

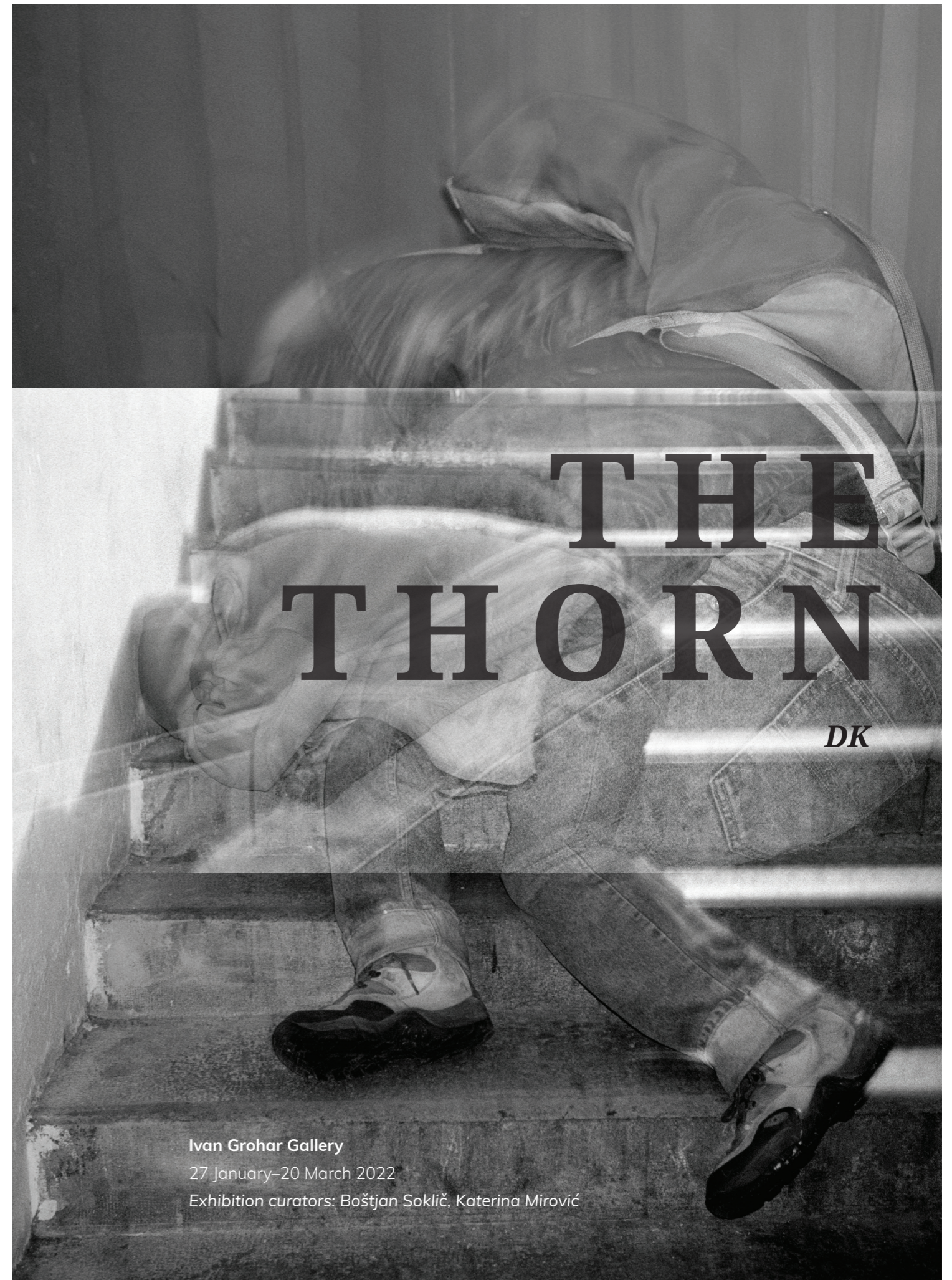
ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME: Due to the changing epidemiological situation, the accompanying program will be published later on the Škofja Loka Museum website.



