

Fairytale Glimpse of Siberian Town of Tiksi

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The London Festival of Photography showcases stunning photos of Tiksi.

LONDON — An exhibit by Yakutian photographer Yevgenia Arbugayeva, currently showcased as part of the London Festival of Photography, offers a playful and magical glimpse into a diminishing community in Siberia.

Bridging fantasy and reality, Arbugayeva conjures up the chilly northern landscapes of her native Tiksi – a remote Siberian port town – through the eyes of a little girl. In this way, vast desolate steppes become evocative of distant planets, while snowy mountains at dawn resemble blueberry ice cream.

"It seems that photography shares a great deal of the spirit of a child's imagination", said Arbugayeva. "The ability to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and sometimes even the sad things."

Once an important scientific and military base in the Arctic coast, Tiksi is now undergoing a process of abandonment. Like many children of her generation, Arbugayeva was just eight years old when her family decided to leave Tiksi for a bigger city in 1991, after the Moscow government ceased funding projects in the north.

The abundant beauty, colors and scenery of the Arctic made a lasting impression on Arbugayeva, however, prompting her to return with a camera at the age of 26. "I have always wanted to be that little girl again," she explains.

Presenting a Tiksi of both past and present, Arbugayeva juxtaposes icy tundra with the flaking pastels of Soviet-era apartment blocs; aurora boreali with abandoned satellite dishes. The works are part-fact, part-fiction and invite the viewer to embark on a journey of exploration and discovery.

"I was mesmerized by the haunting tonal quality of the images," Brett Jefferson Scott, the festival curator said. "They are unlike anything I have seen before."

"Tiksi" is among the 18 exhibitions taking place across London as part of the second installation of the London Festival of Photography. The collection of photos was selected as part of the festival's theme of "Inside Out: Reflections on the Public and Private," which presents a wide range of photographs from the 1950s to present day.

Arbugayeva's work caught the attention of festival organizers after winning the Magnum Foundation Emergency Fund, which aims to shed light on underserved issues and communities.

Other festival highlights include the unseen Gaddafi Archives, which explore Libya before the Arab Spring, new work by Simon Roberts and Magnum photographers Chris Steele-Perkins and Martin Parr. The exhibitions, as well as various events and workshops, are taking place across London venues.

"Tiksi" runs through June 30 at Calumet Photographic Gallery, 93-103 Drummond St, City of London. Euston tube station. Tel. +44 (0)20 7380 1144. www.lfph.org, www.calumetphoto.co.uk

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