

Anastasia Khoroshilova. The beyond-this-World everyday

Anastasia Khoroshilova's cycles of works weave into a garland around one theme: her interest in people. In people themselves. In their faces. In their bodies. In the homes in which they live. In the environment of their habitation that they have created. In landscapes, in the large emptiness of which signs

of the presence of man nevertheless remain. Like a forester, walking through the depths of a forest, reading the signs of the presence of an animal, broken branches, trampled grass, tracks, unnoticeable to the unfamiliar eye. Khoroshilova's interest in people is so calm and unhurried that she has time to look attentively (thoughtfully – as it was done in classical Russian texts) at the whole person, even has time to wonder at his quaintness and uniqueness. Judging by her photographs, any person is worth noticing. Because he is human. For a long time such attention was considered a sign of humanism. But perhaps also a sign of learning. Because when looking at the individual attentively, one can see in him his fate, that connection between the personal and the typical, which makes all of us claimants to a place in History. What remains is the coming of the one who will write everybody into a big book.

In our day the visual supplants the verbal, more precisely, engulfs it, erasing the borders between the image and the sign, forcing signs (the typical) to strive towards an unrepeatable way of writing, and transforms images, because of their huge number which is impossible to grasp in all its fullness of visual form, into signs, reducing the number of multiple details carrying meaning.

Possessing her own way of respectful observation, Anastasia reminds one of a 19th century scientist, a humanist scholar of the Russian folk movement who, having received a wonderful university education, goes to a village in order to “bring the good, the pure, the eternal to the people” and simultaneously to collect and record popular wisdom. Such a scientist was at the same time a collector of folklore and an ethnographer, a historian and a culture expert, a sociologist and a theologian. In the work of the photographer Khoroshilova, who left Russia to study in Germany and returned home in search of her own themes, each series is accompanied by a detailed note, in quite a scientific and dry manner specifying the discourse in which the works should be seen (the impulse for their creation). But the paradox of the image is in the fact that it is far more complex and more profound than that verbally defined task which it should fulfil.

Looking deeply at the works of Anastasia, you catch yourself thinking that in front of you – there, within the photographs – a myth is unfolding. In the opinion of the Russian philosopher Losev, “the myth is ... reality, the highest in its distinctness, maximally intensive and tense to the greatest degree. It is not fiction, but – the most vivid and genuine reality... remote from any fortuity and arbitrariness”. In Khoroshilova's photographs the myth glows within, out through the everyday, the too ordinary, to look at which, it seems, would be dreadfully boring (in the sense of “the boring” as per Dostoyevsky), as it would be to look at the photographs themselves, which by their unhurried simplicity cause a feeling of alienation. But the apparition of the other world seeps through the everyday, the profane.

The ethnologists, on the basis of their study of numerous descriptions of the ancient

idea about the structure of the world (the myth about its three parts – the underworld, the earthly, the heavenly / the myth of Hades / the myth of the afterlife / the myth of the Heavens) have a certain perception of the borders dividing the worlds. Passing through the borders is possible through birth and death. Death and dreams have been compared throughout the centuries, more precisely: in dreams, as in death, one can cross the border dividing the worlds. A sign of crossing is the absence of shadows. An even twilight light covering everything. The unhurriedness and pensiveness of large figures, the continuance of horizon lines and of the corners of walls and floor, the transparency of colours – in Anastasia's photographs they transpose the viewer into the world beyond this world, where everything continues and, for all that, does not exist (being there, but not here where the viewer is). Thus in Dostoyevsky's notes Hell is described as a box room, usually a boring place... Khoroshilova's cycle "9.5% Plus" is a portrait of women, working in public service and therefore dressed in uniform, such as is seen more commonly on men. In her notes to the series Anastasia wrote that she was interested in the relationships between woman and power, the preservation (acquisition of a new?) of the sexuality of woman in uniform... judging by the text the author's priority was the dualism of the situation. Woman /service.

Khoroshilova created a cycle of portraits in which, the viewer, having studied the composition and uniform, finally begins to look at the faces of the heroines. And you cannot break through to them. They are behind a screen, "behind glass" made out of the uniform, independently taking the decision to become staffage, to draw a boundary between themselves and the world. The women, having chosen service (military service), leave one reality, the traditional ("the three Cs": cuisine, children, church) or emancipated (but civilised) and become part of a different world, the world of order (Ordnung). But even the experience of American society, far more emancipated than the Russian one, as portrayed in "Soldier Jane" and in the numerous novels on the "industrial" (military) theme, as well as the ancient legends about the Amazons which excite the imagination, do not for a second give confidence in the fact that woman can be accepted in the world of Ordnung as an equal, can merge with it as a natural part. The heroines of this cycle are like phantoms hovering in the grey without shadows, incorporeal atmosphere of habitual orderly landscapes. Through this uniform one cannot touch them. As swamp spirits, as those sleeping, they look at us from out of their doubly and triply rejected world: rejected wilfully – by the uniform they are dressed in, by the society which has responded to their choice, by the photograph which creates a fragile, but tangible border between the captured reality and the reality of the viewer. Anastasia Khoroshilova, as the chosen few, feels the border acutely. She creates pictures of the beyond-this-world everyday.

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