

PICTORIALISM

Art Photography around 1900

3.2.2023 TO 23.4.2023



ALBERTINA modern

Exhibition Facts

Duration 4. February – 23. April 2023
Venue lower level / ALBERTINA MODERN
Curator Astrid Mahler
Works 98
Catalogue Available for EUR 24,90 (German) onsite at the Museum Shop as well as via www.albertina.at

Contact Albertinaplatz 1 | 1010 Vienna
T +43 (01) 534 83 0
info@albertina.at
www.albertina.at

Opening Hours Daily 10 am – 6 pm

Press contact Daniel Benyes
T +43 (01) 534 83 511 | M +43 (0)699 12178720
d.benyas@albertina.at

Nina Eisterer
T +43 (01) 534 83 512 | M +43 (0)699 10981743
n.eisterer@albertina.at

Annual partner



Partner



Pictorialism

Art Photography Around 1900

3 February – 26 April 2023

The central concern of pictorialism and art photography in general around the turn of the 20th century was placing photography on an equal footing with fine art. In this international photographic movement, Austria's contributions played a significant role. And in the present exhibition, ALBERTINA MODERN sets out to examine an important, roughly three-decade chapter of photography with Austrian output firmly in the spotlight.

The magnificent achievements of Habsburg-era art photography are an aspect of Viennese modernism that has not yet received anywhere near the attention it deserves. In actual fact, the photography scene back then was closely intertwined with contemporaneous avant-garde art movements. It hence arose and grew in active interplay with modern artistic tendencies ranging from historicism to art nouveau and modernism.

From the Viennese Studio into the World

Art photography around 1900, also referred to as pictorialism, was at first driven forward by wealthy amateurs who devoted themselves to the—then still quite expensive—pursuit of photography with great enthusiasm. A catalyst of primary importance here was the advent of the gelatin dry plate, which greatly simplified photographic technology's use. Over the course of the 1880s and 1890s and with the British Arts and Crafts Movement as a guiding light, amateur photography eventually grew into a movement that aimed to aesthetically renew and artistically enhance photography at large.

The Austrian pioneers associated with Heinrich Kühn and Hugo Henneberg engaged in lively exchange with leading American protagonists such as Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen.

Works by these artist-friends were exhibited and celebrated on a regular basis in both countries.

Close connections with the progressive Viennese art scene likewise formed. Elaborate printing techniques enabled the creation of visually stunning compositions informed by the discipline of painting that were exhibited publicly at the Vienna Secession in 1902. However, it was in early 20th-century commercial photography that pictorialism's influence was strongest.

Artistic photography came to a late climax during the 1920s thanks to Rudolf Koppitz, Dora Kallmus (Atelier d'Ora), Trude Fleischmann, and other famous students of the former k. u. k. Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt [Imperial and Royal Institution for Graphic Education and Research] in Vienna.

This presentation extends from works by the movement's English precursors to outstanding Austrian and international achievements in the pictorialist style. Moreover, a close look is devoted to art photography's influence on professional portrait photography as well as its creative visual heritage, which reached far into the interwar period.

This exhibition arose from a desire to draw attention to important but previously under-illuminated parts of the ALBERTINA Museum's own collection and to make our holdings accessible to a broader audience. In furtherance of this interest, works by certain artists are complemented with selected objects from Viennese collections.

Curator: Astrid Mahler

Exhibition Texts

The English Precursors

By the time the French painter Louis Jacques M. N. P. Daguerre presented the invention of photography to the public in Paris in 1839, the scientist William Henry Fox Talbot had developed another photographic process in England. Unlike Daguerreotype, which, producing unique prints, did not allow reproduction, Talbot's invention was based on the negative and positive process. Due to the possibility of making multiple copies, Talbot's method was to prevail in the end. Talbot's trailblazing achievement marked the beginning of a long photographic tradition in his home country. Because of their in-depth exploration of photographic aesthetics, the English pioneers became role models for a circle of committed amateurs who, from the 1880s onward, became increasingly interested in the medium's pictorial aspects.

In the 1840s, the landscape and genre painter David Octavius Hill and the photographer Robert Adamson established a successful business partnership. They used waxed watercolor paper as negative material, which due to its coarse paper fibers caused a soft blur. Their work fell into oblivion until it was rediscovered around 1900. The simplicity in terms of arrangement and the haziness were considered exemplary in the ambition to reform portrait photography.

