

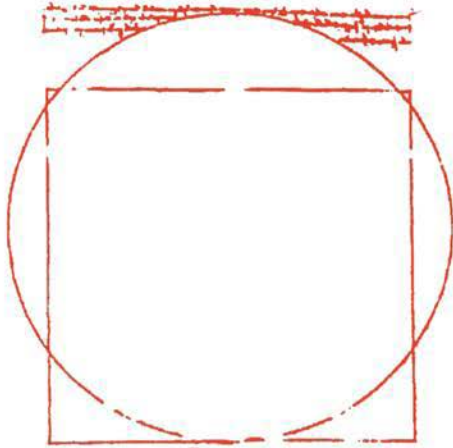
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Schmerz



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REVUE EUROPÉENNE D'HISTOIRE FÉMINISTE
EUROPÄISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR FEMINISTISCHE GESCHICHTSWISSENSCHAFT
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Kylie Thomas

Undoing Gendered Expressions of Grief: Dora Kallmus' Post-War 'Slaughterhouse' Photographs (1949–1958)*

“What she calls the essence of her way of working is this.

As one would have supposed, she does not set to work to compose a picture according to the dictates of the text-books, but with her eyes only.”

(“Madame d’Ora on Her Methods”, 1912)¹



Figure 1: Photograph by Dora Kallmus. OstLicht Collection Vienna, Inv.-Nr. 063-02145 (hare)

* This research has been supported by the European Commission within the framework of H2020-EU.1.3.2. for the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship project Fem-Resist: Women, Photography and Resistance in Transnational Perspective, Grant agreement ID: 838864.

¹ Madame d’Ora on her Methods, in: Wilson’s Photographic Magazine, 49 (1912), 485–486.

At the Ostlicht archive in Vienna, I sit at a large table and examine a series of horrific yet compelling photographs of slaughtered animals. I am confronted by a partially-skinned hare, its feet still covered in fur, and I look as long as I can at this exposed creature, its congealed grin and albino eye encased in shadow, its posture almost like that of a sleeping baby (figure 1).



Figure 2: Photograph by Dora Kallmus. OstLicht Collection Vienna, Inv.-Nr. 063-02146 (goat's head)

I consider a portrait of a severed goats head, two small horns and black and white fur still in place on the surface of the skull, and an eye, perfectly intact, that seems to look accusingly out at me. I wonder how a dead thing can have so much life, and I realise that this is as much a question about photography as it is about these particular images.

A third image shows a bound cow, its body rests in death, its head amputated and positioned close to those who view it, in the foreground of the photograph. In front of this, a metal pan to collect the animal's blood, which overflows and merges with the sticky mess that coats the concrete ground.²

² I am grateful to Marie Röbl at the Ostlicht archive for allowing me to spend time there working with



Figure 3: Photograph by Dora Kallmus. OstLicht Collection Vienna, Inv.-Nr. 063-02145 (decapitated cow)

These three photographs form part of an extensive series made by Austrian-born, Jewish photographer Dora Kallmus (1881–1963) in the abattoirs of Paris over a ten-year period after the end of the Second World War. They represent a radical break from the studio portraits of artists, dancers, writers and society figures for which she is best known, made between 1907, when she opened her studio in Vienna under her artist name, Madame d'Orla, and 1942, when she was forced to stop working as a result of the Nazi occupation of Paris.³ In this article I read Kallmus' slaughterhouse series not only

these images. I began this research on Dora Kallmus in 2018 with the support of a EURIAS European Institutes for Advanced Study Junior Fellowship at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna and thank the fellows and staff at the IWM for their critical engagement and support.

- ³ Madame d'Orla was Kallmus' artist name which concealed her Jewish surname and evoked the glamour of Paris. Kallmus, like many other Jewish people in Austria in the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries, converted to Christianity. I would like to thank Edda Engelke for sharing an image of the Lutheran Church *Taufeintrag* that documents Kallmus' conversion to Protestantism in 1919, which most likely occurred for pragmatic reasons. Charles Maier explains Gustav Mahler's conversion by referring to how "the disabilities of being Jewish in the German lands were a powerful incentive to seek an alternative official identity", see Charles S. Maier, *Christianity*

as signifiers of her attempt to find a language to represent the horror of the death camps, but as a critique of the widespread refusal within post-war European societies to recognise the enormity of the Shoah. The slaughterhouse images are born of pain, but they are not unmediated expressions of personal grief, nor do they document the routine work of the abattoir. These stark photographs have been carefully created to offer no respite – they are deliberately painful to look at.⁴ In order to understand these photographs and their powerful affective charge, I argue that it is necessary to consider them not only in relation to the body of work Kallmus produced before the war, but to read them in relation to the catastrophic events that effectively destroyed both her life and the social world she inhabited.⁵

While there have been several major exhibitions showcasing Madame d'Ora's studio portraits and fashion photographs, her slaughterhouse images have either, with few exceptions, been overlooked or understood as visible signs of her psychic distress after the Shoah.⁶ Kallmus' slaughterhouse photographs can indeed be read as an expression of grief. More importantly, as I argue here, they signify a refusal to limit the pain of loss to the private (gendered) domestic sphere and instead allow Kallmus to use the medium of photography as a form of critique of the indifference of post-war society. Kallmus' images can thus be understood to exceed the normative bounds of gendered expressions of grief, which conventionally individualises and feminises mourning. The slaughterhouse series can also be seen as a form of protest against the post-war erasure of the suffering of those who were deported and murdered by the Nazis.

Lisa Silverman's research on Kallmus recognises the importance of the slaughterhouse images and their relation to the Shoah, and has opened new ways of reading the

and Conviction: Gustav Mahler and the Meanings of Jewish Conversion in Central Europe. Spaces of Multiple Belonging Jewish Topographies in Modernity – The Case of Gustav Mahler, Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig, May 23–24, 2011, 4, at: https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/33085707/Mayer_Conversion.pdf; access: 20 June 2022.

