

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

Exhibition Duration: **31 January 2026 – 26 April 2026**
Opening: **Friday, 30 January 2026, 7.00 pm**
Venue: **Fotografie Forum Frankfurt**

*Frankfurt am Main, 30 January 2026 – Form, colour, and light constitute the defining elements in the visual cosmos of internationally acclaimed photographer Jessica Backhaus. With **Jessica Backhaus. Shadows might Dance**, the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt presents for the first time a comprehensive show bringing together works and books from 25 years of her artistic practice. “Jesus and the Cherries,” her early story-telling style photo-essay will be on view, as well as Backhaus’s gradual shift toward abstraction as seen in “Cut Outs” to her newest series “Papyrus”, which is in Frankfurt having its initial showing. This captivating selection of works traces the riveting and diverse breadth of the artist’s oeuvre. Bringing together the eight series on view and a selection of her publications, this show offers a distinctive perspective on Backhaus’ artistic development.*

Jessica Backhaus’ explorations, collages, and carefully constructed still lifes open a multi-layered visual world – one that unfolds in the fertile space between photography, painting, and object-based art. It is the small things and details which draw the artist’s attention and provide access to something unresolved: unfolding into a quiet intensity, evoking associations and memories. She develops her ideas through intuitive experimentation, as she pursues emotional themes such as vitality, absence and remembrance. Imbued with a heightened sensitivity of materiality and hues, her works reveal lyrical and vibrant atmospheres: Colours, shapes and even shadows become the players – as the exhibition title suggests.

Born in 1970 in Cuxhaven, Backhaus’ own inspiration has often come from 20th century abstract artists such as Josef Albers or Sonia Delaunay. At an early stage, it was her friendship with the author and photographer Gisèle Freund that gave Backhaus perspectives of what photography could become for her.

Of the eight series on display, “Jesus and the Cherries” (2001–2005) shows early documentary work by Jessica Backhaus. In intimate photographs, she portrays everyday life in a Polish village and addresses social and cultural changes between tradition and change.

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

“Once, Still and Forever” (2009–2012) focuses on inconspicuous objects and fleeting moments. Close-up images condense everyday moments into timeless, emotive images of memory and loss.

In the collection “A Trilogy” (2015–2017), Backhaus explores transitions and inner processes. She combines three series that move between reduction, fragmentation, and mixed media, offering space for contemplative perception.

With “Cut Outs” (2018–2021), Backhaus takes steps into abstraction. Using cut paper, light, shadow and scale she creates compositions in which colour and texture develop a life of their own.

The series “The Nature of Things” (2021–ongoing) is dedicated to the quiet poetry of everyday objects. Precise stagings represent connections and personal meanings.

In “Indications of the Sea” (2022–ongoing), Jessica Backhaus implements black-and-white photographs and collage as for reinterpretation of reality, enhancing the view of the sea.

“Plein Soleil” (2023–2024) is characterised by dramatic luminosity. Juxtaposing lines, the curvature of surface and the vivid tones refer to painting, music, and movement.

Backhaus’ most recent series, “Papyrus” (2024–2026) can be seen as an homage to the material of paper and to the artist’s understanding abstraction as a wordless language, (Exhibition texts on the series will follow in the press kit.)

*The exhibition **Jessica Backhaus. Shadows might Dance** is the artist’s most comprehensive exhibition to date. It was curated by Andrea Horvay and Celina Lunsford in close cooperation with the artist. The presentation is accompanied by a diverse programme of talks, guided tours and a workshop with the artist.*

SUPPORTING PROGRAMME

SAT, 31 January, 3.00 pm GALLERY TOUR with JESSICA BACKHAUS and CELINA LUNSFORD

TUE, 10 February, 10 March, 21 April, 3.00 pm CURATOR TOURS with CELINA LUNSFORD or ANDREA HORVAY

FRI, 17 April, 6.00 pm GALLERY TALK with JESSICA BACKHAUS and Prof. Dr. SOPHIE CHARLOTTE OPITZ, media arts scholar FH Dortmund and freelance curator, Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

