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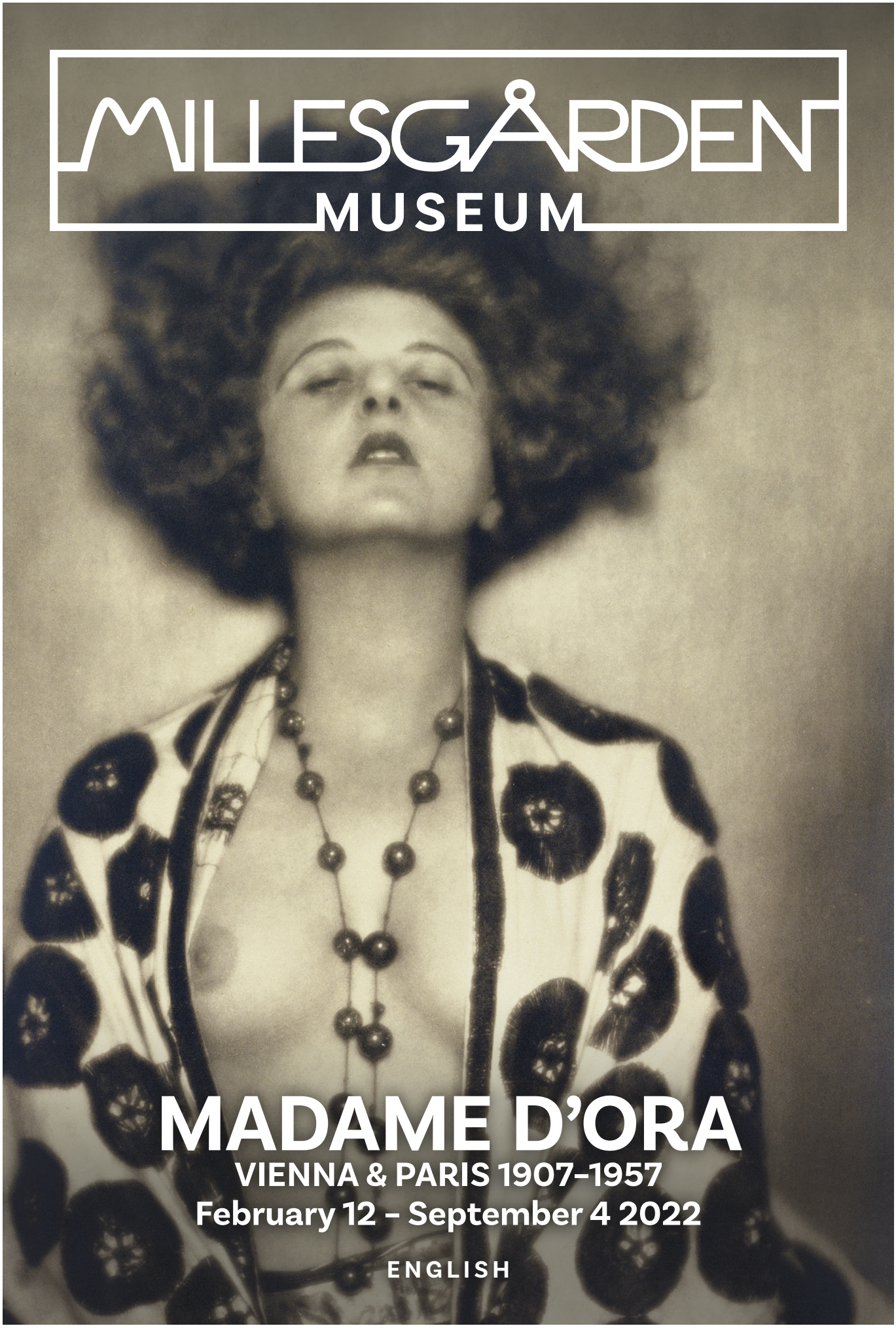

MADAME D'ORA

VIENNA & PARIS 1907–1957

February 12 – September 4 2022

ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

The photographer Dora Kallmus (1881–1963) had a studio in Vienna and later in Paris. Both she and the studio adopted the name d'Ora early on, a wordplay on Dora, which means gold. Her career between 1907 and 1957 as a photographer spans a wide range of subjects: from Gustav Klimt, the first painter she photographed, to Pablo Picasso.

