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**CURATED BY  
KITO NEDO**

**06.09.2025 –  
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**WOHNKOMPLEX**

# **WOHNKOMPLEX: ART AND LIFE IN PLATTENBAU**

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The *Plattenbau* (prefabricated building) was originally at the heart of GDR social policy as a place of planned socialist collectivization of daily life. After the end of the GDR in 1990, its image changed: the once-new housing developments in East German cities often became sites of painful transformations, emblematic of social decline and racist violence. As modern ruins, many buildings awaited demolition, were renovated, or repurposed—yet the *Plattenbau* never became a monument; it has remained a living presence.

The exhibition asks how artists engage with this model of building and living: How are large-scale, standardized housing developments represented in art between the 1970s and the present? The exhibition doesn't merely consider the *Plattenbau* as a form of architectural heritage, but also as a space of cultural resonance that raises questions about belonging, community, and conflict.

The works in the first room address central themes of the exhibition, such as (collective) memory and the subjective appropriation of anonymous urban space. In Markus Draper's *Grauzone* [Gray Zone], the *Plattenbau* becomes a hiding place—literally for underground RAF-members, symbolically for the shadows of German-German history. Wolfram Ebersbach and Gisela Kurkhaus-Müller explore the individual appropriation of the *Neubau* façade, where the balcony becomes an expression of lived autonomy within a grid of uniformity. Sabine Moritz draws on "collective living memory" through recollections of her childhood in Jena-Lobeda; Seiichi Furuya's photographs are created "against forgetting," as fragments of memory and documents of a time gone by. Structural change is made visible in Robert Seidel's painting of an empty *Platte* (2011) set in a desolate landscape. Manfred Butzmann's *Baustelle im Zentrum* [Construction Site in City Center] (1986) illustrates that prefabricated buildings had, by the 1980s, become part of

everyday life not only on the outskirts of the city, but also increasingly in city centers. The seemingly anonymous order of rationalized forms of industrial housing construction is critically examined in both the typographic art of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt as well as Stephen Willats' text-photo work *A Walk in Marzahn. Berlin* (1992/93), which focuses on personal gestures in urban space. Signs of political radicalization and escapism were literally "on the wall"—which is also the theme of Henrike Naumann's installation *Triangular Stories (Amnesia & Terror)* (2012).

## Markus Draper

(\*1969 Görlitz, lives in Berlin)

*Grauzone* [Gray Zone], 2015

*Zeitungsmeldungen* [Newspaper Reports], 2015

*Grauzone* [Gray Zone] (2015) is the title of an installation in which the artist Markus Draper recreated seven residential buildings in model form. In the 1980s, ten (former) RAF members lived under new identities in *Plattenbau*-style apartment blocks in Senftenberg, Neubrandenburg, Frankfurt/Oder, Magdeburg, Berlin-Marzahn, and Schwedt, having gone underground in 1980 with the help of the GDR's Stasi (state police). In June 1990, they were arrested by East German criminal investigators. "The GDR *Platte* is, of course, a cliché," Draper says. "But the RAF is equally clichéd. You could say that I've used a Western cliché to shed light on an Eastern one."<sup>1</sup> Adopting a binary perspective on the history of a divided Germany is deceptive. Things are often more intertwined than one might think. This ambivalence is also suggested in his work *Zeitungsmeldungen* [Newspaper Reports]. Draper studied painting at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden from 1991 to 1996. From 1998 to 2000, he was a master-class student of professor Ralf Kerbach.

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1 "A discussion between Jennifer Allen and Markus Draper," in Markus Draper, *Inge Goes to Work on Foot*, exh. cat. Kulturhistorisches Museum Görlitz, Leipzig (2016), pp. 14–20, here p. 18.

## Sabine Moritz

(\*1969 Quedlinburg, lives in Cologne)

*Lobeda*, 1991–1994

*Bushaltestelle* [Bus Stop], 1992

*Fahnenstangen mit Schule* [Flagpoles with School], 1992

*Versammlungsraum* [Conference Room], 1992

*Wohnzimmer* [Living Room], 1992

*Zuhauseblock mit Stadtplan* [Homeblock with City Map], 1992

*Zuhauseblock* [Homeblock], 1992

Sabine Moritz's drawings and paintings from the early 1990s sharply articulate the relationship between architecture, urban space, and individual memory. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, while studying first at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach and later at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, the artist drew the Jena-Lobeda housing estate from memory—the area where she had lived as a child until the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> In 1985, her family moved from East to West Germany after submitting an application for an exit visa. The series comprises more than 150 drawings on DIN A3 and DIN A2 paper. Both the drawings and the paintings created during the same period offer an unsentimental view of a childhood place. "The strikingly simple spatial quality of the prefabricated buildings initially seemed easy to deal with formally," Moritz later said about the process. "That suited my desire for structure and stability—clear lines, clear forms, clear spaces. Almost everything else emerged from this basic cube form."<sup>3</sup> The paintings can be read as attempts not only to remember, but also to reflect on the very act of remembering.

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2 See Sabine Moritz, *Lobeda* (London: Heni Publishing, 2021), p. 302.

