

Journal of a Voyage

The Erwin Dubský Collection: Photographs from Japan in the 1870s

Due to the sensitive nature of the photographs, the exhibition is held in two thematically commensurate installments: the first between 7 December 2006 and 5 February 2007; the second from 7 February to 15 April 2007.

The exhibition has been prepared in collaboration with the Moravian Gallery in Brno and the National Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Regional Work Section in Brno. State Chateau Lysice.

EXHIBITION CONCEPT

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Filip Suchomel

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MOUNTING AND FRAMING

Antonín Křížek Co., Černošice

CATALOGUE

Journal of a Voyage, The Erwin Dubský Collection: Photographs from Japan in the 1870s
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MEDIA PARTNERS

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Open daily except Mondays from 10.00 to 18.00.

Ramped access

EVENTS & EDUCATION

The programme accompanying the exhibition “Journal of a Voyage, The Erwin Dubský Collection” forms a part of the comprehensive body of programmes organized in connection with the two “Japanese” exhibitions held in Galerie Rudolfinum, i.e. this show and the exhibition “Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation”, to be on view in the Large Gallery from January 11 through April 15, 2007.

Herein we list only those programmes whose dates and/or themes are closely linked with the Erwin Dubský Collection exhibition. For more information on all programmes, visit www.galerirudolfinum.cz and check Galerie Rudolfinum’s other publicity materials.

EVENTS

Thursday, 7 December and Friday, 8 December 2006, 20.00, Archa Theatre
Yasunari Tamai and Vladimír Javorský: Don Quixote of Hakushu

The third project of Archa’s festival of contemporary new-wave Japanese theatre will offer a combination of Japanese dance and Czech dramatic art. The outstanding dancer Yasunari Tamai, student and colleague of Min Tanaka, has collaborated with Prague’s National Theatre actor Vladimír Javorský in the preparation of an original performance on the theme of Don Quixote. Javorský spent a whole summer working and training on Min Tanaka’s Body Weather Farm and has acted in two of Tanaka’s shows for the Archa Theatre. This coming together of the excellent physical art of Yasunari Tamai and the European showmanship of Vladimír Javorský will be presented as an original premiere.

Thursday, 18 January 2007, 16.30, Galerie Rudolfinum’s small gallery
David Labus: The Meiji Period – In Search of a New Identity

The Meiji Period constituted what was perhaps the most radical change in Japanese history: abruptly, the entire Japanese society was forced to seek a new identity – on the national level, in the social and political spheres, as well as in people’s personal lives. The intricate webs of social relationships, too, had to undergo a complete transformation. The outcome of these endeavours engaged in by several generations was put to the test, in a manner that the system’s creators could not have foreseen. Interpretational, rather than factual, the lecture will discuss the Meiji Period within a broader temporal context.

Thursday, 25 January 2007, 16.30, Galerie Rudolfinum’s small gallery
Filip Suchomel: Unexpected Encounters
(Japanese photography of the Meiji and Taisho Periods, 1868–1925, with a brief survey of the pre-World War II period)

The lecture will examine the trajectories of Japanese art after the country’s forced ending of its centuries-long isolation in 1854 by the US navy’s fleet. Under the impact of the abrupt opening of the hitherto completely isolated culture to the outside world, Japan began to adopt indiscriminately everything modern and Western. A wholly unique artistic approach emerged, blending Japan’s well-established traditions and the modern canons of Western culture. There were those Japanese artists who readily embraced the modern trends of artistic expression, while others strived to combine tradition with the new era. As a result, multilayered visual arts came into being, unparalleled in the world.

EDUCATION

Guided tours for visitors

13 and 20 December 2006 at 16.30 (depending on interest, the tour will include the “Acne” exhibition that closes in the large gallery on 30 December 2006)

Afternoon for Senior Citizens

A joint project with the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

Final Tuesday in the month (30 January, 27 February a 27 March 2007)

15.00 Galerie Rudolfinum - Masaryk Study

Guided tour of the exhibit

Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation

Journal of a Voyage / The Erwin Dubský Collection

Coffee break in the Rudolfinum Cafe included in the price of a senior entrance fee

17.00 Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague

17.00 – 19.00 entrance free (not limited to seniors only) applies also for lectures and exhibition tours

30 January 2007

Treasure house - guided tour, PhDr. Petra Matějovičová

Guided tours for schools

Depending on interest, the tour will include the show installed in the large gallery, i.e. “Akné” until 30 December 2006 and “Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation” from 11 January 2007. To arrange the date of the tour, please contact pliska@rudolfinum.org or phone 227 059 346.

Art workshops for schools

Students will learn about Japanese culture through engagement in the themes of the photographs on view; their imagination will be stimulated by simple artistic techniques and methods, complemented by dramatic performances.

For more information and dates of the art workshops, please check www.galerierudolfinum.cz, under “Education”.

