

VIOLA FÁTYOL

PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION
OF COMMUNITIES IN THE HUNGARIAN
COUNTRYSIDE THEN AND NOW

A PHOTOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE
FROM MARISKA TRAVNIK
TO CONTEMPORARY ART

Supervisors

Gábor Kopek
DLA professor
media artist

János Szirtes
DLA professor
fine artist

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Doctoral School
Multimedia Art DLA

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THESES

1.

The productive encounter of peasantry and photography falls to the golden age of peasantry; however, peasants do not make it to the other side of the camera for a long time. At the beginning of the 20th century photographers with peasant ancestry also appear, out of whom the only female artist we know of, until present, is Mariska Travnik.

2.

Mariska Travnik's work is the unique miracle of Hungarian photo history, who, surpassing her era, became the photographer of the village as a young woman with peasant ancestry in Kecel between 1914 and 1919.

3.

The success of Mariska Travnik's photography enterprise was helped by the fact that the demand for portrait photography increased during WW1. In the Travnik portrait collection the normalcy of the Hungarian village manifests, into which the war infiltrates through fine visual transmissions.

4.

In contrast to the usual stiff and ceremonious portrayal of peasants, Mariska Travnik's photos are more animate, relaxed. Mariska photographs her models as the member of the same community, so the trust between them unwittingly becomes part of the pictures.

5.

According to the requirements of the period's portrait photography, Mariska's photos are characterized by visual incompleteness. However, this deficit becomes the creator of visual excitement for today's viewer.

6.

We can see the interlocking of the peasant and bourgeois culture in the imagery, the traces of the fusion can be especially observed in rural Hungary until today. This continuity is one of the reasons for the fact that the Travnik oeuvre appeals to the viewers of the 21st century as well.

7.

We can feel a strong kinship among the figures appearing in the pictures because of the clothes, the hairstyles and mostly because of the sameness of fate. The recurring picture elements, the trust between the models and the photographer and the marks of amateur photography together create the feeling that we are looking at a vast family album.

8.

Mariska stopped taking photos after five years, at the age of twenty. Her being a villager, her peasant ancestry and the gender role expectations of the period together prevented her from choosing photography as a profession on the long run.

9.

Mariska Travník can hardly be described by the creative and sociocultural earmarks that characterize the female photographers of the era; she can be easier put into the group of village photographers. However, her female gender creates a special place for her among the village photographers. With the help of photography, for a short while she detours from the path determined by the social expectations of the period, and she possesses a certain female sight, or the elementary version of it, which can be seen in her ostentatiously sensitive portrayal of women.

10.

Her pictures evoke a withered era in a statuesque way; however, this statement cannot only be interpreted in a sociological, ethnographic or historical respect. Mariska's life's work is figurative, and on a personal level commemorates the transitions from child to adult and the possibilities of youth.

11.

The culture of peasants ceased to exist in its previous form due to historical events and the violent social transformation after 1945; the peasant heritage, however, shows through the descendants' use of objects and space, their language use, the structure of their communities and their social relationships. The photo series that came about under the scope of contemporary art – the masterwork – possesses a layer that can be analysed from a cultural anthropological view due to these visible clues. This layer links the photo project that was created with artistic intention with the early photo representation of peasantry in other genres.

12.

The visual representation of peasantry can be placed on an imaginary timeline, the beginning of which has an influence on its end. The content and form characteristics and possible interpretations of the art project made in the present are shaped by the recollection of the pictures taken of peasants earlier.

13.

The artistic aim of showing a community with empathy is often partnered with the artistic methods of getting close, participation and the need for showing from the inside. The nature of these types of artwork spans on a wide range, their common theme, however, is the presence of trust that comes into existence between the participants.

14.

One of the important groups of artistic topics for feminist and women artists is the issue of the representation of female body, for which they often use the tools of dressing up, masking and transfiguration. One of the important components of my own masterwork is putting on the dresses of the folk-song circle and the identification through dressing up, and this gesture does not lack thinking about women's aging and the role changes and losses that it brings about.