

Eva Jonisová

Portrait – Visual Identity of a Person

Abstract

Portrait is a very sought out and popular genre of photography, and not only at the present time. This was the case even in the times of photographers that could be described as pioneers in portrait photography as such. Nadar, Disdéri, and others popularized this medium and predestined its dominant role in society when the celebrities of that time came to gather in their ateliers. Over time, an artist's approach towards photographed subjects has also changed. Besides physical traits, a photographer also tries to capture something “behind” all this. In this paper, we address not only an analysis of interpretation points of view during the process of portrayal or its social function, but also a clarification of what an identity in portrait photography means and how it is reflected. We also enter the context of media, where human identity adjusts itself to a universal model, the so-called beauty myth, is abused and presented in the form of artificial icons and sex symbols. On the basis of theoretical grounds and

the content analysis of selected authors and their works of art related to the topic of identity in a portrait, we have created a series of self-portraits, which are aimed at analysing the identity of an individual in comparison to the identity of their closest family members.

Key words

Portrait, Photography, Identity, Physiognomy, Beauty myth

Introduction

Although, throughout history, a portrait has been regarded as a status symbol¹, the second half of the 19th century represented a change in this view. It is related to the formation of photography, a medium created for the masses. Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher, essayist, and cultural critic, saw it as a developing visual culture in the modern world. He mentioned it in his essay *A Short History of Photography*: “Every day the need grows more urgent to possess an object in the closest proximity, through a picture or, better, a reproduction.”² He states that such trends have made photography a very popular medium that has been used for everything – from documentation to pornography. However, it was portraiture that brought commercial success to photography. He refers to it in his other essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: “It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time, the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy,

incomparable beauty.”³

The success of photography also lay in its relatively fast generation and reproducibility. It was cheaper, less demanding and consumed less time than painting. The key element of photography as a medium was its truthfulness; photography has always been connected with a true depiction of reality. Susan Sontag writes: “*The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture.*”⁴ The arrival of the digital era has partially destroyed this statement; however, a question still remains: Is what we see in the photograph reality? Analysis of the meaning of reality and this question is pointless, as it has no absolute answer. The relation between photography and our perception of reality is indisputable, as well as the fact that there is no universal reality. Perception of reality is subjective and personal. It is not tied only to the physical perception of our environment through the senses, but it is also a psychological experience related to genetics, upbringing, and background. In many aspects, it generates sometimes subtle, at other times extreme, differences in interpretation of similar events. This concept of “reality” is rooted deeply in our brain and it is what drives us to attempt to interpret a

photograph, both superficially and emotionally. This is especially true in the case of portraits.⁵

1 PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT AND IDENTITY

The act of photography and interaction with the picture is a mirroring of the self; it is an instrument of externalization of our personal reality. This is the main reason why a portrait is considered to be equally a depiction of both the portrayed individual and the portraying artist. R. Angier demonstrates this in an example of a photographic portrait series by Richard Avedon and states that it resulted in “*portraits in which the subject’s own presence was engulfed by the intensity of the photographer’s gaze.*”⁶ The dynamics of portraiture indicates several important aspects, mainly the significance of the perception and interpretation of one’s self. There are various factors that come into play in an interaction between a photographer and a subject influencing the result of the portrait. Although the early attempts at portraiture were purely aesthetical, often imitating the aesthetics of paintings, a desire to portray something “beyond” the physical has become a priority in a relatively short period of time. This

1 WEST, S.: *Portraiture*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 71-72.

2 BENJAMIN, W.: *A Short History of Photography*. [online]. Available at: <https://monoskop.org/images/7/79/Benjamin_Walter_1931_1972_A_Short_History_of_Photography.pdf>.

3 BENJAMIN, W.: *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 27.

4 SONTAG, S.: *On Photography*. New York : Picador USA, 2001, p. 3.

5 MUSCAT, S.: *Identity and the Photographic Portrait*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/3079133/Identity_and_the_Photographic_Portrait>.

6 ANGIER, R.: *Train Your Gaze (A Practical and Theoretical Introduction to Portrait Photography)*. Lausanne : AVA Publishing, 2007, p. 5. »

has been characterized, for instance, by the British photographer Julie Margaret Cameron, who declared an intention “to capture the greatness of the inner, not the outer man.”⁷

1.1 THE TRUE “SELF”

The aspect of interaction between the photographed subject and the photographer is still something that needs to be examined, however, it is primarily important to look at a concept of the true “self”. Some might say that there is no such thing as a “real self”, but it is clear that people perceive aspects of their selves as more important than others – more real than they actually are. We have a tendency to distinguish between who we are and how we behave, especially in certain situations, such as, for instance, a work environment. Generally, people differentiate between their mental state and behaviour. R. J. Schlegel and J. A. Hicks address theories about the importance of “living in accord with one’s true self.”⁸ According to them, perception, realization, and the search for a true self is an inborn characteristic. We must take into consideration the fact that innately there is an immutable identity of one’s own self or a set of certain

aspects of one’s personality that are seen as dominant and that an ongoing search for these persists throughout one’s life. Generally, people trying to identify “what a person is really like”⁹ attach more importance to mental states than to actions.

