

**PHOTO FOR MEMORY.
IF A MOUNTAIN DOESN'T
GO TO MAHOMET...**

Yelena Vorobyeva, 2002

Photo-action, 2002, color photos
video documentation 18 min

In April 2002 we took part in the international travelling workshop “Non-Silk Way” organized by Almaty artists and public association “Asia-Art+”.

It was a ten-day journey about Southern Kazakhstan. Our international company (except Kazakhstani artists there were the artists and curators from Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Armenia, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Austria) went all over the endless steep roads in a little bus from town to town.

In the process of those displacements the project “Photo for Memory. If a Mountain Doesn't Go to Mahomet...” was realized. Absolutely accidental and unfamiliar to us people fell into the sphere of our, as they say, interactive action. We pretended to be the so-called touring photographers with all necessary equipment and accessories. In every new place we asked the volunteers to choose the background and to make photo. We had big posters with the pictures of standard tourist sights of the Kremlin, Eiffel Tower, and New York with non-existent nowadays towers of World Trade Center. We intentionally prepared such poster as many people had in their minds such image of New-York city – the city with some range of skyscrapers. Only once somebody mentioned that it was an image of World Trade Center.

People posed with pleasure (having known that it was free of charge), imagining to be transferred in an absolutely another space – from Kazakhstan province to the famous centers of Western world. There was something touching in concentration and confidence of the people looking at the object-glass, having forgotten about their everyday troubles.

Girls, in general, were eager to find themselves in Paris – the center of perfumery beauty, men preferred attractive New-York City, and middle-aged women dreamt to be in Moscow, the capital of former Soviet motherland - USSR. All their dreams by our efforts came true.

After the journey more than 50 shots were printed. All of them were sent by post to Zhanatas, Taraz, Turkestan, Shimkent to the addresses of our accidental acquaintances.

Yelena Vorobyeva, Almaty, 2002

BAZAAR

Yelena Vorobyeva, 2004

1990s-2004, 30 color photos (67x100)
and 30 objects

The 90s were for Kazakstan the years of profound changes. The collapse of Soviet system and declared sovereignty caused lots of problems – almost all exited social relations were destroyed, economy fell into decay, money devaluated. Disoriented people were trying to find some points of rest. Not so long ago private enterprises and market, called “speculation”, were under a ban but then became economic base of new state. The word “privatization” was in fashion at that time. Public socialist property shortly fell into private hands but the most of population got nothing. People had to do something to survive at any cost. Most of them, old pensioners mainly, carried out from their flats everything for sale that was of some value, from their point of view. Almaty streets turned into entire trade zone at that time. Everything was engaged in trade: shabby clothes, cut-glass ware, spoons, militia uniform, nails, vinyl discs, throw-away ware being used already, various books – from classics of Marxism-Leninism to bible...

This phenomenon seemed interesting for us as a process characterizing the time and as an esthetic fact as well. The goods put on the ground represented some original “still life” which could tell everything about the seller - his personal story, passions, skills... We took photos of these objects and bought some of them to express gratitude (usually it was unnecessary things). Some short conversation followed the buying and additional details were clearing up. For example, an old woman was selling two packs of cigarettes that were left by her dead husband. She proposed them to us saying: “What do I need them for? I don’t smoke...” Or another woman that sold us old photos of Soviet actors said that she had a lot of them as had been collecting them from childhood.

These “still lives” as a whole were the picture of epochs change. Close vicinity of ideological symbols - records of Soviet Union anthem - with ragged Barbie dolls made in China or with “famous brand” cosmetics of origin to doubt – could tell a lot. “Eternal” values of communist Past depreciated and were sold for trifling sum side by side with cheap goods of consuming Present. Actually the same phenomenon took place in all the regions of ex-Soviet Union. And now one can face with identical goods at similar bazaars in Russia, Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan. As long as all of us had common history during 70 years, national specificity concedes the international one.

