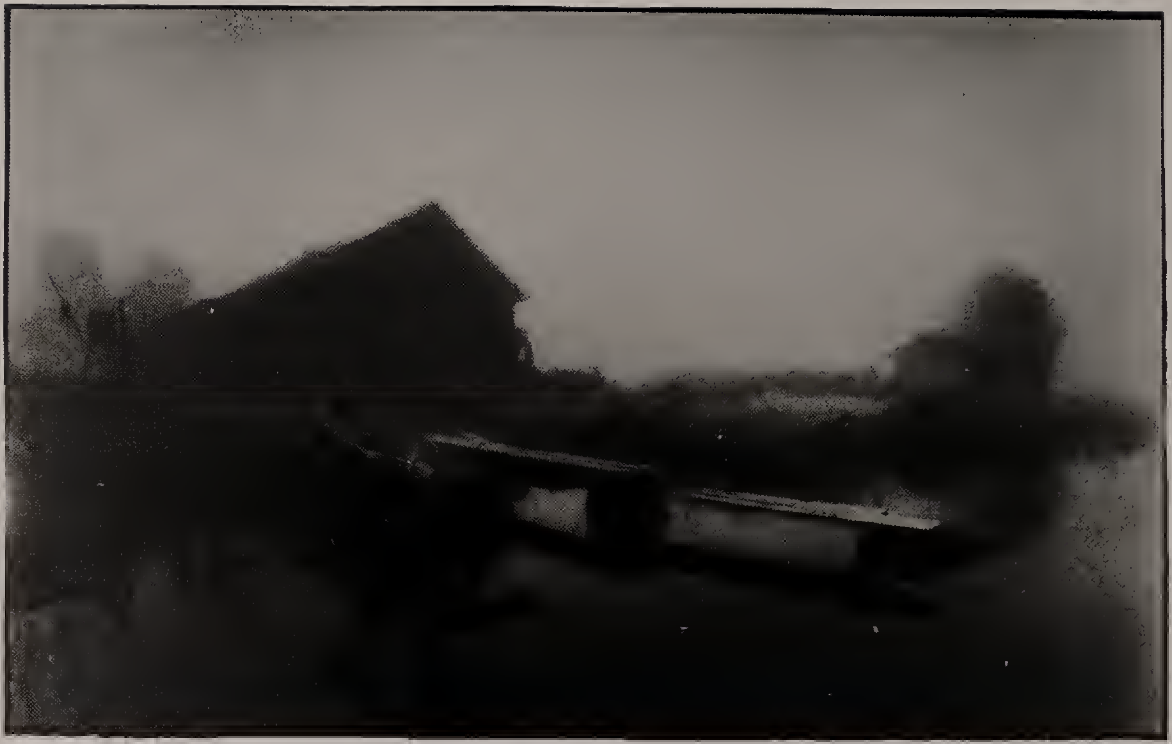


Fig. 66. Vladimir Filonov, *Confusion*, 1975. Gelatin silver print, 10.4 x 14 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21789.

Some photographers returned to the pictorial aesthetic of the Russian school of art photographers, who opposed the constructivist photography of the 1920s. Gennadii Kolosov (fig. 67), and Anatolii Erin, members of the Moscow Novator club, consistently worked with the principles of neopictorialism. They developed their own approach to soft-lens photography, which they mainly used to photograph northern Russia, where they went every summer, because the weather and nature there most closely corresponded to their idea of the national character of the Russian landscape.

In the late 1970s and 1980s the leading genre among the amateurs was the so-called (in the Soviet Union) social photography, dedicated to recording social reality. Unlike the genre photography of the 1960s, social photography incorporated the principle of self-expression, which was tied to a "plastic deformation" of the photographed reality as a symbol of the individual approach and style of the photographer. Liudmila Kuznetsova, Farit Gubayev (fig. 68), V. Zotov, and other members of the Kazan photo club Tasma exhibited works of social photography at the



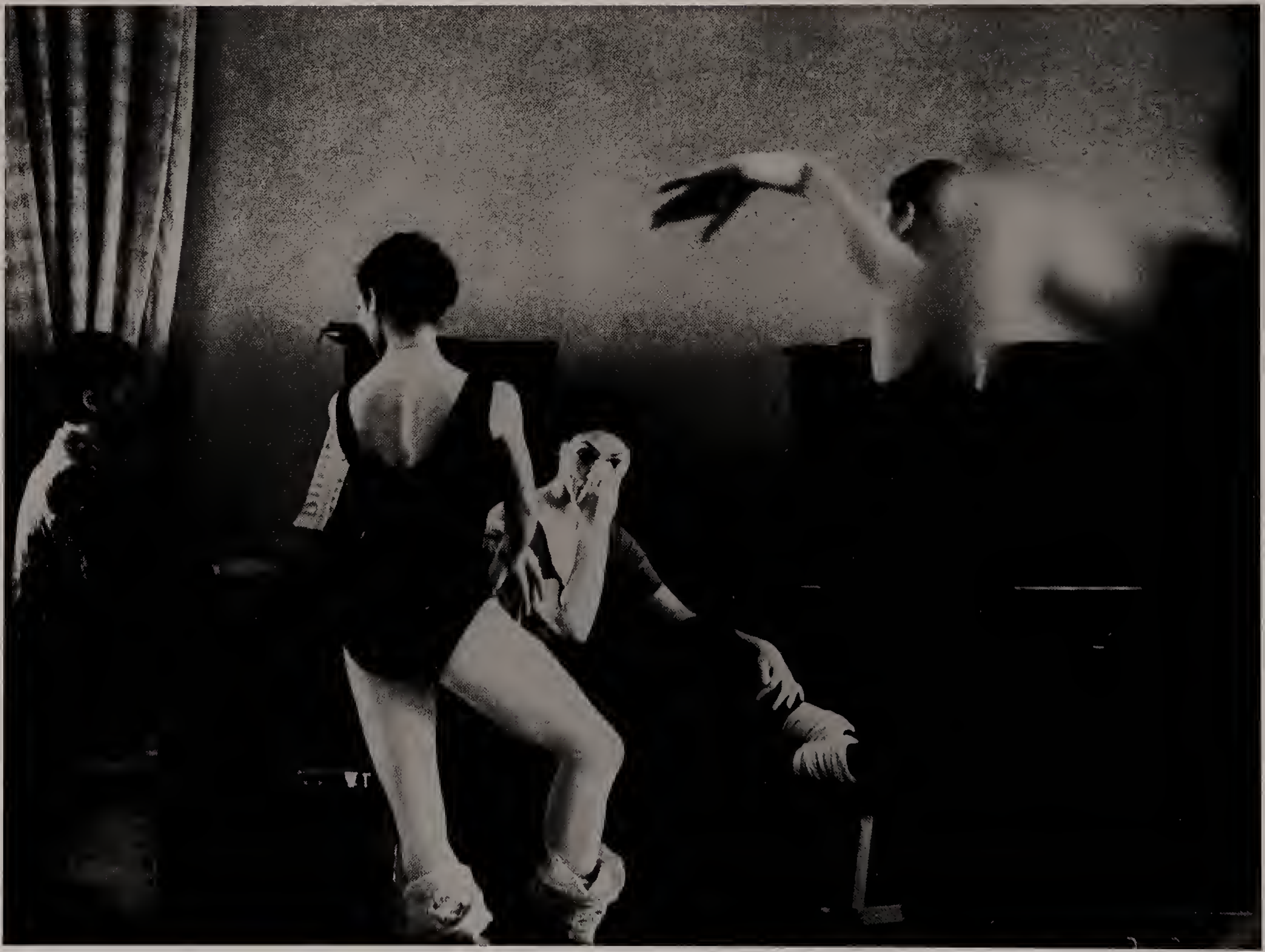


Fig. 67 (*top*). Gennadii Kolosov, *Northern Landscape*, early 1980s. Gelatin silver print, 10.7 x 17 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21788.
Fig. 68 (*above*). Farit Gubayev, *Dance Class*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 17.8 x 23.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21782.

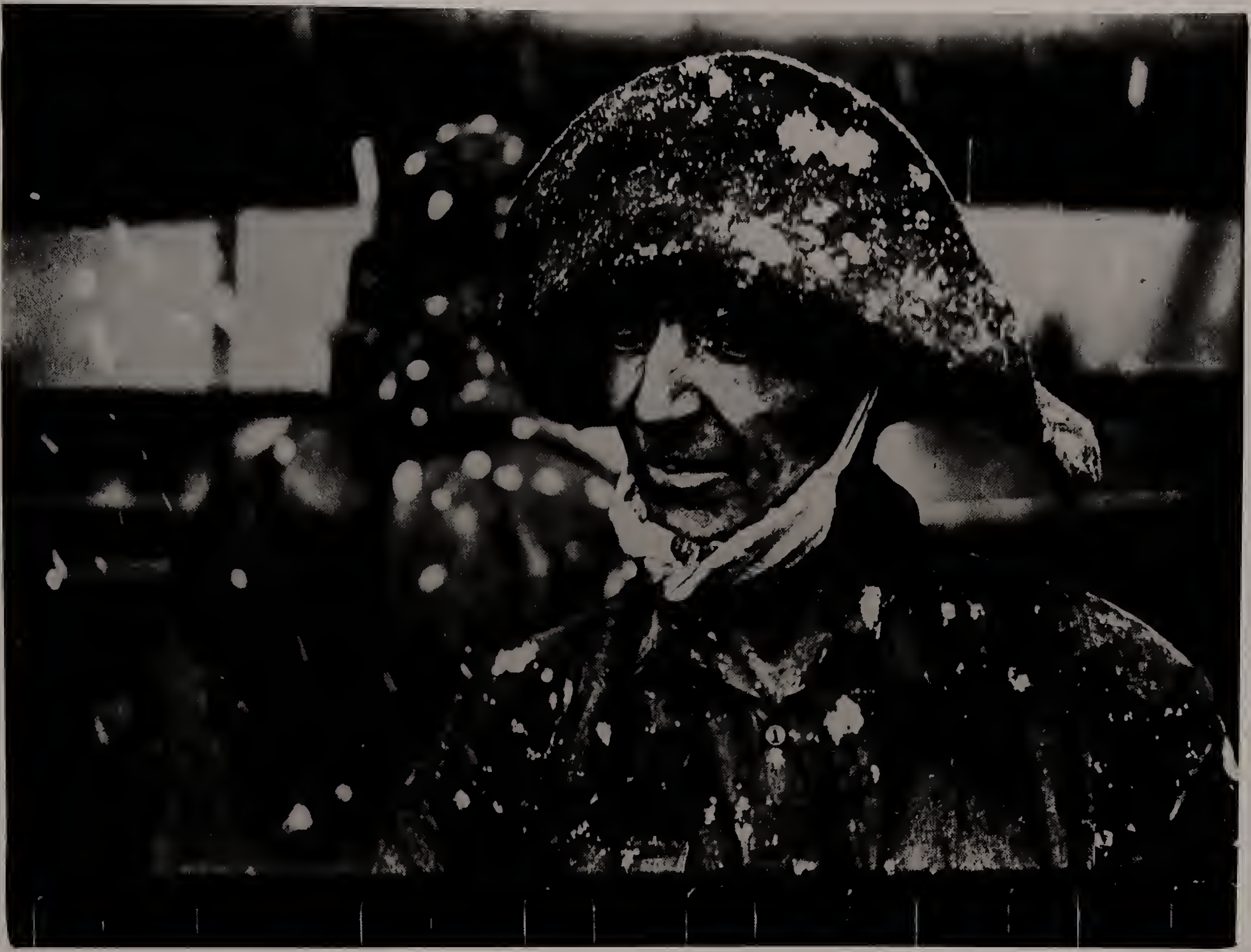


Fig. 69. Vladimir Sokolaev, *Snowstorm*, 1977. Gelatin silver print, 17.8 x 23.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21781.

Rīga Photo Festival and at the editorial offices of *Sovetskoe foto*. Their keen eyes for observing life allowed the viewer to uncover new layers of reality, as in the *Gypsy* series by Liudmila Kuznetsova. The striking forms of the subjects and the expressive use of space imbue these photographs with special meaning.

The work of Novokuznetsk's Triva group—Vladimir Sokolaev (fig. 69), V. Vorobieva, and A. Trofimov—was no less engaging. Their photographs tell of the daily life of a metallurgical plant and are reminiscent of German labor photography of the 1920s and 1930s. Particularly interesting was the detailed depiction of the texture of the machinery, which created an unusually realistic atmosphere. Unfortunately, this work drew the ire of local authorities, who saw in these photographs the defamation of one of the giants of Soviet metallurgy, and the group's activities were suspended.

In the 1980s photographers faced new challenges. They were fully prepared to adapt to the new artistic possibilities that arose during perestroika and glasnost, when all ideological and aesthetic prohibitions were abolished. However, amateur photography was unable to survive the introduction of new economic relations. Photo clubs had been supported by the Soviet state. Without such support, amateurs became independent photographers left to their own devices.

Alexander Borovsky

Closer to the Body

VOPLOSHCHENIE IS A RUSSIAN WORD RICH IN MEANING. While dictionaries give its translation as "incarnation" or "embodiment," the word has no exact equivalent in English that adequately expresses *voploshchenie*'s connotations of sensuality and tactility, and its emphasis on the flesh rather than the body. With its dual implications of the erotic and the allegorical—the use of the body to convey hidden meanings—*voploshchenie* perhaps best captures many of the issues raised in the representation of the body in Russian and Soviet photography. A selection of photographs created in the Soviet Union from the late 1950s through the late 1980s, now in the Dodge Collection of the Zimmerli Art Museum,

"Closer to the body" is a Russian expression synonymous with the English phrase "to get to the point."

Fig. 70. Boris Mikhailov, Untitled, undated. Type-C print, 20.1 x 30.3 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12974.

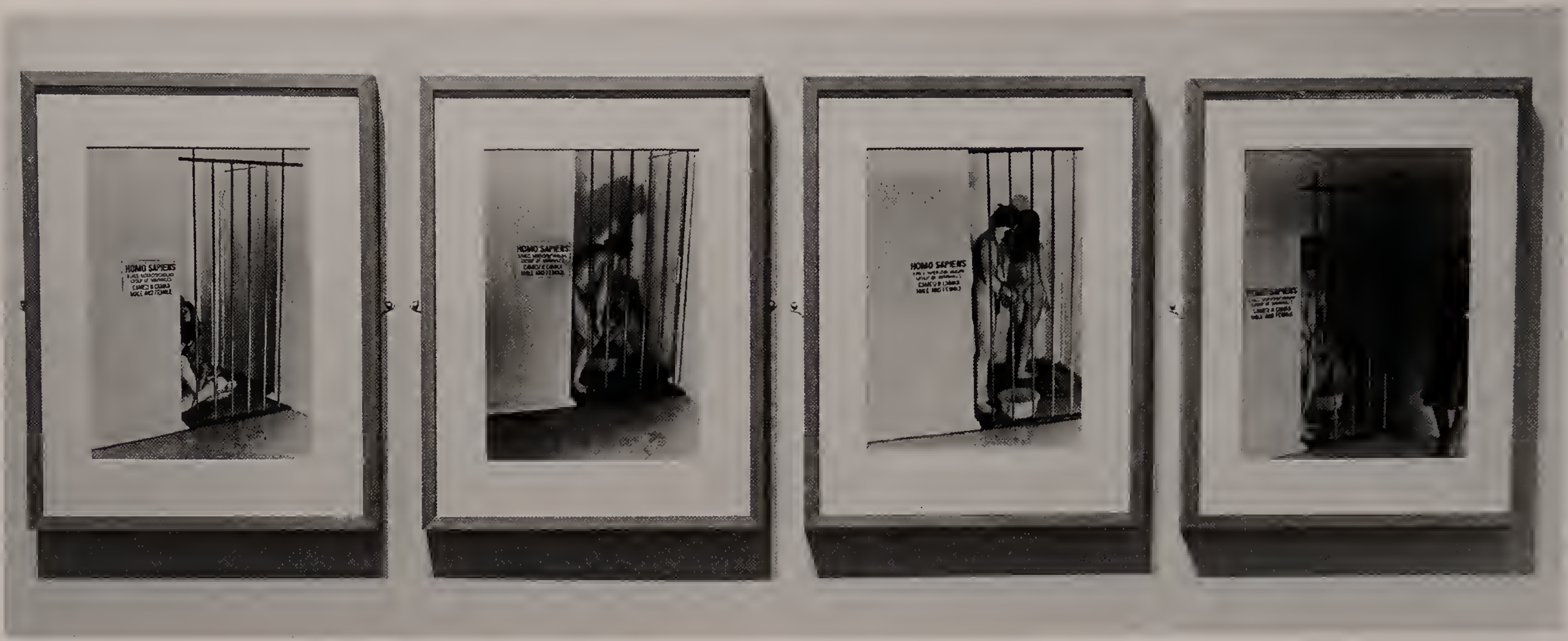


Fig. 71A. Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, *Zoo* (installation view, ZAM), 1977.
Gelatin silver prints, 37.3 x 26.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07516.01–04.

illuminates many of these issues as well as addresses more generally the problematic nature of corporeality in Soviet art (figs. 70–74).

Because of Russian and Soviet culture's intensely intimate relationship to sociopolitical developments, the practice of photographing the body was complicated by multiple social and political dimensions. The imposing of frenetic prohibitions and the no less frenetic overcoming of those prohibitions produced a series of interesting and unexpected tensions not usually associated with the genre or the "normal" course of artistic events—tensions that, in turn, engendered a fascinating variety of creative practices.[1] This fact, in combination with the centrality of literature in Russian culture and the time frame of the works under discussion—three turbulent decades that saw the artistic underground's undermining of the foundations of official Soviet art—prompted me to make a historical digression situating the image of the body in Russian photography in the context of other art forms and social and political developments.

Our exploration of photographic representations of the body in Russian art begins with the most representative category: the nude. While outside Russia the naked body served a range of functions—for example, French impressionist painters such as Edgar Degas (1834–1917) utilized nude photographs as aesthetic tools for the creation of works in other media—the strictures of Russian visual culture did not tolerate such liberties. In nineteenth-century Russian art, the naked body functioned solely within a set of carefully circumscribed parameters: as scientific material (for use in academic illustrations), as a metaphor of exalted classicism (as it appeared in different versions of late academic painting), or as a sub-genre within the larger category of "dirty pictures."

By the end of the nineteenth century, the erotic nude had acquired an almost functional-therapeutic character. Aleksandr Lebedev's (1830–1898) lithographs of the subject, for instance, came to suggest the semi-pornographic photographs of French men's magazines. The nude was soon virtually driven out of mainstream Russian culture, which at that time propagated a strict moral ethos. Populist writer Gleb Uspensky's (1840–1902) short story "She Straightened It Out" presented the Venus de Milo not as a nude female figure but, rather, as an instrument of moral reeducation. Perhaps even more evocative of the puritanical nature of fin-de-siècle nineteenth-century Russian culture is Leo Tolstoy's (1828–1910) advocacy of abstinence over sexual passion in his 1889 story, "Kreutzer Sonata."

In this atmosphere, the nude photograph was condemned as something appropriated by "Parisians." However, this very product was, for the most part, in fact supplied by Paris and Germany, although local versions soon made their appearance in Russia. (Aleksandr Kuprin's [1870–1938] famous and wonderfully daring novel, *The Pit* (1915), offers vivid descriptions of the process of their creation around that time.)

The twentieth century began in Russia with renewed promise on the heels of the moralistic nineteenth. During the early years of the new century, all sorts of prohibitions would be overcome (although monstrously heavy new ones would subsequently be

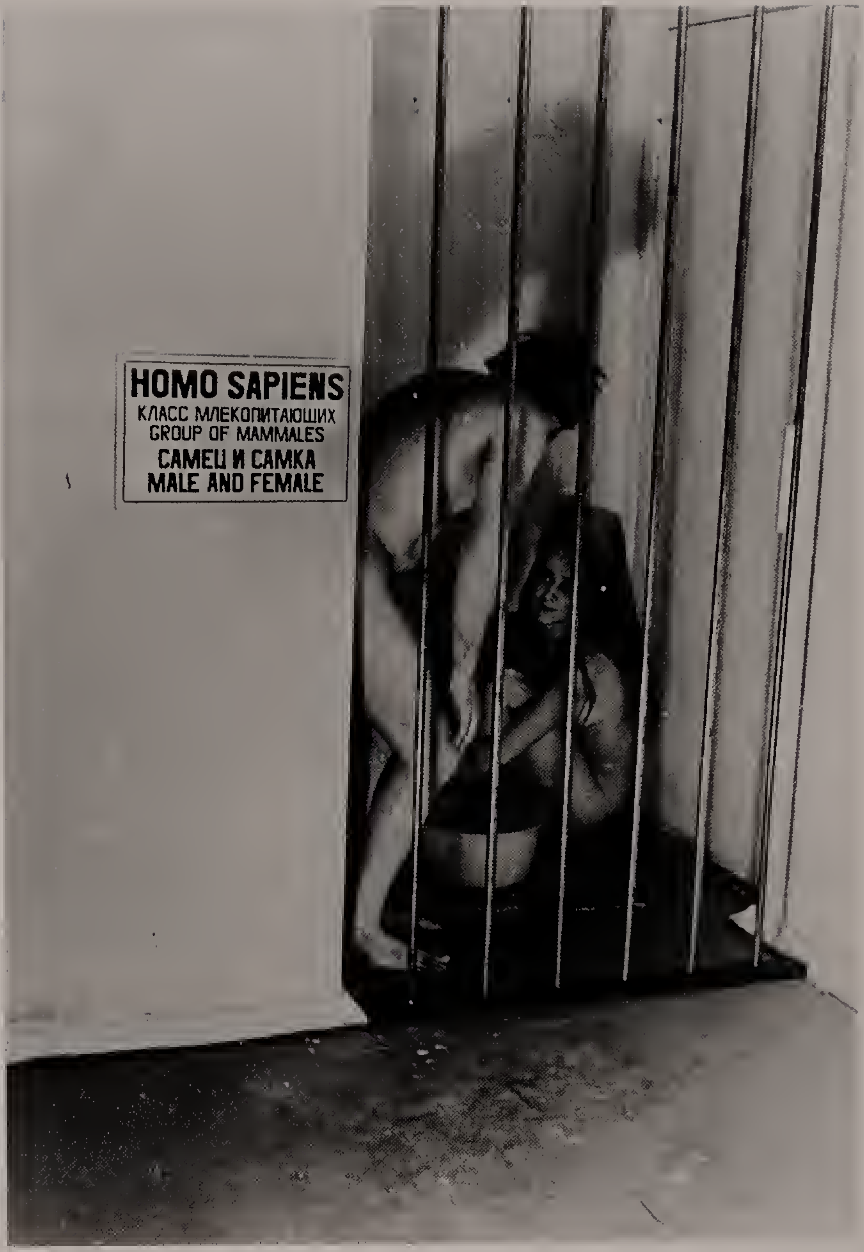


Fig. 71B. Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, *Zoo* (detail), 1977. Gelatin silver print, 37.3 x 26.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07516.03.

imposed). Uninhibited eroticism permeated every aspect of Russian life and culture at that time and "The Eros of the Impossible"[2] triumphed in the upper echelons of society, which was home to both the aesthetes, radicals, and creators of the Silver Age[3] and the masters of the World of Art movement.[4]

The lower floors and semi-basements of Russian society housed another, more sensual and explicitly sexual form of erotica. In these depths nude photography lived. Efforts to restore this genre to the upper levels of artistic culture—or at least aestheticize it à la Wilhelm Von Gloden (1856–1931)[5]—were extremely rare. One notable attempt (albeit one not tried in the court of public opinion) was undertaken by the Russian court painter Alfred Eberling (1872–1950), who photographed nudes in the privacy of his studio. Eberling's subjects included some of the leading Russian ballerinas of the day, such as Anna Pavlova and Tamara Karsavina, and his photographic legacy still awaits study and publication.

The next attempt to raise the status of the nude was made by the Russian pictorialists Yurii Eremin (1881–1948), Nikolai Svishchev-Paolo, and Sergei Ivanov-Alliluev,[6] who tirelessly photographed the subject in works that they enriched with compositional and pictorial effects. These artists played an important role in developing photography in Russia and elevating its position in the hierarchy of the fine arts.

Although contemporaneous with the pictorialists, the photographers of the early-twentieth-century avant-garde, led by Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956), Gustav Klucis (1895–1938), and El Lissitzky (1890–1941), embraced a completely different aesthetic. They insisted on photography's functionality, instrumentality, and utility and its essential differences from the "museum arts," fiercely opposing any efforts to elevate the medium's status to that of a fine art. Their position delayed for many years the institutionalization of the medium. Indeed, even though the 1930s was an era of hierarchies, titles, and state recognition,[7] photography and its most officially honored practitioners did not enter the pantheon of high culture confirmed from above until many years later.

The early years of that decade ushered in a new political era. With the recent completion of the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32),[8] the reality of a socialist utopia (so the Stalinist regime claimed) lay in the not-too-distant future. Soviet art was, consequently, charged not with expressing urgent struggle (as had been the purpose of art created during the Five-Year Plan) but with communicating the ideals of a socialist vitality and love of life—a Soviet "joie de vivre." An artistic language was needed to convey this notion of a state-authorized hedonism, embodied in other aspects of Soviet culture such as the creation of rest homes and health resorts and the treatments of "elixirs of youth" in contemporary literature and films. The old-style realism associated with the nineteenth-century Peredvizhniki (The Wanderers) was rejected for its perennial links to the Russian past.[9] The ascetic visual vocabulary of the early-twentieth-century avant-garde, with its abstract forms and robotic approach to the human figure, was hardly suited to expressing the

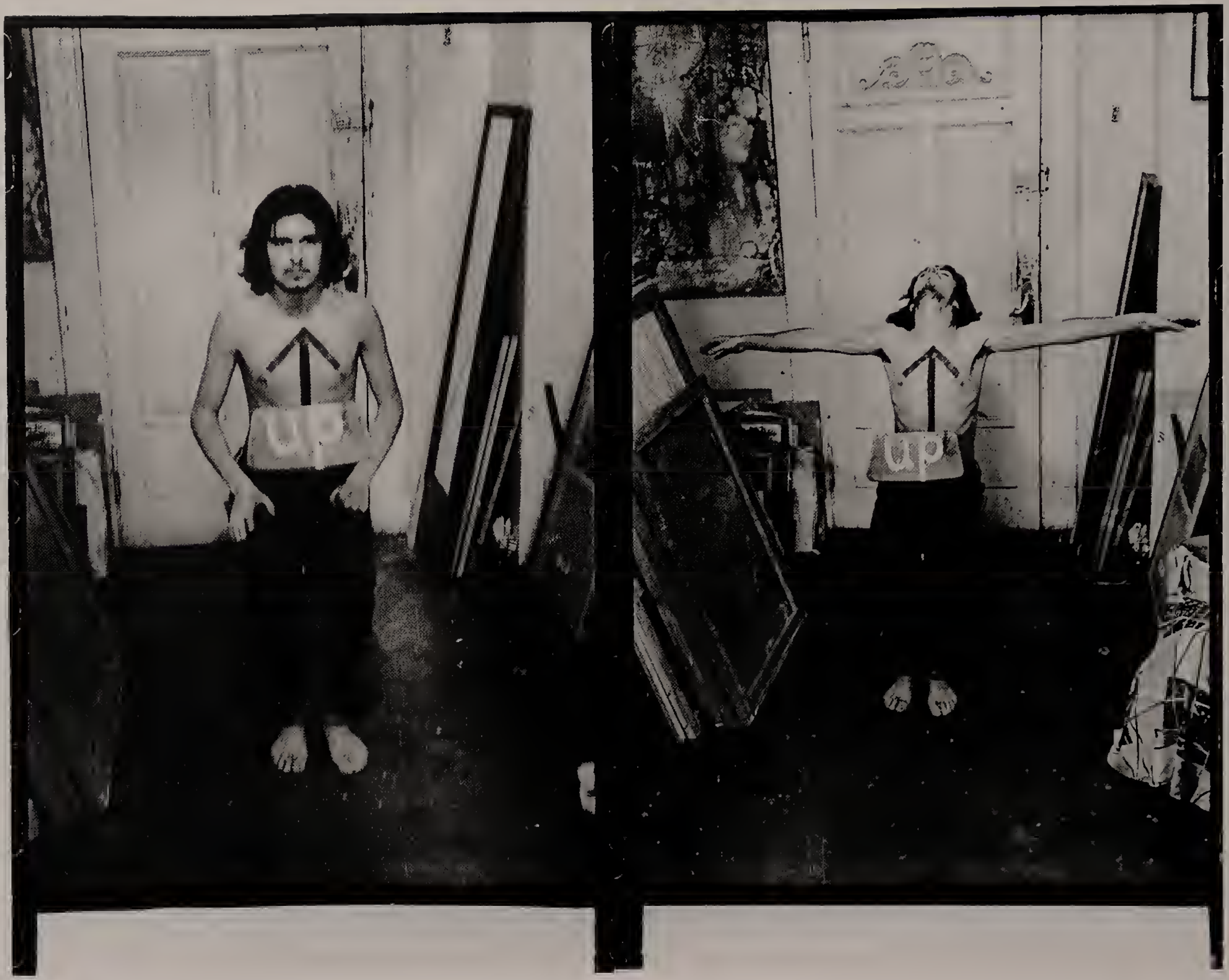


Fig. 72. Vladimir Naumets and Sergei Anufriev, Untitled, 1982. Gelatin silver print, 24 x 29.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10031.21.

"merriment" evoked by the 1934 Stalinist maxim, "Life has become merrier."[10] Something special was needed.

The brilliant, young art historian Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov identified this need: corporeality (*telesnost'*), the use of the body to transmit the tangibility, tactility, and materiality of the new Soviet realities (even though they were, in actuality, based on wishful thinking and allegedly to occur in the near future). Totalitarian corporeality, the use of the body to express the political goals of the Stalinist regime, became a leading component of Soviet artistic culture in the 1930s. The medium of photography came to play an important role in this aesthetic.

The artists who most fully expressed the concept of corporeality during the early Stalinist era—in fact, the inventors of "Soviet sexuality"—were those of the younger generation, who had undergone a solid "formalist" training and had earlier belonged to organizations such as OST and Circle of Artists that looked to contemporary European art for inspiration. Those individuals had grown up breathing Soviet air exclusively—that is, they well understood the ideological hierarchy of Soviet society and the elaborate system of repressions and prohibitions installed to enforce it. The leading creators of "Soviet sexuality" were the painters Aleksandr Deineka (1899–1969), Aleksandr Samokhvalov (1894–1971), Petr Viliams (1902–1947), and Yuri Pimenov (1903–1977) and the photographers Georgii Zelma (1906–1984), Boris Ignatovich (1899–1976), Arkadii Shaikhet (1898–1959), and Max Penson.

Deineka, the painter of Soviet youth, energy, and movement, was typical of the group. Even in his work-related scenes, modeled on "Kuzbass workers" or "future pilots," Deineka treated subjects that allowed for the depiction of "nudity" (*obnazhennost'*): young men and women at rest, enjoying time off from work, or participating in sporting events. Before all else, this artist—not interested in the presentation of psychological profiles or the unfolding of complex plots—depicted nude bodies. At the same time, although

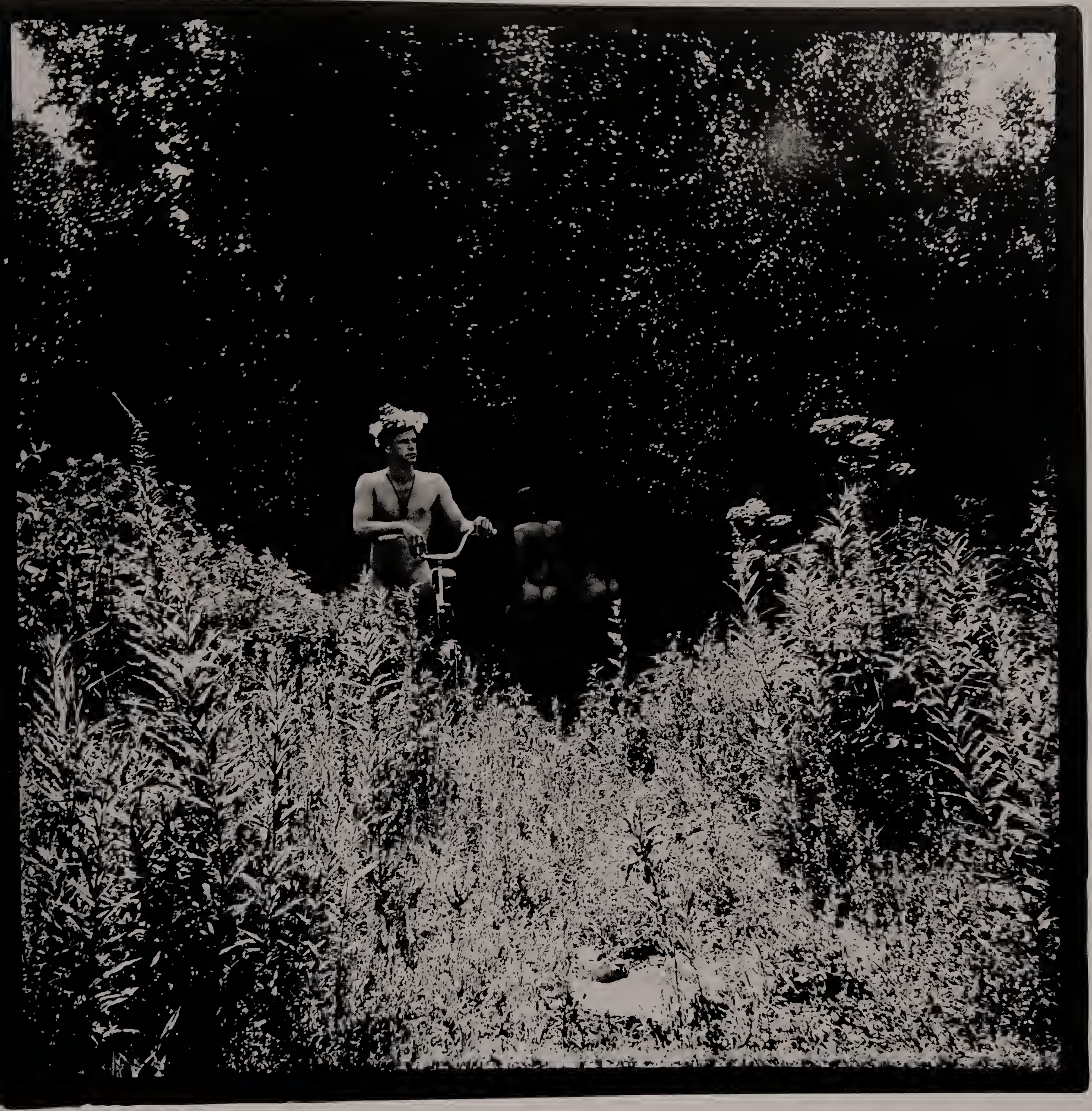


Fig. 73. Andrei Usov, *Solnechnoe, B. G.*, 1983. Toned gelatin silver print, 39 x 39 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14756.

presented from lively angles and in poses that embody a sense of utter freedom and lack of inhibition, Deineka's attractive, youthful subjects fail to arouse thoughts of the "flesh," carnal love, or concrete sensuality. The same can be said of Samokhvalov's *Girls of the Metro* painting series, which features images of powerful, yet astonishingly sexless, female figures created in deliberate likeness to ancient Greek kores.

But it is especially in the era's photography (a medium that is, according to Roland Barthes, the most erotic of the arts) that, in spite of the plethora of highly evocative, corporeal subject matter, the lack of actual eroticism is most apparent. The human body appears like a fine-tuned, well-oiled machine devoid of desire in Ignatovich's images of young, nude male workers whose physiques glisten under cascading water, Zelma's portrayals of the tensed bodies of young sportswomen, and Penson's depictions of semi-clad gymnasts on tightropes that reference Freud and his phallic metaphors. While clearly a result of the strictures imposed by state authorities on the practitioners of Soviet artistic culture, the absence of eroticism in these works nonetheless begs the question: How did such prohibitions translate into actual creative practice? And, more generally, how does a body shown in all its nakedness lose its corporeality, sensuality, and sexuality?

The answer lies in the existence of a particular Soviet "optics," or way of viewing things, derived from the prohibitions against individuality that permeated every aspect of Soviet life and culture. In totalitarian art, the body, although possessing all the qualities of idealized corporeality, was utterly bereft of individuality. The developed, beautiful bodies of the young athletes and workers presented in the photographs described above seem to have been rinsed in a substance that not only washed out their differences and weaknesses. It also eliminated the possibility that they belonged to distinct, concrete persons or could, by extension, arouse actual sexual desires. (Artists of the period indeed suffered the impact of totalitarian prohibitions. When the photographer Aleksandr Grinberg [1885–1979] changed his style to create works infused with a degree of intimacy, secrecy, and mystery, he was accused of producing pornography and repressed by the Soviet authorities.)

This optics was the origin of totalitarian photographic eroticism, which remained in place for nearly ten years. It possessed "all of the sexual features,"[11] yet was sexless. It bore witness to a healthy hedonism on the part of Soviet society but was incapable of kindling individual desire. It symbolized the triumph of healthy, athleticized, and well-maintained bodies but was incorporeal. Toward the end of the 1930s, however, even this officially sanctioned corporeality appeared too permissive to the authorities, who no longer feared accusations of conservatism or regression. By that point, Soviet society had become so unyielding and puritanical that exhibiting nudity in any form was out of the question.

The prohibitions against the exposition of nudes persisted longer than those in other spheres. Only in the years following Stalin's death in 1953 did the corporeal, or even hints of its existence, begin to gradually and timidly reenter Soviet art. A landmark work in this regard was created the next year: Arkadii Plastov's (1893–1972) *Spring* (1954), a traditional (in the good sense) painting of a naked young woman who has run into a Russian bathhouse to warmly bundle her child. *Spring* created a genuine sensation when it first appeared in the all-union art exhibition that opened at the Tretyakov Gallery in January 1955.[12] Only the great authority enjoyed by Plastov, a realist painter and respected member of the Academy of Art, made it possible for him to display a work that depicted nudity in the absence of an ideological context such as sport or bathing after a day at work. Love scenes were seemingly rehabilitated during the Khrushchev "thaw" (1957–64), but how timid, inhibited, and constrained were the examples then produced! Although in its own way a powerful and important painting, Viktor Popkov's (1932–1974) *Two People* suggests the limits of romantic imagery at that time. It depicts intimacy, but in a highly unerotic manner—a love affair "without touching!"

Surprisingly, developments were also depressingly slow to occur in the realm of Soviet unofficial art. The daily challenge of battling the authorities was not conducive to the treatment of intimate subjects. As a result, political games frequently overshadowed erotic ones, although there were exceptions. In the late 1950s, the Leningrad artist Aleksandr Arefiev (1931–1978) depicted his city's corporeal lower depths

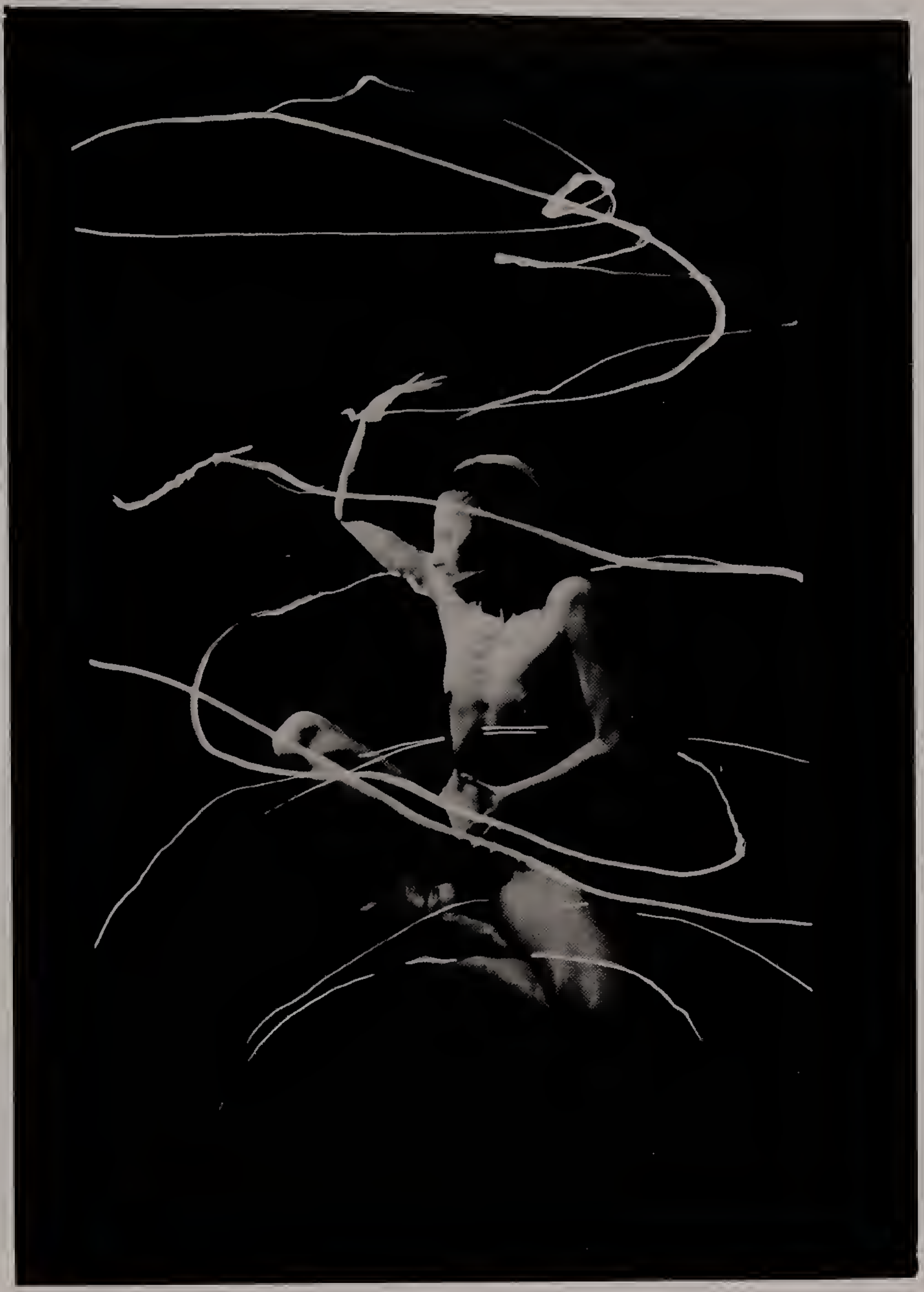


Fig. 74. Gunārs Binde, *The Cage III*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 22.5 x 14 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 01654.

in paintings imbued with an energy and expressionistic fury not seen since the 1920s. Arefiev was, however, unique. The following decade saw more sustained explorations of this theme. Anatolii Zverev (1931–1986), a nonchalant, perennially drunk Olympian and legendary figure of the Moscow underground, demonstrated an enviable mastery in the innumerable seductive, appetizing, and organically conceived nudes he created by means of a few brush strokes. Leonid Purygin (1951–1995) fashioned his own, Rabelaisian mythology in which the lower strata of Russian society acquire their own voice and autonomous existence. Vladimir Yankilevsky (b. 1938) depicted mutant women seemingly under the influence of extraterrestrial eosmic forces.

Such was the context in which interest in the corporeal emerged—or more precisely, reemerged—in Soviet photography during the 1960s. This time, however, bodily subject matter did not appear solely within the confines of nude photography, a genre that was too narrow for it (and that had in any case been forgotten by the generation of artists who began their careers during those years).

In the latter part of that decade, a new type of photography emerged in Soviet art, and with particular intensity in that created in the Baltic states. Imbued with the spirit of state-approved puritanism, it distanced itself from the stylistic hallmarks of erotic photography as well as the direct engagement and functionality typical of photojournalism. It also

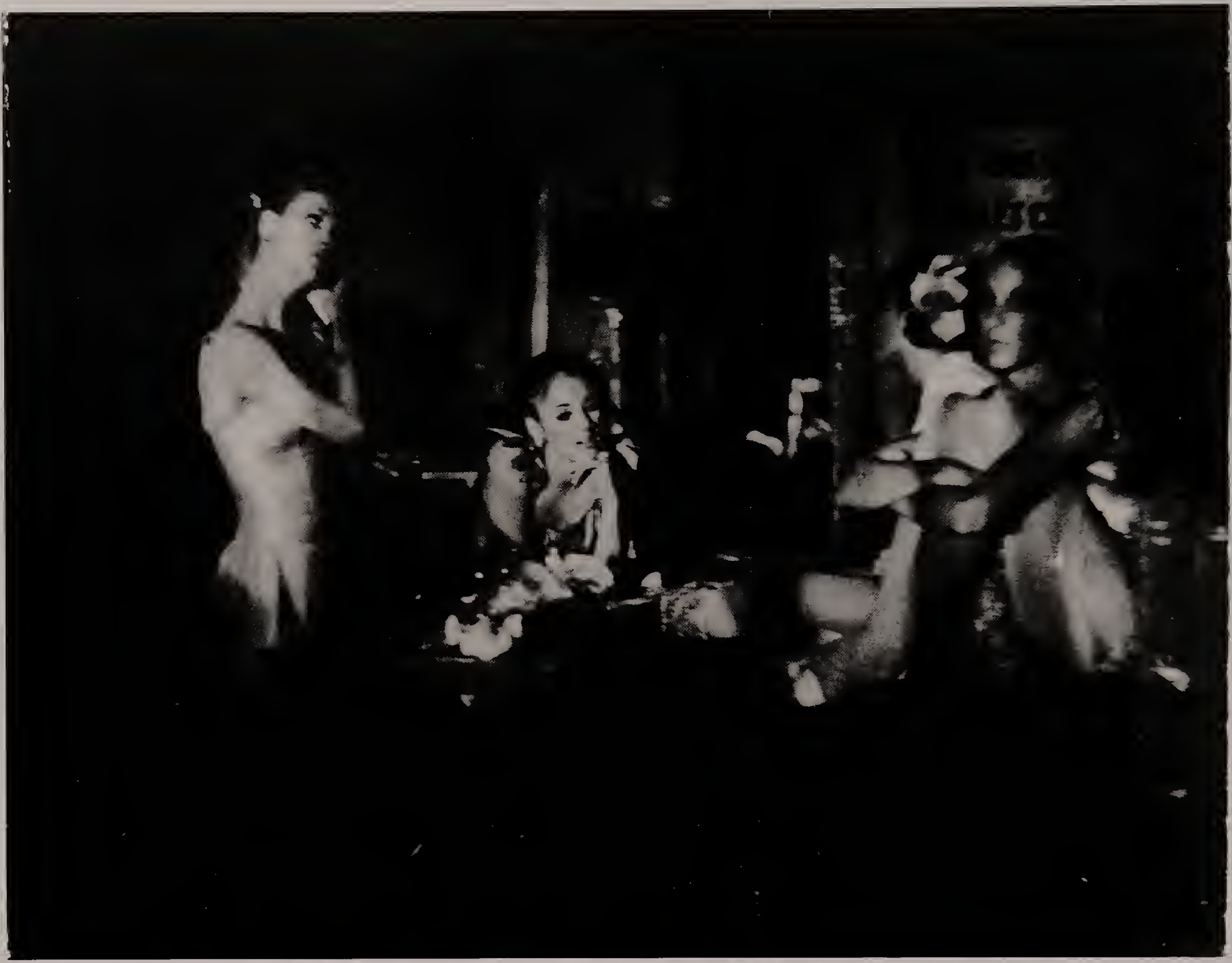


Fig. 75. Oleg Poleshchuk, *Balanchine Ballet in Leningrad*, 1960.
Sepia-toned gelatin silver print, 40.5 x 51.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14696.

distinguished itself from official art because it failed to directly reflect Soviet ideology or address any of the prescribed themes.

What I am referring to is "artistic photography." In this genre, reminiscent of the aesthetic quality of the work of W. Von Gloden, Alfred Eberling, and the Russian pictorialists, the nude was essentially "packaged" and "sold" twice: as classically exalted (in contrast to the mundane) and as symbol of the "pictorial" (occupying an honored place in the system of the arts). While not terribly interesting in and of itself and created in small numbers, artistic photography managed to survive until the 1980s, sometimes in the form of naive interpretations such as Oleg Poleshchuk's ballet photographs from the 1960s (fig. 75), Valerii Shchekoldin's works of the 1970s, and Nikolai Bakharev's early interior genre scenes.

Much more interesting than the photographs themselves, however, were their unintended consequences. The results of these artists' overzealous efforts to establish their links to pictorialism were so unbearable that they prompted photographers of the period to pursue an idiom that was dramatically expressive and contained a meaningful relationship to modernist culture. This search resulted in the creation of serious, important works by artists such as I. Sture, Aleksandras Mačiauskas (fig. 76), Sergei Falin (fig. 77), Violeta Bubelyte (fig. 78), Vitalii Butyrin, and Sergei Grigoriev. These figures, who had had their fill of "artistic photography" during their youth, utilized a diversity of techniques—from collage to "solarization"[13]—driven by the imagery itself and not by any pretensions to pictorialism.

Another major reaction to artistic photography was demonstrated by the "new photojournalism." Developed by a group of journalists, this genre pursued a programmatic "lowering" of photographic imagery by turning to mundane, unremarkable, and unpleasant subject matter. Its practitioners also rejected the staged quality of official Soviet photojournalism, whose emotional typology of forms conveyed a deliberate severity and lack of pomposity. These characteristics likened official photojournalism to the Severe Style of painting.

Practitioners of the Severe Style such as Pavel Nikonov (b. 1930), Igor Obrosov (b. 1930), and Nikolai Andronov (b. 1926) strove to create an alternative to the glorified, idealized version of Soviet reality presented in socialist realism.[14] They substituted in its place an easily read thematic and visual framework typified by a moderate generalization of forms, plastic "severity," formal tension (especially in the area of color), a limited range of topics (consisting primarily of prosaic scenes of labor or preparation for work), and a "legibility" of the emotional states of its subjects, who were usually presented as withdrawn and introspective. While its contrast with socialist realist painting was evident, the Severe Style's programmatic nature made it no less artificial.

Official photojournalism suffered from the same ailment. Its images were constructed in a similar manner as those of the Severe Style: depictions of labor or the readiness to perform it in difficult, dirty conditions and the frequent inclusion of vivid details such as close-ups of straining hands and sweaty brows. Practitioners of this genre dispensed strict dosages of severity and its opposite and developed an entire methodology for the "softening" of images, creating works that, while not resembling the self-congratulatory pomposity of Stalinist culture, nevertheless corresponded only partially to Soviet reality. Clearly designed to meet exhibition and periodical requirements, the works of official photojournalism were obviously staged and compositionally similar to those of the then popular "production genre."

Photographers who embraced the new photojournalism opposed both the severe artificiality of official photojournalism and the "prettiness" of artistic photography, seeking instead to produce images that captured their own perceptions of Soviet reality. The first steps were rather timid. The Leningraders Boris Mikhalevkin and Gennady Prikhodko simply took photographs of everyday Soviet life, doing so without any preconceived notions as to what this reality should look like, whether ebullient and grandiose or completely hopeless. They regarded life as a process and the photographer's role as one of participating in and recording that process.

The initial, modest works of the movement were not intended for the mass media or for display in thematic exhibitions but were instead designed for private consumption and disseminated within a narrow circle. These unpretentious images, which often included the artists themselves, stood out immediately from the mass of officially sanctioned photographs produced during those years.

The new photojournalism's approach to the corporeal contrasted starkly with its treatment in Stalinist photography, which created mosaics out of obedient bodies, and contemporary official photography, which produced "improved," disguised, or monumentalized versions of the body. Practitioners of the new photojournalism regarded the body not as clay to be molded but as itself a shaper of imagery. Although at times this method produced awkward and naive results, as in the works of Mikhalevkin, Prikhodko, Evgenii Pavlov, and Sergei Gitman (b. 1944), this flaw was soon overcome.

The new photojournalists also employed corporeality to address thematic issues such as the clash between corporeal and political practices. For example, in one of his images of female acrobats, Poleshchuk placed a slogan from the proceedings of a routine party congress above one figure. This device served to oppose the precise, detailed movements of the acrobat's body (albeit subjected to the ancient rituals of performance) to the empty, meaningless political phrase (that itself now assumed a ritualistic character). Enduring realities rather than strictly Soviet conditions are addressed in the early, unstaged photographs of Sergei Borisov, who at the beginning of his career showed himself to be an accomplished master of "straight photography." Several of his images from that time visualize the Old Testament metaphor of daily bread through their depiction of partially nude female workers pressing loaves of bread to their breasts.

More interesting results were obtained by those artists who investigated the—always relevant in Russia—

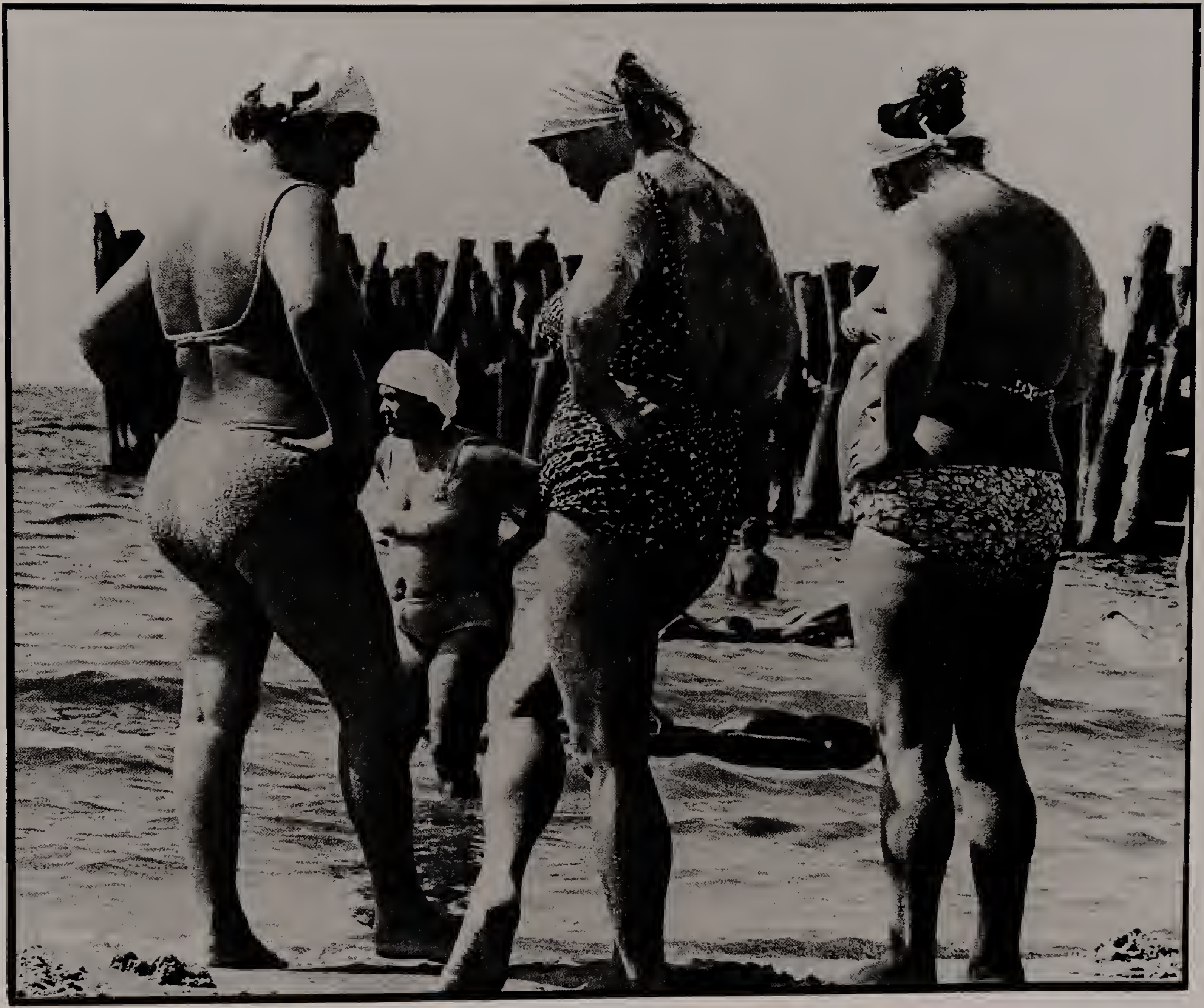


Fig. 76. Aleksandras Mačiauskas, *Summer—9*, 1981.
Gelatin silver print, 29 x 34.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15043.

theme of violence by the state against the individual and the private sphere. In the works devoted to this subject, the state is visualized as pure form while the individual is depicted as simply a nude body without the hierarchical signs of official institutions. At times, the opposition of the individual to the state appears as an inevitable and perpetual, albeit unnatural, unity. This representation is seen, for example, in Borisov's *March with the Left*, which portrays policemen marching together with young boys and girls. The totalitarian state, this image suggests, imposed a mark of ownership on its youth: form. More often, however, the new photojournalists separated the individual from the state, presenting them in contrast. In Yuri Rybchinsky's series *Detoxification Center* and *Juvenile Prison*, Shchekoldin's *Draft Board*, and Pavlov's group of photographs of a military hospital, the institutions depicted (the police, the army, and the hospital) are portrayed as cruelly repressive while the individuals are rendered as helpless and defenseless.

The new photojournalists were also concerned with the individual's position in society, creating works that commented on collective experience evocatively rather than illustratively. Although likely unfamiliar with the theories of Michel Foucault, these artists were indisputably aware of Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938), who famously wrote, "The wolf-hound age is at my throat."[15] As if anticipating the collective's role in the events of national self-determination that occurred in the Baltics at the end of the decade, Evgenii Raskopov's 1980 *Holiday of Song in Rīga* conveys its feeling of wholeness, like-mindedness, and emotional unity (fig. 79). The

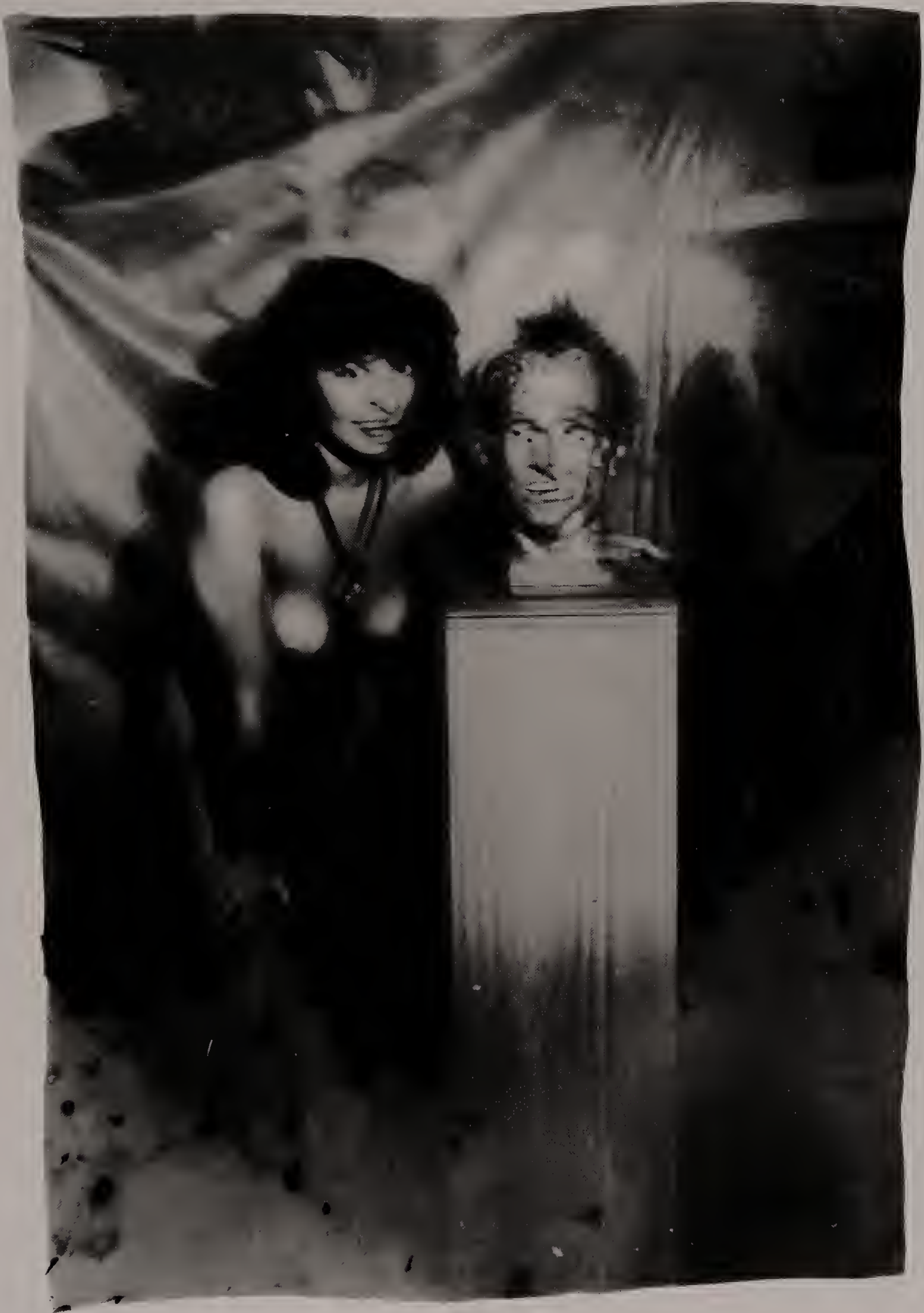


Fig. 77. Sergei Falin, Untitled, 1981. Toned gelatin silver print, 36.2 x 26 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14649.

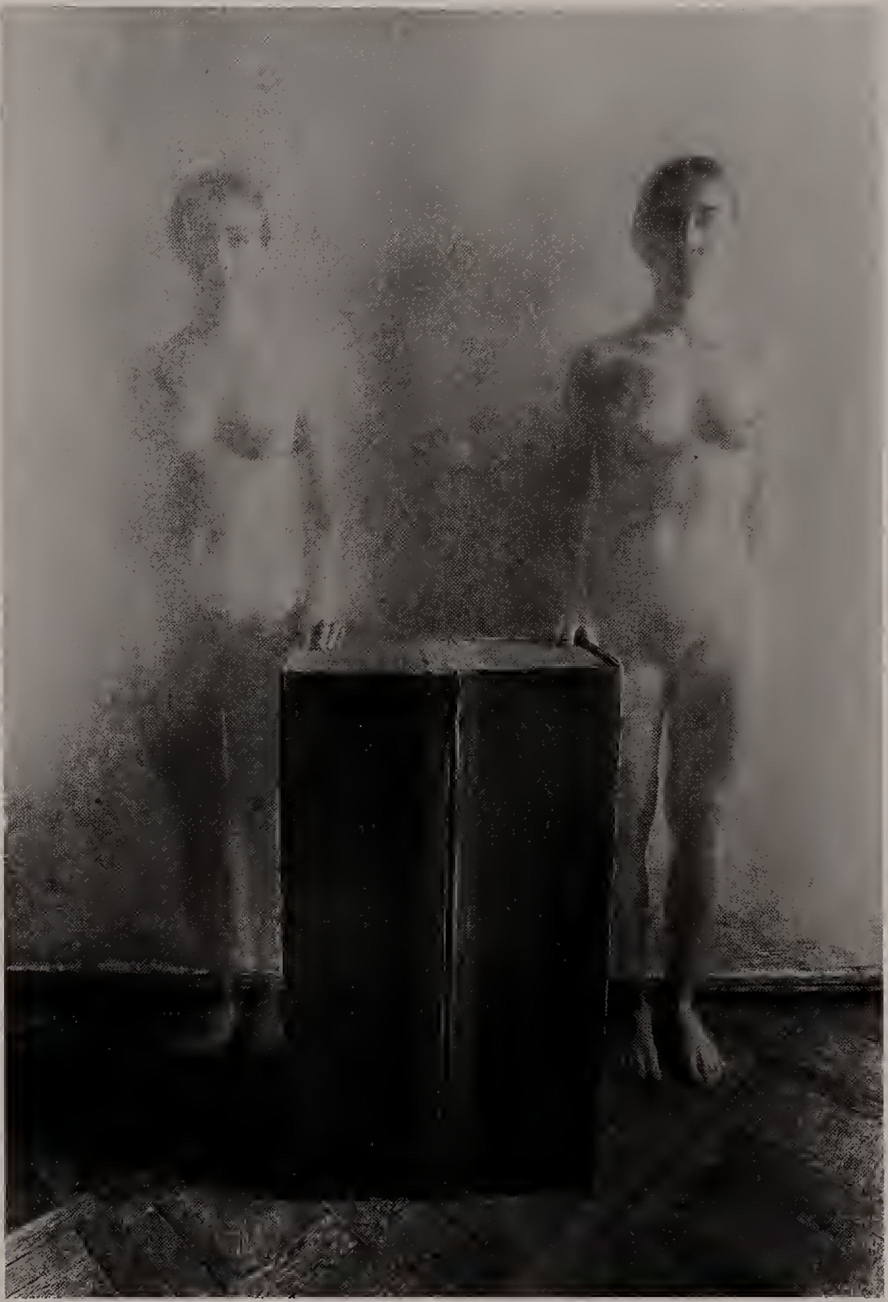


Fig. 78. Violeta Bubelyte, No. 29 from the series *Nude*, 1985. Gelatin silver print, 23.2 x 16 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15060.

collective appears in a different guise in the works of Kharkov photographer Viktor Kochetov and Rīga photographer Aleksandr Lapin (b. 1945): that of an overheated, amorphous mass of people on the beach. The absence of a formative will is evident in these images—which, perhaps unintentionally, recall their antithesis, the mass photographs created in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany—and is rendered physically. Their creators dared to show that an unassuming mass of relaxed individual bodies, wills, and desires left to their own devices is more natural than that same crowd of people molded in the image of the totalitarian state.

Totalitarianism is also explored in Igor Makarevich's (b. 1943) *Metro* series. Makarevich sought to dematerialize and desacralize Matvei Manizer's (1891–1966) famous, aggressively corporeal sculptures that adorn the Revolution Square Moscow Metro station, choosing to photograph them in a deliberately unprofessional manner: out of focus, at a sharp angle, and with the flash reflected. He clearly demonstrated that he is not an architectural photographer, as would be expected of an artist who treats a famous monument of the Stalinist era. Makarevich's *Metro* images may be regarded as "souvenir photographs" that function as a symbolic farewell gesture to that period: after a short passage of time, one is not sure whether one has really been there or whether what has been refreshed in the memory is reality or a mirage. (In his approach to the theme of the Moscow Metro, Makarevich may be regarded as a pioneer: following his example, Boris Groys and Mikhail Rykhlin explored the subject as the most vivid illustration of Stalinism.)

While organically linked to the preceding material, Makarevich's series provides a natural transition to the final body of work to be considered in this essay: the photography created by the Moscow school of conceptualism. The Dodge Collection is rich in conceptualist photography, containing an assortment of both canonical and marginal images that explore the issue of identity. Most important in this context, however, is their frequent engagement of the corporeal. Corporeality was an important theme in Moscow conceptualism—the word "body," couched in various Freudian and structuralist metaphors, appears frequently and with different meanings in the *Dictionary of Terms of the Moscow Conceptualist School*.

Conceptual photography began with the work of Francisco Infante (b. 1943). By the 1960s, Infante's interest in suprematism,[16] particularly its space-creating qualities, informed his concept of the "artifact." The artist placed geometric objects in natural settings, and the synthesis produced by those placements, which was then recorded by means of photography, was the artifact (see figs. 128–30; pp. 158 and 159). This process resulted in unforeseen juxtapositions and strange transformations: the geometric forms came to appear as profoundly natural, alive, and organic, while their natural environments assumed the qualities of the handmade. The human figure occupies an intermediate status in these works. Dressed in specially designed costumes, it recalls the characters of the 1913 futuristic play *Victory over the Sun* and functions in a sense as a "double agent," "betraying" the natural for the synthetic and vice versa.

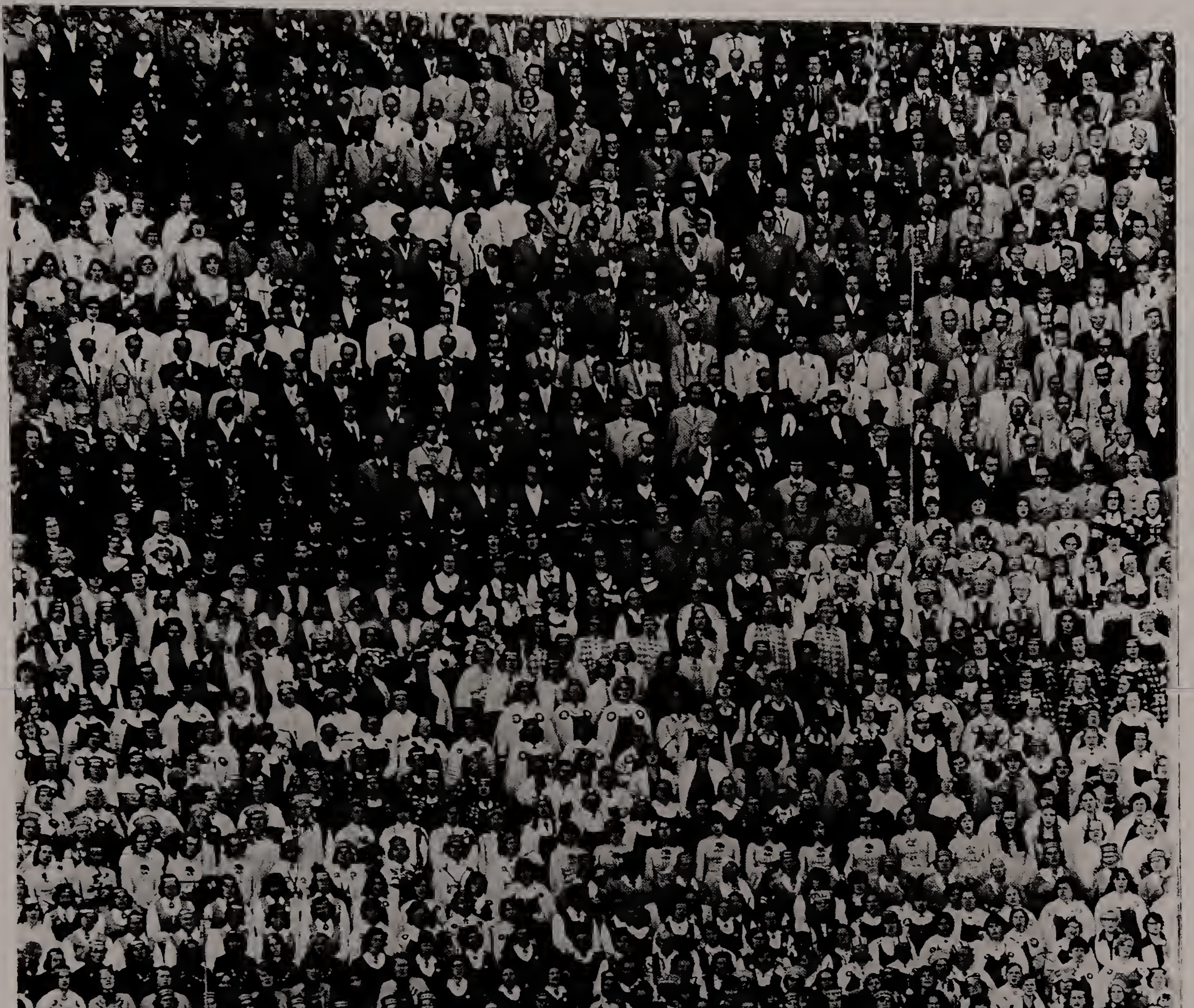


Fig. 79. Evgenii Raskopov, No. 2 from the series *Holiday of Song in Rīga*, 1980.
Gelatin silver print, 59.5 × 44.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14726.

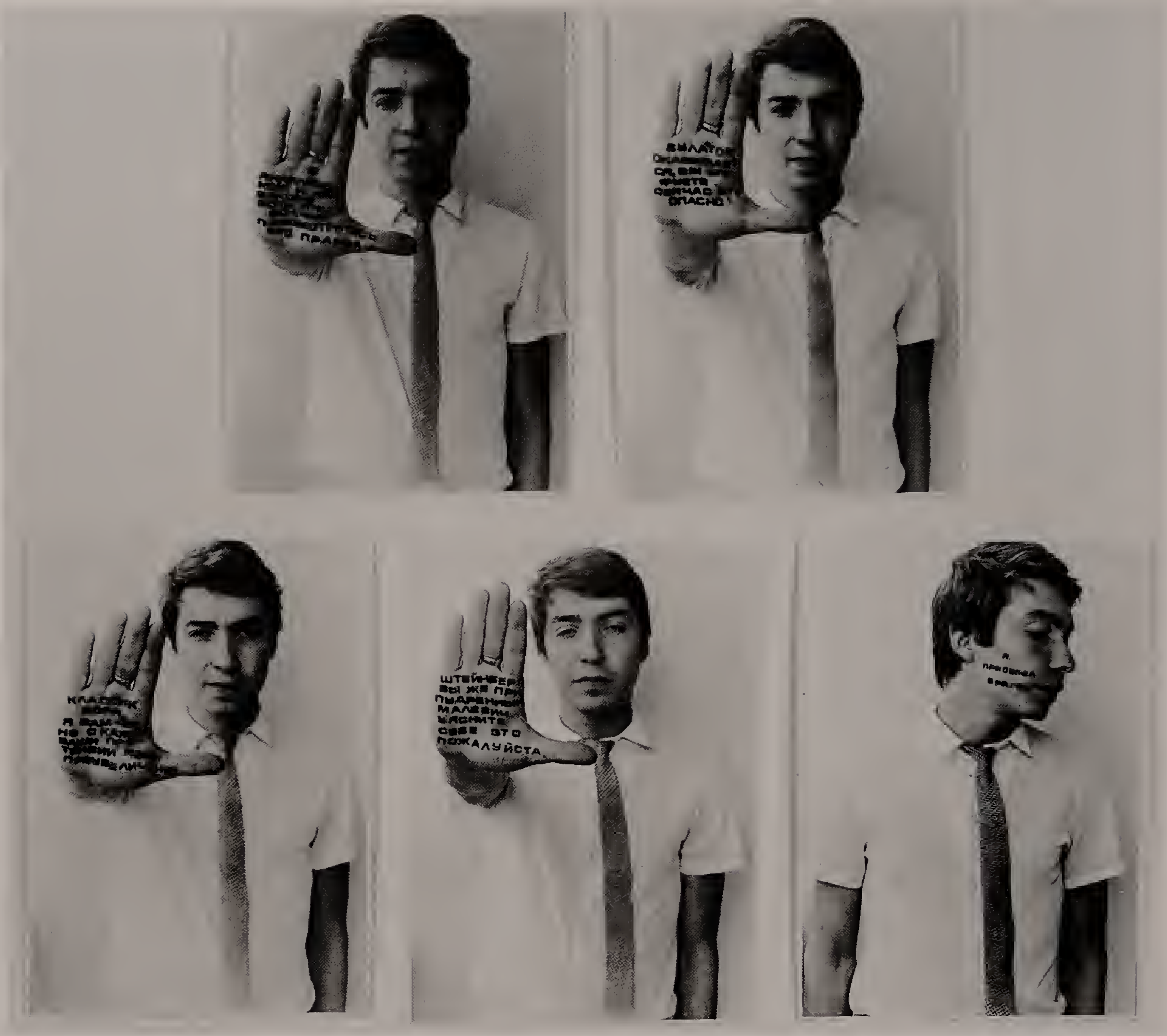


Fig. 80. Vadim Zakharov, *I Made Enemies*, 1982. Gelatin silver prints, 16.5 x 12 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12098.01–05.

A natural setting provides the context of the 1977 series of rare photographs by Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin (b. 1951 and 1945) contained in the Zimmerli's collection that picture the artists at a picnic wearing their signature loose-fitting garments (see figs. 82A–E, p. 93). These garments convey a sense of expectation, functioning as a curtain that suggests the imminent occurrence of a unique theatrical event.

For Infante, the meticulous, lengthy process involved in creating his artifacts served to express photography's "substantial" rather than its "functional" character. By contrast, the last group of photographs to be discussed utilize the medium functionally rather than substantially, as purely a means of documentation. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the centrality of language in Moscow conceptualism, they examine the body's inherently linguistic dimensions. These works involve the frequent use of nudity—a state that enabled these artists to experience, as if for the first time, their bodies' relationship to primitive (but perhaps the only meaningful) linguistic practices.[17]

The communicative possibilities of mimicry are explored in a 1982 group of works by Svetlana Kopystianskaia and Igor Kopystiansky (b. 1950 and 1954), which convey legible messages through facial gestures such as grimaces. They suggest the eighteenth-century anatomical studies of Franz Messerschmidt (1736–1783) and Nikolas Jacob that have often been employed as visual aids to explain the expression of feelings. In *Earning Money*, Vadim Zakharov (b. 1959) utilized "corporeal optics" (another term found in the conceptualist *Dictionary*) as a means of addressing the prosaic qualities of the "communal" body. Esoteric connotations are seen in another photograph by Zakharov that depicts the artist holding the secret lists of NOMA literally in the palm of his hand (fig. 80).[18] This image conjures the Soviet archetypes of salvation or denunciation, no matter what the consequences, references also seen in

Leonid Panteleev's *The Package*, Arkadii Gaidar's *RVS*, and Konstantin Zvezdochetov's (b. 1958) *Photography Studio*. A similar allusion is presented in a work by Vladimir Kupriyanov that depicts the faces of his friends under sacred religious symbols.

As this brief discussion suggests, the conceptualists explored the extreme limits of corporeality in their photographic work. They sought to embody the most fundamental linguistic practices by reducing speech to corporeal expressions such as the scream. Their efforts to do so were critical to the movement's very survival and success and also helped realize their ultimate artistic goal: signaling the presence of life. Our examination of the use of the body in Soviet photography appropriately ends here, not only because of the time period of the works under discussion but also because conceptualism represents a pioneering phenomenon in Russian art beyond which interpretations of the corporeal remain inconclusive.

NOTES

To aid nonspecialist readers, editors Christos Chrissopoulos and Jane Friedman have inserted explanatory footnotes that clarify the many cultural figures, movements, and other such terms referenced throughout the essay.

1. On the "normal" treatment of corporeality and its artistic manifestations, see *Body*, exh. cat., September 12–November 16, 1997, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia (Melbourne, Australia: Bookman Schwartz and The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, 1997), and *Obsession* (Cologne: DuMont und Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1999).

2. This term, coined by Viacheslav Ivanov, the leader of the Russian symbolist movement, is meant to embody the concept of repressed sexuality. It appears as the title of Aleksandr Etkind's 1997 publication, *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia*.

3. The Silver Age describes the uniquely creative period of Russian culture between 1890 and 1917. Its leading figures included Igor Stravinsky, Marc Chagall, and Sergei Diaghilev.

4. The World of Art refers to the St. Petersburg–based artistic movement (and the journal it published) whose members sought inspiration from contemporary European painting as well as earlier phases of Russian culture.

5. German Wilhelm Von Gloden was the first photographer devoted to photographing the male nude. He created many studies of young boys in Sicily, where he lived for many years, which were appreciated for their classicizing, aesthetic qualities.

6. Pictorialism was an international photography movement based in Europe and the United States that lasted from 1886 to the early 1920s. Its adherents sought to raise photography's status among the system of the arts and often manually manipulated their exposures in a variety of ways as a means of enhancing the medium's creative potential. Gilles Mora, *Photo SPEAK: A Guide to the Ideas, Movements, and Techniques of Photography, 1839 to the Present* (New York, London, and Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1998), 155–57.

7. This recognition is seen, for example, in the institution of the Stalin Prize, which was established in 1939 and represented the highest official accolade awarded to Soviet artists and scientists.

8. The Five-Year Plan consisted of massive campaigns to modernize Soviet industry and collectivize the nation's agriculture.

9. The Peredvizhniki refers to the group of nineteenth-century painters who devoted their art to the realistic portrayal of Russian life in all of its manifestations.

10. Stalin uttered this phrase—one of the most notorious expressions of Stalinist culture, given the often brutal realities of Soviet existence during the 1930s—at the Seventeenth Party Congress of 1934.

11. This Russian expression refers to the adolescent's acquisition of sexual characteristics during puberty.

12. For more on this exhibition, see Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 309.

13. Solarization refers to the reversal of light values in a photograph caused by the camera's accidental overexposure. Gilles Mora, *Photo SPEAK*, 180.

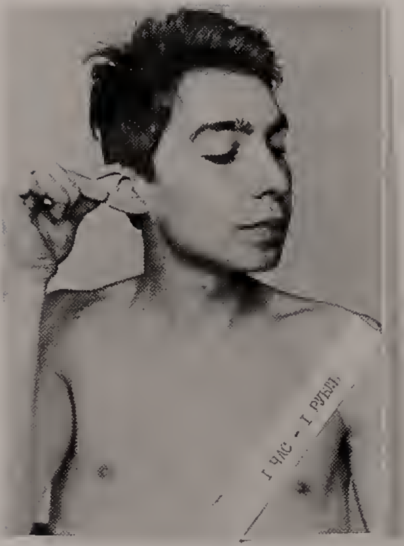
14. Socialist realism was the official style of Soviet art for many decades beginning in the early 1930s.

15. Mandelstam was one of the leading twentieth-century Russian poets. He was arrested in 1938 and died that year in the Gulag. This quotation, written in 1931, has since been used to encapsulate the cruel events of the twentieth century.

16. Suprematism refers to the movement and style founded by and often identified with Kazimir Malevich. Perhaps the dominant style in early-twentieth-century Russian modernist art, suprematism is characterized by the presentation of abstract geometric forms in dynamic compositions and indeterminate spatial relationships.

17. In a recent publication, the critic and theorist Victor Tupitsyn referred to the way the movement "flirted with the corporeal implications of speech practices." Tupitsyn, *"Drugoe" iskusstva: Besedy s khudozhnikami, kritikami, filosofami, 1980–1995* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1997), 14.

18. The term NOMA, coined by Pavel Peppershtein, designates a group of individuals within the Moscow conceptualist movement whose members engaged in esoteric artistic and intellectual practices. Margarita Tupitsyn, "On Some Sources of Soviet Conceptualism," in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 330.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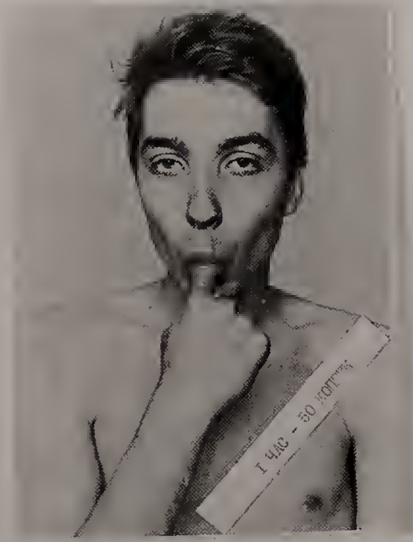
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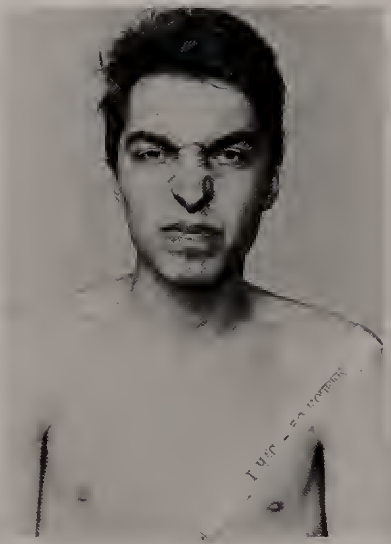
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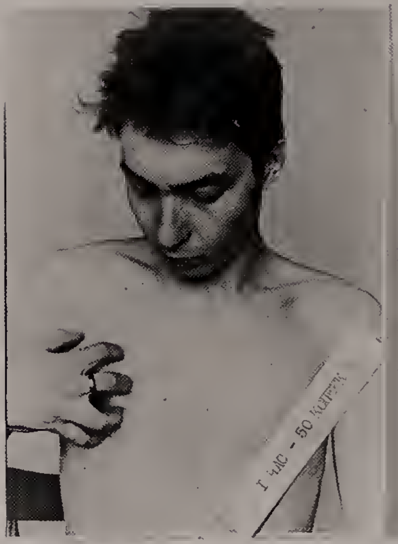
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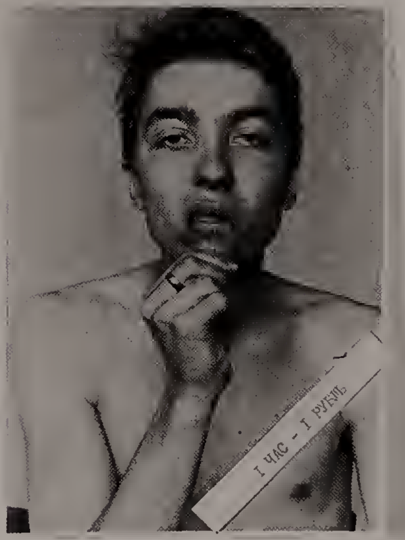

I ЧАС - I РУБЛЬ

Представленные пять фотографий указывают на пять возможных способов заработать деньги.

I. Оттягивание уха.
   Iчас - Iрубль
2. Сосание пальца.
   Iчас - 50 копеек
3. Чесание груди.
   Iчас - 50копеек.
4. Сморщивание носа.
   Iчас - 50копеек.
5. Оттягивание губы.
   Iчас - Iрубль.

За каждые три часа дополнительно выплачивается Iрубль.

Для получения денег вышеуказанные действия должны производится в присутствии В.А. Захарова или его представителя.

В.А.ЗАХАРОВ.
МОСКВА—8Iг.

Ekaterina Bobrinskaya

Freeze Frame Photography and Performance in Moscow Conceptual Art

AT FIRST GLANCE, AN IRRECONCILABLE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE NATURE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND PERFORMANCE SEEMS TO EXIST. Photography captures a distinct and static moment, while performance unfolds over time and is conceived as a process. Whereas photography presupposes, from the outset, the possibility of reproduction, the performance of the action is elusive, unrepeatable. In spite of these differences, for the entire history of performance, photography has been its faithful companion (or, rather, its shadow) and has provided the only evidence of its ephemeral existence.

The question of whether secondary materials could be considered art in

Fig. 81 (*facing*). Vadim Zakharov, *Stimulation*, 1981. Gelatin silver prints, 16.3 x 12 cm each, with one page of typewritten text. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10043.01–06.

and of themselves remained open for a long time. Various types of photographic materials that document performances were deemed marginalia, as they generally lacked the qualities that have placed photography within the ranks of the fine arts. This situation underwent a major change in the 1960s and 1970s with the work of the conceptualist artists, who suggested a new approach to the problem of documenting materials. Photography became for these artists an ideal instrument that allowed them to investigate the nature of art and the conditions of its perception while avoiding any a priori perspectives of consciousness. The conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth concisely formulated the new approach in one of his articles: "My use of photography (in works from 1965 such as *One and Three Chairs*) came about through an attempt to make work which didn't signify that it was art a priori, because of its form. Since I saw the nature of art to be questioning the nature of art, I felt the form the work took shouldn't end the questioning process but begin it."[1]

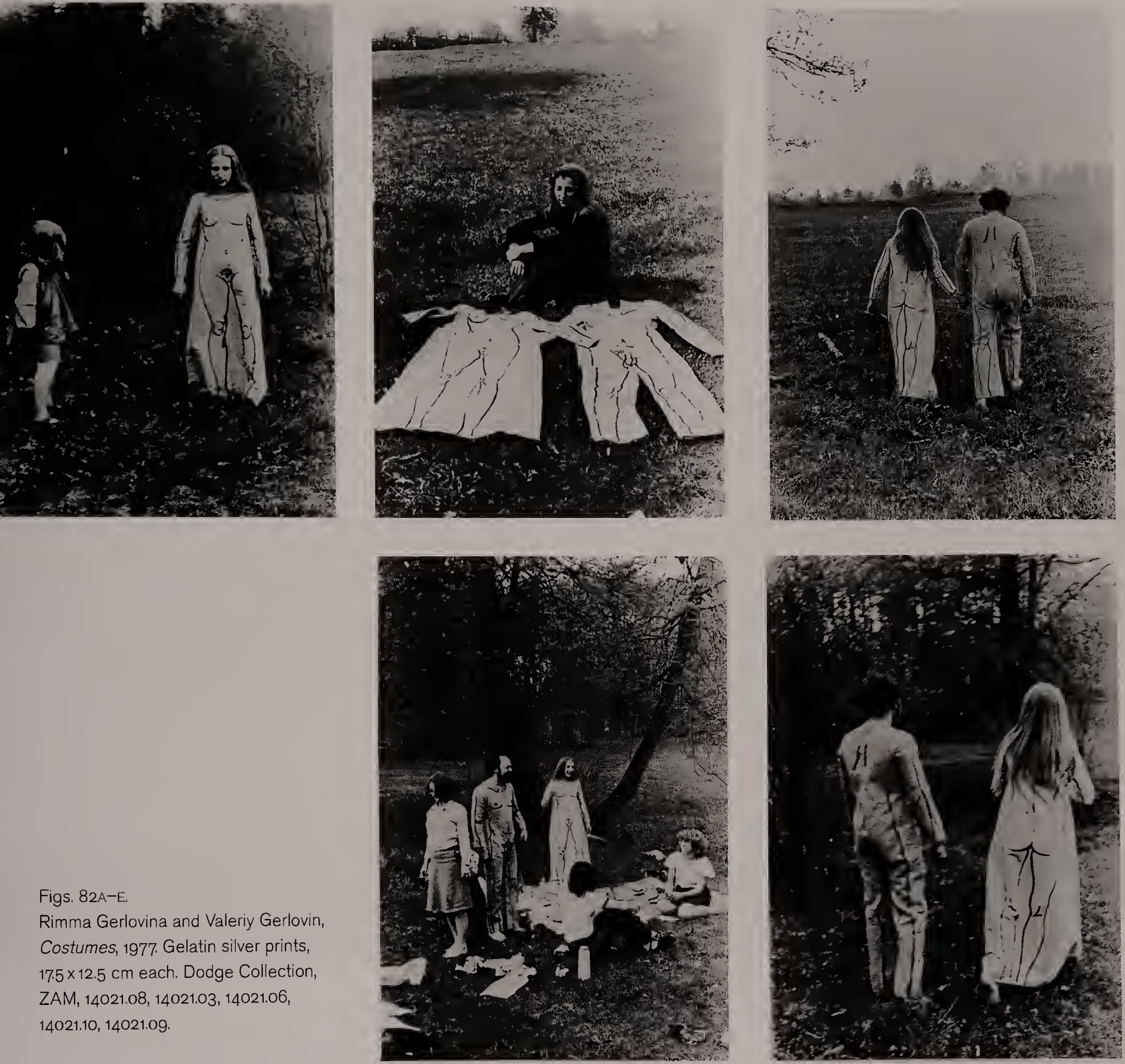
The contemplative character of conceptualist works brought to the forefront various forms of documentation such as photography, video, photocopies, commentaries, and geographic maps. As a rule, for the conceptualists, such secondary materials served only as points of departure in the unfolding of the chain of intellectual events, which took place in the consciousness of the spectator. These ephemeral, speculative procedures made it possible to delineate the contours of these invisible works of "art of ideas" that did not have any physical form.

In conceptual performances documentation acquired a special meaning, frequently turning into an independent form of art. All conceptual performances were oriented in one way or another toward documentation—the juxtaposition of an action unfolding in physical space and time, and the immediate experience of the event with its symbolic (visual or textual) reflections. In many performances the photographs did not document the event but rather served as an invitation to the spectator to take part in a speculative "action-game." Instead of reminding the spectator of the event, photographs were there to delineate the trajectory along which the consciousness of the spectator became involved in an original speculative performance.

In the Moscow conceptualist movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, photography was practically the only form of documentation artists used. At that time they had no access to video recording or filming. The photographic documentation of performances became an independent art form in the 1970s for many Moscow photographers and artists, including Igor Makarevich, Viktor Novatsky, Georgii Kizevalter, and Andrei Abramov. Photography served as the traditional means of recording and recalling the fleeting moments of the action, as evident in the work of Lev Nussberg's group Movement (*Dvizhenie*) and Mikhail Chernyshov's group Red Star (*Krasnaia Zvezda*). In many conceptual performances, however, photo documentation was incorporated into the structure of the work itself, while many other performances were primarily oriented toward photography from the outset. The central aspect of such performances was not the action itself but its documentation (or the process of its documentation) as an original form of artistic creation.

The performances of Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin were the ones most closely linked to photography. In their own words, "The majority of our performances were static, their whole point being the symbolic result rather than the process."[2] The Gerlovins' performances often had no audience except for the camera. In the 1970s, the artists began to use black-and-white photography as an instrument to visualize verbal metaphors or mythologems, which penetrate culture and human consciousness. While their 1990s color studio photographs remain wedded to performance, they are likewise visually cultivated.

The Gerlovins' photo-album artists' book *Mirror Games* (*Zerkalnaya Igra*) (1977, with photographs by Viktor Novatsky) was one of their first examples of a photo performance. It consisted of paired photographs that juxtaposed completely contrasting situations, situations that differed in some details, or situations that were almost the same. *Mirror Games*, the artists stated, expressed "unity in duality." In their performances the Gerlovins were primarily interested in various transitional states—from the physical to the metaphysical,



Figs. 82A–E.
Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, *Costumes*, 1977. Gelatin silver prints, 17.5 x 12.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14021.08, 14021.03, 14021.06, 14021.10, 14021.09.

from the external to the internal, from the visible to the invisible. They also explored the process of qualitative changes and the transformation of the unified into its opposite and vice versa. The photographs of *Mirror Games* demonstrate the symbols of these processes, documenting not so much specific actions or events as the internal, unseen playing of the consciousness. "Our action is a congealed 'performance of thought,'" the artists emphasized.

The Gerlovins' performance *Costumes*, part of the series of *Mirror Games* (figs. 82A–E), included photographs of a man and a woman dressed in garments on which an outline of the human body is drawn, making it appear as if the naked body is showing through the material. These images on the photographs provide the basis for an abstract metaphoric performance based on one of the most lasting mythologems—the body is the "clothing" of the soul. The previously hidden body's appearance on the surface of the clothing underscores the blurring of the boundaries between

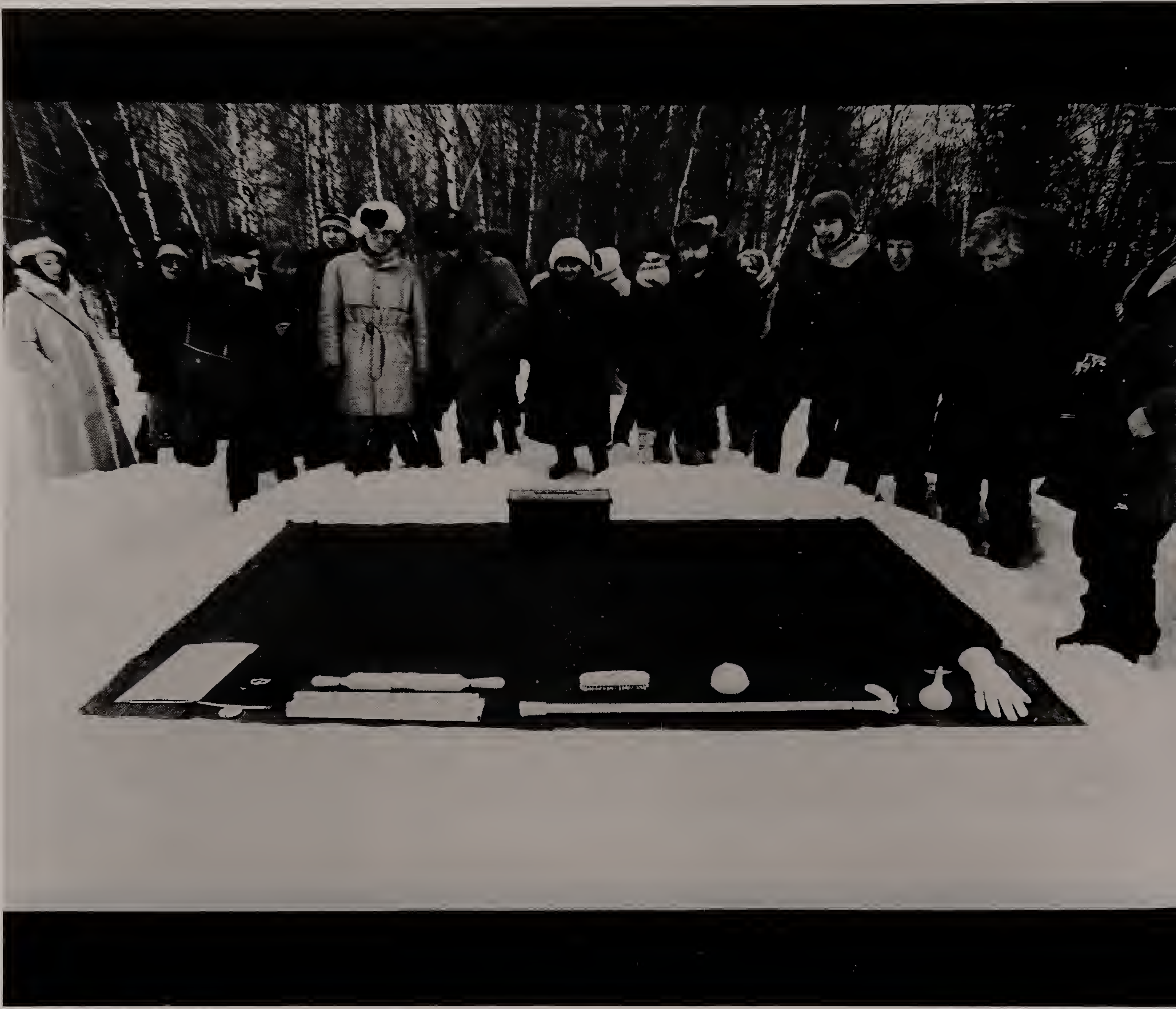


Fig. 83. Collective Actions, *Ruskii mir* (photograph by Igor Makarevich), 1985. Gelatin silver print, 96.7 x 97.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19243.

the corporeal and the abstract, the naked and the hidden, and the internal and the external.

Although photography is an ephemeral imprint of light, it creates highly accurate images. For the Gerlovins the medium was ideal for revealing the realities that are concealed behind the physical envelopment of objects. Photography permitted the artists to create a distinct space in which the world of abstract archetypes and symbols would be revealed. The Gerlovins, describing their photo-performances, said, "This is a new order on the basis of the old archetypical concepts; a congealed spectacle in the augmented eye of photography."[3]

Whereas the photographs in the Gerlovins' performances set a definite trajectory for the action of the consciousness, the photographic documentation of the actions of the group Collective Actions (Andrei Monastyrsky, N. Pantikov, Nikita Alekseev, Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, Georgii Kizevalter, Sergei Romashko, and Sabine Hänsgen) only suggested the direction in which the consciousness could move. The physical activity that formed the basis of the group's actions was, as a rule, quite simple: a displacement in space; the appearance or disappearance of a person; and attentive listening or seeing (fig. 83). The first performances of the group introduced the structural elements of what was to become a distinctive style. Their descriptive texts are extremely laconic and can be presented here almost in full:

> *Appearance*. Invitations to attend the action "Appearance" were distributed to the spectators. Five minutes after the invited spectators (30 people) assembled at the edge of a field, two of the action participants appeared from the woods on the opposite side, crossed the field, went up to the spectators and handed them documents ("Documented proof") certifying their presence at the *Appearance*. (March 1975)
>
> *Liblikh*. Invitations to visit *Liblikh* were sent out. Before the arrival of the spectators (25 people) to the center of the Izmailov field a switched-on electric bell was buried under the snow, which continued to ring after the departure of the participants from the field. (April 1976)
>
> *Balloon*. A sphere-shaped sheath was made out of calico (4 meters in diameter). Then, for six hours in the woods, under the rain, we were blowing up balloons and filled the calico sheath with them. Afterwards we put in a switched-on electric bell inside the "balloon" and floated the haystack-shaped form down the river Kliazma. (June 1977)[4]

The Collective Actions (CA) group consistently avoided theatrical effects as well as any strained and demonstrative style. Their performances were "an attempt to make unusual the perception of ordinary occurrences such as appearance, moving away, light, sound, etc."[5] (fig. 84). The action, devoid of symbolic meaning, and often nearly absurd, inspired the revelation of the real object of the "representation"—the process of perception flowing through the consciousness of the spectator, or the very experience of contemplation and comprehension.

The minimalist structure of CA's actions, which were built on elementary visual and aural impressions, spurred the development of a comprehensive system of commentary and descriptive documentation. But in contrast to the Gerlovins' photo-performances, the photographs of CA's actions are only a part, albeit an important one, of the overall structure of the performance. "The actions are realized in the acquiring of a certain real experience," the artists stressed, "not in receiving the images of this experience."[6]

Most of the photographs of CA's performances are boring, fragmentary, absurd, and obscure. Monastyrsky notes that "upon acquaintance with the photographs, a feeling of positive uncertainty may appear."[7] This visual minimalism in the photographic documentation corresponded to the poetics of the group's performances.

The photographs are devoid of dramatic effect. Rather than show organized, arranged scenes or inferred themes, they transmit a gliding rhythm of perception, which accompanies all of CA's actions. These photographs offer to the spectator contemplative spaces in which the images of the actions are present as a marginal motif. They document not the event or the activity but different contemplative situations. The surrounding landscape thus plays an important role in many of the photographs as an ideal motif for pure contemplation, free of any a priori meaning. One motif is constant in the photographic documentations of the CA—the empty field in the countryside, where

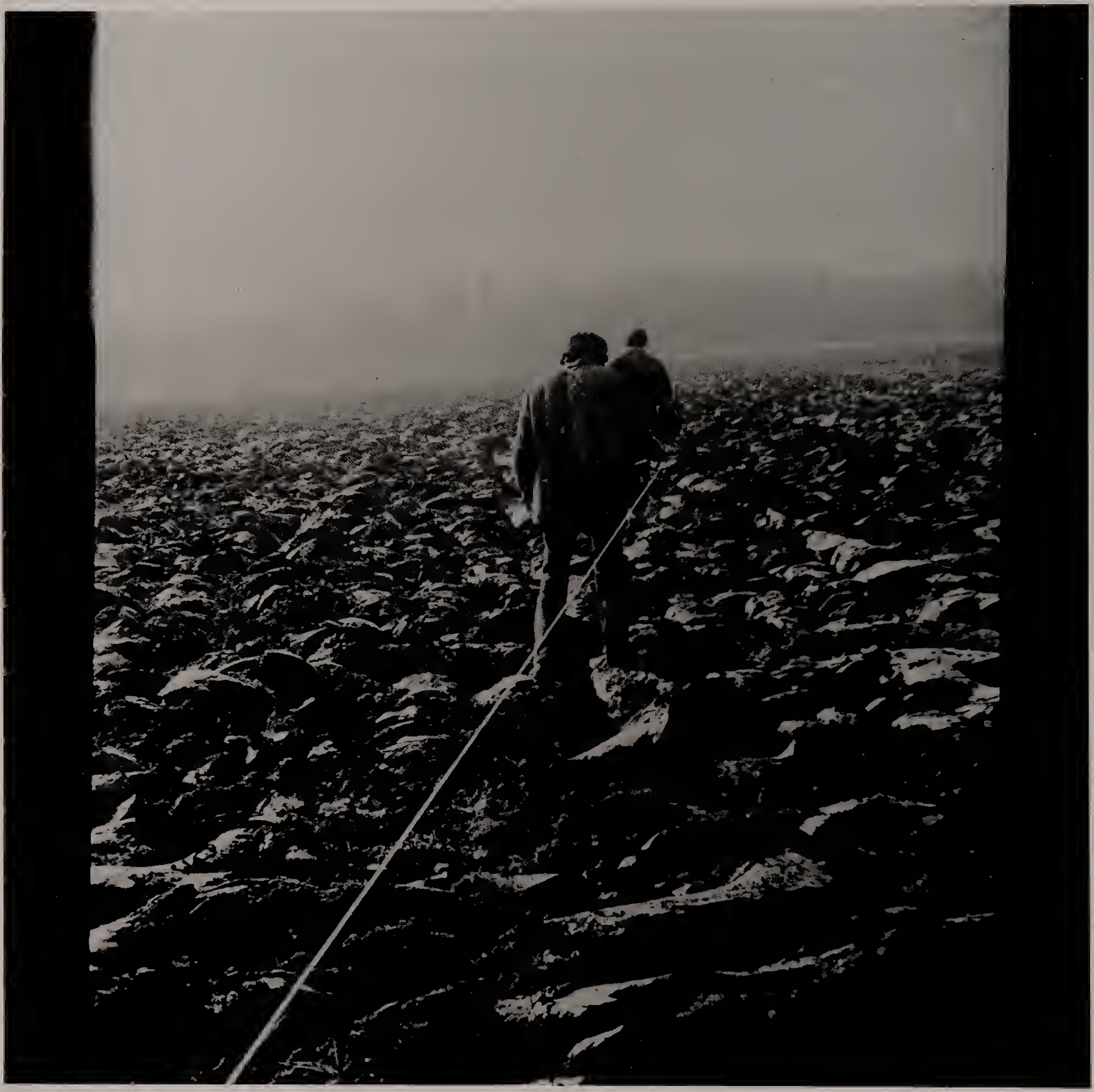


Fig. 84. Collective Actions, *Vremia Deistviia* (photograph by Andrei Abramov), 1978. Gelatin silver print, 96.7 x 97.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19210.

most of the performances took place, and in the distance the barely discernible figure of a person at its edge (fig. 85). Uneventfulness, absurdity, the absence of theme, and extreme minimalism are the distinguishing characteristics of the "empty" photographs that correspond to the state of consciousness the organizers attempted to induce in the mind of the spectator. The performance was conducted to bring the consciousness of the spectator closer to the condition of "pure contemplation." Thus, at the moment of the unfolding of the action, the spectator would be freed from the need for constant mental interpretation and comprehension and experience an effect of "emptiness" that went beyond the boundaries of intense linguistic space.

CA's performances were only a pretext for developing the abstract interpretational topics in the consciousness of the spectator. The secondary materials such as the commentary texts and photographs served not merely as reminders of the event but primarily as a basis for the creation of a unique "factographic space." As Andrei Monastyrsky put it, "The documenting through photography, slides, etc., has an applied instrumental meaning." It is done "not to record the

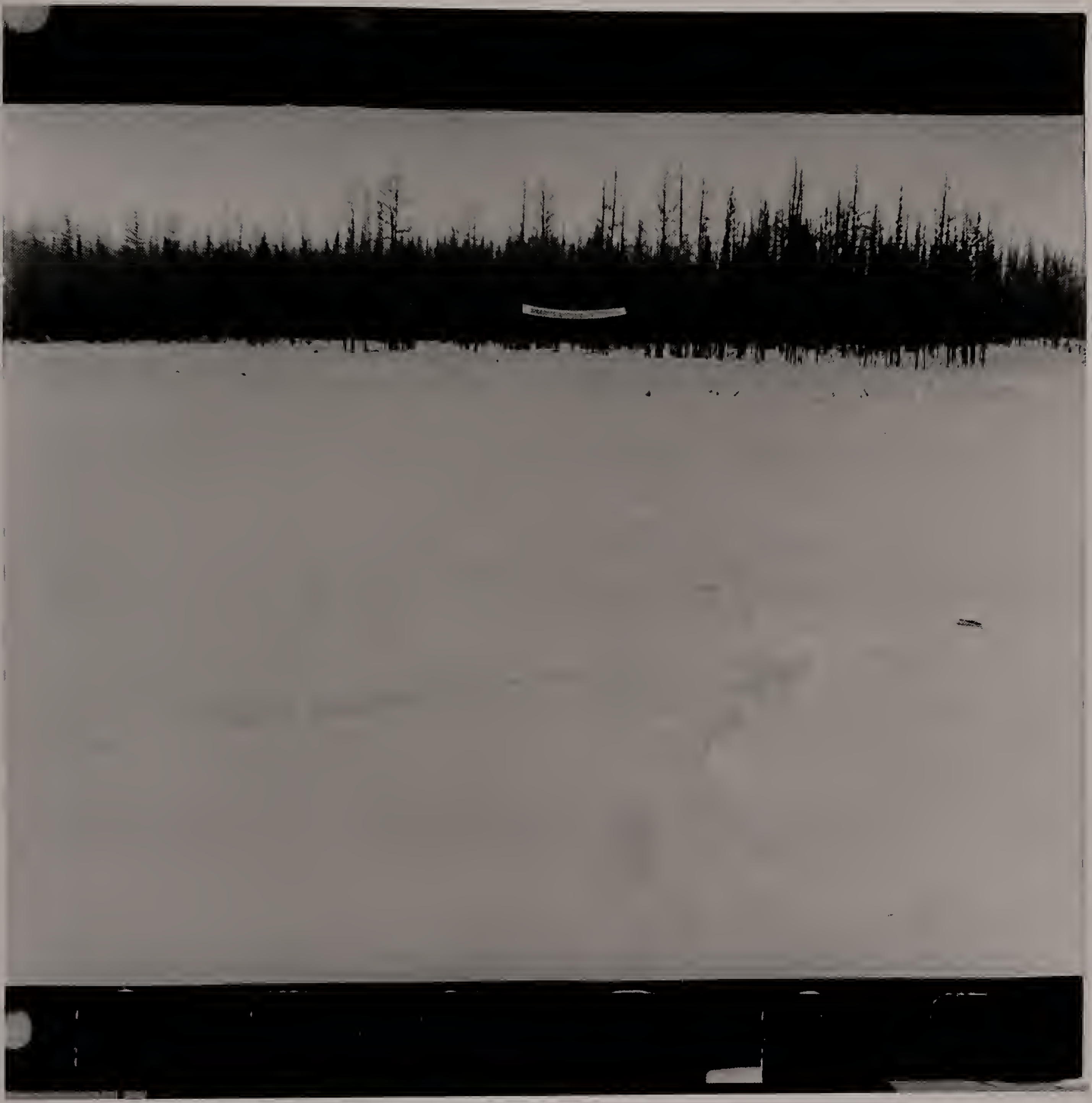


Fig. 85. Collective Actions, *G. Kizevalteru* (photograph by Georgii Kizevalter), 1980. Gelatin silver print, 96.7 x 97.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19205.

fragments of the event and its stages for future reference, but in order that in the process of subsequent discourses, new textual and conceptual spaces would emerge, i.e., the factographic discourse as a space of secondary artistry in particular."[8]

Photography as an element of performance is an invariable component of all of the works of CA. On several occasions, as in *Place of Action* or *Ten Appearances*, the very process of the medium was part of the performance's action. Furthermore, the photographic documentation acted not only as archival material but also as a point of departure for the creation of special performances. For example, they organized audience photographic slide performances, the point of which was to watch slides. Such actions were conducted on the basis of the slides taken of the performances *Place of Action* and *Sound Perspectives of Trips to the Countryside*.

Photographic documentation keeps the ephemeral performance action from disappearing. Thus, CA gets it both ways: their art is illusive from, yet fixed in, history—both free of and guaranteed materiality. The performance is "pure" art; its photo documentation represents, replaces, and even promotes it.

Only one type of photographic activity in the performances of CA functioned as a document in the direct sense of the meaning of the word: the shooting of the souvenir group photograph of all of the performance participants and the spectators, which concluded, without fail, every action at which spectators were present. Indeed, these photographs became important historical documents that made possible the identification of individuals who were connected to the Moscow conceptualist school at the different stages of its existence.

Many conceptual works are built on revealing the linguistic constructions in the basis of the seen, and on revealing the (not always obvious) links between how and what we see and language that dictates to the consciousness its norms of perception. Conceptual performance also frequently investigates this interrelationship. Proper comprehension of many of the photographs in conceptual performances requires the existence of a special context—a textual commentary, a literary history, a theme—that exists only on the level of language.

The performances of Vadim Zakharov were often dedicated to the exploration of the paradoxical interrelationships between language and visual images. Like the Gerlovins, Zakharov performed for the camera, and the resulting photographs are the art that is presented to the audience. His photo-performance *Stimulation* (fig. 81, p. 90) resulted in a series of photographs, taken by the artist himself, in which he grimaced and made gestures such as sucking his finger, twitching his nose, and pulling his ear. The accompanying text stated, "The five photographs indicate five possible ways of earning money." A price list followed: "the pulling of an ear, 1 hour—1 ruble ... the twitching of the nose, 1 hour—50 kopeks." The combination of the absurd visual display and the equally absurd textual commentary created a special reality in which the authenticity of the photographic images served to confirm the text. The photographs recorded gestures and situations that would not be comprehensible without the accompanying text and would otherwise disintegrate into meaningless, disjointed fragments. The main idea of this photo-performance, based on the interplay of the convergence and divergence of word and image, consists of having the text dictate to the eyes the manner of seeing while the authenticity of the photographic images confirms the reality of the text. Sometimes Zakharov incorporated text directly into his works as part of the photographic image, while the performance itself unfolded in front of the spectator as a literary theme. In one photo-performance, a phrase was visualized with the help of a photograph: "Every time I insert a small figure of an elephant in my ears or nose; whenever I put them on my head or shoulders, or my wife or friend line them up on my back, I know that any resistance to the elephants is useless. Elephants make life hard." These carefully constructed black-and-white photo-texts, in which the text and images were integrated as in traditional comic books, also explored the mechanics of reading and seeing. They revealed the freedom that language possesses to construct any situation by simply following the norms of grammar and the complete absurdity of reality attempting to repeat the text.

The performances of the group Gnezdo (Nest; Gennadii Donskoy, Mikhail Roshal, and Viktor Skersis) also played on language and text. Most of their performances, such as *Race Toward Jerusalem*, *A Minute of Not Breathing to Protect the Environment*, and *Fertilization of the Earth*, were based on stock phrases, mythologems, and ideological clichés. They used photography, however, only as an auxiliary device to record the action and confirm its realization. An exception to this rule was the 1976 performance *Aid to the Country in the Growing of Bread-Grain* (fig. 86), in which the series of crude black-and-white photographs "Plowing," "Planting," and "Harvesting" was based on stock Soviet images from cinema and propaganda materials. These photographs pointed out that visual clichés accompany our way of seeing in the same way that verbal clichés are part of our speech and consciousness.

Photography imposes its point of view on the observer of the image, since the photographer chooses the angle, the distance to the subject, and other parameters. Visual language, even the most seemingly neutral and documentary such as photography, provides a means for manipulating the consciousness of the observer in the same way that language proper, speech and text, does. Vitaly Komar and Alexander

Melamid presented one of the most interesting and unexpected uses of text in a 1975 performance called *The Essence of Truth* (*Grinding "Pravda"*) (figs. 87A and 87B). As were all of their performances, this one was a purely conceptual action, directed toward the existence of a documented form; the process itself and participation in the action did not carry any special significance. The performance's main theme was the transformation of text. A text embodying an extreme manifestation of official ideology that aggressively sought to impose its way of seeing reality was turned into a visual artifact, an object of domestic consumption—a "meat patty." This work, like most of Komar and Melamid's performances, cannot be reduced to single or one-dimensional interpretation. In their performances, Komar and Melamid were primarily interested in uncovering the hidden mechanism that controls the consciousness of individuals and culture. *The Essence of Truth* concerned the destruction of the *diktat* of language. At the same time Komar and Melamid deconstructed a parallel myth—the possibility of the existence of pure vision free from the intrusions of language. The pitiful lump of paper turned into text is the ironic image of the possibility of pure vision deprived of its shadow, language.

The style of these photographs in Komar and Melamid's performance is also imbued with a certain ironic duality. On the one hand, these images are obviously amateur snapshots, but on the other, these photographs—simple, haphazard, yet thought out to the most minor detail—are reminiscent of those ubiquitous and fleeting Soviet newspaper images that informed the public of the daily heroism or the epoch-shattering events that occurred in the background of everyday life.

Performance's secondary materials, photographs or text, are often the documentary artifacts with which spectators and art historians come into contact. A work of art understood as action, whether as a physical action or as a speculative Duchampian "choice" of ready-made objects, forms a distinct type of art that presupposes the possibility of a double existence: as a single, ephemeral event and through the various testimonies to its brief life. From the outset, performance was condemned to exist as a reflection.

The photograph of a performance is thus a

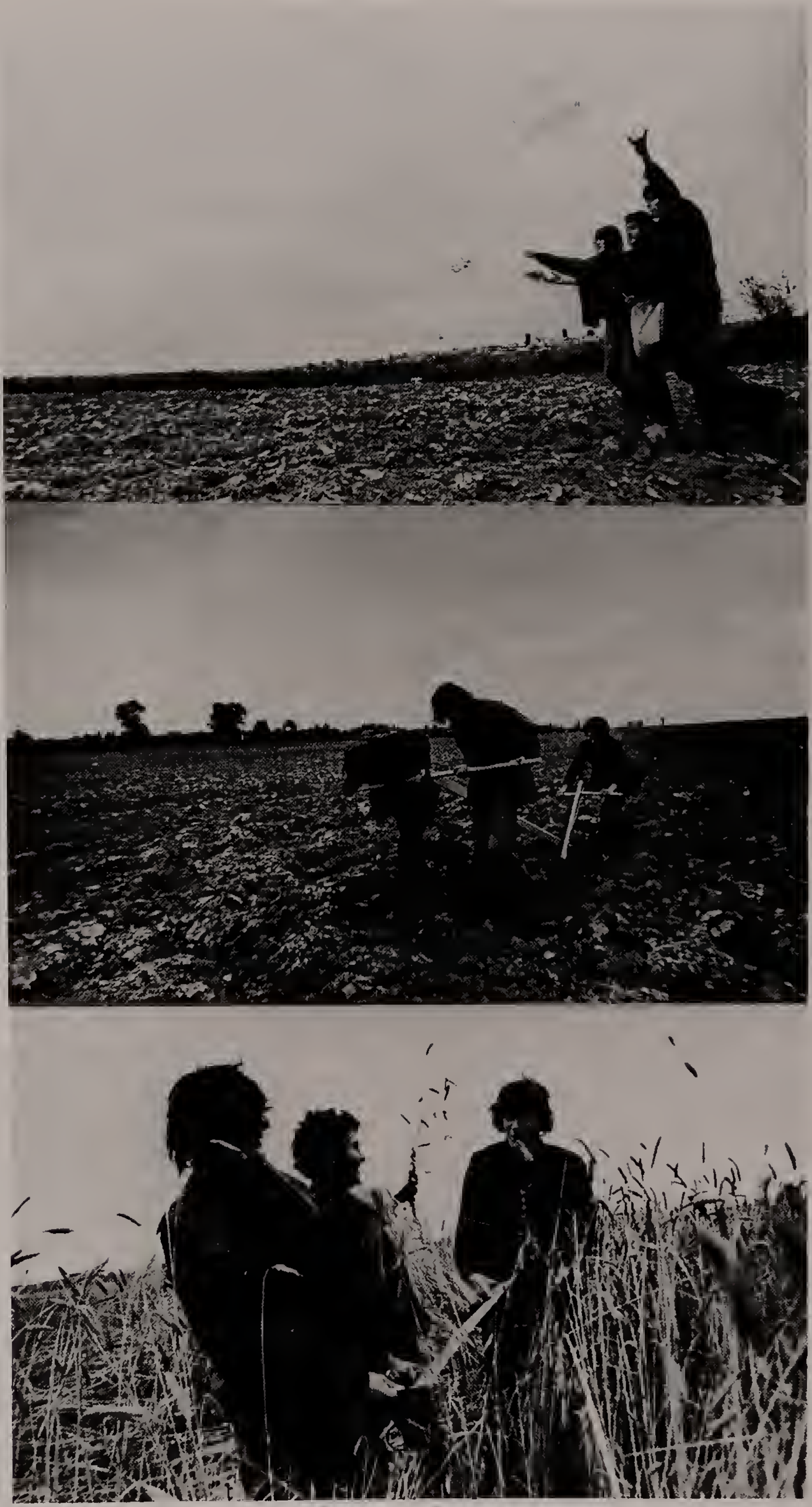


Fig. 86. Gnezdo (Nest), *Aid to the Country in the Growing of Bread-Grain*, 1976. Gelatin silver prints, 24.8 x 39.8 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07517.01–03.

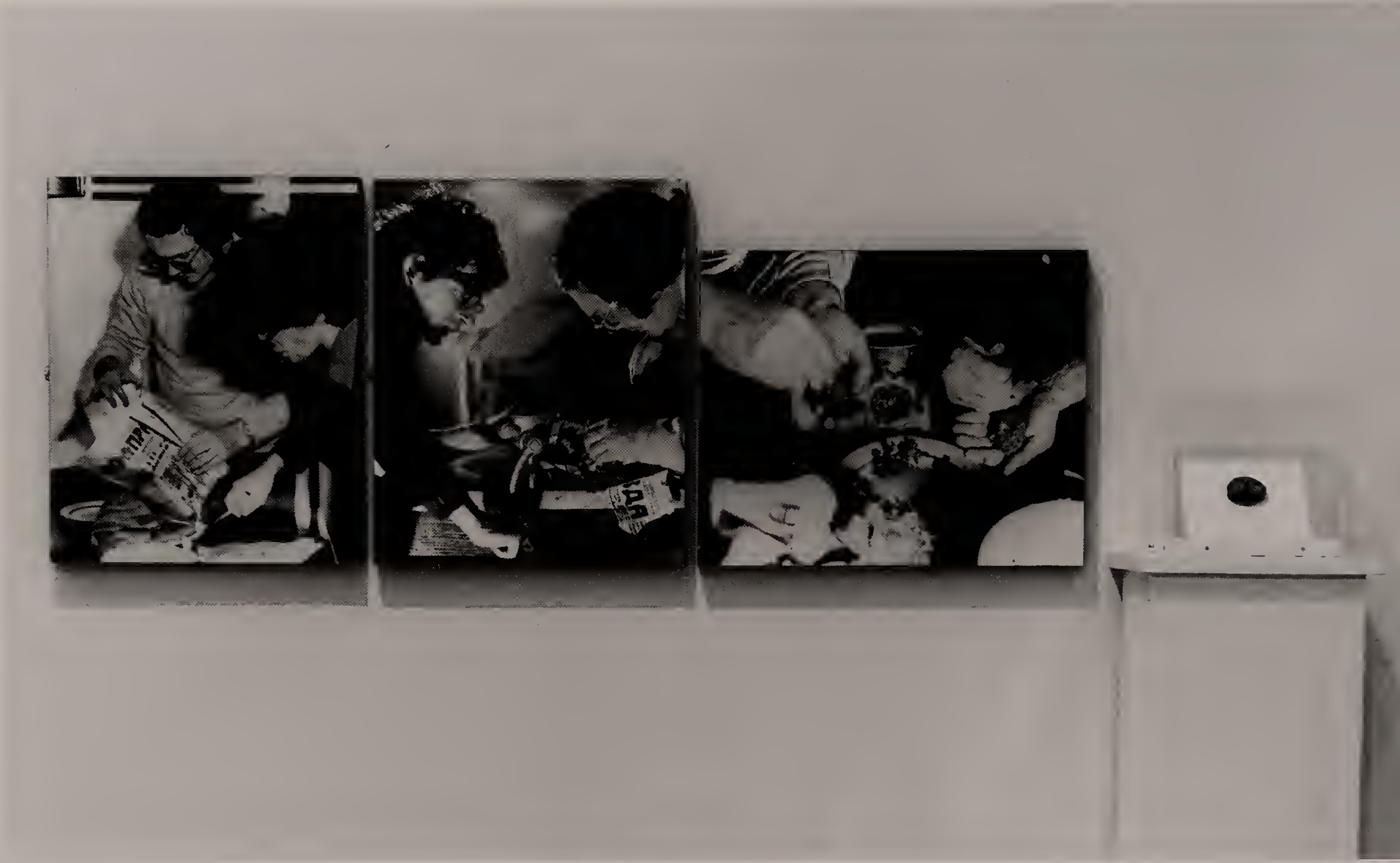


Fig. 87A (*above*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *The Essence of Truth* (*Grinding "Pravda"*) (installation view, ZAM), 1975. Three separate gelatin silver prints and object made of compressed newspaper. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07361.01–04.

