

## **Re-(en)visioning art in the GDR**

Fourteen years after the unification of Germany, the National Gallery embarks on a Re-Vision of art in the GDR. In 270 works by 136 artists, the genres of painting, drawing, collage and sculpture as well as the new media of photography and film are exhibited in their diversity, from the continuation of classical traditions to the experimental approaches of the avant-garde. Here the concept of retrospective does not mean a presentation of a chronological development or thematic contexts; rather, despite the inevitable presence of a chronology and exemplary presentation of individual themes, the aim is to present a large-scale essay. In interlocking facets, 40 years of art in the GDR are brought into view as a field of tension comprising different group positions, affinities and artistic personalities. The exhibition enables visitors to experience that, despite all the cultural policy restrictions and repression, a differentiated and rich diversity of artistic expression was possible in the 'closed society' of the GDR, above all in the centres Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig. In this way, art in the GDR steps out of the chains of ideology and its mere historicity, finally allowing us to perceive its lasting pictorial quality and presenting us with a genuine legacy of this age.

## **I 1945 "Zero Hour"**

With the capitulation of the Third Reich on May 8 1945, the darkest chapter in the history of the "land of thinkers and poets" came to an end. Living under occupation and without shelter in destroyed cities, suffering under physical deprivation, in shock, and sharing guilt for the Holocaust and the expulsion of the intellectual and artistic elite, the Germans were to grasp the chance in their existential crisis to found a democratic society out of this vacuum. As a response to the liberation of artistic expression from the art of National Socialism that was fraught with heroism, myth and pathos, in terms of themes and iconography the art of these post-war years was dominated by symbolic formulations of persecution, deprivation, death and destruction, as well as meditative or expressive representations of simple existence in still life, landscape and portrait compositions. The conspicuously large number of self-portraits redefined the positions, as for example that of Bernhard Kretzschmar. A unique document of the prevailing conditions after the war and the senseless destruction is the series of 150 reed pen drawings *Das zerstörte Dresden* by Wilhelm Rudolph. The beauty of the drawings enters into a tension-ridden relationship with the horror of the destruction. Just as moving are the panoramas Richard Peters senior, formerly a photo journalist for a proletarian newspaper, shot of his native ghost town Dresden in 1945. Both pictorial series have become, as could be expected, metaphors for admonition. The sculptor Will Lammert, who returned from Soviet exile to the GDR in 1951, designed a memorial for the former women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück in 1957. The bronze sculpture of the *Große Tragende* from this group, which Lammert managed to complete before his death, takes its model from a pietà. In the simplest form, the artist thus symbolized the demand for human solidarity – a demand that has lost none of its validity today.

## **II Traditions**

The art academies in Dresden, Leipzig, Halle and Berlin exerted great influence in various ways, forming schools and conveying traditions. As at the beginning of the century, Dresden remained committed to the noble post-Impressionist painting culture; at the same time though, expressionists from Die Brücke group and painters such as Otto Dix and Oskar Kokoschka breathed new life into the ateliers at the beginning of the 20th century. National Socialism condemned their work and that of their followers as "degenerate". Some of them, now professors at the art academy that had once again been founded in 1947 under the rector Hans Grundig,

conveyed the development that had been broken off in 1933 to the young generation. Curt Querner came from the school of Otto Dix and the proletarianrevolutionary art. In austere, unvarnished directness his *Elternbild* presents the dignity and burden of the difficult lives led by simple people. Although both work and artist already belong to the next generation, the portrait of *Fritz Löffler* – art historian, doyen and companion of the Dresden school of painters – by Siegfried Klotz, himself a master-class pupil of Bernhard Kretzschmar, fits into the early years thematically and stylistically. In 1947, Wilhelm Lachnit, known as the "Raphael of Dresden", Dreher pupil, ASSO member and communist, was appointed to a teaching post by Hans Grundig. In the *Gliederpuppe* he articulated the irritation he felt at the dominating cultural policy. In contrast to the form-stressed rhythms of Lachnit's images, Ernst Hassebrauk's forms and colours whirl and weave decoratively in the foreground of the landscape work *Blick auf 'Blaues Wunder', Blasewitz und Loschwitz*, and offer a lively contrast to a background that captivates through its clear and calm depiction. Otto Niemeyer-Holstein was regarded as a father figure by a whole generation of GDR painters. The ordinary world of fishermen and boatmen on the island of Usedom was his theme, as in *Ostsee mit Eisschollen*. With his sensual paintings in bold colours taken directly from visual experience, he set finely cultivated, yet lasting signals that were visible on all larger art exhibitions held in the GDR.

