

Mirror by Mirror, Homage to Andrei Tarkovsky by Sergei Sviatchenko — I remember very well the premiere of Andrei Tarkovsky's film "The Mirror" at the Central House of Cinema in Moscow. The film was long awaited. The shooting of the film had begun in 1973, even though Misharin and Tarkovsky had written the manuscript much earlier, shortly after finishing the production of the film "Andrei Rublev".

There was a large attendance when the film had its premiere in 1974. All seats were taken, people sat on the staircases and stood on the balcony behind the rows of seats. The cinema hall was seething with expectation. At long last, the film crew and the starring actors appeared on the stage. There, at the centre of the large group, was the film director.

The director Julij Karasik approached the microphone in order to introduce the film. (Together with Tarkovsky, he was awarded the Grand Prix at the Venice Film Festival in 1962 for the children's film "The Wild Dog Dingo"). He was just about to begin his speech when the audience started to stamp their feet and to catcall (interpreted as unambiguously negative in Russia) – everybody wanted to hear Tarkovsky himself. After the film director had given a brief introduction – being concise and objective he allowed the audience to assess his work by themselves – the film began.

It is almost impossible to describe the impression the film left on me. Obviously, it was a brilliant work of art. However, watching our mother on the screen and hearing our father's voice, the film did tell the story of our family, of Andrei's childhood and mine. Disentangling relations in public and involving strangers in strictly personal emotions make our family uncomfortable. Andrei had already broken a taboo in the opening scene – an epigraph to the film – in which a young stuttering man exclaims: "I can speak!".

Andrei began to speak ardently. He told of our mother, of our father, of a childhood in starvation – a childhood warmed by motherly love – of the boy from the blockaded Leningrad (we witnessed these children in

the small town by the Volga River to which they had been evacuated). He spoke of this particular family so that people were able to grasp that he was, in fact, referring to the lives of millions of families. The story of one single family – depicted in the light of the global historic events – is suddenly transformed into a story common to all humankind. As far as I am concerned, though, this is mainly Andrei's own personal confession, after all.

Would it be correct to say that the film "The Mirror" contains the elements of the collage? I believe so. The abrupt and nervous aspects of the montage, the shift between the past and the present, from lyric scenes to the publicistic – these effects are artifices employed by Tarkovsky; artifices that are in accordance with the ones used by the masters of modern collage.

Tarkovsky was familiar with the collage genre. In the 1970s, he received letters from his friend, the film director Sergei Paradzhanov, who was being held in a prison camp. This great master – one of the few film directors appreciating Tarkovsky – was an inconvenience to the Soviet party ideologues. They felt better when they knew that Paradzhanov was behind bars. Paradzhanov made collages in the camp, sending them to his friends, including Andrei. Andrei answered Paradzhanov by sending him his own collages, in very small sizes, naturally...

And here we have ten collages, created by Sergei Sviatchenko, which are dedicated to "The Mirror". Black-and-white scratched stills originating from the film – Sviatchenko's taste in art did not allow him to use colour pictures – are cut out as if done with a care-

less hand and bent in order to stand upright when photographed. The local colours of the background... It seems as if the artist employs only a minimum of artistic effects.

Nevertheless, his collages are alive, nervous and shivering, like the texture of the film with its musical murmur, with its dreamlike memories. The boy holding an angel's feather in his hand – played in the film by actor Oleg Yankovsky's son Filipp – is pure and artless. Guarded by the gentle and leading hand of the demiurge, he emerges from boyhood. He does not yet know what awaits him. However, what awaits him is a family drama, a worldwide deluge, and the fact that he will get his voice. ("In the beginning was the Word. Why, father?" asks the Boy, who now has a voice, at the end of Tarkovsky's film "The Sacrifice". We could continue: "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.")

Sviatchenko's collages find themselves in different dimensions. He finds fissures in the real world through which he peeps into another world, the afterlife.

This reminds me of an old engraving, where a man, who has reached the end of the world, looks into infinity through a hole in the firmament. This medieval copperplate represents an untameable urge for cognition; for our contemporary Sergei Sviatchenko, it is about striving towards attaining the unattainable.

