

Photography and painting/#16**prague/#15****commerce/#14****family/#13****reconstruction/#12****performance/#11****eroticon/#10****architecture/#9****landscape/#8****new staged photography/#7****the recycle image/#6****borders of documentary/#5****intimacy/#4****transforming of symbols/#3****collective autorship/#2****face/#1 >****editorial****profiles***Photography of the Face**lili almog**dita pepe**jolana havelková***portfolios***karel novák**torben eskerod**jitka hanzlová**fazal sheikh**ivan pinkava***tendence***tereza severová**tomaž gregorič**matthew monteith**jesper alvaer**vojtůch vlk**boris missirkov & georgi**bogdanov**jan freiberg**karin muller***history***1936:Photography and /history/**Structuralism on a Date in**Prague***theory****reviews >***Around Photography with Susan**Sontag**A History of Photographic**Portraiture**Czech Photographic Avant-**Garde 1918–1948**An Anthology of Five**Generations of Slovak**Photography >**Fototorst*

The ambitious atlas *Slovenská fotografia 1925- 2000* (Slovak Photography 1925–2000) weighs almost three kilograms. It is subtitled: *Modernism – Postmodernism – Postphotography*. The Slovak National Gallery published a thousand copies of the Slovak-English book last year on the occasion of the Bratislava exhibition of the same name. This was opened as the main event of the 11th year of the Month of Photography Festival, traditionally focusing on work from Central and Eastern Europe. While the media response to the popular exhibitions is usually connected with the many celebrities that the organisers manage to fit into the programme, this time the result was a project of a more lasting character.

Concept

Although there are many contributors, basically two individuals were behind the project: Aurel Hrabušický (with a focus on the earlier period) and Václav Macek (contemporary work). They wrote all the texts and were responsible for the overall concept of the retrospective, as well as the polygraphic design of the 472-page album. They had all the type placed in striking frames. The pastel ground in the pages of the translations around some of the reproductions, which occasionally detracts strongly from the visual effect. Thus, the art scholars were not very successful as graphic designers.

One positive thing about both curators is that they are not specialists with a narrow focus on photography, but rather have a much broader base of knowledge. Hrabušický works in the National Gallery as an art history specialist who, in the course of his work, turns his attention increasingly to the medium of photography. Originally a film scholar, Václav Macek has long also been famous for organising the Slovak Month of Photography and for his teaching and publications in the field of photography (and not only as the editor-in-chief of the English language half-yearly *Imago*).

Thus far, Czech historians of photography have not yet achieved anything comparable to the comprehensive overview of Slovak Photography 1925–2000. They have not even produced anything similar to *Dejiny slovenskej fotografie* (History of Slovak Photography), published by Ľudovít Hlaváč in 1989 (with the censorship of exiled artists that was unavoidable at that time).

Hlaváč's panorama, which did not make distinctions on the basis of quality, inspired Macek and Hrabušický to make a sovereign gesture: not to treat everything that took place on the photographic scene. They do not attempt to make an exhaustive description of the traditional genres. Nor is their basic criteria based on the occupations of the photographers. They only focus on what they consider to be decisive from their perspective: the periods that can be seen in the context of modernism. They then divide this material into trends, as represented by exceptional works. They consciously abandon, as Hrabušický puts it, the attempt to present the diverse applied forms of advertising, theatre, fashion and press photography.

In contrast with the exhibition, in the book the authors have an opportunity to make an overall classification, as well as general remarks. Macek distinguishes three methods of applying the medium of photography: the 'live', the 'pure' and the 'intellectual' method. In his view, the development of each method is basically autonomous: each trend has its own ideals. What happens contemporaneously in his immediate vicinity is less important for an artist than what has happened in the history of his own work.

Point of View

It goes without saying that Hrabušický and Macek implement this

events

Ninth FotoFest in Houston
The Manfred Heiting Collection
at the Museum of Fine Arts in
Houston

sovereign approach not only in the delimitation of their field of interest and its internal trends, but also in their selection of representatives of the individual generations. The index at the end of the volume facilitates easy orientation among the photographers and theorists cited.