SAT/SUN, 18/19 April, 10.00 am – 5.00 pm **WORKSHOP** “ABSTRAKTE DIMENSIONEN”
with JESSICA BACKHAUS

MORE EVENTS in the **FFF ACADEMY**

WED, 18 February, 6.00 pm FFF ACADEMY ON THE ROAD to **Basis e.V.** in Frankfurt am Main with preview and tour through the **EXHIBITION** “KAYA & BLANK – INFRASCAPES”

WED, 25 February, 6.00 pm **LECTURE** “WIE KI UNSER BILD VON BILDERN VERÄNDERT”
with ALEXANDRA LECHNER and CHRISTIAN SCHÖN

FRI, 20 March, 6.00 pm **LECTURE** “DEUTSCHLAND, WARUM BIST DU SO?”; SAT/SUN,
21/22 March, 10.00 am – 5.00 pm **WORKSHOP** “VERBINDUNG FOTOGRAFIEREN – THE ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAIT” with PAULA MARKERT

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS WEDNESDAYS, 5.00 pm

OPENING HOURS TUE–SUN 11.00 am – 6.00 pm, MON closed

ENTRY 8 Euros, reduced 5 Euro

Press information and press photos for the exhibition **Jessica Backhaus. Shadows might Dance** at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt are available for download at:
www.fff Frankfurt.org/presse.

The exhibition is supported by



In addition, we extend our thanks to Robert Morat Galerie Berlin for the loaning of works.

FOTOGRAFIE FORUM FRANKFURT

The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt (FFF) is one of the leading centres of photography in Europe. As an exhibition space, institution and event forum, the FFF deals with all aspects of photography. Since its founding in 1984 it has presented over 300 exhibitions with historic and contemporary photographers and artists. Additionally, the programme of the FFF ACADEMY comprises regular workshops, talks and discussions with internationally

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

renowned photographers, artists and experts. Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is the organizing partner of the international RAY Triennial of Photography, which takes place in various exhibition venues in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. Further information available at www.fff Frankfurt.org.

The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is supported by the Förderkreis Fotografie Forum Frankfurt e.V., FUJIFILM Electronic Imaging Europe, the City of Frankfurt am Main, Crespo Foundation, Henryk Sznep and Hauck, Aufhäuser, Lampe.

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Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

Jessica Backhaus (*1970, D/USA) grew up in an artistic family. At the age of sixteen she moved to Paris, where she later studied photography and visual communication. Here she met Gisèle Freund in 1992, who became her mentor. From 1995 to 2009, she lived in New York, where she worked as an assistant to various photographers and pursued her own projects.

Now based in Berlin, Jessica Backhaus is considered one of the most distinguished voices of contemporary photography in Germany. Her work has been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions. She has published many outstanding monographs, including “Jesus and the Cherries” (2005), “What Still Remains” (2008), “One Day in November” (2008), “Once, Still and Forever” (2012), “Six Degrees of Freedom” (2015), “A Trilogy” (2017), “Cut Outs” (2021), “Plein Soleil” (2024) – published with Kehrer Verlag, and »Indications of the Sea« (2024) – issued by dumas salchli editions.

Her photographs are held in national and international museum and private collections, including the Art Collection Deutsche Börse, Germany; Deutsche Bank Art Collection, Germany; Taunus Sparkasse, Germany; ING Art Collection, Belgium; Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA and the Margulies Collection, Miami, USA.

She is represented by Robert Morat Galerie, Berlin; Petra Becker/International Art Bridge, Meggen; Carlos Carvalho Arte Contemporânea, Lissabon; Robert Klein Gallery, Boston; Galerie Anja Knoess, Köln; Bridgette Mayer Gallery, Philadelphia; MiCamera, Mailand und Galerie Wouter van Leeuwen, Amsterdam.

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

EXHIBITED SERIES:

JESUS AND THE CHERRIES, 2001–2005

In this series of intimate photographs, Jessica Backhaus portrays the inhabitants, landscapes and interiors of the small village of Nętno and neighbouring places in West Pomerania, Poland.

Her visual narrative draws attention to the distinctive aesthetic of the ordinary: plastic flowers, crocheted cushion covers, devotional images and lace doilies point to the central role of faith and food within a modest way of life.

