

Table of Contents

7 **Foreword**
Ortrud Westheider

8 **Are Communists Allowed to Dream?**
The Gallery of the Palace of the Republic

8 *Ideologically Compliant Yet Contemporary*
The Genesis of the Gallery of the Palace of the Republic

15 *Official Acceptance and Realist Consensus*
Selecting the Artists

22 *Instructions on Intellectual Enrichment*
The Making of the Works

29 *Antagonistic Compositions and Multiple Meanings*
Social and Art History in the Gallery of the Palace of the Republic

40 *Enthusiasm and Reservations*
Responses to the Gallery of the Palace of the Republic

47 *A Grand Gesture with Aesthetic Flaws*
The Gallery of the Palace of the Republic at the Zenith of State Art

56 **On the Works in the Gallery of the Palace of the Republic**

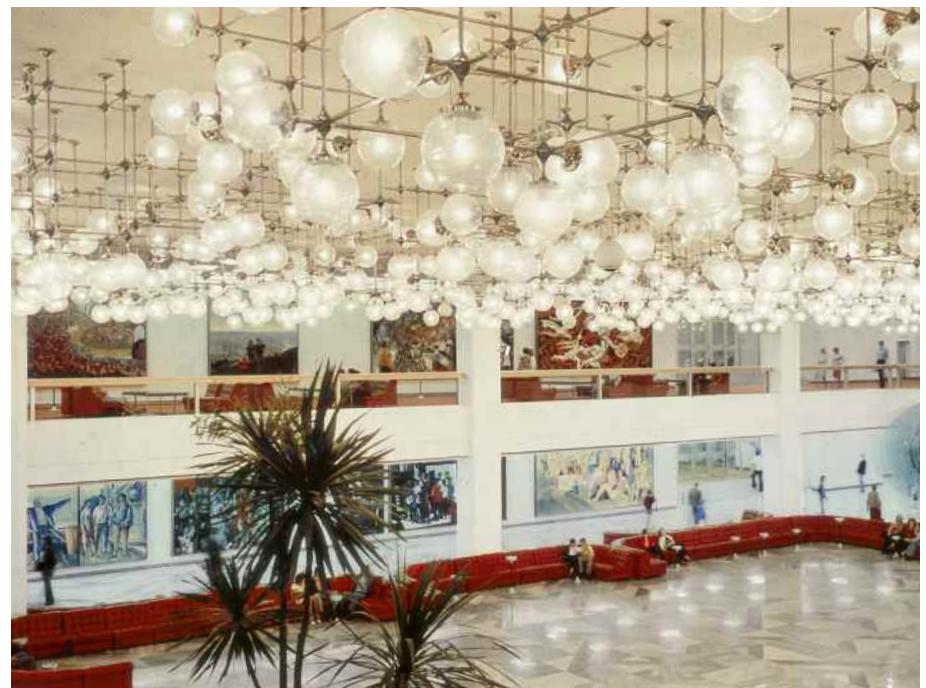
124 Selected Bibliography

128 Colophon and Image Credits



international recognition of the GDR as a state was achieved with the Basic Treaty agreed with the Federal Republic of Germany in December 1972, admission to the United Nations in September 1973, and the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in August 1975. The first time that GDR athletes competed at the Olympic Games as a national team was in Munich in 1972. At the same time, East-West confrontation was intense during the 1970s. The arms race, nuclear deterrence, and the threat of war characterized superpower politics. In Asia, Africa, and South America, there were proxy wars and other open or hidden interventions. From 1964 to 1975, the United States officially waged war in Vietnam; in 1973, it aided a military coup in Chile against the left-wing president Salvador Allende; and in Angola, the two superpowers supported rival forces in the civil war from 1974 onward.¹⁵⁹ The global dualism of the two rival systems also found expression in the GDR's revised 1968 constitution. The preamble declared "that US-led imperialism, with the tacit support of West German monopoly capital, divided Germany in order to establish West Germany as a base for imperialism and the struggle against socialism."¹⁶⁰

