

Dainius JUNEVIČIUS
Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, Vilnius, Lithuania

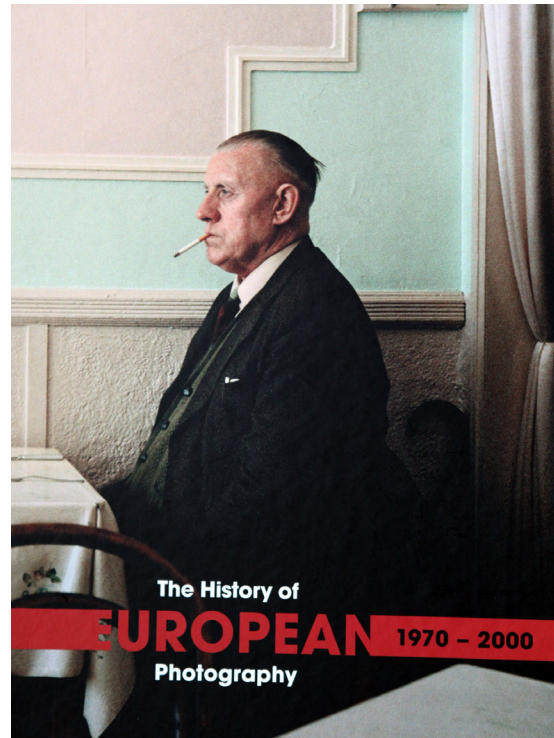
THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN PHOTOGRAPHY, VOLUME III. 1970–2000

BOOK REVIEW

Ed. Václav Macek. *The History of European Photography, Volume III. 1970–2000*. Produced by Central European House of Photography; FOTOFO and Eyes On – Month of Photography Vienna, supported by the Department for Cultural Affairs of the City of Vienna.

Published in late 2016, the volume of two bulky books of large format marks the end of the project on the 1900–2000 history of European photography of the Central European House of Photography (*Stredoeurópsky dom fotografie*) born in Bratislava and Vienna. The previous volumes dedicated to the periods 1900–1938¹ and 1939–1969² came out in 2010 and 2014 respectively. The rationale of the project is explained by the simple fact that there has not been a single publication to date which would incorporate the histories of photography of all present-day European countries. For example, the Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century Photography puts the photography of Eastern Europe at a disadvantage with a mere eight pages of text.³ Not only East European but also other smaller European countries could also feel that they were being represented inadequately in the narrative on the history of European photography.

To eliminate these frustrations, an ambitious pan-European project rallying substantial support in different European countries was initiated. Implemented in 10 years, the project originated not in a central location but in one of the countries where the feeling of dissatisfaction with culture in the “periphery” being known insufficiently (and



“under-represented”) could be the greatest. The goal was to collect information about the development of photography in 35 European countries, from Iceland to Russia and from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean Sea, for the period from 1900 to 2000, and issue a multi-volume publication on its basis. More information on the project and its goals and the previously published volumes is available on the project website⁴. The website also features previous reviews and outlines, and valuable reviews on the second volume.⁵

Two books were required to encompass the histories of photography of each period. This resulted in a total of six books and 2 400 pages of concentrated text and well-chosen illustrations. The big picture of the twentieth century European photography was created by 79 thoroughly selected authors who are researchers of photography in their respective countries and whose names are a quality mark of the publication. For example, the Lithuanian photography is presented by M. Matulytė and A. Narušytė in a competent and interesting manner.

The political map of Europe underwent several changes over the century. The publishers illustrate each book with political maps that show changes, but the present-day countries (except Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia) are represented on the basis of geographical division. This principle is not perfect and may raise reasonable reproaches about the consistency of the narrative, the presentation of the interrelations in the development of photography of different countries, the attribution of photographers to the history of one or another nation and the presentation of the history of photography in isolation from the surrounding context. The reader just has to bear in mind that, although the chosen path of the current political geography is not the best one, any other solution would be an even greater burden on the narrative.

