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## Michal Chelbin

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Eastern European adolescents stare out of Michal Chelbin's staged yet intimate portrait photographs, seducing the viewer into uncomfortable, voyeuristic complicity with the camera. At once touching and disturbing, the series on view in this exhibition ranges from *Jenya, Ukraine*, 2005, wherein a teenager in a swimsuit leans suggestively against a car, to *Nastya, Russia*, 2007, a seemingly old-fashioned portrait of a girl sitting sweetly in a chair, her red hair neatly combed. Many of Chelbin's subjects pose in isolated settings, which stirs the impulse to narrate—a desire quickly frustrated by the pictures' irresolvable ambiguity. *Xenia on the Playground, Russia*, 2003, depicts a skinny, half-naked girl with rouged cheeks hanging from a rusty frame in front of a drab housing project, as if performing for some neighborhood boys who linger in the background.

Boys do not escape Chelbin's sympathetic yet unrelenting scrutiny. They pose in homosocial scenes such as the shirtless *Two Athletes, Ukraine*, 2006, or *Young Cadets, Russia*, 2004, wherein eight uniformed adolescents stand in a light-dappled forest. Adults and parents are conspicuously absent from most of the series, although they occasionally take on uneasy starring roles such as in the black-and-white image *Grandfather, Russia*, 2003, which juxtaposes a made-up Lolita sprawled on the couch with an old man staring out from the foreground. In *Angelina with her Father, Israel*, 2005, an athletic but vulnerable-looking man holds his daughter in front of a swamp, poised as if offering her to the viewer. Legible as a gesture of either exploitation or redemption, the image encapsulates an emotional tension felt across the series.