4 A large collection of images from the Slaughterhouse series is held at the Museum für Kunst & Gewerbe Hamburg, Germany. See [https://sammlungonline.mkg-hamburg.de/en/search?s=Schlachthof-Serie&h=undefined&sort=scoreDesc&f\[\]=creator%3A%2C%20Madame%20d%27Ora](https://sammlungonline.mkg-hamburg.de/en/search?s=Schlachthof-Serie&h=undefined&sort=scoreDesc&f[]=creator%3A%2C%20Madame%20d%27Ora), access: 20 June 2022.

5 The diaries Kallmus kept during the war years provide insight into the torment she experienced when she lost contact with her sister Anna, who was deported and murdered by the Nazis. See Eva Geber (ed.), *Madame D'Ora. Tagebücher aus dem Exil*, Wien/Berlin 2022.

6 The first posthumous exhibition of Dora Kallmus' work was curated by Fritz Kempe in Hamburg in 1971. In 1983, Monika Faber published the first monograph on her work. An exhibition curated by Faber was shown at Vassar College in 1987 and two other sites in the United States. The Museum für Kunst & Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G) exhibited the first comprehensive survey of Dora Kallmus' work under the title "Madame d'Ora: Make Me Beautiful" between 21 December 2017 and 18 March 2018. The exhibition "Make Me Look Beautiful, Madame D'Ora!", which displayed 330 photographs by Dora Kallmus, was shown at the Leopold Museum in Vienna from July 2018 to October 2018. Both exhibitions were curated by Monika Faber and Magdalena Vukovic. From February to March 2020, "Madame d'Ora" was on view at the Neue Galerie in New York.

series.⁷ Following Silverman's description of the slaughterhouse photographs as a "visual narrative of catastrophe" that conveys "not only a preoccupation with suffering but also a struggle with the expressive limits of photography as an art form after the cataclysmic events of the Second World War",⁸ I suggest here that Kallmus' post-war images are the most interesting in her oeuvre because they provide insight into how she thought about photography and its effects, using the medium to express personal pain and to translate it into a powerful form of social critique.

In the first section of the article, I provide a brief introduction to the life and work of Kallmus, who worked under the name 'Madame d'Ora', and who is widely regarded as one of the most significant photographers of the last century, not only because of the images she created but also because she opened the way for the many other women photographers in Europe who followed her. In the second section, I compare Kallmus' slaughterhouse images to the post-war thought of political theorist Hannah Arendt, discussing how both Kallmus and Arendt approach grief and loss in ways that veer decidedly away from the gendered script that conflates women's bodies and mourning.

The representation of grieving women as symbols of loss and of mourning is a key trope in the history of art – from Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which depicts the Virgin Mary holding the crucified body of Jesus after he was removed from the cross, to contemporary photographs of the effects of war and conflict. Public expressions of grief are similarly gendered as female in literary works from antiquity to the present, and entail performative practices that take place in and through the weeping, wailing and (usually) maternal, bodies of women.⁹ War memorials and monuments often foreground men who have lost their lives in battle, while commemorations of civilian losses often centre on women, sometimes accompanied by babies or children. I focus here on how Kallmus translated the painful experience of the loss of her sister, who was murdered by the Nazis, through a very different lens, one that eschews the conventions of gendered expressions of grief. By painstakingly documenting hundreds of individual instances of animal slaughter, she honed in on the horror of the manner of each single killing, producing a clinical dissection of slaughter that refuses to be cast in tragic or sentimental

7 For critical perspectives on the slaughterhouse images see Lisa Silverman, *Art of Loss: Madame d'Ora, Photography and the Restitution of Haus Doranna*, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 60, 1 (2015), 173–190; Savannah Dearhammer, *The Corpse Ballet: Existentialism in Madame d'Ora's Slaughterhouse Photographs*. Unpublished MA thesis, University of California Riverside 2020; Julia Lutz, *Madame d'Ora: Schlachthoffotografie der 1950er. Versuch einer gesellschaftspolitischen und psychologischen Lesart*, Unpublished MA thesis, University of Vienna 2015; Julia Lutz, *Jenseits des Illustrativen: Eine Relektüre der Schlachthoffotografien von Madame d'Ora*, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie*, 24, 3 (2017), 22–23; Katharina Sykora, *Das Morbide und das Exzentrische*, in: *Machen Sie mich schön, Madame d'Ora – Dora Kallmus Fotografin in Wien und Paris, 1907–1957*, Vienna 2017; Magdalena Vuković, *Coming to A Close: D'Ora's Final Creative Phase*, in: *Madame d'Ora*, Prestel 2020, 159–169.

8 Silverman, *Art of Loss*, see note 7, 186.

9 See the article by Eftychia Kalaitzidou in this issue. On gender and mourning in ancient Greece, see Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, Ithaca 1998.

terms. Her photographs do not directly convey the suffering and pain inflicted on those who were murdered in the Shoah, but evoke the brutal conditions of the cattle cars and camps in which people were reduced to less than animals. The photographs seek to make the vast hidden world of slaughter visible, and in this way, serve as reminders of the violence and pain inflicted by the Nazis and their collaborators. Finally, I situate the slaughterhouse series within the contested memoryscape of the Shoah in Austria. While the photographs Kallmus produced of dying and dead animals were not widely exhibited or published in her lifetime, the disruptive capacity of their latent political force continues to trouble attempts at *Wiedergutmachung* in the present.¹⁰

