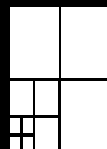


The History of
1900 – 1938 EUROPEAN
Photography



STŘEDOEURÓPSKÝ DOM
FOTOGRAFIE

CENTRAL EUROPEAN HOUSE
OF PHOTOGRAPHY

I.

1900 – 1938

The History of EUROPEAN Photography

Under patronage of:

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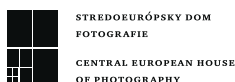
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President Barroso's foreword to Encyclopaedia on History of European Photography

Photography can be very powerful in conveying meaning, able to combine directness of message and complexity of argument. Certain symbolic images summarise the European project – the shot of French President François Mitterrand and German Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl joining hands at the memorial service for fallen soldiers in Verdun, 70 years after the start of the First World War, or the images representing the lifting of borders between Member States after the entry into force and subsequent extension to 25 European countries of the Schengen Agreement.

This encyclopaedia brings together the best national expertise in an extensive history of European photography. By drawing on the histories of photography in the various European countries, the encyclopaedia builds a narrative that demonstrates how vision becomes more complete and accurate when there is a multiplicity of focuses.

This is an initiative that contributes to a deeper understanding of Europe. Europe was the cradle of photography, and its invention has proven to be one of the most remarkable moments in history. By capturing pictures of changing instants, photography allows us to build bridges with the past and with far away places and people. It permits us to observe and make sense of the development of European history and the significance of the European project, an unprecedented period of peace and stability in many countries.

Europe, as a physical and cultural space, has been an infinite source of inspiration for photographers. Thus, an analysis of the major photographic production in European countries also provides a comprehensive view and an insight on the cultural diversity of Europe. It illustrates the incredible richness of variety of cultural expressions, but also the great similarities across our countries. "Unity in diversity" – these words sum up the heart of what Europe is about. The European Union is a community of cultures and values built on the principle of respect for cultural diversity.

Our common cultural heritage is one of the forces that will drive us into the future and will help us to meet the challenges of our time. Creativity and innovation can play a central role in helping the European Union recover from the current economic crisis. Creative talent is one of the cornerstones of an innovative society and the cultural industries themselves have plenty of untapped potential to act as a motor for the European economy.

This encyclopaedia shows that photography does much more than narrating reality. It reflects a form of art, an expression of creative talent and is *per se* part of the European cultural heritage. Through the history of European photography we can all celebrate in the creativity and diversity that have always been at the heart of the European project.



Jose Manuel Barroso

Editor's foreword to Encyclopaedia on History of European Photography.

Yet another history-lesson on photography? History of Photography has already been written, so what new and unknown can be discovered? These were the kind of comments we heard when we started our project in 2006, of which the first volume you are holding in your hands. Not that those questions were particularly pleasant, but it is clear that we were not discouraged. We just had to formulate with a greater responsibility, and ask ourselves why precisely our History of European Photography deserves to exist, depending on the help of dozens of collaborating experts and many institutions to support the project.

In the nineties, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, we, who we live east of the Cheb river, tried very hard to catch up on everything that was forbidden, unavailable and inaccessible before. This learning process was fostered through numerous exhibitions and books, but also thanks to the possibility of an unprecedented freedom to travel around the continent. After a time of euphoria, however, we found that the real cultural and spiritual unification of Europe is a challenge for many years, an experimental process that might never be marked as fulfilled. It was easier to remove the barbed wires than changing the stereotypes in human souls. This was equally true for photography as for culture as a whole.

It sometimes seems to me, that for many people, it is much easier to perceive Europe as a map with few big cities on it... after all, they are only interested in multi-million centres. They do not seek to discover the old continent with all of its monotony. For them is valid only what is happening in mega-polis. Only that seems worth registering, all the rest appears to them like a wilderness and desert, despite of the notion of centuries of lasting history.

The notion of European Culture is a process only got started in the 80s and 90s of the last century. It is at this time we witnessed frequent discussions about the centre and the periphery, about the where and the why of the creative impulses, which are being transformed, mutated and spread through the continent. The necessity for frequent defence of the periphery provoked many discussions and numerous conferences.

The result of this process, at the end of the day was not so much that it would liquidate the centre, as a concept, but that it gave new value to the peripheral theory. Instead of backwardness and agony, new contents had emerged: unconventionality, originality, and the ability to go against the contemporary stream. It was important that the leitmotif of many an essay defended the rights of both the cultural phenomenon and its social impacts: Several authors pointed out that one cannot exist without the other, that the exchange of values or impulses brings along a continuous enrichment of culture. Despite this, of course, nothing changed, as for the fact that the centre will always emphasize its own, supposedly unquestionable superiority.

