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The Artist's View: Museum Barberini shows East German art Over 100 works by some 80 artists from the GDR's whole history

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Behind the Mask: Artists in the GDR

October 29, 2017 to February 4, 2018

For its first exhibition built around its core collection of East German art, the Museum Barberini looks at how artists present themselves. The show illustrates the diversity of artistic self-affirmation and the room for creative maneuver in a state that gave artists political and educational functions and sought to regulate them. The exhibition not only explores specific ways in which art in the GDR drew on Western iconographic traditions; it also refrains from using political conditions as a springboard, focusing instead on the artist as an individual.

In the GDR, the fine arts were seen as supporting the state. Yet artists had their own ideas, defining roles for themselves that far exceeded this function. The Museum Barberini has dedicated *Behind the Mask: Artists in the GDR* to artistic personalities operating on the spectrum between acting out a public role and withdrawing into a private sphere, between producing within a prescribed collective and pursuing creative individuality.

Artists depict how they see themselves in self- and group portraits and in projections of role models. These genres have been handed down through Western art since the Renaissance, and East German artists likewise picked up on this tradition, as well as on the genre of studio painting. Alongside these time-honored motifs and themes, the exhibition traces an interest in the abstract as an artistic rebuttal of social relevance, and in the use of the artist's own body in performative works during the late 1980s.

There have been many exhibitions about GDR art since 1989. Most have shone the limelight on political aspects—from the thorny issue of state-commissioned art (Berlin, 1995) via a comparison of dictatorships (Weimar, 1999) to the potential for dissent (Berlin, 2016). After these political and sociological perspectives, *Behind the Mask: Artists in the GDR* considers how artists turned their critical gaze upon themselves, reflecting on their own way of seeing things and on their response to the tasks required of them, and identifying space for artistic creativity despite the official mission. This thematic approach shifts the focus away from sociological and ideological aspects toward the works themselves, but without decontextualizing the art.

Through this exhibition, the Museum Barberini has begun to investigate its collection of East German art, which still plays a marginal role in German art history. Building on in-house holdings, from which ten exhibits have been selected, the show brings together more than 100 works by about 80 artists (20 of them women), including paintings, photographs, prints, drawings, collage and sculpture.

The loans have been provided by a number of museums, galleries and private collections, among them the Lindenau Museum in Altenburg; the Nationalgalerie in Berlin; Brandenburg's Landesmuseum für moderne Kunst in Cottbus & Frankfurt (Oder); the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden; the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg in Halle; the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig; the Tübke Foundation in Leipzig, and Galerie Eigen + Art Leipzig/Berlin.

The selection includes works by Karl-Heinz Adler (*1927), Gerhard Altenbourg (1926–1989), Strawalde (Jürgen Böttcher) (*1931), Hartwig Ebersbach (*1940), Hermann Glöckner (1889–1987), Hans-Hendrik Grimmling (*1947), Ulrich Hachulla (*1943), Bernhard Heisig (1925–2011), Wolfgang Mattheuer (1927–2004), Harald Metzkes (*1929), Michael Morgner (*1942), A. R. Penck (1939–2017), Stefan Plenkens (*1945), Evelyn Richter (*1930), Arno Rink (*1940), Theodor Rosenhauer (1901–1996), Willi Sitte (1921–2013), Werner Tübke (1929–2004), Elisabeth Voigt (1893–1977), Dieter Weidenbach (*1945), Trak Wendisch (*1958) and the group Clara Mosch.

The curators are Valerie Hortolani and Michael Philipp.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog of about 270 pages published by Prestel Verlag. The catalog can be purchased for € 29.95 in the museum shop and for € 39.95 from the book trade. It contains essays by Valerie Hortolani, Museum Barberini, Potsdam; Petra Lange-Berndt, University of Hamburg; Michael Philipp, Museum Barberini, Potsdam; Carolin Quermann, Städtische Galerie Dresden, and Martin Schieder, University of Leipzig.

Parallel to the exhibition *Behind the Mask: Artists in the GDR*, the Museum Barberini is showing a documentary presentation entitled "Gallery from the Palace of the Republic". These 16 large-format paintings might be read as a testimony to the state policy guideline "Breadth and Diversity" issued in 1971. Against this backdrop of ostentatious officialdom, it is easier to appreciate the rich landscape of East German art that unfolded beyond this domain, and which can be viewed at the show *Behind the Mask*.

The Palace Gallery presentation is accompanied by a 96-page documentation with texts by Michael Philipp, Museum Barberini, available from the museum shop and from the book trade.

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