

## PRESS KIT

# TARGETS

## Photographs by Herlinde Koelbl

9 May to 5 October 2014



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## Press talk on the exhibition on May 8, 2014 at 11 am

With her new, international art project TARGETS the photographer Herlinde Koelbl deals with military training and the cultural differences that are reflected in the targets used for shooting practice in the different countries. The photographs, which were taken over a period of six years in nearly 30 countries, will be shown in the Deutsches Historisches Museum for the first time in 2014, the commemorative year of the First World War.

The exhibition focuses on the unusual topic of targets on which people are trained to be soldiers and prepared for war. They shed light on the changes in the respective "foe images". Does the enemy have a face? Are they abstract? In search of answers Herlinde Koelbl journeyed to military training grounds in the USA, China, Russia, Afghanistan, Brazil, Ethiopia, Norway, Mongolia and many other countries. The photographs show tattered cardboard man-sized silhouettes, plastic dolls riddled with gunshots and metal plates pierced by bullets. At the same time they reveal the different techniques and topographies of war. American soldiers train house-to-house fighting in desert cities created by Hollywood set designers, Japanese militaries prepare for war in unknown territories by passing through surrealistic concrete chasms.

Video and sound installations and portraits of soldiers complement the photos. Excerpts from interviews give a personal insight into the situation of soldiers at the world's firing ranges. Ultimately, they themselves are going to be the targets in armed conflicts. In this way Herlinde Koelbl makes us feel the real savagery of death and war through her pictures, without resorting to any form of sensationalism.

### **Speakers (tbc):**

**Prof. Dr. Alexander Koch**, President of the Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum

**Herlinde Koelbl**, photographer and director of documentary films

## Facts and dates

<b>Venue</b>	Deutsches Historisches Museum Exhibition hall
<b>Duration</b>	May 9 to October 5, 2014
<b>Opening</b>	Daily 10 am – 6 pm
<b>Entrance fee</b>	Free under 18 years of age Daily ticket 8 €, reduced 4 €
<b>Informationen</b>	Deutsches Historisches Museum Unter den Linden 2   10117 Berlin Tel. +49 30 20304-444   E-Mail: info@dhm.de
<b>Internet</b>	<a href="http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen">www.dhm.de/ausstellungen</a>
<b>Exhibition surface</b>	about. 1.100 m <sup>2</sup> on 1st and 2nd floor
<b>Exhibition size</b>	about. 250 photos, video installations, 6 audio stations
<b>Director</b>	Prof. Dr. Alexander Koch
<b>Concept and project management</b>	Herlinde Koelbl
<b>Exhibition coordination</b>	Olivia Fuhrich
<b>Exhibition management</b>	Ulrike Kretzschmar
<b>Exhibition design</b>	Werner Schulte
<b>Publication</b>	Herlinde Koelbl: TARGETS 240 Seiten, 220 Abbildungen Hardcover Prestel Verlag, 49,99 € ISBN 978-3-7913-4948-0
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<b>Partner</b>	Körber-Stiftung and Robert Bosch Stiftung
<b>Media partners</b>	Monopol, Zitty Berlin

## Introduction to the exhibition

Herlinde Koelbl took photographs of her first TARGET more than thirty years ago. It was a shot-up metal figure full of holes in the furrow of a field – a symbol of violence and death for the photographer.

Six years ago she returned to the theme and started her international photographic project TARGETS. Herlinde Koelbl travelled to almost thirty countries in order to record the targets at which soldiers around the world are trained to shoot. How is the enemy represented whom they are intended to kill later? Is it an abstract figure? Or does the enemy have a face? If so, what does he or she look like? Do the TARGETS reveal cultural differences? Have images of the enemy changed?

A soldier from the U.S. Army reported that he had been trained still using the "Ivan figure with a red star on his helmet": the enemy was the Soviet Union. Today this has been replaced by target figures wearing oriental clothing. Who is the enemy? From which side do I see the enemy? Everyone believes that he or she is on the right side. In the reality of war, soldiers are always the target. This is why Herlinde Koelbl also made portraits of them: the living targets.

