

30 Years of Photography Auctions at Lempertz

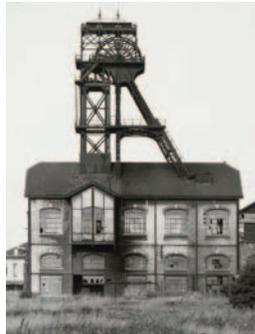


When, in the autumn of 1989, Lempertz hosted the first photography auction on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the invention of the medium of photography, it equalled a truly pioneering act: previously, auctions dedicated to photography had taken place only in New York and London and occasionally in France; in Germany they were a first.

We had already hosted a 'Photographica' auction as early as 1976 in which cameras, lenses, technical equipment and some – very few – historical photographs were auctioned. L. Fritz Gruber, founder and long-standing organiser of the legendary Photokina Bilderschauen paid tribute to that offer in his preface to the catalogue: „It is laudable that such a renowned art and auction house as Lempertz now also extends its work into this important area of masterful technology and imageries, thus moving with the times.“ A further 'Photographica' auction followed in 1978. The fact that the offers of both auctions focused on technology is not surprising considering that, in the 1970s, the German market for photography was still in its infancy. Merely two galleries specialising in photography existed in Germany at that time. Even eleven years later, on the occasion of the first Lempertz auction 'Photography + Photo Works', at which exclusively photographic prints were auctioned, Klaus Honnef, then one of the few German exhibitors in this field, introduced the auction in the newspaper 'Die Welt', saying that it was „being put to the test“ and commenting: „Without a doubt, Lempertz has started an 'experiment' with this photographic auction. It remains to be seen how it will end.“



*László Moholy-Nagy, Portrait Ellen Frank, c. 1929
Sold in May 2013 for € 53,000*



*Bernd und Hilla Becher, Vier Fördertürme,
1967–1975
Sold in December 2010 for € 143,000*

The initial ‘experiment’ turned into a success story: Lempertz has since long established itself among the leading international houses in the field of photography auctions. At first, we held auctions annually but since 1998, we have been successfully offering historic, classic and contemporary photography every six months. Since 2007, higher-priced photographic works by contemporary artists such as Thomas Demand, Nobuyoshi Araki or Bernd & Hilla Becher as well as works by the ‘Becher-Schule’, founded by the latter, have been offered in our ‘Contemporary Art’ auctions – thereby acknowledging the fact that photography is playing an increasingly significant role in the contemporary art trade.

When asked about early photography auctions, Henrik Hanstein, whose personal enthusiasm for photography made him a pioneer among European auctioneers, quickly goes into raptures: „The hall was buzzing, every internationally acclaimed collector and trader was there, Lempertz was the place to be.“ Every two years, the auctions took place parallel to Photokina while the city of Cologne, which had always been an important location for photography, became a meeting place for photographic professionals from all over the world. There were many photographers among the consignors, as the auctions offered them an entirely new distribution opportunity.

As is the case everywhere today, things have also calmed down somewhat in our auction halls, seeing that a large proportion of the lots are sold over the telephone or to online bidders. The Internet in particular offers unmistakable advantages: thus the circle of photography collectors has become more international in the past years and clients in South America or Asia have been gained. Condition report requests prior to an auction from Kuala Lumpur are just as common today as consignments from South Africa or Hong Kong.

It is not only the passion for the medium, but first and foremost their extremely high level of expertise and intimate connoisseurship that links collectors of photography all over the world. People who collect photography don’t usually do this for reasons of prestige or in anticipation of a high return, but rather based on many years of intensive analysis of the history of photography and its technical prerequisites. Many collectors enjoy their treasures in private, collecting literally ‘for the drawer’, so we are dealing with a small, but high-quality collector’s market.

