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RETROSPECTIVE OF ACCLAIMED PHOTOGRAPHER JOSEF KOUDELKA
TO DEBUT AT ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Exhibition of 170 photographs to include many rare vintage prints and historic materials

The unforgettable photographs of acclaimed Czech-born, French photographer Josef Koudelka (b.1938), including eyewitness images of the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, have not been shown at a major U.S. museum since 1988. These documentary works as well as extensive selections from the photographer's work going back to 1958—including his renowned series *Gypsies*, *Exiles*, and a variety of recent panoramic photographs—will feature in the major retrospective exhibition ***Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful***, from **June 7 through September 14, 2014**. It is the first museum show ever to emphasize Koudelka's original vintage prints, period publications and unpublished study materials.



Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful, which takes place in the **Abbott (182–4)** and **Bucksbaum (188) galleries** on the ground floor of the Modern Wing, draws primarily on Koudelka's extensive holdings of his own work. For decades, the photographer has exhibited new and recent prints of images that have grown iconic through frequent exhibitions and reproductions, while holding back the earliest, vintage prints—until now. For example, over the years there have been more than one dozen solo exhibitions of *Gypsies* and numerous reprints of the book of the same name, which has appeared in two editions and six languages. Among the rarities that will

be included in *Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful* is the only surviving maquette for the first book version of *Gypsies*, which Koudelka had to leave unfinished at his exile from Prague in 1970.

Koudelka's habit of revisiting past projects while simultaneously advancing into new territory will be squarely on view in *Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful*. Twenty-two original photographs from the very first show of *Gypsies*, held in Prague in 1967, will be displayed for the first time since that date. In an adjacent room, a different selection from the series, printed at a different size and in another way, will also be shown. Similarly, extremely rare vintage prints of *Invasion*, made and circulated anonymously to the press directly following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, will be shown alongside much larger prints commissioned soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when Koudelka returned from exile and had his first post-Soviet exhibition in Prague.



Also on display will be selections from his early experimental photographs and years of work with Prague theater companies, made during the flowering of the Czech stage and cinema in the 1960s.

Koudelka was born in a small Moravian town in 1938 and moved to Prague, then the capital of Czechoslovakia, in the

1950s. He studied aeronautical engineering while practicing photography obsessively from 1958; in 1966, he turned full-time to a photographic career. Already in 1961, Koudelka had begun his most ambitious life project, *Gypsies*, for which he visited Roma populations for weeks at a time, principally in Slovakia. The rigorously humanist pictures became his calling card at home and internationally in the later 1960s after being published in the Swiss magazine *Camera* and shown to curators and photography representatives around Western Europe and the United States. Meanwhile, Koudelka's *Invasion* photographs became famous after they appeared worldwide to commemorate the first anniversary of the events of August 1968. Worried about reprisals even though the images had been published anonymously, Koudelka chose to leave his country in May 1970.

In exile Koudelka adopted a semi-nomadic existence. He followed village festivals, pilgrimages, and Roma gatherings throughout the United Kingdom (his country of asylum in the 1970s), Spain, Italy,

and France (his principal residence from 1981, and country of citizenship from 1986), photographing throughout the year and printing largely in wintertime. The world-famous photography agency Magnum, which had stewarded publication of the *Invasion* photographs, became Koudelka's home base and as he says his "family." Koudelka's photographs of these years were gathered together in 1988 as *Exiles*, which will also be part of the exhibition.

Since the late 1980s Koudelka has made panoramic landscape photographs in areas massively shaped by industry, territorial conflict, or—in the case of the Mediterranean rim—the persistence of Classical civilization. The final gallery of *Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful* will showcase six of these mural-size black-and-white images, as well as three of the impressive accordion-fold books that Koudelka has made of them since 1989, some of which stretch to more than 100 feet long.



Despite his peripatetic life, Koudelka's moving and stunning photographs have made him one of the most sought-after figures in print and at exhibition. Honored with the French Prix Nadar (1978), the Hasselblad Prize (1992), and the International Center of Photography Infinity Award (2004), Koudelka remains today a leading member of Magnum.

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, overseen closely by the artist and designed by the Czech firm Najbrt Studio. Edited by Matthew S. Witkovsky, the Richard and Ellen Sandor Chair and Curator of Photography at the Art Institute, the book provides extensive new information on Koudelka's formative years in Prague during the thaw of the 1960s, as well as the first complete history of *Gypsies*, its twists and turns from 1961 through 2011. Amanda Maddox, assistant curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum, which has co-organized the exhibition, provides fresh knowledge on Koudelka's underrepresented decade in England and the UK. Stuart Alexander and Gilles Tiberghien, two longtime friends of the photographer, have contributed illuminating essays on Koudelka's years in France and his fascination for panoramic landscape, respectively.

After its debut at the Art Institute, *Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful* travels to the Getty Museum in Los Angeles and Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid.

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Images:

Josef Koudelka. *Slovakia (Rakúsy)*, from the series *Gypsies*, 1966, printed 1967. The Art Institute of Chicago, restricted gift of Sandy and Robin Stuart and Photography Gala Fund. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos. Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

Josef Koudelka. (*Student on tank, eyes crossed out*), from the series *Invasion*, August 21/27, 1968. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos. Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

Josef Koudelka. *Ireland*, from the series *Exiles*, 1972, printed 1987/88 © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos. Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

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