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Images of the Holocaust in East German Art (1949–1989)

Abstract

In chronological order, the authors discuss selected examples of works of art providing a brief overview of the Holocaust representation in East German art. The authors provide evidence that there was a continuous artistic examination of the crimes committed by the National Socialists. At the same time, the emerging 'anti-fascist resistance art' marginalised the commemoration of Jewish victims. Integrated into the inner-German system conflict and controlled by the state authorities, art on the Holocaust was used as a political instrument mainly for the anti-Federal Republican propaganda. It was not until the 1970s that Jewish victims of the Holocaust were commemorated differently. This development was related to the GDR's political rapprochement with Israel, as well as the increasing interest of civil society in the Nazi past.

Keywords: German Democratic Republic (GDR), visual art, Jewish artists, commemoration, anti-fascism, marginalisation

Jewish Life in the GDR

The Jewish population in the Soviet Occupation Zone stood at around 3,500 people immediately after the end of the war. An official census determined that 4,500 Jews were living in the Soviet Occupation Zone in October 1946. In 1949, the year the

state was founded, eight Jewish communities existed in the GDR with a total of 3,750 members (Zuckermann 2003: 18). They consisted of Jews who had survived in hiding, those liberated from concentration camps, people from 'mixed marriages', as well as remigrants (Illichmann 1997: 116). The relationship between the state and the Jewish population in the GDR was ambivalent. On the one hand, Jewish communities received government grants. On the other hand, they were exposed to massive mistrust and were monitored by the *Staatssicherheit* [State Security Service]. This led to a mass flight of Jews from the GDR at the beginning of 1953, including the leaders of almost all Jewish communities (Illichmann 1997: 129–130). In 1955, the Jewish communities consisted of 1,715 members. By 1976, this number had decreased to 728. In autumn 1990, a year after reunification, the Association of Jewish Communities in the GDR had 372 members left (Zuckermann 2003: 18).

As a result of state repression, Jewish communities in the GDR ceased to exist as an independent social and political force. However, unlike in the Soviet Union, they were not fully dissolved. Instead, they were used by the state and party organs for political purposes (Illichmann 1997: 183). The social and political function of the Jewish community was explicitly defined in the 1965 statute of the *Verband Jüdischer Gemeinden in der DDR* [Association of Jewish Communities in the GDR]. Thus, they were required to participate in campaigns against the FRG (Illichmann 1997: 216). Moreover, Jewish communities were constrained to help convey a positive image of the GDR to the West (Illichmann 1997: 225). In the 1980s, the relationship of the state towards its Jewish population, as well as the way in which the GDR dealt with the Holocaust, changed slightly (Illichmann 1997: 15). Parts of the Jewish community centre in the city of Schwerin were handed over to the local museum as *Gedenkstätte der Jüdischen Landesgemeinde Mecklenburg in Schwerin* [Memorial of the Jewish Community of Mecklenburg in Schwerin] (Klie und Sparre 2017: 189), and, in July 1988, the foundation *Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum* [New Synagogue Berlin – Centre Judaicum] was founded (Simon 1992: 22). At the same time, the government attempted to improve its relationship with the Jewish people and the State of Israel. However, it was not until 1990 that the GDR formally acknowledged its special responsibility at the end of World War II (Illichmann 1997: 10). On 8 May 1990, the President of the *Volkskammer der DDR* [People's Chamber of the GDR], Sabine Bergmann-Pohl declared:

> "The burden of our history does not end in 1945. We are not only responsible for the humiliation, expulsion, and murder of Jewish women, men, and children; for the suffering caused by the Germans during World War II in the countries of Europe, especially those in the east. We are also responsible for the renewed persecution and humiliation of post-war Jewish citizens in our country, for a policy of

hypocrisy and hostility towards the State of Israel"[1] (Illichmann 1997: 9).

Early Representations of the Holocaust in East German Art

The first works of art that dealt with the National Socialist crimes were created during World War II, and often drew on traditional depictions of violence. In combination with photographs, they helped shape the memory of recent history. The artistic examination of National Socialism continued without interruption after the war (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 11). Indeed, artists who themselves were persecuted because of their religious beliefs and/or political opinion were now incorporating their personal experiences into art. Additionally, the Nuremberg Trials brought the full horror of the Holocaust into the homes of the public for the first time, as newspapers and the radio reported extensively on the trials: the numerous documents brought in as evidence became generally accessible later, but the trials examined the extent of the murder in a publicly visible way for the first time (Golczewski 2017: 41–42).

To picture the Holocaust at this early point was a difficult endeavour, not just because of Theodor Adorno's dictum.[2] According to Carol Zemel, who examined the relationship between aesthetics and trauma in the visual narratives of Holocaust survivors, 1945 marked a 'critical moment' in both Holocaust history and its representation. Firstly, Holocaust survivors were now free to tell their story and began to document the Holocaust history. Secondly, it was the beginning of a period of change and uncertainty: "For many survivors in 1945, the past continued with an enduring sense of catastrophe; the present was further dislocation, and the future unknown" (Zemel 2010: 49).

To illustrate the experiences of individual and structural violence under the Nazi regime, graphic art became a widely used medium. Indeed, quick sketches proved to be the only possible medium for capturing impressions in the concentration camps. Unlike paintings, they often did not strive for a thorough representation, but were able to depict a multitude of different facets of the Nazi terror. Furthermore, graphic art traditionally attracts a larger audience and allows private reading (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 47–48). Additionally, the forewords of graphic portfolios offered the opportunity

[1]English translation by the authors: "*Die Last unserer Geschichte geht über 1945 hinaus. Wir sind nicht nur mitverantwortlich für die Demütigung, Vertreibung und Ermordung jüdischer Frauen, Männer und Kinder, für das Leid, das im Zweiten Weltkrieg von Deutschland aus über die Länder Europas, besonders über unsere Nachbarn im Osten kam. Wir sind auch verantwortlich für die erneute Verfolgung und Entwürdigung jüdischer Mitbürger nach dem Krieg in unserem Land, für eine Politik der Heuchelei und Feindseligkeit gegenüber dem Staat Israel.*"

[2]See Hofmann, Klaus. 'Poetry after Auschwitz – Adorno's Dictum'. In: *German Life and Letters* 2 (58) 2005, pp. 182–194 for a detailed analysis of the argumentative context of Adorno's dictum and the problematic use of the two phrases out of context: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric [and] [it] is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz.".

to deal with the National Socialism in a written form (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 13).

While a prisoner in Theresienstadt, the artist Leo Haas (1901–1983) produced over 500 drawings, some of which were published as graphic cycles after 1945 and used as evidence in the Theresienstadt Trial. Under the title *Von Theresienstadt ins Gas (nach Osten)* [From Theresienstadt into the Gas (Eastwards)] (Fig. 1), Haas illustrates the transport of camp prisoners to Auschwitz. The artist himself had witnessed such a transport together with his friend, the artist Bedřich Fritta (1906–1944). While Fritta died of exhaustion shortly after arriving at the camp, Haas was imprisoned there for several weeks and carry out forced labour in a counterfeiting workshop (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 88–89). After the end of the war, the artist moved back to Czechoslovakia. In 1947, twelve lithographs by Haas were published in Prague entitled *Aus deutschen Konzentrationslagern* [From German Concentration Camps], with texts in Russian, English and French. The individual sheets bear titles such as *Hunger (Auschwitz)* [Hunger (Auschwitz)] (Fig. 2), *Auschwitz* [Auschwitz] (Fig. 3), *Todesmarsch* [Death March] (Fig. 4), and *Vor dem Krematorium* [In Front of the Crematorium]. The images do not show the heroic resistance of individuals, but rather the everyday life in the camp, prisoners searching for food, their struggle for survival plus a variety of forms of humiliation and the indifference of the camp administration towards the prisoners (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 85–86). In 1955, Haas, who had studied at the School for Decorative Arts in Berlin in the 1920s, moved to the eastern part of the city and worked for the state-owned film company *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) (Rosenberg 2020). In 1965, the *Akademie der Künste* [Academy of Arts] in East Berlin acquired all twelve lithographs from the *Aus deutschen Konzentrationslagern* cycle directly from the artist. To this day, they are still part of the Academy's collection (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 85–86). Other works by Haas can also be found in the collection at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D. C. (USHMM 2019).

