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# river of images

The Rhine and Photography 2016 – 1853



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**LVR**   
Qualität für Menschen

Photo: Valeska Achenbach and Isabela Pacini, untitled, 2003

**river of images**



# **river of images**

**The Rhine and Photography 2016 – 1853**



## **The Rhine and Photography 2016 – 1853**

The Rhine can be accurately characterised as a ‘river of images’ – and this in a double sense of the term. From the earliest days of pictorial production, Europe’s most celebrated river has been the subject of numerous paintings, drawings, and engravings. By and large, these images of the Rhine create and model collective notions that influence our perception of the river to this very day, alternating between testimony and myth, between cliché and art.

Whether as ‘Father Rhine’ or as a disputed borderline between nations; as a (post-)romantic landscape that arouses a sense of longing, an ecological biotope, or as a popular destination for day-trippers; as an economical lifeline, a quotidian urban space, or even as a symbol of Europe and an eternally meandering waterway: The Rhine proves to be the source of a sheer plethora of images. At the same time, its own identity is increasingly determined by the continuous river of images it produces.

The concept of the exhibition is based on the ambivalent status of the Rhine as a pictorial motif. It investigates the correlation between object and image based on photography – this modern technical process that occupies a special field of tension between fidelity to reality and collective desire for imagination.

The exhibition explores the struggle for a photographic 'image of the Rhine' and provides a retrospective view that extends from the present day back to the emergence of the medium in the early 19th century. With works by more than 60 photographers, the exhibition generates its own 'river of images' and simultaneously provides a survey of the history of photography based on one single motif.

**2016 – 2010**

**Jos Schmid**

**Jojakim Cortis and**

**Adrian Sonderegger**

**Michael Lange**

**Barbara Klemm**

**Wilhelm Koch**

**Kris Scholz**

**Bernd Hoff**

# 01 Jos Schmid

The wellspring of our river of images is marked by two individual works that question the self-understanding of the photographic image in the digital age. The youngest picture in the exhibition makes use of the oldest photographic technique: the daguerreotype. A process invented in the early 19th century and largely forgotten today, it drew images of the external world with 'inimitable fidelity' in the form of unique prints.

The Zürich-based photographer Jos Schmid uses the material reference from the early days of the medium to investigate the original sources of the river. The resulting image documents – to quote the picture's title – the 'Rinsing of a Polaroid Emulsion of the Anterior Source of the Rhine in the Posterior Source of the Rhine'. It thus takes the two source regions of the river into consideration on a physical level. By transferring the Polaroid image into the daguerreotype technique, the motif of the Rhine washing avoids any hint of simplicity. As a consequence, any glorifying myth of 'Father Rhine' is thus undermined. The photographer's credo would seem to be that river has indeed many fathers – just like the medium of photography.

## 02 Jojakim Cortis and Adrian Sonderegger

A topical reference to the photographic image of the Rhine is provided by the work of Jojakim Cortis and Adrian Sonderegger from Adliswil, Switzerland. With a hint of humour, the artist duo presents Andreas Gursky's iconic photo 'Rhine II' from 1999 – for a while the most expensive photograph worldwide – as a picture-in-a-picture. In doing so, they ostensibly reveal the world-famous photo as a highly market-conscious artwork, created in the photo studio with painterly means. What we have here is an affectionately sardonic 'making of', which overtly points out the extent to which not only the collective view of the Rhine, but also the authenticity of the photographic image, has changed in the course of the digital revolution.

Which image can still be trusted, and to what does it bear witness? Whereas the utensils laid out in the tableau refer to the complete artificiality of the work in question, the surrounding studio situation appears to reflect reality. In the background is a large row of windows, beyond which one sees a clouded sky. The only point of orientation is provided by the shadow of a bird. Upon closer inspection, however, it reveals itself to be merely a self-adhesive silhouette. In spite of all the artistic delicacy, the message is thus quite pessimistic: The Rhine seems to have long since disappeared behind a world of images, degenerated into a mere artefact.

## 03 Michael Lange

Among the photographic works from the present decade, one increasingly discovers strategies that strive to relieve the burden of an excessive dedication to tradition. In his laconic series 'Fluss' (River), for example, the Hamburg-based photographer Michael Lange presents the banks of the Upper Rhine as an untouched natural landscape. His large-scale, gently elegiac digital montages come across as a nameless river hagiography. In their silent iconic force, the landscapes wish only to be observed with care – and indeed no longer named.

## 04 Barbara Klemm

A harking back to the naturalness of the river is also reflected in an image by Barbara Klemm, who places herself firmly within the tradition of analogue photography. Her black-and-white photo of the Rhine Falls near Schaffhausen was shot in 2013 and captures the dramatically thundering water masses as an elemental force, which, in its temporality, is not bound to the medium of photography. In searching for her motif, the acclaimed photo-journalist referred to notes and sketches by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

## 05 Wilhelm Koch

In the long-term study 'Rheinkilometer 719–721' (2010 – 2014) by Wilhelm Koch, the precise calculation of the frame can be recognized on various levels. The documentarist found his repertoire of motifs – the indefatigably fluent transport of goods and people on the Rhine – literally at his own doorstep, on a narrow section of the Rhine between the two Düsseldorf districts of Urdenbach and Benrath. His colour photos each reveal three carefully layered spatial planes. Taken together, they present the shiploads of the domestic transport of freight and passengers as an endless loop.

