



Book to the future

Gerry Badger reports back from Kassel Fotobuch, a conference dedicated to photographs in book form, drawing together classics from the past together with new concepts in digital and self-publishing

Above: Pekka Turunen's classic book *Against the Wall* was picked out for special recognition at the Kassel Fotobuch conference.

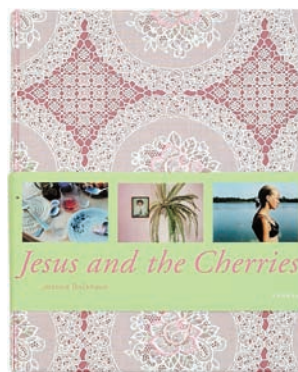
Below: *The Roma Journeys*, by Joakim Eskildsen, who impressed Gerry Badger at the conference.

The second Kassel Fotobuch Conference took place on 15–17 May in the pleasant spa town, almost slap bang in the middle of Germany. The event is just finding its feet but, judging by the enthusiasm of the audiences, is fast becoming a fixture on the international photo scene. Although most of those attending were from Germany, speakers had come from Denmark, Finland, Holland, America, India, and Britain.

Directly translated, the theme of the conference was the 'Uncompromising Photobook', but is more usefully understood as the 'Independent Photobook' or perhaps the 'Uncommercial Photobook', because in these

hard times there was a lot of talk about the economics of the business. The emphasis was thoroughly practical, so along with talking about the actual work, most presenters also covered how they raised finance and how their books were sequenced, designed, printed and distributed.

Jeff Ladd, owner of the photobook blog 5b4, talked about his new enterprise Errata Books, which publishes studies of well-known but rare (and therefore expensive) photobooks, making the full content available as cheaply as possible. Even he conceded that the current climate made them more expensive than he would like. Cologne bookseller



Above: *Blue Book* by Dayanita Singh and *Jesus and the Cherries* by Jessica Backhaus, both of whom were at the event.

Markus Schaden continued the look at international photo-events, and had audience in stitches with his droll account of his business.

Online books

Outside the lecture theatre Schaden had a stall, and was doing brisk business, and various other dealers, of both rare and regular photobooks, were also there. Renowned figures from the photo world, such as Andreas Müller Pohle, editor of *European Photography*, conducted portfolio reviews and there was an exhibition of book dummies, entered for a competition in which the prize was a publishing contract. The entries were of a high standard, conceptually and also technically, thanks to online publishers such as Blurb.

The effect of the internet and digitisation were widely discussed. Katja Stuke and Oliver Sieber from Cologne talked about their Böhm/Kobayashi publishing project, demonstrating a variety of photobooks and issues of their magazine, *Böhm*. They deal mainly with aspects of youth culture, producing small, cheaply produced print runs. Not only



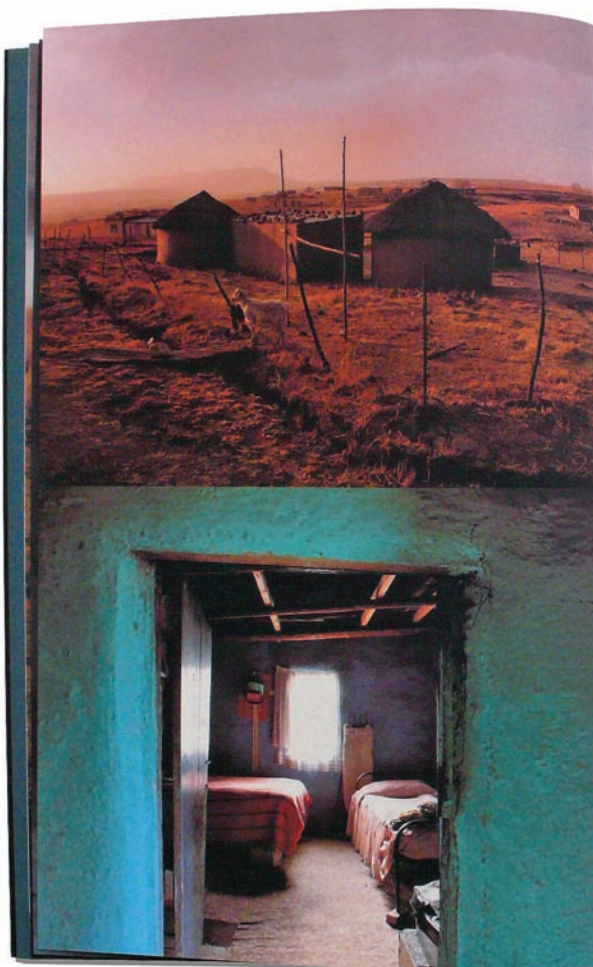
'Magdanz beamed as he showed off the software that allows viewers to virtually "turn" the page – yet another bit of one-upmanship for smug iPhone users.'



does this make their publications viable, it gives them a cheap, throwaway style that appeals to their market.

At the other end of the scale, one of Germany's most respected photographers, Andreas Magdanz, demonstrated how his classic book *Dienststelle Marienthal*, which now sells for hundreds in the conventional format, will soon be available as an iPhone application for only €4. Magdanz beamed as he showed off the software that allows viewers to virtually 'turn' the page – yet another bit of one-upmanship for smug iPhone users.

Fotobuch also hosted small exhibitions too, most notably images from the great *Against the Wall*, by the Finnish photographer Pekka Turunen. A retrospective display of Stephen Gill's books was also a showstopper and, because he unfortunately could not attend, I gave two short introductions to his work. I also gave a paper, about aspects of narrative in the photobook.



Lecture season

All together, the many and various lecturers covered most aspects of the photobook and showed some very stimulating photography. I particularly enjoyed the talks by: Jessica Backhaus, from New York; the Dutch duo WassinkLundgren, based in London and Beijing respectively; the veteran Dane, Krass Clements; the young Dane, Joakim

Eskilden, now based in Finland; and Dayanita Singh, from New Delhi, plus, of course, Andreas Magdanz. All of these photographers talked about the difficulties, as well as the pleasures of making photobooks, but they all shared a fierce determination to make their individual contribution to the oeuvre.

The Fotobuch organiser, Dieter Neubert, and his team are to be

congratulated for their organisation and hospitality. As Singh put it in her Saturday afternoon talk, people had been so fired up by Friday's opening events that they had continued 'talking and arguing about photobooks, drunk out of our minds, until two in the morning'. She was exaggerating the drunken aspect, but on the Saturday evening the discussions continued even later. **BJP**

Top: A spread from Stephen Gill's *Hackney Wick*. A special display of Gill's many photobooks was shown at Kassel.

Above: A spread from Joakim Eskilden's *iChicken Moon*.

Online

Find out more about Kassel Fotobuch at kasselerfotoforum.de.