

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION
29.05.2026 – 17.01.2027

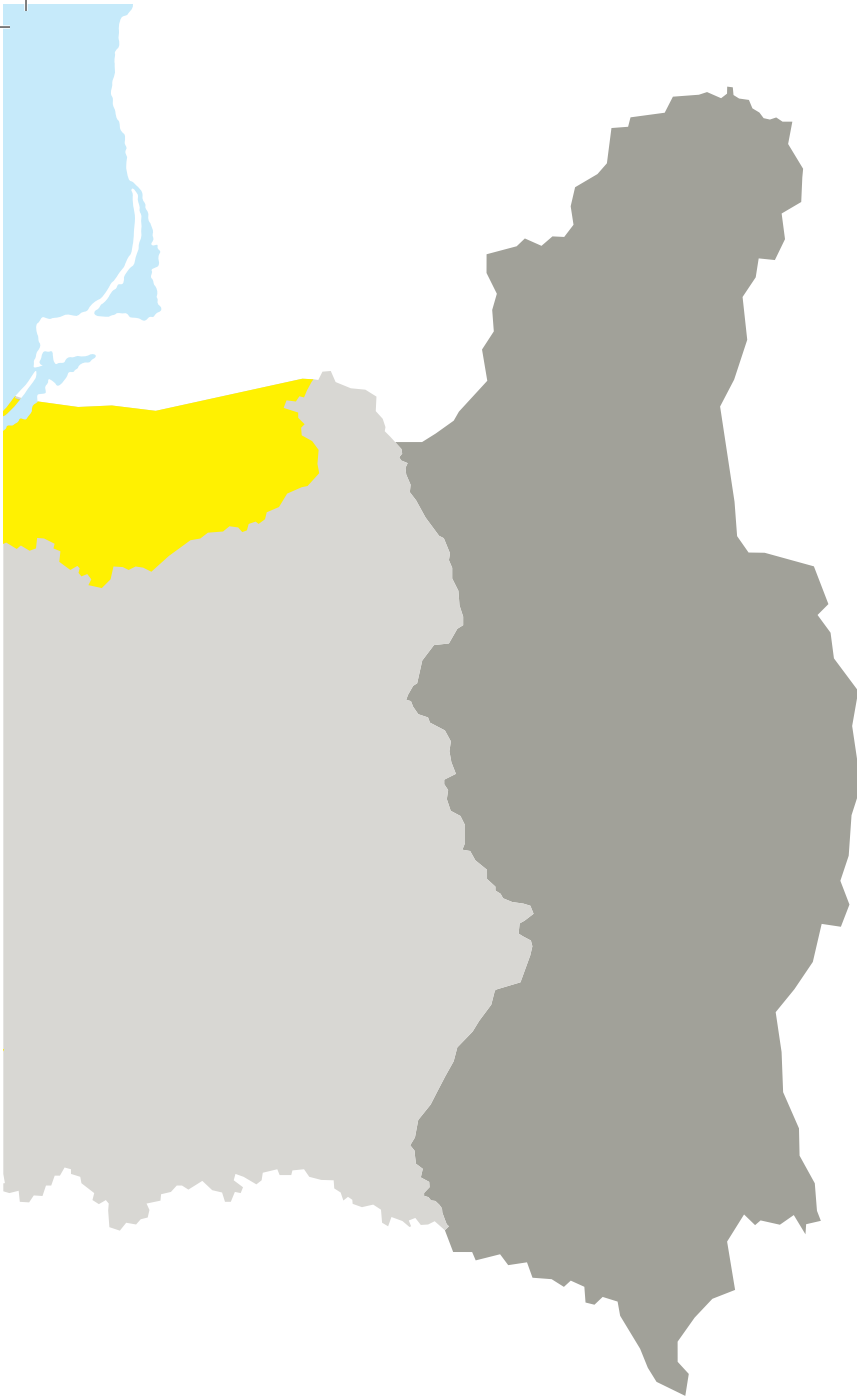
OSTGEBIETE ZIEMIE ZACHODNIE

GERMAN-POLISH
PERSPECTIVES





Ostgebiete /
Ziemie Zachodnie



For many Germans, the *Ostgebiete* – the former eastern territories beyond the Oder and Neisse – remain closely tied to memories of flight and expulsion, to the loss of home and to stories passed down through generations. These experiences continue to shape collective memory today.

