

**Charles University, Faculty of Arts
East and Central European Studies**

Summer 2016

Art Photography and Genius Loci

CUFA ART 321

Instructors: Jan Starý
Email: janstaryart@gmail.com
Office hours: by appointment
Classes: Tue, Wed, Thu 9.00 – 11.45, H201 (Hybernská 3, Prague 1)

Prerequisites

Students are expected to: - Use a digital camera of any quality for class assignments (cameras are not provided by the university, each student has to bring his or her own; no cell-phone cameras, please). No special technical expertise is required. (The technical quality of the working images for the class will by no means constitute the merit for student's credits and is not a part of the overall student's assessment!) - Have a very elementary knowledge of photographic terms and the history of photography. A general knowledge of major artists' work and trends helps and is welcomed. However, a genuine passion for art and specifically for the photographic art form (be it based just on a single encounter with a particular photographer and his/her work) is far the most important prerequisite. The course is conceived as a passionate invitation to a collective exploration of and adventure in photography rather than a dry academic analysis of history, facts, and all-time truisms.

Course Description

An experimental course that will combine some theoretical aspects of photography and its aesthetic and cognitive value as a unique art form with practical exercises and authentic experiential outdoor activities. Not primarily conceived as a course in the history of Czech Photography, the course will provide a basic orientation in the Czech photographic art of the 20th century. The focus is not so much on the techniques, but rather on the styles and how photography as an exquisite artistic medium expresses (or at times suppresses) the individual bias, aesthetics, period style, and the societal and cultural boundaries. The course will also marginally examine the age-old debate about the documentary value versus the artistic value of photography, and similarly the argument on the nude photography versus pornography.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Primary Objectives:

- 1) On an elementary level to explore the phenomenon of photography as a technical means, as a form of art, and as a visual means of an effective communication in the mass-media driven society. Also to place photography in a broader cultural context.
- 2) To provide students with selected information about the major styles and approaches in the Czech photography of 20th century including, but not limited to: Frantisek Drtikol and Art

Nouveau, the Czech avant-garde of Jaroslav Rosler and Jaromir Funke, Josef Sudek's "New Wave" photography, the Socialist Realism of the Communist era, mythological traditions of Ivan Pinkava, and also the contemporary classics Josef Koudelka, Jan Saudek, Tono Stano, and others.

3) Through a study of Karel Plicka's and Josef Sudek's photographs of Prague based on their unique personal experience, and through practical exercises/photo shoots to explore, experience, and identify what Prague's "genius loci" is (i.e. what makes Prague Prague).

Required Readings

Mandatory Reading: One Photographic Book on Prague by Any of Two Czech Photographers of 20th Century. One Monograph on Any of the World's Photographic Artists.

Recommended Readings

(Inexhaustible resources of elementary facts, both technical and historical, are available from the Internet.) John Garrett: *The Art of Black and White Photography*. Amphoto Books, New York, 1990. Vladimir Birgus, Jan Mlcoch: *The Nude in Czech Photography*. Kant Publications, 2002. Vladimir Birgus: *Czech Avant-Garde Photography 1918-1948*. Arnoldsche (Germany), 1999. Howard Greenberg et al.: *Czech Vision: Avant Garde Photography in Czechoslovakia*. Hatje Cantz, 2007. *Crossing Borders, Contemporary Czech & Slovak Photography*. Aperture, 1998. *20th Century Photography*. Taschen, 2001. *Monographs of Czech Photographers: Karel Cudlin, Frantisek Drtikol, Jaromir Funke, Sara Saudkova, Alexander Hackenschmied, Bela Kolarova, Josef Koudelka, Antonin Kratochvil, Lucia Moholy, Frantisek Plicka, Jan Saudek, Ignac Sechtl, Ladislav Sitensky, Tono Stano, Jindrich Styrsky, Josef Sudek, Karel Teige, Adolf Zika*.

All recommended books should be currently available from Prague's bookstores, from the web-based Amazon.com, or from local libraries.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Requirements:

The class work will be primarily based on collective analyses and the students' individual study of selected Czech photographers' work and the students' own body of photographic work. Students may be asked to read a small body of texts related to both the general and the specific aspects of photography as an art form and a way of communication, which should help them understand the different perspectives/approaches in individual photographers' work and their own approaches to photography in their own work.

A great emphasis will be put on classroom discussions as well as individual students' exercises with their own captures of Prague's "genius loci" and other motives. Each student will prepare a paper/a PowerPoint presentation on a Czech photographer of their choice. Students will be encouraged to confront the particular photographer's approach with their own. Students' presentations will be collectively discussed in the class.

The final paper will consist of a portfolio of 12 images accompanied by a short essay (cca 3000 characters incl. spaces) in the form of an "Artist's Statement". Detailed instructions for the final portfolio will be presented in the classroom by the instructor.

Assessment:

The final grades will be based on attendance and participation in the discussions and the final paper.

