

Sicht

**Facing
the Times**

from the collection

Leipziger

**Kunsthalle
der Sparkasse Leipzig**

25 years of the Kunsthalle of Sparkasse Leipzig

welcome
message



Dear Visitors of the Kunsthalle,

Sparkasse Leipzig is making a clear signal of its commitment to culture in its anniversary year of 2026: we are delighted to be able to reopen the doors of our Kunsthalle in March. The return of the Kunsthalle coincides with a special year: 2026 marks the 200th anniversary of Sparkasse Leipzig. The reopening is a wonderful gift that we can give not only to ourselves but also to all of our visitors.

The Kunsthalle opened 25 years ago. It is a strong symbol of continuity and cultural responsibility—and a gift to the city, to all art enthusiasts, and to the many friends of the 'Leipzig School'.

The current exhibition deliberately focuses on the depiction of the human figure. People are also at the heart of what we do. The works on display, spanning six decades, bring together diverse media and styles, showcasing the thematic and stylistic richness of Leipzig art.

Our aim is not only to preserve these important works, but also to make them publicly accessible. With the Kunsthalle, we are once again creating a permanent venue for exchange and cultural participation in Leipzig.

We are particularly delighted about our collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. The artists from the class of Ivana de Vivanco provide new impulses and enter into an exciting dialogue with our collection.

My heartfelt thanks go to everyone involved—especially to our curator for this promising start.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Harald Langenfeld

Chairman of the Board, Sparkasse Leipzig

Facing
the Times

from the collection

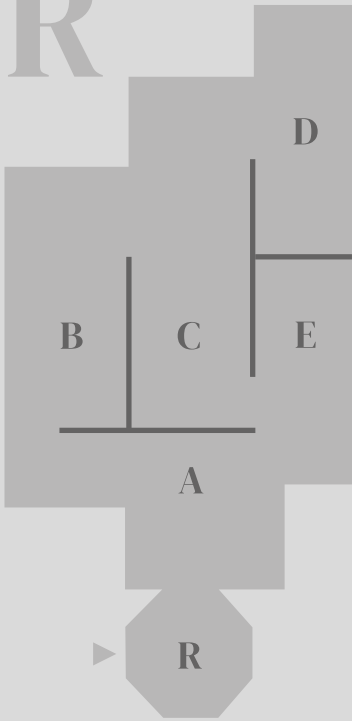
Sparkasse Leipzig has been collecting art from Leipzig since the early 1990s with a focus on painting and printmaking, complemented by sculpture and photography. The aim of the collection is to support and reflect the artistic development of the city and to sustainably promote the local art scene. A large portion of the works is displayed on the bank's premises, making it accessible to employees and visitors. The Kunsthalle serves as an interface between current art production in Leipzig and the public collection that has grown over decades.

The art collection of Sparkasse Leipzig is often referred to as the largest collection of the so-called "Leipzig School". However, it is more accurate to understand it as a collection tracing the development of art in Leipzig since 1949. Although the term "Leipzig School" is highly recognizable, it is imprecise. This term is primarily associated with painting and was controversial from the beginning, even within the local art scene. As early as 1973, artists Ulrich Hachulla, Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and Werner Tübke wrote a letter to the editor of the Leipziger Volkszeitung newspaper protesting against the "distortion" of their work by the narrow concept of a school. Compared to other art hubs in the GDR, they emphasised that Leipzig in particular offered "more divergences".

The exhibition **Facing the Times** presents the Sparkasse Leipzig art collection in all its diversity—deliberately going beyond the label of the "Leipzig School". The curatorial approach supports a deeper exploration of the extensive inventory of the collection and highlights the different Leipzig art scenes of the past six decades. The human figure was chosen as the thematic focus, combining key areas of the collection in a particularly striking way.

1 Ulrich Hachulla, Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, Werner Tübke (1973): Letter to the editor. In: Leipziger Volkszeitung, 8 June 1973. Quoted from: Stefanie Michels (ed.): Leipziger Schule und Kritischer Realismus: die Sammlung Fritz P. Mayer, Munich: Hirmer 2022, p. 45. Or, as Wolfgang Mattheuer put it in his own words: "I only share the place of work with the others, nothing else." (W. Mattheuer in the radio program by Marina Farschid: Ikarus muss fliegen [Icarus Must Fly]. Der Maler Mattheuer im Portrait [The Painter Mattheuer in Portrait]. MDR 2002).

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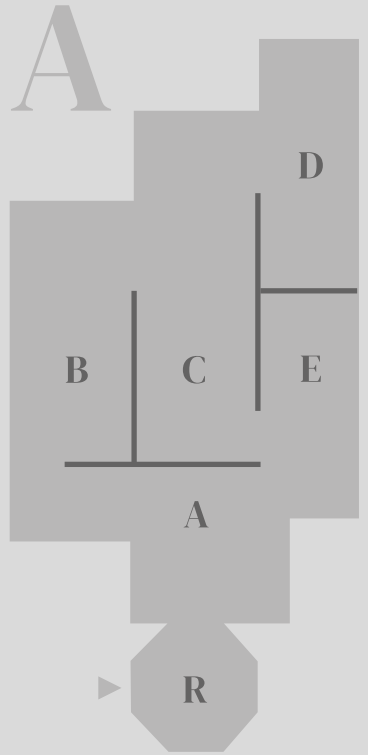


Tour

In the rotunda, you are greeted by the wooden sculpture **Receiver** (*Empfänger*), 2002, by artist **Ulf Puder** (b. 1958). Even before beginning his painting studies in 1982, Puder was a co-founder of the avant-garde artist group *PIG* (*Plagwitz Interest Community*), which was denounced by the Stasi as “pseudo-artists”. He later studied painting under Bernhard Heisig and Dietrich Burger at the HGB Leipzig (Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig) and was one of the most successful artists of his generation in the 1990s. Ulf Puder is primarily known for his paintings: seemingly surreal, subtly dystopian landscapes and planar living spaces, mostly devoid of human presence. His sculptural work, on the other hand, is less well known—which makes this figure at the entrance of the exhibition even more intriguing.



Ulf Puder



Intervention (Image detail)
Ben Lasse Pawelzik,
Paul Weiher



Room A

The exhibition opens with *Ein Strauß Clowns* (A Clowns Bouquet), 2015, by contemporary painter **Mona Broschár** (b. 1985), who is known for her large-format hyperrealistic still lifes. In her intensely colourful, alluring visual worlds, she questions concepts of desire and consumption, casting them into a form of cute madness. The clown heads on flower stems seem to leap out of the vase, nodding invitingly at us with their grotesque faces as we enter the space.



Katharina Immekus

On the front-facing wall hangs a restrained painting by **Katharina Immekus** (b. 1970). Coloured stripes run across a grey background—a human presen-

ce only becomes apparent through the title: *o.T. (3 Schals)* (Untitled. 3 Scarves), 2004. Her works, which often arise from observations of everyday



Wolfgang Peuker

life, offer a fresh perspective on the familiar. Immekus, together with **Bea Meyer** (b. 1969), is considered one of the defining voices of the Leipzig art scene. Both were founding members of the b2_ producers' gallery at the Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei (Leipzig Cotton Spinning Mill) and established an experimental, incisive artistic practice that deliberately tested boundaries. In the exhibition, Bea Meyer presents us with a mirror engraved with the words *Jetzt bin ichs wieder nicht mehr* (Once Again, I'm Not Me Anymore), 2007. Her

conceptual works often draw on quotations from everyday life, which she transforms into questions about society and the role of the individual within it through reduction and transference into various material forms—drawings, embroidery, textile production techniques, assemblages, or artist books.

