

BORIS MIKHAILOV *Profiles and...*

October 30 through December 5, 2015

Since the 1960s Boris Mikhailov has been developing a multifaceted body of photographic work that unites conceptual and documentary strategies. His main focus is on everyday life under various social and political conditions. Most recently awarded the Goslar Kaiserring prize, he is one of the most outstanding photographers today. Since 1998 the Barbara Gross Galerie has exhibited many of his large series of works, such as *By the Ground* (1991), *Case History* (1997-1998), and *Superimpositions* (1960-70). Now, we are pleased to show the exhibition *Profiles and...* featuring three new series of portraits in which the past and present overlap.

German Portraits (2008) is a series of profile portraits of amateur actors of various ages and genders who were hired to play the chorus in a theatrical production of Aeschylus' *The Persians* in Braunschweig directed by Claudia Bosse. With a total of three hundred profiles of students, seniors, and workers (of which only a selection will be on display here), Mikhailov gives a face to the German middle class. By choosing the strict profile view, he picks up on the historical visual tradition of this presentational form, examples of which are the Renaissance portraits by Hans Holbein or Sandro Botticelli. Simultaneously, Mikhailov's series consciously plays with references to physiognomy, used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as pseudo-scientific justification for racism and eugenics.

The exhibition contrasts the *German Portraits* with the group of *Jewish Portraits* (2015), made six years later. For this series Mikhailov photographed male visitors to a synagogue in Kiev, posing in front of a black curtain. Traditional Jewish clothing makes some of the portraits seem almost timeless, while others clearly belong to the present day, thanks to accessories such as shopping bags, fashionable haircuts, or earphones. While the framed *German Portraits* fit together to form a classic portrait gallery, the *Jewish Portraits* are unframed prints of various sizes, underscoring the photographs' unfinished, improvised character.

In the series *When My Mama was Young* (2011-2012) Mikhailov looks back to Soviet society of the 1950s, asking the question if it is possible for a photographer to photograph the past. Here, the artist, known as a chronicler of Soviet and post-Soviet life since the 1960s, undertakes to illustrate life in a period that has, as he says, "left few photographs behind." To do this, he presents present-day politicians, secret agents, and scientists as personalities from the Brezhnev era.

The series shown raise fundamental questions about the photographic portrait. As is the case with all of his work, Mikhailov is concerned with conserving time in all of its contradictions. In doing so, he is aware of the photographer's subjective role and the constructed character of his work, which goes far beyond simple documentation.

Boris Mikhailov, *1938 in Kharkiv, Ukraine; lives and works in Berlin and in Kharkiv.

Solo shows (selected): Camera - Italian Center for Photography, Turin, Italy, 2015; Museo Madre, Naples, Italy, 2015; Sprengel Museum, Hannover, 2014; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, 2012; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY, USA, 2011. **Group shows** (selected): Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf, 2015; BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium, 2015; Victoria & Albert Gallery, London, UK, 2014; Manifesta 10, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, 2014; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2014; Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy, 2014; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, 2013; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland 2013; Barbican, London, UK, 2012, Tate Modern, London, UK, 2013; The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, NY, USA, 2012.