

by Angelika Littlefield



Ernst Leitz Wetzlar

Ilse Salberg

WEIMAR PHOTOGRAPHER

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Ilse Salberg: Weimar Photographer

Ilse Salberg's story reflects a keen drive to learn, impressive financial and personal resources and a photo eye that ventured up close with the male nude, into the dark eyes of inhuman beings and to a seat at a sensory banquet.

In 1934 Ilse Salberg left Nazi Germany. She re-appeared in 1936 in the expatriate art scene in Paris and Sanary-sur-mer. In Paris she rented a studio for herself and her artist partner Anton Raederscheidt in the same building as his colleague from Cologne, the artist Max Ernst. She provided enough art supplies to make Anton's friends envious. She bought the plans for a summer home from the architects Maurice Grandjean and Joel Guenec, a piece of land in Sanary from sculptor André Bloc. She had a Le Corbusier-like home, called Le Patio, built in record time on a hill near the sparkling waters of the Côte d'Azur. Then, splurging on lavish dining, Ilse worked her way into the photographic scene around *Galerie de la Pléiade* and around the Greek critic known simply as Tériade. The latter was the editor and publisher of the influential, avant-garde arts magazine *Verve*.

In a mere three years between 1936 and 1939, Ilse mastered the Leica III, Linhof Technika 6x9 and Contax II—cameras used by cutting edge photographers. Her work was in *Verve* and in 1940 it appeared in a British photo compendium *Still: a Photo-Folio*.¹ She was developing gelatin silver prints in the darkroom she set up at Le Patio. She also had a hand-turned etching press with which she produced professional quality héliogravures.

In 1947 she was dead; her masterworks lay forgotten in a basement in Barjols. No one heard about this modern woman and her nascent talent. Ilse Salberg's amazing personal story is told here for the first time.



LEICA IIIa

¹ *Still: A Photo-Folio*, (Great Britain: The Readers' Union, 1940)

The beginnings

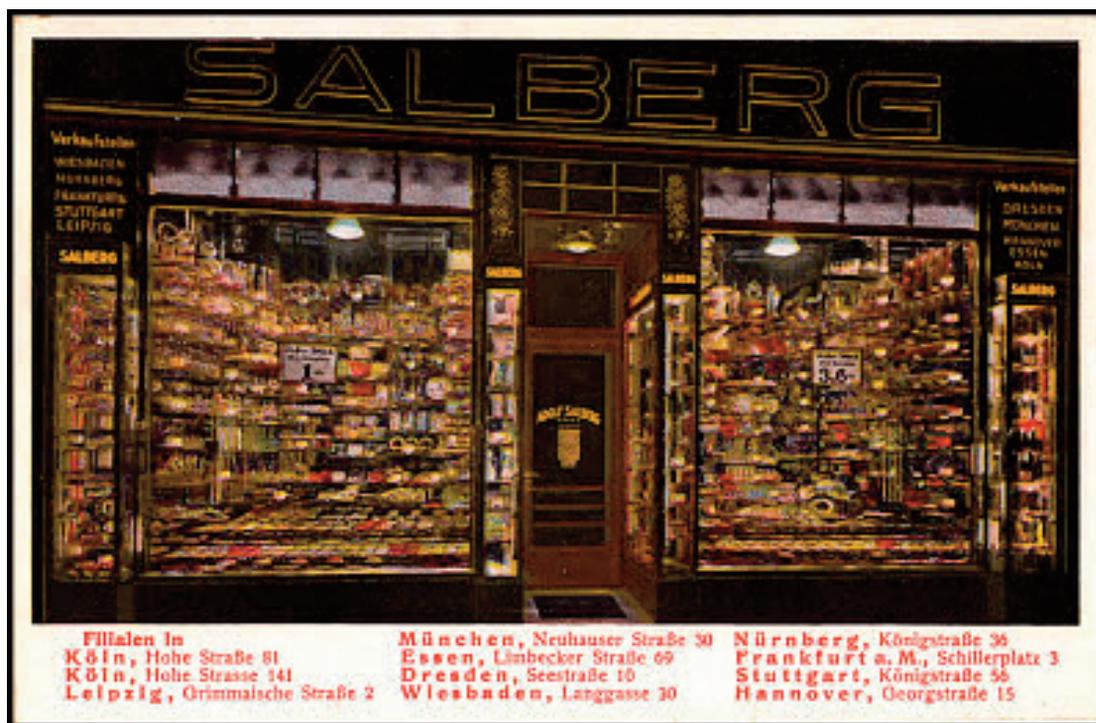
Ilse Salberg's life began in Goerlitz, a Prussian town in 1901. She was the daughter of a prosperous Jewish merchant whose family lived in the scenic old sector. In 1907 whilst still a girl, the family moved to Cologne.



Villa, Hans Schiff

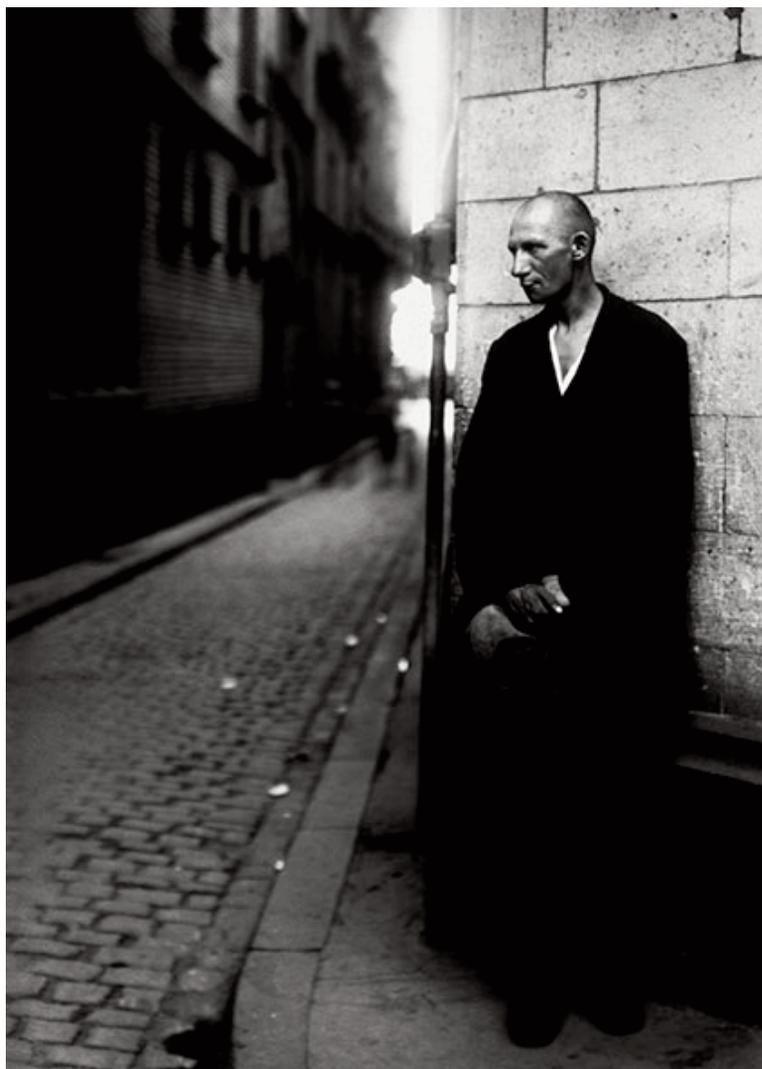
During the years of Ilse's youth, her father Adolf Salberg expanded his upscale retail establishment into a successful chain. With headquarters in Cologne, Salberg situated stores in the best locations in Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich, Dresden, Essen, Frankfurt-am-Main, Nürnberg, Stuttgart, Wiesbaden and Magdeburg. The family became

very rich selling expensive leather and gift ware. They owned a building on Hohe Street in the commercial district of Cologne. On Marienburger Street in a fine residential district they owned a villa designed by architect Robert Stern. Ilse and her sister enjoyed the best of everything: ski-vacations in Switzerland, fine dining, fine clothes, fine books and fine arts.



In her early 20s Ilse married Arthur Meyer, Manager of the Hermann Meyer Cloth and Manufactured Goods Company. When the Hermann Meyer Company struggled during difficult economic times in Germany in 1922, Arthur joined the Salberg family firm as Managing Director of the Hohe Street store. Ilse and Arthur's son Ernst was born January 20, 1923. Ilse continued to work as a purchaser for leather goods for the Salberg chain at the company offices on Bruecke Street. She was independent-minded with the financial security to have excellent child-minders while she pursued her interests.

Photographic influences



August Sander: *Jobless*, 1928 (Modern Print 1995)
 © Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur
 August Sander Archiv, Cologne; ARS, New York, 2014

Ilse's interest in photography was awakened in the 1920s by photographic master August Sander who had a studio in Cologne. Sander made his living from commission work: portraits, architecture, industry, art reproduction and landscapes. Sander's encyclopedic interests kept his talents in the public eye.

In the 1920s Sander was formulating his documentary style while working on the book *People of the 20th Century*. Sander's carefully posed portraits, categorizing farmers, skilled tradesmen, women, artists and others, delineated the classes of citizens he believed typical of the 20th century. Sander's prototypes were meant to be as lasting as the caryatids that Walter Hege photographed around the same time on the Erechtheum of the Parthenon in Athens.

In addition, Sander earned money by producing photos for post-cards and calendars. For example, he photographed the costume event organized by the Cologne Progressives. Guests at the artists' *Lumpen Balls*, dressed,

and often cross-dressed, in outlandish clothing. The financially strapped artists organized the social gathering during Cologne carnival to tap the pocketbooks of rich art patrons. Sander sold his photos as souvenirs. The artists partied for free if they brought rich patrons to the balls and Ilse Salberg was by then a very rich patron.

Tickets for the *Lumpen* or Rag Balls were sold through the New Book Store at Bruecke Street which was conveniently close to Ilse's work location—as was *Dekke Tommes*, the pub where the balls were held. Ilse was attracted to the colourful book store facade, by the posters for the *Lumpen Balls* and by the Friday evening talks on art, literature and politics—interests dear to her heart.

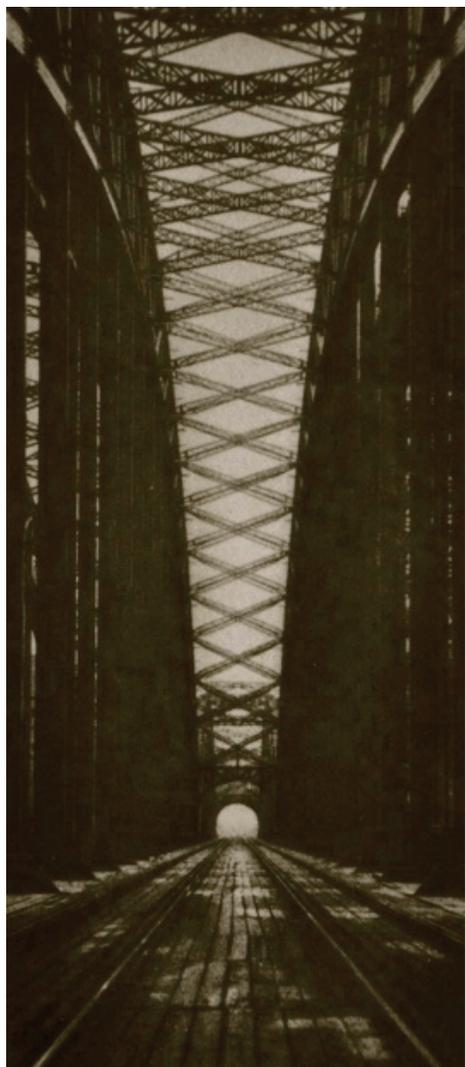
At the balls Ilse saw August Sander at work documenting the revelry. She purchased several of his photographs from this period. Throughout her life Ilse transported them to wherever she lived. August Sander's works were dear to her.

By 1930 Ilse had replaced Arthur Meyer, who she'd found disagreeable. She chose instead, Rudolf Metzger, a jeweller from Pforzheim. Like the Progressives, Metzger was close by. He had an office in

the new Disch Haus located on Bruecke Street. According to a 2009 interview with Ilse's niece Anneliese Nordchild, Rudolf was handsome and charming. Rudolf and Ilse ended up co-managing the Hohe Street Salberg store where Mr. Meyer was conveniently bought out.

Success in commerce and a new handsome husband were, however, not enough for Ilse Salberg Metzger. She wanted to play her part in creating a venue for the arts, especially the photographic arts. On July 23, 1931 she and Rudolf incorporated the *Buecherstube am Dom* or The Book Room at the Cathedral, as an antiquarian book store, exhibition place and events venue. It was located in a premier location near Cologne Cathedral. Ilse's interest in photography was shown at the opening event on September 15, 1931. It was a slide presentation of Walter Hege's brilliantly lit photographs of Greek architecture.

Hege was a renowned for his use of sharp light contrasts, unusual perspectives and evocative atmosphere—all features of the New Vision. He was frequently quoted as saying, 'How many prints one sees that are only snaps. How few are pictures! When the viewer forgets that he has a photo in front of him, then there's something to it.' Hege used a large format camera for the Greek work but by the time he presented at the *Buecherstube* in 1931 he was teaching the Leica courses at the Weimar Arts School, extolling the virtues of Leica portability. Shortly thereafter he owned a Contax camera as well.



Hohenzollern Bridge, Hannes Maria Flach

Interestingly, the first art works exhibited at the *Buecherstube* in 1931 were watercolours and studies by Marta Hegemann. In all likelihood, Ilse met Marta at the *Lumpen Balls* along with her husband artist Anton Raederscheidt. There were other possible juncture points. The women might have met at the New Bookstore or Ilse might have seen Marta's murals in the children's room in the 1929 exhibition at the Cologne *Kunstverein* titled *Raum und Wandbild*. At that point Ilse was the parent of a six-year-old and was expecting Rudolf's child. She might also have seen Marta's works at the Gallery of Dr. Becker-Newman where Marta had her first major show in 1929. Ilse might even have been tipped to Marta's works by references to her in articles written by Cologne art-historian and art critic Louise Straus-Ernst², Max Ernst's first wife.

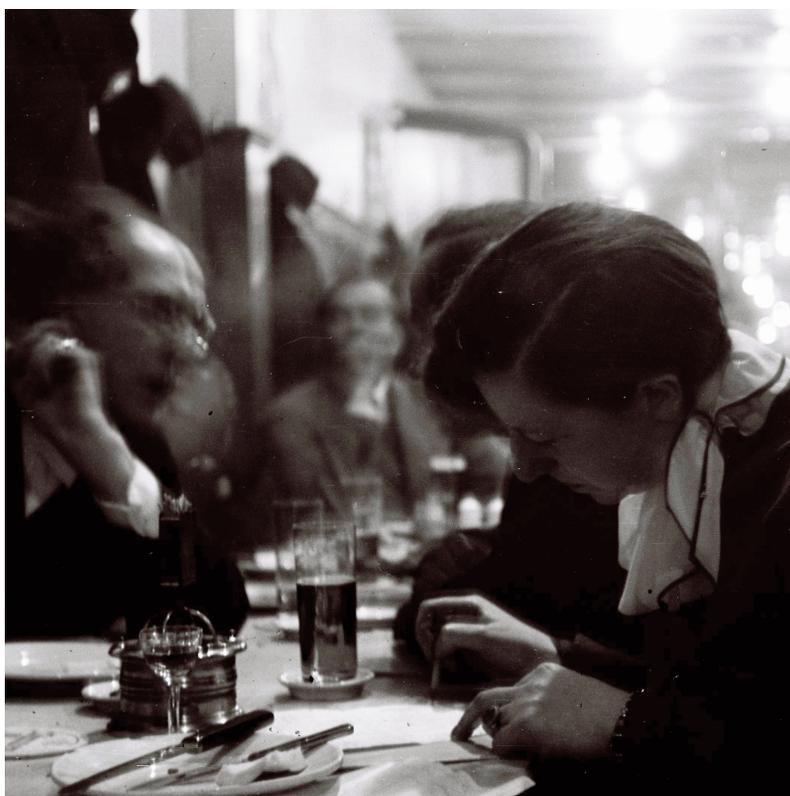
No matter where the initial Ilse-Marta contact took place, Ilse admired Marta's work sufficiently to feature her as the opening exhibition at the *Buecherstube*. In November 1931 as Becker-Newman showed Marta's oils, the *Buecherstube* featured watercolours and studies. Ilse socialized with both Marta Hegemann and her husband Anton Raederscheidt at the opening of the exhibitions.

² Louise Straus-Ernst, "Raum und Wandbild: Koeln 1929", *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration XXII*, 1929, No 7, 194-197



Hohenzollern Bridge with Cologne Cathedral, Hannes Maria Flach

Ilse had also befriended photographer Hannes Maria Flach. Like Sander, Flach photographed Cologne artists. In 1931 he took a series of photographs of Marta Hegemann in her studio. Ilse hired him for November 29, 1931 to cover the lecture of Bauhaus Professor Laszlo Moholy-Nagy who she had invited to Cologne to present a talk in the *Buecherstube* titled, “malerei und fotografie”. Moholy-Nagy’s talk that night mentioned photography could awaken the unconscious and, ‘put into motion the unknown hidden powers of the optical organs.’ These powers, Moholy-Nagy told his listeners were within reach of each individual. By that time in 1931 Ilse was primed to test the hidden powers of her eyes.



Ilse with Maholy Nagy, Hannes Maria Flach

Flach took a photograph of Ilse at a restaurant listening intently to Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and even taking notes. Ah, to be a fly on the wall the night Ilse listened to the master of the New Vision! Moholy-Nagy had just released *60 Fotos* along with art historian Franz Roh. That book followed his Bauhaus book of 1925 that stressed the potential of photography. Moholy-Nagy countered critics who said photographs were not creation but only reproduction. He held that photographs could have an evocative *facture*, or surface texture, thanks to the ‘light machine’ of the camera.

The April 1932 edition of *a bis z*³, a publication of the Cologne Progressives, featured Moholy-

Nagy’s introduction to his *Buecherstube* lecture. This article showed Ilse Salberg was gaining attention in the Cologne art scene. She was doing it by championing photography.

3 Lazlo Maholy-Nagy, “einleitung zum vortrag ‘malerei und fotografie’ koeln, dezember 1931”, *a bis z* (Koeln: Gebr Koenig, 1969) 89



*Regina Kann-Salberg with Ernst Meyer and Brigette Metzger,
Hannes Maria Flach*



Ernst Meyer with Brigette Metzger, Hannes Maria Flach



Ilse with Brigette, Hannes Maria Flach

Ilse was definitely acquainted with, and learning from, a clique of professional photographers. And, thanks to consultations, Ilse knew that Hege, Maholy-Nagy and Flach used Leica cameras. On a 1925 visit to Paris Moholy-Nagy had used his Leica to peer upwards at the Eiffel Tower, morphing the light and shadow of its iron framework into a complex composition. Flach scanned the Hohenzollern and other bridges in Cologne from different vantage points turning familiar forms into intricate abstract patterns. The lightweight, portable Leica enabled Maholy-Nagy and Flach to capture these images with available light and to express the vitality, complexity, and immediacy of the 20th-century.

When Brigitte Metzger was born in 1932, Ilse again looked to Flach. By then, Flach had a Contax camera as well as his Leica. Flach twice took a series of photographs of mother with children—Ernst Meyer and Brigitte Metzger. In one set Brigitte was an infant; in the next she was around two years of age.



Ilse took photos of her children right alongside Flach. Family albums show the differences between the amateur and the professional. Ilse had a knack for composition but still had much to learn before family snaps became pictures in the way Walter Hege meant. Ilse knew she would have to study cameras and lenses, establish a studio and join a community of professionals. The impetus for these actions was about to come.

Ilse with Brigitte, Hannes Maria Flach

Ilse leaves Cologne

In 1932 Anton Raederscheidt was at the height of his fame as Cologne's favourite portraitist. He had painted his new artist friend Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, art dealer Aloys Faust, Museum Director Dr. Ernst Buchner, gallery owner Dr. Andreas Becker, Carl Linfert art critic for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as well as many prominent businessmen and their wives. Ilse joined the long line of portrait subjects en route to Raederscheidt's studio in Bickendorf. Carl Linfert claimed his portrait took weeks of sitting and thus Ilse's probably did too. Ilse and Anton became very good friends during her sittings.⁴

Ilse got to know Anton at a time when he was eager for new directions. He yearned to leave Cologne as his New Objectivity artist friend Heinrich Maria Davringhausen had recently done. Davringhausen had decamped to Mallorca with his Jewish partner Lore Auerbach. Anton did not want to spend his life doing portraits just to keep his family fed. Anton persuaded Marta to cash in their household. With both their children in tow, the Raederscheidt-Hegemann family left for Italy. Ilse Salberg was a silent partner in this venture as she helped finance the trip.

By 1933 Germany had become a poisoned environment for Jews, socialists and 'degenerate artists'—thanks to the Nazis. On March 31, 1933, Nazis paraded Jewish judges and lawyers around the streets of Cologne on a garbage truck. The next day, they boycotted Jewish businesses; all Salberg affiliates were affected. The Nazis instigated book burnings and opened the first concentration camp at Dachau.

Ilse longed to escape the Nazi-promulgated hell and she wanted to see Anton again. She missed him. Accompanied by Rudolf, Ilse met up with the Raederscheidt family in Rome. There, under the hot Italian sun, Ilse and Anton's friendship ignited into a love affair. They were both at a crossroad. Anton faced the deadening prospect of more portraits. Both faced persecution—she for being a Jew and he for being a degenerate artist. Ilse dangled the Salberg fortune before Anton. She offered them both a better life, away from Germany. Anton took the bait.

Back in Cologne Ilse and Anton made plans to flee. Ilse had already sold her interest in the *Buecherstube* in 1932; she was in the process of selling her share in the Salberg store in Cologne. She had funds in England where her son Ernst Meyer was at school. Anton had to settle Marta and the boys.

During the planning for departure, the political situation in Cologne deteriorated further. Jewish art historian, critic and friend of the Progressives, Dr. Louise Straus-Ernst, fled to Paris after her apartment was ransacked and her passport seized. August Sander's son Erich was arrested by the SS. Hitler's Ministry of Culture seized the last copies of Sander's *Citizens of the 20th Century*. Persecution was all around.

June 22, 1934 provided the final impetus. Articles in the Nazi newspaper for business affairs, *Die Deutsche Volkswirtschaft: Zeitschrift fuer nationalsozialistische Wirtschaftsgestaltung* denounced all the Salberg stores as run by Jewish swindlers. One article specifically denounced "The Jewish Store of Rudolf Metzger, Pforzheim" and "The Jew Paul Nordchild in Cologne". Nordchild was Ilse's brother-in-law.

In December 1934 Anton, Ilse and her almost three-year-old daughter, Brigitte Metzger, left for the Motzen Lake area south of Berlin to await papers to leave Germany. The lovely area was home to a bevy of nudist camps, one that drew actors, singers, artists and well-to-do patrons. Winter was no deterrent to the exultation of the body as the camps had year-round facilities. At that point in time, Ilse and Anton luxuriated in their bodies.

⁴ Davringhausen moved to Cologne in 1928. According to Dorothea Eimert in *Heinrich Maria Davringhausen 1894-1970 Monographie und Werkverzeichnis*, Raederscheidt and Davringhausen hosted wild parties in their studios between 1928 and 1931.

Before leaving for Motzen, Ilse settled an allowance of RM 50,000⁵ on Marta and Anton's two sons. Marta was not placated. She brought the boys to Motzen and left them. Marta's and Anton's was not an easy separation.

In spite of the challenges posed by the break ups of two families, once spring arrived Ilse found time to pursue her new passion for photography. On an excursion into the countryside Ilse used the mobility that her new Leica III provided for opportunistic shooting. The Leica III, called the 250, had come out in 1933. It had a 250 frame magazine that held ten meters of 35 mm film—an excellent resource for taking multiple shots. Ilse had the interchangeable lenses which she could easily switch in and out for close up, wide angle and telephoto shots. She also had the rangefinder option that facilitated focus. The expense of state-of-the-art camera equipment was not a deterrent to the wealthy Ilse.

Ilse was aware that early Leica users found it a great training instrument for the New Vision. Ilse Bing was dubbed 'queen of the Leica' for her action shots of Moulin-Rouge dancers, and Germaine Krull, received the nickname 'the Iron Valkyrie' when she captured the industrial landscape in *Metal*. Leica user Maholy-Nagy spoke extensively about training the eyes to see the *facture* generated by the play of light on different new subjects. Bing and Krull had done it. Where better for Ilse to gather haptic data than in fields around Motzen Lake?

Ilse was experimenting with her Leica when she and Anton inadvertently wandered into a restricted zone. In 1935 Germany that was not difficult. The military was growing rapidly. The first motorized unit of the *Reichswehr* moved to Wuensdorf, south-east of Motzen Lake in 1931; in 1933 the training site for the first Panzer division of the *Wehrmacht* located there and in 1935 the third Panzer division and the army driving school settled in. By March 1935 Wuensdorf hosted the high command of the German Army.

None of these many military sites would have welcomed an intruder with a camera, especially with a suitcase full of lenses. Detained temporarily in Potsdam as spies,⁶ Ilse and Anton resolved they needed to get out—with or without papers. It had been a frightening experience to land in a nest of Nazis. Anton contacted Marta to pick up the children— and she did.

Shortly after Anton, Ilse and Brigitte left for Britain where they joyfully reunited with the 12-year-old Ernst Meyer. During the visit Ilse oversaw her substantial holdings at the retail bank London & Westminster. This bank would be blessing in the difficult times ahead of Nazi Aryanization of Jewish assets.

In the spring of 1936, Ilse and Anton with the toddler Brigitte travelled around France assessing locations to live before deciding on Paris. The time for Ilse's impressive 1936 splash of cash on the Paris and Sanary-sur-mer scenes had almost arrived.

First there was an emergency visit to Cologne occasioned by terrible news. Ilse's brother-in-law, Paul Nordchild, had been found fully-clothed, dead in his bathtub after a visit by Nazi thugs. Murder or suicide?

While Ilse huddled with her sister and step-mother in the Marienburg villa, Brigitte had the opportunity to visit with her father. Sadly, Hannes Maria Flach was not available to take photos of the beautiful 4-year-old. He had been murdered on a Cologne street by an S.S. officer. Germany was a nightmare.

⁵ The RM 50,000 allowance is mentioned in "Anhaltenes Beben um Maler Raederscheidt", *Der Spiegel*, 08.07.1985

⁶ Kristina Hoge mentions the Potsdam incident in *Selbstbildnisse im Angesicht der Bedrohung durch den Nationalsozialismus*, (Heidelberg: Ruprecht-Karls University Dissertation, 2000) 185 footnote 534



Brigette, Hans Schiff

In spite of these horrors, or maybe because of them, Ilse turned to photographer Hans Schiff. Schiff was well known in the Jewish community for portrait and other commercial work. Like Sander he took photos of the *Lumpen* Balls and like Flach, he'd photographed the Hohenzollern Bridge with Cologne Cathedral in the distance. Now, Ilse watched as he took photos of Brigette and the Salberg villa—nostalgic photos of a life totally gone.

Ilse arrives in Paris

Ilse was ready for Paris to take her mind off the pounding Nazi sledgehammer in Germany. She did not need an introduction to its world of photography. She'd been following *Arts et Métiers Graphiques* magazine since Charles Peignot founded it in 1927. *AMG* melded her interest in fine books, fine arts and photography with an interest in the most modern techniques in typography, engraving and lithography. *AMG 16*, a special issue on photography in 1930, had included photographs in the styles of Bauhaus modernism, abstraction and Constructivism. Through *AMG* Ilse was connected to the world she was about to enter.

The annual magazine *Photographie* that followed *AMG* provided Ilse with a *Who's Who* of modern photography. In the very first 1931 issue there were héliogravure reproductions by ten female photographers. By the time of Ilse's arrival in Paris in 1936 she'd seen the works of Dora Maar, Ilse Bing, Florence Henri, Ylla, Grete Popper, Aenne Biermann, Germaine Krull, Erika Huber, Klara Wachter, Juliette Lassarre, Berenice Abbott and many more women. These 'new women' were succeeding in the world of fashion, advertising, art and portrait photography.

With her knowledge and the introductions Ilse had through Moholy-Nagy,⁷ it didn't take long to find relevant contacts, many of whom were associated with the *Galerie de la Pléiade* near the Luxembourg Gardens. *La Pléiade* was the Mecca for New Vision photographers. It was host to the names Ilse knew through *AMG* and *Photographie*.



Galerie de la Pléiade exhibition

The *Galerie de la Pléiade* started in 1931 with an exhibition from the studio of Deberny and Peignot. From 1933 onwards the gallery devoted itself almost exclusively to cutting edge photographers. In 1933 Maurice Tabard, director of studio Deberny and Peignot, had a solo show, followed by solo shows for Florence Henri and André Kertész. In 1935 the gallery hosted *Documents pour la vie sociale*, fifty photographers brought together by AEAR, the association of revolutionary artists and writers co-founded by Fernand Léger. In 1936 the *Galerie* hosted *La Publicité par la Photographie*; it held exhibitions of *Les Photographes* annually until 1938.

In 1937 many of the names spinning around *AMG*, *Photographie* and *Galerie de la Pléiade* gravitated to the Greek art critic Tériade. He'd just published the first *Verve*, a high-quality, bilingual French-English compendium of arts and literature. Tériade's previous work on *Cahiers d'Art*, *Minotaure* and *La Bête Noire* made him a magnet. If Ilse Salberg was to make her mark she needed closer connections with the seminal photographers, publishers and artists around Tériade. Luckily she had the wealth, talent and connections to make it so.

1937 was Ilse Salberg's watershed year. In her dark room in Sanary she turned her photographic craft into art. She enjoyed the time in the new Paris studio that she and Anton had at the Villa Brune, an arts hot-spot. Residents Alexander Calder and sculptor Henri Laurens were in the midst of discussions about the World's Fair with the likes of Picasso and Léger. Picasso and Calder were working on the Spanish Pavilion—Picasso on *Guernica* and Calder on a fountain protesting Franco's siege of the mercury mines at Almadén. Léger discussed a project to have three thousand unemployed workers paint the streets as a tricolour swept at night by spotlights from planes.⁸

⁷ Maholy-Nagy was great at brokering introductions. July 14, 1932 he sent Wols to Paris with a letter of introduction to Amédée Ozenfant and Fernand Léger.

⁸ Léger's plane idea is mentioned in Pierre Assouline's *An Artful Life* (New York: Fromm International, 1991), 254

Ilse was clearly intrigued by Léger and Picasso—their political commitment and their art. She purchased their works through art dealer D.H. Kahnweiler. The open houses the Kahnweilers had hosted for a decade on Sundays in Boulogne cemented strong relations with artists, writers and critics—Tériade was one. Kahnweiler and Tériade were the linchpins Ilse needed and with her purchases of paintings by Picasso and Léger, and the expensive restaurant feasts she hosted, she attracted their attention.

There was one wrinkle. The 1937 World's Fair attracted Marta. More than two years after the separation, Marta Hegemann appeared with the boys to persuade Anton to return. She did not succeed.

Ilse's mastery



Cover for Linhof Technika 6x9

Once Marta left, Ilse turned to mastery of the Contax II and Linhof-Technika 6x9—both cameras new in 1936. The 35mm Contax II with a rangefinder and viewfinder combined in a single window had a removable back for loading film, a self-timer and a metal shutter with a maximum speed of 1/1250th. Before she left Cologne, Ilse saw Hannes Maria Flach use the first Contax' bayonet lens mount to change high quality Zeiss lenses and she had even better lenses now.

HIGHEST QUALITY LENSES

Only the best lenses in synchronized Compur shutters are supplied with the Super Technika 23. At present the lenses shown in illustration are available. Of course other lenses, too, can be used, if mounted in suitable shutters.

It is important to remember, however, that normal lenses with a focal length of more than 150 mm, and telephoto lenses beyond 180 mm focal length cannot be coupled to the rangefinder. They can, of course, be mounted for the camera and focused with the groundglass.

All lenses supplied with Technika cameras are of highest optical quality and thoroughly tested by their manufacturers before shipped to the Linhof Camera Works. In addition Linhof checks every lens before mounting it on the camera. Therefore lenses supplied with LINHOF cameras are the ultimate in quality and performance.

All lenses are supplied mounted on Linhof lensboards. To attach to

Lens options for Linhof Technika 6x9

Ilse needed time to practice with the Linhof-Technika 6x9 as well. The all metal folding field camera was marketed for the premium photography market and cost a great deal. Considered a large format camera, the Technika with its triple extension bellows and interchangeable lens boards was amazingly portable and very flexible. Ilse carried it and its various lenses (focal ranges from 53mm to 360mm) in a small suitcase carrier.

With family life regulated between Paris and Sanary, Ilse started experimenting with her cameras and with héliogravure, an intaglio print process noted for its rich blacks, subtle shadings and expressive tonality. Ilse had also purchases a hand-turned press in Sanary; she set about mastering the photochemical procedures that created the intaglio print surface. There was nothing amateurish about Ilse's equipment and networking. It remained for her to find her subject matter and distinctive style.

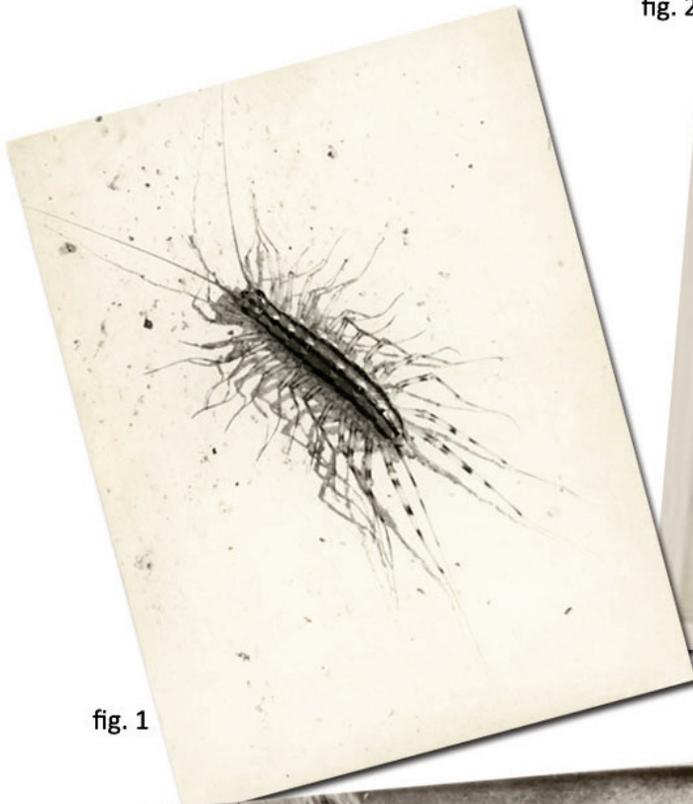


fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3

fig 1 Salberg | Centipede

fig 2 Wols | Centipede from René de Solier, *Naturelles*, Paris 1946, Print Cabinet, State Art Collection, Dresden, copyright VG-Bild Kunst, Bonn 2012, Photo by Hans-Peter Klut.

fig 3 Salberg | The Chicken is Dead

fig 4 Wols | Rabbit, Comb, Harmonica



fig. 4

Ilse finds her style

Ilse was already well-versed in the New Vision's techniques—close cropping, contrast of forms, strange angles, shadows and light—thanks to her connection with Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and her knowledge of *AMG*, *Photographie* and *Galerie de la Pléiade* photographers. But, Moholy-Nagy's influence reached further. Florence Henri had studied with Moholy-Nagy, Ergy Landau posed him in her portrait studio in Hungary and Ylla and Nora Dumas were assistants in Ergy Landau's studio in Paris. Each woman, within six degrees of separation from Moholy-Nagy, played a part in the development of Ilse's style.

Florence Henri's influence took the form of teacher and mentor. Florence maintained a studio at 8 rue de Varenne⁹ where she did portrait, fashion and advertising photography; she also gave lessons. Ilse took to Henri's emphasis on close ups and her interest in nudes. Ilse admired Henri's independence and was friends with her throughout her life. Florence remained a friend even after Ilse's death. She allowed her partner Anton and her daughter Brigitte to stay in her studio in 1948.

Ergy Landau and Nora Dumas made their reputations photographing female nudes, especially their studio photos of the famous Ukrainian model Assia Granatouff.¹⁰ Using chiaroscuro on Assia's curves, Landau and Dumas breathed life into Moholy-Nagy's dictum to create what he called 'light frescoes' or optical compositions. The light play on the landscape of Assia's body created astounding compositions—with facture. Truncated parts of her body showed that less was more.



Torso, Ilse Salberg

Ilse was inspired to do the same as Landau and Dumas but with the male nude. During the 1930s the male nude was less photographed and rarely by female photographers. Using her partner as subject, Ilse photographed parts of his body. In eight extreme close-ups that included Anton's ear, palm, lips, foot, hand, arm pit, shoulders and torso, Ilse elevated his parts into art and design objects with significant gravitas. He was fragmented, framed and lit, rendering the male body magical, mysterious—even totemic.

Marcel Natkin who wrote photography manuals, including one in 1933 for the Leica,¹¹ captured exactly what Ilse was doing. Natkin was quoted in an article about the exhibition *Paris City of Photography 1920-1940 from the Christian Bougueret Collection*:

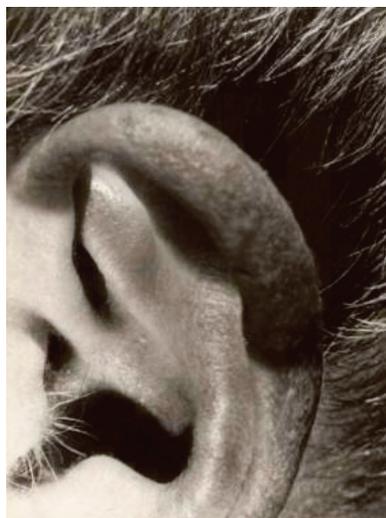
9 Both Florence Henri and Ilse Bing had studios in the elegant eight story building at rue de Varenne. At one point, Wols lived there as well.

10 Assia was the inspiration for photographers Dora Maar and Germaine Krull as well as for sculptors and painters. See Christian Bougueret's *Assia-sublime modèle*, (France: Marval, 2006)

11 Marcel Natkin, *Le Leica* (Paris: Lecram-Servant, 1933)

These days, many artists are attracted to pure shapes, such as torsos, arms, and legs, and pay less attention to the head. They deliberately cut it out of their pictures which only feature the fragment they are interested in. This deliberate omission enables them to focus the viewer's attention, spontaneously drawn to facial expressions, on the sculptural qualities of the body, thereby regenerating the idea of the nude.¹²

In 1936 the male form had been much in the public eye. Several exhibitions popularized photographs of people on vacation, including images of bathers and athletes flexing their muscles. *'Il faut dire que les photos de l'été 1936 font resplendir le soleil sur les corps,*¹³ said an article. The 1936 Olympics also flooded the media with images of sculpted physiques. Ilse blended this cult of sun on flesh and muscle with New Vision techniques regenerating the idea of the nude, just as Natkin had written.



Ear, Ilse Salberg



Portrait, Ilse Salberg



Palm, Ilse Salberg

Ilse used angles, framing, lighting and depth of field to good effect. Anton's ear was a gaping maw, a bristled animal, part of a primitive mask. His palm doubled for undulating desert dunes. These evocative photos of Anton's sculptured parts, with *facture par excellence*, were unquestionably Ilse Salberg's master works.

¹² *Paris, capitale photographique 1920-1940: The Collection of Christian Bouqueret*, (Paris: Éditions de La Martinière et Jau de Paume, 2009)

¹³ Antoine de Baecque, "L'ouvrier, heros d'objectifs", *Liberation*, June 21, 2006



Armpit, Isle Salberg 1938

Theoretically Walter Hege and fellow photographer Herbert List had glorified the male body in photos they shot on a trip to Greece in the 1930s. However, their works were shown only to photographers and artists due to fears of being labelled homoerotic. In the USA the law against bare-chests for males in public was not repealed until 1936! Ilse was treading new and a little dangerous ground with her photographic rendering of Anton's nude body; but, as their past had shown in the Motzen area, Ilse and Anton were not shy about nudity.

Brigitte Metzger-Perline told her daughter Amy in later life about the time at Sanary when she as a child hid the clothing of nude bathers—for which she got into trouble. Whenever weather allowed, the hybrid family headed to the beach at Portissol where there was a diving tower and where bathers shed their swim suits. The Raederscheidt/Salberg/Metzger/Meyer family often sunbathed nude in the courtyard of Le Patio.





Young Rabbit in Anton's Hand, Ilse Salberg

At the same time as Ilse completed her Anton series she focussed on animal and insect photography. Her surviving works include images of a cat, rabbit, elephant, lizard, lady bugs, sow bug, grasshopper, fly and a centipede. Ylla was most certainly inspiration for Ilse's animal photography. By the mid 1930s the Hungarian-born Ylla had exhibited at *Galerie de la Pléiade*, worked as an assistant to Ergy Landau, established her own studio to photograph pets and joined the Rapho Agency¹⁴—all with some connection to Moholy-Nagy and with opportunity for Ilse to see Ylla's works.

Based on the lighting similarities in the photos of elephants that Ilse and Ergy Landau took, Ilse might even have been along on Ergy and Ylla's trip to a zoo. Ergy's shots of Ylla with the elephants echoed Ilse's photo titled, *The Eye of an Elephant* which was published in *Still* in 1940. The technical data provided in *Still* might have done double duty for the Landau shots except that Ilse was again in extreme close-up mode:

"Contax II camera; 13.5 cm. Sonnar F/4; F/11; 1/50 sec.; Agfa Isopan F. Film. Taken at mid-day in March sunlight." (from *Still: A Photo-Folio, 1940*)

Interestingly, Ilse's photo *The Eye of an Elephant* appeared side by side in *Still* with Ylla's close up *Owl*. Other Rapho agency photographers in *Still* were Ergy Landau and Brassai.

Although Ilse and Ylla's elephant and cat photos bore similarities, Ilse's insect shots were distinctly her own. Entomologists had delighted in the study of insects since the Victorian era, but, there was scant interest in insects for art photography during the Weimar period. Ilse showed patience in exploring her tiny subjects. She managed to capture two lady bugs mating on a flower. Her photograph titled, *Beetles on a Flower* abstracted coitus at the same time making it sensual and timeless.

Ilse did not stop with lady bug mating. Using New Vision techniques and the capacity of lens that allowed macro-photography of astounding closeness Ilse's balled sow bug could be the size of a space ship. She exploited its abstract beauty and delighted in the facture created by light play on its coiled form.

¹⁴ Charles Rado, a Hungarian expatriate in Paris, founded Rapho, a photo agency in 1933. He represented Hungarian refugee photographers such as Brassai, Nora Dumas, Ergy Landau and Ylla



Grasshopper, Ilse Salberg

Portrait of a Grasshopper and *Portrait of an Insect* took insect photography to new heights. The beady eyes in the head and shoulder portraits were the stuff of horror movies. The New Vision angles and close-cropping created arresting images that for fear factor rivalled Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein* and Bela Lugosi in *Dracula*—films released in 1938.

Much later, in 1946, the artist known as Wols, used a centipede image that could have jumped off Ilse's image *Centipede* from 1938–39. Wols' version appeared as an intaglio print in the book *Naturelles*. Wols' centipede spin-off raises the interesting issue of the cross-influence between Ilse and Wols. Certainly there were opportunities for them to know one another's work.