In the beginning, my approach towards the division of the century into three periods (1900–1938, 1939–1969 and 1970–2000) by the publishers was very critical. Only one caesura is related to an important event on this continent, i.e. the beginning of the Second World War (1939) rather than its end which

brought the great geopolitical changes. Since all the three volumes have already been issued, the question of periodization appears less relevant as we can read the sheets on each country’s history of photography in a consistent way, finding the reviews devoted to it in each volume. In most cases the continuity of the narrative is ensured by the same authors who wrote about each of the three periods.

The thirty-year history of European photography covers about 800 pages with 400 illustrations. It encompasses 36 articles by 45 authors on photography in 35 countries (photography of East and West Germany is still presented separately), and mentions about 3 000 names. Most of the photographers were born in the second half of the century and later. Over that time Europe witnessed the disappearance of the unnatural boundaries dividing the continent into two civilisations. Europe has healed its wounds, but the scars will remain for years. This process left the Western countries almost intact, and brought more rapid economic and technological progress for the Eastern countries and the restoration of statehood for the third countries.

The chapters devoted to individual countries are presented as separate sheets featuring the theme and the photographers’ names on the cover page and containing the photographers’ biographies at the end (although the lists of references of separate countries appear at the end of the respective volume). The photography of each country presented in this way acquires relatively equal rights in the book, but the level of the art of photography in different countries is certainly not evened out. The absolutely tragic history of Albanian photography determined by the lack of photographic materials and cameras and by the regime, as well as the photography of small Iceland and Luxembourg have their place next to the photography of France and Germany, the dictators of mainstream fashion.

All the chapters provide an adequate political and historical context. Of course, repetition is not avoided when dealing with countries with similar political history. The invited contributors seem to have received only the general guidelines of the project, with much freedom in choosing their form of

writing and highlighting the key events and trends as well as the influences of political and cultural life. The range of contributors is quite varied. For example, Pierre-Jean Amar, the author of the article on French photography, gives much attention to the photographic market, festivals and publishers. The Russian photography historians Irina Chmyreva and Yevgeny Berezner see the exhibition held on the 150th anniversary of the history of photography in 1989 as an event deserving a mention. Probably the criticism of each country profile should be left to the critics of those countries, but there is no doubt that the reader will encounter remarkable discoveries in the story of each country. The reader has an interest not only in the evolution of the art of photography in different countries, but also in the manner of analysis, writing and presentation by art critics who review it.

However, the book cannot be considered the history of European photography. It is a mosaic of the histories of photography of European countries and a good resource for a general study at the level of the continent. An undisputed advantage of this publication is that it provides the possibility for comparative studies covering the whole of Europe. The bibliography, indexes and photographers' biographies permit comprehensive studies of the material.

Nonetheless, will this multi-volume publication change the established system of presenting European culture? Will researchers of other spheres of European art (e.g. architecture, painting or literature) take this path?

The book is worth studying by students and teachers, critics and curators of photography, and maybe even photographers, and for this reason it should be present at least at several Lithuanian libraries as a tool for the knowledge of the history and criticism of European photography. For many readers and even specialists who are well familiar with photography of European countries this publication may become the first source for their explorations of photography of a particular country.

Notes

¹ *The History of European Photography: 1900–1938*, ed. Václav Macek, (Bratislava: Central European House of Photography, 2010).

² *The History of European Photography: 1939–1968*, ed. Václav Macek, (Bratislava: Central European House of Photography, 2014).

³ Alla Myzelev, „Photography in Russia and Eastern Europe“ in *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, ed. Lynne Warren, (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2006), 1368–1375.

⁴ „The History of 20th Century European Photography“ accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.historyof-photography.eu/>.

⁵ Matt Damsker, „Photo Books: Important Two-Volume Set On Europe Photographic History“, *E-Photo Newsletter* Issue #182, 8/5/2011. <https://www.iphotocentral.com/news/article-view.php/192/182/1143> accessed October 10, 2016, and Tomas Pabedinskas, „The Many Histories of Photography“, *Echo Gone Wrong* <http://echogonewrong.com/the-many-histories-of-photography/>, accessed October 10, 2016.

Gauta 2017-09-25

Parengta spaudai 2017-10-02

Dainius JUNEVIČIUS

Ph.D. student, Lithuanian Culture Research Institute,
Address: Saltoniškių g. 58, LT-08105, Vilnius, Lithuania

E-mail: dainius.junevicius@gmail.com