

Paulius Petraitis

Horizomatic Representation and Formal Materialism in Lismanis' Work

Christos Hadjioannou

A Remote Studio Visit with Reinis Lismanis

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with Reinis Lismanis*
Ilaria Speri



Ilaria Speri:

Light, time, frame, subject, vantage point - these features have led the study and practice of photography since its early beginnings. They have also been the features most often used to describe it - until the past two decades, that is. In a short span of time, what we used to consider the basic ingredients of a photograph have changed in depth and grown exponentially in variety.¹ Your research is rooted in the processes, objects and materials underlying the making of an image: printer tests, post-production methods, screen calibrations, instructional DIY videos are all protagonists in your work. Tools and displays coexist. If you were to describe a photographic image today, which elements would you use to define it?

Reinis Lismanis:

Yes, all these aspects you mention are still present in photographic

¹ The starting point of this escalation is usually associated with the events of 9/11 due to their unquestionable uniqueness in terms of visual, geopolitical and historical meanings. It may also be interesting to relate this change to the world surviving the Millennium Bug on 1st January 2000. I have explored this topic in depth in my essay "Google did not kill photography" published in *Fotografija* No. 35 (Lithuanian Photographers Association, Sep 2018).

image making and yet new and radical features keep us constantly on our toes and make us question the very essence of the medium. As in many other fields of interest, it would be impossible not to note the ubiquity of the digital and the dynamic shifts this has presented. In this mode of the photographic, my image is only a few lines of code away from yours and another few lines away from being an .mp3 file. I have found photography, in its classical mode of being, to be an extremely fertile ground to stand on, albeit a limiting one as well. As part of my explorations, looking at the intrinsic elements of production - be they technological, social, economical - is often the point of departure, and everything is as important as everything else.

IS:

How does this democratic conception of photography affect your methods and outcomes as an artist?

RL:

Personally, I try to engage with the limitations I encounter and turn them into active, productive possibilities. Often, once you get into this mindset, the possibilities are actually limitless. As far as creating art with photography goes - it can be either a totally meaningless or the most critically engaged act. Ultimately, I think that context is king.

IS:

Hiding in plain sight within the book, I stumbled upon a portrait of you, wearing electric-blue socks and a respirator mask, spraying a puff of pink. Supposedly, you are in the act of painting one of your *Archival Pigment Prints*, the gestural translation of a printer's mechanical application of colour. The presence of this image suggested two key readings to me. Firstly, it indicates the presence of an author other than yourself - thus, the potential existence of more. Secondly, you take on the role of the observed object, placing yourself on equal footing with respect to your subjects. You shift from spectator to player, a cog



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in the image-making process you are analysing, the very same *behind the scenes*.

RL:

My favourite socks! Yes, other people have been involved in various ways during the production of the work and this publication. Frankly, none of this would have been possible without bouncing ideas off my friends and colleagues. In a way, I see this book as the sum of all parts - it is not just the materiality of the final works but also the production of the camera model, how the algorithms work, the different networks of sharing images and so on. All these aspects are met with the mosquitoes that were flying around in my old garden where some of the pieces were sprayed. The different environments where works have been made and their correlation with the different elements that are present visually in the works - the clinical desktop meeting the happy accidents occurring in the dusty and vapour filled spray booth, and so on. Of course, I am also present in most of this, though that isn't really an aim in itself.

IS:

When you sent me the draft of this book, I was sincerely surprised. We first met in 2015, when you participated in a group show at the newly reinvented Fotopub festival in Novo Mesto, Slovenia. Since then, I've always looked at your work in its exhibited form: rigorous, essential, scientific. In your book however, I see a different approach, one which leaves room for the possibility of chaos, allowing a multitude of references and visual suggestions filter in, usually concealed in the display. It makes me think of a journal, or notebook, rather than a finished object. How does the book compare to your artworks in terms of choice of content, editing and final design?

RL:

That's true to some extent. However, the very nature of questioning what the "final thing" is and what is the process of getting to it, what is successful and what is a failure - and which ones of these are more important anyway - have been central questions in my recent practice. The labour systems themselves are of great interest to me. This mode of working comes with its own issues.





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For example, how to engage with the totality of the work in contrast to selected highlights. As was the case in my recent exhibitions, the final form of this book was only possible with the help of my peers whose opinion I hold dear. The notebook analogy is quite on point, as the small squiggle in the corner of one page has the potential to hold greater value than the full-page detailed drawing on the next.

IS:

In a recent essay, curator and educator Duncan Wooldridge describes the artist's studio as "a space of production - complex enough - but also a space of research and resting, and site of

display. [...] As somewhere artworks are made, the studio is at times a gallery in miniature, a virtual space where artworks can be imagined to be complete, display-ready, projecting the experience of an exhibition to come."² Our acquaintance, and my knowledge of your work all along, has existed primarily online rather than in person. I have never visited your studio. However, this book generously contains and recounts a lot about it: installation, painting, performance, photography, video. If I were to visit your studio today, what would I find?

RL:

Firstly, you would notice two plants that are in desperate need of more care. I was recently on a tour of an art school and the guide told us that if we see a studio that looks empty, with only a tidy desk and a computer present, chances are the artist is working with photography or video. As might be possible to see in some of the pictures spread throughout this book, my studio constantly oscillates between that tidy "office" space and a messy one with bits of off-cuts and ink all over the place, along with a lot of materials hoarded from the nearby printing lab's skip. The space also allows for physical interactions with the works as well as other people. I am fortunate enough to have several great painter friends in next-door studios, and their insights and support inevitably leave a significant mark on the work that I make. And it's a stone's throw from the Thames and a good greasy spoon, which is always a welcome bonus!

² Duncan Wooldridge, "Paul Mpagi Sepuya. Mirror Studies", *1000 Words 10 Year*, Tim Clark (ed.)(London: 1000 Words, 2018).

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