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SCHWERPUNKT

## Portraitfotografie

**PORTFOLIO** Christoph Soeder Was dahinter steckt | **VERBÄNDE** Female Photoclub e. V. Für Fotografinnen  
**TECHTALK** (16) Fokus Peaking Manuell scharfstellen | **MARKTÜBERSICHT** Objektive Linsen aus China  
**BIZZ BITS** Cornelis Gollhardt Portraits für Unternehmen | **KNOW-HOW** Augen AF Technik und Praxis  
**KNOW-HOW** Cloud-Workflow Alle Daten fliegen hoch | **SOFTWARE** Excire Bildverwaltung mit KI  
**STORY** Thomas Hoepker Bilderfabrikant | **TIPA World Awards 2022** 40 ausgezeichnete Gewinner

# WHAT'S BEHIND IT

Politics, business and therapy for people with dementia: Christoph Soeder creates sophisticated contextual statements of psychological depth both as an agency photographer and in his independent series. **By Peter Schuffelen**  
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Olaf Scholz making a statement of power  
– or not. Being open for interpretation is  
part of the visual concept.  
(Foto: Christoph Soeder/dpa)



Background moments from international politics: Soeder knows how to contextualize and give events the decisive spin according to the situation. (All photos: Christoph Soeder/dpa)



>>> Events condensed into a moment in a matter of seconds. Excerpts that illustrate what is special about an event. Visual complexity that clarifies connections: a good news picture demands a lot. In order for it to prevail in the tough competition of images, so that it might even appear on the front page or as a lead story, something else is needed: tension in the composition of the image. Christoph Soeder, who works as a freelancer for AP, among others, and first and foremost as a permanent freelancer for German Press Agency dpa, succeeds again and again in such pictures. In 2019, two of them became "dpa pictures of the year", in 2020 it took 2nd place in the Arts & Entertainment category and 3rd place in the Story category. And with one in particular  
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With a dense picture from the world of politics, he made it into a double-page spread in Stern Magazin last September. You can see Robert Habeck applauding Annalena Baerbock from the side on the stage of the Greens' election party. The top candidate in front of the green and yellow sunflower party logo looks past the camera into the distance, framed by two blurred black hands of the spectator. A typical Soeder picture.

The German-Frenchman, born in 1989, knows how to contextualize, how to give events the decisive spin in a given situation – even in fractions of a second when it matters.

"In order for a news image to prevail in the tough image competition, it needs not only content density but also compositional tension."

So at the Paralympic Winter Games in China, where he was on site for the dpa. Impressive: the image of a slalom runner racing past a gate, taken against the light on a hilltop. The skier (a black shadow only) lies

wide-armed in a right turn, snow sprays up, his handicap in front of the circular sun: his right leg is missing. An incredible athletic achievement, skilfully summed up in milliseconds.

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In a nutshell (above): Ski slalom skiers at the Paralympic Winter Games in China, where Soeder was on site for the dpa. (Photo: Christoph Soeder/dpa Christoph Soeder/dpa) | Right side: In his "staged reportage" entitled "Frame of Mind", Soeder portrayed people with various mental illnesses using a semi-transparent mirror.

"In his free projects, the Berlin photographer works more slowly and narratively."

#### >>> Below the surface

But that's just one face of the Berlin photographer. In his free projects, he works much more slowly, serially – and thus more narratively. "Forgetting Forgetfulness" is the name of one of these series of pictures that was created in 2017. It shows people with dementia who momentarily forget their illness, namely in the moments when they are singing together with music therapists. Soeder has captured these moments of memory and happiness in a touching way by showing the dementia patients and the therapists in the background in a mirror in visual and acoustic harmony.

Thematically related, but conceptually very different, implemented in an innovative way: "Frame of Mind". In a kind of staged reportage, the photographer portrays people with various mental and psychological illnesses in this series and uses a semi-transparent mirror as a kind of metaphor and representation tool in one. This way one can see the person

and at the same time what occupies him or her. He developed the highly symbolic images together with those he portrayed, some over many days. The work was incredibly worthwhile and rich in experience, says Soeder, who kept in touch with some of the subjects far beyond the project.

In his most recent project, "Behind Windows", which he created during the lockdown, he and his photographer colleague Christophe Gateau look through apartment windows using a drone to observe life behind them.

In the well-staged images, both photographers show people in their private surroundings painting, making music, thinking, chilling or doing sports. Symbols of complete seclusion and contact that has become impossible during the pandemic. Literally framed by the window.

Beyond the given framing, these images tell stories about what moves people. They show what's behind it. Typically Soeder.

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Hair: In "Unfading" (left) the photographer addresses hair loss with women, in "Clear-Cut" he portrayed customers of a barbershop in Wales.

## >>> "The worst are the pictures that you didn't take."

■ Christoph, how does that work: with press photos in seconds capture the special part of the moment?

**Christoph Soeder:** In photojournalism it's a lot about context, you need background knowledge. Pre-research is therefore helpful, both for images in which the location plays a role and for portraits in which you can then engage with the other person in a conversation and work out the essence of the moment. In politics in particular, it's also about trying to look behind the scenes, i.e. to make it clear what is being presented and what might actually be behind it.

■ Despite time pressure, you succeed in taking such enigmatic shots that explain things using symbols, apparently quite often ...

**CS:** Thanks for the compliment! I believe that form or shape can be understood as the door to content; It's important that technical aspects are set precisely so that you can condense the content, for example by working with hard or soft light or using the surroundings as a metaphor. However, the latter can only be planned to a limited extent. The worst are the images that you had in your head but which you didn't take in the end - for example because a certain person didn't walk through the picture as you had it previsualized it

■ With your free work you have much more time for the picture layout. Wouldn't it be nice if it was always like this?

**CS:** No, I love this fast work for news agencies – there is something exciting about shooting to the point.

In "Forgetting forgetfulness", Soeder makes visible in an impressive way how people with dementia diseases remember in music therapy.



I've always been a fan of applied photography and don't want to work solely along the lines of my own inspiration on the long run. In addition, I am very attached to teamwork. It's great to see how the work of a team of photographers comes together like a mosaic to form a larger picture of major events in the course of reporting.

■ Free and applied photography – so a harmonious mix for you?

**CS:** Absolutely. After graduating, I turned my back on press photography for almost three years and only then started working for the dpa again. That's when I really realized how much fun it is for me and how well it fits together with my free projects.

■ To what extent are the free projects part of your business model?

**CS:** Financially, the free work doesn't bring anything at all, it's pure passion, the desire to explore new paths and strategies and to develop myself further. It's a condensation that sharpens my profile as a photographer, so to speak - and sometimes commissions arise from it.

■ With "Unfading" you addressed hair loss in women, in "Frame of Mind" psychological problems, in "Forgetting forgetfulness" dementia. Where does this fondness for health topics come from?

**CS:** That happened more or less by chance during my studies. What is less accidental, however, is my interest for typologies, which I like to use in a more systematic way. The field of tension between uniqueness and uniformity fascinates me and can be a way to work out some aspects of being human through the eyes of a certain group of people.



CHRISTOPH SOEDER born in 1989 in France to German and French parents, grew up in Germany. During his school days he worked as a photographer and graphic designer for the school newspaper. After graduating from high school he did an internship of several months as a photojournalist in the Philippines and worked for various German and Filipino clients, including the dpa news agency and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. He later studied at the Ostkreuz School of Photography in Berlin and documentary photography at the University of South Wales, Newport. Soeder lives as a freelancer in Berlin and works for the German Press Agency (dpa), Associated Press (AP) and for clients such as the German Music Industry Association, the German Center for Gerontology, CNN, Greenpeace, Weißer Ring and BBC Music Magazine. [christophsoeder.com](http://christophsoeder.com)