



Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work

Susanne Lange

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Bernd and Hilla Becher's lifetime project of documenting the industrial landscape of our time secures their position in the canon of postwar photographers. Their work--at once conceptual art, typological study, and topological documentation--has influenced German photographers of a younger generation, including Thomas Struth, Thomas Demand, Candida Höfer, Thomas Ruff, and Andreas Gursky. This compelling, exhaustively documented biography describes the Bechers' life and work and offers a critical assessment of their place in the history of photography. Becher scholar Susanne Lange, granted access to the photographers' archives and quoting extensively from interviews with them, writes the first sustained analysis and biography of the Bechers' extraordinary partnership. She discusses, among other topics, both the functionalist and aesthetic dimensions of the Bechers' subject matter, their typologizing (which she finds reminiscent of nineteenth-century naturalists' classificatory schemes), and the anonymous industrial building style favored by German architects. She argues that industrial building types impose themselves on our consciousness as the cathedral did on that of the Middle Ages, and that the Bechers' photographs--which seem at first glance only to record a vanishing landscape--serve to examine this shaping of our perceptions. Their work provides us with a rare opportunity to see how we see. *Bernd & Hilla Becher: Life and Work*, with 53 duotone plates and more than 200 additional illustrations, is the first book to delve deeply into the sources and vision behind the evocative and melancholy beauty of the Bechers' work. It will be indispensable both as a reference for students of postwar German photography and as a guide for readers who want to know how to approach the Bechers' monumental project.

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