

# GREY ART NYU GALLERY

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## MAJOR EXHIBITION SPOTLIGHTS EAST GERMAN POSTERS CREATED IN FACE OF CENSORSHIP

*Künstlerplakate: Artists' Posters from East Germany, 1967–1990*  
on view at NYU's Grey Art Gallery from September 7 to December 4, 2010

New York City (July 15, 2010)—New York University's **Grey Art Gallery** is pleased to announce the first American museum exhibition of artists' posters created in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the 23-year period preceding reunification. Opening on September 7, *Künstlerplakate: Artists' Posters from East Germany, 1967–1990* showcases approximately 120 examples that were produced and circulated primarily in the country's three principal art centers: Dresden, Leipzig, and Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz). These artists' posters—*Künstlerplakate* in German—reveal the art form's evolution from early examples in the 1960s to impressive highpoints in the late 1980s. Drawn entirely from the extensive collections of and organized by the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, the exhibition also demonstrates the wide range of styles employed by East German artists.

*Künstlerplakate* function both as advertisements for cultural events and works of art in their own right, with most printed either by or in the presence of the artist.

Limiting the editions to less than 100 copies,

painters, sculptors, and graphic artists were, for the most part, able to bypass strict GDR censorship boards. While painting—with its associations of bourgeois conspicuous consumption—was discouraged by Communist officials, printmaking and graphic design—with their emphasis on reproducibility and visual communication—were encouraged. Artists' posters



Holger Fickelscherer, *Merrily Merrily*, A. H. Meier presents Fickelscherer by G. H. Lybke, Galerie Eigen+Art, Leipzig, 1990. Courtesy Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz

thus provided a potent vehicle for individual expression and experimentation. Despite pressure to conform to the dictates of socialist realism, East German artists were challenged to produce creative and engaging posters while skirting the edges of ideological orthodoxy. Over time, GDR printing policies and censorship standards eased; a majority of the posters featured in *Künstlerplakate* date from the 1980s and many obliquely address the stifled promise of East German Communism.

“The Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz is thrilled to share these remarkable and vibrant posters with New York audiences,” states Ingrid Mössinger, executive director of the complex of museums located in Chemnitz, a major city in Saxony, and co-curator of the exhibition with Katharina Metz. “The posters, over 100 of which were donated to the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz by collectors Margrit and Gert Becker, demonstrate that the East German art scene was much more diverse than previously assumed. They also offer eloquent testimony to what artists had to cope with and what they suffered at the time,” observe Mössinger and Metz.

With tightly restricted access to Western newspapers, art magazines, and television, GDR artists had limited exposure to contemporary international art developments and turned their attention to historical avant-gardes. During the 1950s, impassioned debates about the proper role of the visual arts in East German culture flared regularly, pitting realism against formalism and abstraction. By the mid-1970s, artists were incorporating new techniques such as offset lithography and silkscreen. Posters produced throughout the 1980s until the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 reveal East German artists’ interest in experimental art as censorship standards began to relax.

While the GDR sponsored “official” artists whose work met specific criteria and paid them a monthly stipend for living expenses, those outside this network had to support themselves via other means. They also faced significant obstacles in finding exhibition spaces. Before the founding of the state-run network of galleries—the Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR—in the late 1970s, this challenge was partly resolved through the establishment of public print fairs and markets. These venues provided exposure as well as an income stream for artists unable to secure state-funded commissions. A number of unofficial artists’ groups were also founded, including Autoperforation Artists, Dresdner Sezession 89, and Clara Mosch. The latter, whose name derived from the first few letters of the last names of its members—Carlfridrich Claus, Thomas Ranft and Dagmar Ranft-Schinke, Michael Morgner, and Gregor Thorsten Schade—staged

events in the spirit of Happenings, Fluxus, and performance art—which were known primarily through journals and magazines surreptitiously imported from the West. The group also operated an alternative gallery space in Chemnitz in the late 1970s and early '80s.

**Carlfriedrich Claus**, widely considered one of the most important “unofficial” artists in East Germany, was also a poet and philosopher who earned a living copying musical scores. In the poster he designed to promote an exhibition at Städtische Museen Karl-Marx-Stadt (now the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz) of his *Sprachblätter* (language sheets), he explores the intersection of text and image along with the graphic possibilities of noise as the source of music and gesture as the source of the alphabet.

**Gerhard Altenbourg** is another prominent East German artist in the postwar period. The poster promoting an exhibition of his woodcuts at Schloss Hinterglauchau in 1976 reproduces one of his brightly colored prints depicting a yellow lyre, green mountains, and a red zoomorphic form. Recognizing that Altenbourg’s artworks were in dialogue with contemporary Western art trends, local Communist Party officials attempted to prevent the show from opening. Although the public was finally allowed to view it, catalogue sales were restricted.

*Künstlerplakate* produced near the close of the 1980s reveal the uncertainty of the times. For his poster advertising his show at the Galerie Eigen+Art in 1990, **Holger Fickelscherer** combines the bold black, white, and red of early Communist propaganda posters with a Western cultural icon—Mickey Mouse. As a grimacing figure shovels a pile of Mickeys into the locomotive’s combustion chamber, the phrase “*Lustig Lustig*” (“Merrily Merrily”) appears above in a billowing cloud of smoke, signaling East Germany’s pending reunification with the West and its full-speed-ahead move into the global economy. Founded in 1983 by Gerd Harry “Judy” Lybke, Galerie Eigen+Art occupied a central position in the Leipzig art scene and operated under the radar until the end of the decade, offering often-controversial exhibitions and programs.

*Künstlerplakate: Artists’ Posters from East Germany, 1967–1990* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue and an issue of the *Grey Gazette*. Among the over 70 East German artists represented by posters in the show are Gerhard Altenbourg, Carlfriedrich Claus, Lutz Dammbeck, Hartwig Ebersbach, Holger Fickelscherer, Wolfram Adalbert Scheffler, and Willy Wolff, along with influential artists’ groups such as Autoperforation Artists, Clara Mosch, and the Dresdner Sezession 89.

**Sponsorship:**

*Künstlerplakate: Artists' Posters from East Germany, 1967–1990* is organized by the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz with major support from Simmons Machine Tool Corporation, the NSH Group, and the City of Chemnitz. The presentation at the Grey Art Gallery is made possible in part by the Grey's Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust. Public programs are supported in part by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and Deutsches Haus, New York University.

**About the Grey Art Gallery:**

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University's fine-arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City's Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on exploring art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art's environment and its contributions to civilization.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications, many of which are distributed worldwide.

**General Information:**

Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003  
Tel: 212/998-6780, fax: 212/995-4024, E-mail: [greygallery@nyu.edu](mailto:greygallery@nyu.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart>

**Hours:**

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11am–6 pm

**Open Late** Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday and major holidays: Closed

**Admission:** Suggested donation: \$3; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge