

Press release

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Akademie der Künste creates Roger Melis Archive

The Akademie der Künste is establishing a Roger Melis Archive. Melis would have been 80 years old on 20 October 2020. The Akademie has agreed with the estate's executor Dr Matthias Bertram to gradually accommodate the artistic estate of the co-founder and promoter of East German auteur photography.

Melis (1940-2009) was already known in the 1960s in East and West Germany as a sensitive portraitist of poets and artists and was one of East Germany's best-known fashion photographers. As a freelance photojournalist and in his street photography, Melis proved to be a pioneer and "master of East German photorealism" (DIE ZEIT). In atmospherically dense, often symbol-charged photographs, he documented life in town and country as a chronicler of East Germany. With his portraits of people at their workplaces, he created a photographic cross-section of almost all strata of the working population. His widely circulated photo book *Paris zu Fuss* published in 1986 was the first illustrated book by an East German photographer to tell of life in a foreign city using street photography alone.

The photographer's extensive and painstakingly maintained archive contains his own prints of his well-known photographs as well as negatives, contact sheets, correspondence, workbooks, calendars and databases. This material permits the exploration and dating of his works, sheds light on the historical background and at the same time affords insight into the photographer's artistic and documentary creative processes. In addition, they spotlight in exemplary fashion the social and historical conditions of the work of a freelance photographer in East Germany.

As its first step, the Akademie's art collection is accepting **Melis' portraits of artists and authors**. The portfolio comprises more than 900 photographs, including over 700 prints made by Melis himself. It contains portraits of more than 500 writers, graphic artists, painters, sculptors, photographers and performing artists from five decades, including extensive series of portraits of Peter Huchel, Franz Fühmann, Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Christa Wolf, Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch, Rainer Kirsch and Thomas Brasch, taken at different stages of their lives and work.

The Berlin gallery argus fotokunst is currently showing the exhibition 'Paris zu Fuss' in the context of the European Month of Photography until 30 October 2020.

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