

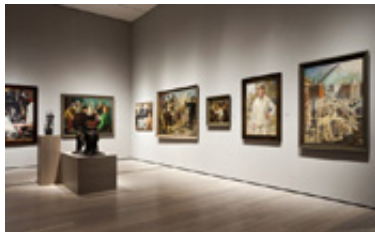
## Print Article



Entrance to "Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Works by Werner Heldt in "Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures"



Examples of socialist realism in "Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures"

## COLD WAR CULTURES

### by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Nowhere is art more firmly tied to history than in post-war Germany. Arising from the ashes of World War II only to follow two dramatically different paths during the Cold War, German art has still yet to gain an unequivocal national identity, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thus we have the powerful exhibition, "Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures," Jan. 25-Apr. 19, 2009, which makes its sole U.S. appearance at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Like "Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970" at the Victoria and Albert Museum last winter, this exhibition surveys the immensely varied art, with all its esthetic presumptions, that arose in two opposing political systems. The show strives to emphasize, however, that despite being separated for some 40 years, German artists retain a common history and heritage.

LACMA curator Stephanie Barron and German curator Eckart Gillen went to great lengths to track down artists in the East who had worked covertly outside and sometimes within the official style of Socialist Realism in the German Democratic Republic. They present them chronologically alongside the artists working in the Federal German Republic of West Germany. The installation of 300 works by 125 artists is presented as a call and response, which evades the usual binary opposition of the Capitalist West versus Communist East. By including photography, video, books, even performance documentation along with painting and sculpture, the curators demonstrate the complexity of the artists' responses to both governmental systems.

Housed in the Broad Contemporary Art Museum (where Broad's own collection had been on view for a year, much of which has been returned to his foundation), the exhibition opens with films of Allied bombers strafing Dresden, and paintings, drawings and photographs completed in the first few years after Germany's surrender. This early section of the show includes black-and-white photographs by German photographer Richard Peter Sr. (1895-1977) of skeletons still clothed in their Nazi uniforms and of the rubble of the Dresden's Semper Opera House. The Berlin-based modernist painter Werner Heldt (1904-54), known for semi-abstract city scenes, painted on a wooden door with lipstick because so few art materials were available. And the German Dadaist Hannah Höch (1889-1978) departed from her typical photomontages to paint primitivist images of hollow-eyed mourners.

As the division between East and West hardened during the 1950s, West German artists like Gerhard Hoehme (1920-89) and Emil Schumacher (1912-99) produced somber Art Informel abstractions while East Germany was overcome by Socialist Realism such as *Construction of the Stalinallee*, a fantasy of happy workers painted by Heinz Löffler, an artist all but unknown in the West.



**Werner Heldt**

*Tür (Door)*

ca. 1946

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Photo courtesy Berlinische Galerie Landesmuseum für Modern Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur, by Mermann Kiessling

Socialist Realism is routinely dismissed as state-sponsored propaganda, while post-war abstraction in the West represents the free individual in a free society. Still, in our Postmodernist time, Löffler's painting, in part because of its strange composition and ludicrous subject matter, is infinitely more compelling to regard.

Another artist who lived in the east but managed to remain "unofficial" is Hermann Glöckner (1889-1987). A large Plexiglas vitrine contains several modest but magical constructions: three tilted matchboxes, painted red, and an off-kilter stack of small cuts of logs. Never before shown in the U.S., his neo-Constructivist pieces are displayed as proof that not all artists succumbed to state-sanctioned styles.

Artists interested in notions of transcendence and the use of everyday materials formed the Zero group in Dusseldorf in 1958. The group included the well-known Yves Klein and Lucio Fontana but this exhibition presents works by the slightly less familiar German members Otto Piene and Heinz Mack, who were concerned with the properties of reflected light, and Günther Uecker, who had been trained in East Berlin as a Socialist Realist but who moved to Düsseldorf in 1953. His bright yellow painting features a halo of long nails surrounding its square stretcher bars, which is hung corner up like a diamond.

