LANDSCAPES&
PEOPLE

ALBERTINA

Contents

Exhibition facts

Duration	25 May to 30 October 2016
Venue	Galleries for Photography
Curators	Dr Walter Moser, Dr Anna Hanreich, Dr Astrid Moser
Exhibits	120

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PARTNER

Landscapes & People
From the Photographic Collection of the Albertina
25 May – 30 October 2016

Whether as aestheticised art photography or framed by a socio-political context, for scientific documentation or as idealised *Heimat* photography: landscapes and their inhabitants have always been in the focus of a great many photographers. This exciting and diverse theme is taken up by the second presentation of works from the Albertina's Photographic Collection, in which over 100 masterpieces provide an overview of central trends of photographic history while spanning an arc from well-known artists of the 19th century to contemporary figures.

In the mid-19th century, documentation was the main purpose for which the entirely new medium of photography was employed. Photographic output ranged from detailed images of the Austrian Alps and Gustav Jägermayer's large-format depictions of the Großglockner massif to picturesque photos of far-off places and their inhabitants, such as Raimund Stillfried von Rathenitz's photographs taken in Japan.

But the advent of international photographic pictorialism around the turn of the century saw photographers' focus shift to the artistic reproduction of atmospheric landscapes. Heinrich Kühn, Hans Watzek, and other combined a strong interest in photographic techniques with aesthetic ideals oriented towards the contemporary fine art of that period. Their central ambition was to elevate photography to the status of an artistic medium, on an equal footing with painting. This aim gave rise to large-format works and refined colouration achieved via complex techniques such as gum bichromate printing, *Gummigravüre* [a combination of gum bichromate and photogravure], and the oil print process.

At the beginning of the 1930s, it was Austria's rural and alpine areas that took centre-stage: the thematic spectrum of Austrian *Heimat* photography encompasses idyllic views of beautiful landscapes, traditional agrarian work and architecture, and people wearing regional costumes. The idealised images created by Rudolf Koppitz and Peter Paul Atzwanger were aimed at helping to provide the young Republic of Austria with an identity following the monarchy's collapse, and the later Austrofascist state and its ideology would eventually provide the basis for their use during the National Socialist era as political propaganda.

Beginning in the 1960s, American photographers such as Joel Sternfeld, Stephen Shore, and William Eggleston originated a new take on traditional landscape photography, which had until then portrayed nature as something sublime and untouched. Their photographs of the *American social landscape* featured motifs that had previously been deemed unworthy of depiction, landscapes that were unexceptional, urban, and/or shaped by human beings, which thus served to train a spotlight on social and socio-political themes of that era. This process also witnessed the birth of *New Colour Photography,* in which colour—previously shunned due to its use in the advertising and fashion worlds—was established within the realm of artistic photography as an acknowledged stylistic tool.

Featured photographers:
Fratelli Alinari | Wilhelm Angerer | Peter Paul Atzwanger | Adolphe Braun | Wilhelm Burger | William Eggleston | Seiichi Furuya | John H. Gear | Jitka Hanzlová | Gustav Jägermayer | Franz Knebel | Rudolf Koppitz | Paul Kranzler | Heinrich Kühn | Joel Meyerowitz | Boris Mikhailov | Henry Peach Robinson | Stephen Shore | Giorgio Sommer | Joel Sternfeld | Raimund Baron Stillfried von Rathenitz | Ferenc Veress | Hans Watzek | Mario Wiberal | Hans Graf Wilczek | Manfred Willmann

Expedition into the Alps

In 1863, the photographer and art publisher Gustav Jägermayer set out for a self-funded expedition to document the Grossglockner area. He had employed a painter for selecting the points from which the photographs should be taken, five mountain guides, and twelve carriers for transporting his extensive equipment. The negatives had to be sensitized on site, exposed while wet, and developed. Contact prints were made after the expedition's return to Vienna, the size of the prints depending on the size of the glass plate negatives. Jägermayer offered the series under the title "Austrian Alps" for sale. Though his photographs are fascinating because of their outstanding quality, attention to detail, and subtly graded tonal values, his project turned out a commercial failure and his company soon had to declare itself insolvent.

Raimund Stillfried von Rathenitz

Officer Raimund Baron Stillfried von Rathenitz moved to Japan in 1868 and opened a photographic studio in Yokohama in 1871. His first pictures of the city and its surrounding scenery, which were intended for a local clientele, testify to the feeling for composition and spatial effects he had acquired during his training as a painter. His later staged studio photographs of people in traditional costumes were mainly aimed at the increasing number of tourists and informed the visual perception of the country in Europe. After his return to Vienna, the Imperial and Royal Ministry of the Interior commissioned him to document various crown estates in photographs from 1885 on. His snapshot-like street views, markedly different from the static photographs taken in Asia, were made possible by the development of photographic apparatuses and materials: the cameras were becoming smaller and lighter, the negatives more light-sensitive.

Henry Peach Robinson

The generation of Pictorialists around 1900 drew great inspiration from the English photographer and theoretician Henry Peach Robinson's work and writings. Robinson had applied principles of fine art like those of composition and the distribution of light to photography. He regarded the manipulation of photographs in the form of montages as a legitimate means for creating a painterly atmosphere. Besides combining a landscape negative and a cloud negative to one picture—the material was not suited to render both correctly at the same time because of different exposure times—he put together scenic tableaus from up to five different negatives.

