

PRESS RELEASE

LICHTBILDER. PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE STÄDEL MUSEUM FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO 1960

9 JULY TO 5 OCTOBER 2014

Press preview: Tuesday, 8 July 2014, 11 am
Städel Museum, upper level of the exhibition annex

Frankfurt am Main, 17 June 2014. In 1845, the Frankfurt Städel was the first art museum in the world to exhibit photographic works. The invention of the new medium had been announced in Paris just six years earlier, making 2014 the 175th anniversary of that momentous event. In keeping with the tradition it thus established, the Städel is now devoting a comprehensive special exhibition to European photo art – “Lichtbilder. Photography at the Städel Museum from the Beginnings to 1960” – presenting the photographic holdings of the museum’s Modern Art Department, which have recently undergone significant expansion. From 9 July to 5 October 2014, in addition to such pioneers as Nadar, Gustave Le Gray, Roger Fenton and Julia Margaret Cameron, the show will feature photography heroes of the twentieth century such as August Sander, Albert Renger-Patzsch, Man Ray, Dora Maar or Otto Steinert, while moreover highlighting virtually forgotten members of the profession. While giving an overview of the Städel’s early photographic holdings and the acquisitions of the past years, the exhibition will also shed light on the history of the medium from its beginnings to 1960.

“Even if we think of the presentation of artistic photography in an art museum as something still relatively new, the Städel already began staging photo exhibitions in the mid 1840s. We take special pleasure in drawing attention to this pioneering feat and – with the ‘Lichtbilder’ exhibition – now, for the first time, providing insight into our collection of early photography, which has been decisively expanded over the past years through new purchases and generous gifts”, comments Städel director Max Hollein.

Felix Krämer, one of the show’s curators, explains: “With ‘Lichtbilder’ we would like to stimulate a more intensive exploration of the multifaceted history of a medium which, even today, is often still underestimated.”

The first mention of a photo exhibition at the Städel Museum dates from all the way back to 1845, when the Frankfurt *Intelligenz Blatt* – the official city bulletin – ran an

**Städelsches Kunstinstitut
und Städtische Galerie**

Dürerstraße 2
60596 Frankfurt am Main
Phone +49(0)69-605098-170
Fax +49(0)69-605098-111
presse@staedelmuseum.de
www.staedelmuseum.de

PRESS DOWNLOADS UNDER
www.staedelmuseum.de

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
Axel Braun, head
Phone +49(0)69-605098-170
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188
presse@staedelmuseum.de

Silke Janßen
Phone +49(0)69-605098-234
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188
janssen@staedelmuseum.de

Karoline Leibfried
Phone +49(0)69-605098-212
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188
leibfried@staedelmuseum.de

Carolyn Meyding
Phone +49(0)69-605098-268
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188
meyding@staedelmuseum.de

Jannike Möller
Phone +49(0)69-605098-195
Fax +49(0)69-605098-188
moeller@staedelmuseum.de

ad. This is the earliest known announcement of a photography show in an art museum worldwide. The 1845 exhibition featured portraits by the photographer Sigismund Gerothwohl of Frankfurt, the proprietor of one of the city's first photo studios who has meanwhile all but fallen into oblivion. Like many other institutions at the time, the Städel Museum had a study collection which also included photographs: then Städel director Johann David Passavant began collecting photos for the museum in the 1850s. In addition to reproductions of artworks, the photographic holdings comprised genre scenes, landscapes and cityscapes by such well-known pioneers in the medium as Maxime Du Camp, Wilhelm Hammerschmidt, Carl Friedrich Mylius or Giorgio Sommer. An 1852 exhibition showcasing views of Venice launched a tradition of presentations of photographic works from the Städel's own collection.