The story grows more complex in the 1960s with West Germany's so-called "economic miracle." A monitor shows vintage TV footage of new cars and well-stocked grocery stores, fruits of the Marshall Plan and the Capitalist free market. The West's fast-track prosperity provoked its younger artists to develop what they called Capitalist Realism, their own homegrown version of Pop Art with a sardonic, knowing edge. It is tough to be sanguine and sarcastic about consumer culture knowing that your fellow Germans are suffering from chronic scarcity in a police state. For example, Konrad Klapheck's exacting 1959 painting of a typewriter, *Will to Power*, melds the flat graphic method of Pop painting with a political grit,

Dieter Roth filled shelves of a metal pastry rack with molded chocolate lions that have deteriorated dramatically since their creation in 1963. His *Literaturwurst*, sausages made from lard, spices and the shredded pages of Goethe and other famous German writers, embodies the irreverence that could prevail in the West. Sigmar Polke challenged the promise of happiness in material security in a group of paintings borrowing from commercial design to convey a jolly, hopeful outlook. Made between 1963 and 1969 and mounted on a wood trellis, they are collectively titled *The Fifties*.

During this same period, artists in East Germany continued to paint in the realist manner, and often took on the country's wartime history as their subject. The emphasis was more on the victimization of the Communist resistance fighters by the Nazis, however, than on the Holocaust. The history painter Werner Tübke (1928-2004) specialized in hideously visionary images, such as a puppet-headed Nazi judge surrounded by hell and heaven. But as the state tightened restrictions on its population, artists were among the 3,500,000 people who had left the GDR by 1960. The Berlin wall was erected to stop the exodus.

Visually and emotionally, the exhibition delivers its strongest punch when referencing the 1963 Auschwitz trials of low-level German leaders -- similar to those portrayed in the current film *The Reader* -- that led young artists to confront the older generation's amnesia about the war.

This is the context of some of the daunting art produced by many of the German artists who have become familiar to U.S. viewers. The Neo-Expressionist painter Georg Baselitz, who came



### Heinz Löffler

*Aufbau der Stalinallee (Construction of the Stalinallee)*  
1953

Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin

© 2008 Heinz Löffler

Photo © Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin



### Hermann Glöckner

Installation view of Glöckner objects at LACMA, 2008  
Private collection, Dresden

© Estate of Hermann Glöckner / 2008 Artists Rights  
Society / VG Bild-Kunst

Photo © 2008 Museum Associates / LACMA

to the FGR in 1957, provided a wide-ranging critique of German history and identity through an ironic appropriation of the historically German Expressionist style. "Art of Two Germanys" features a disturbing 1965 painting of a pile of corpses topped with a smiling pretty girl titled *Picture for the Fathers*. Like Baselitz, Eugen Schönebeck (b. 1936) was trained as a realist painter in the East but moved to West Berlin in 1955, where he was instrumental in driving what would be a fruitful post-war return to figurative painting, seen here in 1965 portrait of the Futurist playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky. Gerhard Richter, who moved to the West in 1961, is represented for his blurred black-and-white painting of a man in a Nazi uniform titled *Uncle Rudi* (1965), a reference to the fact that most Germans had a Nazi in the family.

Joseph Beuys casts a long shadow over German contemporary art, of course, but the curators of "Two Germanys" emphasize his overtly political *Sweeping Up*, the exhibition case filled with the detritus that he swept up with a red broom after the 1972 May Day parade.

The growing social unrest in West Germany in the 1970s, which saw many artists reacting to what they felt were fascist undercurrents in capitalist society, was epitomized by the activities of the Red Army Faction, led by Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof (whose intensely publicized activities included the 1977 kidnapping and murder of Hanns-Martin Schleyer, a businessman and former SS officer). The exhibition includes clips of the constant television coverage of terrorism in the West, as well as the art inspired by it, such as Jürgen Klauke's wall-sized grid of newspaper photographs of masked terrorists and Katharina Sieverding's *Battlefield Germany* (1978), a large black-and-fuchsia negative reproduction of a photograph of the federal government's anti-terrorism unit.

The last section of the show is devoted to the 1980s, when artists from East Germany found ways to become part of the international art world. Jörg Immendorff, who lived in the FGR, and A.R. Penck, who lived in the GDR, became friends and Immendorff's painting, *Two Become One*, depicts the two artists seated in a snowy battlefield, showing each other their works. It is especially poignant. A different perspective on friendship comes from Ralf Kerbach (b. 1956), a member of the Dresden underground counterculture who paid tribute to his friend, poet Sascha Anderson, in a giant expressive painting that shows him fleeing while pursued by black crows. Only in the 1990s, after reunification, did Kerbach discover that his underground friend had been an informant for the Stasi.

