

A SHORT HISTORY OF SLOVENE PHOTOGRAPHY 1941–70

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Introduction

The present survey of Slovene photography between 1941 and 1970 considers production at the moment in history when pre-war artistic production was disrupted and documentary photography became more important. In the first post-war years the Communist regime did not allow the continuation of the pre-war way of work; however, in the 1950s Slovene photographers re-established contacts with European production. Today we can clearly observe the influence of German subjective photography and of the American exhibition *The Family of Man* from the 1950s. In the late 1960s, the most innovative production followed the artistic actions of Slovene conceptualists. Only in the 1980s, however, did photography gain the status of an academic subject. At that time it was introduced as a creative art at the Academy of Art and as a subject of historical research at the Faculty of Arts.

An outline of Slovene photography from the end of WW I to 1941

At present, Slovene photographic production of the first decade after World War I has only partially been researched. The major part consisted of small trade studio portraits for official and personal everyday use in larger cities such as Ljubljana, (Barbara Sosič 2006: 25), Maribor (Ferlež 2002: 21), Celje (Kambič 1996: 16), and elsewhere. Gradually the market for industrial and architectural photography also grew and there were some authors, such as Josip Pelikan from Celje (Kambič 1996: 21), Veličan Bešter (Marc 2002: 12), and Hugon Hibšer (Lampič 2004: 37–39) from Ljubljana, who were able to serve these demands.

On the other hand, the most innovative Slovene landscape photography was tightly bound to organized Slovene mountaineering. The latter began with the foundation of the Slovensko planinsko društvo (SPD; Slovene Mountaineering Society) in 1893, stimulated by similar German institutions with aggressive political ambitions to Germanize the southern Julian Alps. In 1895 the Slovene magazine *Planinski vestnik* was established and began to publish photographs of Slovene mountains, and the photographic section of the SPD was founded in 1897. The production was mostly of topographical and memento kind; other, better quality photographic reproductions displayed romantic symbolism and pictorialistic, postimpressionistic traits (Lampič 1991: 3).

The pre-war tradition was bolstered by the constitution of the Turistovski klub Skala (the Skala Tourist Club) in 1919 and its photographic section in 1922. The leaders were Egon Planinšek, Janko Ravnik, Janko Skerlep, and Stanko Tominšek. Along with modern trends of mountaineering, they also brought some new approaches to photography, such as winter shots, extreme light effects, stressing the juxtaposition among close-ups and long shots, rich atmospheric effects, and shooting towards the sun (Lampič 1991: 3).

The painter Avgust Černigoj provided a new creative impulse. Born in Trieste in 1898, he had taken part in the basic course led by László Moholy-Nagy at Bauhaus, Weimar, in spring 1924. Returning to Trieste via Ljubljana, he formed a circle of devotees and introduced some vanguard, mostly constructivist procedures into painting, designing space, sculpture and photography. The major part of the photographs were used as half products in constructivist photo-collages, some of which are still preserved; photographs as autonomous artistic objects were separately reproduced in contemporary magazines, but they have been virtually unknown until recently and mostly remain preserved in their original state today. The use of mirror pictures and extreme upper and lower points of view led to revolutionary ideas in forming artistic space and art objects in space. In the spirit of vanguard artistic ideas of the time, the most important creative innovations evolved in the group as a whole, there were some artists, such as Mario Lavrenčič, Giorgio Carmelich, and Edvard Stepančič, who devoted relatively more energy to photography (Krečič 1989).

In 1931, Fotoklub Ljubljana (the Ljubljana Photo-Club) took over the creative and organizing initiative of Slovene art photography. From modest beginnings, by 1941 the club had become a leading amateur expert society with its own property and funds, and with rich andragogic exhibition and publishing activities. It formed its own library and even started a market-oriented photo agency. Its wide public activity initiated a photo-amateur movement in other Slovene towns, such as Hrastnik, Maribor, and Ptuj (Lampič 1990a: 269–70).

The club was international and pluralistic (Lampič 1990a: 269–70). The main artists, such as Janko Branc, Ivo Frelih, Karlo and Peter Kocjančič, Fran Krašovec, Janko Skerlep, Marjan Pfeifer Sr., and some others, were successively and simultaneously working in different styles: expressionist (K. Kocjančič), constructivist (Kocjančič), pictorialistic (Kocjančič, Branc, Frelih, Krašovec, Pfeifer), new objectivity (K. Kocjančič, Krašovec, Skerlep), social realistic (Frelih, Krašovec), and surrealist (K. Kocjančič, Skerlep) (Lampič 1999: 25–27, 45–49, 60–61; Kocjančič 1932: 3–4; Lampič 1990b: 13–18, 19–20; Štrumej 1998: 15; Lampič 2006: 226–37).

