

WILLIAM EGGLESTON

Mystery of the Ordinary
Jan 28 – May 4, 2023



CO Berlin

PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, Dec 20, 2022

WILLIAM EGGLESTON

Mystery of the Ordinary

C/O Berlin presents the retrospective **William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary** from **January 28 to May 4, 2023**. The **opening** will take place on **Friday, 27 Jan 2023, at 20:00** at C/O Berlin in the Amerika Haus at Hardenbergstraße 22-24, 10623 Berlin.

In the twilight, the shadows of the plants grow mysteriously along the wall of the house. In front of this shadow theater stands a metallic-lilac Cadillac, on whose lustrous paint the last rays of the sun dance. The brick-lined flowerbed, the shrubs planted in it, and the straw-woven blinds in the window front with their rusty colors complement this image composition, which at the same time radiates an eerie calm.

In a career spanning over five decades, William Eggleston has come to be recognized for almost single-handedly elevating color photography to the status of fine art. Along with Stephen Shore and Evelyn Hofer, Eggleston was one of the first photographers to recognize the distinctive power of color and its unique capacity to create pictures that continuously challenge the everyday. A blue bouquet on the door of a house, a colorfully tiled building façade, a ceiling painted glossy blood red: the intensity of the color alone, and Eggleston's abiding sensitivity to it, was a formal and analytical provocation. Eggleston recognized the beauty and mystery in the commonplace, and imbued his images with an element of the mysterious, made especially pronounced through color's unique relationship to perception. His fascination with the poetic visuality of the American South drew Eggleston to investigate his immediate surroundings, even while, over the course of his career, he ventured across the United States and around the world, always bringing his camera and applying the same discernment to everything he photographed. Consequently, his reputation as a pioneer of color photography has spread around the world.

In his early career, Eggleston was still influenced by the work of Walker Evans and Henri Cartier-Bresson, who established the narrative, documentary style that defined photographic practice until the 1960s. By using color, Eggleston went in a completely different direction, and the pathos of the former became as foreign as the decisive moment of the latter. William Eggleston's solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1976, curated by John Szarkowski, was the first showcase of color photography at the museum. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, *William Eggleston's Guide*, have come to be widely recognized as a pivotal moment in the medium's acceptance into the art historical canon. It firmly established Eggleston's position as one of the leading representatives of the medium to this day.

