

**JOSEF KOUDELKA**

**SEPTEMBER 10 TO NOVEMBER 29, 2015**

FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE is pleased to invite you to the press conference for the Josef Koudelka exhibition, which **will be** held on September 10, **2015** at **12.00 p.m.** in the Exhibitions Hall of **FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE** (Bárbara de Braganza 13). The participants in the press conference will be the Director of the Cultural Area of FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE, Pablo Jiménez Burillo, the museum curator Matthew Witskovsky and the artist Josef Koudelka

OPENING: September 10 from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m.

PRESS CONFERENCE: September 10, 2015 at 12:00 p.m.

PLACE: Exhibitions Hall  
Bárbara de Braganza, 13

DATES: From September 10 to November 29, 2015

CURATOR: Matthew Witkovsky, Richard and Ellen Sandor  
Chair and Curator Department of Photograph by  
of the Art Institute of Chicago.

PRODUCTION: **The exhibition is organized by the Art  
Institute of Chicago and the J. Paul Getty  
Museum in association with Fundación  
MAPFRE.**

WEBSITE: <http://exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/exposiciones/es/josefkoudelka>

Facebook [www.facebook.com/fundacionmapfreultura](http://www.facebook.com/fundacionmapfreultura)

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#expo\_koudelka

For further information contact Alejandra Fernández and Nuria del Olmo at the MAPFRE Corporate Communication Division  
Tél. : 915818464 et 690049112 E-mail : [alejandra@fundacionmapfre.org](mailto:alejandra@fundacionmapfre.org) ; [ndelolmo@fundacionmapfre.org](mailto:ndelolmo@fundacionmapfre.org)

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**FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE presents the most complete retrospective exhibit up to this day dedicated to the Czech photographer of French nationality Josef Koudelka (n. 1938), member for the past forty years of Magnum Photos agency.**

**Engineer by profession, Koudelka became committed to the photographic medium in the middle of the sixties and became one of the most influential authors of his generation. Halfway between the artistic and documentary, Josef Koudelka is now a living legend. He has received prestigious awards in recognition of his work, among others, the Grand Prix National de la Photographie (1989), the Grand prix Cartier-Bresson (1991), and the International Award in Photography of the Hasselblad Foundation (1992).**

**This exhibition goes through his entire trajectory that covers more than five decades of work. The extense selection with more than 150 works reflects his first experimental projects produced at the end of the fifties and during the sixties, as well as his historic series Gypsies, Invasion and Exiles and reaching the great panoramic landscapes produced in the last years. In addition the exhibition includes important documental material, the majority unpublished - layouts, pamphlets, magazines of the period among others-, that allows us to delve into the work as well as the creative process of this author.**

**The title of the exhibition is Uncertain Nationality, which describes the sense of not belonging to a place, a sense of disorientation so present in his work since his exile from Czechoslovakia after the invasion of Prague, and his permanent interest in territories in conflict.**

**The exhibition is organized by the Art Institute de Chicago and by the J. Paul Getty Museum in association with Fundación MAPFRE.**

# TRAJECTORY OF THE EXHIBITION

## EARLY WORKS AND THEATER

Josef Koudelka was immersed in the ambiance of liberalization that occurred in Czechoslovakia after the death of Josef Stalin in 1953 who had subjected the country to a brutal repression for two decades.



*An Hour of Love* by Josef Topol, Divadlo za branou [Theater behind the Door], Prague, 1968. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos

Koudelka began to photograph professionally in 1958 and create a series of landscapes and sceneries of the outdoors taken in Prague, and on trips to Slovakia, Poland and Italy. Right away, the camera accompanied him on all of his trips, which would herald his impulse to work as an independent photographer and nomad for

more than forty years.

During the sixties, he was hired by the most important Czech theater company *Divadlo za branou* [Theater behind the Door] and *Divadlo na zábradlí* [Theater in the balustrade] and many of his images illustrated the covers of the magazine *Divadlo* [Theater], some of them are displayed in the exhibition.

## GYPSIES

In 1961, Josef Koudelka begins to stay for long periods in gypsy campsites in the cities of Eastern Europe. What started out as a marginal activity photographing these communities, right away turned into a job that would become a life project.



Romania, 1968, copy 1980's 1980. The Art Institute of Chicago, promised donation from Sandy y Robin Stuart. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos

Between 1963 and 1968, he visited about eighty places on Czech and Slovakian soil and accumulated thousands of photographs that progressively diminished to a selection of a few dozen. In these photographs, he immersed himself in the life, celebrations and traditions

of Roma (Gypsy) culture.

In the exhibition 22 of 27 copies are displayed exactly as they were almost fifty years ago when Gypsy was presented in the hallway of a Prague theater in March of 1967.

## INVASION

In August of 1968, Koudelka awoke with the Soviet troops entering Prague to invade it. He immediately went out to the street and documented the devastating occupation



(Czech citizen on top of a tank), 1968. The Art Institute of Chicago, pledged donation from a private collector. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos

nonstop for one week. He climbed up onto the tanks and he ran into protestors that confronted the heavily armed soldiers.

His images became a document of the conflict and symbol of the spirit of the resistance movement. The rolls of film that he used to photograph the Prague struggle ended up in Western Europe illegally and the Koudelka images

appeared in newspapers and magazines around the world.

To prevent retaliation against Koudelka and his family, the photographs were signed as "P.P." or "Prague Photographer" until 1984.

## EXILES

Josef Koudelka left Czechoslovakia in 1970 and petitioned to exile to the United Kingdom. While he was in exile, he continued to work throughout Europe on those routes marked by Gypsy religious festivals and folklore that are held annually.

The alienation that he felt for not belonging to a nation is reflected in his Exiles work



France, 1987. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos

that shows symbols of isolation (lost animals, lonely figures, scattered objects and displaced Gypsies) which is the core of the Koudelka vital experience.

Unclear nationality refers to the legal status that appears in the author's travel documents each time he returned to the United Kingdom, his

home base during the first decade of

exile, since he did not have a Czechoslovakian passport and could not prove his birthplace.

## PANORAMA

Since 1986, Koudelka was using a panoramic camera. He uses this expanded format to show territories devastated by conflicts or altered with the passage of time. These images are the core of his impressive foldout publications such as *Black Triangle* or *Chaos* that shows scenery on the edge of ruins.



Jordania (Ammán), from the series *Archeology*, 2012, copy from 2013. © Josef Koudelka/Magnum Photos

More recently, Josef Koudelka used this format to document the border of the West Bank and the territories that surround it such as the Negev desert or the Golan Heights. This work, *Wall*, urges the spectator to see the desolation of vast scenery dominated by walls, barbed-wire fences, access roads and borders. In the exhibition, there is a selection of copies from this work together with the book published in 2014.

The panoramics are impressive objects that are between 1.2 and 1.8 m long. In these panoramics we perceive a scenery created by the man that tells his story, as well as the transformations that he has suffered due to human pillage, meaning: through his photographs we see man as creator and destroyer of the world.

## CATALOGUE

Fundación MAPFRE has published a catalogue with important contributions by Amanda Maddox, Assistant Curator of the Department of Photography in the J. Paul Getty Museum, and Matthew Witkovsky, Richard and Ellen Sandor Chair and Curator of the Department of Photography Art Institute of Chicago.