

## 100 years women's vote in Germany

100 years ago women in Germany got the vote. 69 years ago the German constitution declared that their “human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.” ([Article 1, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany](#)).

It took many years, however, before the equality promised in 1918 took effect. Only 60 years ago Germany affirmed women and men as equal partners before the law. Since then a woman can get her driver's license without permission from her father or her spouse. Since 1977 a woman can take up a profession without her husband's consent and can have her own bank account. Since 1979 men and women have the same legal status as parents and only since 1994 can a man choose to take on his wife's name.

## The photographic exhibition

How do women experience the promise made by the 1918 suffrage today?



**What does the right to vote mean to women in Germany 100 years after it was granted?**

**And what about their dignity? Do they experience it as inviolable? Who protects them, if it is not?**

**What does freedom of choice mean to them? How free do women feel in their family situations, in their professions, in their social class?**

These questions were the starting point for the photographic project that [Sabine Felber](#)

(photographer) and [Gisela Winkler](#) (curator) started in the Burgenlandkreis, Germany. The Burgenlandkreis is a largely rural district not far from Weimar, where women's suffrage was originally granted. The intention of the project was to employ Sabine's method of autobiographical photography as a way of engaging women in an ongoing conversation with themselves and others about suffrage, dignity and choice.

## Who is in the project?



28 women volunteered to participate in the project. They come from all walks of life. The oldest is 92, almost as old as the women's vote herself. The youngest is 19 and voted for the first time last year. Some hold leadership positions, some run their own businesses, while others have been dependent on social security payments for years. Some are single parents, others are stay-at-home-mums. There are women who profess to be feminist and those, who have never been to vote. Most women in the project were born in Germany, but there are also European citizens, who choose to work in the district, and refugee women, who were sent there by the state. The project is inclusive and the women represent the full political spectrum, including those who are politically active, disenchanted or those, who have been refugees all their life.

Many of the 28 participants responded to a public advertisement or came to hear of the project through the women's network. Others were encouraged to participate by their friends. A few were specifically invited, to increase the diversity of the group.

## How did the project work?

Once all women were fully briefed about the project, Sabine worked with them individually at a place of their choice. After talking about the above questions she set the stage for the portrait and prepared the camera and the lights. However, she did not take the final photo. This the women did themselves.

With the help of a remote control device Sabine gave them complete power over their situation. They chose the moment to press the button. They chose the feeling they wanted to document and share. Thus the photos are no classic



portraits. They are also no “selfies”, as the women did not see themselves during the photographic act. They are autobiographic portraits that make their dialogic nature apparent. It is a dialogue that moves us, as we are touched by the emotional honesty of the women, as well as Sabine’s artistic expertise.

After the field work was done, the photographs developed, digital stories constructed and edited, it was time to engage all women in an ethical and honest conversation about “being a public figure” once their thoughts and portraits became part of an exhibition. If “going public” felt too risky or too exposing, the women were free to leave the project, as no material would be used in public without their explicit consent. All 28 women stayed.

### **What can you see in the exhibition?**

The exhibition consist of 28 portraits combined with 28 statements about dignity. There is a 15 minute sound installation that conveys the women’s thoughts about the right to vote. Finally there are five digital stories in which individual women narrate significant experiences to do with suffrage, dignity and choice.



Information about the current showing of the exhibition can be found on the following site:

[www.wuerde-selbst-waehlen.de](http://www.wuerde-selbst-waehlen.de)

## International access

In order to enable [international access](#) to the exhibition the portraits can also be seen on Sabine's blog.

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