

Lovelies from the Files. Sudek and Slovakia

In the oeuvre of a Czech photographer Josef Sudek (1896–1976), there is, perhaps surprisingly, still something yet to discover. In the 1930s, when, apart from portrait and advertising photographs, Sudek focused mainly on artworks, he often cooperated with architects, artists, art associations, art historians, magazine editors and publishers. In 1937, the art association Umělecká beseda commissioned him to take photographs of exhibits from the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia” held in the Vladislav Hall of the Prague Castle. The exhibition aimed to increase the awareness of Slovak culture beyond the mere “enthusiasm for the folk character” and show “the whole of old Slovak culture” through the visual arts. The project also included documentation of Slovak art to build a photo archive of the Slovak cultural heritage and preserve it for future generations.

Sudek took almost 500 photographs of individual exhibits (in total, he charged 14,716 Czechoslovak crowns for them), especially sculptures, liturgical objects made of metal and textiles. With a few exceptions (for instance, Baroque embroidery published in Sudek’s first monograph of 1956), this collection of photographs is rather unknown. It features images of sculptures of saints, folk reverse painting on glass, ceramics, Madonnas and pietas, chalices, ciboria, pax boards, monstrances and chasubles. They are a unique record of the then view of Slovak art and handicraft. The blow-ups of embroideries or details of metalwork look surprisingly modern

and update the old art for current viewers. Since the press Photo Service of Alexander Paul and František Illek also worked on the documentation of Slovak art for the Umělecká beseda, we also present photographs of this Prague agency, which, unlike Sudek, also had a specially adapted car and could take photos in the field.

Newly acquired photographs appeared as reproductions in publications related to the exhibition. In addition, the current show also presents never-seen images. They come from the part of Sudek’s estate kept in the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, which focuses on photographs of artworks. With an emphasis on the original use of specific images and the process of their creation, we want to reveal the character of his photographic practice through working or preview copies.

The exhibition follows the research project “Josef Sudek and Photographic Documentation of Works of Art: From a Private Art Archive to Representing a Cultural Heritage” (2016–2020), implemented by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, and the 2020 exhibition “Lovelies from the Files. Sudek and Sculpture” held at the Prague City Gallery. The exhibition was accompanied by a lavishly illustrated monograph “Sudek and Sculpture”. The entire Sudek’s archive kept in the Institute of Art History is now available via the online database sudekproject.cz.

1. OLD ART IN SLOVAKIA

The exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”, organised by Umělecká beseda in Prague (curator: Karel Šourek; architect: František Tröster), was held from June to September 1937 in the Vladislav Hall and adjoining rooms of the Old Royal Palace at Prague Castle. It took place under the auspices of the then political, church and academic elites (President Edvard Beneš, Prime Minister Milan Hodža and others), with dozens of public figures of the Czechoslovakia represented in exhibition boards. The financial support was provided by significant institutions, private companies and art patrons. Apart from specific historical periods from the “pre-historical” era to the nineteenth century, with the emphasis put on the Middle Ages, the exhibition divided into 15 parts also included folk art, ceramics, Jewish objects, medals, books and book covers, films and ethnographic negatives, and the pantheon of Slovakia’s revival. With the catalogue of 2,077 numbered exhibits (sometimes groups of objects), it was among the most extensive exhibition projects in the interwar Czechoslovakia.

1
Old Art in Slovakia. Praha: Umělecká beseda, 1938
Library of the Institute of Art History of the CAS

2
Josef Sudek
[Madonna, late 19th century, Orava Gallery, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

3
Josef Sudek
[Roman bronze sculpture]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

4
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, from Nitra, 1500–1550, detail depicting the Martyrdom of St Sebastian]
period reproduction
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. V. Medieval metalwork and goldsmithery. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
private collection

5
Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from Zlaté, back featuring dorsal cross, 2nd half of the 15th century, Šariš Museum, Bardejov]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

6
Josef Sudek
[Replica of the Madonna of Altötting, 17th century, detail]
period reproduction
Pestrý týden XII, 10.7.1937, No. 28, title page
Library of Masaryk Institute of the CAS

Pestrý týden

Pestrý týden was a typical Modernist illustrated magazine printed with the high-quality photogravure technique at the Neubert and Sons press in Prague. In 1937 one of the cover pictures featured Sudek’s photograph of the Madonna taken at the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia” for which the artist charged 75 Czechoslovak crowns. The reproduced photograph is a detail of the head, accentuating the age of the wood (riddled with woodworm) with its peeling polychromy, yet at the same time, it strongly conveys the intense expression of the face. Sudek often photographed sculptures as if he were making a portrait. In this case, the large-format reproduction, both dated and signed and printed in very fine quality is an equivalent to the non-existent vintage print. At the same time, it places Sudek’s photographs within the context of a varied picture magazine format for a mass audience, far removed from the elitist understanding of the medium of photography presented in a museum of art.

