

ALFRED
SEILAND
RETROSPECTIVE

Content

Exhibition Facts

Press Release

Wall Texts

Biography

Exhibition facts

Press conference	12 June 2018 10 am
Opening	12 June 2018 6.30 pm
Duration	13 June – 7 October 2018
Venue	Colonade Hall
Curator	Dr. Anna Hanreich, ALBERTINA
Works	65
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (01) 534 83 0 info@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening Hours	Daily 10 am – 6 pm Wednesdays & Fridays 10 am – 9 pm
Press contact	Fiona Sara Schmidt T +43 (01) 534 83 511 M +43 (0)699 12178720 s.schmidt@albertina.at Sarah Rainer T +43 (01) 534 83 512 sarah.rainer@albertina.at

ANNUAL PARTNER



PARTNER



MEDIA PARTNER

derStandard.at



Alfred Seiland

13 June – 7 October 2018

The ALBERTINA Museum is devoting a comprehensive presentation to the works of photographer Alfred Seiland (*1952), one of the first Austrian photographers to devote himself entirely to color photography. Seiland's oeuvre revolves around his interests in various cultural spheres ranging from the East to the West Coast of the USA and on to the former territory of ancient Rome, to Austria, and to present-day Iran. His documentary photography stands out for its finely balanced colors and color gradation in combination with the sharpest possible focus at all levels of a picture. The present ALBERTINA Museum exhibition shows five of his major work series.

Seiland's pictures reproduce the visual impressions that he has while on location taking them—and their consistently large depth of field accords equal status to all depicted elements, from the most prominent foreground motifs to those appearing farthest in back.

In the Footsteps of His American Models

Beginning in 1975, Alfred Seiland went on frequent trips to the USA, where he experienced the rise of color photography as an artistic genre and—in 1979—made his own decision to begin working only in color. Up into the 1970s, classic artistic photography had been the exclusive domain of black-and-white film, with color photography long having been scorned by artistic photographers due to its use in advertising and fashion shoots.

For his earliest series, *East Coast – West Coast* (1979–1986), Seiland traveled the USA taking precisely composed, atmospherically dense shots that reproduce specific lighting and spatial situations. This is the same America of neon signs, sweeping landscapes, and long roads that artistic color photography's American pioneers had immortalized just a few years before. Seiland's photographs are quite consciously set in some of the same locations as those by representatives of recent American color photography, who served as his great role models: Joel Meyerowitz, Stephen Shore, and William Eggleston. In contrast to the Americans, however, the European Alfred Seiland was encountering a landscape that was culturally foreign to him. His photographs thus show the development of a deeply independent gaze on what (for him) were downright exotic-seeming motifs such as giant billboards, neon signs, and motels.

Realistic Heimat Pictures and Smart Celebs

Spurred on by magazine assignments, Seiland also began dealing more closely with the theme of Austria. The 1981–1995 series *Österreich* [Austria] consists of works that cast a gaze on Seiland's own homeland that is neither nostalgic nor subject to any other type of distortion. These photographs much rather stand out for their realistic, un-embellished reproduction of reality.

And for an ad campaign of the newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* ("Dahinter steckt immer ein kluger Kopf" [Always a Clever Mind Behind It]), which ran from 1995 to 2001 and won numerous international awards, Seiland photographed famous personalities—each shown in his or her own elaborate, specially conceived *mise-en-scène*.

Historic Locations in the Present

In a series begun in 2006, Alfred Seiland devotes himself to the juxtaposition of historic locales and contemporary life within the former territory of the Roman Empire, thus shedding light on the charged relationship between antiquity and the present.

And it is from this nearly 130-photograph work group, entitled *Imperium Romanum*, that Seiland has developed his latest series, which features present-day *Iran* and is being presented publicly for the first time in this retrospective.

Wall Texts

Exposure Technique

Alfred Seiland has been working with an analog large-format camera since 1979. He uses a lens that renders space very much like the human eye and relies on negative material tailored to long exposure times. His pictures' great depth of field is owed to a small aperture. On the other hand, the small aperture also makes for long exposure times that result in motion blurs, as the tree moved by the wind in the photograph Provincetown, Massachusetts illustrates.

East Coast – West Coast

From the mid-1970s, Alfred Seiland devoted himself to American photography while travelling the United States, witnessing the recent revolution in contemporary photography. The 1960s had seen the beginnings of an upheaval in American landscape photography that had been black-and-white until then. Considered not worth depicting before, unpretentious everyday motifs came to replace views of a pristinely rendered and idealized nature. Color photography, which had been regarded as inartistic until the mid-1970s, was now used by a group of photographers for their artistic endeavors and found its way into major institutions under the slogan *New Color Photography*.

