

Pavol Breier

The Dominant Role of Photography

Abstract

Pavol Breier is a Slovak documentary photographer. Subjects typical of his work are mountain and alpine nature and the lives of the people in its embrace. Photographs published in the portfolio includes three series. The common characteristic feature of them is time-lapse. Tales from Zázrivá tells the story of shepherds and herdsmen from Zázrivá. The series lends a new look to a story which is at once both old and new – the cabinet arrangements of mementos of the past bring us closer to the “salašník” or mountain shepherd of the 1970s, and his traditional pastoral life in an untouched landscape encircled dramatically by mountains, in dialogue with full colour, large-format evocative portraits from the present day. Horb (hill Horb) is a documentary about an Orthodox religious pilgrimage in eastern Slovakia. In the 1970s, believers made this pilgrimage once a year to the hill of Horb to visit a hermit monk during the celebrations of the Feast of the Transfiguration. The author returned here after 50

years to capture the changes in this genius loci and the character of the pilgrimage itself. The monuments, covered before their unveiling, inspired Breier to create a series of photographs and photomontages in which the figures of socialist realism were transformed into phantoms of socialist surrealism. After November 1989, Breier saw that some monuments were covered up, to never be unveiled again. They were covered before their removal. By photographing them in this form, he documented the individual phases of life of these monuments, a time arc that has finally come to a close.

Key words

Documentary Photography. Monuments. Pilgrimage. Shepherds. Zázrivá.



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Tales from Zázrivá / From the Life of Shepherds

The series tells the story of the shepherds and herdsmen from Zázrivá, with whom the artist is connected by several decades of friendship. The trust which the photographer has built and regular contact in the mountain sheepfolds have offered him a remarkable insight into the world of seasonal mountain pastoralism, and also into the personal lives of its participants: in 2021 he visited former shepherds in their retirement. The contrast of colourful contemporary portraits with black and white images from the past depicts the seemingly idyllic way of life of a slowly vanishing guild – that of traditional herding and “salašníctvo”, a form of seasonal mountain pastoralism unique to the Carpathian region. Breier remains true to the classical documentary form, and his “signature” approach is characterised by the use of wide lens shots and an almost cinematographic rendering of the scenes. The series lends a new look to a story which is at once both old and new – the cabinet arrangements of mementos of the past bring us closer to the “salašník” or mountain shepherd of the 1970s and his traditional pastoral life in an untouched landscape encircled dramatically by mountains, in dialogue with full colour, large-format evocative portraits from the present day.

Horb (hill Horb)

In the 1970s (1971–1972), Breier photographed the pilgrimage site of Horb in Uličské Krivé. Here, on a small hill (Horb), igumen (monk) Ihnatij built a chapel where he lived, and every year on the feast of Preobraženiya (Transfiguration of Jesus), Orthodox believers held a religious procession.

The author returned here in 2022, after 50 years, to capture the changes in this genius loci and the character of the pilgrimage itself. Pilgrims from far and wide still come to this place, which has changed over time, not only for the feast itself, but also to commemorate the personality of igumen Ihnatij at his grave.

Lucia Benická

The Monuments

As an art expert and therefore also an expert on large wrapped objects of Christo, Pavol Breier was able to properly appreciate the sculptures from the SNP (Slovak National Uprising) Memorial in Bratislava by Ján Kulich, which he saw covered (wrapped), just before the ceremonial unveiling of the Memorial in 1974. He found that the mysteriously wrapped sculptures, looking like ghosts, were perhaps more visually appealing than the unveiled, traditionally modelled and bronze-cast figures. He photographed them and then also continued with other monuments

in similar situations. He then created separate compositions from them – photomontages – in which the figures of socialist realism were transformed into phantoms of socialist surrealism.