Very little is known about private amateur photography. The opuses of some recently discovered or researched authors, such as the engineer Evgen Baraga and the clerk Franc Ferjan, (Štrumej 2006), both from Ljubljana, show that there were some sensitive and inventive photographers who were intent on remaking memento intimate photography, regardless of the artistic program of the Ljubljana Photo Club.

The painter and photographer Veno Pilon represented a unique but important exception in contemporary photoartistic production. He began to take photographs in Slovenia, but his Paris opus from 1930 onwards, when he took up permanent residence there, is of international importance.¹ It consists of portraits of many contemporary artists, mainly members of the so-called School of Paris, for instance Giorgio de Chirico, Enrico Prampolini, and Ossip Zadkine (Bernik 1992: 25, 27, 71, 77, 81). Pilon's second contribution are his photographic still lifes from the Paris flea market, interpreted as being influenced by French surrealism (Lampič 2006: 219–25). As his production has only recently been researched, there is no evidence of influence of his work on contemporary photographic production in Slovenia.

The role of photography in the Slovene daily and weekly press was relatively modest. Especially in periodicals like the Roman Catholic *Slovenec* and liberal *Jutro* photographs were of poor technical quality and dim from a journalistic point of view. However, some illustrated magazines such as *Mladika* (1920–41) and the previously mentioned *Planinski vestnik* (1895) published superior art photographs, though they were related mostly to the rural environment and mountains (Krečič 1990: 28).

Journalistic photography was better represented in the weekly supplements to *Slovenec*, *Ilustrirani Slovenec* (1924–32) and of *Jutro*, *Ilustracija* (1929–32). Even here, entirely developed photo-reportages were rare, and successful shoots concerned mostly sport and catastrophes. In the domain of sport, Viktor Vodušek made his name in *Ilustracija*, while the photo-reportages of Janko Hafner, which appeared in both publications, are acknowledged to be more socially sensitive (Lampič 1990: 22–23).

Before World War II, Slovenia had a very small film production industry of its own. The first Slovene full-length silent film, *V kraljestvu Zlatoroga* (In the kingdom of the bighorn sheep), was made in 1931, and only two more feature films were made before the beginning of the war. *V kraljestvu Zlatoroga* was shot and directed by photographer and composer Janko Ravnik, a member of TK Skala (Kavčič and Vrdlovec 1999: 562).

¹ Pilon's photography however was not known generally in Slovenia until late eighties and it had no influence on Slovene photographic production of those days.

Painter and graphic artist Božidar Jakac was also important in photographic and film creativity in the period from 1925 to 1971 (Tršan 1999: 11 ff.; Nemanič 1999: 4ff.). His film shoots and photographs from the U.S., dated 1929 and later, are of prime documentary value, and many of them of artistic value as well, as are many others featuring the Slovene landscape and public events. He even shot the first Slovene color documentary film, *Železarna Jesenice* (The Jesenice Steelworks), in 1938 (Tršan 1999: 12). Also well known are his documentary photographs from his partisan times (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 84).

The first successful Slovene still photographer was Jože Žnidaršič. As Joe Z. List he went to Hollywood in 1921, where he learned photography in a minor studio before becoming a successful photographer for the Mary Pickford Company, United Artists and Fox Film Corporation (Nedič 2009: 4).

Pre-war color photography received a fresh impulse with the new slide films, Kodachrom and Agfacolor Neu that appeared on the market in 1935–36. At that time exposed films were sent abroad for processing. Dufaycolor slide-film, which could be processed at home, was in use as well (Lampič 1999: 34–35). The catalogue of the 3rd International Exhibition of Art Photography in Ljubljana in 1938 also testifies that six Slovene authors exhibited in the color photography section, but no other data were given (*Tretja* 1938: 16).

Public black-and-white slide projections were well known in the mid-1930s; the era of color-slide projections began in 1937 with some fifteen active authors (Lampič 1990: 26–27). Among them was the well profiled Karlo Kocjančič, whose color work is well documented and preserved. He was aware of a conceptual shift from naturalistic rendering of colors to acceptance of the coincidental and to the creation of artificial effects. In the first stage he realized the primal tendency to search for bright colors, but at an advanced level he suggested their symbolic reading and the necessity of hue homogeneity of the cadre together with a special color element, a focal point that attracts the eye (fig. 1) (Lampič 1999: 33–38). Relatively well developed professional photography and a very ambitious photo-amateur movement promised successful photographic production in the future and possible upgrading of photography to the level of university study. Unfortunately all that efforts were scattered by the war.

