

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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MICHAEL SCHMIDT: U-NI-TY

January 18 - March 26, 1996

The premier exhibition of an important new body of work by leading German photographer Michael Schmidt (b. 1945) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on January 18, 1996. **MICHAEL SCHMIDT: U-NI-TY**, featuring approximately 100 black-and-white photographs made between 1991 and 1994, is a meditation on national identity and history, prompted by the reunification of East and West Germany. The exhibition was jointly organized by Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, and Thomas Weski, Curator of Photography and Media, Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany.

After the wall between East and West Germany was destroyed in 1989, the rapid political reunification of the country was greeted with euphoria. However, psychological and cultural reunification has proved to be a much slower and more difficult process. Michael Schmidt, a lifelong Berlin resident, approaches that anxious process in part by reflecting on Germany's past.

About half of the works featured in the exhibition are Schmidt's own photographs; the remainder are photographs he made from other photographs culled from newspapers, magazines, propaganda pamphlets, and other such sources. The pictures are carefully sequenced to interact with one another, but they are presented without captions. As a result, the meanings of

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historical monuments and political symbols, of particular gestures and facial expressions and styles of clothing, are left open to interpretation. Each viewer is challenged to judge whether a given image represents East or West Germany, a villain or a victim, a moment in 1935, 1965, or 1995.

U-ni-ty merges two artistic traditions, treating photography both as a medium for describing personal experience and as a vast, impersonal resource created by the mass media. In its entirety, the exhibition explores the emotional weight of history, the power of ideological symbols, and the relationship of the individual to the body politic.

Michael Schmidt's first book of photographs, a study of the Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg, was published in 1973. In 1976 he founded the Werkstatt für Photographie in Kreuzberg. A selection from his series "Waffenruhe" ("Ceasefire") was presented at The Museum of Modern Art in the exhibition NEW PHOTOGRAPHY 4 in 1988.

Schmidt's eighth book, *U-ni-ty*, was published this year by Scalo, Zurich. It is distributed in North America by D.A.P., New York. The clothbound volume, with 161 duotone illustrations and 316 pages, is available for \$58.00 in The MoMA Book Store.

The exhibition is made possible by a generous grant from Siemens AG. Additional support has been provided by the Intitut für Auslandsbeziehungen through the German Consulate General in New York. Following its New York showing, the exhibition will travel to the Sprengel Museum Hannover (May 26 - August 4, 1996) and the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Albertinum, Dresden (Spring 1997).

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