

CLOUDS

Fleeting Worlds

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GERHARD RICHTER
Clouds (Window), 1970
Essl Museum
Klosterneuburg/Vienna

»Every work of art is a moment«
(Theodor W. Adorno, 1970)

Clouds fascinate – yet, surprisingly, they have rarely featured as the main subject of an exhibition. The Leopold Museum is the first museum to present a comprehensive exhibition dedicated to cloud depictions from 1800 to the present. Featuring more than 300 works, including top-quality loans from Europe and the US, the exhibition »Clouds. Fleeting Worlds« traces a wide arc from the »invention« of clouds around 1800 to the present and surprises with its many facets. Divided into twelve themes, the exhibition is curated by the Director of the Leopold Museum, Tobias G. Natter, and Curator of the Collection Franz Smola.

FLEETING WORLDS

Clouds are of existential importance for the wellbeing of mankind. The multitude of shapes they can take on and the way they refract light also makes them highly esthetically pleasing.

However, we usually don't spend much time contemplating clouds, but rather take them for granted. We also know from experience that they are subject to constant change, that no two clouds look the same and that they are always in motion. This ephemeral and ever fleeting quality is not only a characteristic of cloud depictions, but also dominates the perspective of the exhibition »Clouds. Fleeting Worlds«.

Tobias G. Natter points to Charles Baudelaire who in his 1863 essay »Le peintre de la vie moderne« already defined the temporary, transitory and short-lived as hallmarks of Modernity.

CLOUD DEPICTIONS AS AN ARENA OF MODERNITY

On the concept and aim of the exhibition, Leopold Museum Director Tobias G. Natter remarks that »the exhibition is about paintings in which clouds feature not only in the background, but in which they are either the main protagonists or even the sole pictorial theme«. Works from 1800 to the present illustrate how artists have not only been inspired by clouds, but have made them the central theme of their creations and have used them as purveyors of different emotions and messages. In the exhibition, signs of poetical lightness and romantic interpretations are juxtaposed with bizarre constructs, mysterious celestial phenomena appear as portents, light-filled cloud studies are shown alongside industrial clouds, natural disasters are confronted with nuclear fallout and fiction meets reality.

AN EXHIBITION IN TWELVE CHAPTERS



The exhibition »Clouds. Fleeting Worlds« at the Leopold Museum offers the first systematical overview of cloud depictions from the past two centuries. Divided into twelve often surprising chapters, the presentation explores the different interpretations and manners of representation of this theme from the early 19th century to the present. Franz Smola: »The exhibition begins with the proverbial ›invention‹ of clouds in art and science around 1800«. Before that time, they had been regarded as elusive, fleeting and random. It was only then – surprisingly late – that they became objects of scientific study and received their names and classifications that are still valid today. During this time, artists also adopted a new approach to the subject. Therefore, this period was chosen as the starting point for the exhibition.

WILLIAM TURNER
Margate[?] from the Sea, c. 1835–1840
The National Gallery, London. Turner Bequest, 1856



CLAUDE MONET
Autumn Effect at Argenteuil, 1873
The Samuel Courtauld Trust,
The Courtauld Gallery, London

ON THE »INVENTION« OF CLOUDS, »THE IMPRESSIONISTS' SKY« AND »CLOUDS AS ORNAMENTS«

Around 1800, artists began to take a remarkable interest in meticulously realistic depictions of clouds. Among the most groundbreaking painters of this subject were the outstanding English landscape artists William Turner and John Constable, who was arguably the most important cloud painter of all time. Both feature prominently in the exhibition, along with

Caspar David Friedrich, the main exponent of German Romanticism. They set the sophisticated tone for this exhibition.

In a separate chapter, the exhibition shines the spotlight on the light-filled »Impressionists' Skies« with masterpieces by Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne and others. The chapter »Clouds as Ornaments« further expands on the exhibition's theme. Through stylization in the sense of an esthetically refined Secessionist art, clouds were first depicted as ornamental arabesques, followed by formal reductions and geometrical reinterpretations. This artistic development is illustrated with works by Ferdinand Hodler, Kolo Moser and other Secessionist artists from around 1900.

