

Exhibition Davide Monteleone BORDERLINE EMPIRE

Opening of the new gallery KEHRER BERLIN

Exhibition: June 1 to July 5, 2014, Vernissage: May 31, 2014, 7 pm



© Davide Monteleone, Imperium, 2012. Courtesy Kéhrer Berlin.

Berlin, May 30, 2014

On Saturday, May 31, 2014, at 7 pm, KEHRER BERLIN will open its gallery space for the first time. On display will be the solo exhibition BORDERLINE EMPIRE with works of the Rome- and Moscow-based photographer Davide Monteleone (b. 1974, Potenza, Italy). The exhibition offers a cross-section of over ten years of Monteleone's extraordinary social documentary photography. The exhibition will display works of his DUSHA, RED THISTLE, SPASIBO, and MAIDAN series from the borderlands of the former Soviet Union, which are of special significance in the light of on-going Ukrainian-Russian tensions and the recent Crimean conflict. The exhibition is open to the public Wednesdays through Saturdays from 11 am to 6 pm.

Beginning with his first trip through the former USSR in 2001, Monteleone took photographs over the course of six years, which he first published in 2007 under the title *DUSHA* (soul). The images take up and deal with the stereotypical concepts of the Russian soul, which include a state of persistent bipolarity, a tendency towards emotional extremes, fatalistic and passionate dispositions, and an affinity for rigid stubbornness.

Monteleone strives neither to confirm nor to deny the common stereotypes, which in part stem from the international reception of Russian literature. His early view of Russia instead portrays a subjective image of a country in which he beholds peripheral settings, such as daily life on the countryside, with the same importance as the more pronounced corridors of power, monuments, amusement parks, and Soviet-era apartment blocks. In *DUSHA*, Monteleone captures the atmosphere of an uncertain socio-political present by means of freezing his encounters with various people and places into pictures.

Monteleone portrays settings that have lost their significance since the fall of the Soviet Union, yet still continue to exist. In *DUSHA*, he depicts living situations that are enshrouded by the oligarchic system, which is an extension of Putin's political system, like a pervasive fog. Then there are worlds in which people carry on their lives as a matter of course as if recent history were unobjectionable normality.

Monteleone took a film festival in the Chechen capital Grozny in 2007 as a reason to visit the area, resulting in his intense travel through the Caucasus between the Black and Caspian Seas from 2007 to 2011. He was impacted by the remnants of the two Chechen Wars—broken families, destroyed cities and villages—as well as by the breathtaking landscape of Chechnya, Abkhazia, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and North and South Ossetia. His travels resulted in the publication of the *RED THISTLE* series in 2011. “Red Thistle” is the name Leo Tolstoy uses as the symbol of Caucasian resistance in his “Hadji Murat”, a novella dealing with the Russian expansion of Katherine the Great (1817-1864). Since this period, the Caucasus have developed into a region in which there is little concordance between the structure of ethnic groups and the political division of the land, because the traditional social and judicial systems have been violently dismantled to the point of annihilation by the random demarcations of borders and associated deportations.

Photographs from the *RED THISTLE* series are, on the one hand, documents of wholly degrading politics and a consequentially divided and unsettled people. They are also, on the other hand, non-judgmental witnesses of the convergences occurring in a region on the edge of Europe, as well as of personal encounters with the people who live there, their culture, their values, and their resistance. Monteleone employs photographic colorism to lay out scenes of occupation, images of bombed-out houses, and memories of the hostage crisis in Beslan, all coordinating with terrific landscapes as well as portraits and event photography that were taken at weddings, concerts, and religious gatherings.

The question of who emerged as the ultimate victor in the Chechen conflict and at what price political stability was achieved, especially in Chechnya since Vladimir Putin appointed Ramzan Kadirov president of the autonomous republic in March 2007, is the theme of Davide Monteleone's series *SPASIBO* (Thank you). He shot the large-format, black-and-white series over a three-month period in 2013. These are images of a nation whose capital has emerged from rubble and been rebuilt greater than ever before, whose economy's prosperity is depending on Russian financial aid, and whose Muslim beliefs have been restricted to strict codes of conduct under Kadirov's autocratic regime, which together produce a superficial social order. Armed forces, personality cults, and media propaganda currently guarantee the survival of this apparent social order.

The refusal of the Ukrainian government under Viktor Yanukovich to sign the association agreement with the European Union led to the growing protests on Kiev's Maidan Nesaleschnosti (Independence Square) beginning on November 21, 2013. On February 14, 2014, the protests escalated, claiming 80 lives, resulting in Yanukovich's overthrow, and leading to the accession of the Crimea to the Russian Federation. Now the election of oligarch Petro Poroschenko as the new president demonstrates a minimal chance of re-stabilization in the Ukraine.

Davide Monteleone's MAIDAN photographs, some of which were taken on the Maidan this February, are images of very recent history. They depict a place of both peaceful protests as well as of violent riots, and they're already historic. Additionally, objects embedded in black, isolated from any context—flowers, candles, gasmasks, and batons—offer a look at the instruments of a revolution: fragments that also give Monteleone's "Borderline Empire" fresco a sense of political iconography.

Biography

Davide Monteleone (b. 1974 in Potenza, Italy) spent his first eighteen years living in various cities in Italy. He gave up his engineering studies to move first to the US and then to the UK, where he discovered an interest in photography and journalism. Back in Italy in 2000, he completed his studies in photography and began working for major Italian magazines. At the end of 2001, Monteleone moved again, this time to Moscow, where he lived until 2003, working as correspondent for the photo agency Contrasto. He began working regularly with major national and international newspapers, such as The New York Times, Time, Stern, and The New Yorker, to name just a few. Since 2003, Monteleone has divided his time between Italy and Russia, pursuing long-term personal projects and continuing his editorial work. He published his first book "Dusha – Russian Soul" in 2007, followed by "La Line Inesistente" in 2009, "Red Thistle" in 2012, and "Spasibo" in 2013. His work and publications have brought him numerous awards, including various World Press Photo prizes, the 2011 European Publishers Award, the 2012 Carmignac Gestion Photojournalism Award, and the 2014 PDN Photo Annual Award.

Intended for immediate release.

Images

Further images can be requested after June 4, 2014.

Contact

Für Rückfragen wenden Sie sich bitte an

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