A Glimpse of History

On May 16, 1874, the corvette *Erzherzog Friedrich* set sail from Austro-Hungary's military port of Pula on a voyage around the world. Erwin Antonín Anna Dubský was made First Officer of the ship's crew on that mission. A member of an old Bohemian aristocratic family which, in the 19th century, resided at the Moravian chateau in Lysice, Dubský was later appointed to the rank of Frigate Captain in the Austro-Hungarian navy. The warship, equipped with an auxiliary steam engine, sailed from its home port through the Suez Canal to Aden, then proceeded to the coasts of Ceylon, landing eventually in Singapore, a bustling seaport in South-East Asia. From there, the ship turned to the shores of China, docking briefly in the ports of Hongkong and Nagasaki. One of the ship's important destinations was the Japanese Empire. The next ports of call were Kobe and Yokohama, from where some of the crew set out on various inland excursions. Among the expedition's official missions was to observe the transit of Venus over the disc of the Sun. This astronomical phenomenon was the goal of numerous other expeditions to Japan, as Yokohama was one of the most propitious locations for such observations. In December 1874, members of the expedition were granted an audience with Emperor Mutsuhito, delivering to him a message from the Austrian emperor. Afterwards, the ship returned from Japan to Hongkong and, via Manila in the Philippines, continued to Bangkok in Thailand. The corvette's next destinations were the islands of Indonesia, then once again Singapore, Batavia, and – for the third time – Hongkong. The *Erzherzog Friedrich* bode farewell to Asia by sailing back to Yokohama, where the crew spent three weeks before embarking on the long homeward voyage. In August 1875, the ship crossed the Atlantic Ocean, calling at San Francisco in the United States and Valparaiso in Chile, passing through the Strait of Magellan and anchoring at the harbour of Montevideo. On her return voyage, the ship traversed the Atlantic Ocean, touching at the islands of the Azores and finally arriving in her home port in Pula, where the corvette dropped anchor on June 21, 1876.

Erwin Dubský, Art Collector

In the course of the voyage, Dubský amassed a host of artworks, ethnographic material and period documents, totalling more than 1,300 pieces, of which only a fragment has survived. Despite numerous dramatic turns of events, the chateau in Lysice still houses today interesting examples of Japanese and Chinese arts and crafts, including porcelain sets, lacquerware, cloisonné enamels and bronze vessels. There is a superb collection of Japanese weapons, especially swords and sword fittings. Dubský also brought back a number of Japanese publications, a scroll composed of woodblock prints by artists of the plebeian *ukiyo-e* school and original maps (including one of the first Western-style Japanese maps of the world printed in 1872 and a map of Tokyo from 1871). The chateau library is home to a bound two-volume, hand-written journal, in which Dubský recorded his observations and impressions of his extensive, perilous travels. His narrations include depictions of the inhabitants of the countries and lands visited. These journal records attest to Dubský's erudition as an ethnographer, anthropologist, naturalist and geologist. Retiring as Frigate Captain Emeritus to the Lysice chateau, Dubský described in his account such historically unique experiences as the audience with the Japanese emperor and the ride on the Pacific Railroad. Dubský's eagerness to present his art collections to the general public is documented by the fact that a mere month after returning from his voyage, an exhibition was held at the chateau, featuring most of the artefacts he had amassed during his travels.

Collection of Photographs

The best-known part of Dubský's collection of photographs is a set of nine albums and loose cardboard sheets, with more than 500 prints from most of the countries visited by the expedition. Although formerly scholars asserted that Dubský had taken the pictures himself, systematic research has confirmed that the collection is made up of original works by professional artists who pioneered the photographic tradition of recording places of interest. Dubský engaged in the systematic gathering of photographs, visiting photographic studios in the various countries. His endeavours resulted in a collection which is truly exceptional even by international standards. In terms of its size, state of preservation and meticulous selection, it is on a par with the most outstanding visual records of this sort found today in the United States, Great Britain, France and Austria. Yet not long ago, the existence of these exceptional artefacts was still unknown to the public, as for years the photographs had been kept in storage. Their unique nature has been revealed only recently through art-historical research. Dubský's colleague Captain Lehnert made use of the images for the illustration of his book of travels describing the Austro-Hungarian navy ship's transpacific mission.

Key Figures of 19th-century Japanese Photography

The curator of the exhibition has decided to present for public viewing the most comprehensive portion of the collection of photographs. This ensemble of prints originated in the countries of the Far East, namely Japan, China and Thailand. Whereas the Moravian Gallery in Brno showed photographs from all the visited lands of the Far East, the Prague exhibition will feature only the Japan-themed segment of the collection which, on the other hand, will include all 158 works produced by the pioneers of early Japanese photography, among them Ueno Hikoma of Nagasaki, Ichida Sota of Kobe, Uchida Kuichi and Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz, the latter two of whom were active in Tokyo and Yokohama, respectively. The chief themes of their photographic output were the country's popular landmarks and landscape sceneries. The photographers also made the first attempts at staged photography that centred on traditional Japanese activities, such as the tea ceremony, the playing of musical instruments, dancing, meditation, martial arts training, etc. Studio portraits of beauties and dandies assume a significant place in the collection. Ueno Hikoma (1838–1904) was one of the first Japanese photographers to open his own studio in Nagasaki in 1862, only one year after the first studio under the name of *Eishindo* had been established in Edo (today's Tokyo). Hikoma focused on nature scenes on the island of Kyushu, soon receiving wide public acclaim especially from his non-Japanese clientele that frequented his studio. Hikoma's reputation became widespread due to his interest in portraying prominent personalities who included the first members of the newly ascendant ruling class of the Meiji Period (1868–1912), established from lower-class samurai. Alongside studio portraiture and landscape views, Ueno Hikoma engaged in documentary photography, capturing in his pictures natural disasters and war events of the initial years of the Meiji era.

