Gerhard Winkler: Specimen Photographs and Sculptures

An exhibition of Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne, in collaboration with the artist

On view: September 3, 2021 – January 16, 2022

Press preview on Thursday, September 2, at 11 am (please obtain accreditation online)

Opening on Thursday, September 2, 7 pm

With the exhibition “Gerhard Winkler: Specimen – Photographs and Sculptures,” Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur is venturing beyond the photographic medium to present an artist who has since the 1980s been congenially combining photography with painting and sculpture.

Winkler’s work is exclusively figurative, devoted to depicting diverse motifs ranging from human and animal portraiture to still lifes, landscapes, and cityscapes. But his oeuvre also includes more unusual and unconventional subject matter, such as cuts of meat and clumps of earth. While the pictures focusing on individual motifs and still lifes unfurl a catalogue of significant recollections, the landscapes seem to combine elements of nature with urban and artificial aspects. They can be seen as symbolizing the macrocosm from which Winkler draws his down-to-earth and yet inspiring finds, which he regards as emblematic souvenirs. The oeuvre also includes tableaux in various formats, consisting of three or more images. Depending on the objects brought together, they may either display a narrative structure or invite formal comparisons, remaining open for a variety of associations.

What makes Gerhard Winkler’s oeuvre such a singular phenomenon in contemporary art and photography is his practice of hand-coloring black-and-white photographic prints on baryta paper with egg tempera paint. Furthermore, he usually depicts his subjects in isolation against a white background, evoking an almost weightless impression while directing our full attention to the object itself. We can speak here of a kind of hyperrealism, which Winkler describes as follows: “Formally speaking, the photographs focus entirely on the individual subject, hence its isolation against a white background. This is a simple stylistic device but one that seemed to make sense to me. The strong contrast, this separation of levels, presumably leads to a kind of ‘existentialism’ that I find interesting and which I also see in many natural history illustrations marked by precision and apparent objectivity. It is this...

1 If you wish to attend the opening: As we need to limit the number of people on the evening and ensure traceability, we kindly ask you to book a free online ticket and to present it at the entrance.
strange moment where the mere depiction of the material, of matter, abruptly and in fact unintentionally morphs into other realms, and a kind of metaphysics emerges.”

For years, the artist has had a special fondness for fish and other sea creatures. The publication accompanying the show (Snoeck Verlag) is dedicated to them, and the exhibition also includes an extensive group of works depicting these animals. Fascinated by the rich offerings and elaborate arrangements he saw at market stalls, particularly in Marseille and Lisbon, Winkler photographed fish, cuttlefish, and octopuses individually on a white oilcloth, observing strict rules for his compositions, with the head always facing left. He then colored the prints, whose sizes approximate as far as possible the actual size of the fish, with great sensitivity, trying to recreate the iridescent shades displayed by many of the animals. The highly aesthetic portraits that result show us idiosyncratic creatures that with their exotic beauty sometimes seem to take on their own personalities, astonishing us and even demanding our respect.

The exhibition "Gerhard Winkler: Specimen" features around 100 analogue hand-colored photographs as well as seven sculptures, which the artist has arranged in an installation that meanders through the exhibition space.

Gerhard Winkler (b. 1962) studied at the Städelschule in Frankfurt/Main from 1983 to 1988, obtained fellowships to work in Marseille and Lisbon, and has had numerous solo and group exhibitions, notably at the Galerie Kuckei + Kuckei in Berlin.

Accompanying publication, German/English: Gerhard Winkler: Fishes and Cephalopods,, featuring a conversation between Gerhard Winkler and Gabriele Conrath-Scholl, ed. Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne: Snoeck, 2021, 144 p., € 39,80

on view in parallel in Room 2:

A Look at the Collection: On the 70th anniversary of the DGPh

An exhibition of Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie

Ever since its founding in Cologne in 1951, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie (German Photographic Society) has actively supported, researched, and promoted the medium. With a large network of some 1,000 members today, the society awards several prizes, holds conferences and exhibitions, and initiates publications.

On the occasion of its 70th anniversary, Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur is presenting a selection of 70 important works whose provenance goes back to the DGPh collection, including some that are rarely seen in public. The exhibits are part of a group of around 1,700 photographs acquired by the SK Stiftung Kultur in 1993. Amassed over several decades, the collection reflects the history of the DGPh as well as that of photography in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the period after the Second World War. The works for the most part came to the collection as gifts in the context of awards such as the Kulturpreis and the Dr. Erich Salomon Award, or in the course of exhibition projects. Particularly noteworthy are important sub-collections such as a large number of original prints by August Sander, an equally extensive assortment of works by the fotoform group from the field of subjective photography, and also several representative motifs by Albert Renger-Patzsch. The key collection themes of society and politics bring to light the diversity
of reportage photography, including for example Robert Lebeck’s 1960 portrait of Patrice Lumumba, the first African prime minister of the Congo after its liberation from colonial rule. Alfred Eisenstaedt’s 1929 portrait of Marlene Dietrich in top hat and tailcoat takes us back to the artistic and political heyday of the Weimar Republic in Germany. Liselotte Strelow likewise captured famous contemporaries; her 1956 portrait of Axel Springer is notable for its extreme lighting, recalling the chiaroscuro experiments of subjective photography.

Diverse examples of media photography and experimentation are another focus of the DGPh collection, ranging from Man Ray to Harold E. Edgerton.

Alongside the photographs, the anniversary exhibition presents for the first time a variety of materials and documents from the DGPh archives, with a row of display cases holding letters, scripts, press reviews, ephemera, photographs, and printed matter. Key events are thus brought to life, while exciting background information is revealed, along with surprising details of collective as well as personal reminiscences.


Accompanying publication, German/English: A Look at the Collection: On the 70th anniversary of the DGPh, concept and text by Claudia Pfeiffer, ed. Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, 2021, 28 p., €9

Please address press inquiries to: tel. 0221 888 95 105, email: pr@sk-kultur.de

You can download press photos of the exhibitions here:
Gerhard Winkler: Specimen
A Look at the Collection: On the 70th anniversary of the DGPh

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Please observe our current hygiene rules during the pandemic.
It is possible to purchase online tickets in advance
Admission: €5.50 (reduced €3) plus online sales fee, free first Monday of the month!

Opening hours: daily except Wednesdays from 2 to 7 pm

Public tours take place weekly on Sundays at 3 pm.