

AFTER THE PERSECUTION

THE HUMAN BODY REPRESENTED IN UKRAINIAN PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

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Introduction

In 1991, the once powerful USSR ceased to exist. As a result, the Ukraine, as a former part of the USSR gained independence after almost seventy years of totalitarianism. The early 1990s were a difficult, and at the same time a very busy period in Ukrainian art. Back in the late 1980s, irreversible processes in society developed. These processes significantly influenced the way society thought. As is known, mental changes and certain worldviews are the basis for any culture. In such periods, artists and their work become a reflection of the thinking of the era. The era that began immediately after independence was primarily an ideological revolution. This created a new Ukrainian art. This can be called the post persecution era. This includes particularly the context of repression of the Nude body in art.

The changes in Ukrainian culture were mainly due to the fact that the previous historical period was a form of an anti-democratic political regime. The main indication of totalitarianism is comprehensive intervention, state control and prosecution of dissidence. It is common knowledge that the stronger the state displays such ascendancy, the more constrained conditions its citizens are forced to exist in. Such an extreme form of political regime imposes patterns of behavior on society through the educational system and the media. Undoubtedly, the Soviet totalitarian regime had various methods of control and influence on culture and art. In the Soviet society a certain type of people was formed. For them the aspect of belonging to the general mass of the collective was important, not personal opinion or self-expression. There was also isolation from the rest of the world and from the global cultural situation (Il'in 1991). 'The state possessed various methods for

enacting those policies, but its main goal was to stifle the individual and collective initiatives of its citizens. These include members of the particular societies, more or less dependent on the monopoly of the political apparatus. The state was also to subordinate the public sphere to the ideological doctrine' (Piotrowski 2012, 7). The period of political and social changes after 1991 enabled artists to go beyond the framework of regulated behavior, censored art and the information vacuum. The period of the late 1980s – early 1990s was a time of liberation from control, persecution, and censorship. Describing the 1980s, Ukrainian artist and photographer Boris Mikhailov contended that it was the time of 'information hunger' and the need to hide his art, but also the time to search for a new visual statement. 'The laws caused the prohibition, and each prohibition corresponded to its resistance (it's NO) ... And all this prompted the search for a new language in art' (Kizevalter 2014, 393). In order to understand the conditions under which Ukrainian photography was formed after 1991, it is necessary to clearly understand the main factors that influenced it. First: photography in the USSR had its own history, different from the European history of photography. This is because being a part of the Soviet Union, the Ukraine, like all the republics of the USSR, was isolated from the European cultural processes. It was in a cultural vacuum. Ukrainian photography had not passed through the stages of development that the world had. It was shaped by photographers who worked intuitively and often had no special training. Secondly, the turning point in history and culture coincided with the spread of post-modernism as a certain model of consciousness. At this time, there was the formation of artistic groups, such as the Ukrainian new wave'. Thirdly, there have always been regional peculiarities in Ukrainian art. That is why photographic experiments with a nude body will differ not only visually, but also with conceptual features depending on the region of the Ukraine (West, Centre or East).

The first decisive factor that directly influenced Ukrainian photography was total control by the authorities and isolation from world cultural processes. Art was ideologically subordinated to the totalitarian government, and any manifestations of dissent were strictly persecuted, the activities of artists and photographers were tightly controlled. Cases of arrests of artists did not cease until the early 1980s. In order to understand the relation of the so-called official culture to nudity it is enough to analyze the main photo magazine of the USSR *Sovetskoe Foto*². It is quite noticeable that throughout the history of the magazine nudity was prohibited. Attempts to publish such photos appeared only after 1991. Nevertheless, it later became clear that in photography, as in art in general, there is an official line and the so-called unofficial one. It turned out that along with the canonical Soviet body (healthy, athletic, radically non-sexual, a body that does not focus on sexual differences) there was a nonconformist body. An example of such radical gestures of the 1970's was the Kharkiv School of photography. The Kharkiv group 'Time' used the nude body as the language of political protest. It was a shocking, cruel nudity, which acted primarily as a blow to ideological values. Kharkiv photography researcher Tatiana Pavlova (2014, 4) notes: "In the period of the "Time" group it

¹ Literature about the Ukrainian art of the post-Communist period is written mainly in the Ukrainian language and is diverse, but not comprehensive. It includes studies by Ukrainian art critics such as Gleb Vysheslavsky, Victor Sydorenko, Olesya Avramenko, Galina Sklyarenko and others and represent a comprehensive analysis of the overall artistic situation in Ukraine of the post-Soviet period and do not relate to photography. General trends of Ukrainian photography of the period of Independence are described in my article *La photographie ukrainienne de la période de l'indépendance* (Mironenko 2015).

