

Franz Hubmann: A Well-known Photo- grapher, but near Unknown Collector

Gerald
Piffl
Austria

Emil Mayer, Barber apprentice boy.
Vienna. About 1910.

Lantern slide. © IMAGNO/Sammlung Hubmann



The significance of Franz Hubmann (1914–2007) for post-1945 Austrian photography is undisputed. Through his work at the cultural magazine *magnum – die Zeitschrift für das moderne Leben* [*magnum – The Magazine for Modern Living*] from 1954 onward, and the publication of more than 60 books, his camera followed Austria through an important chapter in its artistic and cultural history. In his years as “photographer-in-chief” at *magnum*, Franz Hubmann focused mainly on movements within Modernism, their impact on day-to-day life, and societal change in the new-found peace following the Second World War. The photographs that Hubmann took for *magnum* saw him focus on the new *joie de vivre*, as well as interest in Modernist art, new techniques, contemporary design, and new scientific discoveries. His works emphasised social issues and comparative studies of different living environments – themes that might be grouped together as “social interest” topics.

Like many of his colleagues, Hubmann wanted to make a stylistic fresh start after the Second World War by drawing on the tradition of life photography that had arisen in interwar Germany and been developed in America. Emphasis was to be placed not on current issues, but rather on the fundamental, universal questions of society. The spirit of the age was to be condensed into a single, archetypal photo intended to represent a greater whole. In this way, Franz Hubmann created archetypal images and used them to tell what was, in the truest sense, history.

For today’s viewer, his photographs show long-forgotten microcosms of everyday life that could only have existed in Vienna. In this respect, Franz Hubmann was a product of his time and of his city. He created reportages, such as the legendary series taken in *Café Hawelka* or *Gutruf* and of the first Viennese performances by international Jazz greats, as well as portraits of up-and-coming artists and musicians. All of these were – like his major reportages from various German cities, or the legendary series on the protagonists of Parisian classical modernism – not journalistic images, but archetypal ones, designed to allude to universals.

Within this extremely rich oeuvre spanning nearly six decades, there are many reportages and projects that are yet to be discovered and were never published in their entirety. The rights to Franz Hubmann’s photographs are administered by the picture agency IMAGNO, and the archive is being worked through step by step in collaboration with the photographer’s heirs. Alongside the several hundred thousand negatives and slides of Franz Hubmann’s photographic oeuvre, the estate also includes many, often undiscovered, historical photographic treasures that have until now



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Emil Mayer, Lieutenant and a needlewoman.
Prater. Vienna. About 1910.
Lantern slide. © IMAGNO/Sammlung Hubmann



remained largely unnoticed. Under the European Photography project, the highlights of the collection are now being restored and made accessible to the public.

As early as the start of the 1960s, Franz Hubmann and his son Axel began to work intensively on the photographic legacy of Austria and its former imperial territories. The impulse for the search for photographic documents was the publication of the book *Die gute alte Zeit* [*The Good Old Days*]¹, material for which was gathered starting in 1962 from colleagues and friends, public archives, and, above all, Vienna's traditionally well-stocked antique shops. In the early 1960s, neither collectors nor museums in Austria were interested in photographs. This was at a time when the first photographic sections were being set up in a few American museums, and internationally, academic engagement with the medium was beginning.

According to many major photography collectors, thanks to this undeveloped market, it was possible to find very cheap, and sometimes significant, photographic works in Viennese antique shops and galleries until well into the 1980s². As Franz Hubmann developed a sophisticated interest in collecting very early on, and thanks to his good contacts, he was soon offered sets that were of historical significance. Often, he also managed to acquire the photo albums of upper-class and noble families through private brokers. In these circles, amateur photography had been a favourite pastime since the 19th century, and so these collections represent an important record of the passage of time. The archives of Demel, baker and confectioner to the Habsburg dynasty, for example, held the works of company head Carl Demel junior (d. 1917), a gifted amateur photographer whose legacy languishes



Emil Mayer, Not only the Radetzky March was performed by the military bands in the establishments of the Viennese Volksprater like the First, Second and Third Coffeehouse. Vienna. About 1905.
Lantern slide. © IMAGNO/Sammlung Hubmann



Karl Demel, Flowers woman and asparagus seller on the Neuer Markt in front of the Donnerbrunnen. Vienna. 1908.

