

# The Order of Things

# Photography from The Walther Collection

## Press Kit



Accra Shepp, Occupying Wall Street, 2011-2012

## The Order of Things

### Photography from The Walther Collection

**Dates**

May 17, 2015 – September 27, 2015

**Press Conference**

Friday, May 15, at 2:30pm

**Curator**

Brian Wallis

**Photography by** Dieter Appelt, Nobuyoshi Araki, Richard Avedon, Martina Bacigalupo, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Karl Blossfeldt, William Christenberry, Song Dong, Samuel Fosso, Zhang Huan, Zhuang Hui, Hiroh Kikai, Les Krims, Ma Liuming, Zanele Muholi, Duane Michals, Eadweard Muybridge, J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, Thomas Ruff, Ed Ruscha, August Sander, Accra Shepp, Stephen Shore, Thomas Struth, Guy Tillim, Ai Weiwei, Huang Yan, Luo Yongjin, Kohei Yoshiyuki, and Unknown Photographers

**Opening Hours**

By appointment and guided tour.

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**Address**

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## The Order of Things

### Photography from The Walther Collection

The Walther Collection presents *The Order of Things: Photography from The Walther Collection*, a survey exhibition exploring how the organization of photographs into systematic sequences or typologies has affected modern visual culture. *The Order of Things* investigates the production and uses of serial portraiture, conceptual structures, vernacular imagery, and time-based performance in photography from the 1880s to the present, bringing together works by artists from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. The exhibition, curated by Brian Wallis, former Chief Curator at the International Center of Photography in New York, will be on view at The Walther Collection in Neu-Ulm, Germany, beginning May 17, 2015, and will be accompanied by a catalogue published by Steidl/The Walther Collection.

Throughout the modern era, photography has been enlisted to classify the world and its people. Driven by a belief in the scientific objectivity of photographic evidence, the logics utilized to classify photographs—in groups and categories or sequences of identically organized images—also shape our visual consciousness. In the twenty-first-century, new digital technologies and globalization have radically transformed the applications of photography, making the reconsideration of photographic information systems ever more urgent. *The Order of Things* proposes a political and philosophical basis for understanding recent organizational methods in global photography, examining not only the ambivalent meanings of the documentary photography but also the social conditions of the image in contemporary culture. The first major exhibition to investigate this critical cross-cultural direction in photography, *The Order of Things* shows the diverse ways that photographers have engaged sequential organizing strategies—or sought to subvert them.

The exhibition's approach upends conventional histories of photography, which until recently have focused primarily on the single photograph and the so-called "decisive moment." *The Order of Things* looks closely at the widespread uses of the multiple images in sequence. Setting early modernist photographers August Sander and Karl Blossfeldt in dialogue with contemporary international photographers such as J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere and Ai Weiwei, the exhibition examines how conceptual structures of photography, serial portraiture, and time-based performance have developed around the globe, and questions how these works have influenced and reflected recent cultural practices. Highlights include Richard Avedon's *The Family* (1976), Nobuyoshi Araki's *101 Works for Robert Frank (Private Diary)* (1993), Samuel Fosso's *African Spirits* (2008), and Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2006-14).

A distinctive feature of *The Order of Things* is the recognition of the similar critical strategies employed by contemporary photographers throughout the world. Featured photographers and artists include Dieter Appelt (Germany), Nobuyoshi Araki (Japan), Richard Avedon (USA), Bernd and Hilla Becher (Germany), Karl Blossfeldt (Germany), Song Dong (China), Zhang Huan (China), Yoshiyuki Kohei (Japan), Eadweard Muybridge (USA), J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere (Nigeria), August Sander (Germany), Ed Ruscha (USA), Accra Shepp (USA), and Ai Weiwei (China). These photographers have pursued a subjective and even skeptical approach to the social construction of photographic meaning, which they demonstrate in typological grids, temporal serial sequences, and collected images of specific cultural patterns.

Many of the images in *The Order of Things* focus on the individual, and on aspects of cultural identity as observed through a sequence or series of portraits. The exhibition includes a compelling selection of vernacular photography from the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century—mug shots, panoramas, and commercial architectural pictures. Referencing the troubled history of pseudo-scientific mug shot archives compiled to demonstrate the legitimacy of phrenology, police work, medical experimentation, citizenship, and the rule of law, these collections vividly demonstrate how the social uses of photography have depended on its temporality, multiplicity, seriality, narrative sequencing, and logical ordering.

