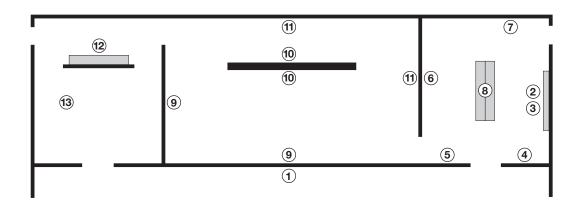# BORIS MIKHAILOV

TIME IS OUT OF JOINT
PHOTOGRAPHY 1966–2011

OUTSIDE WALL

① Superimpositions, 1968–1975
Colour photographs,
each about 159 × 119 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin
and Galerie Barbara Gross, Munich

FIRST SPACE

② Black Archive, 1968–1979
b/w photographs, coloured pencil,
various sizes ranging from
19,5 × 15 cm to 25,5 × 16,5 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

③ Sots Art, 1975–1986
Aniline dye on b/w photographs,
hand coloured, each about 1 × 1 m
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

④ Luriki, 1971–1985
Aniline dye on b/w photographs,
hand coloured, various sizes ranging
from 23,5 × 17 cm to 58 × 50 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

⑤ Crimean Snobbery, 1982
b/w photographs, sepia toned,
each about 18 × 12,5 cm / 12,5 × 18 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

⑥ Salt Lake, 1986/1997
Extracolor professional prints
each 63 × 95 cm
Courtesy Art Foundation Bernhard
Sprengel and Friends

⑦ Red, 1968–1975
Colour photographs,
each 20 × 30 cm / 30 × 20 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

⑧ Viscidity, 1982
b/w photographs, partly sepia toned,
partly pasted with coloured paper,
all marked with coloured pencil and / or
pencil, each 29,5 × 18 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

SECOND SPACE

⑨ Case History, 1997–1999
Colour photographs, each 197 × 127 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

⑩ By the Ground, 1991
b/w photographs, sepia toned,
each about 11,5 × 56 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

⑪ At Dusk, 1993
b/w photograph, blue tinted,
various sizes ranging from 15 × 30 cm
to 50 × 112 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

THIRD SPACE

⑫ If I were a German …, 1994
Photographic project in cooperation
with Vita Mikhailov, Sergej Bratkov and
Sergej Solonsky, Kharkov/ Ukraine
b/w photographs, text, each 30 × 40 cm
(vitrine) and 150 × 100 cm (wall)
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin

⑬ In the Street (Berlin), since 2000
colour photographs,
various sizes ranging from 108 × 68 cm
to 100 × 150 cm
Courtesy Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin,
Galerie Barbara Gross, Munich and
Collection Berlinische Galerie

BORIS MIKHAILOV – TIME IS OUT OF JOINT

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Boris Andreevič Mikhailov is born on August 25th, 1938 in Kharkov, Ukraine. His parents are engineers with senior positions. As of 1963, Mikhailov works as an engineer as well. Due to his artistic ambitions he is allowed to make a film about his employer and take photographs in the factory. Inspired by German and Czech photo magazines, he privately tries taking nude photographs. However, they are discovered and confiscated by the the Soviet intelligence service KGB. Loyal to the regime, the management dismisses him.

In 1968, Boris Mikhailov finds a new job as an engineer and begins devoting much of his free time to photography. In 1976, he gives up his job and starts working as a technical photographer. He takes official portraits and edits old family photos. During the late 1960s, his first works of art, the *Superimpositions,* are being created.

In 1984/85, Mikhailov's work is to be displayed in another Communist country for the first time. In 1991, the first display of his work in the US takes place. Mikhailov's one-man show at the Portikus in Frankfurt in 1995, which moves on to the Kunsthalle in Zurich, is the first presentation of his work in the West to offer a broad overview of his oeuvre. In 1996, Mikhailov visits Berlin on the program for artists run by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). He accepts a guest lectureship at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig in 2002/2003. Mikhailov has recently started working on a series of photographs which explore the KGB.

