

Dennis Hopper: 'Photographs 1961-1967'

Opening: 16. February 2018, up from 6 pm

Duration: 17. February -7. April 2018

„Art is a constant; it's part of you. I think the idea of experiencing life is part of your creative path.“ This is a quote from the American artist, actor and movie director Dennis Hopper which he reiterated in several interviews emphasizing the divergency of his media. And photography was part of that. With his pictures of artists like Andy Warhol or David Hockney, actors like Paul Newman, artdealers like Henry Geldzahler, hippies, with his images from the Liberation March against racial discrimination in Alabama or everyday snapshots from the car, Dennis Hopper acquired a reputation early on which culminated in 1970 in his first photography exhibition in the Fort Worth Art Center in Texas: proof of his infalible sense of whether an image was good or not. The steadfast, distanced sceptical look of the painter Ed Ruscha in front of a tv-repair shop or the trance-like half-closed eyes of a female hippie-dancer grasp our attention. Formally Dennis Hopper preferred shadow patterns, for instance a fence of chicken wire casting its shadow on the nude torso of Paul Newman. Even in his more documentary images of say Martin Luther King delivering a speech he creates his own artistic emphasis. The speaker is moved to the frame whereas in the center a phalanx of microphones rears up like a tidal wave.

Friends labeled him „the tourist“ because his Nikon camera was constantly dangling in front of his stomach until in 1967 when he gave up his camera in favor of working on his international hit „Easy Rider“. Within a those few years he produced about 18,000 photographs which today are esteemed icons of the 1960's reflecting the radical change in the American society. „I wanted to document something. I wanted to leave something that I thought would be a record of it, whether it was Martin Luther King, the hippies, or whether it was the artist“, he later explained. In short: groundbreaking images.

Before he turned to photography at the age of 25, Dennis Hopper worked as a painter of abstract-impressionist or even photorealistic canvases and as a poet. Only one painting which he had stored at his father's house survived a fire that burnt scores of homes including his own in Bel Air. In Hollywood Dennis Hopper had a reputation as a “difficult” actor and got only minor roles. So on the advice of James Dean, a close friend and co-actor in movies like „Rebel Without a Cause“ and „Giant“, he turned to photography. With his Nikon, a birthday gift from his then

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wife, he toured New York City, later Hollywood or Alabama and captured both the glamorous and the everyday life. Without flash, without cropping the images, his pictures narrate stories which unfold before our eyes, small movies so to say. And they sound the depths of human existence, the fleeting, the melancholic, the euphoric, but also the inscrutable or simply the void.

Until his death in 2010, Dennis Hopper cultivated a long-standing friendship with Hans Mayer who recognized the overwhelming artistic quality of the photographs. Thus in 1988, in 1998 and in 1999, the Gallery Hans Mayer exhibited his work in three shows, two in Düsseldorf, one in Berlin. In several interviews Dennis Hopper boiled down his divergent artistic approach to a simple statement. Whether as actor, movie director, writer or photographer „I am a compulsive creator.”