In the light of this hostility between the two sides, it is hardly surprising that the concepts for eight of the paintings—half of the works—made use of dualist principles. War and peace, past and future, reaction and progress, good and evil, imperialism and socialism—these antagonisms underlie the compositions either explicitly or implicitly. They appear in the historical guise of the sixteenth century, as with Werner Tübke, as timeless symbolism, as with René Graetz, or concealed in ornament, as with Lothar Zitzmann. Walter Womacka integrates the antagonistic forces into his work in the form of metaphorical jigsaw pieces. Real historical confrontations provide the painterly material for Willi Sitte, who portrays the labor movement in the first third of the twentieth century, and for Willi Neubert, with his "anti-imperialist" interpretation of the bombing of Dresden in World War II. Ronald Paris makes symbolic reference to the situation in Chile after the military coup of 1973. Matthias Wegehaupt juxtaposes two



conceptions of the world across eras, albeit unsubtly.

Tübke arranges good and evil vertically, with the ideal state depicted in the upper panels and the scourges of the world featured in the predella, whereas the other paintings adopt the conventional direction of reading from left to right, suggesting historical progression. On the left, which viewers usually look at first, there are monsters (Graetz), war (Neubert), persecution (Sitte), or torture and violence (Paris), and on the right, mother and child (Graetz), new humanity (Neubert), history's victors (Sitte), or international solidarity (Paris).

The imagined end of history, namely people existing peacefully together in communism, is depicted in several cases by a similar metaphor: nude men and women (Sitte), unclad mothers and children (Graetz and Neubert), undressed families lying on the ground picnicking (Wegehaupt), on the beach (Womacka), or by the camp fire (Paris). In Tübke's work too, the mother and child and the pair of lovers are wearing few clothes, if any. Whereas in Tübke's case the emphasis on the naked body can be attributed to the influence of mannerism, in the other depictions this lack of clothing in the imagined ideal world might be derived from a

9 Stairs to the main foyer, 1976

10 North wall of the main foyer, 1976

6 Willi Sitte (1921–2013)

The Red Flag—Struggle, Sorrow, and Triumph

(Die rote Fahne – Kampf, Leid und Sieg)

1976

Oil on hardboard

280 × 300 cm

Signed bottom left: W Sitte 75
Inv. no. L 95/232

Sources

Berlin 1977, 32–33
Graffunder/Beerbaum 1977, 46; figs. 28, 29
Halle 1981b, 5; WV G 72/2
(*Reflexionen*, preliminary study); G 74/8 (*Mutter Brosowski*, preliminary study); G 75/4
Raum 1981, 101, 103; 112, fig. (*Reflexionen*, preliminary study)
Berlin 1982b, 344, fig.
Kuhirt 1983, 147
Berlin 1986, 98–99, no. 39
(not exhibited)
Pfender 1993, 42–49
Guth 1995, 285
Hütt 1995, 42; fig. 32
Feist 1996b, 183–84; fig. 78
Weimar 1999, no. 506; fig. 241
Kaiser 2001, 144, note 15;
140, fig.
Sitte 2003, 225–27
Holfelder 2008, 157–58
Scholz 2009, 78–79
Winterleitner 2011, 61–67

Here Willi Sitte thematizes the most important symbol of the workers' revolution: the red flag. Against a uniformly dark red background, which resembles a flag, he places a cornucopia of individual motifs next to each other and on top of each other like so many dreamlike associations with no logical connection: There are portraits of communist figures, citations of his own paintings and art historical sources, scenes of torture, death, and grief, as well as nude figures striding forward. The convoluted and crowded composition, omnidirectional, expressive gestures, and forceful brushwork consciously avoid any kind of aesthetic or emotional harmony. The connections drawn between sensual physicality and historical tragedy, between ideological agitation and baroque pathos, create a provocative sense of unrest.

The red flag was omnipresent at parades, demonstrations, and memorials. It has also been the subject of many workers' songs since the end of the nineteenth century. For example, the lines "Carry it bravely in the morning / stained with combatants' blood / Liebknecht's flag, Thälmann's flag / Proud is he who inherits such a flag" appear in the "Song of the Red Flag," which was still in print in the Free German Youth's songbook in 1988.¹⁴ The German song "The Red Flag" contains the refrain: "Red is the cloth we unfurl / For the people's blood has stained it!".¹⁵ Rosa Luxemburg translated the Polish lyrics into German in 1905.

