

## BERTIEN VAN MANEN by Jacquelyn Davis

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porary ways of seeing upon his paintings? Or, rather, in our society of the spectacle when usually visitors move fast-forward through museums, do the photographs send us back to see his paintings as he intended that they should be viewed? By creating autonomous works of art of real interest, Alpers, Hyde, and Kulok reveal much about how we look at visual art. Usually in Chelsea and at the Met, we are terribly rushed, as if we were looking at MTV. Slow down, they urge us, and then we will see much more.

In the book *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* (1994) she co-authored with Michael Baxandall, Alpers argues that "much of the idiosyncrasy" of Tiepolo's painting "results from his registering the activity of the mind as it grasps the world. This is regressive. ... Tiepolo's own activity is by nature deconstructive." His subjects are traditional, but his way of presenting makes them our contemporary. I can imagine no better demonstration of the argument of *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* than this exhibition. When these three Tiepolos were removed from the main salon of Ca'Dolfin, the intended site-specific lighting effects were lost. But Alpers, Hyde, and Kulok recreate the way that, again to quote Alpers and Baxandall, "the world, on Tiepolo's account, presents a conundrum and his painting makes us conscious of having to work to make things out." According to a 1998 brochure written by the Met curator Keith Christiansen, Tiepolo "is the master of sunny visions." In these photographs, Alpers, Hyde, and Kulok reveal a very different, and I think more plausible, interpretation of Tiepolo.

The precise Nordic nuance of Amsterdam-based photographer Bertien van Manen's "A Hundred Summers, A Hundred Winters" refers to her lengthy travels through the former Soviet Union between 1990 and '94. Setting out to document the collapse of the Communist regime, van Manen succeeds in capturing what recently deceased Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński describes as that "most inaccessible of places—the homes of ordinary people—in order to show us how millions of Russians live and sleep, what they eat, what they look like in their everyday life, in their flats, at their tables, in their beds."

Roaming painstakingly by train and bus through Moscow, Uzbekistan, Siberia, Moldavia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia, van Manen isn't just another world-weary correspondent, whistle-stopping her way through foreign destinations, or a camera-clicking tourist grabbing at convenient cultural markers. As we see in her award-winning China series, *East Wind West Wind* (2004), and her *Give Me Your Image* (2005) European jaunt, Van Manen's brief here is rather to part the iconographic veil that habitually clouds Western perspectives of the Slavic peoples and their historic travails, emphasizing individual heroism and resourcefulness over exotic scenes or local wonders.

In fact, Van Manen's carefully weighted selection of images exhibits an uncanny ability to infiltrate this psychological and ideological minefield. *Rostov-on-Don (Maxim and Tanja Resting)* (1993) portrays a post-coital couple en route to finally tying the knot, testing what could perhaps be anyone's guest bedroom in the administrative center of Rostov Oblast in southern Russia. In *Moscow (Janot and Stepan)* (1994), we interrupt two teenagers canoodling on a moth-eaten sofa. The young girl with hairy forearms in *Kazan (Vlada)* (1992) is slumped on the edge of a net-covered bed, her face cupped sullenly in one hand. The two soldier boys running in some kind of marathon race in *St. Petersburg (Two Soldiers Running)* (1991) both appear to be holding hands. It is impossible to imagine these photographs ever being staged or representing anything less than the reality of the moment, leaving us wondering about the precise meaning of these minor glimpses into post-Soviet "restructuring."

"A Hundred Summers, A Hundred Winters," as this title suggests, is about the search for lost or elapsed time, about the subject experiencing lived moments as eternal return. But it's not just a one-way street, for both photographer and subject must endeavor to communicate the incommunicable if they are ever to embrace this moment completely. Such a photographic exchange naturally bends the viewfinder toward a pretend collectivity, yet also casts doubt on it, setting in train certain gaze-shifting allegiances between past and future. *Yerevan (Alfo with portraits of his fallen Father and Brother)* (1994), for instance, shows a young recruit proudly announcing his present course of action while clearly remaining haunted by nearby pictures of military forebears.

Photographing the past continuous tense in the future imperfect can be eye opening, as well as paralyzing, life changing. *Vachtan (Irina in the Snow)* (1991), whose gaunt, completely nude subject stands in the frigid outdoors happily drying her hair, speaks volumes about the conundrum and ultimate impossibility of ever entertaining another's experience in the same place or time.

