The Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel is as exceptional as the institution whose exhibitions it documents. Spanning from the early 20th century—when photography was still a nascent medium for documenting artworks in exhibitions—to today, it comprises more than 25,000 photographs, glass plate negatives, Polaroid images, and transparencies, most of them rarely seen, some already iconic, and all shining a light on more than 100 years of exhibitions that have taken place at the institution. To look at its contents is to see not only which artworks were shown, how exhibitions were mounted, and the artists themselves at work, but also to recognize the role of Kunsthalle Basel, as well as its audience and supporters, relative to some of the most avant-garde art of its time. Celebrating this archive and the process of cataloguing, restoring, digitizing, and making its contents publicly accessible gives occasion for Exposed Exhibitions – Fotoarchiv der Kunsthalle Basel. The title’s use of the word “exposed” conjures not only presentation and photographic exposure, but also the revelation of ephemeral shows whose histories may have slipped from attention over time. The exhibition opens with a vast timeline that gives visitors a glimpse into the institution’s history through archival materials and photographs. Across from it hang enlarged contact prints, some bearing handwritten annotations. These register the unspectacular views as well as the final selections of what would circulate to represent an exhibition, and as such determine a particular perspective on Kunsthalle Basel’s exhibition history. Most of all, these contact sheets remind us that history is constructed through a subjective and selective gaze.

Six artists from different generations—Cécile Hummel, Esther Hunziker, Doris Lasch and Astrid Seme, Raoul Müller, and Werner von Mutzenbecher—were invited to conduct research in the Photo Archive and make new work from it. In their diverse practices, they share an acute interest in archives and photography, and most also have personal connections to Basel and Kunsthalle Basel. Their works are intermixed with the institution’s own presentation of selected materials from the Photo Archive, revealing the radically diverse interpretive possibilities offered by an archive.

Doris Lasch and Astrid Seme focus in their project The imaginary museum (2017) on a political text work by US-American artist Barbara Kruger originally shown at Kunsthalle Basel in 1994. It gains new topicality in today’s political environment, even as Lasch and Seme’s reprise renders its content not immediately accessible. They re-present Kruger’s work in the form of print sheets arranged for the orientation and layout of their artists’ book such that Kruger’s original work is literally deconstructed and only becomes legible again by flipping through the book, available in the exhibition.

Raoul Müller is concerned less with pictorial content than with the photographic archive’s systems. For him, collecting is a central concern. Surfing the Internet, he acquires images and objects related to the keyword “Raoul,” his first name. This personal approach can never aim to be exhaustive, but instead allows the creation of an ever-expanding collection, including material appropriated from the Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel. With Forget It (2013–17), the quasi-sedimentary accumulation of the artist’s archival materials, mounted on stacked layers of glass and suggesting an archaeological excavation, questions institutional systems of organization and the archive’s limitations, thereby creating an awareness of its blind spots.

The second room’s distinctive architecture has been little altered over the years. Its trio of windows
offers not only particular lighting conditions and a view into the garden, but also was used from time to time to provide access for artworks or even the audience to the space. Here a selection of archival photos permits a comparative view of how artists have responded to these spatial conditions over time.

In the very center of the exhibition and protected from daylight are particularly rare and fragile original photographs, shown in a cabinet-like setting. Unknown and unseen up to now, they show exhibitions featuring Aristide Maillol (1933), Auguste Rodin (1948), Claude Monet (1949), and others. They reveal elaborate retouching as well as behind-the-scenes impressions of individual works. The image of Monet’s *Water Lilies* (1914–26) and the exhibited photographs of Sam Francis’s *Basel Murals* (1956–58) deal with loss. Both artworks were later destroyed and are therefore only preserved in photographic form. Many photographic documents themselves are fragile and of a transitory materiality. Be it fading Polaroids, solvent-dyed prints, or a negative dissolving due to what is called “vinegar syndrome,” each tells its own story. A case of the latter is visible in a negative from 1958 in which the once chemical-mechanical medium of photography was supposed to record the scientific and artistic formations that were shown as part of the exhibition *Kunst und Naturform* (1958). Today, the unstoppable process of decomposition appears on the image itself, almost like a literalization of the historic exhibition’s subjects and theme.

Werner von Mutzenbecher’s newly created video work *Kunsthalle Film II / 2017* [→] construes present and retrospective as deeply imbricated. His experimental investigation of Kunsthalle Basel’s empty building, first carried out in 16mm film for the 1969 exhibition *Für Veränderungen Aller Art* [→], both differs from and corresponds to the current presentation of his work on-site. Mutzenbecher’s reflection vis-à-vis his own filmic archive becomes evident in both digital video and analog film.

Esther Hunziker’s video work *Hall* (2017) [→] takes up the digitized image material of the institution’s Photo Archive. In her artistic practice Hunziker repeatedly creates archives from which she produces new works. In her video piece, based on thousands of digital exhibition views, she has liberated the displayed artworks from their contexts and assembled them in new sequences. Temporal and spatial weightlessness arises from her slowly evolving superimposition and mutual permeation of the artworks.

