



DREAMS OF ESCAPE

PHOTO EXHIBITION

7-26 OCTOBER 2021

NEIMËNSTER / LUXEMBOURG

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PHOTO EXHIBITION

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The starting point for this photographic exhibition is the feeling of being enclosed. After more than one year of lockdown, most of us feel an almost vital need to escape. We dreamed for a long time of being able to escape from our immediate surroundings and to reconnect with the freedom of the unknown and the unforeseen.

But beyond the current context and the purely spatial aspects, there are many artists who observe and question this desire to escape. Faced with an economic and social situation which may seem blocked and in which the possibility of escaping is only ever a dream or even an illusion, the selected artists refuse to give in – on the contrary, they are committed to gaining a better understanding of those who are convinced that a different future is possible and who work towards this on a daily basis. But what do they dream of?

Of a life lived in harmony with nature, more harmonious social relations, greater solidarity at global level, technology that serves humankind... The list goes on, but what they have in common is that they refuse to accept the status quo, determinism or fatalism – they are dreamers, but they are also agents of change who have their feet firmly on the ground.

ARTISTS

Rafael **HEYGSTER**
Petr **ZEWLAKK VRABEC**
Kevin **FAINGNAERT**

PROJECTS

FREE TRACKS
JAKO V NEBI

The five artists whose work is presented in the exhibition therefore encourage us to find an escape firstly through our thoughts and to question some of our convictions and ways of life, but at the same time to create, individually and collectively, ambitious dreams for the whole of humanity, which appear to be the very condition for hope.

Rafael Heygster's project *Corona Rhapsody* depicts humanity grappling with the various stages of the pandemic, but also the various ways or attempts to escape from that overwhelming reality: escaping to nature, to art, to relations with others, but also escaping to religion or to the unreal world. The need to flee from an oppressing reality has never been felt more keenly.

The subjects of **Petr Zewlakk Vrabec's** project *I think thus I protest* are also dreamers, but ones who transform their dreams into actions to achieve an immediate impact on society. On the streets, Vrabec closely follows people who stand up and speak out in the name of the silent majority, defending what they consider to be inalienable rights. The "Zadists" portrayed by **Kevin Faingnaert** [*The ZAD*] protest in a very different way, but pursue undoubtedly similar ideals. Their protest lasts for months, if not years, but is as much an escape "from" as an escape "to". In both cases, the photographers' subjects demonstrate that it is at least possible to try and live another way – closer to nature, more sustainably and more connected to the people living nearby.

Lastly, the exhibition features two collective projects that have a strong formal and material resemblance: the multimedia documentary project *Free Tracks*, which focuses on Polish artists who live in secluded places in Poland, most of whom have developed alternative and close relationships with nature but also with their local communities, and the book *Like Heaven but Different*, in which the author **Aleš Palán** and the photographer **Johana Pošová** follow eight Czech "loners" who have also escaped from the city, from mainstream society or from a previous life. It is clear from both projects that happiness is possible and in some cases very real without all the trappings that many of us deem necessary. These people give us a lesson in modesty, humility and wisdom, forcing us to look at ourselves through their eyes and through their lives.

Jagna Olejnikowska-Grabowska (curator)
Radek Lipka (coordinator)

Rafael

HEYGSTER

PROJECT: CORONA RHAPSODY

Rafael Heygster is a German documentary photographer born in 1990. He studied cultural anthropology and political sciences at the University of Hamburg, as well as photojournalism at Hannover University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the Danish School of Media and Journalism in Aarhus.

Heygster's main interest is the relationship between individuals and their environment. In his work he uses a humanistic approach, focusing on social, cultural and ecological aspects of life.

His work has been exhibited in international galleries, museums and photography festivals. He has won many awards, including the Otto-Steinert-Preis, the Marty Forscher Fellowship, the Portraits Hellerau Award, the Gomma Grant, a College Photographer of the Year prize and the Lensculture Emerging Talent Award, and he was shortlisted for the Leica Oskar Barnac Award.

The Corona Rhapsody project was undertaken in collaboration with the Austrian multimedia journalist **Helena Manhartsberger** and the conceptual documentary photographer **Volker Crone**.

CORONA RHAPSODY

Corona Rhapsody is a series of photographs presenting the reality of the different phases of the Covid-19 pandemic in Germany. Heygster focused on photographing situations involving both crowds of people and individual experiences.

The title of the project was inspired by the song Bohemian Rhapsody, as this photo essay – like Queen's mix of different music genres – combines different aspects and perspectives of lockdown while staying open to interpretation.

In one series of pictures Heygster captures some striking images of lockdown, documenting empty or 'new' spaces but also iconic moments, such as the improvised deliberation of the Bremen parliament, the football game held with cardboard cut-out spectators or the first drive-in concerts and screenings.

Other photographs present various ways or attempts to escape from the overwhelming reality of the pandemic. This escape takes on various forms: it can be physical of course – simply escaping from one's apartment and from the city to nature (although not always exactly following the restrictions in force). But it can also be an escape to a different reality through imagination, art or communication with others, even if only virtual or remote. However, in a world of video calls and online events, the presence of a real person seems to be a luxury with the potential to break the feeling of confinement. The last path of escape depicted by Heygster is the escape to the unreal world of Covid deniers, anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists – groups who seem to illustrate the powerful need to escape in such an unprecedented context.

There is obviously no end to the project (still ongoing) and no conclusion, but some conclusions do seem to emerge: the pandemic may have bared our vulnerability, but at the same time it has reinforced our strength, resilience and creativity aimed at being free while staying a part of different communities. It has shaken us but not deprived us of our dreams.







Petr

ZEWLAKK VRABEC

PROJECT: **I THINK THUS I PROTEST**

Petr Zewlakk Vrabec is a photographer who has been documenting climate protests and other activist events in the Czech Republic, Germany and Poland for several years. He participates in non-violent protests and uses his camera to record events in the immediate vicinity. His photographs show not only the determination of the protesters, but also the – often disproportionate – police violence.

Born in Mlada Boleslav in the Czech Republic in 1984, Petr Vrabec has a degree in geodesy, which is a field that may seem quite distant from photography. His life and career, however, took a turn in 2007 when he took his first photographs. He has worked closely with the independent online daily A2larm, the Romani media and educational organization Romea.cz, and Greenpeace Czech Republic, among others. In 2017, he was nominated for the Czech Press Photo Award in the main category "Current Affairs". In 2018, he won the Czech Press Photo Award for his series Eviction of families with children from quarters in Usti nad Labem in the "Olga Havel Award" category. In 2019, he won the Czech Press Photo "Reportage of the Year" Award for his photo series on the Ende Gelände protests in Germany.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Petr Vrabec's photographs have a strong social appeal. Our contemporary society is undergoing many significant changes, which are very often global in nature. The current pandemic and climate change are but two blatant examples among many. These changes call for a systemic response – public authorities at all levels have to take measures to deal with them, to mitigate the risks and to give their citizens hope for a normal life and a future without major catastrophes.

When they fail to do so, most of us hardly ever protest and only exert pressure once every few years during elections, but the minority that Petr Vrabec closely follows is determined to stand up and speak out in the name of the silent majority, defending what they consider to be inalienable rights, often with their own bodies, at the risk of injury, arrest and sometimes lack of understanding in the eyes of passers-by.

Whether it is protests for decent housing, abandoning coal, against the exploitation of animals, defending the rights of ethnic or sexual minorities, the photographs on display illustrate the wide diversity of such social protests – their objectives, their forms and their strategies.



What we see in them are not gestures of violence or nihilism, of simply negating the status quo. Rather, they bring forward alternatives of a more sustainable and more harmonious life and embody various manifestations of hope.

With his camera Petr Zewlakk Vrabec takes us into the very heart of activist events, and captures not only their form and content, but also their emotional charge. It is in this subtle way that his photography transcends the category of mere photojournalism towards art.



Kevin

FAINGNAERT

PROJECT: **THE ZAD**

Kevin Faingnaert is a Belgian artist born in 1986. After studying Sociology, he pursued his dream of becoming a photographer. As a documentary photographer, he mainly focuses on subcultures and small communities living away from mainstream culture. His works include photo series from different parts of the world such as Faroe Islands, Spain and Romania. As an editorial photographer, he has worked for a number of international publications and companies such as National Geographic, Der Spiegel and La Repubblica.

