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Berlin, 12 May 2017

Faraway Focus Photographers Go Travelling (1880–2015) 19.05–11.09.2017

An exhibition with 17 positions



Unbekannter Fotograf,
Japan, 1875-1910,
© Urheberrechte am Werk erloschen

Ever since its invention some 170 years ago, photography has exerted a crucial influence on the way we see the world. As tourism emerged in the mid-19th century, so too did the first travel photographers. The Prologue to the exhibition “Faraway Focus” displays **historical travel photography** from the Mediterranean and Japan. The spectrum ranges from enactments of everyday life to realistic depictions of landscapes and buildings. These pictures not only reinforced clichés and stereotypes about the exotic Other, but also moulded a Eurocentric view of as yet alien regions.



Robert Petschow,
Viadukt von Eglisau in der Schweiz in der
Morgensonne, um 1930,
© Urheberrechte am Werk erloschen

Robert Petschow (1888–1945) criss-crossed Germany’s entire territory between 1920 and 1939 in a balloon, an airship and later an aeroplane, compiling an archive of 30,000 negatives and making his name as the best-known German aerial photographer of the inter-war period. It is hardly surprising that aerial photography also began to feature in international exhibitions from the late 1920s, for it echoes the uncanny perspectives and visual vocabulary of “New Photography”: the top-down view and the dissolution of space.



Erich Salomon,
Unterwegs in den USA, 1930/1932,
© Urheberrechte am Werk erloschen, Repro: Anja-
Elisabeth Witte



Tim N. Gidal,
Ohne Titel, aus der Serie: Reise nach Berlin, 1931,
Neuvergrößerung, 1983,
© The Israel Museum, Jerusalem



Marianne Breslauer,
Djemila, Jerusalem, 1931,
© Marianne Breslauer / Fotostiftung Schweiz

Erich Salomon (1886–1944) first visited the United States in 1930. By this time he was already celebrated as *the* photographer of political society in Europe. Salomon's surprising pictures from North America demonstrate that, although he was leaving behind Europe's narrow borders and a familiar working environment, he was under no pressure to cling to tried and tested techniques. Instead of relying on atmospheric depictions of events, he responded to his new surroundings with a sober, documentary style.

Tim Gidal (1909–1996) began taking photos in 1929 to finance his studies. After enrolling at university in his home town of Munich, he went to live in Berlin, frequently commuting by train – the state of the art in mass transport at the time. How could a young photo-reporter resist the temptation to narrate his experience of the journey in pictures? The series of 23 motifs, hitherto entirely unpublished, presents images of setting off, of physical displacement and of arriving.

The travels that took **Marianne Breslauer** (1909–2001) beyond the frontiers of Europe in the summer of 1931 transformed the way she saw her role as a photographer. She went to Jerusalem for a schoolfriend's wedding and then with her hosts to Bethlehem, Hebron, the Dead Sea and Alexandria. The photographs taken during her two-month tour of the Middle East have none of the hallmarks of reportage and nor are they a travel log – these are premeditated snapshots. Two years later, the essays and travel descriptions of Ernest Hemingway and Kurt Tucholsky prompted Breslauer and her friend, the writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach, to embark on a journey through Spain together.



Evelyn Richter, Minsk, 1957,
© Evelyn Richter Archiv der Ostdeutschen
Sparkassenstiftung im Museum der bildenden
Künste Leipzig / VG BILD-KUNST Bonn, 2017

A trip to Moscow for the World Youth Games in 1957 brought the breakthrough in the photographic work of **Evelyn Richter** (*1930), radically changing her visual idiom. The trigger – apart from a change of setting – was a technical defect which, although unforeseeable, exerted a decisive influence on her future: when her medium-format camera refused to function, switching to a handy small-format alternative opened the door to a new technique, and she began to photograph life on the streets.



Thomas Hoepker,
Werbung für ein Mittel gegen Sodbrennen an einem
Bus, New York, 1963, © Thomas Hoepker / Magnum
Photos / Agentur Focus

In 1963 **Thomas Hoepker** (*1936) was dispatched to the United States by *Kristall*, then a leading Hamburg-based magazine, on a three-month mission with journalist Rolf Winkler to cross from the East to the West Coast and back. The journey was designed to provide insights into a country whose media perception was still dominated by life in the big cities. His pictures presented a critique of the American Way of Life.



Hans Pieler / Wolf Lützen,
aus der Serie „Transit Berlin-Hamburg“, 1984,
© Wolf Lützen und Dr. Johan Filip Rindler

In October 1984, the West Berliners **Hans Pieler** (1951–2012) and **Wolf Lützen** (*1946) drove a minibus through East Germany on the transit route from Hamburg to West Berlin and back. The series *Transit* describes the bizarre atmosphere of a West German road through the East German state, telling a tale about the relationship between the two countries. Circumstances were tricky for the two photographers on the heavily guarded streets of the GDR: tough border controls, dire warnings not to leave the prescribed route and, of course, a strict ban on photography.



Ulrich Wüst
Güstrow, aus der Serie: Kopfreisen und Irrfahrten,
1986, © Ulrich Wüst

Like all East Germans, **Ulrich Wüst** (*1949) was affected by the government restrictions that made it practically impossible for him to travel to the West until the late 1980s. To cope with an insistent yearning for foreign parts, Wüst resorted to an unusual form of sublimation in his series *Mind Travel*. He scanned his East German surroundings for images to match his ideas of a distant world, and in the course of this exercise he found the Aegean in Mecklenburg and Tuscany in Thuringia. When the Wall fell, Wüst really did reach this other world. The result was his series *Meandering*, his sober demonstration that reality and illusion are not only irreconcilable, but that everyday reality, paradoxically, reminded him of the German Democratic Republic.



Kurt Buchwald,
Ohne Titel, aus der Serie: Cala San Vicente,
Mallorca, 1991,
© VG BILD-KUNST Bonn, 2017

Kurt Buchwald's (*1953) series *Cala Sant Vicente* from 1991 offers views of azure seas, cliffs and Mediterranean vegetation. The disruptive thing about these photographs shot from a central perspective is that almost the entire picture space is filled by a red rectangle. It impairs our vision, and so we have to guess at the motif from the hints we can see around the edges. Like a stop sign, the shape denies us a sight of these natural glories, deflecting our gaze and confronting us with the need to (re)construct our own imaginings about the location.



Karl von Westerholt,
aus der Serie: Die Welt in Auszügen, Teil III, (Die
Reisen des Käpt'n Brass), 1995-1999,
© Karl v. Westerholt

Karl von Westerholt (*1963) spent five years during the 1990s travelling all around the world to photograph objects and places established as landmark sights by modern mass tourism and engraved within the collective memory. The *Travels of Captain Brass*, the title chosen for Part III of *The World in Excerpts*, not only raises issues about perception associated with photography as a medium of representation, but also parodies those globetrotting tourists who travel the world with their photographs like collectors and believe they have understood life in foreign parts.



Max Baumann,
Sicht, aus der Serie: Sprachlos, 1998,
© Max Baumann

In 1998, after the Soviet Union collapsed, **Max Baumann** (*1961) was awarded the Berlin Senate's six-month fellowship for art photography in Moscow. Instead of focussing on the long-range reproduction of reality typical of traditional urban photography, his narrow frame hones in on details, and these introduce a metaphorical element into his photographs. The series *speechless* thus becomes a reflection on the socialist utopia which has degenerated in this historical location into an apparently stifling, almost fantastical nightmare.



Tobias Zielony,
Two Boys, aus der Serie: Trona - Armpit of America,
2008, © Tobias Zielony



Wolfgang Tillmans,
JAL 1997,
© Wolfgang Tillmans



Heidi Specker,
E.U.R. Campo Totale C, aus der Serie: TERMINI,
2010,
© VG BILD-KUNST Bonn, 2017

Tobias Zielony (*1973) concluded while studying in the British town of Newport that any documentary photography worthy of its day would have to respond to the influence of contemporary global media if it hoped to make any credible statements about the current state of the world. He devised a visual idiom which inevitably blurs the boundaries between documentation and fiction, deliberately discarding the self-contained narrative structure typical of photojournalism. Zielony reached a broader audience after his trip to *Trona* in 2008. The photographs of young people living in an almost abandoned mining community in the Californian desert reveal a combination of authorial arrangement and self-styling by the protagonists themselves.

After **Wolfgang Tillmans** (*1968) had spent almost ten years working primarily in his studio on abstract, media-reflexive photographs, he decided in the late 2010s to venture outside again and confront the world and its people directly. And so, on his travels between 2009 and 2012, he responded with a fresh and untrained eye to whatever he could read from the surface of the things he experienced. This was the true purpose: probing behind the façades of recurring objects to render visible what is significant and typical of our times. Photographs of famous or popular sights thus find themselves alongside others depicting banal locations in remote corners of the world. Nothing was of itself unworthy of being photographed.

From 2010 to 2011 **Heidi Specker** (*1962) spent a sought-after residency at the Deutsche Akademie Rom Villa Massimo. Soon after her arrival, she visited the Giorgio de Chirico Museum. Fascinated by the unfamiliar opulence and magnetism of these rooms, she resolved to devote her stay to exploring recent Italian art. Here too, as so often in the urban landscape of Rome, she was struck by the combination of classical and modern. The pictures she took in the district of Esposizione Universale di Roma and in the town of Sabaudia, both created under Mussolini in the 1930s, sought answers to why the Italians, unlike the Germans, had managed to make their peace with architecture from the fascist period.



Hans Christian Schink,
Sichigahama, Shobudahama, Miyagi Prefecture,
2012,
© Hans-Christian Schink

In spring 2012, **Hans-Christian Schink** (*1961) visited Villa Kamogawa in Kyoto on a three-month residency from the Goethe Institute. Exactly one year after the catastrophe, he wanted to observe the local situation for himself. His photographs take respectful stock of the catastrophe. The longer one looks, the more indications emerge that something out of the ordinary has happened here. These landscape photographs shot with a long focus resist time with their absence of people and their cloudless grey skies.



Sven Johne,
20. Oktober 2012, 00:03 Uhr, Zakyntos-Stadt,
Zakyntos, aus der Serie: Griechenland-Zyklus,
© VG BILD-KUNST Bonn, 2017

For his *Greece Series*, **Sven Johne** (*1976) returned repeatedly to the country from June until October 2012, hunting for clues on which to base his pictures of the crisis. The star-studded night sky became a connecting motif, recorded in tourist destinations on the mainland and the Greek Islands. His works take their cue from true stories in newspaper articles about people and milieus on the margins of society and tales of failure. These he distils into short stories, combining these texts with photographs of the starry sky, and this lends his photographs a social and political dimension.