

May 2014
Press Announcement

1914/18 – Bilder von der Grenze / Pictures from the Border

Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur, 7 June to 12 October 2014

Media preview: 6 June 2014, 10am to 12 noon, official opening: 6pm

The First World War not only gave rise to a new kind of devastating war machinery and heretofore unknown means of mass destruction, it was also the first war in which modern mass media and visual communication (film and photography) played a major part. Although photo-reportage of the kind familiar to us from the Second World War was not yet so highly developed, a wealth of photographic evidence still exists, proving direct and lively insight into everyday military and civilian life, as well as into the feelings and thoughts of a whole generation.

Photo postcards were among the most informative pictorial documents from the period of the First World War. These cards, sent in their hundreds of thousands by soldiers from the border to their loved ones at home, were not just simple industrially-produced printed matter. Often they were original photographs taken on site by amateurs and enlarged on photographic paper in small editions: portraits taken outdoors, scenes from the field kitchen or hospital, views of men socialising or in contact with the civilian population. Given their superficial harmlessness, they seem like a collective sedative, a mass medium for repressing anxiety and uncertainty. Yet they also indicate how the Swiss border occupation of 1914/18 was experienced at everyday level and how the Great War was perceived – with subliminal messages about the absurdity of war, about solidarity in a community with a common destiny, about endless waiting for the emergency and about powerlessness in the face of geopolitical developments.

Over the years, the Fotostiftung Schweiz has collected more than 1,000 of these touching pictorial witnesses and is presenting them now for the first time – parallel to the installation of large tapestries by Stephan Schenk entitled “The Way of the Cross”. The arrangement chosen by the Fotostiftung is not intended to provide a documentary illustration of the reality of the First World War. Nevertheless, it represents a highly authentic reflection of a world in a state of emergency.

Documentary film:

The documentary film “Schöner wär’s daheim” by Heinz Bütler (production: NZZ Format / Fotostiftung Schweiz) takes viewers on a journey to that “postcard territory”, respectively to the Swiss border in those dark times. Availing of the visual potential of the photo postcards, with their portraits and small scenarios, the film addresses the juxtaposition of the most diverse perceptions of the “primal catastrophe of the 20th century”. What does world history look like from the viewpoint of a country that was spared the worst? What preoccupies the ordinary man who has to wait inactively for months at the border? Do the many individual

postcards convey a collective or national sentiment? And in which form are the contradictions and absurdities of war expressed?

Beatrice von Matt, Anton Holzer, Georg Kreis and Peter Pfrunder set out together on a journey back in time, immersing themselves as they went in the photographic situations, scenes, persons, settings and snapshots related to the border occupation of 1914–18, and expressing what is known about that period and what preoccupied and moved them personally about the episodes narrated in the images.

The film is being shown as part of the exhibition and is a component of the DVD “Bilderwelten vom Grossen Krieg. 1914–1918” by Heinz Bütler and Alexander Kluge (production: nzz tv / dctp.tv, 2014).

Publication:

To accompany the exhibition the Limmat Verlag, Zurich, published the book “Schöner wär’s daheim”, edited by Peter Pfrunder / Fotostiftung Schweiz.

Accompanying events:

Wednesday, 9 July 2014, 6.30pm: Fokus “Die Fotopostkarte 1914/18: Ein Massenmedium”, with Sabine Münzenmaier (in German language).

Wednesday, 27 August 2014, 6.30pm: “Schweizer Alltag 1914/18”, special tour with Thomas Buomberger, presented by Peter Pfrunder (in German language).

Sunday, 7 September 2014, 11.30am: “Und die Frauen?”, special tour with Elisabeth Joris, presented by Peter Pfrunder (in German language).

www.fotostiftung.ch

With the generous support of the Federal Office of Culture and Migros-Kulturprozent.

For **press inquiries** please contact Katharina Rippstein, responsible for media relations: rippstein@fotostiftung.ch or +41 52 234 10 30.

Press images in printable quality can be downloaded from: www.fotostiftung.ch (heading Press).

We kindly ask you to send us a file copy.