

CZECH VISION

26 October – 8 December, 2007

Opening
Thursday, 25 October, 6-8pm



New York - **CZECH VISION** presents the fascinating spectrum of Czech avante garde photography in an exclusive collection of photographs by well-known and yet to be discovered Czech photographers working in the period between World War I and the beginning of the Communist regime in 1948. The exhibition reveals an aspect of photographic history that until now has not received its just recognition.

The emancipation of the Czech Republic from Hapsburg Austria at the turn of the 20th century had a noticeable effect on the arts, including freeing itself from the provincialism of nationalistic themes, and sentimental romanticism became a thing of the past. Prague advanced as the second hotbed of Cubism and Surrealism after Paris.

Czechoslovakia was the melting pot; Czechs lived alongside Slovaks and Germans, Hungarian and Poles. The newly evolving avant-garde photography was open to International influences. Artists were intrigued by "Neue Sachlichkeit" (New Objectivity). The Bauhaus photographic style was reflected in the use of clever framing, diagonal compositions, views from above and below, and in the use of photograms. Avant-garde journals printed images by Albert Renger-Patzsch and Aenne Biermann, as well as works by Alexander Rodchenko and other Soviet Constructivists. The French influence was reflected in the increasing interest in works by Eugène Atget and Man Ray.

Czech photography absorbed and filtered these influences, contemplated and transformed them, allowing its practitioners to create a unique visual language that reflected the modernist ideals of the time. There is something about the Czech photographic aesthetic that is distinctive from all other styles and movements: a hidden strength, a poetry verging on darkness, a respect for formal austerity, and the exceptional beauty of what are, in the end, common themes and objects.

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The work exhibited in **CZECH VISION** illustrates the creative quality of the Czech avant-garde, one of the most important and original branches of the 20th century European art. Some of its biggest names continue to have a strong impact today including František Drtikol (1883-1961), Jaromír Funke (1886-1945), Josef Sudek (1896-1976) and Jaroslav Rössler (1902-1990).

*In conjunction with the exhibition, Hatje Cantz has published **CZECH VISION: Avant-Garde Photography in Czechoslovakia**, edited by Howard Greenberg and Annette and Rudolf Kicken. The book includes a collection of 200 images by more than 40 photographers, many of which are included in the exhibition.*

Information about some of the photographers in **CZECH VISION**:

František Drtikol, whose life-long theme was women, gained international recognition early in his career. For Drtikol, the female body was not only an aesthetic and erotic object, myth and symbol, but also the embodiment of the human soul. He transformed his subjects into mystical figures with his sophisticated use of light.

Josef Sudek was the poet of the Czech avant-garde. Always working in a series, his work reflects nearly the entire scope of Modernism and expresses his love of Prague. His still-lives – drinking glasses, bread, eggs – are camera-condensed compositions of light and his landscapes and architectural photographs open up a fresh vision of the world.

For **Jaromír Funke**, the still life was his field of experimentation. He began by working with geometric forms and their shadows, placing the objects outside the visible frame so that are photographically perceived only as a non-figurative play of shadows. His work was made in direct response to Man Ray's Rayograms. In contrast to Man Ray's work, Funke remained convinced of the need to use a camera to create his imagery.

Jaroslav Rössler began his career as Drtikol's assistant. He worked in the 1920s and 1930s in Paris, creating poetic images of the Eiffel Tower and animated street scenes. He developed the "photolith", a photographic process similar in method to watercolor painting which creates a surrealistic effect.

Many of the prints of **Eugen Wiškovský**, **Jan Lauschmann**, **Václav Zykmond** were recently discovered in hidden or forgotten archives and will be exhibited for the first time.

For further information or to request visuals for press, contact Ali Price at 212 334 0010 or ali@howardgreenberg.com