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Sailboats and Swans

Photographs by Michal Chelbin

March 9 — May 6, 2023

Artist's reception:

Thursday, March 9, 2023

6:00–8:00 pm

CLAMP is pleased to present Michal Chelbin's exhibition "Sailboats and Swans," her sixth solo show in New York City.

Over the course of six years, artist Michal Chelbin gained unprecedented access in order to photograph male and female inmates in seven prisons across Ukraine and Russia. Not wanting to be influenced by knowledge of her subjects' crimes, she focused on the complicated gaze of the prisoners, completing her sessions before asking about the details of anyone's sentence. Sometimes waiting hours for masks to be let down, Chelbin patiently sought expressions that transcended individual situations and spoke of universal truths beyond the confining walls of the jail cell.

The title, "Sailboats and Swans," refers to the bucolic, unintentionally sardonic murals found on the prison walls amplifying the numbing reality of incarceration.

Chelbin comments: "As much as the prison for adult males troubled me, the juvenile prison for boys was hell on earth. I could sense the terror in their eyes from the moment I entered. They are constantly being watched. Boys who stole a cell phone in an adolescent prank are trying to survive



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next to boys who have raped and slaughtered. Being an adolescent is hard enough, and to be in prison at such a difficult age is almost unimaginable.

"The girls' prison was another shock. Unlike the stories I heard, it was almost a haven, a place where girls who committed awful felonies are being kept safe from the dangers of the outside world, not the other way around. In the women's prison I saw 22-year-olds next to 70-year-olds, women from the age of 'maybe one day' next to the age of 'no hope at all.'"

Michal Chelbin's work has been widely shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions worldwide. Her work can be found in many public and private collections, such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Getty, Los Angeles; Jewish Museum, New York City; Cleveland Museum of Art; Tel Aviv Museum; SFMOMA, San Francisco; and many more.

Her critically acclaimed monograph *Strangely Familiar: Acrobats, Athletes and other Traveling Troupes* was published by Aperture in 2008 and was awarded PDN's Photo Annual Book Award in 2009. Her next monograph entitled *The Black Eye* was published in June 2010 by Twin Palms Publishers, with solo exhibitions in October 2010 at Andrea Meislin Gallery in New York City and M+B gallery in Los Angeles. Her third monograph entitled *Sailboats and Swans* was published in fall 2012 by Twin Palms Publishers with a solo exhibition at Andrea Meislin Gallery in New York City.

Chelbin is a regular contributor to the world's leading magazines, such as *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *BusinessWeek*, *GQ*, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Financial Times*, *Le Monde*, and others.

For more information and images please contact Brian Paul Clamp, Director, or see www.clampart.com. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Image: © Michal Chelbin; "Vania (Sentenced for Murder): Men's Prison Ukraine," 2010; Archival pigment print (Total edition of 7 + 2 APs); Courtesy of the artist and CLAMP, New York.