



Andri Pol – Poliversum 27/06/–06/12/2026

Exhibition Leaflet English

As one of the most influential Swiss photojournalists of the past 40 years, Andri Pol (b. 1961) has received multiple accolades for his work. Over this period his photographs have played a key role in defining the visual identity of print media outlets in Switzerland and other countries, including *Zeit Magazin*, *DU*, *Das Magazin*, *Facts* and *GEO*.

The exhibition *Poliversum* marks the photographer's 65th birthday with a major retrospective in his honour. It aims to showcase both the essence of Pol's photography and the sheer diversity of his thematic interests in a career stretching back to the late 1980s. There is an emphasis on the genres of photographic reportage and portraiture, as well as on Pol's observations of daily life from around the world.

Some of his photographic projects have been commissioned, while others – including many of his equally successful book publications – have been pursued on his own initiative. He was also given the opportunity to curate long-running picture columns in several magazines with a wide readership. Pol has spent decades honing the composition and grammar of his photos with their recognisably assured style and complex visual wit. *Poliversum* provides an overview of these diverse pictorial 'poliverses' by structuring them into insightful thematic sections: Origins, Where is Japan, Global Village, Art Worlds, Gruezi, Inside CERN (all in Room 1); Images of Humanity (Room 2); Picture Columns and Magazine Covers (Room 3); and Publications (Foyer).

Pol's images combine depth with subtle visual wit and a keen sense of the unusual in everyday life. They reflect not only on our contemporary world but also, closer to home, on definitions of nationality and terms such as 'Swissness'. He records people, places and situations, mingling perceptiveness with an irreverent, tongue-in-cheek attitude. His portraits appear spontaneous while at the same time suggesting exact composition; his photographic reportages offer up surprising angles on social, cultural and political realities and identities. Pol's ability to precisely capture complex themes makes him one of the most arresting voices in documentary photography today. His photographic universe invites viewers to marvel, chuckle and make discoveries – it is visually intelligent, closely attuned to the world and full of an idiosyncratic, independent spirit.

Pol recently made a living bequest of his photographic holdings to Fotostiftung Schweiz; the transfer of this archive – which contains both analogue and a significant amount of digital material – has laid the groundwork for determining how the foundation could approach hybrid archives of this kind.

Origins

Pol's work has always been driven in large part by the curiosity that leads him to immerse himself in various milieus, which can range from an entire country to a particular community or the life led by an individual artist or celebrity. However, early in his career he also started cultivating his deep interest in the genres of photographic portraiture and photojournalism, both in Switzerland and abroad.

Whether on trips to Tibet, to a shooting match in Paderborn or to Swiss mountain farms or on visits to former farmhands, farmers and shepherds in a retirement home for agricultural labourers, he was constantly experimenting, which enabled him to create highly individual pictorial compositions and conventions while still a young photographer. One aspect of this was his sense of the ironies and absurdities of everyday life – still a distinctive feature of his work today. Certainly, what sets these photos apart from his later series is his initial decision to express himself exclusively through black-and-white photography. Some of his early works were only published much later when they figured in the books *Festland* (Mainland, 1993) and *24 Knechte, 5 Bauern und 1 Hirt* (24 Farmhands, 5 Farmers and 1 Shepherd, 2021).

Where is Japan

Pol has visited Japan multiple times since 1994, often on assignment from magazines to carry out photo-journalistic work or shoot portraits. He would then make use of the fact that he was 'already there' to devote some time on his own account to the themes and concerns that intrigued him. This allowed him, bit by bit, to develop a 'kaleidoscopic view' of the ways that Japanese society sees itself, ranging from traditional influences to hyperfuturism. His photographic interests embraced individual groups of people as well as the built environment with its specific codes and architectural forms. In 2010 he brought together these visual studies of Japanese society in his book *Where is Japan*.

Global village

The 'global village' is a term first coined by media theorist Marshall McLuhan in his book of the same name. He was referring to the increasingly globalised world of late modernity, which is coalescing into a 'village' through electronic modes of networking such as the internet. More generally, it can also be understood as an umbrella term for the growing convergence of aesthetic codes around the globe.

Today, our channels of communication, work and leisure environments, and individual and collective identities are often largely determined by consumption and techniques for optimising ourselves.

Over the last few decades, all of these areas have been greatly affected by just a few private global corporations, whose closed platforms impose uniformity on the realms of possibility, thereby limiting what can or cannot be said and done. These phenomena are having a similar impact not only on the world of communications but also on the built environment.

