



CULTURE

'Very convincing:' Andreas Mühe's Merkel (or not) photos

Andreas Mühe has taken many an official photo of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. A selection is on display at a show in Dresden – but is it really always Merkel we see in the photos?



© Andreas Mühe/vg Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021

ANGELA MERKEL — REALITY AND FICTION

The chancellor's office

Angela Merkel spent a lot of time at her office in Berlin, pictured above in 2009. Daylight is seen pouring in through a large window; the German and EU flags have a place of honor along one wall behind her desk. These kinds of photos by Andreas Mühe, some of which are real and others staged, are currently on display at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden's Lipsius Building.

In the photo studio

Angela Merkel looks rather relaxed in this 2011 official photo by Andreas Mühe. It is one of the photos on display alongside shots with Merkel look-alikes at the Dresden show.

Author: Stefan Dege

After 16 years in government, Merkel is leaving office in the fall. It will mark a turning point for Annegret Klinker, curator at the Dresden State Art Collections, too. For half her life, Angela Merkel was [Germany's chancellor](#).

At the end of Merkel's last term, Klinker and general director Marion Ackermann put together a photo exhibition of Merkel photos by Andreas Mühe to mark her momentous exit as the woman at the top of German politics. But not all of the photos show Merkel – or do they? As the curator put it, "We're not showing an Angela Merkel exhibition, but an Andreas Mühe exhibition."

The show is entitled "Alles, was noch nicht gewesen ist, ist Zukunft, wenn es nicht gerade jetzt ist" - which roughly translates as "Everything that hasn't happened yet is part of the future, if it isn't happening right now." This verbose title refers to a comment Merkel made in 2012 about Germany's future prospects at that time.

Mom posed as Merkel

Nine years later, Merkel is now just weeks away from her [last day in office](#) as head of government – and is depicted in Mühe's photos as a retiree. The 41-year-old photographer had his mother stand in as a Merkel look-alike and photographed her in the long-disused chancellor's residence in Bonn, which served as the the official residence of Germany's heads of government for 50 years.



Andreas Mühe creates cleverly staged photos

Here, the woman — who could just easily pass as Angela Merkel when her back is turned to the camera — is seen sitting on a bed, at a kitchen table, on a patio or under a fir tree in the garden. The photos are juxtaposed with shots of the real Merkel, standing under a fir tree, with her face turned away, or relaxed in a chair in a photo studio. The images blur the lines between fact and fiction, between the image that Angela Merkel shows to the world and the real person behind that image.

But Merkel as a brand is easily recognized by three familiar features: her hairstyle, her outfit and her posture. Her way of holding her hands together in the geometrical shape of a diamond has long become her signature look.

'Historical figure'

Despite focusing precisely on many of Merkel's typical attributes, the works are not meant to be satirical at all — Andreas Mühe has said that he already sees Chancellor Merkel as "a historical figure." The photo series is an attempt "to find a way of dealing with a woman who has shaped our country and thus probably each of us as well," Mühe said in an interview with *Der Spiegel* news magazine.

Andreas Mühe works as a freelance photographer in Berlin. He took official photos of Chancellor Merkel in 2009. But his new photos show a different woman — one who has withdrawn from the political hustle and bustle. Mühe's mother, 70-year-old theater director Annegret Hahn, took on the role of Merkel in the pictures that were staged.

And even those posed images could be real. "I like how Mühe plays with reality and fiction," said Klinker. "It feels very charged, very convincing."

This article was translated from German.

DW RECOMMENDS

How young photographers see Germany

From fairytales to Merkel and the German military, German photographers as young as 13 take a unique view of their country. Winners of a major youth photo award are presenting their works in a special exhibition.

Merkel empathizes with struggling culture sector

After artists and other people working in the culture sector expressed their COVID-related frustrations to Angela Merkel, the chancellor promised that the industry would be included in any reopening steps.

Angela Merkel — reality and fiction

Posture, hair style, outfit — everything suggests that the woman in the photos in a show in Dresden is German Chancellor Angela Merkel. But is the woman in the shots really her?