Cécile Hummel often works in relation to photo archives and is herself an avid collector of images. In the photographic documents focusing on Kunsthalle Basel conservator Arnold Rüdlinger’s tenure (from 1955–1967), Hummel found records of two ethnographic exhibitions from 1962: *Nigeria 2000 Jahre Plastik* and *Die Kunst Neu-Guineas* [→]. In her response to these, Hummel deals with both the quality and the fragility of the photographic documents produced, as well as with the works of art they depict [→]. The latter find their way into ephemeral, fluorescent wall paintings, a reflection on the appropriation of other cultures and highlighting this appropriation’s reproduction and reception history.

“Art history,” the writer André Malraux once said, “has been the history of that which can be photographed.” The intimate linkage between art history and photography makes the Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel—its breadth and richness here on display and so intriguingly interpreted by the artists in the exhibition—a crucial tool for understanding how the history of art has been written. Not only that, it also reflects Basel’s vital role as a renowned platform for the artists who have been the true authors of that art history.

Cécile Hummel was born in 1962 in Gottlieben, CH; she lives and works in Basel, CH.

Esther Hunziker was born in 1969 in Leimbach, CH; she lives and works in Basel, CH.

Doris Lasch and Astrid Seme: Doris Lasch was born in 1972 in Landsberg / Lech, DE; she lives and works in Basel, CH. Astrid Seme was born in 1985 in Graz, AT; she lives and works in Vienna.

Raoul Müller was born in 1975 in Frauenfeld, CH; he lives and works in Zurich, CH.

Werner von Mutzenbecher was born in 1937 in Frankfurt a.M., DE; he lives and works in Basel and Riehen, CH.
ROOM 1

1 Selected archival material “Timeline”
Design: Studio Martin Stoecklin
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated

2 Selected archival material “Georg Schmidt and the Constructivists”
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated

ROOM 2

3 Selected archival material “Contact Sheets”
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated

4 Doris Lasch and Astrid Seme
The imaginary museum, 2017
featuring Barbara Kruger, Untitled, 1994 / 2017
8 offset prints
Each 100 × 70 cm
Artist book
128 pages, 24 × 33,5 cm, edition of 350, published by Mark Pezinger Verlag

Courtesy the artist

The imaginary museum was founded in 2009, and is a series of exhibitions where place, time and circumstances are constantly redefined.

ROOM 3

5 Raoul Müller
Forget It, 2013—2017
Glass, photographs, printed matter, various materials, wood
Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

6 Selected archival material “Archeology of Rooms”
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated

7 Selected archival material “Image Transformation / Image Loss”
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated

ROOM 4

8 Werner von Mutzenbecher
Kunsthallefilm II, 2017
Digital video, color, sound approx. 9’ in loop
Camera and assistance: Martin Schaffner
Camera 2: Elias Bues
Production Kunsthalle Basel

1/69 Kunsthalle, 1969
16 mm film, b/w, no sound; 8’, in loop
Camera: Klaus Baumgärtner
Assistance: Camille Schlösser
Production Kunsthalle Basel

Courtesy der Künstler

ROOM 5

9 Selected archival material “Veränderungen aller Art”
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated

10 Cécile Hummel
Distance Glance, 2017
22 photographs, numbered
Each 40 × 60 cm, framed

Distant Glance, 2017
Flash lights, photographs, wall paintings
Dimensions variable

Distant Glance, 2017
Acrylic luminous and fluorescent paint, wall paintings
Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

11 Esther Hunziker
Hall, 2017
HD-video, b/w, no sound
12’, in loop
Printed paper, 29.7 × 21 cm

Courtesy the artist

12 Selected archival material “Library Talks”
Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein, unless otherwise indicated
Exhibited Exhibitions – Fotoarchiv der Kunsthalle Basel

Curator
Sören Schmeling, Head of the Photo Archive

Assistant curator
Mara Berger, Assistant of the Photo Archive

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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm, guided tour in German
24.9.2017 Sunday, 3 pm
12.11.2017 Sunday, 3 pm
1.10.2017 Sunday, 3 pm
19.10.2017 Thursday, 6:30 pm
26.10.2017 Thursday, 6:30 pm

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Children’s tour I Spy with My Little Eye!
24.9.2017 Sunday, 3 pm
12.11.2017 Sunday, 3 pm
A tour and workshop for children aged 5–10, in German, by reservation only: kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Family Sunday
22.10.2017 Sunday, 11 am–4 pm
A full day of special programming by the educational team for the whole family, in German.

Workshop Lichtbilder
Dates by appointment
In this workshop, school groups experiment with analog and digital photographic techniques. In German; reservations and more information: kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Students’ Guided Tour
2.11.2017 Thursday, 6 pm
Guided tour, in German, by students from the Academy of Art and Design, FHNW, Basel. Open to all, especially young people interested in art.

Lectures Just for the Record?
Exhibition Shots and Digital Archives
2.11.2017 Thursday, 7–8:30 pm
Lectures by Yvonne Schweizer, Institute for Art History, University of Bern, and Lukas Rosenthaler, Digital Humanities Lab, University of Basel, in German.

Book Launches
12.11.2017 Sunday, 4 pm
Cécile Hummel and Doris Lasch present their latest publications, in German.

In the context of the exhibition, the search engine vitrivr by the Research Group for Databases and Information Systems, University of Basel, provides image-based access to the digital contents of the Photo Archive of Kunsthalle Basel.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to the exhibition.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and share your photos and impressions with #kunsthallebasel.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch.