

Dita Pepe

Borders of Love: Trauma as Motivation to Create Art. Photography as Therapy

MY TRAUMA
IS NOT ONLY MINE

In art, we cross beyond our everyday lives.

- Jiří Šípek

Abstract

This work, entitled “Borders of Love: Trauma as Motivation to Create Art. Photography as Therapy”, is defined by a set of research questions: Is it possible through an artistic experiment connected to examining the topic of love to learn to understand love better and express it better? How is it even possible to perceive and understand love? And can you, through art, live a fuller life, have better relationships with loved ones and those around you, and become more empathetic? Within this work, I would like to establish the initial premise that within my creative profession my own trauma served from the start as strong motivation to create art. But creating one-off works of art does not represent an absolute solution to the problems connected to living through trauma. Healing a deep wound on the soul is not a matter of one or two years, but work for your entire lifetime. I see photography primarily as therapy, not as a means to fulfill my artistic ambitions or as a livelihood. I purposefully do not take on commercial projects; I choose strong and important topics that shape me and have a very positive influence on my life, or at least facets of it.

Key words

Artistic Research. Autoethnography. In-depth Talks. Love. Perspectives Sharing. Photography. Role-playing Method. Therapy. Trauma.

EXTREME Topics

More than thirty years ago, not long after my eighteenth birthday, I ran away from home. What was happening then in my life crossed my *borders of love*. Only much later did I understand that the proper term to describe my adolescence would be *traumatic*.

Now, my daughter is eighteen and I am thinking about what a different starting line for life I was standing on at her age. This book was born in parallel to my older daughter’s adolescence, which has enabled me through work on individual chapters to knowingly and purposefully relive and examine certain topics connected to love that I – personally or via my loved ones – have lived through and experienced. Together with the artistic work, various feelings have appeared. And so for individual chapters I have invited imaginary therapists – including many interesting researchers and artists as well as people who have analyzed the topic from purely personal perspectives and experiences.

Why did I decide to open the topic of my trauma after so many years? Despite the feeling that I have processed everything painful in my life, that I can be happy, that I was able to create a functional family and live in a long-term relationship while still successfully pursuing photography, which fulfilled me professionally? There were many reasons, which were intertwined and related. One was the fact that I unintentionally passed on my perceptions, fear, tension, anxiety, and permanent worries to my older

daughter. Another was the discovery that my partner felt unloved and unappreciated by me. And after all the crises in our partnership, I fell crazily in love, unable to rise above unrequited feelings but instead feeding my fantasies, which grew stronger, and began to have trouble distinguishing fact from fiction. As if my inner life were balancing on the edge.

I saw my concept of love – and my approach to it – as restricted by a border that was, in my case, distorted under the weight of “traumatic” experiences in adolescence. While I was coming up with a name for the project, “Borders of Love” seemed the most fitting. Especially because interpretation of the name – just as with the term “love” – cannot be unambiguous.

When I started working on the project *Borders of Love*, I believed that working on the book would open a new world for me – as happened to me with my years-long collection of self-portraits (*Dita Pepe: Self-Portraits 1999 – 2014, 2014*), which – with varying intensity – I have been taking since 1999. Through this collection, characterized by portraits of people with me accompanying them as their alter egos, I had the chance to enter an intimate closeness with complete strangers. Thanks to these encounters, I gained access to their perspectives on the world, and I could be inspired by each individual and reflect on my own life. Through my photography, which required close personal contact, I had the chance to compare different conceptions of life, linger over them, carve out space for

ways to better know myself and the circumstances in which I live. Thanks to the opportunity to compare, I had the chance to try to start working better with others, while also learning to feel better when by myself. Working on self-portraits helped me find something in myself that I would otherwise have had a hard time finding: the ability to communicate, listen, feel with others and still be able to look at my life from above, detached. While working on *Borders of Love*, I became convinced that it would help me find my purpose, a kind of ability to feel love and mainly to express it, especially to my loved ones. Because somewhere deep inside me lives a fear of disappointing and of pain. Also a feeling of desperation, which can be created only by those closest to me through their behaviour. Even with a rational approach to matters, it is hard for me to change the program that is deeply rooted in my head. I know about it, I see it as an error in the system, and I try to work with it. It is hard; I cannot communicate directly; my methods for getting rid of anxiety are not explicit.