Wols arrived in Paris in 1933 with an introduction from Moholy-Nagy for Fernand Léger. He was soon in the Max Ernst and Alexander Calder¹⁵ circles where Ilse moved about. After a hiatus in Spain, Wols took up photography actively in 1937 taking photos of the *Pavilion d'Elegance* at the World's Fair. He exhibited portraits in *Galerie de la Pléiade*—also in 1937. He was interned in Les Milles along with Ilse's partner Anton.

Anne Gantefuehrer-Trier in '*Das 'Photo Auge' der Ilse Salberg*' highlighted three of Wols' photos, *Torso*, *Grety's Mouth* and *Rabbit*, pairing them convincingly¹⁶ with Ilse's photos to indicate influence. Further similarities were evident in Wols' and Ilse's impetus to use food as a subject. Wols worked on a food series in 1938–39 around the same time as Ilse. Wols' *Plate of Soup and Shell* and Ilse's *Still Life* with a plate and fork show the same stark contrast. However, there the similarities stop.

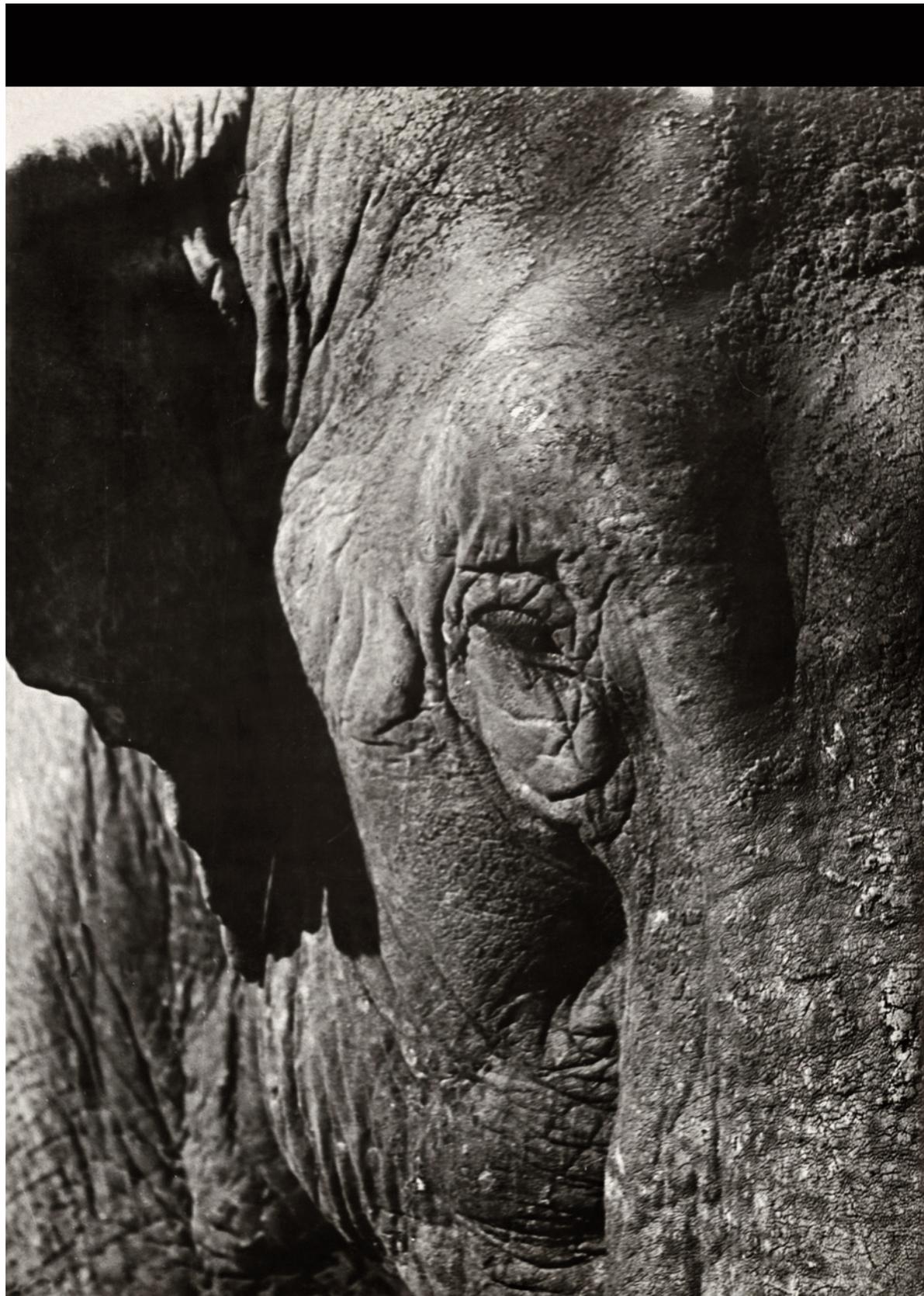


Wols' limp, de-feathered chicken by an egg, a slab of meat, pig's kidneys, a skinned rabbit's head and garlic were a menu for a monster ball. Ilse's oysters, mandarin, lemon, beans, artichoke and onion were sensuous invitations to indulge. Ironically, Ilse took these mouth-watering images of food at a time when it was scarce, so scarce in fact that the expatriate writer Alfred Kantorowicz indicated he visited Le Patio for the meals.¹⁷

¹⁵ Wols lived at 8 rue de Varenne at this point. He taught German to Alexander Calder

¹⁶ Gantefuehrer-Trier's essay on Ilse Salberg is found in *Grenzgaenger: Flucht und Neubeginn 1936-1947*, (Koeln: Kunsthandlung Osper, 2009)

¹⁷ Kantorowicz and Anton Raederscheidt were in Les Milles at the same time

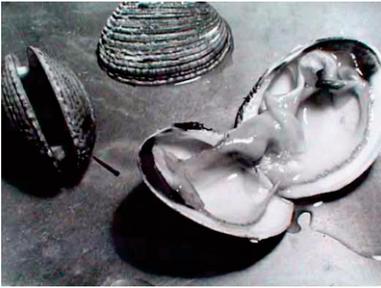


THE EYE OF AN ELEPHANT

ILSE SALBERG



CAT AND DOG'S NOSE
ILSE SALBERG



Ilse's gaping oysters, interior shots of a bean pod, and *mons-venus* onion were as sensuous as Georgia O'Keefe's paintings of flower interiors. The hedonism of life in Sanary from 1937 until Ilse's first internment in the Gurs Camp in the fall of 1939 gave rise to photos that celebrated sensu-

ality. Like Poe's locked in revellers in *The Masque of the Red Death*, the inhabitants of 132 Avenue des Pins, Le Patio, celebrated life while outside there was death. The Nazis had started their killings.



Wols' photographs of food captured darkness. He had already had foreboding experiences in Spain that coloured his world view. Only one of Ilse's photos, *The Chicken is Dead*, eerily similar to an untitled Wols' work designated *Chicken and Egg*, uses food in the same foreboding way.

Ilse should have heeded the warnings that Wols saw. Her good times unravelled with sickening speed. Before they did, she had a brief moment: *VERVE* No 4. The January–March 1939 edition of *Verve*, 140 pages of art and literature edited by Tériade, contained texts by Jean Paul Sartre, Rainer Maria Rilke and Federico Garcia Lorca, colour reproductions of paintings by Henri Rousseau, Joan Miro and Henri Matisse, an illustration by Henri Laurens, héliogravures by Brassai and Josef Breitenbach—and one by **Ilse Salberg!** Hours of practice with her press had finally paid off.

