

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

PRESS RELEASE

RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT

Nichts Neues

February 11 – May 7, 2023

In spring 2023, DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam will present the retrospective *Nichts Neues*, devoted to the artist Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt (*1932 in Wurzen) and her artistic life's work between 1960 and 1990. The exhibition examines Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewritings, print graphics, collages, and paintings in three thematic episodes that open new perspectives on the artist's oeuvre.

The first episode, "Many Open Questions," is dedicated to tracing and overcoming physical, cognitive, and systemic boundaries. "Whether Nature Overreached Itself When It Took on Mankind" is the point of departure for the second episode. Topics like environmental destruction, environmentalism, and the relation between human and nature appear repeatedly in the artist's work. Wolf-Rehfeldt intensively dealt with socially relevant topics, such as information technology, feminism, interhuman relations, and the effects of the Cold War. The final episode asks the question "Where Do You Stand?" and invites viewers to reflect upon their own perspectives and beliefs.

Wolf-Rehfeldt began to write her first poems in the early 1960s and created pastels, drawings, and paintings as a self-taught artist. Her typewriter graphics, which she calls "typewritings," were preceded by a long-term and intensive exploration of image, script, and language. Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's first typewritings were created in 1972. The typewriter became her artistic means of production. She experimented with the image formation of language and laid the foundation for her concrete poetry. In a manuscript entitled *Signs Fiction*, the artist explained how for her, pre-existing signs became the building blocks of fictive signs by conferring words and alphabetic symbols with new meaning. The qualities of the alphabet became material for her visual compositions. Wolf-Rehfeldt thereby used signs beyond their linguistic meaning and in her typewritings gradually developed her own formal language.

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Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt was engaged with a vast network of international artists known as the Mail Art movement. She and her partner, Robert Rehfeldt, were pioneers within the GDR of a type of artistic exchange that allowed for the uncensored circulation of art and ideas.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Wolf-Rehfeldt stopped making work altogether. Her newly found geographical freedom had fundamentally altered the function of making and distributing art.

The exhibition is curated by Paola Malavassi and Marie Gerbaulet.

Parallel to the exhibition at DAS MINSK, Kunstraum Potsdam opens the exhibition *Kunst ist, wenn sie trotzdem entsteht* (Art is When it Happens Anyway) in collaboration with The Mail Art Archive of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt. The exhibition features works by Robert Rehfeldt and from the couple's joint archive.

Further information: www.kunstraumpotsdam.de

PROGRAM PREVIEW

June 3 – August 20, 2023

Collection presentation

The summer exhibition shows a selection of works from the former GDR that are part of the Hasso Plattner Collection.

September 16, 2023 – February 4, 2024

Louis Armstrong

Curated by Paola Malavassi and Jason Moran

The exhibition focuses on the legendary concert tour that led jazz musician Louis Armstrong through the GDR in 1965.

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We would be happy to assist you if you need further information or images.

Further Information

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Max-Planck-Straße 17
14473 Potsdam

www.dasminsk.de
Instagram: @dasminsk

OPENING HOURS

Wednesday–Monday: 10 am–7 pm
Closed on Tuesday

ADMISSION

10 Euros, 8 Euros concession
Combined ticket 20 Euros, 12 Euros concession

The combined ticket is valid for the Museum Barberini and DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam

VISITOR SERVICE

+49 331 236014-699
besucherservice@dasminsk.de

The MINSK team is always happy to receive contact from contemporary witnesses of the former terrace restaurant "Minsk" by mail or e-mail: zeiten@dasminsk.de.

DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam is a project of the Hasso Plattner Foundation. The goal of the Hasso Plattner Foundation is to promote the digitalization of scholarship and education, to improve access to art and culture, and to support the preservation of the environment.

www.plattnerfoundation.org

As of: Potsdam, February 9, 2023

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PROGRAM

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NICHTS NEUES

Nichts Neues. Nothing new? Really nothing new since 1990? When it comes to Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's oeuvre, the "old" is always current and renegotiated with each generation.

In 1990, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt (*1932 in Wurzen) stopped working artistically—uncompromising, like her work itself. When an artist is so far ahead of her time, then it's only logical to stop producing when she chooses, knowing that everything has been said and remains valid. It was the unusual decision of an artist who equally defied the constraints of the art world and the art market. An artist who worked on her typewriter with diligence, humor, ease, and an enviable distance from her own creations. An artist who went her own way and whose work has so much potential to inspire artists of generations to come.