7
Josef Sudek
[Replica of the Madonna of Altötting, 17th century, detail]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

8
Josef Sudek
[Installation of the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”, Vladislav Hall, Prague Castle]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

9
Josef Sudek
[František Tichý, Portrait of Josef Sudek, 1937; Letter, Josef Sudek to Josef Wagner]
1937
gelatin silver print
private collection of akad. arch. Josef Wagner Jr.

Šourek has got me working hard, and I have to shoot an exhibition for him

For correspondence with friends, Sudek quite regularly made use of the reverse side of his own photographs. One such example is this letter addressed to sculptor Josef Wagner, written on the verso of his photograph of a 1937 Portrait of Josef Sudek by the painter František Tichý. The letter says: “So I got a letter of wonders from you today. When I am at Kuks, I’ll be getting those kinds of ideas, too. So far, I am stuck in Prague. I meant to write to you a week ago that I’m coming, but Šourek has got me working hard, and I have to shoot an exhibition for him. I enclose a bunch of lovelies from that shoot.” Given the mention of Karel Šourek and the dating of Sudek’s portrait, the “shoot” probably refers to an extensive commission to photograph the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”.

10
Josef Sudek
[View of the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”]
1937
period reproduction
Panorama XV, 1937, No. 7, p. 193
Library of the Institute of Art History of the CAS

11
Catalogue to the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”, Praha: Umělecká beseda, 1937
Library of the Institute of Art History of the CAS

Umělecká beseda association

From the very beginning, the oldest association in Bohemia (from 1863) represented three art disciplines: music, fine arts and literature. In the interwar period, its exhibition activities intensified, and it started publishing the Život magazine again. In 1926, Umělecká beseda association opened its gallery (Aleš’ Hall) in a new building in Prague, not far from Sudek’s studio. Apart from regular exhibitions in Aleš’ Hall, presentations of members in regional galleries and annual exhibitions, Umělecká beseda also presented works by foreign artists and founders of the association (Mikoláš Aleš, Karel Purkyně). As a regular member of the association, Sudek documented its activities,

notably in the 1930s. Later this privileged position was taken from him by Illek & Paul.

12
Josef Sudek
[Tabula Pacis, from Spišská Belá, 14th century, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

13
Josef Sudek
[Marian chasuble, back, left bar of a dorsal cross, 2nd half of the 15th century, detail depicting Archangel Gabriel from the Annunciation]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

14
Josef Sudek
[Master M.S., Nativity of Jesus, 1506, Church of St Anthony of Padua, Svätý Anton]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

15
Josef Sudek
[Master M.S., Nativity of Jesus, 1506, Church of St Anthony of Padua, Svätý Anton, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

16
Josef Sudek
[Master Antonín, the cross, from Spišská Nová Ves, early 16th century]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

17
Josef Sudek
[Pieta, 19th century]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

18
Josef Sudek
[Ceramic jug with a hunting motif, 1st half of the 19th century, Bratislava City Museum]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

19
Josef Sudek
[St John Nepomucene, folk reverse painting on glass, 2nd half of the 18th century]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

20
Josef Sudek
[Shepherd with a hatchet stick from a folk nativity scene, from Krivá, undated, Slovak National Museum, Martin]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

21
Salon XVI, 1937, No. 8
University Library in Bratislava

22–26
Alexandr Paul – František Illek
[View of the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”]
1937
gelatin silver print
Archive of Atelier Paul
facsimile (digital print)

27
Staré umění na Slovensku, Praha: Umělecká beseda, 1937
Archive of Atelier Paul

28
Alexandr Paul
[Specially adapted car AERO 30 used for journeys to Slovakia]
1937
gelatin silver print
Archive of Atelier Paul
facsimile (digital print)

29
Alexandr Paul
[Madonna with Child, from Čausa, late 18th century, Slovak National Museum, Martin]
1937 (1969)
gelatin silver print (later print)
Archive of Atelier Paul