1. From the studio to the slaughterhouse

Dora Philippine Kallmus was born on 20 March 1881 in Vienna, the second daughter of Malvine Kallmus (born Sonnenberg) and Dr Philipp Kallmus, a lawyer. Dora's elder sister Anna Malvine was born on 28 February 1878, and the sisters were very close. Their mother died when Dora was just eleven years old. In 1900, at a time when women were largely excluded from higher educational institutions and participation in professions, Dora Kallmus decided to become a photographer. In 1905, she was one of the first women to attend classes at the *Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt* (Graphic Training Institute) in Vienna. She received special permission to attend lectures, but was not permitted to take courses on photographic techniques, as these were not open to women until 1908. Determined to become a professional photographer, she went to Berlin to take up an apprenticeship in the portrait studio of Nicola Perscheid.¹¹ There she met Arthur Benda, an assistant to Perscheid, who was proficient in the technical aspects of photographic production. When she decided to open a studio in Vienna, Benda joined her as her assistant, and they worked successfully together for the next twenty years. When Kallmus opened her Atelier d'Ora in Wipplingerstraße in the centre of Vienna in 1907, she was 26 and Benda just 22 years old.¹² Kallmus was the first woman to be accepted into the Photographic Society in Vienna.¹³ She became a

10 A retrospective exhibition of Madame d'Ora's work that included images from her slaughterhouse series was supported by UNESCO and held at the Galerie Montaigne in Paris from 17 November 1958 to 3 January 1959. See Geber, Madame, see note 5, 225.

11 Margaret Denny notes that Perscheid agreed to become Kallmus' mentor for a five-month period because he was paid a "hefty sum" by her father. Margaret Denny, Madame d'Ora, in: Lynne Warren (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, New York 2006, 990.

12 On the establishment of Atelier d'Ora, see Monika Faber, "... mein Wunsch und meine Aufgabe ...". Die Gründung des Photoateliers von Dora Kallmus, in: *Frauen Kunst Wissenschaft*, 14 (1992), 15–27.

13 See Anna Auer, The Photographic Society founded 1861 in Vienna, in: *Photography and Research in Austria – Vienna, the Door to the European East. The Proceedings of the Vienna Symposium*, Austrian National Library, Vienna, 2001, 201–206.

role model for numerous young women photographers, including Grete Kolliner, Edith Barakovich, Trude Fleischmann, Pepa Feldscharek, Edith Glogau, Hella Katz, Trude Geiringer and Dora Horovitz, Margaret Michaelis, Marianne Bergler and Lotte Meitner Graf, several of whom held apprenticeships at her studio.¹⁴

The inter-war years saw a proliferation of photography studios in Vienna, Paris and Berlin, many of which were run by Jewish women. Madame d'Ora was the leader in this field and excelled as a portrait photographer of the aristocracy, as well as of artists, writers, dancers and musicians, including Gustav Klimt, Arthur Schnitzler, Anna Pavlova, Anita Berber and Josephine Baker. In 1916, she photographed the coronation of Emperor Charles I (Kaiser Karl) as the King of Hungary, the last reigning monarch of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. She also produced a portrait series of the Imperial family as well as numerous studio portraits that provide a chronicle of Viennese high society just before the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire.



Figure 4: Tina Blau, 1915. Photograph by Madame d'Ora (Dora Kallmus). Image Courtesy of the Austrian National Library.¹⁵

14 On women photographers in Vienna in the interwar years, see Iris Meder, Andrea Winklbauer and Ulla Fischer Westhauser, *Vienna's Shooting Girls. Jüdische Fotografinnen aus Wien*, Wien 2012.

15 Thanks to Bethany Warner for assistance with obtaining image permissions for this article.

Alongside the hundreds of exemplary Pictorialist portraits, in which the individual sometimes seem subsumed by the trappings of their time, Dora Kallmus produced many photographs that indicate how she was already experimenting with a new approach to capture a sense of the person she portrayed.¹⁶ Her 1915 portrait of Austrian painter Tina Blau, for instance, breaks with the conventions of Pictorialism to convey the formidable presence of the artist, who, as Sophie Vitovec notes, seems to have just turned away from her work to look towards the photographer (figure 4).¹⁷

Kallmus' images, in which the photographic medium is used to push against convention, prefigure the work she was to make in refugee camps in Austria in 1946,¹⁸ as well as the disturbing series of photographs she took in the abattoirs of Paris in the late 1940s and 1950s, which mark the final phase of her career.

In 1925, Madame d'Ora opened a studio in Paris together with Benda. Two years later Benda returned to Vienna to run her studio there.¹⁹ A short while later, their partnership came to a bitter end. Following legal proceedings, it was decided that the studio in Vienna would operate under the name d'Ora-Benda-Wien' and the studio in Paris as d'Ora-Paris.²⁰ Kallmus was to remain in Paris until the Nazi occupation in 1940, when she was forced to go into hiding in the Ardèche in south-eastern France. After the war, she rented a small darkroom in Paris, but as many of her former customers had emigrated or had been murdered, Kallmus had to work under what Magdalena Vuković describes as "much more modest conditions" than before.²¹ As her post-war photographs show, there could be no return to the world that existed before the death camps.

If the early portraits Kallmus produced in her studio in Vienna affirmed the stability of the social world of well-to-do European citizens before the First World War, and if

16 Pictorialism describes the international movement that advocated for understanding photography as a form of art. This approach, in which photographers sought to create a painterly effect in their images, was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

17 See Sophie Dorothée Vitovec, Anita Berber im fotografischen Blick von Madame d'Ora, unpublished MA thesis, University of Vienna 2013, 30.

18 In the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) camps in Vienna and Salzburg, Kallmus made use of photography as a mode of bearing witness to the vast number of people who had been displaced by war. In December 1946, there were 29,156 displaced persons in camps in the US-zone in Austria. See Abraham S. Hyman, Displaced Persons, in: The American Jewish Yearbook, New York 1950, 315–324, 315. On the images Kallmus made in the refugee camps, see Magdalena Vuković, Porträts der Entwurzelung: D'Ora's Fotografien in österreichischen Flüchtlingslagern 1946–149, Wien 2018; Geber, Madame, see note 5, 174–186.

19 On the successful studio Kallmus set up and ran in Paris as well as the wider context in which she worked, see Françoise Denoyelle, Paris, Capitale Mondiale de la Photographie, 1919–1939, in: Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains, 169 (1993), 101–116.

