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Press Kit
Berlin, 22.6.22

Sibylle Bergemann, Niederlande, 1986 © Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Looock Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann

**Town and Country and Dogs
Photographs 1966 – 2010**

24.6. – 10.10.22

**BERLINISCHE
GALERIE
MUSEUM OF
MODERN ART**



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Sibylle Bergemann, Birgit, Berlin 1984.
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Sibylle Bergemann

Town and Country and Dogs Photographs 1966–2010

24.6. – 10.10.22

Sibylle Bergemann (1941–2010) was one of Germany's best-known photographers. During her Berlin-based career lasting more than four decades, she produced an outstanding oeuvre ranging from urban, fashion and portrait photography to essay-style reportage. Recurring motifs are cities, women and – over and over again – dogs. A yearning for far-off places was a major factor in her photographic practice around the globe: Dakar, Moscow, New York and Paris were among her destinations.

With a selection of over 200 photographs, 30 of them so far unpublished, this exhibition places the work of Sibylle Bergemann in a personal context. Six chapters – “An Invisible Observer”, “Berlin”, “Women”, “Moscow, Paris, New York”, “The World in Colour” and “Back in Berlin” – provide a thematic and largely chronological guide to her oeuvre from 1966 until 2010. A further section, “Habitats”, displays her work alongside photographs by Arno Fischer, Ute Mahler, Roger Melis and Michael Weidt. These grant insights into Bergemann's private and social context, revealing her close ties with photographers from her circle in East Berlin but also with colleagues from abroad.

An invisible observer

Sibylle Bergemann already knew at the age of fifteen that she wanted to be a photographer, but in 1958 she began training for a clerical job. She went on to work for various companies as a secretary. From 1965 she was employed by the illustrated monthly “Das Magazin” in Berlin. Here she met the photographer Arno Fischer (1927–2011), her future companion, who was then teaching at the school of fine and applied arts in Weissensee. She joined a stimulating circle of artists and students of fashion and architecture. In the 1970s, professional routine and in-depth exchange with friends and colleagues such as Brigitte Voigt, Arno Fischer and Roger Melis strengthened her independent vision of photography.

Berlin

The city remained a fascination for many years. Picking out apparent opposites, she subtly endowed them with poetic beauty. In the GDR she contrasted the historical court building during demolition with the modern glass façade of the “Haus des Lehrers”. In reunited Germany she placed the dismantling of the Palace of the Republic, formerly a cultural symbol of the GDR, against the neo-baroque cathedral behind it. She photographed people in the city from the subjective perspective of an observer, siting them

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in their social milieu or in an urban habitat. As a general practice, Bergemann sought to defend her artistic autonomy and her personal style beyond the visual canon ordained by the Party, although without risking a publication ban. Her work was included in major exhibitions, such as the East German “Porträtfotoschau” (1971, 1981, 1986) and the 9th and 10th Art Exhibitions of the GDR (1982/83, 1987/88). In the 1970s, she published texts and images in the magazine “Fotografie”, an organ of the Central Photography Commission (ZKF). Here, in 1973, she described photography as “an attitude to people and their relationships, to things and their connections, that is perceived and communicated sensually”. Many of her photographs appeared in the more free-thinking periodicals such as “Das Magazin”, “Sonntag” and “Sibylle”.

One influence on Bergemann was French photography with proponents such as Eugène Atget and Édouard Boubat, and she made repeated efforts in the GDR to obtain a visa for France. She recognised her own people-centred ethos in “The Family of Man”, the travelling exhibition (1955, New York and Berlin) curated by Edward Steichen, which was accompanied by a catalogue. This confirmed to her that there was scope within cultural and public policy to establish photography without renouncing a belief in individual authorship.

For her best-known series “The Monument” (1975–1986) she devised unconventional visual strategies of her own. For eleven years, initially motivated by friendship and later commissioned by the East German Ministry of Culture, she visited the sculptor Ludwig Engelhardt (1924–2001) in his studio on Usedom. She witnessed the evolution of his statues for the Marx Engels Forum in Berlin, a process framed by ideology and debate. Ultimately Bergemann selected images that are at once unique and emblematic: fragmented bodies, geometric shapes and versatile materials. After the Berlin Wall came down, the floating figure of Friedrich Engels suspended from a crane was often used by the media to symbolise the end of the GDR.

Women

Images of women are crucial to Bergemann’s œuvre. Many are actors, artists, writers and fashion models, portrayed by the photographer from her own female perspective. The pose and expression of the sitter are sometimes humorous and defiant, sometimes relaxed and proud. She wanted to “bring reality into

the pictures,” she declared in 1994. A fleeting present haunts her fashion photographs, too. Choreographed studio photography, in any case not widespread in the GDR, did not appeal to her. She wanted situational fashion recorded in natural settings. In 1993, in an interview with the former “Sibylle” editor Dorothea Melis, she commented: “Weather and light are always a risk, but improvising often generates unexpectedly beautiful images.” Nevertheless, she was methodical about her conceptual preparation for these fashion series. During the sessions Bergemann directed and arranged her models. “[W]ith fashion, she says in 2007, “you have to know exactly what you want, and you have to tell people what it is.”

