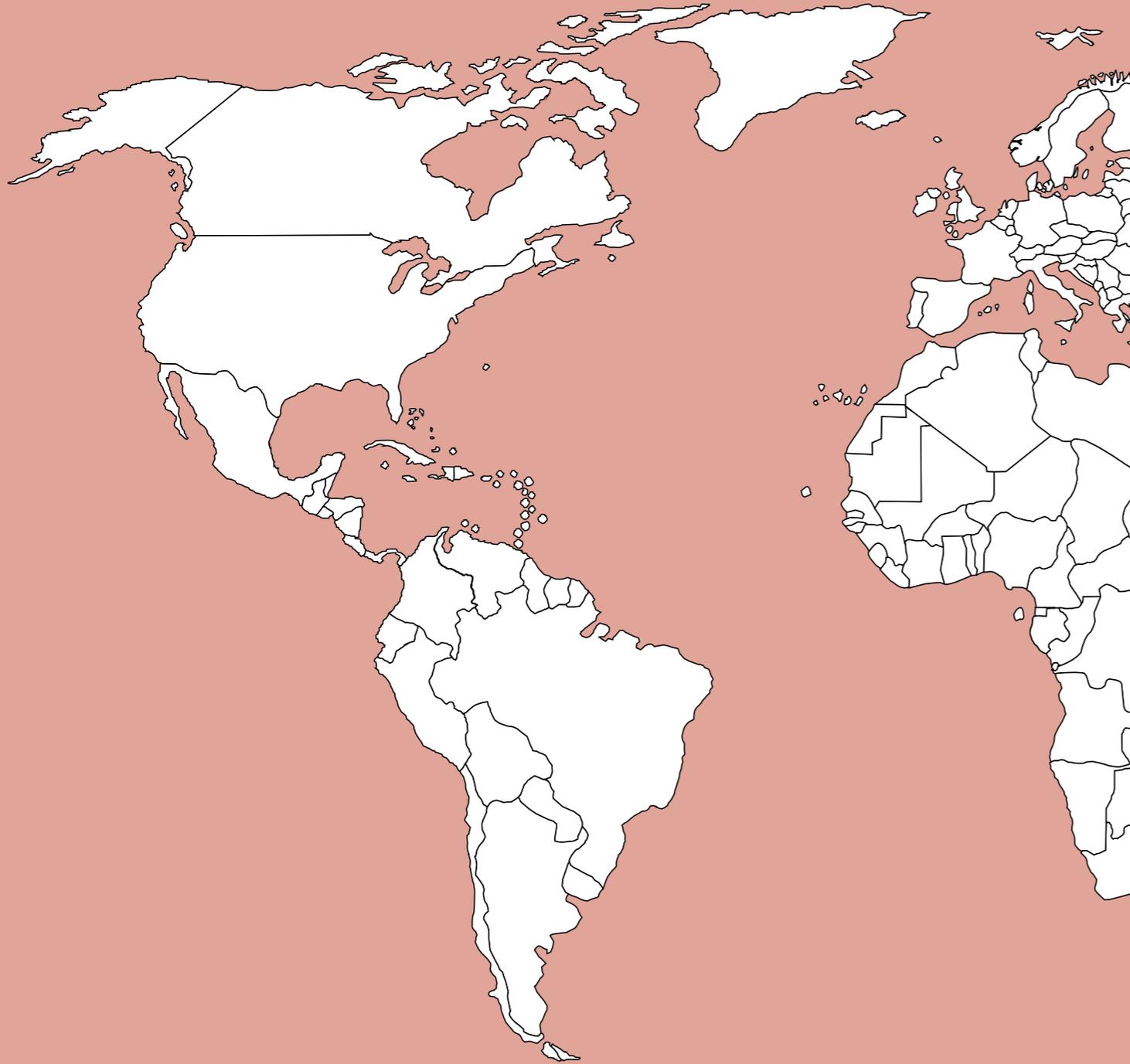




FACE(S) OF HUMANKIND

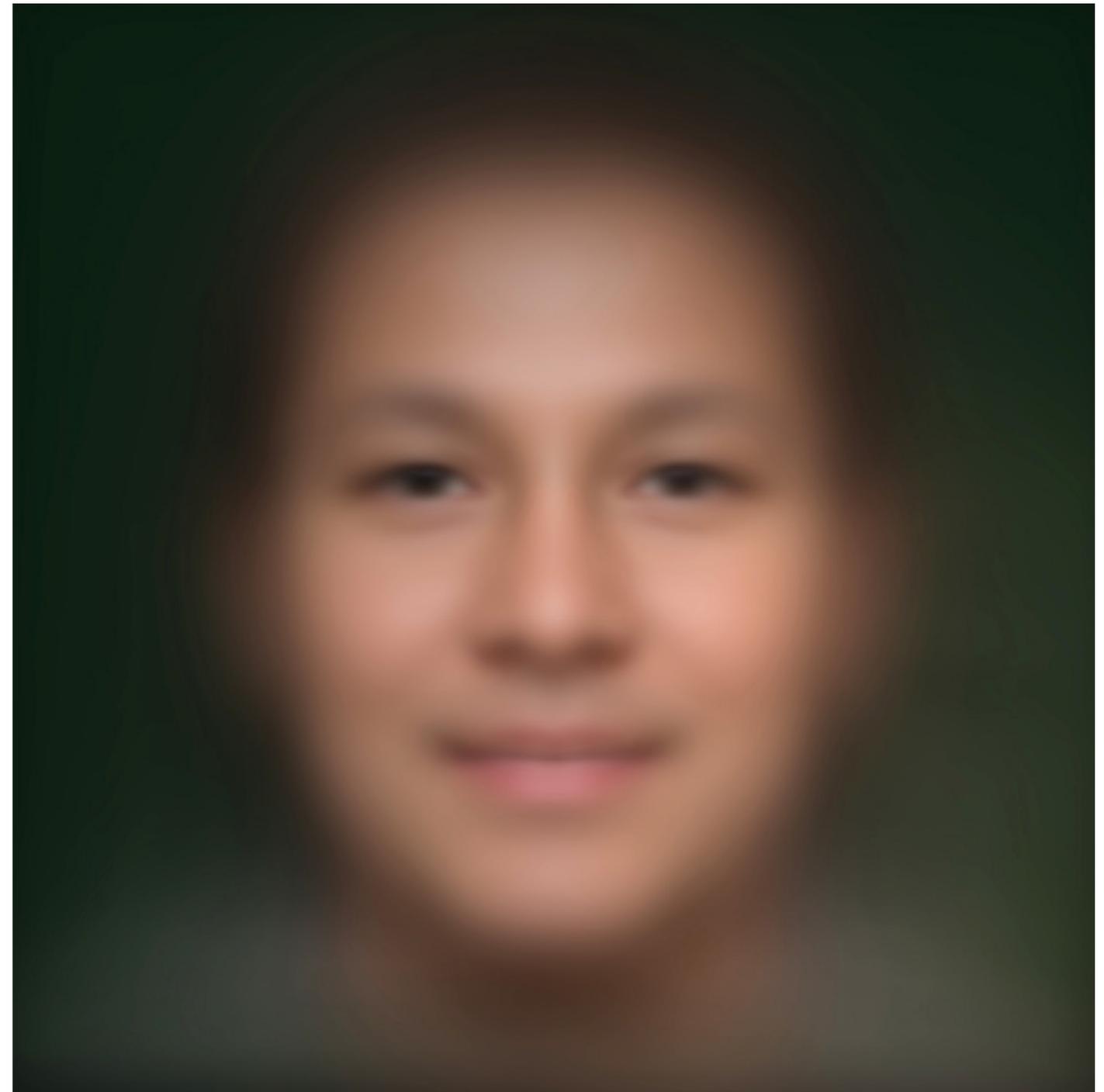
25th anniversary of a global photo art process
by Wolf Nkole Helzle



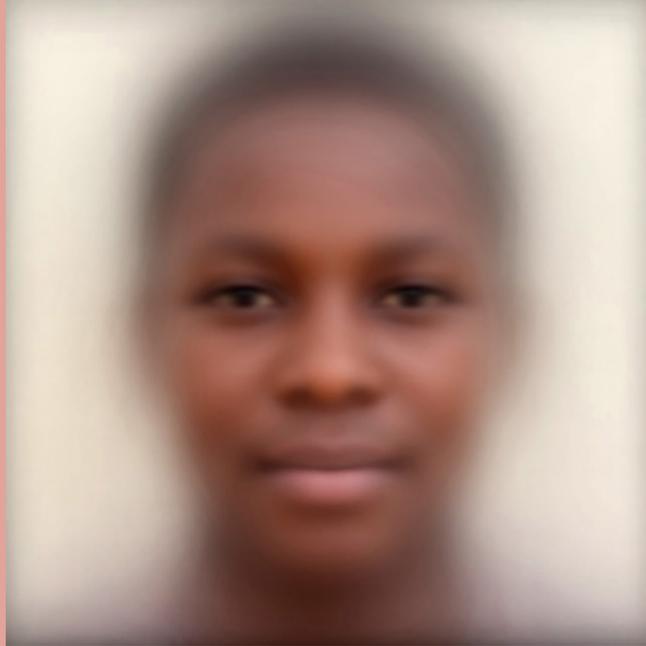
FACE(S) OF HUMANKIND

25th anniversary of a global photo art process
by Wolf Nkole Helzle

FACE(S) OF HUMANKIND, 2021
created by highly transparent
superimposition of 4,620 individual
portraits from 32 countries and four
continents. A special software was
developed for the overlays.



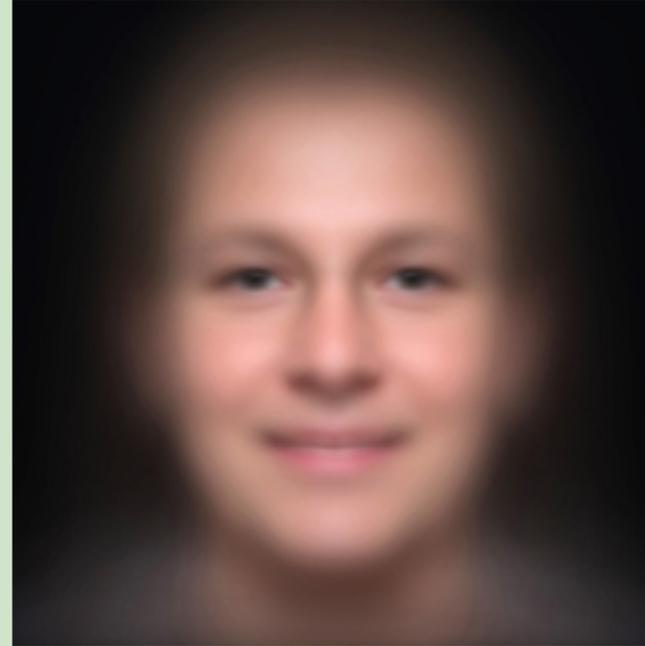
THE COLLECTIVE PORTRAITS OF THE CONTINENTS SO FAR



AFRICA



ASIA



EUROPE



NORTH AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION



This picture was taken at the opening of the Welcome Centre in Stuttgart, Germany. Together with a team of three other photographers, I was able to photograph over 1,300 people from all over the world.

I would like to thank my photographer friend Victor S. Brigola, who supported me in many projects.

As a media artist, I have been portraying people for 25 years, placing the individual images in the context of communities such as schools, clubs, organisations, cities, countries and continents. It is a serial work with always the same background photographed, so that the respective faces are in the foreground.

There are already some catalogues about the work, but so far always in the context of specific events. For the 25th anniversary, I came up with the idea of this catalogue, in which individual and collective portraits from four continents and 32 countries are shown for the first time. I have deliberately kept the texts in the first person, as all the encounters are and were very personal.

This is not a scientific approach, but decidedly an artistic one. All the photo shoots have come about because of someone's interest in this participatory photo-art process.

At the same time as the printed version appears, the website www.faces-of-humankind.org is also online (in German and English), which I have worked on for several months together with the developer Corbinian Stiglmaier.

I wish the reader an enjoyable read and perhaps a gain in the question of who we are.

Wolf Nkole Helzle

Mehrstetten, July 2022

www.faces-of-humankind.org
www.helzle.com

DEVELOPMENT

In 1996 I had an impressive dream. I was three different people at the same time, an old Indian, a man from the time of Johann Sebastian Bach and „myself“. The dream stayed in my memory and I thought about how I could put it into an artistic form. That's how I found access to morphing programmes and I let these three faces slowly merge into each other.

In 1997 I began to photograph people. In doing so, I explored the question of how I could imagine being a six-billionth part (today it is probably 7.85 billion). Of something in an order of magnitude that was unimaginable to me. In the early years, I used a morphing programme to calculate the transitions from one face to the next. The result was projected onto a suitable surface in large format.

The work kept developing and so in 2012 I was able to develop a software that enabled me to layer all the faces of an event in a highly transparent way. From that point on, the result consisted of all individual portraits as well as a collective portrait.

With this work I was invited nationally and internationally to media art festivals and exhibitions, by companies and institutions, by cities and also by private individuals. In the meantime, I have collected well over 50,000 portraits in four continents and more than 30 countries.

In 2021, travel was not possible because of the pandemic, so I invented a new way to get portraits. I wrote to various organisations in all African countries, asking them to put me in touch with local photographers. In this way I got about 2,000 portraits from 16 countries on the African continent.

This now opens up new possibilities to also get in touch with continents I have not been able to visit yet: Australia, Oceania and South America. I am very interested that FACE(S) OF HUMANKIND consists of faces from all continents.



This picture was taken during the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of „Brot für die Welt“ in the Admiralspalast Berlin, Germany. Using a custom real-time morphing programme, the portraits - photographed during the event - were projected onto a large screen as they slowly morphed into each other.

Thanks at this point to my photographer friend Luca Siermann, who supported me in many projects. And also big thanks to the operating team (my children Ingeborg, Markus and Philipp), who simultaneously prepared the portraits for the morphing.



ART HISTORICAL VIEW



The picture was taken on the occasion of an art fair in Dornbirn, Austria. Simone Jung was the director of the Art.Plus Museum at that time and she invited me to take portraits of visitors and friends of the museum on the occasion of its fifth anniversary.

„(...) 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 program, 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

CONTINENTS AND COUNTRIES SO FAR



NORTH-AMERICA

CALIFORNIA

AFRICA

BENIN
BURKINA FASO
BURUNDI
CAMEROON
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
CONGO (DRC)
EGYPT
GAMBIA
GHANA
KENYA
NIGERIA
SUDAN
TANZANIA
TOGO
UGANDA
ZAMBIA

EUROPE

CROATIA
FINLAND
FRANCE
GERMANY
IRELAND
LUXEMBOURG
POLAND
SPAIN

ASIA

AFGHANISTAN
CHINA
INDONESIA
JAPAN
KOREA
NEPAL
TURKEY

CONDITIONS



First online-photoshooting



Stickers for the Africa Project

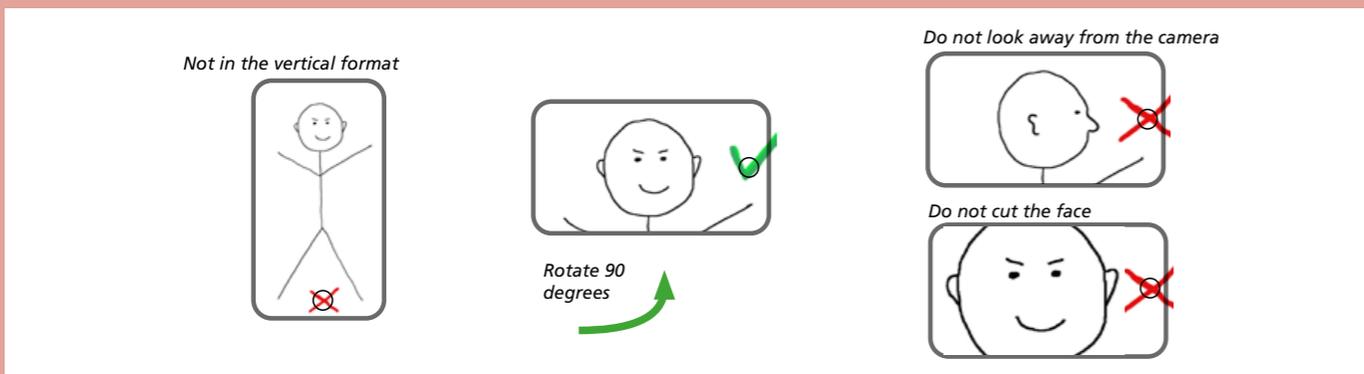
In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, I could no longer travel and was no longer invited with my portrait process. So I asked the work, „What am I going to do?“. The answer came promptly: „Don't make such a fuss about it, there are much worse things. The water is still running down the hill.“

So, I realized my first online photo shoot. For the entire month of November 2020, I was online with Zoom from 2-6 pm each day, inviting friends from all over the world to participate. 100 people opted in during the month and I took their portraits via screen capture. This was an interesting experience, as I had never worked without my mobile photo studio and without direct contact. But: Friends from all over the world visited me in my studio!

