

Peter Korček

Walking with a Camera

Abstract

In his work, the author primarily focuses on the urban landscape and its impacts on human life. His entire documentary work is linked by a unified authorial idea. In the *Jungle City* cycle, he works with the visual counterpart of the current form of the Bratislava metropolis, full of transportation routes, dense modern development, and concrete surfaces. The means to create unexpected views of the city for him are carefully selected locations on the urban peripheries surrounded by dense vegetation – trees and wild grasses. He thus achieves a completely new view of Bratislava, in which it returns to the wilderness. The project *Quiet Sunday Afternoons in the Town by the Refinery* is the author's reflection on the impacts of industry in the rural surroundings. The focal point is the technical structure of an oil factory, which covers a significant part of an otherwise tranquil landscape of a small Austrian town. However, through austere visual expression, Korček delivers an urgent message about the adverse impact of the factory on the ecosystem. As part of the series *Here Is Our Paradise*, which unifies the theme of lawns

and trees, Korček addresses the disruption of the stereotype of urban housing estates through the small self-help interventions of their residents. While walking with a camera, he supplements these plants with various found mixtures of folk interventions placed in front of panel buildings. In the *Searching* series, he adopts the position of an observer of urban movement, consisting of figures of pedestrians in narrow rays of the low-lying sun. This time he works in the environment of New York, but unlike the previous series, he does not specify this location, only utilizing its elemental potential. Korček does not work with photographic effects; he fully utilizes the poetics of the chosen locations. He skillfully works with perspective, multiple plans, or the selection of a location. Through their specific combination, he succeeds in creating authentic images of the location, in which we still find a lot of personal fantasy.

Key words

Architecture. Cityscape. Equilibrium. Human. Interventions. Landscape. Nature. Urbanism.

Stations

Carefully selected inanimate motifs, the essence of which has become the everyday and specific aesthetics of public or private spaces, have been managed in recent decades by several Czech and Slovak photographers. For example, Czech-Swiss author Iren Stehli has focused on the display windows of many Prague shops in one of her cycles since 1978. Astonished by the peculiar combination of assortment, political slogans, or signage, she captured a lasting visual impression to emphasize the exclusively found motif. Following a similar idea and methods in composing images of retail economy and its transformation from totalitarian to market economy, Ľubo Stacho came to Bratislava's Obchodná Street, repeatedly observing minor exterior alterations of shops. Veronika Zapletalová focused on the theme of private cottage dwellings, with her project *Chatařství*, seemingly disjointed at first glance, manifesting in high quality through the accumulation of hundreds of photographs. Tomáš Pospěch, on the other hand, photographed the family house in Šumperák in cultivated, typified shots, cataloging the theme in eight views and simultaneously identifying individual differences in the construction of these objects.

Using similar principles such as searching for elements of a specific theme, developing the quantity of images, or preserving the visual

memory of the natural environment of society, Peter Korček has also been working for a long time. Particularly in the sets *Stanice* and *Zelené stanice*, he intensively deals with the tangible legacy of the totalitarian regime depicted through publicly accessible objects of Slovak railway stations. He senses the strong potential of sites that are becoming increasingly unique. While the subject of most railway-themed shots tends to be visually monumental locomotives, railway bridges, viaducts, and building exteriors, Korček is interested in the backstage of everything attractive and popular yet simultaneously publicly accessible. He evidently holds a positive, even nostalgic, relationship with the photographed places, seeking refuge from sterile and modern interiors through their visits. The author's openness does not align with the political and promotional motivation with which sculptures, mosaics, paintings, or flowers were installed in station halls. Besides capturing them, he also documents unflattering occurrences accompanying waiting for trains. Pseudo-travelers without a destination remain mere stage props within the author's shots, placed in the hall's interior, typically illustrating the spaciousness of the area. He does not manipulate scenes but waits for suitable situations within the station. He approaches reality with exaggeration, seeking grotesque still lifes, concentrations of remnants from past decades, while connecting them with new motifs.

Focusing on one motif led to the separation of the narrower-focused *Zelené stanice* from the set *Stanice*, where Korček finds the potential visual value of shots thanks to human-installed vegetation. Both sets are continuously expanded with new locations. In his work, Korček aptly combines the objective view with more distinctive shots, where his experience and talent as a photojournalist are evident. He complements frontal views with images featuring shallow depth of field or significant horizon shifts. The inconsistency in his photography method corresponds naturally with the diverse character of found locations, creating a fresh collection as a whole. Crafted cultivation and the almost indispensable colour photographic film of medium-format cameras support the viewer's perception of the author's selected motifs.

