

PRESS INFORMATION

**Axel Hütte**

**Imperial – Majestic – Magical**

11 March – 10 June 2018

Kunsthalle Krems



Axel Hütte  
*Portrait#22, 2005*  
C-Print  
157 x 237 cm  
Photo: Axel Hütte

Curator: Florian Steininger

Press Conference: Friday, 9 March 2018 at 11.00

Presse Images: <http://bit.ly/AxelHütte>

Opening: Saturday, 10 March 2018 at 18.00

Duration of the Exhibition: 11 March – 10 June 2018

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday & Monday when holiday 10.00–18.00

Press Contact

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**"Krems proudly presents the work of Axel Hütte, the doyen of landscape photography. Mapping out the world with his camera lens, he is the global explorer par excellence. Glaciers, deserts, mangrove swamps, urban landscapes – such snapshots of the world are transformed into stunning compositions: imperial interiors, majestic mountains and magical water reflections."**

Florian Steininger

**"Imperial, Majestic and Magical are references to imagery that is equally tangible and mysterious. Seemingly familiar, it becomes alien to us when viewed in an image. The intention is to reawaken the viewer's memories and dreams, their implicit memory, inviting them to experience the world as something real, and also as something imagined."**

Axel Hütte

The Kunsthalle Krems presents the first-ever comprehensive exhibition of Axel Hütte's work of photography in Austria. Born 1951 in Essen and today living and working in Düsseldorf, Hütte ranks among the leading protagonists of contemporary landscape photography; since the late 1970s, he has made a substantial contribution to the self-assured standing of photography in visual art. Like his fellow artists from the Düsseldorf School of Photography (Becher School) such as Candida Höfer, Andreas Gursky, or Thomas Struth, Hütte stands for the tableau character of the photographic image as an equivalent counterpart of painting.

Axel Hütte's artistic work started out in the late 1970s with stark objectification of the reality of portraits as well as urban interiors and exteriors. In the early 1990s, the artist turned to considerably larger picture sizes, with landscape becoming his dominant theme. Unlike his earlier documentary pictures, the more recent large-format works have more of an imaginative and hallucinatory dimension.

What is presented in the exhibition is above all a dialogue between older and more recent series or bodies of work on the same subject areas. Portrait series of sober frontality meet with shimmering figurative pictures that look like landscapes; mountain pictures of the 1990s with recent alpine photos; Venetian cityscapes with present-day shots of La Serenissima. Especially for the Kunsthalle Krems exhibition, a series of photographs of imperial buildings and interiors was made, shot at palaces, castles, monasteries—Melk, Altenburg, St. Florian, Belvedere—in Austria. Completing the show are previously largely unknown video works of the artist.

## Axel Hütte and the Becher School

Axel Hütte was one of the first students of the well-known Becher Class at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, where Bernd Becher taught from 1979 as a professor of photography in close collaboration with his wife Hilla.

The German artist and photographer couple Bernd Becher (1931-2007) and Hilla Becher (1934-2015) gained international fame with their austere black and white images of industrial buildings, which included silos, winding towers and half-timbered buildings. A certain strictness and objectivity, a systematic approach and their use of the frontal perspective of their subjects is characteristic of their photographic images. With their work squarely positioned in the context of the New Objectivity movement, Minimal Art and concept art, the couple made a significant contribution to photography's being considered an independent artistic medium.

Artists emerging from the Becher School would influence photography internationally. These include Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, Axel Hütte, Thomas Ruff and Thomas Struth.

## Portraits, Hallways and Metro Stations

The Düsseldorf art scene that met at the Ratinger Hof, an underground-culture hangout, came together before Hütte's camera lens—among them artists like Albert Oehlen, Katharina Fritsch, Walter Dahn, and Hütte himself. The rigor and austerity of the photos still is in line with the photographic New Objectivity of Hütte's teachers at the Düsseldorf Academy. What is fascinating about Hütte's series of colour portraits is the comparison with Thomas Ruff's equally frontal portrait shots from the mid-1980s, although the latter are printed in monumental tableau format. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Hütte also produced far larger photographic prints of artist portraits, showing mainly American artists like Jeff Koons, Ross Bleckner, or Christopher Wool.

Dating from the same time as the Ratinger Hof portraits are pictures of hallways, petrol stations, underground car parks, and metro stations, all of them informed by documentary objectivity. Like, later, his landscapes from the early 1990s, the hallways present themselves as geometrical surface constructions, lit by lights, deserted, empty. Emptiness also characterises the platforms of the Berlin metro stations which Hütte photographed between 1978 and 1987, and then again, after the Turnaround and the fall of the Berlin Wall, between 1990 and 1992. The metro photographs were composed as triptychs by the artist: in the centre, he shows the name of the station, framed by lines of coloured tiles, flanked by shots of the station entrances and exits with the platforms. The photograph turns into a conceptual object, a thing, a tableau on the wall.

## Alpine Views

*Furkablick, Switzerland* of 1994 opens this solo exhibition of Axel Hütte at the Kunsthalle Krems. One side of the hotel of that name on top of Furka Pass defines the vertical leg and the edge of the parking area in front of it the horizontal leg of the right angle that encloses and frames the landscape shrouded in thick fog. This results in an austere surface-related formal composition, in fact a geometricising construction as has become a formative pictorial element in many of Hütte's landscapes since the early 1990s.