Starting out as an amateur, Julia Margaret Cameron took to photography at the age of 48 years. Influenced by Pre-Raphaelite painting, she created portraits of her family and prominent friends. Her large-size heads viewed from close up exhibit a powerful painterly component because of their blur. In spite of contemporary critics favoring sharp prints—which was now possible thanks to more powerful lenses—she was to become a trailblazing ideal for future art photographers.

The British photographer Henry Peach Robinson developed highly influential theories with which he transferred the principles of pictorial composition and distribution of light propagated by the visual arts to photography. He made use of montage by combining, for example, a landscape and a cloud negative to create a single picture. He employed the same principle for groups of figures, which he built within a landscape setting as scenic tableaux consisting of up to five negatives.

The “Trifolium” and the Gum Bichromate Process

Three Austrian amateurs were among the foremost founders of Pictorialism in photography on an international scale: Hugo Henneberg, Heinrich Kühn, and Hans Watzek. Tied by the bond of their personal friendship, they formed an interest group they referred to as “Clover” or “Trifolium.” Their main concern was to elevate the status of photography as an artistic medium and put it on an equal footing with painting. An important vehicle was the gum bichromate process, a special printing technique that greatly enhanced photography’s pictorial potentials. Its manipulability during the printing process, its chromatic power, its decorative effect, and, last but not least, its character of uniqueness brought it close to the medium of painting. When the Trifolium was permitted to present their works at the Vienna Secession, this meant the recognition of its members and the acknowledgment of their ambitions.

Heinrich Kühn’s landscape is executed as a tri-color gum bichromate print. A colored picture is created in multiple printing rounds and by using various pigments. In Kühn’s image, the individual pictorial elements are combined to create a decorative, almost abstract entity. Early on, the artist harked back to the compositional principles of the Secession, as they were exemplarily employed by Gustav Klimt in his landscape paintings. This shows how the Pictorialists’ work soon reflected international contemporary currents, and that they knew how to translate present-day impulses into their medium.

The Austrian Amateur Movement and the Camera-Club

By installing the Vienna Camera-Club (initially referred to as “Club of Amateur Photographers in Vienna”) in 1887, many Austrian amateurs joined forces within an association. As practicing photography required substantial funds, its members came from such social strata as the wealthy bourgeoisie and the monarchy’s aristocracy. In addition to their distinct inclination for everything technical and scientific photography, a keen interest in aesthetics pushed to the fore. What was vehemently and lastingly propagated in England as “photography as art” at the time was enthusiastically welcomed. Not only did the works of English photographers suit contemporary taste, they also seemed to translate into the medium of photography the very style that made itself felt as a progressive tendency in the visual arts in Austria in the form of “Atmospheric Impressionism.” Professional photography’s precise sense of detail thus gave way to the new ideal of a soft blur.

Travel photography was one of the most popular genres amongst amateurs. In line with the modern interest in Orientalism, Nathaniel von Rothschild staged interesting types in exotic settings. An offspring of the famous family of bankers, Rothschild was one of the monarchy’s wealthiest men. He combined a love for photography with traveling and writing.

The civil engineer Robert von Stockert passionately devoted himself to botany. In his private gardens he cultivated flowers for his decorative arrangements, which he mostly composed in the form of blooming bouquets or bunches. The invention of the collotype enabled him to combine flowers and other objects in (nearly) natural colors.

For his picture, the sugar magnate Julius Strakosch chose a tightly cropped view of marshlands. The motif represents a break with contemporary taste for conventional vistas allowing a precise view over impressive landscape panoramas. In keeping with the contemporary style of “Atmospheric Impressionism” in painting, the “paysage intime” came to prevail in the pictorial world of amateur photographers.

Photography’s great wish for color was fulfilled in 1907, when the Lumière brothers marketed the autochrome plate. However, in addition to high material costs, the first commercial color

process had another major disadvantage: delivering diapositives on glass plates, it only allowed the production of unique images, while reproductions were only possible at a considerable loss of quality at the time. The technique was almost exclusively used for projection. The following motifs from the Vienna Woods, Bohemia, and Slovakia derive from a presentation by the industrialist Karl Prokop.