Sociologist and expert consultant on this work Lucie Jarkovská commented on this project as follows: “You want for it to be concealed. This walking on tiptoes reflects the way in which the topics you’ve opened in this book appear in your life and shows how hard it is to resolve some issues, name them, reveal them to others. For me personally, your concealment is key to reading your constant uncertainty about things working out, and you always try to

mask your fears – like when you were taking pictures with Darina and Magdalena – you’re constantly creating the illusion of calm, that everything is alright and under control. Because when something falls apart, absolutely everything falls apart. I understand that well. I just ask whether it’s also understood by readers who will open the book without being prepared, without knowing you, knowing anything about the topic of abuse and healing from trauma.”

Yes, walking around on tiptoes is a good analogy. Because it has another meaning for me. It is about a skill requiring constant repetition of a certain behaviour in an attempt to strengthen specific muscles. Walking on tiptoes means cramps and permanent stress. Unending training also represents the chance to advance and function. It is a strategy enabling disconnecting from the ground, being prepared to fly away, to escape.

MOTIVATION to Work and Create Art

The motivation for writing this work was unrequited love. It happened that I began to live more in my imagination and fantasies, which were unrealistic, and so could not function in ordinary life – as Dita Pepe, who has a husband and two daughters and lives in a beautiful setting in the mountains. I became addicted to thinking about that man. I hoped – and later began to be convinced – that the time and energy I devoted to examining the borders of love would help me return to the real world and finally begin again to perceive the everyday expressions of

love from my loved ones as before.

In the process of creating this work, I have felt many changes. Today I can say that they were for the best – I am functioning better than when I was living through my unfulfilled relationship. Engaging my brain in creative work turned out to be correct and above all a functional solution to my situation at the time. While working on this book, I experienced various other themes connected to love. As if various muscles of mine were activated and led me to diverse forms of love. I remembered my childhood, love as I saw it as a young girl, as I learned about it then. In my thoughts, I returned to the time of my adolescence. The hardest part for me was writing the chapter about paternal love, through which I returned again and again to a massive and systemic traumatic experience that influenced my life once and for all. It was the last part I had to write, and I kept looking around for excuses so I would not have to start working on it. It was hard. Even just putting into words what I had lived through as part of my trauma seemed crazy to me. Writing and deleting what I had written was part of the process. As was feeling pressure on my chest, the salty taste of tears, and the poetic paradox of objects created from my used tissues. After finishing the chapter on paternal love, I felt warmth, relief. For a first reader, I gave the text to Bára, in whose living room in Prague near Letná, I was able to write it. At her place, I could let myself cry, be alone, and let out my emotion. During those days, no one called me, no one wanted anything from me. I took the time

off. I needed time and also distance for writing. I purposefully did not want to be explicit, to hurt anyone. It is not only me in all of that. My trauma is not only mine. It includes my whole family, who lived through the trauma and its aftermath for many years with me – and are still living through it. We just learned various strategies for surviving and functioning. It has been going on for more than thirty years...

Trauma as an IMPETUS to Create Art

A wide range of artistic works already exist on the strength of trauma and artists’ deep internal motivation to find a way to survive their trauma through art. However, we cannot understand many of them as therapeutic when looking back without knowledge of the context, because even the artists themselves might never have spoken of them in this way. After all, experts were only able to carefully describe such posttraumatic stress disorder based on research with soldiers returning to America from the Vietnam War in the 1970s. Moreover, generally speaking, opening and reliving a traumatic event is something fundamentally unpleasant, because many people still live with the mistaken assumption that not talking about a trauma means forgetting it – and so healing. But that is not true. Many effects of trauma then get reflected in people’s lives – and also in their art, although they are often completely unaware and sometimes even deny it.

For many years, speaking about trauma was taboo. We can only guess whether Leoš Janáček, after the

death of his beloved daughter Olga while composing *On an Overgrown Path* (1900 – 1912), one of his most intimate cycles of piano pieces, experienced an effect expected primarily at therapy: relief when his active creation helped him withstand and survive his acute pain.