Muscat in his essay writes that, from the psychological point of view, the difference between public and private life is considered an analogy to public and private/true “self”, a difference between actions and thoughts. In dependence on the situation, in which an individual finds themselves, actions may but need not reflect thoughts.¹⁰ This is also true about a portrait, as it is a reflection of a photographer, regardless of whether it has or has not been planned by the artist. Portraits that do not strongly show the presence of the photographer can be seen only rarely. The viewer is led – sometimes subtly, but often very directly, to interpret a picture in the way intended by the photographer. Essentially, we can say that a photograph is an exercise in interpretation and manipulation of reality, which is consequently passed along to the viewer, who adds another layer of interpretation.¹¹

7 Ibidem, p. 8.

8 SCHLEGEL, R. J., HICKS, J. A.: The True Self and Psychological Health: Emerging Evidence and Future Directions. In: *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2011, Vol. 5, No. 12, p. 989-1003. [online]. Available at: <<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.707.1064&rep=rep1&type=pdf>>.

9 MUSCAT, S.: *Identity and the Photographic Portrait*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/3079133/Identity_and_the_Photographic_Portrait>.

10 MUSCAT, S.: *Identity and the Photographic Portrait*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/3079133/Identity_and_the_Photographic_Portrait>.

11 Ibidem.

The way, in which “photography represents reality, or, as we might say, intercepts it, disrupting our common-sense understanding of the relationship between past and present, stopping the flow of time and holding it in an uncanny stillness for years on end, revealing to us a present without a future”¹² has undoubtedly been a subject of academic research over the years. Green and Lowry write that there is a desire to create “an account of the soul that will in some way be transparent to its presentness, and that will provide a means by which the boundary between being and representation could be distorted.”¹³ It is a question of whether our “self” is dependent on time or, as a whole, exists abruptly, all of a sudden. When we encounter a camera, we construct our “self” and present it in a split second. That is probably also a reason why early portraits had a unique feeling. Interaction and the process of posing were being stored by the camera during a long exposition. It is, however, doubtful whether the “self” of the photographed subject had been captured in a better way. Benjamin argues that “the length of exposition allows the subject to enter the picture.”¹⁴ The subject had time to

12 GREEN, D., LOWRY, J. (eds.): Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image. In: *The Art Book*, 2007, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 57 – 58. [online]. Available at: >https://www.academia.edu/5697845/STILLNESS_AND_TIME_PHOTOGRAPHY_AND_THE_MOVING_IMAGE_EDITED_BY_DAVID_GREEN_AND_JOANNA_LOWRY_DESIGNED_BY_LOUP>.

13 Ibidem.

14 BENJAMIN, W.: *A Short History of Photography*. [online]. Available at: <[https://](https://monoskop.org/images/7/79/Benjamin_Walter_1931_1972_A_Short_History_of_Photography.pdf)

adapt to the time of photographing, thus bringing a truer depiction of their self through a synthesized, compact expression.

1.2 PORTRAIT AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

What does the human face say?

Does every wrinkle, skin crease, size and shape of eyes mean something? This is what characterizes physiognomy (or physiognomonics), the unscientific practice that believes that person’s character and traits can be assessed from their outer appearance, especially their face. It is historically ancient, but was popularized by the Swiss writer and Calvinist pastor Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741 – 1801) in the 18th century. Lavater’s most well-known work is a study with the title *Essays on Physiognomy, Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind (Physiognomischen Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe, 1775)*, a 2000 pages long collection, in which he clarified his central physiognomic assumption: that firm or stable features of the human face, if properly analysed, represent the hidden psychological and moral personality of a subject, while the alterable face features that are involved in making expressions or showing changing moods and

monoskop.org/images/7/79/Benjamin_Walter_1931_1972_A_Short_History_of_Photography.pdf.