Exhibition Colophon:
DK: The Thorn

27 January–20 March 2022
Ivan Grohar Gallery
Škofja Loka Museum

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Curators: Boštjan Soklič, Katerina Mirovič
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THE THORN

DK

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The Ivan Grohar Gallery presents DK, a prominent Slovenian fine art photographer and a selection of his works from the iconic series of colour photographs titled *The Thorn*. In addition to the photographs, DK's original concept consists of a series of spatial artefacts (table football, preserved rubbish, cigarette butts, discarded cans, etc.) "borrowed" from the transitional years at the turn of the 21st century and transferred from the "cult" spaces in Ljubljana's AKC Metelkova (Metelkova Art Centre) area to the present-day exhibition venue. *The Thorn* series, produced by Strip Core/Forum Ljubljana in collaboration with the City Art Gallery Ljubljana as early in 2002, is on view in Škofja Loka for the first time. The artist's conceptual story is based on documentary work spanning several years, i.e. his subjective historical documentation of the happenings at AKC Metelkova. Owing to its artistic weight, significance and topical theme, *The Thorn* project was featured as part of the primary exhibition of the Noorderlicht festival in the Dutch city of Groningen in 2002, right after its creation. It was also presented at the grand opening of the international festival Refract in Belgrade in 2006, at the Fotogalerie Wien in Vienna in 2013 and in several Slovenian towns.

The Thorn, a figural cycle consisting of twenty large-format photographs, reveals the artist's lucid view of the events and protagonists of AKC Metelkova's very specific "underground" scene. Both the first and the second gallery rooms feature photographs of weary and intoxicated consumers of the nightlife in AKC Metelkova's clubs. The photographs are exhibited in wide frames, which symbolically illustrate the door to "a world of different perceptions". As one-of-a-kind mental screens, they provide further insights into the obscure rituals of ordinary people on the fringes of society in their unusual psychophysical states – personified (yet also depersonalised) protagonists of the underground scene, self-alienation and emptiness (in a broader sociological context) without equal opportunities and dignity. According to Prof. Marina Gržinić, a Slovenian philosopher, theorist and art critic, DK's *The Thorn* is a project of photographic exploration into the side effects of the mad dash from transitional post-socialism to crazy global capitalism. *The Thorn* is aimed directly at the post-socialist blind acceptance of the bright future touted by capitalism. Hidden along this insane path to a bright future lie the vulnerable bodies of individuals, hopelessly suffocated by drugs and alcohol. Resembling

corpses, without any prospects. These young souls are permeated with substances that lead to instant oblivion and a downward spiral into the depths of trans-zombie realms.

The radical nature of the descriptions of the world on the fringes of society, which is ruled by outsiders, homeless people, addicts and mentally sensitive individuals in general, is the central theme of DK's photographic "landscapes". The artist has documented the collapse into isolation, thus portraying the socio-social situation of our society, which has not changed much since *The Thorn* series was created. The photographer has described the reality of the early morning hours of people on the fringes of society accurately, the way it really is. The banal and raw everyday reality shows viewers the very bottom of the social ladder of people without identity and hopeless conditions as a consequence of social exclusion. Even if exploring the unpleasant bottom of society, the cycle is an aesthetically immaculate cry for human dignity and a dignified life, which is muffled by the stench of waste and the thick wall of cigarette smoke. As a chronicler of gloomy scenes, DK symbolically breaks the foundations of groupthink, dogmatic truth and social ideology, which thrives in circumstances of people's (especially young one's) growing loneliness, as it obstructs active social connections. *The Thorn* provides a vivisection of the feelings of oblivion and the experience of misery in the smoke-filled world-forgotten AKC Metelkova clubs and clearly illustrates the types of social exclusion from working life (unemployment), consumer society (poverty), society (loneliness) and the portrayed individuals' detachment from power and impact (cultural marginalisation).

