

Justice and Peace in the Czech Republic

Jindřich Štreit

Born on 5 September 1946 in Vsetín in the Valachian region (Moravia), Czech Republic. In 1956 the family moved to Těchanov, a village beneath the Jeseníky mountains. He attended grammar school in Rýmařov (1960–1963) and in 1963 began his studies at Palacký University, Olomouc, graduating in art education from the Faculty of Education there in 1967. He was married in 1971. He and his wife Agnes have one daughter Monika.

After graduation he taught at a primary school in Rýmařov, and later became headmaster of the village schools in Sovinec and Jiříkov. Besides teaching and photography he busied himself with various communal activities. Since 1974 he has directed a gallery at Sovinec; since 1998, he has been in charge of a gallery in Bruntál. Since 1981, he has closely cooperated with avantgarde artists from Prague, Bratislava, Brno and other cultural centres in the Czech Republic and abroad.

He was first encouraged to take pictures by his father. In 1964, it was professor Jan Bukovjan who stimulated his interest in photography. As a student,

Štreit took part in a few faculty exhibitions, and in 1967 he had his first oneman show. Since 1972 he has systematically devoted himself to documenting country life, focusing on portrait and the Gypsy community. In the years 1974–77 he took correspondence courses at the Institute of Art Photography: his graduation piece was a set of backstage theatre photographs.

In 1982 he was the only photographer to participate in an unofficial exhibition of alternative art which took place on tennis courts in Prague. His prints provoked the interest of the secret police. He was arrested and remained in custody, finally being sentenced to ten months' imprisonment suspended for two years.

The sentence, passed under two articles of the Criminal Code (defamation of the republic and the head of state), was based on an interpretation of photographs – those exhibited as well as those never made public (after an official examination of his whole photographic archive). The penalty included confiscation of some of the artist's prints and negatives and his camera as the "instrument of crime". Štreit was forbidden to continue his criminal photographic activities and was kept under surveillance. This case is probably unique in the history of photography.

When released from prison, he was not allowed to go back to teaching. First he found a job in a library but after his case was closed he was forced to look for employment in agriculture. But even as a foreman on a state farm he could not be kept from his cultural and artistic activities.

After the Velvet Revolution of November 1989, Štreit's life changed dramatically. Between 1990 and 1993 Štreit was first an employee of the local authority and later of Bruntál museum. In 1994 he became a freelance photographer. He is senior lecturer of documentary photography at the Film Academy in Prague (FAMU) and at the Silesian University in Opava. At the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Music and Drama in Prague he took a higher doctorate and in 2000 he was appointed senior lecturer in the field of photography. Since 1991 he has worked on documentary projects in France, England, Austria, Germany, Japan, China, Hungary and Russia (Buryatia, the Krasnodar region, Ingusetia) but also in the Czech Republic (The Women's Prison, the Břevnov Monastery, People of the Olomouc Region, People of the Mikulov Region, The Road Towards Freedom, People from the Třinec Steelworks, Among Us, Behind the Curtain, Together, Ways of Life, and People of My

Region – Bruntálsko). He is supervising several student projects at universities (e. g. People of the Hlučín Region, Our World, Zlín and its People, and Voluntarily).

He is a member of the Association Q in Brno, the Association of Olomouc artists, the Creative photography actiongroup at the Prague House of Photography and the Artistic community in Prague.

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