Figure 1. Karlo Kocjančič, "Grajski trg," Maribor, 1939, color slide (Agfacolor), 24 mm x 36 mm, reprint, Arhitekturni muzej Ljubljana, Ljubljana



Photographic production during WW II

In the 1930s, Slovene photography was connected to the Austrian and German spheres in many ways. Of course the war put an end to all such links. As early as August 1939, the Slovene representative to the 2nd Congress of the International Photographic Union in Munich indignantly reported the intentions of German photography clubs to change the union into an instrument for spreading Nazi propaganda (*Kronika Fotokluba Ljubljana 1938–39*: 10–11). Because of incessant military call-ups, beginning in January 1940, the work in the Photo-club of Ljubljana was seriously disrupted (*Kronika Fotokluba Ljubljana 1939–40*: 3). Preparations for the 4th Ljubljana international photographic exhibition began in February 1941 (*Kronika Fotokluba Ljubljana 1940–41*: 2) but were halted by the war (*Odborova seja 23.V.1941*: 23). After the occupation of Ljubljana and west part of Slovenia by Italian army the willingness to cooperate with the Italian amateur photographers' association quickly disappeared (*Odborova seja 21.VIII.1941*: 29). Production of art photography ceased and attention was diverted to documentary photography, made by urban underground photographers and by photographers in the partisan resistance forces in the field.

The most important urban photographers were Miran Pavlin and Dr. Jakob Prešeren, who both worked in Ljubljana. Pavlin was a photojournalist, accredited with the newspaper *Jutro*, but he also took photographs for himself. He was especially sensitive to the nuances of civilian life in occupied Ljubljana during the years 1941–44. He had access to the manifestos of representatives of the military and civil occupation forces and collaborators (Pavlin 2004). Prešeren, a judge, on the other hand produced color slides of Italian occupation forces entering the capital's streets in 1941 and hostage graveyard, as well as black-and-white shots of the occupiers' bunkers and blocks, propaganda posters, scenes of allied bombardments, the liberation of Ljubljana in 1945 (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 17). Both also documented graffiti as the first signs of the presence of guerrillas in the city.

Photographic activity among the partisan forces in the period from the beginning of the war to September 1943 was not officially organized and was left to individual initiative, mostly that of the commanding officers (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 44). A radical reorganization of the photo-service and photo-reportage activity was evidenced by centralization, increased oversight, separation of reporters' jobs and technical service, and with the idea of founding a central photographic archive of military forces and underground civilian authorities at the beginning of 1944. At that time partisan authorities published *The Book of Regulations*, stipulating subjects to be photographed by military reporters—for instance leading cadres; partisan troops on the move, fighting and at work. Civilian reporters were to document scenes of war crimes and war damage (Durjava et al. 1979: 4–8). Despite this many photographs taken at the time featured political, cultural and sporting activities on liberated territories and the hinterland (refugees, meetings, illegal hospitals, civilian life, foreign military missions, war prisoners, spoils of war, and burials). However, there are relatively few shots of combat and only a few photo-reportages covering important partisan activities.

In spite of the prime documentary and narrative value of photographs, some photographers were able to add both aesthetic and expressive touches. Jože Petek was well known among them. He accompanied the legendary march of the 14th Partisan Division through Croatia to Styria, and covered the strategic operation in January and February 1944. Some of his shots had an intentional symbolic charge. While shooting marching troops in the snow or in counter light he managed to overcome documentary faithfulness and give his photographs an added humanistic and aesthetic component (fig. 2) (Zgonik 2002: 17–18.)

Figure 2. Jože Petek, "Partisan column ascending toward the church of St. Lawrence," Poljane above Loka by Zidani most, 12 February 1944, Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije, Ljubljana (reprint, 2009)



Čoro Škodlar and Edi Šelhaus photographed mainly in liberated territory. Škodlar, a pre-war amateur photographer, is known for his color shots of scenes behind the lines, (e. g. partisan hospitals) (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 124, 174, 219). Šelhaus, trained as a trade photographer, had a special feeling for children and refugees, approaching them with unrelenting documentary directness, yet with necessary human warmth (Šelhaus 1985). He also published a well documented and illustrated book about allied pilots who were shot down by Germans on Slovenian territory and rescued by the partisans (Šelhaus 1976).

Dr. Janez Milčinski was a surgeon in one of several illegal hospitals in central Slovenia. On 1 September 1943 he made a series of portraits of his colleagues in Leica sharpness, at medium range and in direct sunlight with a dark forest as a background. The firm, simple concept and the homogeneity of the cycle give these photographs a unique position in Slovene war photography.

Photographic and film skills acquired in the 1930s also served Stane Lenardič well when he joined the partisans in 1943. He was one of

the few Slovene photojournalists operating with a film camera during the war who directly followed the battles. Unfortunately the shots from 1943–44 were destroyed (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 209).

