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The Curation of Identity: Aesthetics of National Division in German Art during the 1950s

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The Curation of Identity:
Aesthetics of National Division in German Art during the 1950s

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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First and foremost, I extend my sincerest gratitude to my parents, Cindy and Henry Rust, and to my grandfather Geoffrey Nathanson for their unwavering support of my academic endeavors. It is because of them that my education and this project were possible.

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Introduction

In his essay on “Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy,” Brian Wallis comments on the nation as a work of art, stating that “visual representations are a key element in symbolizing and sustaining national communal bonds. Through the engineered overproduction of certain types of images or the censorship or suppression of others, and through controlling the ways images are viewed or by determining which are preserved, cultural representations can also be used to produce a certain view of a nation’s history.”¹ Through an examination of visual cultural production in divided Germany during the 1950s, this paper delves into the collective desire for national reinvention in postwar though the divergent tactics for the rehabilitation of the arts in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic during the 1950s. The immediate postwar era witnessed a resurgence of stylistic and thematic plurality in the arts which grew out of the freedom from the fascist efforts towards the synchronization of the arts into a one-dimensional, state-sanctioned realism in celebration of the National Socialist ideology. However, in an effort to reconnect with an image of the German people free from the legacy of the Third Reich, the newly established Eastern and Western German states sought to promote polarized artistic styles that each felt signaled a successful departure from their tempestuous recent past.

The institution of national exhibitions, such as the *German Art Exhibitions* in East Germany and the Documenta series in West Germany, reflects the mutual desires of both states to present the world with a cohesive and enduring vision of a rehabilitated German identity

¹ Brian Wallis. “Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy.” *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. Ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff. University of Minnesota Press: 1994, 266.

within the post-war “Zero Hour.” My first chapter, “Fractured Identity in the Postwar ‘Zero Hour,’” aims to highlight the perception of these exhibitions and the emergence of the styles they sought to promote as tactics of cultural policy for national reconstruction. Through an exploration of artistic culture under the Third Reich and the subsequent tactics of rehabilitation and reorientation employed by the four Allied occupying powers (the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union), I aim to draw attention to the shift in artistic focus from the tormenting legacy of the traumatic shared German past to the desire to construct and stabilize a divided German future.

My second chapter presents an in depth examination of the tactical adaptation of the Soviet socialist realist model for visual culture in the German Democratic Republic. This chapter, “Socialist Realism and German Heritage in the ‘Soviet-Occupied Zone,’” focuses on the period from 1948 through 1953, the year of the *Third German Art Exhibition*, held at the Dresden State Museum as a presentation of East German national identity under the banner of socialist progress. The Soviet genre of socialist realism was introduced through a series of official resolutions and highly publicized essays within East German policy journals and arts publications which called upon artists to inspire and mobilize the proletariat through the promotion of aesthetic realism which was “national in form, socialist in content.” The collection of works at the *Third German Art Exhibition* intended to depict a united visual narrative of post-war East Germany in its revolutionary development.

Subsequently, my third chapter, “Modernism’s Universal Language of ‘Beams, Rings, and Lines,’” examines the standardization of non-representational abstraction in the Federal Republic of Germany as a means of confronting the legacy of Nazism and all ideologies,

theories, and programs espoused behind the Iron Curtain. The years between 1950 and 1955 witnessed a rapid push for the homogenization of West German visual culture and collective consciousness. This resulted in the institutional spurn of art which addressed the need to come to terms with Germany's tempestuous recent history, such as works which depicted anti-fascism, the trauma of war, or social critique of the present realities of life in the Federal Republic. The exhibition of the first Documenta, held at the Museum Freidericianum in Kassel in 1955, was an international retrospective which condensed and reoriented the modernist movements of the 20th century as a means of promoting the universal nature of avant-garde abstraction. Featuring works from 1905 through the 1950s, the exhibition sought both to inspire excitement for Western tastes in the FRG and to advertise the nation's assimilation into the Western international sphere. Because of the heavy promotion of Western reintegration, I found it important to address the exhibitions of German art that were staged abroad in the United States. The belief that contemporary West German artists needed international exposure in order to counteract their cultural and spiritual isolation inspired a collaboration between West German curators and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, which resulted in what became the most prominent exhibition of German art abroad, the 1957 collection of *German Art of the Twentieth Century*.

As nations with shared pasts and polarized ideologies, the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic imagined that the greatest means of postwar recovery could be implemented through the construction of international alliances. These competing alternative identities in divided postwar Germany were further exacerbated by each state's fears of cultural contamination, manifested through the respective attempts to delegitimize the power and security of the other. In this climate of ideological opposition, German art gradually became a power that

was intended to bridge differences, communicate between countries, heal psychic wounds, and compensate for Germany's past alienation from international sphere of twentieth century politics and culture under the Third Reich.

In the process of gathering research materials for the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition*, the 1955 Documenta, and the 1957 exhibit of *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, it became clear that especially in cases in which the preparation or installation of an exhibition was not adequately recorded in the historical material, the exhibition catalogue served as an indispensable resource. However, this is not to suggest that the catalogue can be accepted as an uncritically truthful account or representation of an exhibition, or that it has the ability to take the place of administrative and institutional forms of documentation, such as press releases, exhibition floor plans, archival information, or curatorial design. The difficulty in obtaining contemporary, primary sources on these exhibitions, is one addressed within many of the sources that I consulted during my research for this project. The lack of available information in English was a further obstacle in my research process and it is because of this that I came to use the catalogues for the three exhibitions as more than mere records of cultural production, but as artifacts of the cultural production of national identity.

Fractured Identity in the Postwar “Zero Hour”

After the German surrender at the end of World War II in 1945, a chaotic period of devastation followed the fall of National Socialism. The physical destruction and economic destabilization of the German state echoed the hollow and fractured German identity, as the result of the nation's role in the war. The instability experienced by postwar Germany was reflected within the state of its economy, political system, society, and culture. The trauma imposed upon the nation during the Nazi regime and in the aftermath of the war deeply damaged Germany's artistic culture: theater, film, music, and the visual arts. The desire for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of German artistic identity rose out of the ramifications of the exhibition of *Entartete Kunst* in 1937. The high levels of censorship and the ideological propagation of National Socialist regimes led to the excommunication and imprisonment of artists in the 1930s. The Nazi pillaging of German art before and during World War II and the subsequent raids led during the postwar Soviet Occupation contributed to a great loss for German visual culture. In his account of visiting the capital city of Berlin in 1946, Stephen Spender describes the German citizens' hunger for culture and diversion from the recent past, observing that “the strength and the weaknesses of the [Germans] was their feeling that they could begin a completely new kind of life-- because they had nothing to begin from.”² Within three decades, the German nation had already survived three disparate governmental regimes: the German Empire (1871-1918), the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), and the Third Reich (1933-1945). In

² David Clay Large. *Berlin*. New York: Basic, 2000, 395.

the postwar era, the nation would yet again face its own reinvention and division into the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. The nation's disconnect from the visual culture of the German past fostered the notion of a cultural "Zero Hour," a new beginning constituted by a collectively desired erasure of the past.

Following the devastation of the German public and state in the aftermath of World War I, the Nazi Party worked to propagandize media outlets as a means of promoting the "great cause" of the Aryan race.³ After his election into political office in 1933, Chancellor Adolf Hitler sought to promote the power of the Third Reich and the superiority of the German people through a vast reconsideration of the direction of the nation's aesthetic identity. The National Socialist regime viewed liberalism, modern Western culture, and Judaism as the antithesis of the German purpose and Hitler believed that the fate of human culture and civilization was inextricably bound to the existence and persistence of the Aryan. Viewing the advancement of results in the arts and sciences as the exclusively creative product of the Aryan, the Fuhrer sought to morally purify public life in Germany through media outlets including the restructuring of the educational system, theater, cinema, literature, press publication, and broadcasting.

An examination of the subjects of the art favored by the National Socialist Party shows that art was not only the direct expression of its political ideals, but also served as the base of validation for its political system. Visual representations of the German landscape, peasant life, depictions of the ideal German man and woman, the worker, the German family, and portraiture of party leaders aimed to express the Nazi Party ideology, its strength, its endurance, and its beauty. In 1933, the Reich Culture Chamber (RKK) was founded as the central organization that

³ Peter Adam. *Art of the Third Reich*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc: New York. 1992, 24.

was responsible for the control of departments in German film, visual arts, architecture, literature, and music.⁴ The RKK aimed to cleanse the German art scene of all “foreign” and “modern” influences through the institution of “Gleichschaltung.”⁵ From the moment the Nazis came to power, this process of cultural synchronization of the arts was instituted in the Party’s replacement of liberal-minded curators of museums in Berlin, Essen, Mannheim, and Cologne, with reliable Party members who could be trusted to uphold the ideals of the regime. Because the arts in Germany were predominantly institutionalized through privately sponsored clubs and societies, modernist artists, who were deemed threatening to the state ideology, had already grouped themselves together based on shared stylistic and thematic affinities. An example of such can be found in Der Blaue Reiter, a German Expressionist group from 1911-1914, inspired by a painting by Wassily Kandinsky of the same name.⁶ The group included Kandinsky and other expressionist artists, such as August Macke, Paul Klee, Albert Bloch, and Lyonel Feininger, among others. The image of Der Blaue Reiter, or The Blue Rider (represented on the cover the group’s 1912 almanac), was produced by Kandinsky who viewed blue as the color of spirituality and the freedom of human desire and expression (Fig. 1). The widespread influence of Der Blaue Reiter, along with other modernist movements, even in the decades following the group’s dissipation, threatened the strength of the state under Fascism, for the Expressionist interest in subjective experience, emotion, and the exploration of interior reality through artistic media was in direct opposition with the Nazi ideal for art to serve as a means of strengthening the state.

⁴ Adam, *Art of the Third Reich*, 54.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Franz Roh. *German Art in the 20th Century*. New York Graphic Society: Greenwich, CT. 1968, 71.

Through the confiscation of works and the cultural alienation of modernist artists, the National Socialists began staging propaganda exhibitions throughout the country, of what the magazine *Der SA-Mann* deemed “the most hideous creations of a degenerate humanity and of a pathological generation of ‘artists.’”⁷ In his 1937 “Speech Inaugurating the ‘Great Exhibition of German Art,’” Hitler claimed that the modern view of art as an international, communal experience had killed any understanding of its integral relationship with a specific ethnic group. Hitler believed that there was no longer any art of peoples or even of races, only an art of the times. Hitler’s perception of the fluctuation of styles from Impressionism, to Cubism, to Futurism, as emblematic of modern art’s insignificance and called to the German people for the development of a national art of eternal value.⁸ Exhibitions such as the *Images of Cultural Bolshevism* held at Mannheim Kunsthalle from April-June, 1933 and the *Chamber of Horrors* held at Nuremberg Städtische Galerie from April-May, 1933 presented works collected from the artists related to the Expressionist, Dada, Neue Sachlichkeit, and Bauhaus movements, while the *Art of Two Worlds*, which opened in February, 1934 at Hagen Städtisches Museum presented a comparison of “degenerate” works with that of state commissioned and approved aesthetic styles and artistic practices.⁹ The most successful and widely known of these exhibitions was the *Degenerate Art*, collection, shown in Munich in July, 1937.

The Nazi Party saw art as the perfect medium of expression for creating and directing the public dreams and desires. The German philosopher, Walter Benjamin, once referred to fascism as the “aestheticizing of politics,” a notion exemplified by Hitler’s interest in an architectural

⁷ Adam, *Art of the Third Reich*, 122.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Susan Caroselli. “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Harry Abrams Inc: New York. 1991, 98-101.

conference between arts and politics, dubbed *Kulturtagung*.¹⁰ The art, which grew out of this hope for a racially pure culture, was meant to overcome differences of class and forge an organic community of people following the same ideas, so as to bind the individual German citizen to the State. Though disparate in approach, medium, and subject, all modernist styles and techniques were rebuffed by the Nazi ideology, based on the party's perceptions of the negative implications of subjectivity and abstraction. The National Socialist Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, asserted that the 1937 exhibit had "nothing to do with the suppression of artistic freedom and modern progress" and that the works exhibited were senile representatives of a period that the German people had intellectually and politically overcome, for "the period of Jewish intellectual imperialism is over. From its ashes a new spirit will arise."¹¹ The *Degenerate Art* exhibition was organized in order to criticize and disgrace avant-garde artistic styles, such as the German Expressionist, Dada, Bauhaus, and Neue Sachlichkeit movements, which were prominent throughout Germany within the decades preceding the rise of the Third Reich. The exhibition collection, which featured the works of 112 "degenerate" artists, contributed to the Nazi party's confiscation and destruction of approximately 12,000 drawings and 5,000 paintings.¹²

The Nazi Party claimed that its intent in holding the exhibit was to let the German people decide what art should be deemed "degenerate" for themselves. However, the installation of works, clustered around one another, accompanied by diminutive and insulting labels with aggressive slogans of graffiti, on the walls upon which they were hung, overtly communicated the exhibition organizer's desire to shock and repel. The collection travelled throughout

¹⁰ Adam, *Art of the Third Reich*, 50.

¹¹ Ibid, 53.

¹² Caroselli, "*Degenerate Art*": *The Fate of the Avant-Garde*, 90.

Germany from Munich to Berlin, Leipzig, Dusseldorf, Salzburg, Hamburg, Stettin, Weimar, Vienna, Frankfurt, Chemnitz, Waldenburg, and Halle an der Saale from 1937 to 1941. Organized by subject, the themes included “Farmers Seen by Jews,” “Insults to German Womanhood,” and “Mockery of God.”¹³ At a party rally in Nuremberg in 1935, Adolf Hitler declared, “it is not the function of art to wallow in dirt for dirt’s sake, never its task to paint the state of decomposition, to draw cretins as the symbols of motherhood, to picture hunchbacked idiots as representatives of manly strength.”¹⁴ The curators paid particular attention to the section dedicated to the degradation of Dadaists. In a section heralded by a quote by George Grosz, stating “Take Dada seriously! It’s worth it!,” Wassily Kandinsky’s work was erroneously classified as Dadaist, hung alongside Kurt Schwitters’ paintings, “Merzbild” and “Ringbild,” a piece by Paul Klee, two issues of the periodical *Der Dada*, and an unidentified marble figure sculpted by Rudolf Haizmann.¹⁵ A mural mimicking Kandinsky’s work, on the wall covered by the Dadaist works, sought to emphasize the belief that anyone could produce this art. Photographs documenting the exhibit in Munich show that the paintings are hung deliberately askew, expressing the curatorial lack of interest in the works themselves (Fig. 2). What is on view is not the works of Schwitters, Kandinsky, Haizmann, and Grosz, but the National Socialist perception of their works. In contrast to the simultaneously held “Great German Art Exhibition,” held at the newly erected House of German Art in Munich, the “Degenerate Art” exhibit was curated as a means of promoting mockery, diminishment, and desecration. Within Hitler’s “Great German Art Exhibition,” approximately 900 works were included, exhibiting nudes, genre scenes, still lifes,

¹³ Adam, *Art of the Third Reich*, 127.

¹⁴ Ibid, 122.

¹⁵ Caroselli, “*Degenerate Art*”: *The Fate of the Avant-Garde*, 89.

idealized landscape, mythological or classical scenes, images of workers, and portraits of the “pure” Aryan people.¹⁶ Photographs of the exhibition spaces expose the curation and design tactics as Nazi acts of social control and propaganda (Fig. 3). While the “Great German Art Exhibition” was held within an open, brightly lit, and well organized space, the “Degenerate Art” exhibition was held in a crowded, dark, convoluted environment, with works of art stacked over one another.

The Nazi tactics of cultural propaganda continued in the years following the “Entartete Kunst” exhibit, and throughout World War II. Following their tours throughout the country, these avant-garde works were later auctioned, destroyed, or hidden. Apart from the artists who perished in concentration and internment camps, many who were deemed “degenerates” fled Germany, such as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, Johannes Molzahn, Johannes Itten, Joseph Albers, Max Beckmann, Oskar Kokoschka, Kurt Schwitters, Friedrich Adler, George Grosz, Rudolf Belling, and Friedrich Wilhelm Heine, or retired into an inner emigration to isolated areas of the country, such as Emil Nolde, Erich Heckel, Karl Hofer, Willi Baumeister, Xaver Fuhr, Karl Knappe, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. The disappearance of these artists from the German cultural milieu greatly influenced the fractured reality of the nation’s visual culture and aesthetic identity in the postwar Zero Hour; these artists came to be viewed as part of a lost generation.¹⁷

In 1945, the Soviet occupation of Germany wrought undeniable consequences for the German public, as well as the nation itself. To the USSR, the wrecked nation was a stage upon

¹⁶ Adam, *Art of the Third Reich*, 138.

¹⁷ Jennifer McComas. “Exhibiting Postwar German Art in the 1950s: The Politics of Exclusion.” *Journal of Curatorial Studies*. 2013. eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezprox.bard.edu, 337.

which it could promote and inflict the virtues of its own system. The battered and diminished German visual culture and artistic history evolved from the “lost generation” of German artists, as a result of Nazi persecution and censorship from 1933-1945, compounded with the Soviet pillaging of German art museums and collections in the country’s postwar occupation.¹⁸ In May 1945, focusing its attention on the parts of Berlin earmarked for Western occupation, Moscow sent delegations of “Trophy teams” to Germany’s capital city of Berlin with the aim of plundering German art and valuable material culture. The efforts of these teams were facilitated by the fact that Hitler had ordered that the majority of Germany’s collections be held at the capital as a sign of faith that it would never fall, making it so that all of those works were housed within the same space.¹⁹ The Soviet Union’s rapacious looting of Berlin’s museums, libraries, and archives significantly contributed to the reduction of the city’s previous status as a center of intellectualism and the arts. Under Joseph Stalin, the Soviet government seized large portions of Germany’s remaining artistic, as well as industrial and monetary, resources, which included parts of the stolen treasure that had been amassed by the Nazi Party. Because of the war’s physical devastation of architecture within the city, some museums and acclaimed works were already damaged or entirely destroyed. Existing within the Soviet sector, Museum Island was looted in truckloads and taken to museums in the USSR, where some of it remains, due to the fact that the Russians never kept records or receipts on the works.²⁰

Following the 1945 ceasefire and the death of Adolf Hitler, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and U.S. President Harry Truman, conferred at

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Large, *Berlin*, 376.