² The magazine *Sovetskoe Foto* [Soviet Photography] was the main official publication for photographers and photo amateurs in the USSR. The magazine was founded in 1926 and for many years remained the mouthpiece of the official ideology and a propaganda tool. The digitized archive of the magazine is available here: https://archive.org/details/sovetskoe_foto?sort=downloads

was anger and rage, canned inside, that turned into idiotic muttering when set free. Behind the visual or verbal “noise” there was always hidden an acute statement’. For photographers of the 1990s, political protest was no longer relevant. Censorship and total control had disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and its repression of frankness and sexuality in art. However, the consequences of the previous era were obvious: along with the photographic environment’s lack of knowledge of the history of world photography, there was a real explosion of release from pressure and control. This led to truly unique experiments in the theme of nudity. The 1990s were a period of mental transformations and a completely new aesthetics in Ukrainian photography.

The second factor that influenced Ukrainian photography is post-modernism as a certain model of consciousness. In the early 1990s, a new movement was formed, called ‘Ukrainian new wave’. It was formed by young artists who had almost no direct contact with the nonconformist generation of the 1970s (with the exception of the Kharkiv circle of artists). For Ukrainian artists of the 1990s, it was natural to abandon any foundation. This was as seen as an exemption from the restrictions and prohibitions that had existed not so long ago. Secondly, artists refused socialist realism. This was an expected result, as the obsessive Soviet ideology had declared realism as a true and categorical creative method. The artists turned to self-irony, skepticism. In addition, a special feature of this phenomenon in the territory of the former USSR was excessive politicization, absolutely unnatural for western post modernism. Having arisen not ‘after modernism’, but ‘after socialist realism’, it (post-modernism) tried to break away from the totally ideologized soil by purely anti-totalitarian methods (Mankovskaya 2000, 293).

The third factor in the formation of certain features of Ukrainian photography, especially noticeable in nude body photography, will be obvious regional differences in the aesthetics and concept of the image. The conditional division on the principle of West-Center-East will be especially noticeable in the analysis of the representation of the nude body by photographers from different regions. Western regions focus on the Western European cultural context and demonstrate their dependence on lyrical historicism. Meanwhile, the Central regions of the Ukraine looked for their own way, based on the postmodern irony that arose under the circumstances of the dead aesthetics of socialist realism. Eastern regions that did not interrupt the connection with the non-conformist art of Kharkov, will demonstrate rude, shocking and truthful nudity.

Nudity as a trauma

Kyiv became the center of cultural life in the Ukraine in the early 1990s. An important sign of the time was the release of non-conformist underground art and its rapid institutionalization. No less important in many cities of the Ukraine was the

emergence of a whole generation of artists, known as the ‘new wave’, in the late 1980s. They became the basis for the formation of trends and groups in the next decade (Vysheslavsky 2006, p. 425). Back in the late 1980s, the artists of the ‘new wave’ from Kyiv settled on the streets of the Paris commune, in a house, where for quite some time it became possible to feel the existence of a free art workshop. In fact, the squat ‘Paris commune’ concentrated in itself a single community of artists who were united not only by their common views on art, but also by a purely personal relationship. This was a truly unique phenomenon – the first in independent Ukraine; a free, unbiased creative community, which would no longer tolerate repression from the authorities and was beyond the control of the Union of artists³. The squat ‘Paris commune’ in Kyiv was the center of new trends for post-Soviet Ukraine post-modernism. But it is important to note that Ukrainian post-modernism arose not so much in the controversy with modernism (which was destroyed in the 1930s and glowed only in some places, mainly underground), but as an opposition to totalitarian discourse and socialist realism. This was especially true for Kyiv, because of the strong academic structure that existed there (Barshynova 1990, 48). Among the artists of the squat, there was only one photographer – Mykola Trokh⁴ (1961–2007). Among the Kyiv post-modernists, he appeared almost by accident. Most likely, he was attracted by the free and unrestricted atmosphere and worldview of the squat. Trokh was not an artist, and had no special creative training. He was engaged exclusively in photography, unlike other artists who were engaged in painting, video art and performance. Mykola Trokh will be the first Ukrainian photographer of the new wave, who most powerfully was able to express the idea of abandoning the old cultural model through the image of the nude body; namely the body interpreted as an internal trauma.

