

CONFERENCE REPORTS

A FLANEUR BETWEEN RUBBLE AND RUINS: FRIEDRICH SEIDENSTÜCKER, PHOTOGRAPHS OF BERLIN AFTER 1945

Exhibition at the GHI, November 4, 2005 to January 27, 2006. Jointly organized by the GHI and the Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, which houses the world's leading collection of Seidenstücker photographs. Curated by art historian and photo archivist Antje Schunke (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz).

This GHI exhibition was the first individual show of Seidenstücker's photographs in more than twenty years and his first-ever American exhibition. Scheduled to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the show featured works from the immediate postwar period.

At the end of the war, Friedrich Seidenstücker (1882–1966) wandered through the ruins of the former capital of the German Reich as a “flaneur with a camera,” motivated only by a desire to capture what he saw. He did not intend to document politically significant events; instead, he was more intrigued by the small, necessary activities that made up everyday life in the destroyed city. Seidenstücker's photographs thus differ from the familiar pictures—propaganda materials and documentary photographs—that have shaped our collective memory of the postwar era. While many of his photographs can indeed be read as documents from an important chapter in German history, they are perhaps most powerful when viewed as personal expressions of an individual artist's perspective.

Within a decade, Seidenstücker took more than five hundred photographs of Berlin. The exhibition included approximately sixty works, which were presented in five sections. The first section, *Impressions of Ruins*, explored the manner in which Seidenstücker borrowed from long-standing aesthetic traditions to evoke the antique ruins or destroyed Gothic churches depicted in many nineteenth-century Romantic paintings. *New Rooms—New Views* focused on Berlin's drastically altered spaces and the new photographic vantage points they offered. With the fabric of the former cityscape torn apart, familiar elements appeared in unfamiliar contexts, and Seidenstücker captured the new relationships that emerged between various elements of the built and natural environ-

ments. By the end of the war, many of the city's most prominent official buildings either stood in ruins or had been stripped of their original functions. These well-known structures were the focus of the third section, *Portraits of Ruins*, which featured photographs of burned-out ruins, bombed churches and destroyed palaces. Unlike other photographers, however, Seidenstücker did not analyze these buildings in isolation but situated them within their larger surroundings, so that hints of street life can be glimpsed between the ruins of architectural landmarks. *Nature's Rubble* and *Landscapes of Ruin* explored the war's impact on the natural world, a subject of particular interest to Seidenstücker, who had trained as an animal sculptor. The final section, *People in Rubble*, brought human subjects to the fore. It was Seidenstücker's gift to capture the particularities of everyday life. A self-described *Momentknipser*, he found artistic inspiration in both the deficiencies of the postwar era and the creative improvisation that followed as a necessary result.

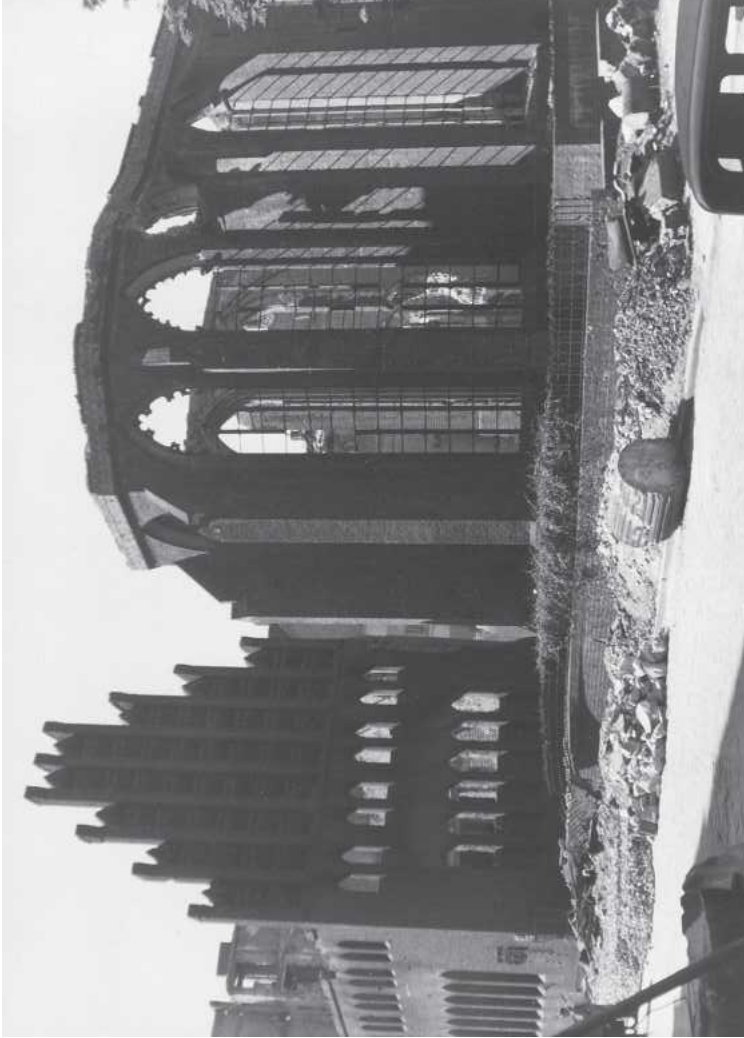
The Seidenstücker exhibition, together with introductory texts and additional biographical information, can be viewed online as part of *German History in Documents and Images* (<http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/>). The photographs and supporting materials can be found under "Images" in Section 8, *Occupation and the Emergence of Two States (1945–1961)*, edited by Volker Berghahn and Uta Poiger.

