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Propriété intellectuelle
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1 There are sometimes unknown artists who burst on the scene and take the art world by storm; it is more usual for artists to patiently construct their careers over many years, gradually maturing as they show their work at increasingly high-visibility exhibitions, receiving recognition from the system and the marketplace little by little. Those who appear suddenly, fully mature, may, in a matter of just a few months or years, be exhibiting at the most prestigious museums under the aegis of the most renowned exhibition organizers. Leading critics and specialized journalists write about them. Their works are acquired by collectors, their prices rise and museums rush to add them to their collections. And sometimes their work survives the test of time.

2 Often such discoveries are of outsider artists – ‘brut’ – marginal, self-taught, or solitary artists who have remained unknown because of their isolation or internment.¹ But there have also been revelations of artists who do not come from the world of naïve or outsider art but who have nevertheless constructed their work at a distance from the art world. While there are a handful of painters who exemplify this phenomenon – such as, Eugène Leroy – two of the most remarkable are photographers. Eugène Atget was only a modest craftsman when, shortly before his death, he was discovered by the surrealists and Berenice Abbott. And the ‘invention’ of Jacques-Henri Lartigue – his passage from the status of amateur to that of artist – didn’t really take place until his exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1963, at the age of sixty-nine.² His discovery was the work of John Szarkowski, curator of photography at MoMA, who introduced a talent that had gone unnoticed, presenting him as a ‘true primitive,’ an amateur who had ‘neither tradition nor training,’³ outside the ‘established values’ of the art of photography.

3 At the end of 2004, the eruption onto the art scene of seventy-eight year old Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý seemed even more radical than that of Atget and Lartigue. His introduction under the auspices of the independent curator Harald Szeemann – a great discoverer of artists throughout the forty-odd years of his curatorial career –
immediately gave him legitimacy in the art world. Less than four years later, Tichý was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Centre Pompidou. The discovery of Miroslav Tichý provides a penetrating glimpse into the work of curators who helped attain recognition for the Czech photographer, an effort that involved developing a schema of presentation and legitimization based on different parameters that depended on the goal being pursued. In fact, as one or another of the particular aspects of his persona and work were emphasized, Tichý appeared first unsuccessfully in the world of outsider art and then was accepted and legitimated within that of contemporary art.

The Failure of Outsider Art

In exile in Zurich following the events of the Prague Spring, the psychiatrist Roman Buxbaum, who would go on to discover Tichý, became interested in the works of Leo Navratil, an Austrian psychiatrist and a pioneer in the field of art therapy. Navratil was one of the first to recognize the quality and importance of his patients’ artwork. He created the Haus der Künstler (House of Artists) for them at the Gugging Psychiatric Clinic, which had inspired Buxbaum to begin a similar program at his Königsfelden clinic. Coincidentally, the Buxbaum and Tichý families knew each other, and Buxbaum’s uncle, who was also a psychiatrist, had been a childhood friend of Tichý’s. On his return to Kyjov, Czechoslovakia, at the beginning of the 1980s, Buxbaum then discovered Tichý’s photographic work.

Thus, the first person to exhibit Tichý was a psychiatrist with an interest in art brut. While Buxbaum was aware that Tichý had formal academic art training, the psychiatrist’s experience and interests led him to regard Tichý as an outsider artist. Buxbaum was also a teacher of art brut at the Institute of Art History at the University of Zurich; he likely knew that the artist Jean Dubuffet had not included any photographs in his personal collection of art brut (‘paintings, drawings, statuettes, and embroideries, little works of all kinds, executed entirely outside the realm of cultured art’), since he was wary of the art of repetition and “objective” representations of nature. For Dubuffet and the theorists of art brut, photography was produced with the aid of a machine, so it was incapable of expressing an original creative impulse and lacked sufficient authenticity. At this time the notion of ‘outsider photographers’ didn’t really exist. Buxbaum saw an opportunity, not only to win an audience for Tichý, but also perhaps to usher in a new chapter in the history of art brut.

