

August Sander / Bernd and Hilla Becher: A Dialogue

Curated by Hilla Becher

May 1st – June 7th, 2014

Opening Reception: May 1st, 2014, 6-8pm



Bruce Silverstein in collaboration with Sonnabend Gallery is pleased to present *August Sander / Bernd and Hilla Becher: A Dialogue*, curated by Hilla Becher.

This thought-provoking exhibition offers a visual and conceptual parallel of the best-known typological projects from the 20th century—images of industrial and residential architecture by Bernd and Hilla Becher are juxtaposed with August Sander's portraits of German citizens from his rigorous *People of the Twentieth Century* series.

This new context for these iconic images provokes a fascinating conversation between these artists' works occurring on both a formal and ideological level. It is relevant to note that the Bechers' contribution to contemporary art as artists and educators resides in their radical presentation of their photographs as a typology, or classification of images of the same subject—i.e. grain elevators, coalbunkers, water towers, etc.—in a grid format which necessitates the viewer's interpretation of the group of images as a single work as well as a comparative study of the differences between the individual subjects. This current exhibition is unusual as the Bechers' architectural images are displayed as singular "portraits" while Sander's photographs of people are presented as typological grids.

August Sander (1876-1964) began his *People of the Twentieth Century* series in 1911—his attempt to capture through "absolute photography" a "true psychology of our time and our people"—a mirror of the age. He worked to create portraits of individuals from various social strata and their particular surroundings as an attempt to order the myriad types of human characters he saw around him and create a more universal portrait of human existence in the 20th century. An earlier manifestation of the Bechers' attitude, Sander's project in its totality highlights a tension between image and document, specific and general.

Bernd and Hilla Becher (b.1931-2007 / b.1934) first collaborated in 1959 after meeting at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1957. They set out to document via photography the various designs of industrial buildings in the Ruhr Valley, choosing for a background a flat, uniformly lit sky, and decidedly portraying the buildings exactly as they were, as clearly and legibly as possible. By the 1960s, they defined their conceptual approach to presenting these images as typologies, employing a purposefully neutral, reductive style of image-making that prioritizes their systematic practice and chosen mode of display, creating an interpretation of these images both as aesthetic, formal exercises, and documents of industrial architecture.

August Sander's work and the Bechers' works have been exhibited widely. Their images are a part of the world's most celebrated collections.

For more information please contact Meredith Rockwell at meredith@brucesilverstein.com