Other outstanding examples of an early artistic examination of the Holocaust can be found in the graphic cycles by the East German artist Lea Grundig (1906–1977). A German Jew, Grundig had been a member of the Communist party in Germany since 1926 (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 16). As such, she was expelled from the *Reichskammer der bildenden Künste* [Reich Chamber of Fine Arts] and banned from working and exhibiting in 1935. Grundig was arrested by the Gestapo in 1938. After her release one year later, she fled to Palestine. On her way, the artist stayed in refugee camps in Czechoslovakia and Palestine (Gillen 2015: 11–12). After almost nine years in exile, Grundig returned to her home town of Dresden in 1947 (Sukrow 2011: 51) where she worked as a lecturer and later as a professor at the city's Academy of Fine Arts (Sukrow 2011: 67). From 1964 to 1970, Grundig was the president of the *Verein Bildender Künstler der DDR* [Association of Visual Artists of the GDR] (Sukrow 2011: 155).

During the 1940s, Grundig began working on graphic cycles on themes of fascism, war, and militarism (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 7). Grundig herself said about her art

that she "wanted to portray people in such a way that their misery, their suffering could be recognised and at the same time anger about it could be felt" (Grundig 1958: 93). Although Grundig left Europe in 1939, she tried to create authentic representations of the Holocaust and its dimensions (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 45). They were important contributions to the formation of "iconography of the Holocaust" in Germany (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 41). However, not a single one of the cycles Grundig produced on the persecution of the Jews with one exception was ever exhibited in the GDR or the FRG, in its entirety and in a coherent order. They were only accessible to people as individual sheets in publications and exhibitions. Like Horst Strempel (1904–1975), Grundig was represented in state collections, whereas their works were banned from storage until the 1970s (Sukrow 2011: 69).

The only graphic cycle by Grundig that was published in its entirety was *Im Tal des Todes* [In the Valley of Slaughter] (Fig. 5) (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 49). It was created between 1943 and 1944 and comprises seventeen ink drawings explicitly dedicated to the theme of the genocide against the European Jews. The images are based on the iconography of the Old Testament, on the depictions of the pogroms of the early 20th century and on the Soviet Army's photographs of the mass murder of Jews by the Germans, which were already known during the war (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 45). Individual graphics from the cycle were exhibited in Palestine, England and the USA in the 1940s, and were published in Tel Aviv in 1944 with texts in Hebrew and English. A German edition was published in 1947 with an introduction by Kurt Liebmann, an Expressionist writer who was persecuted by the Nazis (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 43). He honours Grundig as a 'political illustrator' and explicitly points out the extent of the Holocaust in Europe by providing the total number of Jewish victims and information on their origin (Grundig 1947: 7). The introduction is followed by reproductions of the individual graphics, whose message is emphasized by Liebmann's epic texts. They cover numerous aspects of the life and fate of the Jewish people under National Socialism. Grundig traces the suffering of Jews from flight, captivity and deportation to mass murder through the arrangement of the individual graphic sheets.[3] At the same time, she prompts her audience to intervene. Plate 9, *Helft!* [Help!] (Fig. 6), and *10 Öffnet!* [Open!] (Fig. 7) are dedicated to members of society living outside the labour and concentration camps. Liebmann asks: "Are people out there hearing the cries for help?" (Grundig 1947: 28). Moreover, Grundig addresses Jewish resistance, for example in plate 14, *Revolte im Ghetto* [Revolt in the Ghetto] (Fig. 8), and 16, *Partisanen* [Partisans] (Fig. 9).

[3]Order and titles of plates: (1) *Der Fluchende im Tal des Todes* [The Cursing in the Valley of Slaughter]; (2) *Flüchtlinge* [Refugees]; (3) *Weil sie Juden sind…* [Because they are Jews…]; (4) *Nach Lublin* [To Lublin]; (5) *Bluthunde* [Bloodhounds]; (6) *Vergasung* [Gasification]; (7) *Alle Kinder sind abzuliefern…* [All Children are to be delivered…]; (8) *Die Mütter* [The Mothers]; (9) *Helft!* [Help!]; (10) *Öffnet!* [Open!]; (11) *Das Ungeheuer* [The Beast]; (12) *Hoffnungslos* [Hopeless]; (13) *In den Abgrund* [Into the Abyss]; (14) *Revolte im Ghetto* [Ghetto Revolt]; (15) *Unter der Erde* [Undergound]; (16) *Partisanen* [Partisans]; (17) *Ewige Schande* [Eternal Shame].

The last plate in the book is entitled *Ewige Schande* [Eternal Shame] (Fig. 10). It shows a mountain of corpses, with one body piled on top of another in a ruined landscape. As Dr. Ziva Amishai-Maisels writres in her publication on the influence of the Holocaust on the visual arts, Grundig took great care to identify the bodies explicitly as Jewish victims by giving the most skeletal and distorted figure a beard (Amishai-Maisels 1993: 75). In the middle of the mountain of corpses there is a gibbet from which Hitler is hung, swathed in a swastika flag. Liebmann writes:

> "At the shameful pole hangs the destroyer,
> destruction among his own and destroyed himself.
> To the eternal Memory. To the eternal shame" (Grundig 1947: 44).

The drawing depicts a variation on the image of the old shameful sign of a skewered head on a pole, and represents a desire to defeat Hitler and to make the crimes committed by the National Socialists public. Thus, at the end of the cycle there is no optimistic vision of the future — just a reminder of the never-ending guilt, in order to prevent a repetition of recent history (Ladengalerie Berlin 1996: 48).

In the Valley of Slaughter was not the last cycle by Grundig dedicated to the crimes of the National Socialists. On 20 August 1946, she admitted in a letter to her husband that "the monstrous tragedy of the Jews in Europe has deeply shocked me. I am far from finished with everything" (Grundig 1958: 65). During this time, her focus shifted to Jewish life in the ghetto. Between 1946 and 1950, she explores this theme in her graphic cycles *Ghetto* (1946–1948), *Ghetto-Aufstand* [Ghetto Uprising] (1946–1948) and *Niemals Wieder!* [Never Again!] (1943–1950) (Sukrow 2011: 47).

Jewish Victims in the Remembrance and Commemoration Culture of the GDR

Public remembrance in the form of monuments, memorials and commemorative days is an important element of a state's political culture. Integrated into the inner-German system conflict, public remembrance was used as a political instrument in both East and West Germany (Illichmann 1997: 72–73). In the 1950s, plans for the construction and design of the *Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätten* [National Remembrance and Memorial Sites (NMS)] of the GDR at Buchenwald (1958), Ravensbrück (1959) and Sachsenhausen (1961) began. The works of art commissioned by the state for this purpose can be regarded as exemplary for the official artistic engagement with National Socialism in the GDR. The individual experiences and impressions of individual artists were replaced by a desire for collective remembrance. While shortly after the end of

the war all groups of victims were represented equally, the works of art at the NMS focused on the Communist resistance fighters through the explicit symbolism of the Red angle. As a result, Jews, as victims of National Socialism, did not fit into the image of the militant anti-fascist (Illichmann 1997: 51).

The former Buchenwald concentration camp was the first NMS to open in 1958, and played a key role in the process of forming a national identity in the GDR. It helped to legitimise the state, which saw itself as an anti-fascist, democratic, and Socialist political entity which firmly followed the tradition of the German labour movement (Sukrow 2011: 72). The central element of its artistic programme was the so-called *Buchenwald Denkmal* [Buchenwald Memorial] (Fig. 11) by Fritz Cremer (1906–1993). The bronze sculpture is thoroughly integrated into the extensive memorial on the Ettersberg. It is located at the end of a long staircase leading from the mass graves up to a bell tower with an eternal flame. The sculpture consists of a group of eleven bronze figures representing concentration camp prisoners, both armed and unarmed. Their heads are bald, their clothes ragged, and their bodies pinched. However, the body language of the figures and their posture towards the west express notions of resistance. This was in line with the requirements of the state authorities, who had previously rejected two of the artist's drafts as neither weapons nor flag bearers appeared in them. Instead of heroic resistance fighters, they showed "repulsive characters which could clearly be identified as victims" (Fig. 12) (Sukrow 2011: 71).