## Video installation, audio stations, quotes

The photographic works are complemented by sound recordings and quotes from numerous interviews. A four-sided video installation forms the conclusion of the exhibition.

On her travels Herlinde Koelbl sought direct contact to soldiers. She wanted to hear: How do soldiers think who are or were at war? What experiences do they bring home from war? Are they plagued by doubts and feelings of guilt? Do they think about killing and the possibility of being killed themselves? Are they afraid? What value is attached to comradeship? Why did they decide to join the army? What constitutes good leadership?

It sounds horrifying, but you have to learn to kill automatically in order to function.

I can actually remember the smell of fear in the night before the attack. Your body chemistry changes. It is very distinct. The entire company had it.

I never felt guilty about killing people who deserved to die. In my eyes they deserve to die because they are the enemy. I am trained to think that way.

As a leader you set an example, you don't let anything pass. You have to make the world as black and white as possible. Avoid grey, because it will get you into trouble. Atrocities are always a failure in leadership.

I would sacrifice my life for my comrades. This is a hard choice to make, but I would do it. I have a wife and four kids, a good family, but I would do it. Because the guilt of not helping or not making the sacrifice is harder to bear than the sacrifice itself.

When I am back from my deployment being at home alone nearly kills me. I always turn on the radio or TV because I can't bear the silence.

In my memory I leave the situation at home frozen as it was and I would like to have it the same way when I come back. But it isn't that way anymore. Life went on.

When I decided to be a soldier I accepted to kill and to be killed. It is part of the job.

War is the Chess game of the politicians and we are the figures.

When the training is just on paper targets, it is not the same. When there is a face on the target or when it looks more like the people you are combating, you take it more seriously. We train a lot to shoot the bad guy, to leave the good guy unharmed. That type of training pays off in the end, because you can make better decisions.

## Visited countries and military training camps

Afghanistan	Mongolia
Albania	North Iraq – Kurdistan
Algeria – Western Sahara	Norway
Austria	Pakistan
Brazil	Poland
Canada in Germany	Russia
Ethiopia	South Africa
Finland	South Korea
France	Swiss
Germany	Ukraine
Great Britain in Germany	United Arab Republic
Israel	USA
Japan	USA in Germany
Lebanon	Western Sahara
Mali	



## Vita Herlinde Koelbl

Herlinde Koelbl is one of the most renowned German photographic artists. Her comprehensive oeuvre is characterised above all by long-term photographic projects, often complemented by in-depth interviews. She is particularly interested in creating portraits of milieus and people.

Her photographs have been shown at numerous international exhibitions and are represented in many major collections. Herlinde Koelbl has published more than a dozen books of photography, including *My View* (2009), *Hair* (2007), *Bedrooms* (2002), *Traces of Power* (1999), *Jewish Portraits* (1989), *Fancy People: High Society* (1986) and *The German Living Room* (1980).

Parallel to her books and exhibitions, Herlinde Koelbl frequently also publishes documentary films and video installations on the same subjects. She has received a number of awards for her work, for example the Dr Erich Salomon Prize in 2001.

“Herlinde Koelbl is writing, work by work, the chronicle of an era, as novelists like Zola and Balzac did earlier, but with different means.”

Harald Martenstein, 2001 in *Tagesspiegel*

## Introduction to the catalogue

### **In the Cold Morning Light**

Herlinde Koelbl

Thirty years ago, on an ice-cold winter day in the first light of morning, I photographed a target for the first time. A shot-up, perforated metal figure standing in the furrows of a field. At that time, I was working on a history of the Bundeswehr, the German Armed Forces. However, this image was never published. It was of purely personal interest to me, and stuck in my memory. A symbol for violence and death. Six years ago I took up this subject again.

I was interested in the targets at which soldiers were trained to shoot. Or, as a trainer said: "They're supposed to learn to hit, not shoot." Who is the bad man? What does he look like the enemy that they are later expected to kill? Is he an abstract figure? Does it have a gender and if so, which? Are there cultural differences? Has the image of the enemy changed?

