

Athens News

by Theresa Harchick

Located in the Southern part of the Czech Republic, the small town of Cesky Krumlov welcomed Ohio University alum William Peter Davis (BFA, 1993). Three months ago, the young American photographer had his first solo exhibition in this picturesque medieval town.

At a gallery tucked away on a side street of Cesky Krumlov, the photo exhibition opened on May 4th. Present were 27 Ohio University Art students and professors, all participants in OU's new study abroad program. Davis, previously from Cincinnati, now lives and works in Prague. His hard work and determination in photography took an exciting turn, allowing him to exhibit on an international level.

Davis was taught by Pavel Banka, a Prague native, when the latter was a visiting artist at OU in 1993. Later Banka invited Davis to come to Prague as his assistant. In the meantime, three OU graduates- Kathy Glennon, Ginger Sheridan, and Patty Mitchell- traveled to Prague to teach several photographic workshops to Czech photographers, as well as do research for OU's study abroad programs. Their research came to fruition this year with the Spring quarter in Prague Program. Directed by Pat Kroutel, it includes faculty members Pavel Banka, Ron Kroutel, Mitchell, and Sheridan.

It was good timing for Davis because he and Ron Gibbons acted as teaching assistants for the Prague program. It was also good timing for the students and faculty in the program that they were able to travel to Cesky Krumlov and see Davis' excellent work first-hand.

Unlike art openings in the U.S., this one began with the photographer giving a statement and introducing Dr. Milena Klasova, a Czech Art Historian. She read a critical analysis of Davis' work, an English translation of which was then read by Patty Mitchell, an organizer of OU's Czech program. Davis commented on the importance of having images criticized at the opening, something that's not common in the U.S. He concluded by thanking Eva Enderlein, his photography professor at O.U., who had encouraged him to start a career in the Czech Republic.

Davis' images, which consist mainly of portraiture, were displayed in two rooms of the gallery. The black and white photographs were beautifully printed the same size. One photograph that stood out above the rest was an image of the artist himself. The image appears as if there are two of the photographer standing shoulder to shoulder. The upright, tensed position of the figure appears alert, almost like a soldier. At first glance, both faces of Davis seem to appear solemn, yet mysterious. Staring at the viewer in a questioning manner, his face is illuminated against his dark clothing and the black background. Closer examination shows that one of the faces looks confident while the other is frightened and tense.

The underlying content of the image is self-reflection and an existential sense of inner examination. Uncertainty about the future looms in one of the faces while the other face expresses confidence to face future challenges. The accomplishments the young photographer had made by leaving the United States and starting a career in an unfamiliar setting are clearly reflected in his work.

Courage and talent are the driving forces that make Davis the excellent photographer that he is. His show in Cesky Krumlov was an exciting start for a career that promises to lead to many successful exhibitions in the future.