

Jaromír Funke and Czech Photography, 1920–39

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The Thomas Walther Collection at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, contains some of the most important photographs of Jaromír Funke (1896–1945). The work of this Czech photographer cannot properly be understood without some knowledge of the influences on him. At the most general level, Funke, like the majority of his contemporaries, was motivated by the fact that the First World War had resulted in, among other things, the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into successor states, one of which was the multinational Czechoslovakia. In addition to Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and part of Silesia, the new state also included Subcarpathian Ruthenia. (After the Second World War, Subcarpathian Ruthenia was ceded to the Soviet Union; in 1993, Czechoslovakia split into the Czech and Slovak Republics.) The creation of Czechoslovakia was a powerful impulse for creative people living within it, including photographers. They wanted to make their country famous, and they had the best terms and conditions in which to do it.

The Czech institutions of the former empire survived in Czechoslovakia and were joined by new ones. The clubs of amateur photographers came together as the Association of Czech Amateur Photography Clubs (*Svaz českých klubů fotografů amatérů*) in 1919. A year later, the Association of German Amateur Photography Clubs in the Czechoslovak Republic (*Verband deutscher Lichtbildnervereine in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik*) was established. At the State School of Graphic Arts in Prague, also established in 1919, a specialized photography course was first offered in 1921. It was run by Karel Novák, a native of south Bohemia, who moved to Prague from a similar teaching post at the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt in Vienna.¹ (One of his first pupils, in 1922–24, was Josef Sudek, who would go on to become a well-known photographer and friend of Funke's.) Photographers longing for better instruction no longer had to go to Vienna or Munich. The number of Czechoslovak photographic periodicals also multiplied, providing platforms for practical training, the exchange of ideas, and examples in the form of high-quality plates. Foreign magazines and books also became available in the libraries of amateur photography clubs. Together with well-equipped darkrooms and, often, portrait studios, clubs were very important for amateurs. The amenities and comradery were well worth the monthly membership contributions

Funke grew up in Kolín, an industrial town on the river Elbe, not far from Prague. An only child of a successful local lawyer, he had all the prerequisites to become his father's

successor; but although he completed his law studies in 1922, Funke did not take the final exam. Since his early youth, his main interest was art. In search of his own creativity, he befriended two Kolín modern painters, Rudolf Mazuch and Zdenek Rykr, but came to the conclusion that he had no talent for painting or sculpture. Instead, Funke began to devote himself to photography intensively in 1920, and Rykr opened his mind to Cubism and contemporary art.

Funke had a great deal to learn (and he was helped in this by Sudek, who used to travel to Kolín to visit his mother). In 1920, photography was dominated by Art Nouveau and Impressionism, and the “noble” pigment processes were still being used to make photographs resembling the prints of



fig. 1 Drahomír Josef Růžička. *Pennsylvania Station*. c. 1918. Gelatin silver print, 13 ½ × 10 ½ (34.5 × 27 cm). Moravian Gallery, Brno

graphic artists. Two main areas of interest are perceptible in Funke's early work: the creation of photographic images suitable for exhibition, and the development of his own concepts of art photography. In 1923, his carbon prints were accepted for an amateur photographers' exhibition. (Later, he would exhibit only gelatin silver prints.) They were landscapes, similar in style to the gum prints of Edward Steichen, Hugo Henneberg, and other trend-setting photographers of this founding period of art photography.

In these years, Funke documented the town of Kolín with a handheld camera in a completely different way than what was being exhibited at the time. He was "charting out" the town and its inhabitants and everyday goings-on. A number of the photographs are snapshots, which was highly unusual, if not unprecedented, in early 1920s Czech photography. He took photos of the work being done on the banks of the Elbe, construction of the bridge over it, and areas along the river or near it. Funke was experimenting with his medium for documentary purposes, which would have a lasting influence: in all of his subsequent photographic work and criticism he emphasized truthfulness as photography's key value. At the time, there was nowhere to exhibit such "non-artistic" photographs, and consequently they ended up as contact prints pasted in albums. Around 1925, when Funke began to enter his works in photographic salons, he enlarged at least three cropped photos from his early work. In his first retrospective exhibition, held at the *Krásná jizba* (Beautiful room) in Prague, in 1935, he may have placed one of them—the photograph of the Masaryk Bridge in Kolín under construction—at the beginning of his avant-garde works, under the title *Simplified Space* (1922).² Many other Funke photographs, which have been preserved only as contact prints, are among the pictorially most impressive and important works made at the time in Czechoslovakia, and in Europe. They are, for example, among the early expressions of an interest in the outskirts of towns and in subject matter related to civilization and human labor.

The dichotomy in Funke's work—between the socially engaged and the more introspective or individually focused—entered a new stage in 1923. Funke adopted the new "purist" style of amateur photography and also established the continuous line of his avant-garde work. In addition, he began to write photography criticism and, in 1925, to publish articles. Though the avant-garde overlooked him, he was one of the most influential figures among the amateurs.

JAROMÍR FUNKE AND AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE 1920S

Amateur photography in Czechoslovakia received a strong burst of inspiration in 1921. Drahomír Josef Růžička, a recognized amateur photographer who had just given up his medical practice in New York, traveled to his native Bohemia, then in the new republic of Czechoslovakia.³ A "pupil and friend" (as he used to say) of American photographer Clarence H. White and a member of the Pictorial Photographers of America, Růžička rejected pigment

processes and any manipulation of a negative or positive, but accepted the soft-focus lens. For this "new school," practically the only source of pictorial effect was lighting. In December 1921, the first of a series of exhibitions of Růžička's works took place in the Czech Amateur Photographers' Club (established in 1889) in Prague. Růžička had also brought periodicals to Czechoslovakia, including *Camera Work*, and a collection of original prints by his American colleagues, including Margrethe Mather, Doris Ulmann, Edward Weston, and White (exhibited in Prague 1923–24). The enlargements on photographic paper, previously unknown in Czechoslovakia, and subject matter drawn partly from the outskirts of large cities, set a new standard. Thanks to Růžička, a late branch of American Pictorialism emerged in Czechoslovakia, and the word "Pictorialism" also entered the Czech milieu. In amateur circles, Pictorialism was identified with modern photography until the end of the 1920s. By its purism and more modern subject matter, Czechoslovak photography began to distinguish itself from photography in neighboring countries.

