



### JESSICA BACKHAUS

[jessicabackhaus.net](http://jessicabackhaus.net)

"The photographs would not be by Jessica Backhaus if the colours did not assert themselves," writes the acquisitions editor at Kehrer publishing house, Alexa Becker, of Backhaus' new project, *Once, Still and Forever*. "She thinks in colours," adds Jean-Christophe Ammann, a professor at Goethe University and the man responsible for the Deutsche Börse collection. As their comments suggest, Backhaus' work is a riot of colour but her images are carefully composed and quietly observed, recording otherworldly scenes from otherwise everyday life. Her first project, *Jesus and the Cherries*, combined still life images with environmental portraits to paint a picture of life in a small Polish village; her new work takes a more abstract approach, concentrating on still lifes to consider human emotion and the passing of time.

"I started taking the images in 2009 and finished in July 2012; in 2009 I left New York after 14 years, and went back to Germany after being away for 22 years," says Backhaus. "Of course it was a big change for me but I knew over the last year in America that I wanted to do a project to do with the past, present and future. I knew it would be a series from the start."

Backhaus shot the images in many different places and locations but says they are united by themes of ephemerality and permanence, both in terms of what they show and what they symbolise to her about the passing of time. "Some emotions are so fragile, you feel something for a certain amount of time and then later everything has changed," she says. "Then there are emotions that always stay with you. And of course I can't deny that I am very attracted to colour."

Backhaus keeps her camera with her at all times, taking shots when she finds them on the street, on her travels or in friends' apartments. Even so, she is always clear about what she wants to get from her images, she says, and realised she had finished this particular series when she started to repeat subjects and metaphors.

Over the three years Backhaus amassed many images, but she edited the work down to about 100 before approaching her publisher – Kehrer, with whom she has worked on her last six books – to make a monograph.

"The book has 55 images in total but I had so many more [in the series]," she says. "I worked with a designer, Hannah Feldmeier, to refine the selection. She was a student of mine at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste [where Backhaus taught in Spring 2010] and I recommended her to Kehrer, so it was wonderful to be able to work together. I've worked with Kehrer for about 10 years and it's incredible to see how they've grown; it's a very trusting, loyal relationship."

"As an art photographer you really have two options for showing your work, exhibitions and books," she continues. "Exhibitions can be really fantastic but I've always loved books. They can tell the whole story, where in exhibitions you often have to show just a selection; books can also travel so far, whereas exhibitions really only reach the people who live nearby. And exhibitions are ephemeral, whereas books can last much longer." *BJP*

*Once, Still and Forever* by Jessica Backhaus is published by Kehrer (ISBN 978-3-86828-323-5), priced €48. The images will be exhibited at Projektraum Knut Osper in Cologne until 10 November, then Foil Gallery, Kyoto and Robert Klein Gallery, Boston in spring 2013. [www.kehrerverlag.com](http://www.kehrerverlag.com)



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