

L'AUTRE ALLEMAGNE HORS LES MURS

19.20 ET 21 JAN

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Real Time

Genesis of a commando-exhibition, chapter 1. It happens in East Berlin after the fall of the Wall, at Klaus Killisch's, a young painter "with promise" (as we say). Several friends are there: sculptors, musicians, writers. Of course, they are talking about the event, the "bomb that no one saw coming," about what will change. "We'll finally be able to go to the Louvre, the Prado or Beaubourg!" exclaims Klaus. A few days earlier, Jürgen Böttcher/Strawalde told me about his encounter with Picasso "through bad reproductions cut out from bad art magazines. . . ."

Chapter 2: End of November in Paris. Telephone conversation with Corinne Welger—responsible for programming for the Great Hall of La Villette—whom I tell about the young artists of Prenzlauer Berg, their cultural "resistance," their productions, their hopes. "It would be fantastic to invite them to Paris. . . ." An hour later Corinne calls back: François Barré, the president of the Great Hall, is in agreement. One more hour and François Barré announces the support of Jack Lang [the French Minister of Culture]. A series of impulses, an enthusiastic mobilization: the other Germany would pay its first visit "outside the walls" to Paris.

Organizing such a cultural event—novel in its conception, objects and objectives—in a mere six weeks required both passion and enthusiasm. And if we weren't short on these, it was because everyone (every person that joined his or her efforts from Berlin to Paris) felt that "The Other Germany Outside the Walls" was an exhibition in which culture and society—that is, where politics and history—were intimately intertwined.

First of all because the two hundred or so artists invited to the Great Hall are representative of this other Germany, within the Other Germany, without which the democratic revolution of October-November '89 would not have been what it was. Their rejection of censorship (and self-censorship), their will to produce (and self-produce) despite bureaucratic edicts and the injunctions of propagandists for "socialist realism," their practice of solidarity, mutual assistance and cooperation, their creations bore witness throughout the 1980s to the potential for democratic resistance that existed at the heart of East German society. In this sense it is no coincidence that many of these artists supported the creation and development of pacifist, ecological and alternative groups that, all together, could be considered part of a single anti-establishment "scene."

The Wall fell under the pressure of millions of those at the bottom, but the power of those at the top had already been undermined by the subterranean action of thousands of young people, born into the "workers and peasants" regime, but not at all interested in growing old in it.

Since then other challenges are emerging, which our cultural event—intervening at the exact moment in which one state of being is tipping over into another—will attest in its own manner. Our guests, rather like all of the GDR, lived and produced in a manner that was, in a certain sense, “protected” from a confrontation—which we, here, know is often destructive—with an internationalism in which exchangeable goods reign and form an immense, permanent, trivialized flux. This sidelining, which was also one vector of the creative tension and “identity” they represent, no longer exists. Will the GDR become the twelfth state of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the creators of the Other Germany the foot soldiers of standardized culture? Open questions that are de facto posed by an exhibition that we intended concurrently as homage (to contested creation), discovery (of one another), meeting and confrontation at the horizon of a Europe that will, perhaps finally, talk about society and culture before goods and finance.

—Maurice Najman

Translated by Skyler Arndt-Briggs, DEFA Film Library