And would Alexander McQueen, one of the most significant and talented fashion designers at the turn of the millennium, have created such controversial and distinctive fashion collections without his deep trauma? Was it not trauma that enabled him to go beyond the border of everything conceivable? In a documentary about him released by Ian Bonhôte and Peter Ettedgui (2018)¹ after his death, McQueen talked about how as a young man he was abused by his brother-in-law and that he witnessed violence against his sister. About trauma, he said, “My oldest sister was badly beaten up by her husband. And when you’re eight years old... all you want to do is make women look stronger.” His nephew said his art was “a way of protecting women and himself by creating these strong women who looked like they had armor on.” McQueen died by committing suicide in 2010.

In the early phase of thinking about the meaning and form of my work, a vital work for me was the book *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past* (2015)

by Peter A. Levine, where I came across an essay about trauma being passed down to future generations. “In one pivotal experiment, mice were exposed to the neutral (if not agreeable) scent of cherry blossoms. This neutral scent was then followed by an aversive electrical shock. After several pairings, the mice froze in fear when the scent was presented alone, in the absence of the shock. No surprise – this is a typical example of Pavlovian conditioning. However, what is astonishing about the experiment was that this same robust conditioned response was retained through at least five generations of progeny. In other words, when exposed to the scent of the cherry blossoms, the great-great-grandchildren of the experimentally conditioned mice froze in fear just as though they themselves had been conditioned to the shock.” (Levine, 2015, pp. 191-192) After reading this pivotal study, it occurred to me that unfortunately I had unknowingly passed on my trauma to my daughters and that to open it completely and name it would be how I would process it for the future – and how they would have to process it.

CLOSENESS

The very start of this project was a series of photographs that I created in 2018 with a Polaroid camera from the 1970s as one of the very first photographic reactions to texts about therapy that I had read, specifically about prolonged embrace therapy. This was discovered by the American doctor Martha G. Welch and is intended to help with damaged relationships between parents and

children. I learned of the prolonged embrace method from child psychologist Jirina Prekop, who adapted it for the Czech environment and then successfully spread it here. The method is relatively controversial, and many experts do not agree with it. I can personally imagine how, based on negative experiences, the prolonged embrace of a parent can be seen by a child not as an expression of security, certainty, and love, but as a form of abuse. Nevertheless, based on this method, I created a series of embraces with my loved ones. For this purpose, I discussed this method with them. While taking the photographs themselves, I realized how physical contact is not a matter of course for us and how feelings during it are new, unknown, strange. I see the experience of taking these pictures as deeply inspirational for my further photographic direction.

From that time, I began to record all topics connected to love that might potentially interest me. There were quite a lot of them and for this work I later had to be selective. In recent years, I have been to many lectures and conferences on the topic and begun to see a benefit in interdisciplinary connections. I got to know specific people who dealt with the topic of love and tried to entice them and acquire them as experts, specialists, and consultants for this work of mine. I contacted some of them by email, some by phone, always trying to arrange a meeting in person. Some of these people I had known of previously and had long followed their work, while I learned of others through the topics I wanted to process.

¹ Author’s note: As seen at 34:51 and 36:55 in the documentary film.

In connection to the professional information I gained, both personally and through other people's experiences, I took pictures of the topic in parallel, with some of the photos serving me only as sketches and others being dead ends. I took photos for each text and interview I added. However, sometimes I reversed this working principle, such as with the collection on porn stars, where I added a suitable text to photos taken long ago. I also worked with my family archive, photos taken by me, my husband Petr, and even my father; I drew essential inspiration from the archive of Hana Gerzanicová. In some of the series, I staged myself for the given purpose; I did not only take portraits of objects of love. While researching the topic of pedophilia, I had to accept the fact that within my time limitations I would not be able to present the topic visually in a way that was interesting for me and ethically appropriate.

In any case, I would label the entire process of creating this project as an active confrontation between me and feelings connected to love. During my work, I was constantly realizing how sharing the perspectives of other people was deepening my ability and sensitivity to notice and see expressions and evidence of love in moments where I would not have sought them before.

METHODS

While working on the project *Borders of Love*, I gradually confirmed the benefit of confronting my preconceptions of the world with other perspectives. With great determination and

conviction, I sought and found people I could make enthusiastic about cooperating on the book and who then through their experience or focus helped me open another perspective on examining the topic of love.

