

The trilogy *Garden Store* had a budget of CZK 120 million. Is this the biggest project you have ever worked on?

No, it isn't. I worked on a Russian film *Viy*, which had a budget which was just shy of 40 million dollars. But it is true that in the Czech and European context in general it was an epic film.

For the trilogy you had to create a specific world which was articulated in three spaces: the hairdresser Otta's functionalist villa, the titular garden store for the gardener Milos and the apartment from the first-republic era of his brother-in-law Jindrich. What was your starting point?

Yes, there are three worlds. First, the world of Jindrich, the grandfather of the screenwriter Petr Jarchovsky and a character most representative of our nation. And then there are the two other worlds of then businessmen, the hairdresser Otta and the gardener Milos. I identify both of them more as the exception to the rule. They were people willing to invest in the future and build their own world with the intention to create something valuable for the next generation, something considered quite normal in the rest of the developed world.

Jindrich was a nice ordinary clerk who loved the elegant world of aviation and worked at the airport as a radio telegraphist because he could use the Morse code.

With the advent of the Nazi era the first of the three joined the resistance. Instead of protecting his primary responsibility – his family. After his return from the camp, he was rewarded for the resistance activity with a functionalist apartment originally owned by Germans. This luxurious and very modern apartment in Bubeneč was most likely created by a Czech architect and perhaps for someone who could have afforded something like this in the era of so called First Republic, probably Jewish factory owners. The apartment, which had been confiscated by the Germans, was preserved and its original architecture was kept up during the war ... and that was also why it had been confiscated. It was handed over to Jindrich in its unchanged form as another "confiscation". It was not until his arrival that it had undergone some irreversible changes.

The original appearance of the interior admired more the purity and linearity of the architecture and the man is just a quasi-guest. Jindřich change the color scheme and the light from the darkened walls migrated onto their faded human faces or their frustrated destinies, victims of their own hatred.

After the war, people refused to live in the furniture left behind by Germans, and unfortunately, they destroyed everything that was a reminder of them.

Even if it was good Czech functionalist design.

And this rude interference actually destroyed the values they would have otherwise built as patriots.

Not only you build the film worlds, but you also provide them with a certain ethos, hiding the mentality of the nation inside them. Only a few viewers will be able to understand the hidden meaning – don't you

feel underappreciated?

Not at all! The film is one of the most influential media platforms, and therefore, as the author of the visual form of the film, you have a huge responsibility for what message you are sending out in your own trueness. The film is a form of visual culture, and so everything that makes up this visual message has its reason and sometimes even refers directly to something specific.

Yes, it is possible that the "unprofessional" uninformed public, will perhaps have some difficulty with realizing some of these nuances. But on the other hand, it has to be said that, unfortunately, sometimes even the professional public, is unsure why some things are presented in a certain way. And then only through their seemingly intellectual comments, they critique something that they then themselves haven't been able to decipher and so unfortunately influence the opinions of those who trust them for being the professional public.

You create the worldview for the public with subliminal messages. How do you deal with that responsibility?

I do not know whether I am creating a worldview ... I try to formulate my opinion with the utmost responsibility, which, of course, respects the source information and, in the given context stylizes them pointing out their specificities to make the message come out in its trueness.

However, it is not the case and the concept itself might ask for the reversal of this original trueness and the reformulation if needed.

In a sense, a film is able to formulate or modify an opinion of a society. So every message that has been communicated correctly has its effects ... positive and negative.

A film as a visionary, can influence the future aesthetic perception or define the image of an already forgotten memory.

Film is a form of passive culture which is most digestible and therefore popular. And we all are responsible for what we do.

Did you educate the public about ethos at FAMU (Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts in Prague) scenography workshops, or did you keep it more specific, more on the craft level?

I told them what the formulation of the film visual form is.

Since this profession has unfortunately been devalued in this context to a position where it had no added credit, even for the generally required credibility of the work in the framework of funding, i.e. the ranked professions. It started being perceived as something slightly above a film design director and a location consultant.

The very history of the Czech film awards proves that... how difficult it was to find the name for the role of the person responsible for the film visuals despite the fact that this profession has been in existence since almost the very beginning of the film industry.