3 Hans Ulrich Obrist, ed., *Sabine Moritz: Jena Düsseldorf* (London: Heni Publishing, 2021), p. 41.

## **Wolfram Ebersbach**

**(\*1943 Zwickau, lives in Leipzig and Wurzen)**

*Hausfassade* [Building Facade], 1974

"The city is my subject," says painter Wolfram Ebersbach, who studied from 1966 to 1971 at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig and later taught there for fifteen years. *Hausfassade* [Building Facade], painted in 1974, is among the artist's best-known works. The depiction of the repetitive structure of a modernist *Neubau* balcony facade becomes a meditation on painting itself. Within this architectural image, questions of perspective, spatial depth, and the nuanced modulations of gray and white tones are explored through painterly means. The strict architectural grid seems to dissolve, not least because of the differentiated tonal values. Here and there, residents can be seen behind the parapets; various types of sunshades, plants, and antennas contribute to the individualization of the balconies. Ebersbach chooses a detail that reveals neither sky nor street—these elements are only hinted at through colored reflections in the windowpanes. The overhead wires of a streetcar suggest a location along a main road, as do the capital letters filling a window in the lower quadrant of the painting.

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## **Gisela Kurkhaus-Müller**

**(\*1938 Koszalin, lives in Berlin)**

*Marzahn*, 1982

In September 1978, Springpfuhlstraße in Berlin-Marzahn was renamed "Allee der Kosmonauten" to honor the cosmonauts Valery Bykovsky and Sigmund Jähn. At the time of the renaming, the first *Neubau* apartments along the street were ready for occupancy. With around 58,200 apartments<sup>4</sup> and approximately 150,000 new residents,<sup>5</sup> Marzahn grew into the largest newly built residential complex in the GDR. The name of the street appears twice on a kind of way-finding system, alongside other information, in the lower right-hand quadrant of Gisela Kurkhaus-Müller's offset, color lithograph. The artist, who has lived in Berlin since 1965, studied with Wolfgang Mattheuer at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig from 1958 to 1963. The print shows six balconies, each distinguished by individual design elements like "antique" wagon wheels, floral or brick-patterned wall coverings, different arrangements of plants, or a clothesline. One could only marvel at "the imagination and courage of the tenants," the architectural sociologist Bruno Flierl remarked at the time, in response to the diverse aesthetic adaptations of the balconies. Flierl argued that the phenomenon should not be ridiculed, but rather taken seriously as a subjective form of architectural critique.

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<sup>4</sup> See Nico Grunze, *Ostdeutsche Großwohnsiedlungen: Entwicklungen und Perspektiven* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017), p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> See Simone Hain, "Marzahn, das sozialistische Projekt zwischen rational choice und Diktatur," in Ylva Queisser and Lidia Tirri, *Allee der Kosmonauten: Einblicke und Ausblicke aus der Platte* (Kulturring in Berlin e. V., 2005), pp. 9–13, here p. 9.

## Seiichi Furuya

**(\*1950 Izu, Shizuoka Prefecture, lives in Graz)**

*Juli 1985, Berlin-Ost: Apartment in Falkenberger Chaussee*

[July 1985, Berlin-East: Apartment in Falkenberger Chaussee], 1985

*Plattenbaufotografien, TV-Fotografien und (Küchen-)Interieurs*

1985–87 [Plattenbau Photographs, TV-Photographs and (Kitchen)

Interiors 1985–87], 2025

Loss and memory emerge as central themes in the work of Seiichi Furuya. Between 1984 and 1987, Furuya lived in the GDR, working as a translator for a Japanese building consortium—first in Dresden and later in Berlin. In 1985, his wife Christine Furuya-Göbler took her life in East Berlin after a long illness. In 1987, two years after the death of his wife, Furuya returned to Graz with his son. Years later, Furuya explained in an interview that he was only taking photographs for himself. “Against forgetting. Because when I think back and there is a gap in my memory, I get an uneasy feeling. That’s why I need to document my life. I feel this is my most urgent task.”<sup>6</sup> The artist resists linear narratives. In books and exhibitions, Furuya continually presents images from his archive in shifting constellations. For the exhibition in Potsdam, the photographer selected nearly 300 photographs of *Plattenbauten*, interiors, and “TV screenshots” from his time in Dresden and East Berlin. These will be projected in a continuously changing, randomly ordered sequence.

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6 Quoted from, “Herr Furuya und das Ende der DDR,” *DER SPIEGEL*, July 12, 2012, <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/ost-berlin-fotos-seiichi-furuya-und-die-ddr-a-947640.html> (accessed May 2025).

## Manfred Butzmann

**(\*1942 Potsdam, lives in Potsdam-Bornim)**

*Gekachelter Durchgang* [Tiled Passageway], 1982 (Print 1985)

*Baustelle im Zentrum* [Construction Site in City Center], 1986

*Plattenbauten* were not only built on the “greenfield” outskirts of cities, but also in city centers, as illustrated by the aquatint print *Baustelle im Zentrum* [Construction Site in City Center] from Manfred Butzmann’s series *Steinernes Berlin* [Stony Berlin]. The graphic artist was born in 1942 in Potsdam and has been deeply engaged with urban redevelopment, housing issues, and environmental degradation in his home region for decades. He studied graphic arts at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee and was a master-class student at the former Akademie der Künste der DDR in Berlin, studying with artists including Arno Mohr, Werner Klemke, and Klaus Wittkugel. Through their depictions of ruins, scorched facades, and buildings slated for demolition, his comprehensive graphic work not only alludes to the disappearance of old Berlin and Potsdam but also illustrates the inescapable presence of new GDR architecture in the form of *Plattenbauten*, rendered in razor-sharp, figurative architectural drawings, as in his 1982 work *Gekachelter Durchgang* [Tiled Passageway].

