

Biography Konrad Rufus Müller

The childhood of Konrad Rufus Müller, born on 22 March 1940 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, was characterized by war, by immediate postwar experiences including the Berlin Blockade of 1947–48, and by a Jesuit-inspired philosophy of life. His passion for travel developed early on. At the age of 15, he joined his elder brother in organizing German-French youth meetings, and at 17 he hitchhiked all the way to Sicily. In early 1960, Müller found a 1935-vintage medium format camera in his parents' bedroom. It was during that same year and with this camera that he shot his first photographic portrait at a papal audience at St. Peter's in Rome: the subject was Pope John XXIII.

In 1962, Müller passed the admissions exam at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin, where he proceeded to study painting under Prof. Hans Jaenisch. During his brief period of study, he created portrait sketches in pencil based on photographs of Konrad Adenauer—with whose face the young Müller developed an increasing fascination. In September of 1965, Müller hitchhiked from Berlin to Bonn, where he photographed the (by then former) chancellor for the first time. Over the 18 months that remained until Adenauer's death, Müller was to see him again and again.

During the period that followed, he went on to photograph Ludwig Erhard as an ex-chancellor and Georg Kiesinger while in office. At the same time, he was growing increasingly interested in Willy Brandt, the first government head whom he would photograph before, during and after his chancellorship. Müller was also to succeed in photographically documenting these same three phases of German chancellor Helmut Schmidt's life. Around the same time, from 1980 to 1989, he accompanied Bruno Kreisky, and he also spent ten years with Helmut Kohl, as well as—most recently—seven with Gerhard Schröder.

With his portraits, Müller aims to rediscover for himself the faces of individuals of whom thousands or even millions of photos have been reproduced in newspapers, in other periodicals and on (television) screens. For him, his pictures amount to “a collection of very subjectively regarded portraits which no art director has cropped and no media-conscious agency has doctored up for modern consumption.”

Konrad Rufus Müller has spent 49 years working with one camera only (from 1960 to 1975 with a 1935-model Rolleiflex, and thereafter with a successor to that model). He works without additional light and without a flash. Over all these decades, he has always worked alone. Nobody apart from himself has ever entered his darkroom. And just like during his short study of painting, he produces nothing but unique copies—each negative is used to produce one and only one developed image.

With a very few exceptions, Konrad Rufus Müller has never sold these prints. His entire life's work is stored in a safe and is documented in a catalogue. All pictures are mounted on cardboard, and most are labeled. All motifs assume a paper format of 24 x 30 cm.

The first volume of Müller's photos appeared in 1978. The topic was Willy Brandt. His first picture of Adenauer gave rise to a 1986 book with a written contribution by Golo Mann. To date, 21 volumes of photographic works by Müller have been published, covering figures including Anwar El Sadat, François Mitterrand, Bruno Kreisky, Sergiu Celibidache, natives of Lech, Austria, Vladimir Putin and the chancellors of Germany.

Konrad Rufus Müller's first exhibition with portraits of German chancellors took place in Bonn, in 1972. There followed numerous solo exhibitions at home and abroad. The first retrospective showing of his work was held in 2000 at the German Historical Museum in Berlin. To mark his 70th birthday in 2010, Germany witnessed several exhibitions covering his entire oeuvre and publication of the book *LICHT GESTALTEN*.