

INTO CHAOS?

Targeting a broad audience, the **Amalthea-Verlag** published books on a wide range of topics. However, it was mainly the political writings—with widely diverging approaches—that had somewhat provocative photographic covers: Autobiographical war books [45, 48] were included alongside economic analyses [46] and polemical appeals to revise the peace treaties of 1920 [47].

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there was an immense number of war (and anti-war) novels published, plus works on individual types of weapons, troop units and battle zones, anthologies with letters, photographs, and contemporary reports. These found a large audience, covering a significant segment of the book market, and were released by publishers of all political orientations. They reflect the fact that the war, with its radically disturbing individual experiences and resulting social upheaval, alongside other major consequences, was still a dominant preoccupation among Austrians.

In book cover designs for autobiographical accounts, photomontage was again seen as a fitting design, corresponding as it does to the stark simultaneity and erraticism of remembered images [49, 50]. Even for analytical works about political decisions, covers featured juxtapositions of highly diverse images to generate a sense of alarm about the risk of armed conflict [51, 52]. The single image, by contrast, was often employed by publishers interested in revisionary views on the consequences of war, or who produced monographs that heroized battle [53, 54] and saw the approaching conflicts as a welcome opportunity for demonstrating heroism and technical superiority [55, 56].

Curated by Monika Faber and Arne Reimer

We wish to thank the following lenders: Akademie der Künste/Kunstsammlung, Berlin; Archiv der Massenpresse Patrick Rössler, Erfurt; Josef Chladek, Vienna, josefchladek.com; Nicolas Dostal, Vienna; Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Vienna; Höhere Graphische Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt, Vienna; Marion Krammer, Vienna; Literaturhaus Wien/Österreichische Exilbibliothek; Matthias Louis, Vienna; Ostlicht – Galerie für Fotografie, Vienna; Verein für Geschichte der ArbeiterInnenbewegung, Vienna.

Publication on the exhibition: Hanna Schneck, Arne Reimer, and Monika Faber, *Buchumschlag! Fotomontagen im politischen Kampf der 1930er-Jahre in Österreich* [Book Cover! Photomontages in the Political Struggles of 1930s Austria], with additional contributions by Ernst Fischer, Erik Gornik, Otto Hochreiter, Marion Krammer, and Pierre Pané-Farré (Vienna: Schlebrügge, 2025), 240 pages with numerous illustrations in color and black and white.

This exhibition is a collaboration between the Photoinstitut Bonartes and the Bonartes Vaduz Foundation.

photoinstitut
BONARTES

BOOK COVER!

PHOTOMONTAGES IN THE POLITICAL STRUGGLES OF 1930S AUSTRIA

FOREWORD: BIBLIOGRAPHY/DATABASE

Bibliographic information about the exhibited books can be found in the catalog as well as in a database for the exhibition. The latter was created as an extension of the database on Austrian photo books up to 1945, which was created in 2019 as part of the exhibition *Photo.Book.Art* (fotobuch.bonartes.org).



BOOK COVER!

The use of photographs in political campaign materials became viable with the advent of low-cost printing techniques. But it was only after universal suffrage was achieved following the First World War that the rival parties in Austria fully developed strategies to harness the potential of photography. The book covers exhibited here span the entire political spectrum of the interwar period, demonstrating the various ways in which political convictions can be communicated through striking images. The “political,” in this case, includes not only theoretical or programmatic texts, but also polemical writings and textbooks, educational literature, novels, and anthologies, as well as literary reactions to the First World War.

Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, the standard way of making books identifiable and distinct was through embossed or printed text on the binding. This changed radically with the arrival of cheaper printing and binding methods, allowing larger sections of the population access to affordable books. This helped turn the book market into an active arena in the new field of “advertising experts.” Such experts quickly recognized that illustrated book covers worked similarly to small posters: While competing with each other in bookstore windows, they could distill the content of the entire publication down to its essence.