I tried to teach them how to use it, even in the system of the forgotten

hierarchy, to teach them who and where does what ... Simply put - how to grasp the essence of the story and properly formulate the narrative value, even if it should break all the traditional rules. Since the film is not just about the audio, we have the radio for that.

So what is the film architect responsible for?

For the overall visual side of the film, if the director does not feel confident of being the "artist" who can tell the story non-verbally and properly.

To summarize, the producer is the dad of the project, which should give the stimulus for the creation of that particular piece of art, even with the precise articulation of the desired value, what message the specific piece of art actually delivers.

And that's the concept!

The producer is, in this sense, the "lead artist".

For example, in the visual fine art, it is not a necessity for an artist to be able to paint but to define the piece of art, because there will be a team of people in the end to help you materialize your particular idea for which you are solely responsible. And the fact that someone might deny that only means that they talk about crafts and are lost in some clichés.

Then, there is a scriptwriter who writes the script on the basis of existing stories, and according to the producer's instructions. And then a director whom the producer respects as the author, but of course it has certain limits. The director is responsible for telling a story based on the literary source in the framework of the producer's definition.

And then there's a set designer who does the same thing but on the non-verbal level. And this whole group is completed by a cameraman who perceives this world with all the added value or ties it nicely together. But it is fair to say that sometimes, due to the absence of the designer, he might also substitute his role. Which is probably the most common model within the formulation of the film visual concept.

The question, then, is to what extent this formulation is conceptual and rational, and to what extent it is only aesthetic!

Then, of course, you have a huge number of very important professions that just nicely fit in this predefined structure.

Well, but except for the last part, that does not really work very well in our setting.

Because our cinematography does not work much with the intellectually generated visualization. It might play more with the idea of the radio. With most of the current Czech movies, unfortunately, you can turn off the picture and listen to it as if it was a radio drama. The actors will tell you in the dialogue that they are cold and that they will go to the left because there is a heated house. And so the trilogy *Garden Store* is, in this context and with the enormous support of Viktor Tauš, exceptional and it tries to completely respect the narrative through its visual form.

In *Garden Store*, you talk about the complicated decades from 1939 to 1960. How do you look back at such a challenging task?

It's not difficult to tell the story of the decades that have already been defined, because there is a lot of source material and books and so on.

What is more complicated is to find the key to what you actually want to say through a particular piece of work. And at the same time to support the story itself and the message within. There is no point in being just a postman who simply delivers the content of the script.

In *Garden Store* I wished to talk about what we are capable of creating as a nation and also about what we are capable of destroying as a nation.

And when creating a world that begins in the thirties and goes to almost today, it was a challenge to find it all in the emerging world of functionalism.

The period of one of our most quality architecture eras, which was subsequently devalued and later rehabilitated in the nineties.

The architecture, which not only points to the quality of our thinking, but also to the craftsmanship, and also to the world that, thanks to the socialist deformation of the original concept and in its original trueness, is paradoxically still confused by the public today as socialist representation.

To quote the script, the appearance of the garden store is described as: "a small house with a double sloping roof" and it would be hardly possible on this platform to tell the story as well as in the space of the before mentioned architectural development.

Could a gardener have a villa like that in the 1930s?

Of course. This one is, according to the script, in the region of Hradec Králové where architects like Gočár and Kotěra were active ... When they were commissioned to build something outside of Prague and it was a greenfield investment, the architects could have been more creative. It is usually a challenge and it looks good in their professional CV. And businessmen, like this gardener or hairdresser, had their worlds built that should have lasted for generations.

These houses are still around, but they are either rebuilt or surrounded by later building development and vegetation that had not been there originally. That's why we do not have any vegetation in the movie, and why we really had to build the houses from scratch, so there would be nothing surrounding them. And the fact that they are now a listed building with a different function... as a museum or protected artifact taken care of by a group of civil servants does not mean that it could not have been a regular family home at some point in the past. So, these doubts and general questions rather point to our own problem that something was actually interrupted! That only a hut, a prefabricated house and a stylishly warped architecture are the only legitimate space for a citizen of the Czech Republic! Sometimes people even own mountains and it is absolutely normal. So why are we still wondering if it was possible? And even if there really was not a single gardener in then Czechoslovakia with such a habitat, wouldn't it be great to imagine it and at least to give us the chance now? Otherwise, we are merely a part of the "prefab" culture.

