

G E O R G K A R G L B O X

Kicken in Vienna. Die Weltmeister

Gallery Kicken Berlin as guest in Vienna.

Opening reception: Tuesday, May 6, 2008, 7-9 pm

Exhibition dates: May 7 – June 25, 2008

Press preview: May 6, 2008, 11 am

Opening hours: Tue – Fr 11 am – 7 pm, Thu 11 am – 8 pm, Sat 11 am – 3 pm

In the 1880s a new and international generation of photographers emerged: they joined photo clubs, exhibited in museums, and published work in elite journals. The style they followed was known as “Pictorialism” and soon became part of the artistic avant garde - adopting Symbolist themes, the sophistication of Art Nouveau, and the workmanship of the Arts and Crafts movement. Pictorialist photographers were united in the vision that art served to refine the spirit, cultivate good taste, and beautify everyday life. *Fin-de-siècle* modernism was not old, tired, and decadent—it was fresh, young, and determined from the outset to gain entrance into museums. Hanging on museum walls, right alongside painting and graphic arts, every Pictorialist image proclaimed the triumphant message that photography was art.

The so-called alternative photographic processes—complex photo-mechanical techniques for creating graphic imagery—were developed to alter the slick coldness of the medium’s technical nature and allow viewers to recognize that pictures originated from the eyes and hands of an artist, not from an indifferent machine. The most well-known stylistic device of Pictorialism was the use of intentional soft focus. It transformed the photographic image into an art of atmosphere and mood, allowing it to compete with the feel of Symbolist painting. It taught the eye to register the finest nuances of light and shadow. Pictorialist photographs explained how images are made of light—not much different from a Cézanne watercolor.

The enthusiasm that accompanied the rediscovery of photography as art in the 1970’s did not necessarily include Pictorialism. One important German photography historian declared publically that pictorialist photography was “a mistake, historically speaking”, and many others felt the same. In the meantime, contemporary photography has shown us how modern Pictorialism really is. As during the time of Pictorialism, young photographers today are once again conquering art museums, a victory achieved through artfully manipulated large-format works. The rediscovery of photography’s early years has enlightened us to the hidden modernity therein. We become aware of the high-tech photographic print techniques behind Heinrich Kühn’s large format gum bichromate prints, Rudolf Koppitz’s strikingly modern impression of a field with ravens, which reminds the viewer of a Japanese woodcut, or Robert Demachy’s Symbolist interpretation of the everlasting tale of Adam and Eve, which distinctly displays the traces of the artist’s mechanical intervention. Eventually, we find the same hidden modernism at work that concealed nineteenth-century glass and steel structures behind classical façades. The photographic art of Pictorialism is similarly complex. We shouldn’t allow the blurry surface beauty to fool us, for buried within is the Cubism of our modern world.

The exhibition by Gallery Kicken Berlin at Georg Kargl Fine Arts includes more than 40 masterpieces of Pictorialist photography from the time between 1896 and 1916 - many of them unique pieces, by such renowned and varied artists such as Robert Demachy, Rudolf Koppitz, Heinrich Kühn, Edward Steichen,

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and Alfred Stieglitz. Also to be seen are rare works by artists yet to be discovered, like Erwin Raupp or the painter-photographer Elise Mahler.

The exhibition is accompanied by an elaborately illustrated catalogue (Pictorialism. Hidden Modernism – Photography 1896-1916, with essays by Monika Faber and Wilfried Wiegand.)

List of Participating Artists

James Craig Annan | Hugo Erfurth | Frank Eugene | Hugo Henneberg | Theodor & Oskar Hofmeister | Getrude Käsebier | Rudolf Koppitz | Heinrich Kühn | Dr. Rupert S. Lovejoy | Elise Mahler | Karel Novák | Erwin Raupp | Edward Steichen | Alfred Stieglitz | Anton Josef Trčka | Hans Watzek | Clarence H. White

Kicken Gallery – About us

The Kicken Gallery has its origins in Aachen, Germany where Rudolf Kicken and Wilhelm Schürmann opened the 'Galerie Lichttropfen' (Drops of Light Gallery) in 1974.

The start of Kicken's career as gallery owner nearly thirty years ago heralded the begin of an unprecedented engagement for the photographic medium in Germany. In 1979, the gallery moved to Cologne, without the former partner, and began operating under the name Kicken. During the Cologne years, Kicken became the leading gallery for art photography in Germany. Since autumn 2000, Rudolf Kicken and his wife Annette run the gallery together in Berlin. The Berlin domicile, in the heart of the capitol city's gallery quarter, is home to a spacious exhibition room, a library and "Private Showrooms" which invite the curious to delve more deeply into the field of photography.

