

Beyond Borders: Artistic Internationalism in GDR

The artists participating in the exhibition talk about the works they have on display.

Maithu Bùì

“*Look out the window* encourages the viewer to abandon conventional ways of seeing things and to take a critical look at the layerings of time. How do places on either side of the window stand in relation to the present and future? My starting point is the Humboldt Forum and the former? Palace of the Republic. After the latter was demolished, its steel skeleton was recycled for the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. High up on Berlin’s TV Tower the Stasi tested photographic technology that could be used to identify people and car number plates. The cross of reflected sunlight known as the ‘Pope’s revenge’ gleams on the tower’s sphere, which is made of Krupp steel. A lot of Vietnamese contract labourers worked in the metal industry. Behind it is the former detention centre U-Haftanstalt II in what is today a complex of buildings housing the Berlin Senate Department for Education, Youth and Families. A deportation prison was built there after 1989. The East German armoury was located in Weißensee. Sea mines from the Second World War are still being recovered from the Baltic today. In front of the window is the Marx-Engels-Forum. Karl Marx went into exile in 1846 to escape censorship. Behind it, out of view, is Bebelplatz, one of the many places in Germany where books were burned in 1933.”

Mio Okido

“My silkscreen works *Die Märtyrer* (The Martyrs) are based on portraits of socialist activists and politicians who were murdered for their political convictions in the early 20th century. In East Germany they were revered as heroes of the communist resistance. Following the end of the GDR, these icons were preserved in a damaged, ‘imperfect’ state in the Federal Republic. I show these portraits folded over several times, deformed.”

Minh Duc Pham

“*Präsente: Für die Ewigkeit* (Presents: For Eternity) addresses questions of remembrance and legacy. The textile sculptures, made from East German fabrics, reference the textiles sector in which many Vietnamese contract labourers were employed and where they continued to work after reunification. Their contribution has remained largely invisible to this day. The ambiguity of textiles, whether as a medium of uniformity or an expression of self-empowerment, is likewise reflected in the artistic citation of the orchid.”

Su-Ran Sichling

“I’m concerned with practices of inclusion and exclusion, post-migrant communities, and the antithesis between the natural and the artificial. I question the historical fluctuations that have led people to perceive the world as having either evolved naturally or been artificially created. These perceptions apply to a variety of areas ranging from the writing of national histories and traditional cultural techniques to the use of building materials. In exploring this question I prefer to use materials that reference the history of building and design in the early decades of the post-war era. In my work these materials have not just a formal or aesthetic aspect but also an active, performative one, through which the subject of my work is often renegotiated in the material itself.”

Seiichi Furuya

Seiichi Furuya lived in East Berlin from 1985 to 1987. The photographs he took during this period are a rare trace of the eastern side of the divided city. They are also testimony of his own life in East Germany, where he lived with his wife, Christina Furuya-Gößler, and their son. In 1996, three book mock-ups were created in preparation for an artist’s publication that included chapters on Museums, Cultural Locations, Venues, Showpieces and Urban Landscapes, Street Scenes, Shop Windows and Buildings, Monuments, and Squares.