

# CITY WALK WORKSHOP

## 1.1

Subvert and Challenge the Perception of Familiar Urban Surroundings

Lorenzo Servi alias SerraGlia

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# WELCOME

Welcome, and thank you for your interest in the CITY_WALK_WORKSHOP. Everything you need to know to get started is explained here.

I receive a lot of requests from students and educators asking me to hold workshops. Because my time is quite limited I am able to give only a few. This is why I have decided to create this free kit, giving instructions for a workshop that can be run without me.

This workshop is aimed at anyone with an interest in art, visual perception and communication, at any stage of their studies or careers.

Please be sure to let me know how it goes, and give me any feedback you might have.

Good luck!

# CHECKLIST

Participants
— Optimal group size: 1–25 (recommended age: 16+)

Duration
— Minimum of 3 hours. Recommended: 24 hours or more.

Workshop leader
— Nominate a workshop leader or leaders, for general co-ordination and to keep an eye on timing.

Equipment and state of mind
— Smartphone with a camera and e-mail account
— Wifi access
— Computer
— Projector (if the group has 6 or more people)
— Comfortable shoes
— All your senses turned on.

Schedule
A 3 hours workshop has the following rough schedule:



# BACKGROUND

In 2005, I carried out a street performance in the streets of Florence that featured a white canvas with a light grey sentence on it that read: "ART IS EVERYWHERE". It was temporarily exhibited on public walls. The aim of the project was to create a temporary visual emptiness: a necessary condition for opening people's eyes so that they could see the interesting layers of scratches, marks, old posters, and parts of the city that are normally unnoticed by many.

My interest in documenting signs of scratches, marks, old posters and other involuntary traces led to a two-day workshop held in schools and museums. That participatory experiment led to the publication of a book entitled Art Is Everywhere: How to Really Look at Things (BIS Publishers).

"City Wonders" – my current project – is aimed at gathering the best samples of found objects, marks, tracks, and accidental sculptures from the streets of various cities. Each image carries a story, revealing the unexpected in our everyday life. In August 2017 the "City Wonders: Helsinki" series was exhibited at The Finnish Museum of Photography.




FLORENCE, 2005.

# CONTEXT




THE "TOURIST STATE OF MIND". FLORENCE, 2008.

## Perception needs attention

We are used to walking the same routes every day; from home to school, for example. We are so keen to get where we're going as quickly as possible that we ignore all the beauty and wonder induced by the visual elements around us.

The result is that we tend not to see anything special in our daily routines — not because there's nothing interesting to look at, but because we're paying attention only to practical matters.

It's different when we go somewhere for the first time — as a tourist, for instance. We notice things that surprise and inspire us. Away from home, even a supermarket or a barber's sign gains an unexpected charm. But is it possible to discover something wonderful without having to travel to new places?

This workshop wants to bring that tourist state of mind into our everyday routine.

# START

Where shall we go?
The core of the workshop is to explore with new eyes an urban scape such as a street in front of your school or the entire district. A smaller space is also fine, such as a 50-meter length of a street or a museum yard. Please note: the more familiar the participants are with the space, the slower they will have to walk.

After agreeing with the workshop leader which area is to be explored, and the time available, proceed with the urban exploration in groups of two or three people, or preferably alone.

It is important that everybody feels free to walk at their preferred speeds.

What shall we look for?
Everything that gets your attention!

Please see the Extras section below for some practical suggestions.

Do not take photographs of any objects created by other artists (especially public sculptures, street art, or graffiti).

The good frame of mind
Try questioning everything you see, at every single step. Don't take things for granted.

These kinds of questions might help you to look at things from a different perspective:
— Who made this?
— What did he/she want to communicate to us?
— Why is this object (or mark, or thing) here exactly?
— What is (or was, or could be) its alternative function?
— Does this thing remind you of some known artwork?
— Does this thing remind you of a person or character from TV or cinema or a video game?

