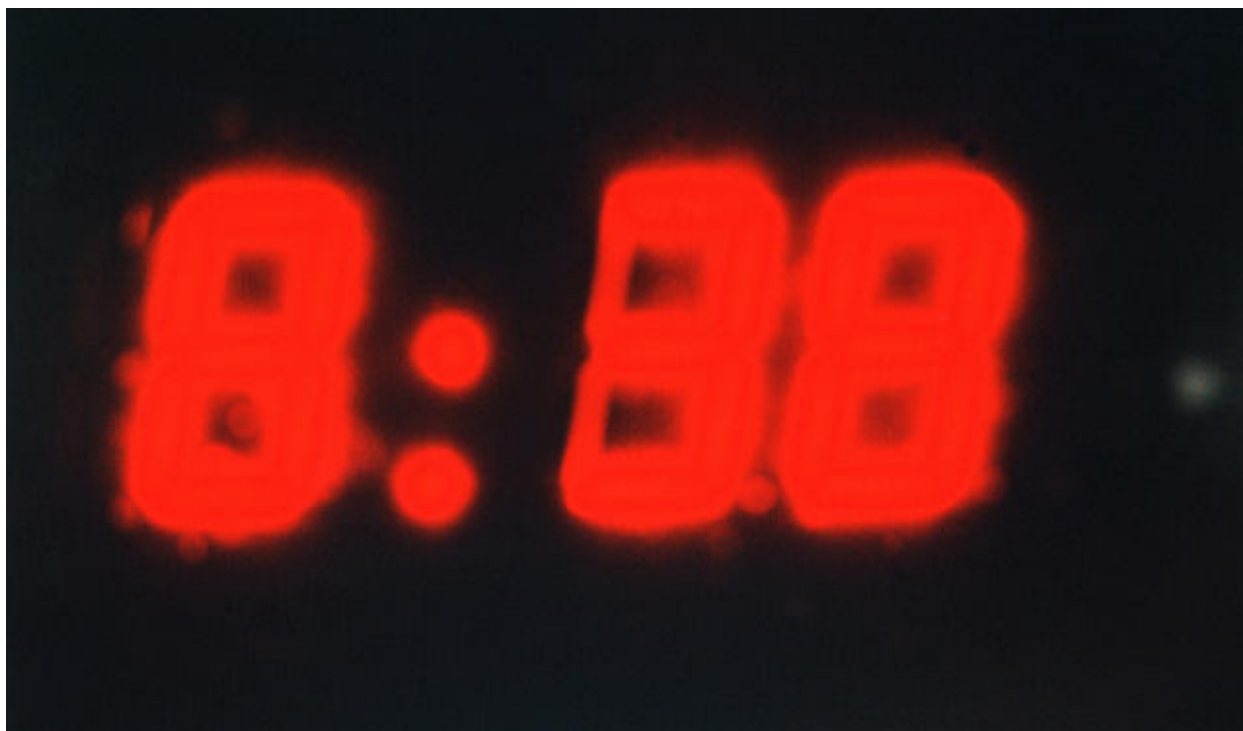


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## Dream Home: Frank Mädler's images feel suspended in time

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**Frank Mädler: Achtachtunddreißig** (from the series "Shine", 2011), 24.41 x 43.31 inches (62 x 110 cm). Images courtesy Jane Corkin Gallery, Toronto.

### Interview by Sky Goodden

*During the last five years, Leipzig-based photographer Frank Mädler has received attention for photographs that combine the abstract with the real. Through juxtapositions of colour and space, he blurs the line between the actual and the illusory, creating work that gives the impression of daydreams or half-recalled memories. Born in 1963, Mädler studied with the renowned photo and text-based artist Astrid Klein during his MFA studies at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig,*

*from which he graduated in 2007. Today, his work can be found in public and private collections around the world. In this interview with Magenta contributor and ARTINFO Canada executive editor Sky Goodden, the photographer talks about how his early life affects his work, his attitude towards the analogue-versus-digital debate and his approach to image-making.*



[\(/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler2\\_0.jpg\)](/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler2_0.jpg)

**Frank Mädler: Gold #5** (from the series "Gold", 2011), 56.10 x 37.60 inches (142.5 x 95.5 cm).

**Sky Goodden (SG):** You are a member of the generation of artists who were born during the GDR era in Germany, and who are concerned with issues related to that difficult political environment and historical trajectory. How has that upbringing and context shaped your work, and what was your impetus to become an artist?

**Frank Mädler (FM):** I was raised as a kid without any artistic influences. I was the first one in my huge family to own a camera; I got it as a present when I turned 14. For my parents, only the performing arts counted as "art", like being a circus performer or a musician. The first real artwork I got to see was one of Casper David Friedrich's paintings. I wanted to be a painter for a long time, until I discovered photography.