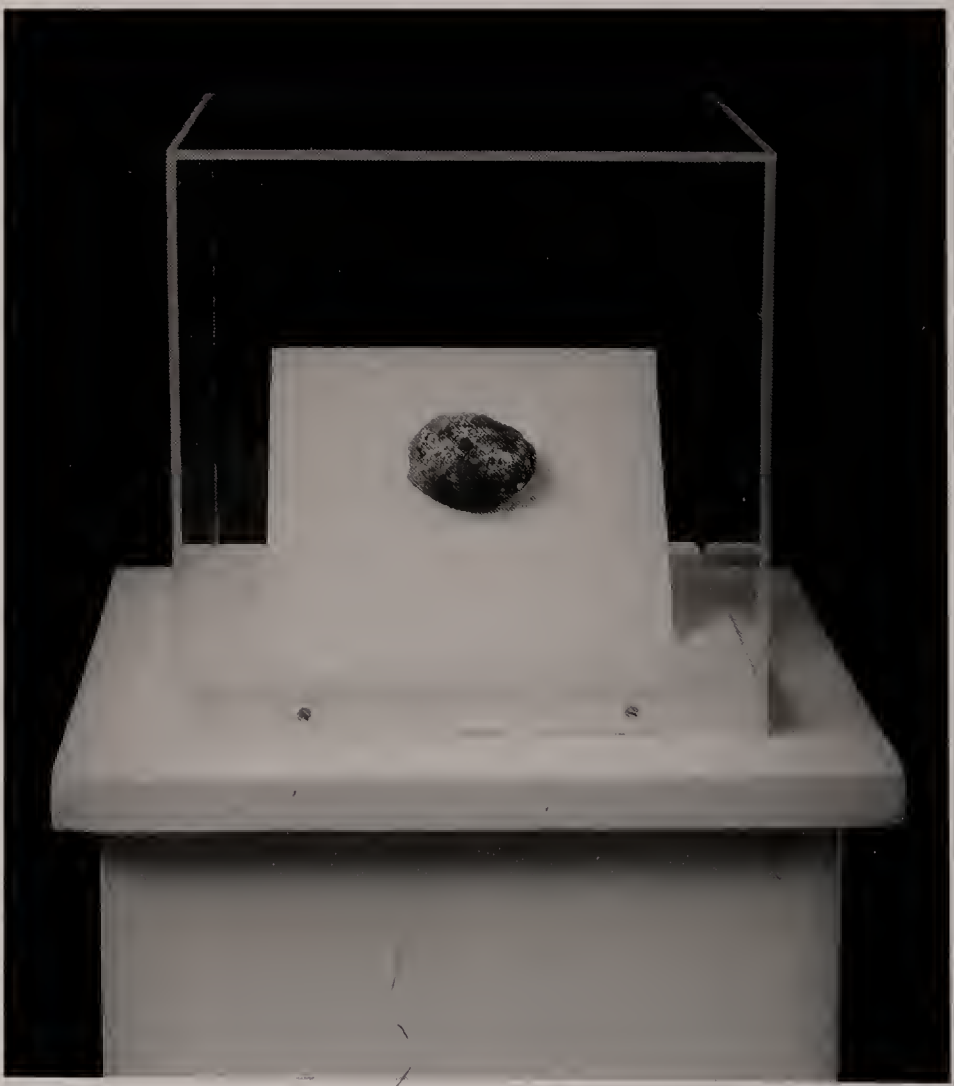


Fig. 87B (*right*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *The Essence of Truth* (*Grinding "Pravda"*) (detail). Object made of compressed newspaper, 1975. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07361.04.

document, which in and of itself is not a work of art but turns into one, becoming part of the structure of the conceptual performance in which there is always tension between the event and its traces; between the specificity of the sensual experience and the memory; between the action that flows in real space and time and its discrete and static symbols.

Translated by Daniel Rishik

NOTES

1. Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 187.

2. Quoted from the typewritten manuscript for *Konseptualnyi Samizdat*, in Russian; the book was first published in English as *Russian Samizdat Art* (New York: Willis, Locker & Owens Publishing, 1986).

3. Ibid.

4. Kollektivnye Deistviia, *Poezdki zagorod* (Trips to the Countryside), ed. Ekaterina Bobrinskaia (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998), 25–26.

5. Andrei Monastyrsky, foreword to *Poezdki zagorod*, 24.

6. Andrei Monastyrsky, "Sem' photografii," in *Poezdki zagorod*, 189.

7. Ibid.

8. Andrei Monastyrsky and Sabine Hänsgen, "O znachenii media v dokumentatsii KD," in "Poezdki za gorod," T7 (manuscript).

ANKO

Ekaterina Degot

The Copy Is the Crime Unofficial Art and the Appropriation of Official Photography

AN EXTRA PRINT AS BETRAYAL

At the end of the 1960s, Boris Mikhailov, then a humble citizen of the city of Kharkov, made a series of black-and-white photographs of female gymnasts training.[1] The status of these photographs and the position of the photographer elude definition. The contemporary Western viewer is sometimes perplexed by the fact that the scene is far from stereotypical "communist" photography: the women are not seen at work, nor are they involved in any ideological activity; besides that, most of them are blatantly—and happily—plump. Are the photographs of an unidealized, "unofficial" subject, not allowed into the normative iconography? Do they contain a hint of satire? Of political critique?

Fig. 88 (*facing*). Nikolai Bakharev, Untitled, undated. Gelatin silver print, 11.6 x 11.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14866.

In fact, these straight black-and-white photographs would have fit in any Soviet 1960s newspaper—at least in its last, moderately entertaining "human interest" page—with some good-natured caption on "our women engineers training for Women's Day competition" (some of their bodysuits carry the name of the Kharkov construction engineers' institute). Rather, they could have appeared in a provincial newspaper; a national one would have had no space for these pleasantly refreshing, but not immediately eye-catching snapshots. The most appropriate exhibition space for them would have been a wall newsletter, the typically Soviet phenomenon, displayed at the workplace of these women—and of the photographer himself (Mikhailov was, in fact, at that time employed at this very institute).

This point is crucial: the photographs were made by a colleague from the office next door. The relaxed atmosphere of the scene makes this familiarity apparent; the women irradiate infinite trust, to which the stunning effect of these photographs is due. They do not seem to be in the least embarrassed by their bodies or alienated by a stranger's gaze; nor are they displaying a servile wish to appear on a page of a glossy magazine. No money passed between them and the photographer. He was being paid—as poorly as were his models—by the enterprise, and he was "one of ours."

They were all amateurs. What the women in the photographs are practicing was in Soviet times defined not just as hygienic gymnastics but as an amateur performance, a self-motivated, uncommercial artistic gesture. The photographer here is also self-motivated. No professional education for photographers existed in the U.S.S.R. (until the very last years). Those who wanted to work in this sphere had, in most cases, an engineering background, a nominal engineering job, and permission to indulge in their hobby at the workplace, documenting mostly leisure activities of an enterprise, such as fitness clubs, dances at enterprise-sponsored parties, or the unavoidable monthly Sunday unpaid workday, which usually turned into another jovial social gathering.

In the core of the word "amateur," "amor" is glaring; an amateur is moved by love of the art and/or subject, not by money or career pressure. He works out of "liking," not out of critical attitude, thus differing from a modernist flaneur. The "love" base of art expresses itself in a subtle eroticism of friendship and trust, evident both in Mikhailov's early photographs and in Aleksandr Rodchenko's 1930s work, where his constructivist camera comes so close to pioneer boys, pioneer girls, and his wife it is practically under their chins, and voyeurism dissolves into warm, cheek-to-cheek, friendly intimacy. These photographs were done by a citizen who chose to belong, not to judge.

In Mikhailov's case this attitude changed. The photographs described earlier were Mikhailov's original black-and-whites; but the more well-known version of these snapshots is colored by hand (fig. 89). Included in the *Sots Art* series, the image was made in the 1970s, after Mikhailov quit his institute sinecure (he was forced to, after his allegedly erotic photographs, shot in his workplace, were found) and began to earn his living, in violation of Soviet law, by privately retouching old photographs. For reasons not easy to grasp immediately, the colored version of the gymnasts' photographs would be impossible to exhibit or publish in a newspaper. Reinventing his own old photographs "for himself," Mikhailov took an irreversible step away from amateur photography, which had always been welcomed in the Soviet Union, toward unofficial photography, which was considered akin to a legal offense.

The same step was taken a decade later by Vladimir Kupriyanov, who subverted his own artless I.D. photos of tired, aged women workers (destined for the canonical "Board of Honor" displayed in front of factories) by mounting them alongside no-less-canonical Pushkin's impossibly romantic, passionate verses, thus producing an unforgettable effect of amusement mixed with sadness (the 1979 series *In Memory of Pushkin*, fig. 90). The core of this effect lies in the heroines' unawareness of how Kupriyanov intended to make use of their faces. The shooting was a safe, routine thing. Serene, aging faces look simply at the camera; the women appear at peace with their worn-out looks, since they were facing, by definition, a friend and comrade, not a choosy consumer.

By exhibiting these portraits outside of their original context, or even by implying the possibility of such an act, the artist (for that was what the technical

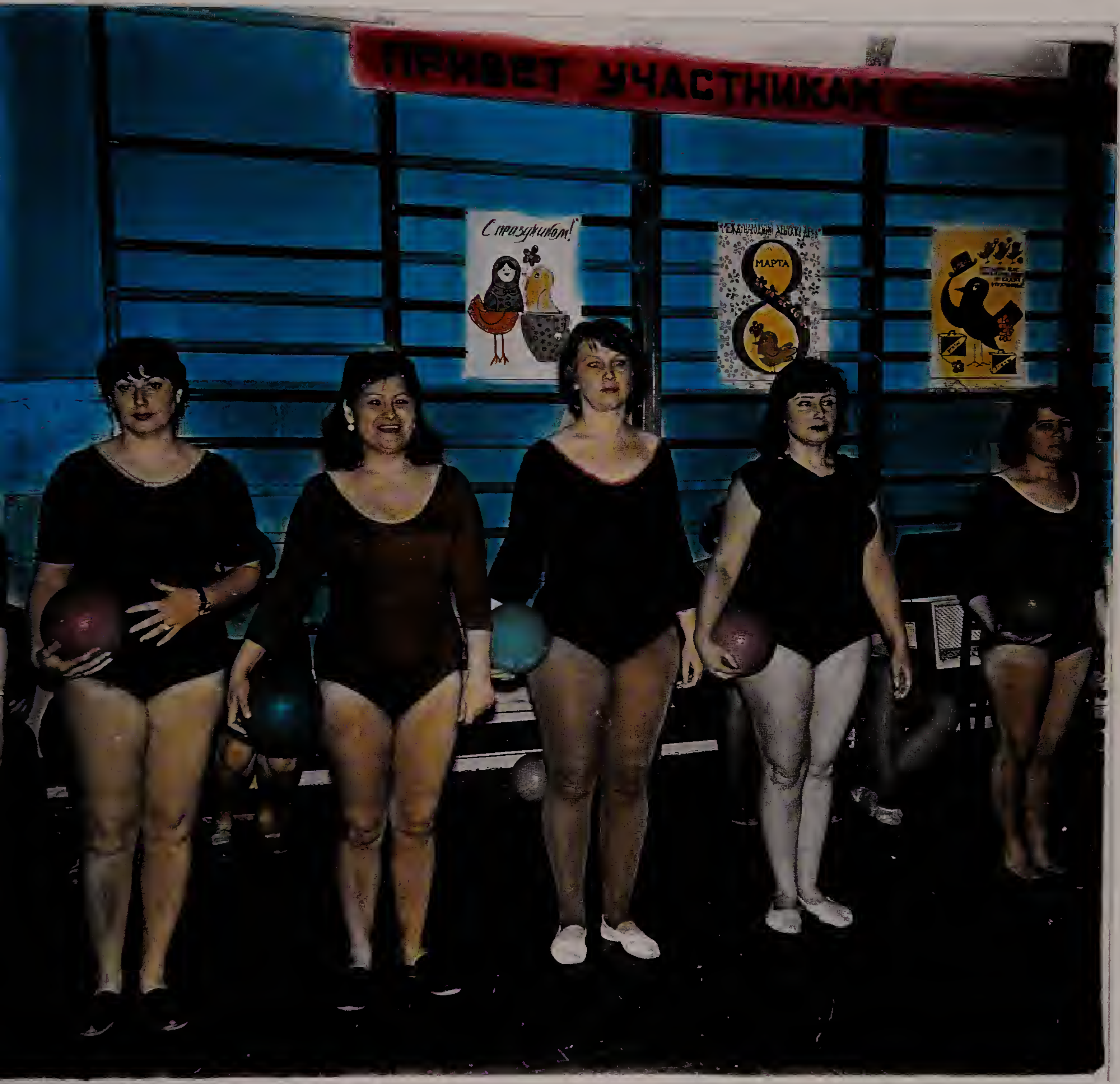

ПРИВЕТ УЧАСТНИКАМ
С праздником!
8
МАРТА

Fig. 89. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Sots Art I*, 1978. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dyes, 45.8 x 48.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16017.

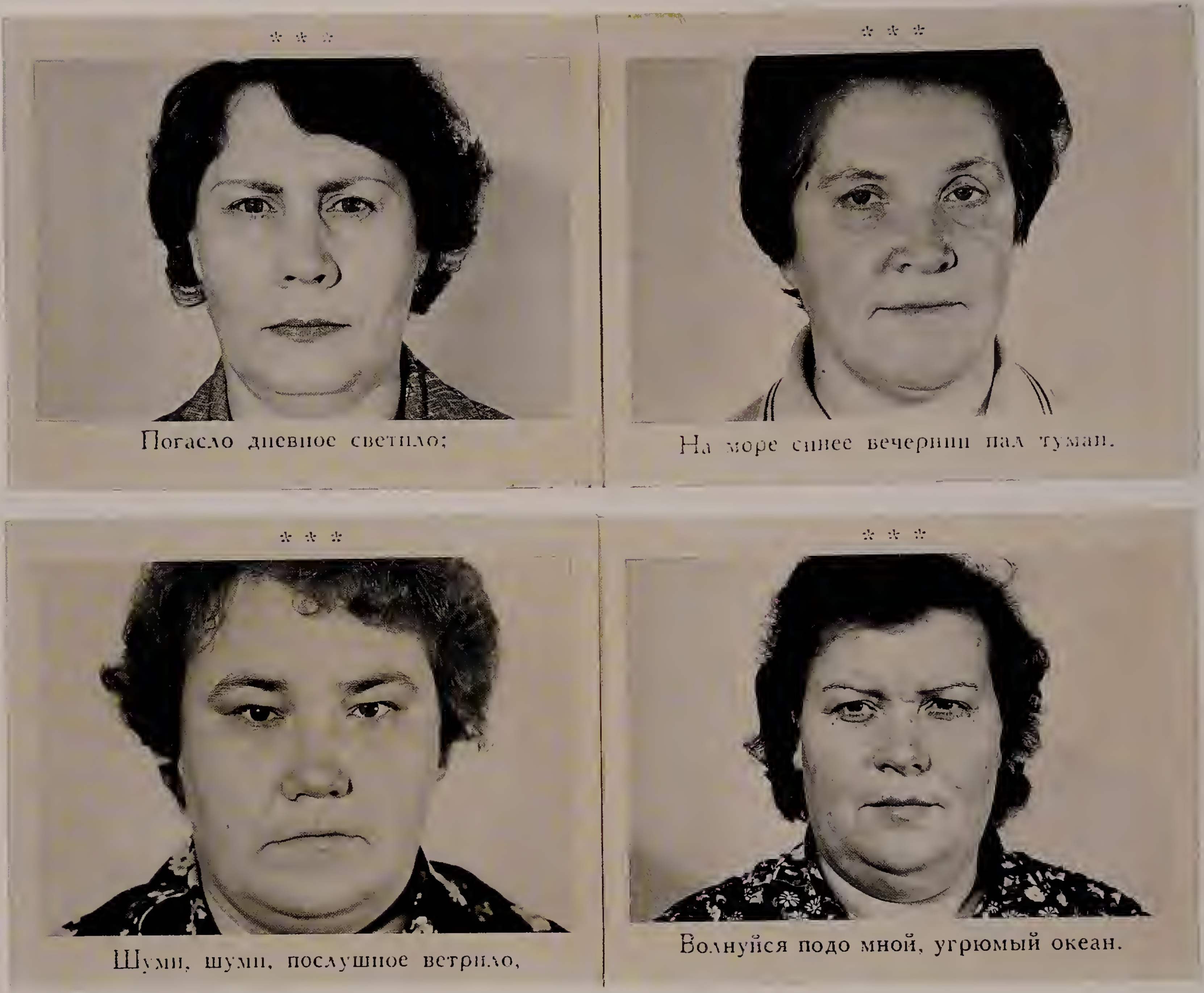

* * *
Погасло дневное светило;
* * *
На море синее вечерний пал туман.
* * *
Шуми, шуми, послушное ветрило,
* * *
Волнуйся подо мной, угрюмый океан.

Fig. 90. Vladimir Kupriyanov, *In Memory of Pushkin*, 1979. Gelatin silver prints, 24 x 30.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10064.01, 10064.02, 10064.08, 10064.09.

photographer now became—an artist) was, inevitably, abusing the trust of his models. What had been an expression of friendship and camaraderie transformed into art. The artist becomes simultaneously close and distant, sympathetic and critical. He is a comrade and a traitor. He uses pictures taken of unsuspecting friends to criticize the system of which, along with them, he is a part. Moreover, he makes this critique for the sake of "personal interest" inasmuch as the photographer is not merely a participant in amateur activities but is in fact a professional artist pursuing his career. This intervention—the coloring and the added text—point to the photographer's criticism; but the main way to become an unofficial artist was, simply, to make an extra print.

Nikolai Bakharev, a municipal services photographer for the city of Novokuznetsk, did the same thing. When, in the 1980s, he began to exhibit his extraordinary, posed, often double or triple, portraits of lovers and friends in various stages of physical and emotional undress on the beach and in the bedroom (fig. 88, p. 102; fig. 91), it became clear that all during his quiet provincial career he had been collecting negatives, printing "for himself" the most ridiculous and telltale positions his models took, while his customers walked away happily with prints of a more conventional nature. Bakharev, as did many of his colleagues, engaged in an illegal "private business," being paid directly by the customer; strangely, though, this transaction did not erect an alienating wall between him and his models. On the contrary, the illegal character of the "business" brought them closer together (within the extreme margins of non-market society), creating a fraternal, quasi-erotic trust. It is exactly this trust that is violated in these images, engendering a bizarre and bitter twist.

There is nothing unusual about the situation, of course. Artists all over the world do this to innocent people (although Bakharev, now living within the law, is said to protect himself by getting signed permission to exhibit extra prints). But Soviet unofficial photographers were breaking an unwritten law of the mass-distributed and unique that was crucial to the communist art system.

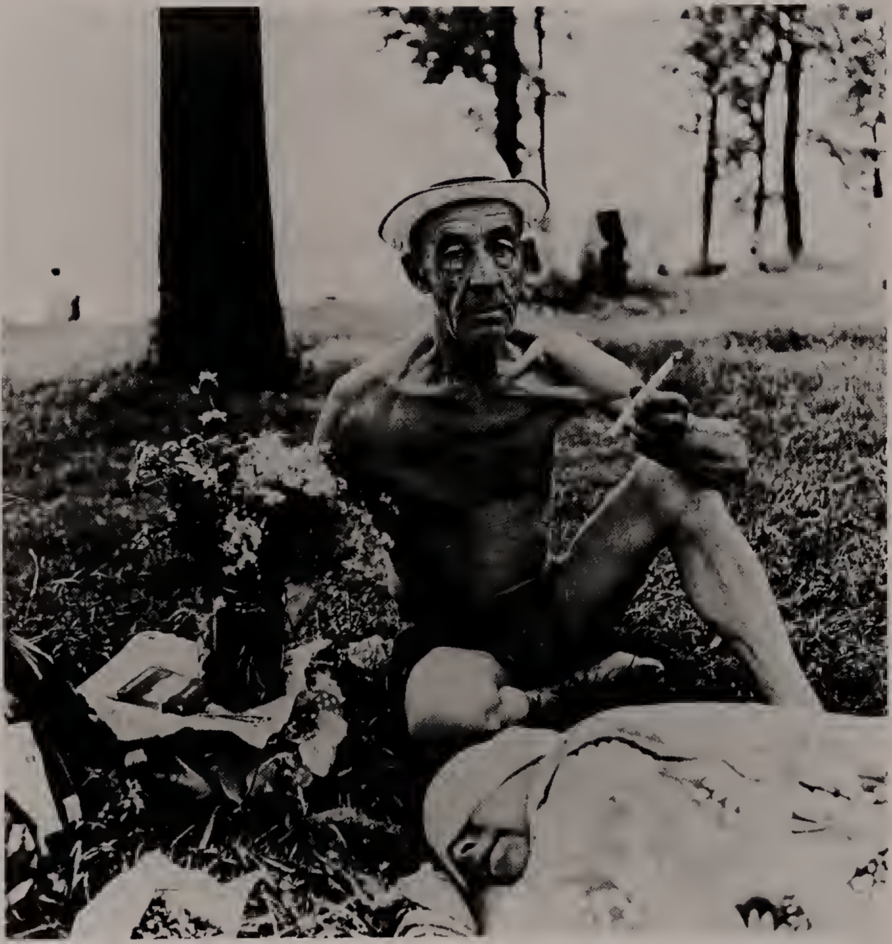


Fig. 91. Nikolai Bakharev, *Relationship*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 18.5 x 17.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14871.

A RETOUCHED PHOTOGRAPH AS THE ULTIMATE COMMUNIST MEDIUM

In the official Soviet art hierarchy, photography rated very low. Museums did not collect photographs; the names of photographers whose pictures were published in newspapers were often unknown; they could join the Union of Journalists but never the Union of Artists. Photography was simply not seen as art.

This very fact, however, suggests photography's extreme importance in the Soviet art system, which radically privileged "non-art." The communist art project was oriented not toward the creation of beautiful, unique objects or even less beautiful mass-produced objects but toward the distribution of information, including images (and also, and often, words).[2] In this, the avant-garde artists and the state authorities were unanimous. Many of the famous projects of the Russian avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s were nothing more than prototypes of gigantic media installations: the "radio-orator" pavilions of Gustav Klucis and Vladimir Tatlin's *The Monument to the Third International*, 1919–20, which was supposed to be the base for a radio broadcasting tower of a revolving newspaper building and a giant projection screen. In his text *Radio of the Future* (1921), Velimir Khlebnikov foresaw how "the peaks of the waves of the scientific sea spread over the whole country towards the local radio stations, in order to become letters on the dark canvases of enormous books, higher than buildings, that have grown around the squares of villages, slowly turning their pages."[3] The main radio station was to transmit images and works of art exhibited in the capital by means of bolts of light. By "radio" Khlebnikov meant the telegraph,[4] but as a whole his utopia anticipates television, albeit in a monumental version.

The media ambitions of communist-oriented art were embodied in the idea of the projection of images on a neutral surface by means of nonmaterial "rays." Aleksandr Rodchenko prophesied in 1919 how "in the future creativity will perhaps engrave its creations onto walls with an invisible "vaporizer" by means of this very same radium."[5] This need for a nonmaterial illusion was later satisfied by Rodchenko and others through color photography and cinematography. Ideally, the entire image was to be broadcast by pure thought into the brain of the consumer. In the late 1910s to early 1920s Kazimir Malevich called his art the projection of "images onto a negative," that is, the subconscious of his students. A group of "projectionists" (Klyment Redko, a pupil of Vasily Kandinsky, and others) developed a program in the mid-1920s in which the work of art was seen in the very method of projecting into the everyday world certain models of life for the masses, while the work of art in its material form was not important.[6] During the 1920s, many projectionists shifted from abstract painting to figurative, but they did not abandon the abstract (neither did

Malevich, who, after around 1926, started to paint human figures again): the difference between abstract and figurative was completely reappraised. This difference, overestimated during Cold War times, was irrelevant for Russian avant-garde artists, who saw the difference in the first place between "imitative" and "life-building" art, while the latter could not necessarily be abstract; it might as well use figurative painting in order to produce tangible models to be built. The "projected" images were in any case secondary to the theory/ideology they were meant to espouse.

The projectionist approach to art coincides with that of socialist realism of the 1930s to 1980s, whose theoreticians always maintained that it was a method and not a style. Although now socialist realism is mostly identified with a certain visual language, its basis was first of all the method of disseminating art—a simultaneous broadcasting of visual material to the masses. The most effective means of such broadcasting would have been, of course, television and film, but at that point in the U.S.S.R., most artists engaged in mass-reproduced images distributed through print. All during the Soviet years, state art in the U.S.S.R. was exclusively mass media. Artists with an avant-garde past worked as book or poster designers, or magazine photographers; those considered conservative, high-art painters were actually working not on their paintings but on postcards and color inserts of mass-circulation magazines that readers removed and hung on their walls, enjoying a "home museum." A strong network of "projection" of art into the masses (state publishing houses, numerous magazines, etc.) formed the Soviet art system in the same way that commercial galleries formed the Western one. Artists were seen as state employees, and, in fact, they often were, not only designers working full-time in publishing houses but "free" members of the Union of Artists as well; almost everybody was guaranteed at least one annual state commission.

The unique, "handmade" work of art, whether a painting or a photograph, was treated as merely a half-finished product intended for reproduction. Radical theoreticians of constructivism, and in particular Sergei Tretyakov, strongly rejected "pure" purposeless photographs destined for exhibitions and not a textbook page. Of course, in painting especially, the temptation to create original artwork was strong, and in the U.S.S.R. there still remained the rudiments of the nineteenth-century art system with its fetishism of the original—museums with velvet couches, academic art education, the cult of craftsmanship, the cult of the name. This was advantageous for artists and impressed the new elite. But from the point of view of socialism's cultural priorities, the postcard version was more effective. Even though painters oriented to the unique were sometimes (although not always) making better deals with the state and earning more than book designers or photographers, painting as such was not considered higher art. In the U.S.S.R., paychecks did not always directly express importance. The state kept "state unique" paintings in museums for the same reason it took away negatives from newspaper and information agency reporters: to retain reproduction possibilities and, even more important, to monopolize reproduction and distribution.

This reproduction was not always mechanical, however. "State unique art" was considered an "original" in the old, academic sense of the word, a high standard others might copy to learn art—a master disk, so to speak. Myriads of identical sculptures of Lenin flooded the streets of Soviet cities. The question of ownership of the image was never raised, and the handmade reproduction became a genre in itself.

One anonymous magazine photograph from the 1950s shows a young soldier,[7] observed by his commanding officer, completing a painting that the reader of the magazine cannot help but recognize: it is a copy of the nineteenth-century landscape *The Rooks Have Arrived*, which is such a clichéd image in Russia the name of the artist (Aleksei Savrasov) is hardly known. The unintentional humor of this scene consists of the fact that the soldier is ostensibly trying hard to make this copy from memory—the original from which the copy is being made is not shown (common sense would suggest, however, that it was a reproduction and not the original painting, which always has been in the state Tretyakov Gallery). This photograph reveals the ultimate Soviet ideal of creativity: the amateur (noncommercial) artist is painting a landscape without any visible nature or model, his hand guided by a

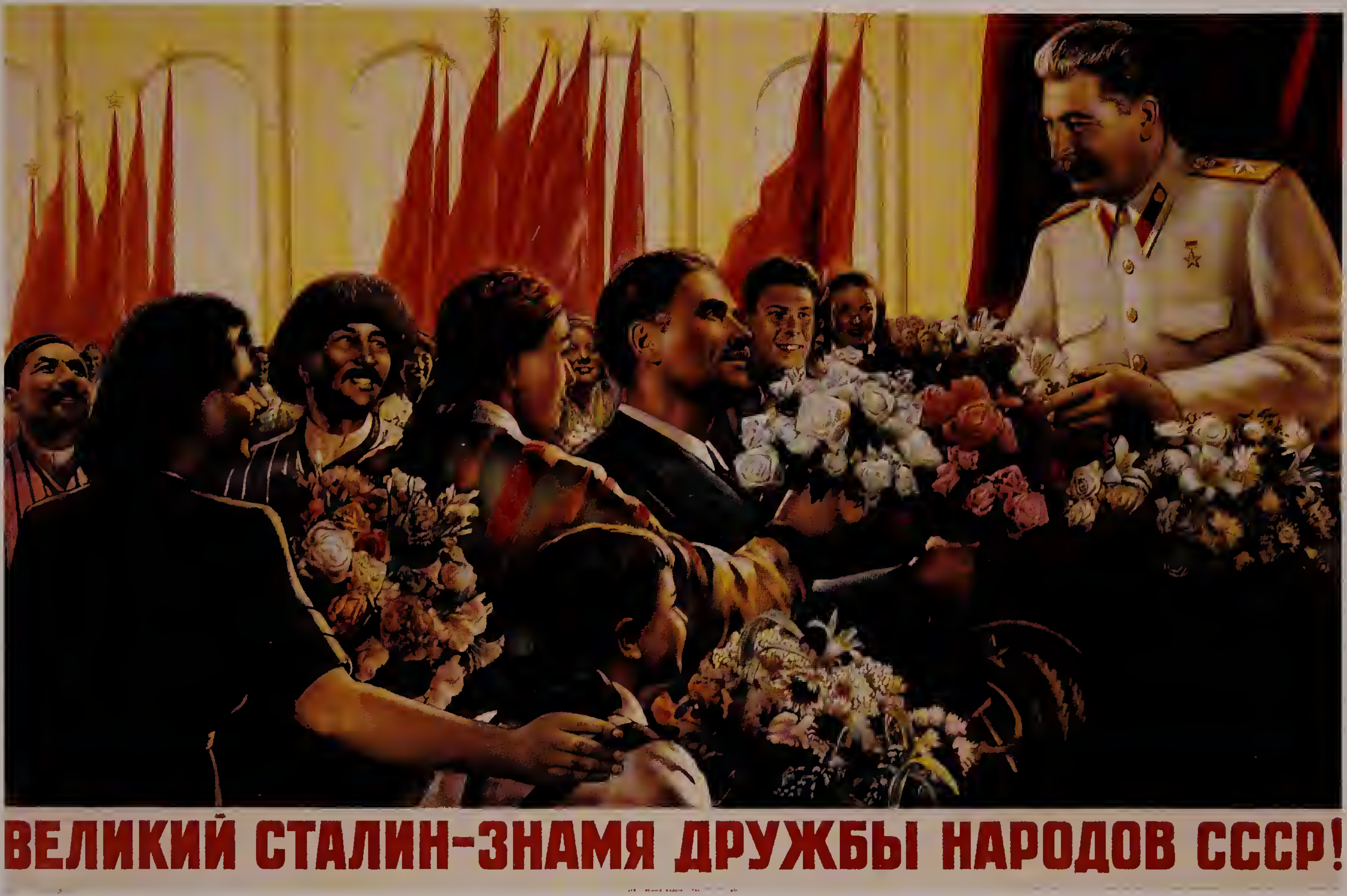
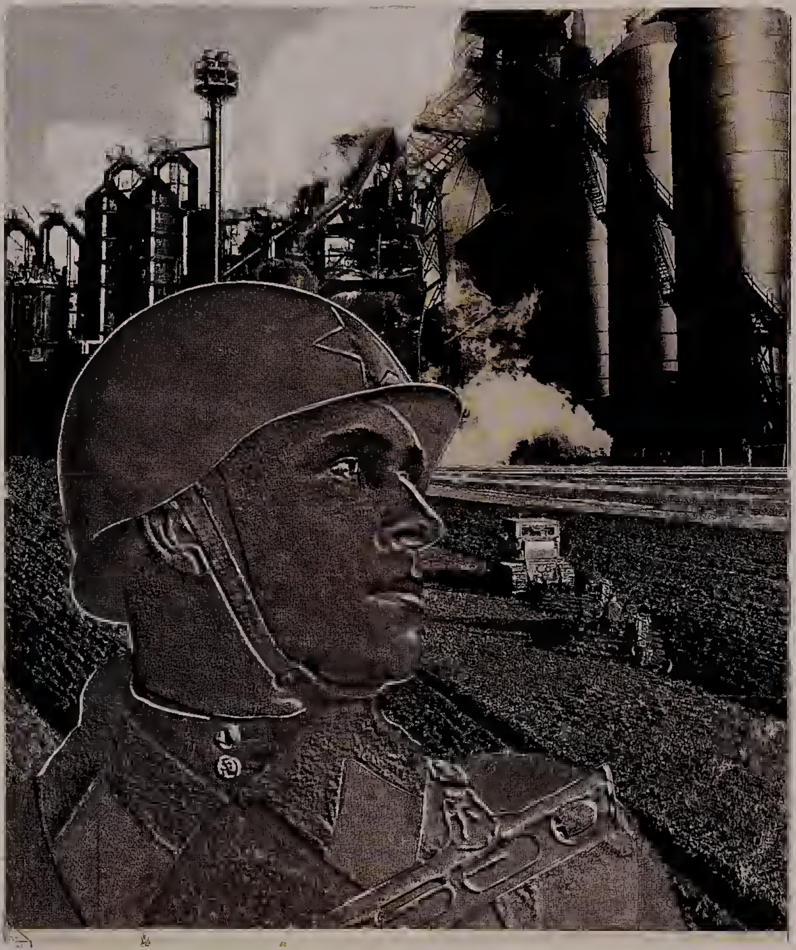

ВЕЛИКИЙ СТАЛИН–ЗНАМЯ ДРУЖБЫ НАРОДОВ СССР!

Fig. 92. Viktor Koretsky, *Great Stalin Is a Banner of Friendship between the Peoples of the U.S.S.R.!* 1950. Photolithographic poster, 57.3 x 85.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 17091.

certain force (the officer?) that projects onto his mind the complete image. One can say his brush is painting over the reproduction; but, then, the photograph itself is built this way—the "projected" image is thickly covered in retouching black ink and white gouache. Thus a reproduction of Savrasov's landscape served as the basis for the soldier's painting; this painting was then photographed along with the painter, then the photograph was so heavily painted over it almost became a painting itself. The image was then reproduced again, this time on the pages of a magazine. This reproduction could be cut out and mounted on a stand, like a painting in a recreation room in a soldiers' club, where it could yet again be photographed for the local newspaper . . . This endless chain completely effaces the source of the reproductions and the specific character of the medium.

This chain of reproduction is an early phase of what Rosalind Krauss calls the contemporary "post-medium condition";[8] in the U.S.S.R. the reproduction became, indeed, the next step in solving the problem of the "post-painting." This problem structured the whole history of the Russian avant-garde since 1919, when Rodchenko, with his famous triptych of pure colors, and, a year later, an explicit taboo on painting (the resolution of Inkhuk, the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow) declared war on the painting. In a reproduction, which is the truly Soviet work of art, differences between painting and photography have been removed. Works that most radically address this post-medium condition are, thus, those in which the differences are completely blurred. The semi-photographed, semi-painted 1950s posters by Viktor Koretsky (fig. 92) and others and the retouched, manipulated photographs by Dmitry Baltermants, Lev Borodulin, Arkadii Shishkin, and many anonymous newspaper photographers from the 1940s through the 1960s look as striking as originals not yet reproduced: photographic illusion (acute spatial reduction) collides with painterly illusion (the foreground is retouched in greater relief). Photomontage had not



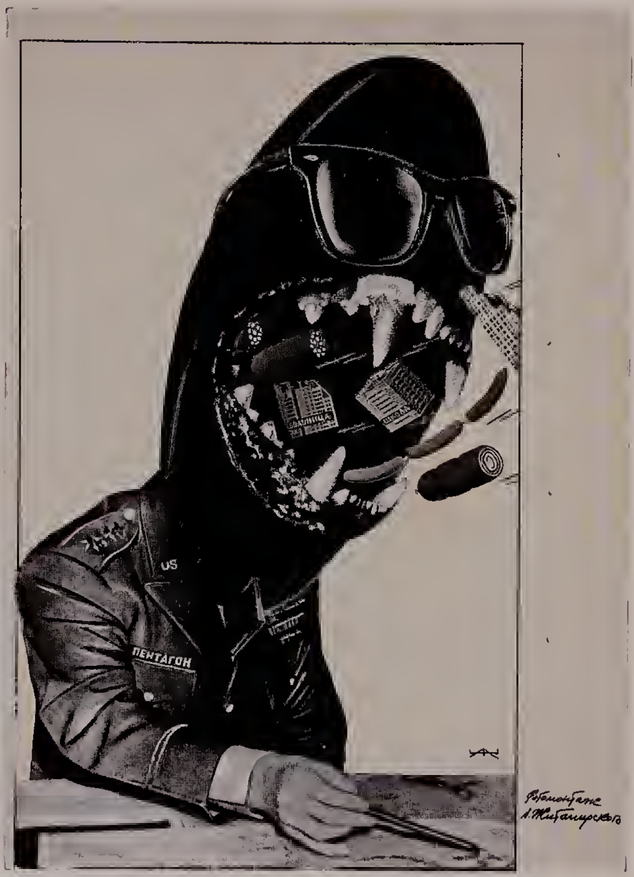


Fig. 93 (*top*). Alexander Zhitomirsky, *On Guard*, undated. Photo collage on board, 39.8 x 32.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15426.

Fig. 94 (*above*). Alexander Zhitomirsky, *Ferocious Appetite*, 1969. Photo collage on board, 37.6 x 22.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15428.

been banned or displaced in the U.S.S.R. in the 1940s–1960s or later, but it was subjected to a great deal of retouching, as in the works of the postwar master of political art, Alexander Zhitomirsky (figs. 93 and 94). It could then be freely copied by hand by anonymous caricaturists in magazines or on posters. In Galina San'ko's color (and very much retouched) photograph *A Match Factory* (1951), a woman worker is represented, and on the wall behind her hangs one of Zhitomirsky's most famous antiwar montage posters.[9] Whether we are dealing with a work by Zhitomirsky or a copy, the image is disturbingly vague: we are not sure what the source of the reproduction was—the drawing based on the photograph or a retouched photomontage. When photographic exhibitions became common in the 1960s and 1970s, many "art" photographs (still lifes, portraits, etc.) were exhibited as high-art "paintings," but without frame, mat, or glass; they were simply glued onto pieces of thick cardboard (so-called "orgalite"), in a clear reference to their post-media nature. These fascinatingly disorienting pictures—semi-photographs, semi-paintings—later inspired the 1970s generation of Moscow conceptual artists, including Ilya Kabakov, Eric Bulatov (figs. 108–11, pp. 133–36), Oleg Vassiliev (fig. 95), and Boris Mikhailov (fig. 96).

Although the photo-painting was mainly a 1960s trend, Rodchenko, ever sensitive to paradigmatic shifts, began to use an intermediary technique between photography and painting as early as the mid-1930s. A diary entry from 1936 mentions his desire to work with the "bromoil,"[10] a nineteenth-century photo technique that imitated oil painting (and for this reason was considered an outrage by the constructivists). In the 1940s Rodchenko made yet another turn, another shift of paradigms. In his memoirs the artist Nikolai Lavrentiev, Rodchenko's son-in-law, mentions that when he was preparing a gift for his wife, Varvara, Rodchenko's daughter, Rodchenko suggested that he make an album combining photographs of her painterly landscape sketches with photographs of the same landscape subjects.[11] The lifting of the differentiation between painting and photography is thus replaced by a reflection on it. This work—an early example of a samizdat album—belongs to unofficial art, which, in the second half of the twentieth century, questioned the mass character of Soviet art.

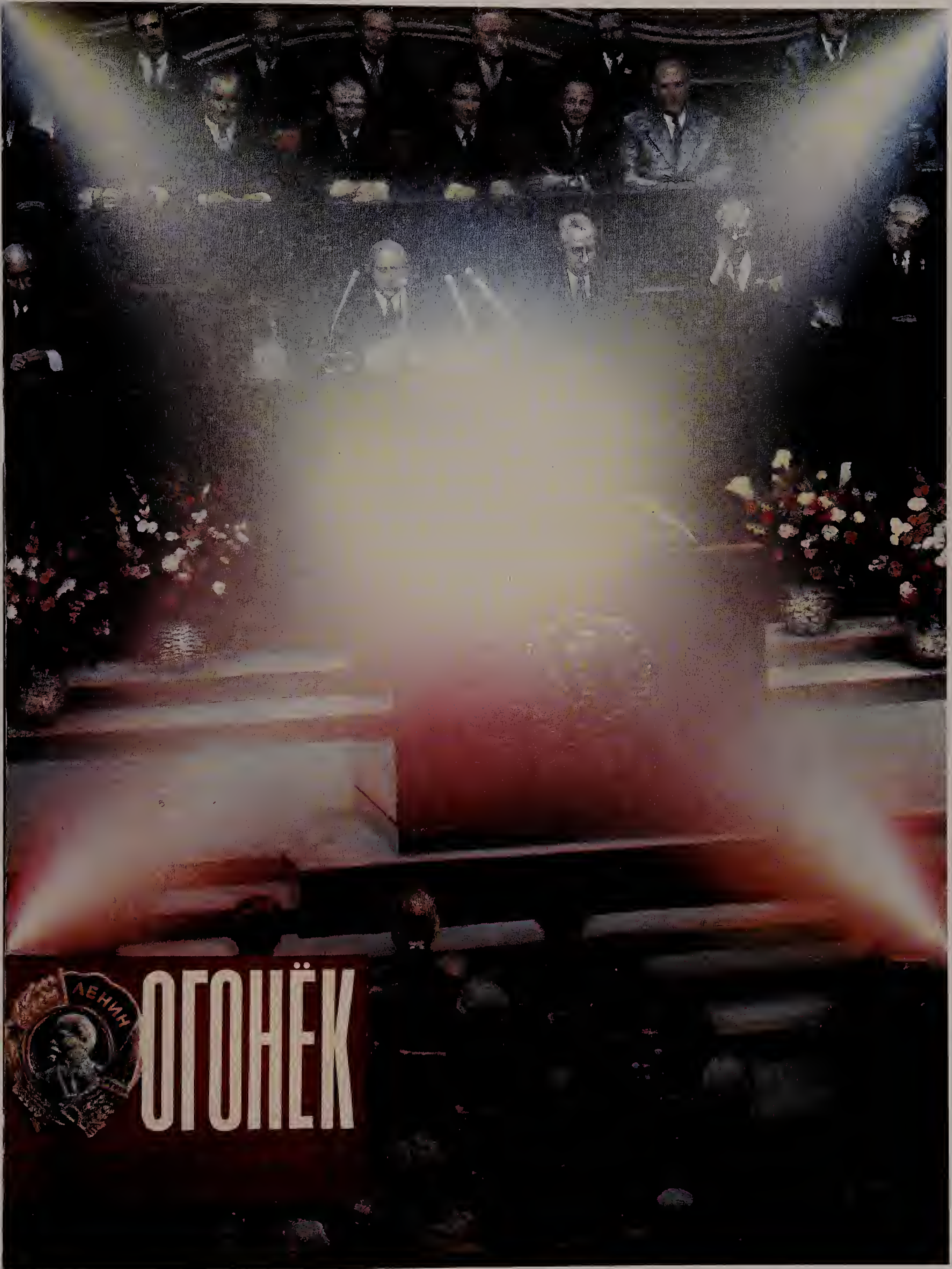

ЛЕНИН
ОГОНЁК

Fig. 95. Oleg Vassiliev, *Ogonyok, No. 25*, 1980.
Oil on canvas, 122 x 91.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 00189.

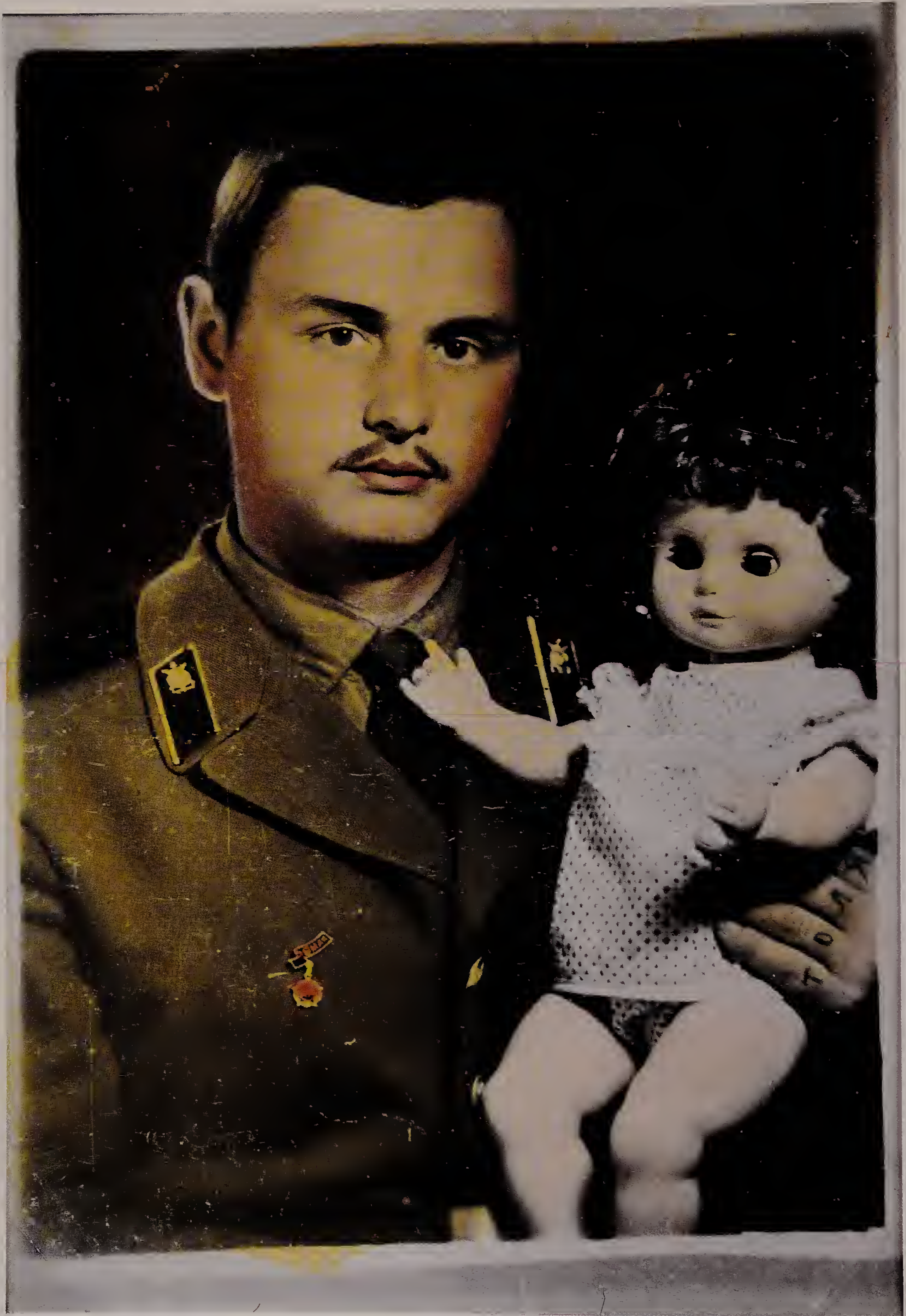


Fig. 96. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Luriki*, 1975–90. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dyes, 59.9 x 50.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15456.

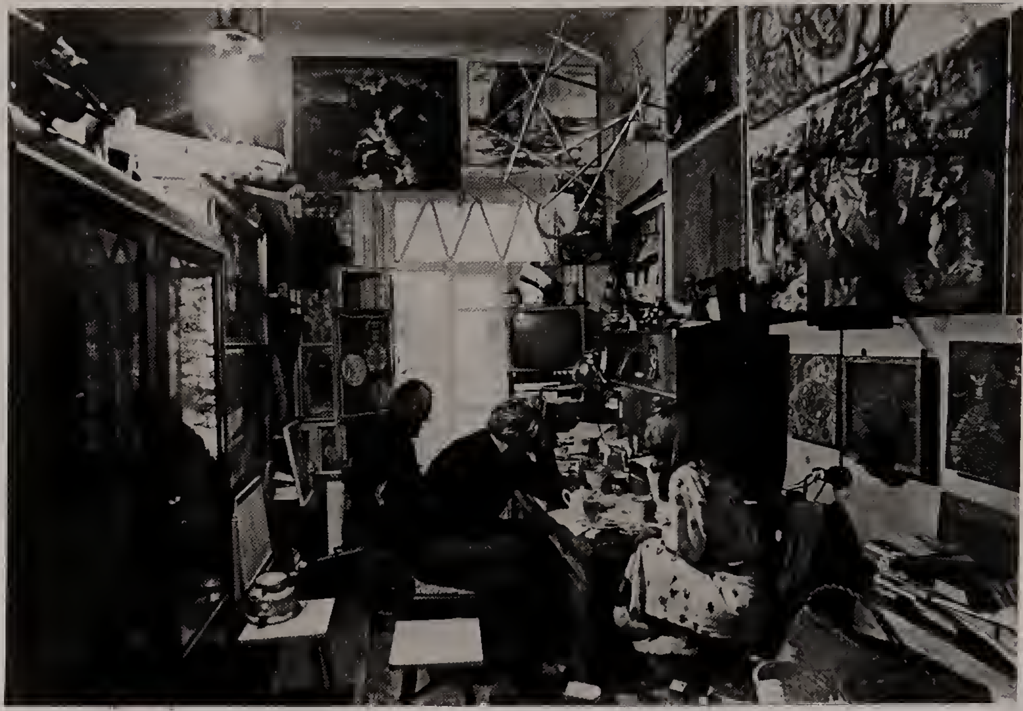
STRATEGIES OF THE UNIQUE

Distribution, not production, was the basis of Soviet art. Therefore, contrary to what is often claimed, the Soviet state was almost completely indifferent to art that was not intended for distribution—let's call it non–state unique art, which included photography. Soviet law differentiated between "personal property" (summer houses, cars, etc.), which was allowed unless used for profit, and "private property," which was illegal. The same principle applied to the arts: as long as the artist was indulging in "creative experiments" not shown to anybody except a spouse, the state was indifferent or even approved, since art needs training. In the 1930s, practically every artist, including laureates of the Stalin Prize, divided work into an "official job" (membership in the Union of Artists was nothing but service in the state apparatus, with limited hours) and works "for oneself," created in leisure time. This division was the foundation for the emergence of unofficial art in the late 1950s.

Reporters who were obliged to surrender their negatives to the editorial offices (even such well-known and politically well-connected photographers as Dmitry Baltermants, Evgeny Khaldey, and Samarii Gurarii) always kept some negatives "for themselves" —not for commercial use, but for their intimate archives as mementos of historic meetings. In other words, they behaved as private individuals who were lucky to encounter more celebrities than simple mortals usually have a chance to. Photos in private archives had an "amateur" status: a status of nonreproduced work.

Amateur photography was strongly promoted by the authorities and became widely accessible. Even before World War II, special "photo loans" supported purchases of the FED camera, the Soviet Leica. The magazine *Sovetskoe foto* (Soviet Photo) published milder works of nonprofessional readers; amateur photographers came from all walks of life. Nevertheless, from the early 1930s up to Gorbachev's reforms, taking pictures on city streets without the requisite journalist's identification was a risky business that could result in arrest (even though explicit prohibitions were never published). The authorities were concerned about unauthorized reproduction (especially in the foreign press). As long as the photographer claimed he was making a snapshot of his wife-to-be, he was relatively safe. As a result, amateur photography in the U.S.S.R., especially in postwar times, was actively channeled to "parks of leisure and culture" and the home—areas of intimate life in which there was no (or little) need for multiple reproductions. Thus, the Soviet authorities unknowingly stimulated erotic photography (professional labs did not exist; taking black-and-white pictures and developing and printing them in the bathroom remained an inexpensive hobby throughout the existence of the Soviet Union). Photography in the private sphere was ordinarily unartistic. But life under Soviet postwar socialism was so centered on cheap self-expression—gardening, knitting, poetry writing, and photography—that even among personal anonymous photographs of the Soviet era[12] one comes across impressive artifacts focused on exalted symbols of the private: sex, eroticism, friendship, intimacy. Into these spheres the Soviet system channeled all the interests not only of amateur photographers but of Soviet citizens as a whole.

The notion of leisure is central to the society and culture of the post-Stalinist U.S.S.R., as that of production is central to Stalin's times (with the productivism of constructivists). Amateur activity in art, and science had always been promoted in the U.S.S.R.; workers were supposed to create in their free time. Citizens exchanged their relative loyalty to the regime for the time their mostly meaningless, poorly paid, and chaotic jobs gave them. From the late 1950s on, they openly sabotaged any work for the state and created their own life projects, mostly in the arena of family, love, and friendship but also in science, literature, and art. Postwar Soviet society was built on the basis of many private and professional "circles" and self-proclaimed elites in opposition to the so-called ruling ideology (in which virtually nobody believed). By the 1960s this "amateur" activity of Soviet citizens had reached a level of some, albeit not complete, autonomy from the state. Paradoxically, this self-educating, self-developing activity of citizens fulfilled a dream of Lenin, who always claimed self-improvement as the ultimate communist goal. But, like in a nightmare, this activity in post-Stalinist times turned against the state—or at least turned its back to the state.



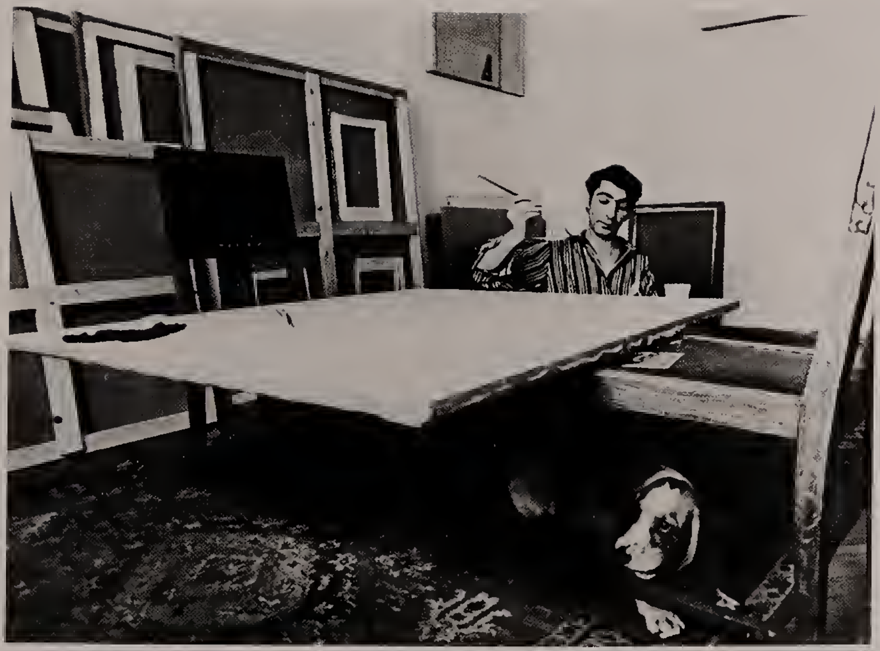
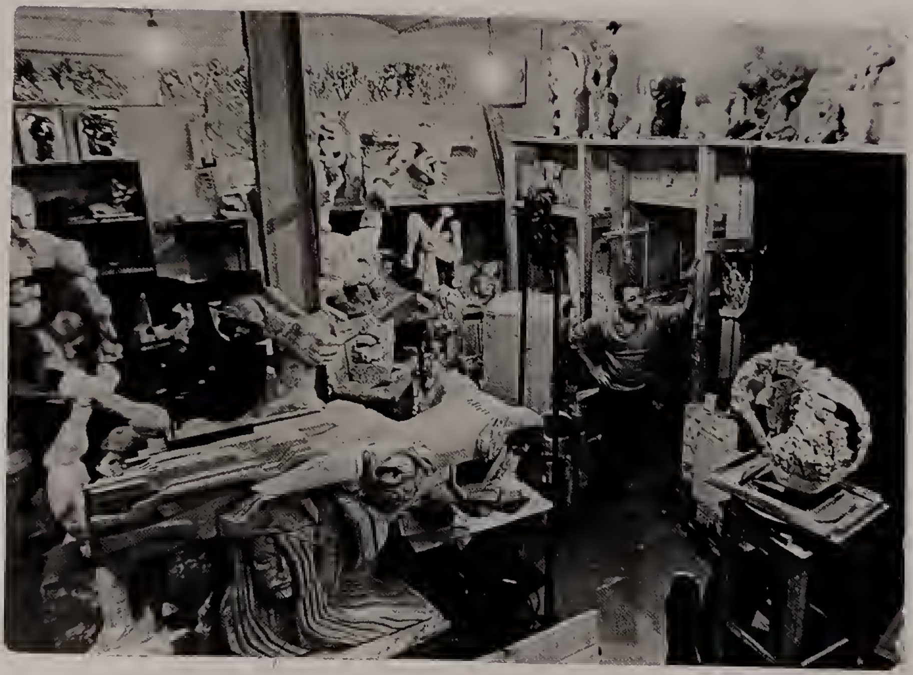


Fig. 97 (*top*). Igor Palmin, *Collector Leonid Talochkin and the Artist Vladimir Nemukhin*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 39 x 56.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 09126.

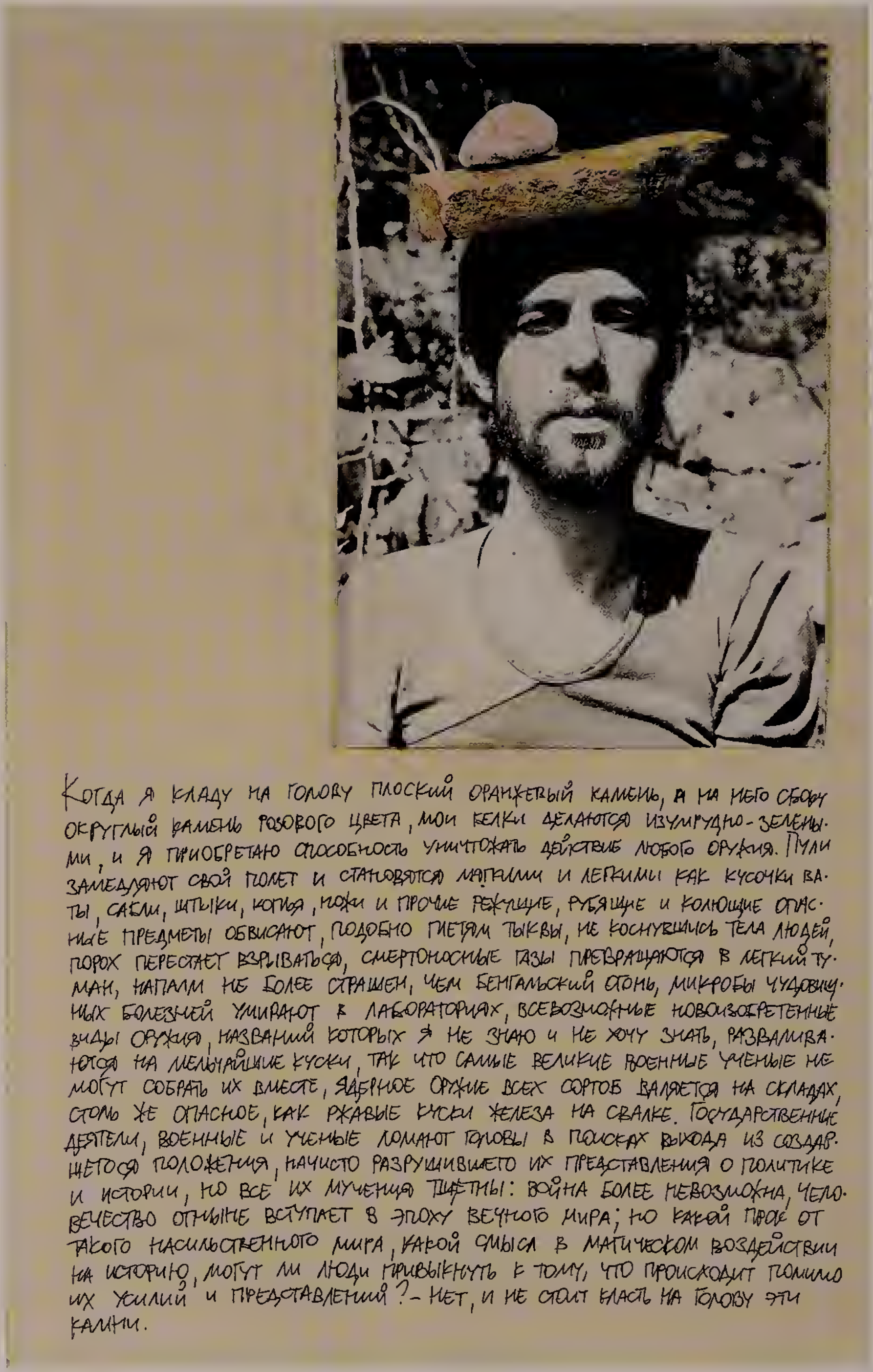
Fig. 98 (*above*). Igor Palmin, *Eduard Shteinberg*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 29 x 40 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 09181.

Fig. 99 (*right*). Igor Palmin, *Ernst Neizvestny in His Studio*, 1974. Gelatin silver print, 28.5 x 40 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 09183.



The unofficial culture of the 1960s emerged out of "leisure" activities also because many unofficial artists were employed as state media artists (book or theater designers, sculptors of numerous bronzes of Lenin, etc.). But they radicalized the Soviet state art orientation to mass media by creating "intimate media"—samizdat magazines, newsletters, and archives, both real and fictitious. Seminars (mostly in Kabakov's atelier), Socratic dialogues, and letters founded an alternative network. Igor Palmin was one of the first to produce photographic albums. In 1975 he made a book of his photographs (figs. 97–99) of artists preparing one of the first permitted exhibitions of unofficial art—ironically, authorities put it in a pavilion at the *Exhibition of the Achievements of the Economy* (VDNKh) that normally presented the successes of Soviet beekeeping. Palmin therefore juxtaposed photographs of dissident artists with quotations from Maurice Maeterlink's *The Life of Bees*, in which bees are described as desperate builders that belong nowhere. Albums with photographs and occasional text documenting performances or the life of the unofficial circle were produced by Francisco Infante, Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, Igor Makarevich, Nikita Alekseev (fig. 100), Yurii Leiderman (fig. 101), and many others. Boris Mikhailov mounted his photographs as albums out of separate sheets and as fold-out books such as *Salt Lake* (1985) and called his photographs *kartochki* ("cards," colloquial for "photographs")—a reference to the tradition of the family album.

On the first page of one of Mikhailov's best-known albums, *Unfinished Dissertation* (1984), in which photographs of everyday occurrences are paired with hand-written comments in pencil, Walter Benjamin's name appeared. After having ascribed the notion of "Traumkitsch" to Benjamin, Mikhailov concluded enigmatically, "The dream no longer reveals the blue horizon. Everything is gray now. The dreams have evolved into the road towards banality."[13] In the 1960s U.S.S.R., Mikhailov was living in a universe saturated with post-media poster images, where photograph and painting disturbingly merged, creating this area he described as gray. To escape the gray, he had to color his photographs—which in *Unfinished Dissertation* he did not do.



Когда я кладу на голову плоский оранжевый камень, а на него сбоку округлый камень розового цвета, мои белки делаются изумрудно-зелеными, и я приобретаю способность уничтожать действие любого оружия. Пули замедляют свой полет и становятся мягкими и легкими как кусочки ваты, сабли, штыки, копья, ножи и прочие режущие, рубящие и колющие опасные предметы обвисают, подобно плетям тыквы, не коснувшись тела людей, порох перестает взрываться, смертоносные газы превращаются в легкий туман, напалм не более страшен, чем бенгальский огонь, микробы чудовищных болезней умирают в лабораториях, всевозможные новоизобретенные виды оружия, названий которых я не знаю и не хочу знать, разваливаются на мельчайшие куски, так что самые великие военные ученые не могут собрать их вместе, ядерное оружие всех сортов валяется на складах, столь же опасное, как ржавые куски железа на свалке. Государственные деятели, военные и ученые ломают головы в поисках выхода из создавшегося положения, начисто разрушившего их представления о политике и истории, но все их мучения тщетны: война более невозможна, человечество отныне вступает в эпоху вечного мира; но какой прок от такого насильственного мира, какой смысл в магическом воздействии на историю, могут ли люди привыкнуть к тому, что происходит помимо их усилий и представлений? – Нет, и не стоит класть на голову эти камни.

Fig. 100. Nikita Alekseev, *Stones on My Head*, from the series of ten, 1982. Hand-colored gelatin silver print, 37 x 24.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10030.04.

But not only this coloring is important. The Soviet art system, in both official and unofficial (i.e., mass-distributed and unique) art, called into question Walter Benjamin's belief in the aura of the unique. We should not forget that the aura is a purely capitalist phenomenon; without the market, as in the U.S.S.R., the unique work of art had no flair of "high art." It was often perceived (even by its creator!) as a lamentable, marginal object unworthy of being reproduced. Unofficial artists resolved this problem by transparently feigning mass distribution, but even in their works the unique and handmade is surrounded by irony rather than pride. Handmade objects in the

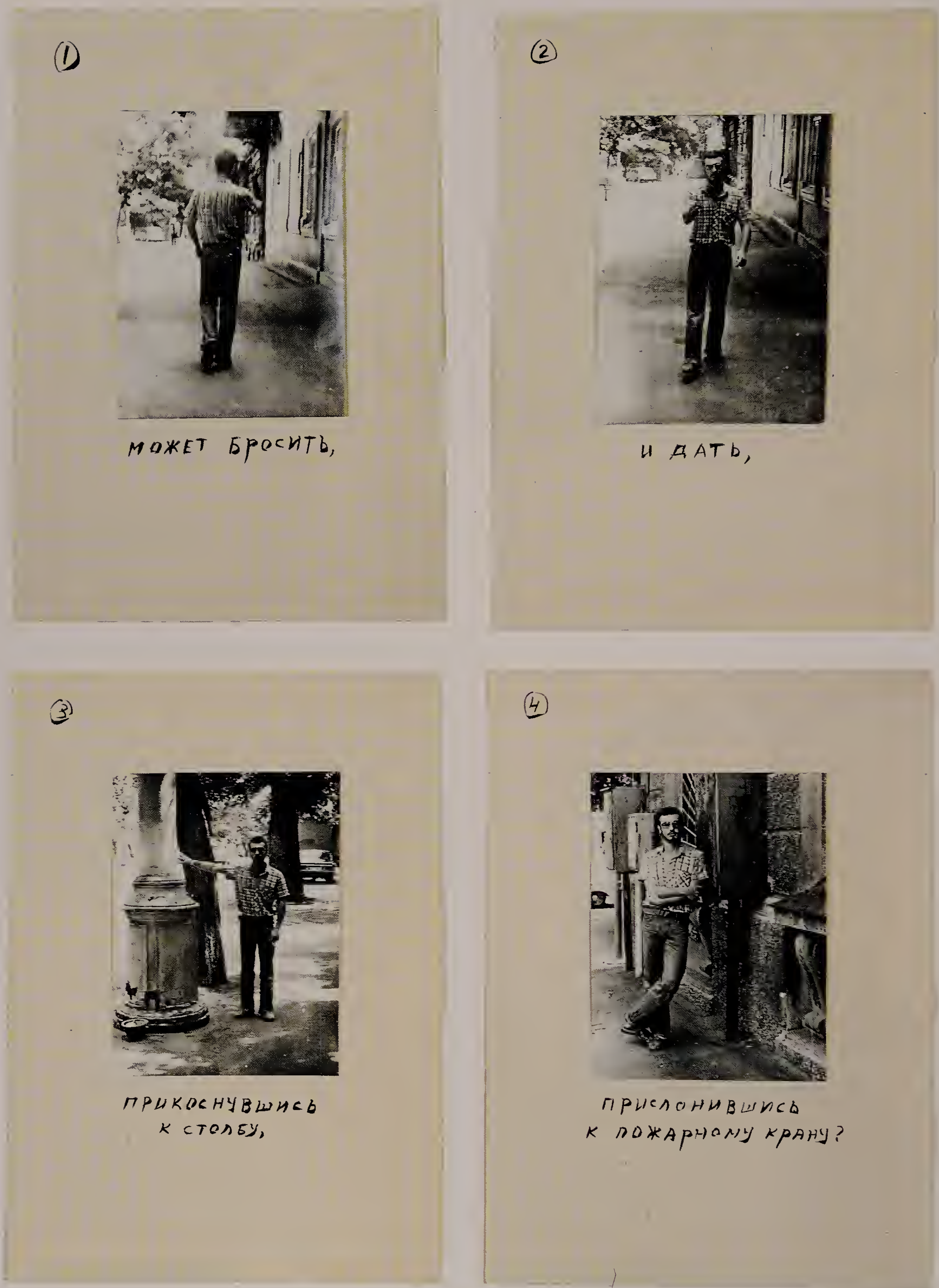

1
МОЖЕТ БРОСИТЬ,
2
И ДАТЬ,
3
ПРИКОСНУВШИСЬ
К СТОЛБУ,
4
ПРИСЛОНИВШИСЬ
К ПОЖАРНОМУ КРАНУ?

Fig. 101. Yurii Leiderman, Untitled, 1983. Ink and gelatin silver prints, 29.8 x 21 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10034.01–04.

U.S.S.R. were much less valued than industrial ones brought from the West. This preference for things Western also pervaded the contemporary music and film industry. The Soviet art system as a whole created not just an early example of total distribution of images but a model of resistance to it as well.

NOTES

1. *Boris Michajlov*, with contributions by Brigitte Kölle, Marta Kuzma, Victor Tupitsyn, and Boris Mikhaylov (Stuttgart: Oktagon, 1995), 44–45.

2. Benjamin Buchloh, "From Factura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984): 82–119.

3. *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, vol. 1, ed. Charlotta Douglas (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 392–96.

4. Maria Gough, "Switched On: Notes on Radio, Automata, and the Bright Red Star," in *Building the Collective: Soviet Graphic Design, 1917–1937: Selections from the Merrill C. Berman Collection*, ed. Leah Dickerman (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 39–55.

5. Varvara Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhet zhit' bez chuda: Pis'ma. Poeticheskie opyty. Zapisi khudozhnitsy* (Moscow: Sfera, 1994), 78.

6. Irina Lebedeva, "The Poetry of Science: Projectionism and Electroorganism," in *The Great Utopia*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 441–46.

7. This work is located in a private collection and was shown in the 2000 exhibition *Artificial Reality: Soviet Photography, 1930–1987* at the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio. See Ekaterina Dyogot (Degot), "Soviet Photography: Post-Montage and Pre-Reproduction," in *Artificial Reality: Soviet Photography, 1930–1987* (Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Museum of Art, 2000), fig. 4.

8. Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea," in *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

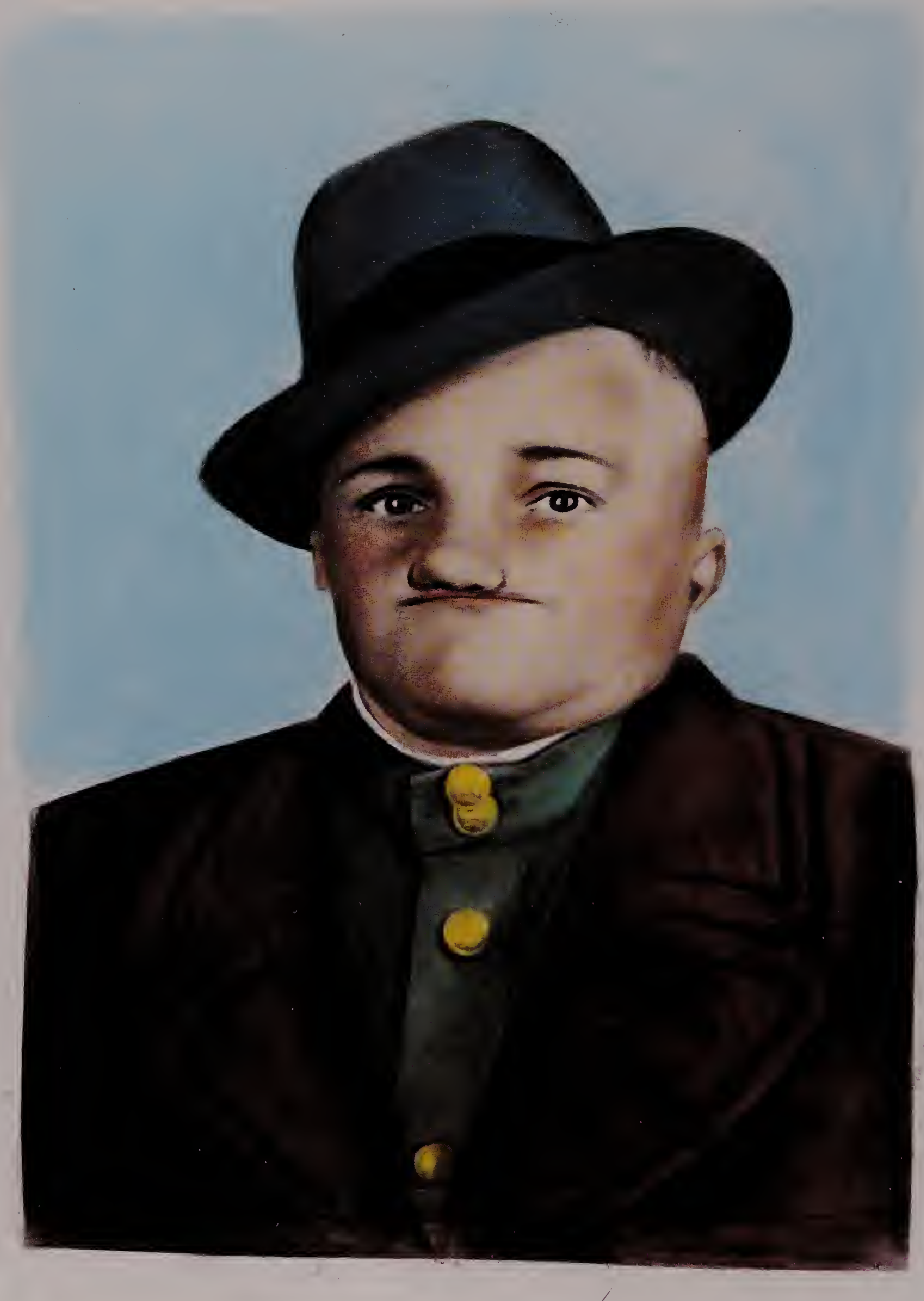
9. See *Le troisième mois international de la Photographie à Moscou Photobiennale* 2000 (Moscow: Moscow House of Photography, 2000), 62.

10. Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Opyty dlia budushchego: Dnevniki. Stat'i. Pis'ma. Zapiski* (Moscow: Grant, 1996), 295.

11. Nikolai Lavrentiev, *Liudi ukhodiashchego veka. Fotografii. Fotoportrety. Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Grant, 1999), 107.

12. I exhibited some of them in my exhibition (co-curated with Julis Demidenko) *Body Memory: Underwear of the Soviet Era*. See *Gedaechtnis des Koerpers: Unterwaesche der Soviet Aera Ausstellungskatalog* (Vienna: Volkskundemuseum, 2003), 115–16.

13. Boris Mikhailov, *Unfinished Dissertation*, with an essay by Margarita Tupitsyn (Zurich, Berlin, and New York: Scalo, 1998).



Boris Groys

Russian Photography in the Textual Context

RUSSIAN PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY HAS BEEN REPRESENTED BY MANY ILLUSTRIOUS NAMES LINKED FIRST AND FOREMOST TO THE ERA OF THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE, SUCH AS ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO, EL LISSITZKY, AND GUSTAV KLUCIS. However, within the context of unofficial art in the post-Stalinist era, this tradition was not significantly developed further. The most apparent reason for this lack is that the Russian avant-garde, especially avant-garde photography, was part and parcel of the official Soviet visual propaganda of that time from which Russian unofficial art wanted to distance itself. Thus the new impulse for the development of Russian photography within

Fig. 102 (*facing*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Luriki*, undated. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dyes, 60 x 48 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12979.

the context of Russian unofficial art emerged not out of the history of avant-garde photography but as a result of the blurring of the boundaries separating photography from other forms of art, a phenomenon that is also characteristic of Western photography of this period.

The art of the 1960s and 1970s is generally marked by an extensive use of photography outside of its autonomous context. Many artists at that time used photography primarily to record their performances, projects, and acts of social and political protest; to illustrate their theoretical manifestos; and to play out various social roles. The use of photography to document artistic events and illustrate artistic texts began to spread in the 1970s in Russia as well. Early in the decade in Moscow unofficial art, a current emerged that was generally referred to as sots art or Moscow conceptualism. Both appellations were based on Western precedents of the 1960s and 1970s: sots art bore a relationship to American pop art and Moscow conceptualism to Anglo-American conceptualism as represented by Art and Language or Joseph Kosuth. The duality of the names suggests that these artists were interested less in the purity of certain artistic approaches than in the application of those approaches to the Soviet cultural context. When the Moscow art community became aware of the new artistic currents by reading about them in Western magazine articles and books, that occasionally reached Moscow, they realized they could apply the same methods to their own social and cultural reality. This combination of "Western" and "Soviet" is reflected in the appellations "sots art" and "Moscow conceptualism."

Moscow conceptualism and sots art may be seen as a return to narrative, representational, and literary forms after the dominance in unofficial Russian art of the neomodernist ideal of "pure painting," which was free of mimetic references to social reality and strove to develop its own autonomous world. This orientation toward creating autonomous art appeared in the 1950s and lasted until the end of the 1960s. It symbolized the yearning for emancipation from the totalitarian *diktat* of "Soviet reality." By the early 1970s the feeling of newly won artistic freedom was so great that many artists began to look at Soviet reality in an ironic manner from the outside while remaining fully engaged with it.

In Western and especially in American art, this newfound interest in the outside world appeared somewhat earlier and found its ultimate expression in the late 1970s struggle of photography against the dominance of painting.[1] Indeed, after many decades of uncompromising battle against topicality and literariness in painting—a struggle eventually won by modernism—painting seemed to have lost its ability to relate to the outside world and "tell a story." Photography took over this function. The account of the gradual rise of photography after a bitter institutional and polemical struggle that lasted throughout the 1970s is well known. Artists such as Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall managed to transform photography into an art capable of competing with the best of classical and modern painting.

For the most part, this struggle took place outside of Russia and Russian art. The reason for this is apparent: the function of photography in Russia had been fulfilled by official Soviet art, which was painterly in form but photographic in content. Officially, painting was at the top of the Soviet hierarchy of the visual arts. But in reality it fulfilled the traditional role of photography, that of "reflecting life" and telling stories "out of life," including the story of "the building of communism," which occupied a central role in the official culture. Official art's orientation toward color photography was declared at the beginning of the introduction of the "method of Socialist Realism."[2] This was true not only for socialist realist painting, based as it was on the composition of the traditional advertising color photograph, but also for the entire official Soviet visual culture, molded in accordance with the laws of photography.

Official Soviet art was characterized by a vast overproduction of pictures, making impossible the traditional orientation of painting toward individual masterpieces focused on the unique, individual, unrepeatable vision of the artist. From the outset, official Soviet art was conceived as a mediocre, stereotyped, faceless, quasi-mechanical mass reproduction and variation of a limited collection of visual clichés. The production and distribution of Soviet art was industrial, planned, and mass-oriented.

The "deconstruction" of painting—so prevalent in Western critical circles of the 1970s and aimed at attacking the unique artistic gesture, which, according

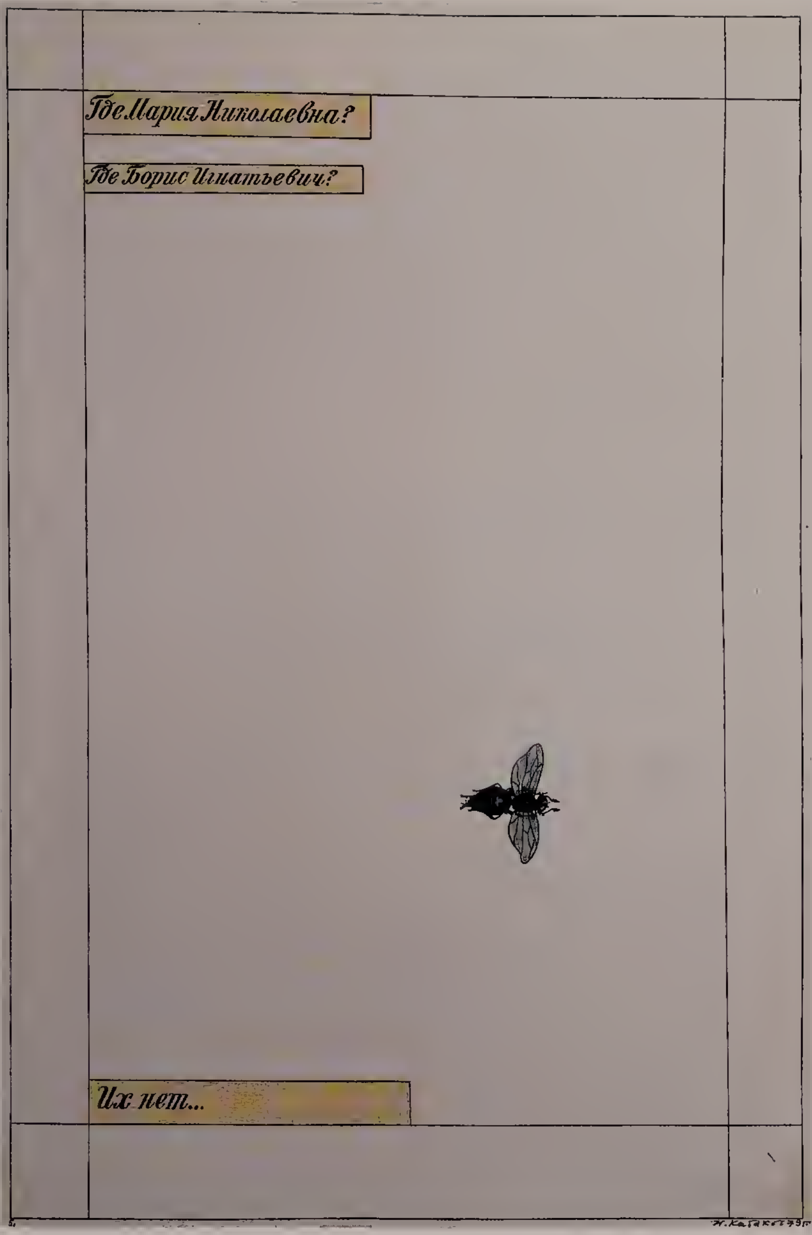

Где Мария Николаевна?
Где Борис Игнатьевич?
Их нет...

Fig. 103A. Ilya Kabakov, No. 4 from the series of twelve *Where Are They?* 1979. Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper, 41 x 27.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07309.05.

to art criticism of the time, was no more than an ideological fiction—was not relevant to official Soviet art. Soviet painting had long since deconstructed itself and had turned itself into the standard language of mass culture, fulfilling the same role in the Soviet Union as commercial photography had in the West. For this reason, Soviet unofficial artists at first naturally turned to official Soviet painting and drawing and not to photography when they sought a visual language for telling stories, for "re-literizing" art after it had been "de-literized" by modernism.

The preceding shows the difficulty in transposing the methods of art historical analysis from one cultural situation to another. Differences in historical contexts result in similar ideological and artistic strategies that bring about different visual results. In the West, as mentioned above, the opposition between photography and painting was understood as the opposition between a mimetic, socially committed, reproducible, and narrative art on the one hand and an art that stressed the autonomy of the artist and his or her inimitable individuality on the other. In the Soviet Union the opposition was not between different artistic mediums—photography and painting—but between Soviet mass-produced art and individual artistic creativity within the framework of unofficial art. One could say that Moscow conceptualism of the 1970s and 1980s utilized Soviet painting and mass book illustrations in much the same way that Western conceptualism utilized photography. This parallelism is especially obvious when one looks at the Western manner of combining photographs and text—a leading artistic device in conceptual photography in the 1970s—and the combination of the Soviet picture or book illustration with text, which was the leading artistic device of the Moscow conceptualist school at that time (figs. 103A and B).

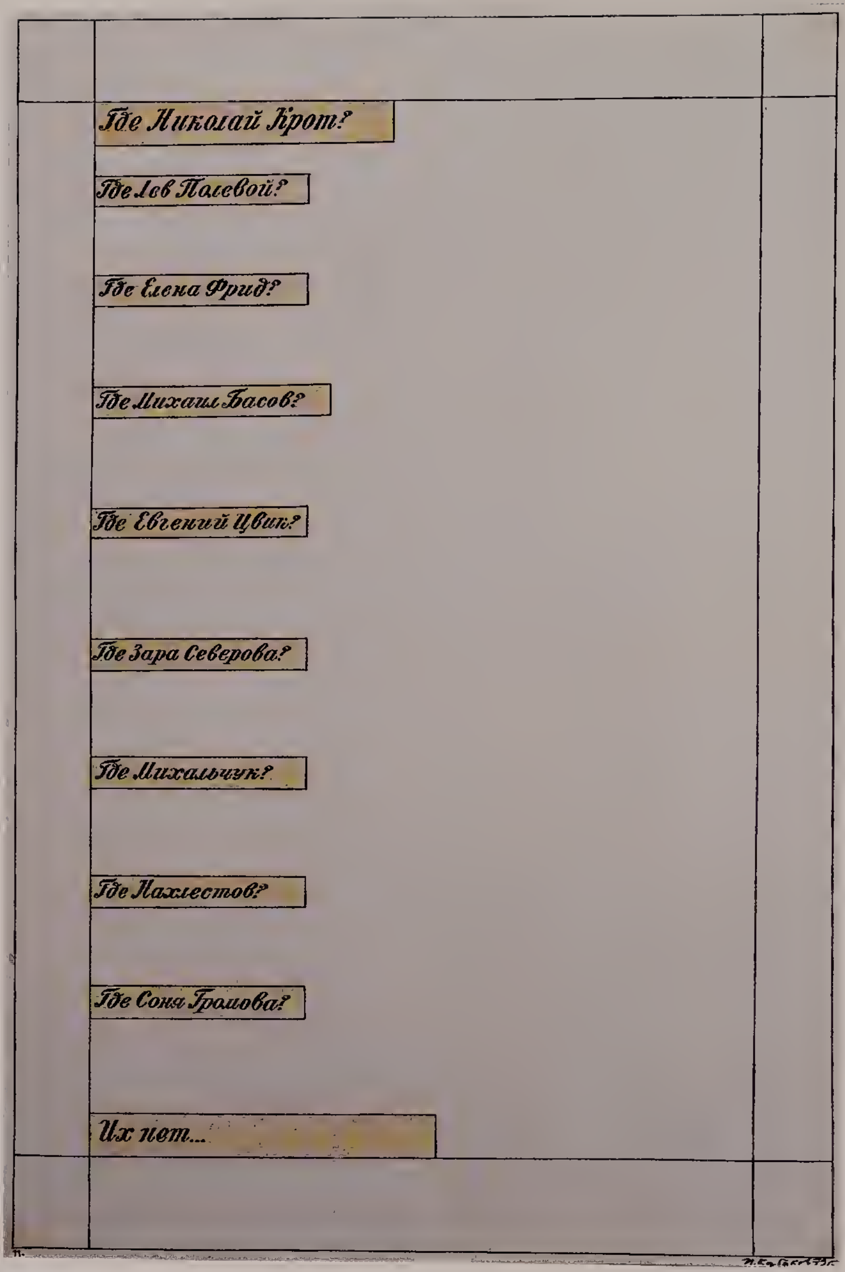

Где Николай Крот?
Где Лев Полевой?
Где Елена Фрид?
Где Михаил Басов?
Где Евгений Цвик?
Где Зара Северова?
Где Михальчук?
Где Нахлестов?
Где Соня Громова?
Их нет...

Fig. 103B. Ilya Kabakov, No. 10 from the series of twelve *Where Are They?* 1979. Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper, 41 x 27.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07309.11.

The beginning of the conceptualist use of text in Moscow can be dated approximately to 1972. That year Ilya Kabakov created his albums entitled *Ten Characters*, in which the text occupies as important a position on the page as the visual image. Immediately after completing these works, Kabakov produced a series of large paintings along the same principles.[3] The equality accorded the text vis-à-vis the image may have come about as a result of Kabakov's experience illustrating books for many years. However, the most important point about his albums is that he utilized the frayed, impersonal style of Soviet illustration to depict private stories of lonely artist-dreamers who are engaged in creating strange and helpless-looking art in the corners of their impoverished rooms, lost in the everyday dreariness of Soviet communal apartments. These stories achieve a level of authenticity precisely because they are presented and illustrated in a conventional manner. Instead of trying to make an individual artistic gesture in the context of the universal history of art, Kabakov used worn-out, mass visual language to tell personal stories. Cindy Sherman also employed this approach beautifully in her early photographic series. Kabakov and other Moscow conceptualist artists such as Eric Bulatov and Dmitrii Prigov "privatized" the worn-out language of official art, just as their Western colleagues at the same time "privatized" the worn-out language of documentary or advertising photography.

By the 1980s Kabakov also began to utilize photography in his albums and installations, exclusively making use of other people's work. At first, he used official

Soviet photographs of "heroes of labor" or festive postcards, as in *The Collector*, 1985; *Garbage Man*, 1985; and *Labyrinth, My Mother's Album*, 1989 (fig. 104). In these works photography functions primarily as a visual documentation of official Soviet ideology, within the context and background of which the individual life of the hero passes. This contrast is especially evident in the installation *Labyrinth, My Mother's Album* in which the text, which documents the tragedy of an individual life, is juxtaposed with impersonally optimistic images based on official Soviet photography. Kabakov employed photography in the 1980s to symbolize the impersonal social background of life. In his later installations, especially in *Healing with Memories*, 1996, Kabakov made use of photographs from his personal archive in which his acquaintances and friends appeared. His use of photography was "privatized," associated with dreams and references to his own past. The images acquired healing qualities by being integrated into an installation that recalled the atmosphere of a hospital or a psychoanalytic session.

The stories Kabakov told in his albums and installations frequently referred to the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian literature—the tradition of such writers as Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, who told stories of "little" people obsessed by big ideas. The literary tradition was still more important in Russia in the 1970s than was the tradition of the cinema. Boris Mikhailov's photographic cycles also made reference to it. He was the only artist connected to Moscow conceptualism who consistently used photography and considered himself to be a photographer first and foremost. The hero of Mikhailov's photo cycles is not the individual but the main hero of Russian literature—the "people." The "people" in Russian literary tradition has little to do with the Western concept of nation or ethnicity; it has even less to do with the concepts of the public and society; and it certainly has nothing to do with the German idea of the "Volk." The "people" as presented in Russian literary tradition embodies the principle of extrahistorical existence over which all waves of historical change break. In Russian literature the people can be characterized as thinking, "Nothing can truly change." That philosophy marks the difference between the people and the intelligentsia, who interminably fuss about in search of change. While the intelligentsia agitate, the people think, "Let them fuss about until they get tired, and then everything will be as it was before." The reluctance of the people to accept change irritated the intelligentsia. But in the great works of Russian literature this reluctance was seen as a chance for Russia's salvation from history, which often dealt the people heavy blows. All of the positive heroes in the works of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky come from the people. Their only reaction to history is "When will it finally end?" They draw hope for an end of every history from the experience of their own lives in which nothing changes.

In this respect, Boris Mikhailov adhered in his artistic work to the traditions of the Moscow conceptualist school. His photographic cycles were always narrative, even when they did not contain any text. His eye was oriented toward the codes of standard, easily recognizable Soviet aesthetics, which he recorded and reflected in his works. Mikhailov also shared the skepticism of the Moscow conceptualists, especially Kabakov, regarding the possibility of making an individual and simultaneously historically significant gesture. The source of this skepticism for Mikhailov and other Moscow conceptualists was not an analysis of mass commercial culture and its mechanisms, as in the case of their Western colleagues, but a deeply rooted belief, inherited from Russian literature, that it is impossible to change people. Of course, they were referring primarily to the Russian people, but this idea applies to any people. Mikhailov's photo series *Luriki*, 1971–85 (see fig. 102, p. 118), and *Sots Art*, 1975–86, illustrate that a gulf of indifference separates these simple, poor, and kind—if not drunk—provincial people from the historical concerns that animate the imagination of Moscow's intelligentsia. Mikhailov utilized in his work the mask of the "people" and made sure the viewer was aware that he did so consciously. Russian literature is known for showing the "thick of the people" in relation to which the thin social layer of the intelligentsia is irrelevant. Photography, with its ability to create the effect of impersonal, realistic documentation, is reminiscent of the classical Russian novel.

Photography plays a central role—albeit one not stressed by the artists themselves—in the performances of the group Collective Actions (Andrei

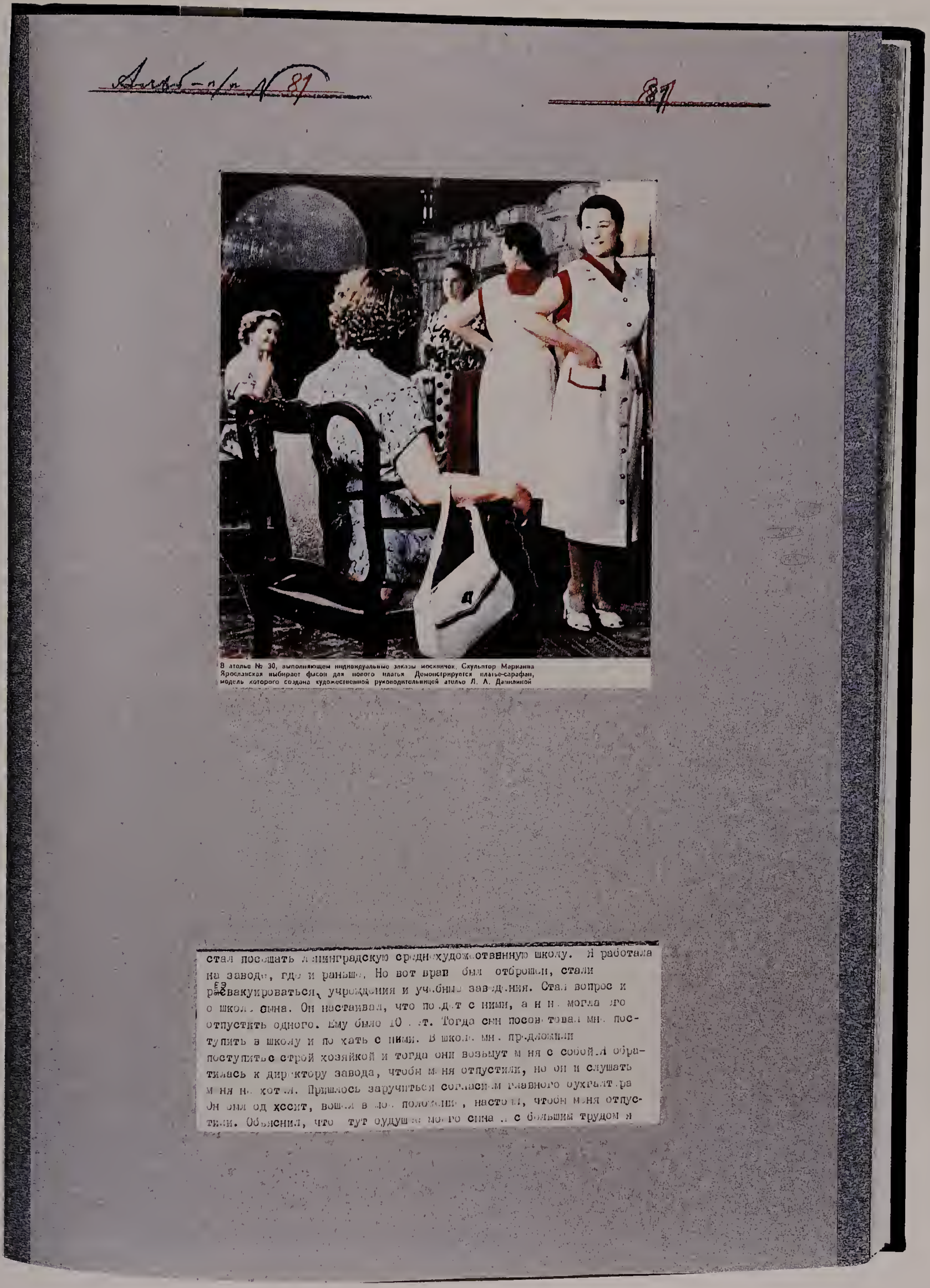
Monastyrsky, Nikita Alekseev, and others), which also belongs to the Moscow school of conceptualism. Performance as an articulated artistic genre became possible due to photography, in particular, which enabled artists to record the events of everyday life in real time. Performance operates by differentiating the ordinary and the extraordinary, the usual and the unusual. The most important aspect of Collective Actions' performances was not the action itself nor the audience's impression but rather the documentation of the performance, which consisted of descriptive texts, interpretations, and commentary.[4] Naturally, photographs taken during the performance played an important role and were integrated with the documentation. The documentation was conceived as a narrative whose task was to solve the riddle of the performance. The result was the same combination of photographs and narrative text that, as mentioned earlier, was common artistic practice at the time—and not only in Russia. The narrative and literary content of Collective Actions' performances nonetheless distinguished them from the performance mainstream. Their artistic practices more closely resembled those of Ilya Kabakov.

In their literary narrative strategy, however, Collective Actions was polemically in opposition to the tradition of Russian classical literature. The group and especially its leader, Andrei Monastyrsky, constructed esoteric, hermetic narratives similar to the descriptions of strange magical or religious sect rituals. This type of narrative broke with the transparent, enlightened "realistic" tradition of not only the Russian but the European novel as well. It had a closer affinity to literary modernism represented in Russia by the OBERIU Society and later by Iurii Mamleev. In their own interpretations of and commentaries on their work, the artists of Collective Actions preferred to make references to ancient Chinese literature, in which they found the combination of the everyday and the esoteric they wanted to achieve in their performances. Due to their use of a medieval Chinese literary subtext, the artists of Collective Actions achieved an effect of defamiliarization, the most important device of modernism, which is described in great detail in the theoretical works of the Russian formalists. In spite of this Chinese literary exoticism, Collective Actions returned to a traditional Russian theme—the people—favored in their turn by Confucian and Taoist traditions. The group's artistic strategy was enhanced by the significant fact that China and Russia were the world's largest communist powers that embodied "collective action" on the political level.

Another artist who came out of the Collective Actions circle was Vadim Zakharov, perhaps the only Russian artist of the 1980s and 1990s who consistently synthesized photography and narrative text (fig. 105). At a time when many Russian artists of his generation were drawn into the atmosphere of the newly found freedoms and attracted by the internationally fashionable "wild" art, Zakharov's art stood out as introverted, esoteric, ascetic, and somewhat agoraphobic. The artist seemingly wanted to drive himself into a corner and be left alone with his art. Rather than viewing the openness of the contemporary art world as a chance for self-realization, he saw it as a threat to this purpose and a dissolution into the commercial flow of art production. The series of photographs produced by the artist in the early 1980s document an atmosphere of quasi-masochistic rituals (*Little Elephants*, 1982; *The Well. New World*, 1983) and his protest against his older colleagues' social success.[5] This atmosphere of fixation and paranoid phobias also characterizes Zakharov's painting in the 1980s.

In the 1990s Zakharov found an original way to depict open spaces by combining photography and narrative. In his 1996 cycle *Funny and Sad Adventures of the Foolish Pastor* (figs. 106A and 106B), Zakharov describes the Pastor's travels and documents them through photography. This treatment might be considered part of the traditional travel diary genre. But in this diary and these photographs Zakharov himself appears in the guise of the fictitious "Pastor," in whose name the story is told. Thus the artist presents himself as a literary hero. In this narrative, the geographic space through which the hero travels and the space of literary associations coincide. The narrative style recalls that of nineteenth-century children's literature, while the photographs fulfill the traditional role of book illustration drawings. In this way Zakharov demonstrates the interchangeability of photography and book illustration drawings in the tradition of the Moscow school of conceptualism.

At the same time, this cycle by Zakharov refers to



Альб-н/п № 81

81

В ателье № 30, выполняющем индивидуальные заказы москвичек. Скульптор Марианна Ярославская выбирает фасон для нового платья. Демонстрируется платье-сарафан, модель которого создана художественной руководительницей ателье Л. А. Данилиной

стал посещать ленинградскую среднехудожественную школу. Я работала на заводе, где и раньше. Но вот враг был отброшен, стали реэвакуироваться учреждения и учебные заведения. Стал вопрос и о школе сына. Он настаивал, что поедет с ними, а я не могла его отпустить одного. Ему было 10 лет. Тогда сын посоветовал мне поступить в школу и поехать с ними. В школе мне предложили поступить сестрой хозяйкой и тогда они возьмут меня с собой. Я обратилась к директору завода, чтобы меня отпустили, но он и слушать меня не хотел. Пришлось заручиться согласием главного бухгалтера. Он был одессит, вошел в мое положение, настоял, чтобы меня отпустили. Объяснил, что тут будущее моего сына. [illegible] с большим трудом я

Fig. 104. Ilya Kabakov, No. 81 from the book *Labyrinth, My Mother's Album* (Paris: Flies France, 1995). Courtesy of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Translation:

In fashion house No. 30 which fills individual orders for Moscow women. The sculptor Mariana Yaroslavskaya is choosing a style for a new dress. A sarafan-dress created by the artistic director of the studio L. A. Danilina is being shown.

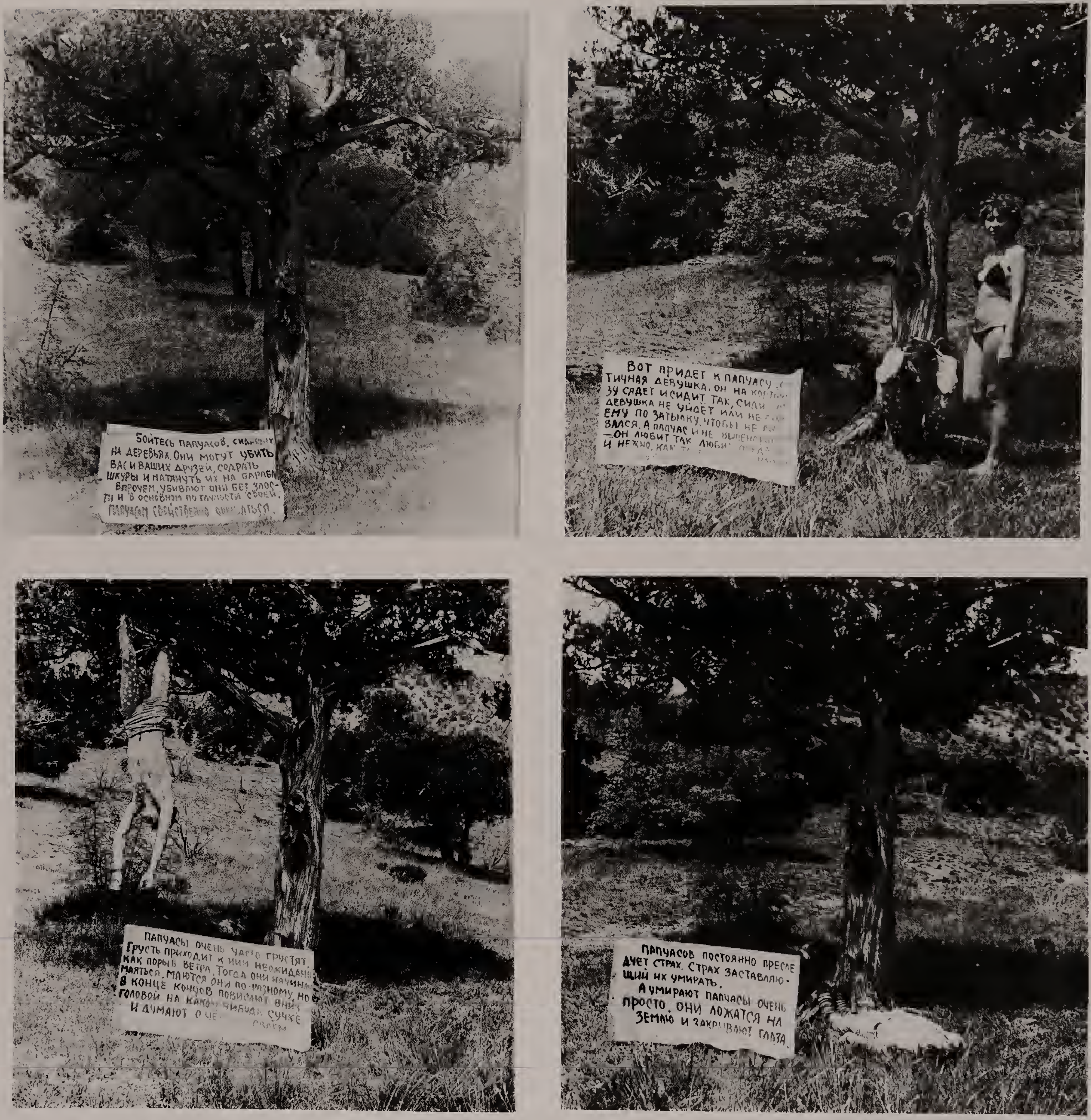

БОЙТЕСЬ ПАПУАСОВ, СИД
НА ДЕРЕВЬЯХ. ОНИ МОГУТ УБИТЬ
ВАС И ВАШИХ ДРУЗЕЙ, СОДРАТЬ
ШКУРЫ И НАТЯНУТЬ ИХ НА БАРАБ
ВПРОЧЕМ, УБИВАЮТ ОНИ БЕЗ ЗЛОС-
ТИ И В ОСНОВНОМ ПО ГЛУПОСТИ СВОЕЙ.
ПАПУАСАМ СВОЙСТВЕННО ОШИБАТЬСЯ.
ВОТ ПРИДЕТ К ПАПУАСУ
ТИЧНАЯ ДЕВУШКА. ОН НА КОРТ
ЗУ СЯДЕТ И СИДИТ ТАК, СИДИ
ДЕВУШКА НЕ УЙДЕТ ИЛИ НЕ
ЕМУ ПО ЗАТЫЛКУ, ЧТОБЫ НЕ
ВАЛСЯ. А ПАПУАС И НЕ
—ОН ЛЮБИТ ТАК ЛЮБ
И НЕЖНО, КАК
ПАПУАСЫ ОЧЕНЬ ЧАСТО ГРУСТЯТ.
ГРУСТЬ ПРИХОДИТ К НИМ НЕОЖИДАН
КАК ПОРЫВ ВЕТРА. ТОГДА ОНИ НАЧИНА
МАЯТЬСЯ. МАЮТСЯ ОНИ ПО-РАЗНОМУ, НО
В КОНЦЕ КОНЦОВ ПОВИСАЮТ ВНИЗ
ГОЛОВОЙ НА КАКОЙ-НИБУДЬ СУЧКЕ
И ДУМАЮТ О ЧЕ
СВОЕМ
ПАПУАСОВ ПОСТОЯННО ПРЕСЛЕ
ДУЕТ СТРАХ. СТРАХ ЗАСТАВЛЯЮ-
ЩИЙ ИХ УМИРАТЬ.
А УМИРАЮТ ПАПУАСЫ ОЧЕНЬ
ПРОСТО. ОНИ ЛОЖАТСЯ НА
ЗЕМЛЮ И ЗАКРЫВАЮТ ГЛАЗА.

Fig. 105. Vadim Zakharov, *Papuasy*, undated. Gelatin silver prints, 24 x 18.2 cm each. Dodge Collection, 20631.01–04.

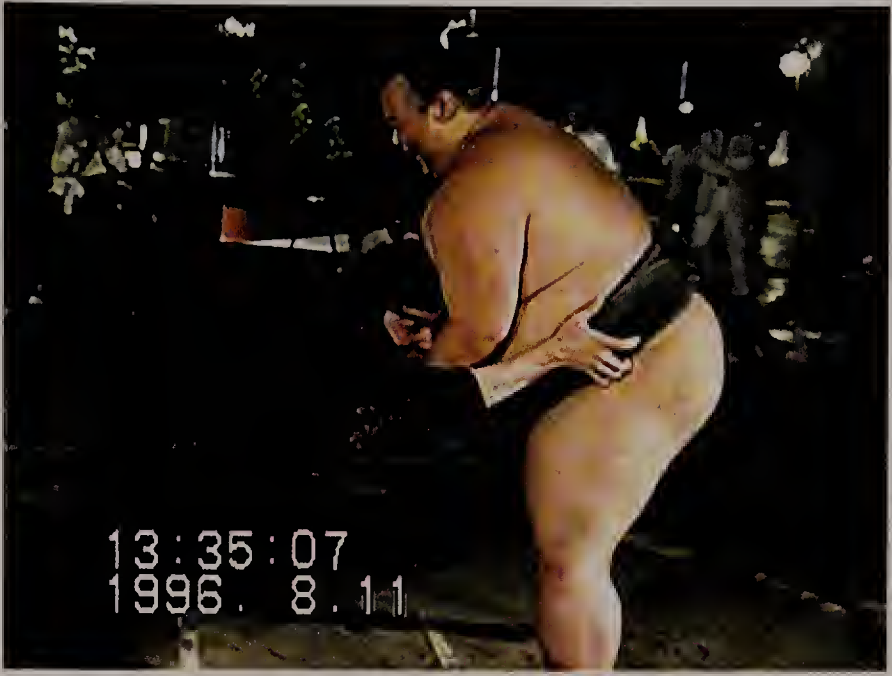


Fig. 106A. Vadim Zakharov, *Theological Conversations* (No. 7) from *Funny and Sad Adventures of a Foolish Pastor*, August 11, 1996 (Atopic Site, Tokyo Seaside Festa). Collection of the artist.

another theme, which in a certain sense goes to the root of the way photography and the shop-worn language of book illustration are used in the system of contemporary "high art": the artist sacrifices his artistic talent to become the Pastor. The economics of sacrifice was analyzed in detail in the theories of symbolic exchange from Mauss and Bataille to Derrida.[6] Only at first glance does a symbolic gift or sacrifice not seem to reward the one who makes the sacrifice. Within the framework of symbolic exchange the victim is rewarded by the attainment of a higher symbolic social status. According to Bataille, the artist and writer achieve this status because within the context of bourgeois society they are able to be profligate and wasteful, squandering their talent, which characterizes an aristocratic lifestyle. By sacrificing the logic of the traditional exchange of talent for fame, the artist achieves, in this way, a higher, even sacred, status. But first and foremost the artist becomes a writer by raising a visual symbol to the level of allegory.

In the work of the Moscow conceptualist school and especially the Collective Actions group, the traditional relationship between art and literature was reversed. Here art did not utilize or illustrate the existing literary tradition. By turning visual art into text, however, it provided a new impulse for contemporary Russian narrative literature, which, within the confines of its own narrative, attempted to reproduce the combination of documentation and the esoteric. The Collective Actions group combined photography with commentary relating to it. Writers who were associated with Collective Actions in the 1970s and 1980s subsequently began to use the narrative techniques they learned from the group. This employment is in evidence in Vladimir Sorokin's novels, which consist of "realistic" and "ritualistic-esoteric" levels of narrative. In one of his latest novels, *Blue Lard*, Sorokin also uses the "Chinese" theme as a defamiliarization device vis-à-vis the Russian literary tradition. The influence of the artistic and literary practices of the Collective Actions group is also in evidence in the hallucinatory prose of Sergei Anufriev and Pavel Peppershtein in the 1998 *Mythological Love of Castes*.

Copying text within the context of the visual arts can be seen as a kind of photography, which is why photography is so easy to combine with text. Thus, while the use of photography in the Russian unofficial art movement was influenced by the Russian literary tradition, photography as it was utilized by the Moscow conceptualists influenced, in its turn, Russian literature. The integration of a large mass of narrative text into visual space brought about a considerable shift in the understanding of the text, which then played a decisive role in the formation of the Moscow conceptualist school's literary branch, as represented by the texts of Dmitrii Prigov, Vladimir Sorokin, and Medical Hermeneutics.

Text in visual space, especially a great mass of text, loses its meaning completely. It becomes de-semanticized and turns into a design, an arabesque, or a decorative motif. Therefore, the conceptualist de-semanticization of the text need not deform or defamiliarize it, nor introduce shifts of meaning into its own structure. The most common, trivial text becomes de-semanticized if it is placed within the space of a picture. Following Derrida's terminology, it is simply transformed into writing. This transformation, though, should not be regarded as a gesture of deconstruction. It does not mean that the original text is dissolved in an infinite game of differentiation. The text remains finite and can be read as such, as it retains its original semantics.

In his theoretical articles Kabakov frequently discussed the interrelationship of visual image and text, which played an important role in the development of the Moscow conceptualist school. In one short essay,

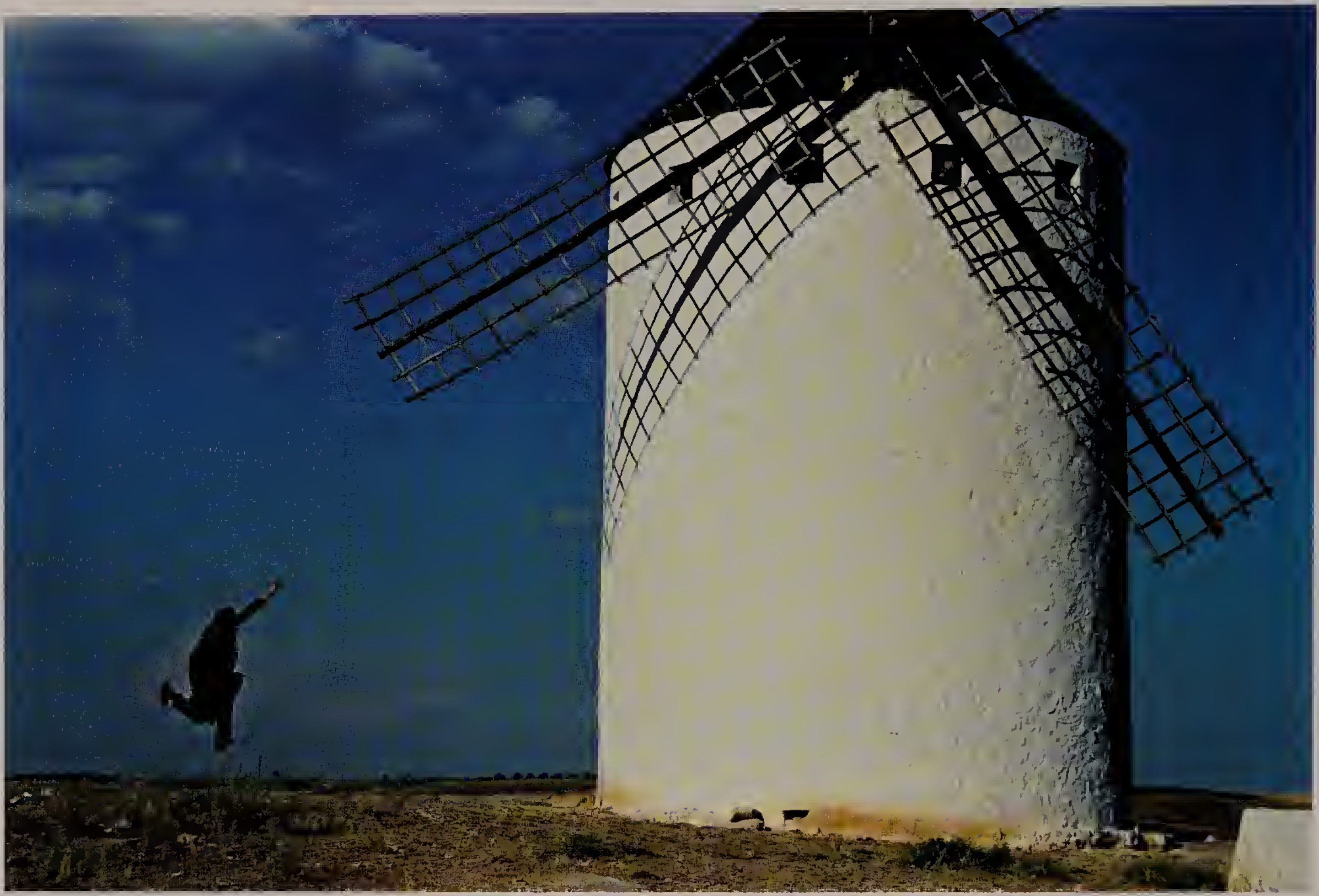


Fig. 106B. Vadim Zakharov, *In Search of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance* (No. 3) from *Funny and Sad Adventures of a Foolish Pastor*, July 9–14, 1996 (El Toboso, Campo de Criptana, Toledo, Spain). Collection of the artist.

in addition to noting the syntactic and semantic level of the text, Kabakov discussed how, in relation to the white background of the paper on which it is printed, the text turns into a "suprematist" visual symbol that loses its usual semantics.[7] Even the most common document, encountered on a daily basis, acquires the meaning of a conceptual image. As a result, the consciousness of the spectator/reader constantly oscillates between two incompatible modes of textual perception. On one hand, the text is perceived as being "ready-made," a purely visual phenomenon. On the other, this very same text may be read as an intelligible piece of writing whose semantics can easily be reconstructed. This oscillation of the perceiving consciousness between spectator and reader that conceptual work produces made a lasting impression on several writers in the 1970s, prompting them to search for a way to achieve a similar effect by purely literary means.

In his novels Sorokin employs the device of appropriating huge blocks of text comprising tens, if not hundreds, of pages. The traditional concept of "quotation" cannot be applied to such quasi-photographic reproductions of styles or literary languages, which in Sorokin's novels exceed all customary dimensions. One might say that every one of Sorokin's novels is a library of contrasting genres of literary texts placed within the space of a single book, without even the slightest attempt of creative synthesis of these textual fragments. Sorokin's work may be seen as a type of "text collage" that follows the example of photo collages. Quoting large blocks of text written in someone else's style actualizes the pure materiality of the text, its "pageness" and the mechanical aspect of copying and "photographing" the writing. The transference of the technique of appropriation into the literary context as practiced by Sorokin illuminates the sacrifice that the author who uses this technique makes: he sacrifices his time. Whereas visual artistic practice makes the task of the artist easier, due to the existence of fast image-reproducing equipment, the production of text remains a laborious activity, the absurdity and mechanistic approach of which becomes evident if it serves to produce a text stylistically perceived as "someone else's."

The sots art and Moscow conceptualist artists succeeded in the interpretation of narrative text as a "text-object," going beyond the usual postmodern "polystylistics" and "intertextuality." They accomplished this with a consistency unusual in world literature, the reason for which can be seen in the extreme tension between the individual artistic expression in the circle of Russian unofficial culture in the 1970s and official Soviet literature. By that time official Soviet literature was completely lacking in style and individuality, making it easy to view the text as simply a mass of paper or a "text-object" produced in accordance with certain rules, good only for copying and reproducing. Thus it became possible to apply the method of appropriation to literature, a technique that hitherto had been successfully applied only in the visual arts. Even though the existing sociopolitical situation facilitated this application, the results are relevant even now. Russian literature has already developed new forms in which it can continue to apply appropriation, maneuvering between literary and artistic contexts, between the communicative and purely visual, objectifying use of the text.

Translated by Daniel Rishik

NOTES

1. See, for example, Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 43.

2. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54.

3. Boris Groys, "The Movable Cave, or Kabakov's Self-Memorials," in *Ilya Kabakov* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 34.

4. See Kollektivnye Deistvia, *Poezdki zagorod* (Trips to the Countryside), ed. Ekaterina Bobrinskaia (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998).

5. Vadim Zakharov, "Der letzte Spaziergang durch die Elysischen Felder" in *Vadim Zakharov: Retrospektive, 1978–95*, ed. Udo Kittelmann (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, Pastor Zond Edition; Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995), 46.

6. Marcel Mauss, "L'Essais sur le don," *L'Année Sociologique*, no. 1 (1923–24): 30–186; George Bataille, *La part maudite* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967).

7. Ilya Kabakov, "Dissertation on the Cognition," *A-Ya*, no. 6 (1984): 30–31.

Alla Rosenfeld

Stretching the Limits On Photo-Related Works of Art in the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection

THE NORTON AND NANCY DODGE COLLECTION OF NONCONFORMIST ART FROM THE SOVIET UNION FEATURES MANY WORKS BY ARTISTS WHO APPROPRIATE TO VARYING DEGREES THE PHOTOGRAPHIC OR PHOTOMECHANICALLY PRINTED IMAGE IN THEIR ART, THUS STRETCHING THE LIMITS AND EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES AND USES OF PHOTOGRAPHY. These artists had no commitment to the heritage and tradition of photography, and elements of their work mirrored contemporaneous developments in art.

Influenced by various twentieth-century movements, including

Fig. 107 (*facing*). Gennady Goushchin, *Restoration of the Taj Mahal Mausoleum* from the series *Alternative Museum*, 1972. Photo collage, 26.7 x 21.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15049.

conceptual art, Soviet nonconformist artists were not constrained by the reportorial conventions of photography. As editor of the exhibition catalogue *Contemporary Photographic Art from Moscow*, Alexander Tolnay argued, "Contemporary art photography in Moscow would define itself as diametrically opposed, aesthetically and historically, to the erstwhile realistic reportage-photography."[1] Although many conceptual photographs do act as records, they differ crucially from conventional photography in that oftentimes the event is set up or arranged by the artist. The camera becomes simply a tool to implement the artist's ideas and record the execution of these ideas.[2] Artist Eduard Gorokhovsky noted, "The shift to photography led me to a new aesthetic, to a new standard."[3]

Some Soviet nonconformist artists chose to create fictional narratives and to invent a theater of the self, as did Rimma and Valeriy Gerlovin or Komar and Melamid; others, including Igor Kopystiansky and Vadim Zakharov, stretched photographic meaning with words. Photo works and photographs by Boris Mikhailov and Igor Makarevich also reflect conceptualist approaches and abandon a commitment to the unmanipulated, descriptive photographic print.

The photo-related works in the Dodge Collection encompass an extensive range of styles and techniques: one can find images combining mechanical and handworked processes, photo collages, photographs that are marked or painted on, photo silk screens, paintings created in photo-realist style, and conceptual photo works. Soviet nonconformist art never existed as a school or homogeneous movement with an aesthetic program but instead consisted of many individual styles. As a whole, the Dodge Collection echoes and documents the incredible scope and noteworthy achievements of the recent movement toward nontraditional photo-related artwork.

By the 1920s, many experimental artists in Russia recognized that photography constituted an important link between the artistic avant-garde and an emerging technological culture, and that the medium could be used to explore the formal issues that preoccupied the most advanced painting.[4] The avant-garde writer and critic Osip Brik (1888–1945) assumed the imminent replacement of representational painting by photography.[5] "The photographer records life and events more cheaply, more quickly, and more accurately than the painter. In this lies his strength, his great significance for society," stated Brik in his seminal 1926 essay, "The Photograph versus the Painting."[6] Brik also claimed that photography "is summoned to replace the painter's primitive methods of 'artistically reflecting life.' "[7]

Since the 1920s, the photograph increasingly has come to be a component incorporated in artworks as one of many diverse elements in mixed-media presentations. Beginning in the late 1950s, experimental artists throughout the world began making work that blurred distinctions between traditional mediums—painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking, and photography.[8] They also began reexamining commercial production technologies and uses of photographic images. The so-called "dematerialization of the art object" reached its logical conclusion in conceptual art. In the 1970s, as a result of this ongoing exploration of approaches to art making and the departure from the limitations of working with specific mediums, camera vision also became an important part of Soviet nonconformist artists' vocabulary. While not unique in their development of the potential of photography, radical Soviet artists freely moved between various mediums or combined them into hybrid and synthesized forms. Some saw photography as a medium ripe for experimental exploration, as a carrier of ideas. Yet the critical, generative role the photographic medium has played in contemporary Soviet art has begun to be investigated only relatively recently.[9]

From the 1960s to the 1980s, Soviet photography was a stepchild of the other arts in official art circles. Often, photography was seen exclusively as a means of propaganda and an instrument of the mass media. Usually trained in areas other than photography—such as painting, sculpture, theater, and literature—many Soviet nonconformist artists rejected conventional photographic craft. As the scholar of Soviet photography Margarita Tupitsyn has observed in her essay "Veil on Photo: Metamorphoses of Supplementarity,"[10] leading members of the older generation of nonconformist artists, such as Ilya Kabakov, Oleg Vassiliev, and Eric Bulatov, "took their visual lexicon from the arsenal of mass produced 'images,' 'narratives' and 'forms' available via photography,

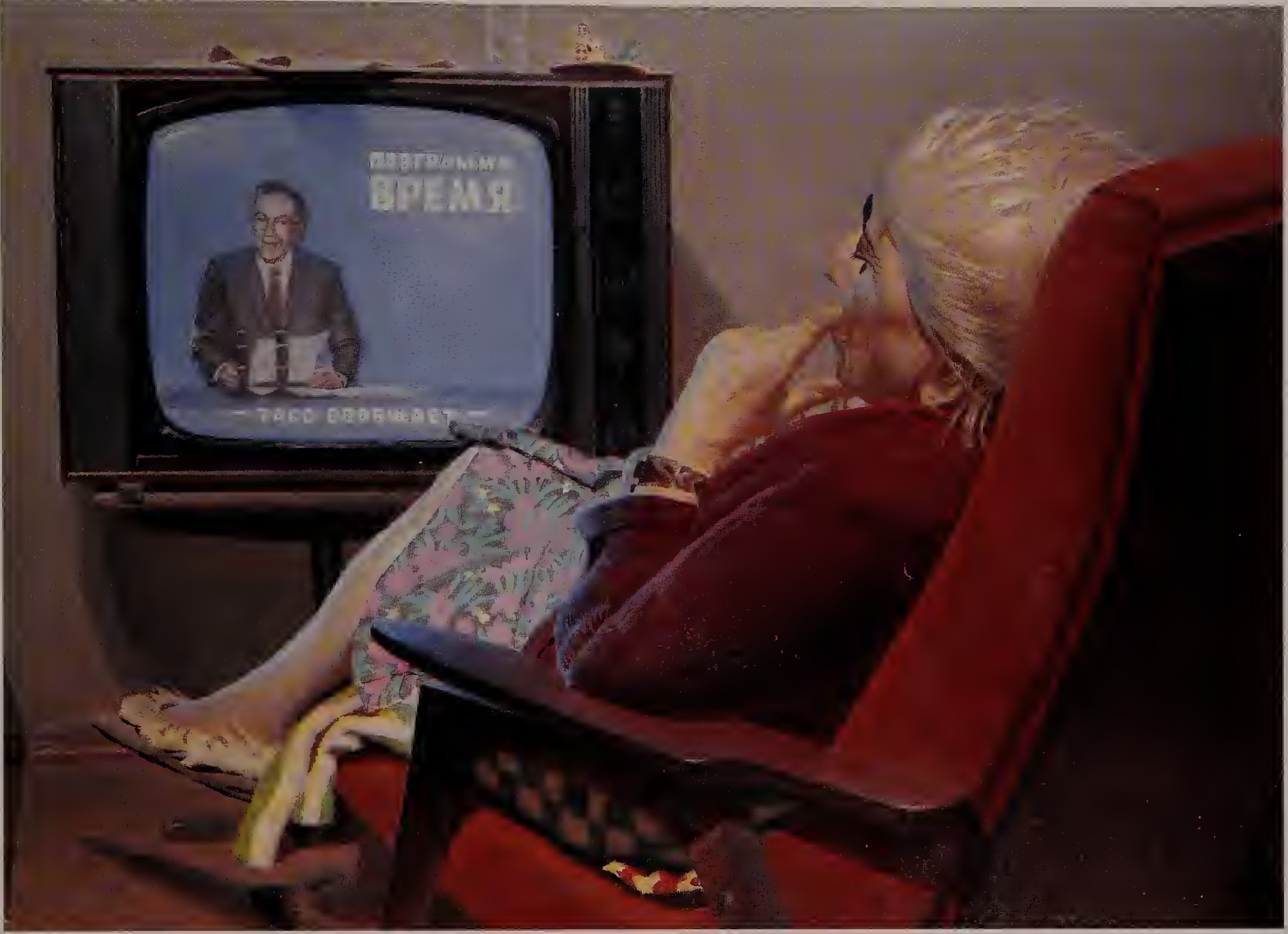


Fig. 108. Eric Bulatov, *At the TV*, 1982–85. Oil on canvas, 116 x 160 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05133.

posters and verbal cliches of Soviet ideological environment."[11]

Many of Bulatov's images are based on photos and photographic reproductions. Poet Vsevolod Nekrasov, the artist's close friend, has pointed out that it would be incorrect to define Bulatov as a photorealist.[12] Unlike photorealist artists, Bulatov produces meticulous studies of human figures and plants and paints freehand, without the use of a projector.[13] However, as Bulatov has noted, he does not wish to reveal any traces of the physicality of brush strokes and intentionally makes the surfaces of his paintings look like photographs. Bulatov believes that "for all the mendacity of existing reality, truth lies not beyond its confines, but before our eyes."[14] He uses the language of Soviet everyday reality, which is one of political clichés, used to expound ideology. He is convinced that in this official, impersonal idiom, "very personal things can be expressed."[15]

During the Soviet period, official artists created idealized images of Soviet life, far removed from reality, while many nonconformist artists looked at these subjects related to everyday Soviet life with contempt, believing that such themes were not appropriate for "real" painters. Bulatov did not turn away from everyday life—on the contrary, he made this mundane, unidealized life a major subject of his works (fig. 108). Although Bulatov maintained it would be erroneous to equate his work with the sots art works by artists such as Komar and Melamid or Alexander Kosolapov, in his works such as *Two Landscapes on a Red Background*, 1972–74 (fig. 109), and *Krasikov Street*, 1977 (fig. 110), he ironically deconstructs socialist realist imagery.

For Bulatov, reality consists of two types of spaces: the social space we inhabit in our daily lives, which exists in front of the picture plane, and the artistic space behind the picture plane.[16] In *Two Landscapes*, the red background signifies the association between official Soviet culture and the false illusions

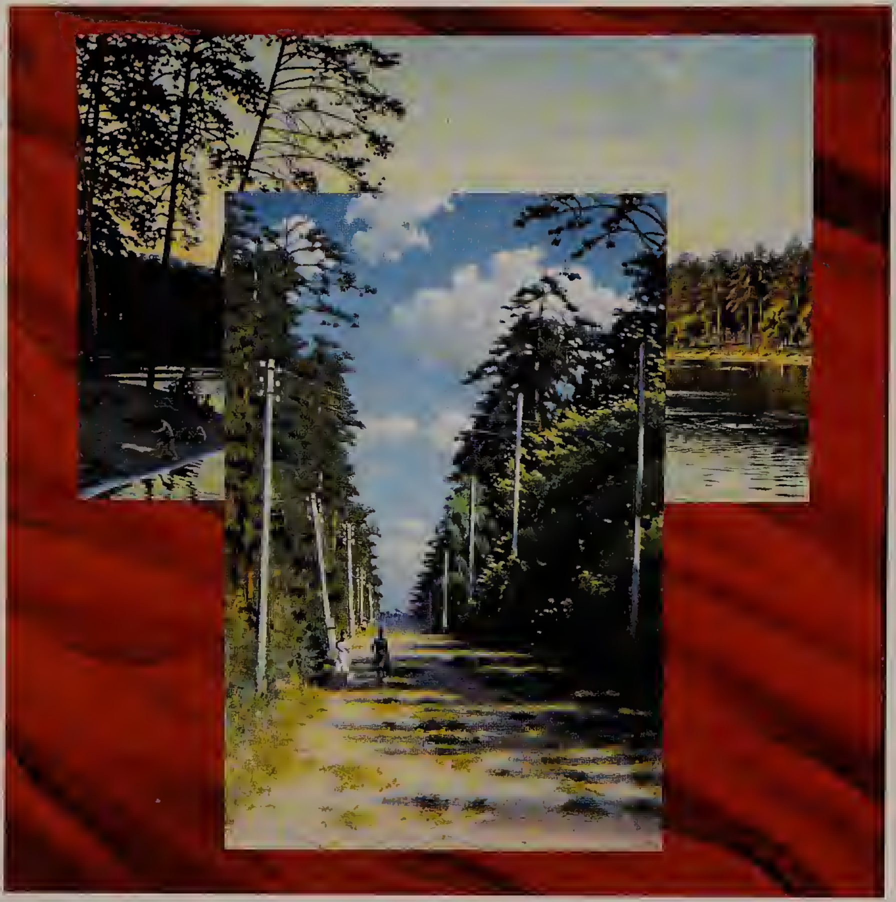


Fig. 109. Eric Bulatov, *Two Landscapes on a Red Background*, 1972–74. Oil on canvas, 110 x 110.3 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05260.

perpetuated through state-sponsored propaganda campaigns. In *Krasikov Street*, Bulatov seems to objectively document an average day on Krasikov Street, a residential area of Moscow, employing a style reminiscent of the realistic manner of canonical socialist realist paintings. In the background, a monumental poster of Lenin several times bigger than the figures on the street dominates the scene. Depicted *en face*, Lenin strides heroically in typical socialist realist fashion while the people shuffling along the street are more absorbed with their own mundane concerns than inspired by the forced enthusiasm of the Lenin poster. Bulatov's work documents the omnipresence of such propagandistic imagery and at the same time conveys the harsh reality and joylessness of Soviet life, subtly implying its surreal nature.

The Poet Vsevolod Nekrasov (fig. 111), painted over a four-year period ending in 1985, is also derived from a photograph, depicting the poet smiling broadly with his eyes shut. Bulatov has said that Nekrasov's writing is closely associated with his own work, and that the common ground between the poet and Bulatov is their preoccupation with things "that are common knowledge, self evident, obvious."[17] Bulatov often pointed out that light is a crucial factor in all of his works.[18] "I always paint light, and what emerges from it is the object," the artist has stated.[19] Bathed in hazy illumination and painted within a narrow range of tonal values, the portrait looks photographically overexposed.

Like Bulatov, Vassiliev was a leading member of Moscow nonconformist art circles.[20] Some of the ideas concerning the compositional structure of pictures as developed by his teacher, the Russian artist Vladimir Favorsky (1886–1969), particularly his idea of "high" and "low" space, were used by Vassiliev in constructing the complex spatial structures of his paintings, often based on photographs. The most important aspect of Vassiliev's works is the light directed at the beholder. This light energy frequently permeates the objects in the picture. In his 1980 work, he depicts a cover of the magazine *Ogonyok* showing a Politburo meeting (fig. 95, p. 111). Glowing rays of light stream from four directions and merge on a podium, creating an apocalyptic setting.

Many sots art artists represented in the Dodge Collection sought to undermine notions of originality and authorship.[21] Boris Orlov, one of the major sots art artists, in his work *The Generals of Russian Science and Culture*, 1982 (fig. 112), presents the most important figures in Russian culture and science as generals with uniforms and numerous medals. Their busts, mounted on marble pedestals like those of Roman emperors, are frontal and static. In such totemic portraits it is not the individual characteristics of the subject that count but those that make him belong to a certain "collective entity." These portraits satirically recall popular representational portraits of past ages and cultures in which the significance of the subject was represented not by revealing his unique character traits or complex inner world but through the exuberance of accessories—medals, costly garments, etc. Through his anti-psychological, cliché-like images of important Russian cultural figures, Orlov ironically refers to the archetypal totemic way of thinking in which material objects are thought to have real power over people. The familiar cultural icons are viewed in terms of their fetishized commodity status.

Alexander Kosolapov also utilizes major cultural icons as the basis for his works. He is concerned with the deconstruction of the notion of originality and with replication. Similar to the American artist Cindy

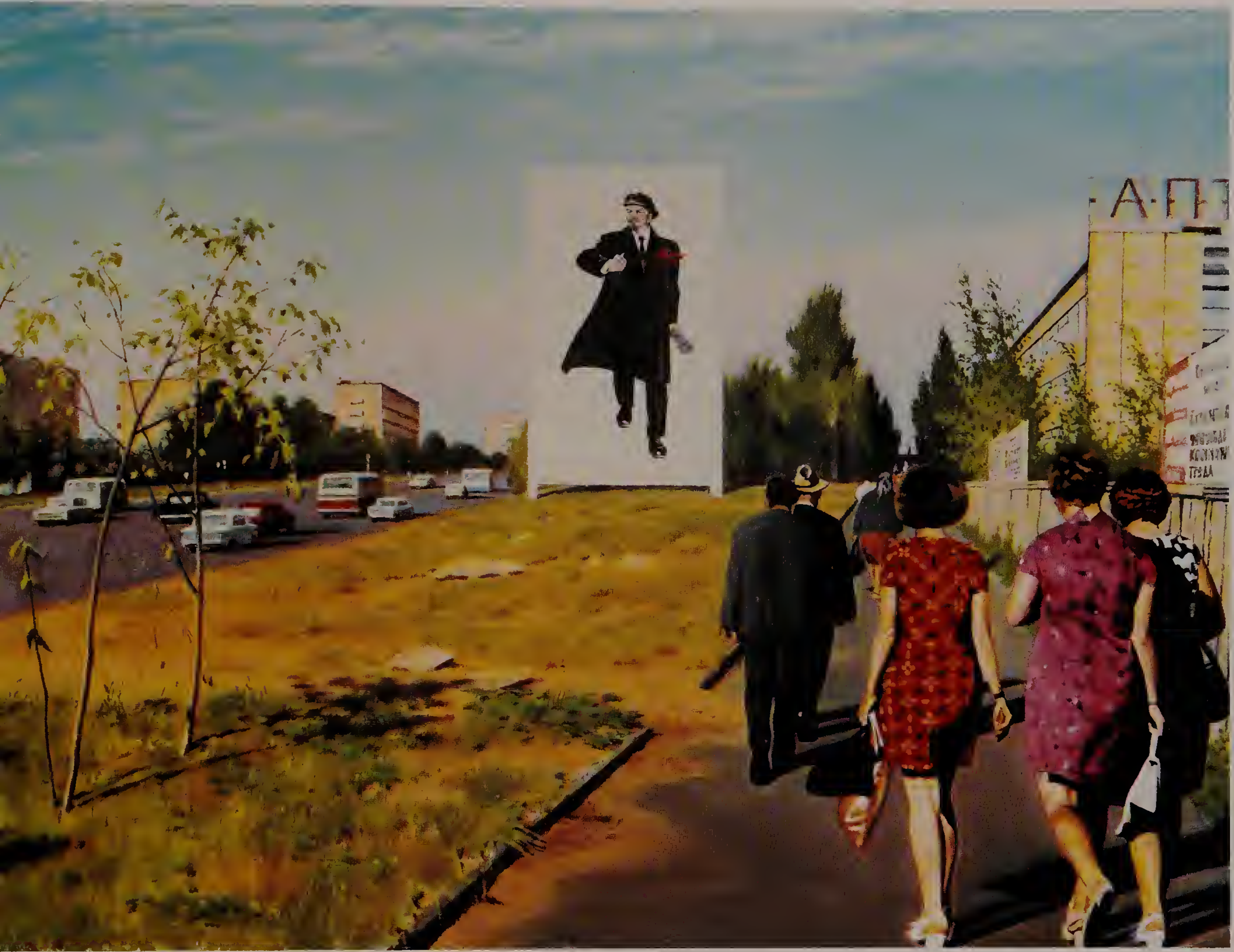


Fig. 110. Eric Bulatov, *Krasikov Street*, 1977. Oil on canvas, 150 x 198.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05125.

Sherman (b. 1954), Kosolapov allied the arts of performance and photography, casting himself as the star of inventive series of still photographs. Kosolapov frees objects from their usual associations, deconstructing familiar images. In *St. Sebastian*, 1980 (fig. 113), Kosolapov appropriates the iconography of a Christian saint, who is usually presented as a handsome, nearly nude young man, his body tied to a tree or column and pierced with arrows.[22] Kosolapov's subversion of the traditional Renaissance imagery of St. Sebastian is accomplished through the representation of the artist himself posing as St. Sebastian as well as through the insertion of an emblem of the Soviet state—a hammer and sickle. In his work, Kosolapov disconnects the image of the saint from its conventional aesthetic, social, and political frames.

Kosolapov's diptych *Caviar*, 1990 (fig. 114), also alters the work on which it is based. Kosolapov's work appropriates the famous 1924 photograph by the major avant-garde artist of the 1920s, Aleksandr Rodchenko.[23] The photograph depicts Osip Brik, a member and a contributor to the constructivist journal *LEF* (Left Front of the Arts), with the inscription "LEF" visually superimposed on one of the lenses of his glasses. The right part of Kosolapov's diptych is Kosolapov's self-portrait, which mimics the portrait of Brik, and an image of a can of Russian caviar replaces a reference to *LEF* in Brik's portrait. Kosolapov's replication of the iconic image of Brik pointedly undermines the ideals of modernism. The image of a can of caviar alludes to Warhol's images of cans of Campbell soup. Kosolapov's diptych also signifies the replacement of the "utopian dream" of the Russian avant-garde with an image of a commodity.

In the early 1970s, Soviet conceptual artists questioned, reinterpreted, or totally abandoned the

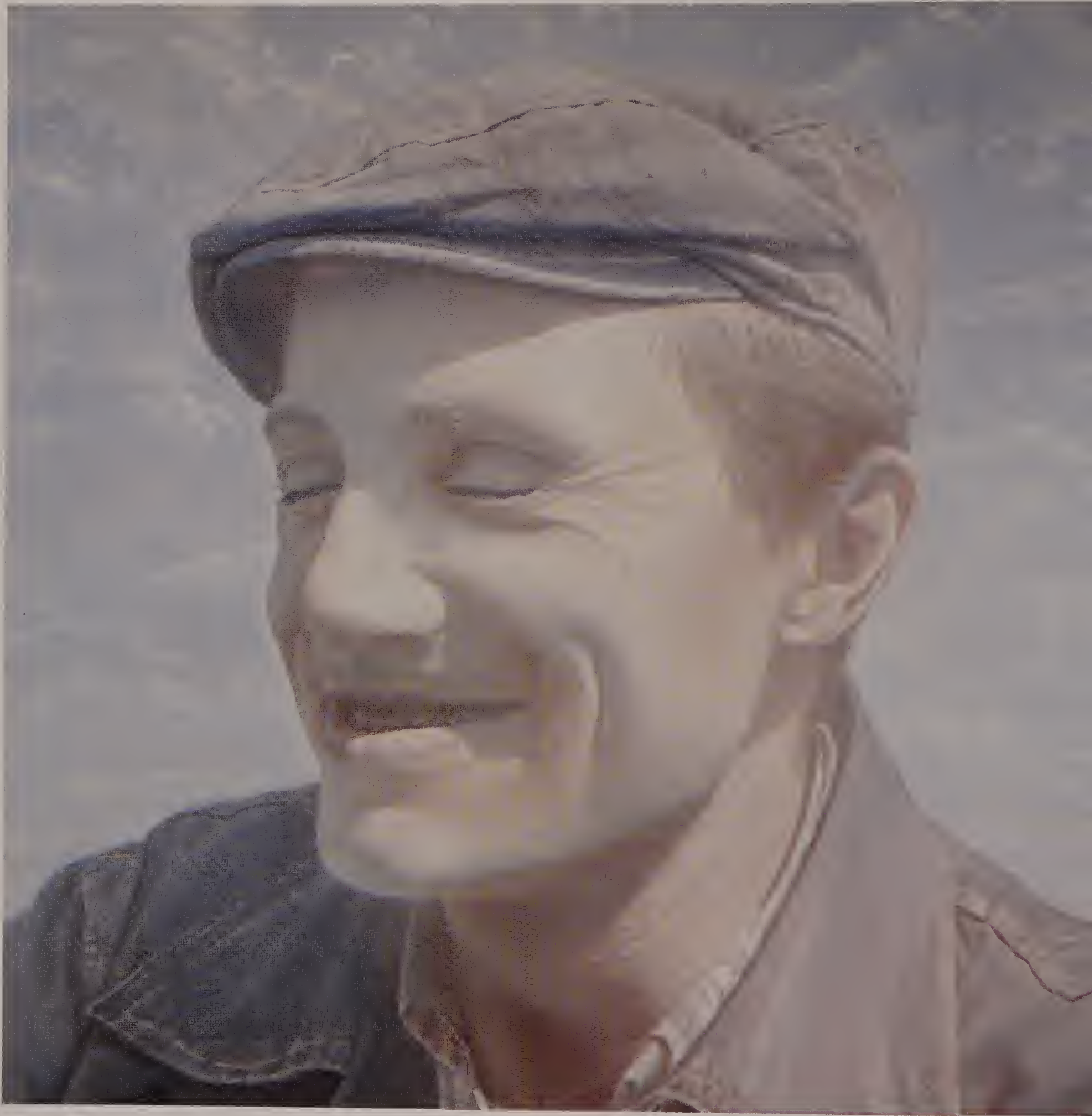


Fig. 111. Eric Bulatov, *The Poet Vsevolod Nekrasov*, 1981–85.
Oil on canvas, 201 x 201 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05123.

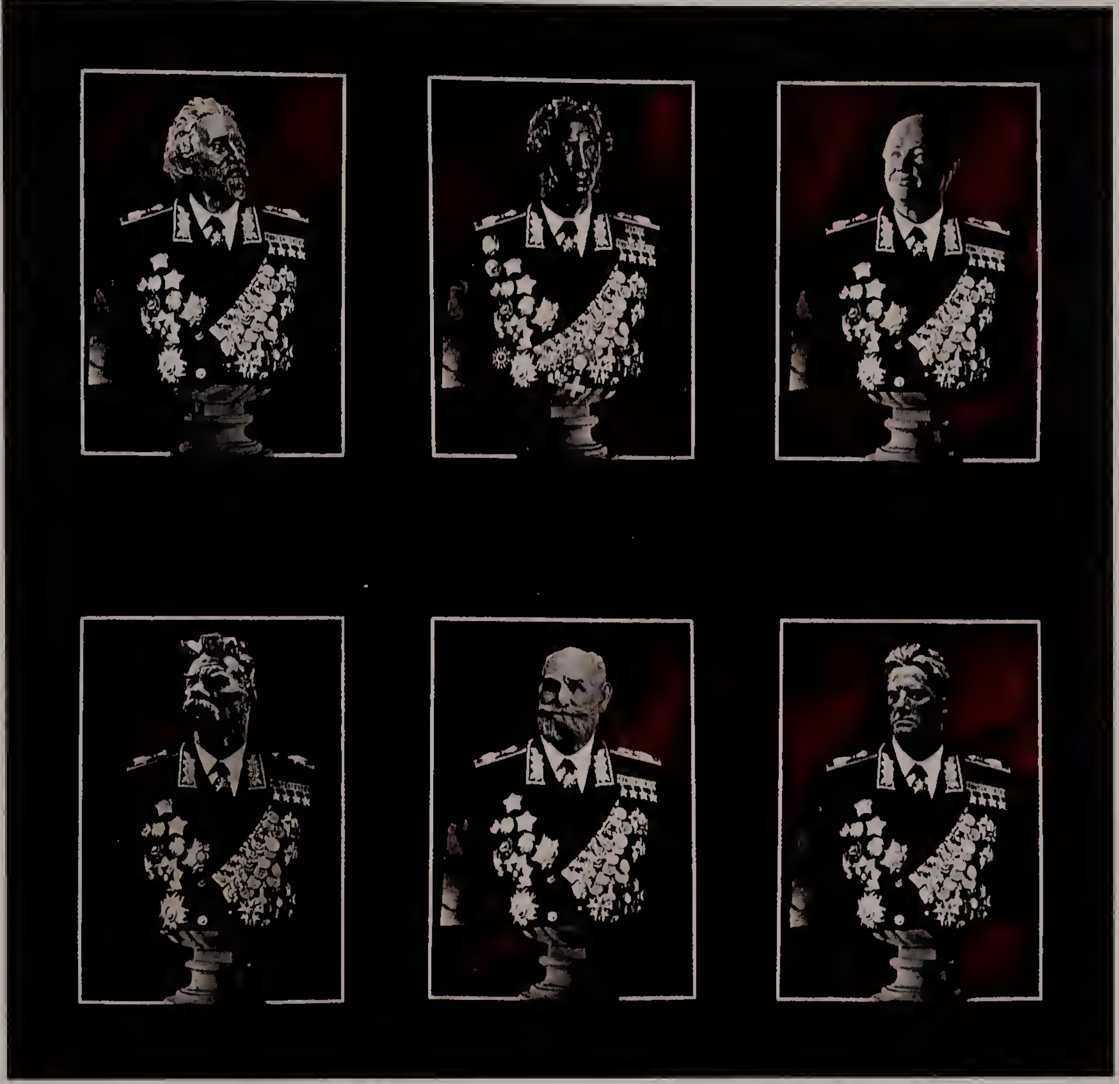


Fig. 112. Boris Orlov, *The Generals of Russian Science and Culture* (Ilya Repin, Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lomonosov, Maxim Gorky, Ivan Pavlov, and Vladimir Mayakovsky), 1982. Collage on paper. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 18898.01–06.

traditional categories of painting and sculpture. In conceptual art, as defined by Sol LeWitt, the idea of "concept" became the most important aspect of the work. As LeWitt pointed out, "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair."[24] For conceptual artists, the meaning of the photograph functions as a sign or indicator of an idea rather than as a precious object to be savored for its surface appearance or expressive capacity.

Many Soviet nonconformist artists used photographs in ways consistent with the practices of minimalism and conceptual art.[25] For example, they explored the possibilities of series as permutations within a general system and often presented their series in gridded formats. Vagrich Bakhchanyan, Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, Komar and Melamid, Igor Makarevich, Georgii Kizevalter, and Vadim Zakharov employed photography as objective records of their performances (see "Freeze Frame" in this volume).

The team of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid often work with photographic prints, and their performances parody archetypes of social systems.[26] Margarita Tupitsyn has pointed out that Komar and Melamid borrowed from official myths, subverted them, and came up with a new set of cultural paradigms.[27] *Grinding "Pravda,"* 1975 (see figs. 87A and 87B, p. 100), is a commentary on the Soviet official press. It documents the artists' act of reducing a copy of *Pravda* (Truth), the major official newspaper of the Communist Party, into a small, hamburger-shaped patty by forcing it through a meat grinder. In its newly concentrated form, it is now called *The Essence of Truth*, suggestively commenting on the proportion of truth to be found within the pages of the entire original publication.[28]

Circle, Square, Triangle, 1975 (fig. 115), by Komar and Melamid, ironically comments on the modernist rediscovery of "ideal forms," such as the cube and the circle, that facilitated the internationalization of art. Just as the white square alludes to Kazimir Malevich's

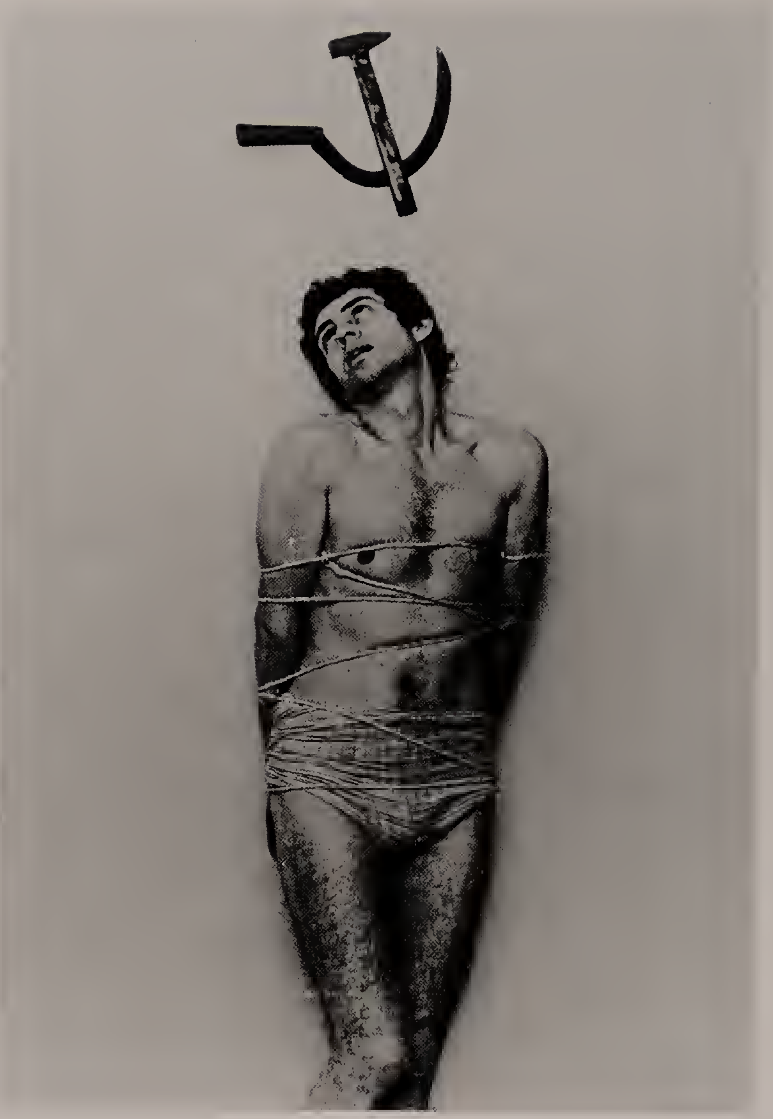


Fig. 113. Alexander Kosolapov, *St. Sebastian*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, 25.3 x 20.3 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 13627.01. Gift of the artist.

White Square painting of 1915, Komar and Melamid's work is a parody of the "mass-produced" ideals and an allusion to the symbolism in Soviet socialist realist architecture (where, for example, fifteen columns were used to symbolize fifteen Soviet republics).

A portfolio of thirty-six color photographs entitled *Catalogue of Super Objects—Super Comfort for Super People*, 1976 (figs. 116A–D), is Komar and Melamid's satire of Western consumerism. According to Komar, in this work the artists also parody the concept of *proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo* (Production Art), the idea of uniting art and industrial manufacturing promoted in the 1920s. The Productivists argued that bourgeois distinctions between art and industry should be abolished and that art should be considered as merely another aspect of manufacturing. Komar and Melamid deconstruct the main idea of Production Art that "the outer appearance of an object is determined by the object's economic purpose and not by abstract, aesthetic considerations."[29] In *Super Objects*, Komar and Melamid depict a series of devices the artists invented after receiving some department-store catalogues from friends in the West. These devices have specific applications, but they serve absurd purposes. As a case in point, one of the photographs, illustrating the proverb that "every word is like a pearl," depicts a man with a pearl on his tongue. This work is an iconoclastic reaction against the concept of "useful" art. Komar and Melamid divided the *Super Objects* into different categories, such as furniture and clothing. They even produced real objects but were not able to take them out of Russia.[30]

The origin for the concept of another important work by Komar and Melamid, *We Buy and Sell Souls*, 1978–83 (figs. 117A–G), is remarkably literary, which is typical for Moscow conceptualism—a movement that included writers as well as artists.[31] *We Buy and Sell Souls* is characterized by the absurd contrast between bureaucratic corporate forms and their mystical content. According to Komar, when he and Melamid first came to New York, not simply the world of the art market and galleries but all corporate business seemed

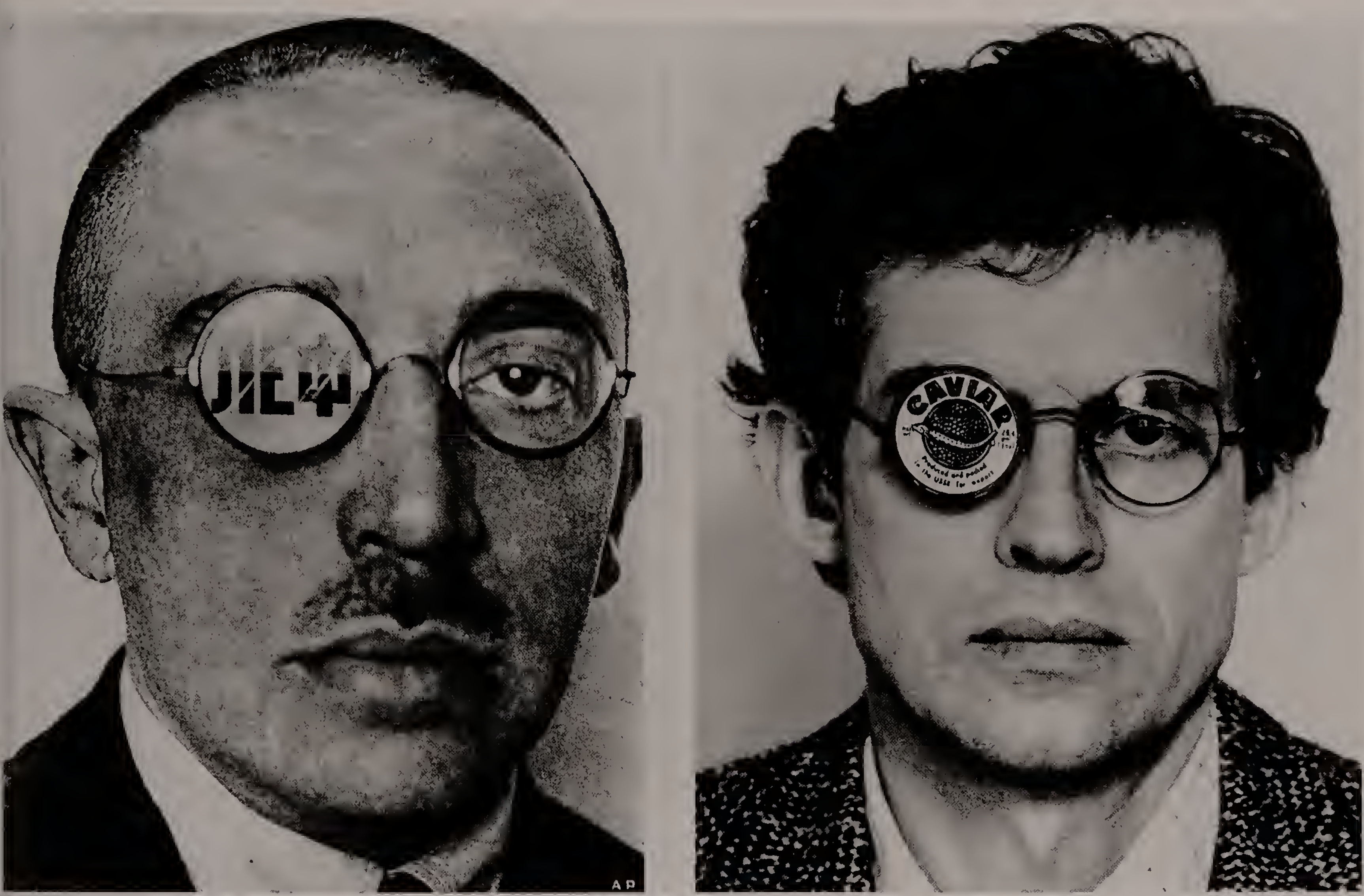


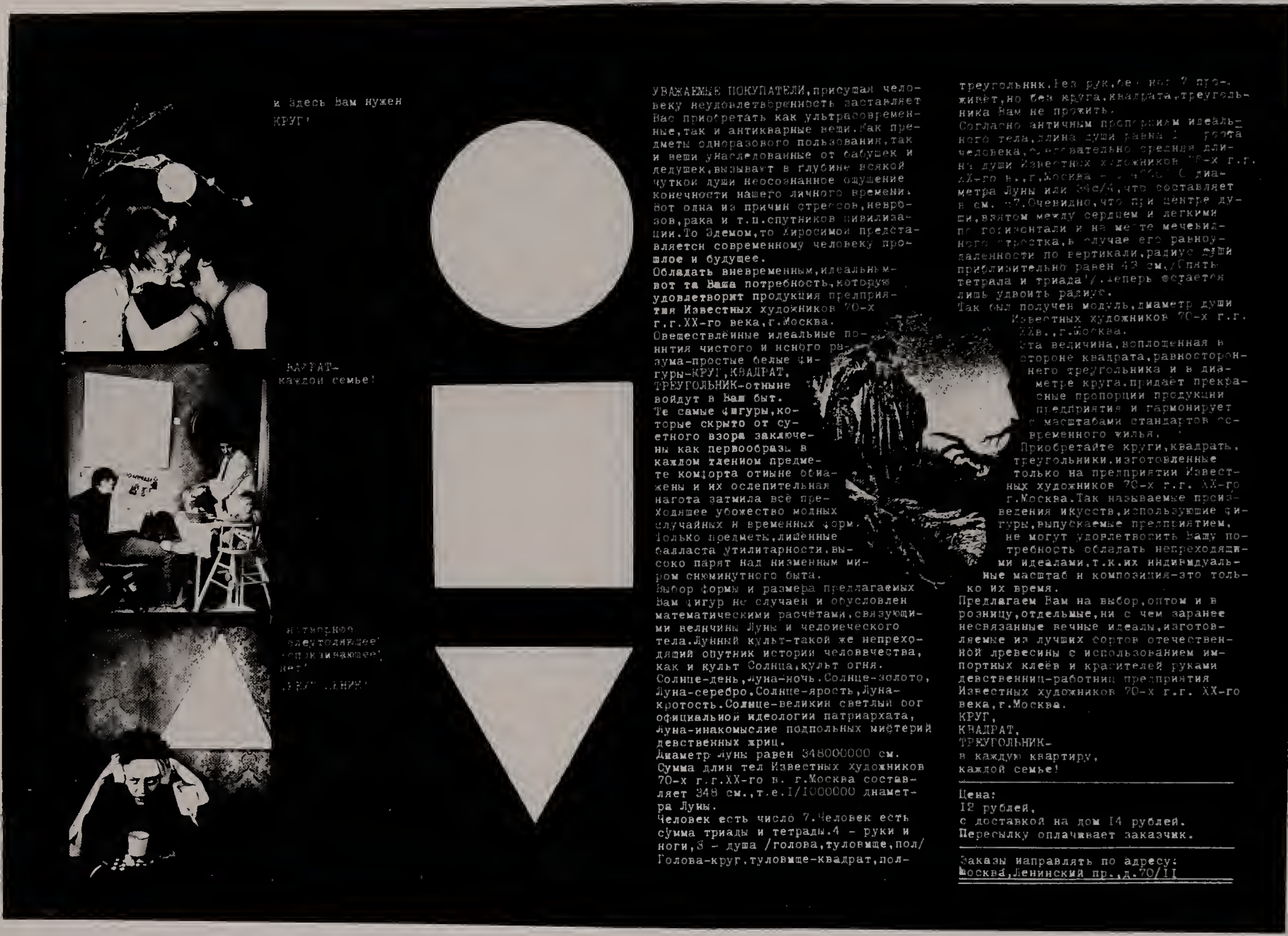
Fig. 114. Alexander Kosolapov, *Caviar*, 1990. Gelatin silver prints, 25.3 x 20.3 cm each. ZAM, 13628.01–02. Gift of the artist.

to them to be a mysterious, dangerous, and fascinating game.[32] Therefore, in 1978 they decided to become "real capitalists." They invented the ideal commodity and a market without competition, registering and founding "Komar and Melamid Inc.—Sale and Purchase of Human Souls." They placed ads and notices in newspapers and magazines to great success. Almost one hundred people sold them their souls on a commission basis. Komar and Melamid held their special auction in Moscow, where all imported souls, including those of Norton Dodge and Andy Warhol, were sold. The many people who signed the bright red forms participated as co-artists of *Souls*, and their signatures joined those of the artists. In the 1980s, Komar and Melamid declared bankruptcy and abandoned this business. The artists pointed out, "The problem is that many people want to sell their souls but nobody wants to buy them."[33]

Like Komar and Melamid, Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin have achieved a masterful blend of humor, perceptiveness, and inventiveness in their work. Since 1977, the Gerlovins have created many performances in which they have participated as actors. The Gerlovins' performances have no spectators, only participants. One of their basic concerns is the creation of "an atmosphere of play." Elements of nonsatirical (basically moralizing) and entertaining fun are present in nearly all their work.[34]

In 1976, Rimma Gerlovina created one of her first "poems-constructions" entitled *Paradise-Purgatory-Hell* (fig. 118), which was hung on a wall like a painting. The honeycomb-like structure was filled with cubes with names of famous people such as Socrates, Raphael, Nobel, Confucius, Lincoln, Alexander the Great, Trotsky, Schopenhauer, Newton, and the Beatles. These cubes were supposed to be handled by the spectators, who could rearrange the cubes, write their own poetry, and pass judgment. The cubes with the names of different personalities drift between "paradise," "purgatory," and "hell," the layers of a final destination, fixed and infinite at the same time.

One of the Gerlovins' wittiest photo documentations


и здесь Вам нужен
КРУГ!
КВАДРАТ–
каждой семье!
успокаивающее
нет!
ТРЕУГОЛЬНИК!

УВАЖАЕМЫЕ ПОКУПАТЕЛИ,присущая человеку неудовлетворенность заставляет Вас приобретать как ультрасовременные,так и антикварные вещи.Как предметы одноразового пользования,так и вещи унаследованные от бабушек и дедушек,вызывают в глубине всякой чуткой души неосознанное ощущение конечности нашего личного времени. Вот одна из причин стрессов,неврозов,рака и т.п.спутников цивилизации.То Эдемом,то Хиросимой представляется современному человеку прошлое и будущее.

Обладать вневременным,идеальным-вот та Ваша потребность,которую удовлетворит продукция предприятия Известных художников 70-х г.г.XX-го века,г.Москва.

Овеществлённые идеальные понятия чистого и ясного разума-простые белые фигуры-КРУГ,КВАДРАТ, ТРЕУГОЛЬНИК-отныне войдут в Ваш быт.

Те самые фигуры,которые скрыто от суетного взора заключены как первообразы в каждом тленном предмете комфорта отныне обнажены и их ослепительная нагота затмила всё преходящее убожество модных случайных и временных форм. Только предметы,лишённые балласта утилитарности,высоко парят над низменным миром сиюминутного быта.

Выбор формы и размера предлагаемых Вам фигур не случаен и обусловлен математическими расчётами,связующими величины Луны и человеческого тела.Лунный культ-такой же непреходящий спутник истории человечества, как и культ Солнца,культ огня. Солнце-день,Луна-ночь.Солнце-золото, Луна-серебро.Солнце-ярость,Луна-кротость.Солнце-великий светлый бог официальной идеологии патриархата, Луна-инакомыслие подпольных мистерий девственных жриц.

Диаметр Луны равен 348000000 см. Сумма длин тел Известных художников 70-х г.г.XX-го в. г.Москва составляет 348 см.,т.е.1/1000000 диаметра Луны.

Человек есть число 7.Человек есть сумма триады и тетрады.4 – руки и ноги,3 – душа /голова,туловище,пол/ Голова-круг,туловище-квадрат,пол-треугольник.Без рук,без ног [illegible] проживёт,но без круга,квадрата,треугольника Вам не прожить.

Согласно античным пропорциям идеального тела,длина души равна 1/[illegible] роста человека,следовательно средняя длина души Известных художников 70-х г.г. XX-го в.,г.Москва – [illegible] диаметра Луны или 348/4,что составляет [illegible] см.Очевидно,что при центре души,взятом между сердцем и легкими по горизонтали и на месте мечевидного отростка,в случае его равноудаленности по вертикали,радиус души приблизительно равен 43 см./Опять тетрада и триада!/.Теперь остается лишь удвоить радиус.

Так был получен модуль,диаметр души Известных художников 70-х г.г. XXв.,г.Москва.

Эта величина,воплощенная в стороне квадрата,равностороннего треугольника и в диаметре круга,придаёт прекрасные пропорции продукции предприятия и гармонирует с масштабами стандартов современного жилья.

Приобретайте круги,квадраты,треугольники,изготовленные только на предприятии Известных художников 70-х г.г. XX-го г.Москва.Так называемые произведения искусства,использующие фигуры,выпускаемые предприятием, не могут удовлетворить Вашу потребность обладать непреходящими идеалами,т.к.их индивидуальные масштаб и композиция-это только их время.

Предлагаем Вам на выбор,оптом и в розницу,отдельные,ни с чем заранее несвязанные вечные идеалы,изготовляемые из лучших сортов отечественной древесины с использованием импортных клеёв и красителей руками девственниц-работниц предприятия Известных художников 70-х г.г. XX-го века,г.Москва.

КРУГ,
КВАДРАТ,
ТРЕУГОЛЬНИК-
в каждую квартиру,
каждой семье!

Цена:
12 рублей,
с доставкой на дом 14 рублей.
Пересылку оплачивает заказчик.

Заказы направлять по адресу:
Москва,Ленинский пр.,д.70/11

Fig. 115. Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Circle, Square, Triangle*, 1975. Gelatin silver print, 59.8 x 83.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07727.01.

Translation of *Circle, Square, Triangle*:

To Prospective Customers:

Ladies and Gentlemen, the urge for the gratification of ever-new desires leads you to buy either ultramodern goods or superannuated antiques. All our belongings, be they designated for use only once or inherited from our grandparents, generate in the depth of any sensitive soul a nascent feeling of the finiteness of our personal existence. Herein lies one of the causes of the stresses, neuroses, cancers, and other negative side effects of civilization. The modern man's image of the past and the future ranges from Eden to Hiroshima.

To possess the non-temporal, the ideal—this need of yours will be satisfied by the production of Renowned Artists of the Twentieth-Century Seventies, Moscow. Substantiated ideal concepts of pure and clear reason are simple white figures —a CIRCLE, a SQUARE, and a TRIANGLE—figures that are from now on destined to become a part of your life. These very figures, hidden from pragmatic vision, are the prototypes confined in each and every perishable object of comfort; they have now been disclosed and their blinding nudity has eclipsed all the transient mediocrity of fashionable chance and temporal forms. Only objects devoid of the dead weight of utilitarian function soar high aloft above the lowly world of daily life.

The forms and dimensions of the figures we offer you are not fortuitous ones. They have been arrived at by mathematical computations that link together the dimensions of the Moon and of the human body. The Moon cult is just as abiding a historical companion of Mankind as are the Sun or Fire cults. The Sun is day, the Moon is night. The Sun is gold, the Moon is silver. The Sun is fury, the Moon is meekness. The Sun is the great, bright power of the official Patriarchy, the Moon is the dissentience of the obscure mysteries of virginal priestesses.

The diameter of the Moon is 348,000,000 centimeters. The combined length of the bodies of Renowned Artists of the Twentieth-Century Seventies, Moscow, is equal to 348 cm., i.e., 1/1,000,000 of the lunar diameter.

Man is the digit 7. Man is the sum of a triad and a tetrad, 4 being his four limbs, 3—his soul (head, trunk, and sex). The head is a circle, the trunk—a square, sex—a triangle. Seven will survive without his four limbs, but you cannot live without the circle, square, and triangle.

According to the ideal bodily proportions evolved by the ancients, the length of the soul is one-half of a man's height, hence the mean length of the soul of the Renowned Artists of the Twentieth-Century Seventies, Moscow, is equal to 1/4,000,000 of the diameter of the Moon, or 348/4, which, on conversion to the metric system, makes 86 cm. Obviously, if the center of the soul, given as being between the heart and lungs in the horizontal plane, is the site of the xiphisteznum, then when equidistant in the vertical plane, the soul's radius is equal to approximately 43 cm. (Again we have a tetrad and a triad!) Now we merely have to double this radius.

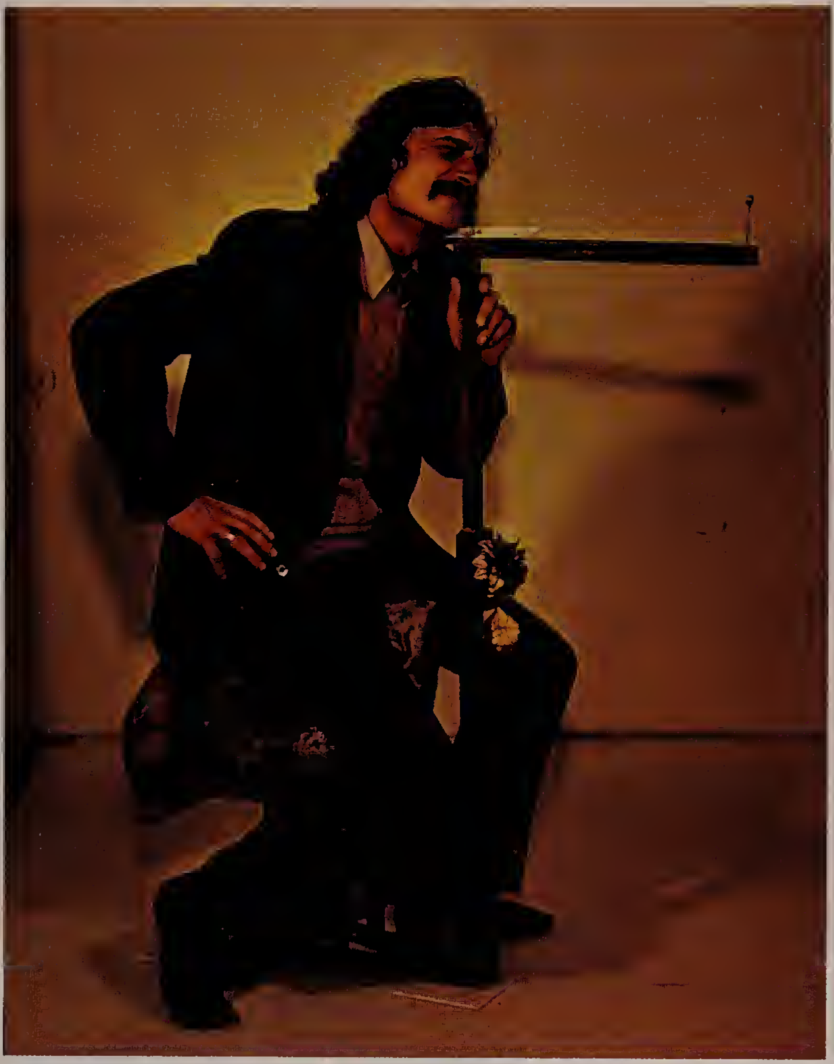
So this is how a module for the diameter of the soul(s) of the Renowned Artists of the Twentieth-Century Seventies, Moscow, is derived.

This value, incarnated in the sides of a square, an equilateral triangle, and in the diameter of a circle, gives splendid proportions to the products manufactured by this company and harmonizes with the dimensions of the standard modern home.

Buy the circles, squares, and triangles manufactured solely by Renowned Artists of the Twentieth-Century Seventies, Moscow. The so-called works of art utilizing the figures produced by our enterprise cannot satisfy your urge to possess eternal ideals, insofar as their individual scale and composition reflect their own time alone.

Take your choice, we can supply you, wholesale and retail, with individual eternal ideals linked a priori to nothing, manufactured from the highest quality of domestic lumber and imported cements and painted by the hands of the virginal maidens employed by the enterprise of Renowned Artists of the Twentieth-Century Seventies, Moscow.

A CIRCLE,
A SQUARE,
A TRIANGLE—
for every home, for every family!



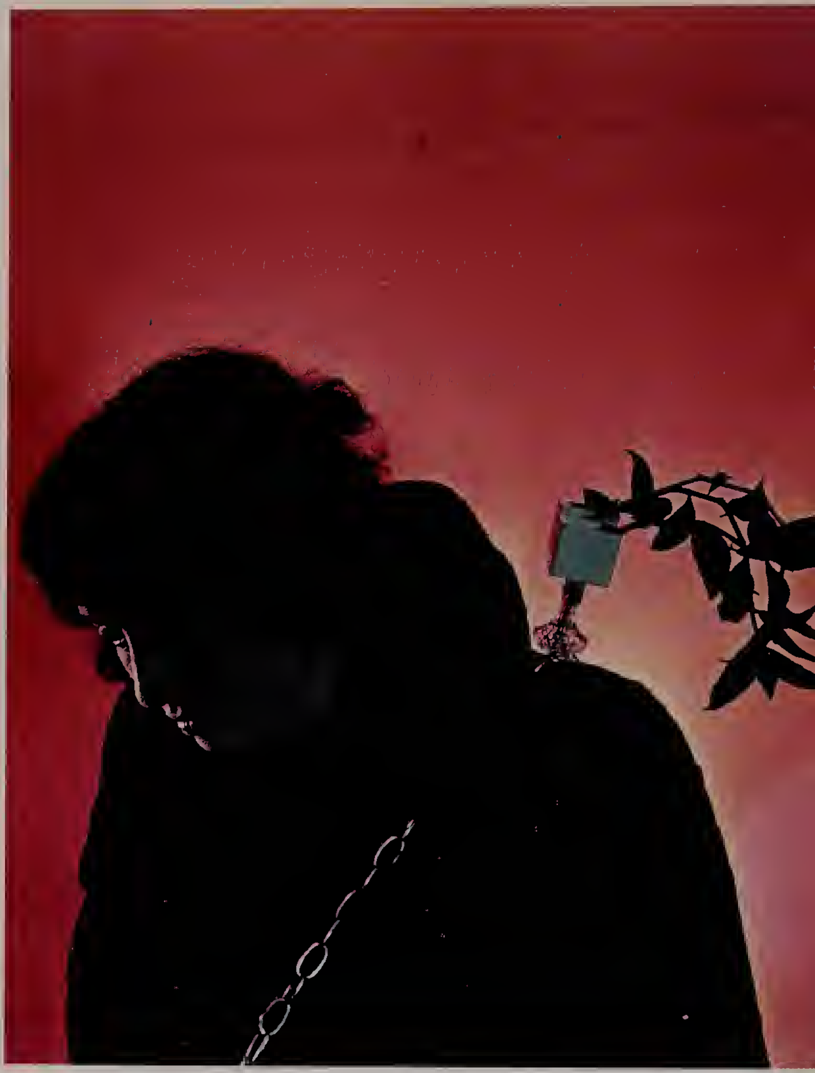
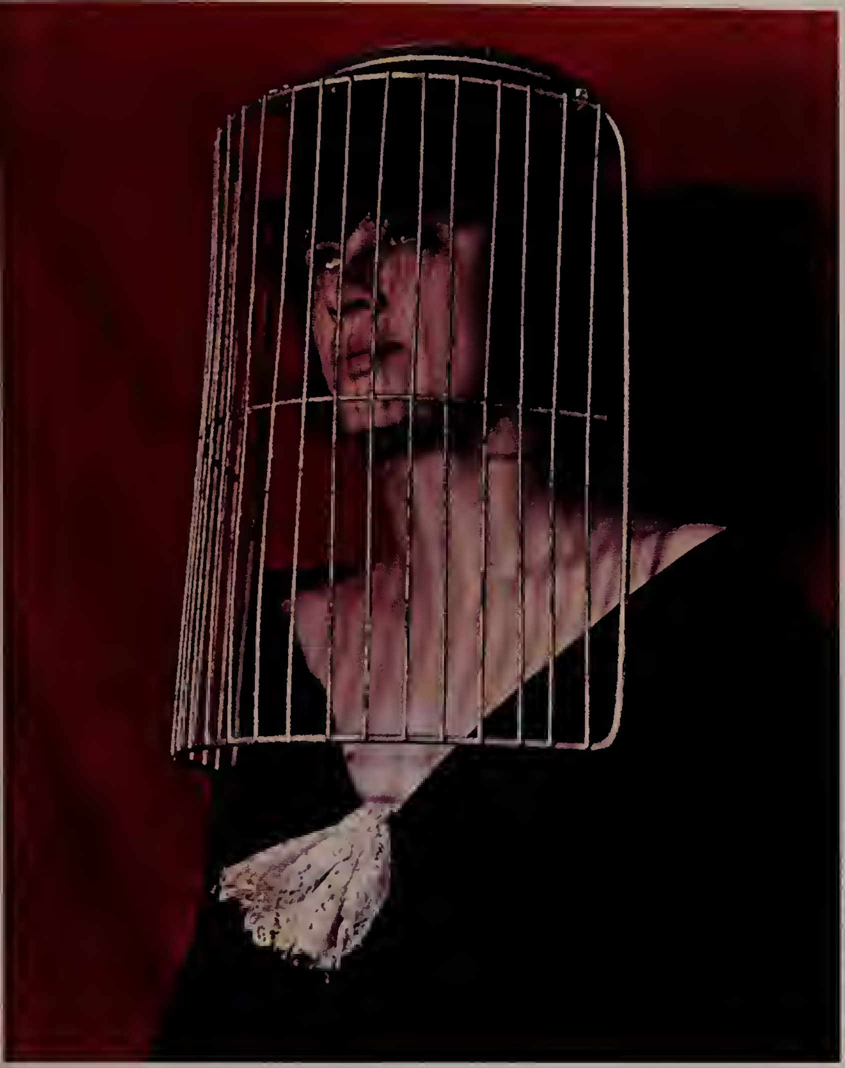


Fig. 116A (*above left*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Dylo-2* from the series of thirty-six works, with text, *Catalogue of Super Objects—Super Comfort for Super People*, 1976. Type-C print, 25.2 x 20.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07596.15. Accompanying text:

> *DYLO-2*
>
> *A Seat to help correct vision and concentrate consciousness on ordinary objects, revealing them in a new way.*

Fig. 116B (*above right*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Kashpo* from the series of thirty-six works, with text, *Catalogue of Super Objects—Super Comfort for Super People*, 1976. Type-C print, 25.2 x 20.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07596.09. Accompanying text:

> *KASHPO—TELOZEMLYATSVETOK*
> *"Bodyearthflower":*
>
> *Our new models—KASHPO 413,270 and 923—*
> *made from special alloys of precious metals …*
> *unite you with Nature.*
>
> *Any season, any place, at home or in the streets,*
> *wear a small patch of Earth with a Flower—*
> *Your Indivisible Self.*
>
> *The fragrance of the flower and the smell of*
> *fertilized, damp earth will follow you everywhere,*
> *consoling and elating you*



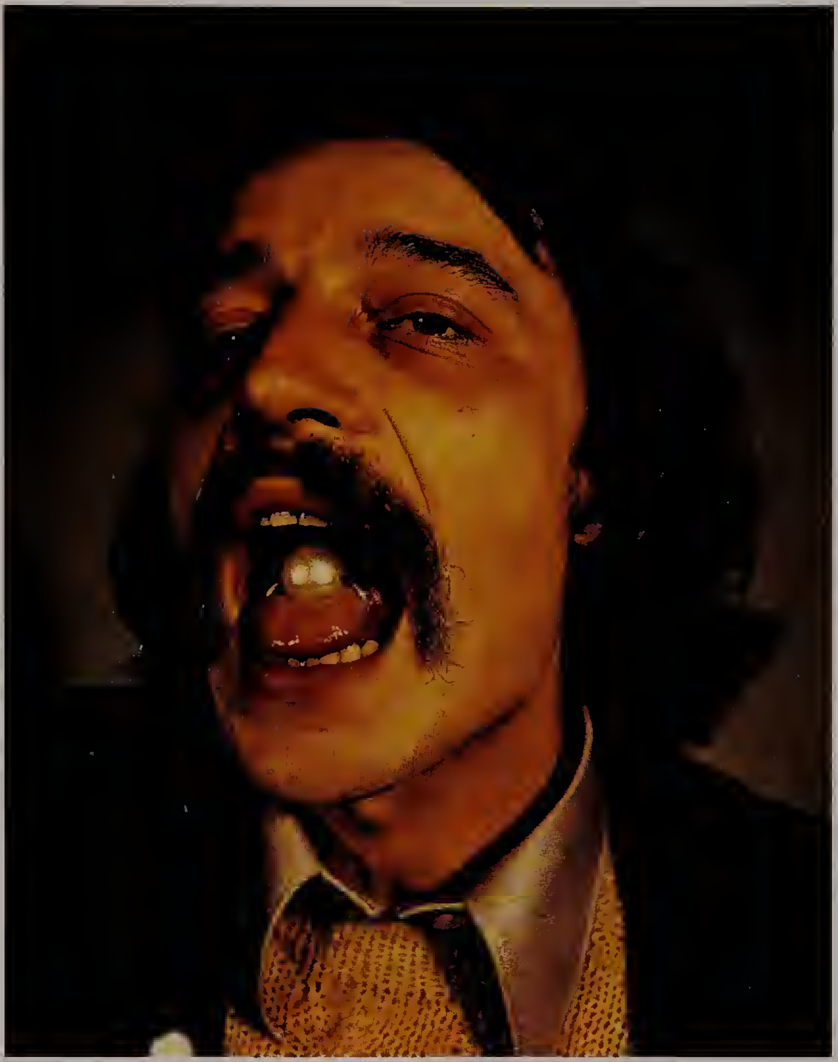
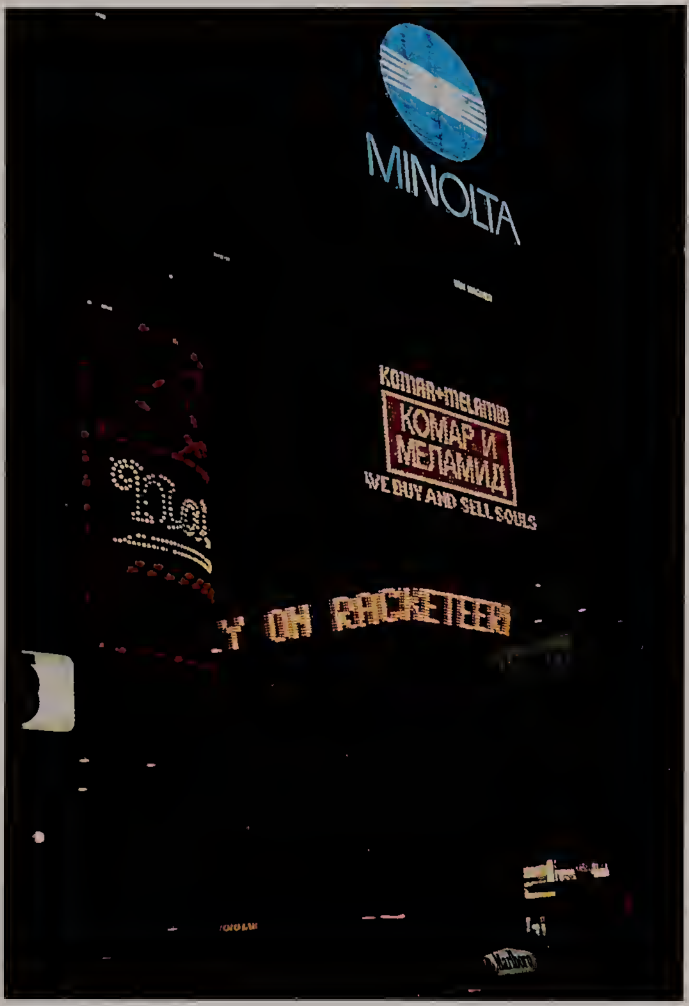


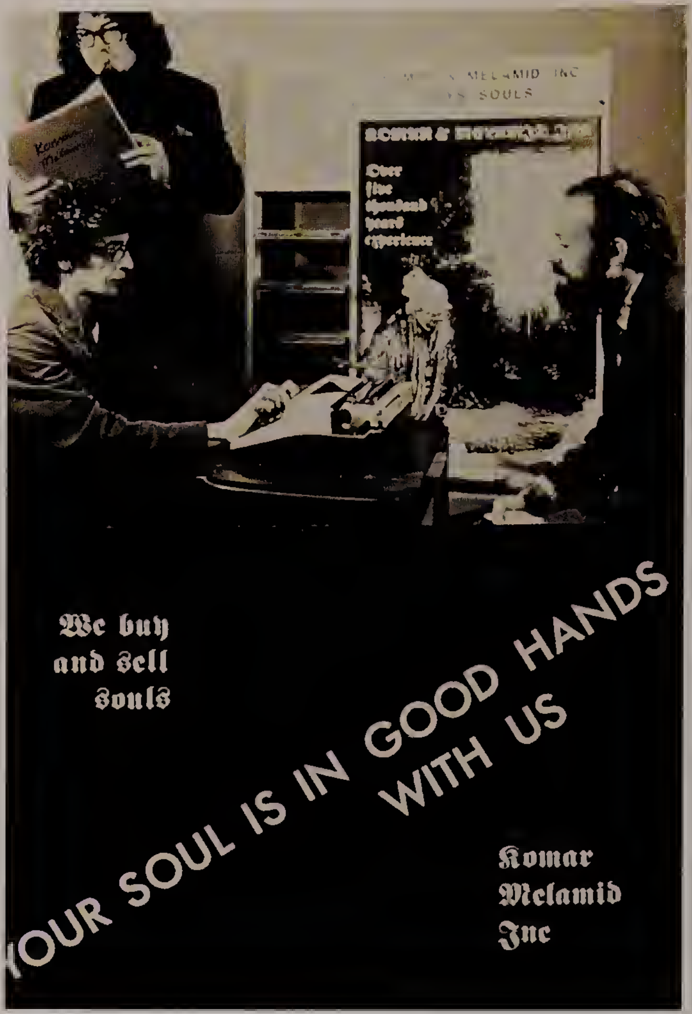
Fig. 116c (*above left*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Charog-15* from the series of thirty-six works, with text, *Catalogue of Super Objects—Super Comfort for Super People*, 1976. Type-C print, 25.2 x 20.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07596.10. Accompanying text:

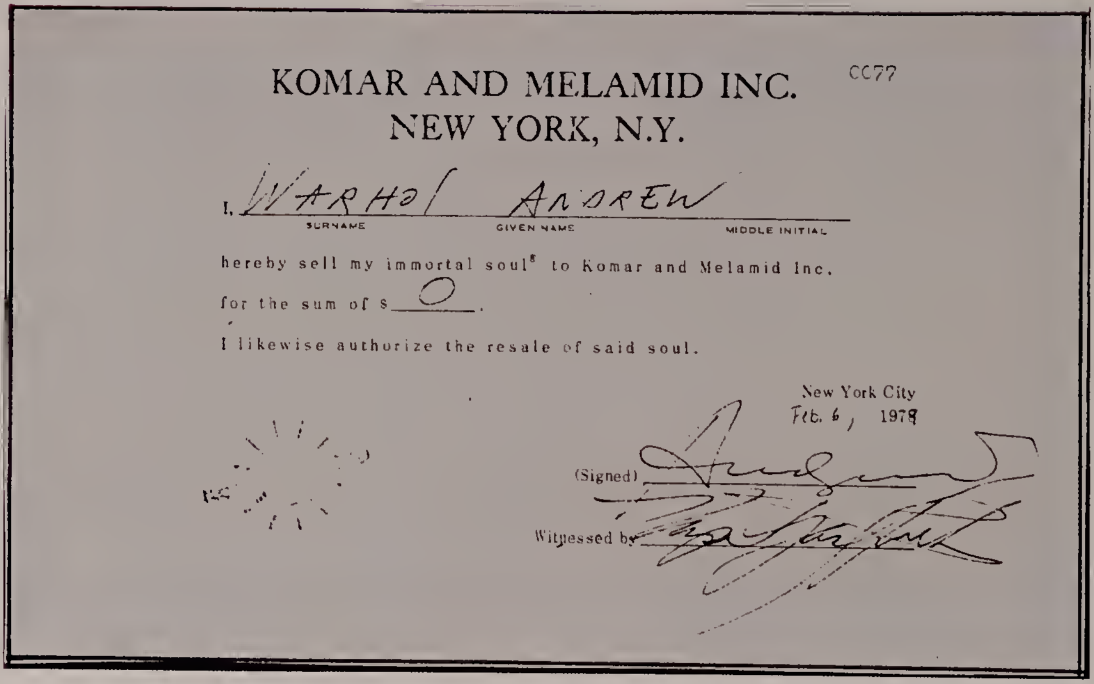
> *CHAROG-15*
> *Protect the purity of your thoughts:*
>
> *Incantations and curses hold no fear for the CHAROG owner.*
>
> *CHAROG: Real security against mass hypnosis and demagoguery.*
>
> *Thin, gold-plated strings lock the vices of the*
> *surrounding world behind a grill and protect*
> *your individuality from coarse assaults.*
>
> *The top of CHAROG is carved from black wood and*
> *can be used as a headpiece completing this*
> *original veil.*
>
> *Through CHAROG you can look to the future with Assurance*

Fig. 116d (*above right*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Olo* from the series of thirty-six works, with text, *Catalogue of Super Objects—Super Comfort for Super People*, 1976. Type-C print, 25.2 x 20.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07596.02. Accompanying text:

> *OLO*
> *A Language Ornament:*
> *Your every word is gold, your every word—a pearl:*
> *OLO is proof of your ideal marriage with Truth*


MINOLTA
KOMAR+MELAMID
КОМАР И МЕЛАМИД
WE BUY AND SELL SOULS
Y OH RACKETEER


KOMAR & MELAMID INC
Over five thousand years experience
We buy and sell Souls
YOUR SOUL IS IN GOOD HANDS WITH US
Komar Melamid Inc



KOMAR AND MELAMID INC. CC77
NEW YORK, N.Y.

I, WARHOL ANDREW
SURNAME GIVEN NAME MIDDLE INITIAL

hereby sell my immortal soul[8] to Komar and Melamid Inc.

for the sum of $ 0 .

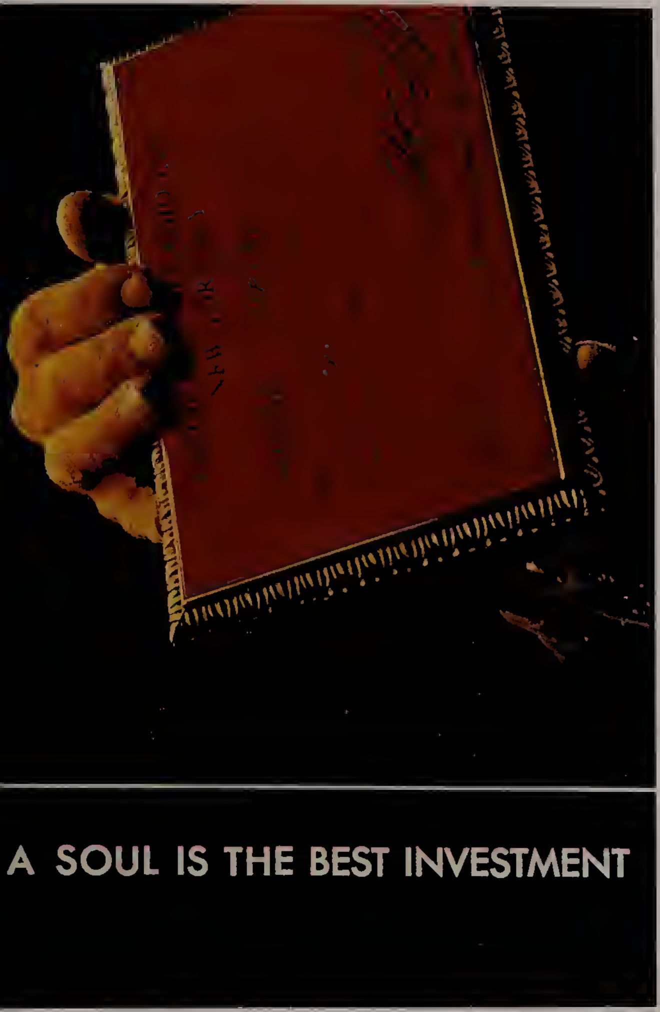
I likewise authorize the resale of said soul.

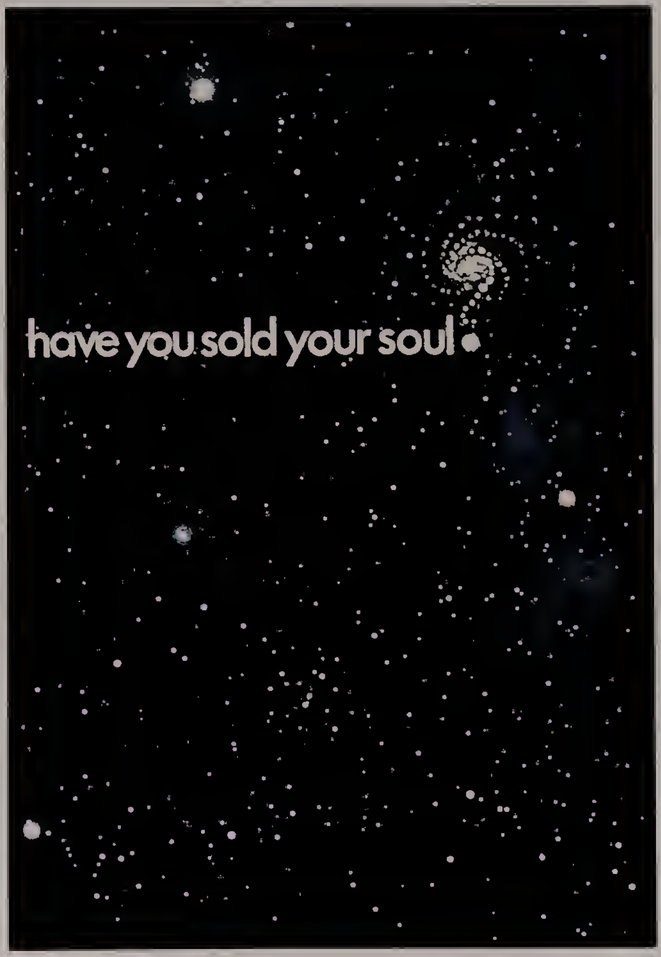
New York City
Feb. 6, 1978

(Signed)

Witnessed by

Figs. 117A–G (*above and facing page*). Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *We Buy and Sell Souls*, 1978–83. Type-C prints, 66 x 45 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 17423.04, 17423.06, 17423.08, 17423.10, 17423.09, 17423.11, 17423.12.


A SOUL IS THE BEST INVESTMENT


have you sold your soul

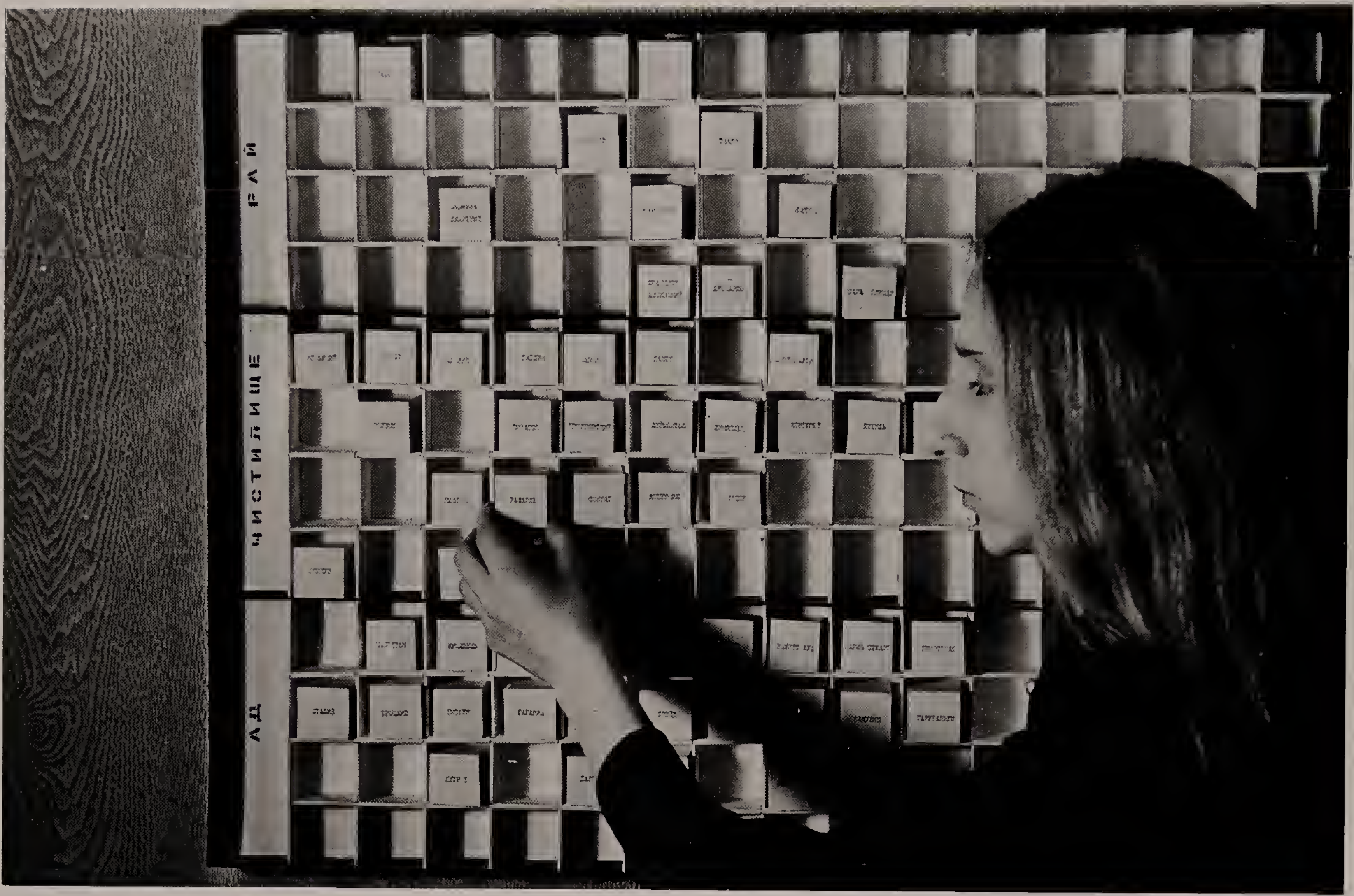


Fig. 118. Rimma Gerlovina, Installation documentation of *Combinational Play-Poem (Paradise-Purgatory-Hell)*, 1976. Gelatin silver print. A-Ya Archive, Dodge Collection, ZAM, 004.004.024.

of their performances is the famous work *Zoo*, March 1977 (see figs. 71A and 71B, pp. 76 and 77). The Gerlovins argued that at birth each person appears in a physical body, which the ancient Greeks associated with a cage. In *Zoo* the two artists spent a day, naked, in a cage labeled "Homo Sapiens. Group of Mammals. Male and Female." The resulting photographs (by Viktor Novatsky) were interpreted by the Western press as a "symbolic image of Russian artists" during the 1977 Eastern European Biennale in Venice.[35] According to the Gerlovins, the life of an artist is usually full of deviations from social standards and has many elements of the wilderness of nature itself. As the artists stated, their *Zoo* experience "appears symbolic of social and emotional isolation and introversion to the point of contact with the unconsciousness or the anima/animus structure (which the title suggests)." The artists believe that it is "one of the uneasy points of departure from the life of a regular social man, since visually it looks like a contamination with bestial elements." Mankind "is stuck midway between the gods and the beasts."[36] *Zoo* demonstrates man's instincts of possessiveness, rivalry, and desires.

Conversations, 1977, a series of photographs (again by Viktor Novatsky) documenting one of the Gerlovins' "still" performances, alludes to the absorption of time, space, personalities, and events. It presents the Gerlovins in conversation with various important personalities of different ages and places, including Joan of Arc, Lao-tsu, Leonardo, Catherine the Great, and John Cage.

The Dodge Collection also features photographic documentation of several performances by Vagrich Bakhchanyan (b. 1938),[37] including *First Russian Propaganda Art Performance*, created four years after the artist moved to New York in 1974. As the Gerlovins recalled the event, Bakhchanyan walked around the Museum of Modern Art in New York dressed as a "walking propaganda center," covered from head to toe with slogans like "Stalin is Lenin today," "Beware, savage dog," and "Why is there no vodka on the moon?"[38]

These slogans mocked the clichés of Soviet official newspapers, typical notes of Soviet bureaucratic institutions, and tattoos, as well as curses commonly found on fences and public bathroom walls in Russia.[39]

The interest in serial forms is evident in many photo-based works by Soviet conceptual artists in the Dodge Collection. Their grid-like format typologies focus our attention on the uniformity of certain motifs at the same time that they display the diversity possible within a given set form.

One of the artists who successfully employs a progression of photo silk screens, which often resemble family albums, is Eduard Gorokhovsky.[40] His works usually consist of two elements. He always uses the first, photography, as a basis for his paintings and photo silk screens. The second element is something that intrudes upon the photographic space: a geometric figure, a silhouette, a text, or another photograph. The photograph, Gorokhovsky pointed out, provides a framework that keeps a painting in balance, and the rest of what he brings into a painting stands in dissonance to the photo image, adding a certain intrigue to the whole.[41] Continually interfering with one's perception of the photographic object, the second element forces the viewer to shift focus in looking at the picture and gives the viewer the opportunity to imagine and interpret. *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1970–79 (fig. 119), borrows its title from a famous 1919–20 poster by El Lissitzky. In Gorokhovsky's work, the portrait of a young woman in full military uniform of the Russian Army's first women's battalion during World War I gradually becomes covered with red, the color of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.[42]

Moscow artist Igor Makarevich (b. 1943) often employs photography in his works.[43] Makarevich's photoseries *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes*, 1977, is an analytical research into his own face and body that slowly disappear under a gypsum mask (fig. 120). In 1977 he had a plaster cast made of his face for the work *Twenty-five Memories of My Friend*. The artist noted that the several minutes it took for the lukewarm plaster paste to turn hard and cold as stone, during which time Makarevich was cut off from the outside world, served as the stimulus for his next work, *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes*.[44] As Makarevich has pointed out, although he spent almost two years working on *Changes*, the series was never fully realized; several versions, which are now in different collections, including the one in the Dodge Collection, should be treated as studies only. *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes* consists of photographic images depicting the gradual transformation of Makarevich's face covered in bandages. Each images forms a small cell enclosed within a massive frame. While the space inside the cell is constantly changing, the frame remains the same and symbolizes at the same time a theater stage and the limit of reality. The work encompasses dematerialization and annihilation. The whole composition resembles an iconostasis in which separate images appear as icons. According to the artist, his thoughts had long been turned to the theme of mortality. The eternal cycle of birth and death is treated in *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes* as a metaphor for the creative act.[45]

While Makarevich in *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes* depicted a gradual transformation of his own face, Irina Nakhova in her photographic series of installations entitled *Rooms*, 1984–87, manipulated and transformed three-dimensional architectural space (figs. 121A–D). She covered the walls of her room in Moscow with painted and unpainted paper. Then she photographed subtle variations of this gradually transformed room, which Nakhova finally turns into a totally abstract spatial composition. This resulting "picture" has been seen from the "inside" by only a few viewers. Nakhova made explicit the reduction of content to form, the volume into a plane, and instead of a banal interior, her photographs of the transformed room represent siteless, autonomous signs.[46]

Two other Soviet practitioners of conceptual art, mixed-media artists Igor Kopystiansky and Svetlana Kopystianskaia, belong to the "second generation" of Soviet nonconformist artists who increasingly used photography in their work of the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas some earlier nonconformist artists addressed a nearly hermetically sealed-off Soviet reality, the Kopystianskys consider themselves part of a larger world and make works that reflect their interest in Western conceptual and performance art.

Since 1984, Igor Kopystiansky has moved

incessantly between mediums, working simultaneously on several series, which he describes as "destroyed paintings," "restored paintings," "constructions," "interiors," and "compact exhibitions."[47] Kopystiansky has stated, "I am interested in working with tradition and traditional forms of art. It's very much about context and about history and rewriting history and rewriting my own version of history."[48] One of his significant photographic series related to memory is his work *Portraits*, 1981 (figs. 122A and 122B), which consists of fifty photographs of different deteriorating tombstones at various Russian cemeteries. Kopystiansky shows tombstones that have succumbed to natural deterioration as well as those that have been deliberately damaged—in some cases during ethnic conflicts. Though in a sense timeless, these images reflect upon memory, the past, and decay and ruin, conveying a feeling of a lost world. The shadowy settings of these images evoke a surreal realm, haunting and dreamlike, but with a disturbing edge.

Seeking to reflect ideas rather than things, in his allegorical work *The Play in One Act*, 1981 (fig. 123), Kopystiansky presents a cinematic progression and transforms ordinary chairs into anthropomorphic objects that argue and otherwise interact with each other almost as if they were human. In this work, Kopystiansky employs allegory as an artistic expression in which regular chairs become symbols and express generalizations about the human experience.

In Kopystiansky's works such as *Dirty/Clean*, 1980, and *Beautiful/Not Beautiful*, 1983 (fig. 124), photographs are used in the service of conceptual notions about the process of perception and established notions of art. *Beautiful/Not Beautiful* refers to established clichés of what a good work of art should look like. This work also comments on the fact that the Soviet Union was a country filled with different propaganda slogans and, metaphorically speaking, everything there, including art itself, was labeled as either "good" or "bad" for society. This series was developed from the artist's book entitled *An Introduction into Aesthetics* (Moscow, 1979), which consists of four "lessons." In each of these "lessons" glasses, bottles, and cans of various shapes are juxtaposed on a page with the inscription "beautiful/not beautiful." A similar idea about the perception of the beholder is expressed in the *Dirty/Clean* series of 1980.

The subjects of Svetlana Kopystianskaia's series of photographs have little to do with the concept of "high art." Her *Cold Shapes/Warm Shapes* of 1979 (fig. 125) are manifestations of the kind of modernist reduction that had been pared down to abstraction; now the objects (in this case, piles of snow formed into simple geometric shapes) are reduced to an essential idea and look anonymous. *Cold Shapes/Warm Shapes* have a stark neutrality and a nonreferential relationship to the world of things in part informed by the prevailing minimalist standards in art, which urged the elimination of all unnecessary visual detail. Mass and shape are what count. Kopystianskaia's other series, *Changes of the Form of Emptiness*, 1980, depict trivial rather than heroic subjects and, like Marcel Duchamp's readymade art pieces, are "anti-aesthetic" and Duchampian in their humor.

While Soviet conceptual art encompassed a diversity of artistic intentions and appearances, it has certain characteristic aspects. Among the characteristics uniting diverse conceptual artists included in the Dodge Collection are their common interests in repetition, self-portrayal, and incompleteness or omission.

The Dodge Collection also features the photo documentation of various performances of the kinetic art group Dvizhenie (Movement) (fig. 126). Lev Nussberg (b. 1973) (fig. 127), the leader of the group,[49] stated that symmetry and movement, understood as change, are the most important principles in art. Turning to kinetic art, Nussberg and his group presented kinetic theatrical performances, which combined kinetic objects, lighting effects, mimes, experimental music, and poetry readings.[50]

The work of another major member of the Movement Group, Francisco Infante (b. 1943), reconnects with the traditions of the early-twentieth-century Russian avant-garde.[51] In 1962–63, Infante first saw the work of contemporary Western abstract artists in reproductions found in various art magazines at the Foreign Literature Library in Moscow. He was also impressed by the dramatic use of space in the work of the Russian constructivist artist Naum Gabo (1890–1977), which he saw in the house of Gabo's brother. In the late 1960s, Infante saw Aleksandr Rodchenko's and Kazimir

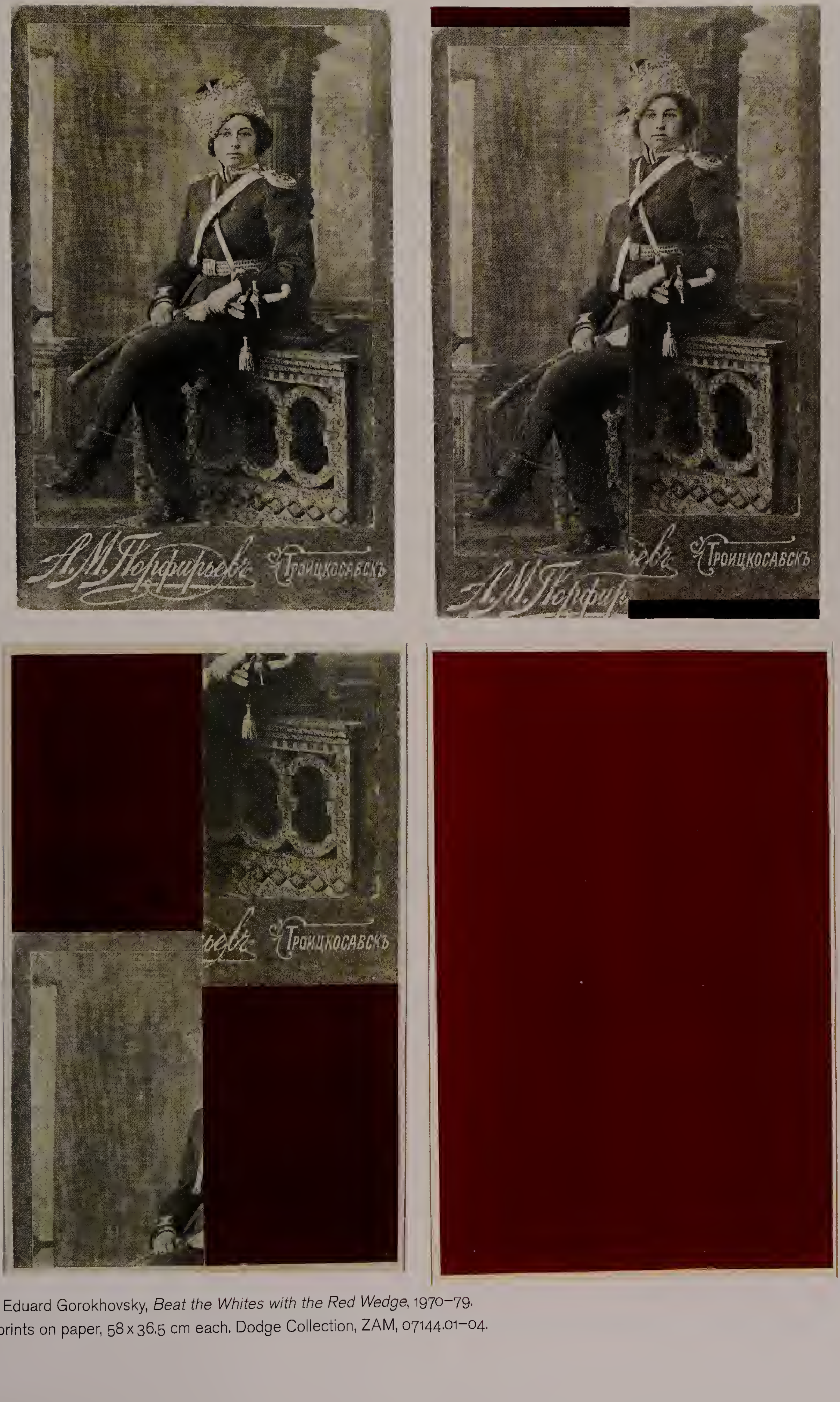

А.М. Порфирьевъ
Троицкосавскъ

Fig. 119. Eduard Gorokhovsky, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1970–79. Screenprints on paper, 58 x 36.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07144.01–04.

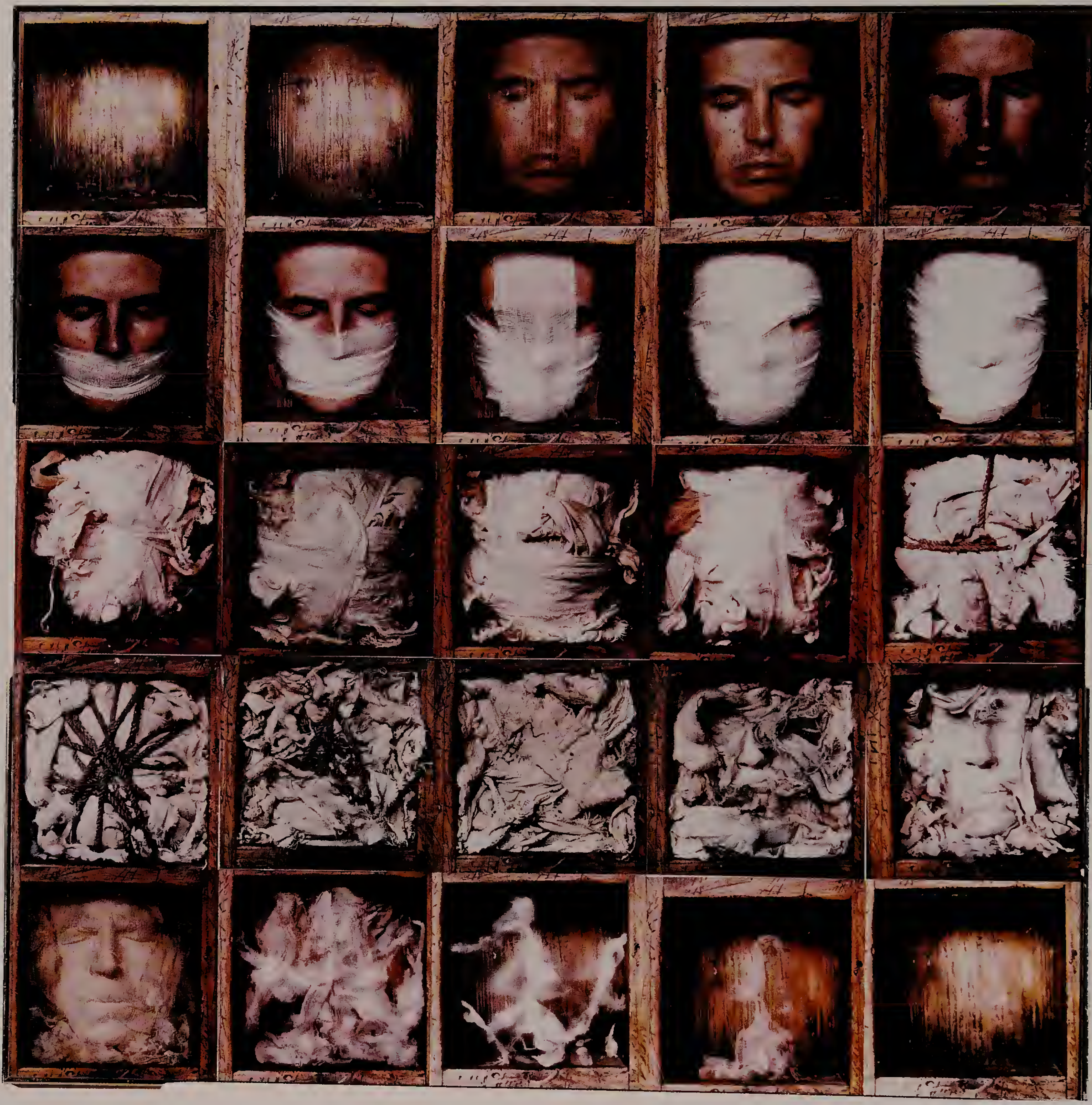
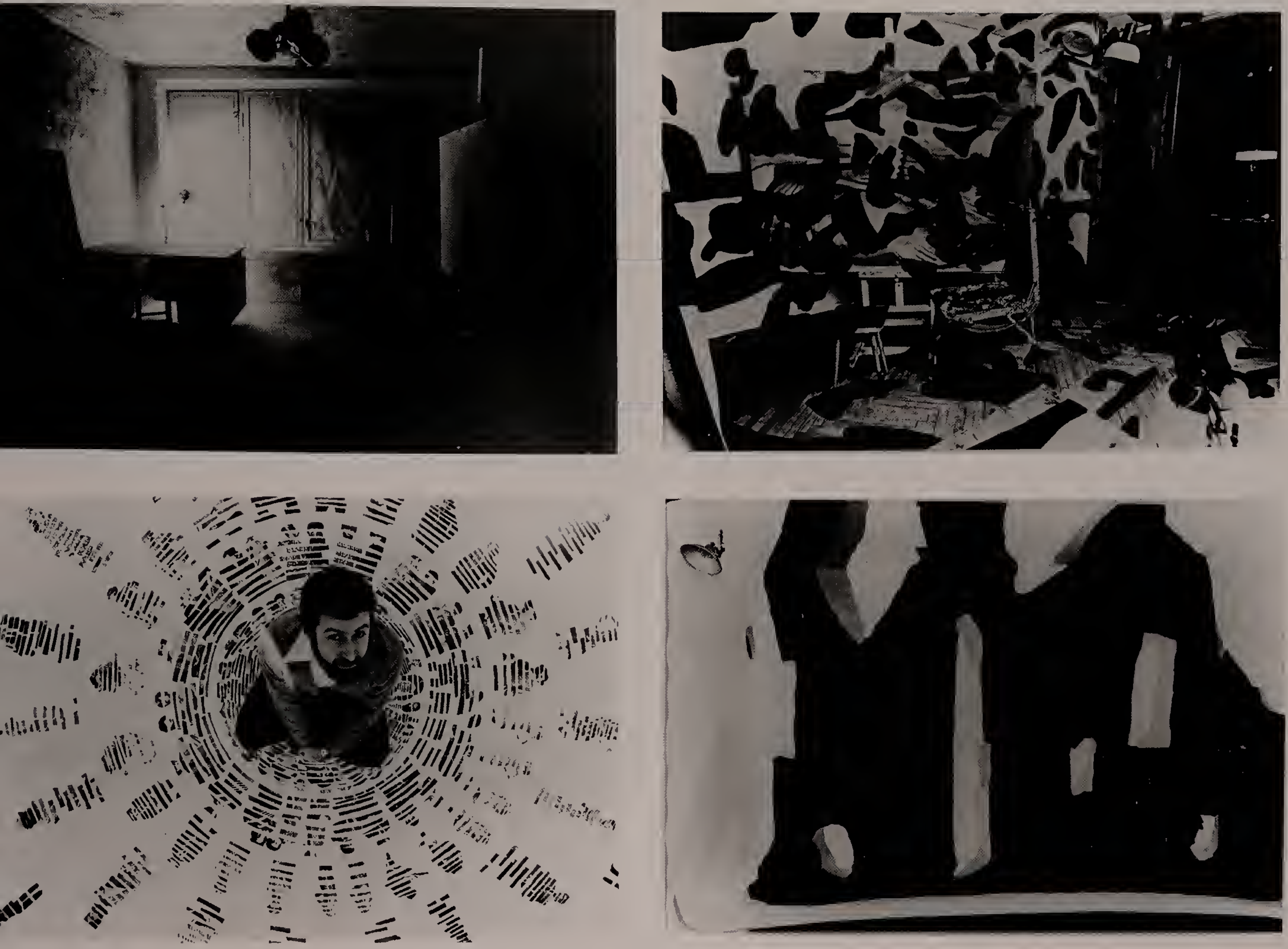


Fig. 120. Igor Makarevich, *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes*, 1977. Photomontage, 101 x 101 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07087.



Figs. 121A–D. Irina Nakhova, from the series *Rooms*, 1984–87. Gelatin silver prints, 28.2 x 35.4 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 18308, 18305, 18303, 18309.

Figs. 122A and B. Igor Kopystiansky, from the series *Portraits*, 1981. Gelatin silver prints, 40.5 x 30.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12238.02–03.

Malevich's works at the house of the famous collector George Costakis.[52] During the early 1960s, Infante became associated with the members of the Movement group. In 1968–89, in collaboration with his wife, the artist Nonna Goriunova, Infante performed *Suprematist Games*, based on the forms and ideas of Malevich's suprematism. In the Dodge Collection, this series is exemplified by the 1968 *Artefacts* from *Suprematist Games (Homage to Malevich)* (fig. 128). In this work, the placement of suprematist elements, made of colored cardboard on snow, refers to Malevich's concept of a white background that signifies "zero" or "nothingness." Infante considers this work the origin of his concept of "artefact,"[53] the "geometric object introduced into the natural environment," which "signifies an object of a secondary nature, a thing made by a person and thus autonomous in its relation to nature."[54] In this context, nature and the artefact operate on an equal footing, supplementing each other (figs. 129 and 130). In the late 1960s and 1970s, Infante and Goriunova, dressed in garments of an aerodynamic/spatial cut, performed snow actions such as *Play of Gestures* (1977; see back cover), thus continuing the disrupted avant-garde tradition of futurist performance such as the 1913 "transrational" opera by Aleksei Kruchenykh, *Victory Over the Sun*, with geometrical costume and stage designs by Malevich.[55]

In 1968, Infante left the Movement group to found his own ARGO group in 1970,[56] which sought to create an artificial kinetic environment with the active use of "chronomusic." After 1976, Infante adopted an art form that he termed artefact. The Dodge Collection includes a number of works from this series. Referring to his employment of photographic media, Infante stated:

> The texture of the photographic surface is passionless, smooth and technical. . . . For me the strict unmanipulated photograph is important, because the event which interests me (the artifact) is constructed and occurs in the concrete space of nature. Therefore, I do not use photomontage, collage, or other photo techniques connected, for example, with thermal treatment of photographic paper and film, with magic

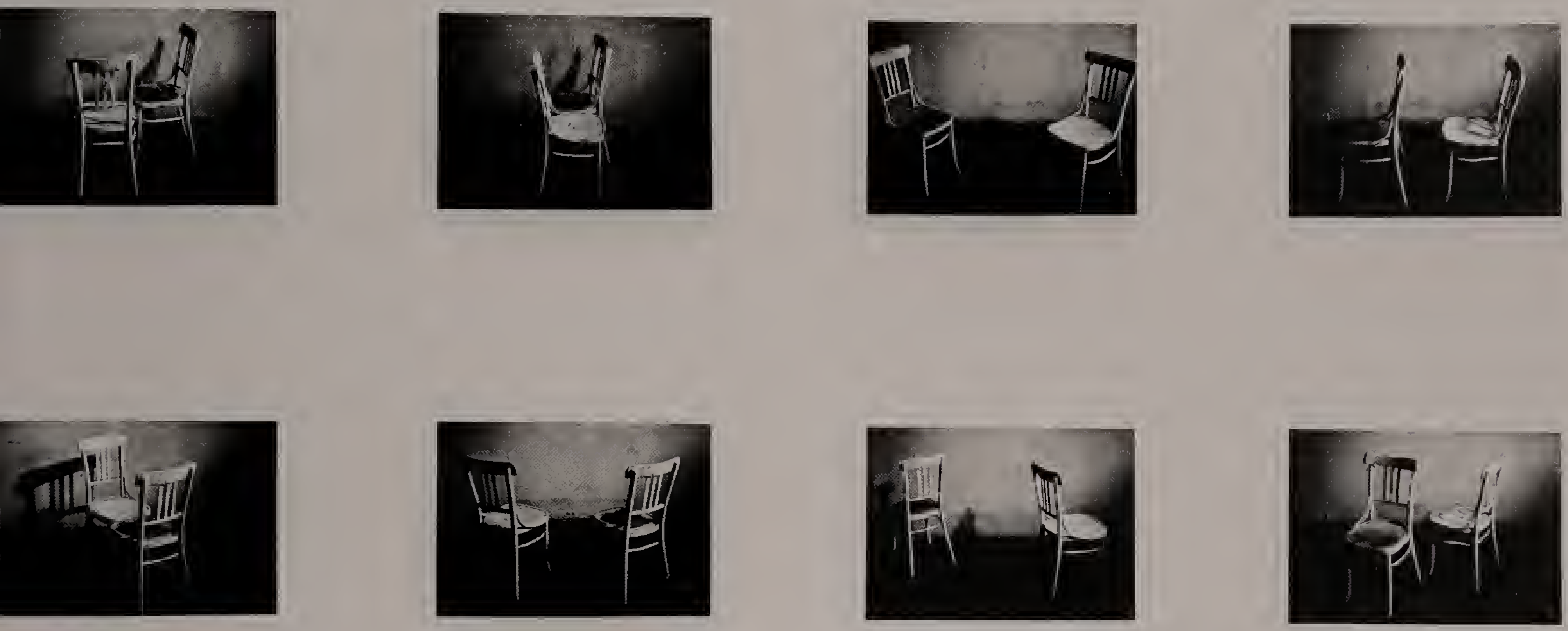


Fig. 123. Igor Kopystiansky, *The Play in One Act*, 1981. Gelatin silver prints, 24 x 30.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12237.01–08.

> tricks using chemicals, etc. That is, I connect my work on the photograph neither with the broad and developed photographic technology, nor with photo-art.[57]

Other nonconformist artists featured in the Dodge Collection, including Bakhchanyan, Petr Belenok, Anatolii Brusilovsky, Gennady Goushchin, and Aleksei Levchenko, turned to the medium of collage, which provided a way to break out of traditional painting. They use other artists' existing imagery and photographs only as a starting point, as material for further manipulations. Photographs, which were readily available from a multitude of sources, including the daily newspapers and various magazines, could be easily applied to various types of support and thus were particularly well suited for inclusion in collages. Juxtaposing often unrelated elements appealed to nonconformist artists who often used collage and photo collage to make social and political statements.

Moscow artist Anatolii Brusilovsky turned to collage in the early 1960s, seeking to rethink and reinterpret stereotypes and clichés and to create a totally new reality. When in 1962 Brusilovsky created his illustrations for the newspaper *Nedelia* using the collage technique, the editorial staff of the newspaper had never even heard the term "collage."[58] Brusilovsky often incorporated familiar images of Soviet political leaders such as Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev in his works, reinterpreting them from his own ironic perspective (figs. 131 and 132). Brusilovsky claims that for the first forty years of his life he had no way to familiarize himself with the work of Western artists who were working in collage;[59] he saw Max Ernst's collages only at the age of seventy.

Throughout his artistic career in Moscow, Vagrich Bakhchanyan produced works with collage elements, some of which were published in the newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta*. However, the editors of the newspaper restricted him to "a maximum of two collage elements in each work" so as to make them easily understood by the newspaper's censors.[60] Operating with well-known visual clichés, Bakhchanyan combines them into satirical images, such as his modified

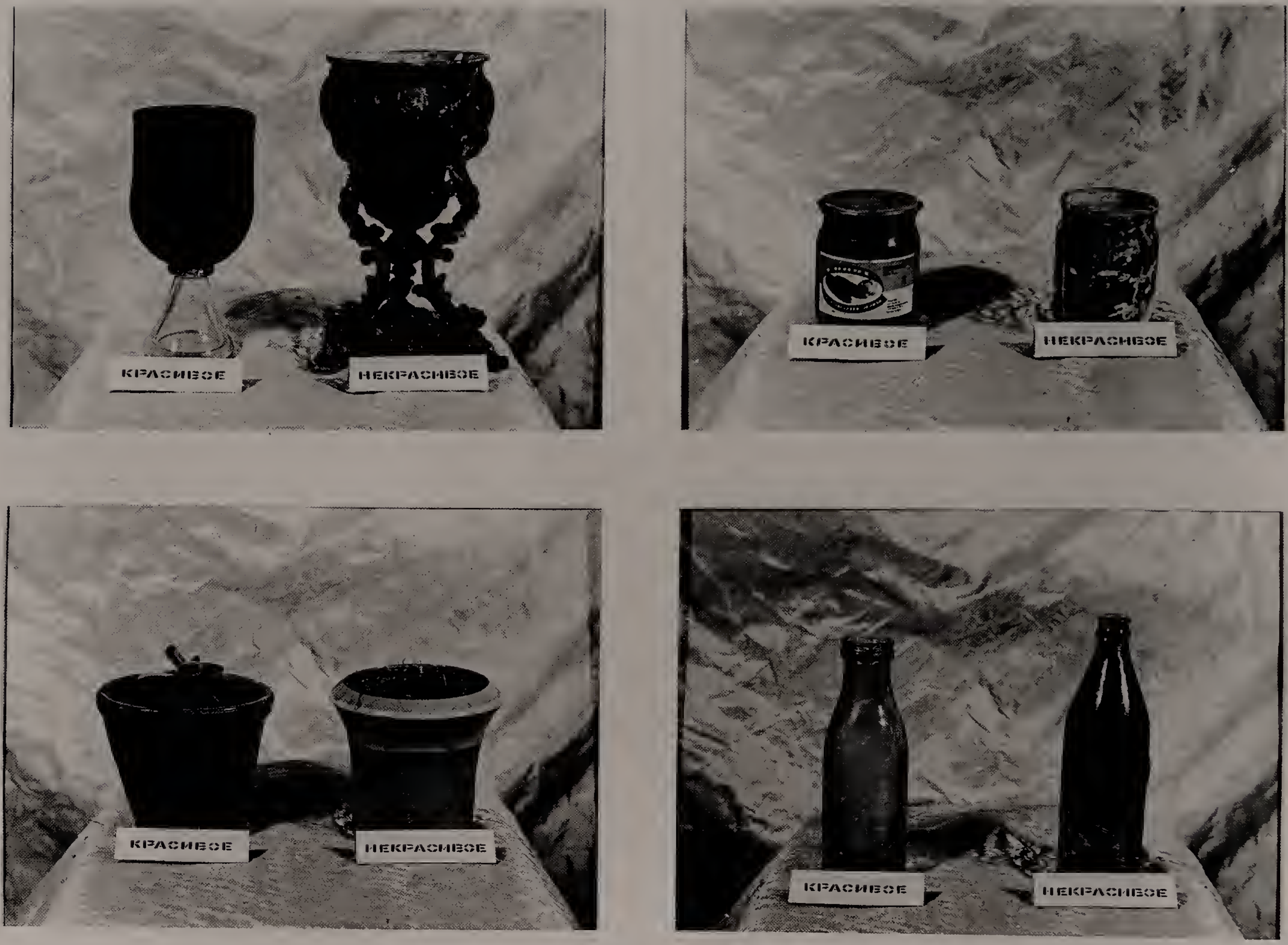

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Fig. 124. Igor Kopystiansky, *Beautiful/Not Beautiful*, 1983. Gelatin silver prints, 28 x 39.6 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 01730, 01732, 01733, 01734.

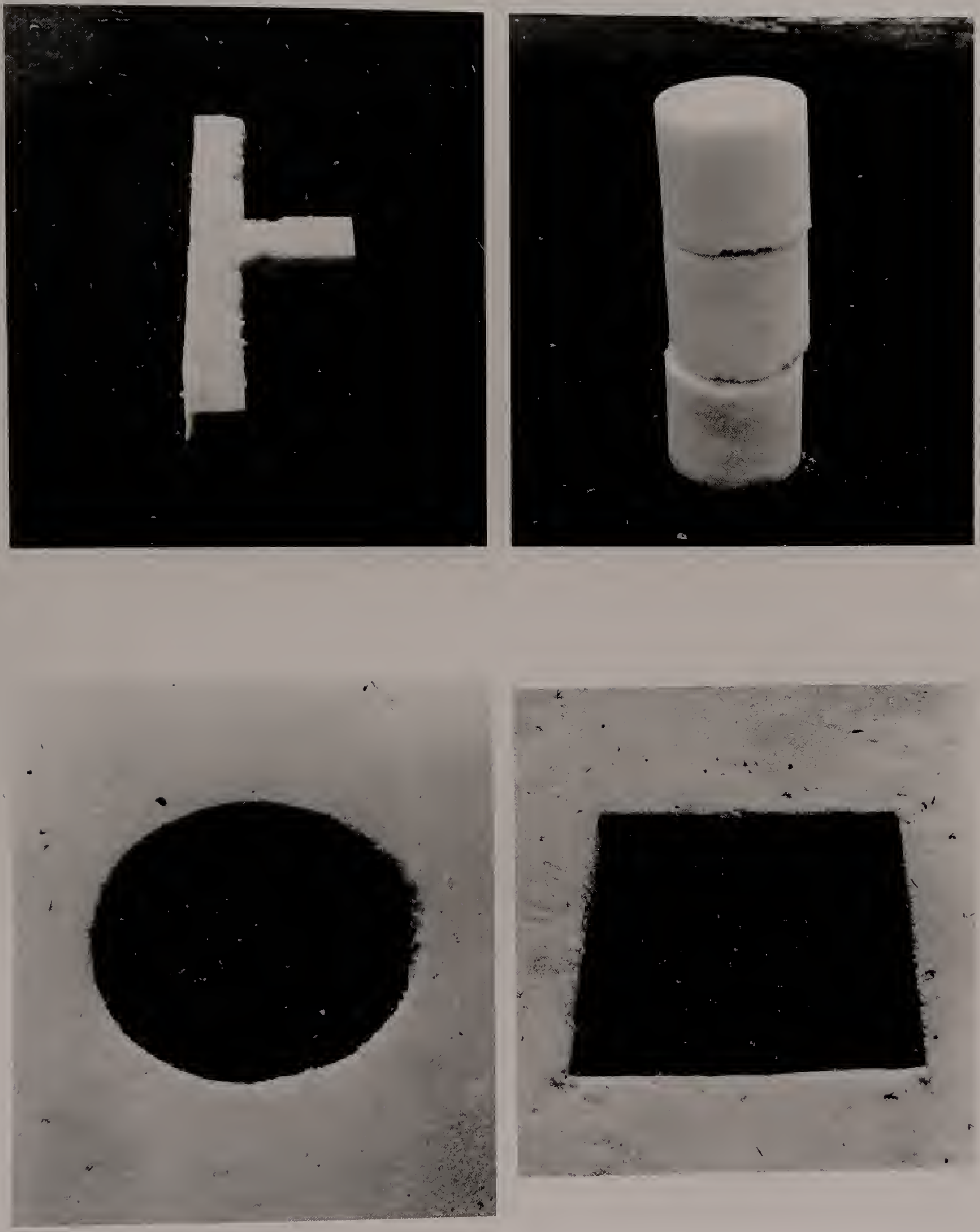


Fig. 125. Svetlana Kopystianskaia, *Cold Shapes/Warm Shapes*, 1979.
Gelatin silver prints, 41 x 30.5 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12234.01–04.

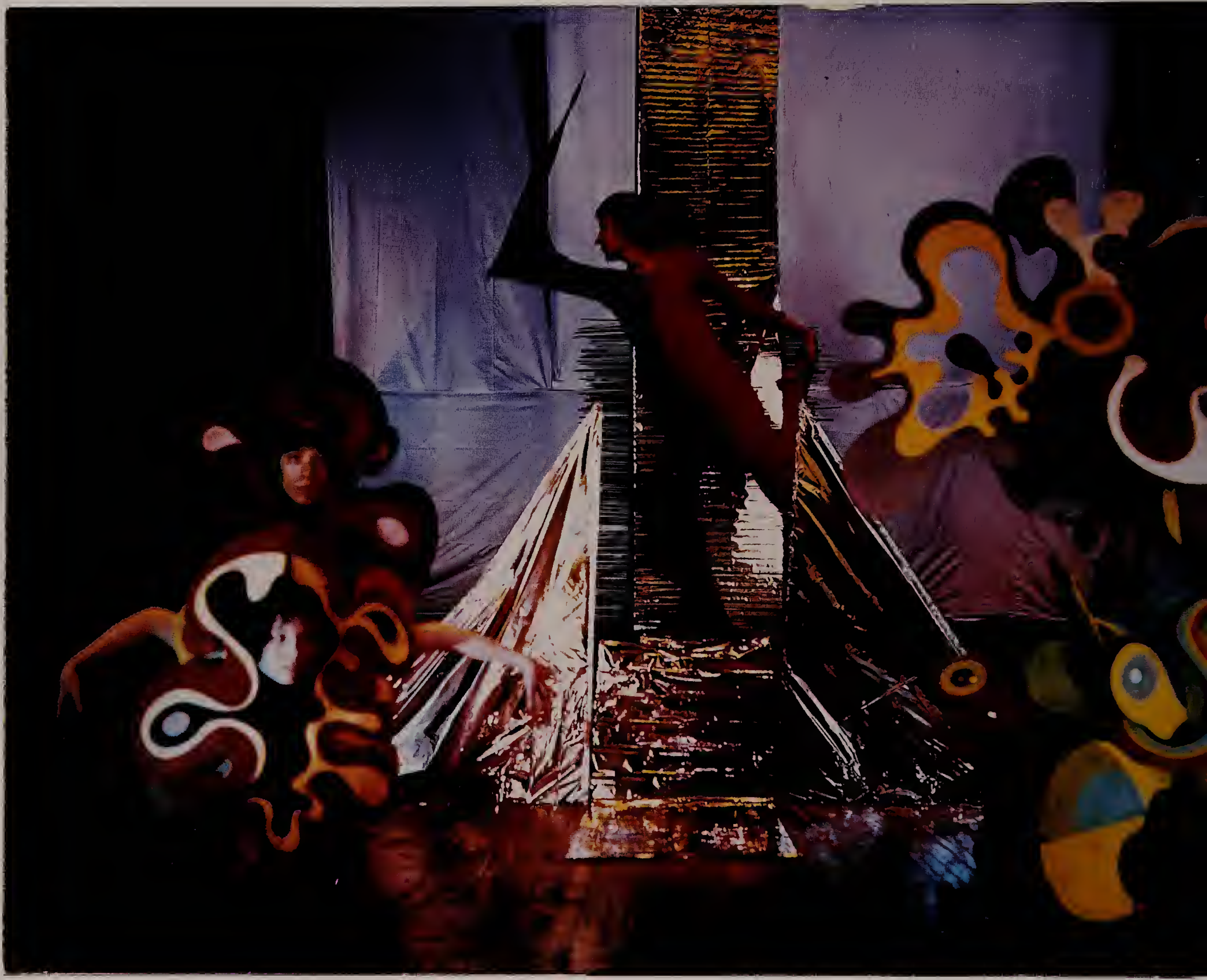


Fig. 126. Lev Nussberg and Movement Group, *Flowers and Black Beast*, Photo documentation of kinetic-theatrical performance of the Movement Group on December 2, 1972, at the Leningrad House of Architects. Scenario and staging by Lev Nussberg. Dye destruction print, 39.3 x 49.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07355.

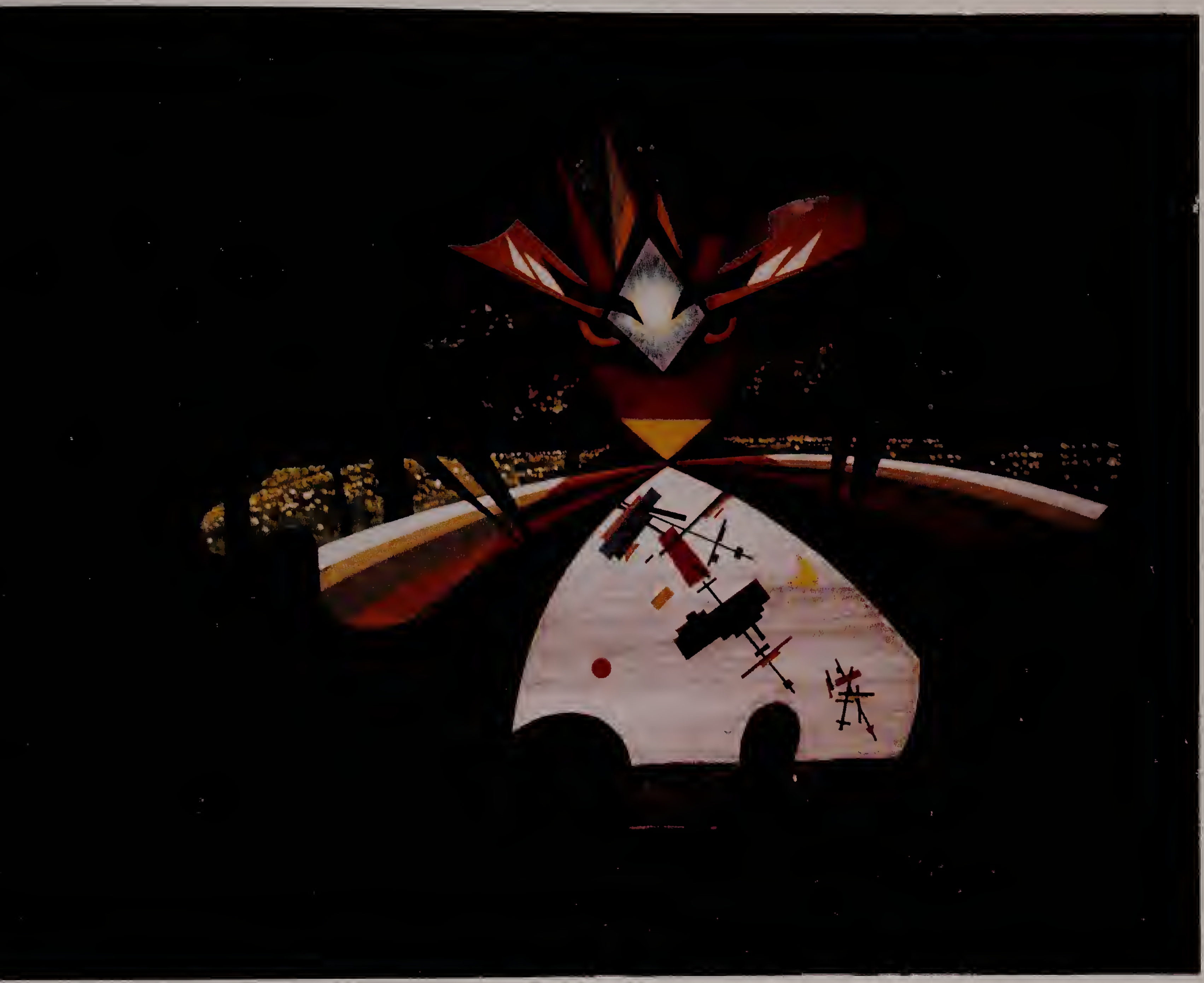
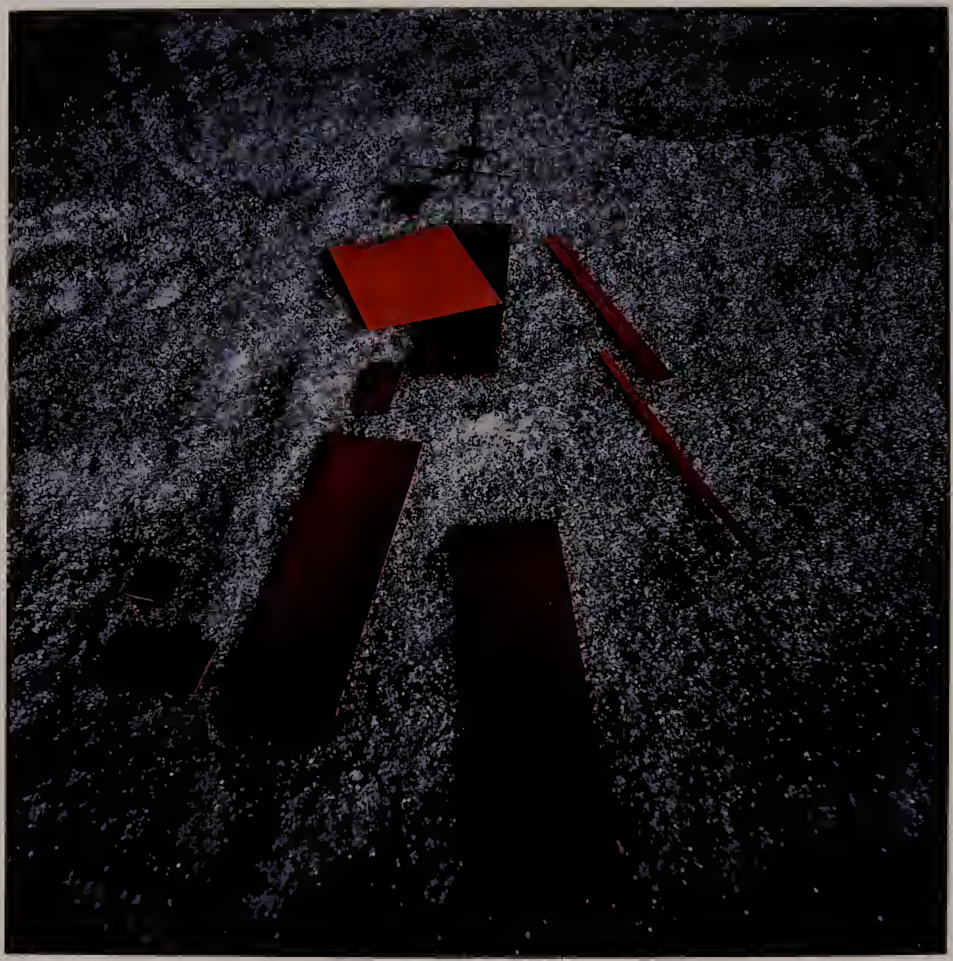


Fig. 127. Lev Nussberg, *Homage to Malevich*, Photograph of the 1968 original design (tempera on paper). From the series of photographs of one of the areas in the artificial "Bion-kinetic" environment, 39 x 49.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07354.



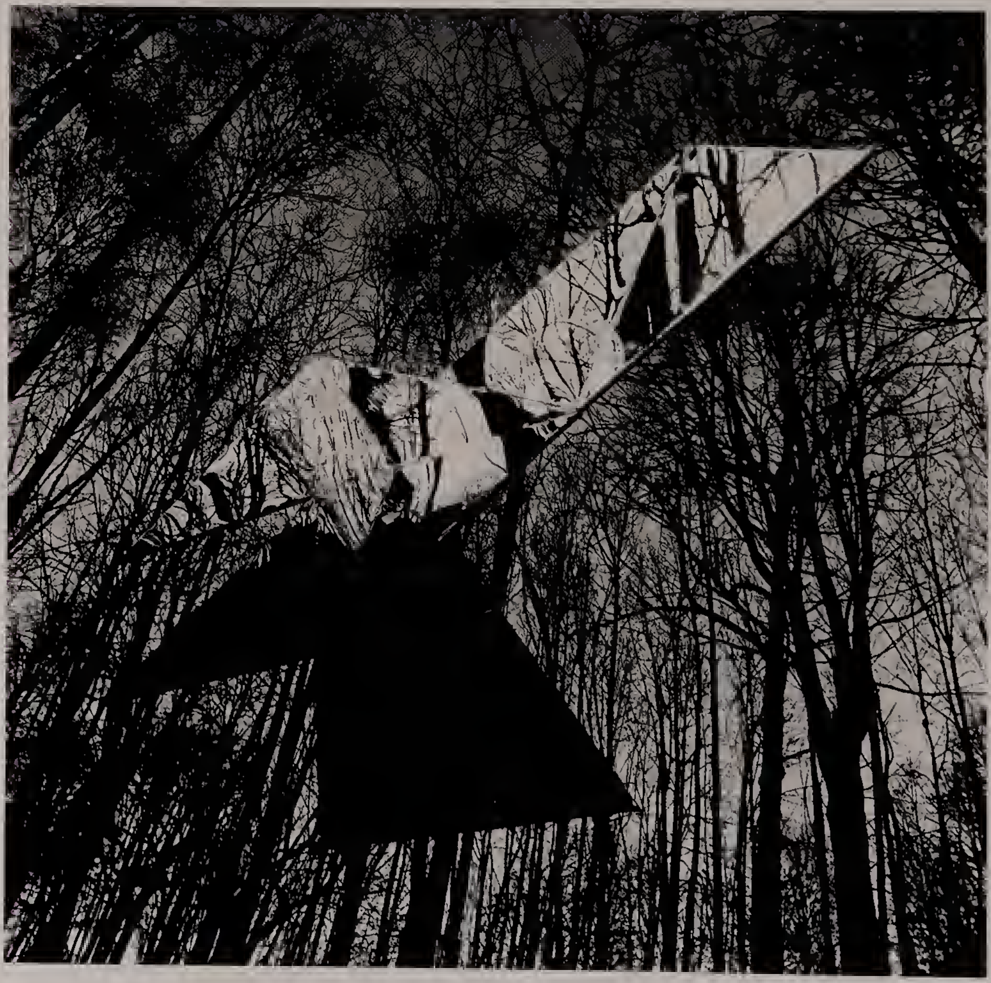


Fig. 128 (*top*). Francisco Infante, *Artefacts* from the series *Suprematist Games (Homage to Malevich)*, 1968. Cibachrome photograph on paper, 51 x 51 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05973.

Fig. 129 (*above*). Francisco Infante, *Artefacts* from the series *Combinations*, 1981. Gelatin silver print, 50.3 x 50.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 03880.

