

Maastricht

For almost his entire career, Werner Mantz worked on commissioned assignments. However, he also carried out some independent projects. Much of this ‘free’ work involves his photographs of old Maastricht, the first of which date back to 1932. He pointed his camera at city walls and gates, alleys, churches, parks and the old town hall. In the post-war years, he took his famous ‘backlight’ photograph of Stokstraat in Maastricht. Some particularly special photographs are the ones that Werner Mantz took of the Wilhelmina Bridge over the River Maas, which was completed in the Art Deco style in 1932 but was blown up during World War II.

Iconic Architecture in Limburg

In 1932, Werner Mantz took many photographs of Maastricht’s large Immaculata College, which was built in a traditionalist style. The architect Frits Peutz, an important client of Mantz’s in Limburg, built a ‘glass palace’ for Modehuis Schunck, a fashion house in the centre of Heerlen. Mantz beautifully captured how the glass façade provided transparency on the one hand, while also, through the reflections of the light, absorbing its surroundings and the sun and clouds. Mantz’s occasional tendency to manipulate reality in his architectural photographs can be seen in his retouching of the image, with part of the construction on the roof having been removed.

Rural Limburg

In the village of Cadier en Keer in the Limburg hills, Mantz made a series of photographs of a number of streets lined with the typical whitewashed houses, farms and barns – a street scene from the 1950s that no longer exists as such. During the years of occupation in 1940–1945, he had built a small country home here, where his partner Karl Mergenbaum lived some of the time. Mantz also completed photographic assignments elsewhere in rural Limburg.

Roads in the Province of Limburg

In 1938, the Provinciale Waterstaat Limburg, the department of public works, asked Werner Mantz to photograph the new provincial roads over the course of four seasons. He carried out the commission in 1938–1939. The result was a long series of shots that now have great historical and topographical value, as the landscape in question has changed dramatically. The roads are



Werner Mantz, *Stokstraat Maastricht*, 1950. Collection Bonnefanten

pristine; with a few exceptions, they are free of traffic in a way that seems inconceivable today. When the occasional car or bike comes past, it seems to have been placed there by the photographer. On the verges, saplings stand neatly strapped and lined up: time for the modern age to begin. Mantz also had a keen eye for the crucifixes that stood alongside the roads here and there.

Religion

Werner Mantz received commissions related to the construction of churches in the province of Limburg on a fairly regular basis. He was able to translate the architecture into powerful forms in two dimensions. Using the slanting daylight that came in through the windows and even with some backlight, he succeeded in capturing the special character of the church interiors without any loss of detail. At some point before 1936, Mantz photographed the sculpture of Mary and Child known as ‘Sterre der Zee’ (Star of the Sea) in the Basilica of Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe-Tenhemelopneming (Our Lady of the Assumption). This photograph is estimated to have been reproduced tens of thousands of times in copper intaglio printing and other forms.

Gemeente-Spaarbank Maastricht

In the early 1950s, Werner Mantz was for a time the ‘in-house photographer’ of the Gemeente-Spaarbank (Municipal Savings Bank) in Maastricht. These photographs were used as the bank’s press images and for various advertising purposes. Mantz employed all his skills to capture the shots of the interior of the mobile savings bank’s bus, where it must have been difficult to get enough distance to create a satisfactory representation of the space.

Photo Tours

Werner Mantz went on various ‘photo tours’ with his partner Karl Mergenbaum, including to Prague in 1930. Other trips took them to Switzerland (1952), France (1956) and Yugoslavia (1963). He photographed architecture and landscapes with the same impressive sense of form as when carrying out his commissions in Cologne and Maastricht. He clearly composed these images with precision as well, once again making the light and shadows work for him. He also made postcards of his travel photographs.

Het Schürmann & Kicken Portfolio

Soon after Werner Mantz’s successful solo exhibition at Lichttropfen Gallery in Aachen in 1975, the organisers compiled a boxed portfolio of ten prints that typified Werner Mantz’s work from the period 1927–1935. Mantz printed the photographs especially for this edition; the portfolio came out in 1977, in a limited run of twenty-five copies plus ten ‘artist’s editions’. This was the route by which many of Mantz’s works found their way into museums and private collections internationally. The publication of these ten photographs marked the worldwide ‘rediscovery’ of Werner Mantz. In the same year, his work was included in the sixth Documenta in Kassel, the world’s most important exhibition of contemporary art, founded in 1955.

The photographs hanging together in this exhibition were not always part of the same assignment. They have been placed together here because of the similarities in subject, theme or composition. All the prints are vintage – made by the photographer himself or under his supervision – and come from various national and international collections. Many were used in publications or had an archival function. Some of them still show physical evidence of this in the form of minor damage and discoloration.