November 1989 passed, and Breier suddenly saw that some monuments, especially those with ideological baggage, such as the Monument to the Militiaman, also by Ján Kulich, or the enormous Monument to Klement Gottwald by Tibor Bártfay, were once again covered up, never again to be unveiled. They were covered before their removal (in the case of the K. Gottwald sculpture, physically destroyed). At first, they were only provisionally wrapped, painted with revolutionary slogans, and only later did they receive a tailor-made “coat”. The well-hidden Gottwald sculpture is marked with a new plaque – Freedom Square. He thus followed up on his photographs of socialist statues before their unveiling in the 1970s. Breier documented the individual phases of the life of these monuments, a time arc that has finally come to a close.

Aurel Hrabušický

Tales from Zázrivá



Ján K., 1980–2021





Jozef K., 1975–2021







Ján J., 1983–2021

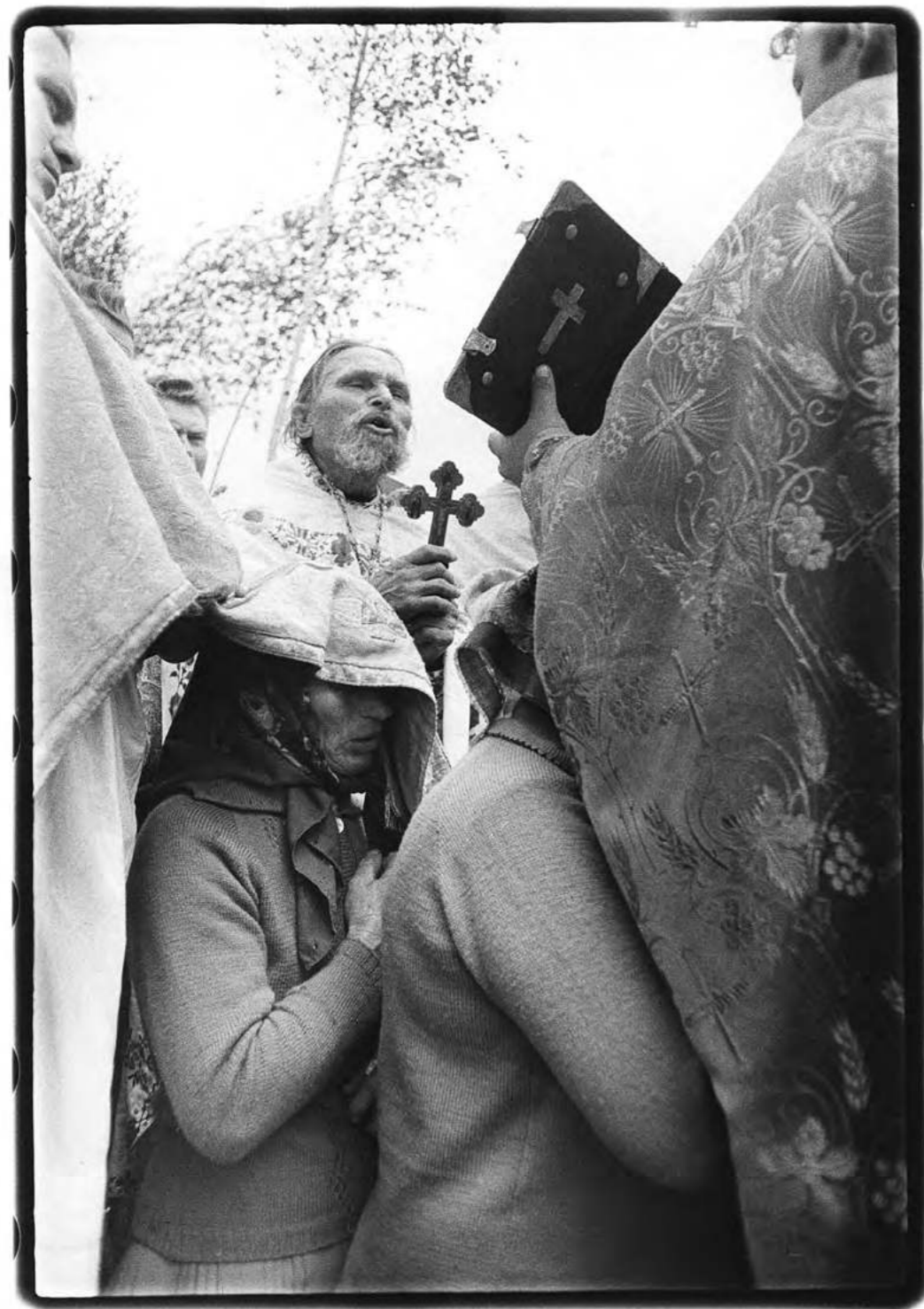


Horb



1 - 9 Uličské Krivé, 1871 - 72









10 - 18 Uličské Krivé, 2022







The Monuments



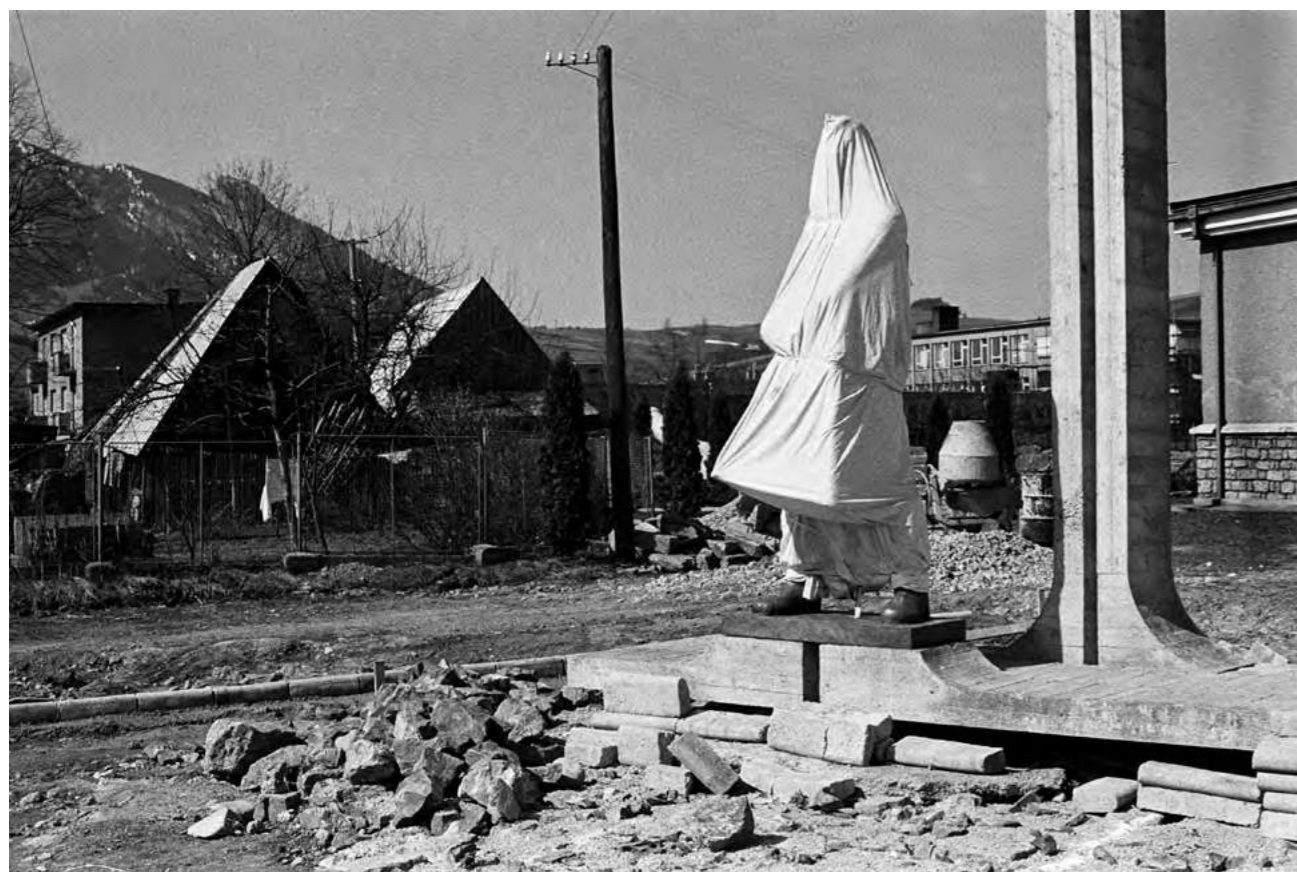
Terchová, 1988



Bratislava, 1974



Bratislava, 1974



Zázrivá, 1976



Bratislava, 1989



Bratislava, 1989



Bratislava, 1989

Pavol BREIER
(Bratislava, Slovakia, 1952)