The emerging 'anti-fascist resistance art' marginalised the commemoration of Jewish victims. Instead of images of misery, murder and grief, Communist resistance to the Nazi regime dominated the imagery (Sukrow 2011: 193). At the end of the 1950s, there were only a handful of works of art which, in contrast to the political instructions, contained references to Jewish victims during National Socialism based on explicit religious symbols or the titles of the artworks (Korn 2018: 7). With her etching *Appell im Konzentrationslager* [Roll Call in the Concentration Camp] (1956) (Fig. 13), Lea Grundig once again reminded people that not only Communist resistance fighters were victims of the Nazi regime. The work was created two years before the opening of the Buchenwald Memorial, and it shows two concentration camp prisoners supporting a physically debilitated person in the middle, who is marked with a yellow star. In doing so, she maintained the GDR hierarchy, which classified victims into 'fighters' and 'those who were persecuted' but that also marked the forgotten group of Jewish victims (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 148). A very similar motif was implemented by the East German artist Hermann Bruse (1904–1953) in his painting *Hungermarsch* [Hunger march] (1945–1946) (Fig. 14).

Recollection and Legal Processing in the 1960s

In contrast to the 1950s, a period in which art about the Holocaust had largely gone unnoticed, during the 1960s increasingly more works of art concerning the Holocaust were created, displayed and discussed as a result of the legal, political and social reappraisal of the Nazi crimes (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 167). At the same time, interest in artists such as Lea Grundig and Leo Haas, who were constantly recalling the crimes of the National Socialists, grew steadily. Many of the newly created works of art were reactions to the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem 1961, the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963–1968), or the West German parliamentary debates on the statute of limitations that began in 1965. Works addressing perpetrators were also used for propaganda against the FRG. In some cases, the explicit depiction of Jewish victims only took place if, in return, the FRG could be exposed as a 'fascist state'. Florian Korn, who studies the artistic and curatorial confrontation with the Nazi past in both German states finds no comparable artistic exploitation of the Holocaust in the art of the FRG (Korn 2018: 8).

Another example of the political exploitation of artistic engagement with the Holocaust in the GDR is a work by the graphic artist and caricaturist Herbert Sandberg (1908–1991) titled *Eichmann und die Eichmänner* (1961) (Fig. 15). The aquatint etching shows the accused Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962) in a retreating attitude and a dismissive gesture on the left-hand side. Co-defendants in the trial – the *Eichmänner* – are behind him. The prosecutors are depicted on the on the right-hand side, brightly illuminated and pointing at Eichmann, led by a young woman bearing the Star of David on her chest.

As both a Jew and a Communist, Sandberg himself was a victim of the Nazi persecution (Lang 1977: 201–203), and was incarcerated for over a decade from 1934 until his liberation in 1945, including seven years in Buchenwald (Held 1991: 90–91). Commissioned by the Buchenwald Committee to turn his experiences and observations into art, Sandberg produced 70 aquatints based on the autobiographical graphic cycle *Eine Freundschaft* (1949) that can be read as both an example of the individual experience of the artist as well as the collective experience of the many people persecuted by the Nazis. At the same time, it illustrates the history of the German revolutionary proletariat (Lang 1977: 83). Recognising a lack of knowledge about recent history from the Weimar Republic to the Nazi regime during his visits to public schools, Sandberg decided to develop a more comprehensive biographical cycle titled *Der Weg* [The Path]. Whereas parts of the cycle *Eine Freundschaft* [A Friendship] had already been created as sketches during his imprisonment, the former is more a reflection than a report by the artist himself, and can be seen as the result of a continued artistic process with a stronger ideologically consolidated artistic positioning. The cycle was published as a book by the *Verlag der Kunst* on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the liberation from 'Hitler

fascism' in 1965 (Lang 1977: 83). Similar to the Buchenwald group by Cremer, the book depicts no victims explicitly labelled as Jewish in the entire graphic cycle. Instead it also focuses on the political narrative of the Communist and anti-fascist resistance. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the Jewish writer Arnold Zweig (1887–1968) does not mention Sandberg's Jewish origin in the foreword of the book (Sandberg 1966: np).

Sandberg was represented at numerous state art exhibitions in the GDR with several works documenting Nazi crimes. His graphic work *Helden* [Heroes] (1966) (Fig. 16) was exhibited with a slight variation at the ninth German Art Exhibition of the GDR under the title *Oh, Buchenwald, ich kann dich nicht vergessen* [Oh, Buchenwald, I Can Hardly Forget You] (1980) (Fig. 17) (Ministerium für Kultur der DDR and Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR 1982: 256). It also featured as the motif of the poster for the exhibition *Bekenntnisse* [Confessions] which opened in Berlin in 1960 (Fig. 18). The exhibition was a commentary on the Nazi continuities in political and legal state bodies as well as the recurring fascism in the FRG. The exhibited artists, including John Heartfield (1891–1968), Fritz Cremer, Leo Haas and Lea Grundig, were to "make a confession against the resurgence of fascism and racial hatred" (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 177–178).

In Sandberg's work, apart from the serial processing and the recourse to Christian iconography, the integration of National Socialist crimes into the anti-fascist and Communist narrative is rather conspicuous. These three observations are also reflected in Werner Tübke's (1929–2004) paintings from the 1960s. Born in the German city of Schönebeck, Tübke experienced World War II as an adolescent. Along with Bernhard Heisig and Wolfgang Mattheuer, Tübke belonged to the so-called *Leipziger Schule* [Leipzig School] and was one of the most popular painters in the GDR. From 1964 to 1967, Tübke produced 12 paintings, 15 watercolours and about 65 drawings on the terror of the Nazi regime and its inadequate reappraisal in the FRG. Later, these works formed the cycle *Lebenserinnerungen des Dr. jur. Schulze* [Memories of the Life of Dr. jur. Schulze]. The cycle was started by Tübke on his own initiative, but was later supported by the *Kulturbund der DDR* [Cultural Association of the GDR] as a commission. The reason for dealing with this topic were neo-fascist phenomena in the FRG during a time in which the statute of limitations for National Socialist crimes was openly discussed. In addition, the Globke Trial[4] had just begun, despite the fact that former judges from the Nazi regime continued to work in the newly formed state (Tübke-Schellenberger and Lindner 1999: 23). The most frequently published painting from the group is the

[4] Hans Globke (1898–1973) was German lawyer and politician. He had started his political career in the 1920s and later served the Nazi Regime. As an official Globke had written commentaries on the anti-Semitic Nuremberg race laws. After World War II, critics accused him of direct involvement in the mass murder of Jews. Nevertheless, Konrad Adenauer had chosen him to be the director of the chancellor's office in West Germany. His name became shorthand for the failures of denazification in the FRG. In July 1963 the GDR organised a public 'Globke trial', which took place at the Supreme Court in East Berlin. After a nine-day trial Globke was 'sentenced' in absentia to life in prison for crimes against humanity (Herf 1997: 183–184).

third version of the *Lebenserinnerungen des Dr. jur. Schulze III* (1965) (Fig. 19), which combines various image and memory quotations concerning violent scenes of the persecution of the Jews without a continuous narration. In addition to the media coverage on the legal processes, it were mainly books with pictorial material, which served Tübke as a model, such as *Der gelbe Stern* [The Yellow Star] (1960) by Gerhard Schoenberner (1931–2012). As Hoffmann-Curtius elaborates in detail, Tübke appropriated numerous photographs from the book. It almost seems as if Tübke provided the illustrations to Schoenberner's introductory words to the book (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 228):

> "The biblical prophecies of the Last Judgement and the visions of fear of Kafka became reality. The monsters of Hieronymus Bosch rose in human form. They did not have tusks or hooves or the faces of toads. They were clean-shaven, wore their hair neatly parted, they were good family men [...]. Dante's Infernos was established in the modern world" (Schoenberner 1960: 7).

