

SEAN KELLY

Fan, Wang. "Filling empty spaces with thousands of words," *Ecns.cn*, August 18, 2015.



Filling empty spaces with thousands of words



Public spaces are revealed through the lens of Candida Hofer. One of her latest photos from China is of the Liyuan Library (above) in a Beijing suburb. Photo provided to China Daily

German photographer Candida Hofer puts all kinds of public spaces – libraries, museums and waiting rooms, among others – under her lens.

Her photos specialize in showing how these spaces look when they are empty. Hofer's first solo exhibition in Beijing was unveiled on Saturday.

The show, *On Methods*, presents 72 photos spanning 41 years of her career, including both large-sized images of empty spaces in theaters and museums, and smaller ones on specific spots such as a window or a floor piled with packages.

"She is one of the most important photographers in the world. ... It's a very comprehensive show, like a retrospective, to let Chinese people know the artist better," says Peter Anders, director of the Goethe-Institut China, which helped get the ongoing exhibition to Beijing.

On display are early works of the photographer in Germany and her latest works and images from China.

Hofer, 71, visited Beijing for the first time in 1996, and has since returned to China on a number of occasions.

She took photos of different museums in Beijing in the '90s and shifted her focus to architecture.

A recent photo she took was of the Liyuan Library in a Beijing suburb. It is said to be one of the country's most beautiful libraries and is well-known for its special architectural design.

Each time she comes here, she notices change, says Hofer, who visited China three times this year.

The photographer will travel to Nanjing, Suzhou and Shanghai next month to catch more glimpses of the country.

"There are more new and experimental buildings designed by Western architects in China than in Europe," she says.

When Hofer studied at the German arts academy of Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, she first took pictures of people. Her series on Turkish workers in Germany earned her fame and got her noticed by her teachers at the academy.

But eventually she felt embarrassed to disturb the private lives of her subjects by going into their houses to take their photos. Hofer then shifted to taking images of public spaces.

She has visited libraries, museums, theaters and universities around the world to take photos in a bid to show how such spaces – often taken for granted by the public – can appear when empty.

Hofer once spent several months photographing Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara's iconic works on "date paintings" on walls of different collectors' homes around the world.

She says it was an interesting way to show how private collectors displayed the late New York-based artist's pieces to match with the interior design of their respective houses.

Many of her small-sized photos are taken by digital camera. Sometimes she even uses smart phones to take a few quick pictures in her daily life.

But for her work-related photos, she never uses phones, she says.

"What makes a difference between a photo and an artistic one is the attitude, the light, the right spot and what you do later to the picture," says Hofer.

She explains that taking a photo only costs her half a day, but completing the entire process usually takes her a month.

In sync with her style of photography, Hofer's show has invited an interior designer to make her works better displayed inside an empty space.

Like the exhibition's title *On Methods* indicates, there's a method to photography and the presentation of pictures, according to show curator Herbert Burkert.

If you go

10 am-6 pm, Tuesday to Sunday, through Oct 7. Three Shadows Photography Art Center, 155 Caoyangdi, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6432-2663.