

Harvard / News Release Art Museums

First Comprehensive Exhibition of Lyonel Feininger's Photographs Makes Final Stop at Harvard Art Museums

A selection of the artist's drawings and watercolors from the Busch-Reisinger Museum's permanent collection complements the exhibition



Untitled (Night View of Trees and Streetlamp, Burgkühnauer Allee, Dessau), 1928. Gelatin silver print. Gift of T. Lux Feininger, Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Ger 146.4 (291). Photo: Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Bauhaus, March 26, 1929. Gelatin silver print. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Gift of T. Lux Feininger, BR71.21.23.

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One of the most versatile talents of the modern art movement in Germany, the American-born Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956) is celebrated as a master of caricature, figurative painting, and a distinctive brand of cubism, but he also created a fascinating body of photographic work that is virtually unknown. Drawn primarily from the collections at Harvard University's Houghton Library, the exhibition Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939, presented at the Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum March 30 through June 2, 2012, offers the first opportunity to consider his achievement within the medium. Around 60 of Feininger's photographs, as well as related works on paper and two of his early cameras, are on display.

The photographs are complemented by an installation of around 25 of the artist's drawings and watercolors, plus a major painting from the collection of the Busch-Reisinger Museum. The works on paper are all drawn from the recent bequest of William S. Lieberman to the Busch-Reisinger. The painting, Gross Kromsdorf III (1921), was a gift from Feininger's wife, Julia, in 1964.

The exhibition focuses on the rich and productive period between 1928 (when Feininger first took up the camera) and the late 1930s, when he was exploring an array of avant-garde photographic techniques and making his own prints. Despite his early skepticism about this "mechanical" medium, the painter was inspired by the enthusiasm of his sons Andreas and T. Lux as well as the innovative work of his fellow Bauhaus master and Dessau neighbor László Moholy-Nagy. In the fall of 1928 the 57-year-old Feininger began to conduct his own experiments, discovering in photography a new means of energizing and advancing his artistic program.

Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939 was curated by Laura Muir, Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Division of Modern and Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museums. Muir also authored the accompanying catalogue. The exhibition and catalogue are based on new research on the collection of the artist's negatives and slides in the Busch-Reisinger Museum's Lyonel Feininger Archive, which has only recently been catalogued and digitized, making it fully accessible for the first time. Muir's research also draws on Feininger's extensive correspondence housed at Houghton Library and her interviews with the artist's recently deceased son T. Lux. The majority of Feininger's photographs, which he shared with only a few close friends and family, remained in his private collection until his

death in 1956. In 1987 his son T. Lux donated them to Houghton Library. The exhibition also includes key loans from other US and German lenders, including the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

“When he took up the camera at the Bauhaus in 1928, Lyonel Feininger was at the height of his fame as a painter. While he remained committed to that practice, he saw photography as a new means of exploring his interests in reflections, transparency, and the effects of light and shadow,” said Muir. “Experimenting with night imagery, negative printing, multiple exposures, and radical enlarging and cropping, he created a strikingly modern yet surprisingly personal body of work that has remained virtually unknown.”

Feininger’s first photographs were atmospheric night views of the Bauhaus Building and the nearby neighborhood, including Untitled (Night View of Trees and Streetlamp, Burgkühnauer Allee, Dessau) (1928) and Bauhaus (Mar. 26, 1929). In Halle, while working on a painting commission from the city, Feininger recorded architectural sites in works such as Halle Market with the Church of St. Mary and the Red Tower (1929–30), and experimented with multiple exposures in photographs such as Untitled (Street Scene, Double Exposure, Halle) (1929–30), a hallucinatory image that merges two views of pedestrians and moving vehicles. One of his Halle paintings, Bölbergasse (1931), makes an appearance in Untitled (Unfinished Painting in Studio, Halle) (1931), an image that explores the relationship between the canvas and the space in which it was created. During summers in Deep an der Rega, a small fishing village on the Baltic Coast (in present-day Poland), he returned to his longtime subjects of seascapes and bathers in photographs such as Untitled (Lux Feininger, Deep an der Rega) (1932), a lively snapshot of his son suspended above the water in a backflip. In the months after the Nazis closed the Bauhaus and prior to Feininger’s departure from Dessau in March 1933, he made a series of unsettling views of mannequins and reflections in shop windows such as Drunk with Beauty (1932). In 1937 the American-born Feininger permanently settled in New York City after a nearly 50-year absence, and photography served as an important means of reacquainting himself with the city. The off-kilter bird’s-eye view he made from his studio Untitled (Second Avenue El from Window of 235 East 22nd Street, New York) (1939) is a dizzying image of an American subject in the style of European avant-garde photography, and mirrors the artist’s own precarious and disorienting position between two worlds and the past and present.

The exhibition previously traveled to the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (February 26–May 15, 2011); the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München, Pinakothek der Moderne (June 2–July 17, 2011); and is currently at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (October 25, 2011–March 11, 2012). The Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum will be the final venue for this traveling exhibition.