OLAFUR ELIASSON
Untitled, from the series
»Island Series«, 1997
Fotomuseum Winterthur Collection,
permanent loan
Andreas Züst Collection



ANONYM
Clouds Viewed from a Biplane,
c. 1920
Private collection

PHOTOGRAPHY

The curators Tobias G. Natter and Franz Smola both wanted to reserve an important place in the exhibition for the medium of photography which emerged around 1840. After all, photography revolutionized the possibilities of capturing nature and its phenomena. While the earliest cloud studies from around 1850 feature particularly prominently in the exhibition, the presentation also focuses on Pictorialist works from around 1900 which lead the way for the 20th and 21st century works throughout all chapters of the presentation. Early photography from its inception until 1900 can be regarded as a groundbreaking new medium. Never before has the Leopold Museum shown examples of early photography of such quality and diversity, including works by Ansel Adams, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Hugo Henneberg, Heinrich Kühn, Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz, among others. In the exhibition's contemporary art section, the medium of photography is expanded to include videos and installations, featuring works by Six & Petritsch, Olafur Eliasson and Ernst Wegner.

RENÉ MAGRITTE
Summer, 1931
Brussels, Musée d'Ixelles
Gifted by Max Janlet
© VBK, Vienna 2013



CLAUDE MONET
La Gare Saint-Lazare, 1877
London, The National Gallery



ABOVE THE CLOUDS – METAMORPHOSIS

The early 20th century brought new perspectives with the first sky scrapers rising up into the sky and above the clouds. Originally, this view had been reserved for fearless mountaineers who were able to look down into misty valleys from vertiginous mountain peaks. The revolutionary technology of aviation, along with the constant development of photography, meant that images of clouds from an aerial perspective soon became popular. Surrealist artists took a particular interest in clouds because of their confineless intangibility and their floating, dream-like and surreal character. The metamorphosis of clouds can be described as the interplay between bizarre alienations and the triumph of the unpredictable. It can be experienced in the exhibition through extraordinary examples of Surrealist art by René Magritte, Conroy Maddox and Herbert Bayer.

DARK CLOUDS AND PORTENTS

In varying weather clouds dominate the sky in different ways, serving either as the crowning glory of harmonious evening atmospheres or as a projection surface for highly romantic sunsets. A darkening sky covered in clouds, however, can herald the onset of a threatening thunderstorm. A perfect example of this is Klimt's landscape »Approaching Storm« from the Leopold Museum. Man-made cloud formations, such as billows of smoke from

industrial chimneys and steam rising from locomotives or cooling towers, are testaments to a new era in which clouds can be interpreted as symbols of tireless industry, but also of the destruction of nature. Curiously affecting are images showing natural disasters, such as ash clouds accompanying volcanic eruptions. Pictures of smoke clouds during wildfires and after military operations as well as of atomic mushroom clouds seamlessly complete this chapter.



BRUCE CONNER, Crossroads (video still), 1976, Nuclear test on Bikini Atoll, 1950s,
Courtesy the Conner Family Trust © Conner Family Trust/VBK Vienna, 2013

CLOUDS REVISITED: FICTION AND REALITY

The exhibition's penultimate chapter is dedicated to artistic cloud interpretations from Pop Art to contemporary art, featuring video works, installations and animations, among other genres.

Through individual mythologies, the theme of clouds is addressed in a highly fictional, yet surprisingly concrete manner, for instance in Andy Warhol's »Silver Clouds« which float above visitors' heads in the Leopold Museum. With his kinetic room installation, Warhol intended numerous helium-filled air cushions to float freely through the room. His silver clouds not only look like sparkling merchandise products, but can also be touched and moved. Thus, beholders are put into the role of consumers. Gerhard Richter's cloud depictions are essentially abstract artworks. His paintings look like accurate cloud images, even though they are not based on particular photographic templates. The artist wanted to explore how an abstract painterly process can produce results that allow for associations with natural phenomena, in this case clouds.

