

Press Release

Merlin Bauer — Grand Tour

A European Journey in Photos

Exhibition & Book Launch as part of the Photography Festival

Les Rencontres d'Arles

July 6 – August 2, 2026

Rue Augustin Tardieu 24, Arles | France

In July 2026, as part of Les Rencontres d'Arles, photographer and conceptual artist Merlin Bauer will present his new series “Grand Tour” in a historic building in the heart of Arles, right next to the ancient amphitheatre.

Les Rencontres d'Arles is one of the world's most important photography festivals. For over 50 years, the festival has transformed the southern French city into a world capital of photography every summer. The 57th edition will take place from 6 July to 4 October 2026; the opening week from 6 to 12 July is the most important gathering for industry professionals, collectors and photography enthusiasts from all over the world.

The exhibition is open from 7 July to 2 August 2026 (Tue–Sun, 11:00–18:00). Please contact us for further information about the artist, the supporting programme, or to request a review copy of the photobook ‘Grand Tour’, published by Hartmann Books.

About the „Grand Tour“

Since the Renaissance, European noble families have sent their sons on the Grand Tour – an educational journey across the continent designed to cultivate sophistication and sound judgement.

Merlin Bauer takes up this theme and travels through today's Europe with his camera: his journey takes him from London via Paris to Marseille and Barcelona. He crosses Switzerland and visits Milan, Turin and Genoa, the Ligurian port city with its interwoven layers of time; the rocky coast of Tuscany, where glamour and decay lie side by side, and on along the Via Aurelia to Rome; cities and landscapes weighed down by the burden of their own transformation.

His photographs do not show picturesque views — they show a built, reshaped, sometimes overburdened Europe. What remains when one sets aside the tourist's gaze? Bauer finds beauty in the incidental: in the seam between old and new, in the life of a street corner, in the chance encounter of infrastructure and sky.

The photographic works depict billboards, fences and high-rises, asphalt roads and box-like residential blocks, staked-out building volumes, and both artificial and historical landscapes, along with the people moving within them. They explore the boundaries between order and chaos, structure and surface — and, in the very tradition of the Grand Tour, invite exploration and reflection.

"The Grand Tour is regarded as the origin of tourism and, during the Renaissance, was reserved for English aristocrats as an educational journey through Europe. When the photographer and conceptual artist Merlin Bauer now titles a series of works after this concept, he travels through our European cities and landscapes with a sober eye. What state have we left them in? How does the new relate to the existing? How do landscape and architecture shape our perception today? What happens when designed order meets uncontrolled growth? And what beauty lies in chance?"

— Dr. Jörg Biesler (Deutschlandfunk / WDR)

Book Presentation & Opening

To coincide with the exhibition opening on 6 July 2026, the photo book "Grand Tour" will be published by Hartmann Books. The book features around 80 images and texts in three languages (German, English, French) — with contributions from Dr Jörg Biesler (Deutschlandfunk, WDR), Dr Magdalena Holzhey (Kaiser-Wilhelm-Museum Krefeld), Simone Klein (Art Advisor & Appraiser) and Prof. Jörg Leiser (PBSA Düsseldorf / BeL).

Michael Wiesehöfer is overseeing the production of the exhibition.

About Merlin Bauer

Merlin Bauer (b. 1974) is an Austrian conceptual artist who has lived and worked in Cologne since 1999. For over 25 years, he has been developing projects that stimulate social debate on urban, architectural and cultural-political structures.

With the multi-award-winning social sculpture "Liebe deine Stadt – Architektur & Demokratie" (Love Your City – Architecture & Democracy) and the 26-metre-long "Liebe deine Stadt" sculpture of the same name, he has created an art project that has gained significant prominence in international art and architectural discourse over the past 20 years.

Since 2024, he has also been devoting himself intensively to photography once again and is working on the extensive series "Grand Tour".

In 2025, the KOLUMBA Museum in Cologne acquired several key works by Bauer, including the "Strandbox" and the "Liebe deine Stadt – Museum", with the support of the Kunststiftung NRW.

Further information: www.merlinbauer.de

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