Publication

A fully illustrated hardcover catalogue with a scholarly essay by exhibition curator Laura Muir accompanies the exhibition. Seventy-six of Feininger’s vintage prints are reproduced as full-color plates. The photographs are drawn primarily from Feininger’s own collection (now at Harvard University’s Houghton Library) and were never shared with the public during his lifetime. The catalogue received the German Photo Book Award in Gold 2012. Published by the Harvard Art Museums and Hatje Cantz Verlag, the catalogue is available in both English and German translations. The English-language catalogue is available in the Harvard Art Museums shop; call 617-495-1440 or email am_shop@harvard.edu for ordering information.

Online Resource

The research resource Lyonel Feininger: Photographs provides access to a searchable database of more than 18,000 negatives and slides housed in the Busch-Reisinger Museum’s Lyonel Feininger Archive. The site also includes

slideshows, information about Feininger's photographic subjects, and a chronology. Access the tool at www.harvardartmuseums.org/feiningerphotographs.

Press Preview

A preview of the exhibition Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939 will be held for members of the press on Wednesday, March 28, 2012, at 9:30am. RSVP to jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu. Parking is often available, by permit, at the nearby Broadway Garage, 7 Felton Street. To reserve a permit, please indicate the need for parking in your email.

Credits

Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939 was organized by the Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in cooperation with the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München; and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue were funded through the generosity of the German Friends of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Dedalus Foundation, Inc., and the Emily Rauh Pulitzer and Joseph Pulitzer Jr. Fund for Modern and Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museums. The exhibition at the Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum is made possible also by the Alexander S., Robert L., and Bruce A. Beal Exhibition Fund; Anthony and Celeste Meier Exhibitions Fund; Charlotte and Irving Rabb Exhibition Fund; and Melvin R. Seiden and Janine Luke Fund for Publications and Exhibitions.

Exhibition Programming

Below is a list of the public events connected to the exhibition Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939. The three ArtisTalk events feature contemporary photographers whose work recalls different aspects of Lyonel Feininger's photography. All events will be held at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum. More detailed information is available on the Harvard Art Museums' website at www.harvardartmuseums.org/calendar.

- Thursday, March 29, 2012, 6pm
Opening Lecture and Reception for Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939
Siegfried Gohr, Professor of Art History and Deputy Director of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, will present a lecture on the artist's drawings and watercolors, Lyonel Feininger: An Artist between the Spontaneous and the Constructive. A reception and open galleries will follow. Free admission.
- Saturday, April 7, 2012, 11am
Gallery Talk: Lyonel Feininger: Drawings and Watercolors, with Joanna Wendel, PhD candidate, Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University. Free with the price of admission.
- Wednesday, April 18, 2012, 3:30pm
Two-Point Perspective Gallery Talk: Feininger in the Darkroom, with Laura Muir, Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum; and Penley Knipe, Philip and Lynn Straus Conservator of Works of Art on Paper, Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies. Free with the price of admission.
- Wednesday, May 2, 2012, 6pm
In-Sight Evening: Lyonel Feininger: Photographs

This special evening includes a talk by exhibition curator Laura Muir, after-hours viewing of the galleries, live music, conversation, and refreshments. Evening begins at 6pm; lecture begins at 6:30pm. Tickets are \$25 (members and Harvard students \$20). To register, contact 617-495-4544 or am_membership@harvard.edu.

- Saturday, May 19, 2012, 11am
Gallery Talk: Lyonel Feininger: Photographs, 1928–1939, with Laura Muir, Assistant Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum. Free with the price of admission.

ArtisTalk Series

- Tuesday, February 28, 2012, 6pm
Vera Lutter, in conversation with Lynette Roth, Daimler-Benz Associate Curator of the Busch-Reisinger Museum. Free admission.
- Tuesday, March 20, 2012, 6pm
Laurie Simmons, in conversation with Robin Kelsey, Shirley Carter Burden Professor of Photography, Harvard University. Free admission.
- Tuesday, April 10, 2012, 6pm
Todd Hido, in conversation with Sharon Harper, Assistant Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies, Harvard University. Free admission.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums, among the world's leading art institutions, comprise three museums (Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler) and four research centers (Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. The collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media, ranging in date from antiquity to the present and originating in Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the art museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and other visitors. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in this country. www.harvardartmuseums.org.

In June 2008 the building at 32 Quincy Street, formerly the home of the Fogg and Busch-Reisinger museums, closed for a major renovation. During this renovation, the Sackler Museum at 485 Broadway remains open and has been reinstalled with some of the finest works representing the collections of all three museums. When complete, the renovated historic building on Quincy Street will unite the three museums in a single state-of-the-art facility designed by architect Renzo Piano. www.harvardartmuseums.org/renovation.

Hours and Admission

Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–5pm. Closed on major holidays. Admission: \$9 adults, \$7 seniors (65 and over), \$6 college students with valid ID. Free for children under 18, members of the Harvard Art Museums, and Cambridge Public Library cardholders. Free plus one guest for Harvard University students and affiliates. For Massachusetts residents

with valid ID, free on Saturday, 10am–noon. Paid admission includes entrance to the museum, guided tours, and gallery talks. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or www.harvardartmuseums.org/visit.

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

For more information, please contact:

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