

Recap & Reload with Julian Sander – Interview by Nadine Dinter

 oeildelaphotographie.com/en/recap-reload-with-julian-sander-interview-by-nadine-dinter

Nadine Dinter December 17, 2024



I met **Julian Sander** through the DGPh, the German Association for Photography, back during the times of Corona. We talked about his gallery program, the legacy of his great-grandfather, August Sander, and the focus of his gallery.

I am, therefore, all the more pleased to do this proper recap with Julian, shortly after his brilliant presentation of August Sander's body of work "People of the 20th Century," which he exhibited during Paris Photo in November. Enjoy the read.

When and how did you start your career in the arts/photography business?

I am from a family of artists and art dealers. As such, it is difficult to put an exact time in an answer. Having grown up in a gallery, I would guess my first real experience was as a 12 year old helping with matting and framing, or painting the gallery before a new show. I have photographed most of my life. I started my gallery in 2009.

What was your main motivation to open a gallery? Do you have any particular role models or idols?

I was sitting with my parents, discussing what to do with the large collection of work my father had amassed over the years. It was too much to put at auction because then, only the so-called “raisins” would sell, without giving the real gems a chance to shine. So I suggested I open a gallery. Dad asked if I was sure—I wasn’t, but said I was. I love adventures! He said, “Welcome to the shark tank.”

Who was the first artist you signed on?

Sean Hemmerle is the first artist I asked to represent. He is a dear friend, a confidant, and an extraordinary artist. The second person I asked was Jory Hull. He is also a dear and long-time friend. He is also a fantastic artist, but very different.

After how many years in the business did you get the affirmation you needed? What drives you to continue working as a gallerist in your space?

I seem to have a reputation as a hard ass, which probably comes from my not being overly concerned with what others think of me. I do what is best for the work I am entrusted to represent. Maybe if I slowed down for a spell I could see if people affirm what I do. I guess they must, or else I would not have been able to do the August Sander – People of the 20th Century Stand during Paris Photo. Although, I am unsure if there are not some people who hate me for it.

But as Cyrano said, “Enemies are like a stiff collar, they keep your head on straight.”

What’s your business philosophy?

Each artwork has a right place for a given time. It is my job to find those places. On a more basic level, I believe it is better to help someone than to not help someone. I succeed when we succeed. If the deal is fair, then everyone wins.

How many artists do you represent now?

My roster is small, as I have a large collection of works, but not enough of any given artist to say I represent them. I do represent August Sander, having the largest holding worldwide. The list of living artists is Rosalind Fox Solomon, Sean Hemmerle, Jory Hull, Oliver Abraham, Michael Somoroff, and Alfredo Srur. I have work by Isabella Armand and Chris Lee Dalton, as well as Xu Yong and Jiang Jian.

Has there been a big turning point, overhaul of the gallery line-up, or major move (of whatever kind) since first opening your gallery?

The idea of an overhaul is based on the principle of monetary success. I don't measure using that ruler. I love doing great shows that speak truthfully about our time. I do need to make money to survive, but that goes without saying. Although I do sometimes wish that the audience would take just a small part of the risk I take regularly to support my colleagues and myself.

Any highlights or challenging moments?

A major highlight is that I am still here with my team after all these years. Challenges? Fuck all. There is a saying that everyone is jealous of what you have, no one is jealous of how you got it. The art business is big-risk tied to vision and faith therein. It is not for the faint-hearted.

Any particular anecdotes you want to share with our readers?

The NFT project I did, AS10k, was wrapped up in a lawsuit for a bit. During the legal process it was all the news. Even Lothar Schirmer spoke about it. After I won, no one reported on it. So maybe my anecdote is that I know what I am doing. 😊

That project is so fundamentally important. You will see. It is a foundation for something we need in cultural heritage—an open place to park information about an artist's work—free from gatekeeper control. In this case, it is August Sander, but the model works for any artist's work. That is part of what we are working on with Collektion.

What's new and what's in store for 2025?

2025 will be the year of Collektion. We built the app to coincide with our Paris Photo 2024 presentation and received an overwhelming response. Keep an eye out for it.

In the gallery, we have some very exciting shows coming, including Xu Yong and maybe Harold Edgerton or Lisette Model.

I believe that February 2023 marked the end date of what we understand as non-AI photography. What I mean is that, after February 2023, you cannot be sure that a picture was made without AI. Just as a proof of point, you could generate 36 images using AI as a narrative, then reproduce them using an analog camera that is just slightly out of focus. This would produce a roll of analog film that could be mistaken for a real series of shots. That is true for all things photography. As such, the work produced before 2023 is the whole of the "true" photography. That end date brings a limited supply with it. That in turn will stabilize and raise the prices and worth of these works.

Your advice for photography collectors?

In short, buy with your eyes, not your ears. Don't be scared to buy something that may lose most or all of its value. The real worth is in what it gives you. With time and experience you will become better at it, and maybe you will love it.

Art is made by both the artist and at least one viewer. The consensus of you, as a viewer, and the artist as a maker validates the art. That is enough.

No-gos and to-dos when it comes to the photography business?

Artists: Don't try and pitch your work at an art fair. We galleries hate, and I mean, HATE that. Find a different time.

Collectors: Don't ask what the work will be worth in the future. No one fucking knows that! If someone tells you a concrete value they are doing so to get you to close the deal. It's a really annoying question anyways. If I could sell a picture for more later why would I have it on the wall in the first place? Also, I know it's common practice, but the entire discount thing is bullshit. What we do, because of the constant request for discounts, is add the discount to the price. The underlying assumption is either that the art is worth less, or that we are pumping the prices. Both are insulting.

Galleries: Tell people what the art costs. I have tested both variants, price on request and listed price. It makes no meaningful difference for interest. We have to accept that some work is harder to sell than others. That is the job.

Photographers on your watchlist?

I don't buy names, I buy pictures. 😊

Stay tuned & in touch with Julian Sander through his gallery's website www.galeriejuliansander.de and on Instagram at [@galeriejuliansander](https://www.instagram.com/galeriejuliansander)

Save the date:

XU YONG – HUTONG

7 December 2024 – 8 March 2025