

L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

Recap & Reload : Kathrin Köhler – Interview by Nadine Dinter

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I met **Kathrin Köhler** around 2016, thanks to an introduction by Vincent Peters, who at the time was getting things ready for an exhibition at their freshly opened IMMAGIS gallery in Munich. That initial meeting sparked a series of exciting projects – showcasing Ellen von Unwerth's *Heimat* series during Oktoberfest in Munich (2017), introducing Greg Gorman to the gallery in 2019, and partying with Olaf Heine and his celebrity friends. What I've always admired about working with Kathrin and her partner Joachim Schmeisser is their exceptional

knack for staging shows. One standout memory for me was wrestling with Jean Pigozzi's mermaid wallpaper – it was a bit of a challenge, but the end result was absolutely stunning. Having collaborated with IMMAGIS on and off over the years, I'm thrilled about their latest venture: opening an art bunker and a special collectors room in the months to come. So, here's to looking back and ahead with this recap & reload. Stay tuned for more exciting news!

When and how did you start your career in the art/photography industry?

I was already very interested in art as a child and spent a lot of my time painting and drawing. I probably got my love for this from my grandfather, who was a very artistically gifted person. I loved creating my own worlds and immersing myself in them, creating my own characters, and telling stories.

Art can give you this wonderful visual stimulation – that's certainly one of the main things that led me to take my life in this direction.

In addition, I have been in a relationship with a photographer for over 20 years, so I am talking about a life with and in images, 24/7 in a visual universe that enriches me a lot and gives me deep insights into this world.

What was your main motivation to open a gallery?

In the end, it was a logical consequence, and many things played a role.

It is the passion for this extremely multifaceted world of art, the opportunity to work with the most diverse (often not easy) artist characters and to present their works, to support and promote young up-and-coming talents. You are part of a very lively network on different levels – the artists on the one hand and the art lovers, collectors, and curators on the other. Not to mention the tasks of developing creative strategies, curating and organizing exhibitions, marketing and successfully positioning your artists, and ensuring an adequate presence in the various media.

All in all, it's an extremely challenging job, but also an exciting one and therefore very rewarding and fulfilling for me.

How long did it take you in this business to receive the validation you needed? What drives you to continue working as a gallery owner in your space?

Of course, I was aware from the beginning that the gallery business is not easy. But I always had a long-term vision. If I were to highlight one validation amidst many smaller successes, it would be a Greg Gorman exhibition I organized in Munich in 2019. He is one of the most famous and successful portrait photographers of our time, and I have a close friendship with him. At the end of the show, he presented me with one of his books with a dedication and thanks for the most successful show of his entire 50-year career. This is not only a great acknowledgment but also a great motivation for the future. But yes, it took more than 10 years!

What is your business philosophy?

To be successful in this business in the long term, you have to be aware of your responsibilities – towards the artist and the buyer. This is the central pillar of this business, without which no long-term trusting relationship can be established. The crucial elements here are fairness, openness and transparency, as well as respect, seriousness, and absolute reliability. These are the cornerstones of my work. Beyond that, there is no overarching philosophical framework. An understanding of art, coupled with excellence and quality at all levels, are the basic requirements.

How many artists do you currently represent?

I am currently working with 31 international artists – some of them I represent exclusively in Germany.

Since opening your gallery, has there been a major turning point, an overhaul of the gallery program, or a major move (of any kind)?

There actually is at the moment. Traditional galleries at fixed locations have been a tried and tested system for many decades, but the internet and digitalization have transformed the art market in many ways and also fundamentally changed the way artworks are selected and sold. Of course, this presents major challenges but, as always, it also means opportunities and new prospects for all players. I have been dealing with this change for a few years now and have been looking for new, interesting, and exciting approaches that offer me more flexibility and creative freedom in the presentation of artworks.

In January of this year, after more than 15 years, I said goodbye to a fixed location in favor of several flexible options that allow me far more creative and experimental exhibition formats and offer an informal and relaxed approach, especially for the younger generation who are still inexperienced. To date (there may well be more), there are three new locations.

I have a huge archive of framed pictures and prints by my artists, which I can now present in a large studio. This studio is only accessible by appointment, has the character of a photo studio or an artist's workshop, and offers a much more personal and diverse exchange with my customers, if desired, also together with the artist. From September, I will also be occupying an art bunker in Munich. It's a really exciting, unconventional place for innovative concepts, also for addressing new target groups. And from May 24, a few of my artists will be on view in a very special location in South Tyrol, which is likely unique in this form. I don't want to give too much away yet – everything will be on the website from May.

Have you had any highlights or difficult moments?

Of course. And there were always both. More highlights in my collaborations with artists and collectors, and more difficult moments in relation to the external factors shaping the business. Let's just take the difficult years of the pandemic in 2020/21, which didn't allow any events and forced many galleries to close. Logistical conditions such as transportation, production, and framing of artworks have also become much more difficult and costly.

What's new, and what's planned for 2024?

See above.

Your advice for photography collectors?

The most important thing: Buy works that appeal to you, inspire you, and move you every day. If you don't have much experience yet, you should first familiarize yourself with the wide variety of styles and genres. Pay attention to the technical quality but also to the artistic concept and the message the artist wants to convey. Look for originality, creativity, and innovative approaches, and don't be afraid to seek the advice and expertise of gallery owners. Believe me, it can be very enlightening and valuable.

No-go's & to-do's when it comes to the photography business?

Authenticity and credibility are paramount for me. By this I don't mean modesty, because if you don't have a certain presence and visibility as a gallery owner or artist in an increasingly confusing and crowded market, it's difficult.

For years, we have seen that aggressive marketing and promotion can help even moderately talented photographers achieve great commercial success. This may have always been the case, but today the possibilities of online media are almost unlimited. But in the long run, a lot of trust can be lost if the expectations of art lovers and collectors are not met due to inflated portrayals.

Photographers on your watch list?

I have just taken on Sara Punt, a young up-and-coming artist whom I consider to be exceptionally promising. Her style is non-conformist, original, and provocative. Never boring – I like that very much. I always keep my eyes open in all directions, and I see great potential in the younger generation in particular. The main thing is that they remain courageous.

Follow the gallery at @immagis.art and find more information at <https://www.immagis.de/>

Next:

2-8 June 2024, Master Class with Greg Gorman in South Tyrol
as of May 2024, Showroom in Galaria / South Tyrol
September – December 2024, Art Bunker in Grünwald/Munich