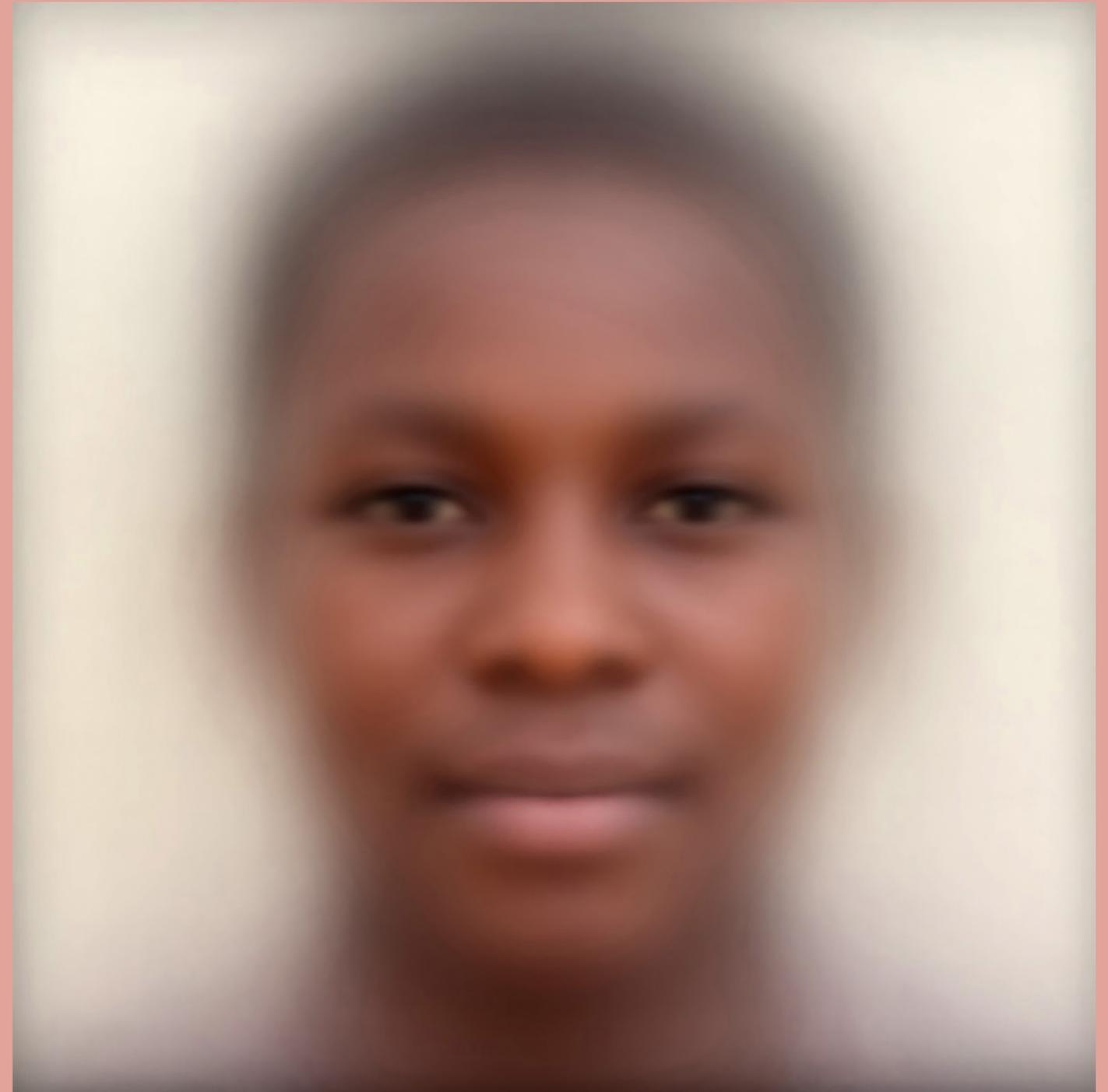
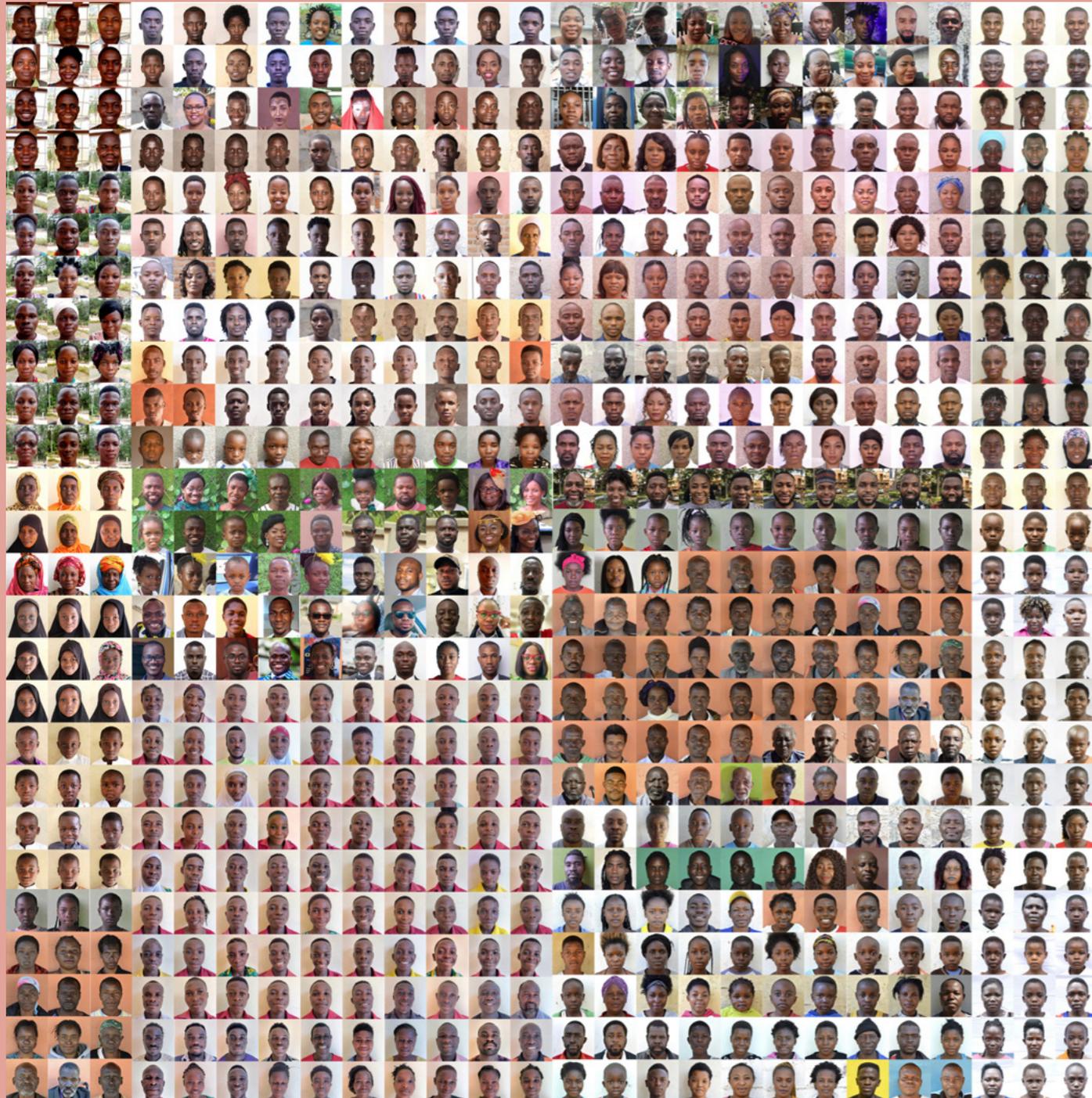
And so, I took together these experiences and my long-held desire to photograph more in Africa and wrote 500 letters to various organizations in all 53 African countries in early 2021 to get in touch with local photographers there. By the end of the year, I had gathered nearly 2,000 portraits from 16 countries. What a treasure. All participating groups received two pictures from me, one with all individual portraits and one with the collective face of the group.

Many thanks to all who helped, i.e. staff of Goethe-Instituts, German embassies, partnership associations, aid organizations, sponsors and foundations. Above all, my heartfelt thanks to all the photographers, you did a super job!

FACE(S) OF AFRICA



Excerpt from the instructions for photographers in Africa



WORKING IN AFRICA

I was in contact with all these people via WhatsApp, email, telephone or Zoom. This created the closeness that was needed for the process. They were my extended eyes.

Thank you much.



BENIN Prof. Mensah Wékenon Tokponto



BURKINA FASO Warren Sare



BURUNDI Audry Rusangwa



BURUNDI Franck Iradukunda



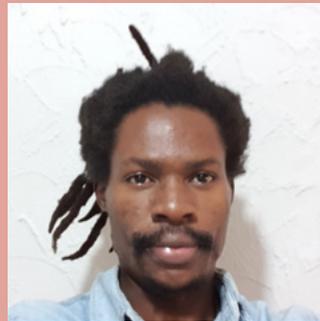
BURUNDI Montfort Ngendakumana



CÔTE D'IVOIRE Dr. Coulibaly Laka



CONGO (DRC) Huguette Tolinga



CONGO (DRC) Cedrick Tshibalanga Lukunku



EGYPT Michael Asaad



GAMBIA Ansumana Darboe



GHANA Helene Prölb



GHANA: Peter Anowie



GHANA Emmanuel Atakora-manu



GHANA Baobab school



KENYA Daniel K Macharia



KENYA Wings of a Dove



NIGERIA Fred Ekene Edom



SUDAN Khalid Alarabi



TANZANIA Editha Gyindo



TOGO Lina Mensah



TOGO David Moreira



UGANDA Linda Sarah Nanyondo



ZAMBIA Chanda Mwenya

BENIN

Barbara Scheel from Eppingen in Germany immediately responded to my first newsletter 2021 announcing this project. She had lived in Benin for several years and knew Mensah Wekenon Tokponto, a professor of German at the university in Abomey-Calavi. If I were interested, she would make contact. Surprisingly, this was not only the first contact for this project, we even talked in German: Mensah studied in Tübingen, Germany. Of course, I immediately bought his wonderful book of fairy tales „Der Regenwurm und sein Onkel“ (The Earthworm and his Uncle).

And so, over a period of three months, I received first the photos of some family members and then of the students of his second and third year.



BURKINA FASO

Carolin Christgau from the Goethe-Institut in Ouagadougou kindly put me in touch with the photographer Warren Sare from Burkina Faso. After I got in touch with him, he sent me portraits of people from Burkina Faso again and again over the course of six months. When it came to publication, he wrote to me that he had not asked many of the people and that he could not agree to publication. In this respect, I am „only“ showing the collective face here, which was created by highly transparent superimposition using specially developed software from almost 100 individual portraits.

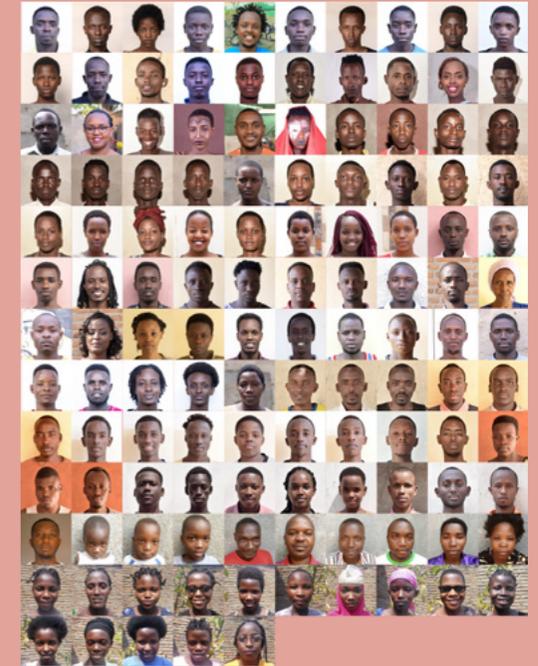
BURUNDI

In the second half of 2021, I wrote again to all the institutions of the countries in Africa that had not yet responded to my first letter. On 15.7.2021 I received this email from Burundi:

„Hello, I hope this email finds you in good health. I run the youth organisation in Burundi called ISHAKA 2250 and the German Embassy had contacted us about the opportunity of a collaboration that you want...Best regards, Audry.“

Also Montfort Ngendakumana, Managing Director of the Apabu-Center asked for participation.

And last but not least Nadège Horimbere send me an email, she wants to participate with young women from „Nyubahiriza“ and the head of the foster home - Burundi as part of Fondation Stamm.



CAMEROON

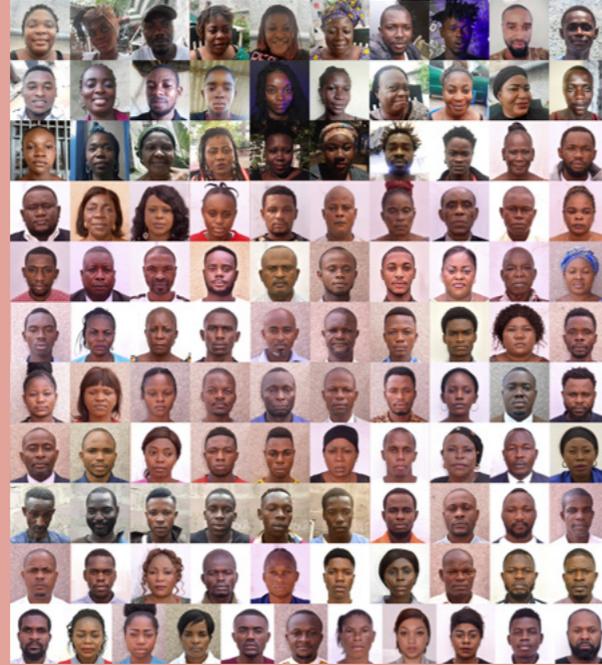
In May 2021, I received an email from Cara Schnabel, project manager at the Managers Without Borders Foundation: „Hello Mr Helzle, in the mail you will find portraits of our project partner Mr Atong Isaiah Agu from Cameroon. The group is called „Rural Help Project Mentees“ from the Rural Help Project.“



CONGO (DRC)

I met the musician Huguette Tolinga in 2020 through a visual music project Germany-Kinshasa. I asked her if she was interested in photographing people from her environment for the FACE(S) OF AFRICA project. That's how the first 25 portraits came about.

The German Embassy in Kinshasa put me in touch with Cedrick Tshimbalanga Lukunku, who then took all the other portraits.



CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Christa Gmelch from Reutlingen, Germany, knew that Boaké is Reutlingen's twin town and put me in touch with the twinning association there and the relevant office in the town hall.

This is how I got in touch with the German teacher Dr. Coulibaly Laka, with whom I communicated by WhatsApp as well as by e-mail, telephone and Zoom. In the course of the conversations, he suggested photographing his students from the German Department of the University Félix Houphouët Boigny. A student, Kouassi Kouassi Parfait, was found who gladly took on this task.

Dear Laka, it was a great pleasure to have met you and to work with you.



EGYPT

When Vittorio Bagnardi from the German Embassy in Cairo contacted me in August 2021 with the address of two photographers, I was very pleased because Egypt was the first country in North Africa to become part of the process.

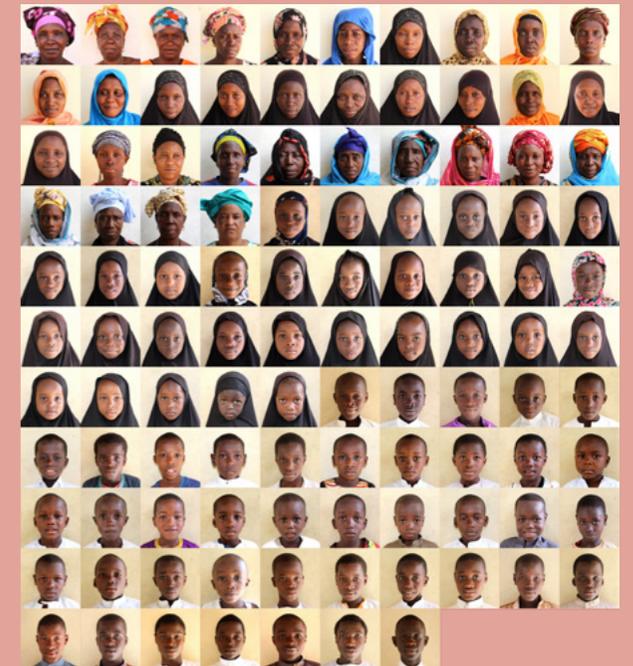
With Michael Asaad, I was able to win a highly decorated photographer. (Head of Photojournalist Department at Rosalyoussef Press Association, in 2014 he received two prizes from the United Nations in photography, In 2016 received the Egypt Press Photo Award, which is the largest award for photo-journalism in Egypt, organized by the Syndicate of Journalists and the Press Photographers Division. He is working with international and national organisations in Egypt.)



GAMBIA

Petra Drammeh from Filderstadt, Germany, who is not only married to a man from Gambia but has also been in charge of an association for many years that is involved in various fields in Gambia. After a telephone conversation with her, she named me the photographer Ansumana Darboe, who is in the process of photographing the various locations of the association and their activities in Gambia. Ansumana Darboe gladly accepts my request and took all these portraits within two weeks.

Supported by Petra Drammeh's YIRABAH Gambia Verein e.V.

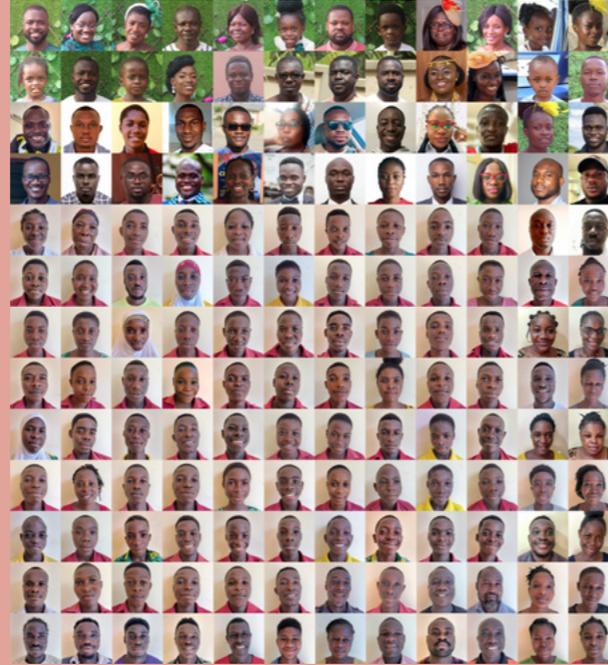


GHANA

Helene Pröbß is the founder and director of the foundation „Managers Without Borders“ and is active in many countries in Africa. We have been in contact for many years and so she visited me together with her friend Monika Lockemann, she has a gallery for art from Ghana in Stuttgart, Germany. Right at the table, they both agreed to support this photo art process to the best of their abilities. This is how some fruitful contacts came about.

These include the Baobab Children Foundation in Ghana, whose director Edith de Vos I was also able to meet recently in Stuttgart.

Supported by Managers without Borders Foundation, Gallery by Monika Lockemann, Kolics Company Limited, Ghana, Baobab Children Foundation, Ghana.

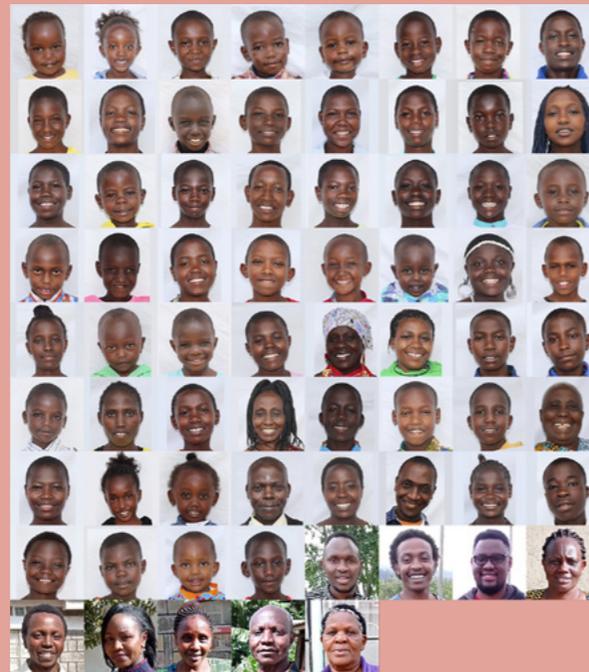


KENYA

Gisela Keller read an appeal in the local newspaper and immediately got in touch with me: „...For more than 30 years there has been a relationship between the Protestant church district of Bad Urach-Münsingen in Germany and people in Kenya. The foundation „Kenia-Hilfe Schwäbische Alb“ is the main sponsor of the street children project Karai. It has just turned 10 years old.

That's how I got in touch with the artist Daniel K Macharia, who did some portraits for the project.

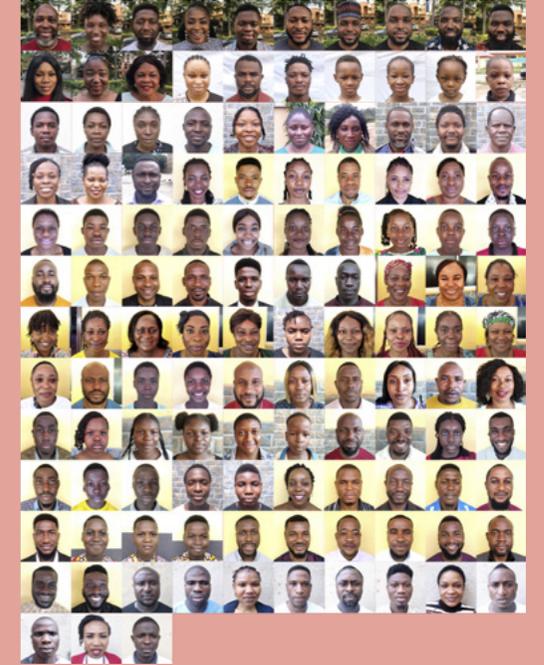
Through the Managers Without Borders Foundation, many pictures of the Wings of a Dove Centre were added.



NIGERIA

Yetunde Oluronke Jonah, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Abuja, Nigeria responded to my request and sent me the phone numbers of three photographers.

I wrote to Olorunrokan Ojomo first via WhatsApp and he sent me 13 photos of a theatre group from Abuja. When he then cancelled after some time because of many assignments, I contacted Fred Ekene Edom, who then took over all the still missing photos. So I took portraits of employees of the Marfex Printing Company and of members of the Living faith church lokogoma, as well as of some friends and acquaintances of the photographer.