In order to categorize Tichý as an outsider artist, Buxbaum placed the emphasis on his distinctive physical and personal traits: Tichý had to seem to be a marginalized individual, dirty, shaggy haired, and living as a tramp. Buxbaum presented him as an opponent of the repressive social system in which he lived. With several stays in psychiatric hospitals and in prison, Tichý was identified by clinical, as well as social, diagnoses of psychosis. The second basic characteristic that Buxbaum emphasized was what might be described as Tichý’s peculiar artistic apparatus: Tichý’s bricolage – he made his own cameras and printing equipment out of salvaged materials, scraps, and repolished pieces of glass and Plexiglas – automatically placed him in the category of the ‘ragmen,’ those who put things together using ‘whatever is at hand,’ everyday magicians who performed heroic feats with next to nothing. Thus, the attempt to integrate Tichý into the world of outsider art was made by conflating the artist’s person with his apparatus.
At first, Tichý was resistant to Buxbaum’s idea of exhibiting his photographs. After showing a few rare prints that he had bought or borrowed at small exhibitions, the psychiatrist introduced the work of Mirek Tichý in an article published in the journal Kunstforum – in its special issue on art brut, Bild und Seele (Image and Soul) in June 1989. Entitled ‘An Outsider among the Outsiders,’ the text highlighted those aspects of Tichý that most strongly resonated with the idea of outsider art. Buxbaum deliberately avoided emphasizing the photographer’s formal training for fear that would have excluded him from the universe of art brut. At the same time the psychiatrist remained circumspect and ambiguous, as suggested by the article’s title. Illustrated by a portrait of the artist with a camera in his hand and four different images of women, the article provides a detailed description of Tichý’s appearance, his house and cameras, and recounted his runins with the authorities.

The following year, Buxbaum mounted a large exhibition of more than thirty outsider artists, at which Tichý was the only photographer. The catalogue contained essays on art brut, art therapy, and psychiatry, including a text by the curator Harald Szeemann, and a long introduction by Buxbaum on art and psychiatry. Buxbaum also wrote the biographical note on Mirek Tichý: in this brief one-page text, he repeated his characterization of Tichý as an ‘outsider among the outsiders,’ again placing the focus on his marginality and photographic technique and linking his work to appropriation and the transgression of social taboos. A single female portrait by Tichý was reproduced in black and white. It was in contrast with the prominence accorded to two color photographs, one of Tichý holding a camera and the other of one of his cameras. Unlike other artists in the exhibition represented by their works alone, Tichý’s case depended on the myth of the outsider artist; it both overshadowed his work and validated his inclusion in the category of art brut.

The article in Kunstforum and the exhibition accredited Buxbaum as an expert on outsider art, while it clearly positioned Tichý in the company of recognized artists like Adolf Wölfli, Michel Nedjar, August Walla, and Louis Soutter. Following the exhibition, the mass-market magazine Stern ran a fifteen-page story on these outsider artists, whom it described as ‘mentally ill.’ The article was illustrated by a large double-page photograph of Tichý, accompanied by a tiny reproduction of one of his photographs and a short text entitled ‘Einsam’ (‘Alone’), placing the emphasis on his strangeness (‘Children cross the street when they run into him’) and concluded with a revealing quotation from the photographer: ‘The work of art is me, not the photographs.’ The journalist quotes Tichý as saying, ‘My clothes and I are a total artwork [Gesamtkunstwerk],’ a term that anticipates – if only by coincidence – a key concept of Harald Szeemann’s.

Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s, Tichý seemed on the brink of being recognized as an outsider artist. As a photographer (and former student at the Academy of Fine Arts of Prague), he was well placed to benefit from the special position defined for him by Buxbaum, that of an ‘outsider among the outsiders.’ Yet nothing happened for the next fourteen years – no exhibitions, no articles.

