

Jewish Historical Studies
Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England

Article:

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How to cite: Hopkinson, A. 'Introduction to Lotte Meitner-Graf: a life'. *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2022, 54(1), pp. 73–97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2023v54.05>.

Published: 19 May 2023

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Jewish Historical Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

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1 Lotte Meitner-Graf, Yehudi Menuhin, 1962.
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Introduction to Lotte Meitner-Graf: a life

AMANDA HOPKINSON

When in 1973 the studio photographer Lotte Meitner-Graf died, her life's work was largely unacknowledged. Alongside her personal commissions, she left a collection of portraits of salient political, scientific, and cultural figures of her time, a high proportion of whom were continental refugees such as herself. Her perspective, shared with other fellow Viennese immigrée photographers, was what became known as “a continental eye”. She lived her 74 years between her native Vienna and her place of exile, London. *The Times* published her only obituary (composed in either

German or English), composed by her nephew, the nuclear scientist and fellow immigrant, Professor Otto Frisch (1904–1979).

Frisch referred to it as an “Appreciation”. It opened with: “There can be few people who have not seen one of Lotte Meitner-Graf’s photographic portraits, either on a book jacket . . . or on a record sleeve or concert programme.” He goes on to list some of her numerous iconic images:

Her love of music is expressed in striking pictures of many musicians such as the black American opera singer Marion Anderson and the British contralto Janet Baker; the German conductor Otto Klemperer; the British composer Benjamin Britten, often together with his muse, tenor Peter Pears; the Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau; the Russian cellist David Oistrakh and the violinist Yehudi Menuhin . . .

More surprisingly, perhaps, he includes the singer Alma Cogan, whose capacity to tunefully belt out pop ballads she also admired, and Jean Seberg, the star as much of French *nouvelle vague* cinema as of the American screen. Furthermore: “[Lotte] was an artist; uncommercial, unconventional, uncompromising. No print left her studio unless she had what she wanted, with shades from velvety black to the most delicate grey.”¹

In addition to such popular reproductions, Meitner-Graf’s portraits figure in at least one major British public collection. Over the years, ten images, including those of the film director Anthony Asquith, her close friends the musicians Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, Julian Bream, Yehudi Menuhin, and of Otto Frisch himself have been donated to the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in London. After all, Sir Roy Strong, who came to the NPG as the assistant keeper in 1959, and was director from 1967 to 1973, estimated that “Lotte Meitner-Graf was an important photographer in her time and her archive is of great significance.” A substantial quantity of her work remains in private homes and archives across the world, while

1 Otto Frisch, obituary, “Appreciation”, *The Times*, 2 May 1973. In his autobiography, Frisch emphasizes this: “She really was a wonderful artist; many of her photographs . . . are found on book or gramophone jackets, and a poster with her photograph of Albert Schweitzer was seen all over England, urging young people to do voluntary work in developing countries. She rather specialised in portraits of musicians and physicists: there of course I was sometimes able to help her make contact.” His help was at least in part reciprocal, for Frisch lodged with Lotte on his postwar arrival in London: “It was a pleasant life and I got rather spoiled there, and in addition I had frequent occasion to visit her at her studio and admire her work”; Otto Frisch, *What Little I Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 196–7.



2 Lotte Meitner-Graf, *Jean Seberg*, 1957. © 2023 The Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive

her family retain the surviving negatives and a collection of display prints, master copies, and proofs, only recently archived.²

2 Roy Strong to Malcolm Farrer-Brown, 1 Feb. 2015, quoted on front cover, *The Lotte Meitner-Graf Portraits: When Lotte meets Julia: Two Portrait Photographers, A Century Apart*, exh. brochure (portraits by Lotte Meitner-Graf and the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron at Dimbola Lodge, her home on the Isle of Wight, 15 April–10 July 2016), n.p. Information on Lotte's prints etc according to important work undertaken by the photographer Anthony Barrett, with Anne Meitner (Lotte's daughter-in-law) and Farrer-Brown. All photographs here appear courtesy of the Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive, with special thanks to Anthony Barrett and Amanda Hopkionson.

Lotte was born Charlotte Graf on 17 November 1899 to a lawyer, Wilhelm Graf, and his wife Berta (née Ruzicka). Her father was among the first Jewish lawyers to qualify and practise in Austria. Both her grandfathers were Czech although, the region being then officially part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the family was German-speaking. Lotte was the eldest of three sisters whose upbringing was bourgeois and conventional, allowing sufficient funds to advance her a portion of her inheritance when she decided to continue her studies. The Grafs owned a comfortable apartment in Vienna and a cottage in the countryside. At home, emphasis was placed on learning and culture, particularly in the arts. In a capital city where Jews and Christians (Catholic and Lutheran [Evangelisch]) co-existed without notable fuss, the Grafs maintained few religious practices and appeared, as did many, to have considered themselves assimilated Austrians. Elisabeth de Waal's *The Exiles Return* (2012), a "novel of ideas" and of Vienna between the wars (prefaced by her grandson, the sculptor Edmund de Waal), offers an atmospheric account of the melting pot the capital had become. No longer the seat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which fragmented after the First World War, Vienna attracted exiles from countries across the former empire and, after the Second World War, returnees from the U.S.A.³

At the age of sixteen, Lotte went directly from school onto the three-year Diploma in Photography course at the now legendary Graphischen Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt (or Anstalt; approximately, College of Graphic Research and Design). Founded in 1888, the Anstalt was progressive in admitting women in 1908. Outstanding in combining applied arts with communication, it was assisted by new inventions in both cameras and printing techniques, bringing photography and graphics into a combined practice. During the mass conscription of males in the First World War, the Anstalt opened its doors to 718 women students.⁴

Its progressive reputation was enhanced in the 1920s when photo-

3 Elisabeth de Waal, *The Exiles Return* (London: Persephone, 2012). De Waal was born in the same year as Charlotte Graf so the novel's timeline and her formation correspond to Graf's.