SUDAN

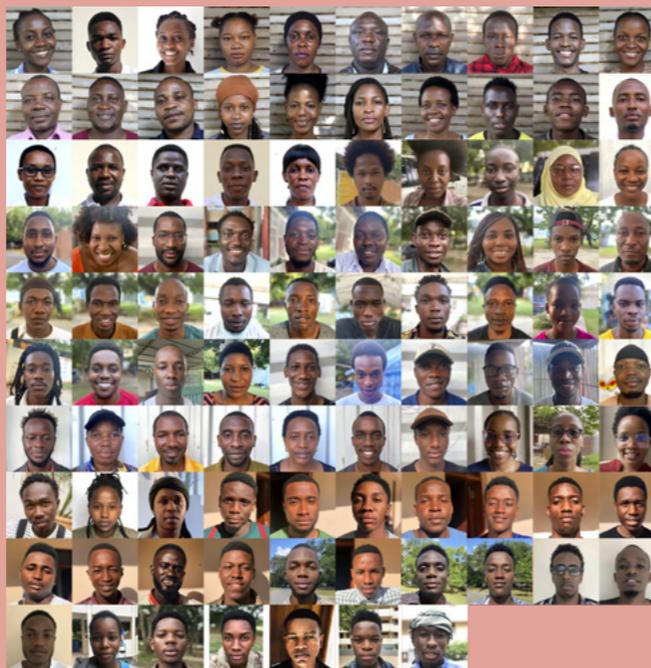
Lilli Kobler from the Goethe-Institut in Khartoum gave me the contact to the photographer scene there. After a long search, I found a Sudanese photographer in Khalid Alarabi and he conjured up wonderful portraits. After most of the pictures were taken, there was a coup d'état in Sudan and so I didn't get any more pictures for a long time. Thank God we were able to continue after a few weeks.



TANZANIA

Ulla Thrän-Lardi, responsible for culture, economy and development cooperation at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, reacted promptly in response to my enquiry and organised contact with the company Africraft. Some time later, the artist and photographer Editha Gyindo contacted me via WhatsApp and sent me the first photos in order to technically coordinate the shots.

After the Africraft employees were photographed, I asked her if she wanted to take more portraits. That's how the two other groups came about: Artists from Tanzania and students from the Ardhi University. It was a very good cooperation.



TOGO

Already in mid-May 2021, I received 45 portraits from the company Gold Food Africa in Togo. This came about due to the mediation of the „Managers Without Borders Foundation“, many thanks for that. In the middle of the year, I wrote to the German Embassy in Togo and asked them for contacts to photographers. That's how I got in touch with Ayana Lina Mensah and David Moreira. An intensive cooperation developed with Lina Mensah, who photographed people from nine different groups.

Thank you much, dear Lina Mensah, for this wonderful cooperation and the insights into your country and your people.



UGANDA

On 1 March 2021, I received an email from Ms. Jenny Herrmann in her capacity as Press and Culture Officer of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Kampala, Uganda; „... the Goethe-Zentrum Kampala has suggested a couple of photographers they have already worked with, and you may be able to get together with for FACE(S) OF AFRICA here in Uganda...“

Photographer Linda Sarah Nanyondo responded to my request and we communicated via WhatsApp over a period of time. When issues were resolved, she photographed 229 people in four districts, each under the Uganda Women Basketry Association. It was a wonderful collaboration, thank you much.



ZAMBIA

It all started with Chanda Mwenya: When I came to Japan in 2004 with my portrait project for the Ogaki Biennale, he was my neighbour in the exhibition. During this time, he asked me if I could imagine coming to Zambia with this project. I said yes immediately. However, it took another year until I arrived in Lusaka, because I had to find sponsors first.

And so I am particularly happy that Chanda, together with his daughter (whom I held in my arms as a baby in 2005), has contributed so many very special portraits for this process of the heart.

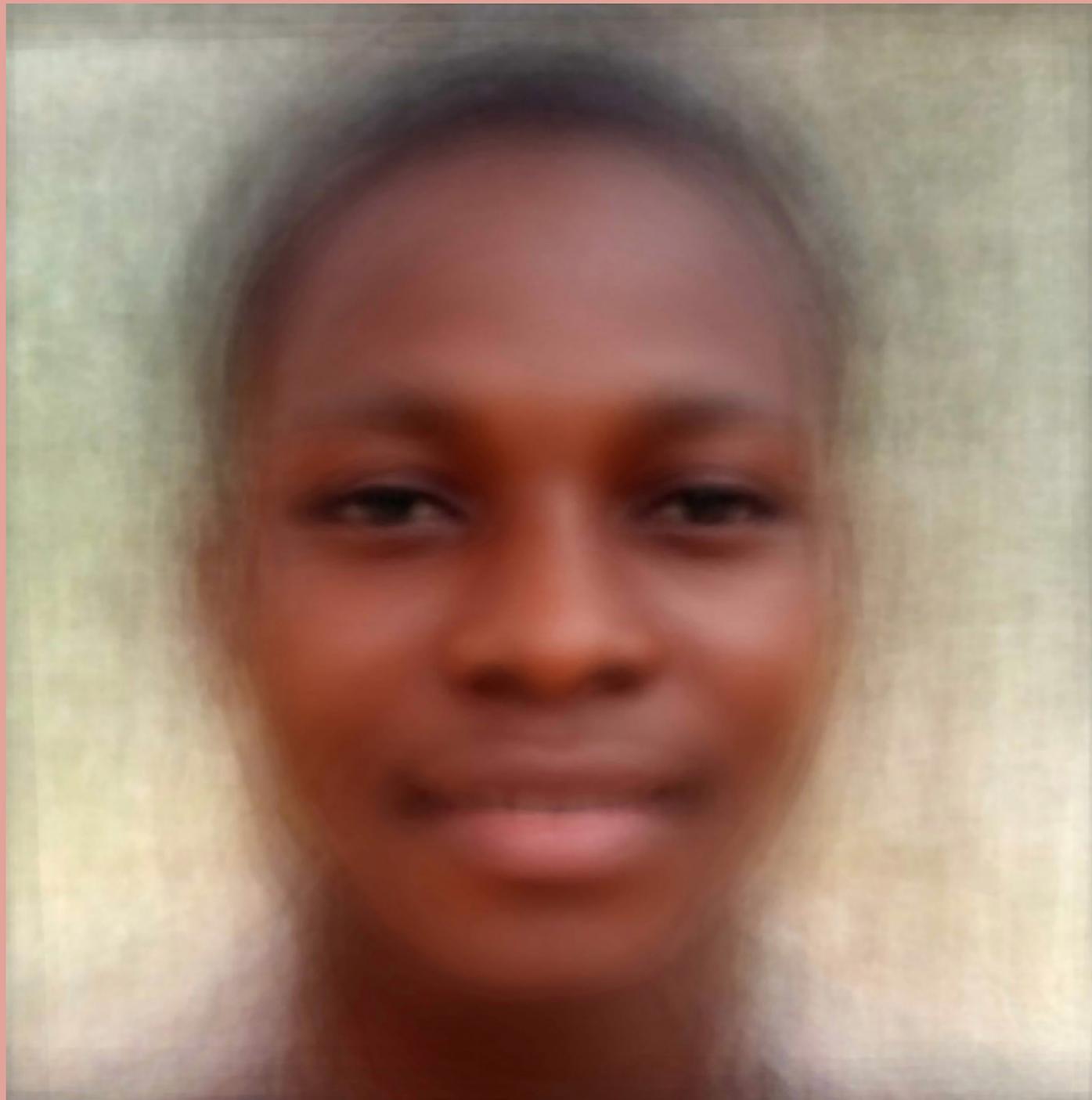
Supported by Matero Artist in Residence Prog. MARP, Zambia



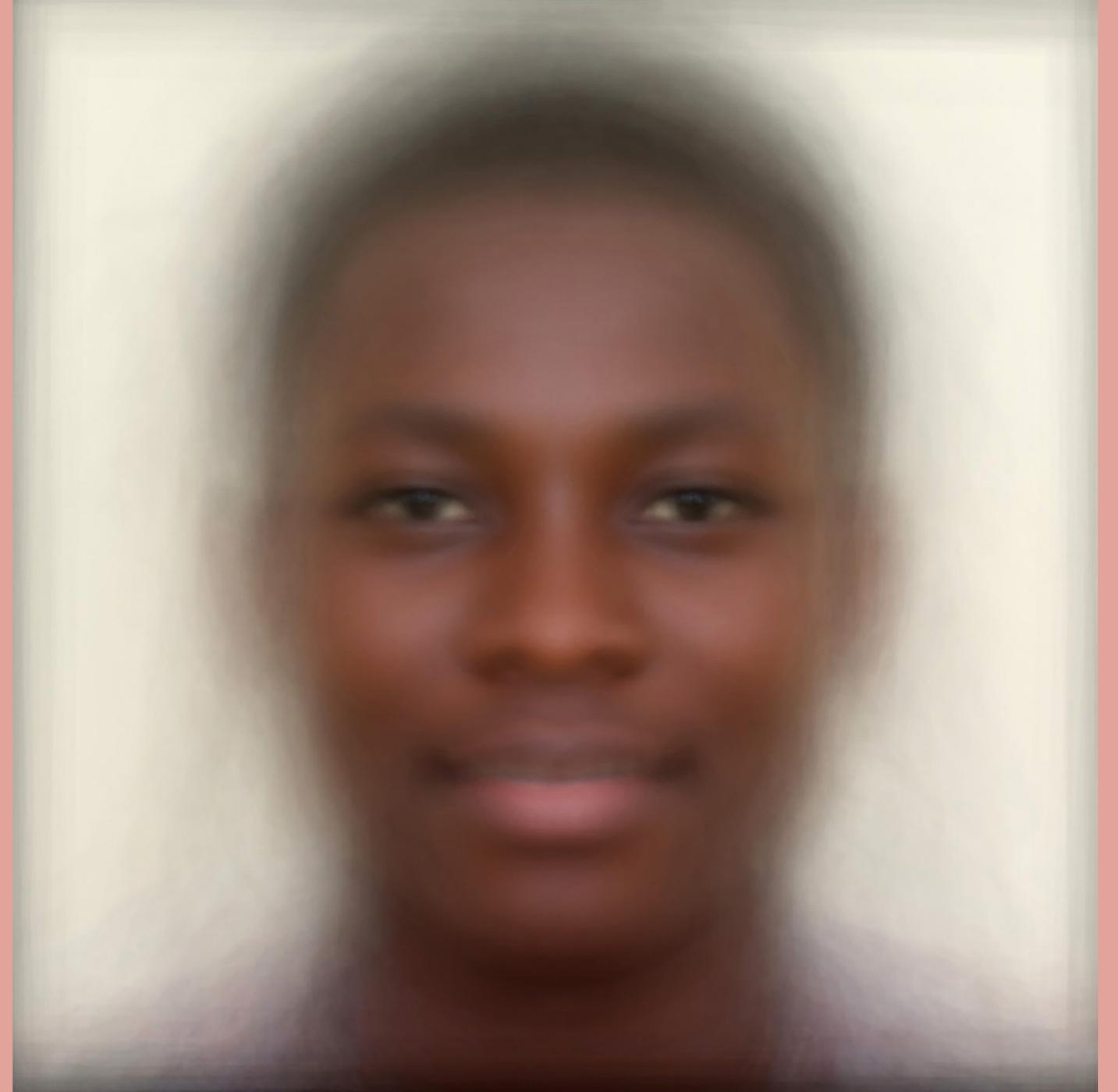
COLLECTIVE PORTRAITS OF THE COUNTRIES IN AFRICA SO FAR



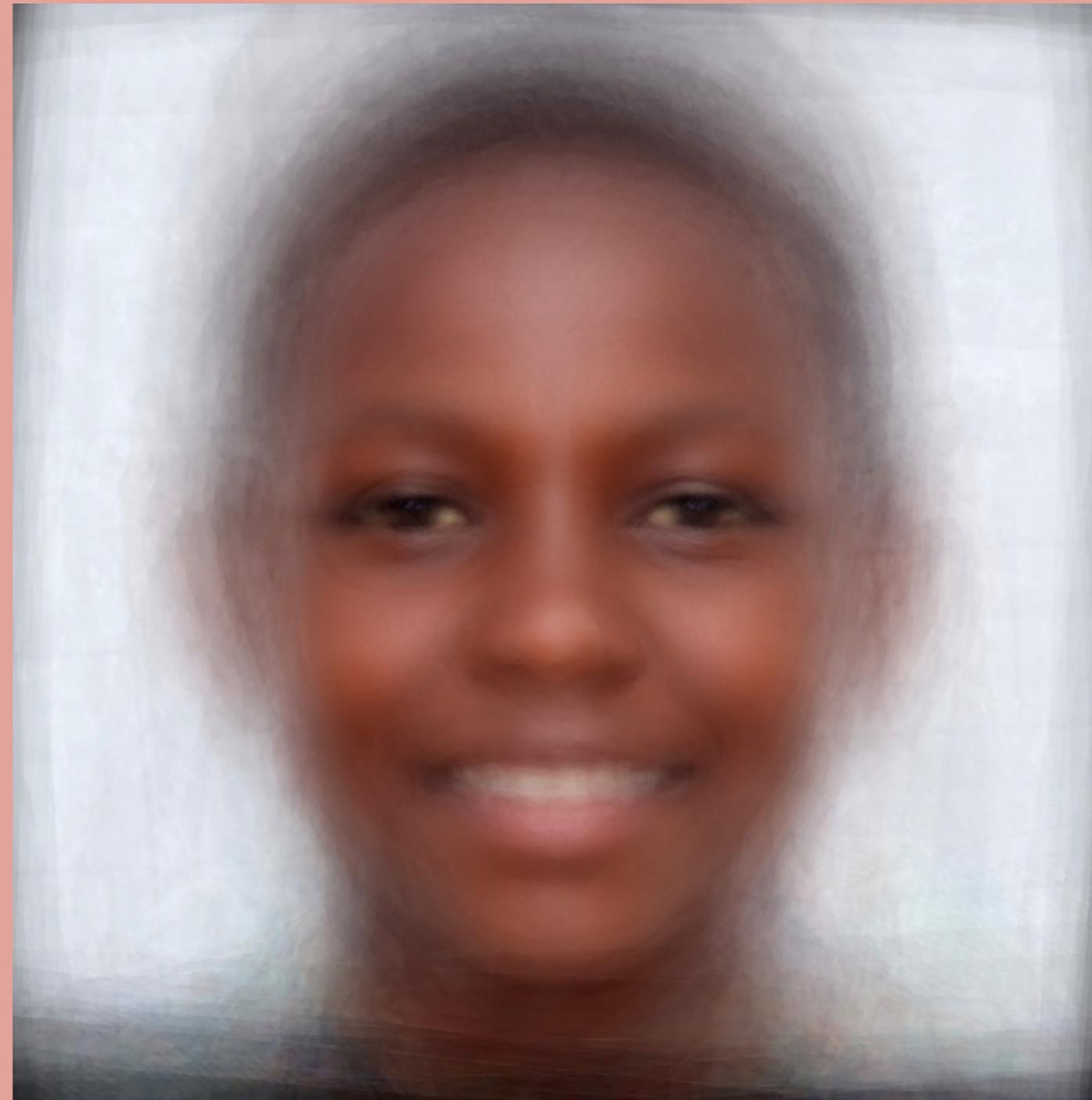
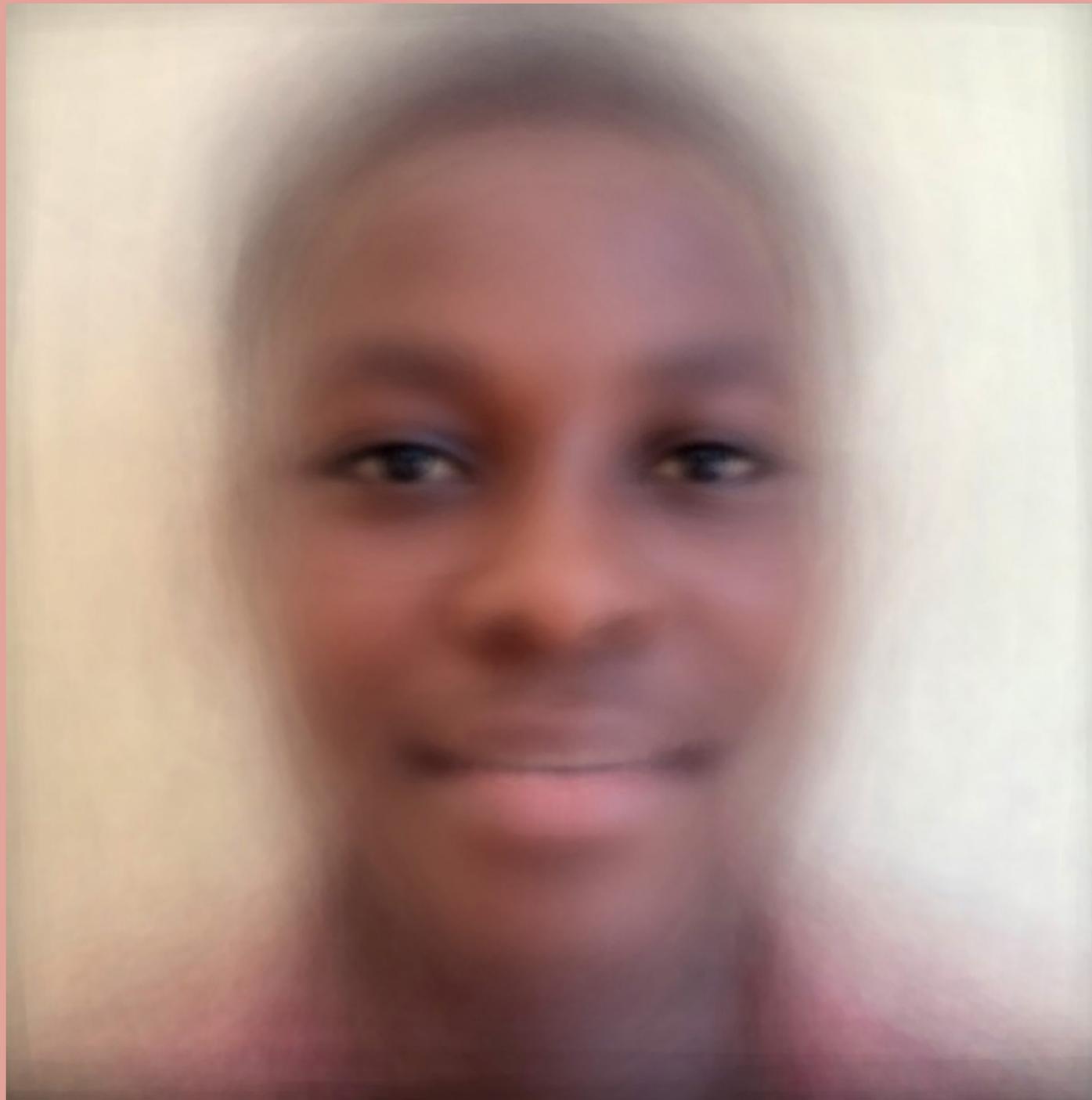
The following collective portraits of the African countries I have superimposed from all the individual portraits I received from the photographers there in a multi-stage process in such a way that each individual face is equally considered.

