



Media Information

DISCOVERING BALTIC MANOR HOUSE CULTURE

Many manor houses are scattered across the rural countryside of Estonia and Latvia. In recent decades some have been renovated, while a larger number are decaying. Anja Putensen's book »Das Gut (The Manor)« is a piece of subjective photographic research that takes us to the sites of historic manor house culture in the Baltic states. Like its memories made up of perspectives that are part fact, part fiction, the book's artistic perspective is poetic and magical.

Bielefeld/Berlin, January 24, 2020 – Many manor houses with adjacent farms and parks are scattered across the rural countryside of Estonia and Latvia. Some have been renovated with the help of public and private funding, but a larger number are decaying.

The photographer Anja Putensen (*1977) has gone on the hunt for these manor houses, and in »The Manor«, she draws a portrait of this very personal, almost commemorative journey. During many trips in both summer and winter, her photographs were taken on rolls of film with an analogue, medium-format camera.

Manor houses in Estonia and Latvia have a complex, centuries-long history. From the local perspective and for a long time, they symbolized serfdom. From the thirteenth until well into the nineteenth century, Estonians and Latvians had to work under harsh conditions on these estates of an immigrant, German-speaking, upper class. The owners of these manor homes led a feudal lifestyle culturally oriented toward Western Europe.

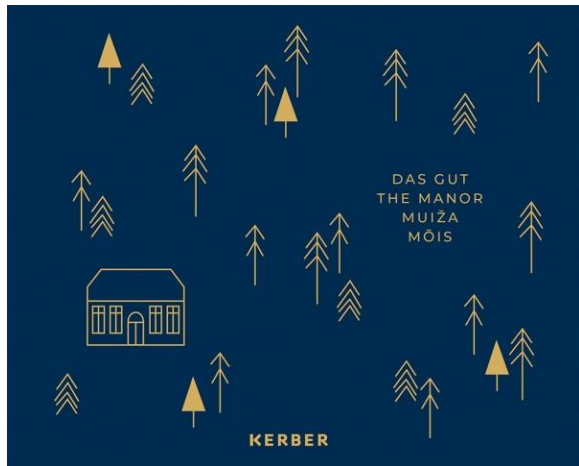
Baltic politics, architecture, art, science, and the economy were influenced by the immigrants. Even though the countries were ruled by various neighboring states during various periods, estate owners still managed to maintain their privileges. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the two countries came under Russian rule. Increasingly, Estonians and Latvians asserted their own interests and after the Russian Revolution and World War I, they founded their own nations. Many estates were reduced in size or confiscated, and the majority of the families fled.

During World War II both Germany and the Soviet Union occupied Estonia and Latvia. After the war the states were compelled to join the Soviet Union. Many Estonians and Latvians were deported to Siberia or fled to the West. The new settlers, mostly Russian, used the manor houses as schools, orphanages, hospitals, or even stables.

Today the manor houses in Estonia and Latvia are mainly thought of as regional tourist attractions and bring hope for tourism. Small tourist bureaus and lovingly equipped museums await guests from home and abroad. Once again, the manor homes represent a cultural orientation toward Western Europe.

Compositionally, »The Manor« is about a fictional manor house made up of diverse individual elements. The estates are shown on a map in the appendix. Brief blocks of Estonian, Latvian, and German-Baltic childhood memories gathered by Putensen, based on literary sources and stories, provide a supplemental historical exploration of the theme.

Anja Putensen's work will be on display in the group exhibition True Stories, which will be shown from February 15-23, 2020, at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie, located in the studio of the Kunstquartier Bethanien (Mariannenplatz 2) in Berlin. The opening reception is on February 14 at 7 p.m.



Anja Putensen | The Manor

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