One of Gallery Kicken's strengths is its variety. Represented are nearly all the great names in art photography from the beginning of the 19th century to the present. The main focus is on the 20th century, especially on the German and Czech avant-garde of the 1920's and 1930's, including Bauhaus and the great masters of the genre: Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko. 'Subjektive Photographie' (Subjective Photography) from the 1950's, contemporary fashion photography and current conceptual positioning also figure prominently in the gallery's work. Especially in the case of conceptual photography, the borders separating the classic visual arts and photography have finally been eliminated. Overcoming these borders and the discovery of new or until now neglected photographic imagery has always been at the heart of Gallery Kicken's work. Along with the stars of photography's history, anonymous or unusual snapshots have a place in the gallery's program. Furthermore, many well-known photographers such as Helmut Newton or Umbo, first gained recognition on the international art market through the efforts of Gallery Kicken.

The gallery mounts four large exhibitions per year of museum quality. Gallery Kicken regularly participates in the most important international art fairs, and its presence contributes considerably to maintaining photography's important position in the art world. A special focus is the preservation and presentation of material from the estates of Ed van der Elsken, Heinrich Kühn, Rudolf Koppitz, Anton Josef Trcka, Umbo and many others.

As one of the leading galleries for art photography worldwide, Gallery Kicken is committed to the preservation and development of visual culture.

Rudolf Kicken, born in Aachen in 1947, studied in Bonn and in Vienna, earning a Masters degree in economics in 1973. He pursued photography at the Visual Study Workshop in Rochester, NY between 1974 and 1975. In 1974 he and Wilhelm Schürmann founded the Galerie Lichttropfen (later renamed

Schürmann & Kicken) in Aachen, specializing in high-quality international art photography. In 1979 he moved the gallery to Cologne as the Galerie Rudolf Kicken. The gallery earned its international reputation with first-time exhibitions in Germany and Europe of important photographers and rediscoveries in the realm of the European avant-garde. Besides, monographs and portfolios are at the heart of the gallery's activities. In September 2000 the gallery relocated to Berlin as the Galerie Kicken Berlin.

Annette Kicken (née van Straelen) was born in Duisburg in 1970. She studied law and art history in Cologne, Berlin, and London and participated in various art projects, including Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrapping of the Berlin Reichstag in 1994–1995. She earned her M.A. degree in art history from the Courtauld Institute in London in 1998. From 1998 to 2000 she was the project manager of the contemporary art fair art forum berlin, and has directed the gallery Kicken Berlin with her husband Rudolf Kicken since 2000.

PREFACE

Monika Faber

The year 1904 marked an important date in the history of “art photography”: Heinrich Kühn, born in Dresden, living in the Austrian Tirol, a pioneer of new concepts in the photographic arts, met with American Alfred Stieglitz, the uncontested mentor of an international movement of amateur photographers. As was the case with all other significant Pictorialist photographers at the time (who were mainly interested in crafting detailed alterations in the final image of their subject matter), they had already been exposed to and influenced by each other’s work thanks to lavishly printed, richly illustrated journals available at the time and, importantly, through international exhibitions in the 1880s that were staged by national associations such as the Vienna Camera-Club (whose members included Hugo Henneberg and Hans Watzek) or the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Amateurphotographie (Society for the Advancement of Amateur Photographers) in Hamburg.

A new type of “international” style was evolving in response to two features of traditional photography: on the one hand, it rejected the standard mass-production model found in commercial studios, emphasizing instead individual attention to composition and image processing. On the other hand, it considered the exact reproduction of photographic detail to be “inartistic,” believing—likely under the influence of late Impressionism—that it prevented what might be termed “atmosphere and mood” as correlated to “subjective visual impression” (Hans Watzek). By the 1900s, special copy and printing processes had been developed that fulfilled both criteria. Platinum, gum, and bromide prints allowed photographers great freedom in making variations on the negative, such as softening contours, and complete choice of color for the positive—features that offered parallels to graphic arts techniques and especially satisfied the Pictorialists’ artistic intentions.