In my work, I started from several methodological bases, primarily from autoethnography, in other words ethnographic research on the researcher themselves. For example, Martin Novák's (2015) master's thesis on this topic gives the primary sources of Adams et al. (2015), Anderson (2006), Ellis et al. (2011), and Geertz (2000). As an autoethnographer, I took an objective position toward myself and looked at my experiences from various (both close and distant) perspectives so that I could understand them otherwise than merely introspectively – instead, through another person's point of view. I took up these perspectives especially through interviews with various experts, people with atypical opinions, people with borderline experiences, and individuals with practical experience related to my topics. To gain information, I primarily used the method known as the “understanding interview” from Kaufmann (2010) and so gained intimate closeness to the ways in which other people looked at my topic. The approaches of perspective imaging, distancing myself from and getting closer to my own experiences, self-distancing, and understanding interviews helped me create a field of possible images and understandings, a thematic terrain, a colourful mosaic of points of view on the topic that were both artistically imaginative and artistically critical, cognitively shared

and cognitively critical. Everything was gradually stored and accumulated in a picture of my newly seen experiences that can be considered artistically and scientifically processed and shared.

The understanding interview method “draws from various techniques in qualitative and empirical research, primarily ethnographic work with informants. Qualitative data are centered in speech recorded on a dictating machine, which becomes the main element for interpretation. It thus draws from common techniques for semi-structured interviews.” (Kaufmann, 2010, p. 12)

“For an interviewer to confidentially connect to their partner's world of feelings and thoughts, they must completely put aside their own ideas and conceptual categories. They must think only about the fact that in front of them stretches an unknown world full of treasures. Each personal universe has its treasures that can give us an enormous amount. For this, however, it is necessary to avoid any sign of rejection or animosity, no matter what the speaker's thoughts or actions. The one thing they must do is try to understand, with affection and appreciation and also an intense longing for understanding.” (Kaufmann, 2010, pp. 60-61)

Methodologically, this work also relies on the concept of artistic research, where a scientific work is understood also as an artistic experiment, even though given the nature of art it is not possible to achieve exact and unambiguous research results that could be

universally relived and repeated.

In the introduction to *Artistic Research: Is There Some Method*, Alice Koubová (2017) wrote that artistic research “exploits new possibilities by deconstructing the traditional dualities of European thinking, like the duality between science and art, perception and thinking, subjectivity and objectivity, body and mind” (p. 8).

I will close the section on methods with the statement that I worked on the text of the work with a team of language experts, whose participation in the project included transcribing interviews, editing texts, proofreading, and translating to English or Czech.

SUMMARY

The book *Borders of Love* is the practical (and creative) part of a dissertation titled “Trauma as Motivation to Create Art. Photography as Therapy,” which will, after its defense, be available from the Library of Tomas Bata University in Zlín. The aim of the theoretical dissertation is, on the basis of this published practical part, to model output of how, within photography, to approach art so that it has therapeutic effects. In individual chapters of this book, I express my thoughts on topics that are the most personal to me. It is on these topics that I wish within my research to subsequently show the therapeutic potential that creating photographs had for me, and for others engaged in this work. In summary, at the first evaluation of this project it is already clear that photography served me primarily as a tool and pretext for meeting other people.

Thanks to our interactions, I then had the opportunity to look at the topics I am researching with different eyes.

Each examined topic in this publication brought me many inspiring impetuses, thoughts, ideas, findings. Through the research of sociologist Zuzana Kolarzová, I got closer to women involved in pornography – a topic that I saw as an adolescent as absolute darkness, as during my adolescence my father had instilled in me the connected ideas of prostitution and promiscuity as the basic parameters for evaluating a person's worth. Similarly, my interview with poet and theologian Magdalena Šipka about polyamory completely changed my view on intimacy and sharing (not only physically) with others. I realized my limits, borders, and complexes. And I accepted them while keeping in mind my experiences. Photographer Petr Helbich closes his text about pure love with a confession of love for the dachshund Isabella, which I sincerely understand. Daniel Frynta describes love as the chance to reproduce and help those close to us and so gain at least a share in the future world. Based on the text by Lucie Jarkovská, I realized what happiness and luxury we as children and mothers can experience in the context of developing relationships connected to maternal love. Sociologist Martin Fafejta again enabled me to look at love within the family in an alternative way connected to a person's identity and also mediated for me the perspective of a father who can feel at a disadvantage in society as a man (in comparison to women in their adored role as mothers). Author Aleš Palán gave