The exhibition *Nichts Neues* follows the words of the artist. Her works show the way. Her work titles therefore comprise the topics and titles for the three exhibition episodes. Through examining the content of the works, we would like to ascertain which pressing questions moved the artist to sit down at the typewriter and begin typing, line by line. The first episode "Many Open Questions" concentrates on the tracing and overcoming of physical, cognitive, and systemic boundaries. The question "Whether Nature Overreached Itself When it Took on Mankind" is the point of departure the second episode, which presciently interrogates anthropocentrism and addresses environmental destruction and conservation. Based on pressing social issues like war and peace, interpersonal relationships, and information technologies, the last episode poses the question "Where Do You Stand?" thereby inviting reflection upon one's own standpoint and convictions.

The title of this exhibition, *Nichts Neues*, also comes from the artist herself. When she was asked to produce something "new" for an exhibition in 2018, she, quick-witted and full of irony, had a stamp made with the inscription "Nichts Neues"; not a new work, therefore, but a logical confirmation of her own decision to never produce anything new, and simultaneously a challenge to the visitor to be active themselves and stamp "Nichts Neues" on a blank card. So, nothing new? No way!

Paola Malavassi, director DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam

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A CONCEPTUAL ARTIST ON THE TYPEWRITER

Wolf-Rehfeldt taught herself typing as a teenager, before beginning an apprenticeship as an industrial clerk in 1947. She subsequently moved to Berlin in the early 1950s to do her *abitur* at the Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Fakultät (ABF) at Humboldt University and studied philosophy there for a year. Several years later, she took a position in the exhibition department of the Academy of Arts in Berlin as an office assistant. In Berlin, she met her future husband Robert Rehfeldt, who would later help to open the first contacts to the Mail Art network, in which Wolf-Rehfeldt participated intensively from 1974.

Wolf-Rehfeldt began to write her first poems in the early 1960s and created pastels, drawings, and paintings as a self-taught artist. But in the long run painting alone did not fulfill her. She felt differently about language. Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewriter graphics, which she called "typewritings," were preceded by an intensive examination of image, text, and language that extended over many years.

For a symposium on language in Wrocław in 1972, Wolf-Rehfeldt used her Erika typewriter as an artistic means of production for the first time. Her first typewritings were created in the same year. Wolf-Rehfeldt experimented with the image formation of language and laid the foundation for her concrete poetry. In a manuscript entitled *Signs Fiction*, the artist explained how preexisting signs became the building blocks of fictive signs for her (thus *Signs Fiction*) by conferring words and alphabetic symbols with new meaning.[1] The qualities of the alphabet became material for her visual compositions. Wolf-Rehfeldt thereby used signs beyond their linguistic meaning and gradually developed her own formal language in her typewritings.

Original and carbon copies were created in formats that generally ranged between DIN A6 and A4. Her acceptance as a member of the Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR (Association of Fine Artists of the German Democratic Republic) in 1978 allowed her to make a limited number of "small graphics" and thus reproduce her works. As a result, she produced zincographic copies of motifs, always small enough to send via post to her Mail Art network, to which she added self-designed stamps. The zincographs were often the starting point for Wolf-Rehfeldt's collages, which were created in the 1980s. These contained randomly discovered elements from magazines, books, her own typewritings, or photocopies from earlier paintings.

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By sending her artwork through the mail, the artist spanned a wide, international network of artistic exchange, far beyond the confines of the closed systems of the former GDR: "Life in the GDR could sometimes be restrictive, but with mail art one felt as if you could think and see more expansively and also push boundaries a bit more," Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt recalls.[2] In the GDR, she and her partner Robert Rehfeldt were pioneers of this form of artistic exchange, which enabled the uncensored circulation of art and ideas.

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's lighthearted works are full of the desire for freedom—subtle, humorous, virtuosic, and imbued with visual plays on form and language. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the death of her partner, Wolf-Rehfeldt stopped making work altogether. Her newly found geographical freedom had fundamentally altered the function of making and distributing art. Recent years have seen a renewed interest in her work, and she was awarded the Gerhard Altenbourg Prize in 2021 and the Hannah Höch Prize in 2022.

Marie Gerbaulet and Paola Malavassi, curators of the exhibition

Many thanks to the exhibition's lenders: Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Chert-Lüdde, Berlin, the Kunstfonds der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, private collections, Sammlung Artothek des Neuen Berliner Kunstvereins (n.b.k.), Staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Kunstsammlungen Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Staatliches Museum Schwerin, and the Zentrum für Künstlerpublikationen / Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, Fonds Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt.

The exhibition is curated by Paola Malavassi and Marie Gerbaulet.
Exhibition Design: Meyer-Grohbruegge

MEDIA PARTNERS

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Magazin für Kunst und Leben

[1] Zanna Gilbert, "Dear Ruth," in Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt: Signs Fiction, ed. Jennifer Chert (Berlin, 2015), pp. 17–33, here p. 27.

[2] Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt in an interview: Kathleen Reinhardt, "Tue Gutes und wirf es ins Meer: Interview mit Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt," in Für Ruth: Der Himmel in Los Angeles / For Ruth: The Sky in Los Angeles: Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, David Horvitz, ed. Hilke Wagner and Kathleen Reinhardt, exh. cat. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; The Wende Museum, Los Angeles (Leipzig, 2021), pp. 100–116, here p. 100.

