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Aspect of time in forensic photography

Abstract

Humans perceive time as an indefinite dimension which has a definitive impact on the life of an individual. Time represents a key element in developing photographs but it also can be metaphorically presented in photographic pictures. During the course of history people tried to represent time in various forms. In 1826 when photography itself was invented by the Niepce brothers as they developed the first photographs that lasted more than just a couple of minutes we can say that the meaning of the phrase „frozen in time“ was given a whole new meaning. Each photograph represents a selective section of perceived reality at a given time. The main purpose of our paper is to connect the aspect of time with methods of forensic photography which by default serves as a tool for crime scene investigators but it also can connote fine art or metaphorical contexts. Based on theoretical resources followed by content analysis of photographers

and their specific works that revolves around the aspect of time we create a series of photographs that indirectly or by content point out the element of time itself.

Key words

Time. Forensic photography

Introduction

Time influences every event around us. Since the beginning of the universe time has been perceived as an abstract yet key part of existence itself. Stephen Hawking often said in his lectures that space and time have not existed for eternity rather they have a common point of beginning approximately 15 billion years ago. The beginning of real time can be determined by a kind of singularity where any of the laws of physics did not exist. A comparison between time scale and the length of one human life is rather difficult and incomprehensible and that is why people tend to perceive time as something infinite.¹ The topic of time, especially connected with photography has been more and more pronounced not only across the photography platform but fine art in general. Time itself is one of the three main factors that are essential to even create a photographic image since the first stabilised image by the Niepce brothers in 1826. Humans always strive to understand the laws of nature and a common understanding of time was no exception. In the context of history photographers began with the literal implementation of time in their photographs for example Muybridge studied different phases of the motion of a horse when galloping. Edgerton for example photographed different phases of the motion of humans during their everyday ordinary activities. Photographers eventually began to shift into more metaphorical thinking

and focused on time indirectly or time as a factor that influenced the photographed subject. The core of our paper is the forensic imaging process. It is defined as a certain visual representation of a scene or a place. From a historical point of view its main purpose was to archive and preserve these scenes or events. The process of archivation itself has a broader meaning and consists of more than just sketches of certain place or the physical photographs it connotes present interlinking with the digital age when everything is archived and stored. Photographing of a defined place or scene is key for that which we do not know when someone else in the future will be „visually evaluating“ that particular scene again.²

Basic fundamentals of forensic imaging are not used only during crime scene investigation but also in fine arts with different secondary and hidden meanings. Due to the forensic character of these photographs we are able to perceive the whole scene interlinked with correlations of each individual elements of photographic images that are created in the process.

First we need to theoretically describe the relationship between photography and time followed by a content analysis of the series of photographs from certain authors that specified their work around time or forensic studies of scenes and places and then we will create our own series of photographs referencing the element of time in a certain scene.

TIME AND THE MEDIUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

According to Søren Kierkegaard from the philosophical point of view the mind of an individual and his ability to acknowledge his own existence and realising his experience is crucial in the connection between human and time. Kierkegaard then indicated that human existence is able to be grasped only by subjectivity of the existence itself and all this leads to theory of existentialism.³ Kierkegaard explains the existence of a human being literally as a way of living one's life he specifically does not include the whole of humanity. Existence itself is a crucial aspect of his religious and philosophical thinking.⁴ He then continues with the theory that a human is a product of a synthesis of the definitive and infinite, temporality and eternity.⁵ Martin Heidegger in his book *Being and time* explains the destruction of traditional antique ontology where as the guiding line serves mainly the question of existence and the purpose of the destruction is in the original experiences. The destruction itself in his work is not presented with negative connotations instead it represents a positive impact on the ontological tradition. Similarly the destruction does not have negative connotations with the past it criticizes mainly the „present day“. The main question regarding the destruction in a relation to a positive meaning is if

¹ HAWKING, S.: *The Beginning of Time*. [online]. [2019-12-03]. Available at: <<http://www.hawking.org.uk/the-beginning-of-time.html>>.

