

# connection American

**Susan Burnstine** profiles the work of a Russian photographer now working in the United States

Alexey Titarenko's timeless, haunting imagery evokes memories of both past and present, while seemingly stepping into another dimension.

By shooting slow shutter speeds and multiple exposures he essentially stops time and reveals a mysterious, ethereal world that resides between the shadows. Titarenko's images are rooted in the deep history of the city in which he was raised, St. Petersburg, along with other locations with rich histories such as Cuba and Venice. The subjects he shoots are rarely more than a blur—a trace of a fading memory which produces an alluring dichotomy in his work that's anonymous, solitary and incomplete, while at the same

time familiar and absolute.

Titarenko was born in 1962 in St. Petersburg, which was Leningrad at the time. As a boy he shared a small, one room apartment with his parents, grandmother and mother's sister. His parents taught him to read at the age of five as a way of keeping him from bothering everyone early in the morning. He attributes reading as the source that fuelled his imagination early on and also which furthered his interest in photography.

He began taking pictures in 1970 at the age of eight when he was given an old Soviet twin lens camera called a Soviet Komsomolets and by 1978 became a member of the well known Leningrad photographic club Zerkalo, where he had his

first solo exhibition in 1978.

Titarenko received his Master of Fine Arts degree from the Department of Cinematic and Photographic Art at Leningrad's Institute of Culture in 1983, earned countless international awards and his work is in a number of collections in major European and American museums. Two monographs have been published about his work: *City of Shadows: Alexey Titarenko* (2001) and *Alexey Titarenko, Photographs* (2003).

The first series that gained Titarenko notice, *City Of Shadows*, emerged unexpectedly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1991. At the time he was 28 and working on his series *Nomenclatura of Signs*. He

recalls, 'Suddenly, I realised that I was struggling with emptiness and that my creative impulses – initially absolutely sincere – were running the risk of contemplating upon ideas no longer valid. This happened because the Soviet people, all these human beings deprived of their individuality and turned into 'signs' by a criminal regime, began transforming from smiling and happy-looking 'signs' into wandering shadows, even though rejecting the role of a 'sign' could result in the loss of life.'

At that juncture, Titarenko realised he wanted to express the suffering and despair the people of his city endured during the 20th century and did so by visualising what he describes as 'peopleghosts'.

Begging woman



White dresses





Crowd 2

All pictures ©Alexey Titarenko

## EXHIBITIONS IN THE USA

### BOSTON

Museum of Arts

**Harry Callahan:**  
*American Photographer*  
Until 3 July  
● [mfa.org](http://mfa.org)

### CHICAGO

Catherine Edelman Gallery

**Michael Kenna**  
*Until 2 July*  
● [edelmangallery.com](http://edelmangallery.com)

### HOUSTON

Houston Center For Photography

**Will Michels: Made by Will –  
Selections From Four Portfolios**  
*Until 27 June*  
● [hcponline.org](http://hcponline.org)

John Cleary Gallery

**Maria Levitsky**  
*Until July 30*  
● [johnclearygallery.com](http://johnclearygallery.com)

### NEW YORK

George Eastman House, Rochester

**What We're Collecting Now: The  
Family Photographed. Includes work  
by Sally Mann and Nicholas Nixon**  
*Until June 30*  
● [eastmanhouse.org](http://eastmanhouse.org)

### SCOTTSDALE

Lisa Sette Gallery,  
Scottsdale, Arizona.

**Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe**  
*Until 26 June*  
● [lisasettegallery.com](http://lisasettegallery.com)

*'A crowd of people flowing near the subway station formed a sort of human sea, providing me with a feeling of non-reality, a phantasmagoria'*

He explains, 'One day I strolled down a street as dusk descended. It was poorly lit. The depressing and strange quietness was only interrupted by the sounds of banging grocery stores' doors, stores in which the shelves were absolutely empty. I saw people in confusion, on the verge of insanity; unattractively dressed men and women with eyes full of sorrow and desperation. They looked like shadows. A crowd of people flowing near the subway station formed a sort of human

sea, providing me with a feeling of non-reality, a phantasmagoria. These people resembled shadows from the underworld, a world visited by Aeneas, Virgil's character.' As a result, the metaphor for these ghosts became an essential component in his creative expression.

Titarenko's prints are unique artifacts in themselves. They're rich in greys, toning and selective bleaching, and he flashes his paper prior to exposing in the enlarger. His printing process is

labour intensive and extremely time consuming. To make one print it takes three to four days. To put that in perspective, he's only able to create four prints a month or 15-20 a year. Which further clarifies why Titarenko's extraordinary prints are in such high demand in the American fine art market.

Titarenko became a permanent resident of New York City in 2007, but returns to his residence in St. Petersburg a few times a year. His latest retrospective,

Alexey Titarenko: Saint Petersburg in Four Movements, was exhibited at the Nailya Alexander Gallery in New York City from February to April 2010 and was divided into four segments: City Of Shadows, The Anonymous, The Light of St. Petersburg and Unfinished Time. The exhibition travelled to Moscow's Pobeda Gallery and is currently on view until the middle of June. This exhibit also includes a fifth section, Nomenclatura of Signs. **B+W**

● [alexeytitarenko.com](http://alexeytitarenko.com)