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RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT (*1932 in Wurzen) is a Berlin-based artist best known for her visual poetry and Mail Art. Despite not having a formal artistic education, she has produced paintings, pastels, drawings, and what she calls typewritings. These works on paper are made on a typewriter and are intricate studies spanning concrete poetry, linguistics, graphic design, and Conceptual Art; they are innovative hybrids of language, symbols, and visual form. In the beginning of her practice, Wolf-Rehfeldt explored semiotics and concrete poetry, she began to shift her focus in later years to abstract compositions, moving from linguistic signs to language as form and matter.

Wolf-Rehfeldt was nominated for candidacy in the Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR (Association of Fine Artists of the German Democratic Republic) in 1975 and was admitted as a full member in 1978. During her entire artistic career, Wolf-Rehfeldt was simultaneously engaged with a vast network of artists known as the Mail Art movement. She and her partner, Robert Rehfeldt, were pioneers within the GDR of a type of artistic exchange that allowed for the uncensored circulation of art and ideas. As works of art prone to accessible distribution, Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewritings were often included in her letters. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the death of her partner, Wolf-Rehfeldt stopped making work altogether. Her newly found geographical freedom had fundamentally altered the function of making and distributing art. Recent years have seen a renewed interest in her work, and she was awarded the Gerhard Altenbourg Prize in 2021 and the Hannah Höch Prize in 2022.

Her work has been exhibited in venues such as DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam, Potsdam; The Wende Museum, Culver City; Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin; Lindenau-Museum Altenburg, Altenburg; MAMCO, Geneva; National Gallery of Arts, Tirana; Albertinum, Dresden; Goethe-Institut, Minneapolis; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Malmö Konsthall, Malmö; Documenta 14, Kassel; Museum Barberini, Potsdam; Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo; Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; and Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen.

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QUOTE STEFANIE PLATTNER

"Tomorrow, we open the artist Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's retrospective *Nichts Neues*, which is the second exhibition at MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam. After we successfully inaugurated the museum with Wolfgang Mattheuer and Stan Douglas, and were able to welcome nearly 42.000 visitors, I am happy that we're now devoting a comprehensive solo exhibition to a great artist from the Hasso Plattner Collection.

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's tile work *Cagy Being (Käfigwesen) 3* was already realized outside at the staircase to the Brauhausberg for the opening of the building. A work, that until this point had only existed as a sketch on paper, has finally found a public place thirty years later. *Cagy Being (Käfigwesen) 3* was originally planned for a kindergarten in East Berlin, but in the unrest surrounding the fall of the wall it was never realized. We don't only have this wall work in our collection, but also the painting *In sich gefangen* from the year 1973. We're showing it in the cabinet for our exhibition series INTERPLAY, together with a *Weltempfänger* [world receiver] from the influential artist Isa Genzken.

We're proud to have Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, as one of the most significant artists from the GDR, with us in our collection and to celebrate with this exhibition.

DAS MINSK is proud to be able to celebrate its second exhibition and to continue to shape the cultural landscape in Potsdam."

– Stefanie Plattner

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GUIDED TOURS

Public Guided Tour in German

Every Thursday and Friday at 11am, every Saturday at 12pm and Sunday at 2pm

Public Guided Tour in English

Every Sunday at 12pm

Public Guided Tour in German for blind and visually impaired people

With tactile models

On 18.3. and 15.4.2023 each 2pm

OFFERS FOR KITAS AND SCHOOLS

The museum and exhibition are explored together with an art educator in a tour with small assignments. What is an art museum? Who works here? How does an exhibition work? The visitors are accompanied by a typewriting by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt. In the workshop part, the participants work with mail art, concrete poetry, and printing techniques and can discuss the possibilities of art to overcome boundaries.

Guided Tour incl. Workshop, 90 min.

Every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 9am on demand

Booking via +49 331 236014 699 / besucherservice@dasminsk.de

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FURTHER PROGRAM

Peace is a complex process

Embroidery workshop with Rufina Bazlova and Sofia Tocar

In the project #FramedinBelarus, the artist Rufina Bazlova and curator Sofia Tocar teach resistant embroidery. The social art project depicts political prisoners in Belarus with embroideries inspired by the Vyshyvanka tradition of red cross embroidery on white backgrounds.

The project is located at MINSK through Rufina Bazlova's artistic intervention *Such a Minsk*, and its precise craftsmanship shows similarities to the layout of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewritings.

On Thursday, 23. and Friday, 24.2.2023, 4:30pm–7pm

The workshop title comes from a typewriting by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt.

Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt: Nothing new?

