

FOTOHOF
>GALLERY

OPEN TERRITORY

Libor Fojtík, Jana Ilková, Martin Kollar, Ema Lančaričová
Lucia Nimcová, Ivana Palečková, Daniel Šperl
> 01.12.23 – 27.01.24

EN

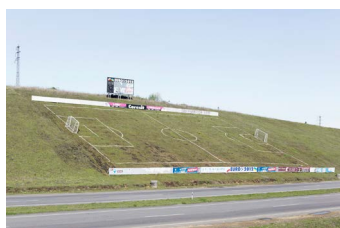
CURATOR:
Motahar Amiri



JANA ILKOVÁ
“Untitled”, from the series: “County”,
2022



DANIEL ŠPERL
"Praha, 2010", from the series: "Homo
Pragensis", 1990–2023



MARTIN KOLLAR
from the series: "Provisional Arrange-
ment", 2014–2016



JANA ILKOVÁ
"Untitled", from the series: "County",
2022



EMA LANČARIČOVÁ
"Piestany", from the series: "Ramble",
2020

"Open Territory" is a group exhibition featuring seven contemporary documentary positions focused on various aspects of everyday life in Czechia and Slovakia. As a genre aiming to capture real-life situations and events, the contemporary scenery of documentary photography in both countries still is in active dialogue with its robust tradition – a tradition of subjective, poetic, fantastic, and surreal documentary in the former Czechoslovakia that prospered as a creative response to decades of rigid political restrictions.

In that context, surrealism became a form of resistance and protest and played a pivotal role, particularly within its early avant-garde circles. Surrealism was "an eagerness for a freer interpretation of reality; what can be considered [its] greatest contribution to photography" (Antonín Dufek, 1988). Among many notable contributions, Josef Sudek's poetic pictures of Prague, Josef Koudelka's "Gypsies" (1975), Jindřich Štreit's collection about bizarre Moravian villages, and Markéta Luskacová's mysterious images of pilgrims all played crucial roles in blending documentary and surrealism and capturing the complex realities of the region. This combination pushed the boundaries of documentary photography at the time, creating dark, dire, and melancholy images, yet infused with humor, magic, and wit. Over time, this characteristic became an established tradition as many artists shaped their language partly in conversation with it. Contemporary documentary photography in Czechia and Slovakia, however, gradually moved away from incorporating those forms and elements of such a surreal documentary in its visual language, even though a touch of language can still be observed and traced all around it.

Daniel Šperl's collection is particularly notable here. "Homo Pragensis" is the only position here that was overtly created in the language of the tradition exercised among the generation responsible for its prosperity, with Daniel Šperl as one of them. "Homo Pragensis" is a collection created over the course of the last 30 years. According to the artist, Prague and its people in Homo Pragensis are unreal, desired, and magical. As much as this specific representation has nothing to do with the real Prague, it is an acute documentation of the hustle and bustle of urban life in a way that anyone can truly remember from the very crowded Prague.

In "Provisional Arrangement, or Temporary Solutions in Time" and Space, Martin Kollar documented an ongoing eternal negotiation with the state of temporality in life. "We find ourselves in a complex world without a sense of permanence and certainty. We surround ourselves with temporary friends, we have temporary women, we have a temporary tooth replacement and we prefer temporary residencies to permanent addresses." The order of things within any given group mirrors the hammered-down collective mentality of that group. By addressing this specific state of temporality, unlike its title, Martin Kollar goes beyond the instance of the provisional arrangements and instead portrays permanency, normality, and eternity that is present in a collective mindset.

Jana Ilková created "County" during the pandemic in her long stroll around her residency. This collection is a process of observation of life as it unfolds itself around the wanderer. In the absence of urban life and the mass of the public, Jana Ilková, as a flâneur of our time, stayed detached yet keenly attentive to the surroundings. She documented, among other things, surrealistic details that might otherwise easily be overlooked. "County" is a rich collection of objects and people that, all together, appear magical and unreal – a world in which each element has a detached, independent, and parallel life.



