



Kamila Berndorffová's MY NEW LIFE photographic exhibition

Although it may seem that the lives of the handicapped as a theme in photography is an old song, Kamila Berndorffová successfully found an entirely new way to illustrate the issue. The idea of creating the MY NEW LIFE photographic project came about thanks to the initiative of Lucie Cingrošová, pediatric oncologist from University Hospital Motol in Prague, and her meeting with fine art photographer Kamila Berndorffová in the spring of 2010.

Kamila Berndorffová has many years of experience in creative photography behind her. The uniqueness of her work stems from the combination of social issues with foreign environments – for many years she has been involved in photographing the lives of women in various regions marginalized by society. This occurs primarily in India, where she often travels on business. On the spot, she manages to establish contact and the intimate proximity of the women being photographed, which, in the aforementioned area, is not easy. Her work method and approach to the project demonstrate precisely this same reality.

Often in photography, is an attempt to show its harsh reality, medical and hospital subject matter tends to be depicted in a manner deprived of personality. It is frequently objective and raw and done unscrupulously, without embellishment or mercy. Tubes, oxygen machines and surgical instruments are portrayed as essential attributes of the hospital environment, primarily during the dramatic moments of medical procedures. Kamila Berndorffová's photographs present the patients of the children's oncological department just like any other children – especially how they themselves would like to be portrayed and how they themselves would like to live. However, in the author's photographs we do not find any indulgence or self-satisfying effort to embellish the reality. Her way of portrayal is based not only on her experience from many meetings with these children, but also from consultations with Lucie Cingrošová, MD and her medical experience. In this respect, it can rightly be said that, in this case, the doctor is the photographer's creative partner in full.

Kamila Berndorffová has separated her photographic project into several thematic series that differ in content and form. Each series corresponds to the surroundings of the child patient during the course of his or her oncological treatment – namely, in the hospital (the MODELING and the PAINTING DAY series), in the setting of their own home (the AT HOME WITH FAMILY series), and, a short time after treatment, on summer vacation with other patients and their friends (the CAMP series). Dreams and fantasies, where their thoughts can escape, are also especially important places for children undergoing treatment. They have given rise to the series of portraits entitled DREAMS AND PASSIONS.

It is not easy to portray the issues of disability and serious illness in the way acceptable to the general public. The perspectives towards this topic range from the average viewer, to the actual patients and

their families, to the doctors and nurses working in the environment of oncologically ill children. The MY NEW LIFE project's outcome stems from, above all, the attitude with both the authors had towards the patients. The photographs radiate with strong empathy and understanding that is supported by the photographer's unique ability to establish close contact with the children and even their loved ones. For the patients, the project became an enjoyable part of their difficult lives otherwise limited to a hospital environment. In collaboration with Lucie Cingrošová, photographer Kamila Berndorffová succeeded in creating an awe-inspiring collection of images from the lives of a group of young people whose realities fate radically changed. The MY NEW LIFE project offers us, as an uninitiated audience, a chance to change our views of children with tumors and to teach us to perceive them as ordinary people with extraordinary destinies.

Radovan Kodera, curator of the exhibition, 2012