4 See Astrid Mahler, "Training as a Professional Photographer at the Graphischen Lehr und Versuchsanstalt", in *Vienna's Shooting Girls: Jewish Women Photographers from Vienna*, curated by Iris Meder and Andrea Winklbaauer, exh. cat. (Vienna: Jüdisches Museum, 2012), 42–50: "The mobilisation of men in the First World War had a drastic effect on the gender balance at the Graphische: the proportion of women was an average of 75% during the War." It dropped to 35% soon after.

graphy graduates also numbered Gerti Deutsch (1908–1979), Wolf Suschitzky (1912–2016), and Trude Fleishmann (1895–1990), all of whom subsequently sought refuge, then permanent exile, in Britain in the 1930s. Dora Kallmus (1881–1963) graduated to become the first woman lecturer at the Anstalt in 1919, specializing in Pictorialism. Under the name Madame d’Ora, she went on to found two famously successful studios of her own, in Vienna and Paris.⁵

Lotte attended the college between 1915 and 1917, at the height of the First World War. It was a period that saw the culmination and repercussions of successive Russian Revolutions (1905–7 and 1917), and of associated political and cultural turmoil when “poster art” combined black-and-white montages and cut-ups with colourful slogans in striking lettering, integral to the New Art for a New Era movement. The Vienna Secession and the radical Association of Austrian Artists had launched in 1897. In 1919 it was followed by the Berlin Bauhaus, founded in Weimar by the German architect Walter Gropius, and developed during political upheaval in which Anstalt graphics also played a role in imparting a radical message through a fusion of image and design.

Poster art was adopted to promote both political causes and advertising, blurring genre distinctions in Germany, Austria, and Russia. Lotte’s primary cultural interest was music, but she was committed more generally to the pursuit of knowledge, whether via fine arts or sciences. Her work expresses a faith that such commitment can be revealed through her portraits. In an interwar period that saw the rise of editorial and street photography, she adhered firmly and throughout her life to her formation in studio portraiture.

After obtaining her diploma,⁶ Lotte continued her photographic training in Munich and Warsaw, before starting work at the Valerie Bruehlmeier-Richter photo-studio in Vienna in 1924. Two years later, she established her first studio at a central location, Wollzeile 24/22. Conveniently situated on a street of shops and cafés built in the grand Rococo style, close to the Burgtheater, it achieved such rapid success that Lotte soon took on three female trainees: Hermi Friedmann, Elizabeth

5 See Lisa Silverman, “Art of Loss: Madame d’Ora, Photography, and the Restitution of Haus Doranna”, *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 60 (2015): 173–90.

6 Out of 42 Viennese photo-studios managed by Jewish women photographers, no fewer than 22 had graduated from the Versuchsanstalt; Meder and Winklbauer, *Vienna’s Shooting Girls*, 14.

Back, and Olga Seybert, the younger sister of the more famous Lisette Model (1901–1983)⁷ who went on to make her reputation in the United States. In Vienna, as later in London, Lotte encouraged her assistants to become independent professionals.

In 1926, Lotte married an industrial chemist, Dr. Walter Meitner. Meitner had formally converted to the Lutheran Church in 1917, and in 1923 Lotte did likewise. The marriage brought Lotte an “almost sister” in Walter’s elder sibling, Lise, despite an age gap of twenty years between them. With Otto Hahn, Lise became the – for far too long uncredited – physicist co-responsible for the discovery of nuclear fission. Lotte’s portraits of her “almost sister” during her stellar career included the profile used to portray her as the first Austrian woman to grace a national postage stamp. It was issued in 1978, on the centenary of Lise Meitner’s birth.

In 1930, the year Lotte received her Master’s degree in photography, she took the portrait of the Scottish microbiologist Alexander Fleming, world-famous for his discovery of penicillin. It was a *coup de succès* to be chosen as his portraitist, and it attracted corresponding attention. That was also the year when the Meitner-Grafs’ son was born. He was named Philip Franz, after his grandfather. Lotte’s busy professional life became compounded by a busy domestic one, divided between a city home and a country farm for holidays and weekends. There Lotte took rare outdoor un-posed images of Philip playing in cornfields. Philip himself retained fond memories of these early lakeside holidays, which may have influenced his decision to move to Hampshire, attend agricultural college, and devote his adult life to being a successful farmer.

Alongside such bucolic scenes of domestic harmony, Lotte’s Viennese studio was increasingly attracting famous sitters, predominantly drawn from the arts and sciences. In addition to Lise’s Berliner colleagues (including Otto Hahn), Lotte made portraits of a number of artists, such as Oscar Kokoschka and Lucie Rie (whose pottery studio shared Lotte’s photo-studio address); the conductors Herbert von Karajan and Otto Klemperer; many opera singers, including Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Emmy Heim, and Irmgard Seefried; and her fellow photographer Lucia Moholy.⁸

Marriage also provided an extended musical family, including the

7 Olga taught Lisette how to use a Rolleiflex, with which she made her salient U.S. career. Olga went on to specialize in medical photography and remained in London.

8 See Robin Schuldenfrei, “Images in Exile: Lucia Moholy’s Bauhaus Negatives and the Construction of a Bauhaus Legacy”, *History of Photography* 37, no. 2 (May 2013): 182–203.



3 Lotte Meitner-Graf, Lise Meitner, 1933–40.
© 2023 The Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive

pianist Rudolf Serkin (Walter's cousin) and the violinist Adolf Busch (Serkin's father-in-law), founder and leader of the Busch Quartet. Lotte's love of music was immense, and her small, elegant figure, dressed in black and slightly stooped in her later years, was a familiar sight at London concerts in the Wigmore and Royal Festival Halls.



4 Lotte Meitner-Graf, *Danny Kaye*, 1955/56.
© 2023 The Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive

Set to become Europe's arguably most famous international music festival, the Salzburg Festspiel was established in 1920.⁹ The cast list of those involved in its founding include the director Max Reinhardt, the poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and the composer Richard Strauss, matched in prestige by the international performers. A notable attraction was Marian Anderson, the black American contralto whose repertoire extended from opera to spirituals and freedom songs.¹⁰ She was photographed at the 1935 Festival by Gerti Deutsch and Trude Fleishmann, among other women photographers.