As Soviet power waned in the '80s, artists were freer to express themselves, and the show includes photographs and artifacts of performances by the Autoperforationists, a group based in Dresden. Photographer Sibylle Bergemann (b. 1941) documented the dismantling of sculptures of Marx and Lenin. Georg Herold (b. 1947), who had been imprisoned for attempting to escape the GDR in the '70s, built a vacuum-cleaner sculpture based on *Laocoön* that includes a tape recording of the artist reciting Hitler's speech from the opening of the 1937 "Great German Art Exhibition." The show concludes with Isa Genzken's sculpture of concrete slabs, a work that indirectly references the Berlin Wall, while Marcel Odenbach's video monitor perched precariously on water glasses shows people walking through the newly opened wall in 1989. It is a moving and fitting conclusion to the story.

"Cold War Cultures" is the third part of a trilogy of shows conceived by LACMA senior curator Stephanie Barron, who organized "Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany" (1991) and "Exiles and Emigres: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler" (1997). Organized in cooperation with Berlin's Kultur-projekte, the show is co-curated by Eckhart Gillen, who had previously organized "German Art from Beckman to Richter: Images from a Divided



**Heinz Mack**

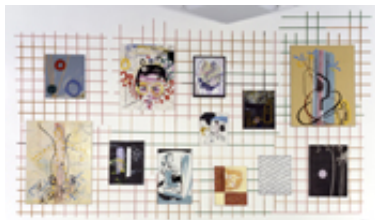
*Relief Wand (Relief Wall)*

Ca. 1960

Re-creation of the installation at Galerie Diogenes, 1960

Collection of the artist

© 2009 Heinz Mack / Artists Rights Society / VG Bild-Kunst



**Sigmar Polke**

*Die Fünfziger Jahre (The Fifties)*

1963-69

Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt

© 2009 Sigmar Polke

Photo courtesy Hessischen Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, by W. Kumpf

Country" and was personally and professionally familiar with the many artists who worked under the German Democratic Republic of East Germany after the war. Some 15 years in the making, it is nothing less than a complete reappraisal of German contemporary art.

E.H. Gombrich wrote, "What I have always loved best about the history of the world is that it is true." No fiction could compete with the reality of 20th-century German history. "Cold War Cultures" is a groundbreaking effort to view post-war German art as a whole, integrated within a specific national context. For more information on the exhibition, and the array of events that accompany it, visit [www.lacma.org](http://www.lacma.org).

"Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures," Jan. 25-Apr. 19, 2009, at the Broad Contemporary Art Museum at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, Ca. 90036. The exhibition subsequently appears at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nurnberg, May 23-Sept. 6, 2009, and the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, Oct. 3, 2009-Jan. 10, 2010, in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall.

**HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP** writes about contemporary art in Los Angeles.





**Werner Tubke**

*Lebenserinnerungen des Dr. jur. Schulze III*  
(Reminiscences of Schultze II, JD)

1965

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie

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VG Bild-Kunst

Photo courtesy Stiftung Moritzburg Kunstmuseum des  
Landes Sachsen-Anhalt. Photo Bildarchiv Preussischer  
Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, by Joerg P. Anders.  
Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



**Georg Baselitz**

*Bild für die Väter (Picture of the Fathers)*

1965

Courtesy Michael Werner Gallery, New York and Berlin

© 2009 George Baselitz



**Gerhard Richter**

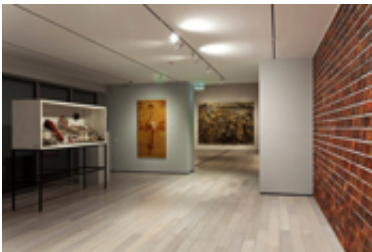
*Onkel Rudi (Uncle Rudi)*

1965

Památník Lidice

© 2009 Gerhard Richter, courtesy Marian Goodman  
Gallery

Photo courtesy Památník Lidice



Works by Joseph Beuys and Thomas Schütte, in "Art of  
Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures"



Works by Via Lewandowsky and the Autoperforationists,  
in "Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures"



**Sibylle Bergemann**

Ohne Titel (Gummlin) (Untitled [Gummlin]), from the  
series "Das Denkmal" (A Monument)

1975-86

Collection Sibylle Bergemann

© 2009 Sibylle Bergemann



Works by Georg Herold, foreground, and Jürgen Klauke  
(detail)



1980-89: Works by Gerhard Richter and Isa Genzken