The Czech Amateur Photographers' Club went through a stormy period after the First World War. The old officials of the club had to face the rise of a new generation of young photographers (with more than 150 new members in 1919–20), for whom the existing orientation of the club was insufficiently artistic. The first storm was linked with elections to the club leadership in January 1920. A new president was elected, and several dissatisfied members, headed by Adolf Schneeberger, now sat on its committee. They wanted to devote themselves intensively to art and to raise the standards of club activity. The club exhibition of the following year reflected the new circumstances: almost all of the exhibited photographs were the work of young photographers. Newcomers Jaroslav Fabinger, Jaroslav Krupka, Schneeberger, and Josef Sudek won prizes. In 1922, tension in the club again came to a peak. For various reasons, Jan Evangelista Purkyně, Jan Diviš, Schneeberger, and Sudek were gradually expelled. (Funke was a member of the Kolín club.) In protest, a few dozen other members also left the club, and immediately, with Funke's participation, founded the Prague Photo Club (*Fotoklub Praha*). Purkyně became its president and Schneeberger its secretary. The new club was dominated by proponents of Růžička's purism. It attracted attention with robust participation in the first exhibition of the Association of Czech Amateur Photography Clubs in Prague in late 1923 and early 1924, which demonstrated the predominance of the new school. Among the exhibited photographs were collections of American photographs and works by Růžička.

In addition to exhibitions, the club activities of those times included circulating portfolios (*okružní mapy*), albums of photographs by club members. The clubs sent albums to each other based on an established order and judged each other's work and assigned points, competing for the most number of points. When the Prague Photo Club gave its

opinion on the circulating portfolio of a club outside Prague, Funke formulated a harsh critique, which was also signed by Schneeberger, Sudek, and Josef Šroubek. The criticism aroused indignation and its signatories were expelled in 1924; they soon learned that no other club would accept them as members. They had no choice but to found a new club, the Czech Photographic Society (*Česká fotografická společnost*), independent of the Association and open to professionals as well. In solidarity, many other members joined them; others returned to the Czech Amateur Photographers' Club in Prague. Consequently, the Prague Photo Club soon folded. The first chairman of the Czech Photographic Society was Schneeberger.

The Society carried on with the aims of the Prague Photo Club, rejecting any manipulation of the print. In 1926–27 and 1929 it held two important exhibitions. The first competed with the exhibition of the Association. As set out in the terms and conditions of the exhibition, manipulated prints were not admitted; “The Czech Photographic Society is based on pure photographic technique and it absolutely rejects processes that seek to make the photograph look like the graphic-art print (including bromoil and bromoil transfer).”⁴ With this regulation, the Society stood apart from camera clubs that were open to all styles and techniques and came closer to modern artists' groups based on a program, on purism and a turning away from the old school of photography. Most of the members of the Society exhibited portraits and landscapes or cityscapes in Růžička's style. Among these were Funke's *Village Impression* (1922–24) and probably also *Detail from Nature* and *Mountain View* (c. 1925).⁵ A further five of his exhibited photos, however, were still lifes, in the style of Cubism, of which *Plates* (1923–24; fig. 2) is reproduced in the catalogue of that first exhibition.⁶ The Czech Photographic Society achieved considerable renown by successfully entering works in photographic salons all over the world. The responsibility for this activity was at first entrusted to Funke. He did not, however, excel at this, and was consequently forced to leave the committee on September 23, 1926. Funke and Sudek, for unknown reasons, were both expelled from the Czech Photographic Society on February 28, 1929, by the chairman, Schneeberger (who himself had been expelled from the two previous clubs). However, the decision was rescinded at the annual meeting on March 26, and Schneeberger quit the society. As far as we know, the “revolutionary” history of the 1920s in Czech amateur photography clubs ended here.

Soon afterwards, from April 27 to May 15, 1929, the second and probably last exhibition of the Czech Photographic Society was held. It included collections of works by members of the Seattle Camera Club (of Japanese-American Pictorialists, 1924–29) and by the Toronto Camera Club. On the international amateur scene, these two clubs had much in common with the New Photography, which had quickly achieved renown through the 1929 exhibition *Film und Foto (Fifo)*, in Stuttgart. In his preface to the Czech Photographic



fig. 2 Jaromír Funke. *Plates (Talíře)*. 1923–24. Gelatin silver print, 1923–45, 8 7/16 × 11 1/16" (21.5 × 29.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA 1672.2001). © Miloslava Rupesova

fig. 3 Jaromír Funke. *Plates (Variant with three plates)*. c. 1923. Gelatin silver print, 8 9/16 × 10 3/4" (21.8 × 27.2 cm). Estate of Jaromír Funke. © Miloslava Rupesova

fig. 4 Jaromír Funke. *Plates (Variant with two plates)*. c. 1923. Gelatin silver print, 8 7/8 × 10 13/16" (22.5 × 27.5 cm). Estate of Jaromír Funke. © Miloslava Rupesova

Society's exhibition catalogue, Funke expresses his belief that with an "unbiased comparison of the Czech and foreign works, our efforts and aims will not be considered light-weight or unworthy."⁷ Elsewhere in the preface, he clearly distinguishes between Pictorialism—"the photographic direction that most of our members are going in"—and photographs based on the photogenic quality of objects. "This trend," he continues (meaning photogenism), "which is completely new in Czechoslovakia, and has not, as far as we know, been developed even outside the country, . . . has a great future."⁸ But photogenism, the first Czech photographic ism (see fig. 1, for example), never caught on, because

shortly after, photogenism became an obvious quality of the New Photography. We are no longer able to identify the eight works Funke exhibited, because he later changed their names. The title *Abstract Construction* (*Abstraktní konstrukce*), however, probably refers to what we know as his series Abstract Photo (*Abstraktní foto*).⁹ And titles such as *Photogenic Construction* (*Fotogenická konstrukce*), *Construction and Glass* (*Konstrukce a sklo*), and *Construction of Surfaces of Light* (*Konstrukce světelných ploch*) also provide us with information about the character of the works. Funke's photograph *Still Life. Frames* (*Zátiší. Rámy*) (see fig. 5) is featured in the accompanying catalogue.¹⁰

The following year, the establishment of a "modern section" was announced as part of the Czech Photographic Society. Called Czech Studio (*České studio*), it was accompanied by *Studio*, an exclusive new film review (published by Aventinum) as a platform for its work. "The Czech Studio's field of activity, however, is both modern photography and, particularly, experimental film," declares an article in the second volume.¹¹ Funke was supposed to make an abstract film in the city of Brno, but this did not pan out, and, moreover, Czech Studio ceased to exist. The Czech Photographic Society suffered from a lack of creative members and after 1929 was probably just barely surviving, before it folded in about 1934. Funke increasingly distanced himself from amateur photography.