²⁰ Ibid.

Potsdam from July 17 until August 2, 1945 to decide the fate of the German nation. Deciding to occupy the devastated country, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union divided Germany into a set of occupation zones; the allies later granted a fourth zone to France in recognition of its role in World War II.²¹ To many it seemed to be the end of the German nation, though to a country that had survived three previous government regimes within the past thirty years it was yet another new beginning. Though the plans for reconstruction differed in the Western and Eastern occupation zones, the Allied powers aimed to execute five resolutions: (1) The denazification of German society, (2) The demilitarization of the arms industry and former Wehrmacht forces, (3) Democratization in religion, politics, press and society, (4) The decentralization of the nation, and (5) The disassembly of Germany's industry (though this was reinstated in 1951 in West Germany).²² However, the shared goals of the divided state's occupying forces were not enough to combat the challenges faced by the Allied administrations.

In the period following World War II, the contemplation of the ruins of Germany's intellectual landscape soon gave way to a call for rapid cultural reconstruction. At the inception of the cultural "Stunde Null," or "Zero Hour," in 1945, the Allied occupation forces of the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union were faced with the question of the cultural legacy Germany should adopt after 1945.²³ In his accounts of the state of Germany in the postwar era, a British military officer observed that "the world has never known before a situation in which four peoples lived and tried to cooperate in a country inhabited by a fifth."²⁴

²¹ Ibid, 386.

²² Ibid, 388.

²³ Nola Butler, Sara Cody, Thomas Frick. *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Abrams Inc: United States. 2009, 73.

²⁴ Large, *Berlin*, 388.

The decentralization of Germany in the post-war era prevented the development of a singular market or national identity. Throughout the four regions of the country, numerous principalities developed their own academies, museums, societies, and clubs. Each found that the identification of individual artists of merit was scarce, as all who opposed the Nazi ideology had either been murdered, driven out of Germany, or had gone into hiding within isolated regions of the country. Despite the vast contrasts in state ideology, the Allied military administrations called upon the artists whom the National Socialists had condemned as “degenerate” to join in and promote Germany’s aesthetic reeducation. Though feeble, the production of modern art had covertly continued under the reign of the Third Reich; artists condemned by the Nazi Party, such as Willi Baumeister, Ewald Mataré, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Fritz Winter, Emil Nolde, Georg Meistermann, and Hans Trier had continued to work in secret while in isolation and exile.²⁵ Cases such as these were scarce and it seemed that the only means of recovery would be to institute the resurgence of all that was interrupted and eradicated by the election of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933. In the years leading up to Germany’s official 1949 division into the German Democratic Republic of the East and the Federal Republic of Germany of the West, despite their shared end goal, the East and West applied divergent tactics to reconstruct and rehabilitate the German identity within the modern international sphere.

The physical and ideological divide between the Western allied powers and the Soviet bloc manifested in 1949 when Germany was officially divided into two separate states, the German Democratic Republic (the Soviet sector) and the Federal Republic of Germany (the combined British, French, and American sectors). In the years following the institution of Allied

²⁵ Adam, *Art of the Third Reich*, 89.

occupation, it became impossible to deny that Germany and Berlin, in particular, were fast becoming prime battlegrounds in the emerging Cold War; the Western and Eastern powers started taking measures to protect “their” Germany. On January 1, 1947, the Americans and the British fused their zones economically into “Bizonia,” while France kept its zone separate, due to its desire to keep Germany weak and fractured.²⁶ While the legal division into East and West Germany took place in 1949, the lines of demarcation were drawn through policy, practice, and a series of events, such as the institution of the Marshall Plan in 1947, and the Berlin Blockade and subsequent Berlin Airlift of 1948, as well as other tactics and practices that exacerbated the already present tensions between the occupation allies. Policies for social, urban, and cultural reconstruction differed from East to West, though the goal of each regime was the same: to strengthen and validate “their” Germany in the post-“Zero Hour”. However, the money needed to rebuild and revive the arts could hardly come out of the wrecked German economy that was simultaneously preoccupied with other social issues.²⁷ Both the GDR and the Federal Republic knew that the greatest means of stabilization would be to reintegrate the separate German states into their corresponding international spheres. For both the West and the East, this ideological reintegration was empowered and enacted through the promotion of the visual arts, performing arts, and artistic culture. At the brink of the Cold War, artistic focus shifted from the drive to overcome their shared past to the interest in conveying the ideals of their divergent futures.

In the German Democratic Republic, the Soviets were determined to promote their role in the emancipation of the German people from the grip of fascism, committed to the construction and success of a new Socialist society within East Germany. The constitution of East Germany

²⁶ Large, *Berlin*, 386.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 371.

specified that the state was antifascist, a stipulation which the Party considered to be a reconciliation of the nation's recent fascist history.²⁸ The Soviets considered their role as the emancipators of the German people to be their foundational claim to governance. In 1949, the Soviet architect Yakov Belopolsky designed a vast war memorial and military cemetery within Berlin's Treptower Park. The monument, which commemorates the deaths of 5,000 of the 80,000 Soviet soldiers who perished in the Battle of Berlin in 1945, is a 12 meter high statue of an armed Soviet soldier holding a German child in his arms, standing over a broken swastika (Fig. 4). The monument stands majestically at the top of a mound of earth that is situated at the end of a magnificent promenade lined with a series of reliefs commemorating the Soviet military role in World War II. The fragmented swastika, crushed under the boot of the soldier, symbolizes the socialist eradication of fascism, while the child in his arms is a personification of the German nation in the aftermath of the war. The monument, situated within the capital city of Berlin, demonstrates an archetypal communication of the aesthetic and ideals of Soviet Socialist Realism. As an artistic and literary genre, the doctrine of Socialist Realism called for an affirmative and standardized aesthetic communication of an idealized future through the representational depiction of simple and positive ideals and circumstances.²⁹ For the political and cultural ideology of the Soviet Union, this included the promotion of anti-fascism, Soviet heroism and alliance within Germany, and the valorization of the proletariat. The war memorial at Treptow, as it depicted the overt theme of the triumphant Soviet cultural domination over the

²⁸ Heather Elizabeth Mathews. *Making Histories: The Exhibition of Postwar art and the Interpretation of the Past in Divided Germany, 1950-1959*. The University of Texas, Austin. 2006, 158.

²⁹ Matthew Cullerne Brown. "Socialist Realist Painting" Yale University Press: New Haven, CT. 1998, 140-203.

German past, heralded the later imposition of Socialist Realism upon the void in the GDR's visual arts.

Immediately following the end of the war, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), as the leading form of political governance, assigned art a characteristically emancipatory function. However, by the end of the 1940s, there was disagreement about what this implied. Promoters of Socialist Realism soon became embroiled in highly contentious, Party-regulated debates, between artists, the public, and the government, over art's role in a new German cultural order that aimed to extricate itself from the infamy of the Nazi past. Initially, an overall promotion of artistic pluralism had come to characterize the Soviet occupation zone of East Germany, the practice of which was commemorated in the institution of the *First German Art Exhibition* in 1946, the first of a series that would continue until the fall of the GDR in 1990. Organized and hosted by the Soviet occupation authority, the exhibit featured artists targeted by the National Socialists and was intended to be "ideologically neutral."³⁰ This artistic advertisement of ideals of freedom under Soviet occupation was further reflected in the establishment of a monthly art publication, *Bildende Kunst*, in April 1947. However, the November issue of the soon to be suspended magazine featured an essay written by Anatol Schnittke on "Thirty Years of Soviet Painting."³¹ The article assured East German subscribers that despite the ties of the Socialist Realist genre to the Soviet Union, the adoption of its style and ideals should not be construed as a form of cultural imperialism. However, this debate soon escalated as the heightened tensions between East and West Germany relayed each state's fears regarding cultural contamination and each regime sought to stabilize polarized national identities through the promotion of the arts.

³⁰ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 120.

³¹ Butler, *Art of Two Germanys*, 68.

The formalism debates in the postwar era came with the aims of German artists, writers, and political leaders who shaped the arts policy during the early years of the East German state. These leading figures had been introduced to the aims and practices of Socialist Realism while in exile in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s; they encouraged artists living in the Soviet-occupied zone to learn from and produce Socialist Realist works in order to promote and shape the spirit of Socialism in Germany.³² The SED hoped to ground the ideological alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union within visual culture, through the production and presentation of works reflecting Soviet ideals by German artists. The visual and literary aims of Socialist Realism were first outlined by Andrei Zhdanov, a decorated leader of the army of the Soviet Union during World War II, who served as Chairman of the Soviet Union. Within a speech at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers, Zhdanov emphasized the genre's ability to shape and re-educate the working class and pronounced the necessity for the depiction of reality in its revolutionary development.³³ The cultural politicians of the SED hoped that German painting and sculpture could emulate the Soviet model, but because socialism was still nascent in the GDR, the real task of the artist was to imagine the future, something which proved difficult for the regime to communicate in specific terms.

Through the adaptation and imitation of strategies of the Stalinist cultural program for the Soviet Union, "formalism" was fashioned as the "catch-all" term for all art that opposed Socialist Realist ideals. In 1947, the Soviet House of Culture opened in Berlin, aiming to provide German audiences with unadulterated examples of officially sanctioned Soviet art. In a similar vein, 1950 saw the establishment of the VBKD, the Association of Berlin Artists of Germany, which sought

³² Mathews, *Making Histories*, 121.

³³ *Ibid*, 122.

to defend socialism against the perceived cultural barbarism of American imperialism. Soviet cultural officer Alexander Dymshitz addressed an audience at Humbolt University in Berlin, asserting that “the figural distortion, abstraction, and subjectivism of cubism, surrealism, and other variants of modern art made such work unintelligible to those outside the cultural elite,” lauding socialist realism as an aesthetic of easily legible, photo naturalistic realism.³⁴ The perceived accessibility of the genre’s imagery, compounded with its capacity for presenting clear, didactic themes defined the terms of its function as an art “of the people.” In regards to Dymshitz’s speech on “The Relationship of Soviet Art to Bourgeois Art,” a Soviet cultural advisor to East Germany stated that “any German painter who attempts to produce [work] without the people, who does not share the life of the people, does not empathize with it or share its joys, who does not draw his own creative power from that of the people, that painter is damned to a miserable fate.”³⁵ Modernist art was viewed as bourgeois, subjective, and decadent, while Socialist Realist art was described as guiding the direction of Germany’s future. Publications, such as the GDR’s principle art journal *Bildende Kunst*, made a point to document leading opinions and debates on the matter, including a dialogue between Karl Hofer and Oskar Nerlinger, and the essay written by the Soviet officer, Vladimir Semyonovich Semyonov, titled “The Paths and Missteps of Modern Art,” in 1951.³⁶ With the support of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany, the SED solidified its position of power and focused on the centralization and exclusion of all trends that did not conform to the cultural aesthetic that had been established by Moscow. As the country remained debilitated, the SED sought for artists to

³⁴ Ibid, 66.

³⁵ Butler, *Art of Two Germanys*, 123

³⁶ Ibid, 27.

reflect the hope for progress as idealized guardians and propagators of Germany's heritage and future, providing a link between their ailing land and its future betterment.

While the Soviet Union and the SED sought to fortify the direction and support of East Germany's future, the Western allied powers of the United States, Great Britain, and France sought to reintegrate their half of the divided country into the Western world of capitalist, democratic culture and politics through a similar promotion of the arts. Abstract art's association with freedom and the Western world was considered proof of the West Germany's successful cultural reeducation and reintegration. In its aesthetic distinction from the art produced in totalitarian regimes, the process of reintegration through the practice of abstraction subsequently functioned as further proof of the Federal Republic's overcoming of the National Socialist past. The desire for art to function as a visual world language that could be universally understood and independent from national restrictions grew out of the Federal Republic's ideological opposition and tension with the German Democratic Republic.

The institution of opposing national aesthetic styles within the two Germanys developed out of reflexivity, due to their respective constructions of the other as an ideological rival, or enemy. In 1951, the West German art journal, *Das Kunstwerk*, juxtaposed East German Walther Meinig's painting "Ein neuer Traktor kommt," or "A New Tractor is Coming," with West German Willi Baumeister's painting, "Komische Geste," or "Cosmic Gesture."³⁷ Meinig's painting depicts a group of people gathered around a tractor in a large open field. In the center of the frame, a man gestures to the right, pointing out into the distance in a direction in which all the other figures are faced. The semi-circular positioning of the crowd brings the viewer into the

³⁷ Butler, *Art of Two Germanys*, 119.

world of the image in the aim of inspiring hope in the betterment of the German future and the arrival of a new era of prosperity. Baumeister's painting conveys the abstraction and flatness characteristic of modernist art of the time; "Komische Geste" presents no narrative and no figurative elements. Unlike "A New Tractor is Coming," Baumeister's painting lacks the overt influence politics or ideology, allowing the viewer a completely subjective and individual experience (Fig. 5). The contrasts between the two paintings convey the disparate social interests of the two states in the distinctions made between the grounded, agrarian goals of the German Democratic Republic and the seemingly limitlessness of the cosmos, which the publication viewed as symbolic of the ideals of freedom and power that were celebrated and upheld within the Federal Republic.

Immediately following Germany's official division in 1949, West German leaders, under the administration of Konrad Adenauer, directed the artistic style of the Federal Republic deeper into the realm of "autonomous art," in rejection of the precepts of totalitarian regimes.³⁸ The ideal of abstraction as a world language was influenced greatly by the advocacy of the acclaimed German art historian Werner Haftmann, who published the 1954 text *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*, or *Painting in the Twentieth Century*. Haftmann claimed that "in the past decade [modern art] has been able to produce a human consciousness that transcends all the limits of language, customs, history, feelings of race, and folklore. Its form of expression and ways of experience have for the first time given a certain reality to the idea of a world culture."³⁹ In Haftmann's view, modern art had the capacity to "rouse inner harmonies" and embed these harmonies in a

³⁸ McComas, "Exhibiting Postwar German Art in the 1950s," 347.

³⁹ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 120.

form of language that could be considered “the first model case for human culture.”⁴⁰ The Federal Republic viewed abstract informal art as devoid of content, as the kind of art that does not evoke memories, as well as the kind of art that had continually opposed Nazi ideals. It was believed that the promotional practice of this aesthetic would allow West Germany to sever itself from the nation’s dark past and unite itself with the universal language of the Western world.

The hope of achieving reconciliation through the language of abstraction was articulated within various contexts in the postwar era, not only impacting speeches on cultural policy, but directing the public perception of the significant role of the artist in constructing West German identity. In the immediate postwar era, the Federal Republic of Germany lacked a defined cultural agenda beyond the restitution of looted art, for the process of cultural re-education at the fall of the Third Reich was markedly more difficult after the pillaging of the Soviet “Trophy Teams.”⁴¹ In order to overcome this obstacle, many exhibitions were curated in the early postwar years by the German cultural elite who had opposed fascism during the Nazi regime. During occupation, the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) division of the US Army set up collecting points in Munich, Wiesbaden, Marburg and Offenbach, with the goal of expediting the establishment of international cultural relations which would overcome the deep spiritual isolation imposed on Germany by National Socialism.⁴² A 1954 *LIFE* magazine article, which featured West German abstract artists, expressed that the “art of the Federal Republic needed to convey a positive, internationalist message, while remaining identifiably German through stylistic affinities with the familiar Expressionist tradition.”⁴³ The construction of a link between

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Large, *Berlin*, 394.

⁴² McComas, “Exhibiting Postwar German Art in the 1950s,” 137.

⁴³ Ibid, 350.

groups such as Der Blaue Reiter and the abstract stylistic practices of the postwar era led to the concomitant exclusion of figurative and socially engaged art, pointing to the role of these exhibitions and artistic patronage as tools of cultural diplomacy. Following the official division of Germany in 1949, the Federal Republic promoted modernist aesthetics which upheld strict limits and prohibited any references to militarism, Nazism, and subsequently World War II and the Holocaust, in order to fuel the nation's assimilation into alliance with other world nations.

In this climate of ideological opposition, German art gradually became a power that was intended to bridge differences, communicate between countries, heal psychic wounds, ease the burden of experiences that could not possibly be rationalized verbally, and compensate for Germany's contemporary alienation from the international sphere of modern politics and culture. Within her dissertation, Heather Matthews asserts that "in both countries, the same vocabulary arises in the language of the artists, politicians, critics and historians, and lay viewers who try to define 'reality' and the state of being 'realistic.'"⁴⁴ Within East Germany, conceptions of reality were tied to the objectivity of collective social experience, while West German perception of reality centered around the subjective experience of the individual. Bonded by their respective international mandates for the promotion of the postwar German differentiation from the National Socialist past, both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany utilized art as a tool for cultural reeducation and rehabilitation in the midst of Germany's cultural "Zero Hour." Though the stylistic and thematic approaches of Socialist Realism in the East and modernist abstraction in the West depict markedly disparate aesthetics and represent the ideals of opposing ideologies, the governed promotion of certain types of

⁴⁴ Matthews, *Making Histories*, 163.

images and the subsequent suppression of others manifested a means of producing a certain view of identity and history. The institution of the *German Art Exhibitions* in East Germany in 1946 and the *Documenta* series in West Germany in 1955 reflect the mutual desire of both states to present the world with a cohesive and enduring vision of a rehabilitated German identity within the post-war “Zero Hour.” However, the growing chronological distance from the tensions of the Cold War in divided Germany has revealed studies, accounts, and primary resources that reflect upon the art world in both East and West as more attenuated, debated, and conflicted than was suggested in the aesthetically imposed singular cultural identities within the two German states.

