

# Elisabeth Neudörfl

## Ansichten von K.

February 22 – April 12, 2025

Friday, February 21: 6–8 pm, Opening  
7 pm, Book Presentation with Elisabeth  
Neudörfl and Steffen Egle, director of  
mpk – Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern

Barbara Wien  
gallery & art bookshop

Schöneberger Ufer 65  
10785 Berlin

+49 30 28385352  
bw@barbarawien.de  
barbarawien.de

## Press release EN

*Ansichten von K.* – Who or what is K.? What does K. think? Or: What does K. look like? Some may already be thinking of Brecht's "Mr. K." or Kafka's "Josef K.", but we are somewhere else entirely. Documentary photographer Elisabeth Neudörfl originally created the photo series and artist's book, *Ansichten von K.* (engl. Views of K.), for the group exhibition *Betze, K-Town, Pfaff* at the Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern (2024/2025). This brings us a step closer to understanding the mystery around the views of K., which Neudörfl herself does not want to solve completely. What is important to her is the abbreviation, which defies localisation, creating a space for more openness. It's about a suggestion: "You can look at it like this."

"K-Town" (not to be confused with Korea-Town) is a colloquial term for Kaiserslautern, a city that has been strongly characterised by US military presence since the 1950s. Around 50,000 US soldiers and their families live in K-Town, with the "Ramstein Air Base" located only 20 kilometres from the city centre. The Ramstein Air Base has repeatedly been in the news in recent years due to the US combat drone missions controlled from there and the question of the extent to which Germany is jointly responsible for human rights violations committed with these drones. The Red Army Faction attack on the airbase in 1981 and the serious airshow accident in 1988 are inscribed in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany as dark events. "Betze" is short for "Betzenberg", a ridge in the city, and the location of the Fritz Walter Stadium, home of the football club 1. FC Kaiserslautern, which currently plays in the 2. Bundesliga but was in the 1. Bundesliga from 1963 to 1996. "Pfaff", the name of an internationally renowned sewing machine company, is a reference to the city's industrial past.

All of these factors shape the identity of the people of Kaiserslautern and define the reality of the city that Neudörfl shows us views of. After thoroughly studying the history of the city, Neudörfl visited the industrial hub and university town – home to just over 100,000 people – in the south of Rhineland-Palatinate five times during the summer and fall of 2023 to take photographs for several days.

And what exactly does K. have to offer, a city in which, according to sociologist Annette Spellerberg, there are only "few architectural highlights", whose "historical identity anchors have been largely destroyed" and which is currently transforming itself from an industrial to a forward-looking technology centre? In Neudörfl's often highly detailed motifs, architecture and infrastructure stand out above all: old and new buildings and facades, always from the outside and without people; streets, traffic lights and signs; the usual street furniture, more or less well-tended green spaces and (front) gardens; plus building sites, junction boxes, fences, barriers, car parks; not to forget vehicles, especially the helicopters and aeroplanes over the city; absurd-looking scenes and objects: rundown, rubbish-strewn, but also beautiful, dignified and inviting, both central and peripheral; flags, company logos, stickers; shops, businesses, restaurants; overall, however, few consumption surfaces, and if there are any, they are rather at the periphery; and in contrast to all this: the archaeological findings that mark the original location of the medieval Kaiserpfalz (imperial palace). Particularly striking are the references to the local American population, who have brought their lifestyle with them: their own street signs, shopping areas, carports and outdoor basketball facilities. Also striking: the aforementioned aeroplanes and helicopters, presumably used for military purposes. When taking photographs, the artist herself was most surprised by "how close the aeroplanes fly over the city on their approach to Ramstein. And how two very different conceptions of urban space exist side by side: a European-historical city, typical of the Federal Republic of Germany, and spaces that feel very American, which are much more open, but also more disorganised."

*Ansichten von K.* consists of 77 landscape-format colour photographs, captured with a small-format DSLR camera. The photos were arranged by Neudörfl in a sequence that made sense to her and then printed double-sided as an artist's book, emphasising the temporal aspect. They are accompanied by a text by sociologist Annette Spellerberg and an index.