There are no "right" answers to these questions.

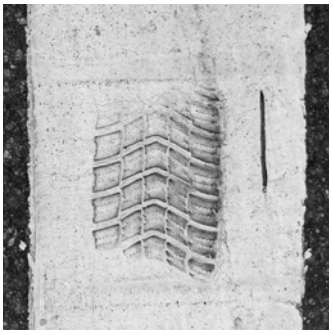
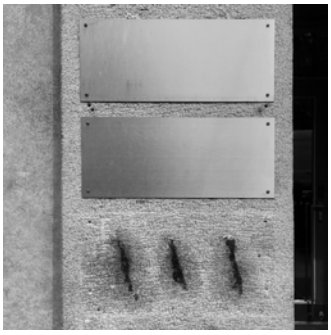
# STREET VISUAL CLUES

You don't always need to know right away why something takes your attention. If it happens, just take a picture of it!

As a starting point, you might consider paying more attention than usual to the following:
— Zebra crossings (but watch out the cars!)
— Wall corners
— Scratches, cracks, marks, tracks on walls or pavements
— Textures: what happens where rough and smooth textures meet?
— Marks made by rainwater (or any other liquid)
— Faces made out of the shapes of random things
— Obviously visual connections to well-known artworks
— Combinations of colours that might resemble a flag (imaginary countries are welcome)
— Objects left in an unnatural context
— Objects unintentionally placed near each other or assembled together.

This list will grow as I receive your feedback.



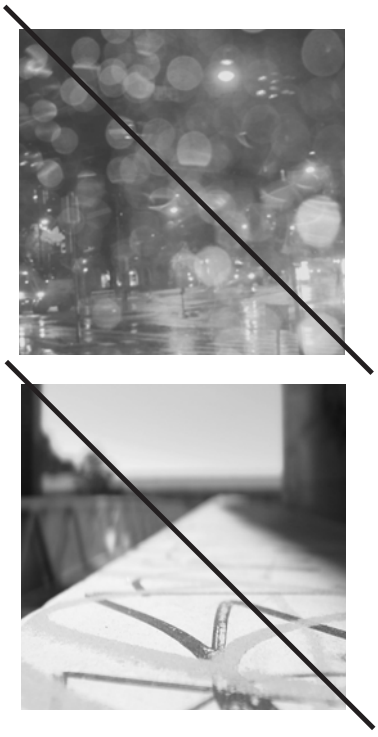
EXAMPLES OF
PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN
THE WORKSHOP

# PHOTOGRAPHY

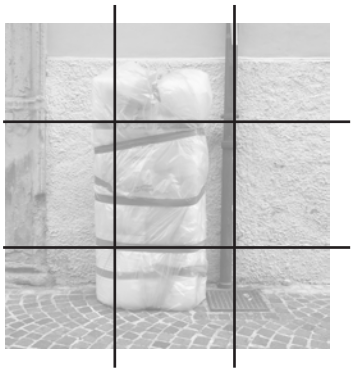
No professional photography skills are required to attend this workshop. The idea of the workshop is to use photography as a medium for creating a visual inventory.

To help you here, imagine yourself as an archeologist recording an ancient object for cataloging purposes. Try to represent what you have found objectively, without any expressivity or intentionality. Keep the most important part of the found object at the centre of the camera frame.

Please do not play with the depth of field, finding extreme viewpoints or complex angles where the photograph becomes too abstract.



AVOID MAKING THE PHOTOGRAPH TOO ABSTRACT.



THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE FOUND OBJECT AT THE CENTRE OF THE CAMERA FRAME.

# INTERPRETATIONS

Once the time for the exploring section is over, return indoors and select your best 3-6 found objects. You can send them to the workshop leader's e-mail address so they can all be shown from his or her computer.

Participants can now see everyone else's found objects and discuss their possible meanings or interpretations.

