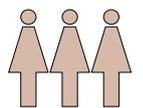
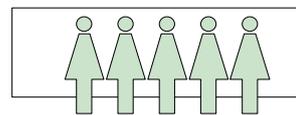
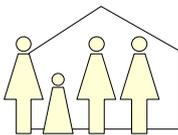
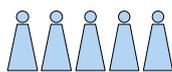
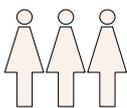


FACE(S) OF AFRICA

*A photo art project by Wolf Nkole Helzle
in the period 2021-2022*

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FAMILY GROUP KINDERGARDEN VILLAGE RELATIVES SCHOOL WORKING PLACE CLUB

FACE(S) OF AFRICA

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BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT

Starting in 2021, I plan to photograph at least 5,000 people in the more than 50 African countries and to form a common, collective face of the African continent from all the individual portraits.

To give Africa a face in this way - that thousands get the feeling of being a part of something big and valuable through their participation - it does not only need an idea and my personal energy and strength, it needs many who support it, so that the portraits can be taken on location and the result - a common face of Africa - becomes visible on different platforms.

However, the idea of portraying thousands of people from an entire continent only became realisable when, due to Corona's travel restrictions in 2020, I developed various computer- and internet-based formats by means of which corresponding portraits can be taken both online and offline (by other people).



Homo universalis, 2018. I calculated this portrait from 4,620 individual portraits of people from 15 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and America.

FACE(S) OF AFRICA

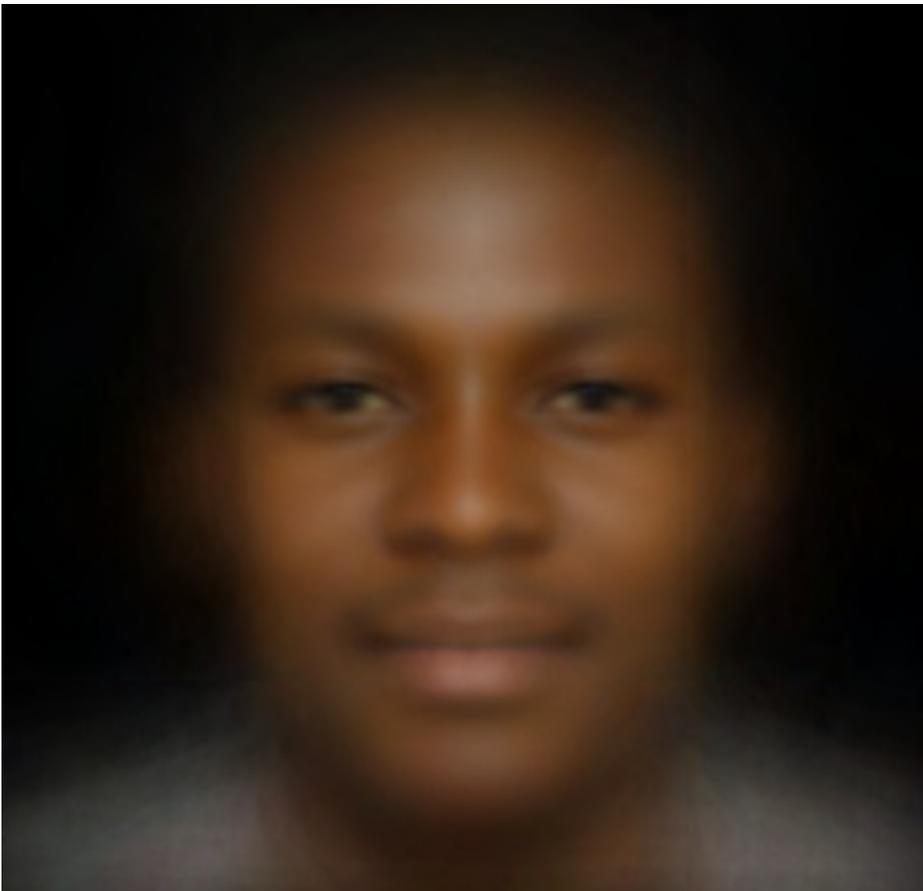
A photo art project by Wolf Nkole Helzle

CONTEXTUALISATION IN THE ARTISTIC OEUVRE

I have been taking photographs in many different countries and cultures around the world for 25 years and have photographed over 50,000 people since then. I set up my mobile photo studio for this purpose in the most diverse places, be it in exhibitions, at festivals, in town halls and city halls, in offices or at trade fairs. In my diverse projects, I am always concerned with the relationship between the individual and the collective, between the single and the many.

Within the framework of the international, participatory art project „Homo universalis“, all these images have been accumulating in a digital archive since 1996, which is constantly expanding. Using software specially developed for this project, I am able to superimpose the individual portraits of different groups of people and unite them in a collective portrait in which every single face is included on an equal level.

In 2005, I was invited to Lusaka in Zambia with this photo project and was able to photograph 550 people during a 14-day stay there. Since then, I have been dreaming of undertaking another, larger Africa project, as the stay opened my eyes in many areas. And whenever Africa is in the news, this feeling of wanting to do something with and for this unique continent and its people comes back to me, to make visible the deep appreciation and eye level that I felt during all the encounters at that time.