As noted above, post modernists manifestations in the visual arts in post-Soviet countries are often politicized and have ironic overtones. That is because this generation of artists remembered the period of ‘velvet terror’⁵ and the adjustment period. The 1990s were a period for reinterpretation of the wound. Mykola Trokh studies the nude body as an artist who belongs to the time after the persecution. It is an experience of an act that whose border with pornography is very thin. This indicates the desire to finally cross the boundaries as much as possible. Indicative are several works of Trokh, dated 1992, notably the photo titled *Achtung Baby*⁶ (Fig. 1). At the center of the composition is a woman’s nude body, which, at first glance, stands in a rather awkward position: a woman takes a step forward, and her left hand is strongly set back. However, the position seems unnatural. The photographer excludes the woman’s head and her right hand from the composition. The field of attention is taken over by female flesh, a large belly and large hips. Trokh chooses as a model a woman with a far from perfect body, emphasizing the imperfect forms by strengthening the shadows on her body. Naturalism and sexuality are definitely the dominant elements of the image. In addition, there is quite a clear political implication. Apparently, the woman’s right hand, which Trokh excluded from the composition, was raised up. And if we imagine the formulation

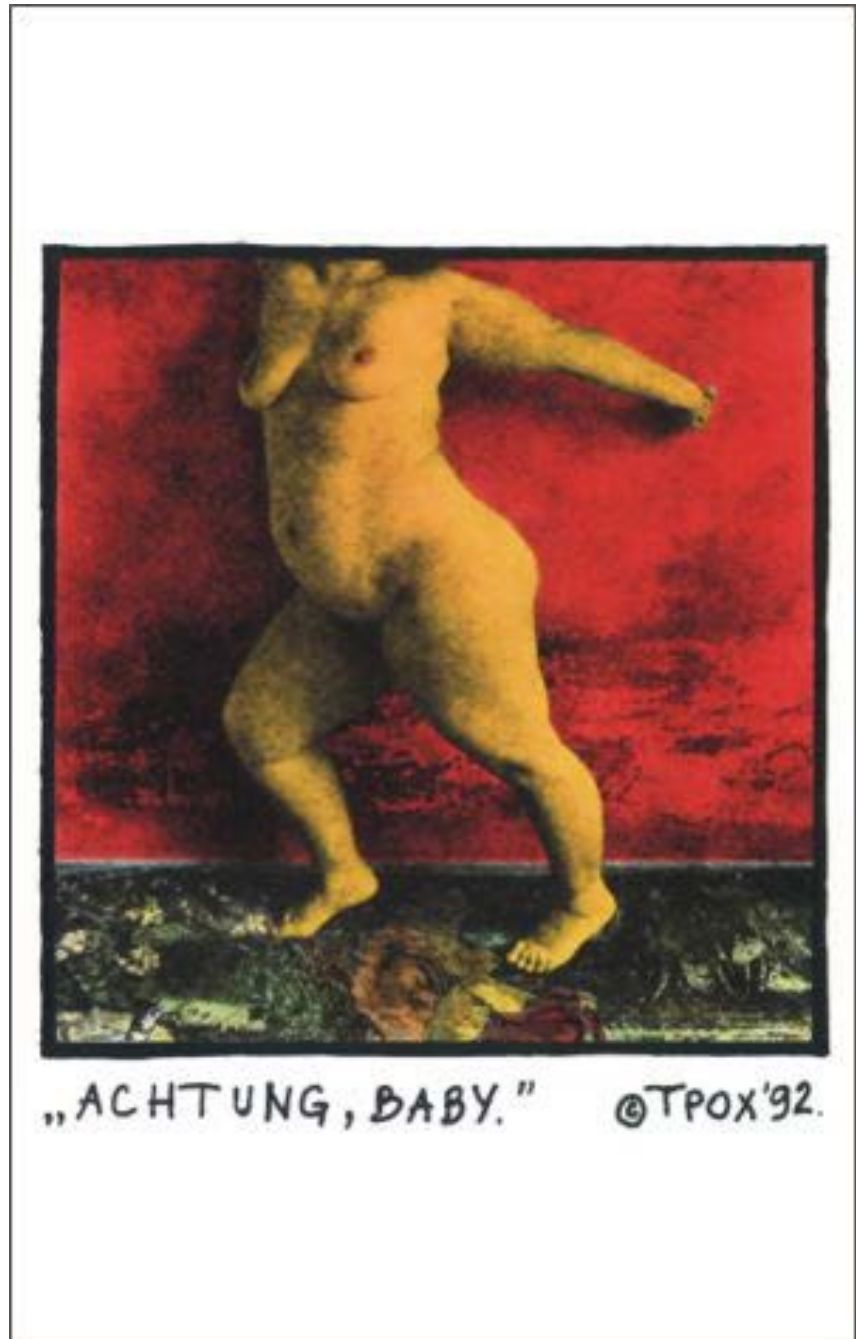
³ The Artists’ Union of the USSR – the official state Union of artists and art critics that existed since 1931 and was the body of ideological control of artists’ creative activity.

