



**Miroslav Tichý**  
(Czech, 1926 - 2011)

## Biography

Originally a student at Prague's Academy of Fine Arts, Miroslav Tichý was regarded as a promising modernist painter. However, with the establishment of Communist rule in 1948, the authorities insisted that students conform to Social Realist styles. Tichý refused, leaving the academy, though the regime kept him under surveillance and made several attempts to "rehabilitate" him, including forcing brief stays in psychiatric facilities. In the 1950s, Tichý shifted his focus to photography, creating an array of crude homemade cameras. His hometown became his studio, with female figures as his primary subjects, much like in a traditional life-drawing class.

Using his homemade cameras, the enigmatic Czech artist photographed women around Kyjov, Czech Republic, for many years. Between the 1950s and 1986, Tichý took thousands of discreet photographs in and around the town. Known for his disheveled appearance and eccentric lifestyle, locals regarded him as a harmless oddity, though his work can be seen as a subtle act of defiance against the totalitarian regime.

Harald Szeemann, the first curator to show an interest in Tichý, noted, "The more you look, the less naïve it becomes; when you listen to what he says, he clearly enjoys breaking all the rules, without caring about the outcome."

Despite aspiring to traditional photographic values like composition and contrast, imperfections were central to Tichý's work. "The flaws are part of it," he said. "That's the poetry. To achieve that, you need a bad camera." He built his devices from scrap materials like cardboard tubes and tin cans, sealed with tar, and powered by bobbins and dressmaker's elastic. He crafted lenses from plexiglass and even made his own telephoto lens. His negatives were often marred by dust or processing errors. After printing, he would trim the images, draw lines to emphasize contours, decorate the borders, and mount his favorite images on cardboard. Christie's specialist Amanda Lo Iacono noted, "These chance encounters, fleeting moments captured on film, have a distinct Baudelairean charm. What captivates us today is how Tichý embodied the quintessential flâneur, blending his art with his way of life."



In 2005, Tichý's work won the New Discovery Award at the Arles photography festival. His life and artistic approach have influenced notable artists such as Thomas Ruff, Jonathan Meese, Fischli & Weiss, and musician Michael Nyman. Roman Buxbaum, a former neighbor, established the Tichý Oceán Foundation to promote his work, helping to secure exhibitions at prestigious venues like the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Kunsthau Zurich.

Tichý's reputation continued to rise, particularly with a 2009 solo exhibition at New York's International Center of Photography, his first in North America, which was titled after the documentary \*Miroslav Tichý: Tarzan Retired\*.

Tichý had little interest in preserving or organizing his work. For years, he left his photographs scattered around his home, untitled and uncatalogued. This changed in 1981 when Roman Buxbaum returned from exile in Switzerland and began collecting and preserving Tichý's work. "For a long time, I was the only person he shared his photographs with," Buxbaum recalled. "We would go through them together, and he would give me this one or that one, based on what I liked."

Buxbaum's efforts to gain wider recognition for Tichý culminated in the 2004 release of the documentary \*Miroslav Tichý: Tarzan Retired\*. That same year, Harald Szeemann entered Tichý's work into the Biennial of Contemporary Art in Seville, likening his style to that of German photorealist painter Gerhard Richter. The following year, Tichý's work won the New Discovery Award at Arles.

Tichý passed away in 2011 at the age of 84, but his art continues to provoke questions about content, form, and the process of creation.

*"The flaws are part of it, that's the poetry"*

### Selected Collections

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'Art Moderne, Paris, France  
Moravian Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic  
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA  
Tichý Ocean Foundation, Switzerland  
Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland  
The International Center of Photography (ICP), New York, USA  
Museum of Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp, Belgium  
Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany  
Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt, Germany  
Haus der Photographie Deichtorhallen (F.C. Gundlach Collection), Hamburg, Germany  
Kantonales Museum des Kantons Thurgau, Switzerland  
La Maison Rouge, Fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris, France  
Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, USA  
Museum of Modern Art (MMK), Frankfurt, Germany  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, USA  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom

### Selected Exhibitions

2013

Solo: *City of the Women*, Zephyr, Mannheim, Germany  
*Homage to Miroslav Tichý*, Prague Biennale, Czech Republic

2012

Solo: *The Artist with the Bad Camera*, Moscow House of Photography (Multimedia Art Museum (MAMM)), Moscow, Russia

2011

Solo: *Miroslav Tichý, Retrospectiva*, SI Fest, Savignano sul Rubicone, Italy  
Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, Braunschweig University of Art, Germany  
Solo: *Les formes du vrai / Forms of Truth*, City Gallery Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

2010

*Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera Since 1870*, Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; SFMOMA, San Francisco, USA; Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, USA

Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, International Centre of Photography, New York City, USA  
*Het onvermoeibaar epos*, Fotomuseum Den Haag, The Netherlands

2008

Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, France  
Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, Kunsthau Bregenz, KUB Billboards, Austria  
Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt, Germany  
*Miroslav Tichý and Julia Margaret Cameron*, Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden  
*Revolutions – Forms That Turn*, Biennale of Sydney, Australia  
*International Triennale of Contemporary Art*, National Gallery of the Czech Republic, Prague, Czech Republic

2007

*Collection Photographique*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France  
*Miroslav Tichý: Dreamy Images of Female Beauty by a Moravian Photographer*, Central European House of Photography, Bratislava, Slovakia

2006

Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, Brno House of Art, Brno, Czech Republic  
Solo, De Hallen. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands  
*Déjà Vu*, Artibus Foundation, Ekenas, Finland  
*Artists for Tichý– Tichý for Artists*, East Bohemian Gallery, Pardubice, Czech Republic  
*Black Night*, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria  
*Artists for Tichý– Tichý for Artists*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Wörlen, Passau, Germany

2005

Solo: *Miroslav Tichý*, Kunsthau, Zurich, Switzerland  
*Arnulf Rainer et sa collection d'art brut*, La Maison Rouge, Paris, France  
*Rencontres de la Photographie*, Arles, France

2004

Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Seville (International Biennial of Contemporary Art), Seville, Spain. Curated by Harald Szeemann, 1990  
*Von Einer Welt zu'r Andern*, Die Blaue Kunsthalle DuMont, Cologne, Germany. curated by Roman Buxbaum and Pablo Stähli