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**Robert Seidel**  
**(\*1983 Grimma, lives in Leipzig)**

*Platte*, 2011

The *Platte* (2011) by Robert Seidel stands empty and abandoned in an abstracted landscape. Shades of gray, green, and sand dominate the painting. Two trees can be discerned on either side of the center, which the painter had seemingly first placed in front of the building and then allowed to disappear over the course of painting. The result is a ghostly atmosphere. The search for the entrance to the structure proves futile—the building imparts a sense of flatness rather than spatial depth. What kind of house is this? “Looking back, I would say that the painting *Platte* conveys a feeling of youth in a small East German town,” Seidel explains. “There is little on offer, and you have to initiate things yourself.” Born in Grimma in 1983, Seidel studied under Neo Rauch at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig. Driven by a desire to focus on what is close at hand, his early work explores the architectural textures of small Saxon towns. His interest lies not in the straightforward depiction of houses, villages, or small towns, but in the artistic penetration of his subjects and their interrelationships.

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**Henrike Naumann**  
**(\*1984 Zwickau, lives in Berlin)**

*Triangular Stories (Amnesia & Terror)*, 2012

An early photograph of the right-wing terrorist Beate Zschäpe from the early 1990s served as the speculative point of departure for Henrike Naumann's installation *Triangular Stories (Amnesia & Terror)* (2012). The work transports viewers back to the year 1992, a time when a wave of racist pogroms in cities such as Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen shook German society. These acts of violence were applauded by segments of the population and tolerated by the police and authorities. Rather than confronting the far-right riots with a decisive stand against right-wing extremism, political leaders responded by tightening asylum laws. At the center of the installation are two staged home videos. One depicts scenes from the lives of a young neo-Nazi clique—the so-called “Generation Terror.” The other shows three teenagers caught in an escapist party frenzy on the island of Ibiza. How are these two narratives connected? “*I explore the question,*” Naumann writes in an early project statement, “*of where the innocence of three young neo-Nazis ends—and where the responsibility of apolitical hedonists begins.*” The shock of the events themselves—and of how the state and society responded—continues to resonate to this day.

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7 Henrike Naumann, *Triangular Stories: Szenenbild, Found Footage und die Ruinen der Postmoderne*, Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf Potsdam-Babelsberg, 2012.

## Stephen Willats

(\*1943 London, lives in London)

*A Walk in Marzahn. Berlin*, June 1992 – January 1993

In 1979–80, the London artist Stephen Willats participated in the DAAD Artist Program in Berlin. His path led him to the high-rise housing estates of the Märkisches Viertel and Gropiusstadt, where he created photomontages based on his work and conversations with residents. In 1992, he returned to Berlin and created *A Walk in Marzahn. Berlin*. Willats took two walks through the new development of Marzahn. The first time, he photographed the buildings he passed; the second time, he focused on the signs and symbols he discovered on the same buildings. *A Walk in Marzahn. Berlin* consists of eleven panels arranged in a linear sequence: "The work is structured between the anonymous order of the planned environment and the personal, through public signs and messages stated by people directly, onto the surface outface of its buildings".<sup>8</sup> One panel shows a swastika. 1992, the year of Willats's walks, was also the year that GDR contract worker Nguyễn Văn Tú was murdered by a neo-Nazi in Marzahn, and the year of the racist pogroms in Rostock-Lichtenhagen. This period is now referred to as the "baseball bat years," a time when right-wing violence was widespread and a dominant right-wing youth culture was able to establish itself, including in new housing developments.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Willats, *Häuser und Menschen: Buildings and People: Berlin 1979–1993*, exh. cat., Berlinische Galerie, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1993), p. 43.

## Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt

(1932 Wurzen – 2024 Berlin-Buch)

*Concrete Architecture ,Dead End'*, 1975

*Concrete Architecture ,Dead End'*, 1975

*Hausbau* [House Construction], n. d.

*Untitled (Concrete Architecture)*, 1978

*Kuben, Kästen, Käfige* [Cubes, Boxes, Cages], 1979

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt experimented with the transformation of language into image. She used the typewriter as an artistic means of production and, starting in 1972, began creating her so-called typewritings, including the work shown here. In her typewriter drawings with architectural references, the artist explores the urbanization and economization of the environment and the resulting alienation of humanity.

Even in her early "typewritings" Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt used punctuation marks, special characters, and letters to depict forms like "cubes," "boxes," and "cages." In the work shown here, entitled *Kuben, Kästen, Käfige* [Cubes, Boxes, Cages] (1979), the typewriter characters coalesce into a grid-like arrangement that recalls housing blocks from a bird's-eye view. In their uniformity and confinement, the blocks evoke associations with cages. Themes of entrapment or imprisonment are also present in other works by the artist, such as *In Sich Gefangen* [Trapped Within Itself] (1973).