PRESS RELEASE

William Eggleston . *Mystery of the Ordinary*

Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

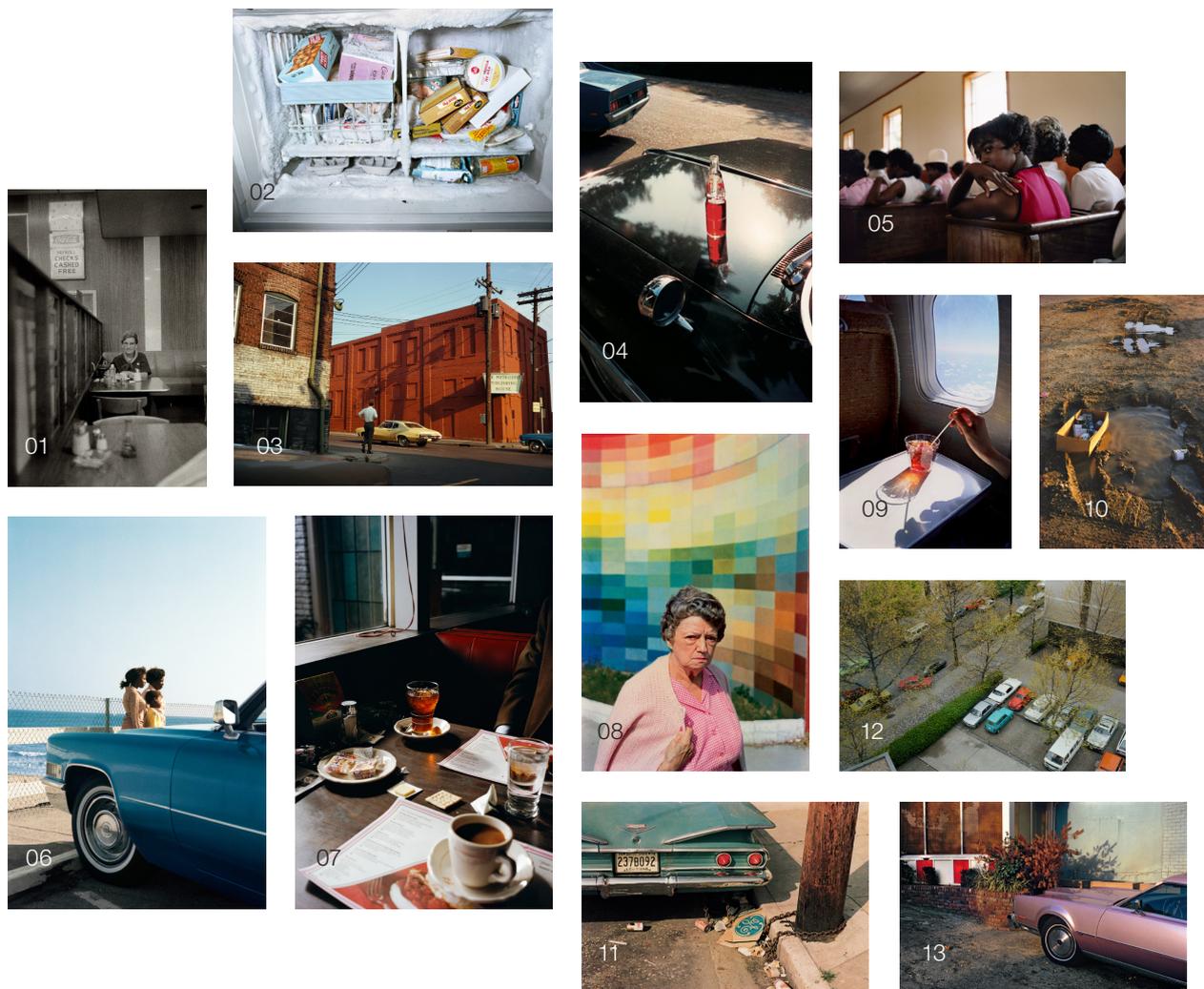
His œuvre has had a profound effect on contemporary visual culture in general, and the impact of his iconic visual language can be seen in a wide range of works by subsequent generations of photographers.

C/O Berlin will present *William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary*, a major retrospective on the American master of color photography, from January 28 to May 4, 2023. In addition to presenting famous series like *Los Alamos*, the exhibition also contains works that have never been seen before, including pictures from the series *The Outlands* and images taken in Berlin between 1981 and 1988. Following exhibitions of the work of Evelyn Hofer (2005), Fred Herzog (2011), Joel Sternfeld (2012), Stephen Shore (2016), and Joel Meyerowitz (2018), the Eggleston exhibition is another important investigation of *New Color Photography* at C/O Berlin. A book accompanying the exhibition will be published by Steidl.

William Eggleston was born in 1939 in Memphis, Tennessee, where he continues to live today. Since the 1970s, Eggleston's work has been the subject of significant solo exhibitions, beginning with his groundbreaking 1976 show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which subsequently traveled to multiple venues. Solo presentations have been organized by prominent institutions worldwide such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1990); the Barbican Gallery, London (1992; later traveling to multiple venues); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2003; later traveling to multiple venues); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008; later traveling to multiple venues); Tate Modern, London (2013); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2013 and 2018); the National Portrait Gallery, London (2016); and Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam (2017). Eggleston has been the recipient of numerous notable awards. The artist's work is part of the collections of many major international museums.

PRESS IMAGES

William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary
Jan 28 – May 4, 2023



Alle images © Eggleston Artistic Trust . Courtesy Eggleston Artistic Trust and David Zwirner

01 William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1963–1968 **02** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1971–1973 **03** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1970–1973 **04** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1971–1974 **05** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1970–1973 **06** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, 1971–1974 **07** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1970–1973 **08** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1965–1968 **09** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1971–1974 **10** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, 1971–1973 **11** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1971–1974 **12** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1983–1986 **13** William Eggleston, *Untitled*, c. 1970–1973

A selection of max. four images may be used free of charge at one time, three months before beginning and until the end of the exhibition in the context of editorial reporting only. They must not be used for commercial purposes or shared with third parties. They may not be modified, cropped, or printed over. Please always include the correct copyright notices and retain the captions supplied with images. Publications must mention C/O Berlin, the artist, and the exhibition.

