

## **Zofia Rydet**

(b. 05 V 1911 in Stanisławów, d. 24 VII 1997 in Gliwice)

The intimate and multilayered practice of Zofia Rydet are today part of both the Polish and international canon in the history of photography. Ever since her late debut (Rydet devoted herself to artistic practice after years of work as a saleswoman) she earned a name for being far ahead of the prevailing artistic tendencies in Poland. Her subsequent series of works and exhibitions testify to her independence and modern approach to photography.

*The Little Man*, which focused on images of children and falls within the tradition inspired by Steichen's *Family of Man*, was Rydet's first major series to be featured in an individual exhibition (Gliwice, 1961). The series proved extremely successful and came to be considered one of the most distinctive works in Polish photography. In the late 1960s the artist began exploring the photomontage, a technique she apparently enjoyed and used for the rest of her life. Initially she juxtaposed fragments of human body with elements of landscape and architecture such as fragments of old buildings. Her further compositions were more elaborate, featuring several photographs and an interplay between foreground and background images, which often formed surreal and extremely intimate visions. Such was the origin of the *World of Feelings and Imagination* project, published as an album in 1979. Among its intriguing stories was the *Sentimental Ballad*, a narrative based on a seemingly banal theme of a man and a woman living together, hiding their emotions behind image-masks identical in each photograph.

Parallel to working with collage and photomontage, Rydet practiced "pure" photography developing her most significant series *The Sociological Record*. This extensive work, which came to include thousands of negatives, dates back to 1978 when the artist embarked on the practice of photographing people in the interiors of old village houses. The arrangement of the photograph taken with a wide angle-camera was usually similar, with the male host facing the camera against the background of the "most important wall", his hands in his lap.

The series, first exhibited in Gorzów in 1979 amongst conceptual works of distinguished photographers, was a sensational success. With time, it was developed to include a number of smaller sub-series, which featured vanishing professions or images of women standing on the doorsteps of their homes. Consistency, regularity and an exceptionally sensitive approach, have earned this project a place in the avant-garde of world photography. Since her debut Zofia Rydet subjected her life to the passion of photography, participating in hundreds of exhibitions in Poland and abroad, receiving numerous awards and honorable mentions. Her works are in Polish and international collections.