This exhibition was organised in cooperation with the Nederlands Fotomuseum and the Werner Mantz Foundation.

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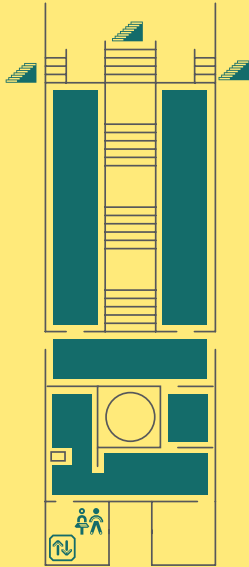
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WERNER
MANTZ



THE
PERFECT
EYE



ENGLISH

BONNEFANTEN

Werner Mantz: *The Perfect Eye*

The work of Werner Mantz (b. Cologne, Germany, 1901–d. Maastricht, Netherlands, 1983) occupies a unique position in the history of photography. He was a great craftsman, and his visual language was like no other. Mantz was able to understand contemporary architecture in a photographic way. Even today, his work remains a source of inspiration for architectural photography.

When Werner Mantz came to the Netherlands as a migrant in the late 1930s, he had already built up a successful career as an architectural photographer and portraitist in Cologne. From 1932, he ran a photography studio with his partner Karl Mergenbaum on the Vrijthof in Maastricht, which continued to have a strong reputation after the war. His specialities included children’s portraits.

With his work, Mantz built a bridge between photographic commissions and the artistic movements of the 1920s and 30s, such as the Bauhaus. For this reason, he is referred to as the ‘missing link’ in photographic history. Although he is famous internationally for his architectural photographs of Cologne, he also photographed a lot of architecture in Limburg. For a long time, it was forgotten that he had also made a great deal of other work, such as advertising photography, pictures of products, industrial photography, shots of roads in Limburg, religion and independent work featuring old Maastricht. His work has never been displayed on such a scale as in this exhibition at the Bonnefanten.

Pickenhahn Hairdressing Salon

In 1926, Werner Mantz photographed the Pickenhahn hairdressing salon in Cologne, which had recently been remodelled to a design by the architect Wilhelm Riphahn. This architect was so enthusiastic about the photographs that he recruited Mantz to document other buildings he had designed. For Mantz, this was the start of a productive period with many commissions by architects who were involved in the Neues Bauen (New Building) movement in Cologne. This architectural movement was related to the Bauhaus. These architects wanted to build in a modern style, with a focus on light interiors, fresh air and hygiene. They often worked with concrete, glass and steel.

Housing Developments in Cologne

‘Siedlungsbau’ is one of the best-known forms taken by Neues Bauen in Cologne. This involved urban expansion in the form of new housing developments, including lots of ‘strip building’. Mantz took a number of his most iconic photographs in these ‘Siedlungen’, or housing developments, which were given names such as ‘Blauer Hof’ (Blue Courtyard) or ‘Weiße Stadt’ (White City). His shots of façades with rhythmically arranged balconies, whose shadows reveal the structure of the interior, have become famous. He always used shadows and the position of the sun to emphasise distinctive features, such as symmetry and the various rhythms in the façades.



Werner Mantz, *Interior hairdresser Pickenhahn, Drususgasse*, Cologne, 1926. Architect Wilhelm Riphahn. ©Werner Mantz/ Nederlands Fotomuseum

Werner Mantz’s archive is the most comprehensive documentation of Neues Bauen in Cologne. It is of great value for architectural history and has been used in the renovation of these neighbourhoods.

Pressa

Pressa was an ambitious international press exhibition, which took place in 1928 on a large site beside the Rhine. For five months, 43 countries presented displays and activities there. A selection of architects were invited to build the pavilions: Riphahn & Grod designed the ‘Haus der Kölnischen Zeitung’; Erich Mendelsohn built the Pavilion for the media mogul Rudolf Mosse; and Hans Schumacher created the ‘Haus der Arbeiterpresse’. Werner Mantz took many photographs, making some of his best-known work. The frontal view of the symmetrical façade of the ‘Haus der Kölnischen Zeitung’ became the symbol of Pressa.

Modern life

In the 1920s and early 30s, Cologne had a vibrant cultural and entertainment scene. Theatres, cinemas, bars and restaurants were very popular. There were also ‘Vergnügungspaläste’, or ‘pleasure palaces’, which were constructed in the Neues Bauen style. Mantz was commissioned by the architects of these buildings to photograph their work. His precisely orchestrated shots offer an excellent impression of the era, as do Mantz’s pictures of the big new department stores. He was commissioned to photograph the new phenomenon of the illumination of – and on – buildings. The arrival of electric lighting gave the city centre a modern appearance even in the evenings and at night.

