
THE
WALTHER COLLECTION

Portraits by Photographic Masters
August Sander and Seydou Keïta on
View at The Walther Collection Project
Space

Extended Through March 10, 2012, Dual Exhibition Captures Individual Experiences of Shifting Identities in Europe and West Africa



August Sander, *Young Farmers*, 1914



Seydou Keïta, *Untitled*, 1952-1955

New York, NY (December 1, 2011) — In an extended presentation on view through March 10, 2012, at the Walther Collection Project Space, *August Sander and Seydou Keïta: Portraiture and Social Identity* unites the portraiture of two modern photography masters, whose images vividly capture the rapid social transformations of the twentieth century through the faces of everyday people. Encapsulating two distinct cultures in pivotal moments of societal transition, Sander and Keïta's portraits reflect on the experience and role of the individual in Germany and Mali. The dual presentation considers how these prolific photographers documented the visual histories and shifting identities of their two countries.

August Sander and Seydou Keïta brings together approximately 60 black-and-white photographs by the two artists, encompassing select works from Sander's portfolio *Antlitz der Zeit* (*Face of our Time*) from the 1910s and 1920s, one of the most enduring and influential essays in modern photography, and from Keïta's portraiture of residents in Mali's capital city Bamako in the late 1940s and mid-1950s. The artists were first presented

in dialogue as part of the Walther Collection's 2010 inaugural exhibition, *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*, curated by Okwui Enwezor, in Neu-Ulm/Burlafingen, Germany.

"The point of this dialogue between Sander and Keïta is to show two contrasting moments of the twentieth century, and the cultural implications of photography in assessing the changes occurring in each of the societies represented," said Enwezor. "When we look at the portraits, the poses and gestures that the sitters adopt in front of the camera suggest the idea of these modern individuals as witnesses to, as well as participants in, the construction of historical narratives."

German photographer August Sander (1876–1964) is considered one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century, and like his contemporaries, Karl Blossfeldt and Albert Renger-Patzsch, his style favored objective detail, uncompromising true-to-life representation, and a comparative approach to photography. His visual portrayals of farmers, workers, students, families, tradespeople, artists, and the bourgeoisie from early twentieth-century Germany highlight both the individuality of the sitter and the typical traits of social and occupational groups, genders, and generations. In his *Antlitz der Zeit* portfolio, a 60-image selection from his ongoing master project, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts (People of the Twentieth Century)*, Sander worked to create an exact photography that contextualized and highlighted varying social strata and underscored the "true psychology" of a period, unsentimentally capturing a society in transition, shifting from agriculture to industry.

By contrast, Seydou Keïta (1929–2001), one of the most renowned West African photographers of the 1950s, worked with a portable studio setting, posing clients against gray or densely-patterned backdrops. Even though his reputation in Mali never dwindled, it was not until the early 1990s that Keïta's work became known internationally, alongside the studio photography of Malick Sidibé and Samuel Fosso. Working during a period of dramatic shifts in Malian familial hierarchies, migration, and political movements, Keïta made portraits of predominantly urban middle-class Bamako residents. His images reflected the society's transition through a merging of traditional and contemporary fashions, and a growing consumer culture, in the decade prior to Mali's independence from France. Frequently pictured with elaborate textiles, jewelry, radios, and cars, in highly-conscious poses, sitters expressed the emerging myth of a modern African city—to be photographed by Keïta was to be made *Bamakois*, beautiful, and cosmopolitan. Keïta's portrait style, which emphasized the visual interplay between sitter and site and the creation of the ideal, shaped the new image of postcolonial identity.

About the Walther Family Foundation

The Walther Family Foundation is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to researching, collecting, exhibiting, and publishing modern and contemporary photography and video art. Founded in the traditions of European and American photography, the collection has expanded to incorporate works across regions, periods, and artistic sensibilities, giving particular focus to artists and photographers working in Africa and Asia. Through its in-depth exhibitions and vigorous publishing program, the Foundation showcases photography and video that advances the history and understanding of the medium. The Foundation has two exhibition spaces: the Walther Collection in Neu-Ulm/Burlafingen, Germany, and the Walther Collection Project Space in New York City. www.walthercollection.com

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