

Artist name: Reinis Lismanis

City of Residence: London

Country of Residence: United Kingdom

Artist Biography:

Reinis Lismanis (b. 1992, Latvia) works to dismantle traditional narratives by investigating the conventions and processes that structure them. Moving away from series- or project-based artworks, Lismanis has established a practice based on the in-depth critique of recurring themes. The medium of photography is a key area of interest for the artist, who interrogates it from both social and technological perspectives, providing insights into what he describes as the ‘black box’ through often invisible, behind-the-scenes processes.

Project name: *Trial and Error*

Expert Name: Paulius Petraitis

Lead/Expert Quote: “Reinis Lismanis’s photographic work focuses on the minutiae of daily life, while experimenting playfully with technical processes. His latest venture, *Trial and Error*, opens up the possibilities contained in everyday rituals. These rituals are explored through thoughtful photographic observations. In Lismanis’s hands the camera not only captures, it enables.”

Anthology:

Art labour is routinely undervalued. There is a certain preconception that if one is working in a creative field, the enjoyment of that work should be remuneration enough. For artists working with photography, this issue is further heightened by the perception that there is little-to-no labour involved in taking photographs. Not only is the work done primarily by the camera, but anyone holding that camera would have taken essentially the same image: skill is seen as irrelevant. Reinis Lismanis’s book, *Trial and Error*, based on his solo-show by the same name, makes visible the labour inherent in photographic work.

There’s something of a double-trick in the way Lismanis does this. Many of the images have the grungy snapshot feeling of mobile phone photographs. Not the naturally-lit, retro-filtered type that encapsulate Instagram’s influencer accounts, but rather the kind you might take as a note-to-self of something funny you stumbled across on the way home. This style plays into the idea that anyone can be a photographer, and indeed, it’s photography’s role as

a social practice that complicates its perception as an art form or commercial industry. As Lismanis himself points out, ‘photography is a beast with a thousand heads’. These images are interspersed with behind-the-scenes shots of the products and processes involved in capturing, editing, and printing photographs, such as studio backgrounds, printer inks, and screen calibration – a process via which photographers ensure that the colours displayed on-screen will match those of the final prints. Through this combination of snapshots, precise commercial imagery, and insights from behind the scenes of image production, viewers are presented with the tools of photographic labour, the results of that labour, and the type of imagery that undermines it.

It’s partly the multiplicity of the medium that inspires Lismanis’s approach, which also includes digital collages, instructional Youtube videos on photography, and impeccably lit installation shots of his own exhibitions. Through these different avenues, the artist hopes to create multiple entry points for people viewing the work, whilst simultaneously deconstructing traditional narratives surrounding the photographic medium. One of the ways he achieves the latter is by repurposing certain processes. For instance, Lismanis uses Epson inks and glossy inkjet-printer papers – materials designed specifically to print digital photographs through a highly controlled and automated system – to create his handmade *Archival Pigment Prints*: abstract fields of pattern and colour that seem particularly removed from the photographic processes their materials were intended for.

As a spectator, it’s easy to feel excluded by self-referential art. At a certain point, questioning the medium can become a rather exclusive variety of navel-gazing. However, the way in which *Trial and Error* examines photography is intricately bound up with the aspects of the medium that are inseparable from modern life. In this way, the work is about photography, but it’s also about the industrial and digital systems that instruct daily-life and the devaluing of labour that increasingly extends beyond the artistic field.

Expert bio: Paulius Petraitis is an artist, curator and theorist currently based in Vilnius. His work orbits around image-making within broad technological, social, and cultural contexts. Petraitis co-curated the first exhibition to take place via Snapchat: *This is It/Now* (2015), and also curated the screen-based photography exhibitions *Sraunus* (2010-2013) and *Blog Reblog* (2013-2014). Under the alias Paul Paper, Petraitis has published twelve titles, including *Contemporary Photography* and *Smoke Screen*. He is the editor of *Too Good to be Photographed*, a publication that explores the intricate relationship between photography and failure through the work of 47 artists.