With Jennifer Chert, Marie Gerbaulet, Paola Malavassi and Kathleen Reinhardt

Talk on the topicality of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt from the perspective of women who have exhibited the 91-year-old artist's work.

On International Women's Day, 8.3.2023 at 7pm

For more information, events and tickets visit our website at www.dasminsk.de/en/program.

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PAOLA MALAVASSI (*1978 in San José, Costa Rica) studied art history and philosophy at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. From 2016 to 2020 she was head of Julia Stoschek Collection Berlin (JSC Berlin). Before that, from 2005 to 2011, she was curatorial director's assistant to Prof. Kasper König at Museum Ludwig Cologne, where she collaborated with such artists as Andreas Fischer and Tobias Rehberger. The exhibitions she curated included, *A. R. Penck: Past – Present – Future* (2010/11), *Georg Herold: wo man kind* (2007), and *Gabriel Orozco: Samurai's Tree invariant* (2006).

Paola Malavassi works in an interdisciplinary manner, frequently involving the areas of music and dance. Such an approach most recently became evident in the exhibition *Stan Douglas: Splicing Block* (2019, JSC Berlin) which she curated, and in the performance *APEX VARIATIONS* by the artist Arthur Jafa and the jazz pianist Jason Moran (2018, JSC Berlin). She had already organized performative events at Museum Ludwig, including a concert with Steve Reich and the Ensemble Modern on Gerhard Richter in collaboration with the Kölner Philharmonie, and a performance by the choreographer Anna Halprin in collaboration with Tanzhaus NRW (both in 2009).

Art outreach and education also play a central role in her work. Malavassi has held teaching positions at Freie Universität Berlin and Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf. At Museum Ludwig she headed the art outreach project "kunst:dialoge" and was co-founder of the interdisciplinary series of events "Late Night Thursday." Both projects continue today.

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MARIE GERBAULET (*1989) is an art historian and curator. Her curatorial practice focuses on the investigation of social and political realities as well as the rapid progression of digital media and technologies, with an emphasis on the development of performance programs and discursive formats.

Currently at DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam, she curated the performance *Ménage de la maison* by the artist Olaf Nicolai in October 2022. Her most recent exhibition project is the retrospective *Nichts Neues* by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt opening mid-February 2023, which she cocurated with the director Paola Malavassi.

Prior to her work at DAS MINSK, she acted as the director of EIGEN + ART Lab (2018–20). Gerbault worked with artists such as Johanna Bruckner, Raul Walch, !Medien-gruppe Bitnik, Adam Harvey, Signe Pierce, Lotte Meret Effinger, and Bertrand Flanet.

Marie Gerbault studied arts and culture at the University of Maastricht and Koç University Istanbul and completed a master's degree in Art History in a Global Context: Focus on Europe and America, at Freie Universität Berlin.

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EXHIBITION ARCHITECTURE

“The inspiration and starting point for the exhibition design of *Nichts Neues* by artist Ruth Wolf-Rehfeld is provided by Ruth's own work. The exhibition concept, which was already shown in 2018 at the National Gallery of Arts in Tirana, was taken up and expanded for this exhibition. Her work and cosmos of interests have been interpreted and spatialized in various ways.

On the first floor, signs often used by her, arranged in her typical stringency, serve as three-dimensional supports for her work. The supports of the room are also integrated.

The wallpaper is printed with various slightly enlarged motifs from her series of works *Strukturblätter* (from the mid-1980s) and are arranged in a progression from signs to people. The cracks allow for a seamless/interlocking transition between motifs and reveal the material of paper.

Upstairs, the artworks are displayed in vitrines of varying geometric size and shape that replicates one of her *Cagy Being (Käfigwesen)*. They are arranged in such a way that the visitor can move freely through the exhibition, not noticing the overall picture created by the shapes until later.”

– Johanna Meyer-Grohbrügge

MEYER-GROHBRUEGGE is an architecture and design office based in Berlin. The office looks for simple spatial answers to complex questions. We want to create relationships, between people but also to our environment as a whole. This involves the spatialization of content and the development of new beliefs in exchange with our clients. With a variety of projects ranging from art galleries and collections, residential buildings, exhibition and furniture design, the office explores the possibilities of creating different ways of living together and generating new identities.

After graduating from the ETH Zürich Johanna Meyer-Grohbrügge worked for SA-NAA in Tokyo for 5 years before setting up her office Meyer-Grohbrügge&Chermayeff in 2010 and MEYER-GROHBRUEGGE in 2015. Since 2021 she holds the chair for architecture and spatial design at the TU Darmstadt.

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SUCH A MINSK

Three Flags by Rufina Bazlova #FramedInBelarus

For the three poles in front of the DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam, the Belarusian artist Rufina Bazlova (*1990 in Hrodna) has designed flags that stem from her cross-stitch embroideries. In this intervention with the punning title *Such a Minsk*, Bazlova refers to the current political situation in Belarus.