Glass Plate Negative. © IMAGNO/Sammlung Hubmann

unnoticed by researchers to this day. The collection included several hundred significant 9x12cm glass plates showing street and genre scenes that offer an insight into daily life in Vienna around the year 1900.

What particularly fascinated Franz Hubmann during his early days as a collector was the period atmosphere of the photographs³. Events, developments and fashions could be read from the images and placed in a historical context. Just as in his own photographs, here, Hubmann was interested in what photographers could say and capture about their time and society. The discovery of the book *Wurstelprater* by Felix Salten and Dr. Emil Mayer (1871-1938) in an antiques shop in 1960 was, then, the catalyst for Franz Hubmann to explore in greater depth the works of the lawyer and amateur photographer Emil Mayer. He began to search for contemporary witnesses who could provide him with their first-hand accounts of the photographer, and eventually



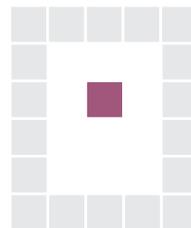
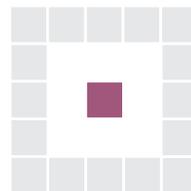
even came across a section of the archives that contained original plates⁴. This forgotten photographic record of Vienna city life around the year 1900 was ultimately only published in 1967 in *Die gute alte Zeit* [*The Good Old Days*, see above]⁵. In this book, as well as looking at Mayer, Hubmann also turned his attention to figures such as Otto Schmidt (1849-1920)⁶ or Wilhelm Burger (1844-1920), who are now considered central figures in the history of Austrian photography.

Drawing upon these extensive resources, numerous further books followed in subsequent years. Today, they are considered pioneering works in the publication of historical photographs in Austria⁷. Some of those publications date are now more than 40 years old. Thanks to funding from EuropeanaPhotography, for the first time, it is now possible to view Franz Hubmann's historical photograph collection in its entirety, digitize it, and, through the Europeana website, make it accessible to interested members of the public.



Karl Demel, People on the Praterstern on the way to the Prater. About 1910.

Glass Plate Negative. © IMAGNO/Sammlung Hubmann





Karl Demel, A painter with her easel outdoors in front of a wine tavern.
About 1900.
Glass Plate Negative.© IMAGNO/Sammlung Hubmann

1. Hubmann Franz, *Die gute alte Zeit: Alte Photographien aus Wien*. [The Good Old Days: Old Photographs from Vienna]. Salzburg: St. Peter, 1967.
2. Koetzle Michael, *Das Foto: Kunst- und Sammelobjekt*. [The Photo: Artwork and Collectible]. Augsburg: Augustus, 1997.
3. Conversation with Axel Hubmann, 21 May 2013.
4. Hubmann Franz, *Ein Pionier der Photographie*. [A Pioneer of Photography] In: Brandstätter Christian, Hubmann Franz, *Damals in Wien: Menschen um die Jahrhundertwende. Photographiert von Emil Mayer*. [At that time in Vienna: People Around the Turn of the Century. Photographed by Emil Mayer] Vienna: Brandstätter, 1995, p. 25.
5. Hubmann Franz, *Die gute alte Zeit*, op.cit
6. The year of Otto Schmidt's death has only recently become known to researchers. See: Ponstingl Michael, *Die Geschäfte des Wiener Berufsphotografen Otto Schmidt mit dem Nackten* [Viennese Professional Photographer Otto Schmidt's Deals with Nudes]. In: Derenthal Ludger, Kühn Christine, Lowis Kristina (Eds.), *Die nackte Wahrheit und anderes. Aktfotografie um 1900*. [The Naked Truth and More Besides: Nude Photography around 1900] Berlin: Nicolai, 2013, p. 43.
7. Hubmann Franz, *K.U.K Familienalbum: Die Welt von gestern in 319 alten Photographien*. Vienna, Munich, Zürich: Molden, 1971, available in English translation as *The Habsburg Empire: The World of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Original Photographs, 1840-1916*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972; Hubmann Franz, *Das deutsche Familienalbum: Die Welt von gestern in alten Photographien. Von der Romantik zum Zweiten Kaiserreich*. [The German Family Album: Yesterday's World in Old Photographs. From the Romantic Period to the Second Empire] Vienna, Munich, Zürich: Molden, 1972; Hubmann Franz, *Das jüdische Familienalbum: Die Welt von gestern in 375 alten Photographien*. Vienna, Munich, Zürich: Molden, 1974, available in English translation as: *The Jewish Family Album: Yesterday's World in Old Photographs*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.