In what is now her fifth solo exhibition at Galerie Barbara Wien, Elisabeth Neudörfl is showing a selection of 35 motifs. As in her exhibition at the Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern, she often arranges several of the digital C-prints of the same size in frameless picture holders so that they abut, causing the motifs to appear as if they merge into one another. Unlike in the book, viewers in the exhibition have the opportunity to see the motifs larger and several at the same time. The grouping also brings a focus on content and unexpected formal aspects.

Her artistic engagement with clearly defined urban spaces – such as in this case Kaiserslautern – is not new for Elisabeth Neudörfl. She has always regarded herself as an observer. In this role, she embarks on a search for contemporary discourses and their architectural and social manifestations in urban spaces: for example in 2020 during the initial Covid-19 outbreak and the student protests against the pro-Beijing government in the Chinese Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong (*Out in the Streets*); in 2010, she documented scenes on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, an important traffic artery in Manila that has been repeatedly used for political protests since the 1980s (*E.D.S.A.*); in 2006, she focused on three streets in Bangkok's red light district (*Super Pussy Bangkok*). Neudörfl's field research always resulted in a photo series and an artist's book.

The following statement by Elisabeth Neudörfl provides insight into her understanding of herself as a documentary photographer: "Each photograph shows a very exclusive section of the world – spatially and temporally. The picture is clearly cropped by the frame and the exposure is only a moment in time. In spite of this spatiotemporal detail that excludes so much more than it shows, we can see things in photographs that we cannot see in our continuous perception of reality."<sup>2</sup>

Text: Barbara Buchmaier

1 See: Annette Spellerberg, "Kaiserslautern – Leben in einer kleinen Großstadt am Pfälzerwald", in the artist's book *Elisabeth Neudörfl – Ansichten von K.*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2024, translated by the gallery

2 Elisabeth Neudörfl in her essay "Photography vs. Visibility: Seeing Unseen Aspects of a City" in: *Visual Resources*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2010, p. 13

**Elisabeth Neudörfl** (b. 1968 in Darmstadt) lives and works in Essen. She studied photography in Dortmund and Leipzig. Since 2009, she has been a professor of documentary photography at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen. Her solo exhibitions include *Out in the Streets*, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2021); *unseen aspects of a city*, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2013/2014); *Habitat*, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2010/2011); *Von der Straße*, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2009); *Future World*, Sprengel Museum Hannover (2002); *der Stadt*, Fotogalerie in der Brotfabrik, Berlin (1998).

Elisabeth Neudörfl has participated in numerous group shows including *Betze, K-Town, Pfaff. Künstlerische Sichten auf Kaiserslautern von Sophie Innmann, Nikolaus Koliussis, Elisabeth Neudörfl und Erik Sturm*, mpk – Museum Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern (2024/2025); *Fotografische Sammlung. Im Krankenhaus: Ludwig Kuffer, Andreas Langfeld, Elisabeth Neudörfl*, Museum Folkwang, Essen (2021); *SUBJEKT und OBJEKT. FOTO RHEIN RUHR*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2020); *Kunst & Kohle. Schwarz*, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität Bochum and *der grosse Anspruch des kleinen Bildes*, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2018); *Photography Calling*, Sprengel Museum Hannover (2011); *Ruhrblicke*, SANAA-Gebäude, Zeche Zollverein, Essen (2010); *Hyper Cities – Über Städte*, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (2007); *Asia City Strangers*, Galerie Fotohof, Salzburg (2006).

She will also participate in the group show *Neugier, Mut und Abenteuer: Fotografinnen auf Reisen*, on view from May 4, 2025 at Kunstforum Ingelheim – Altes Rathaus in Ingelheim am Rhein.

Artist's books and publications by Elisabeth Neudörfl (selection): *Ansichten von K.*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2024; *Out in the Streets*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2021; *E.D.S.A.*, Wiens Verlag, Berlin 2010; *Super Pussy Bangkok*, Institut für Buchkunst an der HGB Leipzig, Leipzig 2006; *Future World*, exhibition catalogue, Sprengel Museum Hannover, Berlin 2002.