There, the artist hopes to find the secret behind the divine forces ruling human life. And hoping, perhaps, to grasp the essence of art. "Does art derive from God or from the Devil?" – a question posed by Tarkovsky in his diary. "From God," says Sviatchenko.



text Marina Tarkovskaya

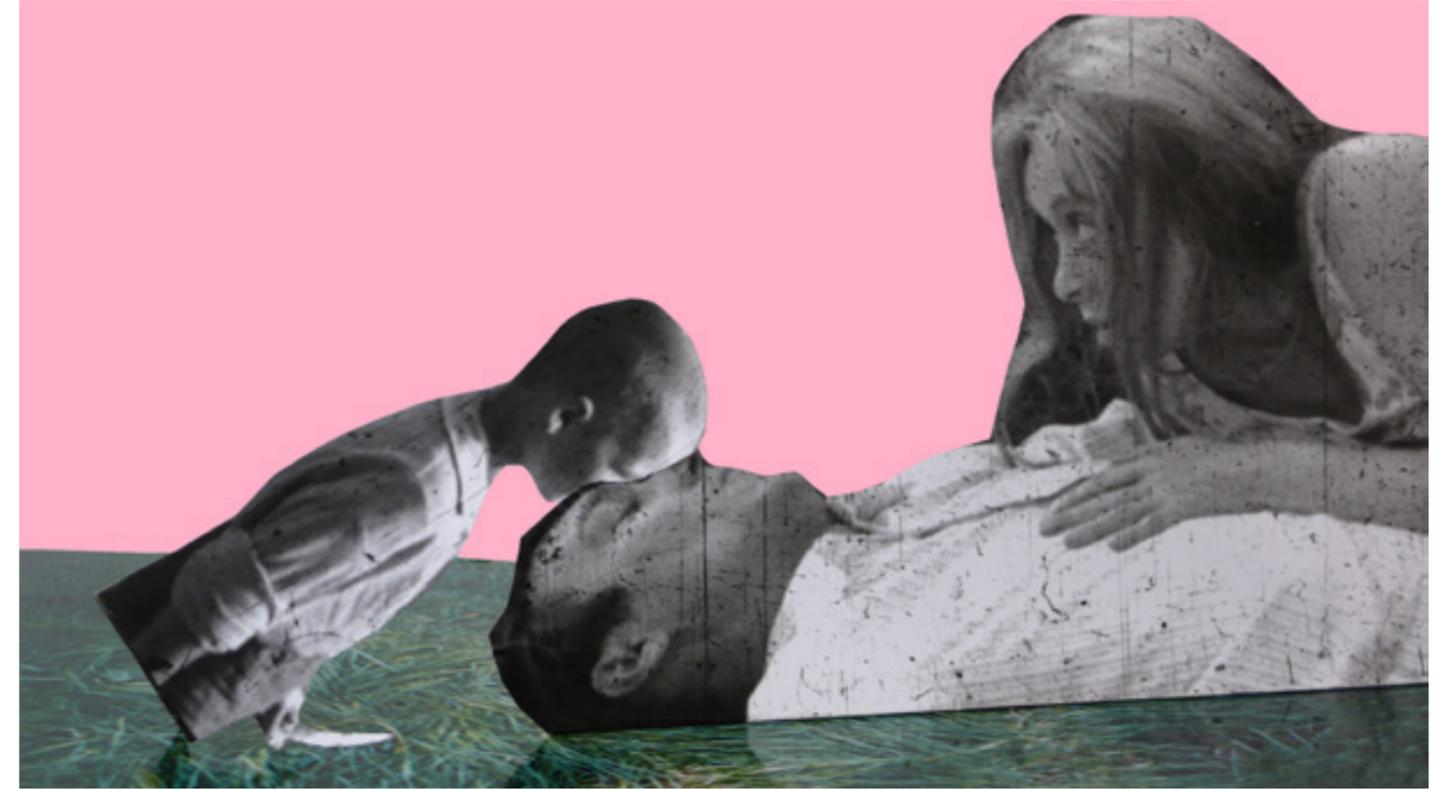
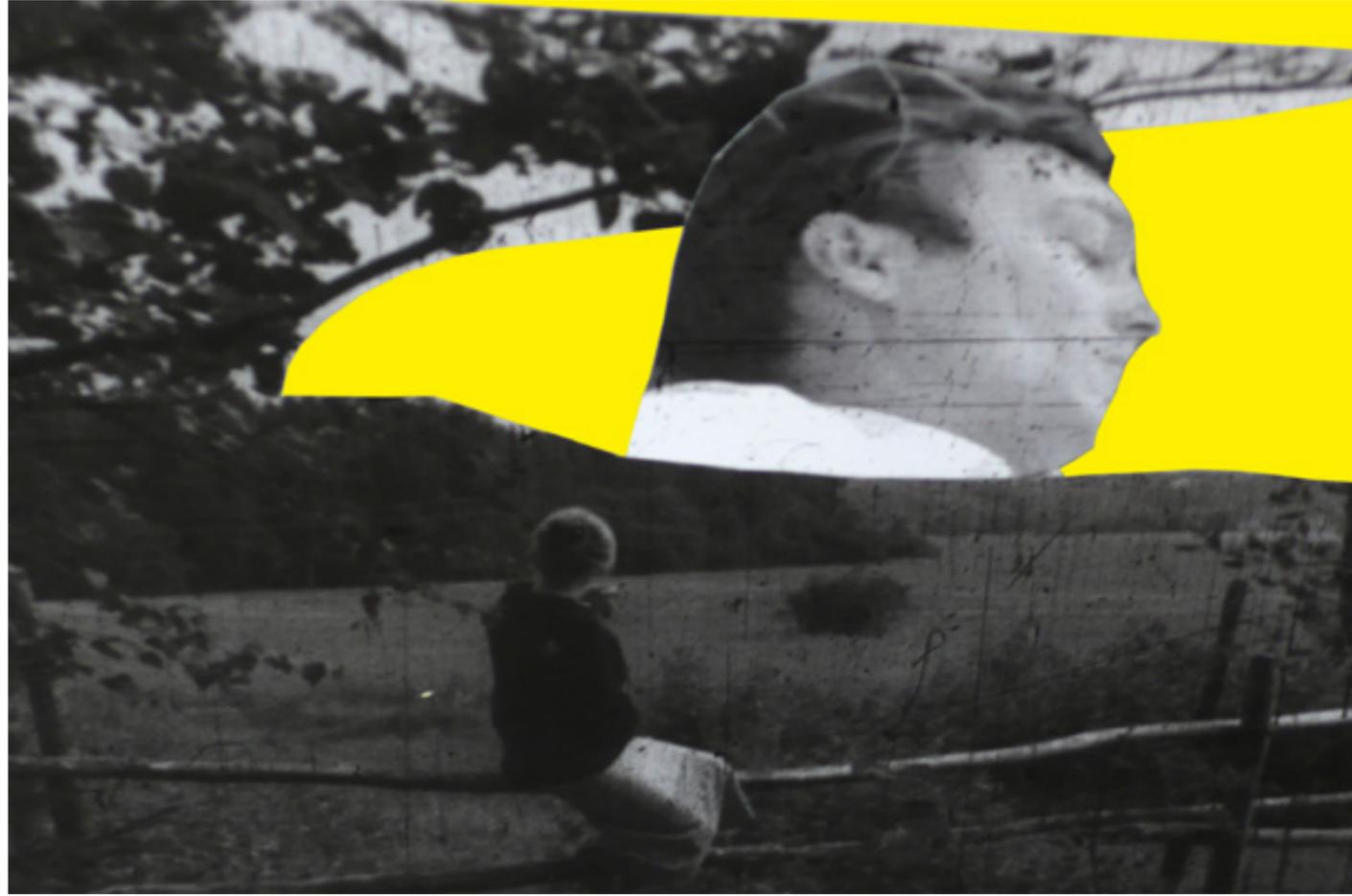
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