Tübke shows the murderer and the murdered in the scheme of a court. He shows the figure of the judge and — in contrast to traditional Christian representations of the world court — the torments of Hell on the left-hand side and not, as is usual, on the right-hand side in the picture (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 230). The agonies of Hell symbolise the crimes against Jews in clarity and detail. Whereas Jewish artists on the whole did not use photographs of the mounds of the dead as a basis for their art (Amishai-Maisels 1993: 86), the influence of historical photographs and their appropriation in paintings becomes particularly clear in Tübke's work. The artist refers to photographs published by Schoenberner, for example an execution scene from Warsaw (Schoenberner 1960: 100) (Fig. 20), but adds a goat's foot and spectacles to the executioner's attire in a reference to Heinrich Himmler. He also adopts the rear view of an SS officer whom he depicts with a skull (Schoenberner 1960: 170) (Fig. 21), the bright iron lattice of an image from the Warsaw Ghetto (Schoenberner 1960: 182) (Fig. 22) and cardboard urns for the dead from Theresienstadt (Schoenberner 1960: 73) (Fig. 23). He indicates not only the names of the victims, but also the sites of crime. Various references of this kind can be found in the painting. While the perpetrators are always anonymised and depicted with skulls, Tübke shows the numerous and nameless victims individually, thus breaking with anonymity (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 232).

Grundig, who in her works depicts the terror of the Nazi regime in an accusatory and drastic manner, could not find access to Tübke's rather spiritual work. The generational conflict between Grundig and the Leipzig School was also visible on a creative level (Sukrow 2011: 232). Tübke integrates the photographic quotations into a complex system of signs and places them in the traditional line of early panel painting, thus creating an artistic space in the GDR, which successfully distinguished himself from the Western avant-garde. At the same time, he integrates the persecution of Jews into a

historical continuum of cruelty and violence. In this way, he emphasises the suffering and torment of the Jews with more strength (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 240). However, his concept of the therapy of deterrence formed a contrast to the state-imposed concept of realism. As a result, Tübke was accused of "leaving the path of socialism" in 1967 (Tübke-Schellenberger and Lindner 1999: 25). Nevertheless, an attempt to remove the artist as a lecturer from the Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig in 1968 failed, partly due to huge student protests (Tübke-Schellenberger and Lindner 1999: 28).

Expansion of the Holocaust Remembrance Content and Form during the 1970s and 1980s

The efforts for a differentiated confrontation with the Holocaust intensified in the 1970s, when increasingly more artists started to create the works of art that were distanced from the popular anti-fascist art. A differentiation and expansion of the commemoration of the Jewish victims of National Socialism can be noticed, which seems to be connected to the political rapprochement of the GDR towards Israel. Moreover, society became more and more interested in the Nazi past. The two last decades of the GDR were also characterised by the beginning of an abstract examination of the Holocaust, especially of the Auschwitz and Treblinka death camps (Korn 2018: 8).

At the beginning of the 1980s, the artist Horst Zickelbein (b. 1926) created a series of non-representational paintings whose titles refer to the Auschwitz extermination camp. After he was taken a prisoner of war during his military service, Zickelbein moved to Berlin in 1947 and studied at the *Kunsthochschule Weißensee* [Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin] under Horst Strempel (Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np). In 1955 he became a member of the *Verein Bildender Künstler der DDR* [Association of Visual Artists of the GDR] (Bildatlas 2020: np). From 1960 onwards, the artist increasingly focused on abstract effects of forms and, above all, colours (Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np). In a series of paintings, he approaches the Holocaust theme. In 1989, his paintings *All die herrlichen Frauen / Auschwitz III* [All The Glorious Women / Auschwitz III] (1981) (Fig. 24), *Die Mulde (Auschwitz)* [The Hollow (Auschwitz)] (1981) (Fig. 25) and *2030 – 2032 (Auschwitz)* (1983) (Fig. 26) were exhibited at a state-owned gallery in Görlitz (Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np). Zickelbein's choice and use of colours are reminiscent of the painting *Die Erde von Auschwitz* [The Ground of Auschwitz] (1962–1966) (Fig. 27) by Lea Grundig. Here she transforms the canvas into dirty ground on which the prints of naked feet and heavy military boots are clearly visible. The foreword to the exhibition catalogue praises "the direct experience of the landscape" through the artist's works (Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np). Here, Auschwitz is a mere patch of land without any history. Thus,

it is surprising that *All die herrlichen Frauen / Auschwitz III* was featured on the cover of the exhibition catalogue.

Another example of the increasingly abstract representation of the Holocaust in the GDR are the paintings by Gerhard Kurt Müller (1926–2019), a volunteer in the Luftwaffe in 1943 who was taken a prisoner of war in France. In 1948 Müller returned to his home town of Leipzig, where he studied at the *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst* [Academy of Fine Arts]. Müller later became head of the class for free graphic art and illustration and was appointed director of the academy in 1961 (Ministerium für Kultur der DDR and Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR 1982: 243). In the years 1981 and 1982, the painting *Die Jüdin* [The Jewess] (Fig. 28) was created and displayed shortly after its completion at the ninth art exhibition of the GDR in Dresden, where it was acquired by the *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden* [Dresden State Art Collections] (Kunst-Archive 2020: np). The painting shows a sitting person in profile, hiding her face in a gesture of grief and despair with her right hand. Behind the figure, geometric elements such as cuboids, cylinders and pyramids pile up to form an abstract building or sculpture. The upper part displays elements reminiscent of a swastika, whereas the Jewish woman in the lower part of the painting is marked by a Star of David. The soft lines of the human body in combination with the fragility of both arms and hands form a strong contrast to the massive steel skeleton that looms behind the woman. The abstract forms in the background, which multiply many times over, have become the artist's signum (Krischke 2018: 38–39). They also occur in the painting *Kristallnacht* (1986) (Fig. 29) by Müller, which also shows a figure surrounded by numerous abstract forms. Due to the monochrome style of the painting, the figure is difficult to identify: it protects its head with its hand while being surrounded by anonymous creatures with faces resembling gas masks. Stylistically, the painting can be connected to works of Futurism or Cubism. Indeed, in the year of its creation, Müller made a trip to Paris, where he visited the Picasso Museum and the Louvre (Gosse 1996: 190).

The colour aquatint titled *Haschoah (Die Katastrophe)* [Haschoah (The Catastrophe)] (1982) (Fig. 30) by the artist Hartmut Berlinicke (1942–2018) shows the interior of the synagogue in Osnabrück, which was destroyed by the Germans during Kristallnacht (Galerie Wildeshausen 2013: np). Berlinicke was a self-taught artist (Kunstamt Neukölln 1977: np) whose artistic activity began in 1965. Three years later he bought his own etching press (Kunsthalle Bremen 1975: np). His work during the 1970s, which was exhibited in both East and West Germany, is predominantly concerned with technical subjects and architecture. Between 1971 and 1977, he was also represented at international biennials in Lubljana, Kraków, Wien, Trieste, Bradford, Segovia, Monte Carlo and San Francisco (Kunstamt Neukölln 1977: np). In *Haschoah (Die Katastrophe)*, a ramp leads to the *bimah* in the depths of a synagogue, which is surrounded by flames, ending in front of a barred gate — the doors of the Auschwitz extermination camp. A passport belonging to the Jewish artist Felix Nussbaum (1904–1944) is clearly visible lying on the

ramp. The artwork becomes a commemorative memorial for both Nussbaum, who was murdered at Auschwitz, and all other persecuted and murdered Jews. Berlinicke chose the infamous 1938 pogrom, the first climax of anti-Jewish violence in Germany, as the subject for his work.