## 06 Kris Scholz

Kris Scholz's large photos of the Rhine are self-referential with regard to his chosen medium. For his motifs, the trained sociologist uses a paper negative technique dating back to the early days of photography. Here, only the blue components of light, which the eye cannot see, become visible. Such a recourse is tantamount to a calculated loss of control, and it is precisely this that interests Scholz. With their finely nuanced grey tones, his landscape photos of the Lower Rhine exert a fascination all of their own. In their material recourse, they invoke an aesthetic autonomy, which refers back to an unfettered photographic legacy that no longer needs to heed to modernism.

## 07 Bernd Hoff

The series by the Düsseldorf-based photographer Bernd Hoff can be understood as an optical digital surrogate. His views of the Rhine in panoramic format make reference to a photographic genre from the 19th century. Even more fascinating is the fact that the photos were shot with a smartphone. The mobile phone was attached to a mount so that, in this case, it was not the guided movement of a steady hand holding the camera that produced the motif, but rather the flow of the river itself over an extended period of time. Compressions, dilations, and abstractions provide a disturbingly artificial perspective of the Rhine. Despite all the irritation, however, the result, as Hoff stresses, can by all means be described as 'pure photography'.

## **2009 – 2000**

Wolfgang Zurborn

Ralf Kaspers

Kris Scholz

Bernd Arnold

Valeska Achenbach

and Isabela Pacini

Max Regenberg

Gabriele Pütz

Gerhard Richter

## 08 Wolfgang Zurborn

In the first decade of the new millennium, younger photographic positions offer diverse concepts and references, motivations and technologies with the goal of wresting new aspects from the traditional schema of Rhine motifs. Their photo series oscillate that much more between the desire for and burden of references.

In his colour photographs, Wolfgang Zurborn from Cologne works with the constructive legacy of photography. His intricate vertical formats created for the book project 'Mitten im Westen' (In the Middle of the West, 2009) enter into a discourse with the image of the Rhine in the form of ostensibly montage-like blocked views, distortions, and overexposures. The cryptic visual language is not only a result of the characteristic style of the photographer, but can also be interpreted on a thematic level: an unobstructed view of the river is effectively denied.

## 09 Ralf Kaspers

Ralf Kaspers sets his sight on the Rhine from a raised perspective. His whimsical photos depict the assembly of the Shrove Monday parade in Düsseldorf. People appear for the first time. Kaspers characterises the clownish activity as a feat of strength, with which the individual participants in and visitors to the parade vehemently assert themselves against the dreariness of their urban surroundings. In the manner of Chargesheimer [see p. 34], an arrow painted on the asphalt points in the direction opposite to their own. A manhole cover appears to hide something sinister. Moments of joy are not necessarily evoked. In the meantime, the Rhine continues to flow stoically in the background, seemingly completely unaffected by all of this.

## 10 Kris Scholz

see p. 11.

## 11 Bernd Arnold

'Why is it so nice on the Rhine?' In 2003, the Cologne-based photojournalist Bernd Arnold explored this question within the frameworks of a reportage, only to thwart it humorously. His 12-part series can be seen as a commentary on the post-romantic Rhine tourism of our present day. Modelled after Chargesheimer's photobook from 1960 (see p. 34), Arnold points his camera at the 'people on the Rhine'. He finds his motifs among potheads and aging dandies, wine-loving senior citizens and straying priests. Despite the satirical pictorial exaggeration, one thing is clear: The terrain of carefree Rhenish joie de vivre appears to a thing of the past.

## 12 Valeska Achenbach and Isabela Pacini

There is also a sense of cheerful melancholy in the work of Valeska Achenbach and Isabela Pacini. Their medium-format colour photos of day-trippers on passenger ships were shot in 2003. This time, senior citizens in front of river landscapes direct our attention away from the viewers within the image towards the process of viewing itself. The promise of an authentic experience of the Rhine once again congeals into a desperate search for motifs. Not only the elderly passers-by, but also the viewers of the image, are forced to ask themselves: What are you looking for on the Rhine anyway?

## 13 Max Regenberg

In 2003, the Cologne-based documentarist Max Regenberg discovered the Rhine as a motif on various posters. He then chose to focus on five political campaign posters installed in the centre of Düsseldorf. The posters quote Andreas Gursky's celebrated Rhine icon, 'Rhine II' (1999), whereby the famous model has been mutated into a billboard for the social democratic and green party coalition state government and party-political propaganda. Not the Rhine itself, but rather its instrumentalisation becomes the subject of biting-collegial commentary: On a neighbouring poster, one can read the social democratic slogan 'Wir schaffen das' (We can do it).

## 14 Gabriele Pütz

'Wegweisungen' (Directions) is the simple title of the 10-part series from 2003 by Gabriele Pütz. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, she falsely interprets the cryptic information on water and natural gas level indicators positioned close to the Rhine as references to passages in the New Testament. This deciphering reveals itself to be an absurd, yet at times also enlightening exegesis, since, in many cases, the biblical passages delightfully comment the riverbanks depicted in the background, all of which have been effected by the flooding of the Rhine.

