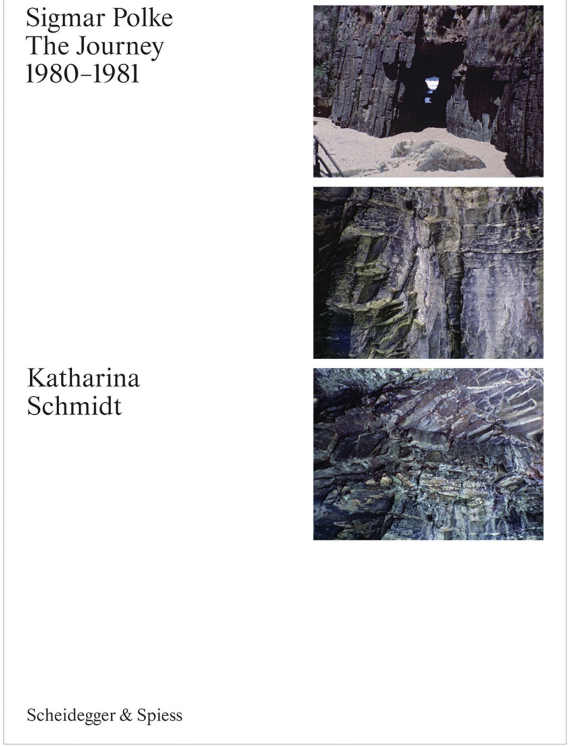
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Sigmar Polke. The Journey

1980–1981

Katharina Schmidt

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- First scholarly account of German artist Sigmar Polke's little-known journey to Southeast Asia and Australia in 1980–81 and the formative effect it had on his future work
- Richly illustrated with photographs and film stills taken by Sigmar Polke's travel companion Britta Zoellner, postcards, and numerous reference images
- A rich source for art historians and lovers of Sigmar Polke's art
- Katharina Schmidt is a renowned expert on Sigmar Polke's work

In 1980, German artist Sigmar Polke (1941–2010) and Britta Zoellner, a close friend of Polke and an artist herself, set off for Southeast Asia from the vibrant art scene in Germany's Rhineland region. A planned period of quiet work on Bali evolved into a 13-month journey from Indonesia via Singapore to Papua New Guinea, Australia, Tasmania, and back to Malaysia and Thailand. Fascinated by the ancient high cultures, the gamelan music and wayang puppet theatre, they increasingly turned their attention to Indigenous societies and their ways of life, but above all to nature, the tropical fauna and flora.

Based on Zoellner's diary entries, films and photographs taken during their extensive tour, as well as other unpublished sources, distinguished art historian Katharina Schmidt traces this little-known journey in chronological detail for the first time. She examines how the intense experience of other cultures and grandiose landscapes, including the discovery of cosmic events through meteorites, moved Polke. She explores how rich nuances of colour impressions and a wealth of observations and experiences shaped his future art, his concept of nature, and his ideas of space and time. Empathy for the Indigenous peoples' fate under colonial rule, and for a nature endangered by exploitation of natural resources such as uranium or gold, reveals the attentive and far-sighted qualities of this quiet, concentrated journey undertaken by Polke and his companion.

Katharina Schmidt is a distinguished scholar of art history. She has held leading positions with art museums in Germany and Switzerland, such as Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (1972–80), Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (1980–85), Kunstmuseum Bonn (1985–92), and Kunstmuseum Basel (1992–2001), and curated numerous international exhibitions of classical modernism and contemporary art. She also served as a member of various international expert committees from 1980 until 2021.

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