

Rineke Dijkstra Portraits

Galerie Rudolfinum

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Press release

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To accompany the exhibition, the publishers Schirmer und Mosel have issued a volume of over eighty photographs by Rineke Dijkstra and commentary by Urs Stahel, the director of the Winterthur Museum of Photography, and Hripsimé Visser, the photography curator of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (ISBN 3-8296-0151- 4). This book is available in Prague with Czech translations of all of the texts.

The exhibition “Rineke Dijkstra - Portraits” had its opening on 13 December 2004 in Paris, in the new museum of photography in the Jeu de Paume, where it remained until 20 February 2005. Afterwards, it was moved to the Winterthur Fotomuseum (11 March to 22 May), to La Caixa in Barcelona (8 June to 21 August 2005) and from 4 November 2005 to 5 February 2006 it was installed in the SMCS, the temporary exhibition spaces of the Museum Stedelijk in the Oosterdokskaade in Amsterdam. In the Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague, the exhibition will last from 1 June to 27 August 2006.

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Exhibition partners

Mondriaan Stichting, Amsterdam; The Royal Netherlands Embassy, Prague; Philips Česká republika s. r. o.; Rezidence Lundborg, Prague

Media partners

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Rineke Dijkstra: Portraits

The presentation of the oeuvre of Rineke Dijkstra is a further, and highly vital, contribution to the development of the trajectory of the long-term artistic dramaturgy of the Galerie Rudolfinum in terms of the formulation of questions closely linked to the problem of identity. From the very outset of the gallery's coming into existence in 1994, the key theme of the exhibition programme emerged as the question, in the widest scope and sense, of group identity and alongside it the understandable questions of the identity of the individual, often placed into contrast with social, political or historic facts. Under present-day conditions, moreover, what appears (particularly in connection with individual identity) a deeply urgent phenomenon is exterior manipulation, which today has unequivocally shifted to the position of the media. Of the many projects that have attempted to uncover, conceptualise or define this vexed matter, we can briefly cite such exhibitions as Václav Stratil's "Stray Dog", Jiří David's "Hidden Images", "Faces and Bodies of the Middle Kingdom" (with the subtitle Contemporary Chinese Painting), the exhibition "František Drtikol – Photographer, Painter, Mystic", the retrospectives of Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin, the cross-section of the oeuvre of Juergen Klauke entitled "Side Effect", the extensive (and in its range unique) display of contemporary Chinese photography "A Strange Heaven"; in more recent years "Heroes" by Ivan Pinkava, the selection of work by Annelies Štrba, the greater part of the retrospective show of Alén Diviš, and most recently the group of photographic portraits by Václav Jirásek from the immediately preceding exhibit, "Industria". In a metaphorical sense, it may also be possible to include in this group such exhibits as Petr Nikl's "Nest of Games", the exhibition "Sonia and the Angels" by Viktor Pivovarov and, in the widest concept of a violated collective identity, both of the exhibitions on the theme of socialist realism, similarly to, for instance, the work "Anthro-Socio (Rinde facing camera)" by Bruce Nauman from the group exhibit "Along the Frontier". The search for and definition of the life-priorities and stances of those of a minority sexual orientation, the problems of those afflicted with incurable diseases, etc. in other words the key challenges of relatively large groups of people who find themselves today, and every day, at the existential crossroads, in situations that force them again and again to seek and postulate questions of personal or group identity, was one of the central clusters of problems at which the large group show entitled "Angel-Angel" took careful aim. Many of the most significant artists exhibiting in the Galerie Rudolfinum – whether in group, thematic or solo exhibits – openly voice (particularly for such creators as Cindy Sherman or Nan Goldin) their adherence and make allusion to the unsurpassed example of the American photographer Diane Arbus, who succeeded in using black-and-white photography with chilling precision to sketch the anatomical details of the depraved identity of the American middle class in the 1960s. The possibility of exhibiting Arbus's oeuvre, one of the chief monuments of 20th century art, has long been one of the efforts of the Galerie Rudolfinum; one of the most significant contemporary artists who also makes conscious reference to Arbus's stimuli is Rineke Dijkstra.

During the last ten years, the Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra (1959) has achieved international renown thanks to her striking portrait cycles, in which she focuses primarily on thoroughly concrete, ordinary people with their own individual fates and emotions. Her large-format portraits are simple, subtly coloured, intensively expressive, well-balanced compositions, and above all, images of an uncommon emotive force and strength, far removed from any artificial stereotypes. For perhaps all of the portraits, it can be said that the artist succeeded in capturing her subjects at the moments when they are most naturally living their own, individual lives, linked to their most personal, instantaneous inner experience at a great distance from the manipulative and artificial world of the media. In her creative

approach, Rineke Dijkstra is transparent, formalistic, precise. There are no photographic tricks or manipulations of the image. The simplicity of the visual means directs all attention towards the person being portrayed, who in his or her individual way reveals a definite uncertainty in front of the camera, a vulnerability that is simultaneously a fragile individuality.

In the early 1990s, Dijkstra began work on her cycle *Beach Portraits*, a series of austere full-frontal shots of young people on beaches in the USA, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Gabon and Ukraine. In this cycle, she focused on the moment when the subjects' stance was only starting to formulate itself, or when it had just disappeared. Fear and uncertainty are evident in the attitudes and expressions, reflecting the existential loneliness of the process of young adulthood. The surroundings are restricted only through the format; a somewhat lower angle of vision of the camera and the use of a flash emphasise often striking details of the local culture and underscore the monumental character of the images.