Atelier d'Ora became a fashionable meeting place. Aristocrats, actors and fashion designers alike delighted in d'Ora's talent, especially her intuition and her flair for arranging clothes and accessories: thanks to clever lighting and meticulous retouching her subjects looked more elegant in d'Ora's pictures than in their own mirrors. She completed an apprenticeship at the famous portrait photographer Nicola Perscheid's studio in Berlin and also had formal academic training, as she was among the first women admitted to theory courses at the Austrian photography school Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt. d'Ora understood which shades of colour were well suited to black and white photography, and her focus on contemporary fashion led to the publication of her photographs in the greatest fashion- and lifestyle magazines of the time. She took photographs for fashion houses like the Wiener Werkstätte and Schwestern Flöge, Balenciaga, Lanvin, Chanel and the milliner Madame Agnès.

In 1925, d'Ora opened a studio in Paris. She turned her lens on artists, variety artists, and trailblazers such as Tamara de Lempicka, Tsuguharu Foujita, Maurice Chevalier and Joséphine Baker.

Because of her Jewish background, d'Ora was forced to close her Paris studio in 1940 and went into hiding from German occupying troops in France. Friends and family were persecuted. Her sister was deported and murdered. From 1945, after her narrow escape, the society portraitist directed her sharp yet empathetic gaze on the plight of the war refugees and the brutality of Parisian slaughterhouses. For her, the cattle waiting for slaughter reflected the persecuted Jews. At the same time, for financial stability, she accepted society portrait commissions. One such example is her photographs of Marquis de Cuevas' flamboyant ball in Biarritz, which featured 2,000 guests wearing 18th century-themed costumes. The contrasts are striking.

The exhibition is a collaboration with Monika Faber and Magdalena Vuković of the research-based Photoinstitut Bonartes in Vienna.

Due the delicate nature of the material, two separate sets of vintage photographs will be shown over the course of the exhibition: the second set of photographs will be presented on 17 May.

1907–1921
VIENNA

Around the turn of the last century, Vienna experienced a golden age. The metropolis was the center of an empire of 50 million inhabitants – an explosive melting pot of cultures, languages, and ethnicities. Here Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalysis, Gustav Mahler revolutionized opera, Johann Strauss composed his waltzes and the art of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele foreshadowed modernism.

Dora Kallmus was one of the first women to open a photographic studio in Vienna. After its foundation in 1907, the *Atelier d'Ora* quickly established itself as the most popular and fashionable address for portrait photography. Kallmus' clientele included prominent public figures, from politicians and members of the aristocracy to artists, dancers, actors, intellectuals, and industrialists. Her father's network within Jewish-liberal Viennese society was as much a part of her success as the advent of innovative artistic portrait photography. Kallmus' empathy and skill in arranging clothing and accessories were appreciated by her clients. Through clever lighting and careful retouching, her subjects appeared more elegant than in front of their own mirror.

The Austrian National Library owns around 2 200 glass plate negatives, the majority of which are 18×24 cm in size. Many of the motifs of the Atelier d'Ora today only exist as these negatives. To make them visible in an exhibition, new analogue prints were made on matte paper resembling the material d'Ora once used. Cracks and scratches in the fragile plates have been left unretouched.

Technical consultation: Gabriele Schatzl

Execution: Foto Leutner

1881
Dora Philippine Kallmus is born in Vienna on 20 March, daughter of Malvine Kallmus, née Sonnenberg, and Philipp Kallmus.

1892
Death of Dora's mother, Malvine Kallmus.

1904
Internship with the photographer Hans Makart; attends photography courses at Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt in Vienna.

1905
Becomes a member of the association Photographische Gesellschaft in Wien; first participation in art photography group shows.

1906
Commercial license as a professional photographer; first portrait commissions.

1907
Apprenticeship with the photographer Nicola Perscheid in Berlin. Opens the studio "Atelier d'Ora" with her assistant Arthur Benda in Vienna's city centre at Wipplinger Straße No. 24–26.

1908 —
Publishes an increasing number of pictures in Austrian and German magazines.

1909–1916
Solo shows in Berlin, London and Vienna.

