

**ALIMJAN JOROBAEV.**  
**MIRAGES OF THE COMMUNISM**

Marco Scotini, 2014

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Since the fall of socialism, Jorobaev's photography has collected the signs and traces of contaminated stories, mixing archaic remnants with present-day conflicts, vestiges of communism with forms of neo-nationalism, a return to religious identity with new ways of surviving.

This atlas of incongruity that Jorobaev collects and captures, and likewise the narrative that is sparked by each individual image, are nothing other than a faithful mirror of the passage of time, of the continuous economic and political changes under way in the central Asian region. Indeed this is present-day Kyrgyzstan: the most diverse forms of coexistence have become possible. The image of masses of men facing Mecca in prayer in the central square of Biskek, under a statue of Lenin that is still standing; likewise the black market for West cigarettes, alcoholic beverages and other goods taking place under the roof of a traditional yurt are glaring contradictions, yet at the same time potent illustrations.

A well-known photo by Jorobaev from 1995 shows a domestic interior in black and white, like a still life: a gas cooker with four rings set between some drawers and a fridge covered in ornamental wallpaper, a pile of unwashed dishes covering the hob. On the same top there is an official portrait of Lenin, the canvas turned upside-down, a clear reference to 1989 and the theme of iconoclasm in the eastern block. But this is not the usual image of a statue that has been ripped from its pedestal. In a most original manner this image questions how symbols weave their way through both the political and private spheres, caught where they are least expected, in mute signs and day-to-day gestures.

Power is also central to a series of colour photographs from 2011 that unfolds inside Moldovanovka penitentiary. The focus of this research is a silent game of glances, mirrors and diaphragms, thanks to which the subject being photographed is never in the same physical space as the observer. A whole system of spatial distribution deflects entry onto the scene: each time both warder and prisoner are captured through a device that is focused on them. Latent, yet completely present, the subject of these photographs (regardless of their role) is always the object of a normalised form of surveillance.

But, apart from being a series of photographs developed by Jorobaev between 1995 and 2005, what are the *Mirages of the Communism* which provide the title for this Milanese exhibition? What is the relationship between the optical phenomenon and reality? Indeed, what Jorobaev shows with his photographic realism is not the socialist perspective. It is more the present which followed on the heels of its demise in 1991. Since the civil uprising in 2010, which toppled President Bakiyev, until the reform of the Kyrgyz Republic's prison system, every phenomenon is investigated without being judged: it is simply the appearance of a sign (whether old or new) in an estranged, inappropriate context.

An extraordinary black and white photo shows the vanishing perspective of a asphalted crossroads on a vast, broad open space which reminds us of the steppes. To one side a solitary cement sign in Cyrillic lettering reads COMMUNISM which we can only read in mirror image. We might observe that the relationship here between words and things is a mirage: the effect of the different refraction of light rays. The horizon onto which the image opens is the natural, immense Tien-Shan mountain chain.

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