passions, can be used to deceive.¹⁵ In the *Essays on Physiognomy* he tried to establish a systematic approach to the process of observation, identification, and analysis of the connection between face characteristics and corresponding moral tendencies or psychological features. The study also contains a significant “how-to” part consisting of a hundred rules that would enable even a layman to practise Lavater’s system. He can also boast of a giant collection of original drawings and pictures including hundreds of detailed silhouettes with accompanying physiognomic analysis. This work shows Lavater’s belief in the tripartite division of a human being, which assumes physical, mental, and moral components of a person that coexist in a dynamic relationship. Stemming from this theory, Lavater asserted that through a thorough examination of the outer appearance of an individual, a skilled observer could detect otherwise hidden information about the moral and intellectual character of a subject.¹⁶ Based on this study, a portrait itself (a depiction of the head, face) could be ascribed an ability to portray a person not only physically, but also mentally: their life experience, traits, and capabilities. Although physiognomy is regarded as pseudoscience and is not applied

15 *Johann Kaspar Lavater*. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.enotes.com/topics/johann-kaspar-lavater>>.

16 Ibidem.

in modern psychology, it cannot be completely rejected. There is some truth in telling an older person that they must have experienced a lot, because they have it written in their face. There apparently is something to all those wrinkles.

Hereby, we state examples of what can be read from a face according to Carl Huter, the founder of psycho-physiognomy, who divides a face into three parts:

- *Chin, mouth.* The low part of a face that extends to the outline of the nose. It is a symbol of physical strength and ability to assert oneself. For example, a strong, long, and wide lower part of the face belongs to someone with a great driving force and an unyielding will. Fine features in this part of the face, on the other hand, show that a person easily succumbs to inborn urges, which can negatively influence their ambition.
- *Nose and eyes.* This section supposedly reveals more information about the mental state of a personality. According to this method, for instance, thick eyebrows appear in energetic people.
- *Forehead.* According to Huter, this region expresses a relationship of the examined individual to the things of psychological nature. The shape and outline of a forehead are supposed to indicate mental abilities of the

person in question.¹⁷

- According to the Chinese, who created *the art of siang-mien* (they used it to determine personality traits of a person; it could practically be described as a predecessor of physiognomy as we know it, the Chinese have applied this art for 3000 years), it is mostly eyes that reveal a lot about a person. Again, we have selected a few examples:
- *Big eyes.* They are connected to traits like intelligence, attractiveness, beauty, strength, openness, frankness, cordiality. On the other hand, people with big eyes supposedly tend to succumb to sudden outbreaks and are very vulnerable.
- *Round eyes.* In principle, the same ideas as for big eyes apply here. In addition, women with round eyes allegedly seem irresistible for those around.
- *Small eyes.* Traits like envy and untrustworthiness are attributed to them. People with small eyes do not let just anyone into their intimate zone; they are loyal, pedantic and ambitious.
- *Eyes slanted upwards.* People with these eyes enjoy life, are gifted with beauty and high intellect. They are very emotional, but fast problem solvers, flexible, and decisive. They are also prone to anger outbursts.

¹⁷ Fyziognómia. [online]. Available at: <<http://www.zdravieportal.sk/fyziognomia/>>.

- *Eyes slanted downwards.*

This type of people is connected to gentleness, willingness to help, and inclination to melancholy.

Friendships are very important to them. They are adaptable and devoted, professionally suited for social work, women make good mothers, etc.¹⁸

From this point of view, one more fact is very interesting – that the left and right sides of the face are not identical. This face asymmetry is natural and attractive; studies have shown that people consider a slightly asymmetrical face more attractive.¹⁹ We know of several photographers, who have taken an interest in this phenomenon. For instance, the Czech photographer Jiří David, who, through a mechanical mirroring, created portraits of abstract people that, in the end, appeared almost grotesque and unnatural.

2 HUMAN FACE – MAIN CARRIER OF CHARACTER TRAITS OF A PERSON

A complex of expressions and actions resulting from the physiological activity of a highly developed nervous system manifests itself mainly in the human face and its mimicry, in gestures,

¹⁸ ČCHI, A.: *Tajemství lidské tváře*. 1. vyd. Praha : Knižní klub a Pragma, 1997, p. 34 – 45.

