

Emil Schulthess – A Retrospective Exhibition

Emil Schulthess (1913-1996) is one of the classics of Swiss post-war photography. His monumental photography books on his travels to Africa, China or the Soviet Union were international bestsellers. Schulthess became famous in the 1970s as the inventor of the aerial panorama. The sun is ever-present in Schulthess's oeuvre – the mere sight of it elicited his astonishment, no matter where in the world he was. His most famous work is a 24-hour colour panorama of the midnight sun that he photographed in Norway in 1950 and that caused a sensation worldwide. Schulthess was born in Zurich and was originally a graphic artist. He learnt the basic principles of photography as a guest student in the photography course given by Hans Finsler. In 1936 he started working for the Zurich printer and publisher Conzett & Huber; from 1941 to 1957 he was a designer and member of the editorial board of the monthly journal *Du*. His first travels in the 1950s took him to Africa and the United States; later destinations were Asia and South America. He also participated in a US Navy expedition to the Antarctic. The Fotostiftung Schweiz is now devoting a first comprehensive retrospective exhibition to Emil Schulthess marking the 100th anniversary of the photographer's birth.

The driving forces behind Schulthess's photographic activities were a boundless love of adventure and the urge to explore the last white spots on the map of the world with the help of his cameras. He had a preference for colour photographs and as of the early 1950s was able to publish many of his photographs as spectacular colour shots thanks to the highly advanced printing technology of Conzett & Huber. What is more, he pushed the boundaries of all the conventional picture formats. In his books he made masterful use not only of double pages and fold-outs, but also of extremely wide book and picture formats, the circular fisheye picture format, and finally the panorama photograph that provides an all round view, the whole world at the press of a button, so to speak. Photography for Schulthess was not a means for subjective expression, but a depiction of the real world as he perceived it and wished to present it to the eyes of the world, using all the photographic means at his disposal.

Martin Gasser and Alexis Schwarzenbach

USA

In 1953 Emil Schulthess spent six months in the United States on an assignment from Conzett & Huber and the editorial office of the magazine *Du*. Together with the writer Hans Ulrich Meier he did a 27,000 kilometre-long round trip in a Ford, from New York to the Pacific, from there to the Gulf of Mexico and back to the East Coast. After that, Emil Schulthess spent several weeks in New York where Arnold Kübler, editor-in-chief of *Du*, assumed responsibility for the corresponding text. The extensive photo material, in black and white and colour, was sufficient for five special issues of *Du*. They were devoted to his experiences on the round trip, the zoos and national parks he visited, the United States as a country of contradictions, and the city of New York. The layout, picture sequence and texts are arranged in such a way that, together, the five issues can make up a book. Entitled *USA. Photos einer Reise durch die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, the first book by Emil Schulthess appeared in autumn 1955. It contains numerous spectacular colour photographs and was published simultaneously in German and French. The 7,500 printed copies of each were sold out within a few months.

Africa

Emil Schulthess and the journalist Otto Lehmann crossed the African continent from Tunis to South Africa in 1955/56 in a station wagon owned by Conzett & Huber. The first highlight was a ring-shaped eclipse of the sun which Schulthess photographed in the Sahara. After that, he focused mainly on the animals and the flora and fauna of Africa, which at the time was almost completely under European colonial administration. These photographs were sufficient for four special issues of *Du* and a two-volume book on Africa published in 1958/59 in a print-run of 35,000. In addition to the beauties of nature, the book documents traditional lifestyles in the African countryside, while steering clear, in narrative terms, of the European-style cities. Emil Schulthess explains: "We were looking for that other Africa, the Africa that is being pushed into the background, hour by hour, day by day, as a result of 'development'. This book is dedicated to that Africa, which is why it does not contain the great achievements of the 'white man', his cities, his industrial sites, his particular world." The photographer's estate, however, contains photographs addressing the theme of the conflict between tradition and modernisation.

