

Prof. Mgr. **JINDŘICH ŠTREIT** Dr.h.c.

Jindřich Štreit is a Czech documentary photographer, university lecturer, curator and cultural mover and shaker. In his work he focuses on documenting rural life and working conditions in farms and factories, but he also explores social issues such as drug addiction, the handicapped, the blind, prisoners, the elderly, foreigners and the homeless in addition to his photography of religious and other social themes. Štreit sees it as his mission to draw attention to societal problems which seeing only slow improvements or those which are entirely neglected.

Jindřich Štreit was born on 5th September 1946 in the town of Vsetín, in the region of Moravian Wallachia (Czech Republic). In 1956 he and his four siblings moved with their parents to Těchanov in the foothills of the Jeseník Mountains. He attended the gymnasium in Rýmařov (1963) and studied art education at the Faculty of Education at the Palacký University in Olomouc (1967). After graduating he began working as a teacher at the Nine-Grade Elementary School in Rýmařov; in 1967 he was appointed headmaster of the school in Sovinec and later in Jiřkov. In 1971 he married his wife Milade (nicknamed Agnes); their daughter Monika is a successful musician and flautist. He has long accompanied his teaching and photographic activities with community service. Since 1971 he has run a gallery in Sovinec and since 1997 another in Bruntál. Since 1981 he has been working closely with progressive artists in Prague, Brno, Bratislava and other cultural hubs in the Czech Republic and beyond.

His initial impulse for photography came from his father. In 1964, during his studies, he was introduced to photography by Professor Jan Bukovjan. Štreit participated in faculty exhibitions at the Palacký University, and he concluded his studies with his first solo exhibition in 1967. From 1972 he devoted himself conceptually to depictions of rural life. From 1974 to 1977 he studied at the School of Art Photography; his diploma work was a cycle offering a behind-the-scenes look at theatre life.

In 1982 Štreit was the only photographer to participate in an unauthorised exhibition of work by unofficial artists on a tennis court in Prague. His photographs attracted the attention of the secret police, and he was arrested and subsequently sentenced to ten months imprisonment and a suspended sentence of two years. He had been convicted of the crime of defaming the Republic and its representatives on the basis of the exhibited and unpublished photographs following an official inspection of his entire photographic archive. His punishment also included the confiscation of his negatives and printed photographs and also his camera which was deemed an instrument of the criminal act. Štreit was forbidden from continuing in his criminal activities (i.e., photography) and remained under surveillance. His case is unique in the history of photography. After his release from prison, he was banned from teaching. He worked for some time in a library and after the end of the court proceedings he found work as a dispatcher at the State Collective Farm in Ryžoviště; through this period, he was actively involved in cultural activities and photography.

Štreit's situation changed dramatically after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. From 1991 to 1994 he worked at the regional administration and later at the museum in Bruntál, but in 1994 he became a freelancer. He taught at the Institute of Creative Photography at the Faculty of Arts and Natural Sciences of the Silesian University in Opava. From 1991 to 2003 he lectured in Film and Television at the Faculty of Musical Art in Prague, where he became a docent in the Department of Photography in 2000. In 2009 he was awarded the title of Professor at the Academy of Arts, Design and Architecture in Prague. He is the only photographer who has been awarded an honorary doctorate by the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, where he also taught for two years as an external lecturer. He lives and works in Sovinec.



Since 1991 Štreit has worked on documentary projects in France, England, Brazil, Moldavia, Austria, Germany, Japan, China, Hungary, Russia (Buryatia, Krasnodar Krai, Ingushetia, Chechnya) and also in the Czech Republic (*Ženská věznice [Women's Prison]*, *Břevnovský klášter [Břevnov Monastery]*, *Ľudia olomouckého okresu [People of Olomouc District]*, *Ľudia Mikulovska [People of Mikulov Region]*, *Cesta k slobode [Path to Freedom]*, *Ľudia Třineckých železiární [People of Třinec Ironworks]*, *Medzi nami [Among Us]*, *Za oponou [Behind the Curtain]*, *Spolu [Together]*, *Cesty života [Journey of Life]*, *Ľudia môjho kraja – Bruntálsko [People of My Region – Bruntál]*, *Ocelový svet [World of Steel]*, *Tichá choroba [Silent Sickness]*, *Vítkovice, Hľadať anjela [In Search of an Angel]*, *Ľudia Vítkovska [People of Vítkovice]*, *Divadelný svet [The Theatrical World]*, *Sme z rovnakej planéty [We're All from the Same Planet]*, *Z tmy ku svetlu [From Darkness into Light]*, *Ľudia v kóme [The Comatose]* and others. He has directed several student projects at the Institute of Creative Photography at the Silesian University (*Ľudia Hlučínska [People of Hlučínsko]*, *Náš svet [Our World]*, *Zlín a jeho ľudia [Zlín and Its People]*, *Dobrovoľne [Voluntarily]*, *Opava na prahu 3. tisícročia [Opava at the Turn of the Third Millennium]*, *Dopravný podnik Olomouc [Olomouc Public Transport]*).

Jindřich Štreit has organised more than 1600 exhibitions and has participated in a large number of group projects. He has published 100 books and 103 catalogues, and he has illustrated many other publications. His book *Kde domov můj [Where My Home Is]* won first prize in a European competition and also in the Most Beautiful Book of the Year award in 2017. His works feature in several renowned collections both in The Czech Republic and abroad, including MOMA New York (USA), the National Gallery of Art in Washington (USA), the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, the Museum of Art in Olomouc, the Moravian Gallery in Brno and many others. Štreit has been the subject of several films, including Jan Špáta: *Mezi světlem a tmou [Between Light and Darkness]*, 1990, Aleš Koudela: *Jindra ze Sovince [Jindra from Sovinec]*, 2006, and Libuše Rudinská: *Na tělo [Burning Question]*, 2018. In 2019 Kamil Zajiček and Štěpánka Bielešová made the film *Jindra ze Sovince [Jindra from Sovinec]* about Štreit's activities in Sovinec. In 2024 was shown the premiere of a documentary film directed by Lubomír Hlavsa a Martin Štoll titled *Fotografuji, tedy jsem [I Photograph, Therefore I Am]*. He is a member of the Q Brno Association, the Olomouc Artists' Association, the Free Photography Fund at the Prague House of Photography and the Art Conference in Prague.