

LEARNING BY SEEING

A project-in-progress, curated by Jerzy Olek / Poland

To see oneself, as one really is, who has not tried that over and over again?

I possess a 1970s hand-held mirror from an optician's store with the following inscription on the back: "Vision deficiency: one in three people does not have full vision". And in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's magical book "The Little Prince" we hear the fox say: "Only with the heart can one truly see well, the essential is hidden to the eye".

In spite of, or rather because of these widely spread vision deficiencies – both physical and psychological – so far 70 artists from the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Mexico, Poland, Romania and Spain have plucked up the courage to look at and critically question themselves in order to reveal what they have found to each other as well as to the visiting audience.

How do I see myself? With what things do I surround myself? What is typical for me and what determines me? Who am I, after all?

Not only do we have to use our eyes and heart to be able to answer these questions but also our intellect. Furthermore, there has to be a readiness to get involved, to be confronted with self-images that are difficult to understand and anything but simple and realistic representations.

These 70 different photographic self-reflections automatically lead to a dialogue about difference, diversity and cultural descent. Through self-reflection and knowledge of oneself, a sharper perception and understanding of the other emerges.

Sometimes these self-portraits are humorous and ironic, for most of the time, however, they are disconcerting. In many cases they reveal alienation, disintegration or even destruction of the self, in other cases there is a kind of revelation which leads to the very core of an individual, its DNA. Others still reveal only a wide open staring eye of what appears to be a strange creature, half man, half animal, or simply a tuft of hair, a shadow, a structure or a deformed skull scantily held together with a worn ribbon.

Who are we behind our façade, behind our eyes? The visiting audience in the different countries are invited to examine the portraits carefully and discuss them with the artists present.

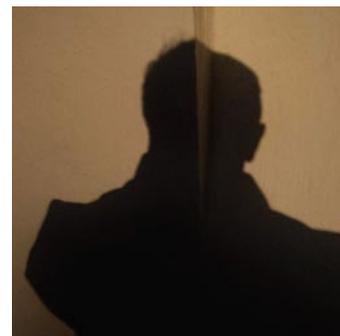
Participating Artists

Czech Republic

Ladislav Hartmann, Viteclav Krejci, Petr Mosko, Rudolf Nemecek, Iva Pavlatova, Jití Pytlík, Pavel Rejtar, Michaela Styjskalova, Jaroslav Tomanova, Roman Unger



Jiri Pytlík (*1966)



Ladislav Hartmann (*1945)

France

Patrick Bailly-Maitre-Grand, Jean-Marc Biry, Jean de Breyne, Evelyne Coutas, Laurence Demaison, Christophe Galatry, Yannick Hedel, Alain Harveau, Philippe Paret, Riwan Tromeur



Patrick Bailly-Maitre-Grand (*1945)



Alain Hervéou (*1959)

Germany

Claus Bach, Kurt Buchwald, Peter Buchwald, Mona Filz, Frank Herrmann, Wolf Kahlen, Annegret Soltau, Jaqueline Sorrer, Viola Vassilieff, Gisela Weimann



Annegret Soltau (*1946)



Gisela Weimann (*1943)

Mexico

Oscar Aguire, Vidal Berrone, Erica Corral, Ingalora Dwyer, Helen Escobedo, Cecilia Hurtado, Cristina Kahlo, Jose Martinez, Shannon Reece, Norma Suarez



Helen Escobedo (*1934)



José Antonio Martínez (*1950)

This contemporary exhibition concept reflects Jerzy Olek's cosmopolitan thinking and his co-operative work as an artist, curator and professor. In the engineering process an artist from each participating country functions as co-curator and organizer on location and proposes 10 colleagues who send Olek their digitalised self-images on a CD. He undertakes the final selection and organises the printing and mounting of the images.

In 2008 the number of artists has grown to 70 from 7 countries who also belong to different generations.

The first presentation of the project with the participation of artists from four countries was organized by Rudolf Nemecek and shown in a beautiful, vaulted gallery in the Nové Mesto nad Metují castle in the Czech Republic in August 2005. The second show followed in the beginning of 2006. It was co-ordinated by Kurt Buchwald and shown at the "Fotogalerie am Helsingforser Platz" in Berlin. The next exhibition took place in November 2006 in the historic Casa de las Conchas in Salamanca and was prepared and realized by Angiola Bonanni. Bonanni also compiled the catalogue. It was the third stage of the project, enriched by the works of 10 Spanish artists.

This year 20 new artists from Mexico and Romania have been included. Irmi Flohr and Enrique Nunez suggested the Mexican artists and prepared a show in San Miguel de Allende in October within the renowned Festival Cervantino. Andor Kömives and Dorel Gaina proposed the 10 Romanian photographers and Kömives organised an exhibition in the Art Museum in Cluj to take place in November/December.

The artists who attend the openings not only experience generous hospitality and inspiring meetings and discussions, they also enlarge their self-perception as well as their perception of others against a cultural-historical backdrop:

- Nové Mesto nad Metují, founded in 1501, is one of the most beautiful Bohemian cities.
- The "Fotogalerie am Helsingforser Platz" in Berlin looks back on a long tradition as one of the leading photo galleries in the East of the city.
- The Casa de las Conchas (Palace of the Shells), that houses a public library and a lively cultural scene has an even longer history dating back to 1493. The unusual palace integrates Gothic, Renaissance and Moorish elements.
- San Miguel de Allende is a colonial town famous for its unique atmosphere.
- The National Museum of Art in Cluj resides in the former Bánffy-Palais, a baroque building from the 18th century designed by the German architect Johann Eberhard Blumann.

The complex effect of Jerzy Olek's simple concept is the contamination of more and more countries with his virus of passion for art and integration by using personal contacts of the growing number of infected artists and art institutions. Through the investigating look at themselves and others the artists and their audiences will hopefully learn to see the essential part of the other with their hearts.

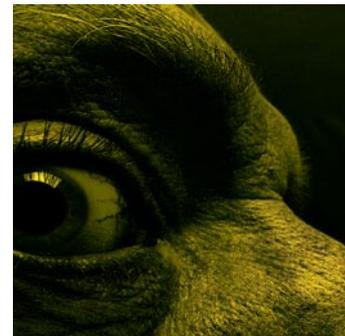
Gisela Weimann, Berlin 2008 (English translation: Christina Nicholson)

Poland

Anna Glinka, Agnieszka Grandowicz, Michal Jakubowicz, Waldemar Jama, Boguslaw Michnik, Jerzy Olek, Jan Rusiniak, Marcin Szcyrba, Witold Wegrzyn, Marzena Zawal



Jerzy Olek (*1943)



Jan Rusiniak (*1964)

Romania

Stefan Badulescu, Alina Bondrea, Andrei Budescu, Istvan Feleki, Dorel Gaina, Radu Ilea, Andor Kömives, Mira Marincas, Alexandru Radulescu, Carmen Vasile



Istvan Feleki (*1955)



Andor Kömives (*1958)

Spain

Patricia Allende, Angiola Bonanni, María Fernández Armero, Angeles G. Pariso, Eberhard Hirsch, Anibal Merlo, Diego Moya, Claudio F. Pérez Míguez, Christina Rendina, Johanna Speidel



Patricia Allende (*1954)



Angiola Bonanni (*1942)