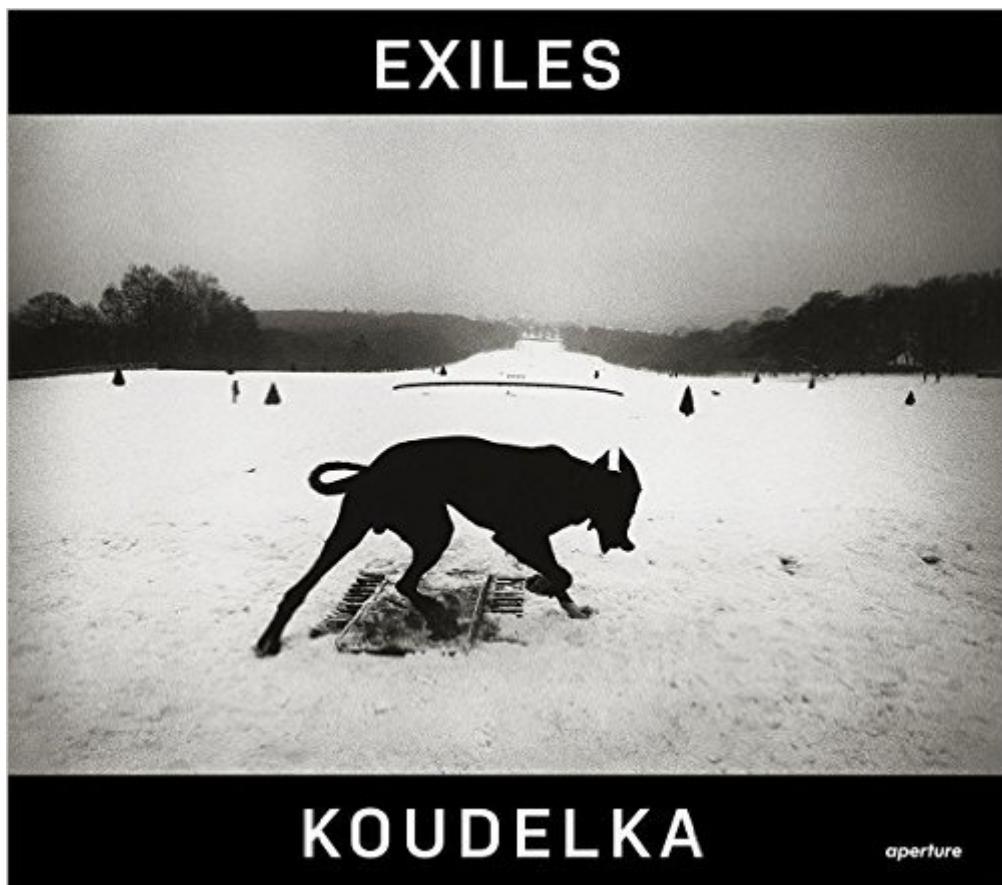


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Josef Koudelka: Exiles



Synopsis

About Exiles, Cornell Capa once wrote, Koudelka's unsentimental, stark, brooding, intensely human imagery reflects his own spirit, the very essence of an exile who is at home wherever his wandering body finds haven in the night. In this newly revised and expanded edition of the 1988 classic, which includes ten new images and a new commentary with Robert Delpire, Koudelka's work once more forms a powerful document of the spiritual and physical state of exile. The sense of private mystery that fills these photographs—“mostly taken during Koudelka's many years of wandering through Europe and Great Britain since leaving his native Czechoslovakia in 1968”—speaks of passion and reserve, of his rage to see. Solitary, moving, deeply felt and strangely disturbing, the images in Exiles suggest alienation, disconnection and love. Exiles evokes some of the most compelling and troubling themes of the twentieth century, while resonating with equal force in this current moment of profound migrations and transience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Exiles” by Josef Koudelka is one of the must-buy books of this year. Previously (before this re-print by aperture) the book would sell second-hand for around \$300. I personally couldn't afford a copy and when I heard this edition (the last and final) was coming out, I jumped on it like a fat kid on cupcakes. Before writing this book review, I re-read the book several times, read a lot of interviews by Josef Koudelka and reflected on the book (and the life and photography of Koudelka). To sum up, I believe that Josef Koudelka is one of the best photographers who has ever

lived (and is still living today) " and his philosophies on life and photography has deeply inspired and moved me.## Background on ExilesTo give a little bit of background of "Exiles" it was first published in 1988 and included images (mostly) in Europe from his 20-year-exile from Czechoslovakia, starting in 1970 (after leaving the Soviet-led invasion of Prague). This is what Cornell Capa once wrote about Exiles: "Koudelka's unsentimental, stark, brooding, intensely human imagery reflect his own spirit, the very essence of an exile who is at home wherever his wandering body finds haven in the night." Personally I think "Exiles" is such an incredible book because it gives you a more personal look into the life, trials, and tribulations of Koudelka himself. I see "Exiles" as a very personal photography journal/memoir of the travel, life, and journeys of Josef Koudelka. His other great body of work ("Gypsies") is more anthropological and sociological in nature " examining outwards towards the life and communities of the Roma people (politically correct phrase for "Gypsies").

A few weeks after receiving Exiles, and after many "readings" of it, I remain ambivalent. I like some, although not all, of the photographs. However I struggle to see the connection between them, the thread running through that binds them as an artistic whole. The lack of captions (beyond the year and country in which the photograph was taken) does not help. For example, the collection of small items (a knife, what looks like processed cheese slices, a piece of apple, a box of milk on top of a newspaper (plate 35). Were these Koudelka's worldly possessions at the time? Perhaps, but we do not know, as the photograph is titled only "France, 1976". Compositonally it does not work for me as a still life; so if not a documentary photograph, what is it? There are other photographs that I do not understand: for example, the light and shadow on a cobbled road and wall (plate 8) also does not work for me as a composition - I get the repetition of triangles, but is this all there is to it? I have no doubt that it had some deeper meaning, but there is no hint of this in the caption ("Switzerland, 1978"). There are other photographs where I think I get the association with "exiles", but don't think the photograph is artistically strong - for example, the upturned tortoise (plate 12) - where, for me, the tonality is wanting (the tortoise blends too much into the sand or road it is lying on, with no strong contrasts). And the person wrapped in paper (plate 52) - what's that all about???That said, there are also many photographs that I like and admire.

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