The third work on the front-facing wall is the painting *Maske (Annette schminkend)* (*Mask, Annette Applying Makeup*), 1993, by **Wolfgang Peuker** (1945–2001).

Portraits were at the centre of his artistic work. In interviews, he was always interested in the changes in people in relation to their environment. He studied at the HGB Leipzig from 1965 to 1970 and was a proponent of the objective trend in Leipzig painting. This portrait was painted during his time in Berlin—when he had been appointed professor at the Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin—and depicts his second wife preparing for a formal occasion.

Gudrun Pontius (1945–1999) is another distinguished painter of this generation. Her objective approach is imbued with an inner poetry, and the touching painting *Alter Mann und Mädchen* (*Old Man and Girl*), 1968, almost invites a literary interpretation, with the figure of the girl looking directly at us. Opposite it hangs a contemporary painting *o.T. (Untitled)*, 2002, by **Julia Tomasi Müntz** (b. 1964) depicting two abstract figures—in red and blue, as in Pontius's work, but reduced to outlines and poses. At the centre of Müntz's work, who studied under



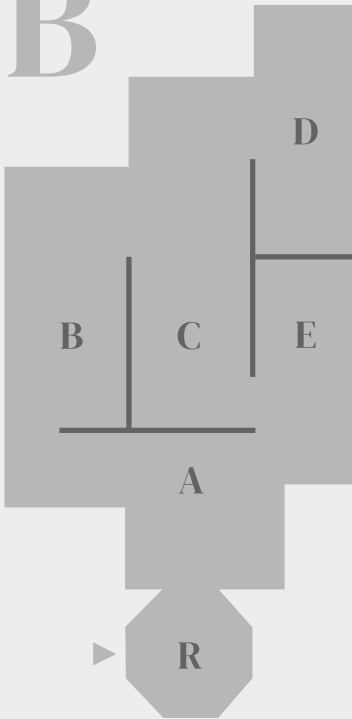
Julia Tomasi Müntz

Rolf Kuhrt at the HGB Leipzig, are figures and faces that are not realistic representations, but rather allow emotion and inner life to shine through. She primarily uses oil paint and oil pastels on canvas, as well as mixed materials on paper.

Gudrun Pontius



B



Intervention (Image detail)
Børge Lehmborg, Victor
Stinglhamber, Maria Wagner



The second hall of the exhibition begins with ***Bildnis Helga L. in Leipzig*** (*Portrait of Helga L. in Leipzig*), 1981, by **Monika Geilsdorf** (b. 1949). The portrait introduces the theme of people in the city: here artist's friend Helga is depicted sitting upright in front of a backdrop



Monika Geilsdorf

of Leipzig. She holds a shot glass in her hand—presumably filled with “Blue Angel”, a cocktail made of sparkling wine and Blue Curaçao. Geilsdorf adopts a clean, distant visual language for her portraits without psychological exaggeration. In the 1980s, she produced a series of portraits of working women in the GDR. The figures are clearly in the foreground, carefully rendered, and

characterised by deliberately placed details such as watches, brooches, and jewellery. The combination of oil and tempera paints and the techniques of the old masters, gives the paintings a special luminosity and tranquillity.

The work of **Kurt Dornis** (b. 1930), shown on the same wall, provides a counterpoint to this focus on individual figures, placing the city in the foreground. The painting ***Alter Brunnen*** (*Old Fountain*), 1973, was created when the Mende Fountain was demolished to make way for the construction of the New Gewandhaus (New Concert Hall). A figure of a mother with her child, and a figure of a man in the distance, emphasise the grotesque ruin of the



Kurt Dornis

deconstructed fountain. In his work, Dornis focuses primarily on architecture, bridges, and industrial fragments. Humans appear only as minor peripheral elements—not as active subjects, but as a scale for the built environment. As a master of printmaking, particularly etching and lithography, Dornis developed a visual language that documented Leipzig as a city in constant flux.

In the photographic work of **Gerhard Gäbler** (b. 1952), it is once again people who shape the urban space. His photographs engage in dialogue with the deserted architecture of Dornis. Since the 1970s, Gäbler has been documenting everyday life in Leipzig. His images were described by



Gerhard Gäbler

cultural sociologist Bernd Lindner as photography of a country in a “state of waiting”. Gäbler captured the end of the GDR and the upheavals of the post-1989 era with particular intensity.

Wolfram Ebersbach’s (b. 1943) painting ***Passanten*** (*Passersby*), 1996, mediates between representational painting and abstraction. Here the city is a stage as

Room B

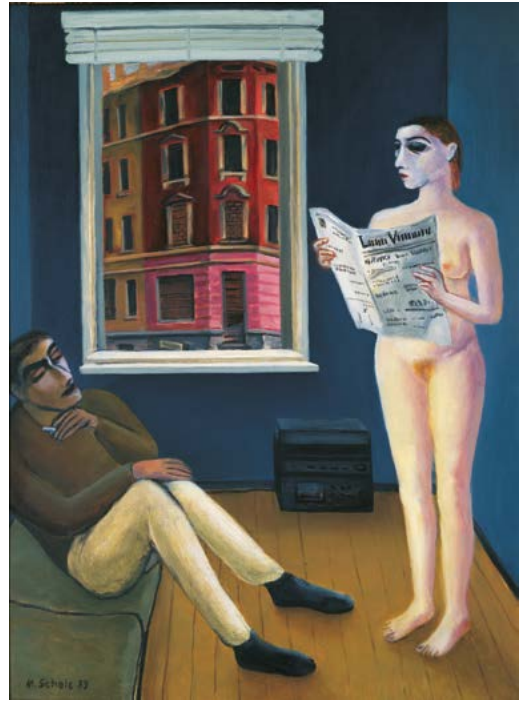
well, but the figures and architecture increasingly dissolve into one another. Anonymous figures move through the space of grey and shadow zones, in



Wolfram Ebersbach

which direction and fixed perspectives seem to be lost. Ebersbach, who studied under Wolfgang Mattheuer at the HGB Leipzig and later taught there himself, uses shifts in perspective and light as his central means of expression. The city no longer appears as a specifically identifiable place but rather as an atmosphere.

The period of political upheaval set against the context of the city is also reflected in the works of Monika and Joachim Scholz. **Monika Scholz** (b. 1941), who studied under Bernhard Heisig, focuses her attention on the inner self. In *Aussichten* (*Outlooks*), 1989, hope, uncertainty, and fear converge in a quiet moment of private reflection. While social conditions are changing outside, the interior becomes a place of self-affirmation.



Monika Scholz

Joachim Scholz (1934–2004) shifts this upheaval into the urban space. His painting *Haus in der Kirschbergstraße* (*House on Kirschbergstraße*), 1991, documents the structural and social changes of the post-1989 period. Humans remain small, almost incidental—as a commentary on the force of urban change, similar

Joachim Scholz



to Kurt Dornis, but at the same time its directness relates to Gäbler's photographic approach.

The opposite wall is devoted to interiors and intimate scenes. In **Partner**, 1987,



Brigitte Poredda

Brigitte Poredda (1936–2015) explores the dynamics between two people. Her psychologically dense portraits draw attention to the contrasts between closeness and distance, the inner and the outer. Poredda, trained as a wood sculptor, worked as a freelancer in Leipzig from the early 1960s onwards and developed

a precise, concentrated visual language for interpersonal relationships.

