

# Bertelsmann Is All This and More

by Jim Rakete

Bertelsmann is distinguished by its diversity, which is why we chose “Bertelsmann Is All This and More” as our tagline this year. And we asked Jim Rakete, one of the most renowned photographers of our time, to capture our diversity in his pictures.

The result is a series of 23 wonderful, captivating and very warm black-and-white photographs in which the artist shows what Bertelsmann means to him. His large-scale photographs, taken at our locations on several continents, show Bertelsmann Corporate and our seven divisions – RTL Group, Penguin Random House, BMG, Arvato Group, Bertelsmann Marketing Services, Bertelsmann Education Group and Bertelsmann Investments – in a unique light. Above all, however, they are now transforming and lending character to our Corporate Center, bringing the world of Bertelsmann back to its headquarters in Gütersloh.

I am delighted that we are able to show the photographs permanently in the exhibition “Bertelsmann Is All This and More – by Jim Rakete” at our Corporate Center – and that I am able to present them to you, dear readers, in this brochure. We are confident that the subjects and composition of the pictures will appeal to you as much as they do to us, and we hope you enjoy this exciting photographic journey through the world of Bertelsmann, as seen and captured by Jim Rakete.

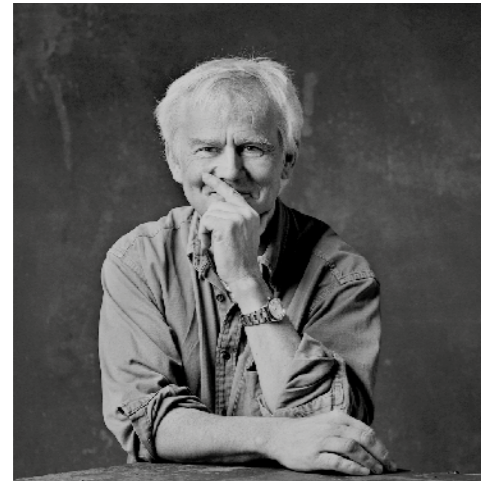
Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Rabe', with a large, sweeping flourish at the beginning.

Thomas Rabe

## Jim Rakete

Born on January 1, 1951, in Berlin



© Katrin Schmidt

Jim Rakete began working as a photo reporter for daily newspapers, magazines and agencies while still at school. His initial focus was on the music scene. Even then, he portrayed stars including Jimi Hendrix, Ray Charles, Mick Jagger and David Bowie. From 1977 to 1988, he ran the creative laboratory “Fabrik Rakete” in Berlin-Kreuzberg, where he not only created the album covers for many musicians of the New German Rock scene, but also handled the management of artists such as the Nina Hagen Band, Spliff, Nena, Die Ärzte and Interzone. In 1988, his love of photography, which forms the center of his creative work, regained the upper hand. Since then, he has taken portraits of numerous big names in the German and international music and film industries, including Til Schweiger, Jürgen Vogel, Natalie Portman, Annett Louisan and Joe Jackson. In the 1990s, he commuted between Hamburg and Los Angeles, photographing and shooting music videos and commercials as

Director of Photography, before returning to Berlin in 2001. After being given the opportunity to combine his great interest in people with politics for the launch of the magazine “Cicero,” he also photographed politicians such as Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Franz Müntefering and Otto Schily during this time. In addition to portraits of national and international stars from the music, film and art industries, his extensive body of work now also includes a number of film productions. For example, the documentary “NOW,” released in 2020, depicts Rakete’s commitment to climate policy and once again connects his creative work with his political interests. But a longing for the artistic is also evident in the documentaries – and so he went on to make films, including one about the actress Iris Berben and a theater film with Susanne Wolff. Jim Rakete has retained his “black-and-white perspective” to this day, even when he photographs in color. His work is characterized by precise composition and a striking directness. Rakete’s pictures have long since become art and can be found in important collections such as the German Film Museum in Frankfurt and Museum Folkwang in Essen. He has lent new perspectives to portrait photography in Germany. To this day, he ensures that people are not reduced to raw material that needs to be artificially optimized, but that their real image appears – unique, unmistakable, and unforgettable. For these achievements, he was awarded the Verdienstkreuz 1. Klasse (English: Officer’s Cross) in 2018.