### III "Formalistic" Informal

Under the dictate of the dull "socialist realism" decreed from above with its populist educational function, abstract art increasingly slipped into the margins of society during the post-war years in the Soviet zone of occupation and later in the GDR. The formalism campaign imported from the Soviet Union exploited the "socialist art close to the people", following the dictate of the conventional genre painting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the heroic painting of the 1930s in the Soviet Union. The abstract painters in the eastern sector of Germany were restricted greatly in their work by the Stalinist formalism verdict, which carried the accusation of "subjectivism" and "cosmopolitanism"; as a result, many of them were driven once again – after the ostracizing as "degenerate" in the Third Reich – into inner migration. At the 5th SED Central Committee Conference in 1951, Walter Ulbricht then exercised his authority as he threateningly declared before the East German Parliament: "We do not want to see any more abstract paintings in our art academies. We need neither the images of moonscapes nor of rotting fish. The grey-in-grey painting, which is an expression of the capitalist decline, stands in the sharpest possible contrast to life today in the GDR." Herbert Behrens-Hangel and his work are exemplary for the fate of this 'non-representational' generation of modernism. The painter, musician and poet 'HBH', once in the circle of the *Novembergruppe* and the *STURM*, was publicly denounced in the *Tägliche Rundschau* in 1951. And yet he continued to work on paintings such as *Marcel Marceau* and *Himeros* in Fredersdorf on the outskirts of East Berlin, works which are characterised by the rhythmical harmonies of the swinging line and crystalline fracture and nobody saw for years except for the few friends and students of the painter. Herbert Behrens-Hangel expressed what most of his companions such as Hermann Glöckner, Erwin Hahs, Edmund Kesting and others also suffered: "The Nazis chopped into my hand, after the war it was chopped off."

### IV Receptions

Not only the abstract painters came under the fire from the judges of art with their criticism and condemnation; all those artists who felt committed to the tradition of German Expressionism and the European avant-garde were also targeted. In Halle an der Saale, young artists formed a circle

that entered into an intensive dialogue with Picasso's dialectical compositional style. Willi Sitte, Hermann Bachmann and Herbert Kitzel belonged to this circle. In 1959, Sitte painted his work *Arbeitspause*, depicting a worker on scaffolding reading during his work break; this is an early, still restrained memorial for the intelligent worker as a constructor of everyday life and history, echoing Léger's promise of happiness in a harmonised world. In the circle of young Berlin artists, along with Picasso Max Beckmann's 'world theatre' also played a stimulating role. In 1956 Harald Metzkes painted the *Abtransport der sechsarmigen Göttin* as a contemporary metaphoric paraphrase of Beckmann's *Abtransport der Sphinxe* (1945, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe), a work he had seen at the first *documenta* in Kassel. This could well be a hedged allegory alluding to the de-Stalinization process initiated after the XX. Communist Party Conference in Moscow. The Berlin sculptors Theo Balden and René Graetz had already focused on the meta-biomorphic sculptures of Henry Moore during their exile in England. Balden's *Zeitungsläser* lives fully from the tension generated between closures and openings, between concave and convex form. As sculptor and graphic artist, René Graetz had also devoted his attention to the art of Jacob Epstein, Marino Marini and Pablo Picasso. In energyfilled form, his *Upright Figures* metamorphose the organic of archaic origin into bizarre figures in a state of straightening up and constant growth. Gabriele Mucchi, who taught as a guest professor at the Berlin-Weißensee art academy from 1956 to 1961, exerted a strong influence on the young artist generation, both in his energetic personality and his vehement painting.