- Class attendance and active participation in the class: 30%
- Practical photographic exercises: 30% (the technical merit is not considered for the purposes of this assessment!)
- The student's final paper: 40%

Attendance

Regular and punctual class attendance is mandatory for all students. Absence of 180 minutes is allowed. Three or more absences (90 minutes each) lower the grade automatically (A to A-, A to B+ in case of 4 absences etc.). Students must attend at least 70 % of the course. If a student attends less than 70 % of the class meetings, he or she will receive the final grade 'F' on their transcript.

Presentation Policy: Missing the presentation will result in an F (when applicable). If the student wants to switch the date, he/she must find someone to do it and both students must confirm the change in e-mails to the professor at least 10 days in advance. If the student is sick and has a medical note, then the professor must agree with the student on how the work will be made up for.

Final Test or Paper Policy: Completing the final test or paper is required. Failure to submit the final test or paper according to the deadline will result in a letter grade F for the entire course.

For further details, please see the Attendance Policy at the ECES website under “Academic Policies and Procedures”: <http://eces.ff.cuni.cz/>.

Student Responsibility and Code of Conduct

Standards of study and conduct in the ECES Program are set and maintained. You are subject to the general standards and requirements of Charles University in regard to attendance, examinations, and conduct, as well as to specific requirements of the program. The student is expected to assume the initiative in completing all requirements at the time specified.

It is the responsibility of the student to be informed concerning all regulations and procedures required. In no case will a regulation be waived or an exception granted because a student pleads ignorance of the regulation or asserts that he/she was not informed by an advisor or other authority.

Charles University expects all students to adhere to the highest standards of ethics and academic integrity. Students certify that all work (whether an examination, research paper, research project, form of creative expression, or any other academic undertaking) submitted for evaluation, presentation, or publication meets these standards.

All forms of academic fraud are strictly prohibited. An automatic grade of F will result for the entire course if a student is found guilty of academic misconduct. These include, but are not limited to:

- Plagiarism
- Cheating
- Falsification
- Violation of professional ethics
- Misrepresentation or research data

Weekly Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. A fair notice will be made available via email if needed.

The following schedule indicates a general direction and a general distribution of the course's content. Students will be advised by the instructor on particular activities each week: Flexibility is required with regard to the planned field trips (weather conditions are a factor) and to the photographic exhibits that are NOT included in the weekly schedule and will be announced based on their availability in the particular semester. Weekly content will be personalized and expanded based on the attending students' interests and needs.

LECTURE 1 Introductory class; Black&white vs. color; Analog vs. digital; Documentary vs. artistic; Is photography art? What is "genius loci" – an abstract concept materialized in concrete elements of reality; What is style in art? Can style be learned? Should style be taught? Rules of engagement; Rules are great to learn and know but...

LECTURE 2 Breaking the rules and creativity; Subjective vs. objective in art and in photography; Relationship between "mastering techniques" and technology; Pros and cons in different approaches to photographic subjects; Does a "photographic eye" exist? MID-TERM PORTFOLIO EXPECTATIONS, GUIDELINES

LECTURE 3 Field trip to Prague Castle and its vicinity; A practical exercise in the difference of subjective vs. objective in capturing reality, specifically the "spirit of the place" (weather permitting)

LECTURE 4 Group work in the classroom putting together a collective portfolio from the previous field trip; A photographic portfolio (criteria vs. ambitions); How to defend one's artistic view; Which elements do we have control over, and which we don't? What does and what does not represent the "genius loci" in the particular location captured in the portfolio;

LECTURE 5 Elements of design in photography that determine an emotional impact on the viewer; Understanding exposure options; Be in control of your camera, don't allow your camera control you; Technology puts limits on a photographer but not on his creativity!
2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 6 Jan Saudek and nudes in photography; What is art and what is pornography? Is personal taste the only criterion? Pixels and nerdy words matter in today's photography; Elements of design cont. – line, shape, and form expressed as a contrast between light and dark and their distribution in an image
2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 7 Mid-Term portfolios evaluation with a group discussion; Genius loci revisited – what worked and what didn't in the mid-term "spirit of the place" task; GUIDELINES FOR FINAL PORTFOLIO WITH ESSAY
2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 8 Elements of design cont. – texture and pattern – tips and trick for effects that are inherently a part of reality, not a matter of the used technology; Looking is not seeing; Depth of field;

2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 9 Intuitive and spontaneous vs. planned and calculated; A short field trip to practice the difference in calculating vs. intuitive approach; Is genius loci an objective entity? Can subjective approach to the place capture its objective spirit?

2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 10 Elements of design cont. - natural light vs. controlled light; professional vs. amateur – categories of economic rather than artistic nature; Protecting your work – technical, economic, and legal aspects;

2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 11 Elements of design cont. - composition: filling the picture frame, defining the horizon, vertical vs. horizontal, skewing the point of view, framing the image, silhouetting the subject, breaking the rules

2 students' presentations on selected Czech photographers with a discussion

LECTURE 12 Evaluation of final portfolios; Evaluation of the course; An honest Q&A session with an encouragement for the students to discuss any subject related to photography, art, life...and the course itself