² CHANDRA, S.: *Principles of forensic photography*. [online]. [2019-12-03]. Available at: <http://subhasishchandra.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Principles_of_forensic_photography.pdf>.

³ ROHDE, P.: *Kierkegaard*, Votobia, 1995, p. 156.

⁴ MAJOR, L.: *Dějiny poklasické filozofie v 19. a na počátku 20. století*, 1991, p. 22.

⁵ KIERKEGAARD, S.: *Bázeň a chvění*. Nemoc k smrti, 1993 p. 123.

and in what way the ontology was connected with the phenomenon of time and also if there is a way to elaborate the question of temporality which is also necessary. The first and only one that tried to study the theme of temporality was Kant. His work of schematism was too dark according to Heidegger and he tried to enlighten and bring knowledge to the whole theory. Heidegger seeks a connection between time and „I think“ in Kant's work but he was not able to find any.⁶ He then continues to evaluate the present from a philosophical point of view as the less authentic it is the more it creates an image of itself in the present and closes upon the future realisation of the state of „be able to be“. Concentration on the present increases the ability to forget what was before and it is not a direct result of curiosity rather than the ontological condition of the curiosity itself. The present depends on its own authentic future and past alike and then the subsistence itself comes into its own authentic existence.⁷ Temporality is directly dependent on human existence and binds him to his own subsistence.⁸

Based on these philosophical assumptions the relation between time and photography is an extension of perception of the surrounding world of a photographer. Every single photograph taken is just a recording of a section of time. We can also say that it is a reminder of a moment that has happened in the past and

a perennial making present of the past itself. Photography however does not reflect reality just an image of it because by pressing the trigger this reality has been changed. Photographers then implemented the perception of time and temporality into their works. Time and photography are interlinked together and dependent on each other. Even from the technological point of view the aspect of time is very important due to the fact that the chemical or physical reaction is proportional to the length of time during the exposure of photograph.

1.2. TIMELAPSE, ARCHIVE AND FORENSIC PHOTOGRAPHY

Timelapse is a long-term, systematic and patience requiring process of collecting materials. In the process of photography the collected materials are images concerning the same motif, or person or scene or a place. It is still uncertain if the photograph is more likely an object or if it is an ephemeral memory fighting to last for the future. The photograph „balances“ somewhere between the material state and an experience it connects these two very different worlds. When the contents of timelapse are consistent there is an observable change in scene and movement of different objects in the picture. Without photography it would not be possible to observe this change.⁹

Forensic photography in its basic form was represented originally by photographs of crime scenes. Most

important was the fact that the main focus was concentrated on dead bodies and the study of remains however over time the competences of forensic photography were broadened. Forensic photographers were invited to „evaluate“ the human identity from an anthropological point of view. Forensic analysis does not specialise only in osteology (science concerning bones) but also in the general human development and the variations of the human body.¹⁰

The primary feature of photography to precisely and accurately mirror reality is sufficient for the verification of the objective truth and that is why it is considered by some as a non interventional means of gathering scientific knowledge in the forensic domain. Details of the real world are therefore precisely reproduced by a method that is selected in advance and automated relatively to other visual arts such as illustration. The definition of objectivity of forensic photography in correlation with reality is based on the premise of independence of scientific knowledge and independence of the context as well in which the forensic photography is being used. Since the photographs are being taken for the specific purpose mainly for the needs of a court they immediately lose objectivity. Therefore it is unable to objectively evaluate forensic photographs in the true meaning of the word but the content meaning of photographs is constructed inter-

nally based on the visual language combined with sociological signs and codes. There is the possibility of using a traditional crime scene ruler to highlight the scale in the photo as well as using numbers to help identify the evidence later during the investigation. This whole process is a mutual exchange and the recipient has certain expectations of visual language, shortcuts and hints that are present in a photographic picture. All these expectations are based on previous experiences and there is an appeal to the „visual literacy“ of an individual. Another benefit of forensic photographs is their ability to communicate the content quickly and precisely however the level of „visual literacy“, education and cultural precondition have a great impact on the perception of an individual.¹¹