Let us return to the issue, whether it is possible to reduce Europe to a few metropolitan areas, where the decisive impulses are still taking place, followed by multiple echoes, that become weaker, the closer you get to the geographical outskirts of Europe – Russia in the east, Greece in the south, Portugal in the west

or Sweden in the north... Or is this concept of reconstruction of European culture wrong? In terms of theoretical abstraction – as a model – such mechanism can perhaps work on paper, but the reality is different. The transformation of Europe into a “skeleton” deforms the picture of development, be it under the term of a Cultural History, or, as in our case, specifically the History of Photography.

We are not trying to say, however, that all that has been written in the manner of the above-mentioned simplification was (or is) an a priori misconception, dysfunctional, and reprehensible. It is more about the need to locate them into a functional context of what has been found, formulated and based on some kind of imaginary “main”-stream of the evolution of culture (photography) and its transformation. For us, the exclusivity of several centres was not important and acceptable, even though, in terms of the number of galleries, museums, magazines, collections, etc., provincial towns cannot be compared to the metropolis. We found it important that the most progressive tendencies – that, what “hangs in the air” – are often found both in circumference and in metropolis. We also relied on the concept of close links between the society and culture.

Today, no one will waive at the fact that in the Chinese painting of the second half of the 19th century, the Impressionism does not appear. Nor do we see the fact that Pictorialism played no role in Slovak photography as a handicap.

We were fully aware that the parallelism of development is only visible in case of a similarity of social-economical conditions. It is even surprising, how many parallel initiatives it is possible to find within three or four years, among geographically distant cultures. Yet, we need to bear in mind, that also some similarity in cultural development must be displayed there.

Nobody will doubt that there were significantly more “good photographs” in thirty-four European countries from 1900 – 1938, than we were able to publish in our book. Thus, each of the authors of a particular chapter had to choose what to prioritize and what to mention only, or whether to mention it at all. Everyone was forced to create a hierarchy, and the fact that something has been left out does not mean that it did not exist. For the readers of this book, these “forgotten” facts and images must stay a secret, unknown and thus less important than the mentioned names and photographs.

On the other hand, the whole book is based on the concept of tolerance. More than concentrating on contradicting – and already existing – evaluations, our aim is to expand the context, a proposal to redraw the European photography map. The authors created their texts based on limited supplies – their own experience and knowledge.

Yes, this book is clearly also about the problem of hierarchy, a limiting, yet necessary condition... a hierarchy managed at all times by the authors. At the same time, it is a book that celebrates Photography, driven by desire to benefit its readers and honour those who created the beautiful masterpieces it showcases.

The authors of the texts were some kind of double agents: On one side, they were almost radically decisive about the question “to be or not to be”, on the other, they were put into the role of solicitors, auditors listening to the voices of photographic culture, which needed to be translated into the content of this book. For this reason, we have very carefully chosen the author for each country. Of course, there is no such thing as a stable and definite hierarchy in history. We are aware that many of the views presented hereafter do not coincide with that expressed by mayor texts on photography. And we are sure that – in parallel with our approach – other texts will be written that will showcase different approaches,

different artists, and different images. This however, does not mean, that we are not standing behind the presented choice in the book, that we would not think of it as about the most appropriate. We selected the contributing authors according to their experience, knowledge and talent.

We are furthermore aware that without the museums and archives, which preserve our cultural heritage, the financing institutions, which have made a great effort to support us, and the many collaborators that have contributed to it, this book would never have happened. The network we have built to carry out our task is a combination of individual choice and institutional background. If somebody should write a new History of European Photography in the future, the authors and images published in our book will probably be crucial to get an idea about what existed in a time given in a particular country. The fact that this heritage was saved thanks to our choice will thus determine the following hierarchies, in terms of legacy of the past for the future.

As for the concept of the book, allow me to underline the fact that visual culture never exists in some kind of vacuum. It is always very closely tied to politics and state, in other words, to problems and values of the respective community. There is no universal European Nation, to which it would be possible to assign some Universal History of the Photographic Culture, but there are different fragments, from which the entity of European Photography can be built.

In some countries, culture was in a conflict with the government at different times, for example because the former's outcry for national freedom and the latter's unwillingness to grant it. Images from such countries and periods will be completely different to those in the state-time-constellation without similar historical problems. And both belong to the history and together create the European tradition. We could maybe emphasize, that our book is also a distinctive contribution to the debate on provincialism as an essence of European culture. Not only because most of the Europeans live in provincial areas, but also because we have gathered sufficient evidence that it is in the province where many of the remarkable works were created.

The unusual form of our publication is associated with an unusual approach. There is a vast amount of books dealing with individual national photographic cultures, respectively books on the history of the medium, which do not take in account the differences of communities where it was promoted. And, of course, there is a number of photographic encyclopaedias. Our approach may at – first glance – resemble an encyclopaedia, ultimately owed to the fact that parts of the book are listed alphabetically. Also, chapters on technological changes of media in countries, which are separated by thousands of kilometres, are plunged next to each other. On the second glance, it will become clear to the reader that although we have chosen a encyclopaedia-like structure, the method is historiographical. We are convinced that the History of European Photography must have the form of a mosaic, in which all the fragments are present, in order to gain a true picture. Moreover, it was substantial for us to present a view from the inside of each country, not from the outside. A view, after all, that applies a deep knowledge into the development of each so-called provincial culture, which therefore includes the French and the German context. We tried to avoid, as much as possible, the simplified view of the passionate visitor.