Heinrich Kühn

As early as before 1900, Heinrich Kühn was one of the leading protagonists of international art photography. He methodically dealt with contrasts of light and dark in photography and limited himself to few themes, such as still life, portraiture, and portrayals of his children. Trained to hold out patiently from an early age, the four children became experienced models posing for the pictures in specific clothes. Influenced by his American colleagues, Kühn increasingly relocated his family studies to natural settings outdoors. Resorting to the motif of the hiker, he arranged his models in ever-new variants, depicting them in the landscape from unusual perspectives while sometimes creating almost abstract compositions.

Heinrich Kühn and the New York Photo-Secession

Heinrich Kühn's close personal affiliation with the amateur scene in Vienna lasted until shortly after 1900 and was succeeded by his friendship with the American Alfred Stieglitz. Stieglitz introduced Kühn to the New York Photo-Secession and supported him to gain international fame. Influenced by his American role models Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Gertrude Käsebier, and Clarence H. White, Kühn began to reorient himself around 1904. Having systematically explored the contrasts of light and dark in photography, he now expanded the tonality of his pictures under the impression of the painterly palette of their small-size platinum prints. The Americans also ideally accommodated Kühn's ambitions thematically, such as in terms of representing the human figure *en plein air*. The high esteem in which the American photographers held Kühn's work for their part is reflected in the correspondence between Kühn and Stieglitz, which they upheld for more than thirty years.

The American Pictorialists popularized the theme of the family picture. Their approach, which was unconventional at the time, conveyed the impression of immediacy and lightness. In the works of Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence Hudson White, women and children set in dreamy idylls play a central role.

The theme of the metropolis was a popular genre among the Americans. As had been demonstrated by the Impressionist Claude Monet, Edward Steichen captured his motif, a high-riser, in changing light situations. In his pictures, the modernity of the city and its architecture are defined by a subjective atmospheric content. Such weather situations as fog and rain, the blurring of contours, and the use of *repoussoir* motifs are characteristic of his image of New York.

Seizing the occasion of an ocean voyage to Europe, Alfred Stieglitz photographed the steerage of the third class passengers. Stieglitz, who had long been an advocate of soft focus, published this comparably sober picture several years later in the context of a series of “snapshots” from New York and its environs. In addition to pictures of the harbor, ships, trains, and high-risers, *The Steerage* attracted a great deal of attention because of its modernist aestheticism and unusual documentary approach. Today it is considered Stieglitz’s central work.

Fascinated by the painterly aestheticism of works of the New York Photo-Secession, Paul Strand came into contact with Alfred Stieglitz. The latter supported and encouraged Strand’s orientation toward new themes and a more objective approach. He made portraits in the streets of New York like that of the blind newswoman, all of which stand out for their documentary humanism. Photographs of such objects as a fence, visualizing an interest in surface and structure, as well as a tendency toward abstraction, are considered as groundbreaking for the modern movement as well.

The Influence of Art Photography on Commercial Portrait Photography

One of the most far-reaching impacts of Pictorialism was its influence on the aesthetics of commercial portrait photography, where monotony and ennui had long made itself felt during the nineteenth century, with standardized poses, interchangeable studio decorations, uniform lighting, and the prevalent application of retouching. In search of alternative representational methods and situations, amateurs sought to arrange their protagonists in a way that looked less posed. Superfluous accessories were eliminated, and nuanced lighting was to accentuate the models' personalities. In Germany, several photographers, including Nicola Perscheid and Hugo Erfurth, embraced the Pictorialists' suggestions as early as before 1900 with enormous success. Austria's commercial photographers opened the first modern studios starting in the mid-1910s.

Atelier d'Ora was one of the first commercial photo studios in Vienna to adopt not only the Pictorialists' elaborate portrait style, but also their use of special photographic processes. Shortly before founding her own studio, Dora Kallmus went to Berlin for several months to work for Nicola Perscheid as a fee-paying student. There, Kallmus met Arthur Benda, who followed her to Vienna and, as an employee and future partner, was put in charge of the technical part of studio work.

The Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt as a Multiplier

In Austria, the k. k. Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt in Vienna (briefly referred to as "the Graphische"), which had been founded in 1888, played a major role in popularizing art photographic ideals in portrait photography. This was owing to several important personalities teaching at the country's most renowned school for commercial photographers. As first head of its department of photography, Hans Lenhard, who was also a committed member of the Camera-Club, propagated the reformed aesthetics in portraiture. His successor, Karel Novák, dominated teaching shortly before World War I. His students, including Rudolf Koppitz, were still strongly influenced by the Pictorialist approach transmitted by him. Koppitz was in charge of photographic training at the "Graphische" as an influential teacher and department head until well into the 1930s.