9 See Michael P. Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theater and Ideology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

10 Marian Anderson sang on Easter Sunday 1939 from the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, at the invitation of President Franklin D. and Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, before an integrated crowd of more than 75,000 people and a radio audience of millions. She also sang there in 1963 as people formed the March for Jobs and Freedom led by Martin Luther King, at which King delivered his "I have a dream" speech.

A number of Lotte's star sitters reappeared as London immigrants or as visitors, re-photographed at later stages in their prominent careers. Throughout Lotte's career as a studio photographer, her private clients added to her thousands of publicity and exhibition portraits. In addition, she took multiple portraits of some 152 musicians (singers, composers, and conductors) and 235 sitters in all other groups including scientists, artists, writers, and publishers.

Other sitters numbered more than 30 actors (among them John Gielgud and Danny Kaye), artistes, dancers, film and media presenters and directors (from the French mime Marcel Marceau to the Austrian-born movie mogul Otto Preminger); 8 pairs of hands (mainly but not exclusively musicians: Bertrand Russell's bony knuckles also feature); a dozen statesmen and ladies (for example, Queen Salote of Tonga, General Jan Smuts of South Africa, and Mahatma Gandhi); and the 20 Nobel prize-winning scientists (among them Sir Lawrence Bragg, Otto Hahn, Dorothy Hodgkin, Lise Meitner, Max Perutz, Sir Joseph Rotblat, and Erwin Schrodinger). Not to mention half a dozen spies, codebreakers, and members of MI5 and MI6 (including the author Arthur Ransome, Thomas Kendrick, and Lotte's sister-in-law Lise Meitner, also apparently a wartime spy¹¹).

On 30 January 1933, the Austrian-born Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and Führer of the Nazi Party. His plan, embraced by much of the German population, was to establish a dictatorship and make Germany a powerful, unified one-party state. Hitler immediately established a rapid expansion of the state secret police, the Gestapo, under Hermann Goering. Composed exclusively of Nazis, it was dedicated to eliminating all dissent and any opposition. Increasing antisemitic persecution resulted, stripping Jews of civilian, religious, and human rights. Deprived of synagogues and meeting places; then of employment and professional opportunities; soon after of homes and properties, investments and possessions, within months Jews were deprived of human rights and targeted for personal attack and public humiliation with impunity. Their banks accounts frozen, homes and businesses "Aryanized", and passports impounded, Jews rapidly even lost the means to flee.

Shutters were coming down across Austria, physically and metaphorically. As businesses and banks, shops and homes were expropriated,

¹¹ Alleged by Arnold Kramish, *The Griffin: The Greatest Untold Espionage Story of World War II* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 191: "the circumstantial evidence is very strong that she was [a spy]".

graffiti appeared across their windows warning Jews to get out. Some came with prescient suggestions to “take a holiday in a camp”, accompanied by images of swastikas and gallows. The political system was in chaos. Chancellor Dolfuss’s assassination (by a Nazi) in July 1934 was followed by the election of the Austrofascist Schuschnigg. Jews in Austria thus faced the same crescendo of attacks as in Germany, where Hitler defined a Jew as anyone one-eighth Jewish. One Jewish great-grandparent automatically elicited dangerous, often extreme, persecution. If a family relationship was not established, mobs erred on the side of denunciation.

In 1936 Chaim Weizmann reported in the *Manchester Guardian* that: “The world seemed to be divided into two parts – those places where the Jews could not live and those where they could not enter.”¹² Within two years, on 12 March 1938, the German army invaded Austria. Hitler’s triumphal cavalcade into Vienna was rapturously received by the local population. On 13 March Hitler announced Austria’s annexation (*Anschluss*) and Schuschnigg, having been forced to resign, was imprisoned days later. It was desperately late for any Jews still seeking a way out: any remaining grounds for exit visas were immediately withdrawn, other than under the most restricted circumstances.

The Meitners needed to act immediately to protect their only child. Like a number of middle-class Jewish parents, they took the precaution of sending seven-year-old Franz on ahead, praying they would soon follow. On 16 June 1938, Franz was escorted by train to London by an unnamed Catholic French woman compassionately dedicated to assisting Jewish children to safety. She handed him over to Meitner family friends, Dr. Paul and Hedwig Frankel, who took responsibility for him and his education at a school in Wimbledon.

It appears that Walter and Lotte believed they would be able to secure their escape via contacts in the British Embassy in Vienna. Instrumental in this plan was Thomas Kendrick, the head of the Passport Office and an MI6 agent, and his two “secretaries”, Clara Holmes and Betty Hodgson, also members of the MI6’s Secret Intelligence Services. In fact it took until August for the British government to issue instructions that the couple were to come directly to England. As soon as Kendrick received the communiqué from London he informed the Meitners, telling them they had no more than 24 hours to prepare for departure. The next day Kendrick,

¹² Chaim Weizmann, *Manchester Guardian*, 23 May 1936, cited in A. J. Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and the Refugees from the Third Reich, 1933–1939* (London: Elek Books, 1973), 112.

in a German car adorned with a swastika, drove Lotte and Walter Meitner at speed and through several Nazi checkpoints to a military airfield outside Vienna. There the Meitners boarded a British plane to safety in London and the hospitality of the Frankels. No sooner had they taken flight than the Gestapo arrested, held, and interrogated Kendrick for four turbulent days before – following the requisite protest from the British government – he was released and allowed to return home. Lotte was later able to express her thanks through a sensitive and striking portrait of the man who had secured their liberty at such considerable personal risk.

The Meitners found asylum a month after Lise who, after an equally desperate search for refuge, was finally accepted in Sweden.¹³ They settled into a rented house in Putney, and Walter found commercial work with a Surrey company, Coles. But in 1940, like many immigré Jews, Walter was interned on the Isle of Man as an “enemy alien” (from an enemy country) until his profession as an industrial chemist, categorized as a “reserved occupation”, secured an early release to an academic post at the University of Manchester. He would spend weekdays there and drive his Austin 7 up to London at weekends, a custom that persisted after the war. Philip too lived only partially at home, as he was sent to board at a senior school. Lotte focused on her photography, often working well past midnight.

