IWPA Submission, free theme:

Ongoing project in the red-light district of Hanover, Germany
by Laila Sieber

three monkeys have never been at Steintor

Hanover's red-light district is as easy to find as in many other towns in Germany. The strip, known here as Steintor, is just a seven minutes' walk from the main railway station. The district's name goes back to the city gate that was the entrance of Hanover at the beginning of the 20th century. The area encompasses five streets and a wide variety of cultures, religions and worldviews. It could happen, that at the same time when two sex-workers complain about few customers in the previous night, the Imam of the mosque nearby prepares for the evening prayer. Brothels and strip bars, casinos and clubs, restaurants and barber shops stand cheek by jowl. The old generation tells stories from the past: The "Golden Age" of the area, when people were cuing to enter one of the locations. Now the shelves of the last porn video store is filled with DVDs sold for dumping prices.

When I started to photograph at Steintor I was told to be like the three monkeys: not to hear, not to see and not to speak. At first it sounded like a warning to me. Then I realised how it could meant to be.

It is easy to pass by the doors leading to a world that does not want to be seen. But it is important to enter and to pay attention to a part of our society that many people try to ignore. Furthermore the way how we look at others is where I decided to use one of the original meanings of the three wise monkeys as a main principle in my work: not to judge.

When I showed my images to male viewers, many of them were missing photographs of women working in the brothels. But I want to avoid stereotyping and, as this is an ongoing project, I am still trying to find out how I can produce a work that neither romanticises nor dramatises but is still able to raise questions. The conversation about structures that are anchored in our society is inevitable for the process of improving equality for all individuals.