UT

# TRACES, TRANSFORMATION, PROJECTION

In the second exhibition space, artistic documents from the early period of industrial construction in the GDR encounter recent discussions on the heritage of East German large-scale housing developments. In his paintings from the early 1970s, such as *Durchgang in Halle-Neustadt* [Passageway in Halle-Neustadt] (1971), Uwe Pfeifer portrays everyday life in the emerging Neustadt (new town) as a social study infused with poetry and objectivity. Similarly, Sibylle Bergemann's photo series *P2* (1981/2017) and Kurt Dornis's *Zweite Schicht* [Second Shift] (1986) document "modern life" in the *Plattenbau*—with the pass-through kitchen as a symbol of the progressive household—though what they reveal often speaks more to unequal burdens and a settling into everyday life than the dawn of a new era. Peter Herrmann and Harald Metzkes link depictions of newly constructed brutalist grid architecture in rural surroundings with humor and surrealist elements.

The spirit of "awakening and renewal" and the "promise of modernity" that Wenke Seemann sees in her father's photographs from the construction of new development areas in Rostock is contrasted in her photo-essay film *Plattenbaugeschichten* (2022) with her own memories of growing up there in the 1990s. Sebastian Jung's large-format mural *Ost-Schrei* [East Scream] (2025) processes the psychological traces of the post-reunification period in expressive images oscillating between rage, fear, and speechlessness. In a more reduced visual language, his *Abstraktionen* [Abstractions] (2015) explore the spatial organization of the neighborhood. Both

Christian Thielke and Manfred Pernice address the transformation and demolition of residential complexes after 1990, using the motif of abandoned playgrounds as a shared symbol.

With a keen eye for what is otherwise overlooked, Sonya Schönberger and Nathalie Valeska Schüler evoke the silent traces of those once present by revealing physical inscriptions in the building material of the *Plattenbau* from the time of their construction. Karl-Heinz Adler's reliefs reflect an aesthetic in which the force of modern ideals becomes visible. Finally, Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani cast the new housing estate in *Klub 2000 – rom, paris, marzahn* (1998) as an ironic utopian site of projection for youth-cultural longing: two ravers wander through Marzahn in search of the club of the future.

Behind the curtain in the second exhibition space, you'll find our LOGGIA — a space where books and short films offer deeper insight into the exhibition's themes, and the view of the city invites you to linger.

## Sebastian Jung

(\*1987 Jena, lives in Leipzig)

*Abstraktionen* [Abstractions], 2015

*Ost-Schrei* [East Scream], 2025

*Ost-Schrei* [East Scream] (2025) by Sebastian Jung presents a series of heads, each with gaping holes where eyes and mouths would normally be. The aesthetic oscillates between Edvard Munch's emotional urgency and Andy Warhol's Pop Art silkscreens. In addition to art history, the titles of the works seem to refer to emotional conditions in the East today. Through these heads, painted with gouache and acrylic on woodchip, inner states are fixed in imagery: mute, unheard screams that could be coming from a *Plattenbau* apartment. At the same time, the heads also function as templates, resembling cut-out models, patterns, or schematic representations. How can one break free from this? The series of seven mid-sized charcoal drawings entitled *Abstraktionen* [Abstractions] (2015) serves as a spatial-sociological counterpart to the heads. In these drawings, Jung, who grew up in Jena-Winzerla in the early 1990s, suggests the airy geometry of large housing estates. The straight lines divide the picture plane like sharp cuts, creating spatial impressions with minimal means.

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## Uwe Pfeifer

(\*1947 Halle, lives in Halle)

*Durchgang in Halle-Neustadt* [Passageway in Halle-Neustadt], 1971

*Beton und Steine* [Concrete and Stones], 1972

*Häuser am Abend* [Buildings at Dusk], 1972

*Nächtliche Szene* [Night Scene], 1972

*Antennendach* [Roof with Antennae], 1973

*Bei Vollmond* [Full Moon], 1973

*Betonfassade* [Concrete Facade], 1973/90

*Fußgängertunnel* [Pedestrian Tunnel], 1973

*Morgennebel* [Morning Mist], 1973

*Poetischer Moment* [Poetic Moment], 1973

*Schöner Abend* [Lovely Evening], 1973

*Wäscheleine im Nebel* [Clothesline in the Fog], 1973

*Kinderfasching im Neubauviertel* [Children's Carnival in the Neubau district], 1976

Uwe Pfeifer's paintings of the new housing development Halle-Neustadt—where he lived for an extended period in the 1970s—stand in the tradition of New Objectivity and Critical Realism. Pfeifer studied in the late 1960s and early 1970s under Werner Tübke and Wolfgang Mattheuer at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig. His oil painting *Durchgang in Halle-Neustadt* [Passageway in Halle-Neustadt] (1971) appears representative of his engagement with life in the large-scale residential complex—a typical block passageway in a new housing estate leads to the heart of the development. The painting depicts a deserted street scene in the satellite city, which was apparently planned primarily as a residential area for commuters. The residents have already left the neighborhood in the morning for work and return only in the evening after their jobs and shopping. Easy-to-care-for, resilient houseplants stand in the curtained windows. Pfeifer not only

painted the newly constructed architecture, but also created psychologically charged images that allude to the social dynamics of the socialist urban environment.

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**Peter Herrmann**

**(\*1937 Großschönau, lives in Berlin)**

*Kühe vor dem neuen Tor* [Cows in Front of the New Gate], 1979

Three cows graze on a hilly field; a massive *Plattenbau* looms in the background, roughly outlined through simple geometric brushstrokes. Peter Herrmann's painting *Kühe vor dem neuen Tor* [Cows in Front of the New Gate] (1979) juxtaposes rural idyll with the austere grid architecture of socialist urban planning. Born in 1937 in Großschönau, the painter lived for around forty years in Dresden, where he helped shape a counterculture to the official art of the GDR alongside artists like A. R. Penck and Peter Graf. "There were often cows lying on the Elbe meadows, and behind them . . . new buildings had been erected," Hermann recalls. In *Kühe vor dem neuen Tor* [Cows in Front of the New Gate], he captured a moment of profound transformation: since the 1970s, new large-scale housing estates were built on the outskirts of East German cities like Halle, Berlin, and Dresden on land that had previously been used for agriculture as a response to the housing shortage after World War II. Industrialized housing construction thus quite literally encroached upon established landscapes; the boundary between city and countryside began to blur. Herrmann responded with laconic humor: "you stood before it like a cow in front of a new gate," referencing a German proverb. His ironic title gives the painting a dual meaning that oscillates between wit and melancholy.

LB

## Kurt Dornis

(\*1930 Glogau/Schlesien, lives in Leipzig)

*Zweite Schicht* [Second Shift], 1986

Kurt Dornis's painting *Zweite Schicht* (*Second Shift*, 1986) is structured like a stage. From the living room, the viewer's gaze is drawn through a serving hatch into a small kitchen, where a woman is bent over the sink. A glossy black pot sits on the stove beside her. On either side, opaque textured glass panes form a kind of frame around the quiet scene, which lacks strong contrasts. In the foreground, a round table covered with a floral-patterned tablecloth is visible. The curved Biedermeier aesthetic of a chair's backrest contrasts with the modern functionalism of the interior. Even in the "socialist household," traditional gender roles often remained unchanged—despite the equality enshrined in the 1949 GDR constitution and women's participation in the workforce. As a result, women were frequently faced with a "second shift" after returning home, as they were still primarily responsible for the household, family, and children.

KN

## Karl-Heinz Adler

(1927 Remtengrün/Vogtland – 2018 Dresden)

*Reihung mit unterschiedlichen seriellen Elementen eines variablen Systems* [Sequence with Different Serial Elements of a Variable System], 1970/82

A central element of the GDR's cultural heritage is art in public spaces. Mosaics, murals, and plastics adorned many public buildings—including the facades of *Plattenbauten*. A notable feature of the GDR's art-in-architecture production were the so-called *Formsteine* (moulded stones), which began appearing in (landscape) architecture from the early 1970s onward. These geometric, abstract modules served as an extension of the predominantly figurative building-related art. They could be combined in various ways and were used, for example, as partition walls or ornamental facade elements. The modular *Formstein* system was developed by the artist Karl-Heinz Adler. Together with Friedrich Kracht, he designed a system of modular forms for sculptural wall design, which went into serial production in 1972 and was used in more than one hundred building projects. The two painters and graphic artists worked at the intersection of fine art and applied art and are considered important representatives of concrete art in (East) Germany. Their *Formstein* structures fused the aesthetics of concrete art with the principles of industrial housing construction—creating a visual language that shaped both the urban landscape and the everyday experience of life in large housing estates. The exhibited work *Reihung mit unterschiedlichen seriellen Elementen eines variablen Systems* [Sequence with Different Serial Elements of a Variable System] (1970/82) by Karl-Heinz Adler illustrates this central design principle: new constellations continually emerge from just a few geometric base forms through systematic variation—theoretically capable of endless repetition. This

serial thinking, grounded in a deep understanding of form, rhythm, and space—and developed by Adler during his apprenticeship as a pattern designer at a carpet company before beginning his art studies—pervades his entire artistic oeuvre, from early paper collages and intricate graphic works to sculptural reliefs.

LB

## **Manfred Pernice**

**(\*1963 Hildesheim, lives in Berlin)**

*Ohne Titel (hässliche Luise)* [Untitled („ugly Luise“)], 2004

The remains of a demolished playground, which Manfred Pernice used as *objets trouvés* for his installation *Ohne Titel (hässliche Luise)* [Untitled „ugly Luise“] (2004), tell a story of demolition that leads right into the heart of the new Berlin after reunification. Through the gesture of exhibiting them, these found objects—originally destined for disposal—are granted sculptural attention. In the early 1990s, the German Bundestag in Bonn decided that Berlin would become the future seat of parliament and government, with the move scheduled for the end of the decade. Several new buildings were planned around the former Reichstag in Berlin-Mitte, including the Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus of the federal parliament, which was intended to form the conclusion of the so-called Band des Bundes (Federal Ribbon). However, the plans of chancellery architects Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank were obstructed by a GDR-era prefabricated housing complex with 162 apartments, completed in 1990. After only fourteen years, it was torn down in 2004. Before the demolition, there had been a public debate about its pros and cons, as well as protests from tenants. Over several months, Manfred Pernice observed the demolition, photographed its slow disappearance, conducted interviews with residents, and collected found objects from the ruins. At the turn of the year 2004–05, he installed the exhibition *hässliche Luise* at Berlin's Galerie Neu, not far from the demolition site.

