



Latvia. Changing and unchanging reality. Photo collection by Andrejs Grants

The entrance of Andrejs Grants (born in 1955) into the world of Latvian photography at the beginning of the 1980s signaled the opening of a new era filled with hope, the epoch of a rebellious generation comprised of young architects, artists, writers and musicians, all in search of new ideas. These young people wished to extend the knowledge and the past experience that could be offered by the official Soviet powers. The Ogre Photo Studio, directed by the designer and photographer Egons Spuris, was one of these platforms for intellectuals. Many of them regularly made the half-hour journey from Riga to Ogre, a small provincial town, in order to discover the secrets of photography and to meet in the creative atmosphere that reigned in this club. Thanks to the vision and the spirit of openness conveyed by Egons Spuris, many figures who are famous today, such as Inta Ruka, Mara Brasmane,

Andrejs Grants, Gvido Kajons and Martins Zelmenis, were able to discover their professional pathways. For Andrejs Grants, Egons Spuris was not only a professor but also a friend who helped him to embark upon the career of photography, in spite of his education as a lawyer, and to devote himself solely to creative endeavour.

"In that era, what mattered was the relative possibility of living a little more openly. The milieu of which I was a part created its own little world and tried to live more freely. We cultivated an inner freedom. In the presence of the Iron Curtain and ideological restrictions, the only way to be free was to be free in one's innermost heart. That was truly a utopian milieu".

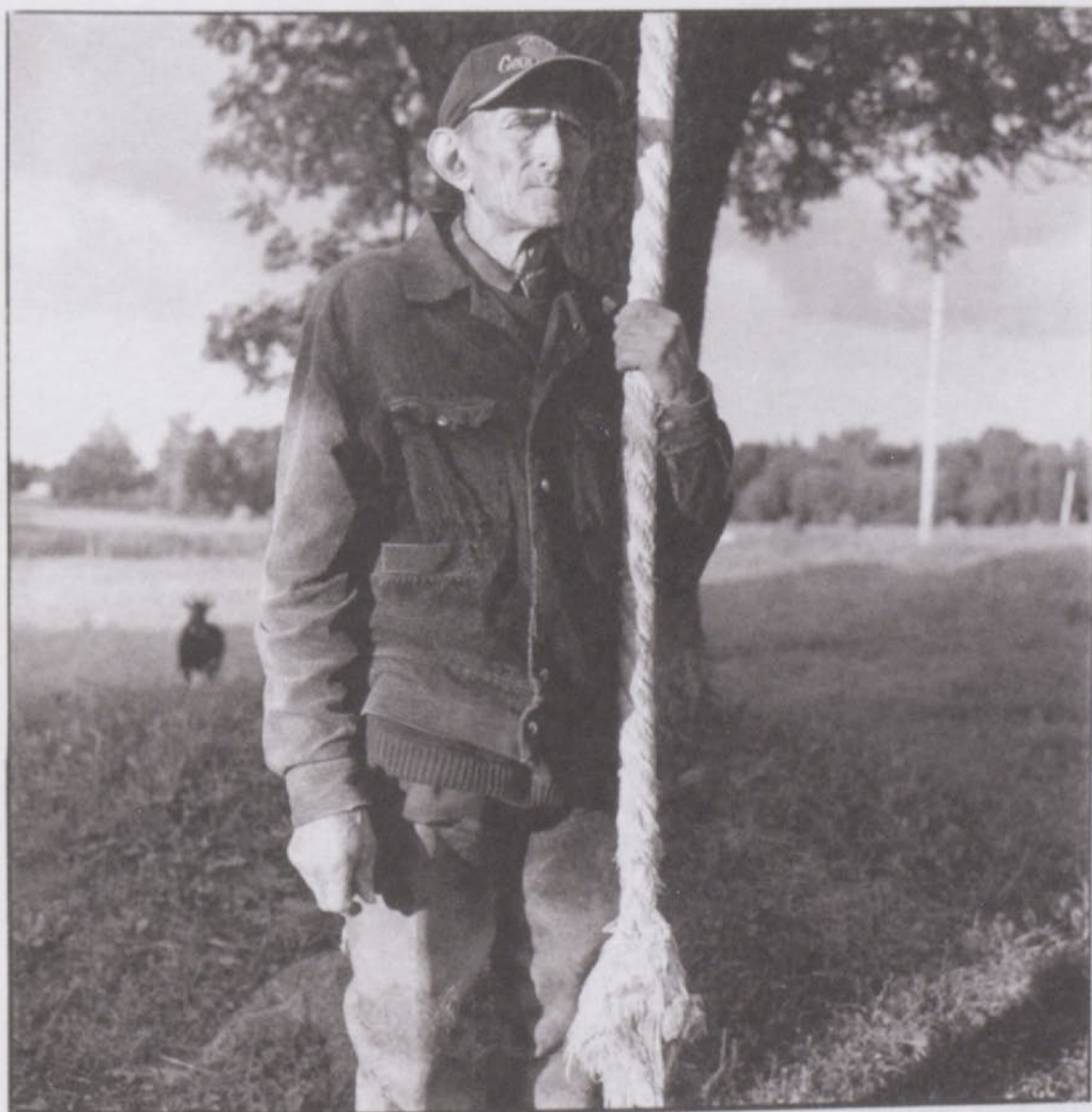
Entering into the artistic world of Latvia, where photography was more oriented towards the salon photograph, Andrejs Grants injected not only his own vision but also his own protagonists representing quite precise layers of society. It was a matter of an alternative milieu where representatives of intellectual bohemianism were pursuing their development. The photographer fixed moments of reality – faces, backs, silhouettes in movement or at a standstill, the corner of a courtyard or of a garden, a room come upon by chance. Nothing is exaggerated or staged. Nevertheless, one is constantly surprised by this particular vision, by its structure and play of light. These moments of reality lead in a simple and unpretentious manner to a certain atmosphere, to a particular vibration of emotions that attracts the attention. The photographs of Andrejs Grants represent without a doubt the most expressive documentation of the rebellious generation from the 1980s.