⁴ In the literature a Russian variant of the spelling of the name can be found – Nikolai

⁵ Vladimir Paperny calls ‘velvet terror’ the period of Leonid Brezhnev (Paperny, 2002). In the Ukraine, this period was marked by severe pressure on the creative intelligentsia and numerous arrests of artists and other representatives of the creative community.

⁶ The photo is in a private collection. In 2017, *Achtung Baby, Golden Carp* and several other works were included in the book *Ukrainian Erotic Photography* (Kostyrko, Kurmaz, Marushchenko and Myronenko, 2017)

⁷ The famous Soviet symbol – the sculpture of Vera Mukhina, *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*, is a monumental sculptural group consisting of two figures of a man and a woman holding the symbols of the Soviet Union – a hammer and sickle. The monument was made for the USSR pavilion at the international exhibition in Paris in 1937. Later it was installed in Moscow. The monument *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* was a model of socialist realism and the expression of the ideal of the Soviet man.

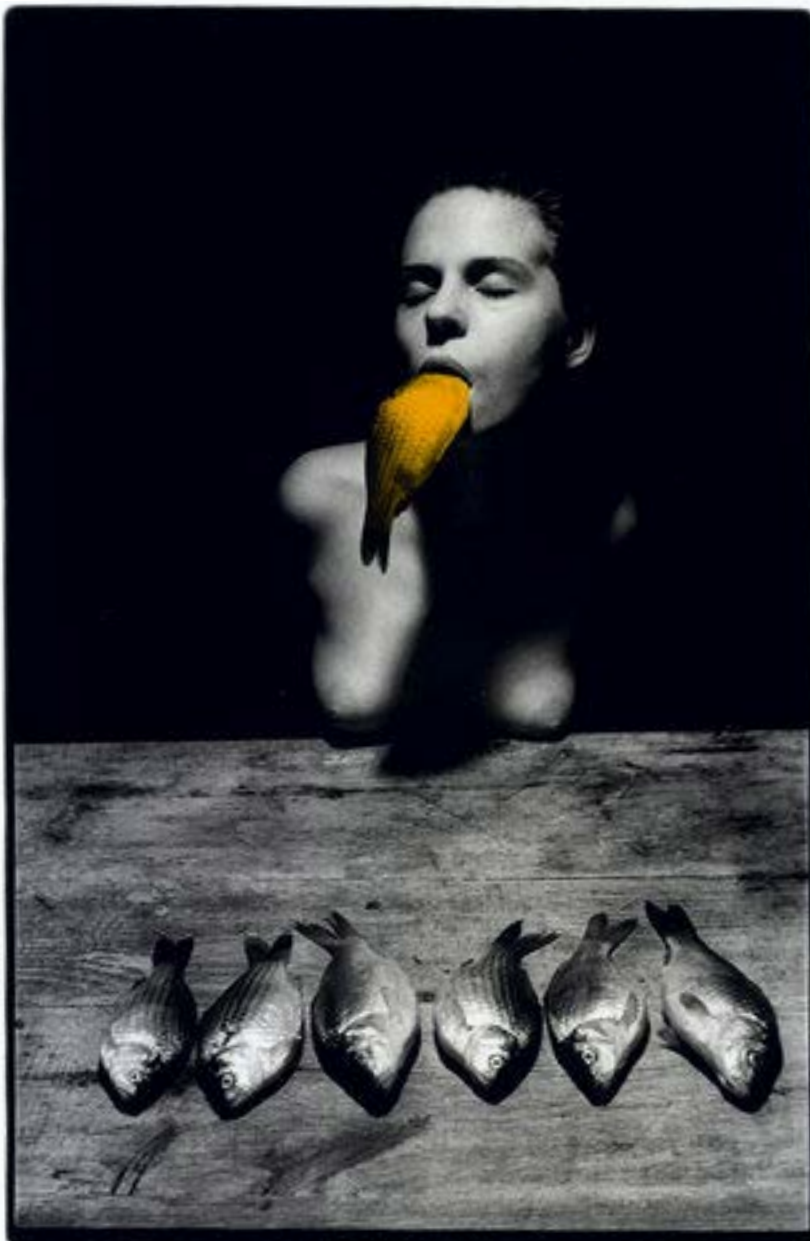


Mykola Trokh – Achtung Baby, 1992
(private collection, Kyiv, Ukraine)

of a woman's body in its integral form, it immediately becomes clear that it stands in the pose of the Kolkhoz Woman of the famous sculpture of Vera Mukhina *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*⁷ – one of the most recognizable symbols of the USSR. On the one hand, the photograph quotes; on the other, it is ironical and cynical – two obvious obvious postmodern features. At the same time, the author does not use any element of Soviet era symbols, only hinting at them. This can only be understood

as an ironic mockery of the Soviet theme. The use of a red background as a symbol of the Soviet era is no accident. But in this case, a more frank meaning is possible. It can be assumed that the naturalistic body (the body that becomes the object of desire) in this case coexists with the idea of suppressed sexuality in the Soviet era. Trokh's portfolio includes male images⁸ that also deserve attention. He chooses a fragile model for his photos. His accentuated subtlety imbues the photographs with internal vulnerability and fragility. In one of the works, a man lies on his back and holds his hand outstretched. In another photo, he is standing on the background

