

Germano

In 2016 photographer and artist Sarah Mei Herman (Amsterdam, 1980) found a box of photographs taken by her grandfather Mordechai. Together with his younger brother Jehuda he ran a photography studio in Kaunas, Lithuania before the second world war. This studio was named *Germano*, Lithuanian for Herman.

Foto Germano specialized in family portraits. Herman recognized marked similarities between her own work and the portraits made by her grandfather in the 1920s and 1930s; the composition, the quiet faces, the subdued looks. This was to be the starting point of an investigation into the pre- and post-war history of the Germano family. During her time as an artist in residence at Kaunas Photography Gallery, Herman conducted archival research and explored some of the places where her family members had lived and worked.

She also discovered several anonymous photos online which were taken by her grandfather. These portraits turned out to be part of a photographic archive owned by the Rokiškis Regional Museum. It was in the town Rokiškis where Herman's grandfather was born and where he and his brother had their first photo studio. The portrait of "Unknown Girls" (Rokiškis 1925) in particular resonated with Herman on a deep level due to the striking similarities with her own contemporary portraits. This photograph became a starting point for the project.

During her research, Herman visited Tonia Levin (1925-2019), the daughter of her grandfather's eldest brother Solomon. At that time Levin was the only living family member who had personally experienced the photo studio. She barely survived the Holocaust and moved to Israel after the war, taking the memories with her which are central to this exhibition. Using archival documents, letters, multimedia elements as well as portraits of Tonia's family, Herman composed an ode to Levin and the strength with which she rebuilt her life after the war.

Alongside the work about Tonia's life and memories Herman presents portraits from her series "Julian & Jonathan", about the relationship between her father and her 21 years younger half brother Jonathan. In this way Herman shows the continuation of the Herman family. *Germano* brings the family history back to its origins and explores the notions of fate and survival, 75 years after the Holocaust.