

LIFESTYLE

European Union and **beyond**

French photographer Jean-Marc Caracci recently came to Prague to shoot for his new portfolio of work that goes against political definitions of Europe and embraces the Continent as a whole.

BY CARRIE BRIFFETT

An observant person passing by the Military Museum in Prague 3–Žižkov, recently might have noticed a patient figure waiting with his camera poised for an opportune moment.

Caracci, from Montpellier, has been shooting in the city as part of his Homo Urbanus Europeanus (HUE) project. And, rather than focus on the often snapped landmarks such as Charles Bridge, his work takes a quiet urban frame, usually with a solitary figure passing through.

For Caracci, the purpose of what he calls his “photographic marathon” is twofold: he wants to show both the similarity of Euro-

pean cities and people, and to capture moments of solitude in a metropolis.

For this project—which began in Bratislava, Slovakia, in June 2007—Caracci has so far traveled to 20 European capitals, but his approach has stayed the same throughout.

“I don’t shoot people very close. I am always far away and often I wait. My way is to find the place first and then wait for somebody to come,” he explained.

Caracci’s added that the composition of his photographs is the same in all cities because he wanted a homogenous feel to the collection.

“We Europeans are so similar. I feel at home in Prague or in Madrid [Spain] or Riga [Latvia]. ...When, for example, you have been sitting in Černý Most at the end of the yellow [metro] line and you are not in the center, you could be in Rome. People are wearing the same thing [in the various cities]. This is a simple thing but we never think about it because when we travel we want to see something different. If you look at my photos you can recognize Europe; you cannot recognize the U.S. or Asia,” he said.

Caracci added that he sees Europe as stretching from Iceland to Turkey rather than being defined as the countries within the EU. He said his project is a little bit political, as

To see more of Jean-Marc Caracci's work visit the Web sites:
homo.urbanus.free.fr/portfolio/index.html
 and homo.urbanus.free.fr/europeanus.

EXHIBITION

it is his way of saying Europe should be more and more united.

Caracci is currently taking a break from traveling and shooting to concentrate on promoting his project, but he hopes to begin traveling again and extending the scope of HUE.

His next stop—Istanbul, Turkey—will potentially be the most challenging. “It is the only one that is not the capital. But for me it is the European capital of Turkey. Istanbul might be the first European capital that is not so similar, but we will see,” he said.

Caracci's notions of loneliness are also apparent in his work. For Caracci, his project is about capturing an instant where people are alone with their thoughts as they walk or wait in the city. Taking inspiration from other French photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, Raymond Depardon and Elliot Erwitt, he aims to capture moments in everyday life.

“I have always been interested in the human being in photography, and if you see my pictures over the years I never shoot landscapes, only architecture with at least one person in the picture. I don't know why, and this is strange, but I cannot shoot something if there is nobody inside [the frame]. One of my friends is a psychologist and their answer is maybe you are looking for yourself. And why not? I am attracted to observing people,” he explained.

He admitted that being an outside observer of people has led to reflection and he finds himself contemplating people's mortality as they rush about in their daily life.

“People walk and walk and, I think, stop and look around you because one day it will be too late. ... This is a new life for me. I have been a photographer for a long time, but I also had another job. I wanted to do something big and to live with my art,” he explained.

European exhibitions

As well as shooting around Europe, Caracci's work has also been displayed in various countries. Last month, the cultural service of the Embassy of France in Ireland presented an exhibition titled A French Glance at Europe to celebrate the French Presidency of the EU Council. The European Union House in Dublin hosted photographs from 27 different French photographers, one for every EU country, including a photo by Caracci taken in Vilnius, Lithuania. Also last month, the Warsaw University Library presented an exhibition of the HUE photographs, and the collection was part of the international French photo festival Visa Off 2008 in Perpignan.

Caracci has had media interest in many European countries from Serbia to Slovenia to Sweden and anticipates further interest. During his time in Tallin, Estonia he met with Estonian Minister of Culture Laine Jänes. “In 2010, one year before the occasion of Tallin European Capital of Culture 2011, she would like to exhibit my pictures in Tallin to announce the [forthcoming title]. Then in 2011 she wants to exhibit the pictures in Paris because there will be a celebration of Estonia there,” he said.


Additionally, Caracci is waiting on confirmation from the city administration in Sofia, Bulgaria, which has enquired about using his portfolio on the occasion of the Week of Europe being there in May 2009.

Now he is trying to summon interest in his portfolio in the Czech Republic—and he said he hopes that its EU presidency in the first half of 2009 will help this process—as well as in other European countries.

“I have to sell my project and my pictures ...to some municipalities or to some companies. Another way is to exhibit and, lastly, I will try to find some publishers not only in France but everywhere in Europe,” he said.

He also admits to a personal reason for deciding to embark on the project. “I will be 50 soon. The European Parliament was born in 1958, like me. This is a good time for me to do something about Europe,” he said. ■

Commercial presentation



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