



THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 27, 2014

RUSSIAN PASTORAL

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Zapadnoe Biryulevo I, 2011.

For “Pastoral,” his latest project, the landscape photographer [Alexander Gronsky](#) took to the fringes of Moscow, the suburbs between Russia’s most populous city and the countryside that surrounds it. Gronsky, who says that he wanted to romanticize his subject, intentionally evokes the classic theme of man’s encounter with nature. Yet this reunion, achieved photographically through measured compositions and a deft use of color, remains an uneasy one: picnickers eat beside heavy industry, sunbathers lie out next to construction sites, and people stroll past piles of urban detritus.

In his foreword to Gronsky’s [monograph](#) (also called “Pastoral”), Mikhail Iampolski writes, “Gronsky’s cities are often completely empty.... The populace is, in essence, indiscernible from the refuse. They are often seen in the dirt looking like figures so miniature that they become a small, insignificant detail—just as incidental as the surrounding rubbish.”

Gronsky, however, told me that “Pastoral” is neither a social critique nor a commentary on Russian politics. Instead, he said, “It’s about my personal perception of Russian landscape, especially the outskirts and borderline areas. I enjoy spending time there—I feel that I fit there, probably because I don’t really feel that I fit anywhere else.”

Photographs by Alexander Gronsky/Institute.