

Hildegard Frübis, Berlin (Germany)

## **Europe as Transit – Jewish Remembrance and the Photographs of Roman Vishniac from the 1940s and 1950s**

For Jewish culture – to the extent that it had survived – post-war Europe was rather uncertain terrain. Europe meant for many of Jewish survivors just a temporary transit station. This situation is most evident in the „Displaced Person Camps“ (DP-Camps) in Germany, Austria and Italy in which between 1945 and 1952 more than 250 000 Jewish „displaced persons“ lived and were administered by the Allies. Despite the partially desolate situation in the Camps these places became centres of cultural activities (journalism, theatre, music, sports), activities which in turn were initiated and supported by institutions of the Jewish self-administration as well as through the support of Jewish welfare organizations such as the *Joint Distribution Committee* (JDC). Situated between the past and the future, between the experiences of the Holocaust and the crafting of blueprints for a new future (e.g. Zionism), between emigration, return or staying, these camps gave rise to a structure in which Jewish and European experience gathered in a new conglomeration. The social-documentary photographs of Roman Vishniac – photographs which dealt with everyday life in Camps and in the ruins of the post-war cities alike – emerged in this spatial as well as temporal situation of “transit”.

This presentation will show how Roman Vishniac’s work from 1947 to the 1950s follows different traditions of pre-war social documentary photography as well as his own photographic projects from the 1930s, projects which had been created in Eastern Europe and commissioned by the *Jewish Joint Distribution Committee*, the largest international Jewish relief organization. At the same time, he developed a new iconography of specific Jewish experiences and history using the photographic traditions of Modernism. Their central subjects refer to the experiences of the concentration camps, to expulsion, deportation and emigration as well as political new orientations like Zionism.

**Hildegard Frübis** is Senior Lecturer at the *Humboldt University Berlin*. In 1993 she completed her PhD at *Eberhard-Karls-University Tübingen* (*Die Wirklichkeit des Fremden. Zur Entdeckung Amerikas in den Bildprägungen des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Reimer 1995). She habilitated on Max Liebermann and his illustrations to Heinrich Heines *Rabbi von Bacherach* at *Humboldt University Berlin*. From 2015 to 2017 she was a Research Assistant at the University of Graz (*Lise Meitner-Program, FWF Austria*); currently she has a research fellowship of *Gerda Henkel Stiftung* on *Jewish modernism in the pictorial arts*.