The painting's drama and suffering are grounded in this kind of combative rhetoric and memory culture. Sitte portrays Luxemburg and Liebknecht, murdered in January 1919, in the top left; below them is the Communist Party of Germany chairman Ernst Thälmann, who was murdered in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944. Above an animal skull—a symbol of the hereafter since Hieronymus Bosch¹⁶—is the Communist International functionary Georgi Dimitrov, author of an influential theory on fascism. A museum in the former Reich courthouse in Leipzig was dedicated to him in 1952. In 1933, he defended himself successfully

in the Reichstag fire trial. The books going up in flames also recall the book burnings that took place in the year the Nazis seized power. Both Dimitrov's portrait and the hand with outspread fingers in the top left reference works by John Heartfield.¹⁷

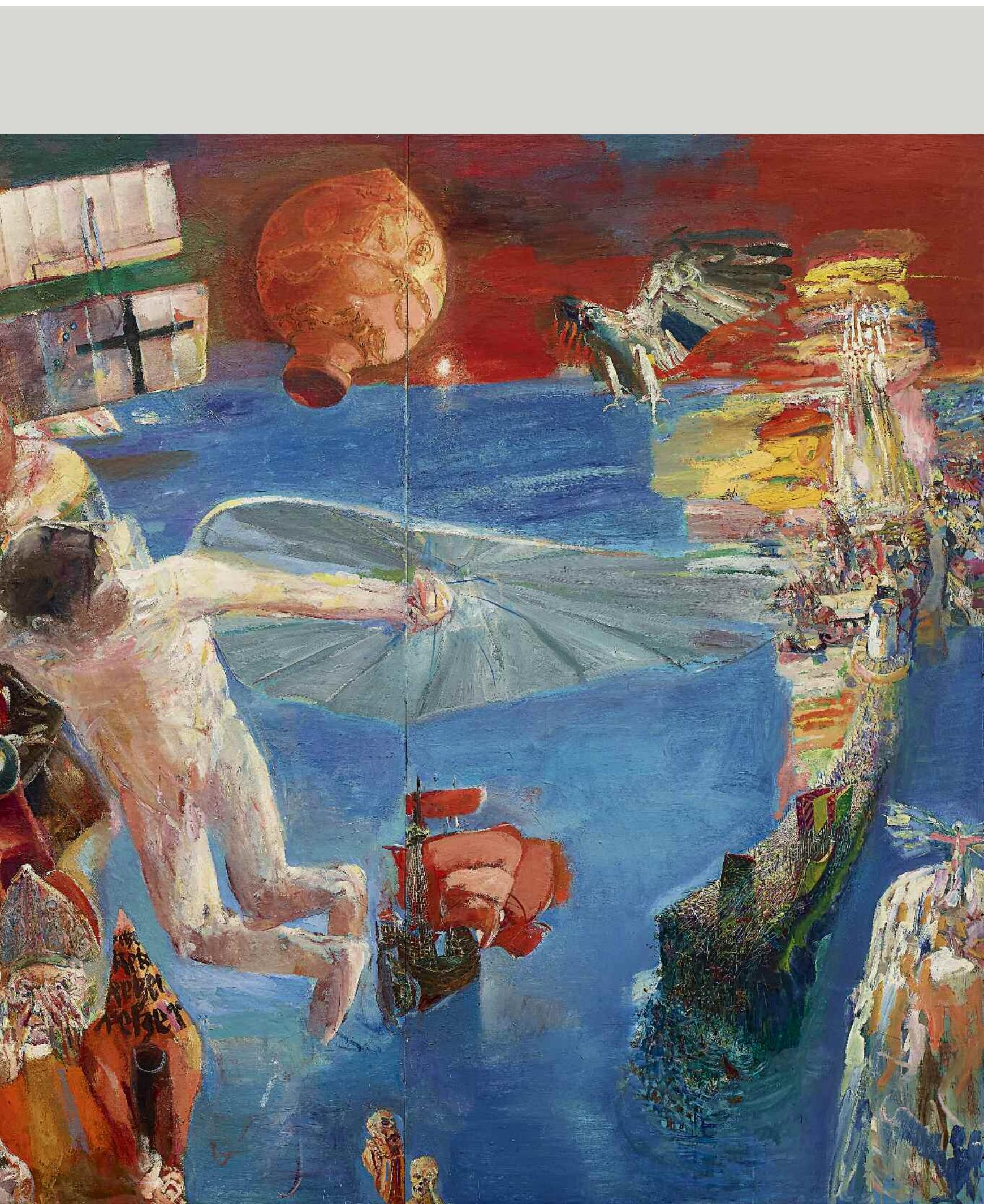
The tortured figures invoke such images of Christ as the corpse Andrea Mantegna reveres from a striking perspective in his *Lamentation of Christ* (circa 1490, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan). The horse's head near the top edge may reference one of the animals ridden by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse as depicted by both Albrecht Dürer in his engraving shortly before 1500, and by Arnold Böcklin in his 1896 painting *The War* (Der Krieg, Albertinum/Galerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden). Sitte had recently painted a horse's head as a symbol of war in *Everyone Has the Right to Life and Freedom* (Jeder Mensch hat das Recht auf Leben und Freiheit, Albertinum/Galerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden). This was his exploration of the Vietnam War, which was still raging at the time. The tortured figure in *The Red Flag* is a self-reference to the center panel of that triptych. Another self-reference can be found in the left-hand edge of the painting: a detail from the 1964 work *The Caller II* (Der Rufer II, fig. p. 29), a programmatic work of socialist realism.