Approximately 14,000 photographs were acquired by illegally copying negatives shot by mostly unknown occupying soldiers and officers in Ljubljana alone (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 23). Slovene historians of photography consider them to be an integral and important part of national war photographic heritage. Some of them exceed elementary documentation bearing witness to war crimes and have an unintended, profound affect. For example, there are photographs showing hostages digging their own graves in front of Italian soldiers at Zavrh above Cerknica on 22 July 1942; German soldiers shooting hostages at Smednik near Kranj on 22 August 1941, and of executions in the Celje prison Stari pisker on 22 July 1942.

The documentary value of Slovene resistance photography is indisputable. At least 160 photographers were active on the side of the resistance movement and in spite of the fact that much of the photographed material was lost, destroyed by occupational forces or confiscated by foreign archives during the war, more than 150,000 photographs remain to testify. By its quantity and quality this fund represents photographically the most well documented part of Slovene history (Fabec and Vončina 2005: 7). Its importance and power is rooted in individual contributions as well as in the fund as a whole.

The anticommunist troops and organizations had comparatively less extensive photographic production, although they were concentrated in Ljubljana and thus had better technical resources. In 1944–45 the Headquarters of Slovensko domobranstvo Departement VI published an illustrated, anti-communist magazine called *Slovensko domobranstvo*. The same circles also documented purported partisan atrocities and published the results in the book *Črne bukve* in 1944 (N. N. 1944)

The partisan photographic fund is estimated at about 100,000 images and it is unique in comparison even with the war funds of other European nations. After the war it was used for research purposes but unfortunately also for propaganda by the communist regime.

Early post-war photojournalism

Because of the Stalinist nature of the Yugoslav regime in the first years after the war there was a strong political tendency to control all parts of social and cultural life (Gabrič 1992: 1217–18). Socialist realism, schematically represented by the formula “bourgeois critical realism + revolutionary romanticism = socialist realism” was established as an officially ordered artistic course at the first congress of the Union of

Yugoslavia writers in Belgrade in 1946. Artistic works were to reflect state mandated optimism. The orders of the day were simple contrasts in literary characterisation and scenes of physical labour and an idealized socialist reality (Fischer 2006: 904). The same was the case for the visual arts. For photojournalists this represented an insurmountable contradiction. Partly because of post-war paranoia, which the communist authorities artificially augmented, and partly because of forced optimism that led to self-censorship, journalists' access was restricted as it had seldom been during the war. Photographers reported of conflicts with local authorities when trying to do their work (Lampič 1994: 56).

For decades the leading weekly *Tovariš* was an example of a typical socialist magazine. The reconstruction of the country, new factories, work brigades, agricultural co-operatives and other successes of the young communist regime, as well as foreign news about the Soviet Union were usual topics until the end of the 1950s. Among the many associated with *Tovariš* was Vladimir Simončič Vlastja, known for his effective cover pages and relatively varied selection of subjects (Lampič 2011: 19).

The best and the most dynamic Slovene photo-reportages immediately after the war were made in Trieste, just across the Slovene-Yugoslav-Italian border where some 260,000 Slovenes lived (Bufon, "Trst"). This socially and politically unstable port city occupied by allied forces offered a superb stage for aggressive demonstrations, street fights, scenes of poverty and despair. Among the photographers working for the Slovene daily *Primorski dnevnik*, which covered the Trieste region, Mario Magajna was one of the most active. He lived the city and documenting its nervous pulse as well as the life in its rural, mostly Slovene suburbs for more than fifty years (fig. 3). His incidental small format shots seem coincidental, but there are so many that they express subtle feeling and reveal a great deal with just a little. In many other photographs the coincidence grew into bizarreness or absurdity and he reached beyond the seen and passed over to the surreal (Lampič 1996).

Edi Šelhaus, already mentioned as a partisan photographer, was active in Trieste after the war as well. The Yugoslav authorities assigned him as a photojournalist and documentary filmmaker to depict life in this politically restless multi-ethnic port (Šelhaus 1982: 85).

Figure 3. Mario Magajna, “Demonstrations against British authorities on the Goldoni Square,” Trst/Trieste, 5 November 1953, Narodna in študijska knjižnica, Trst/Trieste (reprint, 2009)



Socialist Realism in art photography

At the same time in Slovenia, official critics disapproved of the pre-war pictorialism more because of its bourgeois subjects than because of its soft, artificial look, and the unprincipled fusion which took place between it and the subject, at that time secretly and ironically named “the pick-and-shovel theme.” In comparison with pre-war photography, inspired by pictorialism and social realism, in socialist realism neither the style nor the theme were new, though a certain heroism was added. Slavko Smolej, a talented amateur photographer, worked mostly in the style of the New Objectivity before the war, but photographed workers and industrial objects

in the main Slovene ironworks at Jesenice as well. During the war he became a resistance photographer and after the war, in the late 1940s and 1950s, he returned to photograph in the ironworks. The original negatives are sharp and of great documentary and aesthetic value, but during the blow up process some of them were cropped and transferred to paper negatives (fig. 4) (Štrumej 1998: 23–24).