Doris Ziegler (b. 1949) also combines social observation with existential questions. **Stilleben mit Holzkopf** (*Still Life with Wooden Head*), 1992, which depicts several jugs and a head model as if they were a group of people, was created alongside her well-known series *Passage* (1988–1993), in which she thematised Leipzig's architecture as a place of social transition. The still life reveals the same existential uncertainty of the early 1990s, but shifts it from the public to the private sphere. Doris Ziegler studied under Werner Tübke and Wolfgang Mattheuer and in 1993 she became the first woman since 1958 to be appointed Professor of Painting at the HGB Leipzig.

Between **Heinz Müller's** (1931–2007) painting **Frau am Tisch sitzend** (*Woman Seated at the Table*), 1956, and Doris



Doris Ziegler

Ziegler's still life, a dialogue spanning decades emerges. It is the oldest work in the exhibition and it is also typical of the

Room B



Heinz Müller

paintings in the early GDR. In the 1950s, people returned to the art movements that had previously been denounced as “degenerate”, such as Expressionism. The self-taught Müller completed an apprenticeship as a decorative painter, came into contact with artists such as Walter Bodenthal at an early age, and worked as a freelancer in Leipzig from 1952 onwards. His work includes portraits, interiors, and numerous cityscapes and landscapes, often featuring motifs from Leipzig.

Gerald Müller-Simon (1931–2023), on the other hand, devoted himself almost exclusively to depicting Leipzig and its surroundings. His impressionist paintings show the city between brilliance and decay. The painting *Harlekin* (*Harlequin*), 1962, is an early work that bridges the gap between his training and his later specialisation in cityscapes. The harlequin is a traditional motif in art history—from Antoine Watteau to Pablo Picasso—and also appears frequently in Leipzig painting of the GDR period. Käte Müller and Gerald Müller-Simon became



Gerald Müller-Simon

a prominent artist couple in Leipzig over several decades.

The painting *Hinter den Kulissen* (*Behind the Scenes*), 1999, by **Käte Müller** (b. 1931) is a picture about appearance and reality, about the inside and the outside. In her small-format, precisely painted scenes, Käte Müller finds poetry in everyday life and completes the thematic arc of this section of the exhibition. Käte Müller studied under Elisabeth Voigt and Heinz Wagner at the HGB Leipzig and worked primarily in small formats with extraordinary precision.

The transition to the third exhibition hall is marked by two central figures of the so-called “Leipzig School” from different generations: **Bernhard Heisig** (1925–2011) and **Arno Rink** (1935–



Käthe Müller

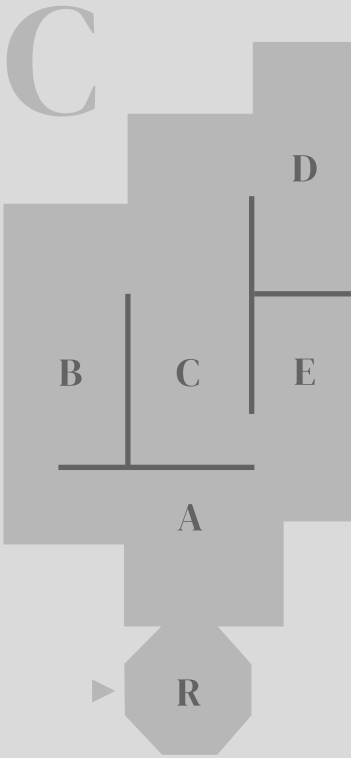
2017). As renowned painters, professors, and rectors of the HGB Leipzig, they had a lasting influence on painting in Leipzig. In the paintings *Dame mit Fächer und Maske* (Lady with Fan and Mask), 1992, by Heisig and *Versuchung* (Temptation), 1997, by Rink, they explore the motif of the masked woman as an allegory for their

Arno Rink



Bernhard Heisig

relationship to reality and to art itself. In the work of Bernhard Heisig, created shortly after reunification, the mask represents the discrepancy between public role and private self that was often experienced in the GDR—the figure appears distant and unapproachable. Arno Rink's *Versuchung*, however, presents the mask in a sensual, enigmatic tableau, becoming a symbol of seduction, shifting roles and the ambivalences of the new era. Together, the two works form a threshold: from urban space and its depictions to an intensive examination of portraiture and self-portraiture in the following exhibition hall.



Intervention (Image detail)
Eliane Diur, Maria Bayer



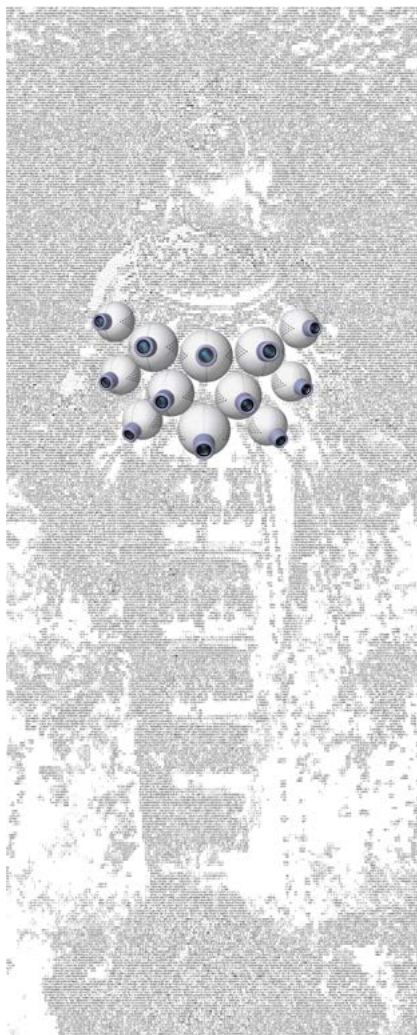
Around the corner, we encounter two paintings by **Dietrich Burger** (b. 1935). Following his studies under



Dietrich Burger

Bernhard Heisig, he enjoyed a unique career at the HGB Leipzig—from his first teaching position to his professorship in 1983 and his many years as head of the foundational courses. In painting and printmaking, Burger is one of the quiet yet unmistakably poetic voices of the Leipzig art scene. He often uses cool blue and green tones, which radiate a particular calmness through his characteristic matte tempera technique. Burger found his greatest inspiration in everyday life and his family environment. Hardly any other painter in the GDR, as Henry Schumann wrote in 1977², was able to capture the “psyche of the child” as “intensely” as he did. The painting *Sabine mit Kind* (*Sabine*

² Henry Schumann: Dietrich Burger, Musizierende Schüler I [Student Musicians I] (1974). In: *Malerei der DDR* (Painting in the GDR). Catalogue of the Gemäldegalerie, Issue 5, ed. by the Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig 1977, p. 68.



Alba D'Urbano

with Child), 1993, depicts a classical subject interpreted in Burger's own style. *Badeanstalt* (Bathhouse), 1986, demonstrates his ability to convey dynamism in a clear, calm composition by removing incidental details and emphasising the core forms of the human figures.

On the following wall, three photographic positions are gathered that focus on

the body, perception, and control in the media space.

