



Jiří Žák (CZ): Mother City

Kostka Gallery

Curatorial text: Anna Remešová

Opening: 21. 1. 2016, 19:00

Exhibition duration: 21. 1. – 7. 2. 2016

A regular grid of family houses sets the rhythm for the green hillsides of Zlín. The hill descends to the river where the factories stand. Shoes are being made there. People working. Cut. In his office, the factory owner Jan Antonín Baťa, brother of the company founder Tomáš Baťa, bends over large sheets of maps, inspecting them and dreaming how much it would cost to move the peoples of Czechoslovakia to Brazil.

Utopist?

Modernist visionary?

Colonist?

The *Mother Town* installation looks back to the visionary ideas of Jan Antonín Baťa, who in the 1920s and 1930s was extending the Baťa shoe company by establishing affiliations and factory towns in Canada, France, India, on Java... Namely Brazil had special attraction for him. There he moved with his whole family in 1940 to establish four new cities. In good faith in the growing capital of his company and boosting the country's economic development he changed irreversibly the character of Brazilian landscape, planting in it his shoe factories. New townships, river dams and whole economic territories grew amidst the rainforests.

"This is a strange world we live in."

Jan Antonín Baťa

In his video-essay Jiří Žák puts images side by side, one after another, however his voice is not affirmative, neither ardently anti colonial. He slowly dismantles the aura of one legend to parts in order to put them together in a new whole. He sets the rhythm by alternating shots from the Museum of Southeastern Moravia, from period newsreels and Baťa Company instructional videos. There is something from the Alain Resnais' criticism and Chris Marker's poetics in it. At the same time a tension occurs in Jiří Žák's narrative between people coming with great confidence and holding power in their hands in the form of a paid job offer on the one hand, and local citizens accepting Baťa's visions without a single word on the other. Yet where lies the dividing line between acceptance and acknowledgement? And who has got more, the shod or the unshod ones?

Jiří Žák (*1989) is the student at Tomáš Vaněk Studio of Intermedia Production at the Prague AVU (Academy of Visual Arts). He paid study visits to the Prague UMRUM (Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design) – Šaloun Studio, and the University of Arts and Design in Karlsruhe. He is this year's laureate of the EXIT Award, designed for students of Czech and Slovak Art Academies. In his works he employs a video-essayist approach and critical reflection on historical events.



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