He was awarded the Zeiss Photography Award (2017), was the winner of Portrait of Humanity award (2019) and was shortlisted in other competitions such as Il Reportage Photojournalism Award (2018).

PROJECT

Faingnaert's project "The ZAD" fits in very well with the theme of this year's festival. ZAD ("Zone to defend") is Europe's largest rural protest camp located near Brittany, France. This 4000-acre zone consists of farms, fields, forests and abandoned houses. Since 2009 it has been inhabited by radical environmental activists (the zadists), fighting against the construction of an international airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Over the years, it has evolved from being just a protest site and is now a strong, independent community with its own vegetable markets, bakery, theatre spaces and other facilities.

The project concentrates on the inhabitants of ZAD in all their differences – their age, background and motivations may differ greatly, but there is certainly one thing at least that they have in common – a green philosophy which they live by, no matter the sacrifices they have to make. We can take a closer look at their "outcast" everyday habits by observing their cabins, barricaded walking paths and "crow's nest" tower.

The characters portrayed are not only a symbol of resistance and rejection of 'the system', they also show that it is possible to live another way – closer to nature, more sustainably and more connected to people living nearby. Zadists may seem strange to us or even off-putting, some may say they live a utopic dream and escape from society and 'real life'. In their mind however, it is not an escape from modern society, but rather from the factors that they feel destroy community and, in the long term, the fundamentals of a fulfilling life on Earth. It is certainly worth taking a moment to look at things from their perspective – maybe they, not us, are the future of humankind?







FREE TRACKS

WOLNE ŚCIEŻKI

**AUTHORS: MARTYNA WOJTKOWSKA,
KAJA KWAŚNIEWSKA & OTHERS**

Martyna Wojtkowska (born in 1990) is a multimedia documentarist by passion and education. She studied documentary studies at the University of Warsaw. Her work includes reportages published in the press and books („Światła małego miasta”, „Izrael okiem reportera”), documentary films, non-fiction audios (for radio and podcasts) and photography. As well as individual projects, she organizes and engages in collective work. Martyna is the founder of Documentary Foundation „wild walkers” which supports young Polish documentarists. She is interested in stories from the peripheries and showing perspectives of people whose voices go unrepresented in the media.

For her latest project, „Free tracks” (Wolne ścieżki), she invited documentarists to explore the coexistence between humans and nature.

Martyna was awarded for her work with nominations for the Teresa Torańska Award and the „Man with passion” Interia Award for journalists under 30. In 2021 she became the laureate of the „Młoda Polska” Minister of Culture and National Heritage Scholarship Programme. She is based in Warsaw, Poland.

Kaja Kwaśniewska is a graduate of documentary studies and media studies at the University of Warsaw. She is a documentary and event photographer with a focus on portrait photography and social and environmental subjects. All the images taken for the „Free Tracks” project were taken with a medium-format analogue camera.

„FREE TRACKS” (WOLNE ŚCIEŻKI)

„Free Tracks” (Wolne ścieżki) is a multimedia documentary project devoted to Polish artists who live in secluded places in Poland and who developed alternative and close relationships with nature. The initial idea was to search for and give a sense of relief during the first months of the pandemic. As reality changed in March 2020 - people were locked down and for some time in Poland it was even forbidden to go for a walk in the woods - the author of the project decided to document stories that show the relationship between humans and nature not as a sphere of conflict but as coexistence.

These stories were published as a podcast. Each of episodes presented one person within his/her environment. Each consisted of three audio components: interview about their personal story, workshop tour and sounds of nature in a particular place. This perspective made it easier to encompass not only a human story but also that person's relationship to the environment. Photographs taken by Kaja Kwaśniewska followed the same pattern: portrait of a person, their sphere of work and natural environment. Martyna and Kaja travelled across Poland for four months, from May 2020 to August 2020. The whole journey covered over 5000 km and resulted in an audio story that lasts over 6 hours. „Free tracks” exhibition consists of photographs, extracts from the conversations and the soundtrack created from audio landscapes recorded in each of the places.