Pavol Breier is a photographer, mountaineer, traveller and lecturer. He graduated from the Film and TV Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (1974). He is a member of the Slovak Union of Visual Arts and the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists. From the beginning, he has inclined toward subjects that are most typical of his work, mountain and alpine nature and the lives of the people in its embrace (series Orava, the Pamirs, the Himalayas, Tibet). His work includes reportage and documentary photography, landscapes, portraits, and theatre photography. As a mountaineer he has participated on a number of expeditions to the highest mountain regions, such as the Himalayas, Caucasus, The Pamirs, etc. Breier's work has been published in photography magazines, and he is the author and co-author of several fine art catalogues and photography books including *Pamír [Pamir]*, *Karpaty - Malé, Biele [The Carpathians - Little, White]*, *Na streche sveta [On the Roof of the World]*, and *Svet tibetského buddhizmu [The World of Tibetan Buddhism]*. His photographs are represented in the collections of the Gallery of Spiš Artists in Spišská Nová Ves, the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava, the Orava Gallery in Dolný Kubín, the Kysucká Gallery in Čadca, the Ernest Zmeták Gallery in Nové Zámky, the National Gallery in Prague (CZ) and The Navigator Foundation in Boston (USA). He currently lectures at

the Pan-European University in Bratislava. He lives and works in Bratislava and Zázrivá.

