

The 23rd Photomonth under the theme “Unreal Estate”. We are announcing the programme!

Poland, Germany, and Polish–German relations within the broader context of Central Europe will form the central focus of the upcoming 23rd Month of Photography in Krakow. Under the title “Unreal Estate”, from 14 May to 14 June 2026, the program will include three exhibitions in the main programme, alongside a range of accompanying events – discussions, guided tours, meetings and screenings – featuring artists and experts. This year’s programme also features six exhibitions in the ShowOFF Section, aimed at young talents, and an exhibition by students from Polish and German art schools as part of the FRINGE Section.

The Visual Arts Foundation’s initiative continues to develop the festival’s format, in which photography becomes a window through which the world is revealed in its various dimensions: social, political and historical.

Opening weekend: 14–17 May 2026

“Unreal Estate” – a photographic tale on borders, entanglements and the ghosts of Central Europe

The theme of this year’s Krakow Photomonth is drawn from the memoirs of Vladimir Nabokov (*Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*). The phrase “unreal estate” refers not only to the people, places, and objects irretrievably lost following the forced emigration of this 20th-century literary classic from revolution-torn Russia, but also to the “beloved details” (“silent flashes of lightning snapping photographs of a distant line of trees at night”). Recalling them was less an expression of sentimentality than an attempt to construct a new identity amidst constant change – one no longer rooted in possession or a sense of belonging. In Krzysztof Pijarski and Anna Voswinckel’s curatorial concept of the main program for the Krakow biennial, “Unreal Estate” encapsulates the essence of Central Europe, including Poland and Germany – the two focal countries of this year’s Photomonth. The Polish-German “Unreal Estate” emerges as an “in-between” territory, a space of close, neighbourly relations, yet marked by scars that remain visible to this day.

Central Europe is a region where borders have shifted time and again over people’s heads, and the very existence of the state has rarely been a given – note the curators Krzysztof Pijarski and Anna Voswinckel. Both in the society of post-1989 reunified Germany, grappling with an unresolved dispute over the legacy of post-socialist transformation and growing inequality, as well as in post-war Poland – a country radically transformed both territorially and socially, and the scene of unprecedented economic growth in recent years – a sense of loss and resentment remains vivid today.

In the case of Germany and Poland, our political border resembles a screen (much like the former border between East and West Germany): we can barely see one another, whilst the condition of both states, as well as our identities, remain tangled, unpredictable, haunted. *Using the medium of photography to tell the story of Central Europe allows us to imbue familiar facts with new meanings and applications. Photography thus becomes an act of sharing, opening up new possibilities for thinking and feeling – conclude the festival’s curators. It is precisely these themes that run through the work of the artists taking part in this year’s Photomonth.*

23rd Krakow Photomonth – in a nutshell

The three exhibitions in the main programme will take place at MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, *Contemporary Art Gallery Bunkier Sztuki* and the Potocki Palace Gallery. The thematic structure organised into successive “chapters” under the collective title “Unreal Estate”, will include both individual and collective presentations. They will be complemented by events organised in partnership with leading Krakow institutions, festivals and media partners. Once again, an integral part of the biennial programme will be the ShowOFF Section, in which six Krakow galleries will present projects by artists selected through an international competition. The programme will conclude with a group exhibition of works by students from Polish art academies as part of the FRINGE project.

Main Programme

Chapter I

Speak, Volumes

MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow

4 Lipowa Street

7 March – 14 June 2026

The first exhibition of the main programme has been open since 7 March. MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow presents works by the German visual artist Anette Kelm, drawn from two series: *Die Bücher* and *Travertinsäulen Recyclingpark Neckartal*. In the project *Die Bücher* (“The Books”), the artist presents book covers – of first or early editions – which were banned by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. Presented frontally against a neutral white background, they seem to evoke the format of portraiture. In the series *Travertinsäulen Recyclingpark Neckartal*, Kelm photographed a row of monumental travertine columns on the outskirts of Stuttgart, which were originally intended to form part of an unrealised monument to Benito Mussolini in Berlin, but now stand hidden in the vicinity of a waste processing plant.

