

## Press Release

Boris Mikhailov

*Diary*

November 20, 2018 – January, 12, 2019

Galerie Barbara Weiss is delighted to present *Diary*, Boris Mikhailov's fifth solo exhibition at the gallery.

The Ukrainian born Boris Mikhailov began his practice clandestinely in the 1960s, as a chronicler of forms of life that were considered completely beyond the pale by the standards of official Soviet representation. Since then, documentary and conceptual elements contrast and mingle in his practice, creating an extraordinarily rich body of work that emphasizes the constructed and partial nature of documentation without ever abandoning its ambition. Mikhailov's artistic approach does not so much play off the subjective elements against the notion of truthful representation as it acknowledges them as an inevitable part of documentary photography. Despite the highly reflective character of his work, his images are often pervaded by a sense of unflinching humor – sometimes pointedly sarcastic, yet never cynical – that subtly critiques the strained seriousness and patronizing moralism of much documentary photography.

*Diary* brings together works from five decades. Although the exhibition's orientation is retrospective, it does not present a clear historical narrative or development. The selection and arrangement of the images refuse to obey a chronological sequence, fracturing its developmental linearity with deliberately personal juxtapositions and ellipses. Political scenes can therefore be found next to erotic ones, while images of unspeakable suffering alternate with ironizations of self and other. If the images collected in *Diary* do indeed attempt to map out an archive, it is one that stages, emphasizes and celebrates its own instability and fragmentariness. For not only do the images refuse to accord with a sequential form of presentation. Through erasures, marks, colorings and superimpositions, the artist also actively reinterprets the images from the perspective of the present. As such, the emphasis on the series – which often functions in Mikhailov's work as an insistence on the partial character of any perspective – is developed further into a form of montage that brings the images from the artist's personal archive into new constellations.

At the center of the exhibition are the original pages that comprise the series *Diary*. They are exhibited here for the first time and allow an unprecedented close look at the artist's reinterpretation of his personal archive. This series is punctuated by several large scale prints that highlight specific moments from this archive, yet again without offering any narrative clues or privileged vantage points. Together, these images present life as it is lived on the margins, under and against the reigning and changing ideologies of collectivism and consumerism. Life, as it is seen here, does not lend itself to triumphant representation. It is aberrant, even obscene.

Boris Mikhailov had solo exhibitions at the Ukraine Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale (2017); MoMA, New York (2011); Tate Modern, London (2011); Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (2012); MADRE, Naples (2015); Camera – Italian Centre for Photography, Turin (2015); Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2013); Portikus, Frankfurt/Main, (1995); Fotomuseum, Antwerp (2016). He participated in *Manifesta 10* (2014), *Manifesta 5* (2004) the *Shanghai Biennial* (2012) and *Ostalgia*, New Museum, New York (2011).