

REVIEWS



Photo: Courtesy of Temnikova & Kasela

## The Poetical Reality of Some Beautiful Songs

A review of Olga Chernysheva's solo exhibition "Algunas Canciones Lindas" at Temnikova & Kasela Gallery

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Photos: Courtesy of Temnikova & Kasela

Temnikova & Kasela Gallery began their autumn season with two exhibitions, or, as the press release states, a "two-in-one" exhibition curated by Anders Kreuger. The dual-exhibition project presents Olga Chernysheva's solo exhibition "Algunas Canciones Lindas" in the Temnikova & Kasela Gallery space, and Jaan Toomik's exhibition "How The West Was Left" at the Tallinn Central Market. It would be much more suitable to analyse these projects at the same time due to the parallels drawn between both artists and their works – for example, both artists emerged in the mid 1990s, and they are both widely acclaimed in their respective countries. However, the following analysis will look solely at Olga Chernysheva's exhibition "Algunas Canciones Lindas".



Olga Chernysheva is a Russian artist who graduated from Moscow's Institute of Cinematography with a degree based in animation. Throughout her artistic career, Chernysheva's working methods have been diverse, including such genres as photography, video, painting, and drawing. Nevertheless, she has stayed devoted to her subject matter while using these various genres of mediums. A running conceptual theme can be seen throughout her previous works in her web-portfolio, and now, also in her solo exhibition "Algunas Canciones Lindas". In a way, her works are about the people and the society from which she comes and what she has seen or felt concerning the surrounding environment. Even if you are familiar with certain aspects of her work or have previously seen her art, she can still surprise you. The more one researches her artistic career, the more one would expect her various works to resemble one another; however, this is not the case. Using different media, Olga Chernysheva touches upon many

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important social subjects with a wide variety of visual languages.



Every time I see her works, it takes me by surprise how relevant and significant the subjects of her works are to both the time and place in which they were created. However, the question is – to whom is it relevant and significant, and what is the reason for such a strong positive reaction towards her works? To answer this question, I do need to take a step back and start from the beginning, or in this case, the exhibition itself and where it has led me, personally.

Firstly, the exhibition title “Algunas Canciones Lindas” (“Some Beautiful Songs”) is taken from an old LP of Cuban popular tunes, and as the press release states, “Olga Chernysheva uses it as a connecting device for her presentation at the gallery of some 30 lens-based works, mostly analogue and digital photographs”. Even though it sounds poetic, neither the title nor its explanation hint at what to expect from the exhibition. The photographs are dated from 1996 to 2014, except for one work from 2017, which was taken in Tallinn Central Market just before the opening of both her and Jaan Toomik’s exhibitions. The fact that her most recent photograph was taken at the site of Toomik’s exhibition is the first link made between both artists and both exhibitions. The photograph itself has been placed separate from the others, and it is also different in size than the other photographs in the series. Although the scale and placement are different from the other photographs, it doesn’t stand out conceptually. The photographs have captured people and places during the 1990s, a period which was a time of change politically, economically, and socially. On one hand, having been born in a post-Soviet country, the idea of the 90s as a time of change is self-evident and not really something exotic; on the other hand, Chernysheva’s documentations are striking, almost as if these photographs were my own memories. Being a part of the 90s generation, every picture reminds me of something, even if those specific people and places are unknown to me. These works are someone else’s memories, yet I can draw parallels between them and what I remember from my childhood and what effect it had on me then.

