

INTERPRETATIONS

Prose and Poetry in Photographs by Sobieraj

I highly appreciate two totally different series in the output by Tomasz Sobieraj; these being an evidence of the dichotomy of the artist's creative development, or more likely, his evolution.

Krzysztof Jurecki

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THIS EVOLUTION HAS NOT BEEN AS SMOOTH as one might think. What has been behind, is not merely the observation of life and philosophical thought but also his private experience. In this individual case, photographs express the metamorphosis of life, a next stage being a transfer from a keen observation and an extremely successful insight into the everyday life of Łódź (occasionally hopeless and tragic) - in *The Colossal Gob of a City* expanded series, to sublimed poetry - in the *Trivial Objects*. The latter offer the vision not so much of physical death; rather a question about the eternity, even if this means a mirage or the fossil of life and civilization.

A strongly worded title, *The Colossal Gob of a City* is a quote borrowed from the *Polish Flowers* by Julian Tuwim. This has been the most pessimistic, yet an extremely true photographic documentary on Łódź, I have come across. The artist presenting neglected backyards of the downtown Łódź, just off Piotrkowska Street, illustrated their inhabitants dragged down by the fate of their lives. The approach by Sobieraj has been close to Tuwim, though the poetry by the latter was merely a point of reference to show the fall of the backward, dying Łódź which cannot meet its end since it has been constantly coming back to life, repeating its fate starting with the period of *The Promised Land*.

An introduction to the series contributed by the author depicts the story of a multinational city, stressing an aspect of Jewish spirits ever present there. Sarcastic or humorous elements (*A Crocodile Drinks*) have been replaced with nostalgic and tragic pieces, if not terrifying with their realistic approach, edging on the thriller climate which is quite a rare feature in artistic photography, nevertheless present everyday in tabloid photographs. In the critical realism by Sobieraj a kid playing with an ax or a gun has not been staged. Sad children, as though from the paintings by Witold Wojtkiewicz, and the crippled, have moved further the explication present in the photographs by Weegee and Diana Arbus, while the topic of kid gangsters reaches to William Klein who dealt with this as early as the 50's of the 20th century. Thus, paradoxically, the photography by Sobieraj has been closer to the American concept of the 50's and 60's of the 20th century than to the Polish tradition. Further, this series proves Sobieraj to be a very good and extremely keen portrait maker. There is neither pretence nor arrangement; the artist has illustrated tragic and hopeless sides of life (*A Crazy Hat-Maker*) with ever present air of primitive anti-Semitic sentiments (*Get Out Jews!*), as one of the assumptions of the series has been to reveal and register this feeling in the



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urban space.

The *CrocodileStreet*, inspired with the prose by Brunon Schulz, has been definitely a more poetic series, oriented on phantasmagoric and fleeting nature of vision which has intentionally explored the value of black-and-white photography in order to obliterate, as a final result, the outline of reality by means of a lack of focus of individual takes.

The *Trivial Objects* - a fight to survive and exist, and to leave a print in human memory - had their premiere this year during the Fotoseptiemmbre Festival in San Antonio, the USA. These have offered a specific category of edit and a picture afterimage, as the photographic and painting concepts, connected with psychology of seeing. In this area, some pieces by Sobieraj have been close - with regard to aesthetics and interpretation of the visible world - to photographs by Leszek Żurek.

Applying simple, trivial motives - to quote the artist - he has conjured up dream like, permeating forms with an emotional climate and defined psychological features linked to his latest biography period. In a formal sense, the works follow up the surrealist tradition, rather literary than photographic.

Ewa Latkowska-Żychska

BOOKS

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