New departures

When Germany united, Bergemann re-affirmed her photographic autonomy. In October 1990 she teamed up with Harald Hauswald, Ute Mahler, Werner Mahler, Jens Röttsch, Thomas Sandberg and Harf Zimmermann to found “Ostkreuz”, the “agency for photographers”. Their aim was to remain independent in the commercial Western environment by supporting each other and managing their own image rights.

From the 1990s, Bergemann was also given commissions by periodicals like “Zeit-Magazin”, “Stern” and “The New York Times Magazine”, and from 1997 by “Geo”. When she travelled to Yemen in 1999 for her first “Geo” reportage, the impact on her work was enduring. Her career advanced by extending to colour, which was all but essential in international picture journalism. Bergemann enlarged her colour prints personally, spending hours in the darkroom: “otherwise they aren’t my pictures” (2007). Her missions for “Geo” up until 2010 included Ghana, Mali, Portugal and Senegal. In Dakar, in 2001, she photographed collections by the Senegalese fashion designer Oumou Sy.

“You cannot take good pictures by force, only take receipt of them,” acknowledged “Geo” journalist Johanna Wieland when describing Bergemann’s technique. For more than forty years, Bergemann travelled the world in pursuit of that quest. She almost always had at least one camera with her. Whether fashion, portraiture or reportage, on her own initiative or on commission – she followed her talent for translating the quintessence of her perceptions from observation into photography.

The project has been funded by the Förderverein Berlinische Galerie and organised in partnership with the Estate Sibylle Bergemann.



Catalogue

Edited by the Berlinische Galerie: Thomas Köhler and Katia Reich. With contributions by Susanne Altmann, Bertram Kaschek, Anne Pfautsch, Katia Reich, Jan Wenzel, Frieda von Wild and Lily von Wild.

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Podcast

An audio feature in four episodes about the photographer Sibylle Bergemann will be available in German at the exhibition and as a podcast on the Berlinische Galerie website and from Spotify:

bg.berlin/bergemann-podcast

Outreach events

Apart from curator tours, open tours at weekends and pre-bookable group tours, there will be free project days and tours for schools. The programme includes children's and family activities and accessible options for visitors with disabilities. These outreach events are organised in partnership with Jugend im Museum e.V and Museumsdienst Berlin.

More details at: berlinischegalerie.de/en/berlinische-galerie/education/

Press images

berlinischegalerie.de/en/press-release/sibylle-bergemann

Social Media

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Foto: Sibylle Bergemann, Selbstporträt, Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin 1986, © Estate Sibylle Bergemann / OSTKREUZ, Courtesy, Looock Galerie, Berlin



The Woman Behind the Pictures

A podcast feature for
the exhibition

The podcast feature “Sibylle Bergemann. The Woman Behind the Pictures” is currently being produced to accompany the exhibition “Sibylle Bergemann. Town and Country and Dogs. Photographs 1966-2010”. Four episodes will explore the life, work and personality of the photographer: Who was Sibylle Bergemann and what kind of a world did she live in? Culture journalist and writer Anne Waak talks to friends and people who shared her journey, people who were close to her, lived with her, loved her, partied or worked with her. And she visits the places that played an important role in her biography.

This audio-portrait traces Bergemann’s path from the start of her career in the 1960s in East Berlin, through the time when she took photographs for the GDR’s ground-breaking fashion and culture magazine “Sibylle”, to the radical political changes she experienced in her late forties. Until 2010, when Bergemann died at the age of 69.

The people interviewed are the photographer Ute Mahler, actor Meret Becker, picture editor and curator Ruth Eichhorn, Bergemann’s daughter Frieda von Wild and granddaughter Lily von Wild, fashion editor Claudia Engelbrecht, photographers Amélie Losier and Grischa Meyer and journalist Johanna Wieland.

Sibylle Bergemann herself is heard in original sound tracks from documentary films. And actors Angelica Domröse and Katharina Thalbach contribute passages from earlier publications about the photographer. Other sources include recent works such as Jutta Voigt’s memories “Stierblut-jahre” about the “bohemia of the East”.

On the website

An English transcript of all the episodes (which are in German) is available on the museum website via a subtitled video slideshow:

bg.berlin/en/bergemann-podcast

Also available there is previously unpublished archive material, which is provided in a variety of media formats: photographs, film sequences, documentary records and a playlist compiled for the exhibition by granddaughter Lily von Wild with some of Sibylle Bergemann’s favourite songs.