Some photographers had tried earlier to free themselves from the milieu of the camera clubs. An interesting piece of evidence is an application (perhaps never sent), from 1925 or 1926, to *Umělecká beseda*, a society of prominent fine artists. It survives in two versions. František Drtíkol's and Funke's names appear on both versions; on one of them, they are joined by Schneeberger and Sudek. The application was formulated by Funke, who probably also initiated it.¹² Finally, in late 1936, the dream of getting the medium of photography included among the traditional fields of art came true, with the establishment of the photo section of the Mánes Society of Fine Artists (*Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes*). Among its six members were Funke and Sudek.

The first two programmatic presentations of works by avant-garde photographers in Czechoslovakia were held in the town of Mladá Boleslav (at the local Club of Amateur Photographers), in 1928 and 1929. Both were called Exhibition of Independent Photography (*Výstava nezávislé fotografie*) and were organized by Josef Dašek and Josef Slánský. The amateur periodicals *Fotografický obzor* (Photographic review) and *Rozhledy fotografa amatéra* (Panoramas of the amateur photographer) offered the exhibition organizers space for manifestos by the two and for photographs by more outstanding photographers. The works shown at both exhibitions are known only from plates in the periodicals. Though many of these photographs must have made a good impression at the *Film und Foto* exhibition, the names and works of the photographers have fallen into oblivion.

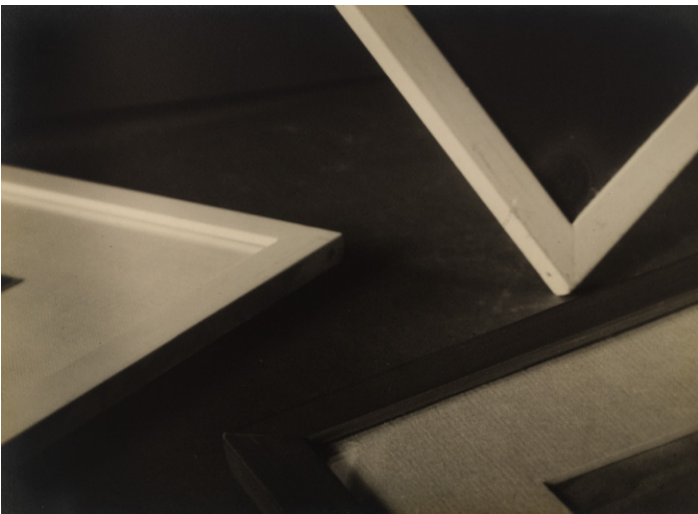


fig. 5 Jaromír Funke. *Still Life. Frames* (*Zátiší. Rámy*). 1924. Gelatin silver print, 1924–39, 8 7/16 × 11 5/16" (21.5 × 29.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA 1675.2001). © Miloslava Rupesova

fig. 6 Jaromír Funke. *Untitled*. 1923–24. Gelatin silver print, 1923–35, 8 5/8 × 11 5/16" (21.9 × 28.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA 1673.2001). © Miloslava Rupesova

Czech participation in *Film und Foto* was organized by Karel Teige, who invited members of his *Devětsil* artists' group (which was then in the process of breaking up) to participate. Apart from Funke, the other Czech pioneer of avant-garde photography, *Jaroslav Rössler*, a former *Devětsil* member, had by then settled in *Paris* and was probably no longer in touch with Teige.¹³ Funke did not become better acquainted with Teige until 1929 and was not included in the exhibition, as far as we know. The Czech artists who participated exhibited mainly *photomontages*. The Stuttgart exhibition, however, inspired young film critics, one of whom was *Alexander Hackenschmied* (later called Hammid), who organized two New Photography exhibitions in Prague, in 1930 and 1931, assisted by Funke and Rössler. Josef Sudek, Pavel Altschul, Eugen Wiškovský, Evžen Markalous, and others exhibited with them in these two shows. Ladislav E. Berka, Hackenschmied, and Jiří Lehovec made their debuts here. But because illustrated magazines, dust jackets, and other advertisements became an endless outlet for the New Photography, signed photographic prints and exhibitions soon became less important.

JAROMÍR FUNKE AND THE AVANT-GARDE

In late 1922 or early 1923, *Devětsil*, the avant-garde association of architects, writers, dramatists, and fine artists, initiated a new stage in its existence with, among other things, the publication of *Život: Sborník nové krásy* (Life: A miscellany of the new beauty). It opened Funke's eyes to new values in art after Cubism and to the kind of beauty that could be portrayed only by the recent mechanical mediums of photography and film, as opposed to traditional hand-made mediums like painting and sculpture. Included within this publication was Teige's long manifesto-like essay, "*Foto Kino Film*," the first lengthy formulation of the international avant-garde attitude toward the two mediums. The essay emphasizes documentary photography and photojournalism and acquaints the Czech reader with experiments in film and photography. It devotes a whole chapter to the American artist *Man Ray*, whom Teige had visited in Paris in the summer of 1922.

Funke began a new stage of his photographic work with a series of still lifes in 1923, presenting objects he was interested in. Several times he photographed a sculpture of a Cubist head, probably a self-portrait of his friend Zdenek Rykr, once in combination with *Život*.¹⁴ Other Funke still lifes feature publications about modern art (including monographs about Picasso and Braque) and a figurine by Rykr.¹⁵ Funke also pursued two complementary interests: on the one hand, he moved closer and closer to objects, providing detailed "visual descriptions" of them through his photographs in accordance with the nascent *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), and, on the other, he moved toward abstraction. Regarding the former, he made three photographs of pewter plates around 1923, combining an investigation of material and a geometric composition

made possible by the round shapes of the plates (figs. 2–4). The purpose was not to create an illusion of the thing itself, but to create a new image from closely viewed parts of objects. The photo *Still Life. Frames (Zátiší. Rámy)* (1924; fig. 5) enhances the principle by adding the dynamic diagonal composition. The subject matter—picture frames instead of pictures—can reasonably be seen as Funke's assertion that a photograph need not be a reproduction. Even more surprising subject matter appears in an untitled photograph showing something as insignificant as two accordion-like pieces of thin cardboard (fig. 6). By means of the angle and the composition, he emphasizes the subject of a cleverly lit three-dimensional object as transferred onto a flat surface. By losing its real dimensions, the single shape repeated in sequence makes an almost monumental impression. Due to their geometric character, actual objects depicted in detail also become abstract. The subject matter is minimalistic, but is presented maximally. In Funke's later work, we frequently come across the motifs of repetition, ordering, series, and the mass-produced item. In the Walther Collection, they can be compared with the platinum print of *Paul Strand's Porch Railings, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* (1916; fig. 7); a photo of steps by Alexander Hackenschmied (1930s; fig. 8); and *Luxury Rentals* by *Jiří Lehovec* (1932; fig. 9).