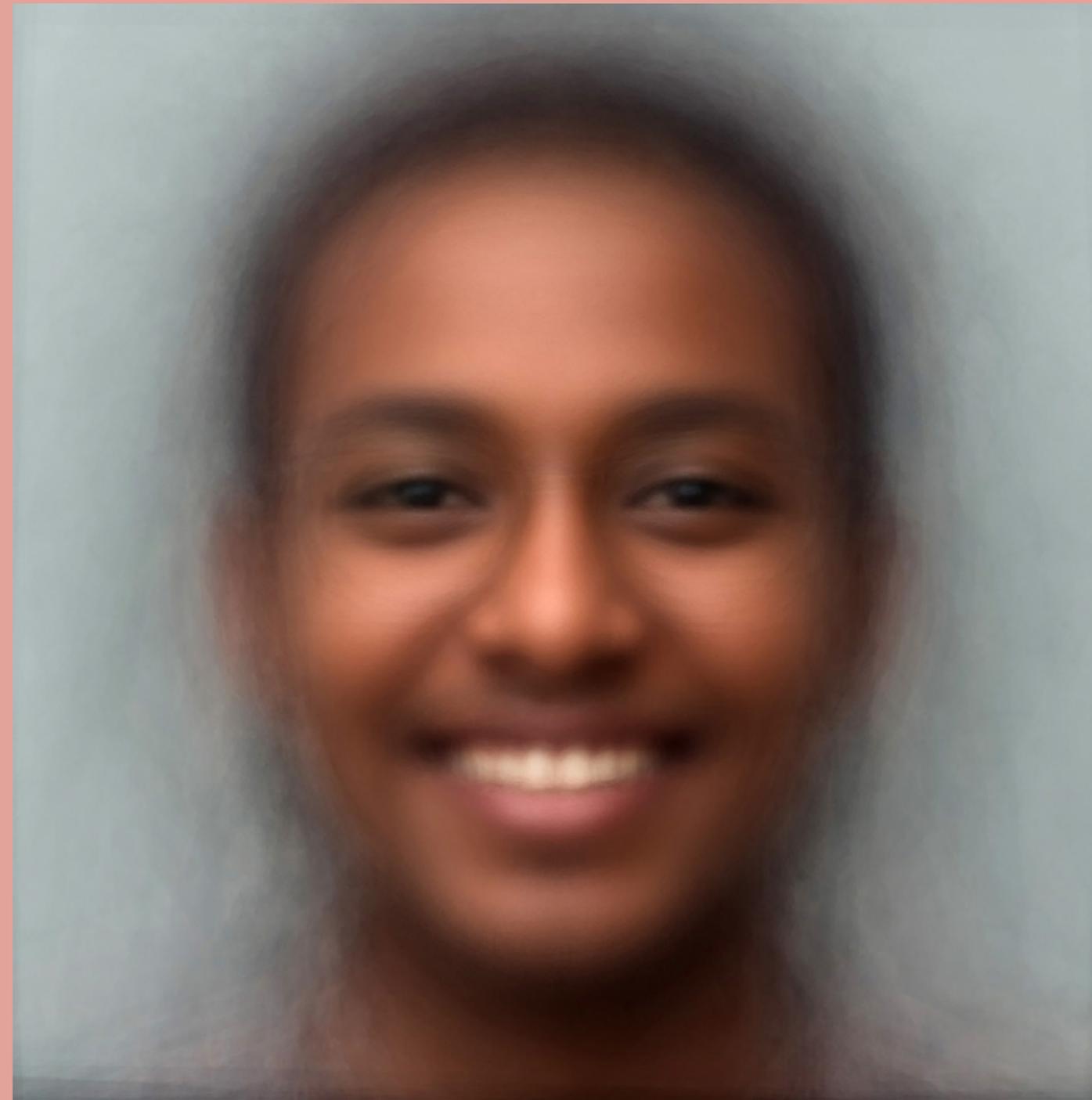


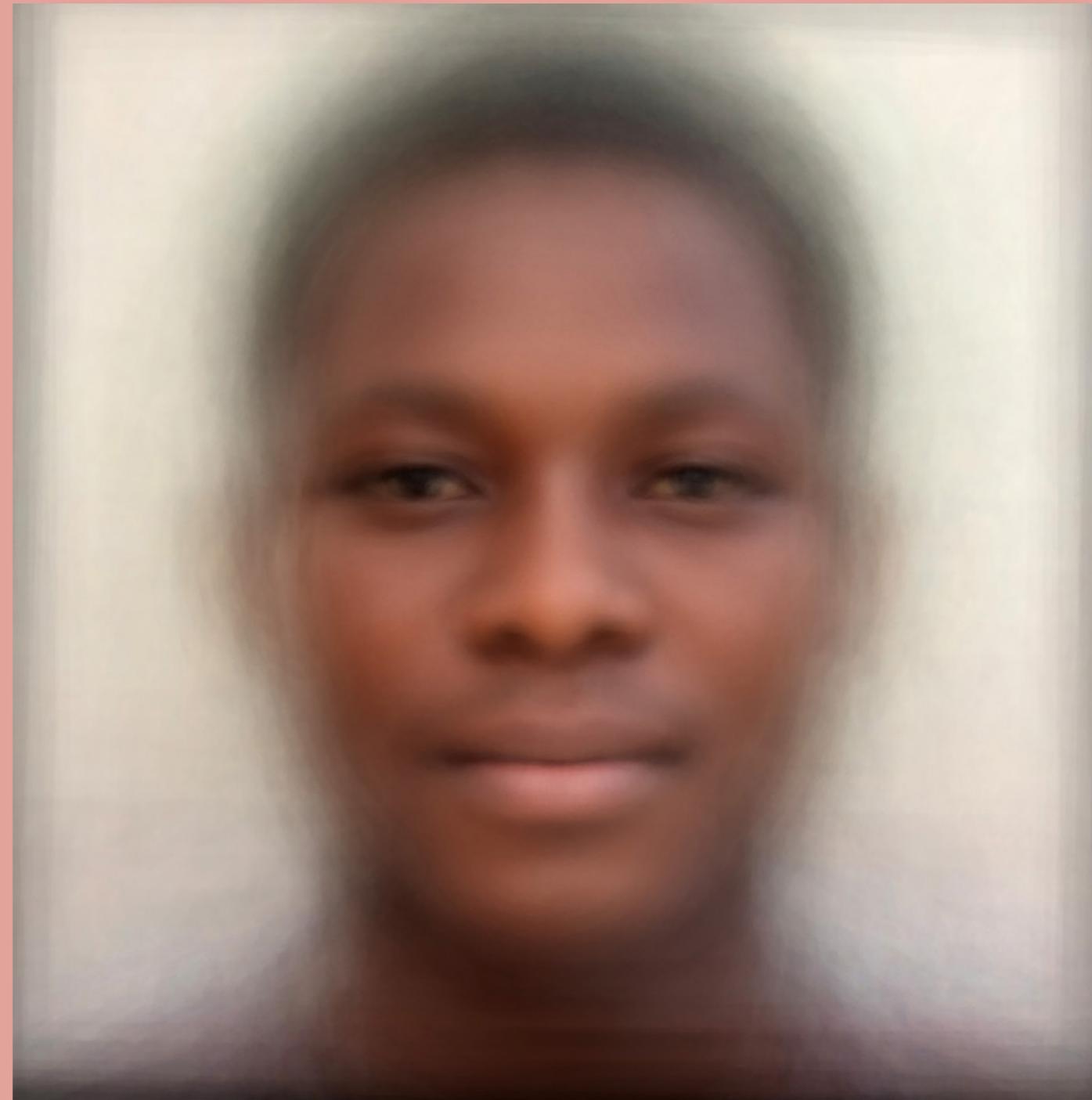
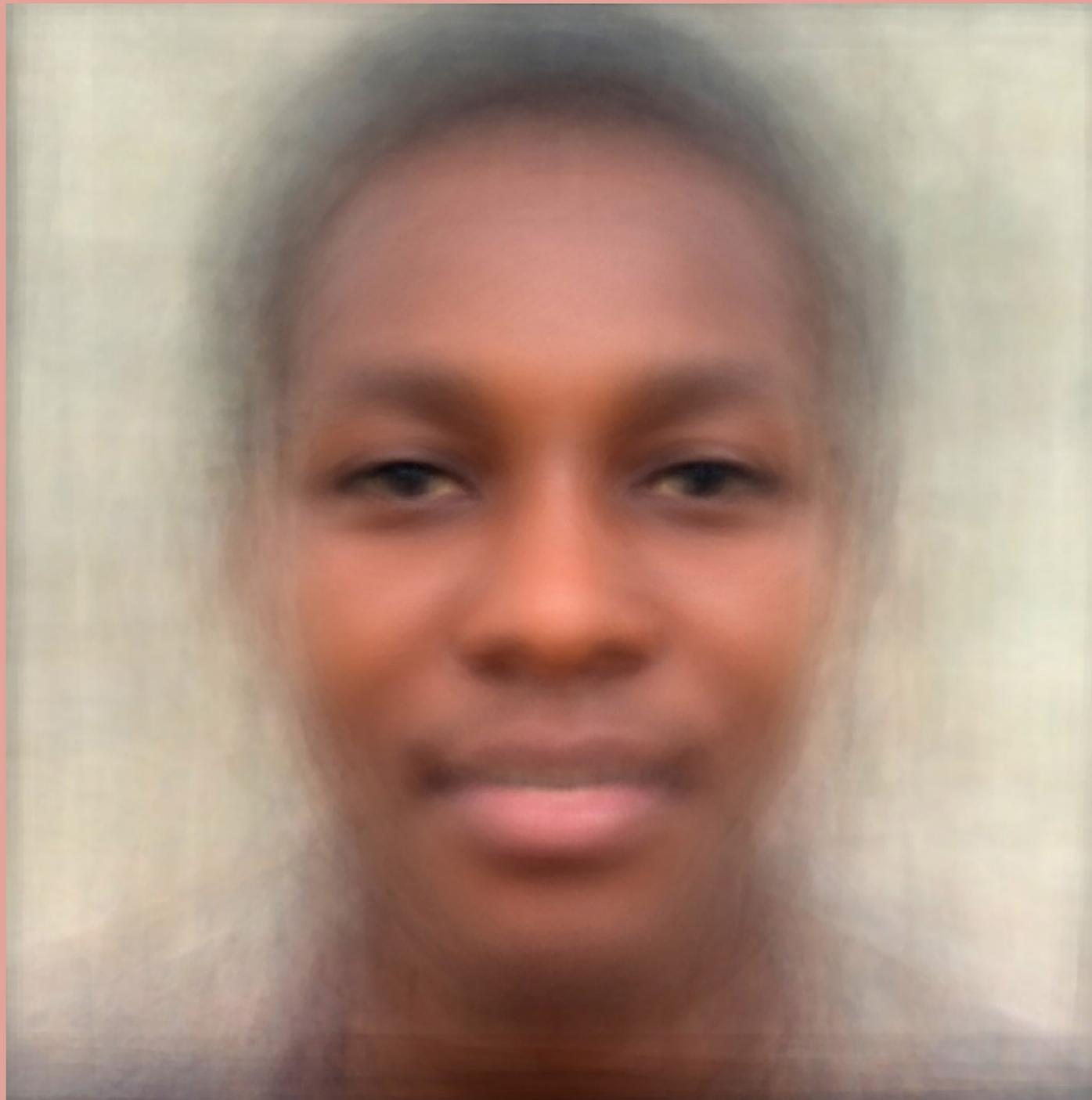


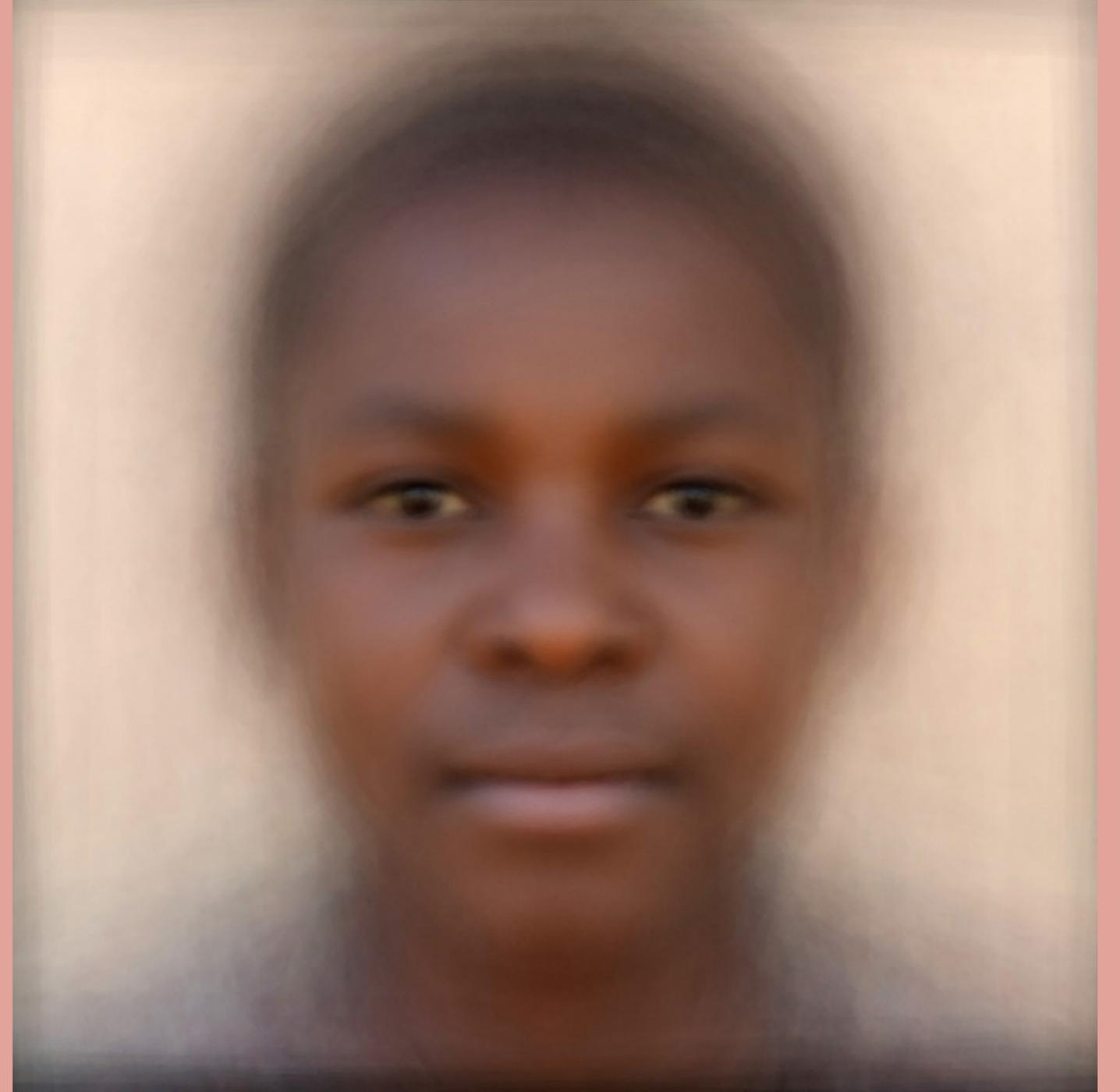














CONDITIONS

I was invited to Asia for the first time in 2004. Under the title „KAO HAI-KU“ I photographed the visitors of the „International Ogaki Biennale“ in Japan, organized by the IAMAS Institute for Advanced Media Art and Sciences.

There the work was seen by curators of the biennale „media_city seoul“, South Korea, to which I was invited the same year. Right at the beginning I instructed students who took portraits at four different places, which I edited centrally at the same time.



China expert Prof. Justus Theinert - Department of Design at Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences - put me in touch with Dali Sun, the Dean of the College of Art and Design in Beijing, China. In 2015, he invited me to teach 40 students for a fortnight in Beijing. Among other things, I introduced them to my style of photographic portraiture.

Friends invited me to join them in Bali to photograph both family, priest and friends in different places of this beautiful island.

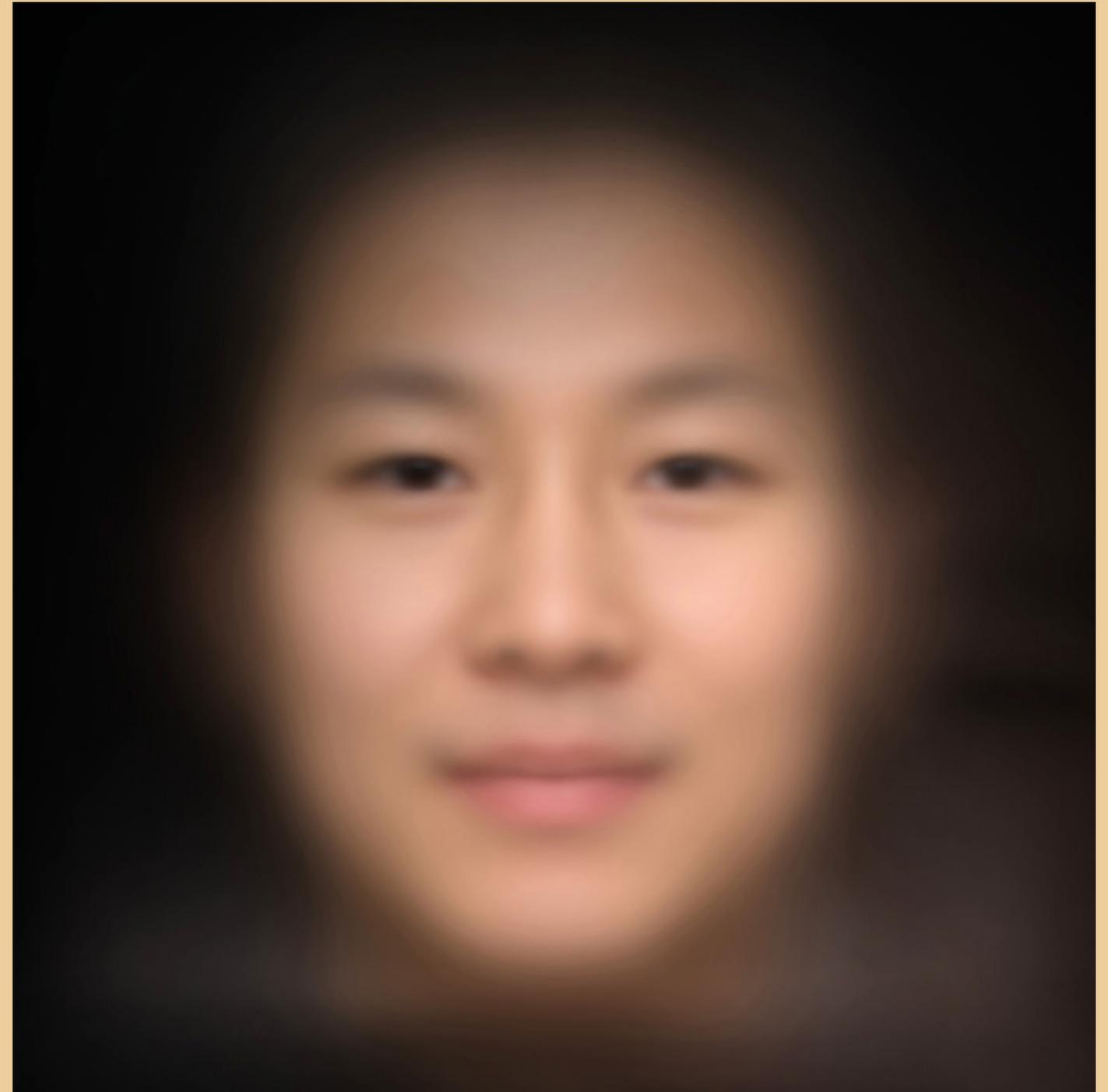
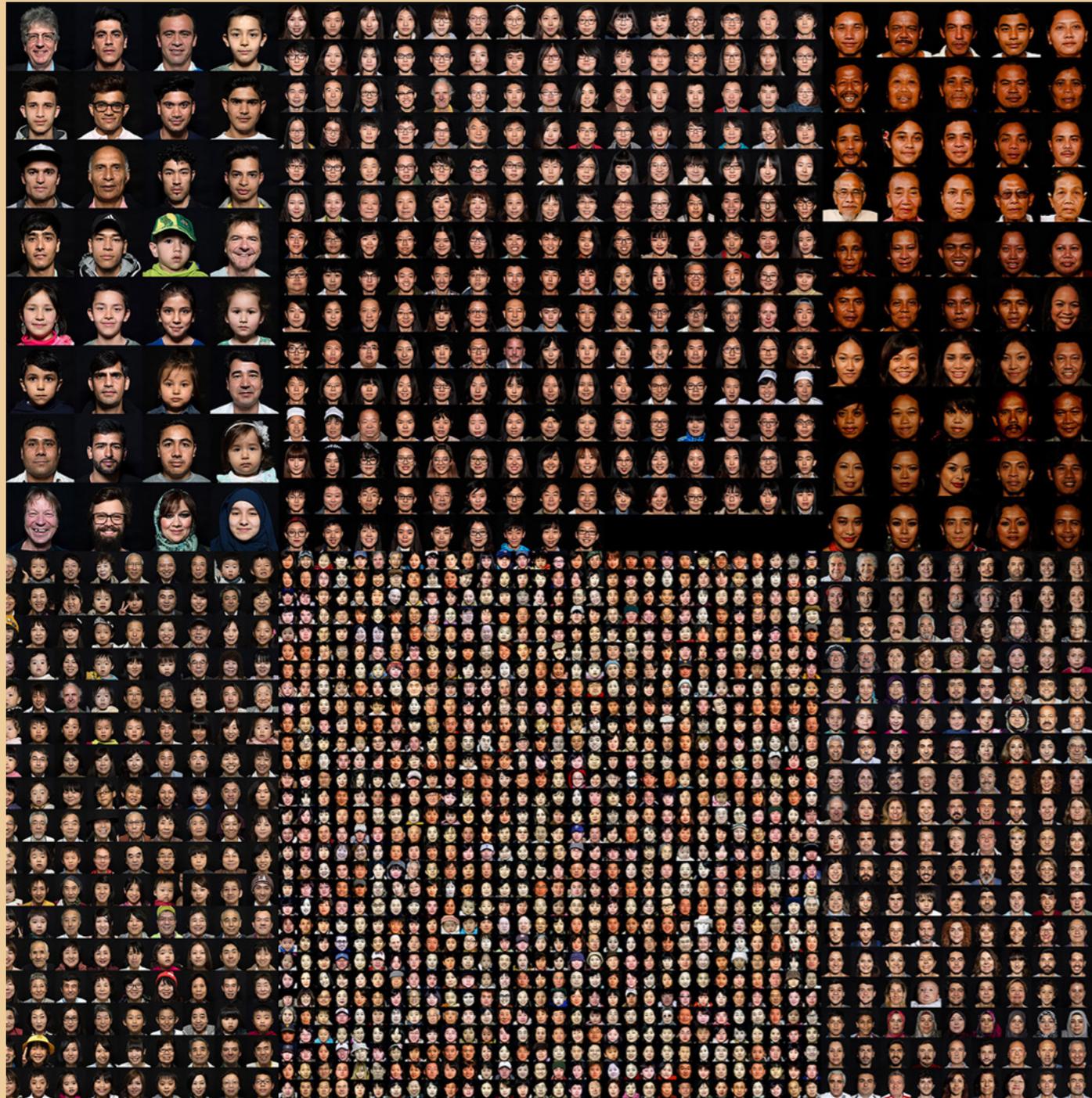


In 2017, many people from Afghanistan came to Germany. They were distributed to countries and communities. In a community centre I organized a party for the Afghan fellow citizens, whom I was able to take portraits of them there.