It has changed. As the person who accompanied me to an American shooting range explained: "My target was the green figure of Ivan with a red star on his helmet." The enemy was the Soviet Union. The red star has disappeared. The Ivan figure has stayed. New targets have been added. Figures with oriental-looking clothing and dark skin. A new enemy.

This is reflected in the many training grounds for house-to-house fighting, which are often an entire reproduction of villages or towns with a Middle Eastern character. The one in Fort Irvin in California was created by Hollywood designers. Mosques with golden domes rise above the houses. Plastic fruit and vegetables are displayed in front of the shops, and carpets for sale are draped across the wall. At the butcher's a plastic lamb hangs from a hook, and meat is still lying on the chopping board. This is about making soldiers familiar with the real surroundings of their next tour of duty abroad.

War has changed. The new, usually asymmetrical war is waged in villages and cities. That is why these ghost towns are springing up in every country. Sometimes they are perfectly fitted out, and sometimes there are only a few roofless houses made from cavity blocks, as in Mongolia. In Japan, training is done in grey concrete canyons. And in Israel, too, a complete virtual town has been built, a gigantic sea of houses with holes in the walls for passing through as if they had been blown up so that soldiers can pass from one building to the next and avoid coming under fire on the street. There are street signs or names of buildings, such as The Bank of Palestine, El Baladia City Hall, Old Age Home. In Germany, there is a village with half-timbered houses, and in France, a new training ground has recently been

constructed in Sissonne with a village square, shops, boulangerie and winding streets which, astonishingly, also have German names such as Berlinerstrasse or Universitätsstrasse, even though France and Germany have been joined in peace and friendship for more than half a century. Who is the enemy here?

The enemy is always the other one. Whichever side a soldier is on, he always believes he is on the right side. And he has to believe this in order to be willing to die. As an ISAF soldier in Afghanistan told me: "I accepted killing and being killed. It's part of the job!" To want and to have to prove themselves in such extreme situations is an experience that they never forget. And one that some of them seek again and again. "You're never more alive than when you're faced with death." Split seconds decide whether they live or die, as an Israeli soldier put it: "If you start thinking about whether you should shoot, him or me, then it's too late and you're already dead."

Being a soldier is a "special" profession. This is why I asked very many soldiers why they decided to join the army. The answers were diverse, but there were recurring priorities. For example: I found structure and discipline there; I wanted to prove myself; after school I didn't know what to do; I had bad grades, so I joined the army; my father was a soldier before me; I found challenges and responsibility there. One young Canadian was motivated by idealism: "I joined the army because of pride and honour. I wanted to be part of the history of my country." And he added: "You can do something for your country." His country is trying to give meaning to the deaths of many young soldiers in Afghanistan. Highway 401 from the air force base in Trenton to Toronto, on which soldiers are taken in their coffins after the flight home, was renamed Highway of Heroes. For the bereaved, it is easier if their husband or son has died for an ideal and is then honoured as a hero. However, another soldier had a realistic view: "War is the chess game of the politicians and we are the figures." The story of the world wars and all the military cemeteries demonstrate this to us very clearly.

The questions that I repeatedly asked myself while engaged in this work over a period of years became particularly evident one autumn day in a small village on the Lüneburg Heath. In the morning, I took photographs of young Canadian soldiers on a training ground, preparing for their tour of duty in Afghanistan. A tank unit. Sunshine, a cheerful mood. It was daily routine, just training. They were shooting with live ammunition. The loud, whip-crack shots made me jump again and again.

In the afternoon, only a few hours later and few kilometres away, I visited a German military cemetery. A secluded spot in a little wood, peaceful and tranquil. I walked pensively along the rows of gravestones. Many of the fallen had died just before the end of the war, in 1944 or 1945. Born in 1925, died in 1944, not even twenty years old. The war wiped out millions of lives. The stillness was abruptly



broken by the heavy, thudding sound of tanks shooting on one of the training grounds. Back to the present. Soldiers training for war. Now it is Afghanistan, some other time it will be a different country. Why?

Late afternoon, next stop: the former concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. Stillness again. An oppressive atmosphere in which the horror of those days was perceptible. The British Army liberated the inmates and ended the atrocities. Films of that time record the heaps of corpses. The perpetrators take the emaciated dead bodies that are piled up on trucks and carry them on their backs to a mass grave. The same question: why armies, why war? What would have happened if Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz, Dachau had not been liberated by soldiers? Bearers of horror and fear, bearers of death and freedom. Armies are both of these.

The moral attitude of military officers, from the leader of a unit to a general, has acquired great, even decisive importance, something that already begins in training, not in war. What is needed are wise decision makers, whose actions are founded on ethical insights, who respect human life and the rule of law, who do not label the enemy as “inhuman” and thus make targets of them. They are involved in deciding whether atrocities and attacks take place or not. An American colonel told me that he permits no grey areas, only black and white, so that moral boundaries are clearly recognisable. Atrocities are always “the consequence of a failure in leadership”, he said. There are laws. But soldiers sense the grey and undefined areas in their leaders’ minds. Then it is possible to cross boundaries without being punished.

“Killing with a firearm is done by what we call muscle memory not by the brain”, a member of the Special Forces told me, and a military trainer aims for something similar with his soldiers: “It sounds horrifying, but you have to learn to kill automatically in order to function.”

Yet humans also have natural inhibitions about killing, as Dave Grossman describes in his book **On Killing**. After the Second World War a study showed that no more than about one fifth of soldiers used their weapon deliberately to kill. It was only intensive training programmes that increased the “firing rate” of the American infantry to fifty per cent in Korea and to around ninety per cent in Vietnam. According to an interview given by Grossman, we have become good at training people to kill as a reflex and creating cold-blooded killers. One of the keys to this is conditioning through desensitisation in training. This is especially effective with Special Forces soldiers, as they have to take out hostage-takers, the enemy, with a shot aimed at the base of the nose, “so that he can’t pull the trigger anymore”. The methods have been perfected, increasingly directed to reducing inhibitions. On one large training ground in international use I saw no figures as targets. The soldiers themselves were living targets for today, simulation systems are in use there and in many other countries, too. The soldier, his weapon, the



vehicles everything is electronically networked as far as is technically possible. This creates a pseudo-realistic situation: the soldiers shoot straight at their comrades, who are playing the part of "enemies". For some soldiers this is a barrier that they consciously have to overcome on the first occasion the aim being to desensitise them with a view to future reality. "During training, when I shoot at a picture of a lady holding a baby, well it's just a paper target. If there's a lady actor out there holding a baby and you shoot her in the chest with a paint round, you understand that you've just killed an innocent woman," is how an American soldier explained the difference to me. I therefore changed my original plan, and in every country also portrayed the soldiers, the living targets, which is what they ultimately always are. Who is the enemy, and from which angle do I see him? That was why I also took photographs in northern Iraq with the PKK and in northern Algeria and Western Sahara with the Polisario. The targets there are reduced to the most elementary form a painted circle, a stone, or small tins.

There was a great contrast in training between the countries that were technically highly advanced, where the quantity of ammunition used was of no importance, and developing countries, where every bullet counted. The targets, too, are minimised there. In Afghanistan, it was just a foam mattress with a piece of paper pinned onto it as a target. In Ethiopia, there were wooden targets reduced to outlines; it was similar in Russia, except that they were painted in bright colours there. Sometimes I saw the same paper targets in different countries, as they had all been ordered from the same catalogue. In Germany, on the other hand, I came upon cut-out soldiers reminiscent of naive painting and life-size chipboard cows on a meadow. They were made in army workshops and lovingly painted. In South Africa, I made a surprising discovery: the targets there had the same motifs as in England. The same applied to Kenya and Uganda. The British Army had thus made colonial history in the shape of training targets, leaving traces in these countries that are visible to this day.

