

ubu

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WOLS

Vintage Photographs from the 1930s

February 22 – April 21, 2001

Ubu Gallery is pleased to present *Wols: Vintage Photographs from the 1930s*. Vintage photographs by Wols are extremely rare and the exhibition at Ubu will contain approximately 30 images covering the four principal areas of Wols's photographic output –still lifes, portraits, fashion and abstraction. Wols's photographs are known largely through modern prints made from original negatives, which were exhibited at the Von der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal and the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hannover (both in 1978) and at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 1996. Both vintage and modern prints were exhibited at the Busch-Reisinger Museum (Harvard University) in 1999. A set of modern prints is also in the collection of The J. Paul Getty Museum.

Wols (the pseudonym of Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze, b. Germany 1913, d. France 1951) occupies a mythic position in post-war European painting as an emblematic figure of the Informel movement, which like its American counterpart "Abstract Expressionism," was a bridge between Surrealist-inspired automatism and gestural abstraction. When Wols arrived in Paris in 1932, he was already practicing photography. It is the influence of the two prevailing, yet seemingly antithetical, photographic currents of the times –Surrealism in France and Neue Sachlichkeit ("New Objectivity") in Germany– that imbues his photographic oeuvre with its unique and distinctive vision.

In Paris, Wols made the acquaintance of Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant through the introduction of the Bauhaus master, László Moholy-Nagy. Wols had met Moholy-Nagy having gone to Berlin to attend the Bauhaus –recently closed– on the recommendation of the Dresden-based photographer, Hugo Erfurth. Wols's earliest photographs show strong links to the Bauhaus, employing bird's-eye views, close-ups and abstractions (both taken from real life and through limited experimentation with the photogram). In Paris, Wols tried to earn a living as a portrait photographer and, in 1937, he was an official photographer for the "Pavillon d' l'Elégance" at the Paris Worlds Fair. It is, however, the still lifes of the late 1930s, which dominate Wols's photographic achievement and assure his place in photographic history. Wols was fascinated with everyday household foodstuffs –for example, grapefruits, cheese, onions, kidneys, as well as the dismembered carcasses of rabbits and chickens– and he rendered them photographically with the formality of the Bauhaus crossed with the visceral punch of Surrealism. The result is a troubling encapsulation of the familiar and banal, an off-kilter representation of reality.