

Jindřich Štreit

Príbehy
v čase

Stories
in Time

"I have always taken a surrealist and absurdist approach to life, always putting two completely unrelated things together. It fascinates me when a foundation of carnality, naturalism and instinct produces relationships that are kind, full of tenderness and beauty..."

Jindřich Štreit in Jan Špáta's film *Between Light and Darkness*, 1990

Over many decades, Jindřich Štreit and his camera have been observing the events in his immediate surroundings and the wider world with a remarkable veracity and an almost cinematic dynamism: his images go beyond mere reportage and are instead the result of his personal dialogue and rapport, a subjective narrative of a given time and place, the art of capturing the moment. This is the first presentation of the work of this charismatic and legendary figure in documentary photography at the Gallery of Spiš Artists: the exhibition is a tribute to his mastery of his form, a reflection of creativity as a way of life from this "humanistic photographer with a big heart" (Tomáš Pospěch).

The exhibition of works by Jindřich Štreit at the Gallery of Spiš Artists is not a retrospective but rather a purposeful selection from four of his many cycles, presented here without a rigid chronology and with an emphasis on the concept of "stories in time" laid out in the black-and-white and coloured sequences. The selections from the series *The Village Is the World, Where My Home Is, ...with Love*, and *Gate of Hope* correspond to the artist's views into various social worlds and overturn the myth of "classic" documentary photography. The mirroring of latent narratives of the passage from birth to death transforms his work into a timeless and universal testimony of life and experience, showcasing his ability to perceive and instantaneously capture images which are at once unsettling and generous, offering us a message of the times in which we live.

The cycle of large-format black-and-white prints titled **Reflexions** (1978 – 1989) is a unique compilation of Štreit's iconic photography of rural life, one of his abiding sources of inspiration: records of his intimate encounters with people in their own surroundings presented with magnanimity, kindness and humour. Štreit is a master of the immortalisation of the moment, not only in black-and-white but also in colour – his dramatic cycles featuring homelessness and palliative care are the product of painstaking research in the field and the establishment of fragile friendships. The cycle **Where My Home Is** (2018 – 2019) was created during a two-year cooperation between the artist and the Salvation Army, while the "visual essay" **...with Love** (2019) documents the activities of Nejste sami [You're not Alone], a mobile hospice. The self-contained exhibition closes with a selection from the religious-themed cycle **Gate of Hope** (1967 – 2007) which was formed over the course of four decades. In the cycle Jindřich Štreit observes a number of churches over time, monitoring the changing people and moments both humorous and bittersweet, never neglecting to remind us how the communist regime treated religious, ecclesiastical and historical monuments.

Štreit's work is a Central European phenomenon, a balancing act between authentic observation and artistic expression. It is, above all, a statement of interpersonal relationships, the charm of everyday life, about communication, the poetry of the ordinary, about faith; and ultimately, about direct contact with photography.

"Not every eye sees the same way. Nor can any eye see what a pure heart perceives. The world around us is different than it appears at first glance. Even the smallest and most insignificant objects have their own magic, and a home is made from that which leaves traces of the love of everyday life. Let the extraordinary eye of this artist help us to see beyond mere objects... As we enter the new millennium, we must sharpen our view of the spiritual."

Jan Graubner, Archbishop of Prague and Metropolitan of the Czech Republic from the foreword to the book Jindřich Štreit: *Gate of Hope* (2000)

Mgr. Lucia Benická – GUS,
exhibition curator

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