In the centre hangs *BiG_Mama*, 2001, by media artist Alba D'Urbano (b. 1955), who headed the Intermedia Class at the Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig from 1997 to 2021. Her artistic practice encompasses photography, video, video performance, installation, as well as publications and curatorial projects; for many years, she also worked in a duo with the photo artist Tina Bara. *BiG_Mama* is a biographically inspired work and refers to a statue of Artemis in the Villa d'Este in D'Urbano's hometown of Tivoli. Here the ancient figure is translated into digital code: the goddess's breasts are replaced by twelve webcams, which serve as symbols of surveillance, control, and the technologisation of the body.

Next to it is the photograph *Frequenz in Hertz* (Frequency in Hertz), 1992, by Leipzig-based photographer and performance and video artist **Edith Tar** (1944–2021). Tar studied photography at the HGB Leipzig under Heinz Föppel until 1976 and expanded her practice from 1986 onwards in close collaboration with the poet, performer, and video artist Radjo Monk. The title refers to physical notions of vibration and movement, which are echoed in the image of a woman in a red dress poised between stillness and motion. Her body appears suspended in a moment of oscillation, as if caught mid-transition. The photograph is embedded within a steel

Room C



Edith Tar

sculpture, its cool, industrial surface bearing an engraved quote by Radjo Monk. The interplay between image, material, and text generates a subtle tension between fragility and solidity, movement and containment.

The photographic work **LVNY 1** (2001) by **Viktoria Binschtok** (b. 1971) is the first image in the eleven-part series *LVNY (Louis Vuitton in New York)*, which was completed in 2004. In New York, Binschtok photographed hundreds of women passing by carrying Louis Vuitton handbags—often counterfeits—while deliberately placing the individual identity of those depicted in the background.

Victoria Binschtok



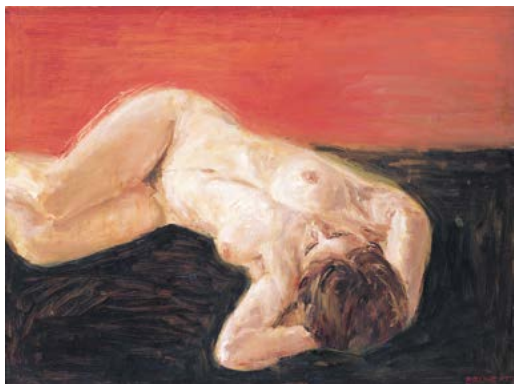
Her work addresses issues of visibility, consumption, and social coding, as well as the role of photographic images in urban spaces. In her most recent projects, Binschtok investigates the mechanisms of contemporary image production and perception by combining her own photographs with media image sources.

The focus on the female body continues on the two-part wall through painting positions. The sequence be-

Gudrun Petersdorff



gins with the painting **Selbstbildnis (Self-Portrait)**, 1985, from **Gudrun Petersdorff** (b. 1955)—an early work that was already shown in her first major solo exhibition in Berlin in 1985. While self-portraits in Leipzig painting often served as a tool for self-assertion, Peters-



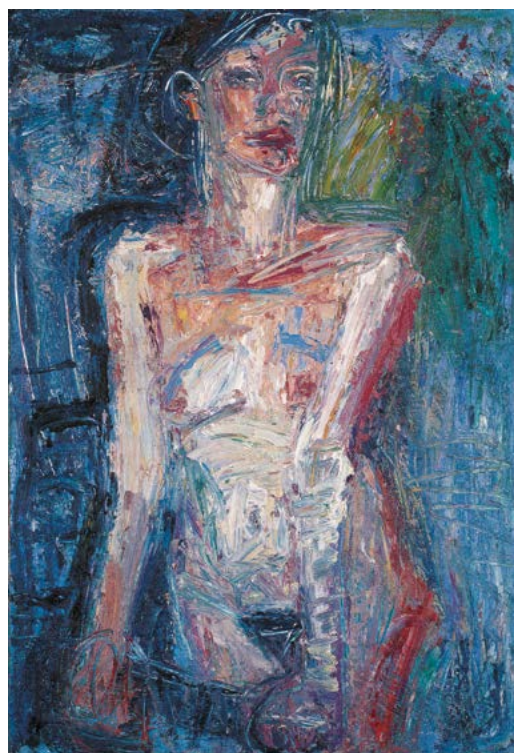
Gudrun Brüne

dorff chooses an unusual, private setting: she depicts herself as a semi-nude figure in a domestic room, with toys on the sofa and a picture on the wall. Even here, her shift towards a clear, figurative language of forms is already evident, although the colour scheme appears more restrained in comparison to her later works. Petersdorff's artistic oeuvre, in addition to oil painting, also includes drawing, printmaking, and ceramics. Her central motifs include landscapes, architectural elements, and scenes from nature. She studied at the HGB Leipzig until 1981 and was a *Meisterschülerin* at the Academy of Arts in Berlin from 1989 to 1991.

Next to Gudrun Petersdorff's work, *Akt (Nude)*, 1974, from the early work of **Gudrun Brüne** (1941–2025), is also on display—it marks a phase in which the artist, after studying under Bernhard Heisig at the HGB Leipzig, established herself as an independent voice within the Leipzig painting scene. This creative phase is characterised by expressive realism. While Brüne frequently uses dolls and masks as metaphorical substitutes in

later works, here she still concentrates on the immediacy of the human image. From 1979 to 1999, she held a teaching position at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design in Halle, where she led a painting class.

The second half of the wall features the nude painting *Erwartung (Expectation)*, 1992, by **Christl Maria Göthner** (b. 1957), created during her *Meister-*



Christl Maria Göthner

schülerstudium at the Academy of Arts in Berlin. Previously, she studied at the HGB Leipzig under Bernhard Heisig from 1978 to 1984. Göthner's work includes nudes, portraits, landscapes, and everyday scenes in painting as well as printmaking, particularly woodcuts and litho-

Room C

graphs. The body appears here in a state of pause, openness, and inner tension. Bernhard Heisig described Göthner as a painter “who artistically reflects people and things in her environment from a very personal perspective and is hardly influenced by fashionable trends”.³

From *Erwartung*, the gaze continues to the painting *o. T. (Untitled)*, 2002, by **Judith Ostermeyer-Køhler** (b. 1974).

The work depicts a female nude in a dance-like movement, together with a hanging lamp that gives the room a



Kristina Schuldt

imals appear as symbolic companions to human figures, alluding to mythical and fairy-tale narrative layers. In addition to painting, she also works in printmaking, sculpture, and wood carving.

On the front-facing wall is a large-format painting by **Kristina Schuldt** (b. 1982), depicting a scene in a shisha bar and titled *Deconstruction*, 2012. Schuldt initially studied under Sighard Gille at the HGB Leipzig and completed her *Meisterschülerstudium* with Neo Rauch in 2009. Her colour-intensive, figurative paintings combine contemporary everyday scenes with cubist fragmentations and surreal overlays. In her work, she combines art-historical and literary references with political and feminist issues and examines social spaces as places of power, attribution, and negotiation.

While Judith Ostermeyer-Køhler emphasises the mythical and Kristina Schuldt emphasises corporeal-spatial density, the position of **Claudia Rößger** (b. 1977) is characterised by a reduced visual



Judith Ostermeyer-Køhler

sense of rhythm. Ostermeyer-Køhler, who completed her *Meisterschülerstudium* under Arno Rink, addresses themes such as passion, love, death, and desire in her often large-format works. Ani-

³ See biography of Christl Maria Göthner <https://www.leipjazzig-orkester.de/maria/main.html> (Hit: 19.02.2026)

language and subtle psychological precision. Her works revolve around identity and the human condition. Recurring motifs such as caps, helmets, or turbans serve as symbols of roles, protective mechanisms, or social attributes. Rößger operates at the intersection of painting and fashion and sharpens the view for subtle inner states and visual coding. She studied at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design in Halle and completed her studies in 2006 as a *Meisterschülerin* under Arno Rink. Her small oil painting on paper, *L'arc (The Arc)*, 2014, serves as a transition to a group of photographic portraits that focus on the relationship between self-presentation, place, and media reflection.