Figure 4. Slavko Smolej, “Plavžar / Smelter,” Jesenice, 1950, gelatine-silver print after paper negative, 35 cm x 28.5 cm, Zgornjesavski muzej, Jesenice



In this way ironworkers were accentuated as heroes, depicted in a fuzzy, simplified, aestheticized way, detached from the reality of hard working

conditions and of declared but nonexistent political rights. Their illusive plasticity is also similar to the voluminosity of the colossal memorial bronze statues of partisans, the wounded, hostages and workers which were erected all over the country at that time (Lampič 1994: 61–63).

Revival of the tradition of mountain photography

There would not seem to have been much time for mountaineering in the first post-war years. From the ideological point of view mountains as a photographic theme were also too neutral. Gradually however, this traditional Slovene sport activity was revived, and the photographic work of Jaka Čop, which had continued since pre-war times, symbolized its return. His photographic concept was rather conservative in the late 1950s, still bound to a certain degree a pre-war mixture of topographic and pictorialistic ideals, featuring mountaineering as a national sport his work received admiration. He was also an excellent entrepreneur, one of the few on the Slovene photographic scene. In conditions where republic and state photo-amateur associations controlled production with its concourses, he managed to publish his work independently in a number of excellent books, the first two even printed in copperprint, unique in Slovenia at that time. *Svet med vrhovi: Julijske Alpe* (1962), *Raj pod Triglavom/Paradise below Triglav/Ein Eden unter dem Triglav* (1968) and *Viharniki* (1970) showed the beauty of the Slovene Alpine region, and being suitable as presents, were a kind of indicator that domestic as well as foreign tourism was returning to the country.

The interest in mountain photographs in fact had a broader base at that time. In 1967 photographer Vladimir Simončič Vlastja founded the amateur Photo-Club of Planinska zveza Slovenije (The Mountain Association of Slovenia), which extended the tradition of organized mountain photography well into the 1980s (Lampič 2011: 29).

Industrial and commercial photography

The communist authorities' desire to control information and thus public perceptions of life is also apparent in the foundation of the state photojournalistic firm Foto-Slovenija, founded in 1951. This was developed by the Information Office of the Presidency of the Government of the People's Republic of Slovenia and was accredited to cover important, mainly political and diplomatic events (Lavrič 1983: 13), while the state photographic firms Fotolik (1948; N.N. 1983: 14), Exportprojekt (1949; Muzej novejšje zgodovine), and Lik (1963)² were founded to weaken private photographic studios. All located in Ljubljana, they were oriented towards

² Private source, Ljubljana, January 2009.

documenting industrial development, and supporting advertising and expositions. They functioned as a type of state photo-agency in which context the contribution of an individual author took second place. Nonetheless, the archives that have been preserved are of great value, containing numerous images that document the development of Slovenia and Yugoslavia after the war.

Because private sector had been suppressed, many state companies gradually developed their own studios for industrial photography or at least employed in-house photographers. These archives have not yet been researched, and there is scant information on their condition and ownership status. Some informants still remember studios at the firms Slovenija ceste-Tehnika, Litostroj, and Lesnina in Ljubljana; Sava in Kranj; Stol in Kamnik; and elsewhere. Some research institutions, such as the Inštitut Jožef Stefan and Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, and cultural institutions (e.g., Narodni muzej Slovenije and Moderna galerija in Ljubljana) had (and still have) their own photo-studios.³

Photography and Film

Many pre-war photographers engaged in filmmaking after the war. Examples are: Ante Kornič, and Marjan Pfeifer Sr., both members of Ljubljana Photo-Club; Lado Sazonov; the trade photographers Ermino Del Fabbro from Tržič, Stane Potrč and Vid Nučič from Ljubljana; the photojournalists Božo Štajer, Leon Dolinšek, and Gorgonij Staut; the first Slovene woman still photographer Kristina Staut; the architect Janez Kališnik, who was later a cameraman; and Karpo Godina, later a film-director (Nedič 2009: 4–6).

In the spirit of socialist overregulation a federal law on film was passed in 1956, among other things defining the tasks of a still photographer—that is, how to document the making of the film. In spite of this only a minor part of materials, originated from this activities preserved today (Nedič 2009: 4–6).

