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The Institutional Pasts of Photographs by Paulis Cīrulis (1917–1991)

The Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU) History Museum houses the significant holdings of Paulis Cīrulis (1917—1991), a long-standing photographer of the Riga Medicine Institute (RMI, currently RSU) and the head of the RMI's Laboratory of Photography and Cinematography. Additionally, by the end of the 1950-s — for more than 30 years, he worked as a staff photographer for *Padomju Mediķis* [Soviet Doctor], an official newspaper of the RMI. The Museum's holdings of the roughly 100,000 works by Paulis Cīrulis constitute an important part of visual testimonies of the history of the Latvian academic medicine under the Soviet rule.

Mostly the institutional framework was decisive and directive and a photographer had to succumb to the communist doctrine as Soviet-photography was more often considered an instrument of politics. Apart from education and research process images, significant photographic efforts were directed at documenting the activities of RMI amateur societies and sports teams, as well as various institutional daily life traditions and public celebrations. The visual paradigm, concerned with progress and innovation, projected its subjects into the future. Photographs operated not only simply with its visual content but were entangled in a system of obligations and values. For instance, so-called a wall newspaper or placard newspapers were used as a means of dissemination official state information and in this context photographs were instrumentalized as efficient vehicles for propaganda. These remnants of the past certainly cannot be condemned as worthless now that they are stripped of their original context and function. Because of its subjection to communist ideology, the visual heritage of the Soviet period is still subject of current heated political debate.

Recently there has been a movement to create a new type of heritage studies, regarding the socialist era Baristaitē and Lukošiūtē (2002) suggest the term 'a complex matter', that seeks to discuss questions of legacy and reception, how a society deals with the physical reminders of the complicated past of socialism. Working with photographs by Paulis Cīrulis the Soviet social and political implications are present. How the Museum shall conceptualise the study of the past and its role in the present? How the Museum shall deal with the Soviet heritage and tell the story to contemporary audience? By examining the Paulis Cīrulis collection, this paper discusses new strategies on ways of dealing with the Soviet heritage embracing innovative museological, educational and artistic practices.

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