From a Polish perspective, the *Ziemie Zachodnie* – the Polish Western Territories – tell a different story: one of arriving in an unfamiliar place, of rebuilding life after war and occupation, and of gradually making a home in regions that until 1945 had been shaped by German history and culture. Here, too, memory is layered, complex and deeply personal.

These perspectives do not simply exist side by side – they are deeply intertwined.

The works of ten photographers from Germany and Poland create a dialogue around this shared landscape of memory, approaching it through both personal and documentary perspectives. Their projects span a wide range of themes: from landscapes and material traces of the past to family histories and individual recollections. Together, they show how experiences of violence and loss, but also of making unfamiliar places one's own and beginning anew, continue to shape places and lives on both sides of the Oder and Neisse. The traces are everywhere. We only need to look closely.

Barbara Kurowska, Arvid Peschel

ASYMMETRICAL MEMORIES

The title of the exhibition, *Ostgebiete/Ziemie Zachodnie*, refers to terms that are not direct equivalents, but historical constructs shaped by different experiences and cultures of memory. In the German context, *Ostgebiete* evokes the loss of the East; in the Polish context, the Ziemie Zachodnie, or “Western Territories”, became a space of settlement and rebuilding after 1945. Yet both terms are bound to experiences of loss and displacement: the Polish presence in the “West” was made possible through the loss of the Kresy in the East, while memories of the former eastern territories in Germany were often shaped by silence, displacement, and shifting forms of remembrance. This ambiguity – the continual shifting of perspectives and the absence of a single narrative centre – provides the conceptual framework for the exhibition. Rather than attempting to reconcile conflicting memories, the exhibition explores their coexistence and the tensions that remain between them.

Discussions of postwar displacement in Central and Eastern Europe most often begin with the year 1945. This exhibition proposes a different perspective, approaching mass migration as a long historical process whose consequences continue to shape the present. In this sense, the “postwar” is understood not as a clearly bounded historical period, but as an extended condition of transition. Displacement emerges not as a singular event, but as an experience that continues to shape memory, landscapes, and social relations across generations.

Rather than viewing displacement exclusively as a consequence of the Second World War, the exhibition approaches it as one of the mechanisms that shaped Europe's postwar order. Borders, ideas of national homogeneity, and concepts of peace were politically negotiated and redefined in the aftermath of the war. For decades, these meanings were incorporated into ideological narratives on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Political myths long replaced public discussion of trauma, loss, and forced migration. While such conversations were at times possible in West Germany, in Poland and in the GDR they remained largely confined to the private sphere; in Ukraine, which became part of the Soviet Union, they often remained impossible even there. Silence itself became one of the central carriers of memory.

This exhibition is not a historical exhibition in the conventional sense, although it engages deeply with history, including the recent past. At its centre lies memory: polyphonic, contested, and asymmetrical. The absence of a shared narrative is not presented here as a failure of reconciliation, but as the consequence of tensions between national memory and family history, between what could be spoken and what remained taboo or obscured for decades. The memory of displacement also reveals the instability of roles – victims, witnesses, perpetrators, and those who benefited from the new order. As

inheritors of these histories, we do not speak in a single voice. It is precisely this plurality that makes an honest engagement with the past possible.

The artists participating in the exhibition work with mediated memory. It was their parents and grandparents who experienced displacement – from East Prussia to Germany, from what is now Ukraine to Lower Silesia, from territories that ceased to exist as places of origin. The artists listen to those who chose to remain and accompany those who never reconciled themselves to loss. For many of them, the point of departure is a question about their own relationship to this inheritance: to landscapes marked by absence and secrecy, to houses once inhabited by others, to ancestral homelands that often survive only as abstractions. Their practices draw on fragmentary archives, objects, and remnants of stories. They work with absence, incompleteness, and the impossibility of fully reconstructing the past.

The focus on individual biographies does not seek to illustrate history, but to create a space in which history becomes tangible. It is a space of ambivalence, where loss intertwines with new beginnings, violence with adaptation, silence with intergenerational transmission. There is no singular or universal experience of displacement, and attempts to homogenise such experiences inevitably lead to simplification rather than understanding. The exhibition therefore invites encounters with specific, irreducible lives and histories – stories that resist overarching narratives and remain rooted in local and familial experience.

To speak about displacement today – or rather, to give it artistic form – is also to reveal how history continues to shape the present. The exhibition questions historical certainties as well as social orders long perceived as self-evident. At the same time, it opens a space in which one's own historical entanglements may be recognised – without obscuring complicity, but also without the need to resolve these histories into definitive conclusions.