Antarctica

Emil Schulthess resigned from Conzett & Huber in 1957 to become a free-lance photographer. The New York agency Black Star enabled him to take part in the US Navy expedition "Deep Freeze IV" so that Schulthess spent seven months in the Antarctic in 1958/59. He documented life at the research station there and participated in the crossing of Mary Byrd Land, which until then had been unexplored. He was very enthusiastic about the rough, untouched nature of the sixth continent. At Christmas 1958 he wrote to his family: "Different celestial phenomena so-called 'halos' almost made my dizzy with excitement – what is more, I simply never tired of observing or photographing the infinitely varied forms on the surface of the snow and fell from one ecstatic state into another when, lying flat on the ground for hours with terribly cold hands, but an all the happier heart, I was able to eavesdrop on mother nature's most valuable things." The illustrated book *Antarctica* appeared in 1960 and reached a circulation of 32,000 copies in eleven languages.

China

Emil Schulthess travelled to China twice in the 1960s. Unlike in Africa, where the traditional lifestyles were of interest to him, in Communist China he was intent on photographing modern life as well. He took every effort to capture images of industrial sites, scientific plants or mass rallies organised by the state party. Thanks to his stubbornness, he was able to travel to outlying areas as well and take photographs of the rural population, most of whom were still living in poverty. His escorts would have preferred to show him the sunny side of the People's Republic only. In Soochow in the Yangtze delta the photographer noted: "Our guide is a bit worried about my interest in everyday life along the canals and my neglect of the sights selected for visits by tourists." Emil Schulthess covered a total of 15,000 kilometres by train, 4,000 by plane and 1,300 by boat. His book on China was published in autumn 1966, in a total of 50,000 copies.

The Soviet Union

Between 1967 and 1970, Emil Schulthess travelled to the USSR seven times. He had been interested in the art and culture of the Soviet Union from an early age and now wanted to get his own impression of that country. Although it was extremely difficult to get permission to travel and take photographs, Schulthess took about eight thousand photographs in all parts of the country, from the extreme West to Siberia, from the Polar Circle to Central Asia. He covered long stretches of the journeys in a private car, and, in the Russian journalist Oleg Kalentschuk, had an ideal travelling companion. In autumn 1971 *Soviet Union* was published in a total of 52,000 copies. The book is highly persuasive because the author clearly expresses his ambiguous attitude to his subject. When something appealed to him, such as the good state protection for working mothers, for example, he recorded this, just as he did the discrepancies between propaganda and reality. His book became an international bestseller and received great reviews worldwide. The *Tages-Anzeiger* in Zurich, for example, points out: "What we do not find here are the many and varied cliché notions, which is something that particularly distinguishes this book."

Sun, Moon and Stars

In the course of all his journeys Emil Schulthess portrayed the sun and repeatedly aimed his cameras at the night sky. He made especially frequent use of the fisheye lens which enabled him to depict the whole vault of the sky in a panorama shot. In preparation for his trips, the photographer picked out ideal spots for sun photographs and, on arrival, did everything he could so as to take the planned photographs. Despite the fact that his best photographs of the sky are sophisticated compositions, for Schulthess personally, documenting fascinating natural phenomena had priority. In 1982 he wrote: “I always feel committed to the documentary, to truthfulness to nature. I deliberately commit myself to the ‘document’ when it serves to round off what has been stated – even at the risk of the statement having no particular artistic or aesthetic merit. I believe that, basically, we can never outdo nature – it will always have the edge on us and be our model, despite all our highly developed technology.”