1919
Opens a summer studio in Karlovy Vary, then in Czechoslovakia. Publishes first texts.

1921
Arthur Benda becomes her studio partner, but Dora Kallmus retains the publication rights.

FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY IN VIENNA

Around 1910, as photographs increasingly replaced illustrations in magazines, fashion photography liberated itself. d'Ora focused on this genre of photography early on and soon counted many renowned designers among her clients. Her models included famous actors or dancers, a mutually beneficial practice that would continue for many years. Artists with stage experience galvanised d'Ora's work and fashion designers benefited from the fame of the depicted subjects, who in turn welcomed the exposure. During World War I, Viennese design prospered as rampant patriotism brought about a renunciation of Parisian fashion. Taking advantage of this turn of events, d'Ora worked extensively for Viennese fashion houses such as Wiener Werkstätte, Schwestern Flöge and Zwieback.

WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

The productive association Wiener Werkstätte was founded in 1903 by architect Josef Hoffmann, artist Koloman Moser and the wealthy entrepreneur Fritz Waerndoerfer. Inspired by the Vienna Secession and the British Arts and Crafts Movement, they sought to raise the status of the artisan, and thereby the value of the craft. Art and design would populate all areas: from architecture, furniture design and wallpaper to jewellery and children's toys. Around 1910, fashion was added to the portfolio. It soon became the firm's most profitable department, known for its cutting-edge designs.

WIENER WERKSTÄTTE & JOSEF FRANK

The productive cooperative Wiener Werkstätte was founded in 1903 by architect Josef Hoffmann, artist Koloman Moser and others. The enterprise evolved from the Vienna Secession and the British Arts and Crafts Movement, headed by William Morris and John Ruskin.

They sought to raise the status of the artisan, and thereby the value of the craft. Art and design would populate all areas: from architecture, furniture design and wallpaper, to fashion, jewellery and children's toys. Books could also be seen as art, in all aspects from font and print to binding and cover. The Wiener Werkstätte included craftsmen of both sexes within every discipline. The starting point lay in simple geometric shapes and squares – a reaction to the lavish and pompous designs and imitations of older styles trending in the late 1800s. They strove to reimagine and improve the status of applied arts. Unlike the Arts and Crafts Movement's premise that products should be available to everyone, the Wiener Werkstätte focused on a wealthy clientele.

From a two-room beginning, operations expanded and eventually branches opened in New York, Berlin, Karlsbad and Zürich. The workshop was closed in 1932, but the Wiener Werkstätte ideas on aesthetics and the "total work of art" later influenced the Bauhaus, founded by architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969).

Swedish-Austrian architect Josef Frank (1885–1967), most well-known in Sweden through Estrid Ericson's company Svenskt Tenn, was closely associated with Josef Hoffmann. Frank was one of the founding members of *Kunstschau* [Art Show], while Hoffmann assumed the role of chairman. Until 1920, they collaborated on projects for the Wiener Werkstätte, such as the villa *Landhaus Primavesi* in Winkelsdorf. Along with Hoffmann, Frank taught at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts. They both designed bentwood chairs for the Vienna-based furniture manufacturer Thonet. In 1925 Frank started *Haus und Garten*, an interior design company. The picture above shows an interior from the *Werkbundsiedlung* from 1932, a modernistic project in Vienna. More than 30 architects were involved in the project, initiated, and directed by Frank. Among them Hoffmann and Adolf Loos.

At the beginning of World War II, Frank, who had a Jewish background, fled to Sweden, where he became one of the country's most esteemed designers.

A VISIT TO THE ATELIER D'ORA

In 1907, Kallmus completed an internship with the society photographer Nicola Perscheid in Berlin. There she met his technically skilled employee Arthur Benda, who moved with her to Vienna and took care of setting up the Atelier d'Ora.

The studio, located on the top floor, it had large windows, as in many photo studios at the time, that provided an additional source of light. A secretary greeted the often wealthy and illustrious clientele in a deliberately homely reception room. They were then led into the studio where d'Ora worked alongside Arthur Benda and other assistants. Shawls and capes were always ready to be draped around the sitters invitingly. By engaging her subjects in conversation, d'Ora lightened the mood thus enhancing the final result. A few days later, the client received raw prints ("Rohdrucke"), to choose from or for touch-ups.

BEHIND THE CAMERA

TEXT: Gabriele Schatzl

With the help of a sophisticated system of camera, light, props and post-processing, d'Ora and her employees achieved the desired image effect. Often, the studio worked with point-like light sources that were attached above the sitters so that they were in the "spotlight" while the background disappeared into the dark. The Atelier d'Ora used lenses with a shallow depth of field. In the portrait of the dancer Anna Pavlova, for example, the focus is on the face and hands, which stand out from the blurred surroundings. The idea of highlighting essential parts of the picture while others were literally pushed into the background was also reflected in the postproduction. This step was carried out by trained retouchers, most of whom were women, directly on the glass plate negative under Benda's and d'Ora's watchful eyes. The shades of gray were adjusted in the background with red and yellow watercolors. Sometimes entire backdrops were painted. Harsh shadows, blemishes or unflattering parts of the body were corrected directly on the glass plate with watercolors, pencils or scraper knives. The final print was carried out on a matte paper that blurred the details and concealed the adjustments.

THE PERSON BEHIND THE CAMERA

d'Ora's private life is revealed in diaries, autobiographical writings, and a lively correspondence from 1937 onward, in which she recounted her life and career. A key event of her time in Vienna was an unhappy relationship with a married man, which lasted over 25 years. d'Ora kept his identity a closely guarded secret. She met him around 1900 and soon afterwards decided to take up the profession of photographer in order to be able to break away from him. Considering her profession unseemly for a woman, he warned her of the unattractive "brown fingers" she would get when handling photographic chemicals.

d'Ora's move - or apparently escape - to Paris in 1925 finally brought an end to the affair. As a self-proclaimed self-made woman, d'Ora maintained her professional independence by remaining unmarried throughout her life.

SWEDISH FEMALE PIONEERS

There were several pioneers in photography in Sweden. It was a relatively accepted occupation for women, who focused mainly on portrait photography and business cards. Brita Sofia Hesselius produced *daguerreotypes** in Karlstad as early as 1845, and five years later, Marie Kinnberg was among the first to use this new photographic process in Gothenburg.

In the 1860s, there were at least 15 confirmed women professional photographers in Sweden, of whom Rosalie Sjöman, Caroline von Knorring and Bertha Valerius were the elite of their profession. Valerius was appointed official portrait artist to the Royal Swedish court in 1864. She began her career as a portrait painter and together with Caroline von Knorring, she exhibited her photographs at the General Industrial Exposition of Stockholm 1866.

In 1888, Anna Hwass was elected the first female board member of the Fotografiska föreningen (Photographic association). Dora Kallmus was seven years old at the time.

* Daguerreotype is a photographic process in which a sheet of silver-plated copper is treated with iodine fumes in a darkroom to create a light sensitive surface film. This sheet is exposed in a camera obscura. The resulting image is then fumed with mercury vapours, and a sodium sulfite solution is used to fix the surface. The result is a single, positive, reversed image. As the images are delicate and sensitive to light, they are protected by a glass plate and stored away from light.

1923-1942
PARIS

In Paris during the 1920s – or Années folles (crazy years) as they were called – the cultural life flourished. World War I was over, and the city attracted singers, dancers, actors as well as artists who questioned traditional values and conventions. In women's fashion, new styles made headlines. Daring and glamourous, but also athletic and androgynous; new means of expressing individualism and gender roles.

In 1924, d'Ora opened a studio in Paris and moved there shortly after. Fashion photography quickly became her main source of income, as evidenced by thousands of pictures from this period. For many years she supplied almost all the photographs for the fashion magazine L'Officiel de la Couture, while also retaining numerous commissions from other publications. In d'Ora's studio, the latest creations by renowned designers ranging from *Chanel* to *Schiaparelli* and *Lanvin* would pile up to be photographed as fast as possible. At the same time, she carried on working as a portraitist of the city's rich, beautiful and famous. Her constant presence in the press as well as her skillful networking made her a favourite of international stars, who took the opportunity to have their picture taken by d'Ora when they came to Paris.

The majority of d'Ora's portraits and pictures for fashion editorials were taken in her own studio. She created variety with different backgrounds and props, using items such as furniture, textiles or simple cardboard details. Although some fashion houses preferred "nameless" faces, often dancers, actresses, society ladies or the designers themselves appeared as models – a practice that is still seen in today's lifestyle magazines.