Interestingly, works from the 1940s that deal with this subject came back into public focus as more and more pieces of art from the 1970s and 1980s concerned themselves with the Holocaust in the GDR. One example is a painting by Horst Strempel, titled *Nacht über Deutschland* [Night over Germany] (Fig. 31). The artist created the triptych complete with a predella in 1945/1946. It was one of his most important works, and today is part of the collection of the *Nationalgalerie* [National Gallery] in Berlin (Saure 1992: 271). The work shows Germany as a camp landscape in the immediate post-war period, with a clear reference to the destruction of the country and its people. The format corresponds to a Christian winged altar, and is composed of several parts. On the right wing, Strempel depicts a Jewish family with the father prominently marked with a yellow spot on his chest. After its completion, the painting was purchased by the Berlin Magistrate and displayed at the exhibition *Meisterwerke der deutschen Bildhauerei und Malerei* [Masterpieces of German Sculpture and Painting] in Berlin in 1947 (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 29). After 1949, the triptych remained in the eastern part of the city. A West Berlin publication on Strempel commented on the painting:

> "Strempel painted the suffering of the Nazi years after 1945 in the great triptych *Nacht über Deutschland* [Night over Germany] as someone who was liberated himself and who found art the perfect method to express his emotion as well as the general silent outcry of the people. Despite the fact that the painting is the property of the *Galerie des 20. Jahrhunderts* [20th Century Gallery], it had to be left behind in East Berlin in 1948" (Kunstamt Charottenburg 1963: 4).

The artist was subsequently caught between the fronts of the Cold War and the cultural-political debate of the time. In 1951, *Nacht über Deutschland* disappeared from public view (Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 29). It was exhibited again for the first time in March 1970 at the Kunstamt in the Tiergarten district in East Berlin. Astonishingly, only the right wing of the triptych, showing the grieving Jewish family, was chosen to be displayed (Kunstamt Tiergarten 1970: np).

Conclusion

Anti-fascism was a central element of the national self-image in the GDR, becoming an integral part of the everyday political life. For many surviving Jewish Communists, returning exiles and Jews who had become convinced anti-fascists, the new state

was a place of hope and refuge. The first generation of artists to deal with the Holocaust in East Germany after 1945 were mostly Jews themselves and/or Communists who had first-hand experience of emigration, violence, and imprisonment in labour or concentration camps. The memory of the Jewish victims was then marginalised by the emerging anti-fascist resistance art. Based on the works for the national memorials in Buchenwald (1958), Ravensbrück (1959) and Sachsenhausen (1961), anti-fascist resistance formed the central focus of the official artistic examination of the Nazi past. Also, works of art which focused on the perpetrators were primarily used for anti-West German propaganda. In the course of the legal, political, and social discussion on the Holocaust, more and more works of art were created and discussed at art exhibitions. It was not until the 1970s that Jewish victims of the Holocaust were commemorated differently. This development was related to the GDR's political rapprochement with Israel, as well as with an increasing interest in society about the Nazi past. Shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, several civil and church initiatives encouraged public remembrance of the genocide committed against the Jews.

The central motifs of the works of art were life in the ghetto, discrimination, evacuation, and various themes connected to the camps, such as hunger, grief, murder, the suffering of children, illness, flight, guilt, hunger marches, and also resistance, solidarity among the prisoners and — eventually — liberation. The Jewish victims in these works of art are mostly marked by a yellow star, concentration camp clothing, religious symbols or partly stereotypical external features such as beards. As a whole, the works of art are realistic respective figurative representations in the traditional genres of painting, sculpture and graphic art which corresponded to the art and cultural political preferences of the Party and state leadership. The few examples of the Holocaust representation in abstract formal language mostly date from the 1970s and 1980s, a time when more diverse art forms were generally established in the GDR.

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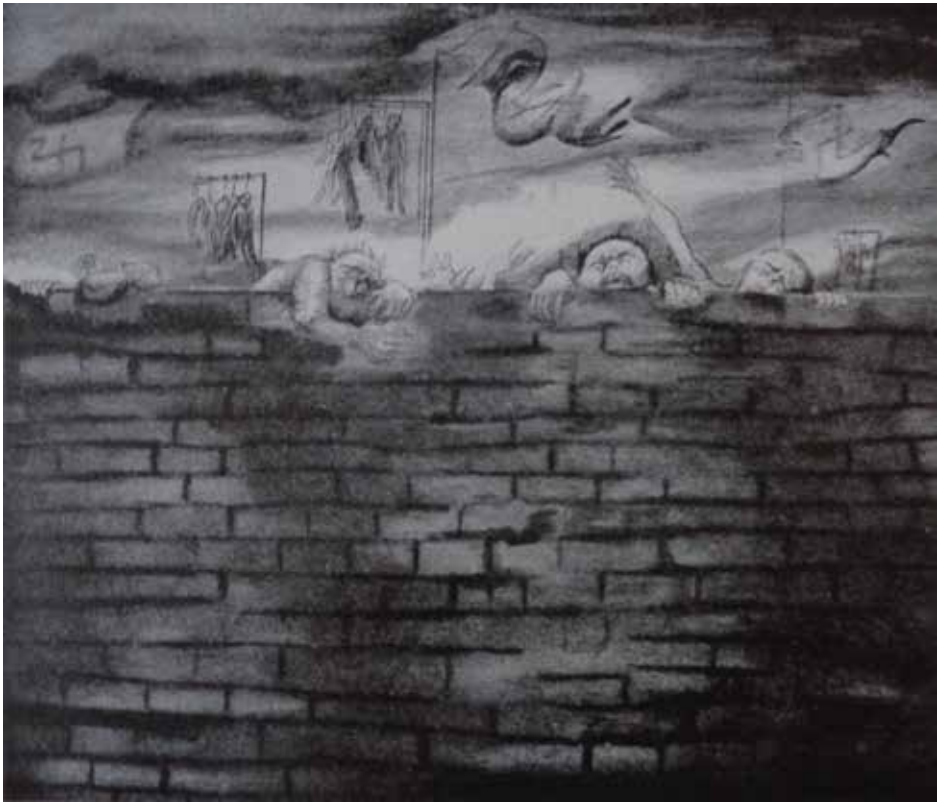

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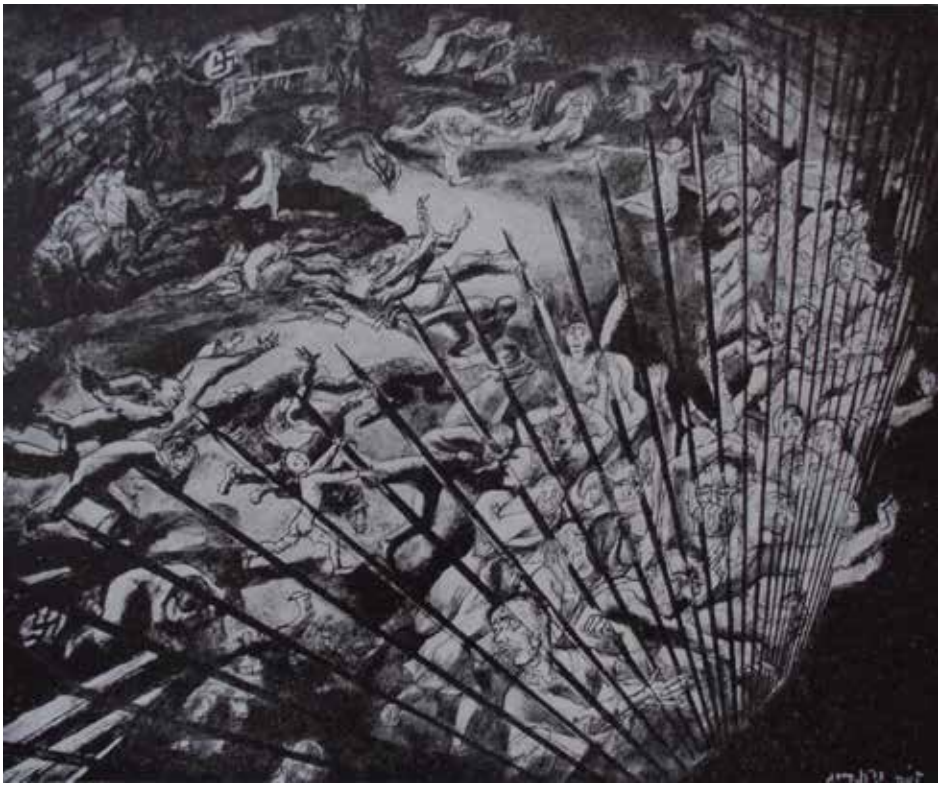