Miroslav Tichý has always been very ambivalent about the exhibition of his works and reports of his intentions are often conflicting. In 1990, he was resistant to the idea of exhibiting his photographs in Cologne but without protest allowed Buxbaum to proceed. According to Buxbaum, Tichý gave his passive consent to the exhibition by saying, ‘If you really want to, go ahead.’ He was surprised that people were interested in him and his photographs (which he regarded as secondary to his paintings) and refused to travel, but
he gave a friendly reception to the journalist and photographer from Stern and translated the articles about him into Czech to show his neighbors. Later on, he was considerably more opposed to any promotional contact. According to several accounts, he was torn between his pride at finally being recognized as an artist after having been treated as a bum all his life and a feeling of silent shame at seeing his most intimate thoughts exhibited through his photographs. Above all, he wished to be recognized as a ‘great painter,’ often comparing himself to Leonardo da Vinci. No doubt he wasn’t pleased to be categorized as an outsider, as he was at this time. There may also have been an element of play and revenge in his attitude that led him to refuse to allow his works to be exhibited again, in spite of Buxbaum’s insistence. This peculiar insistence on keeping his distance from the art world is an important factor in understanding Tichý’s work.

At the same time, in the world of outsider art, interest in Tichý’s work was beginning to fade. Despite his specificity, he remained one artist among others; his originality wasn’t sufficiently pronounced, nor was his marginality truly attractive: he didn’t seem to offer a compelling solution to the problem of the future of art brut. The hoped-for endorsement by a gallery or museum never came; the museum of Thurgau – where curator Markus Landert was developing an exhibition program based on a contemporary vision of art brut – delayed and then ultimately canceled its planned exhibition of his work. In 2004, an exhibition in San Francisco recognized the importance of photography in outsider art for the first time. It focused primarily on collage and photomontage, but it also included a number of works that were essentially photographic. Tichý was not included in this exhibition, although he was mentioned in the catalogue by Roger Cardinal, an authority on outsider art, who referred to him by his nickname, ‘Mirek.’

Finally, while one or two galleries attempted to sell photographs by Tichý – particularly the outsider art specialist Susanne Zander in Cologne, the artist refused to allow his work to be financially exploited in any way. He gave a number of prints to neighbors and friends, and, in 2000 a large collection of his prints, together with his cameras and enlarger, were transferred to Buxbaum and to the Fondation Tichý Oceán that Buxbaum would create in 2004. Such transfers of his print to Buxbaum and to neighbors are also a gauge of his ambivalence regarding the reception of his work, or, perhaps one could say, his voluntary abdication of all control over its marketing and distribution.

Prior to 2004, Tichý’s work had difficulty gaining artistic recognition. Buxbaum’s emphasis on his marginality as a person, his unusual apparatus, and his resistance to the repressive political environment turned out to be insufficient. The decision to minimize his training made it impossible to present him as an artist in an art-historical context; the lack of attention to his process deprived it of any conceptual appeal; and the relegation of the subjects of his images to a position of secondary importance destroyed much of the interest of his work. Faced with Tichý’s own resistance, Roman Buxbaum himself had to admit that his attempt to position him in the world of art brut had led to a dead end.

Recognition by the Contemporary Art World

The first exhibition of Miroslav Tichý’s photographs in a contemporary art context took place in fall 2004 at the Seville Biennale, whose curator was Harald Szeemann. Szeemann was regarded at the time as one of the greatest curators of contemporary art and as a great discoverer of unknown artists. In a sense, he was the inventor of the new profession of curator/exhibition commissioner. If one believes ‘that the art history of the
second half of the 20th century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions, then Harald Szeemann was the quintessential master of the genre, from his first exhibition in St. Gallen in 1957 to his last (and posthumous) exhibition in Brussels in 2005.

The artists whom Szeemann exhibited during his nearly fifty years as a curator are among the most significant of the period: Joseph Beuys, Sigmar Polke, Mario Merz, Richard Serra, Georg Baselitz, but also Francis Picabia, Giorgio Morandi, Victor Vasarely, and many others. After his long tenure at Kunsthalle Bern, Szeemann was director of Documenta 5 in 1972 and was then in charge of the Venice Biennale on three occasions, in 1980, 1999, and 2001. More than one hundred and fifty exhibitions mounted by Szeemann have been reviewed, and many of them have had a defining influence. His curatorial activity explicitly revolved around specific themes: he focused on individual mythologies – the creative obsessions of artists – which he described as 'intense intentions.' He affirmed that he was 'interested only in the deviant conscience, because it is only there that the utopian energies exist.' The art historian Wieland Schmied described him in these terms: 'Szeemann enquires more into the artists’ inner urges than into the outward characteristics of their work. He seeks in artists’ works that which we all too easily overlook: the motive force, the creative impulse that lead to their birth.'