## **V "Blue Wonder" Dresden**

Dresden, one of the most important German Baroque cities, had preserved its own atmosphere despite its destruction in the fire storm of 1945, a mixture of conservatism and a curiosity for transgressing borders. The large iron bridge rising over the Elbe, known as the 'Blue Wonder', could be used as a metaphor for this tendency. The story of the drawing course given by Jürgen Böttcher at the Dresden adult education centre between 1953 and 1954 is well-known. He attempted to earn a livelihood as a teacher. From his pupils, Peter Herrmann, Peter Graf, Ralf Winkler and Peter Makolies formed a circle of friends. Completely outside the officially required direction, works of art arose that in their expression shift between Rembrandt and Picasso, while at the same time displaying a mood that is fully their own. Böttcher, who later as a painter called himself 'Strawalde', was an excellent teacher. He possessed a double talent and embarked very early on a second career as filmmaker. With the final examination work for his film studies in 1961 he set a monument for his circle of artist friends. Peter Graf and Peter Herrmann were for a time typical representatives of the "synthesis of Baroque and Impressionism" taught by Böttcher, which they formed into a poetic celebration of life's everyday magic and wonders by paraphrasing motifs from, amongst others, Van Gogh and Titian. As Dieter Schmidt wrote, the art produced in the 1950s and 1960s by these friends, who did not understand themselves as a group in a strict sense, is sustained by an "affirmation and poetical celebration of the meagre happiness of the underdog and non-privileged." Similar to the artist groupings in Berlin, it mirrors a hunger for inner illumination after the darkness of the war years, a pure light that was in danger of being finally extinguished by the misery of the dictatorship following the Third Reich.

## **VI Poetry of the Everyday**

The building worker Albert Ebert goes to the Burg Giebichenstein Art Academy in Halle at the beginning of the 1950s to learn how to paint. He wanted to paint "all that is beautiful and peaceful" because he, recovering from an illness and the war, had rediscovered the joy of living. He obtained the knowledge of colour and painting technique he needed to allow this world to

illuminate on small panels from the painters and restorers he associated with. His realism has delicate hands and feet, he opens heart and eye for a world that is beautiful but not kitsch, simple but not simplistic, radiant but not without darkness. Even the grey-brown smog from the chemical factories at Leuna and Buna, all the dense smoke over Halle, could not dull the world for this painter – even if he also suffered from it. The ‘poetry of the everyday’, his ‘kingdom’ in painting, had the everyday hell as its neighbour. The circumstances are not favourable for his paintings; he has to earn his keep through all manner of jobs. On the occasion of his 50th birthday he paints himself in *Heizers Geburtstagsständchen*, where he keeps the boiler burning and at the same time sends Walter Ulbricht to hell. For ‘socialist realism’ he was of no use and the official GDR art criticism passed over him as an indefinable peripheral presence until the end of the 1970s. Winfried Dierske, who was in contact with the group around Jürgen Böttcher (Strawalde) and Ralf Winkler (A. R. Penck) in Dresden, also refused to conform to the official art scene. Dierske painted – in this aspect similar to Ebert – whatever everyday life and his city brought to his attention, but in his paintings the building facades and the street scenes as well as the clear or overcast sky spread above them remain calm. Josef Hegenbarth’s world of motifs moves from the street to poetry, from the world of the circus and acrobats to paintings with Christian themes. Dramatically moving compositions allow scenes of everyday life, as in the *Wartende an der Haltestelle*, and those of poetry to become transparent moments capturing people and their emotional state.

## **VII Peinture: Florence on the Elbe**

Precious and delicate, distinguished by a refined colour arrangement and formal elegance – these are the terms generally used to characterise the Dresden painting tradition. This description refers to the ‘intimacy’ in painting that is rooted in the Impressionism of the turn into the 20th century. Belonging to the shared stylistic features of the generation of students grouped around Gotthardt Kuehl, Carl Bantzer and Robert Sterl, which included – to just name two – Theodor Rosenhauer and Josef Hegenbarth, are a powerful, pastose paint application and a reserved, sensitive colour selection. Preferring to use motifs of stillness, a painting style unfolds that explores the essence of the represented objects – and thus that of painting itself – in the balanced distribution of colour. The still life works of Albert Wigand, which make up a great part of his oeuvre, reveal the focus, indebted to French painting, on pure form and colour. The artist was enthusiastic about the painting of Henri Matisse or of the Nabis group for his entire life. The much younger Stefan Plenkers also sought to avoid narrating stories in his painting: “The picture must [be] ‘unliterary’ and felt entirely from the means of painting.” The main themes in Plenkers’ work are rooms that are made up of contrasting colour spaces which are then pulled together by the use of linear structures. As in *Rote Bar*, lonely figures are his preferred motif. Eberhard Göschel occupies a special position in the Dresden painting tradition with his non-figurative, abstract, lyrical work. At the centre of his artistic creativity stands the investigation into the inner logic of image composition in painting and a scrutiny of perceptual patterns. In the late 1980s he creates a series of works, including *Abflug*, which in these aspects take up the composition principles of Caspar David Friedrich.