Whereas the citations and the historical elements can be arranged into a narrative, the figures appear to be striding forth out of the picture with no apparent motivation. The numerous muscular arms signal dynamism and strength, but their destination remains unclear. It is also difficult to interpret the meaning of the female figure turning to leave on the right side of the painting. The bouquet of flowers in her hand—a gesture of thanks that is as common as it is banal—seems inappropriate. In formal terms, Sitte's complex painting may be in keeping with the times, but as a political allegory, his composition is unconvincing.



Bernhard Heisig: *Icarus (Ikarus)*





10 Wolfgang Mattheuer (1927–2004)

Good Day (Guten Tag)

1975

Oil on hardboard
280 × 281 cm

Signed bottom left, on the tree
trunk: W. Mattheuer 75
Inv.-Nr. L 95/246

Sources
Adler 1976

Graffunder/Beerbaum 1977,
49; figs. 34, 36

Schönemann 1978, 13, 42
Kuhirt 1983, 149

Schönemann 1988, 72–73;
plate 67

Pfender 1993, 61–67
Guth 1995, 286

Mann/Schütrumpf 1995,
253–56

Feist 1996b, 184–85;
fig. 79

Mattheuer-Neustädter 1997, 87

Pfender 1998, 80–81

Kaiser 2001, 140, fig.
Held 2002, 27–28

Schönemann 2007

Holfelder 2008, 51

Scholz 2009, 81

Winterleitner 2011, 78–84

Hertel 2014, 156–65; plate 14

Rostock 2017, 216–19

In characteristically clear pictorial language, Wolfgang Mattheuer depicts an everyday scene. A young family strolls on a green hillside above a city on a spring day. The man's arm is linked with his wife's as he raises his other hand to greet the viewer, while the child rushes forward. But the simple, apparently peaceful setting is in fact shot through with disturbing elements: The parents wear tense expressions, an old man stares at them from the other side of a fence, the flowers are fenced in, and the vast city below is engulfed in the haze of factory chimneys. The scene can hardly be taken for the embodiment of the comfort and safety of socialist society—nor is it a celebration of industrial progress. This ambiguity is characteristic of Mattheuer's art, which derives its impact from the contradiction between the apparently naïve directness of recorded observation—a style evocative of new objectivity—and the symbolic charge of semantic pictorial elements that convey further layers of meaning.

Mattheuer had already developed the main outlines of the composition in his 1973 woodcut *People on a Walk* (*Die Spaziergänger*): the viewer's raised perspective, the forward movement of the pair, and the division of the picture plane into three horizontal bands. In this painting, he adds further elements, some of which draw on motifs from other earlier works. The boy with his bow and arrow recalls Mattheuer's 1973 painting *Richard the Indian* (*Richard, der Indianer, location unknown*). The man behind the picket fence repeats the figure from the 1971 work *Elderly Comrade at a Fence* (*Alter Genosse am Zaun, Hamburger Kunsthalle*). There, too, he represented despondency, parochialism, and resignation.

