

# L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

## Recap & Reload with Steffi Jaeger – Interview by Nadine Dinter

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Nadine Dinter

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**Steffi Jaeger** has been an important player in the photography scene for as long as I can remember. I first met her at Camera Work, where I enjoyed her insightful tours through the shows. Her engaging style and expertise left a lasting impression, and we've stayed in touch ever since.

Steffi and her husband Benjamin have since founded their own gallery, so it was about time to do a proper recap on her career in the world of photography. Dive in and enjoy the read!

## **When and how did you start your career in the arts / photography business?**

I was already very focused on photography while studying art history in the mid-'90s. At that time, photography became increasingly prominent in the cultural sector. I felt it was becoming more established as an art form in Germany, and I wanted to be part of that movement. While studying, I started working for PPS, a professional photo lab, where I met its founder, F.C. Gundlach.

Galerie Berinson has been an institution since the late 1980s with its museum-quality photo exhibitions, but the Berlin photo scene experienced a significant boost around the millennium. Argus Fotokunst, established in 1996, was one of the first photography galleries in Berlin, with its founder, Norbert Bunge, pioneering the rediscovery of nearly forgotten great photographers. Camera Work opened in 1997, the renowned Galerie Kicken moved from Cologne to Berlin in 2000, C/O Berlin opened in the same year, and the Helmut Newton Foundation was founded in 2003. These developments solidified Berlin as an international landmark for photography.

F.C. Gundlach introduced me to Christian Diener, the former artistic director of Camera Work, and in 1999, I started working there, finally finding my steadfast place in the world of photography.

## **What was your main motivation to open a gallery? Do you have any particular role models or idols?**

I never really had the desire to open my own gallery, but through many fortunate coincidences, teaming up with my husband Benjamin, and the encouragement of many artists, collectors, and friends, it happened completely unplanned and faster than expected.

In the last few years, we have been involved in several projects and advised collectors, institutions, and estates. At some point, we realized that we were missing a permanent place in the city where we could not only exhibit art but also meet and exchange ideas with collectors, artists, art lovers, and friends. We are glad we decided to take this step in 2022. This decision has led to wonderful exhibitions and many other exciting and unexpected opportunities that would not have happened without the gallery.

## **Who was the first artist you signed on?**

With over 20 years of experience in the field of photographic art, we have built a strong network within the photo art scene and developed close personal relationships with artists. The main question was whom to exhibit first.

After organizing the first solo exhibition in Germany of George Hoyningen-Huene at Grisebach during Berlin Photo Week in 2021, it was a logical step to exhibit his oeuvre at some point, especially as we are on the advisory board of the estate.

The Neue Nationalgalerie did an exhibition about Josephine Baker at the end of last year, and we contributed some iconic vintage photographs on loan from the Hoyningen-Huene estate. This provided a perfect opportunity for us to exhibit Hoyningen-Huene's photographs of Baker's contemporaries, such as Charlie Chaplin, Johnny Weissmüller, Salvador Dali, and Lee Miller.

### **After how many years in the business did you get the affirmation you needed? What drives you to continue working as a gallerist in your space?**

The feedback we have received has been incredible from the beginning. We are sometimes overwhelmed when we hear that visitors come from outside Berlin just to see our exhibitions. The feedback from artists, collectors, colleagues, and visitors is consistently positive, with everyone feeling welcomed and comfortable.

I love sharing my passion for art and creating exhibitions, whether showcasing icons of photography or emerging artists. I also enjoy exchanging ideas with new artists, getting to know them, and, when appropriate, supporting and accompanying them on their journey.

The gallery also enables us to promote and expand our further collaboration projects. We not only create the program for our gallery but also advise and support other exhibition venues with our network and expertise. For example, we advise In the Pink, one of the most beautiful galleries in Southern Europe; a private museum in Falsterbo, Sweden, on the other side of Europe, which has one of the most impressive photography collections in Scandinavia; and a collection in southern Germany, for whose project space, Münzmeisterhaus, we regularly curate exhibitions –like the current one with Kristian Schuller, with both well-known and brand-new photographs. This is the second exhibition we have held there, and it has been well-received by visitors, collectors, and the press. More exhibitions with renowned artists will follow.

### **What's your business philosophy?**

The time without a permanent gallery taught us a lot, especially about leaving the classic paths and thinking outside the box. We are continually exploring new business models and forming strategic partnerships within our network, including other galleries, collectors, institutions, publishers, and commercial enterprises.

Nonetheless, nothing is more important to us than the traditional values every gallery owner should uphold: supporting and promoting their artists in the best possible way and educating the audience.

### **How many artists do you represent now?**

I would like to continue the previous question to answer this one.

To ensure we support our artists in the best possible way, we decided to start with a smaller number of represented artists. By focusing on a limited core, we can give each artist the attention they deserve, take the best possible care of them, and position them effectively in the art market.

