

# ART HISTORY ASPECTS AND CONTEXTS OF STUDYING ART PHOTOGRAPHY OF BELARUS OF THE 1990s–2010s

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The art photography of the 1990s–2010s clearly sees the trends of mutual influence of art photography and easel graphic art, painting, graphic design, and screen culture. In a short time, literally a decade, a foundation for development was laid, which made it possible to use widely the opportunities of analogue and digital photography for organizing lustrous art events. In general, art-photography practice tended towards the style of conceptual art. The percentage of photographic exhibitions is approaching half of all ongoing art events in major cities.

There are small collections of photographs in art and historical museums. Famous masters of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including M. Ananyin, V. Arkashov, V. Lupeiko, Yu. Vasilyev, V. Goncharenko, A. Dudkin, Yu. Ivanov, M. Ramanyuk, P. Tishkovskiy, and others, will certainly take their rightful place in the history of art in Belarus. Photography in Belarus has had a difficult history of development. No event in history can be considered final, especially in the history of Belarusian photography which is just beginning to take shape [1].

Art historian, critic and journalist I. Reut notes ten authors in the Belarusian photography of the 1970–2000s: V. Butra, S. Kozhemyakin, E. Kozyulya, V. Lobko, G. Moskaleva, U. Parfianok, I. Savchenko, V. Shakhlevich, A. Uglyanitsa, M. Zhilinskiy [2]. In the 1990s, G. Karchevskiy (Mogilev), M. Zhilinskiy (Minsk), V. Titov (Mogilev), P. Tishkovskiy (Mogilev), V. Fedorenko (Gomel), Z. Shegelman (Mogilev) became members of FIAP (The International Federation of Photographic Art) [3].

Previously published fundamental studies on Belar-

usian art did not include sections on the development of photographic art. But today, the achievements of art photography in Belarus have become part of systematic art studies in the field of fine arts. N. Bekus-Goncharova, M. Barazna, E. Kenigsberg, P. Liazhanskaya, Yu. Matskevich, I. Reut, N. Savchenko, K. Yanushkevich and others devoted their scientific materials to the development of art photography.

New independent trends in Belarusian photography did not emerge from the underground movement. The official people's photo club Minsk played a special role in the search for new authors. The project *Photo Manifesto: Contemporary Photography in the USSR* (1991) of Belarusian photo artists who belonged to the methodological platform the Minsk School of Creative Photography ensured a greatest success of the studio members in the 1990s. The new Belarusian photography of the 1980s–1990s, like “the new wave” in cinema, introduces specific artistic techniques, experiments, and moves away from the commercial approach. “The more artistic, more intellectual, less commercial and fundamentally different from the prevailing trends” style of “the new wave” is also demonstrated by creative Belarusian photography. Thus, the Minsk School of Creative Photography can be considered part of the broader concept of “the new wave in Belarusian photography” which began in the mid-1980s and also included novel photography from Vitebsk, Grodno, Gomel and authors from other places in Belarus. [4, p. 32]

In 1994, a large exhibition of the representatives of the Minsk School of Creative Photography entitled “Fotografie aus Minsk,” and organized by the IFA Gal-

lery with the support of the Goethe Institute in Minsk, was held in Berlin. The exhibition included works by U. Parfianok, I. Savchenko, G. Moskaleva, V. Shakhlevich, S. Kozhemyakin (curators E. Fischer and B. Barsch [Germany], V. Lobko [Belarus]).

In 1990, the Union of Photo Artists of the BSSR was established, and it lasted until 1992. In 1994, the Constituent Congress of the Founders the Public Association “Photo Art” was held in the gallery of visual arts “Nova” in Minsk. In 2003, a creative union, The Belarusian Public Association “Photo Art,” was created. In 2017, the Belarusian Public Association of Photographers with more than 150 members was registered.

The development of the Belarusian art photography in the 1990s is characterized by a variety of creative methods and technical diversity. This is especially evident in the works of E. Adamchik, V. Baranovskiy, M. Bone, V. Goncharenko, A. Voskresenskiy, M. Zhilinskiy, G. Karchevskiy, A. Kleshchuk, E. Kolchev, G. Likhtarovich, U. Parfianok, D. Romanyuk, V. Fedorenko, A. Tsekhanovich, A. Shchukin.

Modern approaches to working on a photo image are demonstrated by Minsk-based artist I. Savchenko. His works are distinguished by the independent value of each image, the search for modern contexts, and the emphasis on the non-multiplication of the print. I. Savchenko chose photo-documentary quotation as the general line of his artistic language. He was a participant in the international exhibition projects “Belart” (1995) and “Texts” (1997–1998).

There is a predominant development of conceptual photography and photographics within the general polystylism of art practices (M. Batyukova, S. Gudilin, E. Kenigsberg, Y. Leydik-Kanaplyova, U. Parfianok, I. Savchenko, A. Shchukin, etc.).

The principle of a minimalistic choice of expressive pictorial means, the limited use of color, the pursuit of utmost clarity of artistic language united creative methods of photographers A. Uglyanitsa and V. Kalenik.

A. Savitsky’s photo compositions appeal to the viewer’s associative perception of the author’s works. Photos by U. Parfianok are perceived as reflections on the stories and observations of urban visual culture.

The documentary basis of archival materials provid-

ed the foundation for the creative method of G. Moskaleva (the series “Childhood Memories”) and V. Shakhlevich (“Act with a Portrait”), and became one of the most successful in their Belarusian period. The photo project Echo of Silence by photographers I. Savchenko, V. Shakhlevich, G. Moskaleva, and S. Kozhemyakin was displayed in Minsk and outside Belarus (Germany, curator V. Bagaliantz).