## **VIII From Collage to Mail Art**

Ever since the avant-garde movements at the start of the 20th century started to experiment with inserting materials that till then had been considered alien to art into their works, the collage technique has stood for a broader concept of art. Semantic-compositional mixed forms arose and, soon after, three-dimensional works – assemblages – that followed the collage principle. This is

also the case for the collage art created in the GDR. At the same time, however, faced with the accusation of decadence and alienation raised since the 1950s, which had as its consequence an exhibition ban for many artists, considerations on the relationship between image and reality, between copy and original were set a new test. Willy Wolff's panel paintings, from 1967 in the Pop Art style, can be considered examples of a critical engagement with such issues, as is evident in the works *Selbstbildnis* and *Lenin zum 100. Geburtstag*. Robert Rehfeldt was one of the few artists in the GDR to enter into genuine dialogue with artists from other countries, including those of the West, for example Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostell. Rehfeldt's postmarked, glued and printed messages that used the postal service turn a full circle back to the beginnings of collage. Political references are evident in the work of Jürgen Schieferdecker. His assemblage *Das Lächeln der Mona Lisa oder Kann Hoffnung scheitern?* is a highly complex examination of the "mirroring reality" postulate dictated by SED culture policy; the critical foil here is Ernst Bloch's philosophy, which had come into conflict with the "real existing" socialism of the GDR. If Schieferdecker's works are genuine "thinking images", the works of Renate Göritz and Günther Hornig are characterised by a far more direct handling of material. In *Chile 73. Zum Tode Pablo Nerudas* Göritz employs for example a whole series of lost items, which display traces of their former use and are translated into a poetic symbolic aware of contemporary history through their arrangement and layering.

### **IX Berlin – "Black Melancholy"**

An exhibition of French painting in the Berlin City Palace in 1946, Picasso's attempts to politically exploit his concept of artistic freedom, the comet-like rise of the young Bernard Buffet, the stylistic and iconographical influence of the Italian realismo and the philosophical existentialism of Camus and Sartre – these were the formative moments for the so-called "Black Period" in Berlin painting in the post-war years. The initiator of this unusual realism was the painter Ernst Schroeder, who came from the Pomeranian Baltic coast. Before he enrolled in the art academy, he had visited Paris. His encounter with the painting of Bernard Buffet, who belonged to the same generation as Schroeder, became a formative experience. Schroeder's works are characterised by the naivety and melancholy of what is depicted. The treatment of the material conveys an image experience also to be found in Rousseau or Urtillo. As Schroeder then entered the Academy of Fine Arts, he quickly established contact to other master-class pupils, to Manfred Böttcher, Harald Metzkes and Werner Stötzer. The 'black paintings' with their bizarre forms which arose in this circle were labelled collectively with the term 'Black Period'. Manfred Böttcher's *Die Serviererin* from 1957, which is reminiscent of Buffet and Beckmann in its formal and of existentialism in its intellectual aspects, also mirrors the marginal artistic position the artist had slipped into. Shabby interiors, sober suburban streets and meagre still life images, for example the fish as a topos for the subconscious in the *Der Hai* by Harald Metzkes, were all officially undesirable motifs. This art was not a 'retreat into the private sphere' – as was claimed – but rather the early trace of a burgeoning stylistic will, one that brought the painters to a crossroad: it led to a protest against all that was superficial and banal and was an alternative to the Stalinist doctrine of realism.