She began by joining the studio of Georg Fayer, a Hungarian immigré who had formerly owned a photographic studio in Vienna’s Museumsquartier. There he had made a reputation specializing in commissions from government officials and diplomats, musicians and scholars, governmental and military officers, even founder members of the League of Nations. In short, wealthy commercial clients who conformed to a particular type and social stratum. Arriving in London in 1936, Fayer had established himself at 66 Grosvenor Street, Mayfair, where he added political figures to his catalogue of famous names: Anthony Eden, Charles de Gaulle (whom Lotte also photographed), Sarah Churchill (the daughter of Sir Winston, she was a wartime intelligence operator for the WAAF [Women’s Auxiliary Air Force]), General Smuts, Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, the Busch Quartet, the pianist Dame Myra Hess, and the

13 Lise maintained contact with her colleague Dr Paul Rosbaud who, having helped her and many others, including his Jewish wife and children to escape, remained in Berlin for the whole of the war reputedly sending details of German scientists’ weapons research to Lise in Sweden, hiding the information in tennis racket handles; this she decoded and sent to Bletchley Park; see Michael Smith, *Foley: The Spy who saved 10,00 Jews* (London: Politico’s, 2004), 58–9, 158–60, 181–7.

economist John Maynard Keynes, among them.¹⁴ What Lotte brought to the team of immigrants already employed at Fayer's studio was her network of cultural figures, both recent incomers and British-born. Despite her importance to the agency and even though certain prints were personally signed by Lotte, the majority appeared under the Fayer rubric, signalling that she was part of his "stable".

Also out of that stable was Ursula Ruth Pariser (1917–2010), a German immigrant who became head of the photographic laboratory at the Courtauld Institute of Art for twenty years, also serving as a special photographic art adviser to the Queen. In a letter dated 2 February 1991 to the National Portrait Gallery, she described her time as a studio photographer, when

the photographer at Fayer Studios was Mrs. Lotte Meitner-Graf . . . Her technical skills were outstanding and, if I may say so, as impressive as those of Mr Karsh of Ottawa . . . As Mr Fayer and Mrs Lotte Meitner-Graf died many years ago I wonder whether you know where these historical photographs are and who has access to them.¹⁵

According to Anthony Barrett, the photographer responsible for digitizing the Meitner-Graf archive, there is still extant

the entire collection of original negatives created since 1953 [at Lotte's subsequent Bond Street studio], plus a number of negatives from her time in Austria . . . and some she kept from her time at Fayer's studio. They are numbered from 0001–2969. If we assume that she undertook almost 3000 sessions over the 20 years at Old Bond Street – we could say some 6000 sessions in her working life – exclusively taken with only herself behind the camera, then personally supervising and inspecting the quality, retouching negatives and prints, and communicating with clients . . . little wonder she had little time for socialising.¹⁶

Lotte was clearly doing well at Fayer's, and *Tatler* magazine (its office conveniently nearby) gave prominence to at least a dozen of her portraits of cultural figureheads. However, Lotte remained anxious to return to working under her own name. During her first decade in London, she had developed a specialism (and a regular income strand) photographing artworks for national galleries and museums, mainly the British Museum

¹⁴ Fayer's archive is now in the U.S. Library of Congress. It is not clear whether Fayer's departure to the United States in 1940 was a factor in Lotte's decision to set up on her own, as his agency continued at least in name.

¹⁵ Ursula Ruth Pariser to National Portrait Gallery, 11 Feb. 1991.

¹⁶ Anthony Barrett, email to the author, 21 Feb. 2020.

and the National Gallery. This attracted the attention of the new Warburg Institute, named after the Renaissance art historian Aby M. Warburg (1866–1929). It was spun out of the family business, an investment bank, and largely funded through its New York branch. Under the shadow of Nazism, it transferred from Germany to London in 1933, functioning primarily as a research centre with its own imprint of learned publications, and a library specializing in the history of art and religion.¹⁷

Aby Warburg believed his life's greatest work, unfinished at the time of his death, was the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*. Conceived around 1925, begun in 1927, this unusual "picture atlas" was intended as the distillation of his life's work as an intellectual, collector, and archivist. According to the Warburg Institute's website, it comprised "a work-in-progress on a series of wooden panels covered with a black cloth, on which Warburg pinned clusters of images (photographic reproductions, postcards, photos and various kinds of printed material). Repeatedly revising the selection and arrangement of images and the number of its stands, the series was photographed three times."¹⁸

In 1943 its popularity prompted Lotte to design the introductory panel to a Warburg Institute exhibition entitled *Portrait and Character*. Curated by Kenneth Clark, the then director of the National Gallery, Lotte's own photographic contribution came in a section called "The Title of the Portrait Painter", with the cumbersome subtitle "The Various Aspects of a Single Face Shown by the Camera". According to Clark's introduction:

Photography and the cinema have made everybody conscious of the many variations of a face. Photographs of the same person taken with different lighting and background, in different dress, looking upwards or downwards, in profile or full face, can be most dissimilar. We talk of photographs which are not a good likeness, meaning that the attitude of the sitter is unusual, or the expression is unfamiliar, but not that the camera has taken an imaginary face. The eye of the camera is impartial, and a good likeness results only from the selective faculties of the photographer.¹⁹

¹⁷ It took two journeys on the steamship *Jessica*, in 1933 and early 1934, to ship the entire library and furniture to England. The Institute was integrated into the University of London in 1944.

¹⁸ <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/archive/bilderatlas-mnemosyne> (accessed 6 Feb. 2023).

¹⁹ *Portrait and Character* (London: Trustees of the National Gallery, 1944), printed exhibition guide with introductions to sections, in Warburg Institute Archive, London, 26.2, p. 1, cited in Michael Berkowitz, *Jews and Photography in Britain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 174; I am indebted to his account of the Warburg Institute, ch. 3, 134–76.

