



what about this for a the Facebook and online text for my show?
this is not my personal text, but the one to announce the show.

it's a bit weird writing about myself, but hopefully it's ok.

The Martynas Mažvydas National Library is pleased to present Andrew Miksys' exhibition BAXT from his 20 year photography project about the Roma community in Lithuania. Andrew project has taken him on a journey to photograph in Roma communities from Žagarė to Eišiškės, Seredžius, Troškūnai, and Vilnius. This will be the most comprehensive exhibition to date of Andrew's photography about the Roma with several photographs the will be shown for the first time. One wall of the gallery will be dedicated to Andrew's documentation of a single house in the historic Roma neighborhood in Kirtimai also know as the Taboras. Year after year he returned to take a photograph of this simple wooden house as it was transformed from an abandon house beside the railroad tracks to one occupied by a family, and then it's destruction by fire and the empty lot that replaced it. An installation highlighting the slow destruction of the Kirtimai neighborhood will accompany the photography exhibition in the middle of the gallery.

The title of his project, BAXT, comes from a Romani word that translates into English as luck, fate, or fortune. The title perfectly summarizes Andrew's long meditation on the real fate or luck of the Roma in Lithuania. The Roma often live at the edges of Lithuanian society seeking to preserve their traditional way of life. But ancient traditions are often at odds with a contemporary European society that places a premium on integration and a unified national identity. Of course, ethnic identity and national identity are not mutually exclusive and can coexist. The Roma arrived in Europe from India around 1300 and in Lithuania around 1500. Today the Roma are the largest minority group in Europe. The Roma in Lithuania, like all other ethnic minorities, are Lithuanian. However the Roma are truly unique as a stateless people. they have no historic homeland with a government that could defend the rights of Roma diaspora and those living abroad. The Roma are entirely dependent on the local and national governments or Lithuania to assure there rights and security. Unfortunately, some Lithuanian politicians and much of the media have chosen to portray the Roma in all the usual stereotypes as thieves and outsiders. As the only native dark skinned people in Lithuania they are easy targets for racism and discrimination.

When Andrew Miksys arrived in Lithuania in 1998 from the United States on a Fulbright Fellowship he was completely unaware of any issues surrounding ethnic and national identity in Lithuania. His father was born in Kaunas, Lithuania but Andrew didn't grow up speaking Lithuanian or have any contact with the Lithuanian community as a child in Seattle. His mother is an American of Ukrainian and Italian decent. As he said in a interview, "I didn't grow up in a Lithuanian community in the U.S. or even speak the language before I came here. So, when I arrived I saw everything as being equal. Lithuanians, Russians, Poles, Jews, Gypsies were all the same to me." In the US, everyone in is an immigrant. Of course people have tried to make ethnic or cultural hierarchy in the US but it fails. So when Andrew first photographed a Roma family in the Snipiškės neighborhood in Vilnius, he had no idea that they were Romani. In his experience, growing up in the US he'd never had any contact with Roma people. He soon discovered, through conversations with his new fiends in Vilnius, the Roma were considered outsiders and he was repeatedly warned that they were dangerous. Maybe because Andrew himself was an outsider in Lithuania he became extremely curious how the Roma as perennial outsiders in Lithuanian society and even Europe survive and maintain their traditions. And while Andrew's project focuses on the Roma, he is interested in much larger, universal themes about how outsiders or people at the edge survive in any society. And in the Lithuanian context, where in his own grandparent's generation in Kaunas, Jewish and Roma minorities were singled out as less than human and systematically murdered by the Nazi occupiers and Lithuanians who eagerly collaborated with the Nazis. Lithuanians killed their neighbors. Could this happen again?

Andrew Miksys is no stranger to tackling difficult and even controversial subjects in Lithuania. His 2013 book DISKO about Lithuanian village discos was met my a backlash in the Lithuanian media. A series of articles in Lithuania's largest newspaper Lietuvos Rytas calling his photographs "scandalous" and comparing his photographs to "British orgies" in an article entitled, "What's worse: Lithuanian village discos or British orgies." The Lithuanian embassy in London translated one of these articles into English and posted it on their official Facebook page in an attempt to discredit Andrew. The former head of the Photographers' Union in Vilnius also criticized Andrew for supposedly promoting his DISKO project in the foreign press seeking fame and fortune. While he has been criticized in Lithuania, some of the largest fashion brands and galleries have embraced his work. Images from DISKO were shown last year at the Maureen Paley Gallery in London. The head curator of photography at the TATE Modern in London picked Andrew's 2016 book TULIPS as one of the ten best photography books of the year. Andrew partnered with VETEMENTS for a fashion shoot in Lithuania village discos using local teenagers as models. This summer he went to Moscow to photograph the World Cup jerseys designed by Gosha Rubohinskiy for Adidas and DAZED magazine. He is also part of the current Helmut Lang Artist Series and photographs from his DISKO series have been made into t-shirts and posters.