Heinrich Kühn

Heinrich Kühn was one of the founders of the international photographic Pictorialism around 1900. Its amateur photographers combined a strong interest in photographic techniques with aesthetic claims informed by the fine arts of their time. They were mainly concerned with establishing photography as an artistic medium on a par with painting. The Pictorialists questioned both conventional studio photography and traditional landscape photography in its documentary precision. They preferred intimate details of nature, which they represented in painterly blurry pictures. Techniques like the gum bichromate process, creating photogravures from gum bichromate prints, and the bromoil transfer method allowed them to realize their ideas through the free choice of formats and colors. Especially Kühn dedicated himself to photographic chiaroscuro effects and restricted himself to only a few motifs such as still lifes, portraits, and pictures of his children. Showing members of his family in ever new variants in the landscape from unusual points of view, he sometimes arrived at nearly abstract compositions in his pictures of "hikers."

Heimat Photography

The range of subjects Austrian Heimat photography focused on encompassed idyllic views of beautiful landscapes, time-honored rural work, vernacular architecture, and people in traditional costume. Taken after World War I and promoted by the ideology of the Austrofascist Ständestaat, these pictures were to help establish a new national identity. Heimat photography was also a constituent of the official Austrian tourist program. It was popularized through exhibitions such as Rudolf Koppitz's "Land und Leute" (The Country and Its People) in 1936, photo books, and magazines. Heimat photographers originally followed in the tradition of Pictorialist art photography and, regardless of the conservative and retrogressive world view conveyed by their motifs, adopted stylistic elements of the New Vision movement. After Austria's "Anschluss" to Nazi Germany in 1938, Heimat photography did not stray from its track in terms of both contents and aesthetic approach.

German Traditional Costumes

In 1936, the publishing house Karl Robert Langewiesche presented Erich Retzlaff's volume *Deutsche Trachten* (German Traditional Costumes). The photographer collaborated with the Nazi regime for which he worked as a portrait photographer. Retzlaff relied on elements of modern photography, such as little depth of field, low-angle shots, and tightly cropped image areas, to monumentalize the subjects he portrayed. The pre-print material from the Langewiesche photo archives evidences the publisher's retouching wishes, which also determined the impression conveyed by the pictures. The contents of the photo book series "Die Blauen Bücher," which had established itself through high print runs and moderate prices from 1902 on, already began to adopt an increasingly nationalist tenor after the end of World War I.

The American Social Landscape

Influenced by Walker Evans and Robert Frank, US photographers began to modernize traditional landscape photography, which had represented nature as sublime and untouched until then, in the 1960s. The artists captured subjects like everyday, urban, man-made sceneries hitherto not considered worth representing, thus shedding light on contemporary social and sociopolitical conditions. Joel Sternfeld's series *American Prospects,* for example, which was shot during a road trip through the USA in the course of several years, centers on the problematic exploitation of nature.

The artists rendered their motifs in a new—subjective—documentary style. Stephen Shore and Sternfeld relied on large-format plate cameras, precisely planning their compositions beforehand. William Eggleston and Joel Meyerowitz, on the other hand, preferred a spontaneous, almost random approach, which makes their pictures resemble fragmented views that suggest an intuitive and dynamic approach to the world and emphasize the instantaneous character of photography.

New Color Photography

Joel Sternfeld, Joel Meyerowitz, William Eggleston, and Stephen Shore rank among the great exponents of the *New Color Photography* movement, an extremely heterogeneous group of photographers who employed color as a stylistic element of artistic photography from the 1970s on. A completely natural means of expression today, color was looked down upon at that time, as it was associated with popular photography as used in advertising and the world of fashion. The pictures of classical art photographers were black-and-white. William Eggleston's exhibition in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1976, which was felt to be a scandal in its day, proved to a landmark event for the establishment of color photography. The color areas not only rhythmize and structure the pictures' composition but present themselves as pictorial values in their own right.

At Dusk

Boris Mikhailov's series *At Dusk* highlights political upheaval, history, and memory as its subjects. Confronting us with everyday scenes from his native Kharkiv, the artist captures the social changes in Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The characteristic blue color of the photographs achieved by toning the negative helps him visualize his personal recollections of how Ukraine was deprived of its political rights during World War II. The color suggests the so-called blue hour after sunset when the artist found himself dramatically evacuated to the Urals during the war. As not many photographs of Ukraine survived from the years under the Soviet regime, not least for censorship reasons, the artist, lending his photographs a historical appearance, offers the construction of his own history as a substitute.

Forest

Jitka Hanzlová explores her own history in the series *Forest.* Having grown up in Czechoslovakia, the artist fled to West Germany in 1982 and studied photography in Essen. After the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989, she returned home and produced photographs exploring her experience with and affiliation to two different cultures and political systems. Shot in the woods of her native Bohemia near the Carpathians within a period of five years, Hanzlová's *Forest* fathoms how homeland and environs inform one's identity and cultural alliance. The pictures' subtle colors and apparently random compositions visualize the woods as both a concrete landscape and a personal metaphor.

The Albertina's Photographic Collection

The Albertina's Photographic Collection comprises four kinds of holdings. Its core is the institution's historical body of photographs, which was already an integral part of the Albertina's graphic arts collection in the early days of the medium in the mid-nineteenth century. The historical holdings of Vienna's Höhere Graphische Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt, founded in 1888 as the first school to specialize in photography in the world, constitute the most extensive part of the Photographic Collection. The archives of the German photo book publisher Karl Robert Langewiesche, whose series set new standards in the field, offer a trove of landscape and architecture photographs. Finally, an active purchasing strategy has made it possible to build up a comprehensive collection of street-life photographs.