Later, Lady Elizabeth Clark sat for Lotte at her studio; Sir Kenneth apparently did not.

Lotte's panel featured a woman's head taken from twelve angles. Thus seen, the sitter's aspect altered radically according to how it was initially lit and composed, then by every stage of the darkroom process from cropping to retouching. The transformations were dramatic, and the multiple images hard to identify consistently, even as the same woman. Subliminally, perhaps, the panel points not merely to the familiar truism that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but by implication to the fact that the division of fellow Europeans into a hierarchy of "types" is at best an arbitrary, elusive and malleable concept. The cranial analyses beloved of eugenicists appear irrelevant by comparison.

Perhaps this creative experimental emancipation contributed to Lotte's desire to move on to a studio where she could be in charge. After Fayer left for the United States in 1940 (a time when a substantial number of Jewish immigrants moved on, fearing a Nazi invasion), the Fayer Studio started to offer colour portraits, no longer hand-tinted but now relatively cheaply available thanks to the increased popularity of colour film and machine printing. It was apparently a technique which Lotte abhorred, not least because the photographer is no longer in control of the printing process. She decided it was time to open her own studio, drawing on her previous experience in Vienna and on the clientèle she had helped grow at Fayer's. She selected an "exclusive" address at 23 Old Bond Street, next door to that of the established British society photographer, Dorothy Wilding. In addition, it was closer to the smarter south end, and to the Cork Street art galleries, several owned or run by fellow immigrants. Her chosen location was near Piccadilly Arcade, through which pedestrians emerge beside the Royal Academy and across the road from the famous department store Fortnum & Mason.

According to one of her assistants, Lynda Sullivan, Lotte ordered her selection of teas and apples, staples of her daily diet, from Fortnum's. In Lynda's words:

There was a secretary called Caroline. Her main duties were typing letters and – presumably – invoices. She also had the job of preparing Mrs. Meitner's lunch. This consisted of grating the apples and adding lemon juice. There was usually a conversation about the flavour and type of apples . . . The workroom was very small and also had the sink

in it, so flecks of browning apple were evident all around the sink area. How Caroline avoided any of the apple landing on the photos I will never know!²⁰

Presumably the kitchen sink doubled as the darkroom basin where the prints were washed, although Lotte also availed herself of a branch of Wallace Heaton camera shop at the back of the building, a regular supplier of photographic materials and copy prints.

The studio was on the fifth and top floor of a Victorian house (currently the Stella McCartney fashion house). The lift, operated by a lady named Doris, only reached the fourth and customers were expected to climb the final flight of stairs. Special arrangements had to be made for Lotte's most essential item of studio furniture: a Blüthner baby grand piano. It came up via a service lift, arrived at next door's rooftop loggia, thence to be deposited in Lotte's attic. The task required six men. The piano served its prescribed function whenever a pianist attended, and the hands of Alfred Brendel, Arthur Rubinstein, and the composer Antony Hopkins (1921–2014) were among those photographed at its keyboard. Lynda Sullivan recalls the staff pausing in their work to listen to Rubinstein perform an impromptu concert. Other musicians were invited to bring any smaller instruments together with "concert hall outfits".

Lotte's allegiance was to the black-and-white studio portrait, reproduced as large as possible for the purpose of increasing detail and definition; meticulously retouched to remove any imperfection and enhance contrastive lighting; and frequently focused as much on the subject's hands as their face. On rare occasions informal subjects – such as children – were taken outdoors, where she allowed herself greater stylistic latitude. There too, her sense of control over natural light and rigorous composition are paramount. She composed an image of a tree with as much respect for its geometry as she would a building.

Fabrics and clothing figured significantly, principally in emphasizing her deliberately restricted artistic palette. Perhaps Lotte suggested that her subjects dressed to accommodate shades accessible to black-and-white photography. Although not given to taking self-portraits, she was herself her sitters' style model. Her penchant for wearing mainly black, occasionally grey or silver, complemented not only her hair but her style of

20 Lynda Sullivan, telephone interview with the author, Dec. 2016, from which all Sullivan quotations are taken.

photography. Despite the increasing availability and popularity of colour film from the 1950s, Lotte was never tempted to employ it with her sitters. Windows were screened by heavy grey curtains, and shelves of carefully arranged books darkened the walls. Presumably in order to manage her lighting to the maximum degree, Lotte closed the curtains well before sundown. As Lynda Sullivan observed: “Mrs Meitner hated dusk.”

The studio took up as much space as all the rest of the apartment together. According to Lynda again: “The workroom was small and L-shaped and it included the small darkroom. There were seats and small single desks against the windows for the retouchers, and Mrs Meitner’s desk was in the far corner (where she could see everything). The retouchers all had daylight lamps and the windows looked down onto Savile Row.” One retoucher was a fellow immigrée, Mrs. Welkanoz, who during the 1950s supervised two British assistants, Jeremy Grayson (1933–) and Anthony Crickmay (1937–2020). In effect they received their photographic training at Lotte’s studio, and they were the only male members of a staff of five who did so. Grayson (who succeeded to the title of 5th Baronet Grayson of Ravenspoint, Anglesey) introduced Crickmay (“Crix”, at the time working in a warehouse) to “Mrs. Meitner” who initially took him on to type invoices.

