

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

BORIS FRIEDEWALD

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a vibrant red, long-sleeved, pleated dress. She is holding a small green parakeet on her right hand. The background is a textured, light-colored wall with soft shadows. The text 'WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS' is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

WOMEN
PHOTOGRAPHERS

From Julia Margaret Cameron
to Cindy Sherman

 PRESTEL

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JESSICA BACKHAUS

Born in 1970 in Cuxhaven, Germany

In 1990 a young woman strolled through Paris and discovered, quite by chance, a book. It was Gisèle Freund's essay *Fotografie und Gesellschaft* (Photography and Society). Before long the young student of visual communication was fascinated by the grande dame of photography. Two years later Jessica Backhaus suddenly found herself standing next to Freund (see p. 68)—at the buffet during a conference on the subject of photography. Although she was unprepared, the twenty-one-year-old girl summoned up all her courage and spoke to the woman she admired so greatly. Not long afterward the two women sat facing each other in Freund's apartment, drinking jasmine tea. Both had grown up in Berlin. Freund had fled from the Nazis to Paris, while Backhaus had traveled to the French capital at the age of sixteen on a school exchange and had simply not returned to Germany. Freund, at the age of eighty-four, could look back on a long life as a photographer, while the student still had her entire life before her. Soon they were meeting regularly, and became much more than friends. For the younger woman the legendary photographer became a mentor and also in some respects a sort of grandmother, who at some point told her two secrets: for anybody who works as an artist it is important to make a constant study of the results of all fields of artistic activity; and with regard to photography, according to Freund, it was essential, of course, to master the techniques—but what was even more important was to follow one's emotions and one's heart.

After completing her studies, Jessica Backhaus moved to New York in 1995. She read Walt Whitman and was fascinated by the photographs of William Eggleston, the great American photographer, who portrays everyday life with what appear to be snapshots in such a colorful manner that real life seems pale by comparison. Even more colorful are the staged shots by the American artist David LaChapelle, whom Backhaus assisted

in New York for a while, in addition to other photographers. During the summer and sometimes in winter, too, Backhaus frequently traveled to Poland, where her mother had bought an old estate. Here, she repeatedly photographed the people in the surrounding villages and their houses, using countless color films. The items she photographed were often simple and yet colorful objects: a worn-out sofa with a bright cushion; a refrigerator standing in the corner of the living room; and a wall whose brightly colored paint is peeling off. Backhaus had allowed herself to be guided by her emotions and had followed her heart—she had found her own artistic language, which her photographs continue to speak uncompromisingly and consistently to this day. At some point she designed her own volume of photographs and set off for the Frankfurt Book Fair, where she sought



Jessica Backhaus, 2016

a publisher for her book, but without success. When she had almost given up hope she met the publisher Klaus Kehrer, who published her book of photos in 2005 under the title *Jesus and the Cherries*. From now on Jessica Backhaus was no longer an unknown artist. Freund had often asked the young woman to show her the photos she had taken. Backhaus eventually presented her with a single photo, lacking the courage to show her any more. In 2008 she dedicated an entire volume of photographs to her mentor, who by that time had died, naming it *One day in November*, since it was on a day in November that she first met Freund.

For a long time now Backhaus, who has been living in Germany again since 2009, has rarely shown people in her photos. She portrays apparently ordinary things and places that she encounters in her daily life. And yet these pictures tell us a great deal about the essence of humanity, the world, and its phenomena. Her works are sometimes movingly poetic and full of quiet melancholy, sometimes amusing, incredibly beautiful, and at the same time ordinary—like life itself.

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I Jessica Backhaus



ORCHIDS IN SALZBURG, FROM THE SERIES WHAT STILL REMAINS, 2006

The impression of a hand on opaque glass, which appears like the veil of Maya, permitting us to see only the ephemeral and trivial illusion of worldliness. What remains is an impression that is like a symbol for the fragile and melancholy power of memory of the past. In her series What Still Remains, created between 2006 and 2008, melancholy, transience, and memory are condensed—and recorded for a brief eternity with the camera.

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BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY



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Our experiences, our education, and the people in our lives are the essence of who we become. We grow, we change, we evolve and hopefully we keep growing and living in every possible way.

Jessica Backhaus

| *Jessica Backhaus*



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AN INSTANT, FROM THE SERIES *SHIFTING CLOUDS*—PART OF A TRILOGY, 2015

A branch, shrouded in dusk and bathed at the same time in a radiant aura. A moment replete with the gentle poetry that so often resonates in the works of Jessica Backhaus.

LIKE THE WIND, FROM THE SERIES *SIX DEGREES OF FREEDOM*, 2013

Circles, traces of the past, and a couple of folded sheets of paper. Shades of gray in the absence of any bright colors. This image is among the first in the series Six Degrees of Freedom, which came about during the photographer's search for her own roots.

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BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

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