The sequence begins with a photograph by **Piotr Baran** (b. 1972), who photo-

Claudia Rößger



graphed himself at a specific location at a precisely defined point in time. These details are recorded in the title: **30.08.2007/20h59/Nessa**, 2007. For the photograph, Baran constructed a frame out of pieces of furniture that he presumably found at this abandoned site. Baran deliberately turns away from classical canvas painting and works

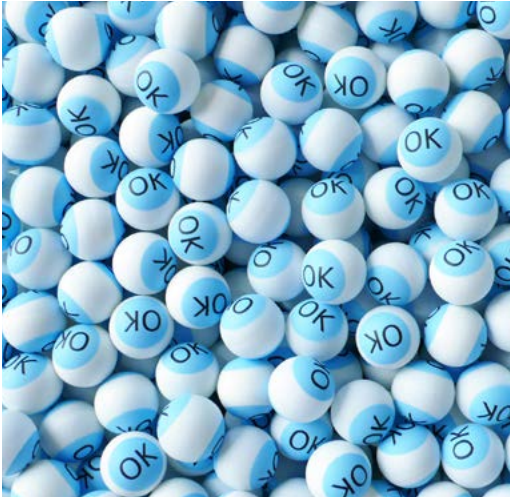


Piotr Baran

primarily in the fields of media art, photography, performance, and large-scale installation. He studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Nantes from 1991 to 1994 and then media art at the HGB Leipzig until 1999.

Room C

Nearby is the sculpture **OK**, 2016, by conceptual artist **Frenzy Höhne** (b. 1975). In her work, Höhne engages with themes



Frenzy Höhne

such as consumption, manipulation, promise, and social critique, which she often translates into humorous yet unsettling forms. Characteristic features of her work include the multiplication and transformation of everyday objects, as well as a pointed use of language, which creates new layers of meaning. The sculpture **OK** brings together several hundred lacquered table tennis balls, marked with the vinyl lettering “ok” under a case on a massive old pedestal. Before studying art, Höhne studied philosophy at the Leibniz University in Hannover. She then studied Fine Arts at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg and was a *Meisterschülerin* at the HGB Leipzig in the Intermedia Class under Alba D’Urbano.

The photographic self-portrait **o. T. (Selbstporträt)** (*Untitled [Self-Portrait]*), 1993, by Leipzig-based conceptual artist **Maix Mayer** (b. 1960) was created during his studies at the HGB Leipzig, which he completed in 2002 under Astrid Klein. Before studying art, Mayer earned a degree in marine biology at the University of Rostock. His interdisciplinary approach combines natural science, architecture, history, and film. In his work,



Maix Mayer

he frequently examines the interplay between architecture and urbanity as a social utopia and engages intensively with modernism as well as the architectural and cultural history of the GDR.

Edgar Leciejewski (b. 1977) uses the medium of photography not only as representation, but also understands it as a subject of analytical investigation. The work **CTT #1 (Selbst mit Kamera)** (*CTT #1 [Self with Camera]*), 2006, is an example of his exploration of photographic

subjectivity and the position behind the camera. Leciejewski studied under Timm Rautert and completed his *Meisterschülerstudium* under Christopher Muller and Peter Piller. Curator Christoph Tannert describes his work as a "meditation on being and silence, light and shadow, identity and emptiness",⁴ which emerges as a central theme throughout his work.

Harry Hachmeister (b. 1979) currently works across various media, including drawing, painting, ceramics, and installation. In his interdisciplinary works, he deals intensively with (gender) identities, body imagery, and their social connotations. Until 2019, he worked under the



Edgar Leciejewski

name Grit Hachmeister. The photograph *Boxer*, 2007, is a self-portrait that presents the artist in a deliberately ambiguous staging: he wears boxer shorts, yet pairs them with goalkeeper gloves and knee socks. The work was created

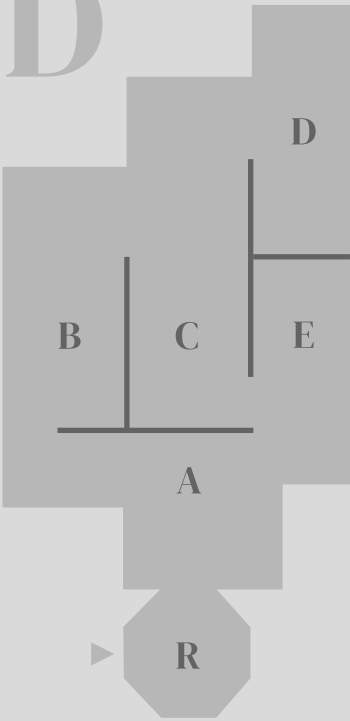


Harry Hachmeister

during his studies in artistic photography under Prof. Timm Rautert at the HGB Leipzig.

⁴ Christoph Tannert, Counterpoint. Fotografische Positionen (Photographic Positions), exhibition catalogue (Kunsthalle der Sparkasse Leipzig, Leipzig 2015), p. 37.

D



At the back of the hall, ***Tränende Madonna VI (Tränensturz)*** (*Weeping Madonna VI [Tears Falling]*), 1996, by **Sighard Gille** (b. 1941) catches the eye. Gille is known for his unique, powerful, and expressive visual language. He often uses mixed media in his works—as is the case with this painting, which was rendered in oil, acrylic, and collage on canvas. He was a *Meisterschüler* of Bernhard Heisig and later became a professor of painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. He is particularly well known for his monumental paint-

Sighard Gille



Intervention (Image detail)
Anastasia Dodeva,
William Liebelt



ing *Gesang vom Leben (Song of Life)*, 1980–1981, in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, which he realised jointly with the painter Walter Libuda.

Directly next to the Madonna hangs the painting *Mutter und Kind (Mother and Child)*, 2018, by **Lena Stühmeier** (b. 1996). The scene has clear biblical connotations: in Western art history, the mother's blue cloak almost always refers to the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus. Stühmeier, however, shifts the focus to the physical intimacy and psychological tension of the modern motherly role. In the figure of the mother, she portrays herself holding a doll in her hand. Her mixed-media technique on MDF produces a strong intensity of colour. Stylistically, her painting unexpectedly builds a bridge to the cubist and figurative works of Dietrich Burger—albeit in a completely different colour palette. With bold strokes in charcoal, pastels, oil, and tempera, she captures movement and childlike emotions.

While Stühmeier brings the motif into the present, **Christiane Wachter** (b. 1966) draws on a classical religious iconographic scheme in her work *Mater Dolorosa* (1997), which depicts the mourning of the son. She uses her characteristic collage technique to make pain tangible, both haptically and visually, by fragmenting and layering materials. The depiction is symbolic and timeless. The aesthetics of the papers used and the overpainting generates a melancholy that goes beyond the merely figurative.

Her works are characterised by a “painterly approach” in which she combines different types of paper with painting, collages, and stencilled outlines.