## 15 Gerhard Richter

Gerhard Richter also dares to interpret a motif of the Rhine on a surprisingly religious level. A contact sheet of six negatives, which he discovered by chance, served as his starting point – aerial photographs taken by the Royal Air Force from a height of 25,000 feet and dated 14 February 1945. The artist undertook several digital interventions, removing, for example, damages to the original print and the picture caption and correcting optical blurring.

The result of this intervention is, according to Richter, a 'brand-new, flawless photo', whereby perceptual differences are revealed especially through the transference of the analogue into the digital. His motif oscillates between beauty and horror, index and document. The most striking element of the picture, a motorway junction, is even reminiscent of a Christian symbol: the cross. In December 2002, Richter installed the motif as a large-scale digital print in the Church of St. Emmanuel in the Rondorf district of Cologne.

# **1999 – 1990**

**Wolfgang Tillmans**

**Axel Stoffers**

**Nora Schattauer**

**Boris Becker**

**Rolf Georg Bitsch**

**Eusebius Wirdeier**

**Ute Mahler**

# 16 Wolfgang Tillmans

(Outside)

The 1990s mark a paradigm shift for photography. Even before Andreas Gursky's digital work 'Rhine II' (1999), artists increasingly abandoned the dogma of documentarism and celebrated the motif of the Rhine as an aesthetic artefact. Even before this, new liberties for photographers had already revealed themselves. In Wolfgang Tillmans' photo of the Rhine from 1998 – part of the 'Aufsicht' (View from Above) series – a particular form of artistic work is articulated. According to the photographer's self-understanding, this is deliberately kept on a democratic level.

'The "unprivileged view" is perhaps a key term that can be applied to my work as a whole. When I shoot a photograph, I prefer to assume precisely this unprivileged position, which anyone who, for example, sits next to the airplane window or climbs a tower can take.' Tillmans' claim is based in equal parts on reflexion, casualness, and wonder. His view from above characterises the Rhine in its blurriness as a rather unconventional beauty.

## 17 Axel Stoffers

In his series 'Im Fluss' (In the River / In the Flow), Axel Stoffers presents a nuanced view of the Lower Rhine. The aesthetic experience of the river has firmly inscribed itself in his colour photos. A car ferry constantly travels from one side of the Rhine to the other. Pensioners protect themselves from the rain under umbrellas on a concrete platform. A pedestrian loses himself on the unspoiled embankment. Between these contemplative pictorial narrations, Stoffers deliberately inserts abstracting motifs, which depict the Rhine's powerfully colourful water surfaces. As a whole, the sequence of pictures captures the fine realities that characterise the atmosphere of life on the river.

## 18 Nora Schattauer

For her artist book 'Rheinwasser' (Rhine Water), the artist Nora Schattauer also analyses the remarkable impermeability of the water's surface viewed from above. Her 'Brückenblicke' (Views from a Bridge) – so the subtitle of her intimate artist book – suggest a reading based on pattern and colour recognition. In her series, the Rhine reveals itself in the most beautiful way as a coloratura for the sense of sight.

## 19 Boris Becker

The first half of the decade is marked by the spectacular events of the Rhine floods in 1993/94 and 1995. In his monumental panorama of the city of Cologne, Boris Becker, who studied at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf under Bernd Becher, lets the muddy brown water of the river all but triumph over the traditional cityscape. His large-scale colour photo places the silhouette of the metropolis in the background. Even in the picture itself, the river has long-since conquered new ground!

## 20 Rolf Georg Bitsch

In his pictures, Rolf Georg Bitsch conforms to a black-and-white aesthetic, which is indebted to the optical instrument of the small-format photograph. His 4-part series sensitively traces the insidious hopelessness that comes with the flooding of the Cologne city centre. A doomsday mood prevails on all sides. Even in the mere act of viewing, the silent encroachments of nature lead subliminally to a curious moment of numbness.

## 21 Eusebius Wirdeier

The conflict between what one sees and the actual truth lies at the core of the series of pictures by Eusebius Wirdeier. Under at times dramatic lighting conditions, the Cologne-based documentarist turns his attention to the enormous areas of silt left behind on the embankment by the Rhine flood. The aesthetic impressiveness of the surfaces contrasts sharply with the photographed subject: Has one landed on the moon? The bitter truth is that the highly contaminated Rhine silt must be disposed of as hazardous waste.

## 22 Ute Mahler

In 1990, Ute Mahler dared to take on a national perspective of the Rhine. In the year of German Reunification, the Eastern German photojournalist travelled for the first time to the West and visited the viewing platform of the Drachenfels. Her virtuoso colour photo depicts a family of five, the members of which surrender individually and apathetically to the prescribed view of the Rhine. Not only do all the emotions of interpersonal communication seem to be extinguished in this ready-made family constellation; it also almost appears as though the traditional image of the Rhine must also be completely renegotiated in view of the recently unified Germany.

**1989 – 1980**

**Wout Berger**

**Wilhelm Schürmann**

**Claudio Hils**

**René Böll**

**Joachim Schumacher**

## 23 Wout Berger

A golf course may be considered a place reserved for the privileged – especially when it is located at a river estuary. In 1989, the Dutch photographer Wout Berger photographed the sports grounds of the Zegersloot Golf Club in the small town of Alphen aan den Rijn for his photobook 'Poisoned Landscape'. His expansive landscape image makes direct reference to the tradition of US American New Color Photography. On second glance, however, the motif proves to be a pictorial booby trap. In the text commentary, the viewer finds himself confronted with details of the highly toxic heavy metal contamination of the broadly photographed ground area. There is also mention of highly unpleasant odours. It smells 'like hell' there, Berger states. All of a sudden, not only is the sunlit recreation ground contaminated, but the act of viewing as well.