Press Photo Service: František Illek
a Alexandr Paul

The Press Photo Service of František Illek and Alexandr Paul contributed to the Slovak event by Umělecká beseda a much larger volume of work (in a total amount of 118,624 Czechoslovak crowns) than

Sudek. The items they charged were divided into photographic archives, murals and blow-ups, casts and maquettes. Their photographs of architecture were presented at the exhibition through large-format slides; life-size black-and-white images of murals were displayed as impressive substitutes for originals. The blow-ups showing the details of sculptures are later copies, which Alexandr Paul submitted in 1969 to the evaluation committee of the Czech Fine Art Fund. At that time, the obligation to submit works annually applied to all artists who wanted to carry out a free-lance job, participate in the art market or win public commissions.

30
Alexandr Paul
[Our Lady of Sorrows, Western Slovakia, 19th century, Imrich Winter Balneological Museum, Piešťany]
1937 (1969)
gelatin silver print (later print)
Archive of Atelier Paul

31
Alexandr Paul
[Corpus Christi, from Kunešov, ca. 1800, Slovak National Museum, Martin]
1937 (1969)
gelatin silver print (later print)
Archive of Atelier Paul

32
Alexandr Paul
[Master Pavol of Levoča and his workshop, The Mourning of Christ, predella of the altar of St John, Church of St James in Levoča, 1520, detail]
1937 (1969)
gelatin silver print (later print)
Archive of Atelier Paul

33
Alexandr Paul
[Master of Madonna of Lomnička, Madonna of Lomnička, 1400–1410, Slovak National Gallery]
1937 (1969)
gelatin silver print (later print)
Archive of Atelier Paul

2. DARKROOM AND PHOTO STUDIO

Sudek’s business archive brings us to the photographer’s “kitchen”. Here, we can see the process of making a photograph from selecting the negatives, through preview contact prints made during development in the darkroom, to samples of final positives with white border achieved by masking and sometimes even with a company stamp. Large-format negatives, presented at the exhibition either

as facsimile from digital data or as new contact prints made in the darkroom (so-called new prints), reveal the circumstances of Sudek’s work: choosing the location and light, finding a suitable angle or taking several shots of the same object from a full-shot to close-ups. Sudek photographed some of the exhibits in a makeshift studio he set up by a southern window in the Vladislav Hall. He employed a stone wall as a backdrop and the refracted sunlight coming through the stained glass windows as lightning. The large sculptures were shot by a pillar supporting the ceiling and illuminated by electric light. Only exceptionally he used a neutral background, which appears more frequently in the photographs taken by his rival, the Press Photo Service.

34–35
Josef Sudek
[Madonna of Ruskinovce, ca. 1300, Slovak National Gallery]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

36
Josef Sudek
[Master of Madonna of Lomnička, Madonna of Lomnička, 1400–1410, Slovak National Gallery]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

37
Josef Sudek
[Pieta of Holíč, 19th century, Imrich Winter Balneological Museum, Piešťany]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

38
Josef Sudek
[Pieta of Holíč, 19th century, Imrich Winter Balneological Museum, Piešťany]
1930s–1940s
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

39
Josef Sudek
[Pieta, from Oslany, near Prievidza, ca. mid-19th century, Slovak Mining Museum, Banská Štiavnica; Pieta, from Holíč, 19th century, Imrich Winter Balneological Museum, Piešťany]
period reproductions
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
University Library in Bratislava

40
Josef Sudek
[Bust of the Female Saint, from Žehra, 2nd half of the 14th century, today lost]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

41
Josef Sudek
[St Nicholas of Myra, from the church in Šiba, ca. 1400]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

42
Josef Sudek
[Bust of the Female Saint, from Žehra, 2nd half of the 14th century, today lost]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

43
Josef Sudek
[Madonna and Child, ca. 1430, Šariš Museum, Bardejov, detail]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

44
Josef Sudek
[Circle of Master Pavol of Levoča, St Joseph (from The Nativity group), early 16th century]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

45
Josef Sudek
[St Anne and the Virgin Mary on a Throne, from Belá in Turiec, 2nd half of the 14th century, East Slovakian Museum, Košice]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

46–47
Josef Sudek
[St Anne and the Virgin Mary on a Throne, from Belá in Turiec, 2nd half of the 14th century, East Slovakian Museum, Košice, detail]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

48
Josef Sudek
[Replica of the Madonna of Altötting, 17th century]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

49–50
Josef Sudek
[Replica of the Madonna of Altötting, 17th century, detail]
1937
new print from negative