The podcast can be found on all the usual streaming platforms, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and Deezer.

About the author

Anne Waak (*1982) is a journalist and writer. She contributes articles about cultural and social issues,

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including to Zeit Online, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Monopol. She recently published the photography book “Aus einem Land vor unserer Zeit – Die Kinder von Kleinwelka” (with Janne Gärtner, berlinartbooks, 2022). “Sibylle Bergemann: The Woman Behind the Pictures” is her first podcast. Anne Waak lives in Berlin.

Episodes: content and release dates

- Episode 1: “Sibylle” (release on 22 June) looks at Sibylle Bergemann’s everyday life and describes how she began her career in photography and her work for the fashion magazine “Sibylle”: How a single mother and secretary in the East Berlin of the 1960s and 70s became an established photographer.
- Episode 2: “Oases” (release on 6 July) examines Bergemann’s social life. The photographer as a wife and mother, as a friend and as the host of numerous parties: Where she and her friends and colleagues ate, drank and debated.
- Episode 3: “Emma” (release on 20 July) delves deeper into Sibylle Bergemann’s photography: What were her working principles? What was it like to be photographed by Bergemann? What kind of a person was she on the job? What was it like to stand in front of her camera?
- Episode 4: “Travel” (release on 3 August) follows Bergemann’s travels, explaining how the photographer managed to visit (non-socialist) countries in the GDR years and asking what personal significance travelling had for Bergemann: How did she respond to other places – in GDR times and later, when the world literally opened up to her?

The people

- Meret Becker (*1969) is an actor and singer from Berlin. She met Sibylle Bergemann in 1991 when she was performing her chansons at the newly opened variety theatre Chamäleon. Bergemann frequently took photographs of Becker in the ensuing two decades.
- Ruth Eichhorn worked from 1979 in Paris, New York and Hamburg as a picture editor for the French and later German edition of “Geo”. She is a curator and has edited an illustrated book titled “Sibylle Bergemann – Unterwegs in der Welt” due to be published in November 2022 by Steidl Verlag.
- Claudia Engelbrecht (*1943) trained as an industrial dressmaker then at vocational college as a fashion

designer before studying fashion design at the art school in Weissensee, where she attended classes by Arno Fischer. From 1970 she worked as a fashion editor for the fashion and culture magazine “Sibylle”. Together with Sibylle Bergemann she produced numerous fashion sequences for the periodical.

- Amélie Losier (*1976) studied German first before taking a course in photography from 2001 at the private school “Fotografie am Schiffbauerdamm” founded by Sibylle Bergemann and Arno Fischer. Since 2003 Losier has been a freelance photographer.
- Ute Mahler (*1949) studied photography at the former College of Graphic Art and Book Illustration in Leipzig and then worked as a freelance photographer. From 1977 until 1995, like her friend of many years Sibylle Bergemann, she created many fashion and portrait series for “Sibylle”. Mahler is a founding member of the agency Ostkreuz.
- Grisca Meyer (*1950) studied applied graphics at the art school in Weissensee and has worked since 1983 as a freelance layout artist, stage designer and writer. From 2006 until 2022 he taught design at the Ostkreuz school. Meyer was a friend of Sibylle Bergemann. They worked together on two productions by Heiner Müller at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin.
- Johanna Wieland (*1958) worked as a reporter, editor and copywriter at the magazine “Geo”. From 2000 she undertook many research trips together with Sibylle Bergemann. The illustrated volume “Sibylle Bergemann – Unterwegs in der Welt” due to appear in November 2022 contains accompanying texts by Johanna Wieland.
- Frieda von Wild (*1962) is Sibylle Bergemann’s daughter. She trained first as a type compositor and then as a photographer. After emigrating to West Berlin in 1988 she worked as a fashion designer. Together with her daughter Lily von Wild she manages the Estate Sibylle Bergemann.
- Lily von Wild (*1994) is Sibylle Bergemann’s granddaughter. She studied art history in Berlin and is now pursuing her MA in Photography Studies and Research at the Folkwang University in Essen. Together with Frieda von Wild she manages the Estate Sibylle Bergemann.

Biography

Sibylle Bergemann

1941

Born in Berlin on 29 August as Sibylle Emma Luise Pohl. Grows up in Blankenfelde, south of Berlin.

1949

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) is founded on 7 October.

1958

Starts training for a clerical profession, then works for eight years as a secretary in various offices and factories; from 1965, works for the monthly "Das Magazin".

1961

On the night of 12–13 August, work begins on the construction of a wall through Berlin. People can no longer cross between sectors at the border points. Germany remains divided for twentyeight years. On 30 September Sibylle marries Wolfgang Bergemann, an import-export salesman; she divorces him in 1963.

