The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Photo Exhibits Celebrate Cities, New and Old

By D. Garrison Golubock

July 02, 2013



Soviet skyscraper under construction on Smolenskaya Ploshchad in 1952. **Nahum Granovsky**

The city, with its towering structures of concrete and steel, may seem eternal to its many visitors. However, it is no secret that our metropolises change constantly, and each generation brings a fresh perspective to the places we call home. This week, two galleries in Moscow showcase major cities in all their glory, spanning both the past and the present.

A multi-part retrospective of Moscow city photography is continuing with the exhibit "Moscow Stories. XX century. Part II" at The Brothers Lumiere Center of Photography, showcasing city scenes by a variety of Russian urban photography masters. Across town, the Les Gallery presents a fresh and very young glance at cities worldwide with its exhibition "Just Look" by a young photographer known only as "Mels."

"The city is not merely comprised of events," writes the Lumiere center."It is the architecture, the people, and that which is born between them."

"Moscow Stories," is the second and final part of their chronicling of Moscow across the past century, after the first part opened in 2011.

Covering the later half of the 20th century, the photos on display here range from missiles rolling down Red Square on Victory Day in the '70s to pictures of children's soccer teams, Gagarin and Khrushchev, and passersby on the street.

Perhaps the most atmospheric set of photos on display at the Lumiere center is the series "The Death of Arbat" by photographer Alexander Potresov, which chronicles the process of building the street now known as Novy Arbat and examines the neighborhood that was destroyed to make way for it.

The glimpses of narrow alleys and wooden houses in this neighborhood now characterized simply by the highly-trafficked avenue that is Novy Arbat brings to mind just how much Moscow has truly changed over the last 50 years.

The photographer Mels agrees with this depiction of a changing Moscow — after only a few years in the U.S., she feels her city has changed: "People don't smile at you on the street here; they are colder [than in America]," she said.

Her pseudonym, along with a series of photographs showing her enveloped in orange smoke, seems to lend a certain aura of mystery to her work. Elena Laskaya, art manager at the Les gallery, said of Mels that "I can't tell you anything about her; I've never seen her; we were contacted by her manager ... her technique is good, her images interesting, but I know nothing about her at all."

In person, Mels is somewhat less mysterious — she explains that her pseudonym is actually adapted from her favorite cartoon character from childhood and is not related the Soviet name Mels, which was an acronym for Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin.

The 17 year old returned to Moscow earlier this year after four years spent living in Brighton Beach, New York City's best-known Russian enclave, and is exhibiting a collection of mainly architectural photographs from both New York and Berlin.

Mels took her first photographs at age nine and was given her first camera at age 11 when she moved to America with her family. "America changes people," Mels said "For me, it was being there that made me want to take photographs — that is, there I was able to start getting enjoyment from the work."

Mels said the city of New York itself was her main inspiration: "For me, Manhattan was my love, I loved the city and all the neighborhoods there, I loved walking there for the way you can see right through the city [down Manhattan's straight avenues]."

Though most of the photographs displayed at the Les gallery were taken in New York, there is also a series taken in a zoo in Berlin, which first started Mels' professional career when a photographer noticed the series at a school art show and invited Mels to take part in a photography workshop.

Now back in Moscow, Mels hopes to continue her art, but is uncertain whether she will continue with the same street photography prevalent in both exhibits.

Her youth, Mels said, gives her a fresh view of photography, and her manager, Anastasia Latysh, agreed: "A young photographer is like a new inspiration, a new contribution to art, and I haven't seen anything quite like her photography."

Mels says she hopes to study at a university in Russia before returning to Manhattan to work more with the medium.

If she stays in Moscow and continues her city shots, viewers can expect, perhaps, to see her work someday in a retrospective of 21st-century photography, documenting the changing city across the decades.

"Moscow Stories. XX century. Part II" is on display until September 8 at the Brothers Lumiere Center of Photography, 3 Bolotnaya Naberezhnaya, Bldg. 1. Metro Kropotkinskaya. Tel. 495-228-9878. Mel's photography is on display until July 6 in the exhibit "Just Look" at the Les Gallery, 65a Ulitsa Vavilova. Metro Profsoyuznaya. Tel. 499-129-0340. Mels' work will be auctioned July 6 from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Les Gallery.

Contact the author at g.golubock@imedia.ru

Related articles:

- "World's Oldest" Director of Pushkin Museum Steps Down
- International Ballet Competition Held at Bolshoi
- Italian Ambassador on Using Art to Break Down Barriers

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/07/02/moscow-photo-exhibits-celebrate-cities-new-and-old-a25457