In his depiction of the boy rushing forward, the strolling adults, and the stationary old man, Mattheuer evokes the "ages of man" motif, popular since the renaissance and exemplified in Caspar David Friedrich's 1834 painting *The Stages of Life* (*Die Lebensstufen*, Museum of Fine Arts, Leipzig). There are also formal parallels with Friedrich's works, for example the use of different degrees of luminosity in the

foreground and the background, which contributes to the separation of the foreground and background.³¹ Like Friedrich, Mattheuer draws on a palette of pale colors in soft tones and strongly demarcates the horizon line. The broad expanse of the sky modulates from brilliant blue to a pale, yellowish white. And as in Friedrich, a certain element of the unknown is added to reality. This poetic elevation seems to express a longing for something that lies in a distant realm.

Because of these similarities, some of Mattheuer's works were presented alongside an exhibition marking the two-hundredth anniversary of Friedrich's birth at the Albertinum in Dresden in the winter of 1974—around the same time he was working on the painting for the Palace of the Republic. Mattheuer paid homage to his predecessor in a number of paintings, including the 1975 work *Oh, Caspar David... (Mined Out Coal Pit)* (*Oh, Caspar David... [Ausgekohlter Tagebau]*, BEB Erdgas and Erdöl GmbH, Hannover). A dead wasteland spreads out before the viewer in that painting, and the trunk of a mighty oak in its foreground resembles the one depicted in Friedrich's *Village Landscape in Morning Light (The Lone Tree)* (*Dorflandschaft bei Morgenbeleuchtung [Einsamer Baum]*) of 1822.

If Friedrich's painting was about reuniting man with nature, treating the landscape as a surface on which to project the search for higher meaning, Mattheuer's landscape depicts the experience of tangible loss. One of his central themes was the serious environmental damage caused by the forced industrialization that started in the 1960s. He also addresses this topic in his commission for the Palace of the Republic.³² The city has encroached deep into the surrounding plane, the sulfur yellow smog threatens suffocation, and the contrail of an airplane lacerates the sky. A mine in the middle distance has left a wound in the earth, while there is a dead tree on the ground on the left. Such references make even clearer the ironic undertone of the title, *Good Day*.³³



11 Walter Womacka (1925–2010)

When Communists Dream...

(Wenn Kommunisten träumen...)

1975

Oil on hardboard
280 × 552 cm

Signed at bottom, right of center: Womacka 75
Inv.-Nr. L 95/247

Sources
Kuhirt 1976b

Schumann 1976, 265, 275–76
Berlin 1977, 41–42

Graffunder/Beerbaum 1977,
48–49; figs. 37, 39

Hütt 1980, 76–80; figs. 86
(detail), 88, 89 (detail),
90 (detail)

Jähner 1981, 151; 160, fig.
(preparatory study)

Kuhirt 1983, 149; fig. 199
Damus 1991, 272–73

Pfender 1993, 35–42

Feist 1996b, 181–82; fig. 75
Pfender 1998, 78–79; 76–77, fig.

Weimar 1999, no. 511; p. 456;
fig. 246

Kaiser 2001, 142; 140–41, fig.
Womacka 2004, 230–32

Scholz 2009, 81–82

Winterleitner 2011, 85–89

Helas/Rambow/Rössl 2014,
77–80, 88

Walter Womacka was the only painter to directly address the theme proposed by Fritz Cremer in the Palace of the Republic commission. In doing so, he played down the skeptical tone of the original question—whether communists are allowed to dream—answering it in the affirmative, and even portraying what might come into a communist's mind while dreaming. This approach corresponded to Womacka's personal approval of socialism and of the GDR. The painter brought together a plethora of scenes, pictorial citations, and details to form a complex image that encompasses artistic, historical, political, and private moments, for the young communist in Womacka's composition also dreams of the pleasures of a family. Formally, the graphic and sculptural approach involved new elements for Womacka, who until this point had pursued a more decorative formal vocabulary. While other artists maintained their personal styles in their commissions for the Palace of the Republic, Womacka used the project to experiment with a new style.

