

PHOTO EXHIBITION

communities

6-23 OCTOBER 2022

NEIMËNSTER / LUXEMBOURG

www.cineast.lu

Yauhen Attsetski | Máté Bartha | Roman Franc | Brendan Hoffman | Alina Smutko



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The word 'community' has extraordinary power – it conveys a sense of unity and belonging. It speaks of solidarity, closeness and responsibility. And while the word evokes positive emotions, being or not being part of a community can lead to difficult experiences. In the course of our lives, we become members of different communities and, to a large extent, these communities shape how we view the world, what we consider to be the norm, and who we accept and don't accept into our group. This means that they can also lead to exclusion.

Our narratives about the world, how we think about ourselves in the world and what stories we want to leave behind also shape our community. The photographers invited to take part in the exhibition running parallel to the 15th edition of the CinEast Festival –

Roman Franc, Máté Bartha, Yauhen Attsetski, Brendan Hoffman and Alina Smutko

– portray communities in all their diversity, capturing their strengths and their power to save us while also revealing the threats associated with them. The exhibited projects ask many questions: How and why do we create communities? What drives them? Do we still need and can we still create real connections in today's culture of individualism? And lastly, the most topical question, can community save us in times of crisis and war?

The exhibition begins with a photo series from the Czech photographer **Roman Franc**, who has been creating a panorama of contemporary communities for several years now. His work shows how different the ties that bind us can be: connections formed by our workplaces, our professions, our passions, how we like to spend our free time, or our worldviews. Franc's simple, classic and elegant photographs encourage us to look carefully at different groups and their members, but they also make us ask ourselves: what do the communities that we belong to look like and how are they formed?

Máté Bartha portrays a very specific community – that of teenagers taking part in military camps in Hungary. He manages to transcend the stereotypical perception of these kinds of groups. Thanks to the great sensitivity with which he observes his protagonists, his project 'Kontakt' becomes a story, above all, about the deep need to belong to a group, of acceptance and of a shared offline experience.

In documenting a Minsk courtyard's community of neighbours, **Yauhen Attsetski** tells the history of the Belarusian revolution, which began in the summer of 2020 following another rigged Presidential election. Although the Square of Changes would appear to be a typical courtyard surrounded by blocks of flats, it has become a monument to, and symbol of, Belarusian unity and the country's emerging civil society.

The power of community in the face of crisis is also captured by **Brendan Hoffman** and **Alina Smutko**. Hoffman is an American photojournalist who has been documenting Ukrainian society for almost ten years. As well as photographing the most important events taking place in the country, he has been recording the solidarity and strength which has been building in Ukraine for many years and which, in recent months, has been admired throughout the world. The exhibition displays his photographs from 2014 to 2022. Similarly, from the reports of Ukrainian photographer **Alina Smutko**, we have selected pictures taken after the outbreak of the current war. Smutko carefully documents Ukraine's volunteer movements and the commitment, selfless help and mutual support provided by Ukrainian society in the face of the Russian army's brutal invasion.

CURATOR:

Marta Szymańska

COORDINATOR:

Radek Lipka

Yauhen Attsetski

The square of changes

In August 2020, Belarusians took to the streets en masse when Alexander Lukashenko, the country's despotic ruler for the past 28 years, rigged another presidential election. The Square of Changes – an ordinary neighbourhood courtyard in Minsk – became one of the symbols of this peaceful protest and ongoing Belarusian revolution.

In the centre of this courtyard is a ventilation booth for the underground car park, which has become the most closely guarded place in the square. Here, just after the first post-election protests, a mural was created showing the DJs of Changes – the unexpected heroes of the Belarusian revolution. The mural was immediately erased by the authorities. Residents repainted it dozens of times but each time it was destroyed. Soon, this ordinary courtyard on Chervyakov Street became not only the centre of local life, but also a meeting point for protesters from all over the city and a place of important and tragic events.

"The Square of Changes" project tells the story of a self-organised community who struggled against electoral rigging and police violence, and supported political prisoners. These people, who didn't know each other previously (despite living in the same district), realised the power of solidarity and the importance of neighbourliness. They told their own stories of creating a chronicle of courtyard resistance. The project creates a visual narrative of how a children's playground was transformed into a memorial.





BIOGRAPHY

Yauhen Attsetski is a Belarusian photographer and civic journalist working mainly in the field of documentary photography. Like many other Belarusian journalists he was forced to leave the country due to the wave of repression following the 2020 rigged election. He moved to Kyiv and, after the Russian invasion, to Lviv, where he is now based. In 2021 his projects were included in the collective exhibitions 'Every Day. Art. Solidarity. Resistance' (Kyiv, Ukraine) and 'Belarus Leb!' (Berlin, Germany), and were presented at several festivals, e.g.: Riga Photomonth (Latvia), Fotofestiwal Łódź (Poland) and many others.





