

Photographs by Jaroslav Kučera represent a special adventure for spectators. They mean intimate encounters with people which would probably never occur; with the worlds they would otherwise never enter. And situations in which they would almost certainly not find themselves. Since Jaroslav Kučera is attracted, like by a magnet, just to what is hidden to usual life experience. To what is deflected from a common human fate. As if his intuition or sensitivity of a diagnostician prompted what forms and to a considerable extent flavours and influences our lives. And so in his photos we meet prostitutes, homosexuals and currency speculators; beggars, pilferers, the homeless and junkies, immigrants and guest workers; punks and anarchists, the specific occupants of the underworld, city streets and border regions. Like a few, Kučera has the gift to converge practically with anybody, entering his or her privacy, winning confidence, and even affection. Thus he is not perceived as a photographer but a fellow. He does not misuse that, on the contrary, you can sense in his photographs a sort of silent community spirit with all the the-so-called "outsiders".

Kučera orders his pictures into cycles thematically aimed at issues of a certain social group or location. In the seventies he made his cycles: Night Prague, Rest Home, Borstal, Prague Buffets. They are snaps sometimes brutally crude, made often at the limit of light conditions, but full of colouring and poetry of that time. As if Kučera tried to define what all it means to be a human. The cycle Moldavia from the eighties is then a supreme expression of Kučera's homage to simple humanity. The phenomenon of humour also fully enters in his production; humanly warm and understanding and kind. That is contained also in his cycle Communist Feasts. It has a wonderful odour of absurdity and with it Kučera ranks among the leading protagonists of the tradition of unreal reality of the Czech literature and fine art. The rapid social changes of the nineties then give rise to two big and still continuing cycles of Sudetenland and Prague Metamorphoses, in which the discord of the old with the new reared up to blatancy. They bring the reflexion of the new life phenomena after the revolution, which the renewed democracy after half a century has to perforce tackle. They are remarkably profound social probes, Kučera-like earthly understanding and bitter sweet humorous. Perhaps they should really be prescribed as obligatory literature for today's politicians...

Jaroslav Kučera nevertheless is not only a sensitive and pensive documentarist, but also a full-blooded and brisk reporter. Since the mid-nineties he has gained in both the spheres one distinguished award after another. He is the first Czech photographer who received the Prague Grant -from the mayor of Prague - with the task of one year recording of the social changes of the capital city. In 2000 the international panel of the Czech Press Photo contest awarded his photo of the Prague anti-globalization protests with the main prize – the title, Photograph of the Year. For the same photo and other two from the same series he then also got the first prize in the category of Topical Subject of Fuji Euro Press Photo Awards 2000 contest, which about twenty countries participated in.

Contemporary Czech life photography includes several photographers of very ringing names, but it is perhaps really just Kučera, who - like a sensitive seismograph - registers the widest range of symptoms of the key changes of the life in our country. He has the sensibility of a diagnostician and brilliant talent of a reporter and analyst.

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