

# PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, Apr 18, 2024

## STUDIO REX

Jean-Marie Donat Collection

**C/O Berlin** presents the exhibition pleased to announce the exhibition **Studio Rex . Jean-Marie Donat Collection** from **Jun 1 to Sep 5, 2024**. The **opening** will take place on **Fri, May 31, 2024, at 20:00** at C/O Berlin, Amerika Haus, Hardenbergstraße 22–24, 10623 Berlin.

What stories are hidden in the archives of photo studios? What can studio photographs reveal about the life paths, dreams, and hopes of the individuals portrayed? These are some of the questions raised by the history of Studio Rex.

The photo studio was located at the heart of Belsunce, Marseille's working-class neighborhood. Assadour Keussayan arrived in the city at the age of 17 and founded the studio in 1933. He was a survivor of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, while his wife Varsenik, hailed from Cyprus. Thanks to her help and that of his children, Grégoire and Germaine, the studio was a family-run business which served as a meeting point for migrants from northern and western Africa as well as other countries. The studio closed in 2018. About ten years ago, French collector Jean-Marie Donat acquired a large part of the studio's extensive archive of tens of thousands of photographs and photo negatives taken there between 1966 and 1985. It was a trove preserving personal memories and historical events.

The photographs include official passport photos showing serious-looking individuals in formal dress as well as portraits of elegantly clad figures presenting themselves against backdrops with props such as flowers and ornamental screens. Finally, there are hand-painted photomontages creating family portraits of people separated by the Mediterranean. Some photographs had been abandoned following an unexpected departure following a long-awaited work contract marking the next stage of a journey. Despite their anonymity as a group, the collection reveals individuals and their unique stories, even though these can only be guessed. Most of the photographs bear neither names nor dates.

At a time of European isolationism and xenophobic policies coupled with the rise in power of right-wing parties, human stories behind migration often remain invisible. One can seldom see individual migrants and their motivations. This archive offers a contrast to the media's largely stereotyped and negative portrayal of migration, allowing a glimpse of how marginalized peoples have chosen to represent themselves.

C/O Berlin is the first to display a significant part of this archive in Germany, inviting a dialogue between Africa and Europe, as well as between personal and collective memory and forgetting across past and present.

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Beyond France, numerous photo studios existed that share a similar history to Studio Rex. An adjacent exhibition space with the title *Where Have All The Studios Gone?* offers a look at the history and disappearance of local photo studios in Berlin using Studio Mathesie as an example. Founded in 1885 and based in Kreuzberg from 1945, the studio was forced to close its doors in 1993 due to rising rental prices. The archive was the subject of a seminal exhibition at nGbK and Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien in 1998. Comprising 300,000 negatives, the studio archive is now held by the municipal FHXB Museum in Kreuzberg.

C/O Berlin presents a selection of studio photographs and newspaper clippings about Studio Mathesie as well as the accompanying exhibition. They provide further insight into the practice of studio photography while also bearing witness to a lost era of Kreuzberg's residents and their everyday lives, as well as the changing times, fashions, and gestures. In addition, a photo studio backdrop invites visitors to photograph themselves.

Placed in dialog with the *Studio Rex* exhibition, this local history intervention raises larger questions about the role of photo studios in visual culture, the relevance of (self-)representation, the challenges that arise when telling such stories. And finally, the significance of the disappearance of this trade. The exhibition was curated by Boaz Levin, Curator and Co-Head of Program of the C/O Berlin Foundation, and the Collector Jean-Marie Donat.

**Jean-Marie Donat** (b. 1962, France) is a publisher and collector who began an artistic practice around his photography collection in 2015. He runs Éditions Innocences, which he founded in 2013. Begun in the 1980s, his collection comprises almost 40,000 photographs, ektachromes, and negatives from all over the world, covering over a century of history (1880–1990), most of which feature vernacular, amateur, and anonymous images. Exhibitions of series from the collection have been shown at the Rencontres de la photographie in Arles (2015; 2022), the cultural center Le Centquatre (Paris, 2021) and the Triennale für Fotografie in Hamburg (2018), among others. Numerous publications have also appeared, most recently the book *Tout doit disparaître. Regard sur la société de consommation* (Innocences, 2021). Donat lives and works in Paris, France.

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| <b>Exhibition</b>            | Jun 1 – Sep 5, 2024   |
| <b>Press Tour</b>            | May 31, 2024 . 11:00  |
| <b>Opening</b>               | May 31, 2024 . 20:00  |
| <b>Opening Hours</b>         | Daily . 11:00–20:00   |
| <b>Admission</b>             | 12/6 euro   |
| <b>Organizer</b>             | C/O Berlin Foundation<br>Amerika Haus . Hardenbergstraße 22–24 . 10623 Berlin<br>Tel +49.30.284 44 16-0 . <a href="http://www.co-berlin.org">www.co-berlin.org</a><br><a href="http://www.facebook.com/coberlinphoto">www.facebook.com/coberlinphoto</a><br><a href="http://www.instagram.com/coberlin">www.instagram.com/coberlin</a><br><a href="http://www.twitter.com/coberlin">www.twitter.com/coberlin</a><br>#coberlin<br>#studiorexcoberlin |
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