

# TO THE FILES

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Germany

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64 photographs, c-prints, 75 x 90 cm

When does a state ever collapse? In the last two decades, since the demise of the GDR dictatorship, a broad and intensive field of research has opened up. At times, there appears to be an intellectual gold-rush mentality regarding GDR history. The research that is done is mainly based on archive material, which is stored by various institutions.

How do these places look, these rooms where the GDR is stored by order of the state? The job of remembering how things were is the province of the museums and memorials that give an idea of the GDR itself, of its everyday life and monuments, of the Berlin Wall, of the Stasi headquarters and of its detention centres. However, for all that there is still something missing – we have no clear image of the places and spaces that exist because the GDR existed.

*To the Files* shows the places where these processes of collecting, administration, archiving, evaluation and research are carried out: aloof functional buildings, endless corridors and shelves with row upon row of files, film reels and papers, which have been labeled, numbered and stored in acid-free cardboard boxes. The photographic view is reserved and objective. No attempt was made to go looking for unexpected finds or eye-catching items in the collections; rather the idea was to show papers that have been ordered and filed in grey boxes.

The interpretation and analysis of GDR history is entirely based on the documents that have been saved and kept in these rooms.

Through the visualized aesthetics, the views of the places inaccessible to the public appear mysterious and powerful at the same time, without providing any insight into the content. The work *To the Files* addresses the limits of visualization in the age of images and also shows how time and prevailing social values influence the interpretation and explanation of history.

#### INVOLVED INSTITUTIONS:

Federal Archives: Berlin Lichterfelde & Hoppegarten  
Federal Film Archives: Berlin Wilhelmshagen & Hoppegarten  
Federal Foreign Office  
Central State Archive Berlin  
Central State Archive Dresden  
Central State Archive Weimar  
Agency of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi records (BStU):  
Berlin & Magdeburg  
Academie of Arts Berlin