SESSION 09 · UNIT 1 — LIGHT & OBJECT · Nov 17, 2026

August Sander

1876–1964 · German

The systematic portrait — and photography as an act of resistance



Young Farmers · 1914

“Nothing seemed more appropriate to me than to render through photography a picture of our times which is absolutely true to nature.”

— August Sander, "Mein Bekenntnis," 1927

KEY WORKS

- Young Farmers, 1914 — three men on their way to a dance
- Pastry Cook, Cologne, 1928
- Bricklayer, 1928
- People of the 20th Century — a lifelong typological project

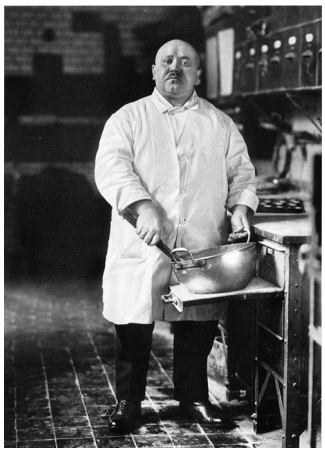
CONTEXT

Sander set out to create a complete photographic portrait of German society — every type, every profession, every social class — with equal directness and equal respect. The Nazis confiscated and destroyed the printing plates of his first published collection in 1936 because his vision of Germany included Jews, communists, and Romani people. He continued working in secret. His project was never completed. The fragments that remain are among the greatest achievements in photography.

WHY THIS PHOTOGRAPHER

Sander introduces the systematic project and raises the most important ethical question in portrait photography: do you owe your subjects beauty, or truth? His photographs are direct, sometimes harsh, always respectful. And his defiance of the Nazis — continuing to work, preserving the plates he could — shows that a photographic project can be an act of resistance.

SANDER: KEY WORKS



Pastry Cook, Cologne · 1928



Bricklayer · 1928

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sander photographed his subjects in their own environments, in their own clothes, as themselves. What does this produce that a studio portrait does not?
2. The Nazis destroyed his plates because his vision of Germany included people they wanted to erase. Can a photograph be an act of resistance?

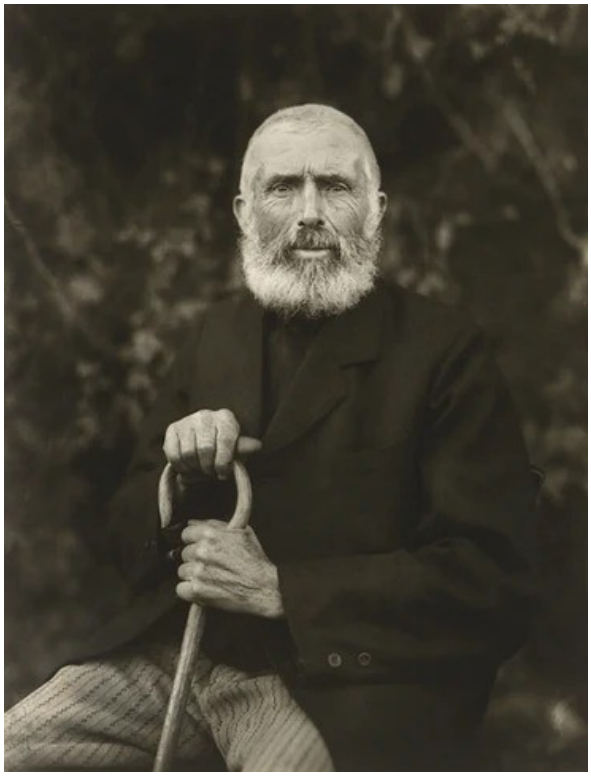
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People of the 20th Century (book set)



Middle-Class Children



The Farmer · 1913



Young Farmers · 1926 (variant)