Both Rudolf Koppitz and Anton Josef Trčka attended Karel Novák's courses at the "Graphische" in 1912/13. Novák explicitly supported a distinct penchant for ornament and a preference for stylized compositions. Under his guidance as a teacher, his students created works in which the ornamental and two-dimensional language of form of artists like Gustav Klimt, whose approach was inspired by Japanese art, was translated into the medium of photography.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the human body as an expressive vehicle of moods and emotions was a topical theme in art. Influenced by modern dance, which was about to emerge at the time, the models' poses started to break away from the conventions of portraiture. In an interplay between his own ornamental approach and Schiele's self-enactment, Trčka created pictures varying the expressive gestures of the sitter.

Motion Study is Rudolf Koppitz's most famous work. Even during his lifetime, innumerable copies of this motif were exhibited, reproduced, and sold around the globe. Besides his work as a teacher at the "Graphische," he and his wife, the photographer Anna Arbeitlang, ran a private studio where they received the Plastic Ballet Issatschenko, a Russian dance company. In this elegant ornamental study that has the air of an allegory, the tradition of art photography reached a late peak.

After World War I, many portrait studios run by women were established in Vienna. Trude Fleischmann in particular stood out for her psychologizing *mise-en-scènes*, which, in terms of form, tended toward ornament, with the modulation of light playing an essential role. In the 1930s, Fleischmann stood for a moderate type of modernism while remaining true to elegant society portraits rooted in the spirit of the *fin de siècle*, in spite of an increasingly objective approach.

The Late Phase of Art Photography in the Interwar Period

In the 1920s, new photographic movements emerged under the directives of such artists as László Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Rodtschenko, and Albert Renger-Patzsch: “New Vision” and “New Objectivity.” These alternative approaches to photography were characterized by pictorial sharpness, unusual perspectives, a surface-texture-oriented appearance, a preference for an abstract formal idiom, and, last but not least, a strong effort to achieve objectivity. Said approaches also developed, among other things, to distinguish themselves from the aesthetic concepts of art photography, and they were made possible thanks to new, more inexpensive, and, above all, lightweight cameras. What was typical of domestic and partly international amateur photography of the 1930s was a stylistic *mélange* the Austrians referred to as “moderate modernism.” Although they did make use of new perspectives and viewpoints, they still preferred the bromoil print for its painterly aestheticism.

Today Peter Paul Atzwanger is considered a leading exponent of Austrian *Heimat* photography. His thematic spectrum comprises idyllic views of alpine scenery, scenes of rural work, and people in traditional regional costumes. Dating from the years after World War I and supported by the ideology of the Austrofascist Corporate State, these images were meant to help constitute a new national identity. Their soft focus accommodated a conservative worldview while camouflaging a clearly modernist approach to composition.

The Czech-born photographer Drahomír Josef Růžička grew up in the United States and studied medicine in Vienna before settling in New York as a physician. One of the most important and most active American amateur photographers of the interwar years, he sent work to exhibitions around the globe and thus achieved international fame. In his meticulous studies, Růžička captured the architecture and streets of New York. His most well-known photographs were made in New York’s old Pennsylvania Station, where the incidence of light, the resulting twilight, and contrasts of light and shadow awakened his interest.

Pressebilder

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at:



Anton Josef Trčka
Egon Schiele Posing, 1914
Gelatine silver print
12 x 9 cm
ALBERTINA, Wien



Heinrich Kühn
Twilight, 1896
Bi-color gum bichromate print
38 x 27 cm
ALBERTINA, Wien



Anton Josef Trčka
Decorative Group, 1912/1913
Platinotype on Japanese Paper
23 x 12 cm
ALBERTINA, Wien
Dauerleihgabe der Höheren Graphischen
Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt



Anton Josef Trčka
Decorative Group, 1912/1913
Platinotype on Japanese Paper
23 x 12 cm
ALBERTINA, Wien
Dauerleihgabe der Höheren Graphischen
Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt



Franz Kaiser
Two Girls in a Flowery Meadow, c. 1910
Autochrom,
9 × 12 cm
ALBERTINA, Wien.
Dauerleihgabe der Höheren Graphischen Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt



Franz Kaiser
Drawing Class at the Graphischen
Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt in Vienna, 1909
Autochrome
11 × 17,5 cm
ALBERTINA, Wien.
Dauerleihgabe der Höheren Graphischen Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt