

PRESS RELEASE

Friday,
August 20, 2021

Legendary Gruber Library to be exhibited in new PhotoBookMuseum

The PhotoBookMuseum gUG, the only museum of its kind in the world, has managed to secure the “Gruber Library: The Renate and L. Fritz Gruber Photobook Collection” for its new location in Cologne, with the support of the ZeroFourFoundation gGmbH. Here, this international collection of around 5,000 photobooks, exhibition catalogues, press publications and documents – one of the most important in the field in Europe – will be made accessible to the public over the long term. The collaboration has made it possible to professionally conserve, academically examine and keep the Gruber Library together in its entirety. The inventory will remain permanently linked to the Gruber name. Renate Gruber officially has announced the handover of the collection in a ceremony on August 19, 2021.

August 19, 1839 is seen by many as the day photography was born – this was the day that one of the first photographic procedures, daguerreotype, was authorised for public use. It was for this reason that the collector couple Renate and L. Fritz Gruber chose this date to hold an annual event at their house in Cologne-Braunsfeld, becoming largely responsible for coining the idea of the “birthday of photography”. This was an occasion that drew photographers and writers from all around the world and made Haus Gruber a key meeting place in the international photo scene.

Open house for photography

Renate Gruber continued this open house tradition after the death of her husband in 2005 – this year is no different. Except there is more to celebrate than just the “birthday of photography”: the preservation of the “Gruber Library: The Renate and L. Fritz Gruber Photobook Collection” as a piece of national cultural heritage has been secured and the PhotoBookMuseum will make it accessible to the public in the future. Its inventory gives invaluable insights into the development of photography in the 20th century.

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Genesis of the Gruber Library

The Gruber Library is unique, as the couple did not purchase the works according to capital value. Instead, it developed through the Grubers' international working relationships with photographers, curators, scientists and authors. Many of the volumes were gifts from friends with very personal dedications, given after being invited to the couple's house. A large part of this working library is comprised of photobooks – a format whose significance is still underestimated, but which has been an important form of expression for many photographers since the inception of the medium.

Permanent location for the PhotoBookMuseum

The PhotoBookMuseum is devoted to the importance of the photobook. Initiated by Markus Schaden and Frederic Lezmi, the museum has been an integral part of the photography scene in Cologne and internationally since 2014. It is the only museum in the world dedicated completely to the photobook and making the medium accessible to a broad audience. Functioning thus far as a mobile museum, the PhotoBookMuseum is currently in intensive discussions with Cologne's culture department about a suitable permanent location. Here, the Gruber Library will be presented physically and digitally with the support of the ZeroFourFoundation. "The ideal conditions have now been created to access the Gruber universe", Markus Schaden explains.

Collaboration with the ZeroFourFoundation

In its work with the collection, the PhotoBookMuseum will, in the Gruber tradition, focus on further developing photographic networks, involving the public and entering into innovative global and regional cooperations with other cultural organisations. The ZeroFourFoundation has acquired the collection and will place it at the disposal of the PhotoBookMuseum for its art educational presentation in a museum context. The newly established, Berlin-based ZeroFourFoundation gGmbH has made it its mission to promote visual art and culture. Its focus is on academic research as well as the promotion of diversity and interdisciplinarity in the visual cultures. The collaboration with the PhotoBookMuseum is expected to result in digital as well as critical content – an approach completely in the spirit of Renate and L. Fritz Gruber.

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Fact Sheet:

- As a collection of photobooks, exhibition and auction catalogues, press publications and ephemera, the Gruber Library is one of the most important of its kind in Europe. It comprises around 5,000 photobooks from Europe and the USA, Japan, USSR and Russia, Israel, China, India and Southeast Asia, South and Central America as well as Turkey.
- The signatures and dedication in the books range from Henri Cartier-Bresson to Robert Frank, from Weegee to William Klein, from Berenice Abbott to Gisèle Freund.
- Prof Dr h.c. Leo Fritz Gruber (1908–2005) was a curator, journalist and collector of photography. His influence on the medium and its mediation is recognised around the world. He was co-founder of the professional photography trade fair photokina and curator of the photokina exhibitions from 1950 to 1980. His name is still current in Cologne: the Grubers' outstanding photographic collection has been with Museum Ludwig since the late 1970s, but it wasn't until June 2021 that Cologne, the "photo city", dedicated a commemorative plaque in honour of L. Fritz Gruber, on the square named after him (L.-Fritz-Gruber-Platz) opposite Kolumba art museum. Renate Gruber (*1936) has maintained and administered the Gruber Library since the 1970s and has continued Haus Gruber's commitment to social and cultural issues to this day as a networker, expert and benefactor.
- Some years ago Dr Bernd Fechner, with his Berlin-based agency photomarketing.de, took over the indexing and expert appraisal of the inventory in close personal consultation with Haus Gruber. He is considered one of the architects in the collaboration between Haus Gruber, the ZeroFourFoundation gGmbH and the PhotoBook-Museum gUG.

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The Gruber Library, Fotoboks A–K + Film, Study L. Fritz Gruber / Photo: Frederic Lezmi

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PRESS IMAGES

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“Gruber Library: The Renate and L. Fritz Gruber Photobook Collection”

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