



Exhibition by Belarusian Photo Artist in Berlin

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The exhibition by Andrei Liankevich, the 27 year-old Belarusian photo journalist was opened at Berlin gallery ACUD. He cooperates with Belarusian independent newspaper "Nasha Niva". Liankevich's pictures are published in Russian and Polish magazines and also in such world famous media as New York Times, Figaro, Zeit, Spiegel and International Herald Tribune.

Breaking stereotypes

As the gallery's exhibition space is quite limited, 40 not so big photos are tightly displayed on the walls. The pictures with no corresponding texts aroused many questions, so I had to ask the artist for explanations.

Andrei Liankevich said the pictures are dedicated to two main topics: one highlights the everyday life of common Belarusians; and the other returns to national roots: who are Belarusians and where did they come from.

Black and white pictures from the "Paganism" series turn one's mind to pre-Christian times, when garlic was used as a means to prevent vampire assaults, and an aspen pole was believed to protect against witches. Pagan traditions are still alive in some Belarusian villages far away from civilization, the photographer assures.

Liankevich pays more attention to present day Belarus. According to the photographer, as a rule typical topics Belarusians discuss are connected with politics. He tried to break these stereotypes, showing the life of common people who "live, work, eat and and produce the GDP". This kind of life cannot be found on the pages of state newspapers and magazines.

Life on "the island of stability"

Two pictures are displayed side by side: solemn faces of World War II veterans on one of them and people from Belarusian underground on the other (some youngsters wearing swastikas and their victims - boys and girls with plastic bags on their heads). Andrei Liankevich deliberately brought these pictures to Germany. To the opinion of the photographer modern art in Belarus is of no demand, because it highlights acute problems of the society and Belarusian galleries are not so eager to exhibit such works. Liankevich considers modern art to be a provocation, which, as we all know, does not always lead to a happy end.

Liankevich explains why he prefers to exhibit his pictures abroad: "Our president calls Belarus "the island of stability", so our country is considered to be quite well-off, notwithstanding that economic crisis is in full swing". That is why only three pictures from the current exhibition have been on display in Belarus. In Minsk Andrei Liankevich deliberately chooses only such exhibition venues where his pictures, topics and decoration will not be subjected to censorship.

Non-glossy pictures

"For me it is the main condition," Liankevich stresses. "If I decide to invite babushkas from Pinsk to sing at the opening of my exhibition on paganism - then it will be in this way. And no one will ask me: why and what for? Because I want it like that!"

However, the photographer reduces his cooperation with Belarusian media. He only rarely frequents Belarus, preferring to travel all around the world. "I make reportages and no publication in Belarus, because publishing them means I can only cover my costs," Andrei says.

The pictures, exhibited in Berlin gallery, tell different stories about Belarus and Belarusians, stories about the side of life never published in glossy magazines.

Ludmila Skvorchevskaya, broadcasted on Deutsche Welle BY on 23 February 2009.

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