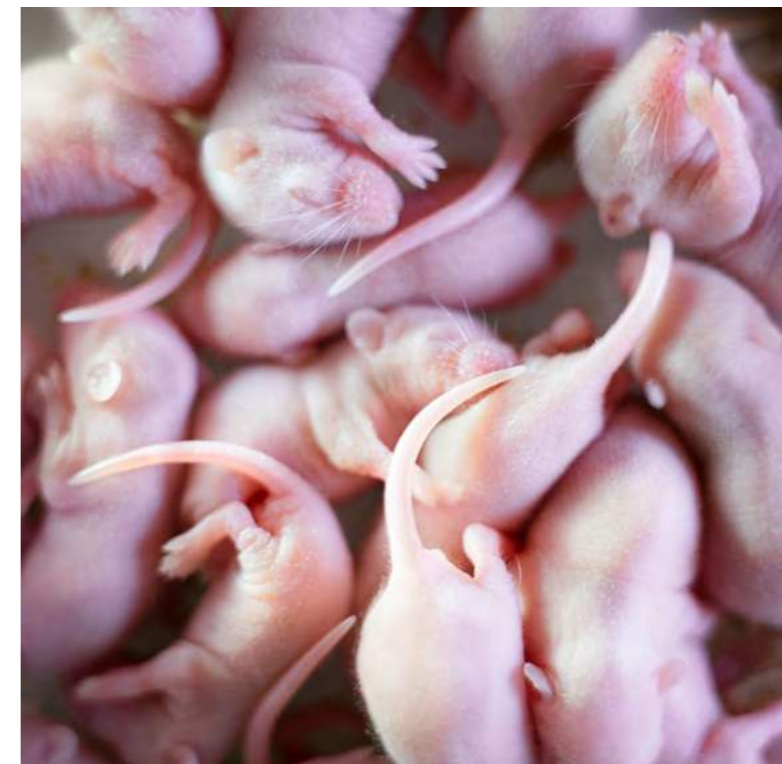
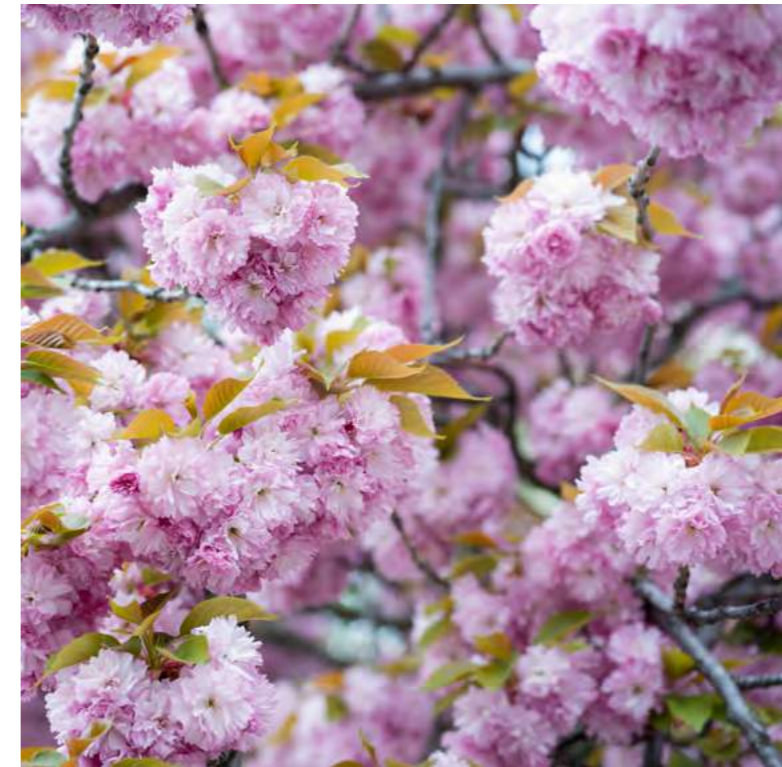
me the feeling that cooperation and sharing are for me integral parts of art and that I most enjoy not working on an artistic project alone, or rather that I want to experience creative energy together with other people participating in the project. Janáček scholar Jiří Zahrádka clarified for me the term “emotion donor” in connection with the work of composer Leoš Janáček. I realized that my falling in love had a similar effect on my work and desire to create art. It comforted me that my feelings were not embarrassing when similar ones were experienced by a person of Janáček's calibre. Thanks to my interview with Professor Ivan Rektor, I overcame my fear of unpredictable authorities and rejection. I understood that some things can only arise from deep internal motivation. Thanks to my photographic work, I met people who saw a higher purpose in their work, and I also accepted the fact I will never be able to understand how some things work, let alone their purpose. From my interviews with neuroscientists Luboš Brabenec and Patrik Šimko, I gained hope that perhaps someday it will be possible to positively stimulate the brain when it is starting to lose functionality, including memories of the state of being in love, which might make it possible to put off the end of life or at least make it more pleasant.

