

ACTING FOR THE **CAMERA**

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Exhibition facts

Duration	10 March to 30 May 2017
Venue	Galleries for Photography
Curators	Dr Walter Moser, Dr Anna Hanreich, Dr Astrid Mahler
Exhibits	120
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 A-1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83-0 info@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening hours	Daily 10 am – 6 pm, Wednesdays 10 am – 9 pm
Press contact	Mag. Verena Dahlitz T +43 (0)1 534 83 - 510 M +43 (0) 699 10981746 v.dahlitz@albertina.at Mag. Ivana Novoselac-Binder T +43 (0)1 534 83 - 514 M +43 (0)699 12178741 i.novoselac-binder@albertina.at Mag. Fiona Sara Schmidt T +43 (0)1 534 83 - 511 M +43 (0)699 12178720 s.schmidt@albertina.at Mag. Barbara Walcher T +43 (0)1 534 83 – 512 M +43 (0)699 10981743 b.walcher@albertina.at

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Acting for the Camera

10 March – 5 June 2017

With circa 120 works from the Albertina's Photographic Collection, the exhibition *Acting for the Camera* examines the diverse ways in which models are staged or stage themselves before the camera. The featured photographic works, created between the 1850s and the present, represent a cross-section of photographic history as well as the diversity of the Albertina's own holdings. The present selection is divided between six thematic emphases: motion studies, models for artists, dance, picture stories, portraits of actresses and actors, and Viennese Actionist stagings of the body.

All of these photographs arose from diverse and multi-layered forms of collaboration between the model before and the photographer behind the camera lens. Some of the models are staged according to their photographers' instructions, while other shots originated via a creative process in which model and photographer collaborated on an equal footing. And in some cases, the pictures were even taken according to highly specific instructions given by the model.

Beginnings

It was photographic studies done in the interest of scientific research that made it possible for the first time to visually analyse the processes of human locomotion in high detail. Anonymous models, such as in the photographs taken by Ottomar Anschütz beginning around 1890, made themselves available in order to render understandable processes such as spear-throwing. The individuals seen in such works act according to the exact instructions of the photographer. Series of this type were used to compare the motion patterns of "healthy" and "unhealthy" bodies as well as undergird medical theories with visual evidence.

While such motion studies occasionally doubled as working studies for artworks by other artists, there was also a category of works created specifically for this purpose such as Johann Victor Krämer's staged studio photographs as well as Otto Schmidt's nudes, and some of these were also sold "under the table" as pornography.

Expressive Gestures

A strong and likewise mutually influential relationship arose between photography and dance. At the beginning of the 20th century, modern expressionist dance was an avant-garde art form, and dancers would work together closely with photographers in order to document and disseminate their performances. Such partnerships made possible expressive stagings that helped define the styles of that era. The expressive gestures often seen therein were also taken up by Anton Josef Trčka, who had Egon Schiele pose with a hand position reminiscent of something one might see in dance.

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Portraits of well-known actors such as a laughing Romy Schneider, along with role-portraits for film productions, were created in Viennese studios by photographers such as Trude Fleischmann and Madame d'Ora, and these iconic pictures represent yet another emphasis in this presentation.

Bodies as Photographic Material

Much like the way in which classic portraits convey the personalities of those being portrayed, photography can also stage the body in the opposite way, as something purely material. Helmar Lerski, for example, treated the human face as a landscape that could be modelled by light and shadow. John Coplans, on the other hand, explored his own naked body centimetre by centimetre, portraying himself without his head and thus questioning stagings of masculinity and social norms.

In Viennese Actionism, the artists likewise placed themselves front and centre as pictorial subjects. Rudolf Schwarzkogler, who wrapped himself like a mummy in muslin bandages during the late 1960s, as well as his Actionist colleague Günter Brus, staged performances specifically for the photographic camera. And the newest works in *Acting for the Camera* are as recent as Erwin Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, for which the artist had models assume ridiculous poses with everyday objects.

Following *Black & White* (2015) and *Landscapes & People* (2016), this is the third large-scale presentation of the Albertina's Photographic Collection. The Albertina, as a treasure trove of visual knowledge, began collecting photographs all the way back in the mid-19th century—but it was only upon the establishment of the Photographic Collection in 1999 that these fascinating works were rediscovered.

Featured photographers (selection):

Ottomar Anschütz | Bill Brandt | Brassäi | Günter Brus | John Coplans | Hugo Erfurth | Trude Fleischmann | Seiichi Furuya | Eikoh Hosoe | Martin Imboden | Dora Kallmus | Rudolf Koppitz | Johann Victor Krämer | Heinrich Kühn | Helmar Lerski | O. Winston Link | Will McBride | Arnulf Rainer | Henry Peach Robinson | Otto Schmidt | Rudolf Schwarzkogler | Franz Xaver Setzer | Anton Josef Trčka | Erwin Wurm

Wall texts

Motion Studies

Photographs taken in the context of scientific experimental arrangements visualize the different phases of human and animal locomotion sequences. Several cameras are mounted one after another, their shutters release at short intervals while the model is moving. Shortly after Eadweard Muybridge, who makes a name for himself with motion studies of racehorses in 1877, achieves his first successes, the physician Étienne-Jules Marey and the photographers Ottomar Anschütz and Albert Londe also dedicate themselves to capturing movement sequences photographically. Londe works with Jean-Martin Charcot, a neurologist at the Pitié-Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital in Paris. Anonymous models have to perform certain movements defined by the scientists. The photographs are used to compare the movement patterns of “healthy” and “unhealthy” people and to provide visual evidence for medical theories. Artists interested in the anatomically correct representation of movements use the photographs as models.