Other people involved in the project:
Andrzej Saferna, Janusz Deblessem,
Justyna Godz.

www.wolnesciezki.pl



LIKE HEAVEN

BUT DIFFERENT

JAKO V NEBI, JENŽE JINAK

AUTHORS: ALEŠ PALÁN & JOHANA POŠOVÁ

ALEŠ PALÁN

Aleš Palán (1965) – a writer, journalist, columnist, editor, and poet. He is one of the signatories of Charter 77. In the second half of the 1980s, he worked as a night watchman, and a digger. Since 1993, he has been working as a journalist and columnist. He co-wrote, together with Kateřina Šedá, "Bronx Brno" (2016), an award-winning tour guide mapping a specific underprivileged part of Brno inhabited by a large Roma community. He has authored several books of interviews both with outstanding personalities and with "invisible" people living on the margin. While in his first book dedicated to loners, "Better to Go Mad in the Wild" (Raději zešílet v divočině, 2018), he meets solitary people living in the South Bohemian region of Šumava, its sequel, "Like Heaven but Different: new encounters with solitaires from Bohemia and Moravia" (Jako v nebi, jenže jinak. Nová setkání se samotáři z Čech a Moravy, 2019), contains interviews with loners from all over the country.

JOHANA POŠOVÁ

Johana comes from Prague, where she studied photography and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in 2012. She completed an internship at the Bellas Artes Faculty in Valencia, at the HERE Creative Centre in Iceland and at the Syntax Gallery in Lisbon. She is a photographer but she also works with video, art objects and installation, and staged photography. She regularly exhibits her work at galleries in the Czech Republic and abroad. The photographs that she took for "Like Heaven but Different" won her a nomination for the 2019 Czech Grand Design award in the "Photographer of the Year" category.

"LIKE HEAVEN BUT DIFFERENT" (JAKO V NEBI, JENŽE JINAK)

"Like Heaven but Different" is a book of encounters. Its author Aleš Palán visits and talks to eight people who live solitary lives on the periphery of mainstream society and civilization – in mountain settlements, in isolated places and often near state borders. These loners live in geographically different parts of the Czech Republic. Six of them are men, two women. Their lives reveal many similarities, characterized, for instance, by positive relationships with animals and manual dexterity (without these qualities a person would probably not last long in solitude in the middle of nature). What is more striking about them however, are the differences. Each interview provides an intimate peek into a fascinatingly authentic and category-defying existence.



"I'm looking for someone I never thought could exist" says Palán in the introduction to his book. In the age of Instagram and Facebook, it would seem easy to find, visit, and "like" such people who are eager to present their unusual lives. Palán's encounters, however, are unique in the sense that the individuals he meets not only choose to make do without things that most people consider normal, but also mostly do not crave exposure. Their stories can seldom be generalized or turned into ready-to-use inspirational anecdotes and life lessons, and therein lies their charm.

Why do these voluntary outcasts, living modestly and almost self-sufficiently, far from the world of consumption, waste and excess, fascinate so many readers and resonate so much in a society that tends to advocate rather the opposite values and principles. Perhaps we find them fascinating because we all share certain romantic inclinations. But maybe we like to seize the gift of opportunity offered by their stories to see ourselves, for a passing moment, through the loners' eyes.





Central and Eastern European Film Festival

LUXEMBOURG, 7-26 OCTOBER 2021

ARTISTS

AND PROJECTS

PARTICIPATING

IN THE

EXHIBITION

Rafael Heygster / www.rafael-heygster.com

Petr Zewlakk Vrabec / www.facebook.com/zewlakk

Kevin Faingnaert / kevinfaingnaert.com

Free Tracks / www.wolnesciezki.pl

Jako V Nebi / http://bit.do/jako_v_nebi

THE TEAM

Jagna Olejnikowska-Grabowska (curator), **Radek Lipka** (coordinator),
Jakub Kucera (assistant curator), **Veronika Gigalova** (consultant), **John Evans**
(proofreading), **Rebecca Watts** (proofreading), **Jiří Vlášek** (graphic design)

MOST SPECIAL THANKS

to all the **ARTISTS**, our main partner **Centre Culturel de Rencontre
NEIMËNSTER** and our partners **Pierre Werner Institute** and **Polish Institute
Brussels**

*PLEASE NOTE that some of the photographs will be available for sale in the framework of our charity project.
More information: festival@ceneast.lu*





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