

Biennale

Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie E4,6 68159 Mannheim

Press Release

7 September 2017, Mannheim/Ludwigshafen/Heidelberg, Germany

The first *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie* officially opens on Friday, 8 September 2017, in Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, and Heidelberg. The title *Farewell Photography* promises a departure from the photography we have been familiar with in the past. The team of six curators presents eight large-scale exhibitions featuring works by more than ninety international artists. These exhibitions, which will run from 9 September to 5 November 2017, thematize the changing forms of photography, political attitudes, the new public profile of the private, and, equally importantly, a new and different language of photography.

Duration: 9 September – 5 November 2017, **Opening:** 8 September 2017, 7pm, Port25

+++++ The *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie* is being staged for the first time in 2017 as the successor to the *Fotofestival Mannheim-Ludwigshafen-Heidelberg*. Complementing the backing of the three cities and BASF SE as the biennale's premium sponsor, the German Federal Cultural Foundation has also contributed to the launch of the new biennale as an additional main sponsor. +++++

The **opening ceremonies for the first *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie***, which take place on Friday evening at 7pm at Port25 – Raum für Gegenwartskunst in Mannheim, will feature speeches by Sabine Schirra, Chairwoman of the *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie*, Theresia Bauer, Minister for Sciences, Research, and the Arts in Baden-Württemberg, Dr Peter Kurz, Lord Mayor of the City of Mannheim, and the biennale's curators Florian Ebner and Christin Müller, as well as Fabian Knierim, Boaz Levin, Kerstin Meincke, and Kathrin Schönegg. Many of the exhibiting artists will also be in attendance.

The **eight exhibitions in seven regional venues and the accompanying projects in public space** present contemporary works in conjunction with historical images. Art photographs are shown alongside discoveries from the regional archives in Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, and Heidelberg. These include private archives, BASF's company archive, the glass plate archive of the Kunsthalle Mannheim, and that of the Heidelberg State Observatory.

Curators' Statement 2017: *"Farewell Photography explores the changing manifestations, material forms, functions, and usages of photography. We examine how the various breaks with classical photography are influencing social, journalistic, and artistic practices, and how the digital storage of data is also changing the nature of the medium: instead of recording, we are increasingly seeing the processing and generation of technical images. Interventionist and performative methods of working have long been a part of artistic photography. The focus at the biennale is not on the major auteur photographers or on the icons of documentary and journalistic photography. Instead, other, new ways of working can be seen, sceptical and critical views, along with some rather playful approaches. There are images by authors who have been forgotten or are (still) unknown, drawn from family archives and the realms of science, medicine, and criminology. Farewell Photography is a survey, a process of taking stock, far removed from any nostalgia, and sustained by a great fondness for photography. The upheaval the medium is undergoing is also an opportunity to examine it with a critical eye and to radically redefine it."*

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Sabine Schirra, Vice-Chairwoman of the Biennale: *“The Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie stands for diversity, so it is a happy stroke of fortune that, in the wake of reconfiguration, the curators responsible for determining the content of the biennale are working this year as a collective. This diversity creates the framework for reflecting on a medium that has an almost unparalleled influence on our society. The variety of forms that photography can take is reflected in the variety of the venues in which it is being presented. Not only do the three participating cities each have their own particular character, but the exhibition venues, which agree to be part of our experiment every two years and generously make their spaces available, also have a distinct and specific individual image.*

Our aim was to connect the biennale’s international aspirations even more closely with the region and thus create many different points of contact, allowing a broad audience to identify with the event. The success of this plan is predicated on the commissioning of works that are produced here in the area and the extension of the curatorial concept into the public space. Together with our team of curators, we want to capitalize on this unfolding.”

Farewell Photography consists of eight different exhibitions: the **Wilhelm-Hack Museum** in Ludwigshafen is hosting ***How Your Camera Works***, curated by Kathrin Schöneegg, which considers points of rupture in the transition from analogue to digital photography. The exhibition explores the myths and material of photography. The tour through the exhibits is modelled on a photographic handbook and leads through different stages in the process of photographic production: from the exposure and recording of the image through the development and further processing of the result to the different formats used for the final photograph.

Another exhibition, entitled ***Leaving the Still Image***, curated by Christin Müller and showing at the same location, shows various forms of photographic experimentation. It brings together works that question the visual and physical rules of the medium. The artists outwit the photographic material with their own individual methods or with optical illusions and suggest an intense process of reflection on our visual culture.

In the exhibition ***Who Are You? That’s You!***, also curated by Christin Müller and on display at the **Prinzhorn Collection** in Heidelberg, historical portrait photos drawn from the realm of clinical psychiatry are set alongside artistic images. It includes photographs that were taken against the will of their subjects, images that play with the format or conjure up stereotypes, and images that critically examine and analyse the portrait.

Global Players, curated by Kerstin Meincke at the **Kunstverein Ludwigshafen**, includes photos from private and public archives as well as other positions by contemporary artists. It examines the role of photography in the nexus of economics and migration, viewing the medium as an essential multiplier in all the different transfers of people and values that are tied in with this nexus and regarding it as a real “global player”.

