

MODERN TIMES. INDUSTRIAL THEMES IN PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY
26 JUNE TO 26 SEPTEMBER 2021

Modern Times. Industrial Themes in Painting and Photography is the first-ever exhibition dedicated exclusively to the dialogue between the two media in terms of how they depict industry. Based on powerful images spanning a trajectory from the early days of industrialisation to the present day, and from Romanticism to contemporary photography, the show highlights how the artistic treatment of industrial themes has developed and changed over the past 175 years. The Bucerius Kunst Forum has assembled for this purpose around 30 paintings and some 170 photographs by over 100 artists including Adolph von Menzel, Conrad Felixmüller, Albert Renger-Patzsch, August Sander, Otto Steinert, Evelyn Richter, Hilla and Bernd Becher, Robert Voit, Thomas Struth and Inge Rambow.

From 26 June to 26 September 2021, the Bucerius Kunst Forum will present a large-scale exhibition devoted to the handling of industrial themes in painting and photography – an absolute first. Never before has artists' engagement with the emergence and progress of industry and the resulting changes in the landscape and working world been examined by way of a dialogue between the two media. *Modern Times. Industrial Themes in Painting and Photography* brings together about 30 paintings and some 170 photographs spanning a period of 175 years. On display are works by artists including Adolph von Menzel, Léon-Auguste Mellé, Hugo van Werden, Albert Renger-Patzsch, August Sander, Conrad Felixmüller, Oskar Nerlinger, Franz Radziwill, Walker Evans, Otto Steinert, Evelyn Richter, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Robert Voit, Thomas Struth and Inge Rambow. The show, conceived by Ulrich Pohlmann and Kathrin Baumstark, illuminates in five chronologically arranged chapters how the artistic portrayal of industry has changed over the centuries. Taken together, the works on view present an impressive chronicle of the history of industrialisation in Europe while also highlighting important developments abroad. "We would like to express our thanks to the numerous lenders who, in these days of closed cultural institutions and exceptional planning and logistics challenges, have made this project possible through their unflagging commitment," says Andreas Hoffmann, Managing Director of the Bucerius Kunst Forum.

The exhibition opens with works from the 1850s: Factories in idyllic natural settings, interior depictions of workplaces and work processes in the huge halls of the steelworks, as well as increasing mobility through rail and shipping are all themes that found their way into the work of painters of this era. Photography had not yet achieved the status of an art form in its own right, but companies were beginning to commission photographers to document major construction sites, for example for railway stations and railway lines or for shipbuilding, as well as to take promotional photographs

of factory grounds and halls. The exhibition juxtaposes these photographs of industrial work and buildings with paintings from the period.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Impressionists began transforming industrial landscapes into ethereal-looking pictures displaying extraordinary lighting effects. Similarly atmospheric images of factories and working life were produced during the same period by amateur photographers with artistic ambitions. Social criticism then gradually began to play a role in this context. Whereas up until circa 1900 the worker had occupied only a marginal position in such images, a mere cog in the world of machines, the relationship between human and technology underwent a fundamental change at the turn of the century. There was growing public awareness of the social ills caused by industrialised labour, and workers began to be appreciated as individuals. Photographers of the day arrestingly captured the precarious living and working conditions of the proletariat, for example in New York and Berlin.

Between 1880 and 1930, industrial paintings commissioned by large companies became a genre in their own right in Germany. Painters set up their easels on the premises of steel or textile companies – occasionally also using photographs as aids – in order to capture the work being done in the huge factory halls as realistically as possible. Artists under the sway of the New Objectivity often set socially critical accents in their work. Instead of focusing on Impressionist effects or heroic industrial motifs, they tried to portray the harsh social and political realities under capitalism. Their themes included mass unemployment and above all the differences in the social classes. The industrial photography of New Objectivity took quite a different stance, in general not conveying any outright criticism of the existing social order.

After 1945, so-called *subjective photography*, marked by an experimental and abstract visual language, dominated the formal canon for industrial motifs. Unlike the technological euphoria of the pre-war era, the photographs now take a more distanced stance to progress. In the 1960s and 70s, picture reportages about everyday life in industrial regions such as the Ruhr Valley became increasingly popular and were frequently featured in illustrated magazines. Issues such as environmental pollution and difficult working conditions were now documented by investigative photojournalists. As traditional industrial sectors such as coal mining began to disappear and new forms of energy emerged, artists likewise took an interest in recording the decline of industrial culture, depicting motifs such as water towers, pithead towers and mines.

From the 1970s until today, numerous artists and photographers have exposed the consequences of industrialisation, addressing in their works subjects such as abandoned industrial ruins, environmental pollution and destruction, exploitative working conditions, Minamata, Chernobyl and Fukushima, the effects of genetic engineering in agriculture, and the changes in our way of life brought about by automation and digitalisation. The exhibition therefore concludes with works by contemporary photographers who portray the changes wrought on our planet by the industrial exploitation of resources and also by the digitalization of work processes.

For further press information and images, please contact:

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Hirmer Verlag is publishing a comprehensive catalogue accompanying the exhibition, with essays by Florian Ebner, Sabine Friese-Oertmann, Thilo Koenig, Kristina Lowis, Ulrich Pohlmann, Lukas Schepers and Ralf Stremmel (approx. 250 pages, with colour illustrations of the exhibited works, 29.90 EUR at the exhibition).