2. ANALYSIS OF THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Lubo Stacho

The work of the slovak photographer Lubo Stacho has been organically classified to a group that is continuously developing the conception of modernism. It is considered as a rare and quite lonely segment of photography of the 1980s and 1990s due to the fact that even with education in a field of photography the author did not strive towards commercial photography work. His main concern was always his own visions. Stacho balanced his work between

documentary and experimental photography as well as post-conceptual work. His consistent modernistic profile evolves in parallel with the photography of architecture and then he continues with social and sociological projects on to time and its thematisation. Stacho did not value the decisive moment instead he was fascinated with attempts at mastering time itself in the context of photography.

In one of his works the author creates a series of two photographs where he confronts two life situations of the subjects, each of them in different time periods. He uses archive images and contrasts them with his own. It is obvious to see the change between two time periods in each of the photographs not only the people but also the places themselves have changed. The recipient is also compelled to think about what has happened during the time period that separates the two photographs. Stacho purposefully edges the confrontation to strengthen the unique nature of each moment in time. **Manifest of the time** (1976-1984) is a project where the symbol of the bitten apple of knowledge changes its state to a dried out and shrivelled mass. It is something completely different from the original. It is only thanks to photography that enables us to perceive past in the future and future at the same time. It is a process that is unique for photography and has not been achieved by any other form of art. Stacho is one of the authors that are able to work on one theme systematically and over a long period of time. Another productive theme were windows of individual stores which he observed for thirty years straight. A series of photographs represent everything that happened

6 HEIDEGGER, M.: *Bytí a čas*. Praha : Oikoymenth, 1996, p. 261- 265.

7 HEIDEGGER, M.: *Bytí a čas*. Praha : Oikoymenth, 1996, p. 380.

8 HEIDEGGER, M.: *Bytí a čas*. Praha : Oikoymenth, 1996, p. 397-398.

9 ŠTROMPACHOVÁ, L.: *Fotografia v čase / Čas vo fotografii*. In: *European Journal of Media and Photography*. [online]. 2015. Vol. 2. [2019-12-03]. Available at: < <https://ejmap.sk/fotografia-v-casecas-vo-fotografii/>>.

10 THOMPSON, T. J. U.: *The role of the photograph in the application of forensic anthropology and the interpretation of clandestine scenes of crime*. [online]. 2008. [2019-12-03]. Available at: <<https://tees.openrepository.com/tees/bitstream/10149/93897/2/93897.pdf>>.

11 THOMPSON, T. J. U.: *The role of the photograph in the application of forensic anthropology and the interpretation of clandestine scenes of crime*. [online]. 2008. [2019-12-03]. Available at: <<https://tees.openrepository.com/tees/bitstream/10149/93897/2/93897.pdf>>.

during the time period when they were captured especially the limits of the communist propaganda. A dialogue of change and constancy is able to articulate similarly in the pictures of sometimes grotesque windows such as in the *Manifest of time*.¹² *Obchodná* (1984-2014) representing transformation of the Obchodná street change of regime, tenants of the local shops and visual change of the place itself. Stacho strictly and precisely composed the individual change of every shop-window on the street to document the transformation in time. We can also interpret the series as an excursion to the past. Each shop-window represents a kind of altar of society in each period of time. People walking by the window and looking inside through the glass seeking something secondary that will drag them into the shop. Every shop-window had different content inside from goods to clothing and so on. It was not only a place for shopping but also a place for meeting other people and social interaction. From the temporality perspective we can see the explicit transformation and influence of time on the facades of the buildings. Many reconstructions and sometimes even complete changes of purpose in some of the shops. Everything had to adapt to the present of given time period.

