

Nicholas Hopkins Memories of Odesa



‘Memories of Odesa’, an illuminating exhibition of black and white photographs of the port city of Odesa, is an ode to this grand metropolis and its people. Awarded UNESCO Heritage status in 2023, Odesa remains an ‘Heroic city’ despite sustained Russian bombardment during the summer of this year. This action has resulted in significant damage to historic buildings such as the city’s main Orthodox Cathedral, several museums and grand apartment buildings, not to mention tragic loss of life.

British photographer Nicholas Hopkins visited Ukraine in the spring of 2003 with thirty rolls of Agfa and Kodak monochrome and colour film, his Leica camera, and a desire to capture the daily life and environs of the ‘Hero City’ (an honour awarded to Odesa in 1945). In the spring of 2003 Odesa was in a state of flux after a long and bitter winter. Repairs were being undertaken to roads and infrastructure; Odesa was readying itself for the arrival of spring.

Hopkins’ insightful and intimate portraits of Odesa capture the daily life of the people as witnessed by his camera in the 14 days spent in the city. Odesa has a rich and vibrant history, reflected in what remains of the grand 17th century architecture sitting alongside stark reminders of the Soviet era. Statues of Lenin, military parks, and monuments to war and great patriotic struggles appear somewhat tired and outdated, yet at the same time retain the austerity and power they had when they were first created.

Hopkins had friends living in Odesa at the time, who organised a one-room, ex-soviet apartment with unpredictable water and electricity supplies, for him to stay in. His surroundings, both by day out and about in the city, and when at rest in his temporary home, were akin to those he photographed. The fact that he lived the life of an Odessan during his visit is crucial to his understanding of their character and the resulting intimate portrayals he captured.

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His friends were also his guides, accompanying him to parts of the city rarely visited by outsiders. With them he navigated his way through the architecture, ports, railways, and huge markets; not as a tourist but as a *Starry druh* (an old friend).

He was able to witness the diversity of Odesa; young boys fishing for their dinner, widows selling sunflower seeds, a dated tram rattling along rusty tracks. Hopkins would often set off with a view to covering a particular district or event, but many of the photographs taken were of a spontaneous nature. Unexpectedly witnessing Yuriy Bilonoh, the Ukrainian shot-putter, training for the 2004 Olympics led to such an image.

Hopkins also visited the Sanatorium Kuyalnik, a health resort located 13km from the centre of Odesa, specialising in mud treatments. During Soviet times it catered to hundreds of health tourists, but by 2003 the numbers had reduced to a trickle of mostly Ukrainian and Russian visitors. The images of Kuyalnik are both strange and mesmerising. The architecture is at once familiar but completely alien to most western eyes, the empty spaces echo with voices from times past.

Hopkins kept an extensive diary of his visit to Odesa, allowing him to accurately locate and date his work. 'Memories of Odesa' is a truly fascinating insight into a city that has been so prominent in world news for almost two years.

One third of all sales made during the exhibition will be donated to the independent Ukrainian charity *Sunrise Ukraine* which collects and distributes essentials such as medicine, food, baby food, clothes, and hygiene products. Established shortly after the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in 2022, the charity continues to support hospitals, emergency services and communities in need.

Iryna Voievodina, stepdaughter of Nicholas Hopkins' friend and guide in Ukraine, Stephen Ennis, works closely in assisting *Sunrise Ukraine*. Iryna lives between Odesa, where she is a practicing lawyer, and the UK, where her children currently live with Stephen and her mother, Olga.

All artworks are for sale and one third of all sales made will be donated to Sunrise Ukraine.

20.3 x 25.4 cm, Silver Gelatin Print on Ilford IV FB fibre, Framed, Edition of 5 + 1AP, £375.00

50.8 x 61 cm, Silver Gelatin Print on Ilford IV FB fibre, Framed, Edition of 5 + 1AP, £650.00

Exhibition dates:

9th November – 2nd December 2023

For further information, images & interview opportunities, please contact:

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Gallery Opening hours:

Tuesday – Friday 11 am – 6pm Saturday – 12 noon – 4pm

Please note: 14th – 17th November 11am – 4pm only, 18th November 11am – 2.30pm only.

All other times by appointment