“Jesus and the Cherries” addresses themes of time and change, tracing the slow political and social transformations in Poland since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Positioned between traditional ways of life and emerging symbols of the new, the series depicts a country in transition – a world that remains present while already belonging to the past.

ONCE, STILL AND FOREVER, 2009–2012

“Sometimes it takes time to grasp an artist’s work. How often does the attention-grabbing motif take center stage? For Jessica Backhaus, the motif is an occasion to reflect on the course of the world, on the order of things (which is necessary because of disorder), on light and colour as life-giving generators. And there is something else: a quiet melancholy that suggests that one cannot change the tides. In other words: one should follow them.”

Jean-Christophe Ammann, 2012

Almost invariably framed in close-up, Jessica Backhaus’ photographs depict objects, details, found elements or spatial situations, without revealing the actual location in which they were taken. Even when separated by temporal or geographical distances, the images form a remarkably cohesive whole. Backhaus directs our gaze towards the overlooked, towards those moments in which the feelings of everyday life becomes palpable.

The series is deeply personal and at the same time universal. It revolves around past, present and future, around loss and new beginnings.

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

A TRILOGY, 2015–2017

“What is intuition and how does it work? [...] It’s a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious mind, between instinct and reason, between perception, logic, and the leap from a question to its answer.”

Axel Vervoordt, 2017

In “A Trilogy”, Jessica Backhaus brings together three series that explore transition, transformation, and contemplative perception. A coloured thread forms the point of departure for the first series, “Beyond Blue”. Through radical reduction, the images open up a space of stillness in which emptiness can be experienced as a present, timeless state.

The second series, “Shifting Clouds”, is dedicated to a reality in flux. Fragments, reflections, and mutable forms address inner processes, memories, and the possibility of new beginnings. Backhaus invites viewers to perceive the signs and metaphors of everyday life and to follow them.

In “New Horizon”, poetic visual worlds emerge in which photography merges with mixed media, painting, and collage. Associations, moments of dissonance, and harmonies come together in open, multilayered compositions – an invitation to embrace new perspectives.

CUT OUTS, 2018–2021

“A genuinely new form of painting will emerge the day we understand that colour has a life of its own, that the endless combinations of colours bear poetry and a poetic language way more expressive than the older forms. This mysterious language has to do with vibrations, the very life of a colour. In this domain, new possibilities are infinite.”

Sonia Delaunay, 1949

Colour and form, light and shadow – the images in Jessica Backhaus’ series “Cut Outs” are created using this basic elements of photography. The artist arranged cut-out transparent papers on a paper backdrop. The papers react to the intense heat and sunlight, deform, rise, contract, cast shadows. Backhaus, who staged these compositions, becomes an observer of processes over which she has only limited influence. She photographs a visual experiment, a poetic choreography of intense colours in the light. The series marks

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

a decisive breakthrough into a new creative phase in the artist's body of work, characterised by an inventive form of abstraction.

THE NATURE OF THINGS, 2021 – ongoing

“Something poetic, even if it is only something small, a tiny detail, gives life, in the moment of contemplation, a depth it otherwise would not have. Life as a whole becomes the subject, without our needing to speak about it in the slightest. [...] we are suddenly different in the world.”

From: “The Weight of Words”, Pascal Mercier, 2021

With “The Nature of Things”, Jessica Backhaus turns her gaze toward the inconspicuous and toward those subtle details imbued with a quiet significance. As the artist suggests, they point to relationships that only reveal themselves in their entirety.

Contrasts of colour and a sensitive handling of materials emphasize the beauty of simple objects, inviting close observation, wonder, and associative reflection.

Everyday things become poetry. Through precise staging, Backhaus makes the essence of objects visible and draws attention to their elemental presence and function. Within this unfolds a profound, sensuous engagement with memory, identity, and personal fate.

INDICATIONS OF THE SEA, 2022 – ongoing

“We tend to think of boundaries as limiting, but a frame is the boundary that transforms experience into art.

Anything can be a frame: an object, a shadow, a color (or lack thereof).

Looking out to sea, the horizon forces us to see infinity and the boundaries of our own existence in a single frame.”