1923
d'Ora stays in Paris for several months and begins to take pictures for the fashion magazine *L'Officiel de La couture et de la mode.*

1924
Sets up a studio together with Arthur Benda in the writer Tristan Bernard's house at Rue Eugène Flachat No. 22.

1925
d'Ora moves to Paris for good.

1926
Sells her studio in Vienna to Arthur Benda, who also acquires the rights to all previous photographs.

1927
Lawsuit over the trademark "d'Ora" between Dora Kallmus and Arthur Benda; from now on there is a distinction between "d'Ora Paris" (Dora Kallmus) and "d'Ora Benda" (Arthur Benda).

1928
Shows her work at a photographic exhibition (Premier Salon indépendant de la photographie) in Paris together with Man Ray and Germaine Krull.

1935
Ban on publication of d'Ora's photographs in Nazi Germany.

1937
Last visit to her sister Anna Kallmus in Frohnleiten, Styria.

1938
Takes pictures at the summer residences of her clients on the French Riviera (Côte d'Azur) for the first time.

1940
Last photograph published in L'Officiel de la couture. d'Ora is forced to sell her studio at rue Eugène Flachat 22.

1941
First photographic experiments with a Rolleiflex hand-held camera.

1942
d'Ora starts writing autobiographical essays; in August she flees Paris and hides in the small mountain village of Lalouvesc, south of Lyon.

A PASSION FOR DANCE

Expressionist dance had its heyday in the 1920s, and photographers like d'Ora played a major role in its popularity. Especially after the First World War in impoverished Vienna, when clients from the aristocracy and the wealthy bourgeoisie more seldom visited her studio, d'Ora instead turned to dancers. Today, many of them are regarded as fearless pioneers who questioned gender roles or tackled social taboos in daring costumes and innovative performances. Throughout her career, in Vienna, later in Paris, and then after the war, d'Ora worked often and closely with dancers, finding exciting creative solutions and also maintaining friendships with many of them.

d'Ora's dance photographs of the 1920s and 1930s rarely allude to the stage choreographies. She invited the dancers to her studio, where together, they developed distinctive expressions for the camera (and for distribution in the press).

DISRUPTION AND ESCAPE

In the mid-1930s, the Nazis' *Berufsverbote* (occupational bans) led to a decline in d'Ora's commissions. Her work gradually vanished from magazines and she was forced to sell her studio in 1940. A somber mood in d'Ora's photographs during this period reflects not only the desperation of her surroundings but also her own frame of mind. Free from the demanding studio routine, d'Ora began to write autobiographical essays critically reviewing her career. The essays reveal that d'Ora regarded these years as a transformative period in terms of her photography. Plans to escape Europe together with her sister Anna with the help of Cristobal Balenciaga failed. In August 1942, d'Ora fled Paris in a hurry, leaving everything behind.

1939-1963
CONFRONTING THE HORROR

Having initially underestimated the seriousness of the situation, d'Ora and her sister in Austria failed to escape. Anna Kallmus was deported in 1941 and perished in an extermination camp. d'Ora only survived by taking refuge in a remote mountain village in France. After 1945, now over sixty-five years old, she returned to Paris, with no work, no property, and no family. She distanced herself from the world of glamour and reoriented herself as a photographer. She returned to Austria in 1948 and found a war-ravaged country. In Salzburg, she took pictures in refugee camps, focusing her camera on the sick, the elderly, and children. Dystopian surroundings provided the settings for tender portraits of the destitute and homeless, whom d'Ora, considering her own experiences of escape and loss, must have seen as fellow sufferers.

In diary entries written while she was in hiding, d'Ora associated the fate of the Jewish population with that of defenseless animals destined for slaughter: "How long will we have to remain rabbits, chickens, fishes?" she deplored in 1943. Similar associations resurfaced when the full extent of the Holocaust became known after the war. d'Ora's slaughterhouse series can also be understood as a reaction to Nazi atrocities. Rather than to solely dwell on the industrially standardised work processes, the photographer also focused on the death and mutilation of individual animals, thus shedding light both on their individual suffering and the mass slaughter.

1939
"Aryanisation" of her sister Anna Kallmus' house "Doranna" in the town of Frohnleiten (near Graz in the Austrian state Styria).

1941
Anna Kallmus is deported and presumably murdered at the Chełmno extermination camp.

1942
d'Ora writes autobiographical essays; flees Paris and hides in the small mountain village of Lalouvesc, south of Lyon.