¹⁹ GRAMMER, K., THORNHILL, R.: Human (Homo sapiens) Facial Attractiveness and Sexual Selection: The Role of Symmetry and Averageness. In: *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 1994, Vol. 108, No. 3, p. 233 – 242. [online]. Available at: <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/710e/7bf19ef6c50d9e5c99c5418c2922394d8760.pdf>>.

and hands. Although head and hands are only parts of the human body, they become carriers of personality and character traits of a person. Mimicry, gestures, poses – whether conscious or unconscious – reflect mental motives. They are of a temporary character, but sometimes express themselves also by permanent states of physical constitution.²⁰

There are anatomical atlases made specifically for painters and sculptors (e.g. *Anatomy for Artists*). It is truly interesting that even ancient Greek and Roman artists had dealt with the proportions of human face and beauty in great detail. They divided a face into three parts: from hair roots to the root of a nose; the length of a nose; form the tip of nose to the chin. They had set precise proportions (e.g. distance between corners of the eyes equals double the length of the nose, etc.). Italian renaissance artists also tried to find laws of aesthetic perfection and based their learning on mathematical reasoning. Around the year 1500, they came to a conclusion that the golden section is the key to absolute beauty in both nature and art.²¹

These theories have survived centuries and have become the basis also for composition in photography. Hereby, however, the pursuit of a feminine beauty ideal has persisted.

²⁰ BARAN, L.: *Portrét ve fotografii*. Praha : Orbis, 1969, p. 75 – 76.

²¹ Ibidem.

2.1 BEAUTY MYTH

Nowadays, media often present us with ideals of beauty. They make us believe that a quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists.²² In women, it induces a feeling of wanting to look like media presented images and in men it evokes a belief that such women should attract them. On the basis of this myth, all ideal women should be tall, unnaturally thin, with a perfectly smooth and radiant skin, healthy shining hair, strong nails, should use luxury cosmetics and absolutely should not carry any extra pound of weight. Beautiful woman = young woman without wrinkles.

We live in a visual time surrounded by an extreme amount of images. On billboards, TV screens, and magazines we see perfect, smiling, artificial faces of beautiful women. They influence our thoughts, attitudes, behaviour, and values. Women in an attempt to conform to these “indicators of beauty” have increased their interest in various diets, developing into fasting, anorexia or other diseases, and, finally, aesthetic surgery has become the fastest growing discipline of medicine.²³ Naomi Wolf writes: “*Influence of the ideology of beauty has grown stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no longer can manage. It is seeking*

²² WOLF, N.: *Mýtus krásy*. Bratislava : Aspekt, 2000, p. 15.

²³ Ibidem, p. 12.

right now to undo psychologically and covertly all the good things that feminism did for women materially and overtly.”²⁴ At the same time, Wolf speaks of beauty as exploitation; she even uses the dishonouring term “pornography of beauty”.

2.2 PORTRAIT AS MEDIA IDENTITY OF A PERSON

Within this context, a photographic portrait has a specific status. It creates the identity of a person and imposes it on us, although it might not be real. It idealizes people. And it is the custom-made portrait that becomes an indicator, a sort of measure of the photographer’s level. Because at the time a photographer executes a *photoshooting* with a celebrity, they become famous, recognized, and sought-after. In our country, it could, for instance, be portraying the presenter Adela Vinczeová, née Banášová, who is regarded as a well-known, respected personality in Slovak show business, or photographing actors or singers. It has been like this since the origins of photography: for example, Disdéri became famous, sought-after, and rich thanks to photographing Napoleon. That attracted thousands of people to his studio. Nadar photographed famous painters and writers (Claude Monet, Franz Liszt...), contemporary photographer Mary Ellen Mark has taken photographs of hundreds

of celebrities (from Woody Allen, through Cate Blanchett, Johnny Depp, Tim Burton, Jim Carrey, Patrick Swayze, Sarah Jessica Parker to Robin Williams). Diane Arbus or Richard Avedon contributed to magazines such as *Vogue*, *Life* or *Harper’s Bazaar*, e.g. life-style magazines that are flicked through mostly by women and which unconsciously show them what they should look like. Slovak parallels to these magazines would be, for example, *Eva*, *Madam Eva*, *Emma*, or *Nový čas pre ženy*. This is what the French artist and designer Orlan, whose work “expresses a disapproving attitude towards the established ideals of beauty and ideological dictate that women are exposed to on a daily basis.”²⁵ She uses her own body for her art by undergoing plastic surgeries. The first one took place in 1990, since then, a number of them have been executed. Orlan makes a real show of the surgeries. She transforms operating rooms into ateliers, reacts to world-renown artists, and makes costumes for the surgeons. She tries to show all the body parts that are considered “beautiful” in one place - her own body. She has had her forehead done to resemble that of Mona Lisa, chin like Boticelli’s Venus, etc. The audience can even watch the process of the operations; Orlan is fully conscious (she only uses local

25 DORIČOVÁ, D.: *Dobrovolným zohavením proti vynútenej kráse*. [online]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/expert/75544-dobrovolnym-zohavenim-proti-vynutenej-krase>>.

anaesthetics), often reads various philosophical texts, paints with her own blood, or replies to telephone questions of the spectators watching the live broadcast.²⁶ The influence of advertisements and media on the spread of the beauty myth is apparent. The creators of these media products are often not satisfied with naturally young and slim women, so they retouch the photograph to a high extent (they make the body slimmer, elongate legs, enlarge eyes, soften skin ...), thus creating a sort of hyperreality - a made-up, modified media identity of people.

