

# URBAN STORIES

photo exhibition 8-25 October 2015

Neimënster, Luxembourg

Mateusz Grybczyński

cinÉast  
festival du film d'Europe centrale et orientale





Dans le prolongement du cycle thématique «*Histoires urbaines*», le festival CinEast présente une exposition de photographies éponyme réunissant les œuvres de huit artistes polonais, slovènes, slovaques, ainsi que suisses et luxembourgeois.

Nous sommes les témoins d'une urbanisation massive qui transforme en profondeur les comportements sociaux - les individus plongent à la fois dans l'anonymat et dans un bassin de possibilités que les villes peuvent offrir. L'approche choisie perçoit la ville comme un phénomène d'organisation sociale entrelacé dans un contexte architectural spécifique et en perpétuelle transformation.

Les projets sélectionnés se concentrent principalement sur les interactions entre les personnes et le cadre urbain/urbanistique auquel ils doivent s'adapter. Ils présentent un espace urbain, qui, d'une part, sépare et peut être angoissant, mais qui, d'autre part, est un lieu d'interaction et d'intégration sociale. Dans les villes de l'Europe de l'Est, il s'agit également des vestiges d'un système qui a utilisé l'architecture et l'urbanisme comme outil de contrôle.

Cette exposition a été conçue comme une série de dialogues photographiques: un dialogue d'un jeune photographe avec un maître défunt - qui tente de suivre ses traces et redécouvrir sa ville grâce à des tirages d'il y a un demi-siècle; une juxtaposition de l'œuvre de deux artistes scrutant le devenir des blocs communistes et de l'architecture communiste; et enfin un projet commun de deux artistes s'efforçant, avec des techniques similaires de glaner du chaos de l'espace urbain certains éléments caractéristiques et significatifs.

Bâtiments, espaces et objets urbains et bien sûr visages des habitants ont tellement d'histoires à raconter, mais sommes-nous prêts et disposés à les entendre?

Jagna Olejnikowska

*Exposition organisée en collaboration et avec le soutien du Centre culturel de rencontre "Neimënster"*

Complementing the CinEast festival's thematic cycle '*Urban Stories*', an eponymous photography exhibition brings together work by eight artists from Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, as well as Switzerland and Luxembourg.

We are witnessing massive urbanisation and changing social patterns, where individuals plunge both into the anonymity and the wide pool of opportunities that cities can offer. The approach chosen looks at the city as a phenomenon of social organisation interwoven in a specific architectural context, which continually changes over time.

The selected projects mainly focus on interactions between people and the urban/urbanistic framework that they have to adapt to. They present an urban space, which, on the one hand, separates people and can cause them distress, but which, on the other hand, is a place of social integration and interaction. In the cities of Eastern Europe, there are still relics of a system that used architecture and town planning as tools of control.

This exhibition has been conceived as a series of photographic dialogues: a dialogue between a young photographer and a deceased master, the former trying to follow in the latter's footsteps and rediscover his city through prints dating from half a century ago; a juxtaposition of the work of two artists scrutinising the evolution process of communist blocs and communist architecture; and, lastly, a joint project of two artists striving to glean, using similar techniques, characteristic and meaningful elements in their city from the chaos of the urban space.

Buildings, urban spaces, landmarks and of course the faces of inhabitants have so many stories to tell, but are we ready and willing to hear them?

Jagna Olejnikowska

*Exhibition organised in collaboration and with the support of the Centre culturel de rencontre "Neimënster"*

## CITY GAME

**City Game** is a project that forges a link between the contemporary approach of **Mateusz Grybczynski** and the historical work by recently deceased **Zbyszko Siemaszko** on urban and sociological evolution.

This dialogue functions like a game: alongside each image by the older master there appears a response by the contemporary photographer. This is a pictorial testimony of evolution over three decades of the twentieth century in connection with our present age. Certain key areas (work, transport, fashion, leisure) – make the contrasts between the different epochs very striking, but sometimes it is a sense of permanence that prevails.

The result is also a study of time deeply permeating the fabric of a city, in this case Warsaw.





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Courtesy of Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe



NARODOWE  
ARCHIWUM  
CYFROWE

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## ZBYSZKO SIEMASZKO (PL)

Born in 1925, Siemaszko became involved in photography at a very young age, accompanied by his parents Leonard and Tatiana, themselves photographers, in Vilnius, Lithuania.

In 1950, he started to photograph the major exterior and interior architectural changes occurring in Warsaw - a capital city that was almost entirely destroyed during World War II. His work is remarkable and he documented all of the mutations of the city and its sites up until the end of the 1970s, publishing them in the magazine *Stolica*.

To develop his work further, he spent time among people in department stores, cafes, restaurants, stations and other public places, following them as they performed their everyday activities. By doing so he came ever closer to a sociological study, revealing, through his understated yet pertinent photography, an increasingly dynamic and responsive society.



## MATEUSZ GRYBCZYŃSKI (PL)

Born in 1984, Grybczynski lives and works in Warsaw as a 3D artist. He founded [www.polishstreetphotography.com](http://www.polishstreetphotography.com), which is the largest street photography community in Poland. The photographs presented on the site display candid moments using distinct visual language.

Grybczynski admires the photographic work of Garry Winograd for commenting on society in an ingenious way, Trent Parke, for his remarkable love of light, and Alex Webb, for his excellent understanding of colour.

Since 2008, he has been spending his free time photographing the Polish capital. He is particularly interested in simple gestures, captured at random, which often create abstract elements.



## Communist bloc(s)

In the two projects by Roman Bežjak *Socialist Modernism* and Olja Triaška Stefanovič *Totalitarian Architecture / Totalitarian Time* presented in parallel, time plays a primary role. They address the socialist period which made its mark on urban architecture. The two projects enable a foray into what was the 'Communist bloc', living spaces in oppressive blocks, monumental public areas and modernistic architectural ornaments, many of which today are crumbling away. These are the relics of a bygone era, an era of political sacredness. Spectators are invited to piece together the history and the stories connected to all of these places.

## ROMAN BEZJAK (SLO)

Born in 1962 in Slovenia, Roman Bežjak has lived and worked in Germany since 1965. He studied photography and design at the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences. He works as a freelance photographer and publishes his work in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung as well as the magazines GEO, Stern and Spiegel. Since 2004 he has been teaching photography at Bielefeld University.

His most significant work is entitled *Socialist Modernism - Archeology of an Era*, which he started in 2005 and which was presented as a solo exhibition in various museums and galleries throughout Europe.

In this project – a result of over five years of traveling through eastern and southeastern Europe from Tallinn and Tirana to Dresden and Dnipropetrovsk – Roman Bežjak takes an impartial view of the communist architecture. He documents and photographs the architectural environment in minute detail, endowing his images with the exact rhythm and perspectives of socialist modernist architecture. He captures the monuments of a Utopia entered a quarter of century ago into every day life – a world threatened by demolition, parts of which no longer exist.







## OLJA TRIAŠKA STEFANOVIČ (SRB)

Olja Triaška Stefanovič is a Serbian photographer living and working in Slovakia. She studied photography at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava and she is currently completing a PhD under Professor Tono Čierny. In 2010 she was a finalist in the prestigious competition Finalist Award 333 organised by the National Gallery in Prague.

This visual essay ***Totalitarian Architecture / Totalitarian Time*** is being done by Olja Triaška Stefanovič from 2012 /2013. She takes up a controversial theme in Slovak architecture: the influence of totalitarian or authoritarian political regimes on architectural production. Particular attention is devoted to the relationship between modernity and totalitarian order.

Using selected works of the 20th-century architecture in Slovakia, the artist shows how the different ideas of the state authorities had varying effects on the formal aspects of architecture, and how the architects themselves reacted to these ideas. At the same time, an indication is provided of how this architecture was received by the public at the time of its creation – and how it is evaluated and dealt with today, at a distance of several decades.

This project, which revolves around the typology and semiotics of space, lies midway between documentation and conceptual photography. Since 2007, Olja Triaška Stefanovič has been gradually expanding the limits of conventional photography in a move towards spatial installation. Her first works already address the ambivalence of poetic photography, mainly characterised by the conflict caused by the creation of an image, through the paradoxical merging of the photo-record and photo-image.