# “When Life Interferes with the Photograph”

## Interview with Jim Rakete

He says he is “not an artist, but rather a witness.” And he is undoubtedly one of the most famous photographers in the world: Jim Rakete. There is hardly a chancellor, actress or musician that he hasn’t photographed over the past decades. And now Jim Rakete has photographed Bertelsmann – or rather what Bertelsmann, which he has known and accompanied for many years, means to him. He has “found his own visual language for the Corporate Center in Gütersloh” and captured it in 23 situational black-and-white photographs. Rakete’s works, each measuring 100 by 140 centimeters (40 by 55 inches), have been lending a fresh, modern and creative ambience to the Corporate Center stairwell and conference zones since November 2024. In an interview, the photographer talks about how this came about.

### **Bertelsmann and Jim Rakete – the connection is a longstanding one. How did it all begin?**

One day many, many years ago, I was at the Sonopress record-pressing plant in Gütersloh. That was my first contact with Bertelsmann. As a photographer, I am firmly anchored in the music scene. I've been privileged to work with many of the greats, from Karajan to Bowie. At Sonopress, I experienced the well-oiled machinery that followed the creative process – how their music was turned into records, how they were packaged and shipped, how they reached the many millions of fans.

### **...and later, this turned into more?**

Yes, when Thomas Rabe, a connoisseur and advocate of good photography, became CEO, I did the pictures for one of his first annual reports, and visually translated his strategic ideas for the Group into photographs. Over time, I also took photos of the Management Board members and Liz Mohn. These were always nice, creative assignments.

### **And then Karin Schlautmann, Bertelsmann's Executive Vice President of Corporate Communications, approached you a few months ago with a request to photograph what Bertelsmann means to you.**

I remember well the beginning of our wonderful collaboration and the assignment, which at first glance seemed incredible to me: Could I imagine giving the Corporate Center a new visual language? That's something you would normally ask of an interior designer or a gallery owner, especially as the design of the building isn't simple. But she asked me. And I really was very pleased.

### **Why?**

Bertelsmann's current slogan is "Bertelsmann Is All This and More." And now I had been tasked with showing what Bertelsmann is for me. Without specifications. That kind of assignment is really fun...

**Especially when it involves traveling halfway around the world.**

A global corporation cannot be adequately portrayed in a studio or at its headquarters alone. If you want to experience Bertelsmann, you have to go out into the world. And so we were in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Riga, Cologne and Berlin for the shoots – but also in Gütersloh, of course. Bertelsmann is everywhere.

**What motifs did you capture there to tell Bertelsmann from your point of view?**

“Capture” doesn’t really describe what we did. We gave each of the 23 motifs a lot of thought in advance, and started taking some test shots. Step by step, we created a series of photographs that show Bertelsmann in all its diversity: filming an episode of “Sisi” for RTL; a sports report from the Paralympics; a reader on the subway; club musician on the Sunset Strip; scenes from a band’s rehearsal room; nurses taking online courses; the legendary swans on the pond in front of the Corporate Center... and the renaissance of vinyl production at Sonopress, too. That felt like a full-circle moment to me.

**...in which you personally experienced that “Bertelsmann Is All This and More”?**

It’s hard to believe that the heart of this company beats in the tranquil town of Gütersloh, yet you can feel its pulse in every metropolis. It was more difficult to find scenic elements from the company’s various divisions that are emblematic of the work culture and the attitude to life of its employees and users.

**You mentioned a precise concept behind the photos and the exhibition. Can you tell us more about this concept?**

The photos show people at a decisive moment. If life were a movie, we would call this moment a “plot point.” After it, many things will be different. Whatever we want to call this moment, photography is the best way to capture and preserve it. Einstein is said to have come up with his theory of relativity on a bicycle. I would have loved to have taken the photo to illustrate that.

### And what in general makes an assignment exciting for someone like Jim Rakete?

One thing I can spend hours thinking about is the question of whether and how things could be simplified. I have noticed that in all communication, including photography, simplicity has a simple elegance, as the famous cameraman Gordon Willis once put it. A picture is all about conciseness, so it has to be relatively simple. There has to be a compelling idea. That is true for every picture, including the ones in my Bertelsmann cycle.

### Speaking of simple – did that apply to the shooting conditions as well?

In principle, yes, if one is prepared to accept that life will interfere with the photographs.

### What do you mean?

When we shot the RTL motif in Riga during the filming of “Sisi,” we had carefully considered the shots beforehand. And then, at the crucial moment, a soundman with his microphone boom came rushing through the middle of the picture. At first you think: This can’t be happening. Now we’re going to have to start all over again. But the opposite is the case. Only a moment like that makes a picture authentic, alive. And these decisive moments run through the entire Bertelsmann cycle like a common theme. My friend Peter Lindbergh, pulling an all-nighter going through mountains of contact sheets with a magnifying glass and a felt-tip pen, was able to filter out the one picture that was different from a thousand other pictures he had taken. The one that was better, precisely because life had intervened – even if it was in the form of a microphone dangling from a rod. All of this just confirms, once again, that pictures always come to you. You can’t go chasing them.