## 24 Wilhelm Schürmann

With subtle humour, Wilhelm Schürmann travelled in the late 1980s from Aachen to the asphalted embankment of the Rhine in Cologne. In a documentary manner, he investigated how man and river have come to terms with each other. Here a parked VW Beetle with immigrants, there a hobby sportsman attempting to climb a bridgehead. The 'Pegel Köln' [Cologne Water Level] – so the title of the corresponding photobook – remains constant and calm, while individual passers-by casually look onto the other side of the embankment. The Rhine promenade outs itself as an open wellness zone. Here, everyone can do what they please. With his lapidary visual language, Schürmann precisely captures everyday West German life on the river, which, in view of the imminent political events, seems even more noticeably relaxed.

## 25 Claudio Hils

The prevailing mood of the colour photo work titled 'Lorelei' (1986/87) by Claudio Hils from Mengen in the Allgäu region is much louder. In the style of the pronounced flash aesthetics of the British Magnum photographer Martin Parr, he reveals a clash of different lifestyles – in, of all places, the romantically transfigured powerhouse of the Middle Rhine Valley. Punks have left an open air concert and cross the Rhine on a ferry near Sankt Goarshausen, where they encounter pensioners and small families on a Sunday excursion to the Lorelei. With amazing scurrility, Hils' 9-part tableau captures a remarkably heterogeneous group of individuals, who nevertheless collectively search for quasi-cultic reassurance on the 'German Rhine'.

## 26 René Böll

The theme of national Identity is also taken up in the photographic works of René Böll. In April 1983, he was asked by his father, the acclaimed Rhenish author and intellectual Heinrich Böll, to conduct pictorial research. The elder Böll was searching for visual inspiration for his new novel 'Women in a River Landscape', which was to take place in the villa district of Plittersdorf in Bonn.

With exceptionally subtle sensitivity, René Böll's series of images captures the oppressive paralysis of the Bonn Republic, which would find a literary counterpart in the controversial last work of the Nobel Laureate for Literature. In the novel, which was published in 1987, the river serves as a last refuge for the desperate women of the West German political caste. Damned to passivity, they walk into the water and commit suicide. In reference to Richard Wagner's Ring symbolism, the Rhine reveals itself to be a deadly maelstrom.

## 27 Joachim Schumacher

The photo essay by Joachim Schumacher, who studied under Otto Steinert in Essen, also superficially references a mythical instance. Commissioned by the magazine 'Merian', the documentarist travelled along the Rhine for several days in 1982 on the freight ship 'Amazone' in the company of the family of a 'particulier', an independent ship owner, who works for the most part as a subcontractor for larger shipping companies.

Schumacher's documentation empathically demonstrates to what extent 40-year-old Georg Kübler's daily life on the river, which can at times be cosy and highly family-oriented, is largely determined by ritualised operations. Here, the river serves as a tried and tested living space, in which a small business owner within the Rhenish shipping industry can set up home.

**1979 – 1970**

**Candida Höfer**

**Martin Manz**

**Reinhard Matz**

**Barbara Klemm**

**Heinz Held**

## 28 Candida Höfer

Beyond all romantic clichés, photographers in the 1970s increasingly saw the river from a socio-critical perspective. In the early colour photograph 'Rhein Düsseldorf I' from 1979, Candida Höfer refers to the work's place of origin in a lapidary way. In her photo of a dreary flooding scene, the horizon is deliberately out of focus. It is surely no coincidence that the blurriness is reminiscent of the paintings of Gerhard Richter. She characterizes the river as a faceless body of water without identity.

## 29 Martin Manz and Reinhard Matz

The inhospitableness of the river also lies at the core of the black-and-white photographs by Reinhard Matz and Martin Manz, shot in the late 1970s for the photobook 'Unsere Landschaften' (Our Landscapes). Martin Manz captures the Rhine near Breisach as a ruthlessly straightened and concrete-covered thoroughfare wedged between highways. The river has been sacrificed to modern mobile society.

For his own biting commentary on the Rhine, Reinhard Matz chose the viewing platform of the Drachenfels. The scenery, brutally covered in concrete, appears to have been exorcised of all romanticism; the oppressive photo has been literally deprived not only of any sightseers, but also of the river itself.

## 30 Barbara Klemm

The photos by Barbara Klemm present a more optimistic attitude. Commissioned by the 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung', the photojournalist travelled to Kaub in 1974 and observed the incidental scenes of everyday life that characterise the residents of the small Middle Rhine Valley wine town and their familial relationship to the river. A second series of photos in panorama format – by all means surprising for her oeuvre – draws attention to the emerging maritime and castle tourism of the day. Among the passers-by, one also finds Asian guests for the first time.

