

**Anastasia Khoroshilova:
Pilgrimage to the Land of Local Spaces**

*“Ineluctable modality of the visible...
Signatures of all things I am here to read.”
James Joyce*

Anastasia Khoroshilova’s vision as a photographer is characterised by the immediacy of her creative path. This path is indivisible from her personal life, from the drama of her biography, which is connected to the socio-cultural “wanderings” of the artist. Anastasia Khoroshilova is in a state of constant movement; she is always “watching”, translating the visual into a unique diary of reflections. Her “armed eye” however does not merely fix its own focus on the reality before it – rather, reality itself stares into her camera, “spilling” the expanse over the artist and penetrating her sight.

Anastasia Khoroshilova’s projects transform into “traveller’s notes”; into the photographer’s evidence of local living conditions in “confined spaces”, where the “confined space”, ever narrowing, hurls out its insides and allows them to soar above itself. Especially, the “confined space” is indivisible from the archetypes of “Russian” space, from its national topography, its phobias and stresses, filled with gravity, where, despite the geographical expanses, life pools in “localities”. The “Russian” point of view allows Anastasia Khoroshilova to use her “insular” vision on a “continental scale”, as Nikolai Gogol’, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Boris Pasternak and Daniil Kharms did in the past. Extrapolating this paradigm into the landscape of social utopias, one cannot ignore Lenin’s thesis on “the possibility of building Socialism in a single country”. The isolation and internal pressures, in the words of Osip Mandel’stam “of a space, pressed together into a point”, opened a universal context to the artist’s camera. This context was born from the transformation of controlled, corpuscular “vision” into the waves of nature, from the dissembling of concentration into the energy of the broadening European “field”. Anastasia Khoroshilova’s photographs by seem imbued with “reverse perspective”; they occur in situations in the passive mode, taking in the internal dimensions and translating them, as Martin Heidegger said, into a “world map”. Fixing reality, emphasising it in its still unnamed state, the position of the artist is balanced between the subjective and the objective, between participant and observer, concealing a deep personal experience within the asceticism of the witness. The work of Anastasia Khoroshilova is able to bring reality closer and to send it further away, acquiring the quality of an inspired “viewing machine” possessed of a camera’s zoom, but also able to express empathy and responsiveness. The strong ethical basis of the photographer’s representations goes into the depths of depiction, into its layered nature. It disappears into the intellectualisation of “observing”, refusing clear manifestation; it condenses the spatial layers of the visual, penetrating them with time and history. This process is reminiscent of the development of photography; of the plot of Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *Blow Up*, revealing how reality is concealed by technology, by optical equipment that exceeds the capabilities of human vision. Within these coordinates, Anastasia Khoroshilova’s “insular” photography of observation at the Moscow State Academy of Choreography, in the shelter at the Savvino-Storozhevsky Monastery in Russia or at women’s shelter No. 5 in Essen, Germany all represent the “radius of curvature”, as defined by Einstein, on which the heterogeneity of our space and history is based. The parallels from classical painting, together with the vectors of observation from the newest

photoreality, in the vision of Anastasia Khoroshilova form a non-Euclidean geometry, points of intersection, knots of energy and actual focus, revealed in the special resonance of light. In its “rays”, time and space form a unified whole, informing us about “insular” humanity, recognising its own confined space in the social world, in culture, in geopolitics, and in the nation. Anastasia Khoroshilova’s images, coming forth from her photographic documentation like flashes, like Zen Koans, destroy the tenacious clichés of former strategies, stumbling over something “not quite right”. Formally linked with traditional depiction, which reminds us of the existence of straightforward reality, displayed at close quarters and in tactile contact with it, the images clearly confirm the inner, layered mutability of contemporary vision and of the fields of our existence, which survives uninterrupted catastrophes. Those photographed by Anastasia Khoroshilova are summoned by the relic-like iconology of the “representative portrait”, of its sacrality, but displayed in the profane banality of the everyday. They do not simply pose; they stand before us in the conditions of momentary equilibrium among the unbalanced measurements of reality, in pauses, dislocations and tears in its fabric, where past and future meet. The artist needs photographic vision like a new optical instrument, which is able to register the shocks, vicissitudes and hesitant states of our virtual world. The non-linear nature of these states, their displacement on the axis of history, their state of isolation, is barely if at all revealed to the naked eye. Burdened by conformism and the accepted logic of vision, the eye avoids conflicts and is distracted by all that glisters.

