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## From a Chihuahua to Marilyn Monroe: Photographer Elliott Erwitt Exhibits the Best of His Work in Prague

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PRAGUE.- Until early next year, Prague's Leica Gallery is hosting an exhibition featuring the work of one of the most renowned contemporary photographers, and a member of prestigious MAGNUM Photos, Elliott Erwitt, whose work is characterised by its gentle irony and a love of the absurd.

Just as the title Personal Best for Leica suggests, the exhibition offers a collection of some of the most important shots taken by the American photographer of Jewish origin during his lifetime. The collection, which includes exactly 50 black and white works, was specially created for the Leica multinational network of galleries. The relatively short, but all the more interesting touring retrospective began last year as part of the Photokino Trade Fair in Cologne, Germany. It has come to Prague from the Austrian City of Salzburg, and can be seen here until January 5th next year.

From the start of his photographic career, Erwitt has never ceased to amaze in his ability to find small humorous details in the banality of everyday life, in its grey and seemingly boring twists and turns that make it unique and unforgettable. At times, the

irony is quite obvious, such as in the shot capturing a person sitting with a bulldog on his lap. The dog covers the person's face, thanks to which the person and animal blend into one being. This is similarly apparent in the photograph from 1975, in which the national flag of stars and stripes envelops a large portion of a corpulent American's body on a beach, as well as the image of nude artists painting a fully clothed model.

Typically however Erwit's humour is more understated, requiring the viewer to look at the photo for a while before noticing the subtle innuendos. Such images include a moment captured in Poland of a crowd of people waiting for absolution before an impromptu confessional, and a photograph of a group of young girls dressed in national costume following in the wake of a flock of geese.

Elliott Erwit spent a considerable part of his life growing up on the road and was strongly influenced by a meeting with legendary photographer, Robert Capa, thanks to whom he became a member and later president of prestigious MAGNUM Photos. One special phenomenon of his work are shots of four-legged friends, specifically dogs. These have been the subject of his photos for a long time and to this day he has devoted four separate thematic cycles to them. "I love dogs. It's easy to photograph them. When I want to get their attention, I bark. They're basically hairy humans," Erwit has been heard to say.

Exhibited images also include portraits of famous personalities. Elliott Erwit took the first of these in 1939 to earn some extra cash in Hollywood during his studies by taking photos of the local stars. The entrance room is dominated by a portrait of preoccupied Cuban revolutionary, Che Guevara with his eyes looking up at a dissipating cloud of tobacco smoke. A little further along are photographs capturing an encounter between Nikita Khrushchev and Richard Nixon, a grieving Jacqueline Kennedy at her husband's funeral in Arlington, and as always a highly lascivious Marilyn Monroe. "I have to say I'm starting to get tired of all the interviews and media attention. It's always about the same thing – Marilyn Monroe, Khrushchev. I took other shots too, although perhaps they didn't become as famous," Erwit lamented a while ago.