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Collaborative Art Practices of the Neo-Avantgarde in 1970s East Germany

This dissertation examines the roles and functions of collaborative art practices from the second public sphere in 1970s East Germany. The project offers a look at the plurality and diversity of art making in the GDR and looks at a variety of different collaborative art practices in the GDR, ranging from die Lücke's collaborative paintings, to Clara Mosch's group land art installations to Karla Woisnitza's feminist Face Painting Actions. Aiming to convey that not only was there so much more than the official art, there are also a lot of different types of unofficial art — even within the groups themselves.

The East German artists who chose to stay and work within the constraints of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have been largely excluded from both German art history and Eastern European art history. While there is a group of highly successful East German artists who migrated to West Germany before the Wall was built (such as Georg Baselitz and Gerhard Richter), there are many artists who stayed in the GDR and made 'alternative' art within the confines and limitations of the GDR. Due to the many different art scenes and groups that emerged in the 1970s, it is impossible to give a comprehensive overview of alternative art making in the GDR, and therefore I am using an exhibition held at the Leonhardi Museum called *Gemeinschaftsbilder* (18 October 1980) as an entry point. The Leonhardi Museum in Dresden was a legendary exhibition space of contemporary nonconformist art in the GDR. *Gemeinschaftsbilder* was a group exhibition which brought together wide ranging art from the GDR, which had in common that they were all works of art that were made by more than one artist throughout the 1970s. Each chapter will deal with one artist group represented at the exhibition, in order to delve deeper into their motivations for working collectively. In art from Western Europe and America, collectivist art practices is usually explained as being an anti-capitalist or anti-individualistic action against a Capitalist art system. However, under a socialist system, this interpretation does not apply to the collectivist art practices in the GDR. I am hoping to use the examples in *Gemeinschaftsbilder* in order to examine the complexities of the economic and social conditions of art making in the GDR. In doing so I hope to be contributing to a growing body of scholarship that aims to create a picture of the GDR that accommodates its inherent complexities and strives away from a stark top-down interpretation.

For the conference I would like to present a chapter of my PhD which looks at Land Art Actions and artistic response's to the 'Waldsterben' (Dying Forests) in the GDR. Artists, like the the Karl Marx Stadt based group Clara Mosch as well as the Dresden based artist Eberhard Göschel, sought out free spaces in nature in order to experiment with Land Art, performances as well as to meet other artists and hold presentations and film screenings.

These trips out into nature, were more than just an effort to find free space to experiment, but there was also a genuine and authentic engagement with nature — in an effort to connect to something larger than the individual or the state. However, the alarming rate of damage to the forests and lakes and rivers in the GDR, combined with the state's denial and suppression of information regarding the environmental decay, forced artists to incorporate the environmental decay into their own art practice. I aim to use current discussions of the anthropocene to explore and exposes the larger tension between regionalism and internationalism that is at the heart of many of Clara Mosch's and Eberhard Göschel's practices.