Socialist Realism and German Heritage in the “Soviet-Occupied Zone”

When considering postwar East Germany’s visual culture, it is imperative to examine the role of the past in defining the representations of a divided national identity. The desire to reconcile the necessity for historical grounding with the need to distance themselves and their new states from the legacy of National Socialism drove East and West German policymakers to establish seemingly polarized identities. The Cold War dichotomy of an abstraction-oriented West and a realism-oriented East did not arise spontaneously through Allied occupation, nor concomitantly with the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949. Germany’s geographic position in Europe, along with its large population and high level of industrial development, has historically permitted the nation to become a force of prime importance for its neighboring countries. As nations with a shared past and polarized ideologies, the tensions of competing legitimacy between the FRG and the GDR pushed divided Germany to become the primary battlefield of the Cold War. Unlike other communist states, which could portray themselves as representatives of national rather than Soviet interests, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the GDR was required to deal with the problem of the division of Germany as an additional difficulty in gaining power. The existence of the Federal Republic of Germany, with its alternative national identity, reduced the base of popular support for the SED leadership in the East. The disconnect between the people of the GDR and the cultural policy makers of the SED, pushed East Germany to continually stress the social component of its ideology as a means of legitimating its authority.

In the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition* catalogue, Ministry President Otto Grotewohl stated that the overall goal for artists, as well as the rest of the GDR's population, was the creation of a new, peaceful, progressive, and united German national culture.⁴⁵ Suggesting that a new German culture could only develop under the guidance of the Soviet Union, Grotewohl declared that "art that does not choose as its central concern liberated labor and the productive human being, that true Prometheus of human culture, his desires and suffering, his battles and victories, that art is alienated from the world and does not deserve to exist."⁴⁶ This assertion that artists who refused to depict socialist themes would lose the right to produce and display art in the GDR implicitly declared that all of the works displayed at the *Third German Art Exhibition* of 1953 would best represent the aims of the Party. As a state existing under unique conditions, the GDR experienced many difficulties in obtaining the acceptance and support of its own population. Due to these difficulties, the state leadership felt a constant threat to its legitimacy; it could not ignore the possibility that the populace, if given the opportunity, would revolt and call for a dissolution of the East German state.⁴⁷ The roots of cultural and political policy within East Germany were determined, as in all socialist states, by the interests of the working people, particularly the working class proletariat. By harnessing the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Soviet genre of socialist realism as a propagandistic means of political and cultural alignment with the might of the Soviet Union, East German leadership sought to legitimize itself among its populace, within Europe and as part of the international socialist movement.

⁴⁵ Otto Grotewohl. *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Translated by Sorrel Dunn. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953. n.p.

⁴⁶ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 136.

⁴⁷ Vale, "Decisive Factors," 15.

The core aims of the Soviet occupied East German state revolved around the liberation of the German identity from the totalitarian ideology of the Nazi regime. Due to the assault upon the nation's visual culture during the Third Reich, the leadership in both the FRG and the GDR sought a means of recovery from the past defamation of aesthetic freedom. In 1946 East Germany established national art exhibitions which would be held roughly every four years until the last in 1987. Displayed at the Dresden State Museum, the *German Art Exhibitions* were initially held as a means of declaring the return of artistic freedom to Germany.⁴⁸ *The First German Art Exhibition* in 1946 was organized by the Soviet occupation authority and featured artists who had been targeted and marked as “degenerate” by the National Socialists. With the aim of ideological neutrality, at least in the sense of inter-zonal relations between East and West Germany, the organizers of the exhibition displayed works made between 1933 and 1945. This effort was intended to convey the notion that the Nazi project of destroying modern art production in Germany had been unsuccessful. Artists and organizers came from throughout Germany's present occupation zones, including prominent modernists such as Will Grohmann, Karl Hofer, Max Beckmann, and Ernst Wilhelm Nay.⁴⁹

At the time of the 1946 exhibition, the GDR had officially adopted the Soviet doctrine of Socialist Realism as a means of promoting the establishment of a new socialist culture. The genre was neither new nor an indigenous product of East Germany, as it was a postwar importation from the Stalinist Soviet Union, where it had spread from Russia to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁸ Heather Elizabeth Mathews. "Formalism, Naturalism, and the Elusive Socialist Realist Picture at the GDR's Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung, 1953." Ed. Matthew Philpotts and Sabine Role. *Edinburgh German Yearbook* 3. Boydell & Brewer, 2009, 90.

⁴⁹ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 121.

⁵⁰ John R. Frey. "Socialist Realism in East Germany." *The German Quarterly* 26.4 (1953): 272.

doctrine, originally meant to apply to literature, was first pronounced by Andrei Zhdanov at the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1932 as serving a didactic function in shaping and re-educating the proletarian worker in the spirit of Socialism. Under the leadership of Josef Stalin, socialist realist artists were instructed to produce works that were “nationalist in form, socialist in content.” Through an adherence to realism, the genre aimed to produce an objective reality constituted by a set of social conditions that could communicate the ideals of socialism in order to inspire and mobilize the historically oppressed proletariat. In his 1934 speech, Zhdanov deemed creative artists as “engineers of the human soul” who must aim to actively arouse ideals, feelings, and aspirations which would stimulate progressive action.⁵¹ Such images would embody the spirit leading to a brighter future by granting the oppressed an image of themselves as positive, heroic, and victorious. Viewed as having an allotted social role and responsibility, artists working in the Soviet Union were asked to produce works which communicated ideals regarding *partiinnost*, or the expression of the leading role of the party in all aspects of Soviet life, *narodnost*, relating to popular sentiments regarding nationality and ethnic history, *klassovost*, regarding the artist’s communication of class awareness, and *ideinnost*, the inculcation and application of new and progressive attitudes.⁵² In a review of socialist realism in the Soviet Union, the historian Paul Baker describes a portrait of Marshal Vasilevsky (who served as Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces during World War II), stating that “if a picture is heroic, then it is heroic through and through, even down to the heroic wart on [Vasilevsky’s] face. If it is nostalgically rural— say, *The Gingerbread Arcade*, by Vladimir Ztozharov (1956)— then it is nostalgic through and through. No contrast of tone is permitted within any picture.”⁵³ Furthering his

⁵¹ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 276.

⁵² Paul Barker. “What Stalin Liked.” *Modern Painters*. (1991): 100-101.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 100.

opinion that “the art of Stalin’s time, full of purpose, was always ready, as it were, to die with its boots on,” Baker emphasizes the fact that socialist realism was not a realist genre, it was all set down for the mystification of the masses, and the inspiration of artists through the celebration and material manifestation of a dream, an unreality.

The organizers of the *Second German Art Exhibition*, held after the official division of the two German states in 1949, intended to design the show to reflect the cultural goals of the newly established East German state. Though the exhibit included contemporary works from roughly half East and half West German artists, an exclusively East German jury, comprised of four workers, a farmer, and a youth, was instructed to ensure that the exhibition included artworks relevant to the socialist state’s most valued citizens.⁵⁴ Despite the presence of these representatives of German socialism, there were few works selected for the show that depicted the new socialist culture that the SED sought to promote. Only a few works focused on the rebuilding of East German cities, the communalization of farmland, and proletarian solidarity, serving as proof that the East German party officers had failed to persuade artists to take up realist form and socialist content. In her review of the exhibition, German art historian Corinna Halbrehder discerned that the large number of self-portraits suggested a continuing need among German artists to take stock of their own individual situations in the aftermath of the war. In a similar vein, depictions of carnivals, fairs, and circuses revealed an equally strong desire to indulge in more frivolous aspects of postwar life.⁵⁵ The failed promotion and adaptation of socialist realism in East Germany can be attributed to many factors, the most significant of which was its claims to being “nationalist in form, socialist in content.” Unlike the Soviet socialism’s

⁵⁴ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 122.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

ideological ties to the October Revolution of 1917, the German Democratic Republic had no revolutions or figureheads, such as the Bolshevik leader and politician Vladimir Lenin, to draw reference and inspiration from. Even artists who enthusiastically followed the SED party recommendations in terms of content struggled to put the valued forms into practice due to the lack of official directives and vague aesthetic prescriptions.

In the years following Germany's official division and the failures of the *Second German Art Exhibition* in 1949, many practicing artists within the GDR struggled with the doctrine's appropriation, leading to widespread debates on how the genre should be interpreted and applied artistically. Socialist Realism, as a doctrine, viewed the arts as instrumental in raising the social consciousness of the masses to the oppression of the proletariat. Therefore, it was necessary that works of art communicate important themes and values of socialism in a comprehensible and inspirational manner.⁵⁶ Due to the difficulty in communicating how exactly socialist realist works should be manifested, both Soviet and East German cultural Party officials sought to define the genre through what it was not. "Formalism," as a concept, was introduced by the Stalinist cultural program of the Soviet Union as a term to reflect art which gave precedence to form over content. In 1948, Alexander Dymshitz, the head of the cultural division of the Soviet military administration of Germany, published "On Formalist Tendencies Within German Painting," which marked the opening of an anti-formalist campaign which aimed to implement the Soviet thinking on visual cultural reorientation.

From 1948 through 1953, Soviet and East German officials introduced the Soviet model of socialist realism into the visual culture of the German Democratic Republic through a series of

⁵⁶ Frey, "Socialist Realism," 274.

official resolutions and a number of highly publicized essays in East German policy journals and arts publications, such as *Bildende Kunst*.⁵⁷ The term “formalism” was implemented within these public discussions as a catch-all to include all modern art styles, whether fully abstract, Surrealist, or expressively representational. The essay published by Dymshitz responds to artistic calls for individual freedom and subjective expression with comments on modernist art’s “negation of reality” and non-representational abstraction as a “masquerade” which cultivated a “falsification of reality that held no answer to the challenges of life.”⁵⁸ Dymshitz’s adamance on the detrimental effects of formalist tendencies as the material manifestation of “bourgeois and decadent attitudes which repudiate the essential truth” further established a binary opposition between the figurative mode of socialist realism and a stylized, subjective, and thus seemingly decadent, mode practiced by those deemed formalist.⁵⁹

Heather Mathews has recently discussed the role of the “formalism debates” in determining and shaping the course of East German visual culture in the 1950s. The failure of the 1949 *Second German Art Exhibition* to show substantial advances in German socialist painting provoked the Party to devote renewed attention to artists who continued to ignore its recommendations, such as Wilhelm Müller within his 1949 composition “Untitled.”⁶⁰ Mathews presents a comprehensive overview of essays published before the *Third German Art Exhibition* of 1953 by cultural policy makers in the SED, prominent German artists, and Soviet representatives such as Alexander Dymshitz. A 1947 essay by Max Grabovski, head of the SED’s Division of Culture and Education, titled “On the Visual Arts of the Present” marks a

⁵⁷ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 110.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 112.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 111.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

turning point in the heightened stages of art criticism, reiterating the need to determine which aspects of contemporary German art were “progressive, and which prevent progress.”⁶¹

Grabovski addresses the fact that modern art grew out of a revolutionary drive, arguing that the style of Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism were ineffective in bringing a full-fledged revolution to pass. Grabovski goes so far as to claim that the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, movement of the Weimar era was a “step backward” from previous modernist movements and served as a stepping stone for the superficial naturalism of the National Socialist period. This attempt to align the infamous Nazi legacy with modernism aimed to delegitimize implications of socialist realism’s representational stylistic affinities with totalitarian aesthetics. This connection was also implied in Dymschitz’s use of terms such as “irrational,” “decadent,” and “degenerate” in his later essay devoted to the defamation of modernism. These words, which had been used similarly by the National Socialists, left an eerie resonance with his East German readers; this illuminated upon his cultural distance from the impact that the Nazi legacy left upon the nation as a Soviet outsider.

In response to Grabovski’s essay, a dialogue between the East German artists Karl Hofer and Oskar Nerlinger was published in October 1948 in the GDR’s principle art journal, *Bildende Kunst*. Hofer, a former member of the Die Brücke Expressionist movement, was continuing to produce works which revealed “formalist” tendencies, such as his painting “Im Neubau (In the New Building)” from 1947 (Fig. 16). Hofer believed that art should be detached from politics and that it should return to the autonomous position that it had held prior to the rise of National Socialism. In his essay, Hofer stated that great art “anticipates the spirit of the time, even shapes

⁶¹ Ibid, 125.

it. [...] Even if great art is rarely comprehended by its contemporaries, art and society are integrally connected.”⁶² Hofer was later critiqued for his views, removed from *Bildende Kunst* and driven out of East Germany. Dymschitz used Hofer as an example to define the antithesis of the aims and aesthetics of socialist realism, for “what person who truly lives in and with the times can recognize himself in the tragic masks of Karl Hofer? The stubbornness with which this painter cultivates his invented forms of falsified reality is the proof that in his art he turns his back on life and enters the world of subjective fantasy.”⁶³ Dymschitz’s critique was largely a response to the implied threats to the legitimacy and success of East German socialism, which he believed to be explicitly presented within Hofer’s painting “Im Neubau” from 1947. The “tragic masks of Karl Hofer,” referenced by Dymschitz, appear upon the faces of four figures inside a room in the midst of renovation, implied by the presence of a ladder, workbench, and bucket. Within the painting, Hofer reveals the “Neubau,” or “New Building,” to be an old, flawed structure whose cracks and instability will soon be covered up with plaster, evoking a sense of the widespread damage, both material and psychic, in postwar Germany, damage that remains largely undressed and concealed.

Karl Hofer’s views on the role of the artist and the direction that German art should take were also refuted by Oskar Nerlinger, who ultimately agreed with Grabovski’s earlier claims. As a communist artist who had previously been deemed degenerate by the Nazi Party, Nerlinger considered the previous modernist movements to be worthy of respect, though he faulted those artists and their isolation from society as a central weakness of modern art. Nerlinger believed that “the artist must be retrained to see that there can be no point of view without political

⁶² Mathews, *Making Histories*, 127.

⁶³ Ibid, 130.

consequences, that every behavior, even the ‘apolitical,’ has a political effect.”⁶⁴ Nerlinger was deeply committed to educating the younger generation of German artists and was involved in many collective projects and group studios as an advocate for the creation of a public sphere of artistic activity which could express the realities of a country in flux. His larger goal for the visual arts was to reinvent and inscribe temporal boundaries between the pre-Nazi past and the present moment and future, attempting to place himself and his colleagues in a position to define national hope for the future. In order to do so, Nerlinger found it imperative that “the artist must step out of a remote position. He cannot just watch human life from afar, from over a fence; he must experience life in community, without reservation or distance.”⁶⁵ For the SED, and leading figures such as Nerlinger, immersion into the reality of the working class was a means of producing authenticity, a realism begotten of the contact between artist and worker.

The year 1951 marked a crescendo in the debates on the directives of visual culture within the socialist East German state, both with the passing of Walter Ulbricht’s “Five-Year Plan for Peaceful Reconstruction” and the publication of Vladimir Semyonovich Semyonov’s essay “The Paths and Missteps of Modern Art” the same year. Within his declaration of a Five-Year Plan for the GDR, the newly elected General Secretary of the Central Committee, Walter Ulbricht, called for a permanent change of direction, admitting that the benchmarks set by “our elder brother” (the Soviet Union) were still far from reach. Remarking that the visual arts had lagged behind in the cultural development of GDR, Ulbricht concluded that “we don’t want to see any more abstract pictures in our colleges of art. We have no need for the pictures of lunar

⁶⁴ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 128.

⁶⁵ Dalton, Caitlin. “Negotiating Boundaries in Postwar Berlin: *Bildende Kunst*, Oskar Nerglinger, and the Politics of Reconstruction, 1947-1949.” University Press of New England. 2015, 22.

landscapes or rotting fish or any of that kind of thing.”⁶⁶ At this point in time, the cultural officers of the Central Committee of the SED believed that there was not even one great artwork that could be singled out as an exemplar for the further development of socialist realism, a feat they attempted to address in the collection of works displayed at the *Third German Art Exhibition*, which would be exhibited in 1953.

The formalism debates grew out of heightened perceptions of the necessity for the realization and production of socialist realist art works as a means of promoting an East German national identity under the progressive banner of socialism. The publication of Semyonov’s 1951 essay sought to further establish what contemporary German artists should work to avoid. Writing under a German pseudonym N. Orlow, Semyonov employed pointed rhetoric towards specific artists and their roles in contributing to the degeneration of German art, including the communist Weimar artist Käthe Kollwitz, leaving no room for interpretation or tolerance for “decadent, unpatriotic, anti-democratic, deformed, and primitive” aesthetics.⁶⁷ These prescriptions, delivered to the East Germans surreptitiously through one of Stalin’s closest confidants, ordered that “art in the new Germany must represent reality in its new progressive, democratic development. [The artists] must take their themes from the battle of the workers for democracy and peace, the Five-Year Plan, [directing attention] to the progressive people of contemporary Germany: the activists in the factories, the progressive intellectuals, the engineers, supervisors, farmers, functionaries of the Free German Youth, the Young Pioneers, etc.”⁶⁸ In doing so, the artists were also directed to look to “classical” German cultural heritage, using

⁶⁶ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 111.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 132.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 133.

models such as “Holbeins, Menzel, and Dürer.”⁶⁹ The inconsistencies in official demands for East German socialist artists and art educators were reflected in the directive to combine the stylistically old with the ideologically new. The rebirth of free artistic subjectivity had to be reconciled with the aims of the socialist state, just as the push for socialist art and the condemnation of “formalism” had to be reconciled with the desire to distance the culture of the GDR from the Nazi legacy.

In selecting the collection of paintings for the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition* in Dresden, the organizers felt it necessary to ensure that the lack of realist works in the 1949 show would not be repeated, so as to demonstrate East Germany’s progress towards the emulation of Soviet culture. In the months prior to the exhibit, articles and reviews in the newsletter of the Union of Visual Artists and the journal *Bildende Kunst* stressed the goals of the collection. The fears that artists were not adhering to the Party’s official directives led officials to bring artists into the world of the German worker in the midst of collectivization, which was slowly being implemented after 1951 and the institution of East Germany’s Five-Year Plan, through land reforms for agricultural production had already begun between 1945 and 1948.⁷⁰ By taking this step, artists would “have knowledge of how real life develops. The typical circumstances of our age, forming the background appropriate for the faithful re-creation of typical characters.”⁷¹ The “typical,” as defined by the Soviet Premier Gyorgii Malenkov in 1952, referred to “not only what is encountered most frequently, but that which most fully and vividly expresses the essence of

⁶⁹ Sigrid Hofer. “The Dürer Heritage in the GDR: The Canon of Socialist Realism, Its Areas of Imprecision, and Its Historical Transformations.” *Getty Research Journal*, 4 (2012): 113

⁷⁰ Jens Schöne. “Ideology and Asymmetrical Entanglements: Collectivization in the German Democratic Republic.” Ed. Constantin Iordachi and Arnd Bauerkämper. *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe*. Central European University Press, 2014. 150.