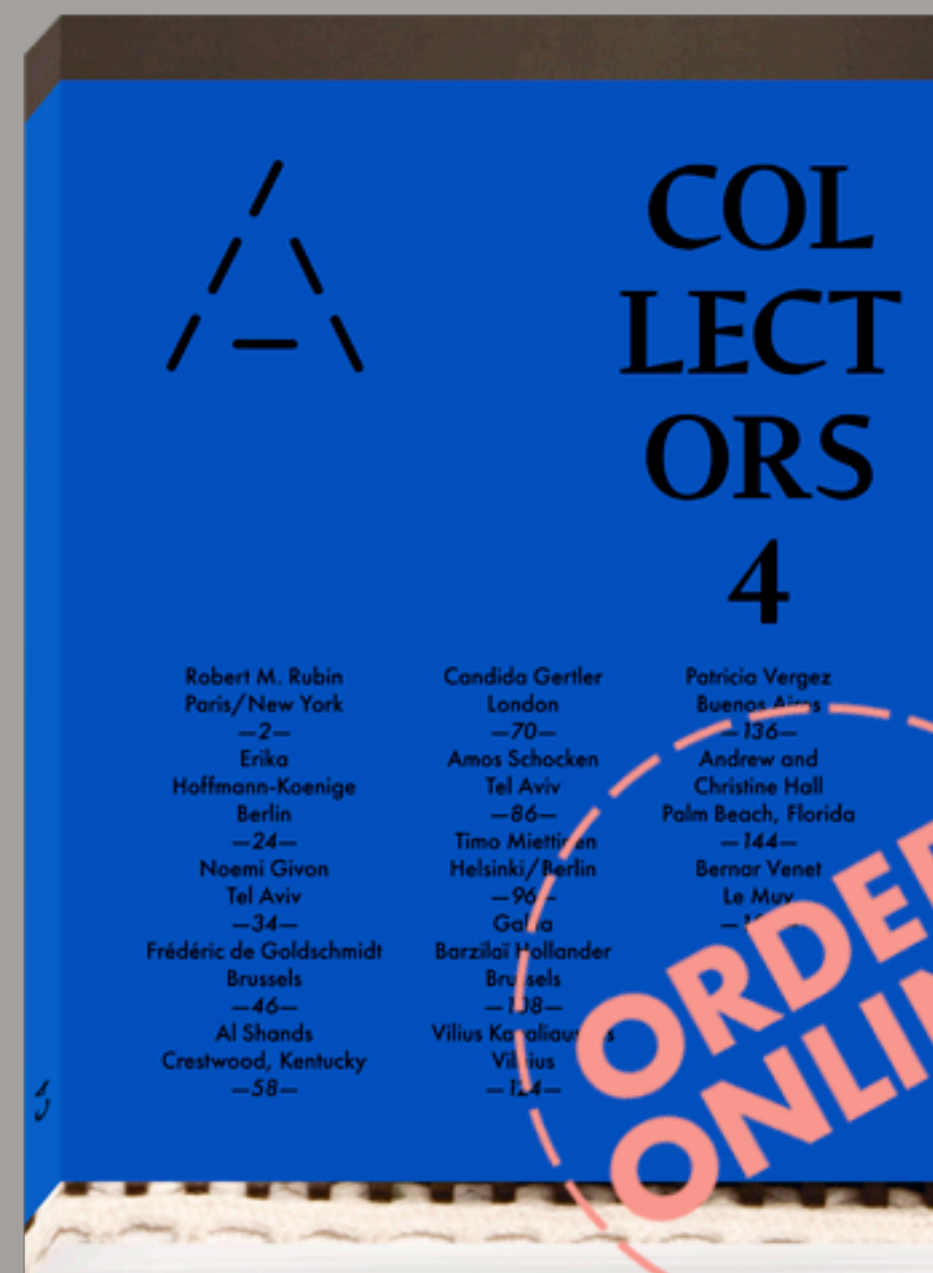


Chernysheva’s photographs have documented that specific period, and even more weirdly, they have captured the zeitgeist of the time in the region. Her anonymous people in the photographs suddenly become familiar, and you feel as if you know them. It made me feel like a voyeur looking at someone else’s life through Chernysheva’s lens because, even though it is undoubtedly documentary, her

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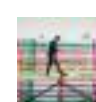
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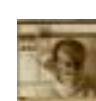
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Iv » Ziņas Anetes Kalniņas izstāde "Ainava-Abstrakcija"

photographs seem too personal for us to be allowed to look at them. The approach to the characters seems almost Dostoyevskian – each of them has a story and every one of them seems to have clear reasons which have led them to be there at that time. This is stressed in the text provided by Temnikova & Kasela Gallery about the artist and her works: “It continues a long tradition of social realism in Russian culture (very different from the Socialist Realism that was the official artistic doctrine of the USSR) and of art as a vehicle for critical and compassionate narrative (which can also be formally bold and experimental).”<sup>[1]</sup> Olga Chernysheva documents life and people through the mundane, and this might be the reason why her work seems so familiar.



Analysing Chernysheva's work, especially the photographs with people, I would like to draw parallels to the work of the Latvian photographer Inta Ruka, for example, the series “My Country People”. Chernysheva's photographs tend to depict the lives of people from specific places, and as observers, we will probably never have a chance to meet them, whereas through Inta Ruka's photographs, we feel as if we have known these people all our lives. Inta Ruka gets to know her subjects and takes photographs of them in their homes, but Olga Chernysheva takes it even further – everything becomes a part of the story and she documents not only the people, but also the surroundings of everyday life.

This is one of the rare exhibitions that I have very little to say about. However, I don't mean this in a negative sense. In terms of the exhibition, there are no issues with the curatorial approach nor the concept of the exhibition, and not even with the artist's works. The works in the exhibition seem to be placed in a specific order, but at the same time, it doesn't feel like a forced order with the objective of creating a certain narrative. That said, some of the photographs continue stories which were started or alluded to in other images somewhere else on the exhibition wall. The series of photographs can be looked at as a group, and at the same time, as individual photographs without any of their depth or impact being lost.



After visiting the exhibition, the only thought I had was that this was a really good exhibition. However, the question remains: why is this a good exhibition? This brings me back to the first question I posed at the beginning of the article. In the context of this exhibition, it is difficult to avoid emotional attachment to the photographs. They depict something I saw as a child, even if I didn't see these specific scenes; however, my memories play tricks on me, making me believe that I have seen things even though I know I haven't seen them before. Thus, rationally evaluating the series, it is a poetical documentation of reality, and Olga Chernysheva has managed to merge many lives in one room.

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[1] [www.temnikova.ee/Olga-Chernysheva](http://www.temnikova.ee/Olga-Chernysheva)

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