### **X Frontal Expressive**

In the 1980s the alternative, non-conformist art and its Bohemians, particularly in Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig, escalated into a revival of an eruptive expressiveness that was especially characterised by its variety of ecstatic forms and means of expression. Of consequence here were the historical currents of the early 20th century. The reception of the expressive means employed

by Die Brücke artists, James Ensor and Max Beckmann is obvious. And yet, it is also the dynamic colour image solutions presented by Bernhard Heisig and Willi Sitte which are here 'overcome'. The course and artistic result of the *Erste Leipziger Herbstsalon* in 1984 provides an example of the intellectual and formal diversity shaped by the attempts to wrestle emancipation from subordination and the continuing resistance blocking such efforts. Here Lutz Dammbeck, Günter Firt, Hans-Hendrik Grimmling and others exhibited their space dominating works, which with their explosive coded images were eruptions of unbridled temperaments. Next to the passionately felt humane idea realised in a gestural painting style, in Hartwig Ebersbach's *Kasper. Abwicklung eines Portraits I* there enters at the same time the theme of the 'self' as self-assertion, which ultimately totally dominates the work. Walter Libuda keeps his distance from the expressive directions typical for the GDR in the 1980s and the veristic objectivity of the predecessors. He is a pictorial narrator of wondrous and hermetic stories which are based on mythology or inspired from literature, as in *Die Verwandten* and *Die Schleuse*. The paintings suggest the perspective of a world theatre or human life as drama.

### **XI Photography + Photo-Graphic Passage**

The exploitation of photography for presenting political goals, which was once again undertaken immediately after 1945 in the Soviet zone of occupation and was continued with in the GDR, intensified the problematic for those who sought a new beginning. From this background, the relatively simple motifs of Ursula Arnold, characterised by everyday constellations, are to be understood as an expression of a search for the factual truth. With Arno Fischer, Evelyn Richter and others from this generation, Arnold shared an orientation on the 'straight photography' of the 1950s. Integral to this approach was the obligation to locate the authenticity of reality; however, this was in contradiction to the prescriptions of 'socialist realism' and its demands for elevating, brightening representations. Even Arno Fischer's great pictorial essay *Situation Berlin* fell into suspicion as, after the building of the wall, the comparative interpretation of conditions in East and West was held to be anachronistic. Christian Borchert and Ulrich Wüst already worked in the face of the clearly emerging and, to a certain extent, accepted hopelessness of the situation. Borchert directed the dissecting sharpness of his focus on everyday life constellations. Even the classical themes such as selfportrait were subjected to an experimental questioning and a new definition – as the broad range of approaches marked by Helga Paris' series of *Selbstbildnisse* and Thomas Florschuetz's tableau series *zweite sekunde eines schrittes shows*. Michael Scheffer and Maria Sewcz belong to the photographers who, since the second half of the 1980s, transposed traditional areas of photographic subjects – landscapes, architecture and portrait – into a context of a strictly subjective symbolism. *Inter esse*, to be between or adjacent, becomes the genuine theme, the synonym for an artistic perspective of knowledge on alienation in society.

### **XII Vision of Nature – City-Spaces**

Berlin also remained after the war the melting pot it had developed into since the end of the 19th century and that had to a certain extent founded its reputation. This confluence of varying forces from different parts of the country continued in the divided city, also in East Berlin, which in the GDR assumed a special position in relation to the rest of the country, the 'Republic', – not just in a representative-political sense but also as a productive and stimulating atmosphere. Despite working together, some artists retained certain peculiarities rooted in their respective origins. For example, the 'typical Berliners' Klaus Roenspieß and Wolfgang Leber display a certain laconism in their finding of forms, while those who had 'migrated' from Thuringia such as Werner Stötzer, Hans Vent and Friedrich B. Henkel placed a stronger emphasis on sensual physicality. For

Roenspieß and Leber, the space of the city formed the decisive point of reference in different ways. Roenspieß focuses his artistic intention on 'finding locations', on an expressive enlivening of apparent undistinguished places, such as his Berlin apartment blocks, the aura of which is gained by the simple, apparent everyday nature of the urban surrounds. In contrast, Leber's work *Figurengruppe mit Akt* is dominated by the human figure reduced to a sign-like presence, which is captured in its integration into the spatial frames of city living spaces. The figure worlds of Hans Vent are more fleshed out in their shape. Vent reduces the body to its basic position. His painting for the Palace of the Republic, which deals with his central theme *Menschen am Strand* and doubtlessly represents the pinnacle of his work, is at the same time a 'life frieze' in which a celebration of the physical is united with existential pensiveness.