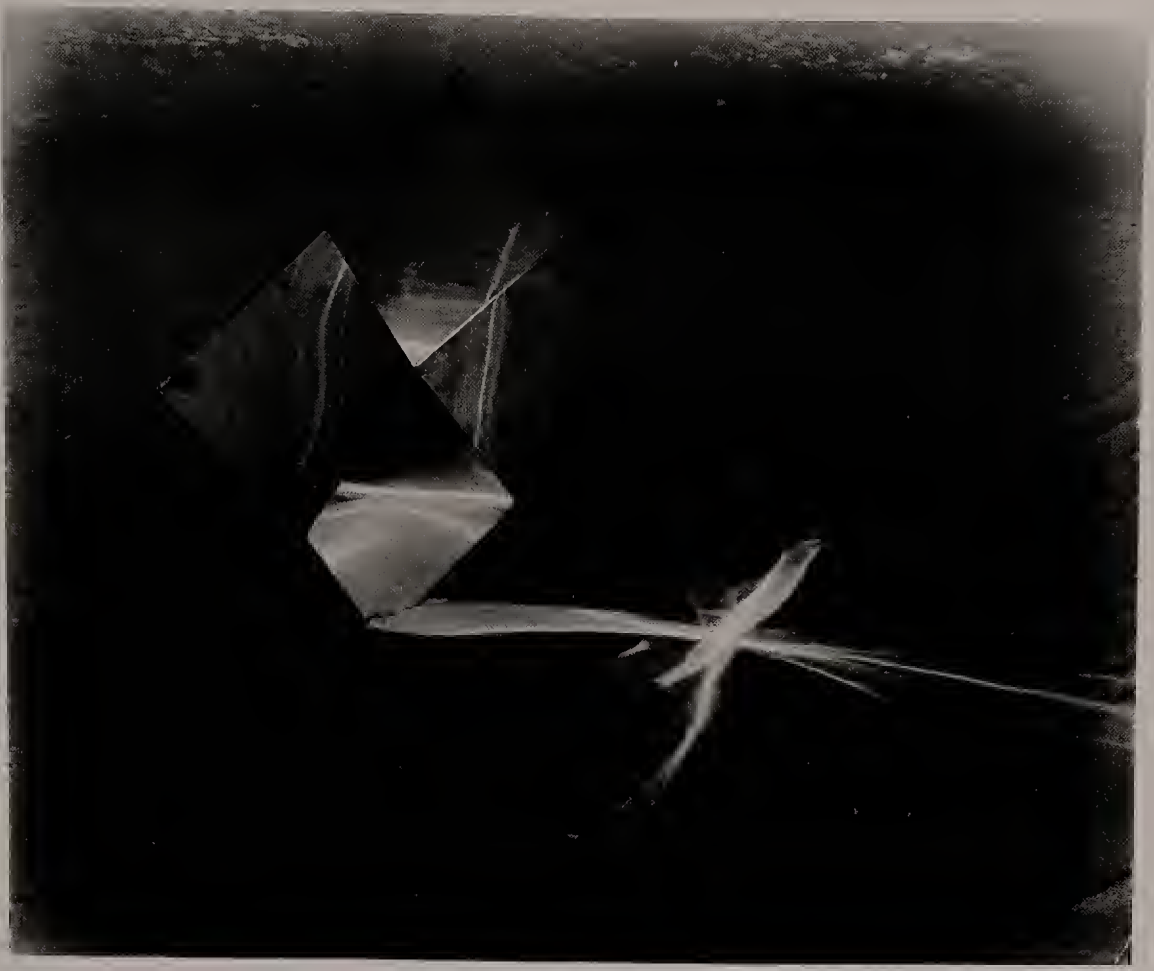


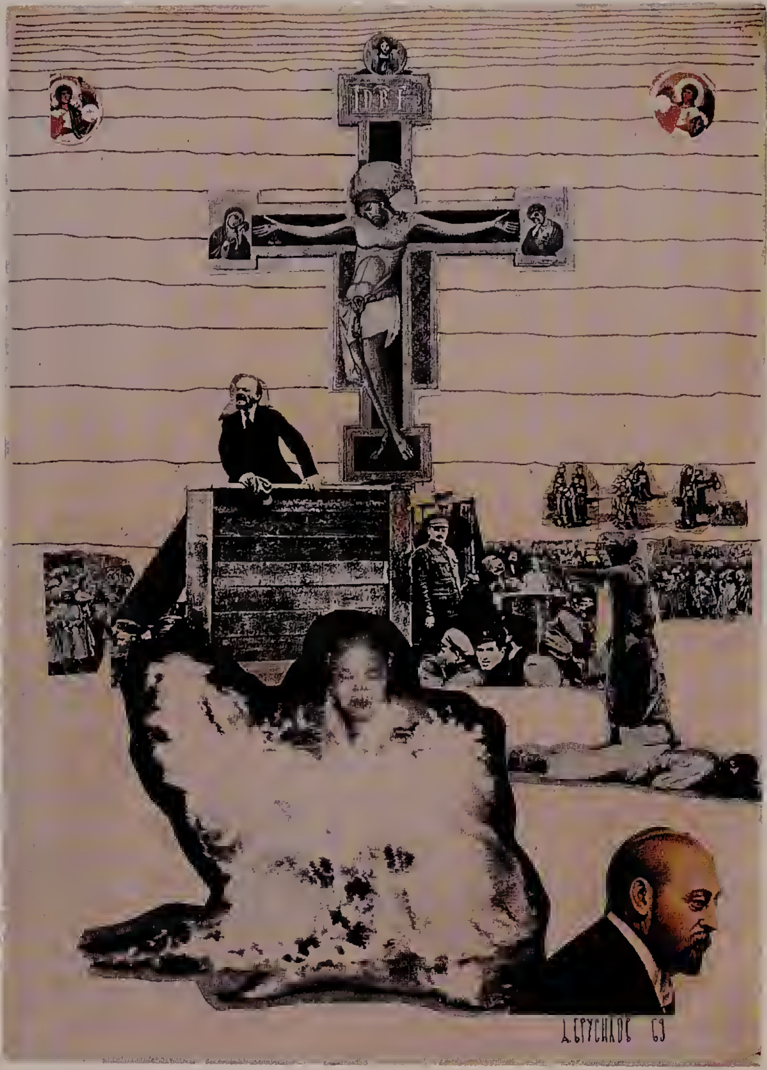
Fig. 130. Francisco Infante, *Artefacts* from the series *Centers of Distorted Space*, 1979. Gelatin silver print, 50.2 x 59.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 03877.

portrait of Lenin in the Dodge Collection (fig. 133). Bakhchanyan refers to his early works of the 1960s as "Bakhchanyazh" (pronounced Bakhchany-age, a combination of the artist's surname and the term "frottage"[61]). He frequently uses a special transfer process in his works (fig. 134), which allows him to manipulate images. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bakhchanyan used techniques of true collage and "Bakhchanyazh" in his highly inventive and witty works.[62]

Another artist who masterfully explored the possibilities of collage in the early 1970s was Petr Belenok (1938–1991), who died prematurely at the age of fifty-three. After graduating from the Kiev Art Institute's Department of Sculpture, Belenok moved to Moscow in 1967, where he soon became a member of the group of unofficial artists that had formed around the studio of Oscar Rabin. In 1974, Belenok was one of the organizers and a participant of the infamous *Bulldozer Exhibition* on the outskirts of Moscow. A sculptor by profession, Belenok often earned his living by producing busts of Lenin. However, in his spare time, he created highly expressive semi-abstract and phantasmagoric compositions that included figurative elements. Belenok combined collages of figures cut from various magazines and miniaturized in an endless space with a quick gesture of the brush typical of abstract expressionism (fig. 135). Belenok called his works, which suggested cataclysmic forces and alienation, "panic realism." Belenok stated, "I am not interested in the minute observations of life; I observe the world and its problems from a detached position in space."[63]

Gennady Goushchin also created an important series of photo collages in the 1970s.[64] His works from the *Alternative Museum* series are collages of fragmented color reproductions of famous canonical artworks that appeared in various Soviet publications. Although based on multiple photomechanical reproductions, Goushchin's handmade collages are always produced in single editions. He gives new interpretations to old themes, thus creating unexpected critical connections and juxtapositions.

In *Restoration of the Taj Mahal Mausoleum*, 1972 (fig. 107, p. 130), Goushchin comments on Soviet construction projects by juxtaposing an idealized photograph of female workers with a reproduction of the 1871 painting *Mausoleum Taj Mahal in Agra*, by the nineteenth-century Russian artist Vasilii Vereshchagin. The Taj Mahal, commissioned by a great ruler in



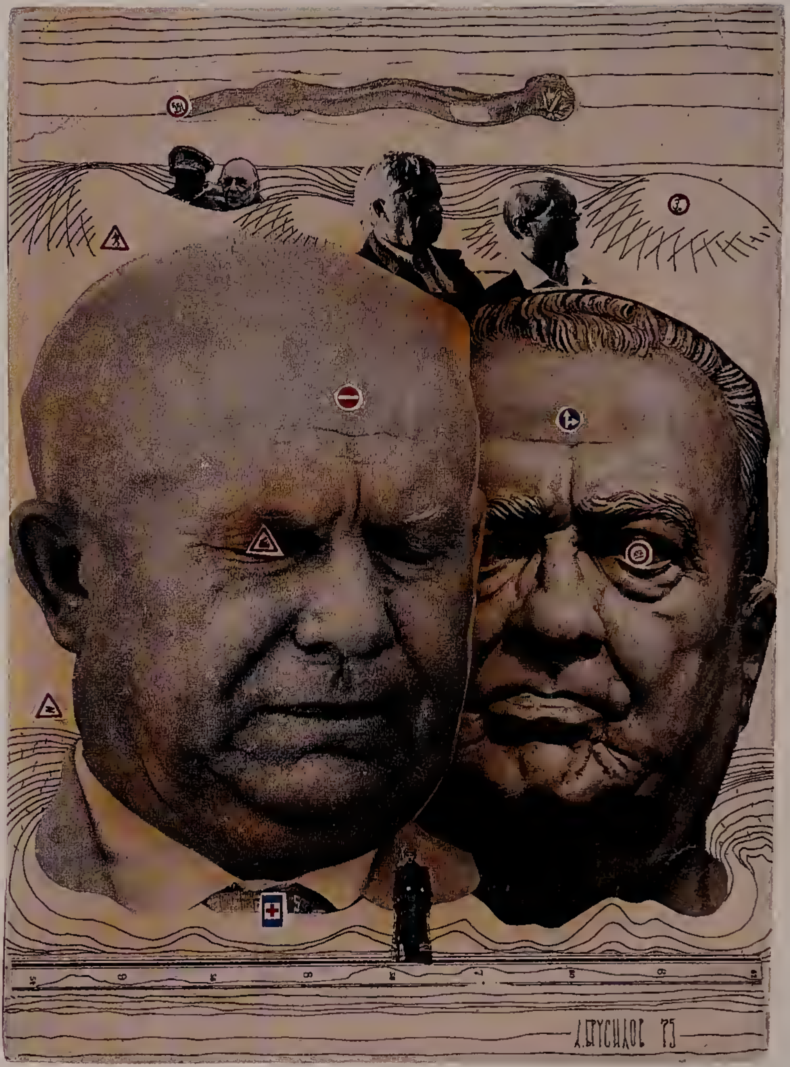


Fig. 131 (*above left*). Anatolii Brusilovsky, *Act of Belief*, 1969. Collage and ink on paper, 33.3 x 24 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25187.

Fig. 132 (*above right*). Anatolii Brusilovsky, *Two Soloists*, 1975. Collage and ink on paper, 33.4 x 24.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25190.

memory of his beloved wife, took twenty thousand workers and the greatest craftsmen of the time, using the finest marble available, twenty-two years to complete. The Soviet workers inserted by Goushchin into the foreground of the composition appear to be building a protective wall for the mausoleum or actually attempting to recreate the Taj Mahal—an absurd project given the architectural perfection of this building. These cheerful female workers—familiar archetypes appropriated from socialist realist imagery—are a component of Soviet mythology, symbolizing the world of idealized collective labor where women are equal with men in terms of having the right to engage in hard physical labor. Accordingly, says the artist, their faces are illuminated by happiness. In Soviet Russia, public works projects were remarkably inefficient; building and transportation projects were constantly interrupted, and the country's infrastructure seemed to be in a state of eternal "repair." The result was a physical environment marred by the effects of unfinished construction that had a detrimental psychological effect on the populace. Therefore, it was necessary to cultivate an optimistic outlook, and to enforce a perception of the importance and greatness of the projects.

That Goushchin's *Sunset in the Bolshoi Theater*, 1979 (fig. 136), is constructed entirely of photographic fragments suggests, at first glance, that it records an actual event. The convergence of nature and culture that Goushchin creates is, in fact, quite surreal: a dramatic sunset is collaged onto the stage of an actual theater. The space represented is beyond both nature and culture, suggesting the "theater of life" through the walls of the actual theater and the hierarchy of the rows of seats.

Goushchin satirizes the Soviet idea of the collective cultural experience by extending it to the appreciation of nature—to witness a sunset honorably and with a feeling of security is possible only in ritualized, cultural

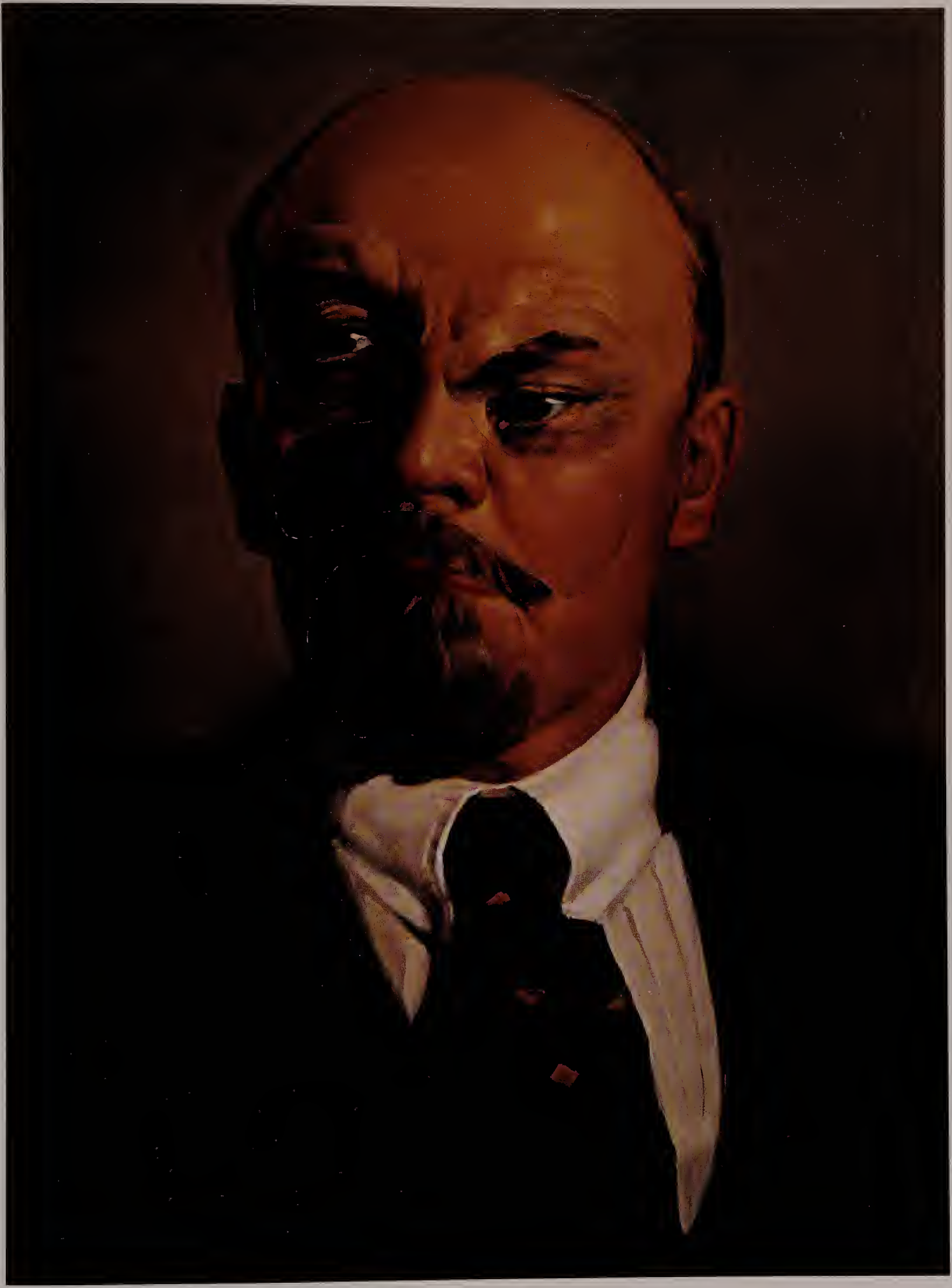


Fig. 133. Vagrich Bakhchanyan, Untitled, undated.
Collage on paper, 61 x 45.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15516.

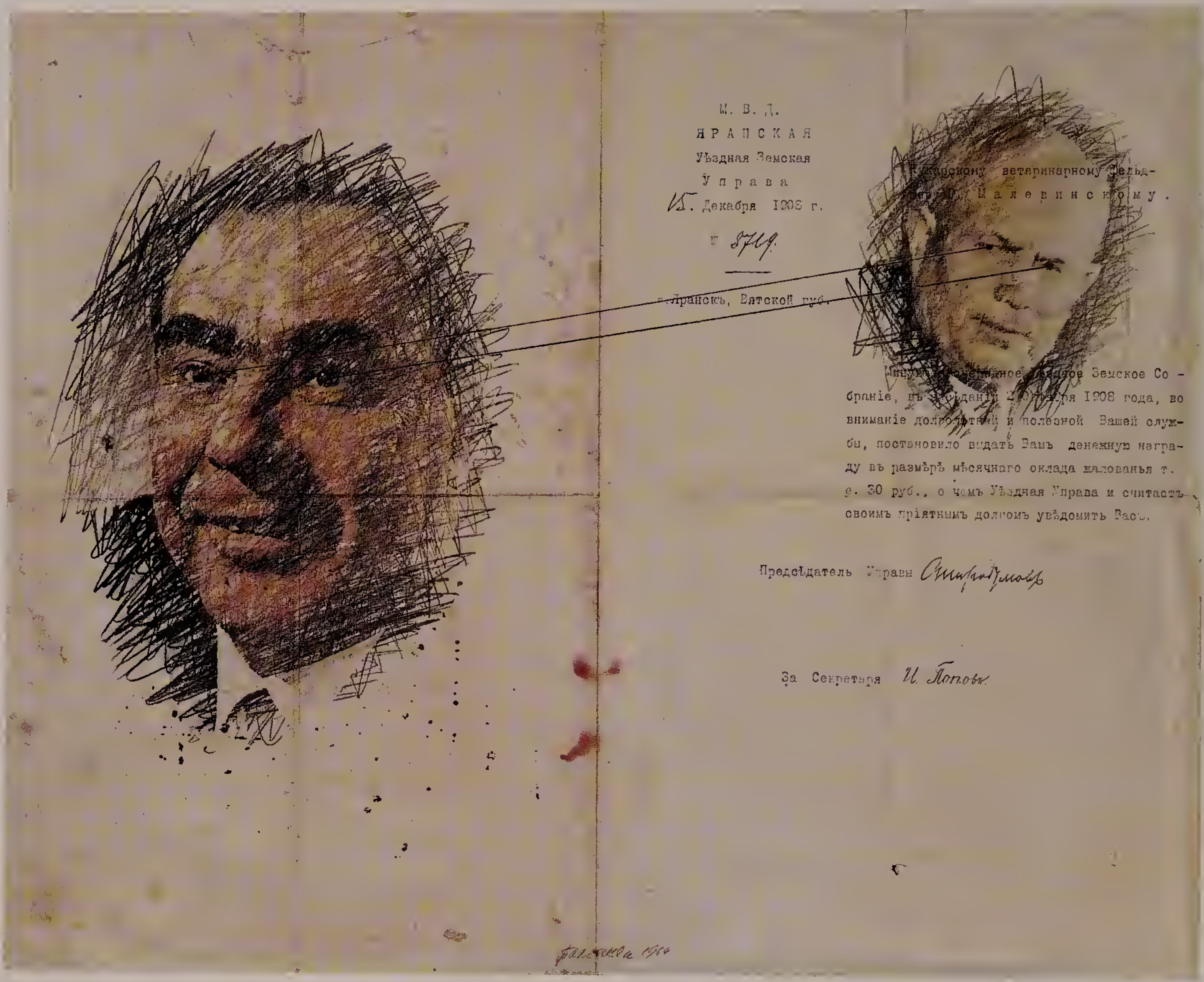

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Fig. 134. Vagrich Bakhchanyan, Untitled, 1969. Transfer process, pencil and typewritten text on paper, 35.5 × 44.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05750.

context. With *Mythological Landscape with Pioneers*, 1977 (fig. 137), Goushchin draws a parallel between Soviet political mythology and the classical mythology of ancient Greece. In the foreground a group of young Pioneers (the Communist youth organization) rests on the bank of a river in Siberia—the site of Vladimir Lenin's exile at the beginning of the century. This image is excerpted from a photograph of a tour of sites marking the life of Lenin. As a backdrop for this enactment of modern, political myth-making, Goushchin uses a reproduction of a mythical landscape created by the seventeenth-century French artist Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). Poussin's painting depicts Hercules and Cacus, mythical heroes of ancient Greece. The mythical space of Poussin's ancient, heroic landscape converges with the site of an actual event in Lenin's life, pointing to the superhuman status assigned to the leader and the impact Soviet mythology had on popular consciousness.

The Ukrainian artist Aleksei Levchenko's involvement with motion pictures influenced his approach to narrative photomontage and mixed-media projects. Levchenko (b. 1948) studied at the Kiev Art Institute in the early 1970s but was expelled during his last year after being accused of producing "American-type art" (as the school's administration referred to his collages).[65] In 1978, Levchenko began working as a set designer at the Kiev Cinema Studio, for which he won several awards. In his photo collages in the Dodge Collection, a series of surreal images appear with typewritten blocks of text, in a format reminiscent of a film storyboard (fig. 138). Levchenko finds his vocabulary of forms and objects in the banal and everyday and in popular culture, from magazines and advertising. In his photo collages, which Levchenko calls "novels," thus stressing their literary basis, he merges two- and three-dimensional space and challenges our expectations of scale and perspective.

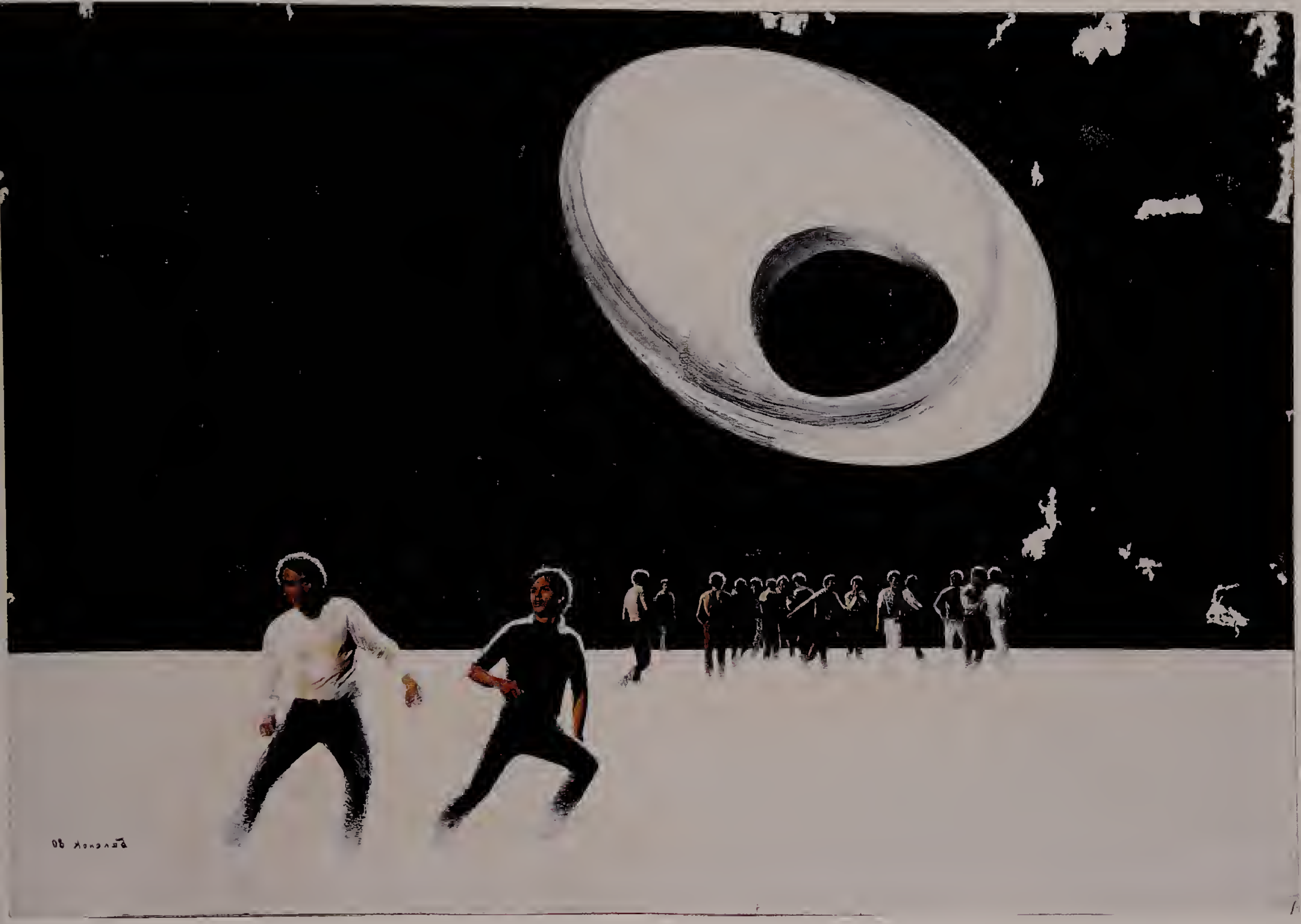
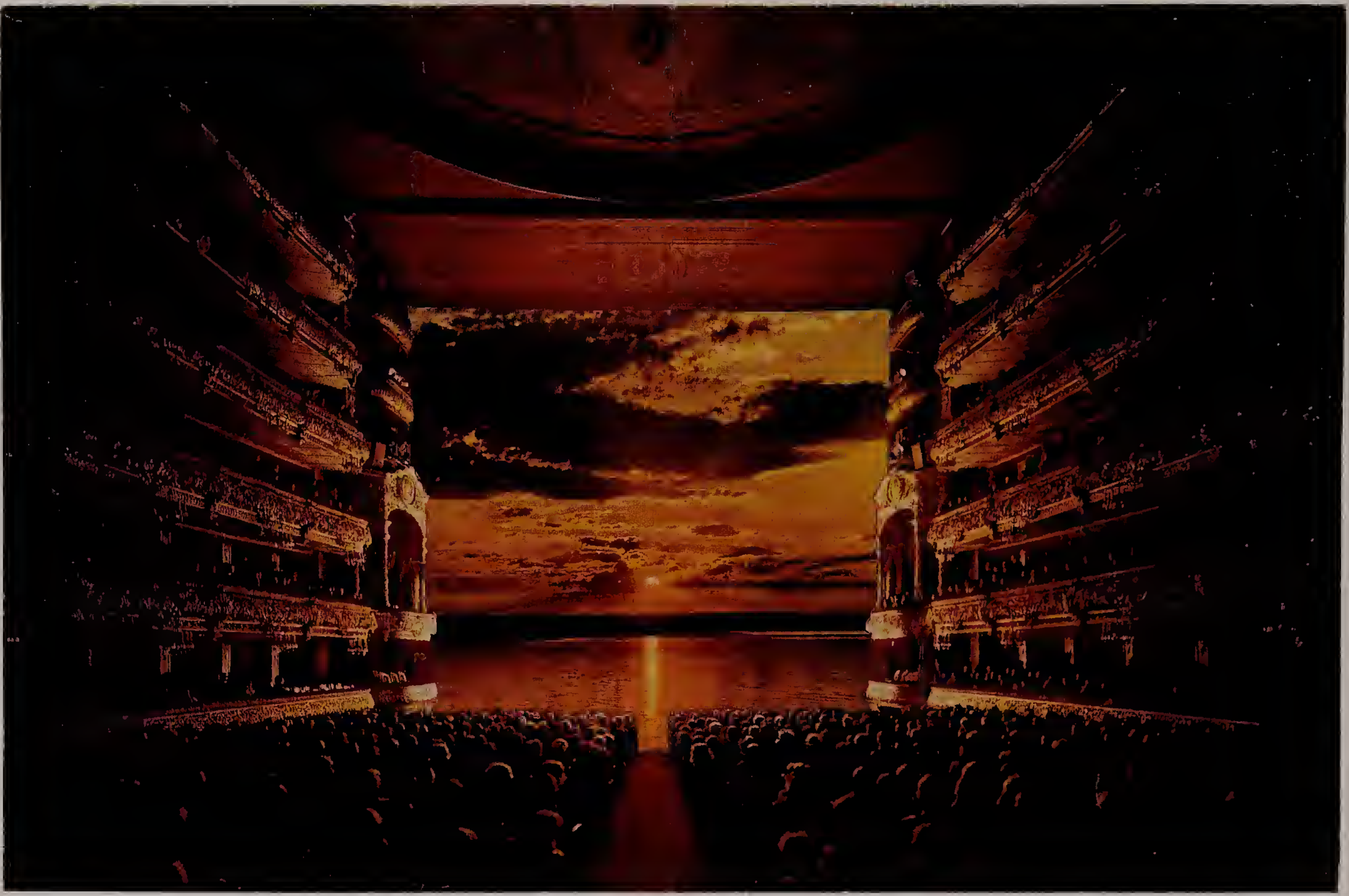


Fig. 135. Petr Belenok, Untitled, 1980. Collage and mixed media on board, 36 x 51.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05376.

By the mid-1970s, some nonconformist artists in Russia as well as in the Baltics began experimenting with superrealism, or hyperrealism, as it was commonly known in Russia. Soviet official art critic Aleksandr Kamensky coined the term "documental romanticism," claiming that the Soviet version of this style bore little resemblance to Western superrealism,[66] a style of painting (and, to a lesser extent, sculpture) popular particularly in the United States and Great Britain from the late 1960s, in which subjects are depicted with minute, impersonal detail. Another critic, Aleksei Korzukhin, called the Soviet version "new documentalism—anti-romanticism."[67] Finally, in the 1980s, the term "slide painting" was adopted.

Some nonconformist artists, who revolted against Soviet socialist realism and turned to abstraction or conceptual art, saw hyperrealism as a cynical sellout to popular taste. Hyperrealist painting was compatible with the Soviet canons of realism and thus was more readily accepted by the Soviet art establishment than abstract or conceptual art, prompting the artist Sergei Sherstiuk to ironically refer to hyperrealism as "post–socialist realism." Estonian art historian Sirje Helme has argued that hyperrealism has been seen as a certain official compromise between contemporary international art movements and official Soviet art politics.[68]

The urban environment became one of the most frequently used motifs in the works of such artists as Semyon Faibisovich, Georgii Kichigin, and Alexander Petrov. Hyperrealism exposed the unconscious thirst of Soviet hyperrealist artists for Western artistic freedom, and these artists were frequently accused by the Soviet authorities of being detached from real problems and issues of the day and not willing to glorify Soviet reality (fig. 139). Helme noted that hyperrealism was usually characterized as "cold, restrained, intellectual, and dealing with the problems of artificial



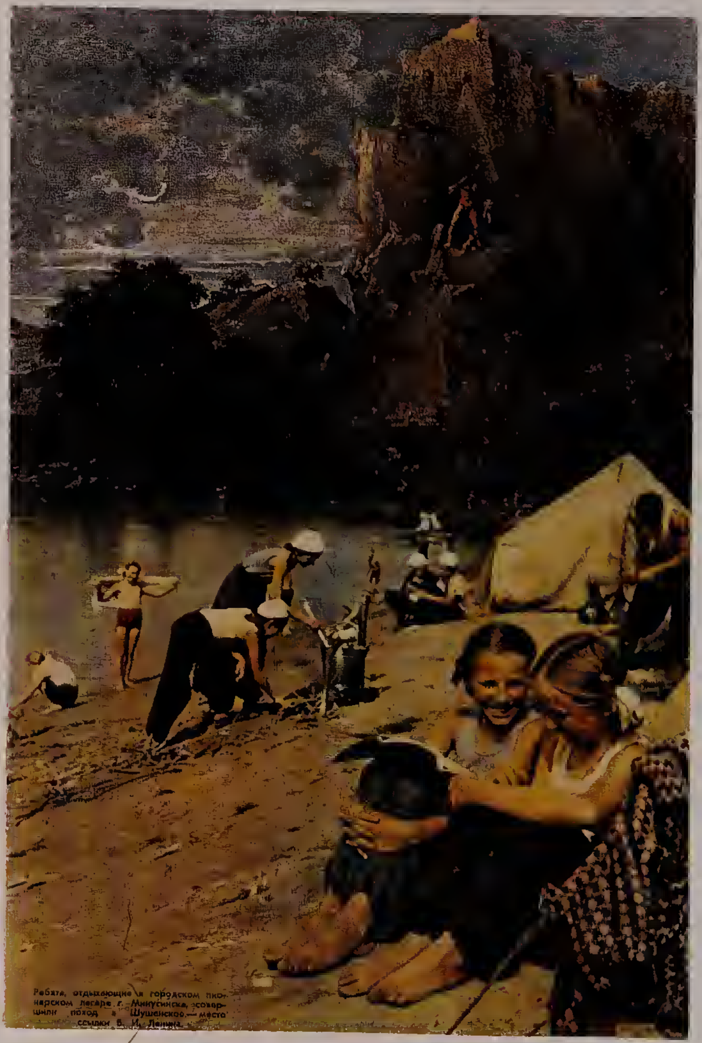

Ребята, отдыхающие в городском пионерском лагере г. Минусинска, совершили поход в Шушенское — место ссылки В. И. Ленина.

Fig. 136 (*above*). Gennady Goushchin, *Sunset in the Bolshoi Theatre* from the series *Alternative Museum*, 1979. Photo collage, 33.1 x 50.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15051.

Fig. 137 (*right*). Gennady Goushchin, *Mythological Landscape with Pioneers* from the series *Alternative Museum*, 1977. Photo collage, 31.1 x 20.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15047.

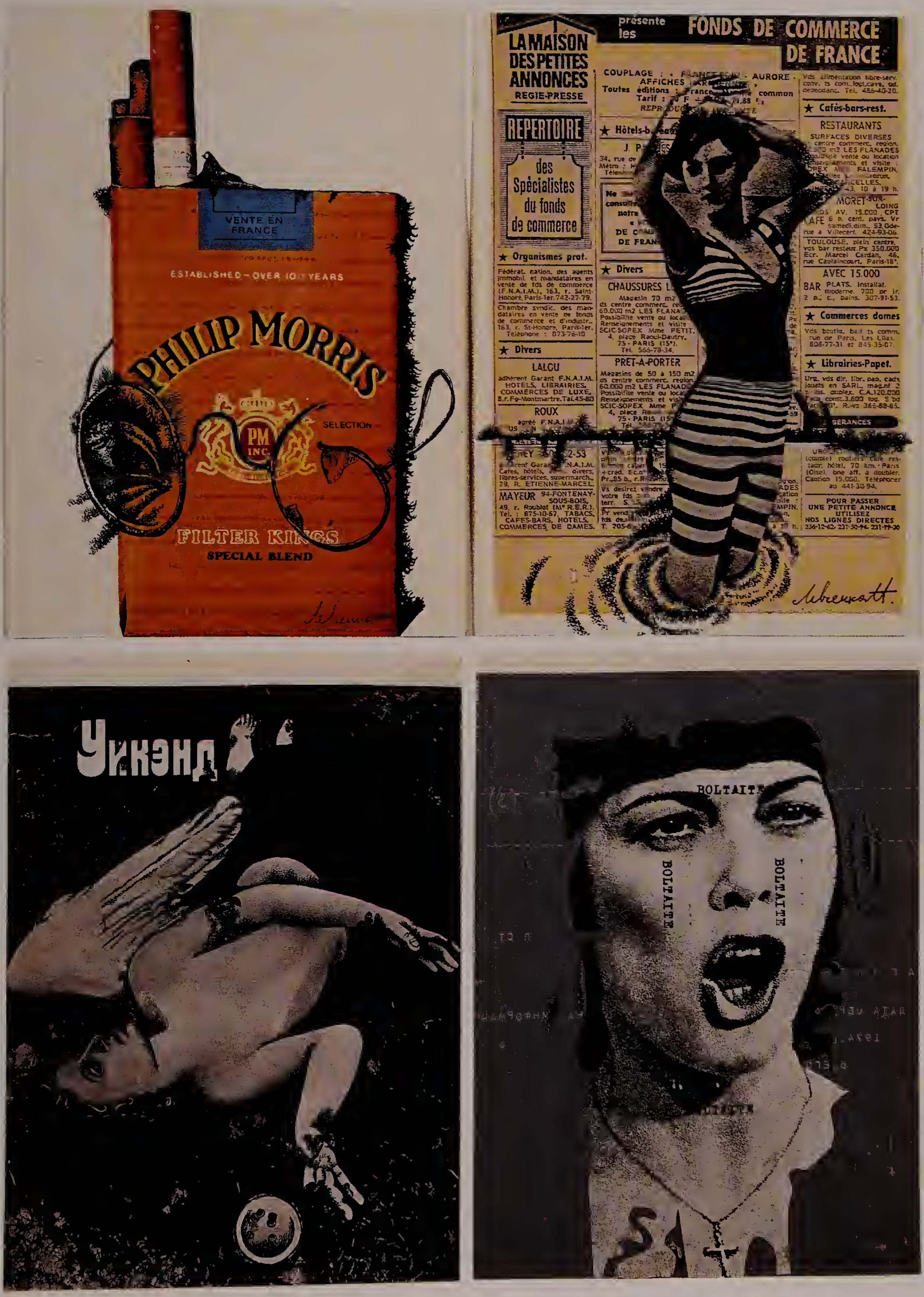

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Fig. 138. Aleksei Levchenko, *Weekend*, undated. Collage on paper, 40.7 x 29.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 11504.

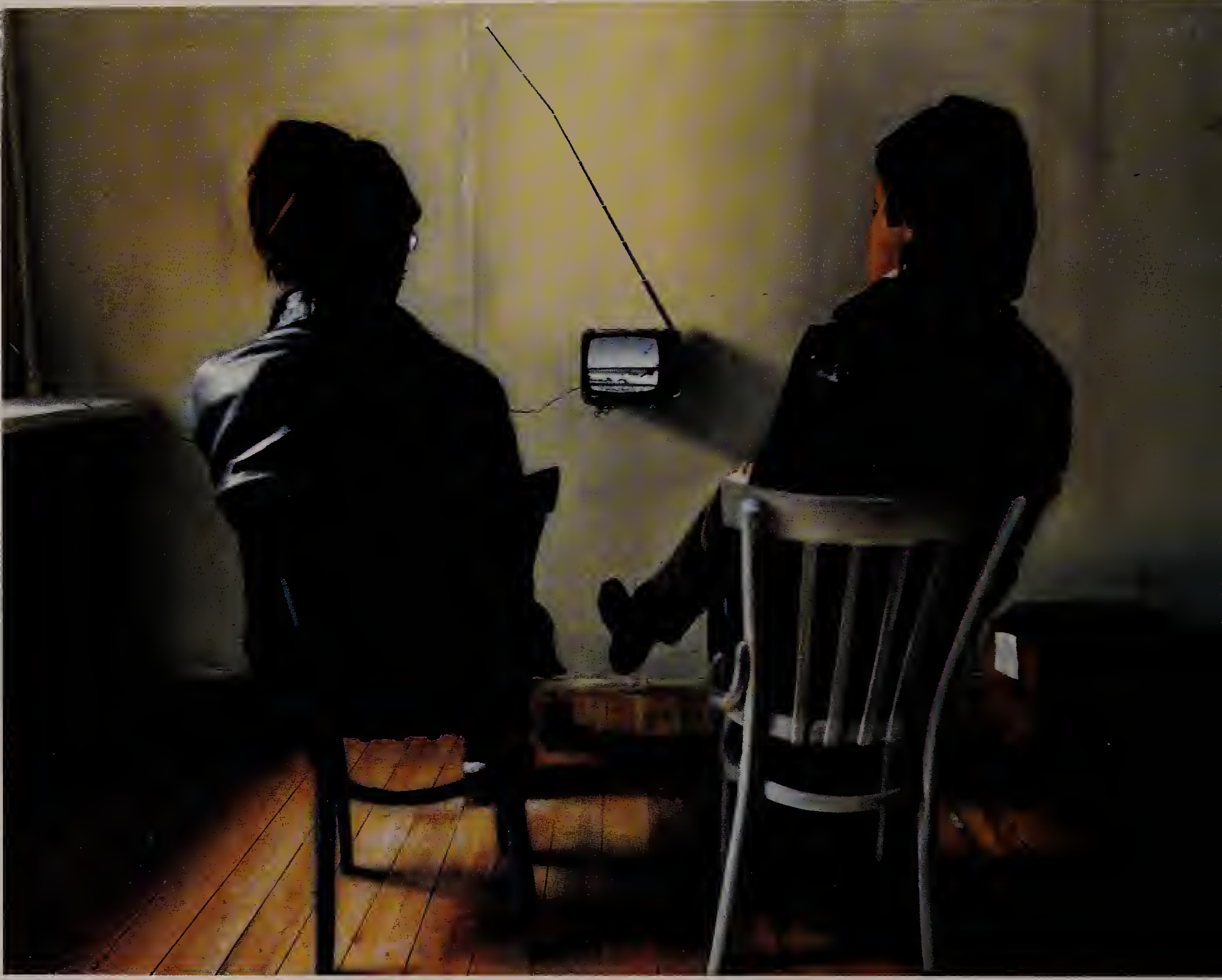


Fig. 139. Sergei Sherstiuk, *Islands*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 140 x 180 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05099.

environment."[69] However, the British art historian Edward Lucie Smith argues that the real message in photorealist works is neither simple dependency on photographic imagery nor an intellectual analysis of ways of seeing things dictated by the camera lens, but "a hunger for figurative images that contain a strong emotional and subjective element."[70]

In the 1970s, a number of Western contemporary art exhibitions, such as the 1974 exhibition in the House of Friendship in Moscow and the 1975 *Contemporary American Art* exhibition at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, provided an opportunity for many Soviet artists to see Western photorealist works for the first time, including works by such American artists as Chuck Close (b. 1940), Andy Warhol (1928–1987), and Richard Estes (b. 1936) who greatly influenced some Soviet artists.

The art historian O. T. Kozlova noted in her book *Fotorealizm* (Photorealism) that a number of Estonian artists initially explored the photorealist method in the beginning of the 1970s, followed in the late 1970s and 1980s by Moscow artists[71] (fig. 140). In the 1980s, artists from many other areas of the former Soviet Union such as Ukraine, Leningrad, Lithuania, Latvia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and even Siberia began creating hyperrealist works. Soviet hyperrealist artists frequently formed groups of like-minded friends. A Group of Six, composed of Aleksei Tegin, Sergei Sherstiuk, Sergei Bazilev, Sergei Geta, Nikolai Filatov, and Igor Kopystiansky, worked in Moscow from 1980 to 1985.

Some Soviet hyperrealist artists started their careers painting in abstract (Sherstiuk) or surrealist (Yüri Palm) modes before turning to hyperrealism.

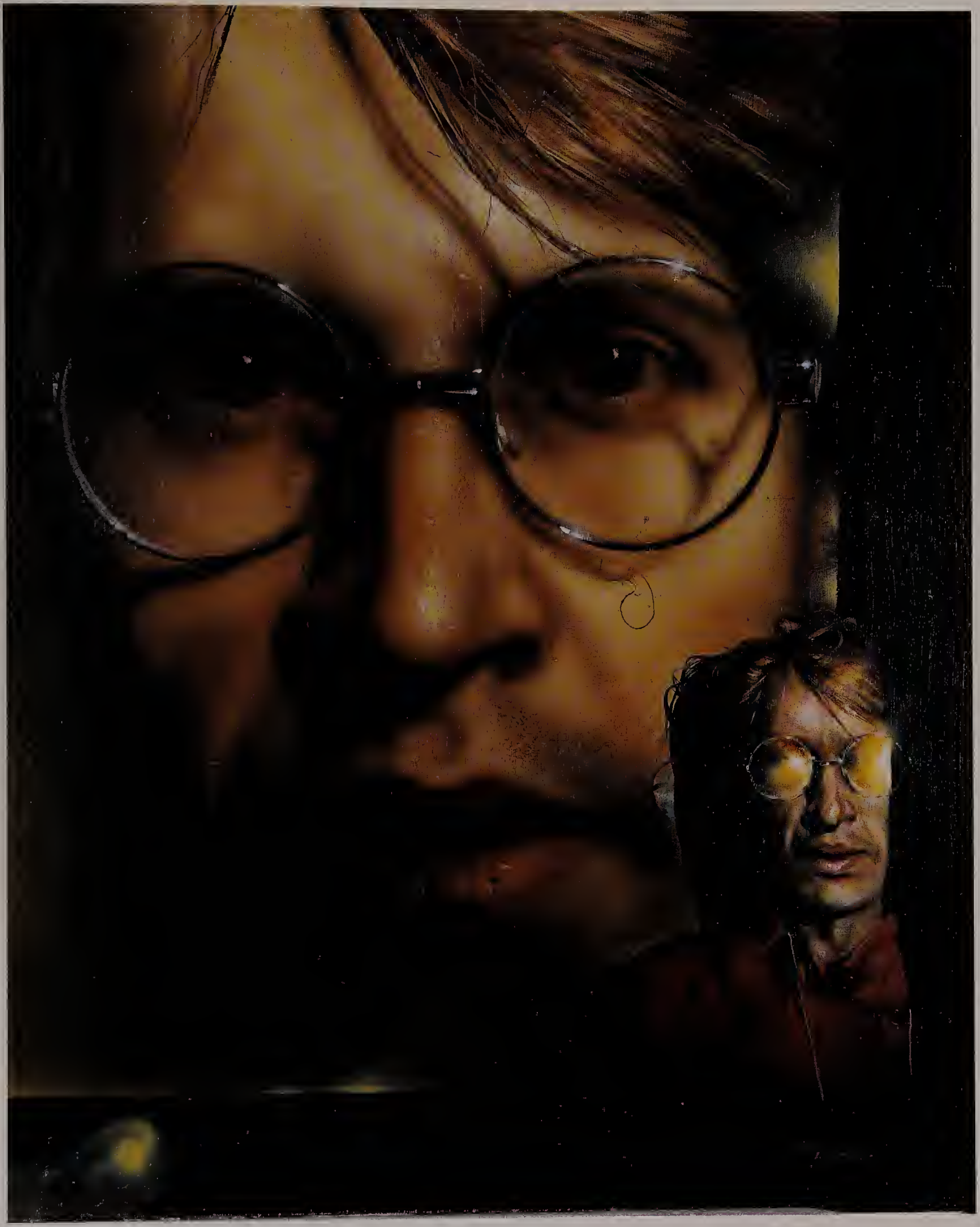


Fig. 140. Georgii Kichigin, *Portrait of Sergei Sherstiuk*, 1983.
Oil on canvas, 119 x 100 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 01173.

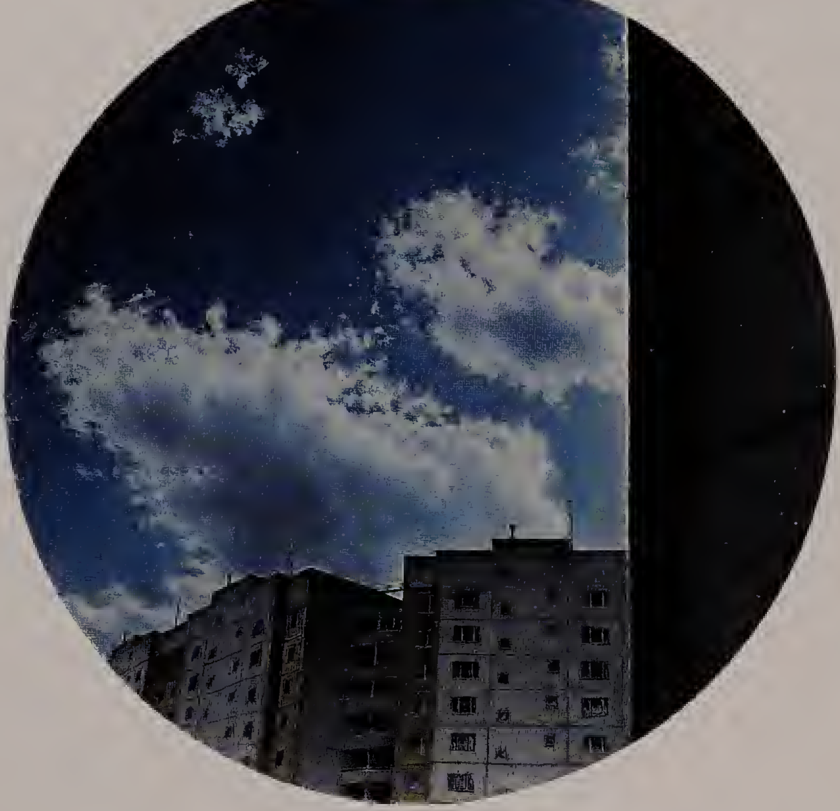


Fig. 141. Sergei Shablavin, *Sky Over City*, 1978.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 84 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05010.

Many hyperrealists were initially trained as designers (such as Alexander Petrov, Andrei Volkov, Ando Keskküla, and Andres Tolts) or had an education in a technical field (Sergei Shablavin, for example, studied cybernetics). Such training facilitated their deemphasis of brushwork and use of airbrush instead.

As art critic Vitaly Patsyukov pointed out, in the work of Sergei Shablavin (b. 1944), one of the pioneers of photorealism in Soviet Russia, space is perceived spherically, while objects are highly exaggerated, as though seen from a cosmic space or optically through camera lenses (fig. 141). Shablavin has thus redefined the nature of the rectangular, flat plane. Presenting various landscape views as a cosmic experience, Shablavin comments on the infinity of the universe.[72]

The Moscow photorealist Alexander Petrov, many of whose works are included in the Dodge Collection (fig. 142), claims that in the early part of his career, he considered his work to be in the spirit of the Flemish school and that he was then unaware of Western photorealism.[73] The experience of holding a rifle in a shooting range in the North Caucasus as well as his thoughts about the wastefulness of destructive human impulses served as a starting point for Petrov's *Shooting Range*, 1978. One version of the work contains images of moving animals used as targets at the shooting range. In later versions, the animals have disappeared, and the only thing that remains is a human being shooting into the void.

In his work *Moscow-Tula*, 1982 (fig. 143), Petrov depicts a train that is heading toward a small town—Tula—past a railway junction with its ordinary attribute of track repair tools. It presents a landscape devoid of any traditional poetic qualities and therefore "unworthy" of the gaze of an artist. In 1986, after having acquired a car, Petrov discovered road signs as the new object for his art. In *The White Horse Is Not a Horse*, 1992, Petrov depicts one of these sign-objects—a traffic light—and transforms it into a symbolic image.[74]

Having studied industrial architecture, Semyon Faibisovich (b. 1949) turned to painting in 1978. He was impressed by the work of American photorealist artist Richard Estes, which the artist saw at the 1975 exhibition of American art at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and also influenced by the still lifes of Italian artist Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964). Faibisovich is attracted by the quotidian, depicting ordinary people such as shoppers, bus riders, and bathers in his photo-based paintings. While living in the gloomy expanses of a new neighborhood on the outskirts of Moscow, Faibisovich spent many hours riding buses from his home to the subway and back. During his commute, Faibisovich would shoot roll after roll of film, and these amateur, drab photographs became the basis of his thematic series of paintings entitled *City Bus* (1983–91), *Moscow Subway* (1984–88), and *Suburban Train* (1985–91). Russian art historian Yevgeny Barabanov argued that although art critics commonly call Faibisovich's art "photorealism," the term is only partially correct.[75] Barabanov pointed out that "the foundation of Faibisovich's artistic analysis and reflection is not photography but the *photographic discourse*." Barabanov is convinced that for Faibisovich "photography is not a 'fact' . . . but a discourse that makes utterances possible."[76] The scholar related Faibisovich's "nonphotographic" images of drunkards, people standing in line to buy wine, insane people, and derelicts at train stations to the "dissident language of truth" and noted that Faibisovich's photographic activities led on numerous occasions to clashes with the police and bystanders.[77] Describing his work method, Faibisovich says that he uses a slide projector to project the negative onto the canvas, permitting him to capture the

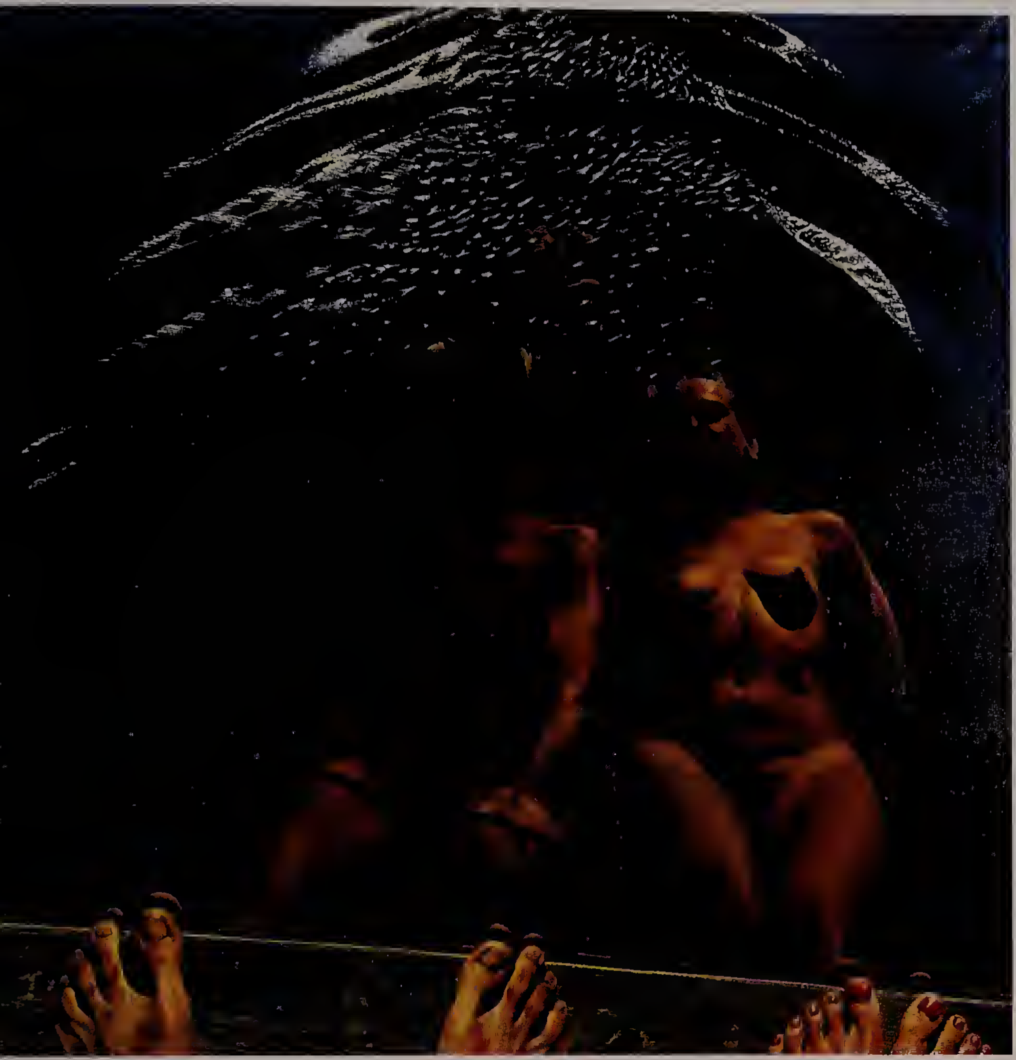
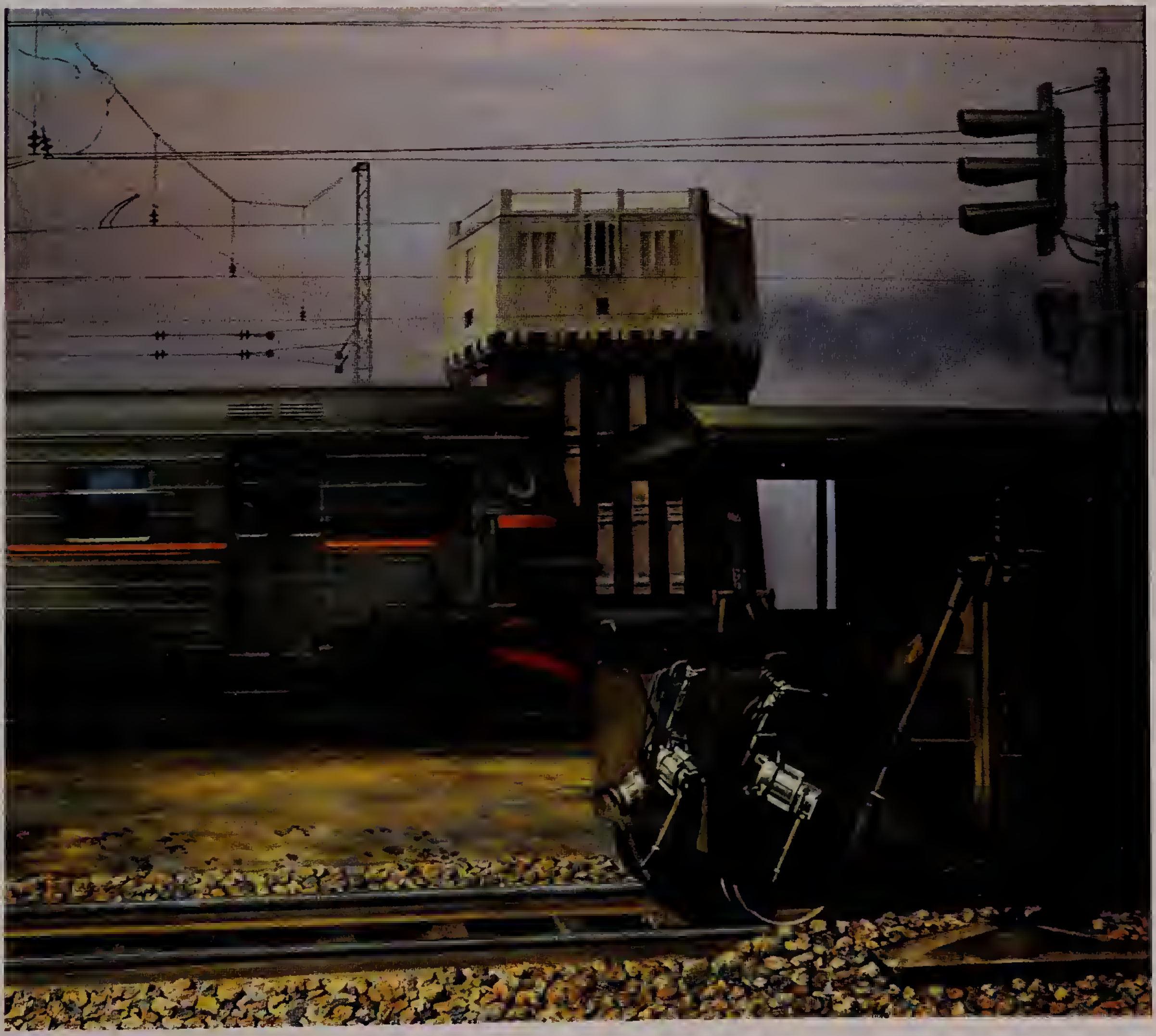


Fig. 142 (*left*). Alexander Petrov, *Shoo!* 1985. Oil on canvas, 150 x 148.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 02152.

Fig. 143 (*below*). Alexander Petrov, *Moscow-Tula*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 150.5 x 169.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07729.



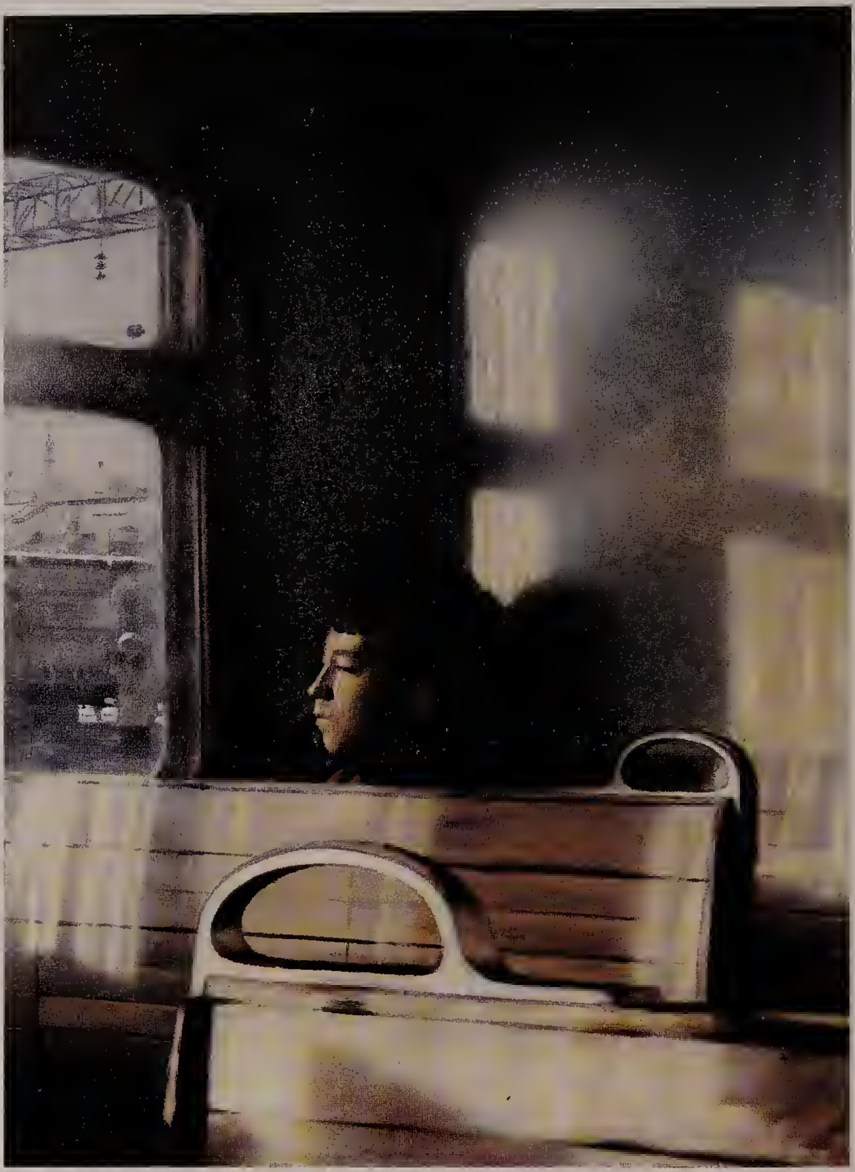


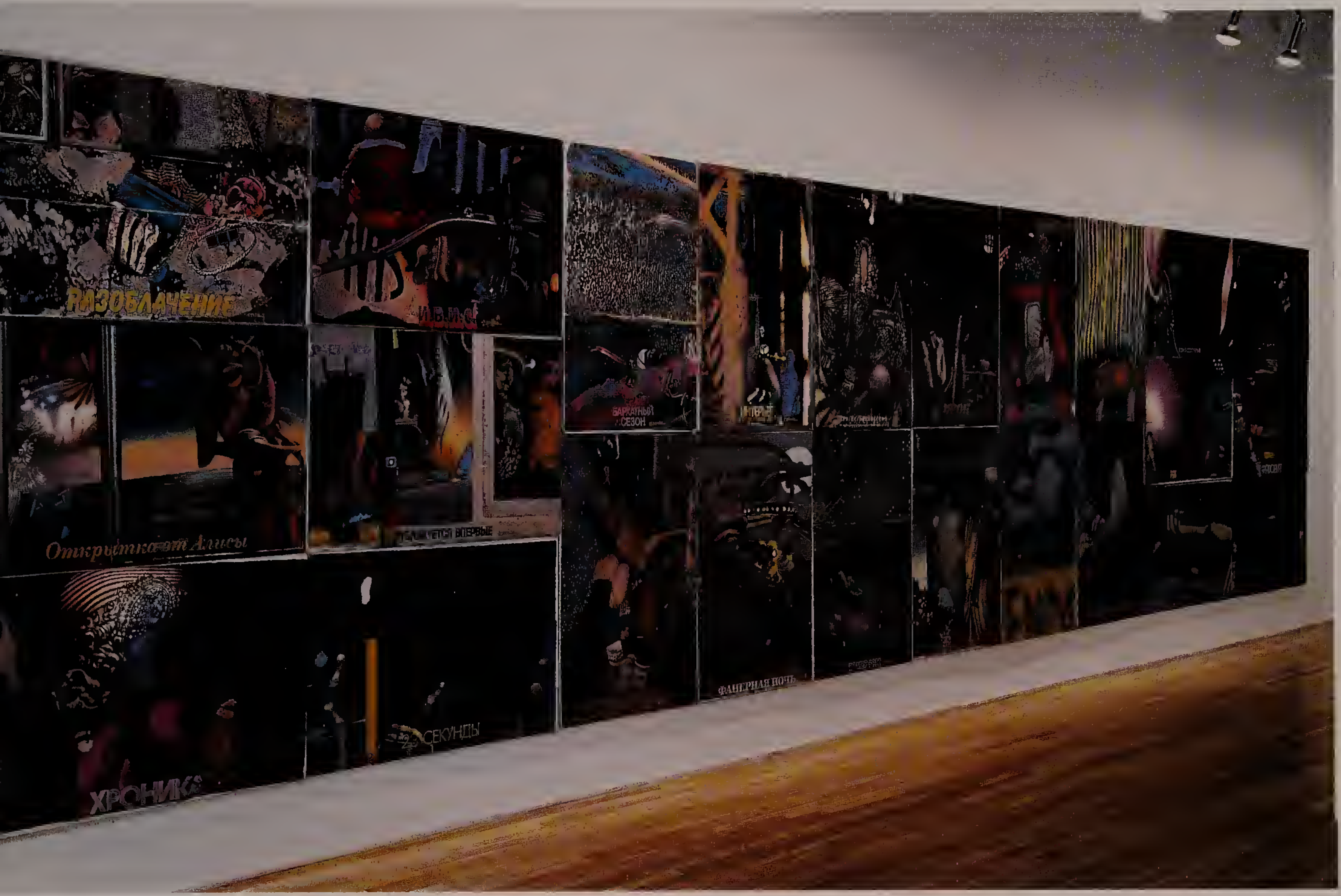
Fig. 144. Semyon Faibisovich, *Boy* from the series *Suburban Train*, 1985. Oil on compressed wood, 131 x 96 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07749.

general composition precisely; he usually draws the rest by hand.

Many of Faibisovich's subjects are technically challenging and involve multiple reflections, as in his paintings *Driver of Icarus*, 1984; *Boy*, 1985 (fig. 144); *At the Exit*, 1986; and *Double Portrait of Artist at Work*, 1987. Faibisovich's subjects and heroes are highly generalized, which is exemplified by his painting *Boy*. This work, with its velvety surface and soft colors, evokes a haze of suppressed childhood memories and dreams. Faibisovich achieves a strange intensity; the effect of his indiscriminate attention to detail creates, somewhat paradoxically, a strong feeling of unreality. The lighting perfectly complements the subdued mood and alludes to the possible fears, desires, and fantasies of a young boy. Slaloming between the poles of truthful representation and aesthetic artifice, Faibisovich's works confound the formerly clear distinction between physical phenomena and mental activities and between objective and subjective states.

Yurii Dyshlenko, another major nonconformist artist, used a projector to transfer his images associated with advertising and other aspects of popular culture to canvas, a practice that ran parallel to the working methods of photorealists.[78] Dyshlenko adopted the practice of working in series and often appropriated commercial labels, tags, and cartoons for his paintings, creating "representation of representation." His *Authenticity* series (figs. 145A and 145B) consists of five cycles devoted to different areas of mass iconography such as periodicals, television, tourist advertising, the reproduction of museum curiosities, and sensational newspaper photography. Many of Dyshlenko's works included in the Dodge Collection utilize screens of dots and other surface textures that suggest photolithography.[79]

The great range of artworks using photography that are part of the Dodge Collection clearly demonstrates that in the early 1970s and throughout the 1980s, modernist purity of means and uniqueness of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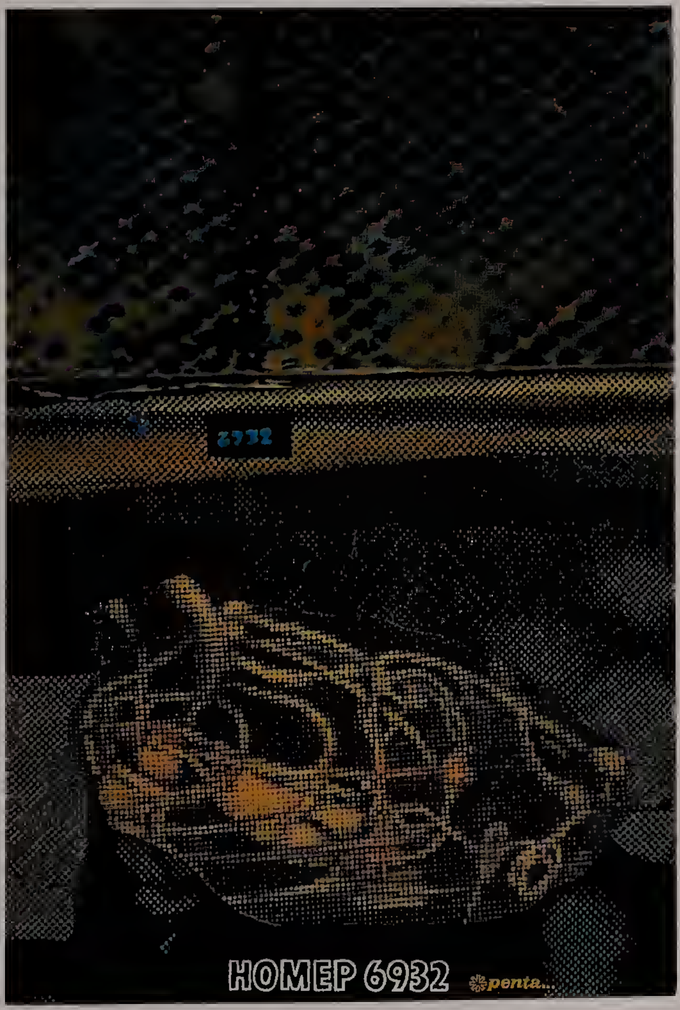
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Fig. 145A (*top*). Yurii Dyshlenko, *Authenticity*, series of twenty-four works, 1978–85 (general view of installation). Collection of the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany.

Fig. 145B (*left*). Yurii Dyshlenko, *Number 6932* from the series *Authenticity*, 1978–85. Acrylic on canvas, 119.4 x 80 cm. Collection of the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany.

mediums were no longer highly valued in Soviet nonconformist art; indeed, advanced artists commingled photography, language, performance, painting, and other mediums. They challenged the distance between art and life, high and low culture, the fine and popular arts. Multiple uses of photography in Soviet nonconformist art expanded the creative vocabulary of contemporary Russian artists.

NOTES

1. Alexander Tolnay, foreword to *Contemporary Photographic Art from Moscow*, ed. Alexander Tolnay (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1995), 8.

2. See Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–83* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984); see also Barbara Haskel, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958–1964*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with W. W. Norton and Company, 1984); *Breakthroughs: Avant-Garde Artists in Europe and America, 1950–1990*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications in association with Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, 1991).

3. *Eduard Gorokhovsky*, exh. cat. ed. Norton Dodge (Jersey City, N.J.: The C.A.S.E. Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in collaboration with Cremona Foundation, 1989), 22.

4. For a thorough discussion of Soviet photography of this period, see Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

5. Osip Brik was close to the Russian constructivists and formalists and interested in photography and film. In 1918, Brik was a member of IZO Narkompros (Visual Arts Section of the People's Committee for Education). He became a member of Inkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture) in 1921 and a member of LEF (Left Front of the Arts) in 1923. Brik was especially close to Aleksandr Rodchenko and did much to make his photographic work known.

6. Osip Brik, "Foto-kadr protiv kartiny," *Sovetskoe foto* (Moscow), no. 2 (126): 40–42; reprinted in English translation (trans. John E. Bowlt), "The Photograph versus the Painting," in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), 215.

7. Ibid., 218.

8. In the West, pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, David Hockney, and Richard Hamilton started to use the photograph to reference and comment on consumerism. The photography critic David Campany has pointed out that while pop art spliced photography directly into contemporary art for the first time, conceptualism subjected the industrially regularized photograph to the most sustained scrutiny. See David Campany, "Conceptual Art History or, A Home for Homes for America," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and John Bird (London: Reaction Books, 1999), 126–27.

9. See David Eliott, introduction to *Another Russia: Unofficial Contemporary Photography from the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1986); Victor Miziano, "Art Photography in the U.S.S.R. Between the Years 1970 and 1980," in *An Insight into Contemporary Soviet Photography: 1968–88* (Paris: Editions le Comptoir de la Photographie, 1988); Margarita Tupitsyn, "Veil on Photo: Metamorphoses of Supplementarity," in *Foto in Painting*, exh. cat. (Moscow: First Gallery and New York: Phyllis Kind Gallery, 1989), 4–16. Other important recent contributions to the topic of contemporary Russian art photography and photo-related art include *Photostroika: New Soviet Photography* (New York: Aperture, 1989); *Photo Manifesto: Contemporary Photography in the U.S.S.R.*, exh. cat., ed. Joseph Walker, Christopher Ursitti, and Paul McGinniss (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1991); Leah Bendavid-Val, *Changing Reality: New Soviet Photography*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Starwood Publishing, 1991); Tolnay, ed., *Contemporary Photographic Art from Moscow*; and Victor Tupitsyn, "Solntse bez namordnika," in *Kommunal'nyi (post)modernism* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 1998), 140–50. The Summer 1994 issue of the *Art Journal*, edited by Diane Neumaier, was devoted to contemporary Russian photography and greatly contributed to the subject.

10. Margarita Tupitsyn, "Veil on Photo: Metamorphoses of Supplementarity," in *Foto in Painting*, 4–16.

11. Ibid., 8.

12. Vsevolod Nekrasov, "On 'Photorealism' and the Paintings of Erik Bulatov," in *Erik Bulatov: Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. James Lingwood, with essays by Claudia Jolles and Viktor Misiano (Zurich-Frankfurt-New York and London: Parkett Publishers and ICA London, 1989), 22.

13. Bulatov was greatly influenced by the Russian artist Robert Falk (1886–1958), whom he knew personally, and from whom he inherited the traditions of Russian Cezannism and its methods of tonal fusion.

14. *Drugoe iskusstvo: Moskva 1956–1976*, vol. 1, ed. L. Talochkin (Moscow: Moskovskii kollektsioner, 1991), 186.

15. Erik Bulatov, artist's statement in *Adaptation and Negation of Socialist Realism: Contemporary Soviet Art*, exh. cat. (Ridgefield, Conn.: Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 11.

16. See Eric Bulatov, "My Attitude Towards Social Reality," in *Margins of Soviet Art: Socialist Realism to the Present* by Margarita Tupitsyn (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1989), 152.

17. Erik Bulatov, " 'Seva's Blue,' 'I Lived-I See' 'The Poet Vsevolod Nekrassov,' " in *Erik Bulatov: Exhibition Catalogue*, 22.

In addition to *The Poet Vsevolod Nekrasov*, Bulatov created two other related paintings dedicated to Nekrasov, *Seva's Blue* and *I Live-I See*.

18. *Drugoe iskusstvo: Moskva 1956–1976*, 10.

19. Erik Bulatov, in *A-Ya, Unofficial Russian Art Review*, no. 1 (1979): 30.

20. A graduate of the Surikov Art Institute in Moscow, Vassiliev received his training in the graphic arts and, often working in collaboration with Bulatov, earned his living as an illustrator of children's books.

21. Sots art was one of the most influential aspects of Soviet nonconformist culture in the 1970s and 1980s. So named by Komar and Melamid in Moscow in 1972, sots art refers to the use of visual and material forms of Soviet propaganda—the art of socialist realism, posters, and slogans. Komar and Melamid pointed out that their motivation in creating sots art was the comparison of Western overproduction of consumer goods with Soviet overproduction of ideology. In sots art, various stereotypes of Soviet propaganda were transformed into a new, contemporary language, which was a satirical inversion of Soviet ideology. The "official kitsch" of mass-produced Soviet ideological souvenirs—statuettes of Soviet leaders, postcards showing idealized workers, toys or posters depicting Young Pioneers—was mocked through distortion, defacement, satirical juxtapositions, or recasting in crude materials.

On sots art, see *Endquote: Sots Art Literature and Soviet Grand Style*, ed. Marina Balina, Nancy Condee, and Evgeny Dobrenko (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2000); Regina Khidekel, *Soviet and Post-Soviet: Sots Art and American Pop Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); O. V. Kholmogorova, *Sots Art* (Moscow: Galart, 1994); Margarita Tupitsyn, *Margins of Soviet Art*; and Margarita Tupitsyn, "Sots Art: The Russian Deconstructive Force," in *Sots Art* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 4–15.

22. St. Sebastian (4th cent. A.D.) was a member of the elite Praetorian guard under Diocletian. The emperor showed Sebastian no mercy when he was discovered to be a Christian, and he ordered him to be shot through with arrows. Some stories report that the archers had orders to aim at the least vital parts, in order to prolong the agony. The most common representation of this saint is from the Renaissance.

23. This photograph was an unpublished illustration for the cover of the constructivist journal *LEF*.

24. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 12.

25. On Soviet conceptual art, see Margarita Tupitsyn, "About Early Soviet Conceptualism," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exh. cat., ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 99–108; Natalia Tamruchi, *Moscow Conceptualism, 1970–1990* (Roseville East, Australia: Craftsman House and G+B Arts International, 1995); *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, exh. cat., ed. David Ross (Tacoma, Wash.: Tacoma Art Museum; Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

26. On Komar and Melamid, see Carter Ratcliff, *Komar and Melamid* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1988).

27. See Margarita Tupitsyn, "Alienation as Status: Ilya Kabakov and the Collective Actions Group," in *Margins of Soviet Art*, 39. See also Margarita Tupitsyn, *Sots Art* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986).

28. *Grinding "Pravda"* consists of three photographs that document the grinding, plus the paper ball displaced in a case like a fetish, or an "ideological" waste.

29. Osip Brik, "From Pictures to Textile Prints" (1924), in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde, Theory and Criticism*, ed. John E. Bowlt (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 249.

30. The series was first exhibited in 1977 at the Feldman Gallery in New York.

31. The title alludes to *Dead Souls* (1842), the most ambitious work by the Russian nineteenth-century writer Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852). The hero of Gogol's novel, Chichikov, a retired government official, arrives in a provincial town with the intention of buying "dead souls"—serfs who were deceased but still carried on the tax rolls until the next census—from local landowners. *Dead Souls* was a satire of Russian life: its targets were not only official inefficiency and corruption but also the crushing banality and utter lack of spiritual or intellectual awareness in Russian life.

32. The origin and the concept of this work was discussed in a lecture by Vitaly Komar, "We Buy and Sell Souls," presented at Harvard University on February 17, 2000; transcribed from the audio tape. Edited by Daniel Rishik.

33. Ibid.

34. *A-Ya: Contemporary Russian Art* (Unofficial Russian art review), no. 1 (1979): 18.

35. *Russian Samizdat Art*, ed. Charles Doria, with essays by John E. Bowlt, Szymon Bojko, and Rimma and Valeriy Gerlovin (New York: Willis Locker & Owens Publishing, 1986), 78.

36. Excerpts from Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, typewritten statement, June 18, 2002.

37. In 1957, Bakhchanyan entered the Kharkov Studio of Decorative Art, where he studied with Vasily Ermilov, an important member of the 1920s Russian avant-garde movement. In 1965 Bakhchanyan took part in an exhibition of Kharkov unofficial artists. He moved to Moscow two years later and became particularly close to the conceptual artist Ilya Kabakov and the poet Eduard Limonov.

38. Doria, ed., *Russian Samizdat Art*, 101.

39. Ibid.

40. Eduard Gorokhovsky was born in 1929 in Vinnitsa. In 1954 he graduated from the Odessa Institute of Civil Engineering as an architect, but he worked in that field for only two years. Beginning in 1955 Gorokhovsky worked as a book illustrator in the town of Novosibirsk and also painted. Since 1973 he has lived in Moscow, where he became close to such nonconformist artists as Viktor

Pivovarov and Ilya Kabakov. See a detailed discussion of Gorokhovsky's work in *Eduard Gorokhovsky: Fotografiia—kartina—fotografiia*, ed. Larisa Kashuk (Moscow: The State Tretyakov Gallery, 1999).

41. Eduard Gorokhovsky, from a conversation with Dr. Norton T. Dodge in *Adaptation and Negation of Socialist Realism: Contemporary Soviet Art*, exh. cat. (Ridgefield, Conn.: Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 19.

42. See Marek Bartelik, *Sequences: As You Can See. Conceptual Works from the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, exh. cat. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1997), 6.

43. Igor Makarevich was born in 1943 in the village of Tripoli, Georgia, but has lived in Moscow since 1951. A graduate of the Art Department of the Institute of Cinematography in 1968, he became a member of the Artists' Union in 1970. He has worked as a monumental painter, book illustrator, and stage designer. Since 1976 he has been exhibiting his conceptual works with underground groups.

44. Igor Makarevich, unpublished statement about *Stratigraphic Structures-Changes*, June 2002, translated by Natalia Orlova-Gentes.

45. Ibid.

46. For a detailed discussion of Nakhova's *Rooms*, see the 2001 interview between Irina Nakhova and Rene Baigell, audiotape, ZAM archive.

47. See Joachim Sartorius, "Monumental (Facade), Ironic (Utopia), Theatrical (Reality): On the Recent Works of Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky," in *Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky*, exh. cat., with essays by Joachim Sartorius, Dan Cameron, and Christine Tacke (Berlin: Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD; Munich: Kunstraum, 1991), 88.

48. From the interview between Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky and Helena Kontova, "Igor and Svetlana Kopistiansky: Through the Past Darkly" in *Flash Art* 26, no. 172 (October 1993): 111.

49. Besides Nussberg, the members of the Movement group included Anatolii Krivchikov, Viktor Stepanov, Rimma Zanevskaia, Francisco Infante, Vladimir Akulinin, Viacheslav Shcherbakov, Yurii Lopakov, Gennadii Neishtadt, and Galina Bitt. Lev Nussberg emigrated to the West in 1976.

50. According to Francisco Infante, the first kinetic performance of the Movement group took place at the Palace of Culture of the Kurchatov Institute in Moscow in 1966, and it was prohibited for "ideological reasons" by the authorities of the Palace of Culture. Also see "Interview with Francisco Infante," *Strelets*, no. 1 (77) (1996): 306–14.

51. Infante, born of a Russian mother and a Spanish father, studied at the Moscow Art School from 1956 to 1962. On Infante, see *Francisco Infante: Monografiia* (Moscow: Center for Contemporary Art, n.d.); Maya Aguiriano, John E. Bowlt, and Nicoletta Misler, *Artefactos Francisco Infante*, exh. cat. (Bilbao, Spain: Recalde, 1995).

52. Maya Aguiriano, "Interview with Francisco Infante," Moscow, December 1994, in *Artefactos Francisco Infante*, 106.

53. See Francisco Infante, "Fragmenty moego tvorchestva," in *Francisco Infante: Monografiia*, 14.

54. Francisco Infante, "On My Concept of the Artefact" (February 9, 1987), in John E. Bowlt, *Francisco Infante from Moscow*, exh. cat. (Sewickley, Pa.: International Images, Ltd., 1989), 18.

55. The futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun* was first performed December 5, 1913. It broke with existing artistic, theatrical, and philosophical conventions. The libretto by Aleksei Kruchenykh, with a prologue by Velimir Khlebnikov, is written in a neologistic "transrational" or trans-sense language, its many invented words built on existing Russian word stems. Influenced by Italian futurism, the text glorifies speed, technology, and male strength. Dissonant music combined with sound effects accompanied the actors' movement and speech. Malevich's black-and-white sets made from cloth sheets painted with conical, spiral, and geometric forms were equally unconventional, as were his costumes—constructions of brightly colored cardboard cylinders, cones, and cubes. See *Theatre in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design, 1913–1935*, exh. cat., ed. Nancy Van Norman Baer (New York: Thames and Hudson, in collaboration with The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and The Bakhrushin State Central Theatrical Museum, 1991), 38, 190.

56. The core of the ARGO group (Avtorskaia rabochaia gruppa) consisted of Infante, Goriunova, and Valerii Osipov.

57. Infante, "On My Concept of the Artefact," 18.

58. See Anatolii Brusilovsky, "Igra so shtampami," Forschungsstelle Osteuropa Historisches Archiv (Archive of Eastern Europe) at Bremen University, FSO, #A, f.142, 1–2. The collage technique was frequently used by the Russian avant-garde artists of the 1920s.

59. Brusilovsky recalls:

> My childhood was filled with and surrounded by magnificent books—folios with countless engraved illustrations by Gustave Dore, and images from the Russian magazine *Niva*, the Brockhaus and Efron encyclopedia, etc. This well structured world, however, was penetrated—as in the 1919–20 revolutionary poster by El Lissitzky *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*,—by a different, aggressive, and disorderly world of Soviet propaganda posters, slogans, photographs of leaders, young Soviet pioneers blowing horns, and images of exaggeratedly severe soldiers. Here, amidst the clashes, mingling and inter-penetrations there emerged an entirely different meaning. Something blinding flared up—thoughts not always articulated by words—a flash at the elusive boundary of consciousness and the subconscious.
>
> My world was patched together from very disparate and conflicting elements. These elements fought, shouted, spat out insults and then, utterly exhausted would lay on one another in a hysterical copulation. . . . I made cut-outs, applied

> various elements and made changes over and over again. . . . Although I often had a plan, a main idea, and even sketches of the composition, I did not know until the very end what the result would be, what my soul would be content with. . . . I had an enormous collection of cut-outs for every purpose—like a typesetter's box that contains all the necessary letters. This activity resembled writing verse more than anything else. I knew what I was writing about but "how" and "why" I use certain words I did not know. . . . This is a remarkable phenomenon—to preserve and conserve the astonishment arising from the collision of individually banal things and "cut-outs" resulting in an unexpected manifestation of a new meaning.

Excerpt from Anatolii Brusilovsky, typewritten statement, June 2003, translated by Daniel Rishik.

60. Doria, ed., *Russian Samizdat Art*, 101.

61. *Frottage* (French: "rubbing") is a technique of creating an image by placing a piece of paper over a rough surface such as grained wood or sacking and rubbing the paper with a crayon or pencil until it acquires an impression of the surface quality of the substance beneath. The technique was invented in 1925 by Max Ernst.

62. Ashley Atkins, *The Sum Is Greater Than the Parts: Collage and Assemblage in the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, exh. cat. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 2001), 9.

63. Petr Belenok, artist's statement in *The Quest for Self-Expression: Painting in Moscow and Leningrad, 1965–1990*, ed. Norma Roberts, with essay by Elena Kornetchuk (Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Museum of Art, 1990), 60.

64. See Gennady Goushchin, "Alternative Museum," in *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (Contemporary Russian Art Photography, ed. Diane Neumaier) (Summer 1994): 76–79. The author of this essay would also like to thank Tricia Laughlin, Graduate Curatorial Assistant, for her assistance in researching information about Goushchin's works and for her editing of Goushchin's typewritten manuscript.

65. Aleksei Levchenko, unpublished handwritten statement, January 26, 2003, Kiev.

66. See A. Kamensky, "Dokumental'nyi romantizm," in *Tvorchestvo*, no. 10 (1982): 18–21; see also V. Turchin, "Giperrealizm: pravdopodobie bez pravdy," in *Iskusstvo*, no. 12 (1974): 48–53.

67. As cited in O. T. Kozlova, *Fotorealizm* (Photorealism) (Moscow: Galart, 1994), 15.

68. Sirje Helme, "From the Ivory Tower to Postindustrial Culture," in *Tallinn-Moskva, 1956–1985*, exh. cat., ed. Anu Liivak (Tallinn: AS Pakett Trukikoda, 1997), 155.

69. Ibid., 166.

70. Edward Lucie Smith, "Photorealism," in *American Realism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 189.

71. Kozlova, *Fotorealizm*, 12.

72. See Vitaly Patsyukov, "Sergey Shablavin," in A-Ya, no. 1: 21–24.

73. See Matthew Baigell, "Alexander Petrov," in *Alexander Petrov* (New Brunswick: privately printed, 1995).

74. During one of his trips to Orekhovo-Borisovo, on a cold winter night, in the middle of an empty intersection, Petrov's attention was drawn to a broken traffic light. All of its lights were flashing, giving contradictory signals that were impossible to follow. These simultaneously flashing lights appeared to Petrov to be a symbol of Gorbachev's policy of perestroika, which permitted everything yet made nothing possible to realize. The title of the work (*The White Horse Is Not a Horse*) evokes Chinese philosophical teachings that question the status of objects and their essence. (From the interview of Alla Rosenfeld with Alexander Petrov, unpublished, translated by Natalia Kariaeva, 2001.)

75. Yevgeny Barabanov, "Analysis of the Unidentified," in *Semion Faibisovich: Paintings from the 1980s* (Moscow: Regina, 2001), 17.

76. Ibid., 20.

77. Ibid., 21.

78. See *Yurii Dyshlenko: Modernity, Abstraction and Mass Media*, exh. cat., ed. Janet Kennedy (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions and The State Russian Museum co-published with Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2002).

79. Ibid., 13.

Lev Manovich and Nick Muellner

Naked in the Grass Absurdity and Play in the Ideological Field

I introduced Lev Manovich and Nick Muellner to each other by e-mail for the purpose of creating the following cyber-conversation. After an initial correspondence—Lev from California, Nick from New York—they met only once in person. Nick agreed to explore the Dodge Collection's photographic works and found, as he put it, "a number of obviously humorous images that indulge in homemade glamour and fantasy, and a joking use of photography's documentary function." The series of e-mail exchanges below is based on those selected images.

DIANE NEUMAIER, EDITOR

NICK MUELLNER: What strikes me about the work that I pulled from the Dodge Collection is the particular vocabulary that photography brings to the subversion of late Soviet imagery and ideology. So much nonconformist art of the 1970s and 1980s took on authority by using—and subverting—its own means: realist painting, stylized graphics, textual slogans, overdetermined symbolism, etc. Even when nonsense and humor infect this vocabulary, they create a dialectic within an art historically (and ideologically) serious framework.

The value of photography in this situation is its vernacular ability to evoke entirely different frames of reference: the casual photographing of friends,

Fig. 146 (*facing*). Andrei Chezhin, No. 5 from the series *Delusion*, 1983–85. Gelatin silver print, 38.6 x 29 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14643.05.

the banality of identifying reference, the frivolous glamour of Western media culture (film, pop music, fashion, etc.). These vocabularies do not create the same direct confrontation with the rhetoric of state power. Photography here allows something more akin to a provocatively nose-thumbing escape.

Look at the book *The Beatles* by the Mukhomor (Toadstool) Group. Mukhomor (1978–84) was a conceptual and performance group with a substantial presence in the Moscow underground art scene—because of both the prominence of some members and the sometimes dramatic extremity of their work. The group included Sven Gundlach, Vladimir Mironenko, Sergei Mironenko, Alexei Kamensky, and Konstantin Zvezdochetov. The two artists depicted in the *Beatles* piece are Zvezdochetov and Gundlach.

This book of nine images with text immediately establishes itself both as an art object—a focused, cleanly constructed, handmade book—and as an aesthetically blunt object. The book begins with an image of two men in a public space, photographed at medium distance—too far to read as a portrait, but central enough that they must be the subjects. This photograph and its accompanying text make two banal and unconvincing assertions: The image says only (in the language of holiday photos), "We were there." The caption states, "We are two Beatles—Kostya and I" (fig. 147A).

They are obviously *not* Beatles (even though, or especially because, they say they are). They are just two guys standing in a public square. The ridiculous contradiction here—between textual assertion and blunt photographic fact—is what gives this piece its force. As the next page makes clear, a silly, willful, unstoppable act of imagination allows the contradiction. Again, they are just two guys standing on a stairway, no place in particular. One gestures to the other, and the caption reads, "Now and then I say to him: 'Well, you are Beatles, Kostya!' " (fig. 147B). This almost juvenile flaunting of make-believe does not confront the rhetoric of state ideology or official art; it does a joyous end run around it. As the book escalates to the purer nonsense of phonically written musical utterances (fig. 147C) and idiotic pop posing in banal settings, the implicit assertion only becomes stronger: We will be as absurd and foolish as we want to be. We will think about ourselves however we like. It may be play and fantasy, but it is ours.

I have a couple of particular questions about this piece for a native Russian:

1. Is there additional nuance that I'm missing about the significance of the Beatles in the U.S.S.R. in the late 1970s? I know they were popular, but could you expand on what images or feelings were associated with their popularity?

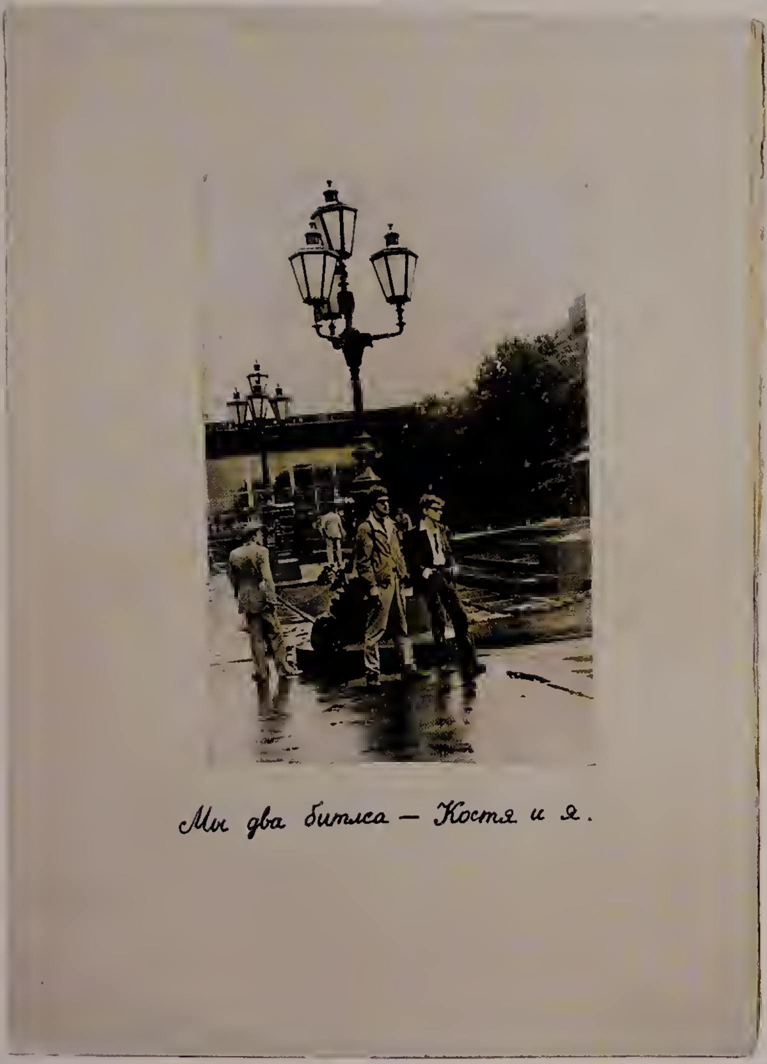
2. The group name—Mukhomor. What are the connotations of that word? A poisonous toadstool? A hallucinogenic? Something a gnome lives under? Just curious about how their name functions.

LEV MANOVICH: 1. The Beatles were very big in Russia at that time; they practically stood for the whole of Western pop music. I remember playing their records over and over when I was a teenager in the 1970s.

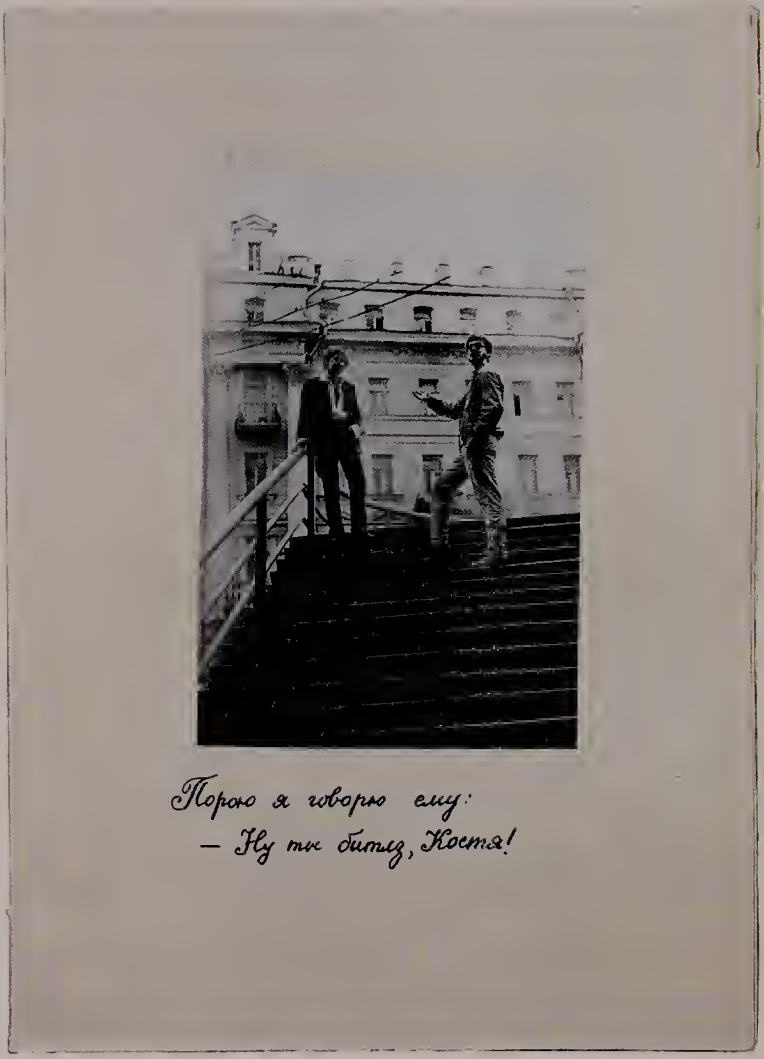
2. Mukhomory are poisonous mushrooms that masquerade as good ones: that is, they look very similar to another, edible mushroom. The poisonous mushroom is big and colorful; it has big red dots all over its cap. Given that, the name Mukhomor can be taken to signal the group's self-proclaimed poisonous/devious/dishonest pose (in relation to official culture and ideology). We are the poisonous ones. Yet we are also the colorful ones; we stand out against the monochromatic palette of Soviet life. This strategy of masquerade is also at work in this particular group of photos where the group members proclaim themselves to be the Beatles.

I think you are right in that many photographs of this period function differently from the paintings, works on paper, and installations. While the latter often invoke the ideological imaginary—the subject matter, symbolism, and visual style of official paintings, billboards, and slogans—the photographs focus on the persona of the artist/performer.

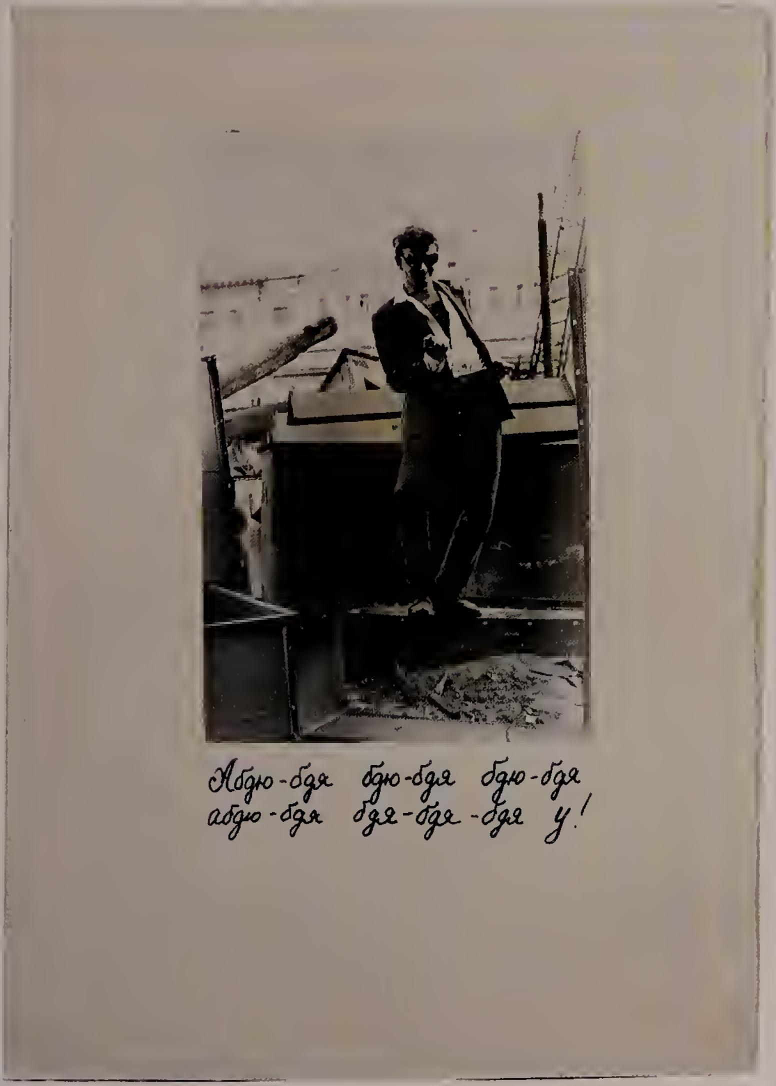
At the same time, all works of Soviet nonconformist art share many devices regardless of the medium: for instance, the use of text on or next to the image that often represents literal "speech acts" of the people in the image. We can find such a strategy in the albums of Kabakov, for example. It is also central to the *Beatles* album: the text that surrounds the photographs of the two "Beatles" is supposedly what they are "singing."



Мы два битлса — Костя и я.



Порою я говорю ему:
— Ну ты битлз, Костя!



Абдю-бдя бдю-бдя бдю-бдя
абдю-бдя бдя-бдя-бдя у!

Figs. 147A–C. Mukhomor (Toadstool) Group, Pages from *The Beatles*, undated. Ink and collaged gelatin silver prints on paper, handmade book, 29.7 x 21.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10010 (pages 2, 3, 5).

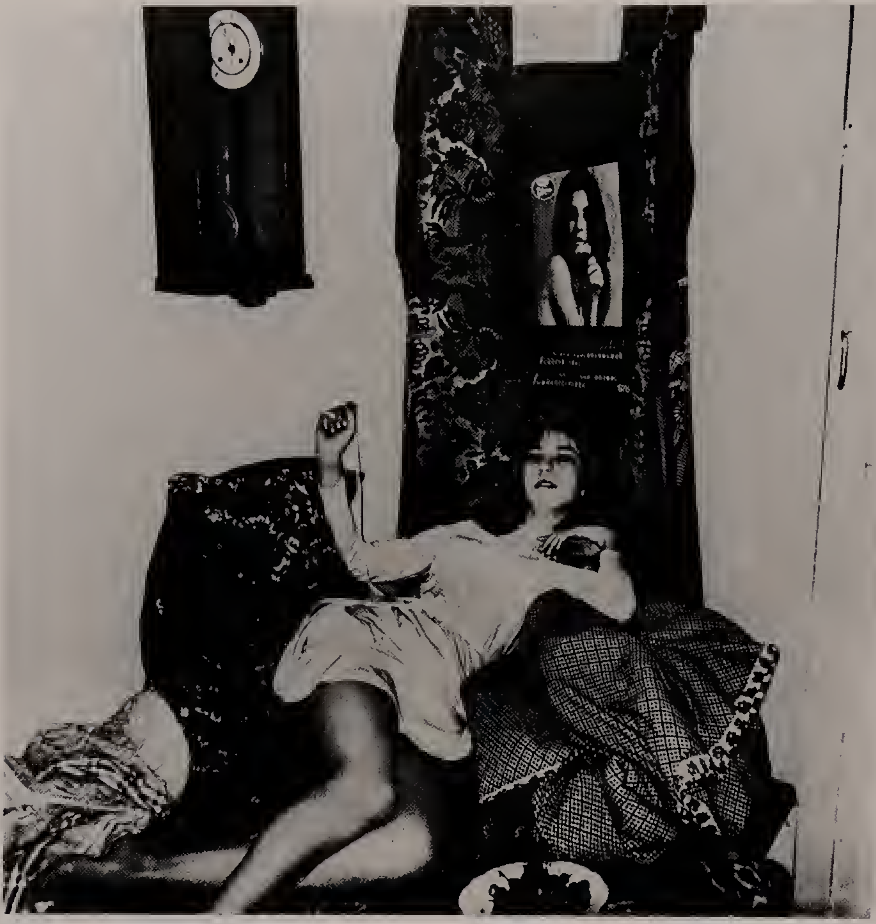


Fig. 148. Nikolai Bakharev, from the series *In the Interior*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 18.5 x 17.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14863.

What strikes me in this album—and in many other photographs of the collection—is the visual contrast between the rather "Western"-looking (in the context of Soviet culture of the 1970s and early 1980s) performers and the ordinary, humble, down-to-earth, totally unglamorous surroundings against which they strike their heroic poses. This contrast makes the ridiculous nature of Soviet "Beatles" even more ridiculous. What is important to realize—and this is yet another way in which nonconformist photography may differ from works of other mediums of this period—is that the same contrast characterized everyday life in Moscow (and, to some extent, Leningrad). That is, many people were able to dress up nicely; women would pour all their earnings into buying certain prestigious pieces of clothing—a leather jacket, a pair of boots. But outside of their apartments, they could not do anything about the ugliness of the public sphere. So my typical visual memory of Moscow at that time is of elegantly dressed-up people walking on a dirty street, with some construction materials lying here and there . . . My point is that the *Beatles* album and many other photographs inevitably rely on this visual aesthetics of everyday life. As was true of everyday citizens, the artists doing their performances outside, in the public sphere, could not control it—they were lucky if they were not arrested!

Here lies one of the differences between Soviet nonconformist photography documenting performances and similar photography done in the West. Soviet nonconformist artists did not have their white cube—the space in the gallery that can be controlled, painted, lighted, and so on. They had three basic choices: either do their performances in private apartments, as did Bakharev (fig. 148) and Chezhin (fig. 146, p. 176); do them in the city, like Mukhomor and Borisov (fig. 149); or take a train and do a performance in the country (Gerlovin [figs. 82A–E, p. 93], Donskoy [fig. 150], and Grinbergs [fig. 151]), where nobody was watching and it was possible to do a real "performance" (Gerlovin) rather than simply strike a pose (Bakharev) or dress up in the privacy of a friend's apartment (Chezhin). Looking through the photographs, I notice less the individual differences between this or that performance than their similarity—people, often naked, doing something in an open field.

NM: Your "typical visual memory of Moscow" seems an eloquent distillation of what you're talking about in this work: obvious discontinuities between the actor and the quotidian stage. This also seems to tie in with your elaboration of the Toadstool. Isn't it also an individualistic and demonstrative fungus—popping up singly in its garish splendor—clownish but dangerous? In recognition of this threat, both Gundlach and Zvezdochetov—the two "Beatles"—were punished for their artistic activity by suddenly having their routinely obtained Muscovite military service exemptions (for "insanity") revoked in 1984. Their subsequent, punishing military service in the Soviet Far East signaled the end of Mukhomor's work.[1]

My favorite example among these pictures of artists audaciously inserting the absurd into the Soviet mundane—and again we have the Beatles in the U.S.S.R.—is Sergei Borisov's 1983 photograph of the Dialog Group (fig. 152). The conflict, in this one image, between the imaginative play of the actors and the dilapidated banality of the surroundings (featuring "construction materials" in the form of small piles of asphalt) functions here on several levels.

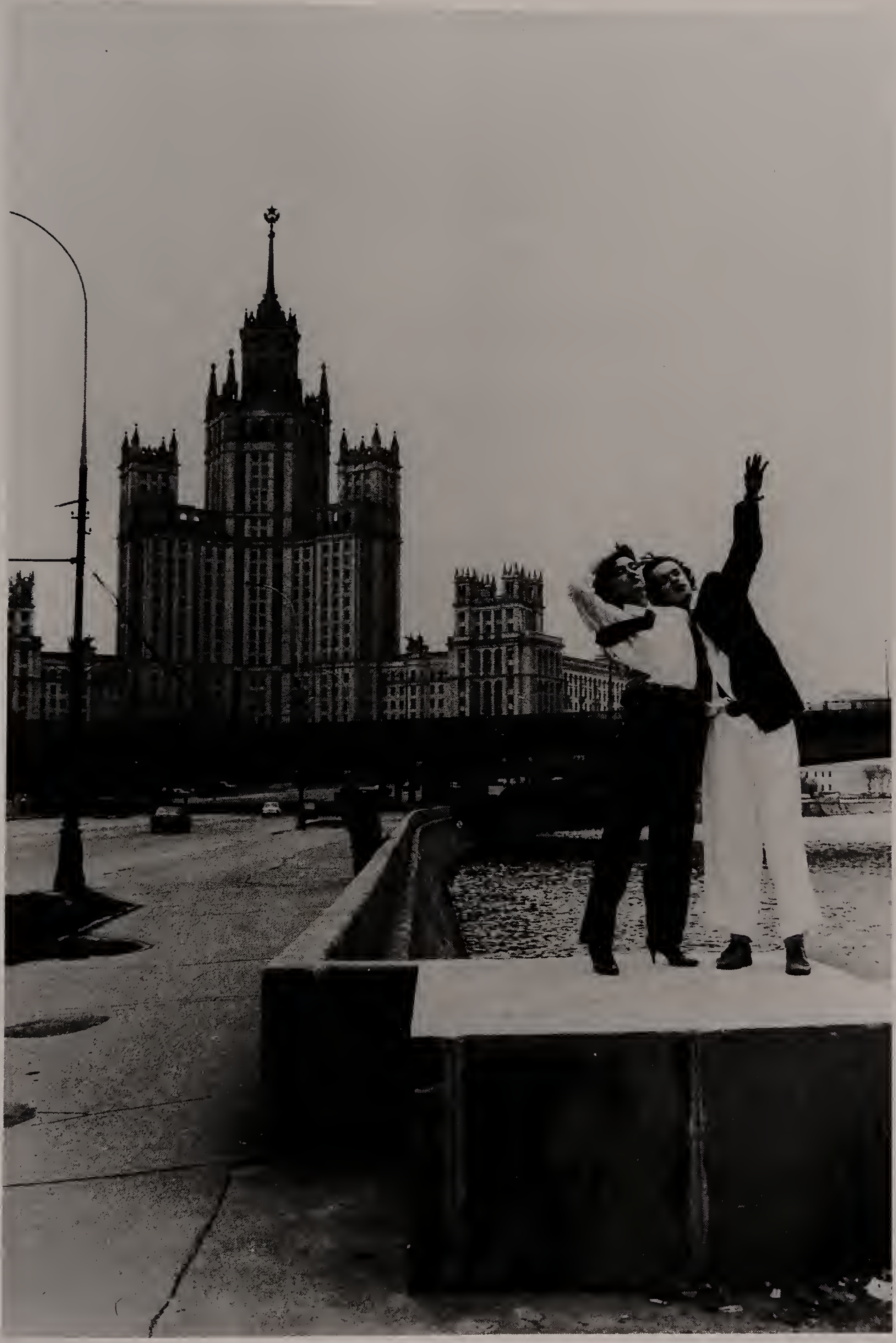
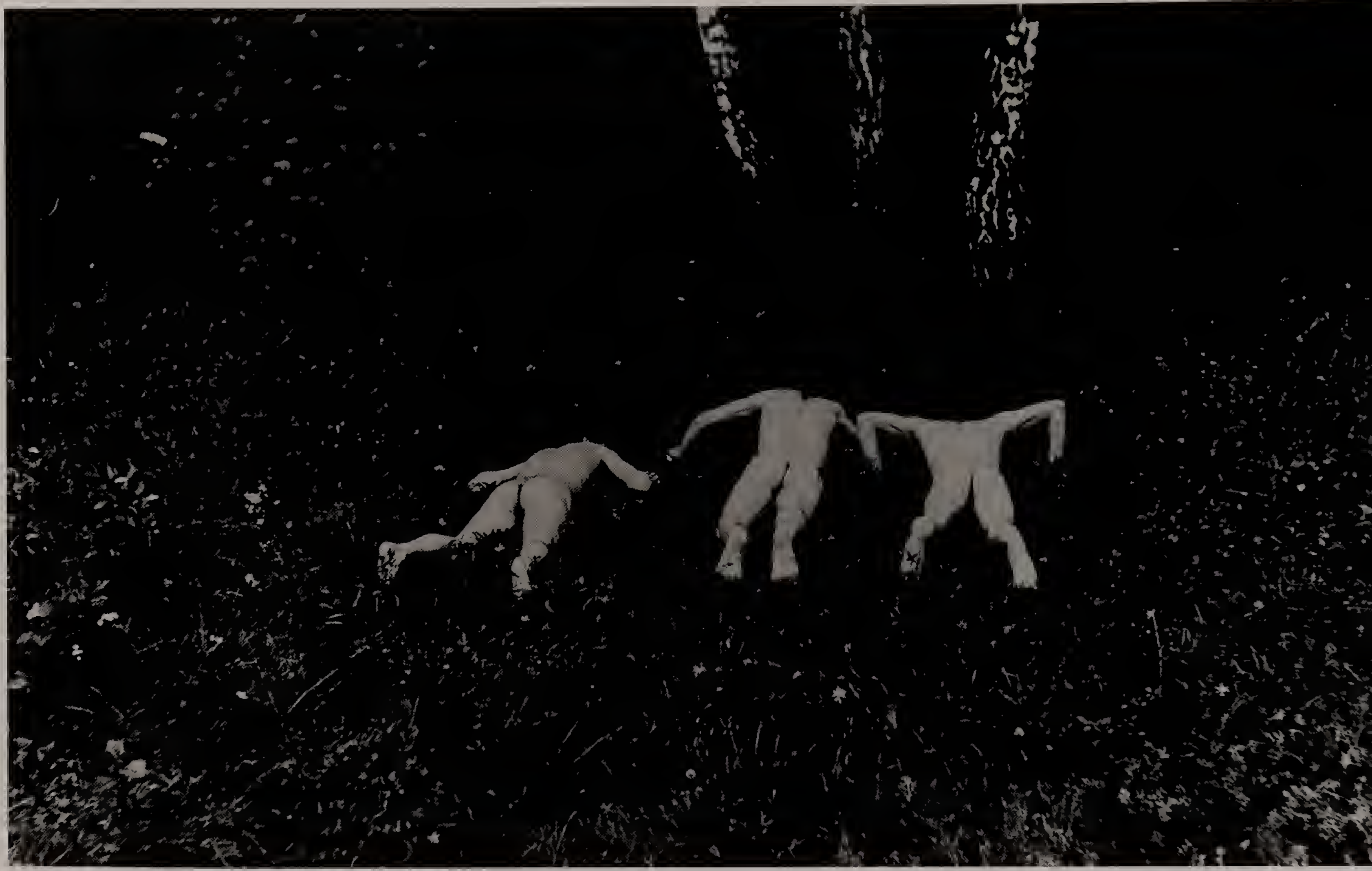


Fig. 149. Sergei Borisov, Untitled, early 1980s. Gelatin silver print, 39.7 x 26.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19304.



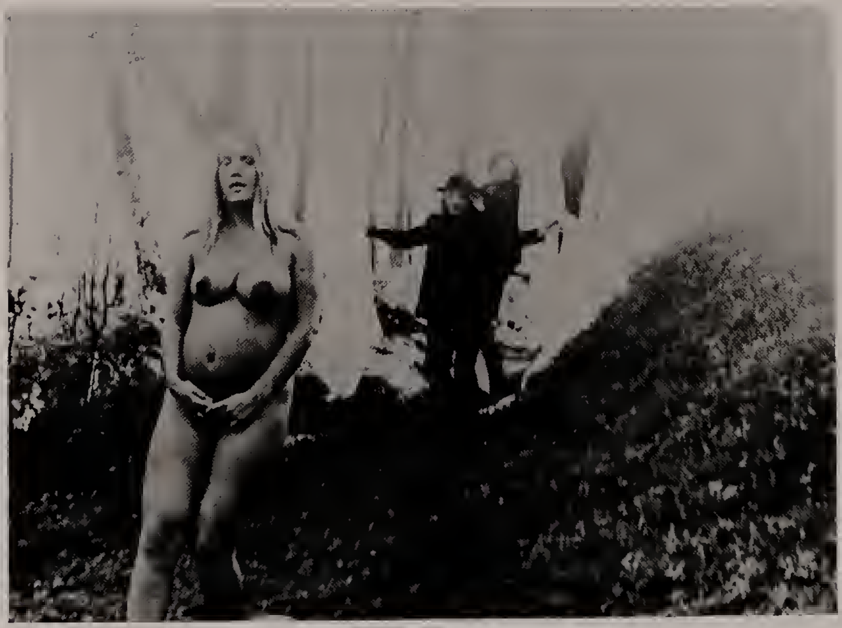


Fig. 150 (*top*). Gnezdo (Nest) Group, *A Happening* (photo documentation by Gennadii Donskoy), 1975–78. Gelatin silver print, 25 x 39.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 09420.01.

Fig. 151 (*above*). Andris Grinbergs, *Easter* (photo documentation by Jānis Kreicbergs), 1975–76. Gelatin silver print, 11.8 x 15.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 20264.

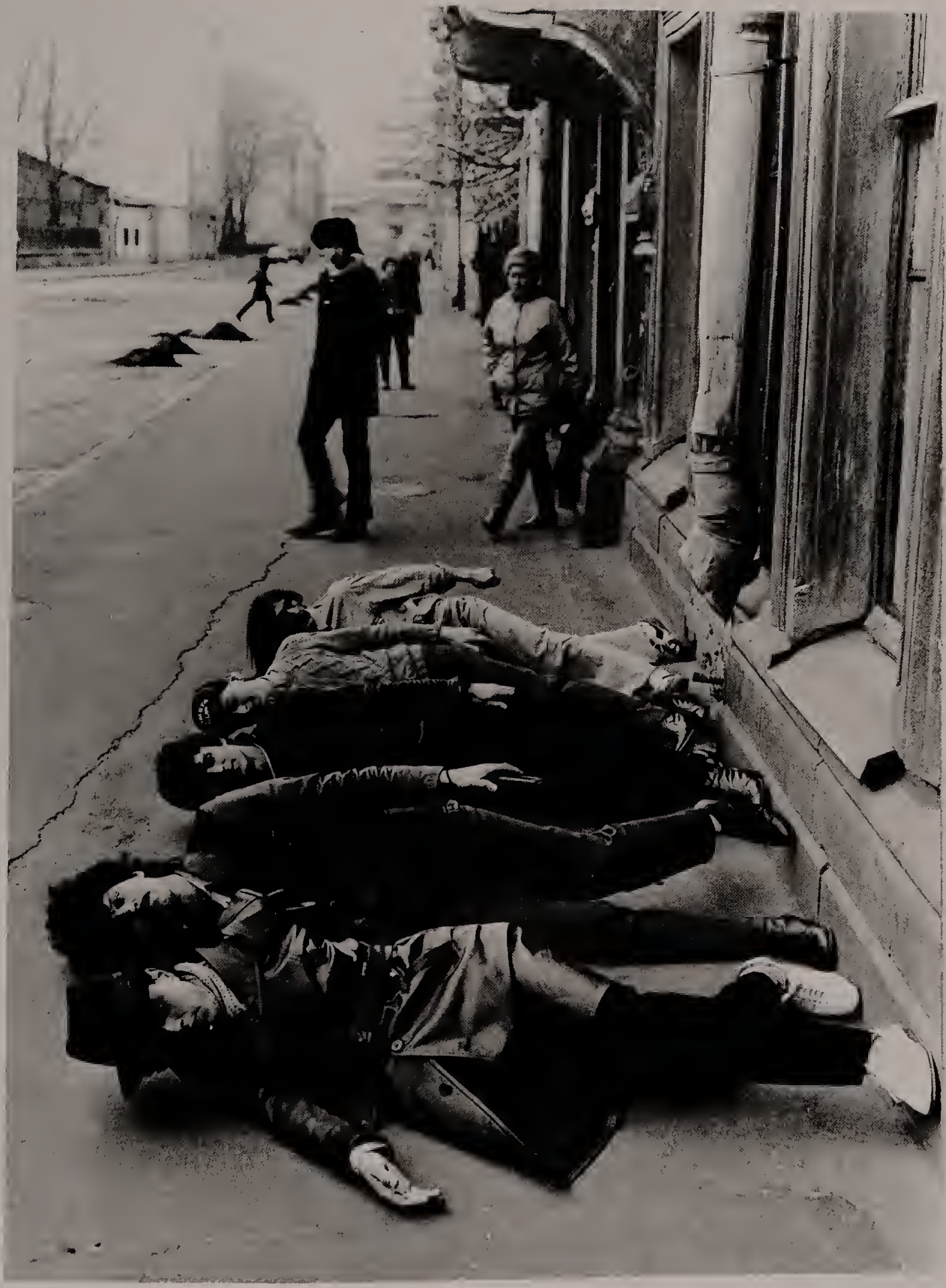


Fig. 152. Sergei Borisov, *Dialog Group*, 1983. Gelatin silver print, 24.4 x 18 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14872.

As you have noted, in many of the images, their appearance is clearly crafted and Western youth-culture oriented—leather jackets, pointy black boots, white sneakers, long hair, etc.—especially if you compare them to the startled Soviet pedestrians in fur hats behind them. As with Mukhomor, the Beatles reference is obvious—a recreation of the iconic *Abbey Road* cover image of the band walking midstride in a straight line. Again, they are not the Fab Four, or even remotely successful fakes. They are characters asserting their right to self-determined make-believe.

But this still leaves us with the most startling fact: they are all lying on their sides in the middle of the sidewalk in the middle of the day. This silly photograph manages to depict two coexistent worlds at right angles to each other: the vertical world of the street and the perpendicular space of these striding pseudo–rock stars. Here the fact presented by the photograph, rather than the "action," becomes essential. Despite our ability to understand the truth of the situation—they are immobile and prone—the still image allows us to subscribe to the illusion that they are photographically frozen in midstride. Any actual presence or temporal documentation would have erased this perception. But in the image, they are convincingly stepping, arms swinging in choreographed lockstep, especially if you turn the picture on its side.

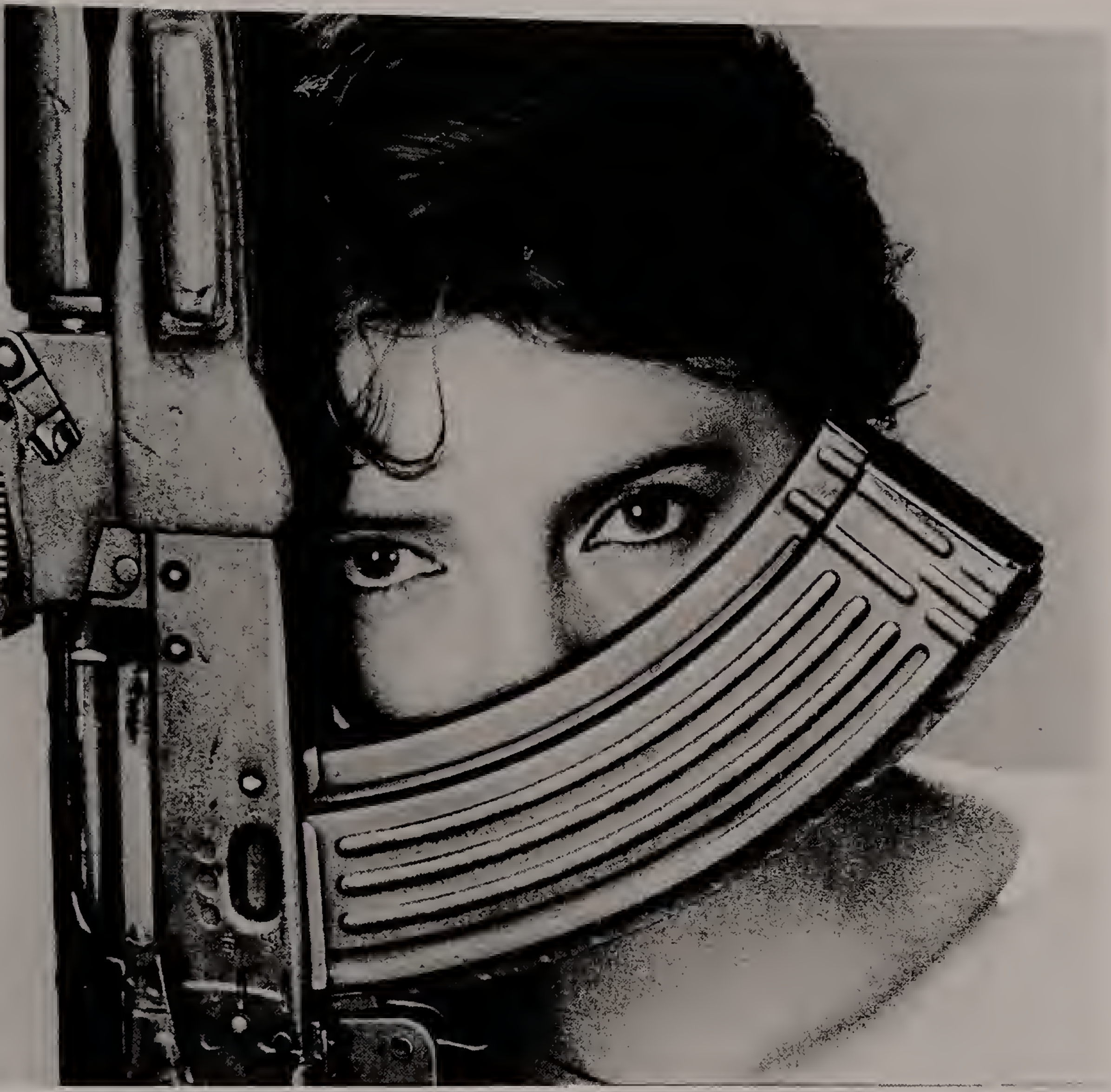
Not only does their perpendicular relationship to the "upright" world of Soviet Moscow constitute a political stance, it also invokes—and compromises—the mythology of forward motion that infuses Soviet ideology. This photograph comes from an urban landscape that had been dominated for the preceding sixty-five years by pervasive images of striding figures (Lenin, Stalin, Workers, Young Pioneers, etc.) and the exhortation (often, literally, up in lights) "Forward!" (to the victory of socialism, to the next five-year plan, etc.). The photograph's illusion of forward motion—momentarily compelling but so obviously wrong—turns the imagery of "Forward!" on its side and then stops it dead in its tracks. "Forward!" is an illusion supported only by the willful suspension of disbelief. As soon as it is punctured, you know they are going nowhere fast.

