

PHOTO.BOOK.ART

Exhibition Facts

Press conference	27 June 2019 11.30 am
Opening	27 June 2019 18.30 am
Duration	28 June– 22 September 2019
Venue	Tietze Galleries
Curators	Monika Faber, Photoinstitut Bonartes Hanna Schneck, Bibliothek Albertina
Exhibition Design	Walter Kirpiscenko
Works	ca. 300
Catalogue	Available for EUR 39.90 (German) onsite at the Museum Shop as well as via www.albertina.at

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Opening Hours
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Photo.Book.Art

Transition and Reorientation in Book Design, Austria 1840–1940

28 June – 22 September 2019

While photography now dominates nearly every type of publishing genre, the origins of its interplay with publishing have increasingly been forgotten—but the path by which photography entered books was long and littered with numerous technical hurdles, a fact that makes the various creative solutions fielded by pioneers in this area all the more intriguing. Original photographs, test prints, and book maquettes (original book designs) from the collections of the ALBERTINA Museum open up a new perspective on a previously overlooked aspect of Austrian cultural history, which is characterized by diverse interrelationships between scientific curiosity, industrial interests, artistic experimentation, and an educational policy beholden to the Enlightenment.

This exhibition, which includes around 300 items from between 1840 and 1940, sheds light on an extraordinary panorama of innovative achievements manifested as luxury volumes and advertising brochures, travelogues and scientific atlases, artists' designs and industrial documentation. And a broad spectrum of early photo books from Austria—of which this is the first-ever exhibition—presents fascinating combinations of convincing photography, refined book design, and artisanal perfection. The publication produced for this exhibition traces photography's path to books in even more depth: on over 200 pages, comprehensive texts and full-scale facsimiles reveal fascinating historical relationships between text, image, and book object.

The advent of photography in 1839 inspired even its earliest commentators to express promising visions of the future, visions that associated this medium with that of books from the very beginning. They compared the innovation of photography with that of book printing long before it became possible to duplicate photographs in large numbers. Photography's revolutionary potential was recognized not only in its ability to depict details authentically without human intervention but also in its mechanical reproducibility—the development of which, however, was still in its nascence.

Even so, photographic depiction's aura of authenticity and infallibility was so strong that this new medium quickly came to be considered indispensable in printed books. So at first, publishers made do with illustrations *after* photographs—realized as lithographs or wood engravings.

ALBERTINA

1857 saw the appearance of books with photographs glued in to illustrate the text. The demand for such productions was to be found above all in innovative areas of scientific research and in that era's expanding industry, but there were also volumes produced privately as luxurious mementos. The print runs involved here were to remain far smaller than those that had been made possible by the revolutionary invention of the printing press, which had first facilitated the widespread dissemination of written works.

There followed decades of institutionally led attempts to render photography printable, with such a technology being viewed as something of an "Egg of Columbus" (Ludwig Schrank, 1864). This phase witnessed the development of refined printing techniques that made possible high-quality image reproduction, thus satisfying a universal desire among scientists to publish comprehensive pictorial atlases with detailed photographic depictions that could serve as authentic comparative material suitable for use in research.

The definitive "professionalization" of photographic printing in Austria occurred at the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt (photographic and graphic art school) under its director Josef Maria Eder, and the present exhibition's main focus is devoted to this institution. Photographic images were then quick to find their way into the sophisticatedly designed books of the Viennese art nouveau.

1914 witnessed the International Exhibition of the Book Industry and Graphic Arts in Leipzig, an event for which Josef Hoffmann designed an Austrian pavilion as a contemporary setting in which to celebrate the significance of the Austrian Empire's book industry. While the outbreak of World War I—which brought this event to a premature conclusion—did produce its own genre of illustrated volumes, it simultaneously marked the end of the era of luxury editions.

The interwar period brought with it further improvements in methods of printing photographs that finally allowed the production of inexpensive illustrated volumes. And for the first time, colorful book jackets were designed with photographic motifs—thus ringing in a whole new era on the book market. In the process, photography was liberated from its functions of illustrating text and storing "authentic" factual information. It indeed took on an entirely new character in avant-garde "photo books": such books contained photographic images printed in deliberate sequences or juxtaposed, and it is as part of a clear interplay between images and text that the photos in books such as the the Wiener Werkstätte's jubilee volume of 1929 or Stefan Kruckenhauser's *Snow Canvas* (1937) appear in a quality that had never been seen before.

