

BERND AND HILLA BECHER'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF INDUSTRIAL SITES SHOWN IN MoMA EXHIBITION

Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Typology

The Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery, third floor
May 21–August 25, 2008

Press Viewing Hour: Wednesday, May 21, 2008, 9:30–10:30 a.m.
RSVP to pressoffice@moma.org

NEW YORK, May 5, 2008—The Museum of Modern Art presents *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Typology*, a focussed examination of the influential photographic work of the German husband-and-wife team. For nearly 50 years, the Bechers photographed water towers, gas tanks, cooling towers, and other large industrial structures, notably including the winding towers of coal mines and the blast furnaces that produce iron and steel. The exhibition juxtaposes two very different aspects of their work: twelve of their celebrated typologies (grids of closely related images of variants of a particular type of structure) and some two dozen of their less familiar landscapes (overall views of industrial sites). Ten of the typologies each comprise nine individual prints; two are each made up of 30 prints. All of the photographs are black-and-white prints. On view in The Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery on the third floor from May 21 to August 25, 2008, the exhibition is organized by Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art.

Bernd Becher (German, 1931–2007) and Hilla Wobeser (German, b. 1934) met in 1957 in Düsseldorf, where both attended the state art academy. They began to work together in 1959 and married in 1961. For decades they traveled throughout northern Europe and the United States to photograph the industrial plants that fascinated them, eventually visiting more than 200 sites. Early on in their collaboration, the Bechers developed the distinctive method for which they soon became widely known: each individual photograph isolates a large structure and describes it with the frontality and exactitude of an engineer's diagram. Thanks to this strict template, the grid-like typologies simultaneously reveal the basic forms of common functions while highlighting the unique details of each particular specimen.

In addition to assembling material for their typologies, the Bechers made overall views of each site. These views generally adopt a high and distant vantage point that permits the viewer to study the layout of the plant and its relationship to its surroundings. In other words, the landscapes embrace precisely what the typologies so rigorously exclude. Far less familiar than the typologies, the landscapes were published together only in 2003.

The landscapes, displayed on the central wall of the gallery, and the typologies, displayed on the perimeter walls, present mutually exclusive pictorial strategies. Mr. Galassi states, "Each yields photographs full of informative and reliable detail—pictures that might be mistaken for objective documents, uninflected by sensibility. When they are presented together, however, each strategy betrays the artifice of the other, proving that in photography fact is the agent, not the enemy, of art."

Apart from regular exhibitions at the Sonnabend Gallery, which has represented the Bechers for nearly four decades and has kindly assisted in the preparations for *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Typology*, this is only their third solo exhibition in New York City. The others were a show in the *Projects* series at MoMA, in 1975–76, and a major exhibition at the Dia Art Foundation, in 1989–91.

ABOUT THE CURATOR:

Peter Galassi was appointed Chief Curator of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art in 1991. He first worked at MoMA as a Curatorial Intern in 1974–75, then returned as Associate Curator in 1981. He has organized more than 40 exhibitions, including *Jeff Wall* (2007), *Friedlander* (2005), *Andreas Gursky* (2001), *Walker Evans & Company* (2000), *Aleksandr Rodchenko* (1998, with Magdalena Dabrowski and Leah Dickerman), *Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective* (1996), *American Photography 1890–1965 from The Museum of Modern Art* (1995), *Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort* (1991), *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work* (1987), and *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (1981). Galassi has authored and coauthored numerous publications to accompany these and other exhibitions, as well as *Corot in Italy: Open-Air Painting and the Classical Landscape Tradition* (1991). He has presented solo exhibitions devoted to the work of Helen Chadwick, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Barry Frydlander, Stuart Klipper, Nicholas Nixon, Lucas Samaras, Michael Schmidt, and Cindy Sherman, and he has frequently reinstalled the Museum's photography collection galleries.

No. 50

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Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.
Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free for children 16 and under. Free for members. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs)
Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

Subway: E or V train to Fifth Avenue/53rd Street

Bus: On Fifth Avenue, take the M1, M2, M3, M4, or M5 to 53rd Street. On Sixth Avenue, take the M5, M6, or M7 to 53rd Street. Or take the M57 and M50 crosstown buses on 57th and 50th Streets.

The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information.

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