3 ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHERS

3.1 SUZANNE OPTON

Although it would seem difficult to create a new kind of portraiture that has never been photographed by anyone before, the American photographer Suzanne Opton has accomplished it. She became famous for her series of portraits of young soldiers, who had returned from the war in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. The series *Soldier* was created in cooperation with the army at Fort Drum army base using an unconventional pose and in a close-up manner. Opton asked each photographed soldier to lay their head on a hard table or base, facing sideways towards the camera. She also asked them to remain still while being photographed.

26 Ibidem.

They exchanged no more words. While she was adjusting the focal length, time, or depth of field, the soldiers’ minds often returned to what they had gone through. She waited exactly for this moment. The results of this are intense, intimate portraits appearing almost lifeless, resembling busts or torn off heads of sculptures. Besides haircuts, nothing suggests that they are soldiers. We see no uniforms, medals, or guns; instead, we see large, seemingly disembodied heads and the intimate details of faces of very young people who look stunned or numb, stiff. Suzanne herself said: “Some of them look serene and some of them look shell-shocked, however, they’re all terribly vulnerable.”²⁷ These portraits are so disquieting also because we rarely see someone at such short distance in positions like these - unless we lie next to them, side by side. We are forced into an uncomfortably intimate closeness with someone appearing traumatized.²⁸ Opton understands that it is hard to look at these soldier portraits (especially for people, whose children are in the army). At the time of taking these photographs, her son was approximately the same age as the subjects, so she admits that seeing her child like this would not be easy for her either.²⁹ The caption of each

27 CASPER, J.: *Suzanne Opton: Soldier*. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.lensculture.com/articles/suzanne-opton-soldier>>.

28 Ibidem.

29 MOAKLEY, P.: *Soldier Down: The Portraits of Suzanne Opton*. [online]. Available at: <<http://time.com/27422/soldier-down-the-portraits>>.

photograph states only the surname of the soldier and the number of days they spent in the war.

3.2 CINDY SHERMAN

Sherman utilizes a camera and instruments of everyday cinema, such as make-up, costumes, or stage sceneries to create iconic shots depicting various concepts of public celebrity, self-confidence, sexual adventure, entertainment, and other socially sanctioned, existential conditions. These pictures suggest that self-identity is often an unstable compromise between social dictates and personal intention.³⁰ Her portraits are intensively grounded in the present, while extending long traditions in art that force the audience to reconsider common stereotypes and cultural assumptions, such as political satire, caricature, the graphic novel, pulp fiction, and other society-criticising disciplines. Although Sherman uses many variations of self-portraiture, they share one important common feature: in the vast majority of her portraits, she directly confronts the viewer’s gaze, even in the case of sex dolls of a kind, as if suggesting that pleasure in deceit is maybe the only value that really unites us.³¹ Sherman’s self-portraits represent clichés deeply rooted in our cultural imagination. They analyse the difficulty of representation in a

of-suzanne-opton/>.

30 Cindy Sherman. [online]. Available at: <<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-sherman-cindy.htm>>.

31 Ibidem.

world filled with images and refer to a cultural filter of images, through which we see the world.³²

3.3 DITA PEPE

As regards the identity in photography, we needn’t forget to mention the Czech photographer Dita Pepe. Since 1999, she has been working on her most renowned cycle *Self-portraits* that has later evolved into self-portraits with women, men, as well as whole families. Dita Pepe is occupied by who she is. She is intrigued by the fact that every human being, every family is completely different. Each individual has its place in the society and Dita is fascinated by the possibility to be anyone. In the series *Self-portraits with Women*, she dresses like her friends or acquaintances, appropriates their clothes, gestures, face expression, style of behaviour and make-up, as if she herself had grown up in that environment. She borrows their identity and imagines that she could live exactly like that. In the cycle *Self-portraits with Men*, she examines her own relationship to men in more depth. She styles herself as the wife of her friends, she adopts their clothes, gestures, and their status within the family. She sometimes includes her daughters, thus creating whole constructed families.³³ In connection

32 Cindy Sherman. [online]. Available at: <<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/cindysherman/gallery/2/mobile.php>>.