DK's voyeuristic observations delve into the field of documentary photography and its distinctly authorial approach. In *The Thorn* cycle, the artist pairs photography with a broader context of contemporary art, thus consciously moving away from the soulless digitally-empty, yet forcefully sophisticated and genre-fragmented photographic high art, which is losing touch with real life. As a conceptual and post-conceptual artist, DK fully develops his own sociologically marked photographic discourse, diametrically different from the neo-avant-garde and modernist photographic approaches. His photographs show viewers more than can be seen; in fact, through expressive

straightforwardness (albeit a static one), they establish a special vibrational communication with the depicted theme, taken from a specific urban space. The scenes of intoxicated young people featured in *The Thorn* series are shocking, however, charged with effectively balanced artistic elements that contribute to the aesthetic effect they attract viewers magnetically. Regardless of the subject, the psychedelically radiant characters are suggestible carriers of the content presented by the artist to viewers so they would comprehend his intense yet subtle visual commentary on hopelessness, which is not often the topic of discussion. Although the photographs part of *The Thorn* cycle date back more than two decades ago, they are still just as topical as they were when they were created. Problems remain although they are harder to notice, swept under the carpet more efficiently. Scenes identical to those depicted in *The Thorn* cycle can now most likely be found even in smaller provincial Slovenian towns and villages.

Its meaningfulness makes the exhibition multifaceted. The exhibited works can be experienced as shocking depictions of hopelessness, as expressionist photographic depictions of events within subcultural social communities, as shocking images with strong visual effects or as in-depth visual reflections on issues related to the meaning of existence, a hopeless situation in modern society, more fictional than fiction itself. The exhibition confronts viewers with a subjective yet analytical artistic approach, imbued with sharp vision and insightful observation. It casts the artist in the role of a voyeur who comes into other people's intimate space silently and then leaves in much the same way.

With both his completed and evolving artistic cycles, as well as his spatial photographic installation *The Thorn*, exhibited in the Ivan Grohar Gallery, DK proves that he is one of the most important creators of the visual identity of Ljubljana's alternative culture from the 1990s to the present day. His conceptual photographic projects made sure a long time ago that he will go down in history as a prominent part of Slovenian art.

Boštjan Soklič, Curator, Škofja Loka Museum

DK (1970)

DK is one of the most prominent Slovenian fine art photographers. He is first and foremost a film photographer focused on black-and-white photography, but also practices digital and colour photography. He is part of the so-called Ljubljana alternative scene and also serves as its documentarian and occasional performer. As a visual artist, he combines different styles and photographic approaches, pairing and actualising them in the context of contemporary art. He exhibits his works, most of which are contentually related, in cycles. Whenever necessary, he uses new technologies. Over the years, DK – an extremely selective photographer and a stickler for perfection – has developed an unmistakably original, socially marked photographic oeuvre that stands out from the rest of the Slovenian photographic production.

DK first studied at the Famous Photographers School in Munich and later at the University of Cologne. He is best known for his portraits of the main Metelkova Art Centre protagonists. The portraits are part of a series titled *The Face* and were displayed on the Metelkova walls for years. He presented *The Thorn* project at numerous exhibition venues and put on a retrospective at the City Art Gallery Ljubljana in 2008. He is a member of the Ljubljana Strip Core and the recipient of many prestigious photography awards. At the 1997 international photography exhibition Goodbye Twentieth Century, he received the Federation of European Professional Photographers' top award in the art photography category for his photographs from the photographic cycle titled *Able's Lineage*. In 1999, he was awarded a scholarship from KulturKontakt, an Austrian programme for artists. In 2004, he won a work scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and the Nikola Tesla Medaille Award presented by Raum & Zeit (Ehlers Verlag GmbH). His individual works and conceptual projects have been exhibited at numerous exhibitions venues and festivals in Slovenia and elsewhere, including the selection "A Century of Nudes in Slovenia", the São Paulo Biennial, the DOMGK Atelier in Munich, the Kapelica Gallery in Ljubljana, the National Museum of Slovenia, Copenhagen's Kronborg as part of the European Capital of Culture, etc.