51–52
Josef Sudek
[Chasuble with a Byzantine embroidery, St Elisabeth Cathedral, Košice, back, 14th century, detail of a dorsal band depicting Archangel Gabriel]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

Conversion of colours to grey scale

Sudek made a full shot and thirteen close-up shots of the back of the chasuble with medieval Byzantine embroidery originating from Thessaloniki. He twice shot the detail depicting Archangel Gabriel on a glass negative and once on a cellulose acetate film negative. You can see the difference in shades of the greyscale on the materials used. The glass negatives used in this case had limited colour conversion options; the so-called orthochromatic emulsion, for instance, did not distinguish red colour (it remained black). Sudek probably tried the negatives on various materials and with a different type of emulsion. Another method to enhance the colour authenticity could have been using colour filters or experimenting in the darkroom.

53–54
Josef Sudek
[Madonna, late 19th century, Orava Gallery, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

55
Josef Sudek
[Ján Silaši, Tabula Pacis, Vranov nad Topľou, 1759–1761, detail of enamelled painted tablet]
1937–1938
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

56
Josef Sudek
[Buckles]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

57
Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from Smižany, back with a dorsal strip, 1st half of the 15th century–ca. 1700]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

58
Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from Smižany, front, 1st half of the 15th century–ca. 1700]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

59
Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from Smižany, front, 1st half of the 15th century–ca. 1700, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

60–61
Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from Smižany, back, 1st half of the 15th century–ca. 1700, detail depicting St Catherine of Alexandria]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

62
Život XV, 1936–1937, p. 245
Library of the Institute of Art History of the CAS

63
Josef Sudek
[Madonna of Lourdes, from Borský Svätý Mikuláš, 1860, Slovak National Museum, Bratislava]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

Madonna of Lourdes

On 20 September 1937, Božena Sudková entered “1 image – close-up of the Madonna of Lourdes” in her brother’s account book. It is one of the

few exhibits described in more detail, as most of them are marked in general terms, such as Gothic sculpture, Gothic chalice, Roman chasuble, etc. There are four negatives of this folk sculpture in Sudek’s archive: a full shot illuminated by obliquely incident natural light and three variants illuminated by an electric lamp, which highlighted shadows in the cannellures. The colour reproduction of Madonna with a masked background was published in the Život magazine and in the book Art in Slovakia (1938). In predominantly black-and-white publications, the exhibit lined with a bright red background belongs to the most distinctive ones.

64–65
Josef Sudek
[Madonna of Lourdes, from Borský Svätý Mikuláš, 1860, Slovak National Museum, Bratislava, detail]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

66
Josef Sudek
[Madonna of Lourdes, from Borský Svätý Mikuláš, 1860, Slovak National Museum, Bratislava]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

67
Josef Sudek
[Master Pavol of Levoča, Virgin Mary from the Small Calvary from Bardejov, 1520–1530, Šariš Museum, Bardejov]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

68
Josef Sudek
[Master Pavol of Levoča, Virgin Mary from the Small Calvary from Bardejov, 1520–1530, Šariš Museum, Bardejov, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

69
Josef Sudek
[Holy Trinity, from the Church of St Giles in Bardejov, ca. 1500, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

70
Josef Sudek
[Holy Trinity, from the Church of St Giles in Bardejov, ca. 1500]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

71
Josef Sudek
[Man of Sorrows, ca. 1500, Šariš Museum, Bardejov]
1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

3. DETAILS OF METALWORK

The strengths of Sudek’s photographs have been pointed out by the exhibition organiser, Karel Šourek: “Today, photography with its sharp-sight allows us to more accurately assess purely artistic power and craftsmanship, revealing even the tiniest traces of the instrument in the processed metal, the purity of the enamel layer, the strength of modelling of filigree sculptures and the certainty of a burin that have been hidden from view in the overall picture.” The photographs in the fifth volume of the book “Art in Slovakia. A legacy of the Land and People” dedicated to medieval metalwork and goldsmithy depict detailed images of figures and ornaments on liturgical objects and other monuments. The original positives show some compositional intentions, which, unfortunately, often suffered when cutting the reproductions to the smallest possible format.