Weegee

His own name is Usher Fellig originally from Ukraine. He first started to work as a photographer when he was fourteen, three years after

his family emigrated to the USA. Weegee was self-taught photographer and before he managed to find a stable job in a photo studio in Manhattan in 1918 he tried many jobs in different fields of photography. In 1935 he became a freelance photojournalist. His work centered around the police headquarters and in 1938 he gained permission to install police radio in his car. This provided him with the means to be at the crime scene early and he took his most controversial photographs during this time period. Weegee then offered these to Herald-Tribune, Daily News, Post and the Sun. In 1940s Weegee's pictures were shown outside mainstream productions and he received praise and success. New York's Photo League held an exhibition in 1941 and the Museum of Modern Art began to collect his work to exhibit in 1943. His life's work is significant for the fact that he was praised in popular media and respected by the community of artists as well during his life. Weegee's ability to balance midst fine art and commercial success came from his strong emotional connection between observers and subjects in the photo. Choosing the right moments from the events that he photographed was crucial for him.¹³ His forensic photographs of crime scenes authentically and exclusively capture the atmosphere of the scene. Sometimes there is an empty scene with only a weapon laying on the ground directly referring to the events that occurred right before he arrived at the scene. He

¹² HRABUŠICKÝ, A. - MACEK, V.: *Slovenská fotografia 1925-2000*. Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 2001, p. 376 - 378.

¹³ *WEEGEE*. [online]. [2019-12-03]. Available at: <<https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/weegee?all/all/all/Photojournalism/O>>.

attracts the attention of the viewer by the expressivity which informs about the acts which preceded. Thanks to forensic photography Weegee engaged with the broader society because the themes he photographed were taboo. Dead bodies lying on the floor without movement in contrast with crime scene investigators may seem to look like wax figurines. Also the crime scenes themselves vary as well as the content of pictures but it cannot be influenced.

Nick Kline

An American photographer who specialised not only in the field of photography but who also publishes his own books and art installations with connections to society.¹⁴ The central figure of his project *Gilgo Beach* is a serial killer known as the „Ocean Parkway Serial Killer“ who murdered at least 10 women alongside the short and thick bushes near Gilgo Beach, Long Island. He was shocked by the fact that media marked victims as insignificant prostitutes instead of calling them individually by their names. As he was walking on the beach he made plaster molds of the grass disturbed by the crime scene investigators in their search for evidence.¹⁵ Kline signed each mold with the number of kilometres determining the distance between the scene where the murder had happened and where the body had been found. These molds could represent

¹⁴ *KLINE, N.* [online]. [2019-13-03]. Available at: <<http://acm.newark.rutgers.edu/faculty/nick-kline/>>.

¹⁵ *KLINE, N.* [online]. [2019-13-03]. Available at: <<http://nkline.com/gilgo-beach/>>.

the actual portrait of the murderer and the place where the murders took place. The murderer left his „signature“ at the crime scene which was interpreted by the Kline in the molds. Testimony to the horrible act of murder is a chilling memory seen in Kline's photographs. If there is anything that the crime scene investigators have found by disturbing the grass these molds also represent the mood of gloom and chaos that the victims were in during the attacks. The molds are an archive of the events that the author captured realistically and cannot be erased from the history and time.

Author's series of photographs

The practical output of our paper is a series of photographs of places in exterior indirectly connotating the aspect of time. They represent the places where people have their first kiss. We contacted these people by social networks and asked them for the specific location and place of their first kiss. People themselves are not physically present in the frame but only their names are stated. Based on the precise location coordinates we scouted for the places. Each place is composed of four different pictures. The main vertical photograph represents the exact location of the act of the first kiss. It is deliberately composed vertically to simulate the classic composition when shooting two standing people in the middle. Inspired by Lubo Stacho the place itself is significant for the couple and the experience is now shared among others. There is a certain mark of temporality left at the place of the first kiss. The vertical photograph is then supplemented by three other horizontal pictures of the significant details of the environment surrounding

the main place. These three images are in complementary relation to the main picture visually by the same colour scheme but they also serve as a narrative element of the moment of the first kiss. We then underlined the plurality with visual references in one of the supplementary pictures to express the relationship between two people. We were inspired by Kline's work *Gilgo Beach* when photographing the details. We tried to simulate the natural texture of the environment surrounding the main place with the plural accent of human relationship. The whole series is partially narrative to express the flow of time itself. All of the photographs are only a section of reality that we selected to express an external point of view at the act of the kiss of two people. Our goal is to create a kind of memory through which each one of the recipients can be brought back to that exact moment and relive it again.

