

IGOR ZAIDEL



Igor Zaidel,

Series “Schwamschwamm (*Urbs Compressa*)”. Paris, 1999. Black-and-white negative film, 35 mm. Scan 2026. Digital print.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

These four photographs were made in 1999 in Paris, on the Montmartre hill. The city was captured using a rare Soviet optical system—the lens system developed by Professor Maksutov, $f = 1000$ mm. This catadioptric construction, originally developed for telescopes in 1941, allows for images with a high degree of magnification and exceptional detail. The choice of this optical system was no coincidence.

With a touch of irony, one could say that the lens appeared “almost military”: it was mounted on a rifle stock, and people reacted with alarm when the photographer aimed this tube at them. Today, the police would likely simply forbid such filming. Yet this is not only about outward

appearance. The Maksutov optics enable a view of the urban environment with extreme, almost ruthless sharpness, without any softening or romanticization.

Paris was the first city outside the USSR in which Igor Zaidel settled in 1989 and lived for some time. He resided directly under the roof, in a garret—hot in summer, cold in winter. It was a period marked by poverty and sadness. Ten years later, already firmly established in Berlin, he returned to Paris and made these photographs. The images show countless garret apartments and innumerable inhabitants—just as he himself once was.

Here, the city is transformed into a geometric structure, a dense, oppressive anthill—very gray, almost eerie. This is a deliberate artistic strategy: a critique of Haussmann's urban redevelopment and the early phase of capitalism. There is no tourist-friendly rose-tinted sentimentality in these works—only a precise, critical, humanistic view of the urban environment of Paris.

The negatives were scanned in 2026 and presented as digital prints. In this form, they are included in the exhibition, in which Igor Zaidel shows four works from this series.

- Igor Zaidel

ARTIST BIO: www.bas-cs-gallery.de | [@igorzaidel](https://www.instagram.com/igorzaidel)

IGOR ZAIDEL (born 1965 in Moscow, USSR. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.)

Igor Zaidel is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, gallerist, and cultural manager based in Berlin since 1991. With nearly four decades of artistic practice, he has been actively engaged in photography since 1986, a medium that has become central to his visual language. His work is deeply informed by an interest in text, intertextuality, and the relationship between linguistic and visual systems. Working within a postmodern tradition of appropriation, Zaidel expands the geography of references in his practice by introducing symbolic elements from Near and Far Eastern cultures into a European context.

Over the past five years, Zaidel has increasingly focused on curatorial work, with a strong commitment to exhibiting emerging artists. He regards the transfer of experience to younger generations as a vital cultural responsibility and aims to provide platforms for new voices. A defining feature of his curatorial approach is the deliberate confrontation of polarized viewpoints—both conceptually and visually—creating spaces for dialogue around complex and occasionally provocative themes. He is a member of BBK Berlin (Professional Association of Visual Artists, Berlin) and the artist collective Kolonie Wedding e.V.

Zaidel studied architecture at the Moscow Architectural Institute (1982–1986) before completing a degree in Visual Communication at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) from 1995 to 2000. His professional career includes founding and serving as Art Director of the BAS CS Gallery in Berlin (2018–2025), curating and managing the EU-funded project *Projektraum.Mehrwert.Kunst* (2018–2021), and working as an art educator for youth and adults in Berlin. Earlier roles include

Art Director at Grebennikov Verlag and artistic archivist for an archaeological expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

His work has been recognized through numerous awards, shortlists, and residencies, including selection for the shortlist of the 7th Guanlan International Print Biennale (China, 2019) and artist-in-residence programs at institutions in Saint Petersburg, Montenegro, Turkey, and Ukraine. Zaidel's works are held in public collections such as the Migros Museum in Zurich and the German Historical Museum in Berlin, as well as in private collections across Europe, the United States, and beyond. Alongside extensive participation in international solo and group exhibitions, he has curated numerous projects in Berlin and abroad and regularly gives public lectures on art, cultural policy, and fundraising. This biography was prepared in connection with an exhibition in which Igor Zaidel presents four photographic works.