Salsify, Ilse Salberg, Verve, 1939

Ilse's untitled héliogravure showed a flower head in seed, very like a dandelion, but probably a salsify. The seed heads of these meadow plants are larger than a dandelion. Ilse allowed the fluffy salsify head to sit tethered like a barrage balloon above the meadow floor, dominating the viewer's glance and blocking out the shady distance where anything could happen—not unlike the uncertain future that lay ahead.

Ilse's life unravels



Rumblings of war caused Ilse concern about her son Ernst Meyer's return to school in Britain. That summer of 1939 in Sanary Ernst enjoyed sailing, swimming and writing poetry. When war was declared, his fate was sealed. In England he was an enemy alien subject to being interned. That fate did not, however, escape him.

September 7, 1939, the 16-year-old reported to Camp des Milles situated between Aix and Marseilles. There he remained for 17 days along with Ilse's partner Anton. Ilse was commanded to the internment camp at Gurs, 34 km north of the Spanish border. Gurs had been built for refugees from the Spanish Civil War. The horrible time in cramped and miserable conditions was made worse as 9-year-old Brigitte got very ill with red measles and was housed away from Ilse.

Salberg envelope, Sanary

There was a brief window from October 1939 to May 1940 when family life at Le Patio resumed a tense normalcy. That respite ended when the German invasion of France began May 10, 1940. German nationals were rounded up once again. Ilse and Brigitte were commanded back to Gurs while the men went back to Les Milles. Ironically, Ilse's Cologne acquaintance Louise Straus-Ernst, Ilse's Sanary neighbour Marta Feuchtwanger from the Villa Valmer and Lore Auerbach-Davringhausen, her friend from Cologne, were at Gurs at the same time as Ilse and Brigitte.



Gurs Internment Camp

Photograph: #78704, 1942 – 1943, Gurs, [Pyrenees-Atlantiques] France, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Landesbildstelle Baden-Bildarchiv, courtesy of Hanna Meyer-Moses Alice Resch-Synnestvedt

Ilse's life was now so stressed that she could not appreciate, and possibly did not even know, that her photograph *Eye of an Elephant* appeared in the British compendium *Still* in 1940. A group called The Readers Union had put together the 'gallery of camera-work from all the world in nearly a hundred plates'. Its foreword, *Why We Made This Book*, stated, 'This book was made for a single purpose: to diffuse beauty in an ugly time'.

The war had cut off most access to the continent but the Readers Union's ally, *The Studio Ltd.* founded in 1896, held a huge reserve of their own photographic resources as well as ties to photo agencies such as Rapho. When German tanks rolled past the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris on June 14, 1940, Ilse's photo was free, in the hands of The Readers Union.

Conditions in Sanary worsened after the German entry into Paris. The small fishing town was already crowded by expatriate artists and writers attracted to its sunny milieu and to one another's company, but with the desperate exodus from Paris after June 14, 1940 Sanary became a place of scarcity and desperation. Millions of refugees flooded south from Paris in that hot June—approximately 100,000 died fleeing.¹⁸

Due to the war Ilse could not access her British bank account. The care packages from Germany were no more. Rudolf had fled to New York. Ilse's step-mother Regina Kann-Salberg would eventually be one of the Holocaust victims declared dead in 1945.

Ilse sold jewellery to help the family survive in Sanary. The family raised rabbits. She would not, however, part with the Picasso and Léger paintings. These she sent ahead to Marseille hoping that if she and her children could leave France her treasures could go with them. Some of Ilse and Anton's friends and acquaintances had left France with the help of Varian Fry's Emergency Rescue Committee. Max Ernst and Leon Feuchtwanger were gone; Wols was trying. Maybe they could escape too?

That hope was dashed when the advances of the Nazi armies finally reached Ilse. French gendarmes expelled Ilse, Anton and the children from Le Patio in 1942. It was requisitioned for Mussolini's troops. Ilse and family were taken to Barjols and placed under surveillance. They had to present themselves weekly to the *Gendarmerie* at Draguignan

Even under these oppressive conditions, Brigitte went to school, Ernst studied viticulture at Le Hyjère¹⁹ near Barjols and Ilse wandered the countryside with what the locals described as a little suitcase; it was her camera case. Ilse continued to take photographs.

September 7, 1942 *gendarmes* came to the door. Ernst held them off while Ilse, Anton and Brigitte escaped through a rear window. Ernst was immediately handed over to the SS. Anton and Emil Brunet, a local acquaintance, went back to the apartment to get their things: art work, family documents, photographs and valuable books from the *Buecherstube*.

Ilse left her precious things in the safekeeping of Blanche and Emil Brunet who stored them in their basement. Then with the help of their Barjols butcher Lucien Coquillat Ilse, Anton and Brigitte fled to the Swiss border. They crawled out from under the meat which had hidden them and walked into Switzerland. They were immediately interned.²⁰

September 9th, Ernst Meyer arrived in Auschwitz.

¹⁸ Hanna Diamond, *Fleeing Hitler: France 1940*, (USA: Oxford Press, 2008)

¹⁹ A list of German refugees in the 4th division of the Prefecture du Department du Var, lists Ernst Meyer as a student at L'École d'horticulture, Hyères.

²⁰ After a short stay in the camp at Eriswil in the Canton of Berne, Ilse went to Camp de Girenbad where she was assigned knitting for seven hours a day.



Maglioso, Men by Pots, Ilse Salberg

The story of Ilse and Anton's separate incarcerations and Brigitte's stays in various foster homes in Switzerland worsened when Ilse lost a breast to cancer in 1944. With all the stresses worrying about her children, relatives in Germany, their finances and her health, Ilse had only one more photographic adventure. She took photos when she and Brigitte visited Anton in the Maglioso Internment Camp.²¹ These photos of incarcerated men bear little resemblance to her master works from Sanary but they do show Ilse's indomitable will to continue with her chosen path.

In 1945 Ilse lost her second breast to cancer and her son to the Nazis. She lingered on, critically ill, until March 28, 1947. When her short life was over; her photographic talent fell into obscurity. Her surviving works only surfaced through the extraordinary efforts of Anton's son Pascal, the offspring of a partnership that started in 1948. Ilse's missing things had been found by Anton and his partner Gisele, but it is Pascal Raederscheidt who put them on exhibition at the Galerie Osper in Cologne. The rescued works speak volubly for Ilse Salberg in a book called *Grenzgaenger: Flucht und Neubeginn 1936–1947*.

²¹ Ilse received a pass dated August 1, 1943 to visit Anton at Maglioso. This visit was mentioned in a blog by Jacky Tronel, "Anton Raederscheidt: un peintre allemand a l'épreuve des camps". The article appeared August 15, 2011 on *Histoire pénitencière et Justice militaire*.

The legacy

Ilse Salberg's portraits of insects and close-up on plants are in the vanguard when contextualized back to 1938–39, a time when macro photography was new in the art world. Ilse's lovingly shot food items, now routine advertising photos, back in the inter-war period, spoke of lost paradise. Ilse's close up shots of the male nude, risqué for the times, show a daring step ahead. Overall, she demonstrated an astounding mastery of her advanced equipment, a feel for the cutting-edge in photography and a determination to leave her mark.

Ilse Salberg never had her moment at *Galerie de la Pléiade*, but she did live and work among the Pléiades of the Parisian avant-garde. Her short life pulls us into the Weimar world changed forever by Hitler. It also shows a talent worth discovering.



Ilse Salberg works in Galerie Osper

In Memoriam Pascal Raederscheidt

January 15, 1953 – May 4, 2014



Pascal Raederscheidt, Galerie Osper

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