A half circle representing the globe spans the breadth of the picture and indeed covers it almost entirely. Blue areas represent the oceans, dark blue the cosmos. Innumerable free-floating figures and motifs in different scales are scattered across the composition, loosely delineated from one another by sections of red, ochre, gray, and blue. The intensity and degree of brightness of the individual hues highlight the different moods of the respective scenes. Slightly off center sits a young worker, supporting his right arm on the helmet on his knee in a pose that recalls August Rodin's *Thinker* of 1880–82 (Musée Rodin, Paris). The pose, generally understood as embodying thoughtful melancholy, has been transformed here into a stance of strength and rigor. The hand shows resolve; the lifted head expresses confidence. This worker, like Wolfram Schubert's farmer (cat. 15), represents an entire class. He is envisioning the past, the future, the full sweep of art and technology, his political duty, and his private happiness. One aspect of how citizens of the GDR saw themselves was as heirs to the humanist traditions of the past,³⁴ symbolized here by the classical column as well

as by the mythological figure of Icarus—also depicted by Bernhard Heisig (cat. 7). Here, the fist holding the snake in the foreground quotes not only the ancient *Laocoön Group* (Vatican Museum, Rome) but also represents the threat to peace more generally. Fascism at least, symbolized by the rusted-over Wehrmacht helmet at the worker's feet, has been overcome. By using the very top of the half circle to cite the Marianne figure from Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* of 1830 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), Womacka establishes a link to the July Revolution in France. To the left is a sketch of the gun turret of the *Aurora*, the Russian battleship that on October 25, 1917 fired a blank shot at the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg—and gave the starting signal for the October Revolution.³⁵

While historical allusions take up about two-thirds of the painting, a smaller portion of the image refers to the present. The control room of a factory and the model of a molecule represent progress and faith in the ability to dominate nature. The likeness of astronaut Yuri Gagarin evokes the Soviet Union's April 1961 triumph of sending the first man into space. This was a crucial moment for the self-esteem of socialist countries, and Womacka had already referred to it in 1962 in *Man and the Cosmos* (Mensch und Kosmos), a window he designed for the Humboldt University in Berlin.³⁶

In addition to alluding to these technical achievements, however, Womacka's painting also depicts private happiness, particularly in the scene of a family bathed in golden light at the beach. The depiction of family intimacy, often in the nude, was one of the few motifs deemed fit to embody the communist utopia; the painters Ronald Paris (cat. 8) and Matthias Wegehaupt (cat. 9) drew on the same barely convincing allegory. Reading the picture from left to right and arriving, finally, at the right of the half circle, the viewer finds a naked child intended to embody the innocence and curiosity of the next generation. The child is shown examining a beetle in his hand—an element that lends the painting a kitschy note.

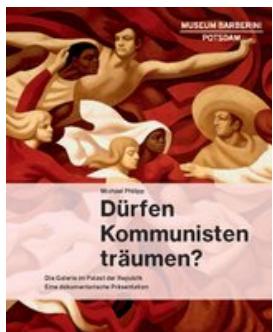


Lothar Zitzmann: *Song of World Youth (Weltjugendlied)*





UNVERKÄUFLICHE LESEPROBE

Michael Philipp**Dürfen Kommunisten träumen?**

Die Galerie im Palast der Republik

Gebundenes Buch, Pappband, 128 Seiten, 24,0 x 30,0 cm

59 farbige Abbildungen

ISBN: 978-3-7913-5746-1

Prestel

Erscheinungstermin: Dezember 2017

Selbstverständnis und Selbstrepräsentation der DDR

Der Palast der Republik, von 1976 bis 1990 Sitz des Parlaments und repräsentatives Kulturhaus der DDR, präsentierte in seiner zentralen Halle ein Ensemble von 16 großformatigen Gemälden, die so genannte Palast-Galerie. Sie stand unter dem denkwürdigen Thema „Dürfen Kommunisten träumen?“.

Das vorliegende Buch untersucht, wie die Auswahl der Künstler, darunter Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, Willi Sitte, Werner Tübke und Hans Vent erfolgte, welche Themen sie behandelten und wie die Galerie wahrgenommen wurde. Wie kam es zu der so vielschichtigen Themenstellung? Wie versuchte der Staat, seine Interessen durchzusetzen und gelang es ihm?

Zeitgenossen haben die Palast-Galerie als repräsentativen Höhepunkt der DDR-Malerei angesehen. Tatsächlich stand sie im Zenit der offiziellen Kunspolitik: Nur ein halbes Jahr nach der Eröffnung des Palasts der Republik beschleunigte sich nach der Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns die Erosion des Staates.

 **Der Titel im Katalog**