Conclusion

Humans have been interested in time since the beginning of history itself and artists especially have interpreted time in various ways. Photographers are even more closely related to time than artists in other art forms. Time has a key value in the everyday life of every human. We focused mainly on the topic of time through a philosophical point of view in our paper and then we added theoretical references to the special fields of photography that are concerned more with time than the other fields. Secondly we described the basic principles of forensic photography in both professional crime scene investigation photography and also in art forms. This theoretical knowledge helped us with the analysis of the selected

photographers and their specific series of photos that concerned the theme of time.

We then created our own series of photographs reflecting time through the means of forensic photography. Human relationships were the center of our series and they have a direct correlation with time itself. Non-directly showing people only by stating their names in the final photos is a forensic approach to substitute for human presence. We also metaphorically described the possible circumstances of the relationship between the two people and what lead to the act of the first kiss by examining the environment around the exact place of the kiss. Our series of photographs can provide a certain look back in time. The series also have the attributes of an archive. Each recipient can then relive an intimate moment of two people in the past.

Time is a crucial aspect for everyone. We as humans live in a constant chase after the next moment in life and sometimes we forget to relive and treasure moments that happen in the present or had happened in the past and this series of photographs should serve as a memento for people to slow down and remind themselves of the important moments in life.

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Photography as a means of communication

I began to perceive photography more intensively only after graduating from high school. As time went by this perception transformed into a fascination. Fascination with pictures themselves as well as with all the visual components and storytelling. In the early days my main subjects that I shot were not of people but mainly static objects, nature etc. Only after a few years I began to understand photography as a means of communication and a tool to capture and transform reality itself.

My main reason for reapplying to college was the opportunity to get into photography more, to connect with other people and to broaden my horizons in this field. Another important aspect of my decision were the teachers themselves and I am thankful to them for every opportunity they provided me. It was in the early years of college when I first came into contact with documentary and fine art photography. After the first more intense workshop in Brehov, a village in eastern Slovakia, I applied for another workshop in the region of Spiš also in the eastern part of Slovakia. To watch, photograph and explore new places and get to know the people that was something which started to really interest me and had a great influence on me in the future. It was no longer solely about photography but more about communication and knowing the people themselves. Since then it

has been easier for me to empathize with people that I shoot, to know their feelings and thoughts and I try to put that into my photographs.

I prefer digital photography due to its flexibility and reliability, that way I can concentrate purely on capturing the right unique moment. I also prefer candid not stylised situations in documentary photography. Annie Leibovitz: There is this idea that in portraiture it's the photographer's job to set the subject at ease. I don't believe that. I apply this quote from Leibovitz in almost all of my projects and it is the thing that I like the most about photography.

The cycle of photographs called "Uhský Pereval / Uzh river region" is divided into three parts - Environment, Portraits and everything is about Easter. I begin the first part of the series with photographs of the ukrainian countryside, just near the regional borders, traditional village architecture, damaged roads, a few kilometers away from the slovakian border. It seems that time has stopped in the Ukraine somewhere during the communism era. Portraits of each inhabitant of Volosyanka village which I was shooting in reminded me of monuments of a lost era in time. Each one of the citizens is different than the other and together they represent a whole picture and idea of that region. This series of photographs ends with the celebration of Easter in the Carpathian region. Volosyanka village is a place cut off

from the “reality” of the western world. Only the so called “Resti Kremla” satirically uplifted the situation. Multiple christenings with water. Children carelessly playing in the ruins of houses around. All this together created a mosaic of Carpatho-Ukraine.