This notion of subverting the positivist rhetoric of state ideology with "cheap" illusionism brings me back to the politics of masquerade that you raised earlier. It also suggests interesting relationships to the trope of failed illusionism in American photography in the 1970s.

LM: Your interpretation of the semiotics of horizontal versus vertical in the Borisov photograph is fascinating. Of course, we should note that in other photographs by Borisov we see artists taking a different path: carefully emulating the iconography of official representations (figs. 153 and 154). I think that such emulation is more common to Soviet unofficial art of the period: think, for instance, of the 1982–83 painting by Komar and Melamid, *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*.

These two strategies—"resistance by inversion" and "resistance by emulation"—can be traced not only in relation to iconography but also in relation to style. So, if we for a second consider Soviet unofficial painting of the 1960s to 1980s, we will see that at first it was dominated by the "resistance by inversion": if the official style was nineteenth-century realism, unofficial artists turned to what they considered its opposite: abstraction. Later, however, the leaders of so-called sots art (Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Ilya Kabakov, and Eric Bulatov) adopt the opposite strategy. They begin to painstakingly emulate the official styles: socialist realism in painting, the texture and color of Soviet photography, the look of official posters. The irony here is that many artists have supported themselves by making such official representations, either freelance or full-time (Bulatov and Kabakov, for instance, worked as children's book illustrators). So the artists simply adapted their already honed "official" skills to their "unofficial" art practice. We can ask to what extent this constitutes a genuine resistance as opposed to self-deception.

The irony continued. As we know, these sots art artists became well known in the West, while nobody who was doing abstraction ever "made it." Why? One explanation is that, behind the sophisticated theoretical and ideological facade of modernism and the Cold War, the Western public always wanted realism. The West also wanted to continue maintaining the distinct difference between itself and the post-Soviet "other" that during the Soviet period was expressed by



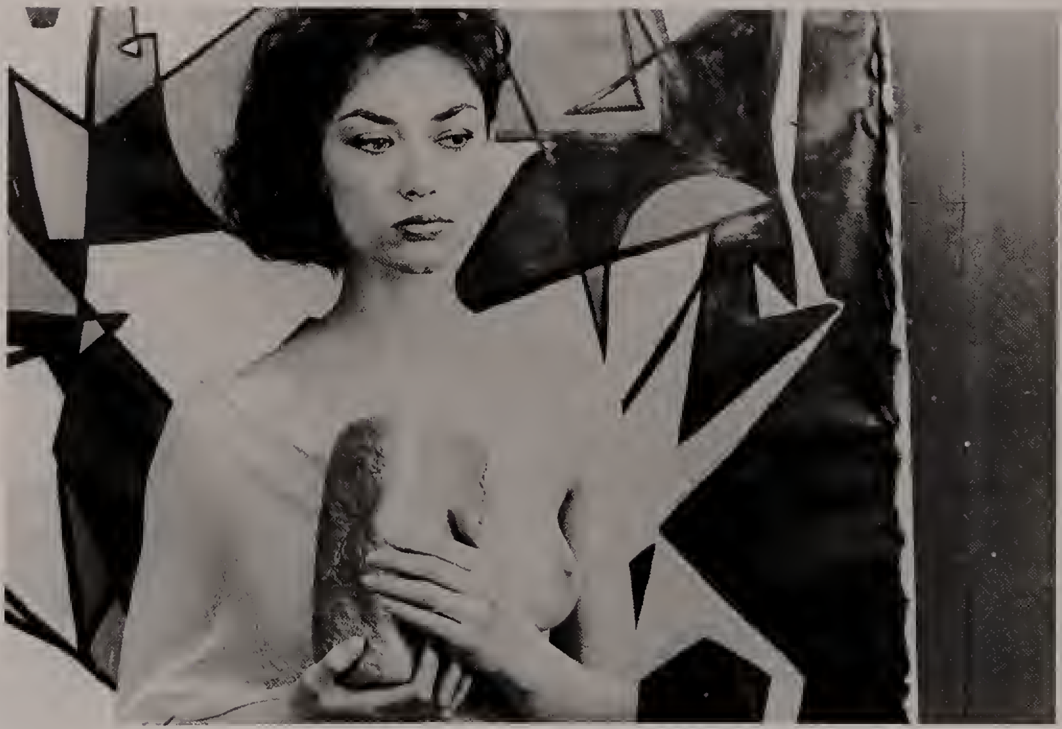


Fig. 153 (*top*). Sergei Borisov, *Oh, Afghanistan*, 1985.
Gelatin silver print, 29.5 x 35.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10684.

Fig. 154 (*above*). Sergei Borisov, Untitled, undated.
Gelatin silver print, 17.8 x 24 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14878.

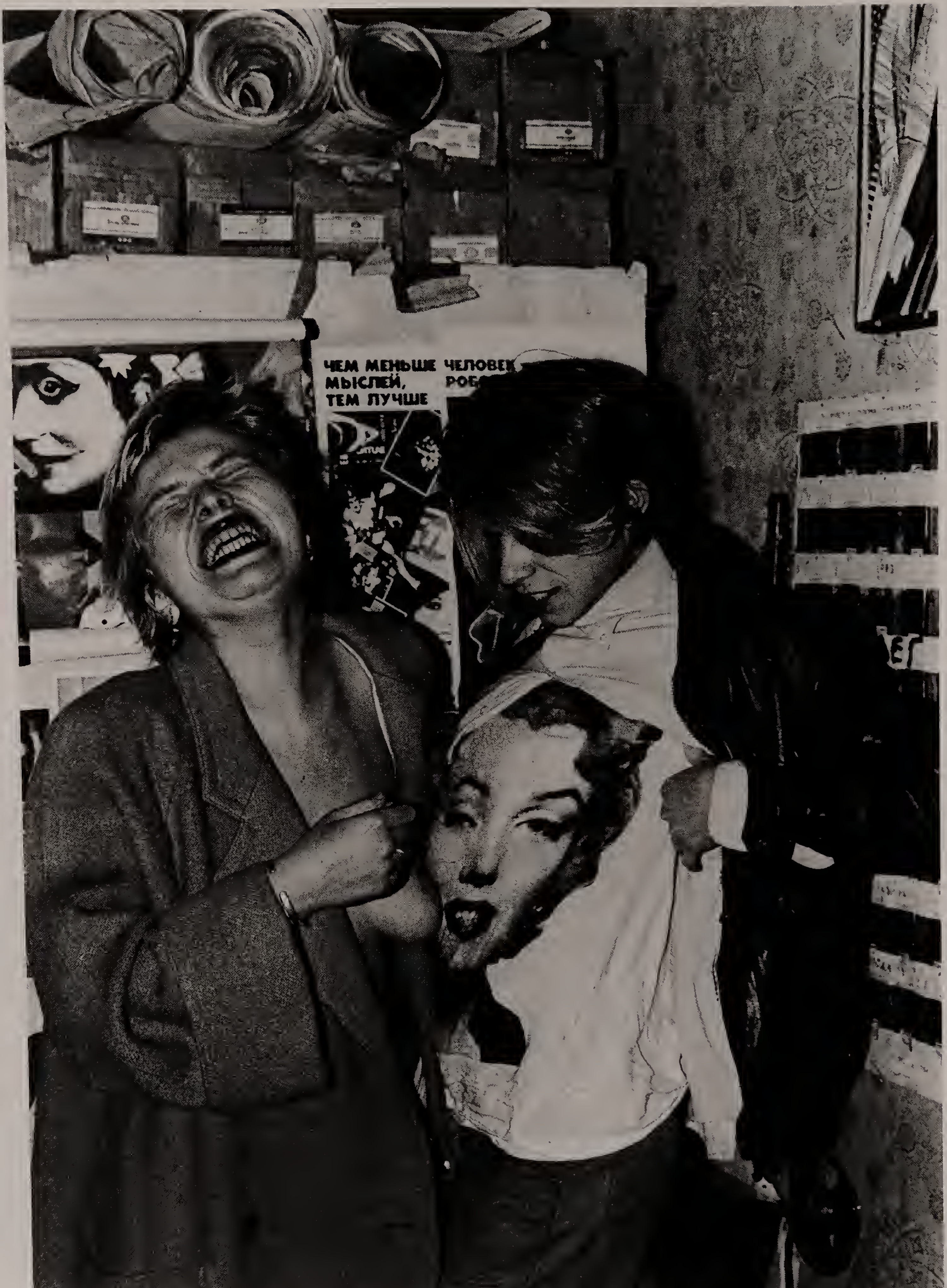

ЧЕМ МЕНЬШЕ
МЫСЛЕЙ,
ТЕМ ЛУЧШЕ
ЧЕЛОВЕК
РОБ

Fig. 155. Sergei Borisov, *The Kiss*, 1984. Gelatin silver print, 40.6 x 28.3 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15093.

the abstraction-realism opposition. So it welcomed Komar and Melamid, Kabakov, and Bulatov precisely because of their skillful realism. Painting in the old realistic style was okay as long as it was done by outsiders. And, even better, these outsiders happened to oppose their totalitarian regime! Better yet, one of these outsiders (Kabakov) continues to represent the dirty, rotten, dark Soviet world of communal apartments—a wonderful advertisement for Western capitalism and a constant reminder of its victory over the Soviet Union.

I've been talking about painting, but the same arguments apply to nonconformist Soviet photography. It seems that in the binary culture of the Cold War there was no "outside"—by resisting and criticizing one system, an artist automatically became a supporter of the other. (So the official Soviet art criticism of the period, which always accused nonconformist artists and writers of being advocates of capitalism, was right!)

In another Borisov photograph (fig. 155), a woman reveals a naked breast while a man unbuttons his shirt to reveal the equally transgressive image of Marilyn Monroe. As can be judged from the expression on her face, apparently the woman experiences extreme pleasure as her breast touches the Marilyn Monroe image. Not only is the Monroe image equated with a naked breast—and thus with freedom and pleasure—but apparently it has the power to bring a Soviet woman to orgasm. What can be a better advertisement for the Western system!

In retrospect, the artists working during the Cold War had some advantage over us. If you were living under one system, you always had a hope that the other system was better—a kind of paradise on earth. Many artists and intellectuals on both sides of the iron curtain dreamed of crossing it—and many did, only to be disappointed. Perhaps the best strategy was to emulate the other system while not leaving: for instance, by pretending to be Beatles.

But we, who live in a single global system, where can we escape to? Whom can we emulate now?

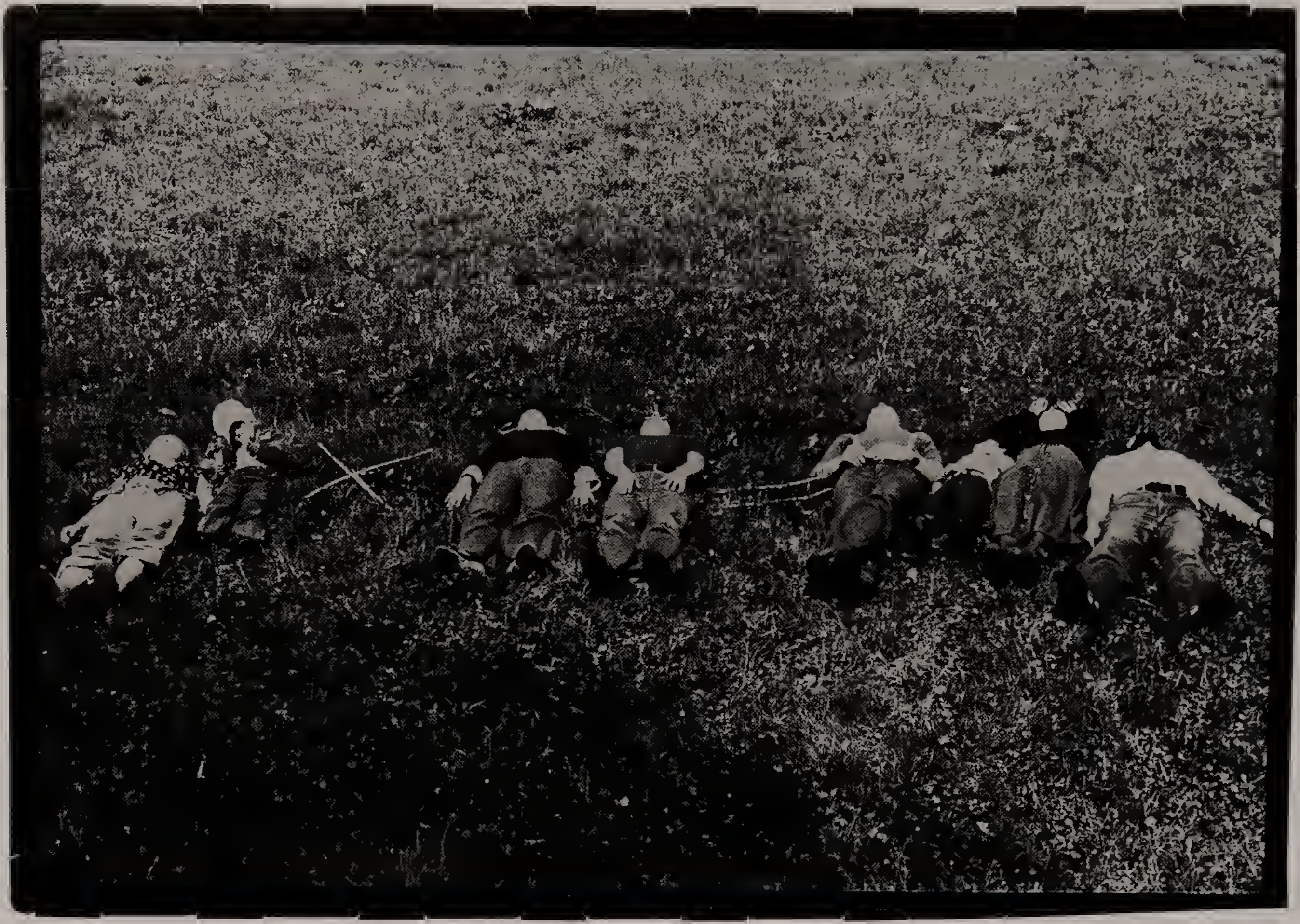
NM: The melancholy problem that you describe—of a contemporary world unshaped by the enviable surety of battling belief systems—does weigh on our viewing of these images now. The inviolable desirability of a world that you do not inhabit seems impossible. But on a good day it seems that there is (and was) a way to hold out for something else: a resistance to tyrannical ideological determinism.

The predicament of lacking an ideological alternative is what leads me to look at Soviet photographic work that, as you point out, was not representative of most artistic practice of the period. This Soviet work from the 1970s and 1980s shared tactics with some notable American photo works of the 1970s. In both contexts, artists used photography's materialism as a medium to break down the power of abstract ideology. These moments can still seem instructive now.

If we look at Valeriy Gerlovin and Rimma Gerlovina's series of 1977 outdoor pictures (figs. 156 and 157), we see photographic documentation apparently in the service of spelling out the obvious or profane. Again, I think it's important to look at these pictures as photographic tableaux rather than documentation of performance. They read as textual human pictograms: they use themselves and their friends and family to illustrate *Two Times Two Equals Four* and *The Great Bear*. These works bring to mind the broken-down documentary "empiricism" of such American work from the same period as William Wegman's early videos, Charles Ray's photographic self-portraits, and the 1970s photography of Robert Cumming.

In Cumming's staged photographic work, including the 1974 diptych, *Zero Plus Zero Equals Zero/ Donut Plus Donut Equals Two Donuts* (figs. 158A and B) the dumbness of fact and physicality asserts itself with a sneaky subversion similar to that of the Gerlovin/a images. The representation of the doughnut is both a symbol—a zero—and a thing, a mechanically molded food product with a hole in it. It either adds up to a sum of nothing, or it doesn't add up, in which case the objects have no iconic value. Cumming's empirical demonstration of fact undoes the most basic binary structure of logic (and capitalism) by suspending the subject between object (doughnut) and symbol (zero).

The Gerlovins similarly present photographic facts that fail themselves. We understand the prone subjects as integers and appreciate their obvious differences of gender, age, size, and attire—so that *this* two



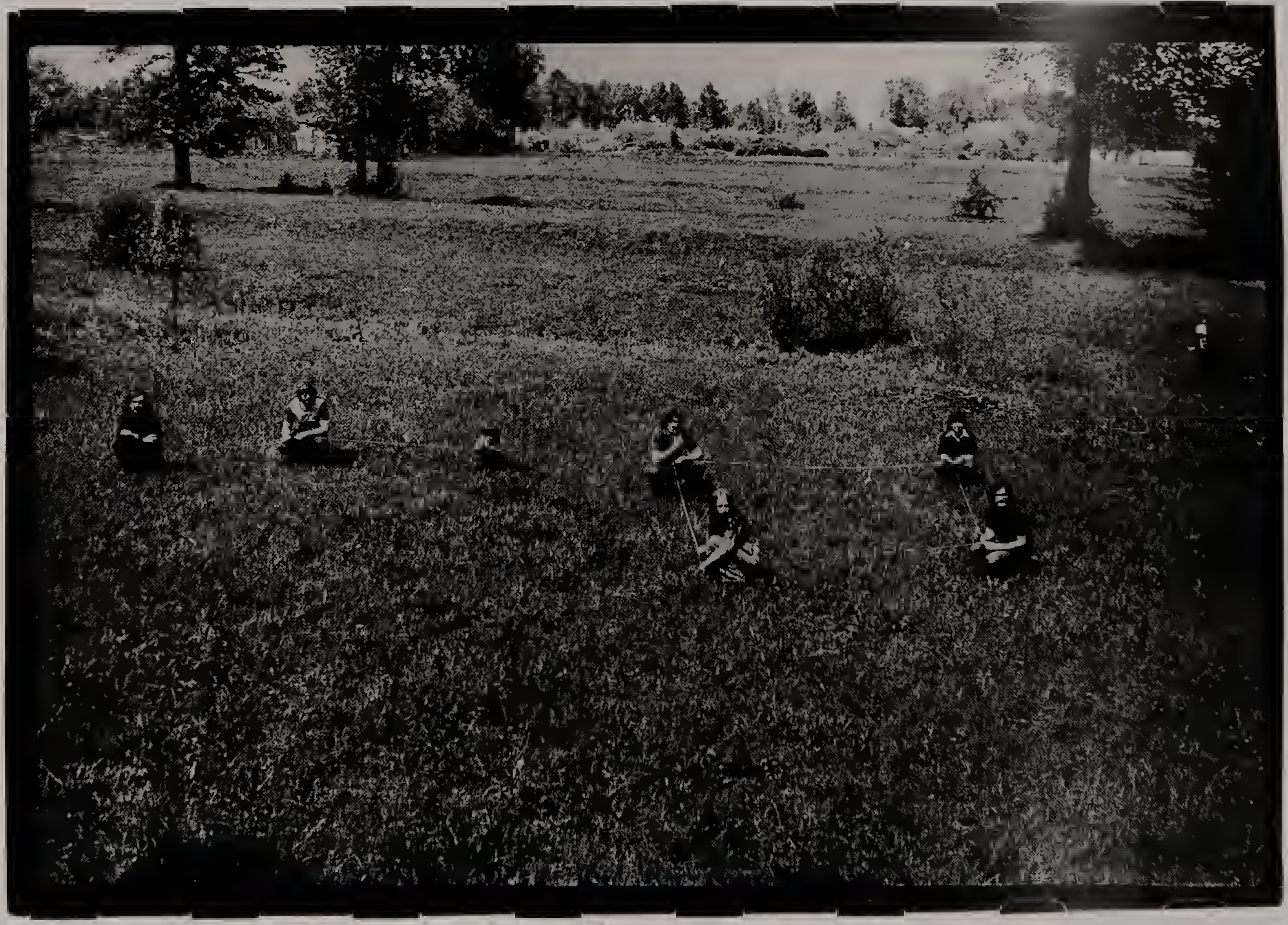


Fig. 156 (*top*). Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin, *2 x 2 = 4*, 1977.
Gelatin silver print, 15 x 22 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14018.

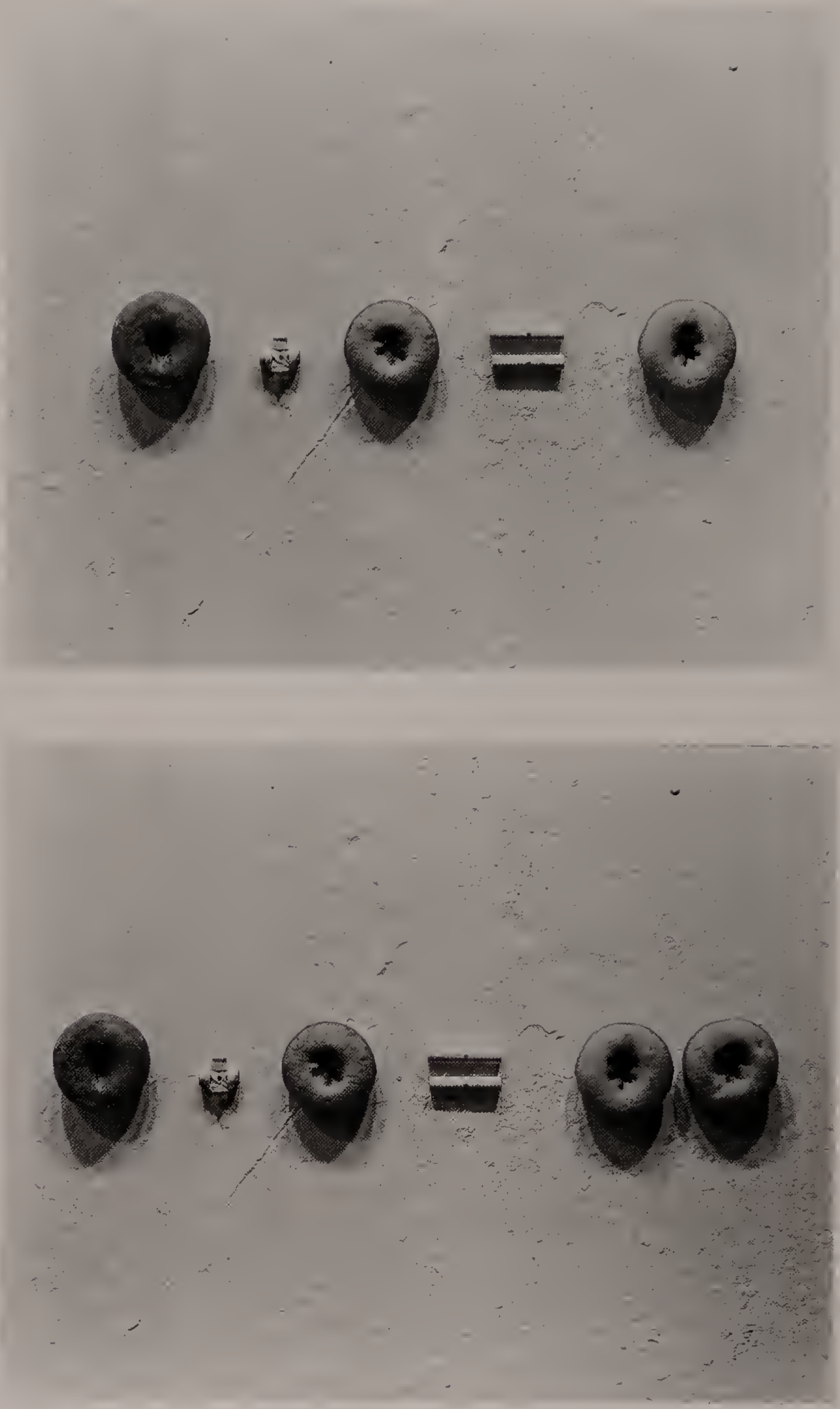
Fig. 157 (*above*). Valeriy Gerlovin and Rimma Gerlovina, *The Great Bear*, 1977.
Gelatin silver print, 14.9 x 22 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14020.

multiplied by *that* two does not really equal *those* four. In *The Great Bear* we confront both a constellation and the activity of seven people in a field absurdly trying to represent an astronomical fact.

The Gerlovins and Cumming adopted philosophical stances in their "documentary" photographs that transcend the historical moment of ideological conflict that the Cold War allegedly presented. These works, by compromising basic logic, poke holes in the evolutionary determinism that these ideologies share. Cumming has described his working process as that of "a product designer of things whose usefulness is in question."[2] In the late 1960s and early 1970s a number of American artists found their way to photography as a means to lay bare the frailty of idealizing practices—in minimalist art, market consumerism (via Hollywood and Madison Avenue), and technocratic rationalism.[3] In the Soviet Union, this same tendency cropped up in unofficial photography as a third way between the two primary resistance strategies that you describe above (inversion and emulation). As in the United States, this work was often produced by artists who did not come to their work as photographers. Perhaps this allowed them to use the medium in a more blankly indexical fashion. The photograph could say: Look at this. It achieves no purpose, supports no plan, argues no ideology, and implies no higher logic.

In both communism and advanced capitalism, the individual tends to be evaluated within a rhetoric of production. Production, as an idea, feels concrete—credible within the intellectual tradition of enlightenment rationalism that produced these ideological structures. Expending obvious effort and labor to make something of no purpose or consequence is, in its small way, an affront to these systems.

In *Ivory-Dial Switch* (fig. 159), Cumming has gone to great manual labor to undermine the brand identity that years of advertising and product development have sought to define. Similarly, the Soviet artists whom we've discussed deploy images of purposeless acts to disable the inspiring state rhetoric of progress through productivity. One unattributed photograph from the Dodge Collection depicts a group of subjects who have heroically thrown down their own bodies on a hillside to spell out the word "cock." In these artists' hands, photography becomes a tool



Figs. 158A and B. Robert Cumming, *Zero Plus Zero Equals Zero/Donut Plus Donut Equals Two Donuts*, 1974. Gelatin silver prints. Collection of the artist.

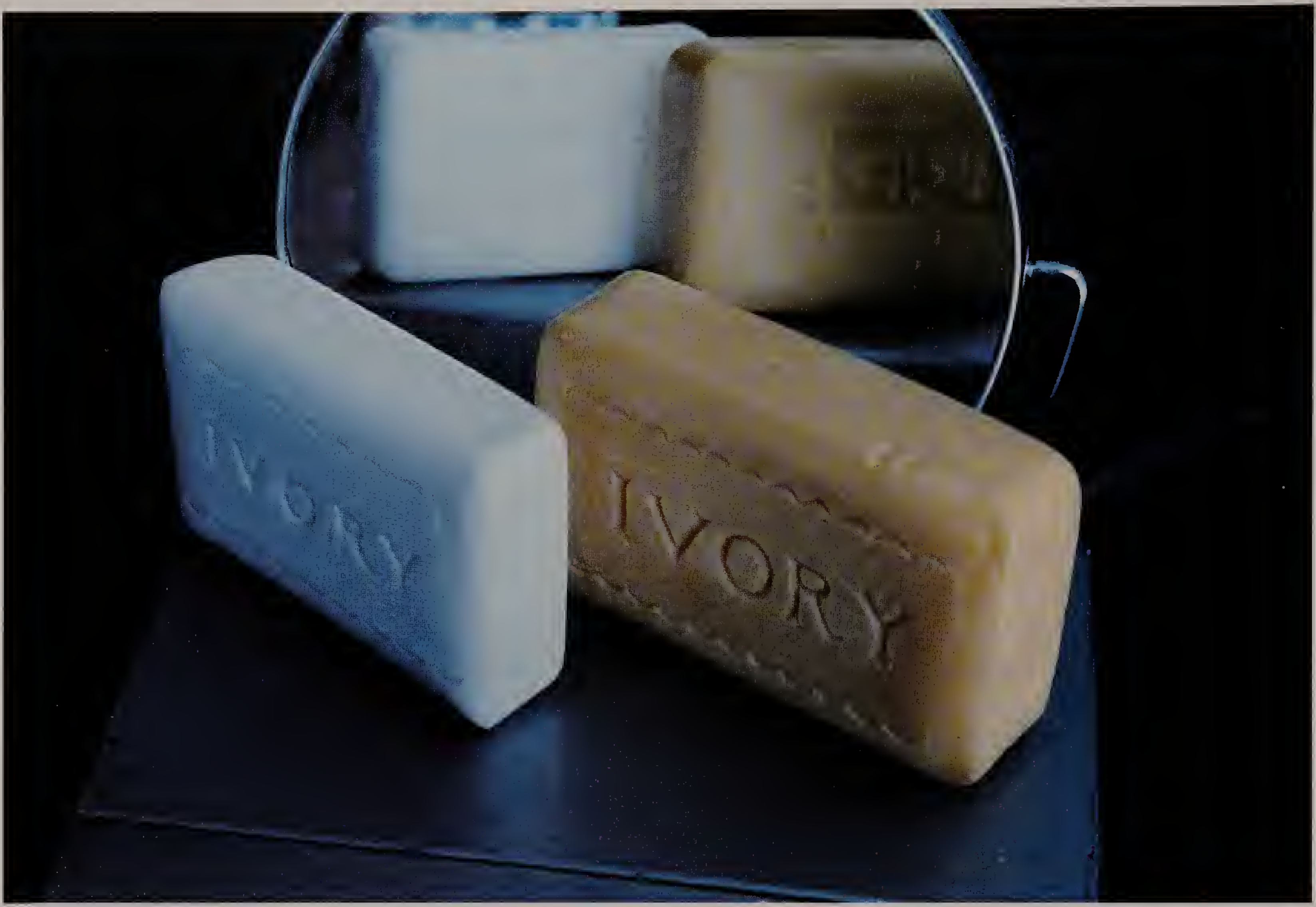


Fig. 159. Robert Cumming, *Ivory-Dial Switch*, 1971. Chromogenic color print, 5 x 7 in. Collection of the artist.

to materially express the accomplishment of the unproductive act.

You mentioned the advantage of emulating one system while staying in the other: the romantic ideal of the unavailable opposite. Another option—and the one that seems even more vital in the globalizing sweep of capitalist positivism—is to remind oneself that there is not really a coherent system, just the ideological pretense of one.

LM: Thinking about the works we discussed, I am struck by how far away these times seem today. The Cold War ended only a decade ago, and it seems to be so far away already. As a teenager in Moscow in the 1970s, I remember desperately trying to find out more about what was going on outside, in the rest of the world—trying to catch the BBC or Voice of America on a portable radio, hungrily reading samizdat publications, lining up for hours to see the show of the Hammer art collection at the Pushkin Art Museum. Today, with the end of the Cold War and the help of the World Wide Web, information is so easy to get, and everybody, from the CIA to the Russian Communist Party, has their own Web site.

Totalitarian ideologies tried to control people's consciousness by severely limiting the amount of information available and by repeating this information ad infinitum—a form of behavioral conditioning. In contrast, modern capitalist societies discovered a more effective and subtler strategy of control—multiplying the amount of information and available choices to such an extent that any particular message becomes lost. You are free to go to any street corner and make a speech against the government—or to put your statement on your Web site—but with millions of other voices being freely available, how do you get people to listen to you? You can reach the masses if you have the huge financial resources of a major international corporation that allow you to present your message over and over and in multiple channels. Therefore, in an information society the popularity curves typically follow the same pattern, regardless of whether it is music, literature, clothes, or politicians: a small number of players control most of the market, while all the other players share the small remaining portion.

The photographs of Russian nonconformist artists come from another time, and yet their strategies are relevant to our own period of the victory of shopping and branding over old ideologies. For instance, Russian artists would escape the city environment, which was always saturated with ideological messages, by making trips into the countryside. There they staged performances before the camera that often involved naked bodies—bodies free of ideological messages.

There is something naive and charming in this gesture—which apparently worked then. Today, in the world of GPS, location-based services for cell phones, and other technologies that try to map, or at least account for, every point on Earth's surface, such an escape becomes more difficult, although it is still possible. So, while cities, both West and East, have become saturated with brand advertising, we can still retreat into the countryside, take off our clothes, and leave our branded humanity behind—at least for a few hours.

NOTES

1. Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost* (New York: Random House, 1991), 117–20.

2. Robert Cumming et al., *Robert Cumming Photographic Works: 1969–80* (Limousin, France: F.R.A.C. Limousin, 1994), 150.

3. In addition to Cumming, Ray, and Wegman, one might think of the early work of John Baldessari, among others.

Ernest Larsen

Subversive Photography

U.S. Theory Meets Soviet Practice

TO BEGIN TO SUGGEST THE UNLIKELY COMMON GROUND BETWEEN U.S. AND SOVIET RADICAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE 1970s AND EARLY 1980s, ONE NEEDS TO LOOK A GOOD DEAL FURTHER BACK—TO THE MOMENT WHEN THE SOVIET AVANT-GARDE FACED A CRISIS OF REPRESENTATION IN ITS ATTEMPT TO REORIENT ITS AESTHETIC PRACTICE TO THE NEEDS OF THE URBAN MASS AUDIENCE. The title of Benjamin Buchloh's essay "From Faktura to Factography" crystallizes this transition. "Thus *faktura*, an essential feature of the modernist paradigm that underlay the production of the Soviet avant-garde until 1923, was replaced by a new concern for the

Fig. 160 (*facing*). Yuri Rybchinsky, from the series *Drunk Tank* (City of Cherepovets, Volgogradskaia Region, Russia), 1980. Gelatin silver print, 23.9 x 16 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14929.

factographic capacity of the photograph, supposedly rendering aspects of reality visible without interference or mediation."[1] Buchloh registers how dubious this capacity is with a single cautionary adverb: supposedly. But, to a large extent, the unproblematized acceptance of such transparency by aesthetically sophisticated Soviet artists was a crucial step in accomplishing the disastrous transition from early Soviet factography to Stalinist mythography. In agreeing to discount the idea that representation should be reckoned as a form of resistance to the pull of everyday reality, the early Soviet avant-garde seemed to be asking for trouble. That no ideology is probably as nomadically efficient as transparency is brought home in the chilling conclusion to Buchloh's essay. Quoting from Chistopher Phillips's "The Judgment Seat of Photography," he connects the transparent dots from El Lissitzky's influence on Herbert Bayer to Bayer's production of a 1936 Nazi brochure to Bayer's participation in Steichen's first project at the Museum of Modern Art in 1942. "Thus, at the cross-section of politically emancipatory productivist aesthetics and the transformation of modernist montage aesthetics into an instrument of mass education and enlightenment, we find not only its imminent transformation into totalitarian propaganda, but also its successful adaptation for the needs of the ideological apparatus of the culture industry of Western capitalism."[2]

And yet, to characterize the rebirth of Soviet photography in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s, Victor Tupitsyn literally renovates the term "neofactography."[3] To do so is effectively to bracket the Stalinist period between two radical practices: on the one hand, the early Soviet "factography as affirmation" and, on the other, "factography as resistance," which showed that "in becoming facts of linguistic reality and therefore communicable, idiomatic narratives are endowed with a destabilizing potential capable of shaking faith in the invincibility of the affirmative culture of Socialist Realism ... and in the totality of its self-representation."[4] This critical tendency to treat visual culture as a text that demands new modes of interventionist rereading is evident in a photographer like Igor Makarevich, who in the 1970s shot close-ups of the friezes decorating Moscow's metro stations in order to invite a defamiliarized rereading. His recent statement that "the mythology of the grandiose Soviet period still stimulates my creative energy" bears out Tupitsyn's argument.[5] His images ask the viewer to look more closely at this grandiose, gilded example of Stalinist efficiency that was built in a single year—on the backs of forced labor. To take a second, even more stylized example, Sergei Borisov's 1986 *Glasnost and Perestroika* ironically depicts the eclipse of socialist realist monumentality. The photograph's angle of approach and composition, in recalling the review stand, shows that official culture, even when completely wrapped and trussed—invisible, in fact—still retains an ability to speak, to exert an influence demanding resistance. Neither this photograph nor Makarevich's metro series are constructed pieces; they are "neofactographic" observations of everyday Soviet reality announcing itself as a totalizing construction of mythical (i.e., one-way) speech. In that sense they are photographs of constructions, critical reframings of the persistence of totalitarian history in cultural monuments and artifacts.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s a number of Russian photographers undertook a detailed examination of the material deterioration and spiritual exhaustion of the Soviet system and its harrowing abuse of its subjects. The works they produced constituted a corrosive and unstinting critique, holding up for scorn the failures and excesses of a sclerotic bureaucracy, a stultifyingly oppressive official culture, and a remote and mandarin officialdom. They provided what is still a startling account of no mean emotional and intellectual depth of a world being squeezed ever tighter in the gnarled fist of a monstrous Authority that was at once all-encompassing and grossly incompetent.

In those same years some U.S. photographers, radicalized by the upheavals of the 1960s, called for "an active resistance, simultaneously political and symbolic, to monopoly capitalism's increasing power and arrogance, a resistance aimed ultimately at socialist transformation."[6] Common to the practice of these U.S. and Soviet photographers was a counter-hegemonic effort, a deeply felt, unqualified repudiation of what they saw as a corrupt social order. In the United States this oppositional photo culture readily availed itself of a fairly complex network of public modes of articulation, including a variety of journals, exhibition opportunities, and educational institutions. The absorbent cultural system in the United States was invigorated by its radical practitioners who aggressively challenged the incorporation of the "art" of photography within the museum. By contrast, the subversive Soviet photographers whose work I will discuss here had few if any such public modes of articulation available under the long shadow cast by the ungainly disciplinary apparatus of official culture. In both countries these photographers, despite the urgency of their claims and the irony of the defining mass reproducibility of their work, proved able to reach only limited and select audiences—if under very different sets of social and political constraints and levels of repression.

One might imagine that pushing this comparison much further would cause it to unravel. However, what one finds instead during that period is an unexpected and striking congruence between U.S. radical photographic *theory* and resistant Russian *practice*. Familiar as I am with that defining moment in U.S. radical photographic theory, an encounter with subversive Soviet photography is astonishing—when the latter takes on the uncanny appearance of a rich and diverse fulfillment of the former. One's first thought is that such congruence could only be coincidental. The possibility of direct influence between the two is, after all, extremely remote. But suppose that it was not a coincidence—that the telling ways in which the two Cold War giants came to resemble each other (one professedly communist but not really, the other professedly democratic but not really) ended up provoking internal cultural resistances that mirrored each other. That's a start.

Then there's the possibility that in both countries what occurred amounted to the return of the repressed: the recovery of a historically ruptured radical tradition of cultural contestation. We have been led to believe by Freud, nightmares, horror movies, and the trauma of history that the repressed does not simply reappear; it comes back with a vengeance. And so this return is marked in both countries by a heady brew of controlled anger, passionate intransigence, historical sophistication, and unsugared irony. The tragic example of the early Soviet avant-garde, which paid for its credulity (or for its willing surrender of art's intrinsic resistance to affirmation) under Stalinism, persists as the last usable radical tradition that was self-conscious about the terms of its production. The radical photographers in both countries were equidistant in time from that historically truncated example. Although that radical tradition was itself far from unified—in either theory or practice—if Tupitsyn is correct, some Soviet photographers of the 1970s and 1980s were able to appropriate aspects of cultural theory identified with the Soviet experiment in the 1920s and early 1930s.

In the meantime, U.S. radical photographers were recovering a tradition occluded by McCarthyism and the Cold War that ultimately led back to the Soviet experiment. The clearest exposition of this leap backward appears in Allan Sekula's *Photography Against the Grain* (1984), a title inspired by Walter Benjamin. The essays and photographs collected in the book contested the modernist consolidation of photography-as-art, explicitly situating this problematic historically, while outlining one way out of that impasse, already undertaken by Sekula's contemporaries. This position is indebted in certain crucial aspects to the productivist aesthetics of the Soviet avant-garde, but (indirectly) through Sergei Tretyakov's influence on Brecht and, through Brecht, on Benjamin. John Roberts in *The Art of Interruption* traces Tretyakov's influence. "Tretyakov was one of the few photographic theorists at the time who developed a positional account of photography and the 'everyday.' "[7] Toward a reading of some photographs in the Dodge Collection, I will describe below how Sekula reformulates Tretyakov's repositioning of the radical photographer in the 1970s—though he never mentions him. Roberts continues, "In 1931 Brecht became good friends with Trekyakov after Tretyakov had visited Berlin. With good reason it could be argued that Brecht was one of the key transmission belts through which a 'productivist aesthetics' emerged in Europe."[8]

Radical U.S. photographers politicized by struggles against the Vietnam War and against racism did not suddenly turn to history or theory in order to guide or otherwise enrich their developing practice. It would be

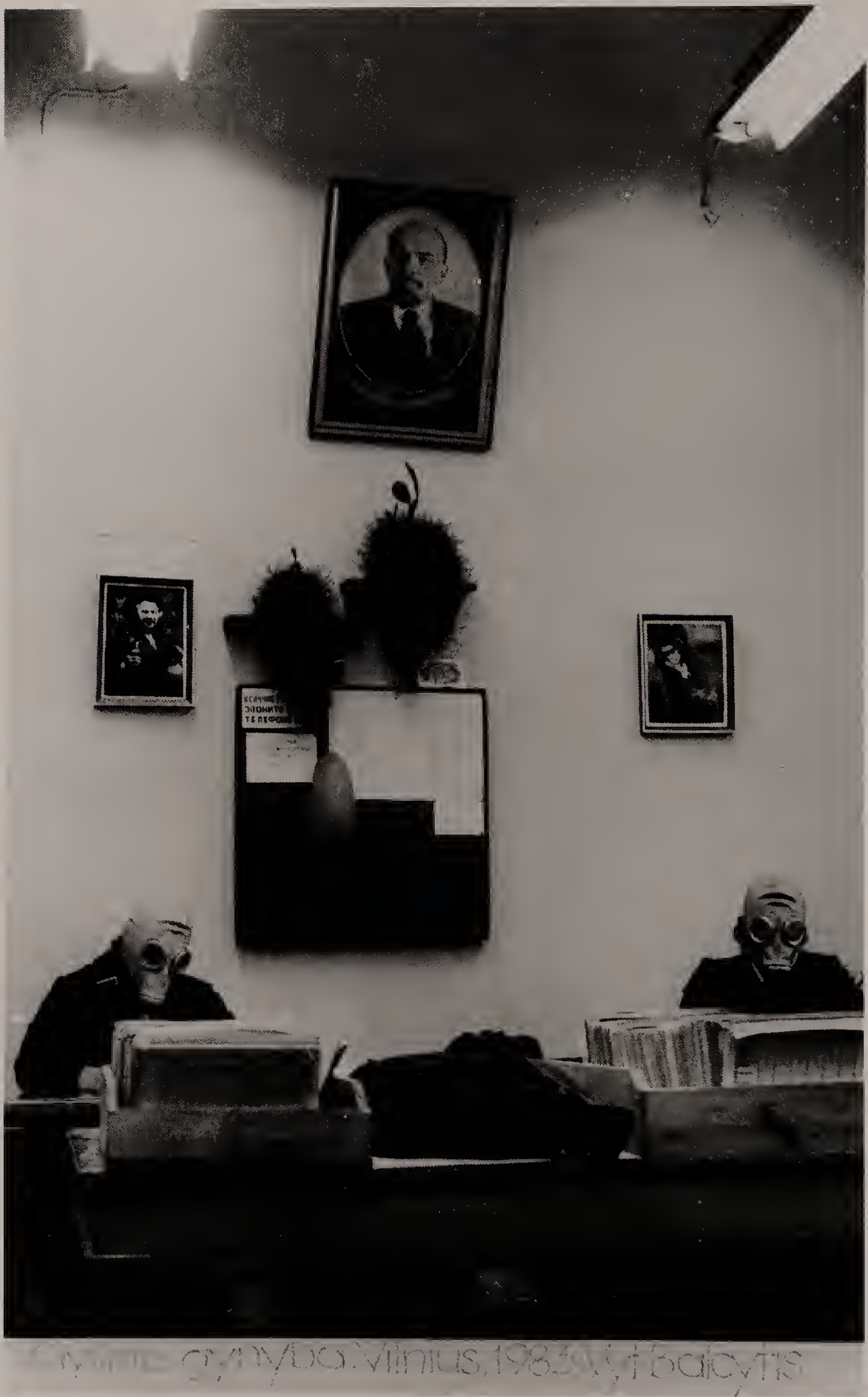

gynyba. Vilnius, 1983. V. Balčytis

Fig. 161. Vytautas Balčutis, Untitled, 1983. Toned gelatin silver print with pencil text, 18.3 x 11.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15069.

more accurate to say that, as intellectuals stimulated by the crosswinds of poststructuralism, conceptualism, critical theory, and Marxism, they were abundantly theoretical in advance. They reacted against the dominant photographic tradition that Walter Benjamin in 1931 disdainfully labeled "creative," and that in the United States, identified with the abstracting and/or decorative tendencies of modernism, has always been unabashedly anti-theoretical. For Benjamin, "the creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion.... In it is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists, even when this photography's most dream-laden subjects are a forerunner more of its salability than of any knowledge it might produce."[9] For Benjamin it was all too obvious in 1931 that the complete conceptual failure of creative photography assimilates it not to the complex modes of signification art can sometimes claim but to the seductive simplicities of fashion and advertising—to exchange value rather than use value. In other words, this conceptual vacancy compensates by harvesting beautiful images, thereby guaranteeing its material success. "But because the true face of this kind of photographic creativity is the advertisement or association, its logical counterpart is the act of unmasking or construction."[10] This opposition, "the contest between creative and constructive photography," is reencountered in Sekula's early essays, which while "dismantling modernism" search for a reinterpretation of the last historically significant theory of photographic practice as social intervention. In describing what guided his own practice in the introduction to his book, Sekula might as well be describing working methods common to all of us caught up in the conscious effort to create an oppositional culture within "the belly of the beast": "I wanted to construct works from *within* concrete life situations, situations within which there was either an overt or active clash of interests and representations. Any interest I had in artifice and constructed dialogue was part of a search for a certain 'realism,' a realism not of appearances or social facts but of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism."[11]

An emphasis on photography as construction tends to mark photography as the province more of labor than of art, while devaluing the individual photograph as a privileged object of semiotic regard. What is being resisted is the valorization of the finished product as art object or commodity in favor of the foregrounding of the process of making, which is conditional, contingent, transitional, incomplete, and subject to revision or revocation. At the very least, construction takes time—and may militate against spontaneity, against its hypostatization as a primary condition of the great photograph. (And a hint of romanticism may exist in the notion of the photographer as laborer.) But one must turn to Brecht, whose theatrical practice was strongly influenced by Tretyakov, to clarify what's at stake. In a footnote in *Photography Against the Grain* Sekula counters August Sander's evident commitment to the "public discourse of liberalism." It is clear, he says, that "Sander, unlike Bertolt Brecht or the left-wing photomontagist John Heartfield, believed that political relations were evident on the surface of things."[12] To demonstrate the contiguity of influence, allow me to quote Sekula quoting Benjamin quoting Brecht: "The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed."[13] If such construction is to do the work of demystifying the reification of human relations in and against the grip of advanced capitalism, it must find ways to make the uneven, fragmented process of construction both more visible and more compelling than the smooth finish of exterior appearances. This process involves a fundamental reorientation of the accepted notion of the photographer (particularly the documentary photographer) as someone who stands outside looking in or at or on. Instead, renouncing the privileged distortion of separation, the radical photographer must move *within* situations.

Although the U.S. radical photographer was, for the reasons outlined above, openly suspicious of the signifying power of the single photograph, I want to look at a single 1983 image by Vytautas Balčutis (fig. 161), a Lithuanian photographer, to show that the claims of this theory of construction are not simply met but exceeded in Soviet practice. The U.S. radical photographer wants to relocate inside a situation to reveal—or maybe even to dramatize (i.e., to dialogize in visual terms)—"either an overt or active clash of interests and representations,"[14] while Benjamin defines this process of construction as unmasking. It seems fair to conclude that the object of unmasking is that clash. Certain images produced by Soviet photographers (including some by Boris Mikhailov) at once literalize and metaphorize this notion by using gas masks. In the Balčytis photograph, gas masks unmask the clash, as the image exploits a vertical axis of compositional symmetry to deliver a Byzantine charge to the iconic picture of Lenin on the wall behind two masked clerks sitting behind identical desks. The icon dictates from on high a comic apotheosis of the noxious fumes that routinely circulate in the space of bureaucratic order. This visual rigidity is so absurdly underlined by the gas masks it seems to speak of its own imminent dissolution, its prospective vanishing into the crevasse between myth and history, like Byzantium itself. Whether the photograph has actually been constructed—posed, that is—seems interestingly undecidable on the evidence of the image alone. This indeterminacy distinguishes it, on the one hand, from the series begun in 1986 by Sergei Kozhemiakin, *Questions of Leninism*, quirky artifices that play the masks against the incongruity of the subject's bare feet; and, on the other, from the Evgenii Pavlov photo, which appears to catch its hapless gas-masked subjects in some open-air prevention exercise. The undecidability of the Balčutis image, if indeed it's not just an incidental effect of my own admiration, enhances its tactical definition of Lenin as the poison god. More generally, what's striking is the precoded deployment of the gas mask as signifier of the unbreathable "climate" imposed from above—while its abstracting quality intimates the prevalent anonymity of a subject whose identity has been reduced to that of a cog in a wheel that no longer moves.

Sekula's emphasis, he says, "has consistently been on the ensemble, and not on the formal or semantic success or failure of the single image," as part of his interest in shifting photography away from the museum and "toward an investigation of its shared and unshared ground with literature and cinema,"[15] which also involves a more focused investigation of the image as text or inscription. And to counter even further the tendency to produce work designed for judgment and acceptance by the museum, he calls his production "photo works" while at the same time he deliberately doesn't organize these photo works with a system of montage . . . "their construction is experimental and contingent." This interest in contingent construction moves the arena of image investigation from the stability of the written text to the multivalent instability of the spoken text, from the relative fixity of the written text to the provisional or intersubjective positioning of the dialogic. After encountering the texts of Bakhtin and Voloshinov in 1975, Sekula incorporated their dialogic "recognition of discourse as an arena of ideological and social difference and conflict" into his photo works.[16] John Roberts comments that "Allan Sekula is perhaps the only major theorist in the Anglo–North American orbit of photographic writing to incorporate Voloshinov into his practice."[17] When considered from a Bakhtin/Voloshinov perspective of the dialogic, the photograph becomes a contradictory force field of multiple voices that speak to and against each other, not only the voice of the author but the voices of those imaged—and even, by extension, the ghostly voices of the dead labor contained in the technical photographic apparatus. Finally, from the complex spatiality of the built environment, the visual evidence of the use and abuse of technology and culture, arise other voices, some mythical, some unsanctioned, with the polyvalent unofficial chorus from below often striking the loudest notes. Bakhtin's great exemplar of the dialogic in literature was Dostoyevsky. Here, in Bakhtin, we encounter a Soviet influence on U.S. radical theory and practice, which was suppressed in the 1930s. But this influence also raises questions that remain unresolved. For instance, should the process of photographic construction be seen as moving in the direction of inscription, which implies a certain degree of fixation, or toward the apparently more open structure implied by the model of the dialogic (in which every statement is subject to enrichment or qualification by the next voice that pipes up from who knows where)?

In the final paragraph of his "Little History of

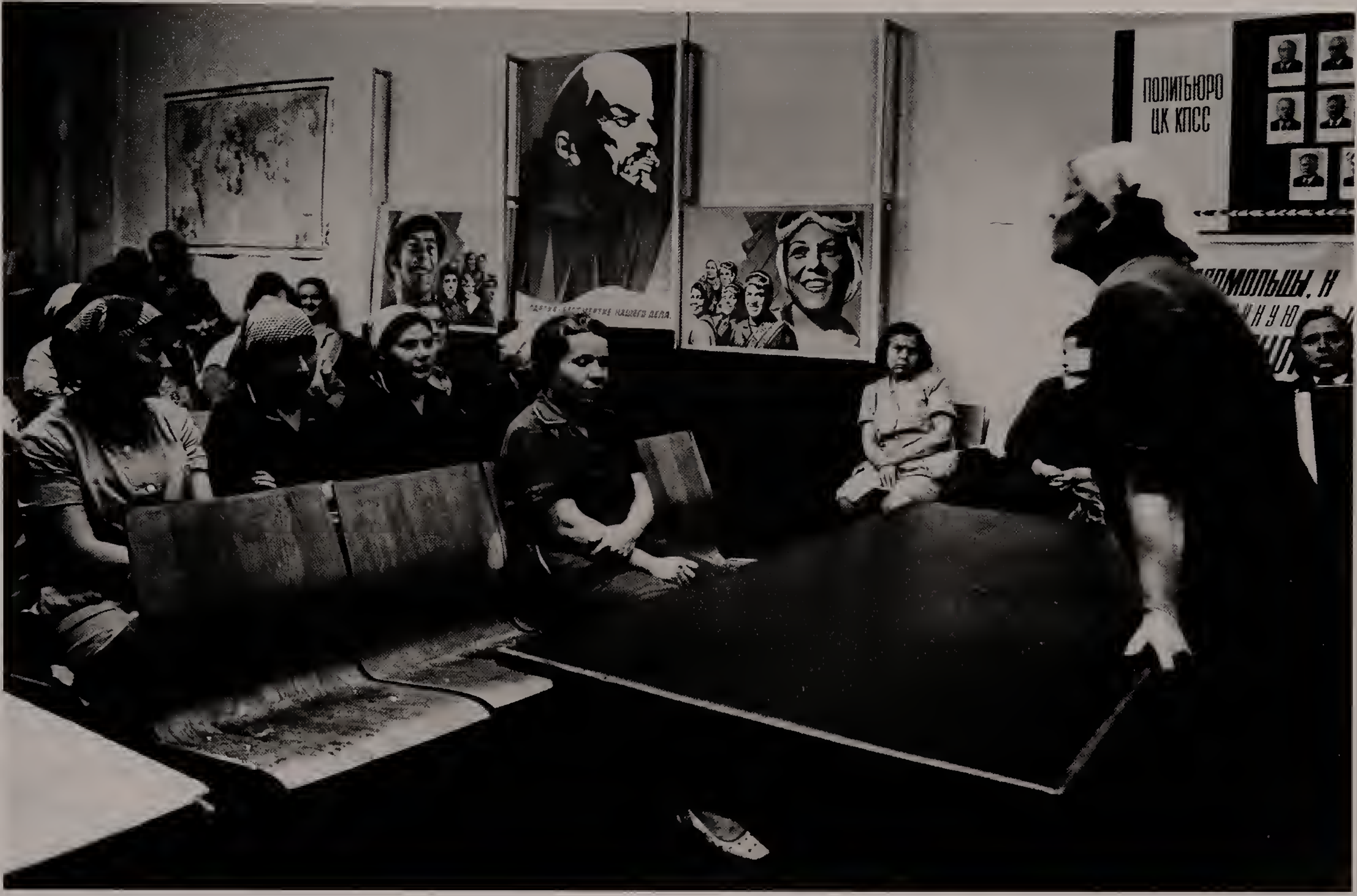
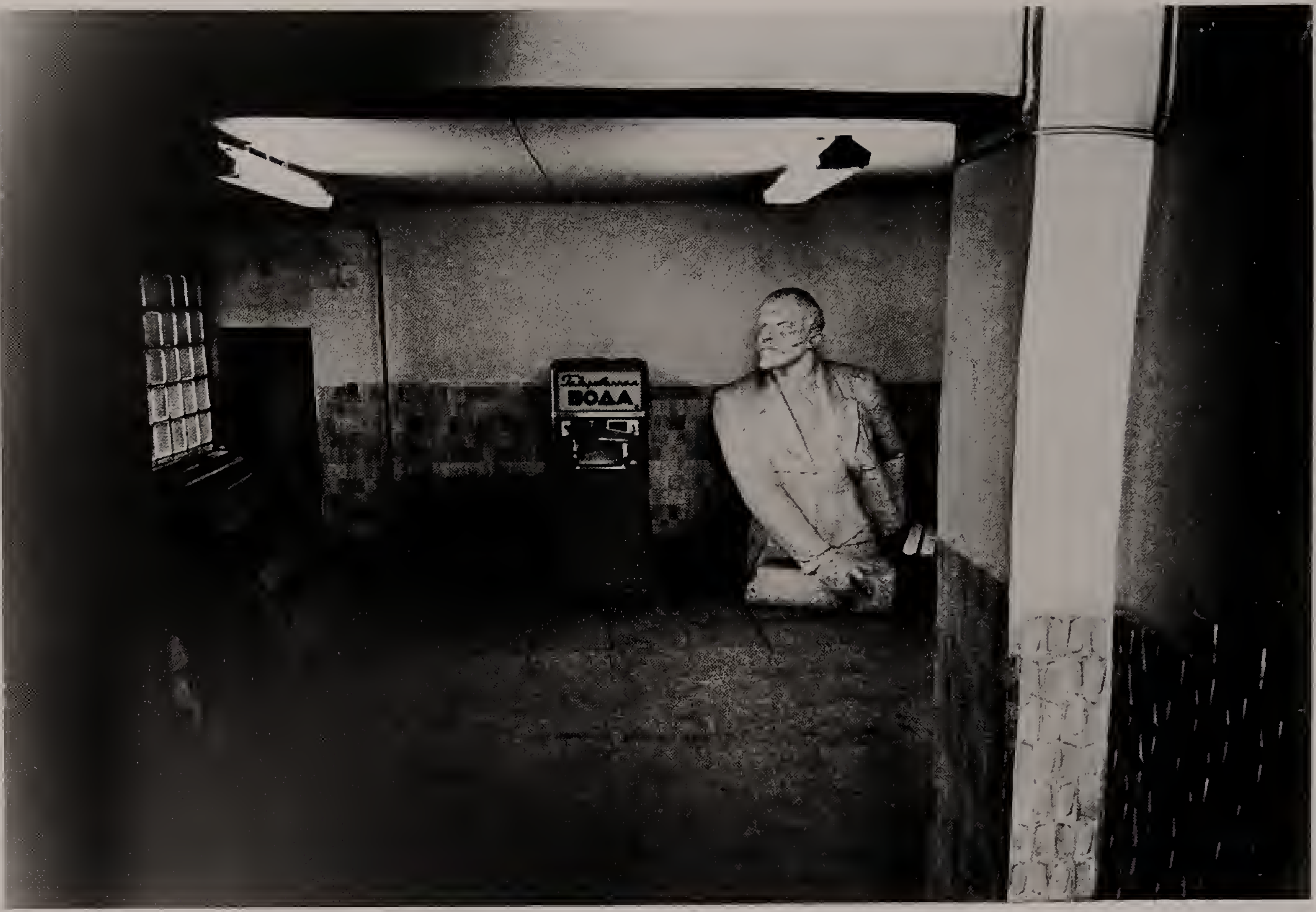


Fig. 162. Oleg Poleshchuk, *Meeting of Brigade of Communist Labor* (Vereteno factory, Leningrad), 1979. Gelatin silver print, 25.2 x 37.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14795.

Photography," Benjamin pursues the idea of photography's potential textual status. He valorizes the camera's ability "to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder. This is where inscription must come into play, which includes the photography of the literarization of the conditions of life, and without which all photographic construction must remain arrested in the approximate."[18] Benjamin considered that the great danger was that photography would succumb to mere creativity. To this danger he counterposed his claim for the particular kind of photographic construction that stipulates as realism only those representations that account as if in writing—photo-graph: light writing—for the transformations that shape everyday life. Benjamin felt crucial steps in this direction were taken by the Russian filmmakers, by the surrealists, and by the German photomonteurs led by John Heartfield. As influenced as he is by Benjamin, Sekula never directly takes up this argument. He's receptive to the construction of the image-as-text, but his commitment to the dialogic suggests an alternative. What Benjamin calls the "literarization of the conditions of life" is lent the breath of semantic flexibility by the dialogic.

Oleg Poleshchuk's capture in 1979 of the contradictory moods of a women's trade union meeting (fig. 162) successfully animates both Benjamin's point, producing the requisite shock effect, and Sekula's dialogic insistence on an overt or active clash of interests or representations. The photograph triangulates voices, stances, and levels of authority to produce a force field of social relations. Each of the inscriptions to be read in the image produces a different resonance or snap in the mind of the viewer. Each of the voices speaks in itself and in relation to the others—and each is differently embodied within the representation. Leaning across the empty desk, separated from the other women, the labor leader, slightly out of focus, since she is the only figure in motion, exhorts the small assembly. On the wall, socialist realist posters of perfect model workers (once the hope of the future!)



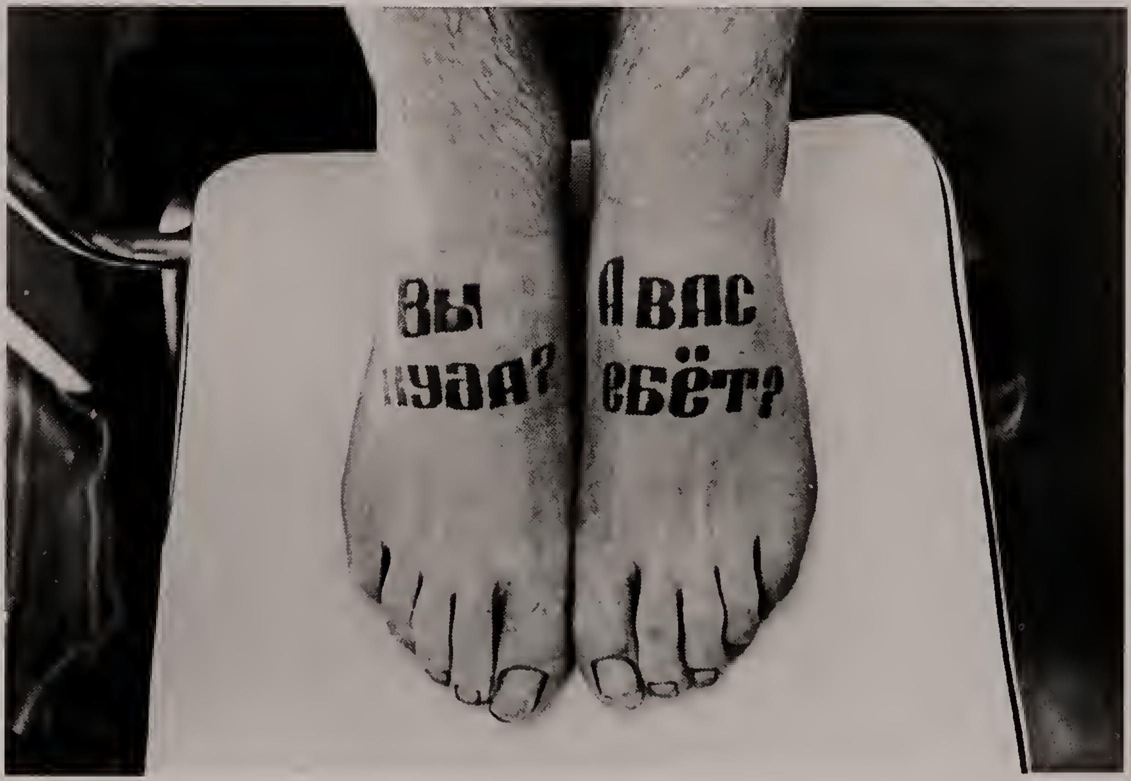

Вы
куда?
А вас
ебёт?

Fig. 163 (*top*). Oleg Poleshchuk, Untitled, 1972. Gelatin silver print, 25.5 x 37.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14704.

Fig. 164 (*above*). Yuri Rybchinsky, from the series *Prison for Youthful Offenders*, undated. Gelatin silver print, 18.6 x 27.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14916.

mime the voice of official culture. The weathered faces of two women in the front of the group of seated workers contest, if not refute, both the model history and its present-day embodiment in the fierce posture of the leader: in the silenced voices of impervious exhaustion, of the atrociously repetitious ache of boredom. Everydayness as it succumbs to the all-but-inert inability to keep one's sense of betrayal hidden away gives the lie to the glories of labor organized from the top down. Like the mismatched parts of an illogical or failed syllogism, at stake here are at least three clashing views of the relationship of ordinary workers to the pace of history. The shock lies first of all in the instantaneous realization that no reconciliation with history could any longer be possible. Benjamin's call for the literarization of the conditions of life is met cruelly here—with the precision that unites in a single historical moment emotion, attitude, and physical positioning, as one reflects that it was supposed to be the direct representation of the worker at the point of production that conditioned the potential transformation, the de-alienation, of the labor process. Instead of potential, we have the tension of historical betrayal, all the more so in that no one except the viewer can see all these elements in play; only the viewer is in a position to rip the mask off. With the viewer as producer and the photographer evoking the clash of interests, we may be able to accept the proposition that this obviously unposed photograph nevertheless attains the conceptual impact of a deliberate construction.

A second Poleshchuk image (fig. 163), from 1972, verifies this concern with the disquieting persistence of the lived moment of a controlling historical representation that has turned out to be not only delusory but also destructive. In a dismal, grimy stairwell hallway harshly lit by fluorescents squat two forgotten artifacts cheek by jowl against the gray wall: an old soda vending machine and a botched old marble sculpture of Lenin, cut off at the loins. Having outlived their usefulness, the stubby little soda machine and the grand theorist of the dictatorship of the proletariat gather dust here where nobody ever notices them—except the viewer. The image implies that the frozen heroic posture of the social realist Lenin is as ready to be tossed into the dust heap of history as the old soda machine or perhaps more so, since the soda machine probably still works, while whose revolutionary thirst had ever been slaked by the machine of socialist realism? What seemed at first to be an oxymoronic juxtaposition turns out to be a cipher for the hopelessness of this historical dead end.

Yuri Rybchinsky's two series *Drunk Tank* (fig. 160, p. 192) and *Prison for Youthful Offenders* (fig. 164) also produce the impact of what Benjamin may mean by literarization of the conditions of life, since they depict near-limit cases of institutional confinement with glimmers of Dostoyevskian fervor, abasement, and sly humor. The strength of the series strategy lies in the multiple perspectives on the same territory, in the suggestive gaps between images—which intimate the irrecoverability of lost time—and in the promise of conceptual interest in the decisions implied by the unsystematic montage prized by Sekula. Little if any narrative exists. Instead, in the apparent guise of reports, both series aspire to the status of metaphors for a dissolute or rebellious populace that, having already twisted beyond the reach of the internalized discipline characteristic of bodies of the pacified, has become subject to the forcible external discipline administered by the state. At one level, the subjects of the two series function as antonyms for each other, in which one feels certain that the opposites will eventually meet in the ever downward course of time: the cocky young delinquent will age in a mere glance into the glassy-eyed alcoholic. Some single images tell the bitter tale of vertiginous irreconcilability—the-no-way-out dialogue of contention embodied in the drunk tank struggle between the dipsomaniac and his jailers, for instance. But the quintessential example here (from *Prison for Youthful Offenders*) of the visible indivisibility of struggle is the image of a bare pair of tattooed feet. The right foot tattoo says (in Russian), "Where are you goin'?" The left answers, "Why the fuck you care?"[19] This text-image (image inseparable from text) literalizes inscription beyond Benjamin's wildest nightmares. The extremity of defiance is found at the lowest extremities of the body, an investment in the grotesque that Bakhtin claimed as the uncontainable energies of potential revolt welling up from the lowest social strata. At the same time, the image seems to evoke the body, the ceaseless site of becoming and

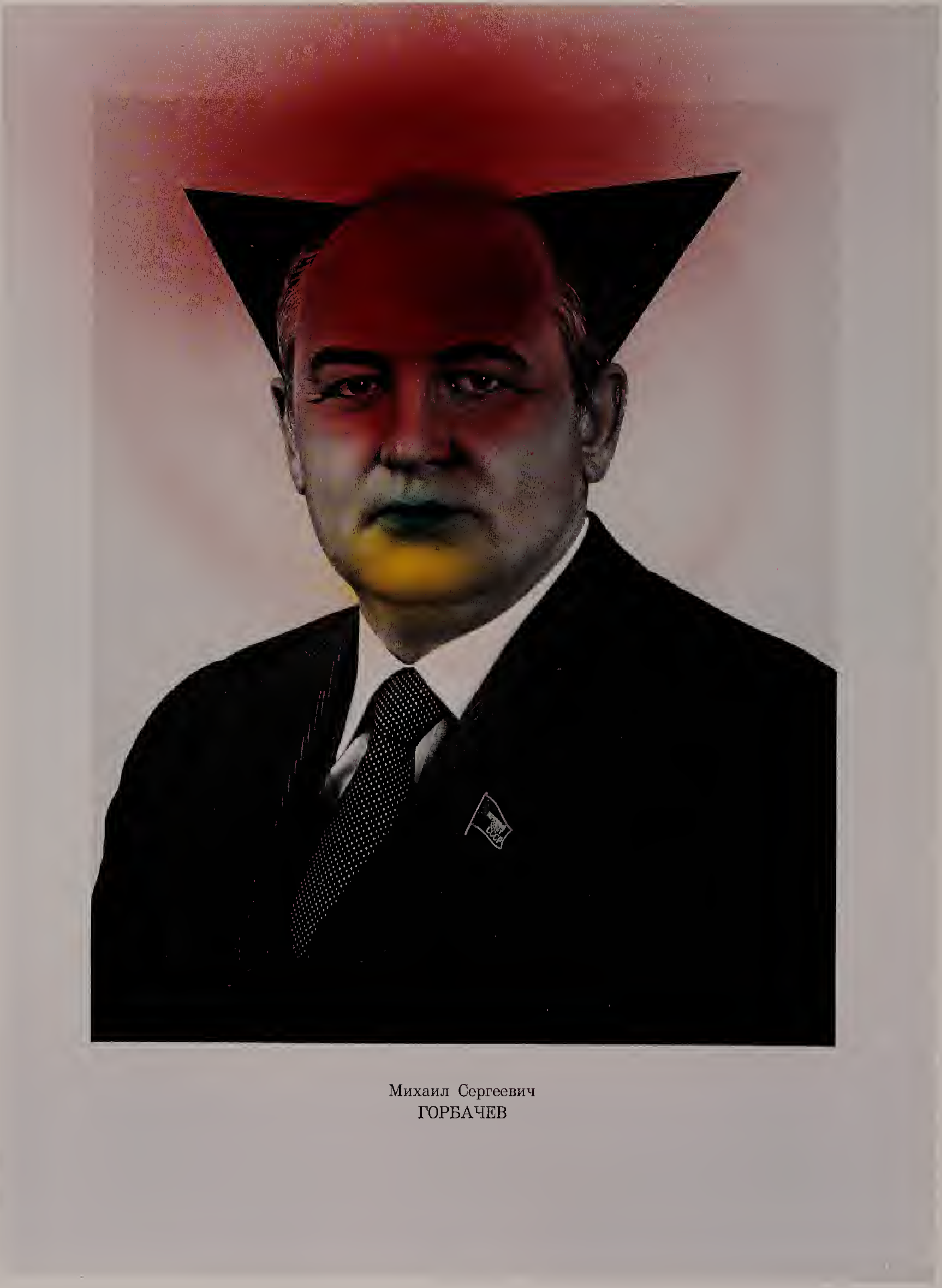

Михаил Сергеевич
ГОРБАЧЕВ

Fig. 165. Aleksandr Shnurov, *Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev*, 1982.
Hand-painted photomechanical poster, 66.5 x 49.3 cm.
Dodge Collection, ZAM, 00983.

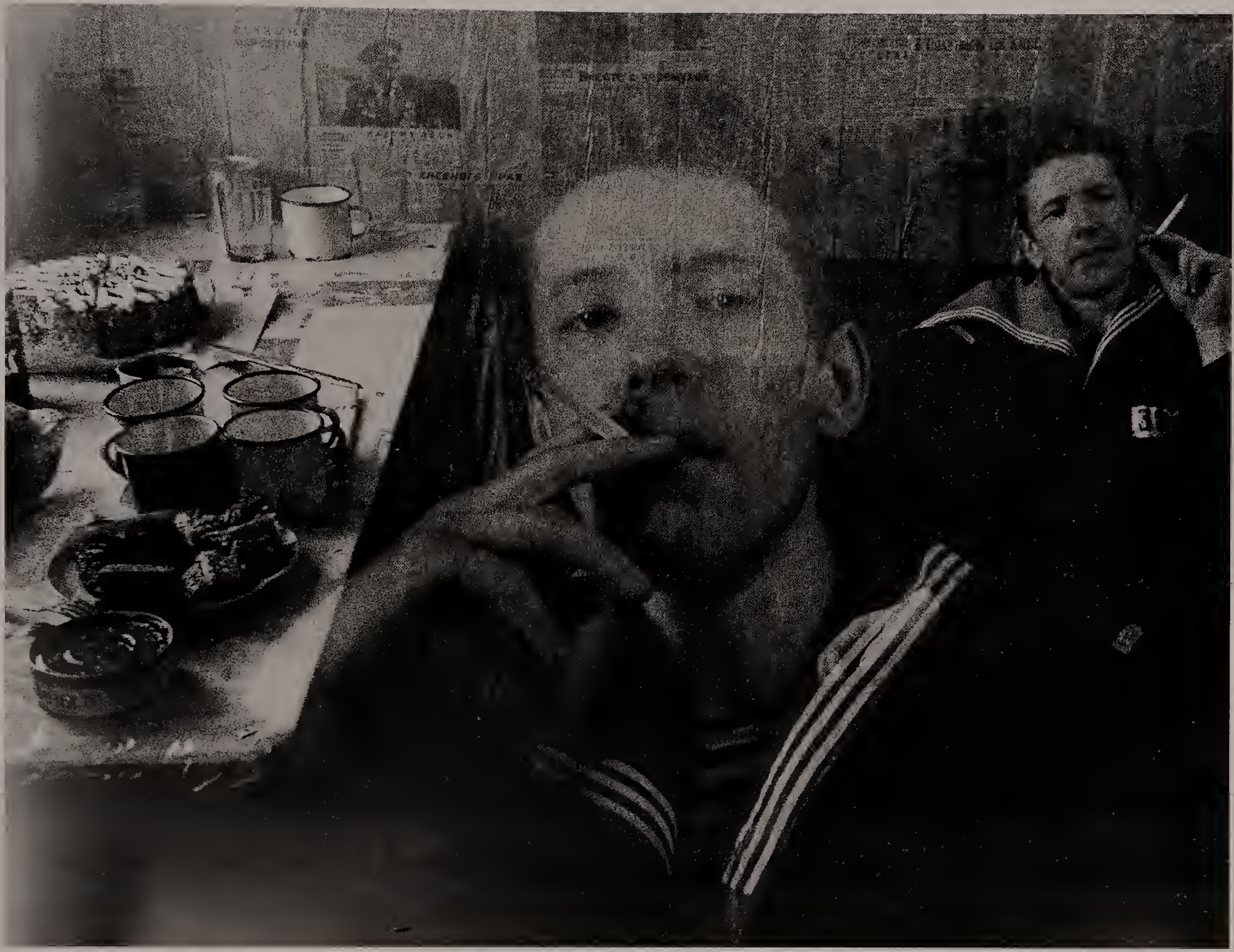


Fig. 166. Andrei Chezhin, No. 6 from the series *Delusion*, 1983–85.
Gelatin silver print, 29 x 38.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14643.06.

transformation, as a dialogic battlefield in contention with itself.

Brecht was often accused of plagiarism, largely, one suspects, because of the arrogant insouciance of his thefts. Aleksandr Shnurov's 1982 mischievously annotated gallery of the Soviet Union's leadership (fig. 165), building upon appropriated official portraits, engages the power of inscription literally, turning one sober portrait of a politburo official after another into a fancifully masked, colorful figure. Paradoxically, through the act of masking Shnurov might be said to unmask (in a Benjaminian sense) the social functioning of this rogues' gallery of the usual suspects. This strategy abuts the widespread photographic use of gas masks as signifier, hearkening to the closeness between defiance and despair.

The *Delusion* series (1983–85) by Andrei Chezhin (figs. 166 and 167) is a rare look—for Soviet photography—at the construction of gender. A smiling young sailor is smoking a hand-rolled cigarette, applying makeup, in drag, regarding his transformation in a mirror. Double exposures underline the boy's easygoing narcissism as well as the swirling role of fantasy in the subject's sense of himself. This series casually analogizes the photographic process of construction to gender as a process of self-construction.

To carve out renewed hopes for a liberatory future, both U.S. theory and Soviet practice found themselves reappropriating an unfulfilled past—the same unfulfilled past, the past as a thwarted theoretical ideal. This constitutes the hidden link, the secret sympathy, between the two that attempts to blot out the sway of radical nostalgia by bringing theory into the present. While filtered through the pungent formulations

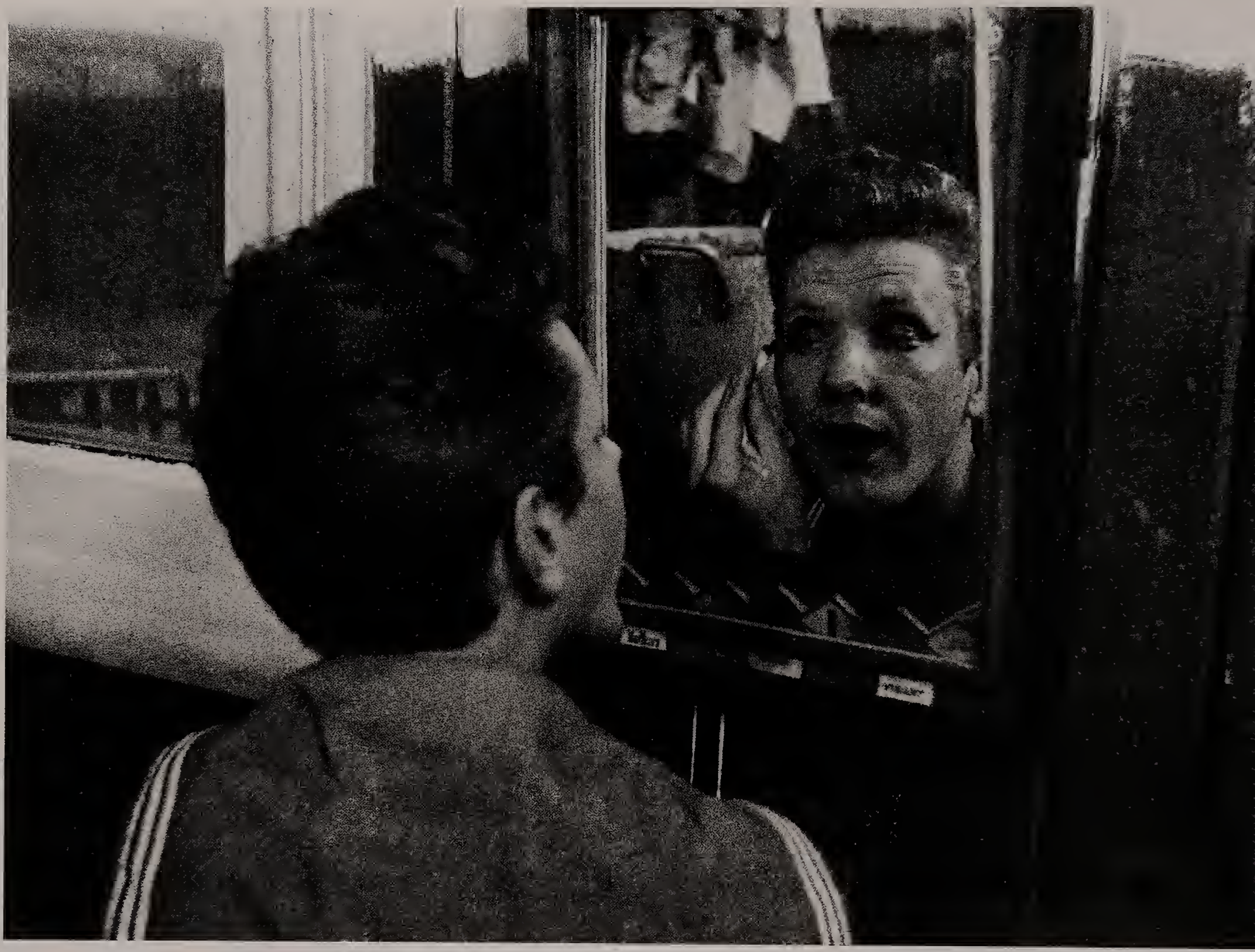


Fig. 167. Andrei Chezhin, No. 3 from the series *Delusion*, 1983–85. Gelatin silver print, 29 x 38.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14643.03.

of Brecht and Benjamin, the understanding of the potential of radical photographic theory in the United States was necessarily constructed—however indirectly—on the basis of a critical reworking of Soviet productivism. Starting again meant going back to the last credibly situated radical theoretical practice—a theory and practice that could be found and that foundered in the early Soviet Union. If Tupitsyn and the visual evidence are to be believed, the same was true for Soviet photographers. This perhaps too rigid theory Sekula made more supple by grounding it in yet another Soviet-based theory: the dialogism developed by Voloshinov and Bakhtin. So thoroughly does Soviet official culture permeate all aspects of everyday life that the contestation of mythic speech, of mythography, becomes possible in radical photographic practice less through a transformation of factography than through an apparently untheorized articulation of the possibilities of dialogism. The temptation from this angle, of course, is to suspect, with the prodding of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, that the process of construction so dear to Benjamin and Brecht and to U.S. radical photographers of the 1970s is not all that much more than the principle of the dialogical transformed into a guiding photographic practice.

NOTES

1. Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," in *October: The First Decade* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 97.

2. Ibid., 112.

3. Victor Tupitsyn, "The Sun without a Muzzle," *Art Journal* 53 (Summer 1994): 81.

4. Ibid., 81.

5. See the Art Projects Foundation Archives of Russian Contemporary Art Web site, www.artdata.ru/artists-e/makarevich.

6. Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of NSCAD, 1984), 74.

7. John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester Press, 1998), 27.

8. Ibid., 28.

9. Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 526.

10. Ibid.

11. Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, x.

12. Ibid., 87.

13. Ibid., 88.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., xi.

16. Ibid., xiii.

17. Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 162.

18. Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," 527.

19. As translated in the Dodge Collection slide archive.

Jason Francisco

The Shock of the Posthumous

Vladimir Syomin's Caucasus Project

for Haskel Simonowitz

> *Experience ... is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data.*
>
> WALTER BENJAMIN

IN RECENT YEARS, VLADIMIR SYOMIN HAS GAINED RECOGNITION FOR HIS LORN, PLAINTIVE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE RUSSIAN COUNTRYSIDE–PICTURES THAT REPRESENT AN IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF LATE AND POST-SOVIET DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY. This work earned Syomin the prestigious W. Eugene Smith award in documentary photography in 1995, and it is this work that has been published and exhibited widely in the United States, Europe, and Russia. Less well known are Syomin's pictures from the trans-Caucasus regions of the former Soviet Union, a sprawling, exploratory collection of photographs made in the outer reaches of the Soviet empire,

Fig. 168 (*facing*). Vladimir Syomin, *Dagestan. Nogai Steppe. Around Terekli-Mekteb. Folk Holiday*, 1985. Gelatin silver print, 17.9 x 23.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25263.

beginning in the early 1970s and continuing through the mid-1990s, the last phase of the Soviet Union's history. In this essay I wish to consider Syomin's Caucasus work on its own terms, to recover it as a project and as a set of photographic initiatives. Admittedly this effort involves a certain license on my part, insofar as Syomin has not publicly shown this work as a discrete portfolio.[1] Considered on its own, however, the project ranks among a number of notable photographic works undertaken in the past two decades—projects by Josef Koudelka, Bill Burke, Gilles Peress, Lise Sarfati, Fazal Sheikh, and Mikael Levin, to name a few—that use direct observational photography in nondeictic ways to address issues of historical memory.[2]

The northern Caucasus and western Caspian regions to which Syomin repeatedly turned are among the most ethnically and politically complex of the former Soviet Union. Dagestan's approximately two million people—to locate Syomin's photographs among the most denuded demographic descriptions—speak twenty-nine different languages and comprise some fifteen major ethnic groups. The politics and social life of the region are correspondingly complex, and the period in which Syomin worked was particularly tense, characterized by turbulent interethnic relations and political struggles with Moscow, the protracted war between Russia and Chechen rebels, and the rise of Muslim religious politics in both Chechnya and Dagestan. Given that Syomin was a working photojournalist, building a breadth and a depth of working knowledge during more than two decades of travel in the region, the viewer of this work is struck immediately by what Syomin does not take as a subject. Other photographers, particularly other journalists, might have made religious, political, and ethnic developments the focus of attention. By contrast, the region *itself* never becomes the full, autonomous subject of Syomin's work. Still other photographers might have understood the cultural and historical differences between Soviet Russia and the Caucasus to be an interpretive challenge that privileged, for example, the photographer's own subjective impressions. By contrast, Syomin treats the area as a source of insight rather than an effect of his own understanding.

By his own account, Syomin's primary recollection of the Caucasus during the Soviet period is of a place away from Moscow, away from home—a place "away from daily routine," whose apartness could "open vision."[3] Such a sentiment is common to photographers and even to tourists: travel intensifies both experience and observation. The emotional intensity and the complexity of Syomin's protracted document suggest, however, that the Caucasus was not a picturesque getaway, a mere playground, or a hunting ground for exotic imagery.[4]

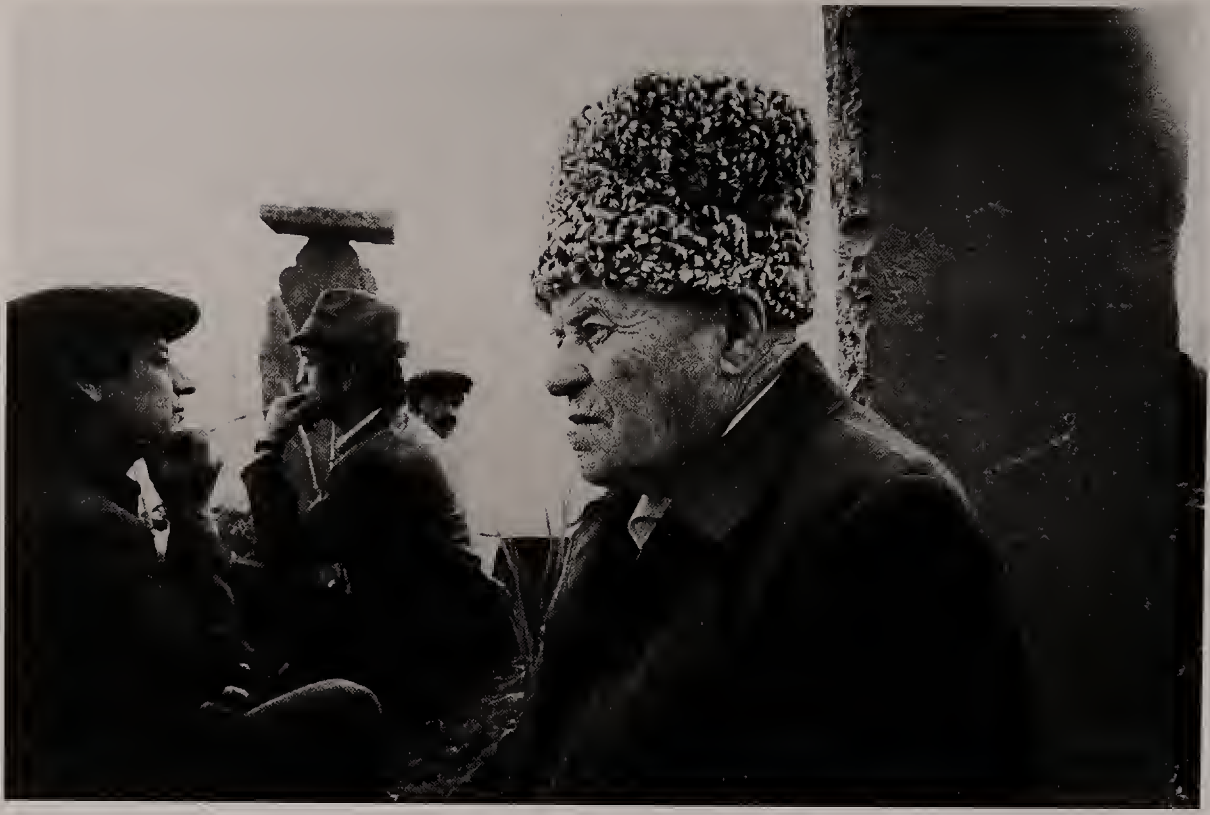
The thick description of Soviet Russian daily life that underlies Syomin's experience in the Caucasus is beyond the scope of this essay; suffice it to say that everyday experience in Soviet Russia was in various ways linked to and grounded in a baseline reality, not just failed state planning and ideological intolerance but the succession of events that resulted in the loss of tens of millions of Soviet Russians: revolution, collectivization, famine, the gulag system, world war. (In this light the collapse of the Soviet Union and the painful adaptation to the dictates of the globalist market economy read as one more sacrifice in a succession of sacrifices.) By the 1970s, when Syomin began his Caucasus work, daily life was marked by ossification in the realms of politics, the economy, and culture, notwithstanding the Soviet system's considerable achievements. The upshot was not only a predilection toward cultural forms that defied suffering and repressed grief through the repetition of themes of endurance and destiny, but also what might be called a crisis of self-reference, a cultural malaise resembling what Octavio Paz calls expulsion from the present, "the search for the present [that] is neither the pursuit of an earthly paradise nor that of a timeless eternity, [but] the search for a real reality."[5]

What greeted Syomin in the Caucasus was the possibility of using observational photography to describe a historical subject, namely the accumulated impact of Soviet experience, a subject both invisible (literally speaking) and elusive because it was traumatic and largely repressed. The Caucasus presented Syomin with not just non-Russian lifeways but in them something like the negative space of Soviet Russian consciousness—the experience of his own historical consciousness peremptorily severed from the things and events of daily life. This severance, in Syomin's hands, became an opportunity, a point of departure for photographic observation. The distance and the apartness of the Caucasus permitted an effort to limn cultural difference for recognition of the self-displacing nature of Soviet historical memory, for occasions when shuttered historical awareness breaks into consciousness. For this reason the Caucasus emerges in Syomin's pictures as a materially complex place, and an eventful place, but a place announcing a certain emptiness that resonated with, and so could be made to freight the historical consciousness of, a Soviet Russian.[6] It emerges as a place displaced, as it were, of Soviet Russian memory—a realm of Soviet otherness whose very alterity invited recognition of a "real reality."

Syomin's solution to the methodological problem of photographing a historical subject is to treat observational photographs as analogues of the states of things and states of awareness, and thus the usual explanatory discourses of fact and metaphor fail to account for his practice. If this mode of documentary practice—I might call it witness by analogy—were not challenging enough, Syomin's handling of it is experimental rather than promissory. Syomin uses it as a way of elaborating and not necessarily resolving a double aporia: a historical subject encountered in an open-ended journey, and a historical subject whose presence in consciousness is without clear origin or destiny. The reason for this approach, as I have indicated, is twofold: the cross-cultural location, which lent itself to an indirect method, and Syomin's probing attitude toward the documentary idiom (the subject of the second part of this essay). The Caucasus work marks Syomin as an observational photographer of difficulty, even opacity. His aim in this project is not to pursue either facticity or expressivity through observation, but to use the techniques of photographic observation—the fragmentation of time and space—to acknowledge the discrepancies between seeing and knowing, to recognize explanatory caesurae registered in the psyche. By loosening reportorial photography from the tropes of evidence, narrative, and continuous time, and by asking for a type of response other than confirmation, Syomin proposes the possibility of a sedulous reckoning with Soviet historical memory.

A 1985 photograph titled *Dagestan. Nogai Steppe. Around Terekli-Mekteb. Folk Holiday* (fig. 168, p. 206) shows a crowd dwelling in an arid space. The crowd is composed of old and young, of women and men, a crowd that would represent the diversity of Dagestani peoples, including perhaps Russians (signified by the two hatted men in the picture's middle ground). It is a crowd to which people are inexplicably drawn: small figures along the horizon line run to join the group waxing on the knoll. In the photographed phenomenon, we encounter a natural assembly of people in a place barren of social markings, an assembly gathered for an indefinite duration along an invisible line. The picture evinces neither eagerness nor restlessness but rather the placable mood of self-induced restraint. We, like the figures in the picture, are asked to respond to an invisible boundary, an inexplicable barrier treated as an epistemic limit, a line between domains of emptiness.

In a 1986 photograph made in the cemetery in Kubachi, Dagestan (fig. 169), Syomin shows a group of four men contemplatively sitting amidst tombstones. This photograph, like many in the Caucasus project, begins (as it were) with the material culture and the cultural performance before the lens and ends with states of heightened equivocality. Such equivocality may be coded as "beautiful" or aesthetically self-sufficient for Western viewers, but Syomin's purpose seems to be a refrangible encounter with Soviet existence, an encounter with life-in-the-midst-of-death. In a remarkable visual homology, a cut stone balances—strangely, almost impossibly—atop a scalloped marker in the same way that the men's heads rest atop their shoulders. The tower of curls of the central figure's hat visually rhymes with (almost as if to derive from the same visual substance as) the chiseled grave marker against which the figure leans. This figure, an older man whose face is creased sharply, sits with eyes open and lips parted in a bated expression we cannot exactly call calm or expectant. Such a photograph is not a picture of hope or of forgetting. Nor can we call it the beginning of a numbness, however much it verges on it. The image captures a moment in which men sustain cessation, in which life spontaneously and unselfconsciously seems to twine with states of removal, neither honoring nor reproving death.



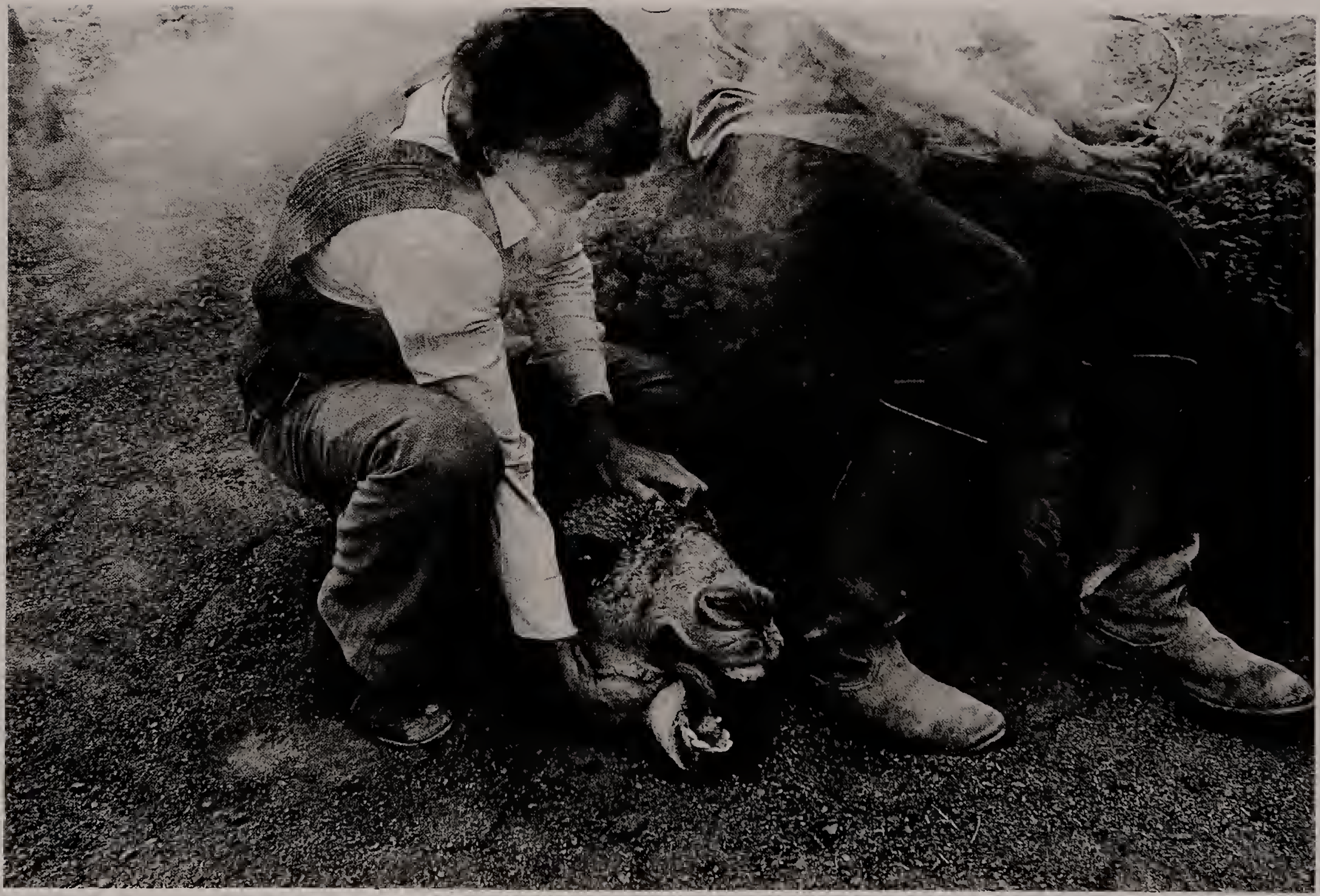


Fig. 169 (*top*). Vladimir Syomin, *Dagestan. Village Kubachi*, 1986.
Gelatin silver print, 19.8 x 29.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25264.

Fig. 170 (*above*). Vladimir Syomin, *Turkmenistan*, 1985.
Gelatin silver print, 29.8 x 39.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25262.

In a 1985 picture from Turkmenistan (fig. 170)—to choose one further example from the numerous photographs that comprise the project—Syomin shows us two figures, one resting atop the massive woolly torso of a farm animal and the other straddling the animal's broken neck, grasping its torqued head and prying open its jaw. The gesture of the figure atop the animal's neck is not the gesture that broke the animal's neck but one that confirms—indeed, announces—the animal's death. The head of the dead beast is seized, pushed toward the earth, and made to grimace; the men grip it as if to wrest from it almost disfiguring expressions. This picture, like most in the Caucasus project, relies for its impact on a certain idiom of encounter. With the drama of an unanticipated, unexpectedly discovered climax, Syomin links the photograph's symbolic power to its narrative instant. In part this drama derives from the celerity of the observation. But capitalizing on the implications of the animal's broken neck, Syomin goes beyond the element of surprise and uses the idiom of the rapidly "snapped" observation to snap—to sunder—the sense of time and place. The subjects of this picture have been discovered at a meeting point of life and death and, once discovered, seem to subsist there. It is for this reason that the ambiance of the photograph is not one of violence. The death the picture announces has been prolonged in the photographic act and thus enters our awareness strangely, still connected to a concealment, still bound up in secrets. Syomin shows this prolongation and does not explain it, as if to disclose the origin or the resolution of the moment would be an act of betrayal. Neither affirmation nor grief seems an adequate response to what we encounter about these subjects and this world.

Insofar as Syomin's broad aim is to recognize the traumatized historical consciousness of a dying empire, his task is precisely to make himself vulnerable to pain, to work creatively with what Walter Benjamin terms "the shock experience," to find form for the catharsis denied Soviet Russian consciousness as it developed in relation to an ongoing shock experience that modulated through decades.[7] The task is almost Promethean: to pry open Soviet Russian historical memory immured against the shock of death, memory formed precisely to protect itself from death, to buttress national consciousness against the tides of grief. Syomin's task involves intuiting and receiving energies that trace grief held below the surface, allowing these energies to be "parried by consciousness," to use Benjamin's phrase.[8]

Benjamin's observations about the relationship between photography and the shock experience illuminate Syomin's aims and the moment in which Syomin attempts to realize them. Benjamin observes that "the camera [gives] the moment a posthumous shock."[9] For Benjamin, the "posthumous" aspect of photographs refers to their capacity to return to us a fragment of a life from the past, to sustain the attribute of existence in what we understand to have vanished. In Benjamin's thinking, the posthumous is also a key term in the formation of the historical, in that history for Benjamin is always coded with its own disappearance. As Eduardo Cadava writes, history for Benjamin begins in the crisis of forgetting and nonrecognition and so exists by definition as something "always on the verge of disappearing, without disappearing."[10] To speak of the historical in and of itself, for Benjamin, is to speak of something "infinite in every direction and unfulfilled in every instant," something that comes to recognition at specific times, namely in moments of danger when historical meaning is in crisis.[11] This time of coming-to-recognition occurs for Benjamin when a mutually implicated past and present together acquire presence as a historical "experience" and validate particular subject positions that would receive this experience. Benjamin explains this coming-to-recognition variously as a "crystallization" and a "constellation" of tensions that otherwise exist in a fluid dialectic.[12] Notably, he also appeals to images in general, and photographs in particular, as a spatial metaphor to explain the ways "chronological movement is grasped and analyzed."[13] "The photographic image," writes Benjamin, "is dialectics at a standstill."[14]

Syomin's sensibility is strikingly reminiscent of that of Benjamin, with certain modifications. For Syomin, the presence of the posthumous is not so much an ineluctable property of photographs as an accomplishment to which they might aspire. Working at a moment in which the meaning of accumulated Soviet historical experience begged recognition—historical experience that itself signified a perpetual deferral, an ongoing crisis of meaning—Syomin in his pictures strives to afflict the present, as it were, with the shock of the posthumous. Syomin's images position the viewer to glimpse the impact of the deferral of grief. His pictures work to name the halted formations that signify halted culture, halted tradition, halted time. They work to enter the viewer upon a process of associative thinking that leads to moments dwelling in the experience of loss inexplicably and partially retrieved. The Caucasus photographs accomplish this recondite naming through an active sense of journeying precisely in an outer and "other" realm of the Soviet empire. Attending to what is unexplained and unforeseen, they attempt to recuperate the present for the sake of memory, without submitting the present to a recuperative end that would make the task of generating memory redundant or sterile. The Caucasus photographs neither reify nor explain away death. The pictures represent ties to the seen world and, through that world, to worlds on the near side of bereavement.

Truth . . . is not an unveiling which destroys the secret,

but the revelation which does it justice.

WALTER BENJAMIN

To better understand the implications of Syomin's documentary practice, the salutary relationship between observational picture making and historical consciousness (and perhaps historical experience not actually experienced), one may find it worthwhile to consider Syomin's practice in relation to Soviet and post-Soviet notions of the photograph-as-document, to Western notions of documentary realism, and to the ways Syomin's work challenges the Western critique of the documentary author.

From a purely pictorial perspective, Syomin's work locates itself in an observational tradition preoccupied with what one might call photographs' composite nature, the ways that photographs organize "emotion and idea in relation to physical objects" of the social world, to use Alan Trachtenberg's phrase.[15] This observational practice grew initially from Syomin's professional work; since 1976 Syomin has worked for the Novosti Press Agency (APN) and other journalistic consortiums, and he made many of his journeys into the Caucasus for APN.

From the beginning, and certainly as he began to recognize a more complex quality in his pictures, Syomin traveled to the Caucasus largely for his own purposes. If every young documentary photographer needs a subject that rises up in the heart as a teacher, the Caucasus seems to have fulfilled this role for Syomin. In the Caucasus Syomin learned the distinction between official imagery in the Soviet context—photographs that more or less venally transmit the conceits of the authority sanctioning the images—and the photographic report as an idiom for multivalent communication. Syomin's discovery meant, in effect, the possibility of observational photographs distanced from institutional prerogatives that favor completeness and legibility in pictures. The expressive possibilities bound up in the shutter's provisional stilling of time and the photographie frame's contingent fragmentation of space—and especially the dynamic issue of making still pictures to convey the flux rather than the completeness of pictorial thought—suggested a strategy for approaching larger themes through the skilled use of symbol, event, and detail. In an early Caucasus photograph that seems to have been important in Syomin's self-recognition as a photographer (fig. 171), Syomin's subject is the phenomenon of tentative balance itself, and also a sense of episodic, uncertain calm and the proneness of the human being to the scale and the power of space.

In an article published in 1994, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, John P. Jacob writes that what most characterizes late and post-Soviet Russian photography is not "the task of deconstructing the Soviet past by assigning blame and complicity" but rather "the reconstruction of Russian national and cultural values through the identification of signs of truth and of the spiritual awareness of beauty that can occur even in the midst of repression."[16] The evidence in Syomin's work of a search for a personal truth—rejecting the mandates of official truth telling—together with the open-ended qualities of his documentary testimony, might seem to confirm his place in Jacob's reading. One could even argue that Syomin's privately-arrived-at truth is noteworthy in that it goes

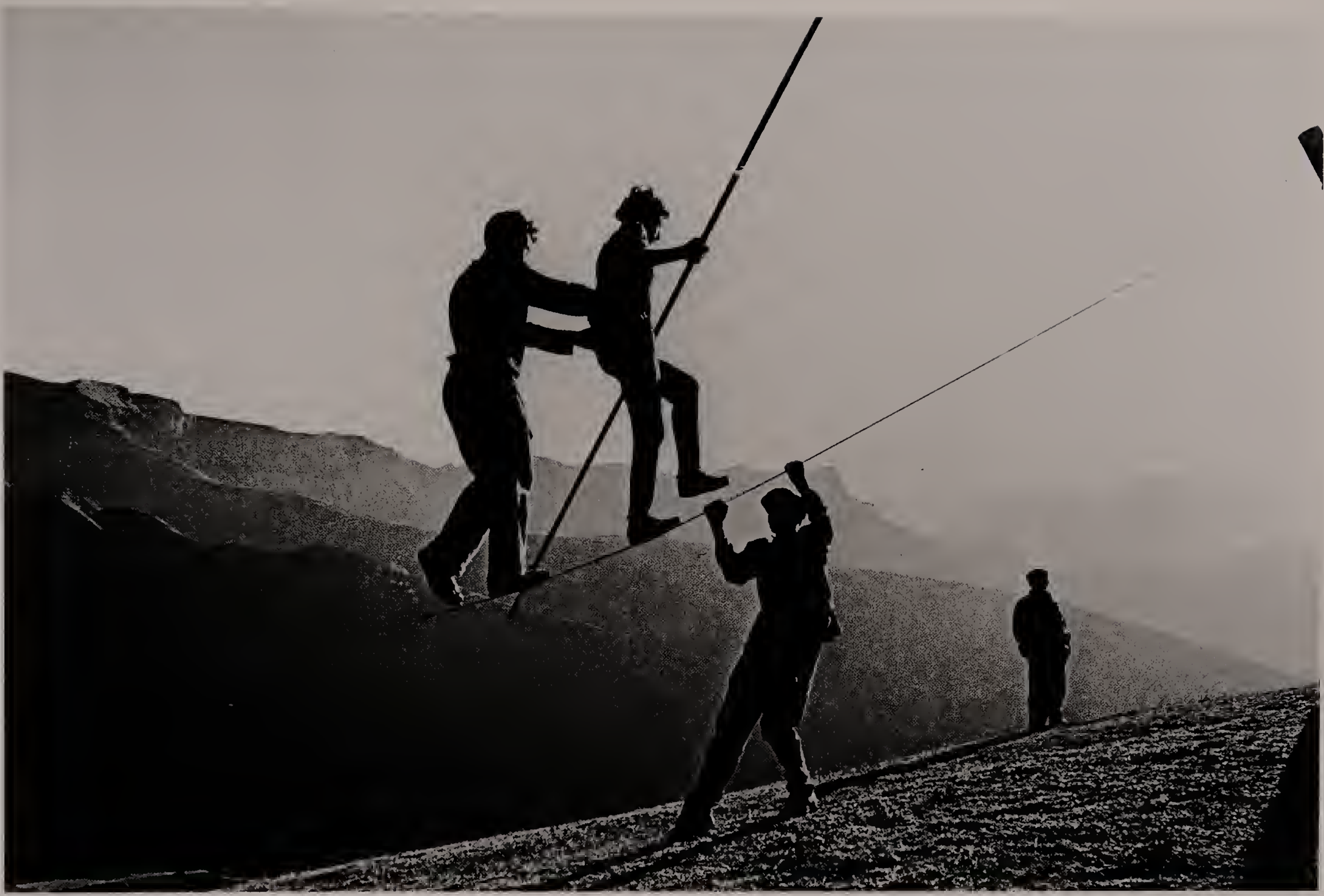


Fig. 171. Vladimir Syomin, *Dagestan. Tsovkra. Tightrope Walkers*, 1973. Gelatin silver print, 29.8 x 39.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25261.

against the mainstream of Russian "art" photography by avoiding an overtly conceptual practice, instead remaining within the realm of the document in order to take on the reconstructive task of wresting the traditions of Soviet documentary from their association with official, hieratic socialist realism and legitimating them as a Russian artistic idiom.[17]

A more compelling reading, in my view, connects Syomin's resistance to the instrumentalism, conventionalism, and organicism of official imagery with the project of photographers associated with the October Association in the 1920s and 1930s, photographers aligned with the Trotskyist wing of the Communist Party who innovated new forms of photographic witness to suit revolutionary consciousness. The Octoberists, represented prominently by Aleksandr Rodchenko, Boris Ignatovich, and Eliezar Langman and featured in the magazine *Let's Give*, favored experimentation in general and in particular a heightened attention to synchronic fragmentariness, often in the form of photographic montage, as a way of expressing the utopian aspirations of the revolution. Their goal was social photography that embodied a participatory demand and that pointed to an unfinished revolutionary process, a totality beyond the frame of view, as it were—or, in the words of the group's defender, Sergei Tretyakov, a "way of linking the facts [so] that they would radiate social energy and hidden truth."[18] While neither Syomin's iconography nor his design strategies reflect utopian longings, his realism, like that of the Octoberist photographers, favors a sense of the unknown, the discontinuous, the nonorganic elements of social reality. Margarita Tupitsyn's description of the goals of the Let's Give group equally apply to Syomin: the images "resist the viewer's temptation to perceive [photographs] as carriers of narrative or definite meanings; instead they produce a kind of shock . . . [in order to disrupt] the dismal and catastrophic continuity of everyday life."[19] For Syomin, working at the end of the Soviet period, the fragmented and allochronic disclosures of photographs disrupt, shock, and link observations to hidden truths.

Syomin's project in various ways tests any simple distinction between conceptual and documentary practices, primarily by recognizing documentary photography as a medium that can reveal (if not display) what it is to be in the midst of repression. We can see the full fathom of Syomin's approach by plotting graphically—admittedly, rather schematically—certain major points along a continuum that describes the ways the photographic image does and does not reveal (or perform) historical time. If documentary practice in the Soviet context is centered in the middle of the continuum with leanings toward the middle left, and documentary practice in the West is based at the far right with leanings to the center right, Syomin's work commits itself not to one of these points but almost equally to each. Syomin challenges observational practice by assuming multiple readings simultaneously:

1. History as unrepresentable.
2. History as mythic, the image as the work of imagination, a fiction, sometimes a lie.
3. The image as revealing history, but only partly; history as hidden "behind" the image.
4. History as fully instantiated in and as the image.

While Syomin's practice in the Soviet context separates realist photographs from institutional prerogatives, in the West his practice separates realist description from factual record, consistently attending to the dissociations and the disjunctions—compounding the associations and conjunctions—between what is visible and what is verifiable. The theoretical implication of this practice is an anti-realist position according to which a photograph is not heuristically commensurate with the world to which it is causally connected.[20] Syomin acts to shift the heuristic field from what documentary photography can grasp and certify to that which is elusive and vulnerable to loss in photographs, a shift appropriate to Syomin's deep subject. To put it another way, Syomin shifts the documentary act from definition to delineation. His reluctance to define what he shows is in effect a refusal to sanctify the documentary image.[21] Syomin's grasp of the contingencies of time and place in observational photography thus come to subvert the common Western metaphysics of presence, in which time and place are understood to exist "before," "behind," or "outside of" the photograph, there to be isolated and seemingly preserved by the photograph, whose chief illusion is that its stillness and fragmentariness spell out the otherwise uninterrupted flow of time.[22]

The practice of setting details of life-moments into indeterminate relationships to call forth elusive or repressed historical experience is at once bold and overtly fallible. Such a practice implies that a certain type of experience with images, one that permits recognition of an anterior reality never fully made present, creates historical "experience" in a primary sense. The historical experience to which Syomin's pictures refer is repressed experience, experience at the limits of representation, experience that has, so to speak, not been experienced. Much as history is for Benjamin simultaneously limitless and unfulfilled, the historical "memory" Syomin's pictures call out toward is apart from intrinsic form and can be given only provisional, analogous form—such as observational photographs of heightened indeterminacy. At the same time, the method of witness by analogy generates a contumacy toward documentary photography's traditional payoff, namely knowledge of the subject, and a sense of control of the information communicated. In this way, the Caucasus project debilitates the traditional Western conceit that to look at photographs is to "know" what they depict. If anything, to "know" the Caucasus through Syomin's photographs is to apprehend the ways that "knowing" makes the objects of knowledge unfree. The objects and the bodies of the photographs are not what they were in those places but, instead, objects and bodies held in discrete relations, revealing things they do not exactly describe and not quite evidencing what they show.

Is an alternate metaphysics at work? Without claiming too much philosophical intent for Syomin, the real, it would seem, is named by Syomin's method as something other than the latent content of the world waiting to be seized, "captured," or codified in a pictured instant—other than the effect of unimpeded access to the world (the synonymy of the real and the actual). Instead, the real is a rhetorical topos in which correlative transformations detected in the world lead to (and are legible in) an image's particular formal and referential tensions. These tensions do not instantiate the literal but induce an irruption—the forced entry of a greater whole of experience upon the halted time and place of the image. Thus, Syomin consistently positions the viewer to receive an unexpected presence in the pictured world, namely, the discovery of unrequited loss, a sense of the present marking an opening in time, a threshold into a "real reality," however unexplained and denatured. At the same time he consistently gives the image "back" to the world,.to a concern with history—something larger than himself and more encompassing than his own interiority —which is why the idiom of the report remains important.

To be sure, a tradition that recognizes documentary witness as immanent in, rather than manifest in, observational photographs has been a part of documentary practice in the West at least since Robert Frank's *The Americans*, which treats documentary meaning as not fully disclosed by the documentary photograph.[23] For some observers, this tradition compromises the revelatory (and revolutionary) potential of documentary witness, shifting documentary's terrain from legible, unambiguous communication to personal, sometimes "artistic" expression—"from metonymy to metaphor," to use Martha Rosler's phrase.[24] But the case of Syomin suggests an emergent documentary form predicated on the experimental use of visual analogy, a form apart from the metonymy-metaphor dichotomy. Like that of other photographers working with observational techniques to describe resistant historical consciousness, the philosophically anti-realist underpinnings of Syomin's work—the implicit disavowal of quiescent acceptance of undifferentiated "evidence" summoned by optics and camera technology—are not easily allied with a lionized documentary author or a bias toward expressive subjectivity. This is so for two reasons.

First, a certain hungry receptivity marks Syomin's approach to his subjects. We in the West might recognize in it an aspect of humanist discourse: a presumption that the viewer and the subject of documentary pictures are stable entities that share in the social and historical content pictured, so that the viewer looks into the pictures with the expectation of believing in what the pictures show and so is implicated in the meanings drawn from the pictures. But in the case of Syomin, in contrast to humanist conceit, history becomes observable paradoxically because we recognize that all that is visible is not factual, and all that is factual is not visible. Neither, however, is Syomin's work straightforwardly anti-humanist, concerned with photographic meaning in terms of artifice or with dystopic readings of culture (one thinks again of Frank). Rather, Syomin's work treats the human subject as intact but not evident to itself, as incompletely self-recognizing, as self-deflecting.

Second, Syomin's photographs in the Caucasus are rhetorically self-dissimulating. Syomin's pictures virtually evacuate themselves of rhetorical appeals to their own authority, whether through stylistic iconicity or through moral witness. As such, Syomin's method complicates the now familiar (and too often hackneyed) critique of the documentary photographer, whose practice—particularly in cross-cultural contexts—amounts to little more than predatory voyeurism, imperious entitlement, tacit or overt coercion, and representational theft. The Caucasus project proposes the example of a documentarian who effectively abstains from the twin conceits of subjectivist expression and objectivist revelation, instead allowing what-is-seen and what-is-felt to play off of one another—in a sense, to cancel one another—for the sake of a discernable sense of absence and a sense of "time that has duration but no direction, that expands and contracts but does not evolve . . . [a] lost and found time," in the words of Wright Morris.[25]

Whether Syomin sustains his investigation of the leading issues of the Caucasus work in his later, better-known work on the Russian countryside remains open to discussion. To the extent that the latter settles into a more familiar commemorative practice and more archetypal (and perhaps sentimental) tropes, the Caucasus project, which approaches his concerns indirectly and cross-culturally, can be understood as a provocation to the other parts of Syomin's oeuvre. At any rate, for those concerned with an invigorated use of the observational tradition to approach historical experience, the Caucasus project is important.

The project—to summarize my understanding of it—sets forth an enigmatic semantic relay possessed of a certain gravity, a relay replete with relationships precisely hidden from view by the fickle qualities of observation and imagination, and of deliberate but nonpossessive regard. Outwardly it accepts the idiom of the report but situates the report in the peregrinations of a wanderer unwilling to claim the authority of the group, a wanderer who is, by turns, a recorder of historical experience mindful of the elusiveness of certification through photographs and a symbolist image-maker who employs photographic realism to address the experience of emotional shock. Further, the project proposes an author who is in equal measures a documentary photographer and an artist concerned with photographs-as-documents—for whom documentary witness occurs by analogy. It proposes the example of a photographer whose observations sometimes take a magisterial turn but who is in fact most committed to the nonsaturated relations between observation and the world, a photographer whose conception of truth telling is the opposite of revelation—a photographer for whom finding outside is already to have found within.[26] Most of all, the project proposes the antinomian intensity of a search for an image of the past, an unheroic pursuit of that which is secreted, enervating, and beckoning.

NOTES

1. Privately, Syomin recognizes the Caucasus project as a project, as he does several bodies of work that form discrete projects; publicly, he prefers to emphasize the totality of his vision through the integrated presentation of his projects. Syomin's large retrospective exhibition, *Russian Memories*, at the Leica Gallery, New York City, December 20, 2002–January 25, 2003, is one such example.

2. See, for example, Josef Koudelka, *Exiles* (New York: Aperture, 1988); Bill Burke, *I want to take picture* (Atlanta: Nexus Press, 1987); Gilles Peress, *Farewell to Bosnia* (New York: Scalo, 1994); Lise Sarfati, *Acta Est* (London: Phaidon, 2000); Fazal Sheikh, *The Victor Weeps, Afghanistan* (New York: Scalo, 1998); and Mikael Levin, *War Story*, text by Meyer Levin (Munich: Gina Kehayoff, 1997). I might also mention two of my own works, "A Dialogue with Separation: Picturing an American Chinatown, 1990–2002" and "Far from Zion: Time in Jewish Homelands" (2002), both unpublished.

3. Conversation with Vladimir Syomin, Brooklyn, New York, May 10, 2001. The Caucasus pictures form the heart of Syomin's representation in the Dodge Collection of Soviet art at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University; I first became aware of the project through the collection. Syomin himself has generously made available to me a great number of the Caucasus pictures, beyond the Dodge Collection's holding. My understanding of the project—indeed, my understanding of the project *as* a project—stems from this broad exposure to the work.

4. To reduce Syomin's work to aestheticized tourist photography would be to me a procrustean exercise.

5. Octavio Paz, 1990 Nobel Laureate Lecture, in Tore Frangsmyr et al., *Nobel Lectures in Literature, 1981–1990* (Singapore: World Scientific Publication Company, 1994), 5.

6. Still, Syomin's embrace of the Caucasus as lacking in its own historical inscription or whose own inscription is not worth his representing—as a territory effectively unconscripted into Russian experience—does suggest a precisely colonial privilege.

7. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Shocken Books, 1968), 160. Reflecting on Benjamin, Eduardo Cadava further notes that the German word for experience, *Erfahrung*, is etymologically linked to the word for danger, *Gefahr*, so that in a strict sense to "experience" is to put oneself in a state of danger and emergency. See Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 147–48 n. 77. The formulation of Soviet historical experience as an "ongoing shock" belongs to Jeff Fort; personal correspondence, June 22, 2003.

8. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 162.

9. Ibid., 175.

10. Cadava, *Words of Light*, 64. Cadava's text adroitly investigates the intertwining of Benjamin's conceptions of history and photography.

11. Ibid. The quotation is Cadava's translation from Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 134.

12. Cadava, *Words of Light*, 60.

13. The quotation is from Benjamin's *Origin of German Trauerspiel*, cited in Susan Sontag, "Under the Sign of Saturn," in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), 116.

14. Cadava, *Words of Light*, 61. The translation is Cadava's from Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, 578.

15. Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 287.

16. John P. Jacob, "After Raskolnikov: Russian Photography Today," *Art Journal* (ed. Diane Neumaier) 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 27.

17. At the same time, one should remember that a Soviet practice of social photography existed that authorized in some important sense the individual photographer. Before and during World War II, such work was commonly practiced under official auspices. See, for example, the work of October Association photographers Boris Ignatovich and Eliezar Langman and the Soviet war photographers Mikhail Trakhman, Dmitry Baltermants, and Evgeny Khaldey. After the war, photographers increasingly pictured daily life in overtly self-authorizing ways—for example, in the photographs of Russian rural life made by Vladimir

Kupriyanov, Farit Gubayev, Valerii Shchekoldin, and Aleksandras Mačiauskas, and in the somewhat more ironic observational photographs of Boris Smelov, Gennadii Bodrov, Aleksandr Lapin, and Evgenii Raskopov.

18. Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 67.

19. Ibid., 97. Tupitsyn's quotation itself includes a quotation of Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 14.

20. It is worth dwelling for a moment on the philosophic problem at the heart of the notion of the photograph-as-document. The proposition that a photograph "documents" what it shows commonly centers on a reification of the causal connections that exist between the photograph and the world. According to the traditional realist argument, the photograph's direct physical relationship to that which it pictures, the formation of an image in response to the action of light reflected from actually existing objects and bodies—together with the lawful character of photographic optics and chemistry and the mechanical character of the camera—ordains photographic images with a truth not found in other representational mediums. This argument bears an impressive pedigree: in the view of Fox Talbot himself and for the better part of its history, photography has been deemed a representational form that is not only objective, neutral, regular, and homologous with the world but also revelatory and self-announcing in its truthfulness. The critiques of the traditional view that photographs have a privileged relationship to reality tend to be of two types, one that preserves the realist ontology and one that denies it. The second, because it is the minority position, deserves particular attention. The crux of the argument is that if photographs authenticate what they show, this authentication is not a result of the physical connection between marks on a page and their referents in the world. As Joel Snyder has shown, the photographic process is inherently plastic—notwithstanding conventions that mitigate this plasticity—and the variety of photographic marks that can be made from a subject in the world do not always permit easy reconstruction of the world from photographs. The upshot is that there is hardly a secure, much less a reflexive, correspondence between form and referent in photography. Many photographers understand this plasticity creatively, even if they do not appreciate its anti-realist philosophic consequences; conversely, many critics (old and new) have derived sclerotic positions on photographic ontology from a poor understanding of the plasticity of the photographic form. Grounded in a clear understanding of photographic processes themselves, the anti-realist position does not seek to derive documentary authenticity from the causal connections between the world and the photographic mark. Reference—the foundation of documentary meaning—is instead treated as a discursive construction, a matter of the social uses of photographs. In this anti-realist understanding, photographs represent *heuristic* correspondences between pictorial forms as they are entered into varieties of discursive practices. A propos the task of writing about a photographer such as Syomin, the language with which we describe photographs' performance shifts when we ground reference in the social construction of meaning through interpretive acts rather than in the photographic index (to use C. S. Peirce's term). Thus "the real," from an anti-realist perspective, is not something photographs "capture" but something photographs "release" into the world. Likewise, photographs are not physical "traces of the real"—the dominant metaphor of both the traditional view and prominent realist critics of that view, from Roland Barthes to Susan Sontag to Rosalind Krauss, critics who retain the primacy of the index but elaborate the ways it is encrypted with ideological codes and embellished with varieties of visual artifice. Rather than a property of photographs, the "trace" describes a discursive characteristic, a trope photographs are culturally charged to perform. Photographs, from this perspective, represent the "trace" of cultural practices that endow camera-derived images with the authority of the real—or, alternately, "trace" in the sense of following or tracking. See Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision," in *The Language of Images*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Snyder's essay remains the best discussion of the ways that the formal plasticity of the photographic process undermine the physical basis of photographic reference, particularly the ways photographs do not easily admit reconstruction of the world.