These were followed by other fascinating variations, expanding Funke's repertoire by the addition of portraits and nudes. The photograph *After the Carnival (Po karnevalu)* (1926; fig. 10), of futuristic costumes probably designed by Rykr, was made at a masquerade ball in Kolín. If we did not know what was going on in the photo, we might guess it was made at a Bauhaus dance. The women depicted here are the Matucha sisters of Kolín; we might wonder whether they are standing or reclining. One of Funke's first striking diagonal compositions, it complicates spatial orientation and, in conjunction with the costumes, evokes rotation or a state of weightlessness. The pioneers of the New Photography who had the most in common with Funke are *Albert Renger-Patzsch*, Strand, and Edward Weston. In comparison with them, however, Funke was more inspired by the fine arts, at least by Cubism and Constructivism, which one can see in his photographs of geometrically shaped solids. His friendship with Rykr, one of the best-informed and cultivated Czech artists, was also important.

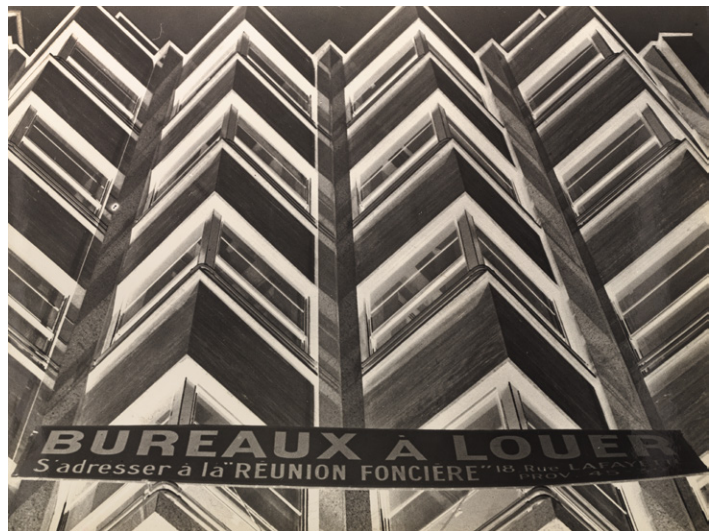
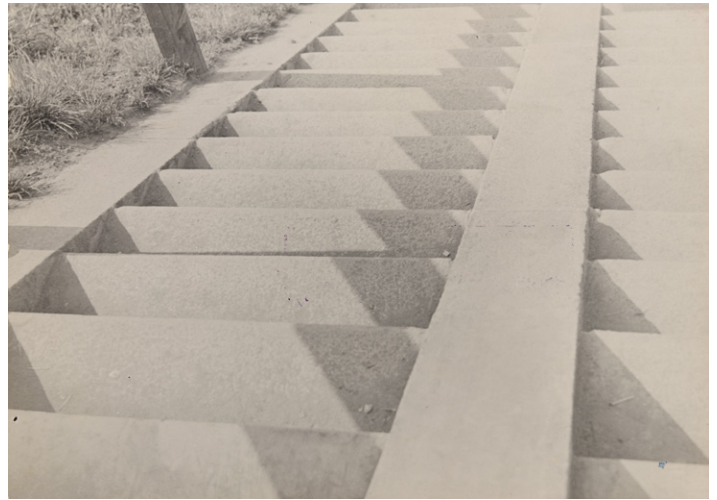
If the first line of Funke's avant-garde work was *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the second line was abstraction, an exploration of light and shadow. This is perhaps most evident in photographs he took of Rykr's head, illuminated from the side with a spotlight, which casts a black shadow. In other photographs, glass flacons, bottles for chemicals, panes of glass, glass prisms, a milk-glass lightbulb, and white sheets of paper are substituted for impenetrable objects. Some photographs are unique representations of Cubism created by means of pure photography (fig. 11). Others show nothing but white squares of paper drowned in light, balanced on the border of objectivity and non-objectivity. In Funke's work, the number



fig. 7 Paul Strand. *Porch Railings*, Twin Lakes, Connecticut. 1916. Silver platinum print, 12^{15/16} × 9^{11/16}" (32.8 × 24.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Horace W. Goldsmith Fund through Robert B. Menschel (MoMA 1865.2001). © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive

fig. 8 Alexander Hackenschmied. Untitled. 1930s. Gelatin silver print, 1930-45, 4^{13/16} × 6^{3/4}" (12.2 × 17.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Arthur Rothstein, by exchange (MoMA 1682.2001). © 2014 Tino and Julia Hamid

fig. 9 Jiří Lehovec. *Luxury Rentals*. 1932. Gelatin silver print, 1932-55, 11^{5/16} × 15" (28.7 × 38.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Abbott-Levy Collection funds, by exchange (MoMA 1757.2001)



of objects gradually decreases over time and cast shadows become more and more important, until the objects find themselves outside the picture (as in the Abstract Photo series) (fig. 12). This is the only time in photographic history that one can observe the artist's process leading away from figurative or object-based photographs to non-figurative shadow plays. Something similar, however, was attempted by László Moholy-Nagy, who at the same time, from 1922 to 1930, created his *Lichtrequisit einer elektrischen Buehne* (Light prop for an electric stage), later called *Light-Space Modulator*, and *Lichtspiel Schwarz-Weiß-Grau* (Lightplay black-white-gray) (1930), a film documenting the production of this mobile "sculpture." Using the technical facilities of the Bauhaus workshops, Moholy, a "constructor" obsessed with dynamism, filmed the shadow patterns of the steel mobile object, capturing the projections on film. Funke, by contrast, was going to the kitchen for whisks and forks in the beginning, but he too, at least in part, used to project things on surfaces (mostly on glass negatives) in his "home cinema." The photographs in his Abstract Photo series were

used as projections in Zdeněk Rossmann's avant-garde stage designs for E. F. Burian's production of J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, in Brno, which premiered on November 19, 1929.