Awards

- 2014** The Most Beautiful Books of the Year 2013, Labrang, Bratislava, SK
- 2013** Deans Award, Faculty of Media of the Pan European University in Bratislava, Bratislava, SK
- 2008** The Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival, 1st prize in Mountain Culture category, Vancouver, Canada, CA
- 2001** The Most Beautiful Books of the Year 2000, Breier - Photography, Bratislava, SK
- 1997** Fujifilm Europress Photo Awards, 1st Prize, Slovak National Competition, Bratislava, SK

Individual Exhibitions

- 2025** *Nepál 2025 - Pavol Breier*, Slávka Breierová, Galéria Karola Kállaya, PEVŠ Bratislava, Bratislava, SK
- 2024** *Príbehy zo Zázrivej*, Oravská galéria, Dolný Kubín, SK
- 30th anniversary of the donation of a Christmas tree to the Vatican*, Dom kultúry Zázrivá, Zázrivá, SK
- 2021** *Orava*, FotoArtFestival, Bielsko-Biala, PL
- Oravská pastieri*, Galéria umelcov Spiša, Spišská Nová Ves, SK
- 2019** *BAHAMA (Breier-Horváth-*

2018

Matuščík) - Abstrakcia a metafora, Galéria umelcov Spiša, Spišská Nová Ves, SK

BAHAMA (Breier-Horváth-Matušík) - Psychostereotaxia, GMB, Bratislava, SK

2017

Fenomén MFS - Harangozó, Breier, Drahoš, Galerie Dolní brána, Prachovice, CZ

Sviatočný Nepál, festival Hory a mesto, Aupark, Bratislava, SK

2016

Labrang - svet tibetského kláštora, Oravská knižnica A. Habovštiaka, Dolný Kubín, SK