In conclusion, I would primarily wish for the result of my attempts to achieve therapy through art, which I have transformed into this book, to show my daughters and others why I am the woman that I am and that crossing borders is the path that I have accepted as the only natural one

for my survival. I would like to show all readers that there is more than just the love they see in films, that there are many other conceptions that, based on our specific experiences, we cannot see, feel, or even imagine. I would be happy if during this darkest period we kept in our minds the idea that there exists something to live for, even if it might not appear so at a given moment. In connection to this, I recall a scene from the short Polish documentary *Szczurołap* (Czarnecki, 1986) about an industrial ratcatcher

who presents his methods during the film. I am picturing especially the scene when a researcher conducts an experiment with two rats. He places both at the same time into identical aquariums with water and they both start swimming. The man measures the time and the rats' endurance; after fifteen minutes, they both show signs of tiring. In one aquarium, he places a piece of wood, where the animal climbs, rests for a moment, and catches its breath; a short time later, the researcher takes the wood out of

the aquarium and the rat has to swim again. The researcher continues to measure the time. The first rat dies of exhaustion after some time. But the second rat, the one that could briefly rest, swims for an unbelievable fifteen hours more before drowning. This crazy experiment is evidence of the strength of hope, that when we believe, we can accomplish nearly impossible things. I know that feeling well. (D)



I HAD MANY DOLLS



I HAD MANY DOLLS

I had many dolls. I loved it when periodically my mother and I would bathe them all, style their hair, and dress them in nice outfits. Once, during one of these baths, I noticed that some of the dolls had holes in their heels where the water would leak in. I was completely taken aback when my mother informed me that I was the one who'd made those holes by gnawing on the heels of my dolls. I had no idea I had done that. It made me angry because at the time I saw the chewed hole as a blemish on my freshly washed and coiffed doll. What had made me want to gnaw on the hard plastic? I can't remember anymore.

I liked to play school with my dolls. In my class, there were only girls and they were all called Lucie. Except for the jester, the big teddy bear, and the monkey. I played the role of an all-knowing teacher who everyone loved. Even long after the dolls lost their prominent place in my life, I toyed with the idea of teaching. I thought I would really enjoy it, maybe because I found my first big role models in my elementary school. Besides being smart and beautiful they embodied fairness and security to me - for example, there was Miss Jarmila Poláčková and Headmistress Eva Šmírová. The headmistress used to give speeches in the school gym at the beginning of the school year and during other celebratory moments; the sound of her heels clicking on the wooden

floor complemented the look of her skin-tight dress suits. She was a professional orator, the most beautiful of all the dolls with her expertly styled blond bob and red lipstick. There was no denying her qualities. Everyone saw her as a figure of authority.

I loved the long-haired dolls the best. I liked combing their tresses - as did my Grandpa Pavel, who patiently played beauty salon with me. I also liked to play bookstore; I arranged the books from the bookcase on the table and became both the shop assistant and the customer. Throughout my childhood, we lived in Ostravice, far away from people with small children. I played by myself most of the time. When I turned six, I was given a school bag with a Barbie doll inside for my birthday. So my first days of school intermingled with the topic of the breasts I had suddenly started to notice. Miss Jarmila Saidlová from the after-school club wore cone bras that could hardly go unobserved since the material of the T-shirts and sweaters at the time did nothing to hide them. She was funny and she played the guitar and sang beautifully.