Translated by Pauline Cumbers

Emil Schulthess

Biographical data including publications

1913	Born 29 October in Zürich
1920-1932	School attendance and apprenticeship to a graphic designer; guest student in the class of Hans Finsler at the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich
1934	Studies in Paris
1932-1937	Worked as both a free-lance and an employed graphic designer in Zürich, in particular in tourism
as of 1937	Graphic designer with Conzett & Huber, Zürich; designed posters, brochures, company magazines
1941-1957	Member of the founding editorial group of the Swiss monthly <i>Du</i> ; head of graphic design, responsible for the photographers
1945	Trip with Werner Bischof to the war-ravished countries France, Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands for a special issue of <i>Du</i> entitled <i>Europa im Aufbau</i> (May 1946)
1948	Graphic designer the book <i>Flugbild Schweiz</i> , Mühlerad-Verlag, Zürich
1951	Received an award from <i>U.S. Camera</i> magazine award for his 360°-panorama of the course of the midnight sun in the north of Norway
1951-1990	Design for the Swissair calendar
1955	<i>USA</i> , Manesse-Verlag, Zürich
1955-1956	Crossed Africa from north to south
1958-1959	Illustrated books <i>Afrika, vom Mittelmeer zum Äquator</i> and <i>Afrika, vom Äquator zum Kap der Guten Hoffnung</i> , Manesse Verlag, Zürich
	Trip to Japan and the Philippines
	Participated in the expedition “Deep Freeze IV” to the Antarctic undertaken by the US Navy and the National Science Foundation
1960	<i>Antarctica</i> , Artemis-Verlag, Zürich
1962	<i>Amazonas</i> , Artemis-Verlag, Zürich
1966	<i>China</i> , Artemis-Verlag, Zürich
1971	<i>Sowjet Union</i> , Artemis-Verlag, Zürich
1971-1983	Development and construction of various rotating panorama cameras
1982	<i>Swiss Panorama</i> , Artemis-Verlag, Zürich
1988	<i>Eternal Landscape</i> , Artemis-Verlag, Zürich
1996	Emil Schulthess died in Zürich on 20 January

The exhibition:

The exhibition and the companion volume on Emil Schulthess's life are based on the extensive Schulthess estate entrusted to the Fotostiftung Schweiz in 2010. The appraisal of that estate brought to light not only material that had been unknown until then, but also revealed gaps, especially regarding the colour photographs. Depending on which brand of film Schulthess used, the original colour slides are more or less faded and can no longer be enlarged using conventional analogue processes; they therefore had to be digitized and reworked for the exhibition so as to ensure that they come close to the images Schulthess published in his books.

Film: A film on the production of the panorama photograph „Top of Switzerland“ for the 1970 Universal Exhibition in Osaka is shown in the Seminar room (Swiss Television DRS, Antenne Spezial, 23 December 1969, 19 min.).

The accompanying publication: Alexis Schwarzenbach, *Emil Schulthess – Fotografien 1950-1990*, with a foreword by Martin Gasser, edited by the Fotostiftung Schweiz, Limmat Verlag Zurich, pp. 296, approx. 200 reproductions in duplex and colour; CHF 68.- (available in the shop).

Accompanying events:

Wednesday, 25 September, 7.30 pm: “Den Mars erforschen – Riesenbild für Riesenbild”. Lecture by Nicolas Thomas, Professor of Experimental Physics, University of Berne

Tuesday, 1 October, 12.15–12.45 pm: “Farbfotografie für immer und ewig?”, Bildfokus with Sabine Münzenmaier

Wednesday, 23 October, 7.30 pm: Film “Picture of Light”, 1994, Dir.: Peter Mettler

Wednesday, 11 December, 6.30 pm: special guided tour with Alexis Schwarzenbach, historian and curator

Prints for Sale: On the occasion of the Emil Schulthess retrospective all the color prints in the exhibition are available for sale in an open edition. Information in the glass vitrine in the shop and at the reception.

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Colophon Exhibition

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Schools and workshops: Fanny Vogler

Graphic design exhibition: Robert & Durrer

Museum technician: Oliver Gubser

Framing: Rosa Schamal

Film projection: Bene Redmann, Oliver Gubser

Installation: Roger Rimmele (management), Giuliano Bruhin, Theres Liechti, Matthias Schilliger, Yves Schneibel

The exhibition is taking place in the framework of the “Kulturherbst Winterthur” under the heading “Art and Science”. www.kulturherbst.ch