



**TICHÝ**

November 18, 2006 - January 14, 2007

*THE LENS DECIDES WHAT'S INTERESTING. I see everything through the lens. Taking photographs is all about seeing – the camera is your eye – and it all happens so quickly that you don't have to see anything yourself... I've never done anything except let the time pass... I observe the world. But what is the world? In any case, it's only an illusion. We see what we want to see. The world as will and imagination, as Schopenhauer put it.*

– Miroslav Tichý

This exhibition of photographs by the Czech artist Miroslav Tichý is a testament to the idea that “we see what we want to see.” These snapshots of everyday life in Kyjov, a small town in Moravia, suggest the illusory world of dreams. Often blurry and lacking in detail, his images immediately provoke the imagination. Miroslav Tichý’s approach to taking photographs is that of a passive observer who thrives on chance encounters and fleeting impressions. Working intuitively, he scans the social world around him, responding to various sensations and momentary distractions. Tichý’s primary subject has been women in the streets of his hometown that he hasn’t left in fifty years. From the 1960s through the 1980s, he shot about three rolls of film a day resulting in a massive archive. Quite different from documentary photographers who claim to witness and “capture” reality, Tichý works with lack of agency as an aesthetics of contingency, as he accumulates impressions. He is a street photographer who has obsessively documented a particular subject while refusing to select “decisive moments” and the exceptional, or even to make claims to interpretation. As a solitary urban stroller recording his social environment, Tichý might be called a *flâneur*. Yet unlike the self-possessed observer in control of his individuality implied by that notion, Tichý’s restless wandering is much closer to that of a *badaud*, a gaper who is absorbed by the outside world which intoxicates to a point where he forgets himself under the influence of the spectacle of society. It is precisely this sense of absorption that becomes so palpable in his photographs. Declaring himself an ‘atomist’ who opposes the apparent solidity of the perceived world, Tichý’s

images vividly express states of dissolution between viewer and subject.

Miroslav Tichý’s approach to photography defies the precision and technical control normally associated with the medium, especially now with digital means. Disregarding the rules of conventional photography, Tichý’s snapshots are taken quickly and at odd angles. He uses handmade cameras inventively cobbled together from scavenged materials such as old tins, toilet rolls, plastic drain pipes and cigarette boxes, with lenses cut from Plexiglas ground with sandpapers and polished with toothpaste and ashes. The imperfections from this improvised, faulty equipment – light leakage, blurs, overexposure, underexposure, scratches, dust – and other incidental ‘mistakes’ are what make his images so compelling. Equally important to the artist as taking pictures are his low-tech production techniques, evident in a fondness for clotted surfaces from the ongoing chemical activity of silver bromides interacting with photographic paper and the presence of fingerprints from handling the prints in the developer. Each photograph is manipulated further through idiosyncratic cropping and mounts with decorative drawing. In the post-production phase, the photographs are then left to age. Neglected, perhaps even slept on, they deteriorate further until rescued. From such clumsy instruments and processes emerge surprisingly evocative images. As with his refusal to comply with aesthetic conventions, the fact that Tichý forgoes the conveniences of the modern world by recycling detritus is not so much a matter of necessity, but rather, a philosophical and politi-

cal negation of the heroics of modern progress and a declaration of his independence from social conventions.

Miroslav Tichý is a type of alchemist who draws out what he refers to as the “poetics of bromide” to powerful effect. He returns photography to the notion of ‘painting with light’ where blackness becomes a mysterious space, rather than inert blankness, animated by gestural illumination. People here are modeled and modulated by light as if apparitions. Often barely identifiable, the spectral figures in his photographs appear so luminous they seem at times almost electric. Tichý’s primary motif has been the female body, evident in his early figure drawings and paintings as well as the photographs. His interest lies with articulating the dynamics of form, gesture and movement, as well as the personalities revealed through casual encounters. Tichý’s pictures of women have a tender quality that evokes the transience of physical beauty and the fragility of existence. The visual confusion of his images creates a sense of contingency and instability – nothing seems certain aside from the passage of time. They are animated by what Roland Barthes theorized as the *punctum* of a photograph, the indescribable detail that attracts and moves us, that creates intensity, whether a tear in the print or a shimmering arm. Miroslav Tichý’s compelling photographs leave open a discursive space between what is shown and what can be understood.

Helga Pakasaar  
*Curator*

Miroslav Tichý was born in a small town in Moravia in 1926. After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague from 1945 to 1948, he became an avant garde artist who produced drawings and paintings, and from the 1960s through the 1980s focused on photography. A recluse and social outcast, Tichý was known only to a few until 2004 when he was included in the International Seville Biennial. In 2005, he won the Discovery Award at Photography Arles in France and a major retrospective and publication was produced by the Kunsthau Zurich in Switzerland. Since then, he has had solo exhibitions in several commercial art galleries and at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, Netherlands and group exhibitions such as *Soleil Noir: Depression and Society* at Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg. His photography is the inspiration for an ongoing project *Artists for Tichý – Tichý for Artists*. He is the subject of several publications, article and a documentary film, and his photographs are in public collections such as the Centre Pompidou, Paris and Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

This exhibition features photographs from the 1960s through the 1980s and a selection of Tichý’s equipment on loan from the Foundation Tichý Océán.

# TICHÝ

November 18, 2006 - January 14, 2007

## **Lecture on Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý by Roman Buxbaum**

Thursday January 11th 7:30pm at the Emily Carr Institute

1399 Johnston Street, Lecture Theatre, Room 328, South Building

## **Miroslav Tichý: Tarzan Retired**

A documentary film by Roman Buxbaum

Runs continuously in the Gallery

## **Presentation House Gallery**

333 Chesterfield Avenue  
North Vancouver BC V7M 3G9

[www.presentationhousegall.com](http://www.presentationhousegall.com)  
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Gallery Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 12 - 5pm, Thursday 12 - 8pm. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

Holiday Hours: The gallery will be closed for the holidays December 24 to January 2. Regular hours resume January 3, 2007.

PHG receives support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Arts Council, BC Gaming Commission, the GVRD, Arts & Culture Commission of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and the City of North Vancouver.

Image: Miroslav Tichý, *untitled*, gelatin silver print, (detail) 11 x 28 cm. Courtesy of Foundation Tichý Oceán.