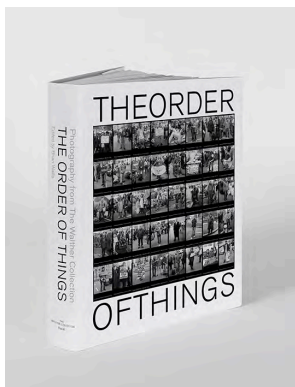
Against this tradition, many of the artists in *The Order of Things* compile counter-archives, posting defiant arguments against the invisible biases of supposedly neutral institutional records. Contemporary revisions of the typological method, pioneered in Germany in the 1920s, are richly illustrated by the contrast between Richard Avedon's 69 portraits of American 1970s-era power brokers in *The Family* (1976) and Accra Shepp's 42 recent portraits of participants in the New York inequality protests in *Occupying Wall Street* (2011). From a very different political perspective, Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* makes prominent her portraits of persecuted South African gay and lesbian individuals, appropriating and inverting the oppressive form of the legal passbook portrait to reinstate the social visibility that those citizens are routinely denied.

The studio portrait is for many artists the initial entry into constructions of identity or self-representation. In *The Order of Things*, the generic regimentation of the studio portrait format is the starting point for an ambitious critical dialogue. In Samuel Fosso's early portraits, the artist poses himself in various inventive guises during breaks in his own studio practice. But, in his more recent series, *African Spirits*, Fosso adopts the role of iconic leaders of the pan-African liberation movement, recreating historic formal portraits of Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, and Muhammad Ali, among others. Fosso's highly theatrical reenactments not only honor those who forged postcolonial struggles but also comment on how their cool styles helped to shape and enforce their political ideals.

Critical to all the artists in *The Order of Things* is the notion of time, and its passage. A suite of images from the 1880s by Eadweard Muybridge visualizes time through stop-action effect, displaying successions of human movements in a precursor to motion pictures. Later photographers in the exhibition not only record sequences of events in time, but also make time, and its deteriorating effects, their theme. The grids of outmoded industrial structures by Bernd and Hilla Becher catalogue and preserve architectural forms in typologies, just as Ai Weiwei's triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995) records the sequential destruction of a valued cultural artifact. Preservation or veneration of cultural patrimony becomes an expression of national political affiliation.

A preoccupation with time inevitably engages with forms of performance. The record of sequential events through time, as in a diary, or the notation of an act as ephemeral and the mark of breath on a mirror, can be actions with profound effects and meanings. Song Dong's installation *Printing on Water* (2003), a documentation of the artist repeatedly stamping the word "water" on the Lhasa River in Tibet, has distinct political resonance, evoking the spirituality of the sacred river in the face of ongoing struggles between China and Tibet. In another mode, Nobuyoshi Araki's diaristic *101 Works for Robert Frank (Private Diary)* is a notation of aspects of everyday life—including women in erotic poses, still lifes, landscapes, interiors with a cat, and shots of the sky—all reflecting a poetic banality as the artist mourned the death of his wife.

The expansive diversity of works in *The Order of Things* broadly illustrates significant global developments in contemporary photography, finding precedents in the typological organizations of key historical photographers, while looking forward to the applications of these rational models in twenty-first century image making.



## Catalogue

*The Order of Things: Photography from The Walther Collection*

Edited by Brian Wallis

*The Order of Things* explores the production and uses of typological sequences, serial imagery, conceptual portraiture, archival imagery, and time-based performance in photography from the 1880s to the present, considering works by artists from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. *The Order of Things* features contributions by Geoffrey Batchen, Tina M. Campt, and Christopher Phillips; a conversation between Brian Wallis and Artur Walther; and a selection of seminal writings on photograph and seriality by George Baker, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Ulrike Schneider, Allan Sekula, and Joel Smith.

416 pages, 1,160 images  
29 x 29 cm  
Cloth-bound hardcover with dust jacket

Published by Steidl/The Walther Collection

## About Brian Wallis

Brian Wallis is the former Chief Curator at the International Center of Photography, where he has organized numerous exhibitions including *Weegee: Murder is My Business* and *Miroslav Tichý*. A former curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art and former senior editor of *Art in America*, Wallis is the author of *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*; *Land Art; Constructing Masculinity*; *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects by Dan Graham, 1965–1990*; *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*; *Blasted Allegories: Writings by Contemporary Artists*; and *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. Wallis is a contributor to *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Aperture*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Village Voice*. He is currently on the faculty of the ICP-Bard College Program in Advanced Photographic Studies.



## About The Walther Collection

The Walther Collection is dedicated to researching, collecting, exhibiting, and publishing photography and video across historical periods and geographic regions. The exhibition and publishing programs of the collection are informed by curatorial research and endeavor to create dynamic juxtapositions by artists working in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, whose contributions to photography significantly expand the history of the medium.

