

ICONS OF HELL 7 DICTATORS, 700 PORTRAITS, 7 PAGES

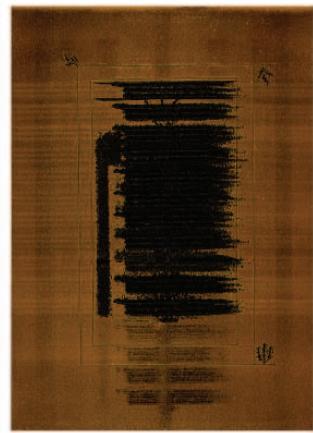
VADIM ZAKHAROV

In the “portraits” presented here, we do not see the characteristic faces of famous dictators who are recognized only by their names. However, the images of those who “immortalized themselves” through mass murder immediately present themselves in our memory when we examine the details in these black portraits.

Working on this series turned out to be unbelievably difficult: it is unbearable to immerse oneself in the world of monsters and murderers. The weight of every portrait made is beyond measure—these are the black holes of humanity, and to close them up is forever impossible. When we look at childhood pictures of these future criminals, the question arises: how could a monster grow out of such a sweet child?

Each “portrait” contains up to 100 depictions of a dictator found on the internet, printed one over the other on a laser printer. In this way, this issue of *ARTMargins* presents seven hundred portraits of these dictators all at once. Each “portrait” begins with childhood photographs (if any exist) and ends with the very last photographs from the lives of Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Mussolini, Ceaușescu, Idi Amin, and Pol Pot.

As I prepared the portraits, I carefully removed the background from each photograph, leaving only the figure of the dictator. Immersed in this mechanical work, I noticed many details that I had previously overlooked: Ceaușescu’s many different ties; Mussolini’s hats, caps, and



The Inferno on One Page, 1998.
V. Zakharov.

boots; and Idi Amin’s long fingers. With physical terror we observe how the transformations that affect a person are reflected in his gaze, and how the faces of those around him change. While looking at hundreds of photographs, we notice a genetical deformation that unfolds in real time: monstrous metamorphoses conditioned, in the last instance, by a person’s freedom of choice.

On each page I printed, by hand, 100 images of dictators onto six “gold” leaves. The printing process took more than four hours without a break; it was impossible to stop. The printing was done with a simple laser printer, and each layer of the “black dust” produced additional thickness, a relief in the image. I ended up with layers tightly welded together by the printer’s high temperature. It’s the same with our lives: seconds, minutes, and hours cover the seconds, minutes, and hours that have already passed, distancing us from the original, while, simultaneously, time and events turn into a kind of matrix or chip that contains EVERYTHING that happened in the past.

I have been using this method of layering one image over another since 2001, when I began the series *Literature on One Page*. One of the books I used was Dante’s *Inferno*. In the Russian edition, this part of *The Divine Comedy* is 168 pages long. As with the dictators, I scanned the images and printed them, 168 images one over another on the same gold leaf. Gold almost always represents the sacred. That’s why we could call the series of dictators “Icons of 20th-Century Hell.”

Today, the layering of images takes place almost every second, in millions of publications on Instagram, on Facebook, and in endless selfies. Whatever is being published at one moment is succeeded immediately by the next piece of information: in this way, endless archives are

being compiled that no one will ever analyze or systematize. No one has the strength or time for such a task. We live in an era when the past and the future have merged into one totalized present. There are no more gaps. Everything is one and indivisible. We only live for the preparation and publication of the next photograph or video. Only a computerized brain would be capable of retrieving from this archive any particular photograph, and it would do so only when it deems a particular image ideal for product marketing. This is the archive of our lives.



Piracy is what we need today, 1983. V. Zakharov.

Lastly, this project indirectly deals with piracy and authorial rights. By using all of these hundreds of photographs, I intentionally violate the copyright of photographers and image agencies by not paying them for use of their materials. In 1983 I made a work from four photographs entitled *Piracy Is What Is Needed Now*. At the time, by “piracy” I meant an active hijacking of ideas and concepts that was not bound by any rules. However, soon afterward, when the World Wide Web emerged, the word “piracy” acquired global meaning. Accordingly, my own work also acquired its true meaning later, when the everyday appropriation of another’s property became true piracy. In actual fact, postmodernism is “Piracy turned into a Norm.”

P.S. When the “dictator portraits” were ready, I hand-printed, letter by letter (using old metallic letters), the following captions: 100 Stalins, 100 Hitlers, and 100 Ceaușescus. Only the last page I left empty; this golden page was not defiled by the portraits of criminals. I sincerely hope that their likes will never be among us again, and that the “the final 100 portraits will remain forever unassigned.”

TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN BY ANGELA HARUTYUNYAN

700
PORTRAITS
OF DICTATORS
STALIN, HITLER, MAO ZEDONG, MUSSOLINI,
CEAUSESCU, POL POT, IDI AMIN

ON 7
PAGES

PROJECT BY VADIM ZAKHAROV
2016–2020



100 PORTRAITS OF **STALINS** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



100 PORTRAITS OF **HITLERS** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



100 PORTRAITS OF **MUSSOLINIS** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



100 PORTRAITS OF **MAO ZEDONGS** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



100 PORTRAITS OF **POL POTS** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



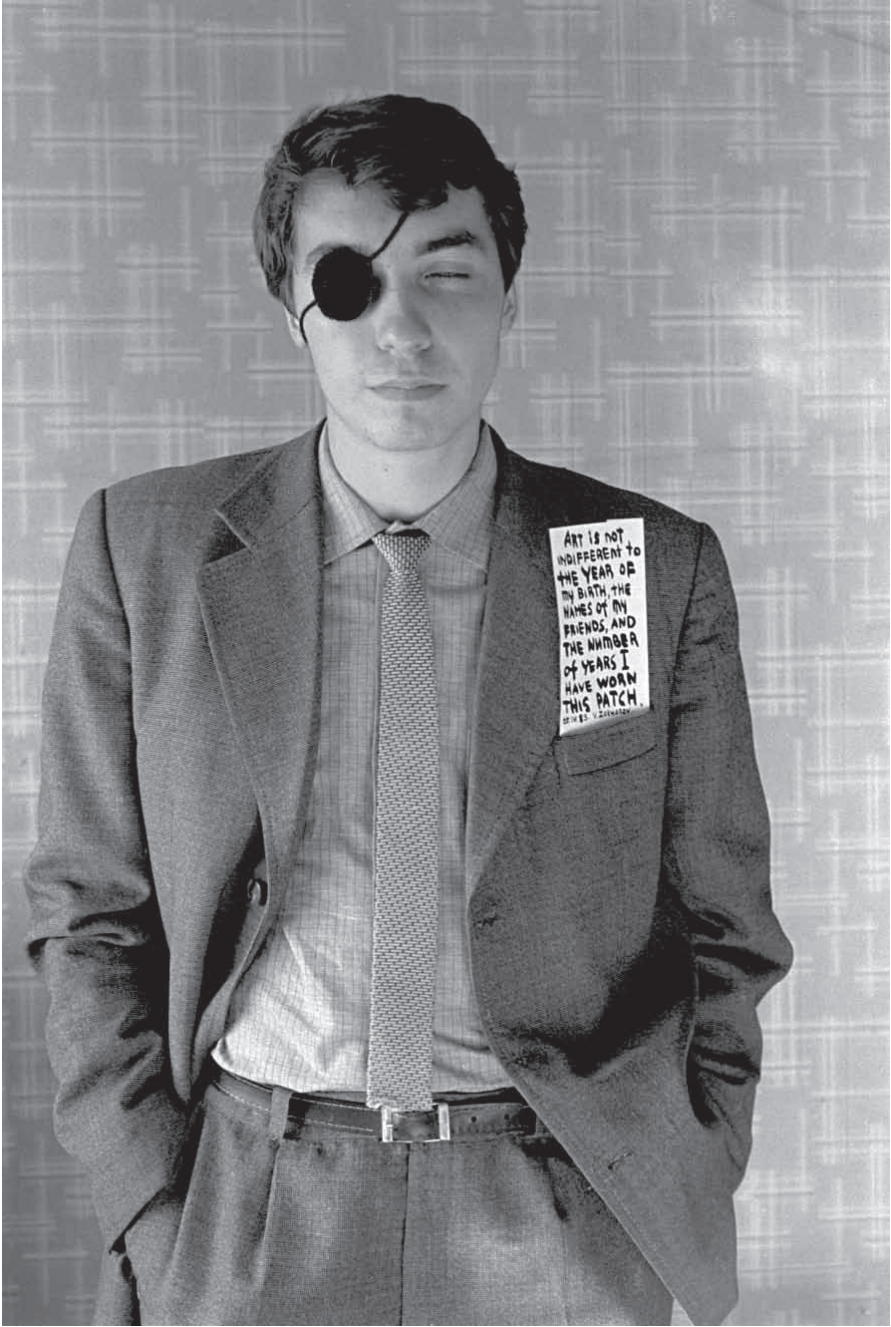
100 PORTRAITS OF **CEAUȘESCU** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



100 PORTRAITS OF **IDI AMINS** PRINTED ON ONE PAGE



100



Vadim Zakharov, "Eye Patch," 1983.

Art is not indifferent to the year of my birth, the names of my friends and the number of years I have worn this Patch. —25.4.1983 V. Zakharov