72
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, from Trenčianska Turná, early 16th century]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

73
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, from Trenčianska Turná, early 16th century, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

74
Josef Sudek
[Reliquary cross, Spišská Nová Ves, ca. 1330–1340, detail depicting Emperor Constantine]
1937
period reproduction
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. V. Medieval metalwork and goldsmithery. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
private collection

75
Josef Sudek
[Reliquary cross, Spišská Nová Ves, ca. 1330–1340]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

76
Josef Sudek
[Reliquary cross, from Spišská Nová Ves, ca. 1330–1340, detail depicting St John the Evangelist]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

77
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. V. Medieval metalwork and goldsmithery. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
private collection

Art in Slovakia – A Legacy of the Land and People

In 1938, Melantrich Publishing House decided to publish materials relating to the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”. Abundant pictorial documentation accompanied by short texts was divided into ten chapters, “from the first glimmers of art expression in the Domica cave, through aristocratic echoes of ancient Rome, to new beginnings of a new language of Christianity, from Romanesque through Gothic and Renaissance up to the nineteenth century”. The publication was available either in individual booklets or in a volume with a cover designed by Josef Kaplický.

78
Josef Sudek
[Ciborium, from Stropkov, early 16th century]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

79
Josef Sudek
[Ciborium, from Závada, 2nd half of the 15th century, Šariš Museum, Bardejov]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

80
Josef Sudek
[Copy of the 14th century ciborium, from Spišský Hrušov, 1916]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

81
Josef Sudek
[Ciborium, from Podhorany (Maldur), late 15th century]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

82
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, Hamborek, 14th–16th century, Šariš Museum, Bardejov]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

83
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. V. Medieval metalwork and goldsmithery. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
private collection

84
Josef Sudek
[Reliquary cross, from Spišská Nová Ves, ca. 1330–1340, detail depicting the Lord of Sorrows]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

85
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, from Lučivná, 1543, detail depicting Phoenix]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

86
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. V. Medieval metalwork and goldsmithery. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
private collection

Modern-looking style

In the 1940s, a French writer, theorist and politician André Malraux used the possibilities of photography to develop a publishing concept of an imaginary museum/museum without walls, which is able to exploit unexpected juxtapositions of works of art. Looking at Sudek’s blow-up of the scene engraved on a stem of the chalice from the Monastery of Friars Minor in Bratislava, one recalls Malraux’s note on the imperfection, which, when enlarged in the reproduction, appears as a modern-looking style.

87
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, from the Monastery of Friars Minor, Bratislava, early 16th century, detail]
1937– 938
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

88
Josef Sudek
[Mazer decorated with engraved medallions at the bottom and reliefs with mythological motifs, 1687, Central Slovakian Museum, Banská Bystrica, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

89
Josef Sudek
[Chalice of Count Hanns, from the church in Spišská Belá, 1515, detail]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

90
Josef Sudek
[Monstrance, from Bojnice, ca. 1500, adapted in the 18th century]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

91
Josef Sudek
[Monstrance, from Bojnice, ca. 1500, adapted in the 18th century, detail depicting the evangelists St Marc and St John]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

92
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, Bardejov, 15th century]
1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

93
Josef Sudek
[Chalice, Bardejov, 15th century, detail depicting St Barbara]
1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

94
Karel Šourek (ed.), Art in Slovakia. A Legacy of the Land and People. V. Medieval metalwork and goldsmithery. Praha: Melantrich, 1938
private collection

4. TERRIFYING BEAUTY

“Sudek was attracted to the photography of artworks and their fragments, notably sculptures and reliefs, by the moments such as the motif of extinction, destruction and time, which leaves traces in the matter, disrupting it gradually. Sometimes they were masterpieces, other times just minor works of art,” Vojtěch Lahoda wrote about Sudek. The involvement with torsos, also evident in the artist’s later non-commissioned work, is related to the often mentioned surrealism and, at the same time, stems from the work on reproductions of artworks. In the photographs from the exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”, we can see a number of motifs, such as a female saint with a broken-off nose, Vangoghian detail of embroidery depicting the Crucifixion, a peeling wall completing the atmosphere of the torso of Madonna or almost sculptural relief “Baroque embroidery” (detail depicting St Peter from a dorsal cross on the chasuble, from the Church of St Cross in Banská Bystrica), chosen by the artist for his first retrospective monograph of 1956.

95

Josef Sudek
[Pieta, from Vestenice, 18th century, Slovak National Museum, Martin]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

96

Josef Sudek
[Madonna of Strážky, ca. 1330, Slovak National Gallery]

1937
gelatin silver print
private collection of akad. arch. Josef Wagner Jr.

