

Image 1: Audio Description Transcript

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From the series Weather Man

[32 x 52.5cm, 2013]

This is a landscape format portrait of a meteorologist seated at work inside the Hodovarikha Meteorological Station. The station is located on the Russkiy Zavorot peninsula in the Barents Sea. The photograph shows the back and part of the side walls of a small, darkened room – perhaps two and half metres across - with a wooden desk in the centre and various pieces of equipment around the walls.

The meteorologist – his name is Vyacheslav Korotki or Slava for short – sits behind the desk, facing us. His face and hands are lit by an electric desk lamp that sits on the near right-hand corner of the desk, turned inwards. It lights a small central area of the room and casts a large shadow of his head and shoulders on the back wall, but the rest of the room is dim. The desk is laden with piles of books and papers. On the left side, a pile of a dozen books balances precariously, about to topple inwards. The walls are covered with a pale brown wallpaper with a very faded pattern of vertical stripes. The floor is dark brown and covered in a pattern of small cracks and shapes – probably aged linoleum. The soft brown tones of the room and objects within it, the symmetrical composition and the focused pool of light, all give an initial impression that this could be a highly detailed nineteenth-century painting, rather than a contemporary photograph.

If we imagine dividing the photograph into thirds vertically, the central third is filled by the wooden desk. It's in a plain, utilitarian style: on the right-hand side, a drawer and small cupboard with silvery metal handles, and space for the knees to the left. The legs of the desk nearest to us come down almost to the bottom edge of the photograph. On the far side of the desk, Slava looks as if he's in his sixties or seventies, with thick, greying hair swept over his forehead, a neatly trimmed beard and moustache, pale skin and pouchy cheeks. He wears wire-rimmed glasses and his brow is furrowed in concentration. He peers down at a bundle of papers, holding them in place with his left hand and writing with a red pencil. He has a thick padded woollen jacket, striped in earthy brown tones, like a ploughed field. The jacket wraps around the neck and crosses the chest diagonally, secured by a metal clasp – materials and design that evoke traditional Russian dress. His legs, in knee-high brown boots, are just visible under the table. He's framed by a section of unpapered, cracked wall behind him, about a metre wide and two metres high. It resembles a large map, thin cracks seeming to outline a landmass of peeling white paint on a background of darker brown plaster.

This association with a map is perhaps suggested by the real map pasted to the wall alongside, to the right. It shows the location of the weather station, with the jagged white mass of the peninsula and the tip of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago above it, in a blue sea. Above the map is a small round clock with a silvery metal frame. It is nearly 7.45 but we can't be certain if it's morning or evening. To the right of map and clock there is a narrow glazed cabinet attached to the wall. It's just over a metre tall and 40cm wide, and is illuminated from within, giving an initial impression that it is a window. It contains two long tubes hanging vertically, perhaps barometrical

instruments. A pair of wooden steps below presumably allows the station chief to take readings from the full length of the tubes. Tucked in against the right-hand wall, and hard to make out in the deep shadow, there is a kind of wooden frame, perhaps a sledge.

On the opposite wall, there is a wooden coat rack with cardboard boxes piled on top and a heavy brown overcoat hanging from a peg, a lining of white sheepskin visible on the cuff. Below it, standing on the floor, are a pair of sturdy knee-length boots. Leaning against the back wall in the left-hand corner are a pair of skis with red lettering in Cyrillic that reads 'Lesny - Novgorod' – and a wooden measuring stick painted white with stencilled numbers in black, for measuring the depth of water or snow.

When the photo was taken, in 2013, Slava had been living here for 13 years. He would go out to collect the data every three hours, write down his observations in a notebook yellowed with age, then report over a crackling radio to a person he had never seen.

One day the photographer asked him: 'Slava, how can you live here? Every day is the same, you are always alone. What do you do with all your thoughts?' He replied to her, 'I understand what you feel, you have too many expectations, and I guess it's normal. But every day is not the same here. Look, today you saw the bright Aurora Borealis, and a very rare phenomenon of thin ice covering the sea. Wasn't it great to see the stars tonight, after they were hiding from us behind the clouds for over a week? How can you say that it's all the same?'

[ENDS]