

Contributions to  
A History of Photography in Austria

Edited by Monika Faber  
for Photoinstitut Bonartes · Vienna  
and Walter Moser  
for the Photographic Collection of the Albertina · Vienna

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Maren Gröning (ed.)  
In cooperation with Ulrike Matzer

Frame and Focus  
Photography as a Schooling Issue



Photoinstitut Bonartes · Vienna  
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This book series is dedicated to those friends  
whose unending trust and generous engagement have  
accompanied and supported the Photographic Collection  
of the Albertina and Photoinstitut Bonartes  
from the beginning.

Page 2 · Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt, *Students  
leapfrogging on the roof of the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt  
in Vienna (Westbahnstraße) for a test of the focal-plane shutter of  
the Wanaus-Triumph camera, 1890, albumin print*

## Preface

This reader is the fruit of a two-day workshop which was organized under the title “Die Photographie als Schuldisziplin” (“Photography as a Schooling Issue”) at the Photoinstitut Bonartes with the help of the Albertina in Vienna from May 10 to 12, 2012. The workshop aimed at launching a discussion on the preliminary results of a research project regarding the Austrian photochemist and historian of photography Josef Maria Eder (1855–1944), which was supported by the Austrian Science Fund.

Observing the enormous growth of photography in the 1880s, Eder persistently questioned its supposedly spontaneous effects. Consequently, he demanded a reform that would guarantee its intellectual standards on every level of production. Published in 1886, “Die Photographie als Schuldisziplin” (“Photography as a Schooling Issue”) became one of his most telling articles to promote ideas that shortly afterwards led to the establishment of an internationally renowned model institution, the (still existing) “Höhere Graphische Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt” in Vienna.

Regarding the wave of accelerated exchange of photographic (and photomechanically reproduced) images through today’s Internet, concerns have been expressed again that such manifestations should not be left without comment, or—as Roland Barthes would have said—“without code.” Aesthetic, technical and scientific uses of the medium should be understood as socially and historically determined processes. Franz Roh’s cautionary remark of 1929 that photography might give rise to a modern kind of illiteracy has been often quoted as a call for a more

comprehensive educational effort in the field. However, there can be little doubt that artistic freedom alone guarantees a genuinely creative approach and deserves to be fully respected. Thus, photography remains the paradigm of a very complicated cultural and communicative development.

We thank Maren Gröning, her assistant Ulrike Matzer, and the authors for developing the project into this publication, which places essential holdings of the photographic collections of the Albertina and today’s “Höhere Graphische Bundes-Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt” in a wider context for the first time. The project would not have come about without Michael Ponstingl’s enthusiastic as well as efficient commitment.

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