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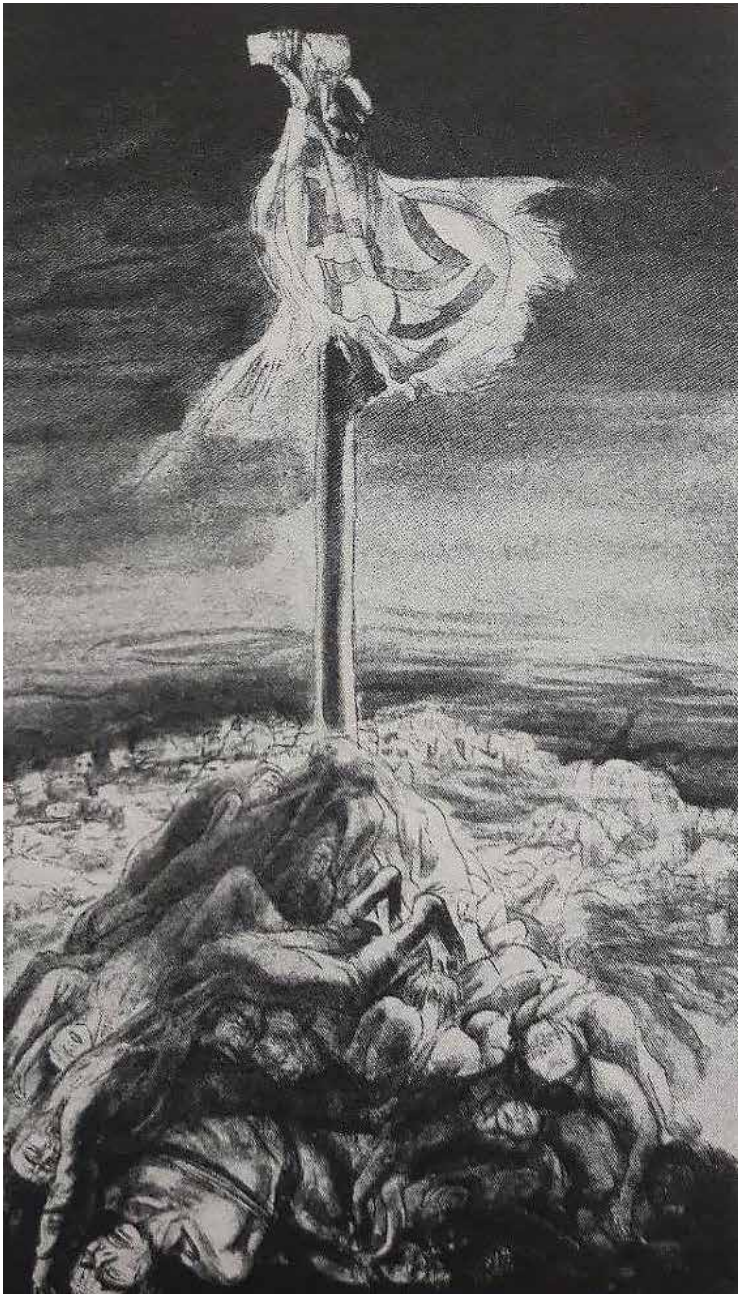

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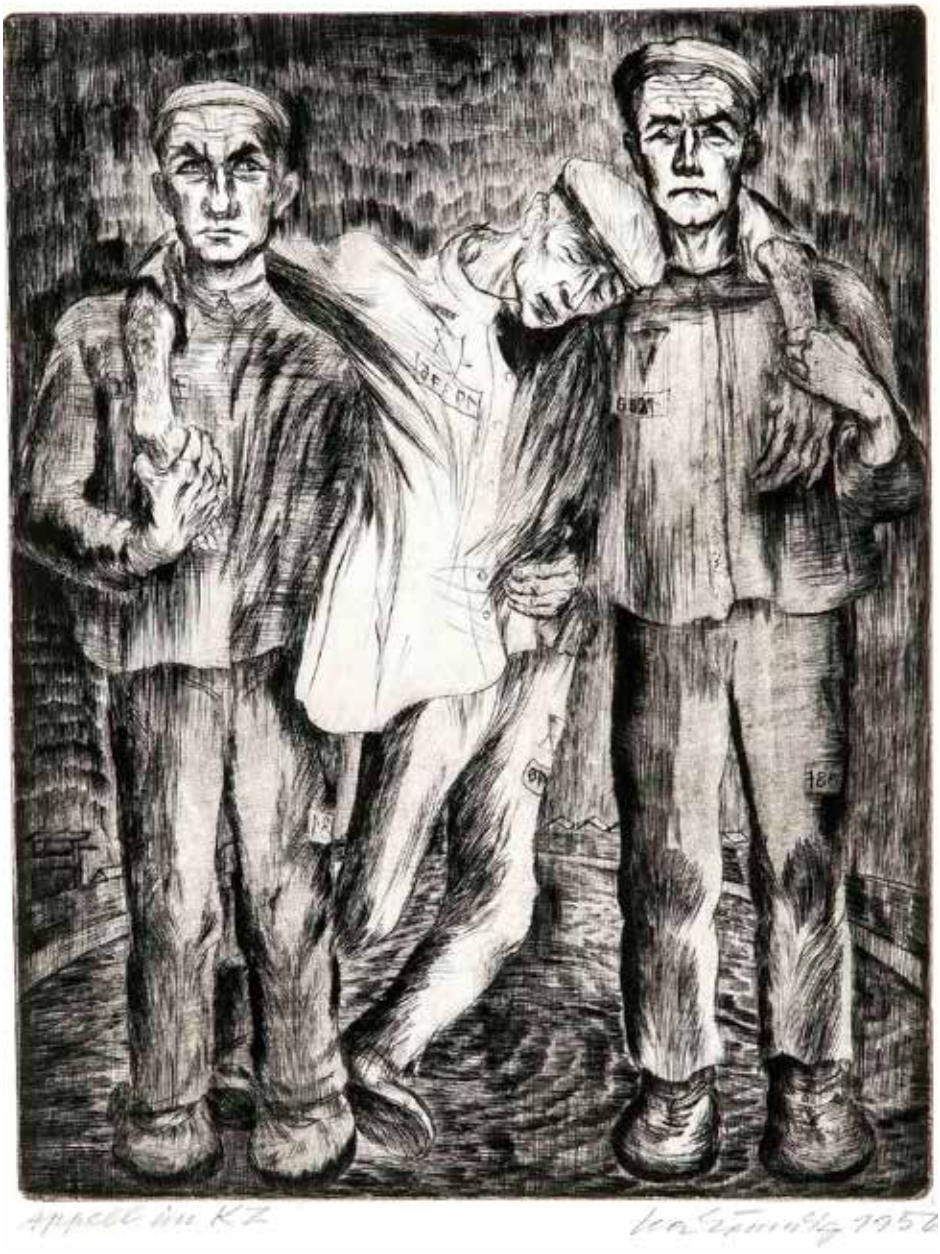

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Fig. 14. *Hermann Bruse: Hungermarsch [Hunger march] (1945/1946), oil on hard fibre, 127.0 x 93.5 cm, Stadtmuseum Berlin*