BMG



BMG



BMG













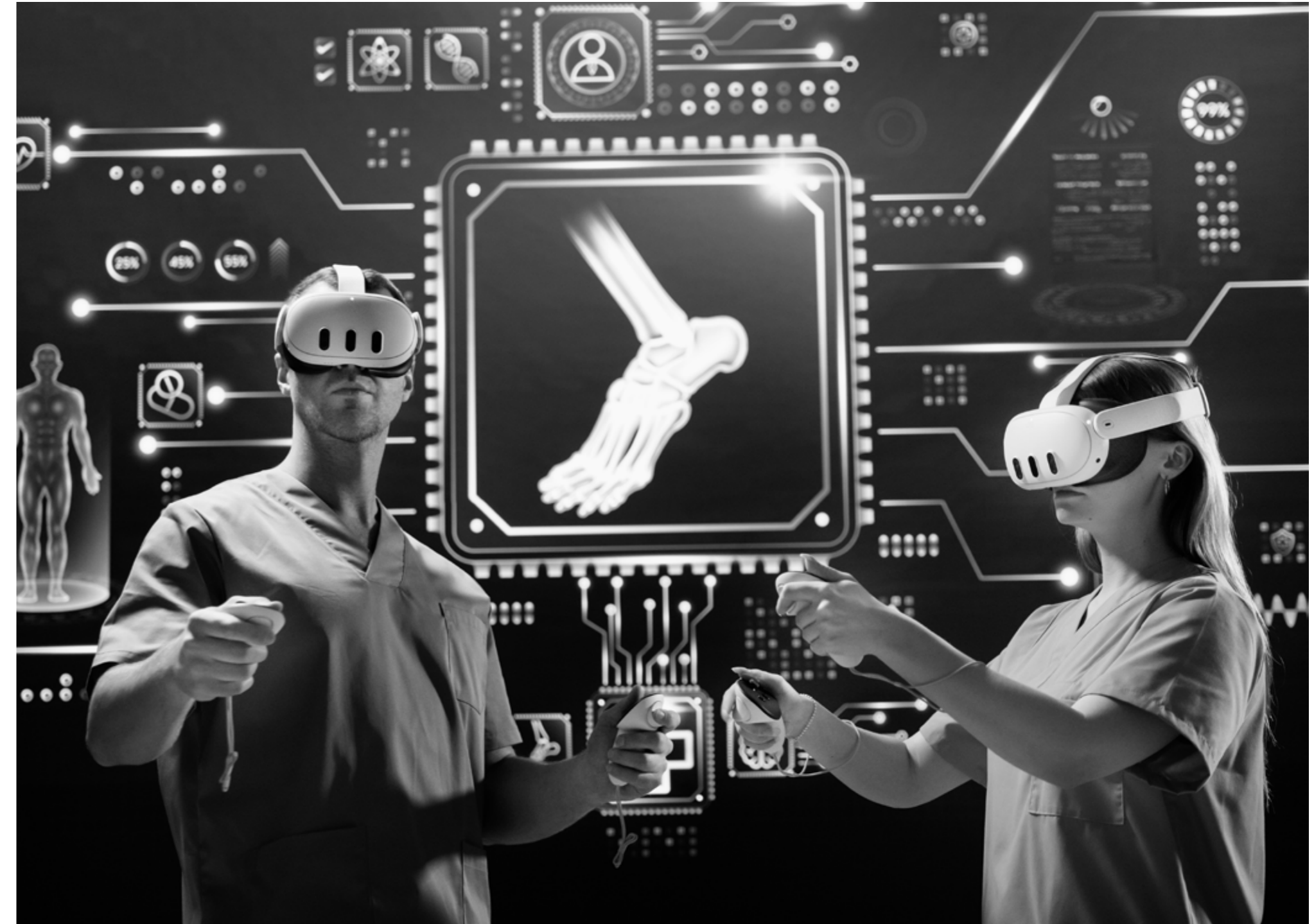


















Bertelsmann





The pictures are located in the Bertelsmann Corporate Center in Gütersloh.

## Production Credits

**Published by:**

Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Strasse 270  
33311 Gütersloh

**Responsibility**

Karin Schlautmann  
Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA  
Executive Vice President Corporate Communications

Further information on:

[www.bertelsmann.com/jimrakete](http://www.bertelsmann.com/jimrakete)





**BERTELSMANN**