I remember playing with dolls with my cousin Irenka. Our games were inspired by relationships. At the time, we were obsessed with dolls that we called "frecklies" because of the freckles they sported. These dolls were a far cry from an actual representation of what a real person looks like; they were more or

less caricatures. The distinguishing characteristics of the frecklies were their big bellies, stubby legs, and ginger hair cut in short, soft waves. Their physical appearances, however, in no way stood in the way of us immersing them in our games of true love and wonderful relationships.

As a photographer, I've always found myself fascinated with lifelike dolls. I saw a couple of them for the first time in Japan at the home of eighty-three-year-old Mrs. Michiko. I visited her book-filled flat with Bára Baronová - she talked to us about her partner-less private life. She dedicated her professional life to sex education in schools. In the narrow hall of her flat, a pair of dolls were locked in an embrace next to the shoe cabinet.

I was interested in finding out what needs these dolls meet in the lives of their owners and what kinds of people the women who want to own these dolls are. I managed to find a website belonging to Monika and Nikol Chmelářová, long-term collectors of realistic-looking dolls who also manufacture them under the label Reborn, and contacted them.









ON DOGS



ON DOGS

My family has always had dogs of various breeds, and it is maybe because I grew up surrounded by them that I am so close to them. I was an only child until I turned eight, living practically in isolation in a big house with a garden in Ostravice, and since my peers lived far away, the dogs became my friends. My favourite dog was named Baron.

I used to love having people over and taking trips - I kept asking all the time, "Are we going anywhere today? Or will anyone stop by?" Today I feel differently - maybe because of my work - I prefer to spend time with my family or by myself. I never get bored. I'm never really on my own anyway. Now, for example, we have two dogs and one cat living with us. They go wherever I go, or they at least stay close by. I love observing them and petting them. They immediately return my affection. The way they look into my eyes says it all. I find the relationships I have with my dogs unburdened and absolute. When my daughters were still babies, I used to breastfeed them on a mattress on the floor and the dogs I had at the time always lay faithfully beside me. And whenever I felt sad, they were there for me.

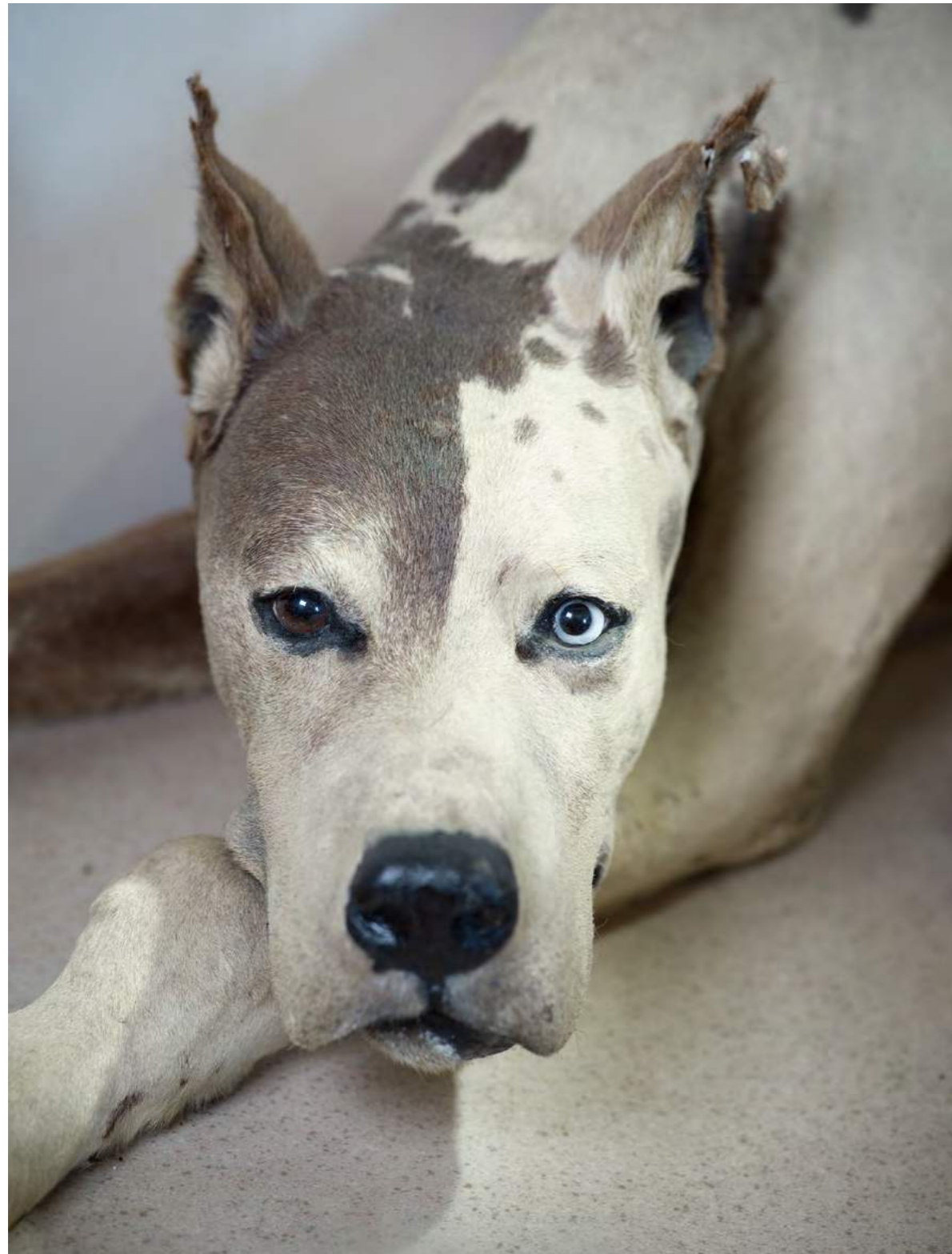
I have noticed that my daughters share my love for dogs and other animals. They enjoy how familiar and warm they are. When my family gathers in the living