21. The connection between definition and sanctification belongs to Roland Barthes, *New Critical Essays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 8.

22. For an illuminating discussion on photographic ontology and historical trauma, see Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), chapters 1 and 3.

23. For an astute critical analysis of Robert Frank's documentary priorities, see Lili Corbus Benzer, *Photography and Politics in America: From the New Deal to the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), chapter 4.

24. Martha Rosler, "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts on Audience," in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

25. Wright Morris, *Time Pieces: Photographs, Writing and Memory* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 11.

26. Conversation with Joel Leivick, October 1999.

The Special Case of Baltic Experimental Photography

Sirje Helme

Uses of Photography in Estonian Visual Art

In 1993, the first annual exhibition of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, *Substance-Unsubstance*, opened in Tallinn, which proved to be photography's breakthrough into Estonian exhibition halls and also into the mentally set system of the visual arts hierarchy.[1] Eve Linnap displayed her work under the title *Estonian Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction* and wrote in the exhibition catalogue, "I borrowed the title of my work from Walter Benjamin, the philosopher who described in detail the social results of the mechanically produced art almost 60 years ago, at the time when Estonian art was constituted mostly by the paradigm of the 'picturesque.' Therefore, it is very strange that this understanding of how mechanical reproduction has substantially changed the culture has become relevant for Estonians only now, during the last decade of the 20th century."[2] This sentence inevitably reveals the indifference of the younger generation toward the historical experience. However, it is true that Estonian photography did not belong in the hierarchy of fine art, it was not included in art exhibitions, and photo theory did not join the debate on fine art of the time before the early 1990s. In *The Memory of Images: Baltic Photo Art Today*, the catalogue of the international exhibition that opened in March 1993 in Kiel, Germany, the curator Barbara Straka wrote, "Firstly, until independence from the Soviet Union was attained in 1991, characteristic forms of expression and developments within the medium of photography in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were subsumed and thus assimilated within the larger concept of 'Soviet photography.' Thus—historically speaking—the question of 'Baltic Photo Art' can only arise today."[3]

Nevertheless, we cannot claim that photography appeared in the Estonian art landscape from nowhere, and we cannot claim that before the 1990s no connections or mutual influence between photography and other visual arts existed. Photography had long prewar

Fig. 172 (*facing*). Jaan Elken, *On the Floor. Studio*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 99 x 146 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 05225.

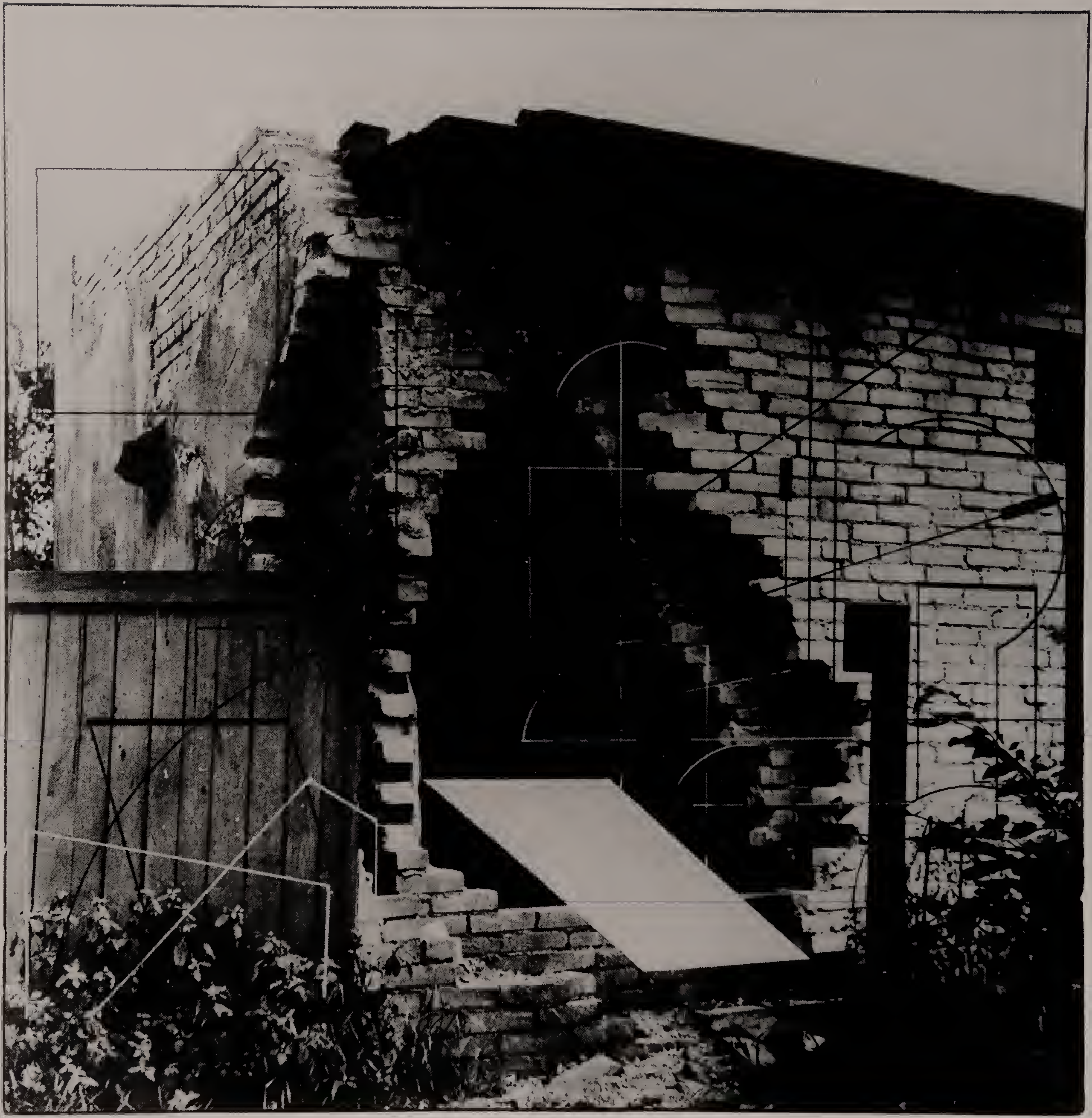


Fig. 173. Jüri Okas, *Reconstruction Mol I*, 1977. Offset lithograph, 50.5 x 49 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19389.

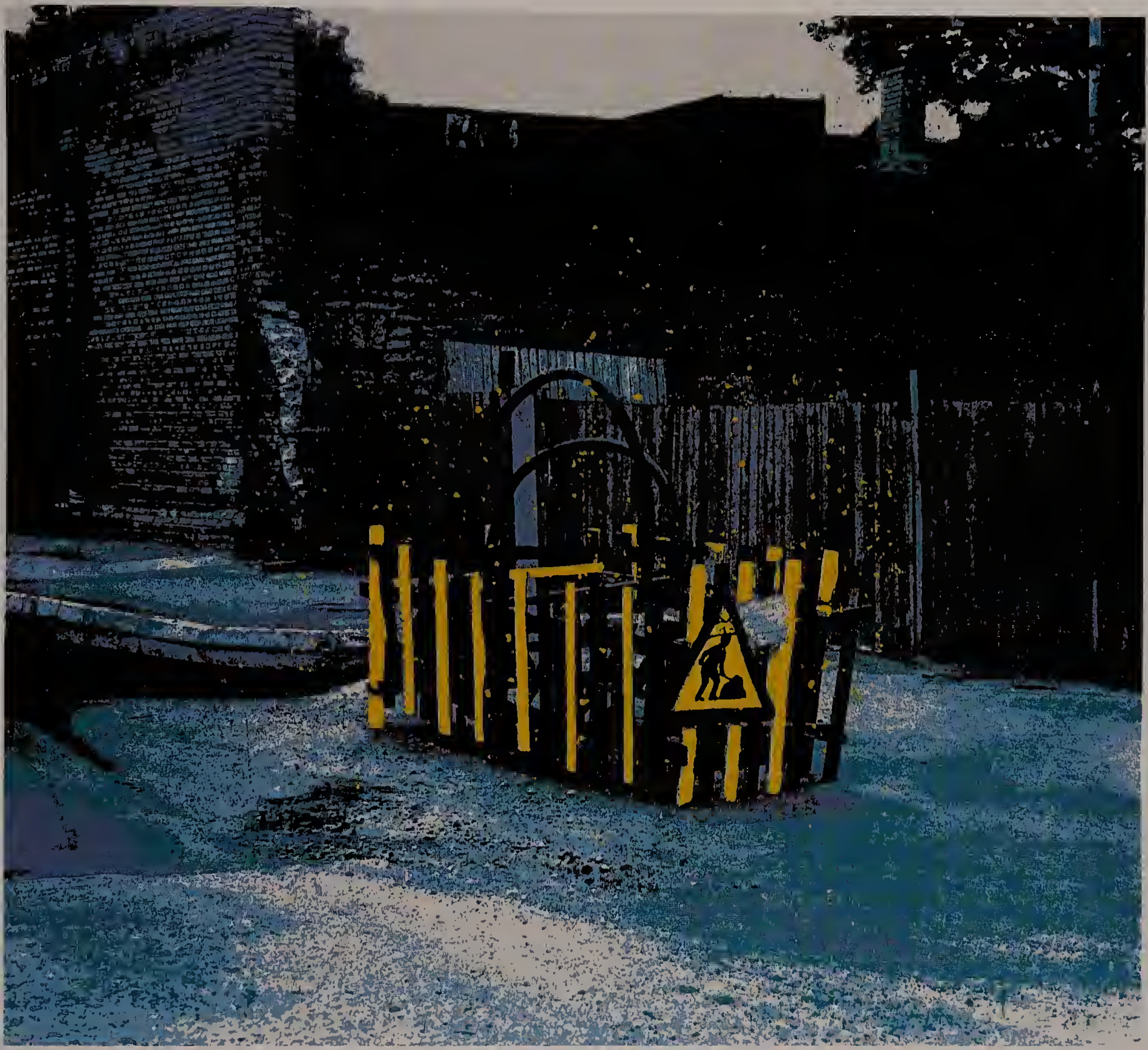


Fig. 174. Ülo Emmus, *Morning in Hometown*, 1984. Silk-screen print, 48.5 x 54 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 04054.

traditions and continued to be active in the postwar period. Several exhibitions were organized every year, a museum of photography had been established, and various clubs of professional photographers met. Furthermore, the visual systems and technical specifics of both photography and painting mixed and used each other, and not only once.

This article does not delve into the history of photography or the problems of the art of photography; it instead deals with the relations between photography and other visual arts. The question is not of the presentation of photography at art exhibitions but of the status of photography in the hierarchy of Estonian fine art. This essay thus constitutes an attempt to view the areas in art where the so-called photographic manner that stressed the belief in the photo's objectivity and neutrality—documenting, distancing from the subject matter, and presenting without commentary—became more significant than the identification of artist and substance, an emphasis that had long prevailed in Estonian art. Fine art has twice turned to photography—in the early 1970s, in the work of Jüri Okas (fig. 173), and in the mid-1970s, with the first of several waves of so-called Estonian hyperrealism, which subsided only in the mid-1980s.

The first part of this essay considers photography's position in the hierarchy of fine art, and the second (comprising four sections) addresses art from 1971 to 1984 that integrated photographic vision into its means of expression and language. These dates correspond to the completion of two works of art, the former Okas's first film and the latter Ülo Emmus's serigraphy work (fig. 174), the last of its kind in the forementioned wave. In that period, the problems raised by the 1960s avant-garde—of different ways to convey reality, of realism's reliability as a manner of depiction, of

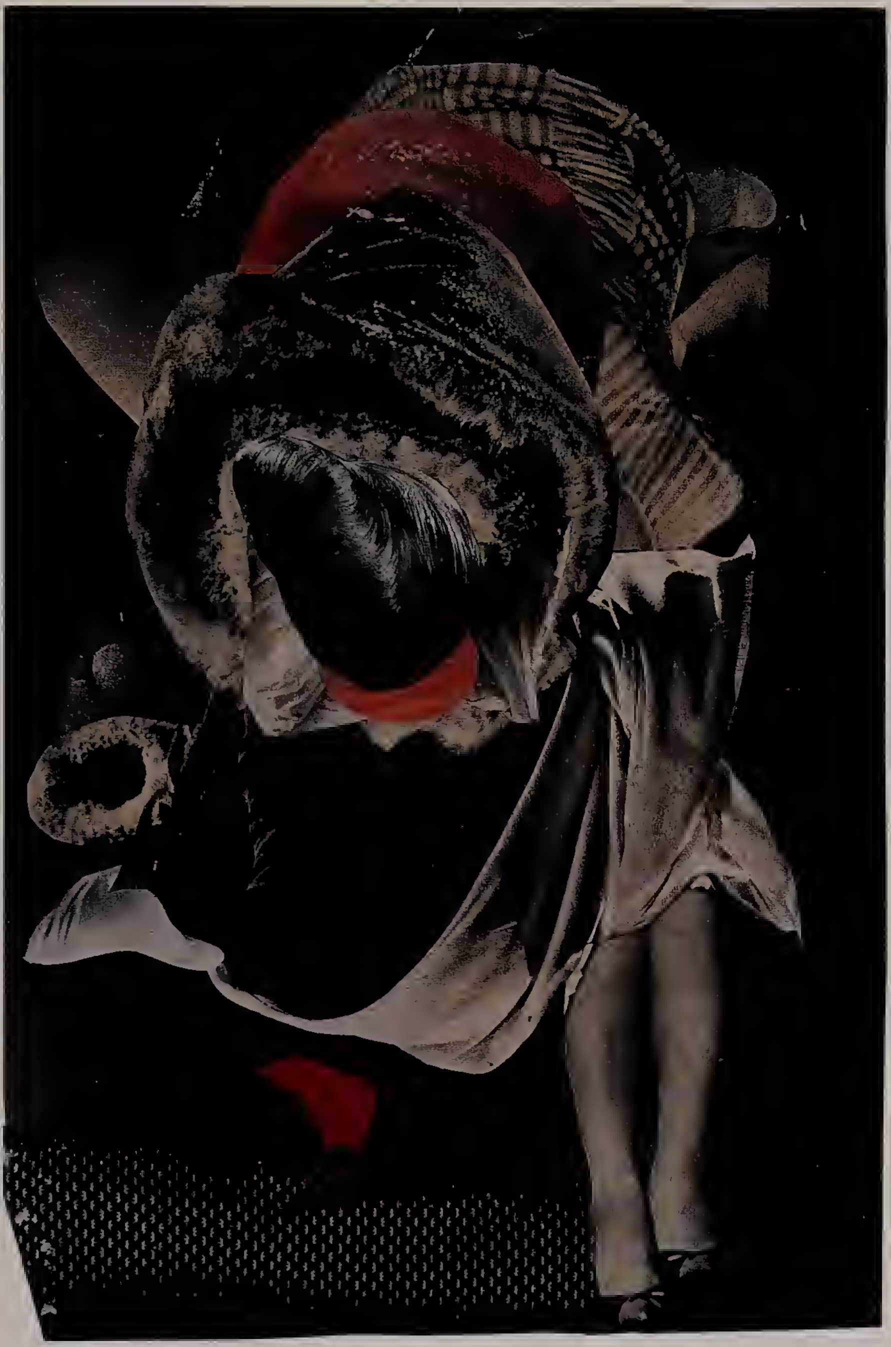


Fig. 175. Olav Maran, *Damsky*, 1965. Photo collage on paper, 40.5 x 27 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 17068.

double coding in visual information—were intensely tackled. These issues, in fact, were addressed in prewar modernism, but in the Soviet world realism remained the preferred method of depiction throughout the postwar period until the late 1980s. Realism, tied for so long to ideology and collaborationism, thus remains a sensitive issue in Estonian art and art history.

ART EXHIBITIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Art exhibitions were highly regarded in Soviet Estonian society. In an undefined way, creative work was associated with virtual independence, with escape from the totalitarian grasp. Estonian postwar society and cultural policy favored escapism, expression of which ranged from linguistic communication to social isolation (building/buying one's own house was much desired). In culture, fine art was one of the best possibilities for escapism, and one can see the connection between social pressure and emphasizing art's autonomy. I have written about the defense mechanism of Estonian art that took shape in the 1960s;[4] one's own imaginary space stressed certain peculiarities of Estonian art and signified a mental protective wall against Soviet art life. This inward turn created reserve, individualism, avoidance of social themes, and a fondness for landscape and still life. A timeless metaphysical space outside place emerged, one's own island, or, as Juri Sobolev calls it in "Virtual Estonia and no less Virtual Moscow," the third place.[5] Fine art with its "third place" occupied a high position in the cultural hierarchy; so-called commissioned work was even forgiven, in appreciation of art's prevalent role in Estonia's mimicry culture.

Photography did not enjoy such esteem and became a perpetual outsider to the fine art system, primarily for ideological reasons. Postwar cultural policy saw photography's role limited to propaganda, and photography itself valued the medium's documentary aspect, which at that time was construed as obligatorily emphasizing social optimism, great achievements in work, and huge construction complexes. In 1945, the new *Photography Paper* described the contents of its subsequent issues: "The paper examines Estonian art, agriculture, industry, oil shale mines, paper and timber industry, work of many factories.... The publication is an efficient and available means of propaganda. Such documentary views will get a wide readership."[6] This demagogy changed little over time—Communist Party papers of the 1980s contain similar wording.

During the "thaw," from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, discussion started about the relations between photography and art; the first was graciously allowed to have its own aesthetic value.[7] But that allowance was mostly formal. Despite photography's growing independence, it remained a phenomenon outside art for the artists and art exhibitions throughout nearly the whole Soviet period. One example of photography's almost schizophrenic situation in determining its identity was the expression "artistic photo," which supposedly implied said photo was worthy of being called art. The term was an attempt to liberate photography from its ideology-centered mentality and stress the medium's independence.

One of the few exceptions of photography's inclusion in an art exhibition was the 1966 show in the foyer of the Estonian Academy of Sciences in Tallinn, where artists and photographers jointly displayed their work. The show took place in the relatively short period in art when Estonian avant-garde thinking accepted new technical processes, and photography was considered fascinating as a print medium.[8] In the early 1960s several young, progressive-minded artists were keen on the collage technique that reached Estonia mainly through the person and work of Ülo Sooster. Sooster lived in Moscow and thus had access to the city's large libraries, where numerous books about prewar modernism were still available.[9] One could say that collage arrived in Estonia, especially for Tartu artists such as Valve Janov, via surrealism.

Collage's heyday, between 1964 and 1967, is evident in the work of Olav Maran (fig. 175), which belongs, without exception, in the surrealist mode. Maran took reproductions from such East German magazines as *Für Dich*, *Freie Welt*, and *Neue Berliner Illustrierte*, which were almost the only foreign publications available, and naturally they served mainly propaganda interests. Nonetheless, they represented a visual culture different from that of the Soviet magazines. Their choice of photography was certainly more fascinating, and they provided artists with wider possibilities.[10] Exhibiting such works at exhibitions was, of course, impossible because they did not belong in the officially approved culture. In addition, most of the public and even many artists did not regard collages with elements of photography as art. As a rule, however, nothing changed the artists' self-centered relation to the photographic medium, and after the 1966 exhibition photography and collage led completely different lives.

Creators of the so-called artistic photo retreated into clubs, the most important and innovative of which was the group Stodom.[11] Club members attempted to abandon the dictate of themes, and people wrote about the "artistic ability to see" and the expressiveness of searching.[12] Photography tried to repeat the steps taken by fine art, separating itself from ideological demands through an "art for art's sake" ideology, which was never publicly proclaimed but was secretly approved. In the late 1960s, the photographers began to use various techniques that focused on impressive presentation. As Leonid Bazhanov later described the situation, "The avant-garde painting, printmaking and even sculpture are trying to acquire the denotativeness typical of photography, appealing to conventional perception, whereas photography seems to walk away from denotativeness and, employing the experience abandoned by fine art, turns to rhetoric, aestheticising their work to the maximum."[13]

PHOTOGRAPHY AND CONCEPTUAL ART

Photography took on an altogether different role within conceptualism. Estonian art of the late 1960s was naturally not prepared to accept the breakthrough marked by conceptualism and minimalism in international art. The meaning of text and documentation appeared as a massive wave only in the neoconceptualism of the early 1990s.

The work of Jüri Okas belongs to the minimalist and conceptual art of the early 1970s. In 1971 Okas used 8-mm film to record his performance. This work was followed by "perspective improvements" of land-art objects photographed at Vääna beach near Tallinn, installations, happenings, and photographs of architectural objects. The camera became a significant medium that Okas used in a radically different manner from that of the so-called professional photographers. He reworked his photos in his intaglio pieces and supplemented them with signs and references, changing the meaning and relations between the objects recorded in the photographs.

Okas thus used photographs as prime material in his graphic work. Employing photo documentation is only one aspect of altering photography's position in the visual arts. What counts more is the change of mentality, redirecting attention from so-called high art with its artisanal attitude to photocopying (graphics), a simple, cheap, reproducible, and easily distributable art. To high art Okas introduced not only photography as a medium but also the evaluation criteria of the age of mechanical reproduction, which included questions about the relationship between the preparatory photo/situation and a work of art bearing the author's handwriting. He also raised the question of the manipulability of the documentary photo.

In the 1970s, Estonian photography aspired to elitism marked by an aesthetics based on technical experiments, distinguishing between the artistic photo and the documentary (journalistic) photo and clearly distancing itself from the latter at exhibitions. Jüri Okas's approach to the medium questioned the very convention of representation.

HYPERREALISM OR SLIDE PAINTING?

In the mid-1970s a new painting trend that depended upon photography arrived in Estonia—hyperrealism, called superrealism or photorealism in the United States. Although closely connected with pop art, which arrived in the late 1960s, hyperrealism incited a much livelier discussion than did pop art or conceptualism. Since neither pop art nor conceptual art was accepted in official Estonian visual culture, the press found it nearly impossible to attract attention to the new art discourse. Opportunities were limited to professional literature, such as in the art magazine *Kunst*, where the first overview of new trends was devoted solely to hyperrealism.[14] The discussion focused on the essence and role of photography in the work of fine art. Hyperrealism's "purity" was kept in mind, including its power to transform the process of painting itself. Belief in the "holy touch" of the artist's hand still held.

With some exceptions, "classical" hyperrealist paintings did not exist in Estonia. Rather, the use of photography stressed the narrative or the metaphysical side of pictures. To avoid nomenclatorial uncertainty, the term "slide painting" was employed;[15] later, "photorealism" was also used. Graphic art also began to use photographs as material, both in urban motifs and in the depiction of everyday life (Jüri Okas's conceptual works were still something else).

Indirectly, discussion of terminology—hyperrealism or slide painting?—concerned the problem of reality perception and the credibility of realism as a method. In the early 1970s there were no serious analyses of perception, which was radically changed by the media that hyperrealists actually deny in their work. McLuhan's "museum" and Baudrillard's "simulacrum" had yet to impact theoretical writing about art.[16]

The first wave of hyperrealist art was influenced, as was Estonian avant-garde art of the mid-1970s, by geometrical abstractionism and pop art.[17] In the Soviet Union hyperrealism was regarded as a false realism,[18] as an invader, and Estonia was without doubt the first place in the Soviet Union where hyperrealist paintings were allowed in exhibitions, although Russian art history claims otherwise.[19] Positioning Estonian art via an unrecognized art was at that time extremely significant. Hyperrealism's genesis in the mid-1970s was closely connected with pop art and other alternative ideas that opposed the demands of the dominant artist-centered postimpressionism and socialist realism. Its representatives, including Ando Keskküla, were connected with pop art as well.

Hyperrealist painting has also been called the art of compromises.[20] Leonhard Lapin even called it a modification of socialist realism.[21] However, Lapin's severe criticism relies not on theoretical analysis but on the integration of hyperrealists into official exhibitions in the 1980s. This inclusion designated the end of hyperrealism's dissident position.

Hyperrealism was later appreciated for introducing the problems of industrial society into Estonian art. Eha Komissarov wrote, "The main problem of slide painting is the re-interpretation of the modernized and industrialized environment, and the elimination of the Soviet rhetoric. A concept of the neutrality of public space was born."[22] To be more precise, the topics of the industrial environment had in fact reached Estonian art earlier, together with the "rough style" (a term that originated in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s) that legitimated the depiction of prewar modernism, with such topics as the new urban environment, production buildings, and technology. Hyperrealism imported the problems of postwar modernism more forcefully than any other field of art. Before hyperrealism existed, practically nothing got published about postwar Western art. Such discussion gradually became easier, only to be forbidden again at the peak of the stagnant mid-1980s.

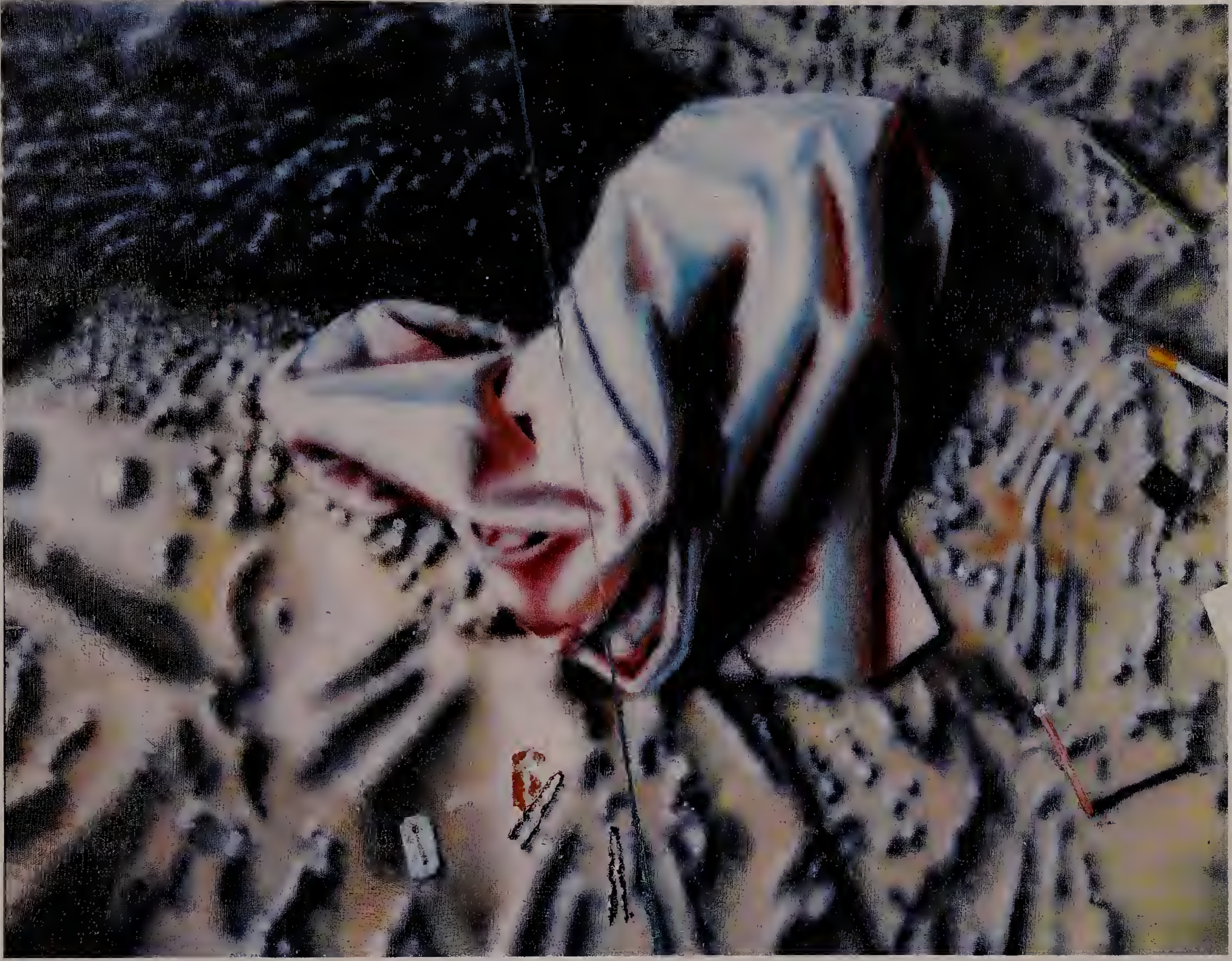


Fig. 176. Ando Keskküla, *The Beach*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 71 x 90 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 08862.

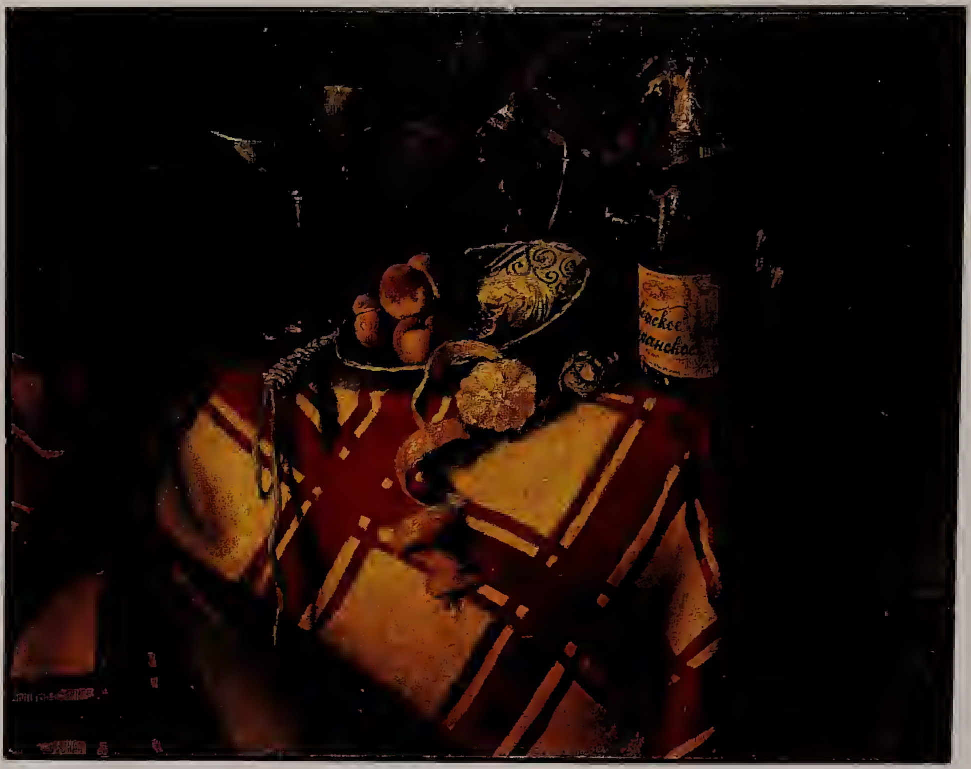
"ON THE FLOOR"

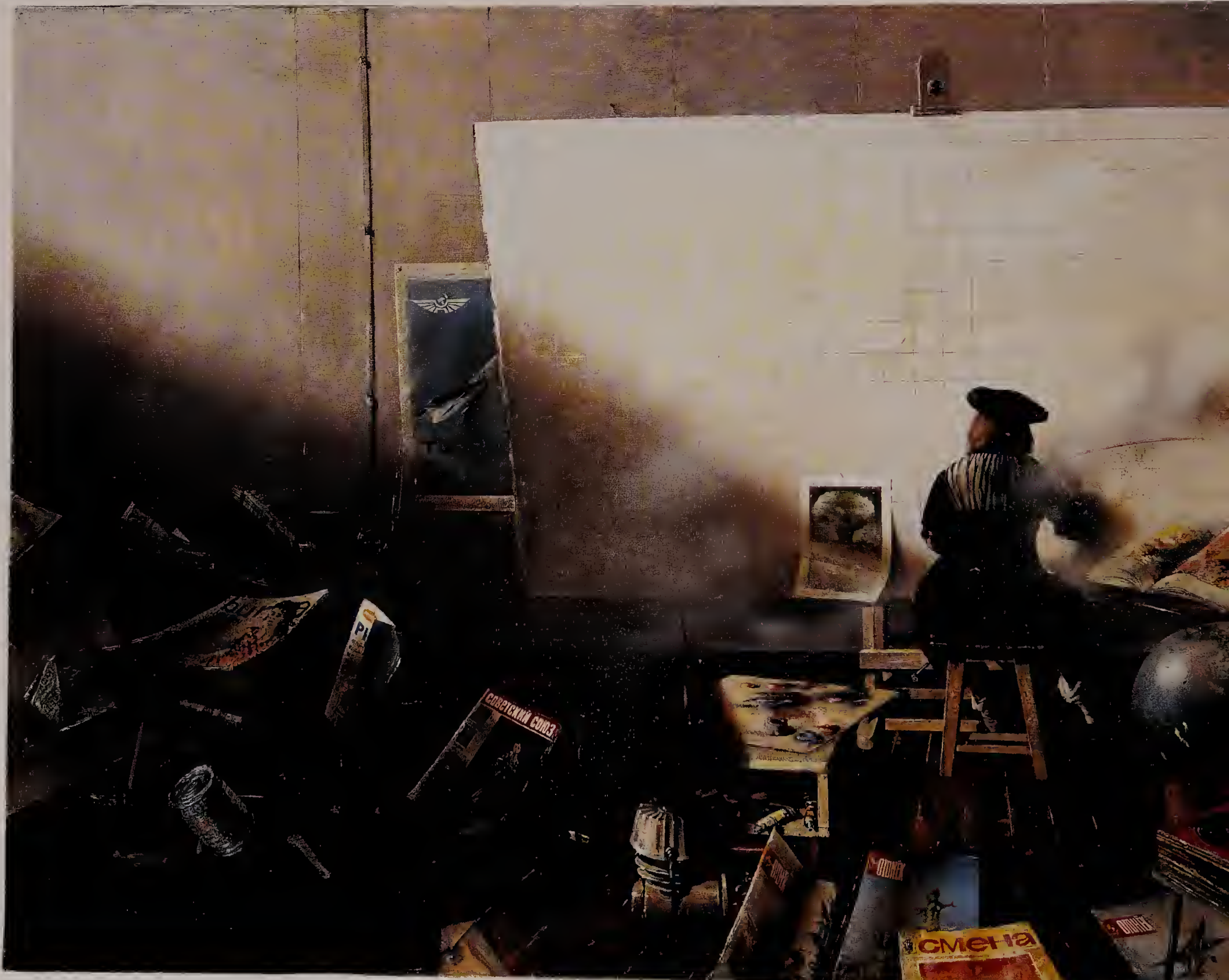
Estonian hyperrealist art is not homogeneous in either its method or its aims. In 1996 I described three waves,[23] the first made up of artists who began working in the mid-1970s, such as Ando Keskküla, Tõnu Virve, Vladimir Taiger, and Heitti Polli. Their breakthrough exhibition was the 1975 youth exhibition in Tallinn, several paintings from which remain textbook examples of Estonian hyperrealist art. In his solo exhibition of the same year, Keskküla displayed paintings that presaged hyperrealism, although their motifs were not exactly hyperrealist. His paintings nevertheless revolutionized Estonian painting. The artist included in his hyperrealist period both the experience of pop art and a serious interest in the metaphysics of space. In his works, especially those of interiors, he used photographic spacial perspective as well as artificial, phototransparent (slide-like), unnaturally sharp or cold color. At the same time, the light in Keskküla's paintings (fig. 176) is extraordinary, magical. The artist's emotional distance from his object was typical of that time when the pathos of the artificial environment (postindustrial culture) was understood to be in opposition to a closeness to nature. Estonian art was generally oriented toward a postimpressionist softness that featured lyrical scenes of landscape, slum motifs, and the like. Keskküla's alienated sense of reality and "cleansed" cold space clearly opposed the prevalent practice.

By the end of the 1970s younger Estonian artists were devoted to hyperrealist painting. This second wave in Estonian hyperrealism was characterized by the use of everyday motifs and the emphasis on photography. The artist's studio was often depicted, not in a romantic light but rather in its mundane boredom and mess (fig. 172, p. 218). In the work of Jaan Elken

Fig. 177 (*right*). Rein Tammik, *Still Life II*, 1978. Oil on canvas mounted on board, 72.5 x 92 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 06761.

Fig. 178 (*below*). Rein Tammik, *In The Studio*, 1982–83. Oil on canvas, 119.1 x 257.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10950.





(one of whose paintings was titled *On the Floor*), the most important artist of the second wave, urban space gained ground. However, the reality he portrayed was not the cold, uninhabited, questionable one of Keskküla. Instead, his spaces continually referred to human activity, even when no figures appeared. Nor did he cover the canvas with even, calm painting that would indicate the artist's neutral relation to the subject depicted; he added spontaneous combinations of color, furious scribbling, taken from the stock of abstract expressionism. Thus the artist distanced himself from the dogmatic conventions of hyperrealism and made clear that what he depicted was not reality but simply a picture.

Heitti Polli, another artist to favor urban motifs, is among the few who sometimes used human figures in their work. Paintings such as *The City*, 1982, openly hint at his use of the camera. In the 1980s Polli too began to move toward so-called picturesque painting, and his warm-hued landscapes no longer bore any connection with hyperrealism.

The third wave comprises young artists who started out in Tartu in 1979–80. The works of Miljard Kilk and Ilmar Kruusamäe (also known as Viljar Valdi) that depicted scenes of everyday life often have slightly funny, unexpected foreshortening. This photographic compositional scheme and the bright, "slide-like" colors they used became the style of the "Tartu hyperrealists."[24] However, these Tartu artists were not in the least interested in the philosophical side of hyperrealism. Consequently, their preference for the term "slide painting" denoted that, to the artists, the photograph replaced the model.

Some artists who are not usually associated with hyperrealism—for example, Andres Tolts, Ludmilla Siim, and Tiit Pääsuke at times employed a photographic way of looking at things. Rein Tammik holds a separate position. He started out in pop art but quickly acquired a photographic sense of space that he first used in still lifes, where his favorite image was of checked tablecloth and a figured bowl (fig. 177). A while later Tammik started to use reproductions of artworks as the objects in his paintings, mixing them with allusions to contemporary space (fig. 178). Thus Tammik may be considered one of the first postmodernists in Estonian fine art.

By 1984 the movement of hyperrealism in painting had all but subsided. But thanks to pop art and hyperrealism's wish to be "objective and truthful" in representing the contemporary world, and using the photographic source for this aim, the artist's glance was no longer "innocent"; impressionistic space, experience, and optics that had so long dominated Estonian painting were replaced by various games of hyperreality and by the pictorial character of reproduced and interpreted reality.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM IN GRAPHIC ART

Photography's role in the development of other visual art mediums is most vividly demonstrated by the photographic realism in graphic art, or printmaking, that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Hyperrealism is the art of painters, and to write about it in terms of graphic art seems strange because—like photography—graphics is a reproducing technology. In Estonian art, however, "graphics" carries a meaning different from that of the rest of the post–pop art world. In Estonian art hierarchy, graphic art was equal to painting and occasionally even superior, thanks to its ability to change more rapidly, as in the early 1960s. Technique was considered paramount, and skill was required for each technological procedure. Etching, aquatint, and soft varnish were the favorites, with serigraphy (silk screen) gaining popularity in the early 1980s.

Painting's new treatment of realism considerably influenced graphic art, although in the end the influence remained short-lived and difficult to determine. In the second half of the 1970s, the graphic art of Kaisa Puustak, Marje Üksine, and Urmas Ploomipuu supplemented the prevailing lyrical trend. *Supplemented* is the right word here, because although the conceptual art of Jüri Okas and the geometrical graphics of Raul Meel and Leonhard Lapin existed alongside the main trend, graphic art seemed to live a life of its own. The mainstream easily accepted Puustak and Üksine, both for their technical skills and for the human dimension of their motifs. Kaisa Puustak started with precise still lifes. From a photographic aspect, her graphics that use architectural photos are more significant. There, the artist used a play of light and reflection common to the urban painting of, for example, American Richard Estes, but Puustak employed aquatint rather than oil. Marje Üksine focused on human figures, exploiting photography's unique capability to record on arrested moment of a fleeting action—a girl with a jump rope, a bird in flight.

For a short time in the early 1980s, Ülo Emmus, a young artist who had studied in the German Democratic Republic, was active in graphic art. Although his works bear only a few signs of the urban environment—a railway junction, a suburban street—they clearly reveal a different environment and mentality and secure a place for hyperrealism in graphic art.

Many graphic artists of the time used photography, sometimes directly, sometimes by stressing various photographic qualities (as did Urmas Ploomipuu and Illimar Paul), and sometimes employing photography merely as supplementary material.[25]

In conclusion, one may say that photography and fine art followed separate roads until the 1990s, although they influenced each other extensively. Paradoxically, at the times when photographers strove to make photography real, "like art," art was examining, by means of photography, the simulacrum of reality and its metaphysics. One of hyperrealism's major contributions to Estonian art was an idea agonized over since the 1960s—the notion of the new, postindustrial environment and how to deal with that environment through art.

Translated by Tiina Laats

NOTES

1. *Substance-Unsubstance*, curated by Ando Keskküla, was held December 1–19, 1993.

2. Cited in Eve Kiiler, "Estonian Art of the Era of Mechanical Reproduction: An Introduction to Postmodern for Beginners," in *Substance-Unsubstance. Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia: The First Annual Exhibition*, ed. Sirje Helme (Tallinn: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1994).

3. Barbara Straka, *The Memory of Images: Baltic Photo Art Today* (Kiel: Nieswand Verlag, 1993), 15.

4. Sirje Helme and Jaak Kangilaski, *Lühike eesti kunsti ajalugu* (The Short History of Estonian Art) (Tallinn: Kunst Publishers, 1999), 141.

5. Juri Sobolev, "Virtual Estonia and no less Virtual Moscow," in *Tallinn-Moscow, 1956–1985*, ed. Anu Liivak (Tallinn: Tallinna Kunstihoone, 1996), 14.

6. Grigori Akmolinski, "Pool aastat 'Fotolehte'—'Õhtuleht,' 6 June 1945," in *Toimetised/Proceedings. Käsitlusi fotograafiast*, vol. 1, ed. Peeter Linnap (Tartu: Tartu Kõrgem Kunstikool/Tartu Art College, 2003), 64.

7. Moissei Kagan, "Kujutav kunst ja fotograafia. 'Sirp ja Vasar,' 15 August 1958," in *Toimetised/Proceedings*, 90–95; Boris Murd, "Kunstilisest fotograafiast. 'Õhtuleht,' 7 April 1958," in ibid.

8. Peeter Tooming, "Dagerrotüübist fotorealismini," in *Ikka fotost* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1995), 47.

9. Eha Komissarov, "Miks kollaazh?" *Sirp*, no. 45 (November 12, 1993).

10. Conversation with Olav Maran, February 5, 2003. Recording in Sirje Helme's possession.

11. Peeter Laurits and Peeter Linnap, "Fin de siècle eesti fotos," *Vikerkaar*, no. 4 (1987), quoted in *Toimetised/Proceedings*, 227.

12. Ibid.

13. Leonid Bazhanov, "Fotograafia ja kaasaegne kunst," *Kunst* 62, no. 2 (1983): 15.

14. Tõnis Vint, "Hüperrealism ja tehiskeskkond," *Kunst* 46, no. 2 (1974): 31–35.

15. Sirje Helme, "Noor kunst '80," *Sirp ja Vasar*, March 21, 1980, 8.

16. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 197; Jean Baudrillard, "The Hyper-realism of Simulation," in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 1049.

17. Sirje Helme, "From the Ivory Tower to Postindustrial Culture," in *Tallinn-Moskva, 1956–1985*, 155–71; Ants Juske, "Hüperrealismi kajastusi eesti kunstis," *Sirp ja Vasar*, July 17, 1987, 8.

18. Viktor Turtsin, "Hüperrealismi olemusest," *Sirp ja Vasar*, February 21, 1975, 9.

19. Olga Kozlova, *Photorealism* (Moscow: Galart, 1994).

20. Kädi Talvoja, "Eesti hüperrealism—kompromisside kunst," B.A. thesis, Estonian Academy of Arts, 2001.

21. Leonhard Lapin, "Salajased seitsmekümnendad" (Secret Seventies), in *Rujaline roostevaba maailm* (Rocking Rust-Free World) (Tartu: Tartu Kunstimuuseum, 2000), 22.

22. Eha Komissarov, "Painting of the Seventies," in *Idealism of the Cultural Space of the 1970s: Addenda to Estonian Art History*, ed. Sirje Helme (Tallinn: Kaasaegse Kunsti Eesti Keskus, 2002), 89.

23. Helme, "From the Ivory Tower," 155–71.

24. Juske, "Hüperrealismi kajastusi eesti kunstis," 8.

25. The Estonian photo poster, whose heyday was also in the mid-1980s, remains to be investigated by cultural and art historians.

Mark Allen Svede

On the Verge of Snapping

Latvian Nonconformist Artists and Photography

Mere weeks after the Soviet Union forcibly annexed Latvia at the close of World War II, cultural officials began to organize painting exhibitions, largely in order to display visual "evidence" of the return of civic normalcy, elevated living standards, the Red Army's benign presence, and grand improvements to the local infrastructure. Few native-born artists hastened to paint these rosy pictures, but eventually enough socialist realist works were produced to cause one to believe—provided that she or he hadn't been present to witness the contrary—that perhaps Sovietized Latvia was as orderly, convivial, and prosperous as these visual fantasies. Photography proved to be another matter. The medium's purchase on mimetic accuracy had, in the pre-Soviet public imagination, commuted to a reputation for objectivity and truthfulness. Consequently, few were surprised when the republic's first postwar photo exhibition was deferred until 1958, more than a dozen years after annexation. This delay bought the colonizers time to clear the worst bombing rubble, restock a few store shelves, subdue the most anti-authoritarian social elements, and even restore a modicum of hopefulness—until residents realized that Khrushchev's liberal reforms would extend only fractionally to the Baltic states. But until physical and social reality could be sanitized, photographers busied themselves by taking head shots of the new political elite or avoiding potentially politicizable content altogether. This latter strategy resulted in what one historian has wryly termed the hypertrophic "aesthetic of snow": innumerable photographs on the order of "*Chilly Winter's Day*, simply *Winter*, *Wintery Path*, *Winter Landscape*, *Sun and Snow*, *Tree in Fluffy White Hoarfrost*, [and] finally, *Ice and Sea*."[1] Perversely, for all its escapist motivation and effort, this blizzard of images unwittingly described the meteorological fate of tens of thousands of Latvians recently deported to Siberia.

Nonetheless, authorities wasted little time pressing photography into propagandistic service. From the start, affirmative journalistic imagery belied the discrimination, impoverishment, and ideological alienation that most Latvians newly experienced under the Soviets. Positivity was accomplished variously by inaccurate captioning (say, misidentifying a compulsory-attendance political gathering as a spontaneous, grassroots rally), presenting an anomaly as the norm (showing a single-family flat instead of the more prevalent Soviet import, the *komunalka*, fashioned from homes recently expropriated from middle- and upper-class Latvians), or, of course, outright manipulation of the image itself. Like painting, photography had its own arsenal of visual deceits, but, tellingly, it often relied on painting to falsify reality. Well into the 1970s, artists could find employment as photo retouchers, and the removal of officially disgraced or sensitive information from published images was so pervasive that artists invented the verb *palmyat*—"to palm"—alluding to the unimaginative practice of painting a potted palm tree into the composition in order to obscure the offending detail.[2] More dispiriting, even non-artists had become adept at altering photographic images during Stalin's reign. In the same way that public figures killed in the Purges were erased (or "palmed") from official group portraits, ordinary citizens were often so fearful after a loved one's arrest that they would scratch or tear the face of the arrested from family portraits,[3] an act as ironic as it was heartbreaking insofar as they were performing the late modernist technique of décollage that would have invited persecution upon any artist daring to work in that manner.

Given that the average citizen understood the subversive potential the state had accorded photographic images, most photographers' awareness of this became so acute as to paralyze creativity. However, if one felt confused about particular ideological constraints—or, indeed, felt unconstrained—certain "colleagues" could be depended upon to clarify matters. With the establishment of Latvia's first photo club in 1962 and clubs' proliferation from the mid-1960s onward, authorities effectively controlled artistic activity, most notably by restricting quality photographic supplies and darkroom facilities to club members and organizing "self-juried" exhibitions for which government censors posed as highly opinionated peers. Moreover, by deliberately combining amateurs and professionals within these photo clubs, not to mention establishing them in such inauspicious locations as a factory or fishing kolkhoz,[4] cultural bureaucrats intimated to practitioners and audiences alike that non-journalistic photography had the aesthetic status of a hobby.[5] Nevertheless, the importance of the photo club phenomenon cannot be underestimated. The clubs functioned as informal academies, vitally compensating for the absence of typical photography courses. Moreover, they served as conduits for cultural exchange, enabling selected photographers to send images for exhibition abroad at a time when artists were forbidden to travel freely and local audiences were unable to view some of these very same ambassadorial images.

Although Latvian critics have debated whether this democratization of the medium elevated or debased local practice,[6] one consequence is inarguable: By putting cameras in the hands of, say, fourteen fishermen of the Free Wave kolkhoz, authorities facilitated a search for photographic content unique to the Baltic region, content widely believed to be the sine qua non of Baltic fine-art photography. As curator-scholar Barbara Straka has observed, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian photographers' primary reaction was against the dominant culture's subject matter rather than against a style.[7] Even after the pressure to portray socialist realist themes gradually subsided, the imposed normativity of all things Russian was resisted. Thus, for many Balts, the push for artistic autonomy was less a formalistic rebellion than a search for indigenous content. Straka noted further that "the work of Baltic artists and photographers could be called progressive, innovative, and destructive of taboos when it did not—as in the West—lead to radical denial and destruction of one's own identity, culture, and tradition."[8] If the photographic histories of most European nations, Western or Eastern, were traced through the pluralistic modern era, such a statement would be so nonrestrictive as to be meaningless. (Like it or not, even the most contrarian work done in one's midst cleaves to one's culture, tradition, and, in a negative definitional way, identity.) But the three Baltic traditions as they existed until 1940 were stylistically conservative enough to make any restoration or continuance of those traditions seem, within the Soviet context, willfully anachronistic and, therefore, more oppositional than entropic.

So what forms did the recuperated tradition assume? For most photographers in the 1960s, a revival of Latvia's strong early-twentieth-century heritage of social reportage seemed overly conterminous with Soviet photojournalism: susceptible to censorship if the work was critical or, worse, to arrogation by the regime if it was optimistic. Pictorialist salon photography was not only a safer choice but also one readily identified with the pre-Soviet period when it had flourished, nominally evolving from its nineteenth-century debut in the studios of Rīga. Well into the late 1930s, Latvian photographers produced a panoply of genteel still lifes, demure nudes, pastoral landscapes, reverential portraits, and edifying rural genre scenes that soon found revival in the photo clubs. Two notable stylistic exceptions among artists active during the interwar period were Kārlis Bauls (1893–1964) and Eduards Gaiķis (1881–1961), but Bauls's surrealistic montages and Gaikis's proto-pop overpainted compositions, limited in number and not widely known, scarcely constituted traditions to emulate *or* contest. Even among Rīga's modernist painters, at the height of their experimentation during the 1920s, photography went unexplored as an adjunct expression of contemporaneity. In marked contrast, Latvian Gustav Klucis had pioneered the use of photomontage within the Soviet avant-garde, and, two generations hence, the émigré's revolutionary example inspired a revival of geometric abstractionism and, more important, renewed interest in photography among designers in Rīga.

Indeed, artists working in the design realm deserve much of the credit for initiating nonconformist photography in Latvia. In light of Soviet cultural attitudes, this development was rather unremarkable because applied artists, by virtue of their reduced ideological utility, were subjected to fewer creative restrictions than fine artists—fine artists who typically considered photography a lesser art form anyhow. In 1964, Dailis Rožlapa (b. 1932) startled audiences at the Rīga Youth Theater with his set design for Gunārs Priede's comedy, *The Reading Beaver*, for which Rožlapa projected Gunārs Binde's (b. 1933) dynamic vignettes of International Style buildings and abstracted biomorphic patterns onto billboard-sized screens incorporated among minimalistic architectonic forms. Binde was an early adherent of the so-called "contemporary style" in Soviet photography, but it was Rožlapa, active in the Latvian film industry, who realized the imagery's cinematic impact.[9] A few years later, photography was enlisted to contemporize public architectural space. Egons Spuris (1931–1990), an engineer by training, created a site-specific "photo-panneau" for the interior of Rīga's café Inlet. Nautical-theme banality was circumnavigated, as it were, when Spuris superimposed large posterized images of navigational instruments, including a compass with German-language cardinal points (evoking Rīga's pre-Soviet—indeed, pre-Russian—history as a Hanseatic polity), on a gridded, solarized, hyper-enlarged map background.[10] The mural's reversals of tonality, extreme grain, ultra-high contrast, shifting figure-ground relation between particular details, and indeterminate position of an implied viewer vis-à-vis the haptic unity of the architectural context were formal qualities yet unseen in local photo exhibitions. The café interior, like Rožlapa's set, garnered immediate critical approval from colleagues while becoming a popular sensation.

Soon others were emboldened to experiment with photographic form without the occasion or pretense of décor, among them Jānis Ancītis (b. 1948), Valters Ezeriņš (b. 1938), Juris Reinbergs, and, most notably, Valdis Celms (b. 1943) and Atis Ieviņš (b. 1946). Beginning in the late 1960s, Celms generated a range of images implicitly concerned with the processes of photography and how those processes might convey attitudes about the world pictured thuswise. For instance, he created a diptych in response to the Prague Spring and its suppression, collaging positive and negative versions of black-and-white photos of a Czech church facade, then overpainting these with white and black vertical stripes that severely challenge figural integrity and heighten the antagonism between elements.[11] The imprisonment metaphor is mitigated, however, by the irrepressible energy of the church's tracery, and the polarized values reconcile as dynamic pattern, evincing residual optimism, if not about the Czech political situation, then certainly regarding the utopian potential of art in general, a clear inheritance from constructivist Klucis. Celms's attitude, tempered by time and politics to resemble the "photomedialist" approach of the 1970s experimental Film Form Workshop (Warsztat formy filmowej) in Poland, is evident in many other works, such as *Rhythms of a High-Rise* or the whimsical *Hippie* (fig. 179), two photograms from 1969. His decision to create artificial forms analogous to high-rises and hippies, both of which were available in Rīga for direct photographic capture, suggests that Celms found the photogram and its graphic punch to be as mod and, therefore, as important and topical as its referents.

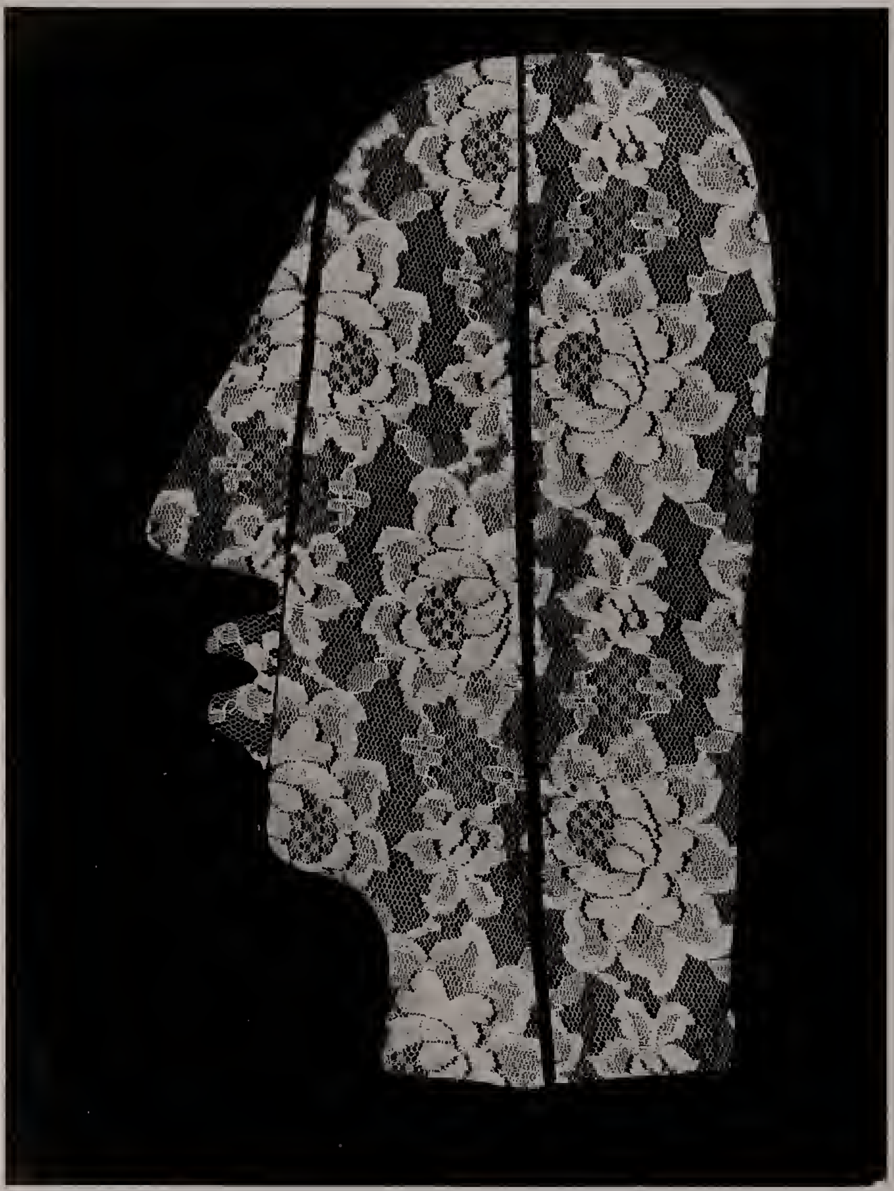
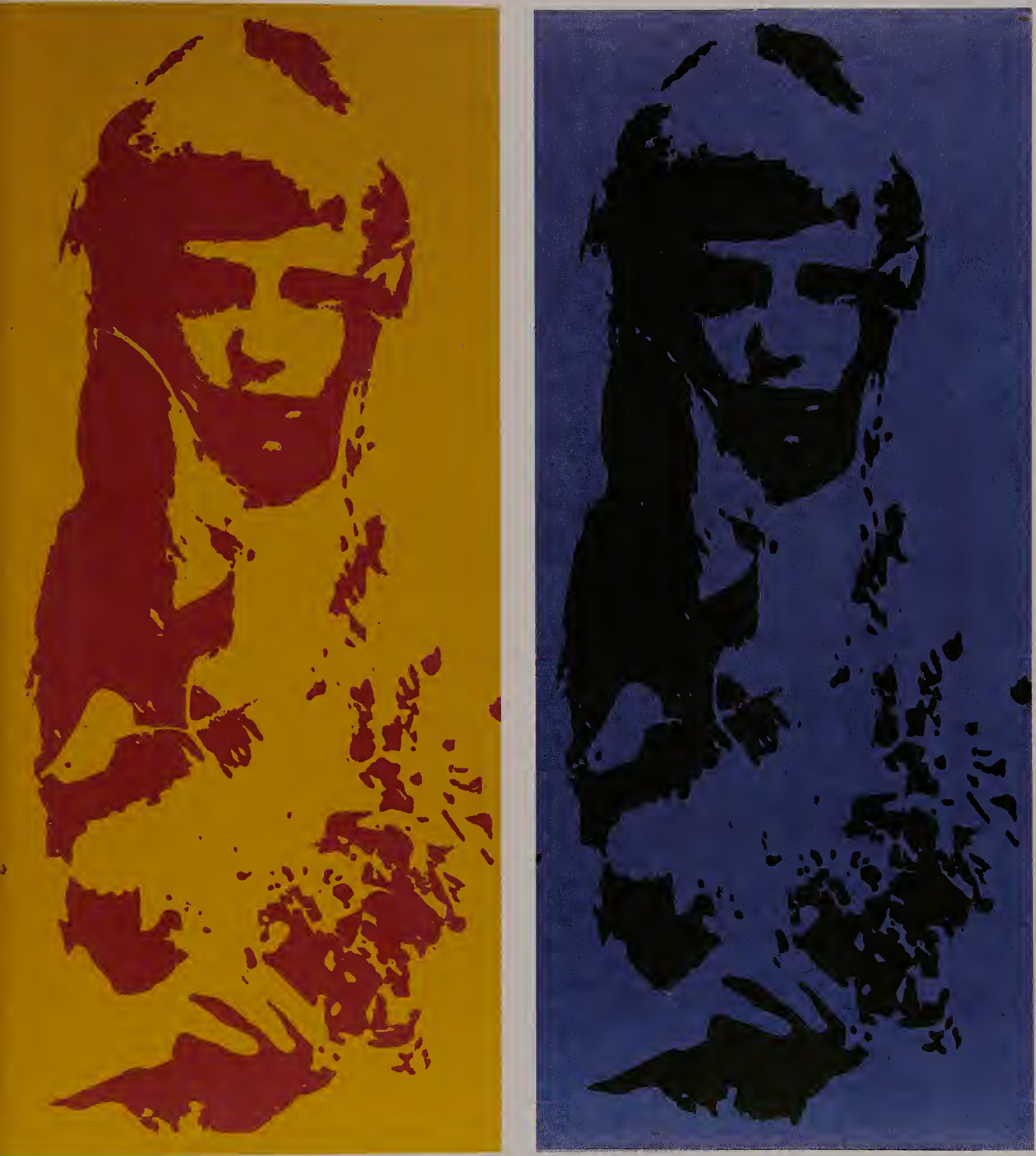


Fig. 179. Valdis Celms, *Hippie*, 1969. Gelatin silver photogram on paperboard, 39.8 x 29.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 01125.

Equally influential in resynchronizing local visual culture with contemporaneous international trends (in general, the pre-Soviet stylistic condition of Latvian art), Atis Ieviņš introduced pop sensibility to photography during the early 1970s, radically refracting it through serigraphy. In true Warholian fashion, Leviņš became a court portraitist for Rīga's bohemia, producing iconic likenesses of the famous—the U.S.S.R.'s first bona fide rock guitarist, Pīts Andersons, and preeminent renegade painter Jānis Pauļuks—as well as those deserving wider fame for their resolute nonconformity, such as local "flower children" Ninuce and Fredis. Like Warhol, Ieviņš replicated his portraits, silk-screened them in a range of psychedelic color combinations, and exhibited the lot in a wallpaper-like format (figs. 180A and 180B). Although the desultory color variations, seriality, and deliberately imperfect printing registration in these works clearly emphasize surface at the expense of depth, it's questionable whether this classic pop operation signified differently within a visual regime epitomized by political imagery bearing an even more superficial relation to social reality than that of the capitalist advertising images that inspired Western pop artists. In addition, Ieviņš fabricated photomontages, outwardly humorous but also unsettling, be it an infantry soldier with an explosive timing device in place of his head or a dumbbell morphing into a pair of buttocks. But just as often, particularly in straight photography, Ieviņš delved beneath surface appearance altogether, locating revelatory moments, isolating core emotions, or, indeed, disclosing discrepancies between surface fact and what lies beyond.

As images by Celms and Ieviņš illustrate, Rīga was a mecca for the Soviet youth counterculture—a vital, if little-known, Brezhnev-era phenomenon centered in the Baltic region—enabling several photographers to create extraordinary bodies of work devoted, appropriately enough, to the liberated bodies of Latvia's hippies. Beginning in 1967, body art and performance pioneers Andris Grinbergs and Inta Jaunzeme (later, Grinberga) became the subjects of countless images, taken mostly from happenings and actions initiated by Grinbergs. Over the years, these events involved dozens of artists, writers, and musicians and were shaped to a significant degree by photographer-participants Atis Ieviņš, Māra Brašmane (b. 1944), Uldis Briedis (b. 1940), Jānis Deinats (b. 1961), Andrejs Grants (b. 1955), and, most extensively, Jānis Kreicbergs (b. 1939). In each case, the photographer's empathy with the other participants' ludic, contemplative, erotic, or mystical states is evident in not only the sensitive framing of the documented events but also the subsequent, expressive manipulation of the prints' material qualities, which became the photographer's fullest contribution to the collaborative performances. For instance, Kreicbergs's photographs of the 1973 event *The Green Wedding* (fig. 181) convey the moods, euphoric to morose, of a happening inspired by the ill-fated lovers in Bo Widerberg's film *Elvira Madigan*. In a sense, *Elvira Madigan* symbolized Grinbergs's and Jaunzeme's careers: brilliant ideas pursued passionately, but doomed to obscurity. Most emblematic of this, Grinbergs directed the 1972 short film *Self-Portrait*, a work that filmmaker and cinema authority Jonas Mekas deemed "one of the five most sexually transgressive films ever made."[12] For most of its existence, however, this nonconformist benchmark remained, in essence, a series of movie stills, concealed for a quarter-century as fragments hidden throughout Rīga after the sole print of the film eluded discovery by the KGB during a raid on an unauthorized photo exhibition held in Grinbergs's flat.

That *Self-Portrait* or photo documentation of much of Grinbergs's overtly sexual oeuvre might be censored out of existence was no wonder, but censorship in Soviet Latvia was so capricious that artists could not always anticipate what might pique official disapproval. Māra Brašmane, for example, was prevented from exhibiting her picturesque urban vignette, *Cabbages* (fig. 182), because the censor astutely noticed that a hat had fallen behind the window display of cabbages. He assumed that its presence was a cryptic statement about stupidity (cabbage + hat = "cabbagehead"—in Latvian, *kāpostgalva*, slang for "idiot") and deemed it inadmissible. Obviously, a bona fide apparatchik was necessary to both impose and complete this circuit of logic, something Brašmane neither planned nor encouraged. Another incident of censorship paranoia was triggered by one painter's trope of competing photographic modalities, black-and-white versus color. When Miervaldis Polis (b. 1948) presented his photorealistic composition *Brass Band* (1974) for exhibition clearance, the censor withheld approval because he felt that the central figure in the marching band, a trombonist, resembled Lenin—albeit without the goatee, high forehead,



Figs. 180A and B. Atis Ieviņš, from *Hippie Girl*, 1973 (fragments of wall installation). Silk-screen prints, 47.3 x 21 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21753.03, 21753.01.

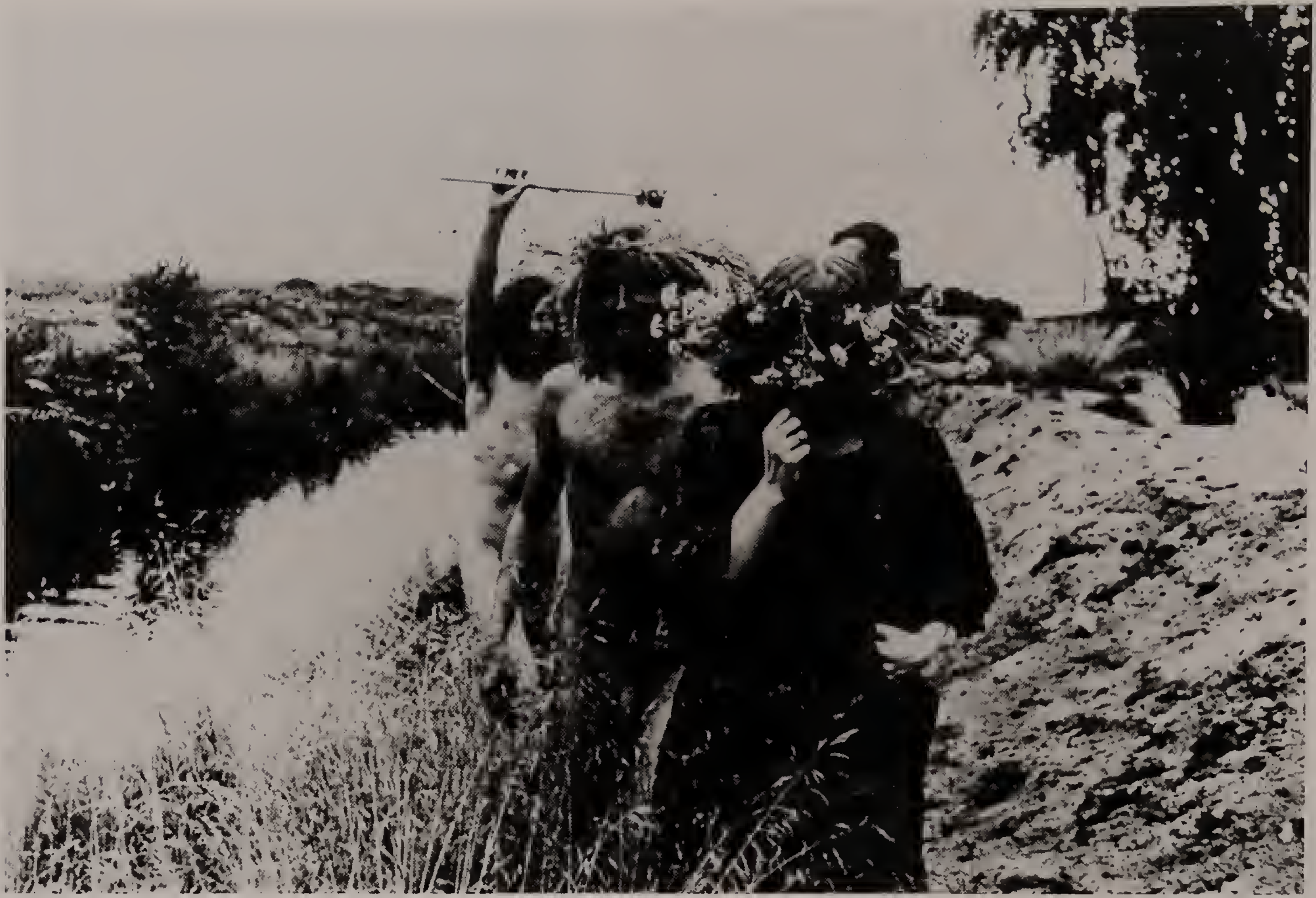


Fig. 181. Jānis Kreicbergs, *Green Wedding*, Happening organized by Andris Grinbergs, 1973 (photo documentation). Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 17 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 20267.

physical stature, or rhetorical gesticulations that made *Lenin* resemble Lenin. If whatever humor inherent in Lenin playing the slide trombone wasn't disrespectful enough, Polis further offended the censor by rendering his hero in gray scale amidst an otherwise full-color parade.[13]

Hard-line technocrats might have considered it a graver sin that Polis and other hyperrealist painters, being veracious to photographic sources, occasionally replicated the pallid hues of inferior-quality film and blurry processing, creating a style wholly unlike high-definition, high-chroma photorealism in the West. The greater irony here was that, given the scarcity of materials, Latvian *photographers* were sometimes forced to replicate the effects of color photography. Latvian-American photographer Boris Mangolds recalled from visits with colleagues in Latvia,

> Film, black and white only (mostly "bartered" Russian aviation film or film brought by tourists or friends). Chemicals, self-made. Paper, scrounged (often of unknown origin, properties, quality, sensitivity, age). Color films, paper or chemicals? There were none, at least not for ordinary people. . . . No Kodak, Ciba, Fuji or other color material was available, so it was home-brewed. Perhaps someday these photographers' little recipe booklets will become collectible![14]

The provisional nature of local photographic practices was hardly lost upon those painters who, starting in the early 1970s, found such technical imperfection appealing, and their preference for painting snapshots was significant. In the same way that Gerhard Richter's photo-derived paintings "function as a retrospective accusation of Socialist Realism's concealed dependence on the photographic,"[15] the hyperrealists' decision to work from amateur photos rather than professional ones privileged the authentic contingencies of the private view over the false assurances of the collective viewfinder. Conversely, for photographers, the collapse of the professional/amateur dichotomy within the photo clubs rendered snapshot aesthetics less attractive as a distancing device or form of stylistic refusal, as was common in the West. Paradoxically, the preservation of salon conventions derived from interbellum Latvian photography can also be interpreted as asserting the private viewpoint (albeit often a received, romanticized, clichéd one) over collective vision.

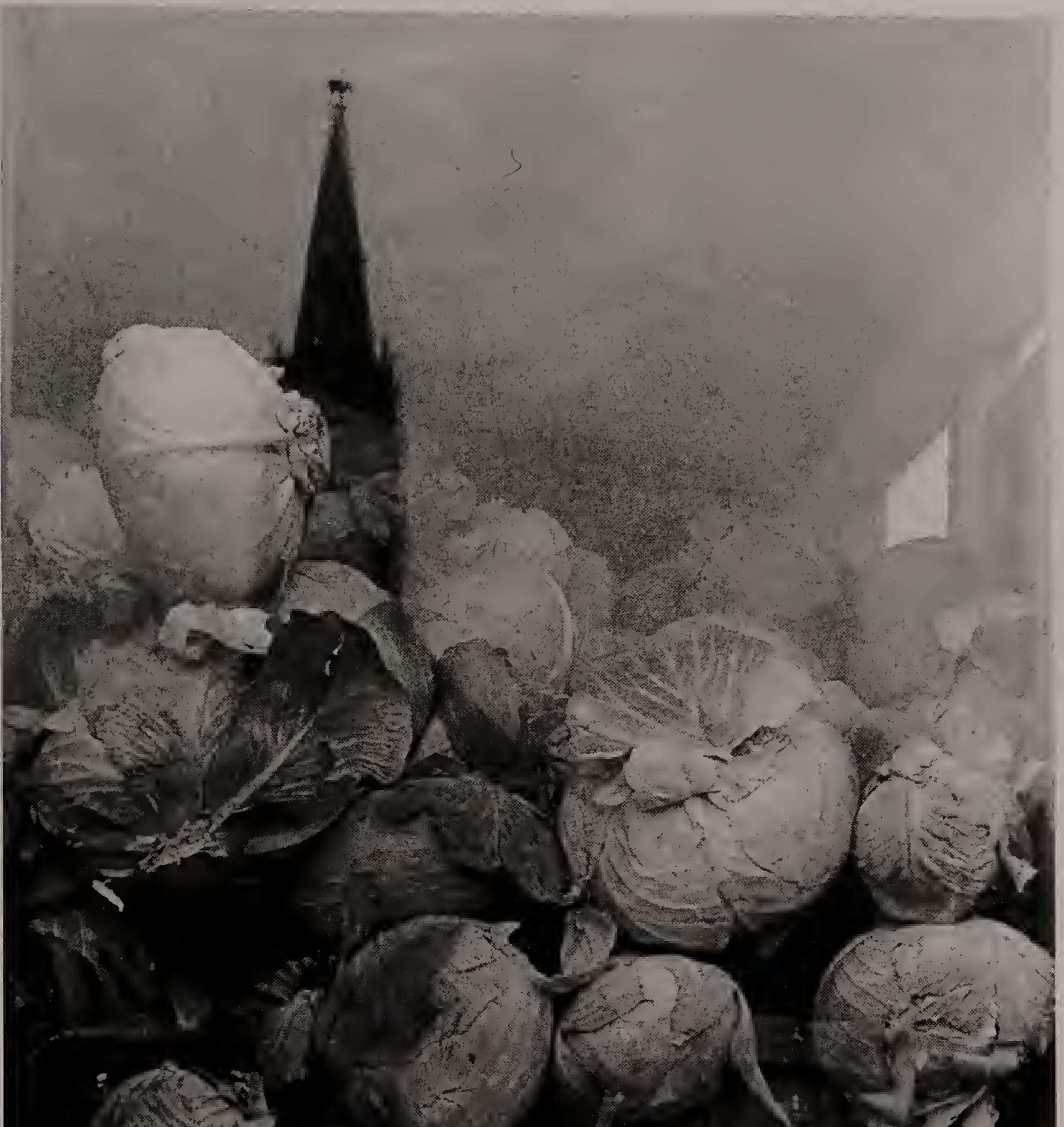


Fig. 182. Māra Brašmane, *Cabbages*, ca. 1972.
Gelatin silver print, 24.8 x 10.4 cm.
Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19045.

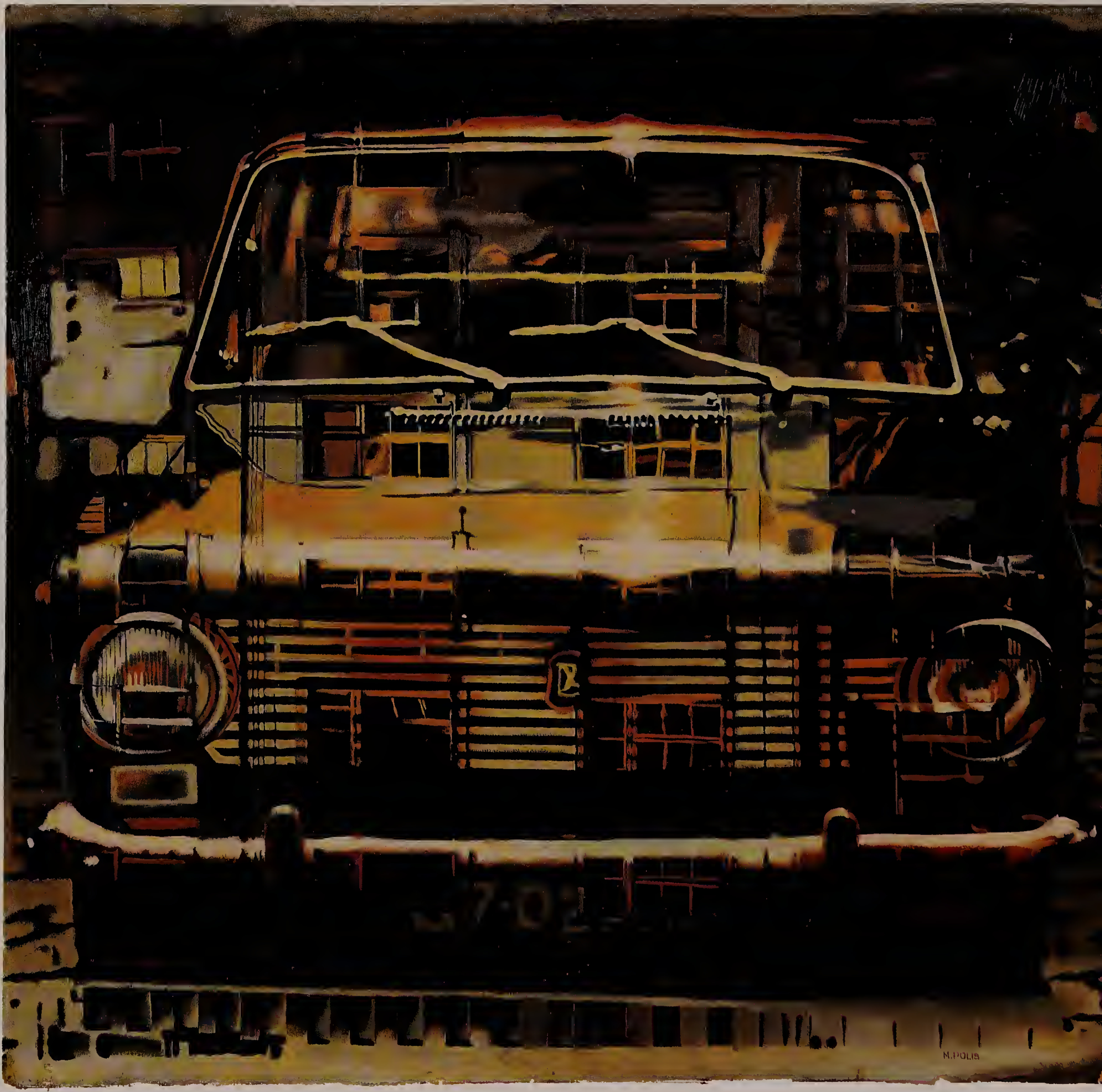


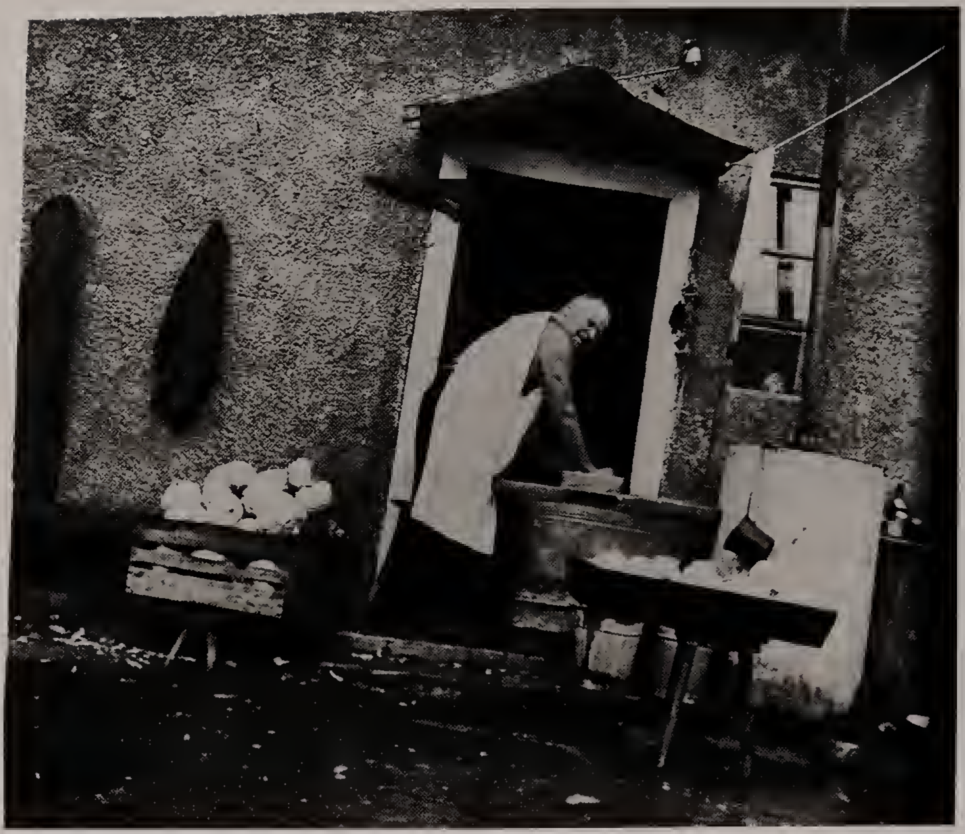
Fig. 183. Miervaldis Polis, *Car and House*, 1973. Oil on fiberboard, 76.5 x 78.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19063.

To some extent, the new painting trend helped dispense with cliché within Latvian art photography—or at least exposed it for what it was. In 1971, Imants Lancmanis (b. 1941) anticipated hyperrealism when he painted a meticulous transcription of a blurred, faded, carelessly cropped shot of pedestrians crossing a Rīga intersection. The pallor of daily existence among the general populace remained, however, sharply in focus. Then, in 1974, painters Līga Purmale (b. 1948) and Miervaldis Polis shocked the establishment by organizing, without approval from cultural bureaucrats or their professors at the academy, a substantial exhibition of hyperrealist works they had been painting during the previous two years. The couple's sources ran the gamut from straight photography to manipulated effects and darkroom artifice (soft-focus, solarization, extreme close-up, filtered shots, etc.). Even the value of accidental effects was affirmed when Polis duplicated a double-exposure image that had resulted from his jammed camera. Finally, with *Car and House* (1973) (fig. 183), we find truthful socialistic realism: a boxy Moskvich subcompact superimposed on a boxy workers' housing block, made possible by one boxy, malfunctioning camera, all of this inelegant commodity fetishism cheerfully incidental to the painting's exploration of lurid optical phenomena.

The challenge to conventional notions of beauty and appropriate subject matter was well under way by the 1970s, a shift most consistently evident in work by photographers Egons Spuris and Zenta Dzividzinska (b. 1944). After his café Inlet notoriety evolved into acclaim from winning major international photography awards, Spuris began the defining series of his career, *Rīga's Proletarian Districts in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. Consonant with an engineer's sensibility, these urban views are less landscape than intricate structures, methodically, economically forged from preexistent material and brought to a state of tectonic perfection without resorting to darkroom contrivance. In the best-known examples from this prolific series, vacant courtyards, puddles, automobile windshields, overgrown side lots, and blank walls are framed rigorously to secure compositional equilibrium and isolate chance geometries, yet the frame generously admits liminal evidence of habitation, be it the blur of a passerby, children playing in the shadows, or simply a shirt suspended on a laundry line.[16] Despite its visual austerity, this project was deeply humanistic, undertaken not as a sterile, formal exercise but, rather, to reveal the muted dignity of these precincts of human life at the moment when new monolithic high-rises began encircling Rīga. Nevertheless, Spuris left architectural dilapidation undisguised, human activity unsentimentalized, and whatever social questions might ensue from their juxtaposition uneditorialized.

Zenta Dzividzinska also found herself at odds with prevailing photographic sensibilities. She first distinguished herself in the mid-1960s with edgy, dramatic images of a Rīga mime troupe—pantomime especially valued for its ability to evade the ideological policing that afflicted theater in general—but soon her "wandering," "nonpurposeful" lens and "interest in nonbeautiful people" resulted in truly singular work.[17] Dzividzinska's achievement was making appealing, compelling compositions out of ordinary people in lackluster settings doing unremarkable things: a middle-aged sauerkraut maker too distracted by the task to register proprietary pride (fig. 184); a pair of unkempt, overweight sunbathers too lovingly self-absorbed to care what anyone else might see; or, in her *Self-Portrait* of 1968 (fig. 185), an artist too bemused by self-portraiture's potential for self-aggrandizement to even bother sitting up straight or addressing the camera. As solidly contextualized and detail-laden as most of these images are, they remain narratively inconclusive, their most refreshing aspect. Frequent blurring and casual cropping in her images reinforce one's sense that she never presumed to aim an omniscient lens at a subject, her respect for the subject's autonomy ever abiding.

Her ethical approach so diametric to the Soviet system's, Dzividzinska was bound to create images of ideological resistance, perhaps even subconsciously. For example, among a series featuring a woman tending children in a dusty farmyard littered with prams, bicycles, and wagons, one image shows a banner stretched overhead, half-untied and flopped over so that its message is upside down and backward, yet legible through the backlit fabric: "Glory to the Latvian SSR's Sportists!" This playful inversion and dislocation of an ideological mainstay recalls, in spirit,



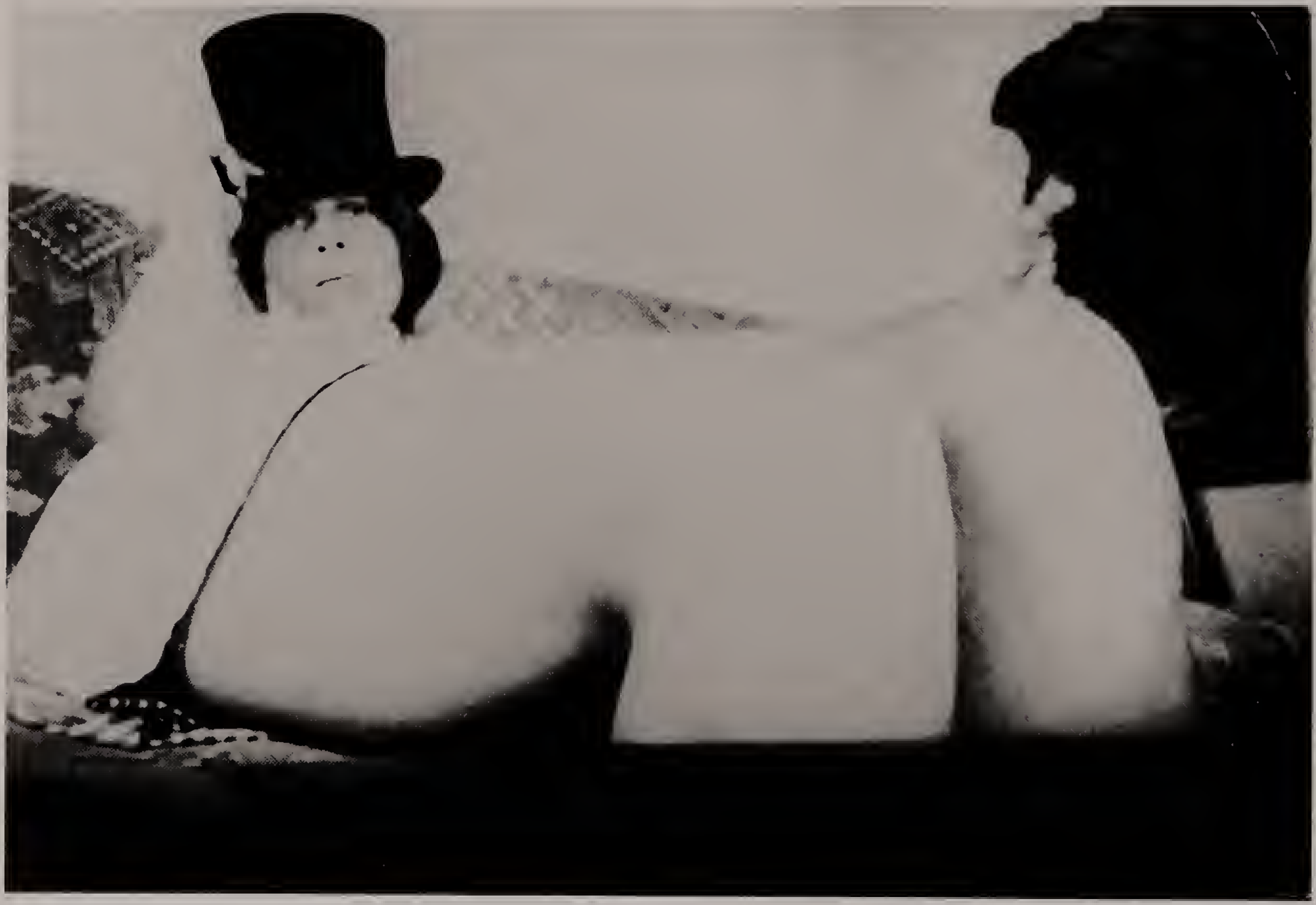


Fig. 184 (*top*). Zenta Dzividzinska, *Cabbage-Cutter*, 1960s.
Gelatin silver print, 9.1 x 12 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21747.

Fig. 185 (*above*). Zenta Dzividsinska, *Self-Portrait*, 1968.
Gelatin silver print, 11.2 x 15.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21746.

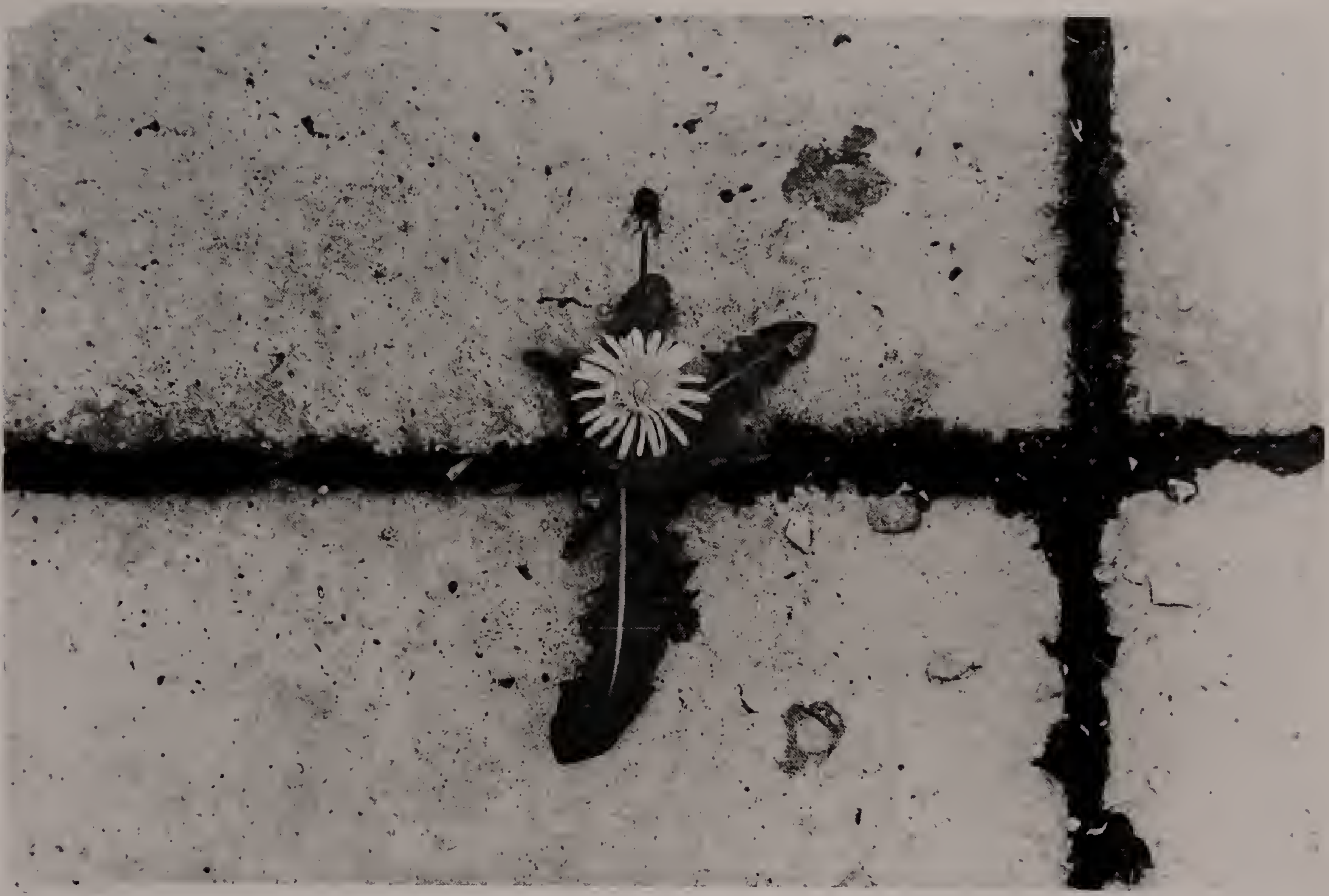


Fig. 186. Jānis Praam, Untitled, 1968. Gelatin silver print, 24.9 x 36.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 21754.

a notorious, local photo-op that delighted countless amateurs: For years, it was possible to stand on a particular spot along Elizabetes Street in Rīga and align the upraised hand of the city's main Lenin statue with the cross atop the deconsecrated Russian Orthodox cathedral's dome behind him, creating a blasphemous image of benediction. When authorities learned of this shutterbug gag, they removed the cathedral's crosses and obstructed the critical sidewalk vantage point with a building addition, but obviously there would always be ways, populist or artistic, of expressing dissatisfaction with the system.[18]

Until the mid-1980s, most photographers' political dissent necessarily remained encoded, such as in Celms's *Prague* diptych or Dzividzinska's response to the Warsaw Pact invasion, a series titled *Women of Stone*, in which shattered, eroded stone fertility figures compositionally confront an armored tank here, an iron fence there, and perishability all along.[19] An untitled, contemporaneous work by Jānis Praam (b. ca. 1952) shows a dandelion blooming within a cruciform pavement joint (fig. 186), and although Rīga's liberals understood this to be an obituary for Czech democracy—not to mention their own vicarious hopes—it remained a popular metaphorical image, with obvious Christian implications, of perseverance under inhospitable circumstances. Years passed, however, before a photographer chronicled just how inhospitable those circumstances were. In 1977, while working as a photojournalist, Uldis Briedis witnessed the wholesale destruction of ancestral farmsteads, many of ethnographic museum quality, by authorities still zealous about collectivization decades after many inhabitants of these farms had been deported to Siberia. Briedis shot the splintered, smoldering wreckage, producing Latvia's first sustained photo documentation of Kremlin-authorized brutality, yet doing so in such a broadly elegiac manner that human atrocity in general was commemorated.[20] A double title for one of the series' images reflects this: *Untitled*, generic and prudently guarded for the 1970s, was publicly elaborated years later, when glasnost authorized accusation (or at least rhetorical accusation), into *Ruins in Rucava Are Smouldering. Who Will Answer to the People for*

Thousands of Demolished Farmhouses in Latvia? Briedis poignantly conveys the tragedy through animated form, radiant tonal contrasts, luxurious texture, and expansive compositions, underscoring the lost vitality and beauty much as one might experience phantom pain from a missing limb.

For the most part, however, anti-authoritarian attitudes did not beget overtly political imagery until perestroika. Instead, artists subtly critiqued social institutions or, less subtly, challenged mores. Jānis Kreicbergs, for example, created a number of bridal "portraits" severely at odds with conventional representations of nuptial bliss. Some border on the fetishistic, both subverting the sentimentality endemic to bridal photography and exposing its latent eroticism.[21] Elsewhere, Kreicbergs superimposed a ghosted, couture-clad bride on a detail of Auschwitz taken during his first trip abroad in 1968, and disturbing morphological correspondences arise between the woman's headpiece and veil and the concentration camp pylon and barbed wire.[22] Although the work ostensibly vilified fascism (and was promoted because of this), audiences had little trouble discerning another target closer at hand: For many ethnic minorities, Soviet demographic policies seemed genocidal. Viewed from that perspective, the staged photographs of giddy matrimonial pairs that one could find in any state-subsidized exhibition effectively trivialized Latvia's soaring divorce rate and plummeting birthrate. Admittedly, Kreicbergs's images are also interpretable as reflections of sociological change in almost any place where traditional gender relations were renegotiated and marriage was assailed as a potentially oppressive construct, but Moscow's chauvinistic social engineering exacerbated the crisis locally.

Sexual identity also emerged as a representational issue at this time when artist Eižens Valpeters was photographed holding forth as a moustachioed drag queen during a 1977 happening, Latvia's first cross-dressing performance. As a rule, however, gender-bending and same-sex desire remained invisible, except for photo documentation of occasional homoerotic interactions within Andris Grinbergs's pansexual happenings. Prevailing puritanical attitudes goaded Grinbergs and friends into a perpetual state of undress, resulting in hundreds of photographs by Brašmane, Grants, Ieviņš, and Kreicbergs, photographs exceptional for the fact that female nudity was depicted prosaically about as often as male nudity was depicted erotically. Equal-opportunity scopophilia was momentarily achieved with Gunārs Binde's 1974 paired images of the depersonalized bodies of a woman and a man revealed through a torn paper scrim, the male most radically reduced to genitalia. Salon nudes, however, were almost exclusively female and so "tasteful" that, eventually, works by Binde and other leading practitioners of the genre regularly graced the inside back cover of Latvia's principal art quarterly. The motive for publishing these images may seem indistinguishable from, say, the rationale behind the ubiquity of nudie-shots in today's British tabloids, but what this Soviet-era decision represented in terms of editorial fortitude was quite another matter. In general, though, totalitarian societies' visually coercive nature raises awkward questions: To what degree do extenuating circumstanees enhance a photograph's value beyond whatever worth might be attributable to its aesthetic qualities? If a photograph's subject matter defies repressive official norms, does that image automatically accrue art-historical significance? More complicated, does an image's political transgressiveness absolve it of ethical lapses—for instance, if the rule-defying nude imagery blatantly objectifies the female subject?

More complicated still (if only because no recourse to anti-totalitarian moralizing exists), dire *apolitical* circumstances redeem what, to Western eyes, may appear to be Latvian photography's most saccharine erotica. Jānis Gleizds (b. 1924), whose nudes (fig. 187) were among Soviet Latvia's top exports to the FIAP exhibition circuit, is an artist whose own corporeality profoundly informed his imaging of other bodies. Having lost both hands in an accident as a young tradesman, Gleizds began anew as staff photographer for Rīga's Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedics, documenting extraordinary physical challenges. His clinical records of the injured and disabled were offset by action shots of amputee volleyball and table tennis players, javelin and discus throwers in wheelchairs, and distance runners on crutches.[23] But the sharp focus and dynamism of Gleidzs's (self-) ironically titled *Invalids* athlete series are nowhere apparent

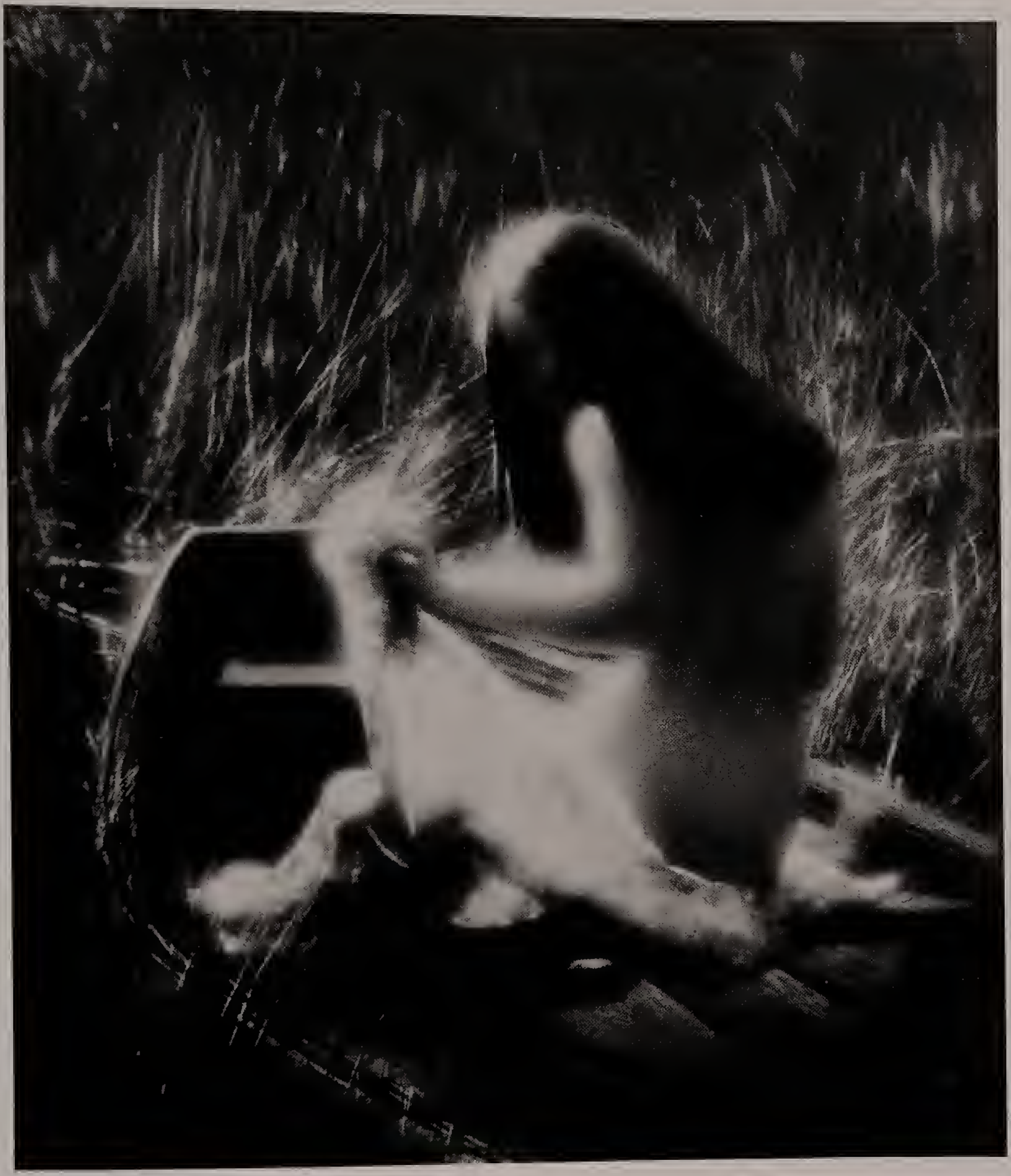


Fig. 187. Jānis Gleizds, *Intimate Landscape*, 1975.
Gelatin silver print, 39 x 29.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 02074.

in his signature work, the ethereal, inert nudes. Instead, bodily contours dissolve into halos of light via the isohelia technique, as if the models are sublimating from the optical realm into the conjectural. These nudes would be dismissable as nymphean banality save for the provocative possibility that Gleizds's assignment was to describe the tactility of an erotic subject as a handless artist might experience it, as if precise sensations of the limning fingers' caress must somehow be recuperated and its graphic equivalency reinvented.

By the late 1970s, officials seemed less concerned about sexual content in photography than about an artists' group whose working methods and, moreover, communal identity attested to the premise and promise of promiscuity. Calling themselves Pollutionists (Polūcionisti)—*polūcions* was slang for "emission" or "ejaculate," rendering them, in effect, Emissionaries or Ejaculationists—they gathered around charismatic designer Māris Ārgalis (b. 1954), who advocated "the free flow of free ideas" and freely shared authorship credit for wildly inventive graphic works.[24] The Pollutionists created a series of antic photomontages that showed Rīgans in unnatural surroundings—which is to say, their built environment. In some images, the collage operation is subtle, as in multiplying the presence of two pedestrians on an already congested sidewalk. Elsewhere and not so subtly, a rotund shopper morphs into a mechanized bird perching before her roost, a housing block that begins to resemble nothing so much as a purple-martin house. But the Pollutionists' playful, absurdist approach did not exempt them from KGB scrutiny—in all likelihood, humor heightened it—so, by the early 1980s, Ārgalis was accused of attempting to establish an alternative artists' union and pressured to cease artistic activity.

Ārgalis's banishment was doubly lamentable for its timing, occurring on the eve of cultural liberalization. Within two years, another group of artists and architects began exercising a similarly serious sense of play within their expanded-media-based activities. Juris Boiko (1955–2002) and Hardijs Lediņš (b. 1955) led the Workshop for the Restoration of Nonexistent Sensations (Nebijušu sajūtu restaurēšanas darbnīca, or NSRD) in an investigation of postmodern cultural forms, ensuring photography an instrumental role in projects staged throughout the 1980s.[25] Notably, NSRD produced most of its own photo documentation. Although these images are typically less dramatic, technically adroit, and self-sufficient as aesthetic objects than those photographs recording the Grinbergs-led performances of the 1970s, they remain all the more interesting for their refusal of an intermediary, interpretive viewpoint. Indeed, the conceptualist imperative of serving as one's own critic had little resonance in Latvia prior to NSRD, whose members strongly objected to external critics' overdetermination of the political significance of certain performances, even as this slant enhanced NSRD's reputation abroad.

By any account, the mid-1980s ascendancy of a self-critical, assertive generation was a profoundly positive development. With perestroika, emergent artists tested curatorial constraints, circumvented cultural fiefdoms, and, almost overnight, mythologized themselves as the initiators of an indigenous contemporary art (that, alas, had predated them by at least a decade). Rīga swarmed with foreign curators and gallerists intent on showcasing a "new" spirit of independence and satisfying the market's appetite for the latest invention. While NSRD, for example, satisfied both agendas, earlier nonconformist artists were often overlooked. Indeed, their achievements were deprecated within certain *Latvian* historical and curatorial representations of Soviet-era visual culture.[26] One leading critic claimed that, before the 1980s, nobody had integrated photography into their art—perpetuating the de facto division between art and photography (even as the de jure division was going the way of the Soviet system)—while the typical exhibition roster implied that only a few photographers had been consequential to overall artistic development.

Accelerating sociopolitical changes supplied artists with Manichaean conflicts, dramatic revelations, and ready-made poignancies. Photographers in particular seized these conditions as an occasion for art. In 1985, with glasnost in the offing and a Cartier-Bresson exhibition as catalyst, Valts Kleins (b. 1960) envisioned an association of kindred individuals devoted to "subjective documentalism." Consequently, Kleins, Māris Bogustovs, Andrejs Grants, Gvido Kajons (b. 1955), Inta Ruka (b. 1958), Dafnis Zande-Leimanis (b. 1960), and Mārtiņš Zelmenis (b. 1957) convened as Group A (Grupa A), or simply A.[27] This assemblage was more intellectual construct than working unit, given that its members neither collaborated to any extent nor exhibited together under the rubric "A." Moreover, as the term "subjective documentalism" suggests, work produced by each photographer was so personally inflected as to discourage broad generalizations about style or content. Still, besides obvious technical commonalities—straight black-and-white work executed with the utmost craft (learned, in some cases, from the preeminent Egons Spuris)—they shared an ethical attitude toward the human subject that disallowed sensationalism and imbued their photographs with a laconic air all the more sensational, considering the convulsive social environment beyond the frame. Social reality was, by no means, cropped from their work; rather, the act of framing distilled it. And as much as the members distinguished themselves from each other thematically, they had distinctive attitudes toward the frame itself.

Since 1983, Inta Ruka has photographed and rephotographed residents of Latvia's rural Balvi region to form her portrait series *My Country People*. These unlikely, sometimes reluctant, subjects might initially be framed by cottage doorways, farm implements, or summer solstice headgear, but even the most evocative mise-en-scène becomes incidental to their reframing over time. The cultural and material stasis of this rather remote region makes personal changes appear precipitous—or simply makes incremental change apparent—whether revealed through an individual's perennial sittings or a domestic setting shaped by lifelong occupancy. Vestigial ethnographic detail within these simple interiors gives Ruka's series a quasi-anthropological cast, particularly for urban, non-Latvian audiences.[28] But temporality in Ruka's project is measured less by calendar years than by the duration of the neighborly conversations that have drawn these people out of their shells and away from their daily activities in order to be photographed. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find indications within these portraits that the sitters, elsewhere in their lives, are traversing a pivotal epoch.

Whereas Ruka's "country people" are posed—calmly, centrally, frontally—before her respectful camera, individuals who appear in Andrejs Grants's *Latvia: Traveler's Notes* inhabit the frame as transitorily as they do the seaside resort locations favored by the photographer for this series. As episodic and casually captured as many of these images appear, Grants's sophisticated compositions belie happenstance. Some *Notes* contain within their borders other framing devices—say, a souvenir photographer's prop or a newly glazed picture window bearing ersatz crosshairs of masking tape—simultaneously admitting and preempting other photographic instants, other perceptual vantages. In general, Grants isolated social phenomena so completely that we observe a populace in suspended animation, an arresting effect always within photography's province, but one particularly significant for the uncertain, late imperial world he pictured.

Gvido Kajons was more aggressively topical with two series titled *The City* and *Portraits*, both of which feature subtle interventions with visual artifacts of the political regime. In *The City*, Kajons compromised monumental propaganda by framing parade placards, billboard exhortations, and *nomenklatura* portraits to include the rude graffiti, bored bystanders, inclement weather, and seedy landscaping found in adjacent spaces. Even if a viewer of these photographs has no knowledge of Soviet iconography or the historical moment, Kajons makes visible the people's estrangement from hypermediated surroundings, gross absurdities of scale, and incongruities between the pristine surfaces of official representations and the shabbiness of the world they begot. As with all Group A work, his photographs adhere to modernist aesthetic tenets, but the fact that Kajons delivers incriminating evidence as bold, graphic schema also suggests an idealistic expectation of art's civic responsibility.

Of all A photographers, Valts Kleins was most likely to train a critical lens on public problems, such as widespread alcoholism, juvenile delinquents, and orphans. Some images, like those of unruly throngs queuing for alcohol, are tragicomical. However, when depicting individual misfortune, Kleins was committed to conveying each person's story as well as getting his or her portrait, supplementing their dignified likenesses with handwritten statements from these troubled youths. Rare as it was to picture marginalized populations, restoring their voices to public dialogue was extraordinary—though even this had local cinematic precedents.[29] Meanwhile, the more controversial and less sympathetic subject of a convicted murderer (albeit a photogenic one) was tackled by Hercs Franks in his 1987 death-penalty film *The Last Judgment*, which made crucial use of Vilgelm Mikhailovsky's (b. 1942) photo series *Invitation to an Execution*,[30] bleak images that both structured the film's narrative and effectively symbolized the stilling of life. Other photographers who charted Latvia's uneven social terrain in the twilight of the empire included Gunārs Janaitis (b. 1934), Jānis Knāķis (b. 1957), Aivars Liepiņš (b. 1953), and Modris Rubenis (b. 1951). From Janaitis's and Liepiņš's vertiginous shots of pro-independence crowds—linking hands to form a 370-mile-long human chain, passing out leaflets, and toppling communist monuments—to Knāķis's equally dizzying, surreal images of the insane (fig. 188) the scope of Latvia's possibilities and problems was manifest.

With photographers freed to picture even the ugliest truths, visual artists in general enlisted photography to expose conditions or limits of truthfulness in their image-making. Anticipating Rīga's changeover from Marxist murals to capitalist billboards, Andris Breže (b. 1958) produced large-format serigraphs with expressionistic drawings that elaborated the crudely attached photographic fragments of workers—in essence, a mixed-media, mixed-messages corps exquis. Kristaps Ģelzis (b. 1962) created light-box works utilizing Duratrans, the material found in illuminated kiosk

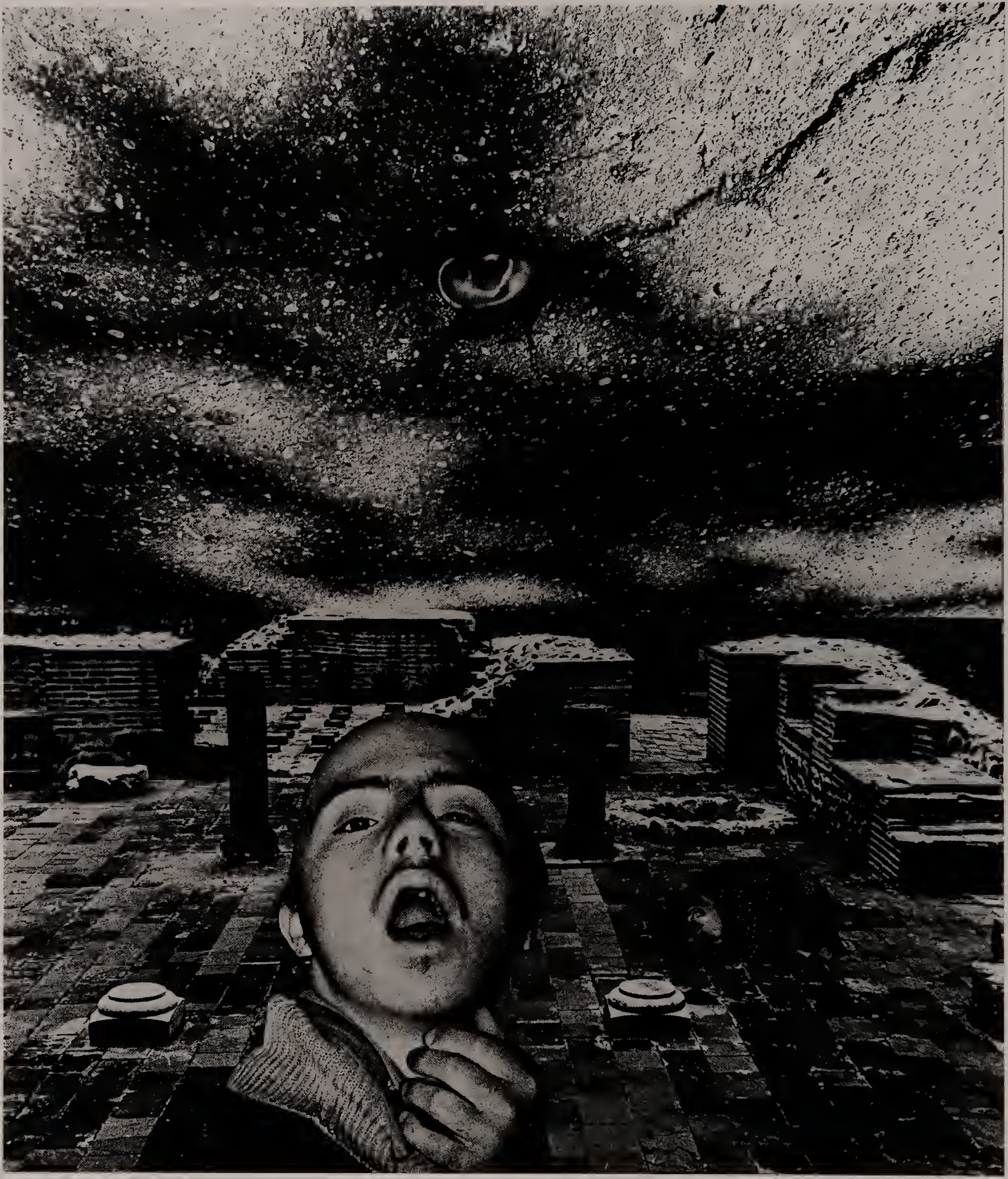


Fig. 188. Jānis Knāķis, *Who Is to Blame? (No. 2)*, 1986.
Gelatin silver print, 36.7 x 28 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 00896.

advertising, but instead of business as usual he projected images of a Latvian Baroque palace, scratching through layers of photographic emulsion to create diagrammatic puns related to the decor. Oļegs Tillbergs (b. 1956) and Vilnis Zabers (1963–1994) incorporated hard-porn excerpts in their collage and installation pieces of the early 1990s, but these blatant provocations had been trumped by that inveterate Priapus, Andris Grinbergs, who for some years already had sewn beefcake calendars, nude snapshots of his male lover, and disco album covers into quintessentially queer photomontages.

For all these liberations—political, sexual, aesthetic—some of the most engaging art in post-Soviet Latvia still looked, or came into being, like photographic images done decades earlier. Miervaldis Polis, whose painting career has been beholden to photographic sources, decided to commemorate nineteenth-century writer Fricis Brīvzemnieks. This itself was not unusual: Polis frequently painted homages to the nation's authors. But here, perhaps because Brīvzemnieks once published a collection of folk riddles, Polis took his photorealistic sleight of hand to a new level: With a pin, he scratched a sheet of black film to produce a "negative" that was used to print an edition of this essentially nonexistent "photograph" of Brīvzemnieks. But the existence of a real negative was no guarantee of historical accuracy, either. Andris Frīdbergs (b. 1970) gathered friends to pose alongside himself for a group portrait, and with everyone assembled, he conspicuously wet his pants, triggering the shutter as their shock turned to amusement. But even greater amusement was had at the portrait's unveiling at Latvia's main contemporary art exhibition of 1997. Frīdbergs had digitally altered the photograph such that his laughing friends appeared incontinent—worse, incontinent and impertinent—while the latter-day *palmyat* master remained dry.

Similar to such visual representations, historical accounts are riddled with contingencies. Well before Frīdbergs's prank, Latvian photography contained, at any given moment, corruptions *and* corrections to anyone's definition of artistic merit, appropriate subject matter, social relevancy, or technical accomplishment. For that reason, the photographers whose work might be nominated for an alternative telling of this historical survey of nonconformist activity number in the dozens. And even if all the prime agents have been accounted for, alternative picks from each of their oeuvres would tell a different story.

NOTES

1. Sergejs Daugovišs, "Fotogrāfija četrdesmito un piecdesmito gadu sākuma presē un tās nozīme vizuālās kultūras attīstībā," in *Latvijas fotomāksla: Vēsture un mūsdienas*, ed. Pēteris Zeile and Gunārs Janaitis (Rīga: Liesma, 1985), 123.

2. Jānis Borgs, graphic designer and erstwhile retoucher, revealed this neologism in a June 23, 1994, conversation.

3. Photographer Uldis Briedis recounts seeing such defacements in photos preserved by Latvians living in Siberia in "Fotogrāfs Uldis Briedis," *Studija. Vizuālo mākslu žurnāls* 22 (February–March 2002): 28.

4. Gunārs Janaitis, "Fotoapvienības un to loma fotomākslas attīstībā," in *Latvijas fotomāksla*, 150. The choice of industrial sponsors for the photo clubs was reminiscent of the Productionist mandate during the early Soviet avant-garde, of which Latvian Kārlis Johansons was an extreme proponent.

5. Granted, hobbyists enjoyed enhanced status, thanks to the Marxist ideal of well-rounded socialist subjects actively producing culture. Yet professional easel painters were not grouped with so-called Sunday painters in painting clubs, nor were professional photographers allowed to join the Artists' Union. Only photojournalists were eligible for professional membership, that being in the Journalists' Union. Finally, and perhaps most debilitating, being accorded hobbyist status discouraged photographers from expecting remuneration from their work, necessitating non-artistic employment.

6. Photographer Gunārs Janaitis identifies the clubs as engines of positive change, noting that even among "pretexts" for their existence was the "desire to break the creative stereotypes of press photography" ("Fotoapvienības," 139). Taking an opposing, elitist view, a non-photographer dismisses the phenomenon as pernicious, causing amateurs to become ideological dupes and, worse, believing the "myth [that], having received many medals in international amateur competitions, [he or she] had become an 'artist.'" Helēna Demakova, " 'Nuzabiļdesimes. Kod numersi, bus iz kū pazavertīs!' " in *Inta Ruka: Mani lauku laudis* (Rīga: Soros Contemporary Art Center, 1999), 31.

7. See Straka's "Das Gedächtnis der Bildern: Baltischer Photokunst heute," in the exhibition catalog of the same title (Kiel: Nieswand Verlag, 1993), 19–36. Her point is blunted by the fact that, within a decade of Soviet occupation, more than one officially tolerated style existed in the Baltics.

8. Ibid., 20.

9. Rožlapa's set is reproduced in Yelena Rakitina's "Šodienīgi par laikmetīgo," *Māksla* 1 (1965): 25.

10. Details of the photomural illustrated a milestone essay that Spuris coauthored with Valdis Celms, advocating photography's reassessment as art and its inclusion within Latvian academic curricula: "Dizaina foto iespējas un uzdevumi," *Māksla* 2 (1971): 46–50.

11. *Prague* is reproduced in my essay "Many Easels, Some Abandoned: Latvian Art after Socialist Realism," in *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets*, 1945–1991, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 226.

12. Summary comments by Mekas at the premiere of the newly restored *Self-Portrait*, Anthology Film Archives, New York City, February 15, 1997.

13. These incidents were recounted in interviews with Brašmane and Polis, February 19, 1998, and June 20, 1994, respectively. *Brass Band* is reproduced in "Many Easels," 248.

14. Boris Mangolds, untitled introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Stepping Out of Line: Contemporary Art Photography from Latvia* (Millersville, Pa.: Millersville University, 1992).

15. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richters anomisches Archiv," in *Photographie in der deutschen Gegenwartskunst* (Stuttgart: Gesellschaft für moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig, 1993), 66.

16. Only a fraction of the approximately seventy-five hundred negatives comprising the series has been realized as printed photographs. Vilhelms Mikhailovskis, "Gruppa A: Latvii," *Rodnik* 46, no. 10 (1990): 43.

17. Dzividzinska quoted by Inga Šteimane in "Versija par laika mašīnu," in *Zenta Dzividzinska. Melnbaltais fotogrāfijas* (Rīga: author, 1999).

18. For a fuller discussion of subversive public interaction with Soviet monuments, see my essay "Curtains: Décor for the End of Empire," in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan Reid (London: Berg Publishers, 2002), 231–48.

19. Dzividzinska's *Stone Woman II* is reproduced in "Many Easels," 209.

20. Certainly, earlier photographs functioned similarly within the collective imagination. For example, Bruno Alsiņš's 1961 image of Staburags, a geological-feature-cum-tourist-destination irrevocably linked with national identity (a Latvian equivalent of, say, Old Faithful or Mount Fuji), became an anti-Soviet reproach years later when central planners inundated Staburags with floodwaters from a hydroelectric dam.

21. Complicating any charges of misogyny, Kreicbergs championed the work of female colleagues, critically situating them within the U.S.S.R.'s first international survey of women photographers, *Woman with Camera*, organized in Rīga in 1977 as an in-their-own-images follow-up to his earlier curatorial effort, *Woman in International Photo-Art*.

22. *Bride* is reproduced in Jānis Kreicbergs, *Logs* (Rīga: Liesma, 1989), n.p.

23. These images are reproduced in Jānis Gleizds, *foto. gaismas atspulgs* (Rīga: Fotoimidžs, 1998), 145–53.

24. Besides Ārgalis, the circle included Jānis Borgs (b. 1946), Jāzeps Kukulis-Baltinavietis (b. ca. 1950), Valdis Celms, Aldonis Klucis, Dimitrijs Lūkins, and Kirils Šmeļkovs (b. 1954). I'm indebted to curator-scholar Ieva Kalniņs for introducing me to the photomontage series.

25. An example of NSRD photo documentation is reproduced in "Many Easels," 257. In addition to Boiko and Lediņš, Imants Žodžiks (b. 1955) authored much of the group's photography. NSRD also included Inguna Černova (b. 1962), Aigars Sparāns (1955–1996), and Dace Šenberga (b. 1967).

26. Even preeminent photography historian Pēteris Korsaks had to presuppose general disregard with a retrospective article whose title translates as "Was There Photography Culture in Latvia?" *Literatūra un māksla*, November 18, 1988.