Contact Magnus Pölcher . press@co-berlin.org . +49.30.284 44 16 41

C/O Berlin

William Eggleston . *Mystery of the Ordinary* . Jan 28 – May 4, 2023
C/O Berlin Foundation . Amerika Haus . Hardenbergstraße 22–24 . 10623 Berlin
Tel +49.30.284 44 16-0 . Fax +49.30.284 44 16-19 . info@co-berlin.org . www.co-berlin.org

WALLTEXTS

William Eggleston . *Mystery of the Ordinary*
Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Back when photography began, the heavens were gray. Fine-art photography as well as photojournalism meant working in black and white. Although color film first became available in 1953, color photography remained the province of advertising until the 1980s. The medium was dismissed as vulgar, lacking in artistry, and commercial. Yet through the 1960s New Color Photography movement, more and more photographers began discovering the possibilities afforded by color photography. C/O Berlin has showcased this phenomenon in recent years with exhibitions by Evelyn Hofer (2005), Fred Herzog (2011), Joel Sternfeld (2012, in cooperation with Museum Folkwang, Essen), Stephen Shore (2016, in cooperation with Fundación MAPFRE, Spain, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York), and Joel Meyerowitz (2018). This exhibition of work by William Eggleston completes C/O Berlin's examination of this topic. Spanning five decades, Eggleston's work not only played a significant role in catalyzing this paradigm shift; it also went on to visibly influence subsequent generations.

Early on, Eggleston recognized the unmistakable power of color, its unique pictorial quality, and the resulting ongoing questioning of the everyday. A blue bouquet on a front door, a colorfully tiled façade, a ceiling painted red: the very intensity of the colors themselves provoked analysis; especially since Eggleston was in no way concerned with revealing beauty in the everyday. Rather, he cast the banal moments, like the frozen food in the freezer or the ketchup bottles on the counter of a snack bar, in an eerie or cryptic light: color was not just used to mimic human vision. Photography was instead a way of constantly checking one's surroundings, as if Eggleston was reluctant to trust. Often they are set pieces of American and US design history, which had a major impact on a collective postwar identity in West Germany, among other places.

In his early work, Eggleston was influenced by the works of Walker Evans and Henri Cartier-Bresson, both of whom established the narrative, documentary image as a subject. Initially working in black and white yet his use of color meant he quickly established a very different emphasis, in which emotion-laden imagery of the former was as alien as the decisive moment of the latter. Eggleston did not elevate, and he was not interested in freezing moments in time. Rather, time seems to have been standing still far before he arrived and took his photograph. He was uninterested in irony and knowingness. Instead, his photographs merge to form a visual tale of decay.

The exhibition is both a monograph and a retrospective. It brings together crucial elements in Eggleston's work, which he refined during his many stays in Europe, particularly in Berlin. C/O Berlin's current home is the former US information center at the Amerika Haus, which was an important meeting place for Eggleston. He engaged in close exchange with local photographers through the *Werkstatt für Photographie*.

WALLTEXTS

William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary
Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

Beginning in Berlin, Eggleston traveled to Austria and Switzerland, where he spread his ideas about color photography within Europe during the early 1980s. Alongside his major work series, the current exhibition also shares works not previously displayed from the series *The Outlands*, as well as selected images taken in Berlin between 1981 and 1988.

The exhibition was organized in collaboration with the Eggleston Artistic Trust and curated by Felix Hoffmann for C/O Berlin. In fall 2023, the exhibition will be shown at Fundación MAPFRE in Barcelona.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog with essays by Felix Hoffmann, Jörg Sasse and Thomas Weski, published by Steidl.