Early post-war modernism: Subjective photography

The first possibilities for a relaxation in political controls were provided by an open conflict between the Yugoslav and Soviet Communist parties from the end of 1947 (Fischer et al. 2006: 931). By 1949, Yugoslav politics had become more independent, and the results in Slovene society were almost immediate. On the art scene, for example, the change was evidenced by a successful defense of Slovene impressionist painters, who

³ Interview with Oskar Karel Dolenc, Ljubljana, 17 December 2011.

Stalinist critics had formerly slandered as formalists (Gabrič 1992: 1221–24).

This relative liberalization led to greater openness of Slovene society to the West and had positive consequences for the photographic scene as well. In 1952 the Slovene Photo- and Film Association managed to organize the 4th International Exhibition of photographs,⁴ where Slovene photographers established their first contact with international production at the creative peak of “subjective photography,” as defined by Otto Steinert and his circle. On this occasion some Slovene photographers exhibited, among many pre-war pictorialistic works, photographs with explicitly modernist character, containing geometric reduction, double exposure, extreme contrasts. The influences are not yet precisely attributable but probably came from several sources, namely from contemporary Slovene painting, from German photographic magazines or catalogues and from previous exhibitions in Zagreb and Belgrade. Though some critics perceived these abstract tendencies as part of an inappropriate modernistic approach, they only became more prominent at the next Ljubljana international photographic exhibitions in 1954, 1956, 1959 and 1962 (Lampič 1991–92: 53).

Because of the lack of opportunities for formal education in photography, the development of post-war Slovene art photography was left to amateur photo-clubs and a few individual pre-war self-taught or trade photographers. Among the former, Peter Kocjančič often incorporated luminograms in his genre shots from 1955 onwards, producing half abstract compositions. Jože Kološa Kološ, working as an industrial photographer in a Slovene machine shop, used machine parts as objects in his artistic photomontages. Both photographers aimed to alter visual reality and produce photography as a visual artifact.

Besides the many photo-clubs in Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje and elsewhere, one of the most important was the Photo-film amateur society in Kranj, founded in 1949 (Robežnik 2005: 24–25). The so-called Kranj group (or school) is known for its photo-graphics, bas-reliefs, flipped images, telephotography, and double exposures. The central person and mentor of the group was Janez Marenčič, one of the most creative Slovene photographers of the 1950s. His aero-, other upper-sight shots and telephotographs are particularly rich in rhythms and they challenge the conditions for correct geometrical perspective (fig. 5), sometimes to the point of optical illusion. Though always animated with a tiny human figure(s) or building(s), referring to man as the central visual and semantic point, their pure, rational concept and their reduced geometrical structures

⁴ Counting from three of the pre-war period (see: *Almanah mednarodne fotografije* 1952).

were influenced by contemporary Slovene abstract painting, stressing the two-dimensional character of the image. The form, anathematized in the late 1940s, was the basis of art photography in the 1950s (Lampič 1991–92: 55–56).

Figure 5. Janez Marenčič, “Preproga / Carpet,” Sorško Field near Kranj, 1955, gelatine-silver print on paper, 20.5 cm x 29.1 cm, Arhitekturni muzej, Ljubljana



In 1955, the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts was founded. It soon established itself as an international event that, in the difficult post-war decades, managed to present art in global terms, regularly hosting artists from both sides of the Iron Curtain and, very early on, transcending the Eurocentric viewpoint by showing art works from the Third World, in particular from non-aligned countries. At the same time, the Biennial recognized and included new art trends and changes in style. At a local level the Biennial has been a significant inspiration and support to Slovene artists, bringing them closer to what was happening internationally and introducing them to new contemporary art currents. It was in the context of such close ties that the Ljubljana Graphic School developed (Mednarodni).

The biennial's influence on Slovene photography has not yet been thoroughly researched. It is presumed that possible influences were mostly indirect and of minor importance, compared with the influence of the international photo-exhibitions in Ljubljana.

Photojournalism in the 1960s

While the relative relaxation of political controls produced an important shift towards modernist, Western art photography, control of the media remained just as severe as before. Edi Šelhaus, who worked together with Mario Maganja in Trieste immediately after the war, reports in his memoirs of editorial censorship by Ljubljana newspapers even in the early 1960s, (e.g., on occasions of workers' strikes) (Šelhaus 1982: 238–41). In *Tovariš*, some photo stories concerning new youth identities and cultures were published in the late 1950s, while sharper socio-critical contributions did not appear before the mid-1960s (Lampič 1991: 282–86). Photojournalism critical of internal politics was, however, still not possible.