This part of the exhibition also features works by Cory Arcangel, Anselm Kiefer, Alexander Ponomarev, Eva Schlegel, Studio ++ and many others.



ANDY WARHOL Silver Clouds
[Warhol Museum series]
(detail), 1994, from the 1966
original,
The Andy Warhol Museum,
Pittsburgh
© The Andy Warhol Foundation
for the Visual Arts, Inc./
VBK, Vienna 2013

CLOUD BAND & SOUND CLOUD: RECORD COVERS



Exhibition installation
»Band of Clouds«
Leopold Museum, 2013

A band of display cases winding its way through the entire exhibition constitutes the twelfth and final chapter. Appearing like a band of clouds, it represents the idea of a sound cloud. The display cases contain record covers on the subject of clouds.

Early on, record sleeves were carefully designed in order to visualize a »sound track« audible only by means of technical apparatuses. With all musical genres, the covers were meant to visually correspond to the music. While this may appear to be a somewhat unusual emphasis for an exhibition, the covers, which represent music from Richard Wagner to John Lennon and Pink Floyd, surprise with extraordinary inventiveness and unexpected solutions

COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK AND ART EDUCATION PROGRAM

Throughout the exhibition »Clouds. Fleeting Worlds« the Leopold Museum offers a diverse framework and art education program. Lectures and guided tours illustrate the subject from different angles, with diverse emphases from art and cultural history to meteorology, while readings and artist talks complement the program. Additionally, the exhibition's diverse and captivating theme can be actively explored through school programs, workshops for adults and as part of the museum's LEO children's workshop.

For further details, please see our framework program folder or visit www.leopoldmuseum.org.

TOP-QUALITY LOANS

The exhibition features a total of more than 300 works from eminent lenders from Austria and abroad, especially from England (The National Gallery, London; The Courtauld Gallery, London), France and Belgium (Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels), Germany (Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne; Emil Nolde Stiftung, Seebüll), Switzerland (Musée d'art et d'histoire de Geneve; Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne; Kunsthaus Zürich; Kunstmuseum St. Gallen), Austria (Albertina, Vienna; Belvedere, Vienna; Fürstliche Liechtensteinische Sammlungen, Vienna; Wien Museum and others), the US (The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh) and many other countries.

CATALOGUE ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue with expert contributions by Thomas Ballhausen, Werner Busch, Franzobel, Bernhard Greiner, Stefan Kutzenberger, Tobias G. Natter, Franz Smola, Johannes Stückelberger, Paul E. Wanger, Herta Wolf and others. Edited by Tobias G. Natter and Franz Smola.

The catalogue is published by Hatje Cantz Verlag and comprises 368 pages with 323 illustrations.

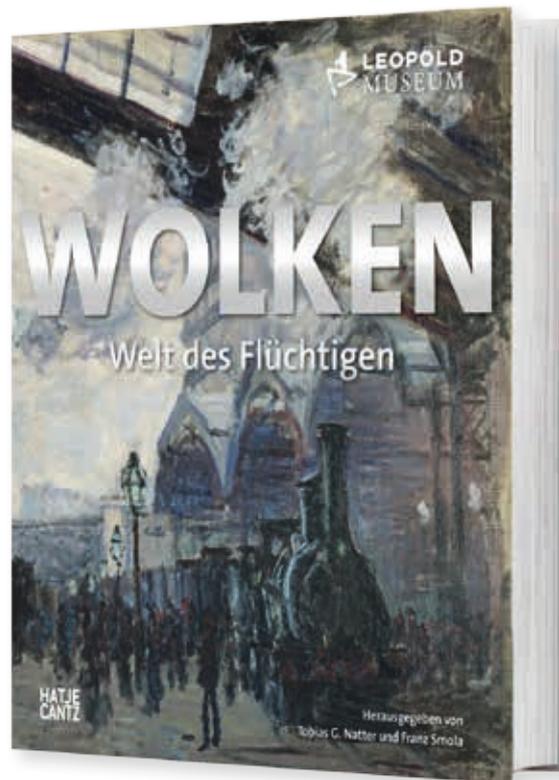
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Closed on Tuesdays
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