In 1926, Funke made a series of *photograms* using, among other things, parts of an ozonit, an electric instrument meant to be beneficial to one's health. The following year, in an article entitled "Man Ray," Funke did not deny that the photogram had its charms and its own special uses, but he emphasized that the principal task of the times was photographing with a camera.¹⁶ Although the avant-garde looked up to Man Ray as an idol, and Man Ray was gaining attention for his cameraless Rayographs, Funke began his article with charitable detachment, saying, in his opening sentence: "An interesting figure in photography, this Man Ray."¹⁷ Despite his affinity with Moholy, however, Funke measured everything in terms of Man Ray, who for him was almost the only criterion.

On the one hand, Funke's move toward abstraction may have been accelerated by his reaction to the photogram, as stated in his article on Man Ray.¹⁸ On the other, the



fig. 10 Jaromír Funke. *After the Carnival (Po karnevalu)*. 1926. Gelatin silver print, 11 5/8 × 9 3/4" (29.5 × 23.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA 1674.2001). © Miloslava Rupesova



fig. 11 Jaromír Funke. *Composition (With a Bottle)*. c. 1925. Gelatin silver print, 11 5/8 × 9 3/4" (29.5 × 23.6 cm). Moravian Gallery, Brno © Miloslava Rupesova

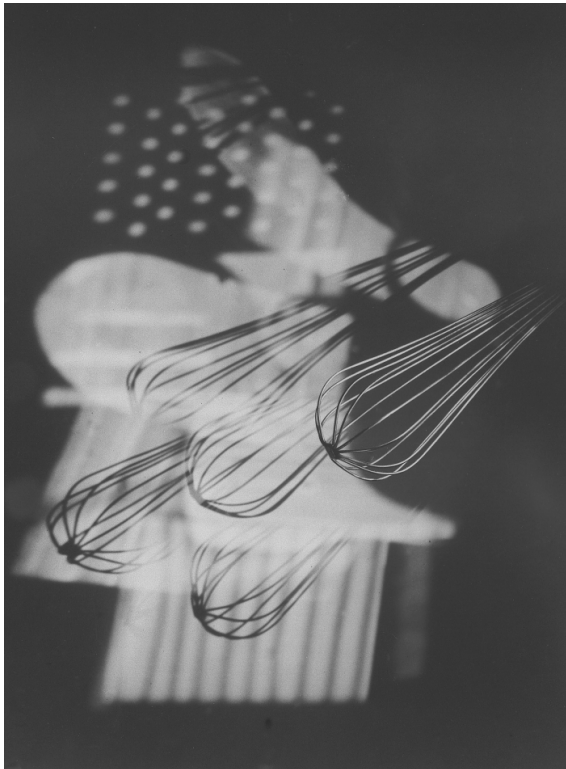


fig. 12 Jaromír Funke. *Abstract Photo, Composition (Kitchen Whisks)*. 1927–29. Gelatin silver print, 15 3/4 × 11 3/4" (40 × 29.8 cm). Moravian Gallery, Brno. © Miloslava Rupesova

photogram inspired him to return to the world of objects. He began to photograph objects on a pane of glass, arranging them as if for a photogram into photographed “assemblages.”¹⁹ These works can be considered to belong to Poetism, a unique hedonistic movement of the Czech avant-garde, strongest in playful poetry, picture poems, and what was known as *artificialismus* (a lyrical kind of painting partly influenced by Cubism). Generally, the still life shot from above—the so-called tabletop still life—is strikingly different from traditional still lifes, which are depicted in side view. Similar overhead works were presented by Walter Peterhans at *Film und Foto* and it was probably just a matter of time before they become ubiquitous. In Czechoslovakia, this principle of photographed “assemblages” (unfixed) was used intensively by several photographers in the 1930s. The painter František Vobecký made almost all his photographs in this way (figs. 13, 14).

If we consider Funke’s Abstract Photo series and the tabletops to be reactions to the photogram, we can reasonably consider the Glass and Reflection series (1929), to be a reaction to the photomontage, as a reflection in a shopwindow is a sort of optical found montage, intermingling worlds in front of and behind the glass surface (fig. 15). Funke saw the uniqueness of photography in its truthfulness and believed that photomontage had only a limited use, in advertising and related fields. His Reflections were likely inspired

by the photographs of Eugène Atget, reinterpreted by the Paris Surrealists only a few years earlier. Glass and Reflection is Funke's first "cycle" (the preferred term at the time), and perhaps also the first Surrealistically conceived set of photographs anywhere. He was one of a few photographers to put his works into sets based on an interpretation of reality, in order to accentuate their conceptual quality and provide sufficient context for interpretation. The title of the set was a hint or an instruction for "reading" it.²⁰

Funke linked his next set, Time Goes On (*Čas trvá*) (1930–34), with his new theory of "emotive photography" (*emoční fotografie*). Its working title was The Extraordinary Ordinary (*Nevšednost všednosti*), a variation on finding surreality in reality. Funke, however, did not consider himself a Surrealist, and with Time Goes On he was emphasizing a certain absurdity about the coexistence of present and past layers of civilization that express different ideals (fig. 16). Thus conceived, the photos do not employ unusual compositions to attract our attention; their sole aim is to present an accurate picture of the subject. One occasionally finds a similar conception in *Bifur*, the periodical the Paris Surrealist dissidents began publishing in 1929. Fascinating sets by Jindřich Štyrský, a member of the Prague Surrealist Group, date from 1934–35. Štyrský, whose prints are rare, was, among other things, a publisher of erotic literature, and

his photographs are mostly in that vein, as is attested by a photograph in the Walther Collection (fig. 17).

FUNKE, THE TEACHER

In 1929, Funke began publishing photographs in avant-garde periodicals, but he was without a steady income. He was supposed to join his friend Zdeněk Rossmann as a student at the Bauhaus in Dessau, but the instructor Walter Peterhans allegedly feared potential competition with Funke.²¹ In 1931, Rossmann was hired to teach design in Bratislava at the Vocational Schools (*Učňovské školy*) and the School of Arts and Crafts (*Škola umeleckých remesiel*), nicknamed the Slovak Bauhaus.²² Rossmann needed a photographer in Bratislava, and he persuaded Funke, who was still an amateur, to apply for the post of photography instructor there. In 1931, Funke started teaching photography in Bratislava and in 1935 was able to move to the State School of Graphic Arts in Prague, taking over from Karel Novák, who had retired. Funke worked at the Prague school almost until the end of his life. His influence on photography in Czechoslovakia continued to increase, partly because of his work as a photography critic, theorist, and editor.