20 The reason for the breakdown in their relationship is not known, but by all accounts, it was unpleasant. Monika Faber, the leading expert on Kallmus' life and work, maintains that it was due to a financial disagreement.

21 Vuković, Porträts, see note 18, 43. In a letter to Oskar Kokoschka, Kallmus describes her post-war studio as a prison. See Geber, Madame, see note 5, 205.

the images she produced in the interwar years can be understood as a world-making practice, the photographs she made after 1945 signal the unmaking of the world. In this sense, Kallmus' post-war images can be read as a theory of photographic praxis in the aftermath of the Shoah, a visual complement to the writings of Hannah Arendt and her views about how “the fabrication of corpses” in the death camps opened an abyss in understanding.²² Like Arendt, Kallmus was not only concerned with reminding society of the horrors of the camps but also with trying to explain what made such horror possible in the first place. The work of both women indicates their refusal of the role ordinarily ascribed to grieving women, to quietly bear the pain of loss. It equally signals their refusal to allow genocide to be rendered as ‘senseless tragedy’ to which no one could be held to account.

2. The pain of denial

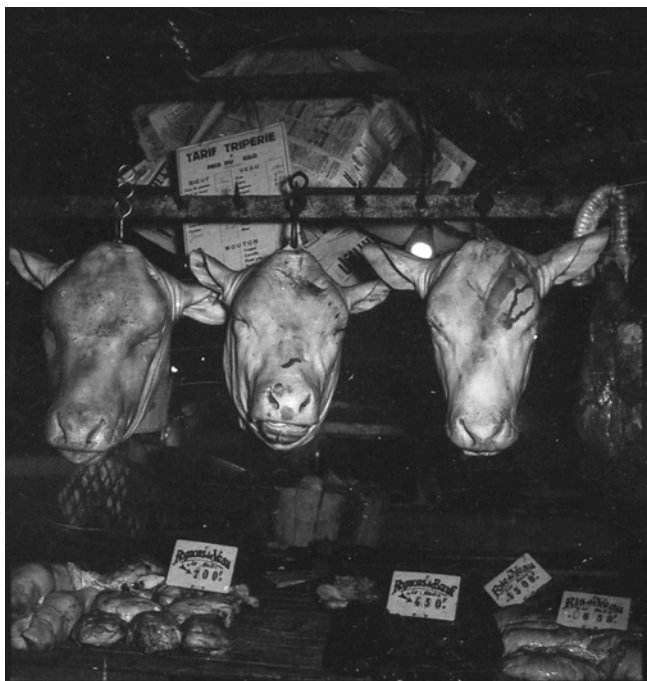


Figure 5: “3 Philosophes” [Three Philosophers]. Photograph by Dora Kallmus, c. 1955. © Nachlass (estate) Madame d’Ora, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg

22 Hannah Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, edited by Peter Baehr, New York 2000, 14.

Kallmus' image of three, blinded, decapitated calves' heads (figure 5), titled "3 Philosophes" [Three Philosophers], has an uncanny resonance with the work of Arendt and her conviction that western philosophy had, at best, led to a form of blindness and disengagement from the world, and at worst, was complicit in the profound moral failure that led to the extermination camps. In "Approaches to the 'German Problem'", Arendt writes of how the conventional frames of reference for approaching social phenomena and understanding human history no longer hold in the aftermath of the Shoah:

"The very monstrosities of the Nazi regime should have warned us that we are dealing here with something inexplicable even by reference to the worst periods of history. For never, neither in ancient nor medieval nor modern history, did destruction become a well-formulated program or its execution a highly organized, bureaucratized, and systematized process."²³

The events of the Second World War, and in particular the industrialised slaughter of millions of people, led to a rupture in Arendt's thinking. Jerome Kohn writes of how, for her, "political thought in the twentieth century had to break with its own tradition in as radical a sense as the systematic mass murder enacted by totalitarian regimes broke with the traditional understanding of political action".²⁴ Arendt argues that the industrialised killing and processing of the bodies of the dead who were murdered in the camps "goes beyond hostility and cannot be comprehended by political categories".²⁵ After the end of the war, Arendt devoted her thinking to understanding how it was possible for the events that took place in the camps to occur and critiqued the unthinking obedience to authoritarian rule that characterised the Nazi state. On her return to Germany in 1949, she wrote about the widespread refusal to acknowledge those who had been murdered and to recognise the suffering and losses of those who survived:

"But nowhere is this nightmare of destruction and horror less felt and less talked about than in Germany itself. A lack of response is evident everywhere, and it is difficult to say whether this signifies a half-conscious refusal to yield to grief or a genuine inability to feel. Amid the ruins, Germans mail each other picture postcards still showing the cathedrals and market places, the public buildings and bridges that no longer exist. And the indifference with which they walk through the rubble has its exact counterpart in the absence of mourning for the dead, or in the apathy with which they react, or, rather, fail to react, to the fate of the refugees in their midst. This general lack of emotion, at any rate this apparent heartlessness, sometimes covered over with cheap sentimentality, is only the most conspicuous outward symptom of a deep-rooted, stubborn, and at times vicious refusal to face and come to terms with what really happened."²⁶

23 Hannah Arendt, *Approaches to the "German Problem"* (1945), in: Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism*, New York 1994, 109.

24 Jerome Kohn, *Introduction*, in: *Essays*, see note 23, xxvi.

25 Hannah Arendt, *Dedication to Karl Jaspers* (1948), in: *Essays*, see note 23, 215.

26 Hannah Arendt, *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: A Report from Germany*, in: *Commentary*, 10 (1950), 342–353, 342.

Arendt interprets the ongoing circulation of images of the pre-war world as signs of the wilful myopia of those who wander through the ruins as if nothing has changed. Even though accounts of the genocide were widely published after the end of the war, Arendt observed that the dominant response was either indifference or denial. Just as Arendt's writings sought to render visible what seemed to be so easily forgotten, Kallmus' slaughterhouse series can be read as an attempt to rupture the 'cheap sentimentality' intended to cover over the unbearable past. In portraying the painful deaths of animals, Kallmus sought a visual language to convey the suffering of those who were murdered in the death camps. The images Kallmus produced after the war were directed by her grief at the death of her sister, and by her anger at the way in which suffering and death could be so quickly forgotten, allowing so many of those responsible to go unpunished. Reading Arendt's post-war writings in conjunction with Kallmus' photographs, it is almost as if the photographer and writer had been in conversation:

"Watching the Germans busily stumble through the ruins of a thousand years of their own history, shrugging their shoulders at the destroyed landmarks or resentful when reminded of the deeds of horror that haunt the whole surrounding world, one comes to realize that busyness has become their chief defense against reality. And one wants to cry out: But this is not real – real are the ruins, real are the past horrors, real are the dead whom you have forgotten."²⁷

The events of the war not only shaped the course of the lives of both Arendt and Kallmus but also the work they were to produce for the remainder of their lives. From 1946 until 1959, when Kallmus was struck by a motorcycle and so badly injured that she could no longer take photographs, she created images that insisted that people take note of the dead.

Kallmus was not a concentration camp survivor, but she experienced the terror of antisemitism, was dispossessed of the house she shared with her sister in Austria, and was forced to close her studio in Paris and flee Nazi persecution. Kallmus survived the war in hiding, but her sister was murdered by the Nazis. Her decision to document events outside her studio, and in particular, in the gruesome sites of industrial slaughter, indicate how, for her, the stark reality of the horrors of the Second World War superseded and obliterated the 'unreal' world of the pre-war era.

3. Reading Kallmus' post-war photographs

In an interview with Günter Gaus in Germany in 1964, Arendt spoke of learning about Auschwitz and how this fundamentally changed how she thought about the events of the war and its consequences:

²⁷ Arendt, *Aftermath*, see note 26, 345.

“It was really as if an abyss had opened. Because we had the idea that amends could somehow be made for everything else, as amends can be made for just about everything at some point in politics. But not for this. This ought not to have happened. And I don’t mean just the number of victims. I mean the method, the fabrication of corpses and so on – I don’t need to go into that. This should not have happened.”²⁸

While Arendt’s statement, “I don’t need to go into that” implies both that she does not need to tell her interlocutor and her audience what it is they already know, this statement also reveals the pain she experienced in thinking about the grim details of the deaths of every person who died in the camps. This seemingly impossible task of careful description of individual deaths in the context of mass slaughter is what Kallmus took up in her slaughterhouse series.

Kallmus’ decision to take photographs outside of the carefully controlled, constructed space of her portrait studio can be read as a shift in her thinking about the use-value of photography and her own role as a photographer. Her vast series of photographs of butchered animals can be seen as an attempt to create a visual language to convey the horrors of the mass killings that took place in the death camps, and in this sense to use photography as a way to bear witness to what she herself did not see. Creating the series required her to spend long periods of time at the abattoirs and to immerse herself in these industrial places of death, closely observing the mechanised killings and photographing the corpses of animals, day after day.

Kallmus’ works raise the contentious question of the comparability of the Shoah to the slaughter of animals.²⁹ However, while the infamous People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) campaign against animal cruelty (“Holocaust on Your Plate”) instrumentalises images of the corpses of those who were murdered in the death camps and positions them alongside photographs of dead animals, Kallmus’ slaughterhouse photographs draw attention to the industrial scale of murder in the death camps and the obliteration of individual life in a more oblique way.³⁰

Her images also show that Kallmus sometimes brought the corpses of animals to her studio, where she positioned them carefully on sheets of white paper before photographing them. While the photographs include no overt reference to the Shoah, these detailed gruesome portraits insist on making known what is ordinarily hidden from view. Very few of Kallmus’ photographs show those who worked in the abattoir, and those that do include their presence at the site of the slaughter through a documentary

28 Hannah Arendt, *What Remains? The Language Remains. A Conversation with Günter Gaus*, in: *Essays*, see note 23, 14.

29 See Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, New York 2002.

30 For an incisive analysis of the PETA campaign, see Mark Webber, *Metaphorizing the Holocaust: The Ethics of Comparison*, in: *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication*, 8, 15–16 (2011), 1–30.



Figure 6: Rind mit aufgeschnittener Kehle (Cow with sliced throat). Photograph by Dora Kallmus, © Nachlass (estate) Madame d'Ora, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg

lens.³¹ For instance, her image of a cow that has just been killed portrays a group of men surrounding the animal, three men in the background holding what appears to be a skinned animal and looking out towards the photographer from the dark interior of the meat-yard. The pale body of the cow, the dark cavity of its mouth, and the glutinous substance beneath it dominate the image. I study their hands for evidence of blood, and my eye is drawn to and repelled by the stained fingers of the man who is shown striding purposely towards the slain animal. The pale body of the cow, the dark cavity of its mouth, and the sticky dark mess beneath it dominate the image. I trace a line between the face of the writhing animal in its death throes, and the faces of the three men, who seem to be smiling from the doorway, holding another slain animal.

I read Kallmus' obsessive documentation of the bodies of dead animals in the abattoirs of Paris (she spent ten years working on this series in these sites of continual slaughter) as evidence of her attempt to provide visual form to what Arendt has termed "the abyss" that opened in the wake of knowledge about the death camps and the

31 This shift in Kallmus' photographic practice away from studio portraiture also reflects wider societal trends in the aftermath of the war, including the rise of picture magazines and the emergence of social documentary photography.