Emre Izzat, 2024

“Indications of the Sea” is a series of predominantly black-and-white photographs that depict unremarkable moments, details, and situations near the sea. Jessica Backhaus emphasizes and reinterprets reality here by working with collages, using this medium to highlight details and open up new perspectives. By subsequently photographing the

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

collages, she removes them from their original context and transfers them to a new pictorial level. Her expressive approach, which incorporates nuances, textures, and fleeting moments, represents an evolution of her work. In this way, a space emerges between reality and abstraction.

PLEIN SOLEIL, 2023–2024

“La créativité demande du courage!” (Creativity requires courage!)

Henri Matisse, ca. 1953

Here, Jessica Backhaus works with differently coloured, textured, opaque, and transparent papers, as well as with the shimmering light of the sun. In this intensely illuminated environment, the artist arranges the rectangular and square papers like performers in a staged action. Through photography, she preserves fleeting moments of transient shadows, light reflections, blur, and iridescent surfaces.

The series consistently continues Backhaus’ abstract explorations from earlier projects, moving toward a visual language in which the compositional interplay of colour, surface, and form alone is paramount. Her artistic references lie less in photography than in music, dance, film, and above all painting – from Etel Adnan, Mark Rothko, and Helen Frankenthaler and American Colour Field painting to Jean Arp, Joan Miró, and the Bauhaus. Also central is the ultramarine blue of Yves Klein, which continues to resonate deeply in Backhaus’ work.

PAPYRUS, 2024–2026

“Learn to see and to feel life – that is, cultivate the imagination – for there are still wonders in the world, because life is a mystery and always will be.”

Josef Albers, ca. 1955

“Papyrus is a tribute to paper and its central role for centuries as a medium for storing, transmitting, and preserving knowledge. With this new work, I continue to explore the boundaries of abstraction and reduce visual language to its most elementary forms. The title Papyrus is intentionally chosen – not only as a reference to material, but as a conceptual bridge between ancient and contemporary modes of expression. In antiquity,

Jessica Backhaus

Shadows might Dance

papyrus was among the earliest surfaces used for recording human thought, memory, and imagination. It was a vessel for communication, a fragile yet enduring medium that carried poetry, philosophy, ritual, and record. In this work, I invoke Papyrus as a metaphor: for communication without words, for emotional inscriptions rendered in form, colour, and light.

Ultimately, Papyrus reflects a deepening connection to my own evolving artistic voice. It is a space of transmission and reception, of pausing as much as creating. This series is part of a broader inquiry into how abstraction can connect us to something both intimate and universal.”

Jessica Backhaus, 2026

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Jessica Backhaus: Dorota, 2003
From the series »Jesus and the Cherries«
© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Pink Pillow, 2002
From the series »Jesus and the Cherries«
© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Violetta by the lake, 2003
From the series »Jesus and the Cherries«
© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Beyond Seeing, 2012
From the series »Once, still and forever«
© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Memories in a bottle, 2011
From the series »Once, still and forever«
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Jessica Backhaus: Blue Note, 2015

From the series » A Trilogy (Shifting Clouds)«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: You will see, 2015

From the series » A Trilogy (Shifting Clouds)«

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Jessica Backhaus: Cut Out 11, 2020

From the series »Cut Outs«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Cut Out 16, 2019

From the series »Cut Outs«

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Jessica Backhaus: Cut Out 46, 2020

From the series »Cut Outs«

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Jessica Backhaus: Cut Out 90, 2020

From the series »Cut Outs«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Beach, 2022

From the series »Indications of the Sea«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: South, 2023

From the series »Indications of the Sea«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Sunrise, 2022

From the series »The Nature of Things«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Purple Cactus, 2024

From the series »The Nature of Things«

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Jessica Backhaus: Untitled 6, 2023

From the series »Plein Soleil«

© Jessica Backhaus, 2026, courtesy of Robert Morat Galerie



Jessica Backhaus: Untitled 21, 2024

From the series »Plein Soleil«

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Jessica Backhaus: Plate 31, 2025

From the series »Papyrus«

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Jessica Backhaus: Plate 41, 2025

From the series »Papyrus«

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