

JITKA HANZLOVÁ

IDENTITIES

Exhibition Facts

Duration	10 July – 26 October 2025
Opening	10 July 2025 6.30 pm
Venue	Column Hall The ALBERTINA Museum
Curator	Walter Moser
Works	134
Catalogue	Available for EUR 32,90 (English & German) onsite at the Museum Shop as well as via https://shop.albertina.at/en/
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 presse@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening Hours	Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Except Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
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JITKA HANZLOVÁ

Identities

11.7. – 26.10.2025

With *Jitka Hanzlová–Identities*, the ALBERTINA Museum presents the first museum exhibition of one of the most distinguished female photographers of the present day. In 1982, Jitka Hanzlová fled the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic for West Germany. She went on to study Visual Communication with a focus on photography in Essen, where she still lives today.

First museum exhibition in Austria

Jitka Hanzlová's work is characterized by a subtle yet consistent examination of the relationship between man and his habitat. The exhibition presented in the historic Column Hall comprises ten series from 1990 to the present day—from portraits to photographs of landscapes and animals to photographs of natural phenomena. Hanzlová's artistic language encourages an examination of social and ecological issues. The focus is on themes such as identity, belonging, exile and the relationship between the individual and their environment.

Memory, identity and exile

Hanzlová's personal experience of exile forms the starting point for her artistic exploration of questions of identity. In many series, she deals with the tension between origin and new home, between the familiar and the foreign. By processing her experiences, identity politics becomes comprehensible not as an abstract concept, but as a deeply personal and at the same time social issue.

In her first major series, *Rokytník* (1990-1994), Hanzlová invites viewers to accompany her to her Czech home village of the same name. Without claiming to be explicitly socially critical, she creates a multi-layered portrait of the village, which at the time was caught between a socialist past and a democratic future. From a formal point of view, her consistent use of portrait format is remarkable—landscape shots are traditionally shot in landscape format.

Living environments

The series *Bewohner* (1994-1996), taken in European cities, was created as a direct counterpart to the *Rokytník* series. The expanse of nature in *Rokytník* has given way to enclosing fences and walls. The series *Hier* (1998, 2003-2010), on the other hand, combines portraits, pictures of animals and photographs of desolate architecture. The people appear isolated and alienated from their surroundings.

The work *Female* (1997-2000) was mainly taken in large metropolitan cities: This series was created between New York, Los Angeles, Berlin and London on the basis of a concept to offer women a platform. The photographs of women encountered by chance on the street show the photographic process as a communicative act. *Brixton* (2002) was created at the invitation of the London Photographer's Gallery in the south London district of the same name and focuses on Afro-Caribbean culture and the women's experiences of migration. The artist refrains from explicit social criticism and shows subtle empathy.

Experiencing nature

In *Forest* (2000-2005), Jitka Hanzlová explores the organic silence of the forest near her Czech home village as a counterpoint to the series in the urban environment. *Forest* is a journey into the past and a confrontation with memory, capturing the subjective experience of nature. For Hanzlová, the forest is crucial for human survival, for the exchange of oxygen, for the cultivation of flora and fauna and for the growth of organisms. In this sense, *Forest* is also a socio-political work.

Ecological issues and climate change

The themes of urbanity, nature and the environment underlie the series *Hier* (1998, 2003-2010), which was created in a large agglomeration in the Ruhr area. It addresses the relationship between nature and culture as well as problematic human interventions in the environment.

Other works by the artist also deal intensively with ecological themes. The *Water* series, comprising eight chapters, ventures down new paths of visual language and imagination and deals with the visible—and invisible—consequences of human activity on nature. Here, the artist focuses on the three aggregate states of water. The exhibition presents two chapters, *Ice* and *Clouds*, in which water always takes on unique forms: sequences of clouds as well as concrete and abstract details of frozen glaciers. The artist draws attention to the vulnerability of ecosystems. The threat to nature and its beauty, which she depicts without any glorification, are closely related in her photographic language.

The exhibition at the ALBERTINA Museum is rounded off by the series *Bohdanka* (since 2004). Like *Rokytník*, it was created in her home town. *Bohdanka* shows the everyday rural life of a large family as an alternative form of coexistence with the environment—nature often becomes the actual protagonist. A selection of these works from the project, which has been running since 2004, is being exhibited at the ALBERTINA Museum for the first time ever.

Hanzlová's photographs address the permeability of borders and the influence of global developments on the individual. Series such as *Bohdanka* show a response to the prevailing consumer society and contrast the globalized world of commodities with a conscious way of life close to nature. The artist shows how globalized processes shape the lives of individuals and how they can create space for themselves in response.

Jitka Hanzlová is one of the most distinguished photographers of our time. With sensitive observation, personal history, socio-political depth and a spirit of formal innovation, her work shapes contemporary photography and encourages a critical examination of questions of identity, society and nature.