Glass skyscrapers are found everywhere, their residents resembling each other not only in terms of their clothing but also with respect to their work and leisure activities. The 'work hard, play hard' ethos has become the core expression of a late-capitalist lifestyle. This is visually embodied by the members of the professional classes who optimise themselves on bike ergometers in their lunch breaks.

The global travel and tourism industry presents us, as visitors, with 'tourist attractions' and 'sights' that we can exploit as 'photo opportunities'. The idea is to attract attention by sharing these on social media in real time, where possible. One hub for many of the above phenomena is China, where Pol has documented developments on his numerous trips.

The idea of the trade fair as a temporary but recurring marketing opportunity is based on the original format of the first-ever World's Fair in 1851, which sought to provide access to both commercial and cultural content for the widest possible audience. Many different kinds of trade fairs are held today, covering a vast range of interests: from agriculture, art and weapons to gardens, fitness and beauty. They form the ideal backdrops for Pol's photographic observations and commentaries.

Yet the concept of the global village can also be viewed in a wider sense with respect to the growth of networking at the planetary level. Climate change and its consequences for global mass migration are a prime example of this. Since 2015, the international Nansen Initiative has been promoting an agenda to improve protections for climate refugees who have been displaced from their home regions by natural disasters and the effects of climate change. In preparation for a forthcoming publication, Pol has already visited many of the affected regions in South Asia, Oceania and Africa, taking photos that record the specific triggers underpinning migration.

Kalmykia

Since 1992, Kalmykia has been an autonomous republic in southern European Russia. Situated on the north-western coast of the Caspian Sea, its

landscape is dominated by steppes. The sole city is the capital of Elista, which has some 100,000 inhabitants. The Kalmyks are a Mongolian people who migrated to the Lower Volga in the early 17th century and settled there. As the only majority Tibetan Buddhist community in Europe, they follow the Dalai Lama as their spiritual leader.

A unique facet of recent Kalmyk history is the establishment of chess as its national sport. Children are taught the board game at a young age, and it is a designated part of the regular school curriculum. Pol travelled around the region in 2003 for the *Tages-Anzeiger* magazine, documenting a part of the world that rarely appears in the media.

Bollywood

The portmanteau word Bollywood, a combination of 'Bombay' and 'Hollywood', denotes India's Hindi film industry, which is still the dominant form of cinema in the country and is one of the biggest such industries in the world. Most Bollywood films can be put in the 'masala' genre. These films have a typical runtime of between two and four hours, including an interval in the middle.

Switzerland and its mountains are very popular in India, largely thanks to the Bollywood films that have been shot in the country since the late 1960s. In a number of these films, the dance interludes take place against the backdrop of wintry peaks, romantic alpine lakes and castles and typically Swiss village settings. One side effect of this has been the rapid growth in the volume of Indian tourists wanting to experience this scenery 'for real' and see it with their own eyes. Pol makes several visits to film sets on location to document this pop cultural phenomenon in its Indo-Swiss guise.

Gruezi

The 2006 publication *Gruezi* became a huge hit on the Swiss photobook market within weeks of coming out, and a reprint was needed after just a few months. It is a synopsis of Pol's photographic study of his native country in 350 images: his associative sequence of pictures zigzags its way through Switzerland, with the only informational element provided by postcodes and place names.

The selection presented in the exhibition brings Pol's explorations up to date by including further visual universes that are able to bring out the exotic aspects of everyday life – a combination, once again, of commissioned press photographs and pictures taken on the artist's own initiative. In the Swiss context too, *Poliversum* affords a non-judgemental synoptic view of elements of popular and high culture: images of traditional customs are directly juxtaposed with pictures of bankers at a wine reception. A photograph of anti-capitalist protests in Geneva collides with

images of 'refined' society in German-speaking Switzerland, such as the picture taken at an etiquette class.

Inside CERN

For the 2014 book *Inside CERN: European Organization for Nuclear Research*, Pol operated as a visual anthropologist carrying out field research at the home of the particle accelerator. The world of CERN has something of a small-town atmosphere, and this milieu serves as the infrastructure for an extremely specific kind of 'gated community' – namely, a global elite of particle physicists who have been working and conducting research on the outskirts of Geneva for decades.

Art worlds

Places associated with creating, engaging with or buying and selling art – be it an artist's studio, a *Kunstgiesserei*, an art fair, an art college or a museum – are key points of reference for Pol and a consistent element in his work; the strong pull they exert is instrumental in prompting him to photograph them.