Máté Bartha

Kontakt

Somewhere in Eastern-Europe, children gather every summer to wear military uniforms, camp in tents under harsh conditions and practise using guns. For an outsider, the idea itself seems quite frightening. For them, it's the time of their lives.

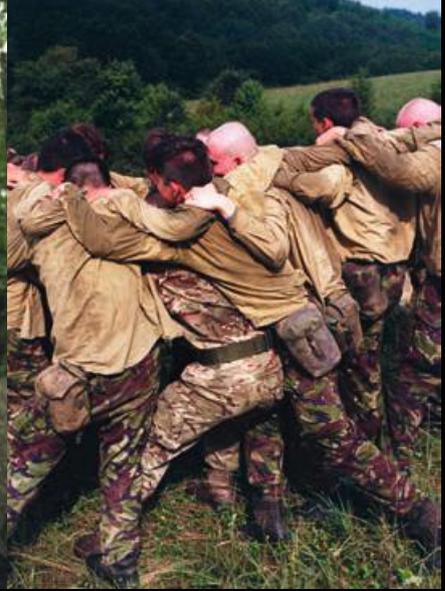
The Hungarian NGO "Honvédsuli" (Home Defence School) is committed to teaching discipline, patriotism and camaraderie to children between 10 and 18 years of age, in a society that it believes is becoming lazy and disconnected. The kids camp under the sky, guard the fire, hike, and sing together. They teach each other how to use airsoft weapons (replicas of real-life guns) and spend weeks adhering to strict military discipline. As they enter puberty, it is the first time that they have to face expectations, responsibility or the opposite sex. Friendships and a strong community are formed as they get a few bruises or struggle to do press-ups as punishment. The teenagers are determined, sometimes lazy, or in love. And for many of them, these adventures provide the only solid ground in life, a framework to understand the world and their position in it.

While reporting from military-themed summer camps for kids, the series observes the emergence of a community, our attitude towards strict discipline, weapons and war, and raises questions about their place in our society.



BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1987, Máté Bartha is a Budapest-based artist working in photography and documentary film. After receiving the National Scholarship of Hungary for photographers, he self-published his first book, entitled "Common Nature" (2014). His project, "KONTAKT" received the Robert Capa Grand Prize Hungary (2018) and the Louis Roederer Discovery Award at the Rencontres d'Arles, 2019. Bartha's debut documentary movie "Downstream" was awarded the Best Student and First Film award at the Verzió International Documentary Film Festival Budapest 2019.





Roman Franc

Groups

What do all these people have in common? How did they come to be part of this community? Did they choose it themselves? Where did they meet, or maybe they don't know each other at all? Looking at the photographs of Roman Franc, we can ask ourselves many questions, which ultimately boil to one - the most important question: why do we form communities?

Roman has been photographing groups since 2016. They meet each other in different ways – sometimes Roman has an idea for a photo and looks for the right group, place and props. Sometimes representatives of smaller and larger communities come to him and then Roman directs a photographic performance for them. Black and white photographs taken with a large-format camera are reminiscent of old group portraits that photographers in the early 20th century were often asked to take. Using this form, Roman Franc returns to those times when photography was a celebration and an encounter that required a special ritual. And maybe that's why he is invited so often to take pictures of different groups. Being photographed is another excuse for them to be together, to define themselves, to look at themselves in the mirror and say out loud "Yes, we are a community!".





BIOGRAPHY

Roman Franc was born in 1983 in Brno (Czech Republic). He studied at Masaryk University in Brno, obtaining an M.A. in Education (2008). This was followed by an M.F.A. in Photography (2015) at the Institute of Art Photography, the Silesian University in Opava (Czech Republic), where he is currently continuing towards a PhD. Franc has exhibited in the United States and United Kingdom. He has worked on projects with the office of the former Czech President Václav Havel. Franc organises photography courses and workshops for both private and public institutions, with an emphasis on inspirational environments and experiences. His works are held in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Zillman Art Museum in Bangor, Maine, the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and the Library of Congress in Washington.



Brendan Hoffman

The Sky Is Blue but the Sun Isn't Shining

(2014 - 2022)

Brendan Hoffman has been documenting the revolution and the war in Ukraine since 2013. He was in Kyiv during the dramatic events in the Maidan (2013-2014), he has photographed local inhabitants and Ukrainian soldiers fighting in Donbas (since 2014), and he is currently documenting the effects of the brutal Russian invasion, including in Bucha, Irpin and Zaporizhzhia.

The photos selected for the exhibition recall the most important events in Ukraine's recent history, while at the same time portraying a society that has lived in the shadow of war for nearly a decade. They are also proof of how Ukrainians have built their strength, identity and solidarity in recent years, which today allows them to face the Russian invasion.