Szeemann became interested very early on in the art of marginal individuals and the insane. In 1963, he organized an exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern entitled Art of the Mentally Ill, Art Brut, Insania Pingen, which was based around the Prinzhorn collection (created by the psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn, Psychiatric University Hospital in Heidelberg, Germany) and the works of outsider artists Adolf Wölfli and Heinrich Anton Müller. At that time, he evoked ‘the apparent compulsion to express oneself visually and the palpable sense of invention underlying the singular form, a visual introversion that is full to bursting, an artistic refuge,’ and he responded to the tendency to regard *art brut* as an isolated phenomenon by asserting that, on the contrary, ‘these creative forms are not alien to contemporary art.’ He gave a section of Documenta 5 to the psychiatrist Theodor Spoerri for an exhibition of art of the insane and included Wölfli in his exhibition of the total artwork (Gesamtkunstwerk) in 1983 alongside Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, and Marcel Broodthaers, thus combining ‘the ‘considered obsessions’ of professional artists with the ‘primal obsessions’ of *brut* artists.’ But Szeemann was also a discoverer of unknown artists who were marginal without being alienated. In 1974, he organized an exhibition in his apartment devoted to his grandfather, a brilliant master hairdresser. Called Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us, the exhibition presented, perhaps for the first time, ordinary objects (which had belonged to his grandfather) as artworks. Fascinated by the community of Monte Verità and, in particular, by the blissful, monomaniacal dream of the painter Elisâr von Kupffer and his sanctuary in Ticino, Szeemann included him in the 1997 Lyon Biennale, whose theme was The Other (L’Autre). At this exhibition, he broke with prevailing norms by showing works by artists who had never regard-ed themselves as artists and had been perceived as ‘Others’ all their lives. As Wieland Schmied emphasizes, ‘Harald Szeemann has a soft spot for crackpots. He is the eager collector of large and small mythologies and obsessions, of the multiplex visions people have made of an earthly paradise.’

Szeemann’s discoveries also included the clown Dimitri and the Swiss police photographer Arnold Odermatt, whom he introduced at the Venice Biennale in 2001 and then at an exhibition at the Maison de Victor Hugo in 2002/2003. At that exhibition,
Odermatt stood alongside Artaud, Beuys, Boltanski, and Duchamp, but also Wölfli and Soutter, in a magnificent testimony to Szeemann's ability to bring together different kinds of artists and to abolish the boundaries between artistic categories. Szeemann had been familiar with Tichý's work since 1989 or 1990, but it was not until 2004 that he decided to present it. He explains why in Buxbaum's film (2004) on the photographer: 'I was fascinated right from the very first moment, but I waited for the right exhibition.' Between 1990 and 2004, Szeemann organized more than thirty exhibitions, at some of which – for example, The Other (L'Autre) or Plateau of Humankind at the Venice Biennale in 2001 – Tichý's work would surely not have been out of place. But Szeemann chose to exhibit it in Seville in 2004, perhaps because he realized that the attempt to cast Tichý as an outsider artist had at that point run its course. In summer 2004, Szeemann paid a visit to Buxbaum and selected those of Tichý's photographs that he wished to present. He declared at the time: 'At first glance, you think it's naïve. But the more you look at it, the less naïve it becomes.' It was with this stamp of approval that Tichý now abruptly passed from the world of outsider art, to which he had hitherto been confined, to that of contemporary art. The Seville Biennale presented sixty-three artists, all of whom were already well known, with two exceptions: Tichý and a Galician village photographer. Exhibited alongside artists such as Maurizio Cattelan, Eduardo Chillida, Tracey Emin, Joseph Kosuth, Annette Messager, and Richard Serra, Tichý thus gained new visibility and legitimacy. The catalogue for this exhibition vividly documents Tichý's passage from one world to another. The appendix contains a short biographical note on each artist along with a small photographic portrait and a list of their exhibited works. The main portion of the catalogue assigns each of the artists – presented in ascending order by age – a four-page section: one page of text and three of reproductions of their works. All except one, that is: Miroslav Tichý. On the page facing the text about him are two photographs, one of him, shaggy haired, ragged, and a camera in his hand, and the other of one of his cameras; one has to turn to the following double page for images of his work. Thus, while Tichý is solidly positioned in the midst of those now his peers, the contemporary artists, his legend as outsider artist is apparently still the obligatory jumping-off point for his work.

