

**Agnieszka Lulinska, 20.10.2009**

### **Situation Berlin**

More than any other photographer, Arno Fischer succeeded in finding highly atmospheric and acutely observed images for the cultural and political situation of the ravaged metropolis of Berlin. With great sensitivity he captured the spirit of the era, oscillating as it did between depression and hope for a new beginning, reality and propaganda. He was particularly intrigued by the rift between the individual and society. From 1953, for a period of almost ten years, he took pictures in the eastern and western sectors of the divided city. He attended political demonstrations and rallies such as those accompanying the 'Birthday of the Republic' in the East as well as a meeting of expellees in the West. He found his subjects on fairgrounds, on the building sites along the Stalin Boulevard and on the Kurfürstendamm, where the West German economic miracle began to flaunt the joys of consumerism. Fischer tended to steer clear of carefully orchestrated pomp and circumstance, focusing instead on the fringe of events, where the careful staging peters out and masks are dropped.

### **New York**

In 1978 and 1984 Arno Fischer travelled to New York. The second trip yielded a substantial body of work, which was eventually published in 1988 in the book *New York. Ansichten* ('New York. Views'). The introduction by Heiner Müller ends with the words: 'Before we die, we should see New York, one of the great errors of the human race. MANY ARE THE WONDERS, AND NONE MORE WONDROUS THAN MAN.' Müller's apocalyptic perspective finds no echo in Fischer's photographs. Inevitably the pictures capture the enormous social contrasts that characterise the city. But Fischer had no preconceived agenda; his unhurried, succinct and keenly observed pictures bear witness to his sense of wonder and his fascination, but never let it take centre stage. Fischer screened the wealth of impressions through the filter of his selective gaze. The resulting pictures are street photography in the best sense of the term – detached and familiar in equal measure.

## **By the Wayside**

'By the Wayside' was the title of an exhibition of pictures taken during Arno Fischer's travels. From the 1960s, his journeys took him to many different countries, chief among them those of the Eastern Bloc, but also Western Europe, India and Africa. Fischer not only published reportages in magazines but also a series of striking illustrated books: *Poland's Capitals* (1974), *Leningrad* (1981) and *New Delhi, Old Delhi* (1983). Abroad, as at home, he stayed true to his principle of using photography as a creative medium of perception, largely eschewing the exotic and the picturesque in favour of subtle observation and narrative. Arno Fischer's overriding concern has always been for people, their everyday life and basic experiences, which renders the location of the shots almost irrelevant.

## **Arno Fischer über die Fotografie**

‘Photography is a technical means that allows creative people to express themselves.’

‘You don’t have to compose; the world is the composition.’

‘If I take a picture of a man waiting for a bus at a bus stop, the picture must show more than a man waiting for a bus.’

## **The Garden**

In 1978 Arno Fischer and Sibylle Bergemann acquired a modest farm house some seventy kilometres north of Berlin, where they now spend most of their time. They planted a garden which has since grown into a prolifically exuberant artist's garden. Here, in his corner of paradise, Fischer has always worked with a Polaroid SX 70 camera. The pictures focus on the unspectacular: details of plants and roots, stones, tools and furniture. The eternal cycle of growth and decay became the leitmotif of the countless undated pictures taken over a period of some thirty years. Not until 2007, when Polaroid film finally went out of production and the series had to come to an end, did Arno Fischer exhibit a selection of these highly private pictures. Ignoring their chronological context, Fischer arranged them into triptychs that have since been widely exhibited and published in a book.