1962

Birth of her daughter, Yvonne Sabine 'Frieda' Bergemann (now Frieda von Wild).

from 1966

Though not enrolled, Bergemann occasionally attends photography classes given by Arno Fischer at the School of Fine and Applied Arts in Weissensee (now weissensee kunsthochschule berlin).

from 1967

Bergemann's first commissions for "Sonntag", a weekly newspaper with a focus on art and literature, launch her freelance career as a photographer; she works closely with editor and journalist Jutta Voigt, with whom she maintains a productive, lifelong friendship.

1967–1975

Together with Arno Fischer, she runs the Club Junger Meister under the aegis of the Berlin County Photography Commission.

1967–1976

Moves with Arno Fischer and her daughter, Frieda, into a flat with one large and one small room at Hannoversche Strasse 2, in the East Berlin borough of Mitte.

1968

Exhibition in Berlin City Library with Arno Fischer, Elisabeth Meinke, Brigitte Voigt and Michael Weidt; Bergemann shows photographs from her series "Fenster" ('Windows'). First trip to Prague.

1969

Sibylle Bergemann, Arno Fischer, Elisabeth Meinke, Roger Melis, Brigitte Voigt and Michael Weidt forma loose alliance called Gruppe Direkt, so that they can take part in the international photography exhibition "Interklub 69" at the Kulturhaus in Potsdam. Over the New Year, she takes her first trip to Leningrad and Moscow, together with Arno Fischer.

1970

"Sonntag" (29, 1970) publishes a long article about the photographer Sibylle Bergemann.

1970–1995

Works as a fashion and portrait photographer for "Sibylle", the 'magazine for fashion and culture'; many of her articles are the fruit of close collaboration with editor Claudia Engelbrecht, giving rise to a spirited friendship.

1972

Joins the German League of Culture as a picture journalist.

1973

In addition to their flat on Hannoversche Strasse, Bergemann and Arno Fischer rent three rooms in Schloss Hoppenrade, a manor house in Brandenburg, for 37.40 marks a month (until 1979); the country seat becomes a meeting place for the arts community in East and West Germany.

1973

Trips to Sopot, Poland, and Kazan, Soviet Union.

1975–1986

Bergemann is commissioned by the East German Ministry of Culture to 'document the genesis of the Marx-Engels Monument', recording the process with her camera over a period of eleven years; the series "Das Denkmal" ('The Monument') will be one of her most important works.

1976–2004

Together with Arno Fischer and daughter Frieda, she moves into a spacious pre-war apartment at Schiffbauerdamm 12 in the borough of Mitte; like Hannoversche Strasse and Schloss Hoppenrade, 'Schiff'damm' becomes a base for a vibrant national and international

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community of photographers and for a school of photography.

1978

On 27 September she is admitted to the Association of Fine Artists (VBK) of the GDR as a photographer in the Applied Graphics section.

1979

Bergemann and Fischer move to Margaretenhof, a farmstead north-west of Berlin. The magazine "Fotografie" (3, 1979) devotes a tenpage article to Sibylle Bergemann to coincide with her solo exhibition in the photo gallery at Galerie Berlin (1978).
First trip to Paris.

1984

First trip to the United States. Her itinerary includes New York and Los Angeles.

1985

Sibylle Bergemann and Arno Fischer are married.

1986

First trip to The Netherlands.

1987

Publication of her first monographic catalogue, "Immer derselbe Himmel", to accompany her exhibition at the Johannes R. Becher Club in Berlin.
Trip to the festival 'Les Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles' in southern France.

1987–1990

Bergemann observes with her camera as Heiner Müller directs "Der Lohndrucker" (1988), "Hamlet" (1990) and "Die Hamletmaschine" (1990) at the Deutsches Theater.

1988

First trip to Italy.

1989

The Berlin Wall opens up during the night of 9–10 November.

1990

On 3 October the GDR accedes to the geographical territory governed by the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Germany is reunited. On 26 October Bergemann is issued with a press card by the Berlin Association of Journalists. Together with Harald Hauswald, Ute Mahler, Werner Mahler, Jens Röttsch, Thomas Sandberg and Harf Zimmermann, she establishes "Ostkreuz – Agentur der Fotografen".

from 1990

Bergemann receives commissions from newspapers and magazines such as "Geo", "Die Zeit", "Spiegel", "Stern" and "The New York Times Magazine".

1992

"Verwunderte Wirklichkeit" is her first monograph to appear in the reunited Germany.

from 1994

Member of the Academy of Arts, Berlin.

1994

Birth of her granddaughter, Lily Rose Marie von Wild.

from 1995

Bergemann receives various grants and awards, including a bursary from the Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg, in 1995, and from the Senate Department for Higher

Education, Research and Culture, Berlin, in 1997.

1996

Trip to Tokyo.

