

August Sander on Photography (November 1927)

Abstract

August Sander (1874-1964) is considered one of the most important photographers of the twentieth century, whose work particularly influenced portrait photography. The portrait series *People of the Twentieth Century* is one of his most important works. In November 1927, Sander exhibited some of these portraits in public for the first time at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. In this short text accompanying the exhibition, Sander describes his understanding of the possibilities and tasks of photography, which he saw primarily as a documentary medium.

Source

I am often asked how I came upon the idea of creating this work:

Seeing, Observing and Thinking

and the question is answered.

Nothing seemed more appropriate to me than to render through photography a picture of our times which is absolutely true to nature.

Every period of the past has left us documents and books with pictures, but photography has given us new possibilities and different problems from painting. It can reproduce things with impressive beauty, or even with cruel accuracy, but it can also be outrageously deceptive. In order to see truth we must be able to tolerate it, and above all we should pass it down to our fellow men and to posterity, whether it is in our favor or not.

If I, as a normal person, can be so immodest as to see things as they are and not as they should or could be, please forgive me, but I cannot do otherwise.

I have been a photographer for thirty years, and have devoted myself to photography with all seriousness. I have been down good paths and bad and I have acknowledged my mistakes.

The exhibition in the Cologne Kunstverein is the result of my quest and I hope I am on the right path. I hate nothing more than sugary photographs with tricks, poses and effects.

So allow me to be honest and tell the truth about our age and its people.

November 1927

August Sander

Source: August Sander, "Seeing, Observing and Thinking," Document REWE library, Die Photographische Stiftung/SK Stiftung Kultur – August Sander Archiv, Köln. English Translation by Shaun Whiteside, Sander Archiv.

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