

Andrey Chezhin

"Kharmsiada" (1995)

A brick face; facial features shorn off or sewn up with thread, a face transformed by a door handle or a drawing-pin: these and other pleasures associated with methods of forming 'new people' are used by Chezhin in this series to present a kind of handbook for incipient power-lovers or a diary of obedience - a warning to the 'masses', i.e. to precisely that material from which, it should be noted, all this is moulded. Man turns to plastic, Chezhin warns us, if he stops thinking and resisting the will outside him - if he forgets his own authenticity, essence, and individuality.

"Andrey Chezhin's reincarnation occurred in the not so distant past, against the background of historic events that had broken the consciousness of generations condemned to witness the change of course undergone by the giant ghost ship USSR-Russia as it turned from socialism to capitalism and from total paralysis of its executive structures to idiocy.

Chezhin's absurd, significant, and meaningless staged photographs of nameless types/characters give off a powerful, unpleasant semi-physiological sense memory of a past age of male and female functionaries and workers stamped with the distinctive marks of the limited, if not curtailed consciousness of social invalidism. Here Chezhin's photography emphatically avoids any attempt to convey the psychological state or mood of the subject; this is photography that stands outside psychoanalysis or psychologism; outside any expression of the 'psychical'. These are still-lives where things (objects) are credited with neither spirit nor personal time, nor personal experience or living space or 'physiognomy'.

Individuality has been ironed out, leaving only the overall characteristic grimace of types in socialist society. This is what they managed to achieve in the 70 years of Soviet rule. And Chezhin the artist here merely reflects the success enjoyed by the now deposed ideology in shaping the Soviet personality.

There is nothing accidental in Chezhin's choice of compositional structure for his works. As a rule, they are composite structures that show man through multiplicity (e.g. Group Portrait or Transformations) ...Time, space, man, object, play are the perpetual engines that drive the St. Petersburg photographer Andrey Chezhin's interest in attaining an equilibrium in the relation between 'the external world' and 'the world in oneself'. The artist uses his craft and photography as instruments.

Chezhin's interest in personal expressions of humanity no doubt explains the constant use he makes of the genre of self-portraiture. Here we should observe a number of different stages in the artist's study of himself as a representative of the human and natural worlds and of reality itself: generalization; reduction to a common denominator; and individualization of the image (himself). Here there is no opposition set up between 'me' and 'they'.

Chezhin is not concerned with asking himself 'me or someone else? Instead, he is out to find an answer to the problem 'me' as 'they'. He studies man viewed statically - not in action and movement, but in the movement/change of time. What is important for him is the nature of man and the human body - not anatomy or anthropology as such, but man in his different dimensions, self-knowledge, and self-realizations."

*—Mariya Sheynina (Terenya), International Association of Art Critics (Russia).
From Postmodernism as an Artistic Space: The Photographic World of Chezhin the Artist.*

Andrey Chezhin was born in Leningrad, Soviet Union in 1960. He graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Cinema Engineers in 1982 and in 1987 he set up the "TAK" photographic group with photographers Yury Matveyev and Dmitry Shneyerson. In October 1988 TAK opened the gallery "Fotogalereya" in Leningrad, which showed a series of exhibitions in 1990 and 1991. The photographic works presented at TAK are exemplified by the dominance of a strong analytical and theoretical conceptualization. Chezhin's photographs have been published in Photomanifesto: Contemporary Photography in the USSR (USA 1991) and in Les experiences photographiques russes (Paris, 1992). His series Self-portrait 366 Days (1990/ 1991) was featured in a TAK exhibition in Paris in 1993. Chezhin's photographs are in the collection of the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. He has been a member of the Union of Photo Artists of Russia since 1995 and he founded of the annual photo festival "Autumn Photo Marathon" in 1998. Chezhin is the director of the "PHOTOimage" gallery in St. Petersburg where he lives and works.