### **XIII The Berlin School**

The so-called 'Berlin School' never existed in the sense of a directly programmatic coherent school. "What we understand under this name is a cultured paint application characteristic for numerous Berlin painters, generated through a sensual reflection; the pictorial world is thus primarily sensual, not rationally founded" (Lothar Lang). The maxim is a saying formulated later by Harald Metzkes: "My programme had only two points: nature and the eye." The neat term 'Berlin School' nevertheless describes an obvious connection between compositional affinities; after all, since the 1950s a circle of artists all striving in a similar direction had joined together in East Berlin as master-class students at the Fine Arts Academy. Without any loud proclamation, these artists had initially committed themselves to a sensualism tinged with melancholy in their depiction of existential experiences during their 'Black Period', before then moving on to a pictorially strict 'Cézannism' with its focus on the internal laws of painting. The label 'Berlin School' also served to distinguish the Berlin painters from the metaphoric realism with its awareness for contemporary issues prevalent in Leipzig. With his 'Cézannist' *Feierabend in Wilthen* and *Pferd* in a mist of blue amazement, the work of Harald Metzkes reached the height of its strict pictorial structure in the 1960s. The painter Lothar Böhme with his sibylline nude figures, *Stehender Akt*, and the sculptor Werner Stötzer with his *Große Liegende* in sandstone both modelled their massive figures in an extremely enclosed form filled with expression. Christa Böhme proved herself to be an Apollinian creator of sound in the polyphonic chorus of friends; influenced by Cézanne and Munch, she lent her motifs, as in *Interieur*, a rhythmical musicality of colour in clear compositional austerity. Looking back at the 'Berlin School', Lothar Böhme gave the following description: "There was a fundamental attitude that was incorruptible. Let's say it was a mysterious resistance that nobody had noticed."

### **XIV The City – Veristic**

The city of Berlin, which in its artistic past had been home to all facets of stylistic expression and had played a decisive role in the development of socially critically veristic works, such as those by Otto Dix and George Grosz, maintained this complexity in the GDR. Since the mid-seventies, as the existential sensualism of the 'Berlin School' around Harald Metzkes dominated, another artistic attitude driven by other impulses began to take root here. Baldur Schönfelder paved the way for this attitude. Both of his *Nike* figures from the beginning of the 1980s show a brokenness that is coupled with danger and paralysis. With its austere stature and painful immobility, *Nike I* also sets a sign of meditative contemplation. The consciously stiff figures by Rolf Biebl followed this direction. Here the anatomy of the body is aggravated into an over- and re-proportioning, one which simultaneously shifted the effects generated by the contortion and 'awkwardness' into the body of the viewer. Quite different is the work of Nuria Quevedo, daughter of Spanish

immigrants. Actually coming from drawing, she successfully entered into painting with the group portrait of her parents and Spanish friends in the work *30 Jahre Exil*. Quevedo's efforts to attain a symbolic compression of her own experience can be characterised as her basic approach to painting. This is also the case with *Das Paar*, which in its empathy illustrates the union between the physical and the emotional. Clemens Gröszler chooses a consciously exaggerated immersion in a detailed 'naturalism' that he enriches and confronts with referential elements that extend back to the Renaissance. In this way, strangely frozen figures embodying the present emerge in *Café Liolet* and *Marin á cholie*.

## **XV The Intelligence of the Hand**

The much extolled attraction of drawing as an artist's most personal language assumed a special status in the art of the GDR, one which is characterised by a consistent high quality and very individual expression. Through their greater subtlety, works on paper appeared less suitable for agitation purposes and they thus did not stand at the centre of public attention to the same extent as for example panel paintings. Circumstances were fortunate from the very beginning for drawing, as some excellent artists and teachers were present, above all at the Dresden Academy, such as Josef Hegenbarth and Hans Theo Richter. Outside Dresden, mention should be made of Otto Nagel and Arno Mohr in Berlin, who as an older teacher generation initially exerted an influence on original artists such as Dieter Goltzsche. For Gerhard Altenbourg, the traumatic experience of the Second World War was to become the basic impetus for his work. The giant *Ecce homo* drawing with the subtitle 'The Dying Warrior' is one of many excellent works documenting such an existential engagement. Quite different is the case with Carlfriedrich Claus. His thought took up the utopian, messianic stream of modernity, in which, for example, Ernst Bloch was prominent with his work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. Claus had first experimented with language, in particular in combination with phonetic processes. The exhibited complex *Geschichtsphilosophisches Kombinat*, the artist's main work of drawing, is comprised of such 'speech sheets'. On sheets written on both sides, Claus develops here a vision of "emergence in history and world", as he explained to Ernst Bloch in a letter. Besides being a tribute to their artistic quality, the works of Achim Feyer (*Gosener Graben*), Hans Brosch (*Figur im Raum*) and Cornelia Schleime (*Gelber Horizont*) are a representative pointer to the 'expatriated' and thus stand for the loss a repressive cultural policy inflicted on art in the GDR.

## **XVI Poetical Abstraction: Figure – Sound – Sign**

First in the 1980s, some artists born around 1950 emerged out of the 'Berlin School' tradition and developed a poetic, at times also expressive tendency towards the abstract. Some of the elder artists were indeed the innovators; moving in the border zone between figures and free form, above all Horst Zickelbein with his palimpsest-like gouaches *Dobrudscha II (Sediment Costinesti)* reflected on this abstractconstructive tendency, which was represented by the Dresden painter Hans Kinder after 1960. Those works often judged in the West as a belated admittance and pure replication of abstract positions from the 1950s and 1960s are upon closer consideration completely independent and follow a line which is continuing until today, also in the West. Hanns Schimansky is a pure draughtsman and thus a representative of a seldom species amongst artists, comparable to Dieter Goltzsche or Gerhard Kettner, the latter one of his teachers. As a draughtsman Schimansky had found a special path, one that liberated him from all role models and led to a strict black-white structural field whose pictorial language operates in dialogue with the visible. Harald Toppl followed – although more of a draughtsman than a painter – another path that led him into the border zone between painting and drawing. His *o.T. (Blatt mit dem*

*grünen Fleck*) gives the vision of an infinite colour space of greater sensibility and is kindred to the psychographical pictorial world of Paul Klee and his followers. As the youngest in this circle, Mark Lammert has pursued his own path to abstraction, causing a sensation with reduced figure drawings in the 1980s.

### **XVII The Leipzig School**

The 'Leipzig School' is a phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s. Bernhard Heisig, Werner Tübke and Wolfgang Mattheuer belonged to this school. They had studied at the Graphic Arts and Book Production Academy and began to teach there in the 1960s. They are the 'fathers' of the celebrated and controversial 'Leipzig School', so often cited since 1972. Two main directions of contrasting painting styles emerged in this school: an objective style determined by draughtsmanship in the case of Werner Tübke; and an expressive concept of art, intensified into the symbolic. Mattheuer's symbolic parables, based on real events and facts, are in the tradition of German Romanticism and the sobriety of the 'New Objectivity'. The main figure within the expressive direction of the 'Leipzig School' is Bernhard Heisig. He developed into a stage director of complex figure constellations, influenced by Max Beckmann's 'world theatre'. In his work *Beharrlichkeit des Vergessens*, he unleashes a furious drama of frenzied survival, a scenery that quotes the centre panel of Otto Dix's war triptych. This painting is a caricature of anxiety and at the same time a warning against a fatal repression of history. In the 1960s Werner Tübke caused a sensation with his systematic engagement, driven by his own inner impetus, with National Socialism. He selected the recollecting perspective of a Nazi judge in the *Lebenserinnerungen des Dr. jur. Schulze*, a theme Tübke continually reworked in numerous variations; the atrocities committed by the judge and his accomplices, still exerting a harrowing effect into the present, are depicted in an allegorical-surrealist manner. Volker Stelzmann's paintings *Gehäuse* and *Jürgen*, both completed in 1983, illustrate the sober and precise painting procedure. Here, formal impulses taken from Otto Dix's verism, the reception of Mannerist painting and elements of Pop Art are all critically exploited.

### **XVIII Constructive Concrete**

Amidst the different artistic centres and stylistic schools in the GDR, an artistic direction developed in Dresden and Berlin that was hardly noticed, one that was in the tradition of the constructive-concrete avantgarde of the early 20th century. Karl-Heinz Adler, Manfred Luther and Wilhelm Müller in Dresden and Horst Bartnig in Berlin were all representatives of this scarcely noticed 'formal' art. Independent of the avant-garde of his time, in Dresden Hermann Glöckner had turned to constructive-concrete art out of his own curiosity and artistic practice. From 1933 till around 1939 he created his constructivist *Tafelwerk*, comprising of 150 panels, that was characterised "as the peak of constructivism" and formed the foundation for his subsequent work. With the help of transparent and folded silk paper strips, glued over one another and all in the same width, Glöckner presented on some of these panels his own innovative principle of folding, which he was to then once again take up after the war in different phases, as in *Rosafarbene Streifen auf schwarzem Grund, darunter Knoten in Blaugelb* and *Gelbe Streifen und roter Knoten auf Schwarz*. This direction culminated in the *Mast mit den zwei Faltungszonen* from 1984, erected in front of the refectory of the Dresden Technical University (the exhibition shows the model from 1975). Staggered fanlike one behind the other, Karl-Heinz Adler's collaged 'layers' of triangles exactly follow the premises of concrete art, while, at the same time, precisely this arrangement transgresses its more statically fixed pictorial space. The layering of identical geometrical element suggests movement and process as well as space, an

approach that inevitably led Adler to sculpture. In contrast, the work titles of Manfred Luther announce a philosophical approach; Luther, from Dresden, spent many years investigating the compositional concept of 'idea concrete drawing', before beginning in 1983 the many part series *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'), following the basic principle of the French rationalist philosopher Descartes, a precursor of the Enlightenment. In this work the geometrical figure of the circle is to be understood as a philosophical concept.

### **XIX Film-Art**

Strawalde (Jürgen Böttcher) had a talent for communicating his understanding of art to others. His first DEFA documentary film *Drei von Vielen* (1961) is devoted to his circle of friends. Peter Graf, Peter Herrmann and Peter Makolies played the 'main roles', A. R. Penck (Ralf Winkler) was one of the writers. In the experimental films *Venus nach Giorgione / Frau am Klavichord* Strawalde documented his own artistic work: he shows how he paints over art postcards, "so that one has the impression that the paintings are overgrown. The overlapping of forms describes the endangering and the forgetting, but also contains a moment of liberation from tradition. The playful is illuminating and subversive." Like Strawalde, the painter Lutz Dammbeck also succeeded in forging links between art, experimental and official film; besides animation films in the state-run DEFA studios, he also produced pathbreaking experimental films. In emulation of the Dresden group *lücke frequentor* many painters discovered the super 8 film in their search for new forms of expression. Cornelia Schleime made the costumes and applied the make-up to her actors, mostly artist colleagues, and filmed spontaneously with only a basic mood in mind. Via Lewandowsky had already shot diverse super 8 films before he documented some scenes from the 'play' *Herz Horn Schrein* in 1987: there is certainly no other film "that in the land of the 'small white dove of peace' was scratched together with such a maximum of degeneracy, violent imagination and a substratum of paranoid feeling." A collage of television programme excerpts is shown in *Bilder über Bilder. Künste und Künstler im Spiegel der DDR-Medien*. Television generated an audience of millions for events such as the GDR art exhibitions in Dresden. The staging of pictorial art in the audiovisual media corresponded to the special role it played in state socialism.

### **XX Utopia and Reality – On Wrecked Hopes in History**

Times in which something new is to be established are characterised by a tremendous interest in the material of past history. The GDR, founded in 1949 with the utopian vision of a 'new man' in a communist society, referred to revolutionary traditions to justify this social form and its claims to legitimacy. In a chiliastic glorification of the state it aligned itself with failed and victorious revolutions, simply because the GDR had none of its own. The Peasant Wars of 1500 were referred to, as well as the quelled hopes of the revolutions from 1848 and 1918. After Stalin's death in 1953, state honours were once again granted to the mummified Lenin, whom Willi Sitte allows to fly into the hereafter as a world-embracing agitator in his *Hommage à Lenin*. Heiner Müller's sarcastic comment was: "One has to draw power from the dead because there is no longer any future. The mummification of Lenin was the end of the world revolution, the idea of the world revolution." It was in particular the photography of the last decade of the GDR that with a blunt pictorial language delivered an undistorted insight into reality, one that pointed beyond the role models of classical French and American photography. The night photos by Erasmus Schröter taken with an infra-red light, such as *Frau mit dunkler Brille*, mercilessly shed light on the dark facets of human existence. From the same generation, Jens Röttsch captured the late vocabulary of mass-staged events and their last phases in 1989 with a distant eye. Sibylle

Bergemann documented the construction and erection of the Marx/Engels figures by Ludwig Engelhardt in the centre of East Berlin. With these seemingly 'sur-real' images, the photographer makes manifest the failure prior to the completion of a hypocritical, glorifying staging of history.