Of course, in overviews of this type, it is always difficult to determine who best represents the strivings of an era. In the oldest generation treated in *Slovak Photography 1925-2000*, one finds new mention of the architect Ladislav Foltyn (1906), a student at the German technical institute in Brno and at the Bauhaus in Dessau, alongside the long famous figures of modernism (from Plicka, Protopopov, Blühová and Dohnány to Kollár). But Foltyn only has two photographs in the book. This has to do with the chosen strategy: mainly large illustrations, usually one per page. One has to wonder how widespread the knowledge of the history of Slovak art photography is. Is it appropriate today to evoke the past with a few choice examples, or would it be better to demonstrate it with a greater number of (perhaps smaller) illustrations?

Twelve years ago, Macek and Hrabu%ick~ chose a sweeping overview for the exhibition and catalogue *Slovenská fotografia 60. rokov* (*Slovak Photography of the 1960s*). It was not only innovative and effective, but also rewarding for the artists and the public. One cannot, however, expect the pair of scholars to provide an academic, exhaustive treatment of an entire field of human activity covering five generations. Their achievement, including an extensive chronology of dates and events, is remarkable as it is.

If *Slovak Photography 1925-2000* presented itself strictly as a catalogue for a representative exhibition, with a focus on certain individuals, it would not raise so many persistent questions. If it functions as a history, however, one cannot help but ask why there are no illustrations for some figures who contributed to the national history of photography. I can imagine that this problem is felt even more intensively in Slovakia. The closer the observer comes to the present, the more doubts he has about the perspective chosen for *Slovak Photography 1925-2000*. With their approach to the subject, the team of curators indirectly drew attention to the unfinished nature of the national history of photography.

An interpretation of the past is unavoidably guided by a certain historically and personally determined view point. Even from Macek's present, hardly detached, perspective, his interpretation of postmodernism is quite interesting. It is presented in a knowledgeable manner typical of a curator who has returned many times to the representatives of postmodernism, born around 1960. One cannot overlook the fact, however, that to a great extent (although not always) Macek presents the figures (such as Stano, Stanko, ·volík, Prekop, Ťupník and Pecha) through their older ideas. To be honest: this is no surprise. The zenith of their work is in the past. The aesthetic credos of the generation of the 1940s- 1950s are, of course, covered even more exhaustively. O°ga Bleyová, for example, who has an entry in the book among the more than one hundred other photographers, but whose work is not presented in an illustration.

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/o Be Continued

It is appealing that Macek treats contemporary topics – which art history prefers to avoid – without any apparent misgivings. He has even raised an issue, which he cannot consider with any detachment. His delimitation of the border between postconceptual photography and the next stage of the 'intellectual' trend, however, strikes one as artificial. Orientation all of a sudden becomes problematic: profound doubts arise as to whether the medium itself does not rather obscure our insight into the world, as Martin Tiso (1973), a representative of the youngest generation, suggested in Rozhovory ticha (The Conversations of Silence, 1996). Macek points out that computer processing does not automatically guarantee the creation of original works.

According to Macek, post-photography is characterised by the digitalisation of the record; the new technology is bound up with a loss of trust in the shot. Together with the ambiguous

authenticity of the image, post-photography also introduces an openness of meaning, caused by the inter-active quality of the artefacts. Macek writes of the installation of the 28-year-old Ivor Diosi: 'a new, constantly changing work arises through the combination of the original photographic model and the viewer's presence in the hall.'

Only through repeated study of the same material from different perspectives is something like a firm core of the national past formed. The Slovak National Gallery will certainly archive the list of the exhibition pieces. That (although it is not part of the book) will remain as evidence of a valuable survey, carried out under the heading: Modernism – Postmodernism – Post-photography. (The Prague City Gallery will host the show this autumn.) Just as Hrabu%ick~ and Macek could not avoid certain icons in the form of basic works canonised in the past (Martinãek, Kállay, Gregor, Krílik, Bielik, Pekár), the i n d i s p u t a b l e emphases of their show will also be repeated. One can assume, of course, that in the future the chosen perspective will produce a somewhat different mosaic of Slovak 20th century photography. And one hopes that the commentary will shift from a list of interpretations of individual works to a more eloquent synthesis, referring to the circumstances in which the works were made.

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