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MINDAUGAS KAVALIAUSKAS A Portrait of Kražiai (2001-)

Inspired by the work of Walker Evans, and in particular a book by Paul Strand and Cesare Zavattini called "Un Paese", Mindaugas Kavaliauskas' sensitive series of photographs depicts the transitory life of a small historic village in Lithuania.

The village of Kražiai has a rich history that dates back over 750 years. An important landmark in Lithuania, Kražiai was the last pagan region in Europe, and in the 17th century was a college town famous for its theology scholars. Kražiai was also an important national symbol of resistance against foreign occupation, when at the end of the 19th Century the town stood up to anti-catholic Russian Tzarist forces resulting in a massacre that has since become a milestone in Lithuanian history. This event significantly contributed to the development of Lithuania's national identity and the restoration of statehood at the beginning of the 20th century.

Once a favourite visiting place for generations of Lithuanian and European nobility, today Kražiai is a small town of 830 inhabitants which, like most rural Lithuanian communities, faces the harsh reality of transformation as it tries to cope with a changing economy and an aging population. Little remains of its glorious past. With the older population dying out and the village struggling to contain the young men and women who leave to work abroad, those that remain find themselves in a kind of social nowhere. As a representative of the younger generation of Lithuanian photography, Mindaugas Kavaliauskas breaks tradition by avoiding the clichés of social photography- exaggerated emphasis on religious rites or on the poverty and degradation- keeping the focus on the daily life.

A Portrait of Kražiai was started in 2001 and continues to document the changes and paradoxes of a village in decline. Mindaugas Kavaliauskas is a photographer, curator and festival director and one of the central figures in the development of photography in Lithuania. He studied photography and arts at Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas, Lithuania), Ecole Nationale de la Photographie (Arles), Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (Paris) and at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). The founder and director of Kaunas Photo, the only international festival of photography in the Baltic States, he is also a member and board member of the Lithuanian Photo Artists Union.

See Kaunas Photo Festival at www.light.lt