Whereas the effort to position Tichý in the world of art brut had primarily focused on his person and artistic apparatus, the Seville catalogue and most of the writings that followed privileged other constitutive elements of his work. The subject of his photographs, obsessively photographed female bodies, now became the dominant parameter. Tichý's interest in women's bodies was now recognized and accepted rather than treated as cause for embarrassment or an index of marginality. The other element highlighted in Seville, Tichý's creative process, became the principal factor in the recognition of his work as contemporary art. Instead of trying to explain his work in psychological or political terms, critics – following Szeemann's lead – now began to treat Tichý's production as a full fledged artistic œuvre, with its gray areas, its mystery, and its genius. This new perspective made it possible to open up the field and develop other approaches and, particularly, to anchor Tichý in the history of contemporary art. After Seville, the recognition of Tichý was rapidly constructed around three axes: growing interest in his works on the part of the art market, his anointing by his fellow photographers, and legitimating by galleries and museums.
Tichý’s first museum exhibition, which took place at Kunsthaus Zürich,\textsuperscript{40} put more emphasis on his work than it did on his person. The presentation of the photographs was very formal, very cold and neutral; the exhibition deliberately avoided giving a prominent place to Buxbaum’s film.\textsuperscript{41} In addition to the omnipresent subject of the photographs, the exhibition highlighted the photographer’s formal training, emphasizing the importance of his artistic education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, the formation of his taste, and the visual legacies visible in his photographs. In the catalogue, Tobia Bezzola related Tichý’s work to the history of the female portrait over the centuries, citing Rubens and Ingres alongside Winogrand and Lartigue.\textsuperscript{42} The history of the representation of the female body through the ages, the topos of the bather, and the mirror of the voyeurism of the artist and the viewer were mobilized to demonstrate that this ‘perverted bum’\textsuperscript{43} was an artist and that the exhibition of his works had a legitimate place in a museum. Highlighting the subject of the works and the artist’s training positioned Tichý within the tradition of classical art, making him the heir of the masters; perhaps this was why the exhibition was the only one to which Tichý consented.\textsuperscript{44}

After this legitimization through the medium of art history, complementing that provided by Harald Szeemann, the path was now cleared for Tichý to be recognized by the art world and its institutions. Throughout all his exhibitions at museums, centers, and galleries of contemporary art, the same aspects were nearly always foregrounded. From 2004 to the end of 2008, there were twenty-four solo exhibitions (Haarlem, Brno, Vancouver, Bratislava, Tokyo, Beijing, Stockholm, Frankfurt, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Dublin) and at least thirteen group exhibitions (the Maison Rouge in Paris, Ekenäs, Salzburg, Berlin, etc.). The catalogue texts, journalistic reviews, and reactions of the public primarily focused on the subject – the ubiquitous female body – and on Tichý’s creative process and working methods. Through this critical reflection on his process, Tichý gradually became anchored in contemporary art. He was credited with affinities, similarities, and correspondences – more, it might be added, than with a ‘genealogy’ or influences.\textsuperscript{45} Generally speaking, little emphasis was placed on his formal training. As for the ‘Tichý myth’ – the combination of person and apparatus – its importance varied according to the individual exhibition and approach, but it was consistently less than it had been in the context of outsider art. Similarly, the importance accorded to context was quite variable within this new schema, and it was identified less with the repressive socialist environment than with the artistic and creative environment in Czechoslovakia. Quentin Bajac’s article for the Centre Pompidou catalogue clearly situated Tichý’s work against the backdrop of the Eastern European art scene.\textsuperscript{46}