SUCH A MINSK: THE VERTICAL OF POWER, RUN FROM A GUN, THE FEMALE POWER

The middle flag, with the title *Run from a Gun*, is a claim for peace and depicts the people literally running away from guns, trying to escape the violence. While *The Vertical of Power*, placed to the far right, criticizes the current political system in Belarus, the flag on the left side with the title *The Female Power* is a depiction of hope in the future and shows the female opposition leader Swetlana Tichanowskaja. With this trinity, Rufina Bazlova makes a strong statement for revolution and peace.

The collaboration with Bazlova is a reference to the design of architectural elements by Belarusian artists in the old terrace restaurant Minsk, which also depicted traditional red-and-white ornamental mosaics in the facade. By working together with Bazlova, DAS MINSK makes a clear statement of solidarity with the resistance and critical artists in Belarus. Bazlova's intervention was inaugurated during the opening of DAS MINSK in September 2022 and will remain installed during Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's retrospective *Nichts Neues* (February 11 – May 7, 2023).

"Despite being from different generations and having distinctive working styles and methods, Bazlova and Wolf-Rehfeldt, two powerful female artists, have something in common: at first glance they work in a handcrafted analogue way, with stitched or typewritten signs, only to transfer them into highly conceptual art that opens up complex fields of political reflection and resistance." – Paola Malavassi, Director DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam

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RUFINA BAZLOVA (*1990 in Hrodna) is a Prague-based artist who works in illustration, social artwork, scenography, and performance. Bazlova holds a master's degree in illustration (University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, 2015) and a second bachelor's degree in stage design (Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, 2020). Bazlova gained an international profile for her series *The History of Belarusian Vyzhyvanka* (vyzyvanka.com), which uses the medium of traditional folk embroidery to depict the peaceful protests in Belarus in 2020. The artist is also known as the author of the fully embroidered comic *ŽENOKOL // FEMINNATURE*, 2012, which explores the theme of feminism present in folk traditions. Bazlova is a coauthor of the installation about the female Belarusian triumvirate of Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Maria Kolesnikova, and Veronika Tsepkalo, created especially for the well-known Charlemagne Prize 2022 in Aachen. In August 2022, the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky wore a shirt with one of Bazlova's ornaments during his speech on the Independence Day of Ukraine.

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AUDIOSTORIES

What does a world view that enables an artist to make artwork sound like? What is the soundtrack of the time in which an artwork was created? And what kind of echo can an artwork elicit in the viewer? These and many other questions form the starting point of the AUDIOSTORIES by DAS MINSK Kunsthau in Potsdam.

The AUDIOSTORIES accompany DAS MINSK's exhibitions in unusual ways. This is because, in contrast to a classical audio guide, they are not based on descriptions of works, but rather the larger social contexts surrounding the exhibited works and their creation. The AUDIOSTORIES function in an associative and playful manner, are personal, and always well-researched. Whether directly in the exhibition or from your sofa, DAS MINSK's AUDIOSTORIES can be accessed on the museum's website and therefore can be listened to anywhere at any time.

The cultural journalist and documentary filmmaker Sylvie Kürsten produced the stories. She takes the audience on an inspiring tour that brings the past and present to mind in a fresh and unbiased way, celebrating the sociopolitical relevance of art. Accompanied by soundscapes by the Leipzig composer Fabian Russ and the voice of Knut Elstermann, a poly-vocal, multilayered, and at times cryptic approach to art is thus made possible.

Sylvie Kürsten, born 1979 in Berlin, is an independent cultural journalist and has worked as a documentary filmmaker since 2011. For the film *Venus auf Abwegen* from the 3sat-series *Kunst und Verbrechen*, she and her team received the 2016 Grimme-Preis. In 2020, she released *Kunst aus der DDR: Vom Westen gehasst, vom Westen geliebt*, a one-hour audio feature commissioned by the WDR. The cultural researcher also moderates from time to time and supports the initiative "Wir sind der Osten."

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INTERPLAY

INTERPLAY is an ongoing collection format of DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam. In each INTERPLAY, a work from the Hasso Plattner Collection encounters a work from another collection. Bringing the works together temporarily in the DAS MINSK Kabinett provides insights into the museum's own holdings and other collections. Sometimes INTERPLAY shows similarities, and sometimes differences between art and artists. This opens up new perspectives that can only arise in the space between works of art.

Good music is characterized by the perfect interplay between different instruments and voices. In jazz, musicians can get in each other's way and challenge bandmates. This is also the case in DAS MINSK's Kabinett, where two artworks encounter one another, not exclusively seeking harmony, but also confrontation. Just as in an interplay in jazz, an interaction occurs in which each side influences the other. Both work together and yet each is independent. Sometimes they attentively listen to one another, interrupt each other, or paraphrase one another. The interaction of the works creates a reciprocal effect that is transmitted into the exhibition space like the sound of a good piece of music.