Models for Artists

Photographs are used as a workaround in the fine arts quite early on; special collections are compiled. Photographs of models in motion, for example, come to replace preparatory drawings after nature. The expanding demand for photographic material creates a new market for professional studios. The Viennese photographer and publisher Otto Schmidt produces body and facial expression studies as well as nudes (so-called academies). Since these photographs, thanks to their erotic pictorial repertoire, enjoy great popularity not only with artists, Schmidt’s circle of customers keeps growing.

The reduction in price and the easier handling of the photographic material increases the number of artists that take up a camera themselves. The painter Johann Victor Krämer has his models pose in front of half-finished paintings to check or complete their posture and gestures. Grids drawn on the photographs sometimes help to transfer subjects to the canvas.

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Dance

Germany's and Austria's cultural scenes of the early twentieth century see the triumphant progress of modern expressionist dance. Many dancers develop choreographies and movement vocabularies of their own. They visit photographic studios, commissioning presentation and promotion materials. The artists present themselves in the costumes of the performances they currently starr in on the stage.

Photographers resort to various possibilities for their dance studies. Hugo Erfurth relies on sequences to convey the flow of movements. The emphasis is on the dancer's pose in these photographs from the early days of modern dance. Shadows are eliminated by massive retouches, since the pictures were to be reproduced in the book *Der Künstlerische Tanz unserer Zeit* (The Artistic Dance of Our Time, 1928), published by Langewiesche. Martin Imboden, on the other hand, focuses on the expression of the artistic performance in his static suggestive photographs.

Picture Stories

Restaging paintings and other works of art is a favorite pastime of the upper middle classes and the aristocracy in the nineteenth century. Costumed amateur actors adopting rigid poses for a few moments present the "living pictures" at certain events. The emergence of photography makes it possible to reenact these fleeting performances in the studio and to preserve them for the long term. The theatrical group photos are sold as editions on the art market or used as models to emulate.

Henry Peach Robinson is one of those who devote themselves to staging photographs in a way that lean on the tradition of tableaux vivants. Brassai's and Bill Brandt's photo reportages, which seem to document nocturnal scenes the photographers chanced upon, are actually staged for the occasion. Brandt, for example, has members of his family embody precisely conceived parts in his mysteriously toned series *A Night in London*. The American O. Winston Link, who shows a penchant for steam engines, plans his pictures in every detail. Relying on an elaborate flash technique and the use of spotlights, his photographs, taken in the open and by night, exhibit a filmic aesthetic.

Portraits of Actresses and Actors

In Vienna, Madame d'Ora, Franz Xaver Setzer, and Trude Fleischmann specialize in portraits of performing artists from the 1910s to the 1930s. They not only catered to the public's great demand; focusing on the cultural scene's clientele also ties in with the personal interest of the studios' owners. The models collaborate with the photographers to realize the desired notions regarding their appearance and the interpretation of their look. Stars from the theater world choose the costume, make-up, and pose they prefer for their photographic portraits. Some of the character portraits and scenic representations show sweepingly theatrical gestures. Film actresses and actors are only rarely captured in traditional character portraits in the early days of the medium. Setzer's portrait of Conrad Veidt, who stars in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in 1919, is an exception. The lighting and styling as well as his facial expression and the expressive gesture of his hand mirror the film's Expressionism.

Actionist Stagings of the Body

The Actionist art gaining momentum from the 1960s on shows itself inseparably bound up with photography. Next to film, photography is the only way to provide live documentations of performances. Some actions are specifically staged for the photo camera. From about the mid-1960s on, the Viennese Actionist artists Günter Brus and Rudolf Schwarzkogler realize constellations of bodies and objects for photographs that are intended as visual works of art. Arnulf Rainer, whose grimaces, like the Vienna Actionists's works, are aimed at criticizing the socially standardized body, also poses for a photographer. The photographer was not supposed to pursue an artistic approach of his own but to neutrally capture the given representations of the body. After the pictures were taken, Rainer defines the final image area and overpaints the photos by relying on gestural techniques that emphasize physical and emotional moments of expression.

John Coplans combines observations on the representation of the body with reflections on the nature of media. Using a straightforward and precise exposure technique and keen on obtaining sharp pictures, he confronts the viewer with defamiliarized views of his body transforming it into sculptural fragments. The humorous and absurd poses in which models present themselves for Erwin Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures* with the help of everyday objects are often based on drawn studies and are captured in factual photographs lending the ephemeral performances durability.