

North by North-East

Latvian pavillion in 55th International Art Exhibition in Venice, 2013

Artists: Kaspars Podnieks, Krišs Salmanis

Curators: Anne Barlow, Courtenay Finn, Alise Tifentāle

Commissioners: Zane Čulkstēna, Zane Onckule

Organized by: *kim?* Contemporary Art Centre, Riga and *Art in General*, New York

The Pavilion of Latvia at the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia is represented by Latvian artists Kaspars Podnieks and Krišs Salmanis. The Project is co-curated by Anne Barlow, Director, and Courtenay Finn, Curator, of Art in General, New York, and independent curator and art historian Alise Tifentale on behalf of kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga, Latvia.

North by Northeast presents two new works by two Latvian contemporary artists, Kaspars Podnieks and Krišs Salmanis. Both artists address the tension between location and dislocation triggered by the ideological implications of constantly shifting political geography. References to the traditional Latvian rural lifestyle with its intimate relationship to nature, utmost respect to labor, and patriarchal worldview permeate the exhibition. *North by Northeast* approaches the self-fashioning of an individual, a community, or even a small nation that is grappling with politicized geography, local artistic heritage, and its work ethic.

Kaspars Podnieks

Rommel's Dairy, 2013

Podnieks's photographs might suggest the notorious Victorian post-mortem portraits where the recently deceased were carefully propped up in order to capture their presence amidst the living one last time. Postures of these figures often appear unnatural, not unlike the ones in Podnieks's photographs, after all it is highly unnatural (and physically uncomfortable) for people to find themselves balancing on a tiny platform more than five meters above the ground for their picture to be taken. Rather the somehow unnatural and restrained pose is determined by the setup, leaving little room for self-expression of poses. This extraordinary bodily experience leads to an altered state of consciousness and a certain tension reflected in the faces and bodies of the farmers, an air of intensified concentration that contributes to the overall uncanny effect of the photographs. (From the essay *Just what is it that makes Latvian art so different, so Latvian?* by the co-curator of the pavilion Alise Tifentale. Full essay is published in the catalogue *North by Northeast*.)

Krišs Salmanis

North by Northeast, 2013

Salmanis's singled out tree serves as a trace of the opposite, of the desperate struggle of a very small and economically troubled country, fatigued by massive unemployment rates and an emigration of its workforce. The removal of one tree hints at the immense removal of whole forests in Latvia, where the regular patches of wood felling sites disfigure and deform the rural landscape. This untouched, natural landscape has been an important element in building the Latvian national identity in the late 19th – early 20th century, and forest views were a prominent hallmark of paintings by Vilhelms Purvītis, a major Latvian painter of the era and founder of the Art Academy of Latvia (From the essay *Just what is it that makes Latvian art so different, so Latvian?* by the co-curator of the pavilion Alise Tifentale. Full essay is published in the catalogue *North by Northeast*.)

The exhibition will be accompanied with two-parts catalogue - artist books that will disseminate the idea of the exposition further and will give additional background information behind the idea, artists and organizations involved.

Kaspars Podnieks (b.1980) has been participating in exhibitions since 1998. His work encompasses photography, video, installations, and environmental objects. His most recent group exhibitions include: *Generation of the Place: Image, Memory and Fictions in Baltics* (2012) in Kaunas, Lithuania; *Preview Berlin* (2011) in Berlin, Germany; *Life in the Forest* (2011) in Bialystok, Poland and solo exhibitions *Unusual Place* (2010) and *Communicating Vessels* (2011) at *kim?* Contemporary Art Centre in Riga, Latvia. Since 2005 Kaspars Podnieks has taken part in social and political activities in his home village Drusti - being a deputy of Drusti Council (since 2005), a Drusti Council chairman's legal representative (since 2007) and a deputy of Rauna's region (since 2010).

Krišs Salmanis (b.1977) works with photography, video, installations, animation and graphics and has participated in exhibitions internationally since 1996. His latest solo exhibitions include: *Light* (2012) in CAC Vilnius, Lithuania; *The Fragility of Trust* (2012) at gallery Alma in Riga, Latvia; *The Earth may be spinning around the Sun, but the World is turning around me* (2011) Raum linksrechts in Hamburg, Germany; and *Moving Landscape* (2011) at Galerie für Gegenwartskunst in Bremen, Germany. Since 2008 Krišs Salmanis has contributed articles on contemporary art processes for the visual arts magazine *Studija* and contributes to other daily press on a regular basis.