1997–2009

With her camera, Bergemann observes productions by Theater RambaZamba, including "Woyzeck(en) – nach dem Fragment von Büchner" (1997), "Medea – der tödliche Wettbewerb" (1997) and "Mongopolis – Fisch oder Ente" (2003). Beginning of a long-lasting partnership with "Geo", resulting by 2009 in twenty photographic suites ("Geo Special", "Geo Wissen"), many in collaboration with journalist Johanna Wieland.

1999

Her first extensive foreign reportage for "Geo", from Yemen.

2001

Another trip for Geo takes her to Dakar, Senegal.

2004

Before Bergemann and Fischer have to give up their home on Schiffbauerdamm so that the building can be sold and modernised, they use it to host an exhibition of their work: "Finissage – Farewell to Schiffbauerdamm"; henceforth their lives centre on Margaretenhof, and they also keep a small flat in the Prenzlauer Berg district of Berlin.

2005–2010

Bergemann teaches first at the Fotografie am Schiffbauerdamm school, later at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie.

2006

Working with the Museum for

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Photography in Braunschweig and the agency “Ostkreuz”, the Academy of Arts in Berlin devotes a major retrospective to Sibylle Bergemann; since 2009 this has been shown in thirty-three venues around the world as a touring exhibition for ifa, Germany’s institute for international cultural relations.

2010

Trips to Dakar and Venice. She begins selecting Polaroids for a book and carries on taking photographs until her death.

Sibylle Bergemann dies at the age of sixty-nine on 1 November in Margaretenhof.

Exhibition

texts

About the exhibition

Sibylle Bergemann (1941–2010) is one of Germany's best-known photographers. Her reputation was sealed by her series "The Monument" (1975–1986) and her fashion photography. Here visitors can explore the full diversity of her work and find out how she built on her earlier success in the GDR after Germany re-united.

Bergemann lived and worked in the central Berlin borough of Mitte and in the countryside of northern Brandenburg. The homes where she lived with Arno Fischer, her companion, were at once workplaces and retreats. They were frequently the scene of lively gatherings with friends and acquaintances. Talking to kindred spirits was the basis for developing independent photography. Her career was launched by publications in the weekly "Sonntag" (1967) and the fashion and culture magazine "Sibylle" (1970). In 1990, after the Wall opened, she and a few colleagues founded "Ostkreuz" as an independent agency for photographers. Commissions for magazines and newspapers like "Geo" and "Die Zeit" followed. Meanwhile she continued showing at exhibitions.

For Sibylle Bergemann photography was a form of artistic expression. Her approach to reality was subjective – and at once both serious and witty. In the course of more than four decades she created a distinctive universe of fashion photography, portraits and essay-style picture reportage. Recurring motifs are cities, women and – over and again – dogs.

This exhibition offers a retrospective and personal view of her work. Among more than 200 photographs on show here, 30 can be seen for the first time.

An Invisible Observer

At fifteen Sibylle Bergemann already knew that she wanted to be a photographer. First, however, she worked as a secretary for "Das Magazin". Here she met the photographer Arno Fischer (1927–2011), her future companion, who was then teaching in Berlin at the school of fine and applied arts in Weissensee. She joined a stimulating circle of artists and students of fashion and architecture. Bergemann began taking

photographs with a passion and set up a darkroom in her kitchen. From now on the camera was her "third eye". Best of all she liked taking pictures as an invisible observer, focusing on her motifs from a waiting position. Bergemann was interested in the people "coming home from work, the tourists strolling across the Alex", as she told an interviewer in 1987. Until the late 1970s she worked primarily in black-and-white. Her quest for a distinctive personal style brought great diversity to her early work. Between 1966 and 1974 alone Bergemann used up more than 2,000 reels of film in Berlin and on her travels.

Women

Women are a recurrent theme in Sibylle Bergemann's work. Often they are actors, artists, writers and models and she treats them with respect, as equals. Many sitters are friends or family members. Over the years she depicts actors Meret Becker, Angelica Domröse and Katharina Thalbach in different contexts. Many such photographs were published in the GDR in the periodicals "Sibylle", "Sonntag" and "Das Magazin".

Portrait or fashion – the boundaries are fluid in Bergemann's photography. From the mid-1970s she shows women in a variety of settings: modelling, dancing or waiting backstage for an entrance. Poses and facial expressions vary. They may come across as defiant or sensuous or inward-looking. In her skilfully composed images Bergemann tends to align the figures, usually solitary in a drab urban environment, from a central perspective. Gaze and gesture are thoughtfully coordinated.

Berlin

Urban environments, especially Berlin, fascinated Sibylle Bergemann from her youth. For decades she watched the city change: the building of the Wall (1961), then the division of Berlin until the Wall opened (1989) and Germany re-united (1990). Architecture and the design of public space were constantly influenced by changing political and urban planning debates.

The central borough of Mitte was part of the GDR until unification. For Bergemann it was a pivotal habitat, her base camp for photographic expeditions. Her pictures show people within the city's urban fabric, architectural façades, even the interior furnishings on housing estates built of prefabricated concrete. Berlin was at once the theme and the stage: on Alexanderplatz she consciously set up a contrast between the historicist Wilhelminian court building during demolition and the modern glass front of the "Haus des Lehrers". By pursuing her own distinctive

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style, Bergemann sought to defend her artistic autonomy beyond the visual canon ordained by the Party without risking a publication ban.

Moscow, Paris, New York

Curiosity and a travel bug motivated Sibylle Bergemann to explore faraway places. In the late 1960s she visited Moscow and Leningrad with Arno Fischer.

Once she had been admitted to the Association of Fine Artists (VBK) in 1978, her travel options improved. Now she could also apply for trips to the “West”, although she was never a member of the ruling party. The procedure was complicated: professional reasons had to be given and obtaining consent called for tenacity. One source of inspiration for Bergemann was French photography, with proponents such as Eugène Atget and Édouard Boubat. She applied three times to visit Paris; twice the VBK granted approval. In 1984 Bergemann and Fischer were given visas for a six-week stay in the United States. As permission was not easy to predict and the duration was restricted, these journeys were difficult to plan. Limited financial resources and a lack of convertible currency posed additional challenges.

In Moscow, Paris and New York she retained her usual focus on social encounters with people in the city, on everyday life and on oddities. She was keen to find out “what people do” and “how they treat each other” (Bergemann, 1987).

The World in Colour

After German unification Bergemann carried on working as an independent photographer. In October 1990 she teamed up with Harald Hauswald, Ute Mahler, Werner Mahler, Jens Röttsch, Thomas Sandberg and Harf Zimmermann in Berlin to found the photographers' agency “Ostkreuz”. Commissions began to come in from other countries.

In 1997 Bergemann received her first request from the magazine “Geo” for a reportage. Another nineteen followed. Now she stepped up her use of colour photography, the dominant medium in international picture journalism. She later professed: “I have learnt to see inside colour.” When Bergemann returned from Yemen in 1999 after her first trip abroad for “Geo”, she taught herself to make colour prints. She would spend hours in the darkroom, “otherwise they aren't my pictures”. The photographer loved the soft, earthy colours in the mudbrick town Shibam and wanted them to appear exactly as she had felt them. By 2010 her travels for “Geo” had taken her, among

other places, to Ghana, Mali, Portugal and Senegal. In Dakar she photographed collections by the Senegalese fashion designer Oumou Sy.

Back in Berlin

“I'm a city person,” confessed Sibylle Bergemann. She always came back to Berlin – from other countries and from the countryside. In over forty years she exchanged techniques and places, but her “view of things was always the same,” she noted as she looked back in 2009.

In the 2000s she portrayed many facets of Berlin: fashion in urban habitats, architecture in flux, women. She preferred black-and-white to colour. The motif was reason in itself: “When I photograph Berlin (...) it's black-and-white.” Between 2004 and 2009 she worked on her series “The City”. She caught the Palace of the Republic, once a symbol of East German cultural policy, in its state of demolition, positioning the pure steel pillar structure against the neo-baroque cathedral behind. Clärchens Ballhaus in Mitte, meanwhile, never altered. She chose its lugubrious backdrops and interiors both as a pictorial theme and as a setting for fashion photography: in the time-honoured dance venue, the hall of mirrors on the first floor was her stage to showcase models in colour.

Schloss Hoppenrade, Brandenburg 1973 – 1979

“Nights at the castle were full of laughter. The noise and the fun were magnified by the high rooms, which reverberated with the echoing centuries. Games were played with the absurdity of existence, the comedy of life, the mutability of the self.”

Jutta Voigt, Stierblutjahre, 2016

From 1973, alongside their flat in central Berlin, Bergemann and Fischer rented three rooms at Schloss Hoppenrade for 37.40 marks a month. They spent seven summers in the north of Brandenburg. The spacious upstairs rooms were a private retreat but also a meeting place for the photography and arts scene from East and West. Here photographers like Karol Kállay, Ute and Werner Mahler, Roger Melis, and Michael Weidt met West German colleagues such as Thomas Hoepker, Michael Ruetz or Eva Windmüller. There was much debating and partying. The visitors often dressed up, helping themselves to Bergemann's curious trove of costumes. The manor house and surrounding park also served

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the photographers as a picturesque backdrop—in 1974, for example, for images of Katharina Thalbach included in an iconic fashion series by Bergemann for the magazine “Sibylle”.

Schiffbauerdamm 12, Berlin 1976 – 2004

“At Fischer/Bergemann’s, people mostly wore black and looked melancholy. There were mett rolls with cheese gratin and doppelkorn from Lichtenberg, the schnapps with the yellow label.”