It would not have been possible to present Tichý in this new way were it not for the contemporary relevance of his work. Among his foci is that of the walker in the city; the flaneur of Baudelaire and Benjamin; the dérives, or drifts, of the situationists; and contemporary artists like Francis Alÿs and Gabriel Orozco, who make walking in the city an essential element of their work.\textsuperscript{47} This theme also links Tichý to street photography, and particularly its most spontaneous practitioners, like Gary Winogrand and Joan Colom. This aesthetic of walking and the importance accorded to urban appropriation associated Tichý with a current that runs through all of contemporary art.\textsuperscript{48}

Equally important was Tichý’s close attention to the process of production, coupled with a radical disdain for the ‘finished product.’ Tichý adheres to a veritable ritual of production, from the preparation of his cameras and film and the self-imposed obligation to take pictures daily, to the development and printing processes and the manual
alterations he makes to his photographs. With the pen and pencil drawings he does on his prints – these ‘improvements’ to his work – and the highly intricate frames that he designs for certain photographs, Tichý exhibits a protracted and elaborate protocol that combines ‘mechanical reproduction’ with the intervention of the ‘artist’s hand.’ Once this process is finished, its product – the photograph itself – holds very little interest for the artist; it is abandoned in the dust or rain, gnawed by rats, or used as fuel. This primacy of the process over the result clearly situates Tichý within the world of contemporary art.

Finally, his fondness for the ‘shoddy job,’ for imperfect photographs – a taste that lies outside the customary aesthetic canons – turned out to be an important criterion as well. Doesn’t Tichý maintain that ‘the flaws are an integral part of the work,’ and that he wants to ‘do something worse than anyone else in the world,’ thus aligning himself with a working method frequently highlighted in contemporary art? One of the most closely related examples is the photographic production of Sigmar Polke and, in particular, his physiochemical manipulation of his images in his series on Afghanistan and São Paulo, which resonate in many ways with the photographs of Miroslav Tichý.

Mention should also be made of Tichý’s close proximity to the vernacular aesthetic. That proximity is apparent in his process, technique, and technical flaws, but also in his obsessive relationship with his subject; etymologically the amateur is ‘one who loves.’ As Fatima Naqvi and Clément Chéroux have emphasized, this amateurism enables him to translate his mental images into photographs as directly as possible.

In addition to those features of Tichý’s work that mirrored the interests of art criticism, the assimilation of his work to contemporary art was also apparent in his practice of exchanging his photographs for the works of other artists. This barter began by chance in 1992, when the Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer, who was interested in the connections between art brut and contemporary art, paid Tichý a visit. The latter refused to sell his photographs, but he did give Rainer two prints in exchange for a drawing, or more precisely a catalogue page that Rainer drew over again and painted as Tichý looked on. Later, a formal program for swapping artworks was set up by the Fondation Tichý Oceán and its director Adi Hoesle, but with little or no involvement on Tichý’s part. More than forty artists have participated in this program, including some of the leading figures in contemporary art. Tichý’s work thus found itself placed on an equal footing with that of recognized contemporary artists, a development that further reinforced its legitimacy, its assimilation to contemporary art, and hence the interests of the curators.