Funke's own system of teaching, whose main principle was the "purity of photographic expression,"²³ resembled that of the Bauhaus and similar German schools. His results

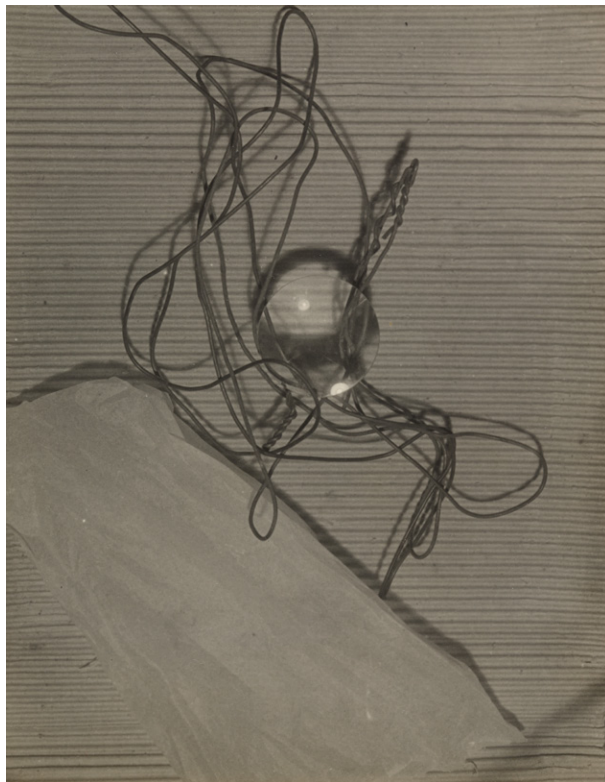


fig. 13 František Vobecký. *Composition (Komposition)*. 1935. Gelatin silver print, 8 1/16 × 6 5/16" (20.5 × 16.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Ansel Adams, by exchange (MoMA 1895.2001)



fig. 14 František Vobecký. *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*. 1935. Gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 × 6 3/4" (23.6 × 17.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA 1896.2001)



fig. 15 Jaromír Funke. Untitled. 1929. Gelatin silver print, 11 1/2 x 15" (29 x 38.5 cm). Moravian Gallery, Brno. © Miloslava Rupesova

fig. 16 Jaromír Funke. Untitled. c. 1929. Gelatin silver print, 11 5/8 x 15 11/16" (29.5 x 39.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Harriette and Noel Levine. © Miloslava Rupesova

fig. 17 Jindřich Štyrský. Untitled, from *On the Needles of These Days (Na jehláčích těchto dní)* (1945). 1934–35. Gelatin silver print, 1934–55, 3 3/16 x 3 3/8" (9 x 8.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Abbott-Levy Collection funds, by exchange (MoMA [1873.2001](#))



are presented in a slender volume, *Fotografie vidí povrch* (Photography sees the surface), with works by Funke and his students, published at the State School of Graphic Arts in 1935.²⁴ In collaboration with Ladislav Sutnar—the director of the school and the most important Czech designer at that time—Funke created one of the few Czechoslovak books of photographs related to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. It was published as the first and only volume of a planned series of eight called *Fotografovaný svět* (The photographed world). This volume presents, among other things, the results of a student exercise on photographing flat structures. The working titles of the other intended volumes provide the most concise information about the school's curriculum: three-dimensional objects, the head, advertising photography, architecture, urban reportage, nature, and night photography. Funke had used a similar curriculum in Bratislava. The results of another exercise, on photographing three-dimensional wooden geometric objects, attracted the most attention. Each of these photos was given the title *Těleso v prostoru* (The solid

in space) or *Objekt v prostoru* (The object in space). For this exercise, Funke employed objects that had been used in the instruction of applied drawing at arts schools since about 1900. His starting point was elementarism, a leading principle of his work since his earliest still lifes with spheres, cubes, and paper and glass rectangles in the early 1920s. The arrangement and depiction of three-dimensional elements remarkably paralleled instruction at the Bauhaus,²⁵ particularly Vasily Kandinsky's teaching about elementary forms.²⁶ Of all the pupils' photographic works, those of the geometric objects were exhibited most often. They were also shown at the International Exhibition of Photography, held at the Mánes Society building in March and April 1936, together with works by the most important Czechoslovak photographers, twenty-eight photographs by Man Ray, and a large collection of Soviet photographs. Nine pupils exhibited ten photographs; two of the works were by Jaroslava Hatláková, perhaps Funke's best pupil (fig. 18). Few of Funke's students could devote themselves solely to art photography after



fig. 18 Jaroslava Hatláková. *Solid in Space—Enlarged (Těleso v prostoru—Zvětšeno)*. 1935. Two gelatin silver prints in overmat, 1935–55, 11 7/16 × 9 3/16" (29 × 23.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Frances Keech Bequest, by exchange (MoMA 1686.2001)

graduating from school, but they did meet the high standards of creative commercial photography, for instance, in the field of advertising. One of the few proponents of modern photography in Slovakia was Miloš Dohnány, who had briefly gone through Funke's training.²⁷ Of the important Czech photographers, Jindřich Brok, Zdenko Feyfar, Dagmar Hochová, Věra Gabrielová, Fred Kramer, and Vilém Kříž (in the USA, Vilem Kriz) were pupils at the State School of Graphic Arts.

FUNKE AND THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE 1930S

Funke celebrated his arrival in Prague in 1935 with a large solo exhibition at the *Krásná jizba* (Beautiful room) of the *Družstevní práce* arts and crafts co-op, where Sudek had exhibited before him.²⁸ In the exhibition, he chose to omit early and Impressionist works, renamed some of his

photographs, and, of his works from the 1920s, showed only his avant-garde photos.

Many of Funke's photographs from the 1930s are striking examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Functionalism. His nudes, portraits, landscapes, and photographs of architecture are inventive, clever. Who could have known, however, that Funke was not just one of many excellent photographers, but one of those who formulated the principles of such work? At the other pole were his works of emotive photography, similar to Surrealism. With the *Unsated Earth (Země nenasycená)* series of 1940–44, Funke reacted to his experiences during the Second World War, creating a vision of destruction and annihilation (fig. 19).