Anastasia Khoroshilova’s subjects are the “islanders” – inhabitants of Russian villages, scattered across the endless expanse of Eurasia and at the same time completely incapable of escaping the Soviet archetype of the “camp zone”; forever abandoned in Turgenev’s metaphor *Bezhin Meadow*. These include the seven navy officers in a “closed” town on the Baltic; women in the military, “confined inside the contours” of their jobs and uniforms; and national minorities of the Russian Federation, who see their identity through the framework of large associations and systems, striving to go beyond the boundaries of the locality of a minority, but in doing so define themselves within the imperial confines of Soviet Russia. They shimmer in their dual presence alongside us, as though in a family photo album, always embodying their dramatic ultimatum: stay, or transgress the borders of the “inner circle”. However, they always find themselves within its confines, in metaphysical dependence, in our grandiose nostalgia for an ideal, reflected self-recognition. Their confident poses are submerged in a shivering torpor of concern, in a penetrating immortality, in a never-ending stance in front of the camera inside of the geo-social matrix. It is impossible to distance oneself from these images – they belong to the continuity of existence, to the binds of life, to human nature and its hopes and illusions. In their endless variations, they find universality, a new canon, like the people in Bill Viola’s video installation, transgressing cultural borders and revealing the immediate fate of humankind in the temptations of history. In their virtual, carnivalesque clothing, reminiscent of the “parsuna” from Malevich’s late works, his “suprematism in contour”, they appear in a situation of naked transgression – a festival or in court. Refusing the psychic, their images form part of a super-personal construction, of Meyerkhol’d’s plastique of theatrical biomechanics, without recognising their own responsibility to their own personality, “playing” their ideal selves, concealing their “I” – like Josef K. in the totality of Kafka’s *The Trial*. The art of Anastasia Khoroshilova makes a statement on their behalf, including the clarity of vision in the sharpness of its reflection, and posing a question to each of us: who are we, where are we from and where are we going?

The spatial paradoxes of the artist's photographs, where document and plastic concentration collide, the actuality of human presence in the "confined space", show their artistic dimensions as a light signal in terms of intensity, intellectual tension and indisputable authenticity. They confirm the energetic nature of the *logos* as a communication, an informational phenomenon, alluding to the dissolution of the visual-sensual in the kingdom of signs. In this artistic system, traditional positions in the contemporary hierarchy of art are taken by completely new, formally extra-aesthetic modules, which demand conceptual "resolution", and this, namely, in the sense in which one speaks about the best photographic "image resolution". The phenomenality of informational pixels in Anastasia Khoroshilova's photographs meets the demands of, and is symmetrical to, the intellectual or conceptual method, to its conceptual categories, and to the deep internal technology of the artist. Anastasia Khoroshilova's forms of photoreality visually underscore the qualitatively new links between art and the philosophy of language, where vision meets pure consciousness, no longer demanding the authenticity of an actual, tactile gesture, dissolving into the semantic expanse. The "confined space" unexpectedly acquires universal figurativeness, where universality is not identified with the limitlessness of matter, but with the limitlessness and variety of conceptual, visual contemplations on the nature of the reality surrounding us, on its layered nature. This nature needs its own dialogue, which the avant-garde was incapable of providing. Anastasia Khoroshilova is not interested in photography as a window onto space, but as a system of communicating links, like a semantic integral, like its context, which unfurls only in the completeness of visual intellectual experience.

In this unique phase, when the figurativeness of the photographic project is revealed, its forms can no longer hide from the real, visual presence of the artist. The forms lose their own shield, like a child who has forgotten about its plaything, refusing any of the technology of defence. In this way one of Anastasia's latest projects came into being – *Russkie* (Russians). The photographs for *Russkie* arose as a replica of a speech given by the then General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev, in 1971, where he proclaimed a "new, historical and international community of people" – the *Soviet Nation*. In the course of the project, a visual paradox appeared in the "Russian-Soviet" dichotomy: the substitution of faceless collectivity for what is ancestral, depriving the depiction of the national of its deep internal dimensions, but granting them a synchronous existence on one visual-semantic plane. In building the horizontal of the new archetype *Russkie*, Anastasia Khoroshilova, without interfering in the composition, which was composed by the subjects of their own free choice, has summoned the birth of a phenomenal symbiosis of the personal and social cosmos. Its iconology is defined by steadfast traditions and at the same time by their loss, by the search for a new universal – Russian – community at the expense of the marginalisation of genuine locality in the national "inner circle", its submission and confirmation in the new structure.

The contemporary Russian Federation stands before the photographer's camera in all its diversity: Mordva, Tatars, Adyghe, Cossacks, Finnish Karelian groups, who vindicate their worth not by sealing up their nation, but by broadening it through linguistic communication – it is as though they live in a relic of the space and time before the construction of the Tower of Babel. Chosen as the only language, Russian, as the lingua franca of the magical, mysterious land known as "Russia", demonstrates its metaphoric variations throughout the project, in the baroque nature of its weave, testifying to the new iconography of our virtual civilisation and to its spiritual and "material" corporeality.

In her documentation, in the organic nature of her “traveller’s notes”, Anastasia Khoroshilova removes all forms of visual covering, and reveals immortality in photography via the endless “gazing” on the world, allowing the world, in turn, to look into us. Reality, which appears on the threshold of our glance, promises to return that which has been lost, which has actually just gone away, and is hiding, waiting for the right moment to announce itself again.

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Short Biography

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Vitaliy Patsiukov was born 1939 in Moscow and studied at the Moscow Institute of Art and Technology. During the Soviet era he worked at the Institute of Folk Art. He is a critic, historian and art theorist. He is currently head of the department of experimental programmes at the National Centre for Contemporary Arts in Moscow. He has been the curator of numerous projects in audio-visual contemporary art.