

## **JOSEF SUDEK: THE TOPOGRAPHY OF RUINS**

22 May 2018 – 19 August 2018

Prague City Gallery

House of Photography

Revoluční 5, Prague 1

Open daily except Monday from 10 am to 6 pm, Thursday until 8 pm.

Exhibition curators: Mariana Kubištová, Vojtěch Lahoda, Katarína Mašterová

The exhibition is organized by Prague City Gallery and the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague.

**The exhibition presents a nearly unknown and as yet unexhibited set of photographs by Josef Sudek (1896–1976) depicting the damage suffered by Prague in 1945 as a result of the events of the Second World War. The mistaken Allied air raid of 14 February 1945 struck primarily the New Town, where the most damaged monument was the Emmaus Monastery. Sudek's series of photographs from its ruins represent his largest set of images from post-war Prague. Then, in early May 1945, the Prague Uprising left wreaked irreversible damage to the historic city center – for instance, a part of Old Town Hall had to be demolished because of the damage suffered in the fighting.**

The exhibited photographs are unique within the context of Sudek's overall body of work. Sudek's photographic look into the inner life of the city and its monuments during the first days of peace, with its images of Prague's citizens viewing the ruins of the historic city center, are a rare moment when his work comes close to reportage photography. One important element of the photographs is their almost surreal depiction of the situation within the occupied country – for instance through his images of a scrapyard at Maniny near the Holešovice docks, where the Protectorate kept war-requisitioned sculptures (often removed from monuments to important figures from Czech national history) waiting to be melted down for military purposes.

Sudek's set of photographs, which consists of nearly 400 surviving negatives, was most probably created on commission for the publisher Václav Poláček, who later published the weekly calendar (unfortunately of poor print quality) with the title *1946 Prague Calendar: Prague's Cultural Losses 1939–1945*. The exhibition presents this calendar, which included 53 of Sudek's photographs, as well as documents related to its creation and numerous previously unpublished images – many of which Sudek probably shot solely out of his own personal interest. The exhibited photographs include both Sudek's original negatives recently discovered in various collections (in particular the Prague City Archives and the Archives of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, as well as new prints produced by photographer Vlado Bohdan from original negatives stored at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Besides work by Josef Sudek, the exhibition also presents images on the same subject by other photographers as well as anonymous photographs from the archives of various memory institutions.

One of the subjects that the exhibition takes a critical look at is photography as a medium for presenting important historical events. Sudek's work overcomes the established view of photography as merely offering a look at past events and emphasizes the images' visual quality, which is often overlooked. Archival images, most of which are preserved as small-format photographs pasted onto labeled card

catalogue sheets or in thematic albums, often encourage a similar reading. With just a few exceptions, even Sudek's positives (if they survived at all), exist only in unexhibited, small, and often non-final copies. Framing these photographs and hanging them on the wall of a gallery thus offers an opportunity to see them within a different, artistic or gallery, context, without dense historical explications. For this reason, the texts and captions for the exhibited photographs are printed only in the accompanying brochure and do not interfere with the actual act of their viewing. Viewer are thus given a new opportunity to actually see the photographic image and not to focus so much on the historical events that the image is presenting to us. Another contributing factor is the significant passage of time (three quarters of a century) since those events, when there are few surviving eyewitnesses who might read the pictures through the prism of painful first-hand experience.

**Josef Sudek (1896–1976)** is a world-renowned Czech photographer who lived most of his life in Prague and enjoyed photographing the city. From 1928 to 1976, Sudek had a professional photographic studio on Újezd Street at the foot of Petřín Hill. He divided his time between commissioned work and fine art photography, but his work is of an exceptional artistic and technical quality in both areas. His commercial work involved primarily photographing works of art, advertising photography, and photographing urban monuments. Most of his commissions were for publications: for instance, he published several books on Prague (*Prague Castle: An Artwork of the Centuries*, 1945; *Prague*, 1948; *Panoramic Prague*, 1959; *Charles Bridge in Photographs*, 1961). The Protectorate era was a watershed period for Sudek – in his fine art photography, he began to focus on more intimate and personal subjects, especially still-lives (such as the series *The Window of My Studio*) or his friends' gardens (Hana Wichterlová and Otto Rothmayer). In Rothmayer's "magical garden," he turned to a world of fantasy and almost surrealist images. His later landscapes are also of a more profound character – for instance, his images of the Mionší primeval forest in the Beskid Mountains, or the open-pit mines near the city of Most.

Starting in early 2018, a traveling version of the exhibition organized by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in collaboration with Czech Centers will be shown in several cities throughout Europe.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by the Artefactum publishing house of the Czech Academy of Sciences' Institute of Art History in collaboration with Prague City Gallery. The catalogue features academic essays by the exhibition authors and other experts.

The exhibition is one output of the project "Josef Sudek and Photographic Documentation of Works of Art: From a Private Art Archive to Representing a Cultural Heritage" ("Sudek Project") supported in 2016–2020 by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic as part of the Program of Applied Research and Development of National and Cultural Identity (NAKI II), ID number DG16P02M002. More information at [www.sudekproject.cz](http://www.sudekproject.cz).