Inspired by contemporary American photography, Alfred Seiland captured the very same everyday motifs of US suburbs—motels, crossroads, and signs—he sought out at both poles, the east and the west coast. His pictures are more compact, less spacious than those by Stephen Shore, however. Like Joel Meyerowitz, Seiland was fascinated with the light and architecture on Cape Cod. Yet his series goes beyond the peninsula, including larger parts of the American coastal area. The pictures focus on light and weather atmospheres; very subtle color values and temperatures dominate the photographs. His large-format camera produces compositions in which all picture planes are in focus. His photographs also show an elaborate staggering of several spatial planes.

Austria

In the 1970s, Austrian photographers focused increasingly on their homeland again. Subjects such as the country's political past, social milieus, cultural identities, and the representation of the regional were given center stage.

Inspired by magazine commissions, Seiland started to depict Austrian places defining the country's national identity. He did not intervene, however, to embellish the motifs he came upon, but incorporates the particles of everyday life, even vulgar and ugly ones.

Parking busses, dirty snow, and chaotically positioned advertising signs confront the viewer with the reality behind the idyll.

The Spectacular Campaign

In the mid-1990s, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* launched a large-scale promotion campaign for which Alfred Seiland was engaged. Garnering multiple acclaim internationally, the spectacular advertising campaign with the slogan “There’s always a clever mind behind it” went down in history as one of the most successful of its kind in Germany. Seiland photographed famous people, staging them in sophisticated ways. Both the setting and the subject’s situation are meticulously tailored to the celebrity in question. Former German chancellor Helmut Kohl, for example, is depicted sitting on the foredeck of the huge ship *Europa*, calmly reading his paper, unimpressed by the surf of the stormy sea. Billy Wilder has not only been placed above the famous Hollywood sign: the picture also shows only the letters that make up part of the director’s name.

The credibility and trust in Europe’s serious paper of record were decisive for the success of the campaign. Though unrecognizable, it is actually always the respective celebrity that is the reader behind the newspaper—however improbable, weird, or abstruse the chosen location and Seiland’s mise-en-scène may be.

Imperium Romanum

The starting point for Alfred Seiland’s exploration of Ancient Rome were photographs he took on the set of the BBC series *Rome* in 2006. Since then, Seiland has purposefully travelled across Europe and Asia Minor visiting important historical sites.

Seiland is not driven by an archaeological interest, but fascinated with the clash of ancient relics and the present-day world. He sees the field of tension in which today’s buildings find themselves and shows the monuments the way they look, unembellished and with the dross of our time. He observes how antiquity is currently dealt with and the way people live with these buildings. Seiland does not present a cleansed image of antiquity; the subjects he finds are depicted without preconceptions. He thematizes how an ideal of antiquity is reproduced when he renders film sets or ancient monuments reconstructed as hotels or casinos. His pictures reveal how reality encroaches upon ancient sites like a razor and how conflicts are still fought out in the same places. Seiland’s picture of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is no pathetic reminiscence of King Solomon’s Temple. It shows the real situation with all blockades, barriers, and security measures. The precise sharpness prevailing everywhere in the picture testifies to Seiland’s unprejudiced approach to his motifs and his attitude: he wants to see everything clearly.

The series *Imperium Romanum* comprises photographs and texts that were abridged for this exhibition.

Iran

The origins of Alfred Seiland's most recent group of photographs on Iran lie in his work on *Imperium Romanum*. Like in this series, Seiland's Iran photographs also depict the buildings as they present themselves today and render the juxtaposition of antiquity and the present without embellishment. One emphasis is on memorial sites erected on theaters of the First Gulf War (1980–1988). These pictures document the way people deal with the memory of combat operations during those years.

Seiland took months to prepare his journey, mapping out a route through the whole country and obtaining press permits to capture the different geographic regions of Iran.

Biography

- 11 April 1952 born in St. Michael, Austria
- 1989–1999 continuous collaboration with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Magazin*
- 1995–2001 assignment for the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* image campaign
“Dahinter steckt immer ein kluger Kopf” (Always a Clever Mind Behind It)
- since 1997 photography professorship at the State Academy of Fine Arts Stuttgart
- Photographic essays for numerous international publications (incl. *The New York Times Magazine*, *Stern*, *Geo*)
- Alfred Seiland lives in Leoben, Austria

Selected Publications

- 1986 *East Coast – West Coast*
Edition Stemmler, Schaffhausen
- 1987 *East Coast – West Coast*
Thames & Hudson, London
- 1994 *Prag*
Edition Stemmler, Zurich
- 1995 *Bilder aus Österreich*
Verlag Christian Brandstätter, Vienna
- 1997 *Kluge Köpfe I*
Klinkhardt & Biermann, Munich
- 1999 *Kluge Köpfe II*
Klinkhardt & Biermann, Munich
- 2001 *Kluge Köpfe III*
Klinkhardt & Biermann, Munich
- 2013 *Imperium Romanum – Opus Extractum*
Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern
- 2016 *Imperium Romanum – Opus Extractum II*
Hartmann Books, Stuttgart