FACE OF ZAMBIA, 2005

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PROJECT REALISATION

Due to the Corona-related travel restrictions last year, I was forced to completely rethink my artistic approach once again.

So I developed two different formats that make it possible for corresponding portraits to be taken for my further processing - basically anywhere in the world - both online and offline (also by other people). This eliminates my personal travel expenses and the possibilities as well as the radius for the encounters are immensely expanded, in a way limitless.

Two smaller projects have already been successfully carried out in this newly developed way: Entitled „WHO ARE WE?“, a work was created during the second lockdown in Germany, in which I was available online for two hours every day and photographed the guests on the screen with the video conferencing software Zoom.

Shortly afterwards, I got in touch with Kathmandu in Nepal and was asked if I could photograph the children and their parents and the teachers of a school via Facebook video call. This is how the first group picture of the work series „FACE OF NEPAL“ came into being.



Result of the first online photo shoot, November 2020



Result of the photo shoot with pupils, parents and teachers of the Sanga Sangai School in Kathmandu, December 2020

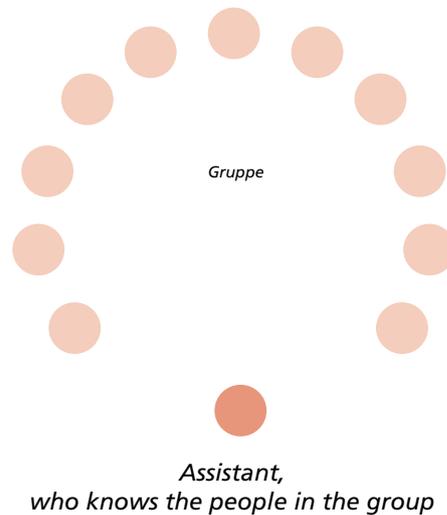
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TARGET SETTING

Currently, over 50 countries in Africa are officially listed. The aim of this project is to attract participants from as many of these countries as possible. A dream would be up to 100 people from each African country! To achieve this, it is necessary to find people or institutions on the local level who will take over the mediation, organisation and, if necessary, also the photography.

A collective portrait is created from the individual images of a group or a country, and finally a joint meta-portrait of all African countries, of the continent of Africa, is created from the collective portraits of the groups.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

1. A group should consist of a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 100 people. It can be e.g. a family, a school class, a club, inhabitants of a village/town, a religious community, a group of friends.
2. Several groups from one country can also be represented.
3. Take photos with your smartphone and use the format 1 : 1 (square).
 - If the format 1 : 1 is not available, please photograph in landscape format.
 - Leave some space at the head end and under the chin.
4. The person you are photographing looks directly at you (frontally).
5. The background should be clear and bright.
6. Essential: The atmosphere should be friendly and appreciative. (Please respect the dignity of the person. Those involved should be informed about the idea of the project beforehand).
7. Send me the photos of a group with the name of the assistant and the name of the group and - if possible - also with the names of the participants.

FACE(S) OF AFRICA

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PRESENTATION

The presentation of the results, respectively the documentation of the creation on different platforms, is also essential for the project context. Ideally, all individual and group portraits of the respective countries should be presented together with the meta-portrait of Africa.

This can take place in a kind of travelling exhibition that is shown in as many different African and European countries as possible. The project should also be presented online, both on the pages of the participating groups or the countries and their representations in Germany, as well as the sponsors, and on my own page.

Depending on the financial support, there are various ways in which such a presentation can be carried out. Here are some examples.

Further presentations and reporting in the media are welcome.



Exhibition view of the photo project in Schussenried Monastery 2014. For the „Face of Upper Swabia“ I took portraits of 2,249 people in 15 cities



Exhibition view of the participatory photo project at Museum Art.Plus, Donaueschingen 2014. A wide variety of visitor groups were photographed

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Projection by using a video beamer on the façade of the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, on the occasion of the Long Night of the Museums, 2007



Visitors to the exhibition „Homo Schaparuikenellsis“ at the Städtische Galerie Ostfildern, 2012, for which I photographed 1,100 people from a wide variety of groups.



Example of a project in Endingen in 2015, in which 28 clubs participated, each group with 48 people was represented by a flag.

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ART SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT

„(...) The classical relationship is thus reversed. The visitors themselves become part of a work of art, the viewers are at the same time the thing viewed and in their multiple superimpositions form the collective face (...)“

For the artist, recording and collecting the faces is like a bow to the infinite diversity of humanity. At the same time, however, he is aware that this diversity is characterised by an endless variation of the same, in accordance with the underlying principles. Consequently, for Wolf Nkole Helzle - contrary to some still prevailing and conflicting images of society - a collective is never conceivable without the individuals, and the individuals are not conceivable without the collective.

