

Yevzerikhin Shows a Hidden World in Soviet Union

By [D. Garrison Golubock](#)

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The synagogue photo series is hung from the ceiling on boards that can be pulled down for closer viewing. **Vladimir Filonov**

The Soviet Union is generally thought of as a black hole for religion, a time when activity of all faiths was suppressed and kept to a minimum. While this is true, life continued for believers in all of the religions of the Soviet Union, as people refused to let a repressive regime prevent them from having a spiritual life.

The exhibit "Photographs That Have Never Existed" (Fotografy, Kotoryix Ne Bylo) highlights the secret life of one particular religious community. This display at the Jewish Museum highlights a series of photos taken by Immanuel Yevzerikhin, a photographer for the Soviet Tass news agency, which follows the everyday lives and events of the Jewish community of Moscow's Great Choral Synagogue in the late '50s and '60s.

"The photographs were preserved as part of the photographer's personal archive and then

bought by the foundation after his death," exhibit curator Maria Yesimova said, explaining the exhibit was organized by the Sepherot Foundation, a Liechtenstein-based organization dedicated to collecting Russian art of the late 17th to 20th centuries.

Emmanuil Yevzerikhin is well known as a Soviet news photographer and took one of the most iconic shots of World War II, a picture of the Children's Khorovod fountain in the midst of the ruined city of Stalingrad that juxtaposed well-preserved sculptures of dancing children with smoke and rubble all around them. Yevzerikhin also took well-known photo portraits of Soviet celebrities like Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Kalinin, Valery Chkalov and Mikhail Gromov.

Despite Yevzerikhin's glamorous career as a Soviet photographer, he remained true to his roots. Born into a Jewish family in Rostov-on-Don, Yevzerikhin continued to be involved in the Jewish community later in his career, resulting in the series of photographs now displayed at the Jewish museum.

In truth, most of the photographs on display are mundane and repetitive — there are many shots of bearded men in Jewish prayer attire reading torahs, carrying torahs and praying in the synagogue. Yevzerikhin has also taken many portraits of various cantors and rabbis from the synagogue.

However, apart from the mundane photos of daily life in the synagogue, Yevzerikhin has captured some interesting details. In an exterior shot of the synagogue, a small cluster of uniformly dressed men can be seen standing innocuously out front.

"We think that these were members of the government security apparatus, who were always close by and took note of anyone who came to the synagogue," said Yesimova. In this way, Yevzerikhin has caught a glimpse of yet another secret layer within the hidden world of the Soviet Jewry.

"Photographs That Have Never Existed" will run until Nov. 17 at the Jewish Museum, 11 Ulitsa Obraztsova, Bldg. 1A.

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