⁸ Two of these are part of a private collection and were shown at the Ukrainian Photography exhibition: 1989-2009, and during the Month of Photography in Bratislava (Slovakia). A small number of works by Mykola Trokh is in private collections, several works are in the National Art Museum of Ukraine. Most of his archive, including films, was lost after the artist's death.



Mykola Trokh – Golden Carp, 1994
(private collection, Kyiv, Ukraine)

of a scuffed wall. In both photos, the model hides his genitals, clutching them between his thighs. Perhaps there is the implication of voluntary or forced castration, or of repressed sexuality. This is also associated with the traumatic experiences of prohibition to demonstrate overt sexuality in Soviet art.

The photos of Mykola Trokh always suggest and never indicate the direct content. This 'caution' is also a consequence of trauma after a period of aggressive censorship. *Golden Carp* (Fig.2) is one of Trokh's most famous works. In the center of the composition we see a nude girl with her eyes closed, holding a fish in her mouth. In this case there is an obvious subtext of a sexual nature, as the image hints at oral sex. Here, it is interesting that in Ukrainian mythology the fish is a symbol of Chthonian creatures (Kulish 2015, 53), associated with otherworldly existence. It is also the symbol of fertility and sexual power (Voitovych 2002, 418). For Trokh the body is an object with which he carries out various manipulations, bringing to the fore not its beauty and plasticity (at times he focuses on ugly physicality), but rather trying to impart coded meanings.

The body as release

The representative of the generation after the non-conformists of the Kharkiv school of photography, Roman Pyatkovka describes his experience with the nude body as an experience of 'hunger and anger' (Lyuk.media 2016). The concept of hunger for many artists of the post-Communist period meant primarily visual hunger, the deficit of the nude body in art, photography and film, as well as sexual hunger. The end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s was a period of profound transition for the Soviet Union. As already noted, this period saw the elimination of government censorship, control, and prosecution of free creative gestures. Therefore, the first years of political change were marked by hope. The political and economic instability of the 1990s forced photographers to become more critical, to resist traditional Soviet aesthetics, and to parody the outward signs of Soviet life and ideology.

