

Visual Art Critics' Choice

In collaboration with the Slovenian Society of Visual Art Critics

Cankarjev dom, Foyer I, 5 September – 8 October 2017

Selection:

MONIKA IVANČIČ FAJFAR

Author:

ŽIGA KORITNIK



Žiga Koritnik: Carlo Actis Dato (2004), Paal Nilssen Love (2004), Joe McPhee (2016), Digital photography, 38,4 cm × 33,2 cm

Biografija

Žiga Koritnik (1964) is known for his many portraits of musicians and as a master of concert, theatre, and dance photography which he has been immersed in for the past 30 years. He was employed as a cameraman at Slovene national television for eighteen years before opting for a career as a freelance artist in 2007. Since 1996, he has been the official photographer of the Skopje Jazz Festival in Macedonia. Simultaneously, he has worked at a series of festivals in Slovenia and abroad, such as the Ljubljana Jazz Festival, the Izzven Festival in Maribor, the Druga Godba festival, the Musica sulle Bocche festival in Sardinia, the Ai Confini Tra Sardegna E Jazz festival, the Sardinian literary festival Isola Delle Storie, and the Vision Festival in New York. He held more than 30 solo exhibitions and has been part of 24 joint exhibitions all over the world. In the period between 1996 and 2002, he exhibited his works at the illustrious Saalfelden Jazz Festival in Austria and at the Kavehaz Gallery in New York (2001). In 2006, he participated at the Vision Jazz Festival at the Angel Orensanz Centre, at the Penang Jazz Festival in Malaysia and at jazz festivals in Hong Kong and in Zhuhai. The photo that he took of Tom Waits was shown at the 2012 New York Photo Festival. Koritnik's photos have found their way into CD booklets from world-famous record companies, such as Tzadik, Intuition music, Leo Records, Clean Feed, Not Two, Enja, Trost Records, Dellmark, Smalltown Superjazz/Carrot Top, Laurence Family Records, and Not Two Records. Furthermore, they have been published by referenced media, such as Time Out, Jazz Times, Jazziz, Signal to Noise, Village Voice, All About Jazz, Downbeat, Jazznyt, Jazzthetik, and New York Records. In the Jazznin Magazine from Japan his work was presented on no fewer than 16 pages.

As a photographer he has worked with the En-Knap dance ensemble, the Mladinsko Theatre, the Ljubljana City Theatre, the Ljubljana Puppet Theatre, the Slovenian National Theatre Drama, the Slovenian National Theatre Nova Gorica, and the Permanent Slovene Theatre Trieste. He took up the role of director of photography in films directed by Metod Pevec, Maja Weiss, Peter Braatz, Michael Benson, and other directors.

In 1996, he released his first photo book entitled *Jazzy-ga!*. In 2009, he published the book entitled *Un Punto di Luce* on the celebration of the end of winter in Sardinia, and a photo book of black and white impressions of Lake Bohinj, entitled *The Lake*.

In addition to being a reportage and portrait photographer, he is a lecturer, a curator of photo exhibitions at the Small Gallery (Mala galerija) of the Cankarjev dom and at the NLB Avla Gallery (Avla NLB Ljubljana), and he conducts photography workshops. At the moment, he is preparing photos for the museum of the Sardinian *fiore sardo* cheese which will open at the beginning of 2018.

www.zigakoritnikphotography.com

From beyond jazz

The visual image of jazz has been evolving in parallel with the music. Record covers, concert posters, and magazine and newspaper illustrations have made the image of jazz a permanent part of popular culture. Jazz has played a major role in contemporary painting (with Piet Mondrian, Henri Matisse, Otto Dix, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol to name a few) and, of course, in photography. American photographers Herman Leonard, Bob Willoughby, Milt Hinton, Bill Claxton, and others closely followed jazz, documenting its on- and off-stage moments and portraying jazz musicians. Hence, a new photography genre was born—jazz photography. In addition to photography skills, this genre requires from a photographer a particular affinity and love for music.

As a teenager Žiga Koritnik started listening to rock music, only to be later captured by jazz. He merged his passion for music with his passion for photography and went from being a concertgoer to following the events on stage from up close. Nonetheless, Koritnik felt that merely documenting musical performances lacked the closeness, connection, and communication he strived to establish with musicians, often people with a strong, fascinating, and peculiar character. His dream came true when he was offered the chance to complement his reportage photography with portraits of musicians.

And once it all moves from under the spotlights to the backstage area, the musical stories change completely. The setting where the action, show, and appearances are at the heart of it all, retreats and concedes some room for peaceful reflection, relaxation, and personal connection. Koritnik's photos are more than just ordinary studio portraits. They are characterised by intimacy and reflect heartfelt, affectionate relations, moments of closeness, sincere communication, and affection between the subject and the photographer. The photos encapsulate a unique moment and human bond.

The portraits are then set into a window frame which divides the composition into four equal squares creating (literally) a window into the world of music. The photos depict musicians who Koritnik met at the Cerkno Jazz Festival: Ned Rothenberg, Eugene Chadbourne, Carlo Actis Dato, Joe McPhee, Pat Thomas, Ken Vandermark, Bobby Previte, Zlatko Kaučič, Paal Nilssen Love, Harry Tavitian, Boštjan Gombač, Nate McBride, Akosh S., Curtis Fowlkes, Dave Rempis, and Bojan Z. The different faces and characters of the portrayed musicians are framed differently which reflects the diverse music genres and artistic expressions, or, in short, the diverse faces of jazz. Some photos include full-figure portraits, others bust portraits, whereas sometimes the entire format will be filled up with a face portrait. The portrayed person's gaze, however, will always be directed straight into the camera, confronting the viewer directly. Occasionally, the photographer will loosen the statics of the portrait photography with various poses, spatial arrangements, and by emphasising the forms of musical instruments which will consequently lose their role of attributes and become visual art elements.

From time to time, the focused facial expressions will be complemented by hand and finger poses to add a sense of dynamics to the composition. The gestures that form a relation between the face and the hands can be seen metaphorically as a dialogue between the body and the mind. By using accent lighting, the photographer further strengthens the message delivered by the subjects' body language of the . Like many other jazz photographers, Žiga Koritnik prefers the black-and-white technique to emphasise the form and depth of the expression and which additionally enables him to experiment with the tone and contrasts. Perhaps, the black-and-white aesthetic suits jazz best because this way the greyscale tones of the photography are representative of the tonal scale in music. Or maybe, it suits jazz because it reminds of black-and-white music notations, black-and-white keyboards, the classic black-and-white apparel of the jazz pioneers, the obscurity of jazz clubs, soaked with mellow smoke ...

Despite the exhibited portraits being very private and characterised by a great level of intimacy, their form is representative. The central composition of portraits set in the window is accompanied by a selection of photos that depict the dynamics of the everyday life of musicians and show other musical motifs. This selection reveals an exclusive attitude of the photographer towards music and musicians which is emotional, relaxed, often waggish, yet sincerely affectionate and devoted.

There is a strong link between the visual arts and jazz. One of these links is the exhibition of the works of Žiga Koritnik as a part of the cycle of presentations entitled Visual Art Critics' Choice in the first lobby of the Cankarjev Dom Cultural and Congress Centre on the occasion of the 4th European Jazz Conference. The exhibition programme that supplements the musical events is intended for conference participants and other visitors to Cankarjev Dom and it aims to capture their eyes much like the photographer captured the look in the eyes of the musicians portrayed.