In addition to their artistic value, the author's images have a broader impact. Their documentary-historical and sociological significance is undeniable. Thus, it is not just a private and particularly oriented archive; Korček also creates illustrative material, the value of which will increase in the coming decades. By supplementing textual information about specific locations, we gain a valuable contribution to both professional and lay studies of public spaces. As a representative of the younger generation of photographers, he has the opportunity to monitor the conditions of various social

themes in the long term. In this case, photography becomes a suitable means of at least visually preserving disappearing, adapted, or reconstructed places. Partial modifications rarely respect the original intentions, and their actualization is even more rare. Thus, it is not about a global reflection of the current state of Slovak railway stations but a carefully selected authorial choice. Therefore, the record of recent realities is even more significant.

Quiet City

Restrictions and closures, which affected our lives during the spread of the coronavirus, manifested everywhere, but particularly markedly in urban environments, with a drastic cessation of most public activities and an extremely rapid depopulation of streets. Areas designed for the movement of large masses of people practically emptied overnight, resembling scenes from a disaster movie. Particularly striking is the view of spaces in the city dedicated to cars. Their absence highlights how much space we dedicate to them not only in urban infrastructure but especially in vast parking areas. This contrast emphasizes the dire situation of urban greenery and nature in the city, which is either radically reduced or modified into an unnatural form, or tolerated more or less where it doesn't interfere too much with traffic.

Similarly to many of his previous projects related to urban areas,

the documentary character of the photographs gains strength through the absence of inhabitants. However, unlike other urban series by Korček, this absence is forced and almost inappropriate. Wide roads, expansive squares, and shopping complexes seem unable to justify their dimensions without signs of the human element.

Photographer Peter Korček, who documented this previously unimaginable change, has long been dedicated to the theme of the city in photography. He is a sensitive observer of spatial relationships in the city, paradoxes in public space, and bizarre intersections of past layers, vividly overlaid with new interventions.

Paradoxically, the collective absence of humans in the space intended and constructed for them provides an opportunity to see its laws in sharper light, emerging from the shadow of our activity. We can suddenly observe chaos and unexpected symmetry in the volumes of buildings and urban facilities. The vivid mosaic of advertising surfaces strikes our eyes, or conversely, we can more strongly realize the impact of a black screen mega billboard on its immediate surroundings.

The *Quiet City* could be any city in Slovakia. It speaks not only of the exceptional situation that has no parallel in our region practically since World War II, but also sets a realistic mirror to the aesthetics of the 21st-century city and the imprint

we leave on its face – even if we ourselves may not be aware of it.

Bratislava at the Confluence of Two Rivers

In this documentary series the author explores the Danube and Morava rivers as inseparable parts of Bratislava and its surroundings. Their condition is a direct reflection of long-term human activity and the climate changes we are all witnessing: last year's floods and this year's extremely dry summer. Many are building their temporary or more permanent homes on the banks and their lives are closely linked to the rivers. The two rivers are also Slovakia's natural border with Austria and the Czech Republic. Not so long ago, the banks of these rivers were lined by an "Iron Curtain" that separated us from the civilised Western world for many decades. The traces of communist terror are slowly and quietly growing into the landscape.

