

**100 Years Leica
Anniversary ceremony
Ernst Leitz Park,
26th June 2025**

Dr. Oliver Nass, Chairman Ernst Leitz Foundation

Distinguished guests from politics and business, Ladies and gentlemen, dear Leica community from around the world,

Today, we gather in celebration of a **remarkable journey** - one that began over a century ago and forever changed the way we see the world. A journey woven through generations, marked by bold vision, unwavering dedication, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

The **Leitz family**, for four generations and over 120 years, shaped this company and infused it with a spirit that somehow still resonates today. It all began with my great-great-grandfather, **Ernst Leitz I**, who arrived from Sulzburg in Wetzlar with a dream. He took over a struggling optical institute and, within three decades, turned it into the world's leading manufacturer of microscopes. His son, **Ernst Leitz II**, continued this legacy, pioneering innovations that not only advanced the industry, but also upheld the well-being of the company's employees and furthermore set an example for exceptional courage during the times of the Nazis regime.

In June 1924, came the moment that would define history: despite countless risks and warnings, Ernst Leitz II made the famous proclamation: *"I hereby decide, we will take the risk"*. With these words, the Leica was born.

And, against all odds, Leica succeeded where others failed. The ingenuity of **Oskar Barnack's** design - utilizing a 35mm cinema film – combined with the state-of-the-art

lenses developed by **Max Berek** proved groundbreaking. What seemed an unlikely endeavour at first, became the standard for photography worldwide. The launch of Agfa's Isochrom film in 1932 further accelerated Leica's rise, unlocking unprecedented possibilities for photographers across the globe.

Under **Ernst Leitz III**, the company expanded its product range by promoting also its own precision optical measurement instruments, hereby laying the foundation for today's Leica Geosystems. Meanwhile, **Ludwig Leitz**, Oskar Barnack's successor, contributed nearly 200 innovations, including the legendary **rangefinder system** with automatically mirrored masks that corresponded to the focal length of the lens in use, as well as the parallax compensation. His vision also shaped Leica's aesthetics. His source of inspiration was his own experience of sculpting, which he further developed with **Adolf Groß** and especially **Heinrich Jahnke**. All this culminated in the Leica M - an icon whose design remains almost unchanged until today, standing as the very embodiment of Leica's essence.

The 1970ies and early 1980ies provided numerous challenges with its economic crises, high inflation, exchange rate tensions, and emerging competition from Japan. My uncle, **Knut Kühn-Leitz**, led the fourth and final generation of the family's stewardship, navigating these times with strategic partnerships - Minolta in Japan and Wild Heerbrugg in Switzerland, and the establishment of Leica's Portugal factory for the pre-assembling of cameras, which has just celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Though Minolta did not withstand the digital revolution, Leica Camera continues this tradition, forging strong alliances with selected partners such as Panasonic.

Our family no longer holds ownership, but the emotional bond remains profound. We take immense pride in witnessing the three Leica companies thrive under the leadership of strong and long-term oriented shareholders. As far as Leica Camera is concerned, we

extend our deepest gratitude to you, dear **Mr. Kaufmann** and dear **Mrs. Rehn-Kaufmann**, for having allowed the company to catch up with the digital revolution and for having come back to Wetzlar by creating the **Leitz Park** which magnificently showcases the company's legacy and the magic of photography, as do the Leica Galleries around the globe.

Through the **Ernst Leitz Foundation**, which I oversee, our family would like to make a modest contribution to preserving the entrepreneurial heritage and continuing the tradition of the family villa, the listed Haus Friedwart, where Henri Cartier-Bresson, Alfred Eisenstaedt and Germaine Krull would come and go, as a place of international dialogue and culture for the welfare of the town of Wetzlar. In February of this year, we commemorated the masterpieces of such legendary Leica photographers with an exhibition showing a selection of the Foundation's collection in the Old Town Hall in Wetzlar.

Today, as we honour Leica's hundred-year legacy, we do not merely celebrate its history - we embrace its future. The **magic of photography** lies in its power to capture emotion, to tell stories, and to connect generations. And so, with deep gratitude, we extend our heartfelt wishes for Leica's continued success - rooted in its history, driven by the employees' commitment to excellence, inspired by a timeless design and empowered by the latest optical and digital innovations.

All the best for the next 100 years!