Little by little we made up rather big collection of bought objects and photographed “still lives”. Installing all of them in exhibition space we would like to show interrelated realities – the reality of exhibited object that can be touched, the reality of place documented in photo, where this object was taken from; the reality of each person’s existence (the owner of the object); the reality of time (history); the reality of interpersonal contact eventually.

Yelena Vorobyeva, Almaty 2004

PETRIFACTIONS

Yelena Vorobyeva, 2009

Stone, iron sculptures and color photos,
1995-2009

Everything becomes rubbish, everything is subject to utilization, turns into nothing but a stone has some chance to remain for a couple of million years on the planet. After all the millions of years had passed before an object of nature became an object of art at an artist's will.

The series "Petrifactions" is something like restoration of historic fairness by way of "immortalization" of consumer goods. A sculpture nearly not-made-by-hands meets our historic notion of "ideal". One would never see here the plastic signs of European academic education.

From time to time we "find" "petrifactions" in our mountains, where one couldn't find other signs of great civilizations of the Past. It's some kind of simulation of archeological situation. Today the myths of the heroic Past of Kazakhstan are welcomed. The more fantastic and courageous pictures historians' imagination depict, the more the others believe in them. And artifacts confirming these concepts are always appreciated. As for us, we are trying to create some myth of the great Present.

Contemplating a petrified iron, a mobile phone, a bulb or a tea-pot, one is like transferred oneself to the museum of the Future where these exhibits are displayed – the witnesses of our Present.

Yelena Vorobyeva, Almaty, 2009

**DOCUMENT PHOTOS.
NECESSARY ADDITIONS**

Yelena Vorobyeva, 2010

Print on grey paper, ink,
pencil, white paint, 2010

Everyone some time made “a document photo”, striking an attitude required by the “Big brother”. Having received a portion of small photos (usually people made more photos than required), the person used just one or two for specific purposes, the rest remained unused. Then these photos 2x3, 3x4 with unnaturally frozen, frightened faces on them can be found in old photo albums as an evidence of endured bureaucratic procedures. Nobody remembers already the documents the photos were made for – either for Komsomol card, student card, or then for trade union card. The documents were lost, there is no more the USSR, the country which needed them so much, however the purposeless photo is left.

Having rummaged in archives, I found many Viktor’s and my “inartistic” photos of different years. Necessary extensions turned them to a part of artistic composition. Photo image missing privacy from the very beginning, here becomes a fragment, an element, some part of an ornament. In fact, this is the purpose of government machine, every time making photos of its citizens.

Yelena Vorobyeva, Almaty, 2010

THE FENCE

Yelena Vorobyeva, 2013

Color photos,
2004-2012

The words “iron curtain” are clear to everyone who lived in the USSR. Invisible but existent border was felt on mental level. Everything out of the “curtain” was another universe, the other world and, in fact, did not exist for a Soviet person. Only a flight to the Moon was a bit less feasible adventure than a trip abroad. Any foreigner, as an alien, evoked curiosity, suspicion and subconscious fear. “Iron curtain” was a thick screen protecting from “hostile bourgeois” information and keeping virgin purity of ‘Homo Sovieticus’ consciousness.

The fence that we found in Almaty outskirts in the middle of 2000s reminded us of the power of Soviet empire. It was a live metaphor of myth about inviolability of whatever in the history. Priority of common was substituted by the priority of private, “the curtain” was readjusted and became a simple fence. Fears changed as well.

Some years have passed, the fence was used up more, the emblems of the republics rusted. As if trying to hide red essence of the symbols, people paint the fence with green colour in vain.

Yes, Islamic green is beginning to cover those parts, where communist red previously was present. But maybe it only seems to us that all Soviet passed away. It still serves us by some chocks, fences, blinders...

We’re still living in everlasting rusty post-soviet reality, not paying attention to it under the brilliance of omnipresent glamour, presenting today.

Yelena Vorobyeva, Almaty, January 2013