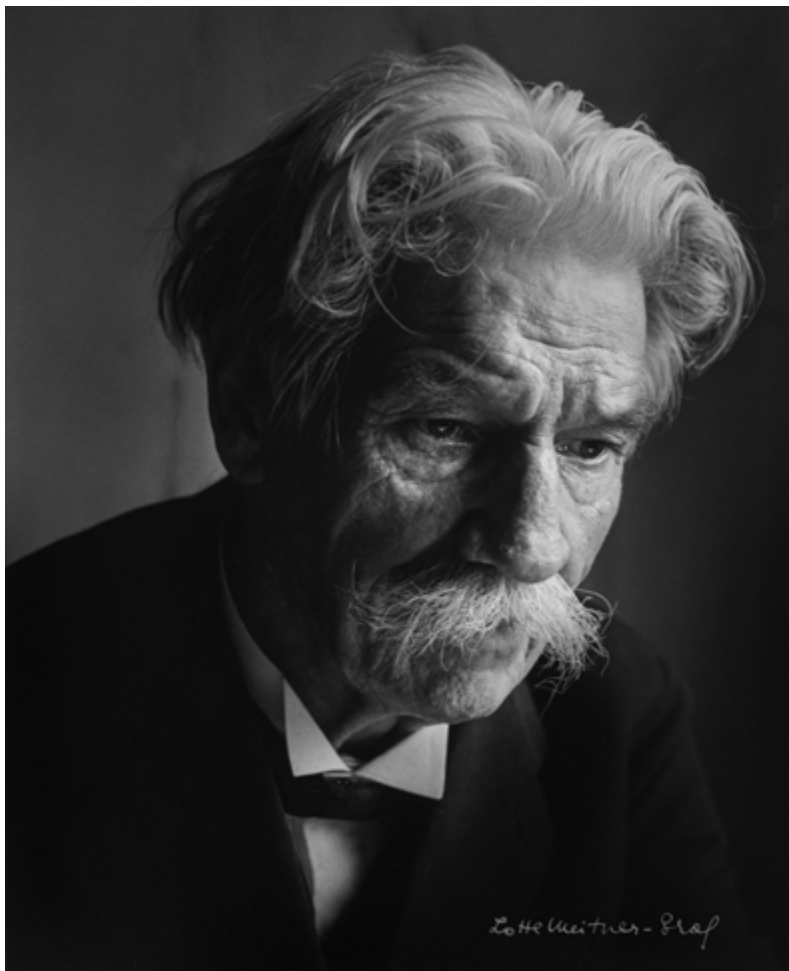
The two men shared a flat in Redcliffe Gardens, Chelsea SW10, until Grayson married and moved to larger premises off the Kings Road. There he established a photographic studio and darkroom in the basement, where Crickmay came to “learn the ropes”, claiming he had only ever seen the inside of Lotte’s studio once or twice. Grayson maintained Lotte’s tradition of portrait photography, finding fresh portraiture markets for record covers and book jackets. Crickmay established his own studio in 1958, using Grayson’s aristocratic connections to obtain access to the Royal Family – patrons of “Royal” dance, opera, and theatre companies – through which he made an international reputation.

While it was commonplace for fashionable Bond Street studio photographers such as Dorothy Wilding and “Mme. Yevonde” (Philone Cumbers-Middleton) who supplied the society pages of glossy magazines, to put their signatures to portraits taken by their assistants, Lotte did not. Not only was she little interested in “high society”, but it would have seemed professionally dishonest to her to let an employee take photographs signed by herself. Her clarity regarding the ownership of her own work meant that no portrait left the studio without her copyright stamp on it.



5 Lotte Meitner-Graf, *Self-portrait*, early 1950s?
© 2023 The Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive

Lotte's one surviving logbook shows she operated a dual accounting system with sitters divided according to whether they were to be invoiced for payment, or photographed to fulfil a commission. It was – in some cases, still is – common for publications to make standard payments without invoice. The same image might serve multiple paying clients, since Lotte's scrupulousness regarding copyright ensured it resided with her, not with the customer. There exist a number of master prints, with multiple client names on the reverse, which suggest publication by different outlets. Penguin Books, the *Radio Times*, record companies, and concert halls were among her most regular customers.



6 Lotte Meitner-Graf, Albert Schweitzer, 1959.
© 2023 The Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive

Lotte could also be generous to a fault, especially to her sitters. Tom Sutcliffe was still a youthful counter-tenor when he received a copy of Helmut and Alison Gernsheim's groundbreaking *Concise History of Photography* (1965) in the post. On the title page Lotte had written "For Tom" followed by "July 1972 from L M G." They had only met at a single sitting, she an old lady in her seventies and Tom a young man in his twenties, but she added a note composed with evident affection:

My dear Tom, since I realized that you are really interested in the history of photography I have been meaning to give you what I consider the best written about it all. That it took me so long is due to more and more pressure of work which I am sure you will understand. My kindest

thoughts go often to you . . . yours as always L M G . . . I imagine you have an overflowing library hence the paperback (no meanness!)²¹

Lotte provided the portrait of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) for a poster promoting Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), encouraging young people to work abroad as a form of non-religious missionary service, including at his “jungle hospital” in Gabon. He repeatedly invited Lotte to visit him there, impressed most of all by her portraits of Lise Meitner, a scientist he deeply admired. When Lotte politely declined either to visit Africa or to charge him for his prints, his invitations only multiplied, assuming an increasingly plaintive tone. One sent on 22 April 1964 opened with his thanks for the supply of prints, before going on to try to tempt her with a business proposition:

Now that people are convinced that my days in this world are numbered, they request of me pictures which are signed by me. I cannot blame them. But I have to get pictures for this purpose [to support his work there]. Thank you for giving me a fair number. You do not want me to reimburse you the cost. Your generosity touches me. The best thing would be if you came to Lambarene and took some pictures here in this last period of my life. This could be good business for you . . .

For her part, Lotte was content to let the matter rest, simply writing that she had found their London sitting “so very enjoyable.”²²

Also among Lotte Meitner-Graf’s distinguished sitters was Irène Joliot-Curie (1897–1956). Joliot-Curie was the daughter of the Nobel-Prize winning scientists Marie (1867–1934) and Pierre Curie (1859–1906), and herself a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry (1935). Marie Curie is well-remembered for being the first woman to win a Nobel Prize and for her work on radioactivity contributing to her fatal illness. Joliot-Curie, along with her pathbreaking research, immersed herself in the battle against fascism. With her husband, Frédéric, Joliot-Curie discovered the first artificially produced radioactive atoms, leading to numerous and ongoing medical advances, especially in cancer treatment. Although we lack documentation about this specific portrait, it seems that Joliot-Curie’s appearance as distressed and somewhat untidy was a deliberate choice

21 Lotte Meitner-Graf to Tom Sutcliffe, July 1972, private collection.

22 Albert Schweitzer and Lotte Meitner-Graf correspondence (in German), 1964, private collection. I am grateful to Evelyn Reisinger, my colleague at City University, London, for her transcription and translations of Dr. Schweitzer’s letters; also to Mark Ogden for translation.