In geographical terms, he is active internationally, with a particular focus on China, whose contemporary art scene fascinates him both as a photographer and as an art lover. Time and again, he is able to gain intimate access to places that are generally kept out of sight – often all that we ever see of them are finished artworks, presented as end products. Besides the major figures in the art world, Pol is also interested in students from art colleges, visitors to museums and people attending art fairs and vernissages: he observes how they interact, the way they view art, and the social conventions and distinctions that go along with this.

Images of humanity

As a photographer, Pol could be described as a 'seeker' of images yet he is a 'creator' of them too. While he registers situations intuitively and captures them photographically, he also knows full well how to influence situations (without directly staging them in any way). He practises social engineering in order to end up with a perfect result. This is particularly true of Pol's portraits, which feature figures from the worlds of politics, culture and industry as well as 'ordinary' people in their everyday surroundings. These portraits come across as both spontaneous and consciously orchestrated, thanks to his meticulous research into the location, combined with improvised strategies for communicating during the sittings.

Picture columns + magazine covers

In addition to working from 2001 to 2015 for the Swiss edition of the internationally renowned reportage magazine *GEO*, where, unusually, he performed the dual role of photographer and image editor, Pol also had the opportunity to curate long-running picture

columns in magazines with a wide readership: these included 'Bild der Schweiz' (Image of Switzerland) for *Facts*; 'Unvergessliche Bilder' (Unforgettable Images) for *Weltwoche*; 'Pol Position' for *SBB-VIA*; and 'Parallelgeschichten' (Parallel Stories) and 'Ein Tag im Leben von...' (A Day in the Life of...) for *Das Magazin*, the Saturday supplement of the Zurich daily newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger*. The 'Day in the Life of...' format started back in 1981. Every Saturday, this column affords an insight into the lives of a wide variety of people – offering a reflection of the Swiss state of mind and painting a portrait of the country's population in all its diversity. In addition to the picture columns, Pol has also produced several dozen magazine covers for '*Tagi-Magi*' over the years. His work thus consistently succeeds in generating considerable appeal without pandering, in visual terms, to the mainstream or to populism.

Publications

Between 1993 and 2026, Pol produced nine monographic publications and was commissioned by publishers to provide the visual input for other books. When these works are looked at in conjunction with the layouts of his commissioned assignments for the press and picture columns for magazines, the variety and intensity of his day-to-day life in the last decades become evident. This is exemplified by versatility and consistency combined with staying power and seemingly endless reserves of energy. Pol has established enduring working partnerships with many editors-in-chief, picture editors and art directors: these relationships are based both on his wealth of ideas and his rock-solid reliability in delivering superb results, even on very difficult jobs. On the photography scene – where he is viewed with a mix of envy and appreciation – this has earned him the nickname Andri 'Monopol'.

Curator: Lars Willumeit

Events

Sunday, 28 June 2026, 1–2 p.m.

Guided tour by the curator

Tour of the exhibition with Lars Willumeit, director of Fotostiftung Schweiz and curator of the exhibition

Sunday, 19 July 2026, 1–2 p.m.

Artist tour

Tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol

Friday, 18 September 2026, 7–8 p.m. + 9–10 p.m.

Book launch + artist tour

Talk with Andri Pol, Valentin Groebner and Lars Willumeit about the book *Welt* by Andri Pol, followed by a tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol as part of the special programme for Kulturnacht Winterthur

Saturday, 19 September 2026, 7–8 p.m. + 9–10 p.m.

Artist tour

Tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol as part of the special programme for Kulturnacht Winterthur

Sunday, 11 October 2026, 1–2 p.m.

Dialogue-based guided tour

Tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol in dialogue with television and radio presenter Monika Schärer

Sunday, 25 October 2026, 1–2 p.m.

Dialogue-based guided tour

Tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol in dialogue with Gilles Steinmann, director of photography at *NZZ* and *NZZ am Sonntag*

Sunday, 15 November 2026, 1–2 p.m.

Dialogue-based guided tour

Tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol in dialogue with journalist and columnist Peter Rothenbühler

Sunday, 6 December 2026, 1–2 p.m.

Artist tour

Tour of the exhibition with Andri Pol

*A selection of **editioned photographs** featured in the exhibition are available for purchase. If you are interested in this possibility, please enquire at the ticket office, where you can find out further details, or contact: info@fotostiftung.ch*

The exhibition has been made possible by:
Landis & Gyr Stiftung; Vontobel Stiftung

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Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 11:00–17:00
Wednesday 11:00–20:00, with free admission from 17:00
Saturday and Sunday 11:00–18:00, closed on Mondays