⁷¹ Barker, “What Stalin Liked,” 100.

the given social force,” a reference to promoted subjects, such as the increased productivity of the worker, worker education, and the advances made by the State in various areas of civic life.⁷²

While the *First German Art Exhibition* in 1946 featured artists targeted by the National Socialist Party, by 1953 the Soviet-occupied zone of the GDR had already been working to elevate interest in the production and exhibition of art which emulated the Soviet socialist realist model. Within his essay for the 1953 catalogue, Helmut Holtzhauer states that at the present moment in the GDR, artists were still struggling to give fresh content to their new theme of the working people. Even the theoretical basis for this new art was still quite weak, due to the fact that “under the rule of Formalism, some artists had lost their artistic mastery, and that even thematically, they were not up to the most beautiful and important tasks.”⁷³ A few months before the opening of the 1953 exhibition, the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts held the First Theoretical Conference on issues of visual culture. The conference served to promote the study of national cultural and historical heritage, a theme deemed decidedly crucial for the development of socialist realism. The director of the conference, Fritz Dahn, organized several seminars for common learning, helping, advising, and critically directing an artists’ collective within the GDR, which would allow participating artists to be educated on the basic tenets and methods of the genre.⁷⁴ The intention behind these seminars was to generate a stronger collection of socialist realist works for the exhibition jury. The deadline for submissions for the exhibition was pushed so that more works could be produced by the newly established participating collectives,

⁷² Mathews, *Making Histories*, 152.

⁷³ Helmut Holtzhauer. *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Translated by Sorrel Dunn. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953. n.p.

⁷⁴ Dagmar Buchbinder. “Painting and the Arts Policy of the GDR.” *‘The Conquest of Culture Begins:’ The State Commission on the Arts of the GDR (1951-1953) and the Cultural Policy of the SED*. Ed. Jochen Staadt. Frankfurt, 2011, 8.

including the Dresden Academy Brigade, the Wartburg Brigade from Thuringia, and the Lucas Cranach Brigade from Saxony. During these production seminars, each participant was granted adequate working material, food, and a bonus of 400 marks from the cultural fund for submitting their work.⁷⁵ By educating young artists in the ideals of socialist realism, while urging their collective participation in strengthening the new socialist nation, the organizers sought to discourage younger artists from exploring formalist tendencies. Subsequently, the sense of empowerment imparted upon those involved, through the emphasis of their individual role in the socialist movement, granted the participating artists the freedom and power of self-representation.

The strong emphasis on the importance in guiding the development of a socialist youth culture is prevalent throughout the catalogue of the *Third German Art Exhibition*. The collection of works selected for the 1953 exhibition catalogue are introduced by three essays which aim to situate contemporary East German painting, sculpture, and graphic arts in the international dialogue of socialist brotherhood behind the Iron Curtain. The contributing introductory essays, one by the Chairman of the National Committee for Artistic Affairs, Helmut Holtzhauer, one by contributing artist and President of the 1953 Dresden Third German Art Exhibition, Otto Nagel, and another by Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl. The essays do not discuss individual works, but rather focus on the impact of the collection as a whole, serving as introductory guides through the subsequent selection of works, organized by medium.⁷⁶ Within his essay, Holtzhauer asserted that though socialist art has overcome many obstacles, the struggle of the present would continue

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The catalogue does not provide dates for the works in the collection, whether it was not in the interest of the exhibition curators to date the works, or whether the indication is that these works were created solely in the year 1953, remains uncertain.

into the future, particularly without the support of the new generation.⁷⁷ Paintings, sculptures, and other graphic works depicting children and youth culture were meant to engage visitors of the exhibition to consider that every German citizen, whether man, woman, or child, had a role to play in the nation's development. In Peter Jakob Schober's painting, "The Small Cowherd," a young boy is depicted within the forefront of the scene, his torso taking up the majority of the frame (Fig. 17). Behind him Schober has depicted the German landscape. Though we do not see any cows, or any sign of the child's labor, the confidence with which the child faces the viewer, directly evokes the image of the heroic socialist worker. With the whole of Germany behind him, the small cowherd proclaims his dominance over the land, his role in cultivating the German nation. The desire for youth participation in the socialist movement was also promoted within Rudolph Schäfer's painting "Admission into the Organization of Thälmann-Pioneers," which depicts a young girl shaking hands with a German youth leader, surrounded by an older girl and three boys all in uniform (Fig. 18). A portrait of Ernst Thälmann, a leading member of the Weimar Era communist party in Germany, hangs on the wall behind them. Thälmann is also represented as a photographed bronze bust at the opening of the catalogue, following the essays published by Otto Grotewohl, Helmut Holtzhauer, and Otto Nagel. Thälmann was a leading figure within the Weimar Era communist party in Germany who was targeted by the Nazi Party and executed in Buchenwald on orders from Adolf Hitler in 1944.⁷⁸ As a symbol of Germany's communist past, as well as a martyr in the fight against the National Socialist Party, Thälmann served as a role model and icon for the pioneers within the organization inspired by his memory. The socialist realist belief that the highest duty of art is to animate the human soul, mind and

⁷⁷ Holtzhauer, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*, n.p.

⁷⁸ Large, *Berlin*, 209.

spirit, as a means of directing it towards great tasks, is reflected within Schäfer's painting, which calls Germany's new generation to action. As a faction of the people, the youth were viewed as having the power to see and shape tomorrow, for they would one day become part of East German leadership.⁷⁹

Despite the efforts of the SED, the realization of socialist realism's didactic function, in shaping and re-educating the modern worker in the spirit of Socialism, met difficulty. Because socialism was still nascent in the German Democratic Republic, the task of the artist was not to depict the present reality, but an imagined future. This was further implied by Grotewohl's statement that "for us, the artist has long since become a person who is called upon by his people to step up in order to mediate a turning point which, in the reality of our national history, came into play long ago."⁸⁰ In his records documenting the organization of *Third German Art Exhibition*, Helmut Holtzhauer outlined the ten major topics of consideration that characterized the 1953 exhibition. The sculptures, paintings, and etchings presented within the collection aimed to celebrate leading statesmen of the Soviet Union and the GDR, heroes of labor, the defense of the Homeland, the struggle for unity and peace, the construction of socialism, the celebration of Young Pioneers and the youth, the production of cooperatives, German friendship with the Soviet Union, and past themes of struggle within German workers' movements.⁸¹ The desire to connect the new socialist state to revolutionary movements and leaders within Germany's cultural heritage was explicitly displayed throughout the exhibit. Busts and portraits of President Wilhelm Pieck, communist martyr Ernst Thälmann, SED officer and Party leader Hermann Matern served to ground socialist revolution into German history of the 20th century,

⁷⁹ Hotzhauer, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*, n.p.

⁸⁰ Grotewohl, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*, n.p.

⁸¹ Buchbinder, "Painting and the Arts Policy of the GDR," 9.

while images of Karl Marx and Thomas Müntzer, a 16th century theologian of the German Reformation, serve to ground German heritage through a series of revolutionary movements--a feat also achieved through the display of works such as Bruno Bernitz's painting of "A Scene from the Peasants' War" and Heinz Wagner's painting of "The Locksmith Apprentices Zinna and Glasewald in March 1848." By giving the catalogue's frontispiece over to a photograph of a bronze bust of Karl Marx, the exhibition organizers sought to ground the socialist revolution as a legacy of the heritage of the German nation (Fig. 19).

The *Third German Art Exhibition* of 1953 presented its visitors with a multitude of images celebrating the heroic image of the proletarian worker, whether man, woman, or child. The portraits of German laborers, activists, inventors, and national prize winners, realized through the diverse media of painting, sculpture, and graphic arts, served to convey the national appreciation of their dedication to the socialist cause.⁸² The images within the catalogue that present studies of individual subjects celebrated the individual within the masses, a feature that many socialist realist works avoid. In his introductory essay, Otto Nagel reflects upon artistic displays of "passionate sympathy with the working people [...] for it is through their work that Germany's visual artists came to identify themselves with the concerns of the people, and support their fight."⁸³ While many of these portraits depict named and acclaimed German subjects, some are merely titled as "Policeman," "Teacher," "Judge," "Dockworker," "Tractor Driver," "Actress," while others are labeled as simply as "Woman," "Child," and in one case,

⁸² Within the exhibition, portraiture and sculpted busts presented the likeness of specific German heroes (such as Philip Müller, Karl Marx, Thomas Muntzer, Erich Werth, Wilhelm Pieck, and Hermann Matern), celebrated professionals (such as the surgeon Dr. Fromme, the scholar Johannes Stroux, the sculptor Tschaplowitz, and the celebrated worker Paul Zickler), or unnamed figures that serve a more general, allegorical image of an ideal.

⁸³ Otto Nagel. *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Translated by Sorrel Dunn. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953. n.p.

“Erika.”⁸⁴ By promoting the images of nameless and unidentifiable figures, these works served to heroize all Germans devoted to the socialist cause through an allegorical universality of identity. The equalizing nature of these diverse portrait subjects showed an earnest effort to appeal to the lives and demands of the common people. The desire to communicate with the visitors of the exhibition in a clear and comprehensible way, was meant to contrast the elite implications of formalist exhibitions, perceived as esoteric in nature, inaccessible to the public masses.

Marxist theory advances the belief that the history of the human race is, in fact, the history of class struggle, particularly in the oppression of the working class. Similarly, socialists consider work to be the source of all culture, both material and spiritual. Indeed, as Grotewohl stated, “only through the people’s having made more than they consumed was the rise of human civilization possible.”⁸⁵ The Marxist valorization of the worker is clear in works such as Bruno Bernitz’s painting “Construction of the Stalinallee,” which presents the viewer with an image of an unfinished building surrounded by scaffolding, paneless windows, pulleys, and tarps which cover open walls (Fig. 20). A crowd of workers is depicted within the foreground of the painting, some working pulleys and lifts, others looking over plans, some lifting planks of wood or holding ladders steady, while some look on at the progress of their comrades. Just as the title implies, the structure of the building takes up the majority of the image, as the primary focus of the artist. However, the action of the image draws the viewer to the figures of the construction workers. The placement of the viewer, facing the backs of the onlooking and participatory crowd, allows one to experience the point of view of the crowd. The vastness of the inanimate

⁸⁴ *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Translated by Sorrel Dunn. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953. n.p.

⁸⁵ Grotewohl, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*, n.p.

structure juxtaposed with the minute, yet active figures of the workers, evokes a sense of awe in what they are in the process of creating.

The link between individual identity and profession reflects the socialist view that a person's relationship to the world is determined through their work and their place in society. Grotewohl asserts that within Germany, "as within other peace loving nations, of which the Soviet Union is at the forefront, work as an eternal and natural condition of human life, has essentially gone from being an oppressive burden to a thing of honor, of glory, and of heroism."

⁸⁶ The notion of the heroic laborer is exemplified within a portrait by Otto Nagel, titled "Young Mason of Stalinallee." Within this painting, we can see the countenance of one of the subjects of Bernitz's painting, whose individual contribution assisted in the postwar reconstruction of the city of Berlin (Fig. 21). Dressed in all white, the young mason stands, his left hand at his hip, his right hanging at his side. In the background of the painting, we see the familiar scaffolding rendered within Bernitz's painting. However, unlike within the previous work, it is the laborer who takes up the majority of the image, while the building merely functions as a backdrop. The mason's relaxed pose (as well as the lack of other workers within the frame) implies that his work for the day is done, while simultaneously inviting the viewer to admire the fruits of his labor. While Bernitz's painting of "Construction of the Stalinallee," evokes the camaraderie of the masses in building the new socialist German nation, Nagel's "Young Mason of Stalinallee," celebrates the valor and dedication of the individual within the masses.

In accordance with the classical Marxist theory, the working class of the GDR is only one division of the international workers' movement. As a state, the GDR "is thus reduced to an

⁸⁶ Ibid.

insignificant but necessary organizational form. [...] the keynote of GDR policy is thus to perform ‘internationalist tasks.’”⁸⁷ This point, highlighted by the historians Michel Vale and Eberhart Schulz, requires a definition of “internationalist tasks” as they are applied within the socialist system. “Internationalism” in this context commits to a class based mutual solidarity between fraternal socialist countries. Beyond the state of the GDR, the East German population was reduced to “an insignificant but necessary organizational form,” with the goal of contributing to “the closing of the ranks of the states of the socialist community around the principal socialist power, the USSR.”⁸⁸ The Soviet occupation powers viewed themselves to be the emancipators of the German people from the clutches of the Third Reich. In his etching of “The Eighth of May, 1945,” Werner Ruhner commemorates the day the Red Army took Berlin by depicting the figure of a Soviet soldier leading a German prisoner out of a prison cell by the arm (Fig. 22). The two men possess a slightly elevated gaze, their jaws firmly set, their hands clasped together in solidarity, suggesting their movement towards a common purpose.⁸⁹ Though the two men are the same height, the Soviet soldier, his forward step slightly ahead of the German’s, is less ragged in his figure, conveying a sense of health, strength, and leadership. Standing in as a symbol for the rest of the German Democratic Republic, the German prisoner declares his readiness to follow the example of the Soviet Union, manifested in the figure of the Soviet soldier; the depiction renders the Soviet both as the German liberator, as well as his superior. As the first illustrated work within the 1953 exhibition catalogue, the reader’s first encounter with the collection is a reflection of German-Soviet cooperation, as well as Soviet superiority over East Germany. The perception of the exhibition as a dedication to Soviet

⁸⁷ Vale, “Decisive Factors,” 9.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁸⁹ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 119.

Support of East Germany is further supported in the inclusion of a sculpture by Hildegard Wiegel, titled “The Carousel— Memorial to the Soviet dance ensemble Beryozka,” which depicts three women dancing with ribbons, dressed in traditional peasant folk costume (Fig. 23). This tribute to Soviet folk culture is the final image presented within the catalogue, as if to commemorate Soviet heritage as one intrinsically linked to the East German cause.

Within his essay in the *Third German Exhibition* catalogue, the Exhibition President Otto Nagel reports on the collection’s success in taking on a “fundamentally different meaning from all other exhibitions that [had] been shown in Germany in the last decade.”⁹⁰ Viewing the exhibition as a material manifestation of all those who have committed themselves to the peace and unity of the Fatherland, Nagel proclaims that “the painters, sculptors, and graphic artists demonstrate that they have transformed themselves, and have stepped out of their isolation from the people.”⁹¹ In this context, isolation refers to the formalist aesthetic tendencies which isolate the artist from the reality of society. In a press release published on the opening day of the 1953 exhibition, Ernst Hoffman echoed Nagel’s promotion of the exhibit as marking a new phase in the development of visual culture in East Germany. Hoffman declares that the working public will not be disappointed when they visit the restored Dresden State Museum, for the *Third German Art Exhibition* shows that art is blossoming afresh and with it, a conceptual richness and depth of content, for “old masters and young artists alike have raised the banner of socialist realism and have carried it bravely forward.”⁹² This union between the old generation and the new generation is one that transcends temporal boundaries, uniting the East German present to

⁹⁰ Nagel, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*, n.p.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Hoffman, Ernst. “Socialist Realism Triumphs!” Translated by Sorrel Dunn. *Neues Deutschland*. 1953, n.p.

the nation's historical heritage, marking the culture of the GDR as fully recovered from the effects of National Socialist ideals.

Within his press release, Hoffman states that the works displayed highlight the fact that “many more artists and cultural officials began to realize the enormous importance of using critique and self-critique to overcome outdatedness in the visual arts. Even many West German artists understood that an open discussion, combined with an objective critique, is an important condition for furthering the development of art.”⁹³ Though a majority of the 650 works that comprised the collection of the *Third German Art Exhibition* could not be included within the catalogue, it is interesting that none of the works recorded in catalogue achieve or even attempt to achieve any kind of critical representation. The only images concerning the theme of social critique are those depicting scenes from West Germany. Through the promotion of pan-German solidarity, the exhibition organizers intended to demonstrate the presence of socialist movements beyond the border between East and West in order to denounce the legitimacy of the FRG and its claim of promoting democracy and freedom. Werner Laux's painting “The Patriot Philipp Müller,” was inspired by the death and legacy of the West German Philipp Müller, a national martyr of German communism; the painting, along with several others depicting Müller, sought to decry the violence of the Federal Republic towards communists and their allies (Fig. 24).⁹⁴

Notwithstanding the need to present a consensual view of art in the GDR as dedicated to socialist ideals, the West German presence at the *Third German Art Exhibition* at Dresden was substantial and composed about a third of the works in the exhibition, a number of which were reproduced for the catalogue and publicized within the journal *Bildende Kunst*. The display of

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Mathews, “Formalism, Naturalism, and the Elusive Socialist Realist Picture,” 93.

works by West Germans and works depicting West Germany within the 1953 Dresden exhibition was crucial to the SED's demonstration of an all-German solidarity.⁹⁵ West German artists involved in the exhibition, such as Willy Colberg, were persuaded to participate for the sake of pan-German unity in support of the proletarian struggle, though their works paradoxically functioned as tools in the delegitimization of the Federal Republic. In fact, inclusion in the GDR's *Third German Art Exhibition* meant that these artists were risking political repercussions at home and the possibility of financial fallout due to lack of support in the FRG. Colberg's painting "Picketers in Hamburg," heralded as one of the show's most successful works, depicted two dockworkers standing in front of a chained and locked wharf (Fig. 25). The painting alludes to a strike in West Germany, organized by longshoremen in October and November of 1951. The strike was endorsed by the local Communist Party as a means of demanding an increase in wages, though it was blatantly ignored by the West German Public Services.⁹⁶ The two figures are rendered similarly in stature, with like facial features and clothing, further emphasizing their solidarity as they block access to the harbor. Because Colberg's painting is not an overt illustration of the 1951 strike, the scene can be interpreted more broadly by the viewer as a symbolic allusion to the struggle for labor rights in West Germany. For the organizers of the *Third German Art Exhibition*, "Picketers in Hamburg" demonstrated the development of socialist realism in Germany as well as the assertion of a greater-German socialist culture, in spite of the recent division of the German state into East and West.