Karolina Gembara



Lübchen / Lubów

Thomas Meyer

The village of Lubów feels quiet and remote. There is no school, no shop, and life largely takes place behind closed doors. Nevertheless, we were welcomed with great openness and hospitality as we embarked on a photographic search for traces of the past. In a place like Lubów in particular, one can sense how deeply experiences of flight and displacement continue to shape people's lives to this day.

Thomas Meyer was born in 1967 in Delmenhorst. He studied at the Hochschule für Künste in Bremen and has worked as a freelance photographer in Berlin since 1997. Since 2000, Meyer has been a member of OSTKREUZ. He photographs for various international magazines and clients and for several years worked on the FAZ campaign "Dahinter steckt immer ein kluger Kopf" ("There's always a clever mind behind it"). From 2008 to 2019, he also taught at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie and held several teaching positions in photography at the Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin. Since 2017, Meyer has been the staff photographer for the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau. His photographs are regularly shown in solo and group exhibitions.



We Just Stayed

Filip Piotrowicz

I grew up in Masuria and always felt that there was something unique about this region. I could never quite explain what it was, but I knew I wanted to tell a story about this place. The impulse to begin working on the project and searching for its protagonists came from a conversation with a former classmate from middle school. He shared with me the story of his family – Germans who, after the war, decided to remain in the place where they had lived for generations.

Filip Piotrowicz is a photographer and participant photographer and participant in the mentoring programme of Sputnik Photos. He studied at the ITF in Opava. A member of the Galeria Czwartek collective, his artistic practice focuses on themes connected to people, drawing on personal experience and his immediate surroundings. He has participated in group exhibitions in Warsaw, Łódź, and Frankfurt (Oder). In 2025, he presented the solo exhibition *A nam się zostało* at the space of the Fundacja Ruino Ruido.



Sentimental Sculptures of Home (Coming) II

Annette Hauschild

It was never my intention to tell a story about the loss of homeland or displacement, because I personally never experienced this sense of loss. Instead, I wanted to make visible the layers that shape identity: memories, traditions, and the things our family has preserved. Especially after ruptures in one's biography, the act of preserving becomes important – and in this I also see a connection to contemporary stories of migration.

Annette Hauschild, born in 1969 in Gießen, lives in Berlin. She completed her photographic training at the Lette-Verein in 1993. In 2004, she attended a masterclass with Arno Fischer at the photography school Fotografie am Schiffbauerdamm. Since 1996, she has been a member of OSTKREUZ. Hauschild primarily works in portrait photography while also developing independent long-term photographic projects. Her works have been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including at C/O Berlin, Hellerau – European Center for the Arts, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, and the Akademie der Künste. Together with Ute Mahler, she curated the OSTKREUZ exhibitions *Ostzeit* and *Über Grenzen*. In collaboration with Boaz Levin, she developed the exhibition *Träum weiter – Berlin, die 90er* for C/O Berlin.



TŁO / Background

Katarzyna Mirczak

In my artistic practice, I am interested in moments of transition — situations in which landscapes, bodies, or objects change their status and identity under the influence of political decisions, historical violence, displacement, or ideological projections. I am particularly drawn to the moment when space is symbolically appropriated, 'denationalized,' or subordinated to a new narrative, and when memory and imagination begin to function according to the demands of the prevailing historical moment.

Katarzyna Mirczak is a visual artist working with photography, sound installation, and the artist's book. In her practice, she develops a method akin to an archaeology of the image, treating visual archives, artifacts, and bodily traces as layers of cultural memory subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation. She studied archaeology at the Jagiellonian University and participated in archaeological research projects in the Black Sea region. Her works have been presented, among others, at the York Art Gallery, during AIPAD Photography Show, Paris Photo, and Vienna Contemporary. She is the author of the artist's books *Ether*, *Przerwa na światło* (Light Break), and *Słowa* (Words). She works at the National Heritage Institute.



Zur Hoffnung

Heinrich Völkel

"Zur Hoffnung" reflects my engagement with my father's birthplace and origins. It is not a search for traces, yet places, situations, and moments are translated into images that enter into dialogue with one another – fragments of memories, experiences, and emotions existing simultaneously.

Heinrich Völkel was born in 1974 in Moscow and grew up in Leipzig. After graduating from high school, he completed his photographic training at the Lette-Verein in Berlin, graduating in 1999. Since 2004, he has been a member of OSTKREUZ in Berlin. Alongside numerous publications in renowned German magazines, he regularly presents his work in exhibitions both in Germany and internationally. His works have been shown, among others, at C/O Berlin, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, as well as in Paris, Perpignan, Munich, and Glasgow. He has received several awards and distinctions for his work. In recent years, he has increasingly dedicated himself to teaching and photographic education. Heinrich Völkel lives and works in Wiesbaden.



