

ARSEN SAVADOV



Donbass Chocolate (1997)
C-print on Aluminum, 115 x 150 cm

Arsen Savadov first came to public attention in the mid-1990s when he published a series of fashion shoots of scantily clad models taken in cemeteries during funerals, with burials as the backdrop. The shocking and provocative juxtaposition of life and death, happiness and sorrow, power and weakness, transformed into an allegory of pretense and reality, has continued in his works until the present.

During the 1990s, when the newly formed Republic of Ukraine was restructuring its economy, Savadov moved to work in obsolete industrial plants, initially in the coal fields of Donbass. His Donbass-Chocolate (1997) series of large photographs were made around Donetsk, a Soviet-era paragon of heavy industrial labor. Here, in close

and camp detail, he depicted the semi-naked, still coal-dust-caked bodies of former miners. Once the Stakhanovite hero-workers of the Soviet Union, they are now garbed, ludicrously and pathetically by wispy fronds of ballerinas' tutus. Initially referring to the false heroism of Soviet Labor, as well as to the lost souls of the newly unemployed masses, these works have, since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War in February 2014, moved away from sarcastic nostalgia to establish a more contemporary resonance with the pseudo-macho Russian-backed mercenaries who have occupied this territory and have provoked the current war.

BIO

Arsen Savadov (born in Kiev in 1962) is a noted Ukrainian conceptual photographer and painter, based between Kiev and New York City. He studied painting at the Shevchenko State Art School. Savadov graduated from the Kiev Art Institute in 1986 and was one of the first artists in Ukraine to work with video in the 1990s. A versatile artist during the course of his career, Savadov has utilized techniques of installation, performance, and photography. His solo exhibitions include *Gulliver's dream*, Art Ukraine Gallery, Kiev (2017); *First-person*, Pecherskiy Gallery (V-art gallery), Moscow (2012); *Paintings*, Daniyal Mahmood Gallery New York (2007), *Donbass-Chocolate*, Galerie Orel Art Presenta, Paris (2003); *Arsen Savadov*, Chasie Post Gallery, Atlanta, USA (1995).

Group shows include *Art Riot: Post-Soviet Actionism*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2017); *Recycling Religion*, WhiteBox, New York (2016); *BALAGAN!!! Contemporary Art from the Former Soviet Union and Other Mythical Places*, curated by David Elliott, MOMENTUM, Berlin (2015); *Escape to Egypt*, Collection Gallery, Kyiv (2012) and *First-person*, Pecherskiy Gallery, V-art gallery, Moscow (2012) as well as in group shows: *Days of Ukraine in the United Kingdom*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2013), the 1st Kyiv International Biennale of Contemporary Art (2012) and *After the Wall. Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, Stockholm, Budapest, Berlin, (1999/2000).