In his essay for the 1953 catalogue, Helmut Holtzhauer remarked upon the fact of the Federal Republic's denial of art's role as a societal power and the West German promotion of

⁹⁵ Ibid, 95.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 90.

cosmopolitanism and modernism had contributed to the destruction of Germany's postwar political and cultural recovery. Holtzhauer furthers his opinion that formalist tendencies stunted the development of art that mirrored reality in his claim that "it is our [East German] duty to stand by those artists who are not submitting to Formalism, but who are rather fighting for the preservation of national styles and are wielding all of their patriotic strength against American imperialism and its anti-cultural and anti-peace politics."⁹⁷ Here, Holtzhauer draws a parallel between aesthetics and politics as a means of delineating the polarized goals and identities of the two German states. Gernot Battesch's painting "August 15 1951 in West Berlin," depicts a group of Free German Youth members as they were attacked by West German police officers. This painting was a direct reference to an episode during the 1951 World Youth Festival, when thousands of East Germany's Free German Youth marched into West Berlin (Fig. 26). This hostile critique of FRG politics aimed to render West Germany as authoritarian and anti-socialist, immune and ignorant to its oppression of the proletariat. The exhibition organizers' included Hans Kinder's painting of the same procession of Free German Youth presents "World Youth Festival 1951" in East Germany as a pleasant and deeply contrasting counterpart to Battesch's West German rendition (Fig. 27). In contrast to the attack in West Berlin, Kinder's East German scene depicts children holding flags and flowers, smiling and cheering, at the foreground of the crowd. In the background, a large portrait of Joseph Stalin is held by a group of men. The contrast between images of East Germany and the few concerning West German subject matter conveys the intent of the collection of the 1953 Dresden *Third German Art Exhibition* as a simultaneous legitimation of the GDR and denunciation of the FRG.

⁹⁷ Holtzhauer, *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*, n.p.

The *Third German Art Exhibition*, held at the Dresden State Museum in 1953, was a major national event dedicated to showcasing the successful emergence of socialist realist artistic practice in the German Democratic Republic. The exhibition organizers claimed that the collection of works within the exhibition depicted a united reality of post-war Germany in its revolutionary development. However, the exhibition's coverage in the press and its reception by East German, West German, and Soviet visitors reveal its message to be markedly controversial. While some viewed many of the works as exemplars of socialist realism, others remarked upon discrepancies between the form and content of the genre, drawing attention to its conceptual inconsistencies.⁹⁸ For many, the all-German structure of the show allowed the differences between East and West German interpretations of socialist realism to appear particularly striking, illuminating the continuing discrepancy between the goals of the Party and the realities of artistic production.⁹⁹ A 1953 review in the West German publication, *Der Spiegel*, went so far as to imply that the art on display at the Dresden State Museum was not German at all, but rather an artificial cultural product forced onto the population by the Soviet-allied SED.¹⁰⁰ The trivializing tone of the review, along with another titled "Polit-Art in the Soviet-Occupied Zone," is typical of contemporary West German opinion of the GDR, not as an independent state, but as an occupied territory, a puppet of the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹

The exhibition organizers' dual challenge of adapting the Soviet method of socialist realism to the specific context of post-war Germany called attention to what many came to view as the persistence of stylistic habits prevalent in the nation under the Third Reich. Like Ernst

⁹⁸ Mathews, "Formalism, Naturalism," 96.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 144.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 145.

Hoffman, many reviewers of the exhibition, were eager to claim that the exhibition showed that socialist realist artist had adopted classical heritage both critically and creatively, “taking the classics as stylistic role models in the new content of our lives.”¹⁰² This remark becomes problematic when juxtaposed with the fact that a number of visitors perceived a disturbing tendency among many of the exhibition’s participants to cling to the regressive naturalism of National Socialist aesthetic ideals.¹⁰³ Soviet ignorance regarding the problematic resonance of naturalistic realism in post-Nazi Germany is highlighted in Wassilij Jefanov’s praise of Gerhard Müller’s painting, “Portrait of an Officer of the People,” as a masterpiece of German socialist realism (Fig. 28).¹⁰⁴ The painting addressed all of the demands made by SED officials regarding socialist realist works through its celebration of the individual, as he fulfills his role with the hopes of the betterment of the future of GDR society. However, Müller’s piece, a three-quarter length portrait of an East German police officer in uniform, was viewed by many German visitors, both Eastern and Western, as an overt recollection of the National Socialist fascist propagandistic naturalism, as the officer’s hand mimics a pose identical to those within depictions of the typical SA or SS leaders. Though the painting’s catalogue reproduction is in black and white, the officer’s complexion evokes the image of the Nazi ideal. This criticism, present beyond debates over this specific work by Gerhard Müller, suggests that fascist elements of aesthetics and politics endured in the methods of contemporary East German policymakers and the artists under their command. The participation of both West and East German artists in the *Third German Art Exhibition* reveals that, at this point in time, recovery from the tormenting

¹⁰² Hoffman, “Socialist Realism Triumphs!” (1953)

¹⁰³ Mathews, “Formalism, Naturalism,” 98.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 100.

legacy of National Socialism was a problematic common bond between all practicing artists within newly divided Germany.

Modernism's Universal Language of "Beams, Rings, and Lines"

In the aftermath of World War II and the dictatorship of the Third Reich, the Federal Republic of Germany witnessed a revival of stylistic and thematic plurality in the arts. This resurgence grew out of the sudden freedom from the fascist effort to synchronize all of the arts into a one-dimensional, state-sanctioned realism in celebration of the National Socialist ideology. At this time, there were three identifiable major trends in West German visual culture: the anti-fascist Left, the non-representational avant-garde, and what many refer to as "eclectic quasi modernism."¹⁰⁵ The anti-fascist trend, though it was only practiced by approximately 5-10% of active West German painters, confronted the political disasters of the immediate past head-on with lamentation, condemnation, and even, periodically, satire. Due to the Nazi's successful destruction to every pre-war organization of leftist artists, there were not many resources available for the promotion of socially critical art; within the Western zones, there was little to no official support for these exhibitions. However, many practicing anti-fascism, including Hanns Kralik, Otto Pankok, and Karl Hubbuch, found support in the popular journal *Bildende Kunst*.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, the non-representational avant-garde suffered from the losses and destruction imposed upon "degenerate" art under the Nazi regime, as very few practicing abstractionists remained in Germany. Only a few "degenerate" painters had continued to produce non-representational art underground, such as Willi Baumeister and Fritz Winter. The works of

¹⁰⁵ Jost Hermand and Biddy Martin. "Modernism Restored: West German Painting in the 1950s." *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 26.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

these artists were exhibited immediately after 1945 in order to make up for their defamation under the Third Reich. However, they did not evoke much enthusiasm in their audiences, due to perceptions of the non-representational avant-garde as old-fashioned. In order to promote the practice of abstract painting, the occupying Allies brought tours of modernist American and Western European exhibitions to Germany. In 1948, an exhibition of *French Abstract Painting* toured Munich, Stuttgart, Dusseldorf, Hannover, Hamburg, and Frankfurt.¹⁰⁷ The same year, an exhibition of *Non-Representational Painting in America*, which celebrated the work of Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, and Willem de Kooning, also toured Germany. In 1948, within the journal *Das Kunstwerk*, Leopold Zahn declared, “The Age of Mimesis is over; the taste for abstract art prevails all over the world.”¹⁰⁸ Zahn’s comment celebrates the resurgence of non-representational art as signifying German recovery in the postwar era, while simultaneously critiquing the continuing existence of “mimesis” in the art of totalitarian regimes, such as the Soviet Union.

The desire for cultural reintegration into the international sphere reflected the West German desire for social and political relevance in the aftermath of their twelve years of cultural isolation from the West. In the immediate postwar era, the trend of “eclectic quasi-modernism” was exceedingly more popular among practicing artists in West Germany, dominating the painting scene within the western occupation zones from 1945 through 1949, the year of the founding of the Federal Republic. Due to the fact that it can barely be categorized as a single movement, it was known by several names, each of which depended on the degree of abstraction within individual works. Works by artists who practiced the style of quasi-modernism, or

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

quasi-abstraction, or magical realism, were neither as realistic and socially critical as the anti-fascist works, nor as abstract and formalistic as the art of the non-representational avant-garde.¹⁰⁹ The collective desire to move past Germany's tempestuous recent history was accompanied by a contrary consideration of the social and political necessity for addressing, mourning, and coming to terms with the past. The coexistence of multifarious artistic forms, styles, and motifs within the genre of quasi-modernism, marked an era of plurality within postwar western Germany that was viewed as a sign of freedom, a sign of the country's departure from the constraints of the 1930s and World War II. Interested in defining the primary purpose of art as self-expression, the quasi-modernist artists explored the catastrophe of German history through abstractions and mystifications regarding notions of human spirit, consciousness, and culture.

Between 1949 and 1950, the confluence of the official division of Germany, the outbreak of the Korean War, and the economic ramifications of the Marshall Plan and *Politik der Stärke*, incited a rapid push for the homogenization of ideology and culture within the Federal Republic, which led to a noticeable suppression of artistic pluralism and a prevailing tendency towards complete abstraction.¹¹⁰ While in preceding years, a clear stylistic plurality had flourished, the years between 1950 and 1955 begot an overarching dominance of what the historian Jost Hermand describes as "beams, rings and lines," reflecting the nearly complete monopoly of non-representational abstract art within the West German art market.¹¹¹ The standardization of abstracted art, an effect of Cold War tension between East and West, was reflected in the culturally propagated demonization of all ideologies, theories, and programs espoused behind the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 27.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 28.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Iron Curtain. Every form of realism was described as symbolic of a lack of freedom, a “Stalinist attempt to gloss over reality.”¹¹² Comparisons drawn between socialist realism and the art of totalitarian regimes, including the Third Reich, led to a complete denunciation of realist aesthetics. Not only did realist artists suffer this defamation, but supporters of the quasi-modernist movement had a difficult time practicing in the years after the official division of Germany. This was due to their interests in representing specific aspects of history and postwar society through the production of existentialist, humanist, or religiously affiliated paintings, which were denounced as suspiciously ideological and left-wing. Spokesmen for non-representational art claimed that under the banner of a free industrial and consumer society of modern men, only the absence of ideology could mark works of art as modern or up-to-date.¹¹³

The organized advocacy of non-representational abstraction came to characterize the artistic climate of the 1950s in West Germany. The desire to unite the pre- and post-Nazi eras of German art, through stylistic similarities, resulted in a collective reinterpretation of modernism and the avant-garde. The belief that the formal aesthetics of non-representational art signified a freedom from objectification was a central strategy in the legitimization of art free from the constraints of mimetic reproductions of reality. Organizational endorsement of modernism came from government officials, industry, municipal administrative apparatuses, exhibition boards, galleries, leading art journals, and star critics. In 1951, the Federal Republic founded the Kulturkreis, or Culture Committee, which propagated and disseminated support for non-representational art through the endowment of prestigious prizes, generous stipends, published conferences and periodicals such as the *Jahresring* from 1954.¹¹⁴ From the

¹¹² Ibid, 28.

¹¹³ Ibid, 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 36.

committee's inception and onward, every year more prizes were awarded to non-representational painters. The institutional promotion of abstract art led to the proliferation of multiple retrospectives which were dedicated to those who were widely publicized as the "fathers of non-representationalism," such as the one for Wassily Kandinsky in Cologne in 1952, those for Jean Arp and Kurt Schwitters in Hannover in 1955 and 1956 respectively, and the one for Hans Albers in Hagen in 1957.¹¹⁵ The championing of these abstractionists reflects the West German desire to locate precursors to the non-representational avant-garde in the attempt to show that the genre of non-representational abstraction had as noble a historical background and tradition as that of realism. However, this desire to appear legitimate and universal led to a deep reinterpretation of the history of modernism, particularly the "age of -isms."

While some members of the older avant-garde had considered themselves politically and socially critical, even in regards to their choices of aesthetic form, the iconic works of 20th century modernism were reinterpreted as the products of a purely aesthetic artistic revolt, concerned first and foremost with formal innovations. Public pronouncements which celebrated the beauty of technical form and geometric patterns, echo a critic's statement that "what matters is the work, the created work. Its own reality is more important than the reality of war or any other experience."¹¹⁶ As one of the leading spokesmen for non-representational art, art historian Werner Haftmann believed that the abstract movement possessed a "global character," functioning as a universal language of aesthetic form. "¹¹⁷ The West German desire to interweave postwar German art into the contemporary international modernist discourse, along with the

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 36.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 31.

¹¹⁷ Werner Haftmann. *Painting in the 20th Century*. München: Prestel-Verlag, 1954. 480.

enforced reinterpretation of 20th century modernist artists and movements, was ingrained in the institution of the Documenta exhibition series in Kassel in 1955.

The first Documenta of 1955, organized by the West German curators Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann, was held at the historic Museum Freidericianum in Kassel, West Germany. As an international exhibit, the collection featured over 670 works by 148 painters and sculptors from the year 1905 into the 1950s. While 58 artists were German, 42 were French, 28 were Italian, 2 were Dutch, 6 were Swiss, 8 were postwar British artists, and 3 were American.¹¹⁸ Despite its attraction to international modern art, the Documenta collection excluded works derived from the movements of Russian Constructivism, Berlin Dada, Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), and Surrealism. As a leading curator, Haftmann believed that “the specific situation of German culture demanded ‘a broad attempt based in history, so that this fleeting, permanently-changing and one-dimensional ‘present’ point in time, regains its depth and multidimensionality.’”¹¹⁹ The exhibition worked to unite the pre- and post-Nazi eras in art through stylistic and cultural similarities. As artistic style became synonymous with politics, as it was during the fascist period (though now modernist and internationalist as opposed to “realist” and nationalist), the Federal Republic of Germany identified abstract art as its design motif for emerging cultural recovery in the post-war period. Konrad Adenauer, the postwar Chancellor of West Germany, claimed that “while the fascists had to systematically vilify modernism in their attempt to ‘regenerate’ German culture [...] the organizers of The First Documenta, aimed to

¹¹⁸ Ian Wallace. “The First Documenta 1955.” *The Triumph of Pessimism*. University of British Columbia Department of Fine Arts, September 26, 1987. 17.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 26.

reverse this history” and to restate the interrupted history of German modernism as the authentic history of the nation.¹²⁰

The homogenization of aesthetics in postwar West Germany allowed abstract art to confront the legacy of Nazism and the effects of partition, through its conditioned status as the enemy of the national socialists and socialist realists alike. Following the trauma and devastation of World War II, the visual arts in West Germany witnessed a broad uptake of what Andrew Weiner refers to as the mass-mediatization of mnemonic content as a means of rehabilitating the image of Germany’s past. Mnemonic aesthetics in art grew out of the interrelation of historical memory, aesthetics, and politics during the *Wirtschaftswunder*, or “economic miracle,” which took place under Adenauer’s leadership in the postwar era.¹²¹ Typically characterized as a period of near-total, state-sanctioned amnesia regarding the crimes of the National Socialist regime, the Adenauer period in West German history utilized acutely polarized international politics as a means of cultural, economic, and political recovery. Weiner states that despite the tendency to “rely on an unproblematic opposition between remembering and forgetting,” the charge of collective amnesia neglects to see beyond the polarized climate of the Cold War and in doing so prevents further discussion of the tension between the German past and present.¹²² The condensation and reorientation of modernist movements of the early 20th century within the exhibition of the 1955 Documenta implicates the event as a site of recollection which sought to mediate and purify collective consciousness of the German past through the ambivalent non-representational content of the collection.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹²¹ Andrew S. Weiner. “Memory under Reconstruction: Politics and Event in ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ West Germany.” *Grey Room* 37 (2990). 100.

¹²² Ibid, 96.

The first Documenta served to present a tradition of modernist innovation in the form of a retrospective look back upon its predecessors as a means of defining the cultural situation of the present. Held in Kassel, the exhibition took place inside the bombed-out shell of the Museum Freidericianum, recognized to be the first public museum in Europe. It was the site of the museum itself that brought the Documenta series to Kassel, a provincial city that served as one of Adolf Hitler's key ammunition depots in the 1930s and was left almost entirely destroyed by the Allies in the final phase of World War II (Fig. 6).¹²³ The choice to display the Documenta collection within a historic landmark damaged by war reflects that, from the outset, the 1955 exhibit was positioned as an occasion for remembrance through the capitalization of the site's symbolic potential. By locating the exhibit at the Freidericianum, West Germany could collectively demonstrate its mastery over the past, contrasting Nazi and post-Nazi German history to frame the damaged, historic building as a site of renewal. By emphasizing the damage inflicted upon Germany in the aftermath of World War II, the mnemonic discourse reflected an image of the Germans as war victims of the Third Reich.

The exhibition was proposed in 1954 by Bode and Haftmann, its main organizers, after their visit to the Venice Biennale of the same year. It was, in fact, Haftmann's *Painting in the Twentieth Century* which formed the outline for the 1955 Documenta. As is elucidated within Haftmann's 1954 text, the exhibition organizers were not solely concerned with displaying the most contemporary of artistic projects, but also in representing and re-presenting a very specific and selective past.¹²⁴ Bode and Haftmann hoped that the Documenta would reintegrate German modernists, specifically abstractionists, into mainstream Western cultural and political life as a

¹²³ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 55.

¹²⁴ Wallace, "The First Documenta," 3.

means of neutralizing the threat of the National Socialist legacy. Within Bode's exhibition proposal of 1954, he claims that the series was "intended to represent all the significant Western artists of this century (painters, sculptors, architects) with two or three masterworks characteristic of their development... We are sure that [this overview] will give rise to exceptional impressions, insights and excitement and that it is a necessity that such experiences emanate from Germany."¹²⁵ Bode's rhetoric indicates a twofold objective within West German cultural policy: to inspire excitement for Western taste and to advertise the nation's successful reorientation to the nation's new allies and its socialist enemy, the German Democratic Republic.