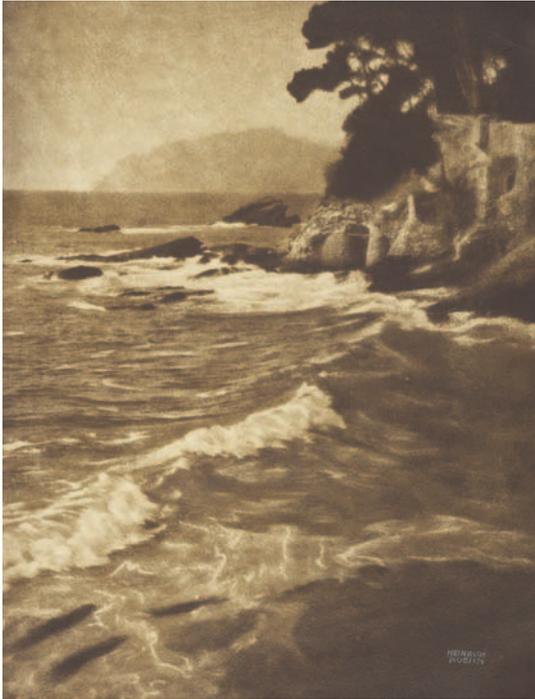


Albert Renger-Patzsch, Natterkopf, 1925
Sold in June 2016 for € 149,000



August Sander, Dorfphilosophen, 1931
Sold in May 2009 for € 26,000

Often, it is the encounter with a particularly appealing original print that marks the start of collecting activity as well as the realisation that photographs signify far more than potentially infinitely reproduced copies of an image. Photographic images with an artistic claim go far beyond their motif and, as individually produced objects with their very own effects and haptic quality, afford the viewer a sensual experience of a very special kind. Anyone who has ever held a delicate salt paper print from the pioneering days of photography in their hands, or a fine-tone vintage print from the 1920s, will find it difficult to escape the aura and magic of such prints.



Heinrich Kühn, *Küstenlandschaft in Italien*,
c. 1897/1899
Sold in November 2018 for € 42,000



Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung,
24 November 2013

Especially in the vintage photography segment of the pre-war modern age, the market has become tighter in recent years and the increase in prospective buyers is faced with an ever-shorter supply. Many of the large collections amassed since the seventies have been acquired by museums or institutions and are thus off the market. Top pieces in the field of classical photography are all the more coveted, with hammer prices today reaching the upper five or six-digit range. A good example for this is the close-up portrait of Ellen Frank by László Moholy-Nagy from the late 1920s, with an estimated price of € 20,000, it finally changed hands for € 53,000 in our spring auction in 2013. In December 2015, *Das Bäumchen* by Albert Renger-Patzsch was sold for € 136,000 at Lempertz and merely six months later, his equally famous *Natterkopf* surpassed this international record hammer price at € 149,000. Similarly positive price developments can be observed in the field of Pictorialism, an important trend around 1900 that helped the medium of photography to gain recognition as an independent art form. Not only did we achieve record results in our special auction 'Heinrich Kühn. 60 Photographs' in December 2017, but with a knock-down rate of 85%, the increasing appreciation of rare masterpieces of photography is clearly seen.

The aforementioned auction constitutes one of the activities that we focus on here in the photography department. For several years now, we are the only German auction house that regularly conducts single owner sales in which private collections are auctioned, with great success. The temporal and thematic spectrum is broad: in May 2013, it kicked off with the Lutz Teutloff Collection titled 'The Human Condition' including classic and contemporary photographs that revolve around the human body and its transience. Two special catalogues followed in the same year and in spring 2014 featuring significant NASA space photographs from the Jesko Siebert collection, a theme with which we not only won numerous new customers, but also achieved an enormous press response (see illus. left). With the collection of German post-war reportage photography of the Düsseldorf gallery owners Elke and Werner Zimmer, photographs were auctioned in 2015 that have decisively influenced our perception of the important historical events of the second half of the 20th century in both halves of Germany, and which are firmly anchored in the collective image memory today. In the spring of 2016, the special catalogue 'The International Style through the Eyes of Photography' included works from an important private collection focusing on European architectural photography from the