The **Heidelberger Kunstverein** is hosting the exhibition ***Resisting Images***—curated by Boaz Levin—which thematizes the political and social potential of photography. The works and artefacts on display show how images are both a means of resistance and an instrument deployed by the very authorities they set out to oppose.

The exhibition ***Other Testimonies***, curated by Florian Ebner and showing at the **Zephyr – Raum für Fotografie in the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museums** in Mannheim, explores the various forms that can be employed to reflect images of events in a different light. Four artistic positions use a variety of themes—including modern-day stories of refugees, the crisis in Europe, and a retrospective look at the German Autumn—to examine the production of journalistic work and present alternatives to the way events are reported in the media.

The exhibition ***No Image Is an Island***, assembled by Fabian Knierim at **Port25 – Raum für Gegenwartskunst** in Mannheim, focuses on how digital images circulate in multiple ways. Sharing images online is *the* photographic usage of the moment. The exhibition examines the contradictory motivations that people have for sharing and asks questions about the aesthetic and social conventions that evolve through sharing, about the relationship between public and

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private, the individual and the community, and about strategies for regulating the flow of pictures.

The huge, publicly accessible installation ***Ghost Stories*** by Austrian photographer Arno Gisinger (* 1964) can be seen at the **Wasserturm in Mannheim** from Tuesdays to Sundays. For the duration of the biennale Gisinger is transforming the Wasserturm into a panoptic canvas. The glass plate archive, which includes almost eight thousand images, is the starting point for this new work. Gisinger reflects on historical exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Mannheim and sets them in relationship to one another in a three-part projection. Gisinger thus initiates a visual debate rendered in images on (art) history and the role of photography as a storage medium. The work is supported by the Kunsthalle Mannheim and the company MVV Energie, which owns the Wasserturm. (Please note that the venue will be closed on Sunday, 10 September, Tuesday, 12 September, and Wednesday, 3 October.

Another focus is on **commissiioned works** for the public space. These were awarded to artists whose work is a response to local social conditions and milieux. *Farewell Photography* includes three outdoor projects: Marc Lee exhibits his *German Federal Election – Warring Opinions on Social Media* at the Thalia bookstore on Paradeplatz in Mannheim; Andreas Langfeld will mount his project *Newsroom* at the C-HUB creative industries centre in Mannheim and at the S-Bahnhof Ludwigshafen, where Adrian Sauer's poster installation *Glossary* is also on display.

The biennale is offering numerous **educational formats**. These begin right away on the opening weekend and include artist talks, the opening of the Mannheim Wasserturm during the evening (9 September, 10–11pm), and a teacher's night. Over the course of the biennale, there will also be regular guided tours that can be readily reserved (public tours, curator tours, and city tours) and workshops (also offered in cooperation with OFF//FOTO)—the schedule and booking information can be found at www.biennalefotografie.de. The extensive **website** provides public access to the debates and outcomes relating to the biennale exhibition.

The biennale is also breaking new ground with its admission price policy. For the first time visitors to the seven exhibition venues can decide for themselves how much they should pay. The **Pay What You Want (PWYW)** principle opens the biennale to a broad cross-section of the public and dismantles access barriers. The biennale itself recommends a payment of 7 euro per venue. The admission fee is submitted at specially installed pay stations when exiting the venue.

A **catalogue** (256 pages), which is published in conjunction with the biennale by the Walther König publishing house in Cologne, will be available for 27 euros at all participating venues. With texts by Léa Bismuth, Jörg Colbert, Aria Dean, Michel Frizot, Valentin Groebner, Tom Holert, Rosa Menkman, David Levi Strauss, Sean O'Toole, and the curators of the biennale. Edited by Florian Ebner, Christin Müller, and Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie e.V.

Participating institutions at the *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie 2017*: Heidelberger Kunstverein, Kunsthalle Mannheim/exhibition at the Wasserturm, Kunstverein Ludwigshafen (Ludwigshafen), Port25 – Raum für Gegenwartskunst (Mannheim), Prinzhorn Collection (Heidelberg), Wilhelm-Hack Museum (Ludwigshafen), Zephyr – Raum für Fotografie in the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museums in Mannheim

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History: The *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie*, the successor event to the Fotofestival Mannheim-Ludwigshafen-Heidelberg, is taking place for the first time in 2017. Building on the festival's first edition in 2005, the biennale has now established itself as one of Germany's most important curated photographic events, drawing people from around the world. The biennale will continue to be characterized by the ideas of its guest curators, whose line-up changes every two years—working in dialogue with invited artists, the metropolitan area, the three cities hosting the event, and local, national, and international visitors, the curators consistently address new aspects of contemporary photography. The most important exhibition venues in the three cities are involved in staging the festival: their specific profile is integrated in each case into the exhibition concept. The last festival had more than 35,000 visitors. Making the Biennale a reality requires the close collaboration of organizers and sponsors of cultural events throughout the metropolitan area. The biennale connects the three cities with one another, bringing together their cultural institutions in a regional dialogue, a cooperative venture that serves as a model at the national level.

Curators 2017: Kerstin Meincke, Christin Müller, and Kathrin Schöneegg, Florian Ebner, Fabian Knierim, and Boaz Levin

Further information and up-to-the-minute visual material on the biennale can be downloaded from the press section at www.biennalefotografie.de

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