Before the war, Funke twice visited Subcarpathian Ruthenia (in 1937 and 1938), the easternmost province of the country. He was among the first to discover a new photographic subject there: the primeval forests. (His first photographs of this kind are from Labský důl in the Giant Mountains, dating from 1933.) He photographed the forests in the "classic" way, using large-format negatives and presenting as precise and vivid a picture as possible, without trying to attract attention by means of unusual form. They have a certain parallel with photographs of United States national parks (for example by Ansel Adams), but Funke concentrated on forest interiors, the "innermost core," the endless cycle of birth, life, and death, probably under the influence of the Surrealist vision of flora and nature as the ultimate supremacy.²⁹ Also from Subcarpathian Ruthenia, however, came Funke's landscape photographs and snapshots that depict the ethnically mixed local population, mainly at marketplaces. In these works, he was one of the few to apply the principle of the diagonal composition as a natural, modern way of looking at things.

In the war years, Funke devoted himself to what he called "regional photography" in Prague, Kolín, and Louny (a small town northwest of Prague). He intentionally did not use the term *fotografie domoviny* (homeland photography), since its equivalent, *Heimatfotografie*, was a national program in Germany. In German-occupied Bohemia and Moravia, however, Czech documentary photography was perceived as anti-German. Unlike the usual emphasis on patriotism in lands endangered by Nazism, Funke emphasized systematic and precise documentation.

FUNKE, THEORIST AND CRITIC

The influence of Funke's writings on Czech photography is hard to demonstrate. Nevertheless, they are extremely useful for the picture they present of Czech photography in the interwar years. Funke was the only person involved in the field to realize early on that Růžička's Pictorialist conception of photography was outdated.³⁰ Of his fellow Czechs, Funke also had the best overview of what was going on in photography abroad.³¹ His manifesto-like articles were always written after he had tried out his ideas in practice. It was in his writings that he formulated his principles of photogenic

work. Probably in large part due to Surrealism, Funke realized that the creative act consists of choosing the reality to be photographed, and, of all the existing mediums, only photography can give a mechanical, exact picture of reality, in which (and not above it or outside it) surreality is based, as André Breton claimed.³²

A constant in Funke's writing is the "truthfulness" of photography. A prerequisite of truthfulness is purism, the pure use of the medium. Two other requirements of photography, according to Funke's writings, are a "sensational quality" (*senzace*) and "cinematic or theatrical direction" (*režie*). These requirements originate not in traditional mediums but in the descendant of photography, cinematography. The sensational quality consists in finding fresh subject matter; direction concerns the method of presenting this subject matter; both must be used in photography.

His involvement with the periodical *Fotografický obzor* from 1939 to 1941—while it was edited by his colleague from the State School of Graphic Arts, Josef Ehm—constitutes an impressive conclusion to Funke's thinking, which was presented in various mediums from newspapers and magazines to radio. Here, Funke published his well-known essay "*Od fotogramu k emoci*" (From the photogram to emotion) in 1940, illustrated with a set of photos that represent a miniature exhibition of what the Nazi regime called *entartete Kunst*, degenerate art.³³

Funke was a rationalist; even his "emotive photography" project was rational. His creativity was extraordinary, his influence—as photographer, critic, and teacher—on photography in Czechoslovakia was substantial, but he was isolated from the international avant-garde. In spite of this, he belongs among the pioneers of avant-garde photography. Beginning in 1923, he discovered several ways of making "new photography" with a camera, the main challenge of the time. As we have seen, all of them are based on the specific means of photography: a sharp optical depiction of objects combined with cropping, the depiction of abstract cast shadows, top shots, and diagonal compositions isolating things in space. No less important is his use of "banal" documentary photography in cycles (beginning in 1928), offering a context for the unconventional interpretation of individual images. Funke was a typical intellectual—quickly absorbing any interesting idea in the international art context—and one of the formative creators of modernity in the democratic state of Czechoslovakia. In comparison to Man Ray or László Moholy-Nagy, Funke concentrated solely on photography,



fig. 19 Jaromír Funke. From the series *Unsated Earth*. 1940-44. Gelatin silver print, 19 × 14 3/4" (48.5 × 37.6 cm). Moravian Gallery, Brno. © Miloslava Rupesova

not on different mediums. At the same time, he was involved in the art world at large (including painting, literature, cinema, and music) and in cultural ideas more, perhaps, than photographers like Renger-Patzsch, Strand, Weston, and others. Perhaps most unusual at the time was his parallel development of different styles or concepts: Pictorialism and New Objectivity in the 1920s, documentary and abstraction (also in the 1920s), Surrealism, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and further documentary in the 1930s. It is still somewhat unusual in the postmodern age, but it was quite unique in his time.

