

Wojciech Prazmowski

The relationship between photography and its absolute and irreversible link to time past is the foundation for Wojciech Prazmowski's work. Photography is often perceived as one of our most effective allies in the resistance against passing time; certainly photographic images provide sustenance to our memories. However, the notion of actually preserving the present by capturing its image is illusory. Photography always depicts the past: the scene in front of the camera becomes a motionless image of the past the moment the shutter is released. There is no present time within the physicality of the photograph, it is simply paper, silver, and chemistry. All memories, including the memory of the duration of the moment captured in a photograph, are therefore nothing but psychological impressions.¹

Family photographs all have individual stories and each story is different for each family member. Prazmowski uses found photographs mined from family albums and archives as source material for his photomontages and photo objects. Although they represent the family histories of strangers, the images often contain a striking quality of the familiar and occasionally evoke an emotional resonance. Prazmowski's characters, long dead and of former generations, are revived as he combines them to create, as he calls them, "new stories from the past." He is not trying to reconstruct events into linear narratives, but simply suggesting relationships between the anonymous characters and universal emotions.



Inner Portrait, 1979

At times historic references are decipherable in Prazmowski's images, and often a sense of family history alternates with that of nations. Prazmowski chooses images that include references to war and death, such as soldiers, monuments, uniforms, and cavalry. In addition, many of his works include elements that allude to containment: wooden doors, twine that binds objects shut; postcards that bridge distances between loved ones. Born in 1949 at the end of World War II, Prazmowski spent the bulk of his life living under a Communist government where the image was heavily controlled and often used as propaganda. Prazmowski's images, by contrast, leave the viewer extreme freedom; they are not direct, simple, or easily interpreted. Although specific time is undetermined, Prazmowski underscores history by choosing images with people posing in clothing and manners from unmistakably bygone eras, and by printing his images in a sepia tone.

The photomontage technique serves Prazmowski's artistic concept well as its layers poetically illustrate the effects of the passage of time on the images lodged in our memory: they adhere, become fragmentary, sometimes indecipherable, often distorted. Prazmowski's images are a cluster of visual suggestions. By sandwiching images together, he creates visions of time and places that are mixed-up, foggy, and unclear, yet expressive as if in a dream.

The documentary characteristic of the single photograph is contrasted with the fiction created by multilayered pictures, both in the artist's "flat" works and in his photo objects. The photo object format further reveals an internal relation between the photograph as a flat image and the pho-

tograph that constitutes a spatial object, underscoring the viewer's simultaneous encounter between an immaterial image and a material photograph. Furthermore, the materiality of the photo object influences what the photographs within it represent, augmenting the viewer's visual experience by offering tactile associations. Displayed in vitrines as precious objects, the photographs are contemplated differently, as their identity as a relic or keepsake is emphasized. Additionally, by intentionally distressing his materials and shaping them like small books and pull-toys, Prazmowski makes his objects appear sentimental and well cherished.

Wojciech Prazmowski studied photography in Brno, Czech Republic, from 1972 to 1974. He has exhibited extensively throughout Central Europe at venues such as the Polish Institute, Budapest; ifa-Galerie, Berlin; Cultural Center of Katowice, Poland; Mala Galerie, Warsaw; and Contemporary Art Gallery, Krakow. International venues that have exhibited his work include Striped House Museum of Art, Tokyo; DuMont Kunsthalle, Koln, Germany; FOTOFEEST, Houston; FOTOFEIS, Scotland; Palais de Beaulieu, Lausanne, Switzerland; and the Museum of Central Finland. Wojciech Prazmowski was born in 1949 in Czestochowa, Poland, where he resides today.

¹ Lech Lechowicz, "Wojciech Prazmowski," 100 Fotografii, April 2000.