

Press Release | Exhibition *Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau – Private Photographs*



TABU - USA 1929-1931 Regie: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau Quelle: Deutsche Kinemathek
Veröffentlichung nur in Verbindung mit der Ausstellung Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau - Private Photographs im Schwules Museum
vom 6.12.2013 - 10.3.2014

07 December 2013 – 10 March 2014
Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau – Private Photographs
Curator: Wolfgang Theis

At last, the photographic works of the legendary film director Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau can be seen in the Schwules Museum.

Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (1888 – 1931) is one of the most internationally significant directors of early cinema. Although he achieved world fame in 1922 with the horror classic *Nosferatu*, it was 1924's *The Last Laugh* which became the calling card for his Hollywood career. The film electrified the film industry with its "unchained" camera. Contemporaries avoided the topic of Murnau's homosexuality more or less elegantly. For his part, he never made it a public theme. His 1931 death in a car accident on the coastal highway at Santa Barbara only fueled the making of myths. Our exhibition, in collaboration with the Deutsche Kinemathek, presents Murnau as a photographer, showing private photos taken in Tahiti during the filming of his final work *Tabu*, and documents his circle of colleagues, friends and lovers. In the bleak years of cinematic abstinence from gay themes and characters, *Tabu* was the rare exception: a series of homoerotic fantasy images embedded in a heterosexual love story which ends tragically. In gay discourse, this film has played a role which cannot be underestimated. Murnau became a poster boy for the gay movement and was drafted into the ranks of assumed prominent pioneers, a role which might well have conflicted with his sensibilities.

The stereo images, which we are exhibiting in new prints, originate from a discovery made by the Murnau researcher Heinrich Gräfenstein. In 1993, while going through a box of film scraps from *Tabu*, he came across ca. 200 stereoscopic negatives, which were already heavily damaged. However, since in the case of the stereo images there are two slightly offset shots of every subject extant, Gräfenstein was able, after many years working with photo restoration specialist Klaus Pollmeier, to save at least the subjects. The restored original negatives were acquired from Murnau's estate by the Deutsche Kinemathek in 1994. In our exhibition, they will be shown for the first time in a larger context.

The evening sun casts long shadows. Murnau is in a sailboat with his friends, exploring the waters around Berlin. Ruth Landshoff reports on this trip in her book *Biographischen Impressionen – Klatsch, Ruhm und kleine Feuer* (EN: *Biographical Scenes – Applause, Fame and Small Fires*) and mentions Hans Jahnke, a paperboy and friend of hers. Murnau was obviously quite taken with the young man as well. In the preserved stereoscopic negatives from Murnau's estate, he is immortalized with and without his bathing suit. Also amongst these negatives, we see the boys Murnau photographed at a Hollywood pool. Their poses are contrived – if for no other reason than the long exposure time. Most of them gaze into the camera, some are aware of their effect on the photographer – they flirt. These images document Murnau's desire, while the surviving photographs of the team on his yacht are more distanced. This is the yacht he took to the South Sea to work with Robert Flaherty on a film about the life of the native islanders.

The exhibition coincides with the publication of a large-format book of Murnau's private photographic work (Schirmer/Mosel).

Opening hours: Mon, Wed – Fri, Son 14–18h, Sat 14–19h, closed Tuesdays

Press Contact

Schwules Museum | Lützowstraße 73 | 10785 Berlin
presse@schwulesmuseum.de | T +49(0)30-69 59 92 52