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## Sonya Schönberger

(\*1975 Dernbach, lives in Berlin)

Neu-Hohenschönhausen, 1987, 2018/25

In the summer of 2017, Berlin-based artist Sonya Schönberger conducted twenty-five interviews with residents of a twenty-story high-rise in Neu-Hohenschönhausen, the last large housing estate built in the GDR, completed in 1989. The interview material formed the basis for the book *Zingster Straße 25*, published in 2018 as part of the series *Berliner Hefte zu Geschichte und Gegenwart der Stadt*. Schönberger was inspired by Irina Liebmann's book *Berliner Mietshaus* (1982), in which residents of old buildings in Prenzlauer Berg dreamed of "living in total comfort." Thirty years after the high-rise was built, the artist wanted to know what life on the city's periphery had become. Parallel to her interview project, Schönberger began making casts of shoe and paw prints in the original concrete paving slabs of the "Ostseeviiertel," a housing area built between 1984 and 1988. As part of this search for traces, she created small relief-like sculptures that resemble archaeological finds—remnants of a long-past "inscription and occupation of space." They recall the concrete gestures of the city's first inhabitants.

KN

## Sibylle Bergemann

(1941 Berlin – 2010 near Gransee)

P2 (Berlin-Lichtenberg, Wohnzimmer eines Häuserblocks)

[P2 (Berlin-Lichtenberg, Apartment Block Living Room)], 1981/2017

The abbreviation "P2" refers to a series of apartment buildings developed in the early 1960s by an architectural collective at the Deutsche Bauakademie in Berlin. This building type marked the triumph of the passthrough kitchen. Efficient like a galley kitchen, it was seen as an attribute of the man who cooks and as a symbol of the progressive household, Simone Hain writes. The floor plan, which did not separate the kitchen from the living space, was intended to soften traditional gender roles. "Around the turn of the 1960s, the growing employment of women in the GDR meant that many everyday functions like childcare, prepping warm meals during the week, or the weekly laundry could increasingly be outsourced to facilities within the residential complex."<sup>9</sup> This futuristic enthusiasm is barely palpable in the ten-part photo series *P2 Berlin-Lichtenberg, Wohnzimmer eines Häuserblocks* [Berlin-Lichtenberg, Apartment Block Living Room], which photographer Sibylle Bergemann created between 1974 and 1981. The series depicts various living rooms in the same housing block. The uniformly uninhabited interiors suggest a lived-in quality, perhaps even an "arrival in everyday life." Somewhere along the way, the modernist zeal of the 1960s seems to have dissipated. Since 1967, Bergemann has worked as an independent photographer in Berlin, producing reportage, fashion, and portrait series for magazines in the former GDR like *Sonntag* and *Sibylle*.

KH

9 Simone Hain, *P2, "leben – neues wohnen,"* in *ibid.*, and Susanne Hopf and Natalja Meier, *Plattenbau privat. 60 Interieurs* (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhd, 2004), pp. 6–9.

**Wenke Seemann**

**(\*1978 Rostock, lives in Berlin)**

»*Plattenbaugeschichten. Eine assoziative Recherche*«, aus:

*Archivdialoge #1 – Bauplan Zukunft*

[“Plattenbaugeschichten: An Associative Research”, from:

*Archive Dialogs #1 – Building Plan for the Future*], 2022

When the Berlin artist and social scientist Wenke Seemann came across a trove of outtakes and negatives in her photographer father’s estate documenting the creation of the *Neubaugebiete* (new residential developments) Lichtenhagen and Groß Klein during the 1970s and 1980s in northwestern Rostock, she was moved in a way that she hadn’t experienced before: “In these images, I saw something for the first time that I had never associated with East German *Plattenbau* housing estates: a spirit of rupture and renewal, a promise of modernity for my parents’ generation.” Her father’s photographs served as the starting point for an artistic investigation that led to the creation of her workgroup *Archivdialoge #1 – Bauplan Zukunft* [Archive Dialogs #1 – Building Plan for the Future], to which the photo-film *Plattenbaugeschichten. Eine assoziative Recherche* [Plattenbaugeschichten: An Associative Research] also belongs, and, most recently, the book *Utopie auf Platte*. Seemann’s archival practice should be understood as a process, Kerstin Follenius writes: “A process of displacement, overwriting, deconstruction—not of facts, but of facticity; not of objects, but of objectivity.”<sup>10</sup> In engaging with her father’s photographic archive, which offers a comprehensive portrait of the large-scale housing developments in Rostock, Seemann transforms the photographs through a process of artistic appropriation: “What was stored and preserved is reactivated, layered, and translated. The visual strata of space—that is, of the *Plattenbau* areas in

Rostock and other East German cities—are laid bare, the simultaneity of histories made visible.”<sup>11</sup>

KH

10 Kerstin Follenius, *Wenke Seemann - Utopie auf Platte*, <https://www.bierke.de/wenke-seemann-utopie-auf-platte/>.

11 Ibid.

**Nathalie Valeska Schüler**  
**(\*1995 Weimar, lives in Leipzig)**

*Aufriss II* [Layout II], 2024

Nathalie Valeska Schüler's *Aufriss II* [Layout II] (2024) explores sociopolitical realities and their (in)visibility within society through shifts in perspective, as well as analyses of form, structure, and material. At the center of the work is the GDR *Plattenbau* type PH16 (a 16-story point-block high-rise), as realized, among other places, in the large housing estate in Leipzig-Grünau. The artist describes the piece as "a formal approach to both architecture and sociological questions surrounding life in *Plattenbauten* in the GDR and today." In an assemblage-like composition, Schüler combines various material and symbolic layers. The photographic component presents an enlarged detail of panel joints made from Morinol, an asbestos-containing sealant. Fingerprints left in the material by construction workers become subtle traces of bodily labor. These marks form the backdrop for a second layer: the artist translates the mass production of the building's prefabricated components into a 3D printing process, assembling miniature model elements made of PLA plastic into a grid-like facade.