The City of the Sun, a project by artist and writer A. Klinov (2006), is a photo album that shows the unreal world of the post-war Stalinist architecture in Minsk.

One of the county’s most prominent photo artists A. Shchukin, together with the sculptor K. Selikhanov, presented black and white large-format works in a special project, Decoding. The Archetype of the Adequate Time, at the 5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2013). The authors successfully complement each other despite their completely different temperaments and choice of plastic language and materials.

V. Kachan creates a visual chronicle of urban life. In his series, city festivals and everyday life of the Belarusian capital are presented in a wide range of genres. He is very versatile in his photographic interests and aspirations. However, it is not just his taste or eclecticism, but some essential property that can be defined as thirst for new spaces, desire to penetrate and master them, to overcome their boundaries including types, genres, and techniques [5].

The work of E. Adamchik who began her career in the late 1980s deserves special attention. She worked a lot in magazine photographics, designed fiction book editions for Belarusian publishers. To date, this is the most consistent author in Belarusian photographic art keeping up with the latest trends in European art photography. Staged photo series in the nude, as well as landscapes of Vilnius, Minsk, and Barcelona, have brought her fame. In 2005, an album of emphatically glamorous photos, “Bielaruski,” was released.

Graduates of educational institutions of culture and art (D. Romanyuk, V. Terentyev, I. Latushkin, G. Karchevskiy, D. Nedelskiy, D. Chernyavskaya, S. Cherenovich, O. Varennikova), as well as, and quite often, graduates of technical universities (M. Garus, V. Kachan, S. Kozhemyakin, I. Petrovich, U. Parfianok,

etc.) choose art photography.

In contrast to official reportage photography, amateurs managed to establish themselves as a clear aesthetic trend in the second half of the 1990s, free of conservative compositional and imaginative thinking. Some of them confidently occupied a niche of professional creative path. Among the graduates of the Academy at that time, few worked in art photography. V. Terentyev's studio at the Academy was in an experimental search, consistently accumulated original methods, its own experience which gave a noticeable result only at the end of the decade. A group of former studio members of the photo club Minsk was ready before others for collective approval of the graphic program developed by them. The works impressed everyone with their unexpectedness, demonstrating consolidated opposition to the daily official photojournalism. Over time, this center became known as the Minsk School of Creative Photography.

Young photo artists strive to emphasize the graphic originality of the photo. Typical elements of the uniqueness of works are constituents of creative strategies: the author's signature, print numbering, the use, except for complex chemical processes, additional processing of the negative and the sheet, the expansion of graphic tools, the application of the author's text. Perhaps this issue requires a more detailed analysis, but a rather pragmatic idea of Minsk photo-conceptualism lacked an internal discussion not so much about the form of an artwork, its content, as about the forms of interaction with other art practices.

The names of famous Belarusian photo masters G. Likhtorovich, A. Kleshchuk, E. Adamchik, V. Vasilyev, V. Kachan, E. Kenigsberg, D. Romanyuk, A. Shchukin, E. Kozyulya, V. Fedorenko, I. Savchenko, M. Garus, U. Parfianok, V. Bazan, M. Maruga, and A. Pavlyut certainly hold a prominent place in the panorama of visual culture of Belarus.

Private and state news agencies and resources in Belarus possess significant material reflecting the chronicle of the country's life after 1991. This is a reporter's material, but it contains a lot of highly artistic achievements. However, neither Belarusian nor foreign researchers systematically worked with this materi-

al [6]. The best examples of photojournalism include works by S. Grits, D. Brushko, A. Kleshchuk, S. Plytkevich, T. Tkachyova. A bright page of artistic photography is the work of the best Belarusian photojournalists. For almost twenty years, A. Kleshchuk highlighted the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster which affected children's fate in his photographs. His well-known series is *The Zone of Sorrow. The Chernobyl Cycle—Children* (1986–1996).

Pictorial photo is presented by M. Bone, a designer by education, and A. Voskresenskiy, a cinematographer. Among film and television cinematographers, high creative achievements in art photography are demonstrated by Yu. Plyushchev, N. Maminov, A. Shkarubo, S. Torbik. Decorative and graphic possibilities of photography are utilized by graphic artist Yu. Pevnev. Yu. Matskevich proved herself a portraitist and author of art projects in the field of social photography.

In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the manifestations of synthesis of artistic techniques, mutual influence of types of fine art and photography intensified in Belarusian easel and book graphic arts. Collage, mixed media, and computer graphics were widely used. Photography remains a necessary means of expression for book designers and illustrators. The national competition *Art of the Book* annually determines winners in the nomination *Best Photo Artist*. Poster artists make use of photo. The photo poster *LEVI'S. 30 YEARS OF WOODSTOCK* by V. Tsesler and S. Voychenko can be found in the collections of the Louvre.

The most important international thematic exhibition projects "Texts" (1997), "The Illusion of Distances" (2000), "The Illusion of Time" (2004), "The Stop Europe" (2006) showcased photographs by Belarusian and foreign authors.

The predominant development of photography and photographics within the framework of polystylism became a characteristic trend for the development of photographic art in Belarus in the 1990s. The percentage of photographic exhibitions was equal to almost half of all ongoing exhibitions of fine arts. Shortly, the foundation for development was laid, making it possible to widely use the potential of analogue and digital photography toward expressive artistic solutions.

The development of Belarusian photographic art in the early 21st century is characterized by a variety of genre forms, creative methods, conceptual approaches,

and technical diversity. And the new opportunity—posting huge numbers of photographic images online—is widely used today by artists and designers.

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