As already mentioned, in 1970s Kharkov there was a powerful nonconformist movement, whose representatives used nudity as a tool of protest against the political system. Of course, the generation of Kharkiv photographers formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had a non-conformist movement as a model, and they did not interrupt the connection with the previous generation. The pictures remained descriptive, permeated by an aesthetics of brutality, naturalism, provocations, and such methods as the deliberate damaging of the negative, artificial scratches, and an unkempt staining of positive.

Roman Pyatkovka's series *Games of Libido* (Fig.3, Fig.4) and *Wrong Pictures* are not openly marked by protest, which was a hallmark of the previous generation's photographs, but rather illustrate the rampant hunger for sex that reigned in society after



Roman Pyatkovka – from “Games of Libido”,
1991 (private collection, Kharkiv, Ukraine)



Roman Pyatkovka – from “Games of Libido”,
1991 (private collection, Kharkiv, Ukraine)

the final collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of repression and total control over the artists. Hunger and anger, liberation and complete freedom – are the main paradigms of Pyatkovka’s series created in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. Moreover, Pyatkovka depicts another inherent phenomenon of time – private space. All the series were made in his apartment – a small space typical of the apartment buildings built during the Communist era. Because this is a private space, in it unfolds a purely private story, a veritable record of their own intimate life: bold, mostly naturalistic, sometimes almost bordering on pornography.

⁹ Yevgeny Pavlov is an outstanding Ukrainian photographer and one of the initiators of the famous Kharkiv 'Vremia' (Time) group.

For the photographers of the Kharkiv circle, the body was indeed a symbol of freedom: primarily sexual, but also political. In the photographs of the Communist era, there was no explicit nudity, especially masculine. In the post-Communist period, the masculine begins to appear not only in shocking semi-pornographic frankness, as a symbol of the final release from ideology, but also as the image of male nudity. Roman Pyatkovka, Yevgeny Pavlov⁹ and other artists often focus not only on the naked male body, but (in the case of Pyatkovka) on the phallus. The phallus in the Ukrainian art of the 1990's was the main symbol of the release (Savitskaya 2009, p.34).

The Soviet body was as 'typical' as any Soviet model project, and it was portrayed, in paintings, film or photography, so as to eliminate the possibility of sexual desire. In the 1990s, eroticism stopped being repressed, and hence, photography was allowed to aestheticize attraction. The standardized, asexual body of the Soviet man, the exponent of the ideological platform, became outdated. Instead of a limited body in the photo, nudity gains another meaning, a nudity reflecting bodily desire, open sexuality, and the permission for sexual freedom.

The theme of release was interpreted in Ukrainian post-Communist photography not only as a release from sexual prohibition. For some artists, the problem of acquired political freedom will prevail. 'By exposing the disadvantages of the previous epoch, they offered salvation from the mistakes made' (Velikanov 2007, p. 15). A vivid example are the photographic projects by representative of the Ukrainian new wave Arsen Savadov. His most famous project, *Donbass Chocolate*, was created in one of the mines of Donbass with the participation of real miners. Savadov explained the essence of his project as an image of people with erased sexuality

Arsen Savadov – from "Donbass Chocolate", 1997 (private collection, Kyiv, Ukraine)





Arsen Savadov – from “Donbass Chocolate”,
1997 (private collection, Kyiv, Ukraine)

and concepts of reality, which are engaged in a sort of internal geography. His characters – nude, dirty men, some of whom dressed in women’s ballet outfits – engage in a symbolic escape from Soviet power and the communist system, towards their own freedom. Through the nude male body, the artist powerfully reflects the idea of mental liberation through absurdity, and the mockery of Soviet norm. In this case, nudity in this case is an instrument of rebellion against the old norms, the pathos of exposing the communist myth and the abandonment of the spiritual component in favor of corporeality. Indeed, Savadov’s *Donbass Chocolate* could

¹⁰ The perestroika was the period of political reforms in the USSR from 1985 to 1991, after which the Ukraine gained independence.

