



### Saudek

Jan Saudek's hand-painted nudes are among the most instantly recognisable photographs around. And despite the fact that they are despised as much as they are adored, he remains one of the most popular photographers of the late 20th century

– something that Taschen hopes to cash in on with its huge 450-page monograph of the prolific Czech master.

Saudek is all about fantasy and pastiche, but he injects his 19th century boudoir schtick with an almost subversive twist, providing a more allegorical take on eroticism through his use of provocative tableaux. And it is this theatrical sophistication, along with his obsession with the 'vulgar' and the fleshy, which marks him out from his more cliché-riven contemporaries in nude photography.

However, as this extensive new book reveals, Saudek sometimes walks a thin rope between the 'theatre of sensual dreams' and pure, old-fashioned kitsch. What you already know of his work is probably his best, and it's evident that Saudek has been well edited through the years by past curators and editors. So, only the photographer's most ardent fans will be left unsated by this vast catalogue (priced £40), which like Taschen's treatment of Leni

Riefensahl a few years ago, serves as much as a biography as a career survey of his work, from the late 1950s to the present day. But what a fascinating biography it is – from his childhood internment in a Jewish labour camp, to his 'semi-legal' acceptance as an artist in communist Czechoslovakia.

In interviews and his own writings Saudek has talked of being ignored in his own country, but more recently that has all changed. The book follows last year's grand retrospective in Prague's Wenceslas Square, and his acceptance of the Artis Bohemiae Amicis alongside Milan Kundera (whose *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, you will not be surprised to learn, he much admires). At home he is now regarded as the greatest living Czech photographer, conveniently forgetting the name that comes to most people's lips abroad – that of Josef Koudelka. Nevertheless, if Saudek's your man, this latest Taschen book is an exhaustive tribute. **SB**