

In Search of a New Meaning

HDLU Zagreb in cooperation with MMC KIBLA
MMC KIBLA / KIBLA Portal

Students of the Erasmus+ exchange organized by **KIBLA and the Croatian Association of Artists** have, under the mentorship of **Gregor Salobir**, created a group exhibition of black and white analog photographs that unveil the curtain from the partially forgotten parts of the Maribor city.

Unbiased observers have directed their gazes to the tradition of socialism, which left imprints in the city streets. The Maribor Textile Factory (Mariborska tekstilna tovarna/MTT), once the biggest Yugoslavian textile factory and one of the most successful companies in Yugoslavia, is now an abandoned area, used only for occasional events which awaken its grand history and architecture. We notice a similar theme with the photographs of the Fashion House (Modna hiša), which closed its doors in 2020 after 57 years, and reduced its employees from 200 to 10 at the time of its closing. Buildings which are well known to citizens of Maribor represent a part of the everyday cityscape, but have, in the fast tempo of progress, lost their influence as monuments of progress or regression of the society.

Upon the first impression, architecture seems to be the guiding thread of the photographs, but upon a more detailed observation, we notice that what really ties the photographs together is the societal sense of the photographer discovering the timeline connecting the legacy and the modernization of the city. Not many photographs have the power of addressing social issues without the explicit display of people. Apart from the rare intimate and sensitive portraits of people, who are in one way or another connected with the tradition of the former company, we are faced with the progress of capitalism and changed attitude towards workers through images, which function as the gaze of a curious, empathic foreigner, who wants to understand the connection between the micro and macrocosm of the history of labour, using nuanced symbols of the timeline stretching between the past and the present.

Photographers have skillfully touched upon speculation of the fate of small business, when they pointed their gazes towards store windows and have, with an allusion to Eugène Atget, caught a moment in time which has not yet been touched by globalization. Above all, the artists trigger an emotional response to the connection with the past, which the citizens inevitably carry, and gave it a wider context of the universal human experience in a rapidly changing world, which demands constant catching up and changing, to disable the contemplation about the influences of the immeasurable wish for growth at any price.

Sara Nuša Golob Grabner

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