

Der Südtiroler Unternehmer und Sammler Siegfried Unterberger hat mit der Herausgabe dieses Bandes eine Neubewertung der Künstlergruppe Scholle und weitere Einblicke in die Zeit um 1900 ermöglicht. Auf der Grundlage seriöser Schriftquellenforschung und gründlicher Analysen der Zeichnungen und Gemälde im kontextuellen Zusammenhang ist eine differenziertere Sichtweise auf eine Gruppe der künstlerischen Avantgarde des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts erarbeitet worden. Gemessen an der Entwicklung in Paris, wo damals u. a. Pablo Picasso daran arbeitete, mit allen künstlerischen Traditionen zu brechen¹⁰, sind die Aktivitäten der Scholle vergleichsweise moderat, in München jedoch nahmen sie für wenige Jahre eine progressive und innovativ wirksame Rolle ein. Als die beste Zeit der Gruppe gelten die Jahre 1905 und 1906 (S. 232).

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10 KLAUS HERDING: Pablo Picasso. Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon. Die Herausforderung der Avantgarde; Frankfurt/Main 1992.

Dutch Eyes: A Critical History of Photography in the Netherlands, ed. by Flip Bool, Mattie Boom, Frits Gierstberg, Ingeborg Th. Leijerzapf, Adi Martis, Anneke van Veen and Hripsimé Visser; Zwolle: Uitgeverij Waanders 2007; 576 p., 675 ill.; ISBN 987-90-400-8380-8, € 69,95; Dutch Edition: Dutch Eyes: Nieuwe geschiedenis van de fotografie in Nederland; ISBN 987-90-400-8337-2, € 69,95

The publication of a history of photography in The Netherlands must be seen as a daring endeavour, considering that art-historical surveys have been criticized heavily in the past and for a long time have been regarded as passé by progressive art historians. This survey publication with the title *Dutch Eyes* is the result of more than fifteen years of work by prominent Dutch photography historians. Initially the book was intended as an update of the last retrospective work on Dutch photography entitled *Fotografie in Nederland* (Photography in The Netherlands), which appeared in three volumes in 1978–1979.¹ However, *Dutch Eyes* has become a new, independent historical survey that places contemporary Dutch photography in a historical context.

The publication of *Dutch Eyes* is part of a larger project under the same title, which aims to write a history of Dutch photography. The project was initiated by photography historians almost all of whom are working at the most important photographic collections in The Netherlands. As part of the project a website – www.dutch-eyes.nl – was launched. In 2005 a study day was organized with well-known scholars

1 I. TH. LEIJERZAPF (ED.): *Fotografie in Nederland. 1839–1920*; Den Haag 1978. – F. BOOL, C. H. A. BROOS (EDS.): *Fotografie in Nederland. 1920–1940*; Den Haag 1979. – E. BARENTS (ED.): *Fotografie in Nederland. 1940–1975*; Den Haag 1979.

such as Geoffrey Batchen and Anne McCauley among its participants. The publication of the book coincided with the opening exhibition of the Nederlands Fotomuseum at its new location in Rotterdam in 2007. This exhibition, also titled *Dutch Eyes*, was dedicated to an overview of the development of Dutch photography.

The main objective of the book is to present a historiography of Dutch photography and thus to „make an inspiring contribution to a better understanding of the history of photography in the Netherlands, and to spur others to delve further in this fascinating field“ (p. 7). The book was published both in English and Dutch with the view to addressing an international audience since Dutch photography has been gaining more and more international recognition. With hundreds of high-quality colour reproductions, *Dutch Eyes* resembles a photobook in its own right. It will certainly be welcomed by the broad public as a coffee-table book for casual reading. Simply leafing through the pages, one sees images of The Netherlands and other parts of the world during the last hundred and sixty years pass by. More interested readers can study the essays devoted to various periods and themes that make up the major part of the book. They can also consult numerous additional features such as textboxes which briefly discuss a selection of related themes in each chapter; a timeline combining politico-economic, socio-cultural and photographic events; a bibliography per chapter as well as a general bibliography; a list of terms and techniques and an index of names. In that sense *Dutch Eyes* functions as a standard survey text on the history of photography in The Netherlands. It presents a comprehensive overview of Dutch photography and thus stands, without a doubt, in the art-historical survey tradition. However, it is intended as a reformed version of this much debated kind of writing. As is explicitly stated in the end note, it is not intended as a complete and definitive history but as a collection of thematic essays on Dutch photography that „reflects contemporary views on historiography and provides additional stimulus to further research and debate“ (p. 575). The book is set-up thematically in order to avoid a teleological narrative that seems to tell in a chronological, and thus ‚natural‘, way the history of photography. In their essays, the authors sketch a specific theme or period in Dutch photography by describing different photographers' biographies and oeuvres, major exhibitions or publications of theoretical works and photobooks. The writers are professionals in the field of photography and their contributions are within their area of specialization, which is often related to the photographic collection they are involved with. The aim of this thematic approach is to show how photography has been studied in The Netherlands until today.