In 2018, Nuray Önoğlu invited me to Izmir with my photo process. For a week we toured together in different places to meet and photograph as many people as possible.

Rajesh Shahi from Kathmandu called me via video call if I would be willing to photograph the students of his Sanga Sangai School in this way. Three weeks and six video calls later, I was able to take portraits of just over 50 people.

FACE(S) OF ASIA



WORKING IN ASIA



Wolf Nkole Helzle at work



JAPAN Hashima Festival 2014



KOREA Working with students



JAPAN Hashima Festival 2014



the simultaneous
appreciation of the
individual and the collective
creates spaces

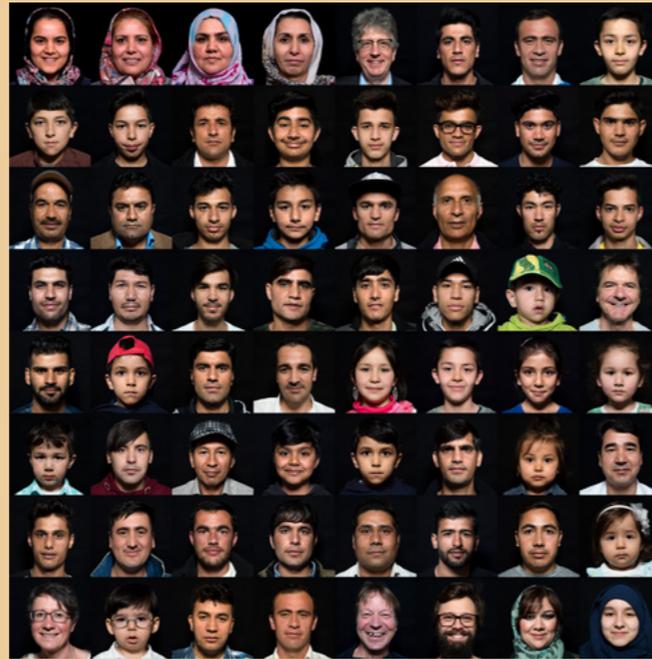
KOREA DMZ exhibition near the demarcation line with North Korea, 2013



the simultaneous
appreciation of the
collective and the individual
creates spaces

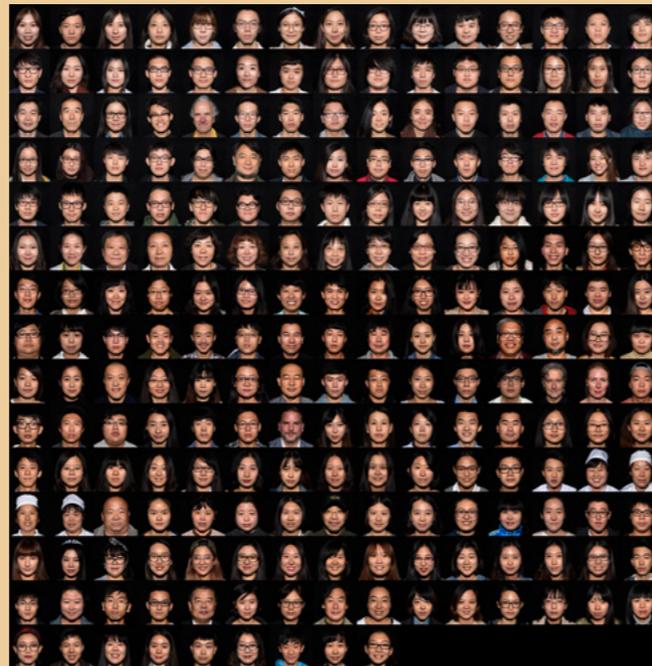
AFGHANISTAN

In 2017, many people came to Germany from Afghanistan. They were distributed among the federal states and municipalities. I followed the call of the church and the town hall and got involved in the newly founded working group on asylum. One of my activities was to organise a party for the Afghan fellow citizens in a parish hall. There was food and drink and a band played and there was a lot of dancing. I was there with my photo station and some of the visitors had their portraits taken, which resulted in the work FACE(S) OF AFGHANISTAN.



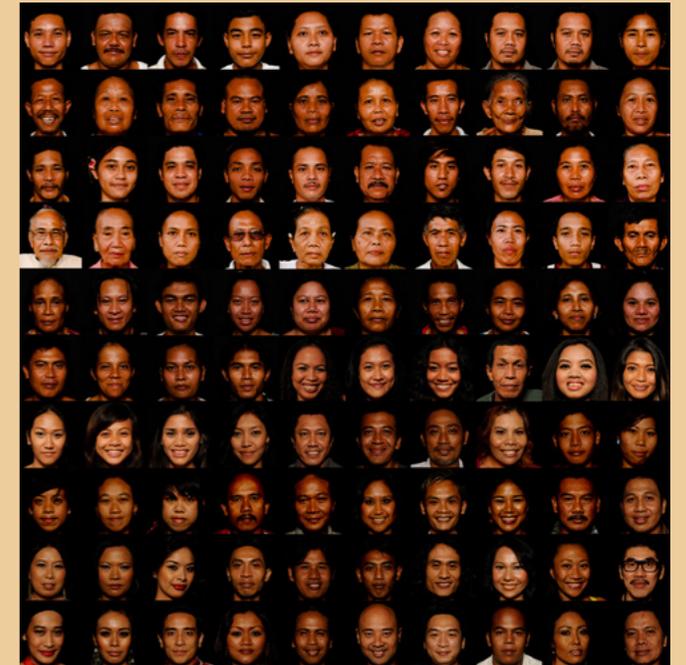
CHINA

China expert Prof. Justus Theinert - Department of Design at Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences - put me in touch with Dali Sun, the Dean of the College of Art and Design in Beijing, China. In 2015, he had the concept of inviting as many foreign artists as possible as guest lecturers. So, I wrote an application and was invited to teach 40 students for a fortnight. Among other things, I introduced them to my way of photographic portraiture and so we were able to shoot over 500 students, teachers and staff and edit the resulting portraits. At the end, we presented all the resulting work in an exhibition. It was an unforgettable experience and encounter.



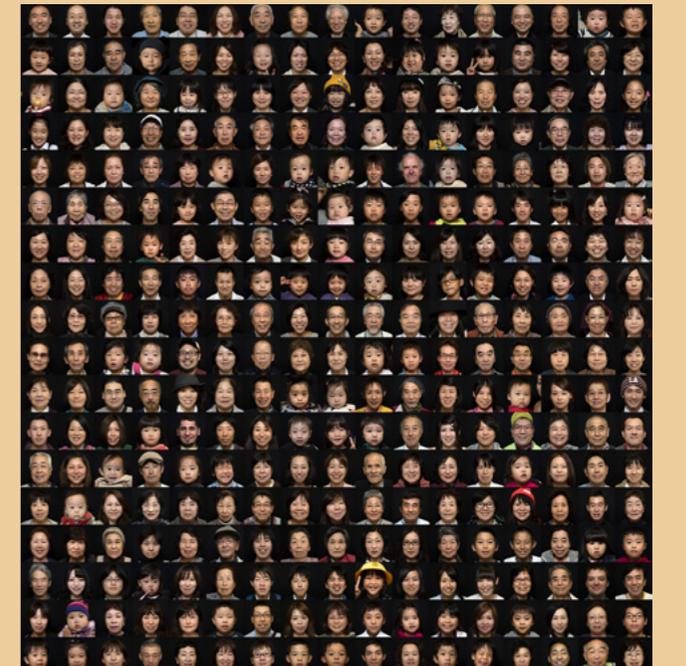
INDONESIA

Friends invited me to Bali to photograph family, priest and friends in different places on this beautiful island. At the end there was a big birthday party in Denpasar. It was very special to be able to be so close to these people, beyond the tourist impressions.



JAPAN

In 2004, I was invited by Masayuki Akamatsu - professor at IAMAS, Institute for Advanced Media Art and Sciences in Ogaki - to photograph the people of Hashima. There was a big celebration for an anniversary when the Shinkansen stops in Hashima. Under the motto „Hashima smiles“, I went with him and a team of operators to various places in the city with my photo station. Among them were two large shopping malls, the city hall and in the middle of the festival on the street. On the evening of the festival, the more than 300 portraits were projected onto the façade of the town hall. A Japanese drum group played to accompany the transformation from one face to another.



KOREA

At the „International Ogaki Biennale“ in Japan, the work was seen by curators of the biennale „media_city seoul“, South Korea, to which I was invited then the same year.

Right at the beginning I instructed students who took portraits at four different places (in the museum itself, in the town hall and at two universities) which I edited centrally at the same time. In this way, over 800 people could be photographed in the course of a week. At the opening of the Biennale, the faces were projected onto a large wall in a slow morphing process.



NEPAL

After Rajesh Shahi from Kathmandu heard about my first online photo shoot, he called me via video call to ask if I would be willing to photograph the students of his Sangai Sangai school in this way.

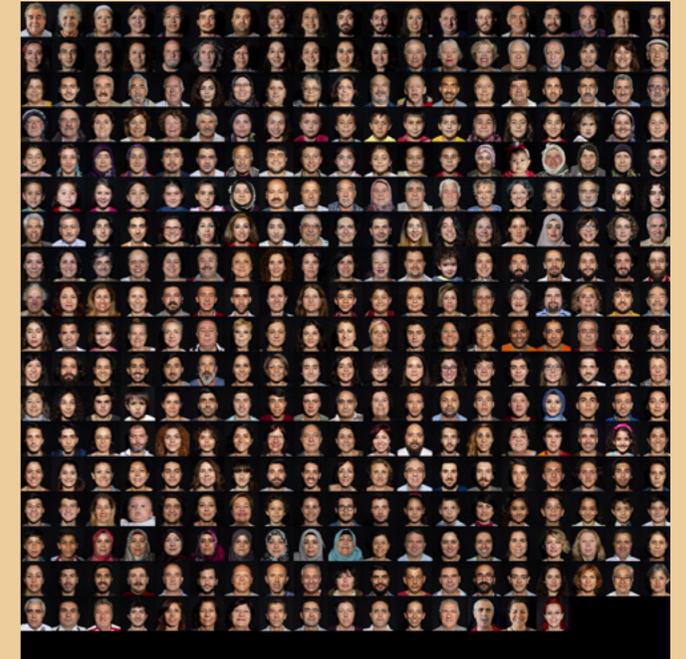
Three weeks and six video calls later, I was able to photograph just around 50 people. Rajesh positioned his smartphone according to my instructions so that the person to be photographed was in the right frame, we greeted each other with NAMASTE and I took a screenshot. After the students it was the turn of the teachers and on two separate dates the parents of the students and of course Rajesh's family.



TURKEY

In 2018, Nuray Önoğlu invited me to Izmir with my photo process. For one week, we toured together in different places to meet as many people as possible. It started with a photo shoot in Nuray's bookstore in Izmir. There I photographed visitors as well as many invited friends. After that, a bookshop friend of hers asked if I could come to them as well. On other days we went by bus to more remote villages. In a small village in the mountains, I was able to photograph the children and women first and then the men in a café. In this way 339 portraits were taken.

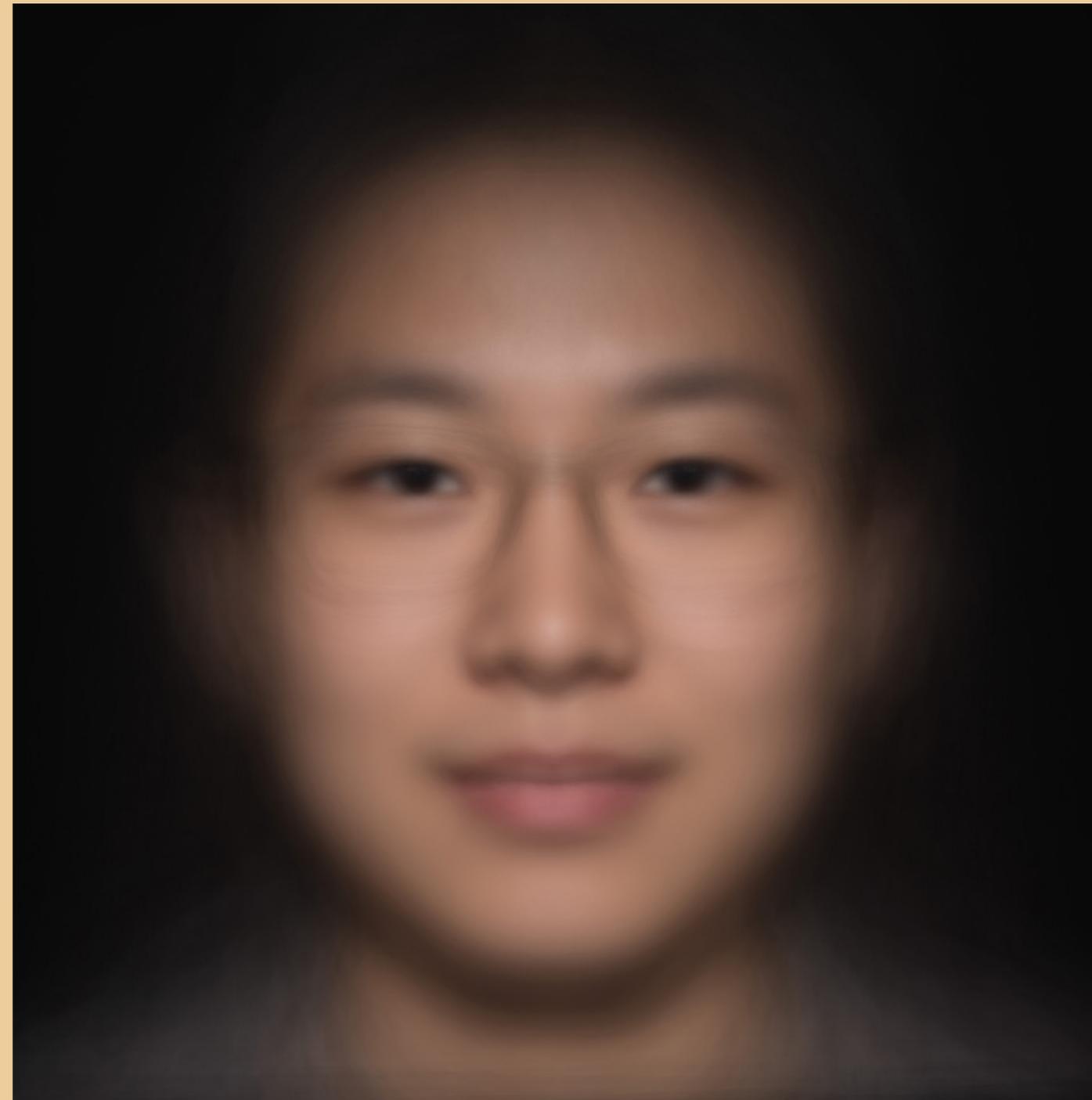
Thank you, Nuray, for your friendship and your endless activity. It was wonderful to get to know your world.

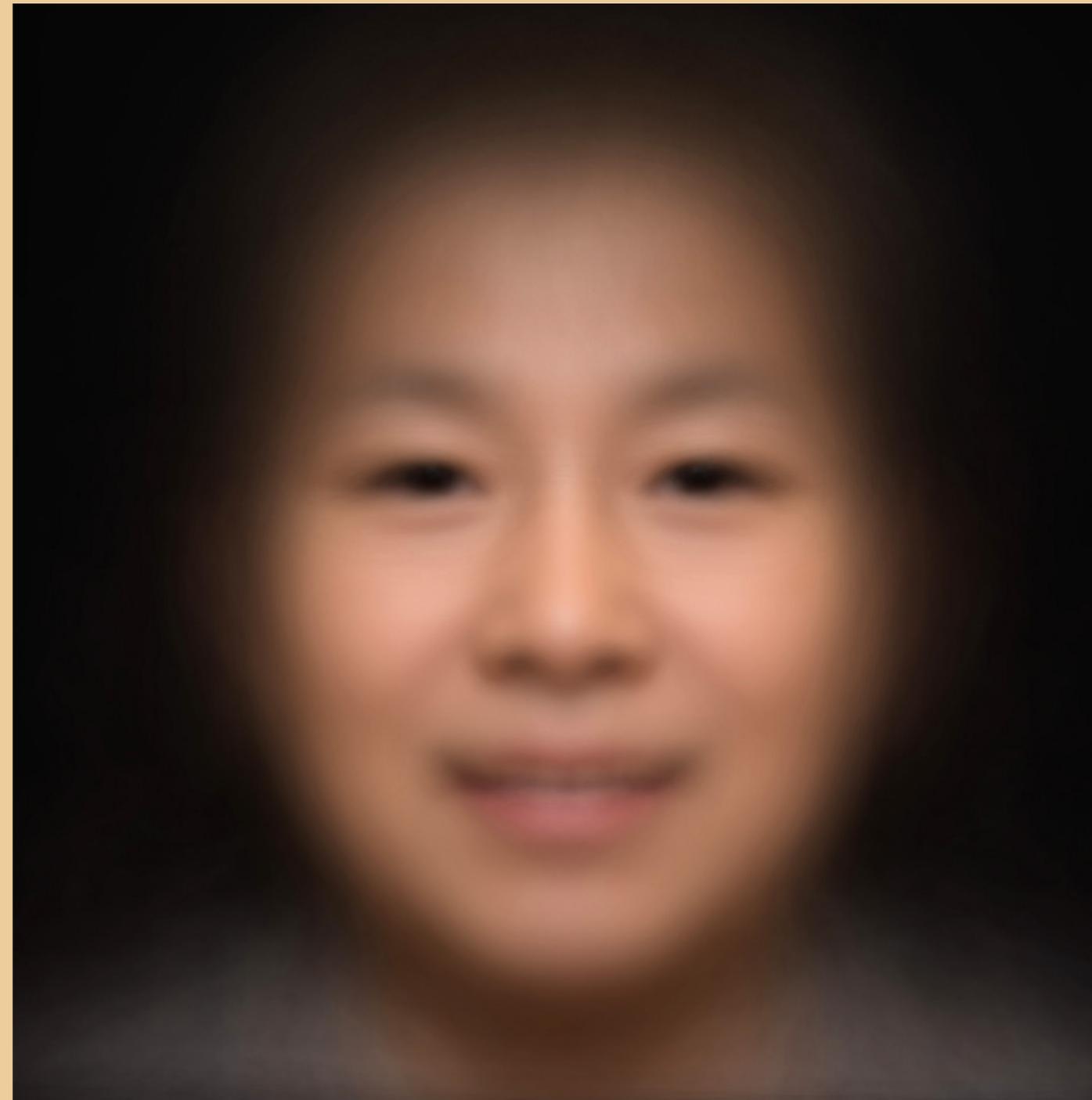


COLLECTIVE PORTRAITS OF THE COUNTRIES IN ASIA SO FAR

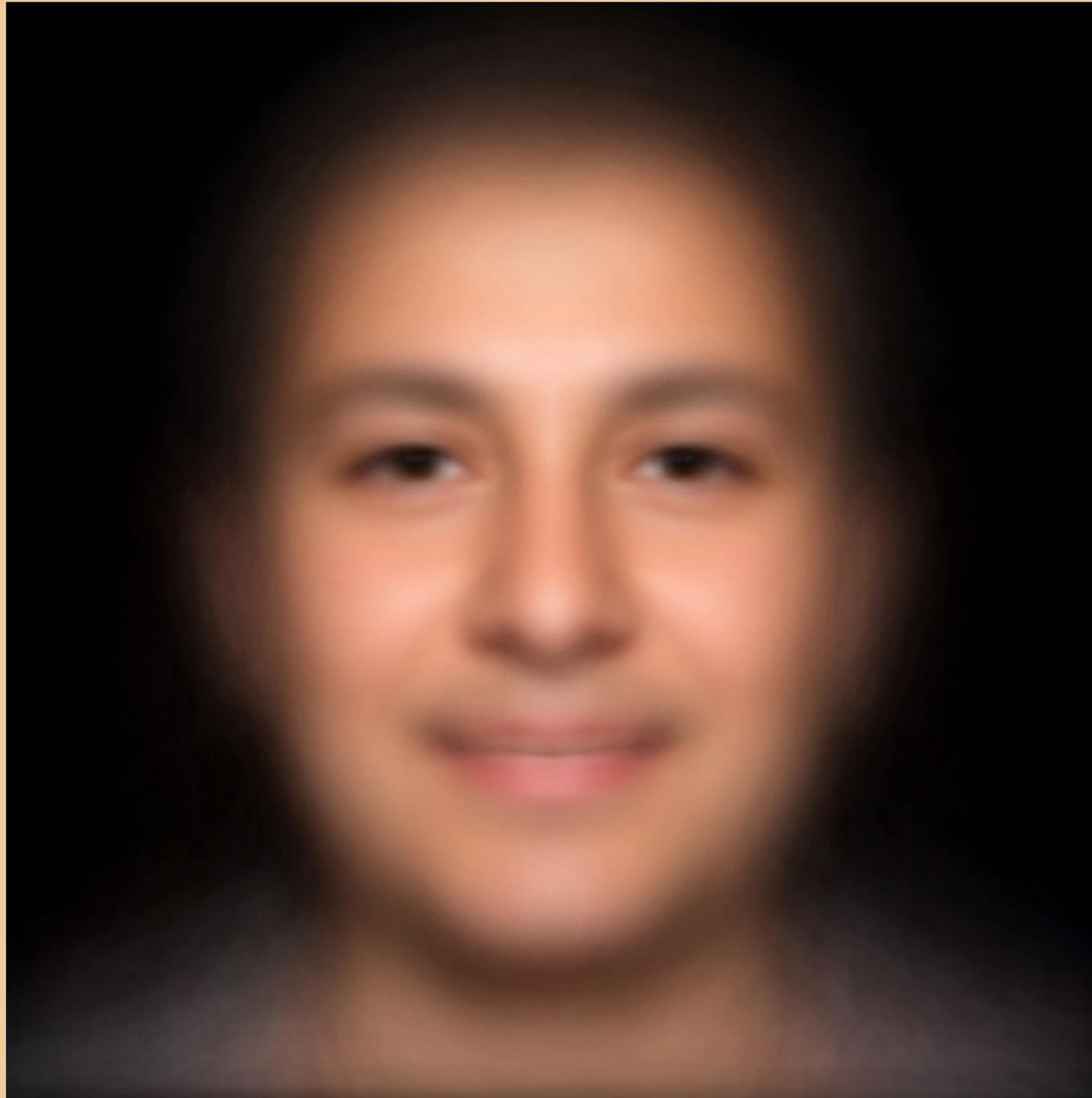


The following collective portraits of seven Asian countries I have superimposed from all the individual portraits I photographed there in a multi-stage process in such a way that each individual face is equally considered.









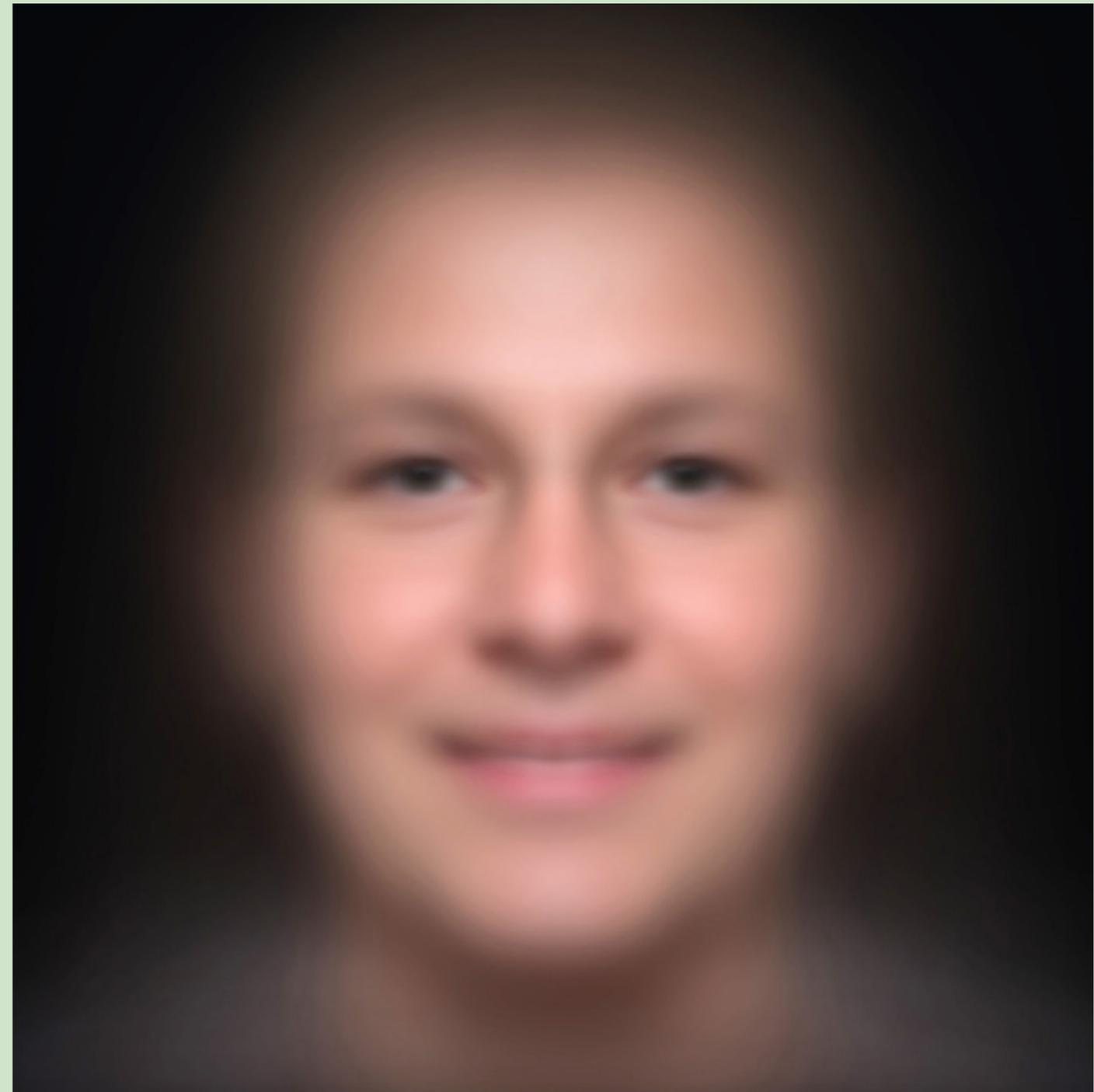
CONDITIONS

In these 25 years, the photo art process has been invited to many different venues in Europe. For example:

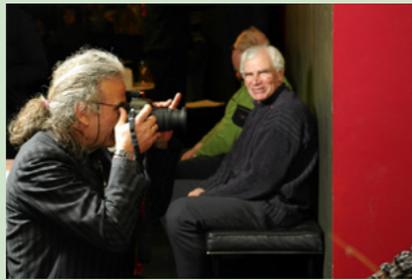
- Exhibitions at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, the Museum Art.Plus in Donaueschingen, the former Schussenried Monastery, the Städtische Galerie Ostfildern and the Turku Art Academy, Finland.
- Media art festivals such as the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück, in Split in Croatia, in Poznan, Poland, in Luxembourg and the World Youth Festival in Stuttgart.
- Openings or anniversaries of institutions such as the Welcome Centre in Stuttgart, Regens Wagner Absberg, the State Parliament in Stuttgart, the Ecumenical Centre in Stuttgart and the Mariaberg Monastery in Baden-Württemberg.
- Companies such as Daimler AG, Deutsche Post, TTR in Reutlingen, the Diakonie Klinikum in Stuttgart and the Fraunhofer Institute in Erlangen.
- Cities such as Donzdorf, Rottenburg, Marburg, Poitiers, Münsingen, Rottenburg, Korntal-Münchingen and Endingen am Kaiserstuhl.



FACE(S) OF EUROPE

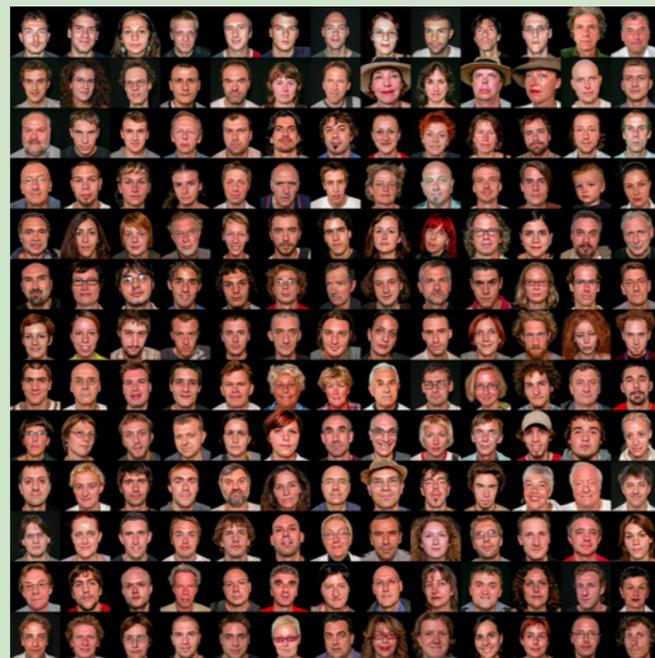


WORKING IN EUROPE



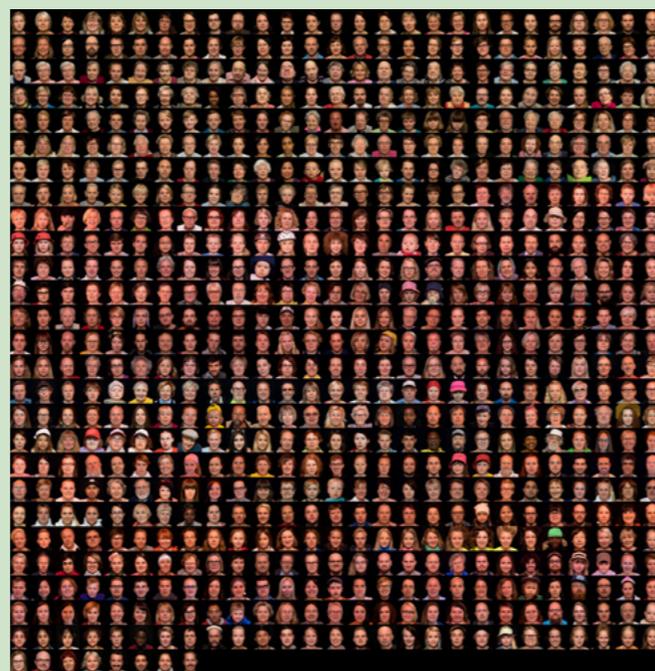
CROATIA

In 2003 I was invited to the „8th International Festival of Film and New Media in Split, Croatia“. During the festival days I was able to photograph over 200 visitors. Using my own real-time morphing process, the faces were projected onto a large screen as they slowly transformed into each other. My son Markus accompanied me on the trip. Split I perceived as a wonderful city.



FINLAND

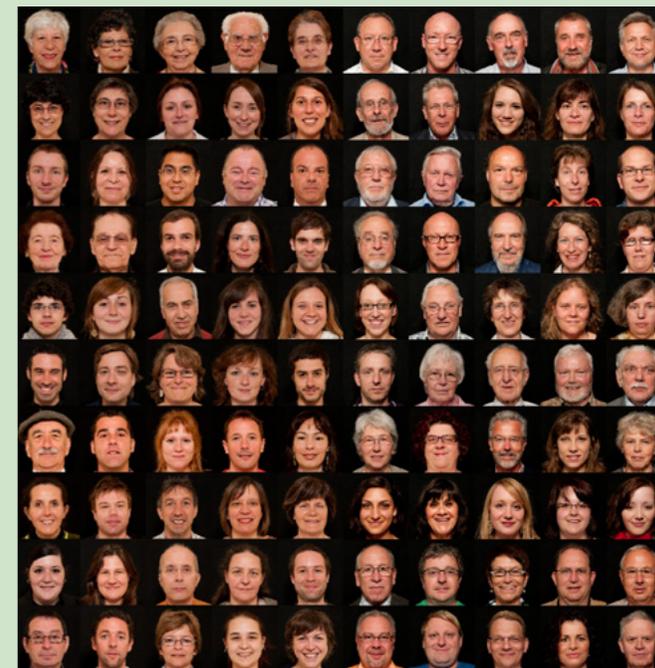
In 2014, Ulla Halkola invited us to Turku for the annual meeting of participants in my online art project „I AM WE_interactive image“. The tenth anniversary of the Finnish Phototherapy Organisation, which included some of my participants, took place there at the same time. The event, including the final exhibition at the Turku Art Academy, was called „Extended Self-portrait“. In this context, I was able to photograph 700 inhabitants and guests of the southern Finnish port city on several days and in different places.



FRANCE

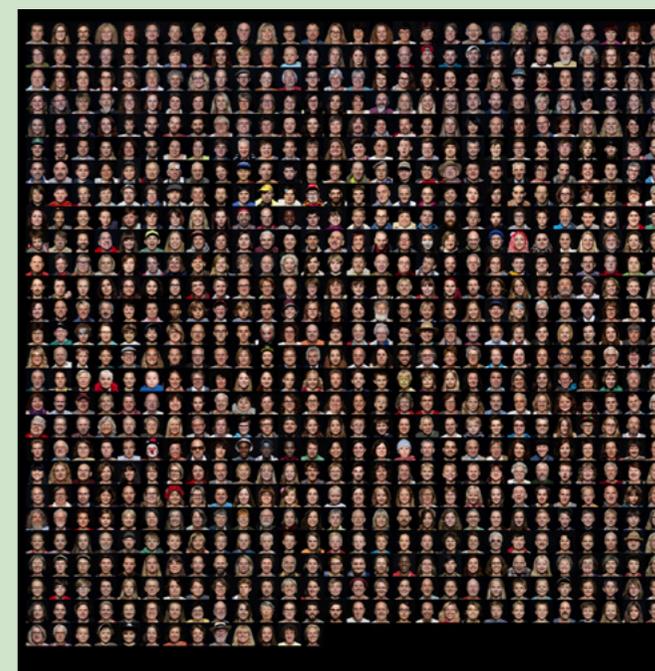
2011 Britta Sprengel from the Marburg Cultural Office in Germany called me to ask if I could imagine doing a piece with both Marburg and the French twin city of Poitiers. So I photographed both 50 people from the partnership association in Marburg and we both took the train to Poitiers to do the same with those involved there.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the town twinning Marburg-Poitiers, there was then an exhibition in both towns with all the individual portraits and the „Homo picto-marburgois“. It was one of the most interesting projects. Many thanks to Britta Sprengel for her ideas, her kindness and her great commitment.



GERMANY

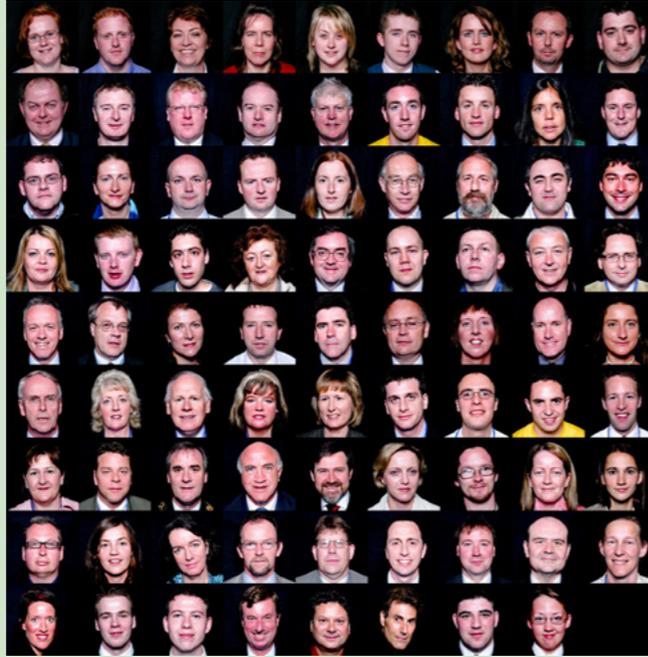
From countless projects that I was able to realise in Germany, I would like to show here the results of several days of photo shoots in Marienberg. Marienberg is a social institution in the southwest of Germany that takes care of physically disabled people. The art project was organised by Alex Klöß-Fleischmann. And so I had the opportunity to meet people with disabilities as well as their carers and family members while taking portraits. I will never forget that.