33 ŽŮREK, R.: *Mladé české fotografie*. [Bakalárska práca]. Opava : Filozoficko-

with this series of photographs, she says that she either has the feeling that she must take care of the man or she is afraid of him. According to her words, one of the points of the shooting was to cure these relationships, to realize what a man means to her and what she means to a man.³⁴ She points out how relationships can change an individual.

It is, as if through her photographs, she answered the questions *Who are you? And who could you have been?* Although initially she had photographed herself with her acquaintances, eventually she has moved this concept a bit further and asked strangers to be photographed. She “sneaks” into a family so convincingly that a viewer does not see that she really does not belong to it.

3.4 PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE AUTHOR

Personal identity is a topic that the author of the article has been interested in for a long time. Examination of identity also appears in her work from three years ago (2016), where she addressed body features and compared herself to her grandmother, i.e. she looked for similarities and differences between generations, stemming from the fact that there are three generations

living together in her childhood home.

In the practical part of this work, she has moved her artwork further – she no longer addresses only physical features. Based on the acquired knowledge, she puts more emphasis on physiognomy, i.e. she notices tripartite (according to Lavater), which incorporates physical, mental, and moral traits of a person. She analyses, senses, searches. She is searching for herself and, through portraiture, is trying to find out who she is; and in her identity she is finding that something from the identity of each member of her closest family is rooted inside her. Mechanically, she has attached half of her face to one half of her sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. The result is the cycle entitled “*Disharmony*”, which handles the wholeness of a person within something bigger – within the whole family. This relationship between an individual and the unit arises from mutual respect that must and need not be present in every moment of life. To this, the author reacts with the prefix “*dis*”.

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy starts his famous novel *Anna Karenina* with the opening lines: “*All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*” Even nowadays, each family struggles with something – whether it is a separation or divorce, unemployment or lack of finances for children’s studies, alcoholism, gambling, or other vices. The author does not manifest this explicitly. We only get to know the family through

the portraits. We do not know who studies, who works and in what profession. All props are eliminated, similarly to the work of Nadar or Richard Avedon. All attention is directed at and only at people. Wrinkles or eye gazes are, therefore, the sole indicators of the family’s and the author’s own identity.

Conclusion

Since the origins of portraiture, when photographers used to stylize people and decide their facial expressions, contemporary photography has changed to prefer the depiction of an individual in their essence. Artists try to catch the right moment and capture their identity. Photography is also interesting due to the fact that a portrait is a reflection of both the photographed subject and the photographer. During this process, a relationship between the subject, photographer, and viewer arises, each one influencing the others. Contemporary photographers constantly look for and introduce new ways of portraiture. For instance, Czech photographer Dita Pepe in her work over several years presents an interesting concept of changing her identity in each photograph. One time she is a rocker, another time a housewife or a mother of a large family in a Roma camp. Searching and finding one’s identity is often present in the art as such. We can find this motive also in the practical part of our work, where the author is at times coming closer to and, at other times, moving further away from the members of her closest family. Portraits in the

form of triptychs are expressions of mutual relationships; they are a game of a trio. Nowadays, a portrait is also perceived as the media identity of a person. In present media culture, we are constantly being attacked by perfect people, perfect faces. It is the media that build a picture of celebrities being the right people who, besides looking good, are also intelligent, fun, our lives compared to theirs are too boring, and that is why we like to read about them and watch them. We cling to their opinions and regard them as little gods. Yet, they are the same people as we are, with the same flaws, sorrows, and joys. This phenomenon is called the beauty myth. It tries to make us believe that universal beauty exists and we should do our best to personify it. Besides the psychological consequences, this attempt to access this “beauty” can also have a physical impact, in the form of fasting or a desire for plastic surgery. This problem is highlighted in possibly the craziest and most visible way in the artwork of the French artist Orlan, who, in an attempt to point out the pointlessness of chasing artificial beauty, uses her own body to demonstrate plastic surgeries, to make her forehead, chin, or anything else resemble what is generally considered beautiful. Who is the author herself? Her identity is hidden, however, comes to light in an expression. Her substance is different, but she finds an intersection of each one member of her family in herself. Photographic portraiture is more

than just the depiction of the subject’s physical shell and we demonstrate this by these triptychs. These portraits are both brutal and chilling. They are a glimpse of the soul, a depiction of reality, i.e. not only the outer appearance, but also the inner world, character, and traits. Through the expressions of the family members, we perceive their lives and compare them to the author’s. She examines and searches for her identity – *who is she, where is she, and where is she heading?* She finds in herself something from her mother, a certain melancholy and weariness, worries, but also care and reliability. She finds the closest similarities with her sister. This is due to the small age difference and common interests. The status of a young woman in the contemporary world, finishing her studies and starting working life. Joyfulness, but also a certain stubbornness and assertiveness. Brother’s playfulness in the eyes, father’s sense of adventure and adrenalin, grandparents’ regrets, burdens, and kindness...