"Photography is the paradox, the marvellous possibility of grasping and playing with the eternity of the moment. If the moment is good, the photograph reflects eternity. It is not important what the genre is, whether still life or landscape. I take pleasure in unrolling this thread that turns before your eyes. Besides, we live more or less for pleasure! In this sense I am a hedonist. If you live for pleasure, others will also experience pleasure. This excludes egotism. Even if you claim that you live for yourself, in fact a creative spirit always lives for others, even if he does not realize it himself".

Since 1979, Andrejs Grants has been an independent photographer. He teaches the art of photography at the "House of Young Creative Activities" in Riga in order to help the new generation in comprehending



Aija. Roja, 2002



Grand-père de Ruk. Cesvaine
Ruk's Grandfather. Cesvaine
1998

the importance and the possibilities of photography, thus following the path of his own professor, Egons Spuris. It is thanks to Andrejs Grants that many young photographers and cameramen had their successful debuts during the second half of the 1990s. During his photographic career, Andrejs Grants has participated in numerous international photographic projects. He travels frequently. Among the most important exhibitions, there must be mentioned the Museum of Photography in Helsinki, Finland (1988); Tallinn Museum of Photography, Estonia (1993); Museum of Photography of Latvia in Riga, Latvia (1993); Studio of Photography 1 in Boston, United States (1994); Galerie Brotfabrik in Berlin, Germany (1996); "Latvia. Changing and Unchanging Reality" (with Inta Ruka), Gallery of the Union of Latvian Artists in Riga, Latvia (2000); "Latvia. Changing and Unchanging Reality", Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France (2000); 17th Festival of Photography of Higasikava in Higasikava, Japan (2001); Giedre Bartelt Galerie in Berlin, Germany (2001); University of Lugano, Switzerland (2002); Prospekto Gallery in Kaunas and Vilnius, Lithuania (2003); Exhibition Room of the House Mencendorf in Riga, Latvia (2004). Andrejs Grants has received financial awards and important prizes; he has benefited from several stipends, including the stipend of the Fondation Hasselblad, Sweden (1999); the prize for the best foreign photographer at the 17th Festival of Photography of Higasikava (2001), the Grand Prize of the Union of Latvian Artists for his contribution to the art of photography (2001).

Andrejs Grants has always presented his works in serial form. For example, *Colleagues, Friends, Acquaintances, Around Latvia and Latvia. Changing and Unchanging Reality*. It is clearly a matter of the reality of Latvia from 1984 to the present. Time has passed, effecting an inexorable evolution and bringing about radical changes in the political system and new social rules. Nevertheless, the purpose of life does not truly change; always remaining the same is the desire to move, to enjoy oneself, to engage in contemplation, to obtain things and to profit from life, in other words – to live. Andrejs Grants has drawn uncustomary moments of pleasure from that which he has described as the "theatre of life", which unfolds right before our eyes at every moment, if we simply look closely.

"I have always been fascinated by Bruegel and his unique vision of the world, his particular attitude with regard to that which takes place within the image. I think that documentary photography can be presented in a similar manner,



Ludza, 1999

in the sense that it possesses its own intrinsic reality. I was interested by this documentary basis, this theatrical scene which is performed at a particular moment when you easily devote more time to remaining seated in a country village in order to see what takes place around you. It is evocative. Why do I love to take walks through the heart of Latvia and to take photographs? Maybe because I spent my childhood in a rural environment. Life is more natural, more free there. All that which others experience in the city is lived out by my protagonists in the countryside or in the little towns. In these presentations, the people are protagonists who play certain roles and who occupy a position in relationships that are more or less defined".

Inese Baranovska