Established by Artur Walther, the collection has a four-gallery museum campus in Neu-Ulm, Germany and a Project Space in New York City, and is supported by The Walther Family Foundation, a nonprofit charitable organization. The collection was founded on the practices of early twentieth-century German photographers and has expanded to become one of the most important private holdings of contemporary African and Asian photography and video art. Today, the collection is characterized by a long-term focus on serial and typological images across geographical regions and time periods from the nineteenth century to modern and contemporary photography.

Since 2010, the collection has been engaged in a multi-year examination of African photography and video through the themes of portraiture, landscape, and the historic archive. The inaugural exhibition, *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*, was curated by Okwui Enwezor and opened in June 2010 in Neu-Ulm. The exhibition represented three generations of African artists from the 1940s to the present and focused on diverse formulations of portraiture, illustrating how artists have used portraiture to visualize changes in society by performing and constructing notions of the self, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

*Appropriated Landscapes* (2011), curated by Corinne Diserens, opened in 2011, explored the distinct and varied histories of Southern Africa and its people. The exhibition considered the effects and traces of colonialism, war, migration, and industrialization on the landscape, and examined how architecture and spatial planning reflected the social order and ideology of apartheid in South Africa. Instead of looking at the traditional notions of the picturesque and the sublime, *Appropriated Landscapes* showed how complex layers of meaning are embedded in the physical attributes of a given space.

*Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, curated by Tamar Garb, was the first major exhibition to stage a dialogue between the ethnographic visions of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century African photography and engagements with the archive by contemporary artists. Presented from 2013-2014, *Distance and Desire* was the culmination of an exhibition series at The Walther Collection Project Space in New York and the international symposium "Encounters with the African Archive," which The Walther Collection co-organized with New York University and University College London in November 2012.

### **The Walther Collection Project Space in New York**

Since 2011, The Walther Collection has presented nine exhibitions and numerous public educational programs at the Project Space in New York. Located in the landmark West Chelsea Arts Building in New York City, The Walther Collection Project Space serves as an experimental exhibition venue that extends the Foundation's mission and program to American audiences. The 1,750-square-foot space hosts three focused exhibitions per year drawn from the collection, complementing the annual thematic exhibition in Germany and helping to foster an international dialogue about contemporary photography from around the globe. Exhibitions have included *Jo Ractliffe: As Terras do Fim do Mundo*, *August Sander and Seydou Keïta*, *Rotimi Fani-Kayode: Nothing to Lose*, *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, *Gulu Real Art Studio*, *Christine Meisner: Disquieting Nature*, *Samuel Fosso*, and *Santu Mofokeng: A Metaphorical Biography*.

### **Traveling Exhibitions**

The Walther Collection has co-presented traveling exhibitions and loaned works to leading institutions in Europe and North America, including Museum Moderner Kunst Frankfurt, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Fotomuseum Winterthur, The Ulmer Museum, Stedelijk Museum, The V&A Museum, Open Eye Gallery–Liverpool, The Scottish Center of Photography, The Centre for Contemporary Culture Florence, The Walker Art Center, Savannah College of Art and Design, Denver Art Museum, The National Museum of African Art, The Seattle Art Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Les Rencontres d'Arles. In 2011, the collection was featured in the inaugural series, "Private Collections," at Paris Photo. The Walther Collection will present *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive* at C/O Berlin in April 2015 and the collection will be shown at La Maison Rouge, Paris, in October 2015.

### **The Walther Collection at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2014**

From July 7 to September 21, 2014, The Walther Collection presented *Typology, Taxonomy and Seriality* at the 45th Edition of Les Rencontres d'Arles, the renowned photography festival in Arles, France. Attracting over 90,000 visitors, including photography enthusiasts, artists, curators, critics, and publishers from all over the world, the exhibition was featured widely in the international press, including *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *La Croix*, and *Le Point*. During the festival, Artur Walther participated in symposia and gave public tours of the exhibition with three participating artists—Zanele Muholi, Samuel Fosso, and Accra Shepp.



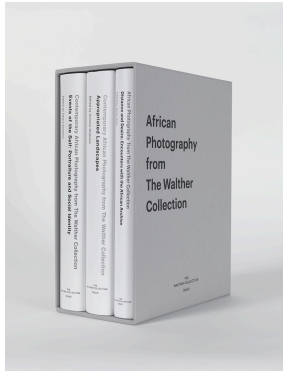
## **Exhibition Spaces and Architecture**

The collection's main exhibition venue is a four-building museum compound set in the quiet, residential streets of Neu-Ulm/Burlafingen in southern Germany. Three principal buildings—the White Box, Green House, and Black House—provide 10,000 square feet of gallery space to present the Walther Collection's annual exhibition program. A fourth building on the campus accommodates administrative offices and a library. With the exception of the newly commissioned White Box, each of the buildings maintains the existing vernacular architecture of the area, while the interiors have been transformed into spare white-walled gallery spaces, proportioned to accommodate different scales of photography and video.