I Have Nothing from Lviv

Natalia Poniatowska

The themes of displacement and resettlement are in my blood. From an early age, I knew that my family had never fully belonged to Silesia. In my grandmother's stories and in the objects that surrounded us, Lviv was always present. Later, when I left my hometown myself, I began to better understand the longing for belonging and explored this subject deeply in my artistic practice. Out of this engagement, and through many conversations with my grandmother, the idea eventually emerged for a shared journey to the place of her childhood, which she had not visited for decades.

Natalia Poniatowska (born in Bytom) is a visual artist specializing in fine art photography. Shaped by growing up in the industrial landscape of Silesia and by seven years spent in Scotland, her practice combines social sensitivity with a formally precise visual language. A graduate of the The Glasgow School of Art, she currently works in Warsaw. Her works have been presented, among others, at the Royal Scottish Academy, the National Museum in Kraków, and during the Pingyao International Photography Festival. She is the recipient of awards including the Female in Focus Award and the British Journal of Photography Breakthrough Award.



Mind of Winter

Karolina Gembara

The experience of displacement had been present in my family for as long as I can remember. In early childhood, it did not seem unusual to me at all – I thought that everyone lived in former German houses and that their previous owners visited from time to time. Only after I moved abroad did I realize how complex this history is and how many people it affects.

Karolina Gembara is an artist, researcher, and curator. She works with photography, film, short video forms, and video installation. Her practice focuses on the relationships between personal and collective memory, migration, social engagement, and practices of care. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School, where she researches postwar displacement and strategies for filling archival gaps through critical fabulation. She is a member of the artistic collectives Sputnik Photos and the Public Protests Archive. She has carried out participatory projects with migrants in Warsaw that combine art, research, and social action. She also publishes texts and has lectured in the fields of photography and visual studies.



„Nicht schon wieder Oma, Mama“

Linn Schröder

This photographic work is a journey into the past that continues to resonate in our present. War, violence, and displacement leave traumas that persist across generations. It is striking that our civilization still believes in war as a solution, even though it leaves behind nothing but loss, pain, and the burden of learning how to live with its consequences.

Linn Schröder, born in Hamburg in 1977, studied photography at the Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften Hamburg, the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg, and the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zurich. Since 2004, she has been a member of OSTKREUZ. Her works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including at the Triennale der Photographie Hamburg, the Deichtorhallen Hamburg, the Akademie der Künste Berlin, and the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation. In 2021, her publication *Ich denke auch Familienbilder* was released by Hartmann Books. Since 2016, Linn Schröder has been Professor of Photography at the Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften Hamburg. She lives and works in Berlin.



Denkmalforschung

Wojtek Sienkiewicz

For me, this is a deeply personal matter stemming from growing up in a place where the term 'formerly German' was considered taboo at school. I realized that the stories connecting me to the place where I live were either invented or left untold, which led me to explore the relationship between people and their surroundings through objects that could, with virtually no cost, from the bottom up and on a mass scale, be preserved, altered, or removed.

Wojtek Sienkiewicz, born in 1979 in Oława (until 1945: Ohlau), currently lives in Jaczkowice (until 1945: Jätzdorf). He graduated from the Wrocław School of Photography and the Institute of Creative Photography in Opava. He creates long-term photographic series exploring his immediate surroundings. Professionally, he works in graphic design and commercial photography, and is also active in bicycle and motorcycle journalism.



Związki

Ina Schoenenburg

In recent years, I traveled repeatedly to the Oder region, where German-Polish coexistence became a central focus of my work. I met young people from both countries who encountered one another with openness and without prejudice. What interested me most were the moments of exchange – those brief instances when borders lose their importance and genuine mutual understanding can emerge.

Ina Schoenenburg was born in East Berlin in 1979. From 2009 to 2012, she studied at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie. Since 2016, she has been a member of OSTKREUZ. For her long-term project Blickwechsel, she received the Prix Exchange Boutographies / Fotoleggendo in 2016, followed by the Otto Steinert Prize and the Vonovia Award for Photography in 2017. Since 2019, she has been teaching photography at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie. Alongside her independent artistic practice, Schoenenburg works as a photographer for national and international newspapers and magazines. Her works have been exhibited in France, Italy, and Switzerland, among other countries. She lives and works in Berlin.

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