The “Vyšné Ružbachy” series is a free continuation of the “Uhský Pereval” cycle. This series is constructed of two parts. In the first one “Dedina/Kúpele” my main focus was the village itself, in conjunction with the portraits of people living in the village. The whole picture is then coupled with photographs of the local spa which was a cultural and economical centre in recent communist history. There is a crater with the thermal water at the centre of the village, a fascinating sort of cultural place for locals and for tourists too. It represents a sort of a memento of the past which will prevail and that amazed me both as a photographer and as a human. The second part of this series “Kroje/Salaš” focuses on two rare things nowadays in Slovakia. Traditional Slovak folklore clothes and sheep farms. Traditional folklore clothes are now being forgotten as well as traditional shepherds. These photographs meant to show them in a different perspective.

The third cycle “Architecture of a human body” is a series of forensic photographs of a human body. I decided to unidentify the human aspect itself. Instead I used a human body as some sort of imprint or trace of something living. The

fact that there are no two bodies that are completely the same is absolutely amazing. There are different imprints everytime, every human is different.

Photography for me means a lot. It is in a constant state of change yet the basic rules will remain. It is a process of learning and exploring myself as well as my surroundings.

Jakub Kovalík

JAKUB KOVALÍK (Slovakia, Partizánske, 1991)

Education

2006 - 2010 High school, Partizánske, Slovakia

2012 - present University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Trnava, Slovakia

Group exhibitions

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

2017 Village, that does not sleep, Theater of Ján Palárik, Trnava, Slovakia

2016 Reflection of the unseen - Social Services Center Domovina, Žehra-Hodkovce, Slovakia

2016 Spiš Homeland, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2015 Architecture of the human body, Theater of Ján Palárik, Trnava, Slovakia

2015 Terra Gothica, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2015 Land Art, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2015 Children of Patrónka, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2014 Advertisement for shoes - Advertisement for death (Homage to Guy Bourdin), Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2014 Violence in media, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