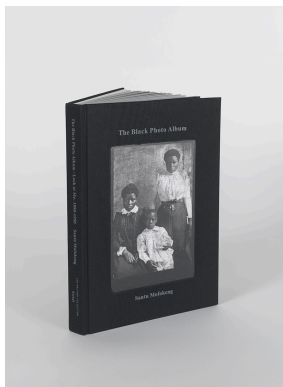
Designed by the Ulm-based architectural firm Braunger Wörtz, the White Box is a light-filled, three-story minimalist structure that houses The Walther Collection's main exhibition galleries. Featuring a glass-fronted foyer overlooking the surrounding landscape, the White Box echoes the size and shape of the other buildings on campus, with its main gallery extending underground to preserve the architectural integrity of the neighborhood. The expansive 5,000-square-foot space on the lower level, which is visible from a first-floor balcony, hosts thematic exhibitions; and a smaller, 1,500-square-foot gallery and reading room on the second floor presents new acquisitions and single-artist commissions.

The intimate scale of the Green House, a former residential home, provides gallery space for small-format works, either for a comprehensive single-artist presentation or for comparative exhibitions between the works of two artists. Except for the remodeled interiors, consisting of two small-scaled galleries on each floor, the two-story house remains exactly as it was built more than half a century ago, with its façade covered in ivy, giving it its name. The Black House is a one-level, bungalow-style structure used for the presentation of serial, performance, and conceptually based photography. Without windows on three sides of the building, the interior space is divided into three separate galleries, lit by a glass curtain wall that allows natural light into the rooms.

## Publications by Steidl/The Walther Collection



*African Photography from The Walther Collection* (2010-2013), a three-volume work representing the collection's multi-year exhibition and publishing program, investigates African photography and video through the themes of portraiture, landscape, and the historic archive. Including *Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*, *Appropriated Landscapes*, and *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, housed in a slipcase. Edited by Okwui Enwezor, Corinne Diserens, and Tamar Garb.



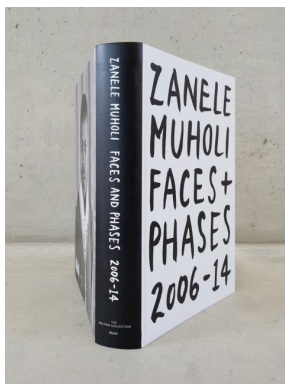
*The Black Photo Album* (2013) is the first complete publication of Santu Mofokeng's groundbreaking project, a slide show of elegant photographs commissioned by middle-class black families in South Africa between 1890-1950. To the image he collected, Mofokeng added detailed family histories and asked meditative questions about the meaning historic photography. Mofokeng analyzes the sensibilities, aspirations, and self-image of South Africa's black population and its desire for representation and recognition in times of colonial rule and suppression.



*Gulu Real Art Studio* (2013) is an archive of studio portraits collected by Martina Bacigalupo from the Gulu Real Art Studio in Gulu, Uganda. Edited from hundreds of discarded, faceless images—the faces were originally cut out for ID photos—the distinctions of clothing and pose in each image reveal markers of self-definition. Bacigalupo later returned to Gulu to interview customers of the studio. The resulting narratives and compelling storytelling illustrate life in the town and the resilience of its community during recent wars in East Africa.



*Ponte City* (2014) is the culmination of Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse's work at Ponte City, the iconic Johannesburg apartment building for more than six years. This visual story is integrated with a sequence of photographs, essays, and documentary texts, exploring Ponte City's unique place in Johannesburg and in the imagination of its citizens.



In *Faces and Phases 2006-14* (2014), Zanele Muholi embarks on a journey of "visual activism" to ensure black queer and transgender visibility. Despite South Africa's progressive Constitution, black lesbians and transmen remain the targets of brutal hate crimes. With 250 portraits taken over the past eight years, accompanied by moving personal testimonies, *Faces and Phases* presents a compelling statement and an unprecedented archive: marking, mapping and preserving an often-invisible community for posterity.



*Guy Tillim: O Futuro Certo* (2015) presents selections from Guy Tillim's most influential works and series of the last decade. Anchored in photojournalism but working against the grain of spectacle, Tillim portrays the communities, social landscapes and symbolic structures of societies altered by conflict. From explorations of modernist architecture—and its utopian ruins—in post-colonial Angola, Congo and Mozambique, to the homes and private lives of Johannesburg's inner-city residents, Tillim's work raises timely questions about the politics and representation of the built environment.