

SK Stiftung Kultur in Cologne Presents 160 Works of Art Made by Joachim Brohm

October 4, 2010 by [All Art News](#) Filed under [Art Events & Exhibitions](#)



COLOGNE.- The exhibition Joachim Brohm. COLOR features a total of around 160 exhibits from different sequences of photographs created in Germany, France, the United States, Portugal and Japan between 1980 and 2010. Among the works on show are a significant number of photographs that were realized alongside the artist's major groups of works but are now being displayed and published for the first time. Included in the presentation are the only surviving early prints of Joachim Brohm's photographs of allotments in the Ruhr region (1980) as well as selected images from the groups Ruhr (1980—1983), Küste (1981/82), Paradis (1982), Ruhrstadt (1988—1992), Ohio (1983—1984), Areal (1992—2002), Japan (2006) and Culatra (2008—).

Joachim Brohm, Ueno (B), 2006. © Joachim Brohm, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2010
Based for many years in Leipzig, where he teaches at and is director of the

Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst (Academy of Visual Arts), Joachim Brohm (*1955) decided even as a student at the University of Essen to work with color photography. Unlike black-and-white photography, which had long been established as an international artistic medium, color photography barely had a toe-hold in Europe in the early 1980s. However, at the universities of Essen and Düsseldorf, it was discussed as a new form of expression — especially in the light of catalogues and monographs from the United States. Contact with Michael Schmidt and the internationally active circle of Berlin artists associated with him also proved inspirational for Joachim Brohm and extended his photographic and artistic environment. On graduating from Essen in 1983, he took the logical step of spending a year at the Ohio State University in Columbus, where he also studied under Allan Sekula and Jonathan Green. In Ohio, his aim was to follow the current American debate about photography from a ‘front-row seat’ and respond to it with a practical project of his own that would produce a special counterpart to the similarly inspired photographs he had made earlier in the Ruhr Region. His precursors were William Eggleston, William Christenberry, Stephen Shore and Joel Meyerowitz.

What Brohm describes in the photographs created during his student days in Ohio, however, is not so much the American dream, the land of unlimited opportunities, but a plain and morbid place that guarantees at best a middling existence. Human beings make only rare appearances. The photographs show thoroughfares, yards, parking lots and what looks like no-man’s land. The artist was particularly taken with automobiles — but even they reflect the myth of freedom, adventure and horsepower only up to a point. They tend to be extensively used vehicles displaying the scars of age.

Reading the signs of the time — whether they be in personal design preferences or in sweeping changes in landscapes or the built environment — has been a matter of paramount importance for Joachim Brohm since the beginning of his career and runs like a thread even through the photographs made in the ’80s and ’90s in the Ruhr region. Included in that work were images that played a major role in establishing Brohm’s reputation: unpretentious panoramas, urban fringe areas, views of vegetation, streets and structures, automobiles, tiny human figures captured in swimming pools and wasteland — rendered in a chromatic balance between restrained neutral hues and splashes of vividly luminous color.

While Joachim Brohm repeatedly trained his camera on trivial moments of urban life and almost imperceptible marks, imprints and legacies of overlapping lives, the photographic study *Areal*, which he realized between 1992 and 2002, offered a new and different opportunity to focus as a photographer on status quo phenomena and underlying processes. In hundreds of photographs, he documented the changing face of a site in the north of Munich, from its industrial origins to its re-birth as an office and residential development. But Brohm's phototopographic study is not primarily designed to depict the linear progress of construction. Rather, it tends to focus on parts of the site that, while being affected by the development plans, are transformed more by provisional arrangements.

The most recent project, on which Brohm was still working in spring 2010, started in 2008 on a small Portuguese island called Culatra. Brohm found the place perfect for his artistic work — neither an exclusive idyll nor a magnet for mass tourism. Culatra also displays quirky, austere traces of modest occupancy; signs of weathering and age, rudimentary embellishments and repairs are found everywhere. Brohm follows the flow of time.

It becomes clear that, even early on, Joachim Brohm created the right photographic images at the right time — images that would prove a pioneering achievement in the context of a virulent debate over the status of photography in art. His work became a vehicle for an understanding of art — prevalent since the 1970s — that made a young generation of artists connect the visual possibilities of color photography with a newly defined “everyday cultural landscape”. At the same time, Brohm's constantly expanding sequences of photographs also show how important the medium and the artist's archive have become as reflectors of day-to-day existence, challenging him to keep developing and reviewing them in the light of changes in the reality of our lives.

With the exception of a number of works from the collection of Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne, the exhibits are on loan from the artist, Niedersächsische Sparkassenstiftung, Hanover, Galerie Michael Wiesehöfer, Cologne, and a private collection. Our special thanks go to those who made them available.