

Dear Secretary of State, Mr Németh,  
Dear Madam Minister Pieper  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I welcome you on the occasion of opening the exhibition „Russians, Jews and Germans. Photos by Michael Kerstgens since 1992“ here, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Budapest.

More than 200 000 Jews, so-called quota refugees came from the former Soviet Union to Germany after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989/90. This wave of immigration brought about lasting changes in the German Jewish community. The Jewish community in Germany counts around 110 000 persons and roughly 90 000 of them have a Russian-speaking background.

Michael Kerstgens started his extensive documentary photography on Jewish life in Germany in 1992. The immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union became soon the main focus of his photographs. In the 1990ies he published his photo-reports in the journals „Stern“ and „Geo“. 2001 he was assigned by the Jewish Museum to extend the photo-series. Ten years later the Jewish Museum acquired the whole collection of 162 black-and-white photographs. The photos are part of the museum-exhibits until the present day.

Michael Kerstgens is one of the few photographers to have documented - intensively and over a long period of time - the immigration of Russian-speaking Jews to Germany from the former Soviet Union.

He records religious celebrations and social events within the Jewish community, everyday scenes from transition houses, and individual families' private moments. His latest pieces document the present circumstances of the migrants he had portrayed in the early 1990ies and followed their often surprising lifepathes.

For Michael Kerstgens the actual shooting is often preceded by a long process of approaching and getting insight, he starts from the position of the „participating observation“ to reach a situation of mutual trust .

Kerstgens says about his way of working: „... the first that should be lasting is the personal experience, then the exchange with the people and only then comes the photographic experience. If only the first works - can the latter be of any quality in terms of substance and visuality. This is what we can be called authentic.“ He creates a syntheses between distance and empathy. The author withdraws and the observer is being involved without thinking of the photographer.

In spite of the diverse technical innovations of the past 20 years in photography, Michael Kerstgens retains deliberately the analogue technology he had chosen at the very beginning so that black-and-white photos make the same lasting impression. The black-and-white coarseness distinguishes his shots from the usual sharpness of other pictures from today.

The invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany made it possible to present to you the exhibition of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

The exhibition wishes to contribute to the current discussions on Jewish life in Hungary.

You will see 40 of the 80 photos that were put on show in the Jewish Museum in Berlin in 2012. The exhibition was very well received in Berlin both according to the high number of visitors and the great press coverage.

I wish the exhibition here on Budapest has many visitors and great interest, too. It is a great pleasure that after the presentation here in the Ministry, the exhibition will be accessible for the general public in the Museum for the History of Budapest after May 2.

I wish you a pleasant evening and an exciting tour through the exhibition.

Thank you.