Typical questions to help to initiate a discussion are:
— Why did you take that photograph?
— Why did it attract your attention?
— What do you see in it?
— How did you feel about having found this?
— What would be a possible title for it?

This list will grow as I receive your feedback.



DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FOUND OBJECTS. THE FINNISH MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY, 2017

# EXTRAS

Titles

Artworks are often given titles that are intended to support the viewers' experience. Especially in abstract art, the title often helps us to set a frame of reference in our mind. It speaks straight to our expectations by informing us in advance what we are supposed to find and recognise.

One way to help us to see common things anew is to give them different titles. Choose one photograph you have taken, and try to come up with two or more titles for it that:

— match and reinforce the meaning of your find
— totally mismatch the meaning of your find.

The title could even have the length of a short story that you make up.

# EXTRAS II

Background

Because our brain allows us to focus on just one thing at a time, it has to prioritise what is most important. In doing so, in our grown-up minds, every object is already associated with its natural context: bikes are found on streets, trees in forests, art in museums, etc.

We are so used to finding the objects we already "know" in their natural context, that we walk and see things almost on autopilot, without paying much attention to their details any more.

This is why, especially in a familiar environment, it is very hard to look at things from a perspective other than our usual perspective.

Another way to help us to see common things anew is to imagine the object embedded in a different scene. What if a tree was placed at the middle of a football field? Or a wheel bolted to a table instead of a bike?



If you are able to use any photo-retouching app, you can also digitally remove the background of your photograph and replace it with a different one. For example, you could use a neutral background, as it would have been on a photoshoot inside a museum.



DIGITALLY REMOVED THE BACKGROUND OF THE PHOTOGRAPH, BEFORE AND AFTER.

# CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this workshop is to highlight the role of a contemporary artist as someone who is able to analyse and process daily stimuli to create "new meanings" that can change the artist's perception of the surroundings, and viewers' perceptions as well, if not the reality itself.

So, congratulations! You have experienced what it means to work as an artist.

Please note that the process of shifting the perception of what and how we normally see things might take some more time and exercise.

For this workshop, more than the photographs itself, the most important aspect is the working process.

Even if it seems that we can't see anything differently, the process of looking and walking in the city with new and critical eyes already creates entirely new expectations and experiences.

Hopefully you will continue to use this alternative mindset after the end of the workshop, too.



DURING THE WORKSHOP, A PARTICIPANT HAS CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF TWO PEDESTRIANS "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?". HELSINKI, 2014

# SUPPORT

Social media
If you have enjoyed this workshop, please help us to promote it by following and tagging @serra_glia on social media. Please include the credit by SerraGlia.com where relevant.

Documenting
It is my aim to make a publication in the future, so please keep the material safe if you would like your workshop to be considered for inclusion.

Feedback
When the workshop has concluded, please consider sending some feedback. In particular, I am interested in receiving suggestions about how to make improvements. Thank you!

# BIO

SerraGlia (b.1979) is the alias of Lorenzo Servi, an Italian-born image creator. He is an architect by training and the focus of his work is at the intersection of photography, graphic design, and digitally created images. He has lived and worked in Helsinki since 2009.

Inspired by the 'readymade' and situationist movements, the core of his work is in transforming the banal into the extraordinary and the unseen into things to admire. His photo-based and publications projects sit between the domains of reality and fiction.

As part of his artistic practice, he is interested in how to make contemporary art more accessible to everyone. This led him to found the Imagined Museum of Contemporary Art, publishing the book "Art Is Everywhere" (BIS Publishers) and holding workshops in schools and museums.

His works have been a part of several solo and group exhibitions in Finland and abroad, among others in The Finnish Museum of Photography.

# LEGAL

Although great care has been taken in preparing the information provided to you, Lorenzo Servi alias SerraGlia cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions, and accepts no liability whatsoever for any personal injury, loss or damage that might occur as a result of following these instructions or participating in the CITY_WALK_ WORKSHOP.

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