Thus, since 2004 we have been witnessing Tichý’s institutionalization as an artist, a process actively promoted by Roman Buxbaum and his foundation Tichý Oceán. The result has been the museification of his work and its general acceptance as contemporary art, as attested by recent exhibitions and catalogues. A second and parallel consequence has been the emergence of a body of critical work on the artist, including journal articles (primarily in response to his exhibitions), a few academic papers, and a certain level of interest (very variable in quality) on the part of amateur critics, particularly in the blogosphere. Finally, the art market is beginning to show an interest in him as well. Several institutions and collectors have acquired his works, while several high-quality galleries are offering his photographs for sale, and a few of his photographs are being sold at auction. The result is that in a very short time, Tichý’s work has passed from the world of outsider art to that of contemporary art, where it has gained a degree of visibility that it could not have otherwise hoped to achieve. This transition was the result of a process in which a
schema of presentation and legitimization was established on the basis of aspects of the work and the persona that had hitherto been minimized within the framework of outsider art, such as his creative process and his subjects. While critics are unanimous in their insistence that Tichý’s work should be seen in an art-historical context, many journalists and members of the general public continue to privilege its sensational aspects, clinging to the legend of the marginal artist or the myth of the pervert whom the art world has inexplicably chosen to promote. Especially revealing are bloggers’ opinions on the Tichý exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in summer 2008. The view that it might be a hoax was expressed on a program on Radio Libertaïre on July 12, 2008, and repeated on his blog by a participant in the program.38 But that possibility had also crossed the mind of a number of curators (including Quentin Bajac) and artists familiar with the practice, like Joan Fontcuberta. This disparity between scholarly and popular criticism is a clear expression of the ambiguity of the conflation of Tichý’s persona and his image.

The discovery of Miroslav Tichý’s photographic œuvre was only possible because of the combination of multiple factors. Its high quality was obviously an indispensable condition. But it was only able to gain a broader audience when curators began to emphasize aspects of it that conformed to the art world’s expectations, thus creating the necessary environment for the invention of a new artist. As long as Tichý was positioned in the realm of art brut – within a schema that privileged his person and artistic apparatus – he sparked very little interest. Roman Buxbaum’s admirable persistence in promoting the artist could only be realized when Harald Szeemann redefined him, removing him from the overly narrow perspective of outsider art and positioning him in the broader context of contemporary art. Since then, critics and curators, by privileging Tichý’s subjects and creative process, have constructed a mechanism of legitimization that has made it possible to affirm the contemporary relevance of his work. Yet however successful it was and is, this invention of an artist continues to run up against the resistance of the actual artist, who is neither dead like Atget nor malleable like Lartigue nor an absent outsider. The fact is that Tichý continues to resist his curators and refuses to submit to the interpretive schemas they seek to impose on his work.

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NOTES

1. Throughout this essay, the words ‘outsid-er’ and ‘brut’ are used interchangeably, without any difference in meaning, to refer to marginal, self-taught, and solitary artists working beyond the influence of the art world.

11. Mirek is a diminutive form of Miroslav. It is only used in texts that present Tichý as an outsider artist; in those that anchor Tichý in contemporary art, by contrast, he is always referred to by his official surname, Miroslav.
13. Roger Cardinal excludes from the field of outsider art, artists with formal training or who exhibit a degree of technical or cultural competence incompatible with ‘pureté brute’; Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (London: Studio Vista, 1972), 37.
14. Von einer Welt zu'r Andern (*From One World to the Other*), Cologne, DuMont Kunsthalle (DuMont Art Gallery), September 28–November 25, 1990; the exhibition included fifteen of Tichý’s prints.
15. R. Buxbaum and Pablo Stäheli, eds., *Von einer Welt zu'r Andern* (*From One World to the Other*) (Cologne: DuMont, 1990); see especially Harald Szeemann, ‘Und siegt der Wahn, so muß die Kunst: mehr inhalieren’ (‘If Madness is Victorious, Art Will Be Too: Inhale More’), 68–73.
17. Ibid., 56–57.
18. Ibid., 70.
20. See the biographical informations and the interviews with associates and friends of Tichý, note 5.
24. Tichý means ‘peaceful’ or ‘pacific’ in Czech – hence the play on words in the foundation’s name.
25. Interview on May 22, 2008. At the time, Landert said to Buxbaum: ‘Are you waiting for him to die before you exhibit him?’