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INTERPLAY NO. 2: RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT & ISA GENZKEN

*I stand in shoes
made of lead
I carry a shirt
of chains
I grow wings
of cement
I sing a sad song
that should save me*

A jam session between Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Isa Genzken in DAS MINSK's cabinet, the second INTERPLAY brings together the works of two uncompromising artists. Although it's rather quiet in the cabinet, it almost seems to me as if free jazz is sounding between the painting *In sich gefangen* (Trapped Within Oneself) from 1973 by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and the concrete sculpture *Weltempfänger* (World Receiver), ca. 1990, by Isa Genzken—a musical style that embodies freedom and resistance and seeks to challenge instead of complaisance.

The *Weltempfänger* by Genzken exhibited here was created in 1990. The year in which Wolf-Rehfeldt ceased her artistic production. How should such a sealed *Weltempfänger* receive or even transmit anything at all? That this cement radio lacking buttons or a speaker could fulfill its function seems unlikely—perhaps just as unlikely as Wolf-Rehfeldt building an international Mail Art network might seem in a regime like the GDR.

In Genzken's *Weltempfänger*, some see a commentary on the "tristesse" (sorrow) of German postwar architecture. Wolf-Rehfeldt's pertinent question to this might be, "Are we really building right?" Genzken, in turn, might add: "Everybody needs at least one window," which is how she also titled her first institutional exhibition in Brussels in 1993. A window always symbolizes insight and outlook, a hinge between the self and the world outside. In the collage *Fensterblick, collagiert* (Window View, Collaged) from 1980 Wolf-Rehfeldt augments the abstract form from her painting *In sich gefangen* with numerous windows.

Others see in Genzken's *Weltempfängern* an expression of unsuccessful or failed communication. But isn't it rather a communication that works in spite of everything? The antenna is there, after all. It is the crucial element—music and news can only be received from around the world through it. The antenna is the window.

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After Genzken first exhibited a Panasonic brand world receiver as a readymade in 1982—a device she used in her studio to receive music from around the world, often in languages that she didn't understand—she then produced the minimalist cement sculptures beginning in 1983–84, which are instantly recognizable as radios despite their strong abstraction. This is how the so-called *Weltempfänger* series came into being, consisting of individual works or work groups of radios. To produce them, the artist filled different-sized rectangular wooden cases with cement and sunk metal antennas in the still-moist material. There are numerous *Weltempfänger* in various sizes, forms, and surface structures in Isa Genzken's oeuvre, all of which are equipped with an antenna.

At the same time, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt was sending and receiving post from around the world, no matter which language. She maintained an international exchange of letters from the GDR with artists from the United States, Latin America, Poland, and the Netherlands, irrespective of any boundaries. She had taught herself the English language for this. Typewriter, radio, and post were major achievements in worldwide communication, which, now often translated into the digital, still exist today. The citizens of the GDR, however, were largely deprived of the unrestricted reception of news and music from all over the world through censorship, control, and manipulation.

The handling of information remains one of the greatest challenges to the preservation of democracy and freedom. Information and media can maintain a democratic system and strengthen it, as well as weaken or even threaten it. *Freedom Won – Freedom Lost* is the title of one of Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewritings from the year 1975: doesn't every bit of freedom gained also contain its loss somewhere else?

In the painting in INTERPLAY No. 2, Wolf-Rehfeldt gives expression to a feeling of being trapped within oneself that is also evident in her many "cagy beings," such as the tile work *Cagy Being 3* (1989/2022) at MINSK. This is an experience that is also, but not only, due to the political system in the former GDR. In a meeting at her home, the artist talked about how the flow of information in the GDR radically decreased, while at the same time the surplus of information in the West really overwhelmed her. Both conditions posed a danger to her, Wolf-Rehfeldt said. In the juxtaposition of the drawings *Gefühl in Grenzen* (Feeling Within Limits), *Grenzübertretung von Gefühlen* (Boundary Violation of Feelings, n.d.), and *Gefühl meiner selbst* (Feeling of Myself, n.d.), Wolf-Rehfeldt gives expression to her striving toward freedom. The first drawing consists of two parts. The "feeling" is depicted here as a round abstract form, similar to the painting *In sich gefangen*. In the upper part, the form dutifully remains in the rectangular boundaries of the drawn frame. Beneath, it rebelliously defies the frame surrounding it. In *Gefühl meiner Selbst* the form surpasses the typed word "restriction" (Einschränkung), which forms the frame.

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Gefühl meiner Selbst could be simultaneously interpreted as both a self-portrait of the artist and a portrait of her art. The aim of her art seems to be the liberation from limitations and constraints. From the constraint of submitting to the function of signs, the constraint of respecting the frame of the paper, from the constraint of thinking within the frame.