It is probably because of these prohibitions that both the leading photographers of the period Leon Dolinšek and Joco Žnidaršič, though indirectly influenced by Steichen's exhibition *The Family Man*, tend to generally benign themes (Štrumej 2005: 12; Bernik 1992). They were both reporters for *Tovariš*, and *Delo* the main Slovene newspaper. Their works are firmly composed and visually effective but have quite recognizable individual signatures. Dolinšek's anecdotal and lyrical genre from the early 1960s is enriched by a touch of melancholy, mild humour or irony. Some years later, Žnidaršič had a better feel for a situation or ambient portrait than for an event, yet his shots perfectly represent heroic post-war photojournalism, aesthetically upgraded by the reduction of elements present in the frame.

Joco Žnidaršič was also one of the contributors to the 1969 literary and photographic project, initiated by the editorial board of *Dialogi*, a journal for literary, cultural and social questions. Its aim was to illustrate and comment on the poor circumstances in the mostly rural northeast of Slovenia. twenty Slovene writers and journalists were invited to visit and write about what they saw. They were accompanied by five photographers, mostly photojournalists. The results of the fieldwork were published in the book *Siti in lačni Slovenci* (Sated and hungry Slovenes; Rotar and Forstnerič 1969), issued as a thematic number of the journal in the same year. The team described movingly and in a critical way the poor residents living in appalling conditions. Apart from the work of Žnidaršič, that of Danilo Škofič a photojournalist from the Maribor newspaper *Večer*, was most prominent. In a series of shots of miserable interiors and the people living there, he pictured the problem of young people abandoning the land, and sometimes even leaving their children with old, helpless and sick grandparents living in ancient peasant houses. This kind of social criticism had not been seen since WW II. *Siti in lačni Slovenci* was not sold openly in bookstores.

Color photography

The history of Slovene color photography after WW II has until now not been well researched, but at least a rough outline can be made. The possibilities for color photography were very limited in the first years after the war. The lack of materials interrupted pre-war attempts. Marjan Pfeifer, a pre-war professional photographer and one of the few freelancers after the war, was the first Slovene author who travelled abroad in the late 1940s. He went to Switzerland and was then invited by Agfa to improve his knowledge of innovations in this activity after the war (Kastelic 1975: 4). Our knowledge of the range and quality of his work is incomplete. He mainly did orders for the state administration and large state owned companies. We must recall that in the late 1940s and early 1950s there were few opportunities to exhibit or publish color photographs. An overview of color photography at Ljubljana international exhibitions after the war shows that from 1954 onwards they all had a color photograph section, the 5th (1954), 6th (1956), and 7th (1959) exhibitions also had a section of color slides and the last two even a section of color stereo-slides. Ten active photographers exhibited color photographs but they were in a minority in comparison with colleagues competing in the black-and-white section.

From around 1956 some individuals from the Photo-film amateur society in Kranj produced color photographs on a small scale as promotional material for firms ORWO from so called German Democratic Republic and Ferrania from Italy. Some amateurs worked in other cities. The procedures for processing at home were reported to be very complicated, and from around 1953 the use of slide-films increased and prevailed until the beginning of the 1960s (Robežnik 2005: 24–26).

From slides preserved from that time it can be concluded, that early photographers mainly shot harmonious landscapes and vegetal details within the aesthetic frames of poetic realism. Throughout the sixties creative approaches evolved into dealing with interactions of autonomous form and color, to the problems of night photography and movement. Abstract photography came about through radicalisation of microphotography towards the beginning of the 1970s. At the same time because of the undeveloped professional sector signs of commercialization of amateur landscape and portrait photography appeared at the beginning of the sixties.

The role of photography in conceptualist practice

The impulse for the shift from photography as a medium of anecdotal narratives, social criticism or formalism, neglecting contents towards new artistic functions did not come from the photographic sphere.

The impetus came from the conceptualist group OHO, founded by a group of arts and humanities students in 1966. Some of them had been involved in alternative artistic activities even since 1962. The group adopted the name between 1966 and 1969 from a book with that title. It comprises a combination of the Slovene words *oko* 'eye' and *uho* 'ear'. The group was founded by four artists (Pogačnik 1978: 4), and had ten other close members with about fifteen periodical collaborators. They were active until 1971 (Zabel 1994: 99–100).

The development of the OHO group was indirectly influenced by new trends in contemporary posthumanistic European philosophy such as existentialism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and semiotics. Artistic impulses came from pop-art, minimalism, *arte povera* and conceptualism (Zabel 1994: 10), though the results of OHO's activities to a certain degree should be considered as simultaneous phenomena.

