



Public and Private: East Germany in Photographs by Ulrich Wüst

Kurtz Gallery for Photography,

MIT Museum, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

September 5, 2015 – January 3, 2016



Left: Berlin, 1985. From the series *Yearbook (Jahrbuch)*.

Right: Binz, Insel Rügen, 1984. From the series *Niches (Zwischenräume)*.

Photographs by Ulrich Wüst.

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Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 3, 2015 – On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of German reunification, the MIT Museum presents an exhibition of photographs by Ulrich Wüst, a rarely-seen master of photography during the Cold War era. ***Public and Private: East Germany in Photographs by Ulrich Wüst***, on view in the Kurtz Gallery for Photography at the MIT Museum from September 5, 2015 to January 3, 2016, is revealing of public planning under socialist rule and of the private life of East German citizens. Wüst's evocative views of the former totalitarian state and the transformations of the capital, Berlin, before and after reunification are seen in 84 black and white prints and over 200 album-mounted prints. This is Wüst's first solo exhibition in the United States. It is curated by Gary Van Zante of the MIT Museum. Trained as an urban planner, Ulrich Wüst (b. 1949, Magdeburg) took up photography

in the 1970s as a rhetorical and documentary tool for studying the development of cities. His early work focused on Magdeburg, Leipzig and other cities of East Germany that had been slow to recover from wartime destruction. In these and other cities, the socialist regime in East Germany focused on the construction of massive and often de-humanizing housing blocks in peripheral districts, while failing to address the reconstruction of historic city centers. Through his photographs, Wüst created a critique of the East German approach to city building.

“I wanted to create a landscape of the soul, drawing attention to what we had done to ourselves with our city planning [in East Germany],” Wüst recalled.

Although fascinated with the form and outward appearance of cities. Wüst also created a large body of work that focused on interior life in East German cities. The socialist focus on communal public life, and the absence of any real civil society, resulted in an intensification of private life – a “collective feeling of privacy,” as one East German described it. The exhibition pays particular attention to Wüst’s interior portraits, which are intimate in both subject and scale and were often assembled by Wüst in albums for private viewing. The private sphere Wüst documented is a fascinating parallel to the street and city views he was executing at the same time, and these two directions have provided the title for the exhibition.

Many of Wüst’s albums were produced in an unusual leporello, or accordion-book, format, a form of visual archiving that recalls nineteenth-century souvenir place albums. Wüst’s leporellos map artistic and social life in East Germany and the daily life of the artist in picture cycles that were often continued over long periods of time.

Wüst’s first solo exhibition was in 1980 in East Berlin, where he has lived since 1972. His photographs document small gatherings of artists and spontaneous exhibitions, sometimes illegal, in Berlin, especially in the Prenzlauer Berg district, where many artists lived. “People constantly visited each other in [the East] as only a few had telephones and it was difficult to arrange meetings,” Wüst recounted. His portrait series *Visitors (Besucher)* documents the writers, architects, artists and others who came to his Prenzlauer Berg home, including some

who left East Berlin for opportunities in the West.

As Wüst was one of a relatively small number of art photographers who created an East German photographic identity during this period, his work raises questions about art practice in a collective society. Although the government officially controlled art practice, and state-sanctioned exhibitions and publications often featured politically-compliant and regime-affirming work, many photographers including Wüst moved in and out of official culture.

The full chronological range of Wüst's work is exhibited, from the 1970s to recent projects documenting the transformation of Berlin following reunification. In his current work, he continues to focus on German cities and historic memory.

The exhibition has been organized by the MIT Museum in collaboration with the photographers and Looock Gallery Berlin. All photographs are on loan from the photographer and Looock Gallery, Berlin. Additional financial support was received by the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, IfA.



Programs Celebrating East German Photography and Film

Curating East German Photography

MIT Museum

Friday, October 2, 6-8pm (doors open at 5:30pm for pre-program viewing of the Wüst exhibition)
Museum curators and gallerists discuss the unique challenges of representing the visual culture of East Germany 25 years after Reunification.

With Andreas Kruse, Curator of Photography, Technology Collections, City of Dresden; Friedrich Loock and Katia Reich, Loock Gallery, Berlin; and Gary Van Zante, curator of *Public and Private*. Free and open to the public.

Wüst Wednesdays

MIT Museum

September 16, October 21, November 18, and December 16, 12-1pm
Curator-led lunchtime gallery talk, third Wednesday of each month. Free with Museum admission; limited to 20 participants per tour. Tickets available one half-hour before tour start on a first-come, first-served basis.

ArtWeek: Wüst Exhibition Tour

MIT Museum

Tuesday, September 29, 2-3pm
Gallery tour led by curator Gary Van Zante.
Free with Museum admission.

East German Film Night at the MIT Museum

Thursday, November 5, 7-9pm

Screening of the East German film, *The Architects* (Peter Kahane, 1990; German with English subtitles).
Introduction by Kurt Fendt, Comparative Media Studies/Writing and Director of HyperStudio, MIT;
Commentary by Bettina Stoetzer and Peter Weise, Global Studies and Languages, MIT. Free and open to the public.

East German Cinema

Organized by the Goethe-Institut Boston, in collaboration with the MIT Museum.

The Goethe-Institut Boston, in conjunction with the exhibition, is presenting a program of East German films at their location and at the Coolidge Corner Cinema.

October 4, 11:00 am: *Solo Sunny*

Director: Konrad Wolf, Co-Director: Wolfgang Kohlhaase
East Germany, 1980, (rare 35 mm. print, 104 min.; German with English subtitles)
Coolidge Corner Theater, 290 Harvard Street, Brookline

October 13 – October 27: *The Weissensee Saga: A Berlin Love Story*

Director: Friedemann Fromm, Screenplay: Annette Hess
Germany, 2010 (German with English subtitles)
Tuesday, October 13th, 7:00 pm: Episodes 1 and 2
Tuesday, October 20th, 7:00 pm: Episodes 3 and 4
Tuesday, October 27th, 7:00 pm: Episodes 5 and 6
Goethe-Institut Boston, 170 Beacon Street, Boston

About the MIT Museum

The MIT Museum's mission is to engage the wider community with MIT's science, technology and other areas of scholarship in ways that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century. The Museum features two floors filled with ongoing and changing exhibitions, currently with an emphasis on robotics, photography and holography, MIT history, and current MIT research. The Museum presents monthly programs that appeal to middle school students and older, Vacation week programs, and presents the annual Cambridge Science Festival in April.

Visitor Information

MIT Museum
265 Massachusetts Avenue
Central Square Cultural District
Cambridge, MA 02139 USA
Phone: 617-253-5927

Open Daily 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Closed major holidays

General admission: \$10.00 for adults; Youth under 18, students, seniors: \$5.00; free admission for MIT card holders and alumni. Discounts are listed online.

Parking: Metered street parking and area lots

Public Transportation: Red Line "T" to Central Square or #1 bus

About the arts at MIT

The arts at MIT connect creative minds across disciplines and encourage a lifetime of exploration and self-discovery. They are rooted in experimentation, risk-taking and imaginative problem solving. The arts strengthen MIT's commitment to the aesthetic, human, and social dimensions of research and innovation. Artistic knowledge and creation exemplify our motto - *Mens et Manus*, mind and hand. The arts are essential to MIT's mission to build a better society and meet the challenges of the 21st century. <http://arts.mit.edu>

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