To some readers it may come as a surprise, that in a time of globalization and the blurring of national differences, this book is based on the principle of national/state culture. Explanation needs to be looked for in convections that are centrifugal from the globalization process, where we are witnessing the ambition

to maximize the local differences (Basks, Flemish-Walloon dispute, Rusyns as a nation, etc.).

Important argument in the discussion on eligibility of our strategy is also the fact, that until now, no such European history of photography was created, that would resign to indicate the national and state nationality of individual photographers. It is still a fundamental characteristic, whether the author is Greek, German or Polish. The name European (yet?) does not have a tangible content.

Our history of photography is a hybrid, no better method in consideration of our ambitions we could not find. (When writing about more partial segments of photographic art – for example the history of self-portrait in European photography 1900 – 1938, or the development of relationships to the body – it would be probably different.) Encyclopaedic History of European photography – that is probably the most accurate term for naming the genre of our book. We introduce comprehensive publication governed by the alphabetical order and at the same time we do not forget the stories, which create the core of the narrative on the history. Formerly, let's say in the 50s or 60s the thinking about the history of photography was unipolar, deciding what was important, precious and unique, from a certain angle. The literature from last period clearly shows that today it is different. Today, we are present on researching the multipolar history. And our book is being a part of this process of change in attitude towards the history. Older history of photography by Helmut Gernsheim, Beaumont Newhall, Peter Pollack, were orientated mainly on American, French, British and German scene and totally bypassed or only marginally registered what was happening in other countries. And even in newer history by Naomi Rosenblum or Michel Frizot, which are trying to extend at least a hint their horizon towards the development in Japan, South America, Scandinavia, Russia, Poland or Czechoslovakia, we will not learn almost anything about the photography in Albania, Croatia, Portugal, Greece or Serbia. Our history book is important because it involves the first complex source of information on the development of photography in more than three dozens of European countries, and we hope that it will be a fundamental publication for everyone, who has a deeper interest in the history of photography. Certainly a legitimate question about the chosen interface is in place. Why we have separated the 20th century to three parts, why have we chosen the years of 1938 and 1970 for the breakthrough? In the first case, the choice is obviously historical-political. In the case of the second book and the year of 1970, the decision-making was more complicated, as the era of 1968 was coming very insistently into consideration (era of student rebellion in Western Europe, the time of the beginning of the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia). In the end the "winner" became 1970, because since then the western return to conservatism and eastern normalization had fully started. With this naturally implies a question, why we decided to do just history of the 20th century, and avoided the 19th century. We did not avoid it, well, not quite. It is clear from according to the texts, that we never perceived the year 1900 as a date, preceded by nothing, contrariwise, in each chapter the history is understood as a continuity, as a chronology, where without more detailed explanation of older features it is not possible to understand the present (nor the future). So, the book is about the 20th century, but it applies full awareness of the context with the state of the photographic medium of the end of the 19th century. (We did not include the very beginning of the history of photography mainly because the rapid development, which came after the discovery of a photograph, asked authors completely different questions then it was later, when the photography succeeded and become a legitimate

communication-information medium, as the recourse of display, which affected wide population.

The barriers, which we agreed on during the preparations of the book in 2006/2007 in Bratislava, where Garry Badger, Vladimír Birgus, Zelimir Koscevic, Jan Erik Lundstrom and Václav Macek met, were important for the authors of individual texts. For the final shape of the book it was essential, that the authors must avoid only a pure fact-telling that their purpose is to write a story, tale, which will include the changes, development transformation of photographic practice of the first half of the 20th century.

A part of each text is also a wider political-historical context so that the reader will gain at least a basic idea on in what social contexts the photographic culture in each country was formed. Historical-political introduction always applies to the whole cultural situation, specifically to the photographic production. The essential was, that we decided to represent photography not only as an artistic type, in terms of changes and developments in art history, but also as a part of a wider cultural practice including many different views...

To complement the information deficit on the European photography, we decided to include short biographies of the most important authors of each country. For those, who are interested in more detailed study, we included also the selection of literature on history of each country. In the annexes you will find calendar of the most important cultural events.

In November 2010, we have happily concluded the first part of the trilogy, which will be finished within four years time. We have gone through discussions on questions such as: What is Europe? What is hidden behind Photography?; How to write its history?

At the same time we found dozens of individuals who believed in this project and institutions that have decided to support it in one way or another. We are certainly thankful to all of them and, in a way, also to the project itself, for it has allowed us to learn and discover new things. I truly hope that reading this book will be equally beneficial for those who now take the time to lean back and let themselves sink into it.



Václav Macek

1900 Europe



Europe 1919



1938 Europe