IRELAND

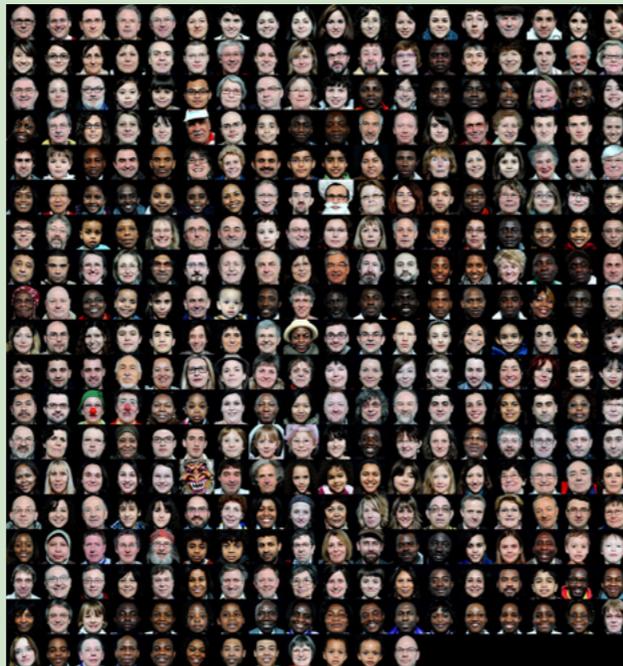
In 2004 I was invited to the European conference „e-Europe4all“ in Derry in Northern Ireland. So, I was able to photograph 80 people, mainly Irish, during the breaks. After the shootings I processed the images using a morphing software. Finally, the portraits were projected onto a large screen as they slowly morphed into each other. Next to me was Uri Geller, who on the same evening bent spoons, among other things, in front of the audience, without using any force.

It was very impressive for me to be in this country shaken by civil war, to see with my own eyes the conditions there.



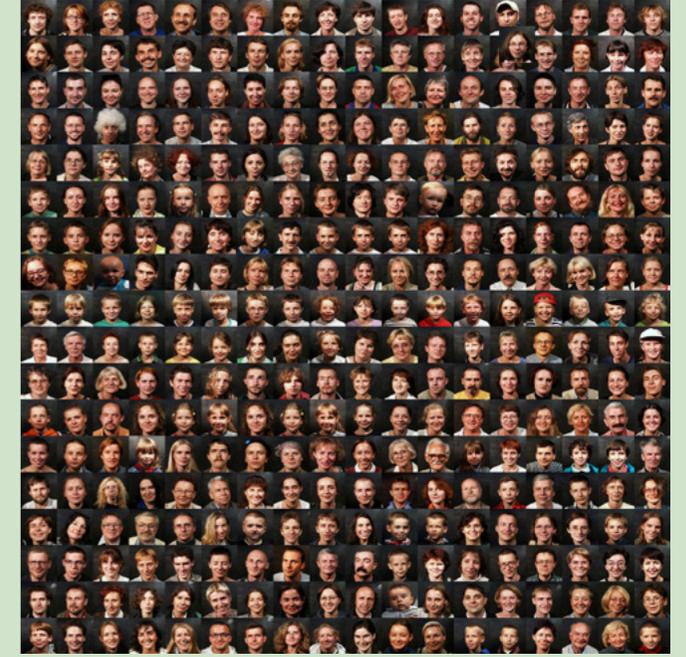
LUXEMBOURG

In 2011, I was invited by Pastor Volker Strauss on behalf of the Eglise Protestante du Grand-Duchee du Luxembourg to the „Festival des migrations“ in Luxembourg. Over several days, I was able to take portraits of more than 300 visitors from many nations at the church’s stand. The photos of the participants were projected onto a screen by means of real-time morphing, as one face slowly merged into the next. The festival was characterized by a diverse and polyphonic hustle and bustle, a coming and going and many encounters.



POLAND

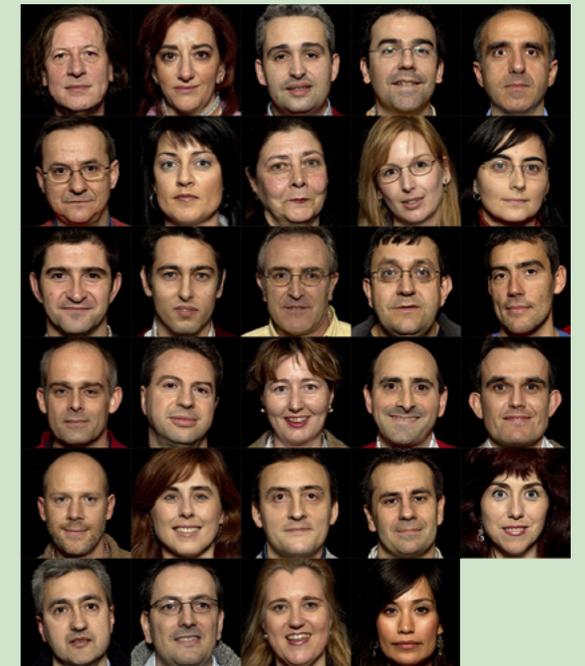
In 1998 I was invited to Poznan in Poland for my first assignment abroad. The media art festival „Inner Spaces“ took place in the State Museum in the middle of Poznan and more than 300 visitors were photographed over the festival period. Luigi Consalvo took the photos, and I calculated the morphing transitions from one face to another with the software Elastic Reality.



SPAIN

In 2004, Angela Titzrath-Grimm - an executive at Daimler AG - invited me to artistically accompany a workshop with employees in San Sebastian, Spain. So I portrayed all the participants of the course in a hotel and after the presentation of the finished work we had a lively conversation about the relationship between the individual and the collective.

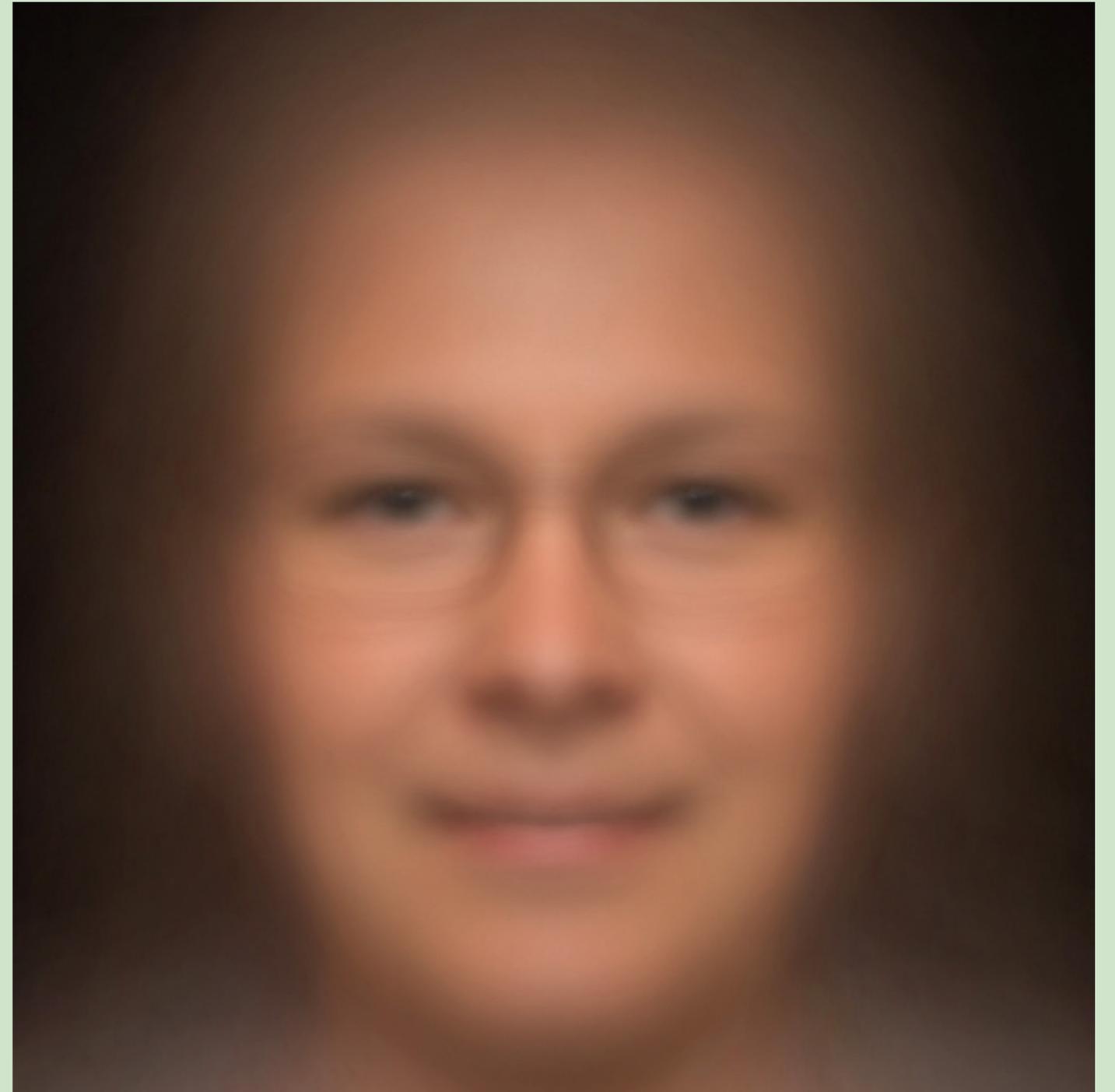
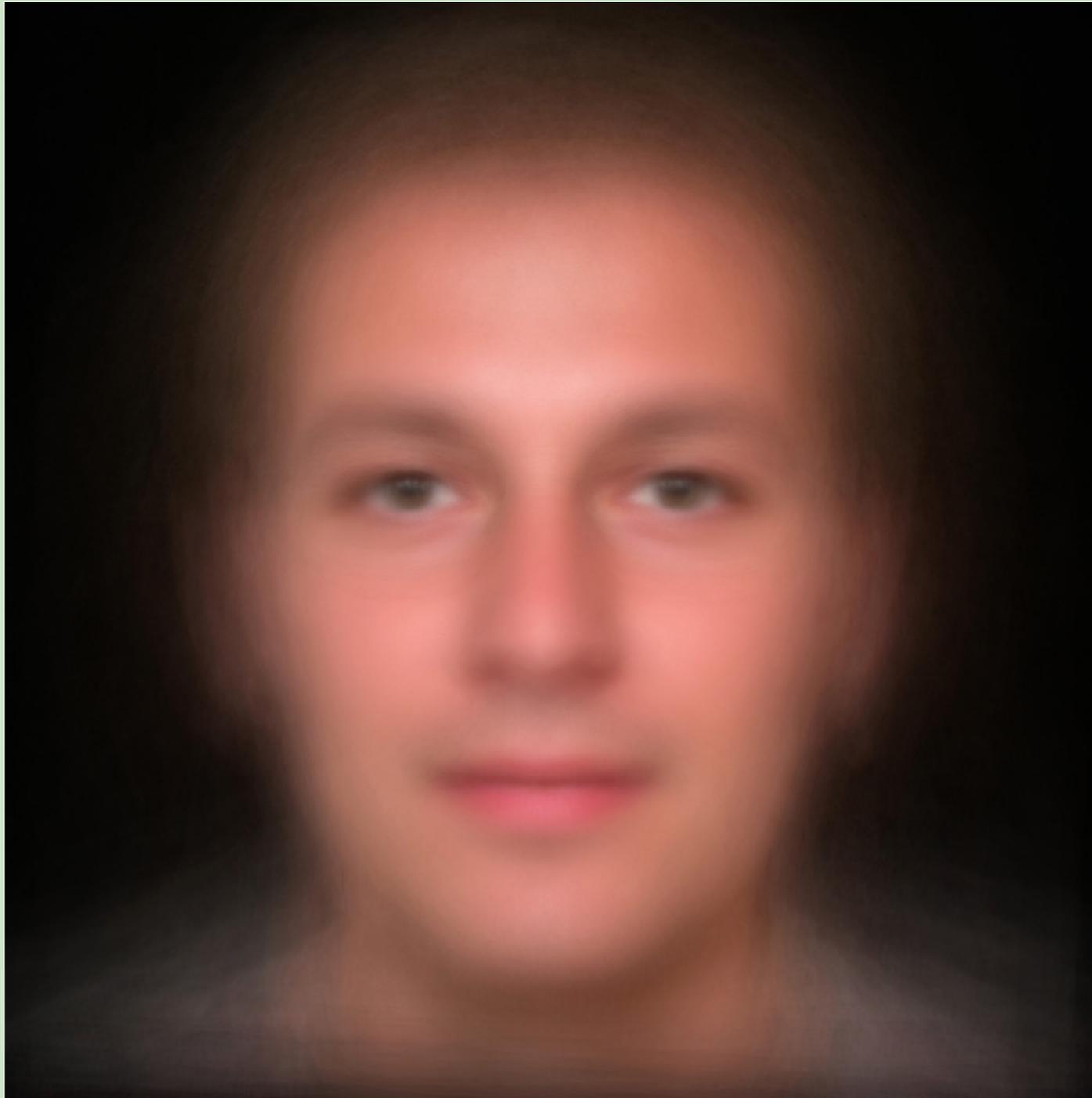
Ms Titzrath-Grimm saw my work in an exhibition and then contacted me to ask whether I could imagine bringing the work into the context of team-building events. I immediately agreed, as being close to people in their everyday working lives - often not necessarily achievable in exhibitions - is very valuable to me. Over a few years I was able to accompany several events in this way.

