

WILLY RÖMER: EVERYDAY LIFE IN BERLIN.

PHOTOGRAPHS 1919 – 1933

The Exhibition "Willy Römer: Everyday Life in Berlin. Photographs 1919 - 1933" is organized by the German Cultural Center (manager: Roxana Florescu) in collaboration with Braşov Art Museum (manager: Bartha Arpad). The exhibition concept was created by Prof. Dr. Enno Kaufhold, a renowned expert in the history of photography, who dedicated an extended research to Willy Römer's photographic work (2013) and the exhibition was organized by the Goethe Institute in cooperation with the Art Library of Berlin State Museums (Kunstabibliothek der Staatlichen Museen Berlin) and the Press Images Archive for Art, Culture and History (Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte).

The exhibition comprises of 50 photographs which capture urban aspects, moments of Berlin's daily life in a period of great political and social upheaval, as well as defining hypostases of prominent historical events - starting with the November Revolution (1918-1919) until the Nazi accession to power (1933). The photographs are made by an important German photojournalist, Willy Römer (1878-1979), whose work has peaked in the interwar period.

The photographer returned from the war right in the middle of Berlin's November 1918 Revolution and he quickly became aware of the importance of documenting defining aspects regarding these historical events. Thus, he captured the return of German troops marching towards Parisier Square through the Brandenburg Gate. The citizens were climbing trees in order to better observe this exciting moment while Chancellor Philipp Scheidemann and War Minister Heinrich Scheuch gave speeches to mark the occasion. Römer courageously snuck in during street battles and immortalized the *Spartakusbund* socialists as they were attempting to take over the power, but were defeated, and also moments captured during Rosa Luxemburg's burial ceremony.

Emblematic aspects of the Nazi accession to power are captured during the Meeting of May 1, 1933, when Hitler passed by car through Lustgarten while he was enthusiastically welcomed by the people and, of course, during the boycott of Jewish affairs in 1933. Many of the photographs included in the exhibition became symbolic images of historical events that happened in Berlin, but the subject of photographic investigations in Römer's work does not only regard the political scene.

The photojournalist was also interested in documenting the life experience of commoners directly affected by historical events, such as traders, newspaper vendors, musicians, women suffering during the inflation, unemployed people waiting in front of the labor office, people buying bread, children playing, family Sundays in the park and other genre scenes. Last but not least, the pictures also illustrate Berlin's rapid urban development - steel and glass buildings emerging alongside medieval streets and courtyards, traditional crafts being practiced simultaneously with mass production. The wagon, the tram and the automobile competed with each other in the context of ever more accelerated technological development. As a veritable visual chronicler of the city, Römer has recorded these impressions for posterity so that today, we could reconstruct a faithful image of the interwar period in Berlin.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY:

Willy Römer began his apprenticeship in 1903 in one of Berlin's first German press agencies, *Illustrations-Gesellschaft*, followed by various training sessions in Berlin and Paris. Between 1915 and 1918, he was sent to the front as a soldier in Russia and Poland, but even there he continued to take pictures reflecting aspects of ordinary people's daily life in different villages.

He returned to Berlin in November 1918 and bought the *Photothek* company from a colleague, and from then on his photographs appeared under this name. In 1920 he associated with Walter Bernstein, who dealt with the commercial aspects of the business and so, *Photothek* continually flourished for a decade. Römer even photographed Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi leader who closed his business in 1935, because his partner Bernstein was of Jewish origin. It was of course a difficult financial period, but Römer continued to take press photographs while working for other companies. Beginning with 1942, he was assigned to work as a war photographer for the National Socialist Party's newspaper, *Ostdeutscher Beobachter* in Poznan.

At the end of the war, he returned to Berlin where he was very saddened to find his hometown in ruins after the 1945 bombings and documented this reality. Fortunately, his archive of glass plates survived the bombings. However, after 1945 the photojournalist was never to achieve the economic success he had during the interwar period.

Römer died in Berlin at the age of 92. His wife and daughter kept the photographic archive in good condition and wished to sell it. The entire Römer archive was acquired by photography historian Diethard Kerbs, the expert who researched this vast photographic work and promoted its message for the first time in 2004. Subsequently, the Römer archive was acquired by the current owners: the Berlin State Art Museum Library and the Press Images Archive for Art, Culture and History.

Exhibition concept: Prof. Dr. Enno Kaufhold, expert in the history of photography

Curator (Braşov Art Museum): Andreea Pocol

Translation by Andreea Pocol