In the middle of the wall is the *Vollblutmaler (Full-blooded Painter)*, 2006, a small sculpture by **Elena Kozlova** (b. 1972) that reminds a baby. The figure is constructed from layers of oil paint and appears as a compact lump of colour. Kozlova completed her *Meisterschülerstudium* at the HGB Leipzig under Annette Schröter and works primarily in the field of tension between figuration and abstraction. Artist's use of layers and textures reveal a strong tactile dimension in her art work.



Christiane Wachter

Displayed alongside it is a *Selbstporträt (Self-Portrait)*, 1989 by **Gero Künzel** (b. 1968). Like Kozlova, he also blurs the boundaries between painting and sculpture: in his work, paint becomes a tangible material. Künzel is known for his extremely thick, almost sculptural application of paint. His paintings often appear as three-dimensional reliefs, built up over months with brush and

Room D

palette knife. As the last *Meisterschüler* of Bernhard Heisig, he continues the strongly expressive tradition of Leipzig painting. His powerful, dynamic brushwork provides his paintings with an enormous physical presence and sensuality.

A striking contrast to this is ***Selbst als Manierist mit Schlafmütze*** (*Self as a Mannerist with Nightcap*), 1989, by **Heinz Zander** (1939–2024). Zander mastered a precise, old master-inspired visual language that clearly sets him apart from the impasto style of many of his Leipzig colleagues. Instead of thick layers of paint, he worked with numer-



Heinz Zander

ous thin glazes. The nightcap is much more than just a humorous accessory: in art history, it often symbolises a retreat into private life or—in the context of the

GDR—the artist who retreats from political realities by escaping into a dreamlike state. Zander liked to call himself a “late mannerist” and used this guise to ironically distance from the world.

Furthermore, there are further examples of old master techniques from the GDR, exemplified by the prominent couple Angelika and Werner Tübke.

Angelika Tübke (b. 1935) depicts her-



Angelika Tübke

self in ***Selbstporträt mit grüner Jacke*** (*Self-Portrait with Green Jacket*), 1965. The image captivates with its clear, almost austere order. The green jacket acts as a strong colour anchor point against a mostly neutral background. Angelika Tübke came to the HGB Leipzig in 1954 to become a book illustrator. Since painting was almost taboo there during parts of the 1950s, the foundation of her art lies in her brilliant drawing technique.

In his visual language, **Werner Tübke** (1929–2004) draws heavily on the Italian Renaissance and Mannerism to reflect the present. Next to her work hangs ***Karneval in Brescia*** (*Carnival in Brescia*), 1976, despite its title, does not appear cheerful at all: it is dominated by an oppressive, almost apocalyptic atmosphere. The figures appear like masks or puppets in an absurd play. Werner Tübke, alongside Wolfgang Mattheuer and Bernhard Heisig, belongs to the founding generation of Leipzig painting. In contrast to his colleagues, he did not teach his own specialised class at the HGB



Werner Tübke

Leipzig, but was primarily a professor in the foundational courses, influencing generations of students.

Also on this wall are two photographs from the series ***Citizens (TSF)***, 2004, by **Albrecht Tübke** (b. 1971), the son of the artist couple. Contrary to his father's expectations, Albrecht Tübke chose to study photography at the HGB Leipzig.



Albrecht Tübke

The portraits in this series are rendered in a clean, documentary style. The people are mostly shown in full-length shots, facing forward and often against plain, “found” backgrounds. This approach is reminiscent of the tradition of typological photography. Today, Albrecht Tübke not only works with photography, but also paints in a richly detailed, “old master” manner like his parents.

Room D



Wolfgang Mattheuer

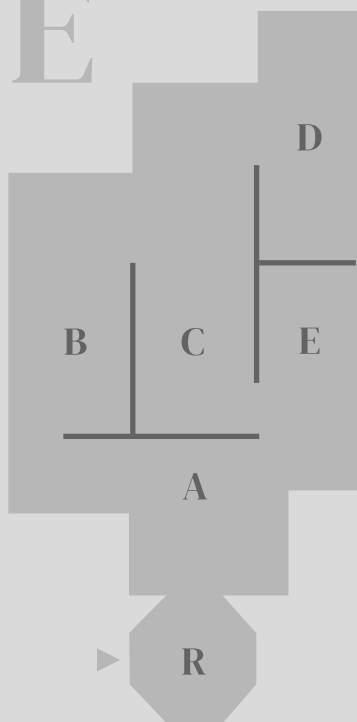
The room concludes with two works by **Wolfgang Mattheuer** and **Ursula Mattheuer-Neustädt**, who were married in their first marriage and are among the most influential figures in Leipzig art. *Briefleserin* (*Letter Reader*), 1963, by **Wolfgang Mattheuer** (1927–2004) is an intimate genre scene reminiscent of the Biedermeier style. It captures a quiet, private moment. Mattheuer often developed striking visual ideas for multifaceted themes. His application of oil paint is partly impasto, partly smooth, but always secondary to the clear legibility of the symbol. While Tübke filters reality through historical masquerade and technical virtuosity, Mattheuer comments on the present with more direct, often melancholic symbols.

Ursula Mattheuer-Neustädt



The *Selbstporträt im November* (*Self-Portrait in November*), 1975, drawn by **Ursula Mattheuer-Neustädt** (1926–2021) shows the same figure seven years later in a serious, analytical style. The focus is clearly on drawing, her primary medium, characterised by great precision and richness of detail. Her works included portraits, landscapes, and book illustrations. A recurring theme was the self-portrait, which she used—as here—for merciless self-analysis. Mattheuer-Neustädt was not only a graphic artist, but as well a writer and poet, often combining her drawings with her own texts or poems to create a close symbiosis of words and images.

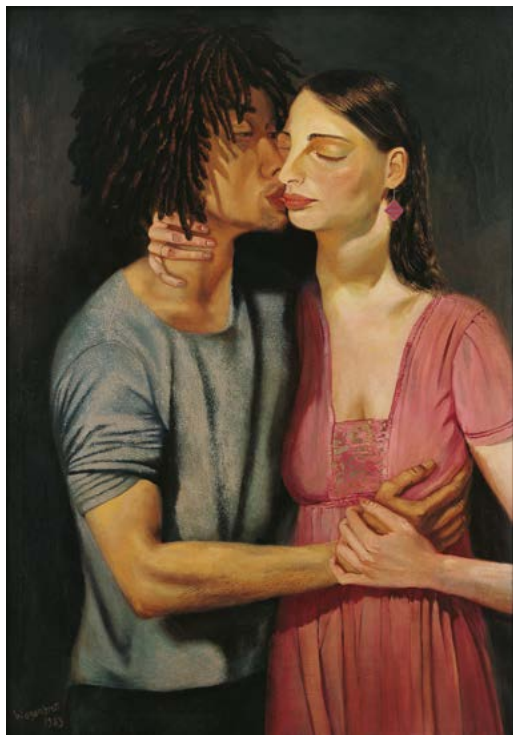
E



Intervention (Image detail)
Tony Bartos, Jared Cobain,
Camilla Suckfüll



The last room of the tour begins with the painting *Junges Paar* (Young Couple), 1983, by **Norbert Wagenbrett** (b. 1954). It is an early example of his now more than four-decade-long exploration of human individuality. Wagenbrett deliberately distinguishes his work from the classical portrait genre and



Norbert Wagenbrett

instead refers to his depictions as “Bildnisse” (evocative images): “A *Bildnis* means a deeper exploration. I try to get behind the many faces of a person and search for the vivid face”.⁵ The central focus is always on the face and figure—

⁵ Norbert Wagenbrett, “Aus Gesprächen und Reflexionen” (From Conversations and Reflections), in: Norbert Wagenbrett. *Vor den Masken* (Before the Masks). Exhibition catalogue, MdbK Leipzig, 2020, p. 18.