The mobilization and display of various forms of historical memory served the goals of hegemonic cultural politics, seeking to facilitate the realignment of the Federal Republic into the Western international sphere. Modernist art was ideal for this task due to its close identification with liberal-democratic values and its deep ideological contrast to Nazi art and Soviet Socialist Realism. The organizers and curators of the 1955 Documenta had built temporary white walls in order to replicate a gallery setting amid the baroque ruins (Fig. 7). The aesthetic contrast between the damaged architectural structure of the Freidericianum and the elite, temporary, modernist exhibition design drew upon the notion of the postwar German people as damaged, but abiding, a curatorial effort furthered by the use of display elements such as freestanding paintings.¹²⁶ The duality of past and present, preserved within the neoclassical grandeur of the fragile structure of the Freidericianum and its contrast with the innovative modernist treatment of the interior, was a perfect reflection of the dual nature of the exhibition inside.

¹²⁵ Weiner, "Memory under Reconstruction," 100.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 97.

Within the museum's foyer, two sets of photograph panels were displayed on either side. One wall panel depicted a range of archaic, exotic, and medieval artifacts, while the other showed selected artists from the exhibition as a means of rehabilitating their degeneracy.¹²⁷ The montage of photographs of objects from ancient Africa, Latin America, and the Near East served as a visual preface to the exhibition, placing the origins of German modern art far in the past (Fig. 8). The suggested affinity between modern art and ancient or "primitive" art, sought to impress upon the viewer the evidentiary continuity of the archaic, an idea that Johan Frerking, in his 1955 review of the Documenta, claimed to be a refutation of the continuity of the classical, a notion championed by the National Socialists only a decade before.¹²⁸ These images embedded modernist art in a world-historical narrative that became further legitimated through the medium of photography, which had recently been featured as a medium of universal humanity in Edward Steichen's *Family of Man* exhibit, held earlier that year at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The other montage panel was composed of large photographic portraits, arranged on the wall in four-by-four grids (Fig. 9).¹²⁹ These portraits were of the prominent 20th century artists, whose works were included in the exhibition, who best represented the continuous history of modernism. Within his essay, "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I," Walter Grasskamp remarks that the majority of the portraits within this display, depict the artists "wearing suits, smocks, lab coats, or other professional dress, [which] presented artists as productive, contributing members of society," an implication which directly opposed the image of artists as the "unkempt,

¹²⁷ Ibid, 104.

¹²⁸ Johan Frerking. "Documenta," *Hannoversche Presse*. July 23, 1955. n.p.

¹²⁹ Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel. *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995. 21.

unpredictable madmen and radicals the National Socialists had described.”¹³⁰ The two panels, when considered in relation to one another, produce an image of German modernism as both universal and innate to human development throughout history, while celebrating artists such as Max Beckmann, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Franz Marc as an aesthetic vanguard which contemporary artists should work to emulate.

In his introduction to the 1955 exhibition catalogue, Haftmann wrote that the show should be understood as a broadly-based, initial attempt to renew international contact and to reenter a long-interrupted “conversation.”¹³¹ As part retrospective and part contemporary showcase, the exhibition’s aim was to reach a new generation of Germans, as well as to reconnect West Germany with the international community. Haftmann continued that “Documenta is intended for the maturing youth, for as yet unidentified painters, poets, thinkers, so that they might recognize the basis that was prepared for them and which they must maintain as well as surpass.”¹³² The desire to grant modernist abstract art a historically sound international tradition (similar to that of realism) is reflected within Haftmann’s perspective of modernism’s development as an “unbroken line,” a “general organic growth.”¹³³ The pronounced historical orientation of the initial Documenta exhibition of 1955 reflected West Germany’s political determination to exemplify a collective sense of the past, which could be achieved by reinterpreting and re-curating its presentation. This new image of the development of the trajectory of twentieth century German art aimed to join the past with the present, the citizen with the new nation, and the Federal Republic with the international community.

¹³⁰ Walter Grasskamp. “‘Degenerate Art’ and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed.” *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, 70.

¹³¹ Werner Haftmann. *Documenta: Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts*. München: Prestel Verlag, 1955, 23.

¹³² Ibid, 25.

¹³³ Ibid, 23.

The identification and representation of the lineage of modernism was both important for encouraging West Germany's future artists, as well as allowing the exhibition organizers to symbolically redeem the postwar West Germans from Nazi crimes against modern art, without directly addressing the history of the Third Reich. Over half of the German artists shown at the 1955 Documenta had previously been labeled "degenerate" by the Nazis, either by the inclusion of their works in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich in 1937, or by means of the censorship of their works and attacks on their practices by the National Socialist cultural authorities. Noting the tactical inclusion of works previously exhibited in the 1937 "degenerate" show, Grasskamp points out that the placement of Wilhelm Lehmbruck's "Kneeling Woman" from 1911 within the Freidericianum's rotunda, the first room seen by visitors once they entered the main exhibition space, was an indirect reference to the fact that the same piece had once stood in the middle of one of the central rooms at the *Degenerate Art* exhibit (Fig. 10).¹³⁴ By placing the sculpture in a privileged location within the Freidericianum's rotunda, the organizers of the Documenta sought to rehabilitate and reclaim its position within the canon of modern art.

The stairs leading through the rotunda bring the viewer into the main exhibition hall showcasing contemporary, postwar European painting (Fig. 11). In her dissertation, Heather Mathews notes that "apart from being the largest, this room was also the most structurally finished of the exhibition spaces, without the provisional design elements, including exposed beams and unfinished floors, that characterized the rest of the rooms within the museum."¹³⁵ This point is clarified when considering the photographs of the exhibition space, catalogued in Harald Kimpel's *Documenta 1955: First International Art Exhibition: A Photographic Reconstruction*.

¹³⁴ Weiner, "Memory under Reconstruction," 102.

¹³⁵ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 62.

For instance, a photograph of a room holding Ernesto de Fiori's "Cowering" sculpture from 1923 and two paintings by Oskar Kokoschka, "Trance Player" from 1907 and "Tietze and Woman" from 1909, supports Mathews' statement (Fig. 12). The floor of this room is rough and unfinished and the paint on the exposed beams in the ceiling is chipped and weathered. These features are in deep contrast to the polished appearance of the contemporary postwar hall, emphasizing its importance within the larger scope of the exhibition. The curators partitioned the long rectangular space by mounting two paintings on smaller, moveable walls at either end. Pablo Picasso's "Girl Before a Mirror" from 1932 and Fritz Winter's "Composition Before Blue and Yellow" from 1955 work as end points within the exhibition space, in between them the walls are lined with recent paintings by West German artists, interspersed with works by artists from the rest of western Europe (Fig. 13).¹³⁶ The visual parallel made between these two paintings, marks them as aesthetic equals, placing Winter's postwar painting on the same level of mastery as Picasso's. The curation of the contemporary paintings within the Documenta exhibit emphasized the organizers' opinion that not only had West German artists re-joined the European avant-garde, but they were already producing work on par with that of other European artists. The fact that the exhibition was not organized regionally further exemplifies the influence of Haftmann, and his book on *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, which centers around his belief in abstract art as a universal language with the power to transcend international boundaries. One reviewer of the 1955 Documenta reported "how much art's national distinctions are in the process of disappearing."¹³⁷ The notion of the collection of works as of European origin, rather

¹³⁶ Kimpel, *Documenta 1955*, 110.

¹³⁷ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 63.

than national, supports the exhibition's aim of serving as beneficial evidence of West Germany's successful cultural convergence with Western Europe, Britain, and the United States.

The first Documenta was not alone in its initiative to reintegrate West German artistic culture into the international community; a multitude of abstract art exhibitions were held throughout the Allied occupation zones after 1945 as a means of instituting a nationwide appreciation for formal modernist aesthetics. In the postwar years, roughly from 1945-1949, the united Germany of the past ceased to legally exist under Allied Occupation, which officially continued until 1955, six years after the official division of the nation in 1949. The American zone, which included areas of Bavaria, Hesse, and Baden-Württemberg, lacked a defined cultural agenda beyond the immediate restitution of looted art and the cultural re-education and reorientation of West Germany.¹³⁸ Throughout this period, leading into the 1950s, collecting points were established by the MFAA (the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives division of the U.S. Army) in Munich, Wiesbaden, Marburg, and Offenbach. Aiming to counteract Soviet propaganda and lingering Nazi ideology, the MFAA, along with many of the German cultural elite, funded and arranged exhibitions of pre- and post-war German art, such as the *Extreme Malerei (Extreme Painting)* exhibit held at the Kunstverein exhibition hall in Augsburg in 1947, which later traveled to exhibition spaces in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart. Established with the aid of the MFAA, the Kunstverein exhibition hall also held an exhibit of *Kunst gegen den Krieg*, or *Art against the War*, displaying works by Otto Dix, Kathe Kollwitz, and George Grosz.¹³⁹

Other exhibitions, such as the ZEN 49 exhibition, organized by British consul John Anthony Thwaites, in Munich in 1950, and the exhibition devoted to Der Blaue Reiter, organized

¹³⁸ Henry J. Kellermann. "Reflections on German Reorientation." *America and the Shaping of German Society 1945-1955*. Ed. Michael Ermarth. Berg Publishers Inc: 1993, 191.

¹³⁹ McComas, "Exhibiting Postwar German Art," 339.

by the MFAA, in Munich in 1949, served as tools of cultural assimilation, a means of overcoming the cultural isolation imposed on Germany by the National Socialist regime.¹⁴⁰ In 1949, William Constable, a paintings curator at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts was appointed as fine arts consultant to the Education and Cultural Relations division of the OMGUS (Office of Military Government, United States) in order to make a thorough assessment of the state of German museums and art education. Within his "Second Memorandum on Exhibitions," written in 1949, Constable recommended sending exhibitions of contemporary German art abroad, believing that "although modern German art is very uneven, contemporary artists need international exposure in order to counteract their 'spiritual isolation.'"¹⁴¹ Though this motion was initially delayed by the transition in governance from OMGUS to HICOG (the Allied High Commission for Occupied Germany) in late 1949, such exhibitions were eventually arranged, serving as precedents to the more ambitious exhibition organized for New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1957.

The first exhibition of postwar German art, sent to the United States, was *Contemporary Berlin Artists*, which toured fifteen museums in 1951 and 1952, under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts, and with the support of HICOG and the State Department. The contents of the exhibition were selected by the art historian Charlotte Weidler, who served as the German representative for the Carnegie International Exhibitions in Pittsburgh from 1925 until 1939. An article in *TIME* magazine described the collection of abstract and expressionist works as "one of the most interesting shows in the US. The painters whom the Nazis prostituted have all but disappeared; those who were persecuted are building on the ruins. Among them are [...]"

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 340.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 341.

topflight representatives of the three main trends in modern art: expressionism, surrealism and abstractionism.”¹⁴² In fact, as the scholar Jennifer McComas has noted, Americans had already been conditioned to respond favorably to these modes of German art, through wartime exhibitions that positioned “degenerate” expressionism as oppositional to National Socialist realist art.¹⁴³ By acknowledging the exhibition as a display catered to appeal to American sympathies, McComas provides her reader with a preview of the larger diplomatic initiatives to come.

On October 1, 1957, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City opened an exhibition on *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, which was curated by Werner Haftmann, the leading organizer of the 1955 Documenta in Kassel. Haftmann co-curated the exhibition with the West German art historian Alfred Henzten, in collaboration with MoMA’s head curator of painting and sculpture, Andrew C. Ritchie, and the museum’s curator of prints, William S. Leiberman. *German Art of the Twentieth Century* was the largest exhibition of German art in America since the curation of *Modern German Painting and Sculpture*, presented by Alfred Barr in 1931.¹⁴⁴ The museum, which opened to the public in 1929 was viewed as a “citadel of civilization,” a sanctuary which would highlight the propagation of the freedom of art as an American political obligation.¹⁴⁵ In his speech at the museum’s opening in May, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed:

“In this hour of dedication we are glad again to bear witness before all the world to our faith in the sanctity of free institutions. For we know that only where men are free can the arts flourish and the civilization of national culture reach full

¹⁴² Ibid, 342.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 340.

¹⁴⁴ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Dorothea Schöne. "Shaping the Perception of German Art after 1945: MoMA and The New York Times." *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 31 (2015): 91-101.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2015.1004783>.

flower. The arts cannot thrive except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors. The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. There can be no vitality in the works gathered in a museum unless there exists the right of spontaneous life in the society in which the arts are nourished.”¹⁴⁶

This authoritative celebration of the role of modern art, in the years leading into World War II, lost its momentum after Harry Truman took office. Truman’s references to modernist works of art as “merely the vaporings of half-baked lazy people,” reinforced a widely spread conception of modern art as low quality, and often times it was even viewed as Communistic among conservative Americans.¹⁴⁷ However, in the aftermath of World War II, Alfred Barr, the founder of the Museum of Modern Art, felt that there were far too many similarities between the culture and arts policy of Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union, and these conservative voices within the American political and cultural sphere. In 1950, Barr, along with the directors of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and those of the Whitney Museum in New York, signed a petition which was later reprinted and discussed favorably within *The New York Times*.¹⁴⁸ The petition responded to McCarthy era anti-communist pursuits by making claims to abstract art’s invocation of freedom. Within the burgeoning Cold War climate of the 1950s, the United States sought to polarize the differences between its ideology, politics, and culture and that of the Eastern Bloc. While West Germany was looking to the United States for support in its postwar reconstruction and reintegration efforts, the United States was looking for an ideological ally with insight behind the Iron Curtain, by way of the FRG’s proximity to its Eastern counterpart, the GDR.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 95.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 96.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 97.

Similarly to the London Tate Gallery's 1956 exhibit, *A Hundred Years of German Painting*, the exhibition in New York strongly favored the German Expressionism movement, for nearly half the works in the exhibit were dated from 1912-1922. Five out of the eleven galleries were devoted to works within the Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter movements. While only one displayed works of the Neue Sachlichkeit, the selection of works privileged portraiture over satirical social commentary. The exhibit also featured the postwar works of ten artists. And, as with the London exhibit, the Dada movement was entirely omitted, with the exception of works by Kurt Schwitters. The desire for self-induced amnesia, regarding radical movements of the 20th century, was connected to contemporary struggles and controversies within the West German state.¹⁴⁹ The Federal Republic of Germany sought to convey a positive, internationalist message, while remaining "identifiably German" through the celebrated stylistic affinities of the past, such as those demonstrated by the glorified German Expressionist works.¹⁵⁰ The inclusion of the West German curators, Haftmann and Hentzen, in the MoMA project further showed that the exhibition was not merely a collection of German masterpieces but, also a tool of cultural diplomacy.

On September 29, 1957, two days before the opening of *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, Lieberman, despite his involvement as head curator of prints and drawings at the Museum of Modern Art, published an article on the exhibition in *The New York Times*. The article, titled "Homage to the Art that Hitler Hated," addressed the role of the exhibition's collection as an homage to the liberated art which had managed to survive the brutal past of Adolf Hitler's regime. While Lieberman's review was vague and somewhat superficial in its

¹⁴⁹ Weiner, "Memory under Reconstruction," 96.

¹⁵⁰ Werner Haftmann. "Painting." *German Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1957, 125.

discussion of the contents of the collection, its emphasis on the rehabilitating character of the show aimed to anticipate and dismiss criticism of the scarcity of postwar German art within the exhibition, as its title indicated a survey. The article was accompanied by nine images illustrating works by Paul Klee, Oskar Kokoschka, Wassily Kandinsky, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, Max Beckmann, Oskar Schlemmer, and Kathe Kollwitz (Fig. 14).¹⁵¹ The ninth image, Nazi painter Elk Eber's "Last Hand Grenade," stood in contrast to the modernist works, highlighting the piece as an example of the style of artwork that Lieberman considered to be the antithesis of those shown within the exhibition. Dorothea Schöne writes that "what has been omitted from the review is also telling: for instance, he [Lieberman] never mentioned the Jewish victims of the N-S regime. Being 'degenerate' was defined as 'painting in a fashion that did not suit the dictator.'"¹⁵² Lieberman's article also neglected to denounce the confiscation and sale of modern art from the possession of German museums by the National Socialist regime, despite the fact that some of the works included in the exhibition had previously belonged to the collections of German museums and galleries. Lieberman's rhetoric and the article's content imply that his purpose was to introduce the underlying intention and concept of the exhibition as a rehabilitation of defamed art, as opposed to offering a detailed analysis and comprehensive review of modern German art in the Twentieth Century from 1900- 1957, as the exhibition title suggests.

Although the postwar works on display were presented as apolitical, the exhibition itself served a political function as part of the Federal Republic's cultural diplomacy. The collection of over 170 paintings, sculptures, and prints dating from the genesis of the German Expressionist

¹⁵¹ Schöne, "Shaping the Perception of German Art," 94.

¹⁵² Ibid, 96.

movement through the contemporary postwar era, was reorganized to form the exhibition catalogue. The catalogue was divided into three sections with respective introductory essays on painting, sculpture, and prints, which were introduced by a forward provided by the Museum of Modern Art's head curator, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie. Haftmann begins his comprehensive introductory essay on "Painting" by posing the question: "Is there such a thing as a 'German' modern art? Is not German merely a geographical term, an historical convention which identifies certain unchangeable and inalienable ways of thought, imagination, and expression with national and language boundaries?"¹⁵³ This question sets the tone for the reader's perception of the works within the catalogue as implicative of modern art's contribution to the expansion of historical and spatial consciousness in the 20th century. Haftmann's later reflection that advanced art responded to global culture long before there was even a public awareness of a global culture brings the reader into his perceptions of "the particular way in which the German spirit responds to the world and how these responses have affected the sensibilities of other peoples."¹⁵⁴ The assertion that German modernist artists had not been working in isolation, that in fact, their aesthetic achievements were a reflection of continual contact with the rest of Europe, brings the viewer of German art into Haftmann's vision of modern art as an international art form with the capacity to breach cultural and national boundaries as a means of connecting people.

