

RADEK BROUSIL: BLACK AND WHITE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

21/09, 2016 – 22/01, 2017

Prague City Gallery

Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Karlova Street 189/2, Prague 1

Exhibition curator: Sandra Baborovská

The exhibition **BLACK AND WHITE IN PHOTOGRAPHY** is the first institutional solo show of work by Radek Brousil (b. 1980, Nitra), graduate of the Studio of Photography at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague. While it is anchored in the medium of classical photography, Brousil's output likewise sets up a polemic with the standard techniques of treatment of photographic image, focusing notably on problems related to photographic renditions of dark hues of the human skin, and the concomitant latent presence of racism in photography. His treatment of this subject earned Radek Brousil last year's Oskár Čepan Award for his series entitled *The Ultimate Norm*. It was not until 1995 that Kodak started to produce film material fit to capture a person's dark skin hues. Previously, therefore, there was for instance no way of making a single-shot portrait of a mixed-race couple without the image of one of the depicted persons being either over- or underexposed. Actually, the initial pressure for a more accurate representation of dark hues then came from the part of food and furniture industries. Today, however, problems still persist in achieving a faithful depiction of dark skin hues, a fact demonstrated by Brousil in his cross-shaped installation of 13 digital prints (*Figure 5*).

Exemplifying Radek Brousil's work in the medium of black-and-white photography is a series using motifs of plaster sculptural portraits of black Africans by František Vladimír Foit, a noted explorer and sculptor who travelled in Africa in 1931 and again in 1947, for field work enabling him to make plaster anthropological studies of local people. Brousil has now transposed Foit's "white sculptures" of black Africans to negative, thereby producing a series evoking the idiom of Josef Sudek.

Brousil's most recent works, shown for the first time in public at the Prague City Gallery, exemplify a crossover to the medium of sculptural object by their references to the Baroque statuary of Ferdinand Maxmilian Brokoff. They feature Brokoff's sculpted figures of Moors dating from 1710 – 1714, located along Prague's historic Royal Route, a communication passing by the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace, to Charles Bridge (sculptural groups of St Ignatius of Loyola and St Francis Xavier) and beyond, to Nerudova Street (two figures of Moors at the Morzin Palace). Here, the photographer's work converges with the historical context of the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace whose Baroque-style reconstruction dates from the same period. Incidentally, while the Moors shown here were indeed part of the heraldic symbolism adopted by the Bohemia-based Morzin family, whether Brokoff was actually able to work with live models or rather drew on first-hand depictions issued by the missionary Jesuit order in Prague, is questionable.

One section of the present show is thematically centered around the past history of Europe's oldest colonial power, Portugal. There, the bust of an African youth by António Soares dos Reis is a real-life

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portrait originally executed in plaster and subsequently reproduced in bronze. As Walter Benjamin observed, "in principle, a work of art has always been reproducible." This portrait, *Cabeça de Negro* (1873), offers material evidence of the individuality of the portrayed person as well as of the material which once played the role of the more recent photographic medium, yet whose advantage over the latter was its threedimensional form. Brousil is concerned both with the medium's material properties, and with its specific variants dependent on the work's setting in different lighting arrangements and angles of view. In its turn, the canvas *O Preto Ciríaco* (1787), by Joaquim Leonardo da Rocha, is a portrait study of a youth whose skin is marked by loss of pigmentation, a condition known as vitiligo. One of its sufferers was the pop icon, Michael Jackson. The status of the archetypal black singer as an artist and musician is dealt with in this exhibition with the use of an audio recording of Michael Jackson's personal testimony, and a portrait of Frank Ocean photographed for his new album, *Blond*, by the fine-art photographer, Wolfgang Tillmans.

Another distinctive device of the artist's handwriting featured here is the use of the mirror in reproduction photography. Indeed, in this exhibition the phenomenon of reproduction proves to be Brousil's prime choice. While in the case of the sculptures he reproduces their present-time reality, with the paintings and photographs he delves into the depth of photographic image by means of a labyrinth of mirrors. BLACK AND WHITE IN PHOTOGRAPHY contemplates the manipulation of photographic image, as well as the phenomenon of otherness, in Czech society still today an issue engendering controversy of opinions. Radek Brousil communicates these social problems and taboos in a way overlapping the boundaries of the twodimensional medium of photographic image, into the domain of sculptural object.