Villas

More so than the ‘Siedlungen’ housing developments, it was detached villas that came to symbolise Neues Bauen. Their photogenic character certainly played a part in this. Mantz’s photographs made the structure of these houses clear and comprehensible. He took care when selecting his angles and waited for the sun to create just the right lighting for the various surfaces and shapes in the façades and the rectangular or rounded extensions and overhangs. He also paid attention to how the house had been placed in relation to the area and the surrounding greenery and trees, many of which were still immature. In Limburg, too, Mantz showed great precision and a strong eye for form when photographing houses created by various architects, including Alphons Boosten.



Werner Mantz, *Gemeente-Spaarbank*, Maastricht, 1951 - 1953. ©Werner Mantz/Nederlands Fotomuseum

Interiors

Mantz was commissioned by individual architects, interior designers and furniture makers to photograph interiors of houses. He documented many interiors of homes in housing developments, with a focus on modern and efficient design, in line with the aim of creating comfortable and healthy but also affordable living spaces for the middle classes. **Schools** Werner Mantz photographed many schools in Germany and the Netherlands that had been built according to the principles of Neues Bauen, such as light interiors, fresh air and hygiene. They were an integral part of urban renewal. In a number of cases, he photographed the special open-air schools that were becoming fashionable. Students could benefit from healthy fresh air during lessons because the façades of such schools could be opened up, partially or even completely.

Mining

In 1938, Werner Mantz was commissioned by the Dutch State Mines in Limburg to take 52 photographs of the State Mines facilities. He succeeded in capturing the very diverse, visually complex, and sometimes unusually large structures in a way that was clear and understandable. He had previously photographed the Emma and Maurits State Mines. Using the frame of his camera, he separated the individual buildings from their complex surroundings, allowing their unusual shapes to stand out vividly. Mantz’s photographs in the Limburg mining region are

of particular value in part because this industry, once the largest in the Netherlands, almost entirely disappeared following the closures announced in 1965.

Industry

Mantz received many different assignments from industry and road and bridge construction companies in Germany. He photographed the new modernist development of the Opel factory, for instance. For the water tower at the Ford factory, he made an exception and angled his camera upwards, so as to emphasise the monumental nature of the construction. In Frechen, he photographed the mining facilities and their tall chimneys. He also documented Francke & Heidecke’s new Rollei-Werke in Braunschweig, where cameras were manufactured with great precision.

Photography for Advertisements

Werner Mantz regularly received commissions for photographs for advertising purposes. His photographs were then edited into advertisements and posters, either by Mantz himself or by other graphic designers. Partly because of the technically perfect reproduction, they have their own visual force and atmosphere. In their appearance – sharpness, details, emphasis on texture – these photographs are closely related to New Photography, an art form that developed around 1920, in which the focus was on photographic technique and the



Werner Mantz, *Anonymous communicant*, Maastricht, 1957. ©Werner Mantz/ Nederlands Fotomuseum

objects photographed were secondary to the composition of the image. Mantz made photographic montages and combination prints for clients including the Leonard Tietz department store, demonstrating that his creativity was not limited to ‘objective photography’.

Early Photography

Werner Mantz started taking photographs as a teenager in Cologne. He was interested in the beauty and historical significance of what he captured on film. In 1920, he photographed the flooding in the old city centre. He made his first money by publishing picture postcards of his shots. Outside the city, he photographed the landscape and the Rhine. He printed his photographs using 19th-century techniques, achieving a painterly effect. He learnt how to do this during his studies in Munich.

Portraits

In the thousands of portraits created by Mantz, it is striking how he used lighting, pose, positioning within the picture, background and sometimes objects to give each of his subjects a unique look and atmosphere. In his later portraits, he sometimes created modern-looking compositions by radically cropping the frame. Some of the dog portraits from his Cologne years also stand out. In Maastricht, his portrait photography really took off. He specialised in children’s portraits, working with a 6x6 Rolleiflex, and became well known throughout the region for his First Communion portraits. Even in his studio, Mantz worked exclusively with daylight.

Art Reproduction

At his Cologne studio in the early 1920s, Werner Mantz specialised not only in portrait photography but also in photographic art reproduction. He documented the work of a number of painters and sculptors in and around the Cologne Progressives group, such as Heinrich Hoerle, Anton Räderscheidt and Josef Pabst. His images of Pabst’s figurative sculptures were sold as postcards.