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Before anything else, photography was craftwork, and good photography good craftwork. Amid all the disinhibited depiction of appalling things, private matters, obscene material and inconsequential things, there is a growing demand for good photos. Commissioned (and uncommissioned) photography have always been based upon technical proficiency, and upon the personal skill of the photographer. The nameless digital flood of images has provoked a counter-movement, raising our awareness of professional photography, and, now more than ever, we are discovering its aesthetic power. Its stylistic diversity and abundance of photographic themes also constitute an authentic image of social conditions, permitting, almost by accident, something that free art has recently been especially concerned to achieve: namely, insights into social and political contexts.

The selection of photographs on display at the Villa Merkel bring a number of exponents with links to southwest Germany into renewed focus. It is no coincidence that the BFF (the Berufsverband Freier Fotografen) happened to be founded in Stuttgart. In Esslingen, the europafoto exhibitions and symposia – organized by the Lichtbildnergruppe from 1960 to 1972 – played a significant role in cultivating photography. The Foto-Triennale Esslingen – which took place from 1988 to 2010 in the Städtische Galerien of Esslingen – was the first outstanding internationalstandard triennial of its kind in Germany, bringing artists and the general public from Germany and from all over the world to the region.

A programme that is consistently oriented toward professional photography allows connections with Esslingen’s photographic reputation. This exhibition is intended as a prototype for a future format in this spirit.