

Magical Moments

The photographer Annemie Wolff has portrayed hundreds of persecuted people in 1943

In her darkroom stars vanished. In her viewfinder there has been space enough for the world. With her camera, Annemie Wolff (1906-1994) has stopped time in the middle of WWII. For a magical moment everything was far away, the Nazis, the raids, the fear to be arrested in the street or to be discovered, per accident maybe, not to make it to the U.S. any more and to be deported instead to Westerbork and from there to the East, to almost certain death. In these instants, the German-Dutch photographer has made artistically valuable photos that have become images for eternity. Many of the kids, youngsters and adults on her photos look so natural, so self-confident, joyful or relaxed, that one wished the time had stood still.

Annemie Wolff had been in exile for quite a while. With her Jewish husband, the architect Helmuth Wolff (1895-1940) who had been successful in the Weimar Republic, she had fled from Munich to the Netherlands after Hitler had come to power. They continued to publish their photos under the alias Kolff in German magazines. Today, the gifted photographer Annemie Wolff who was born in Laufen in Bavaria is practically unknown in Germany. That could and should change as soon as an exhibition is going on a voyage. The documentary „Almost lost in History. Rediscovering the photography of Annemie and Helmuth Wolff” stays in the National Holocaust Museum Amsterdam till the middle of October 2017 and is supposed to be shown in Germany in 2018. With the help of sponsors, the Foundation Wolff (Stichting Wolff) does a lot to make the artistic and political heritage of this special couple internationally known.

And this heritage has surprised even the experts. More than 50 000 pictures belong to it, many of them of extraordinary quality. Photos of the harbour of Amsterdam and of Schiphol, but also cooking, baking, fashion and nature photos and photo stories from voyages to Marocco show the great bandwidth of the two of them. They had been so close and in their style, they had been so similar, that it is difficult to guess today who of them could have made which photo. Helmuth Wolff has founded a magazine for miniature cameras and has experimented with colour photography. They both had made a new start. When the Wehrmacht marched in in May 1940, they took Veronal and turned on the gas in the kitchen. Helmuth Wolff died, while Annemie Wolff was rescued. She did not talk about this day neither of the wartime and the Dutch resistance, not even with Monica Kaltenschnee, the granddaughter of a neighbour, her friend and heir. Therefore, we can just guess what was going on in the studio. The photos speak to us, but they won't spill the beans, either. In their time, to survive meant to stay silent and to hide.

In spite of all this, the word must have been spread among the refugees in Amsterdam Zuid: There is a woman who is taking photos. In her flat in Noorder Amstellaan (now Churchillaan), there is continual coming and going. In case that neighbours had noticed something they have not denounced the photographer to the Germans. And it is unlikely that they haven't seen or heard anything. Because of the curfew, the Jewish customers have to go to Annemie Wolff by day. Women, men and children with a Star of David on their jackets climb the stairs to the third floor and leave the house after a while. They wander through the Rivierenbuurt to Merwedeplein or to one of the other streets and try not to let their fear show. Not to be seen, despite the yellow patch on their chest that makes them an easy prey.

Probably the clients had no idea that Annemie Wolff, nee Koller, had kept a cashbook from Januar to Oktober 1943. She has noted everything in it, the names and addresses of 440 photographed people, the number of the filmroll and the price. One of the customers is shocked when learning about it in a film that comes as a dvd with the remarkable book „Op de foto in oorlogstijd. Studio Wolff, 1943“ of Tamara Becker and An Huitzing. To have this cashbook has been irresponsible from today's point of view, an unbelievable risk for the refugees and the photographer alike. When the photo historian Simon B. Kool found the 100 filmrolls and the notes, the existence of the cashbook was a blessing. An Huitzing (Foundation Wolff) and her daughter Tamara Becker have been able to identify many of the portrayed people, had informations they could use for research in archives, online on Joods Monument und in other sources. The mother-and-daughter-team has spent more than five years with this important task. They have put their heart in it and without doubt achieved a lot. In their book they present the amazing results of a precise, sensitive research. The photos, already impressing as pieces of art, are well combined

with lifestories and contextual informations. This way they have become historical sources of great value, both a cultural heritage and a collection of touching, personal documents.