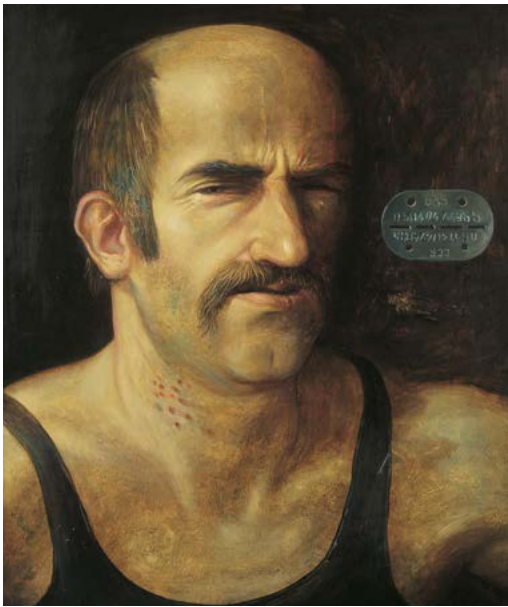
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never harmonious or symmetrical, but shaped by inner fractures, thoughts, and open questions. Wagenbrett locates his artistic influences primarily in New Objectivity and Magical Realism. He studied painting at the HGB Leipzig under Arno Rink and Volker Stelzmann and was a *Meisterschüler* of Willi Sitte at the Hochschule für Industrielle Formgestaltung Halle—Burg Giebichenstein (University of Art and Design in Halle).



Hans Mayer-Foreyt

lated, waiting, or entangled in complex situations—as if frozen in place. Stelzmann consistently uses self-portraits as a means of critical self-examination and repeatedly incorporates his own likeness into group portraits. Volker Stelzmann studied at the HGB Leipzig and held a professorship from 1977 to 1986. In 1986, he left the GDR, moved to West Berlin and taught at the Hochschule der Künste (now UdK, Berlin University of the Arts) from 1988 to 2006.



Volker Stelzmann

Hanging nearby is the *Selbstbildnis mit Erkennungsmarke* (*Self-Portrait with ID Tag*), 1975, by Wagenbrett's teacher **Volker Stelzmann** (b. 1940). His work combines old master precision with a contemporary, often gloomy view of the world. Stylistically, he merges influences from Mannerism and the Italian Renaissance with elements of the New Objectivity. His figures often appear iso-

The small print *Selbst im Rückspiegel* (*Self in the Rear-View Mirror*), 1971, presents the gaze of **Hans Mayer-Foreyt** (1916–1981), one of Stelzmann's most influential teachers. Mayer-Foreyt's work and his teaching had a significant influence on Leipzig's artistic identity during the GDR period. From 1958 to 1979, he was a professor at the HGB Leipzig and is regarded, alongside Werner Tübke, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and Bernhard Heisig, as one of the founders of the so-called "Leipzig School". His work is characterised by precise drawing and psychological depth. With a critical, re-

alistic view, he created portraits, nudes, still lifes, and landscapes, as well as depictions of everyday social life.

Hartwig Ebersbach (b. 1940) is regarded as an eccentric, wild counterpart to the otherwise rather cool and precise “Leipzig” painting, as exemplified by Wagenbrett or Stelzmann. His work appears as an expressive eruption of colour and emotion. After studying at the HGB Leipzig (1959–1964) under Bernhard Heisig and influenced by Hans Mayer-Foreyts, he became one of Heisig’s most important students. In 1979, Heisig assigned him his own class for Experimental Art, which was closed in 1983 under pressure from the SED. Ebersbach works

Hartwig Ebersbach



impulsively, applying paint in impasto layers that create a relief-like surface. He became particularly well known for his figure of “Kaspar”—a clownish character who explores the human condition and social realities. Since the 1970s, this figure has functioned as the artist’s alter ego and protective persona. In the paintings **Boot I** and **Boot IV** (*Boat I* and *Boat IV*), 1987, the Kaspar figures appear in a boat, where the boundaries between figure, boat, and surroundings become blurred. These depictions often are read as symbols of isolation or the desire to escape within the context of the late GDR. Ebersbach is considered one of the most important representatives of nonconformist art in the GDR.

On the long wall, representatives of the autonomous Leipzig art scene are gathered. Five of the six artists who organised the spectacular 1st Leipziger Herbstsalon (Leipzig Autumn Salon) in 1984, a key event in independent GDR art, are shown. Only Lutz Dambeck is absent from this presentation.

The exhibition space, originally privately rented at the Leipziger Messe (Leipzig Trade Fair), was abruptly cancelled by the fair director. It was only through Bernhard Heisig’s intervention with the Central Committee of the SED in Berlin that the Herbstsalon received approval—albeit under state-controlled conditions. The exhibition, which opened on 15 November 1984, attracted around 10,000 visitors. The attending artists engaged in lively discussions with the audience. The

Room E

Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security, [MfS]) classified the project as “counter-revolutionary” and an “enemy of the state,” placing the participants under intense pressure. For some of the initiators—including Lutz Dammbeck, Günter Firit, and Hans-Hendrik Grimmling—this pressure became so great that they left the GDR in 1986. Those who remained maintained a niche existence, yet had a lasting impact on the alternative art scene.⁶

Hans-Hendrik Grimmling (b. 1947) opens the wall with the drawing **Sein Kuss** (*His Kiss*), 1979, from his Leipzig period. It is exemplary of his engagement at the time with the topics of human intimacy and existential anxiety. The year 1979 marked a period of increasing internal and political tension for Grimmling in the GDR, shortly before the creation of his major series such as “Les Oiseaux” (*The Birds*), 1980, and



Hans-Hendrik Grimmling

⁶ See Laura Koch: *Leipziger Kunst abseits der Leipziger Schule: Autonomiebestrebungen der Künstler des 1. Leipziger Herbstsalons* (Leipzig Art Beyond the Leipzig School: Artists’ Strivings for Autonomy in the 1st Leipzig Autumn Salon), Saarbrücken, 2018.



Günter Huniat

“Umerziehung der Vögel” (*Re-education of the Birds*), 1981. After leaving the GDR and relocating to West Berlin in 1986, Grimmling’s work took a significant turn. He reduced narrative elements in favour of greater abstraction and from then on concentrated more on the formal power of colour and symbols. In Leipzig, he studied under Wolfgang Mattheuer, with whom he developed a complex relationship after the Herbstsalon and his emigration, which he later reflected on in his memoir *Die Umerziehung der Vögel* (*The Re-education of Birds*), 2008.

In dialogue with Grimmling’s drawing is the painting **Schwarzer Engel, ekstatisch** (*Black Angel, Ecstatic*), 1985, by **Günter Huniat** (b. 1939). The work displays Huniat’s characteristic style: wild, expressive, and

energetic. Within the GDR art scene, the angel often functioned as a figure existing beyond state authority. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Huniat was a self-taught artist. His work is characterised by a great willingness to experiment: he worked with collage, assemblage, woodcut, and etching. As a central figure of the nonconformist scene, he founded Atelier Mogollon in 1978, which became an important meeting place for the independent art community. In 1980, he launched the Freiluftgalerie Stötteritz



Frieder Heinze

(Stötteritz Open-Air Gallery) in his garden studio—an important refuge for free ideas and artistic exchange beyond state cultural bureaucracy.

