

→ Photography as Medium

The middle section of the exhibition space unites positions that engage conceptually and experimentally with the question of the image, of "the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" (Walter Benjamin) and which explore the relationship between analogue and digital photography, media mixes and media transfer.

Floris M. Neusüss in his colour body photographs, and **Thomas Florschütz**, who garners light tableaux from the reflection of light through his fingers, are preoccupied with the genesis of the "light image", when light meets a body.

Laura Bielau (*1981) photographs dancers – ambiguously – in the red light of the dark room, which is actually intended for developing photographs. While **Klaus Elle** mounts his *Weltbilder* (*World Images*) out of recycled images, **Claudia Angelmaier** (*1972) puts images that have lost their aura through being mass-produced for commercial purposes (postcards) back into their original art context. **Florian Merkel** undertakes a different examination of the medium by taking analogue photographs, mounting them digitally and presenting the photographic images as painting.

→ Photography of Objects and Spaces

A photograph is the two-dimensional result of a three-dimensional order plus a fourth dimension: time. This feature is what links the works presented in the cabinet of the exhibition room. Man leaves traces behind and is only present in the images through these traces.

In their most recent joint work *Die seltsamen Tage* (*The Strange Days*) **Ute** and **Werner Mahler** deliberately address the theme of "the detection of the unexpected", and

Ricarda Roggan (*1972) asks laconically about unknown stories by using chairs, tables and loungers to create an uninhabited spatial situation and capturing it in photographs. By contrast, **Michael Wesely's** (*1963) extremely long exposures render the passing of time visible, and **Hans-Christian Schink**, in his series entitled *1h*, captures the trace of the sun in the sky over a period of one hour, using the effect of a real solarisation.

The development of art photography in Eastern Germany since 1990 is characterized by continuity, in the sense of a continuation of existing technical and thematic approaches, combined with a considerable expansion of themes, subjects and technical processes, for example, the use of colour and the Polaroid. Among the younger photographers in particular, on the other hand, there is a wealth of new approaches towards an engagement with society and the artist's own position. Furthermore the omnipresent media changes force artists to take a stand on the theme of digitization, which frequently leads to a return to older technical processes. In all of this, it transpires that there is a critical cross-generational view of the medium itself as well of our changing society – both among Western and Eastern German art photographers.

The exhibition was made possible through the kind support of

INTO THE OPEN

Art Photography in Eastern Germany since 1990



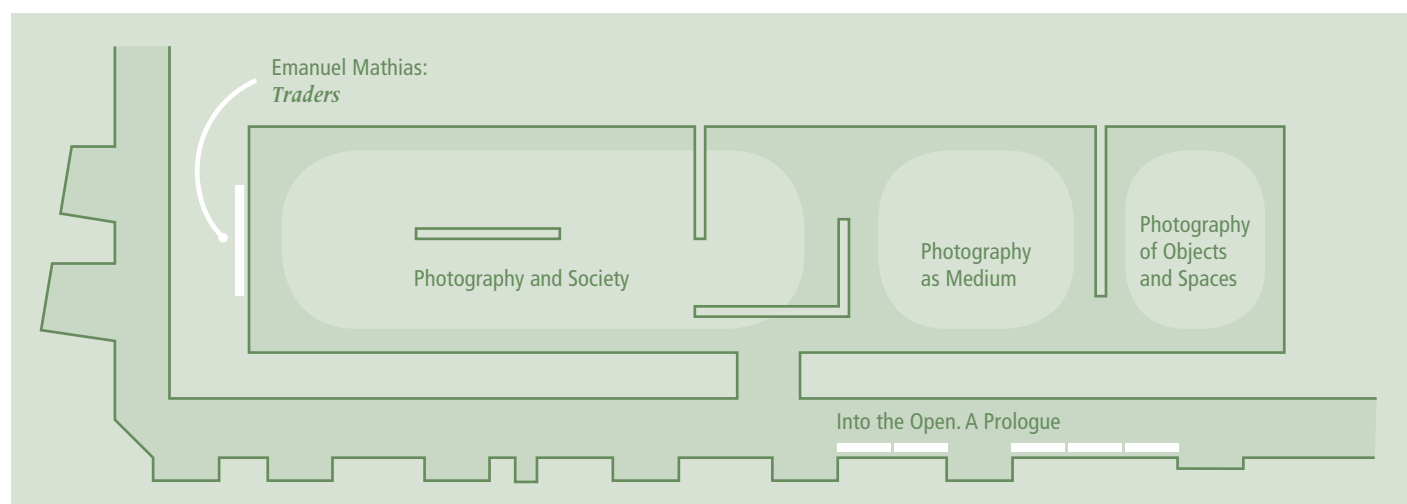
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INTO THE OPEN

Art Photography in Eastern Germany since 1990

Towards the end of the third decade after German reunification, this exhibition enquires about the continuities and new beginnings in art photography in the area that was formerly the GDR. It also asks how photographers from the old federal states have engaged artistically with the East of Germany and which themes drive the new artist generation.