*Aufriss II* is part of an ongoing photographic engagement with a PH16 high-rise on Stuttgarter Allee in Leipzig-Grünau, which began in 2018. Here, the *Plattenbau* is seen as a cipher of both utopia and failure. What meaning does it hold in the present as a relic of the unfulfilled—caught between social attribution and individual experience? Having grown up in a prefabricated building in Erfurt, Schüler fuses artistic research with a (self-)reflective examination of origin, social milieu, and memory.

LB

**Harald Metzkes**  
**(\*1929 Bautzen, lives in Wegendorf near Berlin)**

*Aufbau von Marzahn* [Building Marzahn], 1984

From mud and mire, apartment blocks rise up, seemingly organically connected to the earth. The rubble heaps of the construction sites are still piled high, and above it all, the sky gleams gray-blue. A peculiarly fractured form of optimism speaks from the painting *Aufbau von Marzahn* [Building Marzahn] (1984) by Harald Metzkes: while the background is dominated by the concrete Brutalism of the Marzahn large housing estate, a surreal group in the foreground performs acrobatic pranks. The high-rises in the background lose their Brutalist dominance through Metzke's refined painting technique and his humorous take on verism. At the center of the image sits a well-behaved white dog, gazing out at the dreamlike scene, with the towering prefabricated buildings of this new part of Berlin. Nature, architecture, and people meld into a single entity, satirically alluding to the painter's critique of actually existing socialism and the individual search for creativity and freedom. Harald Metzkes was born on January 23, 1929, in Bautzen. He trained as a stonemason and studied painting at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts. From 1955 to 1958, he was a master-class student at the German Academy of Arts in Berlin under Otto Nagel.

KH

**Christian Thielke**  
**(\*1973 East Berlin, lives in Berlin)**

*Gerüst* [Jungle Gym], 2019

*Kaufhalle* [Supermarket], 2020

Overgrown and nestled in a birch grove, the climbing frame in Christian Thielke's painting *Gerüst* [Jungle Gym] (2019) stands like a forgotten relic. The boarded-up windows of the vacant *Kaufhalle* [Supermarket] (2020), with its characteristic VT folding roof, are covered in graffiti. Born in East Berlin in 1973, Thielke explores the processes of transformation in East Germany after 1989 through painting. He reflects on the social consequences of reunification in figurative, large-format works that depict abandoned architecture, reshaped ruins, and desolate urban spaces. As a student at the Kunsthochschule Weißensee, he experienced firsthand the upheavals of reunification, as well as the societal and urban changes that swept through Berlin. The ruinous collapse and entanglement of history and the present resonate thematically in this series of paintings, which he created around 2020. The work *Kaufhalle*, in particular, suggests a desolate state of abandonment and overgrowth, showing architecture in a process of decay and surrender. These are images of modern ruins with a post-socialist feel—places that evoke a peculiar sense of unease. What's going on here? Where are these places? Only a lone wolf roams around the *Kaufhalle*, its windows boarded up with wooden planks, as if reclaiming the urban space for itself.

KH

**Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani**  
**(\*1965 Emden, Nina Fischer, \*1966 Duisburg,**  
**Maroan el Sani, live in Berlin)**

*Klub 2000 – rom, paris, marzahn*, 1998

The 16-millimeter film installation *Klub 2000 – rom, paris, marzahn* (1998) by Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani explores the prefabricated housing estate as a site of youthful cultural longing. In the twelve-minute black-and-white film, two bored ravers—DJ Poge and his girlfriend Dani—drive their VW bus toward Marzahn on a Monday morning after a dull night out in Berlin-Mitte, searching for a new and exciting club venue in Germany's largest *Plattenbau* district. The periphery becomes a space of the future—the dormitory town turns into a canvas for their desires. But although Marzahn appears as newly discovered territory, the vision of a "Club 2000" remains vague and seems to falter at a moment where "two pioneers are one too many."

With *Klub 2000*—one of the key works from Fischer and el Sani's early joint practice—the artist duo captures the zeitgeist of the late 1990s, on the cusp of a new millennium, when Berlin was in flux and brimming with possibilities. The photo showing the words "Klub 2000" in the window of a prefab building in Marzahn—which also appears on the cover of the book of the same name—becomes a symbol of a hopeful vision: a city beyond old boundaries, open to new networks and narratives. At the same time, the film references real developments. In retrospect, the imagined nightlife on the city's outskirts no longer seems like pure fiction, but rather an early reflection on the displacement processes that have unfolded in Berlin's inner-city neighborhoods ever since.

LB

The catalog *Wohnkomplex* includes the complete glossary of essential terms related to the “*Platte*” complex, compiled by art historian Juliane Richter.