Frieder Heinze (b. 1950) completed his studies at the HGB Leipzig under Werner Tübke and Wolfgang Mattheuer and subsequently became a *Meisterschüler* of these two leading members of the “Leipzig School.” His artistic development can be understood as a conscious emancipation from their disciplined craftsmanship towards a freer, more associative description of the world. His pictures are inhabited by idiosyncratic creatures, mythical animals, flying figures, and abstract symbols, often suspended upside-down and without a fixed orientation in space. Heinze’s oeuvre encompasses painting, printmaking, ceramics, and object art. The ink drawing *Mobilität (Mobility)*, 1986, is a characteristic example of this diverse body of work.

Olaf Wegewitz (b. 1949) occupies a unique position within the Leipzig scene: as a radical autodidact, he understands art not as a reflection of society, but as an organic part of nature. Together with Frieder Heinze, he created the artistic book *Unaulutu*, 1986, based on drawings by the ethnologist Paul Ehrenreich of the indigenous Karajá people, combining original prints, texts, and studies of nature. The exhibition features two linocuts by Wegewitz from the portfolio **ART MOBIL No. 1** (1977), created within a young Leipzig scene that was increasingly emancipating itself from the strict conventions of the Leipzig School.

Günter Firit’s (b. 1947) painting *Kreuzigung (Crucifixion)*, 1985, was

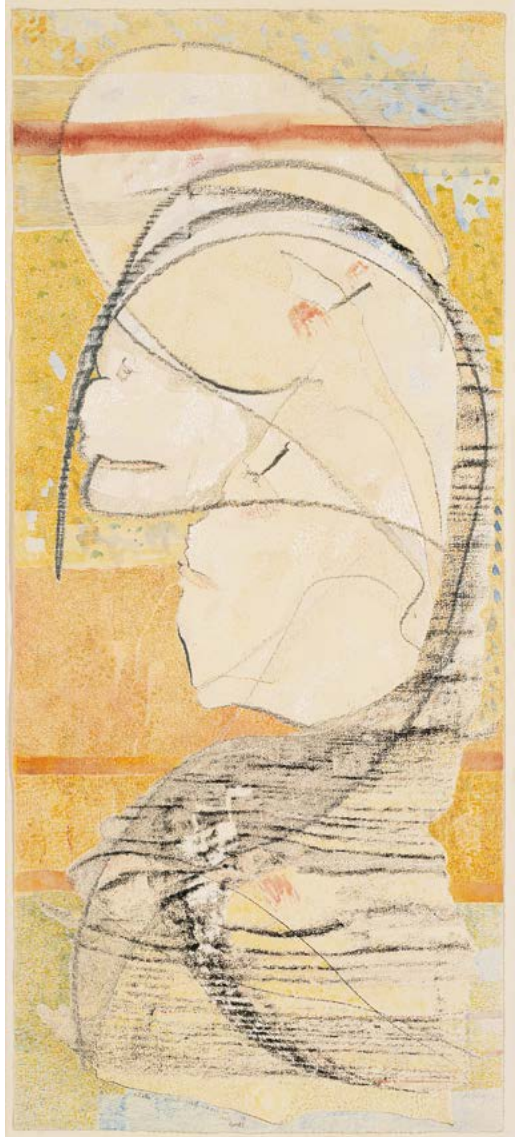
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created during a year of peak tension in his life, just before his departure from the GDR. The depiction is not a Christian devotional image, but a political state-

spaces or pushing against the edges of the picture. Motifs such as window frames often mark the boundary between "inside" and "outside".

A unique figure within the GDR art scene was **Gerhard Altenbourg** (1926–1989). He represented a poetic counterpoint

Gerhard Altenbourg



Günter Firit

ment. The crucified figure represents the artist himself, or the individual nailed down by the GDR system. Typical of this period is the expressive distortion of the figure: anatomical correctness is sacrificed in favour of expression and urgency. The medium of charcoal allows lines to be blurred and creates an atmosphere of dust, ash, and finality. Günter Firit was expelled from the Dresden University of Fine Arts in 1971 for "ideological immaturity". He later became a *Meisterschüler* under Bernhard Heisig at the Academy of Arts in East Berlin. Many of his works depict bodies straining against enclosed

to the expressive voices of the nonconformist scene. The title *'Hihi!' sprach Joel und sah der Seele Specht* ('Hehe' said Joel and Watched the Soul Woodpecker), 1981, reflects his affinity for literature and his quirky wordplay. Altenbourg developed a highly complex, fragile visual language, creating pictorial worlds that often resemble inner landscapes. He remained in his hometown of Altenburg throughout his life; his art often appears as a retreat into a private microcosm. Altenbourg demonstrated that it was possible to exist in the GDR without compromising aesthetic integrity—even though he was excluded from the official art world for many years. His works often resemble surreal maps or microscopic views of landscapes. This working method is often described as "psychogrammatic drawing". In the 1980s, his house in Altenburg became a hub for young artists seeking alternative forms of expression.

With **Otto Bernd Steffen** (b. 1951), the circuit closes with an artist who brings physical weight and a sculptural mode of thinking into this group. Steffen works primarily with classical materials such as bronze, stone, or wood. His sculptures often appear as timeless—massive, block-like, and grounded. The human figure is almost always at the centre, though less as an individual than as an archetype or symbol. Steffen's method is one of reduction: he avoids superficial details and concentrates on the "skeletal", on stability and spatial tension. In the work *Das andere Gesicht* (*The Other Face*),



Otto Bernd Steffen

1989, he shows his most psychologically compelling side. Created in the year of the political turning point, the piece captures the fragmentation and upheaval of that time in a sculptural metaphor.

Room E

The exhibition *Facing the Times* casts a spotlight on Leipzig's art history and opens up new perspectives on the diversity of its art scenes.

Interventions by students from the current **Painting and Printmaking class of Ivana de Vivanco** (HGB Leipzig) on the columns of the Kunsthalle respond to the works in the collection exhibition and counter them with contemporary impulses. Kept monochrome and customised to the unusual format of the angular columns, they unfold a broad spectrum of motifs, styles, and artistic approaches. The students worked in small groups of two to three people on each column—a deliberately collaborative approach that questions the myth of the solitary genius and reveals the shift in art towards collective methods of working.

On behalf of the Kunsthalle der Sparkasse Leipzig, we thank you for your interest in the exhibition and the Sparkasse Leipzig art collection.

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Index of Artworks

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»Hihi!« sprach Jojel und sah der
Seele Specht
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2015

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Dietrich Burger
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Hartwig Ebersbach
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125 × 83 cm
1987

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1978

Gerhard Gäbler
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Gero Künzel
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Christiane Wachter
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Collage, paint on paper
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Norbert Wagenbrett
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126 × 87,5 cm
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Olaf Wegewitz
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1977

Olaf Wegewitz
Anklage
(ART MOBIL Folder No. 1)
Linocut
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1977

Heinz Zander
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mütze
Oil on hardboard
60 × 50 cm
1989

Doris Ziegler
Stilleben mit Holzkopf
Mixed media on canvas
74 × 88 cm
1992

Imprint

Facing the Times

11 March to 16 December 2026
Kunsthalle der Sparkasse Leipzig

Curator: Olga Vostretsova

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**Am
Ange**

aus der sammlung

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V**