Throughout the 1957 exhibition catalogue, Haftmann, Hentzen, and Liebermann consistently drew parallels between German movements and concurrent movements in neighboring France, Britain, Italy, and Spain. Within his essay on sculpture, Hentzen, states that the works on display represent "a medium with many points of connection to the art of

¹⁵³ Haftmann, "Painting," 13.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 14.

neighboring countries.”¹⁵⁵ Throughout the catalogue, one particular comparison resurfaces between the early German Expressionists and the Fauves in France as a means of affirming that the growth and transformation of German modern art often mirrored or surpassed the work produced by neighboring Western nations. After a comparison between Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s “Nude in Hat” from 1907 and Henri Matisse’s “Le Luxe II” from the same year, Haftmann remarked that while “France’s rational genius gave the new European program of modernism formal strength and clarity of style, German painting added depth and an ideal dimension [Fig. 15].”¹⁵⁶ This sentiment is echoed in Lieberman’s discussion of the influence of primitive art on both the Expressionists and Fauves and his assertion that “it appears that the Brücke artists were making discoveries in the Dresden ethnographic museum well before the French artists began collecting Negro sculpture.”¹⁵⁷ By comparing these two movements, the exhibition organizers aimed to emphasize German innovation over French accomplishments, a point which is furthered by Lieberman’s remark that the acclaimed German painter Albrecht Durer was the earliest master of woodcut and engraving.¹⁵⁸

Unlike Haftmann’s discussion of the relationship between the movements of twentieth century German painting and those of other Western European countries, Hentzen and Liebermann utilized this relationship as a means of making their discussions of German sculpture and printmaking more relevant to the trajectory of modernism’s development. The selection of prints exhibited within *German Art of the Twentieth Century* included the works of

¹⁵⁵ Alfred Hentzen. “Sculpture.” *German Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1957. 141.

¹⁵⁶ Haftmann, “Painting,” 125.

¹⁵⁷ William S. Lieberman. “Prints.” *German Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1957. 190.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 185.

artists already represented within the sections on painting and sculpture, with the exception of Kathe Kollwitz, Rolf Nesche, and Helmut Grieshaber, whose work is almost exclusively confined to the graphic arts. While Hentzen's discussion of sculpture introduces new artists to the reader, the majority of sculptures exhibited are attributed to the work of two artists, Ernst Barlach and Wilhelm Lehmbruck, both of whom were working during the decades leading up to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. The focus on Barlach and Lehmbruck places the innovations of German sculpture in the pre-Nazi era, reflecting a similar approach to Haftmann's focus on Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter Expressionist groups. Within his essay, Hentzen attempts to present a continuity of German innovation in sculpture; however, his comment on the medium's "not inconsiderable contribution to European art," thwarts his claims of the stylistic affinities and unified characteristics which endured through the Third Reich.¹⁵⁹ The disparity between Hentzen's seeming lack of enthusiasm for German sculpture and his statements on its "great plastic power" diminishes the impact of these works.

Overall, the catalogue for *German Art of the Twentieth Century* lacked a sufficient collection of works from the post-Nazi era, particularly within the sections on prints and sculpture, a fact that the exhibition organizers attempted to reconcile, as with the elision of many representative works from movements other than Expressionism. Because of the noticeable lack of post-war works, the essays within the catalogue serve to emphasize the point at which German art left off when the National Socialist Party came to power in 1933. The organizers aimed to impart upon the reader a sense of German legacy in modernism. Within his essay on painting, Haftmann enters into a discussion of World War II by reflecting upon the rise of the Bauhaus as

¹⁵⁹ Hentzen, "Sculpture," 83.

an international and pivotal artistic tendency of the 20th century, stating that “just as this magnificent development was spreading wide and deep into the life of society, and public and private collections were opening their doors to it, it succumbed to a new political and spiritual catastrophe.”¹⁶⁰ In his emphasis on the closing of the Bauhaus in 1933, Haftmann aimed to justify the twelve year rift in free German artistic production and thought, a tactic similarly utilized by Lieberman in his assertion that “from the United States it is of course difficult to evaluate German printmaking in recent years. Artists such as Marcks and Mataré have continued to produce many woodcuts, but in general creative printmaking declined during the Third Reich.”¹⁶¹ Interestingly, while Haftmann, Hentzen, and Lieberman collectively skirt the topic of the Third Reich and the German role in World War II, careful to elide any implications of lingering National Socialist ideology within contemporary West German culture, they are quick to note the effect it had on modernist production.

The strong lack of postwar modernist works within the Museum of Modern Art’s 1957 exhibition of *German Art in the Twentieth Century* can be attributed to a collective attempt to escape the unpleasant realities of a bombed out world, the holocaust, German guilt, and the physical destruction wrought upon the German nation. Within the forward of the catalogue, the head curator Andrew Carnduff Ritchie draws attention to the absences within the exhibit. Stating that it was the most comprehensive show of German art that the museum space could permit, Ritchie noted that “some significant artists have been omitted in order to avoid the tediousness of a survey of more artists than the average gallery visitor is able or willing to digest at one

¹⁶⁰ Haftmann, “Painting,” 125.

¹⁶¹ Lieberman, “Prints,” 214.

viewing.”¹⁶² Ritchie attempted to reconcile the noticeable absence of the socially critical Weimar era movements and the scant selection of postwar works as an unfortunate effect of the limited space; yet, this does not account for the extensive interest in displaying the works of the German Expressionist movement. The essays within the catalogue assert the fact that the vitality and inner necessity of modern German art was certified in the fact that “authentic German art” went underground during the Third Reich, and that despite the distress and persecution of the free painters, German art did not lose its spiritual dedication.¹⁶³

The concept of the exhibition was the result of many significant changes made from 1953, the year when Ritchie originally conceived of the show, until its debut in 1957.¹⁶⁴ Initially, Ritchie envisioned an exhibition of approximately seventy works, consisting of both prewar modernism and a significantly larger section of contemporary, postwar art. However, his collaboration with West German curators led to the production of an exhibit focusing on pre-Nazi art produced in Germany during the early decades of the twentieth century. The curators from West Germany did not agree with Ritchie’s wide time span and prominent inclusion of postwar art, for they had different ideas of how German artistic identity should be represented to a foreign audience.¹⁶⁵ The desire to focus on known and established artists fed the notion that a successful exhibition would reinforce and reestablish the meaning, standing, and reputation of German modernism in the aftermath of a tempestuous recent past. Kurt Martin, the head of the German advisory committee for *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, stated that “the exhibition has an extraordinary meaning to [the Federal Republic] because the Museum of

¹⁶² Ritchie, Andrew C. “Forward.” *German Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1957. 11.

¹⁶³ Haftmann, “Painting,” 129.

¹⁶⁴ Schöne, “Shaping the Perception of German Art,” 93

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Modern Art is not only the platform for the entire United States, but also because the show as well as the book accompanying it will lead to a profound change in how German art of the twentieth century is being looked upon in the Anglo-Saxon world.”¹⁶⁶ Martin believed that if such an exhibition was to be organized, it should be done either by or in collaboration with German curators so that West Germany could be granted an opportunity for self-representation abroad.

Both the 1955 Documenta in Kassel and the 1957 *German Art of the Twentieth Century* exhibit in New York presented reoriented and carefully governed history lessons of the development of modernist forms as a means of recovery for a new German state amidst the ruins of the old. Walter Benjamin once remarked that “history decays into images” and in this regard it becomes possible to view each image as directly connected to German national reconstruction, for each comes to represent a scene of memory, intended to convey a specific relation to the recent past.¹⁶⁷ The organization of the modernist movements the collection served to disconnect them from their sociocultural context, focusing on their formal aesthetics, a fact which affected the production of socially relevant postwar works. Both American and British reviewers of *German Art in the Twentieth Century* criticized Germany’s postwar artists for failing to blend formal innovation with social critique in the manner of the artists of the Weimar period. In his critique of the exhibition, Alan Bowness expressed disappointment with the state of German postwar art in his comment that “it would have been unkind to suggest 1933 as a suitable terminal point [for the exhibition]. With the best will in the world it is hard not to see in the post-1945 works evidence of the cultural poverty of Adenauer’s Germany. One is left with the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Mathews, *Making Histories*, 97.

melancholy reflection that the drive for material betterment has been such that an atmosphere altogether inimical to creative work has been established.”¹⁶⁸ Whether or not the contemporary postwar works display stylistic affinities with National Socialist art, the focus on formal aesthetics indicated a collective fear in the possibility that the legacy of the Third Reich may have affected the German people more deeply than they could admit. For Alan Bowness, the curatorial tactics which sought to unite the postwar artists with the German Expressionist and Bauhaus movements of the early 20th century, only succeeded in emphasizing a lack of innovation, rather than a triumph over Nazism. However, for the curators, the before-and-after periodization, which dictated the collections of both the 1955 Documenta and the 1957 MoMA exhibition, sought to enable West Germany to renounce one legacy by substituting another which proposed a narrative of German art that complemented the political priorities of the Federal Republic.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 350.

Conclusion

Benedict Anderson once defined the nation as an imagined political community comprised of members who come to perceive a deep camaraderie with fellows whom most of them will never know, meet, or even hear of. Though Anderson states that these communities are recognized though the existence of boundaries between them and other “nations,” these boundaries are not necessarily determined geographically or temporally. In fact, he claims that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”¹⁶⁹ The production of divergent national consciousness, as a result of newly adapted ideologies under Allied occupation, allowed divided Germany to locate substitute forms of allegiance in their flight from the legacy of National Socialism, which lingered within the heritage of their national identity. The desire for international recognition and legitimization led the divided German states to be directed by ideology as a system for justifying their own cultural politics and for countering the directives of the other. Due to their contested legacies, legitimization required homogeneity, as a means of presenting a carefully cultivated collective consciousness of polarized national identities.

In the 1950s, the exhibition and promotion of homogenized artistic cultures was well suited to articulating the the aesthetics of cultural rehabilitation, due to the fact that the visual arts had been a primary target of National Socialist propaganda. Art exhibitions which showcased the state-sponsored genres of socialist realism in the East and non-representational

¹⁶⁹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London, 1983), 49.

abstraction in the West sought to align postwar perceptions of national identity with a stylistic, rather than geographic, historical heritage and ideological fraternity. The socialist realist works within the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition* functioned as material manifestations of a shared dream, one which united the GDR with the international socialist movement in Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. Similarly, the non-representational abstract art promoted within the collections of the 1955 Documenta and the 1957 exhibit of *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, functioned as a motif for the cultural rehabilitation of the Federal Republic, exemplifying the national goal of assimilation into the international Western sphere of politics and culture through aesthetic associations with freedom and anti-totalitarianism. In this sense, successful art works served as visual representations of an ideological vanguard for the cultivation of collective consciousness as a means of guiding future generations within both the GDR and the FRG.

While the historical moments which witnessed these exhibitions have long since passed, the hopes for postwar divided German identity survive in the form of carefully ordered catalogues. In his contemplation of imagined communities, Anderson identifies print-capitalism as a means of expediting transcendent ideological fraternity through a projection of the continuity of cultural identity through the past, present, and future. In his exploration of the origins of national consciousness and cultural identity, Anderson draws upon a point made by Walter Benjamin, within “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility,” which states that “the authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has

experienced.”¹⁷⁰ Though all three exhibitions succeeded in communicating the construction of polarized ideological, political, and aesthetic identities, it would seem that only the 1955 Documenta achieved its goal of communicating the successful emancipation of German art from the legacy of National Socialist propaganda. The respective East and West German organizers’ intentions for both the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition* and the 1957 exhibit of *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, when contrasted to the collections’ reception by critics and visitors, communicate the failures of these exhibitions in their inability to function as platforms for the showcase of an uncontested and successful construction of national identity within the GDR and the FRG, which was untainted by the legacy of the Third Reich.

Though disseminated and produced separately from the exhibitions themselves, catalogues offer a heavily curated and specific narrative, often more in depth than that of the exhibition itself. Through the careful selection and ordering of what the authors and organizers of the catalogues interpret as the most important objects within the collections, the relationships between objects are preserved within set interpretations, losing their individual meaning as their significance becomes entrenched in their ability to contribute to the production of the whole. As physical manifestations of cultural ideology, exhibition catalogues come to serve the dual function of preserving the memory of cultural artifacts, while functioning as cultural artifacts themselves. In this sense, the catalogues for the 1953 *Third German Art Exhibition*, the 1955 Documenta, and the 1957 exhibit of *German Art of the Twentieth Century* eternalize the aesthetic origins and ideological intentions of divided German national identity. As figures of memory,

¹⁷⁰ Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2008, 218.

they serve as links of continuity which allow the nature of an imagined communal consciousness to transcend time and endure a limitless future.

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Fig. 1

Wassily Kandinsky. *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac Cover*, 1912.



Fig. 2

“Dada Wall at Degenerate Art Exhibit.” *Exhibition of Degenerate Art*. Munich. 1937.



Fig. 3

“Gallery in Great German Art Exhibition.” Haus der Deutschen Kunst, Munich. 1937.



Fig. 4
Yakov Belopolsky. *Treptow Soviet War Memorial* Treptower Park, Berlin. 1949.



Fig. 5

“Photograph of Das Kunstwerk article, no. 5 1951.” *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Abrams Inc: United States. 2009), 119.



Fig. 6

“Photograph of Museum Freidericianum in 1945.” *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 11.



Fig. 7

“Temporary Exhibition Space-- Room 28.” *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 133.

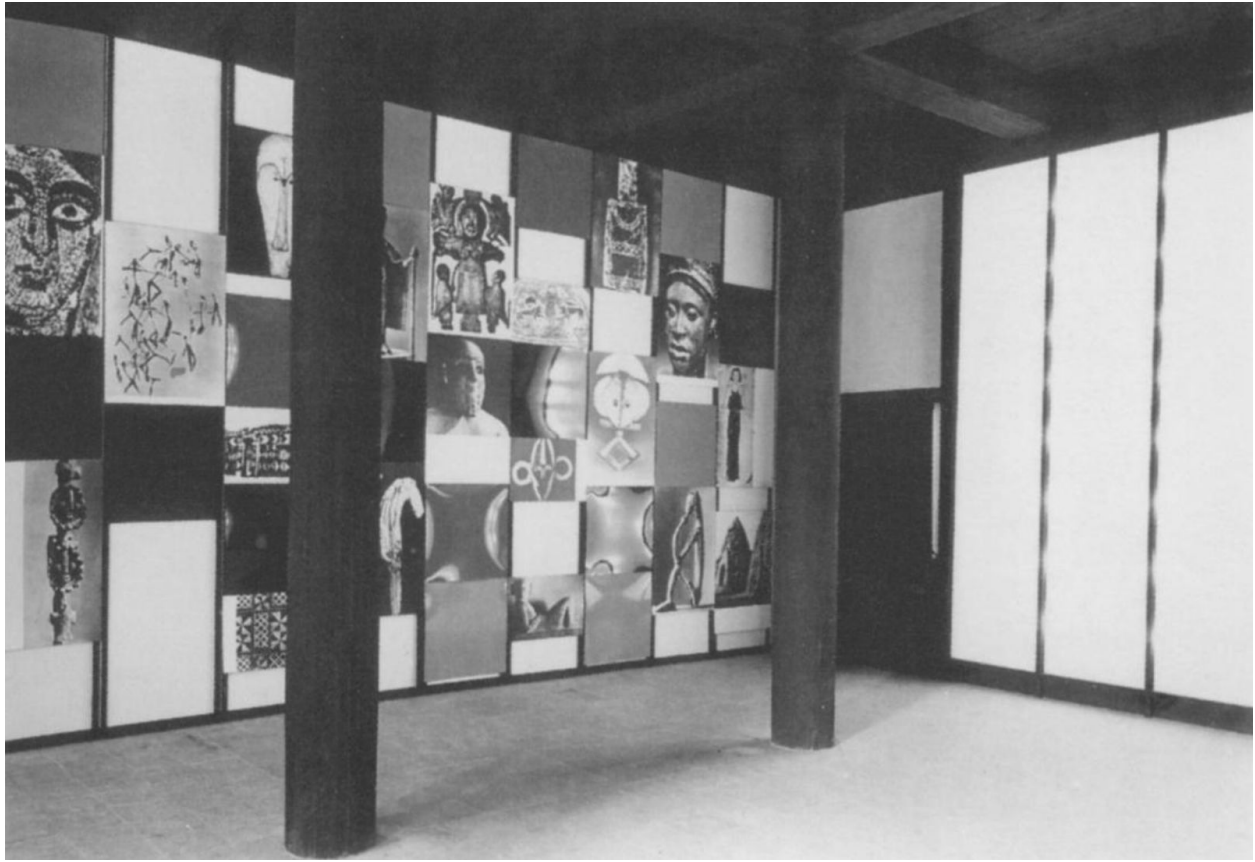


Fig. 8

“Modernism’s Archaic History.” *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*. (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 15.



Fig. 9

“Selected Modernist Artists.” *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 21.

