



Herbert Tobias (1924-1982)
14 January – 28 March 2009
Galerie Rudolfinum

The Photographer Herbert Tobias (1924-1982)

At the end of the 1950s, Herbert Tobias was the rebel star of the German photography scene. Today, only a few veterans recall his name. His images, however, are widely known: Andreas Baader naked from the waist up, the young Klaus Kinski, actress Hildegard Knef, Nico, children at play, erotic fashion photography. These images have made a profound impression on visual memory, making Herbert Tobias into a true legend amongst experts and connoisseurs.

This Herbert Tobias retrospective with approximately 150 exhibits is the most extensive presentation to date of the diverse photographic oeuvre of this important German photographer who died in 1982, aged only 57.

Photographic Work

Russia

Herbert Tobias started taking pictures as a self-taught photographer. While in the army at the tender age of nineteen he took photographs on the Eastern Front in Russia. These pictures already reveal his unusual view of reality. Their metaphorical depth and symbolism far exceed both standard war photography and snapshots taken as mementos by a young soldier.

Paris

Herbert Tobias's professional life as a photographer began in earnest in Paris, where he lived with his partner Dick from 1951 to 1953. Here he took moody photographic tableaux of the city, compelling portraits of existential bohemians and the first fashion photographs for Vogue.

Berlin

After returning to Germany, it did not take long for Tobias to earn his name as a photographer. The critics were enthralled by his photographs full of "sweetly wicked eroticism", describing them as "as provocative as vivid reality, bubbling with fiery seduction". Fashion directors and magazines soon took notice of the unconventional photographer who was not interested in standard trends; commissions from renowned fashion houses soon followed. In fashion photography, Tobias could give free reign to his interest in surprisingly arranged photographs. His pictures of night-time Kurfürstendamm display a special charm and sparkle.

At the same time as doing commissioned work for the fashion industry, he also took powerful images of Berlin as a ruined, and later divided, city. With these photographs Tobias created a psychogram of the city in which he lived until 1969. The absurd poetry of the everyday takes prime position in the ruins of the city, as does the post-war desire for life, yet there is no trace of false pathos or sentimentality. Tobias' images simultaneously convey both the spirit of the time and a timeless presence.

Emotional power is also a striking trait of his numerous portraits. The central theme of his photographs is the human being, or the human male to be exact. The photographer does not conceal his homosexual perspective; on the contrary, he gives it maximum exposure. Tobias' portraits are animated through an intimate dialogue with the model and intertwined with suggestive sensuality and desire. This active presentation of his own homosexuality at a time when homosexual activity was still a criminal offence can also be seen as a political act.

Life

As a person, Tobias was as unique and inimitable as his photographic work. In the mid 1960s he deliberately ditched his career at its peak. Years of excess followed when photography played only a secondary role in his life. The rebel who lived his life according to his own rules gave free passage to his desire for extremes and ecstasy springing from his insatiable passion for life. In his photographs this is sometimes expressed in terms of poetic melancholy, at others as theatrical pathos.

From the mid 1970s onwards, Tobias found new opportunities for expression in gay magazines. The photographs and texts he published there gained him notoriety on the homosexual scene.

The Exhibition

Between 1985 and 1996, the photographic legacy of Herbert Tobias became part of the Berlinische Galerie collection thanks to a series of purchases, gifts and bequests. For the first time, this retrospective presents his work in its full scope and diversity. It focuses on work from the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, which represents the most productive and significant phase in his artistic life. The exhibition rejects customary structuring by genre or chronology, instead following Tobias' creative path in nine thematic sections corresponding to the specific moods and attitudes that determined his view of the world.

A catalogue to accompany the exhibition was published by Steidl-Verlag (260 pages, 240 illustrations) with contributions from Ulrich Domröse, Janos Frecot, Anna-Carola Krausse, Pali Meller Marcovicz, Adelheid Rasche, Ingo Taubhorn and Ulf Erdmann Ziegler.

The exhibition has been organised by **Berlinische Galerie, Berlin's Museum for Modern Art, Photography and Architecture.**

Exhibition curator: Ulrich Domröse

Main partner

UniCredit Bank, Czech Republic

Exhibition partners

Deutsch-Tschechischer Zukunftsfonds / Česko-německý fond budoucnosti
Goethe-Institut Prag

Media partners

Art & antiques, A2 cultural bi-weekly, Artyčok TV, Český rozhlas 3 – Vltava, Pragueout.cz, Grand Princ, publishing, Radio 1

Acknowledgments

friendlyway

Detail information about the exhibition

Maja Ošťádalová, T 227 059 205, E ostadalova@rudolfinum.org

Klára Derzsiová, T 227 059 349, E derzsiova@rudolfinum.org

More information about Herbert Tobias

www.herberttobias.com

Detail information about the events and education

Marian Pliska, T 227 059 341 or 227 059 346, E pliska@rudolfinum.org

Galerie Rudolfinum is administered by the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague.