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Lonely freedom

Few other authors – and certainly no female authors – have been studied as much as Annemarie Schwarzenbach or had as much written or published about them in the last 100 years of Swiss literature as she has. There is an enduring fascination with the Zurich-born travel journalist, writer, and photographer who toured the globe in the 1930s – on account of her extraordinary, tragic life, her difficult family history, her exotic itineraries, her homosexuality and her drug addiction. Whereas literary friends such as Erika and Klaus Mann sought exile in America from 1933 onwards, Schwarzenbach left home in the opposite direction to visit countries that included Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, the Soviet Union, and Belgian Congo. Her travels were frequently an attempt to escape from her bourgeois, Nazi-sympathising family, from traditional gender roles, and from drugs and depression. Although Schwarzenbach saw herself primarily as a writer (she penned around 300 journalistic, feuilleton-style pieces documenting the social and political upheaval and unrest of the period leading up to World War II), the “Departure without Destination” exhibition at the Paul Klee Centre in Berne is dedicated to her previously unknown photographic work. The Rolleiflex camera, known for its square-format photography, was Schwarzenbach’s faithful travel companion, taking pictures that depict her view of the world back then.

EVA HIRSCHI

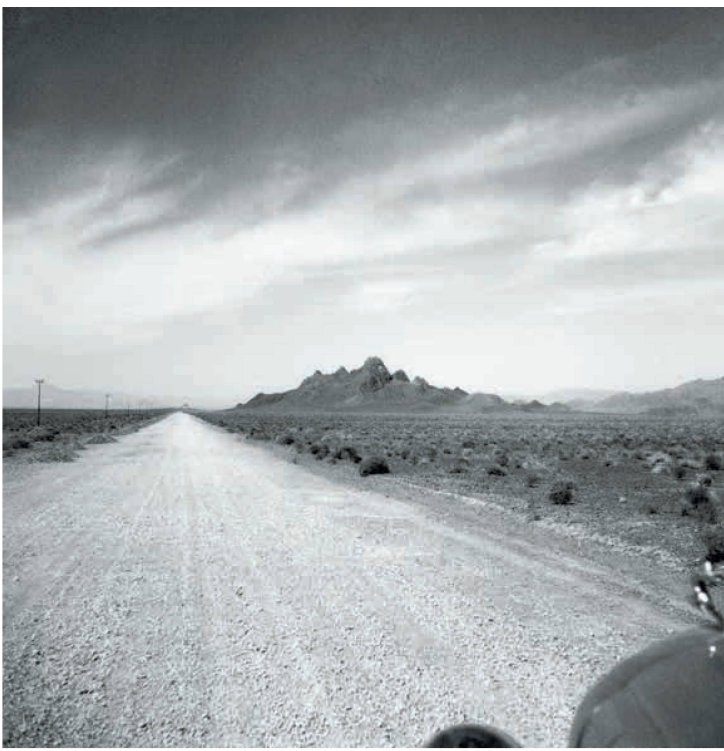
Photos taken from the Swiss Literary Archives of the Swiss National Library in Berne; estate of Annemarie Schwarzenbach



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1) On her American travels (1936), Schwarzenbach portrayed a society still affected by the 1929 economic crisis.

2) Schwarzenbach took photos of European settlers who managed plantations in Belgian Congo (1941–42).

3) The barren wilderness of Iran (1935). Schwarzenbach's writings were almost as vivid as her photos, often betraying her emotional and physical state.

4) Marriage of convenience – Schwarzenbach, a lesbian, married the homosexual French diplomat Claude Clarac in Tehran in 1935.

5) Schwarzenbach travelled – in her Ford – to Afghanistan via Istanbul and Tehran with Genevan travel writer Ella Maillart in 1939.

6) On a ship between two places: the past and the future. Third-class passengers on the crossing to America (1936–38).

7) Annemarie Schwarzenbach, born in 1908 in Zurich, died on 15 November 1942 as a result of a bicycle accident in Engadine. © Esther Gambaro, estate of Marie-Luise Bodmer-Preiswerk



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