

Branimir Ritonja

I am guilty

19 September – 7 October 2017

artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor
ACE KIBLA, Maribor, Slovenia

Branimir Ritonja, a noted portrait, conceptual and documentary photographer from Maribor, is presented on this occasion in the frame of the local Photography Festival, with a cycle entitled *I am guilty*, a series of portraits of well-known artists photographed as prisoners.

Before he became a photographer, Branimir Ritonja was an expert in the field of criminal justice, more specifically, a forensic scientist. A Maribor version of the CSI, sadly without a TV series. Through his work, he contributed to resolving criminal offense matters, mainly through the investigation of material traces with the help of photography, and thus learned to master forensic photography, a method of documenting (most often) a crime scene.

Willingly or unwillingly, the photographs by Branimir Ritonja are connected to his former occupation. Perhaps this is the reason, why his recent works are socially critical; an informed documentation; an artistic photo-interpretation of the contemporary *societas*. His year-long project, *Penitentiary*, for example, focuses on prison issues. The cycle *Faces* was created during street protests in his home town of Maribor, while the project/installation *Portraits* is thematically linked to refugees and the symbolism related to current migration issues. Ritonja photographed migrants standing behind a “technical barrier”, in plain words, a razor barbed wire fence, which stands as an anachronism to the deeply rooted opinion of many – that only the migrants themselves are responsible for their situation.

The project *I am guilty* was created two years back, at the Maribor Art Market. In the beautiful setting of the Jewish Square (*Židovski trg*), around a dozen of artists were gathered to socialize, eat and drink well, and, first and foremost, to indulge in creative activities. The “photographic evidence” displayed today at the artKIT Gallery is a testimony to this all-day-long event, which was held on the day of the Assumption of Mary (confirmed by the date and time stamp). Portraits were created depicting artists, but also by-passers, who supported the artistic action, which was designed to call the attention to the extremely difficult situation of local artists and self-employed workers in the field of culture. For an entire day, the Art Market hosted well-known local artists creating literally in front of the public eye. Among them was Branimir Ritonja, who took *en face* and profile photos of the artists, adding the time and date to the images, which remind us of prisoner shots and symbolize the position of artists not only locally, but in the entire country. This is why Ritonja added the inscription artist, i.e., the artist as a prisoner: it is a call for a more decent treatment of art, and especially a call for art to survive *through and by means of art itself*. Today, we find ourselves living in a country that seems to be forgetting that art, as the only permanent cultural heritage, is actually responsible for this same country to be able to pride itself on the idea of being *civilized*.

“I am as guilty as anyone of you,” says the artist, paraphrasing a famous Hollywood text, and putting in context the fact that an artist is guilty just for being an artist.

Branimir Ritonja (1961) graduated from the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security. His curiosity about photography started in elementary school, as he developed his first black-and-white photographs in the darkroom. Through the course of his career his works were presented in more than 600 group and 47 solo exhibitions home and abroad. In 1989, the Photographic Association of Yugoslavia (*FZJ*) awarded him the title Candidate – Master of Photography. His works have received numerous awards and prizes, among them the French Photographers' Association Award Plaque, and the Glazer Prize and Charter in recognition of his artistic achievements. Branimir Ritonja is a portrait, conceptual, and documentary photographer, living and working in Maribor.

In 1981 he joined Maribor's Fotoklub, and was introduced, among others, to Ivan Dvoršak, who later became his first long-time mentor. In the same year his work *Starec* (Old man) received several awards. In 1986, another prize-winning work, *Deklica z jabolkom* (Girl with an Apple) was created, one of his first photographs in the pure black-and-white technique without a grayscale, which testifies to the artist's continuous desire to experiment and discover within the medium of photography.

In 2002 he was first voted president of Fotoklub Maribor. An important experience and influence was his participation in various art colonies and a number of study visits to different countries and cities across Europe. He has been a member of the Union of Slovenian Fine Arts Associations (*ZDSLJ*) and the Maribor Fine Artists' Society (*DLUM*) since 2007. Among his most notable series are *Portreti mariborskih umetnikov in Glazerjevih nagrajencev* (Portraits of Maribor's Artists and Glazer Award Winners, 2011), *Arhitektura in portreti* (Architecture and Portraits, 1987), *Svetlobne skice* (Light Sketches, 1988/98), *Sin Salida* (2001), *20* (2003), *Mariborska dvorišča* (Maribor Courtyards, 2001–2004), *Nedeljsko jutro* (Sunday Morning, 2004/05), *Predmestja* (Suburbs, 2006), *Motivni kontrasti* (Motif Contrasts, 2005), *Kaznilnica* (Penitentiary, 2010–14), *Portreti umetnikov* (Artists' Portraits, 2011), *Navadni ljudje* (Ordinary People, 2013), *Portret* (Portrait, 2016), *Rob mesta* (City Edge), etc.

Tuesday, 19 September 2017, at 6 p. m. – exhibition opening

Wednesday, 20 September 2017, at 10 a. m. – breakfast with the artist

Curated by Nina Jeza

The exhibition will be showing until 7 October 2017.

The exhibition is part of the Maribor Photography Festival (September 23 to September 30, 2017) by Fotoklub Maribor.

artKIT Gallery, Glavni trg 14, Maribor

Tue–Fri 10 a. m.–1 p. m. and 5 p. m.–7 p. m., Sat 10 a. m.–1 p. m.

KIBLA

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