

Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion and Reconciliation
Special Exhibition: "OSTGEBIETE / ZIEMIE ZACHODNIE. German-Polish Perspectives"

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition presents a total of eleven photographic works from Germany and Poland, including ten contemporary pieces and one historical work. They explore, in various ways, the shared space of memory associated with the former German Eastern Territories, which today belong to Poland and are referred to there as the Polish Western Territories or 'Recovered Territories'.

The exhibition focuses on the contemporary perspective. It explores the role that memories of uprooting, forced migration and resettlement in these regions – and within the families affected – continue to play to this day. Although the medium here is photography, the works invite viewers to look for traces of loss, displacement and new beginnings in their own surroundings and to relate these to the experiences of others connected to the same places.

The exhibition turns its gaze towards a space of memory whose history continues to resonate to this day. The works on display range from documentary research and personal searches for traces to artistic reflection. They deal with landscapes and material legacies, with family histories and individual memories, as well as with the question of how history lives on in images, places and biographies.

The idea for the exhibition arose during work on the Documentation Centre's previous special exhibition, 'The Trek – Photographs of Displacement 1945'. Alongside historical photographs by Hanns Tschira and Martha Maria Schmackeit, that exhibition had already explored the places of flight in the present day. This photographic search for traces was to be continued and expanded, this time with the aim of incorporating Polish perspectives on an equal footing and bringing them into dialogue with German viewpoints. The photographer Karolina Gembara was brought on board as the artistic curator for this project.

The exhibition opens with a photographic collage by the Polish artist Jerzy Lewczyński from the 1970s. It is the only historical work in the exhibition. On the one hand, it powerfully refers to the historical context of the mass resettlements at the end of the Second World War; on the other, it makes it clear that the artistic engagement with the Polish western territories has been part of Polish remembrance culture for decades.

The remaining ten photographic works comprise more recent pieces, some of which were created specifically for the exhibition. Many of the artists incorporate their own family history into their work. Linn Schröder, together with her daughters, traces the escape route taken by her mother-in-law from Upper Silesia. Natalia Poniatowska accompanies her grandmother on a journey back to Lviv, after the latter had spent decades trying in vain to reclaim her family home there. Annette Hauschild examines which memories, traditions and forms of belonging are passed down across generations following a historical rupture.

Other works approach the subject from a more documentary perspective. Karolina Gembara explores the overwriting of memory using a former German photo album from her family's collection. Wojtek Sienkiewicz documents German war memorials in present-day Poland and examines their shifting meanings in public space. Thomas Meyer continues his photographic work in present-day Lubów, formerly Lübchen, and paints a multi-layered portrait of the village. Filip Piotrowicz searches for traces of German and Masurian history in Masuria and speaks with people who remained there after 1945.

The exhibition is structured around four thematic chapters: 'Shifting Borders', 'Legacies', 'Family Memories' and 'Myths and Ghosts'. These chapters address themes that are present in various forms within the individual works and provide the thematic framework for the exhibition.

The exhibition is presented entirely in three languages: German, Polish and English.