This guiding principle also underlies the multiple portraits - or collective portraits - in the „HOMO UNIVERSALIS“ series of works: In a specially developed computer programme, the individual portraits are transparently layered on top of each other to form a „new“, common face. In the process, computer technology makes possible an absolutely equal superimposition, or rather „unification“ of the portraits, since in the digital data space neither the order nor the conciseness of an individual feature generate a superficial increase in attention.

What is fascinating is that the superimposition blurs the specific facial features and softens the transitions, but at the same time condenses them in the prominent features such as eyes, nose and mouth, so that in fact a new, unique face of painterly quality emerges again and again.

With its mostly friendly appearance and the way it seems to look at us from every perspective, it seems very lively. At the same time, however, it is difficult to determine its age and gender, and the closer you get to it, the more it eludes clear description. As a result, it seems both close and distant, familiar and yet alien, but for this very reason it captures our gaze and almost radiates something of a timeless, omnipresent presence. (...)“

*Excerpt from the text contribution by art historian Simone Jung, in:
HOMO UNIVERSALIS - Welcome to the Museum Art.Plus
A performative photo project by Wolf Nkole Helzle
Donaueschingen, 2014*

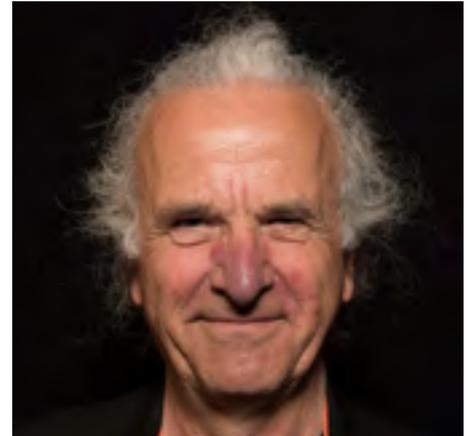
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VITA

Wolf Nkole Helzle

1950 born in Göppingen
1973-1975 Studied painting at the University of Fine Arts, Kassel
with Prof. Harry Kramer
1978-1996 Worked in the hardware and software industry
Since 1996 freelance media artist
Member of the German Artists' Association
Lives and works in the Swabian Alb



The media artist Wolf Nkole Helzle works mainly with photography, video, installations and performances. Many of his works are participatory in their nature, with spectators, guests, passers-by and visitors becoming part of the artistic process. One of the central themes of his artistic work is the question of the relationship between the individual and the collective.

He became internationally known with his ongoing participatory photo project „Homo universalis“, for which he has already photographed over 50,000 people in many countries of the world since 1996. Using software specially developed for this project, Wolf Helzle superimposes the individual portraits of different groups of people into a common, collective face.

With this project he was invited to the Ogaki Biennale in Japan (2004) and the international exhibition project media_city Seoul, South Korea (2004), by the National Visual Arts Council, Lusaka, Zambia (2005), the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (2007), the College of Art and Design, Beijing, China (2015), the Java One Conference, San Francisco, USA (2015) and many other international, German and European exhibition projects and festivals.

Teaching activities

2015 College of Art and Design, Beijing, China
2012 Media University, Stuttgart
2000 University of Applied Sciences, Schwäbisch Hall

Prizes / Scholarships

2020 Klangvoll und Bunt, Landkreis Reutlingen
2012 Digital Content und MFG Medien- und Filmgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg
2006 Atelierstipendium Künstlerhaus Stuttgart
2004 Project funding ifa - Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Stuttgart

Exhibitions (selection)

2020 Atelierausstellung Obermarchtal
2019 Paris Miki in Kyoto / Himeji und Nara, Japan
2018 Stiftung Regens Wagner, Absberg
2017 Deutscher Ev. Kirchentag, Berlin / Oracle Open World, San Francisco, USA
2016 Digital Humanities HUB – University of Birmingham, UK
2015 College of Art and Design, TU Beijing, China / JavaOne, San Francisco, USA
2014 Museum Art.Plus, Donaueschingen / Hashima Namazu Festival, Japan / Werkschau im Kloster Bad Schussenried / Photographic Centre PERI, Turku, Finland
2011 Festival des Migrations, Luxembourg
2009 Museum für Kunst und Technologie, Schorndorf
2007 Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart

FACE(S) OF AFRICA

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2006 UNESCO World Youth Festival, Stuttgart
2005 National Visual Arts Council, Lusaka, Zambia
2004 Ogaki Biennale, Japan / Biennale „media_city seoul“, South Korea
1998 European Media Art Festival, Osnabrück

Collections (selection)

College of Art and Design, Beijing
Museum Art.Plus, Donaueschingen
Landratsamt Reutlingen, Landratsamt Tübingen
Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten, Baden-Württemberg
Städtische Galerie Ostfildern
Städte: Stuttgart, Marburg, Poitiers, Endingen, Rottenburg, Donzdorf, Korntal-Münchingen, Eppingen

Publications (selection)

„ICH BIN WIR“, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, 2014
„Homo universalis“, Museum Art.Plus, Donaueschingen, 2014
„ICH BIN WIR“, Stiftung Regens Wagner, 2018
„DAS SIND WIR“, Stadt Korntal-Münchingen, 2019

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