The essays are grouped in ten chapters; their discussion is unfortunately beyond the scope of this review, therefore I will briefly mention only a few of them to indicate the range of themes dealt with. Mattie Boom and Hans Rooseboom, photography curators at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and Saskia Asser, curator at Huis Marseille in Amsterdam, open their joint contribution with a description of the roles of photographers, publishers and buyers of photographs in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although little evidence remains about professional photographers in the 19th century, it appears that next to making photographs, many of them worked as shop-

keepers, merchants, drawing teachers, engravers or printers. Amateur photographers were very few. Photographs were sold at book and printstores, art dealers, art supplies' or fancy goods shops. The 19th century saw a proliferation of all kinds of images but only the upper classes could afford to spend money on collecting photographs and other prints. These collections often reflect the interests of their owners since photography was regarded as a useful method of registration of objects one was interested in. Artists, for example, bought reproductions of art works by old masters or contemporaries as resources. The Netherlands was of little importance in the international world of photography at that time and no Dutchman/-woman made any major contribution to the innovation of the photographic techniques.

In the third chapter, Flip Bool, head of the department Collections and Research at the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam, discusses the relationship between modernism and traditionalism in the years between 1925 and 1945. Although modernism was a dynamic international movement, it appears that as early as in the 1920s the boundaries between modernization and tradition became unclear. Most significant in this context is the use of photography in the study of national culture, which modernist photographers also contributed to.

In the seventh chapter, Wim de Bell, curator of the Twentieth Century department at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, discusses the Dutch self-image in photography since the Second World War. In his discussion of the relationship between photography and memory he shows, for example, how photographs by Cas Oorthuys and Emmy Andriessse of the Hunger Winter of 1944–45 have become national icons because they confirmed the preferred self-image of the Dutch as a guiltless people that courageously survived the German Occupation. He also pays attention to commissions of series of photographs by the Amsterdam local authorities and the department of Dutch history of the Rijksmuseum that were intended to document present life for the future. He describes how a new generation of photographers since the 1980s has been using forms and techniques that are not regarded as documentary which lead to a blurring between traditional reportage and art photography.

Other chapters deal with the period 1889–1925 (chapter two), landscape and urban photography (chapters four and five), the „View of the Other since 1850“ (chapter six), documentary photography (chapter eight), photobooks (chapter nine) and recent developments in photography (chapter ten).

It becomes apparent that the arrangement in thematic chapters does not exclude chronological notions since the essays are organized in a time line from the 19th century until the present. As regards contents, the essays are often ordered chronologically, too. Nonetheless, the thematic approach has the desired effect in creating an overlap between the chapters because the work of certain photographers and some photobooks are discussed in more than one essay. This effect is enhanced by the regular cross-references to other chapters throughout the book. It is interesting to see how the perspective on the discussed works changes as they are placed in different story-lines and contexts. Emmy Andriessse, for example, is positioned in a genealogy of female photographers (pp. 94–97). In one of the later chapters she is mentioned as

one of the leading photographers of Dutch landscape (p. 235), while in another part of the book she is called „the first of a new generation of humanistic photographers“ that emerged in the 1930s and devoted themselves to street portraits (p. 284). Andriessé's contribution to nationalist photobooks on the „beauty“ and „pride“ of The Netherlands before World War II is discussed in further chapters (pp. 165, 212). During the Second World War she was a member of „De Ondergedoken Camera“ (The Hidden Camera), a group of photographers who were active in the Resistance against the German Occupation and secretly documented the end of the war. Andriessé's images of hungry children during the Hunger Winter of 1944–45 were published in a photobook after the war and soon received an iconic status. In one of the chapters, the activities of the Hidden Camera group are portrayed as heroic acts of resistance (pp. 388–392), while another one details how the images confirmed the dominant self-image of the Dutch (pp. 346–347). Yet another chapter focuses on the formal aspects of the same photobook and its coming to being as a product of team work by photographers, graphic designers and publishers (p. 427). This kaleidoscope of descriptions allows for an emergence of an oscillating biography with various nuances and shades, if the reader takes the time to trace a particular photographer throughout the book.

The photographs' varying contextual background is also reflected in the use of illustrations. In *Dutch Eyes*, photographs are not only reproduced in isolation but also as part of the object in which they were printed or pasted. Photo albums, magazines, posters, book covers and page spreads with dog-ears, stains or annotations are all depicted in the publication. This gives the reader an idea of how photographs were used, what kind of texts accompanied them and in which ways they could function to bring the textual message around. These illustrations are especially useful in the chapter on photobooks as they demonstrate the effects of montages of photographs on the viewer and the mysterious landscapes that the distortions of page spreads create.