There are photos for false papers, photos as souvenirs for friends, family portraits that had been sent to the grandparents who were in a camp, nude and baby photos, photos of pets and photos that express a hope and a will: We are still living. We are human beings with names, with a lifestory and with wishes that might not come true as the Nazis want to wipe us off the book of history, murder us and make us forgotten. They shall not succeed.

On one of the double portraits we see a couple that was supposed to be one only on the paper. The 21 year old Gerda Rosenbaum from Schwerin was the daughter of Otto Rosenbaum (born in 1875 in Schwerin) and his wife Stefanie, nee Vogel (born in 1886 in Berlin). A 90 year old patient of doctor Rosenbaum, the teacher Toni Wunderlich, had taught Queen Juliana 30 years ago. Thanks to her contacts to the Dutch Royal family, the Rosenbaums were allowed to immigrate in 1938 and 1939. Gerda was working for the Jewish Council to prevent her parents and herself from deportation. And she married Rudi Nowalski from Wanne who was 20 years older than she was, hoping that also he and his parents would be safe, then. On the photo she smiles happily, and he has a hard time not to let his tension show. Two days after Annemie Wolff had made the photo, Rudi Nowalski was arrested and deported together with his and Gerda's parents. Gerda Nowalski, nee Rosenbaum, fled to France to her brother Heinz. Both have survived. Heinz Rosenbaum has written down his memories in the eighties. An Huitzing und Ad van den Oord have edited the text that is to be found online: „Edward H. Rose. A short review of my life“. The young couple had decided “to go beyond the ‘make-believe’”, Heinz Rosenbaum found out as his sister was pregnant when she left Amsterdam. She gave birth to her son Rene in France. How they all managed to survive and to meet their brother Herbert in the U.S., is told in many details in this eyewitness report.

About five dozens of the portrayed people had been from Germany, most of them were Jews. Betty Baer, nee Sondheim from Ober-Gleen, and her son Alfred are not among the now published names from the cashbook. Their faces aren't on two of the photos that read “onbekend“. The search goes on. In the project „Deutschland auf der Flucht“ (Germany on the run), our historical society Lastoria (Bremen) will also try to introduce the work and life of Annemie and Helmut Wolff and the stories of their customers to a larger public in Germany. When the exhibition will be shown in Germany and as soon as the book about Annemie and Helmut Wolff is translated into German and English, there could be more names on the list of An Huitzing and Tamara Becker.

On a photo of April 1943 five girls pose. The second to the left has been identified as Dorothea Zucker, three of the others as Loulou Flesseman, Noortje Poliakoff and Julieke de Levie. The blonde Dorothea, then still called Daisy, did already live in hiding, but travelled to Amsterdam from time to time to see her schoolfriends from the Joods Lyceum. The daughter of a manufacturer from Berlin survived the war together with her parents and her sister Marion. The family left Europe via Sweden, went to the U.S. and met family Freundlich there, neighbours from Berlin who called themselves Franklin now. Dorothea fell in love with Edward Franklin, a scientist specialised on rheumatology research. They married and called their daughter Deborah. Like Benjamin Franklin's wife.

After her death, an obituary for Dorothea Zucker Franklin has been published on the website www.hematology.org: “Dorothea Zucker-Franklin, National Academy of Medicine member, pioneer in electron microscopy of blood cells at New York University School of Medicine, and third female president of ASH (1995), passed away November 24, 2015, at the age of 86.” The girl whom the Nazis had wanted to kill had become a scientist of great merits. Her friends and colleagues called her Dottie.

