

Press Information

Picture Cellar

3 October – 19 December 2018
Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz

Opening

29 September 2018, 5 pm

Content

Information

Press Release

The Picture Cellar at Pariser Platz 4

Master Students of the Akademie der Künste

Press Contacts

Akademie der Künste

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Information

Title	Picture Cellar
Duration	3 October – 19 December 2018
Location	Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz 4, 10117 Berlin Tel. +49 (0)30 200 57-1000, info@adk.de
Opening event	Part of Berlin Art Week 2018: Saturday, 29 September 2018, 5 pm Guided tours, talks, films, audio recordings With Matthias Flügge, Angela Lammert, Carolin Schönemann
Opening tours	29 and 30 September 2018 with Angela Lammert and Carolin Schönemann Saturday hourly from 10 am – 4 pm Sunday hourly from 10 am – 7 pm Free admission Limited number of participants, on a first come basis
Weekly tours	From 3 October to 19 December 2018 Tours on Wednesdays at 6 pm Limited number of participants, on a first come basis € 5/3 Tickets must be purchased in advance; sold at Akademie cash desks: Pariser Platz 4 and Hanseatenweg 10, open daily 10 am – 8 pm as well as in the Webshop: www.adk.de/tickets
Website	www.adk.de/bilderkeller

Press Release

On 29 September the Akademie der Künste is opening its “Picture Cellar” to the general public. A series of murals, which were created in 1957 and 1958 for two *Faschingsfeste* (Carnival events), have been preserved in the former coal cellars of the Akademie building on Pariser Platz. Painted by Manfred Böttcher, Harald Metzkes, Ernst Schroeder and Horst Zickelbein – former master students at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste – they are the only original remnants in the historic building apart from the exhibition halls. First photographed in 1989, the works have since been published and carefully preserved. And now, after nearly 30 years, they can be seen for the first time. On view are unique testaments to a younger generation of artists’ within East Berlin painting, which defied a prescribed optimism.

A successor of the Preußische Akademie der Künste (Prussian Academy of Arts), the Akademie in the GDR continued its long tradition of training *Meisterschüler* (master students). Under the supervision of members, this programme offered artists the chance to work relatively independently over a two-year period in the studios located at Pariser Platz 4. During the culturally and politically explosive era in the 1950s and 1960s bitter debates grew up around the master student generation; it was a proxy war against members of the Akademie. Among them was the sculptor Fritz Cremer, who initiated an exhibition of works by young artists shortly before construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 – one that led to a cultural-political scandal. Cremer resigned as director and Otto Nagel, the president of the Akademie, had to leave as well – for “health reasons” – according to official statements. The murals clearly show that the generation of artists born around 1930 aspired to something other than state-approved Socialist Realism. These artists would play a major role in the formation of the “Berlin School”, and their “black paintings” were defamed by officially-sanctioned art criticism as outmoded, decadent and formalist. The pressure they felt from the outside world brought them closer together, encouraging them to react to one another in their paintings. Moreover, the creative freedom surrounding the *Fasching* designs at the Akademie released an urge for the artists to experiment with works that could not have been exhibited.

The opening event for the Picture Cellar features filmed interviews with Jürgen Böttcher (aka Strawalde), Matthias Flügge, Dieter Goltzsche, Harald Metzkes and Werner Stötzer; audio recordings of former disputes; insights into the work of the conservators; and guided tours. The Picture Cellar may only be viewed on a guided tour.

The Picture Cellar at Pariser Platz 4

Initially called the “Königliche ...” (Royal) and then the “Preußische ...” (Prussian) Akademie der Künste, the Academy of Arts took up its current residence at Pariser Platz 4, adjacent to the Brandenburg Gate, in 1907. Architect Ernst von Ihne redesigned and expanded what had originally been a small palace into the Akademie building, adding exhibition halls that were praised as the “most beautiful exhibition spaces” in Berlin. Ludwig Justi also had an influence on their construction. Later, under the National Socialists, the artists’ association was forced out of the building by Albert Speer, the Third Reich’s general building inspector (GBI). Two new academies were founded as a consequence of the Second World War, one in East Germany and one in West Germany. The Deutsche Akademie der Künste (GDR) was able to move back into the building in 1950. It used the property as studios and workshops, primarily intended for its members and master students.

The training of *Meisterschüler* (master students) was an old tradition of the Preußische Akademie continued by the later Deutsche Akademie der Künste in East Berlin. This training programme offered young art students opportunities to work relatively independently in the studios at Pariser Platz 4 for over a two-year period – initially through coursework taught in classes, and later under the individual guidance of a master. In the culturally and politically explosive era of the 1950s and 1960s there was a great deal of conflict and commotion surrounding the master student generation that included Manfred Böttcher, Wieland Förster, Dieter Goltzsche, Harald Metzkes, Ernst Schroeder, Werner Stötzer and Horst Zickelbein.

