

archiving practised among their 'predecessors'? It is the more recent works that permit the aspects of media and material, form and subject to come together in a rough way, with no ties, and so thoroughly undermine any form of hierarchy.

Of course, the question to Aby Warburg remains unanswered. Contemporary art expresses its own ideas and work forms. It is not only a matter of experimenting with image material but also of taking up discourse and pictorial practices. In complex forms of work, the available elements are brought into an open play of references.

First and foremost, thanks are due to the artists for their positive response to the exhibition idea and their willingness to join in, with existing works in some cases but also with new pieces. Most of the exhibited works belong to the artists personally. Thankfully, however, some private collectors have also agreed to lend us works. Equally, we are grateful to the authors, whose texts set the artistic works into art-theoretical, semiological and epistemological contexts.

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Foreword & Acknowledgements

Eva Schmidt

The exhibition *Dear Aby Warburg, what can be done with images?* began with the observation that handling photographic material constitutes a key aesthetic practice in recent contemporary art. Soon the legendary art historian and fascinating intellectual Aby Warburg (1866 – 1929) appeared as a figure of historical reference; with his continuing research and above all with his 'late work', the *Mnemosyne* atlas, he set about tracing the cultural memory of images in the late 1920s. His impressive compilation of images aimed to direct an anthropological perspective at art and everyday art, i. e. at the universal production of images. In the meantime, his picture atlas itself has become a part of collective memory.

The imaginary addressing of Warburg suggested by the exhibition title pays homage to Warburg, acknowledging him as an 'artistic' art historian. Warburg-researcher Georges Didi-Huberman once called the art (and media) historian "our phantom". And indeed, he does haunt – as a familiar spirit and a ghost – not only art and cultural studies but also contemporary art. For art, the interesting thing about Warburg was his courage to treat images experimentally in face of their infinite number. Today, we appreciate – from the perspective of contemporary art – Warburg's incomplete picture atlas because it has variable parameters; but also because its unmistakable montage from different picture sources – as we know it from historical photographs: in different mounts, on tableaux covered in stretched canvas, with provisional fixing and the significant, dark empty spaces between the images – seems incredibly up-to-date. From a contemporary artistic standpoint, the atlas is understood quite automatically as an aesthetic, semiologically complex unit. The exhibition *Dear Aby Warburg* shows corresponding artistic works that deal in a specific way with photographic material, questioning the media characteristics of the reproduced photograph and suggesting unusual work forms.

They open up the perspectives of artistic discourses in which research and insight are inseparably connected to questions of showing and exhibiting.

How can the links be laid out between the very different works and projects in the exhibition? First of all, there are works whose theme is dialogue with an imaginary conversational partner – by means of video, slide projection or 16 mm film. Elke Marhöfer and Ines Schaber & Stefan Pente enter into direct debate with Aby Warburg himself. Eske Schlüters ‘speaks’ to concept artist Ketty La Rocca, who died in 1976. In a multi-voiced exchange, Marianna Castillo Deball animates an illustrated Mexican manuscript from pre-Hispanic times.

How do we perceive one image, or two; and how do we perceive many images? How does the viewer’s body become integrated into the spatial contexts of images? The biggest ‘chapter’ of the exhibition is devoted to artists who present found pictorial material – photocopies, digital prints and ‘originals’ – in multi-part spatial ensembles together with other forms and materials. In this, their strategies have been influenced by Conceptual Art, as in the cases of Katrin Mayer, Özlem Altin, Marianna Christofides, Tobias Buche or Cécile Hummel. In Batia Suter’s work it is possible to discern her own photographic practice. And Thea Djordjadze’s and Haegue Yang’s handling of photographic material is derived from their sculptural work.

The major theme here is that of ‘display’. Multi-part stagings on walls, floors, partitions and tables make the images eloquent. The tableau of image configuration that we know from Warburg’s work is expanded, intervening in the viewer’s space. In this space of ideas and imagination, the images’ internal messages are intertwined via cluster-like or serial formations with messages from other images and with additional aesthetic information.

Here, a part is played in some works by parallel images and texts, e.g. in the case of Ulrike Kuschel, who operates a confusing information game, or of Lia Perjovschi, whose diagrams seem to grow rampantly across walls.

Besides larger contexts of installation, in a narrower sense there is also an interest in the ‘support apparatus’ that presents images for us to see. Katalin Deér transforms her groups of photos into sculptures by embedding them in impressive frames. In Manfred Pernice’s work, the sculpture could also be ‘merely’ a pedestal for the presentation of photos. Abigail Reynold’s frame constructions allow us to see photos through coloured, striated glass.

Photographic material can enter into very unusual relationships with the medium of painting. In a subtle dialogue, Simon Wachsmuth

combines painting and found photos. Hervé Garcia starts out from found photos and interrelates them using replicating, structural painting or drawing.

A traditional way of exhibiting photographs – under glass, framed, hung at eye level – neglects one element that becomes particularly clear in the case of found photos. Above all, they are material objects, even though their flat expanse may seduce us into seeing them as two-dimensional images within ‘purely’ formal exhibition practice. An interest in materiality and object-quality is demonstrated in the work of Alexandra Leykauf, for example, who emphasizes spatial aspects by means of folding or forming, and also through reference to stage sets and scenery. When Koenraad Dedobbeleer exhibits a photo in space or in a display cabinet, he also exposes its reverse. In this way he points not only to his own sculptural interests but also to conceptual deliberations about the photographic medium and exhibiting practice.

How can photographic images once thought lost – due to a lack of place and name – be re-found and made to speak to us again? The significance of a photographic image does not lie in the image itself; the decisive aspects are its context and actualization as a material object. Every work in the exhibition makes this obvious. Although all the works named implicitly formulate the part of the viewer, the ‘user’ through their openness and temporary nature, in Paula Roush’s work strategies of participation are foregrounded. She tracks down photos that have become homeless. Roush calls them ‘orphans’, which can be found at flea markets or in junk shops. She invites others to ‘adopt’ these ‘orphans’ in their own configurations.

The new availability of reproductions in Warburg’s lifetime provided an opportunity for him to formulate something that had been impossible before, that is, seeing images in proximity to other images and developing theses with the aid of such ensembles. The text by Thomas Hensel illuminates Warburg’s attitude to the medium of photography, and the role of reproduction and projection processes, which have transformed art theory from a field science into a science dealing with reproductions in an artificial laboratory. Warburg was interested in both the image comparisons and the media that made such comparisons possible.

Above all, Ludwig Seyfarth sees the artists of the exhibition and their working strategies before the background of a field of forerunners like Christian Boltanski, Hans Peter Feldmann, Peter Piller or Richard Prince. This poses an exciting question: what distinguishes the younger artists represented in the exhibition from the ways of collecting and