Exhibition Texts

Introduction

Jitka Hanzlová (b. 1958) is one of the most recognized photographers of our day. In 1982 she escaped the communist regime from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to West Germany. During this time of reorientation, the artist discovered photography for herself. From 1987 to 1994 she studied visual communication with a focus on photography in the Ruhr city of Essen, where she still lives today. While still a student, the artist was unexpectedly able to return to her native village of Rokytín after the fall of the Iron Curtain toward the end of 1989. Over the next five years she shot her first series there, portraying the inhabitants caught between socialist past and democratic future. *Rokytín* provided the creative foundation for all her subsequent projects.

From then on, the artist's consistently produced series have examined the relationship between people and their environments in extremely nuanced ways. Based on the drastic experience of exile, Hanzlová poses universal questions about belonging. They are expressed in the need for social connectedness and in the ambivalent experience of human habitats. What is central here is how the environment shapes an individual's identity.

Such series as *Bewohner* [*Residents*] (1994–1996) or *Hier* [*Here*] (1998, 2003–2010) convey a sense of isolation that determines the lives of people in European metropolises. In her subsequent works, she also seeks their antipodes: in *Forest* (2000–2005), she explores organic silence in the forest of her childhood. In recent years, Hanzlová has increasingly devoted herself to vanishing natural phenomena as ecological consequences of human activity. Once again located in Rokytín, her most recent project *Bohdanka*, begun in 2004, goes back to the beginnings of her career and explores current problems of globalization.

Jitka Hanzlová. Identities is the artist's first museum exhibition in Austria. Arising from the experience of two cultures and political systems, the ten selected series on view are a profound reflection upon fundamental caesuras in European identity since the Cold War.

Rokytník

1990 – 1994

Jitka Hanzlová's first major series, *Rokytník*, was created in her Czech home village of the same name: it is a journey into the past, to the scene of her childhood. In 1982, the artist fled to West Germany; following the downfall of the communist regime, she was able to return to Rokytín in 1990. In this initially playful confrontation between the familiar and unfamiliar, between past and present, she has found her artistic language: through photographs of the inhabitants, the landscape, and everyday objects, the artist portrays the village without any claim to social criticism. All of Jitka Hanzlová's photographs are in portrait format, which is an unusual practice for landscape shots. She also uses a restrained, unsaturated color scheme to capture the underlying socialist tone. The village seems to have fallen out of time and simultaneously shows a rural life shaped by socialism, which, however, was soon about to disappear. With her melancholy images, which are underpinned by subtle humor, Hanzlová addresses issues of belonging. Rokytín appears as a place that is close, and yet the artist maintains a respectful distance.

Bewohner

1994 – 1996

Jitka Hanzlová photographed the series *Bewohner* [*Residents*] in European and German cities such as Berlin and Essen, where the artist lives. It combines portraits, shots of desolate architecture, and lower-middle-class everyday objects, as well as photographs of animals. The images evoke a feeling of uprootedness and isolation; people seem alienated from their urban surroundings. *Bewohner* was created directly after Hanzlová's first series *Rokytník* and intended as its counterpart: while the people in *Rokytník* are in harmony with nature, in *Bewohner* the open horizons have given way to confining fences and geometric walls.

Female

1997 – 2000

Female is the only series in Jitka Hanzlová's oeuvre that was realized on the basis of a predefined concept. *Female* comprises portraits of women whom the artist met by accident and talked to in the streets during day-long walks through predominantly international cities like New York, Los Angeles, London, or Berlin. The photographs capture the concentrated encounter between the photographer and her models as a communicative act: Hanzlová highlights the individuality of the women, who, without exception, look directly into the camera, through their surroundings and clothing, but above all through their body language and behavior. The photographer herself is inscribed in the image

through the reactions of those portrayed. They undoubtedly underline the fact that Jitka Hanzlová always also negotiates the theme of identity in her work in the context of her own biography.

Hier

1998, 2003 – 2010

The focus of Jitka Hanzlová's work is on the examination of the relationship between nature and civilization, between landscape and the people. For the series *Hier* [*Here*], photographed from 2003 onward in the German Ruhr region, the artist revisited an earlier project on Essen, the city where she lives. More than any other of the artist's photographs, *Hier* highlights the problems of human intervention in nature. Bombed during World War II, the landscape in the photographs has been deformed through utilization: wastelands that still bear the traces of coal mining, birch trunks blackened by air pollution, bodies of water that appear poisonous because of their yellowish color, or infrastructure displacing original nature reflect a living environment deprived of its natural treasures. Hanzlová is interested in contradictions. Subtle traces of vegetation in everydayness reveal how nature is about to reclaim the industrial area.

Forest

2000 – 2005

In *Forest*, the artist returns to the woodlands of her childhood. Aiming not at a photographic documentation but at the visual translation of a subjective experience of nature, Jitka Hanzlová explores the forest beyond any romantic clichés: through atmospheric shots of a vegetation that often appears impenetrable, of the velvety green forest floor, of tree trunks shrouded in silvery mist, or of filigree spiders against deep blue twilight, she conveys the concentrated stillness of this place and makes it possible to grasp a temporality that is both eternal and timeless, independent of human existence. As a journey into the past, as a scene of memory, and as a site of the unconscious, *Forest* is likewise rooted in subjectively relevant and universally valid history.