27. Bogustovs and Zande-Leimanis were relatively peripheral to the group. Regarding the group phenomenon, see Helēna Demakova, "Grupas 'A' ideālā un reāla telpa," *Māksla* 4 (April 1991): 56–63; and Vilhelms Mihailovskis, "Gruppa A: Latvii," *Rodnik* 46, no. 10 (1990): 32–43. For Ruka, see Eduards Kļaviņš, "The story of Inta Ruka and her photoportrait stories," in *Stories, Storytellers*, exh. cat., ed. Helēna Demakova (La Biennale di Venezia. 48. Esposizione Internazionale d' Arte) (Rīga: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1999), 13–16; for Grants, see Laima Slava, "Dzīvot priekam . . . " *Studija*, no. 7 (1999): 18–27; for Kleins, see Inga Šteimane, "Sešas patiesības par fotogrāfiju," *Studija*, no. 22 (February–March 2002): 42–45; for Zelmenis, see Leonards Laganovskis, "Einige Gedanken zu Wegen und Schatten," in *Die Wiederkehr des Vergangenen. Ende der Utopien? 1. Ars Baltica-Triennale der Photokunst*, exh. cat., (Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum Schloß, Schleswig) (Köln: Walter König, 1996), 114–15.

28. In fact, the incipient nostalgia for Ruka's agrarian subjects and the egalitarian scope of her work—she produces, as well, the series *City People*—has invited comparisons to August Sander's attempt at Weimar social typology, made most explicitly by Peeter Linnap in "Anthropologist Inta Ruka. 1980s: Romantic Catalogue on Latvians," in *Borderlands: Contemporary Photography from the Baltic States*, exh. cat., ed. Martha J. McCulloch (The Cottier, Glasgow) (Glasgow: Street Level Photography Gallery & Workshop, 1993), n.p. This comparison is soundly discounted by Kļaviņš in "The story of Inta Ruka," 14–15.

29. A 1971 documentary by Imants Brils (*Faces*) contained a sympathetic portrayal of a substance abuser in the clutches of Latvia's correctional system, but the film was officially suppressed. Laima Žurgina's *Ugly Duckling, Child of Mankind* (1985) demonstrated art therapy's efficacy in treating emotionally disturbed youths. And in 1986, petty teenage hooliganism and its judicial equivalent was the focus of Juris Podnieks's *Is It Easy to Be Young?*

30. The series can viewed at www.junik.lv/~wilhelm/.

Raminta Jurenaite

Reclaiming the Salt of the Earth

Lithuanian Photography Reconsidered

Experimental photography in the Baltic countries played an important and complex role in the nonconformist art movement of the Soviet Union from 1956 to 1985. Many Lithuanian photographers who were active in the movement are today rewriting or reinterpreting their role and accounts of themselves and their generation. Any analysis or questioning that "deromanticizes" the work and conduct of the artists in the Soviet era is seen as an unwillingness to understand the difficulties of the period and the self-sacrificing mission of the artists. All three Baltic republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—were incorporated into the Soviet Union much later than the other republics of the Soviet Union and were thus more resistant to the dogmas of socialist realism. Even though artists were restricted by censorship and party dogma, they enjoyed more liberalization than the artists of Moscow and St. Petersburg even before perestroika. In the Baltic republics, no rigid dividing line between nonconformist and official art ever existed, and dissidents did not take up radical positions, as in the imperial centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg. In contrast to the rest of the Soviet Union, in the Baltics, the most outstanding nonconformist artists were usually the heads of officially approved artists' unions. Photographers and art critics who were then active in Lithuania have written a great deal about a subterfuge that was employed to exhibit "nonofficial" photography: "ideologized" exhibitions and publications were used as "lightning rods" to deflect attention from the "other" types of photography exhibited there.[1] However, such compromises with boldness, truth, and lies might have been one of the reasons the Soviet Union continued to last even after the weakening of the dictatorship.

A tragic paradox arises out of all this: the very elements that artists, censors, and the public, deemed bold and dangerous because of their themes could, in retrospect, be interpreted as a compromise. Early postwar photography in the Baltic republics has still not been researched well. In addition to the official propagandist press photography, another photography also existed, one that was not published or shown to the public at that time.

Only in 1987 were the works of the Lithuanian photographer Vytautas Stanionis (1925–1966), who depicted villagers in passport photos, exhibited. To conserve the scarce photographic materials available to him, the artist took pictures of two persons at once, as a result of which some interesting combinations appeared: father–son, mother–daughter, husband–wife, and neighbor–neighbor. The double portraits clearly show the subjects' fear and turmoil, due to the ever-present danger of being transported to Siberia or caught up in the partisan warfare that was raging in the country.

The photographs of Petras Velicka (1911–1990) are only now being rediscovered. His first retrospective exhibition, *Marks of Time*, took place in Vilnius in the year 2000. In his 1950s photos, the artist depicted his everyday private life and that of his family members and other "unimportant people." His images of a family taking a walk in the old town or outside the city create a mood of nostalgia. An officer's unkempt uniform or haircut may connote the difficult life of postwar Lithuania.

Neither Vytautas Stanionis nor Petras Velicka prepared these series for exhibitions themselves; the images were selected from negatives and then printed and grouped by others. These photographs contribute to a deeper understanding and reconstruction of postwar Lithuania. But later changes in photographic art during the Khrushchev era were made by another generation of artists, who started working in the second half of the 1950s. Official Lithuanian photojournalistic photography succumbed to the rules dictated by the totalitarian regime.[2]

One may better understand nonconformist photography from the beginning of the Khrushchev era by relating it to the press photography of that time. All photos that made their way into the press were strictly censored, scrutinized not only for social content but also for aesthetic quality. The basic principles of this control mechanism were basically the same in all communist countries. In his description of the political iconography of the GDR dictatorship, Stefan Wolle wrote,

> Photography in the former GDR had its own kind of charm. Looking through old newspapers or the rare illustrated magazines which include more ambitious artistic expression the general impression is still the same—beauty, harmony, cleanliness and security are everywhere in socialist society. The visualization of these propagandised "values" created a visual program that was as strictly pleasant and correct in its form as an orthodox iconostasis. Every man and object in society had their defined place.[3]

Under such circumstances, documentary photography on social themes in the former communist bloc developed mostly not in press photography but outside it. Independent photographers such as Juri Streit, Viktor Kolar, and Josef Koudelka in the former Czechoslovakia and Evelyn Richter, Ursula Arnold, and Arno Fischer in the former GDR were freelance photographers who created social photography. In their work, they replaced optimistic propaganda with a realistic view of the general degradation of the population and nature.

During the "thaw" of the late 1950s this documentary role in the Soviet Union was undertaken by Lithuanian photographers. In this period, totalitarianism was lessened but not abolished. A mass psychosis developed: almost every member of the intelligentsia was convinced that the security services were monitoring telephone conversations. Although this was clearly not the case—it would have been prohibitively expensive for the state to do so—such irrational phobias were based on real activities carried out by the KGB and other security services.

Up to the period of Gorbachev's perestroika, there was no freedom of the press or freedom to travel. A paralyzing system of partial prohibitions and "positive censorship" existed, which did not actually point out what was prohibited but rather determined what and how one should paint, make films, take photographs, write, publish, and exhibit.

The photographs of Antanas Sutkus (b. 1939), Aleksandras Mačiauskas (b. 1938), and other like-minded photographic artists served as a rebirth for the public. Their political content was indirect but clear enough to understand. The photographs of Sutkus and Mačiauskas (fig. 189) showed life with its everyday difficulties. The photographers' exposure of the lack of fundamental well-being took courage, and the hard truth they revealed was perceived as a socially critical allegory.

Paradoxically, the censors regarded photography as less important than literature, cinema, or painting, as a result of which it enjoyed greater freedom; the impact of photography in the documentation of the everyday was particularly significant. Photographic artists experienced fewer restrictions than painters or sculptors when exhibiting their works locally or sending them abroad to international exhibitions. Exploiting this state of affairs and fighting for the recognition of photographic art, Sutkus and Mačiauskas in 1969 founded the Association of Lithuanian Photographers, which became a mecca for the talented and committed photographers of the entire Soviet empire. Photo artists used every opportunity to send their works abroad to let the world know of their existence. Photographers participated in contests and won awards not only at numerous local amateur competitions but also at important competitions abroad. Foreign curators, collectors, and journalists would often buy these works for a very low price and take them back to their home countries. The rights of the artist regarding reproduction or exhibition were often ignored. This state of affairs continued until the restoration of Lithuania's independence. As far as the artists themselves were concerned, the mere fact that they were needed and were able to act was enough to provoke euphoria. In the 1960s the refusal to tell lies was an important step, but photographers were still a long way from stating frank opinions. Their socially critical pictures were accepted at exhibitions because they carried masked titles, and because they were obscured by ideologically correct articles by the critics in catalogues and diluted by the "idyllic" works of their colleagues. Despite the photographers' strong opposition to the "glorification of reality," their works were accepted at such exhibitions as *Work Gives People Wings*; *The USSR—Earth and People*; *Bridges of Friendship*; *Love, Friendship, Solidarity*; and *Land of Amber*.

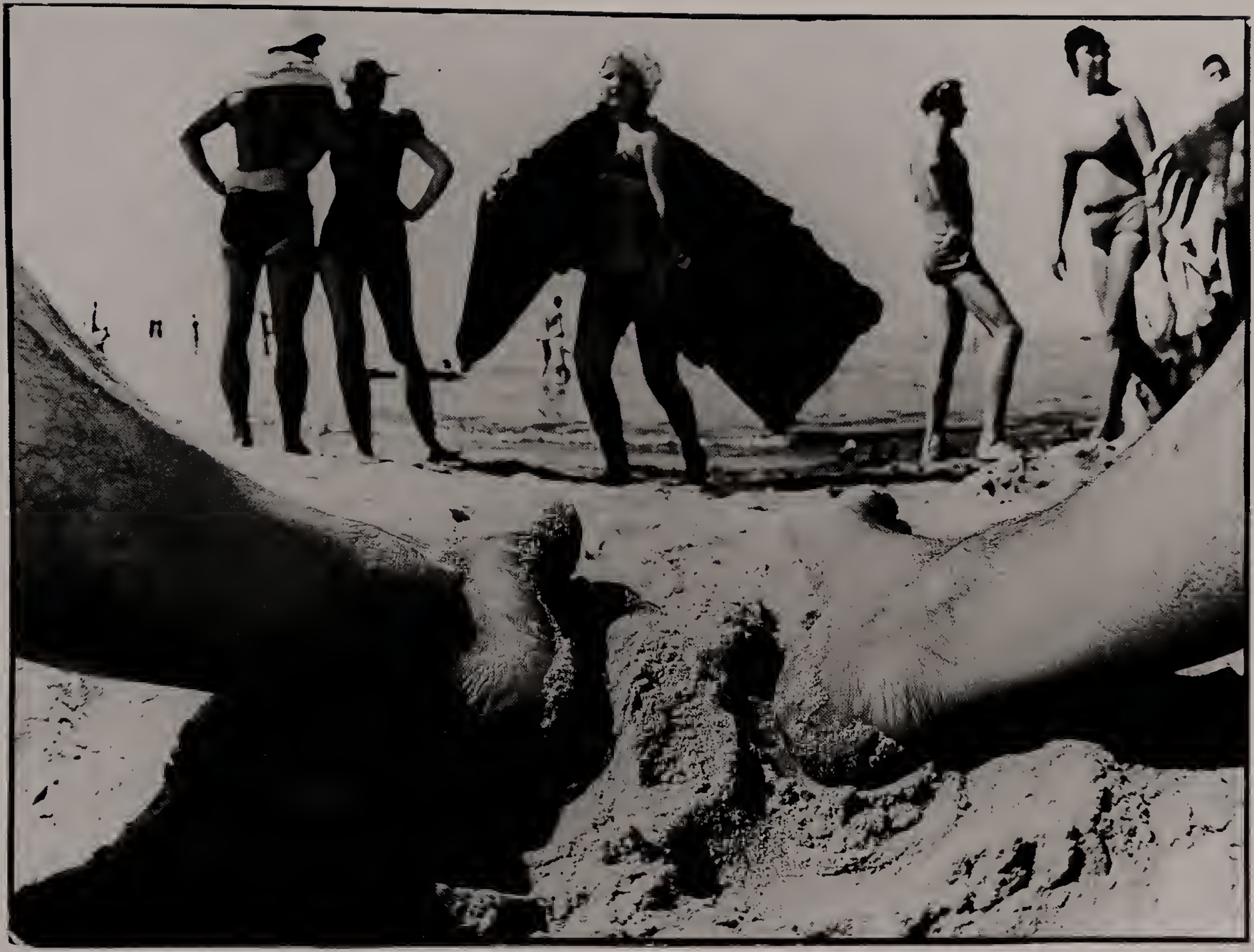


Fig. 189. Aleksandras Mačiauskas, *Summer-24*, 1982. Gelatin silver print, 29 x 39 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15041.

Sutkus and Mačiauskas worked consistently for decades on the same subject matter as attentive observers and eyewitnesses. Sutkus took myriad photos all over Lithuania of people belonging to every social stratum as part of his unfinished series, *People of Lithuania*. The photographs in his archive representing fifteen years of work are more important to him than any newer work. Mačiauskas worked on three large-scale series at the same time: Lithuanian markets, veterinary clinics, and funeral rites. The main theme in these works is the life of farmers after the collectivization of agriculture, which was hard and exhausting when they stayed on their farms and no less difficult when they tried to settle in town. Poverty did not suppress farmers' attachment to their traditions and their land. The sentiment is associated with the myth of "eternal Lithuania," which is important to all of the art of the country as it witnesses a centuries-long rebirth of the fight for national independence.

Due to their passionate dedication, the artists succeeded in preserving traces of the disappearing past without sentimentality. Theirs was not, however, an impassive record making. Both artists were born and brought up in rural Lithuania and felt at home there. Their photographs show no distance from the photographed subjects.

Following the seventeenth-century tradition of Flemish painting, Mačiauskas turns farmers in markets into mythical characters who firmly feel the ground under their feet. Good and evil do not mix, while greed and kindness collide. The human figures are monumentalized, the scenes dramatized. The baroque foreshortening of ground-level shots and the diagonals are combined with a concentration on the main subjects and a fragmented composition. In big, black zones the figures and objects emerge three-dimensionally, and the lighting is dramatic. Naturalism turns into the grotesque, a sneer into condemnation and trickery (fig. 189).

Hard work and fondness for animals link the photographs of Lithuanian village markets with the scenes in the Kaunas veterinary clinic. Between 1977 and 1990 Mačiauskas observed the work of the veterinarians at the Kaunas veterinary clinic and on farms all over Lithuania. Despite the difficult surroundings and poor-quality medical equipment, the veterinarians and

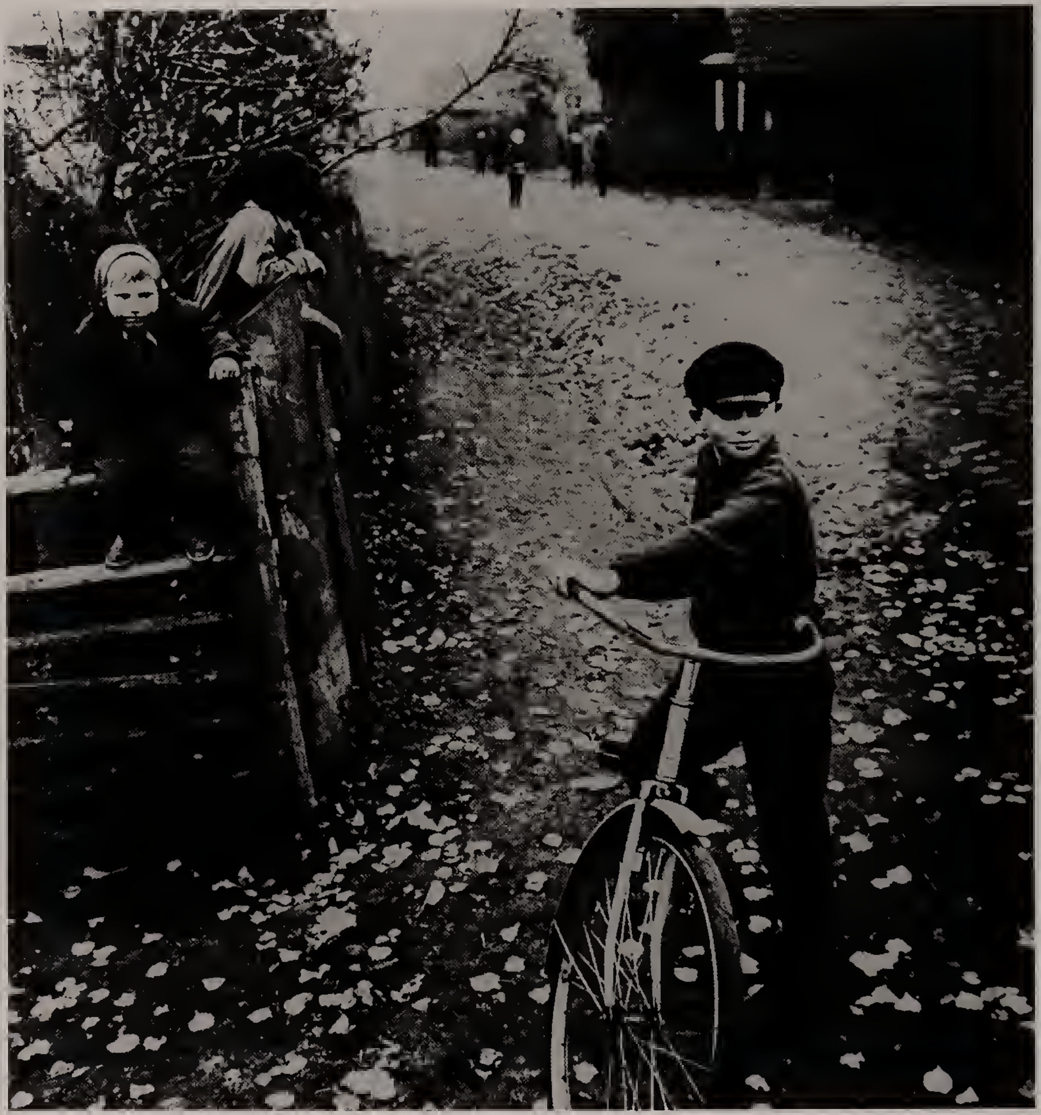


Fig. 190. Antanas Sutkus, *Country Children*, 1965. Gelatin silver print, 31.8 x 29.8 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 13257.

their assistants manage to cope with both ordinary and extremely complicated tasks. Mačiauskas shows sweat, blood, manure, and pain brutally and openly. The operations shown in close-up shots sometimes look threatening but never gruesome. Mačiauskas strove to objectively chronicle the veterinarians' activities without overstepping the bounds of propriety into voyeurism. He seems to attempt to perceive the mystery of life and to feel the limits of interference with it. The photographs unfold an earthy relationship of nature with human activity. Direct excitement alternates with shrewd observation. Genre scenes and portraits are closely intertwined. As in traditional dramatic works, the photographs have plots, culminations, and denouements. Intense moments disclose the personalities of the veterinarians. However, the animals are the true heroes.

In the photographs by Sutkus (figs. 190–92), unlike in those by Mačiauskas, one finds no grotesquery or dramatic foreshortening and chiaroscuro. Sutkus is a pure master of the unmanipulated photograph. Abandoning any theatrical or abstract effects, he imparts profundity and symbolism to the frozen moment.

The subjective photographs of Antanas Sutkus show him to be a restless observer attempting to preserve a vanishing world. The people, who have since left the villages, look as we see them in his photographs. Their manner of life is also disapppearing. Many small towns, villages, and farmsteads no longer exist. The photographic artist narrates his life story through the life stories of others. Sutkus's images preserve the essence of the passing world. They seem to be full of speech and odors. This photography is neither staged nor journalistic. Sutkus is an exceptional portraitist; even in mass scenes he focuses on the individual. For him, the act of photography is the process of the cognition of the human being. The model is always looking at the lens. However, Sutkus's frankness allows some mystery.

Another series of photographs concerns people

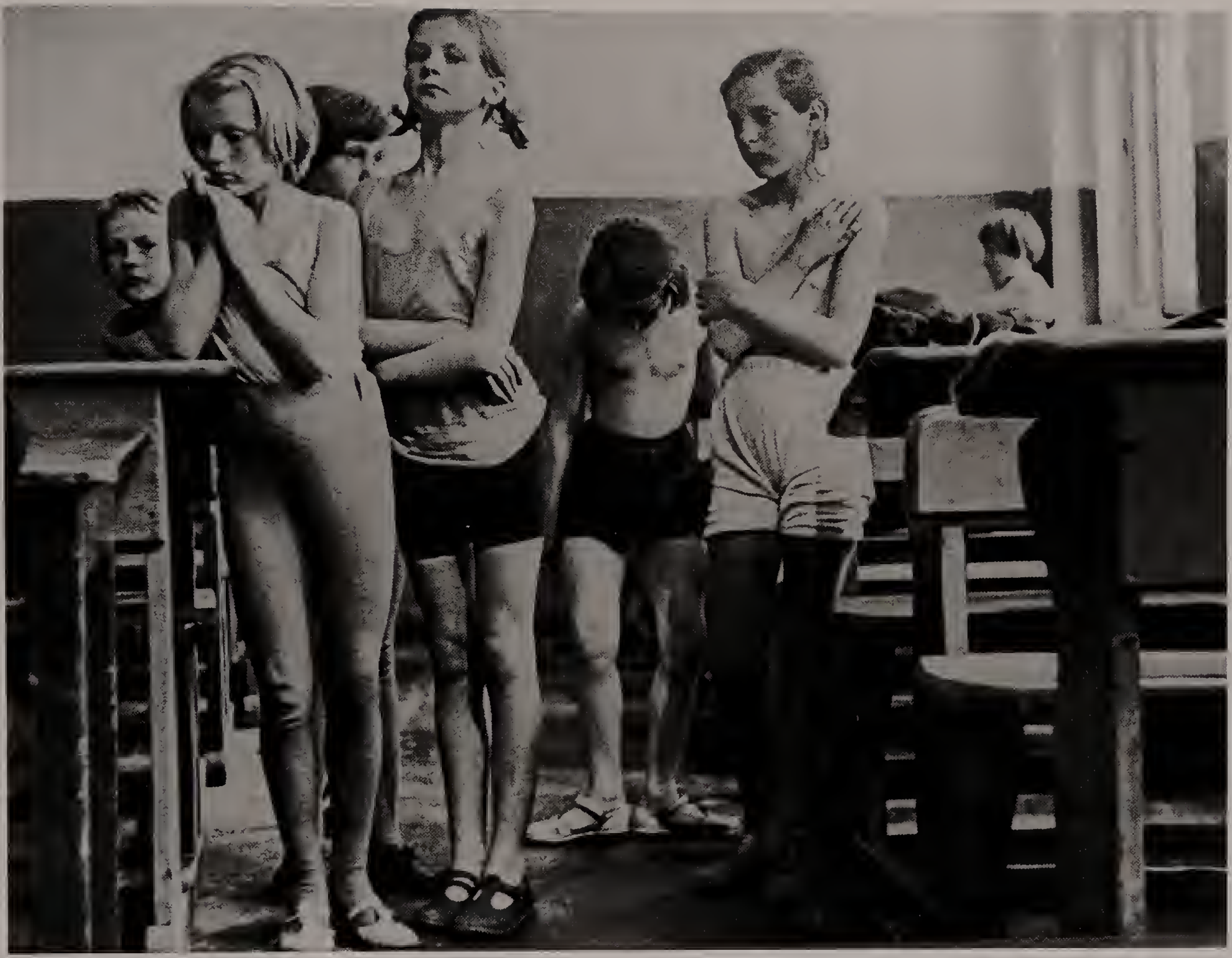


Fig. 191. Antanas Sutkus, *Applicants for Ballet School*, 1963. Gelatin silver print, 30.5 x 39.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 13261.

interacting with each other: members of an orchestra rehearsing, children at play, parents and children—or a policeman and a lawbreaker—conversing. The hard but far from dull life observed by the photographer produces rich characters. Children and teenagers are no less independent than adults. Their faces are not yet wrinkled, but they bear the sharp expression of temporal existence. The local elves—teenagers with bunches of Easter flowers picked in the forest—seem awkward, dressed in over-large clothing and caps with earflaps, but they are appear delicate on an early spring morning. Though their characters are full of life and action, a fragile melancholy informs all of Sutkus's photographs.

In 1965, when Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir visited Lithuania for a week, Sutkus accompanied them and photographed the whole trip. One photograph taken in the region of Nida, Kursiu Nerija, is especially well known because in it Sutkus manages to capture something that hardly seems possible. He convincingly interprets Sartre's ideas of "being and nothingness" and individual freedom: on a white background of sand, the dark, powerful silhouette of Sartre moves from nowhere to nowhere along the horizon. The writer is walking heavily but eagerly, his body leaning forward. This elderly man wearing glasses and city clothes looks not weak in the midst of the natural elements but absolutely alien to them. His monumental figure casts a fragile, fanciful shadow.

As an insatiable and passionate observer, Sutkus revives memory by reconstructing the past with the help of photography, whose archives are full of uncovered layers. In the year 2000 Sutkus organized, from his own archives, a huge exhibition of photographs that had not previously been exhibited. In this exhibition, *From the Antanas Sutkus Archives, 1959–1979*, in contrast to in the exhibition *Nostalgia of Bare Feet*, which toured many countries and was dedicated to the same period, Sutkus now focused his attention on the city rather than the country.

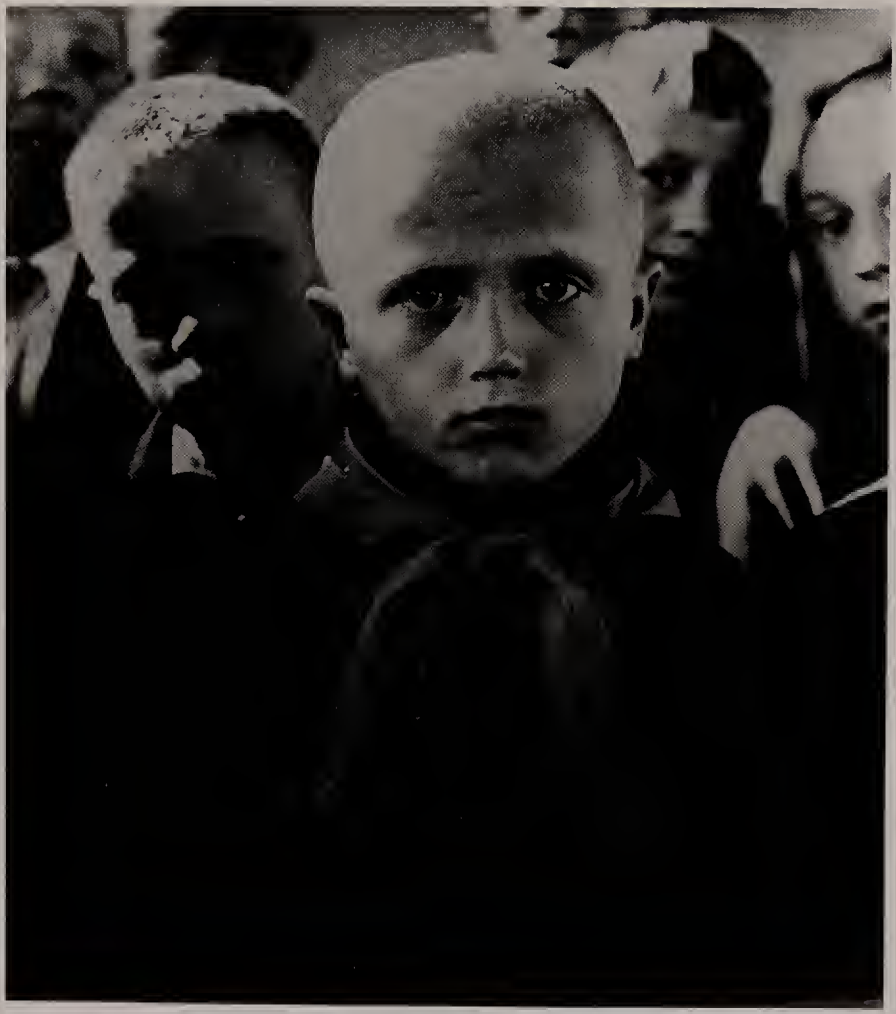


Fig. 192. Antanas Sutkus, *A Pioneer*, 1965.
Gelatin silver print, 33.5 x 29.9 cm.
Dodge Collection, ZAM, 13266.

Even in a city such as Vilnius, Sutkus trains his lens not on the glorious architecture but on the daily life of its people, their troubles, and their character. Remembering this hard period, Sutkus does not moralize or unmask but simply conveys its sense and the facts themselves. He makes us feel the breath of cold and hunger, taste the salt of sweat and tears, as well as share the happy, intimate moments of people's lives.

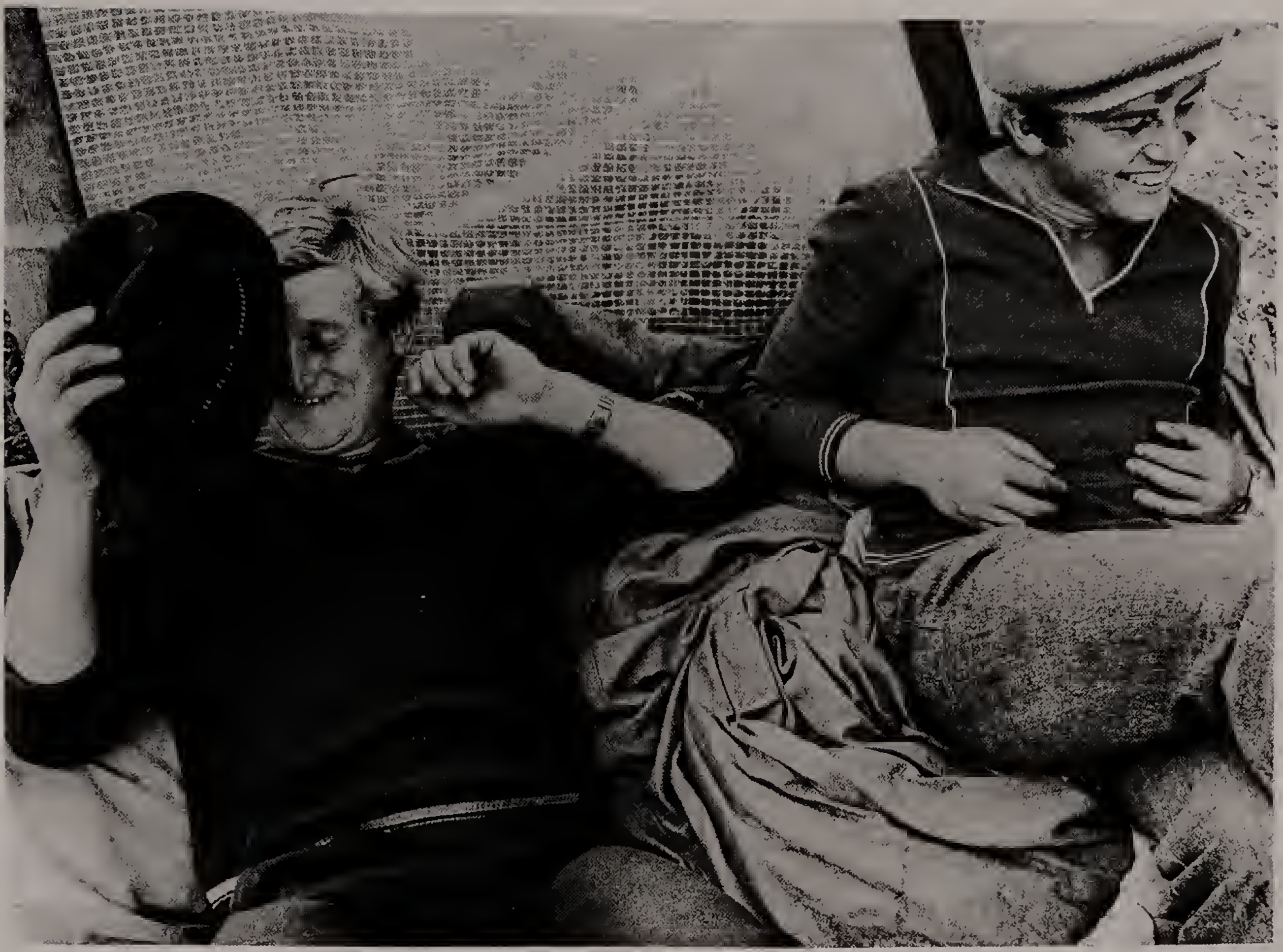
The chosen themes of Sutkus and Mačiauskas and those of their contemporaries Algimantas Kuncius and Romualdas Rakauskas were a reflection of the artists' biographies. However, the decades-long series they created do not form closed cycles or sequences. The individual photographic image always remains important. The artists single out a situation, but they never stage one, nor do they use photomontage. Photographs by Sutkus and Mačiauskas are about an earthy yet dignified life.

In the 1980s and 1990s the socially oriented Lithuanian photographic tradition was continued by Vitas Luckus (1943–1987), Virgilijus Sonta (1952–1992), Alfonsas Budvytis (b. 1949), Juozas Kazlauskas (b. 1941), Vytautas Balčutis (b. 1955), Romualdas Pozerskis (b. 1951), and Romas Juskelis (b. 1946). These artists faced no taboos: they took photos in psychiatric clinics, shelters, and army barracks. Their pictures reveal the complexities of society, its dramatic passion as well as intimate and depressive moods.

In choice of subject matter, Vitas Luckus did not limit himself to his homeland. Living in a closed society, he did not want to isolate himself more than the regime already isolated him. A passionate observer and traveler, he visited the farthest reaches of the Soviet Union—Georgia, Bashkiria, Azerbaijan, and the Altai. Because he was gregarious, he never wound up in the voyeuristic position of a foreigner. He not only observed people but also laughed and cried as if he were one of them, sitting together at a table in their homes or in a local barbershop (figs. 193 and 194).

Vitas Luckus was one of the pioneers in the Baltics in the use of old photographs for collage compositions (fig. 195). In his photographic book entitled *Relationship to Past Photography*, he used the themes of war and Sunday to create montages of family travel, trying to reconstruct the past from what he calls "the deep of the infinitively reverse perspective."[4]

Alfonsas Budvytis's works reflect the importance of social and psychological elements, with subjectivism and the feeling of the absurdity of existence playing no less active roles. The most mundane and common situations in his photographs reveal a frighteningly provocative dark side. The pictures document and draw attention to details yet at the same time do not reveal their full meaning. The observed scenes lose their everyday character. Everything that should be clear and familiar requires a new interpretation, which in its turn cannot be consistent and monosemantic. People appear lonely and abandoned. In small groups, the characters are rarely linked by a common act or by conversation; in crowds, everyone seems to be in a hurry. Focus is frequently on a lone figure that, set in a vast space, looks minuscule; on closer examination it seems squeezed into a corner, or its silhouette begins to be effaced in reflected light. The manipulation of light is an important element of Budvytis's work. More recently, aesthetic elements and experimentation have acquired a greater importance in his work, linking it to conceptual art. He has become increasingly interested in archetypes and subjective



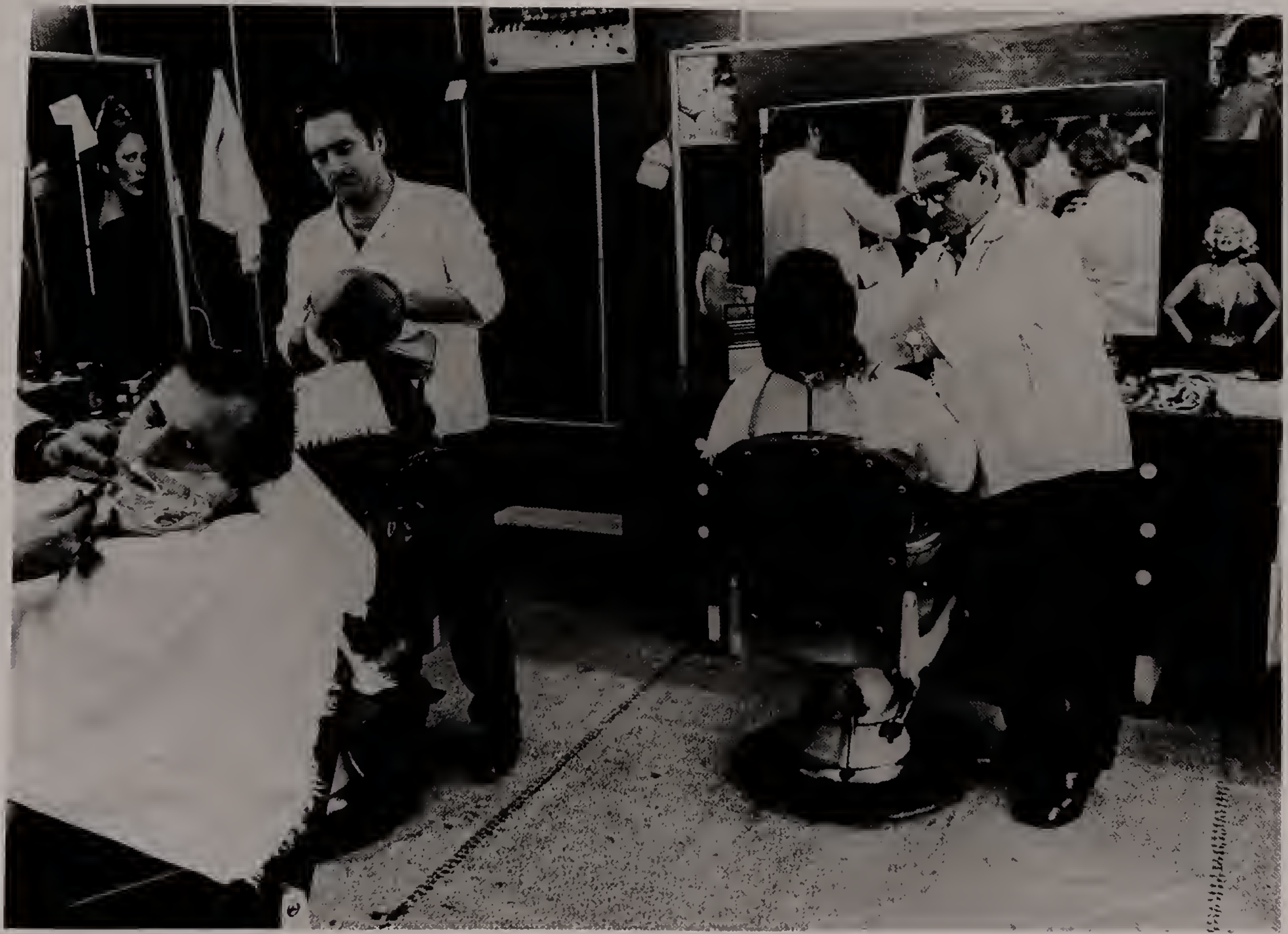


Fig. 193 (*top*). Vitas Luckus, *Altajās*, 1985. Gelatin silver print, 29 x 39.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 18419.

Fig. 194 (*above*). Vitas Luckus, *Azerbaidzanas*, 1981. Gelatin silver print, 28.7 x 39.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 18420.

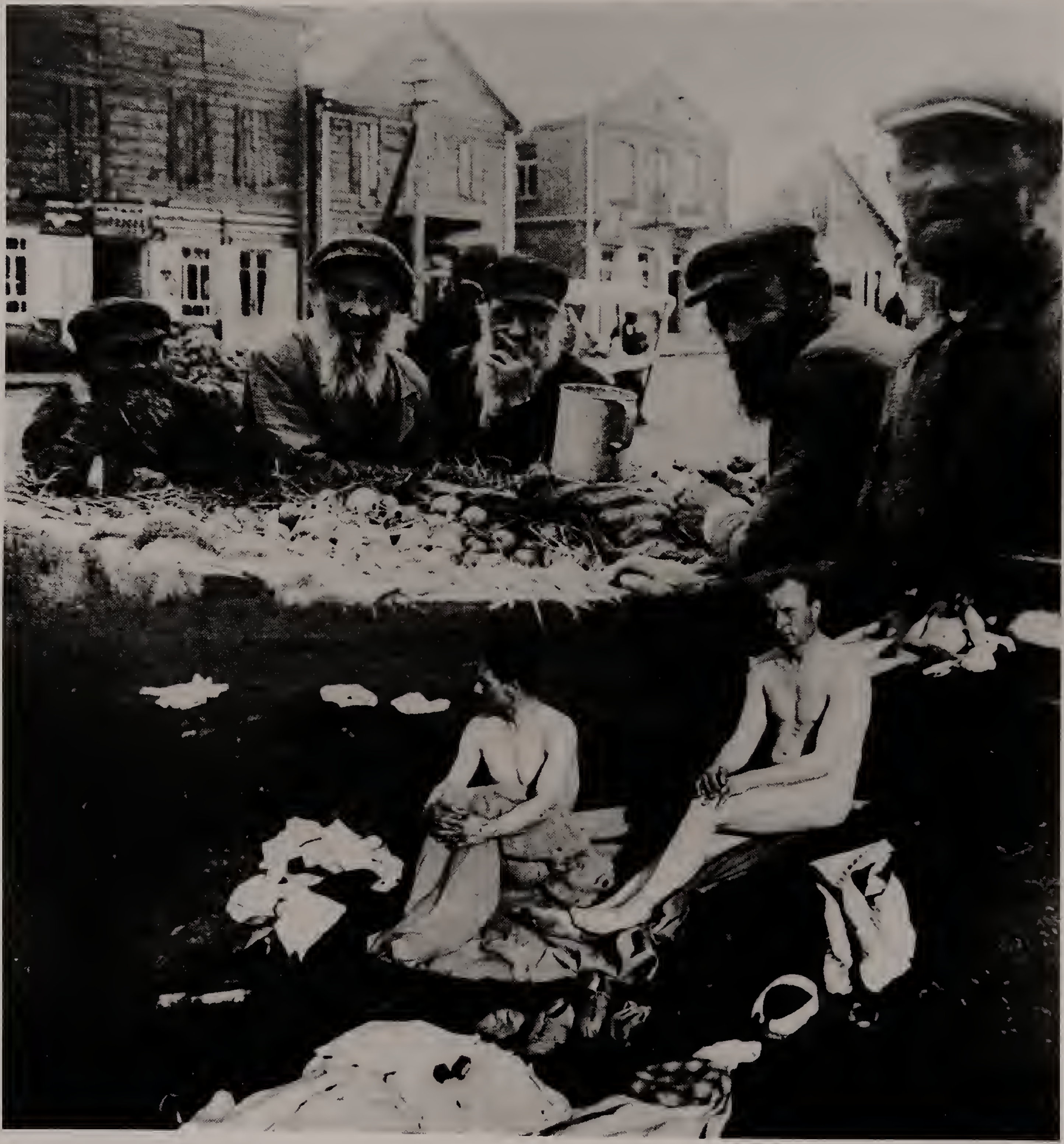


Fig. 195. Vitas Luckus, *Sunday* from the collage series *Attitude Toward the Old Photography*, 1979. Cut and glued gelatin silver print, 34.8 x 29.1 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 19850.

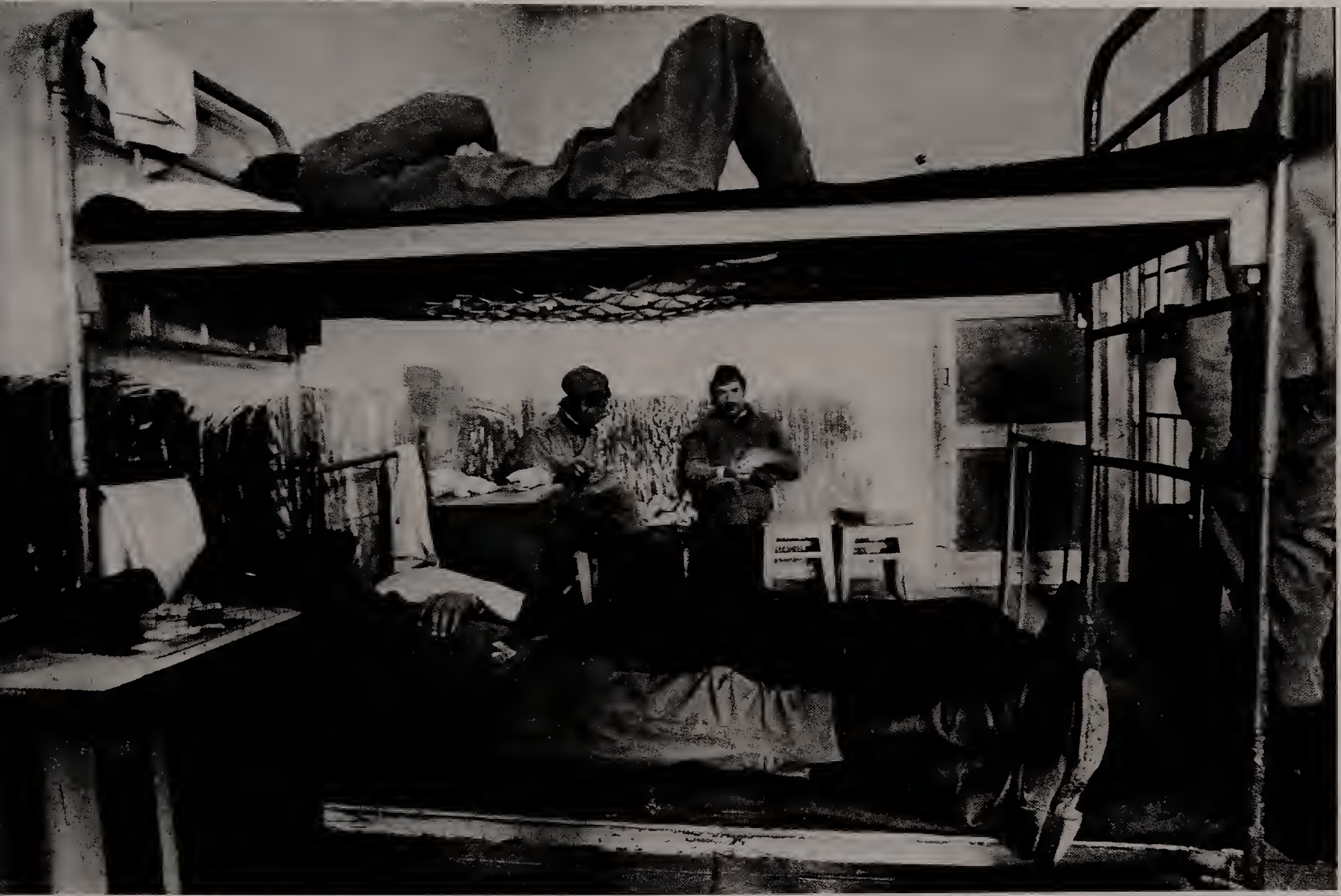


Fig. 196. Romas Juskelis, *Reservists*, 1983. Gelatin silver print, 24.8 x 37.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15056.

experience. Budvytis creates both visual signs associated with traditional cultural layers and new social symbols of his surroundings.

In his series *Reservists* (fig. 196), Romas Juskelis offers the viewer an unexpected perspective on soldiers in the Soviet army, of which he himself was a reserve member. The intimacy of male friendship appears in latent form; the spartan life of the barracks takes on an aspect of strange melancholia and contempt.

A more introverted, contemplative contour appears in Lithuanian photography with the work of Violeta Bubelyte. For many years now Bubelyte has been photographing herself in the nude. The question "Who am I?" has been superseded by the question "What is human nature?" Bubelyte's nudes are neither emancipatory provocations nor reflections on sexuality. What they examine is solitude. An individual is always—not just in birth and death—alone. Bubelyte takes her photographs in the claustrophobically cramped space of a small room, often squeezing her body into a corner. Here, naked self-posing is a meditation technique, a means of studying psychosomatic states. The body speaks of concentration, relaxation, and painful muscle spasms. Even when boxes, planks, and chipboard screens cover the body, they neither protect nor envelop it. In most of the photographs, the model is captured so precisely that her realism is hypertrophied. In some parts of Bubelyte's new, never-ending series a restless light dematerializes, almost melting the body. All that is left is its shadow, which creates a double image. The model becomes her own partner, as if in reference to the nude portraiture of the northern Renaissance. These photographs explore the illusory nature of reality and the second nature of human experience. The body is no longer a reflection of itself. Playful contemplation is replaced by ruthless introspection.

The totalitarian regime in the Baltic countries, which manipulated the people not only through the mechanisms of violence but also with propagandistic rituals, ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. A symbolic boundary is marked in Antanas Sutkus's

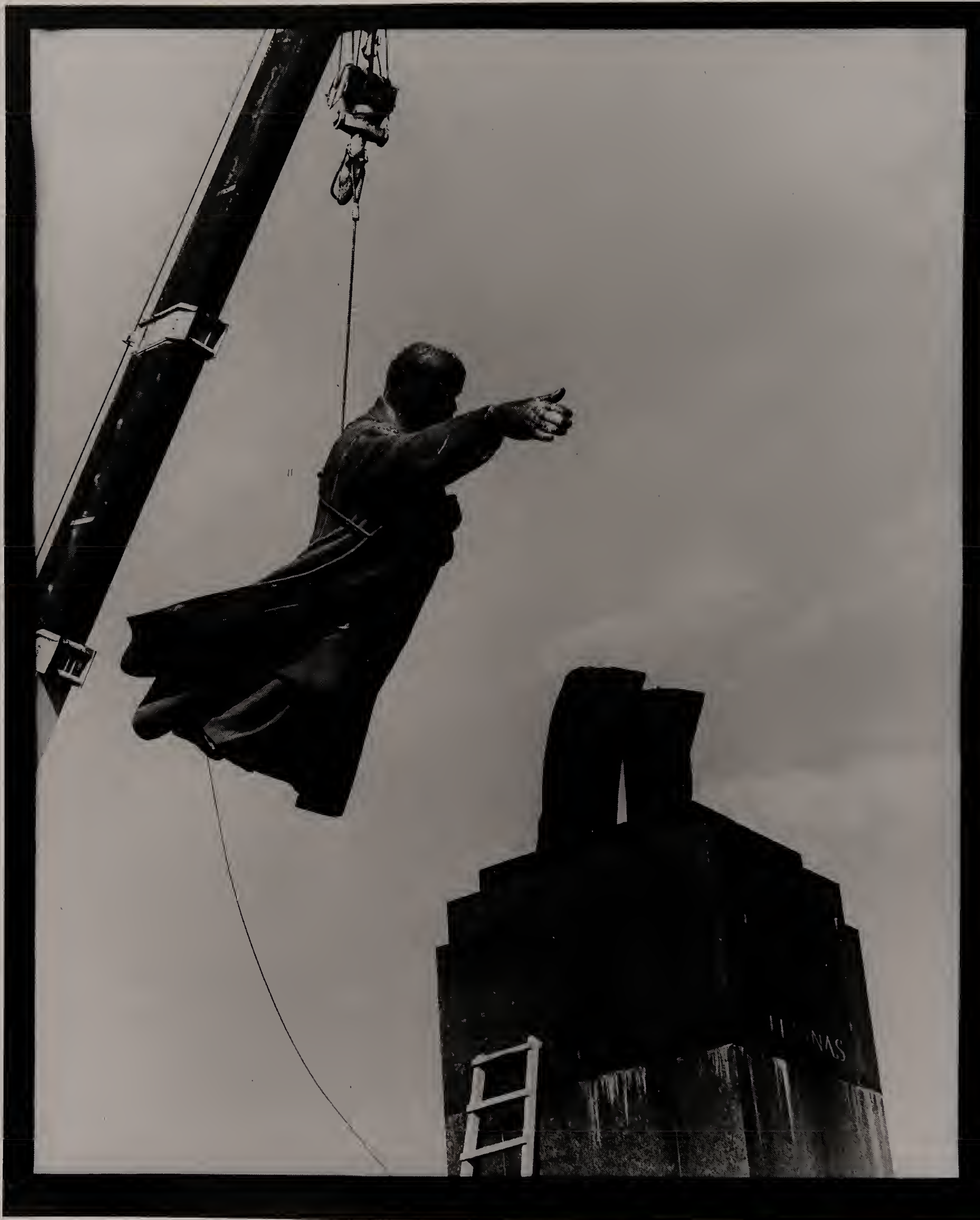


Fig. 197. Antanas Sutkus, *Good-bye, Party Friends*, 1991.
Gelatin silver print, 33.2 x 27 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15035.

photograph that depicts the removal of the Lenin monument from the plaza in front of the Vilnius KGB headquarters (fig. 197). In a matter of minutes, the only things left on the pedestal were the boots and feet of "the great leader."

NOTES

1. Skirmantas Valiulis and Stasys Zvirgzdas, "Lithuanian Photography, Yesterday and Today," in *The Generation of 1960s: What Comes Next?* (Vilnius: Lietuvos fotomenininku sajunga, 2000).

2. Skirmantas Valiulis, "Lithuanian Photography Yesterday and Today," in *The Dramatic Mid-Century* (Vilnius: Vaga, 2001), 10.

3. Stefan Wolle, "Die Diktatur der schonen Bilder. Zur Politishen Ikonographie der SED—Diktatur," in *Deutsche Photographie. Macht eines Mediums, 1870–1970*, ed. Klaus Honnef, Rolf Sachsse, and Karen Thomas (Köln: Du Mont, 1997), 174.

4. Vytautas Luckus, "Relationship to Past Photography," in *The Memory of Images*, ed. Barbara Straka and Kurt Nievers (Kiel: Nieswand Verlag, 1993), 183.

Three Conversations with Photographer-Artists

Boris Mikhailov with Alla Efimova

Feeling Around

Boris Mikhailov was born in 1938 in Kharkov, Ukraine, where he lived until moving to Berlin in 1998. He is considered to be the former Soviet Union's first dissident art photographer and is associated with the conceptualists. Today, Mikhailov's work is exhibited, published, and collected worldwide. This interview was conducted over the telephone (Mikhailov speaking from his home) in 2002.

ALLA EFIMOVA: Let's start by talking about your beginnings as a photographer. How, why, and when did you start to photograph? What did it mean to you? We've talked about it informally, but I never recorded our conversations.

BORIS MIKHAILOV: In any case, I'll have a different take on it this time. Your questions can be answered in many ways. One of these, which I suddenly decided upon, is that I could have, in principle, taken up painting, or film—which is actually how I started out. I began in film and didn't think I would take up photography. I was making documentary films, generally

Fig. 198 (*facing*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Crimean Snobbery*, 1982. Sepia-toned gelatin silver print, 18 x 13 cm. Collection of the artist.

films commissioned by the plant I was working at, and all of a sudden it turned out that I like photography. I took a picture that I liked and felt immediately that there could be a breakthrough.

AE: What was this photograph of?

BM: A woman smoking a cigarette, which, at the time, was not an acceptable image. She was very pretty, but she had a cigarette. This immediately stood out.

There are many ways to talk about why I took up photography, why I became an artist. Art was considered a prestigious pursuit. Any sort of creative activity was, from my point of view, prestigious. Our heroes were not bankers but Vladimir Vysotsky and such. Serious engineers were not heroes, and money wasn't important because there wasn't any. Society was in search of a hero, someone in a prestigious profession. And that prestige lay in the creative arts. For this reason many engineers became artists. All of the photographers of my generation were graduates of engineering schools.

AE: Can you briefly tell me about your education?

BM: I began at a military academy but didn't last there. I wasn't fully prepared for the discipline. First, my collar was always off to the side, not in the center. I'm not sure if this was the thing that affected me, but it was definitely one of the things. Second, I could not sleep at night because there were ninety people in the barracks. Instead, I fell asleep in class. I found it difficult to adjust—too spoiled.

Yet I felt something in the air—something important—and soon I began to make films. Being an engineer was boring. After I started working at the plant, I went to the administration to ask for an opportunity to do something different. They said, "Okay, make a film about the plant. Here's all the equipment you need." They provided me with everything I needed right away. So I made a film about the plant. Subsequently, they threw me out because of various political games. I was accused of being a pornographer because I started taking pictures of women.

AE: How were the photographs discovered at the plant?

BM: In the darkroom. It was a setup. Someone walked into the darkroom, attached a condom to one of my photographs, and said, "You see, he is producing pornography" and some such nonsense. "He is guilty and a scum." Then the incident was blown out of proportion. And a party member who was charged with embezzlement used this as an excuse, claiming that he was dismissed from the plant because pornography was being produced there.

AE: So he used it as a cover-up?

BM: Yes. He couldn't tell anyone he left because he was an embezzler—he wouldn't be able to find another job. He could have ignored the incident, but instead he blew it all out of proportion.

But why did I stop making movies and turn to photography? The moment seems very important to me now. I believed I had created another being. The actual woman with the cigarette was different from its image. I understand the nature of this phenomenon only now. Back then I didn't realize it. It's like bringing forth a new being—the image existed as an alternative reality. It was this reality that probably struck me, this reality that I had created—although I didn't think I created it; I believed I only reflected it. Just now, quite accidentally, after you asked the question, I thought that all along I was creating something and not just reflecting it.

AE: You saw this woman in the photograph, this new creation or being, and she looked like something else, but what did she resemble—a still from an Italian film or something else you had seen?

BM: No, there was just something in the air, some sort of alternative truth. There was one truth about a woman: she is beautiful, she works, she is good, she bears children, etc. Yet there was another truth: this woman—a beautiful girl—can be free, she can smoke. And that's her business and not anyone else's. This difference brought forth a new being. But the idea was in the air, it was very concentrated, and it wasn't specifically mine. It was an expression of the time.

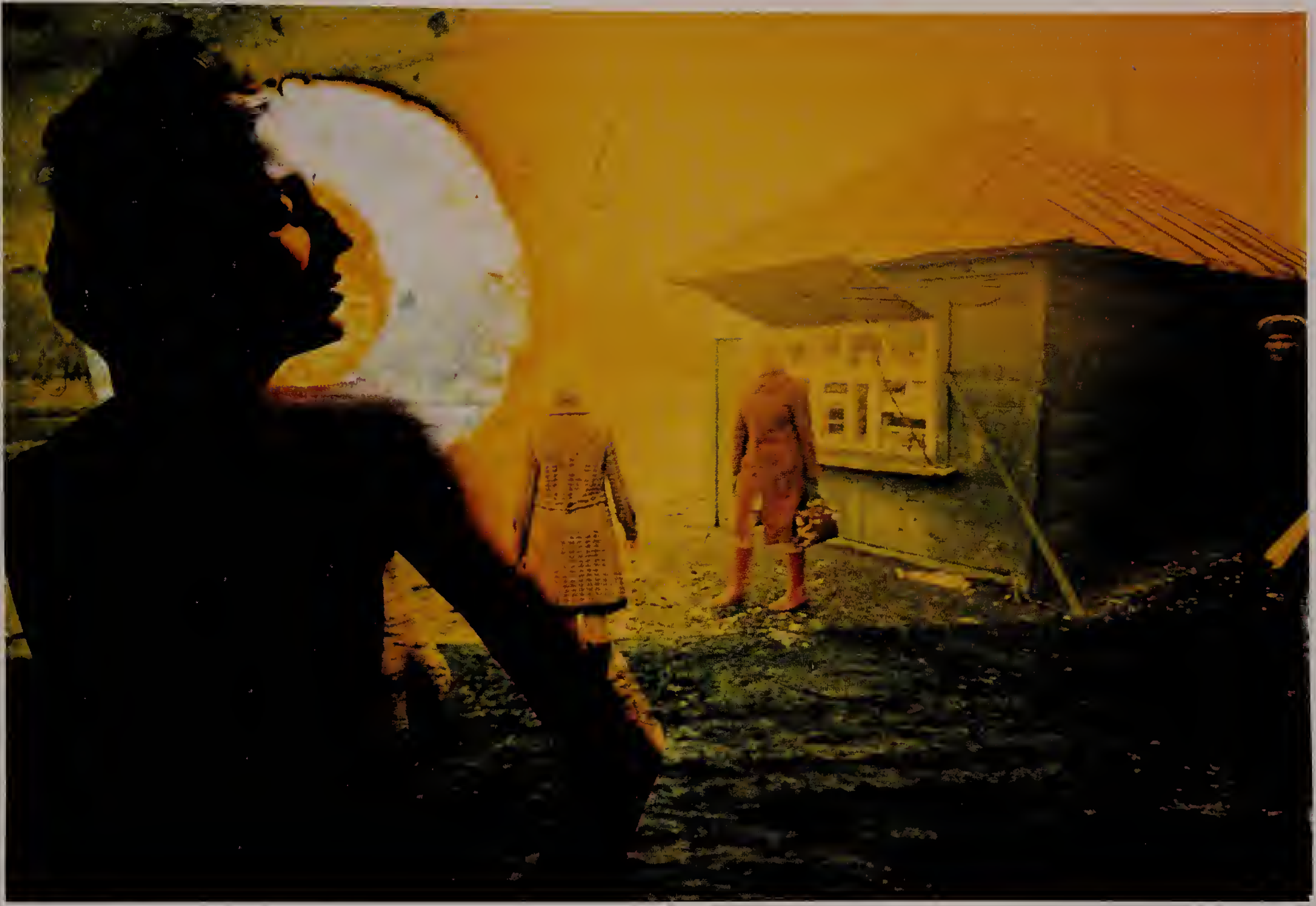


Fig. 199. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Superimposition*, undated. Type-C print, 30.4 x 44.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16059.

AE: But wasn't this new image still based on something preexisting?

BM: There was some sort of alternative knowledge about human life in society, but it wasn't widely expressed. When I was thrown out of the plant, I was told an interesting thing. I showed my photographs to the administration and asked why I was being thrown out: "This is a naked woman who could be my sister or my girlfriend. Look at the pictures from a magazine that we get at the plant, and look at mine. I was trying to do something similar." They replied, "Sure, you are allowed to look at pictures in a magazine, but nobody has given you permission to take photographs." There was a clear distinction between an existing image and its reproduction. For a photographer, the mere possibility of reproducing an image was at that time a goal and perhaps an achievement.

AE: So you were engaged in creating a new visual language that did not exist?

BM: It was new. The clichéd images weighed heavily upon us, they made up the background against which something new could be created. This discovery of the new piqued my interest.

AE: At that time did you feel you were, if not a dissident, at least involved in doing something different or forbidden, or were you too naive for that?

BM: It made me feel like a citizen. Before, I didn't think I could have a voice. Like everyone else, I just tried to survive and come up for air. But here, all of a sudden, I was able to say something. Something became possible, and this feeling of possibility incited me to continue.

After my first images of women I accidentally came upon a different photographic method—layering, superimposing two pictures. I didn't follow anyone's example and wasn't aware of this method—I just put two negatives together (figs. 199–202). Usually people who are trained in photography treat their negatives

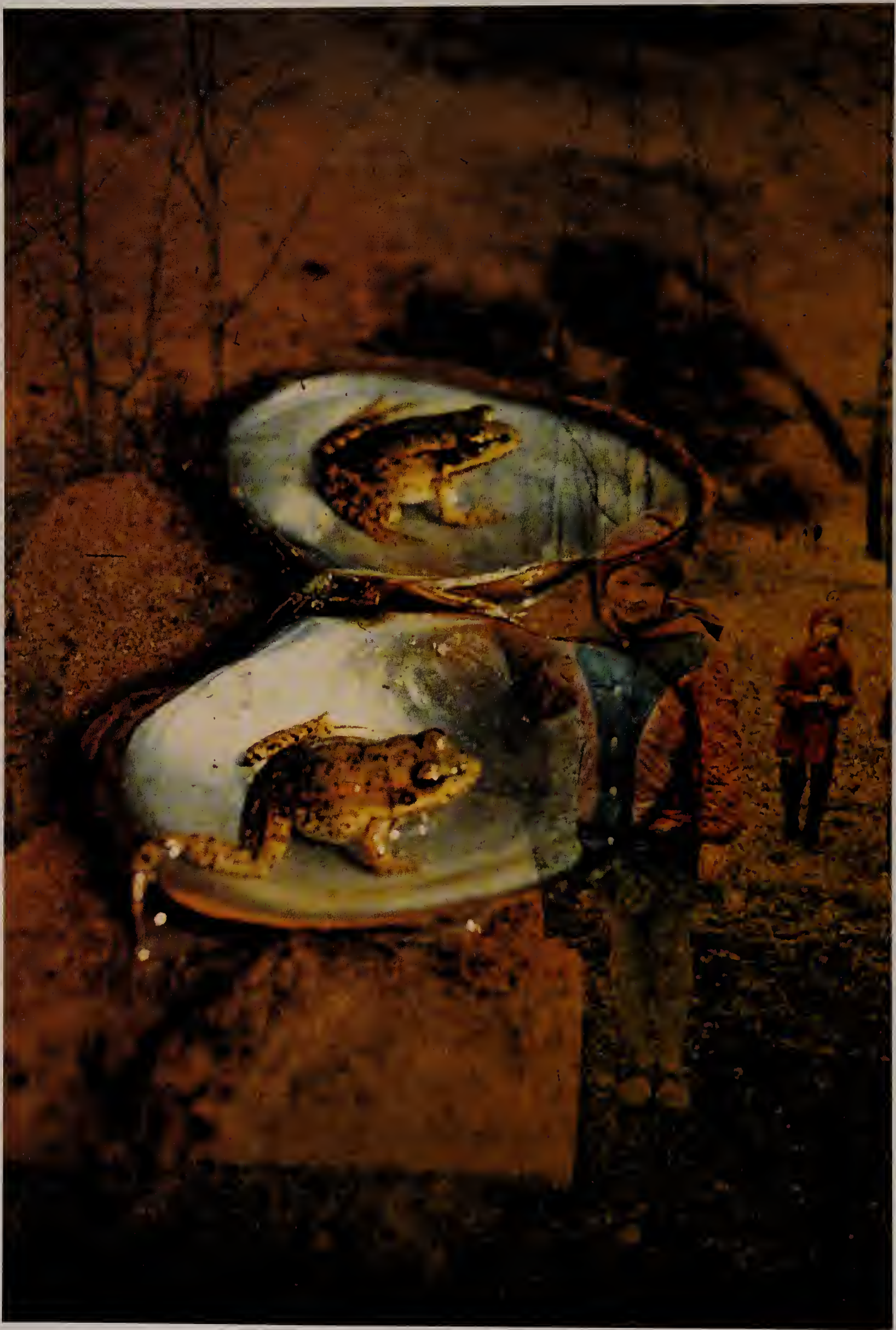


Fig. 200. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Superimposition*, undated.
Type-C print, 44.6 x 30.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16058.

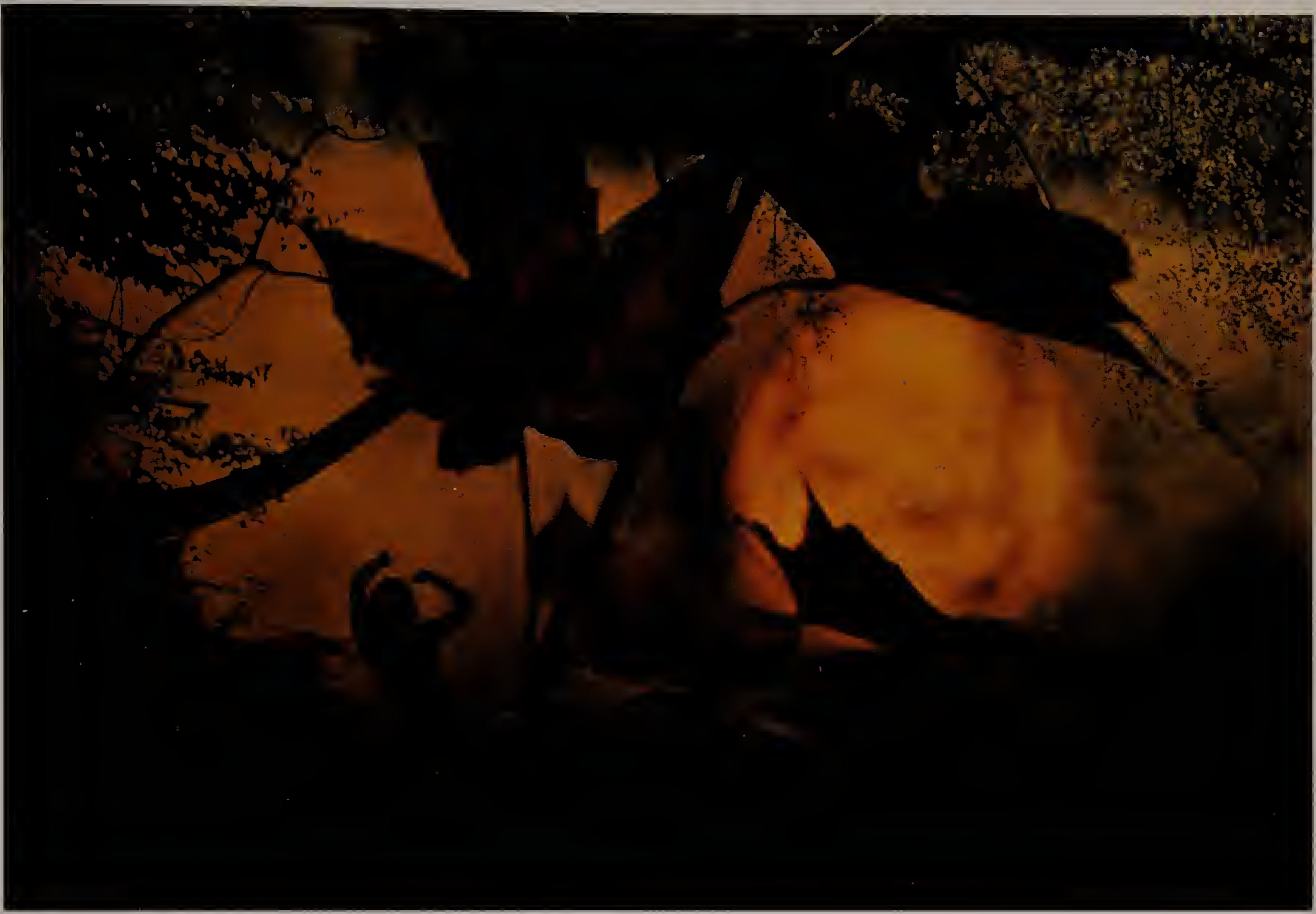


Fig. 201. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Superimposition*, undated. Type-C print, 30.4 x 44.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16061.

with great care. But I came from a different background and I didn't take such care, so accidentally I did something that would be taboo for a professional photographer. I started tossing negatives and sliding them against one another. This accident resulted in some images that worked for me, and I realized I was onto something with these superimpositions. This realization gave me more courage. Besides creating a new image, I also created a technique that had not existed before. Now this method doesn't work anymore—nobody wants to exhibit or publish these superimpositions. Sometimes I still like to show them in the context of my biography. But the work was important at the time. Alexander Rappaport once said that "art reflects *political* situations."[1] The method of superimposition did reflect a political situation: it represented the coexistence of two realities. That is, two things coexisted within one frame. Dualism and coexistence. By the way, coexistence was Nikita Khrushchev's principle: the coexistence of two systems—capitalist and socialist.

AE: Did you think about it at the time?

BM: No. It was aesthetically important for me to bring the opposites together, to layer disparate things in one frame. It allowed me to play with and explore the meaning of juxtapositions.

AE: I want to be clear about what kinds of images were superimposed.

BM: First, I superimposed negatives—for example, a picture taken on a street and a tree. The tree appears to be layered over someone's face, creating a new meaning. Or railroad tracks are superimposed on a face. In principle, this was the same idea as cinematic montage, but nobody has talked about it in these terms. Artists like Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin have done similar things in their photographic series that are like slide shows. But aesthetically their basis is a discrete frame. In my case, the basis was the space between the frames. The unexpected superimposition of the frames was the new aesthetic principle.

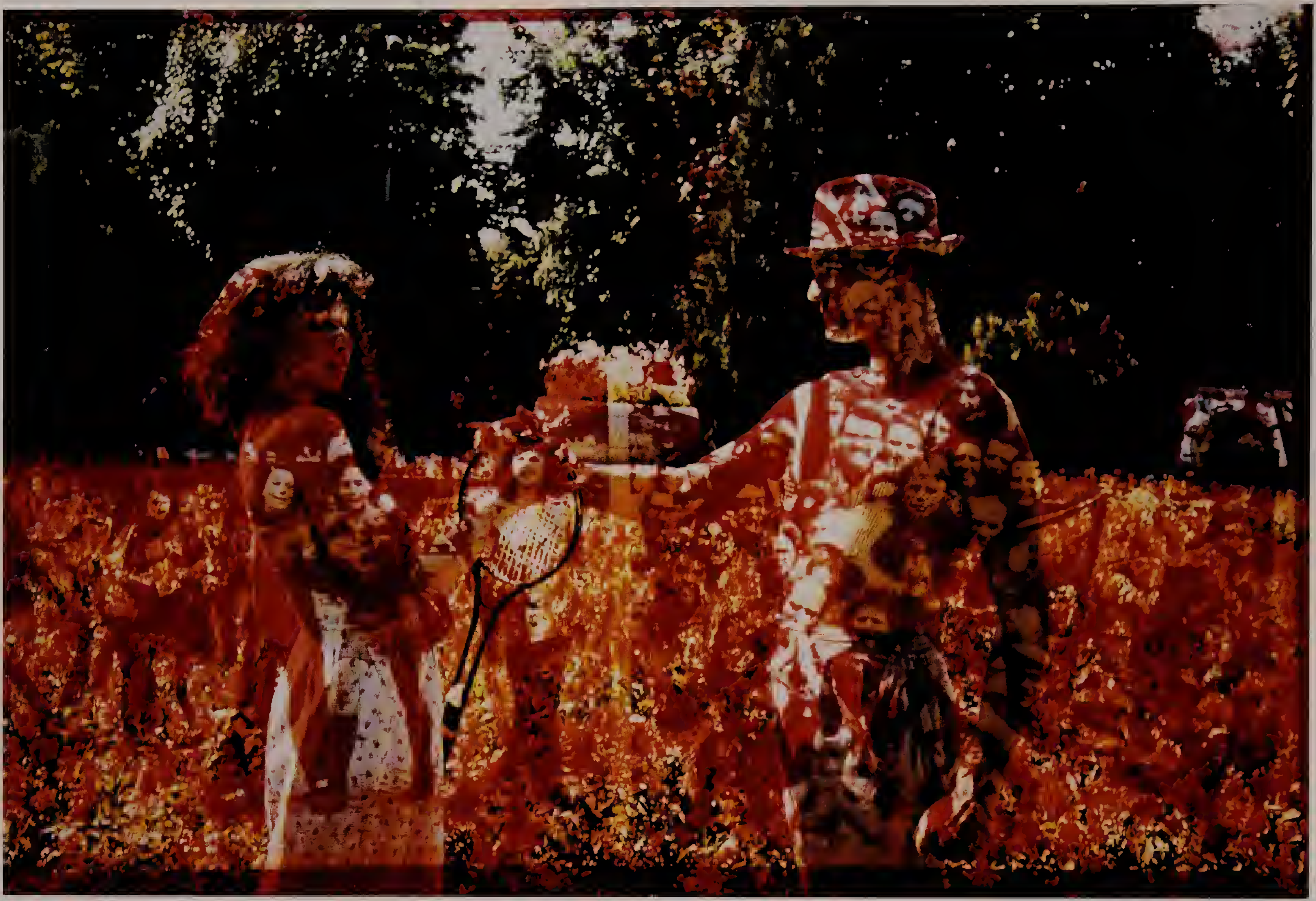


Fig. 202. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Superimposition*, undated. Type-C print, 30.4 x 44.6 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16063.

AE: In other words, "reading between the lines"?

BM: Yes, between the frames. The unexpected, found meaning was valuable. Many artists have tried similar techniques, but only remnants are now left, none really associated with a particular artist's name. That's why, on the one hand, I would like to lay claim to this method and revive it again but, on the other hand, I see its time has passed and I can no longer make it relevant. But interpreting it in relation to cinematic montage seems to be quite interesting.

AE: I remember that in some superimpositions text was layered over images.

BM: After I worked with unexpected superimpositions for a while, I realized it was interesting to layer images over something white or transparent. This was usually a woman's body. A woman was superimposed on any event in the world: events and a nude. Thus events were seen through an individual, intimate viewpoint. People easily related to this method because a woman's body was a forbidden, desirable image. Superimposing it over the social created a new meaning that could be varied. For example, if a woman was beautiful, there was one reaction. If she was unattractive or overweight, there would be a different reaction.

These sequences were not pre-calculated but visually exuberant. I arranged images in sets and presented slide shows, which attracted large audiences. At Moscow State University, there were eight hundred people in the audience. They all got up and applauded. It was like a rock opera accompanied by music. I felt like a hero. As with everything beautiful, it later turned into kitsch and now exists as a memory.

AE: Indeed, at that time rock operas were very popular.

BM: That was the time of Pink Floyd. Their music, which I used, seemed to speak of the end of beauty; of our inability to hold on to it, to catch it; of its decay, at least for me. These slide-show series illustrated the idea. They were titled *Aesthetic*, *Schizoid*, and *Beautiful*. In the last version I superimposed text over images when I felt that texts were also meaningful.

AE: What kinds of texts were they?

BM: They were found texts. For example, a child's school notebook with a "D" or a "C." Once I photographed my girlfriend's diary. I was one of the boys or men she had described. I was the sixteenth, and after me thirty more followed. The photographed text was superimposed over images of some objects. At times I used Evgeny Evtushenko's texts. Only found text. I myself didn't write or arrange them. At that time I felt that every event has its opposite and every object can find its response.

AE: More recently, did you try to present these slide shows again?

BM: I showed them for a long time, the last time in the United States but without music.[2] They used to be effective with music. People don't know how to react anymore. The codes are getting lost. Why a woman, why superimposition? It seems kitschy now.

This work was about photography as art, as following in the footsteps of surrealism, expressionism, etc. At that time it was the thing to do. But eventually I felt that photography that plays with painterly codes is only a game. The reality, the actual reality out of which these pictures were made, is the most important thing I had to search for.

AE: In terms of art, were you looking at anything, or were you influenced by poetry or music?

BM: No. Only photography. I liked many things, but for me it had to be photographic. I liked some music and poetry, but I never illustrated it or made attempts to do so. It didn't inspire me. I could use it only as an accompaniment.

AE: What could you see in terms of photography then besides illustrated magazines?

BM: Among things Soviet, there was a set of permitted subjects. A bearded old man: he has no social concerns; time is his only concern. A boy who has a future—he is a bit freckled but beautiful. A modest woman standing next to a birch tree—she is very gentle, not aggressive, not pushy, not even energetic. A working man, a party boss, etc. Everything was very clichéd. This was one aspect. The second aspect involved Czech photography. That was the extent of what we saw—Czech and Polish photography. There were beautiful nude women and historical things related to portraiture and search for new forms.

AE: So modernism was seeping through?

BM: This was before the Czech Spring. Then this shut down, too. Also, there were Lithuania and Estonia. They were allowed to photograph nudes, which we were completely forbidden to do. There was never a nude at either photo or art exhibitions. Lithuanians and Estonians were allowed to publish and to exhibit. In Ukraine, officials accepted from us photographs of nudes for exhibiting abroad but not for shows inside the country.

A certain organization acted as a broker, through which my friend sold a photograph of a nude woman to Henry Kissinger. My friend's name was Dobrovolsky, and the photograph was from a series called *The Bathhouse*. Kissinger got it at some exhibition abroad, but this photograph was never shown in the Soviet Union.

AE: In other words, it was known that people were photographing nudes, but they were not permitted to exhibit them.

BM: There was no enforcement; photographers no longer went to prison for such an offense like before. I found a declassified legal file of a case in Kharkov where people were sentenced to prison for taking pictures of models in underwear. The models weren't wearing bras, and the photographers were charged with pornography. This was before the 1960s. After the 1960s, nude photography was neither encouraged nor outlawed.

AE: From that time on, two elements have appeared in your work. One is the idea of the found, the accidental. The second is the naked body—not only the female nude but also the ugly body, the terrible body.

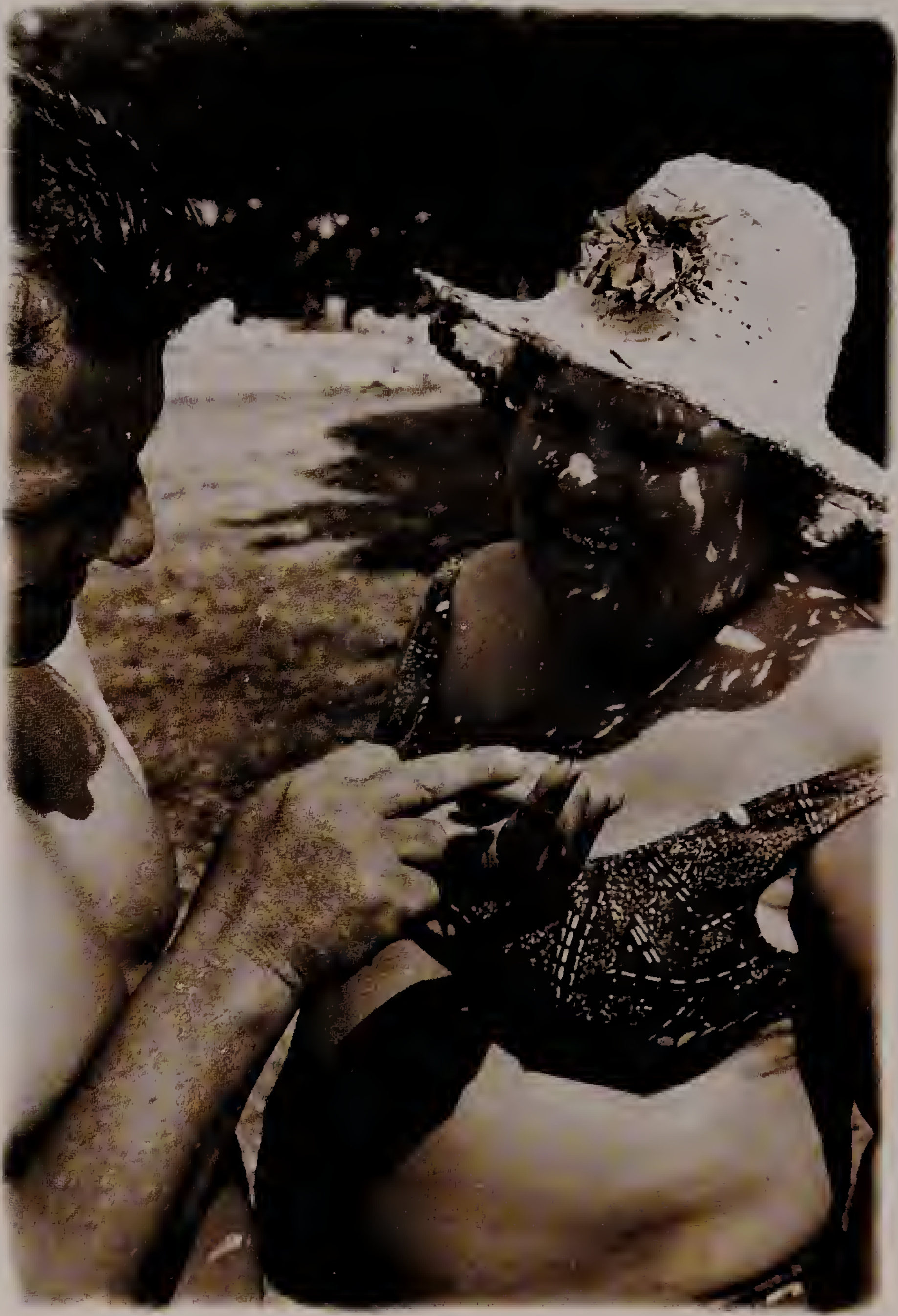


Fig. 203. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Berdyansk Beach*, 1981. Toned gelatin silver print, 41 x 30 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12975.

BM: I felt it was important to reveal the ugly body: a normal body, not one where a person looks like a beautiful mannequin. This human element was completely unknown at that time.

AE: So there was nothing but the ideal?

BM: Mine was a struggle with the ideal. Well, not a struggle with, but a challenge to the declared ideal.

AE: This includes the photographs on the beach at Berdyansk?

BM: The beach photographs became part of an effort to challenge the ideal (figs. 203 and 204). We were under ideological pressure to discover who we were. I realized that the average anthropological type was found on the beach. Anthropologically speaking, the human body had changed. The hero had become fat, obese. He took vacations. He got naked and ceased being merely Soviet, or a social being. This "disrobing" of the hero was my next important move.

The first move was to produce something anti-Soviet, dissident. The challenge was to make an image that would not be openly anti-Soviet but only hint at anti-Sovietness. My *Red* series is an example (figs. 205 and 206). Instead of being openly critical—which could land you in jail—one had to find a subtle way to photograph subjects that were not "bad" but actually beautiful. It was the domestic, peasant version of sots

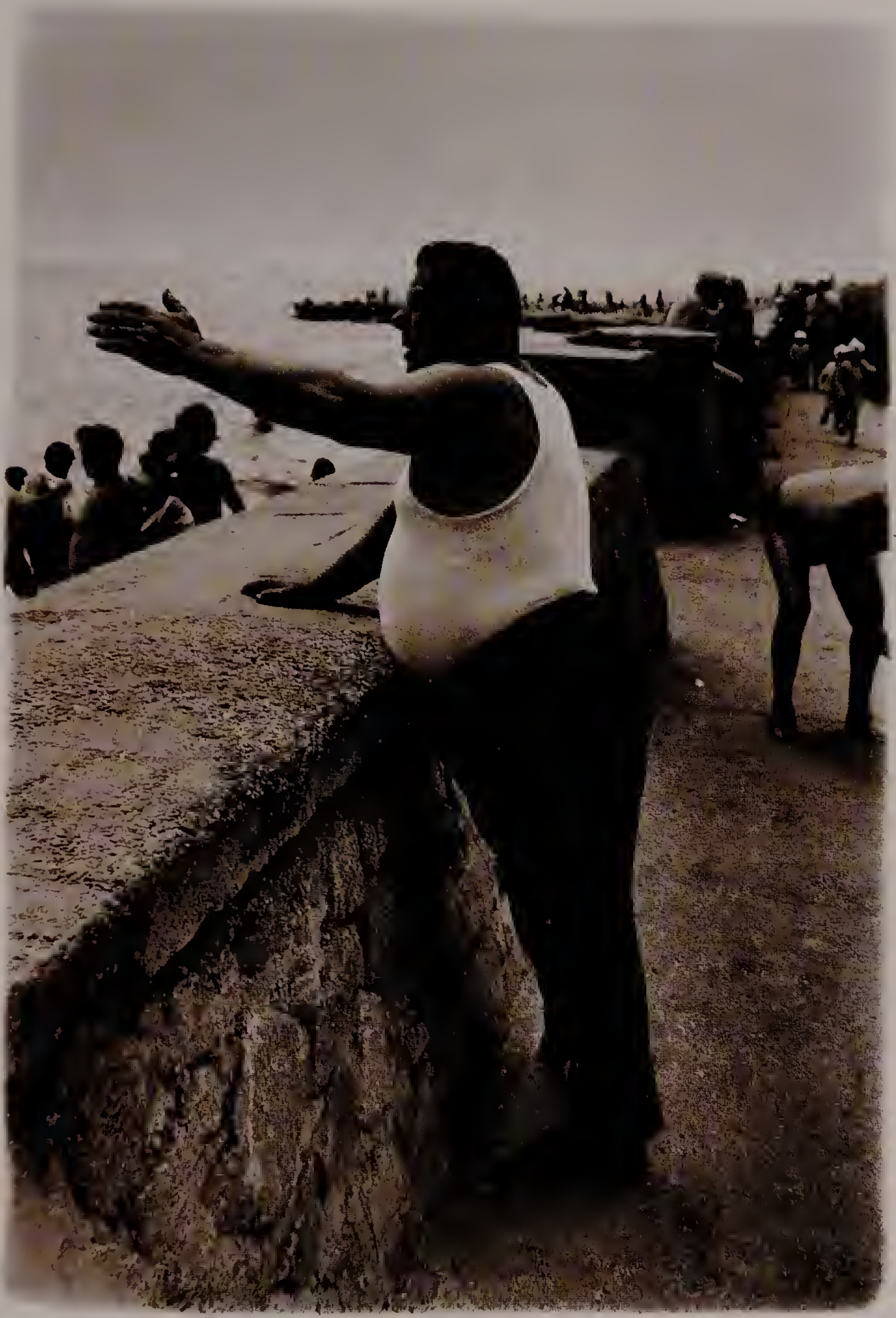


Fig. 204. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Berdyansk Beach*, 1981.
Toned gelatin silver print, 41 x 30 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12977.

art. If Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, living abroad, were able to make sots art explicitly—that is, link Lenin or Stalin with a nude, or something else that actively subverted the image of Lenin or Stalin—those of us who remained had to resort to using irony or, as I call it, "spreading it thick": if it's beautiful, make it even more beautiful, and then it will look funny. This is the case with my hand-colored photographs. We created irony within the limits of the officially sanctioned; it was clear that such work could not be exhibited, but there were no grounds to prosecute a photographer, either.

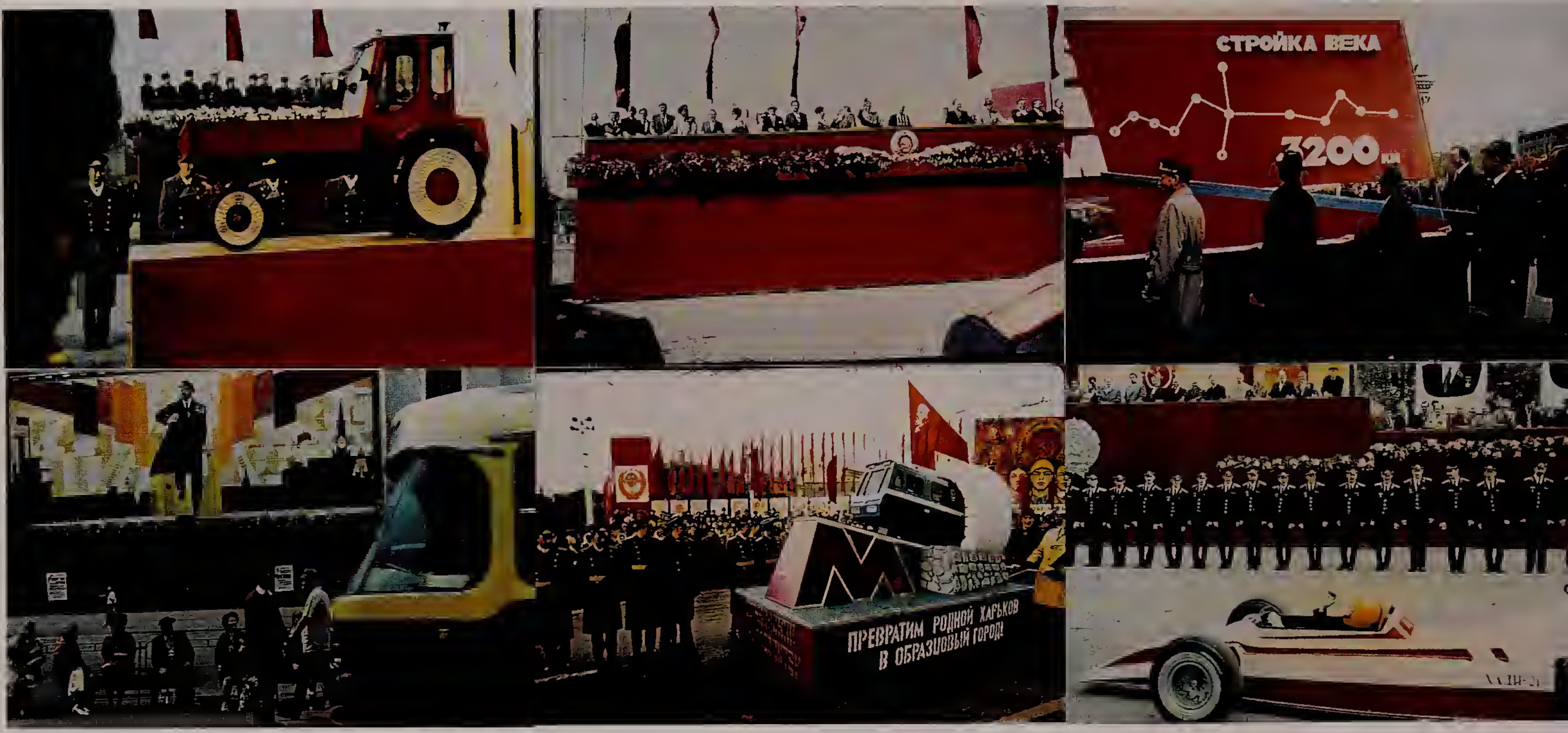
AE: So the authorities could not really articulate why this work could not be exhibited?

BM: Yes, they couldn't understand and prosecute me, because I would immediately explain, "Just look, this is beautiful, really beautiful . . . " The next generation of artists, after perestroika, returned to sots art, but I stopped working with Soviet themes back in 1981 because I didn't think it was interesting any longer.

AE: Were the photographs found, or did you take them yourself?

BM: These were my photographs. I used found photographs in a later series—*Luriki*—but that's a different story.

AE: So you took the photographs in the sots art series yourself?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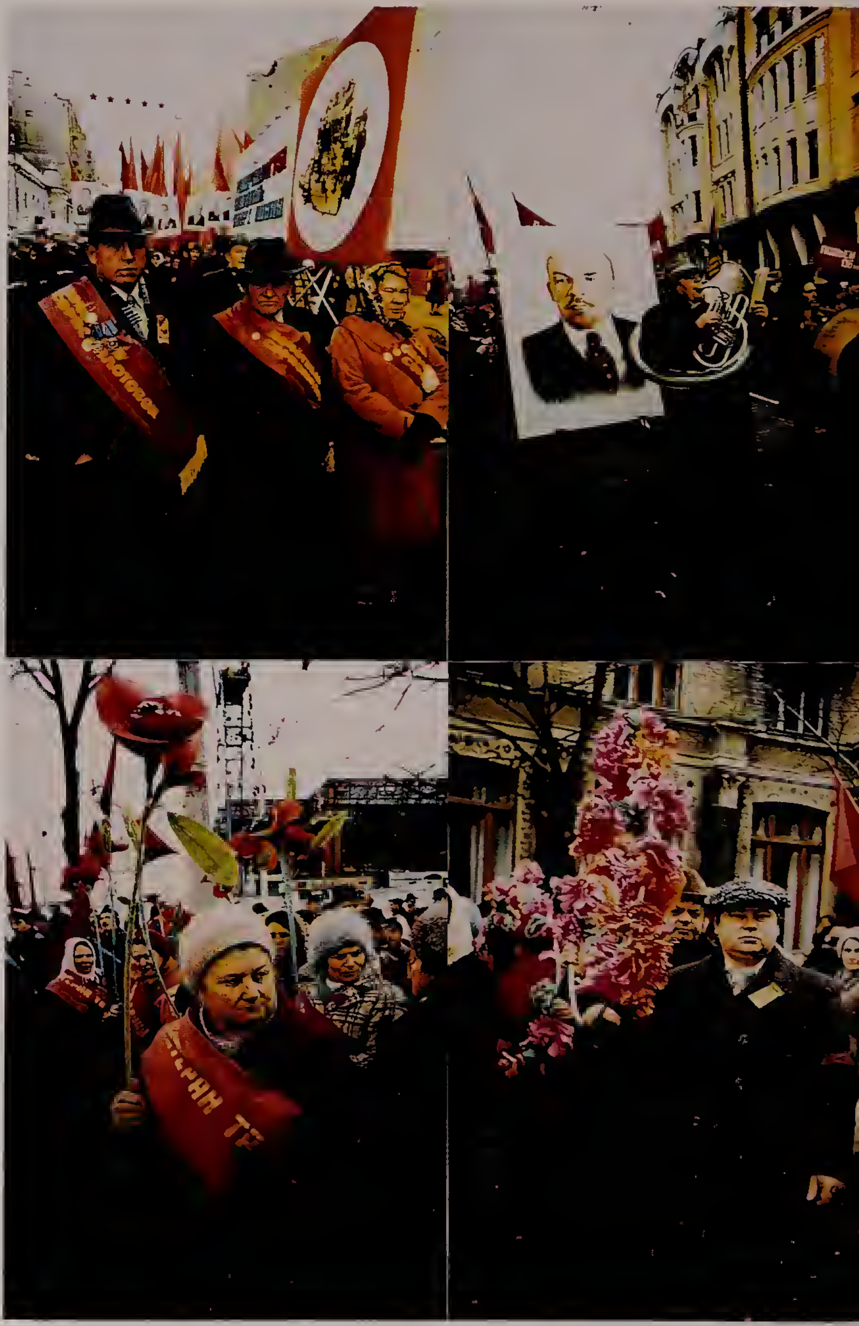


Figs. 205A–F (*above*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Red*, 1960s–1970s. Type-C prints. Dodge Collection, ZAM. A (*top left*): 20 x 30.5 cm. 12982. B (*top center*): 20.5 x 30.5 cm. 12983. C (*top right*): 20.5 x 30.5 cm. 12985. D (*bottom left*): 20.3 x 30.3 cm. 15449. E (*bottom center*): 20.3 x 30.3 cm. 15450. F (*bottom right*): 20.3 x 30.3 cm. 15452.

Fig. 206 (*right*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Red*, 1960s–1970s. Type-C prints, 30.3 x 20.3 cm each. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 12978, 15448, 15451, 15454.

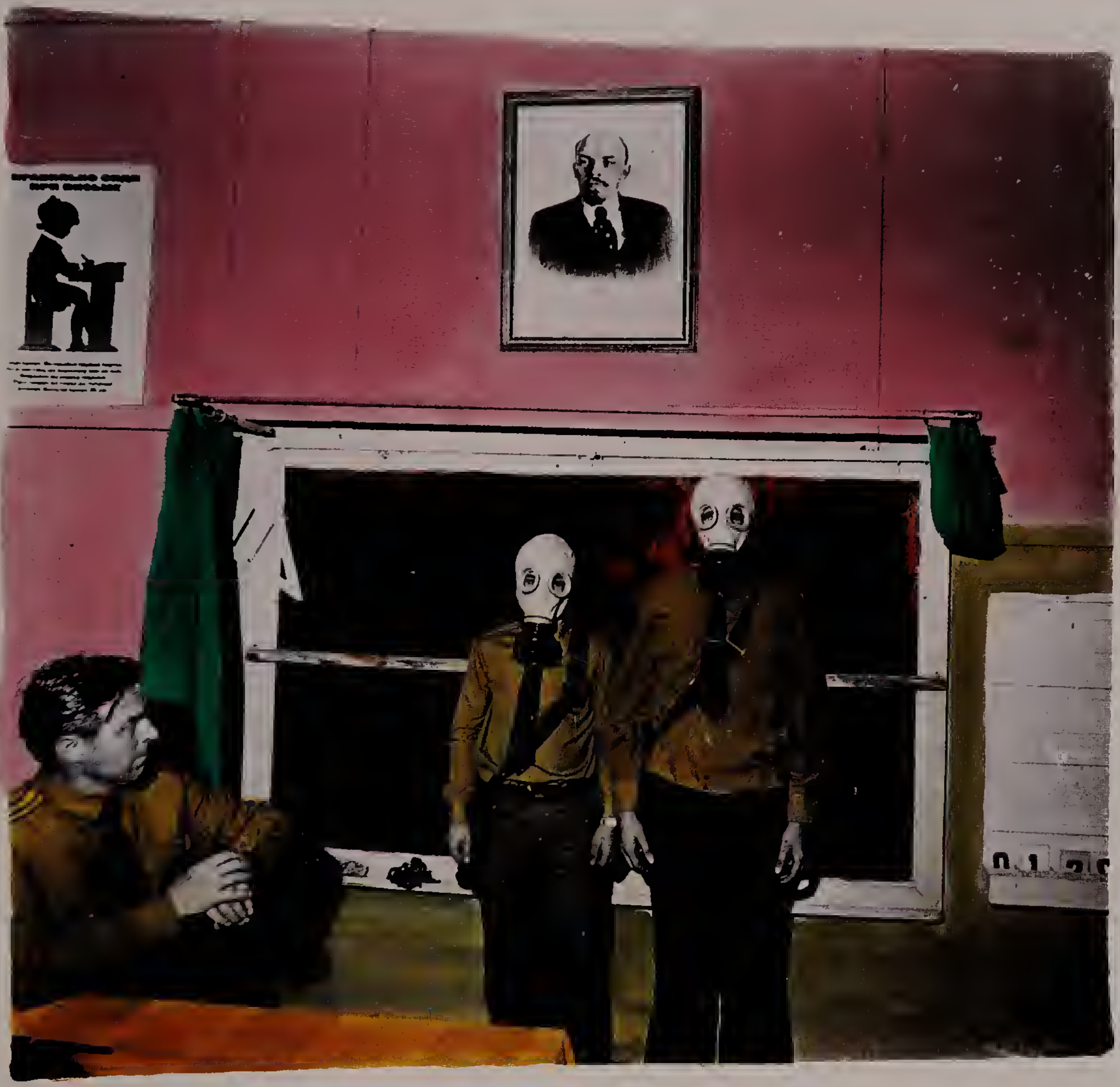


Fig. 207. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Sots Art I*, 1975–90. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dyes, 42 x 43.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 01773.

BM: I took these photographs on the street and then hand-colored them (fig. 207; fig. 42, p. 30; fig. 48, p. 41; and fig. 89, p. 105). From my point of view, they were subversive. In reality, they made people smile and appreciate the irony.

AE: How is the *Red* series related to *Luriki*, the series where you resorted to hand-coloring?

BM: *Luriki* exposed the iconography of the entire Soviet way of life (figs. 208 and 209; fig. 96, p. 112). They were like a Soviet album, a collection of surreal, ridiculous situations: people greeting each other in front of the Kremlin, for instance. *Luriki* revealed the humor of stereotypical combinations.

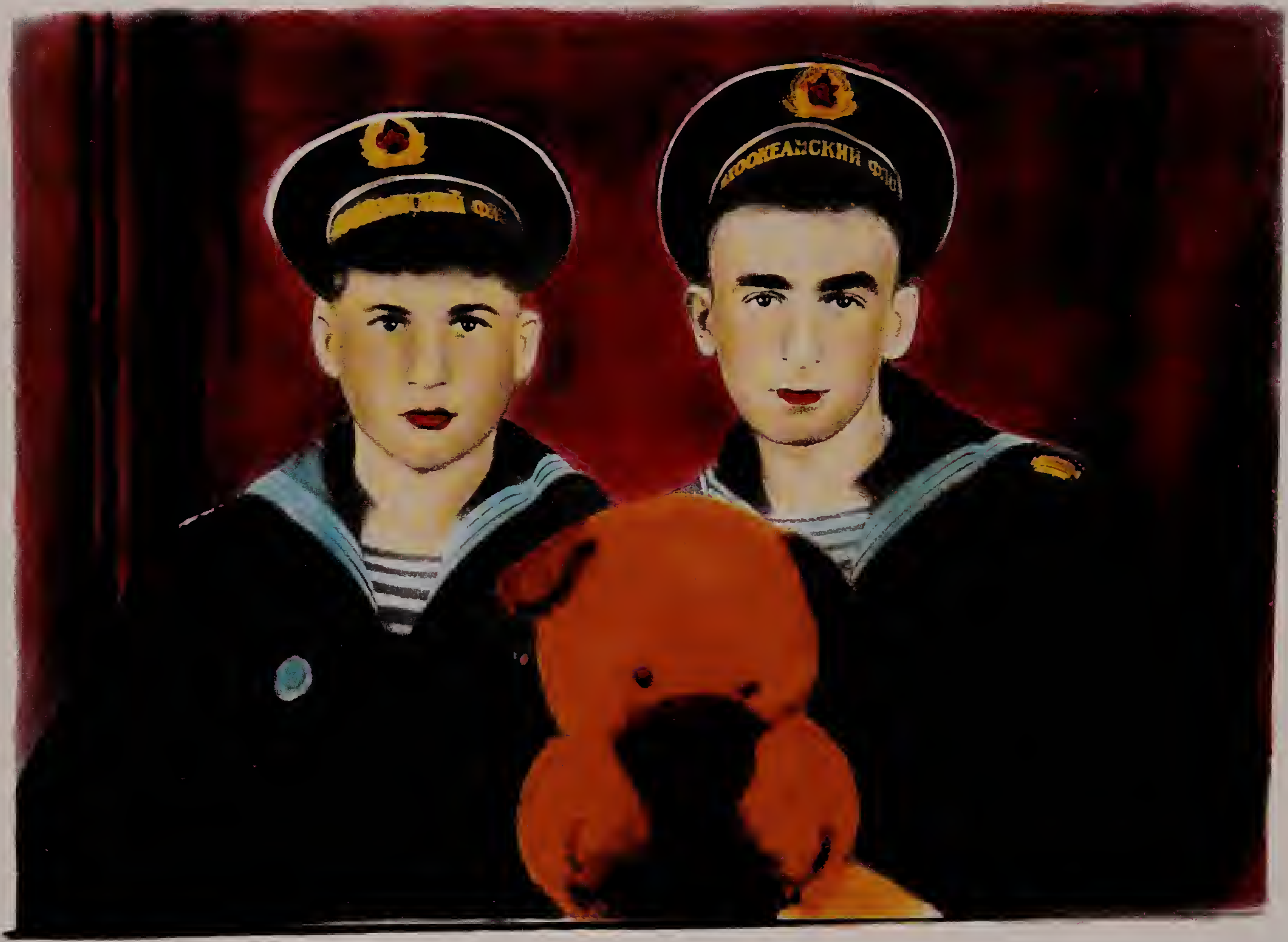
AE: What did the hand-coloring mean to you?

BM: The hand-coloring represented the backwardness of Soviet technology. In the West there was color photography, but here we had hand-colored black-and-white photographs. This was some sort of Eastern idiocy, the idiocy of lagging behind. On the other hand, there was a nostalgic love for this old technology—all the photographs sold. But the main point of *Luriki* was "making the beautiful even more beautiful" with the help of old-fashioned, lagging technology. The series was perceived as having a very Soviet quality and it really was Soviet, like a family album to be found in every home.

AE: The hand-coloring of black-and-white photographs evokes the turn of the century . . .

BM: Exactly. If you create something in the present that looks like it was made at the beginning of the century, the question arises: Where do we live now? This is another set of associations evoked by *Luriki*.

AE: Visually, Soviet family albums are still associated with poor-quality black-and-white photographs. The hand-coloring brings in the dainty, petit bourgeois element to otherwise Soviet subjects.



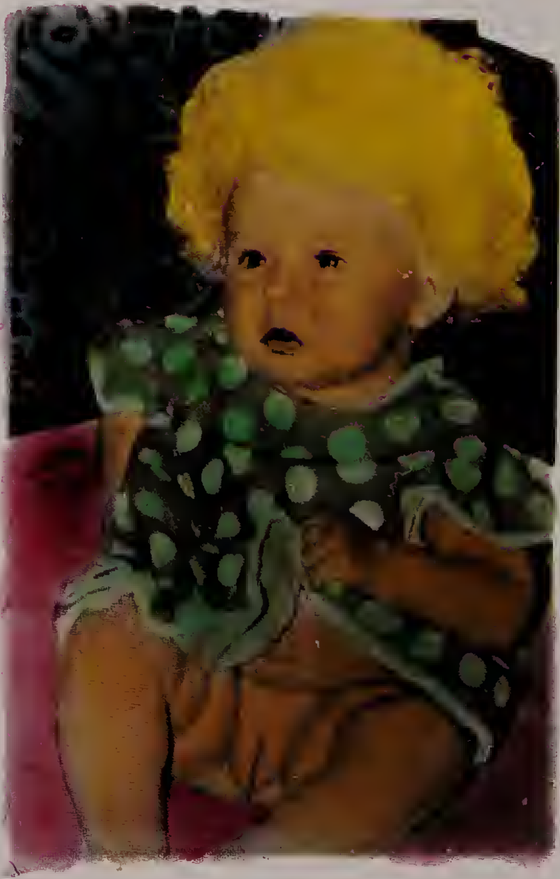


Fig. 208 (*top*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Luriki*, undated. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dyes, 49.3 x 59.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25255.

Fig. 209 (*right*). Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Luriki*, undated. Gelatin silver print hand-colored with aniline dyes, 29.7 x 23.9 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 25256.

BM: Yes, the bourgeois aspect was very much in evidence. Bourgeois in a negative sense, as a total lack of refinement.

AE: So, the Soviet as petit bourgeois . . . Did hand-coloring play a different role in sots art?

BM: It also emphasized the bourgeois element and thus subverted the Sovietness. It's a subtle, complex way of compromising Soviet reality.

AE: When I look at your hand-colored photographs, I have other associations. One of them is art classes at school. I remember assignments where we had to hand-color photographs.

BM: My work at the time, including the references to this kind of infantilism, can be seen as compromising everything Soviet. All Soviet dissident photography was a way to compromise images that were bearing down on us from television and movie screens, from everywhere.

AE: This work also reminds me of automatic drawing, doodling. There is something random about it.

BM: Actually, something else is at stake here. Art can compromise an ideology by aesthetic means. Here, "poor quality" was used as a means of subversion. Not even poor quality but rather a "statistically average" quality such as poor printing, crudeness, inadequacy, etc. Inadequacy can be read as an element of Soviet life, of the entire culture. Inadequacy and ignorance. Accentuating poor quality is a known method in contemporary art worldwide, but we were concerned with its Soviet version. At the time this distortion of quality was important to me because it signified technological inadequacy, which became an object in itself. If photography previously aspired to technical perfection, in my work, poor quality was unique and inadequacy became an object.

AE: If one were to draw a parallel with alternative art practices in the West at the time, the use of primitive photo, film, and video technologies to oppose the sleekness of Hollywood comes to mind.

BM: Well, for them it was opposing Hollywood, but for us it was disclosing a certain reality.

AE: In the early years you used documentary or found photographs, but recently your work relies on more theatrical or posed images, in such series as *Crimean Snobbery* (fig. 198, p. 260) and *I Am Not I* (fig. 210), or a combination of candid and staged situations, as in *Case History* (fig. 211). What can you say about the difference between the two approaches?

BM: The fact is that as time goes by, photography also changes. What to say about the difference between staged and non-staged photography? It has to do with the growing mistrust in the documentary genre, which had ceased to represent the vision of an individual photographer, "an auteur." This mistrust was one of my major concerns. A different issue was at play in the *I Am Not I* series. Here, my concern with the documentary did not matter so much. As always, I was trying to grasp the time, to represent zeitgeist. When I began working on the series, all I wanted to do was a kind of "subjective expressionism." When I started playing with my own image—imagining I could be this or that—I realized that putting my real self forth could be more interesting than creating some subjective expressionist things. For me, this "I" represented a hierarchy of the era, when I was joining the ranks of heroes, or becoming an antihero. If in the Soviet era we knew who the heroes were—Aleksei Meresyev, etc.—now the very idea of a hero was undermined.[3] At the same time, the transition to capitalism was expected to bring forth a new hero. And this hero was born: an antihero as a hero. I think that Oleg Kulik's dog was a representation of an antihero, and Alexander Brenner was doing something similar with images of himself as an antihero.[4] The antihero provided an important reflection of the post-Soviet era.

AE: After the Kharkov series, such as *On the Ground*, sometime in the early 1990s, you sharply changed your photographic approach.

BM: *On the Ground* still belonged to the period of social decline. Then we saw the emergence of

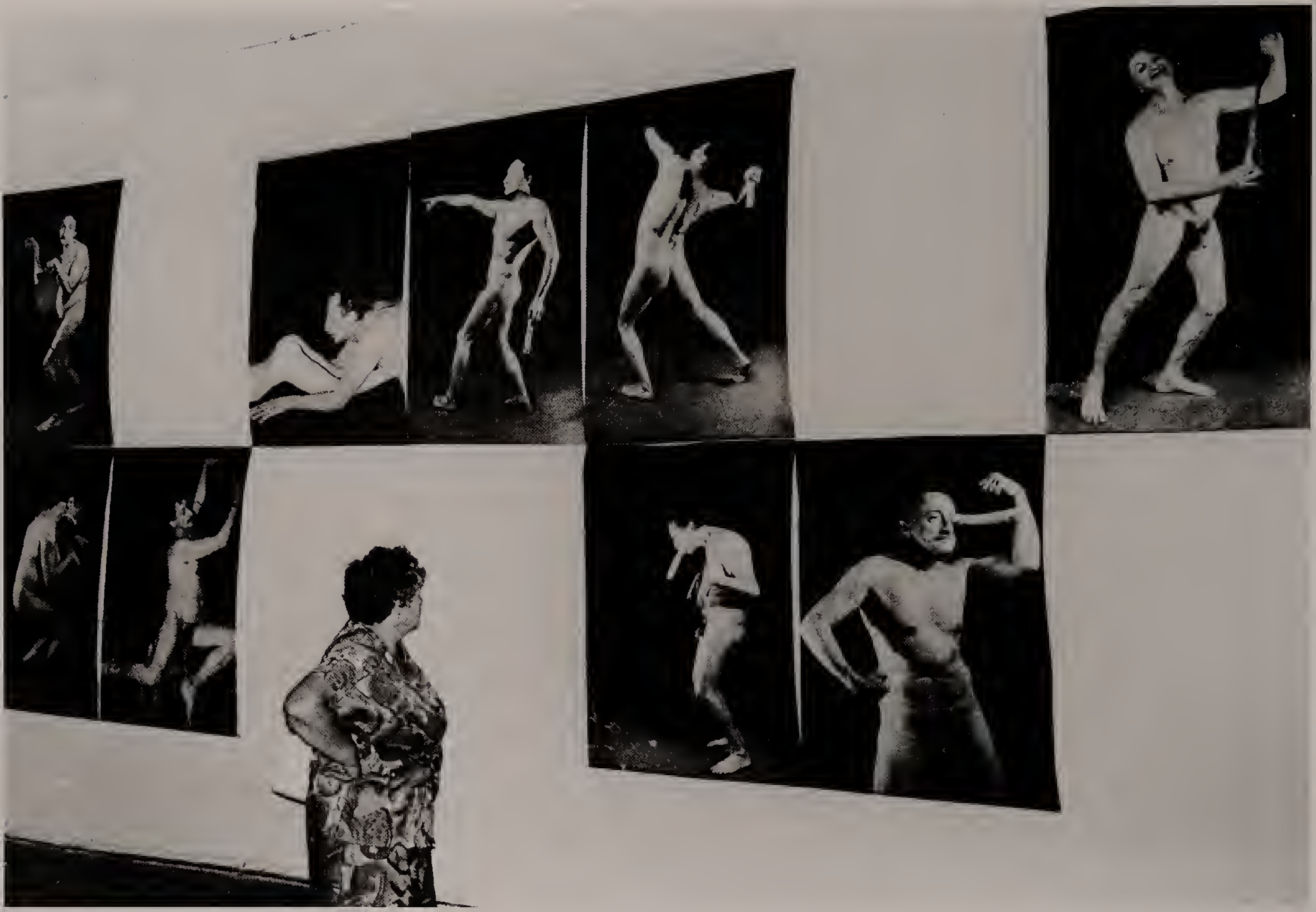


Fig. 210. Diane Neumaier, Installation view of the series *I Am Not I* (1992) by Boris Mikhailov, 1994 (Odessa, Ukraine). Gelatin silver print, 10.7 x 17.2 cm. Courtesy of Diane Neumaier.

capitalism. I felt a need to draw a connection with this new time; I had to comprehend its ideology. *I Am Not I* was an attempt to comprehend our new situation in relation to the West. This series was created between *On the Ground*, when things looked bad, and *Twilight*, when things got worse. There was a lull when the situation was not saturated enough to be expressed in an effective documentary reportage. It wasn't yet clear what was really important. At that moment it was still possible to get involved with so-called art, so the series *I Am Not I* came about.

AE: What followed *I Am Not I*?

BM: The next series—*Twilight*—was documentary. It stated, "We live as if we were at war." I always need to find a very saturated situation for a reportage because it expresses a subjective view, one's unique sensation of the world. What's important is to represent not an event but one's relationship with the world. And yet I think that this relationship should concern everyone. Although a situation is represented through a personal viewpoint, it concerns social processes that are common, shared. I react to social processes that, after reaching a level of saturation sufficient for me, can be grasped.

AE: You speak of the level of saturation, of a unique sensation of the world that allows you to grasp the significance of a particular social situation. Can you talk more about the sources and the nature of your ideas for each project?

BM: This question is very important. If you claim to have an idea and work through that idea, then the idea belongs to you, to the individual, and is not necessarily connected to the real world. However, if you just take pictures, then something comes out intuitively, impulsively, and then you organize it—that's an entirely different matter.

For instance, at first I did not have an instrument for investigating Soviet reality—I was still groping for it. In such early series as the *Family Album* or *Berdyansk Beach*, I was just feeling around for the

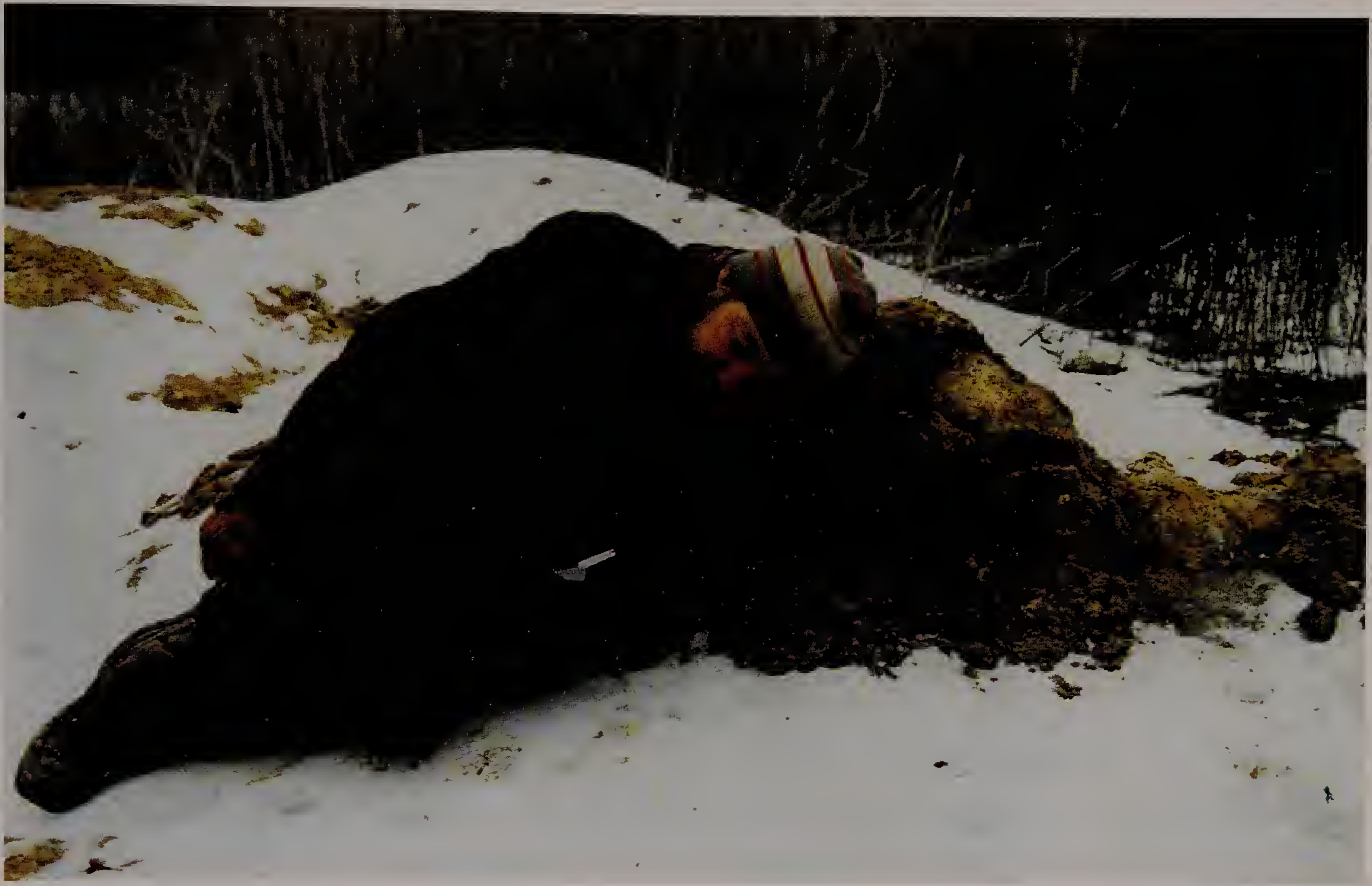


Fig. 211. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *Case History*, 1990s. Type-C print.
Photograph by Boris Mikhailov from *Case History* (Zurich and New York: Scalo Publishers, 1999).

documentary look, for reality, for truth. Once I felt it, I developed a method for investigating Soviet reality. I waited for the level of saturation but I already knew what I was waiting for; I knew what I was doing. It was no longer like finding yourself in a zoo and just clicking away. You know exactly what "it" is, and you just go out into the street and wait for "it" to turn into a critical mass. "It" was not there before, but at a certain moment you see it everywhere. For instance, the *On the Ground* series (fig. 212) began when I took a photograph that reminded me of *The Lower Depths*.[5] From then on, I saw "the lower depths" everywhere. This was right after the end of the Soviet Union—we never saw so many people lying on the ground, hitting the bottom before. Once I found "it," the whole series took less than a month to shoot. *Case History* came about in the same way—you begin to feel a certain tension, notice a new saturation, and search for an idea. Before, we didn't see the masses of such declassé people. By the late 1990s we had a social disaster and a new social class. The idea of how to represent it starts developing.

The "how to do it" idea also relates to period technologies. *Case History* utilized a new technology. In the late 1990s, film developing labs sprang up everywhere. You could just drop off your film and have it developed quickly. Snapshots, no hassles. These pictures were again of a "statistically average" quality. If in the 1970s I had to try to achieve poor or average quality, now the new technology made it available. I did not use a large-format camera or quality printing.

AE: In recent years large-format photography and oversized prints are the hottest things on the market. It seems that you purposely oppose the market trend. Why?

BM: I do go against the market. Also, my series went against the general trend to bury social issues. At the time, judging from the Venice Biennale, for instance, everything was beautiful or fun at the expense of social issues. Perhaps *Case History* played some role in the renewed interest in the social. At least the last São Paolo Biennale presented two or three projects that

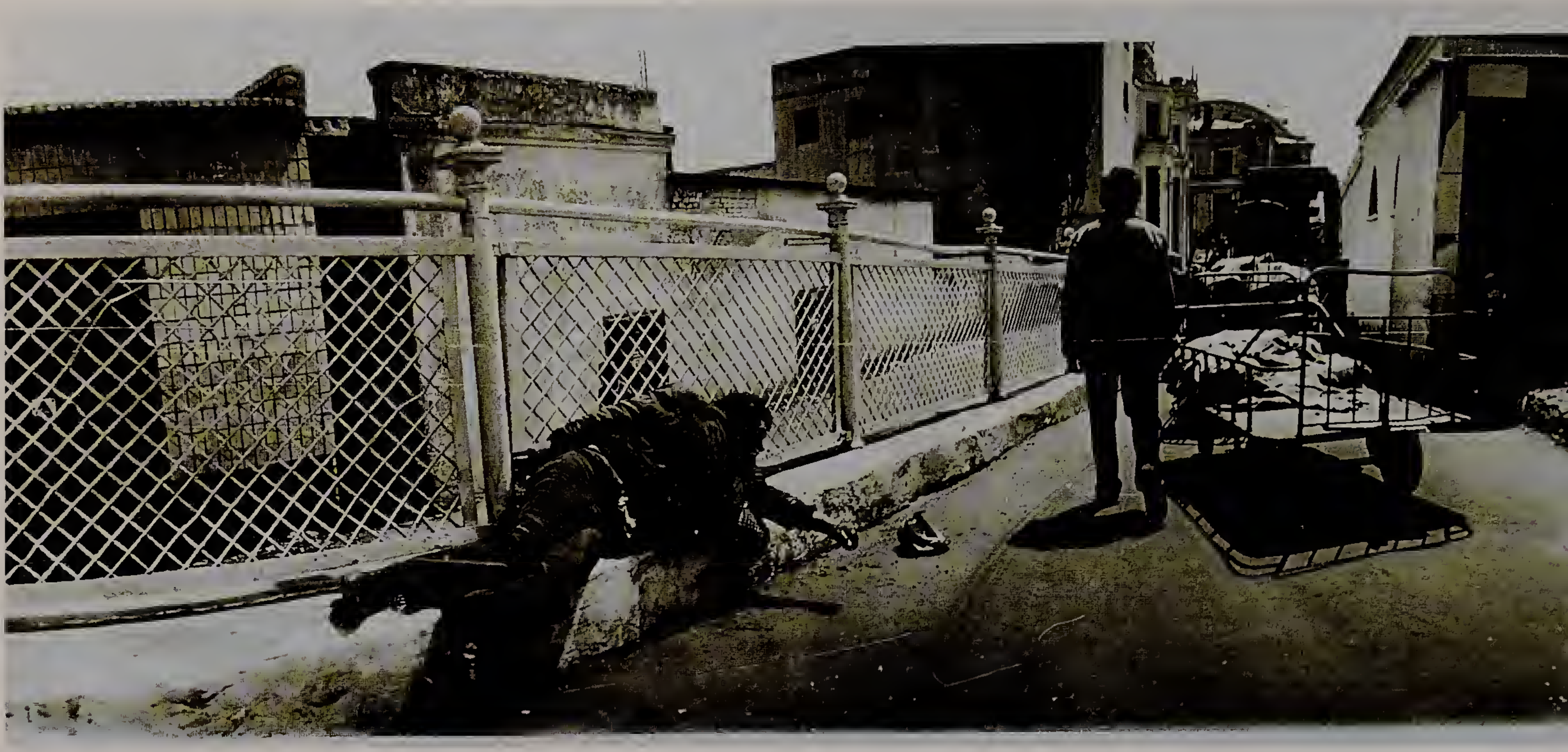


Fig. 212. Boris Mikhailov, from the series *On the Ground*, 1991. Gelatin silver print, 12 x 24 cm. Collection of the artist.

were socially engaged, such as large documentary photographs from Afghanistan. What's important, they can stand up to art, to painting. They hold their own.

AE: Do you think this culture of opposition, of going against the grain, is an effect of your personality or your social and artistic formation in the 1960s Soviet Union?

BM: I think it was formed in the 1960s. Two things mattered then: first, thinking outside of oneself, having a greater worldview. Second, thinking critically. Perhaps in the West, this culture was properly developed within journalism. I channeled it into art.

AE: One can maintain a critical position from the periphery by rejecting the market or art institutions. But then you run the danger of marginalization. It is much harder to play the game while subverting its rules in the process. It seems to me you've become adept at doing just that, whether in the former Soviet Union or in the market-driven "free" West. Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid are the only other artists I know who try to keep this ultimately dissident balance.

BM: You are right. Komar and Melamid also keep playing that same game.

AE: I want to talk a little more about your photographic process. I have an impression that photography for you is almost a physiological act, as if you have an additional sensory organ. This is not true for all photographers. For many, taking photographs is a special activity separate from their daily routine. What can you say about this?

BM: I developed this method a long time ago. I formed an opinion about the whole from chance details I stumbled upon. That's why it's important for me to always collect details, parts of the puzzle. I am trying to explore the West in this way as well, although the results are not great so far. Until I explore the space personally, discover it for myself, I cannot move on. So the camera is like a body part for me, like a set of feelers.

NOTES

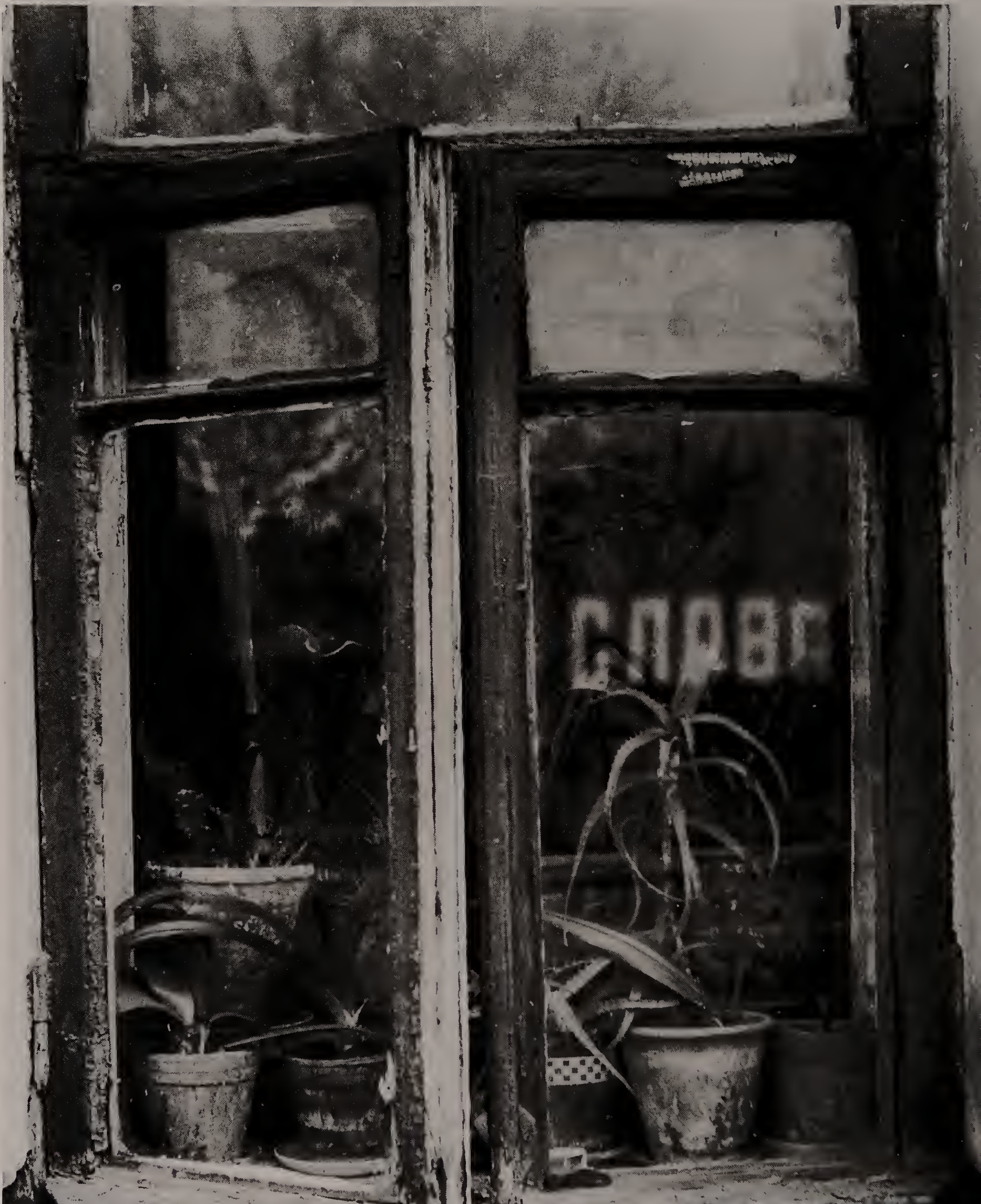
1. Alexander Rappaport, a writer and art critic prominent in Soviet dissident circles in the 1970s and 1980s.

2. The print version of the *Nalozheniia* series was exhibited in 1996 at Bunny Yager, Los Angeles, a nonprofit space run by Virginia Rutledge and Ren Waung.

3. Aleksei Meresyev, the leading character in Boris Polevoy's 1947 novel, *A Story about a Real Man* (Povest' o Nastoyaschem Cheloveke), based on A. P. Maresyev, a wartime Soviet fighter pilot who was shot down and lost both legs but with artificial legs made a triumphant return to duty.

4. Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brenner, two contemporary Russian artists who have used performance to reflect on the brutality of post-Soviet life.

5. Reference to Maxim Gorky's 1902 play, *The Lower Depths* (Na Dne).


СЛАВА

Igor Makarevich with Gerald Pirog

Unusual Perspectives/ Fantastic Possibilities

Igor Makarevich was born in the mountain village of Tripoli on the Hrami River in the Republic of Georgia in 1943.[1] In 1951 he and his family moved to Moscow, where he has lived ever since. He studied art and cinematography and graduated from the College of Cinematography in 1968. Makarevich has been a leading member of the Moscow constructivists and a member of the Collective Actions Group since 1979[2] (fig. 214). In addition to his independent work as an artist in many mediums (fig. 213), he has collaborated with his wife, Elena Elagina, on many occasions. His works are included in many of the world's important collections and museums.[3] This interview was conducted in New York City in 1998 and revised and updated in 2003.

GERALD PIROG: How do you place photography within the context of your art and life?

IGOR MAKAREVICH: The concepts of life and creativity with respect to photography are inseparable for me because photography is more fundamental for me than the concept of art per se. Photography has actually always been a part of my life.

When I came to Moscow as a child for the first time from Tbilisi, I lived in my parents' apartment where, on a windowsill, I saw a small box in which people were moving. I was so astounded that I spent long periods of time

Fig. 213 (*facing*). Igor Makarevich, Untitled, 1974. Gelatin silver print, 23.7 x 18.1 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14891.

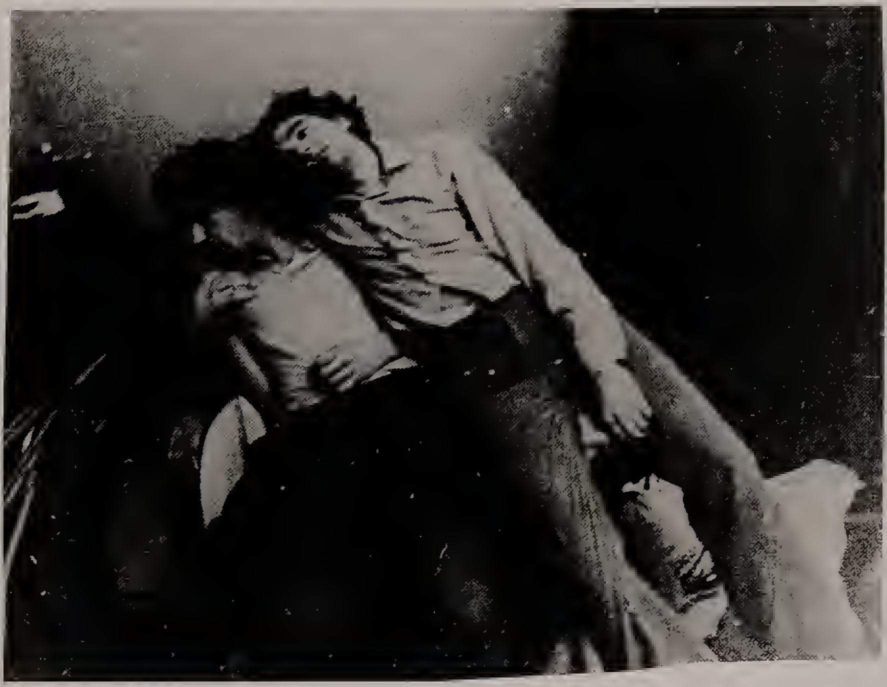


Fig. 214. Igor Makarevich, Fragment from *The Book of Continuations*, 1981. Gelatin silver print, 14.5 x 19.4 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 20046.

transfixed, sitting in front of this magic box, observing the life of these obscure living beings. Now I understand that this was a camera with a glass bottom in which all of this was simply reflected, a camera obscura. This reflection of life made an enormous impression on me. Soon after, when I was in the second grade—I was about eight or nine years old—my father gave me a German camera. I remember it had the name of a strange manufacturer, "Balda." It was a very simple camera, just a box with a primitive lens and a simple viewfinder. Nevertheless, from that moment on, my actual work with photography began.

I was haunted by photography, it was my passion. Even when I was young I called it "the photography demon" because I always tried to keep away from it like one tries to avoid a temptation. It consumed too much time, it was very expensive, and my efforts then were mainly directed toward painting and drawing, that is, the traditional forms of the visual arts. Photography would "devour" all of my time and would always attract me. This is why I struggled against it, my demonic tempter. In the end I was conquered, and this was all for the better.

There was another important factor in my life. When I was young I liked to go into abandoned buildings. There were many of them in Moscow at that time. I would find many strange objects that I would use in my still-life works. Seeing these abandoned spaces was a deeply emotional experience for me because this was a mysterious world where people used to live, and now they seemed to be flying all around like ghosts. During my visits to these old buildings I found many old photographs. There were even negatives in beautiful boxes from the last century. The gentry used to do this, and somehow they survived in storage rooms. I still have a collection of old glass plates and in 1985 my wife, Elena Elagina, and I used some of them for an exhibition in Moscow. I made large prints from the plates of portraits of women from noble families. We created a gallery of some otherworldly, mystical, secret women's society for which we created a hierarchy, and fantastic rules. We called this exhibition *A Game of Croquet*.

GP: Do you often work with Lena on your photography, or do you keep it completely separate?

IM: Sometimes, but Lena in this sense contributes a completely different context—the image as word. In photography per se we do not work together.

GP: You mentioned that Lena's work is closely tied to the word. Is yours also?

IM: Absolutely, but in a different sense. As a writer, I may be working on a narrative. Lena, as a linguist, divides words into their primary components. My sense of hearing is different. I don't hear "rabota prekrasnaia" (the work is beautiful) in the way she does. She separates the root "krasnaia" from the prefix "-pre" and separates "krasnoe" into a separate object. Hers is a more constructivist approach.

GP: Could you elaborate on your understanding of the relationship between your art and the art of the word?

IM: When you find yourself at the final stage of your artistic career, you understand that you cannot get away from the tradition out of which you came, and to which you still belong. To begin with, Russian art has always been based on the word. This is the tradition of Byzantine art. This tradition is linked to icon painting and the interpretation of the image as a visual symbol of the word. In one sense or another, this tradition existed in contrast to the Western one, where the

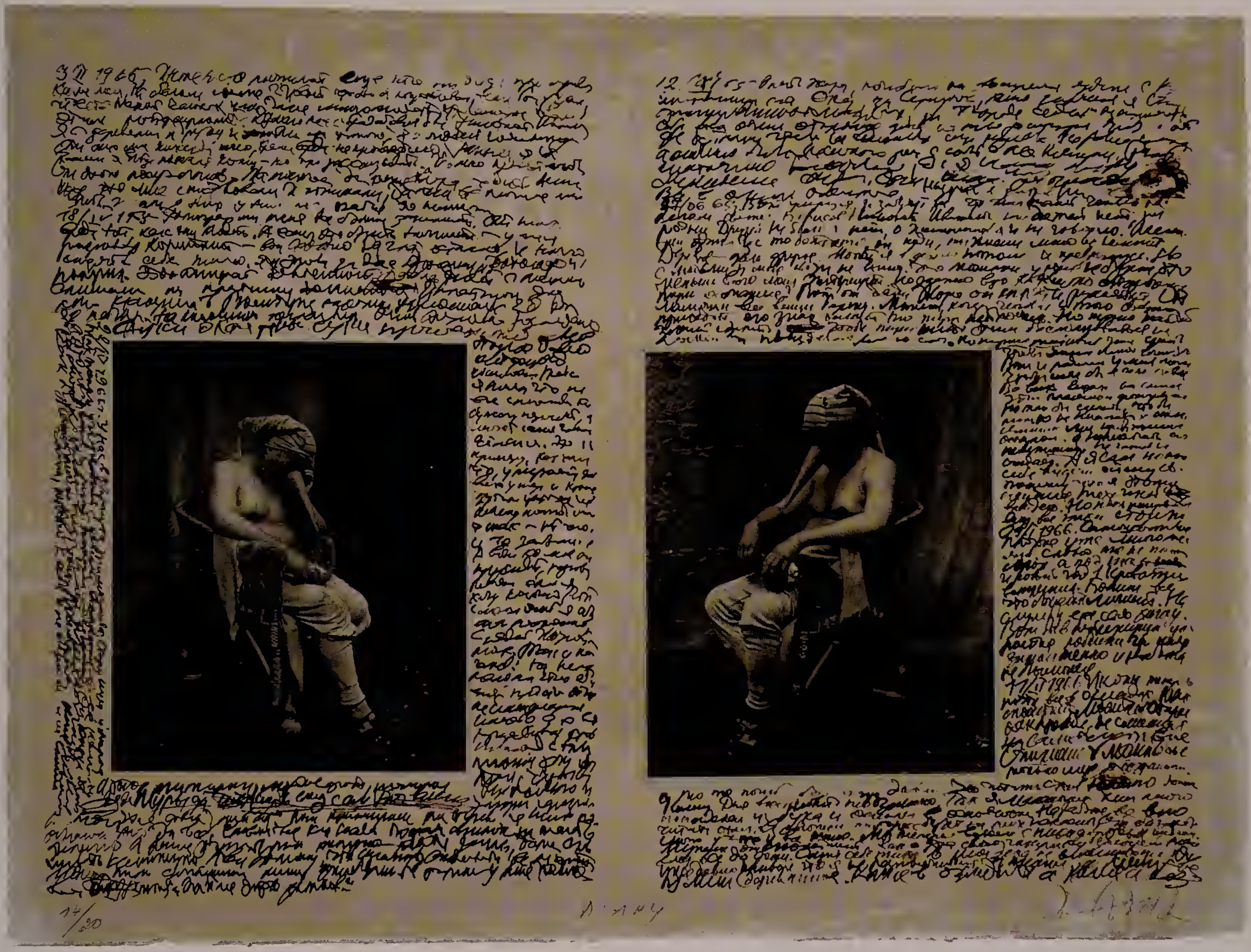


Fig. 215. Igor Makarevich, *Diary*, 1998. Silk-screen print, 56.4 x 76.9 cm. Courtesy of Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

visual was dominant, especially now. In Russian art it constantly plays a considerable role. And it is the same in my art. Like many Russian artists, I am half writer and half artist. My writing abilities, however, are absolutely undeveloped and in an embryonic state. But this embryonic state is like a seed that constantly swells up and grows and gives off visual shoots. Therefore, in the world of my imagination, surrealistic images always played an important role for me. They are still important today.

GP: Your work at Rutgers is a new series[4] (fig. 215). Is this the first time that a literary narrative is a part of your work, or did you attempt to make such projects before?

IM: In fact, it is not the first time. In the works I did with Lena, texts always played the leading role. We simply conducted archaeological work on the field of historic destruction. In the garbage heap of destroyed ideological artifacts we sought out some marginal pieces, pieces that escaped general notice, and then we developed them. Therefore, all of the installations starting with the *Fishing Exhibition*, then *Life in the Snow*,[5] are actually giant visual commentaries to a particular marginal ideological text. The text was presented in different ways. Sometimes it was literally there, sometimes one had to dig for it. In the latest work, which I started here at Rutgers, the text is obviously present. It is part of the visual image, a part of the texture, a background. It is present as the visual part of the composition. This time, although not for the first time, the text dominates. In this work, I first created a literary plan, which is in the written text, and then I transmitted it into visual images.

GP: Speaking of tradition, what connection does contemporary photography have with the avant-garde of the 1920s?

IM: In the 1920s there was a naive and mighty breakthrough that was able to open up unusual new perspectives and fantastic possibilities, which were only partially realized. Of course, half of it was only a dream. Twentieth-century art was an exotic world, a bit naive and primitive but primordial like childhood, at least in the way people remember their childhood. And it had the charm of childhood. No matter how naive it was, there is always the desire to return to this world, in order to perceive with previous clarity some ideas, some new point of view. There have been some attempts to rethink the innovations of the 1920s from today's perspective. Certainly, the entire experience of the avant-garde artists of that time is still valid, still relevant today.

GP: I'd like to discuss what meaning postmodernism has for you. Does it now have any meaning in Russia, or is it just a term that is used without it having made any deep inroads into the culture?

IM: Honestly speaking, I am a bit reticent about pronouncing this word "postmodernism" because this is in actual fact a serious concept that arose, if I'm not mistaken, in modern architecture. This term has now become so popular that "postmodernism" is now used to label anything, and in contemporary Russian art every other artist presents himself as a postmodernist. But what is it in fact? Is this just some sort of pseudo free-for-all or a conscious and mature relationship to the preceding artistic culture of the avant-garde? This is a difficult question to answer. Of course, when it comes to art, we are now living in a world in which there are no more illusions. The pathos of the early twentieth century regarding the serious transformation of not just the visual arts but of the world as a whole made the artist a creative figure, who made claims to playing the role of prophet or demiurge. We look at the major figures of the avant-garde with admiration, but also with a certain amount of irony because the pathos that moved them has evaporated and only the fundamental traces of their efforts remain. We admire them, but the changes they had hoped to bring about did not take place. What they accomplished was realized only on the level of ideas. The avant-garde changed the character of art a great deal, of course. It moved away from the narrow idea of art being the mirror of the visible world. They legitimized some areas of internal spaces and the world of mental illness as a creative form of artistic practice. And yet its pathos was originally greater than the results, which we can now observe. The pillars of the avant-garde, who for all our conscious lives were forbidden figures in Soviet Russia, now appear as attributes of a philistinism in the form of thick monographs. They are already gathering dust in hundreds of stores. We cannot look upon Chagall or Picasso as upon something fresh. I used to love all of this art insanely, especially when it was forbidden fruit. For me and for probably everyone else, modernism was a kind of upsurge, a dream that everyone had. We are now living in a more realistic world in relation to modernism, at least with respect to art. When art becomes "beaureaucraticized," when it has shrunk to the limits of its possibilities, when, just as in the case of science, it spreads out into hundreds of smaller zones, in which only a specialist or critic can orient himself, then one is tempted to refer to large areas of artistic practice as "postmodern."

Can one speak of postmodernism, if there was in fact no modernism in Russian art, an art to which I belong and from which I cannot be separated? Perhaps, more accurately, one should say that it did exist but only in an embryonic form. Although it was very powerful and heroic, it nevertheless existed only in this most embryonic form. And the most fundamental aspect of life is maturity, and the Russian avant-garde had only a youth. It was unable to enter into a mature period, as in the West, because of external circumstances. And the wise, skeptical view associated with postmodernism is possible only when you have gone through this stage of maturity. You can't be a skeptic when you are young—that's nonsense. For this reason I would be very careful in using the term "postmodernism" with respect to Russian art. We are operating in an indeterminate zone insofar as there is still no serious definition of modern Russian art. What exists are the efforts of individual artists, which have not yet flowed into a mighty common stream as is the case

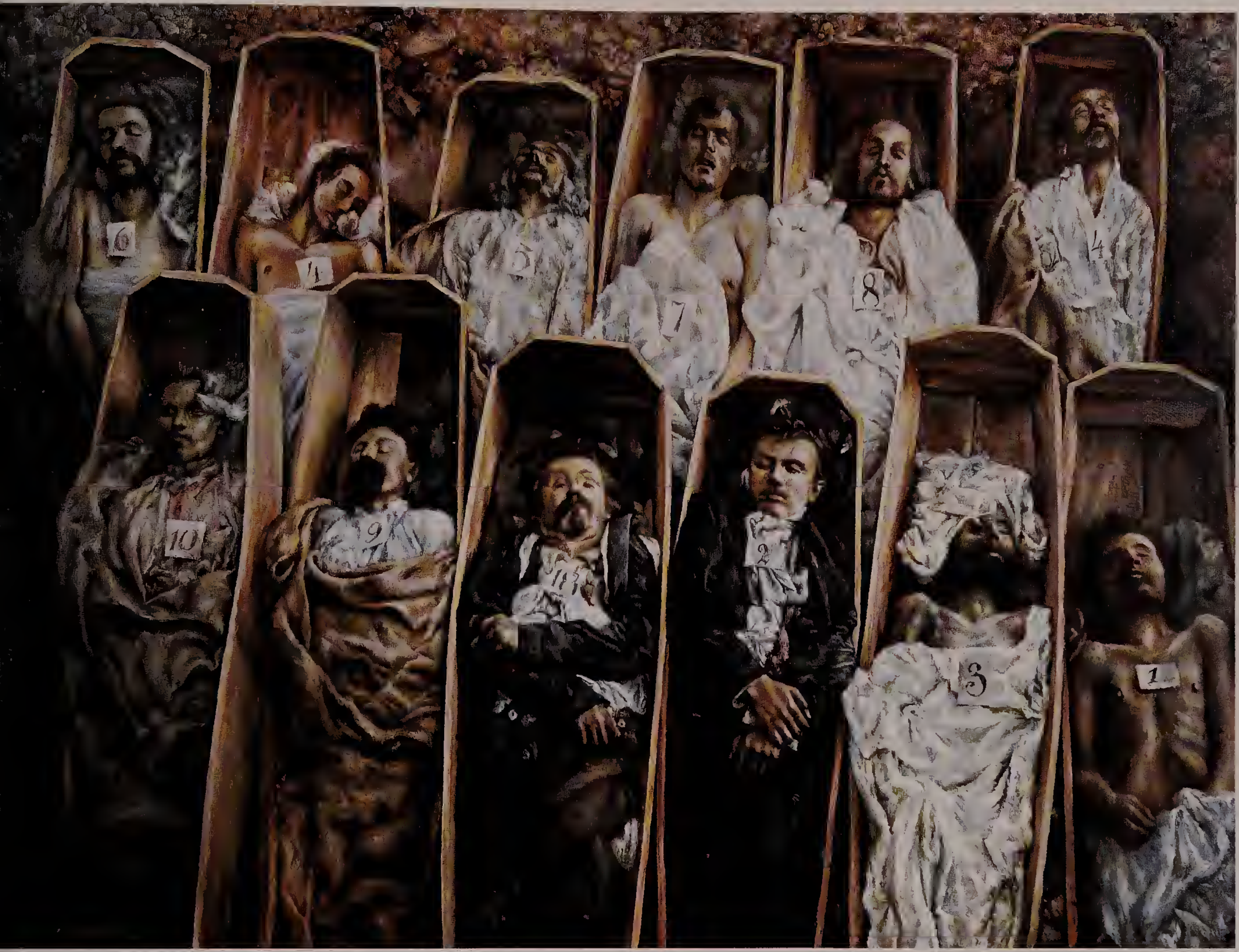


Fig. 216. Igor Makarevich, *The Corpses of Revolt*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 169.5 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 10636.

with contemporary American, German, or other European art. Unfortunately, there is as yet no such mature concept: there are talented individual artists, and for this reason the term postmodernism is not applicable.

GP: Which photographers have been particularly influential in your work?

IM: I suppose I have been influenced greatly by the classic French masters of staged portraits such as Nadar.[6] I am still fascinated by chiaroscuro, which was of interest to me in painting and drawing as well. In the early works of these master photographers, chiaroscuro is mysterious and divine, as in the works of Leonardo, iridescent, with an abundance of silken combinations of tones. As far as contemporary photographers are concerned, I was influenced a great deal by the American Joel Peter Witkin. I saw his works when I came to Paris for the first time in 1989. I was very lucky because there was a big exhibition of Witkin's work in the Museum of Modern Art at the Trocadero. I felt that many of his ideas were similar to mine, but in a more perfected form. This exhibition made a great impression on me, and I remembered it for a long time. I definitely have been influenced by his work.

GP: Has photography influenced your work as a painter?

IM: My painting *Corpses of Revolt* (fig. 216) was inspired by an exhibition of French police photos of executed communards, whose decaying corpses

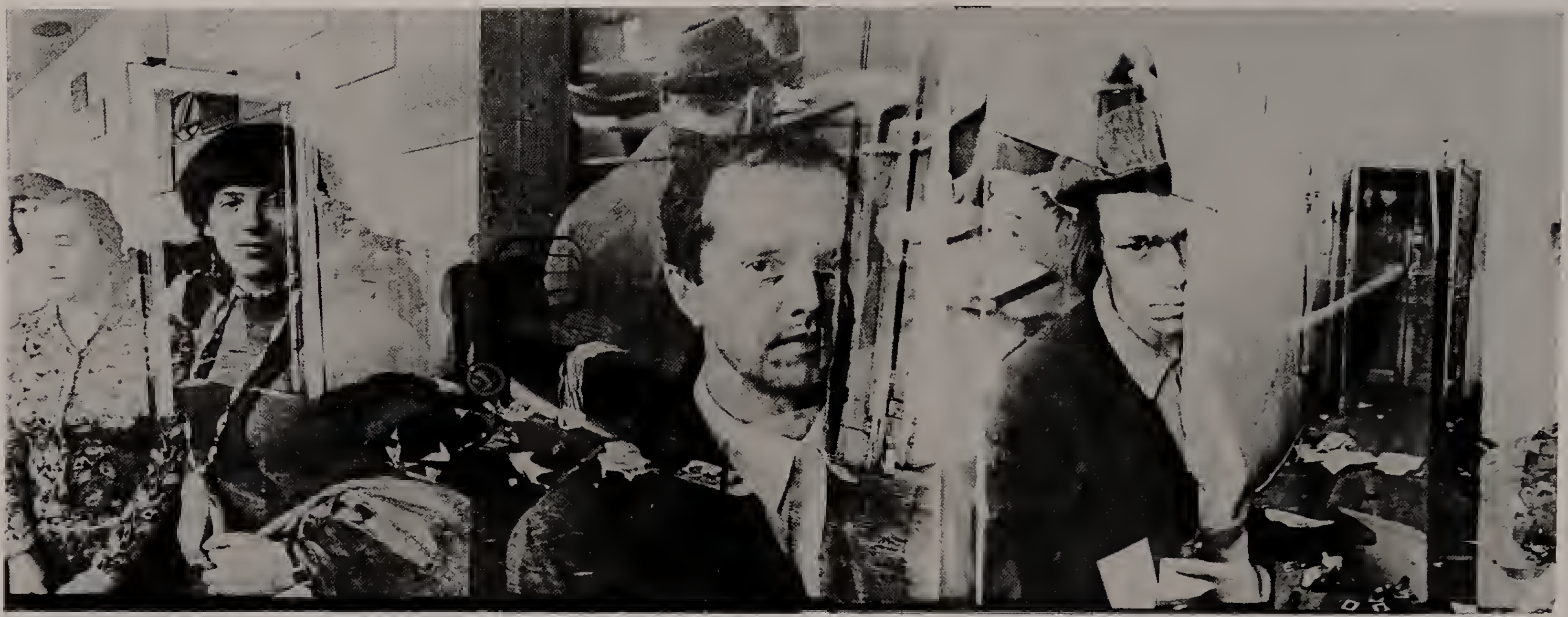


Fig. 217. Igor Makarevich, from the series *Exodus*, 1977. Gelatin silver print, 11.9 x 33 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 14896.

reminded me of our prominent revolutionaries of 1917. I wanted to paint a "historical" painting, such as those that hang in our national galleries, only with a certain internal difference.

GP: Please tell us about the technical aspect of your work.

IM: I enjoy talking about the technical aspect of my work because in spite of everything I was always deeply involved in the technique of engraving. I learned the technique of etching through books, and I have always been interested in it. As a photographer I rarely made use of a commercial lab but prepared all the solutions myself. I sought out complex solutions from old handbooks. I was always interested in the alchemical side of this process, whether it was the etched plate or the darkroom. I always took great pleasure in working on the technical side of things, and now that I'm more mature it has been useful to me. When I work as a photographer and also as an engraver or maker of silk-screen prints or lithographs, I use a layering and juxtaposition of colors that plays an enormous role in the art of printmaking and that is actually related to photography. A person who is not familiar with the technical side of things will find it difficult to execute his ideas on the level that he would like.

As far as photography itself is concerned, I work with a brush as in lithography during the process of developing the film, using chemical solutions as watercolors to attain a desired effect. I make scratches and splotches on the negative, which will later appear on the prints. I make copies and sometimes modify the negative, which undergoes several stages before achieving the desired effect in the print.

GP: You don't work with computers?

IM: No, I don't, and this is a conscious decision. On the one hand, I'm not familiar with this technology, and, on the other, its use is now so widespread and has achieved such a high level of technical proficiency that in professional circles, in most cases, a greater value is placed on working manually. Since I never was able to master this technique, I am reluctant to use it because it doesn't interest me very much. Sometimes, in rare cases, as an exception to the rule, I did use a computer, as in my exhibition *Seeking Paradise*,[7] where I created a large canvas with the help of a computer.

GP: To what extent does the accidental or subconscious play a role in your work?

IM: One example that comes to mind is my series of double-exposure photos that deal with the emigration of my friends the Erastovs to Israel, which took on a biblical meaning against my will (fig. 217). When I returned from the airport, I went to their large, empty apartment to take more pictures. I forgot to put in a new roll of film, and the result was much more expressive work than I could have consciously done.

GP: What do you think of the distinction that is frequently made between art photography and realistic, documentary photography?

IM: It is true that from the first moment of its inception, photography was divided into two parts. First of all, it is a miracle that with the aid of chemicals and optics you can create a mirror reflection of reality. Second, traditional artists attempted, very shyly and reticently at first, to use this innovation for the traditional goals that the visual arts had always pursued. These two aspects of photography have always existed together in different proportions, and always in opposition to one another. As far as the present is concerned, photography has overcome the stigma of being relegated to a lower level than art, since it was thought to be the province of technicians. Although these antediluvian ideas were overcome a long time ago, nevertheless contemporary photography is still divided in the way you mentioned. There is purely documentary photography, which records life by simply pressing a button, and there is the attempt to organize a photograph in space on the basis of a preconceived idea, i.e., staged photography. What do I think of this? Right now photography is one of the leading areas of art. People have understood that photography has absorbed all of the experience of the preceding visual arts and carries within it even more possibilities.

GP: Could you say something about the role that color plays in your photographs?

IM: Color, of course, plays a certain role. If we can continue our discussion of documentary photography and artistic photography, we can compare documentary photography with the external world of interiors, and artistic photography with the internal space of the artist. For me, the space that exists in a closed, dark space is equivalent to black-and-white images. Color can be seen as a window in this space, through which you look at the outside world. This window is like a stained-glass window; it is colored. The rays of the external world penetrate this dark, closed space and they are tinted in a different color and have different symbolic meanings. As a rule, I rarely use color in photography. For me, it is a sign of an external space.

GP: It seems as though you do not use photography as a way to reproduce reality but as a medium to create alternate worlds.

IM: For me, photography has always been connected with conceptual art. In the first or one of the first exhibitions of unofficial art in Moscow, I used photography not simply as a means to fix reality. My early works—for example, *Choice of Target* (1976) or *Changes* (1978)—were works of conceptual art. No one did this back then. I was one of the first to start using photography in this way.

In fact, I don't do photography all the time. Sometimes it dominates my work, but at other times I abandon it altogether. Right now I'm going through one of those phases when photography greatly interests me. Let me say a few words about a recent exhibition, which I called *Seeking Paradise* (fig. 218).

During the course of a year I made about one thousand photographs. From my window I took pictures of garbage pickers. On one hand, this is an international phenomenon. We see this here in New York as well. People are looking for something valuable just as they do in our country. But there is a small difference. They can be divided into people who are looking for primitive things—bottles, food—something that is in fact useful. But there are also people who are looking for their own past. A whole category of decent, neatly dressed people go out of the house often perhaps without their families knowing where they are going. They are all pensioners who keep searching for what seem to be insignificant things. Even when they don't take anything, they are engaged in a kind of simulacrum of their former activity because these were people who worked all of their lives without actually producing anything. Very rarely did they produce something. There was a great emptiness in all of these huge Soviet institutes, which contained masses of people who didn't in fact do anything. Now they find themselves in a completely new reality. They are searching for their past and re-creating a certain order. They appear as if they are going to work, they find something, and in so doing they structure their day. Maybe they throw these things out later, but it does keep them occupied. This category of people was very important to me. This is why I named this exhibition *Seeking Paradise*, after Baudelaire's book *Les paradis artificiels*, because for me garbage is like a narcotic. I investigated the relationship to garbage of people who unexpectedly found themselves in a completely

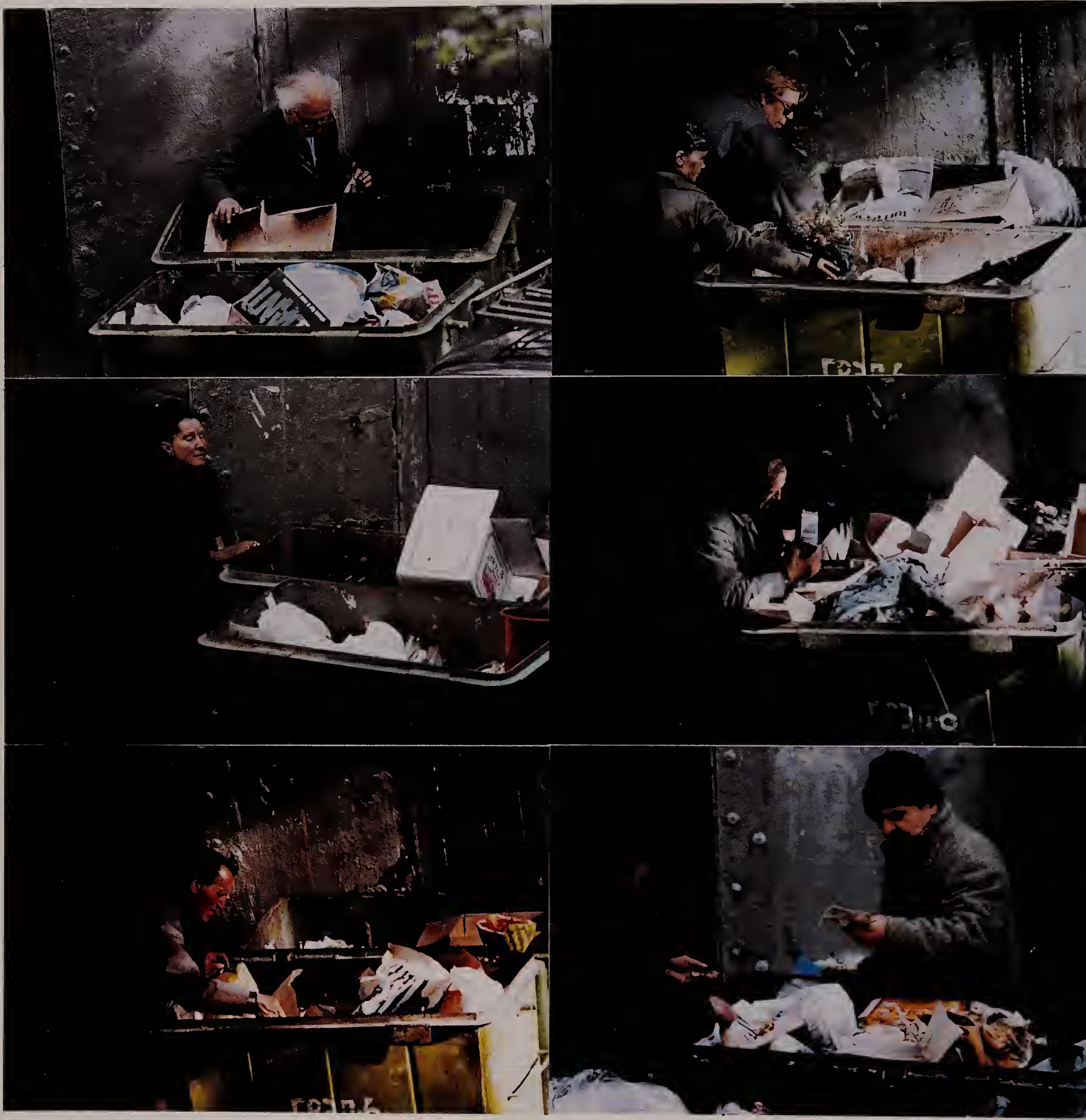


Fig. 218. Igor Makarevich, *Seeking Paradise*, 1998–2003. Type-C prints, 30 x 45 cm each. Collection of the artist.

different country and time. This is the main theme of this exhibition.

For me this form is unusual because I rarely use documentary photographs: I used a hidden camera and I myself was unseen. While I normally pay very close attention to high production values, in this case I made use of the services of a nonprofessional lab. I want to emphasize that these photographs have no intrinsic value. What is important is the mass, the structure of the garbage, which I developed for the exhibition. I pasted the photographs on disposable plates, on pieces of cardboard and plastic, imitating the structure of the garbage and its different dimensions.

GP: Did you notice any patterns?

IM: Since the place of the action is limited, time plays a big role: it is very noticeable that on the same street, the same space, winter is succeeded by spring, summer by fall. However, the people remain in the same space. And since this is all photographed in the same neighborhood, the same people came here all the time. I got used to certain categories of people, and frequently they became novellas in my larger narrative. There was the story of an insane woman who always came with a dog. There are people who like to philosophize, they read books. This theme appears in some of my photographs, too. Among the uncertainties of the world and its ruins, there sits a man in a garbage Dumpster immersed in reading a book. This is also a wonderful theme. Then there's the story about another person who prayed. For him, the garbage was his altar or sanctuary. Before he began his digging, he made the sign of the cross over it, as when people bless food or the earth before commencing on some activity or journey. This was very strange and even frightening.

GP: You yourself never spoke to him?

IM: No. I think it would have been difficult to find common ground with him. Unlike Boris Mikhailov,[8] who, on the contrary, makes it a point to become acquainted with his subjects, I am unable to do this. This could even result in an altercation because they would see that I'm taking their pictures. They would think that I could use the photos against them. After all, these are semi-insane people.

GP: What would have happened if anyone had found out?

IM: You mean if anyone had recognized himself in the gallery? I don't think that anything would have happened. First of all, they don't go to galleries. They are just neighbors. I think that they might even have been pleased if they knew. As a matter of fact, my gesture had nothing insulting or judgmental about it. My intention was, rather, to express sympathy. In all of these photographs there is a friendly gesture. I completely understand this behavior, since I myself like to dig around in rubbish, albeit for different reasons. I still find many photographs in the garbage, including the ones I use in my silk-screen prints. So I am one of them myself, and I don't feel any sense of alienation.

GP: Is this your first work based on this approach?

IM: I suppose it is. My other work is, in a certain sense, staged. Even in one of my early works, *Choice of Target*,[9] which could be likened to a piece of reporting, I photographed a group of artists I knew, posing in front of a camera in a courtyard and reacting to something happening around them—reacting, that is, to the shouts of some unknown people. Although the reaction I recorded was not preconceived, it nevertheless has the character of a staged event, inasmuch as from the very first they had deliberately and knowingly stood in front of a camera. Then a show began, which I did not direct, since someone began to yell that we had better clear out, that we were some sort of agents. This happened a long time ago, at a time when any filming on the street would provoke anger. So my first effort at reportage was in some sense partially staged.

GP: Are many of your photographs now in Norton Dodge's collection?

IM: I'm afraid not. Norton Dodge sees me primarily as a painter. Perhaps he has *Faces*, a work from 1978–79, which I call *Changes* or *Stratigraphic Structures*. At any rate, I didn't see it in the exhibition at the Zimmerli, but it is in the catalogue.[10] I completely forgot the color version at the Zimmerli. There is also a black-and-white variant.[11] It is somewhat older, and there are substantial differences between the two works. In the black-and-white version, the faces are erased and it is done in a more expressionist manner. Norton's version is more reminiscent of Northern European Renaissance painting. In fact, it is visually connected to what I am working on now: a large-scale series on the lonely character of Pinocchio and the idea of a continuously transformed mask beyond which lies the abyss.

GP: But why, of all things, Pinocchio, Buratino?[12]

IM: This is a rather long story. In 1994 Lena and I did a very large exhibition, *Life in the Snow*. In fact, Lena was the initiator of that part of the exhibition in which the image of Pinocchio appeared for the first time. Lena is developing a gallery of representative figures from the Stalinist period, one of whom was Novikova-Vashentseva, a writer who actually existed in Soviet reality. Her story can be summed up by saying that she was a simple workingwoman for her entire life until the age of sixty. One day, when she was sixty-six, her drunkard of a husband hit her on the head with a piece of wood, after which she began to write. Such magical events sometimes occur. I don't know, perhaps she made the whole thing up. In any case, Lena worked up a design for the portrait of this writer as a Bolshevik Madonna, and among the things she placed in the frame was a large log, the magical instrument of the transfiguration of her personality, life, and creativity. Lena herself drew three small wooden Buratinos, who were born out of the log. I immediately became interested. Lena herself was indifferent to this, and she limited her attention only to the exhibition. I, however, passionately began to develop the idea of Buratino.[13]

For me, in this exhibition Buratino was the agent of the idea of a great utopia, that is, a communist agent, an avant-gardist with wooden brains, naturally. Here was a metaphor for woodenness I could use. I was never overfond of the great Russian avant-garde painters: Malevich, for example. That is, on one hand, I loved them very much, but on the other, I was irritated by their radicalism, which approached the idiotic. There always was something lifeless and wooden in Malevich. I found in this metaphorical concept a way to express my attitude toward this.

The difference between Buratino and his famous twin brother, Pinocchio, is that while Pinocchio simply dreams of becoming a boy and becomes one in the end, Buratino, on the other hand, altruistically dreams of inviting his friends and the people around him to a magical theater, a paradise on earth, a utopia to which he has a golden key. From another point of view, love for others and the desire to create paradise on earth is the idea behind communism. Buratino's idea was so popular in the Soviet Union because it was capable of being adapted to the idea of communist morality. If "Pinocchio" is a deformed version of the Gospels—the story has its own Herod, a suffering hero, a baptism in water—and it appeared in Italy, a Catholic country where it had a great influence on the generation that later became fascists and revolutionaries, then Buratino is the same, only in reverse.[14] A whole generation of people, Pioneers, was raised by him. They loved him very much, and so did we. This is a wonderful fairy tale but the basic idea is a communist one, and so for me he was the embodiment of the revolution, of the great utópia, as I look at this from the position of art. I created the whole idea of Buratino and appropriated the most outstanding canvases of Russian cubo-futurism and later, when I had exhausted this topic, Buratino continued to live inside of me. He ceased being such a wooden, one-dimensional, optimistic character. On the contrary, for me he became the embodiment of the destruction of the great utopia—i.e., the destruction of individualism and the degradation of the individual that were brought about by communist morality. In this story he represents evil because he is completely submerged in the elemental force of absolute evil. He is seduced by an uncle who limps, a sign that he is the devil. On the one hand, he is ascetic because he has his own very strict morality; on the other hand, he is a complete sexual maniac. But he is made of wood and wood is what is to be derived from Buratino, the body of Soviet communal consciousness. This is the story of the tragic degradation of a personality. We also have here the themes of death and perversion, which have always interested me, and which completely dominate this work.

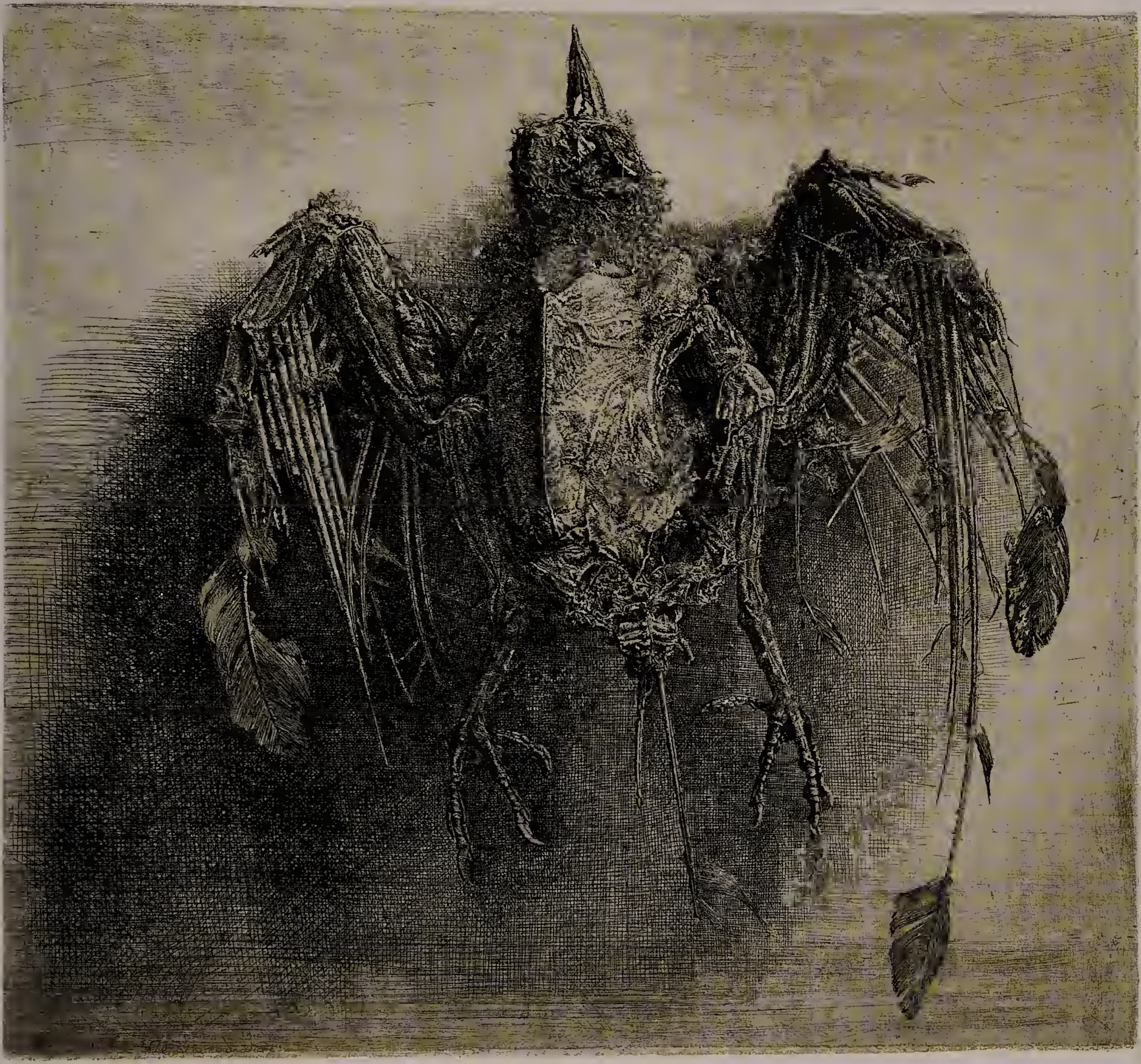


Fig. 219. Igor Makarevich, Untitled (*Bird*), 1973–74. Etching, 41.8 x 45.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 09251.

GP: Perhaps you can say a few more words on your interest in the theme of death.

IM: I was particularly interested in the theme of death during the 1970s. My etching *Bird* (fig. 219) and my paintings *The Corpses of Revolt* (fig. 216, p. 283) and *Surgical Instruments* (fig. 220) all deal with this theme. I suppose it has to do with my youth and its concomitant preoccupation with death and romanticism. Moreover, death was a forbidden theme in the Soviet Union, and this, of course, fueled my interest in the subject.

My etching *Bird* is connected with the universal symbol of piece, the dove. Official propaganda turned Picasso's famous drawing into a repulsive, profaned sign, so when I came upon the mummified corpse of a dead bird on the roof of an old building, I was overjoyed because it was like discovering a treasure. In this engraving of the image of a dead bird, I created an anti-sign, which cried out that this world is not as beneficent as we were expected to think.

At the beginning of the 1970s, I began to work on a large-scale series of *nature morte*, which were paintings of any sort of old metal objects I was able to find in abandoned buildings. One of my friends brought me a metal case full of surgical instruments and, although I liked them very much, I was unable to paint them until the end of the 1970s, when my "romantic" period had already been exhausted. This canvas was much larger than my previous works. The viewer was burdened with the weight of these aggressive, sharp, harmful instruments. When the painting was done and hanging on my wall, a doctor visited me and remarked on their photographic accuracy.

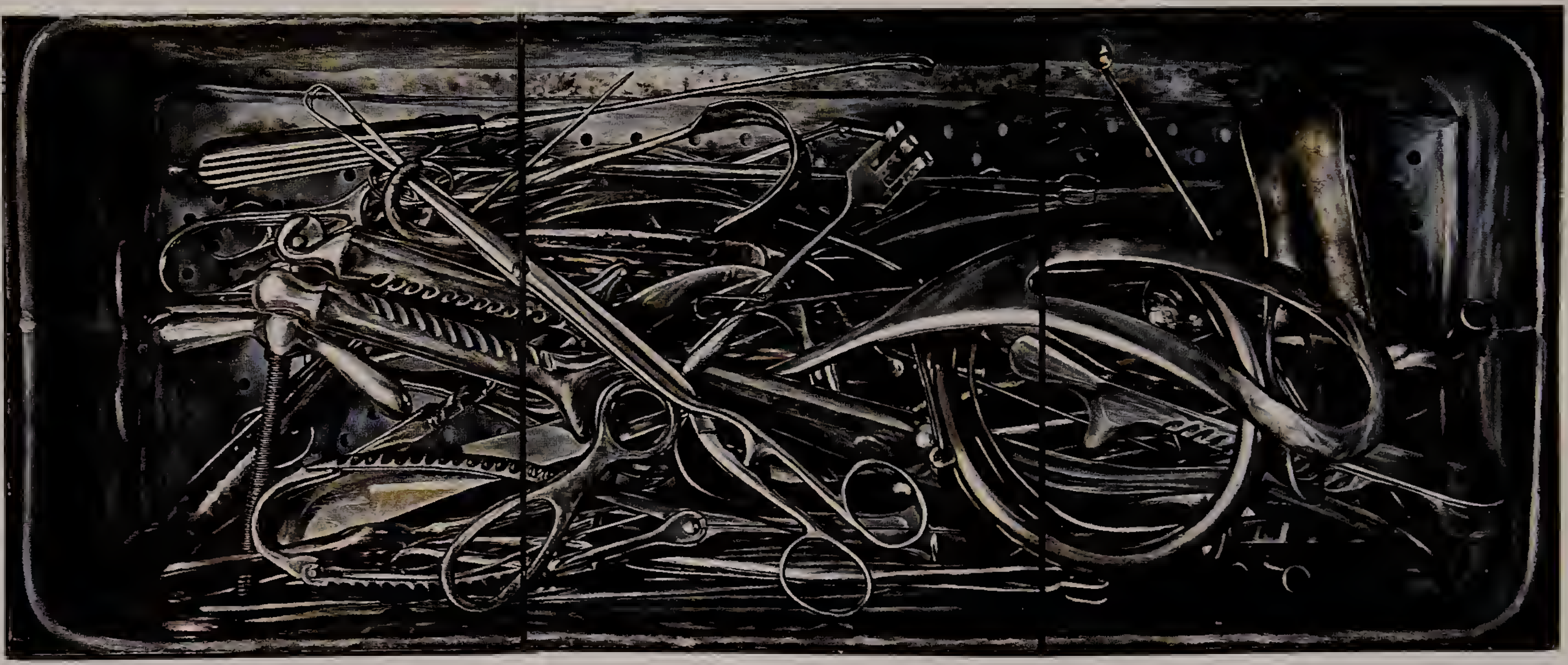


Fig. 220. Igor Makarevich, *Surgical Instruments*, 1978–79. Oil on canvas, 131 x 315 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 07746.01--03.

He explained that these instruments are used at the birth of a child, but more often at its death during an abortion.

GP: Perhaps we can end by discussing the present state of the art in Russia.[15]

IM: In Moscow, photography has had a significant influence on the work of artists. You can see this everywhere. In Moscow we have had a consolidation of artistic activity. While there are fewer artists than in the 1990s, the percentage of artists working with photography has greatly increased. Almost everyone is involved with photography. The majority of young artists introduced photography into their work in one way or another. In Moscow there is no museum of contemporary art, and few professional exhibitions take place. Only photographic exhibitions are done professionally. A museum of photography has been created, and Olga Sviblova, who is based in France, was able to greatly expand this.[16] She has good connections with the city authorities, and she has staged many interesting photo exhibits in Moscow. They took place in seventy different venues, ranging from the Tretyakov Gallery and other prestigious exhibition forums to small galleries. Much was very interesting. A large, serious, high-quality catalogue was published.

There is also another factor. Recently—and I don't know how the crisis will affect this process—many Western and Western-style illustrated magazines have appeared, from fashion magazines to literary and art almanacs. The reproductions are high quality, since they are printed abroad. Now in Moscow there are good photographs and the role of commercial photography has grown, and this always raises the professional level. Higher photographic definition and the appearance of highly professional labs is a positive process.

GP: As far as the economy is concerned, are there now any economic processes that are harming the progress of photography in Russia? Is this a simple question?

IM: It is a normal question. I know of no form of art that is more expensive than photography. As I already said, several commercial photographers appeared in Moscow who, like the ones in the West, have a lot of money. Generally, art photographers and fashion photographers make good money. We have people like this in Moscow. But we are discussing art.

It is important that as recently as five or six years ago photography was not considered art in the broad sense of the term. In Moscow such official institutions as the Tretyakov Gallery did not consider photography to be art. Now, however, they do collect photographic works and exhibit them. This is very considerable progress. As a result, photography has become objectively valuable, as it is in the West. But in Moscow and Russia in general the art market is insignificant, and that applies to photography as well. If there are photo-artists, their work is collected in the West, but not in Moscow.

GP: Where is the greatest outlet for Russian artists right now?

IM: Probably only Germany remains.

GP: How do you explain this?

IM: Germany is Russia's largest economic partner. This state of affairs has also affected the art market. If you compare the interest in Russian art in Germany and in America, there is more of an understanding for the Russian context in Germany. The histories of Russia and Germany are intertwined; there are common cultural traditions. Germans like to read. They read explanations and historic notes at exhibitions with interest. In America, barring a few exceptions, few people have a deep understanding of Russian art. This is how I explain the great interest in Germany.

GP: In Russian culture, especially in literature, the artist-writer plays a very important role in society. What role does the visual artist play in Russian society?

IM: Just recently, artists played a very important role. When the world was polarized during the Cold War, artists were seen either as freethinkers or as agents of an opposing political influence. They attracted a great deal of attention from the public. They were subjected to surveillance and control by the state. Now we see that the power of the state has diminished considerably. We are now seeing complete anarchy. No one is surprised by anything anymore. You have to do terrible things, such as attack the spectator like a dog, to attract attention to yourself. More subtle works can only be internalized. Maybe this is, in actual fact, a serious phase. When we are bereft of support and attention and are left to our own devices, we have to ask ourselves: Are we really trying to say something, or are we just trying to attract attention to ourselves? Are we moved to create because we actually have something to say or because we are on a brightly lit stage? We have now left this stage, and we have to sort out our internal motivations on our own. This is important. Society has now turned away from the artist because it is taken up with more serious problems, as during a war or natural disaster. There is simply no time for subtle aesthetic or philosophical discourse . . .

Translated by Daniel Rishik

NOTES

1. Tripoli has four names: Molotov (Soviet), Zalka (Georgian), Tripoli (Greek), and Rosenberg (German).

2. See Natalia Tamruchi, *Moscow Conceptualism, 1970–1990* (Roseville East, Australia: Craftsman House and G & B Arts International, 1995), 50–56; E. A. Bobrinskaya, *Kontseptualizm* (Moscow: Galart, 1994); *Between Spring and Summer: Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism*, ed. David A. Ross (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 102–5, 156–58; Margarita Tupitsyn, "On the Sources of Soviet Conceptualism," in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art From the Soviet Union*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton Dodge (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 325–27.

3. The State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, and the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

4. Makarevich was a fellow at the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper, Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, in October 1998. Igor Makarevich, *Izbrannye mesta iz zapisei Nikolaia Ivanovicha Borisova; ili tainaia zhizn' derev'ev* (Moscow: XL Gallery, 1999); Dennis O'Neil, *Hand Print Workshop International* 2, no. 2 (October 1999): 2–3; *Homo Lignum*, ed. Elena Selina (Moscow: XL Gallery, 1997).

5. *Rybnaia vystavka* (Moscow: Moscow Archive of New Art, 1990). See Tamruchi, *Moscow Conceptualism*, 70–71, 86–88; Elena Elagina and Igor Makarevich, *Zhizn' na snegu* (St. Petersburg: Russian Museum, 1995).

6. Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, 1820–1910.

7. Igor Makarevich, *Iskanie raia*, Fotobiennale '98, XL Gallery, Moscow, 1998.

8. See Alla Efimova, "Photographic Ethics in the Work of Boris Mikhailov," *Art Journal* (Contemporary Russian Art Photography, ed. Diane Neumaier) 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 63–69.

9. *Vybor Tseli*. See *Russian Samizdat Art*, ed. Charles Doria (New York: Willis Locker and Owens Publishing, 1986), 139–41.

10. See Victor Tupitsyn, "Nonidentity within Identity: Moscow Communal Modernism, 1950s–1980s," in *From Gulag to Glasnost*, 76.

11. Aleksei Tarkhanov, "Igra v iashchik," *Kamera Obskura: Fotograficheskii zhurnal*, no. 3 (1998): 34.

12. Buratino is a character in the popular story *The Tale of the Golden Key or Buratino's Adventures* by Alexei Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1883–1945), based on the story by Carlo Collodi.

13. Tarkhanov, "Igra v iashchik," 34–39.

14. See *Homo Lignum*.

15. See *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994).

16. Olga Sviblova is the founding director of the Moscow House of Photography.

Aleksandr Slyusarev with Mikhail Sidlin

Hinting at Reality

Aleksandr Slyusarev was born in Moscow in 1944. He has been a photographer since 1958. In 1968 he graduated from the State Institute for Foreign Languages with a degree in Italian studies, after which he worked as a simultaneous interpreter and as a designer. By the 1970s he had developed a strikingly individual formalistic style of photography that has influenced his contemporaries as well as photographers of three succeeding generations.

MIKHAIL SIDLIN: Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, you once told an interesting story about how your real surname is Mazepa.

ALEKSANDR SLYUSAREV: Well, yes—although this is completely unimportant now, because I created myself as Slyusarev. Whether my grandfather's surname was Mazepa is of no consequence. This is just an interesting story because his name may or may not have been Mazepa.

MS: Are you in any way related to the hetman Mazepa?[1]

AS: There is complete uncertainty about that. Only my grandfather could have said anything about that, but he died in 1947 when I was three years old,

Fig. 221 (*facing*). Aleksandr Slyusarev, Untitled, 1977. Gelatin silver print, 31.3 x 29.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15415.

and my father had no interest in the matter. Moreover, he was in the military and didn't make his views known on this subject. Military men try not to utter any superfluous words. Furthermore, there was a certain time when such matters were best not talked about.

MS: You mean to say that the change of the surname was connected to the fact that Mazepa was—

AS: —considered an odious figure, and in the army it was "neither one way nor the other."

MS: Your grandfather changed the surname?

AS: Yes, Grandfather. But his daughter's surname was still Mazepa, and when she was at school, she was naturally teased about it as much as possible.

MS: Slyusarev is the surname of your godfather.

AS: Supposedly, yes, but now you can't really ask anyone about that.

MS: Has your family been in Moscow for a long time?

AS: No. My father is from St. Petersburg and my mother is from Moscow. My mother's family came to Moscow when they were no longer young. My grandfather was an interesting person—a physician, but he served in the navy on the battleship *Slava*. In my adolescent years I read all sorts of books on military themes. One of them had a chapter entitled "The Heroic Exploits of *Slava*." This ship was engaged in battle with numerous German ships.

MS: In World War I?

AS: In World War I. Then Grandfather served on the *Andrei Pervozvanny*. Later he worked as a regular physician, without advertising the fact that he served as a naval officer during World War I—for obvious reasons. . . . My second grandfather—Mazepa—was also in the military during World War I and was a holder of all four St. George Crosses.

MS: The grandfather who was the physician, was he a collector?

AS: No, he did not collect. But he had many paintings. After his death some remained with my aunt, and part were inherited by my mother.

MS: You are a philologist of Romance and German languages?

AS: I'm a specialist in Italian. I am still fluent in it, although, due to lack of practice, not as much as before.

MS: Why did you choose Italian?

AS: Very simple, actually. After graduating from school I had to choose something. My mother was a professor. What course of studies should I choose? I was very weak in English. Spanish? For some reason I excluded it immediately. With Italian there were no problems. I even had some success: I worked with Gianni Rodari and Marcello Argilli.[2]

MS: As their interpreter?

AS: Yes, and it gave me a very good perspective on culture in general. I had always been involved with photography. This is very difficult to explain in just a few words. For myself, I was always a photographer and not an interpreter, even though I interpreted for many films.

MS: Which ones?

AS: I interpreted for major films—*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, *Amarcord* . . . [3]

MS: For the Moscow Film Festival? You were a simultaneous interpreter?

AS: Yes. And not only for the festival but also at the places where the films were shown. For the Moscow Party Committee. This was a restricted world. What's funny is that I refused once or twice, and then that was it . . .

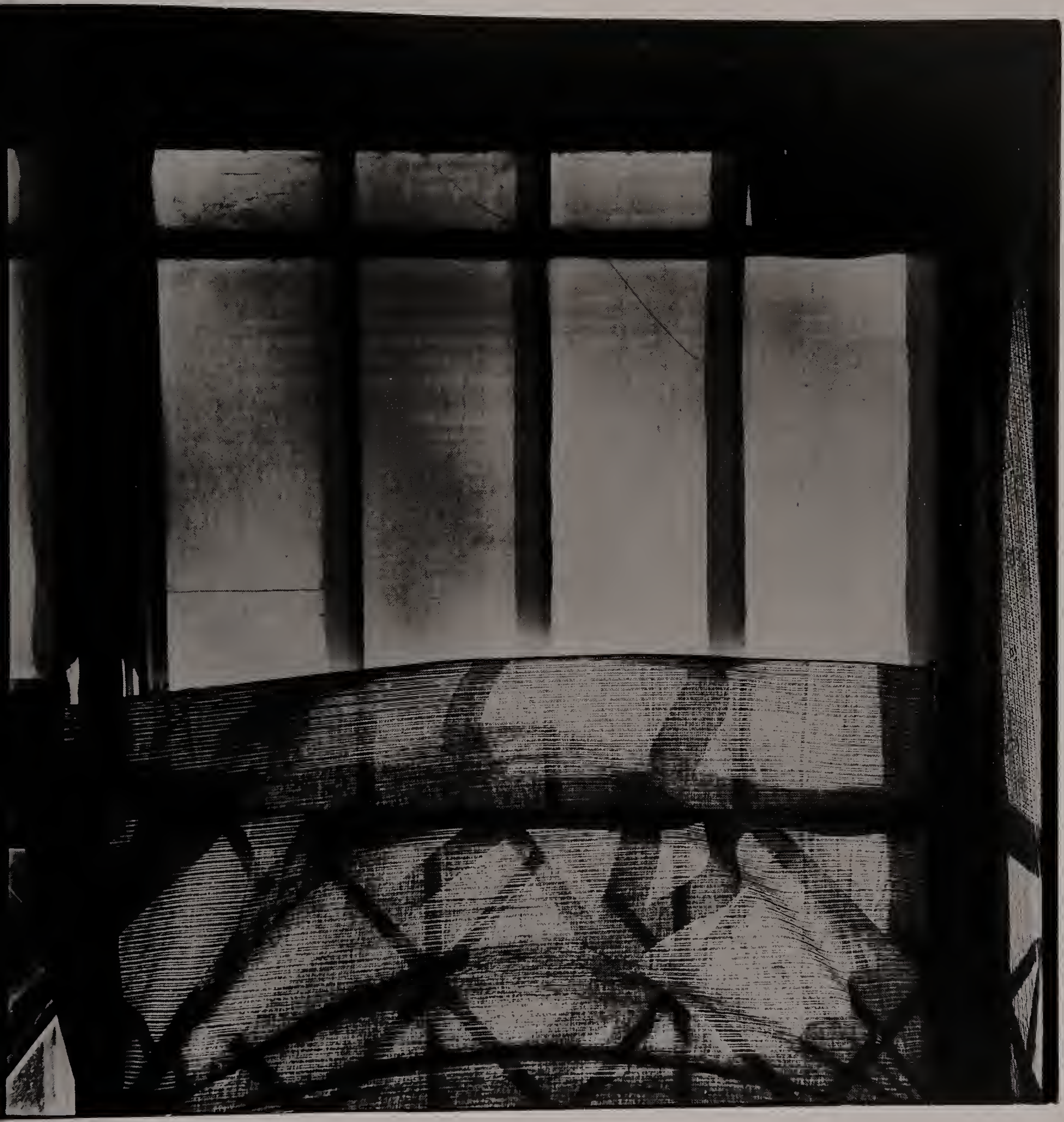


Fig. 222. Aleksandr Slyusarev, *Interior*, 1977.
Gelatin silver print, 30.5 x 30 cm.
Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16091.

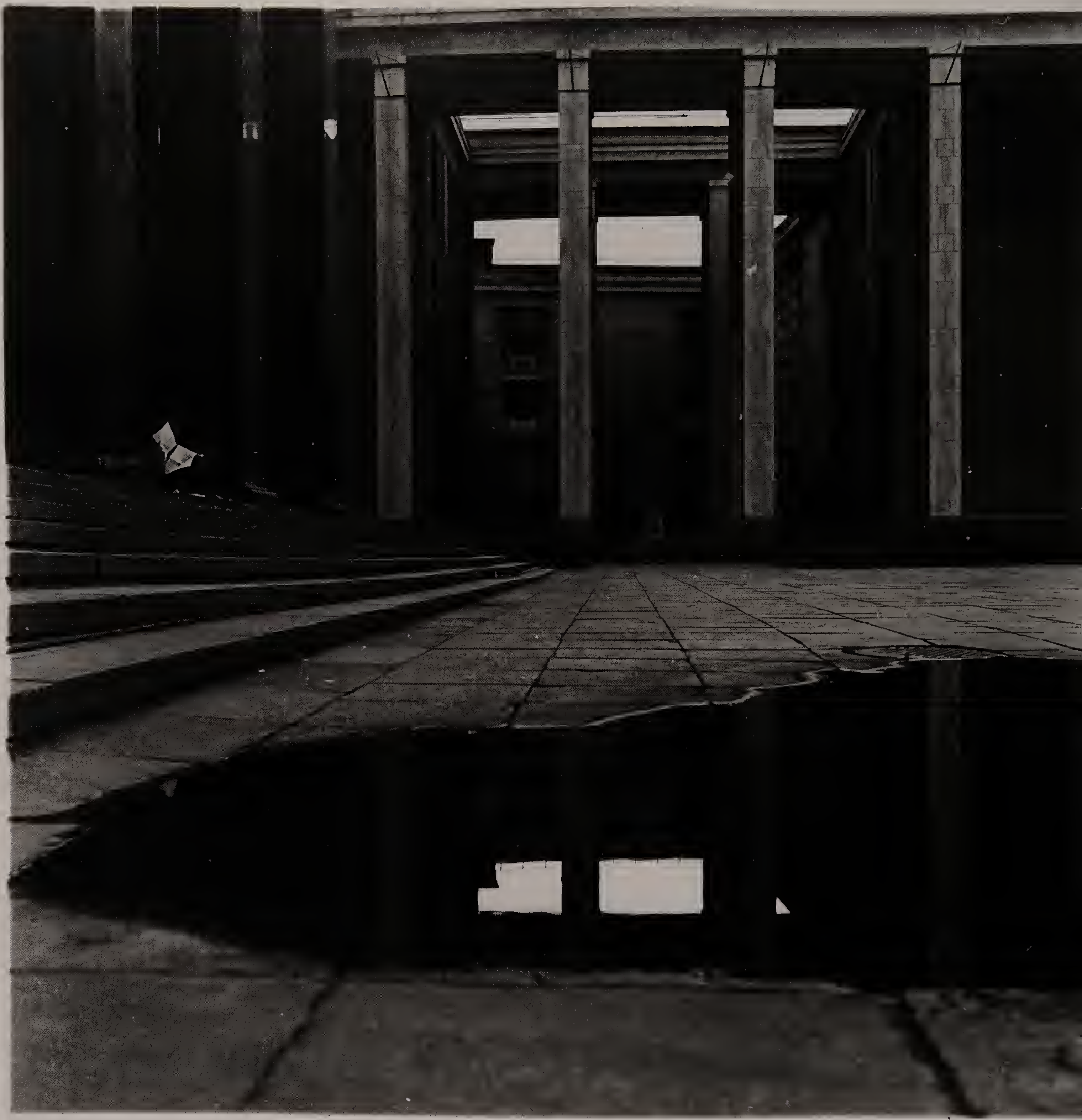


Fig. 223. Aleksandr Slyusarev, Untitled, 1978. Gelatin silver print, 25.9 x 25.7 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15277.

MS: They stopped asking you?

AS: Yes. It's understandable. Because there are many people who want to interpret. Moreover, they paid a pittance. For a two-part film—15 rubles. You can't make much money on that.

MS: Could you make money with photography in the 1970s? Were you already making money?

AS: Yes, I was selling some things. But there was the problem of making a name for myself, which can take anywhere from ten to twenty years. Without it, what can you sell? Who's going to buy just anything? I made a name for myself only in 1979.

MS: What was going on in 1979?

AS: I had a friend from Rīga. He told me, "Let's exhibit under the aegis of the Baltic Photo Festival in Dzinterdzeme." But it wasn't simply like that. There were about three busloads of photographers going from all over Latvia. When they arrived at my exhibition, they were flabbergasted. And that's how after 1979 I became a "classic."

MS: Was that your first one-person exhibition?

AS: Yes. Then I had an exhibition in Tallinn and in many other places.

MS: Did your work undergo any changes over time?

AS: Practically not. Because it's impossible to change. Because practically nothing depends on me. It depends on God—he decides, and I simply try to hear him.

MS: But maybe you changed your equipment, your cameras.

AS: My equipment did change, but this does not change the crux of the problem. Because the heart of the matter is to see. This is not very complicated, but on the other hand, it's not easy.

MS: How did you discover in yourself the ability to see?

AS: Completely by accident. This was in 1958–59. I was given a camera as a gift.

MS: What was it? A FED or a Zorkii?

AS: No, this was a camera produced by the Lenzavod. At that time it was called GOMZ, the State Optical-Mechanical Plant. My father gave me a camera which for that time was quite good—a Yunost.

MS: Was it a reflex camera?

AS: It was a regular range-finder camera. I took pictures with it.

MS: Do you now use the Elektra lying on your table, or do you have another one?

AS: No. I have a Canon 50, which may soon break because it did once before. Before, it was under warranty, but now, who the hell …

MS: How many years did you work with the first camera?

AS: With the Yunost? Three years.

MS: But was this purely amateur photography?

AS: No. Something else happened. I immediately realized that this was my vocation. But when you're young you're not completely aware of what you're doing, and help comes from outside … and since it was two steps from my house to the Pushkin Museum …

MS: You went to exhibitions, and this gave you ideas on how you should photograph?

AS: Not "how to photograph." Because "how to photograph" was intrinsic from the very beginning. I just went to the museum.

MS: What was your introduction to photography? Which photographs do you first remember seeing?

AS: Oh . . . The magazine *Sovetskoe foto*, probably the 1958 edition. But those were reproductions. In 1959 there was the American exhibition in Moscow, and as part of it the famous photographic exhibition *Family of Man* was held, which I didn't get to see, thank God.

MS: Why "thank God"?

AS: Because it would have made too great an impression on me and would have quite probably crushed me, because the exhibition was very striking but bad.

MS: However, it was practically the most popular photo exhibition in the entire history of photo exhibitions!

AS: Yes, certainly. But it had so many shortcomings (even though it contained some brilliant works). I didn't see that exhibition, but I did see "clones" of it made in our country. They initiated the exhibition *The Seven-Year Plan in Action*, which was held every year. These were enormous exhibitions of two thousand works. However, this was live photography, and out of the two thousand you could pick out about a hundred good ones. The Committee of Youth Organizations organized two exhibitions entitled *Our Youth*—one in 1962, I think, and the other in 1964. I participated in both of them while I was still very young. I went to the photography department of the CYO in my school uniform and made a strange impression because people there were already working for publishing houses such as Gende-Rote, Akhlomov, and Iura Korolev.

MS: How did you enter the professional circle of photographers?

AS: It was completely absurd. I was fifteen or sixteen years old at the time, and I went to *Sovetskoe foto* to show my work. On Mondays or Tuesdays anyone could go there.

MS: A free "master class"?

AS: Yes. I went once, then a second time. The people who looked at the works were all different. Then I discovered that one liked one thing and another, another thing. Eduard Kravchuk, who worked there at the time, told me, "You should go to the photo section of the CYO." The section was organized before the Moscow International Youth Festival. They needed some young photographers. Before that, all of the photographers were from the nomenklatura. They had to get together a whole bunch. The festival ended, but the photography section remained. That is where all of the names of photographers who were a little older than me come from.

MS: Did photographers such as Gende-Rote take you on as a student at that time?

AS: No. They weren't interested in anything except themselves. The photo section had a group of formalists, and I joined them right away.

MS: What does a group of "formalists" mean?

AS: This is what they were called: Vitia Reznikov, Tolia Zybin, Boria Aleshkin.

MS: Did you also call yourself a formalist? With pride?

AS: Yes, certainly. What else? Reznikov, for example, made positive-negatives with a "shift," "solarization," and other things no one was doing at the time, although these were quite well known techniques.

MS: What did you regard as formalism at the time?

AS: The primacy of form rather than of literary content. The problem is that photography is, in its essence, symbolism. That is to say, the photographed object becomes a symbol of itself and at the same time has a certain literary content—for example, Petr Petrovich goes out for kefir. And it wasn't as if this was foreign to me, but it wasn't close from the very beginning; also, because I did like the impressionists, who don't have any literary content as such but just an image. And, unlike the symbolists, in photography I was practically always a metaphysician. Metaphysics is almost the same as surrealism, although it's more difficult to pin the surrealist label on me than the metaphysics one. For this reason, I have a rather difficult relationship with the viewer. He cannot "enter" immediately; he needs time to get used to the concrete work, the concrete manner. In this, the symbolists have an easier time of it because people understand them right away. For example, Igor Moukhin. In his works you see and understand right away what he is talking about, although there is a rather strong metaphysical element in his works.

MS: Do you consider your photographic works a representation of pure forms? Are they a representation not of concrete objects but of form, which exists in and of itself?

AS: Yes, but this is a very complex process. It exists in and of itself, but it is always tied to an image.

MS: Looking at your photographs, it's difficult to escape the impression that for you shadows, light, and reflections play a more important role than the surface of the objects.

AS: Yes, and this is completely natural, because as a matter of fact the object has manifold shapes and forms. It has as many aspects as you would want to see in it. Shadow and light have the same original visual meaning as the object itself.

MS: You even make use of patches of light many photographers would regard as a technical error—patches of light from the lens itself.

AS: Yes.

MS: But when your works were being discussed, there must have been a situation where this use elicited lack of comprehension or irritation.

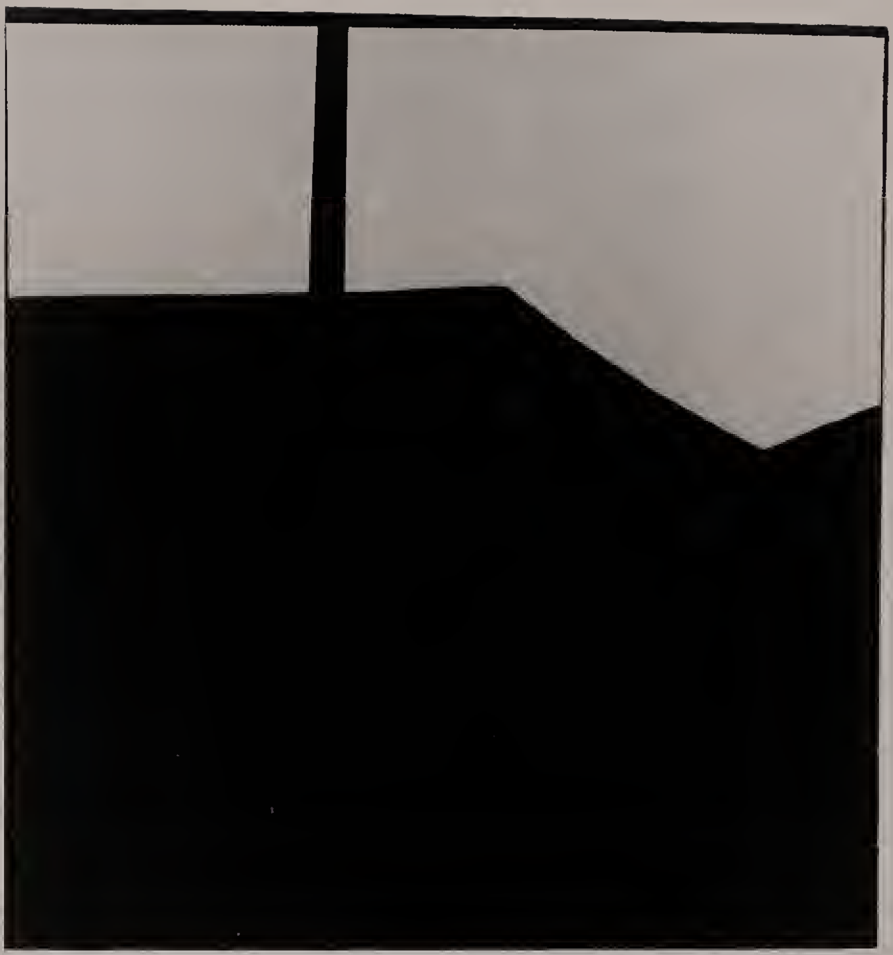


Fig. 224. Aleksandr Slyusarev, Untitled, 1979. Gelatin silver print, 30.9 x 29 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15281.

AS: Yes. Once I exhibited the series *Kuzminki*. The people who came for a discussion—among them, rather authoritative critics—decided that I was, if not completely mocking them, having a joke at their expense and what I was showing them was complete nonsense, even though this was certainly not the case.

MS: For example, looking at one of your photographs, I see that not one of the figures is in focus. Actually, the asphalt is in focus.

AS: Yes.

MS: And all the figures are out of focus.

AS: It's not that they are "out of focus." They are immaterial. That is, they are just figures.

MS: They aren't sharp but blurry. A photograph such as this couldn't be printed in a newspaper or a magazine as a journalistic photo.

AS: Yes.

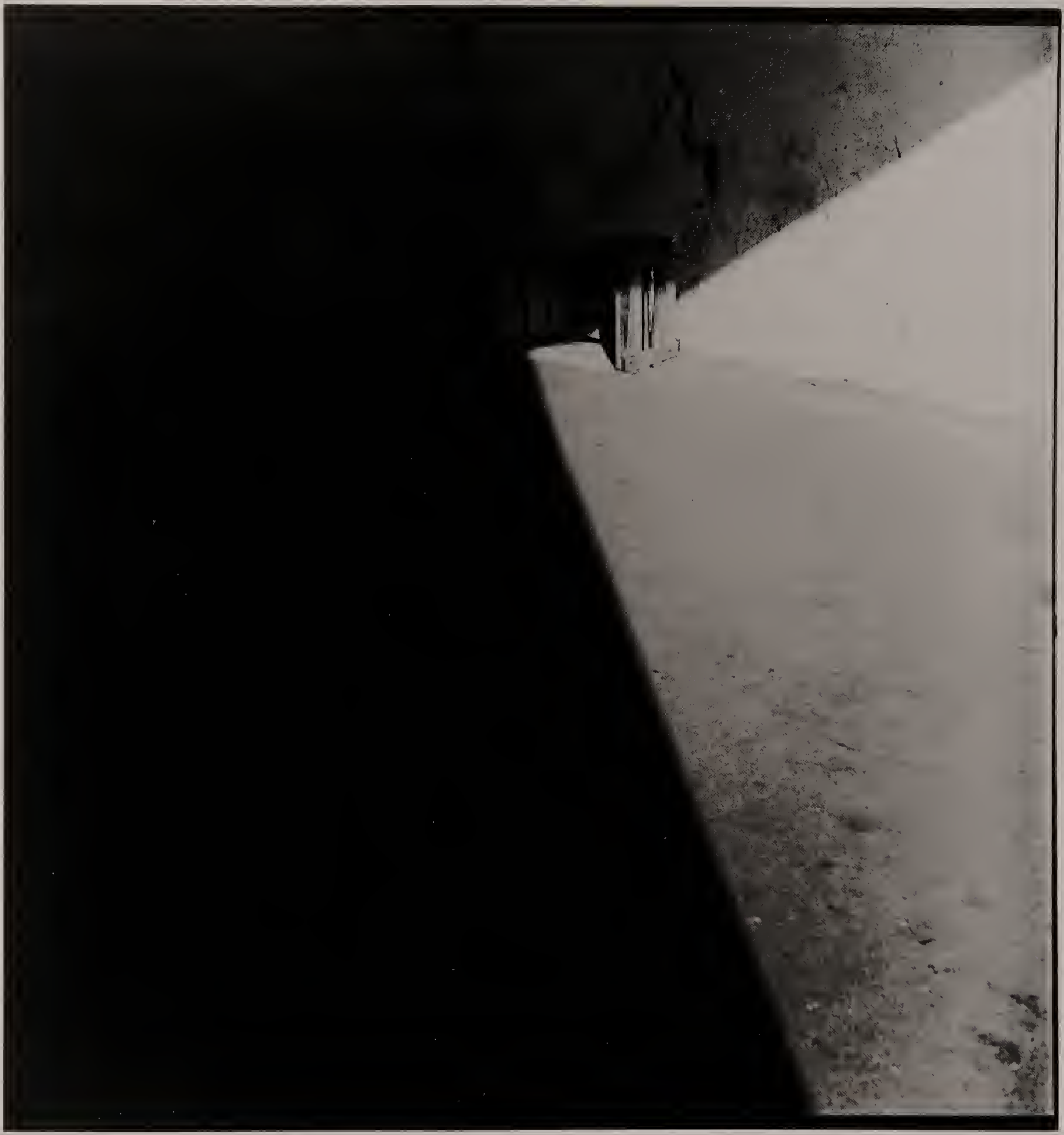


Fig. 225. Aleksandr Slyusarev, Untitled, 1979. Gelatin silver print, 31.1 x 29.2 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 15413.

MS: Is this conscious "anti-journalism"?

AS: Or vice versa, a realistic report. And what is done in newspapers and magazines is from the "Evil One."

MS: But you never worked as a magazine or newspaper photographer, did you?

AS: No. I worked for a short time for the magazine *Persona*. But I just took portraits there—that's all.

MS: Looking at your photographs, I have come to the conclusion that you are more interested in certain structures of a complex density—for example, steam or laundry hung out on a line—structures that do not have clear boundaries or finished textures.

AS: This is, strictly speaking, a hint at reality—although, on the other hand, reality as well.

MS: This can be called "washed-out" objectivity. The object seems to become disembodied.

AS: Yes.

MS: From the very beginning you characterized your work as "formalistic"; to this day do you consider "formalism" to be the most important definition?

AS: No. You see, formalism as such is not a term. The term is "metaphysics." Formalism is . . . Rodchenko is also a formalist. Even though I don't like Rodchenko.

MS: Why?

AS: He is completely unfeeling.

MS: Is there any intentionality in your works? That is, are you on guard for the moment? Waiting for something? Or is it always a moment selected fortuitously?

AS: No, nothing is fortuitous, because precisely the moment when you are not photographing has great meaning—when you are preparing yourself for something. You can then implement it in one day. In one hour. But the inner preparation has a great significance.

MS: This is the moment of concentration?

AS: Yes. It's the preparation before the concentration.

MS: Which then shoots out the frame?

AS: Yes. If you're ready, you then capture the moment.

MS: Apropos the frame. In the series *I am 45* there is a print of the border of the frame.

AS: I try to have it. With the exception of those cases when the camera is standing unevenly—let us say you took it unevenly, and then you have to straighten it out; accordingly, the edge has to be cut off.

MS: But you consider "framing" [*kadrirovka*] not to be a very correct method?

AS: Of course, you can do this only in an extreme case. You have a viewfinder—you can look and see. I said once that photography has three parameters, and one of them is the optical ordering of space. The eye does not see in that way. The eye scans everything; in addition, the head turns. The lens gives you a very narrow perspective, a completely determined one. You have to make use of it. That is all.

MS: I see. You introduced into the series *I am 45* the elements of a self-portrait in the guise of a shadow.

AS: Yes.

MS: But were you ever seriously interested in the self-portrait as a genre? Did you create a series of your own portraits?

AS: No. You take a picture only if you see something interesting. More often [it happens] in hotels. Because, first of all, the situation in a hotel is always unfamiliar, and more often there are absolutely no objects there that could interfere.

MS: What is your relationship to human subjects of photography? Do you have any typology of them? Or are people for you the same as any other objects?

AS: No. For me, a person exists as far as he is present in the city or the place that I am in. He is not a principal character; he is simply part of the environment—a wall, a person, a sidewalk, a ladder. In the degree to which he is present, he will be recorded. But if he is not present, then not.

MS: That is, a person is a moving target?

AS: Yes. The way he is in the city. You go out on the street and do not see a subject with a person. A person either walks, stands, or sits. This is the sum total of what happens to a person in the city.

MS: Does any distinguishing characteristic differentiate Moscow photography to the point that you can say, "This is Moscow photography" and not any other?

AS: No. First of all, the problem of Moscow photography always consisted of the fact that all of those who began to work here in photography would sooner or later—mostly sooner—find themselves [working] in newspapers, magazines, and elsewhere, where they were obliged to work for "uncle" [the authorities] and not do what they wanted to do but what they had to. You had to change the way you were doing things according to what the editors wanted. You can create a shot but it's no longer your shot, strictly speaking, because it's already not what you like but what has to be. You as yourself exist on a purely formal basis. Moreover, it makes no difference if it's the Soviet power or not—you have to shoot in such a way so that at least the art editor or the editor in chief would like it. The problem, however, is that in most cases the art editor or editor in chief doesn't know shit about photography because they are made differently. For example, I once collaborated with a newspaper/magazine where the art editor knew perfectly well how to choose pictures. He selected them as I would have, but he placed them on the page in such a way that I wanted to kill him. He did it because he wanted to add something of his own.... And the result was the devil knows what.

MS: So in Moscow, is there no possibility for freedom of self-expression?

AS: There were practically no free artists in Moscow. They all wound up somewhere because they had to earn money. However, I earned money a different way—by translation, by teaching. I had the possibility of the freedom of choice in photography. In other cities you could also devote yourself to pure photography without feeling the pressure from the press.

MS: If you take a hypothetical provincial city like Cheboksary, does it offer more to the photographer as an artist?

AS: Certainly. The problem, however, is that all of these cities are made as if from a cookie cutter. I remember driving from Pavlodar, and I realized that if I hadn't seen a sign pointing to Semipalatinsk in one direction and Ekibastuz in the other, you could think that you were in Moscow, Cheboksary, or any other city. The possibilities for these photographers are limited. The material itself is such that you can squeeze the minimum out of it, but without any great success.

MS: Do you consider your photographs to be "beautiful"? Does such a concept as "beauty" exist in photography?

AS: Yes, certainly. I consider them to be beautiful. It's another matter that someone else may not consider them to be beautiful. Beauty is not what is "officially" considered to be beautiful but what actually surrounds us. You might regard some object as beautiful or ugly in the same degree.

MS: What is for you an indication of the beautiful? Formal structure?

AS: The harmony that exists.

MS: Let's return to the question of beauty. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was an abrupt turning point in the way of looking at things. An interest

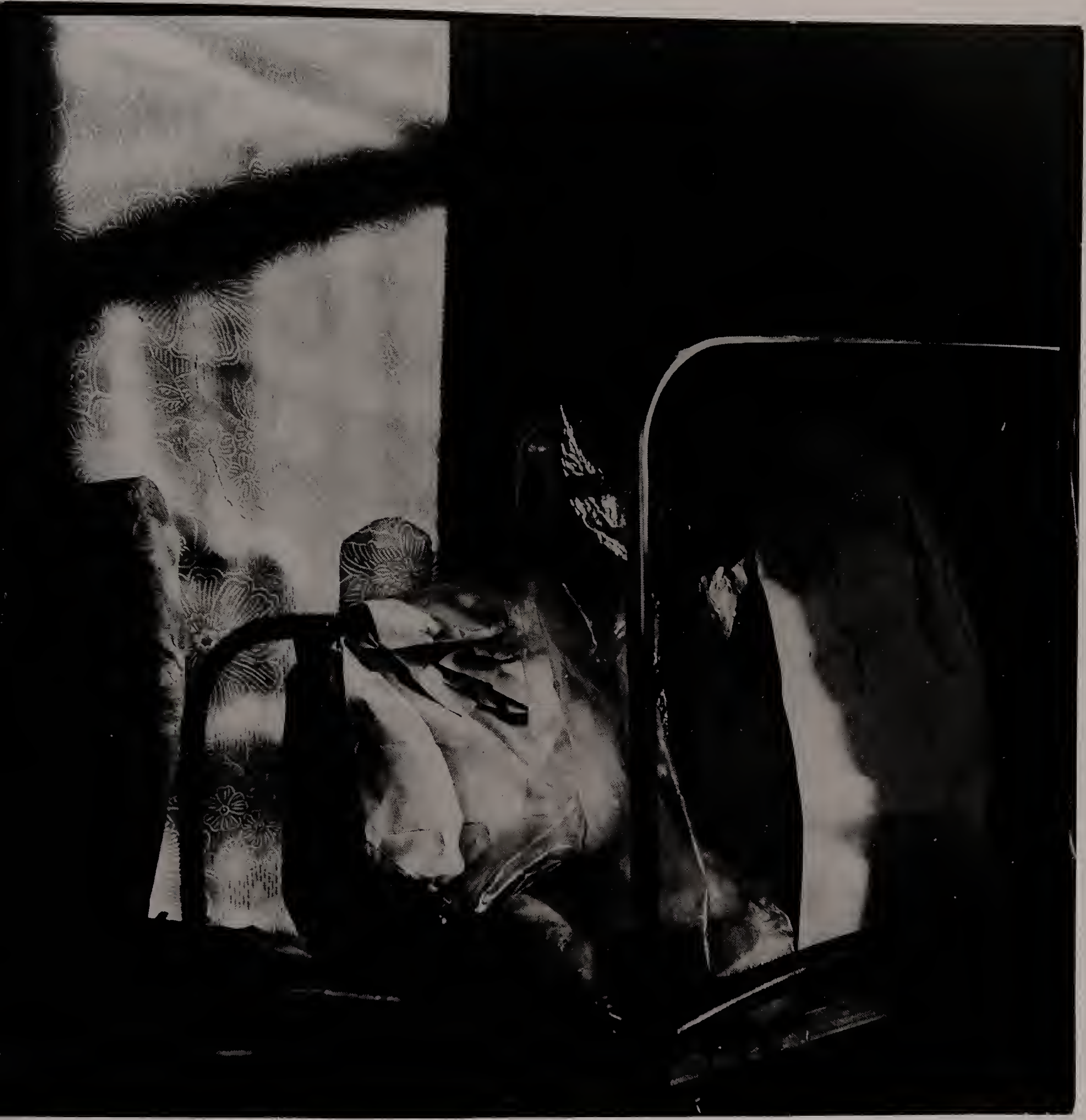


Fig. 226. Aleksandr Slyusarev, *Interior*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, 30.5 x 30 cm. Dodge Collection, ZAM, 16089.

surfaced in what was previously considered to be ugly. This turn influenced many photographers. There was a wholesale depiction of the showing of the lower depths of society, a depiction of life through a negative attitude toward it—something we refer to as "chernukha." What is your relationship to this?

AS: The concept of "chernukha" appeared much earlier. Perhaps it wasn't presented as glaringly and widely, but it was a reaction to the system. And even though the system has collapsed, the concept has remained. It turns out that it was not a reaction to the system but to ourselves. It turns out that that's what we are like. "Chernukha" is the consequence of the actual condition of man.

MS: It is difficult to say that the social changes of the late 1980s and 1990s in any way influenced your work.

AS: No, practically not, because I knew all of this before. There were people who photographed this. It's just that few people knew them. But from the point of view of photography very few people did this.

MS: When you began working in the late 1960s and then in the 1970s, did you have any relationships with artists' circles? Were there artists, painters, who were of interest to you?

AS: I was acquainted with Juri Sobolev through Vitia Reznikov. With Volodia [Vladimir] Yankilevsky. I got to know Kabakov considerably later—in the early 1980s. Kabakov is a real conceptualist, although he did have some funny things. Once foreigners visited him and saw a painting of a cucumber with the word "cucumber" written on it. Taken out of context, this is a brilliant thing. Very simple and original, even though he was working on an ABC for children for the magazine *Veselyie kartinki*: "cucumber," "watermelon." Many artists worked for *Veselyie kartinki*. That's where it originated, seemingly by itself, but taken out of context it turned into conceptualism. Actually, Ilya Kabakov has a very clear mind, and it's interesting to listen to him because he's an intelligent person. Another person who speaks very well is Volodia Yankilevsky. He simply can explain everything—what, from where, and why. When you begin to look at paintings you begin to have doubts ... but then you get used to it. And when you get used to it, then it's interesting.

MS: Do you see other forms of art in connection with your photographs?

AS: I like jazz. But what is the connection? I don't know. May be there is one, but there could just as well not be one.

MS: Were there photographers who influenced you in the 1950s and early 1960s?

AS: Certainly there were. Most likely Kertész, and primarily Sudek. First of all because there were publications you could buy.

MS: Tell me, in the 1960s, were you influenced by the discussions on "documentarism"?

AS: No. I went out on the street with my camera and that was quite enough.

MS: That is, you didn't make a single staged photograph?

AS: I did staged photographs later, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, because the "entourage" influences me and I, whether I want to or not, have to document it. In the final analysis, it turned out that I created still life as such. A "realized" still life at a certain time: not before and not after.

MS: Depending on the light?

AS: Light exists independently of me and I use it.

MS: But you didn't intend to experiment with light. What I mean is, did you use natural light?

AS: Most often, yes. Natural light means a great deal more. And then, when you shoot, you see what you are

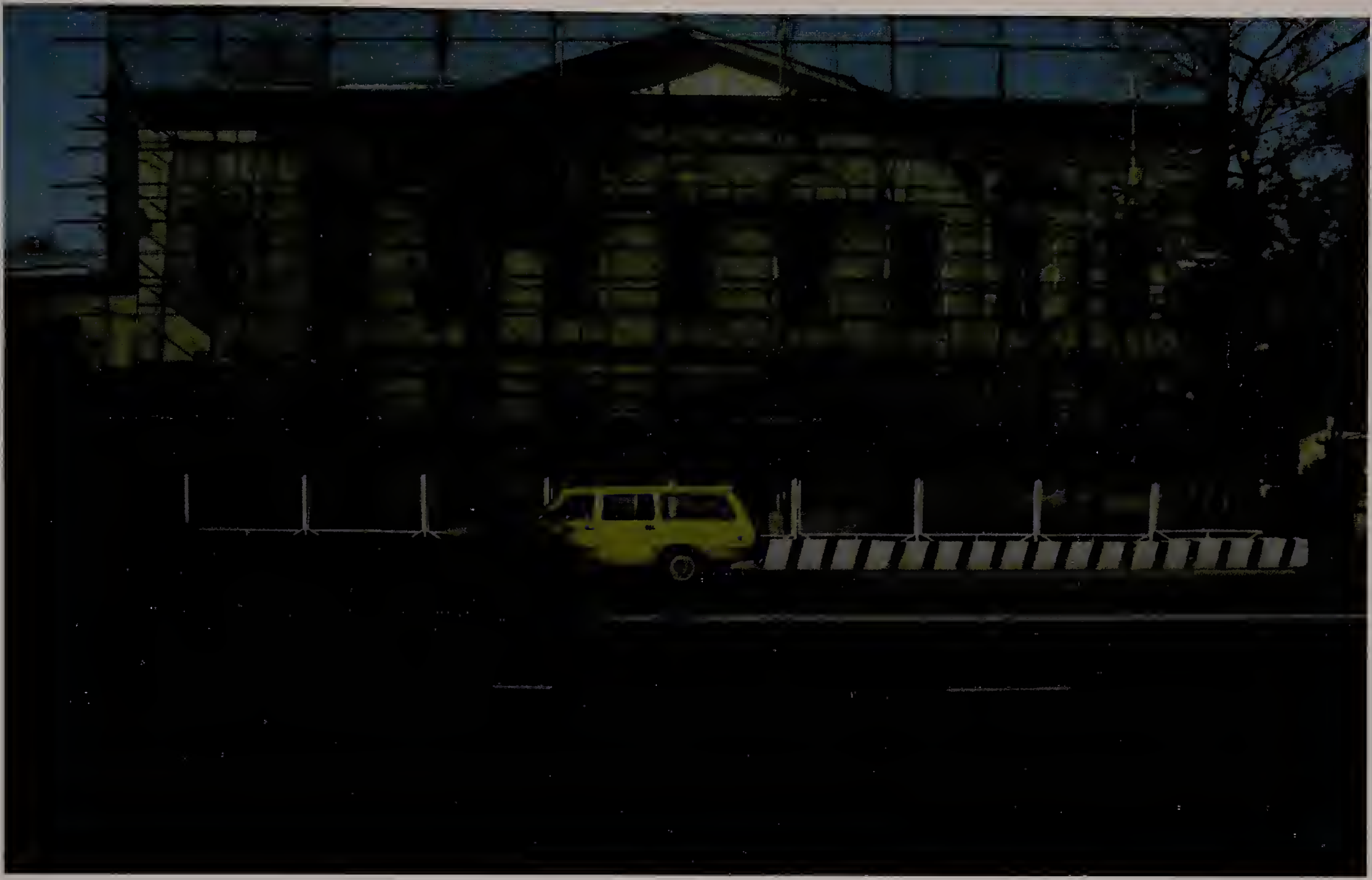


Fig. 227. Aleksandr Slyusarev, No. 31 from the series *Auto*, 1998. Color photograph, 40 x 60 cm. Collection of the artist.

shooting. But when you make artificial junk, you don't even see what you are shooting. You can just assume, but no more than that.

MS: Did the strict rules of the Czech school, which practically didn't use flash, influence you—the fact that you didn't use flash?

AS: No. Actually, I was influenced by everything I saw. It is senseless to talk about whether someone influenced me more or less. Thanks to deceased photographers, I entered photography right away at the age of sixteen or seventeen ...

MS: On the basis of some of your photographs from the 1970s, it seems you worked in close contact with the Lithuanians.

AS: No. I never had any close contact with the Lithuanians, with the exception of Vitas Luckus and Valery Koreshkov. But Koreshkov is not considered "Lithuanian." Well, I was in contact with Sheshkus. But you cannot get anything out of such contacts. Boris Mikhailov was there, too.

MS: How did you get to know Boris Mikhailov?

AS: He came and didn't understand shit about what I was doing. What I saw of his work were slides—sandwiched, superimpositions—at that time this was really cool.

MS: When?

AS: We became acquainted in 1978, probably.... When I first showed him my works he didn't react negatively, but he had no idea what the hell I was doing.

MS: When was the first publication of your works?

AS: In 1962.

MS: What kind of works were they? Would you sign your name to them today?

AS: Yes, but unfortunately, there was a time when I threw out negatives I didn't like. Because of that, I no longer have a certain number of my works. But you can find the March 1962 issue of this magazine.

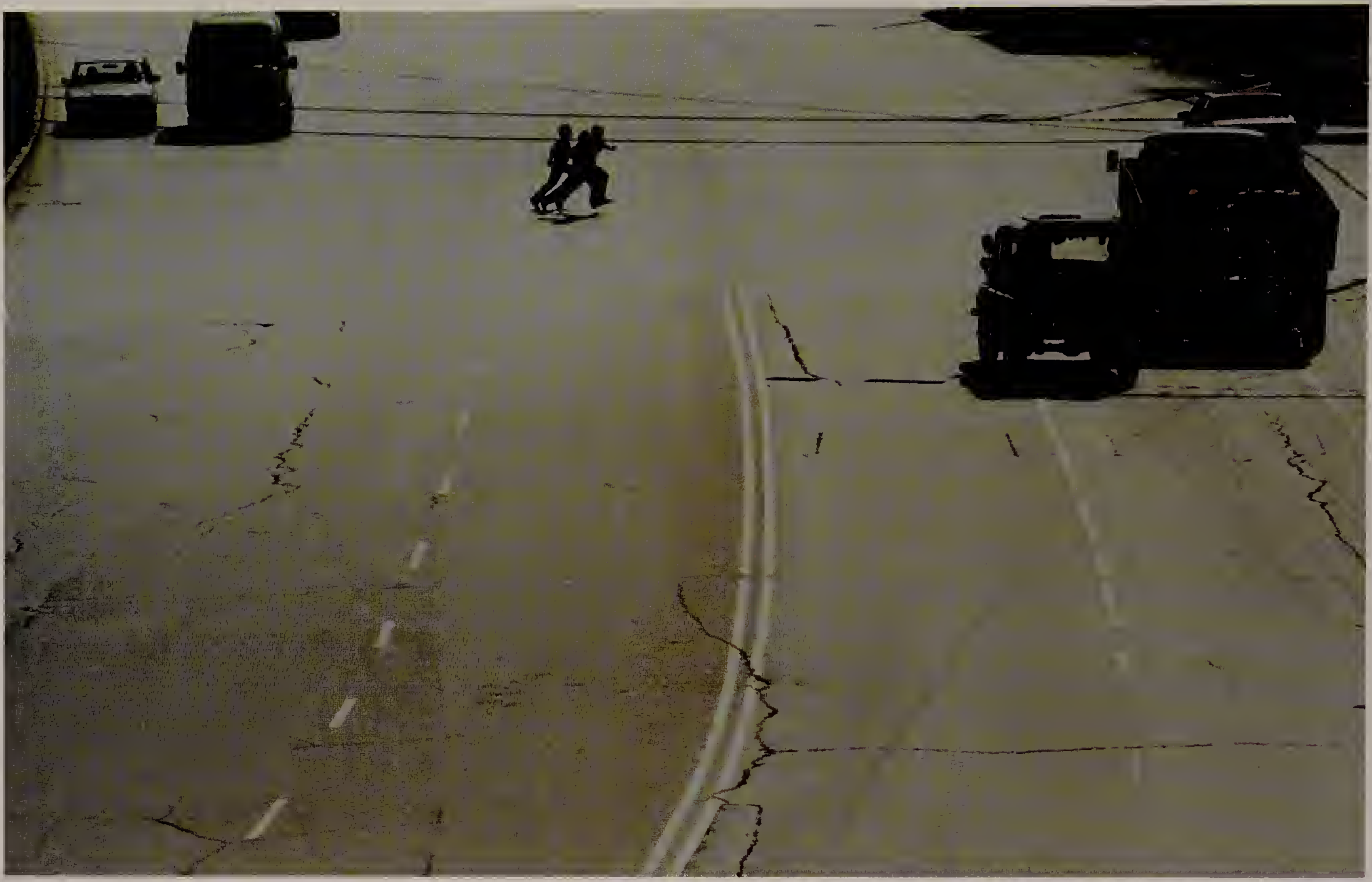


Fig. 228. Aleksandr Slyusarev, No. 23 from the series *Auto*, 1998. Color photograph, 40 x 60 cm. Collection of the artist.

MS: *Sovetskoe foto?*

AS: Yes. It was in the "letters to the editor" section. That is, it wasn't a serious publication. But it is a fact.

MS: What about the first serious publication?

AS: This is a little more complicated, as I didn't like publications. They are copies. These are reproductions and not actual photographs. Now there is even some information on the Internet—photorussia.com and photographer.ru.

MS: Do think that you have students, followers, continuers of your work, a school?

AS: There are many all across the country. I traveled ... What do you mean by "students"?

MS: Those who worked under your direction.

AS: There's Mirovsky. But what does *student* mean?

MS: Those who make use of your methods in the broad meaning of the word.

AS: I suspect that there's a multitude of them. The point is not whether someone's a "student" but how I influenced what they're doing. The furthest extent of my exhibitions is Ust' Kamenogorsk. I didn't move beyond that.

MS: Did you teach photography? When and where?

AS: There is ZNUI.

MS: The People's Correspondence University of the Arts?

AS: ... where this Mirovsky appeared at a certain time. He didn't learn how to photograph, but some of his pictures are completely fantastic.

MS: What's the difference between knowing how to photograph and how to make a picture?

AS: Very simple. I am sitting in front of you and I see that there is no picture. But when you see it you must photograph it.

MS: How does the ability to photograph differ from the ability to see a picture?

AS: Well, there are several parameters—composition, light. If there is no concurrence, there is no need to photograph. The eye easily decides everything. If you see—you see. If you don't see, you can release the shutter but you won't get a picture out of it. This is impossible to explain because this is visual art.

MS: When did you start to photograph reflections?

AS: If not on the first day, then on the second. For me, a city doesn't exist in and of itself. It is always an object, but a reflection is a repetition that increases the sensation.

MS: When did you start working with series?

AS: About 1979–80. This occurred spontaneously. I don't remember having planned a series. It was born by itself without me. This was the bridge in Ogre, in Latvia.

MS: In your opinion, who was the pioneer of conceptual photography in Moscow?

AS: There was no one. But there was a photographer from Cheboksary—Evlampiev.

MS: When did Evlampiev produce his first conceptual series?

AS: This was in the early 1980s, maybe earlier.

MS: I noticed that in your series dedicated to the south of France, there is an unusual sky. Did you use any special filters?

AS: That's what the sky there is like. It is just natural. There is no such sky in Moscow, or very rarely, because in Moscow there is always a haze. But if there is strong wind and a clear sky, then it appears, too.

MS: As far as lenses are concerned, do you use a 28–80?

AS: A 28 is too narrow for me—but a 22 is already normal. Before that, I used a 17-mm lens, which is indispensable in a country like Italy, where all other lenses would be too narrow.

MS: You prefer wide-angle lenses?

AS: My whole life I used a basic 50-mm lens. I had a Rolleiflex 6 × 6. Later, in the mid-1980s, I sold it because I had enough of square shots with a basic lens.

MS: You became tired of it?

AS: That's not exactly it, but the 50-mm lens was beginning to limit me. I then moved on to wide-angle lenses—even though, when you look at my pictures, the wide-angle effect is almost not noticeable.

MS: Yes, absolutely. You just see full range of the space.

AS: It's a different perspective.

MS: Did you take only black-and-white pictures with the Rolleiflex or color as well?

AS: If you saw the book *Poetics of Photography*, there are many color shots taken with my Rollei. There's a picture with reflections in the book—very beautiful—that was taken on the New Arbat Street with an unsharp lens. I had an old Rollei from 1937.

MS: You don't like range-finder cameras?

AS: No, I do like range-finder cameras. But I practically cannot use them.

MS: Why?

AS: Because of my vision—it's getting worse. With a reflex camera I can use a diopter, and I see everything like a normal person. I see everything as it is. With a range-finder camera, on the other hand, I can no longer see the "thing" you use for focusing. Once I got my hands on an FED that had an adjustable diopter. It turned out, however, that I had to adjust it whenever the distance to the subject changed. This was completely ridiculous.

MS: In other words, you have to spend two more minutes, so to speak?

AS: Yes. First I had to put on the diopter, then focus, and then take the picture. However, it is more interesting to take pictures with range-finder cameras. You see the frame better. In a reflex camera you actually see only the center of the frame—and the edge is peripheral. In a range-finder camera you see everything at once and it's easier to compose the shot. But it all depends on what you're used to. I have been taking pictures for a long time with a "closed" camera, and I have no problems whatsoever with composition.

MS: Did you ever like telephoto lenses?

AS: Actually, no, because they liquidate the foreground, which has an important meaning for me. But what about the far range? If you know what you're doing you can take pictures with a telephoto lens. When you take a portrait you need a portrait lens. The possibilities of telephoto lenses are very limited. For this reason I haven't used them much.

MS: Do you use auto-focus cameras?

AS: Yes. This is a very convenient thing. The Canon system is brilliant. It focuses right away. In an ordinary reflex and range-finder camera I have to move the lens first in one and then in another direction and focus on the third time. The Canon focuses immediately. This saves a great deal of time.

MS: Did you ever encounter the problem that the auto-focus can focus on the wrong object? Not the one you want to be in focus?

AS: No, why? It is I who point the camera. It doesn't happen by itself. What's interesting is that lately when I've been taking pictures with a regular reflex camera I would focus on the "eyes" but the "ears" would actually be in focus. I don't know why this happens. Maybe the way the film is inserted in the camera. This never happens with the Canon.

MS: Would you like to try digital photography?

AS: So far, there are no good cameras. Pasha Kiselev bought a Minolta, but the quality is not as good as with regular cameras. Actually, there are good digital cameras, but they are still very expensive. Digital photography is the future—but its time hasn't yet arrived.

Translated by Daniel Rishik

NOTES

1. Ivan Mazepa (ca. 1640–1709), hetman (head) of Ukrainian Cossack autonomy from 1687 until 1709. In 1708 he supported Charles XII of Sweden against Peter I of Russia in the Northern War. Hetman Mazepa is the key figure in the history of Ukrainian movement for independence.
2. Gianni Rodari (1920–1980) and Marcello Argilli (b. 1926), Italian writers.
3. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964) by Pier Paolo Pasolini; *Amarcord* (1973) by Federico Fellini.

Glossary

AKhRR Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia. Organized in 1922, this association advocated a return to representational art in the form of heroic realism; its members laid the groundwork for socialist realism and functioned primarily as an exhibition society based in Moscow. In 1928 its name was changed to AKhR, Association of Artists of the Revolution. The group was disbanded in 1932.

Inkhuk Institute of Artistic Culture. Inkhuk was established as a research institute in Moscow in 1920. Its aim was to formulate an ideological, theoretical approach to the arts based on scientific research and analysis. Inkhuk had affiliations in Petrograd, Vitebsk, and other cities.

IZO Narkompros Fine Arts Department of the People's Commissariat for Education. Started shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Narkompros was responsible for education, the organization of exhibitions, and publications. It was divided into two principal sections—in Petrograd under David Shterenberg and in Moscow under Vladimir Tatlin. Thanks to IZO, many avant-garde artists of the time were given important administrative and pedagogical posts within the new cultural hierarchy. IZO lost its administrative power after 1921.

***lubok* (pl: *lubki*)** Russian hand-colored popular prints or broadsides generally used for entertainment and instruction. Often depicting allegorical, satirical, or folk figures from ordinary life, most *lubki* were copper engravings, but wood-engraved and manuscript examples were also common.

OST Society of Easel Artists. Founded in 1925, this society held four exhibitions between 1925 and 1928. Most of the members were former Vkhutemas (see glossary entry) students. OST was formed as a protest against constructivism and other artistic movements, and its exhibitions demonstrated its orientation toward a figurative art.

Union of Soviet Artists The single official artists' union of the Soviet Union, authorized and controlled by the state. Proposed in 1932, it was fully realized in 1957.

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About the Contributors

Konstantin Akinsha is an art historian and critic who was educated in Russia in both art history and studio art. He is a contributing editor of *Art News* (New York) and a correspondent for *Springerin* (Vienna). In addition, he currently serves as a Senior Research Director of the Commission for Art Recovery in New York City. Dr. Akinsha has numerous publications in English, German, and Russian, including two books, *Beautiful Loot: The Soviet Plunder of European Art Treasures* and *Operation Beutekunst.*

Elena Barkhatova is an art historian based in St. Petersburg, where she heads the Department of Prints at the National Library of Russia. Dr. Barkhatova has published numerous articles on photography, prints, and posters. She is the author of *The Russian Constructivist Poster* and a co-author of *A Portrait of Tzarist Russia: Unknown Photographs from the Soviet Archives.* Dr. Barkhatova has curated more than ten exhibitions in Russia, France, Germany, Japan, and South Korea.

Ekaterina Bobrinskaya is a scholar of twentieth-century Russian art. She has published extensively, including five books that range in topics from early Russian avant-garde to conceptual art. Dr. Bobrinskaya received her undergraduate and advanced degrees in art history from the Moscow State Lomonosov University and since 1994 has worked as a Research Fellow at the State Research Institute of Art History, Department of Russian Art.

Alexander Borovsky is the head of the Contemporary Art Department at the Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg. He is the author of over three hundred essays on Russian and Western contemporary art, including more than fifty articles published in English. Dr. Borovsky has curated numerous exhibitions of Russian, Soviet, and Western contemporary art.

Ekaterina Degot is a Moscow-based art historian, critic, and independent curator. Having spent seven years as a culture columnist for the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, she has since focused on curatorial projects and writing. Ms. Degot has published two books on modern and contemporary Russian art, *Terroristicheskii Naturalizm* (Terrorist Naturalism) and *Russkoe iskusstvo XX veka* (Russian Art of the Twentieth Century). Her solo curatorial projects include the traveling exhibition *Body Memory: Underwear of the Soviet Era* (St. Petersburg and Moscow, 2000–2001; Volkskundemuseum, Vienna, 2003) and the Russian pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2001). Ms. Degot also co-curated the exhibition *Moscow-Berlin, 1947–2003* (Berlin, September 2003). She teaches twentieth-century art at the European University in St. Petersburg.

Norton T. Dodge is a Professor Emeritus at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Dr. Dodge studied Russian at Cornell University, where he graduated with highest honors. He then earned his M.A. in Russian regional studies at Harvard University and also obtained there his Ph.D. in economics in 1960. In 1962, while teaching comparative economics at the University of Maryland, he began collecting Soviet nonconformist art that was created between Stalin's death and Gorbachev's glasnost. Since then, much of his life has been devoted to expanding and exhibiting the collection and honoring the courage and talent of the nonconformist artists. In 1991, he and his wife, Nancy, donated the collection, which now numbers more than twenty thousand works, to the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Alla Efimova is an art historian and curator specializing in modern art and photography who was born in St. Petersburg. She is Chief Curator at the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, California. Dr. Efimova teaches courses on modern art and art theory at the University of California, Berkeley, publishes widely and curates exhibitions of Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet art.

Jason Francisco is a photographer, book artist, and writer whose projects include in-depth studies of rural life in southern India, San Francisco's Chinatown, and contemporary Jewish Europe. In addition, he has done a series of works on the Shoah. He has exhibited nationally and internationally, and his work has appeared in numerous collections, including that of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Mr. Francisco is Assistant Professor of Visual Art at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

Boris Groys is Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung (State School of Design; Karlsruhe, Germany). Since 1991 he has been a member of the Association International des Critiques d'Art. He has written, co-authored, and edited numerous books, including *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (The Total Art of Stalinism) and *Unter Verdacht. Eine Phänomenologie der Medien* (On Suspicion: A Phenomenology of the Media). Mr. Groys was born in East Berlin and studied at the University of Leningrad. He emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany from the U.S.S.R. in December 1981.

Sirje Helme is an art historian and critic who has published numerous articles in Europe and the United States. In addition to being active as a lecturer, she has curated exhibitions in Estonia, Germany, Hungary, and Poland. Dr. Helme has held the position of editor and then editor in chief of the Estonian magazine *Kunst*. Since 1999 she has served as a commissioner of the Venice Biennale. Dr. Helme received her B.A. from Tartu University, Estonia, and her Ph.D. from the Estonian Academy of Arts, where she has since lectured on modernism and post–World War II Estonian art.

Raminta Jurenaite is an art historian. She received her advanced degrees from the Institute of Theory and History of fine Arts, Academy of Arts of the U.S.S.R. (1986), and the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania (1993). Dr. Jurenaite has organized over sixty exhibitions in thirty-four countries as well as directed the Soros Center of Contemporary Art in Vilnius from 1992 to 1998. She has taught at the Lithuanian State Art Institute in Vilnius and currently teaches at the Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Ernest Larsen has published media criticism in *The Nation*, *Art in America*, *The Village Voice*, *Art Journal*, *The Independent*, and *Jump Cut*. His study of *The Usual Suspects* was published by the British Film Institute in 2002 in its modern film classics series. Mr. Larsen also writes fiction and produces video. His novel, *Not a Through Street*, was nominated for an Edgar. His video projects made in collaboration with Sherry Millner have been exhibited at major festivals throughout the world, including two Whitney Biennials. He has received grants and awards from the Jerome Foundation, the Paul Robeson Foundation, the MacDowell Foundation, the Blue Mountain Center, the Gunk Foundation, and the Blumenthal Foundation.

Lev Manovich was born in Moscow and moved to New York in 1981. Currently he is Associate Professor of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego, where he teaches courses in new media art and theory. He is the author of *The Language of New Media* and *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture* as well as many articles, which have been published in twenty-eight countries. Mr. Manovich is in demand to lecture on new media; between 1999 and 2003 he delivered more than one hundred eighty lectures in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. His awards include Mellon and Guggenheim Fellowships.

Nick Muellner is a photo-based artist, writer, and curator who lives and works in Brooklyn and Ithaca, New York. His recent exhibitions have included *Re-enactment: Winter's Campaign* at Project Room in Philadelphia, *As Far As The Eye Could See* at Stark Gallery in New York, and *Propositions* at Locks Gallery in Philadelphia. In addition to showing in solo and group exhibitions, he has collaborated on curatorial projects and multimedia works, including *The Evolution of Closed Systems and Other Propagandas*, an interactive video game based on the relationship between Pong, human intimacy, Maoist doctrine, and the tyranny of market capitalism. Mr. Muellner's creative and curatorial projects have been reviewed in *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, and *The New Yorker*, among other publications. His photographic and language-based project, *Mysterian Shapes*, was recently featured on *Studio 360*, a nationally syndicated public radio program. Mr. Muellner teaches photography and critical studies at the Park School of Communications, Ithaca College.

Diane Neumaier is an artist whose conceptually based photography has been exhibited internationally. Her many works include *Metropolitan Tits*, *Museum Studies*, *Color Plates*, and *Spectrum*. Ms. Neumaier's traveling exhibition about her grandmother who was murdered in the Holocaust, *A Voice Silenced: Leonore Schwarz Neumaier*, was recently presented by the Frankfurt Stadt Jewish Museum in Germany. She was a 1994 Fulbright Fellow in Moscow and continues to work in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Ms. Neumaier is the editor of *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies* and of the *Art Journal* issue devoted to contemporary Russian art photography and the co-editor, with Douglas Kahn, of *Cultures in Contention*. Ms. Neumaier is Professor of Photography at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University.

Gerald Pirog received his Ph.D. in Slavic languages and literatures from Yale University. He is currently the Director of the Program in Russian and East European Languages and Literatures and the Associate Director of the Center for Comparative European Studies at Rutgers University. Dr. Pirog has published scholarly works on the poets Aleksandr Blok and Aleksandr Pushkin as well as on the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. He has a continuing interest in the relationship between the visual arts and literature.

Alla Rosenfeld has served as a curator of Russian and Soviet nonconformist art at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University since 1992. She is currently Director of the Russian and Soviet Nonconformist Art Department at the Zimmerli and also teaches Survey of Russian Art and Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design, 1905–1935, at Rutgers University. Previously, Dr. Rosenfeld was, for a varying number of years, full-time lecturer at the IBM Gallery of Science and Art in New York; guest curator at Castle Gallery, College of New Rochelle, New York; and the Lublin Collection Gallery Director in Greenwich, Connecticut. Dr. Rosenfeld earned her M.A. in art history from the Ilya Repin Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture (Academy of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg). She received her Ph.D. at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, specializing in modern and contemporary European art. Dr. Rosenfeld co-edited, with Dr. Norton T. Dodge, the catalogues *Art of the Baltics: The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945–1991* and *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union* and edited the catalogue *Defining Russian Graphic Arts, 1898–1934*. She also has written many articles on modern and contemporary Russian art for various publications.

Mikhail Sidlin is an art critic and independent curator. He heads the "Accents" department of the newspaper *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (Moscow) and serves on the editorial board for the journal *Terra Incognita* (Kiev, Ukraine). Since 1993, Mr. Sidlin has authored more than five hundred articles on contemporary art and culture, which were published in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* and more than thirty other Russian periodicals. He has also curated more than ten exhibitions of contemporary art. From 1994 to 2002, Mr. Sidlin held various positions in the art and culture departments of *Nedelia* (the Moscow supplement to the newspaper *Izvestiia*) and *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*. In 2000–2001, he taught a course entitled "New Moscow Photography in the Context of Contemporary Russian Art" at the Russian State University of Humanities, Moscow.

Valery Stigneev is a Leading Research Fellow at the State Institute of Art Theory and Criticism and holds an advanced degree in the humanities. He was born in Siberia and graduated from the Moscow State Institute of Engineering and Physics in 1960. Mr. Stigneev has worked as a journalist for various Soviet periodicals from 1968 to 1980. He has written extensively on the theory and history of photography, and among his most notable publications are *Poetika fotografii* (Poetics of Photography); *Fototvorchestvo Rossii* (Russia's Photo Art); and "The Text in Photographic Space," in *Poetics of Space: A Critical Photography Anthology*.

Mark Allen Svede is an independent scholar and curator specializing in Latvian visual and material culture. He has recently published essays on such topics as hippie fashion, dandyism in Soviet-era performance art, underground film, and anti-Soviet architecture practices. After Mr. Svede's 1987 curatorial debut, *Contemporary Art from the Baltic States* (Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Arts), his projects broadened in scope to include collaborations with Rīga-based artists, film restoration, and a documentary short about Latvian performance (co-directed with Julius Ziz; in production at Anthology Film Archives in New York). Since 1991, he has advised the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union regarding its Latvian acquisitions. Mr. Svede is completing his doctorate in art history at Ohio State University, where he was named the first Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., Graduate Fellow.

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PHOTOGRAPHY POSSESSES a powerful ability to bear witness, aid remembrance, shape, and even alter recollection. In *Beyond Memory: Soviet Nonconformist Photography and Photo-Related Works of Art*, the general editor, Diane Neumaier, and twenty-two contributors offer a rigorous examination of the medium's role in late Soviet nonconformist art. Focusing on the period between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s, they explore artists' unusually inventive and resourceful uses of photography within a highly developed Soviet dissident culture.

During this time, lack of high-quality photographic materials, complemented by tremendous creative impulses, prompted artists to explore experimental photo processes such as camera and darkroom manipulations, photomontage, and hand-coloring. Photography also took on a provocative array of forms, including photo installation, artist-made samizdat (self-published) books, photorealist painting, and many other surprising applications of the flexible medium.

Beyond Memory shows how innovative conceptual moves and approaches to form and content—echoes of Soviet society's coded communication and a Russian sense of absurdity—were common in the Soviet cultural underground. Collectively, the works in this anthology demonstrate how late Soviet artists employed irony and invention to make positive use of difficult circumstances. In the process, the volume illuminates the multiple characters of photography itself and highlights the leading role that the medium has come to play in the international art world today.

Beyond Memory stands on its own as a rigorous examination of photography's place in late Soviet nonconformist art, while also serving as a supplement to the traveling exhibition of the same title.

DIANE NEUMAIER is a professor of photography at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. She is also an artist whose conceptually based photography has been exhibited internationally. She is the editor of *Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies* and served as a guest editor for an issue of *Art Journal* focusing on contemporary Russian art photography. Neumaier was a Fulbright Fellow in Moscow in 1994 and continues to work in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe.

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