PUBLISHERS ACTIVE WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The increasing polarization of political groups in Austria is evident in the titles released by publishers close to certain parties. The **E. Prager Verlag**, for instance, published both social democratic theoretical writings [1] and works of fiction [2], which stand out for their careful design and were marketed through targeted advertising (flyers and discounts for members of the party’s paramilitary group, the Schutzbund [3]). Visual references to current and historical events (*Marsch auf Wien* (*March on Vienna*) [4] in the **Anzengruber-Verlag** with a photomontage showing demonstrators in front of Parliament; *Reparationen und Rüstungen* (*Reparations and Armaments*) in the **Hess-Verlag** with a map overlaid by the typeface [5]) were used to draw the viewer’s attention, as were individual images laid out in a way that signaled affiliation with a socially critical book series. A particularly provocative example is the cover for Ernst Ottwalt’s anti-fascist work *Deutschland erwache!* (*Germany Awake!*), for which Edith Suschitzky (married name: Tudor-Hart) photographed an actor caricaturing Adolf Hitler or Wilhelm III [6] (see reading copy at the book table).

THE WAY OUT OF MISERY

In the struggle to gain voter sympathy around 1930, brochures and booklets were published in large quantities. Their covers offered the publishers an opportunity to make abbreviated arguments *from* the content *on* their covers. Doubts about the persuasive power of individual images led to the use of photomontages. These, however, had little to do with the work of the Dadaists, who had invented the cutting out and rearrangement of unrelated elements at the end of the First World War. Instead, this was about making complex political connections visible through the juxtaposition and superimposition of photographs, and through changing perspectives and proportions—a technique first employed in Austria on the occasion of the Justice Palace fire in 1927 (*Die Wiener Julikämpfe (The Vienna July Struggles)*, published by the Communist Party [7]) and subsequently used in “Red Vienna.”

Display Case: In 1928, booklets with striking designs that documented social democratic activities began appearing on various topics (sporting events [8], youth education [9], women’s work [10]). The spectrum ranged from reports on events (Workers’ Olympiad, World Youth Meeting, Women’s Day) to historical presentations (*Kampf und Aufstieg (Struggle and Rise)*, socialist educational policy) to Käthe Leichter’s innovative study *So leben wir ... (This Is How We Live...)* [11], which evaluated questionnaires that had been distributed to 1,320 female workers. Communist Party writings such as *Wien – Moskau. Zwei Städte – zwei Welten (Vienna – Moscow: Two Cities – Two Worlds)* [12] or *Wien baut weiter! (Vienna Continues Building!)* [13], which propagated the Soviet solution to the housing shortage, namely the expropriation of private wealth and introduction of a communal economy, were immediately countered by the Social Democrats with the publication of *Wien und Moskau (Vienna and Moscow)*, which defended the municipal housing and tax policy of the city against the *Feind im Rücken! (Enemy in the Back!)* [14].

Wall: Most of the booklets published in wide circulation by the **Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung**—which were explicitly conceived as “campaign writings” [15] and were used especially in the Vienna election campaign of 1932—were mostly directed against the Christian Social Party and in particular against National Socialism. The covers, (co-)created by the designers of the magazine *Der Kuckuck* (Siegfried Weyr, Alexander Stern), employed aggressive montages of images along with misleading slogans from their opponent, in order to address their own supporters as well as potential sympathizers of fascism whom they wished to educate about its dangers.

COMMUNIST AGITATION

Although the Communist Party struggled to assert itself in Austria, there was a surprising number of publications in the 1920s and 1930s aligned with them, distributed by the publisher couple Hilde and Johannes Wertheim. The Wertheims, both active journalists, were the owners of the **Münster-Verlag** [26], the **Agis-Verlag**, and the **Verlag für Literatur und Politik** in Vienna, among other publishing outfits. While they presented Soviet propaganda material [25, 27] in a very matter-of-fact manner, the works of fiction they published, which had subversive content, demonstrated the range of design possibilities developed by John Heartfield and his circle (Peter Pewas [18], Werner Eggert [19], Günther Wagner) in Germany. Not only were the techniques of juxtaposing and superimposing photography, drawing, and text further refined here, but the usable design area was extended from the front of the cover to its back and eventually to the flaps as well ([29], *Die Kommune der Habenichtse (The Commune of the Have-Nots)* [30], see reading copy at the book table).

