

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

15th NOORDERLICHT International Photofestival

September 7 – October 26 2008, Leeuwarden NL

Opening: Saturday September 6 (invitees only)

Main exhibition

Behind Walls – Eastern Europe before 1989

Location: Fries Museum

In 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the end of the East Block. Socialism and totalitarianism made way for capitalism and democracy. A unique reservoir of photography was buried along with the old values. Over the years, each of the member states of the East Block had developed its own photographic vocabulary, which almost never extended beyond its national borders. Now that memories of the Communist era are no longer welcome, this historically important body of photography faces the threat of remaining unseen forever.

Two decades after the end of the East Block, Noorderlicht unlocks this forgotten treasure. In service of the regime, independently or working underground, photographers in the East Block documented a now vanished era, each in their own way. *Behind Walls*, the 15th Noorderlicht Photofestival, offers an overview of their work, which is generally being seen here for the first time outside its country of origin. Never before has photography from all the former East Block lands been brought together in one large-scale presentation.

Censorship and lack of freedom were a self-evident part of life in the days of the East Block. The totalitarian regimes propagated an heroic image of socialist society. Photographs of everyday scenes and personal interests were not appreciated. Only in periods of relative freedom, such as during the Prague Spring, but also in the DDR of the late 1970s, did photographers violate the unwritten rules, and then carefully. At other moments flight into a self-created reality offered solace, and this became a great stimulant for photographic experimentation.

Proud portraits of the 'worker of the month', clandestine photographs of staged people's manifestations, advertising for products that were not available, forbidden photographs of nude women: *Behind Walls* provides a fascinating picture of life and photography in the Socialist paradise. In one international presentation the viewer can see how photographers throughout the East Block experienced the world around them, and how the absence of freedom affected their work. With contributions by 35 photographers from twelve countries, Noorderlicht brings to life a world that ceased to exist in 1989.

Ancillary exhibition

Beyond Walls – Eastern Europe after 1989

Location: Fries Museum

A new Eastern Europe arose after 1989. The Iron Curtain disappeared, the street scene changed unrecognizably. Some countries disintegrated, a majority have become members of the European Union. After four decades of Communism, capitalism is the new ideology. Individualism has replaced collectivism, opposition politics is again permitted. The heroic worker has had to become a critical consumer.

As a mirror held up to *Behind Walls*, a second exhibition, *Beyond Walls*, provides a picture of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Left opposes right, nostalgia for the old days faces off against the blessings of capitalism. Among the remains of the Communist era – from the gray architecture to the discrimination against ethnic groups – a frantic search for a new identity is going on.

These changes also leave their mark on photography. What was previously forbidden ground – literally, in the case of once heavily guarded border areas – or new phenomena such as a beauty contest in Poland or the rise of a Romanian tourist industry, can now be documented.

Eastern European outcasts also have a chance to visualize their youth behind the Iron Curtain.

Together with *Behind Walls*, *Beyond Walls* forms a full-fledged diptych. In an extraordinary presentation, 35 photographers from East and West visualize the most recent history of Eastern Europe, with work from all the former East Block countries. *Beyond Walls* tells the intriguing story of a world full of contradictions in which a dynamic present still bears the traces of a charged past.

Ancillary exhibition in the Blokhuispoort

Another ancillary exhibition, which is comprised of several unique personal photo documents from the former DDR, is to be seen in the former prison, the Blokhuispoort. This is a short distance beyond the Fries Museum on the Blokhuisplein.

Satellite Programme

Colleagues in other institutions are offering a photographic programme in the context of this festival. The complete programme will be published on www.noorderlicht.com and in the festival guide, which will appear at the end of August.

Catalogue

A high quality catalogue, with work by all the photographers who are participating in the main and ancillary exhibitions, will appear to accompany the Noorderlicht Photofestival. It will contain informational texts on the photographers and an essay by Vaclav Macek, curator, writer and director of the Central European House of Photography in Bratislava. The catalogue *Behind Walls* will be available after September 1.

About Noorderlicht

Noorderlicht is highly regarded internationally for being a driven and dynamic organization that combines social engagement with visual beauty, and for the imaginative way in which it forges high quality photography from all over the world into a cohesive whole.

In 2007 the leading photo magazine *Photo District News* (New York) proclaimed the Noorderlicht Photofestival one of the five best photo festivals in the world.

The Noorderlicht Photofestival is held in alternate years in Groningen and Friesland. In recent years the Frisian edition has focused on photography from various non-Western regions. *Behind Walls* concludes this series of five events, which earlier looked at Africa, South America, the Arab world and South and Southeast Asia.

In addition to the annual festival, Noorderlicht organizes about eight exhibitions a year in its own Noorderlicht Photogallery. It also initiates international commissions and collaborative projects in the field of photography. Exhibitions from Noorderlicht tour around the world. Its own publishing arm, Aurora Borealis, is responsible for the publication of high quality photo books and www.noorderlicht.com is one of the main photography sites in the world.

The activities of Noorderlicht receive structural support from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Province and City of Groningen, the Province of Fryslân and the City of Leeuwarden.

The press on the Noorderlicht Photofestival:

'Northern Holland seems an unlikely destination for a festival renowned for its cutting edge, but Noorderlicht has been unearthing important new talent through its open submission policy since its inception in 1990' (PDN, New York, 2007)

'An overwhelming, exhausting, irritating exhibition that forces one to think – and which will leave no one who is interested in the state of our world unmoved.' (NRC Handelsblad and NRC Next, 2007)

'A dizzying experience... This edition of Noorderlicht is more shocking and controversial than ever. Five stars.' (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2007)

'Act of Faith is both a journey through the world and through photography, a virtuoso turn that has been characteristic of the Noorderlicht Photofestival for years.' (P/F, 2007)

'The organizers of Noorderlicht always succeed in choosing themes which, through their simplicity and universal power of attraction, guarantee a compelling event.' (Focus, 2007)

'Since Noorderlicht began in the 1990s it has become one of the most progressive festivals of photography in the world' (Asian Art News, 2007)

'It has grown into a not-to-be-missed international event. Nowhere will you find such a carefully selected body of work by photographers in one place.' (de Volkskrant, 2006)

'However diverse in content and style the photo series are, they all reveal depth.' (Trouw, 2006)

'Gained a unique position among other photofestivals in the world' (Jakarta Post, 2006)

'One of the most progressive photofestivals in the world' (South China Morning Post, 2006)

'Fascinating, original and profound' (NRC Handelsblad, 2006)

'Surprising and nuanced insights' (Camera Austria, 2006)

Noorderlicht

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Fries Museum Leeuwarden

Turfmarkt 11
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Opening hours

Tuesday through Sunday 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Admission

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| Adults | 6,00 EUR |
| Children through 12 | free |
| Children 13 thru 17 | 3,00 EUR |
| CJP pass | 4,00 EUR |
| Museum card | free |

Every Wednesday free for all

Accessibility

The Fries Museum is situated in the historic centre of Leeuwarden at no more than 10 minutes walking distance from the train and bus station. By bus take lines 3, 10 or 37 (stop Oosterkade is directly behind the museum). By car please follow the P-route to parking garage Hoeksterend (closed Sundays).

The Fries Museum is wheelchair friendly.

Not for publication

For more information and visual materials:

+31 (0)50 318 2227 or publicity@noorderlicht.com