Figure 7: Portrait of Sybille Binder. Photograph by Madame d'Ora (Dora Kallmus), 1917. Image Courtesy of the Austrian National Library

genocide that took place there.³² It is not difficult to understand why close examinations of these images have largely been avoided – in their grotesque depictions of the freshly slaughtered corpses of animals, these images confront us with a monstrous vision – the affluent glittering world of light to which Kallmus devoted her life to producing and documenting, is here shown to be eviscerated, its vitality permanently extinguished. These photographs, which expose the innards of animals, present a perverse, inverted mirror image of the hundreds, if not thousands, of portraits Kallmus took in her studios in Vienna and Paris of affluent women, many of them Jewish, bedecked from head-to-toe in furs. Kallmus' beautifully composed portrait of actress Sybille Binder (figure 7) sheathed in fur, holding a pair of leather gloves in her im-

³² Reports about the fact that thousands of Jewish people were being murdered at Chelmno emerged in the beginning of June 1942, and were published in the "Liberty Brigade", the Warsaw-based newspaper of the Polish underground, but it was not until after 1945 that Kallmus would learn about the fate of her sister.

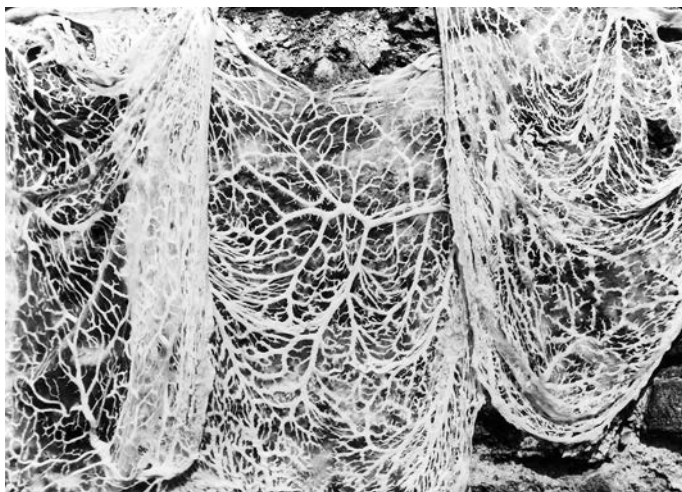


Figure 8: "La Dentelle". Photograph by Dora Kallmus, c. 1955. © Nachlass (estate) Madame d'Ora, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg

maculate hands, is in sharp contrast to the swirling noise, mutilated, dying animals, and bloodstained aprons and hands shown in her photograph of the abattoir (figure 6).

The connections between Madame d'Ora's pre-war portraits and her post-war series of slaughtered animals are amplified through the titles Kallmus inscribed in pencil on the back of some of the images. "La Dentelle" (lace), is the verso inscription that appears on her photograph of caul fat, the membrane that surrounds the internal organs of cows and pigs (figure 8). The title evokes the intricate fabric traditionally associated with wealth and worn by many of the photographer's sitters, while the image presents a hideous replacement for their dresses, a graphic, literal, rendering of the ruptures caused by the events of the war (figure 9).

Seeing Kallmus' sumptuous portraits of women in beautiful clothing and draped in fur coats in the light of her photographs of dead animals conjures images of the frightened people who were taken from across Europe to the extermination camps (figures 10 and 11). These images, in turn, call to mind the photographs of the mounds of clothing that were taken from people when they arrived at the camps and were divested of their belongings. And they return us to Kallmus' sister Anna, who, on 2 November 1941, was among the approximately 1,000 Jewish people taken on Transport 10 from Vienna to the Lodz Ghetto in Poland.³³

On the same day that Anna Kallmus was deported from Vienna, the Jewish Council of the Lodz Ghetto had to issue an order that informed the new arrivals that "it is

33 In November 1941, when Anna Kallmus arrived in Lodz, the ghetto population consisted of approximately 145,992 people.



Figure 9: Portrait of Fräulein Fellner. Photograph by Madame d'Ora (Dora Kallmus), 1911. Image Courtesy of the Austrian National Library

forbidden to wear fur coats, collars and garments in the Ghetto”.³⁴ The injunction marked the start of an extremely cold winter – in January 1942 temperatures in Lodz dropped to -27 degrees centigrade. Between January 1942 to July 1944 approximately 80,000 people from the Lodz ghetto were murdered at the Chelmno death camp situated 70 kilometres away to the north. It is possible that Anna Kallmus was murdered in May 1942 during the third phase of deportations from Lodz to Chelmno, as most of those living in the Ghetto who were taken to be killed at that time were reportedly from

³⁴ Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, The Elder of the Jews in Litzmannstadt. Announcement for new arrivals in the ghetto: Concerning the purchase of fur coats, fur collars and all manner of fox skins, Litzmannstadt Ghetto, 2 November 1941. A copy of the ‘fur action’ order is included in the collection of photographs taken in the Ghetto by Polish Jewish photographer Henryk Ross between 1940 and 1945, at: <http://agolodzghetto.com/view/objects/asitem/search@/1/title-asc?t:state:flow=479aa24b-f756-45f5-a456-4d2226ec724b>; access: 20 June 2022.

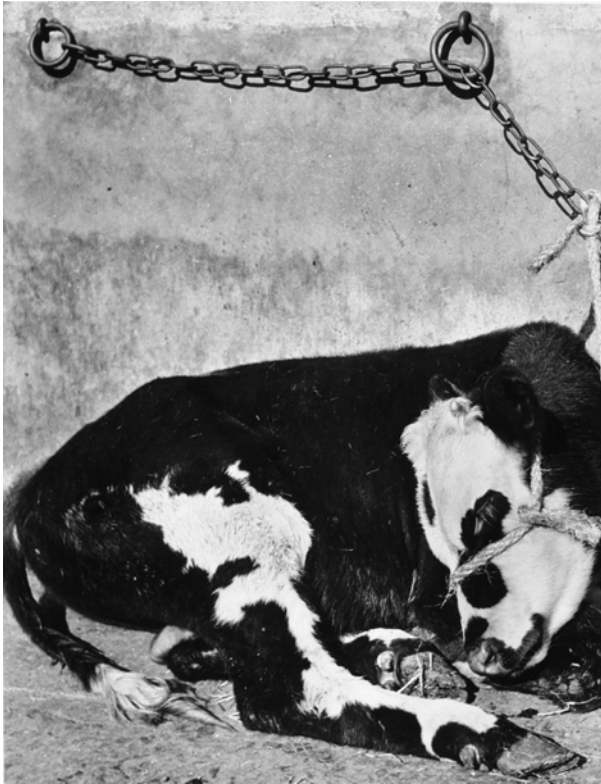


Figure 10: A calf chained to a wall. Photograph by Madame d'Ora (Dora Kallmus), From the Madame d'Ora Collection, Preus Museum Collection

Western Europe.³⁵ In May 1944, Heinrich Himmler ordered the liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto – at that time, there were still 77,000 people living there. By the end of August 1944, over 70,000 people had been transported to Auschwitz and murdered.