Kelly McCullough



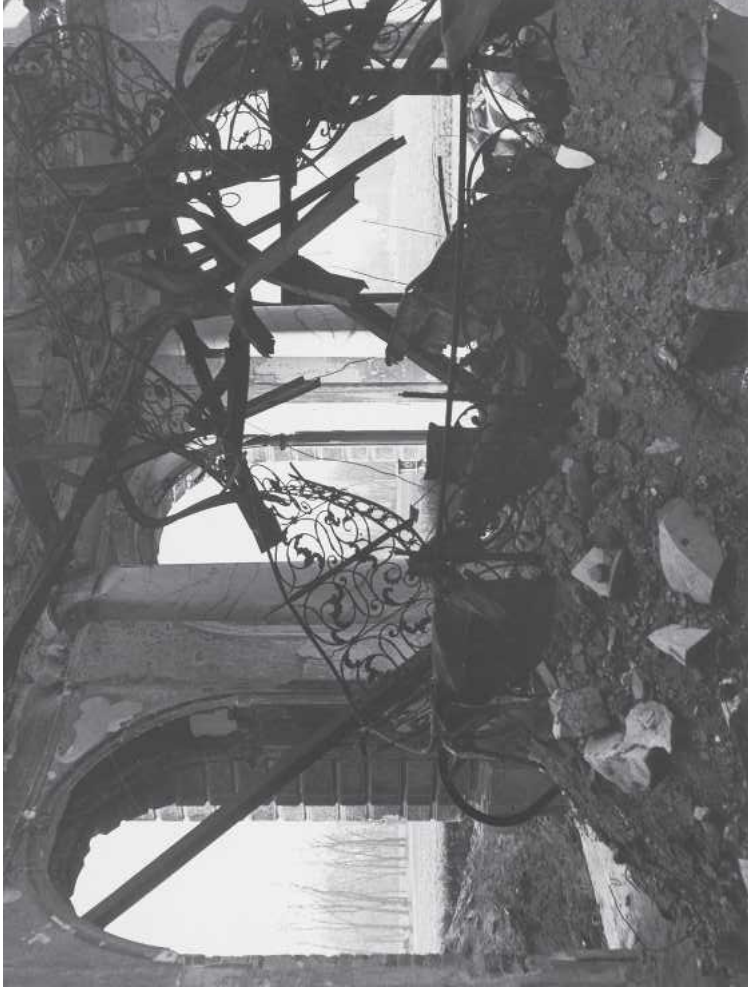
Impressions of Ruins

Friedrich Seidenstücker, *Toppled columns from the Crown Prince's Palace, Unter den Linden 3. Berlin, 1946. Print from original negative. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.*



New Rooms—New Views

Friedrich Seidenstücker, View of the ruins of the medieval Franciscan Church. Berlin, 1946. Print from original negative. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.



Portraits of Ruins

Friedrich Seidenstücker, View of the staircase on the park side of Charlottenburg Palace. Berlin, 1946. Print from original negative. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.



Nature's Rubble and Landscapes of Ruin
Friedrich Seidenstücker, Bullet-marked plane trees in front of Darmstädter Bank, Schinkelplatz, Berlin, 1945. Print from original negative. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.



People in Rubble

Friedrich Seidenstücker, Berliners waiting at a tram stop, 1946. Print from original negative. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

All of the photographs from the exhibition *A Flaneur between Rubble and Ruins: Friedrich Seidenstücker, Photographs of Berlin after 1945* are available on the *German History in Documents and Images* website (www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org). They are grouped together and appear as part of volume 8, *Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945–1961*.