Dorothea Zucker had been born in Berlin. Her family fled 1936 to the Netherlands because of the Nazis. „There she attended the same school as Anne Frank and was forced into hiding in 1943”, is to be read about her on the mentioned website. “Arriving destitute in New York in 1948, Dottie graduated from Hunter College as class valedictorian and proceeded to attend New York Medical College on a scholarship. Dottie and her husband, immunologist Dr. Edward Franklin enjoyed a close professional partnership until his death in 1982. The Franklins required separate home offices since, when together, their constant conversation precluded working effectively.” Dorothea Zucker Franklin's research in cell biology, hema-

tology and immunology is praised, her “Atlas of Blood Cells”, but also her high standards, her character, her devotion to her work and to her patients.

The five girls on the group portrait smile as if they were on an excursion with their school. „Bitte recht freundlich“, smile, please, German photographers used to say decades later when their customers weren't sure which facial expression was asked for. Serious or naive? Strict or confiding? Sensual or pondering? Sad or optimistic? Smiling or laughing, rather like a diplomat or like a movie star? On the photos of Annemie Wolff different kinds of emotions show. One wished to know what the photographer had said before she pressed the release of her camera. How she shooed away troublesome thoughts and how she persuaded shy women to pose a little bit more erotically if the photo was for their husbands. Some customers have looked at her as if she was an old friend. Stiff poses are seldom.

Annemie Wolff who had not had wished to live any more after the Wehrmacht had marched in, might have talked about the future. Or about old times, family, home and profession, voyages, fashion and cooking. It is almost sure that she had not have to make big words: Who risked arrest to visit her studio knew quite well what for. Sitting for a portrait is an act of selfdefining, a piece of freedom and normality amidst the follies of war and persecution. On some of the faces triumph is reflecting, on others we see tears coming up, being bravely held back. It is out of question that these people know about the danger they are in, but they have not lost the ability to hope. With the help of others they still could make it. And thanks to An Huitzing und Tamara Becker and their extensive research, we know: Some of the photos, meant for false papers, have actually saved lives.

It must have been hard to chose a photo for the cover. One of the friends of Dorothea Zucker is to be seen on the front page of the book „Op de foto in oorlogstijd“. It is a good image, but not the most expressive portrait. The 15 year old smiles without looking into the camera. The half profile will not have been for papers. Isabel Wachenheimer wears, as it was in fashion, a scarf around her head, and, as it was a duty for Jews in Amsterdam since May 1942, a Star of David. To remove it for the photo session, would have been too much trouble. When enlarging a photo in the darkroom, Annemie Wolff chose the detail in a way that this deceitful piece of tissue wasn't to be seen any more. Technically, this was no problem. And still it was magic.

An Huitzing and Tamara Becker have found out a lot about Isabel Wachenheimer. The student of Jacob (Jacques) Presser (see „Last address: Biesboschstraat“ on www.monikafelsing.de) had been born in Hamburg and lived in Stuttgart till she had fled to the Netherlands together with her parents and her grandmother Mathilde. First the family lived in Rotterdam, then in Doorn and finally in Amsterdam. Isabel was the last to be deported. She met her parents in Theresienstadt. Eugen and Else Babette Wachenheimer (nee Moos from Reutlingen, born in 1895) had spent 18 months in the ghetto and were so exhausted that they were sent to the gas chamber while her 16 year old daughter went to a forced labour camp. At the end of WWII, Isabel Wachenheimer was liberated in Austria where she had worked 13 hours a day in a factory. It took long to restore her health. Isabel Wachenheimer went to Israel, moved to Frankfurt/Main in 1955 and got her German citizenship back. Together with her husband Karl Elon, she emigrated to the USA soon after that. In 1962, she became a US citizen. After her death, her daughter has given her striped jacket from Auschwitz, photo albums, letters and other documents of the family to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, including the numerous papers, Eugen Wachenheimer (born 1886 in Strassbourg) – a former director of the Deutsche Bank in Stuttgart and highly decorated WWI-veteran, someone who had joined the peace conference in Versailles – had put his hopes on.

With this donation, but also with the exhibition and with the book about Studio Wolff, a wish of Isabel Wachenheimer (1928-2010) has been fulfilled: „Nicht vergessen werden, sonst nichts.“ Not to be forgotten. Nothing else.