SUPERIMPOSITIONS

The series *Superimpositions* (1968–1975) was Boris Mikhailov's first work of art. He created it in parallel to the series "Red", and so a number of images crop up separately in *Red,* only to reappear in a combination in *Superimpositions.*

When Boris Mikhailov showed this work, artists who were not on close terms with the Soviet regime welcomed it as refreshingly new. Experiments of this kind and such an innovative aesthetic were audacious and up till then they had been quite rare. But the *Superimpositions* are not content with a new look. By overlaying different pictures, Mikhailov was provoking ambiguous readings of these photographs, and therefore encouraging thoroughly critical perceptions.

The original material was drawn from a big collection of transparencies. In Soviet years, Boris Mikhailov presented them—like the series *Red*—in the form of slide shows. He often accompanied them with a soundtrack, such as music by Pink Floyd. It was not until after 2000 that he decided to display the individual works as prints, usually in a large format.

BLACK ARCHIVE

In his series *Black Archive,* compiled in Kharkov between 1968 and 1979, Boris Mikhailov contrasts private and public life. He photographs home as a place where fun can be had, where people can move around naked and pose in the nude. Home, therefore, is a space of personal liberty, free of the coercion and regulation imposed by the regime.

This characterisation of the home as a free zone is all the more evident when seen alongside Mikhailov's pictures of public space. Here the photographer seems to creep about like a spy, capturing people from the rear and pretending to point his camera at a distant building rather than the figures in the foreground.

Despite this contrast between the private and public—or rather, state-monitored—sphere, there is nothing oppressive about life on the streets the way Mikhailov shows it here. Rather than presenting Soviet life as grey and despondent, the mood and atmosphere of *Black Archive* open our eyes to a life with inadequacies which people have grown accustomed to and taken in their stride.

VISCIDITY

In the late 1970s, when Boris Mikhailov met the Moscow Conceptualists, and in particular the artist Ilya Kabakov, he discovered the artistic technique of combining images with text. This method offered a platform for bringing together jottings and pictures, although the two components bore little relation to each other, for the paintings did not illustrate the texts, and nor did the texts explain the paintings. Mikhailov was intrigued by the process, and in the early 1980s he began adding handwritten notes to his photographs.

Viscidity (1982) was made at a time when Ukrainians were being subjected to more stringent state control and repression than usual. In 1982 Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, the former head of the Soviet secret service (KGB), took office as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). There was no question now of living outside the norm or the rules imposed by the state apparatus. Everyday life was under surveillance, anything that did not fall within daily work patterns was kept to a minimum—life, felt Mikhailov, had become "viscous".

At a time like this, the jottings came to Mikhailov's aid, enriching his pictures with stories and poetry and breathing life into them.

IF I WERE A GERMAN …

When the Soviet Union came to an end, a period of unprecedented artistic freedom began for Boris Mikhailov and the new art scene in Kharkov. Now they could use performance and other artistic work to draw attention to the politics of the day and topics from Ukrainian history that had been swept under the carpet. In the early 1990s, Boris Mikhailov, his fellow-artists Sergej Bratkov and Sergej Solonsky, and Mikhailov's wife Vita founded a group called "Fast Reaction". Alongside a number of performances, their major works included the provocative, fun-loving photo sequence *If I were a German …* (1994).

Interviews with Ukrainians who had witnessed the German occupation during Word War II firsthand were the springboard for this series. The artists turned the interview questions on their head and stepped into the boots of the occupiers. What if I had been the German? These actors, then, are engaged in role play in the conditional form, and their burning questions are: What privileges would I have enjoyed? How would I have treated those in my power? When would I have gone along with things and when not? What would I have condemned?

These protagonists are not passing moral judgment on the injustices suffered by their compatriots. They are trying to comprehend how individuals, common soldiers, behaved. Ignoring the generals and political bigwigs, they focus on those who (perhaps) might have been in a position to offer someone else a piece of bread.