Paintings by Böttcher, Schroeder, Metzkes and Zickelbein have been preserved in the cellar of the building. They were created in 1957 and 1958 as decorative murals for two *Fasching* (Carnival) events. However, these works represent a great deal more than just impromptu decorations for the *Fasching* celebrations, as a comparison with other works by the artists clearly illustrates. They should be viewed instead in the context of cultural and political clashes of the times, culminating in the exhibition *Junge Künstler – Malerei* initiated by Fritz Cremer in 1961 – which coincided with construction of the Berlin Wall. This was the show in which works by Ralf Winkler (alias A. R. Penck) were exhibited for the first time. In the wake of upheavals brought about by this campaign Fritz Cremer resigned as head of his department and Otto Nagel, the president of the Akademie, had to leave as well. Tape recordings have been rediscovered of a harsh round of debates about this Akademie exhibition, in which filmmaker and painter Jürgen Böttcher (aka Strawwalde), among others, fought back against the attacks, and Akademie members at that time, including Helene Weigel and Arnold Zweig, decisively took a stand to defend the young artists.

The murals distinctly show that this generation of artists and master students born around 1930 aspired to something other than state-approved Socialist Realism. The same artists would play a major role in the formation of the “Berlin School”. The use of terms such as “not of this time” and “art out of a can” are exemplary of the art political debates and reigning views with which these artists felt confronted. In the same context the master student programme was temporarily suspended. The pressure this group of master students felt from the outside world brought them closer together, encouraging them to react to one another in their paintings. In the works of Schroeder, Metzkes, Böttcher and Zickelbein this led to a series of paintings in darker hues. These “black paintings” corresponded to tendencies in European painting by Bernard Buffet as well as to the abstraction of Hans Hartung. The master students considered themselves to be part of a larger European Modernism.

The creative freedom surrounding the *Fasching* designs released an air of experimentation in the final phase of this period, one which was also fed by a large can of black paint. Free and uninhibited scenery populated the walls of the coal cellars on Pariser Platz, where the artists experimented with works that could not have been exhibited.

The use of motifs in the murals is based on a suggestion from Werner Stötzer – they refer to the *Dienstmädchenballade* from *Wilddieb*, a traditional German song and tale about a poacher. In Ernst Schroeder's now restored mural, next to a small, dainty table on which he has placed an oil lamp and a porcelain dog figurine, the artist also depicted a monstrously large dog beneath a set of antlers (according to Metzkes, it's supposed to be the gallerist Rudolf Springer's dog). A hunter's game bag with a duck as bounty and a shotgun hang on the wall. Fragments of the poacher's interior by Schroeder's hand are also preserved in other locations – and their nearly abstract and still life-like qualities strongly correspond to the purism of the post-war period.

Harald Metzkes' mural – which has also been restored and is now located in the Akademie passageway to Behrenstrasse – portrays a feast or banquet. Men dressed in black suits and large black hats sit around a simple tabletop resting on trestles – a wild boar's head serves as its centrepiece. They are joined by a nude female figure shown with her face resting on her hand in a gesture reminiscent of Picasso. The sheer size of her body explodes the proportions of the composition and when taken together with the figures floating above this scene, she lends the painting a surreal character. This work can be viewed as a compositional model for Metzkes' painting *Tischgesellschaft* from 1957 (oil on canvas, 90 x 120), which is also dominated by a table decked with food, plates, cutlery and glasses. The young men dressed in black suits and one female figure reappear – depicted here in theatrical and sideways-inclined poses reminiscent of a silent film. The austere stylization of the figures is in keeping with Italian "Realismo" and a preference for dark tones and colours are characteristic of what came to be known as the Berlin School's "Black Period". Acrobats and tightrope dancers, figures from the Commedia dell'arte, masks and other carnival features are a common thread that runs through Metzkes' visual imagery.

Particularly striking are the white stick figures on a black ground by the painter Manfred Böttcher, who died in 2001. In their turning away from the criteria of cultural politics at that time, these "Pencks before Penck" – which unfortunately have not yet been completely restored – distanced themselves most radically from the expected norms.