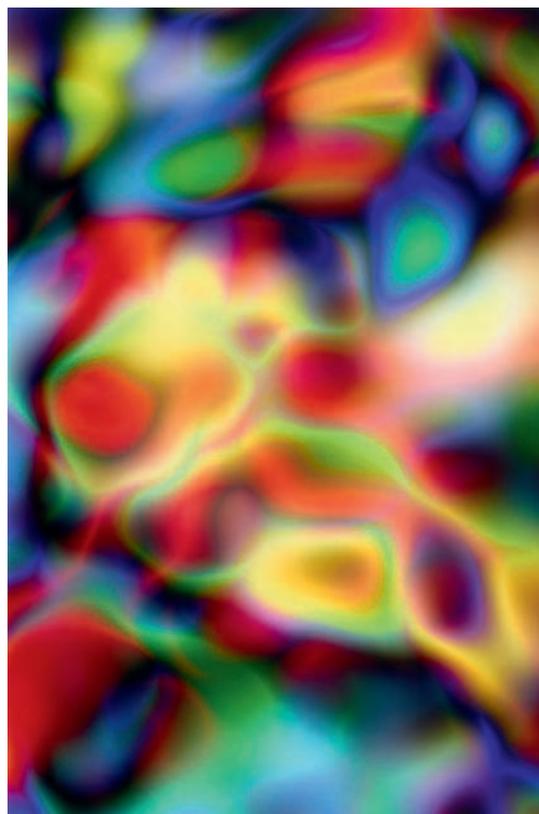


*Thomas Demand, Flügel (Grand Piano), 1993/2005
Sold in May 2014 for € 80,000*

1920s and 1930s. Finally in the autumn of 2017, the above-mentioned auction of 60 fine prints by Heinrich Kühn, the protagonist of European Pictorialism, was devoted entirely to art photography.

The design of our special catalogues is particularly important to us: these are always carefully, individually coordinated presentations that take into account the peculiarities and impressions of the respective photographs as well as the character of the collection as a whole. Format, choice of paper and layout – in close consultation with the consigning collector – make a subtle reference to the materiality of the works.

We landed a particularly good coup in 2011 with the sale of a collection of photographs by Sigmar Polke from the collection of Carl Vogel, the former president of the Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts. This much-acclaimed exhibition, which had previously been shown in our premises in Cologne, Berlin and Brussels, was accompanied by our own today sought after antiquarian publication and was entirely procured by the MoMA in New York, which was busy preparing the major Polke retrospective at the time. The latter was also later shown at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. In recent years, further exhibitions, in addition to the actual auction events, have rounded off our commitment to photography, including monographic exhibitions on contemporary photographers such as Albrecht Kunkel and Elger Esser. His works were



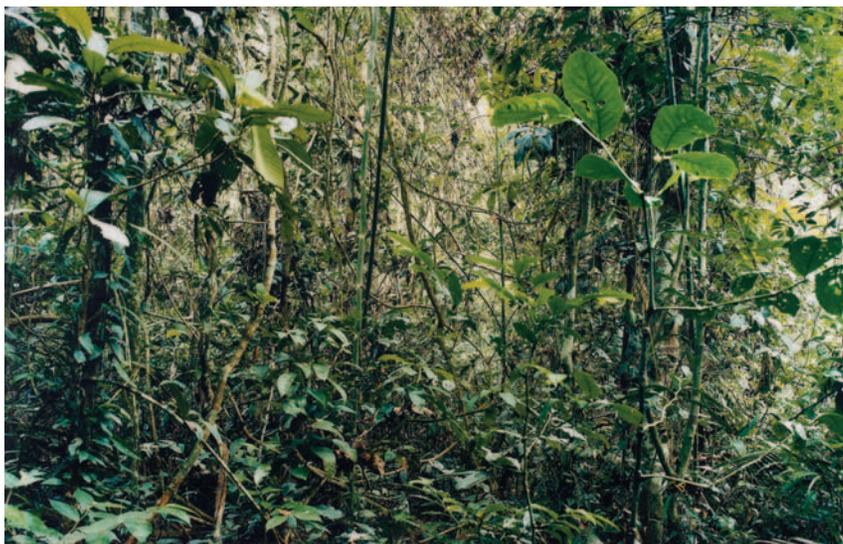
*Thomas Ruff, Substrat 27 II, 2005
Sold in December 2018 for € 59,500*



*Robert Mapplethorpe, Hyacinth, 1987
Sold in December 2009 for € 17,500*



*Helmut Newton, Piscine, Old Beach Hotel,
Monte-Carlo, 1981
Sold in November 2007 for € 37,000*



*Thomas Struth, Paradise 29, Peru, 2005/2006
Sold in May 2008 for € 66,000*

shown together with those of Felix Schramm in a large show in Brussels in 2019. Aside from that were also thematic exhibitions, for example on post-war photography in Cologne.

30 years of photography auctions at Lempertz – by now the market for photography has long outgrown its infancy and we are proud to be an integral part of the international photography trade. We also owe this fact to you, our long-standing customers, whom we would like to thank. We look forward to many more years with you!

Maren Klinge and Christine Nielsen



*Wolfgang Tillmans, Window/Caravaggio, 1997
Sold in June 2018 for € 22,300*

Die deutsche Version des Textes ist online und in der deutschen Ausgabe unseres Bulletins verfügbar.

Special Catalogues (2008–2018)

