

## Press Release

Boris Mikhailov  
*Windows of the Opportunities*

October 28 – December 2, 2023

Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 11am–6pm

Galerie Barbara Weiss is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Boris Mikhailov. *Windows of the Opportunities* brings together two slideshows – one from the early part of Mikhailov's career, when he was working clandestinely under the communist regime of the USSR, and the second created over the past ten years. Despite the five decades between the two works, both exemplify Mikhailov's unflinching approach towards experimentation and controversial subject matter.

Boris Mikhailov is widely known for his unvarnished depictions of everyday life in both Soviet and post-Soviet society. Born in Kharkiv, Ukraine in 1938, Mikhailov studied electrical engineering and began working in this field, teaching himself photography in the 1960. Mikhailov's early series from the 1960s and 70s frequently depicted the artist's friends, acquaintances, and partners in intimate, often sexualized situations, alongside more documentary images of day-to-day existence that are decidedly devoid of the valor and glorification that defined Soviet socialist realism.

His slideshow, *Yesterday's Sandwich*, literally overlays these two modes of image making. Mikhailov superimposed two 35mm slides together in the same frame to create juxtapositions. The approach was based on the deliberate pursuit of change, and an assemblage of conflicting meanings that reflected the different layers and contradictions of Soviet society. Mikhailov notes that, "this was a period of hidden meanings and coded messages in all genres. I made these compositions at a time when, given the scarcity of real news, everyone was on the lookout for the smallest piece of new information, hoping to uncover a secret or read something between the lines. Encryption was the only way to explore forbidden subjects such as politics, religion, nudity. *Yesterdays Sandwich* went against the tenets of official art. And like all unofficial work, it concealed within it many coded allusions."

Begun in the wake of the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, and partly inspired by Thomas Mann's novel *Death in Venice*, the video slideshow *In Search of Windows of Opportunity/ Exodus*, 2020-21 shows a series of two images placed side by side. This work is a continuation of Mikhailov's slideshow *Temptation of Death*, 2017-2019, which won the Taras Shevchenko National Prize in 2021 – Ukraine's highest state prize for contributions to arts and culture. Images taken by the artist over the last 10 years are brought into dialogue with one another, exploring our understanding of beauty, mortality, and both the resilience and fragility of human life. The body is most prominently depicted, some of which have been transformed – by injury, plastic surgery or old age. They are joined by representations of bodies from allegorical paintings and sculptures, children's dolls, mannequins and public monuments – both heroic and kitsch. Working in the diptych format, Mikhailov creates new visual meanings, some harmonious and others difficult. "Perhaps I am employing the diptych now because it is not possible to explain something with just one picture," Mikhailov has said.