Translated from the Czech by Derek Paton

NOTES

1. See Monika Faber, ed., *Photographie der Moderne in Prag 1900–1925*, exh. cat. (Vienna: s.n., 1991); and Faber and Josef Kroutvor, *Photographie der Moderne in Prag 1900–1925*, exh. cat. (Schaffhausen, Switzerland: Stemmler, 1992). The exhibition was held at the Neue Galerie der Stadt Linz, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, and the Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1991–92.
2. Antonín Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, trans. Derek and Marzia Paton (Brno and Prague: Moravská galerie and Kant, 2013), p. 80, pl. 36. We lack clear evidence of which image was exhibited under the title *Simplified Space*.
3. Christian A. Peterson and Daniela Mrázková, *The Modern Pictorialism of D. J. Ruzicka/Moderní piktorialismus D. J. Růžičky* (Minneapolis and Prague: Minneapolis Institute of Arts and Galerie hlavního města Praha, 1990).
4. Adolf Schneeberger, "Česká fotografická společnost," in *Česká fotografická společnost, První členská výstava*, exh. cat. (Prague, 1926), n.p.
5. *Village Impression* is reproduced under the title *Village Idyll*, in Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, p. 66.
6. *Česká fotografická společnost, 1. členská výstava*, exh. cat. (Prague: Česká fotografická společnost, 1926). Preface by Adolf Schneeberger. See cat. nos. 13–20. See also Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, p. 88. Prints of *Plates* are in the Thomas Walther Collection at MoMA, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. About this photograph, Anne Wilkes Tucker has written: "Had Jaromír Funke lived the long life of his friend and colleague Josef Sudek, and had his photographic *oeuvre* not been trapped behind the Iron Curtain for forty years, this simple, elegant composition might be more widely accepted as a major modernist icon. His photographs of vernacular objects should be as well known as Paul Outerbridge's 1922 *Ide Collar* or Paul Strand's 1923 *Lathe*." Tucker, "Jaromír Funke, Kompozice, 1923," in Annette Kicken, Rudolf Kicken, and Simone Förster, eds., *Points of View: Masterpieces of Photography and Their Stories* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007), p. 121. The Estate of Jaromír Funke contains, in addition to this photograph, three other versions, of which two are published in Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, cat. nos. 48 and 49, p. 89. The dating of *Plates* to 1923 is based on a list of photographs that is printed on the invitation to the exhibition *Fotografie Jaromíra Funke*, held at the Krásná jizba of the Družstevní práce arts and crafts co-op, in Prague, October 5–30, 1935.
7. Funke, "Předmluva," *II. členská výstava, Česká fotografická společnost v Praze 1929*, exh. cat., p. 4. The catalogue includes lists of exhibited works and plates (from foreign collections) showing the snapshot *Three-member Family* by M. Sakaguchi and the famous *Collars* by Bruce Metcalfe of Toronto. Funke entered works in the annual Toronto Salon from 1924 to 1931.
8. *Ibid.* For an English translation, see Dufek, ed., *Jaromír Funke (1896–1945), Průkopník fotografické avantgardy/Pioneering Avant-garde Photography*, exh. cat. (Brno: Moravská galerie v Brně, 1996), pp. 157–58.
9. Funke's method, according to photographer Libor Teplý: "The glass negatives of the prints of most of the works in Funke's Abstract Photo series are either not exposed and developed (these function as a projection screen and also let light rays through and reflect them) or are exposed to the light and then developed (and these cast shadows and also reflect light). Sometimes they are exposed with specific simple objects (which contain light properties of the two previous kinds). In this case, they are either spatial compositions or sets, on a single focal plane. The sets are illuminated by a spotlight, for example, from one or more slide projectors. Thanks to these light effects, truly special photographs were made, in which abstract geometric shapes of shadows and lights are combined with specific elements of the photographed objects (for example, the edges of panes of glass and sheets of paper). In some cases, Funke probably also photographed by the window. Some of the photographs may also have been made in diffused light from a single source (for example, also from a window, probably at the beginning of the series)." Teplý, letter to Dufek after visiting the exhibition *Jaromír Funke. Mezi konstrukcí a emocí* at the Moravian Gallery in Brno, January 19, 2014.
10. See fig. 5 and Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, cat. no. 60, p. 96.
11. Anonymous, "Fotografie — česká avantgarda (Photography — Czech avant-garde)," *Studio*, no. 2 (1929–30): 220. See also Jaroslav Anděl, "Fotografie a filmová avantgarda," in *Česká fotografie 1918–1938*, exh. cat. (Brno: Moravská galerie v Brně, 1981), p. 104.
12. For an English translation, see Dufek, *Jaromír Funke (1896–1945)*, pp. 153–54.
13. For more on Rössler, see Vladimír Birgus, *Jaroslav Rössler* (Prague: Torst, 2001); and Birgus and Jan Mlčoch, eds., *Jaroslav Rössler, Czech Avant-Garde Photographer* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).
14. See Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, cat. no. 38, p. 87.
15. See *ibid.*, cat. nos. 39–41, pp. 86–87.
16. Funke, "Man Ray," *Fotografický obzor* 35 (1927): 36–38. For an English translation, see Dufek, *Jaromír Funke (1896–1945)*, pp. 155–57.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
18. Dufek and Jaroslav Anděl, "Recreando el fotograma: La obra pionera de Jaromír Funke & Jaroslav Rössler/Remaking the Photogram: The Pioneering Work of Jaroslav Rössler and Jaromír Funke," in Anděl, ed., *El arte de la vanguardia en Checoslovaquia/Czech Avant-garde Art 1918–1983*, exh. cat. (Valencia: IVAM, 1993), pp. 144–51.
19. The name of one of these cycles is "Things of Glass and Ordinary Things," 1928; *Composition with a Kingfisher*, 1928–29, is an example of one of the works. See Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, cat. nos. 94–95, pp. 124–25.
20. We would, in this context, recall *Abstractions, Twin Lakes, Connecticut* by Paul Strand (1916) and *Music, Songs of the Sky and Equivalents* by Alfred Stieglitz (1922–c. 1931).
21. Funke, letter to Anna Kellereová, November 7, 1931. Quoted in Dufek, *Jaromír Funke (1896–1945): Průkopník fotografické avantgardy/Pioneering Avant-garde Photography*, exh. cat. (Brno: Moravská galerie v Brně, 1996), p. 60 (Czech), p. 179 (English).
22. For an English translation of the letter sent from Bratislava, of November 7, 1931, in which Funke describes to his future wife Anna Kellereová his conversation with Marie Rossmannová, see Dufek, *Jaromír Funke (1896–1945)*, p. 179.

23. See ŠUR 1933. *Škola umeleckých remesiel obchodnej a priemyselnej komory v Bratislave*, n.p., plates.
24. Funke and Ladislav Sutnar, *Fotografie vidí povrch*, introduction by V. V. Štech (Prague: Státní průmyslová škola grafická, 1935). Published as a facsimile (Prague: Torst, 2003), with an afterword by Matthew S. Witkovsky and Jindřich Toman, *Pod povrch české moderní fotografie/Photography Sees the Surface* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications), 2004.
25. Dufek, "Der Pädagoge Funke und das Bauhaus," in Susanne Anna, ed., *Das Bauhaus im Osten: Slowakische und Tschechische Avantgarde 1928–1939* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1997), pp. 122–37.
26. See Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, *The ABCs of the Bauhaus: The Bauhaus and Design Theory* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).
27. See Aurel Hrabušický, *Miloš Dohnány* (Bratislava, Slovakia: Fotofo, 2004).
28. A chronological list of seventy-four works from 1922 to 1934 is printed on the back of the invitation. This is now a fundamental document about the photographer's work. For a reprint, see Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, p. 51.
29. With their images of primeval forests, Karel Plicka and Josef Sudek were his followers in Czechoslovakia.
30. Funke, "K výstavě Dr. Růžičky v ČKFA v Praze," *Fotografický obzor* 33 (1925): 106.
31. Funke, "Poznatky z mezinárodních výstav," *Foto 15* (1927): 2–7, 22–25.
32. Adam Biro et René Passeron, *Dictionnaire général du surréalisme et de ses environs*, Co-édition Office du livre (Fribourg and Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982).
33. For an English translation of the article in its entirety, see Funke, "From the Photogram to Emotion" in Dufek, *Jaromír Funke between Construction and Emotion*, pp. 193–97.

Citation:

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