

HERBERT LIST. THE MAGIC EYE
14 MAY TO 11 SEPTEMBER 2022

On the occasion of the 8th Triennial of Photography Hamburg 2022, the Bucerius Kunst Forum is presenting the first international retrospective on Herbert List (1903–1975) in over two decades. With some 240 vintage prints, first editions of publications and rarely shown reportage photographs, the show offers a unique overview of the œuvre of the Magnum photographer from Hamburg. The exhibition was made possible by close cooperation with the Herbert List Estate and the Münchner Stadtmuseum, as well as between the joint curators Kathrin Baumstark, Director of the Bucerius Kunst Forum, and Ulrich Pohlmann, Head of the Photography Collection at the Münchner Stadtmuseum.

Herbert List, born in Hamburg in 1903 as the eldest son of a coffee merchant, took an early interest in art and photography and began to pursue both in earnest from 1930 onwards, opting in 1936 for a career in photography. A homosexual with a Jewish grandfather, List came under threat by the Nazis and left Germany for Paris in 1936. In 1937 he spent several months in Greece, a country to which he would return again and again throughout his life. To avoid arrest in Greece, List then settled in Munich in 1941 but continued to travel frequently.

The retrospective is divided into seven chapters: *Early Days in Hamburg*, *Fotografia Metafisica*, *Greece*, *Young Men*, *Italy*, *Artist Portraits* and *Reportage*.

It was in **Hamburg** that List launched his photographic career. Inspired by his photographer friend Andreas Feininger, who convinced him to buy a new Rolleiflex camera, he began in 1930 to devote himself more intensively to photography. List focused his lens on the streets of Hamburg, including the harbour and the area around the train station as well as the immediate vicinity of the Elbe River and Baltic Sea. He was particularly fascinated by night scenes. Themes for which he would later become well-known are already hinted at in a series of mysterious, surreal motifs as well as portraits of young men. His interest in experimenting with light and shadow and strong light and dark contrasts are likewise already in evidence here.

Fotografia Metafisica is List's personal trademark. He rose to fame with images that exude an enigmatic air and give an inkling of a world "beyond" what is immediately apparent. The term was coined by Egon Vietta in 1942 in reference to De Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica*. Creating his very own visual language, List interweaves various artistic influences from Surrealism, Neoclassicism, *Pittura Metafisica*, New Objectivity and Magic Realism. These photographs – mostly still lifes – mainly date from the period before the Second World War.

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Greece was Herbert List's place of longing and refuge. He stayed there for extended periods between 1937 and 1941 and returned several times after the end of the war. His enthusiasm for Ancient Greece was shared by his contemporaries, so that many of his photographs were printed in German as well as French magazines. List saw the culture of antiquity as an ideal, an epoch when same-sex partnership was socially accepted. He photographed chiefly ancient temples and sculptures as well as young men. The images capture the timeless aura of ancient Greece, couched in a Neoclassical and Romantic pictorial style that in some cases has overtones of the New Objectivity. Besides Greek culture, List was also inspired by the special quality of light in Greece. His book project *Licht über Hellas* (Light over Hellas), featuring photographs taken in 1937/38, was not published until 1953 due to the caesura of the war.

Photographs of **young men** run through Herbert List's entire oeuvre, an avowal of his own homosexuality. He stages the male body in a variety of ways. Likenesses of friends and acquaintances convey a sense of intimacy and closeness. Contrary to the taste of the time, List did not emphasize masculine traits but rather portrayed men as vulnerable human beings, favouring playful depictions that occasionally recall female nudes from art history. When viewed in the context of the contemporary popularity of Greece, the way the models' bodies are presented invariably summons associations with ancient sculptures.

Italy was a travel destination for List at various times of his life. During his stay in Rome in 1953, he switched from a medium-format camera to a Leica 35mm camera. The latter allows for quick, spontaneous and unobserved shots, which led List to modify his style. Static images were replaced by ephemeral moments of movement captured as snapshots. Moreover, List now interacted more with his subjects, as is evident from street scenes in Rome and even more so in his shots of residents of Naples in 1959 and 1961.

In the post-war period List became a popular **portrait photographer of artists** and intellectuals of his day. Among his sitters were painters, actors, musicians and writers including Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Georges Braque, Marlene Dietrich and Ingeborg Bachmann. His portraits show people posing behind their work and convey a trusting relationship between photographer and sitter. Along with photographs taken in Paris and in Italy in the 1950s, a 1960s assignment for the magazine *Du* took List to the divided city of Berlin, where he portrayed, among others, John Heartfield, Günter Grass and Helene Weigel.

After the Second World War, List increasingly did **reportages** on current events for magazines and the daily press. Images of Munich in ruins recall the aesthetic of his photographs of the ruins of ancient Greece. List was also able to realise a few book projects during this period. He worked frequently with the glossy magazine *Heute*, which enjoyed the highest circulation in the American sector of Germany. The Swiss art and culture magazine *Du* also published his work in many of its issues, and he was one of prime contributors of photographs to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper. A great number of interested readers were thus familiar with his images, strengthening his influence on younger photographers. Outstanding as documents of contemporary history are List's reportages from 1945/46 - rarely exhibited to date - on

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the spectacular discovery of the Nazi membership card index and the Central Art Collecting Point, where works of art looted by the Nazis were gathered together.

To accompany the show, Hirmer Verlag is publishing a comprehensive catalogue with essays by Kathrin Baumstark, Ludger Derenthal, Katrin Dyballa, Nadine Isabelle Henrich, Hans-Michael Koetzle, Bernhard Maaz, Ulrich Pohlmann, Peer-Olaf Richter and Esther Ruelfs (288 pages with illustrations of the exhibited works, 29.90 euros at the exhibition).

In parallel to the exhibition *Herbert List: The Magic Eye*, the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe will be showing from 20 May to 18 September 2022 *Präuscher's Panopticon: A Picture Book by Herbert List*, the world premiere of this photo book project, as well as photographs that are considered heralds of the "queer gaze".

The exhibition is sponsored by



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