



Bernd & Hilla Becher: Coal Mines and Steel Mills

Heinz Liesbrock

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The core themes of Bernd and Hilla Becher's extensive work from the early 1960s on were the coal mines and steel mills in the German Ruhr region and other iron smelting regions of the world, from Lothringen to Pittsburgh.

By way of a contribution to the European Capital of Culture "Ruhr.2010" program, the Josef Albers Museum Quadrat in Bottrop has compiled a comprehensive exhibition with photographs by Bernd and Hilla Becher on this key subject. The exhibition centers on the "industrial landscapes," as the two artists called them. The Bechers did not seek to depict these areas as individual architectural objects, but rather to contextualize them as complete facilities and heavy industry complexes in their urban and rural environment. Now that iron smelting as an industry has almost completely disappeared from the Ruhr region and the European coal mining industry is following hard on its heels, this collection of impressive pictures, which includes photographs from the German Siegerland region, Great Britain, France, and the USA, provides an overview, which we can already deem to be nostalgic, of a past era of industrial history. Our publication accompanies the exhibition with a total of 154 duotone plates of mines and iron works from all over the world.

Heinz Liesbrock, art historian and Director of the Josef Albers Museum, wrote the introductory essay to this publication. As well as famous Becher icons, the volume also features many previously unpublished photographs.

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