Image source: Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 114

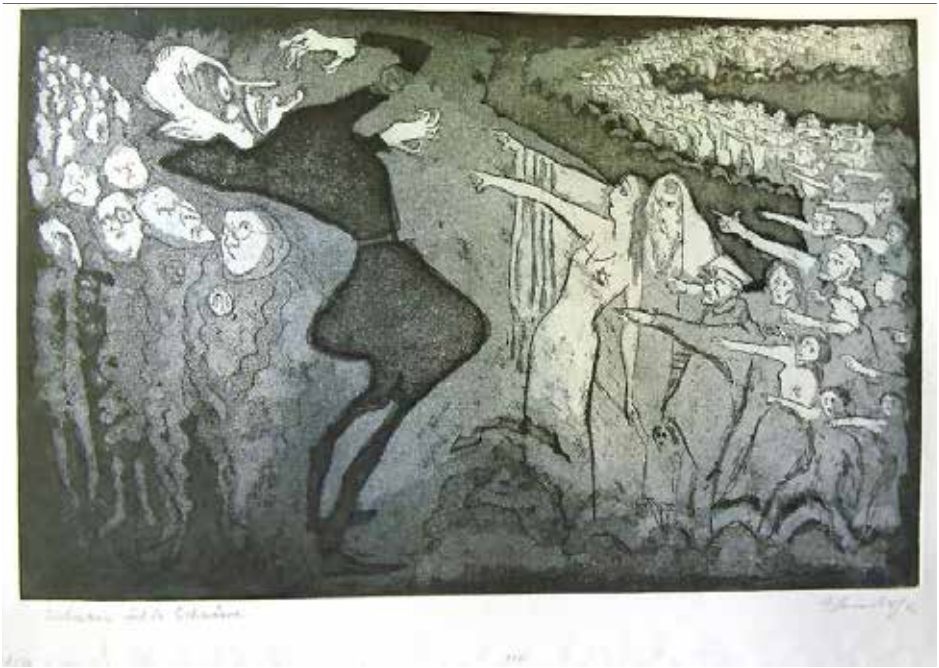

Fig. 15. *Herbert Sandberg: Eichmann und die Eichmänner (1960), aquatint etching, 49.1 x 31.8 cm, edition of 50*

Image source: ddrbildarchiv.de – Zeitgeschichtliches Pressebildarchiv aus den Neuen Bundesländern, 27 Sept. 2021 <www.ddrbildarchiv.de/info/ddr-fotos/grafik-herbert-sandberg-eichmann-eichmaenner-jahr-49664.html> © ddrbildarchiv.de/Prof. Herbert Sandberg.

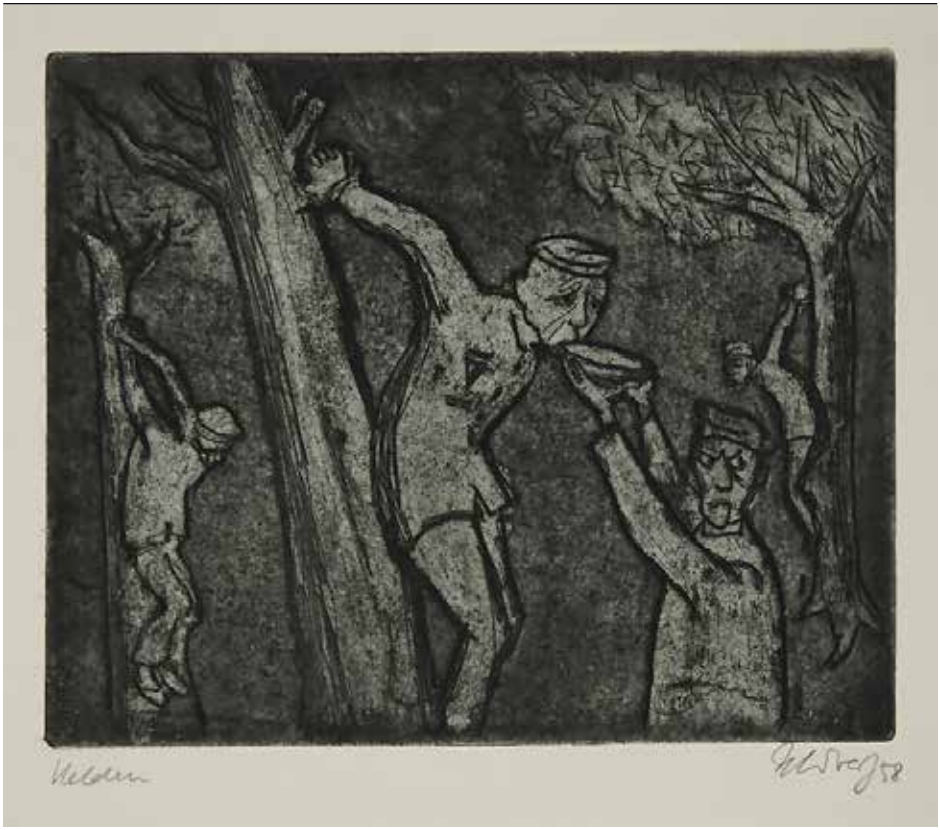

Fig. 16. *Herbert Sandberg: Helden [Heroes] (1958), aquatint etching, 19.5 x 24.5cm, plate 48 of the graphic cycle Der Weg [The Way] (1958–1965), 70 aquatint etchings*

Image source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection

Fig. 17. *Herbert Sandberg: Oh, Buchenwald, ich kann dich nicht vergessen [O, Buchenwald, I Can Hardly Forget You] (1980), aquatinta etching, 20.0 x 31.0 cm*

Image source: Ministerium für Kultur der DDR and Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR 1982: 101

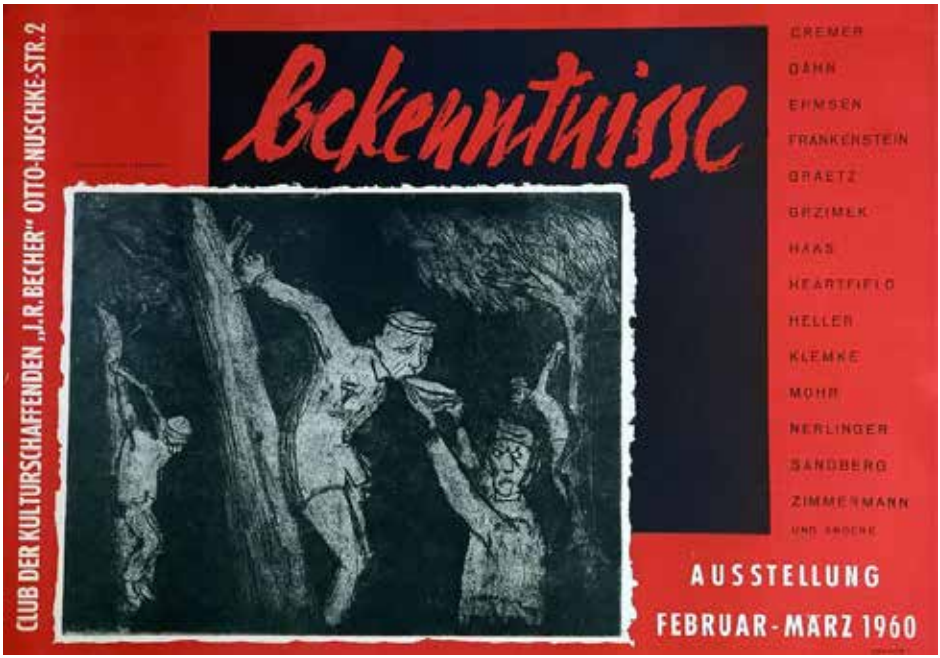

Fig. 18. *Poster for the exhbition Bekenntnisse [Confessions], Klub der Kulturschaffenden Johannes R. Becher, East Berlin (1960) showing Herberst Sandberg's graphic Helden [Heroes] (1958)*

Image source: ddrbildarchiv.de – Zeitgeschichtliches Pressebildarchiv aus den Neuen Bundesländern, 27 Sept. 2021 <www.ddrbildarchiv.de/info/ddr/plakat-ausstellung-bekenntnisse-ueber-herbert-sandberg-jahr-49585.html> © ddrbildarchiv.de/Prof. Herbert Sandberg.

