

Christa Mayer

Photography – The Oeuvre



Tänzerin, Cihangir, Istanbul, 1992
© Christa Mayer, VG Bild-Kunst Bonn,
2025

Over the past four decades, photographer and psychologist Christa Mayer has forged a remarkable photographic oeuvre. With the exhibition “Christa Mayer. Photography – An Oeuvre,” Haus am Kleistpark presents a comprehensive overview of her work.

The show comprises photographs from various work series, both black and white and in color, including significant bodies of work such as “Abwesende I/II” (The Absent, 1979–1996), “Heilende” (Healers, 1982–1989), as well as “Kreative” (Creatives, 1987) and “Kinder” (Children, 1987–1992).

Furthermore, the exhibition presents impressions from Italy and Istanbul (1979–1992), landscape photography (1982–2011), and abstract compositions (from 2007 onwards). Works combining text and image expand the series of portraits. Urban landscapes and portraits prevail in the two-video works “Ex Oriente Lux” (1992) and “Abwesende” (The Absent, 2025).

Mayer occupies a unique position within German auteur photography of the 1980s and 1990s. She began to define her progressive artistic style at the legendary Werkstatt für Photographie (Workshop for Photography), founded by Michael Schmidt, at the adult education center in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district. She was one of very few women able to establish to push through the ranks. In 1983, she received a scholarship for contemporary German photography from the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach Foundation, followed by a work scholarship at P.S.1 in New York in 1987.

Christa Mayer gained renown from early on with poignant portraits from the long-term psychiatric ward at a clinic in Berlin where she worked as a psychologist and psychotherapist for more than two decades. In her portraits of patients, their relatives, and the medical and nursing staff, Mayer sought out the uniqueness and “beauty [...] in the face of another,” as she herself noted. With her “dialogical portraits” and practice of “non-voyeuristic, gentle observation,” Mayer created photographs that center on the expressiveness of the face and on inner experience—works that were without parallel at the time.

What is more, the exhibition showcases Mayer’s “Videospiegel” (Video Mirror): an interactive, processual form of representation that incorporates the patients’ thoughts and self-questioning. These works, e.g. the series “Der blaue Mann” (The Blue Man, 1990), are on display as well.

Alongside the portraits from the field of psychiatry, Mayer also photographed healers from various cultures, ranging from psychoanalysts to indigenous healers. She was equally fascinated by artists, especially painters, dancers, and performers. A further point of interest included children at play, and she frequently thought up enchanted scenes with them. During her stays in Italy or Istanbul, amid the everyday theater of the streets she searched for the miniature dramas that unfolded among those walking by.

In later years, during her travels in France, Italy, India, and the US, Mayer became increasingly interested in landscape photography. To her, coasts and forests

Exhibition
16 January–6 April 2026

Opening
Thursday, 15 January
7 p.m.
Introduction
Carolin Förster,
curator of the exhibition

Guided tour
Thursday, 19 February
7 pm
with Carolin Förster, curator
of the exhibition

Guided tour
Sunday, 8 March
2 pm
with Carolin Förster,
curator of the exhibition

Artist Talk (changed date)
Thursday, 19 March
7 pm
with Christa Mayer
and Katia Reich, director
of the photographic
collection of the
Berlinische Galerie

**Guided tour on the closing
day**
Easter Monday, 6 April
4 p.m.
with Christa Mayer
and Carolin Förster,
curator of the exhibition

Information on further events
can be found on our home-
page.

Address
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Free admission
No barrier-free access
Tue–Sun 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

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An exhibition
by the Department of Art,
Culture and Museums
Tempelhof-Schöneberg.

represented symbolically and spiritually charged places. The photographs appear just as mysterious as her previous portraits. The landscape becomes a projection surface for the relation between inside and outside, human emotions, and metaphysical concerns.

Christa Mayer's work is an expression of a deeply subjective experience and an empathetic engagement with people and places. With her distinctive visual language, she has made sealed-off areas of our lives visible and comprehensible. What is more, she has given expression to the unconscious aspect of our inner worlds as well as the landscapes that surround us.

Christa Mayer, born in 1945 in Bad Kissingen, studied psychology in Würzburg and worked as a psychologist in Berlin from 1978 to 2000. She worked on photographic projects, video films, and theater performances with patients. From 1980 to 1986, she participated in the courses and exhibitions of the "Werkstatt für Photographie" (Workshop for Photography) at the adult education center in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Mayer has received numerous scholarships and stipends, most recently a catalog grant from the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion (2025).

The exhibition is curated by Carolin Förster.

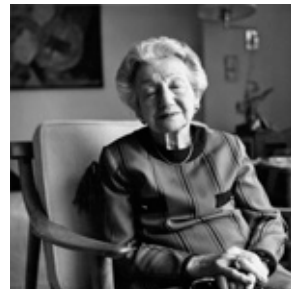
On December 3, 2025, DISTANZ Verlag published a monograph of the same name, edited by Carolin Förster and including texts by Carolin Förster, Thomas Weski, Maren Lübbke-Tidow, and Barbara Esch Marowski.



Untitled, from the series
Abwesende I, 1979–1986



Carsten und Hase, 1996,
from the series *Abwesende II*,
1987-1996



Psychoanalytikerin M. Teich,
New York, 1987



Junge und Hund, Istanbul, 1992



Büffelkuh, Varanasi, Indien, 2001



Untitled, Jaipur, Indien, 2001



Point Reyes, Kalifornien, USA,
2006



Mayanischer Schamane,
Yucatán, Mexiko, 1987