Jutta Voigt, Fischer. Bergemann. Schiffbauerdamm 12. 1040 Berlin, 2004

The ageing 160-square-metre flat in East Berlin lay indirectly opposite the heavily guarded Friedrich-strasse checkpoint. Trains from this station also travelled “west”. Illegal crossings and attempted escapes were prevented by force. Bergemann often found the situation oppressive. Bergemann / Fischer lived here on the bank of the Spree for 28 years until the building was modernised in 2004. With antiquities, travel souvenirs and warm hospitality, they made their home a creative, lively venue. The apartment was a hub for illustrious names from the world of photography and other arts in East and West. Photography was debated on countless evenings, not least by Christian Borchert, Ute and Werner Mahler, Thea and Roger Melis, and international photographers such as Ellen Auerbach, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank and Josef Koudelka. A private photography school, the “Fotoschule am Schiffbauerdamm” (FAS), was founded here in 2001. The farewell to “Schiff’damm” in 2004 was the stuff of legends: a five-day “finissage”, with works by both photographers on display, attracted about 3,000 visitors.

Margaretenhof, Brandenburg from 1979, 2004 – 2010

“Wild shrubbery, tender warmth, a large dog sitting by the sofa with a slice of cherry cake. An idyll threatened by the age of transience.”

Jutta Voigt, Die Polaroids, 2012

In 1979 the couple found a modern farmstead north of Berlin. The woods, meadows and fields around Margaretenhof became motifs in Bergemann’s photographs. The garden evolved over the years into an enchanted oasis. Countless polaroids were taken here on the SX-70 instant camera. Rollicking parties were held in the barn. Fashion artists “chic, charmant

und dauerhaft” performed here in 1982 for Bergemann’s 41st birthday. In on the act were the enfants terribles of Prenzlauer Berg, including daughter Frieda, Sven Marquardt and Robert Paris. The house in Brandenburg became the principal family home from 2004, after the move from Schiffbauerdamm. Bergemann / Fischer continued to teach photography from their new base. Accompanied by all the “critters”—aviary, dogs and a cow—they gradually withdrew to Margaretenhof.

Hannoversche Strasse 2, Berlin 1967 – 1976

“Photography stood for everything, a photo was not just a photo, a photo was a world in itself. Every picture was subjected to rigorous critique, praised enthusiastically or scanned meticulously for flaws. Photography was a mission, not a business, money was not a motive.”

Jutta Voigt, Sibylle Bergemann, 2016

Sibylle Bergemann moved into a flat at no. 2, Hannoversche Strasse—one big room and one small—with Arno Fischer and daughter Frieda. It soon became a meeting place for a “band of photography junkies” (Jutta Voigt, 1997). Here on the second floor of a pre-war building with a view over the backyard she took pictures of windows and early portraits of young Frieda. Half of the kitchen became the darkroom. Friends and guests assembled in the living room. “In that flat we had visitors every evening for ten years,” recalled Bergemann. Talking mynah Jakob and blackbird Else flew about at will and were, of course, included.

BG

Quotes

Sibylle Bergemann

“It was a stroke of luck for me when I met editor Jutta Voigt in 1967. She was the one who gave me my first commission. And all those years that I worked for Sonntag it was on things that I would have liked to do myself if it had been up to me and that really were close to my heart. Sonntag had its own style for addressing its subjects, including many that in those days weren't so much at the centre of everyone's attention. They were very keen on literary reportage, and that more or less reflected my photographic gaze.”

Bildende Kunst, Interview with Gruppe DIREKT, 1984

“I want to know what people are doing, how they respond to each other, the things they surround themselves with. It reveals a lot about their social relations, how they integrate into society.”

Berliner Zeitung am Abend, September 1987

“I see fashion photography as a form of artistic expression. But the fashion is the key to ideas and motifs. If the clothes don't mean anything to me, I won't come up with any pictures.”

“We studied the whole selection of Western journals with great interest, but then something of our own grew from it. They are pictures that express different values and a different experience of life.”

Sibylle - Modefotografie aus drei Jahrzehnten DDR, Interview with Dorothea Melis, 1998

“As I didn't dare to photograph the people, I photographed windows. If you look at them, you have an idea about the people living behind them: Do I see frills? Or no net curtains at all? Windows are people too. That was the idea.”

