

TARAS

1932—1983

EXHIBITION OF UNIQUE PHOTOGRAPHS BY TARAS KUŠČYNSKYJ.

CROSS-SECTION OF THE ARTIST'S HIGHLY INDIVIDUAL OUTPUT PRESENTING MANY OTHERWISE INACCESSIBLE ORIGINAL PRINTS.

PRAGUE, OLD TOWN HALL, ARCADE GALLERY

18/10 – 11/11, 2013

OPENING 17/10 AT 6:00 P.M.

OPEN DAILY FROM 10:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M.

Taras Kuščynskij (1932–1983) is today deservedly regarded as the brightest star of Czech stylized photography of the 1960s and 70s. Still during the post-1968 Communist era, his work became an organic part of national visual heritage. His treatment of what were then considered daring themes centered around romantically and/or existentially hued images of female nudity, rendered with exceptional sensitivity and, indeed, humility, won him acclaim and popularity in the puritanical Czechoslovakia of those days as well as internationally. Interestingly, his grappling with the censors' red pencil at the time and with narrow-minded attitudes in society at large served as inspiration for Karel Kachyňa's film *Dobré světlo* (Good Light), 1985.

Kuščynskij, a native of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and an architect by training, became active as a photographer as early as the 1950s, though he did not win broad recognition until the thaw in the hitherto rigid political line of the country's Communist regime during the 1960s. From 1966 he was able to earn his living as a free-lance photographer. An integral part of his output from that time is constituted by remarkable portraits of actors and artists, as well as a body of innovative applied photographs, including magazine advertisements and wall calendars. Between 1970 and 1976, he was employed as resident photographer at Prague's Semafor Theatre. He also played a crucial part in organizing the country's photographic movement, as a founding member of the group Setkání.

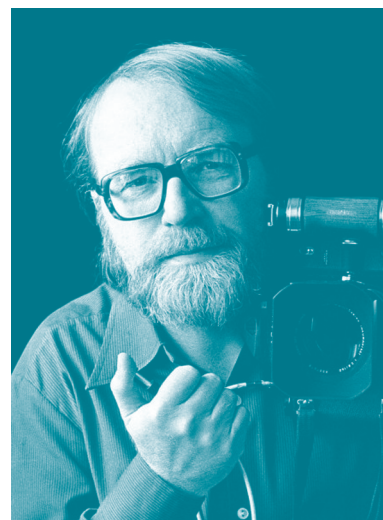
The central theme of Kuščynskij's work was woman, seen as a fantom but also as an element of nature – woman as a riddle, both reflecting and challenging the male world. This essentially “pre-feminist” approach, however, invariably entailed an embedded sense of deep respect for woman's individuality, a fact documented among other things by Kuščynskij's loyalty to his favourite models with whom he would often work through many years, producing sharply focused series of pictures. There, the parallels being now and then drawn between Kuščynskij and his Western European contemporaries (Sam Haskins, Lucien Clergue and others) have tended to ignore not just his thoroughly different status in Communist-ruled Czechoslovakia, but also, and more importantly, his unusual choice of attributes of romantic innocence, nature, and melancholy, a palette which came to be increasingly marked, towards the end of his life, by existential hues.

What then would be the prism through which Taras' output should be viewed today, three decades from his untimely death? Is it to be interpreted as some unexpected, Communist-era offshoot of Art Nouveau? Is Taras a new Drtikol, or perhaps a Rosetti spawned in the totalitarian duckpond? Or is his work rather just a visual anomaly existing in the interstice between the bigoted Communist canon and the timeless romantic yearning? These questions, concerning the borderline between art, pop culture and visual studies, could not remain untackled by a truly meaningful retrospective of his output. Appropriately, they served as the guidelines underlying the aim of staging a representative exhibition and an accompanying publication which would project Kuščynskij in the “good light” blending elements of enchanted nostalgia with appreciation from today's perspective.

The exhibition, the first reasonably large-scale retrospective of Kuščynskij's work in a long time, draws on material from the extensive archives of the artist's family, and presents his original blow-ups with the maximum degree of authenticity, following recent restoration carried out for this particular purpose. The display is supplemented by examples of Kuščynskij's applied production (calendars, record sleeves, etc.). An illustrated booklet with an essay by Pavel Vančát is being published to accompany the show.

Photographs for the exhibition were conserved and restored by the Photography Restoration Team, Department of Photography, Academy of Cinematic Arts in Prague (FAMU), currently the Czech Republic's only academic facility specializing in the field of conservation and restoration of photographic materials.

*To me, taking photos is tantamount to living.
My aspiration is to create beauty.
My aspiration is to portray life.
Its embodiment is a woman.
She is the mediator of my self-acknowledgment,
her hands, her hair, her face.
I seek for, and wait for, those rare moments
when a woman's eyes take in eternity.
Light is my building material.
I transform it to matter, and create
an environment of calm.*
– Taras Kuščynskij



EXHIBITION CURATOR: PAVEL VANČÁT
PRODUCTION: VLADANA RÝDLOVÁ, TAKTUM
CO-PRODUCTION: PETR MÄNDL, PORTE, O.S.
DESIGN: JAN ŠERÝCH
SPECIAL ADVISOR: RADKA KUŠČYNSKÁ
CO-ORDINATORS: EVA HOLEČKOVÁ,
KLÁRA VOSKOVCOVÁ
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