## THOMAS LEUTHARD (CH)

A Swiss photographer and prolific street photographer who specialises in portraits, silhouettes and the movements he encounters through his lens during his numerous travels.

He has an eye for urban chaos, which he reorders in his own way using a classic aesthetic and a respect for composition and light; he fixes on the ever-changing faces and movements captured by his lens.

Traces of the past can be seen not only in urban spaces but are also etched onto the faces of their inhabitants. Thomas Leuthard travelled to several Eastern European cities to explore these traces, and captured some very poignant and eloquent portraits in the process. These glances, smiles and expressions could also have many 'urban stories' to tell.





## BORIS LODER (LU)

Born in 1982, Boris Loder lives and works in Luxembourg.

He has developed his interest in photography through urban motifs, captured in two different ways: firstly, using a classic approach, as pared down documentation, and, secondly, using less conventional processing: the assembly of compositions that may appear abstract.

The series *Urban Elements* is composed of images of various motifs: existing buildings in construction or that have been demolished, telephone booths, and all manner of other elements. All are assembled or re-worked, meticulously, stripped of their context, on a white background, in order to allow a contrast to emerge between clear and planned architectural lines and unforeseeable traces left by time and people.



## KATARZYNA MAJAK (PL)

Katarzyna Majak is a visual artist living and working in Poland and abroad. She has a doctorate in photography from the Faculty of Multimedia Communication at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań. She has received a scholarship from the Anderson Ranch Art Center in Aspen (USA) and has also studied photography with the grandson of Edward Weston in California. She is a member of the Warsaw Photo Days programme, as well as curator and consultant for the private collection Many hands make light work.

Her work entitled **Nomads**, which she began in 2011, traces her long, contemplative walks, mainly in Kabaty, an exclusive residential district of Warsaw. She is eager to develop her own vision of what a landscape consists of in this dormitory suburb, where a clear confrontation is emerging between the residential blocks and nature.



The two independent projects, **Nomads** by Katarzyna Majak and **Urban Elements** by Boris Loder, share their creative approach to the photographic medium and a similar aesthetic. Both artists narrate the towns in which they live, starting a joint dialogue whilst retaining their own technical and aesthetic approaches. Boris Loder prefers to focus on industrial aspects whereas Katarzyna Majak picks out the greenery hidden in the concrete jungle. What they both manage to do is to make visible some significant everyday elements we pass by every day, yet fail to notice.