The exhibition opens with photos from the events of Euromaidan – a social movement linked to the wave of demonstrations and protests that began in Kyiv in November 2013. It was a response to the then pro-Russian president's failure to sign an association agreement with the EU. The Euromaidan led to a revolution that drove the president out of the country, started a process of social and political change, and initiated a gradual separation from Russian influence. These events, in turn, sparked a response from Russia, which in March 2014 annexed Ukraine's Crimea and started a war in Donbas in the east of the country. After failing to steer Ukraine away from its Western orientation through more limited military means, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The final part of the exhibition displays photographs taken after this invasion, including some from early September 2022. While depicting destruction, pain and sorrow, these images are also testament to the extraordinary resilience and solidarity of the local communities.

BIOGRAPHY

Brendan Hoffman (b. 1980, Albany, NY, USA) is a documentary photographer based in Kyiv, Ukraine, where his work reflects his interest in themes of identity, history, politics, conflict, and the environment. His work has been shown at festivals including Visa Pour l'Image, the Zoom Photo Festival in Canada and exhibited in various galleries and educational institutions across Europe and the United States. Brendan is a regular contributor to major media including The New York Times and National Geographic. He has received grants from The Documentary Project-Fund, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, the Magnum Foundation, and the National Press Photographers Association, among others. Brendan has worked on assignment in more than twenty countries and is a co-founder of the photography collective Prime.







Alina Smutko

Ukraine after February 24th

Before the war, Alina Smutko was mainly involved in social and sports photography. As a result of the Russian attack, she became a war photographer overnight. Like millions of Ukrainians, she was forced to ask herself not only how to survive, but also how to get involved in the fight. Capturing and publishing images of devastated towns and villages, portraits of young Ukrainian soldiers, but also everyday life during the war, Alina does so out of the belief that 'We could be more visible to the world: the more pictures we take, the more information we spread to others – the more chances we will have of securing high-level support and understanding throughout the world, which for many, many years was deeply infected by Russian propaganda'.

Ukrainians who decided to leave and those who stayed support each other according to their abilities and possibilities. They donate money, food and warm clothes, or medicines and medical supplies. Some produce bullet-proof vests or camouflage nets. Others turn their businesses into night shelters. Hundreds of volunteers take part in cleaning up and removing rubble after military attacks by the Russian army.

The selected photographs from Alina's reportages show not only how the war has forced people to remodel their everyday lives, but above all, how the crisis has sparked a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility among Ukrainians, as well as the need for cooperation, while also reinforcing a sense of national belonging.

BIOGRAPHY

Alina Smutko is a documentary photographer and photojournalist based in Ukraine. The main topics she usually works on are human rights violations, ethnic and religious conflicts, and life in a post-conflict zone. For more than three years Smutko covered the situation in occupied Crimea. She has also worked in the Donbas region and the South Caucasus. She is interested too in social issues, such as motherhood, orphan diseases and palliative care. Her works have been published by Deutsche Welle, the BBC, Politico, Der Spiegel, National Geographic, The Independent and Reuters.



The Crimean Tatar restaurant in Kyiv city has been open the whole time during the full-scale Russian invasion, even during the occupation of the Kyiv region. At first, the staff prepared food and distributed it for free to the members of the city's territorial defence units. Later, when the restaurant was open to visitors, they continued to deliver food to the frontline. Musafir worked hard during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan to help Ukrainian military Muslims during fasting. (April 2022)



A sewing atelier in Poltava, which with the beginning of the war refocused on tailoring military equipment. Olena, the atelier's owner, considering sewing to be her hobby, had opened a small workshop. However, after February 24, it became clear that the Ukrainian soldiers needed her help – and first as a volunteer, later as a businesswoman, Olena began to supply the Ukrainian soldiers with equipment she had made herself. Now, a lot of internally displaced people from neighbouring Kharkiv are working there. (June-July, 2022)



On weekends, volunteers from Kyiv city go to the towns and villages of the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions to help eliminate the effects of the destruction and occupation. This group went to the village of Lukashivka, Chernihiv region, which was occupied by Russian soldiers this spring. The volunteers clean the damaged houses in the village and prepare them for further repair. (May, 2022)



Central and Eastern European Film Festival

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LUXEMBOURG



ARTISTS PARTICIPATING IN THE EXHIBITION

Yauhen Attsetski	› squareofchanges.net
Máté Bartha	› barthamate.com
Roman Franc	› romanfranc.cz
Brendan Hoffman	› brendanhoffman.com
Alina Smutko	› alinasmutkoph.com

THE TEAM

Marta Szymańska (curator), **Radek Lipka** (coordinator), **John Evans** (translation & proofreading)
& **Jiří Vlášek** (graphic design)

MOST SPECIAL THANKS to all the **ARTISTS** and our main partner Centre Culturel de Rencontre **NEIMËNSTER!**

PLEASE NOTE that some of the photographs will be available for sale in the framework of our charity project.
More information: festival@cineast.lu

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