

Press Release

Rust

Bernd & Hilla Becher, Stephen Shore and LaToya Ruby Frazier

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Sprüth Magers, Berlin

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Sprüth Magers is pleased to present the group exhibition *Rust*, looking at the decline of the American Rust Belt through the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, Stephen Shore and LaToya Ruby Frazier. Their nuanced takes offer complementary views on the industrial Northeast and Midwest since the late 1970s to the present day, against a backdrop of wider societal changes in the face of drastic industrial decline.

The work of Bernd and Hilla Becher is characterized by a minimalistic presentation with an emphasis on form and architecture. In the late 1970s and early 1980s they made several journeys to the Rust Belt and documented the now obsolete industries of the area. From their time there, they present photographs of Blast Furnaces, the large structures responsible for the first stage in steel production, smelting iron ore so it can be further processed. Due to the challenges in accurately presenting the complex, tangling forms of pipes within Blast Furnaces, they became one of the artists' favorite structures to shoot, Hilla even nicknaming them 'octopus' given the extended pipes' resemblance to tentacles. The Bechers' life project as custodians and preservers of the industrial landscape, and of cataloguing and ordering their photographs, lies in stark contrast to the entropy they portray. Despite the lack of people in their depictions, the artists' rigor and apparent detachment nevertheless belies a deeply felt compassion for the buildings and structures they portray and the people associated with them.

In the early 1970s, Stephen Shore and Hilla Becher developed an artistic friendship, that was mutually influential. Whilst interested in this same pivotal point in history, Shore tells the story with a focus on the strain put on the people and towns of the Rust Belt in a series of photographs originally commissioned by *Fortune Magazine* in 1977 for the article 'Hard Times Come to Steeltown'. The streets in these color photographs appear unnervingly depopulated and deserted. By precisely controlling the coloration in his pictures, Shore combines the style of documentary photography with a personal, subjective viewpoint. The dead-pan expressions of the depicted business-owners and steelworkers speaks to the sense of dispossession experienced by those left behind. Shore's photographs allude to the fact that it was not only a material crisis people faced, but a spiritual one lasting for generations.

Working more recently, LaToya Ruby Frazier examines the political, social, and economic ramifications of the ongoing crises within the Rust Belt. Her practice is rooted in her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania, once a thriving suburb of Pittsburgh, which also becomes her subject. Her photographic project, *The Notion of Family* (2001–2014), depicts three generations

– herself, her mother, and her grandmother – against a backdrop of an all-pervading sickness, entwining economic racism and post-industrial decay. By reflecting upon her own circumstances, Frazier instills the work with a sense of poignancy. To her, the camera is a means for social change, utilising and expanding upon the traditions of black-and-white documentary photography.

Rust brings together three perspectives, that are joined in their desire to share an often-overlooked narrative. Capturing the industrial landscape at various phases of decay, their positions visually intertwine the complex realities of change over time.

Bernd (1931–2007) and **Hilla Becher** (1934–2015). Solo exhibitions include National Museum Cardiff, Wales (2019), Josef Albers Museum, Quadrat Bottrop (2018), Photographic Collection/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne (2016, 2013, 2010, 2006), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008), Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2005), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2004), K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf (2003) and 44th Venice Biennale (1990). Group exhibitions include Barbican Art Gallery, London (2014), Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2014, 2004), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013), Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010), Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2008), The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2005), UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2004), Tate Modern, London (2004, 2003) and Documenta XI, VII, VI and V, Kassel (2002, 1982, 1977, 1972). A major retrospective of their work will run at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York from July 15 to November 6, 2022 and travel to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from December 17, 2022 to April 2, 2023.

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Stephen Shore (*1947, New York City) lives in Tivoli, New York. Solo exhibitions include Museum of Modern Art, New York (2017–18), Huis Marseille, Amsterdam, and C/O Berlin (2016), Les Rencontres d'Arles (2015), Fundación Mapfre, Madrid (2014), Aspen Art Museum (2011), International Center of Photography, New York (2007), Sprengel Museum, Hanover (1995), Art Institute of Chicago (1984), Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (1977), and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1971). Recent group exhibitions include those at Luma Foundation, Arles (2018), Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris (2017), Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2017), Vancouver Art Gallery (2016), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2016), George Eastman House, Rochester (2015), Tate Modern, London (2014), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2014), Barbican Art Gallery, London (2014) and Der Rote Bulli: Stephen Shore und die Neue Düsseldorfer Fotografie at NRW-Forum, Dusseldorf (2010).

LaToya Ruby Frazier (*1982, Braddock, Pennsylvania) lives in Chicago, Illinois. Solo exhibitions include Kunsthalle Hamburg, (2022), California African American Museum, Los Angeles, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (both 2021), MUDAM, Luxembourg (2019), MAC's Musée des Arts Contemporains, Le Grand-Hornu, Hornu (2017), CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (2016), The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston and the Brooklyn Museum (both 2013). Group exhibitions include North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, The Philadelphia Museum of Art (both 2022), Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2021), Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Centre Pompidou, Paris (both 2020), Dallas Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (both 2019), Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris, Sprüth Magers, Los Angeles (both 2017) and the Folkwang Museum, Essen (2016).

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