

## FUEL

### Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia

April 27 - June 16, 2012

Preview on April 27: 4 - 9 pm



Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present the exhibition *Russian Criminal Tattoos* featuring 120 sheets of drawings selected from the archive of the original tattoo drawings by **Danzig Baldaev**, published in the Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia Volumes I-III (FUEL Publishing, 2003-2008). They represent the broad range of themes contained in the language of Russian tattoos, from the political to the pornographic. Displayed in groups of fifteen in eight large museum frames, each sheet is accompanied by a detailed translation and information regarding the location, as supplied by Baldaev. Between 1948-1986, during his career as a prison guard, Baldaev made over 3,000 drawings of tattoos. They were his gateway into a secret world in which he acted as ethnographer, recording the rituals of a closed society. The icons and tribal languages he documented are artful, distasteful, sexually explicit and provocative, reflecting as they do the lives, status and traditions of the convicts that wore them. Baldaev made comprehensive notes about each tattoo, which he then carefully reproduced in his tiny St. Petersburg flat. The resulting exquisitely detailed ink drawings are accompanied with his handwritten notes and signature on the reverse, the paper is yellowed with age, and carries Baldaev's stamp, giving the drawings a visceral temporality – almost like skin.

In 2009 **Damon Murray** and **Stephen Sorrell (FUEL)** purchased the entire archive of 739 original sheets of tattoo drawings from Baldaev's widow.

Accompanying the drawings are 32 photographs by **Sergei Vasiliev**, taken between 1989-1993 in prisons and reform settlements across Chelyabinsk, Nizhny Tagil, Perm and St. Petersburg. They act as an important counterpart to Baldaev's drawings, providing photographic evidence of their authenticity, and allowing us a glimpse into this compelling and extraordinary world. In these incredible images the nameless bodies of criminals act as both a text and mirror, reflecting and preserving the ever-changing folklore of the Russian criminal underworld.

**Danzig Baldaev** was born in 1925 in Ulan-Ude, Buryatiya, Russia. The son of an 'enemy of the people', he was subject to repression in communist Russia and sent to an orphanage for children of political prisoners. After serving in the army in World War II, he moved to Leningrad in 1948 and was ordered by the NKVD to work as a warden in 'Kresty' – an infamous Leningrad prison – where he started drawing the tattoos of criminals. His collection of tattoos were recorded in different reformatory settlements for criminals across the former USSR. He died in 2005.

**Sergei Vasiliev** was born in 1936 in the Chuvash region of Russia. He was a staff photographer for the newspaper Vecherny Chelyabinsk for over thirty years. He has received many honours including International Master of Press Photography from the International Organization of Photo Journalists (Prague, 1985), Honoured Worker of Arts of Russia and the Golden Eye Prize. His work has been exhibited internationally and is held in numerous museum collections.

**Damon Murray** and **Stephen Sorrell** founded **FUEL** Design & Publishing in 1991.

Gallery Weekend Berlin: 27 April – 29 April 2012, [www.gallery-weekend-berlin.de](http://www.gallery-weekend-berlin.de).

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