## 31 Heinz Held

The emerging luxury tourism and its saturated facets of alienation are the central theme of the photographic series by the Cologne-based photojournalist Heinz Held. The scenes in his theatrical photos are played out on the 'Deutschland', a river cruise ship that was launched in March 1971 and travels the Rhine from Rotterdam to Basle. With a sense of grandeur, Held captures all the subtle moments of laziness and sophisticated boredom in the midst of a mundane atmosphere: Couples sit across from each other in silence at the dining table; women talk on phones in their cabins; bare chested old men wearing sunglasses walk on the sundeck and occasionally shoot a snapshot. Only the Rhine itself fades out of sight. Heinz Held, the travel photographer, has virtually eradicated it through overexposure.

**1969 – 1960**

**Chargesheimer**

**Frits J. Rotgans**

**Cas Oorthuys**

## 32 Chargesheimer

Image of the Rhine in the 1960s transfigure the river into a day-tourist attraction and neo-romantic backdrop. Individual photographers nevertheless dared to take a closer look. Their questions include: How have residents come to terms with the Rhine, and how have they furnished their homes? And conversely: How strongly does the river influence the people's pride of soul?

Such a refined search for traces is also revealed in the work of Chargesheimer. In 1960, the photographer published his epoch-making photobook 'Menschen am Rhein' (The Rhine and Its People), the most complex psychogram on the theme of the Rhine in the post-war years. Here, Chargesheimer gave resonating space to the scarring of the Second World War in the individual physiognomies of the residents, as well as to the collective attempts at exoneration by West German society, which searched for distraction in the day-tourist bustle on the Siebengebirge hills and the Ehrenbreitstein fortress. 'I am prepared to have complete faith in the Rhine', Heinrich Böll wrote in the accompanying essay.

## 33 Frits J. Rotgans

The Dutch photographer Frits J. Rotgans is rightly known as ‘the Rhine photographer par excellence’. In the mid-1950s, he built a large-format camera and henceforth dedicated himself to the theme of the Rhine, specialising in panorama photos. In the early 1960s, he focused especially on the Middle Rhine Valley and the dangerous rapids at the so-called Binger Loch. It is not the romantic views that arouse the interest of the photographer, but rather the technical intricacies of river navigation.

## 34 Cas Oorthuys

His fellow countryman Cas Oorthuys also embarked on a journey along the Rhine. Around 1960, he accompanied the modern push boat ‘Olivier van Noort’ on a trip from Rotterdam into the Ruhr district. With great attention to details, his album documents the ritualized daily routine of the ship’s crew, from their morning shave to the inevitable scrubbing of the deck. His work verifies that, especially on the Rhine, it is possible to depict life as authentically as possible.

**1959 – 1950**

**Robert Häusser**

**Frits J. Rotgans**

**Henri Cartier-Bresson**

## 35 Robert Häusser

In photo essays from the 1950s, photographers used the theme of the Rhine to reflect upon the emerging economic development in Western Europe. In 1957, for example, Robert Häusser published a photobook that focused on the burgeoning economy based on the example of the Rhine harbour in Mannheim. With his spirited words, the young photographer invokes the increase in prosperity and the open trade climate. 'I enjoy being there, where the air is saturated with the smell of the water, oil, and tar. Where all the nations travelling on the Rhine come together. An international community coalesces here: at work, which is often hard – and at night in the pubs that surround the harbour.' It is not surprising that his photos extol the unadulterated vitality of the waterway, with its never-ending loading and unloading of goods and the industrialised shipping and merchandise traffic. Only the sky above the Rhine is occasionally submerged in dramatic sombreness.

## 36 Frits J. Rotgans

The tonality of Frits J. Rotgans' panorama photos from the 1950s is much lighter. They, too, exuberantly extol the economic recovery – this time from the perspective of the Rhine harbour in Rotterdam. In his spectacular widescreen formats, however, one no longer finds shadows of the Nazi past. Instead, attention is drawn unashamedly towards the present.

'In the north-western part of the Waalhaven, the largest man-made harbour in the world, is concentrated the transshipment of coal and ore destined for the industries of the Ruhr', is written, not without pride, in a text commentary in the multilingual photobook 'Rotterdam. City and Port' (1959). 'In the background, on the other side of the river, which can just be seen, stand the power stations.' The highly energetic atmosphere of the river is omnipresent. Rotgans occasionally expands his Rhine repertoire with elegiac nature shots of the river and its tributaries, which are particularly picturesque in terms of their composition and use of lighting.

## 37 Henri Cartier-Bresson

A fragile portrait of the mental state of West Germany in the post-war years is drawn by the French Magnum photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. The internationally celebrated 'doyen of the decisive moment' travelled to the Rhine in 1953 and again in 1956. With seismograph sensitivity, he captured the atmosphere of the young West German republic. In the Middle Rhine Valley, Cartier-Bresson found a frozen, wintery situation, in which the mental convulsions of the Nazi era are still inscribed in both the people and the landscape. Other photos reveal a subtle sense of humour. The keen sensibility of the photographer in the formerly hostile territory is unmistakable.

# **1949 – 1940**

**Ruth Hallensleben**

**Lee Miller**

**Anonymous (US Air Force)**

**Robert Capa**

**Henri Cartier-Bresson**

**Anonymous**

**Ugo Proietti**

**Arthur Grimm**

**Paul Nathrath**

## 38 Ruth Hallensleben

In the course of the dramatic political upheavals that took place along the Rhine in the 1940s, numerous photographs oscillate fervidly between war and idyll, testimony and propaganda, document and fiction. In 1947, Ruth Hallensleben cast an eye towards reconstruction. In two photographs in particular, she documented the re-erection of a bridge over the Rhine in Cologne, which had been destroyed in the Second World War. Also because of their different formats, the pictures seem somehow fragmentary.

