

Boris Mikhailov: Ukrainian Diary

10 October 2025 – 22 February 2026

Ukrainian Diary is the first major UK retrospective of work by Boris Mikhailov (b.1938, Kharkiv). One of the most influential contemporary artists from Eastern Europe, Mikhailov has explored social and political subjects for more than fifty years through his experimental photographic work.

Described as an outsider, a trickster and 'a kind of proto-punk', Mikhailov combines humour, mischief and tragedy in his pioneering work, ranging from documentary photography and conceptual work, to painting and performance. Since the 1960s, he has been creating a powerful record of life in the Ukraine and the tumultuous changes that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union.

From early underground works and images of everyday life in Kharkiv, to his self-deprecating self-portraits which mock traditional Soviet masculine stereotypes, Mikhailov creates an ambiguous, fragmented view of a world in constant flux. His photographs contradict the one-sidedness of Soviet ideology, especially during the time when photography was heavily controlled and censored in the Soviet Union.

Ukrainian Diary brings together work from over twenty of Mikhailov's most important series, including *Yesterday's Sandwich*, *I am not I*, *Salt Lake*, *Red*, *Sots Art*, *Luriki*, *Case History* and *Theatre of War*.

Self-taught and 'somewhat careless' (in his words), *Yesterday's Sandwich* (1960s – 1970s), one of his most important series, began as an accident when a handful of slides stuck together. He was fascinated by the result and continued to randomly layer slides, creating new combinations which 'reflected the dualism and contradictions of Soviet Society'.

Mikhailov created 'bad photography' as a way to undermine official Soviet aesthetics, as introduced in the series *Black Archive* (1968-1979). Badly printed, damaged or poor-quality productions were an artistic device that Mikhailov described as 'lousy photography for a lousy reality'.

The series *Red* (1965-1978) bridges documentary photography and conceptual art – over 70 images taken in the late 1960s and 1970s highlighting the colour red in everyday objects and scenes. His documenting of red reveals the extent to which communist ideology saturated daily life.

The Photographers' Gallery
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Together his uncompromising, subversive work is a powerful photographic narrative on Ukraine's contemporary history. Seen today, against the backdrop of current events and ongoing war in Ukraine, Mikhailov's work is all the more poignant and enlightening.

The exhibition is organised in collaboration with the MEP - Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.

Notes to Editors

For further information on exhibitions and print editions and for press images and credits/captions, please contact Robyn Deane robyn@margaretlondon.com or Phoebe Heins phoebe@margaretlondon.com.

About Boris Mikhailov

Born in Kharkiv, Ukraine in 1938, Boris Mikhailov is a self-taught photographer. Having trained as an engineer, he was first introduced to photography when he was given a camera to document the state-owned factory where he worked. With access to a camera, he took advantage of this opportunity to take nude photographs of his first wife - an act forbidden under Soviet norms - which he developed and printed in the factory's laboratory. He was fired when the photographs were found by KGB agents. From then he pursued photography full time, using it as a subversive tool and operating as part of the underground art scene. His work first gained international exposure in the 1990s with the series *Case History*, a shockingly direct portrayal of the realities of post-Soviet life in the Ukraine.

Today seen as one of the most important figures on the international art scene, he has received many prestigious awards, among them the 2015 Goslar Kaiserring Award, the Citibank Private Bank Photography Prize (now the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize) in 2001 and the Hasselblad Award in 2000. He represented Ukraine at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and again in 2017.

His work has been exhibited in major international venues, including Tate Modern, London, MoMA, New York; the Palazzo Esposizioni, Rome; the Fotomuseum Den Haag, The Hague, the National Museum of Photography, Copenhagen, as well as the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris.

Mikhailov lives between Berlin and Kharkiv with his wife, Vita.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery explores how photography is connecting, captivating and radically changing our world today. The Gallery's programme and spaces – from exhibitions, talks, workshops and digital platforms, to the galleries, shop and cafe – all explore the beauty, complexity and future of photography. Right outside the Gallery, the very best of contemporary photography is shown for free, day and night, in Soho Photography Quarter. Find out more at: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor information - The Photographers' Gallery

Monday – Wednesday 10am – 6pm

Thursday & Friday 10am – 8pm (Friday free from 4pm this summer)

Saturday 10am – 6pm

Sunday & Bank Holidays 11am – 6pm

Also on show at The Photographers' Gallery from 10 October 2025 - 22 February 2026:

[Zofia Rydet: Sociological Record](#)

[Click! 100 Years of the Photobooth](#)

On show in Soho Photography Quarter, free, every day, until May 2026:
[Lisa Barnard: The Canary and The Hammer](#)

Tickets - your ticket covers entry to all exhibitions on the day of your visit

£10 / £7 concessions (members go free)
Advance online booking: £8.50 / £6 concessions

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