

# Dušan Pavlů

## Vladimír Birgus, Pavel Scheufler: Czech Photography in 1839-2019

Due to the massive growth in digital technologies in the last twenty years, all users of digital phones have gradually become amateur photographers. It seems a good idea to look at the history of the field which more or less intensively touches our everyday lives. Photography is not only a business but also an important source of information able to bring objective data as well as a strong emotional appeal.

20 years ago, Grada Publishing published the book: *Photography in the Czech Lands 1839-1999*, and the co-authors Vladimír Birgus and Pavel Scheufler decided they should continue exploring the history of photography in the Czech lands, including the beginnings and historic development of photography, technique, creative approaches, figures, topics and genres and many others. That is why, twenty years later, Grada would have published the book titled ***Czech Photography in 1839-2019***. This publication represents a hard to imagine volume of heuristic work, research in archives

and libraries, study of tens of professional journals and books as documented in the selected bibliography. It includes knowledge of names and photography creation from more than 2,500 authors whose work is captured in the book as well as 180 years of developments in the field following the invention of daguerreotype. The development of the field, was conditioned by a knowledge of chemistry, optics, composition, and the possibilities of work with light. At first, photography was perceived as a direct competitor to painting and drawing that might lead to an extinction of these art disciplines – but, as evident from the development of the media in human culture, every new medium initiates innovation processes in its predecessors, endangered media, and leads to searching for a distinctive and unique space of expression in the new socio-cultural and economic conditions.

The book contains an inspirational and very rich source of objective information about the authors, foundation and dissolution of

their professional unions and associations, characteristics of professional exhibitions, profiles of professional journals, specialized galleries, relevant schools, movements, and styles. It captures all important and, for photography, essential books and journals as well as notable Germans and Austrians active in the Czech lands.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1841, the first daguerreotype studio was opened on what is today Wenceslas Square (formerly known as Koňský trh - Horse Market) in Prague – i.e., the first permanent commercial photography business in the Czech lands, and in 1862, Vojta Náprstek founded the Czech Industrial Museum with the first collection of photographs in the Czech lands. The brothers Josef and Jan Frič became famous for their photographs of the Moon taken in 1884: you can find hundreds of such lists of similar historical milestones in the book. Representatives of the state administration understood the importance of photography for presentation of their towns, and so the first photographic documentary

series were created to capture notable buildings, monuments, and everyday life in the city with the aim of promoting destinations for travel and tourism. There is also documentary and scientific photography and photographic news reporting; after becoming familiar with printing techniques, photography starts playing a key role in journalism replacing illustrative wood engravings, pen and ink drawings and other imaging techniques. In August 1889, the first Club of Amateur Photographers (KFA) was founded in Prague, after the club in Vienna the second oldest in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Photography becomes interesting for organizers of exhibitions – as an exhibit as well as documenting industrial and cultural exhibitions at the end of the 19th century photographically.

Slide was a new form of image information at that time with a considerable development in the first decades of the century as an important carrier of advertising information screened in cinemas. Static photography starts to be followed by film: “*photography coming alive*”. In the Czech lands, the beginnings of film are inseparably related to the name: Jan Kříženecký and the Exhibition of Architecture and Engineering (1898) in Prague, where he showed three Czech films. The new communication medium needed new professionals – and so the gradually founded art schools ‘curriculum included lessons on photography. And photography

was a great help for the stronger and stronger industry of new forms of commercial, cultural, and state promotion – advertising. The first publication devoted to advertising photography: *Photography in advertising and Neubert’s heliogravura* was published in 1933. The book was focused on the style of creation of the inter-war advertising photographers like Josef Sudek, Jaromír Funke, Bohumil Šťastný, Alexander Hackenschmied, Karel Hájek and others.

In the last half of the past century, advertising photography developed rapidly to meet the needs of advertising/promotions departments of companies and agencies. The authors underline the inspirational role of the journal of Czechoslovak photography in promoting discussions about the genres and techniques of photography, use of photography in travel and tourism, commercial promotion, etc. New exhibitions halls specialized in photography creation were opened in the Czechoslovak Republic as well as art colleges and universities teaching photography as a profession, new books about photography were published trying to include this form of capturing objective reality and dreamy worlds into contemporary lifestyle. The book ends in 2019, supplemented with chronologies of the most important events, initiatives and figures active in the 180-year development of photography in the Czech lands with a sufficiently plastic depiction of

national development in the context of European events. It brings a lot of data and characteristics of events, which make a good guide for orientation of all people interested in gaining deeper insights into some specific features of this contemporary communication form.

### Reviewed Book



BIRGUS, V., SCHEUFLER, P.: *Czech Photography in 1839-2019*. Prague : Grada Publishing, 2021. 381 p. ISBN 978-80-271-0535-9.

### Author of the Review

Prof. PhDr. Dušan Pavlů, CSc.  
dusan151@seznam.cz

AMASIA EXPO  
Agentura pro výzkum efektivnosti  
veletrhů a výstav  
Paříkova 362/3  
190 00 Praha 9-Vysočany  
CZECH REPUBLIC