

NICHTS WIRD UNS TRENNEN

NOTHING WILL SEPARATE US – South African Photography and Apartheid

An international black & white exhibition project and book by Tim Besserer & Dieter Koeve (both Germany), honouring the work of 27 South African photographers and 15 South African writers. Sponsored by Tim Besserer, Dieter Koeve, Deutscher Werkbund, Medico-International, Lutheran Church of Germany.

Photographers:

Paul Alberts, Joe Alferts, Omar Badsha, Bee Berman, Harold Carlsson, Mark van Dyk, Ivan Giesen, David Goldblatt, Natalie Goldsmith, Glynn Griffith, George Hallett, Paul Konings, Lesley Lawson, Ben McLennan, Jimi Matthews, Peter McKenzie, Judas Ngwenja, Cedric Nunn, Myron Peters, Jeeva Rajgopoul, Struan Robertson, Tom Robertson, Kevin Rudham, Karl Sansom, Philip Schedler, Paul Weinberg, Morris Zwi

Writers:

Rita Benzan, Roy Joseph Cotton, Anthony Delius, Christine Douts, Pascal Gwala, Daniel P. Kunene, Mandlenkosi Langa, Mafika Mbuli, Casey Motsisi, O. Mbuyiseni Mtshali, Struan Robertson, Mongane Wally Serote, Basil Somhlahllo, Christopher van Wyk, Peter Wilhelm

In 1980 Tim Besserer initiated a group of German photographers who intended to organize large themed photoexhibitions. Each of the group-members selected a special subject and Tim's focus was South African photography as he was deeply impressed by the work of Peter Magubane, whom he met in person and who gave him many valuable contacts in South Africa.

In those times it was very complicated to exchange information between Germany and South Africa, only to make a phone-call you had to go through an operator to have a call a day later at a precise time, not knowing if the person you wanted to speak to would be there. Letters took weeks, fax-machines and internet were not yet in use.

In 1982 Tim met Dieter Koeve for the first time, who worked parttime for the Frankfurt Bookfair, which had chosen Black Africa as their main theme. Tim and Dieter decided to run the project together, as Dieter had already contacts to South African photographers and writers.

In July 1982, Tim (on his own financial risk) flew to South Africa and proceeded directly to Gaborone to attend the „Festival for Cultur & Resistance“. There he met many of the South African photographers who later agreed to contribute to the planned project. He also made contacts to Afrapix, who invited him to visit their office in Johannesburg. During his trip through South Africa, which led him also to Soweto, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Kwa Zulu and Durban, Tim visited numerous photographers, selected together with them prints and smuggled most of the material through customs on his way back home. The remaining material was sent by airmail later that year and arrived surprisingly without any trouble.

During the 1982 Frankfurt Bookfair Dieter & Tim made first contacts to possible editors and came to an agreement with Swiss publisher Benteli, who offered to print a book on the project, if the exhibition would be shown at least in 10 places.

Medico International (a medical care organisation for 3rd-world-progamms) and the Lutheran Church of Germany agreed, to give money to produce the exhibition (professional framing, packing, transport & insurance).

Swiss author and expert in African literature, Al Imfeld, selected South African poetry for the book, which was named „Nichts wird uns trennen – Südafrikanische Fotografen und Dichter“. It was published in 1983 by Benteli (Berne), showing 133 photographs from the exhibition and poems of 15 South African writers. The title was inspired by one of the pictures, shot by Glynn Griffith, showing a young black family. On the father's amulet „Nothing will separate us“ was engraved.

On March 1st 1984 the photoexhibition was opened after three years of preparation. It presented 191 black and white prints and 24 additional text-boards with information about the photographers and their work. In spring 1985 a second, improved edition of the book was produced.

During 5 years the exhibition was shown in 22 cities throughout Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden.

About 1.500 up to 8.000 visitors were counted in the different cities. The total sum is estimated with 105.000.

There was a wide range of exhibitors: anti-apartheid-groups, solidarity-groups, boycott-groups (mostly among the churches), local cultural administrations, ethnological museums, photo-museums, councils of arts, museums of trade, banks, museums of arts a.s.o. (see detailed list below).

In most of the cities, cultural- and information-programms, such as discussions, life-music from South Africa, films, special guided tours for school-classes, were offered.

In cooperation with Kulturamt Kreuzberg (West-Berlin) and Munich Arts Council, Tim, Dieter and Al Imfeld produced a supplementary tape-slide-show, called „Decolonize, unite and free South Africa“. In Zurich more then 140 school-classes came to watch it.

Most of the german-speaking newspapers and TV-channels published reports on the exhibition and the problems caused by it. Critics were mostly positive.

The donation of the nobel-prize to Desmond Tutu and the high pressure by the South African Embassy (Munich) on us in January 1985 intensified the general interest in the exhibition. About five times more visitors came to see it. The former director of the Munich Arts Council, Mr. Jean Stock, had to resign because of his political engagement with our exhibition. He had sent an official (but politically not authorized) invitation to Desmond Tutu to come to Munich for the opening of our exhibition.

In 1989 the „Museum für Gestaltung“ in Zurich, which had presented the show in 1985 already, agreed to safe store the entire exhibition until further use.

NOTHING WILL SEPAERATE US has been shown in:

01. FRANKFURT	01.03. – 21.03.1984	Römerhallen, Coucil of Arts Frankfurt (Kunstverein)
02. HAMBURG	18.04. – 06.05.1984	Markthalle, Senat of Cultur/Hamburg
03. ERLANGEN	12.05. – 20.05.1984	Hugenottenkirche, South Africa Initiative
04. HANNOVER	04.06. – 20.06.1984	Pavillion am Raschplatz, South Africa Group
05. COLOGNE	23.08. – 21.10.1984	Ethnological Museum, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum
06. MUNICH	17.01. – 17.02.1985	Munich Arts Council
07. BERLIN	01.03. – 15.04.1985	Kreuzberg Arts Council
08. BASEL	23.04. – 02.06.1985	Museum of Trade
09. ZURICH	06.06. – 28.07.1985	Museum für Gestaltung
10. RECKLINGHAUSEN	18.10. – 01.11.1985	Bürgerhaus Süd, Trade Union of German Miners
11. BAYREUTH	11.01. – 09.02.1986	Iwalewa-House, University of Bayreuth
12. SCHWÄBISCH-HALL	19.02. – 16.03.1986	Goethe-Institut
13. BRAUNSCHWEIG	23.03. – 02.05.1986	Photographic Museum
14. ESPELKAM	07.05. – 30.05.1986	Raiffeisenbank
15. PASSAU	09.06. – 30.06.1986	University Of Passau
16. GENEVA	21.07. – 21.09.1986	Lutheran World Foundation
17. LINDAU	24.10. – 14.11.1986	Rungesaal, City of Lindau
18. WIESBADEN	21.11. – 22.12.1986	City Library
19. BENSHEIM	28.01. – 20.02.1987	Park-Theatre
20. SINSHEIM	25.02. – 30.03.1987	City Library, Friends of Nature and Environent
21. STOCKHOLM	29.04. – 10.08.1987	Kulturhuset
22. VIENNA	01.05. – 30.05.1988	Palais Palffy, Austrian Society for Cultural Development