

Imagined Communities: Photographs by Mila Tessaieva
Kurtz Gallery for Photography, MIT Museum, August 2, 2018 – February 28, 2019



Image credit: Mila Tessaieva, House of Kadjar. 2012. Archival Pigment Print

Cambridge, MA, June 27, 2018 -- The MIT Museum announces *Imagined Communities: Photographs by Mila Tessaieva*, a new exhibition of photographs taken in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The exhibition is a retrospective of Tessaieva's multi-year work on constructed identities, consisting of three recent projects in which she interrogates the idea of nation as an "imagined community" and a political construct that is often in conflict with private and public memory.

This is the first monographic exhibition in the U.S. and the first solo exhibition in Boston for Mila Tessaieva (b. Ukraine, 1974). *Imagined Communities* is on view at the Kurtz Gallery for Photography at the MIT Museum from August 2, 2018 - February 28, 2019.

"My work in this exhibition is united by common questions about the many and complex ways personal, family and collective or national identities and histories are preserved, passed on through generations, and politically manipulated in order to create social unity." Tessaieva commented.

The subject matter of the work presented in this exhibition is especially relevant in a time when many countries are embroiled politically and culturally in refugee crises, immigration policy protest and debate, issues of national identity, and resurgent nationalism.

Accompanying the photographs are first person accounts of the events, situations, and subjects depicted, as well as commentary by the photographer and the curator of the exhibition, Gary Van Zante, the MIT Museum's curator of architecture and design.

Among the photographs presented in the exhibition are those in Tessaieva's series entitled "Promising Waters." These images explore the struggle to fashion new national identities after

independence from Soviet domination. Among them are the photos of former Soviet political offices with walls of propaganda still visible and of a modern science center with images of aerospace achievements. These photos present a legacy of the space race between the former Soviet Union and the United States, and serve as a means of propagating a nationalistic narrative about past triumphs.

Other pictures in the exhibition are explorations of place and absence: from large landscapes showing abandoned oil rigs to environmental portraits of people who seem to be lost in rapidly changing environments. Teshaieva also investigates personal stories of conflict, post-conflict resolution, family identity shaped by political associations, and nationalist sentiment. In the photographs - reenactment of familial memory - we see soldiers rest on a patch of overgrown grass, their eyes dreamy and distant. In another photograph, a woman wearing a short dress runs in the woods. These portraits juxtaposed with painterly landscapes, silent, capacious, yet threatening images: thick ochre dust obscuring a road, a fire blazing in a quiet, snowy landscape. The last part is a blend of events, portraits and places, all working with the topics of conflicting memory narratives.

ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHER MILA TESHAIIEVA

Mila Teshaieva (b. 1974 in Kiev, Ukraine) has made national identity, historic memory and related issues the focus of her photographic work for the last decade. Her photography projects incorporate in-depth scientific research and opens new layers for a viewer to reevaluate the social and political mechanisms and to draw attention to her subject matter through innovative and resourceful ways.

Since 2004 Teshaieva has been engaged into long-term projects on the territories of Eastern Europe, in particular, she dedicated years working in the Caucasus and Caspian Sea region. This work has resulted in her first monograph *Promising Waters* that was published with Kehrer Verlag in 2013. Her second monograph *InselWesen* was a result of her project on German Island Föhr and was published with Kehrer Verlag in 2016.

Teshaieva's projects won multiple distinctions and were exhibited internationally, with the most recent solo exhibitions in Museum of European Cultures Berlin (2017), Museum Art of West Coast (2016 and 2014), Haggerty Museum of Art (2015), Blue Sky Gallery (2015). Her works are kept in permanent collections of several museums and organizations in Europe and USA.

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Visitor Information

MIT Museum

265 Massachusetts Avenue

Central Square Cultural District

Cambridge, MA 02139 USA

Phone: 617-253-5927

<https://mitmuseum.mit.edu/>

Open daily 10 PM – 5 PM Open daily 10 AM – 6 PM July and August

Closed major holidays.

General admission to the Museum only: \$10.00 for adults; \$5.00 for youth under 18, students, seniors; free admission for MIT card holders and alumni. Discounts are listed online.

Media Contacts

Leah Talatinian

Arts at MIT

+1.617.253.5351

leaht@mit.edu

Martha Davis

MIT Museum

+1.617.253.4422

marthad@mit.edu