

'Dark Street Revisited 1983-2013' of Krystyna Ziach at the Jewish Historical Museum Amsterdam, 2015

This series of ten dyptichs is based on a series of black-and-white photographs entitled Ulica Ciemna which Krystyna Ziach made in Poland in the winter of 1983 in the Jewish neighbourhood Kazimierz of Cracow.

The Kazimierz quarter developed around 1400 as a special place of settlement for Jews and in the course of the centuries grew into one of the major intellectual centres for Jewish culture in Europe.

Among the people of our time having their roots in this quarter are the author Jerzy Kosinski and the film director Roman Polanski.

The series Ulica Ciemna was made spontaneously, as a personal registration of this historic district where Ziach had walked around a lot in her childhood and had unexpectedly discovered streets and houses which, in a rather mysterious way, bore witness to a lost Jewish culture.

The name 'dark street' is the authentic name of one of the streets in Kazimierz (Ulica Ciemna), in which street and its close vicinity this series of photo works was created. Although the war had been over for almost forty years, the images captured generally made a desolate impression, as if it were only shortly after the war. In the then-existing political situation the communist regime hardly paid attention to a possible renovation of the quarter, nor to offering to the small group of original inhabitants that had returned, the possibility of resuming life in their own way and according to their own tradition.

In the thirties Roman Vishniac had made a series of photo works about the living conditions of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe and often photographed the people in Kazimierz. Ziach felt that the atmosphere revealed in his photos was still present during her photo sessions with a similar camera than the one he had used.

In 1983 the quarter looked very dilapidated, the inhabitants were impoverished and crime rates were relatively high. At the time no-one thought it possible that the former centre of culture with its imposing character could return.

A few years later the Berlin wall went down and the political climate changed in favour of religious and national minorities. The original inhabitants of Kazimierz gradually showed their identity, people with various cultural backgrounds returned from abroad and a new form of society developed.

Now Kazimierz has been largely renovated and has a bustling nightlife. Considering the present character of the quarter - touristic with the emphasis on nightlife - the series Ulica Ciemna acquires the meaning of an historical document.

Some thirty years later Krystyna Ziach made a new series of works: Dark Street Revisited, 1983-2013, which consists of ten large-size diptychs and is based on the series Ulica Ciemna which until then had not yet been printed.

Her black and white negatives from 1983 have been scanned and digitally processed. Each diptych consists of one of the original photos, plus a close-up of part of that photo. For Ziach this combination of images suggests an imaginary journey through time, shown as a physical walk having a cinematographic character.

The close-ups are grey and seem faded in the way memories can fade away. By presenting them enlarged, she tries to find the discernibly personal.

For Krystyna Ziach these works constitute a confrontation with the past and a personal reflection on transience.

Upon closer consideration though, they also try to make the more general, collective store of images and memories visible, thus creating an interaction between the individual and the collective memory.

Photo series 'Dark Street Revisited 1983-2013'

The series consists of ten large-size giclee prints on Hahnemühle Museum Etching Paper 350 g/m², size 112x159 cm (image size 100x146 cm) each.

'Dark Street Revisited 1983-2013' also exists in the form of an edition

Souverein Photo Lab printed of the edition – 10 giclee prints on Hahnemühle Museum Etching Paper 350 g/m², size 42x58 cm (image size 34x50 cm) each – 25 numbered and signed copies, plus 5 artist's proofs.

Each copy is presented in a linen-covered cardboard box, made by Roest, bookbinder's in Rotterdam.

The boxes are numbered and signed as well.

Translation: Hanny Keulers