

# ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

## P R E S S   I N F O R M A T I O N

### **Josef Koudelka is awarded the 1992 International Photography Prize of the Hasselblad Foundation.**

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Photography Prize of 1992 has been awarded to Josef Koudelka, photographer of Czechoslovakian birth.

The prize consists of the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation Medal and a cash sum of 40,000 American dollars. It will be presented to Josef Koudelka at a ceremony in Gothenburg, Sweden, on August 27, 1992.

The Foundation motivates its choice as follows: "Josef Koudelka is one of the great photographers of our time. During his years of travel, he has described human conditions in many countries in his images, e.g. the everyday life of gypsies, their festivities and their cultural heritage. His photo essays are characterized by strict form and a poetic vision. They also express a strong human commitment and a socio-documentary realism."

The members of the nominating group for 1992 were: Ute Eskildsen, Curator, Museum Folkwang, Essen; Rune Hassner, Curator, Hasselblad Center, Gothenburg; Mark Haworth-Booth, Curator, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; William Klein, Photographer, Paris; former Professor Pål-Nils Nilsson, Stockholm; Sebastião Salgado, Photographer, Paris, and Håkan Wettre, Curator, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, Gothenburg.

This is the twelfth time this photography prize has been awarded. Former prize-winners are: Lennart Nilsson, Sweden; Ansel Adams, USA; Henri Cartier-Bresson, France; Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico; Irving Penn, USA; Ernst Haas, USA; Hiroshi Hamaya, Japan; Edouard Boubat, France; Sebastião Salgado, Brazil/France; William Klein, USA/France and Richard Avedon, USA.

## **A nomad with a camera**

Josef Koudelka was born in Boskovice, Czechoslovakia, in 1938. He began studying Engineering Science at the Institute of Technology in Prague in 1956, receiving his degree as a civil engineer in 1961. For the next six years he was employed as an aviation expert in Prague and Bratislava, while at the same time he worked as a freelance photographer with a particular interest in theatre photography. From 1965 to 1970 he was a member of the Czechoslovakian Artists Union.

When the military forces of the Warsaw Pact occupied Prague in August of 1968, Koudelka depicted the dramatic events as the Prague Spring and hopes for more freedom in the future were crushed. Koudelka's series of photographs from the streets of Prague established him as one of the important European photojournalists. However, he was not content only with reporting current world events from barricades and battlefronts. His visual talent developed significantly during long periods of persistent work on self-determined themes.

Koudelka left Czechoslovakia in 1970 and joined the Magnum Photographers Group the following year. His "base camp" was in London in the 1970s and in Paris in the 1980s. He led an itinerant life during these years of exile; summers were spent traveling with a camera, some light luggage and a sleeping bag. The winter months gave him time for dark-room work and editing his material. At times, he slept in a minimal laboratory space at Magnum's in Paris. In 1991 he returned to Prague and established a new base there.

Koudelka began depicting the life of the gypsies as early as 1961, first in Czechoslovakia and later also in Romania. In this work, featuring harsh "stage lighting" and contrast printing, he described the pride and distinctiveness, the religious rites and the living conditions of an ethnic minority that has survived in spite of discrimination from many quarters and the death camps of the Hitler era. He described their marginal existence in today's society with warmth and respect. Since 1970 he has continued to work on this theme in France, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece.

Koudelka notes that his working method through the years has been largely influenced by his early experience as a theatre photographer, when he was able to take suites of photographs of stage scenes from various angles. "This taught me how to get the most out of a situation, something which has been useful in my later work, too."

In the mid-1980s, Koudelka did a series of striking panorama photographs of the industrial areas and coastal landscapes on the French side of the English Channel for Mission Photographique Transmanche. He studied the environmental impact in the area surrounding the Channel Tunnel construction site, for example. The French Ministry of Culture had previously engaged a number of other prominent photographers to gather similar documentation as part of the ministry's own DATAR project.

For the past year Koudelka has been working on two major projects. One concerns the mining district in northern Bohemia, which belongs to what is known as "the black triangle of environmental devastation" (the area where the German, Czechoslovakian and Polish borders meet). The second project, together with five other photographers, is a theme project about Beirut that will be published as a book in the Fall of 1992.

Koudelka's works have been exhibited in Europe and the USA. There have been twenty-odd separate exhibitions and a number of group exhibitions together with colleagues from Magnum and others. He has received larger working grants from the Arts Council of Great Britain, the United States Endowment for the Arts and the Centre National des Arts Plastiques in Paris, in addition to being awarded honors such as the Robert Capa Memorial Award (1970), Prix Nadar (1978) and the French Cultural Ministry's Henri Cartier-Bresson Prize (1991).

The following books by Koudelka deserve mention: *Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi*, (Prague 1966), *Koudelka - Gypsies* (Millerton, New York 1975), *Josef Koudelka* (Milan 1982), *Josef Koudelka* (Photo Poche, Paris 1984), *Exiles* (London 1988), *Prague, 1968* (Photo Notes, Paris 1990).

## **Research and education**

The Photography Prize was instituted by Erna and Victor Hasselblad, who donated all their assets to a foundation. According to the Foundations statutes, a Photography Prize and the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Medal are to be awarded every year or every alternate year, as means permit, to a person of particular merit.

In addition, the Foundation is to promote scientific education and research in the natural sciences and in photography. A number of projects are granted funds each year, totaling approximately 1.5 million USD.

In the Fall of 1989, the Foundation opened a Photographic Center in Gothenburg, Sweden. It operates a continuous exhibition and lecture program. A photographic research and reference library is also being built.

Gothenburg, April 15, 1992

ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD FOUNDATION

For further information please contact:

Rune Hassner or Birgitta Forsell, Curators, Hasselblad Center. Address: Box 53098, S-400 14 Gothenburg, Sweden. Telephone: Int +46 31 17 90 60. Fax: Int + 46 31 774 02 31