Another way in which the book is intended to differ from a standard survey text is its reluctance to describe a closure in the narrative of historical events. This strategy is closely related to the avoidance of a cogent chronology. The essays do not aim to describe a causal chain of developments in photography that find their culmination in recent practices. Rather, present developments in photography are presented as points of departure. A short prologue introduces the work of internationally recognized Dutch photographers followed by a description of recent changes in photography, such as digitization, changes within documentary photography or changes in the relationship between art and photography. In so-doing, the book shows „the lenses through which the historian peers“ (p. 12) that inevitably colour his or her view on the past. Yet, the danger of departing from the present lies in simply turning the chain of cause and effect the other way around by focusing on antecedents or contrasts of present practices. Thus, it is fortunate that the approach has not worked out. The prologue does not have any connection to the essays following it; each chapter bears the signature and approach of its author. Some essays delve more into a chronological survey of a given theme; others are more reflective and invite the reader to think

about what photographs show and tell us – such is the essay on urban photography when it compares photographs of the same street corner from different time periods. That way the differences and similarities that appear in photographic practice over time become apparent. In general, the essays focus on developments within photography and avoid an overload of historic information. As a consequence, specific Dutch terms such as „verzuiling“ (translated as „pillarisation“) or Vinex homes are explained only briefly, also in the English edition. Readers that are not familiar with Dutch history might need to look for additional information on certain historic events, terms or persons.

In the English edition the book is titled „A Critical History of Photography“ while the Dutch version speaks only of a „New History of Photography“. The term ‚critical‘ evokes allusions to postmodern critiques, of which Rosalind Krauss, Abigail Solomon-Godeau or John Tagg are the most famous epitomes. These ‚critical‘ writers were interested in the different discourses in which photographic images featured in the past. They did not study photographs as aesthetic objects, nor did they see them as historical documents that tell us something about the past. In a way, they wanted to rise above this documentary-aesthetic divide by analyzing the institutions and practices that constituted and validated the various discourses of photography in order to reveal the interests and ideologies they served over time. On the other hand, the essays in *Dutch Eyes* are mostly descriptive accounts of historical contextualization or stylistic analysis. Photographs are placed in relation to other images but the interventions of the historian, like the selection of ‚convenient‘ objects of study, their classification and evaluation within the accepted norms of the discipline, are not reflected. Photography does not appear as the outcome of practices of historians, collectors or curators but as a given. Furthermore, there is a lack of reflection on the medium itself. The potential of photography is described in solely positive terms and the limits of the medium itself are scarcely mentioned. One such example is the chapter titled „View of the Other“ where the perspective of the photographer is questioned. Yet, there is much more at stake than merely the perspective of the photographer, especially in colonial photography: how should we deal with a lack of images since the ‚colonized people‘ were not able to represent themselves visually until after decolonization? What role precisely do institutions and archives play in the construction and consolidation of perspectives on human knowledge and memory? How does one address the problem of photography’s inability to represent invisible cultural phenomena? And what about the ability of photographs effortlessly to adapt themselves to different contexts, sometimes just by a change of caption? Although some of these points are mentioned in the text, the critical edge is missing. Moreover, it is arguable whether it is possible to deal with such complex topics in a general survey publication at all. It seems that a fundamental rethinking on the nature of photography is necessary in order to write truly critical histories. It is obvious however that such a critique, which by implication critiques the seemingly neutral storehouses of historical and artistic documents, cannot come from the involved institutions themselves.

The present publication is the result of the professionalization of photographic

studies in The Netherlands. It reflects how the study of photography was initiated by curators who were conducting research on the collections under their care. In the past decades, photography curators have been exploring and mapping their collections by describing the photographs, relating them to other visual material and placing them in a historical context and chronology. The history of photography as an autonomous area of research was established with the publication of a large number of monographs, survey publications and anthologies of photographers. New photography museums were opened, such as Foam and Huis Marseille in Amsterdam or the Museum of Photography in The Hague. Recently, the professionalization of the field has reached universities with the introduction of academic courses on photography. A Master's programme in Photographic Studies was established at Leiden University in close collaboration with the University's Print Room and a number of the first generation photography historians have started teaching at universities and art academies. The present publication is a culmination of this process. The selection of themes for *Dutch Eyes*, for example, draws on the most important photography collections in The Netherlands. As a consequence, certain kinds of photography, such as fashion, sports or photojournalism, are left out of consideration. It might also explain the continuous attempts to define the Dutchness of Dutch photography. The foreword opens with the questions „Do Dutch eyes see differently? Is there a specifically Dutch photography? Does it have a history and traditions of its own?“ (p. 4) and the prologue continues with an emphasis on „typically Dutch characteristics“ of photography and art in The Netherlands. This nationalistic concern seems to have grown out of the need to explore and define the borders of a new subject of study. Yet, it goes too far in demarcating a Dutch photography or a Dutch way of seeing as separate and unique entities, especially since photography has been an international phenomenon from its outset.

It can be said that the authors have achieved their goal: *Dutch Eyes* indeed shows where the photo-historical practice currently stands in The Netherlands. However, the intended temporal and transitory character of the publication is undermined by its monumental format which gives it an appearance of permanence and authority. The book brings up certain intricate points and inherent contradictions in the field of photographic studies and thus raises many questions for discussions still to come. Let us hope that this beautiful sourcebook will fulfil its editors' wish and inspire many students to conduct further research in the field of photography, to explore the uncomfortable edges of the subject photography and to write truly critical histories.

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