## 39 Lee Miller

The US American photographer Lee Miller drew attention to the landscape of ruins along the Rhine from the perspective of the Allied Forces. She noted in her accounts: 'On the other side of the river were artistic ruins of very ancient castles and new ones inhabited by wounded soldiers or by temporary headquarters staffs, planning the reduction of other castles on other hills, deeper in Krautland.'

Her photo taken in front of the Remagen bridge has proven to be exemplary. Four GIs look with great composure at the bridge lying before them, with the destruction of which they had just written war history. As so-called 'repoussoir figures', they served as surrogates for the viewer. In the casually confident pose of the victor, the soldiers signalise that, thanks to them, something historical has taken place on the Rhine.

## 40 Anonymous (US Air Force)

A markedly distanced perspective of the Rhine in the Second World War is conveyed by anonymous aerial photographs by the Royal Air Force from 14 February 1945. These are the analogue source images, which the painter Gerhard Richter would later translate with digital means into a new pictoriality (see p. 18). Not only the motif itself bears impressive witness to the physical wounds inflicted on the Rhenish landscape by the air raid, but also the state of the battered and mounted print.

## 41 Robert Capa

On 24 March 1945, Robert Capa, then a member of the 17th US airborne division, which was part of a large-scale air and land offensive, jumped near Wesel on the Lower Rhine together with 900 British and US American paratroopers. His photo reportage on the advance of the Allied Forces across the Rhine is one of his most famous from the Second World War. In addition to a large number of spectacular candid images of acts of war, he also shot a highly unusual photo of the Rhine, which does not strictly follow his own demand of being 'close enough' at all times. Instead, with its horizontal format, the photo depicts an ensemble of unmanned amphibian vehicles on the banks of the expansive river, waiting to go into action. The photo reveals itself to be one of a deceptively idyllic landscape in the midst of wartime operations.

## 42 Henri Cartier-Bresson

More direct, functioning indeed with the highly effective means of shock, is a photo by Henri Cartier-Bresson from 1944. It documents the devastating consequences of the war using the example of a soldier, who lies dead in front of a Rhine bridge near Strasbourg enveloped in fog. In its formal and motivic exacerbation of the scene, the photo begs to be interpreted on an allegorical level.

## 43 Anonymous

An unauthorised photo shot on 24 March 1945 depicts the 15th division of the Allied Forces immediately before crossing the Rhine. The black-and-white motif deliberately conveys an impressive atmospheric reality. The soldiers appear only as silhouettes. The river seems surprisingly wide, like an expansive sea, and the break of dawn auspiciously announces the forthcoming act of war.

## 44 Ugo Proietti

In May 1938, Ugo Proietti came to Germany from Rome as an exchange student of foreign languages. In the 1940s, he travelled extensively throughout Germany, visiting not only the larger cities, but also the Middle Rhine Valley. His amateur photos from 1941 – shot with a 35 mm camera and revealing the pallid colours of early Agfacolor film – tell of his lively and cheerful excursion to the Siebengebirge hills with his sweetheart, far away from the political drama of the time. In times of war, the Rhine setting often serves as a romantic refuge.

## 45 Arthur Grimm

The fact that one cannot always trust photographic images taken during wartime is proven by the works of Arthur Grimm, one of the leading Wehrmacht photographers specializing in Nazi propaganda. His war photos from June 1940 ostensibly document the military operation of a crossing of the Upper Rhine. In reality, what we see here is the re-enacted scene of a training exercise, which would later be used for Nazi propaganda purposes.

## 46 Paul Nathrath

see p. 48.

# **1939 – 1930**

**Kurt Boecker**

**Hans Heinig**

**Fritz Christian**

**Paul Nathrath**

**Theo Schafgans**

**August Sander**

**Ruth Hallensleben**

**Heinrich Hoffmann**

**Hannes Maria Flach**

**Albert Renger-Patzsch**

**Herbert List**

## 47–49 Kurt Boecker, Hans Heinig, Fritz Christian

In front of the backdrop of the fascist ideology of the Nazi dictatorship, photographic images from the 1930s are under continuous pressure to justify themselves and reveal a subtle moment of tension.

Prime examples of this are the photographic prints by Hans Heinig, Fritz Christian, and Kurt Boecker, which present the Rhine as a magnificent backdrop evoking the dark whispers of nationalist mythology. Ideologically conform, they emotionally serve a conceptual image of the Rhine landscape as a Wagnerian *Götterdämmerung* in the sense of a timeless 'German essence'. Recourse to the non-photographic canon of Rhine motif seems all but inevitable. Fritz Christian's montage-like image 'Abend an der Lorelei' (Evening on the Lorelei), for example, quotes a steel engraving by Jakob Fürchtegott Dielmann from the 19th century. For the pictorial propaganda of the National Socialists, the mass medium of photography proved to be a highly effective instrument of manipulation.

