

# Martin Netočný

## The Imprints of an Ideal Landscape

Slagheaps are among the most visible remains of deep mining, although their traces in the landscape relief cease to be visible in time: artificial reclamation or spontaneous successions blur the inappropriateness of the slagheaps, which gradually blend in with the surrounding landscape. Slagheaps leave impressions on the social and cultural relief, mainly through the stories of people and things that contributed to their formation or that intersect their presence. These impressions become less visible in time as well: they are overlapped with the insistent here and now of everyday which can make the unusual the usual and the unnatural the natural.

Martin Netočný, a student of the Department of Photography, Film and Television at the Faculty of Performing Arts in Prague, focuses on discovering, examining and visualizing various forms of impressions left on the relief of the landscape, people and objects in the Silesian city of Ostrava by coal mining. The seven events he organized under the unifying title *The Ideal Landscape* during the spring and summer of 2018 were mostly related to the Heřmanice slagheap – the largest dump pile in the region. Although the events (their brief description can be found under the photographs on this and the opposite page) work separately, they are particularly interesting as a whole in the way they overlap, complement each other and blend. *The Ideal Landscape* is a series of documentations, investigations and events that can be seen as an artistic and archaeological investigation of the Heřmanice slagheap.

All the events are based on the excavations – in some cases (*De-cultivation*, *The Sorting Hand*) on *literal* excavations – of various forms of traces of mining activity. The traces were created in very different times: the deep time of charred Paleozoic plants (*The Sorting Hand*, *Waste Rock*) meets the time of mining in socialist Czechoslovakia in the late 1980s (*Flags*, *Mad Money*), the time of fishermen on the shore of the Heřmanice pond (*Something Like Nature*), and the time of the Anthropocene that transforms the past and present into a planetary vision of the future. The diffusion and blending of various perspectives is actually significant for *The Ideal Landscape*. The still burning slagheap at Heřmanice attracts the attention of local citizens, the media, geologists, environmentalists, naturalists, former and current miners, DIAMO state enterprise, OKD mining company, and the Ostravská těžební company. Martin Netočný's approach connects these different perspectives in an interdisciplinary and engaging way and puts them into new contexts. Thus, the artist's work is similar to and was inspired by the work of botanist Jan Albert Šturma – a leading figure of the Křovínáři association Netočný is an active member of –, continuously shifting the scientific exploration of expansive plants into visual and performing arts. The impression of blending perspectives is then intensified by the form, especially the transmedia nature of the project: Netočný presents the slagheap through public discussions (*Let It Be*), happenings and performances (*Lighting the Burne*, *To Touch the Slagheap*), exhibitions presenting photographic documentation of events (*Final Foto FAMU*

2018), ethnographic and documentary videos (*Something like Nature*, FAMU 2018, and *Mad Money*, FAMU 2019), guided walks on the slagheap (*To Let It Be*), and a group intervention into the artificially reclaimed surface of the slagheap (*De-cultivation*).

The key imprints of the slagheap – photographs and other forms of technical images (xerox, video) – have been created by Netočný himself. They are used to document, or rather capture the events, and in some cases, they even become key parts of the events (*Waste Rock*). However, they always – as is usual for the status of photography in performative and dematerialized art – respect the aesthetics of proof that Netočný appropriates and that is typical for documentation, scientific or forensic photography: Netočný uses images and other forms of records as an impression, as evidence confirming its authenticity and credibility by factuality, descriptiveness, and expressive austerity.

*The Ideal Landscape* works with material and non-material, human and non-human imprints and weaves them into a network used to capture the effects of mining in the north-eastern part of Ostrava. The waste rock is not only barren and deaf, but it usually brings silence and mutes voices that should speak about its environmental and social context. Thus, what is essential about Netočný's project is not probably only the fact he can excavate the characteristic traces of the past and present of the Heřmanice slagheap, but also that he frees this heap of waste rock of deafness and muteness.

Michal Šimůnek

p. 69, *Mad Money*

This short film is a sociological exploration of the life of miners and tries to expose the factors of their work in extreme conditions and their awareness of environmental damage.

p. 70, *Flags*

This installation on top of the Heřmanice slagheap returns the payslips of former mine employees to the landscape transformed by their work.

p. 70, *Something Like Nature*

Short film about the Heřmanice slagheap presenting the voices of the reclamation company workers, Ostrava scientists and people who move in the relief of the artificial landscape every day.

p. 71, *Waste Rock*

Installation on the windows of the former office building at the Heřmanice Mine. Xerox prints of mine stones were placed in the public space as a memento of the artificial origin of the surrounding landscape.

p. 72, *The Sorting Hand*

The three-month performance thematises the long tradition of coal pickers and the economic interests behind the newly established sorting line separating waste rock from the marketable mineral.

p. 72, *De-reclamation*

Group happening that disrupts the homogeneous structure of the reclaimed part of a dump pile, heralding the opening of a botanical niche for other plant species.

p. 73, *The Sorting Hand*





