

3rd Essen Symposium for Photography (Essen, 4-5 Feb 26)

SANAA-Building at UNESCO World Heritage Zollverein, Essen, Feb 4-05, 2026

Zentrum für Fotografie Essen

3rd Essen Symposium for Photography: What Will Photography Be? An Invitation to Speculate.

The 3rd Essen Symposium for Photography aims at addressing interest in the medium's prospective forms and uses. It is looking for speculations that critically engage with recent developments in the open and much-diversified field of visual media and try to position photography's future role within such a realm.

How will photographic media participate in the dynamics of current technological advancements? How can photography impact and promote such developments with respect to social, artistic, scientific, and everyday practices? We are interested in ideas about photography's future roles in social, artistic, scientific, and everyday realms. What will we mean when we say »photography«? Will we discuss specific techniques, aesthetics, or practices bound to visual images? Keeping the lessons taught by »operational images« in mind, will we leave the idea of the visual behind us? In short, what will be our point of reference when we address something as »photography«?

We are also delighted to invite you to the first public presentation of the Timm Rautert Archive – with the artist in attendance – as part of the 3rd Essen Symposium for Photography. Recently, our partner institution, Museum Folkwang, announced that it has assumed stewardship of the estate. To mark this occasion, the City of Essen will host a public reception at City Hall on 5 February 2026, at 6:30 p.m.

AGENDA:

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

10.00

Steffen Siegel (D-Essen): Welcome: From Here Where to?

10.30

Monica Bravo (USA-Princeton): A Future History of Spatial Photography

12.00

Bernd Behr (GB-London): A Code Without a Message: Photography's Topological Turn in the Age of Machine Learning

14.30

Helen Westgeest (NL-Leiden): Living a Photographic Way of Life in a Mediating Body

15.30

Paul Frosh (ISR–Jerusalem): What Will Become of the Body of Photography?

17.00

André Gunthert (F–Paris): The Accidents of Truth in Photography

18.00

Terrence Phearse (USA–New York): Mise en Sein: Ontological Unraveling of Photography and the Invisibility of Black Phenomenology

Thursday, February 5, 2026

10.00

Daniel Rubinstein (GB–London): Photography as Artificial Unconscious: Desire, Sublimation & the Alpha Function

11.00

Cringuta Irina Pelea (ROM–Bukarest): Virtual Human Photography in Japan: When the Photographed Subject Never Existed

12.30

Therese Schuleit (D–Mülheim): From Photocopier to Prompt: The Bureaucratic Image in the Post-Photographic Age

15.00

Jens Schröter (D–Bonn): Photography and Ghost Imaging

16.00

Michelle Henning (GB–Liverpool): Sense and Sensitivity: Speculations on the Future of Photography

17.00

Markus Rautzenberg (D–Essen): Conclusion: From Here Where to?

18.30

City Hall Essen, Public Reception with presentation of the Timm Rautert Archive

As part of the symposium's accompanying program, Krupp Historical Archive, Museum Folkwang, and Ruhr Museum will offer guided tours of their current exhibitions and provide insights into their photographic collections. Further information will be announced soon. Please keep February 3 and 6, 2026, available if you wish to take part. No separate registration is required.

With generous support from the City of Essen, participation is free of charge. Attendance is limited – please register here: <https://sweapevent.com/b?p=essen-symposium-for-photography>

Reference:

CONF: 3rd Essen Symposium for Photography (Essen, 4-5 Feb 26). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 13, 2025 (accessed Apr 1, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51125>>.