

# BERGGER

## Aleksey Myakishev



A freelance Russian photographer, Aleksey Myakishev is part of the trend of humanist photography. Self taught, he learnt photography during the USSR, making his developers and studying books about painting in the municipal library of Kirov. He was influenced by Cartier Bresson, today he develops a photographic style which continues his tradition of the decisive moment, adding a deep empathy for his subjects. His long photographic projects in the Russian countries are only realised in argentic. In 2015 he has become ambassador of Bergger in Russia and works now with our films and barita-based papers.

*«For me photography is something wonderful. Actually, what we receive doesn't often depend on us. We can choose the frame, the situation, push the shutter release, but eventually, it doesn't happen as we are waiting.»*



Carelia, Kolodozero, 2011



Kirov Oblast, Vyatka, 2005

**Aleksey Myakishev, could you sum up in a few words your conception of photography ?**

... no I couldn't because photography doesn't exist as a conception for me. Generally, I don't like concepts. For me photography, if we compare to music is jazz, improvisation. I think photography is a way of life, a way of thinking and the concept in photography kills this element. Photography can be thought conceptually but for me it is exactly the opposite. I can think of it conceptually.

**It's also a conception !**

An anti conception. It's an attitude in front of the world. I take photos of people according to my attitude to them and I photograph what is around me and next to me. Maybe we can say it's a conception or rather an understanding.

**How do you get to this approach of photography?**

This understanding of photography hasn't occurred immediately, there was a long period of construction, gestation and then this understanding has come. There was the first stage, when I was still at school, I began with the basic knowledge, I developed films, printed photos. I discovered the world through the lenses of my camera. And photography opened the world. During the Sovietic Union and the Perestroika era, we had little photographic resources, it was difficult to have them, so I simply went to the library taking a lot of albums about art and flipped them through. I was interested in topics of painters and how they had built the scene in relation with the composition. In a way I built myself on the paintings of the painters of the Renaissance and the Impressionists. Then, there was a period, from 1995 to 1997 when I

photographed in a permanent movement, according to my sensations. I lived in Vyatka, a town not far from the Urals. I worked for a newspaper, photography became a professional activity, but was still a creative part of my life and I began without knowing it to accumulate matters. At that moment, I knew other photographers and their work.

Then I worked in Moscow, it was the period of reports, I worked for Kommersant newspaper or the Russian Newsweek. At the same time, I put on a lot of exhibitions, meetings between photographers and little by little, this understanding expressed itself, series took up from the matters I had accumulated from my beginnings. This understanding is the sum of discussions, fields of interest. To know and see photos is not enough, it is important to discuss, to go to museum, to listen to music, to develop oneself inwardly and spiritually to explore the world.

**Why do you take photos with a Leica M and in black and white ?**

I have taken photos in black and white for a long time, it's historical. One of the reasons is that I can control the process. For me, generally, the tactile sensations are very important and the film gives them. I can touch the negative, it exists physically. I can look at it through the light, put it on the enlarger, develop photos thanks to it, it's a manual creative combination. And for me, it's a very important part of the work. Then, when I photograph in a movement of sensations and then when I develop what I can't feel any more but what was saved by the film appears. With the digital technology, it doesn't exist. You see immediately, that's all. Magic has fallen. The film gives waiting.

And why Leica? I took photos with Nikon for a long time and then I wanted to try something new and I bought a Leica M4, and I understood that with this camera, I made a completely different photo. I can hardly explain this but the photos were different. And I liked this difference. What I couldn't see with twin band reflex cameras, I saw it through my Leica. And more, it's small, when I take photos, my face isn't completely hidden, it's not aggressive and I look like a funny amateur, not a professional with a big camera which frightens people.

**Does the perfect film exist ? For you are there differences between HP5, Tri-X, Bergger ?**

I am completely satisfied with the films now. I like the grain of the film. Yes sure, there are different films, different emulsions, they are different materials, and they give different representations. Generally, with the film, if it has enough silver, you can do everything from the softest to the most contrasting picture. During the Soviet era, I photographed with films which had a very medium quality but we thought up ourselves developers to improve the features of the films. Obviously, we found usual developers but we used ours thinking they were better. And then western products arrived and you had just to dilute and you had a wonderful result !

**Through your pictures, a great empathy for others is shown, the characters who seem to fill your pictures are here just for themselves and not only to make a picture. Do you feel this ?**

In a way, yes because I was born and lived in the country. I have always respect for people. I try to understand their sensations. And usually, you only need the affection of people. When you develop this affection, they give it back to you. And this sensation is passed on the photo. Photography is like a tracing paper, everything is shown and it's difficult to cheat. When you speak with interested people, you become as a relative. I try to understand people. When you begin to speak, to establish a contact, then it gives birth to any other subject and also to another photo. That's why I don't want to show any production. For me it's important for people to be an authentic state.