By means of selected positions, *Into the Open* thus links up with the questions and positions already presented in the exhibition *Geschlossene Gesellschaft. Künstlerische Fotografie in der DDR 1994–1989* (The Shuttered Society. Art Photography in the GDR 1949–1989, Berlinische Galerie, 2012/13), albeit without seeing itself as a direct continuation of that show. As a kind of prologue to the exhibition, the presentation on the gallery in front of the exhibition room recalls that period by means of works from the museum holdings.



Into the Open. A Prologue (Gallery of Photographs)

Karl-Ludwig Lange (*1949) is an urban photographer. His interest however is not architecture, not individual buildings, but the fabric, the spatial and functional structure of the city. In 1967 he left his small West German town and went to West Berlin, where he photographically explored the topography of the city.

Ute Mahler (*1949) and **Werner Mahler** (*1950), like **Sibylle Bergemann** (1941–2010), **Rudolf Schäfer** (*1952) and **Hans-Christian Schink** (*1961), are among the East German photographers working in a social-documentary manner and preoccupied with the social conditions and relationships. In her long-term series called *Zusammen Leben*, Ute Mahler collected photographs of the most varied

of people living together in very different situations, either side by side or at cross purposes with one another. Her photographs are in-depth portraits, socio-psychological micro-studies. Werner Mahler worked for several years on a series called *Berka* about life in that village in Thuringia. He photographed the inhabitants' everyday activities, working environments and festivals and holidays over a period of time. The results are intense inside views marked by human closeness. Sibylle Bergemann also devoted herself over longer periods of time to themed series such as the relationship between women and their children – at home, travelling or at kindergarten. Another of her topics was the leisure-time behaviour evident in an old Berlin dance hall, *Clärchens Ballhaus*.

In addition to commissioned and commercial work, Schäfer has also repeatedly taken single and group portraits, above all of younger people. With the agreement of those portrayed, he cautiously staged Berlin Punks and the socialist Youth Brigade. In his early period as a photographer Schink engaged mainly with architecture and urban photography. When tasks set during his studies involved photographing people, he avoided static images and instead dynamized his photographs by means of motion blur.

Stefan Moses (1928–2018), the recently deceased grand seigneur of West German photography, was considered to be the inventor of the photo-essay and made a name for himself in the FRG as early as the 1960s with conceptual series. For his so-called *Spiegelbilder* (Mirror Images) he asked important people to photograph themselves in front of a large mirror using a delayed action shutter release, while he in turn photographed them.

Florian Merkel (*1961) organised ironic self-dramatizations, slipping into different roles and photographing his role play. He then heightened the resulting alienation of himself and his photographs using an old process to hand colour the images. The self-dramatizations of **Klaus Elle** (*1954) are very different. In his series *Erleuchtungen* (Enlightenments) he links light painting and a partial bleaching and toning of his images thereby heightening their artificiality. His themes are fundamental existential situations between birth and death.

Floris M. Neusüss (*1937) produced an extensive group of photomontages, *Traumbilder* (Dream Images), between 1958 and 1963. With this group of works, and inspired by Surrealism, he tried to overcome the direct representationality of photography by that medium's own means.

At the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig, the only art academy in the GDR with an academic photography department, a new spirit also asserted itself in the 1980s, enabling and promoting work that was freer and more experimental. **Erasmus Schröter** (*1956) linked infra-red and panorama photography, sometimes in multiple exposures, in his series of night-time situation portraits. The resulting images appear to be almost unreal; the night-time figures seem to glow from within.

In the last decade before the political turnabout, **Thomas Florschuetz** (*1957) was one of the so-called "lateral entrants" who in the early 1980s began to alter the East German photography scene and expand the possibilities of art photography. He photographed his own body and arranged the resulting fragmentary images into multi-part tableaux. His concern was and still is to overcome the individual image. In doing so he creates whole fabrics of images that enable surprising views never seen before. Ultimately his work is about "grasping graphically", as he put it.

Into the Open presents more than 400 photographs by 20 artists. It starts with Emanuel Mathias' projection *Traders* (2012) at the beginning of the gallery. All of the works have been taken since 1990 and are grouped in three thematic sections.

→ Photography and Society

Particularly in phases of social upheaval, photography as a medium can serve self-assurance, emancipation and engagement, to observe and highlight being, or else criticise, resist and reveal alternatives. Correspondingly, the works to the left of the entrance oscillate between quasi documentary idiom, analysis of signs of the times and the Zeitgeist, reactive and active (self-) dramatization and poetic authenticity by interacting with contemporary art forms.

Here, two artists in particular make up the inner arc of tension: **Sibylle Bergemann**, a leading exponent of socio-documentary photography in the GDR, and **Katharina**

Sieverding (*1944), the critical concept artist of West German photography. A high point in Bergemann's work is the Polaroid series called *RambaZamba* (Uproar), in which handicapped actors and actresses are captured in their individuality and their human dignity. While here people showing themselves to the public become visible in their full and unshielded subjectivity, Katharina Sieverding's work entitled *Deutschland wird deutscher* (Germany is becoming more German), disseminated in the form of a large poster in the public domain shortly after reunification, uses her photographic self-portraits to formulate a harsh inventory that is of shocking relevance today by.