

ALEXANDER CHEKMENEV



From Passport series, 1995

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became necessary in the newly independent Ukraine to replace old Soviet passports with new Ukrainian ones. There was a rush to accomplish this in the shortest possible time. All Ukrainians had to get a new passport within a year. In 1994, the social services of Lugansk, a town in southeast Ukraine, started offering photographers the job of shooting passport photos in the homes of the elderly and ill citizens, who could not pay a photographer on their own. I was one of the photographers commissioned by the social services to go door to door during this national passportization campaign. This is how I ended up in the homes of these people, along with the social workers whose job was to provide free medicine and groceries. When I saw how people were living out the final years of their lives, it made a very strong impression on me. I remember a blind woman. I did not know she was blind, so I asked her to look into the camera, but she said she could not see. I thought, why would a blind person need a passport? She did not have too much time left anyway. There was one day when I took pictures of nearly 60 people, mostly old folks, obviously. The next day, when I was handing out the shots, I found out that one of these old guys had just died.

BIO

Alexander Chekmenev was born 1969 in Luhansk, the city located in Eastern Ukraine, Donbass. Alexander started his career as a photographer in a photo studio in his home town. On the free of work time he photographed people on the streets and homes, who were effected the most by economical crisis after Soviet Union collapse. His work give an intimate and unique insider view on transition of coal mining region in 90-s in Eastern Ukraine. He moved to Kiev in 1997, where he works as photojournalist. His was named Photographer of the Year Ukraine 2013.