Art criticism at that time deemed the existential mood of the works depressive, outmoded and decadent. Fritz Cremer defended this new generation, which he considered fundamentally loyal, but he also believed them to be filled "with a great deal of genuine scepticism". He was convinced that at that moment the GDR needed the "so-called difficult young artists" and "not the perfect clones, the boring ones, and those who toe the line". One reaction to the 1961 exhibition read: "Schroeder's decimated landscapes, Böttcher's *Serviererin* who is wasting away, and Metzkes' Chinese trauma manifest echoes [...] of existentialism. These works embody a pessimism surrounding questions of existence to which the viewer seems to be attracted. Created out of a can, so to speak, the depressiveness of their human emptiness and void underscores (...) that the artists have fallen into during their time spent at the Akademie."

The murals at the Akademie on Pariser Platz are unique testaments to a younger generation within East Berlin painting, which defied a prescribed optimism. They are truly exceptional and valuable examples of a critical artistic position against the doctrine of state-approved Socialist Realism at that time, as well as in terms of the building's change in function and the preservation of its historic traces. If the Bohemian life they celebrated was in part sentimental, it should also be seen as a rebellion against the propagation of an egalitarian view of human beings.

Master Students of the Akademie der Künste

Manfred Böttcher (1933–2001)

Böttcher studied under Wilhelm Lachnit and Heinz Lohmar from 1950–55 at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden and was a master student under Heinrich Ehmsen from 1955–58 at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin. He worked as a freelance artist in Berlin from 1961 on. From 1963–68 he directed the “Painting and Drawing Circle” at the Kreiskulturhaus Weißensee in Berlin. Böttcher was awarded the Käthe Kollwitz Prize of the Akademie der Künste der DDR in 1984.

Harald Metzkes (b. 1929)

Metzkes studied painting from 1949–53 at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden under Rudolf Bergander and Wilhelm Lachnit and subsequently worked as a freelance artist in Bautzen. From 1955–58 he was a master student at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin under Otto Nagel. In 1957 he went on a three-month study trip to China with Gertrud and John Heartfield as well as with Werner Stötzer. In 1976 Metzkes was awarded the Käthe Kollwitz Prize of the Akademie der Künste der DDR. In 1986 he became a member of the Akademie der Künste der DDR. In 1989–91 he was Secretary of the Visual Arts Section, followed by his resignation from the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin in 1991. Metzkes lives in Altlandsberg-Wegendorf.

Ernst Schroeder (1928–1989)

Schroeder grew up in Stettin, apprenticed as a metalworker in Swinemünde and lived in Bansin on the island of Usedom after 1945. From 1949–54 he studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Berlin-Charlottenburg, where he was a master student under Max Pechstein. Following his studies he earned a living as a male nurse. From 1956–58 Schroeder was a master student at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin under Otto Nagel and Heinrich Ehmsen. He moved to Hamburg in 1959, where he lived with his mother in seclusion.

Werner Stötzer (1931–2010)

Stötzer trained as a ceramic modeller until 1948, and subsequently studied at the Staatliche Hochschule für Baukunst und Bildende Künste in Weimar until 1951 under Heinrich Domke, Hans van Breek and Siegfried Tschiersky. From 1951–53 he continued his studies at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden under Eugen Hofmann and Walter Arnold. Stötzer was a master student at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin under Gustav Seitz from 1954–58. In 1962 he was awarded the Will Lammert Prize of the Akademie der Künste der DDR. In 1974 Stötzer collaborated on the film *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* by Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. In 1975 he was awarded the Käthe Kollwitz Prize of the Akademie der Künste der DDR. He was guest lecturer at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee from 1975–78. In 1978 he became a member of the Akademie der Künste der DDR; from 1990–92 he was its vice president.

Horst Zickelbein (b. 1926)

Following an apprenticeship to become an interior designer, from 1948–50 Zickelbein attended the Fachschule für Grafik und Buchgewerbe (FWG) in Berlin. From 1950–55 he studied at the Hochschule für Bildende und Angewandte Kunst Berlin-Weißensee under Horst Stempel and Bert Heller. From 1955–58 he was a master student at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin under Heinrich Ehmsen. In 1977 Zickelbein was awarded the Käthe Kollwitz Prize of the Akademie der Künste der DDR. He worked as a freelance artist in Berlin from 1958–95 and has lived on the island of Bornholm in Denmark since then.

Press Photos

Akademie der Künste, Picture Cellar

3 October – 19 December 2018

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Akademie der Künste, *Poachers' Feast*, mural by Harald Metzkes (1958), removed from the cellar in 2000, after restoration installed on the ground floor of the Akademie building
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Photo: Andreas FranzXaver Süß



Akademie der Künste, Picture Cellar, in the foreground mural by Harald Metzkes and Manfred Böttcher
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Akademie der Künste, Picture Cellar, mural by Manfred Böttcher
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Akademie der Künste, Picture Cellar, mural by Manfred Böttcher
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