

## Romualdas Požerskis and Geoffrey Berliner | Photography

Opens on November 2 and will run through November 30, 2023

Opening Reception: November 2nd, 6:00pm-9:00pm

SLA Art Space, 307 West 30th Street, New York, NY 10001

Gallery Hours: Thursday and Saturday from 4:00pm to 7:00pm



Romualdas Požerskis, Kaunas, 1977

NEW YORK — SLA Art Space is pleased to present "Photography," The exhibition, curated by Francine Rogers and Julia Rothenberg, showcasing the work of Lithuanian photographer Romualdas Požerskis and New York photographer Geoffrey Berliner. The exhibition will be on view from November 2nd to November 30th, 2023, with an opening reception taking place on November 2nd from 6:00pm to 9:00pm.

While differing in the focal length of their gaze – Berliner is a master of the close-up and Požerskis' lens is more macro - they both explore intimacy, time, abstraction and documentation through black and white analogue photography. This show includes 19 photographs from Požerskis' work documenting his subjects against the background of small town life in Lithuania during the Soviet Era and 18 of Berliner's portraits of photographic artists and abstract works utilizing the wet plate collodion process.

Both Požerskis and Berliner are preoccupied with the passage of human beings through time. Romualdas Požerskis, one of the best known Lithuanian photographers, was born in Vilnius in 1951 and lives and works in Kaunas, where he teaches the history and aesthetics of photography at Vytautas Magnus University. In the body of work from which we have drawn, he follows and records his subjects in and through historical time, sharing their lifeworld of the street, the town square, the courtyards of Soviet Era housing complexes, marketplaces and homes for the aged. Creating an ethnography in images, Požerskis is an anthropologist who has "gone native" – forfeiting the objectifying gaze of the scientist and the photojournalist's cool detachment. With this sacrifice he humanizes subjects whose social marginality (the aged in his Last Home series or the touching and elegant portraits of Little Alphonso, children on the awkward edge of puberty) might be exploited or rendered grotesque or pitiable in the hands of less empathetic photographers. In Požerskis gaze, these subjects and the environments in which they are woven are rendered with the affection and empathy that emerges from a shared sense of community and experience.

Berliner's portraits also record both the passage of time and an intimate relationships that derive from deep empathy, but his approach is psychological rather than anthropological. Berliner, a native New Yorker who was introduced to photography at an early age, is co-founder and Executive Director of Penumbra Foundation, an arts organization devoted to both historical and alternative photographic processes in New York City. Through Penumbra's lecture series, workshops, exhibitions spaces, residencies and other programs, Berliner meets a comprehensive range of photographers. Over the last decade, he has utilized the 19<sup>th</sup> century wet plate collodion process to make tintype portraits of the artists who come through Penumbra. These images are taken with period large format studio cameras, where they are recorded on a metal plate processed by hand. Despite the immediacy of this process (sitters can view their image as they're being made as a unique hand-crafted direct positive image object), it is also slow and deliberate enough to provide time for interaction with the subject. This is time Berliner savors. It allows for a natural interaction with the subjects, who as photographers, often are interested in learning about this process and thinking and talking about how this historical process might inform their own work and vision. Together Berliner and his subjects reflect on photography and myriad other topics and through this process come to know each other more intimately. While, as Berliner explains, portraits are always a collaborative process, he makes this collaborative dimension manifest. Sometimes, as with the portrait of Samira Yamin, Berliner incorporates aspects of the photographer's process or vision into his portrait.

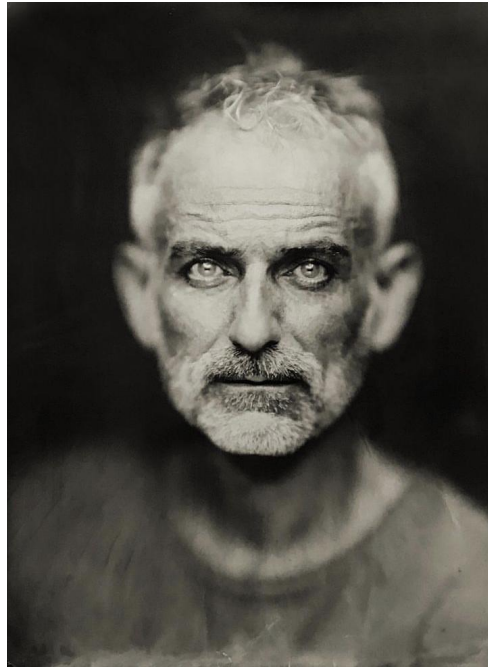


*Geoffrey Berliner, Portrait of Samira Yamin, tintype, 8x10*

Like a good ethnographer, Požerskis approaches time longitudinally, spending months or even years with his subjects in their worlds. He produces multiple images of his subjects over time, images which document change and the ravages of history. Berliner's portraits also record the passage of time, but frozen, in the immediacy of the flesh and the face. Where Požerskis portraits rely on architecture, city streets and landscape to tell the story of time, Berliner's portraits are close up, set against an empty studio wall and free of any extraneous hints about the subject's position in time, space and history. Berliner's time spent with subject in the studio like an analyst with his client in the bland space of a therapist's office tease out the subject's story, her history, her evolution. At the same time, Berliner's process lays bare the individuality and passage of time on the canvass of the subjects' skin. The orthochromatic nature of the wet plate collodion process itself reveals (sometimes brutally) irregularities, wrinkles, blemishes, freckles, warts, moles that we collect over time. These are highlighted again by the use of the large format camera and the directness of the process – the tintype is one of kind, it cannot be retouched or photoshopped.

While much of this exhibition focuses on portraiture, like all great photographers, both Požerskis and Berliner are obsessed with the formal, abstract potential of the photographic medium. We see this in Požerskis experiments with dramatic natural light situations, (as in the

photo of the boy with an umbrella), in his painterly monochrome palette and most strikingly, in his wide range of compositional expressions, in which figures are placed sometimes at striking angles and sometimes in harmonious geometrical relationship to architectural and natural elements. Berliner focuses his interest in abstraction in a series presented here in which representational themes are eliminated entirely. Here Berliner is experimenting with form, motion and light without the use of a camera or lens. With these images he moves deftly from interaction with humans to interaction with the chemistry and tools of photography and the essential elements of space time, light and form. These compelling images, juxtaposed with his portraits, suggest, at least to this viewer, a dialectic between the finite and particular nature of the individual and the timelessness and generality of space, form, time and motion.



Left: Romualdas Pozerskis, Old Towns series, Klaipeda, 1976 Right: Geoffrey Berliner, Portrait of Marco Brewer, tintype, 14x17

About the Artist

<http://pozerskis.weebly.com/>

<https://www.penumbrafoundation.org/>

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