Lisa Silverman observes that “in spite of these traumatic wartime experiences and the profound loss of her family and possessions, accounts of Madame d'Ora's post-war photography have not fully engaged with the significance of these traumas to her images”.³⁶ Silverman has drawn attention to the critical matter of the restitution claim Kallmus filed in 1946 to reclaim Haus Doranna, the house she had shared with her

35 The date of Anna Kallmus' death is unknown. The date 5-8-1944 recorded on the memorial stones installed for the sisters in Frohnleiten refers to the start of the liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto, two days after Anna was presumably deported to Auschwitz. According to historian Edda Engelke, this date was selected as a friend of Dora Kallmus reportedly told her after the war that they had seen her sister just before the Ghetto was liquidated. If Anna Kallmus was deported from Lodz at that time, she would have been murdered in Auschwitz and not, as most have asserted, in Chelmno.

36 Silverman, *Art*, see note 7, 182.

sister. Silverman also shows how Kallmus' pain of loss was intensified on her return to Austria, where she found attitudes not unlike those Arendt encountered when she visited Germany in the immediate aftermath of the war.³⁷ Silverman writes: "Not only were most Austrians unwilling to admit responsibility for and recognize their country's participation in the Holocaust, but they also resented those Austrian victims of National Socialist persecution who, like d'Ora, came back to reclaim what had been taken from them."³⁸



Figure 11: Rose Dolly with white fur. Photograph by Madame d'Ora (Dora Kallmus), From the Madame d'Ora Collection, Preus Museum Collection³⁹

37 On the emotional impact of property loss see Hinke Piersma and Jeroen Kemperman, Robbed and Dispossessed: The Emotional Impact of Property Loss during the German Occupation of the Netherlands, 1940–1945, in: *Journal of Modern European History*, 20, 2 (2022) 183–198.

38 Silverman, *Art*, see note 7, 183.

39 I am grateful to Hege Oulie and Monika Sjue for their assistance with images from the Preus Museum collection and to Hanne Holm-Johnsen for corresponding with me about Kallmus' work.

While Kallmus regained ownership of Haus Doranna, she only returned to the house when she was forced to do so after she suffered an accident in Paris that affected her memory and rendered her unable to work. She returned to Austria, where she lived in the house in Frohnleiten, alongside several other occupants, and died there in 1963.

To understand the ongoing relevance of Kallmus' post-war images, it is instructive to read them alongside the drive to reconstruction that held sway over the defeated countries after the war and in the knowledge that the arrogance of nationalist sentiment in Austria has never been entirely overcome.⁴⁰ Instead, virulent nationalism occupies a place alongside what Gillian Rose has termed “Holocaust piety”, hollow and often sanctimonious forms of commemoration that work to “mystify something that we dare not understand” – against which Kallmus' photographs are directed.⁴¹ Her post-war images insist that to adopt a position of pious reverence towards the dead is not adequate to do justice to their memory. Instead, her work shows that the disquieting glare of exposure is needed to confront the painful truth about the past, and to understand how it continues to affect the present. In this sense Kallmus' slaughterhouse series can be understood as a precursor to the work of contemporary Austrian artists and activists, such as Eduard Freudmann, who seek to contest historical amnesia with regards to the Nazi past, and whose work troubles dominant forms of memorialisation.⁴²

Kallmus' critique of the post-war social order is perhaps most clear and powerful when her slaughterhouse photographs are viewed alongside those produced by her former studio partner, Arthur Benda, during the time Kallmus herself was in hiding and could not take photographs. All through the war and after, Benda made use of the excellent reputation of the d'Ora studio and ran a lucrative business in Vienna until his retirement in 1965.⁴³ The disappearance of Jewish competitors served him well, and in 1938 he opened a new studio on the Kärntner Ring in the centre of Vienna, which he operated under his own name after the end of the war. However, he continued to make use of the signature “d'Ora-Benda-Wien” until at least 1958. While some of his photographs resemble those that he and Kallmus produced together in the early years of the studio in Vienna, Benda's technical skill could not compensate for his lack of imagination. The more than 600 photographs by Benda held at the Austrian National

40 See Peter Pirker, Johannes Kramer and Mathias Lichtenwagner, *Transnational Memory Spaces in the Making: World War II and Holocaust Remembrance in Vienna*, in: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 32 (2019), 439–458. See in particular their discussion of memorial practices at Heldenplatz, 465.

41 Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, New York 1996, 43. Thanks to Dora Carpenter-Latiri, Alastair Douglas, Amanda Hopkinson, Kees Ribbens and Julia Winckler for engaging with me about the arguments I am making here about history and memory after the Shoah.

42 Further information about Freudmann's work can be seen on his website, at: <http://www.eduardfreudmann.com>; access: 20 June 2022.

43 In 1935, Kallmus was banned from publishing her photographs in Germany by the Nazis.

Library provide a chilling visual record of the effects of National Socialism on Austrian culture (figure 12).