room, talking or watching TV, our dogs nestle up to us, peacefully sleeping and - what's the most important - touching us. I consider love for animals a gift that keeps giving - both for me and for my daughters.

Years ago, when I visited the taxidermy exhibition the hounds of Baron Haas at Bítov Castle, I immediately wanted to take pictures of them, to make a portrait of each and every one of those dogs. That's because I understood the baron's wish to keep all of his beloved pets forever by having them stuffed. Later, I heard more about the troubled fate of Baron Haas, his eccentric life, his love for animals, and his womanizing ways from the author of his biography, Luděk Jaša (2013). To take care of his dogs - at one point he had amassed close to two hundred - the baron employed a highly trained staff working on a strict daily schedule: on Saturdays the kennels were cleaned and on Sundays the dogs were washed with black soap. The castle theatre hall was turned into one big dog pen and there was even a kitchen in the castle dedicated to the animals. When a dog died, the baron buried it in one of the cemeteries he gradually established on the castle grounds. Then he marked the grave with a wooden cross and a metal plaque with the dog's name.

Since I couldn't interview Baron Haas and ask him about his love for dogs, I decided to ask a former

student of mine, Lenka Sedláčková. When I started teaching at the Institute of Creative Photography in 2003, I was put in charge of self-portrait classes. I approached it in my own way, motivating the students to use photography as a form of therapy. And a few years ago, Lenka turned in a project about her close relationship with her dog.











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Borders of Love

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(UTB)

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Gallery of Fine Arts in Ostrava, Ostrava, CZ

Museum of Photography and Modern Visual Media, Jindřichův Hradec, CZ

Olomouc Museum of Art, Olomouc, CZ

National Gallery in Prague, Prague, CZ

The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, CZ

GD4PhotoArt, Bologna, IT

Private collectors

Solo exhibitions (selected)

2023 *Dita Pepe - Hranice lásky*, Gallery Etcetera, Prague, CZ

2016 *Love yourself*, Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, Washington D.C., USA

2014 *Dita Pepe*, Gallery of Fine Arts in Ostrava, Ostrava, CZ

2011 *Self-Portraits from Ostrava*, Sächsisches Staatsministerium, Dresden, DE

2009 *Dita Pepe*, Reportage Atri Festival, Atri, IT

2007 *Dita Pepe*, ŽAK Gallery, Berlin, DE

2007 *Autoportraits de Dita Pepe*, Centre Culturel Tchèque, Paris, FR

2004 *Me and the Other*, Encontros da Imagem, Braga, PT

2003 *Autoportéty*, Month of Photography, Bratislava, SK

2002 *Ich, selbst und die anderen*, Altonaer

2002 *Autoportréty*, Galerie Velryba, Prague, CZ
Museum, Hamburg, DE

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