## 50 Paul Nathrath

The work of Paul Nathrath, whose membership in the National Socialist party since 1939 has been proven, reflects the entanglements of the dictatorship in an exemplary way. As the author of numerous textbooks on photography, including 'Die Landschaft. Erlebnis und Fotografie' (The Landscape. Adventure and Photography) from 1942, the amateur photographer from Bonn superficially propagates a formalistically trained 'homeland photography' aimed at focusing on the 'intrinsic landscape', such as the charismatic 'Rhine landscape'.

## 51 Theo Schafgans

The fact that not all photographers from this period followed the folkish-nationalist example is testified by a landscape photo by Theo Schafgans. The image made by the Bonn-based studio photographer depicts the ice-covered Rhine in front of the Siebengebirge hills and makes do without any hint of grandeur. On the contrary, the photographer's perspective appears highly objective in view of the overly clichéd motif.

## 52 August Sander

A prudent counter concept to Nazi propaganda is provided by August Sander. As early as the 1920s, he conducted extensive photographic studies of the Rhine that could not be politically appropriated. On a biographical level, they can be interpreted as an expression of an inner emigration: After his son Erich was arrested in 1934 on charges of 'socialist activities', Sander became increasingly subjected to repressive measures on the part of the state. Recent research has proven that Sanders' Rhine landscapes found concrete inspiration in the work of a friend, the painter Franz M. Jansen. Stylistically, they follow the principles of New Objectivity and reveal a clear pictorial concept, which maintains a certain distance with the help of an elevated position. A repoussoir is not necessary.

## 53 Ruth Hallensleben

The rich diversity of the Rhine motif finds expression in the works of Ruth Hallensleben. The photographer visited the Rhine regions time and again in the 1930s, exploring the natural Alpine springs as well as the leisure behaviour in the Middle Rhine Valley. In Bad Hönningen, she captured a modern outdoor swimming pool located directly next to the Rhine embankment. A jump into the water could now take place in a safe and contained zone – without having to do without the delightful view of the Rhine.

## 54 Heinrich Hoffmann

Among the few event pictures in this river of images are two photos from the studio of Heinrich Hoffmann, the influential 'photographer of the Führer'. His spectacular ensemble was shot on the occasion of a Nazi rally on the 'Homecoming of the Saarland' in front of the Niederwald Monument near Rüdesheim on 27 August 1933. During a speech by the Führer, a huge crowd of people collectively raise their hands in the Hitler salute and mutates in consonance with the current of the Rhine in the background into a single wave and billow. In line with Siegfried Kracauer's analysis 'The Mass Ornament' (1927), the collective 'body of the people' seems to be virtually inscribed in the myth-laden river.

## 55 Hannes Maria Flach

An alternative model from the leftist milieu is provided by the photojournalistic works of Hannes Maria Flach from 1930. With an impressive sense for adaption, a series of photos by the Cologne-based reporter staged a deployment of the city's police force in the style of so-called 'Russian films'. Flach's images correspond closely with the aesthetics of the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein. In another ensemble, the reporter dynamises the early day-tourist excursion culture of the Rhine river cruises with the help of spectacular diagonal views, inspired by the 'New Vision' and especially by the revolutionary visual language of Alexander Rodchenko. There is no doubt that the mobilization of the view is his guiding photographic principle. On the Rhine, a grand sense of cinema is omnipresent.

## 56 Albert Renger-Patzsch

'Photos, such as those by Renger-Patzsch, are born out of another emotion. They depict landscapes that men have left behind.' With these words, the television journalist Dieter Thoma characterized in retrospect the abundant collection of Ruhr photos, which the famous protagonist of New Objectivity shot between 1927 and 1935. Regardless of their formally sober compositions, his photos shot near Duisburg are indeed unusual. Five cows at the mouth of the Ruhr, across from them several coal barges, behind these the smokestacks of heavy industry; at the river, a still distinctly agrarian natural landscape suddenly encounters an industrial landscape.

In another motif, three workers pursue their passion for fishing on the banks of the Rhine in Duisburg. At the waterside, be it animal or man, nature is not – as is usually the case in the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch – excluded from the motif, but is rather smack in the middle of it.

## 57 Herbert List

see p. 53.

**1929 – 1920**

**Herbert List**

**Albert Renger-Patzsch**

**Friedrich Seidenstücker**

**Werner Mantz**

**Hermann Claasen**

## 58 Herbert List

In terms of photography, the 1920s documented a primarily aesthetic search for traces along the Rhine. The decade is represented by individual positions of young photographers, who, driven by a desire to experiment and with a variety of different interests, sought to form their own image of the Rhine.

While travelling through Germany in 1929, for example, the young Herbert List chose the setting of the Rhine for portraits of his friends Stephen Spender and Franz Büchner. 'His lust for life seemed to thrive in these photographs', Spender wrote in retrospect. In this 'Summer of Love', the Rhine proved at a remarkably early stage to be an Elysium, in which the homophile Eros could reveal itself.

## 59 Albert Renger-Patzsch

see p. 51.

## 60 Friedrich Seidenstücker

The Berlin-based photographer Friedrich Seidenstücker, who gained notoriety with humorous snapshots of visitors to the zoo and 'puddle jumpers', offers something special here with two images of the Rhine in winter. They depict the blurred image of an icebreaker in motion. Articulated here is a curiosity for technical innovations, which are linked to the nascent success of the 35 mm camera during these years.