WALLTEXTS

William Eggleston . *Mystery of the Ordinary*
Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

BEFORE COLOR

1963–1968

Before and at the same time William Eggleston worked in black and white and color. The exhibition offers for the first time the opportunity to see the results of the working methods opposite. The pictures were taken from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s. The works are printed later. The black and white work was first published in 2010 by Steidl under the title *Before Color*.

Gelatin Silver Prints

LOS ALAMOS

1965–1974

“While driving through New Mexico in 1973, William Eggleston stopped at *Los Alamos*, the forested site of the atomic bomb’s clandestine development. He chose *Los Alamos* as the title for a sprawling body of work then nearing completion: approximately twenty-two hundred images photographed between 1966 and 1974. This title cloaks with some irony Eggleston’s ostensible subjects, found in a vast American terrain, yet acknowledges his belief in the aesthetic consequences of his private quest.

The photographs that make up this selection from *Los Alamos* begin at the beginning, with the first color photograph Eggleston made, of a grocery clerk pushing a shopping cart; include the center of his world—Memphis and the Mississippi Delta; trace his travels west from New Orleans to Las Vegas and southern California; and end on the Santa Monica Pier.

That day in New Mexico, passing through the piñon woods of the Jemez Mountains, past the guard gates of the National Laboratory, Eggleston turned with a small smile and said, “You know, I’d like to have a secret lab like that myself.” It seems clear from the investigations collected in *Los Alamos* that he already had found the key to his proper place of research”.

Walter Hopps (1932-2005), US museum director and curator of contemporary art

Dye Transfer Prints

DEMOCRATIC FOREST

“I was in Oxford, Mississippi, for a few days and I was driving out to Holly Springs on a back road, stopping here and there. It was the time of year when the landscape wasn't yet green. I left the car and walked into the dead leaves off the road. It was one of the occasions when there was no picture there. It seems like nothing, but of course there was something for someone out there. I started forcing myself to take pictures of the earth, where it had been eroded thirty or forty feet from the road. There were a few weeds. I began to realize that soon I was taking some pretty good pictures, so I went further into the woods and up a little hill, and I got well into an entire roll of film.

Later, when I was having dinner with some friends, writers from Oxford, or maybe at the bar of the Holiday Inn, someone said,
'What have you been photographing here today, Eggleston?'
'Well, I've been photographing democratically,' I replied.
'But what have you been taking pictures of?'
'I've been outdoors, nowhere, in nothing.'
'What do you mean?'
'Well, just woods and dirt, a little asphalt here and there.'

I was treating things democratically, which of course didn't mean a thing to the people I was talking to. I already had a different, massive series. I had been to Berlin and to Pittsburgh and completed huge bodies of work. From that moment everything from the boxes of thousands of prints made cohesive sense for the first time. All the work from this period from 1983 to 1986 was unified by the democracy. Friends would ask what I was doing and I would tell them that I was working on a project with several thousand prints. They would laugh but I would be dead serious. At least I had found a friend in that title, *The Democratic Forest*, that would look over me. It was not much different from Cartier-Bresson bringing the whole world from America to China to *The Decisive Moment*.

I had picked up *The Decisive Moment* years ago when I was already making prints, so the first thing I noticed was the tonal quality of the black and white. There were no shadow areas that were totally black, where you couldn't make out what was in them, and there were no totally white areas. It was only later that I was struck by the wonderful, correct, composition and framing. This was apparent through the tones of the printed book. I later found some actual prints of the same pictures in New York. They were nothing—just ordinary looking photographs, but they were the same pictures I had worshipped and idolized, yet I wouldn't have given ten cents for them. I still go back to the book every couple of years and I know it is the tones that make the composition come across.

WALLTEXTS

William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary

Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

I am afraid that there are more people than I can imagine who can go no further than appreciating a picture that is a rectangle with an object in the middle of it, which they can identify. They don't care what is around the object as long as nothing interferes with the object itself, right in the center. Even after the lessons of Winogrand and Friedlander, they don't get it. They respect their work because they are told by respectable institutions that they are important artists, but what they really want to see is a picture with a figure or an object in the middle of it. They want something obvious. The blindness is apparent when someone lets slip the word 'snapshot.' Ignorance can always be covered by 'snapshot.' The word has never had any meaning. I am at war with the obvious."