Were there any arguments with the scriptwriter Petr Jarchovský when you were redefining the screenplay?

Filming a movie is not about the dispute, but about who has a stronger argument. Jarchovský and Hřebejk needed some time to get used to my approach... Honestly, I am not sure how Peter processed it, but Jan went radio silent for a while, and then sent me a message two days later at midnight saying that it was a great idea. I was very pleased with this message, and I still appreciate his courage to enter the world designed in such a fashion! And Petr Jarchovsky may have realized that his family's saga must be a little stylized to support the main idea. Actually I knew from Peter that the house where the real garden store used to be in Jaroměř was still "there". I went there and met a lady who initially did not want to let me in but later she told me things that are not actually in the script, but they were very important to me. The lady told me how the garden store used to be huge and it used to be one of the most progressive ones. Then the nationalization came, then the agricultural cooperatives and then gradual elimination, actually an honest manifestation of our nation. The owner of the garden store, Mr. Vecka, and not Pecka, who had been allowed to live there, had to watch every day in despair how the members of the agricultural coop were tearing down the world he had built.

That's why I needed to create a world that was so obviously ahead of its time so the viewers could simply guess what had been happening there.

Why does the house have so many glass windows and why is it standing over the greenhouses?

For this particular entrepreneur - the gardener, the architecture of his dwelling was not important, what was important was the architecture of their property, their products and that would be the greenhouses and their functionality. One of the partners of the film *Garden Store*, Mr. Dvořák - the owner of Garden Store Dvořák in Teplice, showed me a real seizure document of their family's property from the 50s. The document, so detailed that probably even the last flower bud was included, listed items worth 1,500,000 of then the Czech crowns even if the value was reduced.

That must have been tremendous estate, right?

And so, in this context, it is perhaps not the building, which is protected by the wannabe professional public today, but the greenhouses and their content what had the real value. The building could easily have been built with the financial support of a bank, just as it could be today. And it happens to be such a post-masterpiece..., probably because there really were great architects.

Who might have designed the house as a sort of levitating glass ship that allowed the owners to observe the values they had created. And so it was a just really bad luck that this original and even fantastically architectural concept became the pain itself and the torture tool at the same time. The gardeners were forced to observe the destruction of their property from inside through the transparency of the house. And this, in my view, better illustrates the real sense of pain than the one that the real look of the house gives us. My house is a concept that honors and reflects the whole idea of the story and supports its narrative value.

Jan Hřebejk mentioned to me how the sound engineers struggled with the horse entering Otto's villa. How do you collaborate with other professions?

You must respect them and that goes without saying. Film is a teamwork and it is unthinkable to put a spoke in someone else's wheel. If you do, it will be reflected in the overall work. But, of course, the visuals themselves are the most important. If I design an old wooden floor somewhere, and the sound engineer says there will be a problem with it, the floor will have to get insulated, etc. If that is possible, and if it does not really affect the budget in such a way that the additional cost would make it more expensive than some extra work in post-production. But the sound cannot take anything away from the visuals in which the film's message is imbedded. Naturally, the other professions can comment on the artistic vision beforehand and may be able to communicate their respective technical issues, and the art department will try to address it. Well, it should work this way but in our domestic conditions it's a lot less organized. Because in order for this to work there would have to be more time for preparation, which is probably the most important thing in the making of a film, and this can even take at least as much time as the shooting itself, and no one will pay for that.

If, as a producer in the European film funding process, you include such an item and it maybe a few millions extra, because it can amount to such a sum, then the "expert" committee will throw it away and they will tell you that you do not need money to form the film visuals, etc. I have had many similar experiences and with amounts that would not even cover the officials' dinner! Nobody realizes that good preparation includes time - salary, buying books, studying individual documents, creating models, finding ideal locations and there are associated costs - accommodation, meals, transportation etc. And so it gets solved during the actual filming and you can guess the results! Or at least you have the chance to read about it in the coming reviews!

How much of Otta's villa is an actual building?