Chapter II

A Possible Arrangement

Bunkier Sztuki Gallery

3a Szczepański Square

15 May – 30 August 2026

As part of this wide-ranging exhibition, the interior of the Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery will bring together artists from Poland and Germany. Artists featured will include: Paweł Bownik, Fungi (Phuong Tran Minh), Karolina Gembara, Eiko Grimberg, Jonas Höschl, Arwed Messmer, Ines Schaber, Arne Schmitt, Paweł Starzec, Andrzej Steinbach and Tytus Szabelski-Różniak.

The personal photographs and poems of the German-Vietnamese artist working under the pseudonym Fungi touch upon issues of integration and growing up in Germany’s multicultural society, whilst Eiko Grimberg’s visual diary of the 2020s poses the question of whether the present moment in history can truly be photographed. To this end, the artist travels, among other places, to the eastern borders of the European Union. Ines Schaber investigates historical narratives, examining the different ways in which the 16th-century Peasants’ War was and is commemorated in the former West and East Germany. Whilst Arwed Messmer examines the very beginnings of the so-called German reunification in the landscape, Tytus Szabelski-Różniak explores how neoliberal capitalism transformed the capitals of Poland and Germany during the period of political transition.

Andrzej Steinbach explores a similar theme through “Hellingierian constellations” of consumer goods, revealing the desires, aspirations and limitations hidden within their relationships. Arne Schmitt drew inspiration from Max Frisch’s famous questionnaires and set out to explore the extent to which our relationships with cities resemble our relationships with people: at the organisers’ invitation, he created a portrait of Krakow understood as a complex network of relationships in which social values are reflected. The photographs by Paweł Starzec and Karolina Gembara, meanwhile, invite us on a visual journey through Lower Silesia – a part of contemporary Poland whose current identity has been shaped by resettlements unprecedented in general history.

Chapter II examines various arrangements of objects, bodies and spaces to explore the tangled relations between Poland and Germany, whilst also touching upon areas of shared experience.

Chapter III

Shifting Strata

Gallery of Potocki Palace

Main Market Square 20

14 May – 30 August 2026

The second group exhibition of Krakow Photomonth will take place in the basement of Potocki Palace, featuring works by Susanne Kriemann, Tobias Zielony, Anna Orłowska, Jadwiga Janowska, Jonas Höschl and Wojciech Wilczyk.

The exhibited projects explore themes such as the histories and weight of a place, such as St Anne’s Mountain in Anna Orłowska’s project, which reveals the deep historical and identity-related connections embedded in the landscape and rituals. Wojciech Wilczyk’s project evokes the abolition of serfdom in what is now Poland, recorded in the space through the crosses erected by the freed peasants. Susanne Kriemann examines a more-than-human landscape: one wounded by humans, yet gradually processing its traumas. It is precisely this landscape that becomes a source of imagery for the artist.

Whilst Jadwiga Janowska’s project explores Gliwice Radio Station with a sense of ease and detachment as a symbol of place and identity, Jonas Höschl’s video installation will introduce us to the world of contemporary neo-Nazi movements in Germany, questioning the mediated nature of political photography – asking whether we are capable of documenting extremism, without legitimising it or turning it into a spectacle. Tobias Zielony’s new video work approaches the same question, but from the other side: it examines movements along the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, addressing pushbacks, militarisation and espionage in a form that hovers on the edge of recognisability.

In Chapter III, which focuses on landscape and photography as a convention and technique of representation, the human clashes with the inhuman, and the historical with the symbolic.

Main programme – special events

An integral part of this year’s main programme will be events organised in collaboration with leading institutions, festivals and media partners, as well as a series of curatorial tours. Highlights include an exhibition of works by Tadeusz Rolke, who passed away last year, from the *Fischmarkt* series (1978) at the ZPAF Gallery, organised in partnership with the Krakow Film Festival, and to an exhibition of photobooks, developed in collaboration with RUST Publishing collective.