Unlike other colleagues, Kühn and Stieglitz were in agreement that a fine line had to be tread: for all the possibilities available for individual manipulation of the photographic processes, a direct imitation of common graphic arts techniques was to be avoided, so that the “photographic essence” would remain central. In extensive correspondence, which spread out over the years to include other vital proponents of Pictorialism (including Fred Holland Day, Gertrude Käsebier, James Craig Annan, and Robert Demachy), all matter of artistic as well as organizational questions arising from the widely spun net of international exhibitions were debated. The enduring influence of joint showings from near and far allowed the basic tenets of Pictorialism to remain relatively stable for a few years.

Kühn and Stieglitz were especially interested in investigating Autochrome plates, the first photographic process to reproduce color that was past the experimental stage. The two, along with Edward Steichen and Frank Eugene, met in 1907, the year the plates came onto the market, to make their first experiments. The color effects obtained were seductive and subtle. Nevertheless, the Americans soon stopped their experiments, possibly due to the difficulty of the process. But Heinrich Kühn achieved virtuosity in learning to work with the Autochrome color palette, whose detachment from reality suited his preference, and between 1908 und 1916 he made a unique and unusual contribution to the history of photography.

PICTORIALISM

Wilfried Wiegand

In the early years of photography, every photographer was both an amateur and a professional, both a craftsman and an artist. It wasn't until the 1880s that the dawning of a new epoch brought the modern notion of specialization. This created two distinct types of photographers who were now dominating the scene: the amateur and the photographic artist. Amateurs trusted their handy box cameras, and since they photographed only for themselves and their friends, they could neglect composition and style. Art photographers, on the other hand, joined photo clubs, exhibited in museums, and published work in elite journals. They prided themselves on being creators of art and were willing to let the public critically assess their work. The style they followed was known as "Pictorialism"—a self-assured name showing that art photographers had already begun to align themselves with painting.

Pictorialism became part of the artistic avant-garde, adopting Symbolist themes, the sophistication of Art Nouveau, and the workmanship of the Arts and Crafts movement. Pictorialist photographers were united in the vision that art served to refine the spirit, cultivate good taste, and beautify everyday life. *Fin-de-siècle* modernism was not old, tired, and decadent—it was fresh, young, and determined from the outset to gain entrance into museums. Pictorial photography accomplished this goal with flying colors. Hanging on museum walls, right alongside painting and graphic arts, every Pictorialist image proclaimed the triumphant message that photography was art.

The most well-known stylistic device of Pictorialism was the use of intentional soft focus. It transformed the photographic image into an art of atmosphere and mood, allowing it to compete with the feel of Symbolist painting. At the same time, it taught the viewer to see more in the image than a piece of the outside world captured on film. It taught the eye to register the finest nuances of light and shadow. Pictorialist photographs explained how images are made of light—not much different from a Cézanne watercolor.

The success of the Pictorialists on the art scene was due in part to the subtle crafting of their work. Whether it was an elaborately framed, large-format piece announcing its artistic aspirations or a work presented in a precious, small format—the unwavering artistic objective was to transform the photographic image into a perfectly crafted art object whose design and details were overseen by the artist himself. The so-called alternative photographic processes—complex photo-mechanical techniques for creating graphic imagery—were developed to alter the slick coldness of the medium's technical nature and allow viewers to recognize that pictures originated from the eyes and hands of an artist, not from an indifferent machine.

Pictorialism dominated the world of photography for a generation—until shortly before the end of World War I. After the war there was a late Pictorialist period notable for its high quality, but in the 1920s, the constructivist clarity of Bauhaus and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) finally asserted itself. Pictorialism fell more and more into oblivion.

The enthusiasm that accompanied the rediscovery of photography as art in the 1970's did not necessarily include Pictorialism. One important German photography historian declared publically that pictorialist photography was "a mistake, historically speaking", and many others felt the same. In the meantime, contemporary photography has shown us how modern Pictorialism really is. As during the time of Pictorialism, young photographers today are once again conquering art museums, a victory achieved through artfully manipulated large-format works. We witnessed how Sarah Moon rediscovered the stylistic device of intentional soft focus, revolutionizing fashion photography in the process. And last but not least, the rediscovery of photography's early years has enlightened us to the hidden modernity therein. We become aware of the high-tech montage techniques behind Gustave Le Gray's dreamy ocean scenes. Here we find the same hidden modernism at work that concealed nineteenth-century glass and steel structures behind classical façades. The photographic art of Pictorialism is similarly complex. We shouldn't allow the blurry surface beauty to fool us, for buried within is the Cubism of our modern world.