

HAUSER & WIRTH

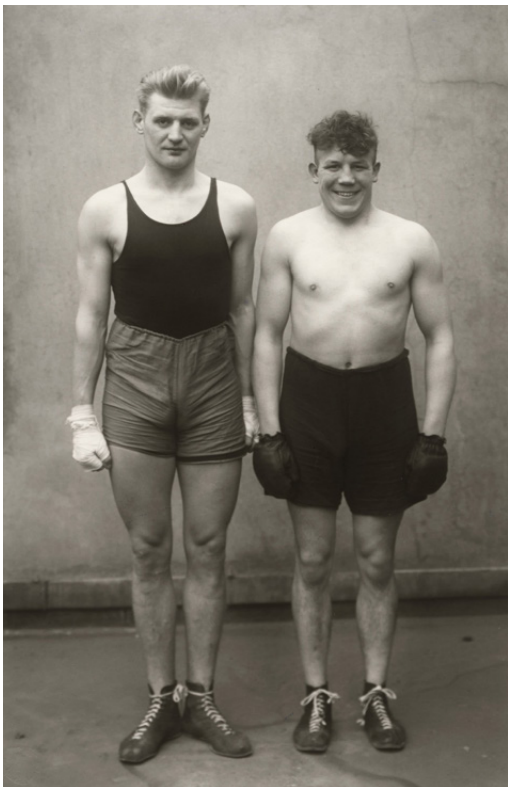
Press Release

August Sander Men Without Masks

Hauser & Wirth London

18 May – 28 July 2018

Opening: Thursday 17 May 2018, 6 – 8 pm



Hauser & Wirth is delighted to present 'August Sander', an exhibition dedicated to the late German photographer, a forefather of conceptual art and pioneering documentarian of human diversity. Over the course of a career spanning six decades and tens of thousands of negatives, August Sander created a nuanced sociological portrait of Germany comprising images of its populace, as well as its urban settings and dramatic landscapes. Working in a rigorous fashion, he pioneered a precise, unembellished photographic aesthetic that was formative to the establishment of the medium's independence from painting and presaged conceptual art. The artist considered empathy toward his sitters to be critical to his work, and strove not to impose a portrayal upon an unwilling subject, but to enable self-portraits.

This exhibition features an extensive selection of rare large-scale Sander photographs. Made between 1910 and 1931, the portraits on view paint a picture of Germany's complex socio-economic landscape in the years leading up to and through the Weimar Republic. These early examples of Sander's oeuvre — in particular, the 'Portfolio of Archetypes', — laid the framework for 'People of the 20th Century', the artist's larger, lifelong effort to catalogue contemporary German society through his photographs and to reveal the truth of its ethnic and class diversity. Upon his father's death and on the eve of the publication of the book 'Menschen ohne Maske' (published in English as 'Men Without Masks'), Sander's son Gunther (1907 – 1987) selected and printed the

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photographs in a unique oversize format for inclusion in an exhibition at the Mannheimer Kunstverein in 1973. In 1997, five portraits from 'Men Without Masks' were featured in the exhibition 'August Sander: 'In photography there are no unexplained shadows!', curated by Gerd Sander, at the National Portrait Gallery in London. With stunning detail drawn forth by their scale, these photographs capture a critical moment in Sander's artistic evolution and in our collective history.

When Sander embarked on his 'Portfolio of Archetypes' in 1910, he had already established himself as a successful photographer in a profession that had only recently become a viable line of work. Urged on by the prevailing pictorialist photographic aesthetic, photographers aimed to make images that stylistically mimicked painting. Sander broke with this approach after a successful experiment in the darkroom. Enlarging a photograph using smooth, glossy paper typically reserved for technical images, he created a portrait that was extraordinarily detailed — a far cry from his earlier, softer portraiture that clouded over imperfections. This matter-of-fact, technically exact approach, enhanced by his adoption of a straightforward perspective and use of natural light, became Sander's modus operandi as he put his apparatus to work cataloging Weimar Germany and his fellow citizens. As Sander explained: 'Nothing seemed to me more appropriate than to project an image of our time with absolute fidelity to nature by means of photography... Let me speak the truth in all honesty about our age and the people of our age.'

Sander's conceptual approach grew from the idea of the Stamm-Mappe, loosely translated as 'basic album.' In his early images, the artist photographed the farmers of his native village Westerwald — people with whom he had a rapport — and proceeded to sort them 'according to their essential archetype, with all the characteristics of mankind in general'. From these photographs Sander produced the iconic 12-photo 'Portfolio of Archetypes', a grouping that would set the tone for his larger project in both organisation and concept. On view in 'August Sander', the 'Portfolio of Archetypes' features stoic farming men and women in single, double, and group portraits. The sitters told their own stories through their expressions, gestures, poses, clothing and accessories. Sander presented each of his subjects as wholly individual — rendering their riveting idiosyncrasies, their unrepeatable details— and representative of a broader 'type' of person; the photographs' titles include 'The Man of the Soil', 'The Sage', 'The Philosopher' and 'The Farming Couple'.

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Expanding this conceptual framework, Sander went on to document individuals across the many strata of German society in strikingly frank images with titles like 'Boxers', 'Architect' and 'Aviator'. He assigned each photograph to one of 45 numbered portfolios envisioning that each portfolio would include 12 photographs. The 45 portfolios fell under the umbrella of seven more general 'archetypes': 'The Farmer', 'The Skilled Tradesman', 'The Woman', 'Classes and Professions', 'The Artists', 'The City', and 'The Last People', or those on the margins of society. The individuals captured by Sander's lens ran the gamut from farmers to industrialists, secretaries to aristocrats and also homeless and disabled people. All were photographed in the same objective manner regardless of occupation or social standing. In a sense, each of the artist's classifications — and each of his sitters — reflected Germany during a period of rapid social and economic change, a time that Golo Mann described in his introduction to the 'Men Without Masks' publication as 'the twilight era between war and war, full of substance and tension, now scattered by the winds.'

In 1927, alongside the Cologne Artist Group, Sander showed approximately one hundred of his photographs at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in an exhibition titled 'People of the 20th Century: A Cultural Work in Photographic Pictures'. The show was positively received by the press, with one reviewer deeming Sander a 'Balzac of the lens'. This exhibition was shortly followed by the publication of Sander's first book, 'Face of Our Time'. Published by the Kurt Wolff/Transmare Verlag in Munich in 1929, the book included an introduction by Alfred Döblin and featured 60 photographs including the 'Portfolio of Archetypes'. By this time Sander was considered an



authority on photography in Germany, and in 1930 he hosted a series of radio lectures titled 'The Essence and Development of Photography'. In 1936 the Nazi government, which had recently come to power, destroyed the printing blocks for 'Face of Our Time' and impounded unsold copies of the book, likely due to the publication's representation of a heterogeneous German society. During his life-time Sander was also very productive in the field of landscape photography and in the 1930s he published volumes exploring regions of Germany in the series 'German Lands – German People'.

Sander set out to depict, with eloquence and empathy, the faces of his world. At the same time, he embarked on a massive conceptual project predicated upon the existence of typologies around profession and social class that can, and do, reduce faces to masks. As Susan Sontag wrote in her timeless 1977 essay collection 'On Photography': 'It was not so much that Sander chose individuals for their representative characters, as that he assumed, correctly, that the camera cannot help but reveal faces as social masks.' Sander's considered oeuvre has served as a wellspring of inspiration for modern and contemporary photographers, from Walker Evans and Diane Arbus, to Tina Barney, Rineke Dijkstra, and Bernd and Hilla Becher, and has exerted a profound influence upon new generations of visual artists.

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About the Artist

August Sander (b.1876) was born in Herdorf, a mining town east of Cologne. While working at a local slagheap as a youth he serendipitously encountered a visiting landscape photographer and was fascinated by the 'magic box' through which he saw the world. Sander purchased a camera with financial assistance from his uncle, went on to serve as an itinerant photographer's assistant and eventually opened his own studio. In a lifelong project entitled 'People of the 20th Century', Sander systematically documented contemporary German society; this encyclopedic magnum opus constitutes one of the most monumental endeavors in photographic history.

Sander has been honoured with major solo exhibitions and inclusion in important group shows and public collections. Currently on view: 'Persecutors and Persecuted', Shoah Memorial Museum, Paris, France. Previous exhibitions include 'Portraying a Nation: Germany 1918 – 1933. ARTIST ROOMS: August Sander', Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, England, 2017, 'August Sander: Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts, People of the 20th Century' at the 30th São Paulo Biennial, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2012; 'Artists Rooms: August Sander', Tate Modern, London, England, 2010; 'August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century', The Getty Center, Los Angeles CA, 2008, and 'August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century' which traveled from the Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne, Germany, 2001, to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA, 2002 – 2003, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY, 2004.

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www.hauserwirth.info

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Boxer
(Boxers)
1929 (printed 1972)
Gelatin silver print
80.2 x 60 cm / 31 5/8 x 23 5/8 in
Photo: Genevieve Hanson

Bauernmädchen
(Country Girls)
1925 (printed 1972)
Gelatin silver print
79.3 x 60 cm / 31 1/4 x 23 5/8 in

Sportflieger
(Aviator)
1920 (printed 1972)
Gelatin silver print
79.3 x 59.4 cm / 31 1/4 x 23 3/8 in

Zirkusartistin
(Circus Artiste)
1926 – 1932 (printed 1972)
Gelatin silver print
80 x 60 cm / 31 1/2 x 23 5/8 in

Boheme [Willi Bongard, Gottfried Brockmann]
(Bohemians [Willi Bongard, Gottfried Brockmann])
1922 – 1925 (printed 1972)
Gelatin silver print
60 x 79.6 cm / 23 5/8 x 31 3/8 in