## 61 Werner Mantz

On the occasion of the Pressa, the International Press Exhibition that was held in Cologne in 1928 and attracted a phenomenal five million visitors, Werner Mantz explored the newly installed Sünner Terraces with his camera. As a modern viewing platform, they open a perspective from the right banks of the Rhine onto a panoramic view of the city. Yet instead of the famous skyline with the cathedral, Mantz is much more interested in the architectural environment of an advertising column on the access ramp to the Hindenburg Bridge. He captures this in three variants with different spatial arrangements. The surreptitious fixed point in each image is the Rhine, which is literally wedged within the dynamic architectural scenery. It appears as though the river was being forced to defer to the dictum of modernity.

## 62 Hermann Claasen

For his first Rhine motifs, Hermann Claasen still used the complicated printing techniques of the Pictorialists – miniatures of winter themes, executed using the oil print process and gum print technique, which persist in a form of aestheticism represented by the emancipatory artistic intentions of photographers around 1900. The young self-taught photographer seems to have drawn upon this tradition because he wanted, among other things, to be able to earn his livelihood with photography.

**1919 – 1900**

**Erwin Quedenfeldt**

## 63 Erwin Quedenfeldt

Erwin Quedenfeldt's portfolio of 'Individual Pictures from the Lower Rhine' is representative of the Pictorialist image culture at the dawn of the 20th century. The rich body of pictures was self-published in four volumes between 1909 and 1915. The majority of the once 1,559 images is considered lost, whereby the few remaining gum prints from this mammoth project clearly illustrate Quedenfeldt's photo-artistic aspirations. His goal was to explore the essence of an entire cultural region in the sense of a panopticon.

'The characteristic features of the landscape of the Lower Rhine have also been captured in many pictures. Especially worthy of note are the marsh landscapes populated with grazing cows and the river embankments lined with tall white poplars. Particular consideration has also been given to specially trimmed trees and groups of trees, as well as to special geological formations.' Quedenfeldt sees in himself the figure of the wanderer, who is still capable of maintaining a holistic perspective of the Rhine and its surroundings.

**1899 – 1853**

**Theodor Creifelds  
Cundall & Fleming  
William England  
Francis Frith  
Charles Marville**

## 64 Theodor Creifelds

In many photographic images from the 19th century, the river landscapes along the Rhine appear curiously decelerated. Their effect is due to the longer exposure times and the elaborate production techniques. The photographers of these early years were faced with a subtle conflict of interests. On the one hand, they were required to honour the still highly idealized pictorial conceptions of the Rhine in accord with the painterly and graphic models of the late Romantic era. On the other hand, however, they also strove to convey a contemporary and, in the documentary sense, 'true image of the Rhine'.

Prime examples of this contradiction can be found in the works by the Cologne-based photographer Theodor Creifelds from the 1870s. Several of the salt paper photos mounted on card depict picturesque views of castle and churches, the compositions of which remain faithful to the landscape genre of the Romantic tradition. In other motifs, this tradition literally clashes with an industrial present. In a formally virtuoso manner, for example, one picture depicts the elevated Ehrenbreitstein fortress near Koblenz being literally towered over by a modern Rhine bridge.

## 65 Cundall & Fleming

One British enterprise commissioned by the Architectural Photographic Society in London placed itself entirely in the service of so-called documentarism and, in the early summer of 1866, set out on a journey to the Rhine. Their task was to shoot photos of medieval defensive and church buildings. Under the guidance of the architect John Pollard Seddon, Cundall & Fleming shot numerous individual photos – in some cases under very challenging conditions – which were then published by John Murray in a book with the title ‘Rambles in the Rhine Provinces’ (London, 1868). The pictures by Joseph Cundall and Lewis Baldwin Fleming all conform to the sober dictates of monument documentation.

## 66 William England

Atmospherically nuanced in comparison is a miniature albumen print from 1865. The image was shot by William England. His photo reveals a panoramic view of the Rhine promenade in Kaub with the Gutenfels Castle and integrates a repoussoir figure, who, within the image itself, questions the way in which the motif should be viewed.

## 67 Francis Frith

'The Rhine, now-a-days, is "at our doors".' In a refreshingly ironic manner, the British photographer Francis Frith comments on the Rhine tourism of the 1860s. At first glance, his book publication 'The Gossiping Photographer on the Rhine' from 1864 follows goals, which, for his fellow countrymen, are closely connected with those of the Grand Tour. Nevertheless, Frith combines the subjective report of a journey along the Rhine filled with bizarre impressions and incidents with photographic images. These consciously depict the Middle Rhine Valley as a romantic idyll. With regard to the embedding of figures, we are in all likelihood dealing here, in some cases, with staged photography. All in all, it is once again a matter of satisfying a collective desire for images.

## 68 Charles Marville

Four photos of the Rhine by the Parisian photographer Charles Marville, who also worked under a pseudonym as a painter and illustrator, go back to the beginnings of photography. His large-scale silver salt prints of talbotypes from 1853 are taken from the album 'Le Bords du Rhin'. They can be celebrated as archetypal masterpieces of the medium. In their choice of motifs, however, they too quote and vary painterly and graphic sources and by no means mark, in terms of the iconography of the Rhine, the wellspring of a river of images.

# Colophon

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