

Media release  
Basel, July 16, 2020

## **The Incredible World of Photography Ruth and Peter Herzog Collection**

July 18–October 4, 2020, Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau  
Curators: Olga Osadtschy, Paul Mellenthin

With the exhibition *The Incredible World of Photography*, the Kunstmuseum Basel celebrates a twofold premiere: the first comprehensive portrait of Ruth and Peter Herzog's photography collection in Switzerland is also the first presentation at the Kunstmuseum dedicated to the history of photography.

A serendipitous flea market find in the 1970s led Ruth and Peter Herzog to begin building what has since grown into a singular photography collection encompassing over 500,000 pictures. The holdings range from the medium's early days to the 1970s and reflect all major developments in analog photography. For the nineteenth century, in particular, the two collectors made important discoveries that have deepened our understanding of the eventful history of photography. Ruth and Peter Herzog now rank among the world's leading photography collectors.

What the Herzogs have created is nothing less than a photographic encyclopedia of life in the industrial age. The myriad anonymous masterworks throw light on an overwhelming abundance of motifs and themes from around the world and illustrate how photography tells stories and relates history. The collection as a whole maps a variety of approaches to exploring the world with and in photography. Immersion in its riches demonstrates above all that photography is far from a unified phenomenon: each individual photograph unfolds a dense web of social, institutional, and historical interconnections.

### **Debut of a long-term cooperation**

The ca. 400 works from the ample holdings chosen for the exhibition represent selected foci of the unique collection, including, in particular, amateur photography, nineteenth-century commercial and scientific photography, and twentieth-century advertising and press photography. We showcase works by Swiss and international photographers that have never been on public display. Art museums generally prefer to present photography in the form of single prints on paper; our exhibition, by contrast, lays out the material diversity of photographic objects, including daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, ferrotypes, salt paper prints, albumen paper prints, autochromes, and gelatin silver prints.

The exhibition marks the debut of a long-term cooperation between the Kunstmuseum Basel and the Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel, which has been the owner of the Ruth and Peter Herzog Photography Collection since 2015. In addition to providing the valuable

exhibits, the Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel has designed an innovative exhibition architecture for the Kunstmuseum that was directly inspired by the setting in which the work at the Kabinett takes place and its sustained engagement with the rich spectrum of historical photography and its materiality. The design is informed by careful considerations on the perception and presentation of the artifacts, many of which are in small formats and light-sensitive. The diversity of the Ruth and Peter Herzog Photography Collection and its qualities as an “encyclopedia of life” (Martin Heller, 1989) are translated into a succession of nine galleries. Each room invites the visitors to sample the different ways in which photography presents a vast diversity of motifs and themes, from the contemplation of individual objects in arrangements on tables to wall projections of individual images.

At selected junctions, the exhibition pairs the historic original photographs with major works from the Kunstmuseum Basel and treasures on loan from the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, including paintings by Vincent van Gogh and Robert Delaunay and works on paper by Andy Warhol and Martin Schongauer, as well as photographs by Thomas Demand and Bernd and Hilla Becher. These constellations draw attention to the dynamic interplay between photography and visual art and inquire into parallels on the levels of motifs and formal composition as well as the media’s (negotiable) boundaries. The ways in which they have influenced each other is scrutinized in exemplary studies on fundamental questions of photography such as seriality, reproduction, and the role of color or its absence.

### **Interactive installation**

In preparing the exhibition *The Incredible World of Photography*, we have been able to build on an ambitious collection review and digitization project dedicated to the holdings of the Ruth and Peter Herzog Collection that was launched at the Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel, in 2015. Drawing on the resulting digital material, the iart studio for media architectures, working with students in the B.A. program in digital ideation at the Lucerne University of Applied Arts and Sciences, has developed an interactive installation in the exhibition. Powered by artificial intelligence, the installation enables visitors to chart their own individual course through the collection.

Scanning your museum ticket at one of two interactive stations, a randomly selected image appears in large format. A family of images with similar motifs is mapped around this initial picture. If two tickets are scanned, the algorithm connects the two images, creating navigational pathways between motifs from different periods. The algorithm works with image recognition, and constantly conjures up new formal relationships.

## **Catalogue and Digital@**

A scholarly publication accompanying the exhibition (360 pp., 300 illustrations) will be released by Christoph Merian Verlag. Highly informative yet eminently legible, the collection catalogue will include essays by Martina Baleva, Jan von Brevern, Eva Ehninger, Steve Edwards, Peter Geimer, Valentin Groebner, Michael Hagner, Peter Herzog, Katja Müller-Helle, Katja Petrowskaja, Vanessa R. Schwartz, and Kelley Wilder.

For the exhibition *The Incredible World of Photography*, the Kunstmuseum Basel debuts the Digital@ online art education format. The initiative is part of [digitorials.ch](https://digitorials.ch), a project at altogether eight Swiss museums implemented with support from Engagement Migros and in collaboration with the agency maze pictures swiss that draws up custom-tailored strategies to respond to the challenges of digital transformation. The Digital@ combines innovative storytelling with a multimedia experience weaving together visuals, sound, and writing, setting new standards for sharing cultural content with audiences. Digital@s were developed at the Städel Museum, the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, and the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, Germany.

The exhibition is realized in cooperation with the Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel. The nonprofit foundation seeks to preserve the integral collection as a unique cultural treasure in Basel and make it accessible to public audiences as well as scholars for research and publication purposes.

The exhibition is supported by:  
Credit Suisse (Switzerland) AG  
Memoriav  
Christoph Merian Stiftung  
iart AG  
Pro Helvetia  
Stiftung für das Kunstmuseum Basel

### **Media conference**

Thursday, July 16, 2020, 11 am  
Kunstmuseum Basel | Neubau, St. Alban-Graben 20, 4052 Basel

### **Imagery and information on the exhibition**

[www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/medien](http://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/medien)

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