IVANA PALEČKOVÁ
from the series: "Public Species", 2019



LIBOR FOJTÍK
"On the T. O Maniwaki Settlement.
Tramp Jamboree", from the series:
"Czech Tramps", 2018



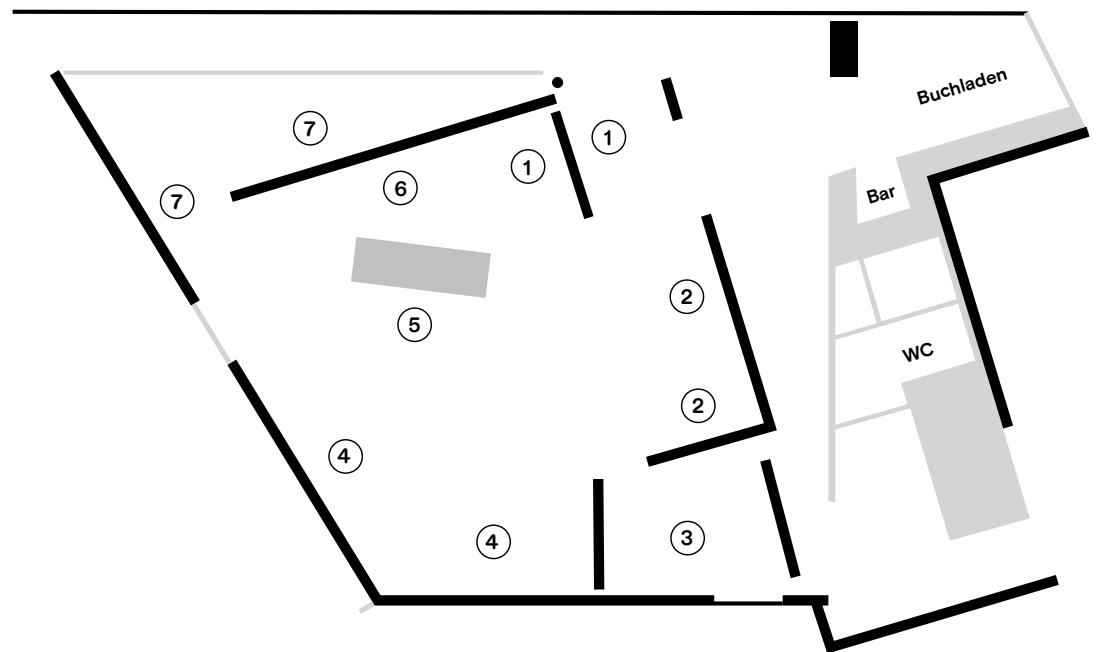
LUCIA NIMCOVÁ
from: "Olena", 2014

"Ramble", on the other hand, is more channeled and specific in its observation. By focusing on the light, Ema Lančaričová moved away from putting the objects in the center of her documentation and got closer to producing atmospheric images in urban landscapes. Created in different cities across Slovakia, Ramble was intended to be a process of encountering the world and its disruptions; "You can try to get used to it or you can take advantage of it and capture the moment you want to forget; just to get it out of your mind".

Ivana Palečková directed the gaze back to the objects in the city, envisioning a city that is empty and abandoned. Both of her books, "Public Species" and "Rareness of Everyday Being", can be seen as collections that revolve around the conjunction of rather empty urban landscapes and the intruding force of nature – a combination that suspends the usual common sense of objects and opens up a new space for a fresh perspective. Originally a graphic designer, she has cultivated a unique and precise style in which forms, shapes, and colors are well harmonized and created a complexity that particularly reveals itself in the design of her books.

Libor Fojtík's documentary, in contrast to all other positions, leans closer to staged photography. He photographed a specific group of hikers in Bohemia and Moravia that are commonly known as "Trampové", or "Czech Tramps". Trampové is a long-standing offshoot subculture with its roots all the way back in the communist era in Czechoslovakia when people resisted the suggested lifestyle. These groups spent time in nature as a clear attempt to distance themselves from the prescribed codes of behavior – a process that gradually led to the creation of an odd assimilation with what is known as scouting in the USA. In this vein, Trampové is a collective fantasy with a unique surreal conjunction of space, objects, and people.

Lucia Nimcová's video "Olena" is about an elderly woman from an indigenous semi-nomadic group that roams across a territory shared by Czechia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Throughout this film, she, reclined on a bed, engages in a conversation without addressing anyone specifically, and narrates stories with uncanny humor, describing how life has unfolded before her eyes over time.



1. Ema Lančaričová
»Ramble«, 2020
2. Ivana Palečková
»Public Species«, 2019
3. Lucia Nimcová
»Olena«, 2014
4. Martin Kollar,
»Provisional Arrangement«, 2014–2016
5. Jana Ilková
»County«, 2022
6. Daniel Šperl
»Homo Pragensis«, 1990–2023
7. Libor Fojtík
»Czech Tramps«, 2018