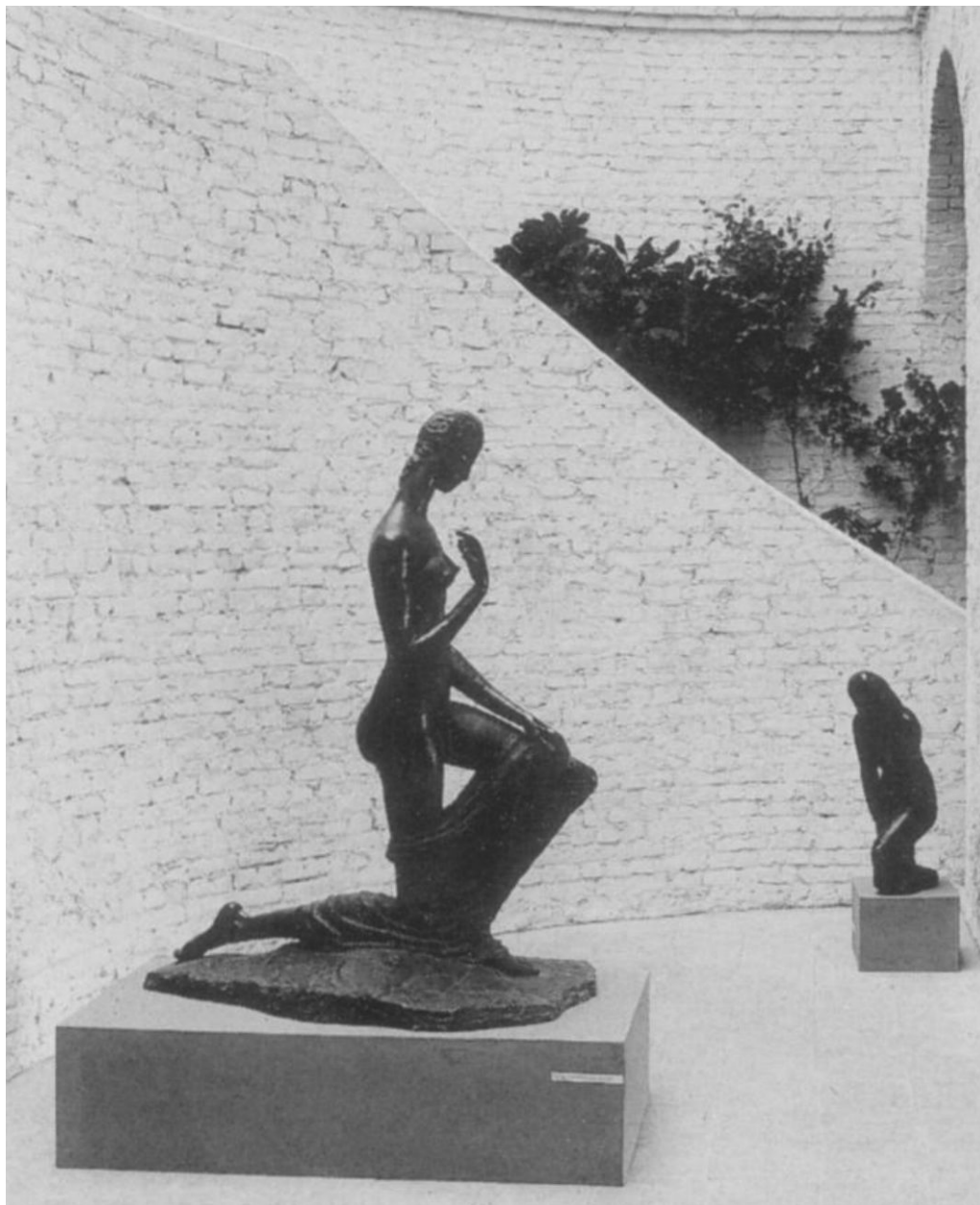


Fig. 10

Wilhelm Lehmbruck. *Kneeling Woman*, 1911. Documenta 1955, Kassel.



Fig. 11

“Contemporary Postwar European Art Hall-- Room 27.” *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*. (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 110.



Fig. 12

“Temporary Exhibition Space-- Room 17.” *Documenta 1955: erste internationale Kunstausstellung: eine fotografische Rekonstruktion*. (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995), 77.

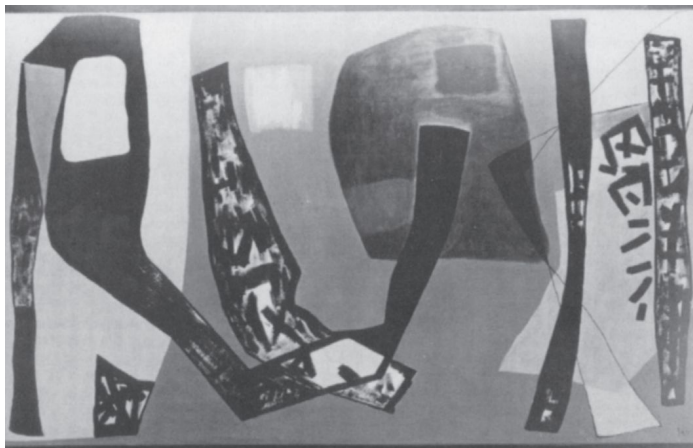


Fig. 13

(left) Pablo Picasso. *Girl Before a Mirror*, 1932. Documenta 1955, Kassel.

(right) Fritz Winter. *Composition before Blue and Yellow*, 1955. Documenta 1955, Kassel.

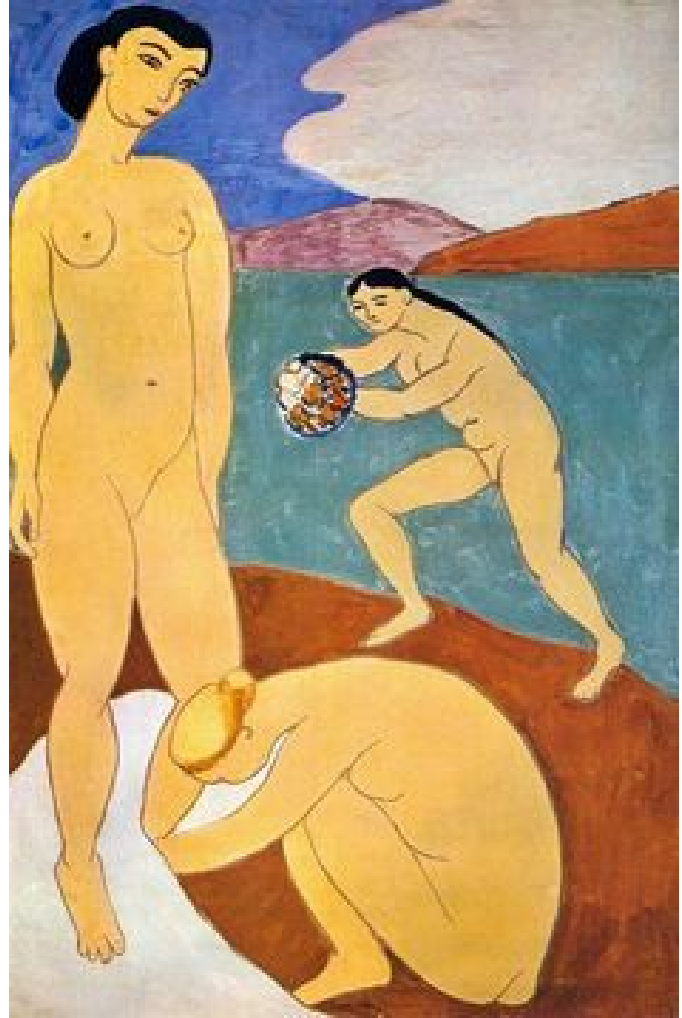
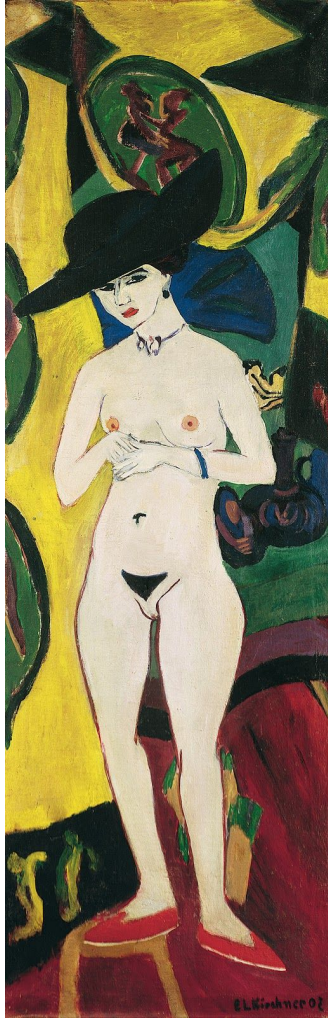


Fig. 15

(left) Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. *Nude in Hat*, 1907. *German Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1957.

(right) Henri Matisse. *Le Luxe II*, 1907. *German Art of the Twentieth Century*. New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1957.



Fig. 16
Karl Hofer. *Im Neubau*, 1947. Oil on Canvas.



Fig. 17

Peter Jakob Schober. "The Small Cowherd." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 18

Rudolph Schäfer. "Admission into the Organization of Thälmann-Pioneers." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.

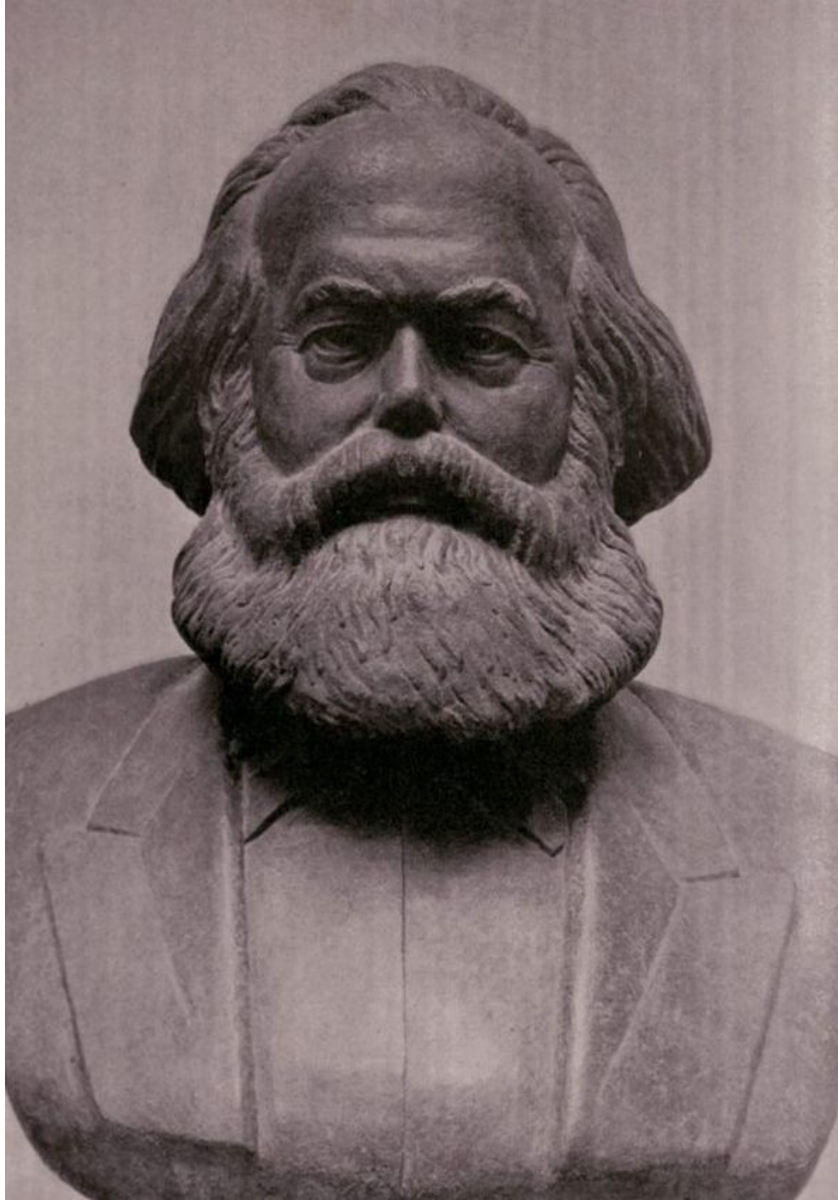


Fig. 19

Will Lammert. "Karl Marx." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 20

Bruno Bernitz. "Construction of the Stalinallee." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.

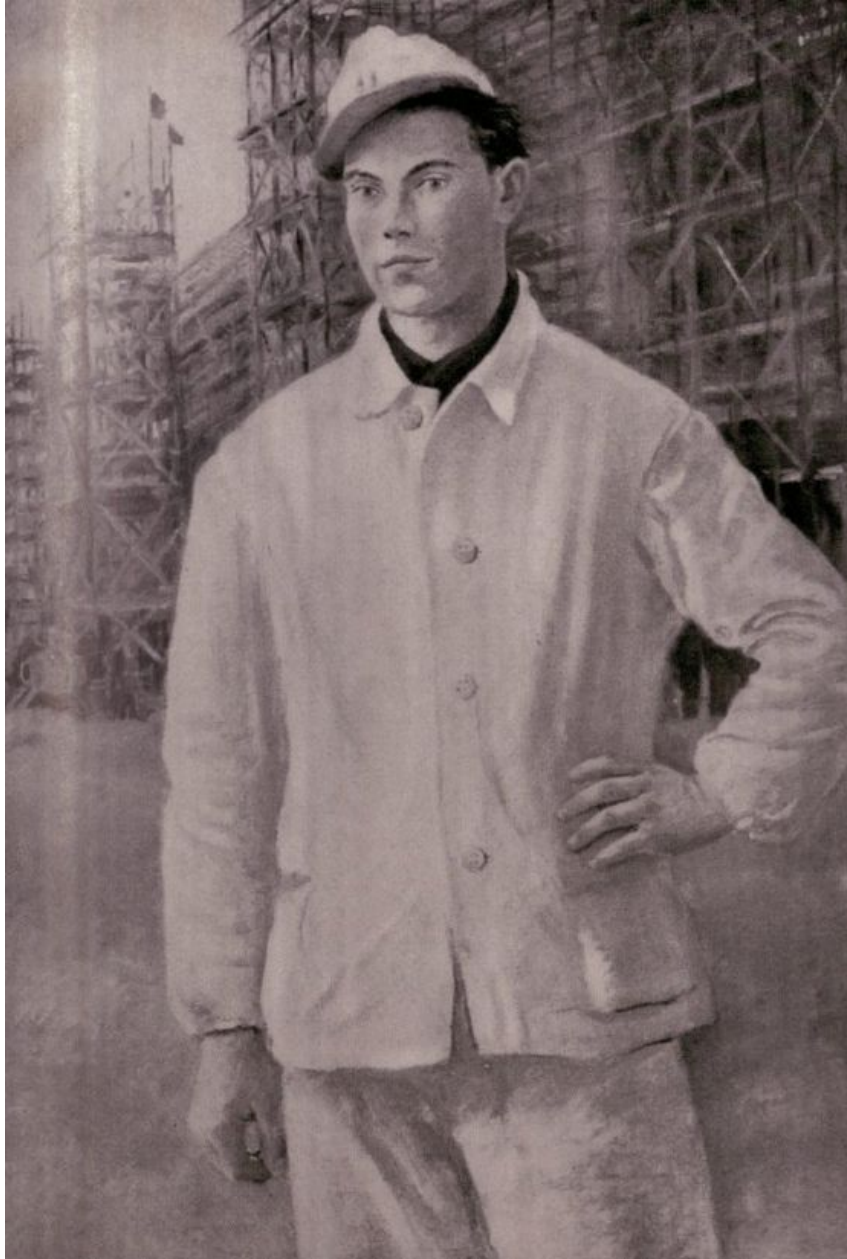


Fig 21

Otto Nagel. "Young Mason of Stalinallee." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 22

Werner Ruhner. "The Eighth of May, 1945." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 23

Hildegard Wiegel. "The Carousel-- Memorial to the Soviet dance ensemble Beryozka." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 24

Werner Laux. "The Patriot Philipp Müller." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. 1953. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 25

Willy Colberg. "Picketers in Hamburg." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 26

Gernot Battesch. "August 15 1951 in West Berlin." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. 1953. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.

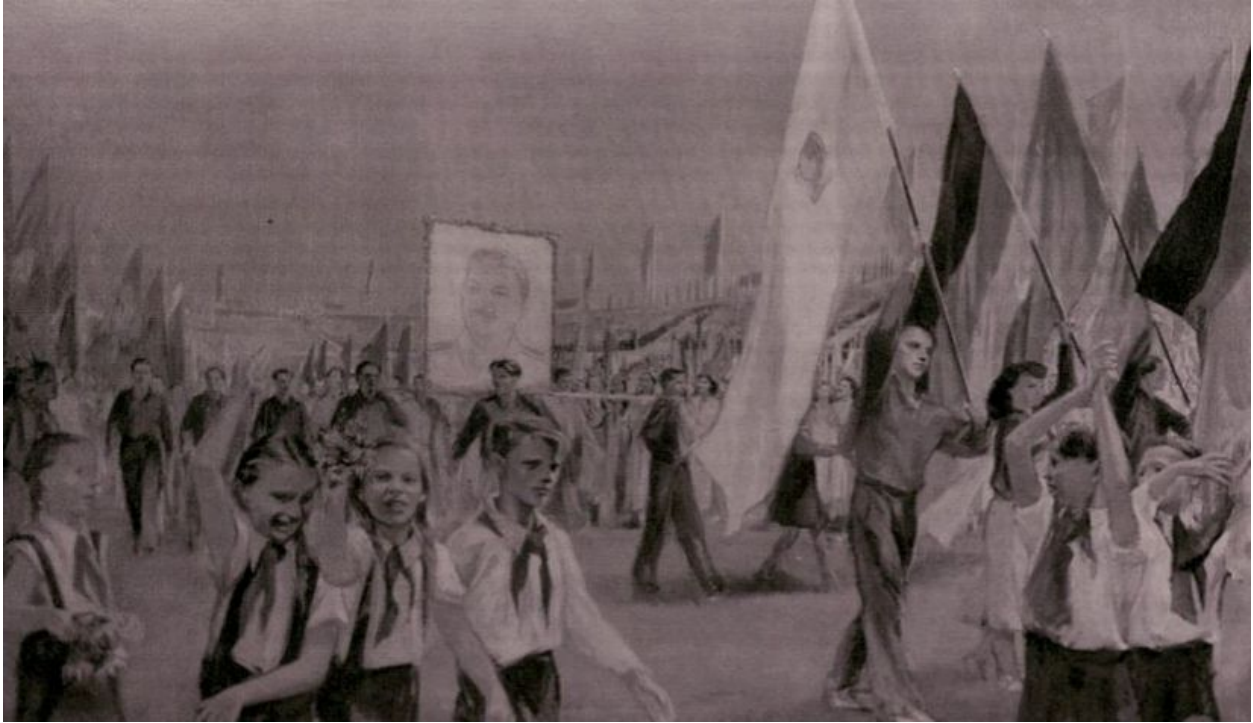


Fig. 27

Hans Kinder. "World Youth Festival 1951." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.



Fig. 28

Gerhard Müller. "Portrait of an Officer of the People." *Dritte deutsche Kunstausstellung*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1953.