

Special Exhibition

FOTO | ALBUM

Private and Anonymous Photography
from the Collection of Werkbundarchiv – Museum der Dinge

Duration: October 20, 2017 – February 26, 2018

Opening: Thursday, October 19, 7 pm

Quirky however conventional, familiar yet enigmatic: The gaze of uncounted nameless snapshooters is reflected in the collection of private and anonymous photography of Werkbundarchiv – Museum der Dinge. This rich, but largely unknown collection is displayed in the special exhibition FOTO | ALBUM. In three chapters, hundreds of photographs, photo albums and tangible photo-objects are presented, highlighting poses and motifs, distinctive narrative structures and social functions.

The first chapter of the exhibition features hundreds of single photographs, grouped into visual clusters according to recurring motifs and conventions of private image practice. Whether formulaically staged images of important life events or snapshots ranging from the ordinary to the absurd, consciously or not, the same motifs are being reproduced over and over again and have become part of our collective memory. We recognise ourselves in the private pictures of strangers showing us possible versions of our own family gatherings, holidays and everyday scenes.

The second chapter displays numerous photo albums as a means of preserving, organising and presenting. These arrangements of glued-in photographs, often alongside written texts and ephemera, condense into narratives charged with symbolic meaning. Creating a photo album is shown here as a sense-producing cultural technique serving crucial social functions ranging from genealogical representation to the intimate portrayal of individual biographies. What is deemed worth narrating and remembering is as fascinating as what is deliberately left out: leaps in time and gaps within the otherwise linear family narrative indicate potentially unpleasant topics and taboos.

A particular focus lies on an extensive lot of the Berg estate, a family of cabaret and vaudeville artists from Berlin. Their photo albums bear witness to an eventful family history which will become alive again through their narration in a film and a sound installation.

Photographs are more than just images – they are also part of material culture as three-dimensional objects that are used, collected and treasured. Chapter three of the exhibition is shedding light on the many forms this can take, such as miniaturisation, repairing, archiving into boxes or commenting. The equally close and ambivalent connection between photography and memory – an important aspect of theoretical discourse as well as very concrete practice – is reflected in these photo-objects. A picture inside a locket for example can be an attempt to cope with impermanence and the absence of a dear person.

Photo albums have nowadays been replaced by digital feeds, streams, the cloud and social media, establishing new visual conventions and social practices like hashtags, sharing and commenting as well as a shift of boundaries between public and private. Simultaneously with the demise of material photography, however, we are experiencing a renaissance of analogue aesthetics and practices, frequently born of nostalgia. Partly expressed through short-lived fashions or simulations, partly indicative of a timeless longing for something “tangible”, something “real”.

The subjects raised in the exhibition also touch upon questions for the museum: how, as an institution, does it deal with this material heritage? Which value does it ascribe to personal pictures that are, unlike works of art, commonplace, widely available yet meaningful for the individual? Which criteria can be identified for collecting, ordering and curating this potentially infinite cosmos of everyday imagery?

A programme of presentations, discussion evenings and guided tours will accompany the special exhibition FOTO | ALBUM. Workshops for children, teenagers and families are being held in cooperation with *Jugend im Museum e.V.* (only available in German). Detailed information on the accompanying programme will shortly be published on our website under the Events & Education section.

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Press information and images available at: www.museumderdinge.org/information/press

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