2014 Identity of a college student, Gallery of Ľudovít Hlaváč, FMK UCM, Trnava, Slovakia

Presentations

2016 Homeland, The Spiš Artists Gallery, Spišská Nová Ves, Slovakia

2015 Land of Spiš, The Spiš Artists Gallery, Spišská Nová Ves, Slovakia

Workshops

2015

-2016 Spišská Nová Ves, Slovakia

2015 Brehov & Rad, Slovakia

2017 Vyšné Ružbachy, Slovakia

2017

-2016 Uhský pereval / Uzh river region, Ukraine

Publications

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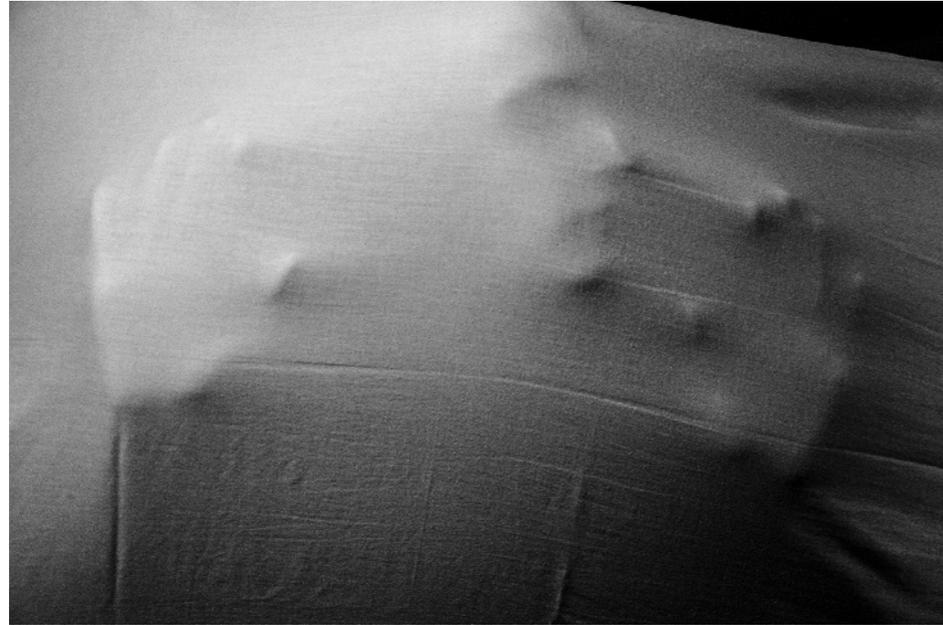
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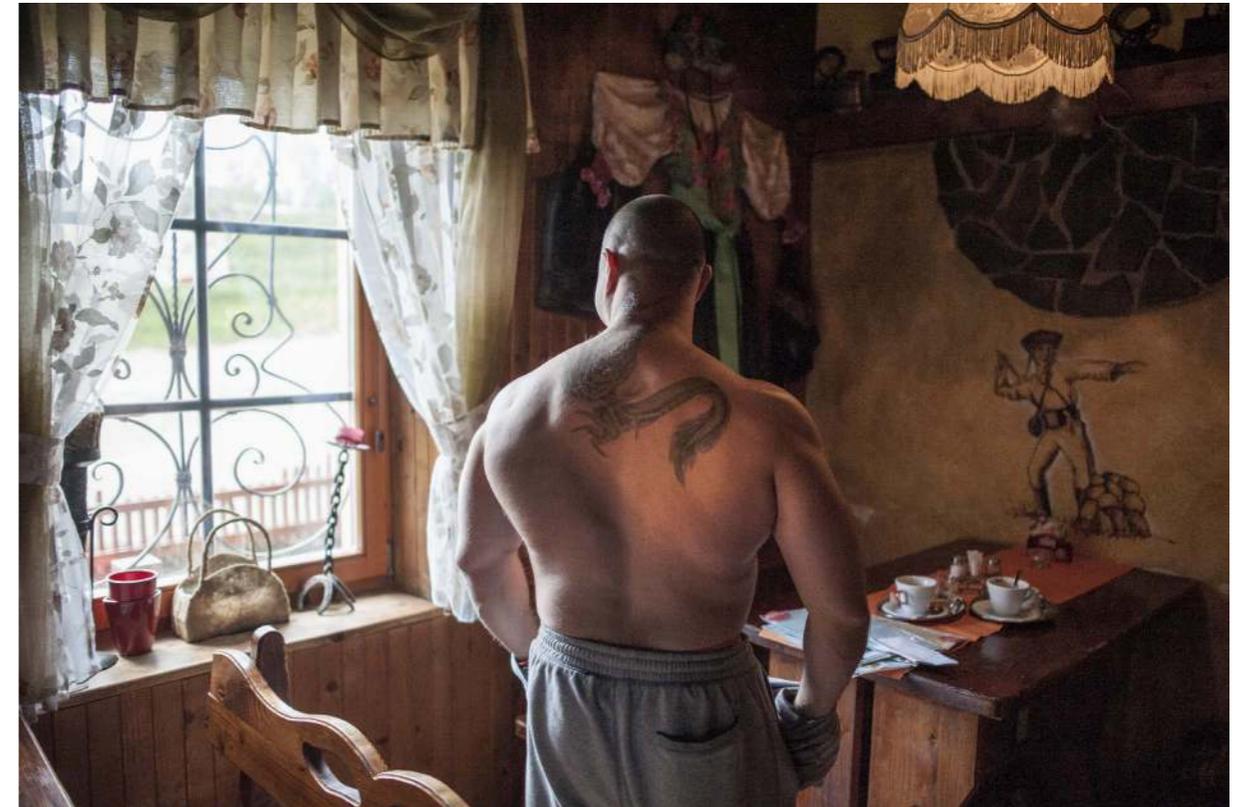
From the series Architecture of the body, 2015



From the series Vyšné Ružbachy - Folk costumes and sheepfarm, 2017



From the series Vyšné Ružbachy - Village and spa, 2017





From the series Uhský Pereval / Uzh river region - Environment, 2017





From the series Uhský Pereval / Uzh river region - Portraits, 2017



From the series Uhský Pereval / Uzh river region - Easter, 2017







