

Press release

Things will get better – Photographs by Hans Steiner

Fotostiftung Schweiz, 28 May to 9 October 2011

Opening 27 May, 6 to 9 pm

Hans Steiner (1907-1962) produced an extremely wide-ranging oeuvre comprising not only reportages and portraits, but also photographs for advertising, fashion and industry. As of the 1930s Steiner's photo reportages were published in journals such as *Schweizer Illustrierte* or *Sie & Er*. After the war he worked for, among others, *Die Woche*. Towards the end of his career Steiner organised his photographs in a huge archive containing about 100,000 contact prints categorised according to keywords. This archive was systematically assessed on the occasion of the first Hans Steiner retrospective exhibition. The exhibition "Alles wird besser" (Things are getting better) focuses mainly on scenes of everyday life in Switzerland during the post-war era, while at the same time indicating that, despite the difficult times, there were also brighter moments.

Compared to other photo-reporters of his day, Steiner clearly did not pursue political or socio-critical objectives. Whereas contemporaries like Hans Staub, Paul Senn or Theo Frey often sided with society's outsiders or criticised social injustices, Steiner presented the more positive aspects of life, preferring to focus attention on all the minor events and phenomena that signify something like happiness in an otherwise hard everyday life. Sport, cars, women, urban life, leisure activities, foreign travel, flying or technical innovations play an important role in his work.

Stylistically too, Steiner's oeuvre differs from those of other photo-journalists indebted to a strict documentarism. Many of his photographs – especially works commissioned by industry and advertising – are subtly composed, and are characterised by a skilful handling of light and a concise pictorial idiom. Today his deliberate creative interventions attract great attention, corresponding as they do to a modern aesthetic sensitivity, tutored not least by more recent art and photography works; in the eyes of many younger photographers any strict distinction between "staged" and "authentic" images has become obsolete. Steiner's pictorial world can also be reinterpreted in this light.

"There was always something constructive about Hans Steiner's photographs and the texts he wrote to accompany them. It was his way of countering the disjointedness of our time." This is how one journalist assessed the work of the Bernese photographer. A symbol of this optimism may well be the airplane rising blithely into the sky, a motif of yearning that recurs in his archive. A large part of his oeuvre reflects the belief in progress that prevailed in the 1950s and the confidence that a solution exists for every problem.

Peter Pfrunder

Fotostiftung Schweiz

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An exhibition organised by the Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, curated by Daniel Girardin and Jean-Christophe Blaser

In collaboration with

Université de Lausanne
Memoriav
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Adapted for the Fotostiftung Schweiz by Peter Pfrunder

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Press photos can be downloaded from the website www.fotostiftung.ch

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