The round forms of the painting *In sich gefangen* seem mobile and flexible, while the concrete of Genzken's sculpture has a finality that is only relativized by the function of the antenna. Is the *Weltempfänger* ultimately more "trapped within oneself" than the forms in Wolf-Rehfeldt's paintings? The sound from Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's typing on the analogue typewriter, character for character, line for line, the sound of Genzken's *Weltempfänger*, sometimes staticky sometimes clear; both artists transmit and receive.

I listen to the imagined free jazz in the cabinet. "Free" like Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's Mail Art, which evaded postal controls and went out into the world; "free" like Isa Genzken's *Weltempfänger*, which as resonating bodies seem to receive sound from all over the world. Even if "free" here does not necessarily mean free: anyone who believes that free jazz originated in a open, utopian space is mistaken. It's much more about regaining and claiming a nonexistent freedom in a society that oppresses and discriminates. Art offers such emancipatory free spaces. To find and maintain them is difficult. Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Isa Genzken are artists who consistently defy the constraints of the art world and artistically talk back. That's the sound this INTERPLAY is made of—not loud, but certainly powerful.

Paola Malavassi

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT, *CAGY BEING (KÄFIGWESEN) 3, 1989/2022*

"'Type your own art' is my special invitation to people wanting to express themselves in an artistic mode for the purpose of becoming, living and altering facts more consciously." (Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, from her text *Signs Fiction*)

The work *Cagy Being (Käfigwesen) 3* by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt is installed in the MINSK's stairway to the Brauhausberg. The large-scale wall work was planned for a kindergarten in 1989 but was not realized after the fall of the Wall. Now, thirty years later, this significant work, which depicts five children in geometric abstract form, is on view for the first time.

Already in early "Typewritings," the artist visualized forms like "cubes," "boxes," and "cages" on paper with her typewriter through the use of punctuation, special characters, and letters. Interlocked, overlapping, and building on each other, numerous figurations with the title *Cagy Being (Käfigwesen)* were created from these character forms—autonomous, fictive (character)-beings. In the title, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt plays with the ambiguity of language. By combining "cage" and "being," she detaches the words from their original meaning in a subversive and humorous way.

With the wall work *Cagy Being (Käfigwesen) 3*, now installed at DAS MINSK, the figurations are transferred from paper to the wall. The figures resist a simple interpretation. They are about closed and open spaces and systems and therefore how boundaries and limitations can be tested and overcome. The treatment of such topics requires taking a stance, then and today, and constitutes the contemporary relevance of Wolf-Rehfeldt's work.

The installation heralds the comprehensive retrospective of the artist Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt at DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam in early 2023. Born in Wurzen in 1932, the artist is considered a pioneer of Mail Art in the former GDR. Her work encompasses "Typewritings," prints, collages, and painting. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Wolf-Rehfeldt ceased to work as an artist. In November 2022, her work was distinguished with the Hannah Höch Prize of the State of Berlin.

KUNST IST WENN SIE TROTZDEM ENTSTEHT

11.02. - 16.04.2023

Kunstraum Potsdam

An exhibition organized in collaboration with the Mail Art Archive of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt at Kunstraum Potsdam.

The exhibition *Kunst ist wenn sie trotzdem entsteht* (Art is when it is created anyway) compares the two artists Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt by focusing on a crucial moment in their lives: the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The story of Robert Rehfeldt and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt begins in the early fifties, when they first met and shortly thereafter decided to wed. Robert, already a recognized painter and an artist with a radically experimental aura, inspires and encourages Ruth to paint and create art on her own. The two begin parallel careers, each developing their own personal and ideological languages connected through the ramification of postal art, a movement in which Robert Rehfeldt is considered a pioneer in Germany.

Enclosed in East Germany, as isolationist policies tighten and the polarization constituting the Cold War grows stronger, the couple finds in Mail Art a gateway of solidarity and inspiration, a network that allows them to stay in touch with artists, friends, colleagues and activists around the world. The title of the exhibition *Art is when it is created anyway* refers us directly to the constraint upon the expressive needs of the two artists, despite repressive circumstances and little-to-no visibility in an international context.

But what happens when the surrounding social-political situation, the source of the qualifying "despite", fails? A revolution as enormous as the one created by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain? The exhibition at Kunstraum Potsdam questions precisely this transition, the socio-political change seen through the mirror of the works of this artistic pair. Immediately and irrefutably visible is the explosion of color and vibrancy in Robert Rehfeldt's paintings of the early 1990s. Whether this is perhaps a deliberate and necessary openness to more Western canons, a clear influence of Pop-Art and the language of advertising, economic boom and prosperity exacerbated by pro-American aesthetics now clearly open to the East, or a simply personal liberation from previous constraints, symbolized perhaps by the painting titled *The New Person* (1992), is left to interpretation and speculation, the truth most probably being a reality oscillating between the two.

