



ShadowHome
Bastienne Schmidt
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In *ShadowHome*, Bastienne Schmidt, a German-born photographer based in New York, creates an autobiographical photographic meditation on “home”, from both personal associations and through a wider exploration of a returnee’s vision of contemporary Germany. Her diverse collection of black and white photographs evokes the randomness of memory. Captions are left until the end, allowing the reader time to explore the visual references free of preconceptions. Two essays, one on the many connotations – past and present – of “*heimat*” (home), the other a description by a fellow German, living in the United States, of his own feelings towards his birthplace, are placed at the centre of the book.

Divided into four chapters, the images are loosely grouped in what it is tempting to define as personal, historical, portraiture and pastimes or place. A rain-swept window-pane, a pile of family photographs, a doll’s house and a rumpled cushion open the book. Across a double page, a tender portrait of a child being breastfed is a significant self-portrait of the author. Reproduced as they are, these images resonate with meaning – an image of tree roots nestles among other pictures explaining her own sense of rootedness. Home, the author suggests, is our place of belonging and of rest, a



material construct and emotional centre, created by bonds of love and family.

Chapter two explores Germany’s history with pictures of an East German guard’s uniform, a stark interior of Nazi architect Speer’s studio and the oblique concrete landscape of a Nazi stadium and concentration camp. In chapter three the swimmer of the cover, a sturdy Germanic cliché, is grouped with hip young things in Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz, a young

Muslim woman, revellers at the love parade, the Brandenburg Gate and Berlin’s new architecture – collectively denoting signifiers of the future. In a mix of references – a picnic, a Chinese restaurant, German sweets, tourist spots – the final chapter is a take on leisure time and diversity of life in contemporary Germany.

Schmidt’s accumulated images, stylistically playful, both abstract and literal, are not particularly artful in themselves, but arranged as they are and combined with two thought-provoking essays, they are greater than the sum of their parts. This book is an interesting exploration of the artist’s own sense of belonging and a suggestion of what it is to be German in the 21st century. **SW**

