

Arts & Entertainment

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(Over) Exposure Is Key

By Sam Smith



Valley of Death (Flossenbürg Memorial and Museum, Germany) by Gesche Würfel

"What Remains of the Day" is a unique collection of landscape photography by Gesche Würfel that explores memories of World War II. This exhibition can be seen in its first museum viewing at Pensacola Museum of Art starting this week.

Following people and places, contemporary visual artist and photographer Würfel explores memories of WWII and the Holocaust through the use of overexposed photos and oral histories from survivors.

Würfel's work has been recognized internationally and exhibited at different venues, including the Contemporary Art Museum in Raleigh, N.C., and the International Center for Photography in New York City. In 2016, she was named the Juror's Pick for the LensCulture Emerging Talent Awards. She currently is the Teaching Assistant Professor

of Photography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The PMA will host an artist talk with Würfel in early 2019 where guests and the artist can discuss how her photography demonstrates relationships between trauma, history, identity and memories.

"Her work is compelling and poetic. In particular, the images are rich and multivalent and draws surprising and cogent connections between architecture, memory, history and sites of power mediated through photography," expressed Amy Bowman-McElhone, the assistant vice president of the UWF Historic Trust Museums and director and chief curator for the PMA.

The memories of the past often fade with the people they affect, but when Chancellor Merkel welcomed the arrival of one million refugees in Germany in 2015, the memories of WWII raised questions for Würfel. She became interested in the possibilities and responsibilities of Germans because of their history. She was asking herself what this might look like both as a memory and in German culture. The idea to overexpose the photos came when she visited the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp, now Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, while standing at the roll call area.

"I was standing on the Appellplatz and was wondering what it would have felt like for the prisoners to be standing there for several hours every day, the floodlights shining onto them. That's how I started thinking about time, memories and ways to present my impressions through my images. By overexposing the

photos only traces of the resulting images are recorded. Much like memory, the photographs are fragmented and ambiguous and either in color or black and white. I came up with the idea to overexpose the image of places for one second for every year since World War II ended in Europe on May 9, 1945. For example, photos taken in 2016 (71 years after the end of WWII) were overexposed for 71 seconds," said Würfel.

Her work is highly influenced by her time living in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, paired with her background as an artist, sociologist and urban planner. "I probably view many spaces differently than people who have lived in one location all their life."

As a third-generation German, Würfel was born and raised in Germany and shares a personal relationship with the aftermath of WWII and her family's involvement in the war. She said time in the U.S. has allowed her to view her home country from a new perspective.

"With this project, I offer an approach to place, history and personal trauma that is historical but still resonates in contemporary U.S. and European politics, where anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments have risen," she said.

Drawn to overlooked or hidden spaces of the past, her work often demonstrates relationships between natural landscapes, culture and environment in urban places. For this series, she captured photographs of concentration, labor and death camps,

the Reich Aviation Ministry, the House of the Wannsee Conference and the D-Day Beaches in Normandy, France.

Würfel explained how overwhelming it was visiting the concentration camps and being able to feel the energy of the people and events that happened there. She interviewed a total of 21 people, including Holocaust survivors, Germans and allied veterans, to provide personal viewpoints on the war and Hitler regime.

She wanted to take pictures that raised questions. What happened there? Where are the people now? Could this have been prevented? Are we seeing similarities in today's political situation? By giving the viewer insight into places people may not visit or places that go unseen, her work engages with sociopolitical implications by inspiring people to engage in critical thinking and connecting the past to the present.

"The photos encourage the viewers to think about how the horrors of fascism and World War II are still relevant today," Würfel said. [{in}](#)

GESCHE WÜRFEL: WHAT REMAINS OF THE DAY—MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

WHEN: On view starting Sunday, Dec. 16

WHERE: Pensacola Museum of Art, 407 S. Jefferson St.

COST: \$7-4, free for UWF students and PMA members

DETAILS: historicipensacola.org