Figure 12: Heinrich IV, Prince of Reuss. Photograph by Arthur Benda bearing the imprint of “d’Ora-Benda-Wien”. Image courtesy of the Austrian National Library

Benda’s unthinking replication of the photographic style used in fashion shoots in his portraits of his new Nazi clientele reveals how easy it was for him to practice the unthinking obedience of which Arendt was so critical, and which Kallmus’ post-war work seeks to contest.⁴⁴ It is instructive to note that while Kallmus’ images have now been reclaimed and celebrated in both Austria and Germany, Benda’s photographs from the Nazi-period and those he continued to make in Vienna in the decades that followed, have gone unremarked. I consider Benda’s photographs of Nazis to be shameful objects in multiple ways: they document Benda’s exploitation of Madame d’Ora’s name; they record his own complicity with the Nazi regime; and they convey how Nazism was both glorified and normalized in Austria. Positioning Benda’s images within the larger story of Kallmus’ life and work makes it possible to insist upon

⁴⁴ See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report of the Banality of Evil*, New York 1964.

uncomfortable – even painful – truths that mitigate the redemptive politics of commemoration.

In a similar way, while the story of the Kallmus sisters' dispossession and the murder of Anna Kallmus has, finally, been recognised in the town where they lived,⁴⁵ the wider history of the terrible events that took place, not only in Lodz and Chelmno but in the provincial town of Frohnleiten itself, remains largely unacknowledged. In June 1942, in response to an order from Heinrich Himmler, 430 children from Yugoslavia were separated from their families and transported to a holding camp at Frohnleiten, one of 1,500 camps of the 'Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle' (VoMi) which were spread across the Reich.⁴⁶ These children were subjected to tests to evaluate their 'racial purity' by "racial examiners", and if they were found to be suitable for 'Re-Germanisation', were assimilated into German families.⁴⁷ The site of the former camp remained unmarked for more than seventy years. In 2020, the *Gruppe Erinnerungskultur Frohnleiten* (Frohnleiten Memorial Culture Group) placed an information board there to commemorate the victims of the camp, including the stolen children who were subject to the infamous *Lebensborn* programme.⁴⁸

In October 2019, Dora Kallmus' remains were exhumed from her grave in Frohnleiten and reburied in an *Ehrengrab* (honorary grave) by the Jewish community in Graz.⁴⁹ One year later, *Stolpersteine* ('stumbling stones') for Dora and Anna Kallmus were installed outside of their former home in Frohnleiten, commemorating their lives and their deaths.⁵⁰

A 'gravesite' for the Kallmus sisters was installed in Frohnleiten to honour their wish to be buried there, although, of course, the grave is empty (figure 13). It is perhaps this memorial – a false grave that both commemorates their lives and, at the same time, omits how, where and why they died – that best conveys the tension between the attempts to repair past wrongs, which since the 1990s have been a feature of Austrian

45 Robert Preis, 'Frohnleiten: Stolpersteine vor dem Haus 'Doranna'', in: *Kleine Zeitung*, 18 October 2020, at: https://www.kleinezeitung.at/steiermark/graz/grazumgebung/5884139/Frohnleiten_Stolpersteine-vor-dem-Haus-Doranna; access: 15 August 2021.

46 See Judith Haran, 'Re-Germanization' and the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Camps: The Geography of Expulsion, EHRI blog (2018), at: <https://blog.ehri-project.eu/2018/09/04/vomi/>; access: 15 August 2021.

47 "Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals Under Control Council Law No. 10", Vol. IV, Nuernberg, October 1946–April 1949.

48 On the Lebensborn programme, see Ingrid Von Oelhafen and Tim Tate, *Hitler's Forgotten Children: A True Story of the Lebensborn Program and One Woman's Search for Her Real Identity*, New York 2016. I am grateful to Edda Engelke for the information she shared with me about the commemoration of the camp in Frohnleiten. Edda Engelke, email correspondence with the author, 19 August 2021.

49 Kallmus' original grave was dissolved and the original gravestone was destroyed as there was no one to tend her grave.

50 Preis, Frohnleiten, see note 45.

society, and the “deep-rooted, stubborn, and at times vicious refusal to face and come to terms with what really happened”⁵¹ which persists in Austria today.

The slaughterhouse series is a clear indication of Kallmus’ refusal to participate in the project of the artificial restoration of the shining world of the past through the erasure of that dark underworld from which, as Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo has written, “none of us will return”.⁵² In breaking from gendered forms of the representation of grief, Kallmus’ images offer a mode of mourning that works through confrontation. Through graphic depictions of animals that have been tortured in life and death, the slaughterhouse series refuses recourse to images of maternal solace or feminised sorrow. Kallmus’ photographs of dying and dead animals were made prior to the consolidation of the visual tropes that are now central in representations of the Shoah, and then, as now, her images defy established forms of memorialisation.



Figure 13: Image of the memorial ‘grave’ for Dora and Anna Kallmus, Frohnleiten.⁵³ Photograph courtesy of Edda Engelke.

51 Arendt, *Aftermath*, see note 26, 249.

52 Charlotte Delbo, *None of Us Will Return*, New York 1968.

53 The inscription reads: “In Memory of Anna Kallmus; 28.2.1878–5.8.1944; Dora Kallmus 20.3.1881–30.10.1963. The smaller ‘tombstone’ is inscribed with the words of a poem Dora Kallmus wrote after her sister’s murder.

In “Camera Lucida”, his now-classic meditation on photography and loss, Roland Barthes writes of the distinction between what he terms the *studium*, images that are readily recognisable and that do not arouse emotion, and the *punctum*, an element in a photograph “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces” the viewer.⁵⁴ The concept of the *punctum* is Barthes’ attempt to explain how photographs move us, how certain images can cause those who view them to feel and think, and how they can cause us pain. In the vast archive of photographs that constitute her sixty-year career, Kallmus’ slaughterhouse series operates like Barthes’ *punctum*, provoking a reckoning with the Nazi past that insists on the pain suffered by victims of the camps, as well as the pain endured by survivors. In Austria, as in other places across Europe, the recent proliferation of sites of commemoration for the victims of the Shoah has coincided with the resurgence of antisemitism, fascism and Nazism. As I have sought to show here, the painful charge in Kallmus’ slaughterhouse series lies not only in the gruesome scenes they depict, but in the fact that their disruptive force remains necessary in the present.

54 Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1980, 26.