7 Lotte Meitner-Graf, Irène Joliot-Curie, late 1940s/early 1950s.
© 2023 The Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive

on the part of the sitter and her photographer/friend. Several of Meitner-Graf's subjects, similarly, have downcast eyes. Joliot-Curie was apparently in the throes of serious illness. One may speculate that she sought an accurate, however painful, representation of herself.

While taking pride in her profession, Lotte did not apparently care to regard herself as a business woman, and despite sporadic attempts to bring her invoicing system up to date, improvements rarely resulted as planned. She inclined towards doing a favour – like rescuing Crix from his miserable warehouse job and pleasing Grayson in the process – rather than pursuing payments. Not charging for her work and giving away “extra” prints, either through generosity (particularly towards the young)

or due to oversight, particularly in her old age, became habit. The fact that her studio survived despite all this is a point in favour of rather than against the soundness of her business model. Lynda Sullivan too has tales of real kindness, of Lotte helping her out when she was unwell, or had simply lost her train ticket, but also of the stacks of invoices never finally submitted to clients.

We are fortunate in having the words of a young sitter herself, recounting the experience of a visit to the Lotte Meitner-Graf studio in 1957. She attended with her parents and three sisters, all named after Greek immortals:

I walked into a curtained-off area of the studio, which felt like a cave. Walls, bed and even floor, I think, were covered in black cotton. Lotte Meitner-Graf asked me to lie down on my side, propping my head on one hand, “as though you’re reading in bed.” For a dreadful moment I thought she was about to ask me to read something . . . even though I was six, I could not yet read. She told me with some impatience that I should simply pretend and I relaxed at once.²³

Reflecting on the experience in later life, Daphne Wright added:

Looking at the photograph now, I recognise myself . . . She caught something essential and individual to me – just as she did in the solo photographs of my sisters. I think it was this ability to see us as we really were – and are – that my parents valued so much. They kept the photographs on display in their bedroom for the rest of their lives. I have the one of me on my desk as I write.

When interviewed, Daphne elaborated: “At home, Lotte’s name was spoken with awe. Being photographed by Lotte was like being painted by Renoir. It never occurred to me that I would take my turn and sit for her, nor that the result would be hung on my bedroom wall.” Looking again at the portrait, Daphne was surprised that Lotte was able to capture something about which she herself was unaware: “I couldn’t have looked at her like that, not right in the eye . . . I think she caught something very different and special in each one of us.”²⁴ The family clearly made a similarly favourable impression on Lotte, for Daphne later added: “This photograph of the three of us was a present from Lotte because she liked it so much and my parents hadn’t selected it because it didn’t have all four of us in it.”²⁵

23 Daphne Wright, in *Lotte Meitner-Graf Portraits: Lotte meets Julia*, n.p.

24 Daphne Wright, interview with the author, 21 Feb. 2018; telephone call, Feb. 2021.

25 Wright, email to the author, 25 March 2021, postscript added to online copy of the photograph described.

Lotte's own fascination with the history of photography did not necessarily generate reciprocal recognition from contemporary historians. She may have liberally distributed copies of the Gernsheims' *Concise History of Photography* but, friends of hers though the authors were, the name of Meitner-Graf does not feature in it alongside those of (predominantly male) fellow photographers. More recent major histories such as that published by Könemann of works in the Getty Archive (a German–British co-production)²⁶ or by Gale Research (in the United States)²⁷ focus on popular (or “street”) photography and photojournalism, not on studio portraiture.

Val Williams's seminal work *The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present* (1986) explored Bond Street in the 1930s and '40s as a hub of women's portrait studios, featuring the extravagant Madame Yevonde and the classical Dorothy Wilding, but omits to mention the studio next door to Wilding's in Old Bond Street.²⁸ As a studio portraitist, when Lotte furnished a souvenir programme such as that for the Festival of the City of London 1964 with a substantial majority of its images (more than a dozen to the half-dozen supplied by recording or publicity companies), it might be a stylized cultural intervention but seemingly not a notable one.²⁹ Research interest has tended to focus on other forms of photography than portraiture – favouring radical experimentation and photojournalism (in which *Other Observers* is a rich source of discovery and coverage) – in preference to a genre with a lengthy fine art tradition behind it.

Also disappointing in this regard is the more recent *Oxford Companion to the Photograph*. Not only is Lotte Meitner-Graf herself omitted, but also her country of origin is not even mentioned under the entry for *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), the art movement with immense influence on photography. Emerging between the two World Wars, the movement had spread through Central Europe, Germany, France, and the United States. Under “Austria” the editor Robin Lenman merely observes: “Between the foundation of the First Austrian Republic in 1918

26 Nick Yapp and Amanda Hopkinson, *150 Years of Photo Journalism: The Hulton Getty Picture Collection* (Cologne: Könemann; London: Konemann, 1995).

27 Martin Marix Evans, Amanda Hopkinson, and Andrei Baskakov, eds., *Contemporary Photographers* (New York and London: St. James Press, 1995).

