

## PRESS RELEASE

### BORIS MIKHAILOV RECEIVES THE HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL AWARD IN PHOTOGRAPHY, 2000

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation has selected Ukrainian photographer Boris Mikhailov, who lives in both Charkov and Berlin, as the winner of the 2000 Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography. The prize, consisting of SEK 500,000 and a gold medal, will be awarded at a ceremony held in Göteborg, Sweden in November 2000. A new exhibition of Boris Mikhailov's work, curated and organized by the Hasselblad Center, will be opened in conjunction with the ceremony.

The Foundation's decision to award the 2000 prize to Boris Mikhailov was motivated by the belief that:

"Boris Mikhailov is unquestionably the leading photographer with a "Soviet background" today. In recent years, his exhibits and books have attracted enormous international attention. At this point in his over thirty year long career, Boris Mikhailov continues to develop his great theme - his narrative of the wreck of the Soviet utopia. Boris Mikhailov's stance is critical; his work is consistently humanist in approach, with strong emotional elements and a sense of humor that audiences in both East and West have found moving. Despite working under extremely difficult circumstances, he has always succeeded in creating deeply engaging and exciting photographic art.

The Jury for the 2000 Award, which submitted the proposal to the Board of Directors of the Foundation, consisted of: Jan Kaila, (chairman) photographer, Helsinki, Finland; Hasse Persson, photographer, Hyssna, Sweden; Joan Fontcuberta, photographer and editor of *Photovision*, Barcelona, Spain and Dr. Margarita Tupitsyn, Berlin Prize Fellow of the American Academy in Berlin, New York, USA.

Boris Mikhailov was born in 1938, in Charkov, Ukraine. He is based in Charkov and Berlin. He trained as a technical engineer. At the age of 28 he began to work with photography, and was soon sacked from the factory where he worked, when the KGB discovered nude photos he had taken of his wife. Thus began his full-time career as a photographer.

Boris Mikhailov is unquestionably the most outstanding photographer of Soviet origin. During his over-thirty-year career, he has produced works which are already considered as classics. At the same time, he has continued to develop, rather than remaining as a classical artist he has gone on to work in radical and often provocative ways. In 1998 he organized an exhibition entitled "Case History", with photographs reflecting daily life. A book entitled *Case History* was also published in 1999. In it, he returned photography to square one, with his simple, straightforward pictures of human beings in states we turn away from and would prefer to ignore, but which, in the name of our fellow human beings, we should acknowledge as long as they exist.

Mikhailov habitually works in extended series, often quite different from each another in form. This makes it difficult to define his photographic style, his aesthetics. However, he is always consistent with regard to the function of photography as medium. It is his view that the medium must be used to help the viewer understand more about the relationship between individuals and society.

Boris Mikhailov's production has always been astonishing and eclectic. Many of his early works such as the "Private Series" (from the late 1960s), the "Red Series" (1968-75), and "Luriki" (1971-85) are playful in attitude. The photos in the "Private Series" resemble a photo album, showing people in their own rooms, women exercising, people dancing and partying; situations foreign to Soviet iconography. In the "Red Series", Mikhailov photographed everyday situations, in a snapshot style, drawing the viewer's attention to the red objects which inevitably appear in them. In this way, he rearranges the Soviet propaganda image. "Luriki" consists of an entire archive of photos which Mikhailov obtained

in the 1970s when he was working for a "commercial" photographer, retouching and coloring old photographs.

In 1984, Mikhailov initiated a remarkable project: gluing small black-and-white photos of everyday occurrences in Charkov onto the back of his uncle's unfinished lecture notes. Later, he added various kinds of handwritten text fragments to the photographs. The project was published in 1998, as an elegant art book entitled Unfinished Dissertation. In the 1980s, Mikhailov also experimented with a number of narrative ideas. In 1986, he photographed an almost film-like series entitled "Salt Lake", in which he portrayed people swimming in salt water -- possibly polluted, possibly clean -- surrounded by gigantic waste pipes in a decaying industrial site.

Perestroika and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about dramatic changes, even for photographers and artists. "The new freedom" was paradoxical for Boris Mikhailov, bringing him personal artistic and also financial success, but at the same time implying serious collective destruction. (According to Mikhailov, the post Soviet Union is a far greater economic disaster than anyone in the West can imagine). Mikhailov's series "By the Ground" (1991) and "At Dusk" (1993) describe life on the new, contemporary, capitalistic Ukrainian streets. The brown toning and the title "By the Ground" both allude to Russia under the Tzar as portrayed by Maxim Gorky, where people lived in a constant struggle for a decent life. The blue toning in "At Dusk" refers, in turn, to a state of war; here Mikhailov has portrayed the sheer struggle for survival.

In the parodic series "I am not I" (1992), Mikhailov posed for the camera nude and surrounded by various male attributes (such as swords and dildos), in scenery reminiscent of great nineteenth century "salon" art.

In the new, bewildering social reality, Mikhailov appears to ask himself and his colleagues: "Why do we create images, and for whom?"

## THE ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation was instituted by a bequest from Erna and Victor Hasselblad. The purpose of the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and photography. A number of projects are granted funds annually amounting to approximately SEK 14 million. One of the awards, the annual international award for outstanding achievement in photography, being given this year to Boris Mikhailov, has come to attract a great deal of attention.

In 1989 the Foundation opened the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Photographic Center (the Hasselblad Center) in Göteborg, Sweden. The Center maintains an ongoing exhibition and lecture program. In January 1996 the new exhibition hall adjacent to the Göteborg Museum of Art was inaugurated. A photographic research and reference library, open to researchers and students, is in the process of being established, as is a collection of photographs including photos by all the Hasselblad Award winners and others. The exhibit of Boris Mikhailov's work that will be opened on the occasion of the award ceremony will be organized by Hasselblad Center.

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