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Mgr. Eva Jonisová

Faculty of Mass Media Communication
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Námestie J. Herdu 2
Trnava 917 01
Slovak republic
jonisova.eva@gmail.com

Medium of Photography as a Form of Communication

I started to deal more intensively with photography 6 years ago. When my grandfather had died, I realized that what I had photographed until then was essentially empty. Shots of flowers or still lifes undoubtedly have their place in the art of photography, but only at this painful moment of life have I realized that something in it is missing.

I had found that “something” during the first years of my university study. Becoming a member of a team of artists, authors that we had met with every week to discuss the meaning of photography, have decided my future direction. I am grateful to my pedagogues, who have guided me down the path of a better understanding of the art itself, for moving forward from the early attempts on photography consisting mostly of macro flower photography. They have taught me to see photography as a communication medium with a purpose of conveying something. This was one of the reasons that I have gradually found a liking for conceptual and documentary photography.

After the death of my grandfather, I have directed my objective towards people and have started to express my perceptions of the world through photography. The cycle “*The Stations of the Cross*” is a series of photographs that depict my grandmother. It is often a grandparent who assumes the burden for the family. Quietly, without blaming. She

sacrifices herself. It is a reference to the suffering of Christ that he underwent for his love of people, as well as a tribute to the person that is always there; ready to give a helping hand.

The series “*So close, so far*” represents the process of coping with the loss of love; it is an attempt at understanding and maybe a catharsis. When a four-year relationship ended without explanation, I have made these intimate self-portraits in the moments of pain with material things - the sole remains of a failed love. The photographs are supplemented and amplified by hand-written messages.

“*Shapes of Love*” are a conceptual documentary, where I have stylized my parents into the same poses that had been captured in their wedding images. The cycle is a kind of a play with memories, family album, and time.

The series “*Little big man*” is, similarly to “*The Stations of the Cross*” a tribute to a human being. These photographs were created at a workshop conducted in the school complex, dormitory, children’s home, and the monastery in Podolíneč. The care worker that has taken care of her ward with love and affection for years is a personification of a great human being. The world probably does not know about her, but for Marcel, a physically disabled boy, she is the whole world. His handicap does not allow him to speak through his lips, but he says everything that is important through his eyes and gestures.

I view photography as a necessity; it

has become my means of expressing my feelings about the world, society, people, and myself.

Eva Jonisová

„Ecce Eva“ Eva Jonisová

If I were to describe Eva Jonisová as an artist and a human being only with a few words, it would be: tenderness, strength and love. She is a graduate of The Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. Since the beginning of her study she appeared as an excellent photographer at AKMF/ Studio of Communication in Media Photography. Here I had the opportunity together with senior lecturer Jozef Sedlák to witness the birth of this very sensitive and perceptive author.

Various photographic aspects of this young talented author do not seem as taken out of context. They together and also on their own tell a lot - about what Eva is like as a human, what she feels, thinks about, what she worries about and suffers from, what she perceives as important to depict through photography. Eva Jonisová is simply not an author marked by cliché and pose. She is exceptionally sincere and human. It is a common and yet such a precious “humaneness”, that radiates from her photographs. So this selection presents her artistic production during all her studies in the greatest authoring, personal and visual statements. However, I see in them a somewhat linear thread which connects them. These four series speak about one and only one thing. About who we are, where we are going and what kind of people we are becoming on this path. It is about a journey through generations diving deep into interpersonal relations, about

altruism towards our fellow man, about faith in the good and also faith in God, about gratitude for the family we have, about the passage of time, but also about an unescapable end. It is the journey towards the desired freedom of an artist who is on this pilgrimage alone. Sometime it begins with big and strong themes (as it is in Eva’s “Way of the Cross”), through an introspective observation of one’s soul in relation to the parents in time series “Shapes of Love”. Another time, it is self-searching through the amazing and admirable commitment of beings full of empathy in the project “Little Big Man” and it culminates in postmodern narrative searching of self- identity, which again by a curve returns to the topic of the family in Eva’s diploma work titled “Portrait / Media Identity of a Man”. As for genres the author works with elements of an expressively staged photography with the theme of a family album and memories. She presents time by topics, she prioritizes sacral themes, manipulates identity and gender questions, but mainly in the purest form she pays tribute to love towards fellow men in a genuine document.