Stations





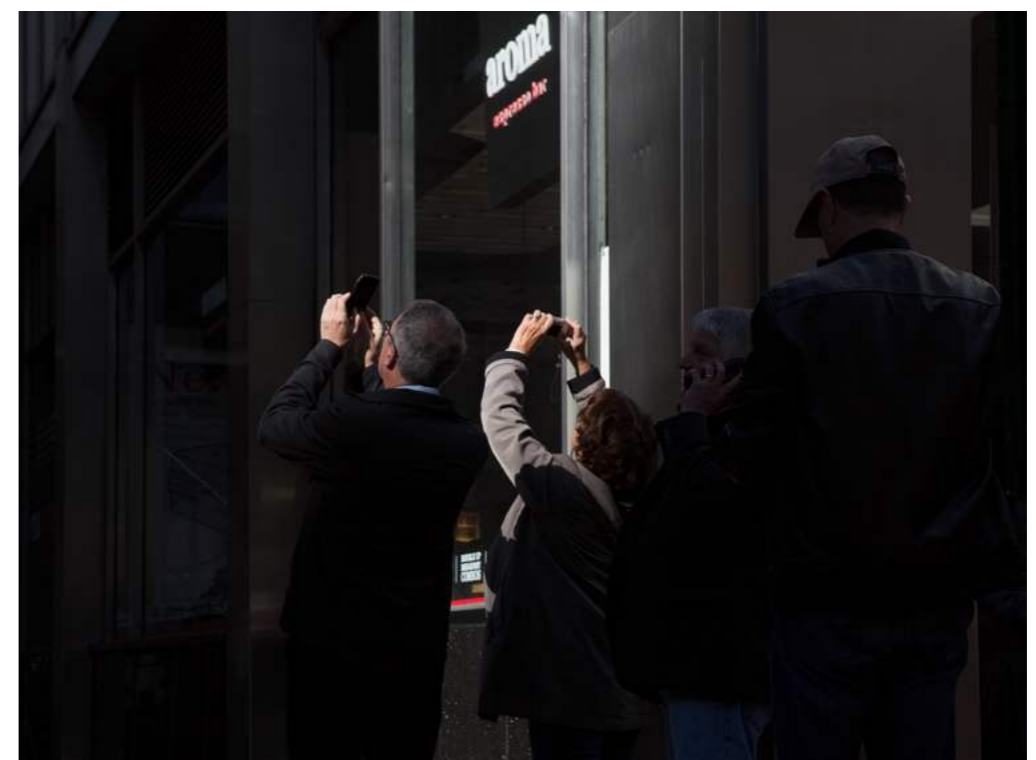


De-Fence





Searching



Bratislava at the Counfluence...





Here Is Our Paradise



Jungle City







Silent City







Peter KORČEK
(Slovakia, 1980)

Peter Korček (1980) is a photographer, pedagogue, and doctoral student at the Institute of Creative Photography, Faculty of Philosophy and Science, at the Silesian University in Opava. In his free work, he focuses on documentary photography, predominantly exploring the relationships between urban dwellers and the environment that surrounds and shapes them through their activities. Professionally, he worked for over fifteen years as a photojournalist for various Slovak publishers. He exhibits both in Slovakia and abroad and has received several awards for his work in competitions such as Slovak Press Photo and Czech Press Photo.

Individual Exhibitions

- 2023** *Stations*, Cultural centre Nová Cvernovka, Bratislava, SK
- 2022** *Bratislava at the Confluence of Two Rivers*, Gallery of Slovak Press Photo Foundation, Bratislava, SK
Stations, Cultural centre Stanica Žilina – Záríečie, Žilina, SK
The Faces of Czech Expatriate Community in Slovakia, Czech Centre Gallery, Bratislava, SK
- 2020** *Silent City*, Gallery Nástupište 1-12, Topolčany, SK
Cities Without Us, Hviezdoslavovo námestie, Bratislava, SK

- 2019** *Stations*, Kupe Gallery, Opava, CZ
- 2017** *Here Is Our Paradise*, Gallery of Slovak Press Photo Foundation, Bratislava, SK
- 2016** *Green City*, Gallery Opera, Jiri Myron Theater, Ostrava, CZ
- 2015** *Jungle City*, Bratislava City Museum, Bratislava, SK
- 2013** *Zlaté Piesky, Faceless*, Saloon of Photography, Bratislava, SK

Collective Exhibitions

- 2023** *Rotlicht Festival*, Masc Foundation, Wien, AT
- 2022** *Photography Days in Levice*, Levice, SK
- 2019** *SEFO 2021, Universum - The Triennial of Contemporary Central European Art*, Museum of Art, Olomous, CZ
- 2020** *Three Decades of Institute of Creative Photography FPF Silesian University in Opava*, Gallery UPM, Prague, CZ
- 2019** *Month of Photography*, Bratislava, SK
- 2018** *Month of Photography - Off Festival*, Bratislava, SK
- 2017** *Czech Press Photo*, Old Town Hall, Prague, CZ
- 2016** *Prague Photo*, Institute of Creative Photography FPF Silesian University in Opava, Kafka's House, Prague, CZ
- 2015** *25 Years of Institute of Creative Photography FPF Silesian University in*

- 2014** *Prague Photo*, Institute of Creative Photography FPF Silesian University in Opava, Kafka's House, Prague, CZ
- 2013** *Slovak Press Photo*, Bratislava City Museum, Bratislava, SK
- 2012** *Journalism Award*, Open Gallery, Bratislava, SK

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/ejmap-24-01-02>

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