27. Florence DERIEUX, introduction to *Harald Szeemann* (note 26), 8.


33. Wieland SCHMIED, ‘Creative Obsession’ (note 29), 653.


35. Ibid.


37. The unsigned biographical note on Tichý in this catalogue has several times been reproduced under Harald Szeemann’s byline in works put out by the Fondation Tichý Oceán (for example: *Tichý* [Cologne: Walther König, 2008], 25). While it is clear that Szeemann approved this text, he did not write it. Its author was the critic Hans-Joachim Müller, who is identified as such in the colophon to the Seville catalogue. Müller confirms this information (which was given to me by Tobia Bezzola in an interview on October 17, 2008) in his book *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (note 26), 150, 153.

38. The Zurich art gallery Galerie Judin presented his work at FIAC in 2004 and then at ARCO Madrid in 2005; other galleries in New York, Berlin, London, and Anvers then followed suit.

39. Introduced by Marta Gili, Tichý was awarded the Prix Découverte at the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie d’Arles in 2005, whose recipient was chosen by a vote of the professional photographers attending the Rencontres.


41. Interview with Tobia Bezzola, the curator of the exhibition, on October 17, 2008.

42. Tobia BEZZOLA, ‘Der Meister der weiblichen Halbfigur’ (The master of the half-length female portrait), in *Miroslav Tichý*, ed. T. BEZZOLA and R. BUHBAUM (Cologne: DuMont, 2005). The similarities between Lartigue and Tichý are so striking, both in terms of their subjects and with respect to their ‘invention’ as artists, that from May to July 2006 the Michael Hoppen Gallery in London organized an exhibition entitled *Tichý Lartigue Combined*. For more on this subject, see the interview with the photographer David Bailey, ‘The Man who Spied on Women’, in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, April 16, 2006.
43. ‘One can look at him as a perverted bum; I’ve shown he’s an artist.’ Tobia Bezzola, interviewed by the author on October 17, 2008.
44. Interviews with Tobia Bezzola on October 17, 2008 and Brian Tjepkema on June 27, 2008.
46. Q. BAJAC, ibid.
49. See the film by Roman Buxbaum, Miroslav Tichý: Tarzan Retired (note 34).
52. Interview with Arnulf Rainer on June 25, 2008.
54. Interview with Quentin Bajac on July 16, 2008.
55. Twelve books and catalogues have been published on Tichý in a space of just four years, and more than sixty articles on him have been recorded to date by the author.
56. Including some ten museums, among them the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the Museum für Moderne Kunst (Frankfurt), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts (Houston).
57. Galleries that are selling works by Tichý include Tanya Bonakdar in New York, Taka Ishii in Tokyo, and Michael Hoppen in London. Artcurial sold prints by Tichý at an auction in Paris on October 28, 2008.

ABSTRACTS

How is an artist invented? How is a photographer propelled from obscurity to fame in a few short years? How do exhibition curators construct a narrative around a photographer and his work? What factors determine the success or failure of such a narrative? This article highlights the curators’ work in attaining artistic recognition for the Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý. Initially exhibited unsuccessfully under the label of ‘outsider art,’ Tichý achieved renown in 2004 when the curator Harald Szeemann presented him under the aegis of contemporary art. He was subsequently honored with an award at the Rencontres d’Arles and exhibited at Kunsthaus Zurich, then at the Centre Pompidou, and his works were acquired by numerous collections. The critical analysis of schemas of presentation and legitimation that vary according to the context in

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which the works are being presented – outsider art or contemporary art – highlights the role played by curators in the artistic recognition of the Czech photographer; their work, however, runs up against the resistance of the artist himself.

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Marc Lenot is a graduate of École Polytechnique and former student of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is currently writing a dissertation on Miroslav Tichý under the direction of André Gunthert to earn a Master 2 degree in ‘Théorie et Pratique du Langage et des Arts’ (theory and practice of language and the arts) at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. In 2008, he worked on the catalogue for the exhibition Miroslav Tichý at the Musée National d’Art Moderne. He is also the author of the blog Lunettes Rouges (Red spectacles, http://lunettesrouges.blog.lemonde.fr/)