Many things happen in our lives unexpectedly and without explanation. Through the medium of photography Eva is coping with her ending love in all her art work, it is for her some kind of a “cleansing”, cathartic effort toward understanding. As many other authors she also takes photographs of herself in the most intimate moments of pain, but in the

absolutely common roughness of everyday routine too, though she analyses it through the membrane of a mirror, as if it protects her from us. In the series “Ecce Homo” she shows the oldest member of their household, a grandmother, who takes on a real as well as metaphoric cross. Just like Christ, also grandparents many times sacrifice themselves for family, for the needs of others. It may be some natural rhythm of the passage of time and love to a fellow man, nevertheless it is not always noticeable.

Still it is necessary to explain the title “Ecce Eva”. For me personally everything, which Eva photographs, points to a man in his pure and complete beauty, simplicity and complexity at the same time. However, this title has many further symbolic levels referred to by the identity of Eva Jonisová. It is Eva as a “femme fatale” with fiery hair, Eva as a biblical temptress offering an apple and a prime sin, Eva as an ancestress, and also Eva from the altar paintings of many famous artists. That’s also why my connection of the famous Latin phrase Ecce Homo in the meaning of “behold the man” with the contemplative Ecce Eva. The point is not a symbolical washing of guilt from hands as it was with Pontius Pilate, it is just the opposite. In this way, I want to point out the uniqueness of Eva, uniqueness of anyone among us, because we are beautiful in our purity, but mainly in devotion to others. Just now I felt goose bumps when I looked intensely at Eva’s photographs and at what connects them. It is for that

reason that they are sincere, honest, universal, human, they just simply are. Love is a bridge. And such are the photographs of Eva Jonisová.

Petra Cepková**EVA JONISOVÁ**

(b. 1994, Tesárske Mlyňany, Slovakia)

Education

2013 – present University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Trnava, Slovakia

2009 – 2013 High School, Zlaté Moravce, Slovakia

Solo exhibition

2019 Ecce Eva, Ján Palárik Theater, Trnava, Slovakia

Group exhibitions

2019 Goral na gory, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2019 Damnatio memoriae – Condemnation of Memory, St. Clement Hofbauer Foster Home, Podolíneč, Slovakia

2019 Damnatio memoriae – Condemnation of Memory, Piarist Monastery, Podolíneč, Slovakia

2018 Where Man and Water Spring together, Municipal Office, Vyšné Ružbachy, Slovakia

2018 Where Man and Water Spring together, Spa – Grand Hotel Strand, Vyšné Ružbachy, Slovakia

2017 Village that does not Sleep, Ján Palárik Theater, Trnava, Slovakia

2017 Village that does not Sleep, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2017 Intimaties, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2016 Seen and Heard, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

Slovakia

Workshops

2019 Starý Smokovec, Slovakia

2018 Vyšné Ružbachy, Slovakia

2017 Vyšné Ružbachy, Slovakia

2016 Nižné Ružbachy, Slovakia

Publications

GAZDA, I., RÁBARA, P.: Michal Zamkovský – Nesmíme se bát! Uhřice : Pavel Nebojsa – Doron, 2019.

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from the series Shapes of Love, 2018





from the series The Stations of the Cross, 2017



Ja nemám vinu na krvi tohoto človeka. Mt 27, 24



Ako vychádzali, stretli človeka z Cyrény, menom Šimona.
Toho prinútili, aby mu niesol kríž. Mt 27, 32



V srdci mi znejú tvoje slová: "Hľadajte moju tvár!"
 Pane, ja hľadám tvoju tvár. Ž 27, 8



Dcéry jeruzalemské, neplačte nado mnou, ale plačte
 samy nad sebou a nad svojimi deťmi. Lk 23, 28



Rozdelili si moje šaty a o môj odev hodili lós. Ž 22, 19



Otče, odpust' im, lebo nevedia, čo robia. Lk 23, 34



Poprosil Piláta, aby mu dovolil sňať Ježišovo telo.
A Pilát dovolil. Jn 19, 38



Vzali Ježišovo telo a zavinuli ho do plátna s voňavými olejmi,
ako je u Židov zvykom. Jn 19, 40

from the series Little Big Man, 2017





from the series Portrait - Visual Identity of a Person, 2018





from the series *So close, so far*, 2017



*S láskou som bola najvyššie.
Spolu sme boli najvyššie.*



*Odstrihla som si vlasy
tak ako by si odstrikol mäta.*



*Rozmamiarala som si láč.
Vybrárala som máš svet s dobrákov.
A tento fotoaparát je paradoxne posledná vec od lába.*



*Ostali po sebe tieto knihy
a 500 gramov mračených rezňov or masničke.*