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Media Information, June 2023

Focus! Click!

Maria Austria – Photographer in Exile

Starting on June 21, 2023, the Jewish Museum Vienna, a Wien Holding museum, is featuring a solo exhibition of the outstanding photographer Maria Austria (1915–1975) for the first time in Austria. Born as Marie Oestreicher into a German-speaking Jewish family of doctors in Karlovy Vary, she received her training in Vienna and pursued a career in exile in the Netherlands as of 1937, respectively, 1945.

With great curiosity and a professional as well as emotional eye, she succeeded in developing a modern and universal visual language centered on fashion photography, artist portraits, and street life. She gained particular importance through her photographs of Anne Frank's hiding place and through her photographs of dance and theater performances, with which she revolutionized Dutch theater photography.

The exhibition *Focus! Click! Maria Austria – Photographer in Exile* highlights the life of the photographer who has been forgotten in Austria through her pictures.

Karlovy Vary – Vienna – Amsterdam

Interested in photography from a very young age, Marie Oestreicher attended the Higher Federal Institution for Graphic Education and Research in Vienna from 1933 to 1936. She explored everything from conservative "Heimat" photography to the modern styles of New Objectivity and New Vision and experimented intensively with light and shadow in still lifes and numerous portrait studies. After working briefly in Vienna as a press photographer she followed her sister Lisbeth, a textile designer educated at the Bauhaus in Dessau, to Amsterdam in the summer of 1937. Not seeing any professional future in antisemitic Austria, they founded the studio *Model en Foto Austria* (Fashion and Photo Studio Austria), and Marie Oestreicher adopted the artist's name Maria Austria. As of September 1943 Maria Austria went underground and joined the resistance.

Narrating with the Camera

Immediately after the end of the war in 1945 Maria Austria founded the Particam photo agency with her partner Henk Jonker and other colleagues. She photographed the destruction of the war, the suffering and hunger of the civilian population and the Jews returning from the Westerbork transit camp. Over time her subjects became more mundane and included street scenes, exhibitions, cultural events, and artist and celebrity portraits.

Het Achterhuis

In 1954 she was commissioned to document Anne Frank's hiding place, as Anne Frank's diary, first published in Dutch in 1947, was being adapted for a Broadway play. The photo series *Het Achterhuis* was used for the stage design and later also published in a newspaper. On a joint inspection of Anne Frank's hiding place on December 10, 1954, Maria Austria and Henk Jonker accompanied Otto Frank (Anne's father) and his second wife Elfriede, Johannes Kleiman (former accountant and non-Jewish helper), the authors Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, as well as the stage director Garson Kanin.

Traveling in Austria and Israel

Maria Austria traveled extensively. In 1955 she attended the Salzburg Festival, where she took photos of artists and captured the flair of the city. When she returned to Vienna for the only time after 1937, she combined contemporary "Viennese types" with typical views in a series of photos, emphasizing both the modern and the timeless characteristics of this city she had known well. In 1965 Willem Sandberg invited her to photograph the opening of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Her first trip to Israel became an extended visit. She returned in 1967, just a month before the Six-Day War. During both visits she documented the country and its people in numerous photos.

Theater and Avant-garde

Fascinated by the theater already as a teenager Maria Austria began photographing performances during her years in Vienna. She developed a unique style that enabled her to capture the essence of a scene. With light and shadow, movement and image detail, she created original and enigmatic theater photos. From 1965 on she was the in-house photographer at the avant-garde Mickery Theater, first in Loenersloot, and later in Amsterdam, documenting every production. Her radical black-and-white style also characterized her annual New Year's cards, which, together with the late theater photos, are among the highlights of her artistic oeuvre.

Maria Austria died unexpectedly on January 10, 1975, having barely recovered from a severe flu.

Focus! Click! Maria Austria – Photographer in Exile

can be seen from June 21, 2023 to January 14, 2024 at the Jewish Museum Vienna, Dorotheergasse 11, a Wien Holding museum. Curated by Andrea Winklbauer and designed by Studio Nardin, the exhibition is accompanied by a self-published German/English catalog that provides a broad overview of Maria Austria's photographic work and costs € 24.90.

In the scope of the exhibition, the Jewish Museum Vienna is holding a photo competition on its social media channels under the hashtag #ClickLikeMaria.

The Jewish Museum Vienna, Dorotheergasse 11, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The second location, Museum Judenplatz, Judenplatz 8, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (wintertime), respectively 5 p.m. (summertime).

Further information can be found at www.jmw.at or info@jmw.at.

Photos and press material for the current exhibitions are available on the Jewish Museum Vienna website at www.jmw.at/en/press. The press photos can be used without charge for reporting purposes by naming the copyright holder.

Queries

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#ClickLikeMaria

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