

Nederlands Fotomuseum opens in the Santos warehouse with a visual journey through 180 years of photography of the city



Cas Oorthuys, *Vondelingenweg*, 1957-1958 © Cas Oorthuys/Nederlands Fotomuseum

Rotterdam, 2 December, 2025

Rotterdam in Focus: The City in Photographs 1843 – Now is one of two temporary exhibitions marking the launch of the Nederlands Fotomuseum, the National Museum of Photography, in the Santos warehouse in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The exhibition offers an impressive overview of photography of the city of Rotterdam from 1843 to the present. Through more than 300 photographs, the development of photography unfolds over a period of some 180 years with images taken by both professional and amateur photographers. Iconic photographers such as Hans Aarsman, Iwan Baan, Eva Besnyö, Henri Berssenbrugge, Johann Georg Hameter, Helena van der Kraan, Jannes Linders, Cas Oorthuys, Otto Snoek and others show how a constantly changing Rotterdam continually inspires new ways of seeing, observing, and photographing. The exhibition features works from leading collections, including those of the Nederlands Fotomuseum, the Rotterdam City Archives, the Dutch Royal Collections and the Maria Austria Institute. It is curated by guest curators Frits Gierstberg and Joop de Jong and will be on view from February 7 through May 24, 2026.

A journey of discovery through Rotterdam

The exhibition takes visitors on an associative journey through the photographic imagination of Rotterdam's urban landscape. It begins with what is believed to be the oldest known photograph of Rotterdam, taken in 1843 by an English amateur photographer, and continues through to contemporary drone and panoramic photography. Rather than following a chronological order, the exhibition mirrors the dreamlike logic of the city itself: surprising viewpoints, unexpected perspectives, and the layered interplay of historical and modern Rotterdam landscapes.

Special Loans and Archival Gems

Many vintage photographs are being shown for the first time, including 42 rare stereoscopic images from a private collection. Special loans also include photographs from the Dutch Royal Collections (Koninklijke Verzamelingen) archive, made on commission by building patrons, offering a rare insight into early construction projects. In addition, a unique six-meter-long panorama by Siebe Swart is on display, never before shown in Rotterdam. These pieces make the exhibition a visually and historically rich account of the city.

Photography Through Time

Rotterdam has been captured by photographers in a variety of ways over time. In the post-World War II reconstruction period, images by Cas Oorthuys, Henk Jonker, and Aart Klein depict an orderly, bright, and modern city, where empty spaces symbolize progress. At the same time, photobooks from the 1960s and 1970s, for example by Carel Blazer and Onno Meeter, offer a new, colourful perspective on the city, reflecting the social and economic challenges of the era. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, photographers such as Jannes Linders and Gilbert Fastenaekens challenged the myth of an orderly Rotterdam by documenting industrial areas, abandoned buildings and forgotten places, allowing the “urban landscape” as a photographic genre to flourish. With this exhibition and publication, the Nederlands Fotomuseum further maps the history of photography in Rotterdam.

Icons and Spectacular Architecture

The exhibition also shows how Rotterdam has evolved into a city of iconic and spectacular architecture. From the striking skyline and the Erasmus Bridge to contemporary high-rises such as the Zalmhaventoren, photographers like Iwan Baan, Stacii Samidin and Lou Muuse capture the city from unexpected perspectives, highlighting both the aesthetics and the social significance of the urban environment. These images pose the question “Who does the city belong to?” and demonstrate how photography contributes to collective memory, urban identity, and residents’ engagement.

Publication

Accompanying the exhibition is the book of the same name, *Rotterdam in Focus*. The publication is released by nai010 publishers in a bilingual edition (English/Dutch). Authors/Editors: Frits Gierstberg and Joop de Jong. Hardcover, 240 pages, 200 photographs, ISBN 978-94-6208-935-8, retail price €39.95.

About the guest curators

Frits Gierstberg is an art historian and freelance curator, lecturer, researcher, and writer. Joop de Jong works as a guest curator and filmmaker for museums and broadcasters, often focusing on Rotterdam, with history and photography as connecting themes. They previously developed exhibitions such as *Rotterdam in the Picture* (2015) and *Rotterdam Works!* (2020) for the Nederlands Fotomuseum.

Exhibition: *Rotterdam in Focus: The City in Photographs 1843 – Now*

Location: Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam

Date: 7 February - 24 May, 2026

Design: Studio Marleen Bos

With works by, among others: Hans Aarsman, Iwan Baan, Eva Besnyö, Henri Berssenbrugge, Johann Georg Hameter, Helena van der Kraan, Jannes Linders, Cas Oorthuys, Otto Snoek

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