

The National Museum of Photography in 2008

We believe that by now almost every resident of Jindřichův Hradec and the surrounding area has visited the National Museum of Photography in the enigmatic Jesuit College at least once - to see the latest exhibition, to take part in one of the specialized seminars, to buy a photographic book in the museum shop, or to just leisurely sit in the Museum café with a cup of coffee or on a bench in the newly renovated ‚Courtyard of Paradise‘.

The photographic museum has been operating in this building since June 2002 and its close links with the town stem from its founding and the necessary financial as well as moral support from the town of Jindřichův Hradec as the institution's founder. On the building-reconstruction side, as well as the running of the museum and its programme, the museum is growing promisingly; and the number of organized exhibitions, events and accomplishments happily increases.

As to the year 2008, a valuable exhibition and social-cultural programme awaited the visitors, just as in previous years. The very first exhibition of the year 2008 was „Flexaret“ (1.2.-30.3.2008) which introduced what are, by now, practically ‚historical‘ cameras, such as Flexarets, Flexettes, Optiflexes, Rotaflexes and Kamaráds, all lent by the National Technical Museum in Prague. At the same time, an exhibition was held based on works from the permanent collection of the museum – „The Golden Fund of the National Museum of Photography“ - thematically focused on nude photography. Following tradition, this exhibition was later on view at the premises of The Czech National Bank in Prague.

The next exhibition was ‚Twice‘ with Jiří Erml and Jindřich Přibík (27.4.-13.6.2008), focusing on the extensive life work of both artists, who were quite unknown in their country prior to 1989. The curatorship of the reknowned art historian, Anna Fárová was a valuable asset. The motivation behind this joint exhibition originated from the long-standing friendship and collaboration which existed between these two photographers who shared a similar destiny. They both emigrated; Jindřich Přibík returned to his native country after 1989, Jiří Erml remained abroad; he resided in New York, the city which inspired the main body of his work – for example the well known series ‚New York Bars‘. This is also where he died only a few weeks before the opening of ‚Twice‘ in Jindřichův Hradec. The authors were connected by a number of similar photographic aspects such as large formats, maximum resolution, or the dark tonality of still lives.

The highest attendance rate was achieved during the extensive exhibition ‚The Photogeny of Identity/The Memory of Czech Photography‘ (20.7.-5.10.2008). The exhibition was lent by the Prague House of Photography, thus instigating closer, and certainly beneficial, future cooperation between the two reknowned Czech photographic institutions. The exhibition itself – seen by as many as 1,900 visitors – covered six thematic areas from the history of our country from 1918 to the present. As the curators of the show, Helena Musilová and Josef Moucha, state, the aim was not to try and map out exact historical events, but to „make the invisible history visible, respectively to capture the memories as they were, at a certain time, imprinted onto the sensitive layer of photographic material“. On view were the works of 31 of the foremost

Czech photographers, for example Pavel Dias, František Drtikol, Dagmar Hochová, Jan Lukas, Markéta Luskačová, Ladislav Sitenský, Josef Sudek, Jindřich Štreit and others. At the same time, although of shorter duration, the visitors were also able to see an exhibition of the South Bohemian photographer, Karel Burda „Photography“ (20.7.-31.8.2008) which focused on creative colour photography, featuring mainly dreamy harmonic themes.

The exhibition of visual artist-photographer Jan Pohribný ‚In Search of Light‘ (12.10.2008-4.1.2009) extended into the following year and brought his specific photographic work to the public. His pictures are characteristic for their distinctive mysticism, unusual combinations of objects or nude figures with the surrounding spaces – usually nature or an artificially created imaginary reality. Through his work visitors were also able to find out about the photographic technique luminography - drawing with light, which the artist’s favours as a creative method. The Jesuit College also hosted for a short time the travelling exhibition of the photographer Daniel Reynek ‚Newly Discovered Photography‘, in order to introduce to the public the author’s typical, almost esoteric-like montages, created by placing colored photos one over another in pairs, often with flower motives. Towards the end of the year, another interesting exhibition, ‚The Heritage of Three-colour Photography‘ (1.11.2008-4.1.2009), was on view at the Museum, where the interested public could take an inside view into the secrets of historic techniques of colour photography. The exhibition was organized together with the National Technical Museum in Prague and the negatives of pictures were lent by several world museums. The whole event was complemented by illustrative examples of how the principle of colour composition and light effects works.

In the year 2008, the National Museum of Photography presented its successful exhibition ‚Closely Observed Hrabal‘, in Nymburk, Brno and Šumperk which was prepared during the previous year to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the death of the world-acclaimed writer Bohumil Hrabal.

Our concerts are immensely popular among the public. Besides exhibitions, the Museum also organized a number of musical performances in 2008; whether it was the summer classical music concerts, the jazz evenings or the small scale concert featuring opera singers Štefan Margita and Vratislav Kříž, or the Advent concerts - the attendance rate was always high, accompanied by sold-out tickets. Another ‚programme highlight‘ of the year 2008 were the already established weekend workshops ‚Historic Photographic Techniques‘ (31.5.-1.6.2008 and 20.-21.9.2008), under the lectorship of the reknowned photographic personality of Miroslav Vojtěchovský. We also prepared a few photographic events for elementary and grammar school students, including special seminars for talented youth, lead by our foremost photography pedagogues.

At the time of Advent the Museum offered its visitors a special Christmas programme and especially, an opportunity to be photographed in borrowed historical costumes with props in stylized settings. This project focused mainly on families with children and so over 100 remarkable new ‚historical‘ family pictures came into being in our provisional photo studio. The Advent Saturday and Sunday programmes were welcomed by a large public response.

Within the range of its activities, the National Museum of Photography is focusing more and more on reflections of contemporary life, covering serious social themes and creating a collection of photographic works. Continuing in this concept, the preparation work for the project ‚Via Lucis 1989-2009/ Czech Society in Photography‘ had been performed throughout the year. This project brings into focus contemporary Czech photography and aims to be a broad reflection of Czech society since 1989 as well. By the end of the year, a special collection of photographs was compiled for presentation in Brussels. Another project, in partnership with the Austrian ‚Waldviertel Academy‘ from Waidhofen/Th., is in preparation phase. This intended historical-photographical project, ‚Stories‘ will map the situation of the Czech-Austrian border region from the end of World War Two to the present day.

In October 2008, the leading Czech photographer and pedagogue, Chairman of the Exhibition Commission of the Museum, Miroslav Vojtěchovský, expressed his thanks in a letter addressed to the Major of Jindřichův Hradec, Karel Matoušek, for his great support of the National Museum of Photography’s projects, and also gave assurance that the present management had chosen the correct professional path.

At the same time, he also recalled the ‚Closely Observed Hrabal‘, the successful monumental exhibition from the summer of 2007, which, in his opinion, revealed to him the encouraging future direction the museum is taking, and in this context he accentuated the ‚Via Lucis‘ exhibition.

The National Museum of Photography in Jindřichův Hradec has gradually become a cultural institution whose significance exceeds the borders of the Czech Republic.