Another Japanese artist whose oeuvre is well represented in Dubský's collection is Ichida Sota (1843–1896), who was professionally active in the port of Kobe. His views of Kobe, Osaka and Kyoto are among the very first images of the midland of Honshu Island, ever made by a Japanese photographer. His main themes were vistas of landmarks in the Kansai region; in lesser measure, he devoted himself to staged photography. In 1877, Ichida began to show his works at national industrial exhibitions, where he received his first awards.

Uchida Kuichi (1844–1875) was a highly skilled photographer who had an ability to capture the fleeting moment. He was born in Nagasaki, but opened his studio in Tokyo. Although he lived to be only 31 years old, he entered the history of Japanese photography due to his modern approach to studio work. His best-known images are the portraits of Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken, created in 1872. For a long time, these were the only official photographs of Japan's head of state and his consort; two versions of these portraits form part of the Lysice chateau's collection.

Few people in this country are aware that among the first photographers to have worked in Japan was Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz (1839–1911), born in Chomutov, Bohemia. Between 1871 and 1885, his Yokohama studio trained an entire generation of Japanese artists. Stillfried arrived in Japan in 1863. Influenced by the success of the new, flourishing commercial sphere of photography, he decided to try his luck in the field. Soon after gaining his first experience under the tutelage of Felice Beato, who had settled in Yokohama in 1863, he became an independent photographer, opening in 1871 in Yokohama his own studio that operated under the name Messrs. Stillfried & Co. His business prospered, as there was an increasing demand for photographs of the country among visitors to Japan. Stillfried specialized in views of famous sites – a genre that was popular in Yokohama and other cities opened to Westerners and their commercial undertakings. As early as 1872, he produced his first albums comprising his *Views*. His earliest compositions are almost certainly derived from those he knew from his mentor Felice Beato, an Italian-born photographer active in Japan between 1863 and 1877. Stillfried's name is also inseparably linked with another genre of photography, referred to as *Types*, which were portrayals of native inhabitants, their traditions and customs. Stillfried also made a wide variety of portraits featuring exotic beauties dressed in ornate costumes and arranged in European poses. As none of his predecessors had produced such portraits, they can be considered a distinctive feature of Stillfried's oeuvre. In 1881, Raimund Stillfried left his photographic studio in Japan and returned to Europe. The two categories of photographs by Stillfried, i.e. *Views* and *Types*, constitute a significant part of Dubský's collection, numbering some eighty pieces. It was the work of Stillfried and his teacher Beato that gave a sense of direction to Japanese photography in the late 19th century. Their images became models that inspired the next generation of Japanese photographers, who focused their attention primarily on a Western clientele. However, they were unable to match the artistic and aesthetic level achieved by their masters. They resorted to repeated clichés that became particularly apparent at the turn of the century in the works of photographers specializing in commercial products made for clients from abroad. The Lysice chateau's collection includes no such examples of the gradual decline in aesthetic quality, as the entire ensemble was created much earlier.

For the first time ever, visitors to the Prague exhibition *Journal of a Voyage, The Erwin Dubský Collection: Photographs from Japan in the 1870s* will be able to enjoy all 158 Japanese photographs from the Dubský collection, which were produced in the then popular technique employing albumen printing paper. After the closing of the exhibition, the prints will be placed back in storage at the Lysice chateau, not to be shown again for a long period.

The exhibition is accompanied by a beautiful book, published with the financial assistance of The Japan Foundation. The volume comprises a catalogue featuring in detail all the images of Japanese origin. In their texts, the authors examine the historical background of the transpacific voyages of the Austro-Hungarian Navy's ships and discuss the journals kept by seafarers in those days. The catalogue provides a survey of the beginnings and development of photography in the Far East in the second half of the 19th century.

Filip Suchomel

Small gallery

Due to the sensitive nature of the photographs, the exhibition is held in two thematically commensurate installments:

the first between 7 December 2006 and 5 February 2007

the second from 7 February to 15 April 2007.

Admission

Regular admission for both installments	70 Kč
Regular admission for one installment only	50 Kč
Regular admission to include large gallery display ("Acne", to close on 30 December 2006 and "Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation", running from Jan. 11 to April 14, 2007)	130 Kč

Reduced admission for both installments	35 Kč
Reduced admission for one installment only	25 Kč
Reduced admission to include large gallery display ("Acne", to close on 30 December 2006 and "Shomei Tomatsu: Skin of the Nation", running from 11 January to 14 April 2007)	75 Kč

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from 10.00 to 17.30

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