28 Val Williams, *The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present* (London: Virago, 1986).

29 *Festival of the City of London Souvenir Programme 1964*, ed. Jack Phipps (London: The Committee, 1964), n.p.

and its absorption into Greater Germany in 1938, photography stagnated . . . [and] styles remained conservative, especially by comparison with developments further north”.³⁰

Lotte does, however, attract attention in at least one major photographic history, Michael Berkowitz’s *Jews and Photography in Britain* (2015). He draws attention to her portraiture, illustrated by a strikingly natural and pensive image of Marian Anderson. He then continues to her work for the Warburg Institute, and contextualizes how Lotte’s images of sculpture, artefacts, and artworks rendered her both distinctive and innovative, commenting that “The photographing of art and architecture – not mainly for postcards or other consumables, but as a part of collecting, scholarship, and curatorship – became something of a Jewish industry in London in the interwar and war years.” He adds: “The photographing of sculpture was ardently taken up as a specialty by a number of photographers, including . . . Lotte Meitner-Graf, who had already been practicing it while in Vienna.”³¹

In terms of publishing, it is not exceptional for fiction to anticipate history. William Boyd’s *Sweet Caress* (2015) is a homage both to photography’s capacity to “stop time’s relentless motion and hold that . . . split second . . . thanks to the properties of a wonderful machine”, and to immigrée photographers, among whom his fictitious subject, the photographer Amory Clay, belongs. Lotte Meitner-Graf’s name may not be included in the novel’s final Acknowledgements of Clay’s progenitors. Yet the list of what might now be called Clay’s “influencers” includes a number from Lotte’s circle, including Ilse Bing, Gerti Deutsch, Trude Fleischmann, and Lisette Model.³²

A combination both of Lotte’s gender and her specialism in portraiture, by the latter part of the twentieth century regularly relegated as an archaic photographic realm, weighed against her work becoming better known. The dearth of solo exhibitions or publications, in Britain or abroad, make it subsequently harder to conserve, research, and evaluate that legacy.

In her native Austria, Lotte appears again to have been overlooked. She does not feature in such compendia as *Österreichische Fotografie seit 1945* by Margit Zuckriegl or *Fisch und Fleisch: Fotografie aus Österreich*

30 Robin Lenman, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55, 442.

31 Berkowitz, *Jews and Photography*, 136, 248.

32 William Boyd, *Sweet Caress: The Many Lives of Amory Clay* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), [451].

1945–1995.³³ However, the database at Vienna’s Albertina Museum lists some early exhibitions. This is all the more interesting since we do not have records of any exhibitions during her time in London, but the Albertina retains none of her images, not even gallery installation shots. The Austrian National Library does, though, and their archive should be an early port of call in further research on Lotte’s Viennese work. In 1998 the Vienna Kunsthalle, which holds a twentieth-century archive, showed *Übersee: Flucht und Emigration österreichischer Fotografen 1920–1940/ Exodus from Austria: Emigration of Austrian Photographers 1920–1940*, an exhibition which also merits more research. It was curated by Anna Auer who, with Tim Starl and Monika Faber (of the photography institute Bonartes), are all specialists in the field of exile studies.

It took until October 2012 for a selection of Lotte’s portraits to be exhibited in her native city, together with other Viennese women photographers, both predecessors and contemporaries. The Jewish Museum’s exhibition, the unfortunately named *Vienna’s Shooting Girls: Jewish Women Photographers from Vienna / Jüdische Fotografinnen aus Wien*, curated by Iris Meder and Andrea Winklbauer, showed eight of Lotte’s silver prints, from both her Viennese and London studios. Inside the entrance to a thematically enhanced presentation of work by twenty-five photographers was a floor map with miniature lights indicating where each portraitist’s photo-studio had been located. The lights flickered on in 1860, accumulated brightness exponentially until 1933, then began to flicker, dim, and die. Following the Anschluss in 1938, almost all were entirely extinguished.

In 2015 in Britain, a Lotte Meitner-Graf Archive was established on the initiative of Malcolm Farrer-Brown, Lotte’s former solicitor. He approached Philip and Anne Meitner, custodians of Lotte’s photographic legacy, and with their co-operation the photographer Anthony Barrett began to digitize and archive a vast photographic collection that had remained largely untouched in the family home ever since Lotte’s death in 1973.

In April 2016, the first British exhibition of Lotte’s portraits was held at Dimbola Lodge on the Isle of Wight, the home of the great British photo-portraitist Julia Margaret Cameron. Curated by Colin Ford CBE (former director of photography at the National Portrait Gallery and founder

³³ Margit Zuckriegl, ed., *Österreichische Fotografie seit 1945* (Salzburg: Universitätsverlag Anton Pustet, 1989); *Fisch und Fleisch: Photographie aus Österreich 1945–1995*, exh. cat. (Krems: Kunsthalle Krems, 1995).

director of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television), it was intended as an accolade that compared and contrasted the work of the two women portraitists. Then in January 2017, Colin Ford curated and introduced a further exhibition of Lotte's portraits for the Garrick Club in London. At the launch, the independent academic researcher John March delivered a paper on the contextual subject of immigrée photographers. By the evening's close, two introductions had thus been made, albeit to a select audience. One was to the work of a Viennese refugee studio portraitist; the other to her wider context within an unexpectedly broad community of fellow and (mostly) German-speaking exiled photographers.

March was additionally involved with the exhibition *Another Eye: Women Refugee Photographers in Britain after 1933*, launched at London's Four Corners Gallery on 27 February 2020. Obligated by the coronavirus outbreak to close within a month, it nonetheless attracted considerable critical and public attention, and was able to reopen later in the year for a longerrun. March was involved in preparing and introducing the exhibition, compiled by Carla Mitchell, Four Corners' senior curator, with assistance from the freelance curator Katy Barron. In October 2020, the month *Another Eye* closed, 300 participants attended an online weekend conference on the subject of this important but overlooked generation who brought not just "another eye" but a "continental eye" to the framing of British photography.

Seeking a contemporary opinion from the Austrian photographer and photography expert Kurt Kaindl, my enquiry after Lotte's reputation in her home country prompted one of his own. In an email of 8 March 2017 he asked for clarification: "Do you want to know . . . if she is at all represented in the art discourse in Austria?" The fact that Kaindl, a director of Fotohof, Austria's national photography centre, thought the question necessary suggests that there is a way to go before Lotte Meitner-Graf has indeed entered "the art discourse" and so the canon of photography where she deserves her rightful place. Yet the current revival of interest suggests that Lotte Meitner-Graf may well now be on her way to a fresh appreciation and a new position within that canon.