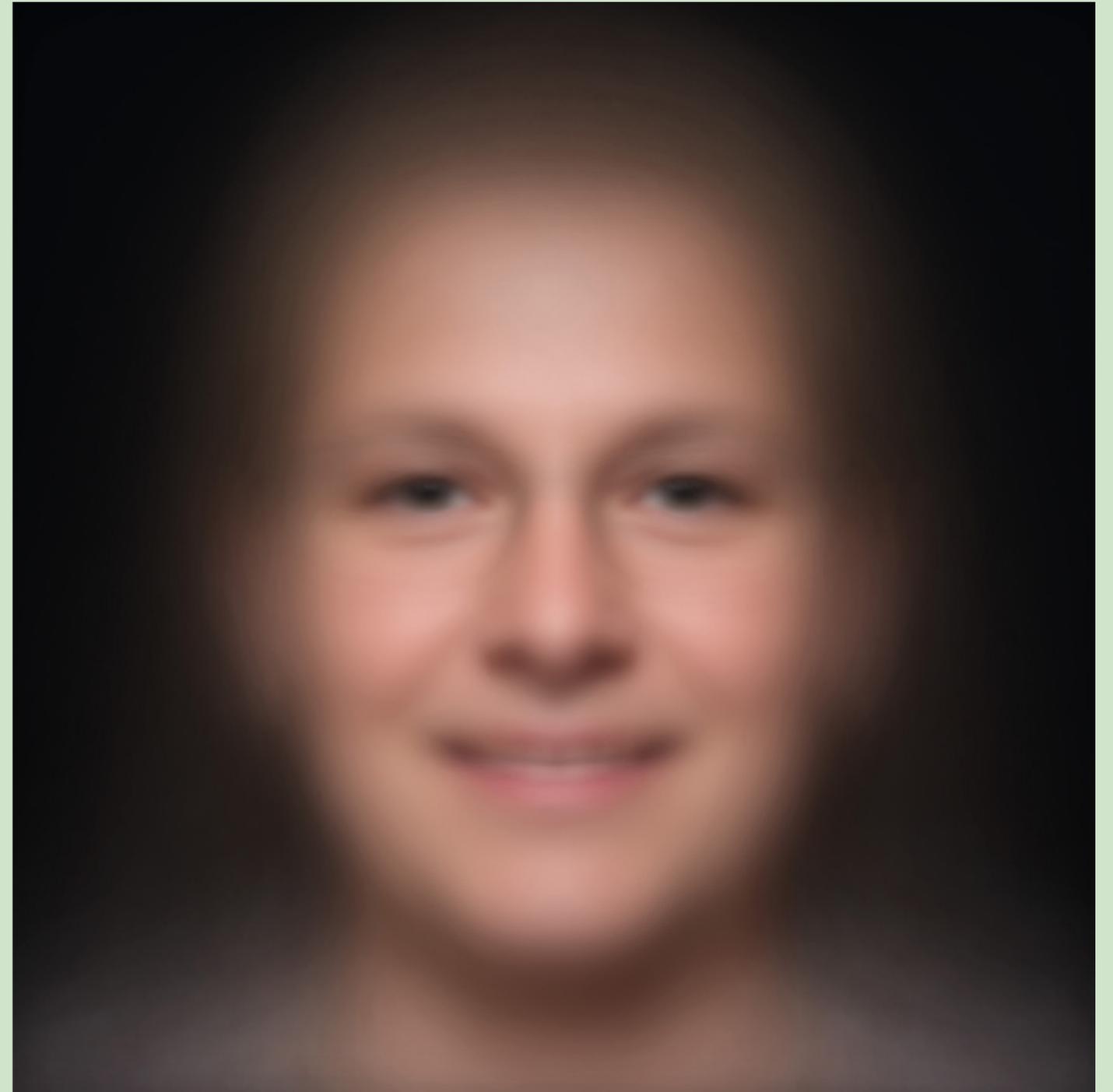


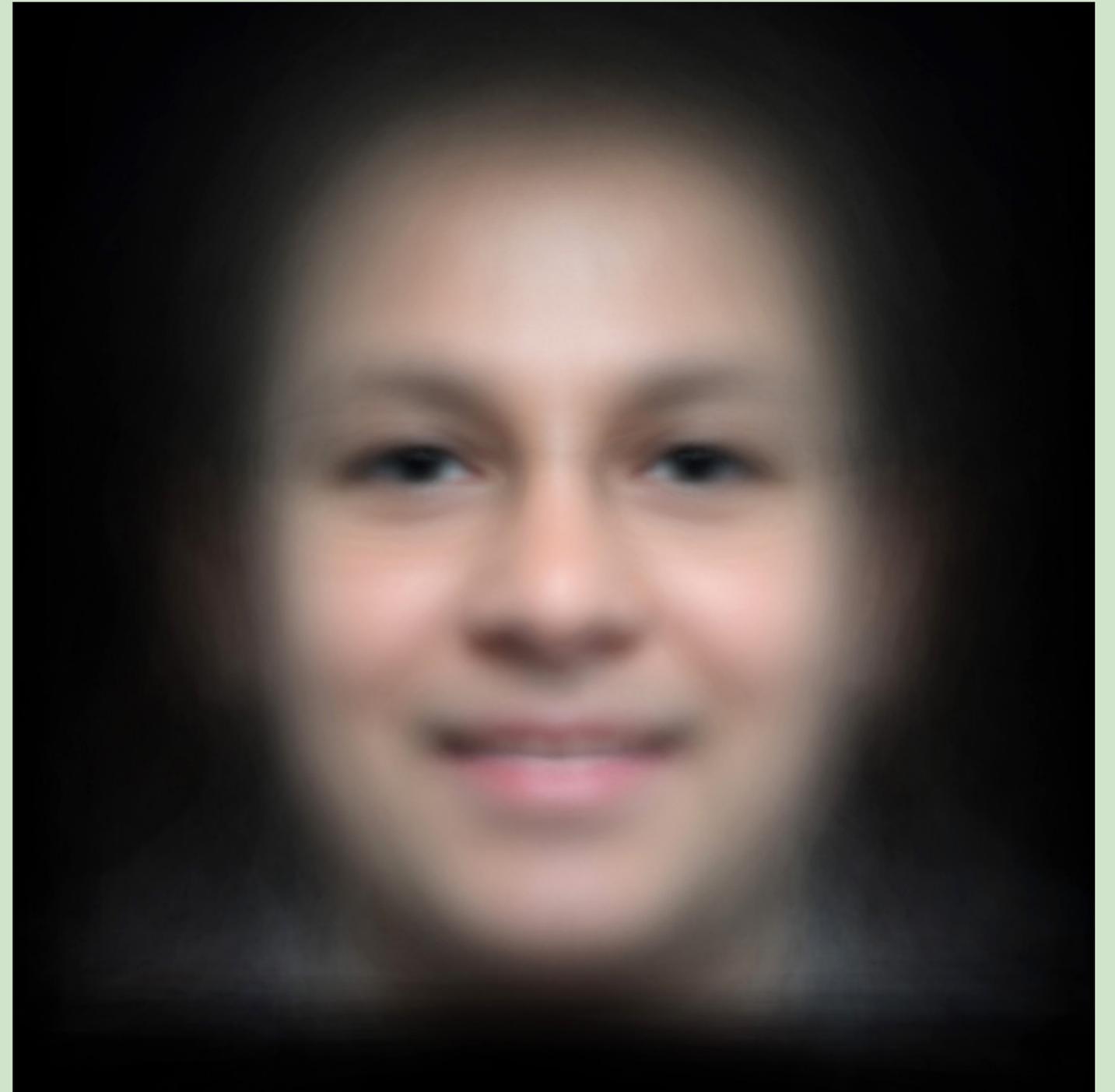
COLLECTIVE PORTRAITS OF THE COUNTRIES IN EUROPE SO FAR

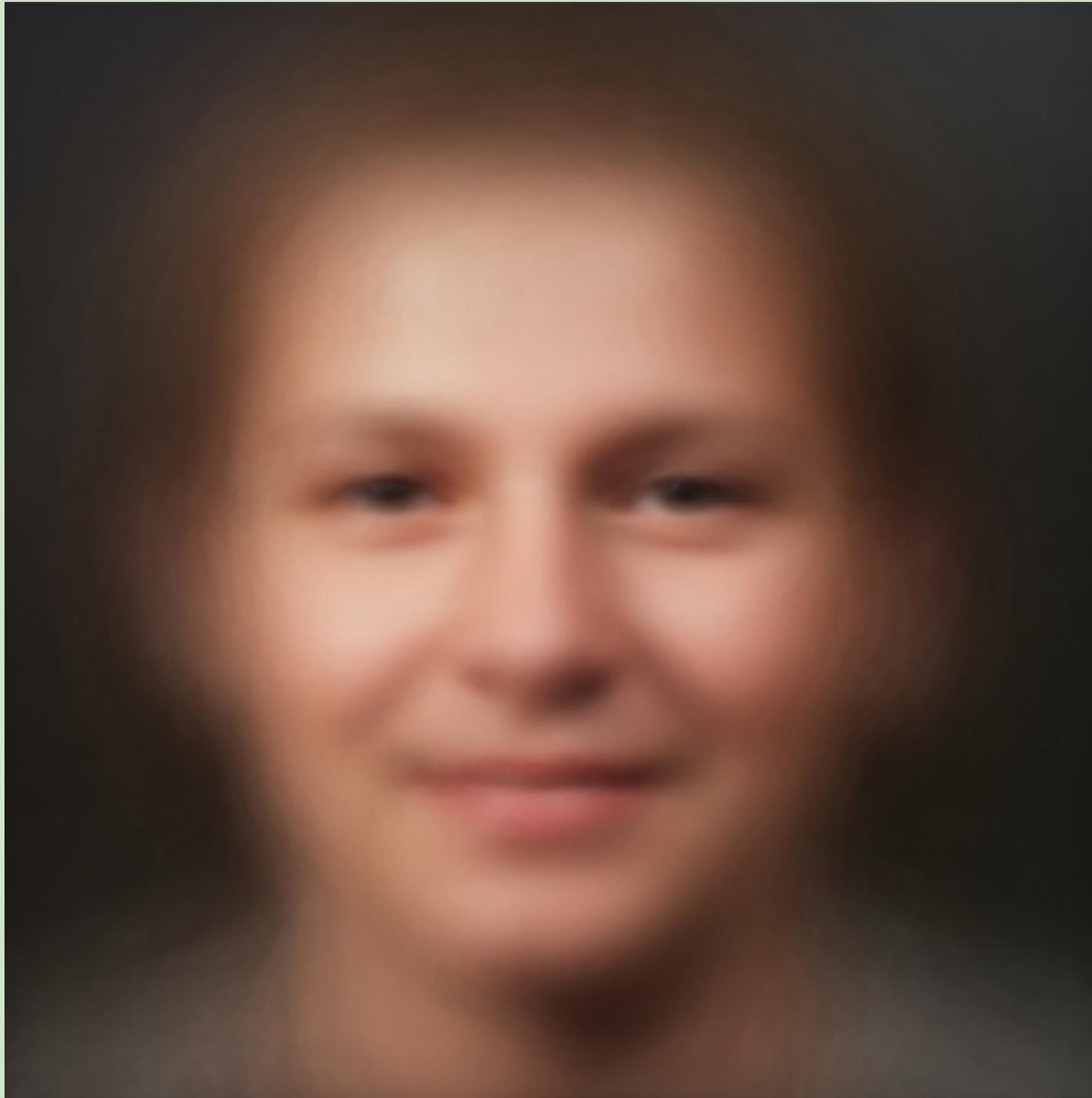


The following collective portraits of eight European countries I have superimposed from all the individual portraits I photographed there in a multi-stage process in such a way that each individual face is equally considered.

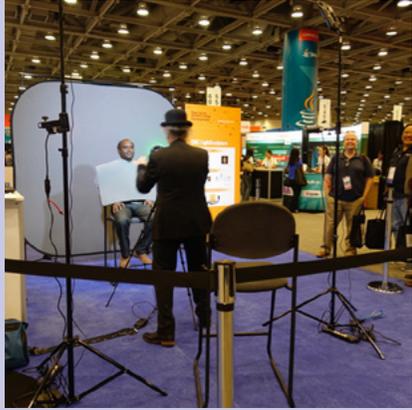








CONDITIONS



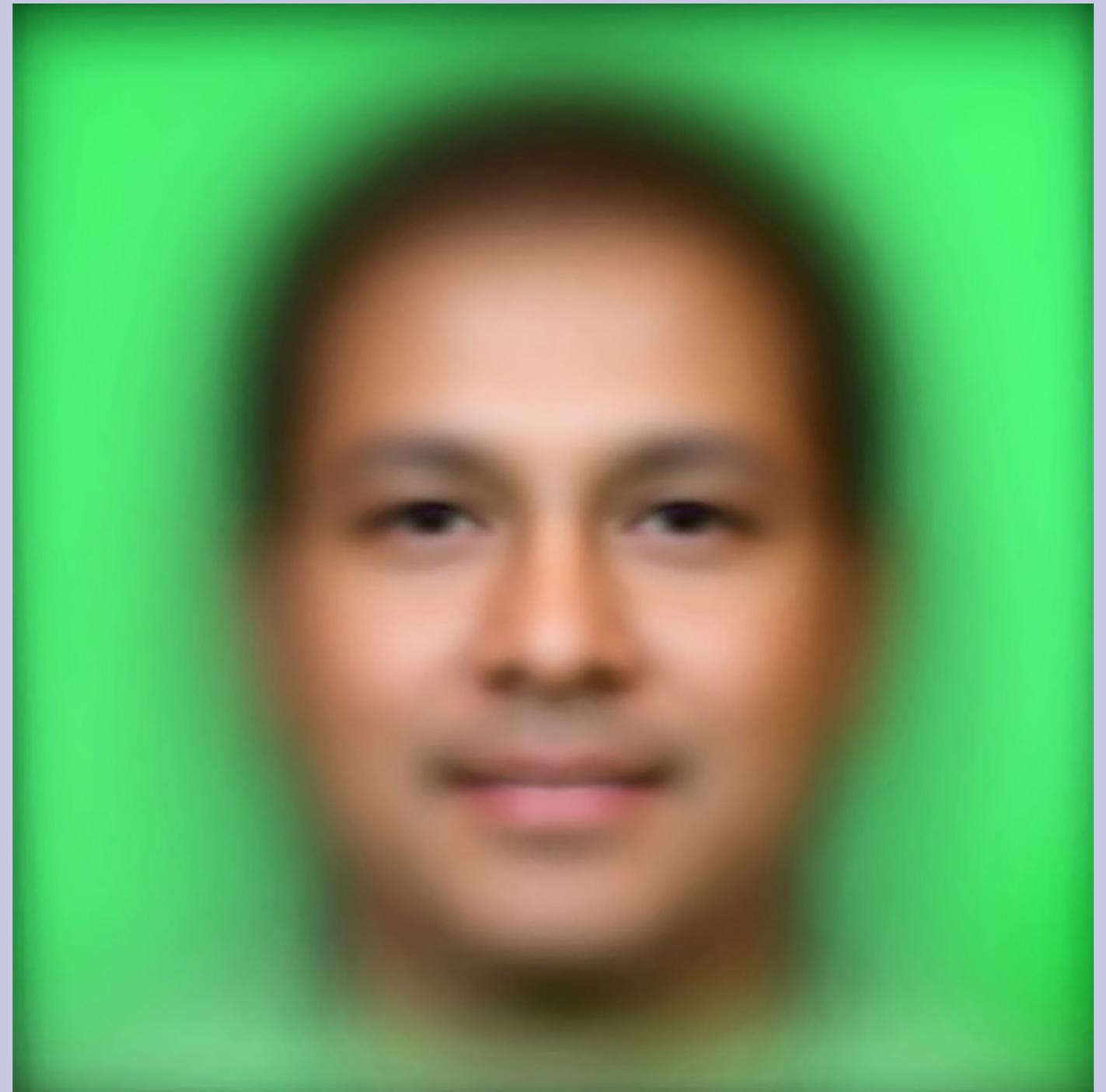
In 2015 and 2017, I was invited by Steve Chin with various works to JavaOne / OracleOne in San Francisco. In 2017, I portrayed over 550 visitors during the five days of the international symposium with a special camera technique in front of a green screen.

The portraits obtained were converted into lines by means of a specially developed software and milled into Plexiglas in corresponding machines. In this way they became part of a large sculpture by Mirja Wellmann.

So it happened that this is the only work up to now with faces in front of a green background. Visitors came from all over the world. The finished work was shown at the end of the event on the occasion of a community note.



FACE(S) OF NORTH AMERICA



OUTLOOK



This picture was taken at the opening of an exhibition entitled „Homo Schaparuikenellsis“ in the gallery of the city of Ostfildern, Germany. For this project I was able to photograph more than 1,000 inhabitants from many different population groups. Kindergarten and school children, people from a nursing home and with disabilities, various groups of foreign citizens and of course anyone who was interested.

This global photo art process is not finished. With this catalogue, I would like to give an insight into what has happened in this framework over the last 25 years.

Since the pandemic, in addition to my personal presence with a mobile photo studio, there are now two options available: the possibility of on-line photo shoots and that local photographers are on the road for me and take photos and provide me with the portraits.

At the top of my wish list are portraits of people from countries and continents that I have not yet been able to reach. Australia, Oceania and South America are definitely still missing.

Above all, however, is my interest in contact with people all over the world, in whatever country. Whether I meet them at art exhibitions or festivals, in companies, organisations, cities or privately.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Without the invitation to many events and the willingness of visitors to be photographed, such work could never come into being. And it is always individuals who have committed themselves to it.

In the context of FACE(S) OF AFRICA in 2021, I would also like to thank the photographers who travelled for the process and provided me with so many wonderful portraits. The contacts with them came at the request of staff from many Goethe Institutes and German embassies. Some foundations also willingly passed on their contacts to me.

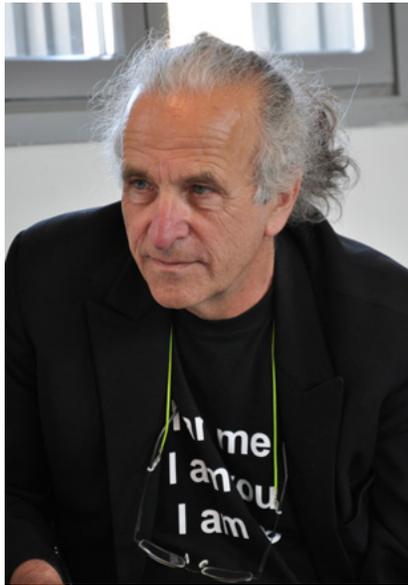
I also received support from other photographers in many processes in Germany as soon as the number of people to be photographed exceeded my own capacity. I have learned a lot from them. In addition, many people supported me in operating the portraits to prepare them for morphing.

I would like to thank all the developers of the various individual programmes for their good cooperation and especially the company InterFace AG from Munich for their manifold support.

And there are many people I would like to thank for their advice, their translations and their active support. I have also been lucky to find sponsors who have helped me financially.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all those who have let me photograph them. Being able to look into your 50,000 pairs of eyes answered many of the questions I have about the process: Every person is individually different but also the same, simply human.





CURRICULUM VITAE

The media artist Wolf Nkole Helzle works mainly with photography, video, installations and performances. Many of his works are participatory in nature: spectators, guests, passers-by and visitors become 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 explores this question in national and international contexts, such as the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, the Museum Art.Plus in Donaueschingen, the Ogaki Biennale in Japan and the international exhibition project media_city Seoul, South Korea. He was invited by the National Visual Arts Council, Lusaka, Zambia, the College of Art and Design, Beijing, China, Oracle Open World in San Francisco and many other international and European exhibition projects and festivals.

The artist became internationally known with his participatory photo art process „FACE(S) OF HUMANKIND“, for which he has collected well over 50,000 portraits of people in 32 countries and four continents since 1997. An archive that is constantly expanding. Using software specially developed for this project, Helzle superimposes thousands of individual portraits to create a collective face. The question: „Who are we?“ is his drive here wonderfully expressed in the statement of the philosopher Ken Wilber: „To understand the whole, one must understand the individual“.

Wolf Nkole Helzle (born 1950) studied painting and plastic at the University of Fine Arts in Kassel with Prof. Harry Kramer. He then worked in the hardware and software industry for twenty years. Since 1996 he is working as a freelance media artist.

2000: Lectureship for media art at the University of Applied Sciences for Design, Schwäbisch Hall. 2006/2007: Studio scholarship Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, lectureship video art at the Media University, Stuttgart. 2012: Teaching position at Macromedia Academy, Stuttgart. 2015: Teaching position at the College of Art and Design, Beijing, China.

Member of the Deutscher Künstlerbund and VG BildKunst.



Awards / Scholarships

2021 Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts of the State of Baden Württemberg
2012 Digital Content Fund MFG - Medien- und Filmgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg
2006 Atelierstipendium Künstlerhaus Stuttgart
2004 Project funding ifa - Institute for Foreign Relations, Stuttgart

Exhibitions (a selection)

2022 Kunstmuseum Reutlingen / Grafschaftsmuseum Wertheim
2021 FACE(S) OF AFRICA-process /visual music performance at the Frank, Reutlingen
2020 One Artist Show art Karlsruhe / Kunsthalle Messmer / Yangpyeong Museum of Art, South Korea
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 / Work show in the monastery Bad Schussenried / Photographic Centre PERI, Turku, Finland
2011 Festival des Migrations, Luxembourg
2009 Museum of Art and Technology, Schorndorf
2007 Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart
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

art fairs

art Karlsruhe 2014 - 2020 (One Artist Show) Gallery Kunsthaus Fischer, Stuttgart

collections (a selection)

Museum Art.Plus, Donaueschingen, Stadt Stuttgart, Landratsamt Tübingen, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten, Baden Württemberg, Städtische Galerie Ostfildern, College of Art and Design, Beijing

publications (a selection)

„ICH BIN WIR“, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg
„Homo universalis“, Museum Biedermann, Donaueschingen
„ICH BIN WIR“, Stiftung Regens Wagner

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Some of the small pictures made by other photographers
e.g. Luca Siermann (page 70), Victor S. Brigola (page 70 + 71,
Nuray Önoglu (page 92), Leif Piechowski (page 29, 57 + 77)

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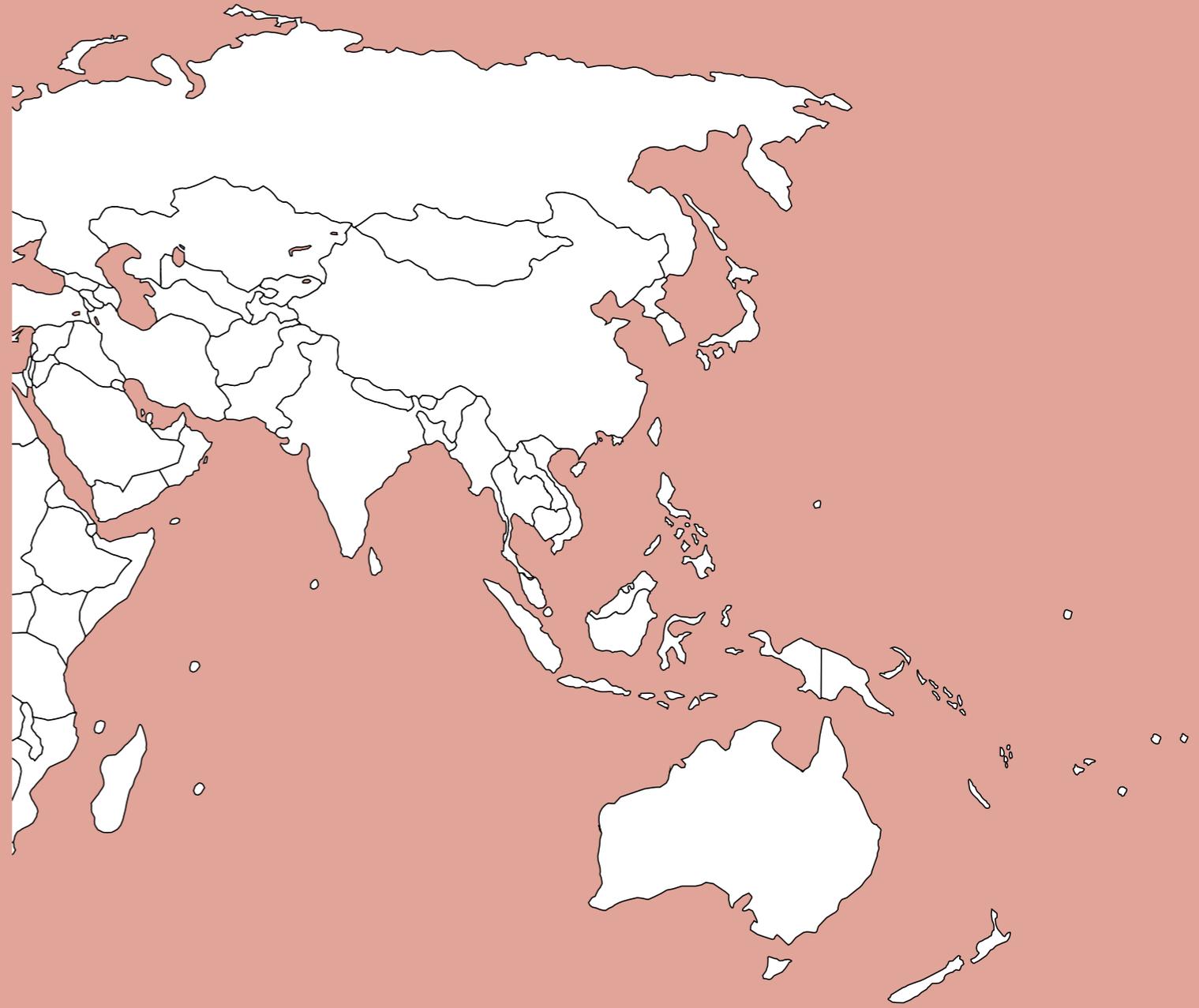
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Contact: mail@helzle.com

ISBN-Number: ISBN 978-3-00-072896-9

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As a media artist, I have been portraying people for 25 years, placing the individual images in the context of communities such as schools, clubs, organisations, cities, countries and continents. It is a serial work with always the same background photographed so that the respective faces are in the foreground.

There are already some catalogues about the work, but so far always in the context of specific events. For the 25th anniversary, I came up with the idea of this catalogue, in which individual and collective portraits from four continents and 32 countries are shown for the first time. I have deliberately kept the texts in the first person, as all the encounters are and were very personal.

This is not a scientific approach, but decidedly an artistic one. All the photo shoots have come about because of someone's interest in this participatory photo-art process.

At the same time as the printed version appears, the website www.faces-of-humankind.org is also online, which I have worked on for several months.

I wish the reader an enjoyable read and perhaps a gain in the question of who we are.

Wolf Nkole Helzle

www.faces-of-humankind.org
www.helzle.com



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