Ľudia Himaláji, Galéria umelcov Spiša, Spišská Nová Ves, SK

2015

Ľudia Himaláji, Mestské kultúrne stredisko, Snina, SK

Amdo, on the occasion of the visit of the 14th Dalai Lama, Moyzes's Hall, Bratislava, SK

2014

Festival Astorka 2016, Divadlo Astorka, Bratislava, SK

Pastieri, Oravská galéria, Dolný Kubín, SK

2013

Festival Astorka 2015, Divadlo Astorka, Bratislava, SK

Labrang, festival Camera Slovakia, Incheba, Bratislava, SK

- 2012** Galéria umenia Ernesta Zmetáka, Nové Zámky, SK
- Pavol Breier / Labdze (Tibet)*, Fotografická galerie Fiducia, Ostrava, CZ
- Zem snehu*, Dom fotografie/Liptovská galéria, Liptovský Mikuláš, SK
- 2010** *Na streche sveta*, Stará tržnica, Bratislava, SK
- 2009** *Na streche sveta*, Stará tržnica, Bratislava, SK
- Na streche sveta*, Slovenské národné múzeum, Bratislava, SK
- 2006** *Kláštor Labrang*, Slovenské národné múzeum, Výstavný pavilón, Bratislava, SK
- 2003** *Fotografie*, Galéria Nova, Bratislava, SK
- Tibet*, Vanderfest, DK
- Ružinov*, Bratislava, SK
- Tibet - tradičné umenie*, Trenčianske múzeum, Trenčín, SK
- 2002** *Tibet*, Galéria Živa, Zvolenský zámok, Zvolen, SK
- Fotografie*, FotoGaléria Nova, Košice, SK
- 2001** *Tibet vo fotografii*, Galéria Cafe, Bratislava, SK
- 2000** *Tibet*, on the occasion of awarding an honorary doctorate to the Dalai Lama, Právnická fakulta UK Bratislava, Bratislava, SK
- Fotografie*, Stredoslovenská galéria, Banská Bystrica, SK
- 1999** *Fotografie*, Oravská galéria, Dolný Kubín, SK
- Fotografie*, Dom fotografie Tatranskej galérie, Poprad, SK
- Fotografie*, Galéria umelcov

2001

Spiša, Spišská Nová Ves, SK

1998

Tibet vo fotografii, Galéria Cafe, Bratislava, SK

1995

Himaláje, Incheba, Bratislava, SK

Pavol Breier, Galéria Profil, Bratislava, SK

1994

Karakoram Highway, World Culture Center, Zuiderpershuis Antwerpen, Antwerpen, BE

Pavol Breier, City Hall Schiltingheim, Schiltigheim, FR

Karakoram Highway, Galéria Focus, Bratislava, SK

1992

Karakoram Highway, Festival horských filmov, Poprad, SK

1991

Svet tibetského buddhizmu, Studio Artama, Prague, CZ

1990

Tibet - Nepál - Pamír, Galéria umení, Žilina, SK

Himaláje - Nepál - Tibet, Výstavná sieň Slovenskej výtvarnej únie, Bratislava, SK

Himaláje, Tatranská galéria, Horný Smokovec, SK

1989

Himaláje, Galéria umenia, Nové Zámky, SK

1988

Ľudia z Himaláji, Galéria Nova, Košice, SK

1987

Fotografie (Pamír), Kysucká galéria, Čadca, SK

1986

Fotografie (Pamír), Dom kultúry, Kysucké Nové Mesto, SK

Fotografie (Pamír, Orava), Stredoslovenská galéria, Banská Bystrica, SK

1985

Fotografie (Pamír), Výstavná sieň L. Novomeského, Bratislava, SK

Fotografie (Pamír), Klub umenia, Prievidza, SK

Fotografie (Pamír), Výstavišťa Černá louka, Ostrava, CZ

1981

Serigrafie P. Breier - Z. Horecký, Považská galéria umenia v Žiline, Žilina, SK

1977

Fotografie, Komorná galéria fotografie Profil, Bratislava, SK

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