

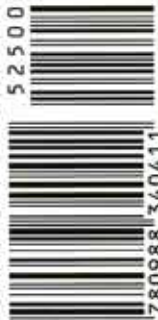
OSMOS

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 01
SPRING 2013



ISBN 978-0-9883404-1-1
\$25.00
52500>



780988 340411



ANDREAS STUTTGART MAGDANZ STAMMHEIM

By Ulrike Groos

The penitentiary Stuttgart Stammheim is not like any other German prison. Until today, the name "Stammheim" conjures the myth of the Red Army Faction, the left-wing extremist terrorist organization, founded in West Germany in 1970, responsible for 34 murders as well as bank robberies, kidnappings, and explosion attacks.

All works carbon print Diasec Left Aerial Approach North, 2010/2011

On April 28, 1974, the first two RAF inmates, Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin, were moved to Stammheim. Andreas Baader, Jan-Carl Raspe and other members followed soon after. The high security prison on the Northern edge of Stuttgart not only stood for the fight of the Red Army Faction against West German society, but more importantly became an international landmark as a site of these RAF inmates' deaths. On the night of October 17 to October 18, 1977, on the seventh floor of the vast prison complex,

Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe committed suicide after a failed attempt to force the release of the imprisoned leadership of the organization by the second generation of RAF terrorists. The year prior, Ulrike Meinhof had already hanged herself from the window frame of cell No. 719.

Today Stammheim still evokes disturbing images of collective memory among a majority of those Germans who experienced the political situation of the 1970s. The forbidding prison complex with its barbed wire and snipers stationed on the roof, reminiscent of a concrete bunker, signifies one of the darkest chapters in the recent history of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Complex I of the penitentiary Stuttgart Stammheim, erected in 1963, is slated for demolition in the near future. The building is eroded and unsanitary, and affords only one toilet for every four prisoners – conditions deemed as irreconcilable with human dignity. For this reason, the photographer Andreas Magdanz began the photographic artistic project, *Stuttgart Stammheim*.

Between 2010 and 2011, Magdanz approached the Stammheim complex from different perspectives, including aerial views. In the center of his project is the architecture of the court bunker – euphemistically entitled “multi-purpose building” – erected specifically for the trial against the RAF leadership, which opened at the State Supreme Court Stuttgart in May 1975. For five months, Magdanz lived in the immediate vicinity of the penitentiary and documented this historically charged locale in hundreds of predominantly large format, black and white photographs. Approximately 30 of these images have been on view at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart.

In the prison, Magdanz conducts a form of visual autopsy; he searched for the history of the site and “dissected” the building, as he calls it. He prepared his careful and slow approach to the building meticulously and carefully, and spent countless nights in the rooms and spaces he photographed. The result is a story of Stuttgart Stammheim told through images. Today’s sober and neutral interior and exterior views of the “multi-purpose building” and its cell complex stand in conscious contrast to the shocking crime scene images known from back then. In Magdanz’ images, there is no human soul in view. His photos show long corridors illuminated in fluorescent light, cells with windows of bulletproof glass, the glass cell of the control post, the covered pergola for the terrorists, the scaffolding and netting on the roof to prevent an escape by helicopter, and finally the notorious cells No. 719 and 720 on the seventh floor that housed the terrorists. Magdanz worked for three weeks on this floor alone.

The images evoke anxiety but they also baffle, for example, when one image juxtaposes the heavy prison bars with a landscape of Stuttgart’s lower middle class droll garden plots seen in the distance. The artist is occupied by the question of how to formally translate Stammheim’s history into photography. Magdanz knows his métier; he uses symmetries and diagonals to structure his motifs, for instance. The picture of the courtroom gives a frontal view of a bench where the accused was positioned during trial from which several microphones crane upwards. The photographs convey things that are not visible. Nothing has been manipulated or dramatized; the

bare facts suffice for the photographer to allow for inhospitable and surreal sites to emerge. Only the personal effects and furniture of current inmates (today, the prison is used as a juvenile penitentiary) were removed to bring the cells closer to their original states. The inmates are different than they once were, but the cells have the same numbers, the buildings have the same administrative terms, such as Mehrzweckhalle (multi-purpose building) or bgH (high security prison cell). These abbreviations give the titles to Magdanz’s photographs. Room is given for the viewer’s memory and imagination. “To have the opportunity to work so closely to history and to visit this site 33 years later, was an opportunity for me to research how our system works, what it does to us, and how it changes society,” the 49-year old Magdanz explains in a television interview. For the artist, the pictures are symbols beyond Stammheim.

Andreas Magdanz has become known for photographs of places where history is concentrated. Like his earlier projects about the nuclear bunker of the German government, *Dienststelle Marienthal* (2000), the headquarter of the *German Intelligence Agency*, *BND-Standort Pullach* (2005), or the former extermination camp, *Auschwitz/Birkenau* (2008), Magdanz’s series on Stuttgart Stammheim is driven by the question of how these visible sites can contain collective memory and social agency.

With respect to his earlier projects, Magdanz has already been invited to participate in political events and make public statements. Similarly, at his opening in the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, the artist’s intentions provoked diverging public responses. But his images are not grounded in a political statement. Instead, Magdanz wants to tell the story of Stuttgart Stammheim to its conclusion, to retain through images the memory of the buildings slated to disappear. His photographs are as sober as their subject matter, the medium a means to preserve its motif.

Magdanz’ views of the historic site can hopefully reinvigorate the debates about past events – which today are all too often confined to historical-political minded circles – and make them current again for a younger generation. The critical engagement with the RAF not only had significant social and political effects, but it is the continued basis for many films, books, plays, and sound works. Thus this exhibition was supplemented with an extensive educational program, including photography workshops with the artist, lectures and presentations, as well as a series of conversations and testimonials with witnesses, writers, and filmmakers.

While other prominent German museum and locals have rejected Magdanz’s work on the basis that it be “too political” or controversial, this exhibition received support from the state of Baden-Württemberg.

The building is to be torn down; the photographs will remain as a memory of the site where the so-called German Autumn came to an end, thus transforming the encounter into a metaphor for an important moment in recent German history.

Right View Courtyard Walkway (Central Perspective), 2010/2011







Left, top *View Guard Box, 2010/2011, Left, bottom* *Visitation Room, 2010/2011*
Right *Frontal View Multi-Purpose Building, 2010/2011*





Left Aerial View Building 1, 2010/2011
Right Hallway on the 7th Floor, 2010/2011





Left *Hallway View Cell 719, 2010/2011*
Right *View Cell 719, 2010/2011*