Thanks to lenders: Archive of B&M Chochola, Prague City Archives, Archives of the National Museum, Archives of Prague Castle, Moravian Gallery in Brno, City of Prague Museum, National Heritage Institute, Prokop Paul, Atelier Paul Archives, Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Military History Archives, Military History Institute, private lenders.

Exhibition curators: Mariana Kubištová, Vojtěch Lahoda, Katarína Mašterová

Exhibition design: Barbara Zedková, Lenka Mrzálková – Studio Miaow

Graphic design: Martin Groch, Tim+Tim

Media partners: Art&Antiques, Art for Good, ArtMap, Czech Radio, Expres FM, Literární noviny, Prague Events Calendar, protisedi.cz, Radio 1, XANTYPA

Admission: CZK 120 adults / CZK 60 students / CZK 30 seniors

**Media contact: Michaela Vrchatová, +420 725 818 721, vrchatova@ghmp.cz**

**More information: [www.ghmp.cz](http://www.ghmp.cz), [www.facebook.com/GHMP.cz](https://www.facebook.com/GHMP.cz)**

## Accompanying program

### **Guided tours and thematic walking tours:**

Sat 2 June 2018, 4 pm

Guided tour with curator Mariana Kubištová and photographer Vlado Bohdan, who produced the later prints from Sudek's negatives.

Sun 22 July 2018, 3 pm

The authors' collective will present their project of a map of Prague in 1945 showing the sites photographed by Josef Sudek, followed by a short tour of the exhibition in the House of Photography and an outdoor walk in the footsteps of Josef Sudek's locations in the Old Town Square area. Beginning at 3 pm at the House of Photography.

Sat 8 August 2018, 6 pm

Guided tour with curator Katarína Mašterová and historian Adam Havlík.

### **Negative – Positive – Newprint!**

In addition to original positives, the photographers' estates kept at various archives and museum collections also contain a large number of negatives. How to exhibit or publish photographic images that have survived as negatives only? How to proceed with "later prints" – contemporary prints made from original negatives? The workshop will focus on the different aspects of this issue in both theory and practice.

Tue 12 June 2018, 10 am and 2 pm

Workshop in the darkroom with Vlado Bohdan

A demonstration of the production of new positives (so-called newprints) from Josef Sudek's original negatives, in the darkroom of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

(two groups, booking required at [pr@ghmp.cz](mailto:pr@ghmp.cz))

Tue 12 June 2018, 6 pm

Moderated discussion with art historians Katarína Mašterová and Hana Buddeus, photographers Vlado Bohdan, Jan Douša and Jaroslav Beneš, and curator Jiří Pátek.

### **Saturday art workshops**

Sat 21 July 2018, 1–6 pm Hidden Beauty in the Ruins, House of Photography

Sat 18 August 2018, 1–6 pm Traces of the Lost Places, House of Photography

During these interactive tours and workshops, we will let ourselves be inspired by Sudek's previously mostly unknown set of photographs of the damage that Prague suffered in 1945 due to air raids and the Prague Uprising, as well as his images of the wartime measures intended to protect the city's monuments. Working with a mixed-media technique (pastel drawing combined with collages made from photographs of Prague's sculptures and buildings), we will create pictures of Prague with an almost surrealist feel. We will also compare historical photographs with contemporary images of the depicted places. Using pigments in various shades of gray recalling particles of dust, we will use our fingers to create drawings of the lost places.

The Saturday workshops are intended for children, families, and any other interested persons of all ages, including seniors and socially disadvantaged members of the public. You may come and go at any time during the workshop hours.

### **Art studio for adults and seniors**

Fri 8 June 2018, 3–6 pm Photographic Documentation I, House of Photography

Sun 10 June 2018, 3–6 pm Photographic Documentation II, House of Photography

Fri 15 June 2018, 3–6 pm Camera Obscura, Education Centre in the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

The interactive workshops will respond to the art of Josef Sudek and to his exhibited set of photographs. The first series of workshops will be held inside the exhibition at the House of Photography, and will be followed by an outdoor walking tour of Prague. We will focus on Prague's architecture and its diversity, on the stories around us, and on elements of the urban landscape. We will approach the chosen buildings and situations from an aesthetic standpoint and also from the standpoint of their photographic documentation. We will also focus on the important role of subjectivity and various points of view. The final workshop will look at the predecessor to the camera (the "camera obscura"). We will explore the laws of visual representation, and all participants will create their own simple optical device.

The interactive tours of the exhibition for all types of schools, age categories, and interest groups include the chance to respond to the exhibition by creating art of one's own. The program can be adapted in terms of length, subject matter, and level of difficulty to suit the specific demands of every school.

Reservations required.

Price: children up to age 10, art school students and teachers CZK 5; over 10 years of age CZK 20

Contact: Lucie Haškovcová, [lucie.haskovcova@ghmp.cz](mailto:lucie.haskovcova@ghmp.cz), 606 612 987, 608 216 418

Besides the above events, there will also be other educational activities for other target groups such as socially disadvantaged individuals or parents on parental leave with their children.