

Lucia Nimcová

Art Eats up Non-Art

Thanks to the fall, not spontaneous and not really revolutionary, of so called iron curtain in 1989, our photographic world has changed. Not completely though, since the humour, irony and wit of staged photography had naturally passed from one system – leaky authoritative – into another – democratic.

Only in the case of documentary photography, the new conditions brought also discovering of new possibilities. It was particularly so because there was suddenly no topic proscribed. Suddenly authors have been allowed to capture and exhibit series about the life of Slovak Catholics, about the fact that so called socialism was actually a Potemkin village and that poverty and backwardness were part of the Slovak – Czechoslovak reality.

Lucia Nimcová's choice not to continue the studies at the department of photography of the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava after the secondary school in Košice, but rather at the Institute of Creative Photography in Opava, focusing on a documentary production and offering lot of freedom for an author, is very symptomatic for her professional journey. She studied seven years in the environment influenced by Vladimír Birgus, Jindřich Štreit, Václav Podestát, Aleš Kuneš, all documentarists but each with a remarkably different style.

In 2003 Nimcová prepared "A Pictorial Report on the State of the Country" for the Institute for Public Affairs, benefiting from her previous experience from the series "Women" (2001-2003). She also finished her thesis "Women's Photography of the 90's in Slovakia" and curated a part of the exhibition "Private Woman" premiered within the Month of Photography, Bratislava in November 2003. For the first time Lucia Nimcová found herself in a double role, not only preparing her own photographic project, but writing a text about others and selecting pictures as a co-curator at the same time. "A Pictorial Report on the State of the Country" (2003) is clearly modest in comparison to her previous series, as if there were no formal borders crossed. The author works with an intensive scale of colours, chooses trivial motifs, particularly interiors and almost exclusively female characters. Nothing here oversteps borders of the broadly perceived documentary production. Her understanding of the topic is clearly different from the other authors involved in creating a picture of Slovakia and Slovaks– whether it was a magnificent, proud mountain region by Martinček, or the Slovakia persistently on a pilgrimage to God,

first in the shadow of communist ideology then in the 90's hand in hand with an admiration for Latin-American novellas and kitsch by Andrej Bán, but also the tragic and abandoned Slovakia in a transformation from totality to democracy by Martin Kollár. Comparing to these public global national strategies, the work by Lucia Nimcová is so to speak „made in kitchen“, consistently private, personal. Instead of historical events, it speaks about personal breaks, frustration, pressure of ideals, maternity, loneliness ...

Feelings are the only certainty we can rely on. Then it does not matter if it is a shot of the Pope's visit in Slovakia or a portrait of a woman half asleep from happiness, tiredness or exhaustion, or something from a wedding. The Slovakia by Nimcová is as poetic as dramatic, but most of all deeply submerged in feelings.

As the author felt not convinced that the topic of Slovak women had been exhausted by one book, she continued in the project. Series "Instant Women"(2003-2005) has become the most complex report about the manifoldness of a modern Central European woman destiny.

Alongside with the report about lives of others where she often identified herself with characters and situations, being no impartial narrator, Nimcová started working on a project related to her search for identity. The young photographer is not Slovak, but Rusyn; just as Andy Warhol. (Rusyns are a minority living in the Eastern Slovakia. Their number does not exceed few thousands. Their first textbook of Rusyn grammar was issued in the 90's of the 20th century. They had to speak Ukrainian before. Rusyns speak mixture of Slovak, Polish and Ukrainian and they write in Cyrillic, not in the Latin alphabet. ) It was not only a long period of living away from home, but certainly also the report about Slovakia, country, which represents just one part of her identity, that meant an acceleration here. She wanted to find her home, as she says, a place "where I meet my parents, friends, love". She sees herself as an example of the last generation, still remembering something from the everyday life and spirituality of the minority, but not belonging there somehow anymore.

In the project RUSYNS – Lost Homes (2005-2006), Nimcová gave up photographing. She immersed into family and institutionalized archives to discover photographs presenting a truthful picture about the life of minority. She also asked six young photographers to capture their families and life around them. On the basis of confrontation of preserved historical documents from the 70's and 80's and

new works, she prepared a book and an exhibition intended not only for natives, but as a report about Rusyns for Slovaks or anybody interested.

Nimcová worked as an archivist, historian and curator. She was discovering that the most interesting pictures were not those official ones, made according to the aesthetics of the social realism or humanistic reportage, but rather those trivial documentations of repetitive events, meetings, celebrations, Brigades of Socialist Labour. The archive opened a picture of a parallel world to her. Beyond the well known family one, intimate one, there was a world where the time seemed to have stopped. Only in an occasional imperfection human, often comedic, aspects of rigid social schemas appeared there.

The basis here was the work with the found photographers, the method was an anthropological, sociological, historical, theoretical research in Rusyns, in the author herself; all without her making any photograph at all.

In the project "Urban Park"(2006), Nimcová prepared site-specific exhibition in public spaces of blocks of flats and a presentation on internet. She selected pictures about history of Humenné (her native town) from archives of amateur photographers and made the exhibition to draw the attention of natives to the history of their town and to interesting people among them.

Naturally, Lucia Nimcová did not give up photographing completely for community projects. But thanks to them she not only better learned roots of her personal and national history, but also the fact that a trivial can be more engrossing than a visual elaboration no matter how effective.

Her last project by now "Unofficial" (2007) has borrowed a language of found photographs capturing moments when events are over, speakers have finished their speeches and there occurs a chance to photograph people free of their social masks; by means of a language paying no attention to composition or shapes, only to the event itself.

It proves here very often that the most important is a moment beyond any time frame that is present in the pictures. In this manner Lucia Nimcová took pictures of people and events almost twenty years after the fall of communism, but nothing seems to have changed. The same passivity, indifference and drowsiness that dominated at the time of communism play the main role in this environment

nowadays. If people used to fall asleep during celebrations of the Communist Revolution in the 70's, today they act the same by democratic anniversaries. At the same time it is important to mention that the pictures display love to the environment and people, which can be comic or seemingly ordinary. The series shows also the generation of those in their 50's and 60's to which the normalization meant the biggest harm. This generation appears resigned in depression.

The principle that nobody pretends here, neither characters, nor the photographer, as if everybody has lost their roles and we get a chance to see them in a moment when they do not have to pretend for a photographer, that is a key to the exceptional quality of the series.

Naturally, Nimcová is not a photographer working for communal services, but an author intentionally choosing a language without aesthetics to allow a space for a viewer to look directly into reality. Nimcová not only observes, but also intentionally stages. If we summarize the photographer's journey from her first series to the currently last ones, we can assume that it is a journey where Nimcová takes an effort to get rid of everything not important. Instead of standing on the effect of a more or less traditional aesthetics, she intends to create an art from a non-artistic, from mistakes. And she does it with success.

The title of series is "Unofficial". But in fact, the unofficial changes into an official, the non-artistic into an artistic in front of our eyes. All details start to harmonize, stains on walls of cultural houses, patterns on women's dresses. Here not only content is important but the way of interpretation as well.

So Nimcová has returned back to her beginnings, only on a higher level. She has found her own language of narration.