be considered one of the most resonant works in the Ukrainian art environment, because it is the most consistent with the situation of the time. For the first time after the Communist cultural vacuum, the viewer saw more than just male nudity. A politicized, shocking, unsightly body desecralized the Soviet myth and openly materialized the idea of a liberation from the rubbish of socialist realism. It should also be noted that, apart from their explicit politicization, Arsen Savadov's projects are openly masculine. *Donbass Chocolate* (Fig.5, Fig.6), *Angels*, and several others unabashedly speak the language of the male body. An equally interesting interpretation is given by Serbian researchers when they point out that Savadov's projects are 'intense, distressing and acrid statements on the inadequacy of masculinity in the impoverished patriarchal societies' (Dimitrijević, Andjelković 2018, 71). It is also interesting that masculinity in post-Communist Ukrainian photography prevailed only because it did not have a powerful feminist answer.

The body as a nostalgia

The specificity of photography of the West Ukrainian regional art schools differed from the Central and Eastern ones. Of course, this difference was primarily due to their geographical, historical and cultural proximity to Western countries. The uniqueness of the West Ukrainian art school is connected, first of all, with the fact that the national background was not completely lost, and because at the same time there was continued contact with Western art. The persecution of the creative intelligentsia in the 1970s was particularly cruel here. In addition, the powerful artistic movement of these regions, from nonconformists to the perestroika,¹⁰ had a rebellious foundation, as it was a systematic opposition of the creative community to the official line of art. The main idea was to escape from the ideological line, which was the removal of socialist realism and the borrowing of Western European aesthetics. From there arose experimentation in order to constantly cross the border of what was allowed. However, in Western Ukrainian photography there are no radical gestures, unlike in works by Kharkov. Instead, the resistance to socialist realism and official art was always quiet but strong.

Especially interesting phenomena in art and photography took place in Lviv. It was in Lviv's artistic environment that the idea, or rather the consequences, of 'the Empire's crepuscule' were most fully and emotionally felt. It is also important to note that that Lviv, a former part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was forcibly annexed to the Soviet Union much later than the other territories of the Ukraine. The aesthetics of photography in Lviv are quite specific, which will become noticeable in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is when the photography of the adjustment period and post-adjustment period will turn to a visual material where the dominant sense is one of anxiety and disappointment. In Lviv in this period, photography undergoes a flight to almost surrealistic worlds, manifest as a sharpening of con-

ventionality, mythologization, romanticism, decorative, and quasi 'mannerism'. At the same time, however, there was also a 'progressive provincialization' (Holubets 2005, p. 89) of the artistic environment.

These features of Lviv photography are due to the fact that the region experienced a permanent state of nostalgia associated with the culture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nostalgia as a substance is not primarily a feeling of longing for the image of what is lost. It is the feeling that there is an opportunity to return to this image. Therefore, 'nostalgia' is part of Lviv's system of images. It can manifest as sadness for the lost style, for a sense of belonging to something bigger. Sometimes this sadness becomes especially expressive in terms of style. Time is gone, but there is a certain space for authentic Lviv, with all the external signs of a bygone era. However, this feeling of belonging to a great style would also become a kind of guide. That, above all, is the cultural experience inherent in Lviv. Lviv's cultural conflict in the context of photographic images takes place, at the crossroads of this nostalgia. Nostalgia for the Imperial style of lightness, romanticism and mythology and the inevitable influence of another cultural model, another Empire – the Soviet. Amidst Lviv's photographic environment of the post-Communist era, along with the theme of nudity and representation of the body, there worked simultaneously several of the most expressive photographers. Among these was Ilya Levin (Fig.7). He worked with staging and imitation, based on the conceptual foundations of the local Western Ukrainian aesthetics. The most expressive series of Levin, where he boldly works with a naked body, are a direct citation of classics and flirt with archetypes. This is natural was natural in Lviv's artistic environment. The uniqueness of this series is not even in the fact that Levin quite confidently demonstrates one of the most common elements of postmodernism – citation. Levin's photos require a certain preparedness from the viewer, because the citation is there to be decoded correctly, at least in one of its many layers (usually the superficial one), i.e, the identification of the cited classic image. More important is that while exploiting classical painting as a point of reference, Levin uses an absolutely typical post communistic environment with all the details of the local interiors: Soviet stools, rugs, beds with books for legs. There is a wardrobe containing typical Soviet articles, very recognizable furniture from school interiors, and even Soviet sports equipment. Against the backdrop of this ordinary, grim post-Soviet world there is an Arnolfini couple, Adam and Eve, Ingres' Odalisque, and many other characters from the history of art. On the one hand, there is a certain irony, since Levin's models sometimes have quite typical Soviet faces, reminiscent of employees of Communist state institutions rather than classical images; on the other hand, there is an absolutely depressing picture of the 1990s, and most importantly, the aesthetics of the frame, which is reminiscent of Soviet staging. Given that Ilya Levin's photos exist in the postmodernist plane, all these features remain solely superficial, ready for the viewer's interpretation. Also in Alexey Lutin¹¹ – another representative of Lviv's 1990s photography –, there are features of expressive gestures and images in Levin's photography, which immediately catch the eye. Features that immedi-