William Eggleston in conversation with the editor Mark Holborn, at breakfast, Greenwood, Mississippi, February 1988.

Dye Transfer Prints

WALLTEXTS

William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary

Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

THE OUTLANDS

1969–1974

The Outlands, a finale of a long process, is, in fact, drawn from where it all started, from the chromes or color transparencies, made between 1969 and 1974, that Eggleston showed John Szarkowski, the Director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and from which Szarkowski drew the work from *William Eggleston's Guide* in 1976. Both controversial and groundbreaking, Szarkowski's selection remains revealing forty-five years later.

Edited in 2020 just before the pandemic by Mark Holborn, the sons William and Winston Eggleston looked deep into the archive and projected the images onto a large screen—as many years ago John Szarkowski did Kodachrome slide carousels overseen by the artist.

The Outlands turns back to the beginning, looking deeply in the geographical situation around Memphis, Tennessee. The result is revelatory. Starting at almost the exact point on the same street in suburban Memphis where Eggleston famously photographed the tricycle, the work follows a route through the back roads to old Mississippi where he was raised. What is disclosed is a sublime use of pure color hovering in semi-detachment from the forms he records. At the time, Eggleston was photographing a world that was already vanishing. Today, this final installment of his color work offers a view of a great American artist discovering the range of his visual language and an unforgettable document of the Deep South in transition.

The exhibition shows a selection made from the three-volume book published by Steidl in 2021 and printed all for this exhibition in a special inkjet process in the US. With the exception of a couple of alternate versions, none of the photographs in *The Outlands* has been shown or published previously.

Pigment Prints

WALLTEXTS

William Eggleston . Mystery of the Ordinary

Jan 28 – May 4, 2023

BERLIN

„London, Paris, Rome, have a history, but Berlin has a past (...)”

Lewis Baltz, Notes on Waffenruhe, in Lewis Baltz, Texts (Göttingen, 2012)

Since the late 1970s William Eggleston—like many other photographers—had paid regular visits to Berlin, where he taught at the *Werkstatt für Photographie* initiated by Michael Schmidt. With his camera in hand, he explored the city as a flaneur and photographed the Reichstag, the Brandenburg Gate, and the ruins of the Museum of Decorative Arts (now the Gropius Bau). All these prominent buildings, which at the time were located directly on the border between West and East Berlin, had been at the center of the city before the war and were indicative of Berlin's stature before 1945. Eggleston approached these places in a new way: his pictures are fragmented, seen from unusual angles and perspectives, with a fundamental interest in the historic significance of Berlin as the city on the front line of the Cold War.

Eggleston's fascination with cultural codes is apparent in his numerous photographs of buildings and ruins, as well as neon signs, lettering, and billboards that played a role in his early work in the United States around 1970. Perspectives of façades seen from below and his interest in colored elements—particularly graffiti on the Berlin Wall—are aspects that permeate Eggleston's oeuvre.

From his base in Berlin, Eggleston took trips to Austria (s. Schössl Kino, Vienna) and Switzerland, spreading his ideas about color photography throughout Europe in the early 1980s. The images were originally published in *The Democratic Forest* in 1989 under the title *Kiss me Krakow*.

Pigment Prints

PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, Dec 20, 2022

William Eggleston

Mystery of the Ordinary

Exhibition	Jan 28 – May 4, 2023
Press Tour	Jan 27, 2023 . 11:00
Opening	Jan 27, 2023 . 20:00
Opening Hours	Daily . 11:00–20:00
Admission	12/6 euros
Organizer	C/O Berlin Foundation Amerika Haus . Hardenbergstraße 22–24 . 10623 Berlin Tel +49.30.284 44 16-0 . www.co-berlin.org www.facebook.com/coberlinphoto www.instagram.com/coberlin www.twitter.com/coberlin #coberlin #williameggleston
Press Contact	Magnus Pölcher T +49.30.284 44 16 41 . press@co-berlin.org
Made possible by	Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne
As Part of	EMOP Berlin – European Month of Photography