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A New Art: Photography and Impressionism
February 12 – May 8, 2022

In the nineteenth century, numerous photographers chose the same motifs as impressionist painters: the forest of Fontainebleau, the cliffs of Étretat, or the modern metropolis of Paris. They too studied different light effects, the passing of the seasons, and changing weather conditions. Experimenting with composition and perspective and using a range of different techniques, photography had an artistic ambition from its beginnings. Until the First World War, its relationship to painting was shaped both by competition and influence. Featuring more than 150 works, the exhibition at the Museum Barberini explores photography's development to an autonomous art form and illuminates its complex relationship to impressionist painting.

The new medium of photography was linked to both the industrial revolution and the advent of a modern knowledge society. At the world's fairs it was presented to an international public. Photographic exposure and reproduction techniques served the panoramic vision of the period and answered an encyclopedic desire to document. The possibility of creating collections of any conceivable theme through photographs corresponded to a new need to make knowledge accessible and to archive it. Similar to the way in which the city centers of Paris, London, Vienna, or Munich were transformed by historicizing architecture, the new medium also fused tradition and modernity: museums, libraries, and archives were built, travelogues, surveys, and maps shaped the era. At the same time as sociology became a subject, social documentary photography emerged alongside novels of social realism. The natural sciences, which were now becoming separate disciplines, described the present.

Photography – a new art?

So what seemed more natural than to exploit photography's exactitude? Might the new medium become an auxiliary science of painting? In 1859, Charles Baudelaire wrote a scathing critique of the first Paris Salon to include photographs. In a fictional dispute, he had a photographer say, "I want to represent things as they are, or rather as they would be, supposing that I did not exist." Against this, Baudelaire set the answer of a painter from his favored faction of "imaginatives": "I want to illuminate things with my mind, and to project their reflection upon other minds." The antagonism between machine and mind established here by Baudelaire, a visionary and a friend of the impressionists, would

continue for a long time. As late as 1936, Walter Benjamin's reflections on the loss of the aura in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" would return to this distinction.

Interplay of photography and impressionism

Claude Monet, just like Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, worked en plein air in order to explore the new relationship between humans and nature. Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini: „The impressionists devoted their works to the fleeting moment. Their painting was entirely committed to the here and now, capturing individual responses to the changing light and weather phenomena. This made them natural allies of the photographers“. Choosing the same motifs as the impressionists, photographers too studied shifting light and atmospheric conditions and the passing of the seasons. "The exhibition *A New Art* at the Museum Barberini now highlights this interplay between photography and painting," Ortrud Westheider continues.

In 1981, the exhibition *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York already made it clear that photography did not emerge from a scientific context but from landscape painting. The medium's perspectival and subjective nature has been a research focus ever since, and the insights gained from this enabled pivotal exhibitions such as *Gustave Caillebotte: An Impressionist and Photography* (Schirn, Frankfurt am Main, 2012) and *The Impressionists and Photography* (Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2019).

Yet the interplay between photography and impressionism remains underresearched. *A New Art: Photography and Impressionism* at the Museum Barberini aims to address this gap: "From the very beginning, photography had artistic ambitions, which it tested by means of composition and perspective, different techniques and materials, as well as blurring, dramatization and montage. Nevertheless, nineteenth-century viewers regarded it as a hybrid of science, technology, industry, and art. In addition to painters, scientists were involved in the invention and development of photographic processes. Initially understood as an aid to painting, the early photographers quickly developed their own artistic self-awareness and measured themselves against fine art's leading masters of the time. Painting, in turn, saw itself inferior in the exact reproduction of reality and had to develop new strategies to distinguish itself from photography," says guest curator Ulrich Pohlmann about the concept of the exhibition.

A New Art: Photography and Impressionism at the Museum Barberini now illuminates the development of the new medium photography featuring more than 150 works, including photographs by Stéphanie Breton,

Auguste Hippolyte Collard, Eugène Cuvelier, Louis-Alphonse Davanne, Robert Demachy, Peter Henry Emerson, Gustave Le Gray, Henri Le Secq, Heinrich Kühn, Charles Marville,

Constant Puyo, Henry Peach Robinson, Alfred Stieglitz, Carl Teufel, and Alphonse Taupin. Important loans have been made by the Albertina in Vienna, the Serge Kakou Collection in Paris, the Münchner Stadtmuseum, Musée d'Orsay in Paris, Museum Folkwang in Essen, Photoinstitut Bonartes in Vienna, Société Française de Photographie in Paris, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, and many other institutions.

A cooperative project of two museums with a focus on impressionism

A New Art: Photography and Impressionism is the first photography exhibition to be shown at the Museum Barberini since its opening in 2017. Its point of departure is the collection of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings by museum founder Hasso Plattner, which has been on permanent display since September 2020 and includes numerous works by artists like Gustave Caillebotte, Claude Monet, or Berthe Morisot. The Von der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal, which will present the show from October 2, 2022 to January 8, 2023 in cooperation with the Museum Barberini, is one of the institutions that began to collect impressionist art early on, setting an example in both Germany and Europe overall.

The exhibitions in Potsdam and Wuppertal are accompanied by a comprehensive catalog published by Prestel, Munich, with contributions by Ulrich Pohlmann, Monika Faber, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, Matthias Krüger, Esther Ruelfs, and Bernd Stiegler, which are based on the findings of the preparatory symposium held in Potsdam in October 2021.

Apart from *A New Art: Photography and Impressionism*, the Museum Barberini will present two cooperative exhibitions in 2022: *Die Form der Freiheit. Internationale Abstraktion nach 1945* (June 4–September 25, 2022) with the Albertina Modern in Vienna and *Surrealismus und Magie. Verzauberte Moderne* (October 22, 2022–January 29, 2023) with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice.

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