

The year 2007 in the National Museum of Photography

When the corner-stone of the National Museum of Photography was officially set into the wall of the former Jesuit College in Jindřichův Hradec in June 2002, few believed that this newly established cultural institution would become an important centre of cultural and community life, its reputation extending beyond the borders of the town of Jindřichův Hradec and the South Bohemian Region.

Since the founding of the museum, the Jesuit College building has changed beyond recognition. The whole of the ground floor has undergone an ambitious reconstruction which, during its last phase (19.3.–21.6.2007), consisted of revitalising the 'Ambrosial Courtyard' and the glassing-in of its arcades.

A great many exhibitions, seminars, themed events, discussion forums and musical performances have already taken place in these reconstructed areas. Besides the exhibited photographic work, visitors can also enjoy the restored vault and wall frescoes dating from the first half of the 17th century which astonish us with their artistic merit and exceptional content.

The year 2007 was no different, once again the Museum prepared several interesting exhibitions, performances and events for the Czech, as well as foreign, general public. The beginning of the year was marked by the exhibition called 'Visions of the New Millennium' (10.2.–18.3.2007) - which presented the work of the world renowned American photographer Clyde Butcher. Visitors could view his characteristic black and white large format photographs, capturing mainly the American wilderness but also including pictures that the photographer took in the Šumava and Vysočina Mountains during his visit to the Czech Republic in 2001. In fact, it was in Jindřichův Hradec where this travelling exhibition ended its tour abroad.

The 2007 exhibition year in the Museum was undoubtedly dominated by the summer exhibition on Bohumil Hrabal (22. 6. – 30.9. 2007) which took place to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the writer's death. At the opening of this exhibition, the Museum celebrated not only the accomplished reconstruction work but also the fifth anniversary of its foundation. Many prominent representatives of the cultural community and society accepted the invitation to the opening ceremony of the 'Closely Watched Hrabal' exhibition and the accompanying events. It is certainly especially good news that in his speech, Vaclav Jehlička, the Czech Minister of Culture, expressed support for the project of the National Museum of Photography.

The decision to exhibit Hrabal was not accidental, it is not difficult to notice certain parallels between the Museum's direction and the phenomenon of Hrabal – namely the diminishing of the borders between being 'Czech' and being part of the 'World'; the ideas of the 'Enlightenment' and leaving enough space for individual thought. The exhibition programme included the appearances of a number of well known personalities who knew Hrabal personally, as well as various multimedia events,

such as; the Theatre of One Actor, a jazz concert by soloist members of the Gustav Brom Band, the showing of films about Hrabal accompanied with a commentary by his friend Tomáš Mazal, or the projection of the film 'Closely Watched Trains' and the subsequent discussion forum with its director Jiří Menzel.

During the summer months, the best photographs from the 14th traditional annual photo competition entitled 'Šumava – Bohmerwald' (23.6.–22.7.2007), were exhibited and included the work of members of photoclubs in Upper Austria and South Bohemia. The exhibition was organized by the Jindřichův Hradec photo group FOKUS who happened to be the contest organizer for this year.

Another significant event of the Museum's programme was the exhibition 'Miloslav Stibor – Photographs' (20.10.2007– 6.1.2008), held towards the end of the year, lent to the N.M.P. by the Museum of Modern Art in Olomouc. The exhibition introduced the body of life-time work of the eighty year old Olomouc photographer, Miloslav Stibor who is recognized and respected especially in the field of Czech nude photography, and whose work is well known abroad. The foremost photographers and pedagogues, Jindřich Štreit and Ludvík Baran, spoke at the opening of the exhibition, when they expressed their acknowledgements of Stibor's life-long artistic work.

At the beginning of the year, the Museum also exhibited externally at the Czech National Bank building in Prague (18.1.–28.4.2007), where it presented a third selection from its permanent collection 'The Golden Fund of the National Museum of Photography', the theme chosen for the year 2007 was documentary.

Within the scope of its activities, the Museum is also providing education to interested parties of the general public. In the course of the year, three weekend workshops took place focusing on historic photo techniques (3.– 4. 3., 8. – 9. 9. and 17. – 18.11. 2007), under the professional guidance of Miroslav Vojtěchovský. More photographic seminars were prepared for schools, targeting students from 10 to 17 year old. It was possible to attend during the last two months of the year and the focus was on portrait photography.

Among the important activities of the Museum were photographic projects. In the year 2007 the National Museum of Photography, together with the agency Createam Prague, prepared the project and contest 'Via Lucis 1989 – 2009', subtitled '20 years of Czech society in photographs'. This project, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and the Mayor of Prague, Pavel Bém, will certainly establish itself as an important society event in our country. It will culminate in a representative exhibition which will be presented at the National Museum of Photography in Jindřichův Hradec, at the Old Town City Hall in Prague and at the European Parliament building in Brussels.

Among the vital activities of the Museum is the creation of a permanent photographic collection. In 2007 we were able to acquire, for example, the extensive photographic estate of Zdeněk Taichman and a part of the photographic estate of Miloslav Hild.

In 2007 the Museum received a very respectable award from the competition 'Photographer of the Year' organized by the magazine FotoVideo, in the 'Camera Magna' category, which evaluates what has been the biggest, most important and most significant photographic enterprise or event of the year. The National Museum of Photography in Jindřichův Hradec won for its large contribution to the advancement of photography in the Czech Republic.

It is clear that today the restored Jesuit College already fulfills its new mission. The foundations of a photographic project for the 21st century have been successfully laid down. We are very happy to say that photography – in connection with other visual media – has found its home in Jindřichův Hradec.

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