Brixton

2002

In 2002, Jitka Hanzlová was invited by the London Photographer's Gallery to realize a project in the district of Brixton—the center of Afro-Caribbean culture in the British metropolis. For *Brixton*, Hanzlová has portrayed women of three generations in their urban environment. As in the *Female* series, the photographs are the result of chance encounters in the streets and thrive on the intense dialogue between those depicted and the photographer. Devoid of any sentimentality or explanatory

context, Jitka Hanzlová's images refrain from open social criticism. Instead, the photographs testify to subtle intuition and quiet empathy against the backdrop of her own experience of migration.

There Is Something I Don't Know

2000 – 2013

The series *There Is Something I Don't Know* comprises portraits inspired by Renaissance paintings. More than in any earlier age, these portraits claimed to convey the sitter's personality through realistic physical features. For *There Is Something I Don't Know*, the artist asked people resembling sitters from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to pose in front of the camera. Postures, backdrops, and furnishings quote the historical paintings. The mise-en-scène, which reflects visual conventions of representation, testifies to the concentrated interaction between Jitka Hanzlová and her models. Her focus on inner processes allows the photographer to capture the sitters' individuality.

The artist realized the first works within this series in 2007, following an invitation to Vaprio d'Adda in the Italian province of Milan, the home of Leonardo da Vinci's pupil and assistant Francesco Melzi. In the following years, she completed the work in the Ruhr District. Hanzlová has always been fascinated by the resemblance of certain faces to historical paintings.

Horse

2007 – 2014

Animals have played an important role in Jitka Hanzlová's work from the very outset. Here the artist has dedicated a series to horses as figures of identification. For Hanzlová, they mirror human action, thought, and communication. As with *Forest*, in the *Horse* series Jitka Hanzlová has successfully reinterpreted a motif traditionally featured by visual media, yet has done so far removed from any cliché. Drastically cropped images render the horses more abstract while highlighting details representative of the animal. Yet images of the entire beast likewise emphasize its powerful energy and dynamic corporeality.

Water

2013 – 2019

Jitka Hanzlová's photographs of ice are part of her eightchapter investigation entitled *Water*. In the groups of works on display in this exhibition, she focuses on different aggregate states of the element water. The cloud images exhibited in the first room also belong to this work. While the relationship between man and nature has already been addressed in the artist's earlier works, *Water* now marks an increased focus on ecological issues. In formal terms, too, the photographs, hung within a rigid

block, deviate from her previous practice of composing series from individual pictures standing on their own. Jitka Hanzlová has worked out both concrete and abstract forms of frozen glacier surfaces in radiant, lucid colors through views of details. For the artist, the work is not meant to create a contrast to earlier series. Rather, she sees the images as part of a holistic examination of the nature underlying all aspects of the world and emerging from it.

Bohdanka

since 2004

Like her first series *Rokytník*, Jitka Hanzlová's most recent work *Bohdanka* was created in the artist's native village in Czechia. The series is dedicated to the everyday rural life of title character Bohdanka and her big family. Nature is often the actual protagonist here. In mostly bright colors the artist captures the changing seasons and the harshness and beauty of the landscape, yet devoid of any romanticization.

Originally coming from the city, the family leads a self-determined life in the countryside—the result of a well-considered decision made in response to the dominant consumer culture after the fall of the Iron Curtain. *Bohdanka* reflects Jitka Hanzlová's interest in the ecological issues of our time: against the backdrop of globalization and the climate crisis, the series, in its liveliness, shows an alternative way of cohabiting with the natural environment. In this sense, *Bohdanka* is a thoroughly socio-political work.

The project, which began in 2004 and is ongoing, is presented for the first time as a selection of works put together especially for this exhibition.

Press images

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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 1993 / from the series: Rokytník, 1990-1994
C-print
Courtesy of the artist
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 1994 / from the series: Bewohner, 1994-1996
C-print
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 1996 / from the series: Bewohner, 1994-1996
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 2005 / from the series: Forest, 2000-2005
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Jitka Hanzlová
Michalka, Rokytník, 2000 / from the series: Female, 1997-2000
C-print
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Jitka Hanzlová
Diane, Broadway, 1999 / from the series: Female,
1997-2000
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Jitka Hanzlová
Joy Angela, Chinatown, 1999 / from the series:
Female, 1997-2000
C-print
Courtesy of the artist
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 1998 / from the series: Hier, 1998, 2003-
2010
C-print
Courtesy of the artist
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 2007 / from the series: Hier, 1998, 2003-
2010
C-print
Courtesy of the artist
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 2003 / from the series: Hier, 1998, 2003-
2010
C-print
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 2005 / from the series: Hier, 1998, 2003-
2010
C-print
Courtesy of the artist
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 2011 / from the series: There is Something I
Do Not Know, 2000-2013
Archival Pigment Colour Print
Courtesy of the artist
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Jitka Hanzlová
Untitled, 2000 / from the series: There is Something
I Do Not Know, 2000-2013
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