Sandra Baborovská

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Radek Brousil

Studies:

- 2000 – 2001 – Academy of Applied Art in Brussels, Anderlecht – Painting
- 2002 – 2003 – Academy of Fine Arts in Prague – New Media 1
- 2006 – 2007 – Concordia University Montreal, Department of Studio Arts, Photography
- 2008 – 2009 – London College of Communication, Visual Communication
- 2002 – 2009 – Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague, Studio of Photography, MA degree course

Awards:

- Laureate, Oskar Čepan Award, Young Visual Artists Award, 2015
- Nomination for Foam Paul Huf Award, 2015

Solo exhibitions:

- 2002 – Medicaments – installation + painting + video, Addict Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
- 2008 – St Francis Comes To Montreal, Parisian Laundry Gallery, Montreal, Canada
- 2009 – Studie mladého muže, Karlín studios, Prague
- 2009 – Obraz vs. Reflexe, 35m2 Gallery, Prague
- 2011 – Bez názvu 9 – Bez názvu 15, Fotograf Gallery, Prague
- 2011 – Bez názvu 9 – Bez názvu 16, T.A.G. city tower's gallery, Brussels, Belgium
- 2012 – Bez názvu 19 – Bez názvu 21, Ateliér Josefa Sudka, Prague
- 2012 – Variace, Galerie Ferdinanda Baumana, Prague
- 2013 – Studio Works (curator Michal Stolárik), OPEN Gallery, Bratislava, Slovakia
- 2014 – Studio Works, Fotograf Gallery, Prague
- 2014 – Jeden svět nestačí (curator Jiří Ptáček), Plusminusnula Gallery, Žilina, Slovakia
- 2015 – Stisk Rukou, FAIT Gallery, Brno
- 2016 – Černobílá fotografie, Galerie Jelení, Prague

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Acknowledgements: Markéta Stará Codeixa, Martin Codeixa, Vítězslav Danda, Adelaide Ginga, Tomáš Hladík, Tomáš Nosek, Jan Pfeiffer, Jiří Ptáček, Lorna Roth, Marius Winzeler, Polagraph, Hrdlička Museum of Man, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea do Chiado, Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, National Museum in Prague.

Media partners: Art & Antiques, ArtMap, Český rozhlas, Flash Art, SOFFA, Literární noviny, Proti šedi, Radio 1.

Admission: 60.- CZK full (adults) / 30.- CZK reduced (students, senior citizens)

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Further information: www.ghmp.cz, www.facebook.com/GHMP.cz

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SUPPLEMENTARY PROGRAMME:

Guided tours

Wed 21/09 at 5:30 p.m., with Radek Brousil and Sandra Baborovská

Wed 26/10 at 5:00 p.m., with Sandra Baborovská

Weekend Art Workshops

Sat 05/11, 2016, 1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., *Black-and-White vs White-and-Black*, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace Education Centre

Sat 03/12, 2016, 1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., *An Object in Photogram*, Colloredo-Mansfeld Education Centre

In their own creative response, visitors will be guided by the artist's example in transposing black-and-white photographic reality to its negative form. Using inversion drawing and painting techniques, they will thus achieve an interesting transformation of the message of their subject matter. The relation between black and white will assume a key relevance in the process. In terms of subject matter, they will oscillate from specific themes (still life, sculptural portrait by Portuguese artist António Soares dos Reis, or select sculptures by F.M. Brokoff and F.V. Foit), to conceptual ones. The essence of Brousil's output will be probed into by means of art games with a transposition grid and the resulting inversion representation. They will work with reproductions of photographs on display at the show, and with the artist's inspirational impulses. Photographs of sculptural objects will serve as unorthodox material used in the experimental photographic medium of photogram.

Art Studios for Adults and Senior Citizens

Sun 16/10, 2016, 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., *Inversion Drawing I*, Colloredo-Mansfeld Education Centre

Sun 20/11, 2016, 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., *Inversion Drawing II*, Colloredo-Mansfeld Education Centre

The art studio programme will focus on inversion image as an impulse for imagination in creative art. Participants will deal with the formal aspects of black-and-white photography, and with the polarity between negative and positive image, elaborated by Radek Brousil in his photographic work. The workshop will likewise provide further information about the explorer, ethnographer and sculptor, F.V. Foit and his sculptural portraits of black Africans which the artist uses as subjects of his photographic study. Part of the programme will likewise touch upon the Baroque statuary (statue of St Francis Xavier on Charles Bridge, sculptural group of the Moors on Prague's Royal Route) by the sculptor F.M. Brokoff, located close to the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace, which are significantly present in the context of this exhibition. Workshop participants will use their own photos, the artist's works and black-and-white models related to the subject of the exhibition, for intimate dialogues of their own, by means of white drawing on dark-toned paper. The workshop as a whole will take the forms of an aesthetic game highlighting the contrast between dark and light.

The weekend programmes are destined for children, families with children, and other visitors of all age categories, including seniors and disabled persons. Time of arrival and departure as you choose, at any time within the programme's duration. Bookings may be placed by 4:00 p.m. of a preceding day (not mandatory for participation).

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Interactive exhibition tours for all types of schools and other age and interest groups, including the option of subsequent creative response in the form of participants' own art work. Programmes are adjusted to the specific needs of each school/group, in terms of duration, subject matter and educational level. Advance bookings required.

Admission: children up to ten years, art school students, teachers 5.- CZK; above ten years of age 20.- CZK.
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