Getting to know different armies was extremely illuminating. The Israeli army probably has the best-trained and fittest soldiers. In South Korea, a certain tension was perceptible due to the latent threat. I was struck by the self-confidence of the armed forces in France, England and America and their acceptance by society, in contrast to Germany and Japan, where the echoes of the Second World War can still be heard. "No more war!" was the slogan in Germany for decades. Yet the image of the German Armed Forces is changing now that they take part in missions abroad and dead soldiers come back in zinc coffins. In a flat hierarchy, for example in Switzerland and Norway, everything was very relaxed, with only a single person to accompany me, while in Russia there were many of them, and in China very many. I described exactly what I wanted to see in advance. Sometimes these wishes were fulfilled, but sometimes I had a tough struggle on the spot to see more. The culture and the way I was looked after in different countries were as



diverse as the destinations themselves. In the south of France, I had to return from the firing range to the barracks at midday for a three-course menu with an aperitif and waiter service, whereas in America nobody asked if I wanted lunch, and in Mongolia the soldiers' food took some getting used to.

My travels for this project took me to almost thirty countries. The plan was that all regions, from north, south, east and west, should be represented. Getting the necessary permission in some countries required a huge amount of patience, sometimes even several years. Some military officials found the idea of photographing targets extremely strange: the military's focus is on weapons, not targets. One commander was extremely disappointed that I was unable to distinguish between different types of tank and he handed me a poster with pictures of them all so that I could improve my knowledge.

At the beginning of the project, I looked for a way into countries via diplomats, but then made direct contact through defence ministries and attachés. This produced a clear "yes" or "no", and a "yes" also led to support. I travelled alone, which was often an adventure. I always had a rucksack weighing twenty-two kilogrammes with my equipment, two cameras and a video camera on my back. My personal luggage was severely reduced and sometimes consisted of only one additional small rucksack.

I got to know countries from a different point of view: most firing ranges are far away from tourist attractions. They are nature reserves for rare animals, birds, plants and flowers. One soldier was especially aware of the contradiction between his activity and nature: "We work in a paradise here and are concerned with death."

Sometimes the reactions of countries that I was not permitted to enter were revealing. Last year, for example, the North Korean embassy in Berlin wrote to tell me that South Korean soldiers had used images of "our Eternal President Kim Il-sung and the Eternal Chairman of the Defence Committee Kim Jong-il" as firing targets, which had greatly angered the entire population of North Korea. North Korean soldiers had responded by firing at pictures of Li Myung-bak and US soldiers. This tense situation meant it was not desirable for foreigners to visit the firing ranges.

Experience of war changes and marks soldiers. What do they bring back with them when they return home? What, as a result of their extreme experiences, do they bring to society, to the families that have been living their own lives in the meantime and which they have to reintegrate into. They cannot or do not want to tell what they have seen and done. "I can't share my extreme experiences with my wife. She can't imagine the feeling, the way you feel when there are bullets flying around your head." I wanted to get insights into how soldiers think, how being a



soldier shapes them. I therefore asked them about coming home, fear, killing, doubts, responsibility, comradeship. About 150,000 Vietnam veterans have killed themselves, three times as many as the number of active soldiers who fell in Vietnam. And for every US soldier killed in Afghanistan there are twenty-five cases of suicide among the veterans. In 2012, thirty-eight active US soldiers killed themselves. A heavy toll.

Many armies that were enemies in the Second World War now train together. Diversity has turned into unity for securing peace in troubled regions. One soldier on operations said: "There will always be war, as long as there is man. I think it is naïve for man to think that there would ever be a time without war." History supports his view. Since Cain and Abel, there has been violence and war in all cultures, for many reasons: land seizure, fighting over resources, religion, expansion of power, economic advantages.

Is there hope for a better future without war? It is politicians who can contribute to this and make changes designed to create greater social justice, taking democracy as their guiding principle and preventing intolerance, extremism and violence. And it is political decision makers who send soldiers to war. The former inspector general of the Bundeswehr, Klaus Naumann, commented: "This is perhaps the most difficult decision that parliamentarians have to make, for by doing so they take responsibility for the lives of the soldiers and for what these soldiers do in carrying out their task. I hope they are always aware of this."

Herlinde Koelbl

TARGETS

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and Arkadi Babtschenko

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