

Personal Statement  
ENTREPRENEUR 4.0 AWARD 2014

## STEVEN KOHLSTOCK

### The People of Kater Holzig

My work *Die Menschen von Kater Holzig* (The People of Kater Holzig) consists of ten images, which are taken from what I view as a comprehensive documentation of the Kater Holzig company. These are ten photographs offering a representative look into the lives of impressive and inspiring people, who are realizing their dreams at a place that would not exist without their persistence and ambition.

Three components are central to this company: the Bar 25 as a symbol of the past, Kater Holzig as a symbol of the present, and Holzmarkt as a symbol of the future. All three parts together have led to the formation of a large company. Its history is a part of me and my Berlin history. Everything began in 2004 with a shack on the banks of the Spree. At the time, no one could have imagined that one of the city's most important clubs would develop here, a place that has garnered significant international attention. For many people, it was just not an opportunity to party but also a place to realize their wishes. We all witnessed how over the course of time a little amusement park developed, which brought us back to childhood. Bar 25 developed into a *gesamtkunstwerk*. But after seven years the party was over for us, and the bar was supposed to make way for the "Mediaspree" development project, which envisioned a new office building for this attractive site on the Spree. The good-bye party lasted five days, and I was there. It was clear to all the guests that there would be no other comparable place in Berlin afterwards, since Berlin had begun to change, and free spaces for experimentation were becoming more and more scarce.

It was planned to allow the idea behind the bar to live on in Kater Holzig, which was situated just on the opposite bank of the Spree. This is where the idea for my project was born. I spent a great deal of time here with these people, and I always tried to discern some kind of hierarchy, which actually does not exist. This company is composed of many different pieces of a puzzle, which would not be possible to maintain, if it were not for the creative activity of now over 200 employees. Numerous jobs were created, and tourists from around the world make their way to Kater week after week. This company is a cultural project, which encompasses a club, a music label, a restaurant, a theater, a gallery, and events of all kinds.

But how does one get a sense of a company in which all employees work on a single organizational level? It was simply impossible to decide who was or is more important or indispensable for my photographic project. My photographs tell their story, a story that has just begun, since once again the future lies on the other side of the Spree. When Kater Holzig is a thing of the past, then a new playground of dreams will have long emerged on the site of the former Bar 25. The operators of the Kater founded a cooperative, and in October 2012 they managed to achieve the impossible. Their bid was accepted for the old property and decided to fight the gentrification of the riverside promenade. Holzmarkt was born, and this time it was allowed to stay. This was good news in terms of the development of the Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg

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districts as well as for the city of Berlin as a whole. The Holzmarkt project demonstrates that creativity, originality, and dreams can overcome the plain fact of who controls the most capital.

The idea for my portrait study of the people of Kater Holzig came to me last summer. I had known many of the people who worked at Kater Holzig for a number of years from Berlin's nightlife and from Bar 25, where I had worked part-time while studying at the Lette School. Meanwhile I have become very close to these people, and I feel very linked to them. I began to interact with each of them individually. I served as an observer of these people and how they developed over the years. They form a node between the past and the future. They have held onto their dreams like children, and they have been ambitious enough to realize them. One basic factor of my work is that they do not perceive me as an outsider. The people from Kater Holzig know me, because I have become a part of them. It was and is my intention to create personal portraits. I chose a documentary approach, which is intended to serve as a tribute to each individual. Each person is therefore given the opportunity to decide where he or she is photographed—so far places such as music studios, parks, apartments, and of course Kater Holzig itself. They welcome me into their worlds, and I am repeatedly surprised how quickly what one plans for an image can chance. I did not consider it necessary to take pictures of the entire Kater Holzig complex. Instead, I wanted to select small details that make this site exciting to the eye. However, these images are merely intended to support the portraits. To take these pictures I used my Mamiya RB67 middle format camera. I knew that it would give me the freedom to create the kinds of portraits that lend the portrayed person an air of importance. It was never my aim to take photographs of the club in operation and show people partying. The public should see that something more is happening here. The employees are shown as individuals, who do not need Bar 25, Kater Holzig, or Holzmarkt to be unique. But this is where they find a point of connection, which makes my series of portraits into a cohesive entity. It took many months before I could start my project. The employees were informed, and Kater gave the OK. This is no small matter, when one considers that this is a place where taking photographs is strictly forbidden. My project will continue for many more months, because my story has not yet been fully told.

My own artistic perspective on the topic of the competition:

Although the idea for my project was born before Entrepreneur, it is practically made for it. My portrait of a company or, better said, a unique location developed in close connection with the competition. I thought a great deal about how to create a portrait of the future in Berlin. I opted for a people-based approach, which illustrates how important the individuals in a company are. As I already mentioned, I selected the portraits of six people for Entrepreneur 4.0, who are representative of all the others. A documentary style was important to me, because I want to communicate my personal and almost intimate view of a com-

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pany—a view that an external person cannot easily have. These portraits are intended to prove that Kater Holzig is a company free of hierarchies and that this location is not just a typical Berlin nightclub. Everyone is encouraged to express himself or herself and to realize their goals. I did not have to think long about whether Kater Holzig was the right subject matter for the competition. If one gets to know the story of this section of the Spree, one soon realizes that something amazing has happened here. Childhood is past, and these people have grown up to become the entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

Steven Kohlstock, 2013