
A Library of Congress Exhibition

November 8, 2008 – January 4, 2009

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art
University of Oklahoma
555 Elm Avenue
Norman, Oklahoma 73019

FRONT:

Yevgeny Stetsko, 1993

As a brass hand plays in the background, a man displays personal possessions for sale at an open-air market.

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REFLECTIONS: 
RUSSIAN PHOTOGRAPHS 
1992–2002
A Library of Congress Exhibition

On March 6, 1992, some three months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a handful of enthusiastic young Westerners living in Moscow began publishing the first English-language daily newspaper ever to be printed in Russia, the Moscow Times. During the next decade, the paper developed into a major source of independent news and commentary, not only for the expatriate community in Moscow, but for many Russians seeking an alternative point of view during a period of revolutionary political, social, and economic change. At first, the paper was printed commercially on the presses of the official communist daily, Pravda, the circulation of which was eight million. By contrast, the upstart Moscow Times printed only 20,000 copies. By 2002, the roles had been reversed. The circulation of the English-language newspaper had grown to 35,000 – exceeding that of the faltering Pravda.

The 1990s were times of extraordinary turmoil in Russia. From an independent perspective, young European and American writers employed by the Moscow Times reported on the death throes of the Soviet system and Russia's struggles, after decades of communism, to reinvent itself as a democracy with a market-based economy. The foreign editors employed a small group of local photojournalists to take pictures documenting the events the reporters covered. As Russians, they were acutely aware of the often painful changes that were daily occurring around them. The photographs in this exhibition, taken for the Moscow Times between 1992 and 2002, represent their own reflections on Russia after communism.

With the fall of communism, Russian photography reentered the international arena. During the long Soviet era, photojournalism had served the propaganda needs of the state. There was no support for Russian photographers who sought to create art or depict a reality at odds with the official party line. The display of controversial work was officially banned, and its creators often jailed. But in the early 1990s, photography reemerged in Russia as a means of free self-expression and a tool for representing a broader range of reality.

Today, many Russian photographers who had no work during the Soviet era are employed as successful photojournalists. While a number of well-known news photographers work abroad for leading Western media and picture agencies, most work for the news magazines and daily papers inside Russia, such as the Moscow Times, which proliferated in the immediate post-communist era.

In contrast to Western news photography, Russian photojournalism often appears to seek a more artistic form. Indeed, a composi-
Yevgeny Stetsko, 1993
A woman prays in the icon corner in the HIV-positive ward of the 2nd Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Moscow.
tional or emotional drama propels many of the images in this exhibition beyond the ordinary limits of documentary news photography. But to non-Russian eyes, the photojournalists’ innate ability to grasp the essential significance and poetic import of their subjects stands out the most. Since each has personally experienced the dramatic upheavals that so convulsed Russia in the 1990s, they are acutely attuned to the often shocking impact of societal changes and are thus able to document their effects with an insight denied to outsiders—an insight that can be passionate, poetic, ironic, sad, and humorous.

The *Moscow Times*’ photographers covered not only the major news stories of the 1990s—the armed conflict between the Russian Parliament and President Boris Yeltsin in October 1993; the momentous 1996 presidential election campaign won by Boris Yeltsin; Russia’s financial collapse in 1998; the terrorist bombings in Moscow in September 1999 and 2000; and the election of President Vladimir Putin in 2000—but also many minor and contradictory dramas and achievements as well. The photographs in this exhibition illustrate the widespread revival of religion; the unprecedented number of political and protest demonstrations; nostalgia for both the communist and tsarist pasts; the presence of AIDS; the continued celebration of military anniversaries; the effects of the wars in Chechnya; the aftermath of the financial pyramid scheme that ruined millions of Russians; and the rise of both business oligarchs and ultranationalist politicians. But the photographs also catch special, timeless moments in the life of Russia: ice fishing in winter; the spring breakup of the frozen Moscow River; young soldiers celebrating on leave; and the discovery of a long-forgotten graveyard during construction of a new downtown shopping plaza. Together, the images help tell the story of a nation undergoing radical transformation on many levels.

The digital prints of photographs in this exhibition have been selected from those published in *Reflections: A Decade of Photographs, 1992-2002* (Moscow: The *Moscow Times*, 2002). They are part of a larger group of pictures that have been generously donated to the Library of Congress by the *Moscow Times*.

This exhibition was made possible by the generous support of the James Madison Council of the Library of Congress and the Russian Information Agency “Novosti.”
Biographies

Igor Tabakov, born in 1957, graduated from the faculty of journalism at Moscow State University in 1985. For more than six years, he worked at the Photocenter of the Union of Journalists of the U.S.S.R., where he participated in the preparation of about 100 exhibitions as well as the publication of a photo book, Der Putsch in Russland (Austria, 1991). He joined the Moscow Times in 1993 and, with the exception of 2001, has been the head of the photo department since 1995.

Vladimir Filonov, born in 1948, left his job as an electronics engineer in 1991 and became a professional photographer with the Moscow Magazine. He has worked for the Moscow Times since 1992. His photographs have won more than 100 awards at Russian and international exhibitions. He has exhibited in 29 countries at more than 500 exhibitions, and his work has been published in books and periodicals.

Yevgeny Stetsko, born in 1951, graduated from the journalism faculty of Moscow State University. He has worked as a photographer at Komsomolskaya Pravda, Smena and Ya. He was employed by the Moscow Times from 1992 to 1999, when he joined its sister newspaper Vedomosti. He is a laureate of the World Press Photo prize and has won prizes in a number of Russian and international exhibitions.

Mikhail Metzel, born in 1960, studied photography at the Moscow Mossoviet politechnical college and the Central House of Journalists. From 1982 to 1988, he was a photographer in the Tupolev design bureau and later worked for the Argumenty i Fakty, Moskovsky Komsomolets and Zeleny Mir newspapers. He was a photojournalist at the Moscow Times from 1992 to 1997, and since February 1998 he has worked for the Associated Press.

Igor Tabakov, 1995
Veterans gather in Moscow on Victory Day to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

Mikhail Metzel, 1995
Members of a military historical society attend a ceremony at the Church of All Saints in Moscow to honor General Lev Kamenev, a leader of anti-Bolshevik forces during the 1917 Russian revolution.

Vladimir Filonov, 1998
The ice breaks on the Moscow River, with the newly-rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in the background.

Mikhail Metzel, 1992
Cossacks rally on October Square in Moscow.

Igor Tabakov, 1999
Moscow prepares for the 200th anniversary celebration of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin's birth in 1799.