Currently, we represent 11 artists from various genres. While we plan to expand in the coming years, we are being very cautious for now as we prioritize long-term collaborations.

### **Has there been a big turning point, overhaul of the gallery line-up, or major move (of whatever kind) since opening your gallery?**

Our gallery has only been around for two years; there haven't been many turning points 😊

### **Any highlights or challenging moments?**

Every exhibition is a highlight for me, especially when an additional layer is added, such as collaborating with curators as well as the variety of art showcased in our gallery: abstract paintings by Julio Rondo, fine and elegant drawings by Tina Berning, sculptures by John Isaacs, or photographs from the 1920s and 1930s by George Hoyningen-Huene.

Our biggest challenge is the one we've set for ourselves: staying true to our vision, maintaining our standards, having fun, and balancing all of this with our family commitments.

### **Any particular anecdotes you want to share with our readers?**

A particular highlight is our collaboration with the young artist Evelyn Bencicova. Evelyn pushes the boundaries of photography and also works with video and augmented and virtual reality. We proposed her for the Berlin Masters Award, where she won the Schliemann Artist Residency in Arles, and she is currently being shown at Photo +, the festival for visual and

sonic media in Düsseldorf, and with our support, she made her auction debut at Phillips last autumn. It's truly gratifying to assist an artist in gaining such significant attention, and that is only one example.

Moreover, I am honored to have been appointed as a member of the German Photographic Society (DGPH) in April this year. I am eagerly looking forward to the challenge of contributing even more to the advancement of photography and its interests.

### **What's new & what's in store for 2024?**

Get ready for some fantastic exhibitions! A personal highlight is the upcoming exhibition featuring Bastiaan Woudt, with whom we've shared a close friendship for ten years. During Berlin Art Week in September, we'll present his photographs for the first time in Germany. Alongside his well-known "classics," we'll be showcasing new works never seen before, possibly influenced by his recent trip to Japan in April.

Bastiaan Woudt is a contemporary Dutch photographer renowned for his striking monochromatic images that blend modern minimalism with classic portraiture. His work often features high contrast, sharp lines, and a strong emphasis on texture and form, creating a timeless and elegant aesthetic. Woudt's photography encompasses various subjects, including portraits, nudes, and landscapes, all characterized by sophisticated composition and emotional depth. He has gained recognition for his unique ability to capture the essence of his subjects while maintaining a distinctive, almost abstract, visual style.

You're warmly invited to attend.

### **Your advice for photography collectors?**

Stay engaged in the art scene: Explore exhibitions in galleries, museums, art fairs, and festivals to stay abreast of emerging trends while honoring art history's depth. Foster connections with gallery owners, curators, and fellow collectors to remain informed and inspired.

While staying informed is crucial, let your gut feeling and heart guide your acquisitions. Invest in artwork that speaks to you and finds a meaningful place in your life, collection, or home. Attend numerous exhibitions, engage in thoughtful conversations with gallery owners, get to know the artists, and acquire pieces that ignite your passion or resonate deeply with you.

Always be open and embrace a diverse mix of artists, supporting both emerging talents and established artists.

## **No-gos & to-do's when it comes to the photography business?**

While the art market can sometimes lean towards speculative buying and trend-chasing, we prioritize authenticity. Our ethos revolves around the belief that art should deeply resonate with you rather than being solely influenced by external factors or market trends.

We take pleasure in cultivating authentic relationships between artists and collectors. By inviting clients into artists' studios and ateliers, we provide a firsthand experience of the creative process. Moreover, we embrace collaborations that transcend our gallery's walls, aiming to showcase artists in diverse and enriching contexts.

## **Photographers on your watchlist?**

Over the years, we have put together two quite interesting folders with the titles "not so good" and "not so bad" – maybe we can review them together sometime ;-)))

Stay tuned & in touch with Steffi Jaeger through her gallery's website [www.jaegerart.com](http://www.jaegerart.com) and on Instagram at [@jaeger.art.advisory](https://www.instagram.com/jaeger.art.advisory)

## **Not to be missed & Save the dates:**

### **Ingar Krauss – This Is Not a Fashion Photograph**

on view until June 22, 2024

@ JAEGER ART

Brunnenstrasse 161

10119 Berlin

[www.jaeger.art](http://www.jaeger.art)

### **Kristian Schuller – Dream Worlds**

on view until June 14, 2024

@ Projektraum im Münzmeisterhaus

Ketschengasse 7

96450 Coburg

in collaboration with the Stahlberg Collection

**Bastiaan Woudt**

September 14 – November 16, 2024

@ JAEGER ART

Brunnenstrasse 161

10119 Berlin

**[www.jaeger.art](http://www.jaeger.art)**