Film buildings that are professionally made resemble the real wooden constructions very closely. Where you cannot fake it are the windows: if you want to use double sash windows, you just have to make them, otherwise it will be obvious when you see the reflections in the glass. You know, the time when people worked in some sort of a "shortcut" or a simplified form is long gone and also due to the near perfect picture and the lack of stylization. Also digital recording has become so perfect that you have to be as close to the real thing as possible as far as the film buildings and other props are concerned. The question is whether this should be this way. The high picture quality is mainly due to post-production work, which has logically more room for further improvement of the desired spectacle, etc. However, this obsession with perfection and manufacturing true reality actually leads us away from the reality. Because true reality can never be produced within the normal cinema format, or rather an "amusement-park-style attraction" like 4dx ... etc. Our peripheral vision and the ability to feel or to think what could be behind what otherwise cannot actually be seen ... what is behind the wall or behind the door cannot be transferred in this mediated information. Even photorealism

failed in its pursuit of reality, and what still remains more realistic is the "impression", which better defines the feeling that creates the reality afterwards. Otherwise it is just an imprint of the fact.

For us, Karel Zeman and his work still remain, in a sense, undefeated. His work is absolutely stylized and yet leaves us with the feeling of reality. Everything is related to everything as I've already mentioned.

Back to your question: Otta's villa, of course, could have been built for cost saving reasons as one building with a garden, but thanks to our local conditions, it was divided into two buildings. We had to deal with the actors' work load and their previous engagements. Which is nothing unusual in the Czech Republic. Our actors perform in all kinds of programs, shows, and commercials, which is a really big puzzle to solve for an assistant director, who must, among other things, synchronize the calendars of people who do not actually have time to shoot a movie. For example, in the time span of about one month, we had to shoot all the interiors, and then again, in a different limited time span shoot the exteriors.

For such an extensive project, which begins in the year 1939 and ends somewhere in the 60s ... it was really complicated, and when considering the interested actors and the scheduled shooting plan, the decorations themselves had to be modified during the shooting. For example, in the morning it was year 1939, after lunch the snow-covered Prague in 1950 ... and in the afternoon the spring of 1945. The construction team, the teams of special effects and film design team worked almost as the teams at Formula One pit stops, with the difference that they only work on four wheels ...

And then when you hear the so-called "professional public" to complain that there was not enough veneer on something, and so on - it's ridiculous, how could it be perfect. Unfortunately, the very reason for such a situation is not mentioned anywhere.

Actors do not have time to shoot the movie?

I know it sounds absurd, but basically they don't ... They are busy and then they have other demands resembling those of European actors who actually have some international credibility ...

For example, a Finnish actress Katy Outinen - when she was offered a role from director Viktor Tauš in *Clownwise*, not only did she live the story, but she was always available for filming, for the director and his rehearsals, but she also participated in all the necessary "technical" procedures ... And her salary was almost the same as what some local actors, who didn't win the Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival, were paid.

I remember reading some of motivation letters that Viktor received from French actors, saying how important these roles are for them because they have clowns in the family ... etc.

It was amazing!

The way it works with our actors is that their agent would provide their calendars after signing the contract, and you would ask - but when do they actually have time for the filming?

How does this specifically influence your work?

Well, it is a complication and also the final result is challenged on the professional level...

You just have to respect their schedule, you're looking for a compromise to make the two worlds meet, and that will fundamentally affect the film's visuals. Otherwise, of course, under normal circumstances with a film such as *Garden Store*, the chronological formulation and adapting of decorations with the necessary time and space for the realization would be a priority. Building and adapting decorations is a minor thing, but doing it backwards, through postproduction is a huge challenge ... and terribly expensive!

The plans on the wall behind you show how busy you are.

This is just one of many projects. There is a schedule like this for each of them and sometimes they overlap.

I remember there were three films in one day, and each was in a different country.

In the morning, I had a technical tour in Helsinki, then there were afternoon location tours in Třeboň in the Czech Republic and the day was finished with a night's meeting in Luxembourg.

Each of these current projects' paperwork is nicely stacked on a desk and pinned to the notice board so you can track them as a whole.

You can just dive in and recall the context and you're back on track.

What are you working on now?