Carelia, Kolodozero, 2012



*Kirov Oblast, Chernopenye, 1996*



*Kirov Oblast, Yaransk, 1998*



*Kirov Oblast, Vyatka, 2006*



*Kirov Oblast, Sovetsk, 2006*





*Carelia, Kolodozero, 2015*



*Carelia, Kolodozero, 2011*



*Carelia, Kolodozero, 2013*



*Carelia, Kolodozero, 2013*



Kirov Oblast, Russian Shuima, 2003

### Could you choose a photo, and tell us its story ?

I'm going to tell you the story of this photo, the one which is on the cover of my book *Vyatka*. For me, generally photography is something wonderful. Because often what we receive doesn't depend on us. We can choose the frame, the situation, push the shutter release but eventually, it doesn't happen as we have waited for. And this photo, it's exactly this. I went with friends in Vyatka by car, we arrived at their parents' home, in a village in the south of Kirov. We were welcomed, and ate. And I saw, through the window that a little girl went out in the street. There was such a light, incredible, I understood that I must go out to take the photo. I took some views of this little girl who didn't care about me and then a grand mother arrived. She was obviously keen to know us, I took some views and then I forgot, I photographed and photographed. For me at that moment, this photo had no interest.

Then time flew . 5 years. I looked again at the negatives and I understood I had been stupid, why had I not seen this photo? I developed it and I understood it was a good photo. And the most amazing is that for me it was not so important but I posted it on internet and I received a lot of reactions. And then I began to analyse. What did people like in this photo? What can do photography ? Which sensations do my pictures give on people ?

Between all the artistic disciplines, photography has a wonderful place. It can show life, give emotions, helped by shadow and light, a small camera and the eyes of the photographer.

### Could you speak of this still working project on this village in Carelia, Kolodozero?

I began it in 2011. For me it's an immersion in an environment completely different from the one I live in. I live in the town, over there it's another

life. I was interested in the life of the local priest Arkadi, with his wooden church in a village with 300 inhabitants and who has a completely different vision of the world. From here, I understood that you could take and he gave you back again with a lot of generosity. I went again and again. Each year, each season, in all its dimensions. For me, it's an immersion in a certain life which is both inwardly nice and also unknown, I want to know it and photography gives me this knowledge.

### Is it very a important project ? A new stage ?

The book on Vyatka was a dive in childhood, a return on the place where I was born, where I grew up, Vyatka is my small homeland, it's always in me. But I have always wanted to see another life, to know other interesting places. I thought of this, that I must photograph something new and my friend Sacha invited me in Kolodozero for Christmas. When I arrived there, I understood that it would be a new story I worked on and that this place would continue Vyatka. That's not the question for me : what's the meaning of such or such story. I only take photos. At first there is an irrepressible wish then the meaning appears. I make everything intuitively.

### Do you claim influences ? Do some photographers inspire you ?

At the beginning of 1995, I was under a great influence of Cartier Bresson. I saw the book "A propos de Paris" and this book inspired me. I wanted to photograph the town, the people. And then I needed to look for something of my own without looking at what other photographers had done. Sure I have my favourite photographers. I like how Koudelka thinks, and photographs. Robert Franck and Depardon too, many photographers from Magnum, not the contemporaries but the ones from the time of Cartier Bresson.

Today, everything has changed a lot and photography has become very conceptual, you must push a concept forward, a speech. I grew up in another photography : for me each photo is as a small story. It's important to take this photo and tells its story I have understood what I have to change and that I must give meaning to all these little stories, that I need to make long term projects.

### Do you share this idea : to belong to this school of humanist photography which is universal, crossing and joining periods ?

I completely agree with this idea. This photography is in its principle without any era.

### A word to conclude ?

Photographers must love people and people must love photographers !

*Interview by Olivier Marchesi and Julia Sheina*



## **Aleksey Myakishev in a few dates...**

**1971 : birth in Vyatka (Kirov) USSR.**

**1991 : began his job of photoreporter in different newspapers in Kirov.**

**1999 : arrived in Moscow and became a freelance photographer. Contributed to Russian newspapers : “Kommersant”, “News-week”, and Finnish : “Helsinki Sanomat”, “Talouselama”.**

**1999 and 2001 : interfoto prize for “the Pilgrims” and “Northern Ural”.**

**2000 / 2015 : more than 40 personal and collective exhibitions in Russia, France, Germany, Austria, The Czech Republic.**

**2012 : photograpser of the year, “Best of Russia” competition.**

**2013 : exhibition “Kolodozero” in MAMM in Moscow.**

**2014 : publishing of the book “Vyatka”.**

**2015 : ambassador of Bergger.**

**<http://myakishev.viewbook.com>**