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Šilainiai Photo 2017: an educational photography project in Šilainiai Microdistrict in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Šilainiai Photo 2017 is a continuous photography project carried out in Šilainiai microdistrict in Kaunas, involving photowalks and photography workshops for school students; this project has been developed in collaboration with Vincas Kudirka Public Library in Kaunas, Juozas Grušas Art Gymnasium in Kaunas, John Paul II Gymnasium in Kaunas, as well as professional photographers from Lithuania and abroad. In 2017, the project has been partially funded by a programme of Kaunas City Municipality called "Initiatives for Kaunas" and Lithuanian Council for Culture. The project started in 2015, commemorating the 30th anniversary of Šilainiai. One of the events to mark the occasion was an exhibition in Šilainiai Library curated by an artist Evelina Šimkutė and featuring archival, art and other photos by various residents of Šilainiai. This exhibition has become an inspiration to continue sharing, recording and exploring the life of Šilainiai. This is when the idea of photowalks and creative workshops in schools has also come to life. In 2016, this initiative continued with financing from private funds.

The results of this year's project can be seen in Šilainiai Library (Baltų pr. 81), to be opened on December 27, 6.00 PM. Additional/holiday workshop for school students in Šilainiai Library will take place the following days (December 28 and 29) at 11.00 AM.

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Photo: PhotoUCLAN

This year, the project has welcomed an addition of photography students from the University of Central Lancashire (UK). The students have joined the photowalks and toured around Šilainiai together with local photographers and Šilainiai residents, getting to know the place and later turning this experience into an exhibition which has been opened in Preston (UK) on November 15. The reflections on student experience together with their works have been published in two journals, namely, North Volume III and Further North. At the same time, Šilainiai Photo project has been introduced by Evelina Šimkutė in the Fieldwork conference focusing on documentary photography.

The aim of Šilainiai Photo photowalks and creative workshops is to feel Šilainiai as a space/ a field of experience and use this exact photosynergy to connect the local community; it is also important to explore and understand the residential space and use various photo techniques and practice. Such an educational photography programme is also a way to encourage a creative approach to the residential microdistrict. It brings Šilainiai residents together to discover

and share: to share not only the photography, but their own everyday life as well. The microdistrict here also becomes a “micro” cosmos consisting of various details and moments that feeds our ability to stay continuously amazed by this endless world. Between here and there, the story and the fairy-tale/ the memory and the legend that we are following step by step...



Photo: M. Kliučininkas

Photography workshops for school students (12-18-year-olds) are events, where I am visible and noticed, I am an observer and a participant surrounded by the light, the touch and the sound. The distance between the surface, volume and shape... Capturing the glimmer of constancy, while everything continues moving in an unstoppable direction... The look and the field in front of it, the photo field, the field of light. Photography workshop is like a dance lesson. However, it requires ceasing to move and noticing the relationships between yourself, other objects and the environment. Such physical coordination turns into a range of vision: all it takes

then is to find a way to adjust yourself to the lens, stay in the moment and reveal one of the endless perspectives of the eternity.

Photowalks in Šilainiai for those who want to discover

A walk is a movement in space, a physical experience, and a visual field that approaches and then moves away. The idea of a walk is to look around and talk. The blocks of the sleeping microdistrict, its streets and people: A PLACE, where you notice changes between the past and the future. This walk is continuously generating stories which in its turn follow the journey. A wandering look drifts to the “former Paris Inn, in a place which, just a few decades ago, used to be called Paris. Now there is only a couple of fir-trees, a thermal route and local Parisian dandies: pigeons which always get some feed here.”

Moving along. Next to the crossing of the roads of the Balts and Samogitians, we are passing Šilainiai fire station and then take a turn towards Linkuva Village. When the current blocks were still farmlands or blue fields of flax, and swamps were inhabited by grass-snakes, Linkuva Village was the centre of the vicinity. There you can find the old Linkuva cemetery and Linkuva Manor... This is another story, however.”

“The Walk” in the First Šilainiai is like a dance through the twisting Vėtrungė Street, semicircle areas, inevitably approaching the beginning of the “block age” in Šilainiai. There are playgrounds characteristic to the period and a structure of concrete blocks: an improvisation by construction workers that can be referred to as “the elements of wellbeing”; the other yard reveals stone gardens developed by local residents or wooden sculptures by local carvers that tell their own stories.

Photography workshops used to present school students with independent tasks: one of them was to discover and analyse the details; the other was to observe and record one another as a portrait capturing practice.

Capturing the fragments that appear in the environment. It is an independent task: walking, being attentive, discovering, details nearby and far away. It is a movement through an unnoticeable everyday route, the aim of which is to notice the “transparent everyday life”, be able to interpret it and improvise in it and together with it. The asphalt and the street are like a river: sleek and soft surface. There are also rays of light, reflections, glass which surround everyone: windows, bus stops, cars. This process turns into looking for some material in the

yards of multi-residential buildings. Discovering nature, surface and texture which become a part of my experience. A photo helps to see the perspective of others, it becomes a part of a conversation about a location where one lives as well as a means to explore it. In this case, a photo inspires and encourages conversations, sharing and continuing the search. What kind of surface it can be/ appear to be? What does it mean to be (un)worthy of attention? Garbage... Waste, residual value. What remains then? What do I find interesting and worth observing? Maybe these are the outskirts of Šilainiai, the gates of the city, movement across the streets, light and shadows playing between two nine-story buildings at four o'clock in the afternoon in the Second Šilainiai, captured by one camera... (12 degree Celsius, three kilometres away from home).

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