

Jane Štravs beyond the Camera: A conversation with the Inspiring Artist

Written by Kooness



Jane Štravs. JS vs 84 #7, 2014. Courtesy of Bazato Gallery

The artist was born in 1965 in Ljubljana. Since 1983 he presented his work on more than twenty solo exhibitions and more than a hundred group exhibitions. Read the interview to discover more.

Kooness: Tell us about your last photography collection

Jane Štravs: "JS vs 84" series is a product of a collaboration with Rone 84, who other than being a dear friend of mine, is also one of the graffiti art pioneers in Ljubljana. The purpose was to create unusual and provoking tension between glossy surfaces and various graffiti techniques. I decided to recycle some large format black-and-white photographs I shot in Cattinara a few years ago. At the beginning, I thought it looked like those images were just waiting for this kind of intervention...so instead of spraying on real surfaces I invited him to do it on my shiny photographs. The choice of colours was his, as well as the sprays, felt pens and colour sellotapes. He added a new dimension to blend the image into a new unity, despite its duality. The starting point of these new works was not the question of originality of the photographic method but rather creating tension by understanding the new reality of mixed media that complement and enhance each other, thus creating a new visual whole.

K: Who are your biggest photography focused artistic influences?

JS: There are many photographers whose work I admire and were influential to my me and my work. Depending on time periods, my

favourite influences also change. However, there are few constants ranging from Americans Diane Arbus, Robert Frank, William Eggleston, William Klein, Saul Leiter to Japanese photographers Daido Moriyama and Hiroshi Sugimoto.



Jane Štravs. NYC # 14, 2009. Courtesy of Bazato Gallery

K: How do you develop your art skills outside of your actual works?

JS: Besides photography, there are a lot of fields I enjoy, such as film, literature, visual art, and music. Curiosity is the main force that drives my interest to different aspects of art.

K: How has your style in photography changed over time? Tell us about the evolution of your art.

JS: There was a title of an article in one magazine referring to my overview exhibition in one Austrian gallery: Vom Underground bis zum Hochlanz, and indeed it was a transition from a raw, bold aesthetic of the alternative 80's to more carefully composed, sophisticated and refined but still provocative "fashion" photography of the 90's. In the new millennium there were a few series of black and white street images inspired by 'film noir' aesthetic and a collection of portraits strongly marked by an ironic touch. Lately I've been drawn to a more raw aesthetic of the snapshots.



Jane Štravs. JS vs 84 #3, 2014. Courtesy of Bazato Gallery

K: What colours do you use to stand out from the B&W photographs?

JS: In color photography I try to follow the principle of 'less is more'.

K: How does your background influence your work?

JS: In the early 1980's in Ljubljana a powerful social and underground artistic movement known as 'Ljubljana's alternative scene' emerged. Through a critique of the dominant culture industry at the time it created a new sphere of alternative artistic expression and work. Photography played the important role in documenting and expressing the Slovenian punk movement and other subcultural events of the time. This was the environment that contributed to the creation of a bold and provocative photographic aesthetic that is still recognizable and influential today. Although I started exhibiting as one of the more prominent chroniclers of the alternative cultural scene in the eighties, and since then my style in photography changed over time, probably some of the rebellious spirit and subversiveness from that period still define my aesthetic and approach.

K: How does your work relate to any societal or political matters?

JS: Usually I'm trying to avoid the anecdotal descriptiveness in favor of expressive force of the images, characterized by strong, complex and sometimes unexpected visual relationships. The subversive element of the image arises from the tensions between chosen specific environments and the subjects in those surroundings. Composition and structure is usually conceived with an emphasis on the space in which the figures move. Although the absolute priority is placed on the concept of the image rather than on its narration aspect, the principle of the counterpoint aims to point at the contradictions and the bipolarity of the society and the real world.

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