### **Industrial Construction**

A concept for organizing the construction process like a factory—essentially manufacturing housing on an assembly line. In 1955, the first Building Conference marked the start of a widespread industrialization and standardization of construction in the GDR. → The Prefabricated Building Method was considered a future model for fully mechanized housing construction; experimental buildings and research at the Building Academy served to further develop this concept. The core principles were prefabrication in Prefab Factories, flow production, assembly on site, and organization of the construction process in a so-called industrial production line system. A dense network of prefab factories produced over 80% of the building components (for prefab and block construction) needed for housing in the GDR.

### **Inner-City Prefab Building**

The name occasionally used today to refer to a variation of prefab building in the GDR (other names include “old town prefab building” or “adapted prefab building”) developed from the mid-1970s onwards to reconstruct or expand historic city centers. The goal was to alleviate the housing shortage while simultaneously preserving the cities’ historic appearance. Prefabricated building panels were designed with architectural elements such as bay windows, arches, and gables to blend harmoniously into the historic cityscape. One specific challenge was adapting the industrial construction method to the floor plans, which were frequently complex,

small lots between buildings, and established old town structures. Generally, a modified version of the WBS-70 system was used for this purpose. In GDR jargon, this was often referred to as “complex reconstruction” or “replacement construction.” Often, however, these terms concealed the fact that old buildings were demolished to make way for new prefab buildings.

### **New Development Area/ Large-Scale Housing Development**

In the GDR, large-scale industrially built residential areas with multi-story apartment buildings were referred to as new development areas. The largest of these areas (apart from Halle-Neustadt, which was a new and separate city) were: Marzahn, Hellersdorf, and Lichtenberg in Berlin; Grünau in Leipzig; the Chemnitz Fritz-Heckert area; the new development areas in Rostock; and Schwerin Dreesch I to III. They were often built on a city's outskirts and in conjunction with industrial site development, were functionally autonomous, and often consisted of several → Residential Complexes and one or more community centers. A centralized land policy facilitated the planning and construction of these development areas, so they were usually larger than in West Germany and were also found in many small cities. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the reference is to the large-scale housing developments (with 2,500 or more apartments) or “relief towns,” such as Munich-Neuperlach, Cologne-Chorweiler, and the Märkisches Viertel in Berlin.

### **Prefabricated Building (Method)**

A technology for assembling residential buildings from industrially prefabricated, floor-to-ceiling panels. This prefabrication-based principle in housing construction, which later led to the prefabricated building method via stages such as (large) block construction,

concrete strip construction, and cast-in-place concrete panels, has its origins in England and France at the end of the nineteenth century, later followed by New York. In Germany, this construction method was first used on a larger scale in the “New Frankfurt” housing projects in Frankfurt am Main from 1925 onwards; technically, it still involved block and strip construction. The first prefab housing project was built in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde beginning in 1926. In the GDR, prefabricated construction was in use since the 1950s. Entire walls and ceilings were produced in specialized factories, transported to the construction site, and assembled there. The term “prefab building” looks back on an astonishing career—even though it is technically imprecise. The correct term would be “(large) section construction,” because the construction of these buildings is based on large-scale sections that are assembled into the desired shape on site as walls and ceilings. Panels, on the other hand, are components that are primarily subjected to bending stress (“ceiling panels”). Together, these sections form a static system that can be described as a “prismatic folding structure”—a technical-poetic term for the simple, geometric forms.

The term “Plattenbau” (prefab building) was used among experts in the GDR, but rarely in everyday language (at that time, people tended to speak of “new apartment buildings”). The word only entered common usage after 1990—and often carried a derogatory undertone. The “Platte” became a symbol of monotonous → Residential Complexes, social decline, and “architecture without architects,” as the magazine ARCH+ titled it in 1990. This stigma still resonates today. The criticism, however, ignores the original idea behind prefab technology, which was to make affordable and comfortable housing available to many. The construction method was also implemented in the Federal Republic of Germany; known as “system construction,” it reached a peak in 1974, when 9% of apartment buildings were built using prefab construction.

## Residential Complex

A residential complex was a basic urban planning element of GDR housing construction, realized both in urban outskirts and in the inner city. It served as the smallest planning unit of socialist urban development and was designed to meet the daily needs of its residents. The basis for this “functional supply unit” was the school commuting radius (developed area of 5,000–6,000 residents). The residential complex was developed to service a city area and equipped with apartments as well as “social facilities” such as supermarkets and department stores, restaurants, schools, various services, and cultural and recreational facilities. The larger a → New Development Area, the more residential complexes it contained.

## WBS 70

From the 1970s onwards, the Housing Construction Series 70 (originally “Housing Construction System 70”) was the standard system for industrial housing construction using → Prefabricated Panels in the GDR. The goal was efficient production with fewer components, standardized floor plans, and a catalogue of uniform types that could be used throughout the GDR and that replaced all previous series (P1, P2, QP). In reality, up until the GDR was dismantled, various series and block construction methods were in use. Over the years, the WBS 70 was further developed to include variants for greater building depth, gap closure, and adapted solutions for the → Inner-City Prefab Buildings.

## Wohnkomplex: Art and Life in Plattenbau

DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam  
September 6, 2025 – February 8, 2026

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