

**Exhibition** 11 February – 13 July 2015  
Nouvel Building, 0 Floor

# **Not yet.** On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism



*Stadtplanung für wen?* [Town Planning for Whom?]. Open-air exhibition of the BINA (Initiative of the citizens of the north of the historic center), Cologne, 1978. Black and white photograph. Gruppe Arbeiterfotografie Köln

This exhibition looks from different angles at the debates on photographic documentary, which took place in the seventies and eighties in a context of ideological critique of modernism and its institutions. These debates proliferated globally in a context of rapid structural transformation in photographic culture. New photographic institutions started to appear at a moment when the prolonged phase of stability and economic growth after World War II, whose turning point came with May '68 and the onset of economic crisis in 1972, arrived to an end.

During the Cold War, the historic narrative of the emergence of documentary art around 1930 had undergone a liberal resignification. *The Family of Man*, the great 1955 exhibition at the MoMA, had institutionalized pre-war documentary culture in humanist terms. This erased the revolutionary edge of its original ideological impulse, which was bound up with the worker-photography movement. Such logic ceased to hold sway in the seventies, when a new generation of artists came on the scene, rediscovered the political origin of documentary culture, and set about its reinvention, understood as running parallel with a critique of the stagnant and falsely conciliatory premises of postwar modernism. The key text for these new practices was Allan Sekula's 1978 article "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary."

The first part of the exhibition presents some of the scenarios for this rediscovery in the seventies of the memory of pre-war worker-photography, which became the starting point for a reinvention of documentary discourse and the links between avant-garde and social movements. It includes works from the second wave of German workers-photography, which arose in 1973 around the magazine *Arbeiterfotografie*, and its reception by the London circle of Jo Spence and the Photography Workshop, and the activity of the San Diego group including Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler, among other cases.

The second part of the exhibition surpasses the geographical and cultural boundaries of Europe and North America. It examines documentary practices linked with various social and political struggles. In the seventies, the geopolitical opposition of center and periphery in the world system was conceived in terms of the opposition between the First World and the Third World, an image constructed through the processes of colonization in the industrial era and the consequent struggles for decolonization, still continuing and at that moment very much in the public eye owing to the Vietnam War. Among the work on show is Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan-Ivens' documentary film made in Vietnam, anti-apartheid photography in South Africa, and the critical photojournalism of Susan Meiselas in Nicaragua.

The third section of the exhibition shows some cases of convergence between documentary photographic activity and the rise of the post-68 new social movements and the new urban struggles. 1968 brought a reorientation of social vindications described by Henri Lefebvre as a displacement from the revolutionary subjectivity based on the industrial worker, to the new social movements and their "right to the city". For Lefebvre, the "urban revolution" consisted of a profound epochal shift in social organization, determined by a totally urbanized society.

This final part of the exhibition includes documents on a variety of urban struggles, such as the neighborhood movement in Barcelona during the years of the transition to democracy, the occupation of Nieuwmarkt in Amsterdam and its repression in 1975, the photojournalism linked to the '77 movement in Italy, and Martha Rosler's collaborative project *If You Lived Here...*, an artistic response to the homeless crisis in New York in the eighties.

Exhibition organized by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía to run concurrently with PHotoEspaña 2015

## Nouvel Building

0 Floor,

## Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

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### Opening hours

Monday to Saturday

and bank holidays

from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Sundays

from 10:00 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.

complete Museum visit,

from 2:15 to 7:00 p.m.

visit to Colection 1 and a

temporary exhibition

(check Website)

Closed on Tuesdays

Visitors are kindly asked

to clear the galleries

15 minutes before closing.

[www.museoreinasofia.es](http://www.museoreinasofia.es)

### Related activities:

11 February, 2015, 7:00 p.m.

Encounter

[Martha Rosler in conversation  
with Jorge Ribalta](#)

Nouvel Building, Auditorium 200

11 to 26 May, 2015, 7:00 p.m.

Lecture series

[Documentary and](#)

[Neo-Avantgarde. Photographic  
Practices in the 1970s](#)

Nouvel Building, Auditorium 200



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