New use of old images

Sudek made use of his archive. Sometimes he returned to older negatives even after many years. In the 1960s, for instance, he used photographs of the Gothic Madonna of Strážky and a folk Madonna (today in the collections of Orava Gallery), which he made at the 1937 exhibition “Old Art in Slovakia”. While in the 1930s and 40s he delivered his contact prints and blow-ups to customers with a white frame, later he put the same negatives on a photographic paper without masking, with a resulting black border. Sudek distributed images of both aforementioned Madonnas among his friends, either signed or as a New Year card with “PF 69” and signature “Sudek” inscribed on the front in the black border.

97

Josef Sudek
[Pieta, from Oslany, near Prievidza, ca. mid-19th century, Slovak Mining Musuem, Banská Štiavnica, detail]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

98

Josef Sudek
[St. Florian, 19th century, Slovak Mining Museum, Banská Štiavnica]

1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

99

Josef Sudek
[Chasuble with The Suffering of Christ, back, dorsal cross, Levoča, 1450]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

100 – 102

Josef Sudek
[Chasuble with The Suffering of Christ, back, dorsal cross, Levoča, 1450, detail]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

103

Josef Sudek
[Crucifixion, from Bohdanovce nad Trnavou, 13th century]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

104

Josef Sudek
[Triptych of St Sophia, from Sásová, right wing, 1440, Central Slovakian Museum, Banská Bystrica, detail]

1937
new print from negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS

105

Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from the Church of St Cross in Banská Bystrica, 14th–17th century, Central Slovakian Museum, Banská Bystrica]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

106

Josef Sudek
[Chasuble, from the Church of St Cross in Banská Bystrica, 14th–17th century, Central Slovakian Museum, Banská Bystrica, detail depicting St Catherine of Alexandria]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

107

Josef Sudek
Baroque sculpture [Baroque sculpture Vanitas, about 1st third of the 18th century, from Emil Filla’s collection]; Baroque embroidery [Chasuble, from the Church of St Cross in Banská Bystrica, back, dorzal cross, 14th–17th century, Central Slovakian Museum, Banská Bystrica, detail of the left bar depicting St Peter]

period reproductions
Lubomír Linhart, Josef Sudek, Praha: SNKLHU, 1956, Fig. 88–89
private collection

108

Josef Sudek
[Master M.S., St Barbara, Banská Štiavnica, ca. 1506, Slovak Mining Museum, Banská Štiavnica, detail]

1937
gelatin silver print
Institute of Art History of the CAS

109

Josef Sudek
[Master M.S., St Barbara, Banská Štiavnica, ca. 1506, Slovak Mining Museum, Banská Štiavnica]

1937
cellulose acetate film negative
Institute of Art History of the CAS
facsimile (digital print)

110

“Dvě fešandy” [Two Lovelies]
Interview with Josef Sudek

1963
audio
Archive of Czech Radio

Lovelies from the Files. Sudek and Slovakia, 29. 10. 2021 – 9. I. 2022, Bratislava City Gallery, The Mirbach Palace, Františkánské nám. 11

Curators: Hana Buddeus, Katarína Mašterová

New Prints: Vlado Bohdan

Architect: Zbyněk Baladrán

Graphic design: Martin Groch

Production: Anna Sopková, Tereza Koucká

Adjustments: Tereza Cíglerová, Kateřina Doležalová, Barbara Líznerová

Installation: Jozef Chovančák, Jaroslav Beniček, Róbert Klváček

Publicity: Anna Jabłonowska-Holy, Barbara Líznerová

Acknowledgements: Atelier Paul Archive, Prokop Paul, Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague (Jitka Štětková, Jan Mlčoch), Jakub Wagner, Masaryk Institute of the CAS, Bratislava City Museum (Zuzana Francová), Central Slovakian Museum, Banská Bystrica (Juraj Žembera), East Slovakian Museum, Košice (Dušan Béreš), Imrich Winter Balneological Museum, Piešťany (Vladimír Krupa), Košická arcidiecéza (Peter Zubko), Slovak Mining Museum, Banská Štiavnica (Daniel Harvan), Slovak National Museum, Bratislava (Magdaléna Mrázová), Slovak National Museum, Martin (Radovan Sýkora, Daša Ferklová, Barbora Wágnerová, Branislav Murček), Slovak National Museum – Spišské múzeum v Levoči (Mária Novotná), Šariš Museum, Bardejov (František Gutek).

The exhibition is organised by the Bratislava City Gallery in cooperation with the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.