

ARSENAL WIEN

FOTO

Photo | Brut . Feeling Photography – From the Bruno Decharme Collection

OPENING (German/English/Austrian Sign Language): May 21, 2026, 7 p.m.

May 22—September 6, 2026

What happens if, over decades, someone writes inscriptions on photographs using tiny letters—not just on a few pictures, but a staggering number? What happens if a car mechanic dresses up for the camera as Cleopatra, Pope John Paul II, or a Hollywood star—and slips into hundreds or even thousands of other roles? And what happens if someone collects countless photographs, cuts them up, sews them together again, and uses them to create intriguing structures?

Photo | Brut . Feeling Photography presents these sorts of passionate explorations of artistic processes by autodidacts who use photography to create independent artistic and visual worlds outside the normative understanding of art. These include people with emotional or physical limitations, social outsiders, and clandestine creators who investigate new artistic issues and aesthetic approaches, creating—sometimes over decades—works of great aesthetic relevance that are not oriented on an academic canon, social norms, or rules of the art market, but are dedicated to processing feelings.

Like the art movement Art Brut, Photo Brut was shaped by personal passions, marginalized living situations, and extreme conditions. This process produces artworks—sometimes without reflection or awareness on the part of the makers. The works frequently bear traces of their experiences—whether the artists were institutionalized because of their mental illnesses and diagnoses or whether they

withdrew from society of their own accord. This is why it is extremely important to familiarize oneself with the life stories of the individual artists of Art Brut and Photo Brut, as well as with the physical and psychological disruptions that triggered their creative process. The exhibition reflects on self-empowerment and self-esteem achieved through art, as well as how society deals with norms and forms of mental illness.

French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) was the first to use the term Art Brut-which means "raw" or "unpolished" art-when he founded an artists' group in 1948. He was referring to works that are created outside the established art world and its institutional parameters-in many cases without the makers even considering themselves artists. Dubuffet used the term for intuitive, often disconcerting art made by psychiatric patients, prisoners, and people in socially precarious situations. He valued these works for their impact and their unpretentious, spontaneous attitude. However, it was not until the first decade of the twenty-first century that the term Photo Brut established itself as a "branch" of photography.

For the first time, FOTOARSENAL WIEN gives visitors in Austria the chance to explore work generated by over forty artistic processes from more than ten countries in one of the largest collections of Photo Brut, which French filmmaker Bruno Decharme has been amassing for over forty years. The exhibition, which was organized in collaboration with the Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center in Budapest and the University of Vienna, will be accompanied by numerous events.

With support from
Stadt Wien Kultur, Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation

In cooperation with
Robert Capa Contemporary Photography Center, University of Vienna, museum gugging, Polnisches Institut Wien, Adam Mickiewicz Institute

Media Partners and Collaborations
Der Standard, Ö7, Datum

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May 22—September 6, 2026

Tue—Sun 11 a.m. —7 a.m.

May 22+23, 2026, 5 p.m., May 24, 2026, 12 p.m.,

The collectors Bruno Decharme and Barbara Safarova give a tour of the exhibition

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PRESS BRIEFING: May 21, 2026, 10:30 a.m., FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

Press contact

Nicole Spilker

presse@fotoarsenalwien.at

Other information and image material are available at

www.fotoarsenalwien.at

About FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

FOTO ARSENAL WIEN is Austria's new center for photographic images and lens-based media. Inaugurated by the city of Vienna in March 2025, the institution presents and explains contemporary photography in all its forms and uses. FOTO ARSENAL WIEN also organizes the platform FOTO WIEN, Austria's largest, biennial photography festival, and, in a collaboration with the Kunsthalle Wien, the annual Festival Vienna Digital Cultures.

FOTO ARSENAL WIEN

Arsenal Objekt 19A, 1030 Wien

fotoarsenalwien.at

fotoarsenalwien.at

@foto_arsenal_wien

fotowien.at

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