

Werner Weber

O.U. 26 January, 1986

Re: WESTERMANN, Thomas - SCHNEIDER, Wolfgang, both of Magdeburg
„TRAUMgeBILDe / DREAM-CREATION“ - „Mail Art Project No. 1“
Materials of the planned 11th exhibition of the GALLERY IN THE
HALLWAY of the Cultural Center “Ernst Thälmann”, Magdeburg,
January/February 1986

After reviewing the two file folders handed over to me by Comrade H. with
about 400 postcards received by mail sent to the private addresses of the
citizens

WESTERMANN, Thomas

und

SCHNEIDER, Wolfgang

and containing works of so-called “Mail Art” by senders from the GDR, a
few socialistic countries, as well as from the FRG/Berlin-West and many
capitalist countries, mostly member states of the NATO, I hereby provide
in the following a first assessment of the materials as ordered:

All documents that this assessment is based on,

- The invitations in German and English language sent to the potential
participants in the “project”,
- The probable mode of invitation as can be concluded from the received
submissions,
- The wording and design of the draft for the invitation to the opening
of exhibition,
- The form and content of the majority of the submitted works,
- The ordering (and apparently not intended selection) principle, and
the comments to the works by WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER (to be read from
the typed captions),

lead to the necessary conclusion that the two organizers do n o t in-
tend their action and the planned exhibition to be a cultural-political
and art-political contribution enriching the cultural life of the dis-
trict capital Magdeburg in the year of the XIth Party Congress of the
SED, the 100th birthday of Ernst Thälmann, after whom their sponsoring
cultural center is named, and before the 21st Workers' Festival of the
GDR. On the contrary, all documents rather lead to the suspicion that the
initiators might have the intent to develop with their “Mail Art Project”
a kind of cultural-, art-, and contact-political “alternative” to the ef-
forts of party and state in the GDR for a partisan, socialist-realist art
that is close to the people and for an increasingly stronger integration
with the socialist brother states.

Such a tendency is already apparent when looking at a statistic overview of the submissions:

Aside from the naturally great portion of submissions from the GDR with about 110, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic is represented with 6 contributions, the Hungarian People's Republic with 4, the People's Republic of Poland with 2, and the Socialist Republic of Romania with 2.

If one adds the 4 submissions from the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, the socialist countries are represented with a total of just 18 works, and together with the GDR, with 128 works.

This is contrasted by 185 submissions from capitalist countries, of those 173 from NATO states, no less than 68 works just from the FRG and Berlin-W. Aside from the clearly "eager" use of all English terms by WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER, their definitions for the creation of "Mail Art" and their explanation of their own intentions in the draft of the invitation are a clear indication that they are mainly concerned with the form, that they do not have a concept of the contents, or try to evade such a concept unconsciously or rather consciously.

According to the opinion of both of them, "Mail Art" is mainly communication, exchange of thoughts, conversation by mail, transmission of information between artists, also to overcome their isolation.

With no word is it mentioned that "Mail Art" has internationally become a major art medium to distribute political demands, mainly progressive, humanistic ones, but that it is also already used by reactionary forces. No word on the fact that "Mail Art" plays a role in the fight against NATO's nuclear missile armament, against the racism in South Africa, against the interference of the US imperialism in Latin America, that typical actions by children and young people in the GDR to free Angela DAVIS, Luis CORVALAN, Nelson MANDELA per mass-mailing of postcards were to a large degree original "Mail Art" actions.

Just a superficial survey of the works submitted by participants from the GDR makes it obvious that the majority of these (amateur and professional) artists are not grounded in socialist realism esthetically and in the positions of the real-existing socialism politically and ideologically. Aside from some true "playfulness", open or hidden criticism regarding environmental protection, supposed loneliness and isolation, bureaucracy, the state "making up our minds for us", general pacifistic peace appeals, and warnings, skepticism, or abstract plays with forms with tendencies towards dissolution dominate (by the way, this also applies to WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER themselves). There can be no question of art for socialism.

Among the works of the foreign artists, all shades of form and content are represented. This ranges from "Onan's Disciples", probably homo-


sexuals, over a glorification of the FRG's revanchism (by WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER erroneously ?? claimed to be the opposite), kitsch, pornography, commercial products to clearly social-critical examinations of everyday capitalism, as well as condemnation of racism and imperialistic endangerment of the peace.

It cannot be seen from the documents whether WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER would have been willing and able to select the works and to represent the politically relevant statements in such a manner that their class- and system-relevant determination would have been unambiguously expressed for the GDR viewer.


The state of things rather suggests the opposite, namely that the GDR viewer would have to and possibly was supposed to relate the statements to his or her socialist environment.

Looking at the typed comments of the two organizers, it strikes one that the term "playing about" is often used to signal irrelevance of the theme and content where the intended statement becomes more or less clear nevertheless. It cannot be clearly decided whether incapability, thoughtlessness, or intention predominates here.

Just a few, but typical examples for this:

1. In the folder SCHNEIDER, a submission under No. 8 from
LANGE, Bernd-Lutz
7030 Leipzig


is called "a plaything". The red bars glued over the photo template of the room can hardly have been meant as "playful".

2. The same applies to the "barricaded room" by
SONNTAG, Jörg
8019 Dresden



(SCHN./18)

3. The work "The way of Zen" by
ROGALSKI, Piotr
SKR Pocl. 99
97-300 Piotrkow TRYB.
VR Polen

(SCHN./57)

is called a "criticism of religion (+ sects)", but it is more likely that it is intended to propagate the "Zen" as escape from the narrowness into the light; the sender does, after all, call for participation in a "project" under the motto "The four-dimensional human being".

4. In the work of


HEB, Hans-Jürgen
9430 Schwarzenberg


the bars motive also appears (SCHN./73) but is again classified as "just playing".

5. "Fear" - a nightmare in red (loneliness) is what WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER call the work by

HIEPE, Bernd

5061 Erfurt



The back of the card has a sticker, under which not just the address of the creator appears but also the true title:

„In ~~dead~~^{red} space“ (!)

6. In the folder WESTERMANN, a card has been filed under the title "Put your stamp on the future" (invitation to an active engagement) that was mailed from the Railway Postal Station 1005 Berlin of the GDR capital.

Among others, it contains a stamp with the following text:

BIMA-MEET

FRG

GDR

Klaus Groh Robert Reha

Augustfehn


24 Feb 85

On the address side, signed with "Heartily R.R..." and also containing the remark: "Never can stop your ideas!", the stamp imprint of the outlines of a cow is shown that, at the place for the names of the various meat parts, contains names of persons of different national backgrounds who are probably members of an international (artist ? Mail Art?) group.

Here, too, the recipients WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER apparently did not see anything worth mentioning.

7. The card filed next to it, by

KIRVES, Dietmar



D-1000 Berlin (-West) 61

apparently contains a criticism of the sender about the motto of the exhibition. The hand drawn over it and the wordplay with the mission of the exhibition

DREAMS ARE NO ROOMS

ROOMS ARE NO DREAMS

DREAMS ARE CONFINED ROOMS

can hardly be interpreted otherwise. Of this, WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER make "Social criticism of restrictions (FRG)".

Assessment:

The "Mail-Art" exhibition "DREAM-CREATION" planned by the organizers WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER violates principles of cultural state policy of the GDR both by the way it was brought about and by the realization in content and form as can be assumed from the available materials, and it could therefore not be tolerated.

1. A concept of the contents in the sense of a socialist cultural policy is neither formulated nor recognizable.
2. The majority of the submissions by authors from the GDR do not meet the standards for socialist art, either formal-esthetically or in terms of content. A larger portion of them articulates criticism on phenomena of the social reality in the GDR in an absolute manner, spreads skepticism and pessimism for the future, tends towards dissolution in their form, if they are not banal or amateurish. These works provide a false picture of art in the GDR, especially of the graphic arts, and serve the expectations of a certain "scene". The great problems of humanity and of the socialist society in the GDR on its path toward the new millennium are not dealt with, aside from general-pacifistic "admonitions".
3. The immense second-largest group of submissions (probably in response to similarly strong "invitations") stems from "Mail-Art" authors from the FRG and Berlin-West. By statistics alone, this objectively supports the FRG thesis of a "uniform German nation" and a "uniform German culture. At the same time, the cultural agreement between the GDR and the FRG, which is being prepared, is undermined by "proving" with this project that an agreement between the two states is not at all necessary because the contact between creative artists, institutions, etc. of both states "works well after all" with appropriate "initiatives". Furthermore, a "precedent" would be created for the time after the coming into effect of the cultural agreement to interpret the points of the agreement "extensively" and to proceed just like WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER.
4. The similarity of the "social-critical" themes and statements of the "Mail-Art" works from the GDR and the capitalist industrial states leads to the impression - together with the to be assumed withholding of the fact that the submitting artists from the non-socialist world do indeed constitute a representative cross-section, while the GDR participants are the exact opposite, that is, a concentration of non-typical, more or less "system-critical" authors - that there is a "system-crossing" convergence between socialist and capitalist industrial states of negative phenomena in the life of the society (opposi-

tion between "mind and power", suppression, manipulation, endangerment of the peace by armament, egoism, fear of the future, isolation, alienation, unavoidable environmental catastrophe, etc.).

5. Finally, the superficial and thoughtless (?) or consciously disguising way in which the submissions were processed by the two organizers by means of their captions would lead to the effect that the exhibition visitors would have to apply the statements of Western submitting artists to their own, socialist reality.

The judicial appreciation of the activities by WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER is difficult.

As persons active in the state-cultural sphere, they must have been surely aware that establishing professional contacts to persons and institutions in the non-socialist world may only be done on expressive instructions, but usually only by the state institutions responsible for such. The fact that they had the submissions sent to their private addresses proves clearly that they were aware of this situation and committed the violation intentionally.

To what extent the required approvals had been obtained for the mechanically copied materials produced or ordered by WESTERMANN and SCHNEIDER, or whether they acted without approvals, the undersigned does not know. In case of an illegal production, the appropriate fine processes must definitely be carried out, and the highest possible sanctions must be imposed due to the significance of the actions.

When reading through the notes on the submissions, the impression was formed that some of the senders from the non-socialist world, especially from Berlin-West, are personally acquainted with WESTERMANN and/or SCHNEIDER, and that they might possibly be former GDR citizens. It should be checked to what degree these could be criminally relevant contacts, passing on of messages, or similar.

Objectively, the "Mail-Art Project" No. 1 represents an attack on the cultural and art politics of the GDR. With high probability, WESTERMANN or SCHNEIDER or both of them are pursuing this goal intentionally. In the undersigned's opinion, this subjective aspect cannot be proven in a judicial sense based on the presented material.

Werner Weber



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