In any case, these works undoubtedly present us with a real stylistic revolution. A turning point that follows the mechanisms of reunification, which for many remain seen as a dominant presence of the West over the East.

Significant in this sense is how Robert Rehfeldt reworks many of his paintings from before the fall of the wall: instead of starting new canvases, he rewrites and erases existing ones with new motifs and colors. As for Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, she instead opted for a much more radical decision: to stop creating art altogether. The situation around her had changed so much that she no longer felt she could add meaning to this enormous upheaval. But before deciding to completely break from her artistic practice, Wolf-Rehfeldt produced a final body of work markedly different in its expression of colors and pop-direction (similar, in a sense, to Robert Rehfeldt): she made use of the introduction of Xerox photocopying machines and colored paper to reproduce motifs with this new medium before almost exclusively presented in black and white (except for rare examples on pink and blue paper).

The presentation of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's work in this exhibition therefore focuses on this last creative impulse. In the showcase dedicated to her, we find examples of historical photocopies from the early 90s, surrounded by replicas of original works pasted on the walls, containing various motifs on colored paper. In addition, a table with a photocopying machine is made available to visitors, who are encouraged to produce their own copies and send them by mail. This interactive moment recalls Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's performative display in the 1975 exhibition in Warsaw at Galeria Teatru Studio, the first exhibition where Rehfeldt and Wolf-Rehfeldt co-exhibited abroad. At the center of Wolf-Rehfeldt's installation was a typewriter for the public to use at will. To this degree, this contemporary homage to the two artists and their important historical legacy aims to inspire a connection between individuals that speaks of harmony and correspondence.

The exhibition also brings together a series of Mail Art showcases, each containing contributions sent by a different artist with whom the couple came in contact during the 1970s-90s. The selection comprises works by Anna Banana, Guillermo Deisler, Damaso Ogaz, Pavel Rudolf, Jiří Valoch, Natalia LL, Stanisław Dróżdź, Andrzej Lachowicz and Permafo Gallery.

Text and curatorial concept by Jennifer Chert / The Mail Art Archive of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and Robert Rehfeldt

The exhibition opening will take place on Saturday, February 11, 2023, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Opening hours: Wednesday until Sunday, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

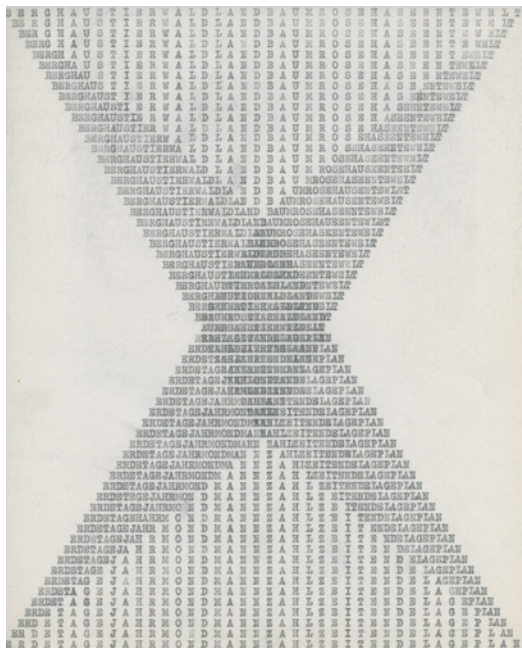
MORE THAN LETTERS

- Rediscovery of an outstanding female artist
- Nonconformism in East Germany
- Fascinating global network of Mail Art

Working as a self-taught artist, and employed as an office manager in the former GDR, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt used her typewriter to create patterns and abstract compositions with characters and letters at the junction of Concrete Poetry, graphic design and Conceptual Art. Her linguistic explorations, which she further developed into collages later on, are often based on ambiguity.

Published on the occasion of the large retrospective at MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam, *Nichts Neues* explores her typewritings, prints, collages, and paintings in thematic episodes. Although Wolf-Rehfeldt discontinued her artistic practice after the fall of the Berlin Wall, her art has lost none of its relevance. In a poetic, idiosyncratic, and often humorous way, this nonconformist artist explored themes such as environmental issues, intellectual freedom, community, and communication. Her sometimes subtle, sometimes more literal play with words, meanings, and forms continue to reveal the unexpected.

RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT (*1932, Wurzen, Saxony) arrived in East Berlin in 1950. From the 1960s, she created paintings, pastels, drawings, and, from about 1970, her so-called "Typewritings." She actively participated in the international Mail Art program, sending her works across the globe. Only in recent years has her work been rediscovered. In 2017 she was both a newcomer and a senior star of *documenta 14*.



Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt Nichts Neues

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