Die DDR nicht schick, aber kreativ, Freitag, 24 February 2009

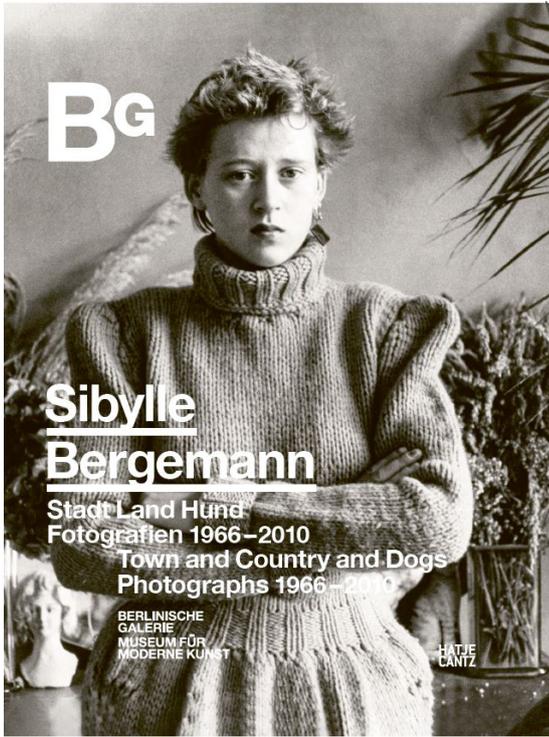
“Nothing has changed about the way I take photographs. Perhaps the themes and techniques have altered now and then. But my take on things has always been the same. And still is.”

Profifoto, September 2009

“Yes, that was it, everyone always thought I started taking photographs because I met Arno Fischer. But it was the other way round: I wanted to take photographs so I went to him.”

Doppelkopf, Hr2 Kultur, 3 August 2010

BG



Exhibition catalogue

**Sibylle Bergemann
Town and Country and Dogs
Photographs 1966 – 2010**

In a career spanning more than four decades, Berlin-born Sibylle Bergemann created an extraordinary oeuvre ranging from fashion and portrait photographs to literary reportages and atmospheric series—her focus remaining always on people. In the GDR, Bergemann worked both freelance as well as continuously for various art and culture magazines. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, she co-founded the self-administered photographer's agency "Ostkreuz", and worked for leading German as well as international magazines such as "Geo", "Die Zeit", "Stern" or "New York Times Magazine". The catalogue accompanying the exhibition at Berlinische Galerie approaches the unique visual universe of one of Germany's most famous photographers on several narrative levels. It includes more than 200 photographs from the museum's own collection as well as from the photographer's estate, and shows selected images from her early work for the first time.

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Thomas Köhler and Katia Reich

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Mon 27.6., 11.+25.7., 8.8., 12.+26.9., 10.10., 2 pm
Mon 22.8., 2 pm (with translation into DGS)

Included in museum's admission
Registration on-site, limited capacities

Public guided tours in English

Mon 4.7., 5.9., 3.10., 3 pm
Every Sat 4:15 pm

Included in museum's admission
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Group Tours

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Tours can also be booked in German and French

Booking and further information
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More information

berlinischegalerie.de/en/education

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Press images

**Sibylle Bergemann
Town and Country and Dogs
Photographs 1966 – 2010**



Sibylle Bergemann, Selbstporträt, Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin 1986
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Unter den Linden, Berlin 1968
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ



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Sibylle Bergemann, Nina und Eva Maria Hagen, Berlin 1976
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Sibylle Bergemann, Clärchens Ballhaus, Berlin 1976
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Sibylle Bergemann, Caravan-Ausstellung, Berlin 1980
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Sibylle Bergemann, P2, 1981
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ



Sibylle Bergemann, Fenster, Berlin, undatiert
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Marisa und Liane, Sellin 1981
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ



Sibylle Bergemann, Frieda, Berlin 1982
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ

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Sibylle Bergemann, Birgit, Berlin 1984
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, New York, 1984
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Das Denkmal, Gummlin, Usedom, Mai 1984
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Das Denkmal, Berlin, Februar 1986
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Sibylle Bergemann, Niederlande, 1986
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Sibylle Bergemann, Bernauer Straße, Berlin 1990
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



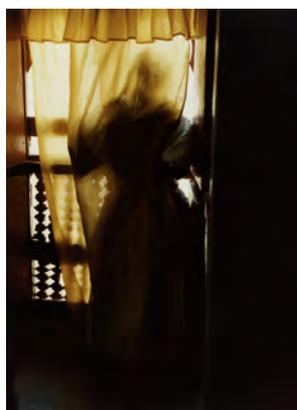
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© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Meret Becker, Berlin 1998
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Zussa, Berlin 1999
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Sibylle Bergemann, Shibam, Jemen 1999
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Dakar, Senegal 2001
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Dakar, Senegal 2001
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Look Galerie, Berlin



Sibylle Bergemann, Ana Moura, Fadosängerin, Lissabon 2006
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Sibylle Bergemann, Lily, Berlin 2009
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Sibylle Bergemann, Bassé, Île de Gorée, Senegal 2010
© Estate Sibylle Bergemann/OSTKREUZ. Courtesy Looock Galerie, Berlin



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