In several later cycles created in the mid-Nineties, Rineke Dijkstra concentrated on the depiction of intense emotional states. She photographed mothers immediately after they were first handed their newborn children, thus creating views of maternal love that are both touching and shockingly revealing, without any indication of the sentiment often ascribed to motherhood. She photographed toreadors in Portugal upon their return from the bullring – tired, proud, satisfied, even surprised or injured. In England, she created portraits of emotionally vulnerable students, or very young girls in extravagantly sexy outfits in front of discotheques. Her approach, immediate yet somewhat restrained and thus essentially polite, succeeded in this cycle in bridging the gap between the personal and the general. At the same time, she continued to search for the boundaries of the possible within the portrait. The people whom she photographed usually are called by their names, yet at the same time represent specific groups, a phenomenon transcending mere individuality. In this sense, Dijkstra appears both a follower of Diane Arbus and her strongly confrontational and revealing depictions of people, as well as of August Sander, who in the interwar years created a “catalogue” of the individual human typologies of German society.

An important role in Dijkstra's work is occupied by the photographic documentation of changes over time, and the psychological consequences of masks or uniforms. For several years after 1994, she photographed Almerisa, a girl originally from Bosnia, and followed her growth from a terrified child in simple clean clothes into a fashionably dressed, self-confident young woman. How uniforms protect, change and give a person standing is the theme both of her shots of girls from the Buzzclub, as well as those of women soldiers in Israel. In her series from the Berlin Zoo, Dijkstra has attempted a divergent approach. Here, the emphasis of her work rests both in the stance and the expression; the atmosphere of the images in the cycle is more theatrical and their expression is strengthened by the dark forest background.

Among other works of Dijkstra's from the 1990s are the videoclips entitled “The Buzzclub/Mystery World” and “Annemiek”. In both of them, music holds a central role. In the first one, patrons of a disco, both boys and girls, dance to the rhythms of disco sounds, some alone, others in couples tightly embracing. Their surroundings are white, as if in a studio. This utter concentration on the youths filmed, their clothing, their body-language, even their sometimes excessive drunkenness is literally fascinating.

"In her choice of the "post climax" as the starting point of three focal groups of work, Rineke Dijkstra opens up a field of subtle, "weak-willed", submissive insights into the human condition. She shows the first scarring, the first achievement, the first "post-experience" of

young people, and she shows it as the first sign of maturity and depth. She creates portraits that are not a confirmatory ritual but which represent a balance between the individual, the group (the bathers, the mothers, the soldiers) and universal human existence in general in the face of birth and death, thereby developing a new and very individual interpretation of the classical portrait. In the age of brash poses and shrill screams, Rineke Dijkstra's calm, full presence creates a new form of monumentality and a new form of beauty in the photographic portrait." (*Urs Stahel - from the catalogue*)

“The visual language that Dijkstra employs for her reading of the hidden and visible is definitely not rhetorical in nature, but, on the contrary, extremely modest. Yet the introverted silence of the subjects of her portraits is given an almost monumental presence that unambiguously seizes the viewer and never lets go of them. It is all the more remarkable that this happens with figures with whom it is increasingly less obvious that we identify. The vulnerable adolescents and new mothers have been exchanged for others who do not call up immediate sympathy, such as bullfighters, soldiers, yobs: tough machos with a thick armour. But the bullfighters are not toreadors basking in glory; they are depicted after the struggle, exhausted, smeared with dirt and blood, their gaze turned inward. The soldiers, representatives of one of the first and most controversial fighting machines in the world, have just completed an exhausting exercise and appear to have slipped entirely **out** of their role. What links the soldier, the disco girl, the mother and the Polish Venus? Not the group to which they belong, but the simple fact that they are vehicles, possibly to reveal something that is essential to our humanity.” (*Hripsimé Visser – from the catalogue*)

The collection assembled for the Prague exhibition contains 75 works, and is a unified overview of all of the photographic cycles that Rineke Dijkstra completed since the outset of the 1990s. Part of the exhibit are likewise the two previously cited videos, *Buzzclub*, *Liverpool, UK/Mysteryworld, Zaandam, NL* and *Annemiek*, as well as independent portraits and materials from still uncompleted cycles.

Petr Nedoma

Events & Education

Guided tours for the general public

Visitors to the gallery have the opportunity to view the exhibiton with a commentary provided by an employee of the education department on Thursdays, 8 June 22 and June 2006, starting in the Masaryk Study at 16.30.

Afternoon (not only) for Senior Citizens

A joint project with the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

Final Tuesday in the month (27 June 2006)

15.00 Galerie Rudolfinum

Guided tour of the exhibit (Masaryk Study) and coffee break in the Rudolfinum Cafe included in the price of a senior entrance fee

17.00 Museum of Decorative Arts

Glass and Light – 150 years of the glass school in Kamenický Šenov

Guided tour of the exhibit

Entry free of charge

Guided tours for school groups

In the event of interest, teachers of all levels and types of primary and secondary schools may arrange a tour of the exhibit with expert commentary via: E pliska@rudolfinum.org, or by telephone at 227 059 346

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