1945
Returns to Paris; d'Ora is without a studio but continues her work in a small darkroom together with an assistant.

1946
First visit to Austria after the war; lodges restitution claim for the house in Frohnleiten; d'Ora unsuccessfully attempts to publish her autobiographical texts.

1948
Restitution of the house in Frohnleiten; d'Ora takes photographs in refugee camps in Salzburg and Vienna.

1949
Begins working on her photographic series in Parisian slaughterhouses; at the same time works as a portrait photographer again.

1958
d'Ora's last major retrospective exhibition opens in Paris with a speech by Jean Cocteau.

1962
d'Ora moves from Paris to Frohnleiten.

1963
Dora Kallmus dies in Frohnleiten on October 30.

PORTRAITS OF THE UPROOTED

d'Ora' s series of photos in refugee camps was likely commissioned by the United Nations. After the war, aid organisations displayed pictures of refugees who appeared fit to work and eager in order to support refugee migration and the success of their own mission. In contrast, d'Ora focusses on single mothers, the elderly, the sick and small children – the weakest among the camp population.

Many pictures in d'Ora' s refugee camp series were taken in the Hôtel de l'Europe in Salzburg which had been damaged by bombs. The habitable parts of the hotel had been converted into a makeshift camp for displaced ethnic Germans after the war. Although d'Ora occasionally also took photographs in refugee camps for Holocaust survivors, for reasons unknown she concentrated mainly on camps for ethnic Germans expelled from Southeastern Europe.

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE SERIES

It was with considerable effort and over a long period (1949-1957) that d'Ora devoted herself to the pictures she took in the slaughterhouses of Paris, which she called her "great final work". She had to apply for permission and arrive early in the morning to begin her work on the abattoir series amidst pools of blood and surrounded by screaming animals.

In her darkroom, d'Ora laid the negative strips side by side on photosensitive paper and exposed it. She then chose the final motifs from these contact sheets, drew in markers for cropping, or wrote down instructions for corrections. Hundreds of these sheets have survived in her estate. In one photograph, she herself can be seen in a Paris slaughterhouse, talking to the butchers, elegantly dressed as always with her signature pill box hat. She maintained the practice of working with an assistant even after the war, in this case the Dutchman Jan de Vries.

BACK TO COMMISSIONS

Mainly for financial reasons, d'Ora, over 65 years old, resumed her work in Paris as a photographer of the rich and famous. Some of her clients had remained loyal to her, but she also made new contacts, portraying Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall and many more. While sitters had once called on d'Ora in her luxurious studio, now she could only afford a tiny darkroom and henceforth portrayed her clients in their own living spaces. After the war, d'Ora switched to hand-held cameras, which granted her greater mobility and allowed her to develop new forms of expression.

A FASCINATING ECCENTRIC

Aside from commissions, d'Ora developed her own projects. The most extensive one was a collaboration with ballet impresario Marquis de Cuevas and his many dancers. After Cuevas had entered the world of the very wealthy by marrying heiress Margaret Rockefeller Strong, he bought himself a ballet company. d'Ora was captivated by his eccentric and controversial image: an aging, frail man, who liked to be photographed surrounded by youthful, athletic dancers.

In one of her most disturbing portraits, the photographer presented the already gravely ill Cuevas surrounded by bloody, skinned sheep heads. The contrast between her earlier works and this radical approach to portraiture was sometimes difficult even for her to understand. She wrote of this picture: "I face this subject today as if for the first time. Alien to myself."

IN THE END

In 1958 d'Ora's last exhibition *Portraits et recherches* (Portraits and research) was shown at the Galerie Montaigne in Paris, where in the past, the Dadaists had met with success. The exhibition included many pictures from all of d'Ora's creative phases. The slaughterhouse series and photographs in the refugee camps were displayed side by side with portraits of members of the high society.

In his opening speech, artist Jean Cocteau for the first time highlighted an aspect that would define how d'Ora's work is understood to this day: the contrast between the work of a portrait and fashion photographer of the glamourous society who, aged, almost forgotten, and strongly affected by the Nazi terror, had found a new means of expression.

In 1959, d'Ora suffered a traffic accident, after which her health rapidly deteriorated. In 1962 she moved to Frohnleiten, to her sister's house, where she died in 1963.