As a designer I am working at the moment on about twelve projects and on half of them also as a producer.

K Film – the company founded by my father, works and develops projects here as well as abroad.

Since some projects are, unfortunately, difficult to fund from local sources, we are forced to prepare them in other countries as well. I can give you some examples - a very visual fairy tale, a bizarre comedy from the past, or the story of the famous Czech racer Prince Georg Christian Lobkowitz, whose story, except for a few Czech real locations, usually takes place in a very spectacular world that describes the background of the Formula One's beginnings.

From our domestic projects - co-production projects of course (no surprise there) we are working on a story that describes some painful places in our society. It is a story of about 10-13-year-old boy whose parents are getting divorced and he is beginning to hate the rest of the world.

This story is not primarily about the pain because every reasonable person can imagine that, and it would also not bring anything new to the movie but it is about where we are today as a society! Why are we not generally able to solve a problem and prefer to run away leaving bad aftertaste if, according to the classic rules, we manage to live harmoniously otherwise!

And to what extent we are victims of the process with dysfunctional legal regulations and distorted justice, which only keeps up the remaining construction based upon this incompetence and unfortunately surrounds us with all sorts of "absurdities ..." parasiting on our pain. And yet as a social

arbiter, it is not able to name these things properly.

And what are you working on with the producer of *Clownwise* and *Garden Store* Viktor Tauš?

We are preparing two movies and one miniseries for the Czech Television and two theater performances ... that is now, but what the situation will be like in a week I do not know.

By the way, one of the movies is called *Amerikánka* (the Czech title), and it's an amazing story based on real events, which takes place for the most part in the 1970s in Florida in a circus, and then in our country, in the totalitarian times in a children's home. It's a fantastically visual platform! And then there is this screenplay called *A Doll*, it deals with homosexuality and pedophilia, but in my exposition it was redrafted. These individual labels are just representative of our actions today. Or more specifically, the future representation of our society. It is essentially a science fiction that reflects the perversion of our contemporary society, and in the future it defines "homosexuality" only as the coexistence of a man with another man who, which thanks to our contemporary context, is his rescue and certain pedophilia is represented through a toy, just a reminder of our childhood, where through our parents we remember the time when common sense still had its place in the society!

It is by no means adoration of homosexuality or pedophilia.

Based on the texts on your website, I would guess that you like science fiction and architecture as a means to project visions of the future.

I am not sure if I really like science fiction that much, but it is true that the world of architecture that logically influences society is very much connected to the world of film and vice versa. It is therefore very difficult to judge who is a visionary and who, in turn, recycles.

Some of the elements and visions contained in these films become reality today and reflect on architecture and design.

For example, the film *Tron*, certainly influenced the current form of the automotive industry, but it is also a question whether it was recycled and in which design or visual visions.

Are there any projects where you need to silence the visual aspect?

You can never silence the visual as long as we still talk about movies!

But, of course, you can suppress some artwork that can hurt this particular piece of work and unnecessarily attracts unwanted attention, and would provide a bad service to the story.

But that is very individual.

Once I had to prepare a psychological horror. In defining the final form of the film, I came up with a concept where it would take place in a neutral environment, something that is familiar to everyone. Everyone could then find something recognizable that would resemble their own living situation. And so

we, the audience, would be able to understand this psychological issues of the character better. Unfortunately, this concept was not met with enthusiasm, as the creators preferred a more traditional concept of horror - a hilltop house that you would find with Hitchcock or Burton. So unfortunately, in my opinion, the audience was robbed of a certain suggestion, because as soon as the film was announced, members of the audience could prepare for this quasi consumer fear!

Are you capable of working on commercials while working on a feature film?

I am, but I do not want to! I no longer do commercials. It's not for me. I have to believe in what I do, and I also have to have fun doing it and if I do not have fun, I will not do it. And to be able to envision a movie, I must love the story and find the message I want to tell the audience.

It's a different world. It is the world of being responsible for the message we present to the public and it really does not happen in the world of advertising! I think of it as a waste of time, time spent just to make money and to enjoy it afterwards. But I do not have the "afterwards" very much, I have never known another world.

It is true that K film sometimes produces advertising, but it is because it is a way to get the necessary funding for the development of other film projects.