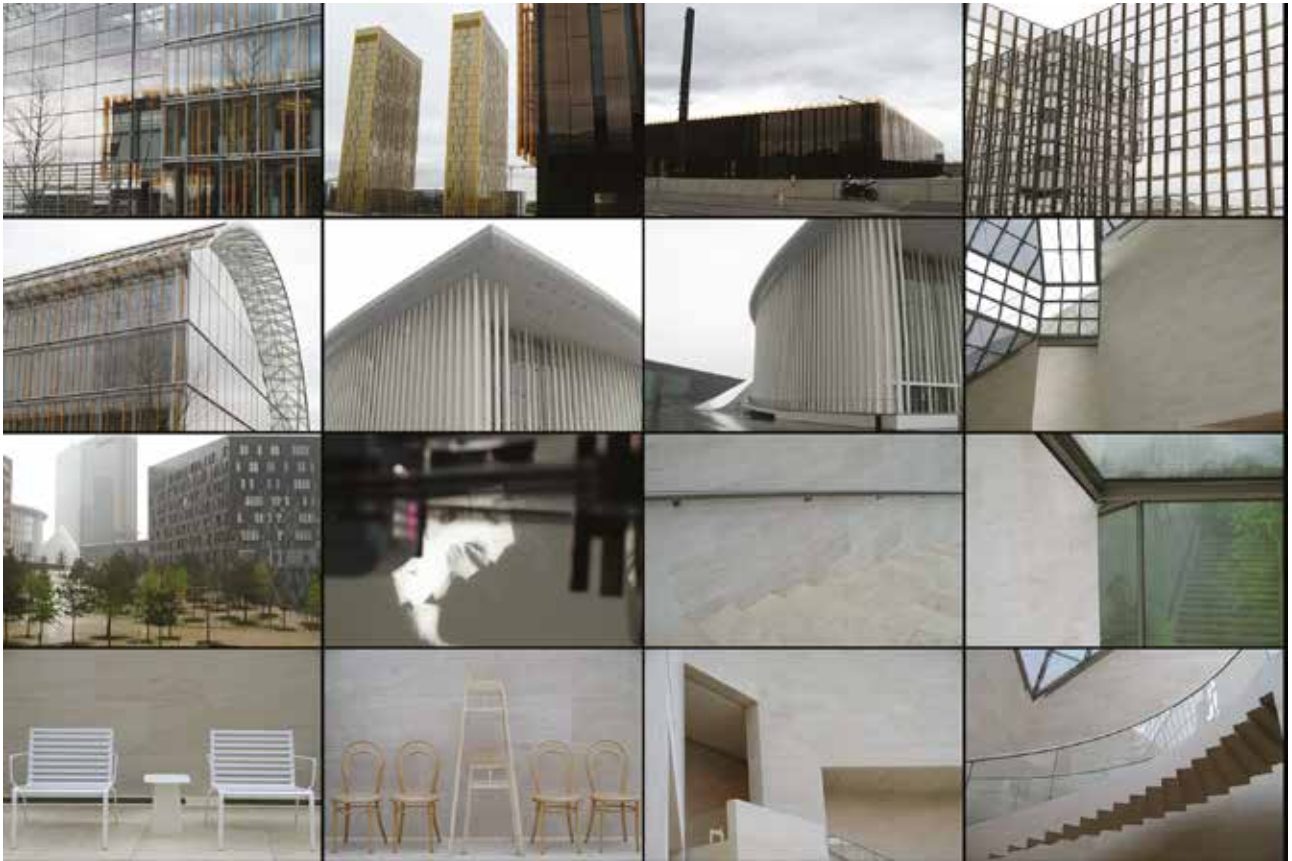
## IZABELA ŁAPIŃSKA (PL)

Izabela Łapińska lives and works in Poland as a lecturer in photography at the Lodz Film School. She holds a PhD in screen arts, specialising in photography at the National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Lodz. She also has a film degree from the Faculty of Cultural Studies at the University of Lodz.

Her photography is frequently featured in exhibitions both in Poland and abroad, and her work is published in numerous magazines, such as *Objectif (B)*, *Photo (F)* and *Pozytyw* and *Camera Obscura (PL)*. Her photos can be found in private collections in Europe as well as Argentina and Australia.

Her work ***Walking Down the City*** arose as a stroke of inspiration. As soon as her camera was out of its bag, the pictures could tell the story of a single emotion that is both unique and different for every town – representing an instant captured and a fleeting emotion free of rationality, analysis and logic.





## ARTISTS PARTICIPATING:

Roman Bezjak

Mateusz Grybczyński [www.mateuszgrybczynski.pl](http://www.mateuszgrybczynski.pl)

Thomas Leuthard [thomas.leuthard.photography](http://thomas.leuthard.photography)

Boris Loder [www.borisloder.com](http://www.borisloder.com)

Izabela Łapińska [www.grupa0plus.pl](http://www.grupa0plus.pl)

Katarzyna Majak [www.katarzynamajak.com](http://www.katarzynamajak.com)

Zbyszko Siemaszko

Olja Triaška Stefanovič [oljatriaskastefanovic.blogspot.com](http://oljatriaskastefanovic.blogspot.com)

## TEAM:

curator: Jagna Olejnikowska

coordinator: Radek Lipka

consultation: Karolina Markiewicz

translations: Hannah Skrinar, Catherine Johnson

Please note that most of the photographs of this exhibition can be purchased as part of the **CinEast 2015 charity project**.

For more information please write to [reservations@ceneast.lu](mailto:reservations@ceneast.lu)



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