



Press Information

Thomas Hoepker - Image Maker

Seven decades of indelible pictures: The Ernst Leitz Museum Wetzlar is presenting a comprehensive retrospective of the German Magnum photographer Thomas Hoepker from April 1 to July 17, 2022, titled Thomas Hoepker - Image Maker.

Wetzlar, 14th February 2022. The large exhibition includes around 180 motifs, taken from Hoepker's rich lifetime oeuvre and multilayered archive. Within the display are numerous images that have long been considered iconic, as well as many never-shown-before photographs, and including some that are completely new. The exhibition traces the most formative stages of the photographer's career, beginning with work from the 1950s, and presenting his most important motifs in a loose chronological sequence. Additional thematic chapters establish other focal points.

Early Works (1954–1959)

Hoepker (born in Munich in 1936) produced his first picture with a glass plate camera, when he was just 14 years old. He received his first awards at the photokina Jugend fotografiert competitions in 1956 and 1958. In 1956, he began to study History of Art and Archaeology. During that time, he also started undertaking journeys, where his strong interest in reportage already became apparent. A selection of those early pictures will be on display; some for the first time ever.

Road Trip 1963: Photo reports for Kristall and stern

1960 saw the beginning of Hoepker's career as a photo reporter for various German magazines, including stern and Kristall. One of the highlights of his work for the Hamburg magazine Kristall was a three-month road trip through the USA in 1963, which appeared in

the magazine in four long photo series. Working with the author Rolf Winter, Hoepker explored a country full of contradictions. The outcome was a many-faceted and visually powerful testimony of US American reality. In 1964 joined the editorial department of stern, where he continued to develop his talent. Countless assignments took the restless photographer all over the world.

Champ: Reportage about Muhammad Ali, 1966

Hoepker gained particular attention for his Champ reportage about Muhammad Ali. The photographer and his wife, the writer Eva Windmöller, accompanied the boxer for weeks, gaining intimate glimpses into his life. The best known among these pictures is the one where Ali's fist is aimed directly at Hoepker's Leica. A large selection of these motifs will appear in the exhibition.

Photo reporter in the GDR, 1976 - 1978

Being able to accompany his wife – a journalist accredited in East Berlin –, Hoepker was one of few photo correspondents to explore daily life in the GDR, first-hand. This chapter of the exhibition reveals how the photographer's sensitive images clearly depict a piece of contemporary history.

Road Trip 2020: USA Revisited

The most recent pictures appearing in the retrospective were taken in 2020, when Hoepker once again travelled throughout the United States. Retracing the route followed on his first trip in 1963, the now eighty-four year-old photographer crossed the country, once more. These new colour pictures will appear exhibited in juxtaposition to the historic motifs. To coincide with the retrospective, Steidl Verlag is publishing The Way it was. Road Trip USA: a photo book capturing a journey, both exciting and critical, through the country and through time.

Thomas Hoepker – Image Maker. Seven decades of indelible pictures

The current exhibition offers clear evidence of Hoepker's on-going interest in social themes, and his particular empathy for the people he portrayed, whether celebrities or unknown. This humanistic approach was always decisive for the photographer; authenticity and visual testimonies were the defining constant in his work. Very humbly, he always considered himself a simple assignment photographer; an “image maker”. He is a person interested in

nothing less than reality and the authenticity of the moment. Calm, subtle and far removed from sensationalism, many of his motifs became icons of "concerned photography", due to their precise compositions and dense pictorial statements, as well as Hoepker's fine visual perception. We find no shock pictures; instead, the sensitive and subtle photographs capture the quiet dramas of everyday life. One of his best known images was taken on September 11, 2001, in New York. It was first exhibited in 2005, and has been provoking heavy discussions ever since. The chance moment, together with the perfection of the photograph, have made it one of the first symbolic images of the 21st century. It is one of the countless important pictures that Hoepker has taken, over the past seven decades – images that will remain as part of our visual memory.

The exhibition will be produced with the friendly support of WhiteWall.

The Ernst Leitz Museum in Leitz Park Wetzlar is open from Monday to Sunday from 10 am to 6 pm. Further information at: www.ernst-leitz-museum.de

Please find further information at:

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