All narration is left away. The landscape remains misty and blurred. Instead of an illusionist view into the depth of space, what dominates is the flat area. Central perspective turns into a decentralized

gliding of the gaze across the picture surface, comparable to the perception of abstract painting. Hütte's pictures are directly informed by nature and outward reality as references and then take on an abstract pictorial structure.

Hütte actually visited all of those sites, going places to see the world: glaciers in Greenland, tropics in Brazil, deserts in Africa. The light leaves its mark on the film inside the large-format camera set up on location to capture a certain detail of reality with a certain exposure time. And yet, for Hütte, this is not about the purely documentary like, for example, in travel photography but about an autonomous pictorial creation by photographic means.

### **Imperial Interiors from Venice to Melk**

Especially for the Krems exhibition, Axel Hütte has created a new group of works—imperial interiors of abbeys, monasteries, and the palaces of the Habsburg monarchy. The artist explored the extended surroundings of the Wachau region for the purpose. His photographic views of St. Florian, Melk Abbey or the princely palaces of the Belvedere or the Winter Palace in Vienna are opulent impressions rendered with austere objectivity. In most cases, the dominant of pictorial structure is symmetry. It was the scenery of Venice which, in 2012/13, brought him to the magnificent interiors of palazzi and churches. Like the examples from Austria, the pictures are mostly symmetrical, structured by a strictly orthogonal grid. In both works, the light plays a central role, bringing radiance to the space.

Instead of photographic paper, the artist uses glass panels as a support so that the spatial character changes with the viewpoint: once all sculptural, once all flat surface. Also, Hütte sometimes uses metal panels on the surface of which the photographic images are applied. They are reminiscent of daguerreotypes—an early photographic technique. They are like mirrors with a memory, as if the subject had burnt itself into them.

### **Magical Water Reflections**

During the 1990s, the documentary image gave way to an increasingly imaginative tableau. Between the objective portraits of around 1980 and the "Portraits" with water reflections from the 2000s, a radical change takes place. Blurry surface effects remind of Gerhard Richter's squeegee-made "Abstract Paintings." The human eye is unable to fixate actual spatial location, the shimmering surface mutates into a kind of fata morgana, a hallucinatory mirage that keeps oscillating between depth and surface. The anamorphic water reflections are wetlands populated by distorted stand-in figures that usher us into the picture only to disappear in the same instant—diffuse apparitions, colour patches indicating garment and human figure. This landscape picture is not a record of topographic fact but a space of possibility, a distorting mirror of phantasm and imagination, bordering on surreality. In the series of "Portraits" with water reflections, no locations are given in most of the titles, unlike in the other works of the artist, heightening the degree of imagination and abstraction for the viewer.

Curator: Florian Steininger

## Biography

### Axel Hütte

\*1951 in Essen, Germany

1973–1980 Studied at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art

Lives and works in Düsseldorf and Berlin, Germany

### Solo Exhibitions (Selection)

2018

Kunsthalle Krems, Krems, Austria

Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf, Switzerland

2017

Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany

Josef Albers Museum Quadrat, Bottrop, Germany

Galerie Nikolaus Ruzicska, Salzburg, Austria

2015

DZ Bank Kunstsammlung, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

2014

Fondazione Fotografia Modena, Modena, Italy

Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venedig, Italy

2009

IVAM, Valencia, Spain

2008

Fundación Telefónica, Madrid, Spain

2000

Museum Kurhaus Kleve, Kleve, Germany

### Group Exhibitions (Selection)

2017

*Fotografien werden Bilder*, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

*Visions of Nature*, Kunst Haus Wien, Vienna, Austria

2015

*Landscape in my mind*, Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien, Vienna, Austria

2009

*Beyond the Picturesque*, S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium

2008

*Objectivités. La Photographie à Düsseldorf*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France

2002

*Heute bis jetzt*, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany

2001

*Nature in Photography*, Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Vienna, Austria

2000

*How you look at it – Photographien des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Sprengel Museum Hannover, Hannover, Germany

## Catalogue

Accompanying the exhibition, the catalogue *Axel Hütte. Imperial – Majestic – Magical* with texts by Florian Steininger and 47 colour illustrations will be published.

Title: *Axel Hütte. Imperial – Majestic – Magical*

Editor: Florian Steininger

Publisher: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König

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Cover: Hardcover with dust jacket

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Texts: Florian Steininger

Costs: € 24



## Exhibition Dates

**Axel Hütte**

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11 March – 10 June 2018

### Opening

Saturday, March 10 2018 at 18.00

With

Florian Steininger, artistic director Kunsthalle Krems and curator of the exhibition, and Axel Hütte

### Press Information

Press Conference:

Friday, March 9, 2018 at 11.00

All press material is available for download

<http://bit.ly/AxelHütte>

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### Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday 10.00–18.00

Monday when holiday 10.00–18.00

### Admission

Adults € 10

Reduced € 9

Family ticket € 18

### Press Contact

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