

# JOZEF SEDLÁK

## Photographic eschatology

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### "Memento mori..."

Exhibition of Jozef Sedlák entitled **Photographic Eschatology**<sup>1</sup> is a thematic testimony about the forms of death, dying, persistence, rebirth and resisting against the transience with the infinity of the human soul. It depicts the parable of the "memento mori"<sup>2</sup>, which has appeared in artistic symbolism for centuries as a reminder of the necessity of death in various interpretations. When assembling the exhibition, we had no notion about the upcoming attack of the modern plague – Covid, and so its introduction in the worst time of escalation of global infection acquires timeless value in the message "vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas..."<sup>3</sup> We tried to create a space for a unique dialogue exploring the volatile nature of life, which, in the case of instability of consciousness, increases the value of the present from several angles: as a celebration or adoration of death, a sign of futility, or a depiction of changes and various forms of transformation.

Jozef Sedlák's extensive work ranges from several genres: from a subjective documentary through staged photography and experiment to conceptual works and installations. The exhibition project focuses on the staged and conceptual way of creation, which we present in nine selected series in a time diapason of four decades connected with thematic narration and distinctive symbolism. Photographic objects in the cycles **Latency** (2011) and **Under the Face** (1977 – 2015) symbolize the fleetingness of time, the intertwining of memories, the confrontation of identity, or the "metaphysics of photography", crossing the boundaries of the medium. The sequence of **Five Seconds of Clinical Death** (1979) is a pause in the meantime on the fragile frontier of life and infinity; at the exhibition, it communicates directly with the adoration of the dead in the installation **Saints** (1977 – 2016) – memorable stories about loved ones in a time-lapse photographic records for almost three decades. The emphasis of the presented topic becomes a photograph from the cycle **Intuition of Multiples** (1994) with an indirect reference to the classic "memento mori". Diptych series **On the Democracy of Light II.** (1989 / 2011) combines classic analogue photographs with digitally transformed conceptual sketches. They are a symbolism of shapes, light and hands, creating a challenging dialogue of subtle chemical black-and-white photographs with digitally generated colour canvases, pointing to the unlimited possibilities of post-production in the age of new technologies. Modifications from the rich author's archive are also installations of monumental works from the series **Tribute to the Installation** (1995 / 2018) and **On the Democracy of Light I.** (1989 / 2018), which follow on from luminographic works from the 1990s: multiplication of motifs creates expressive modern "ossuaries" and the author's light alphabet – "grammar of intrinsic light". The uncompromising and strong message of the presented works closes the novelty – the conceptual mosaic **Firenze** (2013), that forms the reconstruction of renaissance tombstones by projecting contemporary portraits of the author's family members with reference to "visual resurrection".

The exhibition deliberately connects and permeates four decades of Jozef Sedlák's creative work in the subject on the latest reflections on being, in various media formats, reporting on the uncompromising development of the medium and the opening of endless technological possibilities for material processing of the classic quote "Memento mori...". The supertemporality of the ideological, the depth of philosophical and the uniqueness of the aesthetic message point to the importance of the author's work in the context of the current history of Central European photography and fine art.

Mgr. Lucia Benická,  
curator of the exhibition

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jozef Sedlák (\*1958, Bratislava) graduated from the Department of Photography at FAMU in Prague, CZ (1984). Since 2006 he has been teaching at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of UCM in Trnava, where he is currently the head of the Studio of Communication in the Medium of Photography at the Department of Artistic Communication. Since 1991 he has worked as an external teacher at the Department of Photography and New Media of VŠVU in Bratislava. Sedlák is currently one of the most prominent personalities in contemporary Slovak photography. He is dedicated to freelance artistic work, curatorial and organizational activities. He lives and works in Bratislava.

Jozef Sedlák has exhibited at many individual and collective exhibitions in Slovakia and abroad (England, Czechia, Greece, France, Japan, Magyaria, Germany, Poland, Austria, Sweden, Russia, Italy, Sweden, USA, and others). He received several awards for his photographic work: in 2020 Fra Angelico Award of the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia Council for Science, Education and Culture, in 2010 Award of the Slovak Art Union, in 2010 at the Biennial of Free Fine Arts and in 1990 at the Art of Today festival in Budapest. He presented a wide range of works in several publications: *Damnatio Memoriae* (Redemptorists Podolíneč, 2019), *Twice Live Photography* (VŠVU, 2018), *Cardinal Korec Still with Us* (Lúč, Bratislava, 2006), *The Village of God* (FOTOFO, Bratislava, 2000), *Carnival* (FOTOFO, Bratislava, 1999), *Jozef Sedlák* (Osveta, Martin, 1986). Sedlák's work is represented in private and institutional collections: Museum of Applied Arts, Prague (CZ); Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava; Moravian Gallery, Brno (CZ); Murray Forbes Foundation, The Navigator Foundation, Massachusetts (USA); Museum of the Central European House of Photography, Bratislava; Museum and Cultural Centre of South Zemplín, Trebišov; Gallery of Spiš Artists, Spišská Nová Ves.

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1 Eschatology is the study of the last things of man (including the afterlife) and humanity.  
2 Latin proverb: "Remember that you die."  
3 "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."