I guess no one really knows why he became an artist. The idea that photographers can be "artists" as well came to me a long time after I'd started to take pictures. Through art, it was possible to break out of the 'unity' of a dictatorship.

**SG:** You are unique in your commitment to analogue photographic media. What does this more entrenched, and now nearly historicized, media afford you in your image making? Why have you resolutely stayed within its bounds?

**FM:** Actually, I don't care whether photography is made through analogue or digitally. Rather, the question is – what can I do with analogue photography that I cannot do with digital photography? I have no interest in reproducing reality. There are small errors in the analogue photography, like scratches, dust, exposure time or details you did not see during shooting that you cannot find in the digital way. It is much easier to take pictures under difficult light situations with digital photography because the pictures will have a better focus. With analogue photography, one will need a longer exposure time, therefore the pictures will get wiggly and details will fade. During the postproduction with digital photographs, details can be changed or even erased. Due to the fact that digital photography is a young medium, the temptation of correcting over and over again is too high, and the art of knowing when a work is finished is not yet mellowed.



[\(/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler3\\_0.jpg\)](https://sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler3_0.jpg)

**Frank Madler: Apfelbaum** (from the series "Wiesen", 2009-11), 56.10

x 37.60 inches (142.5 x 95.5 cm).

So, I use the last days of analogue photography as long as it remains relatively easy, as it is now. The assortment of paper and film will decrease more than it already has. It will become a tool for fine art freaks who care more about the photograph and less about the picture. Since I like easy equipment, I can imagine using digital photography for my work in the future.

**SG:** A persistent leitmotif in your work is the subject of "home". What does home mean to you? What is your relationship to where you come from and where you are?

**FM:** Yes, "home" is a term that is ever-present for me. Yet, my parents had no home since they were displaced as children during World War II. My mother was born while the family escaped from Bucovina, Romania, and my father's family came from the

Sudetenland and he was raised in Thuringia, Germany. Both ended up in East Germany, which later on became a dictatorship, but called itself "democratic." I was born in this dictatorship; a home you cannot leave is not very tempting. I never got the chance to develop homesickness.



[\(/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler4\\_0.jpg\)](https://sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler4_0.jpg)

**Frank Mädler: Der goldene Mann (27.05.06).**

Polaroid, 8-5/8 x 8-5/8 inches.

My father was in the army and we had to change places often when I was younger. I got the first sense of belonging to somewhere, or especially to Germany, after I spent years in Spain and Italy. Still, with a past like mine, home is more a question than an answer, and I am still working on it.

**SG:** Your use of the Polaroid – a medium made nearly extinct several years ago, but maintained by ardent supporters – forms an interesting body of work that embraces chance, nuance and randomness. You are producing a monograph soon that focuses on this series. What attracts you to this medium, and what is this series' relationship to your broader practice?

**FM:** I used the Polaroid to get a picture, and the picture was done – no laboratory, no computer, no postproduction. The challenge is to think in small pictures, and to not take a Polaroid if it should have been a big picture. I took Polaroid pictures until the films were used up, which was in 2012. It was a good thing to happen; now I can finish this work with a book. It will be called *KOPAL* and will include more than 1,200 photographs.

The Polaroid picture is not only smaller; it is also much more narrative than my usual work. The series includes themes I would not use in other series – pictures of my daughter, dogs, fruits or one of my sons.

**SG:** Considering that photography is still a relatively young and expanding medium, and is still emerging in its perceived legitimacy as a medium within contemporary art practice, how do you see it evolving and what is it capable of?

**FM:** Photography came with the second wave of settlers to America – that makes more than 170 years of photography. So, I'm not sure I would call it a "young medium" in your continent! It is much more a "young thing" in Europe, because of its long history; America itself is not remarkably older than its ability to take pictures. I know collectors who are buying their first photographs nowadays. Here it is not yet on the level with art forms like painting.



[/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler5\\_0.jpg](/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/Madler5_0.jpg)

**Frank Mädler: Grit playa de Rodiles II (06/09/05).**

Polaroid, 8-5/8 x 8-5/8 inches

A friend of mine who is a video artist once said of my pictures, "Good. But, how sad it's not moving." When I watch movies I often think "Too bad it is moving. I cannot see the picture anymore." Photography came to stay – like the telephone, cars, scripture. With all this stuff you can do whatever you want – even art.

**SG:** Some of your works verge on abstraction, despite their marked focus on the figurative subject. Is this a delicate balance for you, and do you entertain the notion of exploring photographic abstraction wholesale?

**FM:** It is indeed a difficult balance between abstraction and reproduction. In between these things I try to find my spot. Documentary photography never had my interest; there are enough artists in this spectrum. Abstract photography seems a little odd to me. Why should I take a photo of something and make it invisible in the picture? For my work, I need the reality to depart me from it.

*Frank Mädler's monograph, KOPAL, will be published by Fotohof Editions, Austria, in*

May 2013.

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