

“Unidentified foreigner”

What did Oleg Holosiy look like? His adult life coincided with the worst period for vernacular photography. Pictures taken with compact cameras are of weak quality in comparison with the older, black-and-white ones, with all participants focused, in poses, following the conditions set by the light meter. At the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s, everything in our region seemed temporary and short-lived, not worthy of documenting it on film. As if in defiance, the cameras kept burning the date onto the bottom corner of the pictures. In the background, daily life continued, with one foot still in the collapsing Soviet empire, and partly in Ukraine on its way towards independence. The collective of artists associated with the Paris Commune squat in Kyiv had taken advantage of the newly arrived freedom and released energy. “Cheer up, Elephant, everything will go wrong again”, as one of Holosiy’s friends used to tell him.

On the earliest photographs, from the university years (1980s), Holosiy resembles Andrzej Wróblewski, a seminal Polish painter who died in the 1950s at a young age. Blurry black-and-white images present a young man smoking a cigarette or grabbing a glass. On the later photos in color, we see a handsome, romantic-looking guy in a sweater or a long coat. The ones from the army are the worst: Oleg poses among his colleagues, all dressed up in too-large Soviet Army uniforms. Had he been alive today, he wouldn’t have been able to leave Ukraine due to general mobilization.

How did Oleg Holosiy work? His paintings reflect the major trends of his time, same as it happened here in Poland, and earlier in Germany or Italy. At the Ukrainian scene, due to a minor delay, expressionist art overlapped with the 1990s transformation: an image of the West mediated through the TV screen, as if it was constantly covered with fog; planes, razorblade commercials, the landscape of American Midwest (which the artist had never been to, and neither had I). A postmodern mess of themes, where anything could have appeared anytime. The artist had remained in that era forever: in January 1993, his body had been found at the Botanical Garden in Kyiv. He had no documents with him and looked unusual, hence the personnel of the morgue tagged the body as: unidentified foreigner.

Holosiy is one of the most important Ukrainian painters, but I had no idea about it until I’ve seen his exhibition by accident, in one of those sad private Moscow galleries. He stood out among all those artists who managed to achieve one interesting thing in their lives. It turned out that Holosiy’s works are represented by The Naked Room gallery in Kyiv, with whom we co-produce this exhibition. Perhaps, were it not for the war, our decision would have been longer pondered, but circumstances imposed a necessity to present these works to the Polish audience.

txt: D. Radziszewski

Oleg Holosiy  
Holosiy in Warsaw  
Dawid Radziszewski Gallery

3-24.09.2022

List of works:

In the Circus, 1991, oil on canvas, 200 × 150

Don't Be Afraid, 1990, oil on canvas, 100 × 120

Coast, 1992, oil on canvas, 200 × 300

O.T., 1992, oil on canvas, 200 × 300

Self Portrait, 1987, oil on canvas, 110 × 102

Bro, 1987, oil on canvas, 100 × 60