Fig. 19. *Werner Tübke: Lebenserinnerungen des Dr. jur. Schulze III (1965), tempera, canvas on panel, 188.0 x 121.0 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie*

Image source: Tübke-Schellenberger and Lindner 1999: 31

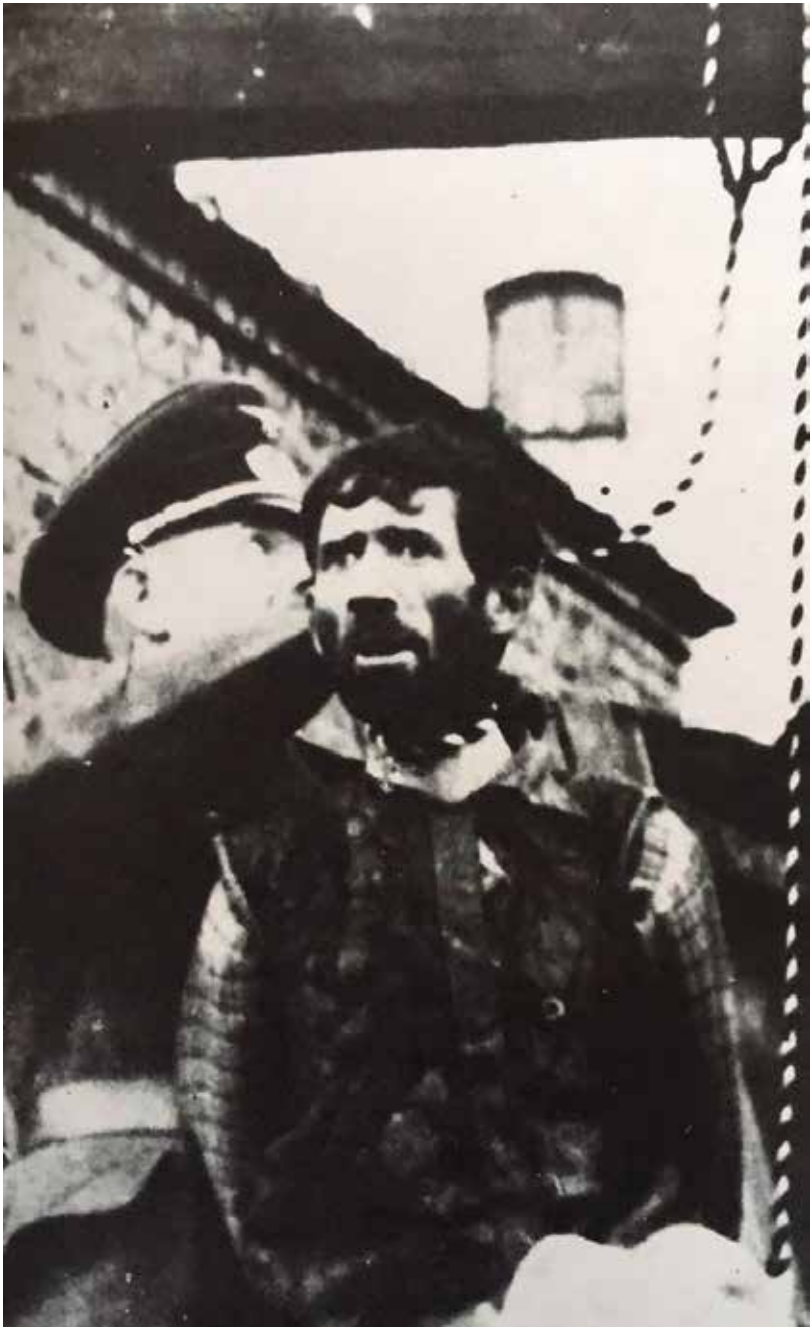

Fig. 20. *Execution scene from the Warsaw Ghetto (Stroop Report) 1943*

Image source: Schoenberner 1960: 100

Fig. 21. *Arrest of Company Brauer, Warsaw (Stroop Report) 1943*
Image source: Schoenberner 1960: 170

Fig. 22. *Executed Insurgents, Warsaw (Stroop Report) 1943*

Image source: Schoenberner 1960: 182

Fig. 23. *Cardboard urns with ashes of the dead from Theresienstadt*
Image source: Schoenberner 1960: 75

Fig. 24. *Horst Zickelbein: All die herrlichen Frauen / Auschwitz III [All The Glorious Women / Auschwitz III] (1981), dispersion paint, paper on cardboard, 89.0 x 100.0 cm, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (acquired in 1991)*

Image source: Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np.

Fig. 25. *Horst Zickelbein: Die Mulde (Auschwitz) [The Hollow (Auschwitz)] (1981), Dispersion paint on paper, 89.0 x 100.0 cm*

Image source: Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np.

Fig. 26. *Horst Zickelbein: 2030 – 2032 (Auschwitz) (1983), mixed media, 59.0 x 46.0 cm*
Image source: Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR and Galerie am Schönhof 1989: np.

Fig. 27. *Lea Grundig: Die Erde von Auschwitz [The Ground of Auschwitz] (1962–1966), ink and watercolour, 55.0 x 76.0 cm, current location unknown*

Image source: Hoffmann-Curtius 2015: 180

Fig. 28. *Gerhard Kurt Müller: Die Jüdin [The Jewess] (1981/1982), oil on canvas, 190.0 x 105.0 cm, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Galerie Neue Meister*

Image source: Kunst-Archive, Werkverzeichnis Gerhard Kurt Müller, 27 Sept. 2021 <www.kunst-archive.net/de/wvz/gerhard_kurt_mueller/works/die_juedin/type/all> © Gerhard Kurt Müller, Atelier und Archiv, Leipzig

Fig. 29. *Gerhard Kurt Müller: Kristallnacht (1986), oil on hard fibre, 160.0 x 185.0 cm*

Image source: Kunst-Archive, Werkverzeichnis Gerhard Kurt Müller, 27 Sept. 2021 <www.kunst-archive.net/de/wvz/gerhard_kurt_mueller/works/kristallnacht/type/all> © Gerhard Kurt Müller, Gerhard Kurt Müller Stiftung, Leipzig

Fig. 30. *Hartmut Berlinicke: Haschoah (Die Katastrophe) [Haschoah (The Catastrophe)] (1982), colour aquatinta, 52.5 x 69.0 cm*

Image source: Galerie Wildeshausen, Hartmut R. Berlinicke, 27 Sept. 2021 <http://bilder.kunstgalerie-wildeshausen.de/201-haschoah/>

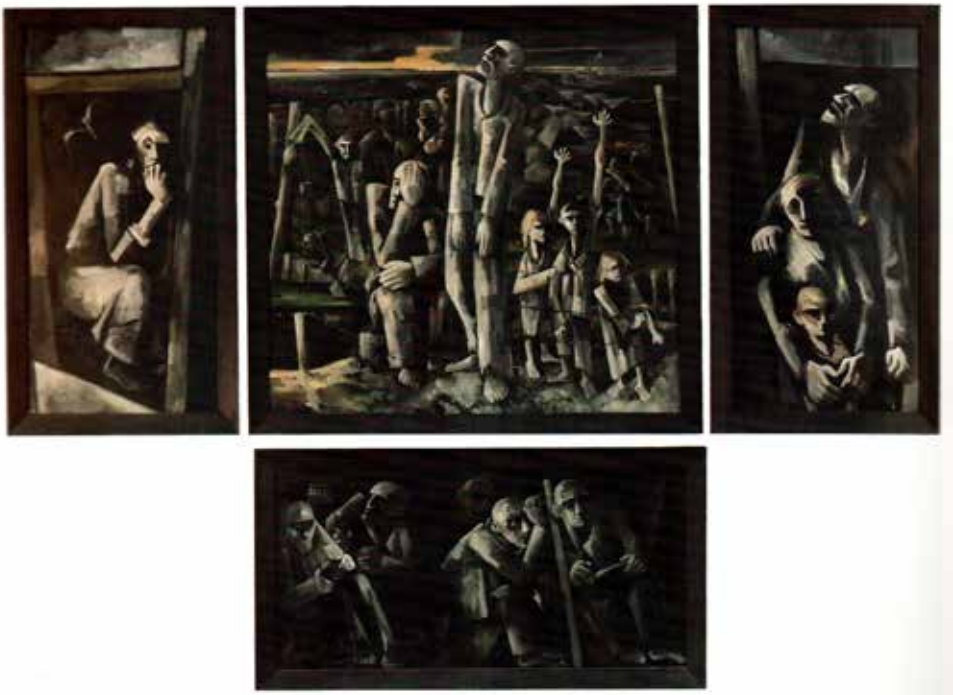

Fig. 31. *Horst Strempel: Nacht über Deutschland [Night over Germany] (1946), oil on canvas, central panel: 150.0 x 168.0 cm, side panels: 150.0 x 78.0 cm, predella: 79.0 x 166.0 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie*

Image source: Saure 1992: 146