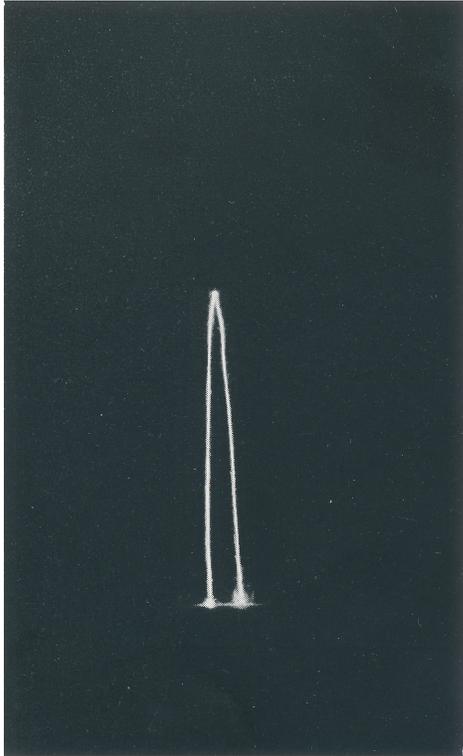
The OHO Group was surely stimulated by events in the turbulent late sixties in Western Europe and the U.S. but it assumed a specific form in the environment of the then Slovene socialist society. From today's perspective, it shows some contradictions. The protest against the consumer society and the art market, for example, which was part of avant-garde art, was implicit in OHO's activities too, but not very well justified, since market relations were not developed and the art market was almost nonexistent.

On the other hand, several incidents occurred between OHO and local authorities in the years 1963–69 (Zabel 1994: 99–100). They were rooted in the conservatism of the latter and in deeply internalized fear, characteristic of lower-level officials in totalitarian societies, that anything that is different might be interpreted as politically unacceptable. It is probably for this reason that OHO never dared openly to attend a political event and that their activities always remained strictly in what they could defend as the sphere of art.

Besides drawing, poetry and visual poetry, publishing and editorial projects, audible research, experimental and art-documentary films, happenings, body-, ambient-, land-, eco-, and process-art, performances, mail art, and parapsychological experiments. Photography played a defined role in OHO's repertoire. At first it was used as a documentary means, then as an integral part of their actions and as a starting point for their reflections, but only David Nez of the group was substantially occupied with photography. In his projects from April 1970, entitled "Časovno-prostorske strukture" (Time-Space structures) he explored and challenged the possibilities of the medium to register moving sources of light during the night. Only from notes from that time that describe the action is it revealed that long exposures (around ten minutes) caused considerable

deformations in the perception of time and space in the frame (Zabel 1994: 94). In this way Nez demonstrated the mimetic limitations of photography, and he also showed that the usual way of perceiving the photograph is based on the presumption that a shot is always a matter of a fragment of a second that is of the duration of a glimpse (fig. 6).

Figure 6. David Nez, "Parabola," from the project "Časovno-prostorske strukture" (Time-Space structures), Moderna galerija, Ljubljana



Conclusion

The late 1960s and early 1970s are an important turning point in Slovene photography. Infrastructure conditions for the breakthrough of photography in the main art institutions were established gradually. In 1970, Kabinet slovenske fotografije (The Cabinet of Slovene Photography) was established in Kranj as the first Slovene public photographic collection (Globočnik 2011). In 1978 the first exhibit of photographic antiquities was

organized in Ljubljana and a year later the magazine *Foto antika* accompanied the second edition of the exhibit. Both are still active today.

During this period there was a shift from a mimetic towards a conceptual approach and from amateur to professional photography. Only a few photographers studied photography abroad, and their influence on the scene was weak, while there was still no educational institution to study photography in Slovenia. Only since the early nineteen-eighties has it been possible to study photography as part of a design course at the faculty of Arts and Design, Ljubljana.

Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana

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POVZETEK

KRATKA ZGODOVINA SLOVENSKE FOTOGRAFIJE 1941–1970

*Pričujoči pregled slovenske fotografije v letih 1941–1970 zaobjema produkcijo v zgodovinskem trenutku, ko se je predvojna umetniška tradicija v času vojne morala umakniti dokumentarni fotografiji, v prvih letih po vojni pa komunistični režim ni dovolil nadaljevanja predvojnega načina. V petdesetih letih je slovenskim fotografom vendarle uspelo obnoviti stike z evropsko ustvarjalnostjo, zato danes v slovenski fotografiji opazujemo očitne vplive nemške subjektivne fotografije in ameriške razstave Človeška družina (*The Family of Man*). V poznih šestdesetih letih je najustvarjalnejši del medija sledil umetniškim akcijam slovenskih konceptualistov, slovenska fotografija pa je šele v osemdesetih letih dosegla status akademskega predmeta; istočasno so je kot ustvarjalno prakso uvedli na tedanji ljubljanski Akademiji za likovno umetnost, kot predmet zgodovinskega raziskovanja pa na Filozofski fakulteti v Ljubljani.*