

RWR CHAPTER 3 - WHETHER NATURE OVERREACH ITSELF WHEN IT TOOK ON MANKIND? - ART RADIO-TRANSMISSIONS TO EARTHLINGS

Original Archive Sound

This is Apollo 8 coming to you live.

Oh my God. Look at that picture over - the earth coming up. Wow, damn pretty.

Female voice

What did 36-year-old Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt think as she and millions of others watched the emerald-glimmering earth rise behind the moon for the first time on Christmas Day in 1968?

Original Archive Sound

Can I get a colour film, Jim!?

F

"This grand oasis in the big vastness of space", as one of the astronauts of Apollo 8 put it.

Original Archive Sound

Just grab me a colour film!

Male Voice

Well, I suppose it's quite possible that the inquisitive artist and philosopher, watching these breathtaking images on West German television, began to contemplate the role of the blue planet within the universe and the significance of the humans inhabiting it.

F

Well, as a visual being this first snapshot of the earth must have fascinated her immensely.

Original Archive Sound

Oh man, that's great. Hand me colour film. Quick!

M

At the end of the 60s, this image became an icon for the young environmental movement, a symbol of the fragility of earth. So why shouldn't it be the same for Ruth?

F

Well, how else can we explain why she created her piece 'Artmosphere' just a short time later? A symbol of the earth, written on a typewriter, like a crystal ball, fragile enough to shatter.

M

Exactly. Artmosphere with A.R.T. the earth is surrounded by a sphere of the beautiful, the true and the good...Perhaps Ruth believed that artists were better at protecting nature and climate!? That protecting this planet is one of humankind's arts, perhaps even its highest art form!?

F

Yes, she believed that people like her are needed to make a difference and raise awareness for the climate. With art postcards for example, sent into the world as a wake-up call for humanity.

M

'Save Nature' is what she calls a collage of a photographed hand, shaped like a cave, into which a small drawn tree seem to tumble. Simple and straightforward.

F

As a citizen of East Germany, which was only half the size of West Germany but emitted twice as much sulphur dioxide, perhaps Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt had an inkling that it might be a close call. Or why is there an apocalyptic piece of paper with typewriter art entitled 'Evolution' in her archive from 1972?

M

Nature.....
nature and men,
men end nature,
men end men.... nature

F

Wolf-Rehfeldts works are square, minimalist, and straightforward, but never trivial. The visionary insight that war is the greatest killer of the climate was already reflected in her work in the 1970s, which was shaped by the conflict between East and West.

M

This is why Wolf-Rehfeldt repeatedly weaves the words 'Frieden' and peace – into her organically growing wave patterns on white, sometimes on blue or pale red paper.

F

Did the artist already know at that time that waves would someday be declared the heartbeat of evolution? That one could find wave patterns, even hear music in all vital processes?

M

Probably. Waves, lazy waves, radio waves, water waves, motion waves are several of Ruth's motifs and expressions... Well, some also see history as a kind of wave movement.

F

Hmmm history in waves – that was too far-fetched for Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt.

Original Archive Sound 1989 GDR demonstration

Wir sind das Volk

F

After the fall of the Wall and the shift from socialism to capitalism, she promptly pulled the ripcord. And she stopped making art forever. After all, Ruth was able to experience growth in her own garden in the north of Berlin. Totally organic, not like a business plan dictated for everyone.

Original Archive Sound Helmut Kohl, 1990

No one knows what a reunited Germany will look like. But I'm sure there'll be a reunification.

M

One of her typed lines read: "Be aware not to be a ware!", by which she warned of becoming a commodity.

F

And what does the 91-year-old Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, who nowadays rarely speaks in public, think today when she watches contemporary television - 33 years after the reunification and 54 years after the spectacular Apollo mission? When she sees activists next to open-cast diggers just waiting to rip the next resource from the earth?

M

Surely she would say, as she has done so often, that we should act more from nature's perspective. And maybe she thinks she chose the wrong shape for one of her typewritings many years ago!?

F

You mean the text sculpture in A4 format in the shape of a question mark: DID NATURE OVERREACH ITSELF WHEN IT TOOK ON MANKIND?

M

Yes, this prophetic observation "DID NATURE OVERREACH ITSELF WHEN IT TOOK ON MANKIND?" is no longer a rhetorical question but a fact, a sad fact with an exclamation mark. Don't you agree?

F

I think it already has the right shape. Ruth Wolf-Rehlfeldt indeed typed her prophetic question as an oversized question mark. But if you look more closely, you'll see that it's made up of many, many exclamation marks! Unfortunately.

But a woman who makes works of art like 'piece by piece', 'try and error', 'forgotten unforgotten', 'past present future', will always see a spark of light and hope for everything that lies ahead on this unique planet earth, won't she?

Original Archive Sound

And from the crew of Apollo 8 we close with good night, good luck and God bless all of you all of you on the good earth.