Striking typefaces were typical for them, as were photomontages from press material and film stills [28], combined with illustrative elements and hand coloring (*Im befreiten Kaukasus (In the Liberated Caucasus)* [24], original design [23]). The method developed from film editing of stringing together spectacular scenes

from completely different sources (Sergei Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions”) was brought to a particularly dramatic effect for the cover of Johannes R. Becher’s novel (*CHCl=CH*)₃As (*Levisite*) oder *Der einzig gerechte Krieg* ((*CHCl=CH*)₃As (*Lewisite*) or *The Only Just War*) ([21], original design [22]). Heinrich Wandt’s *Erotik und Spionage in der Etappe Gent (Eroticism and Espionage in the Ghent Sector)* [20], one of the most successful antiwar books in the German-speaking world, caused a scandal not just because of its content but also because of Heartfield’s cover, the design of which directly addressed the issue of censorship.

The series *Der internationale Roman (The International Novel, 1927–30* [18]) and *Der Rote 1-Mark-Roman (The Red 1-Mark-Novel, 1930–32* [31]) were the realization of the “proletarian mass novel,” which was intended to provide party-aligned political guidance along with affordable entertainment for the working class.

HAIL AUSTRIA!

It was not only the left-wing parties that made use of these new graphic possibilities; conservative publishers also experimented with different combinations of photography and text, although in the course of the 1930s they steered away from sans-serif typefaces and instead used variants of black-letter type, also known as Fraktur or German Gothic. The format of the social democratic campaign writings—which after 1934 had to be published abroad (*Der Bürgerkrieg in Österreich (The Civil War in Austria)* [32])—can also be found in the authoritarian state body (referred to as the *Ständestaat*), both for the dissemination of propaganda speeches and for education about Nazi attacks [33]. The main thrust of the publications in the authoritarian state, however, was the emphasis on “unchangeable values” such as rural customs and Catholicism. The fact that in the same book series, *Die Deutsche Bergbücherei/Das österreichische Wanderbuch (The German Mountain Library/The Austrian Hiking Book)* in the **Styria-Verlag** [34], titles like *Im heiligen Land Tirol (In the Holy Land of Tyrol)* or *Heimat Salzburg (Homeland Salzburg)* were followed by the publication *Oberdonau. Die Heimat des Führers (Upper Danube: The Homeland of the Führer)*, speaks for the ease with which the threshold between Austrofascism and National Socialism could be crossed. With textbooks like *Hoch Österreich! (Hail Austria!)*, a collection of excerpts from historical, religious, and patriotic texts [35]), they relied on slogans that once again sound current today.

The capacity for book covers not only to persuade but also to deliberately deceive can be seen in two brochures published for the world exhibition in Paris in 1937 [36]: The “official” catalog was adorned with a moderately modernist montage that by no means reflected the reactionary content, while the booklet *Beautiful Austria* presented itself as a harmless travel guide but was actually a covert text seeking to expose the dictatorship then ruling Austria.

The preferred time period for art books at that time was the Counter-Reformation [37], and the publishers were partial to landscapes of high mountains in which the “native inhabitants” triumphed as heroic fighters against the adversities of nature [38]—and who were then surpassed by the heroism of daring climbers who, on the *Weg ins Licht (Path to Light)* during the Nazi era, finally ascended to the *Berge der Freiheit (Mountains of Freedom)* [39].

Since the power of photomontage lay in illustrating dynamic political conditions, it is not surprising that publishers close to the new rulers, such as the **Tyrolia-Verlag**, relied exclusively on the single image, allowing them to evoke an unchangeable *Stille Schöne Welt* [40] (*Quiet Beautiful World*, see also reading copy at the book table) or demonstrate the ruggedness of the mountains in which the *Tiroler Standschützen (Tyrolean Riflemen)* had served in the First World War [41], but also experienced in everyday life [44]. The same publisher benefited from the violent death of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss [42], who had broken new ground in Austria with the personality cult he introduced, when its biographies of him were released in short order. The anti-republican booklet *Spanien* [43] (*Spain*), arguing from a Catholic standpoint, is again more reminiscent in its appearance and format of the campaign writings of the hated (and now banned) “Reds.”