Whereas the photos exhibited in the Städel in the nineteenth century were contemporary works, the show "Lichtbilder" will focus on the development of artistic photography. The point of departure will be the museum's own photographic holdings, which were significantly expanded through major acquisitions from the collections of Uta and Wilfried Wiegand in 2011 and Annette and Rudolf Kicken in 2013, and which continue to grow today through new purchases. The exhibition's nine chronologically ordered sections will span the history of the medium from the beginnings of paper photography in the 1840s to the photographic experiments of the fotoform Group in the 1950s.

In the entrance area to the show, the visitor will be greeted by a selection of Raphael reproductions presented by the Städel in exhibitions in 1859 and 1860. They feature full views and details of the cartoons executed by Raphael to serve as reference images for the Sistine Chapel tapestries. The art admirer was no longer compelled to travel to London to marvel at the Raphael cartoons at Hampton Court, but could now examine these masterworks in large-scale photographs right at the Städel.

The following exhibition room is devoted to the pioneers of photography of the 1840s to '60s. No sooner had the invention of the new medium been announced in 1839 than enthusiasts set about conquering the world with the photographic image. The aspiration of the bourgeoisie for self-representation in accordance with aristocratic conventions soon rendered photographic portraiture a lucrative business; to keep up with the growing demand, the number of photo studios in the European metropolises steadily increased. Works of architecture and historical monuments, art treasures and celebrities were all recorded on film and made available to the public. Quite a few photographers – for example Édouard Baldus, the Bisson brothers, Frances Frith, Wilhelm Hammerschmidt and Charles Marville – set out on travels to take pictures of the cultural-historical sites of Europe and the Near East, and thus to capture these testimonies to the past on film.

Among the most successful exponents of this genre was Georg Sommer, a native of Frankfurt who emigrated to Italy in 1856 and made a name for himself there as Giorgio Sommer. The second section of the show will revolve around the image of Italy as a kind of paradise on Earth characterized by the Mediterranean landscape and the legacy of antiquity. That image, however, would not be complete without views of the simple life of the Italian population. These genre scenes – often posed – were popular as souvenirs because they fulfilled the travellers' expectations of encountering a preindustrial, and thus unspoiled, way of life south of the Alps. Faced with the challenges presented by the climate, the long exposure times and the complex photographic development process, photographers were constantly in search of technical improvements – as illustrated in the third section of the presentation. Léon Vidal and Carlo Naya, for example, experimented with colour photography, Eadweard Muybridge with capturing sequences of movement, and the Royal Prussian Photogrammetric Institute with large-scale “mammoth photographs”.

While the pictorial language of professional photography hardly advanced, increasing emphasis was placed over the years on its technical aspects. The section of the show on artistic photography demonstrates how, at the end of the nineteenth century, enthusiastic amateur photographs worked to develop the medium with regard to aesthetics as well. Whereas until that time, professional photographers had given priority to genre scenes and other motifs popular in painting, the so-called Pictorialists set out to strengthen photography's value as an artistic medium in its own right. Atmospheric landscapes, fairy-tale scenes and stylized still lifes were captured as subjective impressions. While Julia Margaret Cameron very effectively staged dialogues between sharp and soft focus, Heinrich Kühn employed the gum bichromate and bromoil techniques to create painterly effects.

After World War I, a new generation of photographers emerged who questioned the standards established by the Pictorialists. Their works are highlighted in the following room. Rather than intervening in the photographic development process, the adherents to this new current – who pursued interests analogous to those of the New Objectivity painters – devoted themselves to austere pictorial design and sought to establish a “new way of seeing”. The gaze was no longer to wander yearningly into the distance, but be confronted directly and immediately with the realities of society. The prosaic and rigorous images of August Sander and Hugo Erfurth satisfy the demands of this artistic creed. The exhibition moreover directs its attention to early photojournalism and the development of the mass media. Apart from documentary photographs by the autodidact Erich Salomon, Heinrich Hoffmann's portraits of Adolf Hitler – purchased for the Städel collection in 2013 – will also be on view. Although it was Hitler himself who had commissioned them, he later prohibited the portraits' reproduction. For in actuality, Hoffmann's images expose the hollowness of the dictator's demeanour. The show devotes a separate room to the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch, whose formally rigorous scenes are distinguished by uncompromising objectiveness in the depiction of nature and technology.

The photographers inspired by Surrealism pursued interests of a wholly different nature, as did the representatives of the Czech photo avant-garde – the focusses of the following two exhibition rooms. In the section on Surrealist photography, the works oscillate between fiction and reality, and photographic experiments unveil the world's bizarre sides. Employing strange effects or unexpected motif combinations, artists such as Brassai, André Kertész, Dora Maar, Paul Outerbridge and Man Ray sought the unusual in the familiar. The Czech photographers of the interwar period, for their part, explored the possibilities of abstract and constructivist photography. Their works, many of which exhibit a symbolist tendency, are concerned with the aestheticization of the world.

The final section of the show is dedicated to Otto Steinert and the fotoform Group. It sheds light on how Steinert and the members of the artists' group took their cues from the experiments of the photographic vanguard of the 1920s, while at the same time dissociating themselves from the propagandistic and heroizing use of photography during the National Socialist era. The six photographers who joined to found the fotoform Group in 1949 – Peter Keetman, Siegfried Lauterwasser, Wolfgang Reisewitz, Toni Schneiders, Otto Steinert and Ludwig Windstosser – coined the term "subjective photography" and emphasized the photographer's individual perspective.

The show augments the joint presentation of photography, painting and sculpture practised at the Städel Museum since its reopening in 2011 and also to be continued during and after "Lichtbilder". The aim of this exhibition mode is to convey the decisive role played by photography in art-historical pictorial tradition since the medium's very beginnings. The presentation is being accompanied by a catalogue which – like the exhibition architecture – foregrounds the specific "palette" of photography as a medium conducted in black and white. The subtle tones of grey are mirrored not only in the works' reproductions, but also in the colour design of the individual catalogue sections. When the visitor enters the exhibition space, he is surrounded by an architecture that is grey to the core, while at the same time making clear that no one shade of grey is like another. In the words of curator Felicity Grobien: "The exhibition reveals how multi-coloured the prints are, for in them – contrary to what we expect from black-and-white photography – we discover a vast range of subtle colour nuances that emphasize the prints' distinctiveness."

LICHTBILDER.

PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE STÄDEL MUSEUM FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO 1960

Curators: Felicity Grobien, curatorial assistant, Modern Art Department, Städel Museum; Dr Felix Krämer, head of the Modern Art Department at the Städel Museum

Exhibition dates: 9 July to 5 October 2014

Press preview: Tuesday, 8 July, 11 am

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de, info@staedelmuseum.de,
telephone +49(0)69-605098-0, Fax +49(0)69-605098-111

Venue: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Sat and Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thu and Fri 10 am – 9 pm

Special opening hours: Fri, 3 October 2014, 10 am – 6 pm

Admission: 12 euros, reduced 10 euros, family ticket 20 euros; Saturdays, Sundays and holidays 14 euros, reduced 12 euros, family ticket 24 euros, admission free for children to the age of 12; groups (min. 10 persons) 10 euros/person; Saturdays, Sundays and holidays 12 euros/person
Groups are required to make advance reservations.

Advance ticket sales at: tickets.staedelmuseum.de

Catalogue: A catalogue edited by Felix Krämer and Max Hollein will accompany the exhibition. With a foreword by Max Hollein, essays by Felicity Grobien, Felix Krämer, Eberhard Mayer-Wegelin and Wilfried Wiegand, and contributions by Ingo Borges, Kristina Lemke and Brigitte Sahler. Published by the Städel Museum, 192 pages, bilingual edition (German and English), 24.90 EUR.

Social Media: The Städel Museum will communicate the show in the social media with the hash tag #lichtbilder.

General guided tours of the exhibition: Thursdays 7 pm, Saturdays 11 am, Sundays 3 pm

Special guided tours upon request at: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de.

Further Städel program offers at www.staedelmuseum.de.