

Arturas Valiauga: *European Chronicles*

1 – 31 May 2013

Cardiff Story

In the exhibition *European Chronicles*, currently showing in the Cardiff Story, for me, the most unique to the exhibition was Artūras Valiauga's series "*I Dropped in on Stepas, We Talked About Life.*" The images depict a mother and son living in rural Lithuania, who over the years covered the walls of their home with newspaper clippings, "Bringing the world into their home," as Valiauga explained in his accompanying text. The result is a striking series of environmental portraits and still lifes that seem to act as anthropological documents of Lithuania's history.

Valiauga makes us wonder – what do these clippings pasted throughout their home represent? What is their importance? Rows of empty seed packets hang next to stoic portraits and beer advertisements, each item seems carefully chosen and placed on the wall. Are they hung merely as a visual aesthetic or do they represent something more? Are they an attempt to preserve a time in Lithuania that no longer exists? Whether symbolic or utilitarian, Valiauga's images leave room for the viewer to decide.

When included in the frame, Valiauga chooses to obscure the subjects' faces with slow shutter speed or cigarette smoke, forcing the viewer to focus on objects in the frame more so than people. His utilization of mixed color temperatures, ambient light and daylight, combine as if Valiauga is working with a canvas. His images are reminiscent of post modernist paintings. Echos of Robert Rauschenberg's *Retroactive II* or *Canyon* – 3D objects merge with the paper on the wall, changing the relationship of the space. Food merges with the tablecloth, discarded newspapers seem to have jumped off of the wall. The rooms take on lives of their own.

Through Valiauga's interpretation, a vision of rural Lithuania emerges. An aging mother, a middle aged son, the suggested absence of a younger generation. Layers of history brought in, keeping the outside world out. Perhaps through his photographs Valiauga is hinting at the direction rural Lithuania is headed toward today.

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