Wall Texts

Photo. Book. Art 1840–1940

The production of systematic knowledge and its dissemination were the key driving forces behind nineteenth-century enlightenment, with a flourishing book industry serving as mediator. From the moment it became known in 1839, photography, a guarantor of images true to detail made without human intervention, seemed to be cut out for not only supporting but speeding up this project.

The ambition to reproduce technically generated pictures unlimited in number like texts would only be fulfilled several decades later thanks to the invention of inexpensive printing techniques. This exhibition is dedicated to the period spanning from the first “vision” of such a feat with its aspiring scientific experiments to manually produced splendid volumes, to the high print-runs of popular illustrated books of the 1930s.

The definitive professionalization of photo printing in Austria took place at Vienna’s Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt, whose historical library, preserved as a permanent loan at the Albertina, has provided the starting point for this presentation thanks to its cataloguing supported by Photoinstitut Bonartes.

“A fortunate thought . . .”: Photo Publications 1850–1870

Almost twenty years after the invention of the new medium, a few enthusiasts began to illustrate mainly scientific works with original photographs, which were glued in. Although their publications were hailed by the critics, it soon became apparent that high costs and long production times curbed the number of printed copies. As documented by surviving subscriber lists, books illustrated with photographs were expensive prestige objects. Nonetheless, the suggestion of the photographic image as being authentic and infallible had such a strong impact that one did not want to completely do without the new medium: prints after photographs served as substitutes ensuring credibility.

“Gradually delivering the whole world in pictures”: The Imperial and Royal Court and Government Printing Office

When Alois Auer was appointed director of the Imperial and Royal Court and Government Printing Office in 1841, he found himself faced with a run-down enterprise whose business consisted in printing legal texts and official forms. Being able to rely on almost unlimited funds from the responsible ministry, he succeeded in turning this printing office into a media company in the modern sense committed to a variety of fields. Auer was the first man in the history of (analog) media to regard writing and images of every kind as a potential unit for the reproduction and distribution of human knowledge.

Pursuing ideas that were far ahead of his time, Auer foundered on the huge scope of his plans: he intended to use photography and nature printing to compile material collections of encyclopedic dimensions in laboratories or on expeditions that would not only provide reliable information but were also affordable.

A State-Run Educational Institution for Photography and Reproduction Techniques

The first pivotal invention on photography's way into books was that of the collotype method in 1868 (a planographic printing process like lithography), which made the first printed photo books possible. Heliogravure (an elaborate intaglio technique in the manner of etching, which achieved particularly brilliant results) followed in 1878, the pioneering autotype method as a relief printing process (woodblock printing being a much simpler form) in 1883. It was no coincidence that these inventions were directly followed by the founding phase of the state-run "Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt für Photographie und Reproduktionsverfahren" (Educational and Experimental Institute for Photography and Reproduction Techniques) in Vienna, which from 1895 onward also included departments for book design and production. It was this institution that, under the direction of Josef Maria Eder, a photochemist, made all these new processes usable for the printing trade and industry: it not only trained the relevant specialists but also initiated or supported innovative photography and book projects.

From Luxury Volumes to Small-Format Books

World War I ushered in a radical transformation in book production. Whereas a few large volumes of plates adhering to the style of the prewar period were published, the now-common cheaper production of small-format books also brought about a change in the presentation of traditional themes. This shift manifested itself in illustrated books on foreign cultures, among others, which had already been popular in the nineteenth century. The result was a separation between scientific and popular books, of which, like in the case of Hugo Bernatzik, as many as 250,000 copies were printed.

Industry and Architecture

Since the sporadic pioneering feats of the 1860s, the brand management of big industrial companies in the form of photographic documentations and illustrated publications had increased considerably. Jubilee works and advertising brochures of all kinds offered a not to be underestimated new market for the professionalized and thus cheaper producing reproduction and printing industries. Among the most innovative users of photography were architects who—a rare case in Austria—were also open to new types of book design in the vein of the Bauhaus.

Specialized Publishers and Their Subjects

The improvement of printing techniques allowed some publishers to specialize in publications illustrated with photographs. Extensive compilations of pictures in a wide variety of fields, from ophthalmology to the holdings of museums and contemporary architecture, testify to the widespread desire to make visual information available in encyclopedic form.

On the other hand, it was necessary to cater to new, only recently developed subject areas that emerged directly from the possibilities of technical image production. Elaborately designed and manufactured in small editions, these works ranged from volumes of wealthy amateur photographers flaunting their craftsmanship to promotionally effective illustrated books of the municipality of Vienna, which were intended to introduce the achievements of Mayor Karl Lueger to a broad public.