Ilya Levin – The Couple, 1990-s (private collection, Lviv, Ukraine)

ately draw attention to the fact that in the direction of Lviv's photography you can hear accusations of bad taste. But it should be noted that this theatrical staging style is only a part of the visual text, which is easy to prove by the example of Ilya Levin's photography. Here, the nude body is as sacred; the body, which represents nostalgia for classical art, a bright historical era, the end of which was a real tragedy for Western Ukraine. All this in combination with subjective vision and purely Western individualism, distinguishes Western Ukrainian photographers, and their interpretation of nudity, from representatives of other local schools in the Ukraine.

Conclusion

¹¹ Alexey Iutin (b.1940) is an outstanding Ukrainian photographer who lives and works in Lviv. He is known for his staged photographs with elements of theatricalization and the use of multi-figure compositions.

After the era of persecution, (Communist period) Ukrainian photography has undergone radical transformations. This was especially noticeable in the image of a nude body. After a period of total control, censorship, denial of sexuality as such, and a ban on outright nudity in art, a period of new art and a new vision of the body began. Experiments with the nude body, the various interpretations of nudity, the use of the

body for the expression of freedom, irony, traumatic experience and the post-modern game with ideological codes, absurdity, stylization – all of this was new to the photography of post-Communist Ukraine after decades of immersion in a cultural vacuum. Sex and nudity in the post-Soviet period are no longer taboo topics. The removal of all constraints and the disappearance of censorship were the reason for photographers and artists to appropriate a completely new concept. Attempts to experiment with nudity were varied and not always successful. The aesthetics of Soviet photography remained in some cases, because in Ukrainian photography there was no historical basis on which to frame world photography, as it were. But at the same time, an absolutely new wave of Ukrainian photography was in the process of forming, and the nude body became an expression of culture, which had been freed from ideological restrictions.

The analysis of Ukrainian photography should take into account the regional factor, the existence of which is a feature of Ukrainian culture. The regions of the West, the Center and the East have demonstrated a different vision of the body as a tool that is able to convey a certain experience arising after the era of persecution. The very concept of ‘persecution’ and ‘repression’ is interpreted according to specific local school as well as the theme of release. For the East (Kharkiv School of photography), where there was a powerful connection with the generation of non-conformists, it was freedom from censorship and the possibility to depict nudity both as an erotic and a political gesture. In the West of the Ukraine, the nude body in photography was the expression of a play with the archetypes of high art, citation and nostalgia for the pre-Communist era. At the same time, the capital of the Ukraine remained the centre of cultural transformation, where the powerful movement of the Ukrainian new wave was formed and where the image of the nude body could be both a subjective experience of internal trauma and a political gesture that mocked the Soviet and Communist myths.

Representatives of Ukrainian photography that worked with the theme of the representation of the body in the 1990s, in their experiments (and almost all of these experiments can, indeed, be called experimental) moved away from the tired Soviet body, which declared everything: impersonality, swiftness, energy, and sometimes even outright unattractiveness, but certainly not eroticism. Therefore, the nude body in Ukrainian photography (after a cultural vacuum and persecution) became an act of experience, often next to the gestures of protest and the idea of liberation, as it demonstrates an excess of intimacy and remaining utterly subjective.

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