The 23rd edition of Krakow Photomonth also marks a new chapter in the history of the Visual Arts Foundation, the event organiser. The Foundation's headquarters (2 Bracka Street, Potocki Palace) will serve as the festival centre and bookshop, and ultimately function as a space for year-round educational activities in the field of photography.

ShowOFF Section

Once again, Krakow Photomonth will present to the public the most interesting works by selected emerging artists from Poland and abroad. As part of the ShowOFF Section, six projects selected through an international competition organised by the Visual Arts Foundation will be shown. They will address issues such as Indonesia's postcolonial heritage, the experience of illness, and the reality of the war front in Ukraine.

Andrzej Frydrych (Poland)

The Guest Room

Curators: Turnus – Kamila Fałęcka, Marcelina Gorczyńska

Venue: Szaber Gallery, 56 Wrocławska Street

Maite Vanhellemont (Netherlands)

A Little Memory of «The Beginning»

Curator: Agnieszka Tarasiuk

Venue: Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, 26 Św. Jana Street

Monika Libera (Poland)

If / Jeśli

Curator: Aneta Grzeszykowska

Venue: "W Przyziemiu" Art Gallery, 36 Starowiślna Street

Abdalsalam Alhaj (Sudan)

The Last Efendi

Curator: Yuliia Krivich

Venue: Szara Kamienica Gallery, 6 Main Market Square

Sonia Góral (Poland)

Family Album

Curator: Dorota Szulc

Venue: APTEKA Janicki Gallery, 43 Józefińska Street

Vitaliy Gerasymenko (Ukraine)

Heat Signatures

Curator: Tobias Zielony

Venue: Piana Gallery, 15 Długa Street

FRINGE Section

As has become tradition, Krakow Photomonth will also serve as a platform for showcasing new trends in Polish photography. A collective exhibition of works by students from photography departments and faculties at universities in Łódź, Poznań and Szczecin, under the banner of FRINGE, will conclude the festival. This year, the FRINGE section will also have an international, Polish–German character as artists from Hamburg will also take part in the project.

Krakow Photomonth | SAVE THE DATE | 14 May – 14 June 2026

Krakow Photomonth is an international photography festival organised by the Visual Arts Foundation in collaboration with leading cultural institutions in Krakow and abroad. Its ambition is to present photography within its contemporary social, political and historical contexts. Since 2022, the event has been held every two years—in a biennial format—enabling a more long-term strategic approach, including investment in multi-year partnerships and the presentation of completed projects in other cities across Poland and internationally.

The artistic director of Krakow Photomonth is Witold Orski, a curator, artist and lecturer associated with the Łódź Film School. The Visual Arts Foundation is headed by Tomasz Gutkowski.

The event is co-funded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage from the Culture Promotion Fund – a state-run special-purpose fund. It is also co-funded by the Municipality of Krakow, the Foundation for Polish–German Cooperation.

The full events calendar will be published shortly on the website photomonth.com.

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Notes on the curators of the main programme of the 23rd Krakow Photomonth

Krzysztof Pijarski – visual artist, researcher, educator, and curator. Professor at the School of Form at SWPS University in Warsaw, and a member of the Visual Narratives Laboratory at the Leon Schiller National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź, which he founded and co-directed between 2019 and 2024. He has published books on Allan Sekula, Michael Fried, Thomas Struth, and Zofia Rydet. He is the founding editor of the journal “Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture”.

Anna Voswinkel – a curator based in Berlin, specialising in contemporary photography. From 2023 to 2024, she was the curator of exhibitions at Camera Austria in Graz, where she organised group exhibitions. In 2020, she co-organised the 10th edition of the Fotograf Festival in Prague (Uneven Ground). She was co-founder and artistic director of the international art and literature magazine “Plotki – Rumours from around the Bloc”, which was published between 2000 and 2010.